

Islay & Jura

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 - 30 October 2013



Barnacle Geese



White-fronted Geese



Immature White-tailed Eagle



Otter

Report & images compiled by Peter Clement



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Day 1

Thursday 24th October

The tour group assembled at the first pick-up point at Glasgow Central Station at 1.30 and then shortly before 2pm at Glasgow Airport and we boarded the minibus for the drive to Kennacraig and the ferry to Islay. Along the way we passed the calm waters of Loch Fyne where the first Hooded Crows appeared together with a few Red-breasted Mergansers along the shore and stopped for a short comfort and tea-break by the old quay at Inverary.

Pressing on we arrived at Kennacraig shortly before 5 pm just as it was beginning to get dark with just enough time for a look around the top of the loch by the ferry terminal. The ferry left a little behind schedule but made up time on the crossing which was fairly smooth and uneventful despite fears that the strong winds earlier in the day may have meant otherwise. Once ashore at Port Ellen we drove the short distance to Bridgend where a warm welcome, as usual, awaited us at Bridgend Hotel our home for the next three nights. We quickly settled in to our rooms and then found a late but welcome hot supper waiting for us in the dining room. Over dinner Peter set up a map of Islay and explained the plan of action for the next couple of days.

Day 2

Friday 25th October

The morning dawned grey and overcast with a brisk breeze and a promise of rain. After a fine breakfast we set off in search of geese, though at first the nearby Bridgend Flats were almost empty but it soon became clear that as the tide was out most of the geese were rather distant out on the open mudflats. A little further on we stopped to look out over the top end of Loch Indaal where in the rather choppy water we found a flock of about 50 Scaup and more distantly one or two Red-breasted Mergansers and a flock of about 25 Eiders and some Shags on the rocks; further along the beach a group of 5 pale-bellied Brent Geese were feeding on the mudflats.

Pressing on we drove north along the narrow road to the RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart passing a small flock of Greenland White-fronts in a field close to the road along the way.

In the fields around the reserve headquarters we came across several large flocks of Barnacle Geese and amongst them smaller numbers of Greenland White-fronts and some Greylag Geese. In the more distant fields we could even larger flocks of geese and numerous smaller flocks flying to and fro between the fields and out onto the nearby Loch Gruinart itself. We spent some time getting close views of the geese and then drove on up to the RSPB visitor centre which is perched on a low hill for a better view over the fields and the bottom end of Loch Gruinart.

By now occasional showers were appearing on the horizon and raced across the island. In between the downpours we walked out to the hides overlooking several lagoons on the edge of the loch. Here we saw a large flock of Teal flying round and included with them was a single Garganey revealed by the pale blue forewing and broad white wingbars, several Shoveler, Gadwall and Wigeon grazing on the grassy islands and in the background the constant movement of Barnacle Geese to-ing and fro-ing on the saltings of the rapidly ebbing tide in the loch. At one point a long line of about 20 Whooper Swans flew in low and continued on over towards the adjacent fields below the visitor centre. On the far side of the lagoons was a mixed flock of waders which included about 40 Curlews, 25 Bar-tailed Godwits whilst in the fields either side of the hides was a loose flock of foraging Lapwings. On the way back to the minibus a female Sparrowhawk flew over the wood.

Taking advantage of another and hopefully prolonged break in the weather we boarded the minibus and pressed on along the road north to Ardnave which runs close to the western edge of the loch stopping several times to look at flocks of geese in the fields. We made a short stop to look out into the now more-mud-than-water loch from the ruined chapel at Kilnave. At the end of the road we stopped by Ardnave Loch and walked out across the dunes to Ardnave Point. Almost immediately the air above us was thick with the sound of clouds of Barnacle Geese taking flight, but as they were rising from over the low hill it couldn't have been due to us. Walking out through the dunes we came across first a few then more and more Chough which flew in and fed in the short grassy knolls and hollows between the dunes. In the end the entire flock gathered together and totalled over 30.

At the headland itself we looked across the narrow channel to Nave Island, separated by a fast-moving current of water in the channel. Below us in the rapidly moving current was a Great Northern Diver and whilst we watching the diver a small flock of Snow Buntings flew right past us. Over on the island a large dark bird sitting distantly at the far end was looked at critically through the telescope which showed it to be an immature Sea Eagle and as we watched this was joined by a second darker bird, an adult, with a massive bright yellow bill and both appeared to have been feeding on something nearby on the ground and happily for us stayed there for lengthy but fairly distant views.

