



**UNITED KINGDOM:
ULTIMATE SPRING TOUR**

15 MAY – 01 JUNE 2024



Atlantic Puffin is one of our spectacular targets on this trip.

The islands of the United Kingdom are situated on the northwestern fringes of the European (and Western Palearctic) region, and as such the birdlife is influenced by a range of geographical and climatic factors. This small group comprehensive tour starts in the south of England (London), finishes in Scotland (Edinburgh), and is timed during the peak of the spring migration within the United Kingdom, when breeding for a number of species also will be well underway.

A number of bird species are resident and common (and spectacular to the visiting birdwatcher or bird photographer), such as **European Robin**, **Eurasian Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **European Nuthatch**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **European Goldfinch**, **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Common Wood Pigeon**, **Willow Ptarmigan** (Red Grouse), **Yellowhammer**, **Northern Lapwing**, and **European Green Woodpecker**. We have put together a detailed "Common Birds of the UK" blog series presenting a photographic look at the common garden, farmland and woodland, and wetland and coastal birds of the UK. These common resident and migrant species will also add great value to our tour and are sure to delight.



Eurasian Blue Tit, gorgeous and abundant in the United Kingdom.

There are a large number of rare, scarce, or very local breeding species in England, and we will target as many of these as possible during the tour, such as **Bearded Reedling** (Bearded Tit), **Eurasian Bittern**, **Red Kite**, **European Honey Buzzard**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Montagu's Harrier**, **Hen Harrier**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Garganey**, **European Turtle Dove**, **Ruff**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Corncrake**, **Common Quail**, **European Nightjar**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Eurasian Stone-curlew**, **Black Grouse**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Little Tern**, **European Nightjar**, **Eurasian Woodcock**, **Short-eared Owl**, **Long-eared Owl**, **Dartford Warbler**, **Common Nightingale**, **Common Kingfisher**, and **Common Crane**.

Some birds are restricted to the Scottish Highlands and will only be possible while we are birding there, such as **Scottish Crossbill** (a Scottish endemic), **Parrot Crossbill**, **Rock Ptarmigan**, breeding **Red-throated Loon** (Red-throated Diver), **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver), **Golden Eagle**, **White-tailed Eagle**, **Horned Grebe** (Slavonian Grebe), **Black Guillemot**, **Eurasian Dotterel**, **Snow Bunting**, and **European Crested Tit**.



The subspecies of Willow Ptarmigan occurring in the United Kingdom is considered a separate (and endemic) species by one authority and is called Red Grouse in the United Kingdom.

As the tour will be occurring during the spring passage period our time at the coast could be interrupted by a scarce migrant such as **European Bee-eater**, **Red-backed Shrike**, or **Icterine Warbler**, or something altogether much rarer. Spring rarities in the United Kingdom can come from far-flung places such as the United States of America, the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, or Siberia, so almost any migratory species could be on the cards!

Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in London and transfer to a hotel near the airport

After our arrival in London (Heathrow) we will transfer to our hotel and gather for our group evening welcome meal together. If you would like to explore the many tourist attractions of the city of London (Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, Kew Gardens, Natural History Museum, etc.) please organize an early arrival into the United

Kingdom (we will not be ending the tour back in London). We can help arrange your plans if you would like to partake in any additional activities prior to the beginning of the tour.

Overnight: Heathrow Airport area, London

Day 2. Transfer to North Norfolk

We will leave the Heathrow area after breakfast and will commence our journey to North Norfolk, our base for the next four nights. Birding near London may get our lists going with some of the many exotic species present in the United Kingdom, such as **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, **Mandarin Duck**, or **Egyptian Goose**. We will also likely see the first of the common species that we will see over the course of our tour, such as **European Robin**, **Eurasian Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **European Goldfinch**, **Common Wood Pigeon**, and **Eurasian Magpie**.

On arrival in Norfolk we will likely get our birding underway at one of the many nearby birding sites described below.

Overnight: North Norfolk



European Robin is a common garden bird in the United Kingdom, and we will likely see it on most days of the tour.

Days 3 - 5. North Norfolk

We will spend three full days birding at a selection of sites around Norfolk and adjacent counties as we explore East Anglia, one of the best birding areas in the whole of the United Kingdom and great for a varied selection of restricted-range breeding birds as well as a fantastic reputation for spring passage migrants and rarities. Some of the coastal and inland reserves we can visit during

our time in the area include Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Titchwell Marsh, RSPB Lakenheath Fen reserve, and Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) Cley Marshes, among others.

We will visit vast areas of saltmarshes, freshwater marshes, inland and coastal wetlands, and estuaries that at this time could be teeming with passage shorebirds changing color into their gorgeous breeding plumage as they head north, such as **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Temminck's Stint**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **European Golden Plover**, and **Dunlin**, as well as several raptors such as **Western Marsh Harrier** and **Montagu's Harrier**.

