

# HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

## MULL & SPEYSIDE SUMMER

11-21 June 2011

**Guides:** Chrissie Nicholson and Craig Round

**Guests:** John Britton, June Roy, Audrey Cowie, Valerie & Peter Lloyd, Carolyn Channing, Sue & Alan Ripley, Barbara Weeks

**Day 1** As we all arrive at the Steading, our home for the first four nights, showers of rain greet us. With some guests arriving earlier than others the opportunity to walk by the river is taken up where they see Common Sandpipers, Tree Pipits and for some an Osprey fly by, a great start. We all settle down for our first meal of the holiday, followed by tea/coffee where Chrissie and Craig describe the activities for the trip ahead. Tired after a long day travelling we head to bed.

**Day 2** The morning sunshine is welcome today, with dew on the grass and low mist in the valley, a spectacular sight to behold on our first day out and about. We call in on an Osprey nest and as we watch the female on the edge of the nest we are sure we see movement and sure enough as the scopes are trained on the nest a tiny punk style head peers over the edge, definitely one chick has hatched, great stuff, we watch for more heads but only one appears whilst we are here. The male comes in and sits on the edge of the nest while the female tries to snap branches off the trees surrounding the nest, what a sight! Whilst watching this, a Blackcap is singing intently and a Willow Warbler and Robin are catching insects to take back to their young, such a busy wee place.

Driving away over the moorland to visit a loch, we find a pair of Black-throated Divers swimming around and watch as two Ospreys fish, they are both unsuccessful, but great to watch. We could hear a lot of commotion in the water and realised three children are swimming across the loch to the ruin in the middle, very brave the temperature of the water could not have been that warm!! We drive past and they are now out of the water shivering!! Driving along Craig spots Siskin feeding on the cotton grass, Common Sandpipers flit along the loch edge and the odd Redshank pipe by, what an amazing morning.

Lunch time calls and we head to Broomhill Bridge, Sand Martins are numerous, flying up and down the river catching insects on the wing, and a juvenile Pied Wagtail also joins us for a wee while. After our delicious

lunch we head to the forest, but before we go on our walk Craig spots something in the water, as we stop and get telescopes ready, he has seen an Otter on the Loch.... how fantastic, Chrissie has heard so much about this Otter, but has never seen it, but today that changed!! Fantastic, the whole group watch this Otter as it fishes on the far side of the Loch, a much unexpected sight as it is early afternoon! We move around and start our walk in the forest keeping the loch in view, we spot a Mallard with nine ducklings and Common Sandpipers call and land on a dead stump on the water's edge, a great photo opportunity. We try to find the Otter again but to no avail, it has gone. Walking through the forest we hear a Redstart calling and then Chrissie spots the bird on top of a tree just off shore, so we all enjoy the view of this beautiful bird out in the open singing away.

The night is fine, but windy, we enjoy dinner and set out for the Wildlife Hide, the day is not over yet. Patiently we settle in, Barbara is the first to see a mammal, it is a Roe Deer walking across the top of the bund. As we wait a Field Mouse feeds on the nuts out the front and eventually a Badger appears, it is a sow and she obviously has cubs back in the Sett, so she feeds quietly and then leaves, we decide to leave shortly after her, sadly no Pine Martens tonight. With the day finished we cannot complain, it has been fabulous.

### Day 3

Today the weather has changed and it is raining and the cloud is low over the mountains, but the Chaffinches never seem to weary with the weather and they sing their songs quite cheerily. We head to the Black Isle where we tuck into Sharon's shortbread and coffee, then head to the point and what a sight greets us! We watch feeding Hurries with Guillemot, Razorbill, Gulls, Manx Shearwaters, and Gannets, they are out at sea then hundreds start passing by us up into the Moray Firth, it is an incredible sight at least 20 Manx Shearwaters pass to and fro, Gannets are really close by, the sight of all these birds feeding is amazing. We have never seen so many birds pass the point in such a short space of time, in spring or autumn; we are all amazed as there are no Dolphins to be seen!! Obviously there is plenty of food for the birds, so we scan for a fin and just as we are climbing in the vans to go, Sue shouts 'Fin, I saw a fin!' So everyone gets back out to scan and sure enough two Bottle-nosed Dolphins appear close to shore, what an amazing morning. We do not go away disappointed!! Although we are a wee bit wet!

