

Autumn in the Cairngorms

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Meet Inverness; afternoon excursion

Day 2/6 Wildlife excursions around the Moray Coast, Speyside & the Cairngorms

Day 7 Return to Inverness after lunch

Departs

September, October or November

Focus

Birds, mammals and landscapes

Grading

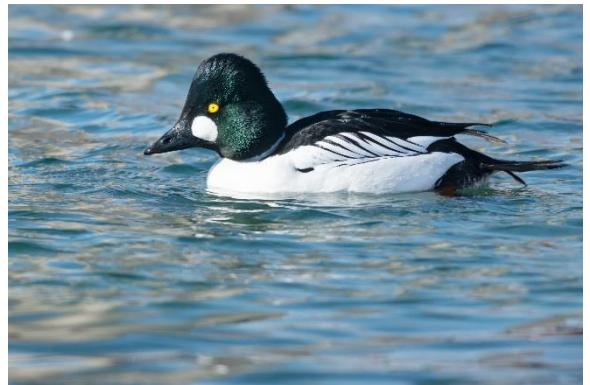
A/B. Easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR157)

Highlights:

- Mammals include Red Squirrel, Mountain Hare, Pine Marten and Red Deer.
- Woodland birds including Siskin, Crossbill and Crested Tit possible.
- Stunning scenery of the Cairngorm Mountains, Speyside and Caledonian pine forests.
- Raptors including Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier.
- Returning winter migrants such as geese and swans.
- Coastal visit for sea ducks.
- Led by expert naturalist guide.



From top: Common Crossbill, Goldeneye & Red Deer
Images courtesy of Shutterstock



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Introduction

Scotland is home to a wonderful selection of iconic and charismatic species, as well as a range of winter visitors that start to arrive during the autumn months. This single-centre tour, based in either a lodge or small hotel in the heart of the Cairngorms, will seek out the varied wildlife of the surrounding mountains, coast and ancient Caledonian pine forests.

Among the mammal species we will search for are majestic Red Deer, timid Mountain Hare, the relatively elusive Pine Marten and the lovely, energetic Red Squirrel. In terms of birds, the moorlands are home to the famous Red Grouse, while Crested Tit and Crossbills can be found flitting amongst the pine trees. Eagles and other raptors make their homes on the hillsides above the forests and glens, while the lochs and marshes host all manner of wildfowl, including ducks, geese and swans. Off the coast, gatherings of sea ducks will be starting to raft and tidal bays may shelter wader flocks. These waters are also home to Bottlenose Dolphin, so it is always worth keeping an eye out for a pass pod during our coastal excursions.



Red Squirrel

We will make the most of each day, spending time exploring this great variety of habitat, before returning to our comfortable and cosy accommodation each evening for dinner and a discussion of the day's sightings.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Arrive Inverness

We will meet in Inverness at around lunchtime (see arrival/departure details below for exact location and timings) and journey south by minibus to Speyside and the Cairngorms. On our first afternoon



Greylag Geese

we will visit some marshes where a variety of wildfowl arrive during the autumn, including flocks of Wigeon, Teal, Greylag and Pink-footed Geese and Whooper Swans. At the end of the afternoon we may be privileged enough to witness Hen Harriers coming in to roost. From here we'll make our way to our accommodation where we will be staying at for the next 6 nights.

Days 2 - 6

Excursions around the Cairngorms

Most mornings there will be the option of a pre-breakfast walk either directly from our accommodation or within a short drive. We will keep our plans for each day flexible, and our leader will make decisions based on the weather and previous sightings. However, we plan to explore the following areas and habitats during our stay in the Cairngorms:



Crested Tit

During our stay here we will visit the pine woods, both ancient and more modern, in search of the specialist species that live here, including Crested

Tit, Crossbill, Siskin, Red Squirrel and a variety of other woodland birds.

At this time of year there are often a good number of ducks around on the lochs and we will be looking out for Goldeneye, Wigeon, Teal and Goosander. Migratory geese will be arriving too, including Greylag, Pink-footed and Barnacle. There are also a few locations favoured by the graceful Whooper Swans which we will take time to visit.

A little to the northwest of our location is Strathdearn, more commonly referred to as the Findhorn Valley. This is where the source of the River Findhorn begins, and very well known for Mountain Hare. Depending on how fast the season is changing, the hares may be starting to moult into their white winter coats. We'll also be looking out for the herds of Red Deer that will be mid-rut at this time of year; the stags with their full rack of impressive antlers bellowing loudly to proclaim their dominance. Golden and White-tailed Eagle frequent this valley, their huge wings spread wide as they soar upwards on the thermals.



Mountain Hare

The area around Lochindorb has the perfect habitat for Red Grouse. These moorland birds live up to their name, with their reddish brown colouration and bright red eyebrows, and we'll make a stop here one day if we haven't found the grouse elsewhere.



