

Winter birds of Scotland

Black Isle Birding and Birdwatching Breaks are pleased to offer this new tour which takes in some of the optimum winter birding areas in Eastern Scotland and Argyll. It is timed to coincide with the southbound movement of seabirds off the east coast. In addition to this, we will witness the amazing spectacle of geese, swans and ducks arriving into their wintering areas. Islay is particularly important for birds of prey and wintering geese from Greenland and north-east Canada. Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese winter on Islay in their thousands and constitute a large percentage of their respective world populations. Red-billed Chough has its last stronghold in Scotland on Islay. This tour starts and finishes in Edinburgh, which has excellent transport links with the rest of the UK. It is also possible to return from Glasgow on November 24th. Clients should arrive in Edinburgh on the night of November 16th.

Day 1: This morning we visit Fife Ness before making our way to Vane Farm and Loch Leven. The loch is an important area for wildfowl including thousands of geese and swans. On the muddy edges we may find a wintering Green Sandpiper, Northern Lapwing or European Golden Plover. Hunting Peregrine Falcon and Merlin are regular visitors to the area. The feeders attract a variety of finches and tits. In the afternoon, we make the short drive to Perth and visit Scone Palace. The grounds here are extensively wooded and we may see a returning Hawfinch. Other woodland birds present include Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Eurasian Jay. Transfer to the Edinburgh area for a three-night stay.

Day 2: We begin our exploration of the Edinburgh area with a visit to Musselburgh Lagoons. The river mouth is an important area for gulls and we may find rarer species in Mediterranean and Little. A walk around the seawall which overlooks the sea may be productive for grebes, seaducks and divers, with recent visits producing sightings of Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes, Common, Velvet and Surf Scoters, and if there have been strong gales, Little Auks. The wader scrapes regularly attract Ruff among the commoner species. Aberlady Bay is a superb site for birds during the winter with several rarities being recorded in recent years including Water Pipit, Horned Lark and Black Redstart. Aberlady has similar birds to Musselburgh with the addition of Jack and

Dates

**Saturday November 17th -
Saturday November 24th 2018**

Leader: Mark Finn

Group size: 8

Birds: 120-140

Common Snipe and, along the shoreline and scrub, Twite, European Linnet and Snow Buntings.

Day 3: Today starts with a visit to Barns Ness, an important migrant trap adjacent to the North Sea. Within the campsite scattered bushes should be checked for passerines which are mainly Goldcrests and thrushes and on occasions Pallas's Warblers. Skateraw is near Dunbar and another migration hot spot. The fields and bushes here can be alive with migrants and on the fields we have the opportunity of finding finches including Brambling and in some years Lapland Buntings. On the beach we check for migrant Black Redstarts and roosting waders on the rocks.

Day 4: This morning we travel to Argyll and Bute from Edinburgh and take the ferry to Islay. The ferry crossing offers us Great Northern, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers, Northern Gannet, Common Guillemot and Razorbill. On arrival at Port Askaig or Port Ellen, we make the journey to our accommodation at Bridgend.



Greenland Geese Photo: Jo Finn

Days 5-7: Islay has many places in which to observe birds in a wide variety of habitat. Loch Gruinart, situated at the head of a sea loch amidst low lying hills and moorland, is famous for Greenland White-fronted and Barnacle Geese. Careful scanning of the goose flocks may reveal annual but rare visitors in Cackling and Snow Geese from Greenland and Canada. Birds of prey include Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Hen Harrier and, on occasions, Golden Eagle. The reserve has areas which flood, attracting wildfowl and waders. The surrounding dykes and damper areas attract Barn Owl and Eurasian Woodcock at dusk, along with the spectacle of geese coming in to roost. Ardnave Point, a remote peninsula, juts out towards Colonsay. The loch often has Whooper Swans and, occasionally, vagrant Green-winged Teal and Ring-necked Duck. The machair at Ardnave holds Red-billed Chough and Twite. Loch Indaal, a large sea loch with mud flats, beaches, rocky promontories and several piers, almost severs Islay in two. Greater Scaup are numerous along with smaller numbers of divers, Slavonian Grebe, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck and Common Goldeneye. Rocky beaches and mud flats attract Purple Sandpiper, Dunlin,

Bar-tailed Godwit, and Common Knot. Woodland on Islay is generally stunted and old, attracting tits, Eurasian Treecreeper and Goldcrest. In some years Iceland and Glaucous Gulls appear around Port Ellen. The Mull of Oa is close by, an RSPB reserve with important populations of Golden Eagle and Red-billed Chough.

Day 8: Today we take the ferry back to the mainland at Kennacraig and travel to Glasgow and onto Edinburgh where the tour concludes late afternoon.

Prices

Ground Price: £1,795
Single room: £150
Deposit: £150

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, ferry fares, transport and guidance

Not included: insurance and items of a personal nature. Entry into RSPB reserves if you are a non-member.