

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

MULL IN SUMMER

19 -26 JUNE 2021

Guide: Kate Mennie

Guests: Yvonne Hamblin, Richard Swinbank, Lesley Nolan, Carole Reeves and Jean Cox

Day 1 In a very busy Glasgow centre, guide Kate meets all five guests who have arrived promptly in central station and walk round to the car park. Once we navigate the multi storey car park and maze of one-way streets we get out of Glasgow and drive up the banks of Loch Lomond to our hotel overlooking Ben Lomond for the night. Arriving early, some of us stretch our legs and walk a short distance from the hotel. Canada Geese with young are in the bay, Oystercatcher and wagtails. A walk further along the road becomes very noisy but a distant Wood Warbler is a surprising song to hear, but we don't get a glimpse of the bird. On our return we see distant Goosander flying and Richard finds a Common Sandpiper. At the hotel when we all meet up and admire the House Martins around the hotel, Chaffinch, Song Thrush and hear Blackcap and Nuthatch.

We brave the midges to talk about the week ahead and have dinner before heading to bed early.

Day 2 After an early breakfast and with us all ready for what Mull has to offer, we gather our bags at the minibus where Carole and Kate see a Nuthatch. We leave before 9am for our journey to Oban. We briefly stop at Loch Long where a Common Seal is dipping in and out of the water and then to the toilets and bay at Inverary overlooking Loch Fyne. Kate spots a pair of Gannet that we enjoy watching gliding over the bay and a few Common Seal are swimming around. Richard then spots some fins of Harbour Porpoise, maybe only a handful as they make their way out to sea. As we scan the bay Kate catches a Black Guillemot that continues to fly straight in front of us, getting a lovely view of the white wing patches. We continue our journey through some rain to Oban where we check in early and watch Swifts and Black Guillemot. On the ferry we start by all watching Gannets flying by, but as the cool wind picks up some retreat inside for a hot drink. As we get nearer to Mull, drifting past Duart Castle, Kate suddenly spots Common Dolphin swimming towards the ferry.

Some of us manage to see them close by the ferry and others onboard also enjoy the sight.

As we land on Mull, we sit along on the harbour wall to have some lunch where a Rock Pipit makes an appearance, House Martins gather mud from a dried puddle, and Swallow fly in and out of an old boat, which they are using as a nest site. The sunshine is now out, and Kate shows us all a map of our journey so far to get our bearings, before having the rest of the afternoon to bird watch. We head a short distance along the road towards Duart Castle, stopping at a cemetery to scan the trees and bay in front. As we admire the view and Song Thrush, Kate looks behind before shouting "eagle" as an adult White-tailed Eagle flies from the trees and glides right over us with its giant wingspan and showing its white tail as it glides down to the bay behind. Extraordinarily close view for our first eagle of the week! The crows mob it as it lands on an island below. Turning our heads away, a Redpoll sits on a fence and a Male Linnets sings beautifully on one of the cemetery stones. A young Stonechat also hops around on the road. We continue onto Duart castle, a 14th century castle, home to the islands clan Maclean, where we walk into the millennial garden, looking at the various tree species and listening to Willow Warbler, Caroles first of the year. We admire the wildflower meadows and spot a seal 'dolphining' below.

Heading onwards, further south we call into Lochdon, where a passing area gives us clear views around. As Kate gathers everyone near the telescope, she views some Canada Geese before seeing a female Hen Harrier banking away from us before we could get a view. We use our teamworking skills and ears to listen to the song of a Whitethroat which does briefly sing on top of a tree. Scanning behind, Kate then spots a White-tailed Eagle on a tree before quickly realising it is a nest site. Richard makes the clever suggestion it was the nest we had seen the eagle from the other side, which it turned out to be. We are far enough to view it at a safe distance whilst getting great views of an adult and two chicks on the nest, hidden by branches. Jean spots a female Stonechat on a telegraph wire, and we watch a few buzzards flying around and also Red Deer. Before getting to the hotel, we give a last effort to see the Hen Harrier, Kate drives round to the Grasspoint road, where we walk a short distance along the road, spotting a field full of Common Spotted Orchid and Lousewort. Kate suddenly spots a female Harrier quartering not too far away and we all get onto the bird as it glides over the bracken before rising into the sky, along with Buzzards. A great first few hours on Mull! As we cross the bridge a Red-breasted Merganser with nine young swim and dive.

