

## HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

### CANNA AND CORNCRAKES

22-31 May 2023

Guides: Sally Nowell and Ailie Brown

Guests: David and Gillian Smith, Gaye Henson, Heather James, Susan Ripley, Charles Gordon, Rachael Ford, Bridget Carbines, John and Lynne Tidmarsh

**Day 1** We all meet at the Premier Inn in Inverness. After sharing stories about our various journeys to Inverness we enjoy a rather drawn out meal and then retire in anticipation of our next day when we are heading to Mull.

**Day 2** We meet for breakfast and then everyone is prompt in getting their bags to the van for the first packing attempt. It goes without a hitch and we are thankful that all the bags and all the guests will fit in the vans comfortably. Off we go, firstly heading down the side of Loch Ness, it's a rather dismal day so nothing is looking very photogenic, but the vibrant spring greens of the beeches and acid green of the new oak leaves are spectacular as we drive. We stop in Fort Augustus for a comfort stop where we see our first Swift for some, even those who have travelled from the south, it is their first of the year.

On past Loch Lochy (thanks Sue for looking that up) and on to get our sandwiches for lunch. We stop outside Home Bargains and Marks and Spencer, nobody is sure where we are getting our lunch but are pleased its M & S. We load up with supplies and then we are off again down this time down the side of Loch Linnhe. Sally has a stop off planned but is so engrossed with the chat in the van she sails past it, we turn round and come back to look out over the Loch and to the spectacular hills across the water. A distant Black-backed Gull, a Goldfinch, a calling Common Sandpiper and some hauled out Common Seals are all we spot here so we continue our journey to Oban. Sue R tells us about the Falls of Lora, a strange and very complicated phenomenon which she explains later when we are in the ferry queue.

We get a top up of fuel and then find a parking space overlooking a beach for lunch. We spot Red-throated Diver, a pair of Red-breasted Merganser, a Grey Heron and a very vocal and visible Wren shows off to our two Australian guests Rachael and Bridget.

After lunch we head to the ferry terminal where Sally discovers we are not booked on the ferry!! Due to some changes in the schedules we learn that 8000 bookings have been cancelled and ours is one of them. We are advised

to join the standby queue and soon realize that we are not going to get on to the ferry we hoped so have an hour to spend in Oban before, hopefully, getting the next ferry. John and Lynne have told us about the delicious mussels at the ferry and cannot resist getting some, Gillian and David explore the town and the rest of us wander along the harbour walls enjoying some great views of Black Guillemot and Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Soon we are back in the vans hopeful that we will get on the next ferry and in no time we are loaded and on deck. The weather has remained dull but it is dry with a fresh breeze and sadly not a lot of birdlife. We are soon on Mull and head quickly to the golf course parking area not far from the hotel. Everyone is quick to start spotting things and we get quite a list of excellent birds. Summer plumage Great Northern Diver and a great spot by David who sees a distant wader, it's a Greenshank hidden in the sand bank preening. Ringed Plovers appear all over the place, so well camouflaged, invisible one minute and then very obvious the next. But perhaps the highlight for us are the Arctic Terns courtship feeding right in front of us and giving us an excellent opportunity to notice some of the key identification features of this charming bird that has travelled so far to be here. An excellent 40 minutes of birding before the drizzle becomes a little more persistent so we decide to call it a day and go to check in at the hotel just around the corner. We all settle in and meet for the bird list whilst enjoying the views out to sea.

**Day 3** We leave our comfortable hotel overlooking Craignure Bay at 9am. Our first stop is the local shop where we stock up on midge repellent which fortunately we don't need for most of the holiday but it's always good to be prepared!

Next we head towards Duart Castle and we stop beside the cemetery. We hear a singing Whitethroat which David is quick to spot perched on a telegraph wire, we enjoy some good scope views but as we stand we all start spotting different birds in this location. Meadow Pipits everywhere, Sue spies a co-operative Skylark perched on a woodpile and a male Linnet decides it's a good place to pose too. A Song Thrush gathers food in the graveyard, Lapwings display overhead and a Curlew hides cryptically in the heathland in front of us.

