

## HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

### SUTHERLAND AND SPEYSIDE

20-30 JUNE 2015

Guide: John Picton

Guests: Melanie and John Parker, Nicky Lovely, Ann Bolton, Margaret Murphy

**Day 1** We all arrive at the Steading in the late afternoon so spend the evening settling in, having our first of many tasty meals prepared by Sharon and going over what exciting excursions we will be undertaking over the next ten days.

**Day 2** The weather is not the best start we could have hoped for, overcast and drizzly rain along with no breeze means the dreaded midges are in evidence. Regardless we set off, heading for the Findhorn Valley.

As we drive slowly down the Findhorn Valley, we notice that some of the resident breeding waders of Lapwing, Curlew and Oystercatcher have fluffy chicks with them, which always brings an 'ahh' from even the hardest of people. We pull in at Dipper Bridge, but sadly there is no sign of any dippers, but Common Sandpipers are noisily buzzing around, and an adult along with a young Grey Wagtail and a couple of Pied Wagtails are busy feeding on the fast flowing burn. On the hill behind, Red Deer and Feral Goats graze.

As we continue down the valley a female Redstart flies across the road in front of us and luckily it has stopped raining. What seems like several hundred Mistle Thrushes are flying around as we proceed down the valley along with the usual suspects of Meadow Pipits, lots of Common and Black-headed Gulls, Kestrel, Buzzard, Raven and Jackdaws. Large numbers of Red Deer are up on every hillside, the more you look the more seem to appear out of the hillsides, with the stags all in velvet and looking very smart in their fresh summer coats. A walk out from the second bridge reveals two or three Mountain Hare ensconced in their forms on the hillside in their 'blue' summer coats. From the plantation behind us we hear the calls of Common Crossbills, but sadly they don't make themselves visible. Golden Eagles are notable by their absence which is a shame. At the end of the valley a lengthy scan of the crags reveal a young Peregrine chick sat high up on its cliff-face eyrie, stretching its wings and looking very close to fledging. More deer and goats scatter the hills. We eat lunch and continue to search for eagles but sadly none appear.

We leave the Findhorn and go up and over the Farr Road heading towards Loch Ruthven. The high moors seem devoid of life, but we do see some Red Grouse with chicks by the road a solitary Wheatear and a lonely looking Buzzard soaring over the moor.

At Loch Ruthven the rain comes down in earnest, so we head for the hide. There are two pairs of Slavonian Grebes visible, one pair out fishing on the Loch, along with a pair of Red-throated Divers, which call briefly then tuck their heads in and doze whilst bobbing in the rain. The other pair of Slav's are down in the reeds and appear to be nest building, we watch as they busily construct a base from vegetation and sludge from the bottom of the loch. Being so late in the season we can only conclude that their first attempt had failed and they are hastily trying again. A pair of Little Grebes have obviously had more luck as they are busy feeding chicks. Tufted Duck and Mallard are also out on the Loch, and Black-headed Gulls fly around calling. Despite the best efforts of the many Sand Martins, House Martins and Swallows hawking over the area the midges are becoming a nuisance so we leave the grebes and head home, adding Reed Bunting and Willow Warbler to our day's list. On the way back we pull in at Loch Insh to look at the resident Ospreys here. The female is sat on the nest and the male is sat up in a nearby Larch tree looking soggy and fed up. We leave them to it and head home.

After dinner we head to our mammal hide. An excellent evening is had as we watch our female Marten come bounding in onto the rocks at the back of the hide and feed for nearly 10 minutes; in the meantime whilst watching her, the male had come in, stolen the egg and left! Luckily as per the usual M.O. he comes back 10 minutes later, just after a Badger sow has arrived. The Marten climbs the tree and down the branch which connects the tree to the feeding table, as the Marten comes down the branch it slips off the table coming down with a crash which sends the handsome male Marten and the Badger running in fright. Luckily they both come back after a few minutes and we enjoy prolonged views. Another sow comes in with two cubs, which are always great entertainment. Roe and Red Deer are also added to the sightings tally and of course, we can't forget to mention the Wood Mice which also provide good entertainment. After a long day we head home to bed.

