HIGHLANDS IN SPRING

"Spring is such a special time of year, with trees coming into leaf, some birds singing and starting to breed and others on migration further north. With Black Grouse on the moor, Osprey on their nests, Cuckoos calling and divers seen inland and on the coast, this week is always special."
Jane Atkins

Dates	Sat 24 April - Sat 1 May 2027
Price	£2,815
Deposit	£550 Single Supp £420

Leader	Jane Atkins
Weather	Can be unpredictable with rain or wind possible or may be warm and sunny. (8°-18°C) Likely to be cold at start of the day. Snow may be lingering in the mountains
Walking	Most walks are 1-2 miles or less on wide sandy tracks. 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
Meals	All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8
Insects	Not a problem at this time of year
Accom	Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite
Group	6

Just some of what we hope to see:

Golden Eagle	Golden Plover
White-tailed Eagle	Rock Dove
Osprey	Crested Tit
Red Kite	Redstart
Peregrine	Tree Pipit
Great Northern Diver	Dipper
Black-throated Diver	Ring Ouzel
Red-throated Diver	Raven
Slavonian Grebe	crossbill
Scaup	Pine Marten
Long-tailed Duck	Mountain Hare
Black Grouse	Otter
Ptarmigan	Red Deer
Red Grouse	European Beaver
Black Guillemot	Red Squirrel
Purple Sandpiper	Bottlenose Dolphin

Special Highland birds and mammals in an action-packed week around the mountains and forests of Speyside, Moray Coast, Black Isle and the West Coast of Scotland.

- Kick off your year's wildlife quest in style with the Highland specialities
- Chance of Golden Eagle, Crested Tit, crossbills, Osprey and Slavonian Grebe
- Dusk visits to our hide for Pine Marten and Badger
- Early morning visit for Black Grouse
- West Coast for White-tailed Eagle, Black Guillemot, Greenshank and three diver species
- On the Moray Firth and Black Isle coast - seaduck, terns, waders and dolphins
- Visit local lochan to see European Beaver at dusk

1 Our action-packed week starts with dinner together on Saturday evening, followed by a chat about the coming week.

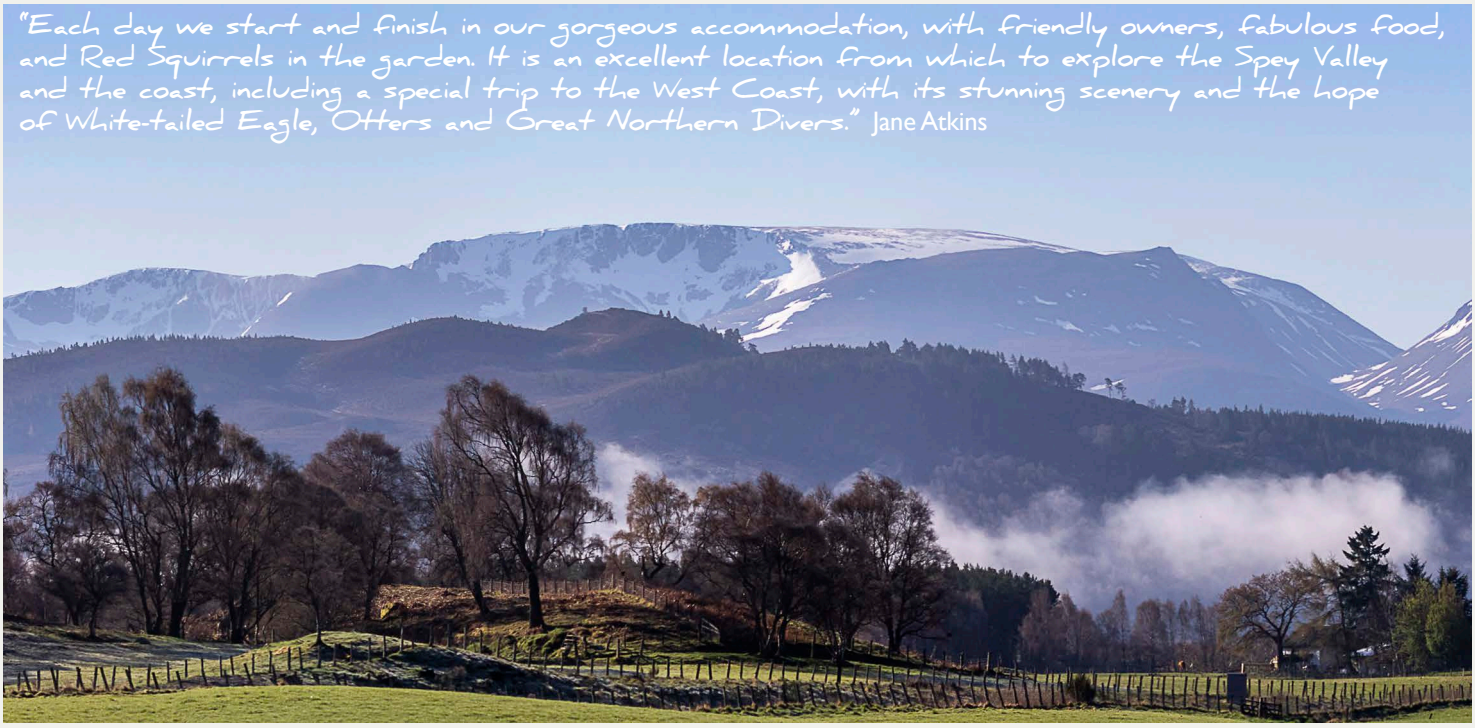
2-7 From our base in Dulnain Bridge, near Grantown-on-Spey, there is plenty to see close to home and we may start with a walk down the river, or visit the beautiful pine forest nearby. Here, amongst the ancient pines, we shall search out delightful Crested Tit and parties of crossbill - which we'll need to check carefully, as Common and Scottish Crossbills are possible - though identification can be a serious challenge.

