

Islay & Jura in Summer

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Islay

Day 2/6 Islay

Day 7 Depart Islay

Departs

June

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR27) or brochure

Grading

Grade A. Easy day walks only

Focus

Birds, mammals, butterflies and some botany

Highlights

- Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine & White-tailed Eagle among raptors.
- Explore the machair, a fertile, low-lying grassland rich in summer flora, bordering the sea.
- Nesting waders include Redshank, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher & Lapwing.
- Occasional Glaucous or Iceland Gulls & Great Northern Diver in breeding plumage.
- Peatbogs resound to the evocative cries of Curlew & the 'drumming' of Snipe.
- Look for Corncrake, Twite & Corn Bunting.
- Eider Duck, Red-breasted Merganser & Black Guillemot among resident species.
- Bog Myrtle, Black Bog Rush & White-beaked Sedge all flower on the machair.
- 5,000 Red Deer on Jura, plus Grey Seal & Otter
- Led by an expert naturalist guide.



Images from top: Marsh Fritillary, Lapwing & Otter (courtesy of Dani Free & Dave Pierce)



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Introduction

This is a wonderfully scenic tour, taking you on a 7-day trip to some of the best wildlife destinations in the UK. The small island of Islay situated in the Western Islands of Scotland, give you a real chance to get away from the rush of everyday life and enjoy the open beaches, hills and fresh air. It is the most southerly island of the Inner Hebrides and boasts a very varied landscape of moorland, woods and farmland, surrounded by an impressive coastline. As the population of the island is small, it provides an unspoilt remote setting for enjoying natural history. There are classic examples of glaciation effects to be seen within the lochs, hills and glens. The neighbouring island of Jura is much hillier and home to large numbers of Red Deer, while Otter are often seen along the shorelines. We'll be taking day trips across from Islay, so that we can enjoy both of these scenic islands.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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

Islay

We depart from Glasgow in the early afternoon (see joining instructions below) and drive to Kennacraig, where we depart by ferry around 1800hrs for the two-hour crossing to Islay. We will be staying in a comfortable guest house or hotel on Islay.

Please note that the first evening meal will be taken on the ferry at your own expense.

Day 2 - 6

Islay

Islay is one of the most wildlife-rich areas in the UK. It is rightly best known for tens of thousands of wintering geese and as a spring and autumn migration watch-point but it also has as much, if not more, to offer the visitor in summer. Over 100 bird species breed on the island including two of Britain's largest birds of prey and there is also a wide range of plant species, some at either the northern or southern limits of their ranges, together with beautiful butterflies and a fine range of mammals.



Common Redshank

Islay, often called the 'Queen of the Hebrides' comprises long shallow bays and lochs, sandy beaches, wet grassland, rolling moorland and boggy areas all overlooked by tall craggy mountain peaks. The indentations and curves of a coastline which extends for over 130 miles, provides countless secluded places for wildlife to flourish and during our leisurely exploration we will be



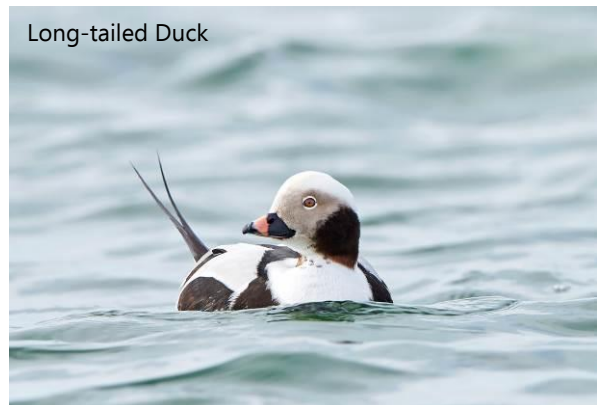
Corncrake

scanning many such inlets and beaches, hoping to spot an unusual visitor or two as well as becoming acquainted with the more usual residents. Occasional Glaucous or Iceland Gulls spend the summer frequenting the coast and perhaps a Great Northern Diver in splendid breeding plumage might be fishing for crabs in one of the bays but such encounters will be bonuses and the principal attractions for us will be the regular nesting birds of Islay.