By now the rain had cleared away to the east and the sun was breaking through in an increasingly blue sky. On our way back to the minibus the huge flock of Barnacle Geese suddenly took flight and it was obvious that something other than us had disturbed them again. Moments later a large female Peregrine appeared flying low through the flock and landed on a fence post atop the hill and stayed there giving great views through the scopes. By the time we had retraced our steps back to the minibus the Chough flock had beaten us to it and were spread out all round where it was parked searching for grubs on the ground. Setting off in search of a slightly delayed lunch we drove towards Loch Gorm and had just arrived at the loch when a ringtail Hen Harrier flew by and away along a low ridge.

In the fields around Sunderland Farm several flocks of geese were gathering, these were mostly Barnacles and Greenland White-fronts together with about 120 Grey Lags, a little further along the road we came across a fairly close group of 3 female Red Deer which although nervous and aware of us stayed around long enough for photos.

By late afternoon the light was beginning to fade and there was just time for a drive along the west side of Loch Indaal to Bruichladdich to check for any Otters. On this occasion we failed to find any Otters but at the jetty there we managed to find several Great Northern Divers (including one in full breeding plumage) and about 5 Red-throated Divers (including one with a red-throat) and a small flock of Common Scoter. We returned to Bridgend as dusk was falling at the same time as small flocks of Barnacles were flying in to roost out on the flats.

Day 3

Saturday 26th October

The weather forecast had promised a similar day to yesterday with some sunny periods in between scattered showers so after another fine breakfast we boarded the minibus and set off along the road to Loch Indaal stopping only to check out the birds at the top end of the loch. Apart from a winter plumage red-throated Diver and several Slavonian Grebes amongst the Scaup flock all seemed to be much the same as yesterday. We stopped to look at the goose flocks in the fields below the RSPB visitor centre where a male Hen Harrier was quartering the ground over the distant heather and bracken-covered hillside. A brisk walk down to one of the hides on the reserve produced a large flock of Golden Plover out on the mudflats and on the lagoon in front of us were 2 Black-tailed Godwits still in partial summer plumage.

Back at the visitor centre we were told that the immature Red-backed Shrike, which has been present here for several days (and which we had briefly looked for but failed to find in the rain yesterday), was still present so we took a quick detour off the intended route up to Gruinart Farm and there, giving good views whilst flitting between brambles and low roadside bushes, was the shrike sitting out in the morning sun. We could only speculate on which of the thick bramble bushes it must have been sheltering during most of yesterday's heavy downpours. We continued along the road round the large peaty-fringed Loch Gorm where we found a large flock of newly-arrived Redwings, a few small flocks of Greenland White-fronts and some Greylag Geese together with a family party of Whooper Swans in the roadside fields.

At the windblown Machair Bay on the west coast we stopped to see if there were any waders roosting at the top end of the long, sandy beach. A small flock of Ringed Plovers at the far end amongst the swirling sand together with a couple of Sanderling and a Dunlin were all we could find in the vast expanse of the otherwise deserted beach. Out on the heaving sea a few Gannets were flying and occasionally diving into the swell and on one of the far headlands a small group of Chough were enjoying tumbling in the wind. Back at the car park on the landward side of the dunes a pair of Stonechats perched on the fence and a small group of Twite were feeding on the ground nearby, one of which stayed close to the fence and showed off the streaky buff and brown plumage together with the small yellow bill.

Back on the road again we set off for Port Charlotte, stopping on the way at Bruichladdich to look for some Black Guillemots that nest under the jetty there but were regrettably not at home today. Instead we made do with another Red-throated Diver and some Common Scoter and Eiders together with a rather poorly-looking Common Guillemot just below the jetty.

We had just arrived at our intended lunch stop at the cafe in Port Charlotte which has a superb view over the seaward expanse of Loch Indaal (and were in the course of ordering) when an Otter was spotted swimming in the sea immediately below the large picture window. The cafe owner coped as best she could with orders being taken whilst the group strove to find the best vantage point and watched as the Otter dived and surfaced with crabs for a lunch of his own.

