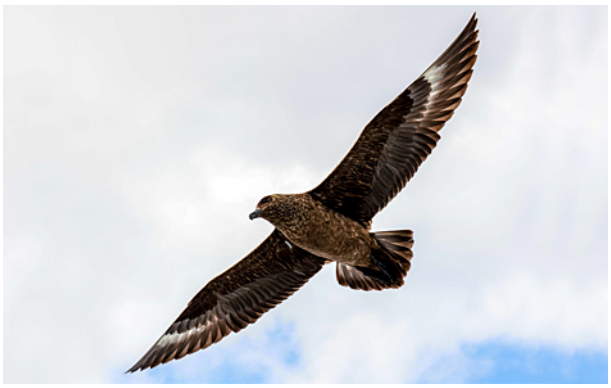
Shetland in Style

Naturetrek Tour Report 10th – 18th July 2026



Killer Whales



Great Skua



Gannet



Puffin

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Tour participants: Mark Woods and Brandon Rowlands (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients

Day 1 Friday 10th July

The group boarded the Northlink ferry in Aberdeen and set sail at 7.00pm. We assembled on the rear deck as we left the harbour, where we saw a mix of gulls, Kittiwakes, Eiders, Fulmars, Gannets and Common Guillemots. Most of us returned inside for dinner, then retired to our cabins for a smooth crossing.

Day 2 Saturday 11th July

We arrived in Lerwick at 7.30am and disembarked to meet the second tour leader, Brandon, in the ferry terminal. We then loaded up the rental vans and set off north to Busta House, our hotel for the week, where most people had a tea or coffee. We set off to the nearby Mavis Grind, a narrow strip of land that separates the North Sea from the Atlantic, then headed on into north-west Mainland. We stopped by a roadside loch, where we found a pair of Whooper Swan and their young cygnets. We also had a Whimbrel appear behind us a few times, calling from the hillside, but best of all was a female Merlin which posed on rocks among the heather, allowing excellent scope views. We continued to another loch, where we found a nice pair of Red-throated Diver, and then moved on to the small village of Hillswick. We scanned the bay here, getting good views of Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Diver, Arctic Tern and Black Guillemot.

We went for lunch at the Braewick café, where we had excellent views of the impressive coastal scenery; in a meadow outside the cafe was a Whimbrel with two chicks, which we watched at length. After some satisfying soup and sandwiches, we made our way to the road end at Eshaness, where we went for a picturesque walk along the clifftops and found Rock Pipit, Turnstone, Ringed Plover, Arctic Skua, Fulmar, Puffin and Razorbill, while out at sea we spotted a couple of pods of Risso's Dolphins. We returned to the Busta House Hotel where we checked into our rooms and relaxed for a while, before meeting again for our first superb dinner together.

Day 3 Sunday 12th July

Today we would be going out to visit the island of Noss, but due to the group size, half would go in the morning, and the others in the afternoon. Brandon's group headed straight for Lerwick to catch the boat, while Mark's went to Loch of Tingwall, where we found several Tufted Ducks with chicks and many Greylag Geese with goslings. We also had a look at some of the plant species, and the location of the old Norse parliament. We were about to head down to the island of Burra when news came through of a pod of Killer Whales off the south of Bressay, so we headed off to the east side of the island and managed to see these awesome marine predators from shore, plus another pod of Risso's Dolphin, these ones showing much closer.

Meanwhile, the others had departed Lerwick for their boat trip and were able to get up close and personal with these great cetaceans. Otherwise, both boat trips had a similar experience with the wonderful mixed colonies on Noss of Common Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Shags. They were much appreciated from the boat, but the real spectacle was the colossal cliffs stacked with nesting Gannets, many of which had chicks. We spent some time around the seabird colonies, then sailed out into the open water to throw some fish for the Gannets, allowing us to see them dive right alongside the boat, with Great Skua and Great Black-backed Gull trying to get in on the action too.