With lunch time comes fairer weather and at Udale Bay an Osprey is being mobbed, so it flies off. Another one is spotted on a nearby fence post so telescopes are put up and everybody has a great view before it flies off. Whilst lunch is eaten, we all listen to Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer and Whitethroat, and most of us watch them also. We then watch an Osprey

fishing, it dives but does not catch anything and gives up after being mobbed by gulls. The afternoon is over and we head home for another sumptuous dinner, checklists and coffee.

#### Day 4

It is a sunny day and the clouds are clearing quite quickly off the mountain tops, which is good as we are walking today. A couple have decided to stay at the Steading and explore the surroundings, so we leave them to it and head to the mountain. On our way Craig stops quickly as an Osprey fly's over the nearby loch, but it is not long before it is out of sight so we continue.

We take our time and slowly walk up the Northern Corries stopping to admire the stunning scenery and take photographs, as we can see for miles, such a clear day and mild, there is wee breeze but it is welcome. Chrissie is up front but not going fast at all, making sure no one is too far behind. When we get to the top we have lunch before scanning for Dotterel/Ptarmigan, it is a welcome sit down for all. Craig takes a detour and finds a female Ptarmigan, Chrissie spots a male Dotterel, so after lunch we watch the Dotterel from a safe distance and Craig tries to find the Ptarmigan but it has moved, that will go down as 'a dodgy leader tick', we do not see Ptarmigan but everyone is really happy as they made it to the top and got Dotterel, all we have to do now is walk back down... This also takes a time, but we are all looking forward to our cups of tea and a rest before our dinner. Well done to all, shattered but triumphant, what a fantastic day with fabulous weather!

#### Day 5

The second part of our holiday starts today, as we drive to Oban to catch the ferry to Mull.

As we drive we pass through showers and low cloud, not able to see the top of Ben Nevis today, (again). By the time we get to Oban the rain has stopped and it is looking fair for our crossing. The harbour is the home to Black Guillemots and this is a first for a few, with their bright red feet and white wing patches, cute little birds.

The crossing only takes 45 minutes and it feels like no time at all that we are driving off the ferry onto Mull. We head along the island to a spot Craig and Chrissie know quite well. We spot three Red Deer on the edge of the woodland and then a huge Stag with great velvet covered antlers appears from behind the hedge line, not bothered at all by the vans and the cameras clicking through the open windows, it just keeps munching away undeterred, fabulous. We reach a parking area and Chrissie spots two Red-throated Divers on the estuary, Skylarks and Whitethroat are singing nearby and Craig shouts Snipe, as it flies high displaying in flight, great stuff. The highlight is yet to come as Craig finds a White-tailed Sea Eagle sitting in a tree, trying

to explain where it is so everyone can see it is a challenge, but eventually all are watching this magnificent bird sitting proud in the tree. We drive a wee bit closer but as we do, Chrissie and her van see it fly off and it is out of sight. Craig's van is ahead and he misses the flight, it is a massive bird to see flying.

Further along we stop for Red-breasted Merganser, Buzzard and a female Hen Harrier is spotted flying high, then a Peregrine comes swooping over the hill and we lose it, so quick! This is all within half an hour from getting off the ferry, what a place, it never disappoints... After this short burst of activity we head for the hotel to get folk settled in and arrange dinner time.

## Day 6

Our schedule on Mull is a busy one and our first day is heading out on the boat to the Treshnish Isles. The weather is sunny and warm with a slight breeze which pleases all. The hotel grounds are full of bird song, Swallows, Blackcap, Greenfinch and Oystercatcher down by the shore before we even have breakfast.

As we make our way along to catch the boat, there are Red-throated Divers on the sea loch and Craig spots a White-tailed Sea Eagle and as Chrissie puts her scope up she also has White-tailed Sea Eagle? The guests look through Craig's scope then Chrissie's and June says 'you are looking at different birds'..... Sure enough Chrissie has an adult with a yellow wing tag 'L' and Craig is looking at a juvenile, wow, what a sight, without knowing they found different birds. What a start to the day. A Kestrel hunts over the distant hill, whilst Oystercatchers are on the shore. As we drive off a Sparrowhawk flies past both vans and as we look at a bird on the telephone wire, Chrissie is shocked as she shouts 'Common Sandpiper' which is a very unusual sight for all, usually they are on the ground, stumps or shore, but never seen one on a wire before.