After lunch and otter-watching we set off along the road to Port Wemyss and Portnahaven. Portnahaven is a small village set on two sides of a narrow sheltered inlet which is itself a small arm of the channel between the headland on which Portnahaven sits and two offshore islands. The water in the channel is eternally on the move and almost a raging torrent in places with swirling currents sweeping along with smaller side-streams and eddies. In the inlet below the village a few Common and one or two large Grey Seals were swimming and diving seemingly unconcerned by our presence close-by and on the rocky beaches of the offshore islands several more were contentedly snoozing.

At the next-door Port Wemyss we looked out across the channel to the offshore islands and the wild whipped-up seas beyond, here a couple of Gannets were being swept along together with occasional groups of Kittiwakes. On the shingle beach on one of the islands were several Eiders and a large flock of Great Black-backed Gulls together with the dozing seals. On the way back we stopped at Bridgend Flats to see if there were any geese coming in to roost but apart from those that we already seen in the morning there was little sign of any roosting movement, possibly due to the very low tides allowing the birds to stay out on the mudflats. As the sun shone through a couple of late afternoon showers attended by a dazzling pair of rainbows we drove on to Bowmore where from a vantage point at one end of the town's sea-front which overlooks another part of Loch Indaal we found a fine male Long-tailed Duck (complete with a long tail) amongst the numerous Red-breasted Mergansers and a pair of more distant Goldeneye.

Day 4

Sunday 27th October

The weather forecast was promising wind and rain today and the strong south-westerly winds further south meant that there would be a strong swell around the island which in turn meant the possible cancellation of the ferry to Jura. With this in mind we opted for an earlier mid-morning ferry and loaded the minibus, said our farewells to the hotel staff and set off to Port Askaig. As there was a little time before the ferry we stopped for a stroll around Finlaggan, the ancient seat of the Lords of the Isles, based on two small islands at one end of the loch. The visitor centre at the loch was closed but several boards placed at the site helped explain the significance of the site. The ferry crossing over the Sound of Islay to Jura was short and thankfully uneventful although there was clearly a swell on the rapidly moving water through the Sound. The weather was not really improving as we drove along the road that hugs the shoreline of the Sound for the first part of the way whilst peering out through rain-spattered windows at all the otter look-alike rocks and clumps of seaweed for signs of life. We had gone a few hundred yards when one of the otter-like rocks actually became an Otter swimming along the edge of the shoreline immediately below us! Coming to a sudden stop we looked down and there was not one but three Otters swimming close together, a mother and two cubs fastidiously searching the shoreline and seemingly oblivious of the pouring rain. The Otters swam on keeping close together with the cubs giving a sharp eye and attention to anything that the mother caught. At one point the group swam in a line with one of the cubs appearing to hold on to the mother's tail.

To everyone's astonishment, instead of disappearing, the trio swam in close to the shore and then came out onto the rocks and strandline of seaweed. It now became clear that in her last dive the mother had caught a fairly long eel which they now brought ashore and the cubs taking one end each proceeded to either eat or have a game of tug-of-war with. It was also now clear that one of the cubs was much smaller, possibly only a little over half as big as the other, and we wondered how old they might be and whether the smaller was an 'adoption' or a runt. Whichever way it was the smaller of the cubs was determined to get his full share of the eel, frequently squealing and tugging it away from his elder sibling to make sure he could continue chewing at it. From time to time the mother, clearly aware of our presence from frequent looks in our direction about thirty feet away, swam back out and called to one or both of them to join her but although the larger or presumed elder cub occasionally went and joined the mother, the smaller one stayed put clearly enjoying his meal. Eventually all three swam back out into the Sound (but only after cleaning their whiskers of the slippery eel) and were last seen heading round the far side of a rocky promontory. We all felt that this had been an utterly amazing and truly unique (a once in a lifetime) experience having been privileged to sit in the minibus at distances occasionally down to around twenty feet for over an hour and share this engaging cameo of otter-life with this trusting family group!

