

# HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

## NORTH COAST 500

19-28 MAY 2017

Leaders: Simon Pawsey and Darren Rees

Guests: Gillian & David Smith, Chris & Rob Mason, Gillian & Paul Bamford, and Judy Millson & Richard Thomas

**Day 1** A new holiday with a new itinerary and so why not a new way of meeting up with guests. This is the first time the introductions for a Speyside Wildlife trip have been conducted in the bar! It sets the tone for a wonderful week ahead and we go through the plans for our route around the spectacular coastal road of northern Scotland and the counties of Easter Ross, Caithness, Sutherland and Wester Ross – the North Coast 500.

**Day 2** The NC500 starts and ends in Inverness and we are driving the route in a counter clockwise fashion, so the day's plan is to work our way from our overnight hotel along the northeast coast to John O'Groats.

We are hoping for some things 'ottery' and 'dolphiny' to start the tour with a splash, and as the high tide is early in the morning we offer a pre-breakfast outing to North Kessock to kick-off events. The weather has other ideas but nevertheless we arrive on the north shore of the Beaulieu Firth feeling optimistic, and slowly drive to beneath the impressive Kessock Bridge. Our first scan reveals a Bottlenose Dolphin in the centre of the water but this mysteriously disappears before most people can see it... Elsewhere, along the shore are Grey Herons, Common and Grey Seals, Oystercatcher and a fly over from a group of Goldeneyes. Behind us in the tall trees are singing Blackcap, Blackbird, Siskin, Greenfinch, and Goldfinch. Further along the shore is a large group of Goosanders, so we get a good haul to start the trip list.

After breakfast we gather some sandwiches and snacks for packed lunches then start the circular route around the wild north coast of Scotland. The drizzle is still persisting as we pass by the Cromarty Firth that is marked by several giant drilling platforms that are parked in the water for maintenance procedures. Shortly after, the rain eases and we see our first Red Kite along the side of the road. When we arrive at our first birding stop, the RSPB reserve at Nigg Bay, the improved conditions has promoted some bird song and we hear and see

Sedge Warbler, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting. Over the damp meadows Lapwing are calling and diving and over some small pools are several Sand Martins, House Martins and Swallows hawking for insects.

We enter a well-appointed hide and settle in for a session. Chris spots a godwit sat on an island and it has a nice black and white tail as it preens – a Black-tailed Godwit - it then settles in and dozes so is more difficult to identify. Out on the mud flats there are some late winter stragglers: Pale-breasted Brent Geese, Pink-footed Geese, and David finds a smart drake Wigeon.

At Loch Fleet we can stop and scan from the elevated Mound. Two Red-breasted Mergansers are in the water with a drake Teal and a Common Sandpiper. David finds an elegant Greenshank on the far shore, and on the other side of the road are pied forms of Shelducks and Eiders looking good amidst the grey.

We stop for a comfort break at Golspie (award-winning loos no less) before scanning the beach, there are our first Ringed Plovers and lots of gulls. Further at Brora we have lunch over-looking the harbour where Kittiwakes are bathing and more gulls are loafing on rocks: Herring, Lesser, Greater Black-backed, and Common. More eye-catching is the hillside behind us that is a riot of yellow with flowering gorse. At sea are big numbers of birds milling around and we see our first Gannets, Razorbills, Guillemots, and Black Guillemots.

The weather soon deteriorates from clear and overcast to fog and drizzle. As we approach John O' Groats there's little let up in conditions but we still feel compelled to walk, and wander to overlook the harbour – there's a sick Guillemot on the rocks and our first Fulmars passing by with Gannets, Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns. Then a pale form Arctic Skua passes by, cutting a dashing shape in the dank.

We drive to Duncansby Head where the slightly higher elevation is enough to put us back into the fog and mist. We can just make out the breeding seabirds on the nearest rocks: Fulmars and Razorbills. A Great Skua flies by, but it's a bit uncomfortable viewing in the drizzle so we decide to check in early at our hotel at Castletown.

