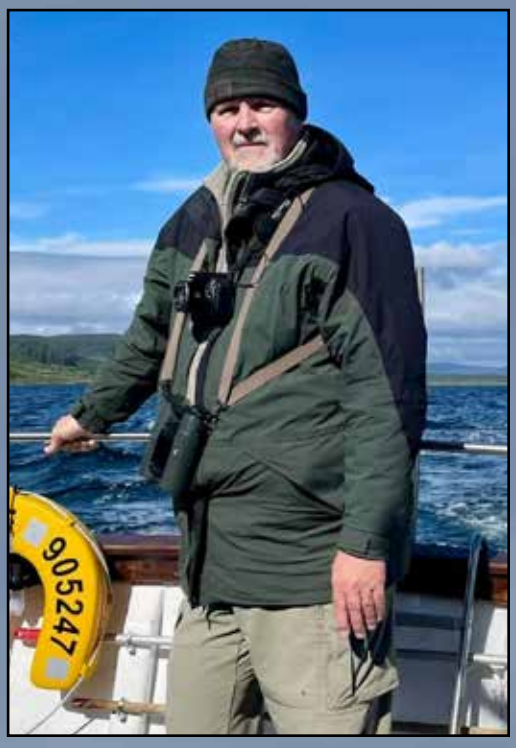
Squam Lakes Natural Science Center

Presents:

Scotland's East Coast

A Tour of Aberdeenshire, Angus, Perth & Kinross, Fife, and Stirling

May 16-29, 2027



Led by Iain MacLeod

Itinerary

Join native Scot Iain MacLeod for a very personal, small-group tour of Scotland's east coast. Iain is an experienced group tour leader who has organized and led tours of Scotland over twenty times in the last 35 years. This is a brand new tour that visits many of the haunts where Iain grew up. The hotels are chosen by Iain for their comfort, ambiance, hospitality, and excellent food. Iain personally arranges every detail — meals, transportation, and daily destinations. The group size (maximum 12 people), and unhurried pace fosters new friendships, a relaxed atmosphere, and flexibility in the schedule.

Monday, May 17: The official meeting location is in **Glasgow Airport** in Scotland. You will make your own flight arrangements departing from the US on **May 16** (or earlier if you wish). Iain will recommend the best flight for May 16 arrival and will assign a specific meeting time based on the arrival time of that flight into Glasgow (typically 8:30 am). **Note: your return flight will be from Aberdeen airport.**

We will load up the mini-coach and head north stopping at **Argaty Kites**. Argaty is a working upland livestock farm which has been home to the Bowser family since 1916. They have been pioneers in rewilding the area. They have nesting Red Kites, Ospreys and reintroduced Beavers in the ponds. If time (and energy levels) allows, we will visit **Stirling Castle** — one of Scotland's most historically important sites, a crucial Scottish fortress, royal palace, and iconic symbol of Scottish history, central to the Wars of Independence, the childhood home and coronation site of Mary, Queen of Scots, and boasting stunning Renaissance architecture, and gardens. We'll contunue to Kinross to our first hotel.
Hotel: **The Green Hotel** (our base for 5 nights).

Tuesday, May 18: Today we will take the short trip over to **RSPB Loch Leven**. There are three bird blinds to chose from that offer different views of the extensive wetlands. Ducks, swans, geese, coots and Black-headed Gulls nest here. The nearby Vane Farn Nature Center has exhibits, a picnic area and gift shop. A woodland walk trail offers chances to see warblers, flycatchers and thrushes. Later we will explore some other birding spots on the Fife Coast and around St. Andrews.
Hotel: **The Green Hotel**.

Wednesday, May 19: Today we will head to the lovely wee town of Anstruther and board the May Princess for an expedition to the **Isle of May**. The Isle of May is a remarkable island which lies only 5 miles off the Fife coast and is an important National Nature Reserve. It is home to an incredible array of wildlife — up to 200,000 seabirds nest on the May, including 100,000 Puffins. There are also large colonies of Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Shags and about 300 seals live all year round on Isle of May. We will land on the island and explore for up to three hours.
Hotel: **The Green Hotel**.

Red Kite

Stirling Castle

Black-headed Gull at Loch Leven

Guillemots (Common Murre)

Thursday, May 20: Today we will head deeper into Perthshire and visit **Scone Palace and Gardens**. Scone Palace is the ancestral seat of the Earls of Mansfield, built in red sandstone with a castellated roof, it is an example of the Gothic Revival style. Parts of it date back to the 12th century. We will then visit **Loch of the Lowes Reserve** to see the nesting Ospreys and Great Crested Grebes.
Hotel: **The Green Hotel**.

