

The Shetland Isles
Holiday Highlights
29 June – 6 July 2024

Leaders: Craig Round and Tim Drew

Guests: Catherine Harkness, Teresa Black, Angela Mackersie, Julia Todd, Gaye Henson, Heather James, Bridget Carter, Penny Blake, Kate and Peter Wright

Day 1: After all meeting at Aberdeen Airport, we are soon onboard our flight and heading north to Shetland. Landing at Sumburgh Airport we transfer to our two hire vehicles and drive round to make a stop overlooking the large tidal bay at Pool of Virkie.

Scanning out across the bay we pick out some Shelduck and Eiders with young, as well as a selection of waders including a flock of some eight+ Red Knot as well as Dunlin, Redshank, Oystercatcher and single Sanderling and Turnstone in summer plumage. Our first Arctic Terns and Bonxies fly over and we get some great views of a pair of Curlew perched on fenceposts nearby. From here, we head north and up to our hotel for the next few days at St Magnus Bay with time to get settled in before dinner.

Day 2: Today dawns dry, if a little cool and breezy from the NW, as we head North to catch the first of two ferries that will take us to the island of Fetlar. Enroute, we pass several Red-throated Divers on the roadside lochs before arriving at Toft ferry terminal. Whilst waiting for the boat to arrive we get great views of Arctic Terns overhead as well as seeing several Black Guillemots, Shags, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Curlew and two Common Snipe calling and also hearing a displaying Dunlin.

We board the ferry across to Yell and during the short crossing see Gannets, Puffins and Guillemots and Razorbill, before landing on Yell where we drive across the island to catch our next ferry. At the next ferry terminal on Yell, we see several Rock Pipits as well as two female Red-breasted Mergansers before we board the next boat which takes us across to Fetlar.

Landing on Fetlar we drive across the island, getting great views of some smart Golden Plover in summer plumage right next to the road, as well as Redshank and Oystercatchers with fledged young. The meadows are full of drifts of pink Ragged Robin and vivid yellow Buttercup and we get great views of several Snipe perched on fenceposts near the road, as well as Meadow Pipits and Wheatears.

Dropping down towards the coast we stop off at a marshy area of shallow pools and have only just pulled up when we see the first of at least six Red-necked Phalaropes quietly feeding around the margins of the pool! We are treated to some great views

of these tiny and rare Arctic breeding waders, including seeing a small flock of phalaropes rise up into the air to mob and chase off a passing Hooded Crow! The sounds of displaying waders are all around and a flock of Golden Plover fly over, Fetlar really is a magical place for birds!

From here we drive to the relative shelter of Houbie for some lunch and take a look around the islands Heritage Centre. Whilst here we get nice views of some recently fledged Wheatears and a summer plumaged Dunlin, before we drive around to the Loch of Funzie.

Near the loch we get views of a Red-throated Diver on a small lochan by the road, before we park up and take a walk out to the hide at the Mires. On Loch of Funzie we get fantastic close views of yet another three stunning Red-throated Divers on the loch close to the road and also see Redshank, Wheatear, Meadow Pipits and Skylark. The fields near the hide are full of flowering Orchids and Ragged Robin however it's pretty quiet bird wise from the hide overlooking the Mires of Funzie, so we start to walk back. However, have only walked a short distance before Tim and Craig spot a first summer Franklins Gull flying directly towards us and only a few yards away!! Tim loses the power of speech! We all get some incredible views as this rare American vagrant gull hawks for insects low over the ground, making multiple close passes of the group, as Tim and Craig stare on in disbelief!! What an incredible find!

Arriving back at the vans, time is getting on somewhat! So, with a boat to catch off the island we make a hasty exit and get back in time for the ferry back to the mainland and onwards back to the hotel.

Day 3: Today starts bright but with rain forecast to come in later, we decide to make a quick dash out to the NW mainland to explore Northmavine and Eshaness.

Three Red-throated Divers fly over as we gather outside the hotel and as we drive through the ever more rugged landscape on to Eshaness we pass several Red-throated Divers on roadside lochs, as well as seeing Ringed Plover, Curlew and numerous Meadow Pipits, Skylark and Wheatear.

We see at least four Whimbrel on the moorland here, as well as more Curlew including with young, as well as lots of Oystercatcher and Lapwing. A single Great Skua flies over and we also see more Red-throated Divers, including hearing several divers wailing and displaying.