### Day 3

We've a dramatic change with the weather, and after breakfast we drive to nearby St John's Pool that is bathed in sunshine. It's a private nature reserve and has a fast growing reputation as *the* place to visit in Caithness. We are met by the owner, Julian Smith, who explains the history of this little piece of birdy heaven in the northernmost part of mainland UK. There are some well appointed hides over-looking colonies of Sandwich Terns, Black-headed Gulls

(already with chicks), and Arctic Terns (several displaying). Elsewhere are Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, and Moorhen with chicks. All the birds are protected by a perimeter electric fence to keep marauding Otters away – who would think our furry friends would create such havoc. We spend over an hour enjoying the intimate views of birds going about their daily routines, getting even closer views from the small photographic hides arranged around the pools.

Continuing along the road to Dunnet Head we stop at a rise in the road where we can scan some small lochans – these are empty but there are two Arctic Skuas flying over the moor (and a Short-eared rock!). Dunnet Head itself, gives us marvelous views over the Pentland Firth to Hoy and the Orkney Islands. To the west we see past several headlands and beyond to Cape Wrath and the Sutherland hills. We walk to the west side of the lighthouse to scan the cliffs where Fulmars are along the uppermost ledges, and Kittiwakes fly to and fro. Arctic Skuas fly by and we get our best looks at Great Skuas that are flying around below us. Out at sea there are several big groups of Kittiwakes fishing, Gannets diving, and rafts of Guillemots and Razorbills. A Minke Whale makes a brief appearance (turns out to be the first of many dodgy leader ticks) – these must be very rich waters! A short walk to the south and east is where we can scan into the cliff-face and see more ledges of seabirds, including our first Puffins on the cliffs and our first Wheatear.

Lunch is at the beach overlooking the broad Dunnet Bay, then it's on to Forsinard Flows Reserve. The road winds inland getting increasingly more rugged and remote, so we stop at a couple of places to scan. Simon picks up a male Hen Harrier over a distant hill – good to see a rare breeding bird in much decline throughout the highlands. As we stop for a better look we hear a Cuckoo that soon perches in a tree, giving us great looks in a telescope – it's not common to actually see this bird and Chris has her magic moment!

At the visitor centre at the train station we can read about the sterling work the RSPB has done to secure this unique habitat for rare breeding birds (seemingly at odds with the local views displayed by graffiti on local shacks). We walk around the well-made boardwalk to the elegantly designed observation tower. Sadly there are Skylark and Meadow Pipits but little else on show.

Back at the hotel we enjoy an evening meal then walk to Castletown Harbour over-looking Dunnet Bay. There are Red-throated and Great Northern Divers on show, and several waders on the beach: Ringed Plovers, Dunlin in summer plumage, Sanderling, Knot and Oystercatcher. There is also a lovely Otter for the late, late crew (another dodgy leader tick!)

## Day 4

Breakfast is at 7 for an 8 o'clock departure as we'd like to catch the morning activity at the RSPB reserve at Broubster Leans. The sun is shining as we arrive in the area and we can scan across a broad sweep of marshy meadow and bog, fringed with rough pasture and heather. Curlews are displaying, Lapwings chasing Hooded Crows, and all the while Skylarks are singing from on high. A distant Grasshopper Warbler reels and there are Buzzard soaring and Roe Deer in the marsh. We scan at various points but fail with raptors like Hen Harrier, Merlin and Short-eared Owl – maybe next time. Other birds for the morning include Cuckoo, Siskin, and Teal.

It's now mid-morning, so we drive further west to Strathy Point for a coffee in the car park before walking to the headland that pokes north into the Pentland Firth - another prime spot for seabirds and looking for cetaceans. We walk along the track to scan the cliffs and water – Gannets are passing by with Kittiwakes and Shags low on the rocks. At the light we watch the Kittiwakes that are in fishing parties joined by busy Razorbills. Simon then announces 'I've got a White-billed Diver!' A look down the scope reveals a Great Northern Diver with a huge ivory-coloured bill. Wow – a real find! Simon already has his bird-of-the-week!