We arrive at the landing in plenty of time to enjoy a coffee and get ready for our trip out. Two Shelduck and three Heron fly by. The boat is full and we set off in calm waters and blue sky it is incredible weather looking out across the sea to our first destination, Staffa. By the time we get out there the sea is a wee bit choppy and the skipper tells us we cannot land as the swell is too high, so he bobs around like a cork so folk can get photos of Fingals Cave and the island.

After not too long we are heading out to Lunga where we will land and Chrissie cannot wait to get off the boat!!, but landing on the boulder beach is not as easy as we thought. We have to be very careful walking across the boulders; we do not want any accidents. Eventually we all gather together and take a wee walk up to Puffin City, what a sight to behold us, hundreds of Puffins on the island edge, just going about their business undisturbed

by folk lying flat on their stomachs for the perfect shot, an amazing sight. We all enjoy our lunch in the warm island sunshine and amongst the Puffins, listen to some calling from the burrows, or some flying in with sand eels or collecting grass to refresh their burrows, no one can believe how close these wee birds are and they are a magical experience for all. Some folks walk on to the gulley trying to photograph Fulmars as they soar in with the wind, but find it's harder than it looks, as moving objects are never easy to photograph. The views from the island are fantastic with blue sky and sea, white waves crashing up against the island shore, a truly fabulous day. On our way back to the boat we hear a Storm Petrel calling from a rocky outcrop, another amazing sound, so cute and bubbly, it is unusual to hear them through the day time, but brilliant all the same. Our journey back is enjoyed up on the higher deck in the wind and sunshine; we sail around some of the islands and watch Common Seals as they frolic in the sea. Great Skuas and Greater Black-backed Gulls patrol the smaller islands hoping to find an easy meal.

As we near the landing area a White-tailed Sea Eagle is spotted on a nearby island and we all get a fantastic view of it as it fly's right over our heads, it is immense, there are camera's clicking, but some just enjoy the spectacle, we get off the boat with smiles on our faces, remembering the island of Lunga and Puffin City in fabulous sunshine, so much for Chrissie telling all to wear plenty layers!! We are very lucky today..... we head back to the hotel for a hot cup of tea and freshen up before dinner.

## Day 7

After breakfast Chrissie scans the water outside the hotel and spots some Dolphins, quickly she runs to reception, but no guests are there to tell, so it will be another 'dodgy leader tick'!! There is a lot more cloud today and before we set off it starts raining. We drive along the valley to 'Twitch' a Roller, which Craig has been informed is around, we watch and chat to folk and find it has not been seen that day, so we all 'dip' on a Roller. Reports later in the day tell us it has not been seen at all, phew!

Although we do not see a Roller, we do get a cracking view of a Grasshopper Warbler, a first for some guests, unusually these birds do not sit out in the open and are not seen but heard in the undergrowth. How fantastic it is to actually see this bird reeling its song on top of the shrubs, amazing. Driving back for a coffee stop, Chrissie and John have a brief glimpse of an Otter, but no one else sees this secretive creature.

Driving around the loch sides we see Whinchat, Stonechat and meet a herd of cows in the middle of the road which do not really want to move, eventually we edge our way through them to then meet the Bull, oops! Glad to see it is not interested in our vans...

We stop at the end of the road and scan from there, not much about as the rain has still not stopped. We are defeated and head back to the hotel, Chrissie and Carolyn make use of the leisure facilities, it is nice to relax!

## Day 8

We are travelling to Iona today, Chrissie's van sees a White-tailed Sea Eagle flying over and away over the woods, a good start. Along the lochside we spot Common Sandpiper, Oystercatcher, Grey Heron and flying over the forest along the Glen are Sparrowhawk and a male Hen Harrier, a majestic bird to watch quartering and then out of sight. Over the mountains Craig sees two Sea Eagles, we stop the vans and jump out to watch as these two birds fly high then tumble downwards, with one bird turning upside down with talons reaching out to the other bird, wow this is a fabulous sight for all to see, this makes our total Sea Eagles 12 for the trip.