We arrive at Eshaness Lighthouse, where sadly the weather is starting to turn more rapidly than forecast and the fog is descending! Still, we have time to take a walk out around the clifftops, taking in the dramatic scenery here as the waves crash into the

cliffs below us. We get some lovely close views of Ringed Plovers as we walk, as well as finding a small flock of five Dunlin. Craig shows us the evidence of the dramatic cliff erosion that happens here during violent storms that can batter the cliffs and throw huge rocks well out beyond the cliffs.

We make our way back as the rain starts to fall in earnest and as we drive we pass the incredible sight of six Red-throated Divers on a loch by the road, chasing each other and displaying as the rain falls all around! No wonder they are known as the 'rain goose' in Shetland! From here we head back south and have some lunch by the coast just outside Lerwick, and seeing more Curlew, Arctic Terns and some Grey Seals hauled out on the rocks.

After lunch and with the weather still pretty grey and wet, we head into Lerwick to have some time taking in the wonderful Shetland Museum, before heading back to the hotel.

After our dinner at the hotel and a little down time we are soon heading out again for our night visit to the island of Mousa to see Storm Petrels. We cross on the boat to the island in the 'simmer dim' and even though its gone 11pm at night it's still pretty light this far north.

Landing on Mousa we walk around the coast and as the light begins to fail, we hear our first Storm Petrels beginning their bizarre 'purring' calls from the stone walls next to the path. At the Broch, while we wait for the first Storm Petrels to arrive some of us make our way up the narrow winding staircase inside the broch and out onto the top of the broch, where the views are just incredible! A short while later the first Storm Petrel is seen flying around the outside of the incredible 2000-year-old Iron Age broch. More and more Petrels begin to arrive in off the sea and the walls of the broch slowly come alive with their calls. The birds whip around at great speed, like bats around the tower as they look for their nest holes in the stonework. It's simply a magical experience and we spend a magic few hours here with the Sumburgh Lighthouse flashing away to the south, before making our way back to catch the boat back. What a magical night!

Day 4: The weather thankfully is much better today, bright, sunny and breezy and we enjoy a later start this morning after our late night and finish at Mousa in the early hours of this morning!

With the much better weather today we decide to head back out onto Eshaness this morning, passing the dramatic sea stacks of 'The Drongs' and the impressive 'drinking horse' of 'Dore Holm' stack, before we make stop to get great views of a Red-throated Diver with its small chick on a small loch by the road. Arctic Terns fish over the loch

and a single female Eider on the freshwater loch here is a slightly odd sight! From here we drive through some beautiful rugged and wild scenery and we make a stop at a viewpoint looking across the whole of Eshaness with birds all around us, with Golden Plover, Curlew and Lapwings all seen.

Driving out to the lighthouse, we stop to take in the incredible views out here today, with the waves crashing into the huge cliffs below us as numerous seabirds pass by, including Gannets, Fulmars and Great Skuas. Arctic Terns fly over and from the clifftop we get some good views of Razorbills, Guillemots and a few Kittiwakes flying over the sea, as well as some Puffins on the cliffs through the scopes.

Moving on again we stop at the head of a nearby firth, where we enjoy some fantastic patches of the rare Oysterplant on the shingle beach here, as Arctic Terns fly by. We then take a drive alongside a quiet and scenic sea loch or voe as they are called in Shetland. Driving slowly along the road alongside the loch scanning out all the time, our patience is rewarded when we spot a cracking dog Otter that is diving for fish just out from the shore below us! We get some great views as the Otter spends some time fishing just out from the shore, before swimming purposefully across to the other side of the voe.

From here we drive up a steep road up onto the top of Collafirth Hill for some lunch. We see several Whimbrel as we drive up, gaining height all the time. The views from the top as we have lunch are just stunning today and we can see right out to Foula in the West as well as up to Yell, Unst and Out Skerries!

After lunch we drive back down and Craig finds a stunning breeding Black-tailed Godwit which flies over the road calling and drops in briefly on a small loch by the road before flying off over the hill, before we head into Lerwick for some time sightseeing in Shetlands capital.

Day 5: Today starts cloudy with some rain showers about and we make an early start, as were heading up to the far North of Shetland and the island of Unst and have several ferries to catch. We drive up to catch the first ferry at Toft across to Yell and enroute pass a pair of Whooper Swans on a loch by the road as a Red-throated Diver flies right over them wailing as it goes! Arriving at the ferry terminal, the ferry soon arrives and we cross onto Yell and drive across the island to board the next ferry across to Unst.

