

# Scotland's Mammals & Highlights of the Highlands

Naturetrek Tour Report

9th – 16th August 2025

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Juvenile Kittiwake



Basking Shark



Grey Seal



Red Squirrel

Tour report and photos by Glyn Evans

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Tour participants: Glyn Evans (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

The Ardnamurchan peninsula has an island feel about it, which may have something to do with getting there via one of the shortest ferry trips anywhere (the Corran Ferry across Loch Linnhe), but also that it is remote. Remote from the relative hubbub of Fort William and other populated parts of mainland Scotland but also sparsely populated with human beings – a major plus for people who wish not only to find wildlife on their holidays but also to find sanctuary in silence and detachment from the rat race.

Apart from the wildlife featured on our checklist, it should be remembered that Ardnamurchan is one of the best examples anywhere of Atlantic Rainforest – a spectacular set of habitats that gives one a sense of gratitude that it exists where almost everywhere else is compromised.

Being based at the Bunkhouse, the sense of detachment is also apparent. It is your “come and go as you please, eat sleep do whatever you please, when you please” home for the week. And some of the wildlife performs for you right outside your window.

Read on to see what I mean...

## Day 1

**Saturday 9th August**

Our journey to the Ariundle Centre in Strontian required 3 hours 15 minutes of driving, due to a minor detour through Glasgow before crossing the Erskine Bridge. We got out briefly at the southern end of Loch Lomond so that those who had packed optics anywhere accessible could have them handy for subsequent stops. Next was the traditional halfway comfort stop at the Green Welly in Tyndrum after which we took a little ride along the track by the babbling brook at Bridge of Orchy, briefly mingling with walkers of the West Highland Way while finding a Grey Wagtail from the little humpback bridge behind the hotel. The “shallow end” of Loch Tulla was quiet, with flyover Siskins staying out of identifiable range, but there were a few Sand Martins still around and distant waders included Dunlin and Oystercatcher. We drove to the end of the track and turned around, stopping briefly a couple of times for a scan without success

After a brief opportunity to compare both Cormorant and Shag as they flew under the bridge at Ballachulish, we hastened to Strontian via the Corran Ferry. The nestboxes at the Ardgor terminal were now empty of the Black Guillemots they hosted in the spring.

## Day 2

**Sunday 10th August**

### Way Out West

After Kate had given us a poor forecast the previous night, I had thoughts of sheltering in the Garbh Eilean hide for at least some of what, we were informed, was to be a dreich (wet, basically) day.

Fortunately, the consensus of online forecasts gleaned the previous evening - once passwords allowed Wifi access - was a reasonably dry day with light winds (although “light” has to be considered in relative terms in this part of the world). So we stuck to my preferred itinerary for an opening day on Ardnamurchan: Head west!

Before all of that, our “early” morning walk, (after a long day yesterday) at 06.30 was a gentle stroll down the drive to the lochside, where the tide was in and the winds were light. And midges were out looking for breakfast, finding the selection box that was me with all but one of the clients buoyed by adrenaline (or was it denial) to overcome residual tiredness!

Whilst waiting mainly for an Otter to show up (it didn't), we noted a couple of Little Grebes out in the loch and a Grey Wagtail on the edge. We heard a distant couple of Ravens betray their presence and showed briefly as they took a wide line around us with their flypast. Some of us were able to hear a young Tawny Owl, which at one stage might have been two, or perhaps this youngster was a ventriloqual prodigy...?

Ravi was persisting with trying to nail down a small bird in one of the nearby birches. No, it wasn't either of the Blue Tits, or a Willow Warbler. The light was poor, but eventually, Ravi's bird hopped along a branch to reveal the unmistakable profile of a Nuthatch! A rare bird in Scotland and a write-in on the checklist. We took a few minutes to get everyone to see the bird, but by the time we'd all had views, the midges had found us again, so we made an early declaration and headed for breakfast.

Heading west after breakfast, we stopped first at Camas nan Geall viewpoint; a spectacular view which in itself is worth a jaw-dropping visit, but within two minutes of getting out of the van, an eagle loomed straight toward us...! By all accounts, as it drew closer, the proportion of head and neck to tail pointed to Golden.

