

## HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

### SUTHERLAND AND SPEYSIDE

1– 11 JUNE 2022

Guides: Sally Nowell and Kate Mennie

Guests: Lyn & Dave Maslin, Lynne & John Tidmarsh, Lynda Nicolls, John Duerden, Rosealie Hammond & Magnus Persmark and Perri Strawn & Bill Kunze

**Day 1** Sally and Kate do train pick-ups before meeting everyone together before dinner at our country hotel. With the jubilee coming up, a life size queen also greets us, as well as Elaine and Iain..

**Day 2** We wake up to a low mist over the Strath, with the Cromdale Hills and sun starting to shine through. We enjoy the delights of breakfast with the hope of continued sun for the day as we head off after 9am. First to Grantown-on-Spey and the old Spey Bridge in hope of Dipper. Kate spots a Red Squirrel jumping through the branches above as we head towards the river. Down on the banks, the first Dipper sits on the edge of the water for us to see and begins to fish. We move closer and see two Dippers fishing and Grey Wagtails close by. We hear Great Spotted Woodpecker and Lynne finds them on a tree past the bridge, two juveniles being fed by parents. There are Swifts and Sand Martins flying around the bridge and the Dipper goes into its nest. Sally points out a Blue Tit nest in the wall of the bridge as we go up. From the bridge we see female Goldeneye, Black-headed Gull, Common Sandpiper, Pied Wagtail and three Buzzard. Back at the minibuses a male Blackcap sings on a perch and Siskins call from the trees. We stop for a comfort break in Grantown, where we get close views of Goldcrest.

We get on the road again driving towards Strathdearn. There are Brown Hare jumping through the fields and a Curlew lands beside the minibus calling loudly, but we don't hang around as there must be a nest. A little further up with views over the hills and fields we park up. There are Curlew, Lapwing and Oystercatchers in the field. As Kate is scanning the hills, she spots a Red Kite and larger raptor flying away from us but unfortunately, they don't stay up. John T spots Lapwing chicks running around in the fields and a Lesser Black-back Gull on the rivers edge. Our first of many Cuckoo can be heard in the distance. Kate spots a Spotted Flycatcher in a spruce tree right behind us, and it poses nicely for a few minutes so we can get good views.

We continue along the road to another parking area. There is a vocal Blackcap singing, which hides before eventually sitting in some birch trees. A Willow Warbler sings from the wires and Tree Pipit sings close by before Kate finds it in her scope for people to have a look. Before we leave, the Blackcap perches at the top of a tree, and we all get a view. Parking at the bridge we set up and have our lunch with sunshine and a slight breeze to keep midges away. We take a slow wander along the track to the next tree plantation where the views are breath-taking. Kate notices a gull diving into the heather which leads her eye to a Mountain Hare in its form. It is well camouflaged in its summer plumage but we all get a nice view. Sally notices some fungi on our walk up, including Pennybun. We scan for raptors and hares but a Red Deer with its velvet antlers is the only sighting. Walking back to the bridge, Sally discusses the regeneration of the Hazel trees, protected from being grazed.

We drive to the very end of the road where there is a possible Peregrine nest. John D and a few others take a stroll looking at insectivorous plants like Butterwort and Sundew whilst Kate scans the rock face in front for possible Peregrine. Sally notices a Meadow Pipit on wires with a caterpillar and Buzzard are flying around. Kate eventually spots a Peregrine shape on a tree in a gully up the hill. After some effort to find it again, we all manage to get on it. Another Peregrine comes up from the horizon of the hill along with a Buzzard. Many of us follow this one, before it lands near the horizon with only its head showing. Sally spots some Mountain Goat before we decide to head back up the glen. We stop where Kate heard Chiffchaff on the drive down, and sure enough it is still calling from the dense trees. Despite our best efforts we don't see it, but enjoy its song.

On our way to Tomatin, for facilities, a Red Kite rises beside the road and drifts low beside us. Back down the A9 we take a small road home near Carrbridge with grassy fields for us to scan from the minibuses. We start the road drive with Oystercatchers, corvid species, Roe Deer grazing and Brown Hare. Sally stops at a cow field that has an amazing number of Curlew feeding. With the fifty percent drop in Curlew numbers over the past two decades, it is lovely to still see a good number feeding along this road. Red-legged Partridge run across the road and Brown Hare are in every field. At a small pool, some of us get a glimpse of Teal, Redshank, Lapwing and Reed Bunting. We return back to the hotel, where the life size Queen greets us from the window and before dinner Iain serves up Prosecco and makes a speech to mark the Platinum Jubilee. We even get a group photo with our additional guest for the week, what a privilege!