We move on to Loch Don where an obliging Common Buzzard perches on a nearby telegraph pole. John sees a Stonechat which eludes us. As we stand the sun is breaking through the clouds and a bit of blue sky is appearing. We hear a bit of a commotion with Ravens calling and the Canada Geese look alert over in the distance, Sally gets a fleeting view of a White-tailed Eagle which is upsetting the geese and Ravens but it doesn't show again. We continue to Grasspoint but the parking area is full so we drive on. Ailie spots a large bird overhead, a fabulous adult White-tailed Eagle is circling above and we watch as it magnificently cruises away from us. We drive on, and on the way out of Grasspoint a herd of Red Deer hinds catch our eye. The Bluebells are amazing and as we drive the scent fills the van, Rachael and Bridget start

to get out of the van to take a photo as do John and Lynne but a car is behind us so we miss the photo opportunity and have to drive on hoping to see more bluebells elsewhere on our travels.

We take a quick detour back to Craignure for the loos before the main event of the day, our drive around to Loch Spelve. We are soon passing through the beautiful Oak trees and down toward the shore. We stop and are welcomed by Mary, a 100 year old lady who lives by the shore, what a wonderful place to live. If she knew we were coming she says she would have made us tea. We chat to her about what we are doing at the same time scanning the loch and hills around. We can hear a Snipe drumming and soon spot it sitting up on a telegraph pole giving better views than most of us ever get of this charming bird. Greylag and Canada Geese are around the shore with their goslings, Oystercatchers and Lapwing are around too.

We drive on and Ailie thinks she may have an Otter but nothing reappears. We drop off the guests and find a safe parking space to look out for Otters and whatever else we can see. We spot a Golden Eagle over the far hillside, its being mobbed by a male Hen Harrier, what a sight to see the two birds in combat and what an impressive comparison, the harrier looks tiny! Another Golden Eagle appears and we watch as they drift away out of sight behind the ridge. We decide this isn't a bad lunch spot and as the sun is appearing and the light drizzle is clearing we find a suitable spot to sit or stand whilst eating our sandwiches. Ailie spots another Golden Eagle, perhaps one of the same birds we have just seen but its much nearer so we get a little closer, its being mobbed by Ravens, the poor bird speeds away from its tormentors.

Out on the water a Black Guillemot but no Otter for us here. We continue round the loch to Croggan, hearing a Tree Pipit on route. At Croggan we see the sign warning of Adders, all the guests immediately head in to look instead of heeding the warning, all hoping to come across our only venomous snake. By this time the weather is beautiful, illuminating the fabulous weather beaten Oaks with their fresh green leaves. Bridget (from Australia) is interested in our native trees so Sue and Sally enjoy celebrating the delights of our Rowan and Hazel trees. We walk through the dappled sunlight looking for Otters, scanning for eagles and hoping to catch sight and sound of Tree Pipit. Ailie and Gaye compete over their impression of the bird but Ailie wins! We return to the van and make our way back toward Lochbuie. We arrive at four just as the café is closing but enjoy scanning out spotting Great Northern and Red-throated Divers. A distant Peregrine flies across the bay and we see a very, very distant White-tailed Eagle. Gannets dip and dive and we all relax in the sun for 20 minutes before we need to make our way back.

We have a fruitless stop to look for Redstart and Wood Warbler and though we hear the former we don't manage to see it. The woods look beautiful, ancient Oaks covered in mosses and lichens and a beautiful road to wander along, if a little steep! As we return to the van Lynne and Sally hear a birdcall

they don't recognize but we can't work out what it can be which is frustrating for all. Its time to return to the hotel past a field of Peacocks whose call makes it feel like we on safari in India! We reach the hotel at 6.00pm precisely and are ready to do the bird list at 7.10pm and dinner at 7.30pm. Our table enables us to enjoy views across the bay in the evening sunshine. Everyone has enjoyed a beautiful bird filled day and are ready for bed and anticipating the next day.

#### Day 4

We awake to blue skies and sunshine, what could be better than a day on Mull in the sunshine. A bit of a challenging start as one of the minibus doors won't close but we press on with the day. We stop at the golf course and there's a White-tailed Eagle in the top of one of the trees, we enjoy scanning out across the bay but soon hear geese being disturbed, the eagle has taken to the air giving us a spectacular start to the day as it wheels up the hillside gaining height and eventually disappearing. In Salen with a bit of juggling and sweet talking, a local garage has the issue with the minibus door resolved in no time and we are off to explore the centre and west coast of Mull.

We start by looking for Otter at Salen but don't have any luck. however the joy of looking out over a flat calm sea in the sunshine looking for them is hard to beat. We continue up Glen Aros and shortly stop to walk a forest track in search of Whinchat. When we get out of the van we immediately hear Tree Pipit and are treated to a magnificent display of song and the high parachuting display repeatedly over the next 10 minutes, what a treat after Tree Pipit was so elusive the day before. We enjoy the flora along the route, Globe Flower is a special find as are Magpie Moth and Water Avens. As we wander down the track we scan the bushes and wires and Sally eventually spots a Whinchat perched on some bracken. Initially the view isn't great but then it hops up onto the telegraph wires where we enjoy some really good views. We walk down to the river and relax in the sun for a few minutes before heading back to the van, we see a distant White-tailed Eagle and Stonechat on our return.

Further along the road we stop amongst some clear fell areas to scan the hills and open country below. Several of us spot what looks like a tree stump across the river, once in the scope we see that it's a White-tailed Eagle sitting with two Hooded Crows. It's hard to get a good view in the heat haze, whilst we look we also see Sand Martin and hear a Whitethroat. We walk further down the track to see that the eagle has been moved on by the 'hoodies' which are taunting it. It then takes off across the hillside showing us just what an amazing and huge bird it is. It lands and we see it well through the scope but off it goes again and eventually we decide to leave it be and press on to our next stop. In Dervaig we find a vantage point overlooking the rocky bay. Two Shelduck, several Common Sandpiper and a couple of handsome Redshanks feed and preen below us. We are getting hungry so head to the hills to find a suitable lunch spot. We drive up a narrow and steep road to open country where we find the ideal spot in a small quarry with great views down

to Dervaig and across the moor. But despite our constant scanning we only get a Common Buzzard overhead and a couple of Siskins drop into a minute tree beside us briefly.

After a delightful lunch break we continue across the moor spotting a Greenshank in beautiful summer plumage in a wetland just below us. Its disturbed by us stopping so we assume it's a breeding site and move on, a real treat to see. A couple of Wheatears as we drive and then we descend into Hazel woods and back on to the main road and towards Calgary Bay. The narrow road takes us through some beautiful scenery and as we round the corner the spectacular white sand of the bay is before us. We drive down to the beach and spend a pleasant 45 minutes wandering the near empty sand. A Kestrel over the hillside is the main birdlife but it's a stunning location and perfect on this beautiful sunny afternoon.

We reluctantly leave and retrace our steps enjoying some photos stops on route including one for Rachael of some gorgeous Highland Cow calves. We pull into a layby as we near the end of our day. The late afternoon sun has turned hazy but it lights the fresh greens of the landscape perfectly. A couple are busy watching something, they have two White-tailed Eagles perched distantly in tree tops. Sally spots another two birds high over the hillside on the other side of the loch and David has a handsome Great Northern Diver out on the sea. As we look there are several but all tricky as they are feeding and constantly disappearing under water. It's hard to tear ourselves away from this beautiful location but before we do we have a great view as one of the perched eagles flies across the bay in front of us.

Our final stop is back at Salen to try again for Otters but no luck so we head for the hotel arriving in time for a quick swim and shower before our last meal at the lovely Mull Hotel.

**Day 5** Today we leave the Mull hotel and head to Iona. The day is overcast as we drive south west. We stop briefly at the Craignure store to buy a bottle opener as we have been given drinks with a non screw cap. We stop briefly to enjoy the dramatic views of Loch Squabain and Glen More. Sally hears a Whinchat and we locate it perched on a layby sign singing away. We continue down the glen to Loch Beg. A Reed Bunting pair flit about, John spots a Golden Eagle high over the hillside and then David spots a distant Greenshank and a small group of Goosander, our first of the trip. We eventually move on but as we do we come across a herd of cows being moved on by a farmer, he tells us his cows can be rather "obstinate" and don't move out of the way for cars, he's not wrong but eventually we get past them only to turn the vans and have to negotiate our way back through the docile bovines.

