

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

INNER HEBRIDES

11-19 AUGUST 2021

Guides: Sally Nowell and Kate Mennie

Guests: Christine and Chris Hutchinson, Jo Tomalin, Penny and Keith Chantler, Marilyn Davidson, Yvonne Lenoir and Steve Morris, Janette and Peter Warden

Day 1 After checking into our hotel in Inverness Sally and Kate meet the group to introduce themselves before having dinner and an early night before our journey tomorrow.

Day 2 We pack up the minibus and head towards Dores, where we are greeted by the sunny view down Loch Ness. Heading over the hill we drop down to Loch Duntelchig, where Yvonne first spots a Buzzard above a rocky outcrop, Sallys' minibus sees a Wheatear and Kates van has a Red Kite fly close beside them. Along the road there are a pair of Grey Wagtail flying about and a Kestrel hovering in the wind. We continue to RSPB reserve of Loch Ruthven where we hope to see some Slavonian Grebes. Along the path there are Common Blue Damselflies, Scotch Argus and Speckled Wood butterfly. Sally spots our first Slavonian Grebe on the loch. It dives, but eventually we all get a view and also a Little Grebe. Looking out from the beach across the loch, a family of four Slavonian Grebes are feeding and diving, Grey Heron on the shore and Little Grebe feeding and we continue to the hide, spotting Fly Agaric fungi. Once at the hide, we watch another family with three young Slavonian Grebe making their way through the reeds giving us nice views and around ten Red-breasted Mergansers are also on the water.

Continuing the back road towards Fort Augustus, Sally and Kate decide to take a small road into Glen Garrogie following the River Fechin. We reach a high spot overlooking the glen and hills all around. As we get ourselves out of the vans and telescopes set up, Yvonne and Sally get onto a large raptor above one of the hills. A young Golden Eagle is soaring back and forth above the horizon in the distance. With all telescopes set up we all get a chance to look at our first Eagle of the trip as it stays in the air for a while allowing us to watch it over lunch. Sally spots Red Deer on the hillside too. With time getting on and midges beginning to bite, we drive along to where the road ends at Loch Killin then turn round, spotting a field of Sika Deer beside the road. We continue to Fort Augustus taking in the views where we stop for a comfort break. As we wait at the locks of the canal, Steve sees a bird of prey dive into nearby bushes. When it reappears, a male Sparrowhawk makes its way across the field and sits in a nearby tree.

We continue onto Fort William, where after a wait in traffic, head to Mallaig. To stretch our legs a final time, we stop overlooking Loch nan Ceall, where Common and Herring Gulls and Oystercatchers are feeding. We reach our hotel in Mallaig with views over to Eigg and some of us have a wander into the town before we meet for notebooks and have our evening meal.

Day 3

We wake to a rather windy Sound of Sleat, we change our original plan because of the sea conditions, so after breakfast we set off towards Ardnamurchan today to explore the peninsula. With Penny navigating, the first road we go down is at Glenuig, where a drive along the bay gets us some Rock Pipits and Hooded Crows. The rain continues so we next go down the road to Doirlinn, when Sally spots a Hen Harrier being blown by the wind. Some of us manage to jump out in time to see it flying over the trees before it flies out of sight. We get down to the bay, overlooking Castle Tioram, where we scan a small island with gulls, Curlew, Oystercatchers, Redshank and Arctic Terns are perched. With the rain starting again we head along to Acharacle for a comfort stop and things from the shop. We now travel along the Ardnamurchan peninsula through the ancient windswept plantations and follow some twisty roads until we reach Sanna Bay. We seek shelter round the minibuses to have our lunch out of the wind, where we can see Gannets out on a nearby cliff. Sally spots a small flock of Ringed Plover on the grass, where a summer plumage Dunlin is also in with the group.

