

Scottish Highlands & Islands

with Naturalist Journeys



June 9 – 21, 2023

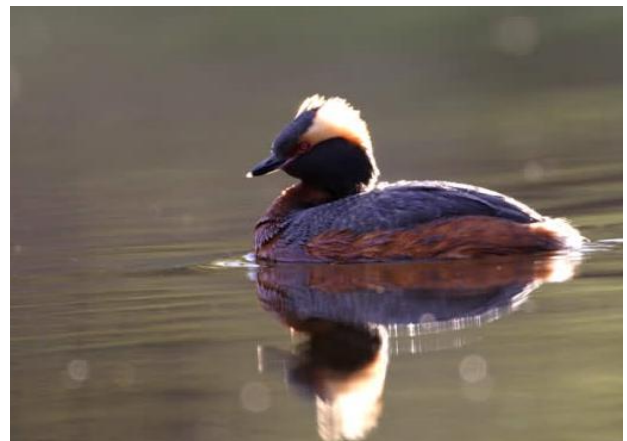
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Join Naturalist Journeys to discover the Scottish Highlands and Islands at the peak of wildflower season. June is a marvellous time to explore. We are based out of Mountview Hotel at Nethy Bridge for seven of our 12 nights, a particular delight. Mountview Hotel sits upon a hill, within walking distance of the quaint, small town. Expert local naturalists have a long history of work with the hotel, so they know where to find the birds and the scenic stops; they set a comfortable tone right away. Dining is lovely and the lodge boasts a fully-stocked bar — you may want to try their wide variety of local Scottish whisky in the fireside room!

This tour explores Scotland's wonderful pine and oak forests, rugged coastlines and trails, and walks in the heather above treeline in open moorland. Look for Ptarmigan, nesting Dotterel, Crested Tit, and Scottish (Parrot) Crossbill. Study shorebirds, seabirds (puffins!), and raptors, including Golden Eagle. After a week at Mountview, we venture to Mull and Iona, enchanting islands with wilderness species such as White-tailed Eagle and Hen Harrier. The islands' residents take pride in their gardens, and the open moorland is in bloom, here we may find Skylark displaying and Twite. Iona's Abbey hold Celtic treasures, and the rhododendrons and azaleas should be in bloom. Interesting geology, historic castles, fascinating birds ... Scotland is a special place!

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Enjoy rolling mountain and woodland vistas right from our lodge
- ✓ Visit the nearly 8000 year old Abernethy Forest, a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reserve
- ✓ Witness mainland Scotland's only Gannetry during a boat ride to Troup Head ... watch for puffins, too!
- ✓ Search for the extremely rare and magnificent Capercaillie, a bird rarely seen even by local birders
- ✓ Opt for a hike into the arctic-alpine realm, just over 4000 feet, to see Ptarmigan and Dotterel
- ✓ Explore stunning Mull and Iona, with colourful villages and stunning ancient architecture
- ✓ Boat to the tiny isles of Staffa and Lunga to see thousands of seabirds

Tour Summary

13-Day / 12-Night Scottish Birding Tour

\$5990, from Inverness

Airport is Inverness (INV)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Fri., June 9 Arrival in Inverness, Scotland

Welcome to Scotland! Today there are no activities planned so you can rest up from travels. Enjoy the gardens at your hotel and a walk if you wish to. Those in on time can join together for an optional group dinner — once we know everyone's arrival schedule and who wants to join in, we make dinner reservations.

Our accommodations are close to airport tonight and since everyone arrives at different times, please transfer by taxi to our first hotel.

Accommodations at an airport hotel, TBD closer to time of departure

Sat., June 10 Scenic Drive to Nethy Bridge | Arrival at Mountview Hotel

This morning we enjoy breakfast together and time to get acquainted, then go a short ways to the impressive historic site of Culloden Battlefield. We have time to take in the exhibits and walk through the field, a sobering but rewarding experience.

We then have about an hour drive today to reach the delightful Mountview Hotel at Speyside, our lodgings for the week ahead. A bonus to this trip is not having to keep on the move! En route to this perfect base, we make scenic and birding stops along the way and enjoy a fun picnic lunch.

