

Winter birding in and around the Borders

Black Isle Birding and Birdwatching Breaks are offering you a unique combination of early winter birding in Northumberland and the south-west region of Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland. Your tour is timed to coincide with the arrival of wintering birds to these regions, which can be varied and exciting and often turns up rarities. The tour starts and finishes in Edinburgh, which has excellent travel connections with the rest of the UK. Clients should arrive in Edinburgh on the evening of November 5th 2021 or November 4th 2022.

Day 1: From Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, we travel south to the border town of Berwick-upon-Tweed which is in Northumberland. Our main interest is the River Tweed and adjacent North Sea. The river is an important area for Mute, Whooper and on occasions Bewick's Swans, plus concentrations of Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser. Any exposed areas of mud may yield views of the commoner waders at Yarrow Slake and a chance of wintering Jack Snipe. Transfer to Berwick-upon-Tweed, which is our base for three nights.

Days 2-3: Our destination today is Lindisfarne, an island situated just off the Northumberland coast and reached by causeway. We have to time our visit with the tidal conditions as the island gets 'cut off' at high tide. The area is internationally important for Pale-bellied Brent Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Red Knot, European Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit. In deeper waters we have good chances of locating Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck and Common Scoter. The island has stands of bushes, hedges and cover which attract migrant Redwing, Fieldfare and maybe a late Ring Ouzel. In recent years the area has had late migrants including Black Redstart and Siberian Chiffchaff. The sand dunes and open fields often have Short-eared Owl, Hen Harrier, Merlin and Eurasian Woodcock, especially if the winds are easterly. On another day we head to Budle Bay, a huge expanse of tidal mud and shore which attracts Barnacle, Pink-footed and Greylag Geese and in some years Greater

Dates

TOUR A: Saturday November 6th – Saturday November 13th 2021

TOUR B: Saturday November 5th – Saturday November 12th 2022

Leader: Simon McLaughlin

Group Size: 8

Birds 110–130

White-fronted Goose and Northern Lapwing. Further south we visit the picturesque village of Bamburgh with its dominating castle. The coast here is attractive to wintering Black-throated and Red-throated Divers, Slavonian and Red-necked Grebes, Common and Velvet Scoters, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Guillemot, Razorbill and if the winds are onshore Little Auk. Rocky areas can be productive for Purple Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey Plover, Sanderling and Red Knot. In recent years rarities and scarcities which have occurred at this time of the year have included Long-billed Dowitcher, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls and Bohemian Waxwing in irruption years.

Day 4: This morning our travels take us westwards into Dumfries and Galloway, a remote and sparsely populated area of south-west Scotland. En route a visit to The Hirsell is planned. This large estate close to Coldstream has commoner waterbirds on the lakes, whilst the surrounding extensive woodland holds Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Eurasian Nuthatch,



European Stonechat Photo: Simon Papps

tits including Marsh, and on occasions Hawfinch. Transfer to Dumfries, which is our base for four nights.

Days 5-7: Caerlaverock is one of Scotland's most famous reserves and attracts thousands of birds during the winter months. A combination of grassland, hedges and coastal habitats combined with several hides makes it an ideal winter destination. In early November most wintering birds will have arrived, including thousands of Barnacle Geese and lesser numbers of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese. Wildfowl can be numerous with important populations of Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Wigeon. Vagrant ducks from North America occur on a regular basis with recent visits recording American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal and Ring-necked Duck. As dusk falls we should encounter Short-eared Owl, Western Barn Owl and falcons including Peregrine and Merlin. On one morning we make a visit to Loch Ken, a habitat of woodland, fen, marshes and open water. In the forest habitats we may find Willow Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch and the commoner woodland birds. Damper areas around the loch lure Water Rail, Common Snipe, Northern Lapwing and in some winters small numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese. Mersehead is another

important wintering area which we will visit during our stay. Loch Ryan is close to Stranraer. This large sea loch, with a shingle spur and patches of exposed mud at low tide, is an important wintering ground for Great Northern, Black-throated and Red-throated Divers, Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes and Greater Scaup. At the Mull of Galloway, south of Stranraer, farmland attracts Common Stonechat, Twite and small numbers of Corn Bunting.

Day 8: Depart from Dumfries, where the river attracts Common and Red-breasted Mergansers and White-throated Dipper. Transfer to Edinburgh, where the tour concludes mid-afternoon.

Prices

Tour Price: £1495
Single Room: £ No Charge
Deposit: £150

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation, meals and complimentary transport.

Not included: Drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature.