

# Ardnamurchan – Wild Scotland in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th – 25th June 2023

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Minke Whale by Andrea Caws



Pine Marten



Puffin



Red Deer

Tour report compiled by Marcus John, images by Marcus John and Andrea Caws

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Tour participants: Marcus John (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Sunday 18th June**

We all met at lunchtime in Glasgow and set off on the long drive to Ardnamurchan. After enjoying views of Loch Lomond and refreshments at the Green Welly Stop in Tyndrum, we drove across Rannoch Moor and then through Glen Coe, considered one of the most spectacular and beautiful places in Scotland. Soon after, we crossed Loch Linnhe at the Corran Ferry, drove on to Strontian and stopped for dinner at the Ariundle Centre. Despite the long day of travelling, most of us stayed up a while in the sitting room and were rewarded when two Pine Martens came to look for food!

## Day 2

**Monday 19th June**

We walked down to Glenborrodale Bay before breakfast and out to Aperitif Point. The midges were out in force, but we persevered and were rewarded with several Common Seals out in the main loch. Better still, these were joined by a pod of Harbour Porpoise, which we watched for several minutes. Then a large fish (probably a Salmon) shot past the platform, almost under our feet, with a Common Seal in hot pursuit! And before we left, Bill spotted an Otter swimming towards us. Unfortunately, the Otter also saw us and quickly swam out of sight.

It was a wet day but with dry spells and light winds. We drove all the way out to Ardnamurchan Point, where we enjoyed coffee and cakes in the cafe before heading out to the lighthouse. Marcus immediately saw a large splash - a breaching Minke Whale! An adult showed very briefly but the juvenile continued to breach clear of the water for several minutes, often turning on its back and creating a big splash.

As the rain was intensifying, we ate our lunch back at the bunkhouse, before heading out to the hide at Garbh an Eilean. Here we spent a thoroughly enjoyable hour watching Oystercatchers, the heronry and Common Seals, which were loafing on the rocks and swimming in the shallow water. Most unexpected was a first summer Great Northern Diver, which was busily feeding and swam quite close to the hide.

In the evening, we were delighted to see (and photograph) several young Red Deer in the garden around the bunkhouse - a lovely way to complete our first full day.

## Day 3

**Tuesday 20th June**

Today was spent almost entirely at sea and on the Treshnish Isles, which lie off the west coast of Mull. With light winds and dry weather, the sea was quite calm as the Staffa Tours boat set off from Kilchoan. Our course took us around the north-west coast of Mull and we soon started seeing both Common and Black Guillemots swimming in the water. As we headed south, the Treshnish Isles came into view, and we began to see Razorbills and a few Puffins. As we approached the landing point, we saw many seals hauled out on the rocks and hundreds of birds floating on the water.

We had two hours on the island of Lunga and it was superb. Puffins were sitting outside their burrows just a few hundred metres from the jetty and none of us could walk on without stopping to take photos. The main footpath meanders through grassy and rocky areas, past cliffs where Fulmars constantly fly in and out of their nests, until

after a mile or so it reaches Harp Rock. Literally thousands of Common Guillemots jockey for position here; the noise (and smell) is impressive! Also breeding here are dozens of Razorbills, Shags and Kittiwakes. The bright light and close proximity to the birds provided wonderful opportunities for photography. A Great Skua flew past in menacing fashion, and a pair of Arctic Skuas were patrolling the skies, chasing auks to force them to drop their catch.

It took just a few minutes to travel from Lunga to Staffa, where we had an hour to wander across the flat grassy plateau or walk along the basalt columns to enter Fingal's Cave. After that, we settled down to enjoy the fast ride back to Kilchoan, enjoying more spectacular coastal scenery.

## Day 4

## Wednesday 21st June

Several of us went out early to walk through the RSPB Glenborrodale reserve, an area of maritime oak woodland that is now defined as temperate rainforest. The walk climbs steeply into the hillside and then traverses the wooded slopes above Loch Sunart. We heard both Grasshopper and Wood Warblers but just as we were trying to find the latter, the heavens opened and we had to walk quickly back down to the road and then to our vehicle.