**Day 3** The low cloud begins to lift as we head south towards Aviemore, stopping just before to walk down to a small loch. We first spot Goldeneye and Common

Sandpiper on our walk down. Creeping up on the loch to make sure we don't disturb anything we reach the shore. There are Little Grebe chicks with parents being fed, Greylag Geese and Oystercatchers. Sally finds Moorhen with four ducklings. Scanning out on the loch we look for our Target Species, before Kate announces "Slavonian Grebe behind the blue boat!" It moves quickly underwater but sticks close to the reeds so every moment it comes up, we all get a nice look at it. As it gets nice and close, and with so many of us with telescopes we all get great views of the orange head feathers and red eye. We also spot Oystercatcher chicks and Goldeneye again before we head off.

After a quick stop in Aviemore we head up to Craigellachie NNR. A fabulous hidden gem behind the town filled with Silver Birch trees and many habitats for wildlife. The sunshine is showing up the vibrant green of new leaves and bracken and the low level of wind makes it perfect to listen for birds. We first find a Spotted Flycatcher heading for a nest box and Buzzard are showing well above the cliff. Chickweed Wintergreen is out in flower along the path.

Further up, we stop at a nest box that Kate has seen Pied Flycatcher in this year. With it easy to see from the path, we set our scopes up and wait. After a few minutes the male darts about the trees before perching outside the nest box. The female also suddenly appears and seems busily attending to the nest. It is a hive of activity with both flycatchers around the nest, also chasing off a Spotted Flycatcher that gets too close. With us all getting fabulous views, we continue up the path, Kate making everyone smell the scent of the Bog Myrtle. There are a few damselflies and Four Spotted Chasers over the lochan as we walk along side. Where two paths meet, Kates keen ears pick up the song of the Wood Warbler. Sally and Kate both guide everyone the right direction and once in position it quickly comes closer and lands on the pathway in front of us. It hops up into the trees where it continues its fishing reel song that echoes towards us and we get flitting glimpses of its lemon-coloured chest. We are happy with our target species views, so heading back down to the minibuses we enjoy views of Wren and the Pied Flycatchers once more.

For lunch we take a small road up in the Rothiemurchus Estate, where a panoramic view of the mountain range greets us for lunch in the warm sunshine. Making our way past busy Glenmore beach, we head up the Cairngorm Mountain to the top car park. With the bank holiday, it is busy, but construction is quiet, so we hold out hope for Ring Ouzel. Taking a walk, Magnus and Bill find a Dunnock, Kate points out Dwarf Cornel and Cloudberry in flower. Keeping an eye as we go, we follow the path to the edge of the mountain garden where we scan. Just then, Magnus spots a bird flying up the hill, a male Ouzel! It perches briefly on a higher fence before dipping onto the other side. We walk further up to try and get a better view. Perri and

Magnus spot it flying from the funicular and it lands on the brow of the hill in front. We creep up on it, and everyone gets great views of it up the path, picking out worms and grubs from the ground.

We head back towards Grantown, taking a small road via Loch Pityoulish which is too busy to stop at today unfortunately, so we continue to Boat of Garten and Deshar pool. The water level is lower but there are still some new species for us to look at on this flooded area of field. Wigeon, Tufted Duck, Redshank, Greylag with young and Little Grebe. As we are heading out later, we head back to the hotel before an early dinner.

Later we meet Harris at our evening watch hide, who shows us some of the rare and exotic plants in this old nursery before heading inside. It is still very light outside, and we are treated to nice views of Great Spotted Woodpecker, Robin and Chaffinch whilst we wait. The Wood Mice and Voles sneak out for peanuts. It isn't long until we see our first of five Badgers for the night, who give us regular views and keep us entertained. On our way back, we take the back roads, seeing Bats, Roe Deer, Brown Hare, and stopping briefly at Loch Pityoulish, a roding Woodcock and Ospreys in the fading light. No owls on our way back, so it is off to bed.

**Day 4** After a leisurely breakfast, we head of towards Dava Moor on the way to the coast. At our first stop, there is Cuckoo calling, which seem to call at every place we stop. Scanning around Kate spots Mountain Hare in the heather and a second in the field. Willow Warbler are singing in the shrubs around.

