Shetland's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th June - 8th July 2025



Hermaness



Edmonston's Chickweed (Arctic Mouse-ear)



Puffin



Otter

Tour report by Mark Wood



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

Tour participants: Mark Wood (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1 Monday 30th June

Aberdeen to Lerwick Ferry

The group boarded the Northlink ferry in Aberdeen for a 7.00pm departure. As the vessel left the harbour mouth, several Bottlenose Dolphins were seen. From here the voyage to Shetland would be fairly smooth, only getting a little bumpy late in the evening.

Day 2 Tuesday 1st July

South Mainland

The group disembarked in Lerwick at 7.30am, where they met Mark, the tour leader, in the ferry terminal. We loaded the van and set off south in the direction of our hotel for the next three nights. We dropped off our bags at the Sumburgh Hotel and immediately headed out in search of wildlife. The weather was absolutely gorgeous, with bright blue skies, warm sunshine and a light breeze. Our first stop was the nearby Pool of Virkie, where there was a good selection of waders on show, including Curlew, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Redshank, Lapwing, Turnstone and Bar-tailed Godwit. We also found several Shelducks, Eider swith chicks and a few fly-over Great Skuas.

From here we went south again, right to the tip of Mainland: Sumburgh Head. We parked the van and slowly began to work our way up the cliffs toward the lighthouse. A Twite flew over a couple of times, and an Arctic Skua marauded around at eye-level, dashing down in pursuit of an auk every now and then. The cliffs were packed with nesting Fulmars, Guillemots, with some of their noisy and adorable chicks visible, Shags, Kittiwakes and (everyone's favourite) Puffins. We watched these at very close range as they came and went, or posed beautifully among the Thrift and Sea Mayweed. Once at the top, we visited the small café and had tea and cake, while gazing at the seabird spectacle outside. Afterwards, we walked to the top cliff to view the sea. We had only been there a moment when a Minke Whale appeared, and we were able to see it surface several times. We descended, getting more brilliant views of Puffin, Great Skua and Rock Pipit along the way.

We returned to the Sumburgh Hotel for a spot of lunch in the restaraunt, after which we spent an hour or so exploring the fabulous ancient ruins of Jarlshof. While here we had nice views of a family of Wrens, and a few Wheatears bobbed about on the walls. We then returned to the van and made a visit to Loch Spiggie. We started at the RSPB hide on the north shore, where we got great views of both Common and Arctic Terns, and there were several Mute Swans, a pair of Shovelers and a few Sand Martins. We relocated to the southern end of the Loch, where the light was better. Here we got views of Grey Heron, Moorhen, Lapwing and Redshank on the marsh. On the open water there were Great Skua bathing, families of Tufted Ducks, a variety of gulls, a sleeping Redthroated Diver, and perhaps best of all two pairs of Whooper Swans with their cygnets.

We returned to the hotel for a rest, before reconvening to go through the list and have our first dinner together.

Day 3

Wednesday 1st July

Central Mainland, Noss & Mousa

The weather was glorious, with bright sunshine and a light breeze. We took this opportunity to visit the stunning sandy isthmus which connects Mainland to St Ninian's Isle. The crystal-clear water in the two bays looked wonderfull, and as we walked across the white sands we got nice views of Common and Arctic Terns, Black Guillemot, and both Great Northern and Red-throated Divers. Once on St Niniansm we wandered up to the twelfth-century kirk and explored the ruins. There were a great many Rabbits here, along with Red Admiral butterfly.

We then retraced our steps back to the mainland, and drove up to Lerwick, where we explored the wonderful old broch on Clickimin Loch. The stone structures looked wonderful in the sunshine, and were covered in an array of lichens and small Polypody ferns. On the surrounding water we observed at close range a few female Tufted Ducks, some with chicks, Mute Swan and Common Terns nesting on the small islands.

We picked up some lunch from Tesco, then drove to the coast south of town to eat on the beach. A few Grey Seal hauled out on the rocks kept us company, while we watched Gannet, Shag, Oystercatcher and Razorbill come and go. We then headed north of Lerwick to Wadbister Voe, where we quickly caught up with the stunning summer-plumaged Red-necked Grebe, which had been hanging out there for a while. Great views were obtained by all. We then circled back toward Lerwick, stopping at Loch Tingwall along the way, where the local Vikings used to hold their parliaments. Here, we looked at some marsh plants like Marsh Ragwort, and found a few birds like Red-throated Diver, Tufted Duck and several family parties of Greylag Geese.