We check into the Isle of Mull Hotel, and Carole points out a Poplar Hawkmoth by the front door. We enjoy some down time before dinner that evening overlooking the sun drenched Craignure Bay in front.

Day 3

Today is to be sunny if not a little windy, but we decide to make the most of it and head south to the Isle of Iona. Kates description of Iona was for turquoise water, white sandy beaches and views galore, and the day met those descriptions and more. Leaving just before 9am, we head south and reach an area near Lochdon where Kate mentions can be good for Short-eared Owls some years. Just like that, one drifts just to the right of us about 30 metres away, so we stop and watch it gliding before slowly getting out of the minibus. It dives down into the bracken and emerges with a vole. To our astonishment it lands on a clear grass bank in plain view and enjoys its dinner as we all get fantastic views through Kates scope. As it flies away, we scan further afield, possibly spotting a second, when our ears are alerted once again close by – a male Hen Harrier appears dropping food to a second bird, possibly a juvenile, as it begs from the bracken. We watch the male before it disappears out of the site. The owl reappears as we get back in the minibus. Stopping next overlooking Loch Ellen, Yvonne spots a Short-eared Owl, before we park, but taking a wander back along the road we do not relocate it. Along the road, however, a Whinchat hops onto some grass, and we take note of its white supercilium for identification. Continuing along the road, Kate spots a Kestrel disappearing over a crag, then round the next bend other cars are all facing the crag and Kate shouts “eagle” after a quick glimpse. We find a suitable place to stop and get out just as it lands on a crag. With the dark rock and appearance of the eagle it takes a while to find it, but Richard points out its location and we get to see this young Golden Eagle standing tall on the crag.

Eager to get to Iona, we continue down the Ross of Mull and onto the ferry to Iona for midday. Arriving to the turquoise water and white sandy beach Kate mentioned, we find a stone and enjoy lunch watching the boats going down the Sound of Iona. We snap some pictures of the tiny post office and nip in for a look at the Iona craft shop before taking a stroll through the nunnery, looking at Toadflax and Maidens hair spleenwort growing on the walls. Unfortunately, Jean cannot get into the abbey grounds because of restrictions but pops into the shop across the road for a look. We continue walking up towards the north end of the island, with the north wind making it challenging to hear anything. We do see a few Wheatear along the way, keeping ears open for elusive Corncrake. Kate explains how they hide in the tall vegetation and ditches out of sight. Cupping our ears from the wind, we get the first call of a corncrake and we stand with fellow enthusiasts to try and locate it. The field it is calling from has a mix of tall

flowers and grasses so despite prolonged scanning, a sight was to prove too tricky, but we enjoy its “crex crex” echoing from the undergrowth. We got to the north end where the ground is covered in buttercups and daisies, and we enjoy half an hour sunning ourselves and taking in the breath-taking views over to Mull and the Treshnish isles. We drag ourselves away and walk back to the village, fitting in one last stop for souvenirs and gifts from the craft shop before the ferry back to Mull for 4.30pm. With a journey north ahead of us, we keep going, looking out to the clear mountains of Ben More and beyond, stopping briefly to look at Eider with ducklings and scan for any potential Otters. We get back to hotel, too tired to enjoy the longest day at its full, but watch Craignure Bay fill with pink as the sun goes down.

Day 4

Today is our boat trip out to the Treshnish Isles. The day starts sunny as we head off, stopping first at Craignure golf course. Here there is a colony of Arctic and Common Terns, Greylag Geese, Eider with young, and Red-breasted Mergansers. Richard also spots a single Ringed Plover. We stop in at Salen shop, then stop along the bay where there are two wrecked boats making a good photo opportunity. We scan the bay for potential Otter, but we do see Mute Swan and seals hauled out on the rocks. We head now to the banks of Loch na Keal, stopping to scan and hear Sedge Warbler. It is quiet, but Kate spots a Buzzard above hillside and a distant young Golden Eagle. It flies higher so not everyone gets on to it. We continue, enjoying the views over the Benmore and Burg which are standing out in the sunshine.