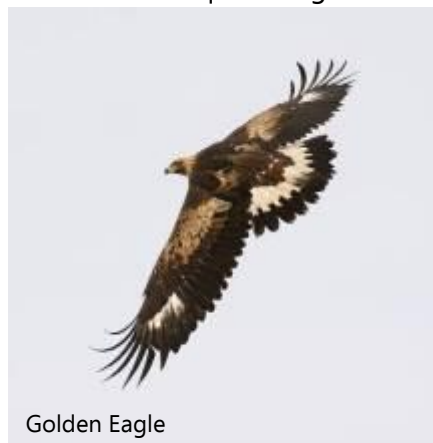
One of the special vegetation features of the Hebridean islands are the swathes of 'machair' a term describing fertile, low-lying grasslands bordering the sea which are

particularly rich in summer flora. As well as the colour provided by the abundant flowers, the machair is also notable for being an ideal nesting place for many ground-nesting birds and waders such as Redshank, Ringed Plover, Oystercatchers and Lapwing abound here whilst the large expanses of peat-bog resound to the evocative cries of Curlew and the 'drumming' of Snipe. The national decline of the Corncrake has been well chronicled but recent years have witnessed a welcome improvement in the fortunes of this once familiar farmland bird and given optimism for the future. The Scottish Islands have always remained a stronghold for the vanishing population and on Islay, their distinctive rasping calls carry across the machair through the warm evenings of summer and, with patience, we should enjoy views of these enigmatic birds although the most frequent sighting is of one in flight before dropping back into cover. Other characteristic birds of the coastal meadows include Twite, the 'Highland Linnet', which like the Corncrake has decreased as a British bird but is still plentiful on the island, and Corn Buntings uttering their repetitive songs from convenient fences. Along the shores, the local Eider Ducks will be accompanied by flotillas of brown ducklings, Red-breasted Mergansers dive for fish in the sea-lochs and Black Guillemots will be bringing food to their young in nests placed under piers and jetties. If we are very fortunate we might find a summering Long-tailed Duck or Scaup.

Long-tailed Duck



Switching focus to the open moorland fringed by craggy mountains, we will enter the domain of the island's raptors and the appearance of a silvery grey male Hen Harrier quartering over the roadside heather will be the kind of encounter we will be hoping for. Both here, and along the coast, the dashing shape of a Merlin or Peregrine could cause temporary panic among the small birds but even the gulls and crows will take fright when a White-tailed Eagle decides to go fishing for sea trout or to investigate the shoreline for any tempting carrion. These huge eagles have been one of the great conservation successes of the last few decades and whilst better known from places such as Mull, they are increasingly frequent visitors to the islands of the Inner Hebrides and will hopefully be one of the highlights of our week. Careful scans of the mountain ridges might also reward us with sightings of the equally impressive Golden Eagle, perhaps the most magnificent of Scotland's raptors and one that is ideally suited to Islay's rugged hills and plentiful supply of prey.



Golden Eagle

In the south-west of the island the ringing cries of Chough might draw our attention to these smart members of the crow family with their bright red legs and beak. A few pairs breed here and by mid-June the adults will be busy feeding youngsters although they will quickly divert from this task to mob any passing bird of prey when their amazing aerial dexterity is breath-taking. Unlike the other Hebridean members of the crow family, the handsome Hooded Crow and the powerful Raven, the Chough have no interest in nest-robbing or carrion but find an abundance of grubs as they probe the soft turf above their favourite sea-cliffs.

Birds are the most conspicuous summer residents of Islay but there are many other natural history treats for the visitor. Butterflies tend to be associated with the southern areas of the



Red Deer

British Isles but the Inner Hebrides enjoy a benign, relatively mild climate and among the numerous insects feeding amid the profusion of wild flowers, we will be looking out for the rare Marsh Fritillary which has a very restricted British distribution but thrives in the boggy, unfertilized grasslands of Islay. Thistles are a favourite nectar source for the adult butterflies and they should be on the wing during sunny days in June giving us reason

to inspect any suitable feeding area. Resident mammals include both Roe and Red Deer which present rather less of a challenge to find than the Marsh Fritillary! Herds of Red Deer are widespread and although the impressive rutting displays of the stags take place later in the autumn, the consequent results will be evident by the mid-summer presence of many young fawns with their mothers. Distinctly red-coated Brown Hares are another mammal species found

in the meadows and grasslands whilst around the shores we should observe both Grey Seals with their big 'Roman' noses, and the smaller Common or Harbour Seal. A creature with a similar taste for fish is the Otter and a week on Islay affords excellent chances of seeing these appealing animals. Rarely predictable, they frequent the length of the entire coastline, delighting in diving and swimming among the seaweed of sheltered bays. Sometimes they can be shy and elusive, at others confiding and almost extrovert, but in general they keep away from man, although previous groups have seen them near the ferry port at Kennacraig on return to the mainland! We will be looking out for Otters whenever we visit the coast and will hopefully be rewarded with some encounters.

