

Orkney

Naturetrek Tour Report

4th – 10th June 2023

Tour report by Stewart Woolley



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Stewart Woolley (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Sunday 4th June

Our trip began mid-afternoon, meeting up in the foyer of the Orkney hotel, our “home” for the week. With a brief meet and greet we immediately set off to begin our quest. Having arrived earlier in the day, I went in search of one of the Orkney specialities, the diminutive and pretty rare Scottish Primrose, not expecting to find any in flower, as this week falls right in between the two flowering seasons for this species, I was delighted and surprised to locate several stunning stems, each with several flower heads, and decided that, although it was a bit of a drive, we should go and see them straight away, as one good heavy rain shower could remove all petals in seconds.

We dived in the bus and set off towards Finstown and then on over to the West side of Mainland and to the clifftops at Yesnaby, where we were all soon watching, with some adopting the classic Naturetrek pose (hands and knees, camera to hand!) some of these beautiful wee plants, standing two, maybe three inches tall. As we enjoyed the scenery, a smart male Wheatear flicked among the ruins of one of the many military buildings constructed during the last war, Oystercatchers made plenty of noise and several Curlew called from nearby farmland, a species that is really doing well on Orkney, faring far better in the north than elsewhere in the UK. As we watched, a large female Peregrine steamed through low and fast and disappeared over the cliffs, no doubt in search of one of the many Rock Doves that nest locally.

We had a stroll over to the cliffs and spent a short time looking out to sea, where with flat calm waters and lovely settled conditions we saw plenty of birds. Common Guillemot and Razorbill formed small rafts, Gannets passed by in modest numbers, Black Guillemot (Tystie locally) were distinctive close in, and we were glad to see our first Great Skua of the trip, a species who's breeding numbers have taken a massive hit due to the latest strain of H5N1 bird flu.

Mindful that many had had long journeys to get here, we reluctantly tore ourselves away to ensure we got back to the hotel in plenty of time for dinner. Our drive back to Kirkwall saw us stop off at the northern end of the Loch of Stennes, where we looked out over a secluded bay with reedy margins. Sedge Warblers scratched away from the reeds, two or three Common Terns hawked over the water, whilst Shelduck, Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Coot and a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers fed close by.

All pretty satisfied with our couple of hours out, we were blown away when a stunning male Hen Harrier crossed the main Finstown to Stromness road, giving us good, if a little brief views as he quartered the roadside vegetation - superb! Some in the back seats had not had great views of this bird, but just a few minutes later, to the east of Finstown, another male harrier, a different bird to the first, performed superbly for us all. We pulled into a quiet side road and spent a few minutes watching this ghostly form, glowing almost white from a distance, as he floated back and forth, covering every inch of nearby farmland in search of food, eventually drifting off and out of sight. Returning to Kirkwall from Grimbister, the small dis-used quarry just out of town held several breeding pairs of Fulmar and two Raven sat on the low cliff top.

We'd had a really good start to the trip, and with several “key” species under the belt in just a couple of hours out, we arrived back at the hotel well pleased with our efforts!

Meeting up later for dinner, we relaxed with a drink and had a chat about plans for tomorrow.

Day 2

Monday 5th June

Our first full day dawned bright and still, with a very slight breeze from the North, as is the norm on many of our trips. The option of a pre-breakfast trip out was available to those who fancied an early start, and with the temperature at 06:00 set at a pretty mild 12°C we set off for the RSPB Hobbister moors site on the northern shore of Scapa Flow. Our destination was Waulkmill Bay, where our raised vantage point gave great views south over the flow. Below our position we soon picked up a decent number of Guillemots and Razorbills loafing around on the flat calm water, Two Bonxies (Great Skuas) fed on a carcass at the water's edge and lots of Fulmar drifted back and forth below us. These super aeronauts breed on the low cliff here and others sat on the water in large preening groups.

The proximity of Waulkmill Bay to some of the island's freshwater lochs makes this a good spot to look for divers, and we were soon to be rewarded with our first Red-throated Divers of the week; eventually after repeated counts, our tally here reached seven individuals, three pairs and a single non breeding bird. As an added treat, a summer plumaged Great Northern Diver flew over heading for the Loch of Kirbister. The bay also gave up a smart pair of Long-tailed Ducks, common here in winter, but much harder to connect with in June, so not at all expected. A distant cuckoo was heard and a Sedge Warbler sang from nearby scrub. With an eye on the time, we eventually had to tear ourselves away and head back to Kirkwall for breakfast - a great start to the day with some nice birds "under the belt" in the first 1 ½ hours!

With a hearty breakfast taken care of we all set off and with the weather set fair for the day we slowly made towards Finstown and then west towards Stromness. Our first stop today was to be a trip around Maeshowe, the finest chambered tomb in north-west Europe. The large grassy mound sits prominently in the flat landscape of the Stenness area of West-central mainland Orkney. We met our guide, George, at the Maeshowe visitor centre and were bussed to the site, where he gave us a great understanding into the history and cultural significance of the chamber, which was built some five thousand years ago, possibly as a burial chamber for high-ranking Orcadians. It was in use for a few centuries, before being sealed up for around three thousand years. The next peoples to utilise the structure were the travelling Norse, who, in the mid 1100's broke into the mound, and, luckily for us, daubed the walls with "Graffiti", Runic inscriptions and several sketches, the translations of the Runic suggesting that they enjoyed a laugh just as we do today!

Whilst George was talking to us outside the tomb, a smart Short-eared Owl quartered the nearby grassy pastures before drifting out of sight. Looking across the far southern end of the Loch of Harray, we also saw the long-term resident Australian Black Swan; although no doubt of "dubious" origin, this bird has been here for at least five years and is always interesting to see.

