

The Magic of Mull

Naturetrek Tour Report

19th – 25th June 2023



Common Dolphin



Otter



Puffin



Great Skua

Tour report and images by Rob Williams



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

Day 1

Monday 19th June

Glasgow to Mull

We made a prompt departure from Glasgow and drove up past Loch Lomond in the rain. We stopped for some lunch at Tyndrum and then headed on to Oban. We arrived early so made a stop at the Falls of Lora and the tide was perfect to appreciate this curious spectacle of a marine waterfall.

In Oban harbour we saw a few Black Guillemots and when we had boarded the ferry, three Common Swifts appeared moving ahead of some oncoming rain. The ferry took us north out of the rain and we enjoyed the crossing heading up to the Sound of Mull. We saw a few Northern Gannets and a single Arctic Tern. Several Common Seals and Atlantic Shags were seen on Lady's Rock south of Mull. Lismore Lighthouse stood out and Duart Castle impressed as we drew in to Craignure.

Heading towards our hotel on Loch Scridain, we drove through the southern hills of Mull and started to get a good feel for the geography of this wild island. After settling in at the hotel and dinner, some of us set out for a short walk along the edge of the loch, familiarising ourselves with some of the common birds and even a few plants.

Day 2

Tuesday 20th June

Western Mull

It was overcast with menacing skies as we set out this morning. We worked our way around Loch Scridain searching the shoreline. We picked up our first Red-breasted Mergansers and groups of Greylag Geese with goslings. We paused to enjoy great scope views of an adult White-tailed Eagle perched in a spruce tree near a nest. We continued working the shoreline of Loch Na Kiel and were soon rewarded with fabulous looks at a big dog (male) Eurasian Otter just offshore. We watched it fishing hard in the seaweed fringing the shore for a while and then it headed west and further out. Almost immediately a small bitch (female) Otter appeared right in front of us, but she was timid and skulked away. We followed the male offshore for a while, but he seemed to head out to an offshore island. Several Harbour (Common) Seals were loafing on offshore rocks and their wailing calls impressed.

After stopping for lunch in Salen we paused at Scallaste to have a look at the mixed colony of Arctic and Common Terns. A couple of female Common Eider were offshore with small chicks and two males were nearby. At Grasspoint we found an Osprey, an unusual bird on Mull, that was being mobbed relentlessly by Oystercatchers. A male Hen Harrier carrying food flew past. A flock of Red Knot were seen distantly. The wet grasslands here held a variety of orchids: Greater Butterfly, Fragrant, Heath Spotted and Pyramidal. A fresh-looking Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary was seen very well, one of 10 butterfly species we found this afternoon. We also found a couple of Golden-ringed Dragonflies.

We saw a few Red Deer as we passed through the southern mountains and again started to check the shore of Loch Scridain. We hit jackpot with a female Otter with two well grown cubs hauled out on some rocks. We watched for a while as they groomed and played. They then slipped into the water and started fishing hard and we enjoyed

watching them catching Butterfish, a small flatfish and a crab. The female came back ashore again and spent some time on rock whilst the cubs carried on feeding. Eventually they all came ashore and seemed like they wanted to head inland so we departed. In the hills we returned to the White-tailed Eagle nest and enjoyed views of an adult at the nest with a large chick. A female Hen Harrier soared over a distant ridge and a Common Cuckoo called. Rob spotted a distant Golden Eagle which disappeared, fortunately a couple of minutes later, it or another appeared above us being mobbed by a Raven to give it scale. Scotch Argus and Dark Green Fritillary were new butterflies for us here. Content with a very special first day on Mull we headed back to the hotel for dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 21st June

Minch Boat Trip and west coast of Mull

We drove around the island to Tobermory to take a boat trip into the Minch to look for cetaceans. As we headed past Bloody Bay we saw a female White-tailed Eagle perched on a sea cliff and the captain took the boat closer for a good look at this fabulous raptor. Heading out towards the north end of Coll we started finding rafts of Manx Shearwaters and various auks. A Minke Whale was spotted to the north and we approached and had repeated good views of it as it surfaced. We saw another that surfaced right by the boat further south. Several Atlantic Grey Seals were seen on some rocks of north-west Mull.

Back in Tobermory we enjoyed some lunch and then headed across the island towards Dervaig. A couple of Common Shelduck and a Beautiful Demoiselle were seen in the inlet here. We then stopped at Calgary where we looked at the botany of the Machair grassland and admired the impressive volcanic dyke that runs down the hill north of the bay. A sub-adult White-tailed Eagle soared overhead mobbed by Hooded Crows. At Loch Na Kael we found two otters working the southern shoreline and spent some time watching them.

Day 4

Thursday 22nd June

Staffa and the Treshnish Isles

Given the forecast for tomorrow we changed our planned trip to Staffa and the Treshnish isles. It was a beautiful sunny day with a light breeze. We drove round to Ulva Ferry, seeing a male Otter fishing hard along the north shore of Loch Scriabin. We watched for a bit as it caught butterfish, an eel and a flatfish. It was close enough that we could hear the crunching as it ate these.

