

# St Kilda & The Hebrides – Islands on the Edge of the Atlantic

Naturetrek Tour Report

6th – 14th August 2022

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White-tailed Eagle



Northern Gannet



Fingal's Cave



Common Dolphin

Tour report & images by Greg Smith

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Tour participants – Greg Smith (Leader) with nine Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

A wonderful, spectacular and wildlife-filled week wandering the Hebridean islands in August. The sea conditions prevented us from crossing the Minch to the Western Isles and on to St Kilda. Despite our collective disappointment at this, we finished the week feeling inspired, delighted and not at all unhappy with the way things turned out. Our bird list topped 85 species, including two Golden and nine White-tailed Eagles, both Leach's and Storm Petrel, a Goshawk, a rare Bonaparte's Gull and all the expected auk species. The mammal highlights were three separate Otters, Red and Roe Deer, numerous Harbour Porpoise, several large pods of Common Dolphins and a couple of pods of Bottlenose Dolphins – one of which gave us an unforgettable evening 'performance' around the boat. We were shown some fascinating plants, frequent butterflies and dragonflies, rare fungi, and even an array of sea weeds, but top billing must go to the Basking Shark seen on the last morning. Add to this the fabulous food, some spectacular scenery, jaw-dropping geology and an assortment of sea states. What a great week!

## Day 1

Saturday 6th August

### Cruising from Dunstaffnage to Tobermory

Our group of nine Naturetrekkers met at Dunstaffnage marina near Oban at lunchtime on Day 1. It was a long walk through the maze of floating pontoons while our bags were ferried round on an inflatable. After what seemed like an age, the hulking hull of *Seahorse II*, our home for the week, loomed above us, a powerful contrast with the sleek ocean-going yachts docked all around.

The first job of the day was the collective introductions to our fellow guests, to Greg our guide and to our crew: Alan, the skipper; John, the boatswain; and (the most important member of the crew) Natasha, the chef. This was followed by our pre-trip briefing and a guided tour of the ship.

Once all our rooms were allocated and bags stowed, we set off into Loch Linnhe. With a strong south westerly breeze blowing, we quickly discovered the value of the leeward side of the boat. From here we could see the contrasting landforms of the limestone on Lismore and the igneous volcanic rocks all around. Glensanda quarry, the largest quarry in Britain with ships carrying crushed granite all over Europe, dominates the landscape behind Lismore. We had ticked off our first birds of the trip, Mallards, in the marina but we soon locked onto some 'proper' seabirds - Manx Shearwaters and Gannets, which were to become our constant companions over the week ahead.

A series of castles mapped our route up the Sound of Mull from Dunstaffnage, via Dunollie, Castle Duart, Aros Castle, all the way up to Mingary Castle in Loch Sunart. Along the Sound, between the Isle of Mull and the remote mainland peninsulas of Morvern and Ardnamurchan, we saw numerous Guillemot duos (fathers with their young chicks, the mothers at this point taking a well-earned rest) and Kittiwakes - a sign of some reproductive success during this worrying bird flu summer.

We were surprised but not unhappy to have our watching from the deck interrupted by afternoon tea (home-made scones with jam and clotted cream). A red-sailed Brixham trawler came into view (perhaps to instruct us to put the jam on last!) while a wandering Oystercatcher was our first wader of the trip. We steamed past the tern

colony at Eilenan Glas, where several Arctic and Common Terns were still in attendance and a ‘bottling’ Common Seal did its best impression of a buoy.

We passed Loch Aline where our guide drew our attention to its connection with St Kilda, this being the harbour to which the remaining 36 inhabitants of the island were evacuated in 1930, most of them going on to work for the Forestry Commission here. A distant dot over Morvern failed to resolve itself into the hoped-for eagle, but a Great Skua over the boat was a distraction after which our guide was unable to relocate the now even more distant dot.

After a relatively quiet trip, we dropped anchor in the bay at Tobermory and hopped into the inflatable for a quick stroll along the famously brightly-painted main street. Marian found an exhibit in the window of the Tobermory Museum which, to her delight, was the same age as her husband Colin. She politely avoided making the obvious suggestion...

Not having pointed out any wildlife to us for a little while, our guide got excited by some Ivy-leaved Toadflax growing on a wall. He explained the impressive photo-tropism exhibited by this plant – at first the flower-stalks reach for the light (in order to present themselves to any passing pollinators), until the flower shrivels, at which point they shun the light and the same stalks now seek out the darkest crevices in the wall behind, into which to insert their seeds.

We watched our first Shags at roost on the wooded cliffs below the trees and several Grey Herons perched in the trees. A satisfying dinner of fresh trout was followed by equally satisfying beds.

## Day 2

Sunday 7th August

### Tour of the Small Isles: Eigg, Rum and Canna

We gathered on deck before breakfast to enjoy the still morning. A steady stream of Hooded Crows flew over the boat, en route from their nocturnal roost on Calve Island, and a male Sparrowhawk hunted through the treetops. In the water a steady stream of Lion’s Mane Jellyfish passed the moored boat with a sense of purpose belying their supposed passivity. A couple of Common Seals took long dives in search of breakfast, tweaking our interest each time they surfaced. Several Herring Gulls floated around the boat – with an innocent ‘butter-wouldn’t-melt’ gleam in their eyes.

Soon after breakfast we were away, steaming west – heading in the right direction for the Western Isles and one particular place beyond, but the morning’s shipping forecast did not bode well for our plans for the week, with winds approaching storm force predicted for the north-east Atlantic.

We suspended suspicion for the time being and went out onto the deck to enjoy today’s wildlife offerings. Quickly we found a Black Guillemot powering up the Sound of Mull while Ravens hung lazily above the cliffs. As we rounded Stephenson’s lighthouse on Ardnamurchan Point (famously the most westerly point on the mainland of Great Britain and further west than both Dublin and Belfast) and headed north, the sea got wild and the handrails on deck came into their own! Distant Common Dolphins began to breach, as if spotting the boat, and sped towards us seemingly from all directions. In a moment the boat was surrounded by dolphins, some leaping and breaching, others riding the pressure wave at the bow of the boat. Such close company enabled us to see the solid bodies and pale flanks of these cetaceans at point blank range. As this experience was repeated

regularly during the trip, we kept coming back to the eternal question – why? What do the dolphins get out of such playful behaviour?

Two Harbour Porpoise gave typically fleeting views as they surfaced twice briefly behind the boat, before remaining submerged for what seemed an eternity. Our seabird count was enhanced by a couple of Razorbills joining the Guillemots in their single-parent families and the occasional Fulmar appearing among the large flocks of Manx Shearwaters. A couple of Cormorants flew across the stern of the boat enabling a ‘compare and contrast’ with the closely-related but smaller and faster-flying Shags. A single Puffin flew close to the boat, wings whirring and neck bent down, as if the weight of its bill were too much for it to bear. As it passed, its red feet shone like brake lights.

As we skirted the Isle of Muck, a large party of Manx Shearwaters gathered, first 50 from the north, then 200 from the south and then another 700 from the east. The birds came together in a vast floating flock, darkening the sea and seemingly daring each other to stay put on the water until the boat was almost upon them before lifting lazily and angling away.

By midday we had reached Galmisdale on the Isle of Eigg, where we decided to go ashore before lunch. An Eider, and both Common and Arctic Terns, accompanied the inflatable to the jetty, where we waited for a much larger boat (invitingly equipped with diving gear) to clear the way. Straight away we were immersed in wild flowers: Heather and Bell Heather, Devil’s-bit Scabious and Eyebright, Red Clover and Zig-zag Clover, and a single Heath Spotted Orchid. The track soon led us along the edge of a woodland, where an understorey of Hazels and Aspens sat beneath a canopy of Ash and Oak with occasional Wych Elms and Rowans. Along the roadside, Common Carder Bees nuzzled Red Bartsia, and Speckled Wood butterflies stretched out on Raspberry leaves, while we helped ourselves to the tiny luscious fruit beneath.