A Red Kite is a nice surprise over the distant hillside, making its way along the horizon. Suddenly a larger raptor rises from behind the hillside, with a smaller bird beside. At first look we identify as a White-tailed Eagle and Sally thinks an Osprey following. After we all have a view Sally and Kate take a longer look as identify it as a young Golden Eagle due to the pale wing patches and tail. Lynne spots Redpoll on a close small tree and Stonechat with young. As we pack up, three cuckoo fly across, one landing on a fence.

Continuing to the loch we stop to look closer at Red Grouse hiding in the heather and Reed Bunting near the bridge. The loch is flat calm, we see Redshank on the far side and park to the north end. After a few minutes scanning the loch, Kate locates one Black-throated Diver on the far bank, camouflaged in with the Greylag Geese. It isn't the best view, but it gives us a hint of what to look for when we are up in Sutherland. With time ticking on we work our way back along the loch, taking the back road to Forres.

It feels like summer now, so after using facilities Sally's suggestion of an ice cream is most welcome, so we sit in the park and watch a game of cricket in the summer sunshine.

We carry on to Burghead, stopping at the maltings to have a scan. There are large flocks of gulls and Gannet feeding far out, Eider out on the water and Sally spots a pair of Red-throated Divers. We drive up to the point to have lunch and scan out in hope of cetaceans. As we settle for lunch Perri spots a wader on the rocks, a Knot, which is a nice addition. Fulmar fly close in, Eider, Guillemot and Razorbill are on the water and the Red-throated Divers come much closer.

We now drive East in hope of stopping at Lossiemouth to look for waders, but the new bridge means the place is busier than ever, so we keep driving to RSPB Loch Spynie where it is quiet. There is a Red Squirrel on the feeders to welcome us as well as many garden species like Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Yellowhammer, Tree Sparrow and Siskin. Rosie spots a Grey Heron flying in and landing on a tree where the heronry is. An Osprey flies over the loch, Chiffchaff are singing and Common Tern fly over as we walk down to the hide.

We all manage to fit inside, seeing the Black-headed Gull colony with young. On the loch there are Mallard, Mute Swan, Tufted Duck and Coot. We are scanning the loch to identify what else is resting when Sally and Kate both excitedly shout "Otters!" Two Otter are weaving their way through the reeds at the back and once we get everyone on them, we enjoy seeing them playing out in the middle of the water. Nice to see some freshwater Otters which are much harder.

There is disturbance in the reeds beside us as the Moorhen seem agitated. We think maybe a mammal was trying to attack them but see nothing. The chicks are hiding in the shade as we leave the hide. Magnus spots a pair of Bullfinch and we get lovely views. On our walk back, a Yellowhammer sits on a tall tree singing and we get nice views. We make our way back through Forres, turning off a while later to Darnaway. We park at a woodland with a nice mixture of Pine trees to search for Crossbill. It isn't long until Sally hears some so we go looking. Kate spots a single male perched at the top of the tallest Pine, so although the view is straining, it sits for a long time so we get a good look. We make our way back to the hotel now driving through the Dava Moor.

**Day 5** An early start this morning in hope of seeing a Black Grouse lek, as we head from the hotel in the mist, arriving before 6am. Brown Hare and Rabbits along road as well as surprise Red Kite low down by the roadside. We slowly get out

in the eerie mist greeted by the calling of Cuckoo. Unfortunately, we cannot see very far so our ears will be put to the test. After a few minutes we hear the first bubbling call of the Black Grouse. They obviously don't like the fog either as it goes quiet. There are at least four Cuckoo calling around us and they perch up on the tees in the mist, their calls echoing through the moor. A Stonechat family joins us and a single Redpoll shows nicely. The outline of the hillside begins to appear and so the bubbling Grouse begins again. With the midges gathering and the mist not moving we slowly make our way back. No sightings of the Back Grouse but the haunting bubbling and magical cuckoo experience was well worth it. After breakfast the sun start to push through, ready to start the rest of our day.

Stopping at Broomhill Bridge where there is a large Sand Martin colony, some are perched on a fence and others fly over us on the bridge. John T spots a Common Sandpiper at edge of the river. We arrive at Abernethy to walk the Mallachie rail in hope of some key woodland species. We walk mainly in silence so we can use our ears to help locate the species. The loch is flat calm and the vibrant green colours of the forest floor are nice to walk through. Goldcrest and Treecreeper are vocal and perch for us to see.

