

# Scotland's Mammals & Highlights of the Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Report

9th – 16th August 2023

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Harbour Seal family by George Baker



Guillemot and chick by Andrew Whittaker



Manx Shearwaters by George Baker



Red Deer by Anthea Lovatt

Tour report by Marcus John



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Tour participants: Marcus John and Barrie Cooper (Leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Wednesday 9th August**

Glasgow - Tyndrum - Corran Ferry - Ariundle - Glenborrodale

After meeting in Glasgow, we had a smooth journey up past Loch Lomond before a break at the Green Welly Stop in Tyndrum. We continued on across Rannoch Moor, down through Glencoe and over the Corran Ferry. As we crossed over Loch Linnhe, we saw several Black Guillemots and a couple of Common Seals - a nice introduction to the wildlife of Ardnamurchan!

We enjoyed a delicious three course dinner at the Ariundle Centre in Strontian, before continuing on our way to the Glenborrodale Bunkhouse. After settling into our rooms, most of us waited up to see if the local Pine Martens would put in an appearance: we were delighted when two arrived to feast on peanuts, right outside our sitting room window!

## Day 2

**Thursday 10th August**

Ardnamurchan Point - Kilchoan - Kilmory

We set off at 6:30am for our first walk down to Glenborrodale Bay. From the road, we saw several Grey Herons out on the rocky islets, as well as Oystercatchers and Greenshanks. We walked out to the boathouse and immediately saw an Otter feeding on the far side of the bay. We continued on to Aperitif Point and watched it feeding for a long time; at one point it climbed up over a large rocky promontory, before sliding back into the shallow water. It gradually made its way across the bay, and we headed back to the boathouse where it approached to within 40 metres of us - magical!

After breakfast, we drove west and stopped to check the shallow bays that lie within two miles of the bunkhouse. At the last of these, we were checking the water when a pair of Golden Eagles soared out from the rocky ridge behind us. We watched as they flew effortlessly along the coast for a couple of minutes, the sun catching the pale golden feathers around their heads and necks.

The sun shone when we arrived at Ardnamurchan Point, where Gannets, Manx Shearwaters and Kittiwakes were present in good numbers. Better still, Barrie picked out a dark phase Arctic Skua as it flew past. The views across to Mull, Coll and the Small Isles were impressive.

After lunch in Kilchoan, we headed north to Kilmory Bay, where the sun continued to shine. There was a lot of seabird activity out to sea, with hundreds of Manx Shearwaters joined by Gannets and gulls in a feeding frenzy. Unfortunately, the south-east wind was blowing hard, and the white-crested waves made it impossible to pick out any cetaceans.

As we headed back up past Achateny, we stopped to look at a herd of Red Deer, including a few impressive young stags. Then Val spotted two large raptors and for the next five minutes, we watched a pair of White-tailed Eagles as they flew high across the valley.

Back at the bunkhouse, two female Red Deer fed on the grass outside the house before three Pine Martens came in to feed - we had amazingly close views for about 15 minutes; what a way to complete our first full day in Ardnamurchan!

## Day 3

Friday 11th August

### Laga – Isle of Carna – Loch Teacuis – Acharacle – Loch Shiel

After breakfast we drove to Laga Bay to board the *Laurenca* with skipper Andy Jackson for a morning trip around the Isle of Carna and Loch Teacuis. We were heading across Loch Sunart when Barrie found an adult Golden Eagle soaring above Ben Laga; we were able to watch it for several minutes, though it remained high in the sky. We continued across the loch to check a White-tailed Eagle nest that Andy had previously located. We searched hard but no eagles were present and so we continued on around Carna. Dozens of Common Seals were hauled out on some low skerries and as the light improved, we had great opportunities for photography.

After eating our sandwiches in the remote and beautiful Loch Teacuis, we checked a low sand bank where Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank and Ringed Plover were present and Common Terns were feeding. We carried on around Carna and went to explore the island of Risga, where we saw the three feral goats that live there. Before returning to Laga, we went back to check the White-tailed Eagle nest site and as we arrived, an adult flew across and perched in a tall pine tree. Andy turned the engine off and we watched the eagle at close range for about ten minutes - a truly memorable encounter!

We finished our day with a visit to Acharacle and after coffee and cakes at the cafe, we visited the jetty on Loch Shiel. We found Common Gull, Tufted Duck, Little Grebe and a surprising total of 24 Red-breasted Mergansers!

## Day 4

Saturday 12th August

### Garbh an Eilean - Acharacle - Kentra - Ardtoe - Castle Tioram - Ariundle

We woke to heavy rain and so did not walk down to the bay but enjoyed a more leisurely breakfast instead. We set off east in light rain and so we started with a visit to the wildlife hide at Garbh an Eilean. There were approximately 30 Common Seals out basking and swimming around, several Common Terns and a juvenile Common Merganser. A juvenile Grey Heron was perched in one of the nests in the heronry and several others were feeding around the island.

