

SCOTLAND IN STYLE: A BIRDS AND HISTORY BREAK IN THE HIGHLANDS

MAY 18 - 26, 2007

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VENT has often chartered special ships for exclusive and custom-designed wildlife cruises. We went further with our unique charter of the “Palace on Wheels” train across India. Now we propose a very special and unusual tour offering a week of varied birding and historical visits in the heart of the Highlands of Scotland in a privately hired and beautifully furnished Period Scottish Country Home in idyllic surroundings. The property we use will depend on group size, but the properties on the selected short-list have been chosen for their fine and often grand decorations, antique furnishings, spacious and elegant public rooms, and lovely bedrooms with private bathrooms. They all also possess fine architectural merit in a superb setting to ensure a wonderful private “house party” atmosphere to the week’s holiday. We will have privately catered meals in our own grand dining room and relax in the lounges and studies afterwards.

During our six full days in Scotland, there will be a varied and flexible daily program of events. We shall offer birding and cultural/historical options and the possibility of splitting into interest groups, so that the tour will be able to interest and accommodate both birders and non-birding partners or family.

The Highlands scenery is the most dramatic in the British Isles: the highest peaks in Britain; extensive moorlands; large tracts of ancient woodland of Caledonian Pines; stunning coastal scenery of cliffs, inlets, and offshore islands; vast tracts of prehistoric peat bog and fast-flowing rivers. We’ll be targeting localized and rare specialties such as Eurasian Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Rock Ptarmigan, Willow Ptarmigan (the British subspecies known as Red Grouse), the endemic Scottish Crossbill, localized Ring Ousel, Crested Tit, Horned Grebe, Arctic Loon, and raptors such as Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Golden Eagle, Osprey, Red Kite, and White-tailed Eagle. Most of these only breed within the British Isles, exclusively in this wild region of Scotland, 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, such as Great Spotted Woodpecker; Tawny Owl; Great, Blue, Coal, and Long-tailed tits; Goldcrest; Eurasian Treecreeper; White-throated Dipper; Eurasian Jackdaw; Hooded Crow; Rook; Eurasian Siskin; Eurasian Greenfinch; Chaffinch; Eurasian Bullfinch; Red Crossbill; Tufted Duck; Common Pochard; Common and Red-breasted mergansers; and Common Goldeneye. Further opportunities exist for watching exciting coastal sites for many more migrants, shorebirds, and seabirds. We will be central to many fine castles and sites of historical significance.

May 18, Day 1: Travel from United States. Depart United States. There are many flights to the UK, including some direct flights into Glasgow with onward connections to Inverness.

NIGHT: International Flight

May 19, Day 2: Arrival in Inverness. Meet up with your leaders and transfer to our exclusive country house in the Highlands. There should be time in the afternoon for some local birding, orientation, or relaxing in the surrounds of our accommodation.

NIGHT: Glenlivet House

May 20-25, Days 3-8: Exploring the Highlands. Daily events are left deliberately flexible to allow us to best fit in with the group's wishes and interests. The places we may visit include:

Wester Ross coastline from Skye, north along the Atlantic west coast of Scotland, is some of the most striking scenery in the British Isles. Remote headlands, deep sea lochs, wooded bays, and offshore islands provide a wonderful landscape for pretty coastal villages and some exciting wildlife. Most significant here is a small population of White-tailed Eagles. Re-introduced into Scotland after an absence of over 100 years, this largest of European eagles is now slowly increasing and gracing Scotland's western shores with its powerful presence once more. The surrounding crags and heather-clad hills hold good populations of Ring Ousel, Red Grouse, Northern Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine, Golden Eagle, and Eurasian Buzzard, while the immense freshwater lochs are nest sites for Arctic Loon and Horned Grebe.

The Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland is probably the largest remaining expanse of blanket peat bog in the world, making it important on an international scale. This unique and very special vegetation, landscape and habitat is fragile and easily damaged, with only a small percentage remaining intact today. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is making considerable effort to restore and save this unique wetland habitat at its 25,000-acre Forsinard Reserve. This vast flat, open landscape is the ancestral breeding home to many special birds rare elsewhere in the British Isles, such as Red-throated and Arctic loons, Merlin, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Black Scoter, Eurasian Golden Plover, Dunlin, Common Redshank, Eurasian Curlew, Common Snipe, and Common Greenshank.

The Black Isle is not an island at all, but a small varied peninsula of fertile farmland and woodland jutting out into the North Sea on the east coast of Scotland near Inverness. The gentle, varied scenery and large numbers of indented bays with salt marsh and mudflats provide for a wide range of breeding and migrant birds. Most noteworthy here is a healthy population of the dramatic Red Kite—another highly successful raptor re-introduction of recent years. The waterbirds and shorebirds can be abundant and highly varied, with several nature reserves set up for their protection.

The Cairngorms and Strathspey include some of the oldest, highest, most stark and beautiful, glaciated, arctic landscapes in Scotland. On these higher plateaus are occasional Eurasian Dotterel and Rock Ptarmigan, while below are the pretty straths—wide glaciated, flat-bottomed valleys with attractive, fast-flowing, meandering rivers, deciduous woodland, and pretty villages and farmland. Wildlife highlights here are species such as White-throated Dipper, Black Grouse, Tawny Owl, Common Redstart, Tree Pipit, and Whinchat. In this region, too, are the Caledonian Pine forests—remnants of former extensive cover that now harbor specialties such as Capercaillie, Crested Tit, and Scottish Crossbill.

Handa Island: This remarkable island, off the remote northwest coast of Scotland just south of Cape Wrath, is one of the largest seabird colonies in Northwest Europe. Magnificent and immense sea cliffs, formed from stratified Torridonian sandstone, rise vertically from the Atlantic. Each summer they come alive, when nearly 200,000 seabirds gather to breed. Common Murre, Razorbill, and Great Skua reach internationally important numbers. There are also Northern Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Eurasian Shag, Parasitic Jaeger, and Atlantic Puffin nesting, and Black Guillemot are often seen offshore. Until 1847, up to 60 people inhabited Handa, living

on oats and potatoes. Their food crops failed due to potato blight, and they were evacuated to Nova Scotia. The ruins of their houses can still be seen.

Historical Sites: there are many fine castles, battleground sites, museums, and other places of historical interest and significance in this region. The bleak moor of **Culloden**, where Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Scots of the Jacobite Rising were finally defeated by the English forces in 1746, is a short distance from our base. **Cawdor Castle** is the fairytale home of the Thanes of Cawdor since 1370. Linked with Macbeth and Shakespeare, it is a romantic and fascinating place to wander through, with its intact towers and drawbridge, beautiful gardens, and superb collections of artifacts. **Brodie Castle** is a fine example of a 16th century tower house, with fine collections of art and ceramics. **Dunrobin Castle** was the ancient seat of the Earls and Dukes of Sutherland. The castle dates to the 13th century and has an outstanding collection of furniture, silver, tapestries, porcelain, and paintings within its vast and splendid structure and fine ornate gardens outside. It is the most northerly of Scotland's great houses and the largest in the highlands, with 189 rooms. **Urquhart Castle** is a medieval fortress set in a stunning position on the banks of Loch Ness. Its history is inextricably woven into Scotland's bloody power struggles—firstly between the English and Scots, and later between the great Macdonald and Grant clans. **Fort George**, built on the shores of the Moray Firth, was built directly after the Battle of Culloden to defend against any further Jacobite unrest. It is a sprawling and elaborate, remarkably well-preserved area of barracks and fortifications bristling with cannons and phenomenal collections of arms—pikes, bayoneted muskets, and swords—the mightiest artillery fortification in Britain, if not Europe. And, of course, no discussion of historic Scotland would be complete without mention of **Malt Whisky Distilleries!** The Highland region is home to some of the finest and most famous—such as Glenmorangie, Glenlivet, Cardhu, and Dalwhinnie—and we can include a visit to these for fans of the *Uisg Beatha*: “Water of Life.”

