

NICK BAKER—CELEBRITY GUIDED WEEK *continued*



John Poyner

of this valley and the salmon spawning, hand-feeding the Coal Tits at Loch Garten, the experience, company and knowledge of Nick and John, great hotel—lovely food and helpful staff.

Nick is back in November 2018 for another week, so if you want to experience some of what this group had then reserve your place soon.

CAIRNGORM STARGAZING WEEKEND AND THE GHOUL STAR 'ALGOL'

I had a great two nights of stargazing with guests at the Grant Arms Hotel in Granttown-on-Spey this weekend. The Grant Arms is a 3-star gold hotel located on the main street of Granttown-on-Spey, and a superb base for adventure holidays within the Cairngorms National Park. The Cairngorms also doubles as one of Scotland's best stargazing locations due to the area's superb dark skies and elevated position. After dinner on Friday I met my guests and we travelled out to the remote moors beside Lochindorb, where the skies were ablaze with stars and the Milky Way soared overhead.

Most of the main autumn constellations were on display with only the low western flank of the sky obscured by some distant weather fronts. Some of my guests had never seen the Milky Way under really dark conditions before and were amazed at the clarity of the galactic disc soaring overhead.

We opted for naked eye and binocular observing and had stunning views of objects like the Pleiades, Hyades and the Andromeda galaxy, which was a clear naked eye target and resolved into a lovely oval haze in binoculars. Most of the bright stars shone with stunning intensity under these

conditions, allowing us to pick out clear colour differences in Orion's main stars (just rising in the east), and within constellations like Aries and Andromeda.

During my tour I told the story of Algol, the ghoul star in Perseus, and how the ancients were mystified by its queer dimming every few days lasting several hours. What I didn't realise was that at that moment we were looking up at Algol during its lowest brightness, which only happens around 3% of the time you care to look at it. The reason for Algol's periodic dimming is because it has a larger but dimmer companion star in a relatively tight orbit. Every three days the larger companion occults Algol, reducing the intensity of light reaching an observer. Algol is therefore classified as an eclipsing binary system.

We headed out into the darkness again on Saturday evening for more fleeting but equally rewarding observing, with scattered cloud providing tantalising glimpses of clusters and constellations. Afterwards we packed up and headed back to the Grant Arms for some hot chocolate, and I concluded the weekend with an astronomy presentation in the lecture theatre.



I'd like to thank my guests for being such great company and making it an enjoyable and memorable weekend. I'll be operating more Stargazing weekends out of the Grant Arms in the near future so keep a look out for new dates.

By Stephen Mackintosh

Upcoming Stargazing Dates at the Grant Arms
19th & 20th Jan 2018 Weekend package
16th & 17th Feb 2018 Weekend package
<https://modulouniverse.com/highland-astronomy-tours/stargazing-grant-arms/>

WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS MONTH...

Things tend to quiet down this month as people start getting ready for Christmas and New Year, however there is still wildlife to be seen and trips to be had and from **Thursday 7th**, **EWAN MILES** of **NATURE SCOTLAND** will be leading a group of people on a winter wildlife holiday with his dad **JOHN MILES** co-leading with him. During their week here, Ewan and his dad John will give some talks which will be open to everyone. John will give two talks, the first on **Thursday 7th** is on **Speyside** and the next on **Saturday 9th** is on **The Nile**. On **Monday 11th** Ewan will give a talk on **Eagle Ecology & Predator Tourism**.

Then from **Saturday 23rd to Wednesday 27th** we have our Special **CHRISTMAS IN WONDERLAND BREAK** and from **Saturday 30th to Tuesday 2nd January 2018** we have our **HOGMANAY IN THE HIGHLANDS BREAK** with more events and talks going on in between these two breaks as well—a whole 10 days of walks, field trips and

talks. We start off on **Saturday 23rd** with an ice-breaking **Special Christmas Quiz** by author **GORDON HAMLETT**. On **Sunday 24th** wildlife artist **CHRIS ROSE** will give us a **Painting Demonstration**. On **Monday 25th** author **GORDON HAMLETT** will talk about the adventures of writing his book **Molotovs and Merlins**. On **Tuesday 26th** birding tour guide **ALAN DAVIES** will take us on a tour **Birding Africa From the Equator to the Cape** and on **Wednesday 27th** his partner birding tour guide **RUTH MILLER** will take us around their home patch **North Wales—So Much More Than Sheep!**. On **Thursday 28th** wildlife photographer and tour guide **ASHLEY GROVE** will show us the **Jewels of the Gambia** and on **Friday 29th** ecologist and photographer **DR GRAHAM LENTON** will take us around **Two Islands—Handa and Isle of May** and on **Saturday 30th** author, publisher and tour guide **NIGEL REDMAN** will take us on his **Adventures in Antarctica**.



On **31st December** we will have dancing in house after dinner followed by Hogmanay in the Square as the whole of Granttown comes out to welcome in the New Year. On **Monday 1st January** wildlife photographer and tour guide **ASHLEY GROVE** will show us some **Wonderful Winter Wildlife**. On **Tuesday 2nd** author, publisher and tour guide **NIGEL REDMAN** will take us **Round the Horn: Africa's Endemic Hotspot** and to finish off the extended holiday period on **Wednesday 3rd** ecologist and photographer **DR GRAHAM LENTON** will show us the **Black White and Gold in Finland**.