After about twenty minutes, David spotted an Otter feeding about 150 metres to the right of the hide. For the next 45 minutes we watched it feeding, surfacing and eating small fish before diving back down. It was notable that as it surfaced, it frequently popped right up so that half its body was visible.

We went for coffee and snacks in Acharacle before heading out across Kentra Moss to check Kentra Bay for waders. Sure enough, we found a mixed flock of Ringed Plover and Dunlin numbering about 40 birds in total. Then Andy drew our attention to two raptors flying over a ridge at the back of the bay; these turned out to be a Common Buzzard harassing an Osprey, which was carrying a fish! Most of us managed to get a view through the scope before they flew out of view.

After enjoying our sandwiches on the beach at Ardtoe, we drive out to Castle Tioram, the ancestral seat of the Clanranald, an ancient fortress in a magnificent setting. We walked up to the castle walls to scan the surrounding bay and hills and were delighted to find an adult White-tailed Eagle perched on a nest; after a few minutes it took off, revealing its huge wingspan, before flying out of sight.

Driving on towards Ariundle, we paused by a small bay when Marcus spotted an Otter sat out on a close rocky islet. We had fantastic views as it finished eating, walked across the top of the rocks and swam off - one of the highlights of the tour!

Most of us finished with a walk around Ariundle Woods; despite the showery rain, we did find a close Spotted Flycatcher. After another excellent dinner in the Ariundle Centre, we drove back to Glenborrodale feeling very satisfied with another successful day.

## Day 5

Sunday 13th August

### Ockle - Fascadale - Ardnamurchan Point - Kilchoan

On our early morning visit to Glenborrodale Bay we had close views of Greenshank, which until today had been very flighty. Common Terns were feeding close to the point but sadly, the Otter did not reappear.

We headed back for breakfast and despite the rainy weather, soon set off for Ockle with high expectations. However, the rain increased in intensity, so we only took a short walk along the burn before driving back towards Kilchoan. Just above Achateny, Marcus spotted a large raptor and when we stopped to check, he found a White-tailed Eagle perched on a low rocky promontory. As we watched the eagle through the scope, Barrie shouted, "Dolphins!" For the next ten minutes, we watched a big pod of Bottlenose Dolphins feeding close into shore, on several occasions breaching clear of the water. When they swam further west, we drove out to Fascadale to get a closer look but they did not reappear. However, Barrie found a distant Minke Whale and we spent about half an hour watching it and a good variety of seabirds as they fed in the choppy waters between Ardnamurchan and the Isle of Muck.

After a coffee break at Kilchoan community centre, we decided to visit Ardnamurchan Point to check for cetaceans. Though we did not see any whales or dolphins, there were dozens of Kittiwakes, Manx Shearwaters and Gannets flying quite close to the lighthouse and we enjoyed a dry spell of weather as we ate our sandwiches.

The rain was falling again when we returned to Kilchoan in mid-afternoon. Marcus quickly spotted an Otter as it climbed onto a small, rocky island to eat a fish. We watched it for the next 15 minutes or so as it fed in the water and twice climbed out onto some rocks, on the second occasion only about 80 metres away - a fantastic end to another memorable day.

## Day 6

Monday 14th August

### Laga Bay - Loch Sunart - Cairns of Coll - Sea of the Hebrides - Isle of Muck

Despite a very good weather forecast, it was drizzly and overcast when we boarded the *Laurenca* and left Laga Bay for our day on the Sea of the Hebrides. Even in the grey light, skipper Andy Jackson spotted an adult White-tailed Eagle perched on a ridge overlooking the loch - an excellent start. Next, we paused to get a closer look at the dozens of Common Seals on and around the skerries off Kilchoan.

The sky began to clear and the water was very calm as we entered the Sound of Mull. A Basking Shark had been reported earlier that morning and sure enough, we soon found it swimming near the surface, its huge dorsal fin visible at some distance. We watched it feeding for several minutes, its tail fin swishing around, before it dropped out of sight. We estimated it to be seven metres in length!

The sun was out in a clear blue sky by the time we arrived in the Cairns of Coll. We had great views of another adult White-tailed Eagle as it flew over; we sailed right in amongst the tiny islands, encountering many seals and hundreds of Shags. When we left Coll behind and motored on towards the Isle of Muck, we encountered three separate pods of Common Dolphins, all of which swam over to inspect us, with a few dolphins briefly riding the bow wave - what an exhilarating experience!

After a short break on Muck and a chance to stretch our legs, we came across more Common Dolphins as we headed back past Ardnamurchan Point, then enjoyed good views of an adult Golden Eagle as it soared over the cliffs by Ormsaigbeg. Finally, as we returned through Loch Sunart, good views of several Harbour Porpoises completed a wonderful day at sea.

