



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

SCOTLAND IN STYLE

MAY 10–20, 2025

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Cairngorms National Park © Andrew Whittaker

Based in a single historic hotel, our short tour provides a delicious taste of the enormously varied natural and cultural offerings of the Scottish Highlands. During eight full days around Strathspey and the spectacular Cairngorms National Park, our excursions will focus not only on the excellent

birding in this scenic region, but on rewarding visits to fine castles, battlefields, and other sites of historical significance.



The Highlands scenery is the most dramatic in the British Isles: the highest peaks in Britain, remote moorlands, ancient woodlands of Caledonian pine, stunning cliffs, deep lochs, rugged islands, and famously crystalline rivers. We will be on the lookout for such specialties as the Black Grouse, Rock and Willow Ptarmigans, Horned Grebe, Arctic and Red-throated Loons, Crested Tit, Ring Ouzel, and the endemic Scottish Crossbill; the distinctive British subspecies of the Willow Ptarmigan, originally described 250 years ago as the Red Grouse, is a strong candidate for re-splitting, producing another British endemic. Among the raptors we can hope to see are the striking Red Kite, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Buzzard, and Golden Eagle.

In the British Isles, most of these species are entirely restricted to this wild part of Scotland, but of course there will be many other, more widespread species of particular interest to those of us new to European birding. Among them are the Common Shelduck, Red-legged Partridge, Little Grebe, Eurasian Curlew, Tawny Owl, and a whole suite of colorful tits, finches, and chats. On our visits to the coast, we might encounter seashore species such as the Pink-footed Goose, European Golden Plover, or Eurasian Oystercatcher, and the scenic oceanside cliffs are nesting sites for the Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Common Murre, Black Guillemot, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Northern Gannet.

We will also have opportunities to see a number of mammal species, among them the shy Pine Martin, European Badger, European and Mountain Hares, Eurasian Red Squirrel, Red Deer, or Roe Deer; Common and Gray Seals, Bottle-nosed Dolphins, and Harbor Porpoises are also frequently met with.

We have intentionally kept our day-to-day plans flexible, allowing us to take full advantage of local weather and birding updates.



The distinctive local race of the Willow Ptarmigan, the Red Grouse © Andrew Whittaker

May 10, Day 1: Travel to Inverness, Scotland. Most transatlantic flights from the United States depart in the late afternoon or evening and arrive the following morning at a European hub city with connections to Inverness Airport (airport code INV).

NIGHT: In transit (overnight flight)

May 11, Day 2: Arrival in Inverness. Participants should arrange to arrive in Inverness before noon on May 11. Our group transfer to Grantown-on-Spey will depart from the Inverness airport at approximately 1:00 p.m.; transfers can also be provided from Inverness railway station on May 11. If needed a private transfer can be arranged. It is a pleasant drive of 45 minutes to our base for the tour, the historic town of Grantown-on-Spey in the center of the Scottish Highlands on the northern edge of Cairngorms National Park. Grantown-on-Spey was one of the first Georgian planned towns in Scotland, developed in the 1760s by Sir James Grant. Grant built mills, factories, a hospital, and an orphanage; many of the town's historic buildings survived, including our hotel.

After arriving in Grantown this afternoon, we will have a chance to make the acquaintance of some of the local avifauna along the scenic River Spey. World-famous for its salmon fishing and picturesque bridges, the Spey is also a fine place to look for Common Swifts, Dunnocks, European Robins, and Eurasian Siskins; where the water is at its roughest, White-throated Dippers and Gray Wagtails hunt and nest. Dinner this evening will be at 6 p.m.

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey



A lovely sunset on our fabulous Grant Arms Hotel © Andrew Whittaker

May 12, Day 3: Anagach Woods, Black Isle, and Chanonry Point. Our hotel is adjacent to the pine forests of Anagach Woods, where the hotel staff maintains bird feeders. Among the birds we can hope to find here on our first pre-breakfast birding walk include Crested and Coal Tits, Eurasian Siskins, and Eurasian Treecreepers, and this is also a fine place to look for the diminutive Roe Deer.

After a hearty Scottish breakfast, we'll take a breathtaking drive to the picturesque Black Isle area. Red Kites, hunted to extinction in England and Scotland, have now been re-introduced, with impressive results, and the peninsula of Black Isle is a noted hotspot for watching these magnificent birds as they soar high above in their tireless search for carrion. We will be keeping our own sharp eyes out for otters at the RSPB blind at Udale Bay and Beaully Firth.

