

# Shetland's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 25 June 2019



Edmondson's Chickweed



Fulmar head



Northern Gannet



Otter

Report & images by Andy Bunten



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Tour participants: Andy Bunten (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

## Summary

Two carnivorous plants, five sightings of Otters, six islands and 30,000 Northern Gannets.

But numbers aren't everything – add to this Atlantic Puffins peering at us from only a few feet away; European Storm Petrels, flitting like bats, buzzing and clicking a few inches away in a 2000-year-old Broch; towering cliffs full of the hubbub of vast seabird colonies and crystal-blue seas glinting in the sun.

As always, the Shetland trip was wonderful. We saw some very special birds with great views of Whimbrel and briefer ones of Red-necked Phalarope; loads of hulking Bonxies (Great Skuas) and plenty of slimmer, more dashing Arctic Skuas and everywhere masses of wonderful waders – Common Redshanks, Snipes, Northern Lapwings and the evocative Eurasian Curlews.

A visit to the Keen of Hamar brought some very special plants including Edmondston's Chickweed, a plant unique to the island of Unst – Britain's most northerly inhabited island.

We found Otters at various places, including a great showing on Unst where one was chewing away on food in a rocky, seaweed strewn bay and Grey and Common Seals were our constant companions.

## Day 1

Monday 17th June

### Ferry from Aberdeen

Everyone met as planned at the ferry terminal and we all boarded the ship and settled into our cabins before some of us met up again at the rear of the top deck as the ferry started its impressive manoeuvres to leave this busy harbour. We had excellent views of adults of various common gull species and it was good to see quite a few Black-legged Kittiwakes delicately making their way to and fro; male Common Eiders in various stages of dress bobbed about on the water and arrayed themselves on the harbour edge. As we left the shelter of the harbour so Arctic Terns and Common Guillemots became more common and the occasional Razorbill was seen amongst them too. Large concentrations of gulls, mainly Herring, on the water raised our hopes that we might see some hunting cetaceans but try as we might we couldn't find anything.

It was a lovely evening and Northern Gannets were flying past regularly either in coordinated lines of 15 to 20 birds or the odd singleton beating its way purposefully to a feeding ground. We watched these various seabirds, some with complete mastery of the air and some, like the Common Guillemots, whose whirring wings seemed rather desperate, before we went back inside for a meeting at 9pm to discuss the excitements of the week ahead.

Then it was an early night so those who wished could rise fresh in the morning and see what might be about as we neared Shetland.

## Day 2

Tuesday 18th June

### South Mainland – Sumburgh Head

The sea crossing was as smooth as anyone could wish and those who emerged from their sleeping quarters were rewarded with wonderful views of Northern Fulmars and Northern Gannets gleaming in the lovely early morning sun. We passed Sumburgh Head about 6am to the accompaniment of these commoner seabirds and noted the occasional European Herring Gulls nesting on the smaller islands. We docked smoothly and disembarked around 8.30am, found our bus waiting for us, collected the keys and headed off to the supermarket to collect our food for lunch.

Then it was off towards our hotel at Scalloway, but on the way we made a quick stop in the Tingwall Valley. Here we were able to observe some of Shetland's wonderful waders – so rare now in parts of England. Eurasian Oystercatchers piped around us, looking very smart in their black-and-white plumage, beautifully offset with red beaks and legs. Common Redshanks were also vocal and indulging in their habit of sitting up, sentinel-like, on fence posts also showing off their eponymous legs. We all particularly relished the wonderful, evocative calling of the Eurasian Curlews as they flew up and seemed to parachute down again, 'curlewing' as they did so. We had a brief view of a Common Snipe in a field which also contained young Northern Lapwings, with their displaying parents chasing away the Hooded Crows, and a young Eurasian Oystercatcher which quickly skulked away into a bed of Yellow Flag.

