

Scotland's Mammals & Highlights of the Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Report

9th – 16th August 2022



Garden Tiger



Naturetrek group in the field!



Pine Marten



Coastal scene

Tour report and images by Dave Jackson



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Tour participants – Dave Jackson & Bob Gill (Leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The second of our early Autumn tours to the Ardnamurchan peninsula was well attended with 11 guests. We visited historic sites at Camas nan Geall, the ruined Castle Tioram, strategically placed on Loch Moidart and a deserted township on the way to Sanna, one of the most picturesque beaches on the peninsula where Sand Martins and Northern Wheatears fed along the path in front of us.

We watched the incredible sight of a Supermoon rise above the mountains as we waited for the Perseid meteor shower in the clear, dark sky near our accommodation.

A fine male Hen Harrier seen briefly on the previous tour showed very well and White-tailed Eagles were regularly sighted at scattered locations.

Seabirds, including Manx Shearwaters, Northern Gannets and Arctic Skuas were seen on the boat trips. Good numbers of Harbour Porpoise and Common Dolphins were actively feeding in the loch and a surprise European Storm Petrel overtook the boat as we returned from the island of Muck.

Otters remained typically elusive although they were seen several times on our early morning walks before giving themselves up with a pair cavorting around the rocks at low tide from Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide where many Harbour Seals loitered on the islands.

Red Deer were seen regularly around the bunkhouse but everyone's favourites were the family of Pine Martens who entertained us every evening as the two kits became less timid. Both parents and the kits could be seen during the day allowing photos to be taken in good light on a number of occasions when we returned to the bunkhouse for lunch and for dinner. A delight to watch!

Day 1

Tuesday 9th August

Glasgow – Glencoe – Ariundle – Glenborrodale, 21°C

After picking up our guests from Glasgow's Airport and Railway Station we headed north, across the Erskine Bridge and up the A82 along the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond towards the Ardnamurchan Peninsular. A comfort break was made at the Green Welly Stop before continuing to the Corran Ferry for the short crossing of Loch Linnhe, a short crossing that saves a minimum 90 minute drive via Fort William.

A mile or so after the ferry we pulled into a regular layby stop overlooking a trio of small islands in the loch where 39 Harbour Seals either basked on the rocks or swam, 11 Red-breasted Merganser and nine Common Eider were also seen.

One vehicle arriving early continued on to Ariundle Oakwood National Nature Reserve where 20 plus Scotch Argus were seen with Green-veined White, Small White and Speckled Wood also in attendance. A really smart Common Dor Beetle with its metallic blue sheen was also found.

We drove back to the Ariundle Café where we met up with the 2nd minibus before dinner. After introductions we enjoyed one of Kate's superb meals, after which we continued on our journey to Ardnamurchan Bunkhouse, our accommodation for the week. Our first job on arrival was to put food out for the Pine Martens and it wasn't long before we were rewarded with the resident female first to show, soon to be followed by one of her kits. Just for good measure, four Red Deer also showed well.

Day 2

Wednesday 10th August

Kilchoan – Sanna - Mingary Pier, 21°C

First job was to empty the 20 watt Actinic Moth Trap we had brought with us. Only seven moths caught on a cool, clear night but Garden Tiger and Marsh Oblique-barred are both worth a mention.

Our pre-breakfast walk was down the track to Glenborrodale Bay to look for Otter. Curlew, Greenshank, Oystercatcher, Grey Heron and Mallard were all seen but sadly no Otter showed on the falling tide.

After breakfast we set off west stopping first at Camas nan Geall viewpoint where nothing of note was seen although we were able to discuss the history of the site. Next stop Loch Mudle where, surprisingly, a White-tailed Eagle chick had still been seen on the nest the previous week. Unfortunately, the nest now stood empty and there was no sign of either youngster or parents in the surrounding trees. Heading towards Kilchoan we made a further stop en route to look for a male Hen Harrier that had been seen in the vicinity the previous week. Firstly a White-tailed Eagle was picked up at distance by Sue and although it was flying towards us, sadly it turned some distance away; the white tail however stood out well. Dave then picked up the male Hen Harrier as it quartered the hillside; a bit distant although a few record shots were taken of this cracking bird. A surprise bonus came in the form of a juvenile Kittiwake flying over the hills. A second stop a few hundred metres further along the road failed to turn up the Hen Harrier again but a much closer White-tailed Eagle gave us a fly-past.