We retrace our steps to the car park and then find a lunch spot at Bettyhill where there's an Osprey hunting over the picturesque small estuary. Continuing our route, the landscape gets grander, and at the Kyle of Tongue a causeway crosses the water with wonderful views all-round to the high slopes and peaks of the mighty Ben Loyal. Rob informs us that he has climbed it in his youth! We stop to scan the mud, water and fine views: we see Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Heron, and a Great Skua in the water.

Onwards west to beautiful Loch Eriboll, we stop where we can look over the 'tombolo' that links the mainland to Ard Neackie. Along the route around the loch are more Great Northern Divers, Red-breasted Mergansers and a mother sheep with a lamb marooned on the smallest island of green. The last leg of the journey takes us through more spectacular scenery to Kinlochbervie and our new base for two nights.

## Day 5

After breakfast we drive to Keoldale on the Kyle of Durness for the start of our big day on Cape Wrath, the most northwest point on mainland Britain and the stuff of legend and shipping forecasts!

We assemble for the short ferry at 9 o' clock, but we need to wait twenty minutes or so as there are lots of people waiting. Without too much bother we are soon over the water to meet with friendly Stuart who will take us on the long bumpy ride to the outer cape.

Stuart is a seasoned guide and driver and tells us some interesting tales of history of this wildest of places. There are signs of the military presence here and there, with check-points and some trucks used as target practice on the barren slopes (one painted pink by local kids!)

We get dropped off at the track that leads to Kearvaig Bay. We walk down the hill, and as the track swings round, a beautiful secluded cove is revealed - white sand and turquoise water is flanked by imposing headlands. For a focal point, a shiny white bothy is perfectly placed on the grazed green in front. The building is maintained by the Mountain Bothy Association (MBA) and we can't resist a look inside. There are several clean, dry rooms, a fireplace, a few supplies and a list of dos and don'ts. Could come in very handy!

From the bothy we start our steep walk along the cliffs to the east. The first view is now elevated looking back onto the bay with the white beach - Kittiwakes are gathered and Gannets fishing offshore. The views get better as we walk along, looking down on a distinct looking stack that has huge blocks of rock perched precariously between upper towers of rock (Stack Clo Kearvaig). The higher we climb, the windier it gets and we are thankful for the small cover afforded by a stone wall that weaves along the cliff top. The furthest point gives us an amazing look along the awesome Clo Mor face - the highest cliff on mainland Britain. Masses of birds are wheeling through the air and more are peppering the ledges. It is just stunning, and the perfect spot for lunch.

Back at the bothy we assemble for biscuits then walk back to our pre-arranged rendezvous with the bus driver – this time a happy chappy from London! We drive to outer cape checking out Red Deer, Red Grouse and neat Arctic Skuas roadside. Finally we arrive at the lighthouse and the welcome Outer Zone, or Ozone Café. It's all very welcoming (if in need of a little refreshment) but the news from the Stuart is not so nice – with all the visitors today it will be over a two hour wait for our return bus trip... ah well.. there's plenty of time to view the stunning cliff scenery at the end of the world.

Eventually Stuart arrives to drive us back for the late ferry and finally we get our evening meal at some time after 8 o'clock (served with a little Irish sauce and blarney).

## Day 6

Our destination for the day is the island of Handa – a seabird haven managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, just a short ferry ride away from the Sutherland mainland at Tarbert. As we approach the small harbour it's still grey and misty and a large bank of low cloud is obscuring the hilltops and summit of Handa's cliffs.

We don the life-vests and board the ferry for the ten-minute ride across to the island, arriving at a sandy beach where a small welcoming team greets us and ushers us to a hut where we get a brief orientation from one of the volunteers. Outside the hut, in the small shallow bay, is a pair of Red-throated Divers giving us incredible views of their fine plumage markings – beautiful birds. There are also Eiders, Ringed Plover and three Arctic Skuas land on the beach.

The trail and boardwalk takes us across the centre of the island past some old ruined buildings. Around us, perched on tussocks and rocks, are some of the present inhabitants of Handa – skuas! We get wonderful looks at both Arctic and Great Skuas as they go about their courtship and display. Some are so close we can read the identity of the rings that they are carrying - S2 (Great Skua), I5 (dark form Arctic). It seems a little early for birds to be on eggs and for the most part we witness pairs going about bonding rituals including some regurgitating when a partner arrives – nice!

