ORKNEY

"I love the relaxed pace of Orkney, with its wide open spaces, big skies and atmosphere of peace and freedom. There are 13 RSPB Reserves around the islands, testament to the great birding here, with excellent numbers of Short-eared Owls and Hen Harriers in particular, hunting the Orkney Voles - a sub-species of Common Vole from Europe in its only UK site!"
Duncan Macdonald

Dates	Sun 3 - Sun 10 Sep 2017
Price	£1,695
Deposit	£300 Single Supp £150
Leaders	Duncan Macdonald and Simon Pawsey
Weather	The weather can vary enormously. During a typical week in this season we would expect to experience mixed sun and showers with temperatures in the range 10-20°C. Around the remote coastline of Orkney we may expect cooler temperatures and though it is possible that we shall see unbroken sunshine and settled weather, Orkney can receive wet and windy squalls and occasionally fog. Having said all of that, it can often be warm and sunny and you may want to bring sunscreen.
Walking	On Orkney the walking is generally very relaxed and easy, but on at least two of the days we may take walks of up to 3-4 miles on rough grassland and small coastal paths with some climbing
Meals	All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8
Insects	Biting insects should not be a problem
Accom	Premier Inn, Inverness; Standing Stones Hotel, Orkney; Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite
Group	12

Just some of what we hope to see:

Hen Harrier
Short-eared Owl
Merlin
Great Skua
Arctic Skua
Pomarine Skua
Manx Shearwater
Sooty Shearwater
Red-throated Diver
Pink-footed Goose
Black Guillemot
Golden Plover
Sanderling
Bar-tailed Godwit
Ruff
Lapland Bunting

Enjoy the magic of Orkney – autumn bird migration, coupled with world class archaeological sites, on a holiday dedicated to both, on this delightful island archipelago.

- Autumn migration on Orkney - you never know what might turn up!
- Short-eared Owl, Hen Harrier, Red-throated Divers and skuas
- Visit to Rousay, one of the many islands
- Tomb of the Eagles, via Churchill Barriers
- Maeshowe, Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness
- The Loons RSPB Reserve
- Visit to ancient settlement of Skara Brae

1 We meet in Inverness in time for dinner in our overnight hotel, giving us time to discuss the coming week.

2-7 From Inverness, we follow the coast road through the eastern seaboard of Sutherland and Caithness, to catch our ferry from Scrabster to Orkney. Along the route, past historic villages like Golspie and Helmsdale, the last Sandwich and Arctic Terns fish on their way south and some of the autumn's Eider and Common and Velvet Scoter can be seen. Buzzards are common and we may also see Red Kite circling above the rich farmland of Easter Ross.

The crossing, on a large modern, fully equipped ferry, takes us across The Pentland Firth, rightly famous for the strength of its tidal race. These waters provide rich pickings for wildlife, cetaceans in particular and we shall be vigilant during the crossing and watch for Storm Petrel, Manx Shearwater, skuas and dolphins. We shall be travelling during the peak of migration and species like Sooty Shearwater and Grey Phalarope could be seen.

The ferry takes us past the impressive cliffs of Hoy and past the great sea stack of the Old Man of Hoy, to land us in the wonderful harbour of Stromness, where the great author George Mackay-Brown lived.

The landscape of Orkney has broad coastal vistas, interspersed with ancient archaeological wonders. The pastures are home to Brown Hare, with Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl quartering the moors and meadows. At this time of year there is also the good chance

"The astonishing archaeological sites on Orkney make this a trip like no other. There are so many astounding sites to visit - Maes Howe, Ring of Brodgar, Tomb of the Eagles and Skara Brae, may even surpass the wildlife as highlights of the trip!" Duncan Macdonald

of migrants and we shall check through the passage flocks of waders for any rarities that might be amongst them, like Pectoral Sandpiper. Over the years many exciting birds have been found on these northern islands, including Wryneck, Common Rosefinch and Red-breasted Flycatcher.

We shall also look out for Black Guillemot, Great Northern Diver, Twite and Rock Dove and of course Otter is always a possibility. There will be Red-throated Diver, often still in their breeding finery and Turnstone, picking at seaweed on the rocky shore. With the approaching winter, Greylag, Barnacle and White-fronted Geese begin to arrive too.

Orkney is an archipelago and although we are based on Mainland, we shall also travel to the island of Rousay, to the north. This island has a lot of heather moorland and we shall look for raptors such as Hen Harrier and Merlin. There will be waders on the shore and species like Stonechat should be obvious.

The gardens around the ferry point can be good shelter for migrants, so we shall work these to see what we can find! We'll also visit the chambered tomb and broch of Midhowe, whilst being observed by the curious Common Seals along the shore.

The archaeological sites of Orkney cannot be missed. Skara Brae is an absolute must - an entire prehistoric settlement with rooms, beds, dressers and pottery, all exposed by a storm some 5000 years after it was built.

The Standing Stones of Stenness, close to our hotel and the Ring of Brodgar, where 36 of the original circle of 60 stones still stand, are both impressive, however it's the magnificent Maeshowe that steals the show, along with the Tomb of the Eagles, where we can see neolithic artefacts.

The Tomb of the Eagles is situated on South Ronaldsay and our journey here will take us over the Churchill Barriers that connect the southern islands, where the bays hold divers and waders and we shall look for Otters. This tomb holds the echoes of our past connections with the totemic wildlife around us, in particular the White-tailed Eagle that was once abundant here. Now, after an absence of nearly 200 years, a pair has established itself on the island of Hoy.

On our penultimate day we'll take the return ferry from Mainland back to Scrabster. There are some good wildlife locations near to Scrabster and we shall explore Dunnet Bay, as well as the most northerly point on mainland UK, Dunnet Head, where we could encounter Twite and Wheatear.

Just nearby is a freshwater loch with hide, where we may fill in some of the gaps in our list with species like Tufted Duck, Little Grebe and the two Highland rarities Coot and Moorhen! We shall return to Inverness in time for dinner on our final evening.

8 After breakfast we say our farewells.

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Arrive in Inverness 1 night at the Premier Inn
Day 2	Travel up the north east coast of Caithness and Sutherland and take the ferry to Orkney 5 nights at the Standing Stones Hotel
Days 3-6	Wildlife and archaeological exploration of Mainland
Day 7	Take early morning ferry from Orkney and travel back down the coast to Inverness 1 night at the Premier Inn
Day 8	Depart after breakfast

Pete Cairns: Hen Harrier
Colin Scott: Red-throated Diver
Chrissie Nicholson: Ring of Brodgar, Old Man of Hoy
Simon Eaves: Arctic Skua **Craig Round:** Short-eared Owl
Mary Braddock: Black Guillemots