

Holiday Highlights

Wildlife Bonanza

1 – 8 July 2017

Guides: Roy Atkins and Duncan Macdonald

Guests: Connell, Pam and David Petts, Wendy Castine, Cathy Fathers, Felicity Gilmour, Barbara and Mike Shaw, Dave Thompson, Liz and Chris Piper

Day 1: Everyone arrives at the Steading over the course of the afternoon and evening and enjoy a delicious evening meal, after which we gather at the top lounge for a chat about the coming week. The weather forecast looks rather mixed for the next few days with showers, rain and cloud forecast but a few sunny intervals too - so it's fingers crossed for the dragonflies and butterflies. The flowers will be there whatever the weather and we head to bed excited about the coming week.

Day 2: We wake to cloud with little blue bits in between and as we head out we make a brief stop at a spot where there are Common Wintergreens in flower. They are just delightful with their little pink flowers poking up out of the heather. It is tempting to go for butterflies somewhere as there is a little sunshine but we stick to the plan and head to a woodland in which we are hoping to see Twinflower. The cloud arrives as we do and we realise this was a good move. We walk up through the trees, stopping to identify flowers and ferns as we go. We pass another patch of Common Wintergreen and some lovely plants of Chickweed Wintergreen - a strangely named plant that is neither a chickweed nor a wintergreen! We enjoy some of the commoner species too like Cow-wheat, Bugle, Heath Bedstraw, Tormentil and spot a few Creeping Ladies Tresses plants - though all are still in bud. Duncan points out the distinctive structure of Hard Fern with its flat photosynthesizing leaves and upright spore bearing leaves and Roy does a short lesson on some of the other ferns like Broad and Narrow Buckler and Male and Scaly Male Ferns.

There are a few birds around, including common species like Chaffinch and Coal Tits but also a calling Spotted Flycatcher and a singing Goldcrest. A Treecreeper is here too and we hear Crossbills flying overhead but can't see them. We continue up to our first patch of Twinflower and though it is going over a little there are still plenty of the lovely little pairs of flowers - just delightful with their tiny, pinkish-white bells above a carpet of trailing stems. We walk back to the vans pausing to look at fungi and a patch of Lemon Scented Fern then drive round to Nethy Bridge, where we use the facilities and enjoy a coffee.

Our next stop is at a Northern Damselfly site and as we walk down to the board walk the cool weather means we will need to spot them perched up, as they are unlikely to be flying. They are usually not too hard to find though, perched in the tall vegetation and it does not take long for us to spot one. It is a little far into the

horsetails and so we set a scope up on it and we can see the distinctive rather greenish underside of head and thorax and can just make out markings. It is a bit distant to see the detail well, so Roy walks round the other side of the lochan and soon finds one that he can easily catch in a pot and allow everyone a close view of the distinctive markings. Shortly we tap it onto the vegetation and after pausing for a few photos it flies, landing in the horsetails. We also find an Emerald Damselfly and Large Red Damselflies here too and a few flowers of interest including Marsh Cinquefoil, Marsh Lousewort and Lesser Spearwort.

We move on to Tulloch Moor for lunch and find a few flowers of interest, such as Petty Whin, Bitter Vetch, Mountain Everlasting, Heath Fragrant Orchid and Crowberry and Roy explains how to tell Cowberry from Bearberry. There are a couple of Common Blue Damselflies here too and a rather smart July Belle moth.

We decide that perhaps we should go and look for birds, given the lack of sunshine and drive round to the RSPB Loch Mallachie car park. We take a short walk down the trail and soon find a few birds, though they mainly seem to be Coal Tits, Chaffinches and Willow Warblers. We pass a patch of Intermediate Wintergreen with a couple of flowers then suddenly Duncan hears a calling Crested Tit. It takes a bit of finding but eventually we get some good views of this lovely little bird. We head back to the car park where Roy points out a small patch of Serrated Wintergreen looking in excellent condition.

