

The Magic Of Mull

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 16th June 2025



White-tailed Eagle



Puffin



Common Dolphins



Fallow Deer

Tour report by Greg Smith



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Summary

We had a super week on the Hebridean island of Mull, exploring moorland and farmland, shoreline and forest, neighbouring islands and the open seas. We had amazing views of up to a dozen Minke Whales, a super-pod of perhaps 700 Common Dolphins around our boat, and almost daily White-tailed Eagle sightings, often at close range; we spent several hours in the company of Puffins, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Guillemots; we walked through a farm with seven species of orchid in flower among an abundance of other wild flowers; we enjoyed great views of Otters, including one which, to our wonder and delight, walked across the track right in front of us. We also visited some of the prehistoric sites on the island, giving us a very rounded experience of this magical place.

Day 1

Tuesday 10th June

Everybody was where they were supposed to be for the pick-ups at the station and airport, so we were soon on the road out of Glasgow. We headed up the west shore of Loch Lomond, which looked beautiful in the warm sunshine, and drove on to Tyndrum. A quick loo-stop at the Green Welly, where Siskins 'shneer-ed' around our heads, meant we had time for a brief detour via Bridge of Orchy. Here, Whinchat and Greenshank were nice early additions to the bird list, and a distant Reed Bunting sang tediously.

Before long, we were in Oban and waiting to board the Mull ferry. The promised Black Guillemots failed to materialise, so our guide threatened us with a lesson on age class identification of Herring Gulls. Thankfully we were spared this fate since, before enough gulls of the required ages had gathered, we were crossing the Firth of Lorne. Bouncy Arctic Terns and the more flat-flighted Common Terns flew around the boat in small single-species flocks (at least they can tell each other apart!), while a squadron of Gannets passed over in search of better fishing.

The strong wind made the sea choppy and only an occasional Common Guillemot, bobbing up and down, was visible on the surface, so our eyes turned to the distant shores. The verdant green of Lismore contrasted with the duller browns and yellows of the Morvern hills beyond, revealing the great difference in their respective geologies (sedimentary limestones versus igneous granites). Another geology surprise followed as we turned towards Craignure: as the roly-poly landscape of the billion-year-old Scourian gneiss behind us suddenly gave way (along the line of a great thrust fault) to regular layers of basalt lavas from a mere fifty million years ago; this landscape of 'stepped' lavas was to become very familiar to us over our week on Mull.

We were soon driving again, having completed the crossing in less than an hour, but the single-track roads on Mull were rather slower going than the roads in mainland Argyll. This wasn't a problem, as we enjoyed a leisurely couple of hours to cover the 25km or so down to our hotel.

We stopped along the way at two delightful locations. The first was overlooking Loch Spelve, where a distant ringtail Hen Harrier was our first bird, though rather more obliging was our second: a male Stonechat which perched up on Foxgloves in the field before us. In the loch, a few Harbour (Common) Seals were hauled out on the rocks, and small gaggles of Canada and Greylag Geese floated about in small flotillas. Willow Warblers and Redpolls trilled and buzzed in the bushes around about and, as the wind dropped, we caught the delightful ululation of a distant Curlew on the hills behind us. Red Deer were grazing the hillside in a scattered flock and occasional Rock Doves, the ancestors of all domestic pigeons, flew over.

Our second stopping point was high up in Glen More overlooking the 'three lochs'. Almost immediately, a raptor-like bird on the ridge caught our attention: a Short-eared Owl was busily (almost frantically) quartering the moor in search of prey. We were not being treated to great views, as the bird was silhouetted against the sky, but we were able to watch it for some time as it kept disappearing and reappearing along the ridge above us.

Here Greg introduced us to our first 'grass of the week': Purple Moor-grass, a bright green, tussocky species with lots of dead leaves at the base, and a few purple-hued flower spikes beginning to emerge. We were shown the distinctive, hair-lined ligule at the junction of leaf-blade and stem, and learned about the complex ecological role it plays, choking hillsides like these while playing host to some of our rarest butterflies.

We dropped down to our hotel on the edge of Loch Scridain, where we met Sarah, our host for the week. We checked into our rooms, two of which had upstairs windows looking out over the bay: a source of envy to the rest of us! After a hearty dinner, we stepped outside to be greeted by not one but two distant Otters fishing offshore. We would have stayed longer, but the midges drove us back indoors to find refuge and antihistamine cream!