No white bits. Adult...?

Broad wing base.

It turned and came back, doing its best to display upturned “fingers” *a la* Golden, but then revealed a large bill, with a dark tip. Juvenile White-tailed Eagle. Oh well, clients were happy with a great sighting so early in the trip, even if it was by far the easiest of eagles to find.

Next was Kilchoan pier, where the Staffa Tours boat had just picked up some passengers for a wildlife trip of some sort. Shortly after, the Calmac ferry from Tobermory loaded, but then, having suggested to the clients that we keep our eye on what the Staffa tours guys were doing, I saw that three of them were converging on a point where there was a frenzy of seabirds feeding. This was always a good sign of possible cetaceans.

Scope trained on the flock.

Boom! Up came a huge body, trailing a small dorsal fin, with a spurt of water visible from 1½ miles away. Minke Whale!

Some clients had a turn at the scope waiting for her to blow while others remained transfixed with binoculars.

Most got some sort of a view.

With the wind being a light southerly, there wasn't much seabird activity going on in the loch, so we agreed to get over to the lighthouse early to see if that gave us a better vantage point from which to see the whale.

It didn't. The whale was probably further into Loch Sunart than was viewable from the lighthouse, so we settled in under the foghorn for a sea watch. Shags, Gannets, Guillemots, A Rock Pipit, Kittiwakes, Manx Shearwaters; all the expected stuff turned up, but there were no dolphins following the boats. There was, however, the unmistakable (this time) form of a White-tailed Eagle heading toward us, with pale head and forewing almost glowing in the watery sunshine. It headed past us a decent range, giving everyone a decent view as it went behind the lighthouse and out the other side until briefly, it perched on a rock about 500m away, not far from a brown, furry object on the same rocky outcrop, chomping on something so tasty as to render it unconcerned by the monstrous avian visitor. The eagle thought better of challenging the Otter and flew on, but we all enjoyed zoomed-in views through the scope, happy even to share views with other visitors.

Then Alice found an Otter on the other side of the lighthouse, this time half as far! It didn't linger and soon swam out of sight, but we then saw a flock of four Twite on the rocks, revealing pink rumps as they flitted around and then a pair of Black-tailed Godwit flew past, quite close at head height.

A good morning's watching was followed by a picnic on the benches sheltered from the strengthening wind, where Kate's generously filled rolls were supplemented with more delicate victuals from the lighthouse café.

Rather than linger after lunch, with the breeze now quite keen, the idea of heading somewhere sheltered had appeal, so we headed for Fascadale, stopping at the café for a toilet break first. Alice and I casually noted the ridge opposite and wondered if it might have a Peregrine on observation duty.

Quick scan follows. Dark shape protruding from rocky ridge...

Yep. The scope was waiting for those emerging from the toilet, with some simply having to take my word for it that the super-magnified, trembling image through my scope was of a Peregrine.

Fascadale was indeed perfect for us to nestle in by the cottage and enjoy a relatively calm 50 minutes looking out to sea, where there were hundreds of Manxies and the usual fare, but apart from a pair of Common Terns, nothing particularly new until an adult Red-throated Diver flew past. Andy then saw a butterfly settle on a rock. He pointed at it. Nope, can't see where you're looking. He leaned forward and wiggled his digit at the insect, which then took off and landed some way off. Then it came back and landed close by, closing its wings and leaning over like the sailing yachts we were watching at sea, but well camouflaged on the rocks. It was only when I zoomed in for a photo that I realised this was a Grayling. We trooped back to the van, noting the Sundews in the sphagnum as we turned and made for our final stop at Ockle for a short walk there.

There was some excitement when an adult female Hen Harrier was found on the way to Ockle. Britain's most persecuted bird of prey is now a rare sighting anywhere, so we were fortunate to see this one, as none had bred on the peninsula this year as far as I was aware.

The walk at Ockle was pleasant, with two Scotch Argus butterflies seen; the second of which posed nicely in the grass for photos. Redpolls on the wires were more animated, but most saw the rouged forehead in the scope.

