

Ardnamurchan – Wild Scotland in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

26th June – 3rd July 2022



White-tailed Eagles



Pine Marten



Great Pied Hoverfly



Lunga

Tour report & images by Dave Jackson



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Dave Jackson and Bob Gill (leaders) and 13 Naturetrek clients

Summary

The last spring tour of 2022 with highlights being the Pine Marten family visits each evening, the trip out to Staffa & Lunga with Puffins, Razorbills and Guillemots and the amazing scenery, occasionally under blue sky. We were pleased that the White-tailed Eagle chick that had been seen on previous tours was reluctant to leave the nest and was still there at the end of our week having tricked us into believing it had flown a few days earlier. Several Otters were seen, including one showing very well in the bay from the entrance to our accommodation. We enjoyed wholesome food cooked freshly for us by Kate and her team at Ariundle Café, and had the flexibility of preparing our own breakfast before going out or when arriving back from our early morning walks.

Day 1

Sunday 26th June

18°C - 12°C Glasgow – Glencoe – Ariundle - Glenborrodale

With one vehicle picking up at Glasgow Central Station and the other from Glasgow International Airport, we were soon on our way for the drive up to the Ardnamurchan Peninsular. Our rendezvous point was The Green Welly Stop at Tyndrum for refreshments etc. By this time, it had turned decidedly damp so although we stopped at the Glencoe viewpoint, only a couple of brave souls ventured out to take photos, a shame really as the weather conditions made the place menacing but really atmospheric. With that we continued on to the Corran Ferry. A short drive after the ferry we pulled into a layby with views over the loch, from here we picked out our first Harbour Seals, Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Eider, Common Terns and Eurasian Oystercatchers. From there it was on to The Ariundle Café, Strontian, where we enjoyed our first night's dinner courtesy of Kate and her team followed by a 40-minute drive along the single track road of the Peninsular to the Ardnamurchan Bunkhouse, our base for the week.

Our first job on arrival was to put food out for the Pine Martens who duly obliged with an early appearance to a chorus of shutters as the first photos of the week were fired off.

Day 2

Monday 27th June

18°C, light breeze, overcast

After a leisurely breakfast, we headed west stopping first at Camas nan Geall viewpoint where a Grasshopper Warbler was reeling but avoided our gaze. No raptors showed so we continued on to Loch Mudle, firstly to the Sand Martin colony and then to the White-tailed Eagle nest, viewable on the far side of the Loch. The chick was still on the nest although it was getting really big, wing stretching and flapping, working its flight muscles and looking almost ready to depart. Both adults were perched up in the conifers some distance away but carefully watching on.

We then dropped down to Mingary Pier where the highlights were very close Common Sandpipers and Rock Pipits before moving on to Kilchoan Jetty where we enjoyed a singing Sedge Warbler and three Red-breasted Mergansers out in the bay. We then drove to the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse stopping on the way for a very photogenic Lesser

Butterfly Orchid. The lighthouse sits on the very western-most tip of the mainland and has had a pair of Orcas in the area although they failed to show today. There were however good numbers of Gannets and Kittiwakes offshore.

We then enjoyed a brief visit to Portuairk, an interesting and scenic rocky beach but little was seen apart from a couple of flyover Redpolls. We then headed back towards the Bunkhouse stopping again at the eagles' nest where the chick was still in residence followed by a longer stop at Camas nan Geall where we walked down to the beach to view the standing stones and old graveyard. Back at the Bunkhouse it wasn't long before the Pine Martens put in an appearance, interrupting dinner in the process.

Day 3

Tuesday 28th June

14°C, windy and rain

A day of wind and heavy rain was forecast and so it turned out. Our boat trip had already been postponed so we enjoyed a leisurely breakfast before deciding on braving the conditions. We made a quick stop in Acharacle for the Greater Butterfly, Northern Marsh and Heath Spotted Orchids before continuing on to Castle Tioram. Few birds were braving the weather, but Oystercatchers, Ringed Plovers and Rock Pipits were feeding on the strand line. We braved the walk over the causeway to the castle mound, the castle itself is closed to the public for health and safety reasons but there is a walk around the base. We then made a quick comfort and shop stop at Salen Pier before heading off to Garbh Eilean hide.

From the hide we enjoyed our first Otter sighting as it swam across the front of the island, diving regularly before disappearing altogether. Good views were also had of Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander and two Red-throated Divers. A number of Eider sat on top of one of the islands and a good number of Harbour Seals were either lazing around on rocks or swimming close by. After enjoying our picnic lunch in the hide, we headed back to the Bunkhouse for hot drinks and some relaxation. Late afternoon we walked down to Aperitif Point but we ended up retreating as the weather worsened.

