

ISLAY AND SPEYSIDE EASTER



"Islay is the jewel of the Hebrides and at this time of year is alive to the sound of geese. Standing on the shore watching thousands of Barnacle Geese coming overhead is simply magical. Islay is also rightly famous for its whisky. What a winning combination!"
Duncan Macdonald

Dates Wed 28 Mar - Sat 7 Apr 2018

Price £1,795

Deposit £300 **Single Supp** £200

Leaders Duncan Macdonald and Craig Round

Weather Varies from cold to warm and sunny with windy weather regular on the isles (0° - 10°C), sun and showers

Walking There will be some short easy walks on wide paths. Walking boots are recommended

Meals All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11

Insects Biting insects are unlikely to be a problem

Accom Ballintean Mountain Lodge - double, twin and single ensuite rooms, the last single room will be in a self-contained flat 50 metres from the main building.

Bridgend Hotel - double, twin and single ensuite rooms

Group 12

Just some of what we hope to see:

Golden Eagle	Raven
Short-eared Owl	Peregrine
Barnacle Goose	Merlin
Greenland	Buzzard
White-fronted Goose	Kestrel
Barn Owl	Snipe
Chough	Rock Dove
Hen Harrier	Stonechat
Red-throated Diver	Twite
Black-throated Diver	Black Guillemot
Great Northern Diver	Shag
Long-tailed Duck	Eider
Scaup	Gannet
Pintail	Red Squirrel
Shoveler	Common Seal
Eider	Otter
Common Scoter	Roe Deer
Purple Sandpiper	Red Deer

Ian Tulloch: Chough, Brambling, Linnets, Lesser White-fronted Geese, Pale-bellied Brent Geese

Simon Eaves: Barnacle Geese

Mark Denman: Crested Tit

The ultimate winter wildlife combination - the best of Speyside, plus the 'Queen of the Hebrides', for geese, Chough and possibly the odd dram!!

- Speyside specialities - Capercaillie, Crested Tit, Scottish Crossbill and more
- Wintering seaduck, divers, grebes and white-winged gulls
- West Coast day for White-tailed Eagle, Black-throated Diver and more
- An evening at our hide for Pine Marten and Badger
- Huge flocks of Barnacle and White-fronted Geese with chance of rarities
- Otter, Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier and Ptarmigan in white winter plumage
- An excellent loch-shore hotel on Islay with great food

Dinner together on Wednesday starts the holiday at the Steading.

2-5 The high mountains of the Cairngorms may still be covered in snow at this time of year, making a truly beautiful backdrop to our local birding. From the warmth of our accommodation in Glen Feshie, we'll enjoy the views, while nearby forests provide excellent chances of Crested Tit, Scottish and Common Crossbill and Red Squirrel. Black Grouse will already be performing at a local lek and we'll search for Capercaillie in the ancient pines of nearby Abernethy Forest. Wintering Waxwing may linger into this time, while summer Ring Ouzel, Wheatear and Ospreys are just arriving, so we shall be on the alert.

One evening we'll head to our wildlife hide, where Pine Marten and Badger are regular visitors - with the chance of close up Red Deer, or perhaps a Tawny Owl too. We'll visit Cairngorm ski area for Snow Bunting and scan for Ptarmigan, still in their beautiful white winter plumage. This is a fabulous season for Golden Eagle encounters in the glens, with birds performing their astonishing 'switchback' display over their territories. At dusk, Hen Harriers flight in from the moors to roost at Insh Marshes, where Whooper Swans, Goosander, Goldeneye and a variety of other duck species can all be seen.

A visit to the Moray Coast at this time of year is a must, with wintering flocks of Velvet and Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck and Eider. There'll be Red-breasted Merganser, Slavonian



"This holiday is truly superb. Not only do we take in the best that Speyside has to offer in Spring, with Black Grouse on the hills, Crested Tit singing and returning Ospreys, but also Islay, one of the finest Hebridean Islands and home to thousands of geese, ducks, waders and raptors. What a wonderful combination." Duncan Macdonald



Grebe, Red-throated and Black-throated Diver and we'll be on the lookout for Great Northern Diver, or scarcer species like Red-necked Grebe or Surf Scoter. Purple Sandpiper are possible amongst the Turnstones and Pink-footed and Greylag Geese are in the fields. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls sometimes appear and if we hear of any wintering King Eider, we'll surely take a look!

The dramatic peaks and sea lochs around Gruinard Bay make for a memorable day on the remote West Coast. Twite and Great Northern Diver are specialities, Black Guillemot and Shag are common and Otter regularly pop up, but it's White-tailed Eagle that forms the focus of our quest - all in a spell-binding landscape.

6-9 We journey to Islay through stunning scenery via Oban and south-west to Kennacraig, catching an afternoon ferry.

Thousands of Greenland White-fronted Geese and Barnacle Geese occupy every field around RSPB Loch Gruinart. We'll spend plenty of time enjoying the spectacle and searching through the flocks to find rarer species amongst them. Pale-bellied Brent Geese are likely and several other species have been found, including North American Snow Goose and genuine vagrant Canada Goose, often of the smaller forms, now split as a separate species, known as Lesser Canada Goose. They are surprisingly small and can be the same size as the Brent Geese! Brown Hare are

everywhere and Merlin and Peregrine hunt over lagoons where Shoveler, Snipe and Pintail feed.

At the dunes of Machir Bay and at Ardnave Point Red-billed Chough are the stars, a species with very limited distribution in Scotland. We'll also be alert to the chance of Otter, which is relatively common along the shorelines. Loch Gorm has been a good site for rare Snow Goose, whilst the rough moors of the Rhinns are very good for Golden Eagle, Stonechat, Twite and Rock Dove and we'll check Loch Indaal for all three divers, Scaup and rare gulls such as Ring-billed - we may also pop in to sample a dram at the Bowmore distillery! The evening goose roost at Bridgend is always something special, as thousands of cackling birds drop into the shoreline at dusk against a sunset sky.

10-11 We make the journey back to Speyside and the Steading for our last night, watching out for birds along the way. After breakfast on Saturday we say our farewells.



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Arrive at Glen Feshie for 5 nights
- Days 2-5 Wildlife and birdwatching exploration throughout Speyside, plus a day on the West Coast
- Day 6 Journey to Islay via Oban and the ferry from Kennacraig 4 nights at Bridgend Hotel
- Days 7-9 Birdwatching and wildlife exploration on Islay
- Day 10 Return by ferry back to the mainland then drive to Speyside 1 night at the Steading
- Day 11 Depart after breakfast