Our hotel is in the Highlands; as we head south to it we pass through open moorland with views of rolling mountains and woodlands. Upon arrival at the Mountview Hotel, enjoy some free time to get settled before a welcome dinner and orientation. It's an easy wander down to the river or the nearby village of Nethy Bridge. Or there are those tempting local scotches awaiting you at the bar

Accommodations at the Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Sun., June 11 Abernethy Forest — Walking & Birding

Today we visit extensive pine forests, a habitat type that has existed here for close to 8000 years. This ancient Caledonian forest is the largest natural woodland remaining in Britain, a true national heritage. It is a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) reserve. Here we find a good number of songbirds, including Crested Tit and Scottish Crossbill. A number of trails cross the reserve and we have the day to walk and explore. We join British visitors most excited to see nesting Osprey, still a relatively rare bird, though recovering, in Britain. In the 1950s, after an absence of nearly 50 years, Osprey returned from their winter home in Africa to breed at this location.

Accommodations at the Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Mon., June 12 Gannets & the Scenic Moray Coastline

This morning we take an exciting cruise to the foot of Troup Head, mainland Scotland's only Gannetry, to see the birds. Auks on the sea include Puffin and Black Guillemot, and Great and Arctic Skuas may be seen too. A very exciting boat trip, after which we enjoy local fish and chips for lunch.

After a satisfying lunch, our walkers can enjoy the Moray Coastal Trail, while our birders can enjoy summer birding along the Moray Coast, which can easily include Osprey fishing, Common Eider, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser, Stonechat, and lots of spring waders, including Purple Sandpiper, Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot, Dunlin, and Ringed Plover, many in bright summer plumage. We visit some picturesque coastal towns including Banff, Macduff, Crovie, and Pennan.

Accommodations at Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Tues., June 13 Classic Highland Birding & Scenic Walking

Enjoy stunningly beautiful rolling mountain scenery today as we search for some of Scotland's most iconic species. We visit our operator, Heatherlea's, exclusive private woodland estate where we hope to find magnificent Capercaillie. Here we have the possibility to see female birds with young chicks in June. These birds are now extremely scarce, and many British birders have never seen a Capercaillie!

In these private woodlands we have to search for birds while remaining inside the minibus, so later we take a good walk through moorland at a remote glen where we may see Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin, Red Kite, Ring Ouzel (a member of the thrush family found in mountains and moorlands), Stonechat, nesting Common Sandpiper, and more. It's a lovely day, with spectacular scenery, and a good time to walk for those who are interested. Perhaps a celebration with a drink of Famous Grouse scotch is in order this evening!

Accommodations at the Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Wed., June 14

Scottish Plateau Country of The Cairngorms | Summer Solstice!

In Scotland you don't have to contend with high elevation to enjoy a taste of the arctic-alpine realm, as the highest peaks of the region, rounded and sculpted by time, reach just over 4,000 feet. We can drive to around 2000 feet. Feast your eyes on mountain vistas today, whether you chose walking or birding. We have

the full day up on the Cairngorm plateau with unforgettable scenery all around. This is the realm of the Ptarmigan and a preferred nesting place for the beautiful Dotterel, a long-distance migrant which is breeding in June. Snow Buntings are singing, their loud sweet repetitive songs often given in flight. There may be a show of alpine flowers, and we discover the alpine adaptations of these rugged enduring plants. There are 2,200 square miles of mountain wilderness here, and the geology is fascinating as well. It may be brisk up on the plateau so dress warm and enjoy a return to a nice roaring fire and an excellent dinner. If this hike sounds too strenuous, you can enjoy a day at leisure in Nethy Bridge or just do a portion of the walk and enjoy the wildflowers near the start of the trail until others return.

And this evening marks the summer solstice; it's the longest day of the year so we have extensive daylight in this northern realm! Perhaps a toast with some Famous Grouse.

Accommodations at the Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Thurs., June 15

Local Moors for Black Grouse | Exploring the Scenic West Coast

Today enjoy an optional early morning outing to look for Black Grouse, another of Britain's displaying grouse, intermediate in size with a long forked tail. The males gather in impressive numbers on known leks, often on the edge of woodland and moor. The lek is now finished, though birds still return to parade and hopefully attract a female.

After this outing and breakfast, we head north to explore more of Britain's 7000 miles of varied and beautiful coastline, exploring the rocky reaches where rivers flow straight to the sea. We visit beautiful seaside places and towns including Spey Bay, Lossiemouth, Burghead, and Findhorn, where we find time for a coastal walk. Migrant shorebirds are heading north — we hope to see Dunlin, Turnstone, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, and more. Terns include Sandwich, Arctic, Common, and possibly Little. We have very good chances at Scotland's breeding divers including Great Northern Diver (Common Loon), Black-throated (Arctic), and beautiful Red-throated Diver.