We reach Ardnamurchan lighthouse where the wind and driving rain makes it hard to stand. Most of us brave the elements and stand up at the lighthouse wall for some “hair raising” wildlife watching. In between the rain showers we manage to scan out into the water where Manx Shearwater are coursing over the water, Guillemots on the water and Gannets are flying. Kate also spots a Great Skua. As the next rain shower comes in, most of us run back to the van, Jo braving it and getting very wet. Once we manage to get wet jackets off, we decide a coffee stop is required to warm up and dry off. Much to Peter’s excitement, Chris and Christine knew just the place on our way back. With the sun trying to shine we stop at Camas nan Geall where Sally spots a brief Golden Eagle above one of the ridges. Travelling along from Kilchoen, we drive round a bay that we comment looks perfect for Otters, but a sudden stop from Sally as we get a pair of young Golden Eagles close above the ridge. We watch the pair battling the elements, perching briefly on a rock before disappearing over the ridge. Sally spots an Otter in the bay beside us. We watch it dive and fish before it swims into the next bay out of sight.

We stop at Glenborrodale Café where a large raptor is above the car park, a Golden Eagle. It is holding its wings in, making an interesting conversation about whether it is an Osprey. We enjoy tea and cake before making our way back to the main road to get back to the hotel. As we cross Loch nan Uamh viaduct, Chris shouts “what’s that bird being mobbed by a Gannet?” As we pull into the parking area at the Prince’s Cairn we realise it is a White-tailed Eagle at our eye level being mobbed by Gulls and Gannet. We all manage to get out

and have fantastic views of this adult bird as it flies back and forth across the bay before going out of sight. Back at the hotel we discuss our plans for the next couple of days and get packed ready for our first boat trip.

Day 4

With better weather today, we meet Donald and Arthur at Arisaig Marine to start our days charter on the 'Orca.' We get underway and get into the open water where hundreds of Manx Shearwater are on the water. We cross the Sound of Sleat and reach the south end of Eigg where we get into calmer water and slowly go up the east edge of the island. Arthur gives us some local knowledge on the island, 120 residents living there, as we head north into the sun and the sea turns into a mirror image. Sally spots a pair of Red-throated Divers coming beside the boat. As we move to the north end of Eigg a shout from Arthur alerts us to a Minke Whale, we all take to the bow of the boat and watch the water closely for the fin to reappear. Sally spots it up front which most people see before we watch closely for where it might reappear. A minute later and it comes up again close-by the boat and we get a fantastic view of it breaching. Donald tells us an interesting theory that Minke will come up twice then disappear for seven minutes. We give it a few minutes, but it doesn't reappear, so we head on towards Rum, our second island of the day. We are in awe of the size of Rums hills peeking through the clouds when Sally shouts Eagle, as a White-tailed Eagle fly above us making its way south.

Our skipper takes us north towards the Isle of Skye, where we take a route in by Soay Island. Just as Arthur tells us about an Eagle territory, it isn't long until Kate spots an Eagle flying over the hillside. We get close where two birds are soaring before being joined by a third young one. One of the Eagles above the horizon is being mobbed by another smaller raptor, a Peregrine which makes its way over us. Another raptor, a Kestrel, takes the Peregrines place and we watch it and the Eagles before deciding to proceed for lunch. Getting into a sheltered bay, we anchor for lunch as the mist begins to lift. Seals hauled out are basking on the rocks and the sun soon clears to leave a breathtaking views of Skye's Cuillin mountains which dwarf the boat. We have lunch surrounded by the vast mountain sides before anchoring into the coast. Some of us take a short walk to the waterfall and secluded Loch Coruisk to stretch our legs. We see some Greater Sundew and Dragonflies on our wander as we take photos and return to the boat.

Leaving the 'misty island' behind Kate spots a Golden Eagle above one of the Cuillin ridges as it makes its way across the bay above us. What a stunning and memorable anchorage. The panoramic view of the mountain behind us follows us as we make our way back towards Arisaig, but not before we encounter more Manx Shearwater and a second boat leads us to our second Minke Whale of the day. The calm blue water leads us back into the harbour with views of Eigg and Rum and we bid a fond farewell to Donald and Arthur. We now journey to Oban via Fort William to get to our hotel before heading out for dinner overlooking Oban Bay. After we eat, we walk back to our hotel after a long day.