We dropped our bags at the hotel before heading off south towards Sumburgh. On our drive we passed lots of damp meadows abundantly covered with Cotton Grass and doubtless home to Eurasian Skylarks, Common Redshank and Common Snipe. We stopped for a while by the Loch of Clumlie and steadied ourselves against the wind to see what we could find. Despite the wind, we could hear Skylarks singing lustily overhead while Meadow Pipits flitted around us uttering their thin calls.

Searching the loch we found a bird we'd been hoping to see – a Red-throated Diver. The wind and distance didn't make it a perfect view but we all had a good look through the telescope and at times one had glimpses of its red throat. Greylag Geese were in evidence around the loch edge and three Whooper Swans flew in and landed in the far side. Our best sighting was that of a low-flying Common Snipe which flew past us into the wind giving good views of its improbably long beak.

We could tell that rain was approaching so we made our way to Sumburgh Head, parked up in the car park and spent the next couple of hours at this marvellous place. We spent a good time gazing with binoculars and telescope at the lively array of auks spread out beneath us. There were lots of Common Guillemots, including a good percentage of the 'bridled' form. The Razorbills were scarcer but we were able to find them and make good comparisons between these and their cousins the Common Guillemots – the former having darker black backs and distinctive deep, white marked, bills. Atlantic Puffin was obviously on everyone's list and we managed some excellent views of these often extremely confiding birds. A definite highlight!

Higher up, near the information centre, we peered over a wall hoping we might catch a glimpse of a cetacean or two, but although we weren't lucky, we did see some great birds. Atlantic Puffins were flying around the steep grassy slopes, 'proper-looking' Rock Doves were perched around the rocks and everywhere was the busy traffic of Guillemots and Northern Fulmars.

Skuas were patrolling the cliff faces in a very predatory way and we had some excellent views of these menacing birds. A Great Skua chased various birds as they approached the cliffs, clearly intent on making them drop the hard-won fish they'd caught. On one occasion we watched as it grabbed a Northern Gannet by the tail forcing it to dive into the water and, presumably, disgorge the food it was carrying.

More elegant, but no less predatory, were two svelte and falcon-like Arctic Skuas, one a dark and the other a light morph, which also sped around the cliffs dashing after auks and terns following their every twist and turn like a Formula one racing driver. All very exciting.

At one stage a Hooded Gull had claimed the prize of poor young Puffin chick but, flying off with it, was pursued by European Herring Gulls, one of which grabbed it before losing control of the little corpse and letting it fall to be triumphantly claimed by a huge Great Black-backed Gull. This bird was not going to surrender its prize and took it back to its nest site where two fluffy chicks emerged to fight over the food. All three were tugging away at the poor puffling corpse before the adult manoeuvred it around and swallowed the whole thing down head first. A normal day in this bustling seabird city.

Heading back towards our coach, we spent more time looking at lovely adult Atlantic Puffins and various Northern Wheatears perched up on the dry stone walls before making our way to the Sumburgh Hotel for our lunch or a quick coffee and then, for some, a visit to the excellent Jarlshof site where around an hour was spent exploring this fascinating archaeological treasure which had over 3000 years of continuous habitation. Another prize was found in the area when Mike rescued a very cold and sluggish Shetland Bee which was crawling around the gravel car park and put him safely away into some vegetation.

Leaving Jarlshof, we headed back north again stopping at Loch Spiggie where we saw a couple of groups of Bonxies, one of around 40 and another of around 20, busily washing away in this fresh-water site: an indication that they are not yet as well-adapted to a life in the marine habitat as petrels or shearwaters, as they need to visit fresh-water sites such as these to wash their feathers.

Continuing along up the coast we stopped for a brief period looking down on a small bay with a few Harbour/Common Seals, both adults and pups, hauled out on the sand. Then it was on again to the amazing tombolo of St Ninian's, where we had around half an hour to wander around the seashore and get down to the bar of sand joining the island to the mainland. Ringed Plovers and Dunlin were finding food in the plentiful seaweed while Eider females were shepherding their creches of ducklings around this sheltered bay. The showery weather had returned by now and so we decided it was time to head back to the hotel, claim our bags, settle in to our rooms and get ready for the first of many excellent meals we were to have here.