A little further, Kate hears Crested Tit, so we all stop and gather. They come closer before half a dozen come close and perch on a single Birch tree to be fed. They don't stay very still, but a couple of the young show well as they move through the trees. Round the corner, Sally spots a Redstart feeding in the heather which some see, but it moves off quickly. There is one singing further along so we go to search. Tree Pipit is also singing and makes a brief appearance. The Redstart sounds close as Sally and Kate search the branches. It is hard to locate but Sally finds it perched right at the top, so we all get a view through the scope.

We get to the banks of Loch Mallachie where the mirror image loch makes a good photo spot. Lapwings call overhead, a female Goldeneye come out from a nest box and Rosie spots tadpoles on the waters edge. As we are enjoying the tranquillity, Magnus spots a Crossbill that is feeding silently on the island. We continue back along the track, getting another view of the Redstart that is still singing. Kate hears more Crested Tits, so we stop for another opportunity to view them.

We make our way down to the Badenoch area now to Insh Marshes where the sunshine and picnic benches make a perfect spot for lunch. Some go for a walk after lunch, whilst the rest of us stand on the lookout tower overlooking the marsh. Breeding Lapwing, Black-headed Gull and Curlew are visible and Grey Heron flies into the pools. There are a few garden species on the bird

feeders below. Once everyone is back, we take the small road following the reserve to Loch Insh to watch one of our favourite Osprey pairs. Viewing through the trees, it is nice to see the female attending to the nest whilst the male dries off on a nearby tree. To end the day we drive up to Invereshie reserve to take a walk into some beautiful old pine forest. Up a short hill we can look over the reserve and the mix of old and new trees, where Sally talks about the rewilding project to preserve this landscape. We stop in Aviemore to stock up on supplies for the rest of the week before heading back to the hotel.

**Day 6** It is the second half of our holiday today and we pack up to head to Sutherland. Heading off just after 9am we drive past Inverness, Red Kites flying over the road and drive first over the Moray Firth and then the Cromarty Firth to get to our stop at Tain. After our luck with the weather so far, the cloud and cool wind is a shock as we scan out in the bay. The tide is very far out, but we manage to see our first Hooded Crow, Mute Swan and Shelduck. Everything else is quiet, so we continue up to the lovely town of Dornoch to the beach.

Skylark are singing galore, and we get nice views of them rising and displaying. Yellowhammer are posing in the gorse, Kittiwakes and Gulls out on the beach and the sea. After a bit of scanning, Kate spots a couple of Harbour Porpoise fins, they aren't up long but some of us see them. Heading into the town, we have some time mooching around the shops. After we gather everyone back, we head out to Loch Fleet. Most of us are hungry and it is a nice bay to scan so we decide to have lunch here. There are dozens of Grey and Common Seals hauled out on the sandy islands so it gives us an opportunity to identify them. There are Eider, Oystercatcher and Wigeon also. Bill spots an Osprey coming in and we get excited hoping for a dive. It comes almost overhead and with Sally's commentary of their fishing style it does exactly what she says and we all see it diving into the water, coming out with a flat fish and then doing a wiggle in mid-air as it flies off, what a moment! It rests over the other side to enjoy its catch. Perri spots a Kestrel along the road and we hear two Ospreys call as they fly over and continue to fish along the estuary. Not a bad lunch spot.

Before heading west, we stop in at the mound, which often has some good waders. The car park is closed but we manage to find space to scan. There is a total of six Common Sandpipers in one area, Shelduck, Red-breasted Merganser and a lovely surprise Greenshank, the first of the week. Kate hears Chiffchaff and spots Red Deer on a hillside. We head west now, taking the road to Lairg for a comfort stop before heading along the side of Loch Shin enjoying the first of the Sutherland scenery.

At the far north end of the loch it looks a perfect spot to scan, so we park near a bridge. The first spot is a nice pair of breeding Whooper Swan on the water. Kate notices a large moth on the road, which we later identify as an Oak Eggar. Further along the road, we stop for a photo of the dramatic hills when Perri spots two birds on the waters edge, a pair of Black-throated Divers. We brave the midges to get lovely views of the divers fishing. A pair of Stonechat watch over us from a close telegraph wire. On a small loch round the corner, two Red-breasted Mergansers catch our eye.

