

# ULTIMATE UISTS



*"The Uists are so rewarding, a Corncrake creeping out of cover to give its rasping song, or a group of summer-plumaged Black-tailed Godwits resting by a loch where Wigeon and Teal display. Watching Little Terns nesting on sandy fields and the sun catching the nape of an adult Golden Eagle. These are magical experiences and I hope you can share some with me on the Uists in 2023."* Stuart Housden OBE

Dates Fri 2 - Sat 10 Jun 2023  
 Price £2,795  
 Deposit £500 Single Supp £350

Leader Stuart Housden OBE

Weather Though usually quite dry, these islands can experience all the seasons during one trip and can be windy (5°-20°C)

Walking Coastal walks on uneven terrain of up to three miles - walking boots recommended, but trainers or even sandals suitable on some occasions. Collapsible/telescopic walking poles could be useful for this trip

Boat Trip Our boat trip around Grimsay lasts 2 hours

Meals All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9

Insects Biting insects unlikely to be a problem at this time of year

Accom Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite

Group 7

## Just some of what we hope to see

Corncrake	Pomarine Skua
Red-necked Phalarope	Long-tailed Skua
Golden Eagle	Manx Shearwater
Hen Harrier	Black Guillemot
Merlin	Black-tailed Godwit
Short-eared Owl	Wheatear
White-tailed Eagle	Stonechat
Great Northern Diver	Redpoll
Black-throated Diver	Puffin
Red-throated Diver	Storm Petrel
Whimbrel	Twite
Little Tern	Golden Plover
Arctic Tern	Hebridean Orchid
Arctic Skua	Harbour Seal
Great Skua	Otter

This tour has been created by Stuart, who first visited the islands in 1978. As the former Director of RSPB Scotland his knowledge of the Uists and their conservation is exceptional.

- We visit North and South Uist, Benbecula and Berneray
- A chartered boat trip affords close views of skuas, raptors, Harbour and Grey Seals
- Corncrake and Red-necked Phalarope - we shall search for these elusive rarities
- Visit scenic Loch Druidibeg, looking for Short-eared Owls, waders and raptors
- Walk through beautiful machair flora hoping for the rare Great Yellow Bumblebee
- We shall keep a watchful eye open for Otters and Golden and White-tailed Eagles
- Visit the RSPB Balranald Reserve for waders, duck, Twite, Corncrake and Corn Bunting

**1-2** We meet for dinner in Inverness and set off next morning for our journey through the Great Glen, across the Isle of Skye to Uig, where we board the ferry to Lochmaddy. On the crossing we shall go on deck to search for Puffins, Razorbills, Gannets and Manx Shearwater. With luck, we may see Common Dolphins and even a Storm Petrel. After docking we make our way to our hotel nearby.