From Stenness, we decided to take a slightly odd route, and headed back through Kirkwall and on south-east to Deerness, a large promontory at the far south-eastern end of Mainland, where we drove up to Sandside for a walk around Mull Head and some surrounding farmland.

Arriving in perfect time for lunch, we sat in the bright sunshine outside the wee visitor centre, where a pair of Stonechats perched on nearby fences as we tucked into strawberries! A smart male Linnet gave nice views from close-by.

After lunch we headed off for a walk, initially heading into the East Denwick plantation, a small area of low trees, which is used by local ringers during the spring and autumn migration periods and regularly holds some good scarce and rare birds. Today all we could find were a few Northern Marsh Orchids and a Cuckoo flew out as we reached the top of the plantation. Carrying on, as we walked across open farmland, Curlews called from nearby fields and Skylark were singing in good numbers. Our route then took us along the border between the heather moorland of Mull Head and the pools just behind the plantation. Looking across the pools in bright sunlight, we found a smart Red-throated Diver, with a second bird a short time later. Lots of Greylags were also present on and around the pools with dozens of various age goslings among the waterside vegetation. The pools also held a handful of European Teal and a couple of Gadwall too.

As we slowly wandered along toward the clifftop path, Common Snipe were heard drumming overhead with several birds being seen. This sound was new for some of the group and is always a joy to hear. Very close to the path, we stopped to watch a cracking pair of Arctic Skuas on territory. They sat, quite boldly, on grassy tufts among the heather and from a distance of maybe 50 yards, we watched through the scope, and could see in clear detail their smart, silky, chocolate-brown plumage. When they took short defensive flights, we could also note how elegant these stunning birds are in flight.

A nearby pool gave us good views of Snipe on the deck with another Teal for size comparison.

Reaching the cliff top path, we took a short detour to have a look a breeding Shag colony. These birds were nesting in a very narrow ravine with a drop to the sea of maybe 60 or 70 feet. We stood above on a wooden platform and looked down into some of the nests, most of which held three or four fluffy but well grown youngsters. We were also able to see the beautiful glossy, scaled green plumage of the adults and their emerald green eyes in the bright light.

From here we began to slowly make our way back towards the minibus, some of the group taking a relatively direct route over the grasslands, whilst others wandered along the rugged cliff path. Here we saw a few Rock Pipits, and a couple of Great Skuas patrolled by. Raven were also noted as were one or two Puffins out to sea.

Nearly back at the bus, we stopped briefly to look down into the “Gloup”, a collapsed sea cave. From the viewing platforms we could see down and noted Rock Doves, Black Guillemot and several Swallows and House Martins below us.

Pleased to have given our legs a bit of a stretch, we set off towards Kirkwall, taking in a short detour to Mill Sand at Tankerness. As we pulled up and hopped out of the bus, another Short-eared Owl quartered back and forth over nearby farmland. The bay held up to twenty Bar-tailed godwits, a number of Oystercatcher were preening in a nearby fresh water stream and one or two Common Redshank fed on the flats.

Time had well and truly caught up with us, so we headed back to Kirkwall and the hotel. Meeting in the lounge before dinner, we went through the daily log and had a natter about our plans for tomorrow over a drink. A good day had by all, with great weather and plenty of birds.

Day 3

Tuesday 6th June

A fine, settled if a little cool start greeted the early risers for our daily pre-breakfast excursion today. Heading just a couple of kilometres from Kirkwall town centre we arrived at the Head of Work, the middle of three small promontories just to the north-east of the town.

As we de-bussed we looked out over the Bay of Carness and the large salmon farm that is prominent in the bay. The fish cages are a big draw to other species, with large numbers of gulls often found here. As we scanned, we found several hundred Common Eider both in the water and roosting on the flotation rings of the cages, while closer in, Cormorant and Shag dived for fish, and a few Arctic Terns dipped for fry in the shallows much closer to us. The air was full of the song of Skylark and the bubbling of Curlew - so great to notice two of our nationally struggling species in such prolific numbers on Orkney. As we wandered along, Redshank alerted all to our presence, and a number of Meadow Pipits got up from the path in front of us.

Between our position and the nearby island of Shapinsay is the deep-water channel called "The String", which gives large shipping access to Kirkwall and we watched as one of the many cruise ships that visit Orkney each summer quietly slipped by. The channel held lots of Black Guillemot, maybe 30 or so and a couple of Grey Seals lurked about close to the rocks.

Just behind us a pair of Arctic Skuas stood on guard, much as the Mull Head birds did but much further away, obviously less used to human interaction. A couple of Great Skuas also sat on the skyline, their deep chested, heavy billed profile being very obvious

The time had flown by, and with a walk back to the bus, we made tracks. Common Butterwort were found in the few damp margins by the path-side and a Rock Pipit briefly called as it flew off. Of note during the short drive back to town were the large numbers of Brown Hares in the fields by the road; these were an introduced species to Orkney, but are now very much naturalised and a welcome part of the island's fauna. We'd enjoyed our wee stroll and ready for breakfast, arrived back at the hotel a few minutes later.

With breakfast done, our plan for the day was to cover the "Southern Islands", - everything South of Mainland Orkney. Our first stop was at the Loch of Ayre, at St. Mary's village, where the small freshwater pool held a family of Mute Swans, a dozen Tufted Duck and around twenty Red-breasted Mergansers, while a Sedge Warbler scratched away in the reeds and a number of mixed hirundines hawked over the pool,

From the stone pier we could see a few Common (harbour) Seals loafing among the weed on a rising tide and a couple of Eider Duck fed close by.