A simple hydropower unit, humming to itself in a small shed, was a reminder that, since its community buy-out in 1997, Eigg has become self-sufficient in its energy generation (from wind, solar and hydro), enabling them to dispense with the once ubiquitous diesel generators.

Back on the boat our lunchtime discussion addressed the pros and cons of bird ringing: the disturbance and, in some cases, harm to individual birds, versus the increased scientific knowledge it generates, which in turn informs conservation action for whole populations.

We enjoyed the calm seas in the shelter of Eigg, where a plunge-diving Gannet drew a sudden flutter of Manx Shearwaters, descending like pigeons on a fallen bag of city chips. Between Eigg and Rum the swell built and the wind howled in the superstructure. Into the teeth of the gale, a Razorbill, sporting a fish like a Frank Zappa moustache, easily powered past our rocking boat – a sign that there may still be seabirds feeding young when we reach the cliffs on Canna. Meanwhile two Fulmars shot past in the opposite direction as if fired from a cannon.

The Razorbill got us wondering what the purpose might be of a Razorbill’s razor-like bill: does it have a different diet to the thinner-billed Guillemot? Or can it carry greater amounts of food back to its nest? Or, the default answer when faced with evolutionary conundrums, is it for reproductive display purposes? While we were ruminating in the gale, our guide spotted a Storm Petrel delicately tiptoeing on the surface of the wild sea some way in front of the boat. But, rookie error, he took his eye off it while gathering the rest of us and then couldn’t relocate it. Though we hoped there’d be another before the week was out, this turned out to be our only encounter with the species.

Two Red-throated Divers flew north with a tail-wind towards Skye – their long necks characteristically curving down and heads held uncomfortably upwards.

And then we reached the shelter of the striking north shore of the Isle of Rum – where cliffs of ancient Torridonian Sandstone are criss-crossed by basalt dyke bands. We scanned the skyline for raptors and eventually a distant White-tailed Eagle appeared, but proved elusive for most of the watchers. By contrast, the Red Deer grazing on the rough sward above the beach line were a little more accommodating. After a few minutes another diver flew along the shore, this time it was a Black-throated Diver – looking altogether more solid, with a straighter, thicker neck and big feet projecting at the back.

A wrecked trawler at the foot of the cliffs on the north-west shore of Rum was a salutary reminder of the power of the seas around here – although we learned from our skipper that this wreck (over 10 years old now and far beyond recovery) was the result of human error or, to be more accurate, human exhaustion as its skipper had fallen asleep at the helm.

Some more rough seas appeared as we entered the Sound of Canna, where a lone Common Dolphin played peek-a-boo with us, though the lurching deck made getting bins onto it a little tricky. By this point we were approaching the most westerly of the Small Isles, another recognised sea bird hot spot. We rounded the headland and worked along Canna's north shore with immense sea-cliffs and multiple caves and sea stacks.

Very soon we were watching puffins, on both sea and shore, some carrying sand eels to youngsters still in their burrows. We also enjoyed great views of Razorbills still on the cliffs – though at this point in August they (along with the other seabirds) would surely soon be gone. Similarly the Kittiwakes were perched on ledges in numbers, while below in the water great rafts of youngsters gathered and squabbled – the characteristic black smudges on the back of their necks standing out. At sea, Gannets fished with a purposeful plunge, while along the shore Great Black-backed Gulls and a Great Skua patrolled the cliffs in hope of catching off-guard a harassed parent or careless offspring.

Back to the harbour at Canna where, under the protection of a cliff-top castle and to the haunting song of Grey Seals, we dropped anchor for our second night on the water. After dinner we celebrated Tania's birthday with a big birthday cake, lovingly constructed by Natasha.

## Day 3

Monday 8th August

A walk on Canna followed by a cruise along the southern shore of the Isle of Skye

A damp start but we were up on deck bright and early, drawn by the still singing Grey Seals. Black Guillemots were fishing around the boat – this year's streaky-grey youngsters looking nothing like their dapper black and white parents. An early morning conflagration with the skipper confirmed our worst fears – more strong winds and the resulting state of the sea out in the Minch and beyond the Western Isles were such that we would be unable to make St Kilda. A Curlew flew over the boat calling dismally as if to apologise for the weather. But our guide knew the Inner Hebrides well and there was still plenty to enjoy and experience over the week, starting with Canna itself where, after a multifarious breakfast, which included some highly indulgent French toast, we went ashore.

A decent flock of Eiders and a crèche of Greylag Geese accompanied us in the inflatable to the quayside. Our bird count was further boosted by Wheatear, Blackbird, Linnets, Meadow Pipits and Rock Pipits, the latter distinguishable (according to our guide) on whether they are in a meadow or on a rock – a rule which, while not appearing in the best field guides, seems to work most of the time! As the drizzle fell, we found a Six-spot Burnet Moth sheltering beneath a Knapweed flower in the grounds of a small chapel. From here, we headed up towards the ruined castle on the headland and down onto the beaches beyond. The advance party of Colin and Andrew chanced upon a large raptor which called and quickly flew away over a nearby ridge. Subsequent discussion suggested it may have been a Golden Eagle (too big for a Buzzard, too ‘leggy’ for a White-tailed Eagle) though no one was absolutely sure. We watched for a while but it didn’t return.

The beaches revealed the treasures of the deep, including a couple of furry Heart Urchins (an egg-sized, five-panelled echinoderm) and a large round Edible Sea Urchin, all surprisingly intact given the stoniness of the shore. We also found the skeleton of a small cetacean with distinctive vertebrae separated by tiny intervertebral discs. The beaches enumerated the summer’s toll of dead seabirds, with several Guillemot corpses. One had a numbered leg ring which, we were subsequently informed, it had received as a nestling (is ‘ledgling’ a word?) a couple of miles down the coast, six years previously.

The mediaeval castle of An Coroghon (described in the literature as a ‘small stronghold’ rather than a castle) sits atop a large sea stack on a headland and is reached (by anyone foolish enough to attempt it) via a doorway at the top of a narrow, crumbling and precipitous path. Apart from this doorway, little appears to remain of the castle itself but even in its heyday it would have been but a wee structure – a bolthole in extremis rather than a residential building. The literature suggests it may even have been a prison at some stage.

Below the headland a sparse plantation of trees links back to the mainland and here we heard Willow Warbler and Goldcrest, though whether these were local breeders or early migrants it was difficult to say. The fields on either side of the track back to the village centre (if such a small collection of buildings could be described as a village) showed evidence of management for Corncrakes – a local speciality. In spring, the broad strips of uncut vegetation among the pastures, and the stands of planted Russian Comfrey along the trackside, provide the arriving birds with the cover they need at the start of the season.

By this point the rain had closed in and we re-gathered by the café to head back to the boat. Before we did, there was just time to admire the ferns (including Maidenhair Spleenwort and Hart’s-tongue Fern) and other opportunist plants (like Common Figwort) covering the walls along the roadside. Back at the boat, we cleaned and disinfected our boots – an action that became habitual wherever we made landfall, in order to minimise the risk of transporting pathogens (not least that of Avian Influenza) from island to island.

From Canna we cruised north to Skye, seeking shelter behind Soay under the shadow of the menacing Cuillin mountains. It continued to pour down for much of the day so all but the most hardy/foolhardy enjoyed the views from inside the boat, some scratching the St Kilda ‘itch’ with a book.

