

# AUTUMN WILDLIFE IN THE CAIRNGORMS



*"We take in the Caldeonian Pine Forest, wild glens, coastal bays and the west coast, in search of some of the Autumn spectacles you can expect to see in Scotland."*

Kate Mennie

Dates Sat 23 - Sat 30 Sep 2023

Price £2,170

Deposit £300 Single Supp £270

Leaders Kate Mennie and one from our team

Weather The weather can vary enormously. Snow can occur in the mountains at any season with sunny warm weather also possible. During a typical week in autumn we would expect to experience mixed sun and showers with temperatures in the range 8-18°C. You may want to bring sunscreen

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 take groups in to the Cairngorms to see Ptarmigan, therefore it will be necessary to take a walk on paths over uneven and occasionally undulating rocky terrain. Low-level unguided alternatives are available.

Walking boots will be needed on the holiday and walking poles helpful

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

Insects Biting midges are rare at this time of year

Accom Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite or with private facilities

Group 12

The season of golden colours, roaring stags, hunting eagles, seaduck and rarities - this is a wonderful time to be in glorious Speyside, within the Cairngorms National Park.

- Capercaillie, Black Grouse and Speyside specialities
- Includes a West Coast 'White-tailed Eagle' trip
- Seaduck, geese and thrushes arriving from the north
- Regular rare skuas, ducks and white-winged gulls
- Young Golden Eagles above roaring Red Deer stags
- Ptarmigan parties in the Cairngorms
- An evening for Pine Marten, Badger and more

I Dinner together on Saturday evening to start the holiday, is followed by coffee and a run through the coming week.

**2-7** As colder weather grips northern Scandinavia, thousands of birds stream south to warmer waters, many spending the winter off our shores. Like grains from a pepperpot, seaduck, grebes and divers are scattered across the sea like nowhere else in Britain. Rafts of Common and Velvet Scoter can be found in Findhorn Bay and we'll search through them for rare Surf Scoter which are annual here - lost birds from North America. Long-tailed Duck are in beautiful winter plumage and we'll check through flocks of Eider just in case a rare King Eider is amongst them. There will be Slavonian Grebe, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers, Scaup and the chance of Great and Arctic Skuas - even Red-necked Grebe is possible.

Purple Sandpiper, Ringed Plover and Turnstone pick around sea-weedy rocks and we'll visit estuaries alive with waders, Knot, Dunlin, Oystercatcher and Bar-tailed Godwit, which may hide something more unusual and we'll find big flocks of Wigeon plus Teal and Pintail. Skeins of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese are constantly on the move and may be arriving in their thousands.

If winds come from the north we'll check through the flocks of gulls, as there is always the chance of stray Glaucous or Iceland Gulls. Red Kite drift over farmland on the Black Isle and we'll visit a spot where Bottlenose Dolphins frequently come surprisingly close to the shore and hope for some acrobatics as they chase salmon coming in on the rising tide!

At Insh Marshes, Icelandic Whooper Swans quietly feed and Goosander and Goldeneye dive in small pools, where furtive Teal skulk in the margins.

## Just some of what we hope to see:

Golden Eagle  
White-tailed Eagle  
Ptarmigan  
Black Grouse  
Capercaillie  
Pink-footed Geese  
Long-tailed Duck  
Scaup  
Common Scoter  
Velvet Scoter

Rock Dove  
Crested Tit  
Scottish Crossbill  
Snow Bunting  
Red Squirrel  
Pine Marten





Towards dusk, Hen Harriers fly buoyantly in from the moors to roost in the long grasses here, sometimes Merlin too. Golden Eagle and Peregrine hunt the higher glens and we'll search for Mountain Hares - now moulting into their winter coat and starting to go white in patches. A real highlight can be watching the Red Deer. This is the time when they are rutting and the roar of rutting stags echoes across the valley. Occasionally we see a real confrontation, as stags meet head to head, or we may see males that have adorned their antlers with grass and heather!

Open moorland holds parties of Red Grouse and, weather permitting, we'll explore the Cairngorms for cryptically camouflaged Ptarmigan - a walk into the foothills will bring us in to their domain

In the ancient pines of Abernethy Forest, Crested Tit are found and flocks of Siskin, Goldcrest, Coal Tit and Treecreeper weave through trees that flank the mountains. There is always the chance of Common and Parrot Crossbill too and we'll keep alert for elusive Capercaillie and Black Grouse - though neither species are easy at this time of year.

Golden Eagle are possible and there is now a resident pair of White-tailed Eagles here, so keep your fingers crossed!

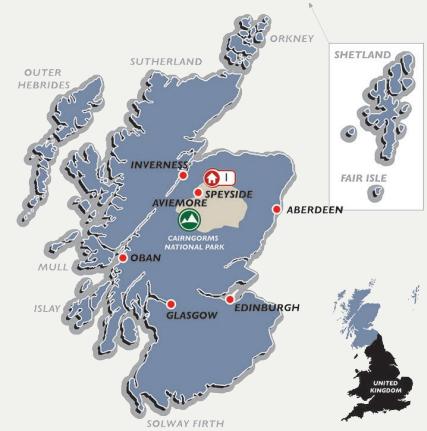
Flocks of winter thrushes, Redwing and Fieldfare, or even scarce Waxwing may appear on berry bushes. One night we'll go out for the chance of close up views of delightful Pine Martens and Badgers!

We shall also venture to the remote west coast through the dramatic peaks and sea lochs of wildest Wester Ross. The scenery gets more and more spectacular as you head west and the coastal beaches around Laide and Mellon Udrigle are beautiful too, with stunning mountain views towards Sutherland.

Wild Rock Dove may be found here along with Raven, Twite, Stonechat and Golden Eagle, but it's imposing White-tailed Eagle that may steal the show. We'll search for Red-throated and Great Northern Divers amongst more numerous Black-throated Divers that winter here, along with Black Guillemots, Eider and Shags.

Common Seals may be hauled out on the rocks and we'll scan the water and rocky shore for Otters. These wonderful animals are more linked to tide than time of day here, allowing the chance of animals out in daylight. We have enjoyed some wonderful views of them - especially when they catch something they need to bring to shore to deal with!

**8** After breakfast on Saturday we say our farewells.



### Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Arrive in time for dinner and a chat about our plans for the coming week.  
7 nights at Tigh na Sgith Country House
- 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 and depart

**Mark Denman:** Red Deer  
**Jane Hope:** Pine Woods, Crested Tit, Red Grouse, Whooper Swans  
**Bill and Sue Gill:** Ptarmigan  
**John Osborne:** Red Squirrel