### Day 3

The weather has not improved, so instead of heading into the Caledonian Forest we head up to the Black Isle. This is a good idea as the weather here is much better but still doesn't feel too 'summery'. Our first stop is at North Kessock, where we stop for loos and a scan of the firth below. There is nothing visible on the water but a Chiffchaff is singing from a nearby tree so we track it down and watch this Highland 'rarity' as it delivers

its monotonous call. We head down through the village and under the huge Kessock Bridge as it can be good for Otters down there; but not today! No sign of Otters but we do get a couple of male Goosander which is nice.

We make our way through the Black Isle, and see Tree Sparrows on a farm house feeder, and add Red Kite and a Whitethroat to the days tally. We stop in Avoch to watch the Common Terns nesting noisily on the pontoons, and are pleasantly surprised to find several Sandwich Terns on the beach too. Moving on, we see several gorgeous Yellowhammers on the gorse as we drive through the golf course down to Chanonry point. Two Bottle-nosed Dolphins are off the point but not hanging around and keep moving out towards the open sea. A solitary Grey Seal is present too and we see several species flying past, Cormorant, Shag and more Terns, along with a Guillemot out fishing on the water. We head over to Udale Bay on the Cromarty Firth on the north side of the Black Isle. It is not the best time of year for this site, there is much more going on during passage and in the winter, but the main resident waders are around with lots of Curlew, Oystercatcher and Lapwing, along with some wildfowl, Mallards, Teal, Red-breasted Merganser, Shelduck and quite a few Canada Geese, which aren't usually something you see a lot of in the Highlands. There are also plenty of gulls around represented by four species; Common, Black-headed, Herring and Great Black-backed. Having made the best of the weather we make our way back to drizzly Speyside.

#### Day 4

The weather has not improved much and a cloudy drizzly start to the day ensues. We head out to Lochindorb on the bleak but beautiful Dava Moor. We kick off the day with a family of Red Grouse feeding on the heather as they move across the damp moor. We drive slowly along the shore scanning for divers but see nothing on the grey, choppy loch.

We stop in the lay-by opposite the castle and are alerted to a commotion as an Osprey appears and starts mobbing a Buzzard which is soaring over the wood. This heavily implies the Osprey has a nest in the wood, as after seeing the Buzzard off it returns to the wood and appears to go down into the wood. This is great as until now John has only known of Ospreys commuting here to fish rather than having a resident pair. Just after this we see the pair of Black-throated Divers, and even better they have a chick! This is really good, as at this site the divers often suffer disturbance or predation. At this time of year on Lochindorb the many Greylag Geese which nest in the area gather here to moult and form huge crèches with their goslings. There are literally hundreds of geese on the loch, and a scan through them reveal some oddities. Firstly there is a solitary Barnacle Goose in amongst the myriad of Greylags, then a closer look reveals a Barnacle, Greylag hybrid, then a Canada, Greylag hybrid! John loves finding things like this, it gives a good twist to birding and tests your i.d. skills.

A few waders are around too, Common Sandpipers and Redshank feed on the loch shore while Oystercatchers and Lapwing feed in the fields adjacent to the loch. The Common Gull colony looks good with seemingly more birds breeding here than in the previous couple of years.

We leave Dava and drop down towards Grantown-on-Spey, stopping at Tomveich Wood, hoping to pick up Crested Tit and Crossbills. We have two flyovers by what sounds like Common Crossbills but they are high up and don't stop, their calls the only way we can id them but not really what you would call a great sighting. It is a similar story with Crested Tit, as a single bird feeds in the trees nearby, but never stops flitting about, so we are hardly able to get it in our bins; birding can be a frustrating business! The wood is quiet today, with a Song Thrush, a family of Robins and a Coal Tit feeding its young the only other birds we see.

We pop in to Dorback, with Short-eared Owl in mind; right on cue, one appears and starts quartering the moor. It successfully catches a vole and we watch it fly with purpose to a spot on the hillside where it goes down and appears a moment later without the Vole, a good indication that that's where a nest is. We carry on watching it and it does the same again; it catches a Vole then goes back to the same location and drops it off. It's great to see this pair successfully breeding here as this species suffers from persecution on the areas grouse moors. Curlew and a Wheatear are the only other things we see here.

