

# Shetland's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 June - 2 July 2013



Arctic Skua



2013 Naturetrek Group on St.Ninian's Isle with tombolo behind



Northern Fulmars



Noup of Noss

Report & images compiled by David McAllister



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour Leader: David McAllister - Naturalist

Participants  
Angela Melamed  
Robert Pluck  
Megan Howells  
Helen Young  
Nicky Brooks  
Andy Wainwright  
Julia Spragg

## Day 1

Monday 24th June

Weather: Calm, clear

Between 3 and 5 pm we met David in the Northlink Ferry terminal. On boarding MV Hrossey we settled into our cabins and seats then ate our evening meal so that we could be on deck when the ship sailed. We did some bird-watching as the ship manoeuvred through Aberdeen harbour, and had excellent views of a Grey Seal with fish. Unfortunately the local group of Bottle-nosed Dolphins were not off the pier this year but we did have a brief view of one further out.

## Day 2

Tuesday 25th June

Weather: Bright, sunny in PM

The ship passed Fair Isle at about 5am and David and a few of the group were on deck from 5:30 am watching the Fulmars, auks, Gannets and Bonxies (Great Skuas) following the ship. We passed Sumburgh Head and as we came into the Bressay Sound leading to Lerwick met our first Tysties (Black Guillemots), a common sight in Shetland's harbours.

On disembarking we collected the waiting minibus and headed straight for the Sumburgh Hotel where we met Megan, the last member of the group. After ordering our packed lunches we went straight to Sumburgh Head. We parked half way up and climbed the steep road to the lighthouse, which is being converted to a visitor centre. At the car park we saw a Swift flying back and forward along the cliffs, an unusual sight in Shetland. As we climbed the Head we had close views of Fulmars, Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins, with gulls and skuas offshore. At the viewing point, as we watched a Grey Seal on the rocks below the head, and a Shetland Wren visited its nest in the buildings behind us, carrying food for its young.

After collecting lunches from the hotel we headed north to the Loch of Spiggie for an introduction to the freshwater birds of the islands. We ate our picnics by the loch and then as we set off David spotted a pair of Whooper Swans with a well grown chick in Loch of Brow, a marshy area at the south end of Spiggie. We moved on to St Ninian's Isle with its impressive tombolo (the largest of its kind in the British Isles). Here, as we walked over the sand spit in the warm summer sun, we had excellent views of a pair of Red-throated Divers fishing along the beach.

As it was very calm after dinner we went out to look for cetaceans and Otters, with no success, but we did find Little Terns fishing in West Voe.

## Day 3

Wednesday 26th June

Weather: Sunny, very calm, warm

Today was a day of seabirds... Straight after an early breakfast we set off for Lerwick. Unfortunately there was an accident on the road so we just missed the 9am ferry to Bressay and had to wait an hour for the next. David stayed with the bus while the rest of the group explored the main street of Lerwick. From the ferry we drove across the island of Bressay to the narrow Noss Sound where the warden was waiting for us in her small zodiac. We crossed in two groups in the zodiac and set off around the island.

Along the south coast we were able to see both Common and Grey Seals, the latter in a large group in the flat calm water. We stopped for lunch at the Holm of Noss where we could see nesting seabirds including Puffins. Then we went on to the magnificent Noup of Noss with its enormous Gannet colony. The sea was flat calm, even in the geo below the headland, called Rumblewick by the Norsemen as it usually always has breaking waves. The long descent from the Noup took us across the edge of Bonxie nesting territory but we didn't get close enough to their nests to be attacked by the adults. On the north coast as well as the nesting Fulmars and auks on the flower covered cliffs we had excellent views of Dunlin in their breeding plumage.

We crossed back to Bressay in time to get the 5pm ferry back to Lerwick. We had dinner and a short rest before setting out north again to the little pier at Sandsayre. Here we joined other groups on the ferry taking us to Mousa at 11 pm. We arrived on the island at 23:20 but of course it was still bright in the Shetland Simmer Dim. We walked the 1km along the coast to the imposing Mousa Broch, the most complete Iron Age tower of its type. As we came along the dry stone dyke of the island we had heard Storm Petrels "singing" and the same sound came from the walls of the broch in several places. Before it got too dark we were able to explore to interior of the broch tower and climb the stair between the inner and outer walls.