Day 2

Wednesday 11th June

The forecast for today was good (indeed it looked like our best chance of sunshine all week), so we decided to head up to the north-west corner of the island to walk around Treshnish Farm, an award-winning conservation farm with an extraordinary list of species.

On the way, we kept checking for eagles along the ridges and out over the bays, but every 'large' bird of prey that we found soon resolved itself into a Buzzard. One was particularly striking, hanging on the updraft close to the minibus, hovering and with talons dangling. As we watched, it dropped lower and lower over some unsuspecting item of prey until finally pouncing, for all the world like an over-sized Kestrel.

We set off on the three kilometre walk through the farm to the headland, where lunch was planned. "It should take us an hour," observed our over-optimistic guide as the delights heaped up.

The striking Alder Tongue Gall fungus was the first. It had taken hold on some Grey Alder in a plantation by the bridge over a stream: their emerging flower buds were bedecked with curious, pink, finger-like projections as the galls grew. As we studied these, a pair of Curlew bubbled majestically overhead, the second time we had heard this now rather scarce breeding species in our brief time on the island.

Up the main track, we discovered a host of lovely woodland plants sneaking onto the narrow verge from the precipitous ancient woodland beyond: among them were Sweet Woodruff, Dog's Mercury, English Bluebells (not to be confused with 'Scottish Bluebells' which the English call 'Harebells') and Wood Sage. In the hedge, an ancient Elder was festooned with mosses, which in turn provided a rich substrate on which Common Polypody ferns flourished. This vignette was an insight into the recently recognised 'Celtic rainforest', a distinct and rare habitat which the wet climate and clean air foster here on the Atlantic fringe.

A little further on we found a cage which had been erected around a Sword-leaved Helleborine, a nationally scarce plant which had already finished flowering and had gone to seed. The cage triggered an interesting discussion about the merits of such measures for the protection of rarities like this: would it be better to let them take their chances? Perhaps, but the strategy here appeared to be working, as two or three younger plants were evidently doing well nearby. We commented on the orchids to a chap working in his garden across the way; he asked us if we'd seen

the Broad-leaved Helleborines. For a moment our guide thought he'd misidentified the plants in question, but was soon reassured when the man showed us the leaves of a couple of Broad-leaved Helleborines growing close to their near namesake; the Broad-leaved species, although much more common nationally, is actually the rarer of the two on Mull.

Next, some Northern Marsh and Common Spotted Orchids caught our attention; we'd got our orchid eyes in now, and quickly added both Heath Spotted and Marsh Fragrant Orchids to the list. The Fragrant Orchids received the attention they deserved, as several of us knelt to cup our hands around the pongy blooms. Remarkably, we soon added a seventh orchid species to the list, with numerous Greater Butterfly Orchids. Their arching pollinias distinguished them from their Lesser brethren, though the imposing bulk of most of them meant this check wasn't really necessary. The abundance of orchids growing here undoubtedly explained the presence of two separate Orchid Beetles busily rootling among the vegetation.

We walked past a noisy and smelly pen where lambs and ewes had been separated while the mothers were shorn of their ragged fleeces. Our attention here was soon drawn to a Twite, calling its name from a nearby fence. The bird flew before we got decent views and, although two birds were soon flying around calling, they landed out of sight in the long grass. Unfortunately, though we didn't know it at the time, these would prove to be the only Twite we saw during our week together.

But any disappointment was short-lived because, at that moment, a magnificent White-tailed Eagle soared along the ridge and perched up on a rock on the hillside. We could see that this was a youngster because it lacked the key feature from which it takes its name (that is, a white tail!). Its colossal mass and imposing presence reminded us of the old adage about seeing large birds of prey in Scotland: "if you're not sure whether it's an eagle or a buzzard, it's a buzzard!"

We saw too many wild flower species to mention them all here, but a list of all those that we stopped to see and discuss is attached: over fifty different species. We noted the remarkable number of leguminous plants on show (ten out of the fifty), from the humble Bird's-foot Trefoil to the nationally scarce Upright Vetch. The latter played host to a buff-coloured Common Carder Bee.

