

Dragonflies of The Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Meet Cairngorms NP; afternoon excursion
- Day 2/3** Explore Cairngorms NP for Odonata; drive to Gairloch
- Day 4/5** Explore Loch Maree and environs
- Day 6** Gairloch & depart

Departs

June/July

Focus

Odonata

Grading

A/B. Easy day walks, but some uneasy terrain.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR295)

Highlights:

- Azure Hawker, Northern Emerald & Northern Damselfly.
- Good chance of White-faced Darter & Brilliant Emerald
- Stunning scenery of the Cairngorm Mountains & Loch Maree, near Gairloch.
- Orchids comprise Lesser Butterfly and Small White Orchid.
- Butterflies comprise Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary & Large Heath
- Led by expert naturalist guide.



Northern Damselfly, Northern Emerald & Azure Hawker – all images by Operations Manager, Matt Eade



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Introduction

Scotland is home to a wonderful selection of iconic and charismatic species, although there is one subject which tends to get ignored, and that is the dragonflies and damselflies of the area. The rare Odonata of The Highlands will be our main aim during this 6-day holiday, as we cover much ground to secure sightings of all the region's specialties, including Azure Hawker, Northern Emerald and Northern Damselfly. Of course, there should be daily sightings of Four Spotted Chasers and Azure Damselflies, but visits to beautiful lochans, small acidic pools and secluded forest clearings will hopefully produce our main quarries.

As we venture into the isolated pockets of The Highlands, we will bump into other forms of wildlife, and we will keep our eyes peeled for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterflies, Large Heath butterflies, Lesser Butterfly Orchids and Small White Orchids.

There will be plenty of time for photography throughout this tour and this is to be encouraged, but please bear in mind other members of the group when trying to clinch that winning shot!

This tour is of course dependent upon the weather, however, even if the weather isn't ideal for dragonfly watching, some species can still be found with much vigilance. Of course, other aspects of natural history will be attended to if the weather is poor.

Please note: This tour starts in the Cairngorms and ends at Gairloch. Your tour leader can pick anyone up at Inverness Airport or Aviemore Train Station, but remember if you are driving to The Highlands, then you will have to drive yourself to Gairloch on Day 3.



Loch Maree

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 Cairngorms

We will begin our holiday by meeting at our hotel in the Cairngorms National Park. Meeting time will be at 2pm, although this is subject to change. From then, we will explore some nearby areas to start off our Odonata list, visiting some sites close to Loch Garten. Northern Damselfly will be our top target, often seen alongside Azure Damselflies, we will need to pay careful attention to the subtle difference in these two closely related species. If time, we will try a site for White-faced Darter too.

Days 2 – 3

Excursions around the Cairngorms

As our hotel is based close to the River Spey, each morning here you may have the option of walking down to the river for a pre-breakfast walk. Look out for Dippers, Grey Wagtails, Common Sandpipers and Goosander which use this river in the summer months.

After breakfast, we will head deep into the Caledonian Pine Forests and explore a secluded boggy area, comprising acidic pools and a boardwalk, where we hope to encounter a number of Odonata species. Although far from guaranteed, Northern Emeralds reside here and may be seen hawking the treetops, although they are the most reliable of the three emerald species to come down and land, so we will keep our fingers crossed. Four Spotted Chasers are common and we may be lucky to see a White-faced Darter on the boardwalk. This late morning/early afternoon walk will certainly make you feel you are in one of the remotest parts of the Cairngorms National Park.



Four Spotted Chaser

Birds which may be seen in this area include Scottish Crossbill, Crested Tit and Spotted Flycatcher.

We will meander around the area in the afternoon, checking out other key locations for other Odonata species, plus checking a couple of sites for Lesser Butterfly and Small White Orchid, though numbers fluctuate year to year.

Our timings and sites may change due to the weather we experience, but be assured our time will not be wasted in this wildlife-rich area.

On Day 3, we will target any species we may have missed in the area before starting our journey to Gairloch, a driving time of perhaps three hours, although there will be plenty of stops along the way, including scenic vantage points, the checking of lochs for Black-throated Divers and any recently cleared areas for dragonflies.

We will arrive in to Gairloch in the late afternoon, where we will have time to rest and enjoy the scenery before dinner.



Viewpoint looking towards Loch Maree

Day 4 – 5

Loch Maree & environs

At over 13 miles long, Loch Maree, situated in Wester Ross, is the number one site in the UK to find the Azure Hawker – surely one of the UK's most wanted dragonfly. We will have 2.5 days to try and find this suitably adapted species, searching amongst fallen trees, exposed pale tree trunks and over acidic pools. This unique species, which has adapted to living in colder climates by changing its thorax colour, is probably best located in cooler weather, where they try and absorb heat from pale tree trunks, and even, people's clothing, so be prepared and wear pale trousers or shirts!

This region is also excellent for Northern Emerald, Golden-ringed Dragonfly, 'Highland' Darter and Common Hawker (usually later in the season but still possible). Out on the loch, Great Northern and Black-throated Divers can be present, and the roadsides here are good for Lesser Butterfly Orchid. Those with the keenest eye may even spot a Lesser Twayblade, but Large Heaths are easier to find.

There are three main sites alongside this loch in which to concentrate our efforts, and with the time given, we hope to succeed in finding the many highlights here.



Azure Hawker (Matt Eade)

Day 6

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 head back, whether this is to Inverness airport or on our separate ways.

Tour grading

Grade A/B – Easy day walks, with some rough terrain, especially at the Azure Hawker site where care must be taken on foot.

We will travel by minibus on this tour between sites, but please note on Day 3 those who have travelled to the Cairngorms by car will have to drive themselves to Gairloch. 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 our hotel in the Cairngorms at 1400 hours. **We recommend flying to Inverness Airport, where you tour leader can pick you up at midday.**

It is also possible to arrange a pick-up from Inverness or Aviemore Train Station later in the afternoon, and on Day 6, be dropped off at Inverness Train Station.

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
- Water bottle
- Walking poles for those unsteady on their feet
- Binoculars
- Camera
- Recommended Field Guide: Dragonflies & Damselflies of Britian

Focus

We will be focusing mainly on the Odonata of the region. This tour is both for beginners and keen Odonatists alike.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Breakfasts and evening meals are included in the cost of this tour, from the evening meal on day 1 to breakfast on day 6. Lunches, alcoholic beverages and snacks are not included.

Accommodation will be in comfortable, en-suite rooms in two different hotels.



Cairngorm Hotel



Myrtle Bank Hotel

Weather

At this time of year, the weather can range from rain showers to very warm sunshine. We may get both on the same day! You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including warm fleeces, jackets. Walking boots will be needed for some excursions. **Midges**, although early in their flight season, can still be present so please don the appropriate deterrents.

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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