

605SOT2
P/SEA061004
Rev: 062404/PH

SCOTLAND'S HEBRIDES & HIGHLANDS AN EARLY SPRING BIRDING BREAK

April 3-13, 2005

©2004

This new tour in 2004 was fully booked and worked extremely well. We saw a fine selection of birds and Scottish scenery and above all had great fun doing it! The tour is a late winter / early spring birding and cultural experience combining Peter Robert's island home of Islay (pronounced "eye-lah") in the Hebrides with the Scottish Highlands (staying at the renowned Aigas Field Centre). Good numbers of special winter birds remain, while the most sought after of Scotland's breeding species are already nesting. Islay, the most southerly of the Inner Hebrides on the West Coast is a fine mix of sea lochs, cliffs, long sandy beaches and dunes pounded by the Atlantic, heather moors and hills, peat bogs, freshwater lochs, woodlands, streams and farmland rearing prime beef cattle and Scottish black-face sheep. This is winter home for a spectacular gathering of 35,000 Barnacle Geese and 15,000 Greater White-fronted Geese from Greenland. A good range of other wintering birds includes Greylag Geese, Whooper Swan, Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck, Common Pochard, Eurasian Teal, Common Eider, Loons, European Shag, Fieldfare and Redwing. Amongst these are occasional/regular Brants, Pink-footed Geese, Long-tailed Duck, Arctic Loons, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls and more (we had superb views of a vagrant Red-breasted Goose in 2004!). Shorebirds include Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Golden Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Common Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Woodcock, Eurasian Oystercatcher and Common Snipe (the latter split from its North American counterpart). Black Guillemot, Golden Eagle, Eurasian Buzzard, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Merlin, Eurasian Kestrel, Peregrine, Northern Harrier, Red-billed Chough, Barn and Tawny Owls, Twite, White-throated Dipper, Rock Pipit and Yellowhammer are regularly seen resident breeding birds.

Islay has a long, colorful history: gaunt standing stones, hut circles, the best examples of surviving Celtic crosses and Finlaggan, the power center over much of Scotland's Atlantic coastline and seat of the Lord of the Isles and Clan Donald in the 12th-17th centuries. Islay is world-renowned for its single-malt whiskies. Seven distinctive whisky distilleries and a working woollen mill producing world famous fine tartans all welcome visitors. We'll be staying at the 4 star Port Charlotte Hotel in a picturesque coastal village. Very comfortable accommodations are combined with excellent meals using fine locally produced beef, lamb and shellfish.

The Highlands scenery is the most dramatic in the British Isles - the highest peaks in Britain still snow-covered; extensive moorlands and large tracts of beautiful ancient woodland of Caledonian Pines. We are based at the Aigas Field Centre; a gloriously early Victorian Hunting Lodge near Beaulieu, family home of acclaimed conservationist Sir John Lister Kaye O.B.E. And beautifully appointed with antique furniture and historical family heirlooms. We'll be targeting species such as Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Willow and Rock Ptarmigan, flocks of Pink-footed Geese, the endemic Scottish Crossbill, localised Ring Ousel, Crested Tit, Eurasian Siskin, nesting Arctic Loon and special raptors such as Golden Eagle, Osprey, Red Kite and White-tailed Eagle. These will have

commenced breeding and displaying by early April and we have good chances of seeing them all. There will of course be many other more widespread species that will be of interest to any birders new to European birding. There will be plenty of further opportunities for watching exciting coastal sites for shorebirds and seabirds. While staying at Aigas House we'll be treated to fine dining prepared by Lady Lucy Lister-Kaye in the Great Hall of the Lodge and lectures on various historical, cultural and conservation topics by staff and experts including Sir John Lister-Kaye. We can vary the program to accommodate additional historical asides if interest and time permits.

In addition to some great birding, there are a number of interesting mammals to be found on this tour. Red and Roe Deer, Harbor and Atlantic Seals are quite common, while there is a very good chance of finding European Otter and Pine Marten. Photographic opportunities for landscapes and birds such as the geese should be good.

While expecting to see some very special and sought-after birds, we also aim for a fun and varied tour, using excellent accommodations with good food in highly scenic areas. Transport will be by roomy minibus – much of the best birding can be done from the roadside using the vehicle as a platform for watching and photography; or with short, easy walks. We'll visit excellent nature reserves with large Visitor Centers and observation blinds looking out onto prime birding areas. Join Peter at home in Scotland to sample special birding amidst some fascinating history, whisky and tartan!

