

SUTHERLAND AND SPEYSIDE



"A two-part holiday with the best of two areas of Scotland. Exploring the forests and rugged Sutherland landscape, with the long daylight hours giving us time to explore."
Kate Mennie

Dates Sat 3 - Tue 13 Jun 2023
Price £2,695
Deposit £500 Single Supp £450

Leaders Sally Nowell and Kate Mennie

Weather Mixture of sun and showers (10°-25°C) although it can be cooler in the mountains and on the boat crossing

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

We may take a steep uneven walk into the Cairngorms. Sturdy boots and walking poles are essential. Low-level unguided alternatives are available.

Our day on the remote Island of Handa has limited toilet facilities and will include a 3.5km walk round the island on boardwalk.

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 insects may be encountered, so bring repellent

Accom Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite

Group 12

Just some of what we hope to see

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

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 seascapes

- Fabulous long summer days when the sun barely sets
- Our favourite Speyside days, including the Scottish specialities
- Four days of stunning Sutherland birds and landscapes
- A full day on spectacular Handa Island in north-west Sutherland
- Durness and Balnakeil Bay on the northern edge of Scotland
- White-tailed Eagle, Greenshank and Rock Dove
- Early morning Black Grouse and cackling Red Grouse over the moors

I We meet at our hotel in Grantown-on-Spey in time for dinner and a chance to chat about the coming days.

2-5 We'll start with a visit to a local glen or to the beautiful Caledonian Pine Forest. Here, Crested Tit and crossbill are amongst the breeding birds and Red Squirrels scamper. We shall go out early one morning for a chance of lekking Black Grouse.

Nearby lochans hold beautiful Slavonian Grebes and we'll visit nesting Osprey. 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 into the foothills of the Cairngorms in search of Ptarmigan and Dotterel if we're lucky. The plaintive notes of Ring Ouzel may also be heard and seen.

One evening we'll visit our hide for Pine Marten and Badger 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 are nesting. 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.



"Early Summer in the Cairngorms will be a great time to look for warblers, flycatchers, Slavonian Grebe, Osprey plus many more migrants. Then setting off for the north-west, the landscape changes dramatically, where every loch has a breeding pair of diver, eagles soar overhead and seabird colonies are plentiful." Kate Mennie



On the wild moors of Dava and the Monadhliaths, 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.

6-9 We journey past deep-indented sealochs and dramatic peaks of Wester Ross on our way to Sutherland, where we'll search for White-tailed Eagle and perhaps see a Black-throated Diver in stunning breeding plumage.

There is always a chance of Otter here and perhaps Golden Eagle as well, before we head 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 of Suilven and Stac Pollaidh standing in splendid isolation, interspersed with numerous peaty lochs and small patches of native broadleaves, while the coastline is dotted with sandy bays and skerries - 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, whilst Shag hiss from hidden nests.

Black Guillemots breed in the boulders at the base of the cliffs and we often get close views from the

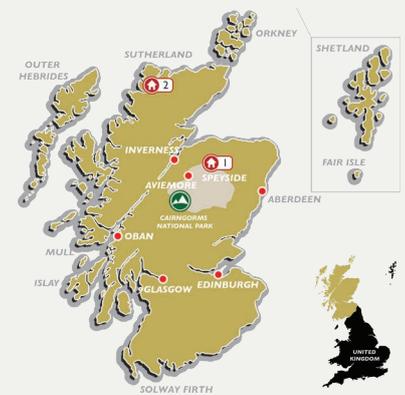


boat. The colonies are patrolled by Great and Arctic Skuas looking for a meal. Both nest on the island, allowing close-up views of these spectacular birds and Great Skuas often gather to bathe in lochs where Red-throated Diver may be nesting.

Summering Great Northern Divers are frequently found on the sweeping azure seas of Balnakeil Bay, at the edge of Scotland, next stop the Arctic! This northern coast is a beautiful mix of rocky coastline and gorgeous white beaches sweeping up to grassy slopes and moorland dotted with orchids. We may find tiny Scottish Primroses in short turf on the cliff-tops - especially at Strathy Point where viewing out to sea can be spectacular! Gannets dive offshore, while Kittiwakes, auks and Fulmars are constantly streaming by. This is a premier sight to scan for dolphins, or even whales if it is calm.

There are more Puffin colonies along the north coast, plus wild Rock Doves and Twite and just inland are lochs where Black-throated Divers breed. Merlin and Greenshank also breed on these remote moorlands. At nearby Dumess, Corncrakes can sometimes be heard, though they are difficult to see in the tall vegetation and we'll look out for Golden Eagle as we journey around Loch Eriboll and Loch Assynt - truly wonderful places.

10-11 On our last afternoon we enjoy more spectacular scenery as we take an inland route, birdwatching as we go, back to Speyside and our hotel for the last night. After breakfast the next morning we make our farewells.



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Arrive in the Cairngorms. 5 nights Garth Hotel, Grantown
- Days 2-5 Wildlife and birdwatching exploration throughout Speyside including Abernethy Forest, Dava Moor, the Moray Firth coast and the Cairngorms.
- Day 6 Travel north-west to Sutherland, via Gruinard Bay. 4 nights The Rhiconich Hotel
- Days 7-9 Exploration of the north-west corner of Scotland including Handa.
- Days 10-11 Travel back to the Cairngorms. 1 night Garth Hotel, Grantown

Andrew Hoyne: Black-throated Diver
Kate Mennie: Coast View, Chalamain Gap, Razorbill
Jane Hope: Black Guillemot
Simon Eaves: crossbill
Sue and Bill Gill: Greenshank