Getting ourselves ready to catch the ferry across to Iona, everyone is quite excited about visiting this special island. As we go to get on the ferry everyone is very happy as someone spots Dolphins in the channel between the mainland and the island. So all aboard we head up deck to get better views of these Bottle-nosed Dolphins fishing in the channel, cameras are clicking and binoculars are raised, what an unexpected sight, fabulous, all before we get on the island.

We walk along the road and hear our first birds, Corncrakes, they are calling in amongst the Iris and nettle patches in the field, not to be seen though.... Walking further on we get to a lovely beach for lunch, there are only two other people here so it is very peaceful, well it would be if the sheep would stop?? In the bay we find female Eiders and ducklings, Red-breasted Mergansers, Ringed Plovers and Dunlin and the sun tries to appear. Walking back towards the Abbey, Sedge Warbler gives a great song and show from a telephone wire? Nearer to the Abbey, Corncrakes start calling again, this one is just below us in the Iris/Nettle bed but again not to be seen. Most wander on eager to look around the Abbey, etc., but John stays patiently behind and is rewarded with views of the Corncrake which he is able to photograph and show the group when we meet up for the ferry. Well done John! We all return having had a great day on a magical island, dinner, checklists and nobody stays up late, all this fresh air makes folk tired.

## Day 9

From the hotel this morning the mist is low over the hills, we can see sea, land, cloud, and hill topped again with cloud, quite a typical scene on Mull early morning. It dries nicely whilst we are enjoying breakfast. Driving out again along the shores we watch Common Seals hauled out on the rocks in their banana shape pose enjoying the rest.

Common Sandpipers are the most numerous birds on Mull; every shore line has them, incredible. As we stop a White-tailed Sea Eagle is seen in a tree at the back of the car park, wow, what a sight. It's a female with a yellow wing tag 'O', very visible. We watch but she does not move far, then the male is spotted out in the channel it swoops down, catches a fish and flies directly towards us and over the back, this is an incredible sight such, a huge bird, we watch as it goes out and returns three times, each time getting closer above us. We are mesmerised and do not want to leave, but once it stops fishing we decide to go, there is still a lot to see yet!!

Driving around the bay we stop for comfort and a scan, Craig sees a Golden Eagle flying above the ridge, this island is full of raptors, everyone sees this bird as it rises above the ridge then drops behind and then raises again, fantastic views for all. We can hear Red-throated divers calling on the loch, but they are tucked in behind a rise then suddenly they appear, there are three all swimming together and calling. What a day this is!

The road goes upward and we pull in well off the road for lunch, the sun is shining and the views are tremendous. Before lunch is out of the bags Craig has spotted two Golden Eagles sitting on a tree on the side of a cliff, so lunch is delayed while everyone gets a fantastic view of these magnificent birds sitting still for a change! We watch them all lunch time; they fly along the ridge and out of sight and then back again, what a nice way to spend lunch.

We hear Twite flying over and drive down out through the forests, as we stop there is a party of Common Crossbills flying in the nearby Larch trees feeding, telescopes are on a group of six birds, two brightly coloured males and four females, amazing. We travel a wee bit further and there is a Sea Eagle nest in the trees visible from a good distance away, we find two well grown chicks in the nest with the female standing beside them, what a sight, this bird has succeeded this year, great news.

Moving along the loch shore we get the notion an Otter may be about as there are lots of folks with cameras and camouflage gear right on the shore!! We drive into the car park and get out quietly and head to the shore. We all sit low and watch and wait, not before long the Otter is spotted and it climbs right out of the water just metres away and feeds on a fish, making sure everyone gets a view in the scopes, we watch in awe, so close.... We watch as it disappears back into the water and start fishing again, we see it come up and go down just as quick, bubbles reminding us where it is. It must have been spooked by the folk on the shore and we see it again a lot further along the shore swimming away. We are lucky

to see what we did and the guests are thrilled, this is one thing a lot wanted to see! The sun is now shining and it is warm at last, shame our last full day on the island is at an end. We return to the hotel for dinner, packing and checklists.

