

Ardnamurchan – Wild Scotland in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

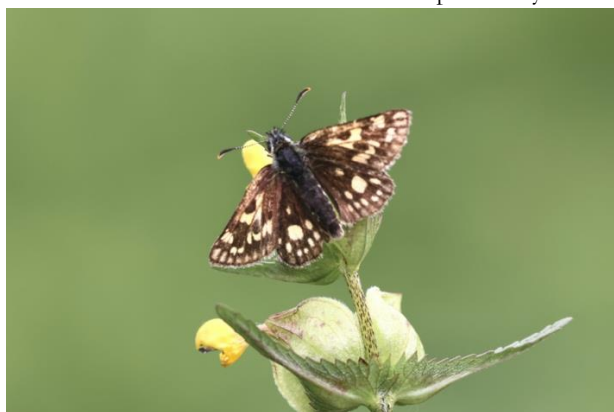
18th – 25th June 2022



Spotted Flycatcher



Pine Martin



Chequered Skipper



Atlantic Puffin

Tour report and images by Dave Jackson



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Tour participants - Dave Jackson and Bob Gill (leaders) with 10 Naturetrek clients

Summary

This was Naturetrek's penultimate spring tour to Ardnamurchan, with highlights being the Pine Marten visits outside the accommodation window each night, the trip out to Staffa & Lunga with Puffins, Razorbills and Guillemots all within a short distance and sightings of Otter in and out of the loch.

The weather was generally fine all week, we manage to see rare orchids, Chequered Skipper butterfly, White-tailed Eagles with a fully grown chick and a few lucky observers saw the dorsal fins of the famous Orca pair, John Doe and Aquarius, from Ardnamurchan Lighthouse.

Day 1

Saturday 18th June

21°C - 8°C Glasgow – Glencoe – Ariundle – Glenborrodale

With one vehicle picking up from Glasgow Central Station and the other from Glasgow Airport we were soon on our way to the Ardnamurchan Peninsula. Our rendezvous point was The Green Welly at Tyndrum where there was time for a quick coffee before setting off again for the Corran Ferry via a quick photo stop in Glencoe. Black Guillemot and Common Tern were seen from the ferry and a short stop overlooking Loch Linnhe added Oystercatcher, Common Gull and Harbour Seal.

Our first evening meal was at the Ariundle Café, Strontian and prepared by the lovely Kate and her team after which we travelled the final leg of our journey to the Ardnamurchan Bunkhouse where we were met by two of the resident Red Deer. We quickly unloaded before preparing some jam sandwiches and putting out these and some peanuts out on the picnic table and it wasn't long before the first Pine Marten arrived giving everyone excellent, close views. More visits were made during the night including three together, all picked up on the trail camera. A portable, actinic moth trap was also put out.

Day 2

Sunday 19th June

15°C, sun and windy.

An early start to empty the moth trap. Species caught included Northern Eggar, White Ermine, Flame Shoulder, Bordered White, Beautiful Golden Y and Heart & Dart. Birds on the feeders included Jay, Bullfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Coal Tit, Siskin and a Grey Wagtail fed around a puddle.

After breakfast we headed off west along the peninsula stopping first at the viewpoint of Camas nan Geall where, after scanning Ben Hiant, the highest point on the peninsula, for eagles we walked down to the picturesque beach past meadows full of Yellow Rattle, a graveyard from the 1700s and some ancient standing stones. On the beach Ringed Plovers, Common Sandpipers, Linnet, Barn Swallow, Sand Martins and a family of Stonechats were seen.

Our next stop was at the northern end of Loch Mudle where we were able to view a White-tailed Eagle nest complete with a well grown chick and an adult looking on. The chick was clearly well developed and rapidly heading towards fledging. We continued down to Mingary Pier where we polished off our packed lunches whilst watching Rock Pipits feeding amongst the rocks before moving on to Kilchoan Jetty where the highlight was a male Merlin perched on the rocks.

