

# Gloucestershire & The Somerset Levels

*Starlings, Bewick's Swans & The Great Crane Project*

*"In Comfort & Style"*

**NEW**

*February 7-11*

*A smoky "Murmuration" of three million Starlings, one of Britain's most fabulous bird spectacles!*

**The habitat?** The Somerset Levels & Moors – a land of extraordinary natural beauty and one of the country's best kept secrets! The vast expanse of former marshland stretches inland from Bridgewater Bay to the Mendip Hills in the north and the Quantocks to the west, often overlooked by visitors and forming a natural wildlife haven, especially in winter. To the north the "Mendip" reservoirs of Chew Valley Lake [designated an SSSI] and Blagdon Lake attract thousands of winter wildfowl, whilst straddling the east bank of the River Severn lies Slimbridge, the world-famous headquarters of the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust [WWT], founded by Sir Peter Scott in 1946.



**Bewick Swans**

**The Birds?** As dusk approaches at Ham Wall RSPB Reserve, millions of Starlings begin to gather in their "smoky flocks", the *Murmuration* preparing to roost in the reedbeds – it's one of Britain's most superb wildlife spectacles! Nearby Shapwick NNR & Catcott SWT hold thousands of wintering Wigeon, Teal, Gadwall, Pintail & Shoveler, along with Bittern & Marsh Harrier, Cetti's Warbler and occasional wintering Great White Egret. Nearby Grey Lake RSPB attracts Common Snipe, Golden Plover & Lapwing, whilst West Sedgemoor RSPB is "home" to the exciting *Great Crane Project* to re-introduce these wonderful birds back into the south-west, a flock of 17 now currently resident in the area. Besides thousands of dabbling duck, The Mendip Reservoirs attract diving Slavonian Grebe, Goosander, Ruddy Duck & Scaup, with Slimbridge WWT the winter home to Bewick's Swans, Barnacle & White-fronted Geese, along with the superb collection of captive wildfowl including many "near threatened" species.



**Starling Murmuration**

**The Accommodation & itinerary:** Our base will be at *The Old Priory Hotel*, Midsomer Norton. Reputed to be one of the oldest houses in Somerset, with beams & inglenooks and just six bedrooms, and also home to the famed *Moody Goose* restaurant offering fine, classic English cuisine with genuine, attentive service in lovely relaxed surroundings. From here we can access all the birding sites mentioned above plus visit Cheddar Reservoir for more diving wildfowl and nearby Cheddar Gorge. With the beautiful Georgian city of Bath just ten miles distant, it's the perfect winter birding break!

**Cost:** £895 [s/s £125]

**Deposit:** £200

**B//L due:** Dec. 7

**Included in the cost:** 4 nts. dinner, bed & breakfast at *The Old Priory*, entrance to Slimbridge WWT and private hides at Chew Valley Lake, transportation & guidance throughout.

**Not included in the cost:** Entrance to Cheddar Gorge Caves, travel insurance, lunches, drinks, gratuities & items of a personal nature.

**[NB: Since distances are relatively short and with limited spaces in the vehicle, guests will be requested to assist in driving on a rota basis].**