We were shown two new 'grasses of the week', the spreading Creeping Soft Grass, with its hairy knees, and the more 'clumpy' Yorkshire Fog, wearing pink-striped pyjamas. We could see that these two species were closely related, but the differences in form between them were striking.

Eventually, as the sun came out, and only two and a half hours after setting off (so much for Greg's "one hour"!), we reached the headland at Treshnish Point, where we sat on the boulder beach to have lunch. A family of Hooded Crows had evidently had the same idea and gathered further down the beach, to the alarm of the local Oystercatchers.

Four Ravens flew noisily along the basalt cliffs above us. These cliffs revealed some interesting secrets: the horizontal bands of red rock ('bole') between the thick layers of basalt were evidence of long periods of stability between the laval eruptions. During these stable periods, a great mass of vegetation colonised the soils forming on the slowly eroding rock surface, only to be engulfed and frazzled by the pyrotechnics of the next eruption, leaving behind this tell-tale red layer.

We had a brief beach-clean after lunch to clear away the worst items of detritus on the shore, a sad but universal feature of Hebridean strandlines.

To begin our return, we circled round to pick up a precarious Tolkienesque trackway carved into the side of the hill above us. Along here a Green Tiger Beetle, skittering along the trackway ahead of us, eluded all eyes but our guide's. By contrast, the Swift which belted through low over our heads was seen by all; this is a relatively scarce species on the Hebridean islands. Indeed, when reported, our Swift turned out to be the first record of the year for Mull.

Different plants we saw triggered brief discussions about different ecological strategies, such as the way hemi-parasitic plants (like the Marsh Lousewort and Yellow-rattle) get their nutrition (in part at least) by stealing it from the roots of other species, and the cunning means by which Primroses manage to avoid self-pollination by having two very differently-structured flowers on neighbouring plants.

The insects that we hoped might emerge with the sun were in short supply: a couple of Small Heaths and a freshly emerged male Common Blue butterfly were the best we could manage.

On the long drive home, we were able to add several new birds to the week's list, including Mute Swan, Collared Dove and Eider. All of these got a mention after dinner, when we sat together to compile our list for the week so far.

Day 3

Thursday 12th June

We enjoyed a leisurely start today, heading out around 8.30am, taking the slow route around the shores of Loch Scridain and Loch na Keal to Ulva Ferry, where we were to board a boat to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles.

Every hundred metres along the shore, 'swittering' Common Sandpipers perched up on convenient rocks; their only competition, in terms of abundance, were the neurotic Oystercatchers and statuesque Grey Herons. At this point, as you may have guessed, we had started a game of 'match the bird to its adjective!'

We soon stopped to watch our second White-tailed Eagle of the trip powering up the valley, escorted by a comparatively tiny Buzzard. We stopped two or three more times to scan the shore and the hills behind. A couple of Harbour Seals, several more Buzzards and a mature Red Deer stag on the skyline, doing its best 'Monarch of the Glen' impression, were the highlights.

A line of inosculating Beech trees lined the roadside at Gruline, the characteristic result of clump-planting by the local estate a hundred or more years ago.

We arrived at Ulva Ferry in time to make use of the welcome facilities and then board our boat. Our first sighting from the boat was a surprise; a Red Admiral fluttering purposefully north. As we steamed out towards Staffa, the birds were sporadic at first, with the occasional Shag, a couple of Arctic Terns, Common Guillemots and a delightful Manx Shearwater, but slowly numbers increased as we got closer to the famous island.

With Mendelssohn blasting over the Tannoy, we turned and turned again to get in as close as possible to the entrance to Fingal's Cave. From the boat, it was possible to get a sense of the immensity of the natural architecture, with the vaulted hexagonal columns towering over our heads. Rafts of Puffins gathered in the choppy sea around us as we ventured up the east side of Staffa and on towards the Treshnish Isles.

A Swift barrelled along purposefully low over the boat, unaware of its celebrity as the second of the year up here. Rather more expected was a Great Skua, which was making faster progress than our boat, but with equal determination to reach Lunga and its city of birds.

On Lunga, a love-lorn Rock Pipit sang relentlessly along the shore as we scrambled up to the 'Puffin platform'. Here we spent some time communing at ridiculously close range with the handsome Puffins. Many of them were still loafing around on the grassy sward, while a small number, whose eggs had hatched, were now busy bringing beakfuls of Sand Eels back to the burrows. Assembled below, vast flocks of auks were gathered on the sea.