We keep driving through the landscape on our way west, making a last stop overlooking Loch More. We make our way past the high cliffs of Ben Stack towering above us, coming out at Laxford Bridge and arriving at our hotel in good time. That evening at dinner we can't believe the setting overlooking Loch Inchard and some enjoy a sunset stroll after dinner.

**Day 7** Before breakfast some of us stand at the door to the hotel and see an Otter making its way up a small stream towards the hotel, from the breakfast table, we can also watch it before going into the seaweed. A pre-breakfast walk for Bill and Perri has rewards for them like Whitethroat and Goosander.

With the sun continuing, the wind looks the lightest today, a perfect day for Handa Island. A short drive later we arrive at Tarbet and wait for our turn on the small boat across to the island. Common Sandpiper, Pied Wagtail and a Great Black-backed Gull is enjoying breakfast. On the smooth journey over we see a close Black Guillemot on the water before landing on the east beach where we are greeted by the staff. We are given information about the island, being distracted by the Wheatears hopping around. Magnus and Sally spot Ringed Plover on the beach below.

We have a whole day to explore the island, meaning we can take our time and walk the entire 3.5-mile circuit of the island over boardwalks. Beginning up the first hill we get our first close Great Skuas on nest sites. On the way to the cliffs we stop to look at different plant species that are in this environment like the 'worts' and Heath Spotted Orchids. The Arctic Skuas in their different colour morphs are very active, swooping and chasing each other above our heads. On the Skua bathing pool, a Red-throated Diver enjoys a bath, it's our first close view of this diver and the colour on it is perfect.

Arriving at the first cliff, the sound sight (and smell!) is outstanding, and we can compare the difference between the Razorbill and Guillemots that are nesting here. Fulmars are flying around and Puffins fly in from the sea. We walk

up to the top area overlooking the Great Stack and agree this is a perfect place for lunch. The Puffins nest in burrows on the top, Razorbills on the ledges underneath, and the Guillemots huddle together on the remaining height of the wall.

With the sun on our backs, we enjoy a relaxing lunch, scanning out to sea just in case anything pops up and enjoy flypasts by the sea birds. We carry on our walk, Bill enjoying catching some shots of the Great Skuas flying close-by. The cliffs get more dramatic, and we continue to get views of seabirds, including Shag and Gannet. As the path gets to lower altitude, a family of Eider are on the water, and seals resting. The final section of our walk takes us past some territorial Arctic Skuas, but luckily instead of diving at us, they perch closely for us to pass safely.

Gathering back at the ranger base, we get in the queue of boats back, but don't mind going last as it gives us more time on this tranquil island, with Arctic Terns and Wheatears close-by and a white sandy beach to enjoy. It is too tempting and with Kate and Sally taking the lead, Rosie joins for a paddle in the turquoise water to refresh the feet. By the time we get back to our minibuses it's time to drive back to the hotel, giving time for walks before dinner.

**Day 8** Heading slightly further south today, stopping first at the village of Scourie to the bay. A sheltered little beach, there is a merganser happily feeding. On the shoreline a mixed flock of Ringed Plover and summer plumage Dunlin are feeding. We hear Willow Warbler and Sedge Warbler that after some looking, Kate manages to show people through the scope. We have a wander and scan further onto the other side of the bay when Lynda suddenly announces a very large bird making its way across the hillside low down. A White-tailed Eagle, gliding at nearly eye level against the hill. We all watch it as it goes past the village and into Buzzard territory, where six Buzzard try to fend it off. We watch until it gets too distant in the heat haze. Stopping in Scourie for facilities, Lynne sees a Spotted Flycatcher perched on a wire.

We continue south now to a spot near Kylesku for a walk. We make our way down a private driveway towards Kylestrom Pier. The grass verges are perfect for butterflies, like Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Orange Tip. A Sedge Warbler perches in the gorse bushes for us to have a closer look and small garden birds like Wren and Goldcrest are nice to see on the way down. There is a big haul out of seals in the sheltered bay as we also scan here for any Otters. No Otters, but as the tide is out, we see some evidence of Otter tracks in the sand. Reaching the old pier, that used to take passengers across the bay before the Kylesku Bridge was built, we get nice views of the new bridge with the Quinag mountains behind.

