

A Naturalist's Tour of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland

July 30 – August 10, 2021

Itinerary

Day 1 (Friday, 30th July) Arrive in Glasgow

We will arrive from the U.S., and meet at our hotel by early evening. NB Please make sure your final destination is Glasgow airport (not Prestwick). You might want to consider traveling a day earlier and spending the previous night in Glasgow. *Night in Glasgow*

Day 2 (Saturday, July 31st) Edinburgh

We'll drive from Glasgow to Edinburgh after breakfast and have a full days sightseeing in the city. If this isn't for you, then there's an option of an excursion to the nearby Aberlady Bay Reserve in the afternoon (wildflowers, shorebirds, gulls, wildfowl). *Night in Edinburgh*

Days 3, 4 & 5 (Sunday, August 1st- 3rd) Aviemore & the Cairngorms

After breakfast we'll head north across the Firth of Forth towards the Cairngorm National Park. On the way, we'll be taking in Loch Leven in Fife. Here we get the chance to observe numerous species of wildfowl, including Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, and Common Goldeneye, but also migratory shorebirds and raptors. The loch is also home to European Otter and Water Vole. There will be plenty of opportunity to stop for food as we meander slowly north, with a stop in Pitlochry. Arrive at accommodation in Aviemore late Sunday afternoon, with a short pre-dinner nature walk at the Craigellachie Reserve. This is an excellent town site for nesting Peregrine Falcon, Roe Deer, Spotted Flycatcher and butterflies such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Scotch Argus. Next 3 nights in Aviemore (Sun, Mon, and Tuesday nights).

During Monday and Tuesday, we'll have two full days out exploring the wonders of this beautiful area. We aim to see most of the classic birds of the Scottish Highlands here, with Osprey, Crested Tit, Scottish Crossbill, White-throated Dipper, Capercaillie, Common Redstart, Eurasian Siskin, Common Redpoll, Eurasian Treecreeper and Common Goldeneye all possibilities, plus we'll have a chance for numerous mammals such as Pine Marten, Roe and Red Deer. Thirteen species of dragon and damselflies (Odonata) also breed within the park boundaries such as Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Four-spotted Chaser and Emerald Damselfly, so we'll be allocating enough time for some photographic opportunities as they really are great insects to watch! The sites we'll visit during our stay include Abernethy Forest, Loch Garten, Loch an Eilean, Craigellachie National Nature Reserve and Loch Insh Marsh.

Day 6 (Wednesday, August 4th) Black Isle & Inverness

Following breakfast we will drive north-west towards the Black Isle where we will spend most of the day. It is hoped we will observe European Otter, Red Kite and the areas infamous Bottlenosed Dolphins here. We should arrive at Chanonry Point well before lunch, so heaps of time

for exploring the picturesque seaside town of Rosemarkie. Late afternoon, head towards Inverness taking in productive sites around the Kessock Bridge area. *Night in Inverness.*

Day 7 (Thursday, August 5th) Transit to Isle of Skye

We'll leave after breakfast and head south-west along beautiful Loch Ness, stopping at suitable sites of interest including Loch Ruthven and Eilean Donan Castle. We will finally reach the west coast officially at Loch Duich and Alsh, where we will have the chance of seeing both loons and other coastal species such as White-tailed Eagle and Osprey. Arrive at our hotel late afternoon, and look for wildlife around the Skye Bridge area early evening. *Night in Kyleakin*