Suddenly, the loafing Puffins on the platform all scarpered and, moments later, two Great Skuas patrolled along the cliff top. They were soon joined by a third, and together they proceeded to make life troublesome for the assorted throng. There is a theory that the Puffins actively benefit from their ease in the company of people. Our proximity to them, it is suggested, may deter potential predators (like the skuas), thus making life safer for the Puffins.

After a while, we headed out on the coastal path, past ever more Puffins, whose numbers seem to have grown enormously here in recent years. Now Fulmars, Shags and Razorbills joined them on the grassy slopes. It seemed that every rock had a preening bird on it or a nest under it.

As we approached the Harp Rock, our senses were assailed by the sight, sound and smell of the vast sea stack crammed with birds. The scene was reminiscent of a high-rise apartment block, stratified from basement to penthouse; hundreds of rowdy name-calling Kittiwakes on the lower storeys, and thousands of Common Guillemots on the sloping slabs higher up dominated the scene.

On one rock, we found a Shag, its back feathers like scaly reptilian skin, sporting a numbered blue band; it was part of a long-term study into the longevity of sea birds being conducted by the Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group.

There were some interesting plants on the cliffs too, including Roseroot, Sea Spleenwort and Sea Campion, some of the latter showing violet dust on their anthers and petals, evidence of an infection by an STD, the Anther-Smut Fungus *Microbotryum silenes-inflatae*. It is sometimes called a 'castrating smut' because it infects the anthers (i.e. the male parts) of the flowers and prevents them producing pollen, instead copiously loading them with fungal spores, which are then transported unwittingly by pollinating insects to neighbouring plants, thus spreading the infection.

As we headed back to the rendezvous point, we saw, in the shelter of a quiet bay, a veritable 'mums and toddlers' group of Eiders, comprising five adult females and fourteen ducklings.

Back on the boat, we were treated to great views of Grey Seals as they lumbered into the water from their rocky skerries and swam over to watch us pass by, holding themselves high in the water to get a better view and showing their long Roman noses; it was we looking at them looking at us. Here at last we found our Black Guillemots, as they motored away low over the water at our approach, showing big white wing flashes and red feet.

As we passed the Cairn na Burghs (Beag and Mòr), with an astonishing natural sea arch, like a needle's eye, and Napoleonic era fortifications, the lowering clouds above us turned the sea iron-black. The few hardy souls who braved the foredeck soon retreated to the rear of the boat, but not before some of them were soaked to the skin by the spray.

We disembarked back at Ulva Ferry after a fantastic trip, with enough time for Greg to share another 'grass of the week' with us before we got into the minibus for the return drive. The grass in question was one we would all remember (wouldn't we?): the Perennial Ryegrass with paired florets held alternately up the flower spike at 180° to the stem (contrasting it with Couch Grass whose flowers are held at right-angles to the stem) and with a distinctly glossy underside to the leaf, most noticeable in fields when the wind blows and shiny ripples run through the grassy sward.

Day 4

Friday 13th June

The day began with a pre-breakfast walk, which was enlivened by a flypast by an adult White-tailed Eagle; other fare included a Bullfinch on the rocks by the sea, a Treecreeper giving away its presence with a single trilling call, a big and very healthy-looking Wych Elm, and an epiphytic Rowan growing on the trunk of a Pedunculate Oak tree.

After breakfast, we headed out to Lochbuie for the day, with a lovely drive along Lochs Spelve and Uisge, the latter flanked by hectares of dense Rhododendron. The day was overcast and drizzly, and occasionally positively wet. Our walk along the shore took us past St Kilda's chapel, with its medieval Celtic cross, and the imposing Castle Moy, the ancestral home of the Maclaines of Lochbuie, until the enforced peace of the years after Culloden enabled them to move into a more palatial country house next door.

Turnstones and a Greenshank flew into the bay as the tide fell, and a Grey Wagtail flitted around on the rocks where a burn cascaded across the beach and down to the sea. We walked on to Laggan Sands where one sharp-eyed member of the group spotted a distant Shelduck and a small Sand Martin colony in a low cliff at the back of the beach. We also chanced upon a regionally scarce plant, Prickly Saltwort, in a new location for the island.

