

The Magic of Mull

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th – 18th June 2023



Common Dolphin



Puffin



Otter



Manx Shearwater

Tour report and images by Rob Williams



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Tour participants: Rob Williams (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 12th June

Glasgow to Tobermory

After we discovered a small technical problem with the vehicle which necessitated a change, we departed Glasgow and headed straight to Oban, pausing en route for some lunch. From the ferry we saw our first Black Guillemots in the harbour and the town of Oban was stunning on a bright sunny afternoon. The crossing was flat calm and we enjoyed watching Northern Gannets, Shags, Common Guillemots and a Kittiwake as we crossed the sound of Mull. Several Common Seals and Atlantic Shags were seen on Lady's Rock south of Mull. Lismore Lighthouse gleamed in the bright sun and Duart Castle imposed as we drew in to Craignure.

En route to Tobermory, we stopped at Scallastle to enjoy views of the mixed tern colony - with both Arctic and Common Terns on show as well as Oystercatchers and Common Sandpipers on the beach. After checking in to the hotel, we took an early evening walk down to the harbour, marveling at the many Common Moon Jellyfish in the crystal-clear water.

Day 2

Tuesday 13th June

North-west Mull

We spent a hot sunny day working our way around the northern part of the island. The views were breath-taking with the sea flat calm. The inlet at Dervaig held a summer-plumaged *islandica* Black-tailed Godwit along with the more common waders. The reedbed had singing male Reed Buntings and Four-spotted Chasers and Beautiful Demoiselles were amongst several species of odonata we found. At Calgary the machair was in flower but we were soon distracted by two summer-plumaged Red-throated Loons (Divers) just offshore. Heading down to the water's edge, we enjoyed wonderful scope views of these fantastic birds. Towards Treshnish a stop on the cliffs gave us our first White-tailed Eagles, Bottle-nosed Dolphins offshore, an American Mink working the shoreline and Heath Spotted Orchids in abundance.

An early evening walk to Ruby Nan Gall (Tobermory) Lighthouse gave us good looks at several coastal bird species, a Golden-ringed Dragonfly and a variety of woodland plants. A Ctenophore or comb jelly (though not actually a jellyfish) was a great find in a narrow channel of water by the lighthouse. A Song Thrush was bashing a snail on its anvil stone on the trail in front of us.

Day 3

Wednesday 14th June

Staffa and the Treshnish Isles

We worked our way towards Ulva ferry searching the north shore of Loch Na Kael. This yielded nice looks at an adult White-tailed Eagle perched in a pine tree. Our main objective was getting to Ulva Ferry for the boat to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles.

We got open deck seats and were soon on our way enjoying the wonderful scenery of coasts and mountains as we headed out past Ulva, Inch Kenneth, Little Colonsay and Gometra islands. We saw a few Black Guillemots and as we approached Staffa started seeing increasing numbers of Common Guillemots and Atlantic Puffins. It was so calm the captain took the boat right into Fingal's Cave. We landed and headed up to look over the west side. A Black Guillemot was in full view on a rock and Northern Fulmars swept past at eye-level. A pair of Twite came past us and fed on some seeds for a few seconds. A pair of confiding Eurasian Skylarks showed well.

On Lunga we enjoyed fabulous views of hundreds of Atlantic Puffins and Razorbills and Common Guillemots, as well as good numbers of Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwakes. A single Common Snipe was flushed from a nettlebed. A Great Skua (Bonxie) was seen on a headland by some of the group and Frances saw an Arctic Skua harrying auks offshore. Four more Twite put in a show as we headed to the boat. The boat ride back gave us good looks at several Atlantic Grey Seals.

Day 4

Thursday 15th June

South-east Mull

The south-east of Mull is markedly different from the northern and western areas we had focussed on in the first days. We headed down to Loch Spelve. The wet grasslands here held Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe and Common Sandpipers as well as a series of good plants including Fragrant Orchid, Bog Asphodel and Greater Sundew. A couple of Golden-ringed Dragonflies were seen. We worked the loch shore carefully and found several Red-breasted Merganser, Common Eider and Harbour Seals. We lunched at Loch Buie before heading to Grasspoint where we saw a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. It was a really hot day, more reminiscent of Spain than Scotland, so we headed back to the hotel for a quick siesta and shower before an early dinner.

We headed out again to search for Otters on Loch Na Kael, we worked the southern shore carefully but there was a lot of human activity with boats, kayaks, campers. Rob saw a distant otter heading to shore and we hurried that way to find two people with a dog having an "existential conversation" right where it should have come ashore, presumably it had changed course and probably headed up a nearby stream as we could not find it again.

Day 5

Friday 16th June

North-west Mull and the Minch boat trip

Some of us headed out before breakfast and worked our way around the north-west of the island looking for Otters. We enjoyed some fabulous displaying Eurasian Curlews at Ulva ferry port where we also found a nice Common Redpoll. On the north side of Loch Na Kael we were scanning the shore when Trudi spotted a male Otter swimming offshore. It was fishing its way east and getting ahead of it and setting up scopes we enjoyed some stunning views of Britain's top predator in action. After 20 minutes it swam towards us and hauled out on an offshore rock ledge. It groomed and rolled, then sprainted on the rock to mark its territory before heading back out to sea and heading back west. Euphoric with the amazing sighting we headed back, arriving for a well-earned breakfast. The light was amazing as we walked down to the harbour for our boat trip out of Tobermory, with great views of this famously picturesque village. In the harbour water we noticed many jellyfish, including some Lion's Mane Jellyfish of both brown and blue forms.