Day 4

Wednesday 29th June

15°C, rain showers, sun. Treshnish Isles

After breakfast we drove to Mingary Pier to catch the boat for the Treshnish Isles. Whilst the weather was looking mixed, it was a vast improvement on the previous day. Our first real sighting from the boat came in the form of two Great Skuas (or Bonxies), sitting on the water behind a fishing boat in the company of a Great Black-backed Gull giving a good indication of just how big these Skuas are. Our first stop was the island of Staffa where we trooped around to look into the magnificent Fingal's Cave, made all the more spectacular by the sea swell crashing into the cave. Black Guillemots, Oystercatchers and Shags were all showing well by the landing stage.

Our next stop was Lunga where we were to spend a couple of hours getting close up and personal with the Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots and Fulmars the island is famous for. Just before we arrived, a Great Skua flew past the boat. Once on the island and as if by magic, out came the sun with everyone enjoying the seabird spectacular of thousands of Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes, Shags and Fulmars with the sounds and smells of a

seabird colony. A single Twite, two families of Eider, Rock Pipits, Oystercatchers and two more Great Skuas provided the supporting cast. Two hours absolutely fly by when you are having fun, and all too soon it was time to clamber back to the boat for an uneventful journey back to Mingary Pier.

After a quick pit stop at Kilchoan Jetty, it was time to get back to the Bunkhouse, dinner and the waiting Pine Martens who, once again, entertained us with their antics well into the night.

Day 5

Thursday 30th June

18°C, still, light cloud and sun

An early morning walk down to Aperitif Point and Glenmore Bay failed to bring us an Otter sighting but there was a lot of Harbour Seal activity and the bonus of a distant Harbour Porpoise. After breakfast we decided to head up to Sanna Bay with our first stop at Camas nan Geall failing on the raptor front. Our next stop was at Glendrian where the small Sand Martin colony was very active and we made the pleasant walk to the top of the hill with the long inactive caldera on our left and the abandoned settlement of Glendrian out in front of us. The caldera shows the extent of the volcanic activity and the effect it had in shaping this landscape. The settlement was abandoned in 1941 although some of the buildings are still visible.

At Sanna we enjoyed a stroll through the dunes down to the picturesque beach often rated as one of the top ten in the UK. The walk is made all the more enjoyable by the stream that winds its way through the dunes down to the sea, the wetland area created in the dunes is a haven for many species of wildflower and the stream itself holds Nine-spined Stickleback as well as Large Red Damselflies. The beach is stunning with white sand and exposed rock pools. Bird life was a bit scarce but an adult White-tailed Eagle perched on some rocks being harassed by three Herring Gulls was a real bonus.

The walk back to the car park over sheep grazed grassland added Wheatear and a Slow Worm to our day list. After a picnic lunch back at the vehicles, we headed back to the Bunkhouse for a cuppa, stopping briefly to check on the progress of the eagle chick - a no show leading us to believe that it had finally fledged.

After a quick cuppa we headed off in the opposite direction to Ariundle Woods, no Chequered Skippers were seen but both Small Pearl Bordered and Dark Green Fritillaries were along with a close up Golden-ringed Dragonfly. As we pulled up at the Ariundle Café for dinner, a Spotted Flycatcher was watched in the trees around the car park.

After another fine dinner, we headed back to the Bunkhouse, stopping at Garbh Eilean hide on the way. No Otters showed but there was plenty of Harbour Seal activity and three Common Sandpipers were perched in a line on the island facing the hide. Back at the Bunkhouse we enjoyed three Pine Martens on the table together, one a youngster. A Badger also visited the table during the night as picked up on the trail camera.

Day 6

Friday 1st July

17°C, fine

After breakfast we planned to drive to the north of the peninsular but we were brought to a rapid halt at the bottom of the drive as ripples were spotted out in the loch. An Otter was busy fishing, swimming and diving before eventually hauling itself out on to the rocks giving prolonged views before slipping back into the water and disappearing altogether. We made our regular stop at Camas nan Geall which proved to be very quiet apart from a distant lone Great Skua sitting out on the water.

We then made what we expected to be a quick stop at the eagles' nest only to find the chick back on the nest. Had it just been hiding in the bottom of the nest the day before? As we watched an adult flew down the valley and perched close to the nest, after a while it flew back up the valley before joining its partner perched up on a distant ridge. While this was happening, a Grasshopper Warbler had been reeling away from nearby scrub giving occasional but brief views.

