

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

LADIES MULL

6-13 August 2011

Leader: Chrissie Nicholson

Guests: Marion Noy, Agnes Kay, Barbara and Julie Nessling, Diana Taylor, Marie Burley

Day 1 We all meet at the ferry terminal in Oban with showers greeting us. When we begin our journey across to Mull the showers clear and the views are spectacular, we can see the top of Ben More and the mountain range. The crossing is so calm and the reflections nearer to the shore are brilliant in the evening light. We settle into our rooms and enjoy an evening meal then run through the programme for the week ahead, then after a long day we retire to our rooms.

Day 2 After our breakfast with a view looking across the bay to the ferry coming and going, it is dull and raining a wee bit and we head out for our first day on Mull. Driving along the coast and stopping for a scan, Chrissie spots a Ring-tailed Hen Harrier quartering over the fields across the bay, what a great start. We park up and put on our waterproofs for a wee walk down to the point. Before we get to the bay an Otter is spotted, wow, so picking up the pace and having a building to hide our approach, we get down to the shore. The otter is fishing and not at all bothered by our presence. Whilst watching her fishing another one pops up beside her and then another, what a sight!! A mother and two cubs, they are calling all the time now, we don't know which way to look as one appears right out on the rocks and walks along the top still calling for its mother, she is the other way! Still listening and watching this spectacle of an Otter family we are mesmerised and cannot believe our luck. Amazing. The rain has stopped although with all of the activity we are watching no one actually notices. Walking back along the road in our excitement, Buzzards fly from the trees with Swallows swooping catching insects, feeding up for their journey ahead. Meadow Pipits are numerous and are flying from the road side into the verge it must have been a good breeding season for them this year.

Calling back at Craignure for facilities and checking out the information centre, we are ready to journey on for a coffee break. Stopping along a loch side, juvenile Whinchats flit around on top of the bracken. Goldcrests call

from the canopy, but it is not easy to see them. The scenery along the valley is fantastic, Red Deer are spotted up on the hillside on the other side of the loch and with the telescope up everyone sees these deer well with more being picked up as we watch.

Driving on to end of the loch, the sun comes out, it is beautiful. A Golden Eagle is sitting on the top of the mountain in the distance silhouetted against the blue sky, great stuff, and as we watch it fly off over the ridge and away. Walking along the shore Goldfinch feed on the thistle heads and give us all a brilliant view, only being disturbed by a family walking towards us. Chrissie hears Red-throated Divers calling on the loch and the group stops to look, the sound is magical echoing around the bay. Another shower is approaching so we retreat quickly back to the van for a quick cuppa and then leave. On our way back along the road, a Black Guillemot is on the loch and then out from the hillside a White-tailed Sea Eagle flies over, and as Chrissie drives along the road trying to get everyone to see this magnificent bird, it flies between the trees and over the road and disappears over the hill with only a few seeing this massive bird. Not a mile along the road, a Sparrowhawk with prey in its talons flies right across the road and into the forest and luckily everyone sees this bird, phew! We then watch another Ring-tailed Hen Harrier, what a fabulous first day! We eventually get back to the hotel, for dinner and checklists.

Day 3

Today the sun is shining and we are off to the Treshnish Isles, before getting to the boat, we stop at a few places, the first produces Common Seals, a flock of Rock Doves and Hooded Crows down on the shore line. Driving further along, Canada and Greylag Geese are feeding in separate fields. A Sparrowhawk flies in front of the van and off into the woods. Stopping for a short scan, a juvenile White-tailed Sea Eagle is spotted on the edge of the forest calling; we can hear two birds calling but can only spot the one. Then an adult Sea Eagle flies right over head and the wing span and white-tail are silhouetted against the blue sky with brilliant views for all. It flies to the forest edge but has no food for the juvenile, who is still calling. Its' amazing how this huge bird can land on the edge of a tree and not snap the branch, and also be hard to spot against the tree where we see it land.

Driving along to the ferry landing, there is a feeding flock of Coal, Blue and Great Tits and Chaffinches are flitting amongst the shrubs on the edge of the road. Time is getting on and we have a boat to catch and coffee to have before we go. Parking up, it is so windy even getting out of the vehicle is quite a challenge, but hiding behind the bus we make coffee and get ourselves ready for the boat trip to the Treshnish Isles.

The skipper warns us it is going to be choppy and if anyone is prone to sea sickness they could go another day? But we are all in agreement to go, so off we set.

It is calm in amongst the islands, but it is not long before the sea gets a wee bit rougher and the upper deck slowly clears of folk as they are getting soaked with the spray. Determined not to go inside three intrepid ladies (Chrissie, Barbara and Agnes) stay out the whole journey, and yes they are drenched but what a laugh they have..... We travel out to sea first and head straight for Lunga which Chrissie thinks is a good plan, even though it is rough, we have to hang on at times.