From our position we were able to see the first of the four famous Churchill barriers. On the night of the 14th October 1939, the German U-boat U-47, under the command of Gunther Prien quietly slipped into Scapa Flow through Kirk sound, just to the east of where we stood. Three torpedoes were fired at HMS Royal Oak, a Revenge

class battleship which sat peacefully at anchor and of the ship's complement of 1,234 men and boys, 835 were to lose their lives in the coming minutes. The incident rocked the nation, and the response by the then First Lord of the Admiralty, one Winston Churchill, was to commission the construction of permanent structures between the islands south of mainland Orkney.

Labelled a civil project, labour was provided largely by the Italian prisoners of war who were housed on two camps nearby, one each on Lamb Holm and Glimps Holm. The following six years saw the hand-moulding and placement of some 66,000 concrete blocks across the narrows. The figures are staggering: 580,000 tons of stone quarried and 333,000 tons of concrete poured, the blocks being moved by a series of elaborate overhead cables and lowered into place by hand. The barriers changed the lives of Orcadians, as road surfaces were laid on top and the southern islands were connected at last.

As we looked out across the barrier, a stunning summer plumaged Great Northern Diver fed unconcerned by our presence just below us giving super views through the scope, while one or two Common Terns were further out, and a quick scan gave several Black Guillemot in the sound.

Crossing Barrier 1 we arrived on Lamb Holm, a small island of some 40 ha, which, as stated earlier, was the site of one of the WW2 prisoner of war camps. The inmates had been captured in North Africa and transported to Camp 60 on Lamb Holm. The largely Roman Catholic prisoners were afforded at least some "normality" during the war years and converted two disused Nissen huts into a remarkably ornate chapel, complete with frescos and beautiful mouldings (cast in concrete). Today, the Italian Chapel stands in complete preservation, and is held dear by the people of Orkney and visitors alike. We took the opportunity for a look round while the site was quiet and enjoyed the peace while marvelling at the incredible skill expressed by the original craftsmen.

Heading on south, we crossed Barrier 2 onto Glimps Holm (55ha) and Barrier 3 to Burray passing some of the "blockships", - merchant vessels which had been scuttled in the channel preceding the construction of the barriers in an unsuccessful attempt to stop U-boat attacks. Reaching the beach at Barrier No.4, we were greeted by the children from Burray Primary School who were having some outdoor classroom time with the local ranger and one of the RSPB Orkney staff. The kids went on to tell us all about the wonderful work they have been involved in to help preserve and bolster the numbers of breeding Little Terns at this site. They'd been painting decoy terns that are placed around the colony early in the season to encourage birds to settle and they had also produced signage to help local users of the beach to be mindful of the terns. It was great to listen to the children and encouraging to see schools engaging with the environment.

Tern numbers seemed to be fairly strong and we estimated that at least 50 birds were using the colony, slightly up year on year. Not wanting to get too close, we stood a while and watched Common Ringed Plover, also breeding on the shore here. Many Pied Wagtails and several Meadow Pipits were feeding on the strand line and three Skylark shuffled along just in front of us. Also of note here was a small but healthy looking patch of Oysterplant; this unusual looking plant is in fairly steady decline and now largely confined to Scotland. It is named after the flavour of its leaves, (never tested this!).

The beautifully calm bay in front of us held another three Great Northern Divers, (two summer plumage and a bird in heavy moult). A single Great Skua passed by at distance and Arctic Terns gave a nice size comparison against the tiny and delicate Littles. Although we could have stood in the warm sunshine for hours, we had much

to see, so we moved on, down onto South Ronaldsay, stopping for a quick coffee at a roadside van on the way. Motoring right to the bottom of “South Ron”, we reached Bur Wick, where we found a comfy spot to sit overlooking the rocky bay and had lunch. Pairs of Common Eider picked among the shallows, the odd Arctic Tern hawked and the vegetation around us held Linnet and Meadow Pipit.

With a relaxed lunch “taken care of” we wandered to the viewpoint overlooking the Pentland Firth, where we spent a short time scanning the calm and deceptively benign-looking waters in the hope of spotting some cetaceans; alas, all quiet today, just a few Atlantic Grey Seals, a handful of Shags on the rocks below and the odd Puffin passing by out to sea. From the viewpoint we could see across to the Caithness coast where both Dunnet and Duncansby Head lighthouses were in clear view and the uninhabited Pentland islands of Stroma and Swona screamed for exploration! As we walked back to the minibus, several Rock Pipits flicked between the boulders and the grassy path, some with bills stuffed with food items; the birds were obviously feeding young very close by so we quickly moved on and left them in peace.

Wanting to slowly “bird” our way back towards Kirkwall, we travelled the few km north to Mossetter for a walk around Olav’s wood. The modest plantation has a network of pathways and has produced some good birds in the past; being the only woodland this far south in Orkney, it’s always worth a look. A couple of singing Goldcrest, Greenfinch and Linnet were our only rewards today but it was good to get a wee leg stretch and see the slightly eclectic mix of planting here over the years.

Continuing on North, through St Margaret’s Hope and out to Hoxa, we arrived at the Sands of Wright, for another short walk around the small nature reserve there. This comprises a tiny area of marshland with a small area of open water, surrounding willow scrub and rank grasslands, with another larger pool closer to the sea a little further on. As we walked, several Curlew called from nearby fields and a very obliging bird sat on a fencepost giving great photo opportunities. Two snipe drummed overhead and a drake Teal slinked off into poolside plants. Reaching the larger area of water, a number of Arctic Terns were present, some feeding and others perched on posts, where we were able to see their characteristic deep, blood red bills and incredibly short legs! A handful of Tufted Duck and two Moorhen were also on the pool.