From the east shore of the Black Isle, Chanonry Point extends more than a mile into the Moray Firth, the largest North Sea inlet in Scotland. The bay here is good for Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Greater Scaup and even loons. Chanonry Point is best-known, though, as one of the most productive sites in the UK for watching cetaceans. Moray Firth's famous bottle-nosed dolphins are one of the northernmost resident herds of that species, and harbor porpoises are likewise common here; the eighteenth-century pier has become a tourist attraction as the place to watch these captivating sea mammals. Minke whales are also seen in the firth, and harbor and gray seals are

present as well. On this or another evening after dinner, we will have an optional outing to a heated blind for a chance to see some of the area's more reclusive mammals, perhaps including the rare pine martin or a family of European badgers.

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey

May 13, Day 4: Culloden and Loch Garten. The last pitched battle on British soil was fought on the bleak moors of Culloden in April 1746; the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his Scottish Jacobites marked the beginning of the end for an independent Scotland and its clan system. As we learn more about this pivotal moment in British history, we are likely to enjoy European Stonechats, Reed Bunting, and Willow and Sedge Warblers, while Skylarks sing high above us, just as they did on that spring day in 1746.

After lunch, we will visit the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' Loch Garten Reserve, famous as the site where Ospreys first returned to Britain after an absence of nearly a century. In addition to admiring the breeding Ospreys, we will spend some time watching the feeders, which are frequented by Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Eurasian Siskins, and Great, Eurasian Blue, and Coal Tits; other woodland birds we will be looking for include the Eurasian Treecreeper, Spotted Flycatcher, and Chiffchaff. These ancient Caledonian pines and bogs are the only site in Britain where the very rare Eurasian Capercaillie and Crested Tit occur; another of our prime targets here is the Scottish Crossbill, the only species currently recognized as endemic to the British Isles. Mammals such as the Eurasian red squirrel and short-tailed field vole are present here, and on one visit, we even saw the common otter.



A multi-colored Eurasian Blue Tit with a caterpillar © Andrew Whittaker

On this or another evening, as weather and the clock allow, we will offer an optional after-dinner trip to a small woodlot just down the road to watch Eurasian Woodcocks over the forest and meadows; the male's ritualized display flight, known as roding, is accompanied by bizarrely unbirdlike growls and sneezes.

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey

May 14, Day 5: Loch Ruthven Reserve and Lochindorb. We'll drive out over the wild moors to the secluded RSPB reserve of Loch Ruthven, where we will have a picnic lunch and enjoy birding from a lovely blind. Loch Ruthven is a beautiful, tranquil arm of the sea edged by silver birch trees, the most important site in the UK for



A stunning male Black Grouse displaying on the Scottish moors © Andrew

breeding Horned Grebes. The grebes look their best in early spring, when they are wearing their gorgeous red, black, and gold breeding plumage. We will also be looking for Common Cuckoo, Red-throated and Arctic Loons, Lesser Redpoll, Reed Bunting, and European Robin; among the warblers, we will hope to find Chaffinch, Sedge Warbler, and perhaps an early Grasshopper Warbler.

After lunch, we will take a scenic drive around Lochindorb, a freshwater loch just north of Grantown. The ruined castle on an inaccessible island makes an evocative backdrop to our search for breeding Red-throated and Arctic Loons, Redshank, Dunlin, and Common Gulls. The moorland above the lake is home to Graylag Geese, Red Grouse, and Common Cuckoos.

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey



A Northern Gannet at Troup Head RSPB Nature Reserve © Andrew Whittaker

May 15, Day 6: The Cairngorm Mountains and the Highlands Folk Museum. Covering some 1750 square miles, Cairngorms National Park is the largest in the UK, and a morning spent here is always a highlight of any visit to this part of Scotland. At the lower elevations, we will be on the lookout for Ring Ouzels, Northern Wheatears, Meadow Pipits, and White Wagtails. A curiosity is Britain's only herd of free-range reindeer, descendants of animals introduced seventy-five years ago by an eccentric Swedish couple.

If possible—operating dates vary from year to year, and even in spring, the weather is an unpredictable factor—we will ride Scotland's only funicular railway to an elevation of some 3600 feet. The 1.5-mile trip takes about eight minutes, and deposits us at the aptly named Ptarmigan Restaurant. Some of us may wish to enjoy the view from here; with special permits in hand, the rest of us will venture forth on an hour's walk on gravel paths across the alpine tundra, the summer home of Rock Ptarmigan, Snow Buntings, and Eurasian Dotterels.



European Badger— a highlight on our mammal dusk trip © Andrew Whittaker

In the afternoon we'll visit the Highlands Folk Museum. Some of the buildings occupying the eighty acres of this outdoor museum are original structures moved here, while others are recreations to the highest standard of accuracy. Docents demonstrate many of the crafts and trades that were vital to rural Highland life in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. The significant object collections include everything from curling stones to agricultural implements.