## Day 3

Wednesday 19th June

### Bressay, Noss and Mousa

A lovely bright sunny day dawned which looked absolutely perfect for our day's adventures. So, after a delicious breakfast (some had the excellent haddock with poached egg), we made our way back to Lerwick to catch the ferry across to Bressay and thence to Noss. We caught the first ferry at 8.40am and were on Bressay by 9am.

We stopped first at a small inlet where we watched Dunlin and Ringed Plover and then later at a spot where we could see lots of chattering Arctic Terns and take photos of the lovely Lerwick view. A little later we stopped at the Loch of Brough and were treated to the wonderful sound of Eurasian Skylark song pervading the skies and the evocative calls of Eurasian Curlew. We saw a couple of Arctic Skuas perched up on hummocks, one of which flew up to see off a Bonxie that had strayed into its territory. On another nearby lochan we saw a lovely Red-throated Diver and, while admiring this bird, we noticed a Dunlin sitting and trilling beside the water.

Then we made our way to the area where we were to catch our ferry to Noss. Looking over the narrow sound we could see the warden getting his boat ready for us. On the brief stroll down to the ferry point we noticed a group of 15 or so European Shags clustered together fishing in the turbulent waters where the currents met in the sound. Those with their heads down also noticed our first Louseworts, a semi-parasitic plant, and Butterworts, an insectivorous plant.

We joined the queue of some 15 people waiting to cross until it was time to don the life jackets and take the brief trip over to Noss. We all gathered into the old building, converted into an information centre, for our introductory talk about this island, before we headed off steadily uphill on a course which would take us anti-clockwise around the island. Bonxies were very apparent here and we saw a good number just sitting and looking quietly menacing as we trekked past them. Northern Wheatears were accompanying us most of the way as we tracked along the coastal path and it was wonderful to get such close views of these very confident birds. There were a lot of beautiful Spring Squill as well as Tormentil, Silverweed and more Lousewort along the rough tracks we were taking. We made our way up to Cradle Holm, where the numbers of Atlantic Puffins seemed to have decreased in recent years although we were still able to see a few birds sitting outside their nesting burrows and there were plenty across on the stack opposite.

Lunch was taken by some at the breath-taking Rumblewick where we looked down on around 11,000 pairs of Northern Gannets; some on their nests and others swooping and gliding around the cliffs. This was an amazing site - the sights, the sounds and the wonderful (to some) smells of a hectic seabird colony with thousands of birds; auks, gulls, fulmars, shags and gannets, all dashing to and fro, cramming in the all too brief breeding period with a frenzy of activity. Fantastic!

We walked to the top of the cliffs where the view was nothing short of stupendous with pretty much all of Shetland laid out in front of us in absolutely glorious sunshine. Thousands of gannets wheeled behind us as we gazed at the sunny vista of these beautiful islands.

There was a fairly steep descent with more opportunities to see ledges full of Common Guillemots and other seabirds gliding by, as well as nesting Northern Wheatears and Rock Pipits popping up in the stone walls. The sun had brought the insects out too and Shetland Bumblebees and Painted Ladies were almost abundant.

Some had completed the circuit faster than others and had already made the crossing back to Bressay before the rest of us also clambered into the rib for our return trip and retraced our path across the island to pick up the ferry back to the relative hurly-burly of Lerwick. While waiting for the ferry to appear an Otter popped up over the shore before, very frustratingly, slipping out of sight again.

Our plan that night was to go across to Mousa so, once we had had our dinner, we left at 9.45pm for our next adventure in these wonderful islands. We joined a number of other folk on the boat to make the brief crossing to the island. Our Mousa Ferry then slid away to the island as we heard tell of Orcas which had been seen – but sadly the previous week!