## Day 10

All packed and ready to go, we head to Tobermory for a couple of hours last minute shopping, walking and coffee. All in different directions, Craig meets Chrissie for coffee before leaving, but he does not really want coffee as there is a Peregrine sitting on one of the spires on the church in the middle of the High Street, incredible. Chrissie steps out to see, amazing; it is not in the least bit bothered by the folk below taking photos. Craig has his photos so we do have coffee, but Peter is out of his seat and away, what a sight!

We leave the Peregrine and the island on the Fishnish ferry and then drive to the Corran Ferry, we stop for lunch in a picnic area, the sun shines and it is glorious. After lunch we head back, going through Fort William is a treat today as the whole of the Nevis Range is visible, so Chrissie eventually sees the top of Ben Nevis what a sight! We arrive back at the Steading so folk can spend some moments with the Red Squirrel and Ospreys, before having our final dinner and checklists, but not forgetting the Magic Moments.

## Day 11

We all depart for home at different times, its drizzling so with fond farewells, we leave another fabulous Speyside/Mull adventure.

**Species of the Trip:** White-tailed Sea Eagle, Puffin, Grasshopper Warbler, Dotterel, Red Squirrel, Crossbill and Common Sandpiper.

**Place of the Trip:** The winner is Iona, followed by Mull itself, Lunga and surroundings, Chanonry Point with the numerous birds seen.

**Magic Moments:** Listening and seeing Corncrake, Otter at Loch Garten, two Golden Eagles sitting side by side, tracking Sea Eagle on telescope, Sea Eagle flying off rock in front of boat, Otter on the shore, Osprey and chick at nest, Abbey on Iona, Salen last day, Iona having tea!!

## BIRDS

Red-throated Diver  
Black-throated Diver  
Slavonian Grebe  
Fulmar  
Manx Shearwater  
Storm Petrel (H)  
Gannet  
Cormorant  
Shag  
Grey Heron  
Mute Swan  
Greylag Goose  
Shelduck  
Wigeon  
Mallard  
Tufted Duck  
Eider  
Goldeneye  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Goosander  
White-tailed Sea Eagle  
Hen Harrier  
Sparrowhawk  
Common Buzzard  
Golden Eagle  
Osprey  
Kestrel  
Merlin  
Peregrine  
Red Grouse  
Ptarmigan (DLT)  
Pheasant  
Corncrake  
Oystercatcher  
Ringed Plover  
Dotterel  
Lapwing  
Dunlin  
Snipe  
Woodcock  
Curlew  
Redshank  
Common Sandpiper  
Great Skua  
Black-headed Gull  
Common Gull  
Lesser-Black-backed Gull  
Kittiwake  
Common Tern  
Arctic Tern  
Guillemot  
Razorbill  
Black Guillemot  
Puffin  
Rock Dove  
Woodpigeon  
Collared Dove  
Cuckoo (H)  
Tawny Owl (H)  
Swift  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Skylark  
Sand Martin  
Swallow  
House Martin  
Tree Pipit  
Meadow Pipit  
Rock Pipit  
Pied Wagtail  
Wren  
Dunnock  
Robin  
Redstart  
Whinchat  
Stonechat  
Wheatear  
Ring Ouzel (H)  
Blackbird  
Song Thrush  
Mistle Thrush  
Grasshopper Warbler  
Sedge Warbler  
Whitethroat  
Blackcap  
Willow Warbler  
Goldcrest

Spotted Flycatcher  
Long-tailed Tit  
Coal Tit  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Jackdaw  
Rook  
Carrion Crow  
Hooded Crow  
Raven  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Greenfinch  
Goldfinch  
Siskin  
Linnet  
Twite  
Redpoll  
Common Crossbill

Bullfinch  
Yellowhammer  
Reed Bunting  
Jay

**Total Birds: 110**

#### **MAMMALS**

Wood Mouse  
Red Squirrel  
Rabbit  
Brown Hare  
Otter  
Badger  
Red Deer  
Roe Deer  
Bottlenose Dolphin  
Common Seal  
Grey Seal

**Total Species: 121**