

# HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

## ISLANDS OF THE OUTER HEBRIDES

2-10 MAY 2025

Leaders: Craig Round & Sally Nowell

Guests: Viv Emery, David Fosh, Pamela Footit, Liz & Roger Newsome, Andrew Seal, Stella Bignold, Peter Warden, Lynne & John Tidmarsh.

Day 1 We all meet up at the hotel in Inverness, and during our evening meal run through our plans for the week.

Day 2 After loading up our luggage into the vans and making a stop to pick up some lunch supplies for the day, we head West for the Outer Hebrides. Its a breezy but sunny day with some showers around as we leave Inverness behind us and drive towards Achnasheen seeing an Osprey and enjoying the ever more dramatic scenery as we drive alongside Loch Carran before we arrive into Kyle of Lochalsh. After a quick stop here we cross over the bridge and onto the Isle of Skye. Its a lovely drive as we cross the Isle of Skye and past the dramatic Red and Black Cuillins, before we arrive into Uig where we have time to stretch our legs and eat lunch, before we have to catch our ferry. As the ferry heads out of the harbour and out into the Minch we get stunning views of several Great Northern Divers in full summer plumage right alongside the ferry, and during the ferry crossing to Lochmaddy we get good views of a selection of seabirds, including lots of Puffins as well as Razorbill and Guillemots, Gannets, Kittiwakes, and Arctic and Common Terns

The good sea conditions also mean we manage to spot some Common Dolphins breaching in the distance.

As the ferry arrives into Lochmaddy two White-tailed Eagles soar over the distant hills, before we disembark and drive towards the hotel on South Uist. Arriving

at the hotel we have time to settle in and a Short-eared Owl is seen from the hotel, before we enjoy the first of many mouthwatering meals here!

### Day 3

It's a cool but lovely and sunny start and the plan today is to spend the day exploring North and South Uist.

After breakfast a Cuckoo is seen outside the hotel being mobbed by Meadow Pipits before we head up towards North Uist via Benbecula. As we head North no less than five different Short-eared Owls are seen hunting near the roads as well as a brief male Hen Harrier!

Near Balranald Reserve we see two Black-tailed Godwits and a Raven flies over mobbed by Lapwings! Its quite windy and cool by now as we make a quick stop at the Visitor Centre at Balranald as numerous Skylark sing overhead, before we head down to a large tidal loch on the coast. Nearby we stop to hear at least three male Corncrakes calling from the fields and also get several brief sightings of one of the males before it disappears into some thicker cover! Its almost high tide by now as we walk out across the machair towards the loch shore and its a magical sight and soundscape with the sounds of many displaying waders such as Dunlin, Redshank, Lapwing, Oystercatchers and Skylark filling the air. Walking around the shore and out onto the beach we get views looking out towards the Monarch Isles as a flock of some 150 summer plumaged Dunlin land right on the shore nearby giving us lovely views, there are also a few Turnstone and Ringed Plover with them. Finding some shelter we have a lovely lunch stop here looking out to sea, as two Little Terns hover and plunge for fish along the shoreline and three Whimbrel roost on the rocks nearby.

Walking back we get some brilliant views of a male Peregrine hunting all the gathered waders and soaring right over us before powering off into the distance.

From here we head down onto South Uist and take a drive across the machair on the MOD rocket range. There are masses of waders displaying and nesting on the machair here and we also get some nice views of two very close Whimbrel feeding as well as numerous Rock Doves. There are also masses of young Rabbits all over the Machair this year, and the glut of prey has obviously attracted predators, as we get some simply epic views of a huge adult male White-tailed Eagle perched on the ground just a matter of feet away from us! What a sight!!

Parking up looking down the coast we take in the stunning views down South Uist towards Barra in the distance and looking down the beach we pick out a flock of Bar-tailed Godwits as well as some Sanderling, before we head back to the hotel.

#### Day 4

It's an amazingly still, sunny and virtually windless start today as we head out from the hotel this morning, to the backdrop of calling Cuckoos! We see two Short-eared Owls on the drive up onto North Uist where we make a stop overlooking a large freshwater loch. It's amazingly still here this morning and the sky is simply full of the calls of birds, Sedge Warblers chatter from the Reeds nearby and displaying Lapwing cartwheel and display all around us. Two Whoopers Swans are out on the loch along with some Gadwall and Wigeon and we also see Redshank, Dunlin, and a single Common Sandpiper. Also whilst here 'Rippling calls' announce the arrival of an incredible flock of some 120 Whimbrel! They drop in to bathe along the shore of the loch right in front of us and giving some magical views! Whilst watching the Whimbrel suddenly the calls of White-tailed Eagles shatter the stillness and we look to see the incredible sight of four adult Sea Eagles soaring low directly over us!! We watch on for some time enthralled as the eagles circle above us slowly getting higher before drifting off. What views!