Our next stop is to have a look at a lovely orchid meadow - though sadly one that you are not allowed in. It is still well worth a visit though with Lesser Butterfly Orchids and Fragrant Orchids growing just the other side of the fence and easily close enough to photograph. There must be hundreds if not thousands of them here and they make a wonderful show. More astonishing however is the show of Small White Orchids. We rarely find any here but this year there seems to be dozens of them. We find a few Heath Spotted Orchids and a few patches of Rockrose too

Our final destination is a lovely bit of moorland/heath where we are hoping to find more Small White Orchids in particular and perhaps Lesser Twayblade. We get out of the vans to discover Heath Fragrant Orchids in good numbers and a few Small White Orchids in excellent condition. We also find some spikes of Intermediate Wintergreen that are in better condition than the ones at Mallachie earlier. There is Petty Whin amongst the heather here and Bitter Vetch and a few small patches of Mountain Everlasting then Roy works his way down the slope searching under the heather for Lesser Twayblade. It is a hard plant to find being incredibly insignificant to look at but after a bit of searching he spots one in flower. Everyone is astonished by how tiny the flowers are - yet perfect little orchid flowers and the same structure in miniature as its larger relative - bizarre that they grow under the heather.

We head back for our evening meal before running through the checklist - but the day is not over yet and soon it is time to head out to our mammal watching hide. We arrive to find Wood Mice already out and about and after Duncan puts out the peanuts and raisins they are busy as anything! According to the book there have been no sightings of Pine Marten for five days so we are not feeling particularly optimistic but suddenly one appears at the back of the hide! It is extremely close and we enjoy fabulous views as it feeds and climbs around on the branches before running round to the bird table. Again we enjoy superb views before suddenly it hops back down to the ground and is away.

We watch the Wood Mice again for some time and suddenly realise there is also a Short-tailed Field Vole in with them. It is feeding on the nuts very happily and seems very relaxed staying out in the open for much longer than the mice do. It is getting quite late when at last the Badgers arrive. First two come running in together then another and another and another until five Badgers are feeding there, so close you could reach out and touch them if it were not for the glass. One is a very cute, if quite well grown, cub and we enjoy watching their antics as they rapidly work their way through all the food – even climbing up the tree to get to the peanut butter put out for the Pine Marten! When they finally disappear, it is our signal to leave and we drive back feeling very happy with our sightings, even adding Roe Deer and Brown Hare to the list on our return journey.

Day 3: We head out in sunshine this morning, feeling very optimistic for some dragonflies today!! We are on our way to one of Scotland's best dragonfly spots, where many species have been recorded and the broken cloud bodes well.

We make a stop on the way at a spot where Peregrines nest on a low cliff. Duncan says he has heard that the nest may have failed this year and this is confirmed when we meet one of his friends who lives nearby - which explains why there is no sign of any birds here. We do spot a circling Sparrowhawk however and find our first Northern Marsh Orchids and a Ringlet flutters by.

Arriving at the car park we gather what we need and then scan the river before we start our walk finding a few nice plants on our way. There are lots of Heath Spotted Orchid and one or two Fragrant Orchids too plus Fir Clubmoss, Lemon Scented Fern, Common Polypody, Slender St John's-wort and Common Wintergreen.

Our first dragonfly appears as we cross the bridge over the river - a Common Hawker, which shows for about two seconds! On the far side, we find Oak Fern and other common species before following the trail up and over a ridge. Near the top get fabulous views of a perched Golden-ringed Dragonfly in the bracken – a stunning species and big with it! The view down to the almost circular lochan is superb and it looks wonderful for dragonflies with mossy edges and white waterlilies round the outside. Even from here we can see a few dashing around the edge and we head down as fast as we can, soon arriving at the shore. The

sun is still out as we arrive and we are pleased to quickly spot our first Downy Emerald. They are cruising back and forth along the edge of the lochan and you can easily see the brilliant green eyes as it flies towards you. We get great views of these plus several Four-spotted Chasers too and another Golden-ringed Dragonfly.

