

Ardnamurchan - Wild Scotland in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

16th – 23rd May 2026



Razorbill



Otter



Puffin



Pine Marten

Tour report by Bob Elliot



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Day 1

Saturday 16th May

Paisley to Tyndrum

Our group met at Paisley Gilmour Street and Glasgow Airport, and we began our journey north towards Tyndrum. Our first stop was at Inveruglas, where we scanned the waters of Loch Lomond while discussing the management and conservation challenges of the National Park. Loch Lomond is the largest area of freshwater in the UK, and it spans the Highland Boundary Fault, a geological boundary which separates the more rugged mountainous highlands from the lowlands. The Highland Boundary Fault cuts right through the National Park, and it is why Loch Lomond is broad, shallow and nutrient rich at the southern end, and narrow, very deep and nutrient poor at the northern end.

Continuing north, we stopped at Loch Tulla just north of Tyndrum and took a walk along the remote road to look for wildlife. Although the hoped-for Wood Sandpiper was not present this time, we enjoyed sightings of Greenshank, Tufted Duck and Mallard with young on the loch, and Sand Martins flew over the water. A pleasant walk along the roadside towards the pinewoods produced a selection of common woodland birds, including an incredibly confiding Willow Warbler carrying food to a nearby nest. We returned to Tyndrum and settled into our hotel ahead of dinner.

Day 2

Sunday 17th May

Tyndrum to Ardnamurchan, via Rannoch Moor and Glencoe

An early start had some of our group walking out along the West Highland Way at 6.30am. A very dark Red Squirrel showed particularly well, and a range of common woodland birds accompanied our walk. After a hearty breakfast we departed Tyndrum, stopping briefly to scan traditional Black Grouse habitat. Although none was seen this time, perhaps due to the heavy rain and wind, the marked deer fences suggested birds were still present locally in the restored Caledonian Pine habitats.

Crossing the dramatic brooding expanse of the peatland and pools of Rannoch Moor in heavy rain, we searched the lochans for divers, but without success. Fortunately, the weather later improved suddenly, revealing the magnificent mountain scenery of Glencoe, and a stop gave us time to appreciate the grandeur of the Three Sisters of Glencoe, the towering, steeply-sided ridges of Aonach Dubh, Gearr Aonach, and Beinn Fhada which form the northern face of the Bidean nam Bian massif. It was absolutely stunning scenery, and we could see evidence of woodland restoration taking place on the lower slopes. We continued to the Glencoe Visitor Centre for a coffee stop and to call in to the village for provisions.

Near Corran Ferry, we visited a well-known Red Squirrel site, before making the short crossing to Ardnamurchan; a few Black Guillemots was seen from the ferry as we crossed. With lunchtime approaching, we paused in a very scenic spot overlooking Loch Sunart, where the scopes and binoculars were out in full force as we scanned the loch and surrounding fields. Common Terns were fishing offshore and Common Sandpipers displayed from the water's edge, while Redpolls called from the nearby trees.

We set off towards our accommodation at Glen Borradale. En route we stopped at the Garbh Eilean Wildlife Hide, to stretch our legs and see what we might see over Loch Sunart. The hide sits on a prominent rocky outcrop and has great views. We were in luck, and enjoyed stunning views of a nesting pair of White-tailed Eagles; we watched the larger female feeding two chicks while the male perched nearby. Grey and Common Seals hauled out on surrounding rocks added to the spectacle, and later the female eagle was seen basking in the sunshine on the top of a tall tree. A distant Harbour Porpoise was a great bonus. We managed to tear ourselves away from the wildlife watching, and checked into the Glenborradale Bunkhouse. We enjoyed our dinner at the Natural History Centre, before returning for the evening wildlife log.

Day 3

Monday 18th May

Staffa and the Treshnish Isles

Having risen early, we took the short walk down to the shore below our accommodation, stopping to scan in the bay and a location dubbed 'Aperitif Point', a rather lovely rocky promontory with great views of the loch. Common Sandpipers flitted along the shore edge, and Red-breasted Mergansers fished just offshore.

After our breakfast at the Bunkhouse, we set off for our day at sea. We stopped to look for Otters along the route to our boat rendezvous at Kilchoan Pier. While we scanned, a White-tailed Eagle soared over a ridge behind us: not a bad start to the day!

