

The Winter Wildlife of Central Scotland

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Edinburgh, transfer to Fife
Day 2	Largo Bay & St Andrews area
Day 3	Tay Reedbeds & Scone
Day 4	The Glens
Day 5	The Glens, depart Edinburgh

Departs

February - March

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR361)

Grading

Grade A/B. Birding day walks only.

Focus

Birds, and other wildlife

Highlights

- Visit the largest lowland loch for ducks, swans and geese
- Watch flocks of seaducks & divers offshore
- Visit Scotland's largest reedbed for Bearded Tit
- Ptarmigan in winter plumage & Mountain Hare in winter coats
- Stunning scenery
- Possibility of Golden Eagle



Images from top: Mountain Hare, Common Scoters & Bearded Tit, (courtesy of Shutterstock)



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Introduction

Late winter is an excellent time to visit the counties of Fife and Angus, located on the east coast of central Scotland. Though often overlooked by the visiting naturalist, combined the counties boast a huge variety of habitats and, with it, a great diversity of plant and animal species all within a relatively small area. At this time of year, however, it is the birdlife that is of greatest interest, with the varied coastline being particularly productive. The rich, fertile waters of the many picturesque bays are home to immense winter flocks of sea duck, especially scoters and Long-tailed Duck along with various divers, grebes and auks. Inland the excitement continues with some excellent freshwater habitats, including Loch Leven and the Tay reedbed, the largest lowland loch and largest reedbed in Scotland respectively. Here huge numbers of Tufted Duck, Pochard, Bearded Tit, Whooper Swan and many other species are found.

Long-tailed Duck



Farmland bird populations are also faring well here compared to much of the UK and good numbers of Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting and Grey Partridge are likely to be seen.

Finally, the forests and mountains of the Grampians rise dramatically from the low fields and woods of Angus. At this time of year they are likely to be covered in snow, but in hidden valleys below this is the perfect time to see lekking Black Grouse, perhaps a Golden Eagle above and the delights of Ptarmigan and Mountain Hare in their pure white winter plumage and coats.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather, tides & 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 Edinburgh, transfer Fife

We begin the tour at Edinburgh Airport/Gateway train station and journey north, over the Firth of Forth via the Queensferry Crossing, for 30 minutes before arriving at Loch Leven National Nature

Reserve. Here we will have a cafe lunch at either Findatie or RSPB Loch Leven, with fabulous views across the loch and the surrounding hills. Exploring the loch-side trails, we will look for the wide



Bullfinch

variety of waterfowl for which the loch is famed, including large numbers of Tufted Duck, Pochard, Teal, Wigeon, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Whooper Swan, Little, Great-crested and Slavonian Grebes. Around the feeders and woodland trails, we have a good chance of Red Squirrel, Tree Sparrow, Bullfinch, Treecreeper and possibly Brambling.

From here we will work our way clockwise around the loch, stopping at Kinross and Burleigh Sands to look for any species on the loch we may have missed including Pink-footed Goose, Curlew, Kingfisher, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer and Grey Partridge.

Afterwards we will travel to our hotel in central Fife for dinner at our first of two hotels.

Day 2

Largo Bay & St Andrews area

We begin the day (the order may differ depending on tide times) by travelling the short distance to Largo Bay, where we scan the sea for the large numbers of ducks that congregate here. This should include Common and Velvet Scoters, Long-tailed Duck and Eider, plus Red-throated Diver and sometimes Black-throated and Great Northern Divers and Red-necked Grebe. Waders along the coast here could include Turnstone, Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit and Ringed Plover.

We will then head further east where we will make a stop in the farmland north of Crail for Corn Bunting, then a stop in the ancient city of St Andrews for lunch. In the afternoon we will visit the nearby St Andrews Bay and Eden Estuary where we could find regular wintering species like Scaup, Pintail, Brent Goose, Kingfisher, Black-tailed Godwit, Knot, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Little Egret and sometimes Short-eared Owl, Merlin and Peregrine.



Great Northern Diver

We will then return to our hotel for dinner.

Day 3

Tay Reedbeds & Scone

This morning, we will check out of our hotel and travel north to the extensive Tay Reedbeds. We may have the opportunity to stop at a few locations along the way depending on how successful

we have been on previous days. Once at the reedbeds we will look for Bearded Tit, Water Rail, Marsh Harrier and the wide variety of wildfowl that winter here.



Eurasian Beaver

We will then travel to the nearby woods of Scone, where we will search for the stunning Hawfinch which breeds here. Other species present here include Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Stock Dove.

From here we will continue north to the town of Blairgowrie, where we will check into our hotel and then have an attempt at trying to see some of the local Beavers before returning for dinner.

Day 4

The Glens

We start in Glen Prosen to the north of Kirriemuir where we will look for lekking Black Grouse; there is a good population in the area and we could see high numbers. Singing Mistle Thrush and soaring Red Kite are also likely. From here we will travel into the adjacent Glen Clova with its rugged valley sides and high peaks. We will walk up a good trail through conifer forest to the impressive Corrie Fee, where we will enjoy a picnic lunch. Along the way we will look out for Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Red Grouse, Dipper, Crossbill, Siskin and Redpoll.



