

Scottish Highlands & Islands

with Naturalist Journeys



August 11 – 23, 2023

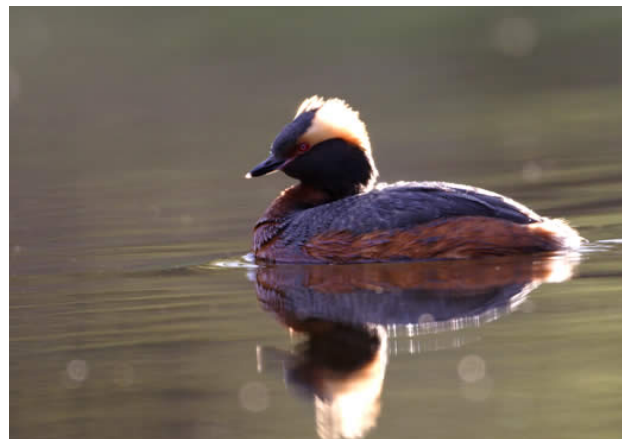
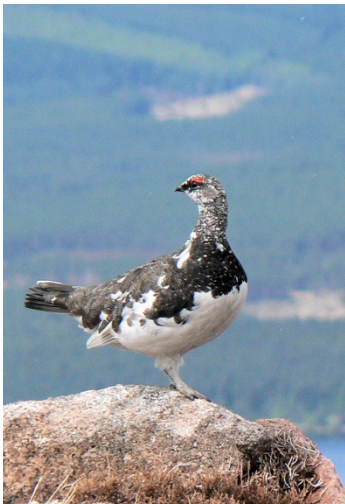
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Join Naturalist Journeys to discover the Scottish Highlands and Islands at the peak of wildflower season. August is a marvellous time to explore with the addition of the Abernethy Highland Games! We are based out of Mountview Hotel at Nethy Bridge 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

- ✓ Experience the traditional Abernethy Highland Games – a true spectacle
- ✓ Visit the nearly 8000 year old Abernethy Forest, a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reserve
- ✓ Enjoy an exciting return ferry crossing for shearwaters, petrels, skuas, cetaceans and more
- ✓ 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 isle of Staffa to visit the unique geological phenomenon of Fingal's Cave!

A note about the Western Capercaillie:

The Western Capercaillie is a huge woodland grouse under the protection of several wildlife and government organizations. While we will not be seeking out Capercaillie on this tour, incidental sightings are possible as we work to respect and protect their essential habitat.

Tour Summary

13-Day / 12-Night Scottish Birding Tour
\$5990 DBL / \$6440 SGL, from Inverness
Airport is Inverness (INV)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Fri., Aug. 11 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., Aug. 12 Scenic Drive to Nethy Bridge | Arrival at Mountview Hotel

This morning we enjoy breakfast together and time to get acquainted, then we will head to the unique and wonderful Abernethy Highland Games, which is close to our hotel in Nethy Bridge. An unforgettable spectacle and a genuine experience of Scotland at its traditional best. Enjoy dancing, piping and athletic competitions, see throwing events and of course the wonderful spectacle provided by the massed pipes and drums. The games also include entertainment and exhibits related to other aspects of Scottish and Gaelic culture, including a 10-mile foot race, refreshments and a variety of trade stands, often provided and manned by local people.

Upon arrival at the Mountview Hotel following the games, enjoy a welcome dinner and orientation. The garden at our hotel should give you a nice taste of the local birdlife with Robin, House Martin, Western Jackdaw, and Rook all being seen on a regular basis. There are those tempting local scotches awaiting you at the bar following dinner

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

Sun., Aug. 13 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 morning 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. There are a number of bird feeders set up at the visitor centre providing an excellent opportunity to get good views of the more commoner “backyard” birds such as Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, and Robin.

In the afternoon we may visit a local moorland loch where breeding Black-throated (Arctic) Loon may still be feeding their chicks and Red Grouse meander through the heather. With the heather now being in bloom, the hills turn a glorious shade of purple and the scent of the flowers adds to an unforgettable atmosphere.