About midnight Storm Petrels began to sweep in off the sea and circle the tower to find the entrance to their burrows and for the next hour we watched intrigued at the small birds which live most of their lives over the ocean only coming to land to breeding sites such as this for 10 weeks in the summer. The RSPB staff supplied hot chocolate to keep us warm. All too soon, at 01:00, we had to make our way back across the island to the pier and then had a flat calm crossing on a windless Shetland morning. We got back to the Sumburgh Hotel at 02:00.

## Day 4

Thursday 27th June

Weather: Sunny, breezy

A more leisurely day after our long day yesterday... After breakfast we walked over to the historic Jarlshof which is just 100m from the hotel. This important site was occupied for about 4000 years from Neolithic times until the medieval period. Many of the important areas were buried and rediscovered in the 19th Century. Unlike many historic monuments we were able to walk everywhere among the ruins and used the audio guides to explore the Neolithic, Bronze age, Pictish, Norse and Medieval buildings.

After some free time and lunch in Lerwick we went to the little fishing port of Scalloway on the west mainland. Here we first visited the memorial to the seamen of the "Shetland Bus", the Norwegian fishing boats which kept communications going between Shetland and the resistance movement in occupied Norway during the Second World War.

In the afternoon we visited the three islands of Trondra, West Burra and East Burra which are connected to the mainland south of Scalloway by a series of bridges. We had good views of waders and tried to learn the identification characteristics of Whimbrel and Curlew. We ended the afternoon at the beach at Lu Ness on West Burra where there was a fine selection of coastal flowers and seabirds fishing in the bay.

After dinner we drove around the Pool of Virkie, a muddy bay near the hotel. We had a very good selection of waders and were again able to practice separating Curlew and Whimbrel. Among the Curlew we found some Bar-tailed Godwit then Julia noticed a red-brown bird which turned out to be a Black-tailed Godwit still in its breeding plumage. We found another amongst the other Bar-tailed Godwits.

## Day 5

Friday 28th June

Weather: Heavy rain, windy. Sunny in evening

Today we travelled north. Unfortunately as we had very heavy rain all morning and early afternoon we did not see as much Shetland scenery as we had hoped for. The torrential rain also meant that, apart from a singing Blackbird and a few Rooks, we didn't find the hoped for woodland birds at Kergord wood. For our picnic lunch we went to Lunna Ness one of the least developed areas of mainland Shetland and famous for its Otters. In the poor conditions we didn't see any Otters and few birds.

In the early afternoon we went on to the ferry at Toft which took us to Ulsta on the island of Yell. As the rain had stopped we had a short break at the attractive Southladie Voe at Sandwick. While we were looking at the voe Andy found Golden Plovers to the landward side of the road and we had excellent views of these attractive waders. There was a Red-throated Diver on the voe and while we were watching the Golden Plover another pair of divers flew in giving the "clacking" flight call. As they went overhead the bird on the voe replied with its haunting "long call". On to Gutcher for the next ferry to Belmont on Unst the most northerly island in Shetland.

David took us first to see the Unst bus stop, famous for its themed furnishing! This year's theme was Shetland sheep and their wool. After that we settled into our cabins at the Baltasound Hotel. After dinner we had a walk down to the pier where we spent some time looking for Otters as well as bird watching. Again the Otters were not showing themselves.

## Day 6

Saturday 29th June

Weather: Sunny, breezy

Most of the group headed out for an early run in the minibus before breakfast. Half way along the shore of Baltasound Robert noticed an Otter on a rock. We stopped to watch and realised there were two eating fish. We moved around the voe to the south shore where we found a Crane which had been reported in the area. It was feeding on stubble among hay rolls.