Roy manages to catch a Four-spotted Chaser and shows everyone through the net - the dark spots on the wings very obvious and the rather short triangular body. Then after lunch Duncan manages to catch a Downy Emerald. Taking the net to the path everyone can see it through the net but it is hard to see the detail, so Duncan suggests a trick he knows - to dip the dragonfly in water for a few seconds to cool it down. We are a bit nervous but he insists it is ok and taking it down to the water he literally dips it for just a moment in the water before lifting it out and placing it on his hand. Now everyone can see every detail of this beautiful dragonfly as it sits there quivering its wings to warm the flight muscles, the eyes brilliant green and the body covered in thick hair! Then moments later it takes flight and heads into the trees unharmed.

The sun is coming and going now and we wait for more dragonflies to appear. We see a Common Hawker and find both Large Red and Emerald Damselflies. Roy finds the wiry stems of Small Cranberry and there are baby frogs and toads but when the sun finally disappears we decide to move on.

The trail passes through some lovely woodland with nice plants like Common and Serrated Wintergreens, Cow-wheat, Slender St John's-wort, Bitter Vetch, Yellow Pimpernel and Butterwort amongst others. We spot several Rannoch Looper moths and as we reach the main trail a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is remarkably tame on the flowers here. Walking on, we pause to look at more and more wintergreens looking in superb condition. With the sun now gone behind the clouds we don't expect to find any more dragonflies though a single Common Blue butterfly is nice to see. We are therefore quite surprised when a Golden-ringed Dragonfly appears and lands on the bracken allowing crazily close photo opportunities. There are almost no birds – just a single Willow Warbler.

At the bottom of a slope we find an Ashy Slug - rather large and pointy tailed species that when full grown can be very long indeed. We find some lovely patches of Beech Fern and plenty of Lady fern and a Grey Wagtail by the river. As we are walking back Connell suddenly asks what the dragonfly is she has just spotted right beside the road on a fence post - and we are completely gobsmacked to discover it is an Azure Hawker!!! This is just astonishing - having gone through all that great habitat we find this rarest of species right by the road almost at the end of our walk! It seems hard to believe but with the weather now cold there is no doubt as it stays sat there while we have a really good look, taking in every detail and taking pics from just a foot away or less! It really is quite unbelievable and we walk back with a new spring in our step and really can't believe our luck.

Day 4: With the forecast looking good on the west coast today we head that way. We have a long drive and head up the main road north, passing a couple of Red Kites on the way and making our first stop at the Rogie Falls car park for the toilets. The ladies has been like a giant moth trap overnight and inside is full of moths! At first the gentlemen hang back but eventually we decide to all go in and we identify Green Carpet, Brimstone, Coxcomb Prominent, Large and Light Emeralds, Mottled Beauty and more - we even have to stop one lady coming in as the ladies toilet is full of men!

We pause for coffee at a viewpoint looking down Loch Maree, where Roy show people Yellow Mountain Saxifrage through a telescope! We also get astonishing close up views of a family of Ravens that drop onto the fence right by the car park. We then make a stop for toilets at the Beinne Eighe Visitor Centre, where feeders out the back have lots of Siskins, Great and Blue Tit, Bullfinch, plenty of Chaffinches and a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

With some sunshine all around we are very disappointed to finally arrive at our premium dragonfly site to find it the only bit with cloud blocking the sun. We walk out into a clearing in the trees and while we wait for sunshine and the dragonflies to appear we admire some superb plants of Great and Round-leaved Sundews, Bog Asphodel and sheets of White-beaked Sedge. Roy spots a Golden Eagle way off in the distance which then sails up into the clouds within seconds, which is rather frustrating. A Redpoll flies over and we see plenty of Meadow Pipits then the sun appears briefly and within moments a Large Heath butterfly appears. On some very shallow pools further down there are several Four-spotted Chasers and we are beginning to think that any moment one of the rarer species will appear. Then the sun goes in again! And that is that! No sun - no dragonflies - so in the end we have to give up and decide to take up birdwatching instead, starting well with a Greenshank perched on a rock silhouetted against the lake.

