# The Magic of Mull

# Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd - 30th June 2022



Fallow Deer fawn



Golden-ringed Dragonfly



Orcas



Puffin

Tour report and images by Rob Williams



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

**GU34 3HJ** 

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

## **Summary**

The island of Mull is the fourth largest island in both Scotland and the UK and the third largest of the Hebridean islands. Arguably it is one of the most beautiful, with a varied volcanic landscape including Atlantic woodland, forest, craggy moorland hills and a gloriously rugged coastline. Our base for the week was the Park Lodge hotel in Tobermory, overlooking the majestic Tobermory Bay and Calve Island.

We spent six days exploring the island and several of its most spectacular satellite islands including Iona, Staffa and Lunga. In total, 109 species of bird, 12 species of mammal, six Odonates and two Butterflies were encountered during our tour, plus some notable plants including four species of Orchid.

Day 1

Thursday 23rd June

Arrival and travel to Mull

The majority of the first day was spent traveling to Mull, with pickups starting in Central Glasgow and at Glasgow Airport, before crossing to Mull via the ferry and a short drive to the Park Lodge hotel in Tobermory. The scenic drive, particularly through Loch Lomond, offered the first opportunities to begin our trip list with Buzzard and Hooded Crow amongst others. We stopped for lunch en route and then had a bit of time in sunny Oban for an ice cream and a stroll. The ferry crossing from Oban to Craignure was our first chance for good wildlife watching and our group joined another Naturetrek tour group on the upper deck. The weather was perfect and the scenery stunning. We encountered a couple of Black and a few Common Guillemot, Shag, Cormorant and a couple of Red-throated Divers. Four Grey Seals were seen on rocks off Mull. The final leg of our journey saw us make a few stops along the coast seeing many Common and a few more Grey Seals, as well as Common Eider, Greylag Goose and a colony of Arctic Terns. The coasts held a few waders and we got our first views of Common Sandpiper, Eurasian Curlew and Eurasian Oystercatcher.

Day 2 Friday 24th June

North Mull area and boat trip

We took a boat trip heading out north from Tobermory into the waters between Mull and Coll. We started off seeing a pair of White-tailed Eagles, an adult female and a slightly sub-adult male. Shortly after we came across a pod of 15-20 Bottle-nosed Dolphins and spent more than 20 minutes watching these large dolphins fishing, bow-riding and playing around us.

Heading towards the islands north of Coll, we spotted two distant Orcas and spent over an hour watching them travelling south past the Ardnamurchan peninsula and then collaboratively hunting something, probably a Harbour Porpoise. A couple of times they approached the boat quite closely and we enjoyed good views of these impressive animals. It was slightly sad to learn that there two, named Aquarius and John Coe, are the last two resident Orcas in the UK, the remnants of the Western Isles group of which the last female died in 2016 and her autopsy showed she was elderly and infertile, likely as a result of very high PCB levels. This group has dwindled over the last decades and has never been known to have a calf. The two remaining males are thought to be 60-70 years old.

A sub-adult Minke Whale was spotted and seen to surface a few times as it travelled west, passing quite close to the Orcas at one point.

The area held interesting seabirds, with good numbers of Common Guillemot, Atlantic Puffin and Manx Shearwater, a few Kittiwakes, a couple of Razorbills, a couple of Northern Fulmar and a single Great Skua - Bonxie - was seen travelling past us, poignant on the day the news of the massive population crash of 70-75% due to the avian influenza outbreak with significant concerns for the species survival was announced. Three European Storm-Petrels were seen, a couple feeding around the Orcas.

After lunching in Tobermory, we drove west to Dervaig. A stop by Loch Peallach gave us nice views of Little Grebe, Common Whitethroat and a couple of fly-by Tree Pipits. The loch edge held Common Blue, Common Darter, Blue-tailed Damselfly and Four-spotted Chaser and we enjoyed some Northern Marsh Orchids. Near Derviag, we spent some time watching the bay enjoying our first Common Redshank of the trip and a variety of Gulls. A Wren carried food into a hidden nest and a Beautiful Demoiselle was fluttering over a stream.

