

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

MULL AND KINTYRE

12-21 JUNE 2021

Leaders: Sally Nowell & Julian Sykes

Guests: Anne Rowe & Malcolm Hopkins, Louise & John Sykes, Maggie & John Tester

Day 1 As usually happens at the start of a Speyside Wildlife holiday, guests and guides arrive from different corners of the UK, all on this occasion meeting at the rather splendid Central Station in Glasgow.

After loading up our vehicles we made our way out of Glasgow, over the Erskine Bridge and along the side of scenic Loch Lomond. As we head north, west and then south the roads get quieter and we begin to enjoy some stunning scenery passing the sea lochs, Loch Long and Loch Fyne. At the latter we stop, hoping for a cup of tea but sadly we missed the boat after a bit of a build up as the café was just closing, so we continue our journey towards and then through Inveraray, and on to our hotel, the Grey Gull at Ardrishaig. We arrive in a light haar (sea mist) but this soon lifts and we are treated to a delightfully warm evening, with blue skies and views across the loch from our hotel. As we arrive a couple of local comedians are entertaining guests and locals outside the hotel, with some real Scottish humour and some very colourful language! Several of us take a stroll before dinner and do some birding from the harbour wall, whilst others choose to take the air and stretch their legs after a very big dinner. Birds seen on these local walks include Eider, Gannet, Red-throated diver, Black Guillemot, Rock Pipit and Oystercatcher.

Day 2 We are all up for an early breakfast not realising the hotel do not serve breakfast until after 8:00am on a Sunday. But never to miss an opportunity to do some birding, some walked along the shore and some ventured up to the canal tow path just behind the hotel adding Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Blackbird to our bird list but giving us a lung full of fresh air to build our appetites before breakfast.

After breakfast we make our way along some beautiful and exceptionally well maintained roads, towards Knapdale. The sun is glistening on the sea which looks like the Mediterranean coast in glorious turquoise hues and surrounded by the fresh foliage of mixed broadleaved woodlands. Our first stop and a real treat for the day is the sight of an Osprey hunting in a small cove. After several minutes of watching it, it takes a dive and comes up with a fish which it promptly stows underneath and after a few circuits to gather height takes off determinedly and out of sight. Quite a start to our day and a magnificent show and surely a magic moment in the making!

We drive past lush meadows of Flag Iris, Cuckoo flower and Ragged Robin whilst eyeing up the rocky outline of the shore hoping to see the Otters that Julian tells us he has seen earlier in the year. Sadly no Otters but lovely views and sights of Sedge Warbler singing high on the telephone wires for all to see.

A return journey takes us onwards through woodlands ringing with the sound of birdsong and to the beautiful Taynish National Nature Reserve which we really cannot get enough of. We manage to cover a mile in about two hours! Not only do we have great birds, we have wildflowers, insects and amphibians to entertain us too.

Our first stop is to try and spot Tree Pipit which we can hear but not see. We are then distracted by thousands of Frog Tadpoles, bees and damselflies. After a bit of research they are identified as, Early Bumble Bee, Common Carder Bee and Blue-tailed Damselfly. As we walk we hear and see a myriad of woodland songbirds including Tree Pipit, Willow and Garden Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart. In the wetland areas we get Whitethroat and Reed Bunting, along with Large Red and Common Blue Damselflies.

It is hard not to keep walking to discover more and get a better look at the Redstart just a few of us have seen and to pursue the possible Pied flycatcher John T thought he had seen earlier, but lunchtime is approaching.

We cover the return journey in no time at all but as the sun is warming everything up, including us, the damselflies are appearing in abundance and are hard to ignore.

We gather up our lunch and walk to a lovely lunch spot in the sun surrounded by wildflowers and an unexpected visit from a magnificent Common Goldenring Dragonfly. We walk down to the waters edge before returning to the vehicles, a quick comfort stop and then on to the Crinan Canal, River Add and Mòine Mhòr for our final birding location of the day.

