Islay: Geese and Raptors
14-21 November 2027



Barnacle Goose by Fozzy

Holding 70% of the Greenland-breeding Barnacle Goose population and 40% of the world's Greenland White-fronted Geese during the colder months, the stunning Scottish island of Islay offers some of the best winter wildlife spectacles in Britain. Add in a host of other Scottish specialities such as Golden and White-tailed Eagles and Eurasian Otter, this trip will be one to remember.

Itinerary

Join us for an unforgettable winter wildlife tour on the beautiful Scottish island of Islay, exploring its rugged coastline, expansive farmland and sheltered bays. We'll seek out the spectacular gatherings of Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese that make the island so special, while keeping an eye out for other wintering wildfowl and waders. Beyond the geese, we'll hope to encounter iconic Scottish wildlife, including Golden and White-tailed Eagles hunting over the landscape and Eurasian Otters along the coast. With a flexible itinerary shaped by local conditions and real-time updates from the BirdGuides Sightings team, we'll make the most of Islay's exceptional winter wildlife and the opportunities each day brings.

Accommodation will be at the historic boutique 4* Port Charlotte Hotel, located in Port Charlotte for six nights.

Day 1: Arrival and seabirds
Our adventure begins with the ferry crossing to Islay, which departs from Kennacraig. The exact time of the crossing will be confirmed once the timetable is released. Transfers can be arranged from Glasgow railway station or if travelling by car, meet at Kennacraig in time for the ferry to Islay. The group's first birding session will be along the coast and on the ferry, which will take approximately two hours. A good number of divers can be seen with Great Northern, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers all wintering here. A short journey on arrival will take us to our comfortable hotel where we will have time to settle in for a week of wildlife-watching ahead.

Day 2: Loch Gruinart RSPB
We will spend the rest of our week exploring the island. The schedule will be flexible depending on the weather, timings and species seen. With roughly 5,500 Greenland White-fronted Geese and up to 40,000 Barnacle Geese, there aren't many areas of this island that won't have geese present. Pink-footed, Greylag and Brent Geese can also be found; other rarities to look out for may include wild North American Canada, Cackling and Snow Geese. Loch Gruinart RSPB, which is a working farm producing food for the island's residents as well as many thousands of geese, provides a mix of habitats that hold other target species. Raptors such as Hen Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon and Short-eared Owl hunt over the wetlands and marshes, which hold many waders and wildfowl including Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Common Goldeneye and Northern Pintail.

Day 3: Loch Indaal
Another must-visit site is Loch Indaal. There are several purpose-built pull-ins along the shore here, providing us with excellent birding opportunities. A good selection of waders can be viewed as the tide recedes with Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Dunlin and Ringed and Grey Plovers to name just a few. The open water can be fantastic with rafts of Greater Scaup, Common Scoter, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck and Common Goldeneye. In addition to all three diver species, this is a good wintering spot for Slavonian Grebe, with Red-necked Grebe occasionally reported. We will also keep our eyes on the rocky shores for Purple Sandpiper and possibly Iceland and Glaucous Gulls.

Day 4: The Oa RSPB
Heading south, we will visit the towering cliffs of The Oa. Another breathtaking reserve of dramatic sea cliffs, freshwater lochs and open moorland. Here we will pick up a range of birds including Black Guillemot, Black-legged Kittiwake, Red-breasted Merganser and divers on the sea, Chough and flocks of Twite along the coastal grasslands and possibly Golden Eagle soaring overhead.

Day 5: The South-East Islay Hills
Higher elevations and more mountainous terrain are located to the south-east of the island. Here is a good chance to find further Golden Eagle as well as several mammal species including Red, Roe and Fallow Deer along with Mountain Hare. Eurasian Otters can be in any of the coastal bays and inlets and we will take time to check spots as we move around the island.

Day 6: The Rinns and Loch Gorm
We will have time to revisit areas with good potential for any missed species on the trip or a last-minute rarity that may be hiding. We will cover the western peninsula, checking geese flocks and

stop to scan inland lochs for waterfowl in the hope of picking up a final duck or diver. Our final evening will be followed by a recap and highlights from our trip.

Day 7: Departure
The morning transfer back to the mainland will be our last opportunity to enjoy wildlife together as a group. From the boat, there will be further opportunities to see various seabirds up close. The sailing time will be confirmed once the timetable has been published in 2027. After a final goodbye and drop off at the station, a magical trip on Islay will conclude.

Pricing

Our Islay birding tour offers exceptional value, with the price covering comfortable accommodation, ground transportation, entrance fees to all scheduled sites and reserves, and the expertise of an experienced birding guide.

Priced at £2,549 per person, a single supplement is an additional £250.

A non-refundable deposit of 20% of the total trip price, per person, is required to secure the booking. The final balance is due 60 days before the tour start date.

Included in the price:

- Accommodation throughout the tour at Port Charlotte Hotel;
- All evening meals from Day 1 to Day 6, and breakfast from Day 2 through to Day 7;
- Ground transportation during the tour (minibus);
- Return ferry from Kennacraig to Islay;
- Services of an experienced birding guide;
- Entrance fees to all scheduled sites and reserves.

Not included:

- International flights to and from the UK;
- Visa fees, if applicable;
- Travel insurance;
- Beverages and lunch;
- Optional activities not specified in the itinerary.

Trip Information

Tour leader
This tour is run exclusively for BirdGuides Travel by WildSpace. Your tour leader will be John Hague.

Group size
Eight, plus tour leader.

Minimum participants
This tour requires a minimum of five confirmed participants. If we do not have the minimum required number of participants, we reserve the right to cancel this tour. We will notify you not less than 30 days before the start of the tour should this be necessary.

Recommended items

- Binoculars;

- Telescope for scanning geese and wildfowl. Your guide will have a scope that will be shared with the group;
- Camera and waterproof camera cover;
- Water bottle and fridge bag for lunches on the go;
- Walking poles;
- Comfortable walking shoes;
- Warm and waterproof clothing as the weather can be unpredictable.

Is this tour for me?

- Ferries have steps with rails to embark on them;
- There is limited walking on this tour with birding mostly from the roadside. Short walks around the coastline and nature reserves may see us walk up to 3 miles on some days.
- The hotel is adaptable and ground floor rooms can be requested;
- The hotel can adapt to dietary requirements however cannot guarantee the absence of any allergens due to them being prepared in a kitchen containing allergens. The live menu can be found HERE;
- BirdGuides Travel tours are unsuitable for persons under the age of 16 years old. Please talk to us before booking your trip should you require further information.

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