Taking a secondary road over the hills southwards, an adult female Hen Harrier drifted past and soon vanished over a distant ridge. Descending through some oak and beech woodland we found a cooperative Spotted Flycatcher. Near the scenic falls of Eas Fors, we found a couple of Willow Warblers and brief views of a single Wood Warbler. Three Grey Wagtails flew past calling.

Stopping along the north shore of Loch Na Kael, we found a couple of broods of recently fledged Northern Wheatears and a few Common Buzzards. An immature White-tailed Eagle soared overhead, and two Golden Eagles were over a slightly distant ridge above some Red Deer.

Day 3

Saturday 25th June

Western Mull

After picking up some packed lunch supplies, we headed off to explore the central western area of the island, with our main target being Otters. The sky was slightly ominous and the wind was strong from the south. We arrived to Loch Na Kael to see a stunning rainbow as a squall moved through. We searched along an area of the north shore but the waves were pounding the rocks and we decided to concentrate our efforts on the more sheltered southern shore. We did find some nice Fragrant Orchids and enjoyed good looks at a few waders.

The southern shore was much more sheltered and the tide had just turned meaning there was plenty of seaweed covered rocks and islets to check. Just before 11 am, we found two otters asleep on a rocky islet offshore. We spent the next three hours watching them. After a bit they fished and then mutually groomed, this gave us the chance to see that is was a mother with a large female cub. They then slept again, but as the tide was rising and their chosen resting place was gradually being covered they had to keep moving, these shifts usually accompanied by some territory marking and mutual grooming. At one point the cub appeared to attempt to suckle - amazing behaviour for such a large cub. The scope views allowed us to admire their eyes and whiskers in detail. As their chosen rocks disappeared they started fishing hard, the mother catching something on most dives, mostly small crabs or small fish that were consumed rapidly at sea, much to the annoyance of the begging juvenile who dived only infrequently and did catch some of her own food. They drifted slowly west and we had to move the vehicle

several times to keep level with them. The vehicle made a great hide and also protected us from the intermittent rain showers. Eventually when the female caught a larger eel-like fish, they headed to a newly formed rock islet close to shore and landed on the far side. The wind had shifted and was in our favour so we walked slowly and quietly down to the shore and along a shingle beach. As we got nearer, the Otters appeared on the top of the rock, giving fantastic views and allowing nice photos to be taken. They then fished a bit more, returned to the same rock for a while and then headed offshore fishing again. We had enjoyed an insightful and prolonged experience with two Otters, with plenty of time to chat about their ecology and behaviour; it was time to leave them to their business and head onwards. As we had been watching them, we had enjoyed good looks at several Red-breasted Mergansers and Rock Pipits.

We headed south then east, enjoying views of an adult and a juvenile White-tailed Eagles in Glen More en route to Grass Point. It was still very windy but beautifully sunny when we arrived. We picked up a ringtail Hen Harrier hunting the grasslands south of Loch Don. A family of recently fledged Whinchats with the adult female were perched on a roadside fence. Just after we parked the van an adult White-tailed Eagle flew past giving great views. The grasslands here we scattered with Common Spotted Orchids. Off-shore Gannets and Kittiwakes were passing by amongst the white caps. We checked one of the wooded valleys and Rob saw a Golden-ringed dragonfly.

After dinner a few of us went out for a drive on the road to Dervaig. The scenery was stunning, but it was still very windy and a Mistle Thrush, Little Grebes and Buzzard were the most notable birds.

Day 4

Sunday 26th June

South-east Mull (mostly)

We awoke to continued windy weather and rain, so headed to Knock seeking some shelter. Here we found a few new woodland birds: Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Eurasian Treecreeper and had good looks at a young male Fallow Deer. We continued south to Loch Spelve and worked our way carefully around the shoreline. We added Common Snipe and enjoyed good looks at most of the common waders. We located a male (dog) Otter feeding offshore and spent a while watching it. It was mainly catching small crabs and fish and eating them quickly in the water. However, when it caught a decent-sized flatfish, it turned and headed to shore. This allowed us to approach along the coast road and enjoy fantastic views of it eating its prey. It then proceeded to work its way along the shoreline sprainting (marking its territory with its faeces) and rubbing on places where the local female Otter had presumably been.