Day 5

It is an early start today but we all get packed and transfer down to the ferry terminal for 6am to catch the ferry that takes us to the island of Coll. We all head to the outside deck for the journey taking us through the Sound of Mull and on to Coll. In the harbour we see Black Guillemots and a scan of the bank Kate spots an Otter rummaging in the seaweed. As the ferry is moving only some of us catch a glimpse. We pass by Duart Castle and Lismore lighthouse, scanning all the while when Kate spots some Harbour Porpoise. Gannets and Kittiwakes are feeding and two Red-throated Divers are further up the sound. Kate spots some Common Dolphins leaping out of the water. We begin to make our way past Tobermory when some more Common Dolphins show well and also a handful of Bottlenose Dolphins which Chris manages to get some superb photos of. Sally spots a large bird sitting on a distant rock, a White-tailed Eagle. We can see Coll on the horizon now and see Manx Shearwater on the way over.

Arriving on Coll, Basking Shark Scotland take our bags and drop us at the pier where we are met by Shane and Jack to start our day on the boat. We get ourselves comfortable and cruise by the Common and Grey Seals before heading towards Tiree. Kate spots a couple of Harbour Porpoise as we head out. Jack gives us a safety talk and chats about our excursions before we arrive at Tiree where we take a wander round the bay for a comfort top. There are Ringed Plover in the bay and Linnets on the grass around the beach.

We cruise away and eat lunch before going towards the Gunna Sound where we see astonishing numbers of Shags, with Great Skua and Great Black-backed Gulls. We circle around Gunna Island, where Jack points out Ringed Plover on the beach and more Seals. We see a Great Skua eating a Guillemot on the water surface. We anchor in the bay and get in the dingy to the island to explore the white sandy beach and stretch our legs. Jack leads the walk as we admire the rock formations, seaweed types, shells and look for birds and any sea life that may be in the shallow water. Oystercatchers are on the beach and a pair of Knot are a nice surprise to fly past. As we walk back and board our boat once again, we enjoy a hot drink and watch as a small flock of summer plumage Sanderling land on the beach we came from. With the day coming to an end, we make our way back, seeing Arctic Skua, terns and Shearwaters before returning to the pier. We tackle the ladder from the boat and walk back to the hotel through the main street of Arinagour, where we meet for dinner and catch up on our bird list.

Day 6

Today begins drizzly but is set to clear as we meet Shane and Jack on the boat for 9.30am. We work our way slowly round the pier where Sally catches a glimpse of a distant Otter, but it doesn't reappear. As we make our way round the ferry pier, Jack points out a beautiful summer Great Northern Diver making its way to shore.

We begin our journey to north Coll where the sea gets choppier, but two Arctic Skuas fly past. We go out into deeper waters to have a chance of any cetaceans or Basking Sharks that might be around. The seas are a little rough,

so we make our way slowly to scan for birds. Thousands of Manx Shearwater, scanning for any that may be Sooty. A Great Skua begins to follow the boat, thinking we have fish, and Jack makes it come close where it almost lands on our heads. Sitting on the water we see a couple of Puffins and Pufflings, who have recently left their breeding grounds to go out to sea for the winter. A pair of Storm Petrels are also picked up as they fly through the waves.

We head back towards calmer waters and into Cairns of Coll, which is a series of small islands in the sound of Coll. As we get closer a big group of Manx Shearwaters take off in front of the boat, creating a cloud of these seabirds around us that is quite mesmerising. We reach our small lagoon where we get onto dry land and another private beach for lunch. Jo wastes no time to go for a swim in the clear turquoise water that looks very inviting. Shane points out the tiny shells of Cowries that are said to bring islanders luck, so we all have a go at doing some beach combing. The sun shines as we have lunch and have a relaxed hour on this beach and Sally and Kate have a paddle too. As we get ready to depart, there are some nosey Seals close, and we hear Red-throated Divers.

We pass the rocks of Shags and single Great Black-backed Gulls and have a hot drink as we return to the east side of Coll. Sally spots two Red-throated Divers, and we watch them as they fly past. Following deeper waters again, we encounter many more rafts of Shearwaters, where Jack explains the amazing migration they undertake to America, down to South America before crossing to west Africa, returning to the west coast next year to breed.