Glen Clova

In the afternoon we will stop at RSPB Loch Kinnordy, where we will walk its short woodland trail and visit its three hides. Here we can hope to see a variety of wildfowl, including Shoveler, Gadwall and Water Rail with the possibility of Otter and Beaver and more Red Squirrels in the woods. If

there is time, we may stop at the dramatic Reekie Linn waterfall where there is a chance of Dipper and Grey Wagtail if we missed them earlier.

We will then return to our hotel in Blairgowrie.

Day 5

Our final day will see us head up into Glenshee, the highest public road in the UK, where we will start by searching the surrounds of the Ski Centre car park for Snow Bunting and Red Grouse. Then we will explore/scan some of the higher mountain slopes to try and locate winter-plumaged Ptarmigan, Mountain Hare and Red Deer; if successful this is sure to be a highlight of the trip. Other possibilities include Golden Eagle and returning Golden Plover.

The Glen; depart Edinburgh



From here we have around a 2-hour return journey to Edinburgh where the tour will end.

Images courtesy of Shutterstock

Tour Grading

Grade A/B. We will undertake mainly gentle wildlife walks during the course of the holiday (with any more demanding walks always being optional). It may be wet and muddy underfoot, which can make the paths a bit slippery. Some of our activities will be weather dependent, so we will need to be prepared to be flexible with the itinerary to make the most of the best weather.

Focus

The focus of this tour is primarily birds and mammals, along with stunning landscapes.

Weather

Weather in Fife and Angus is as unpredictable as anywhere else in Britain at this time of year. It is likely to be quite cold and, although we hope for dry, settled conditions, we should be prepared for some wet and cold weather. Warm, waterproof garments, both jacket and trousers, are recommended as rain is always possible. We would also recommend bringing waterproof boots, such as walking boots, to keep your feet dry.

Arrival/Departure Details

We anticipate that the majority of the group will arrive in Edinburgh by train and so Edinburgh Gateway Station will be our first meeting point. Exact timings will be confirmed in the tour's final joining instructions but are likely to be as follows: 1230 hours at Edinburgh Gateway Station and

1240 hours at Edinburgh Airport pick-up point. At the end of the tour we expect to return to Edinburgh Gateway Station by 1530 hours. Those departing by rail from Edinburgh should arrange trains to depart after this time. As 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.

By Train

We meet at Edinburgh Gateway Station at 1230 hours at the beginning of the trip (further details will be given in joining instructions sent before the tour). At the end of the trip, we normally return to the station by 1530 hours. It's very difficult to pick up from Edinburgh city centre, so we would ask those travelling by train to please connect to Edinburgh Gateway Station or Edinburgh Airport for the pickup and drop-off.

By Bus

There are a variety of buses to Edinburgh from Glasgow, London, Aberdeen and Inverness. A number of these stop at Edinburgh Airport, but for those that terminate in the city centre, please take either a bus or a train to Edinburgh Airport or Edinburgh Gateway Station to meet the group.

By Air

We can meet you at Edinburgh Airport at 1240 hours; please make your way to the dropping-off point at the front of the airport terminal. At the end of the tour, we expect to be back at the airport at around 1545 hours.

By Car

If you come by car, you are welcome to drive directly to the first location and meet the group in the early afternoon. Exact details will be provided in the final joining instructions for the tour. Please note that you would need to drive on the transfer day between hotels and at the end of the tour. Alternatively, you could book airport parking for the duration of the tour and meet the group at the airport.

Accommodation & Food

Accommodation will be in comfortable hotels or guesthouses in a small town in each area, where all rooms have private facilities. A limited number of single rooms are available for a supplement.

Breakfast and evening meals are included in the tour price but LUNCHES ARE NOT INCLUDED. Wherever possible, the leader will try to arrange the programme so that group members will be able to choose whether to have a cooked meal or a picnic lunch, and anyone preferring the latter option will be able to visit a shop.

Inclusions/Exclusions

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

- Accommodation in comfortable rooms on a dinner, bed & breakfast basis
- Entrance fees for planned activities
- Transport for the duration of the tour
- Expert guiding

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

- Lunches
- Drinks
- Discretionary tipping
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs

Clothing

The average temperature will be around 4 - 6°C, although it may feel colder higher up or near the coast due to the wind chill factor. We recommend taking warm, windproof and waterproof clothing with you for your holiday, which can be removed or added in layers as required. A good waterproof jacket and waterproof trousers are essential. It would be useful to have a hat, scarf and gloves too. It is recommended to check the weather forecast for the region during the week prior to your holiday. Sturdy waterproof footwear such as walking boots or shoes with warm socks is recommended. Gaiters can also be useful.

Comfortable, casual clothing and shoes are suggested for the evenings at the hotel.

Equipment

The following is our recommendation of general equipment that you should bring with you:

- Binoculars
- Telescope (optional, but highly recommended)
- Thermos Flask
- Personal first aid kit (including tweezers in case of ticks)
- Small rucksack/day pack
- Dry bags for keeping equipment dry during wet weather
- Wash kit and medication
- Camera & accessories (optional)
- Sun protection (if the forecast is for sunny weather)
- Chapstick/Lip balm
- Field guide and reading material
- Refillable water bottle

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.