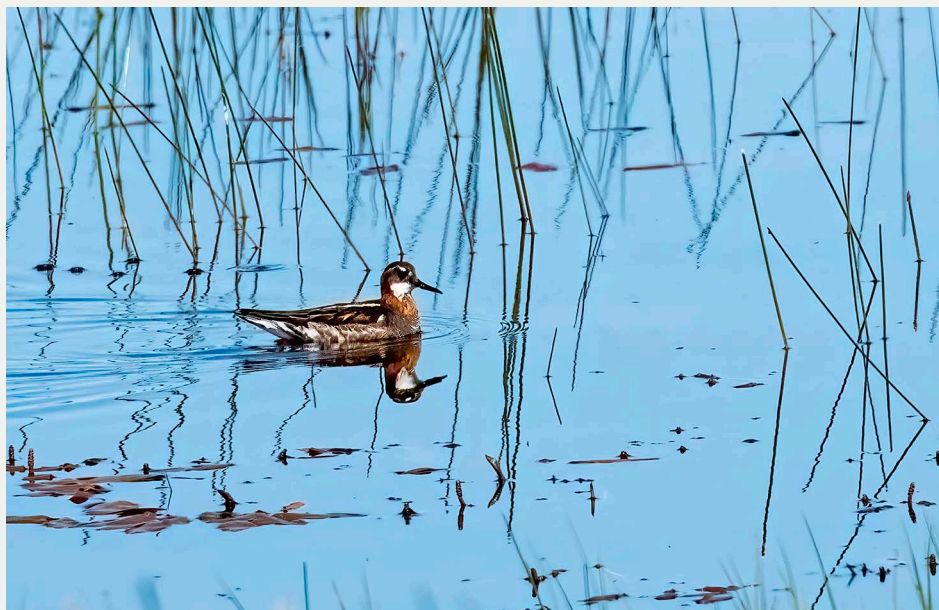


# WILD HEBRIDES



*"We shall explore off the beaten track through remote moorlands where Short-eared Owls glide past and Golden Plovers call plaintively. Our trip to the Shiant Islands with its huge seabird colonies overwhelms the senses, it is a privilege to visit such an awe-inspiring place. This is the Western Isles in all its glory!"*  
Stuart Housden OBE

**Dates** Sat 18 - Tue 28 May 2024

**Price** £3,395

**Deposit** £600    **Single Supp** £500

**Leaders** Stuart Housden OBE and Julian Sykes

**Weather** Though usually quite dry, these islands can experience all the seasons during one trip and can be windy (5°-20°C)

**Walking** Coastal walks on uneven terrain of up to three miles - walking boots recommended, but trainers or even sandals suitable on some occasions. Collapsible/telescopic walking poles could be useful for this trip

**Boat Trip** Our boat trip to the Shiant Islands lasts around 4 hours

**Meals** All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11

**Insects** Biting insects unlikely to be a problem

**Accom** Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite

**Group** 11

## Just some of what we hope to see:

Corncrake	Arctic Tern
Red-necked Phalarope	Arctic Skua
Golden Eagle	Great Skua
Hen Harrier	Pomarine Skua
Merlin	Long-tailed Skua
Short-eared Owl	Manx Shearwater
White-tailed Eagle	Black Guillemot
Great Northern Diver	Puffin
Black-throated Diver	Twite
Red-throated Diver	Golden Plover
Whimbrel	Hebridean Orchid
Little Tern	Otter

This holiday has been designed by Stuart, who spent 23 years as Director of RSPB Scotland. His extensive knowledge of these islands and understanding of the conservation stories here, is exceptional.

- We visit North and South Uist, Benbecula, Berneray, Harris and Lewis
- A chartered boat to the Shiant Islands, 80,000 Puffins with close viewing of seabirds
- Corncrake and Red-necked Phalarope - excellent chance of these elusive birds
- Peak time for skua and wader migration with Long-tailed and Pomarine possible
- Otters, three species of diver, Hen Harrier and Golden and White-tailed Eagles
- Beautiful machair flora, including the endemic Hebridean Orchid
- Standing stones of Callanish and other historic sites

**1-2** We overnight in Inverness, to give us an early start for our journey through the Great Glen and across the Isle of Skye to Uig and the ferry to Lochmaddy on North Uist. Arctic Tern, Puffin, Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake, Gannet, Great and Arctic Skuas, Manx Shearwater and with luck even cetaceans are possible from the ferry. Arriving on North Uist the bustle of modern life seems far behind us as we head to our hotel.