We are soon on our way to Fionnphort weaving our way along the single track road, stopping to let traffic pass or hoping they will return the favour. We arrive at the Iona ferry for about 12, Sally and Ailie park the vans and we are soon

onboard. At the pier we are met by the hotel staff and our bags are whisked away. We walk to the hotel for lunch and enjoy a couple of hours of down time to wander the village. Some of us spend the rest of the day walking and most find their way to the beach. Sally, Ailie, Charles, Sue and Gaye spot Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Sanderling. The machair here is a sea of daisies and Swallows and Sand Martins whizz low over the surface thrilling us with their elegant flight and how close they were coming to us. We chat to other birders but nobody has seen a Corncrake.

We wander back to the hotel, some stopping for a beer or ice cream on route. After dinner we walk down the road in the hope of seeing Corncrake. We find a field where one is calling intermittently. Every time it calls we all lift our bins and peer in the rich vegetation hoping that one of us would spot the bird. After 40 minutes we are losing hope. Sally spots a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins out to sea. There are several and they are really active, leaping out of the water two at a time, flipping over or just cruising along, they put on a much better display than the Corncrake which we did not see. As we walk back to the hotel it is nearly dark and we start to hear more crakes calling. Back at the hotel there is one calling in the field and as we go to bed there are at least two birds "crex crexing" outside the bedroom window. What a treat to fall asleep to the sound of Corncrakes, how many people can do that now, unforgettable.

**Day 6** We have a busy day ahead of us! We leave Iona after a delightful breakfast. Everyone waits at the ferry and are welcomed back on Mull by a friendly tabby cat. Sally and Ailie go and get the vans and in no time we are back on the road on route to Loch Beg to try yet again for Otters, which are turning out to be quite tricky this holiday. We park up and Sally finally finds an Otter to her huge relief! Its on a seaweed covered rock and then sliding into the water it swims out and starts fishing. It is heading in our direction. As it fishes, it swims and dives, swims and dives and then disappears. Bridget spots it again some distance away and it continues to come towards us, we are all silent and holding our breath. All through the holiday folk stop to ask what we are looking at and this time a couple stop and we are pleased to be able to show a lady an Otter. She's been looking for days and is due to leave Mull in a couple of hours so she is delighted when John helps her locate it. We watch silently as it swims nearer and are thrilled when it gets out of the water, it's a large dog Otter but it is soon back in the water and we need to be on our way. David says "we just need Short-eared Owl now, no pressure!"

We move swiftly on through Glen More and as we approach Craignure we see some photographers in a layby, we slow and pull in and see that they are watching a Short-eared Owl. We are delighted and see it sitting amongst the grasses looking around and giving us some really good, though distant, views. We are in a passing place so need to move on and we have a ferry to catch.

We arrive at the ferry just as one is leaving but the small café is open and Heather is delighted it is selling ice cream. We all have time to have a stroll, get a coffee or ice cream.

We get back in the van and are off across the water to Lochaline. The vans are parked side by side at the front of the boat and the men on the boat joke that we are in pole position to race out of the boat, but tempting as it is, we gently ease the vans forward and continue towards Strontian. By now its lunchtime and Sally has in mind a stop which she comes upon a little sooner and quicker than expected, so we quickly pull off the road into beautiful Oak woodland. Charles spots a quiet spot on a bridge overlooking the river and we all see he has chosen the best spot and follow.

We arrive at the bridge and hear Nuthatch, quite unexpectedly, John sees it fly over but then it disappears and falls silent. We eat our delicious sandwiches from the Columba Hotel whilst looking for Dipper and Grey Wagtail, it looks the ideal spot. Lynne spots an immature Grey Wagtail but its very mobile. We hear a distant Mistle Thrush and Cuckoo is calling, we've heard them at nearly every stopping spot on the trip so far. We have another view of Grey Wagtail but again its very mobile. We are reluctant to leave this lovely spot and as we get back to the vans we spot the Nuthatch again and a few of us get a view but its difficult amongst the dense foliage. Redstart are calling somewhere in the distance but its time to move on to another Oak wood location near Strontian.