The bay was quiet, with the southerly wind not conducive to close views of seabirds, but a nice surprise to end the day was a 2<sup>nd</sup> summer Great Northern Diver loafing offshore, snorkelling 400m away in calm enough sea for decent scoped views.

It started raining just as we reached the Bunkhouse and didn't stop. The peanut butter lasted through twilight with no interest from the arboreal mustelids.

## Day 3

Monday 11th August

### Sunart in the mist

Well, mizzle would probably describe it better. Just two takers for the early morning walk, which was a decidedly damp affair, walking to Aperitif Point and back, with a very close view of a Red Deer hind breaking cover as we descended to the point. A young Buzzard doing likewise on the return walk and a couple of Common Terns on the loch, but otherwise, quality silence and a lovely view across Sunart.

Once we got back, a Red Squirrel was waiting for us, apparently holding territory on an old tree stump with a few peanuts left on it. Another attempted to share the spoils and was shown the door (and probably some teeth as well). A third, fourth and fifth squirrel entered the fray, each showing clearly different ID characteristics! Wow! After breakfast – and with the forecast in mind – we travelled to the Garbh Eilean hide, expecting the weather to start wet but hopefully get drier in the afternoon. The hide doesn't always keep you dry: most of the time the wind blows the rain in sideways through some of the apertures in the arc-shaped hide, but today it was calm. And in the event, although the light was often gloomy with thick clouds rolling slowly through, there wasn't much in the way of rain. What there was was a little mizzly, often affecting long-range visibility.

We needn't have worried.

Our main target on this vigil was Otter. After picking out all the easy stuff, like Common Seals by the dozen on the rocks opposite, a flock of fully sated, slumbering Eiders beside the ransacked mussel farm, Grey Herons loafing above the tide line and eclipsed Mallards merging into the seaweed, we barely had time to summarise the above before an Otter appeared some way out, but clearly visible between the islands. It was moving around presumably chasing fish, but then eventually settled on an area where there was a bed of shellfish, plunge diving and then popping up like a cork, sometimes munching, other times just catching breath. In around 45 minutes watching this ravenous dog Otter, it slowly came closer and in clearer air, we enjoyed some dark but detailed views, justifying our decision to reschedule the boat trip to the afternoon instead of its original morning slot.

Once the Otter finally rounded the island out of sight, things quietened down and I suggested we might leave a little earlier for the Salen Jetty store, where alcohol could now be bought.

In the event, a few goodies and hot drinks were bought and consumed, but no alcohol was present at the dinner table!

On to Laga Bay, where the manoeuvre into the car park is a most enjoyable challenge, involving a hairpin bend and a 1:3 slope! Approaching from Salen requires a double hairpin, so discretion was applied, and we reversed into the car park, deciding to eat lunch from there, overlooking the loch, as we were a little early.

Good move as it turned out: a small pod of six Common Dolphins were in the middle of the loch, with calves enjoying a good old splash. A great start to the afternoon session!

Andy joined us shortly after 1pm and we immediately set off for a known site for White-tailed Eagles, where, from the “crow’s nest” on top of the boat, I spied the juvenile bird perched on the green behind the salmon farm. Andy steered the course and at the appropriate time, we pointed the clients toward the youngster.

We drifted gently past the bird, during which Alice pointed out a large, low-flying raptor flying away from us to a perch some 400 metres away. It was another young (second year) White-tailed Eagle: quite possibly an older sibling of this bird, as yet not detached from its parents.

We similarly drifted close to the second youngster, and it responded to calls from the other direction. We turned around and this time, watched one of the adult birds sit above its offspring, staring disapprovingly at us until it flew to a perch higher up the bank from which to observe all and sundry.

A great start to the boat trip.

We headed around the corner into loch Teacuit, where we found a single Whimbrel, a colony of Common Seals, three Greenshanks, Redshanks, 46 Oystercatchers and an early winter plumaged Tystie (Black Guillemot).