We drive and stop and drive and stop, spotting Stonechat, Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and hoping for Whinchat, on one occasion an unfamiliar butterfly is spotted which turns out to be an exciting find; a Marsh Fritillary! The stars of this area though are the Ospreys again. A nearby nest appears to become a focus of some squabbles as one bird sits on a nest tree and another warns it off in no uncertain terms. Fabulous scope views of perching birds and then again a fishing bird completes our day. Other birds include Red-breasted Merganser, Shelduck, Redshank, Sand Martin and an exciting moment of a possible Great Egret spotted by Maggie that sadly turns into a very pale grey Heron seen through a bit of a heat haze. A great first day with some super species all in fabulous locations.

We have planned a visit to the Beaver location this evening but rain stops play but we are all grateful for an early night!

Day 3

We begin the day by driving south towards the small fishing town of Tarbert. After parking at the harbour we quickly spot a distant Black Guillemot and shortly after realise that there is quite a gathering of these charming birds on a stone structure in the middle of the harbour. There seems to be some squabbling between them which we wonder whether is related to a territorial dispute or the birds pairing up. We all enjoy watching and photographing the cooperative show they are giving us before our onward journey towards Westport Beach.

On route Julian, John T and Maggie all spot a small raptor on a roadside rock, we decide to do a 'U'-turn but sadly the bird has gone on our return meaning no positive id, always a bit frustrating! At the beach we encounter a police road block, which after investigation by Louise we discover is because of the transportation of wind turbine blades and several minutes later huge lorries pass by, each carrying a single blade. Soon enough we are on the very windy beach, amongst the dunes and some fabulous rocks covered in lichens, Thrift, Birdsfoot Trefoil and various plantains. Amongst the sand and shingle we find Sea Sandwort and Sea Rocket. Maggie almost stands on a Ringed Plover and quickly backs off realising that it is on a nest, we all stand well back and admire the birds amazing camouflage, taking photos and viewing the bird through the scope.

With the road block gone we continue on to Machrahanish Bird Observatory. As we approach Louise catches sight of a possible wheatear but it doesn't show again. At the observatory, which we had not expected to be open, we have coffee and enjoy great views of handsome Rock Pipits and Ringed Plover. Malcolm particularly enjoys the passing Gannets and gets some good video as they pass by in small but spectacular groups quite close to the shore. Sally, Maggie and Louise search out various cliff top plants including Wild Thyme and some beautiful English Stonecrop. A gentleman arrives at the observatory and opens it up but tells us that sadly Eddie, who runs the observatory is very ill, Julian sends him our best wishes. We have the opportunity to go into the observatory and John S is particularly impressed "What a great shed"!

From here we have a quick comfort stop where we spot our first House Martin of the trip and onwards to the 'Mull of Kintyre'. This amazing drive takes us right down to the most southerly point of the Kintyre Peninsula. Another blustery stop so sandwiches are consumed inside the vans. However we all brave the elements and a very steep downward route to admire the view out across the Minch to Northern Ireland just a few miles away. Our walk is interspersed with birding and plant spotting. Julian struggles to get us all on a very mobile group of Redpoll but fortunately the plants stay where they are so a fabulous gathering of carnivorous Common Butterwort is greatly admired. Our first orchids are Heath Spotted and all along the track in the damp ditches the mosses and lichens are beautiful.

A steep climb back is followed by a productive birding drive with two fast flying Cuckoos being pursued by a Meadow Pipit, being glimpsed by most of us. A search for a family of Whinchats spotted by Julian eludes us but finally a perched bird on a telegraph wire gives good views, though it is struggling to hold

on in the wind. Further down the road a stop at a beautiful river crossing produces Grey Wagtail. Some great views of perched Buzzards on our return journey through lush fields full of fabulous herds of dairy and beef cattle lead us back down a long and winding road and then a drive back up the peninsula to our hotel and an early dinner before going out to Loch Barnuasgan in search of Beaver. A quick diversion to listen out for Chiff chaff heard the day before, the bird immediately responds but then falls silent. We then weigh up the midges and feel there is enough of a breeze to brave the walk around the loch. Quietly we proceed around the loch through mixed woodland looking out and listening carefully for Beavers and birdsong. At a viewing screen Maggie picks out an elusive Little Grebe with chicks and we are joined by an elegant pair of Mute Swans who glide quietly by, feeding as they go. Maggie and John T hear a Grasshopper Warbler but most of the rest of us do not catch it until later. After 45 minutes or so some of us decide to return to the vehicles and on to the hotel. On our walk back we hear Grasshopper Warbler call several times and then Anne spots a gorgeous clump of Northern Marsh Orchids. There is just enough light for John S and Anne to take some photos but the midges get the better of us so we return to the vans and head towards the hotel. On route we are treated to a Barn Owl flying across the road in front of us. Julian, Maggie and John T sadly didn't see Beaver but they did hear Grasshopper Warbler and Tawny Owl so a successful night for all.