The carpets of summer flowers are not only visually spectacular but also include several scarce species. Three of the Island habitats are listed in the European Habitats directive, Annex 1; North Atlantic Wet Heath, Blanket Bog and European Dry Heath. There are also areas of Machair as mentioned earlier, which is a habitat confined to the West coast of Scotland & Ireland. Among the 900 species of plants recorded from Islay are; Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Black Bog Rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), White-beaked Sedge (*Rhychospora alba*), Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*) Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*), Grass of Parnassos (*Parnassia palustris*), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustre*). Heath Spotted (*Dactylorhiza maculata agg*), Pyramidal (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), and Frog (*Coeloglossum viride*) Orchids, together with Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*), True Dog Violet (*Viola canina*), Devil's-bit Scabius (*Succisa pratense*), and Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*). The Devil's Bit is the food plant for the caterpillars of the Heath fritillaries.



Machair

The adjacent island of Jura is connected to Islay by a regular ferry service across the short stretch of sea separating the two. During our stay on Islay we will spend at least one day visiting Jura. The southern part of Jura is dominated by the Paps, three dramatic rounded hills. None of the Paps exceeds 2,500ft, but the fact they rise from close to the sea, in a fairly narrow island, makes them more impressive than they might seem if they were close to mightier companions. Jura offers a sharp contrast to the rolling fields and moors of Islay and some visitors viewing



Eurasian Sparrowhawk

its brooding mound across the water decide not to go there, missing out on its wonderful wildlife. The island is home to 5,000 Red Deer, many of them remarkably insouciant as vehicles pass, giving a 'safari in Scotland' feel, especially in the areas where the road is unfenced. The name of the island is said to come from Viking times and as long as 1000 years ago, the island was known as Dy Oer - meaning Deer Island. Small wild goats can be found on the west coast along with Grey Seals and Otters, the latter of which there are said to be a pair of otters for every three miles of coastline.

Jura has most raptors commonly found in Scotland: Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Merlin, and Peregrine. We may have seen many of these already on Islay, but have more chances to see them here together with a few White-tailed Eagles which have extended their range south from the breeding area on Mull.. Of nocturnal raptors, Barn Owl has also been regularly observed.

The west coast is home to many caves and raised beaches which have been formed by the land lifting up after the great weight of the ice sheets retreated. The beautiful beaches are quiet and unspoilt and as the climate is warmed by the Gulf Stream such exotic looking plants as fuchsias and palm trees can be seen.

Day 7

Glasgow

We depart by ferry this morning, returning to Kennacraig about noon. We are normally back at Glasgow by 1600hrs.

Grading

This trip is graded 'A' (easy) and in fact you can normally see all the wildlife on our list without leaving the vehicle. Walks of one to three miles are available most days; some of these are on hard, dry paths, but others may be wet. If you are planning to do all the walks, then you should have adequate footwear.

Focus

The main focus for this tour is birds, mammals and butterflies, with some botany included.

Food & accommodation

We stay in a comfortable hotel on Islay, where all rooms have en-suite facilities. All breakfasts and evening meals are included from breakfast on day two to breakfast on day seven. The evening meal on the first day of the trip however will be on the ferry at your own cost. The cafeterias on the ferry boats provide a choice of hot meals and sandwiches, both at reasonable prices. Lunches are NOT included in the holiday cost but suitable arrangements will be made to stop each day. Packed lunches may be obtained from the hotel and charged to your room account. Except during particularly inclement weather, packed lunches are recommended each day to maximise time in the field.

Weather

At this time of year, the weather can range from moderately warm sunshine to wet, cold and windy, with days often having mixed conditions. You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including warm fleeces, jackets, hats and gloves. Walking boots or good waterproof shoes are also useful to have.