Across the highest part of the moor there are small freshwater lochans and at one, several Great Skuas are gathered to bathe - two Red-throated Divers are at the far end of the same loch. The path then reaches the clifftops at Puffin Bay where we catch our breaths at the dramatic scenery and get our first looks at the seabirds stuffed into the rockfaces. Fulmars and Kittiwakes are wheeling around and Guillemots squeezed on ledges. On the upper tiers Razorbills are dotted around and we see a couple of orange-footed Puffins!

The path continues around to the Great Stack where we can look across to a giant rock pillar crammed with birds – a truly awesome sight and to add to the sensory experience the wind is now at its strongest! Nevertheless, through scopes we can pick out 'bridled' forms amongst the thousands of Guillemots and enjoy our best looks at bright Puffins amongst the pink thrift. Thankfully, as we walk further around, the shape of the cliffs offers a windbreak and at Geodh na Goibhre we can enjoy our lunch with the seabirds and one of the most spectacular cliff views to be had anywhere in the world – amazing!

The circular path continues along the southern section of the island where the lower cliffs are punctuated by a series of sandy and rocky bays. Shags are gathered on rocks (with Cormorants for comparison) and Eiders bob in the surf. The boardwalk then cuts back through the island to the old village remains and we get a second look at the skua colony. Finally we drop back to the landing beach where we wait for our ferry back to the mainland – it's been a memorable visit to Handa (and no wonder it wins Place-of-the-Trip award!)

Leaving Tarbert we head south along the NC500, and at Kylesku a modern bridge spans the head of the Loch at Chaim Bhain where we scan the shore and hinterland for things in the water and the air – sadly not successfully this

time, though further at the point at Unapool we can look over islands dotted with both Grey and Common Seals. Again, the landscape of upper Loch Glencoul is dynamic.

The road winds through the dramatic peaks of Assynt though the summits are obscured by cloud that only adds to the grandeur. Dropping down to Loch Assynt the alternating rocky bluffs are catching the light and as we drive slowly along the shore we have to stop for the photogenic ruins of Ardvreck Castle that cuts a dramatic profile on the landscape. More bewildering scenery unfolds as we enter Inverpolly and after another full day we finally arrive at Ullapool and the very comfortable Ceilidh Place Hotel. The food (especially the chowder) is as wonderful as the surroundings and we unanimously decide we want to stay longer than one night.

## Day 7

After a nice breakfast surround by objet d'art (including the memorable Humpty Trumpty) we leave sunny Ullapool and the weather forecast suggests it's going to be fine day to drive the Wester Ross section of the NC500. Our route takes to the viewpoint that overlooks the straight 'u' shaped valley that leads back to Ullapool. Buzzards are soaring, Cuckoos calling and the lofty peaks of the coast beckoning. We drop into Dundonnell Gorge where we can scan the steep sides of the narrow valley - Chris spots a Grey Wagtail on the stony river and Richard points to one of the feral goats that roam the highlands - a hairy wild thing (the goat, not Richard). Simon sees a Ring Ouzel dart across the slopes but it disappears quickly and fails to reappear (another dodgy leader tick!)

At Dundonnell village we can scan the water at Little Loch Broom seeing Greenshank, Curlew, Red-breasted Merganser and Oystercatcher. Further on we see two Red-throated Divers, and then an Otter appears on the far side. Rather infuriatingly, it shows just once or twice then disappears ...

We drive on to the next pullout where we can scan over Gruinard Island, a known location for White-tailed Eagles. This lonely island has a dark history as it was designated as a site for chemical weapons testing during the second World War and as a result of the release of anthrax spores Gruinard was deemed uninhabitable for 48 years, finally given the all-clear in 1990.

With the successful re-introduction of White-tailed Eagles on the west coast and their spread from the core release sites of Rum, Gruinard is a great place to look for these birds – and we are not disappointed. A first scan reveals divers in the bay then some splashing in the distance catches the eye. Towards the horizon, passing along between the adjacent headland and the Summer Isles, is a pod of exuberant dolphins. Through the scope we can track the animals and even catch the tell-tale markings on the dorsal flanks

– Common Dolphins. Then Simon calls “White-tailed Eagle!” Above the distant mountain ridges behind us is a massive bird circling in the sky. Wow! What a place!