The drive is beautiful. We arrive at Ariundle National Nature Reserve and walk along the track. We are surrounded by bird activity, Siskin, Chaffinches and Willow Warblers. As we move past magnificent fern and moss covered ancient Oaks of the Celtic rainforest we hear Spotted Flycatcher and spot two birds moving through the trees. They will not sit still and for the first time on the trip the midges come out and get the better of us. Ailie hears a Wood Warbler, but it is distant and we can't locate it in the now well leaved Oaks. We continue a little further hearing Redstart and getting better views of the Spotted Flycatcher which aren't feeding, perhaps they are nest building? Time runs away with us again, the woodland is beautiful but the woodland birds are challenging to see especially when the midges keep finding us in the more sheltered spots, in the breeze they disappear but the damp forest seems to attract them and the birds to the same locations.

As we leave Ariundle, Ailie spots young Coal Tits, the first of the trip, in the road. She stops to move them to the safety of the side of the track. We continue our drive towards Salen along Loch Sunart and as we do we see a mammal at the road side, is it a Red Squirrel, no its too big, it's a Pine Marten!!! Sally gets excitedly on the radio to Ailie but the Marten crosses the road in front of us and disappears before everyone sees it well, just a disappearing tail, a chance and very lucky encounter to see one during the day.

Our next stop is a hide over looking Loch Moidart. From here we see a group of basking Common Seals, Red-breasted Merganser, Charles spots a raft of Eider and Common Terns fly over the off shore islands. It's our last stop of the day so we drive on crossing through Moidart and some beautiful inland sea loch scenery. Our single track roads turn into a two lane road and we whisk along the roads where lots of burning has taken place, we wonder if its to get rid of the Rhododendron which flank the hills and road sides, later we discover it was the result of a huge wildfire a few weeks earlier. We get on to the main road to Mallaig and arrive at our hotel for check in just before six. We enjoy a delicious meal and some of the guests take an evening stroll around Mallaig which is quite lively, its Saturday night, last night we fell asleep to Comcrakes tonight we fall asleep to Karaoke!! We are all looking forward to our next two days on the boat and the forecast is looking good!

## Day 7

Well today is a big day, we are heading to Canna. We leave the hotel at 8.30am and arrive at the Arisaig pier 20 minutes later ready to board Orca III. Donald meets us and then we go and meet the skipper Andrew and Niall who is looking after us onboard. We are soon leaving Arisaig and working our way through the skerries in the sheltered bay. Common Seal lie out on the rocks and Sally and Lynne manage to catch a glimpse of an Otter on one of them before it slips into the seaweed. Black Guillemots are everywhere as we gently move out into the Sound of Sleat. The throttle is opened and we all take our seats as our powerful boat cuts through the waves like butter. Sally and John spot a Manx Shearwater way off but it's the only one we see.

We make our way towards Eigg working our way along its south coast before heading north towards Rhum. The scenery is spectacular and we spot a remote cottage way up on the hillside. We stop briefly on the west of Rhum for a coffee and delicious homemade cake watching groups of Shag and hoping to catch sight of one of Rhums resident White-tailed Eagle. We continue north towards Canna which we can see in the distance. As we approach we begin to see more seabirds on the water surface. We are all delighted to see Puffins and as we approach a high stack we are amazed that most of the birds here are Puffins, hundreds of them! Amongst the Puffins are Common Guillemot and handsome Razorbills. We see a Bonxie (Great Skua) briefly and our first Fulmar of the trip. We are all pleased to see a healthy population of seabirds after fears that bird flu has decimated the populations.

After enjoying the number of birds both on the water and flying overhead we move on. Lynne and Ailie have seen some activity in the water, it looks like a small pod of Harbour Porpoise but most of us don't see them, they skulk away. We head onto the pier on Canna where we disembark and wander along the road to the village shop and to find the beach where we are going to have lunch. On route we enjoy a beautiful group of Eider. Two males and a few females with chicks entertain us with their purring calls, as if they are all sharing some local gossip. David and Gillian head off to explore but the rest of us continue to the beach which we have all to ourselves except for sightings



of Whinchat, Whitethroat and Pied Wagtail. Its a blissful spot and most of us enjoy our sandwiches in silence just soaking up the tranquil atmosphere. Sally is the only one to take a paddle in the chilly clear water but the sand is silky soft and black from the basalt rock (thanks Lynne). We wander back down a grassy lane past some deep purple Comfrey on the verge against the stone wall that separates us from some rather unfriendly looking bulls. We are charmed by the simple peace of the island, it's as if we've gone back in time.