As we turned to head back to the van for our picnic lunch, we spotted a few birds flitting between Bracken, the fenceline and a thick Alder tree. After a while we managed to nail them down as Willow Warbler, Meadow Pipit, a male Siskin and our first Spotted Flycatcher of the trip.

On the way back, beside a few scattered trees, we found an area of Soft Rush and Yellow Flag irises which had, for no apparent reason, been mown. In the trees, with a beakful of food, was a slightly hysterical Tree Pipit, alarm-calling repeatedly and hopping frantically around. As a ground-nesting bird we pondered whether the random mowing may have destroyed its nest. (Thankfully, a return visit the following week confirmed that the adult birds were still feeding young in this area, so it seems they managed to avoid the mower's blades.) A couple of spectacular Fallow Deer were loitering among the sheep, though the juxtaposition of the two rather spoiled the photos some of us were taking.

After lunch at the Old Post Office, which involved lots of coffee and cake, we strode out to find Mull's one and only stone circle. On the way we were subjected to another 'grass of the week', Tufted Hair Grass, with its elegant, silvery, pyramidal flower spikes and leaves that could cut hardened steel (well, soft fingers anyway!).

Looking along the burn for Dippers, someone found a black and white bird on a boulder in the stream; but it was a Pied Wagtail! Even the birds were playing tricks with us. At the stone circle, our tentative discussion of Neolithic culture was interrupted (to everyone's relief) by an adult White-tailed Eagle flying over, our fifth of the week so far.

The rain, which had been stuttering like our archaeological conversation, now set in a bit more persistently, so we headed purposefully for the van, only stopping to admire the oily scent of the Bog Myrtle leaves and the sticky entanglement of the Oblong-leaved Sundew, gorging on tiny insects. After twenty minutes we turned the corner into the carpark to see a big, dog Otter nonchalantly swaggering across the track in front of us, passing within a few metres of where we had been eating our lunch a couple of hours earlier. He stopped and turned to look at us as we all held our breaths and then sauntered on, entirely untroubled by his experience, unlike us, who were left bursting with excitement.

As it was raining fairly heavily by now, we headed back to the hotel for an early meal and the promise of another trip out should the forecast of 'sunshine later' materialise. By 8.00pm it had, so in gorgeous light and dead calm conditions, we set out 'notter-watching' (as our guide called it) and sure enough, in seemingly perfect conditions, we didn't see a single Otter. However, ample compensation was provided in the shape of three Short-eared Owls (including one which flew up onto a road sign and perched for us), and a male Hen Harrier which was quartering the fields with them, so we were thrilled. It was a perfect end to another great day, despite the weather.

Day 5

Saturday 14th June

We had an early start today for our second boat trip of the week. We had an uneventful drive to Tobermory. The weather was heavily overcast but, arriving at the marina, the sea was flat calm which promised good viewing from the boat: and so it proved. We joined a small group of like-minded enthusiasts and headed out into the Sound of Mull on a small boat staffed by some of Mull's most knowledgeable naturalists.

We soon ran into a couple of Minke Whales feeding in the mouth of the Sound of Mull, their presence given away by the large number of Gannets plunge-diving into the water. The skipper killed the engine and we sat and watched as the whales fished around us, surfacing three or four times close by, before arching their backs on the final emergence and diving deeply. In the stillness we could even hear the whales' breath when they surfaced. Indeed, on one occasion we were all looking to one side of the boat when we heard the unmistakeable exhalation behind us; we all turned to find a whale no more than fifty metres from the boat. At times the whales were so close that you could smell their breath: a surprising aroma of stale cabbage rather than the ripe 'fishiness' we were expecting. After a while, the whales moved a little to the south, and we left them to their meal. What an experience! Nothing could possibly surpass that, surely?

"Hold my glass," said the dolphins. What happened next was a wildlife experience that will stand out as one of the most remarkable any of us had ever experienced; and this in a group that included several Naturetrek veterans of African safaris and Galapagos adventures.

In the distance, towards the Isle of Muck, we could see the sea boiling across a vast area. As we slowly approached, we realised that the disturbance at the surface was down to Common Dolphins, hundreds and hundreds of them, as far as the eye could see, leaping and crashing on the sea's glassy surface. Soon, some of them came towards the boat and, in no time, we were surrounded by cavorting dolphins. The skipper's wise words at this point were to put down our cameras and soak up the moment. But the 'moment' lasted for more than two hours! Among the dolphins we observed several mothers and calves, mismatched in size, but the smaller beast never straying from its mum's side, swimming and leaping in perfect synchronicity with her.