Following the road round to the coast we make a stop at Poolewe, where we pause to scan the bay. There are a few Mallards and Red-breasted Mergansers but nothing else. We continue on to Aultbae, where we are delighted to find a pair of Black-throated Divers!! They are such elegant birds and come closer and closer providing superb scope views. We spot an Eider out in the bay plus Shags and a Red-breasted Merganser and a couple of Red-throated Divers as well. There are surprising number s of Rock Doves flying around and we see our first Hooded Crows. A Common Sandpiper flies across the bay and a Goldfinch comes in to drink from the stream.

We drive on and at the junction with the main road we spot several Northern Marsh Orchids which are in great condition and jump out for photos - then on the other side of the road discover Greater Butterfly Orchids too plus Common Blue Butterfly and a Six spot Burnet moth.

We continue to Laide Jetty, where we take a coffee while scanning the bay finding Shags and a distant Gannet, Shelduck, Great Black-backed Gull and Curlew. Roy wanders down onto the jetty and notices several Comb Jellies in the water - superb little things with brilliant green and purple iridescent cilia down the sides in lines. We all gather to look then we are astonished when a huge Lions-mane Jellyfish appears below us - a magnificent beast. We are amazed at its size and how long the tentacles are trailing below it.

We decide to head round to Gruinard Bay and pause to take photos of the stunning view in the glorious sunshine, which seems to be restricted just to the coast. As we are here suddenly Duncan calls that he has spotted a pair of White-tailed Eagles flying towards Gruinard Island, so we have a look then jump back in the vans and set off to see if we can relocate them. After a good search, eventually Duncan finds them again perched on a rock on the island. Although distant they look fabulous through the scopes. They also fly around a little and we watch them being mobbed by crows, which look tiny in comparison. Roy is very pleased to find a Great Northern Diver in the bay and later we find a second bird - but there is remarkably little else here.

Finally, we are out of time and drive to the hotel where we are eating our evening meal. There are several Red Deer stags outside as we arrive with impressive antlers. Then after a very enjoyable meal we head for home.

Day 5: We start the day with a run through the moth trap which we set last night. Despite the cool weather there are a few nice species of moth, including Beautiful Golden Y, Grey Mountain Carpet, Mottled Beauty, Green Carpet, Map-winged Swift, Silver-ground Carpet, Light Emerald and True-lover's Knot. Once we have identified everything, taken the photos we want and tapped them out into the vegetation we get on our way.

The forecast is for sunshine this morning and we feel optimistic for butterflies and dragonflies, deciding to start at our Northern Brown Argus site. We arrive and pass through the gate and walk along to the bottom of the slope where seconds later we have found one! We are delighted but we have a few comments... 'this one has got a bite out of its right hindwing and we want a pristine one' - so we have to walk a few yards further to find a better one - it is that easy! This is so much better than some recent years when poorer conditions have meant a long search. There are lots of Rockrose plants in flowers (the food plant) and we find a very strange one with orange bases to the rather slimmer petals. We find a Common Blue, several Ringlets and lots of Chimney Sweeper Moths here too and have the chance to see Melancholy Thistle up close.

We cross the road and drop down towards the lochan here where there is a lot of Least Waterlily growing. It is not the most attractive of lilies - the white water lily is much prettier - but it is quite rare and localised and this is the best part of the UK to look for it. As ever we find other incidentals along the way such

as Small Heath butterfly, Bank Vole, Marsh Lousewort, Heath Spotted Orchid and a beautiful Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Once we have finished here we make our way to Abernethy Forest. We are feeling a bit concerned that the forecast blue skies are going to fail us as it is clearly clouding up. We make a dash to our White-faced Darter site arriving shortly after the sun has vanished behind the clouds. Roy is not feeling optimistic as he walks to the boardwalk by the pond - but there on the wood is a White-faced Darter! He calls for everyone to come quick but even before they arrive it takes flight and vanishes into the trees.