As we turned to head back to base, there was a distant feeding frenzy of birds, probably on sand eels. Sure enough, we saw Kittiwakes, gulls, Common Terns and Manx Shearwaters all gorging on the silver slivers of fishy goodness.

We thanked Andy for an inspiring and informative short boat trip, looking forward very much to the all-day version, with good weather forecast, in a couple of days’ time.

Home to a fine meal and for some, a late Pine Marten at 21.15. Hopefully, there might be others at an earlier hour and in better light...?

## Day 4

## Tuesday 12th August

The early morning walk was to Aperitif Point, with Elaine, Ravi and Kate in tow. It was a calm and relatively bright morning, with the expectation that it was going to get better! There were a few birds of interest: Curlew, Greenshank, Common Terns, Bullfinches, Siskins and Redpolls overhead and a cronking Raven. The breeze was just enough to keep the midges at bay, so it was a very pleasant hour.

Back at base, a single Red Squirrel ate a few stray peanuts while we ate breakfast.

The first morning trip was to nearby RSPB Glenborrodale in lovely sunshine. It’s a bit of a workout to get up the slope but then, this is one of the best and most beautiful examples of Atlantic rainforest you will ever see, so it is

worth it. A few Scotch Argus flitted around the brackens as we emerged from the climb onto the ridge and then Speckled Wood as we neared the descent back through the wood. Bird wise, it was quiet: Bullfinches kept their distance and Redpoll/Siskin likewise until, as we began the descent, an immature White-tailed Eagle flew along a ridge behind us and quickly out of sight. I had a gentle prod around the pools with the foot of my tripod but no newts were interested. Then from the information board, we enjoyed a spectacular view over the loch and found an adult White-tailed Eagle perched up on a small outcrop; its pale head and neck obvious in the now bright sunshine.

Pleasant but otherwise uneventful walk back along the road required checks at every bay of the loch, but no Otters this time. We made such good progress that it was still only 10.50 by the time we drove back to the bunkhouse for a fresh brew.

Next stop on the way to Sanna was Camas nan Geall viewpoint. It was warm and quite still, even at the elevated platform in front of the car park. I wondered if this was the kind of conditions the Golden Eagles might like, as they usually prefer a bit of wind.

We racked up Buzzard, Kestrels, Raven, loads of House Martin and Linnets, before deciding to cut slightly short, as Elaine had read some information about the ancient old church and graveyard in Kilchoan, which might have been worth a quick look? OK...

We headed off toward Kilchoan with Google confident that it had the right directions to said church. I started to mention some omissions from the trip list so far.

Some decent-sized Red Deer stags was one.

No problem! Eagle-eyed Alice locked onto a small group at the bottom of a valley, some of which were laid down by a stream; one of which just had a wallow. We managed to find a place to stop safely and scope them. They eventually all got up and started back up the hill. The vote for the most impressive stag was unanimous!

Another thing a guide should never promise but always hope for is Golden Eagle, which, it was suggested, might be nice. About 90 seconds later, Ravi observed a distant “blob” about a mile away, high over a hill. A quick stop and check through binoculars – and a shout of bingo! The unmistakable upturned fingers of the Golden Eagle!

Woohoo!!

This bird had small patches of white in the underwing and some white at the base of the tail, which suggested a sub-adult bird, which gave us all plenty of time to dismount and enjoy it. It would occasionally disappear below the skyline, requiring new directions to find it again. On one such occasion, it became apparent that different directions were being given. This is because two eagles were flying! The other was a fully dark, adult Golden Eagle which then displayed with its “rollercoaster” flight, showing off (or perhaps coaching?) in front of us all. After about 10 minutes of entertainment, they flew out of sight and one o’clock had already struck.