Once we had landed we made our way along the slightly uneven track to the amazing broch. We explored this quite incredible structure, with some making their way up to the top, and then waited for the European Storm Petrels to come in. And after a while they certainly did so, swirling around like mist as they looked for their nest holes, guided by the rather nightjar-like churring and croaking of their mates. They were amazingly bat-like as they flickered around this ancient structure in the half light of a Shetland night. One couldn't imagine anything quite as atmospheric as this twilight with a prehistoric structure and these unworldly birds flitting around it as they must have done for thousands of years.

## Day 4

Thursday 20th June

### South Mainland and the Nesting area

The following morning, following our 2am return earlier that day, we had a more leisurely start, indulged in a most wonderful breakfast, and viewed a rather mixed weather forecast.

We headed out from our hotel at around 10.30am and just a short way north we stopped at Loch Tingwall to see various gulls and hear the wonderful sound of calling Eurasian Curlews. Out on the loch itself there were our first Tufted Ducks as well as a few Mallard and the usual constant motion of Arctic Terns. We stopped by the ancient parliamentary setting of Tingwall to view the beautiful scenery and have a quick look at the information there before the rain caused us to retreat back to our bus.

Our drive north took us through classically beautiful, if bleak, Shetland scenery with its usual complement of Common, Herring and Black-headed Gulls. It was wonderful, too, to see so many waders; Eurasian Curlews calling and gliding through the air on bowed wings, Common Redshanks bursting up from nearby fields calling wildly and Common Snipe dashing past us and up into the sky. An outburst of democracy, influenced by the continuing rain, took us to the somewhat idiosyncratic Pierhead Hotel where we had shelter, a warm welcome, hot coffee and a well-timed break. In the lovely sheltered harbour, a male Red-breasted Merganser was fishing away untroubled by the weather while a colony of Arctic Terns vigorously defended their territory further long the pier. Their harsh calls explaining well why the onomatopoeic Shetland name for them is 'Tirrick'. After our coffee we made our past the thin woodland by the loch and paused for a few seconds to check if anything was singing from the woodlands: there was and the song of a Willow Warbler could just be heard filtering through our windows.

Refreshed we continued north and east towards Lunna Ness. We stopped at various points on the way to see more of the abundant waders Shetland has to offer. At Vidlin we experienced what was almost a traffic jam as there was a very well-attended funeral and the cars, plus a bus, were making their way slowly up to the Kirk. We stopped to let them clear and had lovely views of a young Oystercatcher sheltering under a low peat hag, as well as a Common Seal checking us out and another small colony of very lively chattering Arctic Terns. As we drove on we noticed that one pair had produced two very fluffy young, busily tucking themselves under mother's warm feathers.

We arrived at the top of the Lunna Ness peninsula and sheltered against the elements while we had our lunch. We made a brief foray to see what may be about but our timing coincided with another flurry of rain so we headed back to our bus and set off back down the peninsula again.

Just before Vidlin we caught a glimpse of something that looked interesting and, stopping to get the telescope out, we discovered it was a Great Northern Diver. This is a bird which can be seen around Shetland but only as a non-breeder and is a very nice bird to find. Much larger than the more-common Red-throated Diver, we were able to get good views of this bird in its drabber winter plumage. While watching this treat, another appeared in the form of an Otter. We had better views for most of the group this time as the animal appeared close to the shore swimming and diving around. A few of the party went closer to see if a closer sighting could be obtained but this shy mammal had swum off.

Our final stop of the day was at the remote coastal area of Gletness where we hoped to find another Otter. Alas, no such luck, but we did see a couple of distant seals, a few Northern Gannets, Shags and auks. Back at our bus three Common Snipe were indulging in some energetic courtship flying repeatedly round and round calling incessantly.

Eventually it was time to head back to our hotel and get ready for another sumptuous meal with delicious Lemon Posset pudding on the menu.

## Day 5

Friday 21st June

South Mainland, Toft to Ulsta ferry (Yell) – Gutcher to Belmont (Unst) – Baltasound.