Driving north across Unst we have only driven a short distance when we stop to look at the rare and lovely sight of a breeding pair of Whooper Swans with two cygnets on a loch beside the road. Arriving at Burrafirth, we stop at the car park above the lighthouse shore station to begin our walk out to the seabird cliffs. On the walk we cross the open moorland via sections of boardwalk and we see a pair of Golden Plover

singing and displaying overhead as well three+ Snipe drumming in display. The first of many Great Skuas fly overhead and singing Skylark are all around, as well as displaying Meadow Pipits. As we reach the end of the boardwalk near the cliffs a Dunlin is displaying and amazingly a male Red-necked Phalarope then drops in onto a tiny pool right beside the path and only feet away from us! What incredible views!

Arriving at the clifftop we take our lunch with stunning views to Muckle Flugga at the most northerly point in the British Isles, as numerous sea birds sweep past, around and below us and with Puffins on the clifftop nearby. The weather is still being kind and the rain is holding off, so we take our time taking in the views, with the azure blue sea below us and a sky full of seabirds, it really is an incredible spot!

After lunch some folk start to walk back whilst the rest of the group continue walking on further around to the dramatic 'Saito' cliffs, the views are staggering and we are greeted by the sights, sounds and smells of a 'blizzard' of thousands of Gannets wheeling around and below us. There are literally thousands of birds nesting on the sheer cliffs and birds are seemingly filling every available ledge below us and we take some time here taking in this incredible seabird spectacle. As the rain starts to move in we make our way back across the island and enjoy more good views of the Great Skuas, including a pair feeding two chicks.

Back at the carpark at Burrafirth a small flock of Twite are perched on the fence line and a flock of Barnacle Geese are seen flying over. With time getting on we drive to catch the Ferry back to Yell, before crossing Yell and catching the ferry back to mainland, where we quickly head back to the hotel at Hillswick to pick up our luggage before driving south down to our next base for the rest of the trip down at Sumburgh. The weather by now has rapidly deteriorated, with very heavy rain and thick fog encountered as we drive south to Sumburgh, though we do see a Merlin briefly as it flies over the road carrying prey.

Day 6: After an earlier breakfast this morning we drive north to meet our boat charter out to Noss for 8am. It's a cloudy but dry and fairly calm morning, as the boat cruises out of Sandsyre and heads north up to the island of Bressay. As we come around, under the cliffs of Bressay we see increasing numbers of seabirds both on the cliffs and passing the boat. The calm sea conditions this morning allow us to go right inside one of Bressays impressive sea caves, 'The Orkneyman's Cave' with Kittiwakes nesting above the entrance to the cave and several pairs of Shags nesting right at the back of the cave. We also get to sail through the 'Giants Leg', an incredible natural sea arch in the cliffs!

From Bressay we cruise in under the cliffs of Noss and around to the Noup, a few Arctic Skuas fly overhead and we are greeted by the incredible noise and spectacle

of this vast seabird colony. The dominant birds are Gannets and the sky is full of wheeling birds overhead as we look up to the towering sea cliffs above us, it really is a breathtaking spectacle! The sea is very calm under the cliffs, so we spend some time taking in the views of this immense sea bird city, large flocks of Guillemots are rafting on the sea under the cliffs with the cliff ledges crammed with thousands more seabirds and a cacophony of noise all around. What an incredible place!

Cruising back out from the cliffs, we start to head back and some fish are thrown from the boat, causing a frenzy of plunge diving Gannets to surround the boat along with a few Great Skuas joining the throng, a truly amazing sight, just awesome!

Arriving back at Sandsayre pier we drive around to Hoswick Heritage Centre for a warming drink and some soup before driving back south down to Sumburgh. Here, folk have some time to have lunch and wander from the hotel to the nearby coast and beaches, as well as take in the magnificent multi-period Archeological settlement site of Jarlshof next to the hotel. With the well-preserved remains of dwellings from the Prehistoric Bronze Age into the Iron Age and right through to the Norse period all on the same site!

Day 7: This morning dawns cloudy with some showers about, but also some bright and sunny spells. Our first stop this morning is in Scalloway, where we take a look at the memorial to the 'Shetland Bus' a wartime resistance movement that used local fishing boats to take wireless operators, armaments and combatants into Nazi occupied Norway, returning with refugees and resistance operatives during World War II.