We needed a comfortable place for lunch. I remembered there were several benches and picnic tables at Kilchoan bay, where we stopped and peered at the sparkling water in bright sunshine. Three Twite wheezed overhead and

then flew around the shore. A discussion as to who the dreadlocked character in the shop might have been the previous day came to the inevitable conclusion that it was the celebrity cameraman, twinkle-toed Hamza Yassin! Onto Sanna after lunch, we frustratingly stopped at two churches, neither of which was the one in question, but then we spied the old church just up the hill from the new one, the path to which was unclear... Time was marching on, so it was decided to head to Sanna and see what time was left afterwards to visit the church. We stopped for a look at some delightful “Heeland Coos” who declined to come close for photos, but the location was noted for a second try on the home run. We saw loads of Stonechats on the approach and surely there were other small bird species apart from the one Northern Wheatear which appeared all too briefly on a boulder with insufficient time for some to lock on.

We arrived Sanna and strolled down to the little bog beside the dunes, where Whirligig beetles danced on the surface of the water and sticklebacks wafted below it. Sadly no dragonflies were on the wing, so onto beach we strolled. A fair few revellers were enjoying the afternoon sunshine. A single Red-throated Diver flew out of the bay. We made for the headland separating the two beaches to overlook the deserted eastern beach, with rippled sands and shallow pools upon which there should be waders.

I heard the distant “plit” call of a Sanderling. Two birds were picked up flying low around the beach, settling close to a shallow pool, where a dozen more were waiting. The telescope showed that most were juveniles. Dunlins and Ringed Plovers were also seen and heard, with three adult Dunlins obligingly perched atop a large rock so we could see their solid black underbellies while they were still resplendent in their full summer kit.

After we dispersed for a short wander, we then walked along the beach to the burn at the far end, here we found many more roosting Ringed Plovers and a few remaining Otter tracks made that morning.

A small flock of Twite allowed backlit scoped views as they fed on the machair as we returned to the van.

There was still time to work out a route to the old church, which we did, finding a single Dark Green Fritillary on the clover on the way in.

It had been a warm day and most of us had clocked 10,000-plus steps on our various exercise apps, grateful for some very generous helpings of excellent home-cooked fish pie for dinner!

## Day 5

**Wednesday 13th August**

### The long boat trip

The decision to swap around the long and short boat trips seemed to be a good one, as the consensus of weather forecasts for this day was idyllic.

Surely not!

The early morning walk was declined, as the day would require a lot of concentration looking out to sea. We arrived at Laga Bay bang on time, grateful to be given a warm, calm day for the boat trip. No sooner had we got out of the van, there was a splashing sound out in the loch below us, where a small pod of Common Dolphins were



playing, with the youngsters in particular shooting out vertically and then splashing down with their tails with sheer exuberance. A good start.

Andy was out bang on time, as though he was looking forward to the day as much as we were and after the briefest reiteration of safety protocols, we were off! We took a closer look at the dolphins and a couple of Harbour Porpoises, turning off the engine to hear the little puffs of expelled breath, before crossing the loch to have a look once again for the White-tailed Eagle chick(s). Monday's two left us wondering whether they were both still in harness...

The adult female was perched high on a conifer as we approached and as we watched her (and vice versa), the male also came into view, atop a rather shorter spruce nearby. But where was the youngster? Today, Andy had come equipped. Out came the thermal monocular and within a few seconds the telltale glow of the hidden juvenile allowed Andy to locate the small tree in which it was hidden. Later, it parachuted down to the ground and was seen creeping through a gully, eventually sitting up for all to see. Then the adult female took off and went hunting, so all possible views were enjoyed. Could the day get any better?

Well, yes.

We came across another pod of Common Dolphins who this time were more engaging, with one or two initially peeling off from the feeding frenzy (betrayed by a mixed flock of seabirds on the surface) to swim alongside, under and in front of the boat giving point blank views. Eventually, most of the pod joined in the distraction and an enthralling 10 minutes or so was then interrupted when, from the vantage point on the roof of the cab (hereinafter, "crow's nest") I spotted the huge body of a Minke Whale some distance away. After a short wait, it showed again and soon, we were headed for it, just as one of the Mull Sea Lifeboats was coming down the loch toward Tobermory. It looked like they were going to go straight past the whale, but after they crossed our path, they slowed, as though the whale had followed them.

