

SCOTLAND IN STYLE

JUNE 1 - 9, 2007

**LEADERS:
ANDREW WHITTAKER
RAY NOWICKI**

COMPILED BY: ANDREW WHITTAKER

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

SCOTLAND IN STYLE
A Birds and History Break in the Highlands
June 1-9, 2007

Compiled by Andrew Whittaker

Leaders: Andrew Whittaker and Ray Nowicki

Itinerary:

June 1: Depart United States.

June 2: Several of us coming directly from the Scottish Cruise, and others starting in Inverness, transfer in our very comfortable Mafia vans to the lovely Scottish Pitcalzean house with its spectacular gardens. Rest of evening birding the extensive forested grounds.

June 3: Visit to Dunrobin Castle and its gardens and falconry display; p.m. visit to the famous Glenmorangie Whisky distillery. Birding Nigg RSPB hide which overlooks the mudflats and pool. After our wonderful dinner we were entertained by Ray Owens, with a Scot's look at Scottish history.

June 4: Drove across to the scenic Scottish west coast where we birded all day at the following sites: Loch Droma, Dundonnell, Gruinard Bay, Melton Udrigle, and finally Loch Maree.

June 5: Early start for the Black Grouse lek at Cairngorm National Park, Boat of Garten, and a well deserved wonderful breakfast at Aviemore. We then birded Avilochean and the spectacular Scottish Caledonian Pine forest of Abernethy.

June 6: Birding at Strathconan and its magnificent valley and Loch, followed by an afternoon visit to Urquhart Castle on the bonnie shores of the famous Loch Ness where some searched for Nessie!

June 7: Dava Moor, and superb weather high up on the Cairngorms famous funicular. Afternoon birding at White Wells, history at Clava Cairns, and finally birding Nigg Marsh.

June 8: Cawdor Castle, followed by birding Corrachie and Chanonry point. After our farewell dinner we enjoyed a great display of Scottish bagpipes and charming dancing.

June 9: All transferred onto Inverness for homebound flights, etc.

Top five birds elected by the group:

- 1- Rock Ptarmigan (with 2-day-old chicks)**
- 2- Red Kite**
- 3- White-tailed Eagle (eating a dead lamb)**
- 4- Tawny Owl**
- 5- Short-eared Owl and Golden Eagle (tied)**

What more can one ask for than dramatic Scottish highland scenery, great birding, exploring several stupendous historical castles, and visiting the fine Scots whisky distillery of Glenmorangie where we sampled a wee dram! Combine this with a fantastic group of people based in a wonderful Scottish country home where we were treated to great British food (we all gained a few kilos) and family hospitality. All set in magnificent forested grounds; really, life cannot get much better!

Birding highlights were many. However, I know none of us will ever forget the wonderful mothering antics adopted by a female Rock Ptarmigan to divert some walkers. With a little help from me—first my shouts to the photographer, and then detailed explanations to the nice walkers about exactly what they should do—Mrs. Ptarmigan saved her precious little balls of fluff from a certain untimely trampling to death! First she courageously attacked the human (giants!) feet, and then followed up with a tremendous broken wing display which finally worked, luring the walkers an amazing 150 m. closer to us and away from her 2-day-old chicks. I could almost hear the sighs of relief from the crowd of onlookers as she immediately flew back to join her young!

In fact several of the trip highlights were what we termed “Bambie” moments. There was the Common Sandpiper who led her bobbing fluff balls (just hatched) down to the lake’s edge, and the two baby lambs (bodyguards) of the brooding Eurasian Oystercatcher. Others included spectacular studies of both soaring White-tailed and Golden eagles, as well as scope studies of the White-tailed feasting on a dead lamb. Bubbly crystal-clear mountain streams produced stunning Gray Wagtails and the magical White-throated Dipper, while mirror-flat lochs, surrounded by breathtaking mountains, rewarded us with great studies of majestic Red-throated and Arctic loons. Smaller lakes treated us to handsome Horned Grebes, male Eurasian Wigeon, and Common Goldeneye.

A lone Common Snipe amazed even Ray as it was spotted uncharacteristically singing from the top of a tree! We enjoyed stunning scope views of this recent split from Wilson's Snipe. Walks through the wonderful Caledonian Pine forest rewarded us with Black Grouse, Chaffinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, Eurasian Treecreeper, Goldcrest, and flocks of enigmatic tits including Crested, Long-tailed, Blue, Coal, and Great. Spectacular moorlands scenery throughout also provided us with Willow Ptarmigan (Red Grouse), a great study of a pair of cooperative Ring Ouzels, and in-your-face looks at a Short-eared Owl.

Fond childhood birding memories flooded back to me as I heard the pleasant rambling song, "a little bit of bread and no cheese," gracing the hedgerows, allowing us to locate a stunning male Yellowhammer, while European Goldfinch, European Greenfinch, and Eurasian Linnet also landed close by to vie for our attention.

We also dove into the wealth of Scottish history with visits to Cawdor Castle (linked with *Macbeth* and Shakespeare) and the medieval fortress of Urquhart Castle, situated on the banks of the famous Loch Ness where many English and Scots' lives were lost in bloody battles. No luck with spotting Nessie though! We marveled at how the Earls and Dukes of Sutherland had lived since the thirteenth century in the exquisite Dunrobin Castle, as well as the castle's fine ornate gardens which contain a giant redwood!