With improving weather conditions, we boarded our boat at Kilchoan Pier for a memorable excursion to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles. Sunshine and a lively rolling Atlantic swell accompanied us as we travelled along the coast: Ardnamurchan and the lighthouse were to the east, and the imposing coastline of Mull was to the west of us. Several large flocks of Manx Shearwaters passed close to the boat throughout the journey, their black-and-white plumage showing well as they flew just above the water's surface. There was much excitement as the first Puffins and Guillemots were seen on the water around the boat. A rather fine pale-morph Arctic Skua was seen in the distance, harassing a small flock of Kittiwakes, and later a Great Skua passed by.

Landing on Staffa was a bit of a challenge, to say the least, due to the swells rolling around the jetty; those who did go ashore admired the island's remarkable basalt columns and dramatic coastal scenery before continuing to Lunga in the Treshnish Isles. Here, the Puffins proved as enchanting as ever, allowing exceptionally close views as they carried nesting material, socialised, and excavated burrows. Nearby, Guillemot colonies crowded the sea stacks in extraordinary numbers, and as ever on Lunga, the Razorbills and Shags were very confiding. The sights and sounds of a bustling seabird city providing one of the highlights of the trip.

Day 4

Tuesday 19th May

Ardnamurchan Lighthouse and Sanna Bay

An early-morning search for Otters proved unsuccessful, but the beautiful scenery alone made the pre-breakfast effort worthwhile. After breakfast, we collected our picnic lunches and headed towards Ardnamurchan Lighthouse,

situated at the most westerly point on the British mainland, which has panoramic views across to the Small Isles and the Inner Hebrides.

Weather conditions improved as we arrived at the lighthouse, where six Bottlenose Dolphins were seen passing by, just below our watchpoint. Shags and Guillemots were feeding in the strong tidal currents and Gannets flew past, one of them harassed by a Great Skua. After some rather good coffee and cake in the lighthouse café, we travelled north to Sanna Bay for a relaxed walk along the magnificent white-sand beach. Offshore, we managed to see two Great Northern Divers in full summer plumage, and a small group of Dunlin in both breeding and post-winter plumages. We enjoyed our packed lunch beside the shore, while Common Snipes flew about and called from the wetland in front of us.

Later we returned to the bunkhouse, before another delicious meal at the Natural History Centre. While we were enjoying our meal, a White-tailed Eagle was spotted soaring over the coastline, before it dived down at some unseen prey. Not bad for a dinner tick!

Day 5

Wednesday 20th May

Loch Shiel and Ariundle oakwoods

We made another early start, and a walk to Aperitif Point produced immediate rewards when an Otter was seen just offshore at the bottom of the drive. It was watched feeding on a Butterfish (*Pholis gunnellus*) before it disappeared beneath the water. It was the first Otter of our trip, and was so good to see. Following breakfast, we boarded our vehicles and explored the bays near the Natural History Centre, and although no further Otters were seen, a White-tailed Eagle gave excellent views. What a bird: it was so imposing and dominant on the skyline. Nearby, singing Blackcaps and Song Thrushes provided a constant soundtrack.

We travelled to Loch Shiel, scanning from the jetty used by the cruise boats. Highlights included Red-breasted Mergansers, Sand Martins, a Ringed Plover and a distant Cuckoo in flight, all set against the stunning backdrop of the loch. After a short stop for provisions, we continued to Castle Tioram, where magnificent views of the Caledonian Pine cloaked banks rewarded our walk across the tidal causeway to the castle. Interestingly, the usual White-tailed Eagle nest appeared unused this year. During the return journey, a Red Squirrel dashed across the road and climbed into nearby trees.

Refreshments at the Ariundle Centre were accompanied by sightings of Willow Warbler and Bullfinch. We set off on a walk through the ancient Atlantic oakwoods, which were especially atmospheric, with moss-covered branches and lichens draping the trees, and really encouraging signs of woodland regeneration visible throughout the glen, with young oaks poking through the ground flora. Tree Pipits sang and flew their butterfly display flights to and from treetop perches.