Our next destination was Ardnamurchan Lighthouse where Gannets, Kittiwakes and Manx Shearwaters were watched out at sea. Twite were also seen, part of a small flock that always appear in the vicinity of the Lighthouse. A nice patch of Northern Marsh Orchids was a pleasant diversion. On the return journey we stopped to photograph Lesser Butterfly Orchids before returning to the Bunkhouse for dinner and once again the Pine Martens performed admirably.

Day 3

Monday 20th June

15°C, rain showers, sun. Treshnish Isles.

Today was the day of the boat trip to the Treshnish Isles so after breakfast we drove down to Mingary Pier stopping at Camas nan Geall viewpoint on the way. No eagles showed but two Otters swimming in the bay was a real bonus and three Harbour Seals were also on show. Two Common Redpolls flew over. At Mingary Pier a pair of Common Whitethroat were showing well while a Northern Wheatear tackled a snail on the road just ahead of us.

With eyes peeled from the boat we were quickly spotting Gannets, Kittiwakes, Shags, Guillemots and Razorbills while a Bonxie fly past was a bonus. The highlight was definitely a Minke Whale which surfaced several times much to the delight of the watching throng. As we neared the islands Puffins started to appear on the sea.

Our first stop was the island of Staffa on which we had an hour to explore. The first route taken is normally around to Fingal's Cave, made famous by the music of Felix Mendelssohn although the basalt formations had been around thousands of years before his arrival on the island. There is usually some time left to climb to the top of the island where around 600 pairs of Puffin breed before boarding the boat for the 25 minute crossing to Lunga.

After negotiating the rocky beach and short steep climb to the island's upper level we were rewarded with the sight of hundreds of Puffins at very close quarters, 3,000 of which are reported to inhabit the island at breeding time. There is also a 20 minute walk to the rocky eastern end of the island which contains the main colony of Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes along with even more Puffins. The walk is dotted with breeding Fulmars and Shags. All in all a photographer's dream. Our two hour stay on the island seemed to fly by but just before we started the trek back to the boat a Bonxie flew through the colony putting everything up in the air in a mad swirl of hundreds of seabirds. A couple of families of Eider were also seen.

As we boarded the boat it started to rain so our timing was spot on. The highlight of the return journey was a fly past of up to fifty Manx Shearwaters. Once back on dry land it was back to the Bunkhouse for another fine meal and more Pine Marten action. Overnight a Badger was picked up on the trail camera.

Day 4

Tuesday 21st June

16°C, mist early, clearing later

A misty start this morning but nevertheless after breakfast we kicked off the day at Aperitif Point where we were rewarded with views of two Otters, one clearly a pup. Willow Warblers seemed to be singing constantly and a Great Spotted Woodpecker called from the Sessile Oaks. Oystercatchers, Curlew, Greenshank, Common Tern and Common Gull provided the supporting cast.

Our next destination was to be Sanna Bay but we took the opportunity for a quick look at the White-tailed Eagle nest where the chick was still in residence and an adult was watched in flight. Also on route to Sanna we stopped for a walk up to view the abandoned settlement of Glendrian and the very obvious caldera. Meadow Pipits and Skylarks were plentiful and the small Sand Martin colony in the car parking area was being well used.

At Sanna a Cuckoo was calling and was located on some wires; it stuck around long enough for everyone to get good views. A family of Wheatears were busy hunting insects amongst the sheep. More than 100 Manx Shearwaters were on the sea, taking flight when a boat passed, Gannets and Common Terns were also present while Ringed Plovers were on the beach. Everyone enjoyed Sanna and it was with reluctance that we moved on.

On the return journey we stopped off at Kilchoan Jetty where we watched two Otters for around 20 minutes, a Common Snipe had been seen on the approach to the Jetty and two Black Guillemots were seen on the water. A Sedge Warbler showed and gave a brief burst of song before disappearing into cover.