NIGHTS: Glenlivet House

May 26, Day 9: Travel to United States. We will transfer you to Inverness or Glasgow airports for onward connections towards home or your own journeys within the UK. It will be possible to offer further short extensions to the tour to cover the birds, wildlife and ancient historical sites of Orkney or Shetland or Outer Hebrides. Please ask for details if interested. This tour can also be combined with our Scottish Islands Cruise, May 25 – June 2; participants choosing this option will be transferred to Aberdeen to meet the cruise group.

TOUR SIZE: The tour will be limited to 25 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Peter Roberts and Ray Nowicki

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.

Ray Nowicki's interest in natural history began during his teenage years when he developed an enthusiasm for plants. This evolved further into a passion for birdwatching and other wildlife. He has spent many years working in the United Kingdom for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) as a nature reserve warden in England and Scotland. His conservation work included habitat and species management, visitors and education,

public relations, research, and survey and monitoring. Ray's interest in wildflowers resulted in working as part of a team that produced wildflower seeds on a commercial scale. He moved to Nethybridge in the Scottish Highlands in 1999 to develop a career in wildlife tourism and wildlife guiding. Ray's main interest lies with the wildlife in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, but he is tempted away from this to lead tours overseas on a few occasions each year. Ray has worked with Peter Roberts guiding similar tours in the Highlands, and his all-round wildlife knowledge and familiarity with the local area where we are based in Strathspey will be a huge asset to our tour.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$2550** per person in double occupancy from Inverness. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 9, accommodations 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 **\$175**. Please note that single accommodations are extremely limited and may not be available for everyone who requests them.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. 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 the tour departure date, the deposit less \$125 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.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$125.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	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, however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

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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 base for our daily explorations should be **Glenlivet House**, a splendid, large Scottish country house within the Cairngorms National Park that enjoys some of the most spectacular views

over the Banffshire countryside. Built in the late Victorian period as a grand shooting lodge, Glenlivet House is perfectly placed in the extremely scenic Strathspey, central to much of our daily ventures. The house is a magnificent stone-built property on its own extensive and secluded grounds, close to the famous Glenlivet Whisky Distillery. We can accommodate just over 20 people and will, of course, have sole, private, and full use of the entire house. Grand period decorations and furnishings are reminiscent of bygone times, but the house has all modern comforts and features. Open log fires are supplemented by central heating, and all bedrooms (some with four-posters!) have private bathrooms. The public rooms are spacious and relaxing. The tour will be fully catered; we will dine privately each evening in the large and elegant dining room of the house, rather than having to go out to restaurants.

CLIMATE & CLOTHING: Late spring in the Scottish Highlands can be very variable, but the scenery is fine regardless of what the weather deals us. Come prepared for everything from cool temperatures in the 50s, cloud, rain, and wind, through to dry, beautifully sunny weather with temperatures in the high 60s. Bring warm, light, layered clothing to allow for all eventualities of temperature, wind, and precipitation. Gore-Tex, fleeces and windproof/waterproof outer clothing and walking shoes/boots are advised. Though we do not anticipate long, arduous, or muddy hikes, there is the opportunity for the keen to go further in search of some of the more upland species such as Eurasian Dotterel and Rock Ptarmigan. Dress is casual throughout.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required by everyone for entering the UK. Visas are not required for entry by U.S./Canadian citizens. Non-U.S./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.). Items such as batteries and film are all readily available in UK. 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.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

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!).

Currency – £ Sterling, most easily obtained using the many ATMs. Credit cards are accepted almost everywhere.

TRANSPORTATION: Transportation will be in comfortable, roomy minivans. The distances we travel each day may vary from 50 – 200 miles round-trip. The scenery alone should make the traveling worthwhile!

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated 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 the 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 field guides 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 field guides 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 January 31, 2006, 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.