

NORTH EAST 250



"This new route explores everything from Caledonian Pine forest, through mountain passes, to the diverse seascape of the north east of Scotland, full of birds, mammals and possible cetaceans!"
Kate Mennie

Dates Sat 23 - Sat 30 March 2019
Price £1695
Deposit £300 Single Supp £200

Leaders Julian Sykes and Kate Mennie

Weather Weather can be extremely variable at this time of year so come prepared for everything from rain and wind to calm early spring sunshine!

Walking Mostly easy walking on level paths up to 2 miles or perhaps a little more if rarities require it! We may be on our feet for a lot of the day even if not walking far

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

Insects Unlikely to be a problem at this time of year

Accom Double, twin and single ensuite

Group 12

Just some of what we hope to see:

Ptarmigan	Golden Plover
Black Grouse	Purple Sandpiper
Red-throated Diver	Bar-tailed Godwit
Great Northern Diver	Iceland Gull
Slavonian Grebe	Glaucous Gull
Red-necked Grebe	Short-eared Owl
Whooper Swan	Redwing
Pink-footed Goose	Fieldfare
Velvet Scoter	Waxwing
Long-tailed Duck	Crossbill
Red Kite	Snow Bunting
Hen Harrier	Mountain Hare
Golden Eagle	Otter
Peregrine	Bottlenose Dolphin

We'll visit some of the wonderful landscapes of north east Scotland, from Royal Deeside, to the rugged and varied coastline of the Moray Firth, through to Aberdeen Harbour

- Classic forests, upland moors, lochs and estuaries
- Chance of Mountain Hare, Otter, Bottlenose Dolphin
- Only Scottish mainland colony of Gannets
- Spectacle of UK's largest Eider population
- Gorgeous geese and divers in breeding plumage
- Breathtaking views around Royal Deeside and Balmoral
- Black Grouse, Ptarmigan, Golden Eagle, Snow Bunting all possible

| We meet up in The Granite City and head inland to our lovely accommodation in Braemar, situated in the heart of Royal Deeside. Enroute we shall take the minor road from Aboyne through Glen Tanar; where roadside stops and a potential short walk, could produce some Caledonian Forest species, which with luck, could include our first crossbills. Early evening we shall reach our hotel where we spend the next three nights.

2-3 Royal Deeside offers some wonderful areas of ancient Caledonian Forest, upland moor and mountain. We shall be visiting the best of them, including the skiing area of Glenshee, where from the station car park we shall scan the surrounding mountainside for Ptarmigan, which should still be in their 'white' winter finery. Here

we could encounter Golden Eagles and Peregrine overhead and if we are lucky, a few Snow Buntings around the parking area itself. We shall spend time at the Muir of Dinnet and hopefully make a short walk around the stunningly beautiful Loch Kinord. We'll wander through Birch woodland looking for Siskin, Redpoll, tits and thrushes, with the loch possibly holding a few Goldeneye and maybe even an early Red-throated Diver. One morning we'll make a pre-breakfast visit for Black Grouse nearby and if successful, this could be one of the highlights of the week. However, this is not all about wildlife as we shall also see the historic castles of Braemar and Balmoral – who knows royalty might be an added bonus!

4-5 This is where we leave the forested mountains behind us and make our



"The NE250 follows a route of diverse landscapes through Royal Deeside, before hugging the coastline from Moray to Aberdeen. With views of moorland birds and mammals, plus seabirds on the dramatic coastline and waders on estuaries, this trip will encompass it all." Kate Mennie



way north to the Moray coast, stopping along the way at spectacular viewpoints. Our hotel is perfectly positioned at Cullen Bay so we can explore this wonderful area west towards Inverness. This whole stretch of coastline is riddled with fabulous bays and headlands, from Burghead to Spey Bay and beyond and is home to breeding pairs of Crested Tits.

This is a haven for wintering seaduck such as Common and Velvet Scoter, Long-tailed Duck and Red-breasted Merganser. We shall scan these flocks for scarcer species such as Great Northern Diver, Slavonian and Red-necked Grebes. The Moray Firth is famous for its Bottlenose Dolphins and we'll look for dorsal fins breaking the surface, as pods patrol these fish-rich waters all the time. The beautiful beaches should be quiet, so at low tide we shall search for waders such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Purple Sandpiper, Redshank, Grey and Ringed Plovers, making for a wonderful contrast to our earlier mountain days.

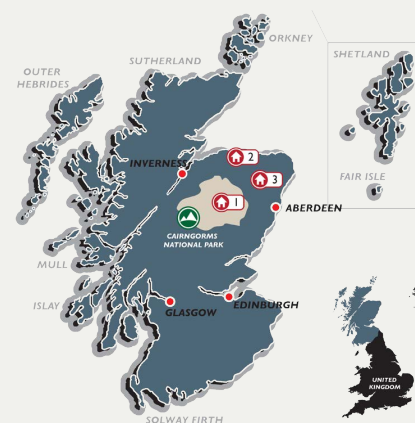
6-7 The next day we shall meander slowly along the coast to our final accommodation inland from Peterhead. Our first port of call is the famous RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, which is the UK's largest dune slack lake. This is a magnet for migrants and over-wintering Scottish waterbirds. The shallow pools attract waders and hordes of wildfowl, with an awesome track record for rare and scarce species turning up. In the surrounding fields there could be Yellowhammer or Corn Bunting, along with Pink-footed Geese

and within the huge flocks we might be lucky to find Barnacle or White-front. Further around the coast we shall stop off at a couple of headlands such as Fraserburgh and Rattray Head.

These make ideal watch-points to observe seabirds and at this time of year Gannets, Kittiwakes and auks can stream by. It is also a fabulous coastline for gulls, with all the commoner species well represented, but this is a good time of year to find an odd 'white-winged' such as Glaucous or Iceland.

Our final full day will be spent around the fabulous Ythan Estuary – this is the perfect early spring location, with large numbers of waders taking advantage of the intertidal mud and sand flats. Most of these will have over-wintered, but we may see the vanguard of northward moving migrants, arriving to fuel up on their epic journey. Large numbers of common waders such as Dunlin, Redshank, Knot, Golden and Ringed Plover wheel and turn above the estuary and amongst them we hope to find scarcer species such as Greenshank, Whimbrel and Ruff. It's the perfect place to get to grips with wader identification.

8 After breakfast we shall load the minibus for one final time and return south to Aberdeen where we shall say farewell to the NE 250.



Outline Itinerary

- Days 1-3** Meet in Aberdeen and drive to our hotel in Braemar, hopefully stopping enroute at Glen Tanar. Full days in the beautiful Royal Deeside, with possible visits to Glemshee, Muir of Dinnet, Balmoral and Linn of Dee
3 nights Braemar Hotel
- Days 4-5** Drive out of the mountains, north towards the coast, where we stop for the next two nights, visiting the coastal sites of Spey Bay, Burghead and Rosemarkie
2 nights Cullen Bay Hotel
- Days 6-7** Travel to our final hotel stopping at Loch of Strathbeg Reserve, Fraserburgh and Rattray Head. Last day around some of the classic east coast sites such as the Ythan Estuary and Blackdog
2 nights Saplindrae Hotel
- Day 8** Travel back to Aberdeen

Mark Denman: Long-tailed Ducks
Mary Braddock: Golden Eagle
Jane Hope: Black Grouse, Cairngorms
Duncan Macdonald: Common Scoter
Roy Atkins: Pink-footed Geese

