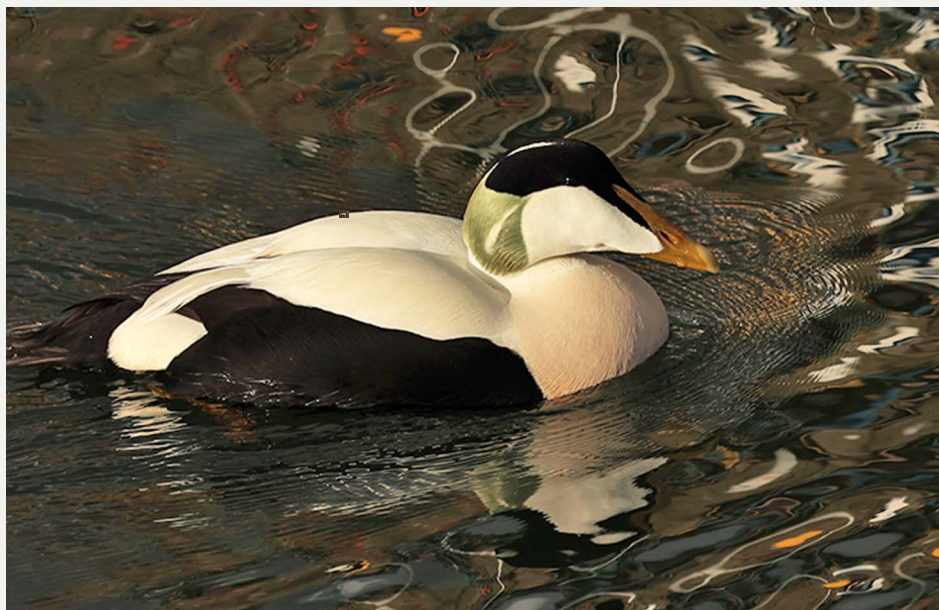


MORAY FIRTH IN WINTER



"Our first Moray coast holiday exceeded my expectations, with Long-tailed Duck from the breakfast table and some fabulous birding just a stone's throw from our hotel. We have found the perfect location for some great winter birding"

Sally Nowell

Dates Sat 11 - Sat 18 March 2023

Price £2,275

Deposit £450 Single Supp £0

Leader Sally Nowell

Weather The weather will be mixed (0-15°C). Expect sun and showers, snow in the mountains and gusty wind on exposed headlands

Walking Varied, from wide forest tracks, to beaches and rocky shorelines. Walking boots are recommended

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

Insects Not anticipated this early in the season

Accom Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite

Group 7

Just some of what we hope to see:

Long-tailed Duck

Scaup

Common Scoter

Whooper Swan

Red-throated Diver

Black-throated Diver

Great Northern Diver

Red-breasted Merganser

Pink-footed Goose

Golden Eagle

White-tailed Eagle

Peregrine

Red Kite

Bar-tailed Godwit

Knot

Purple Sandpiper

Ptarmigan

Snow Bunting

Crested Tit

Waxwing

Red Deer

Red Squirrel

Mountain Hare

Bottlenose Dolphin

Need to get away for a relaxing week in the Scottish Highlands? We have just the thing for you. Fabulous winter seawatching on the Moray Firth and the iconic wildlife of the Cairngorms National Park.

- Rafts of seaduck, including Common Scoter and Long-tailed Duck
- Red-throated, Black-throated and Great Northern Diver
- Huge flocks of geese, ducks and swans
- Good raptor list including Golden and White-tailed Eagle
- Cairngorm Mountain for Snow Bunting and Ptarmigan
- Mountain Hare, Red Deer, Bottlenose Dolphin and much more
- Charming accommodation on Nairn seafront

We meet at our hotel in time for dinner and a chat about the coming days. As the days are shorter, there will be only one early start and plenty of time for rest and relaxation at the end of each day.

We'll keep the itinerary flexible throughout the week to maximise our birdwatching opportunities in varied habitats; coast, river, mountain and forest.