We head to Cairngorm to see if the cloud has lifted high enough to ascend the mountain for the three 'high tops' specialities, but sadly this is not the case. So we concentrate on looking for the Ring Ouzels that nest here on the lower slopes. With this we are lucky and get good views of the male as he sits on various rocks and stunted pines giving his plaintive yet uninspired three note song. Meadow Pipits and Wheatears provide the supporting cast here. We head back to the Steading but pop into Inshriach Forest where John has been seeing Crossbills lately but unfortunately not this afternoon. We try a walk in the woods by the Steading too but no joy here either, those pesky Crossbills are definitely playing hard to get this week.

## Day 5

The clouds are refusing to play ball still, with a big dollop of the grey stuff still squatting on the summit of Cairngorm. So we head into the woods on the Rothiemurchus Estate to try again for Cresties and Crossbills, and again they evade us. Indeed it's very quiet in the woods and Chaffinches and Coal Tits seem to be the only birds about. We do see a pair of Little Grebes too on a wee Lochan in the woods. The Midges are out in force this morning so we retreat to Glenmore Café for hot chocolate and hopefully a Red Squirrel for Margaret. Sadly, they are not playing ball either, but there's hardly any food here as Jackdaws, Black-headed Gulls and Wood Pigeons

seem to have taken over the feeders here with hardly any small birds around except for a few Chaffinches. After our choccy we go for a walk in the woods behind the caravan park. We connect with a Dipper and its chick on the river which is nice and there are a few Spotted Flycatchers around too but not much else. We head into the Forestry Commission Visitor Centre which has got some good displays about the Caledonian Forest. We then drive up to Whitewell for lunch, which gives great views to the mountains beyond. Redpolls are flying around calling but not much else is stirring. A check on Cairngorm after lunch reveals that the cloud has come down even lower, so we give up that idea and head over to Loch Garten. The Ospreys have failed this year so they aren't around, but we watch Great-Spotted Woodpeckers, Coal Tits, Chaffinches and Siskins on the feeders and after a while, Margaret finally gets her Red Squirrel.

We finish at Dorback again (by popular demand), and sure enough we are lucky enough to watch the 'Shorty' hunting the moor again. This time however it drops its catch off a lot closer to us than yesterday and we could see a young owl take the vole from its parent. This obviously means the young are able to fly short distances and have left the nest site. The only other birds around are Redpolls flying over, Curlews, Meadow Pipits and a Kestrel after the same Voles the 'Shorty' is hunting. From the plantation behind us came the calls of Tawny and the 'squeaky gate' call of a young Long-eared Owl, a very owly place indeed. Of course these other two are not going to be around until dark, but it is good to get confirmation that Long ears have bred at the site.

## Day 6

Today we head North and West to start the second part of the holiday in Sutherland, this dramatic area of the Highlands contrasts with Speyside in looks being what could only be described as bleak and barren, yet incredibly dramatic and awesome scenery with a stunning coastline heaving with wildlife. I love this far-flung corner of Britain, its remoteness, lack of people and gorgeous empty sandy beaches make it unique and very special. It is also the 'Diver' capital of Britain and we hope to be seeing a lot of them in the next few days. We make various stops along the way, as we have taken the 'scenic route' via Loch Maree. Our first stop is at Glen Doherty, which has always been a lucky spot for John for Golden Eagle. It waits until we pull away then appears over the ridge being mobbed by a Buzzard, which looks particularly puny next to the enormous Goldie. A couple of Ravens fly down the ridge too, and a pair of Cuckoos are around, and we hear the little heard 'bubbling' call from the female, which is cool. A few Red Deer hinds are scattered around the hillside too. A stop at Gairloch provides nothing but the lovely views, so we head further along the stunning coastline and stop for lunch Gruinyard Bay. A Red-throated

Diver is in the bay along with a group of Red-Breasted Mergansers (females and young), some Shags and one or two Guillemots. Some Common Seals are hauled out on Gruinyard Island as well, but no sign of the White-tailed Eagles that usually nest here.