With the sun now firmly behind the clouds his new optimism starts to fade and he predicts a failure here unless there is a parting of the clouds. Duncan finds a few small Raft Spiders which are rather smart and we find Large Red Damselflies too. We go and grab coffee and cake and then return and while Roy's optimism is now at a low Duncan is cheerier and says he thinks it is warm enough for a darter to appear. After some time he is proved right when a male White-faced Darter reappears and lands briefly on the boardwalk. It flies seconds later but shortly it is back and we get another chance. It eventually reappears for long enough for everyone to see it well and pick up the red marking and white face clearly - a superb little dragonfly. As we wait for more views we are astonished when suddenly another dragonfly appears and starts egg-laying - a Northern Emerald!! This is our only other real target dragonfly species today and we are absolutely thrilled that given the conditions it has still appeared. We get fantastic views as it continues egg-laying - dipping the tail down towards the surface of the water again and again, and we can even see the little yellow dots at the base of the abdomen. We can't believe our luck.

Delighted with our success we realise it is lunchtime and drive round to Tulloch Moor, where we enjoy a very relaxed time. Connell finds a Common Lizard which vanishes all too quickly then we head out to the far trees to scan for Large Heath butterfly. On the way we discover a family of Whinchats as we cross the moor and enjoy extremely close views of them - a scarce species these days. There are of course all the same flowers as the other day and it is good reinforcement to go over some of them again. We then scan the large area of marshy ground out beyond the trees but have no luck in the now rather cool and cloudy weather.

From here we head round to Boat of Garten for loos and ice cream, then we move on to Avielochan to see what we can find. There are Goldeneye with delightful little duckling with little white faces, a big group of Greylags, Lapwings, Oystercatchers, two Common Sandpipers and two or more pairs of Little Grebes - but there seems to be no sign of the Slavonian Grebes at all. We spot a distant Buzzard, lots of Sand Martins and a few nice plants including more Least Waterlily and some very large patches of Amphibious Bistort. As we leave we are astonished to find a Tree Pipit in what is not exactly typical habitat.

Our final stop of the day is the Loch Insh Ospreys, which have two very well grown chicks and look fabulous through the scopes. We get to watch the female feeding them and the male perched nearby and the chicks themselves look superb with their rather scaly looking plumage and orange eyes. We enjoy a final coffee as we take turns at the scope before heading back to the steading.

Day 6: With high cloud and a light breeze today is ideal for our botanical walk up into the Cairngorms. We pause enroute to look at some Brown Hares in the fields then make a short stop to search for Ring Ouzel but with fledged young they can move around now and seem to be no longer around the nesting area, so we continue up to the upper car park and get ready for the walk.

The nice thing about the route we have chosen is that there are interesting flowers right from the start of the walk and almost as we leave the car park we are finding interesting species like Cloudberry and Bog Bilberry. There are already a few berries on the Cloudberry and the Bog Bilberry is growing with Common Bilberry making for a nice comparison. There is also Crowberry and Roy points out the berries with old withered anthers underneath making it the hermaphrodite subspecies. There is Dwarf Cornel here too though with few flowers and a patch of *Luzula nivalis* - a species that has presumably appeared here from seeds off walkers boots who have been to Europe. We are delighted to find a perfect Lesser Twayblade flower out in the open at the side of the track as well as lots of Heath Spotted Orchids and a single Northern Marsh Orchid. The area seems to be devoid of any birds apart from Meadow Pipits until a family of Red Grouse appear on the track up ahead.