Mid-afternoon, as we were approaching Loch Eishort, the ship’s bell rang and we rushed up on deck to see a huge pod of Common Dolphins enthusiastically approaching the boat, seemingly from all directions. They exhibited a great range of behaviours: breaching, tail-slapping and bow-riding and were surprisingly noisy too: their squeaks and clicks audible to those on deck. We judged that there were a minimum of 70 individuals

(including 4-5 very small youngsters), but so widespread was the pod with small groups joining all the time that, in practice, there may have been twice that number. They stuck with the boat for more than 30 minutes as we steamed further into the Loch. Keeping them company was a large flock of Manx Shearwaters. Despite careful scanning, we couldn't pick up anything more exciting among these, though we were aware of recent records of Great, Cory's and Sooty from out in the Minch.

The rain didn't let up for the rest of the afternoon so, after the dolphins left, we had a quiet trip up into our mooring in Loch Eishort behind the island of Heast. To make up for the weather, we had a magnificent dinner comprising delicate beetroot and walnut filo parcels, roast duck and an enormous trifle!

## Day 4

Tuesday 9th August

### A walk through the village of Heast, a cruise to Loch Ceann on Ardnamurchan and a walk on the Singing Sands

It was an early start on deck this morning for those joining the ambitiously entitled 'Otter Watch' – a name guaranteed of course to define the one thing we wouldn't see! Nevertheless, a pleasant if unrequited couple of hours were spent scanning the seaweedy shoreline as the tide dropped. An adult Herring Gull flew over with a persistent mewling youngster in tow; an army of squabbling Oystercatchers briefly drew our attention; a Common Seal fished among the moored boats; and a lone Great Black-backed Gull stood sentinel on the shore, while a Common Sandpiper chattered from the rocks. An unusual structure over towards the fish farm further up the loch put us in mind of the conning tower of a partially submerged submarine, but John the boatswain explained that it was actually a (long-disused) feed blower that was used to distribute fish meal to the nets of salmon in the fish farm beyond.

After breakfast we went ashore in the inflatable, its outboard motor chopping the peat-stained saltwater into a brown froth. We clambered carefully off the landward end of the floating pontoon and admired the host of seaweeds washed up on the strandline. Our guide put names to many of them – conveniently descriptive names such as Toothed Wrack, Channelled Wrack, Egg Wrack, Bladder Wrack, Spiral Wrack and so on. Among them, we found the distinctive egg case of a small shark, the Small-spotted Catshark, a creamy envelope adorned with long tendrils which hold it among the seaweed.

We walked up the lane through moorland of Heather, Bell Heather and Cross-leaved Heath, Sneezewort, Eyebright and Tansy. The tiny spikes of yellow and orange Bog Asphodel drew a comparison from Andrew with the white-flowered asphodels he knew from Portugal – tall and showy, quite unlike these.

Interrupting the botany, three Twites briefly showed themselves on a fence-line before flying off – small, streaky finches with pale bills and a honey-coloured breast. The wildflowers kept coming: Angelica, Tufted Vetch and Wild Carrot – the latter furnishing a host of stories and playing host to a couple of Red Soldier Beetles (also known as Hogweed Bonking Beetles for their orgiastic behaviour frequently seen on the Wild Carrot's umbelliferous relative).

In the former crofting village of Heast, we watched a recently fledged House Sparrow, flopped in a gravelly drive, being fed by its hard-working father. We also saw a group of six Rock Doves flying around the village – looking sharp and identical, suggesting that they retained the pure characteristics of true Rock Doves, unlike many populations in the Hebrides which are beginning to show signs of cross-breeding with Feral Pigeons (of which these are the wild ancestors).

Some of the gardens here showed the benefits of the Gulf Stream-moderated climate with some glorious garden plants, including one particularly striking blue Hydrangea and a hulking Hebe. Several fulgent Fuschias and cool Crocosmias had hopped the garden fence and were now semi-naturalised on the verges and moorland edge.

Further on it seemed as though the village was going for the full set of more troublesome Scottish invasive non-natives, including the vast, rhubarb-like Gunneras, orange-flowered Mimulus in the stream, large tracts of Himalayan Balsam and a bank of Japanese Knotweed.

The gardens had other features of interest, including a house sign made using a defunct Fender Precision Bass guitar (our guide was always keen to get things down to species level wherever possible!) An AA hut in a garden appeared to have found a new lease of life as an outside loo, and every house appeared to have a microwave oven as a mailbox at the end of the drive – perhaps, one wag suggested, this was to enable them to reheat their takeaway deliveries!

*Seahorse II* looked resplendent in the sunshine as we headed back down the hill. On the foreshore we got into conversation with an engaging SUPER (Stand-up Paddleboard-er) who was in training for a trip to Rum – hopefully on a day when the sea is less wild than the one we experienced yesterday!

Lunch comprised the fishiest fish-soup we'd ever tasted (in this case fishy was a good thing!) We marvelled at how extraordinarily accomplished our chef Natasha was – and everything done single-handedly. This drew the wry observation from Linda that, when she cooks the dinner, she does 100% of the work but when her husband Bryan cooks the dinner, she only has to do 75% of the work!

After lunch we weighed anchor and headed out of the sea loch and along the Sleate peninsula. The sea loch was deceptively calm until we came round the headland and turned for the south – with the big seas the Manx Shearwaters were once again out in force.

A huge bull Grey Seal, sitting erect on an off-shore skerry, waved a vast flipper at us like the old man of the sea. Three Arctic Terns and a couple of Lesser Black-backed Gulls marked time with the boat for a while, the latter enabling us to compare their long-winged elegance with the solidity of their 'Great' namesake. The different heights and angles of plunge-diving Gannets got us wondering how they calculate the direction, depth and speed of the dive, while taking account of the refraction at the surface, so as to meet the target fish 'just right'. A calculation beyond any of us!

Towards the Point of Sleate cries of "Greg! Greg!" rang out as a White-tailed Eagle appeared over the cliffs. A blast on the ship's bell drew everyone else to the deck and we watched this immense bird wheeling effortlessly in the sky. After a short while, it dropped to the ground and landed near some sheep, which provided a helpful scale to demonstrate just how big this creature is. Magnificent!

By this stage the sun had come out and the open seas were alive with seabirds: Manx Shearwaters, Shags, Kittiwakes, Razorbills, Guillemots, Black Guillemots, Fulmars and sadly the occasional dead Gannet on the water. A small pod of Common Dolphins joined us briefly and a Great Skua pursued a Kittiwake relentlessly.

As we tucked in behind the mass of Ardnamurchan, the sea and the birds got a little calmer and in glorious sunshine we steamed down towards our destination for the evening, Camas an Lighe – the 'singing sands' of Loch Ceann, near Kentra. A perfect calm. A blue sky. A golden beach. Azure seas. A moored yacht. In short, it could have been a Mediterranean paradise.



Although it was late in the afternoon, we were keen to view this idyll from the shore so we hurried into the inflatable and sped down to the beach. As we walked up onto the dunes behind the beach, things got even better, as an amazing dry maritime heath came into view. Low hills of Marram and Sand Sedge – the ultimate landscape engineers – gave way to a short sward of Heather, Crowberry and crunchy Cladonia lichens, interspersed with the distinctive fruiting horns of Stag's-horn Clubmoss and a few yellow flowers of Common Cow-wheat.