Late afternoon saw us back in Lerwick, where we boarded our boat for the two-hour trip out to Noss. On the voyage out we passed many Puffins, Razorbills and Guillemots, and were pursued by a few Great Skuas. At Noss proper, we spent some time sailing beneath the towering cliffs and observing the huge mass of nesting Gannets and Guillemots. Then we headed offshore, where Phil performed his old trick of throwing the Gannets some mackerel, so that they would dive en masse right alongside the boat. Great Skuas and Fulmars joined the throng, and all chased us as we began heading back to shore. There had been some Risso's Dolphin around, so we spent a bit of time trying to relocate them; it was worth a try, but we were unlucky. We headed back to the hotel for dinner.

At 9.30pm we met at the van outside the hotel and drove back north again to catch our evening boat trip to the island of Mousa. Here, we were led by a father and son duo through the twilight and across the moors as they recounted tales of the island, before we arrived at the mysterious old broch. Several of us climbed its ancient steps, and soon the first Storm Petrels began to arrive. The spectacle of the tiny birds whizzing around the ancient stones was truly magical, and some of us even managed to see one on the ground in red torch light.

Day 4

Thursday 3rd July

West Mainland

It had been a late finish last night, with us getting back to our rooms at 1.30am, so we had a leisurely start to the day, leaving at 10.30am. We made a brief stop at Loch Spiggie, where we had a brief flyover by three Crossbills, swung by Lerwick Tesco to pick up something for lunch, then continued on to west Mainland where our first stop was at Bridge of Walls. Here we waited a while, seeing Lapwings, a few gulls and Grey Heron. We were about to leave, when suddenly a large dog Otter appeared on a seaweed-strewn rock. We were treated to several good views of it hunting in the kelp, before it eventually settled on a rock to chow down on something; we all got great views in the scope. It then slinked into the water and vanished.

We then headed out across the moors, finding very little bar a few Whooper Swans on a loch. Once we arrived at Sandness, we found Shetland's only Magpie in a field, and then stopped down at the bay, where we had lunch just as it began to rain. Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls were on the beach, along with Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Rock Pipit, but little else. The rain was getting heavy, so we decided to return to the hotel early, with some of us opting to return for one last dance with the Puffins at Sumburgh Head. There were even more present than on the first visit, along with all the other cliff-dwelling regulars. Then rain returned in force, and we decided to beat a retreat back to the hotel for dinner and an early night.

Day 5 Friday 4th July

Yell and Unst

Today we checked out of our hotel and began the journey northward. We made a stop in the woods at Kergord, where we saw the resident Rooks and a few Jackdaws. A Great Skua flew through, throwing up a huge flock of Oystercatchers from the surrounding fields. In the trees we heard our only Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Robin of the trip, and we got some views of a Goldcrest. We then headed up to the ferry at Toft, where we managed to get on an earlier sailing than planned, and landed on Yell at noon. Our first stop here was a tidal bay on the south coast, where we found a small flock of Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers and a few Bar-tailed Godwits. Then we stopped at a freshwater loch with four Red-throated Divers on it, and had a closer look at the diversity of herbs, sedges and grasses growing around it. We headed north across the rolling peatlands, pausing to observe a showy pair of Red-throated Divers on a loch, while Snipe drummed overhead and a Redshank posed on a rock. We continued all the way to the top of the island, where we stopped for lunch overlooking Gloup Voe. Here we saw a Great Northern Diver, but little else.

We then headed back around the coast, stopping to look at some hauled-out Common Seals in Cullivoe before reaching the terminal for the boat to Unst. The rain was starting to worsen, and the wind was picking up. That did not stop us all jumping out of the van when we spotted a dog Otter in a freshwater loch by the roadside. We watched him swim towards us, then climb out of the water onto a stone wall, in full view. He then jumped down into the grass and seemed to settle down, and we got great views of him sticking his head up. After a while, he returned to the water, and we returned to the van.

We had some time to stop at some other roadside pools on the way to the new hotel, where we got great views of a pair of Golden Plovers with a tiny chick; two female Red-necked Phalaropes appeared, but were difficult to see well through the wet van windows.

