



## Autumn Gold

Dates: 26th September - 1st October 2016



Timed to make the most of the southern isles and migration this tour has the potential to locate birds from both the Far East and west. Waders are still on the move and although warblers and flycatchers are thin on the ground this far west; this is the time you're most likely to find them. Past years have regularly produced Red-breasted Flycatcher, Yellow-browed Warbler and Common Rosefinch whilst waders have regularly included American Golden Plover and Pectoral Sandpiper. The list of unusual species found around now is impressive but with a supporting cast of eight resident birds of prey, including two species of eagle, Hen Harrier, Merlin and Peregrine; plus a great array of waders and wildfowl you can't fail to have a good trip.

We explore a variety of habitats although birds can turn up anywhere and regularly do which adds to the excitement. Regular sites such as Rubha Ardvule, Bargarva and Ardivachar in South Uist are excellent for waders whilst Loch Eynort, Howmore and Druidibeg plantation sometimes hold migrant warblers and flycatchers.

Benbecula also has its attractive sites with the freshwater loch complex around the west side attracting good numbers of waders and wildfowl whilst the machair here has produced such gems as Upland Sandpiper. Eiders gather off Stinky Bay and Long-tailed Ducks will be returning whilst the bay off Balivanich usually starts producing Slavonian Grebes now too.

The cover for smaller birds is sparse and dispersed but does hold tired migrants for short periods and has included Red-eyed Vireo and Baltimore Oriole.

North Uist and Berneray although similar to the South Uist and Benbecula have quite a different feel but are no less productive. Balranald is always worth a look with the bays and shores turning up waders and gulls. Nearby Loch Paible has a track record of rare waders with Baird's Sandpiper being particularly attracted to this site whilst Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint are regular. Loch Sandary is also nearby and often holds wildfowl and acts as a resting / bathing site for gulls. Further north is the plantation of Clachan Farm which would pay much more regular scrutiny as it regularly holds migrant warblers, flycatchers and finches.

The anticipation and excitement of being there when some wayward migrant wader or warbler is found is what makes this tour stand out with the potential for almost anything. Even if the rarities are not there the chance for seeing scarce passerines, waders and wildfowl are at their peak now, as migration is in full swing.



### **Itinerary:**

Day 1: Once we are all-together we shall explore the South Ford and Loch Bee with the main aim of locating waders and gulls. The roadside pools at Balgarva are a great spot to start although wader activity depends on the most recent tides. When the pools have been freshly flushed by the tide they often hold many smaller waders which regularly include Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint amongst the flocks of Dunlin. White-rumped Sandpiper and Baird's Sandpiper have been seen here on more than one occasion over the last few years whilst more irregular rarities have included Wilson's Phalarope and Semipalmated Sandpiper. Pectoral Sandpipers are also regularly found in the area whilst the north end of Loch Bee is a good spot for wildfowl which attracts hunting White-tailed Eagles. Nearby Ardivachar and North Bay are also excellent wader sites and have held many of the species already mentioned. The former site often holds gulls which could include a white-winged gull or even a passage Sabine's Gull depending on the weather. The machair at the north-west end of Loch Bee is a great area for Golden Plover flocks which may contain American

Golden Plover and Buff-breasted Sandpiper as well as Ruff. Smaller birds are represented by flocks of Skylarks as well as possibly Lapland and Snow Buntings. These in turn attract hunting raptors such as Merlin and Hen Harrier.

Day 2: This morning we'll head to Balranald on the west side of North Uist. Heading across the machair to Aird an Runair we'll explore the bay and rocky headland. The bay regularly holds a good variety of waders which could include Purple Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. Pipits and wagtails sometimes seek shelter along the shore here and have included Citrine Wagtail at this time of year in the past. The headland itself may hold migrant Wheatears and Lapland Bunting whilst off-shore there's a chance of divers and passage seabirds. Flocks of Twite will be building on the machair which regularly draws in Merlins and Hen Harrier as well as the odd Peregrine. The freshwater lochs inland are worth checking for wildfowl whilst nearby Loch Paible can be excellent for waders. This tidal loch is probably the most regular location for Baird's Sandpiper in the Outer Hebrides but has also held Semipalmated Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper. The freshwater Loch Sandary can be easily viewed from the vehicle as a track runs the eastern edge of this compact water body which has held many scarce and rare gulls, waders and wildfowl. We shall also explore the relatively little known birding area of Rubh' Arnal which is proving to be a very productive site. It is also the last stronghold of Corn Bunting in the Outer Hebrides. Langass Lodge lies towards the east side of North Uist and although much of the cover around the hotel is coniferous plantation there are a few patches of deciduous trees and shrubs. Yellow-browed Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher have been seen here at this time of year whilst more regular migrants include various finches and thrushes.