Today we set off from our wonderful Scalloway Hotel around 9.30am, with a quick trip to pick up food for lunch before heading back along the Tingwall road with the loch to our right. We stopped, together with a cruise ship coach-load, to pay homage to some very cute looking Shetland ponies while the ubiquitous Eurasian Curlews and Oystercatchers called all around us. We paused long enough to watch a rather self-conscious golfer take out a divot and for us to take photos of the smart Oystercatchers perched up on a post. As yesterday the loch held a number of Tufted Duck which were skirting along the water's edge.

We arrived at the Kergord Woods which are the most substantial woods in Shetland with Ash, Elm, Sycamore and some quite sizeable Horse Chestnuts. Here there were a few Rooks and Common Starlings but also a couple of new birds in the shape of a nice small flock of Siskins and a singing Blackcap. A Common Wood Pigeon flew past and many Blackbirds were present too along with a vigorously singing European Robin.

We continued our gradual drift north until we got back to Voe where we decided to try a short walk beside the loch before retreating in the face of a smart rain shower. We did, however, get a good view of a rather smart male Chaffinch.

We continued north to the well-known Mavis Grind site where we wanted to get a photo of the 'Otters Crossing' sign and see this site advertised as one where one could, with a strong arm, throw a stone from the Atlantic Ocean to the North Sea. We didn't take up this challenge but instead strolled along a delightful loch with stunning views of the Atlantic and fields full of colourful flowers including Lousewort and the insectivorous Butterwort.

We visited Brae to have lunch at the famous Frankie's Restaurant before stopping at Sullom Voe/Garths Voe for a while. Here the tide was quite well in so there was no exposed mud for waders but we did see some families of Common Eiders feeding along the loch side.

We arrived quite early at Toft and scoured the loch edges for Otters. We found a Common Tern which, posing nicely, gave a good opportunity to compare and contrast with the much more frequent Arctic Terns we were seeing every day. Four Red-breasted Mergansers flew by, an Arctic Skua whizzed along chasing a rapidly fleeing Arctic Tern while other terns plunged into an area of water clearly rich in fish. Just as we were about to leave, Ba spotted an Otter and we leapt out for quite good views of the animal rolling and diving in the middle of an inlet. Once on the ferry we saw a number of Common Guillemots, Shags and Northern Gannets in the sound before disembarking and hurrying across the island of Yell to catch our last ferry of the day to Unst. This shorter crossing provided a handful of Atlantic Puffins and a few Black Guillemots.

Once on Unst we went more or less straight to our hotel and then met at 6pm to see if an Otter might be around. The weather was a bit windy and though we had good views of a very obliging Fulmar, no Otters were around this evening so we headed back to the hotel for our meal and checklist and to prepare for tomorrow's adventures.

## Day 6

Saturday 22nd June

### Fetlar

The weather was decidedly cool and windy as a few of us made an early morning pilgrimage to the Baltasound marina in search of Otters. Sadly, again no luck, and as the rain came in it became a little unpleasant. A couple of us, when the brief shower was over, made a short trip to the lower part of the Keen of Hamar. Still no Otters but rather surprisingly a Red Admiral fluttered past.

Then after our breakfast, we headed off to the ferry terminal of Belmont to go to Fetlar. Fetlar's fertile soils and green landscape has led to it being known as the Garden of Shetland and we all felt that this beautiful small island had a distinctive and welcoming character. After arrival, we spent a little more time in a bay area, again hoping for views of our furry amphibious friend but again, with no joy.

Then it was straight to the Loch of Funzie, though on the drive we couldn't help but notice the sleek shapes of two elegant but piratical Arctic Skuas. We walked around the loch and to the hide where another group of birdwatchers were already in situ, although they politely emerged to allow us some time inside. We'd literally just arrived when a Red-necked Phalarope put in a brief appearance before melting away into the marshy vegetation. A few minutes later another bird whizzed past the hide and that, sadly, was the last sight we had of the bird. (Apart from those proudly shown to us on a camera by one of the members of the other group - not quite the same.)