The water and its surrounding edge habitat are likely to hold a wide array of breeding ducks (e.g. **Common Shelduck**, **Tufted Duck**, **Garganey**, and **Mandarin Duck**) along with a mix of wading birds like **Pied Avocet**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Eurasian Bittern**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Little Egret**, **Grey Heron**, and **Water Rail**, while reedbeds may hold **Sedge Warbler**, **European Reed Warbler**, and **Bearded Reedling** (Bearded Tit) and scrub may be supporting the prized **Common Nightingale**, **Cetti's Warbler**, and **Dartford Warbler**.



Pied Avocet is a striking bird.

We will spend some time inland in the Brecks, where we may find breeding **Eurasian Stone-curlew**, **Common Crane**, **Eurasian Bittern**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Water Rail**, **Woodlark**, **Common Firecrest**, **European Green Woodpecker**, **Northern Goshawk**, **Red Crossbill** (Common Crossbill), **Little Owl**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Little Egret**, **Western Yellow Wagtail**, **White Wagtail** (Pied Wagtail), and maybe even the now-rare **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**.

The above is just a small selection of the birds we will encounter and places we will bird during our time in Norfolk to give some idea of what we might find.

Overnight: North Norfolk



Eurasian Hobby will be a target in the Brecks.

Day 6. Transfer between North Norfolk and the City of York

This will be a travel day as we move between North Norfolk and the City of York after our final early-morning birding session in the area. York will be our base for the next four nights as we spend time birding in Yorkshire. York, the former Roman capital of the north of England, is a walled city and has some very impressive buildings, none more so than York Minster, although Clifford's Tower and 'the Shambles' (an ancient street) also take some beating. We will have some time to see these areas while we are in the city. We will spend an evening (either tonight or one of the following nights) looking for a range of crepuscular or nocturnal species, such as **Eurasian Nightjar**, **Long-eared Owl**, **Tawny Owl**, **Little Owl**, **Western Barn Owl**, and **Eurasian Woodcock** not far from the city itself.

Overnight: York

Days 7 - 8. Yorkshire birding

We will spend two full days birding around the county of Yorkshire. We will focus our attention near our base in the farmed landscape of the Vale of York and the surrounding hills (the Chalk Wolds). This patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland (many areas managed specially for flora and fauna) interspersed with woodland and 'common land' forms an incredibly important mosaic of habitats, and here we may find **European Turtle Dove** (now regrettably a rare breeding bird in the country).

Other species we will search for around York include **Western Barn Owl**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Red Kite**, **Common Kestrel**, **Common Buzzard**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Common Redshank**, **Common Snipe**,

Corn Bunting, Common Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Marsh Tit, Willow Tit, Goldcrest, Common Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Skylark, Common Linnet, Eurasian Goldfinch, Red-legged Partridge, Grey Partridge, Common Pheasant, Rook, Western Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Common House Martin, Sand Martin, Barn Swallow, Common Swift, Common Cuckoo, Dunnock, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Common Blackbird, Common Chaffinch, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow.



Lesser Whitethroat, one of the many migrant passerines we will look for around York.

Part of the farmland in the Vale of York is a seasonally flooded wetland, and depending on water levels during the preceding winter there may be some bonus birds within the area we will be birding, such as **Black-necked Grebe, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Crake, Garganey, Corn Crake, Common Quail, Common Tern, or Black Tern.**

Moving further from the city of York one of the must-see places on the Yorkshire Coast is Bempton Cliffs RSPB reserve. Here huge and staggering sea cliffs will be packed with returning breeding seabirds like **Common Murre (Common Guillemot), Razorbill, European Shag, Black-legged Kittiwake, Northern Fulmar, and Northern Gannet.** There may even be our first chance of seeing the gorgeous (and clown-like) **Atlantic Puffin**, and likely **European Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Skua,** and **Peregrine Falcon** will all be patrolling the sea cliffs, looking for an easy meal.



*Bempton Cliffs RSPB reserve is home to a large nesting colony of **Northern Gannet**, and great eye-level views will be possible as they fly onto and off the cliffs.*

While we are at the coast we will need to keep an eye out for passage migrants; anything could turn up here at this time of year from the likes of **White Stork** to **Eurasian Hoopoe** to **Eurasian Wryneck**. None of these are necessarily to be expected, but with spring migration you never exactly know, and this area has a track record of rare birds turning up! However, birds like **Wood Warbler**, **Common Redstart**, and **Pied Flycatcher** might be more likely. We will probably also visit the rarity hotspots of Flamborough Head or Spurn Point during this time; exact locations will depend on the weather and the rarity forecast.

The moorland in Yorkshire is known for its great birding too, and here and in the nearby dales and wolds we will spend time searching for the likes of **Willow Ptarmigan** (Red Grouse), **Eurasian Dotterel**, **Tree Pipit**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Whinchat**, **Eurasian Blackcap**, **Garden Warbler**, **Common Grasshopper Warbler**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **European Golden Plover**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **European Stonechat**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Lesser Redpoll**, **Black Grouse**, **Short-eared Owl**, and **Merlin**, with adjacent woodland likely to hold a wide range of migrant and resident breeders such as **Wood Warbler**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Common Redstart**, **Willow Warbler**, and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**.