After a brief comfort and coffee break at Kilchoan Community Centre we headed off to Sanna where, on arrival we made for the dunes and our picnic lunch. Hundreds of Harebells nodded and swayed in the stiff breeze and there was a good display of Grass of Parnassus along the marshy stream that ran parallel to the path. Good numbers of Beadlet Anemones, Rough and Edible Winkles, Acorn Barnacles and Common Limpets were noted in the rock pools while a lone Gannet sat on rocks just off the beach, hopefully not one of those suffering from Avian Flu. On the walk back to the vehicles a fine male Wheatear was watched on the track and rocks.

On leaving Sanna we started our return journey, stopping at Glendrian, a village abandoned in 1941. On the walk up to the viewpoint there is also the opportunity to look out over a long-dead caldera although the signs of volcanic activity are still visible. A quick stop at Mingary Pier failed to turn up Otter but a Garden Tiger Moth and Moon Jellyfish were seen. Stops at Aperitif Point and Genborrodale Bay also failed on the Otter front so we returned to the Bunkhouse for dinner and another fine display from the Pine Marten family.

Day 3

Thursday 11th August

Boat Trip – Loch Sunart – Muck, changeable, 15°C – 21°C

Only five moths in the trap this morning but Large Ear Moth and Scarce Bordered Straw (a migrant) were good additions to the list.

Our 6.45am walk down to Glenborrodale Bay again failed to deliver Otter although conditions looked perfect, but nine Grey Herons perched on a small island was a spectacular sight, while Grey Wagtail and three Great Spotted Woodpeckers were the supporting cast.

Our main excursion today was a boat trip to Muck departing at 9.30am so after breakfast we travelled the few miles east to Laga Bay to meet up with Andy and to board the boat. The boat would take us along Loch Sunart, across the northern edge of Mull, around the Point of Ardnamurchan and across to Muck.

Early into the trip an adult White-tailed Eagle which was spotted perched on a rocky outcrop eventually took flight, rounding the cliff towards Camas nan Geall. It soon reappeared and landed on the clifftop again with another adult perched a short distance away. Both eagles took flight at the same time only to fly off in opposite directions.

There were a lot of Manx Shearwaters flying around the boat with more on the water and a very active pod of Common Dolphins showed well providing good entertainment for all on board. Common and Black Guillemots, Kittiwakes, Black-headed Gulls, Gannets and two Arctic Skuas were all seen from the boat as we made our way across the Sea of the Hebrides.

As we approached the harbour on Muck, Harbour Seals basked on the rocks and Black Guillemots made use of the buoys to rest on, while two Curlews flew down onto the exposed mud. We had a couple of hours on Muck which has a good population of House Sparrows, Starlings and Greylag Geese while Pheasants have been introduced for shooting. Two lucky group members spotted a Twite by the small graveyard. Rock Pipits and 11 Ringed Plovers and a Common Sandpiper were feeding in the harbour.

The wind had got up so the return journey across the open sea was a bit rougher than the outward journey but a fly-past European Storm Petrel was a bonus. Once into the calmer waters of the Mull Sound the loch Manx Shearwaters were very active again with a few Gannets thrown in for good measure and a small pod of Common Dolphins put in an appearance. The White-tailed Eagle was perched back up on its favourite outcrop.

After an excellent day it was back to the Bunkhouse for dinner and to feed the Pine Martens.

Day 4

Friday 12th August

Loch Shiel - Castle Tioram - River Moidart, sunny, 21°C

Not a lot in the moth trap this morning but July Highflier and Brown China-mark were both new for the trip. Our early morning walk down to Glenborrodale Bay finally produced a long-awaited Otter which performed

exceptionally well for a good 30 minutes, climbing in and out of the water and over rocks while the Grey Herons kept a watchful eye on its antics. We knew that our persistence would eventually pay off and we were right!

After breakfast we headed east to Acharacle where we walked down the lane to Loch Shiel. Three juvenile Stonechats showed well on a garden fence while a Willow Warbler flitted through the shrubbery. Five Little Grebes and a family of Tufted Ducks were seen on the Loch but star attraction was a stunning Black-throated Diver fishing on the loch, a little distant but showing well. Scotch Argus butterflies, Common Darter dragonflies and Common Blue Damselflies were all seen in good numbers.