Continuing on, a large female Sparrowhawk steamed through low and fast, with only some of the group managing to “lock on”,

Soon arriving back at the shoreside, a quick scan across Widewall Bay produced up to four Red-throated divers with what was probably a Great Northern much further out in the strong haze.

With an eye on the time, we decided to carry on north, back across the barriers and on towards Kirkwall, although a diversion to the Loch of Tankerness saw us add a smart male Hen Harrier on our way back to the hotel. Arriving back in reasonable time, we’d had a very varied day, learnt a little of the significance of Orkney to the war effort and seen some great birds along the way. The glorious weather had helped, and we settled in for another natter in the lounge to discuss plans for tomorrow.

Day 4

Wednesday 7th June

An early start for all today, leaving the hotel by 06:45, and we made for the quay in Kirkwall to catch the ferry north to Westray. Arriving in plenty of time we looked out over the outer harbour for a few minutes picking up a small feeding group of Arctic Terns, a couple of Shag and a single Cormorant. Boarding the MV Earl Sigurd, (named after Sigurd Hlodvirsson, a famous 11th century Earl of Caithness, who regularly set off to plunder the Western Isles and Ireland and who also enjoyed a good scrap with the Scots!) we soon began the 1 ½ hour trip to Westray. The day had started a little dull, but with a clearing sky and a comfortable view out to starboard we enjoyed watching the increasing number of Auks that passed in all directions. Long strings of Common Guillemots and Razorbills gave us a great opportunity to compare their id features in flight and by the end of the trip, group members had really got to grips with sorting these birds out from each other, with the confidence to call them out! Continuing on, many Black Guillemots were noted, some close enough to the boat that we could see their bright red feet underwater as they dived out of the way, a number of Grey Seals were hauled out on little Green Holm and the appropriately named “Seal Skerry”.

The trip north took us up past the islands of Shapinsay, and Eday to starboard with Gairsay, Wyre, Egilsay and Rousay off to the port side, and all too soon we approached Westray and disembarked at Rapness, the southernmost point of Westray.

Setting off in the minibus, we headed slowly north. The roadside verges were carpeted in Northern Marsh Orchids, their large deep purple heads very distinctive even from the van. Our first stop on the island was at the Loch of Swartmill, just 6 km from the ferry slip. This small freshwater loch can hold huge numbers of birds, particularly during the autumn migration period, although today was somewhat quieter unfortunately, the highlight being an adult Whooper Swan among the many mutes. An unseasonal find, this bird had been present since the winter and for whatever reason had failed to travel north in the spring. A few Teal hugged the far bank and a pair of Gadwall dropped in briefly. We stood a while hoping to hear the elusive Corncrake, for which this area had been good in the past but speaking to a local resident birder later on, none had been recorded on the island so far this year. We were really satisfied though to just stand and enjoy the drumming Snipe overhead; such an evocative sound of the summer up here and new to some of the group.

After a quick comfort stop in Pierowall, the main settlement on Westray, we headed west some 5 km towards Noup Head taking the very rough track slowly up to the lighthouse. Constructed in 1898 by the famous Stevenson family its 24m tower stands atop the 79 metre cliffs. Approaching the lighthouse, two Wheatear flicked among trackside rocks, and a single Bonxie sat on the exposed grasslands.

Parking up, a very short stroll took us to the cliff edge where we set up the scopes for a good look at the huge numbers of seabirds here, the rising aroma giving away their presence long before we could see them! The seabird colony here is by far Orkney's largest, approximate numbers (pre birdflu) being follows, Guillemot, 60,000. Kittiwake, 25,000 pairs. Razorbill, 3,000 and up to 1,500 Gannet. The gannet count is astonishing considering the first three pairs nested here in 2015! As well as the big count species, we also enjoyed watching the comings and goings of smaller numbers of Puffin, Fulmar and lots of Rock Doves. Notable by their absence in any numbers were Great Skuas (Bonxie). I first saw this sudden decline last year and it seems to have carried on sadly. Great Skuas have been particularly badly affected by the current waves of H5N1 due in part to their primary feeding strategy as scavengers.

Scoping the terraces, we could pick out a decent number of “Bridled” Guillemot among the regulars; although the same species, this slight variation are more numerous the further north one travels in Europe, their pencil thin white “Spectacles” standing out among the masses.

We eventually had to tear ourselves away - a difficult task on what had now become a day of glorious sunshine. The sea was flat calm with a sunlit shimmer; looking south, we could just make out the island of Birsay and the Kitchener memorial at Marwick, and with a squint, the hazy outline of the Caithness coastline was just visible, some 80 miles away.

Our next stop was for lunch at Noltland Castle on the way back into Pierowall. This incredibly imposing structure was built around 1560 by Gilbert Balfour, a member of the new Scottish aristocracy. He was a less than popular figure and a serial meddler in politics, and his troubled history is well reflected in the architecture of the castle, its metres thick walls, tiny entrance doorway and 71 gun ports suggesting that he knew well the vulnerable position he had put himself in locally! Eventually fleeing to Sweden and continuing to get involved in the business of others, he was ultimately executed for treason in 1576.

From the castle walls we could view across to the Loch of Burness, here we picked up at least three dark Arctic Skuas as they preened in the freshwater, while two Bonxies also did the same.

