

SPRING BIRDS IN THE HIGHLANDS



"As we leave the winter months behind, this exciting time of year will see us welcoming our summer visitors, fresh on their territories and singing loudly in their Spring choruses."
Kate Mennie

Dates Sat 29 Apr - Sat 06 May 2023
Sat 20 - Sat 27 May 2023

Price £2,175

Deposit £350 Single Supp £270

Leaders Two from our team

Weather Varies from cold to warm and sunny (8°-20°C), with less rainfall than much of Scotland but snow possible in the mountains

Walking Most walks are 1-2 miles on wide sandy tracks, although there is the possibility of a forest walk of up to 4 miles

Our Cairngorm walk is more steep and uneven, but low-level unguided alternatives are available. Walking boots will be needed and walking poles may be helpful

Boat Trip Our boat trip to Handa is over sheltered waters and lasts about 15 minutes

Meals All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8

Insects In May, biting midges occasionally occur on sheltered loch shores

Accom Double, twin and single ensuite or with private facilities

Group 12

Just some of what we hope to see:

Black-throated Diver	Crested Tit
Slavonian Grebe	crossbills
Fulmar	Dunlin
Golden Eagle	Snipe
Osprey	Curlew
Ptarmigan	Redshank
Black Grouse	Arctic Skua
Goldeneye	Great Skua
Red-breasted Merganser	Black Guillemot
Capercaillie	Pine Marten
Dotterel	Badger
Puffin	Common Seal

Our classic signature week, perfected over 25 years, with all Speyside's special birds at their most active, including crossbill and Black Grouse - and time for great mammals too.

- Bird specialities of the ancient Pine Forest of the Highlands of Scotland
- A west coast trip to fabulous Handa Island in north-west Sutherland
- The Moray Firth, alive with seaduck, terns and migrants
- Divers and grebes in spectacular breeding plumage
- A day for mountain birds in the splendour of the Cairngorms
- An evening for Pine Martens and Badgers too
- Come by train or plane and enjoy the wonders of the Cairngorms National Park

We shall meet at our lovely country house hotel on the edge of the forest in time for dinner together on Saturday evening, with plenty of time to discuss the options for the coming days. The hotel and its fine food are always a delight for guests.

2-7 We may start the week with walks in the local area, perhaps along the river, or around beautiful lochans surrounded by forest nearby. The RSPB have extensive Reserves here and we'll visit the ancient pines of Abernethy Forest, a remnant of the 'Great Wood of Caledon', in search of dainty Crested Tits and parties of crossbill.

We'll need to check them carefully, as both Common and Parrot Crossbills have taken up residence in the area. Red Squirrels are still abundant in the forest with Redstart, Siskin, Tree

Pipit and countless Willow Warblers singing in the clearings. We'll also rise early to see Black Grouse as they 'bubble and coo' at dawn - a fabulous spectacle.

On one evening we'll look for Pine Marten and Badger, with Woodcock roding over the trees. Sparkling forest lochans hold exquisitely plumed Slavonian Grebe - a wonderful chance to see them in their breeding finery, whilst Ospreys will be nesting locally in forests and glens. Recently White-tailed Eagles have begun to nest and we'll look for these and Golden Eagles too.

The arctic-tundra plateau of the Cairngorms is unique in Britain and, weather permitting, we'll head into the hills to seek out camouflaged Ptarmigan as they feed quietly amongst the boulders. We may encounter beautiful Dotterel too and there is always a chance of Snow Bunting.



"Whilst in Strathspey, local lochs and forests will be abundant with Spring arrivals and we'll take a trip up the Cairngorm Mountain for any arriving Dotterel. We'll visit the Moray Coast for terns and seaduck and travel west to the small island of Handa for breeding seabird and Skuas, driving through the stunning landscape of Sutherland." Kate Mennie



The River Spey winds its way through the strath, with nesting Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Goosander and noisy Common Sandpiper, while Curlew, Redshank, Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Snipe display over marshes in river valleys and around Insh, Europe's largest inland fen and at Lochindorb, with its impressive castle rising on an island from the middle of the loch.

On tranquil waters beautiful Red-throated Divers give their haunting wail and we'll take you to remote glens where Golden Eagle hunt Mountain Hares. We'll search for Raven, Ring Ouzel and Peregrine, with Red Deer on the skyline and even Wild Goats. We may find Hen Harrier, Merlin or Short-eared Owl hunting the open moorland, where we'll hear cackling Red Grouse and the mournful piping of Golden Plover.

Along the coast and tidal bays of the Moray Firth a few Long-tailed Duck and Common or Velvet Scoter may linger with the local Eider. The shingle shores are busy with Arctic, Common and Sandwich Tern and we hope to see fishing Ospreys and perhaps even a Great Northern Diver offshore.

Red Kite circle lazily above the rolling farmland and we'll search out some of the farmland birds found there, such as Tree Sparrow, Corn Bunting and Yellowhammer. We shall look out for our resident Bottlenose Dolphins, which may come remarkably close to shore and harbour.

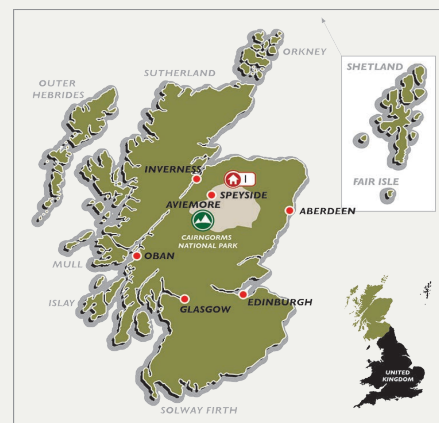
We'll enjoy a wonderful day travelling through stunning scenery on our way to the far north west of the Scottish Highlands on our day visit to Handa

Island. We'll pause to look for Black-throated Diver enroute and there is always the chance of Golden Eagle or perhaps a Greenshank, as a small number breed this far north.

Black Guillemots bob on the water close to the boat as we make our ten minute crossing, then we walk across the island, enjoying fantastic views of nesting Great and Arctic Skuas as we go - the Arctic Skuas often chasing each other in their exhilarating display.

Gannets pass by offshore and we'll look out for Rock Dove, Raven and Twite as well. On the far side of the island, towering cliffs and stacks host a seabird city, with thousands of Guillemots and smaller numbers of Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Fulmars. A few delightful Puffins nest on top of The Stack - but don't forget to look back towards the mainland where the scenery... well it's simply breathtaking!

8 On Saturday after breakfast we say our farewells.



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Arrive in time for dinner and a chat about our plans for the coming week. 7 nights at Tigh na Sgiath Country House
- Days 2-7 Wildlife and birdwatching exploration including Abernethy Forest, Dava Moor, the Cairngorms, the Moray Firth and West Coast
- Day 8 After breakfast we say our farewells

Jane Hope: Crested Tit, Crossbill
Craig Round: Handa Island
Steve Cullum: Black Grouse
James Stevens: Dotterel
Colin Scott: Great Skua
Andrew Seal: Osprey