Day 4 Sadly it is time to leave the Grey Gull and the Kintyre Peninsula but we have Mull to look forward to. Everyone does their lateral flow tests necessary before heading to any of the Scottish islands at this time, and thankfully everyone tests negative.

Initially we retrace our steps to Crinan and the River Add. Not much activity other than Red-breasted Merganser, a few Eider and Redshank. Further along the road we spy the Osprey nest which is visited by a single bird and then a second which does not stay long. Malcolm and Anne enjoy the Ospreys but despite their efforts are not sure they got any decent photos. Along the road edge in some willows a Sedge Warbler sings persistently but is reluctant to show as was a distant calling Cuckoo. Redpolls again are elusive but a stunning male Stonechat sits up well for us on a small stunted spruce tree.

From here we drive towards Loch Awe and the village of Ford. The road narrows and passes through some stunning old mixed woodland dominated by ancient oaks dripping with lichen. Our target species is in fact a Rosy Starling, Julian has a report one was present in the village of Dalavich so we think we'd give it a try. We park beside a small green and a welcoming coffee shop which provides a comfort stop and a decent cup of coffee. We then walk around the pretty forest village in search of the Starling. Initially we have our first views of Blackcap, Mistle Thrush and some excellent views of Siskin on a garden feeder. On a large open lawned area we see several Starlings but not the one we were looking for. A gentle meander in this area provides good views of Mistle and Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher and a range of tits and Goldfinches. Further into the village

which certainly seems to attract a lot of Starlings we don't catch up with the Rosy, though later reports suggest that it had been seen, was this to become our bogie bird of the trip?.

Onward again through stunning woodland habitat and narrow winding and undulating roads until we eventually meet the main road down to Oban. In the ferry terminal we have views of Grey Seal and Black Guillemot but after the previous days fantastic views we are more interested in eating lunch! Arriving at the ferry terminal we discover we are not able to get out of our vehicles' on the crossing due to Covid restrictions, but a smaller faster ferry means we are on Mull in no time at all.

After a bit of texting back and forth in the stationary vans on the ferry, Sally and Julian decide to go straight for another Rosy Starling seen in a garden not far from Craignure. The rain has started but we persevere driving round the loch and then to the village. We spy a likely feeder filled with feeding Starlings, Siskin and Goldfinch, but no Rosy. Sally and Jules check out the many Starlings feeding on the grassy areas and seaweed strewn shore but still no Rosy. The weather beats us and after a busy few days we check into our fabulously refurbished hotel and retire early for some rest before meeting to do the birdlist and dinner in the hotel restaurant. The weather is gloomy but the forecast for the next day was improving so we hoped everyone would wake to see the wonderful view from the hotel.

Day 5 One of our favourite days on Mull is about to begin. We start with a quick return trip to try and locate the Rosy Startling that has yet again been spotted in Loch Don but once again it is nowhere to be found. We drive down the LochDon road and stop to look out across the bay seeing only a couple of Curlew but Anne spots a beautiful Common Blue butterfly, a perfect specimen, flying along the trackside. Onwards we go to Grasspoint a small group of Red Deer hinds are spotted resting in a field and a female Hen Harrier is spotted as we drive but disappears over the ridge. Further along the road a group of Red Deer stags in velvet are almost missed as they mingle with the local Highland Cows. We stop in the car park and are immediately joined by a pair of Stonechats who perch up perfectly for photos. They have young hidden away in the stone wall and seem to be distracting us away from them. Along the road we find a couple of new plants, Lousewort and Marsh Cinquefoil. Out to sea Maggie spots a passing Red-throated Diver and Julian identifies several juvenile Kittwakes. Sally and Maggie also catch sight of some distant porpoises. Sally and Jules go to fetch the van whilst everyone enjoys the area around the tiny harbor. Julian receives a phone call from John T which immediately makes him think that the Rosy has been found but instead it is to report on the discovery of some beautiful orchids, Lesser Butterfly, Fragrant along with previously seen Northern Marsh and Heath Spotted.