After lunch and our look around the castle, we made for the village for a visit to the fabulous Westray heritage centre. This wee building is ram packed with all things appertaining to Westray, a huge archive of records being available with exhibits about the island’s past and future. The star attraction here is the “Orkney Venus” locally and affectionately known as the “Westray Wifey”! This carved figurine, standing just 4cm tall, was excavated from the links of Noltland just around the corner and the tiny figure was, at the time of discovery in 2009, the earliest representation of the human form in Europe, dating back to around 3,000BC. With a few mementos purchased from the shop we looked out across Pierowall Bay, where a smart non breeding plumage Great Northern Diver fished in the shallows giving good scope views before we moved on and headed for a slow drive to Westside. Again quiet, Sedge Warbler, Linnet, Wren and a handful of Common Redshank being some of very few species noted.

Our meandering route around the island took us to what has become a must for visitors. Just a couple of kilometres north of Rapness lies the Castle O’Burrian, a small grass covered sea stack at the end of a ten minute walk. The well-made cliff top path is surrounded by wildflowers, including Red and Sea Campions, Thrift in huge swathes, Spring Squill, Cuckoo Flower and Trefoils all set against a background of shimmering Silverweed with its small yellow flowers.

The star birds here are the numerous Puffins and we encountered our first just a hundred metres from the carpark. Apart from a few dozen pairs of Fulmar here the puffins are the only birds present in any numbers, a much quieter scene than the busy cliffs to the north. With the sun backlighting the stack, we settled in for a good long session just watching and enjoying the birds. A few Rock Pipits foraged among the grasses with one or two Black Guillemot sat on the sea and a couple of Raven “Cronked” overhead before we eventually had to force ourselves to get up and head for the van. Our time on Westray was nearly done, but a quick detour on the way to Rapness was made to the bay of Tafts, where in glorious sunshine, we stood on the white sand and had a quick scan along the beach.

A handful of Sanderling and Dunlin were picked out in the strong haze and an adult Great Northern Diver gave reasonable views out in the bay. Reluctantly we soon moved on and arrived at the quay in good time to board the MV Varaggen for our voyage home. This ferry doesn't give the same views out as the morning ship, so we settled in and just enjoyed the early evening sunshine. A few Gannet were noted and two very brief Harbour Porpoise were seen by some before we reached Kirkwall at around 19:30 for a well-earned dinner and run through tomorrow's plans. A lovely day had been had by all, with great weather and some super sightings.

Day 5

Thursday 8th June

Early risers this morning were met with a grey and much cooler sky. Visibility was limited, and prospects looked less than promising, so let's get to it! A very short drive out of Kirkwall took us to Wideford Hill, the steep road to the summit of which can be a good spot for raptors and gives a broad panorama of Wide Firth away up to the Northern Isles and across Kirkwall. Today we could see around 50 yards! A smart male Wheatear was the highlight whilst up on the hill. Soon deciding our time would be better spent lower down, we turned north towards Finstown and Stewart immediately noted what was first thought to be a Buzzard drop down into a ditch at the roadside. Slowly creeping the minibus towards the bird, we were all soon blown away as a stunning Short-eared Owl hopped up and sat on fenceposts just a few metres from us! We sat for several minutes as it preened and were left close to speechless when it eventually drifted off to continue its hunt. None of us, myself included had ever had an encounter with a Short-eared that had come even close to this one, I'd seen them in the hand in the past, but this experience with a wild bird was something else!

With a little time to spare before breakfast, we motored on towards Finstown and took the small road through Heddle and on down towards Kirbister. Explaining to the group about the winter Hen Harrier roosts locally, what should hop up and drift across the road right in front of us? As if on cue, a gorgeous male harrier, glowing almost white in the now improving conditions; we could clearly see his bright yellow eyes and legs as he quartered back and forth over roadside pasture. The supporting cast of decent views of Cuckoo in flight, lots of Curlew and dozens of Brown Hares left us well satisfied with our efforts - not a bad start to any day!

With breakfast taken care of, we all set off west towards our pre-booked visit to the world-famous neolithic site at Skara Brae. Although numbers of visitors here can be large, it's an essential stop-off during any visit to these islands. Our route across took us up through Brodgar, the narrow strip of land surrounded by large expanses of freshwater, situated in the south-western part of Mainland Orkney. Just at the top end of the RSPB Brodgar reserve lie the Brodgar Pools, a series of shallow, small lagoons that dry out during hot summers, leaving muddy margins which are worth a look from the roadside. We stopped and set up the scope and soon found a rather dapper looking summer plumaged Curlew Sandpiper among the Dunlin and Common Ringed Plovers. The brick red Curlew Sands always give a slight feel of the exotica, and never fail to impress when picked out among the masses! The short drive, just 15 mins from Brodgar to Skara Brae took us through more of the expansive farmland of Mainland Orkney. The agricultural landscape here is made up largely of intensive ryegrass for silage making and to the growing of Barley. The move to silage as the primary winter feed for the thousands of cattle and sheep on Orkney has seen some pressures on the breeding bird populations, but the many damper, less productive areas are still rich with birdlife, with Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Snipe being noted almost everywhere.