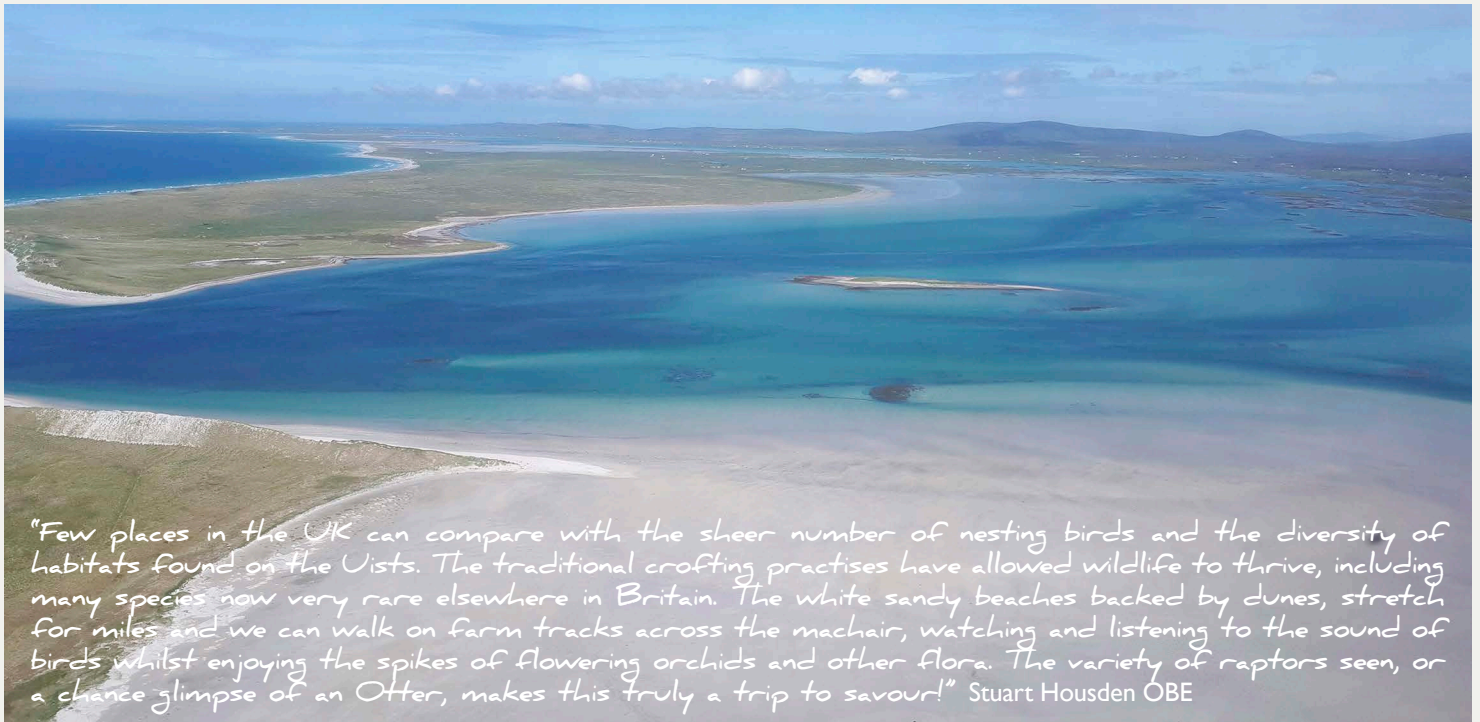
**3-7** At this time of year the days are long, dawn breaks at 04.25 and the sun sets at 22.30! We shall pace ourselves to enjoy the mornings when birds are active and take a more relaxed approach in the afternoons. Optional walks before breakfast will be offered on some mornings.

Making full use of Stuart's expert knowledge our exploration starts in the south, where shallow lochs

fringed by Yellow Flag Iris and rocky headlands emerge from beautiful stretches of shell-sand beaches. Behind the dunes that face the Atlantic is the machair, a sandy grassland rich in wildflowers used by crofters to grow crops and raise cattle. The stunning flora includes deep purple Northern Marsh Orchids, the wine red Early Marsh Orchids and a succession of colourful pansies, clovers and Corn Marigolds. These flowers attract Moss Carder Bumblebees and with luck the Great Yellow Bumblebee, now confined to the far north of Scotland. The machair is alive with Skylarks and calling waders and we shall search shallow lochs for Snipe, Teal, Shoveler and Wigeon.

Migrant birds are still passing offshore, with summer plumaged waders and sometimes skuas heading up to the Tundra! We shall look for lingering Great Northern Divers and Whimbrel, or Black-tailed





"Few places in the UK can compare with the sheer number of nesting birds and the diversity of habitats found on the Uists. The traditional crofting practises have allowed wildlife to thrive, including many species now very rare elsewhere in Britain. The white sandy beaches backed by dunes, stretch for miles and we can walk on farm tracks across the machair, watching and listening to the sound of birds whilst enjoying the spikes of flowering orchids and other flora. The variety of raptors seen, or a chance glimpse of an Otter, makes this truly a trip to savour!" Stuart Housden OBE

Godwits bound for Iceland, which may drop into the fields. Otters are widespread and with luck we may see one during our visits to coasts or lochs.

