

THE FARNE ISLANDS



"Northumberland has always had a reputation for fantastic castles, rugged coastline and huge numbers of nesting seabirds. It is not so well known for its pods of off-shore dolphins, superb coastal wetlands and extensive coniferous forest - yet this incredible county has it all."
Julian Sykes

Dates Sat 7 Jul - Sat 14 Jul 2018
Price £1,695
Deposit £300 Single Supp £200

Leader Julian Sykes

Weather Variable, with a good chance of sunshine, (10°-20°C) but on the boat trips waterproofs, warm clothing and walking boots are needed

Walking Walks of up to two miles, mainly on level tracks around Reserves

Boat Trips Our trip to the Farne Islands lasts 6 hrs, including 2 hrs onshore on both Staple and Inner Farne. Trip to Coquet Island lasts 1 hr. Our evening White-beaked Dolphin trip lasts 4 hrs

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

Insects Could be a problem, especially on the inland day

Accom Twin and single rooms all ensuite

Group 7

Just some of what we hope to see:

Puffin	Red-throated Diver
Kittiwake	Little Egret
Arctic Tern	Avocet
Common Tern	Tree Sparrow
Sandwich Tern	Yellowhammer
Roseate Tern	Stonechat
Little Tern	Osprey
Mediterranean Gull	White-beaked Dolphin
Eider	Harbour Porpoise
Crossbill	Common Seal
Goshawk	Grey Seal
Red Grouse	Red Squirrel

Fabulous summer birdwatching, as we explore the coastlines, forests and moorlands of this corner of historic Northumberland, around the famous Farne Islands.

- Full day visiting two Farne Islands looking at seabird colonies - not to be missed!
- Day in the famous Kielder Forest for Red Squirrel, Osprey and crossbill
- South to Teeside for Common Seal, waders and wildfowl
- Beautiful coastline with long sandy beaches, jagged rocks and migrant waders
- Boat trip out into the North Sea, with possibly White-beaked Dolphins
- A trip out to Coquet Island to watch Roseate Terns and Grey Seals
- Comfortable hotel to return to each day

We are based in the beautiful, historic town of Alnwick, inland but perfectly placed to explore the wonderful scenery and wildlife of this fabulous north east county. The hotel is noted for its excellent, local and wholesome cuisine, with portions to satisfy the keenest of appetites. Depending on time of arrival, a short walk into town towards the local park and castle, could produce some of the commoner woodland species of this region. Later that evening we have dinner, followed by a look at the planned itinerary, which will be weather and tide dependent.

2-7 This is a full and diverse week, where a certain amount of flexibility is required, due to the uncertainty of the weather and wildlife on offer, with a possibility of scarce and rare migrants. Our lovely hotel is within easy reach of the North Sea and an easy walk along the many coastal paths can produce Northern Wheatear, Linnets, singing

Reed Bunting and possibly Yellow Wagtail. Offshore we shall find Eider; or the local 'Cuddy Ducks' (after St Cuthbert's) loafing around the bays, along with Red-breasted Merganser, Cormorant, Guillemot and possibly Common Scoter. North of Alnwick is Newton by the Sea, where a stop overlooking the North Sea can produce a Little Tern fishing in the shallows. There are some excellent pools here that are always worthy of investigation, as migrant waders tend to make a stop here on their journey south.

Our longest drive is into the adjacent county of Teeside (bring your passport!), to a couple of their flagship Reserves along the River Tees – Seal Sands NR and Saltholme RSPB Reserve. Both are excellent and both very different, with the former being notable for Common Seals hauled out on the river edge and the latter for its breeding Avocets, along with plenty of other wildfowl and waders. This is also an area that can produce an avian surprise or two, especially since



"Visiting in mid-July always involves the chance of passage waders and seabirds starting their return journey south to their wintering grounds. This could involve something a wee bit special, with each year producing a British scarcity or rarity, culminating in our group finding a Temminck's Stint in 2017 - fingers crossed for this year." Julian Sykes



waders such as Black-tailed Godwit and Greenshank are moving south from their breeding grounds.

Thousands of seabirds breed in Northumberland and we'll enjoy special boat trips to see them astonishingly close up. A visit to the Farnes Islands needs no introduction and will be one of the highlights of the week. Our day here includes landings on both Inner Farnes and Staple and we shall see birds at incredibly close range - expect Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins, Shags and Eiders at your feet - a photographer's dream! Arctic Terns nest beside the paths and dive-bomb you as you walk - a good hat or a stick held aloft will keep us safe from their sharp bills!

Colonies of Sandwich and Common Terns are here too and inquisitive Grey Seals lift their heads from the water as we pass. A second boat trip takes us to RSPB Coquet Island (no landing) where 90% of the UK's Roseate Terns breed. It's a great opportunity to see this scarce breeding species fishing and loafing around on the rocks adjacent to their nesting boxes.

The target of our third boat trip is to glimpse one of the small groups of White-beaked Dolphins in these waters. This little known cetacean spends its summer along the Northumberland coastline, feeding in the fish-rich waters and trying to avoid their larger cousins who they see as a threat. This tour takes us out into deeper water and as a consequence we have a chance to see Gannets fishing, Red-throated Diver and possibly Manx Shearwater.

Our coastal hopscotch day is punctuated with visits to the pools and wetlands just inland from Druridge Bay. Reed and Sedge Warblers sing from the extensive phragmites beds, along with the more difficult Grasshopper Warbler. We hope to encounter the UK's most northerly breeding Avocets at one of the Reserves, along with Common Snipe, Redshank, Dunlin and Green Sandpiper. There are usually a few surprises, with Little Gull, Mediterranean Gull or Whimbrel distinct possibilities.

One day we drive inland to the mighty Kielder Water - a huge reservoir that's surrounded by coniferous forest. Due to the construction of platforms, it offers the chance of finding the nest of an Osprey and if our luck is in, one fishing in the lake itself. A stop enroute could also produce Grey Wagtail in the river and we shall also be keeping an eye out for game birds on the drive across the moorland. Typical pine forest species all breed in Kielder and we shall look for Common Crossbills and Red Squirrel in this vast forest - there's always a chance of finding a Goshawk here too.

8 After our last 'full english' breakfast we say our fond farewells and conclude this 'canny' visit to the north east.



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 We meet at The Oaks Hotel for a 7 night stay
- Days 2-7 Exploration of the coast, forest and moorland, including 3 boat trips for The Farnes Islands, White-beaked Dolphins and Coquet Island
- Day 8 We say our farewells and depart after breakfast

- Simon Eaves: Guillemots
- Ray Burgess: White-beaked Dolphins
- Craig Round: Puffin
- Sally Dowden: Arctic Terns
- Mark Denman: Kittiwake and Sandwich Tern
- Colin Scott: Eider Duck
- Chrissie Nicholson: Grey Seals