Siskins and Coal Tits called from the adjoining plantation woodland, but the place was alive with insects and arachnids – after all the days of wet and wind, it felt like they were making up for lost time. There were plenty of Common Hawkers and Common Darters – we felt the habitat deserved something more impressive (a White-faced Darter perhaps?) but it didn't materialise while we were there. We did though see a couple of Green Tiger Beetles resplendent in green and gold, while Common Grasshoppers and Cross Orb-weaver spiders abounded. Common Blue and Speckled Wood butterflies were also in evidence in the late afternoon.

Marian pointed out some lumpy black mounds on the bare sand – a fungus or droppings? Definitely the former, but one unfamiliar to our guide. After a little detective work back home, it turned out to be the Dune Earthtongue (*Sabuloglossum arenarium*) – a very rare species of undisturbed acidic dune sands – seemingly unrecorded on the west coast of Scotland (though perhaps like many fungi just under-recorded more generally).

As we returned to the beach, our interest was held by the distinctive prints of a Grey Heron that had evidently taken an afternoon stroll across the sand. Incidentally, the name 'singing sands' is a reference to the sound the sands make underfoot in certain atmospheric conditions – a performance we were unfortunate to have missed out on, but we hoped the heron enjoyed!

## Day 5

## Wednesday 10th August

### Cruising around the Ardnamurchan peninsula and up Loch Sunart – a walk in Salen Woods

Our warm and sunny morning was spent following the Ardnamurchan shoreline. We quickly locked onto a White-tailed Eagle standing erect and proud on a rocky knoll above the shore – master of all he surveyed. And then the Common Dolphins selected our boat for some fun and games. They seemed to be in a very loose pod but, over the course of 20 minutes, numbers around the boat steadily increased to perhaps 150 as they gathered from far and wide, barrel-rolling and leaping in their eagerness to join the *melée*.

The usual seabirds accompanied us and, for a while, they were joined by a Leach's Petrel which gave distant views before drifting away. As we rounded the point of Ardnamurchan, the seas got bigger and the clouds loomed – but, even then, we all agreed we'd rather this than the 35 degree heat being experienced in England today.

Another adult White-tailed Eagle appeared over the shore giving great views as it hung on the updraft above the cliffs. Nearby, a distant dot on the skyline was, to our surprise, transformed (by the power of a digital camera) into a Feral Goat, a species for which Ardnamurchan is famed and whose control (for conservation purposes) has caused some local controversy.

As we entered Loch Sunart on the southern shore of Ardnamurchan, more Common Dolphins (this time 15 perhaps) popped in to bid us a brief hello, Common Seals appeared on the offshore skerries (up to 50 in total) and a lone Great Skua cruised past.

The clifftop pastures were here grazed by occasional Red Deer (of both sexes, including a magnificent multi-pointed stag) and two more White-tailed Eagles were observed standing around on a knoll – something which they evidently do quite a lot!

Further up into Loch Sunart, Black-headed Gull numbers picked up: this species is never common on Hebridean shores. A mixed flock of 14 female and juvenile Goosanders fished along the shoreline as we spotted and named different locations along the coast which one of the group, David, had visited recently on a Naturetrek trip to Ardnamurchan.

Lunch was taken in the delightful wooded bowl of Salen Bay, after which we headed ashore for our fix of woodland delights in Salen Wood, part of the Sunart SSSI. We followed a path up through the canopy of low-growing Oak, Birch and Hazel, where ferns, mosses, fungi and wildflowers carpeted the floor, among them: the attractive Hard Fern (with its distinctive fertile fronds), the moss *Polytrichum juniperinum* (forming dense hummocks of tiny Christmas tree-like shoots), the carnivorous Sundew (with yellow-green leaves covered in red, sticky, glandular hairs), Angel's Wings (a gorgeous alabaster fungus restricted in the UK to just a few sites in this part of Scotland) and the graceful Wood Horsetail (with finely branched branches). At this point, one of the group, Colin, observed that horsetails were self-fertilising: this seemingly erudite observation drew the biggest groan of the week, as he explained, "Well you know what comes from under a horse's tail...!"

Our guide hastily raised the tone by pointing out a Common Toad on the path, one of several we had seen along the way, ranging in age from this year's youngsters to an old captain of great size and antiquity. Like several terrestrial species, the distribution of Toads on the Hebridean islands is patchy – reflecting where they had managed to reach after the retreat of the ice sheets at the end of the last glaciation and before sea level rise cut the islands off from the mainland. Here on mainland Ardnamurchan, although very remote, species have had all the time since the last ice age to get here.

The unpolluted quality of the air was evident from the ferns, mosses and liverworts festooning the trees, including the striking Tree Lungwort, *Lobaria pulmonaria*, a three-way symbiont comprising a fungus, an alga and a bacterium playing happy families – four if you include the tree on which it makes its home! We talked about how all these aerial lifeforms constituted epiphytes rather than parasites (as they do not exploit the food systems of the host trees).

Throughout the woodland we saw small dark butterflies, the Scotch Argus which, despite the numbers, frustratingly refused to pose for a decent photo.

At this point, as the path got steeper, we split up, with one group continuing up onto the moorland to complete the circuit and the rest returning the way we had come. On the return we found a predated Great Spotted Woodpecker's nest in a hollow tree, an iridescent blue Dor Beetle (with its usual complement of tiny red hitch-hiking mites) and the delicate Slender St. John's Wort.

The two halves of our party reunited as we approached the jetty. In the crystal clear waters we watched a large gathering of Moon Jellyfish with their distinctive lilac-coloured, four-ringed reproductive organs. To our surprise one particularly well-endowed individual was sporting six rings!

Back on the boat we enjoyed dinner on the deck in the late evening sunlight, to an accompaniment of shrieking Jays. The challenge of dividing 31 profiteroles fairly between the ten of us was resolved when our guide, holding the spoon on which sat the last doughy ball, suddenly cried, “What’s that?!” and, as we all turned in search of the latest wildlife wonder, in it went!

## Day 6

Thursday 11th August

### Cruise to Loch Tuath on Mull followed by afternoon walk on Ulva

The next morning was warm but overcast, with a gentle southerly breeze keeping the midges at bay. Some of us gathered on deck before breakfast to scan the shoreline and, after a couple of false alarms involving a young Common Seal, we finally found an Otter working its way along the shoreline where a stream came down into the bay. Its hunting seemed relatively fruitless, as it spent most of its time under the water just surfacing long enough to catch its breath and scan for threats before diving again. We were sorry to see it round the corner of the headland and disappear from sight.

After breakfast, we bade farewell to Salen and sailed back down Loch Sunart, with most of the previous day’s wildlife (including the Goosanders and one of the White-tailed Eagles) putting in a return showing. New for the trip, a lone Greenshank flew over the boat calling – the first returning passage wader, signalling the advent of autumn.

As we exited Loch Sunart into the Sound of Mull, four Bottlenose Dolphins crossed in front of the boat. Soon after a small pod of their Common cousins appeared – and, unlike the Bottlenoses, whose purposeful journey was not interrupted by a desire to play, these escorted and entertained us for a while. Two Harbour Porpoises were also seen a little way off. The cetacean action had clearly drawn the attention of some local day trippers out of Oban, whose crowded boats soon gathered – making us grateful for the luxury of space we enjoyed on the deck of *Seahorse II*.

Along the Mull coast near Glengorm Castle, a seemingly random gathering of birds on the sea (Shags, Kittiwakes and several Great Black-backed Gulls) hinted at shoals of fish beneath the surface. To our surprise, a White-tailed Bumblebee joined us on the boat for a while before heading off in the direction of Coll.