Scone Palace

Friday, May 21: Today we will cross the Forth Road Bridge and skirt around Edinburgh and head to the East Lothian Coast and the town of North Berwick. We will vist the **Scottish Seabird Center** which includes interacive exhibits, films and live camera streams for seabird nesting sites including Bass Rock. Then we will take a boat trip around the **Bass Rock**—home to the largest colony of Northen Gannets in the world.
Hotel: **The Green Hotel**.

Bass Rock

Saturday, May 22: Today we will pack up the van and head north through Angus towards Aberdennshire. Along the way we will visit **Montrose Basin** — a vast tidal estuary. From the bird blind we will search for shorebirds and terns and hopefully spot a Kingfisher. Then it's on to **Loch of Kinnordy**. From the bird blinds we'll look for Marsh Harriers, Ospreys, Tufted Ducks, Moorhens and reedbed specialists. We'll end the day at our second hotel in lovely lower Deeside (our base for three nights).
Hotel: **Tor-Na-Coille**

Loch of Strathbeg

Sunday, May 23: We'll head back to the North Sea coast today to visit the spectacular **Dunnottar Castle** — a ruined medieval fortress located upon a rocky headland. The surviving buildings are largely of the 15th and 16th centuries, but the site is believed to have been fortified in the early middle ages. After lunch we will head a little further south down the coast to the seabird colonies at **Fowlsheugh RSPB Reserve** — home to Puffins, Razorbills and Kittiwakes, Shags and Rock Pipits.
Hotel: **Tor-Na-Coille**

Dunnottar Castle

Monday, May 24: Today we will head inland and explore the beautiful Dee valley (known as Royal Deeside). Stops might include the **Muir of Dinnet Reserve**, **Loch Muick** and **Glen Tanar**. These area are home to a huge variety of highland woodland birds. We will look for White-throated Dippers along the river while Common Buzzards soar overhead.
Hotel: **Tor-Na-Coille**

Tuesday, May 25: Today, we will pack up the van and visit **Crathes Castle Estate and Gardens** — a magnificent 16th-century castle, with its intricate maze of turrets, towers, oak panels and painted ceilings. The formal gardens will be alive with bird song. We will loop over to the North Sea coast and visit the **Sands of Forvie Reserve** and Newburgh. Thousands of terns and gulls breed here as well as Eider Ducks and Shelduck. It also has a large Grey Seal colony. We will end the day at out third hotel in Inverurie (our base for four nights)
Hotel: **Thainstone House**

Crathes Castle

Wednesday, May 26: Today we will head west along the coast to **Findhorn Bay** and **Culbin Forest**. Along the way we will stop at Lossiemouth to look for shorebirds and fishing Ospreys. At Culbin, we will explore the woodland trails in search of Crested Tits, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Pine Siskins and other pine forest specialties. Findhorn Bay is a huge tidal estuary where shorebirds feed and Ospreys fish on the rising tide.
Hotel: **Thainstone House**

Thursday, May 27: Today we will head north-east to the RSPB reserve at **Troup Head** where thousands of seabirds nest on the spectacular cliffs; including the largest mainland Northern Gannet colony in Scotland. Later we explore some of the picturesque fishing villages along the Banff coast.
Hotel: **Thainstone House**

Friday, May 28: Then we will head further east to **Loch of Strathbeg**. Strathbeg is Britian's largest "dune loch" and is managed for the thousands of geese and other waterfowl that visit in the winter. During the spring and summer, terns, shorebirds and waterfowl nest here as well as the majestic Marsh Harrier. The visitor center has exhibits and restrooms, and there are multiple blinds for us to visit. Later in the day we will explore **Rattray Head** and other coastal birding sites.
Hotel: **Thainstone House**

Saturday, May 29: We'll load and head the short hop over to Aberdeen Airport where you will catch your flights home.

Cost per person: $7,250 (assumes double or twin occupancy room. There is an additional $750 single room supplement).

For more details or to book a space, call Iain at 603-968-7194 or e-mail him at iain.macleod@nhnature.org.

Thainstone House

Northen Gannets

Loch of Strathbeg

Sands of Forvie and Ythan Estuary