After bidding the Otters farewell we drove on towards Craighouse and the idyllic Small Isles Bay that lies in front of the village protecting it from the wilder sea in the main Sound beyond. The hotel at Craighouse sits on a slight rise overlooking Small Isles Bay which, on the far side, is marked by a line of small rocky islands (hence the name). We checked into our rooms and had lunch in the lounge bar that overlooks the hotel garden (complete with huge date palms) and the bay. Afterwards we drove slowly along the edge of the bay and the only birds of note were a distant Great Northern Diver, several Grey Herons and a few Red-breasted Mergansers. Driving further north the road crosses a rapid peat-coloured river and then carries on into the wilder and more rugged peaty moorland with bracken outcrops that make up most of the island. The large grey scree-sided and largely vegetation-free Paps glowered beneath a cap of misty low cloud. There were few birds, cars or people about on this largely uninhabited island away from Craighouse. We did however find several groups of Red Deer including several stags with fine sets of antlers and an attendant harem of females together with several lone males which we presumed had been less fortunate in the rut.

Day 5

Monday 28th October

Our first morning on Jura dawned bright and clear though a little cool; most of the group were up early searching the bay for any signs of Otters. Although there were a couple of Seals playing along the shore in the shallows the only other wildlife were a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers together with a few Mallards and some Mute Swans.

After breakfast we set out along the road back to Feolin and the Sound of Islay again and the area where we had seen the Otter family yesterday but today there was not a sign. We left the minibus by Feolin (the single house by the ferry terminal) and walked along the tops of the cliffs overlooking the narrow Sound with Islay only a few hundred yards away across the water. One side of the path looks down onto the choppy waters of the Sound whilst the other side has great views up over the vast moorlands sweeping down from the first of the grey and conical Paps. We were a little way along the track when a flock of 15 Whooper Swans were seen arriving from high over Feolin and continued on south towards the mainland, a little further on a Merlin dashed by and slightly later a Sparrowhawk showed briefly just before Inver cottage together with a few distant Fieldfares in the birches.

Suddenly, some way in front of us, an adult White-tailed Eagle was seen coming slowly along towards us. As we watched transfixed by the size and sight of this bird it was joined by another and then, shortly after, yet another. They came steadily closer and as they did so, the first bird (an adult from the fully white tail) drifted towards the later arrival and as they met they talon-grappled with the first bird tumbling over beneath the other which it now became clear from the longer tail and slightly different shape of the wings was an adult Golden Eagle. As they broke apart they drifted higher with the Golden disappearing back the way it had come whilst the two White-tailed Eagles drifted high overhead and off along the Sound.

We carried on along the track to the loch and just before Inver cottage an Otter was seen swimming and diving in shallow water at the edge of the Sound. From the shape of the head this was presumed to be a lone male and at one point swam into the shore and shook himself as he walked up onto the beach not a hundred yards in front of us. Hoping for another up-close encounter we were not to be so lucky this time as very soon he either heard us or sensed our presence and quickly took to the water and promptly disappeared.

Finding little in the way of any wildlife beyond Inver cottage we turned back and had just reached the high part of the path again when a repeat of the White-tailed Eagle flypast took place again. This time there were two adult and a fairly well-grown immature White-tailed Eagles which came almost overhead one by one and again went off along the edge of the Sound eventually getting lost to view around a distant headland. Scarcely able to believe our luck (the rain had miraculously held off too) we marvelled at the great views we had had of both Golden and White-tailed Eagles and yet another Otter, what more could we ask...

After lunch back in the hotel we drove the minibus north along the edge of the bay and on across the east side of the island over some rugged terrain of rolling hills and bracken-covered slopes leading up to the Paps of Jura. Stopping from time to time to look over the bay there was no sign of any Otter activity but we did find the now familiar Buzzards, Red-breasted Mergansers and a flock of Grey Lag Geese and a couple of young Common Seals and a Grey Seal hauled out on some rocks together with a couple of Great Northern Divers further out in the bay.