We arrive back on the boat, almost on time, and head back towards Eigg where we visit an old wreck of a French Trawler that ran aground eight years ago after the lookout fell asleep, fortunately nobody was hurt. Andrew tells us about the salmon farm off the Rhum coast and we eventually leave these stunning majestic islands and head back across the sound. Several of us are scanning constantly in the hope of a cetacean or Manx Shearwater. John eventually spots one and we soon have a small group in the distance which most of us manage to get on to. We continue back to Arisaig in the afternoon sun, its all rather soporific and some have an afternoon nap. We arrive back at the pier, have a quick loo stop and then drive down the old back road to Morar and Loch Morar. It's a beautiful drive where we hope we might see Black-throated Diver but there is nothing out on the water. We return along the loch side and back to the hotel in time for a shower before dinner and most of the group take an evening stroll into town. What a wonderful day, we are all aglow with fresh sea air and sunshine.

**Day 8** We awake to clear blue skies and calm seas which we see the minute we wake from our bedrooms overlooking Mallaig Harbour and out to Rhum, Eigg and Skye, what a view!

We make our way straight to Arisaig for our boat and a relaxing day of sea watching. Andrew is ready to greet us with Donald today to look after us on board. Coffee and tea and fresh made cakes are awaiting us. We head off towards Eigg and on route we spot a distant Great Skua and Charles spots a small group of Manx Shearwater, showing better than yesterday in the bright sunshine. We skirt round the bay past a colony of Artic Terns and Shags. We continue close in shore around the west of Eigg and cut into the south of Rhum. We stop to admire the rafts of Guillemots and Razorbills glistening in the sun as they float by unperturbed by the boat. Their white under parts seem to be illuminated in the sun and make a spectacular sight. Kittiwakes join them too but overhead Ailie spots a White-tailed Eagle which appears to have taken off from the cliffs, its being mobbed by a Hooded Crow, the eagles throughout our trip are being mobbed by something or other, they never seem to get any peace.

We watch the eagle majestically gain height over the cliffs and catch a glimpse of a second bird but they soon disappear out of sight, what a thrill to see them over Rhum where they were first introduced back in 1975. This is a wonderful location with the mountains of Rhum soaring up around us, the cliffs filled with

seabirds and White-tailed Eagle overhead. We have coffee and tea here with delicious cakes and then we continue from here past the castle on Rhum and out towards Skye and the island of Soay, thanks to Sue we know that this is not where Soay sheep come from, that's somewhere out near St Kilda.

The scenery is breathtaking here, with the low lying island of Soay on one side and the Cuillins of Skye rising above us on the other. We sail into a natural harbour leading to Loch Coruisk and down anchor for an idyllic lunch spot. Common Seals and Black Guillemots are all around. We watch a couple of walkers struggle over the rocks around the bay and a loan Red Deer comes down to the water to drink. As we leave this gorgeous spot John sees a distant Red-throated Diver which Gaye miraculously manages to photograph. David spots a Bonxie, the best view we've had, its not in view for long but most of us manage to get a view of this one.

On we go, back towards Eigg in the hope of seeing cetaceans but knowing it's a little early in the season. As we reach Eigg we stop to watch fishing Arctic and Common Tern and slowly we creep along the east side of the island. We turn to head back to Arisaig and start looking for Shearwaters. We see a group of a dozen or more wheeling over the waves making their way towards us, they are a spectacular sight as they turn and glide towards us in the afternoon sun. John is keen to find a Storm Petrel but despite watching the sea for several hours we don't catch up with this delightful seabird. We continue and Ailie spots another group of Shearwaters before we come into the sound and finally back to Arisaig. We say goodbye to Andrew and Donald who have looked after us so well and given us two very different but equally enjoyable days at sea aboard the Orca III.

**Day 9** We wake up to a stunning morning, the views from the hotel across to Eigg and Rhum are stunning even more so when a White-tailed Eagle flies over the bay, spotted after being alerted by the gulls on the harbour clamouring, they alert each other to danger but birdwatchers are alerted.