From here we drive to the RSPB reserve at Balranald and out to the headland for some lunch.

The views are wonderful today and we are greeted by an azure blue sea and sky and sweeping shell sand beach before us with views out to the Monarchs.

It really is idyllic here with the sounds of the waves and Skylarks singing overhead and flocks of Sanderling and Dunlin along the shore. During lunch a few Arctic Terns fly over as well as a Little Tern and we take some time soaking up the atmosphere of this wonderful place, before we take a walk out towards the point.

On our walk we get wonderful close views of the assembled waders including stunning summer plumaged Dunlin, Turnstone and Sanderling and also quite a few Purple Sandpipers. Rafts of Eiders are just off the beach and we manage to find a stunning drake Garganey on a small freshwater pool on the headland!

From the headland we get great views of several Dunlin display fighting, and looking offshore we see four Harbour Porpoise surfacing as well as Gannets going by.

From Balranald we drive to the site where we saw yesterday's Corncrake, and after a patient stake out we get some incredible views of these secretive birds, with three males seen out in the open and even in flight. At one point we are surrounded by five calling males! Back at the hotel an Immature White-tailed Eagle is seen along with a male Hen Harrier nearby.

## Day 5

It's another incredibly still day with light winds, if a little cloudier than yesterday, with an adult White-tailed Eagle seen flying past from the breakfast table at the hotel this morning! Also around the hotel two male Cuckoos are calling and chasing each other and a juvenile Stonechat is in the hotel garden!

Today the plan is to explore some more of South Uist, so we drive down and make a stop at the statue of 'Our lady of the Isles' with great views looking west out across the islands and right out to St Kilda on the horizon! Whilst here we also see a flock of some 25 Whimbrel feeding in the pasture just below the viewpoint. Driving further south we see two Cuckoos being chased by a Sparrowhawk! Before we cut out to the West side of the island and out to the coast and a remote headland. There are masses of waders out here on the machair and an immature White-tailed Eagle that soars over. We also see several Lapwing with chicks as well as displaying Ringed Plovers, Redshank, two Whimbrel along with numerous Wheatears, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits. As we make our way out to the headland another two White-tailed Eagles are seen including an immature Eagle seen perched on the ground in the distance.

We stop to have some hot drinks and shortbread out here and whilst here we see a flock of some 150+ Sanderling along the shore as well as Dunlin, Turnstone, Ringed Plovers and two or three Whimbrel that are joined by a single Bar-tailed Godwit on the beach. Looking out across the bay there are several Great Northern Divers as well as Common and Grey Seals, but best of all whilst here we get fantastic views of a family of three Otters feeding out in the bay and scampering around on the rocks giving us some wonderful views of their antics through the scopes!

We take a walk out to the point and stop to look at the remains of an Iron Age Broch as we go and enjoying lovely views of all the assembled waders on the beach, we also get very close views as a Great Skua flies low right over us mobbed by gulls as it goes before heading off and out to sea on the next leg of its migration. The freshwater loch here has several Arctic Terns roosting on it as well as a Red-breasted Merganser and some Tufted Duck, and three Little Terns fly right over us calling and giving us some great flight views.

Looking out to sea from the point the views are stunning, as Gannets go by offshore before we walk back again getting great views of all the birds and hearing the 'cooing' calls of drake Eiders as a stunning male Hen Harrier flies over the beach, heading off inland!

From the headland we drive back over to the East side of South Uist and out to Loch Druidibeg. Here we take a walk through some lovely woodland with a backdrop of dramatic mountains and the loch. On our walk we see three male Cuckoos perched calling and chasing around the hillsides well as a smart male Red-breasted Merganser on the loch. There are many Willow Warblers singing from the trees and we also see three Redpoll singing and displaying over the tree tops. An immature White-tailed Eagle flies over before we drive to the end of the road and walk down to the loch shore, where we get fantastic views of a Male Cuckoo calling from a stone wall nearby which is joined by another Cuckoo before they both fly right past below us! Looking across the loch we pick out five Red-throated Divers as well as Shags and a colony of Common Terns. A Raven flies over and another White-tailed Eagle soars in the distance before we make our way back to the hotel.

## Day 6

Today starts cloudy and cool but again with light winds, and adding to the growing quality bird list from the hotel dining room, a Short-eared Owl flies past during breakfast!

