

# Scotland's Mammals & Highlights of the Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Report

1st – 8th August 2023

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Common Terns



Harbour Seal



Common Dolphin



Great Skua

Tour report and images by Marcus John

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Tour participants: Marcus John (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients.

## Day 1

**Tuesday 1st August**

### Glasgow - Ariundle - Glenborrodale

After meeting in Glasgow, we had a smooth journey up past Loch Lomond before taking a break at the Green Welly Stop in Tyndrum. We continued across Rannoch Moor, down through Glencoe and over the Corran Ferry to Strontian. After a delicious three course dinner at the Ariundle Centre, we continued our way to Glenborrodale. We paused when a Cuckoo flew across the road and perched quite close to us, though briefly. A Red Deer stag was also close to the road, partially hidden amongst a stand of dense trees.

## Day 2

**Wednesday 2nd August**

### Camas nan Geall - Ardnamurchan Point - Kilchoan - Kilmory

Before breakfast, we walked down for our first views of Glenborrodale Bay. It was high tide and the water was right up, so few birds were to be seen apart from several Grey Herons and a pair of noisy Oystercatchers. A Common Seal was "spy-hopping" out in the middle of the bay and swam closer as we watched. After a few minutes, we made our way out to Aperitif Point to scan the outer waters. We found another Common Seal but otherwise it was rather quiet. However, when we arrived back at the bunkhouse, we were delighted to see a lovely Red Squirrel on the peanut feeder!

After breakfast, we headed west and made our first stop at the raptor watchpoint above Camas nan Geall. We immediately found a slow-flying Common Buzzard but as no other raptors were visible, we resumed our journey out to Ardnamurchan Point. On the way, we enjoyed good views of commoner birds like Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and Linnet; we stopped the vehicle to get a proper look at our first Scotch Argus butterfly.

We enjoyed coffee and cakes in the excellent cafe before heading out to scan the sea from the lighthouse itself. A few Shags and Gannets were flying past and a solitary Kittiwake; more interesting were a line of low-flying Manx Shearwaters. After a few minutes of careful scanning, we found a small group of cetaceans that we soon identified as Common Dolphins. Over the next 40 minutes, we found several groups and estimated at last 30 animals were feeding about two km off-shore. Although they were distant, it was very exciting to see them through the scope as they broke the surface, showing their distinctive flank pattern.

We ate our sandwiches in the little village of Kilchoan before visiting Kilmory on our way back, where two of the group enjoyed a wild swim in the sheltered bay. Several Red Deer were seen from the road, including some beautiful little fawns. Back at the bunkhouse, several more Red Deer were feeding on the grass close to the building, including three young stags - a lovely way to round off a memorable first day.

Late in the evening, after the regular Pine Martens had been and gone, Jean stayed up late and saw a Badger when it came onto the patio for peanuts!

## Day 3

Thursday 3rd August

Isle of Carna - Loch Teacuis - Glenborrodale - Acharacle - Loch Shiel - Garbh Eilean

We took our usual pre-breakfast walk down to Glenborrodale Bay and although the tide was in, we did see both Curlew and Greenshank. The only mammal was a single Common Seal.

After breakfast, we spent the whole morning out on the *Laurenca* with Andy Jackson. We went across towards the Isle of Carna, enjoying the views on a bright if cloudy morning. We carefully navigated the shallow channel that separates Carna from Morven and continued into Loch Teacuis. Here we stopped to photograph over a dozen Common Seals which were hauled out on the low rocky outcrops at the entrance to the loch. More seals were swimming in the water, coming close to the boat. We found a flock of juvenile Common Mergansers and talked through the identification of Cormorant versus Shag.

We continued around the east side of the island until Andy called out, "Otter!" Although there was now a light drizzle, everyone saw it as it fed quite close to the boat, surfacing briefly before diving back down with a flick of its tail. At the same time, lots more Common Seals were swimming all around us - a memorable encounter!

After eating our sandwiches back at the bunkhouse, we set off east to visit the jetty on Loch Shiel. We added several new species of bird including Little Grebe, Tufted Duck and Common Gull. As the weather had taken a turn for the worse, we decided to finish our day at Garbh Eilean. Everyone enjoyed spending time at this exceptional location, a hide made from local oak, with a heather roof, which overlooks two islands in the upper reaches of Loch Sunart. Amongst other species, we saw a small flock of Common Merganser, a larger flock of Eider and yet more Common Seals.

## Day 4

Friday 4th August

Port na Croisg - Camas Fearna - Camas nan Geall - Kilchoan - Sanna

The day dawned a little overcast but when we walked down to Glenborrodale Bay, the sun eventually made an appearance. Although we did not see an Otter, we found our first Grey Wagtail, a Little Grebe and a flock of four Greenshank.