Down here there is a large colony of Common and Arctic Terns nesting and a good opportunity to get comparisons of different gull species. As we wander back, the seals are playing in the water, whilst others still lie on the rocks. Kate spots a wader sleeping in amongst the seals, a Greenshank. As we approach the car park a young Stag is posing perfectly on a mound with the mountain behind, he really is a fan of the camera!

We make the short journey across the bridge and down to Kylesku itself, where there are facilities, and we manage to find a car parking spot so we decide it is a good spot for lunch. The Terns are fishing and also a Black Guillemot isn't too far out on the water.

Back along the road we find the Loch a Mhuilinn Nature reserve Kate has read about. Driving along a dead-end road, we realise we cannot park at the end, so we retrace our steps and take a walk along the deserted road instead. The breeze keeps the insects at bay as we enjoy the walk. There are plenty of flowers along the roadside here, which John D enjoys. We find the Common and Heath Spotted Orchid, Marsh Orchid and to John's surprise the Small White Orchid beginning to flower. Other botanical highlights included Mountain Everlasting and Marsh Lousewort otherwise known as Red-rattle. The reserve is home to the most northerly remnant of Oakwood and the expanse of trees here is beautiful. A real mix of oak, birch, willows and rowans, holding plenty of wildlife. We enjoy our walk in the sunshine, but realise walking down to the shore is too far, so retrace our steps.

We enjoy our spot down at Scourie Bay so much this morning, so we end the day here, parking up near the cemetery. The Dunlin and Ringed Plover are still on the sandy beach below and a Ringed Plover defends its territory from the wall of the cemetery. There is a mass expanse of Northern Marsh Orchids in and around the graveyard, with some very fine examples to photograph. We reach a point with great views over to Handa Island and out to sea where we can scan. Some nice Wheatears join us and Red-breasted Mergansers in the bay. There are Cormorants that trick us in the water, then Lynne sees a Red-throated Diver. Nice views as it makes its way round the shoreline beside us. Kate suddenly hears a Twite, a species we haven't seen yet and notices it on the rocks a few metres from us. It poses for a while, and we all get lovely views perched on the rocks. A lovely way to end another day in Sutherland.

**Day 9** Today we are heading up to the north coast. There is a risk of some showers today, but the sun is still shining and we head off at 9am. On our way to Durness, some of us spot something big jumping in the river as we cross a bridge, we stop in case it is an Otter. We walk down to the river and watch

for a while but nothing appears so we carry on. We head down to Balnakeil Beach just west of Durness. Sally spots some Sandwich Terns just out at the water where they are gliding back and forth. We walk up to a little lochan Kate knows but once we are there, the water level is very low so there aren't many species to see. A Mute Swan is on its nest, Lapwings fly around and we hear a Moorhen.

Back to the beach, we walk along spotted divers a fair distance out on the water. A herd of cows and calves join us as we walk along and some sand beetles become a bit of a pest so we keep moving. Turning off the path up the grassy hill we eventually make it to the top where the sound of the waves and seabirds is amazing and we have 360 views of the turquoise sea, beach and mountains surrounding us. We can scan the little rocky islands where Fulmar, gulls and Puffins are nesting, Sally finding a Fulmar falling asleep in the warm sunshine. The Puffins are resting on the water below and we can see Gannets and Shags further out. We have a few minutes here just taking in the views and scanning out to sea in hope of cetaceans, but none are seen so we make our way back. We have our lunch here overlooking the beach.

We continue east now, making our way slowly around Loch Erribol, a large sea loch, once used as a submarine base for WW2. After Laide, a small bird catches Sally's eye, hoping it was a Whinchat, once we park up and look back, we see a Stonechat family. We watch and scan here for a while, with distant Black and Red-throated Divers seen. Sally then notices a large bird on the island in front, a White-tailed Eagle. Once we are all on it, it starts to move, taking off to move to where there is a second bird. They both land next to each other, and you can see the size of these birds as they are perched. We decide to leave them and carry on round the loch. As we come over the brow of a hill, there is a small lochan, Loch Achan Lochaidh that could be good, so we stop. There is a very vocal Greenshank, so we get ourselves in a better position to be able to see it. There is also Snipe and a Cuckoo calling. Perri sees Buzzard flying, hoping it was something else. With the afternoon ticking on we carry on and turn off towards Loch Hope to look for raptors. When we stop Sally thinks she spots an Eagle but it doesn't reappear. It is very calm here but despite scanning there are no raptors or little else, so we retrace our steps.