## Day 7

Tuesday 15th August

### Swordle - Kilchoan Community Centre - Sanna - Kilchoan Bay

The morning was dull and cloudy as we set off along the peninsula, checking the small bays before we drove past Ben Hiant and onwards to the north-east coast. Our first destination was Swordle, where we parked by the farm and walked down the leafy lane to the beach. On the way, some of us took a slight detour to visit the site of an extensive Bronze Age settlement and the stones that mark the site of a Viking ship burial: Swordle has been more or less continuously settled since the Stone Age. At this point, an adult White-tailed Eagle flew low over the beach, an impressive sight. We added a couple of new species to the bird list, including Sedge Warbler, before heading back west.

After a brief break in Kilchoan village, we set off for Sanna, which took us across the famous volcanic landscape that dominates the tip of the peninsula. The great upwellings of lava, which took place at the time of the formation of the Atlantic Ocean, have left a dramatic "ring formation" of rocky ridges.

Sanna beach is rightly famous, with its combination of white sands, smooth grey basalt boulders and turquoise water. After eating our sandwiches, we had plenty of time to enjoy exploring the rock pools (where we found three species of crab) and a beautiful grassy meadow nestled in the dunes. Flowers here included the scarce Frog Orchid,

beautiful Grass of Parnassus and lovely Autumn Gentian. After a stop in Kilchoan Bay, we returned to Glenborrodale with plenty of time to pack before dinner.

## Day 8

Wednesday 16th August

### Fort William - Glen Coe - Tyndrum - Glasgow

With the Corran Ferry once again out of operation, our route to Glasgow took us through Glenfinnan and Fort William, before the usual break at the Green Welly Stop in Tyndrum. Despite the longer drive, we arrived in Glasgow on time and bade farewell at the airport.

It had been a memorable week, with four different Otters seen very well, along with regular Pine Martens and Red Squirrels at the bunkhouse. Although our only Minke Whale was rather distant, a close encounter with a Basking Shark and several pods of Common Dolphins were real highlights. We also saw several Golden and White-tailed Eagles, as well as an Osprey. The weather had been mixed but with more sunshine than showers, we had made the most of every day!

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## Species lists

### Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	August 2023							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
River Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		1		2	1			
Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>	2	3	3	1	1	1		
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		1						
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>								3
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		57		10	70			27
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	2	2		1	1			2
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>					15			
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>							24	
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>				2			5	
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>					1			
Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	2	2		24			110	
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>							5	
Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	1	1		1				1
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>				3				

### Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	August 2023								
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓		✓					
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>				1	2				
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			24						
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>						H			
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		1		1					
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>						6			
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>						2			
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		300			300	2K	300		
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>					1				
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		20			60	30	6		
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	1		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				1					
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		2	1			1			
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1				1				
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2	1	1	1	2	1		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	5		5	8		6		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				40					
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		1							
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		2		6	2	1			
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			2	2					
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		3			4				

Common name	Scientific name	August 2023							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>					1			
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				2				
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		30			50	100		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		3		2		2		
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		6				10	4	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		20		10	6	10	4	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus graellsii</i>		1						
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	2	4		10	10	30	8	
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		2						
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		1						
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		15			6	30	2	
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		1				4		
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>	3			1		2		
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>						2		
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		1		2		H		
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		6		2	1	1		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	1		1		1		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>					2	1		
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		H		1	2			
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>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>							2	
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>		3		3				
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				H	H		5	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		1						
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>							3	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H		1	1		2	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H			2	1	1	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				1			2	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		2		2	2		2	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	1			1				
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		5		6	6			
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		3		2	2			
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1	3		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		3		✓	✓		✓	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1						
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		1			3		4	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1		1		1		



Common name	Scientific name	August 2023							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		2			2	1		
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		15					6	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		20				1	30	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					1			

## Others

Common name	Scientific name
<b>BUTTERFLIES</b>	
Scotch Argus	<i>Erebia aethiops</i>
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
<b>AMPHIBIANS</b>	
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>
<b>INSECTS</b>	
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>
Common Carder	<i>Bombus pascuorum</i>
Dor Beetle sp	<i>Geotrupidae sp</i>
<b>OTHER FAUNA</b>	
Moon Jellyfish	<i>Aurelia aurita</i>
Lion's mane Jellyfish	<i>Cyanea capillata</i>
Brown Crab	<i>Cancer pagurus</i>
Hermit Crab	<i>Pagurus bernhardus</i>
Shore Crab	<i>Carcinus maenas</i>
Common Prawn	<i>Palaemon serratus</i>
Basking Shark	<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>
<b>NOTABLE PLANTS</b>	
Spotted Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>
Devil's-bit Scabious	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>
Frog Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza viridis</i>
Autumn Gentian	<i>Gentianella amarella</i>
Grass-of-Parnassus	<i>Parnassia palustris</i>
Harebell	<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>
Marsh Woundwort	<i>Stachys palustris</i>
Centaury	<i>Centaureum erythraea</i>