This morning we drove west and spent some time checking the bays along the southern shores of the peninsula. We stopped for coffee in Kilchoan before continuing to Sanna, driving through the striking landscape of the famous volcanic ring formation. There seemed to be Stonechats and Meadow Pipits everywhere, and a pair of Buzzards flew overhead calling as we reached the car park.

After a spell of drizzle, the sun reappeared as we walked through the extensive dunes and down onto the white sand beach. We saw our first Skylark when it flew calling from the long grass and better still, we found a smart adult Ringed Plover on the beach, along with a fledged youngster. The turquoise sea, white sand and smooth grey basalt rocks would not look out of place in the Caribbean! After eating our sandwiches, we walked through another

area of dunes which was full of wildflowers, including Grass of Parnassus and several Frog Orchids. Stonechats and Wheatears were flying around the beach and dunes.

After dinner and the checklist, we waited at the lounge window and were delighted when no fewer than three Pine Martens came in together. They stayed eating peanuts for about 20 minutes, at times playing together as they ran up and down the pine trees and across the patio.

At 11:30 we set off on our night drive; almost immediately a Tawny Owl flew across the bonnet of our vehicle – a very brief but extremely close view! We also saw a total of 12 stags, some impressively big with huge antlers.

## Day 5

**Saturday 5th August**

### Ockle - Salen Jetty - Castle Tioram - Ariundle Woods

After a late start, we drove out to Ockle, where the road along the north coast of the peninsula ends. The lovely stream held Grey Wagtail and as we walked up past the cottages towards Ockle Point, the walls and fences were alive with passerines. Amongst the pipits and Stonechats we had good views of Siskin, Goldcrest and best of all, at least six Spotted Flycatchers. When we reached a higher vantage point, we looked along the coast and on the sea were several groups of Manx Shearwaters, each numbering in the hundreds. Then a Minke Whale surfaced, and we watched it for the next few minutes, everyone getting good views. In fact, we soon realized that at least two whales were present!

We drove out to Salen to pick up our packed lunches, which we then ate on a picturesque old bridge overlooking a deep section of the river Shiel. Then it was time to visit Castle Tioram. This imposing fortress sits at the junction of the River Shiel and Loch Moidart, a strategic location in the time of the clans. It was the ancestral home of the Clanranald and was burnt out during the first Jacobite uprising in 1715. We enjoyed a stroll along the sandy beach and up to the castle walls, from where we could see an active White-tailed Eagle nest, though alas no birds were present.

We finished our day with a walk at Ariundle Woods, a National Nature Reserve. The path follows a beautiful burn, leads over a boardwalk and then returns through open woodland, where old oak trees dominate; a range of common woodland birds were seen. We ate our dinner in the homely Ariundle Centre, before driving back along the coastal road to Glenborrodale.

## Day 6

**Sunday 6th August**

### SEA OF HEBRIDES

#### Laga Bay - Loch Sunart - Cairns of Coll - Isle of Muck

For once, the weather forecast proved to be accurate, and the sun was shining when we met Andy in Laga Bay. We motored along Loch Sunart and past Ben Hiant, finding our first Porpoises of the tour. We paused to enjoy views of the many seals hauled out on the skerries near Kilchoan before entering the open waters of the Sound of Mull. It was exceptionally calm, with barely a breath of wind, when we had our first encounter with Common

Dolphins. We spotted several dorsal fins about 200 metres from the boat, but more dolphins soon appeared. They swam over to us and as Andy opened the throttle, they began to ride our bow wave. They were clearly visible under the water and then began jumping out just a couple of metres from our faces. There were about 80 dolphins all around us for several minutes - it truly was an amazing experience!

We continued to the Cairns of Coll, where Minke Whales had been reported. We saw several Puffins and Storm Petrels, small birds that were relatively easy to spot in such calm weather. When we saw a large concentration of seabirds in the distance, we headed over to investigate and soon saw a Minke Whale surfacing in front of us. Andy cut the engines and as we floated in the calm waters, two Minkes surfaced several times within 100 metres of the boat, while two more were feeding further off. When we finally continued towards Muck, we found another two - six Minke Whales in one hour!

We enjoyed coffee and cakes in the delightful tearooms on the Isle of Muck before returning past Ardnamurchan Point. On the way we saw several Great Skuas, or "Bonxies" as they are known in Gaelic. We enjoyed two more Common Dolphin encounters before entering Loch Sunart and returning to Laga Bay.

Even after a long day on the boat, Jean stayed up late and was rewarded when two badgers came onto the patio to finish off the peanuts left by the Pine Martens.