After leaving the hotel en-route for Inverness we have an idea to stop at Glennfinnan monument but the busy car park puts us off and we drive away. Gaye googles information of the history of the area and the monument, which stands spectacularly looking down the loch in the morning sunshine. We continue to Spean Bridge for a comfort stop and an opportunity to look for Dipper but the river is obscured by the vegetation and fresh spring foliage. We continue towards Inverness and turn off at Fort Augustus.

We soon leave the busy road and traffic which has slowed our progress. We stop at Loch Tarff to scan for possible divers but spot just Greylag Goose and Common Gulls. We have been delighted to hear Cuckoo throughout our trip and yet again we can hear one but they are always distant and we just can't find them. We continue our journey toward Loch Ruthven but Sally sails past

the turn off and Ailie van spots that we've passed it. Sally has been too busy chatting and we have to turn round but are soon on our way and stop in the car park at RSPB Loch Ruthven.

We walk down to the beach and soon see Slavonian Grebes out on the loch but they are distant. Sand Martins swoop over the loch and a Common Sandpiper lands on a rocky island. Better views of the grebes are found but still at a distance so we go to the hide in the hope of finding something closer. Before we leave Ailie finds a group of Long-tailed Tits flitting about in the birches, the first of the holiday so we are all delighted to see them. A lone photographer who thinks he has the hide to himself is soon disabused of this idea when the 12 of us arrive. In front of the hide is a family of Teal, the chicks weave in and out of the reeds.

We are delighted to see an Osprey overhead soon joined by another, the first and only Ospreys of the trip so a real treat to see them in this beautiful location. Eventually we spot a pair of grebes move out into the loch and soon after there are a pair in the reeds just below us. It's great to see them so close but they are so well camouflaged despite their brilliant colouration. We enjoy the closer view of the grebes and then head back to the vans for lunch. Here we have Redpoll and Reed Bunting and again a distant Cuckoo.

We move on and take a narrow road which provides a rather prickly comfort stop amongst the thistles and gorse but the route turns out to be quite a challenge as we encounter a broken down tarring machine. The fresh tarmac is a delight to drive on but it's so fresh it's still being laid. We can see the obstruction ahead and as one of the workers approaches he advises us to turn round as we are likely to be delayed for quite a while. Charles kindly opens a gate for us to reverse into and we manage the manoeuvre well, though one of the workmen have a different view about this, feeling we've been impatient and should have waited, we were only doing what we were told!!

Soon we are back on track and finding a different route, Heather comments on how beautiful the countryside is and it is indeed very beautiful in all its spring green. We pass Loch Duntelchaig and continue towards Inverness. We drop into the city and head to the Merkinch local reserve. In winter this is a great area to visit but today it's quiet. Despite this we add Moorhen to our list though we had been hoping for Kingfisher!! We enjoy a small group of Herons dozing in the reeds, two lazy Teal and the challenge of crossing the trainline. The mudflats are pretty quiet with just a few, Redshank and Curlew.

We leave the reserve getting to the hotel in time for a pre-dinner outside gathering to reminisce and reflect on our holiday together.

We say some of our goodbyes as we are not all leaving together in the morning

**Day 10** David and Gillian make an early start but the rest of us have a more leisurely breakfast and then all head in our separate directions hoping to meet again in the future.

### Species of the Trip

Bridget	Puffins
Rachael	Puffins
Lynne	Puffins
Heather	White-tailed Eagle over the cliffs off Rhum
John	The White-tailed Eagle over the cliffs off Rhum
Gaye	White-tailed Eagle
David	Corncrake, hearing it in the fields and then at night from the hotel
Gill	Cuckoo, hearing it wherever we went
Sue	Manx Shearwater
Charles	Otter
Ailie	Golden Eagle and Otter
Sally	Greenshank

### Place of the Trip

Bridget	Iona and Canna, not touristy and had a charm.
Rachael	Iona, peaceful walk at night-time
Lynne	Lunch spot on the boat in the bay on Skye
Heather	Off the coast of Rhum, where we saw the WTE.
John	Along Rhum coast on boat
Gaye	Iona and the lunch spot on Canna
David	Iona, quiet and peaceful. Place of the past.
Gill	Loch Spelve where we saw the Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, and Hen Harrier
Sue	Iona, the whole Island
Charles	Iona and Loch Ruthven
Ailie	Iona. The beaches
Sally	Canna