Our next stop is along Loch Spelve for coffee, the weather is beginning to look a little threatening but we enjoy stretching our legs and scanning the loch and hillsides for activity. A slow drive along the loch-side takes us to Croggan for lunch where the rain catches up with us briefly. But a further walk through the windblown hazels and oaks is delightful as the sun comes out and warms our backs. Ringed Plover along the shore and some beautiful scenery along with Spotted Flycatcher and another Common Golden-ring Dragonfly are the treasures we find on this lovely track along the shore. We then head to Lochbuie through some amazing rhododendrons to the bay at the end of this gorgeous road. A cup of tea at the new small café and a scan across the bay unusually shows up very little so we make our way slowly back. As we drive beside Loch Spelve a van is stopped, a man we met earlier Otter watching is there with his camera, could he have spotted an Otter? Yes!! Not one but 2 Otters. One disappears but the second puts on a great show for several minutes which we all enjoy in total silence allowing it to be sufficiently relaxed to scratch and groom before slipping back into the water. We are obviously all totally delighted with a wonderful view of a beautiful animal which trusted us all enough to go about its business just yards away from us.

On to look for Wood Warbler and Redstart. A disappointing no show for both species but we meet a couple who give us more information about the Rosy Starling so off we go for another look. On route we have Hen Harrier overhead giving great views but still no luck with the starling.

Day 6 Another favourite day especially when the sun is shining. We are going to be heading off to the Treshnish isles today but before breakfast a quick sortie to look for the starling again but despite our best efforts it is nowhere to be seen. Back for breakfast and then onward north this time towards Salen to refuel our vehicles and then our beautiful drive along Loch Spelve towards the Ulva ferry.

Our first stop at the head of the loch is our first chance to look for White tailed Eagle. On the shore John T spots some very well camouflaged Common Gull chicks which keep us occupied but no eagles despite a lot of false alarms with numerous Buzzards overhead.

Our next stop proves more successful, Jules spots a bird at the top of a spruce tree and everyone is delighted to get some excellent views of an adult White-tailed Eagle sitting high overlooking the loch. On the other side of the loch two other White-tailed Eagles are spotted on rocks, one eventually joins the other, they look huge across the loch. We watch the eagles for a while and a loan Wheatear chick and parents before making our way further down the Loch. The freshly tarmacked road is a dream to drive and the views just keep coming, lush greens of grass and bracken against the beautiful blue sky and clouds is just breath-taking. We arrive at the jetty for the ferry in plenty of time but discover the loos are shut so have to quickly make alternative arrangements! An improved car park accompanied by improved loos would have been welcome but its all part of the experience and fortunately not too much coffee and tea had been

consumed at breakfast!! Aboard the boat the sea is quiet, a lone "comic tern" is seen but unusually not a great deal else. As we sail we have views of two other White-tailed Eagles sitting on the hillside and in an old dead tree, they seem totally un-phased by our presence though we remain quite distant.

An easy crossing to Lunga and we arrive with an easy landing and continue up to the 'puffin lawn'. John S's face when we arrive is a picture, he looks like a child in a sweet shop when he sees the Puffins and promptly sets about taking photos. Sally continues with John and Maggie T who finds a suitable patch on 'the lawn' and settles in to have lunch surrounded by delightful Puffins.

We all explore and take photos but Malcolm and Anne stay aboard the boat with Jules and are treated to a mini cruise around the island. Jules has a go at fishing for mackerel and catches the Skippers tea.

After a couple of hours we re-board the boat on route to Staffa. The Skipper advises us that we may not be able to land on the island because of the swell but as luck would have it by the time we arrive the swell has dropped and we land safely and have 50 minutes to visit the cave. Sally, Anne, Maggie and John T make the most of their trip and sit in the warm sun at the mouth of the cave admiring the incredible basalt structures. Anne has always wanted to visit Fingal's Cave and Maggie and John have the visit on their bucket list so it is especially important to them that we are able to land. John S and Louise stay on the boat with Jules and Malcolm, who is sadly feeling a little worse for wear. They circumnavigate Staffa spotting Snipe displaying on route and photographing those on the island from on board.