Before dinner, Sally and Kate take a walk with most guests towards the pier for more bird watching. There are flocks of Goldfinch, Lapwing, a Goosander family and Curlew. Jo spots a Whitethroat hopping in the bracken before it perches on a branch for a few moments. Twite and Meadow Pipits also fly around. When we reach the top of the hill, we scan the shore and seaweed for the elusive Otter spotted earlier, but no luck. We head back to the hotel spotting seals and Redpoll on our return. We discuss tomorrow's plan, have dinner and get an early night after another day in the open water.

Day 7

After breakfast we meet Jack outside, who packs our bags into the van to take to the pier. The sun shines as we load the boat and get a group photo. We make our way down the ladder and begin our journey to Oban, seeing seals and Harbour Porpoise on our way out of the bay. We slowly make our way up the side of Coll, scanning the water and land for any possible Hen Harrier. Before we head across the choppy water, we pass another large group of Manx Shearwaters. We make our way across choppiest water where Shane gets us over to Ardnamurchan lighthouse before hugging the shore into Loch Sunart and Kilchoan. We cruise into the bays here looking for any Otter, or raptors that may be along the coastlines. We get into the calm waters past Carna island where a small pod of Porpoise swim past the boat but have no interest in the boat. Sally thinks she sees an Otter so Shane takes us round the bay but none are to be seen. With time ticking on, we head west before

going back into the choppy water to get us across to Mull. Whilst some sensibly take refuge inside, Penny, Kate, Sally and Jack feel the effects of an open boat, testing our waterproofs as the water soaks us. It gives us all a laugh, especially those watching from dry seats. We pull into Tobermory where a short break allows us to use facilities and have lunch whilst we dry off in the sunshine.

We board the boat a final time and continue our way out of Tobermory bay and follow a thin strip of water past Calve island, looking for White-tailed Eagles that have a nest nearby. Scanning all the way along, Kate suddenly spots an adult perched on an ash tree on the edge of the water. We all get prepared as we slowly approach and it sits perfectly for us all to get a fabulous close view and great photos courtesy of Chris. A little further along a second adult is sitting on its "usual" perch but isn't so photogenic. It is great to get so close to an adult from the water.

We now make our way south through the Sound of Mull enjoying the stunning scenery as we see the island from the water, unfortunately we see no cetaceans, like our ferry the other morning. We now turn into Loch Linnhe where ancient oak plantations hug the rocks and is a site known for another Eagle nest. We all have a go at finding the well-hidden, but large nest in one of the trees. Kate shouts "Eagle" as a young one from this year emerges from a tree and proceeds to fly right over us, another great sighting. We pass some more Porpoise on our way across to Lismore Lighthouse and then speed up again to make our final journey into Oban Bay where we say thank you and farewell to the fabulous Basking Shark Scotland crew of Shane and Jack who help us with our bags.

Getting to our hotel, we once again have an evening walk round the bay to our restaurant for the evening before heading to bed after another tiring day in the sea air.

Day 8

Our final day today starts off with an early morning walk in search of Otters. Everybody joins Kate and Sally as we walk along the shore, where Kate spots an Otter from the ferry. We scan the seaweed and water's edge for any movement. Sally shows everyone some great winter and summer plumage Black Guillemots that are abundant in the Oban Bay, as well as Grey Heron. Kate suddenly notices movement in the water and confirms it is an Otter! After watching it in the water fishing it finally emerges onto the seaweed and everybody gets a fantastic and prolonged view as it moves around and rolls in the seaweed. A walk to breakfast this morning to a local café which caters for all diets, and although he is a one man show, the gentleman manages to give all twelve of us a fine breakfast before we get back to the hotel and make our way on our journey, stopping at the shop to pick up lunch.

The sun is shining, and we have clear views all the way to Loch Tay where we follow the shores of the loch and stop in at Kenmore for a comfort stop by 1pm, before heading over the Tummel road. Kate stops in at Loch Kinardochy in hope of some wildfowl there, Tufted Duck are seen, and Peter

gets a close view of a Scotch Argus butterfly. Keen to get to Trinafour moor for lunch, Sally pushes on and we stop overlooking moorland for a spot of lunch. We watch Kestrel and Red Deer, but we head on out of the wind. We stop at the bottom of the road to search the river for any Dipper before continuing onto the A9 towards Aviemore. We decide to stretch our legs in a wood, but first stop in at Loch Insh where two of the three Osprey chicks are perched. They will soon be departing for Africa, but they give us all welcome views as a nice extra bird for our week.

