

Autumn migration in the Northern Isles

The remote archipelago of the Shetland Islands is closer to Norway than the Scottish mainland and is ideally placed to receive autumn migrants from Asia and North America. The islands are around 90 miles in length and connected by a good inter-island ferry system. To make best use of our time we have two bases on the islands: on Unst in the far north, and Mainland, which covers the southern part of Shetland.

■ Please note you should arrive on Shetland on October 1st.

Days 1-3: These three days have been set aside to explore the extreme north of Shetland with visits to the islands of Fetlar, Yell and Unst from our base at Saxa Vord. Our birding adventure starts in Unst, the most northerly of the islands, and we concentrate on the sycamore plantations and gardens at Norwick, Uyeasound and Baltasound. Recent visits have produced sightings of Lesser Whitethroat, Eastern Yellow and Citrine Wagtails, Blyth's Reed Warbler and Barred Warbler. There is always something unexpected with the possibility of Snowy Owl or a vagrant wader from North America. Yell is the second largest of the islands, with Yell Sound being important for passage and wintering birds including Common Eider and Long-tailed Duck. Fetlar is a compact island where a search of gardens and crofts may be productive for migrants. Recent sightings have



Arctic Warbler Photo: Jo Finn

Dates

Saturday October 2nd – Saturday
October 9th 2021
Leader: Simon McLaughlin
Group Size: 8
Birds: 100-120

included Greater Short-toed Lark, Hawfinch, Olive-backed Pipit and Greenish Warbler. Falls of Redwing and Fieldfare are also possible and there is an outside chance of finding a Ring Ouzel during our visit.

Days 4-7: Travel south to our base at Sumburgh Head, which is ideally situated for visiting the southern half of Mainland Shetland. The hotel gardens often have migrants and the area is a rarity hot-spot itself. Our precise plan is dependent on the prevailing weather conditions and news of recent arrivals. We visit a number of sites in the southern part of Mainland. Sumburgh Head and Grutness are well known for migrants, which may include Siberian Stonechat, wheatears, Marsh Warbler, Richard's Pipit, Red-backed Shrike and Eurasian Wryneck. Open ground and stone walls are important for tired migrants and we search these for anything of interest, especially warblers, thrushes and flycatchers.

Pool of Virkie attracts waders with Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew Sandpiper being regular visitors and occasional rarities including the odd red-letter bird such as Killdeer. Nearby gardens lure migrants and



Long-eared Owl Photo: Jo Finn

vagrants such as Western Bonelli's Warbler. Virkie willows are a reliable spot for Yellow-browed Warbler, a regular autumn migrant on the islands. They are often joined by other scarce migrants in the form of Barred and Icterine Warblers, Red-backed Shrike and Common Rosefinch. Rarer species noted in recent years include Lanceolated and Arctic Warblers, Red-flanked Bluetail and Great Snipe. Quendale Mill with its habitat of damp vegetation can sometimes be good for warblers, with recent records of River and Sykes's.

Places such as Scatness, Exnaboe and Toab are locations likely to be on the agenda for interesting migrants. Many of the species associated with Fair Isle are possible, and mouth-watering rarities often appear at these locations during the autumn. Rarer species seen in this area have included Pallid Harrier, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Citrine Wagtail. Loch of Spiggie attracts wildfowl including Common Goldeneye, Eurasian Wigeon, Whooper Swan, Greylag Geese and in 2018 Pied-billed Grebe and Lesser Scaup.

We also explore other locations further north on Mainland, with the plantations of Kergord, Vidlin and Voe having more cover than much of Shetland and hence often

encouraging tired migrants to linger a little longer. Recent visits have produced Long-eared Owl, Brambling and Red-breasted Flycatcher. The numerous mussel farms attract Slavonian Grebe, Long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Eider and recently also Surf Scoter and King Eider.

Day 8: The tour concludes after breakfast in order to catch connecting flights back to mainland UK.

Prices

Ground Price: £1,795
Single room: £100
Deposit: £200

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation, meals, complimentary transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: travel to and from Shetland, accommodation in Shetland on October 1st, drinks, insurance, and items of a personal nature.