As we leave the cave the waves are coming in strongly and we are all mesmerized by the strength of the waves as they crash against the basalt columns. Once aboard a relaxing journey back in the late afternoon sunshine is bliss. Gulliemots, Puffins and Razorbills accompany us on our route, and after landing and thanking the crew for the excellent care and attention they gave us we make tracks back to the hotel. A brief stop for photos as the evening light illuminates the hills to stunning effect, and a return to see if there are eagles still in the spruce, one is sitting again giving excellent views. Dinner is calling so it is heads down and a swift drive back to base for dinner.

Day 7 A leisurely start to the day which will be our 'Iona Day'. We look like we are going to be blessed with idyllic weather for the day ahead but though the sun is shining the temperature remains pretty cool. All we care about is that it isn't going to rain and we keep our fingers crossed the sun and sea breeze will keep the midges away.

We drive south from our hotel setting eyes on the houses with feeders where the Rosy Starling had been seen as we pass. Our first stop is a small car park overlooking beautiful Loch an Ellen. We scan the skies and eventually John T picks up a distant Male Harrier very well camouflaged against the rocky hillside and

eventually it disappears before most of us get on it. We spy a young stag with antler buds in velvet silhouetted on the hillside and several others high up the hill top avoiding the insects in summer. We drive on down the valley with two further harrier sightings on route before stopping at Lochbeg. We haven't been stopped long before Jules spots a White-Tailed Eagle above the hillside, an adult is then joined by a juvenile bird which we watch for several minutes. John and Julian get into a discussion about three Buzzards high on the hillside also and later two more White-tailed Eagles are spotted not far away. Sally finds a very well hidden Otter resting amongst the seaweed. It is quietly cleaning and grooming itself almost invisible against the weed and very difficult to spot without the telescope but eventually everyone enjoys good views. Time to continue our journey to Fionnphort along the narrow road which winds its way along Loch Scriden. Arriving at the ferry Sally and Jules parks the vans and we walk straight on to the next ferry and within minutes are transported to the magical island of Iona.

We decide to look for the Rosy Starling that has been spotted on Iona and make a left upon embarking from the ferry. Our attention is immediately drawn to a beautiful group of orchids beside the fire station. Most of the orchids are Northern Marsh Orchids but amongst them are some Early Marsh Orchids, a slightly paler mauve rather than the rich purple of the former. The meadows are full of beautiful flowers including some magnificent Marsh Marigold, Ragged Robin, Buttercup by the thousand all interspersed with stunning orchids. We walk past houses looking for the starling, no luck, we are destined not to see one, this is indeed our bogie bird!. A gentleman comes out of his house and advised us of the best place to see Corncrake, we follow his advice and then split into two, Jules, Maggie and John T go in search of an interesting bird Maggie has spotted and Sally and the rest of the group continue walking towards the beach where some wooden seats make a welcome rest stop for lunch. Ann and Louise walk to the beach and are surrounded by Sand Martins fearlessly flying around them at ground level scooping up flies. On the beach a bit of beachcombing is inevitable and Anne finds a small piece of Iona marble to add to her stone collection at home.

John and Malcolm enjoy sitting in the sun and cool breeze before we all walk back into the village passing some stunning and very photogenic Highland Cattle on route. Anne and Louise walk ahead in search of Jules who has messaged to say he has located a corncrake, when Sally joins them there is certainly a Corncrake calling but no sign of the bird. Earlier Jules, John and Maggie had had lunch whilst listening to it and had been lucky to catch a glimpse of the bird amongst the Flag Iris. A return to the village centre, a couple of visits to gift shops and some ice cream topped off the day before boarding the ferry after a beautiful and serene four hours on beautiful Iona.

On route home a slow drive through stunning scenery and a final stop at Loch an Ellen. Scanning the skies there is nothing to be seen but then Jules spots a bird above the skyline between two rocky outcrops, we all look to the bird, at first it isn't clear what it is, in the next few minutes we have a real raptor fest

to remember. It seems that they just keep appearing, firstly a Hen Harrier then a Golden Eagle, then another Golden Eagle and then another, then a Kestrel, or was it two, and then the harrier, a female, dive bombing an eagle then a male harrier driving off an immature eagle, so much excitement it is hard to work out what is happening but we surmise that this is an eagle territory and an immature bird has ventured in being driven off by mature birds, possibly its own parents. On the same territory are a pair of Hen Harriers who join the fray with a Kestrel all making sure the immature eagle knows it isn't welcome. What a finale to the day!!