This morning we take a drive out to the west coast of North Uist near Carinish, and as we cut out to the coast, the fields are full of breeding waders including Lapwing, Redshank and Oystercatcher and we also see a large passage flocks of migrant Dunlin feeding in the fields with Ringed Plovers. The sky is simply full of the calls of displaying Common Snipe other waders and Skylarks overhead and it really is a magical place out here! Six Golden Plover are also seen and Craig

points out a regular nesting Oystercatcher, that chooses to nest some 5ft off the ground in the top of a fence post! From the beach here it is a beautiful view out to the azure blue sea and sweeping shell sand beach looking down to South Uist.

Heading back we pass several Common Snipe that perch obligingly on fence posts next to the road and giving us some good looks at these normally skulking birds, before we drop in for some welcome hot drinks and cakes in the sun at the Claddach Kirkibost Centre and cafe.

From here we drive down towards the coast again and stop to have another look for Corncrakes in the fields, again our luck is in and we get more good views of two male Corncrakes as well as hearing more craking from the surrounding fields. Magic!

For lunch we drive back towards Balranald and out to the headland, where we take our lunch in the warm sunshine and with the staggeringly beautiful sweeping view of the beach and bay here. A large flock of some 150+ Sanderling are feeding below us along the beach along with more Turnstone and Ringed Plover, whilst Arctic Terns and Little Terns sweep past and a Great Northern Diver is in the bay. What a very special place this is!

After lunch here, as we drive back across the machair two lovely Arctic Skuas fly right past, before we drive up to a high viewpoint looking over North Uist, there are lots of Wheatears in the fields beside the road here as well as Lapwing, Redshank and Oystercatcher and the views from the viewpoint with virtually the whole of the Uists spread out below us, across to the Monarch Isles, and even way out to St Kilda are simply breathtaking today! From the high point of the road we get some great views looking north to the Isle of Harris and get some wonderful views of two male Hen Harriers 'sky dancing' over the distant forestry as well as a female Hen Harrier hunting briefly, there are also a large herd of Red Deer in the fields below us. As we drive back towards the hotel a Short-eared Owl is seen soaring over the road and being mobbed by a Common Buzzard!

## Day 7

Its another beautiful day of weather that greets us this morning with some thick early mist clearing to another beautiful still and sunny day!

Whilst loading the vans at the hotel a Short-eared Owl floats casually past us hunting and being mobbed by a Hooded Crow, and two male Cuckoos are frantically chasing a 'bubbling' female Cuckoo around the hotel!

This morning we drive down onto Benbecula first and make a stop overlooking some freshwater lochs. There's lots to be seen from here including great views of three+ Common Snipe that are 'drumming' in display right overhead! A magical sight and sound! Also here we pick out a single Little Egret roosting at the edge of the loch, as well as seeing Gadwall, displaying Dunlin, Arctic Terns and masses of Lapwings in the surrounding fields. We also see a Short-eared Owl being mobbed by a Common Buzzard in the distance.

Moving on again we drive around to the shore nearby, where we get fantastic close views of the masses of waders sheltering and feeding here just below where we are parked all in simply gorgeous light and reflections! There are literally hundreds of beautiful summer plumaged Dunlin, Turnstone and Sanderling all frantically feeding just a few feet away from us and giving us such special views of some stunning birds! We also get lovely views of a flock of Shelduck and Eiders here and a wonderful soundscape of all the calling waders and the 'cooing' calls of the Eiders! Magic!

Our next stop is around to a sheltered bay on the coast where scanning out across the bay we pick out a few Great Northern Divers and some folk do a little beach combing and have a walk on the beach finding all sorts of shell treasures including some Northern Cowrie shells and a stunning Blue-rayed Limpet!

Making a stop at a large freshwater loch nearby. and we see a good selection of wildfowl including Gadwall, Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Little Grebe, though we save the best bird until last with great views of Coot here!

Heading further south we cross onto South Uist and make a stop on the coast for some lunch. It's an incredible spectacle here looking down to the distant hills of South Uist. There are large flocks of waders carpeting the beach frantically feeding along the strand line just below us and giving us fantastic close views. The flocks of Dunlin, Sanderling and Turnstone are mostly in stunning summer plumage, there is a single summer plumaged Red Knot and Craig finds a stunning male Ruff feeding with the assorted waders! Ooof! What an absolute stunner!