Day 8 (Friday, August 6th) Isle of Skye

After breakfast we'll head towards Portree stopping off at suitable sites along the way to look for both Golden and White-tailed Eagles, plus seals and otters. Following an early lunch in the lovely town of Portree, we'll head counter clockwise around the Trotternish Peninsula taking in the Old Man of Storr, Quiraing, and Staffin Bay. The geology is absolutely stunning here, and well worth a look. It has to be said that it's one of the most picturesque drives anywhere in the world. Raptors, terns, seals, and wildflowers are the main focus here, as well as passerines such as Northern Wheatear, Whinchat, Common Stonechat and Skylark. Corncrake also breed on the peninsula. We'll aim to be at the port of Uig for the ferry over to North Uist late afternoon. During the ferry crossing, there will be excellent opportunities to view seals, Basking Shark and cetaceans including Minke Whale, Harbour Porpoise, and if we're lucky, an Orca or Risso's Dolphin. Birds should include divers (loons), Black Guillemot, Common Guillemot (Murre), Razorbill, Manx and sooty Shearwaters, European Storm-petrel, Great and Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) and terns. Arrive Lochmaddy mid evening. *Night in Lochmaddy*

Day 9 (Saturday, August 7th) North Uist

Today, we'll be heading in a clockwise direction around the island of North Uist taking in six main wildlife areas. After breakfast, we'll be having a quick look for migrant bird species at the Langass Plantation, then south into the Baleshare area to look for shorebirds, wildflowers and seals, but plan to arrive at the RSPB's reserve at Balranald for lunch. Here we expect to see many flowers of the Machair, plus Corn Bunting, Northern Lapwing, Common Redshank, Hen Harrier, and orchids such as Heath-spotted. The beautiful beaches here are peppered in pine cowrie and spiral tower shells. Continuing on, we will be heading to the Griminish area in search of Greenshank, Short-eared Owl and Hen Harrier. Ben Risary Plantation will be our next destination, then onto the crofts around Grenitote for Twite, various shorebirds and wild flowers. Back to Lochmaddy late afternoon. *Night in Lochmaddy.*

Day 10 (Sunday, August 8th) Benbecula and South Uist

After breakfast we'll be heading south across the causeway onto the island of Benbecula. Here we'll go in search of the rare Red-necked Phalarope around Loch Mor & Loch Fada, plus wildfowl species such as Eurasian Wigeon and Northern Shoveler. Continuing south onto the island of South Uist via another causeway, we'll explore Loch Druidibeg NNR for loons, Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier and Merlin. Plus there's a number of small excellent plantations here, which will be definitely worth a look for migrant passerines. Next stop will be Bornish and Rubha

Ardvule which is a great spot (especially in stronger SW winds) for seawatching, so we'll spend some time scanning for auks, terns, loons, skuas, shearwaters and cetaceans. The areas around Bornish are good for shorebirds and gulls and has recorded numerous North American species such as Buff-breasted Sandpiper in past years. We change direction after our lunchtime seawatch, and now head east over to Locheynort in search of White-tailed Eagle, otters and seals, then we continue to drive south towards Lochboisdale, our final destination on the Uists. *Night in Lochboisdale.*

Day 11 (Monday, August 9th) Minch and Lochaber

We leave our hotel early for the return ferry across the Minch to the mainland and Mallaig, so breakfast onboard if stomachs can handle it I'm afraid (it must be said that Caledonian MacBrayne ferries offer an excellent cooked breakfast however)! Again, we have the chance of observing cetaceans and seabirds from deck, as we'll be crossing some very productive waters. We will pass the Small Isles of Rum, Eigg, Canna and Muck, and southern Skye, so potentially awesome landscape views if the weather is kind! On landing we'll explore the port of Mallaig with its inshore wildlife and then we'll head to the nearby beautiful village of Arisaig for the afternoon and evening. Here, there'll be opportunities to study wildflowers, shorebirds and seals. *Night in Arisaig*

Day 12 (Tuesday, August 10th) Transit to Glasgow

After breakfast at c.0900, we'll be heading straight back to Glasgow via Fort William and Glencoe. The drive normally takes no more than 5 hours in total, but depends on traffic. We'll aim to stop at Loch Eilt for loons and ducks, and then Glenfinnan for its famous viaduct (i.e. the Harry Potter Bridge). We'll continue to follow Loch Eil east, and will be scanning suitable areas until we reach Fort William.