After breakfast we set off back to Belmont this time to take the ferry to Hamars Ness on Fetlar. While waiting for the ferry to arrive Nicky got out to have a look over the sea wall and came back to say there were three Otters playing just beside the pier, an adult and two young. We were able to watch these until the ferry arrived.

On Fetlar we went straight to the Loch of Funzie famous as it is at the centre of the area where Red-necked Phalarope breed and they are often seen on its reed fringes edges. We went down to the RSPB hide on the Funzie mires where the birds breed. Despite sitting quietly for over 30 minutes we didn't see any. We then went down to the beautiful Funzie Bay a famous geological site. Just before 1 pm we went to the little café at Houbie where there were sandwiches and soup waiting for us. After lunch we returned to Funzie. As we approached the hide a small wader flew down into the marsh and then out again over the hill, a Red-necked Phalarope! Unfortunately this was to be our only view of this secretive wader. Another session in the hide produced no further sightings. We then had to hurry back with a brief stop at the airstrip to see nesting Great and Arctic Skuas; then back to the ferry.

When we returned we went up to Keen of Hamar where very unusual plants grow among the wind-blasted serpentine rock. We found the rarest, Edmondston's Chickweed (*Cerastium nigrescens*) almost straight away. The total world distribution of this plant is this headland and the hill behind! Many of the other plants show extreme adaptations to the extreme conditions and are very difficult to recognize.

After dinner we drove round to Haroldswick where we had good view of Common Seals and waders but no more Otters...

## Day 7

Sunday 30th June

Weather: Cloudy, windy. Drizzle in late PM

Our last full day in Shetland took us to its most northerly tip. After breakfast we set off to Herma Ness the most northerly point. A two-kilometre trek across the moor brought us suddenly to the cliff edge at Toolie. From here we headed south to the enormous Gannet colonies at Neap. Then back north along the cliff tops, across a steep-sided dale to Hermaness itself with views of Muckle Flugga and Out Stack, the most northerly land in the British Isles. David and five of the group made it out to the very windy headland for a group photo before starting the long windy trek back! Altogether we had walked 8 kms (5mls).

After leaving Herma Ness we went to Saxa Vord where we visited the most northerly chocolate factory in the UK for well-deserved refreshment. From there out to The Haa at Skaw, the most northerly occupied house in the British Isles. On the return we stopped for a short time at Norwick beach. Here Andy and David found a sub-adult Great Northern Diver as well as several Red-throated Divers. One pair of Red-throats were fishing in the surf and when they caught small fish put on a wonderful display dance with feet paddling and their bodies raised straight out of the water.

After dinner we had a final run in the bus to Haroldswick. While we were watching the Common Seals Julia realised there were Otters on the rocks just behind the seal group. There was an adult and two well grown cubs. We watched them for about 15 minutes feeding on fish, playing and tumbling in the water and lazing on the rocks.

## Day 8

Monday 1st July

Weather: Cloudy, very windy. Sea: moderate to rough

David took the minibus for a final tour round Baltasound before breakfast. We saw the crane again but the highlight of the trip was a Wood Pigeon, quite an unusual bird for Shetland! After breakfast we packed up and set off south again. As we went down Baltasound we waved good-bye to the crane, which was still feeding in the stubble.

Then Belmont – Gutcher ferry, a short stop at Sandwick, Ulsta – Toft ferry and south to Voe and on to Lerwick! We all went to the Shetland Museum restaurant at Hay's Dock for a final lunch together. After lunch we said farewell to Angela, Megan and Andy who were flying south and David took them to the centre of the town to get a taxi back to Sumburgh.

The rest of the group had an hour in Lerwick before we transferred our luggage from the bus to the ferry for our boat journey south. After a windy day we had a rough crossing to the south of Sumburgh Head but as the ferry we were on was going via Orkney it went close to Fair Isle and we had good views of the island. We also saw our last new species of the trip, several Manx Shearwaters just to the east of Fair Isle. The sea was calmer once we go into the lee of Orkney.