We walk on, finding more interesting species as we walk. Fir Clubmoss, Alpine Ladies Mantle, large spreading patches of Bearberry, Blinks and where a small stream crosses the path we discover Starry Saxifrage, Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage and several plants of Chickweed Willowherb almost in flower and some tiny plants of Alpine Willowherb with a couple of pink flowers that are barely open.

Further up the track Roy recounts the surprise of finding Scottish Asphodel here in this habitat, before leaving the track to see if we can find some - and we find several plants in a rather small area by the stream. Further up the track we cross the stream and soon add Globeflower, plus Alpine Saw-wort and spreading plants of Interrupted Clubmoss.

We stop to eat at some large boulders, where Roy points out Alpine Lady and Northern Buckler Ferns. Walking on, the vegetation gets shorter and shorter and becomes a low and sparse vegetation cover of Bog Bilberry, Trailing Azalea, Dwarf Willow, Stiff Sedge and Three-leaved Rush. Then a little further towards our final destination we find our first patches of Alpine Clubmoss.

Finally, we reach the big boulder field at the far end of the corrie and wander along the near edge, until we reach a damp area where Frog Orchids grow and

this year we are amazed how many there are here - there must be dozens and mainly reddish-green in colour with a single bright green one. The whole area is awash with alpine flowers with large clumps of Roseroot amongst the boulders, sheets of Alpine Ladies Mantle, Alpine Meadow Rue, Alpine Saw-wort, Globeflower, Northern Bedstraw and other species. We find a patch of Moss Campion and are amazed how much Butterwort is in flower here. We walk into the boulder field a little way and Roy finds a few tiny plants of Dwarf Cudweed as we search for Alpine Speedwell. There seems to be no sign where we have found it in the past but then Connell spots a small group of plants in a hollow nearby. It is a gorgeous little plant with intense blue flowers in small clusters on top of the stems and perhaps the rarest species of the trip. We also find a Mouse-ear nearby that looks rather large flowered - one we have identified in the past as the hybrid between Common and Arctic Mouse-ear, a species which grows on the slabby rocks further on.

Delighted with our findings we start back down, making a slight detour to enjoy the mountain form of Marsh Marigold growing by the stream. It looks beautiful here with so many different colours in the moss and hundreds of tiny Starry Saxifrage flowers. Walking back down we are surprised to add one more species, Alpine Bistort, to the list.

We now have a relaxed walk back to the vans where coffee and cake is waiting for us and boy does it taste good - we feel we have really earned it.

Day 7: The forecast is not brilliant today, a band of rain passing through this morning and then cloud with perhaps the odd bit of sunshine for the rest of the day - so we decide to try heading up the Findhorn Valley in search of Mountain Hare, hoping the rain may stop soon enough for a chance of an eagle.

We pause here and there as we drive up the valley, spotting Pheasant, Lapwing, Red-legged Partridge, Mistle Thrushes, Oystercatchers, Roe Deer and more. We make a stop to look at a Common Tern on a nest that Duncan found last week and find a sitting adult, probably keeping the chicks dry. At the same spot a Spotted Flycatcher is feeding a very spotty young one. There are a few flowers too such as Northern Marsh Orchid, Ragged Robin, Monkey-flower and Fairy Flax.

Our next stop is to enjoy a coffee by a small bridge where Dippers have nested and we find one of the fledged young, now independent it seems, as it feeds in the river. We find Grey and Pied Wagtails too and watch a feeding Common Tern. There are Welsh Poppies on the river shingle and New Zealand Willowherb. Curlew seem to be migrating overhead and we hear them calling as they fly over very high.

We continue on our way, making our next stop at another bridge where we park and go for a walk. The rain has now stopped and it is an easy stroll across to some conifers from where we can scan the hillsides for Golden Eagles and Mountain Hare. There are some lovely patches of Mountain Pansy as we walk.

We arrive at our scanning spot and almost immediately Barbara spots a Mountain Hare on the slope nearby. It is a great view through the scopes of a brown individual who seems completely unbothered by our presence.