We cross from Wester Ross into Sutherland and stop at the beautiful Kylesku, one of John's favourite villages found on the shores of Loch Glencoul, a huge, magnificent sea loch and a most serene location. We see a couple more Red-throated Divers, Eiders, Shags and there are also some Razorbills and Guillemots out fishing in the loch. Common Seals are hauled out on the islets in the loch some in their tell-tale 'banana' pose. This is usually a good spot for eagles but not today, sadly. Also noticeable by their absence are the usual noisy calls of both Arctic and Common Terns which usually nest on the islets. Oystercatchers however are filling in nicely as the disturbers of the still silence, with backing from some common Sandpipers. We push on the last bit to Rhiconich, our base for the next few days. The hotel overlooks the long narrow Loch Inchar a big sea loch which usually holds some potential goodies. We see our first 'genuine' Rock Doves wheeling around the small fields in front of us and some Hoodies forage on the tide line. A large number of Greylags are on the loch too and a couple of Mergansers. We settle in and hope the weather holds as today has been the first day it's been warm and dry all day.

## Day 7

First off we head down to Loch Stack and Loch More, which usually hold divers; but this morning both are empty. Except for a weird one, a solitary female Mandarin! Very bizarre, the most unlikely duck to be found up here in the treeless moorland loch. A buzzard soars off to our left as we head back and out to Oldshoremore, a beach just down the road near Kinlochbervie. This is a stunning little secluded beach and with the sun out is reminiscent of the Caribbean with its white sandy beach. The small bay is heaving with birds, numerous Shags, Guillemots, Razorbills and Black Guillemots are fishing in the crystal clear water, as well as a Red-throated diver along with two Great Northern Divers, one in full summer plumage, one in non-breeding plumage which are fishing behind a rocky headland. Hooded Crows are on the prowl and probably up to no good as Meadow Pipits and Wheatears forage around the small fields and a pair of Ringed Plover stand on the rocks in front of us calling. A few Fulmars are nesting on the cliffs opposite and one or two are soaring over the water on stiff wings. This is a magical place and if anywhere else in Britain would probably be teeming with people but here you get it practically to yourself which is just marvellous, although it seems quite busy today. We have our first, but certainly not our last, view of the mighty Great Skua here too. We then move on towards the North coast at Balnakiel Bay, but first we stop at the Kyle of Durness, usually a good place to see Greenshank, and sure enough we see one of these elegant waders feeding in a channel, one of the very

few places to see these lovely birds in summer. Mergansers fish the same channel, and Curlew are feeding on the sand. We stop here for lunch and add Shelduck, Common Sandpipers and some more Hoodies to the days tally. After lunch we drive the short distance to Durness, a small village on the north coast where we have a look in the shop and use the loos before making our way to Balnakiel Bay; which is a slightly larger version of Oldshoremore, a lovely bay with a concave sandy beach going up to the dunes and cliffs of Faraid head.

Two Great Northern Divers are fishing here too, one in summer finery and one in non-breeding plumage. John's favourite Auk, the Black Guillemot is here with his relatives the Guillemot and Razorbill fishing here too along with the obligatory compliment of Shags. Amongst these usual suspects is a bit of a surprise however, a lovely male Long-tailed Duck in summer plumage! Scotland has plenty of these handsome sea duck that come here from their Arctic breeding grounds to spend the winter; but they have all usually left by the end of April, so why this one was still here is a bit of a mystery, maybe a non-breeding bird, but a more exciting thought is that there is a female somewhere and they have decided to stay and nest, but we guess we will never know.

We take a walk inland where the dunes blend into pasture fields. Rabbits are dashing everywhere disturbed by our passing as we approach our objective, a small marshy area with a small narrow reed bed, thick vegetation and some open areas of water, John found this little oasis a few years ago whilst doing this holiday for the first time and it never disappoints. There are three Whooper Swans, and a pair of Shoveler! What is it with odd ducks in odd places today? As well as that Highland rarity, the Moorhen, looking pristine, a female Tufted Duck and her brood of ducklings and one or two Teal hiding at the back. A few pairs of Black-headed Gulls are nesting here and we see a Sedge Warbler along with a Stonechat in the reed bed. Lapwings fly by and a large number of Swallows and Martins hawk the area for insects. The marsh has one more surprise though, a White Wagtail, the continental version of our own Pied Wagtail, obviously nobody has told this one it should be on the continent! But he is hanging out with a couple of his relatives and at one point starts chasing a Swallow, why I'm not sure, but we are impressed by how well he kept up with the fast, agile Swallow.