Apparently, it had. We saw it come up again close to their boat. And again, to the left. No, to the right. Hang on, there's two! Andy patiently observed the "No overtaking" protocol and we went to have a closer look at the whales after the other boat moved on. Then, unbelievably, a third came alongside giving even closer views as it swam in a circle around us!

We eventually headed back out to sea, as we had intended to go well out, possibly even to the Cairns of Coll, but having done so well and enjoyed so much, we had got to lunchtime and still hadn't exited the mouth of the loch, so Andy headed out toward the lighthouse to see what else we might enjoy. There were plenty of rafts of Manxies and Guillemot creches – and even a couple of Razorbills – with the Kittiwakes, Arctic Terns, a couple of Great Skuas and even, at one stage, a Golden Eagle patrolling a distant ridge on the mainland.

From the crow's nest, surveying calm, oily waters at some distance, finally another Minke Whale surfaced, a long way off.

"How far?" asked Andy. "800 metres" I underestimated.

"Yeah, that's doable".

As we approached, another appeared over toward the lighthouse, but we stuck with our original target, out in the middle of the sea.

A large, silhouetted object, over toward the Cairns of Coll, appeared to be a revolving fin... It was quite large and had a distinctive shape. Surely not. It was along way off and we were well into the day, but...

“Andy, I reckon that might be a Basking Shark...”

It was a mile away.

Andy later revealed to me that he hadn't seen a Basking Shark here in 10 years, where they used to be common.

As we neared the object, it was still pivoting and then, there was another fin trailing behind! WOOHOO!!

I knew what was coming.

Andy expertly slowed the boat for an approach that wouldn't disturb the animal – an accustomed skill in Andy's case – and after cutting the engine out, the shark turned and came close; close enough for incredible views inside its cavernous mouth as it slipped quietly by! I managed to get a couple of snaps from the crow's nest for the media. The highlights of the steady return journey were first, a pair of European Storm Petrels in front of the boat and then when Susie saw one of the Minke Whales which gave us even better views when we stopped.

We returned to Laga Bay feeling euphoric. It had been a fantastic day.

## Day 6

**Thursday 14th August**

This was going to be a less intense day than yesterday's wall-to-wall excitement, with a visit to the Ariundle Centre for dinner at its end. This would follow the lovely Ariundle Forest walk, before which we would spend the morning doing the delightful walk to overlook Loch Shiel starting at Polloch.

Polloch was fine & still. There was not much showed but we enjoyed stunning scenery with Blackcap takking & Willow Warbler occasionally hueeting. Occasional Redpolls trilled overhead, but they were proving tricky to pin down. We missed a discreet (slightly overgrown) path to the viewpoint Kate told us about, but instead got a little further and, thanks to Elaine insisting she explore a path down to the lochside that looked like it may have been long and precipitous, she got down to a lovely pontoon from which she called us down only a minute later. The loch and its surrounding greenery shone like a mirror, with lovely geometric souvenir images once again bagged by those with cameras. A single adult Cormorant looked disdainfully over its shoulder at us for disturbing its peace! The highlight of the walk back were the Golden-ringed Dragonflies patrolling the trackside ditch, but there were also Common Darter and Common Hawker on show to suggest that the day was as warm as you could hope for in this part of the world.

We were back bang on schedule and headed off for Ariundle on the delightful winding drive through classic landscapes. The lochans were now showing just a little rippling on the surface from the breeze.

We ordered teas and coffees from Kate to supplement the packed lunches, which we ate in pleasant sunshine on the veranda.

The Ariundle Forest Walk is a must for any week here. In truth, this was a quiet one as far as wildlife was concerned, with a bashful Grey Wagtail found by Susie failing to reappear, several Common Hawkers this time not chasing Northern Emeralds and only a couple of thermalling Buzzards, but we did flush a juvenile Tree Pipit which sat cryptically in the shade of a small birch tree, showing its fawny tones and clean underbelly for those crouching into such a position as to see it.

We didn't take checklists to Ariundle so tomorrow would be a rollover session. Would we remember all that we saw today?

Probably.