Passing along the northern shore of the Loch of Skail, which is a winter magnet for wildfowl, we arrived at Skara Brae, passed through the very slick visitor centre and walked down to the site. Some 5,000 years ago, life on Orkney

was obviously very different, with large areas of woodland, full of deer. Boar and wolves prevailed, then along came the early settlers, the hunter gatherers, the farmers and fishers. Skip ahead nearly five millennia, and a great storm in 1850 blew away the deep covering of sand that entombed the settlement at Skara Brae. Excavations over the following years, and into the next century revealed a fascinating look into the past and the remarkably well-preserved buildings and artefacts recovered subsequently are on display to this day. The well-trodden path around the village allows us to peer down into the buildings and use our imagination to paint a picture of what life would have been like in 3,000BC. My image is one of relative comfort, with cosy, warm houses, and extended families all working to the greater good, with plenty to eat from the woodlands, land and seas around the area. Evidence suggests that the relatively small population probably led peaceable lives with little or no in-fighting, (step ahead two thousand years for a different picture!)

Looking out across the Bay of Skail, a single Red-throated Diver fed close in and a Sedge Warbler scratched away from deep cover close by. Having had our fill of the neolithic ruins, we walked the short distance to Skail House, the then home of William Watt, who discovered the ruins after the storm. The fine mansion house allows access to most of the rooms occupied by the family at that time and is full of artefacts ranging from militaria to homewares, with accounts of tours to far off lands and mementos presented to the family by guests over the years, who have included Lady Jane Franklin, the officers of HMS Resolution and HM Queen Elizabeth II to name but a few!

With warm sunshine now set in, we decided we would leave the crowds and seek some peace and quiet for lunch. Just a few kilometres north lies Marwick Bay and a tidal lagoon called the “Choin”, where we sat in comfort on the large beach stones and enjoyed the comings and goings of the many Kittiwakes that fed just off shore. Several thousand in large feeding flocks was a very rough estimate, while easier to count were Shelduck and Eider close by, each with young of varying ages, Three Bonxies preened in a small freshwater outlet into the bay and a smart male Wheatear flicked along the weedline of the beach. Scots Lovage, one of the scarcer plants of the region, grows in some profusion here, its slightly bitter, celery and aniseed flavoured leaves being distinctive.

With a relaxed lunch done, we were in need of a little leg stretch, so we drove the very short distance to the Marwick Head car park and walked the 1km or so up to the Kitchener memorial that overlooks the high cliffs here. The imposing tower that can be seen from many miles away was erected by the people of Orkney to mark the loss of Lord Kitchener, who perished with over 730 sailors when HMS Hampshire struck a mine leaving Scapa Flow heading for Russia in early June 1916. One hundred years later, in June 2016, a wall with the names of all lost that night was added here, a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by so many.

We stood on the clifftop and breathed in, both visually and aurally, the sights, sounds and smells of the busy seabird colonies below. All the usual players were present in good numbers, with the Kittiwakes making a particular racket! We were pleased to finally see some Arctic Skua action with a few patrolling birds making lunges at passing auks; their acrobatic prowess and ability to change direction without losing speed is incredible.

The views from Marwick are stunning, and we were able to clearly see the Old Man of Hoy to the south and away to the Caithness coastline on the mainland. With lots still to do today we gradually made our way back to the van, enjoying the warmth and the sound of the many singing Skylarks that seemed to be all around us. Several Heath Spotted Orchids were noted as we approached the car park.

Just a couple of kilometres to the east lies the Loons RSPB reserve and the Loch of Isbister where we sat in the comfortable hide to see what we could find. Initially the reedbed and pool looked quiet, but, as is often the case with bird hides, a little patience and time can often be rewarding. Black-tailed Godwits breed here in very small numbers - never more than a few pairs, so we were delighted to find these birds perched on posts and in flight at some distance. I think one would struggle to name a more elegant and beautifully marked wader than a summer plumaged Black-tail, their deep brick red upper parts, and black and white underwing in flight making them so distinctive.

A surprise to us all here was a female Pintail with very tiny ducklings, which we enjoyed watching at close range. However, we weren't the only ones to be watching them. The following minutes were hard to take in for all of us, as an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull dropped in and systematically reduced their numbers, the mother desperately trying to protect her brood. Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Sedge Warbler were also seen before we moved on. We hoped the gull had had its fill, but had to accept that things didn't look good for the Pintail family as we left.

Just along the road, as part of the same reserve, stands the listening wall, a curved, free standing concrete wall that is designed to reflect and amplify the sounds of the marsh. We sat in the warmth here, and for a minute closed our eyes, just using our ears to absorb nature, Drumming Snipe overhead, Lapwing and Oystercatcher alarm calls, bubbling Curlew, the piping of Redshank and the wind through the reeds all making for a magical experience. I for one, since sitting here, have continued to do this frequently whilst out birding and am certain my senses have been sharpened!

As the day was now wearing on, we tore ourselves away and headed for our final stop of the day, the Ring of Brodgar, part of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney world heritage site.

This classic henge, some 104m in diameter stands prominent in the landscape. Today 27 of the original 60 stones remain, and when built, the surrounding ditch, which today is a grassy depression, was the most impressive part of the structure, as it was 3m deep and 10m wide and was cut into bedrock. Although even the experts can only guess as to the true purpose of this site, its importance to the population 5,000 years ago is obvious. The path from the carpark up to the stones was covered with the caterpillars of the Garden Tiger moth, and we had to be careful where we trod. Snipe both drummed overhead and made their odd "chep chep chep chep chep" call from deep cover as we walked around the stones.

We had the site virtually to ourselves given the time of day, which afforded good photo opportunities before we set off back towards Kirkwall and dinner. We'd had a great day with plenty of memorable sightings and had scratched the surface into the long and rich human history of Orkney.