Or was the England vs Scotland match the finale. We have an iPad at either end of the table, respectfully on silent for those of us who aren't football fans, but between dinner chat there is an occasional outburst regarding the match which ends with a nil:nil score.

Day 8 After our hearty breakfast we are due to head to the north of Mull today. The forecast for the day isn't brilliant and we set off in light drizzle and rather irritating midges. However, we all don our midge nets and our smidge spray and brave the elements at our first stop just a mile or so from the hotel. At Scarrista Bay we scope out across the rock to find a large number of Arctic Tern nests, beyond them are yet more and intermittently they all rise up into the air. On the shore are young Oystercatchers and a single Ringed Plover. Grey Seals loaf and our first Goosander of the trip cruises at the end of the bay. A great location to spot White-tailed Eagle and we are not disappointed when we locate one sitting at the top of a Larch tree. The bird is repeatedly dive bombed by a brave Hooded Crow but though moving once, it returns to its perch only marginally annoyed by the persistent crow.

Our next stop is a comfort break at Salen and then onwards to the Aros Castle site. From here Malcolm and Anne enjoy watching a couple of Curlews, Jules sees a Goosander in flight and we also see our first common seal of the trip. A little further down the road we take a left down Glen Aros driving beside the Aros River. A coffee stop is called for and on arrival at our parking space we are entertained by a stunning group of stags in prime condition sporting their sleek red summer coats. The stags seem in a great rush across the fields below us but then stop and graze. Some plant spotting with a few new species including Water Avens and Heath Speedwell.

We back track a little to a track which takes us down to the river Aros. On route we are looking for Whinchat, every time a chat appears frustratingly it is a Stonechat, but finally a Whinchat is spotted perched up on the fresh green bracken, sadly it doesn't perch for long, but with some persistence by us all, everyone eventually has great views of a stunning male perched on the bracken and then on the telegraph wires. At the same time a Ring-tailed Hen Harrier flies past, again giving us good views before disappearing. We meet a couple of ladies walking a dog who tell us there are possibly 44 pairs of harriers on Mull, all of which are closely monitored. We chat to them for a while about the best

locations to see birds on the island. Our onward walk to the river Aros delivers beautiful Demoiselle Spotted by Louise and much photographed by us all. Jules and Maggie go in search of a small orange butterfly which is identified as a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

We return to the vehicles, and continue along the valley to Dervaig where a scan out across the small estuary turning little up, other than Oystercatcher and a number of Common Gulls. We continue on a very narrow steep road which leads south to Loch Tuath. A high and wild landscape awaits us at the top of this road but then we are greeted by a magnificent view looking across to the Treshnish Isles where we had been just two days ago. An ongoing, but quite exquisite drive to Calgary Beach where we find picnic benches and a beautiful and sheltered lunch spot. We all have a bit of time to wander and Sally has two loafing Red-throated Divers out in the bay and some very keen plants spotters enjoy the Machair and discovering some very beautiful orchids which we are still trying to identify!!

After a walk on the glorious white sand beach and where folk are actually swimming! We continue to the nearby art gallery for a browse and a cup of tea. Everyone resists temptation to purchase and we make tracks back to Dervaig and then towards Tobermory. Passing loch Peaclach we have a good view of a Red-throated Diver and some Little Grebes. Jules and Maggie occupies themselves looking for bees, White-tailed Bumble Bee and Common Carder Bee are both present in among the Bog Myrtle as well as a Dark Green Fritillary. Yellow waterlilies cover the loch edges and then on to Tobermory for a couple of photo opportunities. The main town on Mull is looking great in the afternoon light and the still water reflects the colourful houses beautifully. Down at Salen we have a last look out at Castle Aros and then on to a fabulous photogenic pair of derelict boats for a quick photo shoot. John S is decisive as he has been throughout the holiday taking just a couple of perfectly chosen images whilst the rest of us are shutter happy taking way too many images than we need. Our target time for being back at the hotel is 6pm to give everyone time to freshen up before dinner, we arrive at 2 minutes past!