Day 3: We'll head south again this morning to the excellent Loch Eynort. This tidal loch is home to good numbers of Harbour Seals and Otters whilst it usually holds Red-breasted Merganser, Great Northern Diver and Black Guillemot. The surrounding hills and moorland regularly produced Golden and White-tailed Eagle whilst Peregrine, Hen Harrier, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk are a strong possibility; Buzzards are of course everywhere. We may well hear Red Deer as their rut begins in early October but perhaps the most attractive habitat here is the relatively large amount of sheltered cover. Warblers, flycatchers and thrushes often shelter in amongst the trees and scrub. Following this we'll travel the short distance to the headland at Rubha Ardvule which by contrast is very flat and can feel very exposed. Seabirds often pass close inshore here and beside the regular Gannets, Kittiwakes and Great Northern Diver other possibilities are Sooty Shearwater, Leach's Petrel and Sabine's Gull. The bays are often temporary home to migrant waders which include Purple Sandpiper amongst the Tursntones, Dunlin and Sanderling. Scarce waders such as Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and Pectoral Sandpiper are also possible. This site has also held more than its fair share of rare waders. Bornish machair lies just inland from here and often hosts good numbers of Golden Plover and Lapwing which sometimes conceal the odd American Golden Plover or Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Merlin, Peregrine and Hen Harrier are also regular visitors adding to the excitement and variety. Returning north we'll stop off at Stoneybridge

where we'll have a quick look along the coast at various sites between here and Howmore. More waders, gulls and wildfowl should be seen as well as Great Northern and Red-throated Divers. Otters are also regularly a feature with Howmore River sometimes producing great views if you're lucky. Our last stop will be at Druidibeg plantation which is usually quiet although regularly holds Yellow-browed Warbler at this time of year and has produced some top drawer rarities including Blackpoll Warbler and Hermit Thrush. We're more likely to see a few migrant thrushes and the odd Blackcap although you never know!

Day 4: Back to North Uist today and a stop off at Clachan Farm where a small plantation often shelters a few stray warblers and thrushes that use the dense cover to hide from Sparrowhawks and Merlins. Greylag Geese and Golden Plover gather on the machair here whilst the hills lying just east of the main road often produce good views of Golden Eagle. We shall continue north to Berneray and up to Rushgarry where we'll search the shore and sea for a variety of waders and wildfowl. Long-tailed Duck, Slavonian Grebe and Great Northern Diver should be present whilst Black-throated Diver is a possibility. Seabirds are often seen passing through the Sound of Harris which should include Gannets and Kittiwake whilst there's an outside chance of a Pomarine Skua. Hordes of Ringed Plover and Sanderling will be along the shore and we'll carefully pick through them as they feed along the tide line. We'll also take a look at the freshwater Loch Bhrusda which usually holds a few diving ducks which can include Scaup as well as a few swans. The northern edge of Bhrusda can sometimes provide habitat for a few waders if the water levels aren't too high so we'll take our time here and make sure we don't miss anything. We'll also take a spin across the machair and possibly head for a walk to the west side as long as the weather's suitable. Twite will be gathering on the machair plain along with good numbers of Skylarks and possibly the odd Snow Bunting or Lapland Bunting. Leaving Berneray we'll head back across North Uist, taking the turn to the small island of Baleshare. We shall scan a scatter of freshwater lochs for wildfowl which normally includes Gadwall and Shoveler whilst a look along the coast may produce an early Glaucous Gull or maybe even a Grey Phalarope. There's a good chance we'll bump into a White-tailed Eagle and maybe Merlin, Peregrine and Hen Harrier here too.

Day 5: For our final full day we'll head to the far south-west of South Uist to Smerclate. A small freshwater loch lies adjacent to the Sound of Barra and we should pick up a good variety of wildfowl, waders and the odd diver. A little further north we'll stop in at Kilpheder and take a short walk to Loch Hallan. The usual Merlin and Hen Harrier are likely to be seen as well as flocks of Twite and Skylark on the machair. Reed Buntings are usually obvious on the margins of Loch Hallan whilst this shallow loch may hold Pintail as well as other regular wildfowl. We'll check any flocks of Golden Plover for American as they have been seen here previously at this time of year. The coast often holds good numbers of waders and Great Northern Diver are likely to be seen off-shore. We'll also take another walk through the trees and scrub at Loch Eynort as things are constantly changing at this time of year and one never really know what might have dropped in. Finally we'll take another look around

Balgarva and the South Ford where we should pick up Knot, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and possibly Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. We may find the odd Arctic Tern lingering whilst the Wigeon flock at the north end of Loch Bee should be building. The variety of habitats should produce a good array of birds for our final full day and with a bit of luck something out of the ordinary.

Day 6: On our last morning we shall explore west Benbecula machair and lochs as well as the cover around Torlum.

**Dates:** 26th September - 1st October 2016

**Tour duration:** 5 nights / 6 days on the islands.

**Cost:** £670 per person

**Accommodation** is provided in some of the best local guesthouses for 5 nights.

All meals are provided with evening meals taken in local hotels. If you have special dietary requirements please let us know when booking.

**Group size:** 8 (maximum)

**Booking:** Please email: [steveduffield70@gmail.com](mailto:steveduffield70@gmail.com)

**Where to meet:** The tour begins and ends in Uist. If you arrive by plane or as a foot passenger off the ferry we will be there to meet you and take you to your accommodation. If you arrive early and are already in the islands on the first day then you'll be picked up in the morning and we'll explore local habitats and wildlife whilst others arrive during the morning. On the last day we'll continue to search for wildlife until everyone has departed on their various flight / ferry connections.

**Getting to the islands:** Flybe operate regular flights from Glasgow to Benbecula although the earlier you book the cheaper the fares are. Alternatively Calmac operate ferries between Uig, Skye - Lochmaddy, North Uist and from Oban - Lochboisdale, South Uist.

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