Back at the bunkhouse, we prepared for a Pine Marten watch later in the evening, by baiting the tables and logs outside the bunkhouse windows with jam, peanut butter and peanuts. Amusingly, the local Red Deer which regularly graze in front of the Bunkhouse found the peanuts and peanut butter much to their liking, so more food was placed above deer height. Later that evening, we were rewarded, when a Pine Marten showed well near the

windows, foraging on the food as it investigated the area. It was so special to see this impressive mammal so close, and our cameras were working overtime.

Day 6

Thursday 21st May

Garbh Eilean, Loch Moidart and Glenuig

At 6.30am we were again out searching before breakfast for wildlife, and enjoyed brief views of a male Otter near Aperitif Point before it slipped back beneath the water. A Red Squirrel was seen from the bunkhouse windows, obviously enjoying the high-rise peanut placement!

After breakfast, we checked several roadside lay-bys for Otters, without success, before revisiting the White-tailed Eagle hide at Garbh Eilean, thus avoiding the rain. Both adult eagles were present, and we spent time simply appreciating the spectacular setting, accompanied by numerous seals hauled out nearby.

Continuing towards Glenuig, we stopped at Acharacle and again scanned Loch Shiel, where Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Sandpiper were recorded as the rapidly-falling tide exposed the shoreline. Following refreshments, we enjoyed the scenic drive towards Glenuig, with expansive views across to the wild and remote Morvern Peninsula. Lunch was taken beside the shore, before we explored a nearby bay. Some of the group went for a paddle along the shoreline, while others walked the road and discovered a Great Spotted Woodpecker nest. Both adults were observed carrying food into the nest hole and removing faecal sacs: they gave excellent views for everyone.

We later returned via Acharacle and Loch Shiel, before enjoying another excellent dinner at the Natural History Centre. The evening concluded with the customary log, before bed.

Day 7

Friday 22nd May

Otter bays, Camas nan Geall and Fascadale

Our final full day began early with one of the finest wildlife encounters of the trip. Near Aperitif Point we found a female Otter accompanied by two well-grown cubs. At times, the animals were only around twenty metres away in a flat calm sea, and the sound of crabs crunching between their teeth could clearly be heard. The cubs vocalised loudly as they squabbled over food. Eventually the family swam to a nearby vegetated island and disappeared from view: what a truly unforgettable experience.

After breakfast, we travelled towards Camas nan Geall, stopping frequently to scan the bays. Although no further Otters were found, two White-tailed Eagles gave spectacular views soaring overhead, their immense size obvious against the sky. Blackcaps and Willow Warblers provided a constant chorus throughout the morning. At Camas nan Geall, we scanned unsuccessfully for Golden Eagles in the cool, overcast conditions, though a small roadside Sand Martin colony attracted interest due to its unusual location.

We later continued to Ardnamurchan Lighthouse for lunch. Offshore, Manx Shearwaters passed steadily, while Gannets and Guillemot were seen on the water below. Two Arctic Skuas harassed fishing Kittiwakes close to shore, providing an exciting display.

Our final stop was the beautiful bay at Fasdale, on the north coast of Ardnamurchan. Here, we admired views towards Eigg, Muck and cloud-covered Rum, while another White-tailed Eagle soared above the nearby hillsides. We returned to the Bunkhouse, before our final dinner at the Natural History Centre and a last evening log together.

Day 8

Saturday 23rd May

Ardnamurchan to Glasgow

Today we began our return journey through some of Scotland's most spectacular scenery, travelling back via Corran Ferry, Glencoe and Rannoch Moor towards Glasgow Airport and Paisley Gilmour Street. As the tour concluded, we reflected on a memorable week, filled with outstanding wildlife encounters, dramatic landscapes and excellent company, on the beautiful Ardnamurchan Peninsula.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026						
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓					
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓				✓		
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓				✓	✓	✓
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>			✓				
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			H	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</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>		✓	H		✓		
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓			✓		✓
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>						✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>					✓		✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>							
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>						H	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓				✓		✓
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓			
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓			
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>			✓				✓
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>			✓				
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			✓				
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓				
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>							✓
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>					✓	✓	✓
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓				
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			✓	✓			✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			✓	✓			✓
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>							✓
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026						
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓					
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus 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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>					✓	✓	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓					
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>							✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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>					✓	✓	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓						
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>						✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>							✓
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026						
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓				✓
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>				✓			
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>		✓					
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Domestic Goat	<i>Capra hircus</i>		✓					
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓				✓	
European Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>					✓		
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>					✓	✓	✓