April 3, Day 1: Depart the USA bound for the UK.

April 4, Day 2: Glasgow to Islay via Loch Lomond: Arrive Glasgow (either direct from USA or via London), no later than 1pm. You will be met at the airport and take a scenic 100 miles drive passing alongside Loch Lomond and then south down Loch Fyne to join the Islay ferry at the terminal halfway down the Mull of Kintyre. Once on Islay we will transfer you to the Port Charlotte Hotel. (Note: anyone arriving later can opt to take the late afternoon British Airways flight from Glasgow to Islay where you will be met and transferred to the hotel).

Overnight: Port Charlotte Hotel, Port Charlotte, Islay

April 5-7, Days 3-5: On Islay: We have 3 full days on Islay, a popular destination for UK birders between October and April who come for the huge concentrations of wintering wildfowl, shorebirds and other attractive and sought-after bird species that congregate here. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has a strong presence on Islay and administers many thousands of acres as nature reserves with a large Visitor Center and an excellent observation blind looking out onto the prime areas for birding. The island is the non-breeding home for c.70% of the Greenland population of Barnacle Geese (35,000 birds) and the distinctive sub-species of Greenland Greater White-fronted Geese (15,000 birds). This is a prime area for large concentrations of geese, wildfowl and shorebirds – and also attractive to raptors: Eurasian Buzzard a certainty and Eurasian Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Peregrine, Merlin and Golden Eagle all very likely.

The shores of Loch Indaal, (where our hotel is situated) will be a focal point for its large variety of shorebirds, ducks, loons, grebes and seabirds such as Black Guillemot, Common Murre, Razorbill, Northern Fulmar and Northern Gannet. On calm days the water is dotted with hundreds of birds and the coastline full of shorebirds (Purple Sandpipers are usually just outside the hotel) as well as finch flocks, Rock and Meadow Pipits and White Wagtails. It might be worth looking through the large concentrations of gulls for Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. We will call in to the windswept dunes and sandy beaches of Machair Bay or Ardnave where Red-billed Choughs and Twite tend to congregate to feed in winter and perhaps drive the very attractive south-east coastline with wooded coves and offshore skerries full of seals.

The Oa – a peninsula on the extreme south-west of the island offers further good chances of Red-billed Choughs and Golden Eagles and is the site of a memorial erected by the USA Government to hundreds of American servicemen who perished off this shore in the troop ships “Tuscania” and “Otranto” in the First World War.

We can make time to delve into some of Islay’s colorful history, from the Mesolithic and pre-Christian standing stones to Iron Age hill-forts and early Christian sites, which are testament to 1500 years of spiritual presence. Gael settlers arrived from the 3rd century, Christian missionaries came from Northern Ireland at the time of St. Columba of Iona in the 6th century and Somerled rose up against the Norse & Viking invaders in the 12th century, establishing over several hundred years Finlaggan as the main centre of political power over a large area of Western Scotland’s Atlantic islands and coastline – the home of the Lord of the Isles and Clan Donald. We’ll see the Kildalton Cross – one of the finest early Christian Celtic crosses in Britain, standing in an ancient churchyard amidst later ornate 14th-15th century grave slabs.

More recent history is well presented in the island’s award-winning Museum of Islay Life just opposite our hotel. The landscape is dotted with ruins of old crofts – from an era when the population was much higher than now, and prior to mass emigration to North America and the land clearances of the lairds and landowners. The Islay Woollen Mill has displays of weaving, old weaving machinery and produces gorgeous tartan and tweed clothing (supplying tartan to H.R.H. Prince Charles and famous films such as Braveheart!). We will include a visit to one of Islay’s world famous single-malt whiskies; there are seven superb and distinctive whisky distilleries – Caol Ila, Bunnahabhainn, Lagavulin, Laphroaig, Bruichladdich, Ardbeg and Bowmore, with another on nearby Jura - a much more rugged island of few people and many Red Deer. The landscape is dominated by The Paps – stark peaks of rock and moorland rising sharply to over 2000’. The north of this spectacular island where George Orwell, the author of “1984” and “Animal Farm” lived part of his life.