After a while we realised that there were also Minke Whales here, a little further from the boat but working the same food source as the dolphins. Some began lunge-feeding, as if wanting to share in the dolphins' exuberance.

All the while a steady stream of Manx Shearwaters, Puffins and Kittiwakes passed through the scene, and even a juvenile White-tailed Eagle en route from Muck to the mainland came by to see what all the fuss was about.

One or two small RIBs came to share the moment, but the spectacle was happening over such a vast area that we felt as though it was a privilege unique to our small boat. Even the experienced guides on the boat were marvelling at the scene. Eventually we dragged ourselves away; everyone was in a daze as we motored back to Tobermory. Even a call of “Storm Petrel” didn’t galvanise us to muster stations.

Back on dry land, we grabbed a sandwich, still in a state of shock at what we had just experienced. While some opted for a chance to see the town of Tobermory, the rest of us headed up onto a lovely woodland walk out towards the lighthouse at the mouth of the harbour. Now it was the turn of the botany to wow us; it did a reasonable job (given the morning’s competition).

We quickly racked up a series of delights from the bromeliad-like Great Wood-rush growing epiphytically on a fallen tree trunk, to the tiny Yellow Pimpernel, the sweet Wild Strawberries and even three or four Broad-leaved Helleborines. Strangest of all was the Melancholy Thistle (usually a meadow species) growing on the woodland trail.

As we walked back down into the town (stopping only to take a snap of the rare Edward VIII postbox) the clouds finally decided it was time to do what clouds do, and we hurried back to the van as the heavens opened. We drove back to the hotel, hoping that the weather might clear later as it had done on the previous day, but on this occasion the rain was set in for the duration.

Day 6

Sunday 15th June

It was still wet the following morning, so we had a slow start; this was a good thing because several of us saw a distant Otter busily fishing in front of the hotel. We drove slowly around the shores of Loch Scridain and Loch na Keal, but couldn’t add more than a group of juvenile Oystercatchers comically chasing each other across the short grass sward. The cloud base was very low, obscuring the crags above the road at the public viewing point looking towards a Golden Eagle’s nest, so we cut our losses here and drove on.

We decided to brave the weather, put on our waterproofs and take a walk alongside Loch Ba. This was lovely, if increasingly wet, though the rain didn’t seem to bother the Sand Martins which were flying around, making the most of the midges and other insects over the loch.

The geology here was plutonic in nature, and thus rather different to that which we had experienced over much of the island. The flat terraces of basalt lava flows were replaced by a more massive landscape of granite, where fifty million years ago a vast chamber of magma had stood; its cooling had resulted in a great depression at the surface.

A wet flush had the botanists in the group delighting over Bog Asphodel (the ‘bone breaker’), White-beaked Sedge and Round-leaved Sundew. Even the biennial Marsh Thistles and pithy-centred Soft Rush got a look in. Two thirds of the way up the Loch we found an area of mature Atlantic rainforest woodland and an old stumpy oak. Here there were suddenly birds: Siskins, Treecreepers, Spotted Flycatchers, Blue Tits (not a common bird on Mull), Redpolls and Chaffinches.

Peering out onto the loch, we found another scarce island bird, a Black-headed Gull, perched on a spit of mud. One wag in the group observed that it had been a long way to come in the pouring rain to see a Black-headed Gull. They could have done this at home, if they'd wanted to! We turned and headed back, in order to ensure that our fronts were as wet as our backs by the time we reached the minibus.

We dived into a lovely café for lunch and to dry off. The ambience was only spoiled by the dulcet tones of Frank Sinatra crooning "I'm Singing in the Rain", but we could all see the funny side!

As the rain cleared, we headed down to a hide at Fishnish where, according to the board, Otter and White-tailed Eagle had been seen on a daily basis. Neither was on show when we arrived. But we didn't have long to wait until an adult White-tailed Eagle discreetly crept in and took up its station in a tree overlooking the ferry port.