On the east side of Loch Erribol, Kate turns a corner and there is a very close diver next to the road. When we can, we turn round and park where it was. A lovely summer Great Northern Diver with even closer views in the telescope. Once we sit here for a few minutes we scan and find all three divers all in close proximity, renaming this loch the loch of divers! Past Durness we get

fantastic views of the mountains we passed this morning, the light making them shimmer and we can't help to stop a few times for photos. Another great end to the day, avoiding the rain and ending our last full day in Sutherland.

**Day 10** Sad to leave this beautiful location, we pack and leave the hotel shortly after 9am to make our way slowly back to Strathspey. Stopping in at Kylesku it gives us a chance to scan from here. Kate spots a Red-throated Diver on the loch as well as Black Guillemot. Some people have a very obliging Robin who sits to be photographed. We carry on, and after a slight wrong turn we make our way through more dramatic Sutherland mountains, stopping briefly next on the banks of loch Assynt. It is windy today and no birds are flying at the moment.

We head to the famous pottery shop at Lochinver where a bit of retail therapy is welcomed. Carrying on a small road to Achmelvich, we aren't sure what we will find. There is a very lovely beach here, where we see Wheatear and a Pied Wagtail that we check in case it is a White Wagtail, before getting back on the road again.

We take the road south of Lochinver stopping next at Loch Kirkaig. We think there is a Redshank out on the bay, but it turns out to be Greenshank. There is also Curlew and Red-breasted Merganser. Kate has two Great Northern Diver out on the loch, which are fishing and diving, but most of us manage to see them. To get out of the wind we park for lunch along the road, where a Blackcap serenades us throughout. The winding single track road takes us over some interesting hills and bays, every summit with a different view of the sea or mountains. Our next stop overlooking Ben Mor Coigach is a perfect spot for Eagles. Kate does spot an eagle sitting on a high ridge which then flies off, but out of sight unfortunately.

We take our time along this loch before getting to Ullapool, where we spend another hour here to look round the shops or get supplies (or Ice Cream.) Last leg of the journey now as we drive to Inverness and then down the A9 to be greeted once again by the Queen, Iain and Elaine.

We spend our final evening relaxing in the lounge, enjoying a final meal together and going over our highlights of the trip. It is always nice to hear the moments guests find special and share these moments with each other.

**Day 11** After breakfast together, we say a fond farewell to David, Lyn and Lynda as we head off to the train station, where Sally and Kate say a fond farewell to the remaining guests. A fantastic week of weather, record number of bird species seen and great company to have been in.

### Species of the Trip

John T	Red-throated Diver
Lynne	Arctic Skua
Lynda	White-tailed Eagle / Cuckoo
David	Great Northern Diver
Lyn	White-tailed Eagle
John D	Small White Orchid
Perri	Dipper
Bill	Red Kite
Rosalie	Dunnock
Magnus	Ring Ouzel
Sally	Sandwich Tern
Kate	Otter

### Place of the Trip

John T	Loch Shin
Lynne	Craigellachie NNR / Handa
Lynda	Handa
David	Scottish scenery throughout and the Tigh na Sgiath Hotel
Lyn	Tigh na Sgiath Hotel
John D	Craigellachie NNR
Perri	Loch Inchard
Bill	Handa
Rosalie	Handa
Magnus	Handa
Sally	Loch a Mhuilinn NNR
Kate	Balnakeil

### Magic Moment

John T	Twite posing, view through the scope
Lynne	Twite
Lynda	Osprey diving in front of us
David	Osprey diving
Lyn	Osprey diving
John D	Waking up to the view from the hotel window
Perri	Inshriach Garden/ wildlife hide
Bill	Scenery glistening over Loch Inchard after a rain shower
Rosalie	Fulmar in flight
Magnus	The company and camaraderie
Sally	Everyone's joy of watching the birds on Handa
Kate	Osprey diving just as Sally had explained