Scanning for eagles proves fruitless but we find a herd of Mountain Goats and we watch as more and more appear - a whole family in the end. Then Roy discovers a small wetland area that has some nice plants - Round-leaved Sundew, Bog Asphodel, Marsh Bedstraw, Stagshorn Clubmoss, Fir Clubmoss, Lousewort, Marsh Lousewort, Starry Saxifrage and a new clubmoss - Lesser Clubmoss.

We walk back to the vans and have lunch here scanning for eagles. We spot Raven, Kestrel and Buzzard then Roy picks up an eagle over the ridge - it circles up and vanishes into a cloud! It reappears all too briefly and is joined by a Buzzard which is a great size comparison but seconds later it vanishes. We wait for it to reappear but after some time, in which we find a couple of Red Deer and more goats, we decide to give up and head over towards Loch Ruthven.

We don't add anything extra on our way but walk down to the shore of the loch and scan the water - soon finding some distant Slavonian Grebes. There is one closer bird that looks superb in the scopes but apart from these very little else other than a Tufted Duck and a Little Grebe. Roy points out some beautiful flowers of Water Lobelia, a beautiful plant and also explains how to tell the difference between the leaves of the different underwater shore plants - Shoreweed, Quillwort and Water Lobelia. We spot a distant Red Kite and as we walk back find a Reed Bunting.

After a coffee, we decide to finish with a drive round some of the back roads here which go through some very nice habitat but there seem to be few birds. Roe Deer are here and there and we find a Brown Hare, plenty of Meadow Pipits and a Hooded Crow hybrid. Eventually we come to a spot where we pull in and there at the side of the road is a fabulous patch of Yellow Mountain Saxifrage - and what a show it makes - a brilliant yellow patch that is a solid mass of flowers. There is little else here other than a very tiny, pink-flowered Eyebright so different to some of the others we have seen. A Red Kite flies over high up but we add little else as we make our way back to the main road and head back to the Steading.

After our evening meal we gather at the top lounge for coffee and a run through the checklist, before our traditional round up of the holiday in which we go round the group to hear their favourite species of the trip (three this week!) a favourite place and a 'Magic Moment'.

It must say something about the great variety of species we see on these weeks when the number of species mentioned in the round-up is 24 species!! There is everything from butterflies, dragonflies, flowers, mammals and birds through to jellyfish!! And from enormous White-tailed Eagles to tiny alpenines with flowers just millimetres tall - it is hard to remember a trip with so much variety in the

species chosen. It may also be the first time we have ever had a four-way split in the top scoring species! Three people chose Northern Brown Argus, Azure Hawker, Spotted Flycatcher and Alpine Speedwell - so not just a four-way split for the winning species but four different taxonomic groups too. There were plenty of different places chosen too with Glen Affric scoring well and Coire-an-t-sneachda too, though the West Coast also does quite well. The winner all depends on whether you score each individual place or lump them all together – if you lump then it is a draw between all three!

Magic moments are always very personal and can be unpredictable and this week include orchid meadows, tiny flowers, badgers, dragonflies and even Duncan's story – but the winner is actually the amazing Lion's-mane Jellyfish suddenly appearing in front of our very eyes! It was so surprising and wonderful it will stay in our memories for sure. We are all agreed that despite the poor weather it has been a fantastic week with so many highlights and wonderful sightings and there is a lovely vote of thanks from David to Roy and Duncan. Thanks to all for all the fun, laughter and enthusiasm.

