

SUTHERLAND AND SPEYSIDE



"Speyside is at the heart of Scottish wildlife, with The Steading at the heart of Speyside and I love spending time there year on year. With great chances of iconic 'north of the border' birds and mammals local to this fabulous accommodation, it's almost a holiday for me spending time there."
Julian Sykes

Dates Sat 17 - Tue 27 June 2017

Price £1795

Deposit £350 Single Supp £150

Leaders Julian Sykes and Simon Pawsey

Weather Mixture of sun and showers (10°-25°C)

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 Cairngorms walk is more steep and uneven but low-level unguided alternatives are available. Walking boots will be needed on the holiday

Boat Trip Our boat trip to Handa Island is over sheltered waters and lasts 15 mins

Meals All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11

Insects Biting midges can occasionally be a nuisance by lochs and shores

Accom The Steading - double, twin and single ensuite and non ensuite rooms

The Rhiconich Hotel and The Rowan Tree Hotel - double, twin and single rooms all ensuite

Just some of what we hope to see:

Great Northern Diver	Dotterel
Red-throated Diver	Osprey
Capercaillie	Red Kite
Black Grouse	Merlin
Slavonian Grebe	Peregrine
Golden Eagle	Guillemot
White-tailed Eagle	Razorbill
Puffin	Fulmar
Dotterel	Arctic Skua
Crested Tit	Great Skua
Scottish Crossbill	Black Guillemot
Snow Bunting	Pine Marten

To Handa Island and back - Speyside's speciality birds and mammals, plus spectacular seabird colonies in the north-west, all in Scotland's most incredible land and sea-scapes.

- Fabulous long summer days when the sun barely sets
- Our favourite Speyside days, including all the Scottish specialities
- An evening for Pine Marten and Badger at our baited hide
- Four days of spectacular Sutherland birds and landscapes
- A special journey to Handa Island in north-west Sutherland
- Durness and Balnakeil Bay on the edge of Scotland
- White-tailed Eagle, Greenshank and Rock Dove

Dinner together on Saturday starts the holiday at the Steading, followed with a chat about the coming days.

2-5 From our base in Glen Feshie we'll start with a visit to a local glen or to the beautiful Caledonian Pine Forest. Here, Crested Tit and Scottish Crossbill are amongst the breeding birds, Red Squirrels scamper through the branches and we'll look out for elusive Capercaillie and Black Grouse.

Nearby lochans hold beautiful Slavonian Grebes and we'll visit nesting Osprey, including our very own pair so close to the Steading. We have our own places to find camouflaged Mountain Hare, with huge herds of Red Deer watching us from the skyline. Golden Eagle and Raven soar above

the mountain slopes and Peregrine hunt in the valley, where Oystercatcher and Curlew have chicks and Common Gull nest on the shingle. We'll also venture onto the arctic-tundra of Cairngorm in search of Ptarmigan - easy now we can use the Funicular Railway to get there!

Wandering higher onto the plateau we'll search for Dotterel and with luck we may find Snow Bunting too. One evening we'll visit our own hide for Pine Marten and Badger, plus cute Wood Mouse and the chance of a Tawny Owl or a roding Woodcock.

The meandering River Spey holds Dipper, Grey Wagtail and noisy Common Sandpiper, while waders display over marshes around Lochindorb and Insh. Goldeneye have delightful little black and white ducklings and 'proper' Scottish Greylag Geese



"The north west corner of the Scottish mainland is an astonishing place to visit, being stacked with tiny coves of white sandy beaches, rocky outlets and the stunning Handa Island. This is where we get up close and personal with skuas, terns, gulls and of course auks - not least the very cute Puffin - just love this place!" Julian Sykes



nest. Red Kite circle above the rolling farmland of the Moray Firth, whilst tidal bays are busy with Eider and noisy Arctic, Common and Sandwich Tern. There may even be the odd non-breeding scoter or Long-tailed Duck.

On the wild moors of Dava and the Monadhliath, Merlin and Peregrine can be found and these are places where the plaintive notes of Ring Ouzel, the cackling of Red Grouse and the mournful piping of Golden Plover can be heard.

6-10 We journey past deep-indented sealochs and dramatic peaks via Gruinard Bay, where we'll search for White-tailed Eagle and perhaps see our first Black-throated Diver in stunning breeding plumage.

There is always a chance of Otter here and perhaps Golden Eagle, before heading for our hotel farther north at Rhiconich. This is wild country, feeling as spectacular and 'foreign' as it's possible to get in this land. It is open, ice-scoured and wild - the soaring mountains like Suilven and Stac Pollaidh standing in isolation and interspersed with numerous peaty lochs and patches of native broadleaves, while the coastline is dotted with sandy bays and small islands - for many this is the most beautiful part of Britain.

The most renowned birding location here must be Handa Island and taking a small boat to get there we'll spend a full day enjoying the circular route around the island. Thousands of Guillemot, Razorbill, Fulmar and Kittiwake nest on the towering cliffs

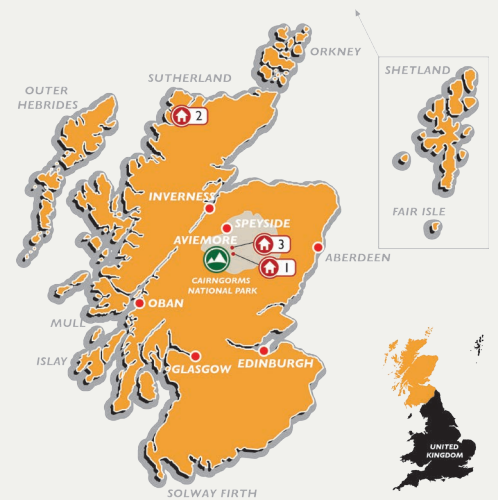


of the stack on the north coast, with smaller numbers of Puffin right on top. Black Guillemots breed in the boulders at the base of the cliffs and we often get close views from the boat.

The colonies are patrolled by Great and Arctic Skuas, both of which nest on the island, allowing close up views of these spectacular birds. Red-throated Diver may be nesting, even on the smaller lochans. Summering Great Northern Divers are frequently found at Balnakeil Bay, where the white beach rises up to the grassy slopes of Faraid Head, dotted with Puffins.

Here, near Durness, Corncrakes can sometimes be heard. Wild Rock Doves are found here too, along with Twite and we'll scan the sea as there is always the chance of whales and dolphins. Divers, Merlin, Greenshank and Golden Eagle will punctuate our journeys around Loch Eriboll and Loch Assynt - a truly wonderful place. On our last afternoon we enjoy more spectacular scenery as we return to Speyside.

|| After breakfast on Tuesday we say our farewells



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Arrive in Glen Feshie
5 nights at the Steading
- Days 2-5 Wildlife and birdwatching exploration throughout Speyside including, Abernethy Forest, Dava Moor, the Moray Firth coast and the Cairngorms
- Day 6 Journey through stunning scenery to Sutherland, birdwatching enroute
4 nights at The Rhiconich Hotel
- Days 7-9 Wildlife and birdwatching exploration around Sutherland including a visit to Handa Island
- Day 10 Return to Speyside for overnight stay
1 night at The Rowan Tree Hotel
- Day 11 Depart after breakfast

Colin Scott: Slavonian Grebe
 Ted Stevens: Kyle of Durness
 Simon Eaves: Crossbill
 Mary Braddock: Guillemot
 John Grierson: Fulmar
 Geraint Young: Pine Marten