### Magic Moment

Bridget	The beach and quiet on Canna where we had lunch, just being there.
Rachael	Sitting on the boat with Puffins and things flying around, special experience.
Lynne	Otter watching, it took time to find it, it was really big and it came right out of the water then away back in.
Heather	Watching the Otter at Loch Beg, watching it for almost 20mins, it came along closer to us gradually.
John	The flock of Manx Shearwater flying past, it's just complete freedom.
Gaye	The walk after dinner hearing Corncrakes croaking and the light on the water while we were watching the dolphins leaping.
David	Short-eared Owl. Just Beautiful, the movement of it's head and it's eyes.
Gill	The Corncrake moment while hearing it in the field although we couldn't see it.
Sue	Sally said 'OTTER' the sound of relief and joy! Worth waiting for
Charles	Seeing Ospreys and Slavonian Grebes together at Loch Ruthven.
Ailie	Airundle Oak Woods, listening to the Wood Warbler and other birds, dappled sunlight.
Sally	Finally finding an Otter and falling asleep listening to Corncrakes

## BIRDS

Mute Swan  
Greylag Goose  
Canada Goose  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Eurasian Teal  
Tufted Duck  
Eider  
Goosander  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Corncrake (H)  
Pheasant  
Red-throated Diver  
Black-throated Diver  
Great Northern Diver  
Slavonian Grebe  
Little Grebe  
Fulmar  
Manx Shearwater  
Gannet  
Cormorant  
Shag  
Storm Petrel  
Grey Heron  
White-tailed Eagle  
Osprey  
Golden Eagle  
Red Kite  
Hen Harrier  
Common Buzzard  
Kestrel  
Peregrine Falcon  
Moorhen  
Oystercatcher  
Ringed Plover  
Lapwing  
Sanderling  
Dunlin  
Common Sandpiper  
Common Redshank  
Greenshank  
Curlew  
Common Snipe  
Great Skua  
Black-headed Gull  
Common Gull  
Herring Gull  
Greater Black-backed Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Kittiwake  
Common Tern  
Arctic Tern  
Puffin  
Black Guillemot  
Guillemot  
Razorbill  
Rock Dove  
Woodpigeon  
Collared Dove  
Common Cuckoo  
Short-eared Owl  
Tawny Owl (H)  
Swift  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Skylark  
Swallow  
House Martin  
Sand Martin  
Rock Pipit  
Tree Pipit  
Meadow Pipit  
Pied Wagtail  
Grey Wagtail  
Dunnock  
Robin  
Common Redstart (H)  
Wheatear  
Whinchat  
Stonechat  
Song Thrush  
Mistle Thrush (H)  
Fieldfare  
Blackbird  
Blackcap  
Whitethroat  
Sedge Warbler  
Willow Warbler  
Wood Warbler  
Wren  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Great Tit  
Coal Tit

Blue Tit  
Long-tailed Tit  
Nuthatch  
Jackdaw  
Rook  
Carrion Crow  
Hooded Crow  
Raven  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Linnet  
Twite  
Redpoll  
Goldfinch  
Greenfinch  
Siskin  
Reed Bunting

#### MAMMALS

Rabbit  
Otter  
Roe Deer  
Red Deer  
Fallow Deer  
Common Seal  
Harbour Porpoise  
Bottlenose Dolphin  
Pine Marten  
Feral Goat

#### **Other things.....**

Orange Tip  
Green-veined White  
Dark Green Fritillery  
Magpie Moth  
Cinnabar Moth  
Peacock Butterfly  
Tortoiseshell Butterfly  
Speckled Wood  
Common Carder Bee  
White-tailed Bumble Bee

#### **Some of the plants we identified:**

Globe Flower  
Water Avens  
Butterwort  
Greater Stitchwort  
Flag Iris  
Birds foot Trefoil  
Chickweed Wintergreen  
Heath Spotted Orchid  
Water Avens  
Tormenil  
Bog Myrtle  
Common Bluebell  
Wood Anemone  
Primrose