



To John O'Groats and Beyond

CAITHNESS & ORKNEY



Day 1

Leave Inverness on the A9, travelling north towards Dornoch. Once over the Kessock Bridge, a detour can be taken across the Black Isle on the A832 to Cromarty for a boat trip out into the Moray Firth with Ecoventures to look for the UK's most northerly pod of bottlenose dolphins. Continue up the A9 looking out for the distinctive shape of common seals hauled out on the sandbanks as you cross the bridge over the Cromarty Firth. Continue on until Golspie and turn right down the unclassified road to Littleferry. Car parks along this road give access to SWT's Loch Fleet Reserve. Scanning out over the bay will reward you with views of eider, shelduck, red-breasted merganser, oystercatcher, wigeon, bar-tailed godwits, terns and geese, depending on the tides and the season.

Day 2

As you continue north past the imposing Dunrobin Castle, any stop along the coast gives a chance of common seals hauled out on the shore or dolphins on the shore or dolphins out to sea. Inland lochs are home to ducks and waders, whilst the hills are the haunt of peregrine, golden eagle and red deer. At Dunbeath, the signposted woodland walks give you a chance to see yellowhammer and greenfinch, whilst merlin, short-eared owl, hen harrier and kestrel can all be found on the open moors. Where the A9 turns inland, continue along the coast on the A99 to Wick. The unclassified road north east of Wick will take you out to Noss Head where puffins and other seabirds can be seen during the summer, close to the ruined Sinclair and Girnigoe Castles.

Day 3

From Wick, follow the A99 to John o' Groats where an unclassified road takes you to the seabird colonies of Duncansby Head. During the breeding season shags, puffins and guillemots can be seen on the Geo of Sclaites and the offshore stacks. Heading west, any sheltered bay along the A836 may harbour divers and eider, whilst offshore watch for minke whales and risso's and white-beaked dolphins. The large hide at the Loch of Mey, just past the Castle of Mey, is a good spot for ducks and waders, and white-fronted geese in winter. At Dunnet, the B855 takes you past a small hide at St John's Loch, haunt of little grebe, terns and otter. The pools on the road to Dunnet Head, the most northerly point of mainland Britain, are frequented by red-throated diver, and the moors are home to raven and red grouse. Dunnet Head is a good spot to watch breeding seabirds. Watch out great and arctic skuas that divebomb the unwary.

Day 4

Past Thurso, the A9 takes you to Scrabster where the ferry across the Pentland Firth to Orkney only takes 1 1/2 hours. Look out for cetaceans throughout the crossing and seabirds whilst rounding the Old Man of Hoy. You can join tours with local wildlife guides, such as Orcadian Wildlife or you can take the car ferry over to the island of Hoy, haunt of short-eared owls and hen harriers and a further array of majestic seabird cliffs. Return to Scrabster at the end of the day.

Day 5

The tidal reaches of the River Thurso are good for waders and ducks. The A836, west of the town takes you along coastal stretches which hold waders, divers and eider in the sandy bays and rock dove, skuas and harriers on the moors. At Melvich Bay, turn left onto the A897 towards Kinbrace. This is the heart of the "flow country", home to golden plover, hen harrier, short-eared owl, greenshank and dunlin, as well as red deer and golden eagle. At Forsinairn, walks through Forestry Commission Woodland can give you the chance of Scottish crossbill. At Forsinairn, the RSPB visitor centre has details of all the birds seen in the "flow country" as well as cameras trained on a hen harrier nest. Red throated divers nest on small lochans and in spring the area is alive with the sounds of breeding waders.

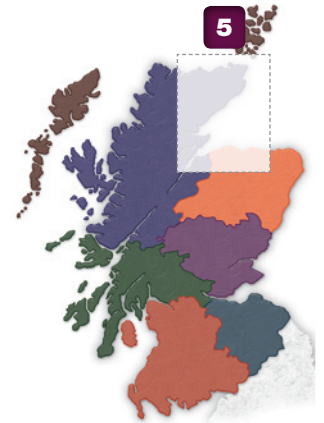
WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
1 Bottlenose dolphin												
2 Common seal												
3 Golden eagle												
4 Great northern diver												
5 Guillemot												
6 Hen harrier												
7 Puffin												
8 Red throated diver												
9 Short-eared owl												
10 White fronted goose												



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Courtesy of Dunnet Head Educational Trust



Courtesy of Northern Light Charters

ROUTE STATISTICS

Length	5 days / 4 nights
Mode of transport	Car
Start/finish	Inverness

Organisations not shown on the map are either regional initiatives or run holidays to the area, but are based elsewhere.

1 ECOVENTURES

Wildlife watching boat trips from Cromarty on the Moray Firth.

Tel: 01381 600323
www.ecoventures.co.uk

4 NORTH HIGHLAND TOURISM

Tourism association for the North Highlands.

Tel: 07970 027741
www.northhighlandsscotland.com

HOLIDAY COMPANIES

C-N-Do Scotland
Tel: 01786 445703
www.cndoscotland.com

Heatherlea (Scotland)
Tel: 1479 821248
www.heatherlea.co.uk

Speyside Wildlife
Tel: 01479 812498
www.speysidewildlife.co.uk

Wild Green Travel
Tel: 0131 4786500
www.wildgreentravel.com

Wildoutdoors
Tel: 01350 727201
www.wildoutdoors.info

And even further North...

Shetland Nature
Tel: 01957 733372
www.shetlandnature.net

2 DUNNET HEAD EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Small charity promoting the Dunnet Head area.

Tel: 01847 851774
www.dunnethead.co.uk

5 ORCADIAN WILDLIFE

Wildlife watching holidays on Orkney and Shetland.

Tel: 01856 831240
www.orkadianwildlife.co.uk

3 HIGHLAND UNBRIDLED

Trekking centre and riding school offering wildlife watching rides.

Tel: 01408 622789
www.highlandsunbridled.co.uk

6 RED KITE TOURS

Wildlife tours throughout the Highlands with wildlife guide, Jonathan Willet.

Tel: 07740 216595
www.redkitetours.co.uk