After our trips, one group headed to Bannaminn beach, where they spent some time enjoying this beautiful sandy bay, while the other just had enough time to find the female King Eider in Lerwick harbour; it had been hanging around for several days. We all returned to Busta House for another excellent dinner together.

Day 4 Monday 13th July

Today would be spent in the south of Mainland. We began at Grutness, where many Common Gulls and Arctic Terns came and went from their colonies, and where Ringed Plovers walked about on the pier. Out in the bay was an excellent Great Northern Diver. We went to Sumburgh Head, where we undertook a gentle walk up the cliffs to the lighthouse. Along the way, we were dazzled by the packed Common Guillemot colonies, where several cute chicks were visible. The Shag nests also held well-grown chicks, and many Puffins came and went from their burrows with Sand Eels. From the lighthouse, we scanned the sea and were happy to find another couple of pods of Risso's Dolphins, which we watched at length. Most people opted to get a tea in the café here; then we descended in the sunshine to have lunch on the clifftop near the van, while watching Gannets and Fulmars fly past.

We next travelled the short distance to Jarlshof, where we spent an hour or so exploring the fantastic and remarkably well-preserved ancient ruins; we saw birds like (Shetland) Wren and Wheatear. Loch Spiggie was next, where we scanned the waters from the south end. There were good numbers of Tufted Ducks, with a great many chicks, more Whooper Swan with cygnets, and many Great Skuas were bathing in the water. We still had enough time to visit the beautiful St Ninian's Isle; we walked across the famous long, sandy tombolo and visited the twelfth-century abbey ruins on the island. We saw birds like Twite, Rock Pipit and Red-throated Diver, and a Great Skua and a Great Black-backed Gull were fighting over the remains of a dead seal. We returned to the hotel for dinner.

Day 5 Tuesday 14th July

Today we would travel by ferry to the island of Unst, the most northerly island in the UK. We first crossed to the island of Yell, but wedid not have any time to spend there and drove straight across to catch the next ferry across the Bluemull Sound. Once on Unst, we made straight for Hermaness NNR in the north of the island, where we went for a good walk across the moors, passing several nesting Great Skuas, some with well-grown chicks, and an interesting assortment of plants, including Butterwort and Round-leaved Sundew. Once at the clifftops, we were greeted by spectacular coastal scenery, with the dramatic rocks of Muckle Flugga ahead of us, covered in Gannets. We climbed higher still to the main Gannet colony, where we could marvel at the spectacle from above. The nests were full of well-grown, fluffy chicks, and we spent a good deal of time admiring these wonderful seabirds while we ate our lunch.

We returned to the vans and made our way across the island to the Keen of Hamar, an area of serpentine heath with a unique plant community. Here we found the endemic and beautiful Edomston's Chickweed, along with other botanical treasures like Frog Orchid, Northern Rock Cress, Moonwort and Moss Campion.

It was time to depart this enchanting island, and we caught our two return ferries without incident, getting back in time for dinner at 7.00pm.

Day 6 Wednesday 15th July

Today we would be going on another island-hopping adventure, this time to the island of Fetlar. Again, we had to catch the ferry to the island of Yell, but today we had a bit more time and travelled along the more scenic road around the east side of the island, stopping at a loch on the way, where we found a nice selection of plants and a Red-breasted Merganser. At the top of the island, we spotted another Whooper Swan on a loch, along with a pair of Little Grebes. We then made our ferry for the thirty-minute crossing.