Day 9 Sadly it is time to leave the beautifully refurbished Isle of Mull Hotel and its attentive staff team, but we are determined to stay on mull as long as we can to make the most of the opportunities it offers. A drizzly start but we decide to visit some new territory on the south side of Loch Na Keal. We stop just after passing some old lodges at the beginning of the loch where we disturb a couple who have had the place to themselves overnight camping and are just emerging from their van when we descend upon them. We scan the seaweed strewn rocks for Otters and the skies for eagles but this isn't weather for large raptors to be taking to the wing. We enjoy a slow drive beside the loch, hearing Snipe and spotting Wheatear. More Common Sandpipers, a Shelduck out to sea and a flypast Red-throated Diver, our ferry is due so we retrace our steps.

Anne particularly enjoys the old Celtic Rainforest or Atlantic woodland temperate rainforest a rare and endangered habitat that clings to the steep hillsides that form the sides of the glen.

Slightly tight timing for the ferry, arriving with just minutes to spare but having made the most of a rather dreich morning. The ferry is so calm Malcolm hasn't realized we are even moving, a 10 minute crossing and we immediately park up on an old harbour side for coffee and a comfort stop. We are in the small village of Lochaline on the Morvern peninsula. The roads are surprisingly quiet so we are able to saunter along scanning the hillsides as we go, a small road down to Kingairloch narrows as we drive, a Reed Bunting sings from a wire and then a Jay, first for the trip, flies down below the vans as the road climbs through mixed woodland and back to the sea and the banks of Loch Linnhe. Our lunch spot is in sight and we pull in just above a beautiful strand of sandy beach strewn with weed and a few Ringed Plover, Rock Pipit and even a Song Thrush making the best of the available pickings. Our lunch spot overlooks a sweeping bay where we immediately spot an Otter, quite far out happily feeding on what looks like either octopus or starfish. We watch for several minutes until it goes out of sight but eagle eyed Louise spots it again and it returns to its previous activity diving, flipping up its tail and then returning with food which it eats with relish before jumping up and diving again. A beautiful male Redpoll shows well in some Alder trees, its breast almost as Rosy as a Bullfinch. Willow Warblers with food bound through the bracken and a raft of eiders drift by on the flat calm sea, just idyllic and the sun has come out.

Julian and Maggie go in search of a butterfly, a Dark Green Fritillary, and get a bit of a soaking in the boggy ground. Reluctantly we tear ourselves away from this beautiful spot but no sooner have we left, than Sally thinks she has an Otter swimming not far out to sea beside the road, Julians van then picks up an Otter swimming quite close to the shore in the same direction as us. We stop the vans, switch off the engines and sit and wait, the Otter is aware we are there but keeps moving a little further, disappearing and then reappearing, just magical, we watch for 10 minutes or so but then it disappears.

The narrow winding road beside the sea is always a stunning experience but with the sun out and the tranquil conditions it is just spectacular today. We stop to look out and Maggie spots some hard to see Red-throated Divers, John T a fabulous group of Twite, first for the trip and then Julian spots porpoises. We all manage to see them and once again it is hard to tear ourselves away, we have the place to ourselves apart from a distant camper van, but we have a hotel to get to so off we set. Before we have gone 50 metres we spot the porpoises' again but closer to the shore this time, it looks to be an adult or two with a youngster. The calm water makes this a fabulous opportunity to watch these cetaceans who are so often difficult to see and quite distant. A few more metres and the group of Twite appear again. This time everyone is out of the van with their cameras as the birds are just beside the road and being very cooperative by staying close if not a little flighty to get a good image.

Finally we are off again, this time toward the short Corran Ferry crossing. A group of boys and dads fish by the shore as we wait for the ferry to return and then we are on a mission to get to the hotel, but also to enjoy the imposing and magnificent mountains of Glen Coe. We are at our hotel by 5.30, and ready for our final bird list and reminiscences of the holiday before a delicious dinner.

Day 10 Our final morning of breakfast together and then goodbyes in the car park, as guests and guides go their separate ways after an excellent holiday.