Birds

Red-throated Diver
Black-throated Diver
Great Northern Diver
Slavonian Grebe
Little Grebe
Gannet
Shag
Grey Heron
Greylag
Wigeon
Teal
Mallard
Tufted Duck
Eider
Goldeneye
Red-breasted Merganser
Red Kite
Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
White-tailed Eagle
Golden Eagle
Osprey
Kestrel
Red Grouse
Pheasant
Red-legged Partridge
Oystercatcher
Lapwing
Snipe
Curlew
Greenshank
Common Sandpiper
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Rock Dove
Woodpigeon
Collared Dove
Tawny Owl
Swift
Great Spotted Woodpecker

Sand Martin
Swallow
House Martin
Tree Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Dipper
Wren
Dunnock
Robin
Whinchat
Wheatear
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Willow Warbler
Chiffchaff (h)
Goldcrest
Spotted Flycatcher
Long-tailed Tit
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Crested Tit
Treetreeper
Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Hooded Crow
Raven
Jay (h)
Magpie
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Siskin
Redpoll
Goldfinch
Bullfinch
Crossbill sp
Reed Bunting
Snow Bunting (h)

Dragonflies

Emerald Damselfly
Large Red Damselfly
Northern Damselfly
Common Blue Damselfly
Blue-tailed Damselfly
Common Hawker
Azure Hawker
Golden-ringed Dragonfly
Northern Emerald
Downy Emerald
Four-spotted Chaser
White-faced Darter

Butterflies

Green-veined White
Small White
Common Blue
Northern Brown Argus
Ringlet
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
Red Admiral

Mammals

Wood Mouse
Short-tailed Vole
Rabbit
Brown Hare
Mountain Hare
Pine Marten
Badger
Pipistrelle Bat
Red Deer
Roe Deer
Mountain Goat

Reptiles and Amphibians

Common Frog
Common Toad
Common Lizard

Moths

July Belle
Northern Spinach
Chimney Sweeper
Common Wave
Six-spot Burnet
Rannoch Looper
Green Carpet
Silver-ground Carpet
Clouded Border
Snout
Small Square Spot
Map-winged Swift
Ingrailed Clay
Beautiful Golden-y
Mottled Beauty
Coxcomb Prominent
Grey Mountain Carpet
True-lover's Knot
Common White Wave
Brown Rustic
Spectacle
Light Emerald
Large Emerald
Brimstone
Riband Wave
Straw Dot
Purple Bar

Plants

Globeflower
Marsh Marigold
Alpine Meadow-rue
Moss Campion
Northern Dock
Amphibious Bistort
Alpine Bistort
Common Rockrose
Slender St-John's-wort
Mountain Pansy
Round-leaved Sundew
Great Sundew
Common Scurvygrass
Bilberry
Bog Bilberry
Cowberry
Small Cranberry
Crowberry
Cloudberry
Trailing Azalea
Common Wintergreen
Intermediate Wintergreen
Serrated Wintergreen
Chickweed Wintergreen
Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage
Starry Saxifrage
Yellow Mountain Saxifrage
Roseroot
Marsh Cinquefoil
Alpine Ladies Mantle
Bitter Vetch
Petty Whin
Alpine Willowherb
Chickweed Willowherb
New Zealand Willowherb
Dwarf Cornel
Heath Milkwort
Lousewort
Marsh Lousewort
Common Cowheat
Bogbean
Eyebright
Alpine Speedwell
Common Butterwort
Water Lobelia
Northern Bedstraw

Common Valerian
Twinflower
Mountain Everlasting
Dwarf Cudweed
Alpine Saw-wort
Melancholy Thistle
Least Waterlily
Bog Asphodel
Scottish Asphodel
Heath Spotted Orchid
Heath Fragrant Orchid
Northern Marsh Orchid
Small White Orchid
Lesser Twayblade
Frog Orchid
Greater Butterfly Orchid
Lesser Butterfly Orchid
Creeping Ladies Tresses
Least Willow
Fir Clubmoss
Lesser Clubmoss
Stagshorn Clubmoss
Interrupted Clubmoss
Alpine Clubmoss
Wood Horsetail
Water Horsetail
Scaly Male Fern
Male Fern
Broad Buckler Fern
Narrow Buckler Fern
Northern Buckler Fern
Lemon-scented Fern
Lady Fern
Alpine Lady Fern
Common Polypody
Oak Fern
Beech fern
Hard Fern
Quillwort