

Southern Scotland Photography Tour

Naturetrek Wildlife Photography Tour

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Meet Glasgow; transfer to Kirkcudbright

Day 2/4 Photography excursions

Day 5 Return to Glasgow

Departs

September to April

Focus

Wildlife photography, including birds and mammals.

Grading

A/B. Easy to moderate day walks.

NB. Up to several hours in a hide at a time.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR362)

Highlights:

- Explore & enjoy the wildlife of Scotland
- Photograph from specialist hides designed for birds and mammals
- Mammals include Red Squirrel, Badger, Otter & Pine Marten
- Birds include Sparrowhawk & Kingfisher
- Based in a comfortable, delightfully situated hotel
- Led by expert photographer



From top: Common Kingfisher, Eurasian Otter, Red Squirrel
(Courtesy of Paul McDougall)



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Introduction

Dumfries and Galloway, the most southerly of the Scottish regions, enjoys a milder winter climate than the Highlands and is rich in wildlife. This specialist photographic holiday includes six fully guided hide sessions, each led by your professional wildlife photographer leader. With a maximum of five participants, there will be ample opportunity for both group and one-to-one tuition.

The hides are ethically baited using natural food sources, with alternative hides available if certain species are not showing regularly. Most mornings will begin before sunrise, followed by photographic workshops in the afternoon and optional evening hide sessions that may extend to midnight. Flash photography may be used under guidance during night sessions.

Please note that, for both safety and conservation reasons, guests must remain inside the hides throughout each session.

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 Glasgow, transfer Kirkcudbright

We will meet in Glasgow at around lunchtime and transfer by minibus to our hotel near Kirkcudbright, our base for the next four nights. After settling in, we will enjoy an introductory presentation on photographic techniques for birds and mammals. There will also be free time to explore Kirkcudbright's picturesque harbour, shops and cafés.

Day 2

Hides for Sparrowhawk & Pine Marten Photography

Each day will have similar timings, typically entering the hides before sunrise (around 0630 hours) and remaining until early afternoon (around 1400 hours), followed by an optional photographic workshop and time to rest. Dinner will be served around 1800 hours, with evening hide sessions running from 1900 hours to as late as midnight, depending on wildlife activity.

As the best time to look for animals is first thing in the morning and at night, we aim to make an early start today to go and settle



Sparrowhawk (Paul McDougall)



into the Sparrowhawk photographic hides before dawn. You will have packed breakfast and lunch to allow you to make the most of these hours. In this hide we hope to be able to capture images of perched Sparrowhawk, and also images of birds in flight. There are up to five different Sparrowhawks that visit the hide and, although nothing is guaranteed, we hope to have opportunities to capture images of

the male, female and juvenile birds. In addition to the Sparrowhawks, there are many other species that can be seen and photographed from the hide including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay, Buzzard, Red Kite and many small woodland birds.

Returning to the hotel, there will be an opportunity to review images taken during the morning. Your leader will offer some advice on processing and provide a critique to assist in getting even better images during the next sessions. Alternatively, you can take this time to do your own post-processing or rest.

This evening, after an early dinner, we will head to the hides in search of Pine Marten.

The Pine Marten hide includes an old dry stone wall and several logs and tree branches, giving a very natural set-up. The Pine Marten will be photographed using low-powered flash. All information on set-up and use will be provided along with the flash units. If you have never shot with flash before, then please don't worry. It is not difficult, and you will be fully guided throughout. There are up to three different Pine Martens that visit the hide, and we would hope to capture images of at least one of these through our evening session. This hide is a silent hide to minimise disturbance, so it is advisable to bring something to occupy you whilst we are waiting. There is also the opportunity to photograph Tawny Owl from this hide. The Pine Marten usually visits before midnight, but it can sometimes be much later. We will leave the hide either after the Pine Marten visits or at a set time agreed beforehand. We will return to the hotel to sleep and recharge our batteries.