After a late breakfast, we headed out along the coast to look for Otters in the nearby bays. Although we were unlucky with mammals, after spending several minutes scanning from the Camas nan Geall raptor watchpoint, an adult White-tailed Eagle soared above a high ridge. We all had good views as the white tail gleamed in the sunlight – the sheer size of this majestic raptor was impressive.

We drove up to the north coast and out to the end of the road at Ockle. We checked the stream, where several Grayling were resting in a deep eddy, then walked up to high ground to look for eagles. The raptors were not showing but instead, we enjoyed watching several Gannets flying around offshore and then plunging into the sea for fish. We also had good, prolonged views of Whinchat sitting up in the bracken. Although we didn't see Dipper on the stream, we did find Grey Wagtail and even better, a family of Spotted Flycatchers.

We drove into Kilchoan for lunch and then back to the north shore to explore Kilmory Bay. The sun came out as we wandered down to the deserted beach. Common Sandpipers and Oystercatchers were calling whilst standing watch over their young and a Common Buzzard flew low overhead. With obliging wildlife and a beautiful sandy bay, we spent a time enjoying the moment and taking lots of photographs!

On our drive back to the bunkhouse, we stopped to photograph an impressive stag which sat high on a crag above the road – the monarch of the glen!

## Day 5

## Thursday 22nd June

As usual, a group of us headed down to the bay before breakfast. It was a bright morning, and our hopes were high. The bay looked serene from Aperitif Point and as we scanned the flat water, we saw movement across the outer bay - an Otter! We watched it swimming and eating at the surface and were delighted when it climbed out onto the rocks to eat a larger fish. Everyone enjoyed excellent views through the scope. After three or four minutes, it swam off into the inner part of the bay and out of sight. Most of us quickly headed back to the road where we

saw it again, though more distantly. Kathy stayed at Aperitif Point and the Otter swam right past her as it headed back out of the bay.

Today we explored the eastern area of the Ardnamurchan peninsula. Our first destination was Castle Tioram, the ancestral home of the Clanranald and a strategic fortress in the middle ages. It sits on a rocky outcrop, connected to the shore by a narrow sandy causeway that was still covered by the high tide. With an open, shallow bay backed by sheer cliffs, it is a dramatic location. We walked up to the castle walls and were able to watch a juvenile White-tailed Eagle on the nest. Although fairly distant, we could see it quite well through the scope.

The next stop for most of us was the hide at Garbh an Eilean, after which we visited Kentra Bay and went for a short walk at Arivegaig. Others went to participate in a craft activity at the Ariundle Centre, where they spent the morning making beautiful, felted scarves.

In the afternoon, we visited Loch Shiel, looking out across the waters from the jetty in Acharacle. We found a pair of nesting Common Gulls and enjoyed watching the Sand Martins as they fed low over the water. We had time for coffee and cakes in Café Tioram before returning to Ariundle for a walk in the Oak woods. After another delicious three-course dinner, we drove back to the bunkhouse in warm evening sunshine.

## Day 6

## Friday 23rd June

Despite the wet weather, several of us set off for Aperitif Point on the basis that Otters don't mind the rain! And sure enough, an Otter was quickly seen feeding on the far side of the bay. It gradually swam across as it fished and came very close before finally noticing us and disappearing. An excellent start to the day.

After a good breakfast, we set off for Swordle Bay. It was windy and quite wet as we drove through Branault, but a Snipe sat up on a roadside post, giving us an unusual opportunity to admire its cryptic plumage. Once at Swordle, we walked out to see the Bronze Age remains and the site of a 9<sup>th</sup> century Viking ship burial, before exploring the beach. We found our second Great Northern Diver quite close on the sea and a smart Ringed Plover.

Having got rather wet, we decided to go to the visitor centre and as we approached the back of Ben Hiant, a huge raptor appeared over the road in front of us. We pulled over and quite close overhead was an immature White-tailed Eagle. It was flying away towards the mountain when an adult appeared and flew across - an exhilarating experience!

After our coffee break, we drove to Kilchoan to eat our sandwiches overlooking the bay. The sky was brightening, so we set off to finish our day at Sanna Bay, one of the most beautiful beaches in Scotland. We walked through the dunes and onto the white sand, where we had time to relax and enjoy this special place. We found our first Red-throated Diver and another Ringed Plover, which was very photogenic as it stood on the black basalt rock with the turquoise sea behind it.