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey



Eurasian Oystercatchers are common breeders in fields. © Andrew Whittaker

May 16, Day 7: Findhorn Bay, Nairn & Cawdor Castle. The extensive mudflats, saltmarshes, and shore of Findhorn Bay and Nairn are at their best when the water is closest to the shore, and we'll plan today's visit for high tide, hoping to see flocks of Pink-footed Geese, Eurasian Wigeons, Bar-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels, and Common Ringed Plovers among the many birds likely to be feeding here.



Cawdor Castle and its forested grounds © Andrew Whittaker

After birding these productive sites, we'll stop to tour lovely Cawdor Castle. Shakespeare tended to not let historical detail get in the way of a good story: the fact that the castle was built more than 300 years after Macbeth died has not kept the two from being inextricably linked in the popular imagination. Cawdor Castle was built by

the thanes of Cawdor in the late fourteenth century; many additions have been made over the centuries, but the consistent use of a Scottish vernacular style gives Cawdor a strong sense of aesthetic unity. The severity of the exterior belies an intimate interior with a surprisingly personal, friendly atmosphere ornamented by good furniture, fine pictures, and outstanding tapestries. The castle has all the essential ingredients—drawbridge and portcullis, minstrel’s gallery, old towers, hidden trapdoors, dungeons—and, of course, ghosts. Two are said to haunt Cawdor Castle: one a lady in a blue velvet dress, and the other John Campbell, the first Lord Cawdor.

Spirits aside, the beautiful gardens and wooded grounds of Cawdor are a good place to find the very local Eurasian Tree Sparrow and fabulous Mandarin Ducks. We will also search the woods for the resident Tawny Owls, Goldcrests, and Common Treecreepers.

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey



A male Mandarin Duck in all its full glory © Andrew Whittaker

May 17, Day 8: Black Grouse on the lek, and the Findhorn Valley. We'll start before breakfast this morning to watch the captivating antics of Black Grouse on their lek. The males' slightly ludicrous bubbling vocalizations and pompous strutting determine the (sometimes literal) pecking order; the dominant male will occupy the prime real estate on the lek, and he will copulate with most of the females drawn to the show.

We'll take time to enjoy a full breakfast before setting out again, this time for the crystal-clear rivers, barren moors, and oak forests of the Findhorn Valley. This spectacular glacial valley is home to many great birds, and we hope to come across Golden and White-tailed Eagles, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Stonechat, Northern Wheatear, Ring Ouzel, Meadow Pipit, and many more exciting species. With luck, we may find a mountain hare or roaming herds of red deer.

After this morning's early start, we will try to plan in a bit more "down time" than usual in the afternoon before gathering for another convivial evening meal together.



Horned (Slavonian) Grebes in their marvellous breeding dress
© Andrew Whittaker

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey

May 18, Day 9: Fort George and Loch Ness. We will make an early start this morning to return to the Moray Firth, this time concentrating on Fort George and the coastal trail, just across the water from Chanonry Point. Fort George was built immediately after the battle of Culloden to assert control over the Scottish Highlands; never attacked, the fort has survived nearly unchanged since its completion in the mid-eighteenth century. Those with family history in the region will enjoy a visit to the Highlander Museum here, with displays dedicated to the history of the British army in Scotland and its relation to the clan system.

The jagged coast of the Fort George promontory is a rich feeding ground for a wide range of aquatic and littoral birds. Bar-tailed Godwits, Common Ringed Plovers, a nice selection of sea ducks, and sometimes large numbers of gulls can all be found here. As time allows, we will also stop off at the harbor in charming Findhorn Village.



The famous Urquhart Castle and mysterious Loch Ness © Andrew Whittaker

After lunch, we'll visit famous Urquhart Castle, a romantic ruin perched improbably atop an irregular stony outcrop. The castle is surrounded on three sides by the even more famous Loch Ness, and visitors from around the world come here in hopes that the 600-foot-deep waters might suddenly ripple and part, to reveal something completely unknown to science emerging to confound a sceptical world. Access to the loch otherwise is relatively difficult, so the fine view from the stunning ruins of Urquhart Castle makes it even more of an attraction.

NIGHT: The Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey

May 19, Day 10: Troup Head Nature Reserve. We'll make an early start today for the towering sandstone sea cliffs of Troup Head, jam-packed with some 130,000 seabirds in full breeding mode. From the RSPB's new cliffside blind, we can watch nesting Northern Fulmars, Atlantic Puffins, Common Murres, Razorbills, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and Common Gulls; with more than 2000 pairs, the gannetry here is the only colony on the Scottish mainland. We will also keep our eyes open for European Shags, Great Skuas, Rock Pipits, Yellowhammers, and Greater Whitethroats, while we will watch offshore for Purple Sandpipers, Black Guillemots, and even the prized Yellow-billed Loon, which we have been fortunate enough to see on some tours. Gray seals, dolphins, and maybe even the rare basking shark are all possibilities. We may be able to have our lunch in nearby Pennan, the setting for one of the best Scottish films ever made, "Local Hero," starring Burt Lancaster. As a bonus, the village is a great birding spot, and we may encounter Black Guillemots along the way.