Red Grouse

Another day we will take an excursion up the Moray Coast where we will scan the sea for sea ducks and divers that often come here for the winter. The sheltered bays can be particularly good for Eider, Wigeon, Long-tailed Duck, scoters, Goldeneye and

occasionally Pintail that will be starting to gather. There may also be flocks of waders feeding on

the tidal beaches. Depending on the tides and prevailing weather we will stop at one or more locations. Around towards the Black Isle we will look out for the Red Kite that are starting to repopulate this area. Making our way to Chanonry Point, we'll aim to time our visit for the turn of



the tide when there is a good chance of the resident Bottlenose Dolphin pod being sighted closer to shore, as they hunt the fish which are trapped against the sand banks.

Finally, on one day we will return to our accommodation a little earlier and then head out again in the evening, in order to visit a nearby hide that is purpose built for viewing characterful Pine Marten, and often attracts Badger too.

Day 7 Morning Excursion, return to

Inverness

Our final morning has some flexibility in it to allow us to return to a site that we enjoyed, explore somewhere new, or try to find a particular species that we might have missed earlier in the week. Around lunch time we must pack up and turn northwards again, back towards Inverness. We will aim to be back in the city in the mid-afternoon.

Images courtesy of Shutterstock & A. Steel

Tour grading

Grade A/B – Easy to moderate day walks, with some rough terrain.

We travel by minibus most days, but will spend plenty of time exploring on foot. Enjoyment of this tour, therefore, demands a reasonable level of fitness and an enjoyment of walking. All walks will be taken at a leisurely pace, and a built-in flexibility will take into account the overall abilities of the group.

Arrival / departure details

Our first meeting point will be at Inverness Airport at 1200 hours. We will then pick further group members up from Inverness Railway Station at around 1230 hours. It is also possible to arrange a pick up from Aviemore station later in the afternoon or to make your own way to the lodge/hotel by car, or indeed to meet at the site of our first excursion (further details available from the Naturetrek office prior to departure).

At the end of the tour we expect to return to Inverness airport by 1400 hours. Those departing by air from Inverness should arrange flights to depart after 1530 hours to allow enough time for check-in procedures. Departure times from Inverness railway station should be after 1445 hours. As flight

and train timings do vary from year to year, we would ask you to contact the Naturetrek office before booking travel arrangements that are unlikely to fit in with the timings mentioned above.

Equipment to bring

This is a list of suggested items that would help you get the most out of the tour:

- Hiking boots
- Cold weather and wet weather clothing
- Warm hat and gloves
- Thermos flask and water bottle
- Walking poles
- Binoculars
- Camera
- Telescope (if you have one)
- Guide books for birds and mammals

Focus

We will be focusing mainly on the birds and mammals found in this region.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food is included in the price of the tour, from the evening meal on day 1 to lunch on day 7. Accommodation will be in comfortable, en-suite rooms, however the exact location may vary between tours. On departures where we are using the exclusive lodge, this is based in Glen Feshie, at Ballintean Mountain Lodge. Other groups will stay at the Rowan Tree Hotel, or similar comfortable hotels in the Aviemore area.

Weather

At this time of year, the weather can range from rain showers (or even snow blizzards) to moderately warm sunshine. We may get both on the same day! You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including warm fleeces, jackets, hats and gloves. Walking boots will be needed for some excursions.

Tour Transport

For this tour we will be using small 9-seater mini-buses for the day to day travel. Please assist our tour leaders in ensuring that there is a rotation of seats around the tour vehicle(s) to allow each tour member to enjoy approximately equal time in the front. In order to be fair to all participants, we regret that we are unable to guarantee a perpetual front seat to those who might suffer from motion sickness or other concerns.

Accommodation in Inverness

If you arrive the night before the trip, or want to stay the night at the end of your trip, then we suggest the following hotels:

Convenient for Inverness Station (5 min walk away):

Royal Highland Hotel

Station Square, Academy St, Inverness, IV1 1LG

01463 231 926

www.royalhighlandhotel.co.uk

Mercure Inverness Hotel

Church Street, Inverness, IV1 1QY

01463 548 111

www.accorhotels.com

PentaHotel Inverness

63 Academy Street, Inverness, IV1 1LU

01463 228 850

www.pentahotels.com/hotels-destinations/united-kingdom/inverness?

MacDougall Clansman Hotel

103 Church St, Inverness, IV1 1ES

01463 713 702

www.invernesscentrehotel.co.uk

Waverly Inn Guesthouse

25 Union St, Inverness, IV1 1QA

01463 716 008

www.waverleyinnngroup.com

Alternatively take a look at options on www.tripadvisor.co.uk **How to book your place**

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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