Our final stop was Loch Mudle where the White-tailed Eagle chick was showing then it was time to return to the Bunkhouse for dinner and to feed the Pine Martens.

Day 5

Wednesday 22nd June

16°C, changeable

Today we kicked off with a 6.30am walk up Glenborrodale RSPB Reserve, where unfortunately the weather was a bit damp and few birds were singing. Apart from Willow Warblers and Wrens a lone Tree Pipit perched on the overhead wires at the top of the reserve. Sadly Wood Warbler failed to show. After breakfast we headed off to Swordle Bay on the north of the peninsula, another very scenic place comprising of wild flower meadows, sandy beach and rock pools. Birds seen here included Greylag Geese, Ringed Plover, Red-breasted Merganser and a Whinchat. A brief stop at Ockle produced nothing of note but again this is a beautiful spot. As the weather was closing in we made a coffee stop at the Natural History Centre before taking lunch back at the Bunkhouse.

After lunch we walked down to Aperitif Point but no Otters were showing so we drove east to Acharacle where a walk down to Loch Shiel saw us all admiring and photographing a superb stand of Greater Butterfly Orchids. Tufted Duck, Common Sandpiper and Sand Martins were seen on the Loch. A 15 minute drive further on saw

us looking across at Castle Tioram on Loch Moidart, and as the tide was out we were able to cross the causeway to the castle mound. From there we were able to watch a Buzzard chasing two Oystercatchers while being chased itself by a Herring Gull. Rock Dove and Rock Pipit were seen on the castle walls and a Cormorant showed well on the water giving us the opportunity to compare the ID features with those of the Shags we had watched on the Treshnish Isles.

Back at the Bunkhouse we had another fine dinner, a good helping of Pine Martens and an interesting talk on the history, landscape and peoples of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula from Niall, Deer Management Consultant and Bunkhouse manager.

Day 6

Thursday 23rd June

16°C, fine with a gentle breeze

After breakfast we headed off to Kentra stopping at Salen Jetty on the way to pick up some supplies. At Kentra a Sparrowhawk flew over the saltmarsh, while Common Sandpiper and Oystercatchers were on the shore and a Cuckoo called from the woods. Our next stop was the Garbh Eilean hide where we enjoyed close views of an Otter as it clambered over rocks before swimming into open water and started fishing. There were at least 15 Harbour Seals either on the rocks or in the water, a Red-breasted Merganser was also diving for fish and a Spotted Flycatcher was in the Oaks close to the hide. We enjoyed our picnic lunch in the hide before driving to Ariundle Woods near Strontian.

After a lengthy search we eventually found three Chequered Skippers giving everyone good photographic opportunities. Other butterflies seen were Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Orange-tip and Red Admiral. Moths included Common and Green Carpets, Brown Silverlines and Chimney Sweepers. Beetles seen were Two-banded Longhorn, the ground beetle *Pterostichus niger* and Garden Chafer. Hoverflies include *Sericomyia silentis*, *S. superbiens* and *S. lappona*.

All in all a lovely place with bags of potential. It was then off to Ariundle Café for another excellent dinner before heading back to the Bunkhouse for our Pine Marten fix.

Day 7

Friday 24th June

23°C, fine, rain in the evening

Our first stop after a leisurely breakfast was at a viewpoint overlooking Camas Bân with a breath-taking view down Loch Sunart, although the odour coming from the rotting silage meant that we didn't stay for long! Never missing an opportunity to stop at the beautiful view along the Peninsula we stopped first at the viewpoint of Camas nan Geall where distant calls of Common Sandpiper and Yellowhammer could be heard and Redpolls and Linnets flew overhead.

Two fine Red Deer stags with velvet antlers looked down from above Allt na Mi-Chomdhail as they decided if we were friend or foe. The velvet covers the antlers during the growing period and is shed before the deers start to rut.