May 20, Day 11: Departure. We will transfer this morning to the Inverness airport, where the tour ends. Please do not schedule any outbound flights earlier than noon.

TOUR SIZE: The tour will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Rick Wright and John Poyner



Rick Wright is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are the ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey, the ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona, and the Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and

Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands. Rick lives in northern New Jersey with his wife, Alison Beringer, their little girl, Avril, and their jet-black lab, Quetzal. University.



Scotland resident **John Poyner** has been a professional wildlife tour guide and freelance ornithologist for the past 20 years. After 12 years of guiding tours throughout Scotland and abroad for two of Scotland's leading wildlife holiday companies, simultaneously conducting ornithological survey work, John launched his own company, Highland Nature, in 2012. He also serves as a wildlife expert and guide for the Birdwatching and Wildlife Club (BWWC) and for the Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown-on-Spey.

John holds a Bachelor of Science (honors) degree in environmental science and ecology. He has extensive experience in upland windfarm surveys, working in Scottish mountains in the winter months and in the summer breeding season.

John moved to Scotland in the early 1990s, where he volunteered for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds at Loch Garten and Insh Marshes. He then spent a season building trails in the Cairngorms Mountains before becoming assistant warden at RSPB's Loch of Strathbeg Reserve, where he spent the next two years. John has also worked as a seasonal countryside ranger for Aberdeenshire Council. Later, he spent time teaching in the Czech Republic before returning to the Highlands to become a full-time guide.

John is a competent and experienced ornithologist and a keen overall naturalist. An active birder for over 35 years, he administers the local Bird News Facebook page and the Highland Bird Forum, which he set up in 2006. John is based in Nethybridge, at the heart of the spectacular Cairngorms National Park, where he resides with his wife, Lucka, and sons, Mattias and Jakub.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$9,295** per person in double occupancy from Inverness. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 11, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, entrance fees to bird reserves and historic sites, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Inverness and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$580**. 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.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (December 11, 2024) prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS: Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of \$500 per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. For participants' protection, **we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If you cancel:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "Force Majeure" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

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.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its Ripcord plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: <https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the Ripcord logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:
https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based on the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

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. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE:

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

CLIMATE & CLOTHING: Spring in the Scottish Highlands can be variable, but the scenery is fine regardless whatever the weather. Come prepared for everything from cool temperatures in the 50s, with clouds, rain, snow flurries, and wind, to dry, beautifully sunny weather with temperatures in the high 60s. Bring warm, light, layered clothing to allow for all combinations of temperature, wind, and precipitation. Gore-Tex, fleece and windproof and waterproof outerwear, and walking shoes or boots are advised. Though we do not anticipate long, arduous, or muddy hikes, there is an opportunity in the Cairngorms to go farther in search of high-elevation species such as Eurasian Dotterel and Rock Ptarmigan. Dress is casual throughout.

DOCUMENTS: For United States and Canadian citizens, a passport valid beyond your planned departure (with one blank page for entry stamp) is required for entering the UK. We recommend that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned return date. Visas are not required for entry by U.S. or Canadian citizens for stays under 90 days. Citizens of countries other than the U.S. or Canada should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should bring a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, 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.

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 generally a high standard of hygiene in Scotland, and we should be generally safe from stomach upsets. Water is safe to drink.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, 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.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

MISCELLANEOUS

Electricity – 220 volts; Type G 3-pin square plugs are standard throughout.

Time – Scotland is 5 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time, 8 hours ahead of Pacific Daylight Time.

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

Currency – The legal currency of Scotland is the pound sterling (GBP), easily obtained from ATMs in Scotland; US dollars are not accepted anywhere. Credit cards are accepted almost everywhere.

Complimentary WiFi access is available throughout the Grant Arms Hotel.

The Grant Arms Hotel has a laundry room that is free of charge to guests.

TRANSPORTATION: Transportation will be in comfortable 22-seater coach. The distances we travel each day may range from 50 to 200 miles; the scenery makes the longer drives more than bearable. We’ll carry a supply of snacks and drinks.

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Field Guides

Svensson, L., K. Mullarney, and D. Zetterstrom. 2023. *Birds of Europe*. Third edition. Princeton: Princeton UP. Indispensable for birding anywhere in Europe; this book goes under the title *Collins Bird Guide* (Collins, 2023) in Great Britain.

Recordings

Kettle, R., and R. Ranft. *British Bird Sounds on CD: The Definitive Audio Guide to Birds in Britain*. British Library, 2006.

Sample, G. *Collins Field Guide: Bird Songs and Calls of Britain and Northern Europe*. 1996.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, 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 tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “VENT”) act only as agents for the participant 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 participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour.

VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 23, 2024 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "Airline") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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