Overnights: Port Charlotte Hotel, Port Charlotte, Islay

April 8, Day 6: We will return to the mainland on the ferry this morning, watching for seabirds including Manx Shearwater on the 2-hour crossing, passing the isles of Jura and Gigha. Thereafter we’ll use much of the day in a splendid drive north along the west coast and into the Highlands passing such famous sites as Oban, Loch Linnhe, Fort William and up the Great Glen Fault past Loch Lochy and Fort Augustus along the full length of Loch Ness passing Urquhart Castle to arrive at Aigas in good time for an evening meal.

Overnight: Aigas Field Center, Beaulieu

April 9-11, Days 7-9: The Highlands of Scotland: Based at the very central Aigas Field Center, we have three full days to make day excursions to the birding hotspots, historical and scenic splendors of this beautiful region. Our travels will probably take us to some fine scenic locations. The nearby Black Isle and the east coast Firths of Beaulieu, Cromarty and Dornoch, the more rugged west coast around Loch Maree, Gairloch and perhaps the Isle of Skye, plus the very special old Caledonian Pine habitats and adjacent mountains of Abernethy, Strathspey and Cairngorm. We will concentrate on searching for the localised and rare specialties - Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse (both should be displaying at this time of year and both were seen in 2004), the endemic Scottish Crossbill, plus Ring Ouzel, Crested Tit, Red Kite, White-tailed Eagle, Arctic Loon and Rock Ptarmigan. Most of these are only found within the British Isles exclusively in this wild region of Scotland. Other breeding species such as Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tawny Owl, Great, Blue, Coal and Long-tailed tits, Goldcrest, Eurasian Treecreeper, White-throated Dipper, Eurasian Siskin, Eurasian Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, Red Crossbill, Osprey, Willow Ptarmigan (the British subspecies known as Red Grouse), Horned Grebe, Common and Red-breasted mergansers and Common Goldeneye, should also be present and easily found, some as common “garden birds” and at feeders. Although early spring birds are arriving, displaying and starting to nest by now, birds from the Arctic are still present on their wintering grounds. The many delightful sea inlets hold large gatherings of wildfowl including many seaducks, shorebirds, Whooper Swans, Graylag Geese, large flocks of Pink-footed Geese and in adjacent fields wintering thrushes - Redwing and Fieldfare may be abundant.

Aigas is central to many fine castles and sites of historical significance such as Culloden where Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Scots were finally defeated by the English forces in 1745. Depending on time and interest we can make efforts to include some of these into our program. Sir John Lister-Kaye will meet us for cocktails in the fine Drawing Room of Aigas House and give us some fascinating informal insights and short lectures about recent historical and cultural developments in the Highlands of Scotland.

Overnights: Aigas Field Center, Beaulieu

April 12, Day 10: Return to Glasgow: Depending on your preferred flight arrangements and onward travel details, we can return you to the airport at Inverness or Glasgow. From here you can either overnight to connect with outbound flights the next morning or fly to London and overnight there to connect with outbound flights tomorrow: or you may wish to continue with your own private travel within Britain.

April 13, Day 11: Onward flights to USA: Connect with your homebound flights from Glasgow or London arriving in the USA the same day.

TOUR SIZE: The tour will be limited to 16 participants in two spacious minivans driven by the tour leaders.

TOUR LEADERS: Peter Roberts and expert local guides as required.

Peter Roberts is based in Britain and has been a keen naturalist since childhood in London. While birds remain his main interest, close contenders include whale-watching, the big game animals of Africa, snorkeling and the study of insects. A varied, lifelong career has included conservation and wildlife-related work from nature reserve management and teaching wildlife field courses, to ornithological survey and research, environmental consultancy and work for the UK government's Department of the Environment. Wardening the bird-banding station on the Welsh island of Bardsey for seven years and a year managing the Aldabra Research Station in the Indian Ocean stimulated a passion for seabirds and islands. His work has taken him to archipelagos worldwide from Antarctica, Falklands, Juan Fernandez, Galapagos, Hawaii, Seychelles and Sao Tome north to the Shetlands, Pribilofs and Aleutians, and he now lives on the small Scottish Hebridean island of Islay. Peter has an MSc in woodland invertebrate ecology and published research on various subjects from feeding ecology of fruit bats to bird migration, identification and behavior through to ecology of seabirds and Red-billed Choughs. Tour-leading for over 25 years has now become virtually full time and resulted in travel to over 55 countries on all seven continents, concentrating in particular on the birds, history and wildlife of Europe and Africa.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$3375** per person in double occupancy. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 10; 8 nights accommodations on Islay and in the Highlands as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The tour fee does not include airfares, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$250**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the VENT registration form and return it with a deposit of **\$500** per person (check or money order in US dollars.) If registering by phone, the deposit must be received within 10 days or the space will be released. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before departure date, the deposit less **\$75** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date
Fewer than 120 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$75.
No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available, as are other coverages such as terrorism protection; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