Once on Fetlar, we went straight to Houbie, where we were immediately greeted by Red-necked Phalaropes on the marsh here. We had lunch while we watched these beautiful little waders scooting about on the water's surface: some of them came very close, and it was a super experience. We also spotted Whimbrel, Curlew, Redshank and Lapwing. We stopped at the café, where people got drinks and gifts, and continued to Aith beach, where we found the rare Oysterplant. We sat a while in the sun here, watching the Eiders and Oystercatchers, then continued to Loch Funzie, where we found a large flock of Golden Plovers and several Red-throated Divers, including one with a chick. We went for a walk along the shore and had a few fly-over Arctic Skuas and some nice plants like Field Gentian. At the road's end, we spent a bit of time at the beach, where we found Twite but not much else. We retraced our steps to the west side of the island, where we found a stunning pair of Great Northern Divers, which showed well in the afternoon sun. We then returned to Mainland for dinner.

Later in the evening, we ventured out once more for our night-time excursion to the island of Mousa. We caught the boat for the ten-minute crossing, then took a walk across the island as the summer sky dimmed, while the boat man filled us in on some history. Eventually, we reached the iconic broch, and before long the mysterious Storm Petrels began to make an appearance. At first, just one or two were buzzing around the wall, but their numbers soon built and there were many dozens swirling around. Inside the broch, we listened to their atmospheric calls emanating from within the ancient stonework. We made our way back and returned to the hotel, arriving around 2.00am.

Day 7 Thursday 16th July

After the very late finish yesterday, we departed later today, at 10.30am, and set off for Lunna Ness. Our first stop overlooking a loch gave us some distant views of several Red Grouse, a Mountain Hare and another Whooper Swan pair with chicks. We carried on to the Lunna Kirk area and had a look around the kirk and graveyard, but we did not find much except Oystercatchers, so we continued to Hamnavoe at the end of the peninsula. Here we ate lunch in the sun while watching some fishermen pull in their catches from creels. Many of the fish and crabs were thrown back, but several Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls swooped in and hoovered some of them up. Afterwards, we walked along the coast in the hope of finding an Otter; we had no luck, but we did see a pair of Harbour Porpoises and birds including Whimbrel, Wheatear and Rock Pipit.

The afternoon was running out, but on the return journey we stopped at the small fishing harbour in scenic Voe, where we got great views of nesting Common and Arctic Terns, Black-headed Gulls, a Swallow and a Siskin posed in the tops of some Spruce trees.

Day 8 Friday 17th July

For our final day on Shetland, we would explore the west of Mainland, starting at the Bridge of Walls where, after having been frustrated all week, we finally spotted an Otter resting in the seaweed. We got great views of this large male in the scope, and were then treated to it foraging in the kelp, coming up onto the rocks from time to time when it caught a larger prey item. Eventually, it disappeared under the bridge, and we moved on to Walls.

We continued north past Dale of Walls, where we came across a pair of Mountain Hares on the road; they then posed out on the moor, and we were all able to get great views of these graceful mammals. Moving on, we ended in Sandness, where we had lunch while scanning the scenic bay, finding fishing Gannets, Arctic Skuas and terns, and on the beach a nice selection of waders including summer-plumaged Sanderling, Dunlin, Turnstone and Ringed Plover. We also found Shetland's only Magpie!

It was time to return to Lerwick for our ferry, but we still had time for a visit to Clickimin Loch and broch, where we went for a walk to explore the ruins and the surrounding Birch and Alder scrub. We found Redpoll, Siskin, Blackbird, Tufted Duck, Mute Swan and a vagrant Ring-necked Duck!

We returned to the ferry terminal where we boarded for our 5.00pm departure. As we made our way out to sea, we assembled on deck again, but not much was showing except Fulmars, so we retired for dinner and then our cabins for the overnight crossing.

