Shetland Rarity Hunting
1-7 October 2027



Lanceolated Warbler

Join BirdGuides on an exhilarating autumn adventure to Shetland – Britain's premier destination for rare and scarce migrant birds. With wild landscapes, rich habitats and a legendary track record for megas, Shetland offers the ultimate opportunity to connect with iconic vagrants and perhaps even find one of your own. From windswept headlands and sheltered iris beds to remote croft gardens and loch fringes, each day promises thrilling possibilities. With direct links to the BirdGuides sightings network and a flexible, responsive approach, we'll be at the heart of the action as the peak migration season unfolds. Whether checking gardens for flycatchers and warblers, remote crofts for buntings, or scanning offshore for passing seabirds and cetaceans, this is a week designed for birders eager to explore, react and discover the very best of Shetland in autumn.

Itinerary

Join BirdGuides on an unforgettable seven-day adventure exploring Shetland's spectacular autumn migration hot-spots, from Sumburgh Head to the remote island of Unst. This tour combines coastal scenery with dynamic birding, focusing on tracking down rare and scarce migrants across Mainland Shetland and surrounding islands. With a flexible itinerary and direct access to BirdGuides sightings updates, we'll be ideally placed to respond quickly to breaking rarities and changing conditions, offering participants a prime chance to experience one of the UK's most exciting birding destinations.

Accommodation will be at the comfortable 2.5-3* Brae Hotel for 5 nights.

Day 1: Departure from Aberdeen Ferry Terminal
Location: Aberdeen to Lerwick Ferry
Activities: We'll meet at the Aberdeen Ferry Terminal to begin our overnight voyage to Shetland. We shall confirm the exact time as soon as the ferry timetable is released in early 2027. The ferry is spacious and comfortable, with lounges, a cinema, a cafeteria and a restaurant onboard. Standard tour fees include reclining pod seats, but upgrades to cabins are available on request and for an additional charge, subject to availability. This is a great opportunity to meet your fellow birders and our guides, and to prepare for the exciting days ahead in one of Britain's most legendary birding locations.

Days 2-6: Shetland birding
Location: Mainland Shetland and surrounding islands
Activities: For the next five days, we will fully immerse ourselves in the magic of autumn migration in Shetland. Our focus will be twofold: tracking down the latest rare and scarce vagrants reported across the islands and working the habitat-rich hot-spots ourselves in hopes of finding something exceptional. With a direct link to the BirdGuides sightings team, we'll be in prime position to respond quickly to any breaking rarity news.

Day 7: Departure returning to Aberdeen Ferry Terminal
Location: Lerwick Ferry to Aberdeen
Activities: We will spend time exploring top migrant spots in South Mainland and enjoy lunch before boarding the afternoon ferry sailing back to Aberdeen. Departure time will be at approximately 5pm, arriving in Aberdeen on 8 October at approximately 7am. We shall again confirm the exact departure time as soon as the ferry timetable has been released.

Target species
This is peak season for eastern vagrants and Nearctic surprises. Shetland regularly hosts species such as Lanceolated and Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers, Pechora Pipit and White's Thrush – collectively known as the 'Shetland four'. Barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Little Bunting are expected at this time, while Bluethroat, Olive-backed Pipit, Arctic Warbler and Blyth's Reed Warbler are all regular scarcities.

We'll visit a range of key locations, including:

Sumburgh Head: A classic rarity trap at the southern tip of Mainland. The stone dykes and open spaces are a magnet for passerines. Watch for scarce avian migrants on land and cetaceans such as Orca offshore.

Loch of Spiggie: The largest loch on Shetland is a haven for wildfowl, while surrounding gardens and iris beds are renowned for producing passerine migrants.

Quendale: One of Shetland's most famous vagrant sites. The iris beds and surrounding habitat have hosted recent megas including Siberian Rubythroat and Oriental Turtle Dove. Offshore, expect divers and seaduck.

Unst: Britain's most northerly island and a hot-spot for vagrants from all points of the compass. Past rarities include Cape May Warbler and Siberian Thrush. We'll also be on the lookout for the likes of Barred Warbler, Common Rosefinch and Little Bunting among the crofts and gardens.

Our flexible itinerary ensures we can respond rapidly to breaking rarity news anywhere across the archipelago. Previous autumns have produced incredible birds including Britain's first Least Bittern, Veery, Blackburnian Warbler, Eastern Crowned Warbler and Siberian Accentor.

Pricing

Our Shetland 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 experienced birding guides.

Priced at £2,249 per person, a single supplement is an additional £275.

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 Brae Hotel
- All evening meals from Day 1 to Day 6, and also breakfast from Day 2, through to Day 7
- Ground transportation during the tour (minibus)
- Return ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick – reclining pod seat
- All inter-island ferries
- Services of two experienced birding guides
- Entrance fees to all scheduled sites and reserves

Not included:

- International flights to and from the UK
- Visa fees, if applicable
- Upgraded ferry seat (information available upon request)
- 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 leaders will be Alan Tilmouth.

Group size

8, plus tour leader.

Minimum participants

This tour requires a minimum of eight 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. 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?

- Due to the rugged terrain, this tour is unsuitable for people with reduced mobility;
- We will be walking on average 3-5 miles per day with plenty of breaks;

- 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;
- 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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