Day 3

Hides for Kingfisher & Otter



Kingfisher (Paul McDougall)

This morning, we will leave the hotel at 0700 hours and travel the short distance to the hide. The Kingfisher hide is located alongside a local river and is set up with a variety of different perches that can be changed and rotated. The Kingfishers are attracted by a pool which is filled with small fish. We would hope to get images of the Kingfisher sitting on different perches with various backgrounds. We hope to capture images of them diving

into the pool to catch fish. The diving is only available for two people to do at one time so we will rotate places throughout the morning. There is also the opportunity to photograph various ducks, heron and occasionally Egret from this hide. We will aim to leave the hide at around 1400 hours.

After returning to the hotel, this afternoon will follow a similar pattern to Day 2 with opportunities to review images or rest.

After an early dinner, we will head to the hides in search of Otters this evening. The Otter hide is beside a nearby river. The Otter will be photographed using low-powered flash. All information on set-up and use will be provided along with the flash units. As with the Pine Marten hide, if you have never shot with flash before, then you will be fully guided throughout. The Otters live along the local river and in front of the hide is a raised platform and in the centre of the platform is a hole which is filled with fish and scallops. The Otters come up onto the platform and take fish from the hole. The



Eurasian Otter (Paul McDougall)



Night Hide (Paul McDougall)

Otters are less than 5m away and it is essential in this hide that you are quiet and keep movement to a minimum. From this hide we would hope to capture images of Otter portraits with reflections in the water, and there are also opportunities to capture images of them shaking the water from their fur, which can create a very striking image. The Otters use the hide food as part of their evening search for food; they usually leave after half an hour and continue their journey along the river. There can

be multiple Otters at one time if the female has young. Otherwise, it will be either the male or female visiting separately.

The Otter usually visits before midnight, but it can sometimes be much later. We will leave the hide either after the Otter visits or at a set time agreed beforehand.

Day 4

Hides for Red Squirrel & Badger

This morning, we will leave the hotel at 0700 hours and travel for around 20 minutes to the hide.



Red Squirrel (Paul McDougall)

The Red Squirrel Hide is located on the edge of woodland near a small stream. This hide is perfectly positioned for early morning sunlight. There are various logs and branches positioned to add interest to your images and a raised platform made to look like a woodland floor. In this hide we would hope to use the available light to create interesting portrait images of the squirrels. There is also a jumping set-up here where

you can get the squirrels jumping head-on and from the side onto a platform. Full tuition will be given on how to capture these images. Once we have spent time concentrating on the squirrels, we will switch focus to the finches. We will set up a post where it is possible to get squabbling finches, with dramatic images of them touching beaks in the air as the ultimate photographic goal. It is also possible to photograph Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Buzzard and many small woodland birds. We will aim to leave the hide at around 1400 hours.

You will have the chance to review your images or relax before discussing the focus for the group's final evening at the hide.

This evening, after an early dinner, we will head to the hides in search of Badgers. The Badger hide is on the edge of woodland near a small stream, approximately 20 metres away from their set. This is the same hide that we used during the day for the Red Squirrels so the set-up is very similar to the daytime. The Badgers usually start to appear early and come right up onto the platforms in front of you. It is not uncommon to have up to 10 Badgers in front of you eating. We will be particularly looking to capture interesting portrait images of the Badgers



Night Hide (Paul McDougall)

and any interaction between them. There is also the possibility of photographing Tawny Owl from this hide and the photographic goal for the owls is to try and get them as they are about to land on a post. The Badgers usually visit and have normally left before 2200 hours, but sometimes they can be later. We will leave the hide either after the Badgers visit or at a set time agreed beforehand. We will return to the hotel to sleep and recharge batteries.

Day 5

Return to Glasgow

This morning after a full cooked breakfast in the hotel, we will review and share our images with the group from throughout the week before making the return journey to Glasgow. We will aim to be back in Glasgow by late morning. There will also be the opportunity to walk around the harbour and explore the shops and cafés in Kirkcudbright in the morning before we leave.

Images courtesy of Paul McDougall

Optional Extensions

There is the option to add the following additional unguided seasonal hides:

- Water Rail – November to February
- Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Cuckoo – April to June
- Golden Eagle – Year-round

You would need your own transport to visit these hides. Please contact the Naturetrek office for details. (Subject to availability and seasonal variations).