Suitably inspired, and with the sun beginning to peek through, we walked down towards Garmony. On the way, we stopped to view across the Sound of Mull and quickly picked up a family group of Otters frolicking in the water. They gradually approach the shore and came out of the water onto the seaweed-covered rocks, just out of our sight, except for a brief view of the high haunches of the female as she guided her youngsters to safety.

Greg went to retrieve the minibus while everyone else viewed the bay at Garmony. Here Greenshank, Dunlin, Eider, Shelduck and even a Great Tit were added to the day's list. We were all a bit soggy as we drove back to the hotel, but we all felt that the day had been a success, despite the weather.

Day 7

Monday 16th June

We woke up to another wet morning, and our last morning of the week. While our hearts may have wanted to be outside, our heads told us to stay indoors and have another coffee before we headed off to the ferry.

This we did, and very pleasant it was. When we did get on the road, the rain showed no sign of easing, but our regular roadside fare didn't disappoint: Stonechats and Hooded Crows in the glens, Red Deer and Buzzards in the hills, and Red-breasted Mergansers and Greylag Geese in the lochs.

We had half an hour at Craignure while the ferry loaded, giving us another chance to compare Arctic and Common Terns, and then we were off towards Oban. The rain cleared occasionally, making time on the deck worthwhile. We quickly located a couple of Harbour Porpoises rolling characteristically at the surface a couple of times before slipping away, not to be seen again. A large gathering of Persil-white, plunge-diving Gannets, in the Firth of Lorne, at least two hundred kilometres from their nearest breeding colony, reminded us just how far they travel in search of food.

For those who wanted it, a sneaky crab sandwich was grabbed on the Oban quayside before we hit the road to Glasgow. The clouds lifted along the bonny banks of Loch Lomond so we stopped at Luss for one final hurrah: a crannog (a prehistoric artificial island made of timber and stone) and our final 'grass of the week': Cocksfoot, with its blue-green leaves, flattened stem and chunky stature. The presence of Carrion Crows in this area proved that Loch Lomond, for all its glory, isn't really the Highlands! You get Hooded Crows (not Carrions) in the true Highlands!

In Glasgow, we shared some quick farewells and we were all soon making our various ways home, after a wonderful week on Mull.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓			✓		
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓		✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			✓				
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>				✓			
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓				
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>							✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓			✓		✓	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				✓			
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>						✓	
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓		✓		✓		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>						✓	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>			✓				
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			✓		✓		
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>			✓			✓	✓
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓				
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓				
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			✓		✓		✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓			
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓			✓		✓	
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

I=Introduced		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	✓			✓			
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>							✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>							✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				✓			
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓			✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>						✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓					
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓		✓			
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓			✓		✓	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				✓		✓	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				✓		✓	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	✓						
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓		✓			
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓			
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>				✓			
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓		✓		✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓		✓			
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓					
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓			✓			

Mammals

		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓				
Short-tailed Field Vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>			✓				
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>					✓		
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>					✓		
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>							✓
Common Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Western Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	✓			✓		✓	

Butterflies

		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓					
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓				
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓		✓			

Other insects

		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common Carder Bee	<i>Bombus pascuorum</i>		✓					
Green Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela campestris</i>		✓					
Orchid Beetle	<i>Dascillus cervinus</i>		✓	✓				
a snipe-fly	<i>Rhagio scolopaceus</i>			✓				

Fungi

		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Alder Tongue Gall on Grey Alder	<i>Taphrina alni</i> on <i>Alnus incana</i>		✓					
Sea Campion Anther-Smut Fungus	<i>Microbotryum silenes-inflatae</i>			✓				

Plants

I=Introduced		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Common Bugle						✓	
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Common Alder				✓			
<i>Alnus incana</i>	Grey Alder		✓					
<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	Wild Angelica			✓				
<i>Asplenium marinum</i>	Sea Spleenwort			✓				
<i>Atriplex glabriuscula</i>	Babington's Orache				✓			
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Ling Heather						✓	
<i>Calystegia pulchra</i>	Hairy Bindweed							✓