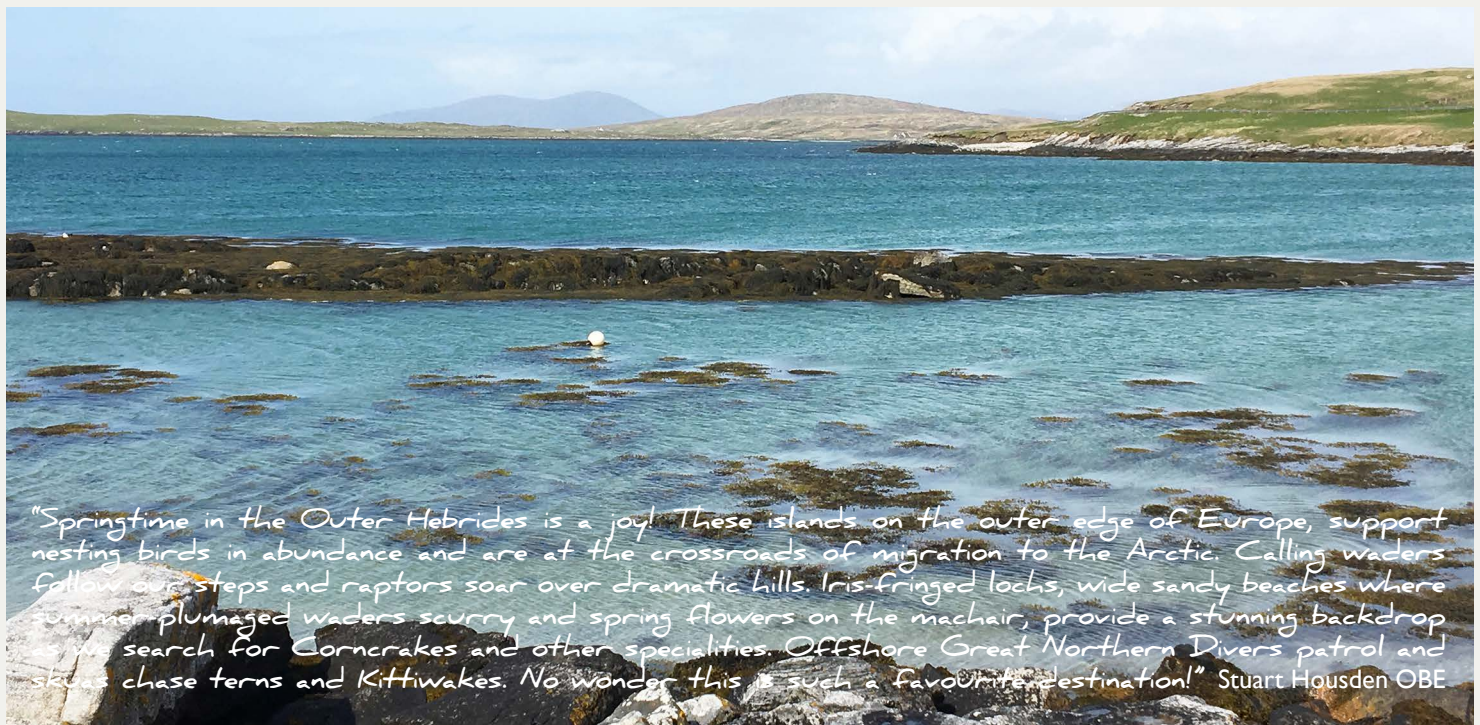
**3-6** Stuart has visited these islands many times in his role with RSPB Scotland and we are thrilled to have him lead our Wild Hebrides trip - his expert knowledge and experience of the islands and their conservation issues adding enormously to the holiday. Our exploration will start in the south with

shallow lochs, rocky headlands, dunes and our first machair - a beautiful habitat with stunning flora including the endemic Hebridean Orchid, with purple flowers and heavily blotched purple leaves. The wealth of flowers may attract Moss Carder and Great Yellow Bumble Bee, a rare species confined to the very north and west of Scotland.