We stayed in the hide and just outside it for a while and, though no more Phalaropes appeared, there was an astonishing abundance of Common Snipes. Flying, 'chipping', drumming – they were everywhere, a fantastic sight and sound to experience. After a time we made our way to the local community shop and café to try out their extremely tasty soup and sandwiches before dropping down to the south of the island. In the freshwater loch we saw more Bonxies washing but no other Phalaropes.

Our next port of call was back east to the airstrip area where, again, we had great views of a couple of Arctic Skuas before we noticed a Hooded Crow being harried by a large wader. This bird settled eventually giving us time to put the telescope on it and confirm that it was a Whimbrel – a target bird for the trip and excellent views to boot.

We tried our bay for Otters again but quickly abandoned it as the tide was higher now and so went back to the ferry terminal where the boat picked us up and transported us to Yell where we had to drive off and re-join the queue to board the ship again to get back to Unst.

Back at the hotel we relaxed and had another very filling meal before another evening excursion down to the bay. As always this was a beautiful, peaceful location with Common Redshanks, Eurasian Curlews, Common Eiders and Oystercatchers in abundance – but, sadly, no Otters.

## Day 7

Sunday 23rd June

### Unst

A few of us gathered early in the morning in what was a beautiful clear blue day for another Otter watch this morning and were rewarded with a brief view as one swam rapidly across the Baltasound Bay before disappearing into the rocks.

After breakfast we all gathered in the hot sun and set off to Hermaness via the Loch of Cliffe where we saw a number of Bonxies busily washing themselves in the freshwater. We parked at the reserve car park and started the 40-45 minutes' walk up the clearly marked track to the cliffs.

On the way the large number of Bonxies at this site became apparent with individuals loafing on the ground near the path and others flying around looking out for potential meals. In the beautiful sunshine Eurasian Skylarks and Meadow Pipits were singing lustily and the wonderful trilling of Dunlin could be heard from the undulating hillsides to our west. We found two different types of insectivorous plants – Butterwort and Round-leaved Sundew both supplementing the meagre supply of nutrients in this acidic waterlogged soil by trapping small insects with their sticky leaves. When we reached the top of the path the views were stunning as we looked at the throngs of seabirds around us and the vast open sea- and cliff-scapes. As we reached the cliffs, there were Atlantic Puffins whose burrows were clearly right where the path met the cliffs. A group of other birdwatchers at this site was making the birds a bit wary but they were flying in and then scuttling quickly to enter their homes.

We headed south initially towards the Gannetry. This site was really amazing. Birds were hanging in the gentle winds only a few feet from our faces; thousands of birds swirling around below all showing complete mastery of the elements. Punctuating this scene of dazzling white were small black-and-white whirring dots of Atlantic Puffins as they shot along to their nesting burrows. All the while, Bonxies patrolled the cliffs in a menacing way – woe betide anything that faltered or failed. This was a quite literally breath-taking scene and a real privilege for those of us who experienced it.

Some of the group continued south, some made their way north towards Muckle Flugga and others just luxuriated in the beautiful, hot sun. And so it was back down the boardwalk past all the lurking Bonxies, trilling

Dunlin and singing Eurasian Skylarks. One pair of Bonxies had a young chick which was making them very protective so any sheep wandering nearby were being chased away in no uncertain terms!

We gathered at the base of the walk and picnicked looking out across the bay with Shags, Eider, Fulmars and trilling Northern Wrens as our companions and Spring Squill and Milkwort carpeting the ground. The Information Centre was sadly closed for 2019 but fortunately the toilets were still open so we availed ourselves of the facilities and then headed off to our next stop of Skaw Bay.