As we rounded Treshnish Point and entered Loch Tuath, three Red Deer appeared on the Mull skyline and then a White-tailed Eagle wheeled into view. As we watched it, the bird dropped onto a fallen dead tree where another bird was already in situ. These two gave great views, their pale heads and necks showing us that they were adult birds. They were joined briefly by a third which flew past the tree and the others lifted into the air and followed it with languid, deep wingbeats. For a while, we followed these three birds as they cast vast shadows on the hillside below them. Wonderful!

The loch gradually narrowed as we travelled east, and the shore of the Isle of Ulva came closer enabling us to see a big-eared Roe Deer among the Bracken. The Isle of Ulva inevitably raises the topic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century clearances – which were particularly vicious here, affecting a population swollen by kelp workers gathering seaweed to supply potash to the fertiliser and arms industries. The evidence of past occupation (in the form of lines of ruined cottages) and ‘lazy beds’ of past cultivation were visible all along the shoreline.

We dropped anchor in the bay at Ulva Ferry and lunched before heading out for a walk on Ulva. What turned out to be our only Hen Harrier of the trip was seen briefly through the window while we were enjoying our lunch in the saloon.

The trip in the inflatable to the jetty, through two metres of the clearest waters, was a delight. Meadows of Eelgrass (one of the few flowering plants that flourish in saltwater) coated the seafloor, and long thread-like stems of Dead Men's Ropes rose to the surface around us, while Arctic Terns fed young on the nearby rocky islets.

We passed The Boathouse restaurant, where two working Golden Retrievers gambolled in the shallows trying to catch the skimming stones being thrown by the youngsters on the shore, and headed up onto the island. It transpired that Marian and Colin had been keeping a note of the different varieties of dog seen on the trip so far – should we add them all to the Naturetrek checklist? Probably not!

The walk on Ulva took in a variety of habitats: meadows, pastures, mature woodland and saltmarsh. This provided a great variety of plants, birds and insects. We were pleased to see more Scotch Argus butterflies and, as we examined the Cinnabar Moth caterpillars on Ragwort (a familiar sight in England but much less common in northern Scotland), we came across an adult Orange Swift moth lurking on the stem. The Swift moths are a primitive family of moths whose flight is floppy and ungainly (their two pairs of wings work independently of each other) and they lay their eggs by randomly scattering them on the wing rather than setting them deliberately on individual plants.

We walked beside colourful meadows of Purple Loosestrife, Sneezewort, Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil and Marsh Woundwort. Our guide delighted in pointing out plants of Dandelion and Burdock beside each other on the trackside, and explaining how the difference between the massed 'choirs' of Creeping Thistle and the solitary 'soloists' of Marsh Thistle reflects their different reproductive strategies.

As the path got trickier underfoot, and after consulting the map, the group again decided to split-up, with Team Valour, completing the (at times) precipitous circuit and in the process one of them (Brian) almost stepping on an Otter which crossed the path just ahead of him. Meanwhile, Team Discretion headed back through the meadows and woodlands without incident.

Before boarding the inflatable for the return to the boat, we detoured via Sheila's Cottage, a black-house museum, where the huge whale vertebrae indoors contrasted with the tiny Wood Mouse on the roof. From the inflatable we saw a Wood Pigeon, never a common species in the Hebrides, and a Whimbrel, another returning autumn migrant like this morning's Greenshank.

After dinner, we sat in the saloon compiling our checklists. In answer to the question "What was the best thing about today?" Tania immediately piped up, "The chocolate fudge brownie!" but our guide was reluctant to add a 'puddings list' to the burgeoning checklist!

## Day 7

Friday 12th August

Cruise around the Treshnish Islands – then to Staffa for a walk – then on to Iona and another walk

The day began warm and calm, with high cloud and occasional sunshine. The deck lights had attracted a couple of moths to the boat overnight: Lesser Swallow Prominent and an Ear Moth. We weighed anchor and headed

west out of Loch Tuath. As the Treshnish Islands lined up ahead of us, we passed a broch on the Mull shore ('Dun nan Gall' – Donegal in Ireland gets its name from the same Gaelic origin).

The first islands we came to were the Cairn na Burghs, a pair of precipitous islands of volcanic lava, fortified in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to strengthen the military dominance of this maritime thoroughfare in the years following the Jacobite rebellion and during the Napoleonic war.

Grey Seals were frequent company to the boat in the rough seas towards Fladda. Tucking in behind Lunga, the swell died and the Gannets, plunge-diving into the clear water around the boat, gave the photographers on board a chance for some target practice. All the while, the constant wheezing wheedling of the juvenile Guillemots to their fathers was audible in the calm seas.

Concerns about Avian Influenza had rightly prevented us going ashore on the next volcanic island, Lunga. But it was evident that, by this point in August, the breeding seabirds had more or less all left– Harp Rock in particular, a vast sea stack, which two weeks earlier would have been heaving with tens of thousands of Kittiwakes and Guillemots, was completely deserted and the absence of Puffins on the sea was striking. The only birds still on the cliffs were (somewhat ironically) Shags, which notoriously start to breed earlier in the year than any of the other seabirds, and Fulmars.

We watched two Great Skuas working in tandem to pursue a Kittiwake remorselessly across the sea until the pursued gave up its lunch to the pursuers – a practice which gives Skuas the scientific misnomer *Stercorarius* (meaning poo-eater) since early naturalists thought the skuas were feeding on their terrified victims' droppings rather than their abandoned dinner.

Towards Bac Mòr (also called the Dutchman's Cap) we spotted a small pod of half-a-dozen Harbour Porpoise and, soon after, around 20 Common Dolphins – seemingly less frenetic in their approach from which we correctly inferred that they wouldn't stay around the boat for long. By this point the sea had become miraculously still – flat calm, almost glassy. And every bird on the water (especially the Razorbills and Black Guillemots) had a perfect mirrored image below it.

Around 11am we approached the island of Staffa and a sea mist appeared from nowhere, draping the island in a mysterious, impervious stillness. We moored a little offshore and, in a fortuitous gap between holiday boats, climbed into the inflatable and motored slowly into the mouth of Fingal's Cave, surrounded by huge cathedral-like columns of basalt. What an extraordinarily awe-inspiring experience! It was low water and the exposed basal rocks glowed with a pink encrusting coralline alga, while the kelps, Oar Weed and Furbelows, formed a mass just below the surface.

We went ashore and climbed the steps to the moorland plateau on top of the island. As we ascended, vast cushions of Thrift and Sea Mayweed, and the umbelliferous, carrot-like flowers of Scots Lovage and Angelica, adorned the rockface. We followed the path up out of the mist into the sunlight illuminating the highest point of the island. We delighted in the tiny specimens of Buck's-horn Plantain and English Stonecrop growing on the exposed basalt which resembled a carefully laid cobbled floor. The island vegetation was a lush wet maritime heath, dominated by Devil's-bit Scabious, Heather, Tormentil and Purple Moorgrass.

As our guide was minutely examining a patch of Creeping Willow, Rachel, the Staffa ranger from the National Trust for Scotland, joined us. And just in time she was, because our guide grinned warmly as he showed us the red, berry-like galls which he had been searching for on the underside of the leaves. These belonged to a Hebridean speciality, the rare sawfly *Euura collactanea* – you can always tell they're rare when they don't have an

English name! This species (which appears to live exclusively on Creeping Willow) had not previously been recorded on Staffa.

As we walked around the island, we stopped to watch a Wren dust-bathing on a worn path. A Wheatear flew down, intent on the same activity, but the (much smaller) Wren was having none of it and aggressively chased the incomer away. A Heath Bee flitted about the Bird's-foot Trefoil and, as we headed back down to the inflatable, pitiful cries drew our attention to three nestling Shags (shaglets?) still in occupation on a deep ledge, constantly pestering their parents for food.