## Day 7

Friday 15th August

### Mop-up day?

Well, usually it would be, but we had done pretty well until now, ticking most of the boxes, so instead, I thought I'd take the group to see some nice sites and see what turned up. The early morning walk was absolutely still and thick with midges, so much so that Elaine didn't hang around at Aperitif Point and kept walking to keep ahead of the midges. Ravi's black hat then became the centre of attention and liberally applied Smidge kept us from being eaten alive. Our 45-minute vigil was rewarded with an adult White-tailed Eagle and a flypast Kingfisher – a bit of a rarity here – so we breakfasted well and enjoyed watching a slowly clearing sky, anticipating another good day of weather.

Today we would head north to Castle Tioram and perhaps, Glenuig.

The first port of call was Loch Shiel at Acharacle. Here, it was a quiet: the breeze was just starting up and the temperature was several degrees lower than the last couple of days. Here, there was one juvenile Tufted Duck to add to the few Mallards on the water. The plan would have been to visit Kentra Moss before moving on to the castle, but it was too cold for many of the insects we might have seen, so we made for the castle for an earlier visit, perhaps giving us time to get to the Glenuig Inn for lunch with a fresh brew.

The drive into Tioram Castle is a delight: a beautiful mill pond with wooden jetties for fly fishing, a babbling river headed for the bay and then the castle itself: derelict but still proudly perched on its mound, surrounded by water, overseeing all around. Well, when I say "surrounded"... Most of the time there is a sand and shingle causeway that enables people to walk to the castle. As we arrived, it was partly submerged by the tide...

Oops.

I'd not experienced this before; surely it would be long to wait? We walked along to what was left of the causeway, to check whether the tide was still coming in or receding. It was the former.

Decision made: we would head on to Glenuig and visit the castle properly on the way back. We stopped briefly before we reached the car park, where I looked over at the White-tailed Eagles' now redundant nest. There, sat beside it was an adult eagle! I set up the scope for all to enjoy. It then flew off and around the corner. We waited for it to perhaps reappear and whilst scanning, I was distracted by a couple of shapes on rocks at the very bottom of the wooded ridge hosting the nest. One was pale; the other dark. Well fan my brow! It was the other adult and the young White-tailed Eagle I had watched being fed just five weeks previously! Wow!

Next, Glenuig, where we might take a fresh brew with lunch, but first, there was the little walk at Ardmolich, requiring first a drive of a mile down a narrow path with a little car park at the end of it, with beautiful scenery to enjoy at the end. As we reached the turn off, the clouds were clearing. We eased along by the burn, hoping perhaps to find a Grey Wagtail or even a Dipper. There were now a few dragonflies on the wing, which suggested the temperature was rising. We stopped abruptly for a small brown bird that wasn't one of several Meadow Pipits; it was a juvenile Tree Pipit – this time posing nicely for all to get a decent view before we had to reverse to a passing place for a marauding 4x4...

We reached the car park, and a decision had to be made: I first did this walk last year; it entailed walking back down the road toward Ardmolich as far as time permitted and scanning the ridges on both sides as well as the burn. However, in the spring, one of the clients had walked off, contrarily, in the other direction, waxing lyrical about a lovely view over a loch, requiring only a short walk. Maybe there would be time for both...?

There was an incline of about 1:5 for about 400 metres before reaching a gate which overlooked a quite beautiful scene: a natural deep amphitheatre, with a mirror-like lochan at its centre, reflecting the green hues behind. The skies were blue and wispy and the temperature perfect. We strolled down the track to the point nearest the loch and drank in the atmosphere and once again, the perfect silence. Common Darters silently manoeuvred themselves into optimal sunbathing poses on the track. At last, a dark, distant shape registered on a scan above the ridge. It turned to face head-on and presented the telltale upturned arc that was...Golden Eagle! It flashed a fair amount of white on the tail as it turned its back on us, indicating it as a youngster; always encouraging to see. We basked briefly in the euphoria of our fourth Golden Eagle of the trip before tearing ourselves back up the track and on our way.

Kate had mentioned a little beach just beyond the Inn at Glenuig, which we checked out before deciding to use the benches at the Inn with hot beverages purchased as a condition of hire.