Day 6

Friday 9th June

06:00, and a full house for today's pre breakfast trip out very impressive! Today started cool, overcast and a little breezy, but dry with a prospect for an improvement later on. We trundled just out of Kirkwall to Heatherquoy which overlooks Inganess Bay, a picturesque spot where the prominent feature is the wreck of the Juniana, a small coastal tanker that was towed here after the last war to be scrapped. This never happened so she still sits here today, upright and is very slowly being re-claimed by nature. The hulk provides a safe nesting site for several pairs

of Arctic Terns and Fulmars, with more of the latter using the quiet, grassy low cliffs on the western side of the bay as safe haven.

From the car park, we took a stroll along the footpath that heads back towards Scapa Bay, which took us through a rich area of wetland with deep reedbeds, marsh plants and scattered willow scrub. Sedge Warblers were immediately obvious with some good close views of singing birds sat in prominent positions, and a treat was the smart Short-eared Owl that put in a brief appearance close to airfield buildings nearby; this has become a pretty reliable site for “Shorties” over the last few years and they never fail to impress!

Stewart nipped back and took the bus around to meet the group at the other end. Marsh plants noted included Water Avens, Marsh Cinquefoil, Bogbean and Marsh Marigold amongst others. The tiny stream held lots of small fish which looked to be Sticklebacks from a distance. Coot, Moorhen and Mallard, as well as several Sand Martins were seen as well before reaching the bus. With a little time to spare before breakfast, we drove out past the airfield to Tankerness, an area that has, in the past, been good for owls and harriers. We struggled today but were surprised at the number of Brown Hares in almost every field. Some small fields held dozens of feeding animals, and we certainly saw over 50 this morning!

After breakfast we set off towards Finstown once again and took the single-track lane behind the tidal lagoon called “The Ouse” in the direction of Norseman village. Common Buzzard and Kestrel worked along the hillside, yet more Curlew probed into recently worked arable fields and a single Raven was seen nearby.

Reaching the road end we then made for RSPB Cottascarth, and the Eddie Balfour Hen Harrier hide. Parking at Lower Cottascarth we walked the 10 minutes to the ruins of Dale Croft and the very comfortable and plush viewing building. Our short walk was very productive, with two more Ravens drifting in, Cuckoo was heard and unexpectedly, a Spotted Flycatcher was sat atop a small clump of conifers in the open, a less likely spot fly site I’ve never seen! Hen Harrier was seen before we’d even reached the hide, with a female (ringtail) floating in from the moors. We were also pleased to see a carpet of both Heath Spotted and Common Spotted Orchids and probably every hybrid in between!

Once at the hide we settled in and didn’t have to wait long before the ghostly shape of a male Hen Harrier floated in on stiff wings, and some of the group were quick, and lucky enough, to see the female rise up from the heather for a food pass; this happens so quickly it is very easy to be blinking and miss it! Both birds put on a good show over the next few minutes with prolonged views of them working the bowl of the nearby heather clad hillside.

Two, probably a pair, of Red-throated Divers flew rapidly over the ridgeline, no doubt just off one of the moorland lochans and heading out to sea to feed. With us all watching for more Harrier action, a Kestrel flew in from the left with a smaller bird in pursuit, which turned out to be a gorgeous male Merlin, his slate grey mantle glowing in the sunshine as the two falcons twisted and turned. The smaller falcon was seemingly relentless, easily matching the kestrel for aerobatic prowess! The fight eventually broke off, with both birds no doubt needing to catch their breaths! Cuckoo was next on the list to give good views, with two birds being seen in trees close by on the way back to the van.

With a fairly full itinerary planned today, we left Cottascarth well satisfied and made for a comfort stop at Evie; the loos here just happen to be at a great birding spot! As we scanned out across Eynhallow Sound towards the

island of Rousay two Red-throated Divers flew in and landed right in front of us. In good light we could make out their bright red throats and all were able to note this species' characteristic bill-up head carriage. A few Red-breasted Mergansers and passing Shag added to our tally too.

With it being just about lunchtime, we drove up to yet another RSPB site, the hide at Bugar Hill, which overlooks Lowries Water, a relatively small loch of around two acres. Initially it looked fairly lifeless with few birds on the water, but a scan gave us many Greylag Geese sat in the deep vegetation and a Bonxie weighing up its options from a tuft of grass a little distance away! As we ate lunch, a cracking Red-throated Diver dropped in just in front of us, its contact with the water better described as a controlled crash rather than a landing! The hide here is situated under a series of five large wind turbines. The divers follow a very predictable flight path out to sea to feed and it was great to see that the energy company shuts down the one turbine that could affect the birds during the breeding season!

History is very evident on Orkney. We'd seen into our Neolithic past, learnt about the Norse influence and the strategic importance of Orkney to the war effort is marked by the many military buildings and gun batteries that still remain, so we now went for something in between! Just down the road at Aikerness lies the Broch of Gurness, dating back to the first millenium BC, and this wonderful ruin offers an "access all areas" look into a time of uncertainty and conflict for Orkney. Evidence suggests that the site was occupied well into the 5th century AD and used occasionally for burials into the 9th. Gurness is situated on a small promontory overlooking Rousay, and is made up of a central defensive broch, originally 12 metres in height, with a number of smaller dwellings around the outside, all encased by three deep ditches and high walls for protection. Today, the walls of the broch provide a safe nesting place for many Starlings, and a few pairs of Wren, and the recently built sea defences give home to Fulmars. A quick look out into Eynhallow sound from the broch gave up to four Red-throated Divers close in with lots of Black Guillemot, Razorbills and Shag too. The flat rocks close to the car park held a number of Arctic Terns, and up to 23 Red-breasted Mergansers snorkelled for food in a sheltered bay nearby as we left.