2-7 On the Moray Firth, Britain's finest gathering of seaduck can be seen - with vast rafts of Common Scoter; an occasional Velvet Scoter; parties of Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser, Long-tailed Duck and Eider. We also hope for Slavonian Grebe and Red-throated and Black-throated Diver.

Each day out will take us in a different direction. On

one we'll explore the fields, harbours and inlets of the Moray Firth. Under bright, wide skies, estuaries and beaches are strewn with Oystercatcher; Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot, Wigeon and Pintail. Noisy skeins of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese, constantly on the move, feed in barley fields, often with Barnacle Geese or Greenland White-fronted amongst them.

This season can bring scarce shorebirds, with beautiful seaduck and divers coming into the harbours where we shall also search out Purple Sandpipers. Rare Glaucous and Iceland Gulls often follow the fishing boats and Little Auk can be driven down from the north and spotted offshore.

Venturing along the north banks of the Moray Firth, we'll spend time on the beautiful and slightly milder Black Isle, including the picturesque



"Highlights on this trip are undoubtedly the spectacular seaduck, but Black Grouse on a frosty morning and Snow Bunting on the hill come a very close second." Sally Nowell



village of Cromarty. This area has one of the driest climates in Scotland. The rolling farmland is interspersed with plantation and scrub. It is also surrounded by shallow firths that provide excellent habitat for the internationally important wintering wildfowl and waders. The farmland is rich habitat for Linnet and Twite, Yellowhammer and Skylark, Red Kite circle above and we shall always be on the lookout for something unexpected.

The food-rich waters are important for seals and Otter and there's an excellent chance of Bottlenose Dolphins, (the largest in size in Europe!) close inshore, as they hunt for salmon on the turn of the tide.

We'll visit the vast, internationally important inlet that is Udale Bay, where waders and seaduck abound and can be seen scattered across the sea like nowhere else in Britain. We'll be looking all the time for rare ducks such as King Eider and Surf Scoter.

Weather permitting, we'll venture into the mountains of the Cairngorms National Park, looking for all things white! Snow Bunting may be picking amongst the boulders of the ski area car park, as we scan for white Ptarmigan amongst the snow-covered tundra of the Cairngorms mountains!

We shall also make our way to Insh Marshes where large numbers of Whooper Swans spend the winter. A late afternoon visit may, with luck, turn up a Hen Harrier on its way to a winter roost. In the Caledonian pine forests we shall listen out

for passing and feeding crossbills and groups of mixed tits moving through the canopy, of course hoping for sight of Crested Tits which can be quite vocal at this time of year.

On the moors Red Grouse form small parties, Mountain Hare hide amongst the boulder fields and winter thrushes and scarce Waxwing regularly appear on berry bushes. We shall have one early start taking us in search of early Black Grouse on the open moors.

It's a fabulous season for close Golden Eagle encounters as they hunt low in the glens, while scavenging Raven flocks may harass one of our wintering immature White-tailed Eagles. With luck we may have closer views of Red Deer than we manage in summer, as they usually head to the lower hills in the winter.

This season, when the 'Northern Lights' can appear in the sky, is special for bird rarities and over the years we've found White-billed Diver, King Eider, Surf Scoter, American Wigeon, Waxwing, Little Auk, Long-tailed Skua, Northern Grey Shrike and many more.

8 After breakfast on our last day we shall say our goodbyes.



Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Nairn
7 nights at The Invernairne Hotel, Nairn
Dinner at The Golf View Hotel, Nairn

Days 2-7 An exploration of the Moray Firth, its harbours, estuaries and beaches, the Black Isle, Cromarty and Udale Bay, the Cairngorms National Park and local moors and glens

Day 8 Depart after breakfast

Steve Down: Eider, Moray Firth, Brent Geese, Red-breasted Merganser

Jane Hope: Mountain Hare, Purple Sandpiper

Mark Denman: Snow Bunting

Chris Piper: Black Grouse