Further along, at First Coast, we can scan over the many seals that are hauled out on rocks. Simon picks out Common Porpoises in the bay and a female Long-tailed Duck in the shallows. All this wildlife in glorious weather has us ready for lunch in the sun at Aultbea, alongside the pub over-looking the harbour.

After sandwiches we work the shoreline at Laide but can't quite get sightings of any Otters – just seals working along the water's edge. So we re-join the NC500 and drive along the scenic road that continues towards Poolewe with stunning looks over Loch Ewe and south towards the series of jagged mountains of Wester Ross – I've never seen them look so clear. By now its really warm so we feel an unscheduled stop at the village of Poolewe is in order for ice-creams.

The road drops down to the impressive Loch Maree and we stop first at Slattadale where we can look over a series of islands in the loch, all clad with ancient Scots Pines. Behind are the slopes of the mighty Slioch mountain – a brute of 3215ft high. Buzzard and a Peregrine are wheeling across the skyline. Red-breasted Merganser and Common Sandpiper are along the shore.

Our second view over the loch is at the far southern end where the water is at its narrowest and the steep slopes of Slioch rise up. We can spot walkers climbing the ridge and elsewhere more Feral Goats break the skyline. Behind us is a family of Long-tailed Tits – a new addition to the species list. Our final stop is from the elevated viewpoint above Glen Docherty that gives us great looks along the valley as well as photo opportunities for inquisitive Ravens. Buzzards soar along the ridges but sadly no larger birds...

After another long day we arrive at Ledgowan Hotel at Achnasheen, which is a throwback to the era of hunting lodges with stags adorning the walls of each room!

## Day 8

After breakfast we head west in wonderful weather conditions and the road takes us past a long loch that is showing a perfect reflection of the hillside behind. Anything breaking the surface of the water will show well and when we stop and scan we immediately find a diver. We set up scopes and see it is a Black-throated Diver, and as well as the adult in the water there is another tight on a nest on a floating platform.

The picturesque village of Loch Carron is on the shore of the sea loch with the same name, and we pause to scan the calm water and view. On islands in the



middle of the loch are numbers of male Goosanders sat on the beach, their white bodies gleaming. Red-breasted Mergansers, Eider, Cormorant and other now familiar birds dot a perfect grand vista.

The road continues over a rocky pass and drops to spectacular Loch Kishorn with the huge buttresses of Applecross Forest behind. We stop to scan the shore and calm waters of the bay. A close Black-throated Diver and more Red-throated Divers dot the water. Common Seals are hauled out on rocks and cruising the shallows.

From Kishorn we start the slow and twisting climb up the infamous Bealach na Ba that winds through breathtaking terrain of barren mountains. Boasting to be the greatest ascent of any road in the UK, the series of hairpins take us from sea level to over 2000ft and is not for the faint-hearted. We can't resist a coffee break near the start, to take in the views and scan the ridges. Then it's onwards, zig-zagging ever upwards, pulling into passing places and admiring the stamina of the many cyclists that ascend in a continuous display of determination.

We arrive at the summit to a large parking area busy with people looking westwards where the panorama takes in the islands of Raasay and Skye with its distinct peaks. We decide to stroll the path that goes to the telecoms tower, across boulder fields and bare rock interspersed with the shortest of moss and grassy vegetation, not unlike arctic tundra. Recalling the tops of the Cairngorms its not surprising that there is a small population of Ptarmigan here and near the top one walks in front of Paul and Simon so we all get great views. Gillian finds another at the highest point too, and here the views are amazing as we can see west to the islands, and north and east to the interior with the escarpment falling away beneath us.

Lunch is taken at the seashore near Applecross where we can enjoy the sun and superb views across the Inner Sound to the island of Skye and the successive ridges of the Red and Black Cullins. Beautiful!