Our walk across the turf with its plentiful Silverweed, Sea Sandwort, Yarrow and Yellow Rattle was a delight and made even more so by some wonderful Shetland and White-tailed Bumble Bees which we chased about trying to photograph with varying degrees of success. A Grey Seal surveyed us from the bay while the quantity of Shags, various auks and Northern Gannets was testament to the good fishing in this lovely, sheltered bay. We decided it was time for a coffee break and, after a few false trails, we found the delightful Victoria's Vintage tea shop and satisfied our caffeine cravings while also being able to watch a lovely pair of Red-throated Divers, perfectly illuminated by the sun, in Haroldswick Bay.

Now it was back south to the nearby replica Viking long ship and then to pay homage to the rather incongruous, but strangely compelling, decorated bus shelter before a few of us proceeded to the altogether more absorbing plant site of the Keen of Hamar. Here we hunted the fascinating creeping plants found at this truly unique site. The key species we were looking for was Edmondston's Chickweed, a plant only found in two sites in the world, both on Unst. Almost immediately, and helped by the interpretation signs, we found a single specimen of the chickweed shining brilliantly in the sunshine. A little further on we found another, even better, specimen. We were also successful with some great examples of Frog Orchid, towering up to two to three centimetres, and a few specimens of Norwegian Sandwort as well. This was all great fun and the site itself a really odd, windswept area. Fascinating.

Back to the hotel we had our meal and then at around 8.20pm, we made another mammal-watching excursion. We studied the Baltasound area closely, finding loads of Common Redshanks, Eurasian Curlews and a few Dunlin. We headed to Haroldswick where we struck lucky.

An Otter had climbed out onto a rock shining in the sun and we were able to drive closer and get good views as it ate a fish on a rock before it slipped away and then re-appeared a little further down the bay. Here we watched as it rolled about on edge of seaweed before it moved behind a rock - then vanished! A wonderful performance and great to have such good views.

The Otter wasn't the only mammal about though as there were also five Common Seals hauled out on some rocks close to the edge of the bay. There was one large bull, two cows and two pups –one of which was suckling enthusiastically. The bull, in particular, was remarkably well camouflaged and when flopped over the rock seemed to just merge in with it.

So at around 10pm we returned, triumphant, to the hotel.

## Day 8

Monday 24th June

### Unst & Sullom Voe

Our final day in Shetland dawned with some sunshine and higher clouds. Not quite as wonderful as the day before, sadly. A couple of people had a wander down to the marina area near the hotel but the Otter there was still playing pretty hard to get and didn't put in a showing.

Then it was time for our breakfast, and we left our most-northerly hotel at 8.10 to head for the ferry down through Yell and to the mainland once again. At each terminal we rather hopefully looked out for more Otters but we'd done pretty well really, so had to be content with nice views of Common Guillemots, Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills and Tysties (Black Guillemots) – not bad!

We drove back past Sullom Voe with its dramatic buildings and a Herring Gull which had found a Razor Clam and flew up to drop it onto the rocks below before swooping down to claim the tasty prize within. A little further on we found Red-throated Divers in a small loch before we headed onward to the little valley of the Burn of Valayre. Here we stopped briefly and had a look over the loch opposite where a number of Red-breasted Mergansers were swimming close to the shore and the ubiquitous Arctic Terns were swirling and chattering. Opposite this enchanting little valley there were waders: Redshank and Common Ringed Plover probing around at the edge of the loch as well as swirling, chattering Arctic Terns.

Our drive took us past the Voe settlement and the Pierhead Hotel and then on the loop round to Nesting. The usual suspects were seen on this drive – plentiful Common Redshanks, Common Snipe, Eurasian Curlew and Lapwing. Waders that are so rare in parts of the UK are, thankfully, really common here.

Then it was back to the relative hustle and bustle of the big city –Lerwick. The group were disgorged from the bus in the town centre and spent the rest of the afternoon checking out the tea rooms and other attractions of Shetland's neat little capital. Then it was off to the terminal and onto the ferry for our journey back to Aberdeen.

As we sailed out of the harbour we watched a variety of auks, including some excellent views of Tysties and Razorbills and had our last view of Sumburgh Head with a few Northern Puffins whirring past to remind us of our first day in these magical islands, before we headed back down inside for a meal.