From Ulva ferry the boat took us north of Ulva and Gometra islands and out to Lunga. As we approached, we saw three Great Skuas chasing each other and they flew right over the boat. On Lunga we enjoyed the thousands of seabirds, with plentiful Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills and European Shags nesting right beside the paths and the impressive stack covered in Common Guillemots with a few pairs of Kittiwakes. Northern Fulmars cruised past at eye-level. Offshore a dark phase Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) harried the incoming auks. Fran watched a Great Skua catch, drown and devour a Puffin.

We carried on to Staffa where the calm sea conditions enabled the captain to take the boat into the entrance to Fingal's Cave. Landing, some headed to Fingal's Cave for a better examination of this geologically fascinating famous grotto and others headed to the top of the island for a spot of botany and a very nice catch up with several

Twite which were singing and feeding around some exposed mini headlands. Nicky and Rob head and saw a couple of Common Snipe.

As we took the boat back south of Ulva, we found a small pod of Common Dolphins accompanied by Manx Shearwaters and Northern Gannets. Driving back to the hotel we watched the female White-tailed Eagle at the nest for a few minutes.

Day 5

Friday 23rd June

South-east Mull

A wet windy day with atmospheric views across the sea lochs. We took a trip around Loch Spelve finding some Common Seals, Black Guillemots and a Red-breasted Merganser. In a gap between showers, we looked at some plants of boggy habitats. We enjoyed a nice lunch and drinks in a cafe at Loch Buie. Back of Loch Spelve we found a female otter heading up the side of the loch and had great views as she came out and headed into a holt in the broken at the edge of the loch. We headed off in search of a garage to check a tyre, as we found out mechanics are rarer than otters and eagles on Mull, first was on holiday, second and thirds were too busy, and the fourth's garage had literally blown up recently! With more air in the tyre we headed round Loch Na Kael and called in at the usual eagle nest where the female was on the nest with the chick. We tried the road to Carsaig but the rain started much harder, as forecast, and we headed back for an early dinner.

Day 6

Saturday 24th June

Southern Mull and Iona

The morning was misty with drizzle, so we took our time heading out and headed west to Fionnophort and took the ferry across to Iona. Here we enjoyed a walk around the island with some visiting the famous abbey and nunnery. The hay fields held a couple of calling Corn Crakes but despite a good period staring at the grass and the calls being close we could not see anything in the moving grass. It was great listening to the incredible call of one of the UK's most threatened birds. Some of the group saw a small pod of Bottlenose Dolphins offshore. After lunch, and with the weather improving, we headed to Loch Spelve and found a young female Otter which we watched for a few minutes. We took a walk near the mouth of the loch and enjoyed the afternoon sunshine as well as some orchids and dragonflies. On the way back we picked up a pair of Golden Eagles and watched them for a few minutes as they displayed over a ridge, although distant the scope views were spectacular and revealed just what masters of the air these majestic birds are.

Day 7

Sunday 25th June

Mull to Glasgow

We awoke to a windy rainy morning and departed after breakfast to start our journey back to Glasgow. Before breakfast George saw an Otter in front of the hotel - the 11th individual of the trip. We drove into Duart Castle for a look as we headed to the ferry.

We had had a great trip with highlights being 11 Otters, nine sightings of at least five different White-tailed Eagles, three Golden Eagles, two Minke Whales. We found 95 bird species, 10 mammals, 12 butterflies and 5 odonates.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only, LO = Leader only)

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		10	✓			✓	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>						2	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		4	2				1
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓		1	2	
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		10		25			
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	2	10		2	1	4	
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			2		3	H	
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>				50			
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			300	50			
European Storm-Petrel	<i>Hydrates pelagicus</i>			1 LO				
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		1	2			1	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2				1		2
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		1					
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		1				2	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1	1			
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		2	3				
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2	2	3	2		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Corn Crane	<i>Crex crex</i>						2H	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		2	3	1	✓	5	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		4		3	✓		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		H		2	1	H	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		2	2	2	1	H	1
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	1		2	1			
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canuta</i>		12					
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>			30	30			10
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	1		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>							1
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		10	2	5			
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	1	30					
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>				4			
Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>				1			
Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓	1500			
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			3	200			
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	10	5	1	10	3	2	
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			100	500			
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	2	20	20	10		2	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	2		2	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		5		1	5		
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	3						
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H	1	H			
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			1			1	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			1				
Western Jackdaw	<i>Cololeus monedula</i>	2					5	
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>						20	
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	10	30	5	1		
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		H					
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2			2	5	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		1				1	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		5	2	5	5	5	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		2	1			2	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	H	1	2	H	H	5	2
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			1		1		
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			1	H		2	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H					
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		H	H	2	2	2	

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H					
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	2	2	H	10		5	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		2			1		
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		2	1	1	H	2	1
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	2
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		1	2				
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>						1	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1	1				
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		H	1				
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓	✓	2	10		5	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>							
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		H	H			1	
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>				8			
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		2	2	2			
Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		3	H	H	2H	10	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		1					
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		5	H	H		10	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		10	H	5	2	5	2
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		1					

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023						
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>					2	1	
Western European Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>		1	1	1	1		
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			10	20			
European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	✓	✓	10	30	10	2	
Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>		5	2	1	1	1	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	2	✓		10	8	10	
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>				12			
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>						4	
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>			2				
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>				6			