Equipment to bring

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

- Hiking boots
- Cool weather and wet weather clothing layers, including waterproof jacket & trousers
- Warm hat and gloves
- Thermos flask and water bottle
- Walking poles if required
- Sun protection
- Binoculars
- Camera
- Insect repellent
- Telescope (if you have one)
- Guide books for birds and mammals

Inclusions / Exclusions

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- Accommodation in a comfortable hotel on half board basis
- Transport from Glasgow
- All guiding
- Ferry tickets

The following costs are **not** included and should be budgeted for:

- Lunches
- Dinner on the ferry on the first evening
- Drinks
- Discretionary tipping
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs

Arrival / departure details

By Train

We meet you at Paisley Gilmour Street Station at 1310hrs at the beginning of the trip (further details will be given in joining instructions sent before the tour) Do not worry if our bus is a few minutes late, parking is difficult in the station and it is easier for us if we are sure everyone is together. Unfortunately, because of the afternoon timetable it is regretted that we cannot wait beyond 1310hrs. At the end of the trip, we normally have you back at the station by 1600hrs. Most trains from the south come into Glasgow Central Station and there are regular connections from here to Paisley Gilmour Street. If you arrive at Queen Street Station, there is a shuttle bus which runs regularly to Central Station.

By Bus

If you arrive by bus at Buchanan Bus Station, you can either take the airport bus from there, getting off at the airport or Central Station; or walk the short distance to Queen Street Rail Station, and get the shuttle bus to Central, mentioned above. (Passengers without a train ticket will be charged for this journey) This shuttle bus, incidentally, leaves from the West George Street side - that is, south side - of Queen Street Station. There are regular connections from Central Station to Paisley Gilmour Street, where the leader(s) will meet the group.

By Air

We can meet you at Glasgow Airport at 1320hrs; please make your way to the dropping off point at the front of the airport terminal. The vehicle will normally pull into area B or C.

You can also fly to Islay from Glasgow if you wish. If you are in a hurry at the end of the trip, we do suggest an air journey to Glasgow as it saves several hours travelling.

By Car

If you come by car, you may drive directly to the ferry terminal at Kennacraig. Clients have left their cars there in the past with little trouble. However, if you prefer more security, we suggest you may spend the night before your trip at the Stonefield Castle Hotel, a beautiful hotel situated in extensive and attractive grounds. (This hotel will normally let you leave your car with them for the week if you stay a night with them - but check when you book.) Stonefield Castle Hotel lies a little north of Kennacraig; we would normally meet you there about 1600hrs on the first day of the trip. Telephone: 01880 820836. www.bespokehotels.com/stonefieldcastle

In Glasgow secure overnight parking is available at Cambridge Street car park, about 10-15min walk from Central Station. For weekly parking we suggest that you contact the car park to get information on the best available rate- 0141 276 1830 or carparkinfo@cityparkingglasgow.co.uk. Information is also available on the website www.cityparkingglasgow.co.uk. Alternatively you could use one of the airport car parks and meet the group at the airport.

If you have sufficient time in Glasgow, you may wish to visit the Burrell Collection a magnificent assemblage of paintings, sculpture, furniture, tapestries, ceramics and other items of interest and beauty from three continents. It is easily reached by train from Central Station and alighting at Pollockshaws West. Even before the opening of the Burrell, Kelvinside Art Gallery was recognised as one of the finest municipal (as opposed to national) art galleries in Europe.

Accommodation in Glasgow

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 city centre (5 min walk away):

Rennie Mackintosh Station Hotel

59 Union Street, Glasgow, G1 3RB

From £49 per double/twin

0141 221 0050 <https://www.glasgowmackintoshhotel.co.uk/>

Premier Inn City Centre – St Enoch Square or George Square

St Enoch Square, Glasgow, G1 4AZ/ 187 George St, Glasgow, G1 1YU

0330 175 9007/ 0330 777 7294 www.premierinn.com

Radisson SAS Hotel

301 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G2 8DL

From £130 per double/twin

0141 204 3333 www.radissonblu.co.uk/hotel-glasgow

If you would prefer smaller, boutique-style accommodation then we suggest the following, which are situated about 1½ miles from the city centre:

The Flower House

33 St Vincent Crescent, Glasgow, G3 8NG

From £60 per double/twin

0141 204 2846 www.scotland2000.com/flowerhouse/

Alamo Guest House

46 Gray Street, Glasgow G3 7SE,

From £48 per double/twin

0141 339 2395 www.alamoguesthouse.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.