Eventually arriving at Lunga's sheltered waters, we disembark, a bit dishevelled and some of us wet through! We head up to the top of the island for lunch, the sun is shining and the wind is blowing so clothes are drying quite quickly. The scene is amusing for some. Some set off to explore the island a bit further and others set back down for the shore slowly and steadily, stopping for photos. On the shore line Shag's sit not at all bothered that we are there. A few Puffins are flying around but most have gone to sea now. Great Skuas are cruising around looking for an easy meal, and checking us out closely. The weather is spectacular considering a few are soaked? Returning to the boat, we are off again, this time to Staffa and Fingals Cave. The waters around the cave are quite sheltered considering and we are able to land, but only one guest gets off, the sight of the steps up to the top of Staffa or the rocky path around to the cave put a lot of folk off after the eventful landing on Lunga. So some opt to stay on the boat and float around the base of the cliffs. Amazingly a Whimbrel flies by, and then an Arctic Skua starts chasing a Tern with determination and skill, we watch in amazement. So it is not uneventful staying on the boat. After everyone returns to the boat we set off on our last journey back to the mainland, on the way we watch Kittiwakes and Gannets diving in front of the boat and the most fabulous rainbow appears, so cameras are out and it is a great end to a great day, we are all gasping for a cup of tea and our dinner at the hotel.

Day 4

A beautiful blue sky and sunshine greets us at our breakfast, we are all quite excited as this is our Iona day. We collect our packed lunches and flasks and set off. Driving along through the mountains, Chrissie spots a Short-eared Owl flying up off the road side and stops immediately in a safe place. We all jump out of the van for a good look. It has gone behind a hill, but then reappears, describing where it is on the hillside takes some doing, but eventually everyone gets onto this beautiful bird quartering over the hillside.

The ferry is in as we arrive, and with no time for coffee we rush on board. As the ferry sets off a call of Dolphin is made and to our delight we watch a school of Bottle-nose Dolphins leaping out of the water and swimming away from the ferry, wow, what a start to our day.

Arriving on the island we have a coffee before we set off on our walk across the island. The sun is shining and layers are discarded, the temperature increases and the wind is cooling. We see families of Meadow Pipits, Wheatears, and when we reach the bay, Eiders and Ringed Plovers. The edge of the bay looks inviting with a bit of shelter from the wind, what a lunch spot!! We are joined by Wheatears as they feed on the flies sheltering from the wind also, they are great to watch as they jump up and down catching the insects, making us all laugh. It is a lovely day, the sun comes out for our lunch break, Chrissie cannot resist the clear blue waters, so off she went for a plodge!! Socks and shoes off, she couldn't persuade any of the ladies to join her. Cold at first but then, ah bliss!!

We walk back to towards the Abbey and everyone enjoys some time wandering around the ruins, sitting in the sun and enjoying another coffee. It is a magical day, a very peaceful place to be. The ferry journey back is good, but no Dolphins this time. Driving back through the mountains we watch two Golden Eagles soaring along the ridge for a wee while and then over the mountains and away. Dinner is good and we recap our day for the checklists. Everyone now has a wee bit colour in their cheeks after two good weather days.

Day 5

After looking out of the window before breakfast, it does not look good, the fine weather has gone and it is pouring down, and has been most of the night, but undeterred we tog up after breakfast and off we go. One good thing today is that we have done our boat trips and we are thankful for that. Rain does not deter the birds though, driving along we watch Swallows, House Martins and Meadow Pipits still feeding in the bad weather.

The Salen show is setting up for tomorrow, not a good start for that! Oystercatchers and Curlews are feeding on the shores as we drive by. It is definitely a driving day and when we stop for coffee we have the shelter of the van tailgate, (pew). Julie spots a White-tailed Sea Eagle sitting in a tree on the edge of a forest, we must say a very wet Eagle, the telescope could not focus through the mist, but binoculars are better to pick out the bird. While we watch, another bird flies from behind the forest and on the edge of the tree line too. Great spot!!

Driving slowly around the shores, the waterfalls are spectacular gushing over the hillsides and down to the shore, even the wee streams are torrents, and cameras capture some amazing photos. There is not much flying now, we search for a sheltered spot for lunch and find one down a forest track, well, as sheltered as we could get today!! Some do not venture out of the van but others brave it and again use the tailgate as shelter. Goldcrests call again from the canopy, keeping us cheerful on this driech day.

As we drive around the coast the tide is rising and we are hoping to spot an otter, but not today! As we arrive back at the hotel, surprisingly the sun comes out so we decide to venture out for a wee walk. On our walk a Buzzard takes to the skies and our family of Meadow Pipits are calling and flying along the road. Still searching for Otters, we are to be disappointed as the folk staying at the cottage don wetsuits and go for a swim; no Otters would be about today..... The rain comes on again and we return to the hotel for our dinner and checklists.

Day 6

It is another wet morning that greets us at breakfast, but we are not going far today. Tobermory is our destination for the morning and once there the drizzle starts to ease and the blue sky is appearing. After our shopping and coffee stops, we head back to the hotel for our Spa afternoon.

