

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

July 29 – August 9, 2022

Itinerary

Day 1 (Friday, July 29) 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 30) 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, July 1 –Tuesday, August 2) 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 3) 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 4) 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 Loch Alsh*

Day 8 (Friday, August 5) 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. *Night in Dunvegan*

Day 9 (Saturday, August 6) Isle of Skye

Today we will spend the entire day on the Duirinish Peninsula looking for birds amongst the crofts and hillsides. We'll make a special effort to get out to Neist Point where we'll get great views of the Minch and hopefully a sight of Minke whales, Atlantic Puffin, Common Murre, Manx Shearwater and other seabirds. However, the day will remain flexible, with chances of independent local walks. *Night in Dunvegan*

Day 10 (Sunday, August 7) North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist

Today is an epic day as we set out early to the port of Uig for the ferry over to the Uists and Benbecula. We should start with some marine animals, as the vessel affords 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.

After a brief stop in Lochmaddy on arrival, we'll head south around the island of North Uist taking in the main wildlife watching areas including Langass Plantation, Baleshare and Balranald. We expect to see many flowers of the Machair, plus Corn Bunting, Northern Lapwing, Common Redshank, Hen Harrier, and orchids such as Heath spotted. These beautiful beaches 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. After lunch we'll head 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. If time allowing, we'll head east over to Locheynort in search of White-tailed Eagle, otters and seals, then we continue to drive south towards Lochboisdale for evening dinner.

Night in Lochboisdale

Day 11 (Monday, August 8) 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 9) 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.