A commotion of Herring Gulls suggested a large bird of prey which did not manifest itself, but a Grey Wagtail and a few Redpolls were found in amongst the rocks as Swallows hawked low over the edge of the loch.

We then packed up and left for the promised return to Tioram Castle, now that the tide was out and the causeway viable.

The sight of the castle in bright sunshine was nice enough and the adult White-tailed Eagle was back on sentry duty by the now dishevelled nest. We set off to climb the mound and settle by the castle to enjoy the view, perhaps with the hope that one of the adult eagles might perform a flypast.

Ravi looked to extend the raptor fest by picking out a couple of Buzzards over the tall ridge behind us; first one then two, then a third bird joined the thermal and broke away, showing longer wings and tail...

And a white underside...

Osprey! The bird drifted high over, interested in the watery habitat below. It hovered loosely for a few seconds and then kept going until out of sight. Two more distant raptors were seen behind the Osprey; then there were three...

One was a Common Buzzard which was being chased by two similar-sized birds which had longer wings and longer tails...

Honey Buzzards? No! Red Kites!

What. A. Day.

We stopped briefly at Acharacle briefly for a loo break and another look at the loch with nothing to add. Alice, having suffered with a migraine and sat out the trip today, had apparently missed what must have been a late morning raid on the peanut butter she put out by the Pine Marten.

We got back after dropping off half the party at Aperitif Point for a quick try again for Otters and I replenished the sweet treats on the feeding station.

A fine dinner was served up by Colin and Eunice who were generously thanked by all the clients after their last dinner.

This was the week that kept on giving. As twilight approached, at a little before 9pm, Gill, who had retreated to her room and was just glancing out the window, sounded the alarm that the Pine Marten was on its way for a feed! All the clients were summoned, some in pyjamas, and we watched the charismatic little mustelid for 10 minutes before it exited stage left. The perfect end to a brilliant week.

## Day 8

## Saturday 16th August

The journey back to Glasgow was uneventful, with a couple of Black Guillemots splashing down in the loch as we waited at Corran for comfort breaks after the crossing. Fond farewells at both airport and station were unhurried.

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## Species lists

### Mammals

Common Name	Scientific name	August 2025							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
River Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		2	✓					
Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>			✓					
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		2						
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		✓	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>			✓		✓			
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>			✓					
Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>					✓			
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>		✓			5			

### Birds (h = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	August 2025							
		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>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
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>				✓				
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓		✓			h	
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>		✓						
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>					2			
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		✓			✓			
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓		✓	✓			
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>							✓	
Western Osprey	<i>Paandion haliaetus</i>							✓	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				2	1		1	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓		✓				
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓						
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2	3	2	3		4	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓						
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓	✓			
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		2						

Common name	Scientific name	August 2025							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>								
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			✓				✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			✓	✓			✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		h	✓	✓				
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>					✓			
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				✓				
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</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 graellsii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓		✓			
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>					✓			
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>					✓			
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓			✓			
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>					2			
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>			✓					2
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>								
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓				✓	
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		h						
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓		h		h	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>								
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓						
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</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>	✓	h	h	✓		✓	✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>								
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				h			✓	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curucca communis</i>				✓				
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓				✓		
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓						



Common name	Scientific name	August 2025							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓					✓	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>				✓				
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>			✓			✓	✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	✓				
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				20				
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓					
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				✓				
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		✓				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>						✓	✓	
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓		✓		h	h	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓						
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓		✓				
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓		✓				
Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			✓					
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		h	✓	✓		✓		
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				✓			✓	

## Other taxa recorded

Common Toad
Common Frog
Adder
Common Lizard
Oil Beetle
Dorbeetle
Dung Beetle
Green-veined White
Red Admiral
Grayling
Scotch Argus
Small White
Dark Green Fritillary
Speckled Wood

Golden-ringed Dragonfly
Common Darter
Common Hawker
Lion's Mane Jellyfish
Moon Jellyfish
Compass Jellyfish
Barrel Jellyfish
Basking Shark