We've still some miles to drive so it's onwards north along the Applecross peninsula stopping here and there to scan the water and admire Red-throated Divers on lonely lochans. Gradually the road swings round to the east and the mountains of Torridon come into view. The single-track road hugs the coast and at every twist and corner we get the most incredible views across Loch Torridon, the series of islands in the water, and the most formidable of barren peaks that make up the Torridon group: Beinn Alligin, Liathach and Beinn Eighe. Awesome!

It's another warm afternoon so we decide to visit Shildaig for ice-creams, dropping through some picturesque relic Caledonian woodlands that cling to the steep slopes. At the village we pop in the café and as well as a good selection of ice-cream flavours, the owner has some useful information about the local eagles... very local eagles! It seems that the wooded island in the bay is home to nesting White-tailed Eagles, so with that knowledge we enjoy our refreshments looking out to sea. And we don't have to wait long...

Suddenly, there's a commotion with the gulls taking off from the rocks at the base of the island. A huge bird comes flapping around the corner with Hooded Crows and Raven in pursuit. It's a wonderful adult eagle and as it rises we can compare it with the seemingly diminutive Raven that is diving and mobbing it. Wow! It flaps across the island then lands in the highest tree, just obscured from sight, yet easily pin-pointed as two Hooded Crows keep dive-bombing the bird. After a few minutes it takes to the skies again and flies across the loch to trees on the far shore. What an encounter and a nomination for magic moment for sure!

From Shildaig we drive along the south shore of Upper Loch Torridon where we, again, can't resist stopping to photograph the stunning views. While we look over the water to the mighty mountains David is looking the other way and points to something large in the sky above a rocky buttress. It's a Golden Eagle and is soon joined by a second bird and we can watch them soar through telescopes – a wonderful sight to cap a wonderful day.

## Day 9

The earlybirds are out before breakfast as we would like to investigate David's report of a Redwing carrying food nearby – these are exceptionally rare breeding birds in the Highlands. Driving the short distance to a stand of pines we are soon onto the bird as it is singing in the tall trees – bingo! A note to the county recorder methinks.

At Glen Docherty we stop to scan the valley hoping for some raptors riding the updraughts but sadly there are none – maybe a bit early in the day. However, we are drawn to the plaintive simple calls from a male Ring Ouzel on a stony slope and the search is on. David is scanning through his scope and finds the bird singing from a clump of heather – smart bird! We return to the hotel for breakfast after a short stop to admire Red-throated Divers on a roadside loch.

After breakfast we start the last leg of the NC500 that takes us back to Inverness. The route takes us through Garve where we join the main road and drive to take another look at North Kessock, under the large suspension bridge. We scan around the foreshore but notice things in the water the other side – there are two or more dolphins in the water around the marina at South Kessock so we'd better take a closer look!

Although we arrive at same spot within ten minutes of leaving North Kessock, the dolphins are nowhere to be seen, but Simon finds an Otter instead! We walk to the small light that marks the marina entrance for better views but fail to locate dolphins or Otter but enjoy the fine view of the Kessock Bridge.

We drive back on to the Black Isle for our tour of the peninsula, heading first for Avoch for teas and coffee with the Common Terns that are perched on nets just offshore. Then it's off to nearby Chanonry Point, the best place on mainland Britain to watch cetaceans and judging by the number of vehicles in the car park it's a popular pursuit. We soon see why, as when we are negotiating a space we can see splashes in the water. We quickly walk to the shingle point and enjoy superb looks at Bottlenose Dolphins that are fishing on the incoming tide. We can even see one manipulating a large salmon that it has caught! What a great place for lunch (for dolphins and us).

At Udale Bay we can enjoy the high tide roost of shorebirds that are stuffed onto a small green island of grass as the water level laps the edge. Oystercatchers and Curlews are joined by Redshank and Ringed Plovers. Further along the south shore of Cromarty Firth Simon spots two Scaup, another great addition to the bird list.