Favourite Species

Malcolm	Osprey fishing, Otter fishing
Anne	Whinchat and Twite
John S	Otter, Puffin, Hen Harrier, but Otter number 1
Louise	Whinchat
John T	Puffin or Common Golden-ringed Dragonfly
Maggie	Common Sandpiper
Sally	Beautiful Demoiselle
Julian	Hen Harrier and Marsh Fritillary

Favourite Place

Malcolm	Iona because it took me back to my childhood days
Anne	The meadows and wildflowers on Iona
John S	Iona, beautiful weather added to the experience of being there.
Louise	Iona, lovely peaceful place, the flowers were beautiful and it was lovely to hear the Corncrake
John T	Fingals Cave
Maggie	Fingals Cave
Sally	Morvern Peninsula
Julian	Loch and Ellen Car park, seeing the vista and witnessing the eagle, Hen Harrier interaction

Magic Moment

Malcolm	Iona, feeling taken back in time to the 50's, a sense of community, it was magical, I felt like a child again.
Anne	Wanted to see Otters in the wild so seeing the Otters was great but also loved the mackerel fishing on the boat, it was so unexpected and fun having the boat all to ourselves.
John S	Arriving at the top of the cliff on Lunga and seeing all the Puffins, it blew me away, said "I think I've died and gone to heaven"
Louise	Iona, when I walked down to the beach with Anne and the Sand Martins were swirling around our feet and then seeing them in their nesting community along the River Aros.
John T	The raptor fest at Loch an Ellen
Maggie	The Corncrake moment when we sat and had our lunch listening to the Corncrake
Sally	The raptor fest at Loch an Ellen
Julian	Fishing for Mackerel and being on the boat and just stopping for an hour and putting in a line and catching a Mackerel. Also the Corncrake moment but a shame we weren't all together.

BIRDS

Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Canada Goose
Mallard
Eurasian Teal
Eider
Goosander
Red-breasted Merganser
Goldeneye
Pheasant
Great Northern Diver
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Storm Petrel
Grey Heron
White-tailed Eagle
Golden Eagle
Hen Harrier
Common Buzzard
Sparrowhawk
Peregrine Falcon
Merlin
Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
Golden Plover
Lapwing
Turnstone
Common Redshank
Greenshank
Bar-tailed Godwit
Curlew
Common Snipe
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Greater Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Black Guillemot
Guillemot
Rock Dove
Woodpigeon
Collared Dove
Tawny Owl (H)
Rock Pipit
Meadow Pipit

Grey Wagtail
Dunnock
Robin
Stonechat
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Redwing
Fieldfare
Blackbird
Goldcrest
Wren
Great Tit
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Eurasian Treecreeper
Jay
Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Goldfinch
Greenfinch

Total Birds: 73

MAMMALS

Rabbit
Otter
Roe Deer
Red Deer
Fallow Deer
Common Seal
Grey Seal
Harbour Porpoise
Grey Squirrel
Short-tailed Vole

OTHER THINGS

Marsh Fritillary
Orange tip
Green-veined White

Small Heath
Common Blue
White Spring Moth
Common Goldenring
Four Spotted Chaser
Large Red Damselfly
Keeled Skimmer
Common Blue Damselfly
Blue-tailed Damselfly
Common Darter
Beautiful Demoiselle
Chimney Sweeper
Dark Green Fritillary
Pearl-bordered Fritillary
Early Bumble Bee
Common Carder Bee
Common Toad
Common Frog Tadpoles
Moon Jellyfish
Mackerel!

Some of the plants we identified

Mouse-eared Hawkweed
Yellow Pimpernel
Ragged Robin
Red Campion
Lady's smock
Watercress
Greater Stitchwort
Hemlock water dropwort
Flag Iris
Pignut
Cow Wheat
Marsh Thistle
Sea Sandwort
Sea Rocket
English Stonecrop
Wild Thyme
Birds foot Trefoil
Sea Kale
Lousewort
Lesser Butterfly Orchid
Fragrant Orchid
Northern Marsh Orchid
Early Marsh Orchid
Common Spotted Orchid
Heath Spotted Orchid
Marsh Marigold
Vipers Bugloss
Yellow Waterlily
Heath Speedwell
Water Avens
Hairy Lady's Mantle
Burnet Rose
Cross-leaved Heath
Tormentil
Bog Myrtle
Marsh Cinquefoil

Total Species: 142