Day 9 Saturday 18th July

We arrived at the dock in Aberdeen at 7.00am, and the group broke up and made their separate onward journeys, after a superb week enjoying the wildlife and scenery of Shetland.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced		July 2026							
Common name	**Scientific name**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
Greylag Goose	*Anser anser*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	*Cygnus olor*			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Whooper Swan	*Cygnus cygnus*		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	*Anas crecca*		✓						
Tufted Duck	*Aythya fuligula*			✓	✓				✓
King Eider	*Somateria spectabilis*			✓					
Common Eider	*Somateria mollissima*	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Red-breasted Merganser	*Mergus serrator*		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Red Grouse - E	*Lagopus scotica*							✓	
Rock Dove	*Columba livia*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feral Rock Dove - I	*Columba livia 'domestica'*	✓							
Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*			✓			✓		✓
Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*						✓		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	*Haematopus ostralegus*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Golden Plover	*Pluvialis apricaria*						✓		
Common Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*		✓			H	✓	✓	
Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius arquata*		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*					✓	✓		
Red-necked Phalarope	*Phalaropus lobatus*						✓		
Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*		✓						
Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ruddy Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*		✓						✓
Sanderling	*Calidris alba*								✓
Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*			✓	✓		✓		✓
Arctic Tern	*Sterna paradisaea*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*	✓					✓	✓	
Black-legged Kittiwake	*Rissa tridactyla*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Common Gull	*Larus canus*	✓					✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	*Larus argentatus*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	*Larus marinus*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	*Larus fuscus*			✓	✓		✓		✓
Arctic Skua	*Stercorarius parasiticus*		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Skua	*Stercorarius skua*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Atlantic Puffin	*Fratercula arctica*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Black Guillemot	*Cepphus grylle*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Razorbill	*Alca torda*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Guillemot	*Uria aalge*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-throated Diver	*Gavia stellata*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black throated Diver	*Gavia arctica*					✓			
Great Northern Diver	*Gavia immer*				✓		✓		
European Storm Petrel	*Hydrobates pelagicus*						✓	✓	
Northern Fulmar	*Fulmarus glacialis*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sooty Shearwater	*Ardenna grisea*			✓					

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced		July 2026							
Common name	**Scientific name**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
Manx Shearwater	*Puffinus puffinus*				✓				
Northern Gannet	*Morus bassanus*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
European Shag	*Gulosus aristotelis*	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*					✓			
Merlin	*Falco columbarius*		✓						
Hooded Crow	*Corvus cornix*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	*Corvus corax*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sand Martin	*Riparia riparia*				✓				
Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*						✓	✓	
Common Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*				H				
Eurasian Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*		H		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Redwing	*Turdus iliacus*						✓		
Common Blackbird	*Turdus merula*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*				✓				
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*			✓	✓		✓		
Redpoll	*Acanthis flammea*								✓
Eurasian Siskin	*Spinus spinus*							✓	

Mammals

		July 2026							
Common name	**Scientific name**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
European Rabbit	*Oryctolagus cuniculus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mountain Hare	*Lepus timidus*			✓				✓	✓
Killer Whale	*Orcinus orca*			✓					
Risso's Dolphin	*Grampus griseus*		✓	✓	✓				
Harbour Porpoise	*Phocoena phocoena*							✓	
Grey Seal	*Halichoerus grypus*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harbour Seal	*Phoca vitulina*		✓	✓					
Eurasian Otter	*Lutra lutra*								✓

Butterflies

		July 2026							
Common name	**Scientific name**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
Large White	*Pieris brassicae*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red Admiral	*Vanessa atalanta*				✓	✓	✓		
Painted Lady	*Vanessa cardui*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Bees

		July 2026							
Common name	**Scientific name**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
Northern White-tailed Bumblebee	*Bombus magnus*		✓		✓	✓			
Shetland Bumblebee	*Bombus muscorum agricolae*		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	