## BIRDS

Mute Swan	Redshank
Whooper Swan	Greenshank
Greylag Goose	Curlew
Shelduck	Woodcock
Mallard	Snipe
Wigeon	Great Skua
Teal	Arctic Skua
Tufted Duck	Black-headed Gull
Eider	Common Gull
Goldeneye	Herring Gull
Goosander	Great Black-backed Gull
Red-breasted Merganser	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Red Grouse	Kittiwake
Black Grouse (H)	Sandwich Tern
Red-legged Partridge	Common Tern
Pheasant	Arctic Tern
Red-throated Diver	Puffin
Black-throated Diver	Black Guillemot
Great Northern Diver	Guillemot
Slavonian Grebe	Razorbill
Little Grebe	Rock Dove
Fulmar	Woodpigeon
Gannet	Collared Dove
Cormorant	Cuckoo
Shag	Swift
Grey Heron	Great Spotted Woodpecker
White-tailed Eagle	Skylark
Osprey	Sand Martin
Golden Eagle	Swallow
Red Kite	House Martin
Common Buzzard	Rock Pipit
Sparrowhawk	Meadow Pipit
Kestrel	Tree Pipit
Peregrine	Pied Wagtail
Moorhen	Grey Wagtail
Coot	Dipper
Oystercatcher	Dunnock
Ringed Plover	Robin
Lapwing	Redstart
Dunlin	Wheatear
Knot	Stonechat
Common Sandpiper	Song Thrush

Mistle Thrush  
Blackbird  
Ring Ouzel  
Blackcap  
Whitethroat  
Sedge Warbler  
Willow Warbler  
Chiffchaff  
Wood Warbler  
Goldcrest  
Wren  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Pied Flycatcher  
Great Tit  
Coal Tit  
Blue Tit  
Crested Tit  
Treecreeper  
Jackdaw  
Rook  
Hooded Crow  
Carion Crow  
Raven  
Jay  
Magpie  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Twite  
Redpoll  
Goldfinch  
Greenfinch  
Siskin  
Bullfinch  
Crossbill Sp.  
Reed Bunting  
Yellowhammer  
**Total: 122**

**MAMMALS**  
Short-tailed Vole  
Wood Mouse  
Red Squirrel  
Rabbit  
Brown Hare  
Mountain Hare  
Otter  
Badger  
Daubenton's Bat  
Pipistrelle Bat  
Feral Goat  
Red Deer  
Roe Deer  
Harbour Porpoise  
Common Seal  
Grey Seal  
**Total: 16**

**OTHER**  
Common Lizard  
Common Frog  
Oak Eggar

## PLANTS/FLOWERS

Creeping Willow	Russell Lupin
Bog Myrtle	Tufted Vetch
Common Sorrel	Kidney Vetch
Sea Sandwort	Birdsfoot Trefoil
Greater Stitchwort	Hop Trefoil
Lesser Stichwort	White Clover
Procumbent (Mossy)	Wood-Sorrel
Pearlwort	Common Storksbill
Bladder Campion	Fairy Flax
Sea Campion	Herb Robert
Red Campion	Common Milkwort
White Campion	Wild Pansy
Ragged Robin	Common Butterwort
White Water-lily	New Zealand Willowherb
Marsh Marigold	Dwarf Cornel
Meadow Buttercup	Sanicle
Lesser Spearwort	Cow Parsley
Lesser Celandine	Sweet Cicely
Wood Anemone	Pignut
Common Poppy	Heather/Ling
Cuckoo Flower / Lady's Smock	Bilberry/Blaeberry
Common Scurvy-grass	Cowberry (Lingonberry)
Common Whitlow-grass	Crowberry
Common Sundew (Round-leaved)	Primrose
Oblong-leaved Sundew	Chickweed Wintergreen
Roseroot	Yellow Pimpernel
Biting Stonecrop	Thrift
English Stonecrop	Bogbean
Lady's Mantle	Heath Bedstraw
Lady's Mantle	Wood Forgetmenot
Dog Rose	Water Forgetmenot
Cloudberry	Viper's Bugloss
Water Avens	Bugle
Mountain Avens	Wild Thyme
Tormentil	Ivy-leaved Toadflax
Silverweed	Monkey Flower
Rowan	Foxglove
Bird Cherry	Germander Speedwell
Gorse	Heath Speedwell
Broom	Ivy-leaved Speedwell
	Eyebright
	Marsh Lousewort/ Red Rattle

Lousewort  
Common Cow-Wheat  
Ribwort Plantain  
Sea Plantain  
Elder  
Daisy  
Mountain Everlasting  
Yarrow  
Ox-eye Daisy  
Groundsel  
Marsh Thistle  
Dandelion  
Bluebell  
Star of Bethlehem  
Yellow Iris/Yellow Flag  
Early Marsh Orchid  
Northern Marsh Orchid  
Heath Spotted Orchid  
Small White Orchid