SUMMER WILDLIFE BONANZA

"If you want more than birds from a tour to the Highlands then this is for you. Rare butterflies, dragonflies and spectacular flowers such as Twinflower and One-flowered Wintergreen. This tour has it all." Duncan Macdonald

The special northern dragonflies, butterflies and wild flowers are our focus, with the chance of some Highland birds and mammals too, on our much requested Highland Full Monty!

- Special and scarce Highland butterflies and dragonflies
- Walk in Glen Affric to beautiful, dragonfly rich Coire Lochan
- A dozen species of orchid likely, including Small White and Lesser Twayblade
- Relaxed Cairngorm walk for alpine flowers as well as Frog Orchid
- A great list of Scottish birds and mammals too
- Based at a small country house hotel on the edge of the pine forest
- The perfect holiday for the ‘all-round’ naturalist

Our action-packed week starts with dinner together on Saturday evening, with a chance to discuss the coming days ahead.

On this week, more than any other, our itinerary is dictated by the weather! If the sun is shining we shall head to lochans and streams for dragonflies and flowery meadows or moorland for butterflies. Some of these species need sunshine to be on the wing, so we may need to grab these times if the forecast is not so good. If it is raining - well the flowers will look fabulous whatever the weather!

Our focus this week is on the special Highland species of flowers, dragonflies and butterflies, so we may start locally, visiting ancient Caledonian Pines where delicate Twinflower spread in patches on the forest floor - their tiny paired flowers are exquisite and surely one of the most beautiful of the flowers we shall see this week. Common, Intermediate and Serrated-leaved Wintergreen are here too, while boggy pools hold Common Hawker and Four-spotted Chaser; plus rare Northern Damsel and White-faced Darter. Orchid meadows host Small White, Greater and Lesser Butterflies, Northern Marsh and Heath Fragrant Orchids and we’ll search for Lesser Twayblade, always tricky with its habit of growing under the heather!

On slopes dotted with Rockrose, we’ll hunt for Northern Brown Argus in its full Scottish form - with white dots on the forewings. Large Heath and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary are on the wing and we’ll also run a moth trap whenever we can.

The forests provide the chance of Red Squirrel, Crested Tit and Scottish Crossbill, though we shall need to check these carefully as both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Sat 3 - Sat 10 Jul 2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>£1,495</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deposit</td>
<td>£250</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single Supp</td>
<td>£120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Duncan Macdonald and Kate Mennie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>The weather can vary enormously. During a typical week in this season we would expect mixed sun and showers with temperatures in the range of 10-25°C</td>
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<td>Walking</td>
<td>There’ll be some short easy strolls on wide paths but also two longer more strenuous but unCommanded walks, including an “at-your-pace” 3 mile round trip walk into the Cairngorms and a walk around the “yellow route” to Coire Lochan in Glen Affric. Walking boots are recommended and walking poles may be useful.</td>
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<td>Meals</td>
<td>All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8</td>
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<td>Insects</td>
<td>Biting midges can occasionally be a nuisance by lochs and shores, especially in the west</td>
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<td>Accom</td>
<td>Double, twin and single ensuite rooms in a small hotel on the edge of the pine forest and close to the River Spey</td>
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<td>Group</td>
<td>12</td>
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Just some of what we hope to see:

- Northern Emerald
- White-faced Darter
- Northern Damsel
- Northern Brown Argus
- Large Heath
- Brilliant Emerald
- Azure Hawker
- Dark-green Fritillary
- Twinflower
- Common Wintergreen
- Serrated-leaved Wintergreen
- Lesser Butterfly Orchid
- Heath Frangrant Orchid
- Small White Orchid
- Frog Orchid
- Lesser Twayblade
- Globe Flower
- Starry Saxifrage
- Dwarf Cornel
- Pine Marten
- Red Squirrel
- Golden Eagle
- White-tailed Eagle
- Black-throated Diver
- Crested Tit
- Scottish Crossbill
- Slavonian Grebe
- Osprey
Common and Parrot Crossbill now breed here. We’ll also make an evening hide visit, with fingers crossed for close up views of Badger and delightful Pine Martens!

The Findhorn Valley provides a chance of Golden Eagle and Mountain Hare, plus Red Deer, Dipper and Peregrine. Mountain Pansy, Stagshorn Clubmoss, Alpine Bistort and Bearberry are likely as we cross the moorland to Loch Ruthven, the stronghold of beautiful Slavonian Grebe, here in colourful breeding plumage. There is always a chance of fishing Osprey and we may find Water Lobelia – a beautiful plant with submerged leaves and white flowers. If the sun is out we’ll make a dash to beautiful Loch Bran, where the rare, metallic green Brilliant Emerald and other dragonflies such as Highland Darter may be on the wing.

We’ll spend a whole day walking in beautiful Glen Affric, following a trail that will lead us to a lily-studded lochan where Downy Emerald, Golden-ringed Dragonfly and White-faced Darter can be found, along with some of the more common damselflies. Our walk includes some steeper sections, but we can take it slowly - and one section of wide track holds Common Hawker and sometimes the ‘holy grail’ of northern dragonflies - Azure Hawker - with slim chances of Highland Darter and Dark-green Fritillary too.

Further west, we’ll visit sea lochs where Rock Dove, White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle, Black Guillemot and Red-throated and Black-throated Divers are possible. Common Seals haul out on the rocks, Great Skua cruise over the islands and Arctic Terns breed, but the real focus is Loch Maree, in the heart of Torridon, where we have our best chance to find Azure Hawker and Northern Emerald Dragonflies - two real Highland specialities. Great and Round-leaved Sundews trap midges here, as does Butterwort and we’ll see other typical moorland species like Bog Asphodel, Lousewort and Bog Myrtle.

Our route up into the alpine world of the Cairngorms Corries is not too steep and we can stop for rests to enjoy the flowers on the way. We can compare up to six berry-bearing bushes as we walk, including Bog Bilberry, Crowberry, Bearberry and Cloudberry. The beautiful alpine flowers include Starry Saxifrage, Dwarf Cornel, Globe Flower and Trailing Azalea as we gain height.

We’ll get excited about club-mosses with Fir, Interrupted and Alpine, then as we get higher, we hope to find more alpine flowers, including Alpine Ladies Mantle, Alpine Sawwort, Alpine Meadow Rue, Roseroot and perhaps the rare Alpine Speedwell - with tiny deep blue flowers. We have found patches of Frog Orchid in the past and if we have time to get beyond the large boulders in the corrie, we may even add Moss Campion and Arctic Mouse-ear.

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"I love this trip for the variety of species that we look for. This quest takes us to some of the most beautiful locations in the Highlands, such as sitting next to flowering Alpine Speedwell with Ptarmigan croaking from the surrounding rocks. Pure magic." Duncan Macdonald

Outline Itinerary

Day 1  Arrive at our Victorian Villa in time for dinner and a chat about our plans for the coming week (7 nights at The Pines House)

Days 2-7  Wildlife and birdwatching exploration including Abernethy Forest, the Cairngorms, Loch Maree, Glen Affric and West Coast

Day 8  After breakfast we say our farewells