We then headed to Loch Buie for a quick lunch and enjoyed watching Gannets off-shore and the flock of Chaffinches at the picnic tables. We returned to Loch Spelve and found a group of three Black Guillemots close to shore. A ringtail Hen Harrier drifted past. We headed up the coast to Duart castle where we enjoyed a piece of cake and walked around the area looking at orchids and the fabulous views.

After dinner, some of us headed out for a drive. We saw a lot of Red Deer and heard both Sedge Warbler and Common Reed Bunting in the reedbed at Dervaig. In Glen Aros we bumped into Chris and one of his group at dusk and soon after we were watching a roding Eurasian Woodcock and a hunting Short-eared Owl. On the way home we found an Irish Hare in a roadside field.

### Day 5

## Monday 27th June

Boat trip to the Treshnish Isles and Staffa

The wind had dropped and although cloudy, there were signs of sunny intervals ahead. After buying some picnic provisions, we headed to the Ulva Ferry to catch our boat to the Treshnish Islands. We had a quick look at the south shore of Loch Na Kael and found a male Otter fishing offshore, we watched him for a bit but he was a bit distant and the light was not in our favour. Heading to the north shore we stopped to check for eagles and found a White-tailed Eagle perched in a pine, at the same time offshore there were two Otters, a female with a male cub who was begging and being fed. After a bit, another White-tailed Eagle flew into the same tree and we could watch both in the scope together giving us a clear example of the sexual dimorphism. Off-shore another female Otter appeared, and we could watch all three at the same time.

We headed round to Ulva ferry and after a warming drink waited to board the boat to the Treshnish Isles. Another Otter appeared briefly, and a Common Shrew dashed along the tideline. We noted the geology as we left Ulva, the basalt columns giving a hint of what we were to find on Staffa. We travelled out to the south of Ulva, Geometra and Little Colonsay. Heading out to Staffa we saw a variety of seabirds including brief looks at a summer-plumaged Great Northern Diver. As we approached Staffa numbers of seabirds increased, notably Atlantic Puffins. The weather had improved, and we were treated to stunning views. To the south: the Ross of Mull, Iona and the paps of Jura, to the west: Tiree and Coll, to the north: Rum, Eigg, Muck and even Skye.

Arriving at Staffa, the boat took us round in front of Fingal's Cave where we admired the distinctive geology of the island. We landed for an hour and shared our time between looking at birds and the views and some made the walk to the edge of Fingal's Cave. Puffins were coming ashore on the northern end of the island. Northern Fulmars cruised past the cliffs, good numbers of European Shag were on the rocks, a few Black Guillemots were on the sea. A single Great Skua was on the island. Heading on towards Lunga, we watched a trawler go past followed by gulls and two Great Skuas.

Arriving at Lunga, the sea was covered in Puffins with a scattering of other auks. We landed for a couple of hours and most of our attention was on the fabulous colony of Atlantic Puffins. Amongst them there were a few Razorbill and Common Guillemots were on the steeper cliffs. Meadow and Rock Pipits were common. A few Common Snipe were heard and seen. By the old ruins, a couple of Corncrakes were calling but remained unseen. Some Twite were feeding in the same area. A pair of Peregrine were seen.

On the way back, we had more great views and saw several Atlantic Grey Seals and a White-tailed Eagle. We drove back to Tobermory via Dervaig but saw little of note.

# Day 6

Tuesday 28th June

North-west and south-east Mull on a wet windy day

The forecast was for heavy rain and significant wind from the south-east all day, so we headed to the north-west of the island hoping to find more sheltered areas. At Dervaig we found three summer-plumaged *islandica* Black-

tailed Godwits foraging with Eurasian Curlews. We walked on the beach at Calgary where several female Common Eider were offshore with their chicks. Glen Aros produced a female Eurasian Sparrowhawk.

After getting a bite to eat in Salen, we headed down to Loch Spelve as the weather seemed to be easing slightly. Arriving a White-tailed Eagle, being mobbed by Hooded Crows, Oystercatchers and Gulls flew past. A female Hen Harrier gave decent views as it quartered a field by the road. A distant White-tailed Eagle was carrying some prey remains and was soon joined by another. An adult female Otter was fishing along the shore; our 10th Otter sighting of the tour! The weather was still challenging, and we headed back to Tobermory for a little bit of shopping and to have time to get packed for the next day before a delightful final dinner together.