Redstarts, Tree Pipits, Siskins and countless Willow Warblers are singing in the forest clearings and Cuckoos call from the wooded slopes. Red Squirrels scamper through the branches and we'll visit our own baited hide for fabulous close-up views of Badgers and hopefully Pine Martens too. An early start one morning takes us to see Black Grouse as they strut, bubble and flutter at each other. It is a wonderful sight to see.

Nearby lochans hold beautiful Slavonian Grebes, with golden plumes in their breeding finery. This is a great time of year to see Osprey - just returning to nest, with the chance of Golden Eagle too and in recent years sightings of White-tailed Eagles have increased locally.

The Black Isle and Moray Coast have a few of the Long-tailed Duck, Scaup and perhaps Common and Velvet Scoters that winter here amongst the Eiders, while Purple Sandpiper may be on rockier coasts. We'll visit Udale Bay, where passage waders may include a few Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and other waders. Flocks of wintering Pink-footed

"Each day we start and finish in our gorgeous accommodation, with friendly owners, fabulous food, and Red Squirrels in the garden. It is an excellent location from which to explore the Spey Valley and the coast, including a special trip to the West Coast, with its stunning scenery and the hope of White-tailed Eagle, Otters and Great Northern Divers." Jane Atkins



Geese, plus perhaps a few Wigeon, Teal and with luck Pintail, may still be lingering before they head north and we'll look out for farmland birds such as Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer.

We'll make a special effort to see the resident group of Bottlenose Dolphins at a headland on the Black Isle, where they can often come remarkably close to shore as they hunt fish moving in on the rising tide - with luck perhaps we'll see some acrobatics!

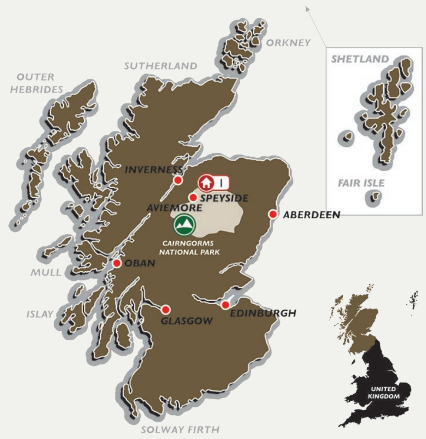
One evening we have the exciting chance to see Scotland's newest mammal - European Beaver. Introduced locally they are doing well and are showing regularly at certain sites. We shall learn how they are affecting the landscape and hopefully get to see one or two as they come out to feed at dusk. Using a bat detector we shall see what species are flitting around the trees - Pipistrelle is most likely, but other species such as Daubenton's are possible too.

In nearby Highland straths we'll keep an eye on the sky for hunting Golden Eagle, Red Kite or Peregrine. Raven pass overhead and Dipper breed in the fast flowing rivers, Wheatear will have arrived on the slopes and we hope for Hen Harrier or displaying Red Grouse as we scan for Red Deer and Mountain Hares. Weather permitting we'll venture into the Cairngorms using the funicular railway to search for Ptarmigan and other wildlife that can be seen on the mountain slopes, with chances of newly arrived Ring Ouzel near the base station.

We'll have a wonderful day amidst the dramatic mountain peaks and shores of the West Coast. As we drive west, the scenery becomes more and more impressive and the beach at Mellon Udrigle is beautiful and so peaceful. It is a great chance to see Great Northern, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers in breeding plumage just offshore, before they move to their nesting sites.

Wild Rock Doves nest on the cliffs and we'll look out for Ravens, Hooded Crow, Twite and Black Guillemot, plus Common Seals loafing on the rocks. Along the seaweed strewn shoreline we'll search for Otters as they hunt for butterfish and crabs, while another big target here is the resident White-tailed Eagles - huge and impressive as they soar over Scottish Islands. With so much to see - it'll be a busy week!

8 We say our farewells after breakfast.



Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Arrive in Dulnain Bridge in time for an evening meal and a chat about what we shall do for the coming week. 7 nights at Tigh na Sgiath Hotel, Dulnain Bridge
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, Cairngorms in Spring, crossbill
Tom Cadwallender: Pine Marten
Andrew Seal: Osprey
Colin Scott: Red Squirrel
James Glover: Bottlenose Dolphin