After refreshments at Café Tioram we headed off to the castle of the same name situated on Loch Moidart where, after our picnic lunches, we walked over the tidal causeway to the castle embankment. Peacock, Meadow Brown and Red Admiral butterflies and Black Darter dragonflies were all seen enjoying the sun in this local beauty spot.

We then enjoyed a scenic drive along Loch Moidart stopping at a viewpoint with good views down the glen. This looks like the ideal spot to see Golden Eagle but sadly not today. Our next stop was a bridge over River Moidart - Dipper country and where one had been seen the previous week. No Dipper today, so we had to make do with Buzzard, Pied Wagtail and both Canada and Greylag Geese. It was then a slow drive back to the Bunkhouse for dinner and another lively Pine Marten display.

At 10.00pm we took a walk up the track from the Bunkhouse to look at the night sky for the anticipated Perseid Meteor shower. The meteors were a bit sparse although we did see five but the real highlight was a rising supermoon which really was spectacular. We also saw a few satellites wending their way across the night sky albeit more slowly than the meteors.

Day 5

Saturday 13th August

Camas nan Geall - Garbh Eilean hide - Ariundle Oakwood, sun, 25°C max.

After a very bright, much cooler night there were no moths in the trap this morning. Our pre-breakfast walk down to Glenborrodale Bay proved very quiet although 12 Grey Herons were perched on their favourite rock, the Grey Wagtail was very active and six Oystercatchers disturbed the peace.

After breakfast we set off west along the peninsular stopping first at Camas nan Geall where we made the walk down to the beach seeing Stonechats, Yellowhammer, Common Whitethroats and Blackcap on the way. A flock of 50 Greylag Geese, seven Oystercatchers, two Common Sandpipers and a Ringed Plover were on the beach with Linnets and Meadow Pipits making full use of the wire fences. We were also able to compare the differences between Herring and Common Gulls of varying age and plumage. For good measure a single juvenile Black-headed Gull was also in the flock.

Kilchoan Jetty was quiet bird-wise but sadly not people-wise so we drove back to our Hen Harrier lookout point for lunch before heading back to the Bunkhouse for coffee. In the afternoon we drove out to Kentra Moss stopping at the roadside to look in the ditches for Round-leaved Sundews, Bog Asphodels and Bog Myrtle.

Stonechats and Meadow Pipits seemed to be the only birds present. A quick stop at Garbh Eilean hide proved quiet apart from a small number of Harbour Seals and a couple of Rock Pipits.

Before dinner at Ariundle Café we spent half hour in Ariundle Oakwood National Nature Reserve where plenty of Scotch Argus and Green-veined White Butterflies were showing well and a good number of Willow Warblers were very vocal. Another one of Kate's fine dinners and then back for the Pine Martens, another of which was also seen on the road from the lead vehicle.

Day 6

Sunday 14th August

Carna - Ardnamurchan Lighthouse, heavy rain becoming clearer, 14°C – 21°C

Only two moths in the trap this morning, Large Yellow Underwing and Purple Bar. Our pre-breakfast walk down to Glenborrodale Bay was much more productive today with a family of five Goosander, two Greenshank, 11 Grey Heron, Grey Wagtail and an obliging Otter which performed well although it remained in the water while on view.

After breakfast we made our way to Laga Bay to catch the boat for our morning trip around the island of Carna in Loch Sunart. We had only just set off when two Harbour Porpoise were spotted soon followed by two more giving good, prolonged views.

Skipper Andy gave us a good running commentary on the history and management of Carna. We also had good photographic opportunities of Harbour Seals before a fast approaching storm finally caught up with us with spectacular lightning, rolling thunder and heavy rain. Time to head back!

We enjoyed lunch back at the Bunkhouse before venturing back out this afternoon. We decided to head out west to the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse and, by the time we arrived it had stopped raining and the sun was out. Seawatching proved profitable with Common Dolphins, Red-throated Divers, Manx Shearwaters and Gannets all putting in an appearance. A large, slow moving fin pointed out by another birder as a Basking Shark has been the subject of some discussion. Basking Shark normally show the nose, the fin and the tail, in fact almost looking like three fins in a row but this was just a single fin. An Ocean Sunfish would seem more likely based on the distant views.