Along Loch Eynort the efforts of one landowner has transformed the north side of the loch. Native woodland has been planted and the shelter offers a home to warblers and Redpolls and the occasional rare migrant. There is an excellent area to picnic, where we watch for divers, Harbour Seals and sometimes Otter. The ridge lines of the mountains form a wonderful backdrop and we shall scan for Golden and White-tailed Eagles! Another highlight is Loch Druidibeg, where the local community and RSPB have a Reserve good for moorland birds, including Short-eared Owls.

By special arrangement we shall take a chartered boat around the island of Grimsay, exploring the channels and islands where seals haul out and terns breed. The boat allows close views of eiders, mergansers and even Black Guillemots. With luck, we shall find Black-throated and Red-throated Divers and hopefully catch a glimpse of a White-tailed or Golden Eagle!

With care we look for the Red-necked Phalarope, which in some years nests here. There are only 30-40 pairs in the UK and this tiny population winters in the seas off Ecuador! This dainty wader swims confidently and it's the more dowdy male which incubates the eggs.

Our attention now switches to North Uist and Berneray, which have lovely Machair and rolling moorland where Hen Harriers, Short-eared Owls,

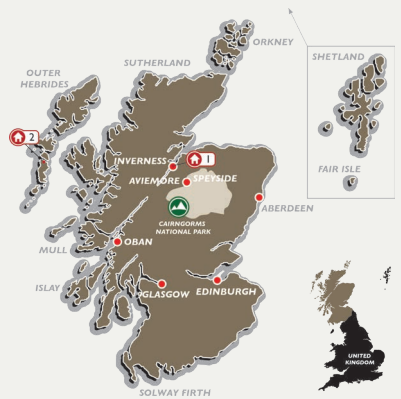
and sometimes Merlin can be seen. There are excellent viewpoints to scan for these species, with Stonechats and Wheatears to keep us entertained. Cuckoos often fly across the moorland searching for Meadow Pipit nests. The moorland is visited by hunting eagles, often mobbed by Ravens and other raptors!

The RSPB Reserve at Balranald has ideal habitat for Corncrakes. This area is also the best place for Corn Buntings and Twite. In the fields we may see young Ringed Plover chicks following their parents. Little and Arctic Terns nest nearby and we should see them diving for fish just offshore.

We shall identify the three species of Marsh Orchids found on the Uists. The deep wine red of the Early Marsh, contrasts with the purple Northern Marsh. Hebridean Orchid which has a smaller flower spike and deep black or brown blotches on its spear-shaped leaves and is found nowhere else in the world!

If time permits we shall visit Berneray for a walk beside Loch Bhrusda which can be good for waders, wildfowl and nesting terns.

**8-9** Today we catch our ferry. For those who wish to look for seabirds and cetaceans, we shall go on deck and watch the mountains on Skye get close, as we journey across the Minch. Then it's a steady drive to Inverness. The woodlands seem so vivid after the near treeless landscape we have left! Then it's back to our hotel for dinner. After breakfast the next morning we say our farewells.



### Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Meet up in Inverness for overnight stay. 1 night Premier Inn
- Day 2 Travel down the Great Glen and across Skye, before catching ferry to Lochmaddy and making our way to our hotel. 6 nights at Hamersay Hotel, Lochmaddy
- Days 3-7 Birdwatching, botany and wildlife exploration of North and South Uist, Benbecula and Berneray.
- Day 8 Travel back to Inverness. 1 night Premier Inn
- Day 9 Depart after breakfast.

**Steve Batt:** Short-eared Owl  
**Stuart Housden:** Uists from the Air  
**Colin Scott:** Great Skua **Craig Round:** Machair Flowers  
**David King:** Red-necked Phalarope  
**Kate Mennie:** Otter **David Penton:** Arctic Skua