## Day 9

Tuesday 25th June

### Return to Aberdeen

The crossing was a very smooth one and a few of us braved the dawn to see what wildlife may be around. There were Common Eider, a small flock of Common Scoter, Arctic and Common Terns, a variety of gulls, including larger numbers of Black-legged Kittiwake than on Shetland, and Common Guillemot too, but the star turn was a small group of around 10 Bottlenose Dolphins leaping around at the harbour entrance.

We docked at Aberdeen a little before 7am and people started to go their separate ways having previously said their various goodbyes the night before.

I would like to give thanks to the group who gelled together so well and made the trip an absolute pleasure to lead. We had great fun, some wonderful wildlife and many laughs. We all left with some very special memories of this very special place.

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Boat to Noss

## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	June								
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
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	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
10	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>						✓			
11	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>					✓				
13	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓		✓			✓	
14	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	H	
17	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>						✓			
19	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓		
21	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>						✓			
23	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	
25	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
26	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
28	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
29	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓								
30	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>					✓				
31	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
32	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
33	Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
34	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
35	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
36	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
37	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
38	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
39	Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>				✓					
40	European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>			✓	✓					
41	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
42	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
44	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓			✓	✓				
45	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓			✓					
46	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓							
47	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>					✓			✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	June							
			17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
48	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
50	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓						
52	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				H				
53	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>					H			
54	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					H			
55	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>					H			
59	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
61	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
62	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
64	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>					✓			
65	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>					✓			

### Mammals

1	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
3	Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Atlantic Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓				✓	
5	European Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>		✓						

### Insects (D = Dead)

1	White-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus magnus</i>			✓				✓	✓
2	Shetland Bumblebee	<i>Bombus muscorum agricola</i>		✓	✓	D	✓	✓	✓	

### Butterflies

1	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>							✓	✓
2	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓			✓	✓	
3	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

### Plants

	Common name	Scientific name	June							
			18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
1	Sitka Spruce	<i>Picea sitchensis</i>				✓				
2	Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>			✓	✓				
3	Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>				✓				
4	Downy Birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>			✓					
5	Common Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
6	Norwegian Sandwort	<i>Arenaria norvegica</i>							✓	
7	Edmondston's Chickweed	<i>Cerastium nigrescens</i>							✓	
8	Sea Sandwort	<i>Honckenya peploides</i>							✓	
9	Ragged-Robin	<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>				✓	✓	✓		
10	Sea Campion	<i>Silene uniflora</i>			✓	✓				
11	Red Campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	June						
			18	19	20	21	22	23	24
12	Marsh-marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	✓			✓			
13	Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Cuckooflower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Silverweed	<i>Potentilla anserina</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
16	Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>		✓		✓			
17	Bird's-foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Kidney Vetch	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>			✓	✓		✓	
19	White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Heath Milkwort	<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
22	Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
23	Common Dog-violet	<i>Viola riviniana</i>					✓		
24	Ground Elder	<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>				✓	✓		
25	Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Bell Heather	<i>Erica cinerea</i>							✓
27	Thrift (Sea Pink)	<i>Armeria maritima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>					✓		
29	Lousewort	<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>		✓		✓			
30	Yellow Rattle	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>						✓	
31	Eyebright	<i>Euphrasia sp.</i>				✓			
32	Sea Plantain	<i>Plantago maritima</i>						✓	
33	Round-leaved Sundew	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>						✓	
34	Common Butterwort	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
35	Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>						✓	
36	Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	
37	Mountain Everlasting	<i>Antennaria dioica</i>						✓	
38	Common Cottongrass	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Spring Squill	<i>Scilla verna</i>		✓			✓	✓	
40	Yellow Iris	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Frog Orchid	<i>Coeloglossum viride</i>						✓	
42	Heath Spotted-orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>					✓	✓	
43	Northern Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



Round-leaved Sundew