At the top of the bay we took the other road on Jura that leads to the settlements at Knockrome and Ardfernal before becoming a bumpy track that leads to Lowlandman's Bay. As we passed the end of the settlement at Ardfernal a close ringtail Hen Harrier was patrolling over an of sedge and peatland and at one stage hung briefly in the air before plunging down, moments later it re-appeared but had been unsuccessful and was in the process of making another run-in when it spotted us and made a hasty retreat over the ridge. At Lowlandman's Bay we parked by one of the cottages that must have one of the best views on the island looking out over the wild and often white-capped Sound of Jura to the rocky and indented coast of mainland Argyll with very little sign of any human habitation anywhere. The bay itself appeared rather birdless at first though the shoreline was dotted with various groups of dozing Grey Seals. We walked a little way down towards the shoreline and scanned the bay when first one Otter was picked out in the shallows right below us and then another swimming and diving slightly further away. We spent some time watching the first and closer of the two Otters before he too vanished from sight.

As it was now mid-afternoon the best of the light was beginning to go. We retraced our drive back along the shore and on through Craighouse back to the bend of the road above Jura Estate with a wonderful vista of moorland to our right and the pine plantation and the open Sound of Islay (and Islay itself distantly) to our left.

Here on previous tours there has been a late afternoon movement of Hen Harriers coming in to roost either in the rough grassy areas on the edge of the moorland or in the plantation. We didn't have long to wait as first one then another Hen Harrier came into view over the hills and circled the roost area. In the fading light it was difficult to be certain how many we saw but a conservative estimate put it at 5 individuals, curiously all were ringtails (females or immature). We drove back to Craighouse happy and elated with the day but ever watchful for a Barn or Short-eared Owl that may be out hunting - but to no avail.

Day 6

Tuesday 29th October

Most of the group were up and about again in front of the hotel shortly after dawn hoping for an Otter. As the light improved one was seen a little way along from the hotel slightly further out in the bay but still giving a good swimming and diving display before moving out into deeper water and we moved back to the hotel for breakfast.

As the weather was looking fair and promising after breakfast we headed off back to the ferry to Islay in a bid to get to the Oa where we were scheduled to be on Sunday when we had to catch the early ferry to Jura. The Oa is really only worth visiting for large birds of prey when the weather is favourable and today though a little windy seemed more than suitable. The road from Port Ellen to the Oa twists and turns a little, passing through several small hill farms before coming out onto a wide rolling but almost plateau-like area of dry bracken and heather moorland. Arriving in the car park near the headland the weather was still holding fine so we set off along the track to the monument on the tip of the headland. Along the way birds were few and far between but the panoramic views were fantastic and at one stage a Sparrowhawk flew overhead and away before dropping out of sight. As we neared the monument we looked out across the sea and large parts of Northern Ireland stood out well against the shimmering pale blue sea and appeared much closer than the thirty or so miles distance between us.

We carried on along the circular path and passing through the fields on the way back to car park we suddenly noticed a ringtail Hen Harrier in the valley that runs down to the cove from the most south-westerly house on the island. Amazingly, although we were only a hundred yards or so away, the harrier appeared oblivious of our presence. Shortly before we left the Oa we took a short detour a little way down to Loch Kinnabus and found a large flock of Twite feeding in a weedy field by the side of the track together with a fine male Brambling and in the fields around the loch about 300 Greenland White-fronts were feeding. At one point over the more distant edge of the cliffs a Golden Eagle soared up then flew along a ridge before dropping out of sight.

On our way back to Port Ellen we stopped briefly to look for the eagle but there was no sign and the weather was again threatening which further reduced our chances. A late lunch was had in the cafe at Ardbeg distillery and afterwards as there was only a little time before the return ferry to Jura we drove along the old road north to Bridgend passing flocks of Barnacle Geese together with a few Greenland White-fronts in the fields and at one stage a huge flock of Fieldfares were in roadside bushes. We drove back across Jura in the orange glow of the setting sun and reflected on what a great trip it had been.

Day 7

Wednesday 30th October

A pre-dawn start today, first to get the early ferry across the Sound to Port Askaig, before driving down to Port Ellen to then catch the ferry back to Kennacraig. There was a slight hitch in the proceedings when the ferry across to Islay broke down forcing an anxious wait to find out how long it would take to fix and would we make it onto Port Ellen and the ferry to Kennacraig. In the end the ferry to Jura was fixed in record time and the world record time for a minibus from Port Askaig to Port Ellen was matched or possibly broken, only to find that the ferry from Kennacraig had also been delayed and was only just arriving as we pulled into the port!