Overnight: York

Day 9. Transfer between Yorkshire and Northumberland

This will be a travel day as we move between York and our next base near Alnwick, Northumberland. We will make a couple of stops along the way (there are a lot of great options) depending on what we've seen over the past couple of days and the rarity forecast.

Overnight: Northumberland

Day 10. Northumberland Coast

We will spend the day birding in Northumberland visiting the Farne Islands. The seabird nesting colony here will likely be a highlight of the tour with close views of breeding **Atlantic Puffin**, **Common Murre** (Common Guillemot), **Razorbill**, **European Shag**, **Black-legged Kittiwake**, and **Northern Fulmar**, as well as **Common Tern**, **Sandwich Tern**, **Roseate Tern**, **Little Tern**, and **Arctic Tern**, which will allow excellent photography opportunities. **Common Eider**, **Purple Sandpiper**, and **Ruddy Turnstone** are all possible around the rocky shores of the islands too.

Overnight: Northumberland



*We should have excellent photographic opportunities for **Purple Sandpiper** in Northumberland.*

Day 11. Northumberland to Edinburgh

A final morning's birding along the Northumberland Coast, where, tidal conditions permitting, we may call in at Holy Island (the mudflats here are likely to have an interesting assortment of shorebirds present e.g. **Grey Plover**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, and **Common Redshank**). We will then drive north once more to Edinburgh, the Scottish capital city and home to some impressive castles and historic buildings. We will pay careful attention to the latest bird news as over recent years a flock of **Common Scoter** has been present along this route, and they may contain the odd surprise like **Velvet Scoter**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Eider**, or something much rarer, like **Black Scoter**, **King Eider**, or **White-winged Scoter**.

Overnight: Edinburgh

Day 12. Edinburgh to Aviemore

We will drive north from Edinburgh to Aviemore. The farther north we get we may start noticing a different set of birds. We will likely stop at a wetland site along the way, where we may find **Western Osprey**, and there's sure to be some interesting waterfowl too, maybe **Common Goldeneye**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, or **Greater Scaup**. The shores of the wetland may support **Common Sandpiper**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Wood Sandpiper**, or **Common Greenshank** at this time of year. We will arrive in Aviemore in the late afternoon and check into our hotel, which will form our base for the next six nights of the tour.

Overnight: Aviemore

Days 13 - 16. Scottish Highlands

We will have four full days exploring the Scottish Highlands. Our base is in an ideal location for finding some of the Scottish specialties, such as **European Crested Tit**, **Scottish Crossbill**, **Parrot Crossbill**, **Horned Grebe** (Slavonian Grebe), and **Golden Eagle**.

We will spend a couple of days getting the most out of the local area, where other birds we might find include **Black Grouse**, **Red-throated Loon** (Red-throated Diver), **European Pied Flycatcher**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, and **Spotted Flycatcher**.



Red-throated Loons may be seen in locks in the area.

On one of the days in the area we will visit the Cairngorms plateau, where we will look for resident **Willow Ptarmigan** (Red Grouse), **Rock Ptarmigan**, and freshly arrived **Eurasian Dotterel** as they set up their territories for breeding, and as we search for these species we may

find **Twite**, **Snow Bunting**, **Ring Ouzel**, and **Northern Wheatear**. Streams lower down the mountain may also hold **White-throated Dipper** and **Grey Wagtail**.

On another day we will head west, where we will look for **White-tailed Eagle**, **Black Guillemot**, **Golden Eagle**, **Hooded Crow**, and **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver) among others.

Overnight: Aviemore

Day 17: Aviemore to Edinburgh

After a final morning birding around Aviemore we will have lunch and then check out of our accommodation and commence our drive back to Edinburgh, where we will have a final meal together and tackle the difficult task of selecting a “Bird of the Trip”.

Overnight: Edinburgh



*We will search for **Rock Ptarmigan** while on the Cairngorm plateau.*

Day 18: International Departure

This is a non-birding day with international departures from Edinburgh.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides

and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 18 days
Group Size: 6 - 8
Dates: 15 May - 01 June 2024
Start: London, England (Heathrow Airport)
End: Edinburgh, Scotland (Edinburgh Airport)
Prices: GBP£7,049 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2024)
Single Supplements: GBP£1,371 (2024)

Price includes:

Meals (from evening meal on day 1 until breakfast on day 18)
Accommodation (based on sharing)
Guiding fees
All entrance fees to national parks, nature reserves, bird blinds/hides, etc.
All ground transport while on tour including airport pick-up and drop-off
Tolls

Price excludes:

International flights (arrival Heathrow, departure Edinburgh)
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access when no free WiFi available, etc.
Alcoholic and soft drinks
Personal insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))