Tour Grading

Grade A/B – Easy to moderate day walks. The majority of walks on this tour will be easy walks, but please note there will be long periods of up to several hours in hides at a time. We will be up early and out late most days, which can be very tiring for some.

The tour is therefore suitable for all ages and people who are comfortable carrying their camera equipment for short distances and able to cope with early starts each day and late finishes. It is not suitable for those not prepared to watch patiently and quietly, often for long periods of time! It is advisable to bring a Kindle or book to help pass the time. Dependent on the network there is not Internet connectivity in all of the hides. The Sparrowhawk hide has basic toilet facilities available; however, the other hides do not have toilet facilities and people should be prepared for this. Your leader or guide can advise on best practices for using 'bush toilets'.

Please note that there are strict rules during the visits to the hides that need to be adhered to and there is zero tolerance if the rules are broken. Your leader will explain these at the start of the tour, prior to any hide sessions. An example of these rules is that you are not able to leave the hide unless agreed with the group leader.

Weather

Weather in Dumfries and Galloway 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 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. As you will be sitting in hides for long periods of time, we would recommend having some additional layers to keep warm.

Arrival/Departure Details

We anticipate that the majority of the group will arrive by train into Glasgow. Over the last few years, access to the city centre for private vehicles has been greatly reduced, so we would ask those travelling by train to take a short journey out of the city to Paisley Gilmour Street Station, where your leader will meet you. There are numerous trains between Glasgow Central and Paisley Gilmour Street, and the journey can be added to most rail tickets for no/little additional cost if requested at the time of booking. We will then pick any other group members up from Glasgow Airport before travelling on to Kirkcudbright. Exact timings will be confirmed in the tour's final joining instructions but are likely to be as follows: 1210 hours at Paisley Gilmour Street Station and 1220 hours at Glasgow Airport. At the end of the tour we expect to return to Glasgow Airport by 1530 hours and Paisley Gilmour Street by 1545 hours. Those departing by air or rail from Glasgow should arrange flights or trains to depart after these times. 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.

By Car

If you come by car, you are welcome to drive directly to the hotel in Kirkcudbright and meet the group in the early afternoon. Address details will be provided in the final joining instructions for the tour.

Clothing

The average temperature will be around 4 - 6°C, although it may feel colder as there will be limited walking during the hide sessions. 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 to Bring

- Digital single-lens reflex cameras or Mirrorless camera capable of photographing at ISO 12800 for low-light shots early and at night. Some bridge cameras are not suitable for this tour due to their unreliability in low-light conditions. Please contact Naturetrek for further information.
- Telephoto lenses (300mm or 400mm focal length) for bird and mammal photography
- 70-200 range for the Otters as they come very close to the hide
- Camera manual
- Gimbal to attach to hide set-up
- Sandbag/beanbag
- Laptop with editing software
- Hard drive(s) to back up photo
- Cold weather and wet weather clothing layers, including waterproof jacket and trousers
- Warm hat and gloves
- Daypack
- Water bottle and thermos flask
- Additional snacks for time in the hides

Focus

This is a specialist small-group wildlife photography holiday, limited to a maximum of five guests. It is designed for keen amateur wildlife photographers and focuses on capturing images of birds and mammals. We will travel by vehicle and spend time in dedicated photography hides to locate and photograph target species – all with the aim of providing excellent photographic opportunities.

We would be grateful if you could complete the photography questionnaire (included in your tour pre-departure pack) to help your leader tailor the tour to your interests, ensuring you get the most from your experience.

Food & Accommodation Included in the Price

We stay in a comfortable, local hotel, where all rooms have en-suite facilities. All food is included in the price of the tour, except for lunch on Day 1 and Day 5.

Inclusions/Exclusions

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

- Accommodation in a comfortable hotel on DBB basis
- Transport
- All guiding and photography tuition for the above itinerary
- Packed lunches on Days 2 – 4
- Use of specified photographic hides

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

- Lunch on Day 1 and Day 5
- Drinks and snacks
- Optional extensions
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs, discretionary tips etc.

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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