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

Mon., Aug. 14 Outer Hebrides Migration Sea Trip

We travel north to Ullapool, perhaps seeing Raven and Hooded Crow on the way, to join the ferry to the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. The ferry is a large ship, with excellent viewing opportunities in all directions, perfect for birding, and we take both the outbound and return sailings to double our chances of migrant seabirds. Leaving port, Black Guillemot, Shag, and any late terns are possible and entering the Minch and more open water, Fulmar, Gannet, Shag, Manx Shearwater, European Storm Petrel, Great and Arctic Skua and commoner auks become likely. It is a great time of year for wandering Sooty Shearwater and rarer possibilities include Balearic, Cory's, or Great Shearwaters, Leach's Petrel, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, or perhaps storm driven Grey Phalarope or Sabine's Gull. The Minch has a superb reputation for cetaceans and on calm seas we have a better than average chance of seeing Minke Whale, Harbour Porpoise, and dolphins with Risso's and Short-beaked Common Dolphin the most likely.

Accommodations at Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Tues., Aug. 15 Local Moors in Search of Black Grouse | Classic Highland Birding & Scenic Walking

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 display

grounds, known as a 'lek', 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, enjoy stunningly beautiful rolling mountain scenery today, as we search for some of Scotland's most iconic species. We visit Heatherlea's exclusive private woodland estate where we likely see Crested Tit and Crossbills.

In the afternoon we visit moorland at a remote glen where we may see Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin, Red Kite, and Ring Ouzel, a member of the thrush family found in mountains and moorlands, Stonechat, 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., Aug. 16 Mountains & Whisky!

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 visit the southern end of the Cairngorm mountain range and take the chairlift up to around 3,000 feet to feast our eyes on mountain vistas with unforgettable scenery all around. We walk the final stretch to the summit to reach the realm of the Ptarmigan and Mountain Hare and there is also a show of alpine plants. More common species are present here too with Meadow Pipit and Northern Wheatear. 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

If time allows we have a stop in the village of Braemar where you can explore the unique, independent shops selling local produce—everything from chocolate to haggis to gin! The main attraction this afternoon is a tour of a whisky distillery to learn how the spirit is made before tasting the results!

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

Thurs., Aug. 17

Exploring the Scenic West Coast

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 villages including Gruinard Bay, Dundonnell, Little Loch Broom and Gairloch. Migrant shorebirds are heading north — we hope to see Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, European Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, and more. Terns include Sandwich, Arctic and Common. We have very good chances at Scotland's breeding divers including Black-throated (Arctic), and beautiful Red-throated Diver. This is a great day for raptors too with both eagles (Golden and White-tailed) being possible along with Hen Harrier, Peregrine and Merlin

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

Fri., Aug. 18 Moray Coast

Due north of our base is the Moray Firth (a Scots word for sea inlet) which has a stunning coastline lined with quaint fishing villages, beautiful sandy beaches and a surplus of wildlife. We may look for concentrations of waders, including Bar and Black-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot and Curlew. We'll have a look at some farmland too with species such as Corn Bunting, Grey Partridge and Yellowhammer high on our target list. If we are lucky we'll come across the resident pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins along the way. Not to be missed is our visit to a local fish and chip shop for our lunch.

Accommodations at Mountview Hotel (B,L,D)

Sat., Aug. 19 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. 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., Aug. 20 Staffa Boat Trip

We enjoy a spectacular morning boat trip, visiting the Isle of Staffa, where we have enough time to visit Fingal's Cave, a unique geological phenomenon recognised as one of the wonders of the natural world. We hope to find Twite, Meadow Pipit on the grassy tops of the island while European Shag and Great Cormorant linger on the rocky shore. From the boat we can hope to see Manx Shearwaters along with a few auks, Great Skua, Arctic Tern. This is an excellent opportunity to see Atlantic Grey Seals as they loaf on rocky islands, sometimes getting into the water to come and have a closer look at us! Minke Whale and Common Dolphin are also possible. This trip can be weather dependent, though it usually sails one of our two full days.

In the afternoon we take a drive round Mull's scenic coastline where European Otter is always a possibility as are White-tailed Eagles. Common Greenshank and Oystercatcher can usually be found on the tideline and we should get a look at some passerines such as Linnet, Mistle Thrush and Grey Wagtail.

Accommodations on Mull (B,L,D)

Mon., Aug. 21 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.

Accommodations on Mull (B,L,D)

Tues., Aug. 22 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 enjoy a last dinner in Inverness with our guide before settling into our accommodations. Most need an airport hotel this night, so we include it.. If you are staying on in Scotland or taking the train to other areas, we can help with suggestions.

Accommodations in Inverness (B,L,D)

Wed., Aug. 23 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) at your convenience on August 11, 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 at leisure on August 23. Please check your flight times with us before you book and finalize your plans.

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