#### Day 7

## Wednesday 29th June

#### To Glasgow and departure

Waking early to a relatively still morning, some of us went out before breakfast. Our main target was eagles and we did not find any but we enjoyed great views of the island and saw Common Kestrel and Eurasian Sparrowhawk on the Glengarin road. Near Dervaig we saw a Eurasian Bullfinch and a Reed Bunting. After breakfast we headed to Loch Na Kael and watched an immature Golden Eagle on a nest through the scope. It was then sadly time to head for the ferry. The crossing to Oban was delightful and Harbour Porpoise, two Red-throated Divers, many Gannets, Kittiwakes and Common Guillemots were seen as well as a few Black Guillemots and Razorbills.

From Oban we drove south beside Loch Lommond and picnicked on the shore. Not many birds but great wildlife. As we neared Glasgow we added the last few species for the tour, a trifecta of common corvids: Common Magpie, Rook and Carrion Crow. Just as we arrived at the Erskine Bridge, we received a call from the other group who had broken down at the north end of Loch Lommond. Everyone was very accommodating, and we dropped off at the airport for Rob to head back north to help get Chris's group to the flights on time.

We had enjoyed a fabulous week on Mull, with many brilliant wildlife encounters and endless spectacular scenery with ever-changing light and weather adding to the interest. Both boat trips had been very successful with fantastic looks at some highly sought-after marine mammals and a lot of seabirds. We had seen multiple eagles on most days which was a treat, but it was the Otters that were probably the highlight (certainly for anyone of sound mind!); we had seen 10 different individuals and had sightings that lasted up to three hours at a time, allowing a great insight into the ecology and behaviour of Britain's supreme animal.

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# **Species lists**

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name		June 2022								
	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29		
Greylag Goose	Anser anser	30	20	30	150	120	150	100		
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	10		2	10		100	20		
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	10	2	4	2		2	2		
Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna				1					
Common Scoter	Melanitta nigra		7	5						
Eurasian Wigeon	Mareca penelope			1 male						
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	10	V	10	10	5	10	10		
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima	30	10	4	5	50	20	5		
Common Merganser	Mergus merganser					1	1	1		
Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator			10	5	3	5			
Common Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus			1	5			1		
Red-throated Loon	Gavia stellata	2						2		
Common Loon	Gavia immer					1				
Northern Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialis		1			30				
Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus		V							
European Storm- Petrel	Hydrobates pelagicus		3							
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis		3	13		3	3			
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	10	<b>V</b>	10	5	5	5	5		
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus		2	5	50	25		20		
European Shag	Phalacrocorax aristotelis	10	10	5	5	100	5	5		
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	2	2	1	5	2	3			
Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos		2					1		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus						1	1		
Hen Harrier	Circus cyaneus		1	1	2	1	2	1		

Common name		June 2022								
	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29		
White-tailed Eagle	Haliaeetus albicilla	1	3	4			3			
Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	4	V	10	5	5	10	5		
Corn Crake	Crex crex					H (2)				
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	50	V	<b>V</b>	V	1	V	V		
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	2		3						
Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago				5	5	5			
Eurasian Woodcock	Scolopax rusticana				1					
Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa islandica						3			
Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	2	5	10	20	5	10	5		
Common Redshank	Tringa totanus		5	2	2	3	5	8		
Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	5	V	V	V	10	10	10		
Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia						Н			
Dunlin	Calidris alpina						6			
Black-legged Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla		30	20	1	250		50		
Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus				1					
Mew Gull	Larus canus	10	20	√	√	20	30	20		
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	5	5	5	2	10	2	10		
European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	√ 	√ 	√ 	√ 	<b>√</b>	√	√ 		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus		5	1	1	5	2	10		
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo	2	2			20		1		
Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea	40	5				10	20		
Great Skua	Stercorarius skua		1			3				
Common Murre	Uria aalge	6	√			50		50		
Razorbill	Alca torda		2			20		2		
Black Guillemot	Cepphus grylle	2	2		5	10	2	3		
Atlantic Puffin	Fratercula arctica		40			500				
Rock Dove	Columba livia		20	2	10		20	30		
Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	V	√	5	2	7	2	5		
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	2	1	3	5	5	5	5		
Short-eared Owl	Asio flammeus				1					
Common Swift	Apus apus	2								
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major	Н	1			1				
Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus							1		
Merlin	Falco columbarius							1 (LO)		
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus					2				
Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius				1			1		
Magpie	Pica pica							2		
Rook	Corvus frugilegus							3 (LO)		
Hooded Crow	Corvus cornix	5	V	20	10	10	20	20		
Carrion Crow								4		
Western Jackdaw	Corvus monedula	3						2		