Arriving at Ulva ferry by 11am, we get ourselves ready and head down to the boat. Many of us stand out on deck as we head into the water towards Staffa, seeing Guillemot, Black Guillemot and Puffin on the water on our journey. The skippers take us into the mouth of Fingal's Cave, playing Mendelssohn's Op.26, which Jean very much enjoyed. We climb onto Staffa and make our way up the steps to have lunch and watch the many sailing boats surrounding the island. A Great Skua flies past, and pipits and Skylark sing behind. The hour is passing quickly, and some take a walk along to the cave before boarding the boat again. The water is now getting choppy as we start to cross the water to the Isle of Lunga. Halfway across, the skipper calls over the radio to let us know there are dolphins bow-riding a yacht up ahead. They eventually latch onto our boat and a small pod of Common Dolphins come within two metres beside the boat.

We arrive on Lunga to a mass of birds on land and water. Getting off onto the pontoon we make our way over the rocks and up the hill, where the grass is carpeted with Puffins. We sit quietly and are soon surrounded within one metre by these characterful birds. Puffins stay close by to people

as human presence protects them from their biggest predator, the Great Skua. In one flash, many Puffins take off towards the water, a Great Skua flying close overhead. We enjoy watching their antics as they groom each other and go in and out of their burrows with fish for young. Kate, Richard and Lesley continue walking along Lunga, making our way past Shag nests that are hidden under rocks, Puffins and Razorbill. As we make our way over the hill to the great stack, the sight and sound of the thousands of seabirds take our breathes away. Guillemot, Fulmar, Razorbills and Puffin are huddled on this headland on their breeding sites. Above our heads, Puffins fill the sky as they come back and forth with fish. It's a breath-taking sight and the sound of constant calling is deafening. We drag ourselves away and meet the rest of the group who have enjoyed sitting amongst the Puffin colony. On our walk back down to the pontoon we spot a film crew, before noticing wildlife presenter Hamza Yassin standing with Martin Clunes, presumably filming for a tv show. Back on the boat the skippers take us past the Treshnish Islands where we see seals. The sea is choppy now, so we head back in to Ulva, then try not to get distracted on our way back to the hotel for dinner, before early bed after a fabulous day out on the water.

Day 5

Today starts drizzly with low cloud as we head off after 9am. Heading south we stop just after Lochdon where Kate picks up a Short-eared Owl hunting low over the bracken and hillside. There are also a few Red Deer scattered in the field. We turn down the road towards Lochbuie, spotting some colourful peacocks in a garden. Driving through the ancient oak plantation we stop beside Loch Spelve, where there are Common and Grey Seals hauled out on an island. Walking along the road slightly, we hear Common Snipe calling and a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers are on the water, where a Common Sandpiper sits calling from a rock. The midges are out in force today, so we continue along the road. The sound of Curlew makes Kate pull over, and whilst scanning she spots a bird of prey on a rock. We all get out and confirm it is a Short-eared Owl, it takes off and begins to hunt in front of us. After the overnight rain, it perches on a fence post and attempts to dry its wings, before beginning to hunt again before landing to eat its reward on the road verge. Jean spots a Ringed Plover on the seaweed beside the loch. We keep an eye out for Otters as we continue along the road, spotting Lapwings as we go. When Kate stops to scan the water again, a shout from Yvonne and Jean alerts us to two hares on the side of the road. As we pull up towards them, we see these Mountain Hares hopping through the bracken. They are a gorgeous chocolate brown colour, much darker than ones Kate is used to in the Cairngorms.