A message received for Tom at Naturetrek alerted us that two bull Orcas had been seen from Ardnamurchan Lighthouse. The Orcas have been named John Doe and Aquarius and are the only remaining individuals from a pod of around 20 and have been spotted as far south as Cornwall.

The news was a couple of days old but we thought it was worth checking just in case. There were a couple of boats off Coll and one looked like a whale-watching boat so we scanned the area and eventually an Orca's dorsal fin rose from the sea and promptly disappeared again. After about 10 minutes the boat took off at a rate of knots and came to a sudden stop. We kept on scanning ahead of the boat and two Orca fins broke the surface a couple of times. They didn't reappear for another 20 minutes or so and the boat headed off back to Mull.

A fortuitous and memorable encounter, thanks for the message, Tom!

We had a few apples left over from our lunch so we took a short diversion along the road to Sanna to feed the pigs before returning to the bunkhouse.

The afternoon was spent at Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide where Harbour Seals continued to show well although there was no sign of the Otter so we headed off to the Ariundle Café for an early dinner.

Day 8

Saturday 25th June

20°C

A pre-breakfast sighting of Pine Marten was unusual on our last day at Glenborrodale and two fine male Siskins were early visitors to the bird table as we prepared to leave for our journey home. We'd seen some fabulous wildlife, incredible scenery and enjoyed wholesome food cooked freshly for us by Kate and her team at Ariundle Café.

Overall, a very successful tour to this remote part of Scotland although midges were few and far between!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only, I = Introduced)

	Common name	Scientific name	June 2022							
			18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
1	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓				✓	✓		
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓		✓				
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>					✓			
6	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					✓			
7	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>			✓					
8	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>					✓	✓	✓	
9	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>				1		H		
10	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>			1	3	2			
11	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>								
12	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		4		1	✓	✓	✓	
13	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓							
15	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
16	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>				3				
17	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				2			1	
18	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				1				
20	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>			✓					
21	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	1						
22	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
24	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓							✓
26	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		1		2				
28	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		2	✓					
29	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓					
30	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>			✓	3				
31	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			✓					
32	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>					2			
33	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓					
34	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		30 +	✓	100 +				
35	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓			1		✓	
36	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓			1			
37	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>			✓	✓			✓	
38	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
39	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>						1		
40	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		2		2			1	

			June 2022							
	Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
41	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2		1	✓	✓	✓	
42	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>					H			
43	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓		H	✓			
44	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1					1	
45	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1						
46	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓							
48	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓							
49	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓							✓
50	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			4	4	3	1	H	
52	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
56	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	H	✓	✓	✓	H	✓	
60	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		1		1				
61	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1			H	H	H	
62	Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		H	2		1			
63	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	H	✓	H	H	
64	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		2			✓	✓	✓	
67	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					2	1	1	
69	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>					1			
71	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		
72	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				2	6			
73	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	1		1	1		1	
76	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
78	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>					1			
79	European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
80	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		3	✓	1	2	1		
82	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>					✓	✓		
83	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓						
84	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
85	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
86	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

			June 2022							
	Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
87	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		H		1				

Insects

		June 2022							
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Butterflies									
Chequered Skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>						3		
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>						1		
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>						1		
Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>						1		
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>						4		
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>						1		
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>				1				
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>				1				
Moths									
Green Carpet	<i>Colostygia pectinataria</i>								
Common Carpet	<i>Epirrhoe alternata</i>								
Brown Silverline	<i>Petrophora chlorosata</i>								
Chimney Sweeper	<i>Odezia atrata</i>								
Dragonflies									
Golden-ringed Dragonfly	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>								
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrosoma nymphula</i>								

Other fauna

		June 2022							
Scientific name	Common name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Mammals									
Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>			2	3		1		
European Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>					1			
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>			1					
Orca	<i>Orcinus orca</i>							2	
Field Vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>						2		
Long-tailed Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	1				1			
Orchids									
Lesser Butterfly									
Greater Butterfly									
Common Spotted									

Heath Spotted									
Northern Marsh									