We celebrated with teas and coffee from the tearoom before spending some time looking at the wild flowers; Scotch Lovage, Pennywort, Devil's Bit Scabious and Wild Angelica were all identified. With that it was time to return to the Bunkhouse for dinner and to feed our friendly Pine Martens.

Day 7

Monday 15th August

Camas nan Geall – Ockle - Garbh Eilean Hide – Ariundle Oakwood, mist early, changeable, 21°C max.

No new moths in the trap this morning. Our pre-breakfast walk down to Glenborrodale Bay was quiet with eight Grey Herons on the island, two Greenshank and a Grey Wagtail but no Otter despite the conditions looking perfect.

After breakfast we headed back west with our first stop at Camas nan Geall where we saw Raven, Oystercatchers, Canada and Greylag Geese and Harbour Seals. Our next stop was Loch Mudle where, although the nest was still empty an adult White-tailed Eagle was spotted perched in the trees busily preening.

We took the road towards Ockle and not too far along the road a juvenile White-tailed Eagle was spotted in the company of a couple of Ravens. There was some hope that this could be the long-awaited Golden Eagle as it looked quite slim perched on the crest but luckily Steve managed to get a photo as it took off which left no doubt that this was a juvenile White-tailed Eagle.

Ockle was quiet with Swallows, Goldfinch and Meadow Pipits the only birds seen; the river there will eventually turn up Dipper, it looks too good not to.

After lunch back at the Bunkhouse we headed east spending some time at Garbh Eilean hide where two Otters were spotted on the island. They were proving difficult to see but eventually everyone managed to see them as they ran between the seaweed covered rocks and swam at low tide. Our next stop was Ariundle Oakwood National Nature Reserve where even more Scotch Argus were seen along with Migrant Hawker dragonflies. Our final dinner was at the Ariundle Café before heading back to the Bunkhouse for our last evening with the Pine Martens and to start packing for the next day's departure.

Day 8

Sunday 16th August

Glenborrodale – Glasgow via Glencoe and Rannoch Moor

After an early breakfast it was a 7.45 start for our journey back to Glasgow, saying our goodbyes to those travelling independently. A handful of peanuts were strewn across the patio just in case the Pine Martens payed an early visit before the chickens were let out of their coop to devour any left-overs. Carrion Crows replaced Hooded Crows as we made our way back to Glasgow after a quick stop at The Green Welly at Tyndrum where the two vehicles went their separate ways, dropping off at the airport and Central Station where the tour concluded.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	12							
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</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>	✓							
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			2					
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		2		1		✓		
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>				1				
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>			1					
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			✓		✓			
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓					
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		2	✓		1	✓		
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	1	✓	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1		2			
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		1						
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		3	2					3
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			✓		✓			
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		2	1		H	H		
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>						1		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		1	1	1	H	1	2	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			1		✓			
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		1						
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		1	✓			✓		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓	✓				

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus graellsii</i>		✓						✓
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>			2					
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓					
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	✓					✓		✓
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓				2	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			1	✓	✓	✓		
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H		H	H	H		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1						
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>								✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓							✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓							
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓							✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓							
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		1		✓	✓			
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>						2		
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>					✓			
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H						
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				H	1	H	H	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				H				
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓			1		
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	1							
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1						
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓		✓	✓		

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓				✓		
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				1				
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>			1		2	1		
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>							1	

Mammals

Scientific name	Common name	August 2022							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<i>Lutra lutra</i>	River Otter				1		1	2	
<i>Martes martes</i>	Pine Marten	2	2	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	European Rabbit						2		
<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	Roe Deer			2					
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Red Deer	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Red Squirrel			1					
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	Common Dolphin			✓					
<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	Harbour Porpoise			✓			✓		
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Harbour (Common) Seal	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Others

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Butterflies									
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓							
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>	✓				✓			
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>				✓				
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>				✓				
Scotch Argus	<i>Erebia aethiops</i>	✓				✓		✓	
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>				✓				
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓			✓				
Dragonflies & Damselflies									
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>				✓				
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>							✓	
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>				✓				
Black Darter	<i>Sympetrum danae</i>				✓				