We see a dark, black, bank of cloud moving our way from the West so we decide to retreat to Balnakiel Craft Village (recycled from a WW2 early warning base) and it is hot chocolate all round as the rain comes down outside. With the rain looking like it is settling in we head home.

## Day 8

Today we venture over to the wonderful Handa Island, (180,000 sea birds can't be wrong!) and it's no coincidence it's the best day of weather so far. You can actually feel the heat in the sun today. Like Kylesku there are no Terns here either, apparently they came, tried and went again, probably due to a lack of Sand Eels. On the bright side there are far more Arctic Skuas around this year compared to the previous few years. One of John's favourite birds and both pale and dark phase birds are here, there and everywhere it seems. Their cousins, the burly, barrel chested bully boys known up here as the Bonxie (Great Skua) are present in good numbers too.

We walk over the island to the great stack where we stop for lunch and scan the noisy, busy and slightly smelly stack. On the way, however, a pair of Arctic Skuas have decided to nest right next to the boardwalk, which meant they took umbrage to us walking past in single file and took to the air, but they must have thought we were a giant snake as they only dive-bombed the head; which was Nicky, and some of the blows are pretty close too. After we leave the danger zone a Bonxie strays too close and both Arctic Skuas turn their attention to it and chase and harry it mercilessly showing off their prowess and mastery of flight.

The sheer rock faces are crammed with Razorbills, Guillemots and a smaller number of Puffins, which are still building in numbers after the eradication of Rats from the island, along with plenty of Fulmar and Kittiwakes. A constant patrol of both types of Skuas and Great Black-backed Gulls cruise around waiting for a chance to pirate a sea bird's catch or even take the bird itself. It seems like there are as many birds rafting on the sea as are on the cliffs, like an oil slick of Auks! After lunch we carry on round the island taking in more birds on the cliffs and sea. Other birds we see on the walk round are a couple of Red-throats which fly over, Meadow and Rock Pipits, Shags, Cormorants, Eiders and Ringed Plover. A solitary Grey Seal is the only marine mammal we encounter, John was hoping for some possible Cetaceans which he had had before here but constant scanning reveals nothing. John flushes a couple of common Lizards which are basking on the board walk, and nearly treads on a Snipe which is feeding in a wet ditch on the path. Once back on the mainland we see a small flock of Twite feeding in a small field by the car park. We end the day with another visit to Loch Stack and Loch More, to try again for divers but we see a gorgeous Black-throat on a loch as we are leaving Tarbet and on arriving at Loch Stack a stunning Great Northern in breeding plumage is fishing there giving everyone excellent views. A Red-throat is on Loch More and we all get good views of that too but the Mandarin has gone. After another great day we head home to another excellent Rhiconich dinner.



## Day 9

Today we head out along the north coast to Strath More in the shadow of Ben Hope. But our first stop is overlooking the huge Loch Eriboll, a massive sea loch, which is also very deep and was used as a submarine base by the Navy during WW2. The sailors were not as enamoured by its wild beauty as we are though and nick-named it Loch 'orrible'! We stop and scan the loch and John spots a Gannet sat resting on the water. John then spots an Otter fishing just off shore, it's tricky to keep tabs on from where we are standing, but we watch it for some time before it disappears round a headland.

A small raft of Eider are on the south end of the loch, comprising of males in eclipse, some first summer males and some females. A trio of Red-throated Divers cruise down the loch fishing as they went along with a solitary Guillemot as well as a Black Guillemot. The road follows the edge of the loch and we move round to the eastern shore and John spots a single Black-throated Diver relaxing just off shore, and we all coo over its jaw dropping beauty. Further on the road climbs up to look down upon the loch and we stop to have a scan. More Eiders are present along with a few Shags and Gulls. Then in the distance we notice a black hump appear briefly from the water, it's a Harbour Porpoise and as we watch it looks like three or four of our smallest cetaceans are moving up the loch towards the open sea, momentarily surfacing as they go. The constant twittering of Redpolls provide the soundtrack to our views.