Meeting at reception we head down to the Spa, most of us are having a back and shoulder massage, Marion is having a pedicure, so she is first for the treatment. Others sit and relax or go for a swim and sauna, etc., how lovely. The champagne, strawberries and cream are well received. Although we keep the Champagne till dinner time because one lady does not come into the Spa and we do not want her to miss out.

Dinner time comes and whilst we are completing the sandwich choices for the next day, and deciding when we should open the bottle, the top explodes off with a bang and we have Champagne everywhere, the sandwich list is soaked and the table is a wee bit wet also, but what a laugh and a shock we got.... we think the bottle had its say in when it was to be opened. Still laughing the barman pours our Champagne so as not to waste anymore!!!! Chrissie gets another list for sandwiches and we go into the dining room trying not to cause any more trouble..... Even during checklists we are still chuckling about the bottle.... What a day, we are certainly relaxed at bed time.

Day 7

We cannot believe how quick the week has gone and so we get ready for our last day on Mull. We are exploring a different part of the island today, off we go, it's a grey day and spitting a wee bit, but driving around we first

see 13 Common Seals doing their banana pose basking up on the rocks, there are also Red-breasted Mergansers, Oystercatchers, Herons and Hooded Crows all along the shore. On the inland fishing lochs a Dabchick is spotted, and then a Golden Eagle is glimpsed coming towards us then disappearing as quickly behind the hillock. Stopping along the road trying to find the Eagle, Chrissie spots another bird but again it doesn't stop! Still searching, the other bird reappears and it is a Short-eared Owl hunting quite close by. It flies closer and closer then dives into the grass, flying back up it has caught a vole, and subsequently flies away out of sight to eat in peace, a fantastic view though.

Stopping en-route for photographs of bays, Ravens fly overhead. We call at the facilities before having coffee, we are very lucky to get parked though, it is a busy wee car park. Coffee is enjoyed looking over the white sands and sheltering from the showers. Walking along the track the sun comes out and the track side is covered in wild flowers, Hemp Agrimony, Ragged Robin, Grass of Parnassus to name a few, the colours are fabulous. Looking out to sea the shades are coming and going with the sunshine, the different sea weed colours shine through the water and on the rocky shore. Ravens, Buzzards and Hooded Crows fly overhead, whilst Wheatears feed amongst the rocks and sea weed. With the showers gone, looking back inshore the sea is turquoise and deep blue, the sand white, fields green and trees are looking ready to change, but it is so quiet and peaceful, just the birds and water lapping against the rocky shore, do we have to go!! We have left our lunch in the van so yes, we did!

As we drive back along the coast Julie shouts, 'fins, Stop!' so Chrissie pulls up at the next parking bay and we all jump out, sure enough Julie has found us a group of Harbour Porpoise, we reckon five to six swimming close to shore feeding, fantastic, what a spot! We watch them for quite a while; there are also some further out swimming away, but very distant so we concentrate on the ones close by, amazing.

Calling in at our favourite point, Red Deer are grazing in the fields and easy to see today. Again it is quiet and the rain starts again, we do not want to get too wet for packing, so we head back to the hotel for our final meal and checklists, now including our Magic Moments, what a choice.

SPECIES OF THE TRIP: Short-eared Owl comes out tops, as it is a first for most, White-tailed Sea Eagle, Otter and Heron come next.

PLACE OF THE TRIP: Calgary Bay is a clear winner, with Grasspoint and Iona joint next.

MAGIC MOMENTS: Barbara has the best: - looking out of her bedroom window and seeing the mother Otters tail disappearing and two cubs following close behind, calling. WOW! The others follow with the Otter family we saw on our first day, the sight and sounds of this will be etched on our memories. Seeing the Short-eared Owl with prey is also a recorded moment.

Day 8

We have an early breakfast and then head for our ferry back to Oban, from there we all go our separate ways, wishing all a safe journey home, and hope to see again in the future.

BIRDS

Red-throated Diver
Little Grebe
Fulmar
Arctic Tern
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Grey Heron
Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Mallard
Eider
Red-breasted Merganser
Goosander
White-tailed Sea Eagle
Hen Harrier
Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
Golden Eagle
Kestrel
Pheasant
Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
Lapwing
Snipe
Whimbrel
Curlew
Redshank
Common Sandpiper
Arctic Skua
Great Skua
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Herring Gull
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Siskin
Linnet
Redpoll

Common Crossbill (H)
Canada Geese
Greater Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Common Tern
Manx Shearwater
Black Guillemot
Puffin
Rock Dove
Woodpigeon
Collared Dove
Tawny Owl (H)
Short-eared Owl
Great Spotted Woodpecker (H)
Sand Martin
Swallow
House Martin
Meadow Pipit
Rock Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Wren
Dunnock (H)
Robin
Whinchat
Wheatear
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Willow Warbler
Goldcrest
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Jackdaw
Rook
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling

Total: 79

MAMMALS

Otter

Red Deer

Rabbit

Common Seal

Grey Seal

Hedgehog

Bottle-nose Dolphins

Harbour Porpoise

Brown Hare

Total Species: 88