We stop finally at Uath Lochans, where we take a walk, finding Wren, Treecreeper, Robin and lots of interesting fungi and flowers that Kate points out. We hear some Crossbill flying overhead and Yvonne spots one that had been drinking from the water. It feels good to stretch our legs and take in some sights of Strathspey before we head back to Inverness for our final evening.

After dinner we all manage to find a quiet corner and relive our full and exciting week. Highlights of the week included the thousands of Manx Shearwater, White-tailed Eagles, Dolphins, Otter and Minke Whale with many miles travelled on land and sea, and 11 different islands visited.

Islands Visited

Eigg	Skye	Tiree
Rum	Coll	Gunna
Cairns of Coll	Carna	Lismore
Mull	Eorsa	

Species of the Trip

Marilyn	Minke Whale/Golden Eagle
Yvonne	Golden Eagle/raptors
Steve	Golden Eagle
Janette	Minke Whale
Peter	White-tailed Eagle/Scotch Argus Butterfly
Jo	Manx Shearwater
Chris	Manx Shearwater/ Dolphins
Christine	Dolphins
Penny	White-tailed Eagle/Otter
Keith	Great Skua/Manx Shearwater
Sally	Manx Shearwater
Kate	Manx Shearwater

Place of the Trip

Marilyn	Coll
Yvonne	Cairns of Coll beach
Steve	Skye/ Isle of Gunna
Janette	Gunna Beach
Peter	Skye
Jo	Cairns of Coll lagoon
Chris	Coll
Christine	Skye
Penny	Skye anchorage
Keith	Skye
Sally	Skye/ Loch Coruisk
Kate	Skye and Loch Coruisk anchorage

Magic Moment

Marilyn	Common Dolphins beside the ferry
Yvonne	Great Skua chasing the boat
Steve	Mass of Manx Shearwaters
Janette	Dolphins following the ferry
Peter	Manx Shearwaters
Jo	Manx Shearwaters
Chris	Manx Shearwater cloud / White-tailed Eagle being chased by gull
Christine	Jack the skipper Great Skua following boat
Penny	Manx Shearwaters flying off/ having the giggles getting soaked on the boat
Keith	Raft of close Manx Shearwaters
Sally	Manx Shearwater eruption
Kate	Close Minke Whale beside the boat

Birds

Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Mallard
Tufted Duck
Eider
Red-breasted Merganser
Red-throated Diver
Great Northern Diver
Little Grebe
Fulmar
Manx Shearwater
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Grey Heron
White-tailed Eagle
Golden Eagle
Hen Harrier
Common Buzzard
Kestrel
Peregrine
Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
Lapwing
Knot
Sanderling
Turnstone
Dunlin
Redshank
Curlew
Great Skua
Arctic Skua
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Puffin
Black Guillemot
Guillemot
Razorbill
Rock Dove
Collared Dove
Swift
Swallow
House Martin
Sand Martin
Rock Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Robin
Wheatear
Stonechat
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Blackbird
Willow Warbler
Wren
Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Linnet
Twite
Redpoll
Wood Pigeon
Canada Goose
Red Kite
Sparrowhawk
Slavonian Grebe
Grey Wagtail
Pheasant
Carrion Crow
Coal Tit
Goldfinch
Blue Tit
Goosander
Whitethroat
Storm Petrel
Osprey
Crossbill sp.
(86)

Mammals

Otter

Common Dolphin

Bottle-nosed Dolphin

Harbour Porpoise

Minke Whale

Red Deer

Common Seal

Grey Seal

Sika Deer

(9)

Other

Common Blu Damselfly

Speckled Wood Butterfly

Scotch Argus Butterfly

Ringlet

Fly Agaric

Chanterelle

Lions Mane Jellyfish

Migrant Hawker

Moon Jellyfish

Cowrie shells

Small White Butterfly

(11)