From here we drive south again and across to the east side of South Uist through dramatic mountain scenery and past long indented sea lochs we head towards the end of the loch road. From here we take a walk out through some fabulous woodland, there are Common Seals hauled on the rocks below us, whilst the woodland holds both Blackcap and Willow Warblers. We stop to take in the wonderful scenery from a high point of the track with stunning views looking out over the loch and hills from here, and scanning from here we get views of at least eight White-tailed Eagles soaring over the ridges! Its 'Eagle-tastic! We see four Eagles soaring together as well as a wonderful adult White-tailed Eagle right overhead, the sun making its white head and tail feathers glow! The Raptors just keep coming here, and we also see a Peregrine and three Kestrels from here as well! A Red-throated Diver 'wails' from the loch below our viewpoint and we also see a flock of Redpoll 'buzzing' around and a Chiffchaff singing.

## Day 8

Its a slightly breezier start today, and sadly today we have to leave the Outer Hebrides. After loading all the luggage we head off to catch our ferry back to Skye and the mainland, but we have some time, however, before our ferry departs later this morning, so we first cut out to the coast briefly where the fields are again full of breeding waders. Moving on we head up across a high moorland road that crosses the island. As we drive a lovely pale Arctic Skua flies over before we make a stop at the highest point of the road with fantastic views back down to the coast. Whilst here get some great views of at least two Hen Harriers a male and female before we drop down to the coast where we pick out a Greenshank in a river channel by the road.

Arriving into Lochmaddy we are all too soon, it seems, boarding our ferry for our crossing back to Skye, and during the ferry journey a good selection of seabirds are seen, including Manx Shearwaters, Guillemots, Razorbill, Puffins, Kittiwake, Common and Arctic Tern and Gannets before we finally land back on Skye and drive back via the dramatic Quiraing and ever onwards to Inverness, at the end of another fantastic week on the Outer Hebrides!



### Bird of the Trip

Corncrake, Short-eared Owl, Whimbrel, Ruff, Snipe, Eider

### Place of the Trip

Balranald, Ardvule, The Strandline, Archies Garden, Dining room view! Walks around the hotel, North Kessock.

### Magic Moment

Otters moment and excitement! Whimbrel flock heading out to sea, Sky dancing Hen Harriers, Short-eared Owl flying straight towards us! Watching Sanderling feeding just feet away.

## BIRDS

Mute Swan  
Whooper Swan  
Pink-footed Goose  
Greylag Goose  
Greenland White-fronted  
Goose  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Gadwall  
Shoveler  
Wigeon  
Teal  
Garganey  
Tufted Duck  
Eider  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Corncrake  
Pheasant  
Red-throated Diver  
Great-northern Diver  
Little Grebe  
Fulmar  
Manx Shearwater  
Gannet  
Cormorant  
Shag  
Little Egret  
Grey Heron  
White-tailed Sea Eagle  
Golden Eagle  
Hen Harrier  
Sparrowhawk  
Common Buzzard  
Kestrel  
Peregrine

Moorhen  
Coot  
Oystercatcher  
Ringed Plover  
Golden Plover  
Lapwing  
Knot  
Sanderling  
Purple Sandpiper  
Turnstone  
Dunlin  
Common Sandpiper  
Redshank  
Greenshank  
Black-tailed Godwit  
Bar-tailed Godwit  
Curlew  
Whimbrel  
Snipe  
Ruff  
Great Skua  
Arctic Skua  
Black-headed Gull  
Common Gull  
Herring Gull  
Great Black-backed Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Kittiwake  
Common Tern  
Arctic Tern  
Little Tern  
Puffin  
Guillemot  
Razorbill  
Black Guillemot

Rock Dove  
Collared Dove  
Woodpigeon  
Cuckoo  
Short-eared Owl  
Skylark  
Swallow  
House Martin  
Sand Martin  
Meadow Pipit  
Rock Pipit  
Pied/White Wagtail  
Grey Wagtail  
Dunnock  
Robin  
Stonechat  
Wheatear  
Blackbird  
Song Thrush  
Sedge Warbler  
Willow Warbler  
Chiffchaff  
Blackcap  
Goldcrest  
Wren  
Jackdaw  
Hooded Crow  
Carrion Crow  
Rook  
Raven

Starling  
House Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Greenfinch  
Linnet  
Goldfinch  
Redpoll sp  
Reed Bunting

## **MAMMALS**

Otter  
Hedgehog (Dead)  
Rabbit  
Grey Seal  
Common Seal  
Harbour Porpoise  
Common Dolphin  
Red Deer

## **BUTTERFLIES/INVERTS**

Green-veined White  
Small White  
Red Admiral  
Large White  
Drinker Moth Larva  
Emperor Moth  
Puss Moth  
Moss Carder Bee  
Common Carder Bee  
White-tailed Bumblebee