## Day 9

Tuesday 2nd July

David and several of the group were up on deck for the approach to Aberdeen Harbour. We had breakfast on board and then said good-bye and headed off on our various journeys home...

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## Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July							
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>				✓				
3	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
4	(Common) Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓		✓	✓			
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	(Eurasian) Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓			✓	✓		
7	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
8	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>					1			
9	(Common) Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>				✓	✓	✓		✓
11	Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>							✓	
12	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	(Northern) Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>								✓
15	(European) Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>			✓					
16	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓						
17	Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>						1		1
18	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓						✓	
19	(Northern) Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
20	(European) Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	(Eurasian) Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	(Northern) Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
24	(European) Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>					✓	✓		
25	(Common) Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
26	(Common) Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
27	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				✓				
28	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				✓				
29	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓	✓	✓		✓
30	(Eurasian) Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	(Common) Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	(Ruddy) Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓		✓		✓		
33	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
34	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
35	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓
36	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	(Eurasian) Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓		✓				
39	(Common) Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓						
40	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓						
41	(Western) Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓							
42	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓							
43	(Barn) Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
44	(Northern) Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓						✓
47	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July								
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	
48	(Eurasian) Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓				✓	✓	
49	Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>			✓				✓		✓
50	(Common) Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						✓			

### Mammals

1	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>							5	3	
3	Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			✓				✓	✓	
4	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	✓	✓						✓
5	Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>								✓	
6	Wood Mouse (Shetland Hill Mouse)	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>									✓

### Invertebrates

1	White-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus magnus</i>		✓					✓		
2	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓		✓					

### Plants

1	Marsh-marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>				✓					
2	Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>				✓					
3	Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
4	Common Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
5	Norwegian Sandwort	<i>Arenaria norvegica</i>							✓		
6	Edmondston's Chickweed	<i>Cerastium nigrescens</i>							✓		
7	Ragged-Robin	<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>			✓				✓	✓	
8	Sea Campion	<i>Silene uniflora</i>		✓	✓					✓	
9	Moss Campion	<i>Silene acaulis</i>							✓		
10	Red Campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
11	Common Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosa</i>			✓	✓					
12	Thrift (Sea Pink)	<i>Armeria maritima</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
13	Round-leaved Sundew	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>								✓	
14	Common Dog-violet	<i>Viola riviniana</i>			✓				✓		
15	Cuckooflower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓	
16	Common Scurvygrass	<i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>			✓					✓	
17	Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
18	Roseroot	<i>Sedum rosea</i>			✓						
19	Silverweed	<i>Potentilla anserina</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
20	Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓	
21	Bird's-foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
22	Kidney Vetch	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓		
23	White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
24	Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
25	Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>		✓	✓				✓	✓	
26	Sea Plantain	<i>Plantago maritima</i>				✓			✓	✓	
27	Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>			✓					✓	
28	Lousewort	<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>			✓						
29	Common Butterwort	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓	
30	Greater Burdock	<i>Arctium lappa</i>		✓	✓	✓					
31	Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> agg.		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
32	Mountain Everlasting	<i>Antennaria dioica</i>							✓		
33	Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July							
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1
34	Common Cottongrass	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>			✓			✓	✓	
35	Hare's-tail Cottongrass	<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>			✓			✓	✓	
36	Spring Squill	<i>Scilla verna</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
37	Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>					✓			
38	Ramsons (Wild Garlic)	<i>Allium ursinum</i>					✓			
39	Yellow Iris	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
40	Heath Spotted-orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
41	Northern Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
42	Early-purple Orchid	<i>Orchis mascula</i>						✓		
43	Fragrant Orchid	<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>		✓				✓		
44	Greater Plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	
45	Creeping Willow	<i>Salix repens</i>			✓	✓			✓	
46	Wild Thyme	<i>Thymus polytrichus</i>				✓		✓	✓	
47	Bladder Campion	<i>Silene vulgaris</i>						✓	✓	
48	Deer Grass	<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i>							✓	
49	Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>							✓	
50	Marsh-bedstraw	<i>Galium palustre</i>							✓	



Final evening meal at Baltasound