Did someone mention food? Lunch awaited us back on the open deck of the boat! While we'd been botanising, Natasha the chef had been doing a spot of foraging herself and two large specimens of Oar Weed now occupied the galley sink. To our delight, they were covered with tiny, tiny jewels: Blue-rayed Limpets which (unlike the more familiar rock-based limpets) occupy little hollows on the laminae of various kelps. Once cleaned of its bling, the kelp would be used to flavor soups and fish stocks on the rest of the trip.

As we set off southwards towards Iona, the sea mist returned – an inversion of low cloud, above which the hilltops alone were visible, bathed in glorious sunshine. The surface of the sea was perfectly still and eerily quiet – we imagined that this must be what mariners in the Bermuda Triangle experienced. The only wildlife we observed in this period was a single Harbour Porpoise rolling silently.

As we powered up the Sound of Iona, we noticed the contrast between the red, Silurian granite on Mull and the grey, pre-Cambrian gneiss on Iona – reflecting the vast gap in geological time represented by the fault line running between the two. We anchored in the Sound and went ashore for a couple of hours of 'free time': to explore the abbey and chapel, to worship in the restaurant bar or to stroll along the machair and beaches.

Those of us who headed to the beaches on the west shore enjoyed Harebells and Knotted Pearlwort on the machair and an abundance of the distinctive Heath Snail. In the bay a large flock of Eiders loafed while the Rock Pipits and Wheatears on the beach were joined by a mixed flock of waders: Sanderling, Ringed Plover and a lone Dunlin. As usual the overhead wires were worth checking out, with a large flock of Twite and an autumnal gathering of Swallows. On the road, a bedraggled Dark Arches moth had seen better days but there was no time to look for more as we realized our guide's watch had stopped and we might be embarrassingly late for the return rendezvous. Rooks were also hurrying along, in their case the destination was a small glade of Sycamores in the village where corvids from across the water on the Ross of Mull were heading to roost.

As we motored back to the boat, a sundog appeared – not another pooch for the checklist but a meteorological phenomenon of sunny afternoons where rainbow-coloured patches of refracted sunlight form at 22 degrees to either side of the sun when thin, wispy cirrus clouds and ice crystals are present in the atmosphere.

This evening's pre-prandial cabaret was provided for 20 minutes by a pod of eight Bottlenose Dolphins which gathered beside the boat. These vast, dark, barrel-chested animals went through a seemingly well-rehearsed routine while we sat on the deck mesmerised: huge individual leaps out of the water, synchronized jumps, cross-jumps, upside down jumps, belly flaunting, parallel travelling and so on. Several people came out on paddleboards and kayaks to watch the spectacle but it was clearly being laid on for those of us on the boat. Just when we thought it had finished, they produced a final flurry of activity reminiscent of the grand finale of a fireworks display. It felt like being in a scene from the film Madagascar, though one possibility we hadn't considered was that they may have escaped from a dolphinarium... Whatever, this was certainly a contender for

the high point of the trip, or even of a lifetime's nature-watching. We stayed on deck, willing the performers to return, as the full moon rose over the Ross of Mull.

## Day 8

Saturday 13th August

### Cruising to Lochbuie on Mull, walk from Lochbuie to Loch Spelve

The next morning we woke and hurried up on deck but, apart from a dead sheep floating past, the sea was quiet. A Grey Seal turned up to help raise the tone. The previous afternoon's Rooks flew back across the Sound of Iona, several hours after dawn so these late birds were unlikely to secure the worm! This morning's lepidopteran offering on board was a Ruby Tiger, the deep red of a fine Burgundy with brighter pillar box red on its legs and undersides.

This morning's route through the offshore islands and skerries was charming, though our enjoyment was tinged by the recognition that today was the last day of our trip together. A dense gathering of loafing Shags raised the question as to how many Shags you can get on a single rock. The answer in this case (to judge from the photographs) was at least 135.

After a couple of hours, most of us went below decks for coffee and biscuits, only for shouts of "Greg! Eagle!" to hurry us back up top where we were able to watch a big raptor briefly as it worked along the cliff tops at Malcolm's Point and dipped out of sight. But the bird was up for long enough for us to establish that it was a Golden Eagle. Our first of the trip!

As we steamed into Loch Buie, in glorious sunshine and a gentle breeze, we observed several Scotch Argus butterflies flying low and purposefully over the water. We went ashore at the village of Lochbuie and arranged with Alan, our skipper, that we would walk the four miles or so through to Loch Spelve, where we would meet the boat again later in the afternoon. The shoreside vegetation here was lush and tall comprising Gorse and Bracken backed by a woodland of Hazel and Alder. The leaves of the Alders were festooned with the tiny bobbles of the Alder Leaf Gall Mite, while the fresh cones were infected by the distinctive Alder Tongue Gall fungus – so much life within life.

Before setting off on our walk we explored the chapel of St Kilda, with its ancient Celtic cross built into the wall of the porch. By this stage, we had got over our disappointment sufficiently to joke that we did get to St Kilda after all!

We then lunched in the shade of an ancient Ash Tree beside Moy Castle, a classic Hebridean defensive stronghold from at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was abandoned in favour of the nearby country pile Lochbuie House in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The contrast in the design of the two buildings seemed to reflect how much less hostile the 18<sup>th</sup> century environment must have felt to a clan family in contrast to the internecine rivalries of 300 years earlier.

We noticed that the three-sided stone enclosure, on which we were sitting, had all the hallmarks of a quayside with the notable exception of the sea, which was 200 yards away. We surmised that the sea must have been closer in the 1400s, an indication of how much the land here has risen relative to sea level after the last ice age – a process called isostatic readjustment: effectively, the land had sunk under the weight of the ice sheets and, after they melted, it has slowly risen back up.

We walked up through the parkland woodland of the Lochbuie Estate – where a Treecreeper see-see-ed at us from the Silver Birch trees festooned in Witch's Brooms (another gall!). On a single rotting Beech tree, covered in Southern Bracket fungi, we saw a great variety of epiphytes: Tree Lungwort, Common Polypody, a Sycamore seedling, a Rhododendron sprout and several tiny Wood Sorrels. A dead Silver Birch tree on the roadside played host to several distinctive Hoof Fungus brackets.

A female Sparrowhawk charged through the canopy of the trees, where the dense Rhododendrons were being cleared in an effort to prevent them harbouring the fungal pathogen *Phytophthora* which can infect a number of both native and commercially important trees. We walked along the road through the flooded glacial valley occupied by Loch Uisg – the valley itself opens into a sea loch at each end and the freshwater loch (Loch Uisg) is separated from the sea lochs by two ridges of glacial deposits. That Loch Uisg was freshwater was confirmed by the presence of a Cormorant (no self-respecting Shag would lower itself to fish in freshwater) – otherwise it was pretty quiet.

A squashed Hedgehog on the road played host to several orange and black Sexton Beetles, which lay their eggs in rotting mammal carcasses. A Bullfinch calling in the trees drew our attention and, while we tried to locate it, a Golden Eagle appeared and flew along the ridge above us.

As we walked along the road, the sun beat down. It was being enjoyed by a group of Peacock butterflies on a bank of Brambles, but less so by the walkers so we pulled off the road into a glade among tall Wellingtonias where we found the Red Monument – a tribute erected in 1863 to Donald MacLaine, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Laird of Lochbuie, by his loyal “tenants, servants and friends”, a paean to his “wise counsel and Christian example”. He was, we read, a “considerate landlord and master, a useful country gentleman [*whatever one of those may be!*] and a fair and upright magistrate” – one couldn't help but read it, as it was probably written, through gritted teeth!

