

ORKNEY & NORTH RONALDSAY



"I love birding on a small island, so North Ronaldsay is definitely a new favourite of mine in the Orkney archipelago. Combined with mainland Orkney, the diverse and unpredictable birdlife at this time of year makes for a really memorable experience."
Simon Eaves

Dates Sun 6 - Wed 16 Sep 2020
Price £2,395
Deposit £450 Single Supp £300

Leaders Simon Eaves and Adam Batty

Weather 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 coastline of Orkney and the island of North Ronaldsay, we may expect cooler temperatures, though it is possible that we shall see unbroken sunshine and settled weather, Orkney can receive wet and windy squalls and occasionally fog, however, it can be warm and sunny so you may want to bring sunscreen

Walking On Orkney and North Ronaldsay 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.

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

Insects Biting insects should not be a problem

Accom Premier Inn, Inverness; Bird Observatory, North Ronaldsay; Standing Stones Hotel, Orkney
Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite. The Observatory has simpler accommodation than the hotels on Orkney

Group 12

Just some of what we hope to see:

Great Northern Diver	Golden Plover
Red-throated Diver	Grey Plover
Hen Harrier	Black-tailed Godwit
Short-eared Owl	Wryneck
Merlin	Lesser Whitethroat
Great Skua	Yellow-browed Warbler
Arctic Skua	Common Rosefinch
Sooty Shearwater	

A wonderful archipelago awaits – combining fantastic autumn migrants, worldclass archaeological sites and three nights at the North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory.

- Autumn Migration on Orkney - you never know what might turn up.
- Three nights on North Ronaldsay - a migrant hot-spot
- Possibility of migrants such as Yellow-browed Warbler, Bluethroat and Wryneck
- Maeshowe, Skara Brae and the Ring of Brodgar
- Short-eared Owl, Hen Harrier, divers and skuas
- Italian Chapel, Churchill Barriers and the Southern Isles
- Chance of cetaceans and skuas in the Pentland Firth

I We meet in Inverness in time for dinner in our overnight hotel, giving us time to discuss the days ahead.

2-3 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, 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 for Storm Petrel, Manx Shearwater,

skuas and dolphins. We shall be travelling during the peak of migration and species such as Sooty Shearwater and Grey Phalarope could be seen. The ferry takes us past the impressive cliffs of Hoy and the great sea stack of the Old Man of Hoy, to the wonderful harbour of Stromness, where the great author George Mackay-Brown lived. We are only a short distance from our hotel, where we shall spend our first night on these remarkable islands.

From the main town of Kirkwall we board our ferry to the island of North Ronaldsay, the island time forgot. Our journey takes us north, past islands such as Shapinsay, Eday and Sanday. We shall have over two hours to look for both Great and Arctic Skua, Black Guillemot and cetaceans. North Ronaldsay is the most northerly island of Orkney and lies further north than the southern tip of Norway. Its location is perfect for migrating birds at this time of year.





"The famous autumn bird migration on the northern islands of Scotland sees numerous seabirds, waders and passerines on the move. The varied scenery of farmland, coastlines, lochs and marshes create many habitats to explore, so the excitement of finding birds is made even more special with this dramatic landscape backdrop." Simon Eaves

Our accommodation is in the Bird Observatory that was established on the island in 1987. We shall have time to explore after checking in. The island is small and low-lying with grazing land, freshwater lochs and shingle foreshore. It is also famous for the seaweed eating sheep that inhabit the foreshore.

4-5 Our next two days are spent exploring. We shall work all the main habitats looking for migrants, as well as enjoying the ambience of this remote island. Regular migrants include Yellow-browed Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Bluethroat, Wryneck, Common Rosefinch, Lesser Whitethroat and Pied Flycatcher; to name a few of the large number of song birds that pass through now. The freshwater lochs and surrounding fields attract waders in good numbers, including Golden Plover, Curlew and Whimbrel. American waders are annual visitors, so we shall scan the flocks for Pectoral Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper or even White-rumped Sandpiper. From headlands we'll scan for seabirds, as this is peak passage, with species such as Sooty Shearwater in good numbers given the right conditions. We may not know which way to look first!

6-9 We take a lunchtime ferry back to Mainland Orkney and back to our hotel. We'll birdwatch around Scapa Bay, where Bar-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Turnstone and Dunlin may be feeding, with Great Northern Diver offshore amongst the plunging Gannets. 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 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, one of the most impressive tombs in the world.

We'll explore these sites, as well as taking in north and east mainland and the southern isles down to South Ronaldsay, now linked via the Churchill Barriers. Created in WWII, they were built by prisoners of war; who have left behind one of the most beautiful sites on the islands - The Italian Chapel. We'll visit this remarkable place whilst exploring freshwater lochs, sandy bays, moors and farmland for flocks of waders, ducks, Stonechat, Wheatear and more. Pastures are home to Brown Hare, with Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl quartering the moors and meadows. There is always the chance of migrants, so we shall check through the flocks for any rarities, such as Pectoral Sandpiper. Over the years many exciting birds have been found on these northern isles, including Red-breasted Flycatcher, Wryneck and Common Rosefinch.

10 We take the morning ferry back to the Scottish mainland. There are some good wildlife locations nearby and we shall explore Dunnet Head, the most northerly point on mainland UK. We could encounter Twite and Red Grouse on the way. There is a freshwater loch nearby with a hide, where Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Coot and Moorhen could fill in the gaps of our list. We then return to Inverness in time for dinner on our final evening.

After breakfast on our last day 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
1 night at Standing Stones Hotel
- Day 3 Take the ferry to North Ronaldsay
3 nights North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory
- Days 4-5 Exploration of North Ronaldsay
- Day 6 Ferry back to Mainland Orkney
4 nights at Standing Stones Hotel
- Days 7-9 Wildlife and archaeological exploration of the mainland
- Day 10 Take early morning ferry from Orkney and travel back down the coast to Inverness
1 night at the Premier Inn
- Day 11 Depart after breakfast

Richard Stacey: Short-eared Owl
 Tim Drew: North Ronaldsay Lighthouse, Otter,
 Duncan Macdonald: Grey Seal
 Ian Smith: Lapland Bunting
 Craig Round: Whimbrel