We decided it was time to retreat to the hotel, but along the way we were treated to a wonderful Whimbrel calling on a roadside post. At the hotel, we found our rooms and then reconvened for dinner and the list.





Lesser Twayblade

Moonwort

Day 6

Saturday 5th July

Fetlar

We left the hotel in Baltasound and headed towards the ferry at Belmont. Along the way, we made a couple of stops to observe a pair of roadside Whimbrels, and the phalaropes again appeared on their pool. At the ferry terminal we got brief views of an Otter. The crossing was smooth enough, and from the deck we got nice views of Black Guillemot, Gannet and Fulmar. Once on Fetlar, we made our way across the moors, spotting some nesting Great Skuas, Ringed Plovers and Golden Plovers blocking the road. We stopped at some pools for phalaropes, but we only had a few brief flight views. We stopped at the café in Houbie for tea and cake before carrying on to the beach at Aith. Here we found the rare Oysterplant, Red-throated Diver and a Turnstone.

Further on at Loch Funzie, we had the wonderful experience of seeing an adult Red-throated Diver fly onto a small roadside pool with a fish and feed it to a chick. We also saw a nice pale-morph Arctic Skua fly by. We then walked around the loch and had lunch in the RSPB hide. Here we had great views of perched Snipe, several Redshanks and Curlews, and some excellent plants like Marsh Cinquefoil, Marsh Lousewort and a Field Gentian.

Back at the van we spotted a pair of Whimbrels on the moor, and many Lapwings flapped about, while Snipe drummed overhead.

We tried for the Red-necked Phalaropes again in a few places, but only managed to see one fly off in the direction of Tresta; we headed down to the beach there to see if we could find it. The sun had come out now and the water looked glorious. On the freshwater loch here was a lone Whooper Swan, and on the beach we had a Dunlin and Ringed Plovers. On the sea were a pair of showy Great Northern Divers, several Kittiwakes resting on some rocks, and many female Eiders with chicks.

It was now time to return to the ferry. Once back on the sea, we saw more of the same as on the way out, including Puffin, Razorbill and Gannet. Back on Unst we visited the phalarope pools again, where we had one adult, plus nice views of a small chick scooting about on the open water.

Day 7 Sunday 6th July

Unst

We started the day back at the phalarope pools, where we had a few brief flight views of one, and a fly over from a Merlin being chased by Golden Plover! From here we went to the Keen of Hamar; we spent some time wandering across the unique serpentine heath here, finding many the endemic Edmonton's Chickweed (or Arctic Mouse-ear) in full flower, along with other rare gems such as Northern Rock Cress, Norwegian Sandwort and other plants such as Early Purple Orchid, Frog Orchid, Mountain Everlasting and Moss Campion.

We stopped at the most northerly shop in Britain for some lunch supplies and headed up to the wonderful beach at Skaw, where we found a nice sheltered spot below the cliffs where we could eat. Many Gannets were fishing in the bay, Grey Seals noses protruded from the surf, and Ringed Plovers scurried across the sand.

We retraced our steps and made our way west to the dramatic cliffs at Hermaness. On the walk up, we had a brief view of a pair of Twites, found some nice plants like Lesser Twayblade, Bog Ashpodel and Round-leaved Sundew, and got to see Great Skua chicks at their nests. At the clifftop, there were a great many Gannets swirling on the updrafts and Puffins whizzed about, with a few perched. Climbing a little higher, we reached the gannetry, where we sat admiring the great spectacle of tens of thousands of birds packed into the cliffs; many nests contained well-grown chicks.

We gradually made our way back down, spotting a Dunlin with two chicks as we went, and then it was back to the hotel to rest after a fresh and breezy day.

Day 8 Monday 7th July

North Mainland

This morning would see us beginning the long journey home. We departed the hotel at 9.00am, made a short stop at the phalarope pools, where a male made a brief appearance, and then drove on to the ferry to Yell. We crossed Yell and spent a bit of time waiting for the next ferry in the sunshine, with two pairs of Rock Pipits provisioning

their nests with invertebrates here. Once we crossed back to Mainland, we passed through Brae, where we got some lunch from the Co-op, then continued on across the rocky hills and moors to Eshaness. We ate our lunch up on the clifftops, admiring the view, then went for a walk around the impressive geo here, where we watched nesting Fulmars at close range.