Common name	June 2022								
	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
Northern Raven	Corvus corax		5	3	2	10	3	50	
Coal Tit	Periparus ater			1	4				
Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus			1	3	5	2	2	
Great Tit	Parus major		2	2	5	2	2	5	
Eurasian Treecreeper	Certhia familiaris				1				
Eurasian Skylark	Alauda arvensis		2	5	2	5	2	2	
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia		2		4	1	5	1	
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	$\sqrt{}$	<b>V</b>	<b>V</b>	V	20	10	20	
Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum	V	V	V	10	10	5	10	
Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus		2	5	5	5	2	2	
Wood Warbler	Phylloscopus sybillatrix		1						
Sedge Warbler	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus				Н			Н	
Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla				Н		Н		
Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis	1	2	3	3		2	1	
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus				4	2			
Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	1	2	2	5	10	2	5	
Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	$\sqrt{}$	√	40	20	20	10	20	
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	$\sqrt{}$	<b>V</b>	10	10	5	10	10	
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos	1	2	4	10	5	5	10	
Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus		1	1	2	2	1	5	
Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata		1		1	4	2	1	
European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	3	5	5	10	5	5	5	
Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra			4	1				
European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola		3	10	5		5	5	
Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe		10	20	10	3	5	10	
White-throated Dipper	Cinclus cinclus							1 (LO	
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	$\sqrt{}$	V	10	20	10	5	5	
Dunnock	Prunella modularis	1	5	3	1		1	2	
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea		3	1	3			3	
White Wagtail	Motacilla alba	1	10	10	10	3	3	5	
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis		√	20	30	30	20	10	
Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis		2			1			
Eurasian Rock Pipit	Anthus petrosus			10	5	20	2	5	
Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	V	V	5	30	2	10	10	
Eurasian Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula	2	2	1	3			1	
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris		1	1	2				
Twite	Linaria flavirostris					5			
Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina	5	1				2		
Common Redpoll	Acanthis flammea						2		
European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		√	5	10	5	5	5	
Eurasian Siskin	Spinus spinus			1	20	5	5	10	
Yellowhammer	Emberiza citrinella			1					
Common Reed	Emberiza schoeniclus				Н			1	
Bunting									

#### Others

MAMMALS								
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Irish Hare	Lepus timidus hybrida				1		1	
European Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus		1		1	3	1	2
Common Shrew	Sorex araneus					1 (LO)		
Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus	5	1			30		2
Harbour Seal	Phoca vitulina	30	10	20	10	20	5	10
European Otter	Lutra lutra			2	1	5	2	
Red Deer	Cervus elaphus		5	20	100	2	8	20
Fallow Deer	Dama dama				7			6
Killer Whale	Orcinus orca		2					
Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops truncatus		15					
Harbour Porpoise	Phocoena phocoena		1 (LO)					1
Common Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pipistrellus				2			
DRAGONFLIES AND DAM	MSELFLIES							
Beautiful Demoiselle	Calopteryx virgo		1					
Common Blue Damselfly	Enallagma cyathigerum		1					
Blue-tailed Damselfly	Ischnura elegans		1					
Emperor Dragonfly	Anax imperator		1					
Golden-ringed Dragonfly	Cordulegaster boltonii			1				
Four-spotted Chaser	Libellula quadrimaculata		1					
BUTTERFLIES								
Small White	Pieris rapae		2					
Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta					2		