Accommodations at the Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Fri., June 16 Favourite Places

Today is a "guides choice" day. Based on our interests, the staff designs a couple of options for us for further birding or walking in the Highlands or along the coast. Or, you may want to tuck in for half a day or more and just enjoy the hotel and local town. There are many areas to explore — we make it a wonderful day.

Accommodations at Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Sat., June 17 Travel to Mull

After breakfast we travel to Mull, one of the most scenic islands of the Hebrides, its coast deeply indented and laced with smaller scenic rocks and islets. We travel via Fort William, crossing the Corran Ferry and driving through the area known as Morvern. Mull's geologic story tells of violent volcanic activity some 30,000 – 50,000 years ago when sequential lava flows accumulated to thicknesses of 6000 feet.

Mull is the second most mountainous island after Skye—its central tablelands reach over 3000 feet. We visit Duart Castle, quite striking on its headland setting. Driving near the coast, we look for Harbor and Atlantic Grey Seals and River Otter. On arrival we visit picturesque Tobermory, the capital town of Mull, known for its colorful buildings. Enjoy some time to explore before heading to our comfortable hotel for three nights.

Accommodations on Mull (B,L,D)

Sun., June 18 Iona & Mull

Mull is a wildlife paradise, becoming ever more popular with birdwatchers. It's easy to see why, with more

eagles (both Golden and White-tailed) than anywhere else in Britain, Hen Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Raven, and a range of northern moorland birds. The coastal habitat is special and allows us to search for Great and Arctic Skua, Manx Shearwater, Great Northern Diver (Common Loon), Puffin, Gannet, and much more, including a variety of waders. It is also a popular walking area, set in magnificent scenery and featuring towering cliffs, rugged mountains, rocky coastlines, and beautiful pristine beaches.

On Iona, accessed by ferry from Mull, we look for Skylark and Twite (a Redpoll relative) and visit the Abbey, a Celtic treasure dating from the 5th Century. We also plan to visit local gardens known for collections of azalea and rhododendron, which we hope to find in bloom.

Accommodations on Mull (B,L,D)

Mon., June 19 Treshnish Isles Boat Trip to Staffa & Lunga

We enjoy a spectacular boat trip today, visiting the Isle of Staffa, where we have enough time to visit Fingal's Cave and also scan for the few Great Skua that sometimes breed here, as do a few Puffin.

Next, on to the tiny isle of Lunga to visit the fabulous auk colony on the cliffs of Harp Rock, facing west across the ocean. Many thousands of Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake, and Shag are present, with Black Guillemot, Manx Shearwater, and perhaps tiny Storm Petrel, Great Skua, Arctic Tern and "real" Greylag Goose offshore. On Lunga, the Puffin experience is perhaps the best in the British Isles, as we pass right by the burrows (the birds are inquisitive, and a careful birder can enjoy views from a few feet). Further along, auks, Shag, and gulls can be safely appreciated at eye level just yards away. Photographers love this spectacle! A quiet walk away from the main cliffs and we may hear Twite singing. Our boat returns to harbour in time for us to keep birding as we return to our hotel. This trip can be weather dependent, though it usually sails one of our two full days.

Accommodations on Mull (B,L,D)

Tues., June 20 Mull to Inverness

Today we bird and explore on Mull in the early morning and then cross by ferry to the Scottish mainland, returning to Inverness. This is a four to five-hour drive in total, and we break it up with a picnic lunch and some geographic commentary en route.

We arrive in the late afternoon and say goodbye to our guide as the tour ends. Most need an airport hotel this night, so we include it, though dinner is at leisure. If you are staying on in Scotland or taking the train to other areas, we can help with suggestions.

Accommodations in Inverness (B,L)

Wed., June 21 Departures

Your return to the airport is by taxi today to match up with your flight; we can help coordinate possible ride-shares if flights match up with others in the group.

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$5990 DBL / \$6440 SGL** per person from Inverness, Scotland, based on double

occupancy and includes: accommodations for 12 nights, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, local guides, local park and reserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost does not include roundtrip airfare to or from Inverness, airport transfers, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for portage or personal services.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Inverness Airport (INV) on the morning of June 9, 2023, or ahead of time (at your own expense). We can recommend a hotel if you plan to come in early. Please plan your flights home in the at leisure on June 21. Please check your flight times with us before you book and finalize your plans.

Photo Credits

Photos courtesy Heatherlea.

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