Leaving Eriboll the road heads east and we turn off and down Strath More following along the shore of Loch Hope, which sometimes has divers on but not on this occasion. We pause by a barn which inexplicably is usually a good spot for waders, and today there is a Ringed Plover feeding here. Further along the road we pull over for lunch with the imposing form of Ben Hope at our backs we look across the strath and as we eat lunch constantly scan the ridge of mountains opposite for eagles; but the only signs of life are a few Red Deer hinds grazing on the mountainsides. A couple of Willow Warblers feed in the Alders giving their single note call. We are just about to leave when a Goldie comes cruising down the ridge behind us! A Kestrel appears and starts dive-bombing the mighty eagle, looking like a Swift in size, compared. The eagle disappears over the ridge but a few minutes later another eagle (or possibly the same one has looped back round) come down the ridge again and gives us great views as it cruises overhead before vanishing over the ridge. John never tires of seeing these magnificent raptors; they truly are the masters of the sky. We wait to see if it would re-appear but it doesn't. We scan further along the ridgeline and can see something large, so we jump in the van and set off after it, but when we get to the spot it has gone but a Buzzard is slope soaring further along the ridge.

We drive on a short distance to an ancient Broch, a fortified cylindrical stone dwelling. Behind us eight Red Stags graze on the hill behind and watch us nervously before deciding to move off, their antlers in velvet and looking lovely in their summer coats. Redpolls fly over calling and House Martins are hawking for insects over the river. It's a lovely strath but with time ticking on we need to start heading back. As we are about to leave the valley Nicky spots a pair of Eagles drifting towards us, John pulls over and we all get cracking views of the pair (the size difference being obvious) as they start off quite low and circle up on a thermal and drift off out of sight, a fantastic stuff.

We leave Strath More and go a bit further along the coast to the Kyle of Tongue. A few Eiders are resting on the shore with a few more on the water and a pair of Common Sandpipers noisily fly about, but apart from that, the area is quiet, so we retrace our steps back to Durness. We go for another look at Balnakiel Bay to see if we can find a Great Northern to keep up the record of all three divers every day, alas in the very choppy waters we fail to find a diver or indeed relocate the Long-tailed Duck for Margaret, but a couple of Razorbills and Guillemots are braving the swell and there are three or four Arctic Terns fishing in the bay, but most surprisingly there is a first summer little Gull with them! A Fulmar sits on the turbulent water sleeping, and on the washed up seaweed a White Wagtail (almost certainly the same one as the other day) feeds with a couple of Pied Wagtails, a Rock Pipit and a solitary Dunlin in its smart summer plumage. As we are leaving John spots a Bonxie cruising menacingly over the bay.

## Day 10

Sadly its time for us to leave the spectacular North West and head back to Speyside. We come back via the inland route, which takes us past Loch Stack and More, and this time we hit the jackpot, no less than four Black-throats and a Great Northern Diver all together! We all watch with gaping mouths at this awesome spectacle, the divers make their way up the loch and we hit the road again.

Our next stop is at Shin Falls, a well known Salmon leap; we descend the steps down to the roaring falls. There isn't much action going on but we do see two or three good sized Salmon attempt the falls and even a little tiddler had a go. A Grey Wagtail flies past and we decide to move on. We hit the main road by Dingwall and it suddenly seems very busy after the tranquil isolation of Sutherland. We pass along the shores of the Cromarty Firth and spot some Common Seals hauled out on a sand-bank. It's getting close to midday so we head down the beautiful Strathconon for lunch. As we drive down there seem to be Stags everywhere. No sooner have we stopped the van than an adult Golden Eagle appears over the ridge in front of us and we watch in wonder as we get another stonking view of this, the finest of birds. As we eat by the river we add another Grey Wagtail, Common Sandpipers and a family of Stonechats to the days tally.