We arrive at Lochbuie Bay, where the newly refurbished old post office café provides a little bit of gift shopping and toilet facilities before we have

a wander along the bay. As Jean had not managed to get into Iona Abbey, Kate takes us into the St. Kilda Chapel, with its miniature appearance, and we enjoy looking round this small chapel and its history, spotting a field of Fallow Deer nearby too. Along the bay, there are young Pied Wagtails, Heron and Ringed Plover. Scanning from a height, Kate sees a pair of Shelduck in the scope and also gets us all onto a distant Great Northern Diver and two Red-throated Divers. With lunch calling we head back to the minibus and sit on the benches overlooking the bay. Yvonne samples some homemade soup from the café and Jean and Carole shared a large slice of fresh Victoria sponge. Distracted from the cake, Kate continues to scan and spots a Sparrowhawk flying over the trees behind us.

We head back along to Loch Spelve, taking a minor road on the east side to scan in hope of Otter. We arrive at Croggan and have a walk round the bay, and through ancient oak forest. It is very calm and tranquil, but sadly no Otters make an appearance. The midges arrive again so we keep walking, spotting Red-breasted Merganser, Mistle Thrush and fragrant Orchids amongst the bog myrtle. A large group of Eider Duck catch our eye as we scan out in the bay. We slowly drive back along Loch Spelve on both sides, when Kate suddenly locks eyes with a roadside Otter, so pull into the next parking bay. It disappears into the water, but we persevere and catch another glimpse further up before it slips into the water. We drive back to try and locate and watch from our "minibus hide" catching glimpses as it comes up from fishing. The choppy water makes it hard to watch and locate and it obviously wasn't a camera-friendly Otter, so after a while of searching we continue back along the road. The mist rolls in again, but we drive to the end of the Grasspoint road for one last try for some birds, being serenaded by the sound of Curlew. We get back to the hotel by 5pm to have a well earned break before dinner.

Day 6

Today is wet, with low cloud making visibility tricky. We start by stopping in at Garmony, where Kate suggests taking a wander to look for Otter tracks in the sand, but before we make it very far we spot an Otter in the water diving and fishing. It is still distant, but in the telescope, we all get to watch it closer up and fishing out in the water. It slowly makes its way towards a little island where Common Seal are also hauled out. As we lose sight of it, the rain gets heavy, so we retreat to the minibus. Heading north, we stop briefly at Salen Bay for another 'Otter scan' then carry on through the rain until we reach Aros park and take a stroll down to the impressive Alann waterfall. On the return to the minibus, Jean spots a tiny Common Toad making its way into the grass. Past Aros park, we arrive into Tobermory, Yvonne and Kate joining in a song of Balamory, and the Wombles. Parking in the bay, we admire the colourful houses round the

harbour and decide to wander down the street to look into a couple of shops for some gifts. With the rain heavy, we find an old church café and enjoy a hot drink and cake. As we dry off, we head back towards the car park, looking for Dippers in the stream. We now head out west towards Dervaig, stopping first at Loch Peallach, where gulls are bathing, and a pair of Little Grebe. With rain easing slightly we stop at Loch Torr in the hope that the clouds would lift for lunch, but they don't so we overlook the loch and dodge the midges as we eat. Grey Herons are on the loch below, and a Whitethroat sings in the bushes.

Taking the twisty road to Dervaig, we stop at the bay where Redshank are calling. We stop next at a drier Calgary Bay, but the beach still looks lovely and bright. Kate explains about the conservation work that is being done on the machair, where they have fenced off the area to pedestrians to help the wildflower meadow to grow. A short walk down onto the beach gives us a few Eider in the bay with young. We continue the road on the west side of the island, but as visibility is now extremely compromised by the mist and rain we do not get to enjoy the view west or down to Ulva. Not many birds to see along the way, apart from a couple of Wheatears on fence posts and a wet Buzzard.