Next, we went up into the hills south of Voe, where we found a pair of Common Sandpipers on a loch, and a huge Raven nest. However, we failed to find our hoped-for Red Grouse. It was now time to return to Lerwick and to board the ferry back to Aberdeen.

As we departed, we stood up on deck, picking up a range of seabirds including Gannet, Razorbill, Black and Common Guillemots, Puffin, Fulmar, Kittiwake and a Manx Shearwater.

Day 9

Tuesday 8th July

Arrival in Aberdeen

As we approached Aberdeen harbour Gannets, flocks of Kittiwakes and a single Arctic Skua could be seen in the bright morning sunlight, and a collection of gulls gathered as we came in to dock. The group disembarked at 7.00am, and we said our goodbyes. It had been an excellent trip with many wonderful highlights, decent weather by Shetland standards, and great company.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I = introduced						-July	2025					
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Greylag Goose	Anser anser		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor		✓	✓			✓	✓				
Whooper Swan	Cygnus cygnus		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓			
Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna		√									
Northern Shoveler	Spatula clypeata		√									
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos		√	√	√	√		√				
Eurasian Teal	Anas crecca		√				√					
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula		√	√	√	√						
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima		√	√		√	√		√			
Common Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula				√							
Goosander	Mergus merganser					√						
Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator					√						
Rock Dove	Columba livia	√										
Feral Rock Dove - I	Columba livia 'domestica'	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	√		
Common Wood Pigeon					√		/		√	_ v		
Eurasian Collared Dove	Columba palumbus				V		√ √		V	-		
	Streptopelia decaocto			,	,		√			-		
Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus		✓	√	√					-		
Red-necked Grebe	Podiceps grisegena			√						-		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-		
European Golden Plover	Pluvialis apricaria		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	-		
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Northern Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus						✓	✓				
Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica		✓			✓						
Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Red-necked Phalarope	Phalaropus lobatus					✓	✓	✓	✓			
Common Redshank	Tringa totanus		✓	√	√	√	√	√	✓			
Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres		√				√					
Dunlin	Calidris alpina		√			√	√	√				
Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea		√									
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo		√	√			√		√			
Black-legged Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla		√	√	√	/	· ✓		· ✓	√		
Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus		√	√	<i>\</i>	· ✓	√	√	√	Ť		
Common Gull	Larus canus		√									
European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus		√									
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus		√	_ v								
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus		✓ ✓	√ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	√	√	✓ ✓	√		
Arctic Skua			✓ ✓	√ √	√ √	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓		
	Stercorarius parasiticus					-				V		
Great Skua	Stercorarius skua	,	√	-								
Atlantic Puffin	Fratercula arctica	✓	√	√ /	✓	√	√	✓	√	-		
Black Guillemot	Cepphus grylle		√	√	,	√	√	,	√	-		
Razorbill	Alca torda		√	ļ.,								
Common Guillemot	Uria aalge	✓	√	✓								
Red-throated Diver	Gavia stellata		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	-		
Great Northern Diver	Gavia immer			✓		✓	✓			<u> </u>		
European Storm Petrel	Hydrobates pelagicus			✓	✓							
Northern Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus								✓			
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	√		

I = introduced		June-July 2025								
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo		✓				✓			
European Shag	Gulosus aristotelis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		✓	√	✓	✓				
Merlin	Falco columbarius							✓		
Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica				✓					
Western Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula					✓				
Rook	Corvus frugilegus					✓				
Carrion Crow	Corvus corone		✓							
Hooded Crow	Corvus cornix		✓	√	✓	✓	✓	√	✓	
Northern Raven	Corvus corax		✓	✓	√	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Skylark	Alauda arvensis		✓	✓	√	✓	✓	√	✓	
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia			√	✓	✓				
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica		√	√	√	√	√	√		
Western House Martin	Delichon urbicum				√					
Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita					Н				
Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla					Н				
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus					✓				
Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		√	✓	√	√		√	√	
Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris		✓	✓	√	✓	✓	√	✓	
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula		Н		√	✓	✓	√	✓	
Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe		√	✓	√	√	√	√	√	
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus		✓	✓	√	✓	✓	√	✓	
Pied Wagtail	Motacilla alba yarrellii			√		✓			✓	
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis		√	✓	√	√	√	√	✓	
European Rock Pipit	Anthus petrosus		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Twite	Linaria flavirostris		✓					✓		
Red Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra			✓						
Eurasian Siskin	Spinus spinus					Н				