## Day 7

Monday 7th August

Port na Croisg - Camas Fearna - Camas nan Geall - Kilchoan - Tobermory - Mingarry - Swordle

After an early breakfast, we headed west towards the ferry jetty at Kilchoan, but made several stops along the road to look for Otters. Alas, we had no more luck than on previous days and although we found Buzzards and Ravens flying at Camas nan Geall, there were no eagles on the wing.

We were in good time for the ferry and saw a variety of seabirds on the short crossing to Mull. We spent an enjoyable couple of hours exploring Tobermory and eating lunch at a pleasant cafe. On the journey back, we had good views of Manx Shearwaters as they flew in characteristic "shearing" flight in the brisk breeze.

We drove through heavy rain showers but the sun came out soon after our arrival at Swordle in the mid-afternoon. As we explored the Bronze Age remains, an adult White-tailed Eagle flew over and we had great views as it made its way slowly along the coast - our first of the tour! Once on Swordle beach, three people went for a swim and the rest of us scanned the sea from the sand. We soon saw dolphins about 250 metres offshore and were able to watch them for several minutes as they swam across. We were delighted when we realised that they were our first Bottle-nosed Dolphins of the tour. As we left Swordle, we all saw a lovely Roebuck standing on a hillock near the road - another first for the week.

After our last delicious dinner, we completed the checklist and waited for the Pine Martens to come in. We all had our last views of one as it sauntered around the patio and picnic table; those that stayed up late also had a last visit from one of the badgers.

## Day 8

Tuesday 8th August

Glenborrodale - Corran Ferry - Glencoe - Tyndrum - Glasgow

We left Glenborrodale at 8am and had a clear run all the way back to Glasgow. At the Corran Ferry, we found six Black Guillemots and two Porpoises - a lovely way to say farewell to Ardnamurchan. We were back in Glasgow in plenty of time for everyone to catch their trains and planes.

It had been a fantastic week with several memorable wildlife encounters. The Pine Martens and Badgers outside the bunkhouse window were memorable, the White-tailed Eagle over Swordle was impressive but it was our day on the Sea of the Hebrides that everyone agreed was the real highlight.

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## Species lists

### Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	August 2023							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
River Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>			1					
Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>	2	1	2	3	2	1	1	
European Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		1	1	1		2	1	
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>					1			
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>							1	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	2	25	2	100	25		40	
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		1	1	1	1	1	1	
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>					2	6		
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>							3	
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>		30				80		
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>						8		
Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		5	100	2		50		
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>						2		
Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>		1	2	2	2	1	1	
Bank Vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>		1						
Feral Goat	<i>Capra hircus</i>		1	3			2		

### Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	August 2023							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		40	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	2	15	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			23					
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>			✓					
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		1	16					
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>					1			
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			1				2	
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>						5		
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		50			2000	2000	50	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			6	1	7			
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		20			10	10		
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			3	!		3	2	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>						1		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1						
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			1				1	
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>							1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		8	5	8	8	2	6	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				2				

Common name	Scientific name	August 2023							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			1	1	1	2	10	1
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			2					
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			2	4	2	H		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			2	2				
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		1				20		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			1		1			
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>			1	1		1		
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			6	3	2	6	2	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			120	30	6	20		6
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>						7		
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>						100	6	
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>						100		
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>			2			2		6
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>						5		
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>							11	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>						2		
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		2						
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1							
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				1				
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	1	1	1	1	1	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>						1		
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1	6	2		2		1
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>								
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		1		2	2		5	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				1				
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				H			1	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>							1	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>				1				
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				1	2			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H	2		1			
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>				10				
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	2	1		2			1
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>							1	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		12					8	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					7			
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		4	6	6	2	1	4	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		4		10	6		4	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1		6				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	



Common name	Scientific name	August 2023							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>							1	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				1	1			
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>						1	4	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			2					
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		2		1				
Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>					3			
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		1			1		2	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					1			

## Others

Scientific name	Common name
<b>Reptiles &amp; Amphibians</b>	
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>
Slow Worm	<i>Anquis fragilis</i>
<b>Marine Invertebrates</b>	
Green Shore Crab	<i>Carcinus maenas</i>
Sea Urchin	<i>Echinus esculentus</i>
Moon Jellyfish	<i>Aurelia aurita</i>
Lion's Mane Jellyfish	<i>Cyanea capillata</i>
<b>Insects</b>	
Scotch Argus	<i>Erebia aethiops</i>
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Dor Beetle sp	<i>Anoplotrupes stercorosus ??</i>
Common Carder	<i>Bombus pascuorum</i>
Drinker moth caterpillar	<i>Euthrix potatoria</i>