Along the banks of Loch na Keal, Kate pulls in to scan the loch when she spots a Great Northern Diver out on the water. It is much closer than the previous days sighting and we all get great views of this summer plumage bird feeding on the loch. Two Black Guillemots are also on the water as we carry on and park up a short distance along where we can scan the water further for Otter. The mist begins to rise slightly and Kate scans behind in the trees for any raptors that may be taking shelter waiting for a break in the weather. She is right, and spots a young White-tailed Eagle perched on a nearby conifer. It is a dark brown individual, that may have been a young and it is looking rather damp sitting observing the bay below. As we look up at it in the scope, it is staring down at us. A fantastic close view of this bird and for such a long time as it doesn't seem to be in a rush to go anywhere. Yvonne and Lesley then spot a second bird flying in, an adult this time, landing a couple of branches above the young. The light even clears for a moment for us to see them clearer and get a quick photo. The midges are beginning to bite a lot and the rain returns, so we decide to call it a day after that great sighting and head back to the hotel.

Day 7

After our last breakfast on Mull, we pack up the minibus to squeeze in a couple of extra hours on the island as the weather is clearer today. We head south to where we get good views of White-tailed Eagle on the first day. We park up, and there is an adult sitting on one of the branches.

Scanning over the bay Kate spots an adult eagle flying towards us, being mobbed by Oystercatchers in the bay. It flies into the nest as we watch it, a great way to end. We drive slightly further south where we had seen harriers before and it isn't long until Richard spots a female low over the grass, and a male also joins. We enjoy watching them hunt before disappearing behind a hill. We head north now to Fishnish ferry and take the short trip over to the mainland. Driving through the Morvern peninsula we turn right onto a small road and stop beside Loch Uisge in time for lunch. As Kate scans for Red-throated Diver we do spot a diver, but it is actually a Black-throated Diver, which is a nice surprise. As we have lunch, Kate shouts eagle, as a pair rise above the horizon. One comes much closer, gliding overhead to the next hill before returning over us again. We all get fantastic scope views, a perfect lunch spot. We continue along the road past Loch Linnhe looking for otters but none today, so we take the next ferry and drive through the breath-taking Glencoe before reaching our hotel in time for dinner.

We enjoy our final meal and reminisce about our time on Mull before saying farewell after breakfast the next morning and getting dropped off in Glasgow.

Bird of the Trip

Jean	White-tailed Eagle
Carole	White-tailed Eagle
Richard	White-tailed Eagle
Yvonne	Short-eared Owl
Lesley	Short-eared Owl
Kate	Short-eared Owl

Place of the Trip

Jean	Iona
Carole	Iona
Richard	Lunga
Yvonne	Iona
Lesley	Lunga
Kate	Iona

Magic Moment

Jean	All of it!
Carole	White-tailed Eagle flyby, getting attacked by Oystercatchers
Richard	Seabird cliff on Lunga
Yvonne	Close White-tailed Eagle flyby and seeing the Otters silhouette.
Lesley	Seabird cliff on Luna and the Otters silhouette
Kate	Puffin shower! On Lunga

Birds

Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Canada Goose
Shelduck
Mallard
Eider
Goosander
Red-breasted Merganser
Pheasant
Comcrake (H)
Red-throated Diver
Great Northern Diver
Little Grebe
Fulmar
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Grey Heron
White-tailed Eagle
Golden Eagle
Hen Harrier
Common Buzzard
Sparrowhawk
Kestrel
Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
Lapwing
Common Sandpiper
Redshank
Greenshank
Curlew
Snipe
Great Skua
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Common Tern
Arctic Tern

Puffin
Black Guillemot
Guillemot
Razorbill
Rock Dove
Wood Pigeon
Collared Dove
Short-eared Owl
Swift
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Skylark
Sand Martin
Swallow
House Martin
Rock Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Dunnock
Robin
Wheatear
Whinchat
Stonechat
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Blackbird
Whitethroat
Sedge Warber
Willow Warbler
Garden Warbler (H)
Blackcap (H)
Wood Warbler (H)
Chiffchaff (H)
Goldcrest
Wren
Spotted Flycatcher
Blue Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Magpie
Jackdaw
Rook

Carrion Crow
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Linnet
Redpoll
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
Siskin
Reed Bunting
Nuthatch
Black-throated Diver

Total Birds: 96

Mammals and Other

Rabbit
Red Deer
Fallow Deer
Grey Seal
Common Seal
Otter
Mountain Hare
Harbour Porpoise
Common Dolphin
Common Toad

Total Species: 106