The weather for the crossing was overcast and breezy but a few souls braved the elements outside. As we left Islay Philip out on deck saw a couple of Manx Shearwaters and a Puffin and later a few Gannets, Guillemots and Kittiwakes appeared close to the ship as we passed. In mid-crossing a Storm Petrel flitted around close to the ship before continuing on south but there was little else along the way until we were approaching the entrance to Loch Tarbert when several Great Northern Divers and a couple of Black-throated Divers were sitting on the sea and over a small flat island at the entrance to the loch a ringtail Hen Harrier was hunting.

Once on-shore, the journey back to Glasgow was fairly uneventful, except the rain kept us company all the way becoming torrential through the pass at Rest and Be Thankful, but surprisingly it had turned to warm sun and blue skies once we reached Glasgow.

The first Carrion Crows reappeared on cue at Loch Lomond and we said farewell to several of the group at Glasgow airport who were flying back home. By mid-afternoon we were in the traffic on the M8 heading into Glasgow and heading for the farewell destination at Glasgow Central Station where we said our final goodbyes and everyone agreed that despite the weather it had been a very successful and extremely memorable tour.

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted)

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

At least 5, including one in full breeding plumage, on Loch Indaal 25th and 26th Oct.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

2 at the entrance to West Loch Tarbert on 30th Oct.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

Up to 7 including one in full breeding plumage, on Loch Indaal on 25th and 26th Oct and 1 from Ardnave Point also on 25th. 2 Small Isles Bay, Jura on 28th also up to 9 at the entrance to West Loch Tarbert on 30th.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

Up to 3 on Loch Indaal on 25th and 26th Oct.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

2 on Ardnave Loch on 25th Oct.

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

2 at sea from Machair Bay, Islay on 26th Oct. Several between Port Ellen and Kennacraig on 30th.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Fairly common, small numbers seen daily.

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Very common, seen every day.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers seen every day, slightly more numerous on Jura than on Islay.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Small numbers on Loch Gruinart and Loch Indaal, Islay and up to 6 Small Isles Bay, Jura.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

About 20 on Gruinart Flats on 25th and 26th Oct. also a family group of 4 in fields around Loch Gorm on 26th a single near Sunderland Farm on both dates and a group of 6 on Loch Indaal at Bowmore on the evening of 27th. On Jura flock of 15 arriving high from the north over Feolin on 28th Oct.

Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*

Up to 350 daily on Islay, mostly around Loch Gruinart between 25th and 27th Oct. On Jura small flocks totalling about 25 arrived from the north on the evening of 28th.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

About 150 in fields between Gruinart Flats and Loch Gorm between 25th and 27th Oct with smaller numbers in fields around Loch Gruinart and a flock of about 50 in fields near Small Isles Bay, Jura on 28th and 29th.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

Flocks totalling over 30,000 on various parts of Islay between 25th and 27th Oct.

Pale-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*

A flock of 5 along the top of Loch Indaal, Islay on 25th and a single with Barnacle Geese on Bridgend Flats on 26th.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Up to 30 on lagoons and Loch Gruinart 25th and 26th Oct.

- Wigeon** *Anas penelope*
At least 50 on Gruinart Flats and Loch Gruinart 25th and 26th also at least 15 feeding along the tideline near Bowmore on 28th.
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera*
Up to 4 on lagoons in front of the hide on Gruinart Flats on 25th to 27th.
- Common Teal** *Anas crecca*
Up to 300 on Gruinart Flats and lagoons between 25th and 27th Oct, also about 15 feeding along the tideline near Bowmore on 28th.
- Garganey** *Anas querquedula*
Single female in flight with Teal flock from hide on Gruinart Flats on 25th Oct.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*
Up to 30 on flooded area around Loch Gruinart on 25th and 26th Oct and up to about 10 on Small Isles Bay, Jura on 28th and 29th.
- Scaup** *Aythya marila*
A large flock of about 100 on Loch Indaal on 25th -27th Oct.
- Eider** *Somateria mollissima*
Up to 35 on Loch Indaal on 25th and 26th and a flock of about 10 in Sound of Islay on 28th.
- Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis*
A single male along the edge of Loch Indaal at Bowmore on evening of 26th Oct.
- Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*
Flock of about 20 on Loch Indaal on 25th and 26th Oct.
- Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*
Pair on Loch Indaal from Bowmore on evening of 26th Oct.
- Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator*
Common in small numbers and seen daily on Loch Indaal, Islay and Small Isles Bay, Jura.
- White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla*
An adult and immature on Nave Island on 25th Oct, 2 adults and an immature along the Sound of Islay from Jura on 28th.
- Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*
A ring-tail female/immature in flight over Gruinart Flats and another near Loch Gorm on 25th Oct. A male distantly over Gruinart Flats on the morning of 26th. On Jura single ringtail near Ardfernal and five ringtails coming into roost area above the pine plantation, Jura Estate on evening of 28th and a ring-tail female/immature on the Oa on and one on Jura 29th.
- Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*
Single female in flight over Loch Gruinart woods on 25th Oct, two singles Loch Gorm and near Portnahaven on 26th, 2 females in flight on Jura on 27th, another on Jura on 28th and a single on the Oa on 29th.
- Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*
Common, seen every day, maximum of 10 on Islay on 26th Oct.
- Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*
An immature/subadult along the edge of the Sound of Islay between Feolin and Inver Estate on 28th Oct. in flight and talon-grappling with an adult White-tailed Eagle at one stage, also single distantly over the Oa cliffs on 29th.

- Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*
Only seen on Jura with up to 4 daily between 27th and 29th Oct.
- Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus*
1 in flight and perched on Ardnave Headland on 25th Oct.
- Merlin** *Falco columbarius*
Single along the track near Feolin, Jura on 28th.
- Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*
Common and widespread, mainly introduced birds on both islands.
- Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*
A covey of about 5-6 flew in and landed in garden of the Port Askaig Hotel on 27th Oct.
- Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*
Common on both islands.
- Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*
About 50 in fields around Loch Gruinart on 25th and 26th Oct.
- Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*
About 300 in fields around Loch Gruinart on 25th and 26th Oct and about 30 in field along the old road between Port Ellen and Bridgend on 29th.
- Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*
Flock of about 30 Machair Bay on 26th Oct and about 12 on beach at Port Ellen on 29th.
- Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*
Up to 4 on lagoons at Gruinart Flats on 25th Oct, and single flushed from roadside on the Oa on 29th.
On Jura single by roadside near Craighouse on 28th.
- Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica*
About 40 on mudflats and lagoons on Bridgend and Gruinart Flats and Loch Gruinart on 25th – 27th Oct.
- Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*
2 on lagoons in front of hide on Gruinart Flats on 26th.
- Curlew** *Numenius arquatus*
Up to 100 on flooded fields at Bridgend and Gruinart Flats 25th - 27th Oct and 3 Small isles Bay, Jura on 28th.
- Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*
Up to 4 on flooded fields on Gruinart Flats on 25th and 26th Oct and 8 on rocks Small Isles Bay, Jura 28th Oct.
- Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*
5 present on rocks at Bruichladdich on 26th and flock of about 15 along edge of Sound of Islay, Jura on 27th and 28th.
- Sanderling** *Calidris alba*
3 on Machair Bay, Islay 26th Oct.
- Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*
At least 1 with other waders Machair Bay, Islay on 26th Oct.
- Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Small numbers seen daily.
- Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*
At least 30 together in Sound of Islay from Feolin on 28th Oct and 2 in the same area the following day.

- Common Gull** *Larus canus*
Small numbers daily on both islands.
- Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus*
Common on Loch Indaal and smaller numbers around Small Isles Bay, Jura.
- Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus*
Up to 20 daily on Islay.
- Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea*
A 1st winter bird flew west past the jetty at Bruichladdich on 25th Oct.
- Rock Dove** *Columba livia*
Small numbers in fields on both islands but more numerous on Islay.
- Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*
Small numbers daily on both islands.
- Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*
Small numbers daily on both islands.
- Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco*
Single heard calling from Bridgend Woods on evening of 24th Oct.
- Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*
Small numbers on Gruinart Flats and Ardnave Headland 25th and 26th Oct.
- Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*
Small numbers present in fields around Loch Gruinart and along edge of Small Isles Bay, Jura.
- Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus*
Small numbers around Loch Indaal and along Sound of Islay, maximum of 6 on 28th Oct.
- Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*
Pair or family groups at Kilcolman distillery 25th Oct, Loch Gruinart visitor centre on 26th and max of 10 Machair Bay also on 26th and on Jura single at Craighouse, Jura 28th – 29th.
- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*
Single near Bridgend on 26th Oct.
- Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Small numbers seen or heard daily on both islands.
- Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*
Up to 4 seen daily on both islands.
- Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*
Single near Loch Gorm on 26th Oct and at least 2 near Inver cottage, Jura on 28th.
- Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*
Fairly common in small numbers, seen daily on both islands.
- Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*
At least 50 between Gruinart Flats and Ardnave on 25th Oct and 100+ in fields at Loch Gorm on 26th.
Smaller numbers of up to 30 in scattered locations on Jura on 28th.
- Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*
Small numbers daily, max of 100+ along old road from Port Ellen to Bridgend on 29th Oct..
- Blackbird** *Turdus merula*
Common and widespread, seen daily on both islands.
- Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*
Common and widespread on both islands.