The eagle doesn't return so we head off, but do see a brief view of a Sparrowhawk as it whips across the road, and once out of the strath we see a couple of Red Kites lazily quartering the fields. We make our way back to Speyside for our last night, staying in the Rowan Tree hotel.

## Day 11

It has been a great trip, despite the weather being far from summery and stopping us getting up the hill to see the three high tops specialities, we have still seen the majority of our target species and been treated to some really good sightings of some spectacular birds. John has never had so many Goldies in a holiday before and for him it's the bird of the trip.

We say our farewells and make our way home. I hope to see you all again in the future and John reckons you will all return to Sutherland some time.

**Favourite Species:** This was a tie, with the votes split evenly between the stunning Black-throated Diver and the magnificent Golden Eagle. Mentions in dispatches go to the perfectly proportioned and elegant Arctic Skua, and to the Redpoll for providing the soundtrack to the trip.

**Favourite Places:** A mixed bag in this one, but Strathconon takes it with two votes, Dorback, Johns marsh, the great stack on Handa and all of Sutherland got a vote each too.

**Magic Moments:** Arctic Skuas feature in two magic moments which followed each other, Johns was Nicky getting dive bombed by the magnificent pair (one pale phase one dark phase) which went on to my moment when they turned their attention to a Bonxie which had strayed too close too. The Great Northern waving us goodbye, The Goldie in Strathconon, the multiple 'diverfest' on loch stack all got mentions as well.

## BIRDS

Red-throated Diver  
Black-throated Diver  
Great Northern Diver  
Little Grebe  
Slavonian Grebe  
Fulmar  
Gannet  
Cormorant  
Shag  
Grey Heron  
Mute Swan  
Whooper Swan  
Greylag Goose  
(Barnacle X Greylag and Canada  
Greylag hybrids)  
Barnacle Goose  
Canada Goose  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Shoveler  
Teal  
Tufted Duck  
Eider  
Long Tailed Duck  
Goldeneye  
Red breasted Merganser  
Goosander  
Mandarin  
Golden Eagle  
Red Kite  
Common Buzzard  
Osprey  
Kestrel  
Peregrine  
Sparrowhawk  
Red Grouse  
Pheasant  
Oystercatcher  
Ringed Plover  
Lapwing  
Dunlin  
Snipe  
Curlew  
Redshank  
Greenshank  
Common Sandpiper  
Arctic Skua  
Great Skua  
Black-headed Gull  
Common Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Greater Black-backed Gull  
Herring Gull  
Kittiwake  
Little Gull  
Common Tern  
Arctic Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
Guillemot  
Razorbill  
Black Guillemot  
Puffin  
Rock Dove  
Wood Pigeon  
Collared Dove  
Cuckoo  
Short-eared Owl  
Swift  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Skylark  
Sand Martin  
Swallow  
House Martin  
Tree Pipit  
Meadow Pipit  
Rock Pipit  
Grey Wagtail  
Pied Wagtail  
White Wagtail  
Dipper  
Wren  
Dunnock  
Robin  
Redstart  
Wheatear  
Stonechat  
Ring Ouzel  
Blackbird

Song Thrush  
Mistle Thrush  
Sedge Warbler  
Willow Warbler  
Chiffchaff  
Blackcap  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Long-tailed Tit  
Crested Tit  
Coal Tit  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Jackdaw  
Rook  
Carrion Crow  
Hooded Crow  
Raven  
Jay  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Greenfinch  
Goldfinch  
Siskin  
Redpoll  
Linnet  
Common Crossbill  
Bullfinch  
Yellowhammer  
Reed Bunting

**TOTAL BIRDS: 118**

## **MAMMALS**

Bank Vole  
Wood Mouse  
Red Squirrel  
Rabbit  
Brown Hare  
Mountain Hare  
Pine Marten  
Otter  
Badger  
Pipistrelle Bat  
Feral Goat  
Red Deer  
Roe Deer  
Grey Seal  
Common Seal  
Harbour Porpoise  
Bottle-nosed Dolphin

## **OTHERS**

Common Lizard  
Common Toad  
Atlantic Salmon

**TOTAL SPECIES: 138**