Altogether a fantastic group enjoyed a superb Scottish experience. I'm already looking forward to my return next year.

Key:

H = Heard only

Loons (*Gaviidae*)

Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*) – Repeated stunning views of this handsome bird

Arctic Loon (*Gavia arctica*)

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*)

Grebes (*Podicipedidae*)

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) – A real crippling bird in summer plumage.

Shearwater & Petrels (*Procellariidae*)

Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) - Odd watching one over the Castle grounds!

Comorants (*Phalacrocoracidae*)

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

European Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristtelis*)

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns (*Ardeidae*)

Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Duckes, Geese & Swans (*Anatidae*)

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)- Early molting flock

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) – Great scope studies of some lovely males

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*)

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)

Osprey (*Pandionidae*)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Hawks, Eagles & Kites (*Accipitridae*)

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) - Simply great studies of the magnificent raptor.

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – Who will ever forget our scope studies as it ripped open and cleaned up that dead lamb carcass.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Eurasian Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – A great scope study at the nest site and in flight as well.

Falcon & Caracaras (*Falconidae*)

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Grouse (*Tetraonidae*)

Willow Ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*) – Known as Red Grouse by many, nice looks at this endemic subspecies.

Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*) – **The trip highlight for me spectacular studies and what behavior as the mum lead the walkers 150m away up the path from her 2 day old balls of fluff!**

Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) – A great looking bird and what odd calls at the lek!

Pheasants & Partridges (*Phasianidae*)

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdi*) H*

Ring-necked Pheasante (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Rails, Gallinules & Coots (*Rallidae*)

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Oystercatchers (*Haematopodidae*)

Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Plovers & Lapwings (*Charadriidae*)

Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Eurasian Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Eurasian Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) – Wonderful luck having scope views on a nest!

Sandpipers & Allies (*Scolopacidae*)

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) – In a tree singing, great scope study.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) – Apparently a rare find.

Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

Common Sandpiper (*Actilis hypoleucos*) – Another Bambi moment as a parent led the newly hatched young to the lakes edge, already they had the bobbing jive!

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

Skuas & Jaegers (*Stercorariidae*)

Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*)

Gulls (*Laridae*)

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*)

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

European Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Terns (*Sternidae*)

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*)

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Auks, Murres & Puffins (*Alcidae*)

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*)

Razorbill (*Alca torda*)

Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*)

Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) – Great looking bird.

Pigeons & Doves (*Columbidae*)

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common Wood-Pigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Cuckoos (*Cuculidae*)

Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) – Multiple good studies.

Typical (*Strigidae*)

Tawny Owl (*Strix Aluco*) – Great scope looks for those who persisted until later searching with me.

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) – Great looks up close and personal.

Swifts (*Apodidae*)

Common Swift (*Apus apus*)

Woodpeckers & Allies (*Picidae*)

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Larks (*Alaudidae*)

Sky Lark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Swallows (*Hirundinidae*)

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*)

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Wagtails & Pipits (*Motacillidae*)

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla Alba*)

Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Kinglets (*Regulidae*)

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

Dippers (*Cinclidae*)

White-throated Dipper (*Cinclus*) – Always a real crowd pleaser, a real gem.

Wrens (*Troglodytidae*)

Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Accentors (*Prunellidae*)

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)

Thrushes & Allies (*Turdidae*)

Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*) – Superb looks at a pair of this often shy mountain dweller.

Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Song Thrush (*Turdus Philomelos*)

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus* *Turdus viscivorus*)

Old World Warblers (*Sylviidae*)

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*) – A good find, not common this far north, a great songster!

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Greater Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

Old World Flycatchers (*Muscicapidae*)

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

European Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*)

Northern Wheater (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Long-Tailed Tits (*Aegithalidae*)

Long-Tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)- Cute

Chickadees & Tits (*Paridae*)

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)

Crested Tit (*Lophophanes cristatus*) – A little stunner with that crest.

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

European Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

Creepers (*Certhiidae*)

Eurasian Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

Crow, Jays & Magpies (*Corvidae*)

Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*)

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Starlings (*Sturnidae*)

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Old World Sparrows (*Passeridae*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Siskins, Crossbills etc. (*Fringillidae*)

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

European Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)

Eurasian Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*) - Common

European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*)

Eurasian Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Eurasian Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – Males are simply stunning birds.

Buntings & Sparrows (*Emberizidae*)

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) – ‘A little bit of bread and no cheese’ great to see them doing well here and a bird that brings back childhood memories of birding British farmland.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Grand Total = **118 bird species**

Mammals and other interesting records

Rabbits & Hares (*Leporidae*)

European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

Squirrels (*Sciuridae*)

Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

Seals (*Phocidae*)

Common / Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Gray / Atlantic Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)

Deer (*Cervidae*)

Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*)

Roe Deer (*Capreolus*)

Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*)

Common Toad

Common Lizard

Short-tailed Field Vole

Shrew sp

Pipistrel Sp Bat

Green Tiger Beetle

Butterfly

Peacock

Small Tortoise Shell

Small White

Red Admiral