- Stonechat** *Saxicola torquatus*
Small numbers seen daily on both islands.
- Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*
Single heard calling in wood at Loch Gruinart reserve on Oct 26th.
- Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*
Single heard calling in wood at Loch Gruinart reserve on Oct 26th. and 2 in gardens of Craighouse and hotel on Jura on 28th and 29th. Oct.
- Coal Tit** *Parus ater*
Single near RSPB offices at Gruinart visitor centre on 25th Oct.
- Great Tit** *Parus major*
Up to 4 in gardens at Craighouse, Jura on 29th Oct.
- Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus*
Small numbers seen daily on both islands.
- Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*
Single immature along lane by Gruinart Farm, Islay on 26th Oct.
- Chough** *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
Loose flock of 32 in dunes on Ardnave Headland on 25th Oct and at least 5 on headland to north of Machair Bay on 26th.
- Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*
Common, seen every day.
- Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*
Common and widespread up to about 100 daily on Islay.
- Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone*
Seen mainly up to Loch Lomond and at Arrochar on Oct 24th and on return journey.
- Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*
Common and widespread, seen daily.
- Raven** *Corvus corax*
Common on both islands.
- Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*
Seen daily (mostly around Loch Gruinart) on Islay and several flocks daily on Jura.
- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*
Small numbers daily on both islands.
- Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*
Common, seen daily and about 50 together near Port Charlotte, Islay on 26th Oct.
- Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*
A fine male with the Twite flock at the Oa on 29th Oct.
- Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*
A single with the Twite flock at the Oa on 29th Oct.
- Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*
Common, seen daily with flocks or small parties on both islands.
- Twite** *Carduelis flavrostris*
3 in dunes by the car park at Machair Bay on 26th Oct. and a flock of about 200 in field by Loch Kinnabus on the Oa on 29th.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Small numbers around Loch Gorm and about 30 along field at Kilcolman distillery on 25th and a few with the Twite flock near Loch Kinnabus on the Oa on 29th.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Single at the pine plantation en route to Craighouse, Jura on 27th and 2-3 en route to the Oa on 29th.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Fairly common, mainly in bushes around Loch Gorm, Islay 25th and 26th Oct. also 1-2 present around Small Isles Bay, Jura on 27th and 28th.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

A flock of about 13 in flight at Ardnave Point on 25th and a single female or immature by the road to the Oa on 29th.

Mammals**Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

1-2 seen on both islands.

Brown Hare *Lepus capensis*

Single on Gruinart Flats, Islay on 25th Oct.

Otter *Lutra lutra*

Single in Loch Indaal from the cafe at Port Charlotte on 26th Oct. Adult female with two cubs along the edge of the Sound of Islay on 27th Oct. Single (presumed male) along the Sound of Islay near Inver Estate, Jura and two other singles Lowlandman's Bay all on the 28th and single (presumed male) Craighouse, Small Isles Bay on 29th.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*

Common and widespread on Jura, small numbers, mainly around Gruinart Flats on Islay.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Up to 3 Bridgend Flats on 25th and 26th Oct. Also single by the road to the Oa on 29th.

Common Seal *Phoca vitulina*

Small numbers at Portnahaven on 26th Oct. Several in Small Isles Bay, Jura on 28th.

Grey Seal *Halicaerus grypus*

Small numbers at Portnahaven on 26th Oct. At least one on rocks in Small Isles Bay, Jura on 28th.