## Day 7

## Saturday 24th June

Once again, we met up at 6:30am to head down to Glenborrodale Bay. This morning it was overcast and breezy, but the light soon changed, and the shadows lifted to reveal the rich golden browns and bright greens of the

seaweed. The different coloured strata of rock, seaweed, water and trees create a unique and constantly shifting landscape. The bay seems to have a different character each morning as the tides come and go and the light constantly changes. Six Common Seals were feeding in the shallow water, whilst Oystercatchers, Curlews and Common Sandpipers flew calling around the bay.

After breakfast we set off for Camas nan Geall raptor watchpoint; although we did not see many raptors on a cold and grey morning, an adult Cuckoo was an unexpected bonus. The rain began to intensify, so we decided to head for shelter in the Visitors Centre.

We boarded the ferry at Kilchoan and headed out on the 35 minutes crossing to Tobermory, on the Isle of Mull. On the way, we had good views of Common Guillemot, Northern Gannet and Common Tern. We all greatly enjoyed a relaxed lunch in Tobermory, with time to wander around the harbourside shops of this picturesque town.

On returning to Kilchoan, we went for a short walk along the foreshore by Mingarry Castle. We found both Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat near the castle and from a raised viewpoint, we had good views of four Harbour Porpoise as they fed quite close to the shore.

In the evening, we were again visited by our resident Pine Martens. Everyone felt privileged to have enjoyed such exceptional views of this normally shy mammal throughout the week.

## Day 8

## Sunday 25th June

After a final visit to Glenborrodale Bay, we set off after breakfast for the long drive back to Glasgow. We crossed back over Loch Linnhe on the Corran Ferry and up through Glencoe, before taking a break in Tyndrum. We arrived back in Glasgow in plenty of time for trains and flights.

It had been a memorable week with some excellent wildlife on view. From prolonged views of Otter, through close encounters with Puffins to our resident Pine Martens, there had been so many highlights! We also enjoyed encounters with White-tailed Eagles, as well as a range of other highland bird species - all amidst stunning scenery and mostly good weather.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023							
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		12	30		20			
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>					5			
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>							1	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>							1	
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>							✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>					1			
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		2	4	4	2	2	2	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>						2		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>						1		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	2	5	9	6	4	10	4	1
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>				H		2	2	
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>			20					
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>							1	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>					2			
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		8	6		6	4	6	2
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>			1					
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>			2					
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			c200 0				1	
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			c100					
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>			20					

Common name	Scientific name	June 2023							
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			c500					
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			1			1		
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>		1				1		
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			c80					
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			✓	✓				
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			2	20			2	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		2						
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	2	2	c100		4		2	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				1				
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>				1		2		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1		9		6	4	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>								
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			H	4	2		2	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			2	1		2		
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>				H				
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		H		2	1		H	H
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>							1	
Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>				H				
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H					H	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>				2	H	H	1	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					1			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			2	H			H	H
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		H	H	1	1		1	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				3				
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				1				
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				1			1	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1				2		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>							1	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				1				
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓		✓				

		June 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>					1			
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		1		1		6		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				2		2	2	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				4		6	H	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		H		H			H	

## Mammals

		June 2023							
Scientific name	Common name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			12					
Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		20	5		20	2	6	6
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		1			1	1		
European Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>	1	2	2	1	2		2	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		14	5	45	20	3	6	
Domestic Goat	<i>Capra hircus</i>							1	
Common Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>		2						
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>		3					4	
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		1		1		1	1	
Field Vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>						1		

## Others

		June 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>			✓					
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>					✓		✓	
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>			✓					
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>					✓			
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>				✓	✓			
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>					✓			
Common Goldenring	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>					✓			
6-spot Burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae</i>			✓					
Chimney Sweeper	<i>Odezia atrata</i>					✓			
Common Carder	<i>Bombus pascuorum</i>			✓		✓			
Dor Beetle sp							✓		
Violet Oil Beetle	<i>Meloe violaceus</i>					✓			

Flora noted – Early Purple Orchid, Heath Spotted Orchid