Plants

Common name	**Scientific name**
Hard Fern	*Blechnum spicant*
Bracken	*Pteridium aquilinum*
Sitka Spruce	*Picea sitchensis*
Common Nettle	*Urtica dioica*
Common Sorrel	*Rumex acetosa*
Japanese Knotweed	*Reynoutria japonica*
Arctic (Edmonston's) Mouse-ear	*Cerastium nigrescens* var. *nigrescens*
Common Chickweed	*Stellaria media*
Sea Sandwort	*Honckenya peploides*
Ragged-Robin	*Silene flos-cuculi*
Sea Campion	*Silene uniflora*
Moss Campion	*Silene acaulis*
Red Campion	*Silene dioica*
Marsh-marigold	*Caltha palustris*
Meadow Buttercup	*Ranunculus acris*
Creeping Buttercup	*Ranunculus repens*
Dame's Violet	*Hesperis matronalis*
Sea Rocket	*Cakile maritima*
Cuckooflower	*Cardamine pratensis*
Common Scurvygrass	*Cochlearia officinalis*
a lady's-mantle	*Alchemilla* sp.
Meadowsweet	*Filipendula ulmaria*
Silverweed	*Potentilla anserina*
Tormentil	*Potentilla erecta*
Marsh Cinquefoil	*Comarum palustre*
Common Bird's-foot-trefoil	*Lotus corniculatus*
Kidney Vetch	*Anthyllis vulneraria*
White Clover	*Trifolium repens*
Red Clover	*Trifolium pratense*
Tufted Vetch	*Vicia cracca*
Meadow Vetchling	*Lathyrus pratensis*
Meadow Cranesbill	*Geranium pratense*
Heath Milkwort	*Polygala serpyllifolia*
Sycamore	*Acer pseudoplatanaus*
Common Dog-violet	*Viola riviniana*
Broad-leaved Willowherb	*Epilobium montanum*
Marsh Pennywort	*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*
Cow Parsley	*Anthriscus sylvestris*
Ground-elder	*Aegopodium podagraria*
Hogweed	*Heracleum sphondylium*

Common name	Scientific name
Pignut	*Conopodium majus*
Heather	*Calluna vulgaris*
Bell Heather	*Erica cinerea*
Thrift (Sea Pink)	*Armeria maritima*
Heath Bedstraw	*Galium saxatile*
Lady's Bedstraw	*Galium verum*
Water Forget-me-not	*Myosotis scorpioides*
Wild Thyme	*Thymus drucei*
Self-heal	*Prunella vulgaris*
Foxglove	*Digitalis purpurea*
Yellow-rattle	*Rhinanthus minor*
an eyebright	*Euphrasia* sp.
Sea Plantain	*Plantago maritima*
Ribwort Plantain	*Plantago lanceolata*
Buck's-horn Plantain	*Plantago coronopus*
Round-leaved Sundew	*Drosera rotundifolia*
Common Butterwort	*Pinguicula vulgaris*
Monkeyflower	*Erythranthe guttata*
Bogbean	*Menyanthes trifoliata*
Devil's-bit Scabious	*Succisa pratensis*
Sheep's-bit	*Jasione montana*
Yarrow	*Achillea millefolium*
Daisy	*Bellis perennis*
Sea Mayweed	*Tripleurospermum maritimum*
Pineappleweed	*Matricaria discoidea*
Common Groundsel	*Senecio vulgaris*
Colt's-foot	*Tussilago farfara*
Perennial Sow-thistle	*Sonchus arvensis*
Spear Thistle	*Cirsium vulgare*
Creeping Thistle	*Cirsium arvense*
Orange Hawkweed	*Pilosella aurantiaca*
Dandelion	*Taraxacum officinale* agg.
Mountain Everlasting	*Antennaria dioica*
Marsh Ragwort	*Jacobaea aquatica*
Common Cottongrass	*Eriophorum angustifolium*
Hare's-tail Cottongrass	*Eriophorum vaginatum*
Bog Pondweed	*Potamogeton polygonifolius*
Spring Squill	*Scilla verna*
Bluebell	*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*
Ramsons (Wild Garlic)	*Allium ursinum*
Yellow Iris	*Iris pseudacorus*
Frog Orchid	*Dactylorhiza viridis*
Heath Spotted Orchid	*Dactylorhiza maculata*
Northern Marsh Orchid	*Dactylorhiza purpurella*