Beyond the town of Cromarty is a raised headland called South Sutor, paired with North Sutor that marks the entry of the sheltered Firth. Small trees surround the small area where we park and it is busy with birds: Redpolls, Siskin, Coal Tit, and Tree Pipits. We walk to the field where we can look over the water and more birds appear: Yellowhammer, Swallows and a small Whitethroat are all in full song. A Buzzard circles below us, and then David spots an Osprey passing by. Across the water seabirds criss-cross in small numbers and in the distance we see a group of Bottlenose Dolphins breaking the surface.

Back along shore we pause at a nice flock of drake Eiders that are resting on the weedy rocks. Further along at the Udale hide the tide has gone out and reveals lots of mud. The waders are now dispersed over a wider vista and Simon spots an Osprey perched in the open. What a fitting spectacle to end on!

Finally it's back to Inverness for our last meal together. We relive some the highlights of what has been a memorable first tour along one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline anywhere in the world. The votes are cast and the results are in:

**Species of the Week:** White-tailed Eagle and Ptarmigan, followed by (in no particular order) Great Skua, Arctic Skua, Red-throated Diver, Cuckoo, White-billed Diver, and Bottlenose Dolphin.

**Magic Moments:** Lots of personal highlights: the Raven mobbing the adult White-tailed Eagle at Shieldaig (Richard and David); discovering a White-billed Diver (Simon and Paul); close and intimate with the terns at St John's Pool photography hide (Gill); courting Bonxies and ritual regurgitation! (Rob); first perched Cuckoo (Chris); the idyllic bothy setting and beach at Kervaig (Gillian); the perfect day and scenery of Wester Ross (Judy and Darren)

**Place of the Week:** Handa

**Toilets of the Week:** Handa's self-composting and turf-roofed cubicle!

What a week and thanks to all,

Darren

## BIRDS

Red-throated Diver  
Black-throated Diver  
Great Northern Diver  
White-billed Diver

Fulmar

Gannet

Cormorant

Shag

Grey Heron

Mute Swan

Greylag Goose

Canada Goose

Pink-footed Goose

Pale-bellied Brent Goose

Shelduck

Wigeon

Teal

Mallard

Gadwall

Shoveler

Tufted Duck

Scaup

Eider

Long-tailed Duck

Goldeneye

Red-breasted Merganser

Goosander

Red Kite

Common Buzzard

Hen Harrier

White-tailed Eagle

Golden Eagle

Osprey

Kestrel

Peregrine

Ptarmigan

Red Grouse

Red-legged Partridge

Pheasant

Moorhen

Coot

Oystercatcher

Ringed Plover

Golden Plover

Lapwing

Knot

Sanderling

Dunlin

Snipe

Curlew

Black-tailed Godwit

Redshank

Greenshank

Common Sandpiper

Turnstone

Arctic Skua

Great Skua

Black-headed Gull

Common Gull

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Herring Gull

Great Black-backed Gull

Kittiwake

Sandwich Tern

Common Tern

Arctic Tern

Common Guillemot

Razorbill

Black Guillemot

Puffin

Rock Dove

Woodpigeon

Collared Dove

Cuckoo

Short-eared Owl

Tawny Owl

Common Swift

Great Spotted Woodpecker (h)

Skylark

Swallow

House Martin

Sand Martin

Meadow Pipit  
Tree Pipit  
Rock Pipit  
Grey Wagtail  
Pied Wagtail  
Dipper  
Wren  
Dunnock  
Robin  
Wheatear  
Stonechat  
Blackbird  
Ring Ouzel  
Song Thrush  
Mistle Thrush  
Redwing  
Blackcap (h)  
Whitethroat  
Willow Warbler  
Chiff-chaff  
Sedge Warbler  
Goldcrest  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Coal Tit  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Long-tailed Tit  
Rook  
Hooded Crow  
Carrion Crow

Jackdaw  
Raven  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Greenfinch  
Siskin  
Bullfinch  
Goldfinch  
Redpoll  
Linnet  
Twite  
Yellowhammer  
Reed Bunting

**Total Birds: 126**

#### **MAMMALS**

Rabbit  
Otter  
Red Deer  
Roe Deer  
Common Seal  
Grey Seal  
Common Dolphin  
Bottlenose Dolphin  
Harbour Porpoise

**Total Species: 135**