ACCOMMODATIONS: The bases for our daily explorations are **Port Charlotte**; an extremely attractive, well-maintained and preserved coastal village of old whitewashed stone cottages founded in 1828. We stay at the very comfortable, family-run Port Charlotte Hotel (4 star rated) overlooking the sea inlet of Loch Indaal. The 10 guest bedrooms in this beautifully restored Victorian hotel are individually and tastefully furnished and all have private bathrooms. There is a bar, a cosy visitor's lounge and an excellent restaurant offering plenty of choice of good local produce – meat, fish, seafood and vegetables on its extensive menu.

Aigas Field Centre; a splendid early Victorian Hunting Lodge near Beaully in its own extensive Estate grounds. The beautiful, historic and atmospheric main building is the family home of acclaimed conservationist Sir John Lister Kaye Bt., O.B.E. Lady Lucy Lister-Kaye is a cordon-bleu chef. Accommodations are in well-appointed wooden lodges within the grounds, while meals are taken in the Great Hall of the main house where we'll have use of the beautifully furnished Drawing Room for our evening meetings.

CLIMATE & CLOTHING: Early spring in Scotland can be very variable! Come prepared for everything from freezing temperatures, rain and wind through to dry, sunny weather with temperatures in the low 60s. Islay tends to be mild and influenced by the Gulf Stream and Atlantic Lows – weather can be wet and windy one moment then quickly revert to bright and sunny the next. The Highlands tends to be colder – freezing on some nights, but usually above freezing to mid 50s during the day.

Bring warm, light, layered clothing to allow for all eventualities of temperature, wind and precipitation. Goretex, fleeces, thermal underwear and windproof/waterproof outer clothing and walking shoes/boots are advised. Comfortable rubber boots will allow full access to any areas wet underfoot, though we do not anticipate long, arduous or mucky hikes. Dress is casual throughout.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required by everyone for entering all countries on this itinerary. Visas are not required for entry by United States/Canadian citizens. Non United States/Canadian citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leaders will have spotting scopes, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. There will be an

extensive library of bird, wildlife and history books available and we'll carry a supply of snacks and hot and cold drinks.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS: There are no required immunizations for this tour. Bring an adequate supply of all personally required medications with you, though similar products should be available to purchase if needed. There is a generally high standard of hygiene in Britain and we should be generally safe from stomach upsets. Water is safe to drink.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Departure Tax – None

Electricity – 220 volts; European style 3-pin square plugs are standard throughout

Time – Britain is 5 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Language – English is spoken throughout (but you may have fun trying to decipher some of the local Scottish dialects and hear Gaelic being spoken at times!).

TRANSPORTATION: Transportation will be in comfortable, roomy minivans. The distances on Islay are not great – the longest road journey is only about 30 miles from southern to northern extremes and much of the best birding can be done either from the roadside using the vehicle as a useful platform for watching and photography, or with short, easy walks. Distances in the Highlands are slightly greater, but Aigas is very centrally placed to be able to reach our target species in Speyside and the West coast with comparative ease. The transfers from Glasgow to Islay, Islay to Aigas and Aigas to Glasgow vary between 2-4 hour drives, but take us through some of the finest Scottish scenery, passing famous landmarks such as Loch Lomond and Loch Ness.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from our store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. There are many adequate fieldguides to European birds including the Peterson series. Two considered currently the best are:

Jonsson, Lars: Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East. 1992. Excellent illustrations and comprehensive. Available in a 1996 paperback edition. Published by Christopher Helm in UK.

Svenson, Mullarney, Zetterstrom & Grant: Birds of Europe. (2000). This is the latest of a huge range of fieldguides available on European birds. It has masses more up to date identification detail and illustrations than other guides and has received excellent/rave reviews. Highly recommended!

There will be an extensive library of books on local history and all other aspects of wildlife available throughout the tour.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary

or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect June 10, 2004, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.