We hadn't been back on the lane more than couple of minutes when a bird of prey flushed from a bush on the scrubby hillside above us. Those in the front were able to watch it as it fled agilely across the bracken and away through the scrub with large, rounded wings, fine barring on its undersides and bright white under-tail coverts. A female Goshawk! An unbelievable chance encounter!

The excitement didn't diminish – next, a pretty, neat White Wagtail paraded on the road. We just managed a couple of photos of this migrant from the north, when the local post lady stepped in front of us to ask if we might help her. She had managed to reverse her van over a low ledge, leaving one wheel spinning freely. We happily leapt to her rescue, building up the ground below the wheel with some nearby chopped firewood and clambering onto the back of the van to provide sufficient traction to get her back on the road.

A rather late Dark Green Fritillary flitted along the roadside and away before we could get a decent view. The group were bemused that a butterfly, so clearly orange and brown, should be characterised in its name as dark green. We briefly took in a roadside quarry where the unstratified, unsorted material revealed its glacial origin.

As we came over the brow of the hill at the end of the valley, Loch Spelve opened up before us. We were pleased to see *Seahorse II* moored in the bay. A quick chat on the radio and we agreed where we were best to meet the inflatable, a short walk along the road. Fields opened up beside the road and a family of Whinchats flitted around – always a nice bird to see. With the end of our trip looming, we started to notice birds we'd not yet seen: some Stonechats on the wires, a Whitethroat on a fence and a party of Lapwings on the shore (how could they have been our first Lapwings?!)



The spot to which John the boatswain had directed us seemed unremarkable, but he had spotted an old boat house on the shore which, he quite rightly determined, would be approached via a channel cleared of stones. This enabled him to bring the inflatable right up onto the shore and enabled us to board dry-shod.

Later, Tania and Lee swam around the boat confessing it was icy cold even in their wet suits, but not before Natasha the chef had leapt in to join them in her cossie. To judge from the speed at which she came back out, Natasha was of the same view as them regarding the water temperature! After dinner we had a small ceremony to mark the end of the trip, with praise, presentations, poems, sketches and even a tear or two.

## Day 9

## Sunday 14th August

### Cruising up the Firth of Lorne from Loch Spelve to Dunstaffnage marina

Our last morning together began cool, calm and bright. We enjoyed an amazing breakfast of smoked salmon, scrambled eggs and caviar up on deck (Natasha was going out with a bang!), during which a juvenile White-tailed Eagle cruised along the shoreline causing pandemonium among the assembled Oystercatchers and Common Gulls.

As we motored across the loch, our guide's attention was drawn by a tiny gull sitting low in the water, turning in circles as it picked morsels off the surface. A Little Gull – a very nice and unexpected addition to the list. Greg alerted some local birders to its presence, only to be told to double-check the photos, as a Bonaparte's Gull (the North American version of a Little Gull) had been seen on Loch Spelve in recent days. And so it transpired – if there's a prize for the most unexpected bird found on a British Naturetrek trip, this must surely be a contender!

John the boatswain told us that the shoreline at the mouth of Loch Spelve was a good place to see Otters and it wasn't long before Andrew called "Otter!" Not the best views but the distant shape diving repeatedly confirmed the ID for us by waving its pencil-like tail in the air each time it went down.

The Firth of Lorne was flat and shimmering in the sunshine as we headed along the Mull shoreline. The calm conditions had brought out the Harbour Porpoises (a species for which this area of sea is specially protected under international conservation conventions). Soon we had seen two, then two more and then a single. Within 20 minutes we had totted up more than a dozen of them – consistently rising twice in close succession before diving for several minutes.

And then it seemed Mother Nature had saved her very best till last! Less than an hour from home, the holy grail of Hebridean wildlife, a Basking Shark, appeared ahead of the boat – the sun glinting off its broad triangular dorsal fin which was joined at the surface by a sickle-shaped tail fin. Baskers had been in short supply so far this year around the Hebrides. Earlier this week, one (perhaps the same individual?) had been seen in the Sound of Mull, suggesting perhaps they were wandering into more inland waters in search of a plankton dinner. Our basker didn't spend long at the surface before submerging. But what a special and privileged moment it was.

Back at the marina, our skipper Alan expertly completed a tricky parallel parking manoeuvre into a space along the pontoon. As the heavens opened, we collected our belongings and bade our crew and fellow passengers sorrowful farewells.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only, D = Dead)

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022									
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓					✓			✓	
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>			✓				✓			
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>					✓	✓				
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>								D		
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	.							
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>		✓	.							
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>		✓								
Leach's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>					✓					
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	.	
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	.	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>			?					✓		
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>							✓			
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓				✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓				.	.	✓	.	
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		.				.		✓	.	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>								✓		
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>							✓	✓		
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	.	✓	.	✓					
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>						✓				
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>						✓				
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>							✓			

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022								
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>							✓		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓					
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>							.		✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	.	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	.
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</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>	.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓							
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>				✓			✓		
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>		✓		✓					
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓				✓			
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>							✓	✓	
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	.	.
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	.	.	.	✓	.	.	.	.	.
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>					✓	✓		✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>						✓		✓	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>						.		✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>							✓		
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>			✓						
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>								✓	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓						
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	.
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>						✓	✓	✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</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>							✓		
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>								✓	
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	✓				✓	
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓				✓		
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022									
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>									✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>								✓		
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>				✓				✓		
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓							
Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>										
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓				✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				✓			✓	.		

## Other vertebrates

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022									
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
<b>Mammals</b>											
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓								
European Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>									✓	
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>							✓	✓		
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>		✓	✓	✓		.	✓	✓		✓
Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>							✓			✓
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓				✓	✓			
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>							✓			
Feral Goat	<i>Capra aegagrus</i>						✓				
Field Vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>							✓			
Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>							✓			
<b>Amphibians</b>											
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>						✓				
<b>Fish</b>											
Basking Shark	<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>										✓
Small-spotted Catshark	<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>		.		✓	.	✓				
Sand Eel	<i>Ammodytes tobianus</i>		✓								

## Invertebrates

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022									
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
<b>Lepidoptera</b>											
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓		✓						
Scotch Argus	<i>Erebia aethiops</i>					✓	✓		✓		
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>				✓						
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>									✓	
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>									✓	
Six-spot Burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae</i>		.	✓							
Cinnabar (larvae)	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>							✓			

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022									
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
Orange Swift	<i>Triodia sylvina</i>						✓				
Lesser Swallow Prominent	<i>Pheosia gnoma</i>							✓			
Ear Moth	<i>Amphipoea sp</i>							✓			
Ruby Tiger	<i>Phragmatobia fuliginosa</i>								✓		
Fox Moth (larva)	<i>Macrothylacia rubi</i>					✓					
Dark Arches	<i>Apamea monoglypha</i>							✓			
<b>Hymenoptera</b>											
Common Carder Bee	<i>Bombus pascuorum</i>										
White-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus lucorum</i>							✓			
Heath Bumblebee	<i>Bombus jonellus</i>							✓			
a sawfly gall	<i>Euura collactanea</i>							✓			
<b>Diptera</b>											
Marmalade Hoverfly	<i>Episyrphus balteaus</i>								✓		
<b>Coleoptera</b>											
Devil's Coach Horse	<i>Ocyopus olens</i>						✓				
Dor Beetle	<i>Geotrupes stercorarius</i>						✓				
Red Soldier Beetle	<i>Rhagonycha fulva</i>				✓						
Green Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela campestris</i>				✓						
Sexton Beetle	<i>Nicrophorus sp</i>								✓		
<b>Odonata</b>											
Common Hawker	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>				✓						
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>				✓						
<b>Orthoptera</b>											
Common Grasshopper	<i>Omocestus viridulus</i>				✓						
<b>Arachnidae</b>											
Alder Leaf Gall Mite	<i>Eriophyes laevis</i>								✓		
Cross Orb-weaver	<i>Araneus diadematus</i>				✓	•					
<b>Cnidaria</b>											
Lion's Mane Jellyfish	<i>Cyanea capillata</i>		✓								
Moon Jellyfish	<i>Aurelia aurita</i>					✓					
Compass Jellyfish	<i>Chrysaora hysoscella</i>										
<b>Echinodermata</b>											
Heart Urchin	<i>Echinocardium cordatum</i>		✓								
Edible Sea Urchin	<i>Echinus esculentus</i>		✓								
<b>Gastropoda</b>											
Blue-rayed Limpets	<i>Patella pellucida</i>							✓			
Heath Snail	<i>Helicella itala</i>							✓	•		