We then drove out to the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse where, despite extensive scoping very few birds were seen and certainly no Orcas. A bonus came in the shape of two Red-throated Divers, which performed a fly past. After lunch, we planned to drive round to Swordle Bay, stopping on the way to feed some pigs. The food around the pig run also attracting Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Whinchat and a Common Snipe. We were unable to park at Swordle so we continued along the road to Ockle stopping on the way for a fly-over Golden Eagle. At Ockle we also had a fly-over White-tailed Eagle, several Redpoll and a Spotted Flycatcher. On the return journey we detoured to Fasadale where a small cliff-top pool contained tadpoles and young Common Toads and a small stream contained a number of Round-leaved Sundew.

Day 7

Saturday 2nd July

17°C, showers

The day started with a wet walk down to Glenborrodale Bay where we were rewarded with a close Otter that really performed for the small watching crowd for 20 minutes. The only bird of note being a Curlew that we disturbed on our walk down.

After breakfast, we headed east to Kentra Bay, stopping first at Camas Torsa for a quick scan of Loch Sunart. There were no birds showing but some of the group amused themselves turning over stones and seaweed on the beach, Sandhoppers and Sea Slaters were numerous amongst the bladder-wrack.

A Walk down to Loch Shiel only produced Tufted Duck and Teal although on the walk down a bright Emperor Moth caterpillar was a bonus. At Kentra, the tide was out exposing plenty of mud but the only waders on show were Oystercatchers and Curlew.

We returned to the Bunkhouse for a leisurely lunch before setting off again towards Strontian. Our first stop was at Garbh Eilean hide where no Otters were showing, not surprising as children were playing on the slippery rocks below while their fathers watched from the hide!

There was plenty of Harbour Seal activity and several Red-breasted Mergansers showed well. At Strontian we dropped our guests in the centre of the village to walk along the river towards Ariundle while we drove the vehicles to a meeting point midway before walking back to join them. We finished the afternoon at Ariundle Woods where even the insects were quiet although two Slow Worms were a pleasant distraction.

We then enjoyed a pleasant last evening's dinner at the Ariundle Café before saying our goodbyes to Kate and the team and heading back to the Bunkhouse to feed the Pine Martens and get packed for our departure the next morning. It appeared that the Pine Martens sensed that it was our last night as the whole family came out to entertain us, the two kits were almost as big as the adults with a paler throat patch and less bushy tails.

Day 8

Sunday 3rd July

15°C, fine

After our final breakfast at Glenborrodale, we made our way back along the narrow road that we'd become so familiar with over the week passing Salen and the Garbh Eilean hide before boarding the ferry for the short crossing over Loch Linnhe. With no hold-ups as we passed through Glencoe and Rannoch Moor, and after a short stop at Tyndrum, we were soon back in Glasgow where the tour concluded ending another very successful tour to this remote part of Scotland.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced		June/July 2022							
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓							
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>							✓	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓	✓				
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓		✓	✓				
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			2					
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓	✓	✓				1	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓		✓	✓			
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓	✓					
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>							✓	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		H				2	1	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					1		✓	
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓		✓				
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓							
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>								✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>				✓		1		
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>				✓				
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>				✓				
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>	✓			✓				
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>				✓				
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	✓		2			2		
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>				1				
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>				✓				
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>					✓			
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓				
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>						1		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>							2	
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		3		1	1	4		
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	1	1	1	✓	✓	
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			H				H	✓

I=Introduced		June/July 2022							
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>					H		✓	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>					1			
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1	1	1			2	
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓			H	H	✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</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>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓					
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓		✓	H		H	H
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓						
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		H		1				
Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>		H		1				
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H	H		H	1	H	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		✓						
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>				1		H		
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	H							
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓		✓	H	H	H	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>							H	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	1	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>						✓		
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					1	1		
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>						3		
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>					✓			
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓						
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					1	✓		
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>						1		
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>				1				
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>					✓	✓		
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	H	✓	✓	

I=Introduced		June/July 2022							
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓			H	2		
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						1	1	

Mammals

		June/July 2022							
Scientific name	Common name	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3
Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>			1			1	1	
European Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Harbor Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>					1			

Butterflies

		June/July 2022							
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓						
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>					1		1	
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>		✓			1			
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>					1			
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓						
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	

Moths

Brimstone, Drinker, Light Emerald, Clouded-bordered Brindle, Buff-tip, White Ermine, Chimney Sweeper, Mother Shipton, Emperor Moth (caterpillar)

Dragonflies

Keeled Skimmer, Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Large Red Damselfly

Other

Slow Worm, Common Toad