Migration is still in full swing and late parties of Whimbrel or Black-tailed Godwits enroute to Iceland can drop in anywhere, while tidal strands have summer plumaged Sanderling and Turnstones. At 'stinky bay', with rotting seaweed on the foreshore, many waders occur and divers and seaduck are sometimes just offshore. We shall scan for Red-necked Phalarope at a reliable site, while keeping an eye open for Hen Harrier







"Springtime in the Outer Hebrides is a joy! These islands on the outer edge of Europe, support nesting birds in abundance and are at the crossroads of migration to the Arctic. Calling waders follow our steps and raptors soar over dramatic hills. Iris-fringed lochs, wide sandy beaches where summer-plumaged waders scurry and spring flowers on the machair, provide a stunning backdrop as we search for Corncrakes and other specialities. Offshore Great Northern Divers patrol and skuas chase terns and Kittiwakes. No wonder this is such a favourite destination!" Stuart Housden OBE

and Golden Eagle, with Otter possible whenever we are on the coast.

The RSPB Reserve at Balranald provides a chance of Corncrake calling from the iris beds and we'll work on getting good views. Twite feed, Skylark sing overhead, Corn Bunting still give their jangling song and summer plumaged waders are on the beach. Sea-watching from Aird an Runair is renowned but weather dependent, so north-westerlies may bring passage skuas, including rare Pomarine and Long-tailed. Breeding waders are everywhere including Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Snipe, Ringed Plover and Dunlin. We shall search for Purple Sandpipers and other rarities on the headlands and beaches.

We shall visit remote areas of dunes and machair where Arctic and Little Terns nest on sandy fields, waders display overhead and we have a chance of finding Twite, Corn Bunting and wild Rock Doves. Optional early morning walks will be offered on some days to experience this special location.

**7-9** We head, via Berneray, to the ferry across to Harris with its rugged and forbidding mountains. A healthy population of Golden Eagle means we'll keep our eyes peeled wherever we travel. Time permitting we'll visit Rodel and its beautiful 15th century church built for the chiefs of Clan Macleod. It has fine statues and we'll check the surrounding area for migrants. The machair at Northton can be alive with waders and has nesting Little Terns. This is one of the last areas for Corncrake on Harris and they often call from crofters' gardens!

We shall enjoy an exclusive boat trip to the Shiant Isles, eight miles off Harris in the middle of the Minch. This truly spectacular experience will be an adventure to remember! The islands support over 100,000 pairs of seabirds, including 10% of all the UK's Puffins! We shall work hard to get good views of the seabirds and may see Manx Shearwaters, seals and perhaps dolphins. There were six White-tailed Eagle present in 2021! We shall get stunningly close to rafts of Puffins and other auks allowing fantastic photography opportunities.

Harris is conjoined to Lewis, but the habitat is very different and we'll drive up through moorland to the Standing Stones of Callanish - world famous and a stunning example of a circle and cruciform arrangement, with almost 50 standing stones. If time permits we may visit Dun Carloway, one of the best iron age brochs in Scotland and Loch na Muilne RSPB Reserve nearby. On our final full day we shall explore the mountains and moorlands in search of eagles and more, with a visit to the Butt of Lewis.

**10-11** Today we say goodbye to these wonderful islands, but if our ferry schedule allows we shall visit Tiumpán Head, east of Stornoway to scan for cetaceans and seabirds before making our way back across the Minch, then on to Inverness, birding as we go, for our last night together before going our separate ways.



## Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Meet up in Inverness for overnight stay. - 1 night Premier Inn
- Day 2** Travel down the Great Glen and across Skye, before catching ferry to Lochmaddy and making the short journey to our hotel. 5 nights at Orasay Inn.
- Days 3-6** Birdwatching, botany and wildlife exploration of North and South Uist and Benbecula in search of Corncrake, waders, seabirds and raptors.
- Days 7-9** Take ferry to Harris and Lewis birding these two very different islands. We shall also take a half day boat trip to the Shiant Isles and visit Callanish Standing Stones and Dun Carloway Broch. 3 nights Hotel Hebrides in Tarbert
- Day 10** Travel back to Inverness. 1 night Premier Inn
- Day 11** Depart after breakfast

Mark Philips: Red-necked Phalarope  
 Kate Mennie: Port na Long, Otter, Puffin  
 James Glover: Red-throated Diver  
 Stuart Housden: Callanish Standing Stones  
 Christine Maughan: White-tailed Eagle and Buzzard