From Scalloway we head further south where we stop to admire two stunning Red-necked Phalaropes which are on a small pool right by the roadside and giving us some great views! Our next stop is in the warm sunshine for lunch, overlooking the beautiful sand Tombolo linking the mainland to St Ninians Isle. After lunch we take a walk out along the Tombolo surrounded by lovely views and a stunning turquoise sea. On our walk we get great views of Arctic Terns diving into the sea feeding as well as seeing three Harbour Porpoise out in the bay, a Great Skua is seen just feet away on the beach eating a Puffin and a group of female Eiders with a 'creche' of ducklings are just offshore.

We walk onto St Ninians Isle and around to take a look at the remains of the 12th century chapel famous for the "St Ninians treasure" 28 Pictish silver objects and also the jawbone of a porpoise which was found during excavations and buried under a cross-marked slab close to the altar. Whilst here we also get great views of a family of Shetland Wrens and the adult birds feeding the fledged young amongst the thistles.

From here we head back south and up to Sumburgh Head and walk up to the lighthouse, it's a seabird city up here. We enjoy fantastic close views of the many Puffins on the cliff ledges and riding the up draughts, as well as Kittiwakes, Shags, Guillemots with chicks, Razorbill and Fulmars. Several dark phase Arctic Skuas patrol the cliffs and there are also a few Twite around the lighthouse, as well as Wheatears, and looking out from the cliffs a Minke Whale is seen surfacing several times offshore.

Day 8: Today we sadly have to leave Shetland, but as our flight is not until a little later on we have a little time to play with before we have to head for the airport. This morning Tim briefly finds a Melodious Warbler in the hotel garden! Though the bird soon makes itself scarce sadly!

After loading up all the luggage at the hotel we take a short drive up to Compass Head, where the views are incredible this morning. We can see right out to Fair Isle on the horizon, with lovely views over the south end of Shetland. Whilst up here we also get good views of a flock of Twite, as well as numerous Wheatears and another Minke Whale is seen surfacing offshore.

From here we drive back down to Grutness and spend some time taking in the views of the Arctic Tern and Common Gull colony. Many of the terns now have chicks and we manage to also pick out a first summer Arctic Tern in the colony. We also get some nice close views of a Ringed Plover and Dunlin on the small pool here.

With time getting on we drive around to Loch Spiggie and from the hide overlooking the loch here we see a large flock of 40+ Sand Martin hawking over the loch, as well as two Common Swifts mixed in. Several Common Terns are perched on the tern raft close to the hide and we also pick out some Kittiwakes, Mute Swans and a pair of Tufted Duck with young.

Before all too long, sadly though it's time to head to Sumburgh airport to catch our flight back to Aberdeen at the end of another fantastic Shetland trip!

Species Of The Trip:

Red-necked Phalarope, Red-throated Diver, Gannet, Black-tailed Godwit

Place Of The Trip:

Mousa, Hermaness, St Ninians Isle, Sumburgh Head, Fetlar

Magic Moment: Gannet diving frenzy, Mousa mindful moment, View from the top of the Broch, Storm Petrels at the Broch, Franklin Gull.

BIRDS

Mute Swan
Whooper Swan
Barnacle Goose
Greylag Goose
Shelduck
Mallard
Teal
Tufted Duck
Eider
Red-breasted Merganser
Red-throated Diver
Great Northern Diver
Storm Petrel
Fulmar
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Grey Heron
Merlin
Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
Golden Plover
Lapwing
Turnstone
Dunlin
Sanderling
Red Knot
Common Redshank
Black-tailed Godwit
Bar-tailed Godwit
Curlew
Whimbrel
Common Snipe
Red-necked Phalarope
Great Skua
Arctic Skua

Black-headed Gull
Franklins Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Puffin
Black Guillemot
Guillemot
Razorbill
Pheasant
Woodpigeon
Rock Dove
Collared Dove
Common Swift
Skylark
Sand Martin
Swallow
Rock Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Wheatear
Blackbird
Blackcap
Melodious Warbler
Wren
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Twite
Greenfinch

MAMMALS

Otter
Rabbit
Ferret
Hedgehog
Brown Rat
Common Seal
Grey Seal
Harbour Porpoise
Minke Whale

INVERTS/PLANTS/ADDENDA

Shetland Bumblebee
Red Admiral
Large White
Oysterplant
Round-leaved Sundew
Butterwort
Northern Marsh Orchid
Heath-spotted Orchid