After a drive of about 12km, passing the Loch of Swannay, we arrived at Birsay in the north-west corner of Mainland. Some went for a walk along the road whilst we scanned the shore for waders. Turnstone, Dunlin and a few Sanderling picked sandhoppers from the weed-line with Redshank, Curlew and Oystercatcher further out.

We'd witnessed raw nature earlier on with the Pintail family at the Loons, and while looking out at the Eiders here at Birsay, a Great Black-backed Gull appeared from nowhere and predated a couple of Eider ducklings right in front of us. The mothers actively defended their young and the apex predator moved away before all were lost. Large gulls must account for a huge number of young birds around here, but the seemingly healthy populations of all commoner species suggest there is a balance. Just around the corner, we took a wander through the ruins of the 16th century Earl's palace. This imposing structure was built by Earl Robert Stewart, half-brother to Mary Queen of Scots and was of elegant design, a showpiece to demonstrate wealth and status - a far cry from the heavily defensive Noltland Castle on Westray that we'd seen earlier in the week and built around the same time. We grabbed a quick coffee from the Birsay stores before heading on. Time was catching up with us and we still had a couple of places we wanted to visit.

Cutting across the centre of Mainland we ended up once again at Brodgar, this time to look at the stones of Stenness and the Barnhouse settlement. The three massive standing stones, standing up to 6m in height are all that remains of a henge that once consisted of 12 similar slabs. Some of the structure was toppled by a local farmer in

the 1970's to the dismay of locals and was not rebuilt as nobody could put the jigsaw together again! The nearby Barnhouse settlement was very different in nature to Skara Brae, which was occupied around the same time, The residents of Barnhouse may have been higher ranking, or held positions relating to the ceremonial usage of the henges and Maeshowe; one can only guess, but artefacts found here were of more decorative design, with form as important as function.

The small bird hide here let us look out across the bottom end of the Loch of Harray, the resident Australian Black Swan putting in an appearance; it's almost a rite of passage to connect with this bird during our annual visits now! And yet another Red-throated Diver was visible at distance. Common Tern, Wigeon, Mute Swan and Teal were also noted before calling it a day and heading for Kirkwall. Our final stop of the trip was a return visit to Wideford Hill, which had been fog-bound earlier in the week. This evening, in beautiful clear sunlight, we stood together and admired the view way down onto South Ronaldsay and up as far Stronsay and beyond. St Magnus's Cathedral in Kirkwall positively glowed in the sun and we could see many of the places we'd visited during the week. We'd had a very full day and were all pretty tired by now. With some great sightings "under the belt" we set off and soon arrived at the hotel and settled in for a natter about the day and indeed the week as this was our last day together. Some, myself included, had early departures in the morning to connect with ferries to the mainland, so we were unable to head out in the morning before breakfast.

We'd had a super few days together and had were able to take home some great memories of the wildlife and history of Orkney. I'd like to thank the group for making this a special week; plenty of humour, and lots of keen eyes really helps! I'd been particularly impressed with the turnout for the early morning trips! Hope to meet you all again for another adventure soon, thanks again, Stewart.

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Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023					
		4	5	6	7	8	9
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>				✓		
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓		✓		
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>				✓		
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓				✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			✓			✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>					✓	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓	✓	✓	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓				
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>		✓				
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>		✓	✓	✓		
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓			
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Northern Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓			
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓				
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓				✓
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>						✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓					
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>					✓	
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓				
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓				
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>						✓

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023					
		4	5	6	7	8	9
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>					✓	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>					✓	✓
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				✓		✓
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			✓			
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓			
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Pigeon (Rock Dove)	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>		✓			✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			✓			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓			
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓					✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓				
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓			✓	✓	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>						✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓				
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023					
		4	5	6	7	8	9
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓	✓	✓	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>						✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓			✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓				
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓			✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓	✓		✓

Mammals & invertebrates

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023					
		4	5	6	7	8	9
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>		✓	✓		✓	
Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>				✓		
Invertebrates							
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓				
Northern White-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus magnus</i>		✓				
Moss Carder Bee	<i>Bombus muscorum</i>		✓				

Plants

Common name	Scientific name
Lady-fern	<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>
Marsh Marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>
Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>
Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>
Pink Purslane	<i>Claytonia sibirica</i>
Sea Sandwort	<i>Honckenya peploides</i>
Ragged-Robin	<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>
Sea Campion	<i>Silene uniflora</i>
Red Campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>
Sheep's Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>
Thrift (Sea Pink)	<i>Armeria maritima</i>
Eared Willow	<i>Salix aurita</i>
Cuckooflower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>
Common Scurvygrass	<i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>
Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>
Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>
Scottish Primrose	<i>Primula scotica</i>
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>
Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>
Water Avens	<i>Geum rivale</i>
Kidney Vetch	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>
Bird's-foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Bogbean	<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>
Oysterplant	<i>Mertensia maritima</i>
Water Forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis scorpioides</i>
Sea Plantain	<i>Plantago maritima</i>
Greater Plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>
Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
Lousewort	<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>
Common Butterwort	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>
Creeping Thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Sea Mayweed	<i>Tripleurospermum maritimum</i>
Common Cottongrass	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>
Common Reed	<i>Phragmites australis</i>
Spring Squill	<i>Scilla verna</i>
Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>
Yellow Iris (Yellow Flag)	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>
Heath Spotted-orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i> subsp. <i>Ericetorum</i>
Northern Marsh-orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Lovage	<i>Levisticum officinale</i>
Silverweed	<i>Potentilla anserina</i>
Scots Lovage	<i>Ligusticum scoticum</i>
Marsh Cinquefoil	<i>Comarum palustre</i>