Plants

		August 2022									
Common name	Scientific name	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
<b>Tobermory</b>											
Ivy-leaved Toadflax	<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>	✓									
<b>Eigg</b>											
Ling Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>		✓								
Bell Heather	<i>Erica cinerea</i>		✓								
Common Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>		✓								
Eyebright	<i>Euphrasia offinialis agg</i>		✓								
Devil's-bit Scabious	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>		✓								
Lady's Bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>		✓								
Mouse-ear Hawkweed	<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>		✓								
Selfheal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>		✓								
Heath Spotted Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>		✓								
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>		✓								
Zig-zag Clover	<i>Trifolium medium</i>		✓								
Red Bartsia	<i>Odontites vernus</i>		✓								
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>		✓								
Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>		✓								
Raspberry	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>		✓								
Enchanter's Nightshade	<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>		✓								
Tutsan	<i>Hypericum androsaemum</i>		✓								
Montbretia	<i>Crocsmia sp</i>		✓								
Fuschia	<i>Fuchsia magellanica</i>		✓								
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>		✓								
Aspen	<i>Populus tremula</i>		✓								
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>		✓								
Wych Elm	<i>Ulmus glabra</i>		✓								
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>		✓								
Pedunculate Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>		✓								
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>		✓								
<b>Canna (additional species only)</b>											
Russian Comfrey	<i>Symphytum x uplandicum</i>			✓							
Maidenhair Spleenwort	<i>Asplenium trichomanes</i>			✓							
Hart's-tongue Fern	<i>Asplenium scolopendrium</i>			✓							
Black Spleenwort	<i>Asplenium adiantum-nigrum</i>			✓							
Common Figwort	<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>			✓							
<b>Heast (additional species only)</b>											
Bog Asphodel	<i>Nartheccium ossifragum</i>				✓						
Channeled Wrack	<i>Pelvetia canaliculata</i>				✓						
Bladder Wrack	<i>Fucus vesiculosus</i>				✓						
Egg Wrack	<i>Ascophyllum nodosum</i>				✓						
Toothed Wrack	<i>Fucus serratus</i>				✓						
Spiral Wrack	<i>Fucus spiralis</i>				✓						
Cross-leaved Heath	<i>Erica tetralix</i>				✓						
Sneezewort	<i>Achillea ptarmica</i>				✓						
Tansy	<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>				✓						

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022									
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
Angelica	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>				✓						
Tufted Vetch	<i>Vicia cracca</i>				✓						
Wild Carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i>				✓						
Garden Hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea sp</i>				✓						
Garden Hebe	<i>Hebe sp</i>				✓						
Osier	<i>Salix viminalis</i>				✓						
Giant Rhubarb	<i>Gunnera manicata</i>				✓						
Monkeyflower	<i>Mimulus guttatus</i>				✓						
Himalayan Balsam	<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>				✓						
Japanese Knotweed	<i>Reynoutria japonica</i>				✓						
<b>Camas an Lighe (additional species only)</b>											
Marram	<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>				✓						
Sand Sedge	<i>Carex arenaria</i>				✓						
Crowberry	<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>				✓						
Common Cow-wheat	<i>Melampyrum pratense</i>				✓						
Dune Earthtongue	<i>Sabuloglossum arenarium</i>				✓						
Stag's-horn Clubmoss	<i>Lycopodium clavatum</i>				✓						
<b>Salen Wood (additional species only)</b>											
Silver Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>					✓					
Round-leaved Sundew	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>					✓					
Bog Myrtle	<i>Myrica gale</i>					✓					
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago virgaurea</i>					✓					
Slender St. John's Wort	<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>					✓					
Juniper Haircap Moss	<i>Polytricum juniperinum</i>					✓					
Wood Horsetail	<i>Equisetum sylvaticum</i>					✓					
Hard Fern	<i>Blechnum spicant</i>					✓					
Tree Lungwort	<i>Lobaria pulmonaria</i>					✓					
Russula sp	<i>Russula sp</i>					✓					
Bolete sp	<i>Boletus sp</i>					✓					
Angel's Wings	<i>Pleurocybella porrigens</i>					✓					
<b>Isle of Ulva (additional species only)</b>											
Common Eelgrass	<i>Zostera marina</i>						✓				
Dead Men's Ropes	<i>Chorda filum</i>						✓				
Purple Loosestrife	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>						✓				
Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>						✓				
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>						✓				
Turkey Oak	<i>Quercus cerris</i>						✓				
Downy Birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>						✓				
Marsh Woundwort	<i>Stachys palustris</i>						✓				
Creeping Thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>						✓				
Marsh Thistle	<i>Cirsium palustre</i>						✓				
Crested Dog's-tail	<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>						✓				
Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>						✓				
False Oat Grass	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>						✓				
Cocksfoot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>						✓				
Yorkshire Fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>						✓				
Perennial Ryegrass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>						✓				
Dandelion sp	<i>Taraxacum officinalis agg</i>						✓				

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022									
		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
Wood Burdock	<i>Arctium nemorosum</i>						✓				
Sea Campion	<i>Silene uniflora</i>						✓				
<b>Staffa (additional species only)</b>											
Oarweed	<i>Laminaria digitata</i>							✓			
Furbeles	<i>Saccorhiza polyschides</i>							✓			
Thrift	<i>Armeria maritima</i>							✓			
Scot's Lovage	<i>Ligusticum scoticum</i>							✓			
Sea Mayweed	<i>Tripleurospermum maritimum</i>							✓			
Creeping Willow	<i>Salix repens</i>							✓			
Buck's-horn Plantain	<i>Plantago coronopus</i>							✓			
English Stonecrop	<i>Sedum anglicum</i>							✓			
Bird's-foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>							✓			
Purple Moorgrass	<i>Molinia purpurea</i>							✓			
<b>Iona (additional species only)</b>											
Harebell	<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>							✓			
Knotted Pearlwort	<i>Sagina nodosa</i>							✓			
Chicory	<i>Cichorium intybus</i>							✓			
Poppy sp	<i>Papaver sp</i>							✓			
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>							✓			
<b>Lochbuie - Loch Spelve</b>											
Common Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>								✓		
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>								✓		
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>								✓		
Alder Tongue (gall fungus)	<i>Taphrina alni</i>								✓		
Southern Bracket	<i>Ganoderma australe</i>								✓		
Hoof Fungus	<i>Fomes fomentarius</i>								✓		
Witch's Broom (gall fungus)	<i>Taphrina betulina</i>								✓		
Common Polypdy	<i>Polypodium vulgare</i>								✓		
Wood Sorrel	<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>								✓		
Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>								✓		
Dog Lichen	<i>Peltigera sp</i>								✓		
Wellingtonia	<i>Sequoiadendron giganteum</i>								✓		