Our boat trip took us up the sound of Mull where we found some Harbour Porpoises. As we past Ardmore point, the northern-most point of Mull, Rob saw a White-tailed Eagle on some distant cliffs and we went over to get closer. The eagle flew and joined another briefly before the male flew off again and the female was then mobbed by a Herring Gull. Heading north we passed the Ardnamuchan lighthouse and found a pod of Common Dolphins which put on a great show, we some feeding hard and leaping clear of the water and others riding the bow wave of our boat. Heading west to the small islands off the north of Coll where we found an amazing flock of 5,000+ Manx Shearwaters and drifted amongst them for a while. Shortly after we found two Minke Whales which showed well. A Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) was harrying some Black-legged Kittiwakes. We picked up a few more Harbour Porpoise and saw some Yellow Barrels Jellyfish and more Ctenophores on the way back past the north coast of Mull.

After lunch in Tobermory, we had a rest and then headed out after an early dinner. We worked our way across the north end of the island searching for raptors. A Common Snipe calling from a post and a quartering male Hen Harrier were good finds, but the larger eagles continued to elude us. Apparently, all Golden Eagle nests on Mull failed this year and the adults are proving hard to locate as a result.

Day 6

Saturday 17th June

South-east Mull

The weather was beginning to change. We decided to make an early start to loch Spelve to look for Otters and spent a few hours searching to no avail, though we did find some nice birds and saw several Red Deer and a Hedgehog en route. Heading west to Loch Scridian we had a field breakfast and then headed on to Fionnphort. We took the ferry across to Iona and after a pause for coffees and snacks we headed to the hay fields near the fire station. Immediately, we heard our first Corncrakes calling with two birds calling intermittently but slightly distantly. A pair of Sedge Warblers and a Common Grasshopper Warbler were calling, and both showed well for photos. We walked a circuit around the fields enjoying the views and picking up Rook and Jackdaw that are very localised on Mull. Coming back to the village another Corncrake was calling, this time much closer. We spent an hour or so staring at a noisy field and despite seeing the grass move several times and it calling almost constantly, only David and Rob managed to actually see the bird in the long grass. It came within 2-3 metres of us, and we all enjoyed the fabulous song of this threatened rail. We took a look at the Nunnery and then walked the coast path to view the famous Iona Abbey built of the local pink granite. After some lunch we headed back to the mainland and took the scenic route back to Salen. We stopped for a female Hen Harrier and then a male appeared in the same area, we enjoyed great views. A pair of White-tailed Eagles were perched in some pine trees near their nest. The scope views of these fantastic birds, including watching them calling. A small chick was visible on the nest. We checked the south shore of Loch Na Kael for Otters, but it was high tide and we did not find any.

Day 7

Sunday 18th June

Tobermory to Glasgow

The final morning was overcast with intermittent rain. We headed to Loch Spelve for a final check for Otters. About halfway around the loch David called "stop!", on the rocks below us was an Otter - no two Otters! We watched them on shore for a bit and then fishing their way along the shore, catching many small fish. It was

amazing to see how their colouration helps camouflage them in different water areas. They fed well, mostly on small fish of various species, and then came ashore again right where we were standing. Unperturbed by our presence about 10 metres away, we watched as they groomed their fur and looked around. Sadly, we had to leave for the ferry port in a bit of a hurry as we had spent over 45 minutes watching these amazing animals. It was a shame to leave but what a way to end our fabulous week on Mull. Heading back to the main road we had a male Hen Harrier flying parallel to the van for a few hundred metres.

Once across to Oban we made our way to Glasgow and said our goodbyes. We had seen 100 Birds, 11 Mammals, and a good selection of plants, butterflies and odonates as well. Highlights had included three Eurasian Otters, eight White-tailed Eagles, thousands of seabirds, four species of cetacean, all in unprecedentedly fine weather which added to our enjoyment of the fabulous landscapes.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		2	2	2	2	2	2
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		12				2	1
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		3					
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>				1			
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			5	2	2	10	4
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	1				✓	✓	✓
Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		2				3	
Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>		1					
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			30				
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			150		5000		
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		1			2		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓			5		
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2			2		1	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		1					
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1			1		
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>					1 LO		
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				2	1	2	1
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		3	1		2	3	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Corn Crake	<i>Crex crex</i>						3	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	1		1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				5	5	5	✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			1	3	2	5	✓
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		8	1	✓	✓	✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		10		✓	✓	✓	1
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	1		30		30		4
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>					2	1	
Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			3		1		1
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓		20		2		
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓		1				
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>			1				

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>			2		1		
Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		2
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			100		50		
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>	5	4	10	5	5	5	2
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			✓		200		
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	2	5	2			10	5
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		1	2		2	5	
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	1						
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		2	2	✓	✓	✓	2
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		3		H	H	H	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	1			1	1	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1	3			1		
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1					
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	2					5	
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>						30	
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		5	1	2	1	2	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>					H		
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓		5			
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		2		H	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		5	5		2	2	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		1		2	10		
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		2	2	✓	✓	✓	2
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		1					
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>					1	3	
Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>						2	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H					
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		2	1		1		
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					H	H	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		1	5	✓	✓	✓	2
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	10	✓	✓	✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	2				2		5
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			1	3			
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		5	2	2	2	2	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				1			
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	2	10		✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		2	5	✓	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		3		2		2	1
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		2		2		2	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	10	✓	✓	✓	5

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		2		2	2		
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		5	10	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					1		1
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		15		✓	✓	H	
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>			6				
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		1		2		5	
Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>					2	3	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>						1	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			H	2		2	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		2			H		

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		2		✓	✓	✓	
Western European Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>						1	
European Mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>		Hills					
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			20		30		
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	30	5	10	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>					1		2
American Mink	<i>Negate vison</i>		1					
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			2	3	2	2	30
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>						2	
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>			8		1		
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>					8	5	1
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>						20	