I=Introduced		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	Cuckooflower		✓					
<i>Centaureum erythraea</i>	Common Centaury		✓					
<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>	Sword-leaved Helleborine		✓					
<i>Cirsium heterophyllum</i>	Melancholy Thistle					✓		
<i>Cirsium palustre</i>	Marsh Thistle						✓	
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cocksfoot							✓
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common Spotted Orchid		✓					
<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>	Heath Spotted Orchid		✓					
<i>Dactylorhiza majalis</i>	Northern Marsh Orchid		✓					
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	Tufted Hair-grass				✓		✓	
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Common Foxglove	✓						
<i>Drosera intermedia</i>	Oblong-leaved Sundew				✓			
<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	Round-leaved Sundew						✓	
<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>	Broad-leaved Helleborine		✓			✓		
<i>Equisetum sylvaticum</i>	Wood Horsetail		✓					
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	Bell Heather						✓	
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath						✓	
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	Common Cotton-grass		✓					
<i>Euphrasia nemorosa</i>	Common Eyebright		✓					
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech			✓				
<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	Wild Strawberry					✓	✓	
<i>Galium odoratum</i>	Sweet Woodruff		✓					
<i>Geum rivale</i>	Water Avens		✓					
<i>Gymnadenia densiflora</i>	Marsh Fragrant Orchid		✓					
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire Fog		✓				✓	
<i>Holcus mollis</i>	Creeping Soft Grass		✓				✓	
<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	English Bluebell		✓					
<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>	Slender St John's Wort		✓					
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	Yellow Flag				✓			
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft Rush				✓		✓	
<i>Larix decidua</i>	European Larch				✓			
<i>Larix kaempferi</i>	Japanese Larch						✓	
<i>Lathyrus linifolius</i>	Bitter Vetch		✓					
<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	Meadow Vetchling		✓					
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Ryegrass			✓				
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Common Bird's-foot Trefoil		✓					
<i>Lotus uliginosus</i>	Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil		✓					
<i>Luzula sylvatica</i>	Great Wood-rush					✓		
<i>Lysimachia nemorum</i>	Yellow Pimpernel					✓		
<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>	Dog's Mercury		✓					
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor-grass	✓						
<i>Myrica gale</i>	Bog Myrtle				✓			
<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>	Bog Asphodel						✓	
<i>Oenanthe crocata</i>	Hemlock Water-dropwort			✓				
<i>Pedicularis palustris</i>	Marsh Lousewort		✓					
<i>Picea sitchensis</i>	Sitka Spruce						✓	
<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>	Common Butterwort		✓					
<i>Pinus contorta</i>	Lodgepole Pine						✓	
<i>Platanthera chlorantha</i>	Greater Butterfly Orchid		✓					

I=Introduced		June 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>	Heath Milkwort		✓					
<i>Polypodium vulgare</i> sl	Common Polypody		✓					
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil		✓					
<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	Primrose		✓					
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken				✓			
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate Oak				✓			
<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Common Yellow-rattle		✓					
<i>Rhodiola rosea</i>	Roseroot			✓				
<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>	Rhododendron				✓			
<i>Rhynchospora alba</i>	White Beak-sedge						✓	
<i>Rosa pimpinellifolia</i>	Burnet Rose		✓					
<i>Rubus spectabilis</i>	Salmonberry				✓			
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Common Sorrel		✓					
<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	Sheep's Sorrel		✓					
<i>Salsola kali</i>	Prickly Saltwort				✓			
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder		✓					
<i>Sanicula europaea</i>	Sanicle				✓			
<i>Sanicula europaea</i>	Sanicle				✓			
<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>	Common Figwort						✓	
<i>Scutellaria galericulata</i>	Common Skullcap					✓		✓
<i>Silene uniflora</i>	Sea Champion			✓				
<i>Sisynchrium californicum</i>	Yellow-eyed-grass (I)		✓					
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Rowan				✓			
<i>Sphagnum cuspidatum</i>	Drowned Kittens Moss				✓			
<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>	Wood Sage		✓					
<i>Trifolium dubium</i>	Lesser Trefoil		✓					
<i>Trifolium pratensis</i>	Red Clover		✓					
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White Clover		✓					
<i>Ulmus glabra</i>	Wych Elm				✓			
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	Bilberry						✓	
<i>Valeriana dioica</i>	Common Valerian		✓					
<i>Veronica officinalis</i>	Heath Speedwell						✓	
<i>Vicia cracca</i>	Tufted Vetch		✓					
<i>Vicia orobus</i>	Wood Bitter-vetch		✓					
<i>Vicia sepium</i>	Bush Vetch		✓					
<i>Viola riviniana</i>	Common Dog Violet		✓					