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
European Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus		✓	√	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Minke Whale	Balaenoptera acutorostrata		√							
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops truncatus	✓								
Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus		√							
Harbour (Common) Seal	Phoca vitulina			√		√				
Eurasian Otter	Lutra lutra				√	√	√	√		

Butterflies

			June-July 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Large White	Pieris brassicae		✓	✓					✓	
Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta		✓	✓				✓		

Bees

		June-July 2025								
Common name	Scientific name	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Shetland Bumblebee	Bombus muscorum agricolae					√		✓	√	

Plants

Scientific name	Common name
Blechnum spicant	Hard Fern
Pteridium aquilinum	Bracken
Botrychium Iunaria	Moonwort
Picea sitchensis	Sitka Spruce
Urtica dioica	Common Nettle
Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel
Claytonia sibirica	Pink Purslane
Gentianella campestris	Field Gentian
Arenaria norvegica	Arctic Sandwort
Cerastium nigrescens	Arctic (Edmonston's) Mouse-ear
Stellaria media	Common Chickweed
Honckenya peploides	Sea Sandwort
Lychnis flos-cuculi	
Silene uniflora	Ragged-Robin Sea Campion
Silene acaulis	Moss Campion
Silene dioica	
	Red Campion March marigald
Caltha palustris	Marsh-marigold
Ranunculus acris	Meadow Buttercup
Ranunculus repens	Creeping Buttercup
Cardamine pratensis	Cuckooflower
Cochlearia officinalis	Common Scurvygrass
Arabis patraea	Northern Rock Cress
Filipendula ulmaria	Meadowsweet
Potentilla anserina	Silverweed
Potentilla erecta	Tormentil
Comarum palustre	Marsh Cinquefoil
Lotus corniculatus	Bird's-foot Trefoil
Anthyllis vulneraria	Kidney Vetch
Trifolium repens	White Clover
Trifolium pratense	Red Clover
Vicia cracca	Tufted Vetch
Lathyrus pratensis	Meadow Vetchling
Polygala serpyllifolia	Heath Milkwort
Acer pseudoplatanaus	Sycamore
Viola riviniana	Common Dog-violet
Hydrocotyle vulgaris	Marsh Pennywort
Aegopodium podagraria	Ground Elder
Heracleum sphondylium	Hogweed
Conopodium majus	Pignut
Ligusticum scoticum	Scots Lovage
Calluna vulgaris	Heather
Erica cinerea	Bell Heather
Armeria maritima	Thrift (Sea Pink)
Galium Saxatile	Heath Bedstraw
Myosotis scorpioides	Water Forget-me-not
Mertensia maritima	Oysterplant
Thymus vulgaris	Wild Thyme
Plantago maritima	Sea Plantain
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort Plantain
Plantago coronopus	Buck's-horn Plantain
Drosera rotundifolia	Round-leaved Sundew
Pedicularis palustris	Marsh Lousewort
Pinguicula vulgaris	Common Butterwort

Scientific name	Common name
Mimulus guttattus	Monkeyflower
Menyanthes trifoliata	Bogbean
Succisa pratensis	Devil's-bit Scabious
Achillea millefolium	Yarrow
Bellis perennis	Daisy
Tripleurospermum maritimum	Sea Mayweed
Matricaria discoidea	Pineappleweed
Cirsium vulgare	Spear Thistle
Cirsium arvense	Creeping Thistle
Taraxacum officinale agg.	Dandelion
Antennaria dioica	Mountain Everlasting
Linum catharticum	Fairy Flax
Eriophorum angustifolium	Common Cottongrass
Eriophorum vaginatum	Hare's-tail Cottongrass
Potamogeton polygonifolius	Bog Pondweed
Hyacinthoides non-scripta	Bluebell
Allium ursinum	Ramsons (Wild Garlic)
Iris pseudacorus	Yellow Iris
Orchis mascula	Early Purple Orchid
Dactylorhiza maculata	Heath Spotted-orchid
Dactylorhiza purpurella	Northern Marsh Orchid
Dactylorhiza viridis	Frog Orchid
Neottia cordata	Lesser Twayblade