

# The Scottish Hebrides by Land & Sea

Naturetrek Tour Report

9th - 16th May 2025

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Black-throated Diver



Butt of Lewis



Callanish



White-tailed Eagle

Tour report and photos by Mick Durham



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Tour participants: Mick Durham (Leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Friday 9th May

The long journey north.

Ullapool – not the very northern point of Britain but certainly the most northerly town on the West coast of Scotland. It was a long day of travelling for all of us. Mick, the tour leader, left home at 6am to drive to Glasgow and pick up the tour minibus. From there it was across to the A9 and onwards through the Cairngorms and up to Inverness airport to pick up some of the group.

Safely on board we made our way back into Inverness to collect three more members of the group waiting patiently at the railway station. Heading out of Inverness we crossed over the Kessock Bridge and drove for just over an hour to reach Ullapool to find the last of the group waiting for us.

However, this was not journey's end. We joined the queue in Ullapool for the CalMac ferry, to sail across The Minch and dock in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis. From here it was a short drive to our hotel and the end of our journey north.

The drive up from Inverness to Ullapool produced little in the way of wildlife apart from a single Red Kite just after we had crossed the Beaulieu Firth. However once on the ferry we began to pick up a number of sightings. As we left Ullapool we saw Herring Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls, a couple of Black Guillemots and for a couple of members of the group, a brief sighting of Harbour Porpoise. Further out across the Minch we met up with rafts of Common Guillemot, some fishing Gannets, two Great Skuas, Fulmars, more gulls and then in the outer harbour of Stornoway we found a couple of Oystercatchers and some Shags.

## Day 2

Saturday 10th May

We woke to more sunshine but a breezy day. After breakfast we drove to the local Co-op for some lunch. Big surprise – there was hardly anything on the shelves. It turned out that the Co-op was yet another of the victims of the recent cyber attacks and all their computer systems were down and they couldn't order fresh stock. We did manage to find some supplies and then we went across to the Spar shop and found some sandwiches. Suitably stocked up we drove out of Stornoway and headed across the moorland road to Barvas. Mick told the group that this was one possible place to find Hen Harrier. A few minutes later a female Hen Harrier was spotted and although we stopped we didn't really get good views of it as it flew off over the moorland.

Next stop was Loch Barvas and this was much more productive. The loch itself was quite choppy making viewing difficult but even so we found a group of Arctic Terns, three sorts of gulls – Herring, Great Black-back and Lesser Black-back. Leaving the loch behind we walked out across the machair to the rocky beach. Mick was hoping to find divers on the sea but the wind had kicked up some impressive waves and nothing else was visible. The foreshore however was alive with activity. As the group scanned around the number of species grew and we eventually agreed on Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Knot (a group of three in summer plumage), Sanderling and Turnstone. We also added Black-headed Gull and Common Gull to our gull list. Skylark and Hooded Crow were also seen as we walked back to the van.

Leaving there we drove along to the minor road up to Barvas cemetery. Along here we found Lapwing, Curlew, Meadow Pipit and Swallow. Moving on we made a brief stop to view the standing stone at Truiseil, the highest of its kind in Scotland. It was time to continue north, with the Butt of Lewis as our next destination – about 12 miles away. En route one of the group spotted a very large bird high in the sky. Luck was on our side with a big area to pull off the road nearby. We spilled out of the van, located the bird and confirmed it was the first White-tailed Eagle of the trip. As we watched it circling higher and higher we realised that it had been joined by a second bird. When they had drifted so far away that they were mere dots, we got back in the van and continued north. We made a brief stop at Ness for a comfort break and then drove up to the Butt of Lewis.

The wind was quite strong giving some dramatic waves around the cliffs here. We spent some time watching them crash against the rocks. Fulmars sitting in the sea pinks looked on as if it was nothing new. We had been talking about the possibility of seeing Whimbrel on this trip and by some quirk of fate, Mick spotted a group of seven sitting out on the rocks. Their shorter bills were very obvious and then they took off calling and that confirmed for everyone that they were indeed Whimbrel. A male Wheatear put in an appearance and we saw our first Rock Pipit and Rock Doves here too.

It was now well into lunchtime so we walked back to the beautiful cove of Port Stoth and sat watching an Arctic Tern fishing as we ate our lunch. Food over, we drove down to the RSPB Reserve of Loch Stiapabhat and walked out to the hide. As we walked along the path we spotted a large flock of Golden Plover accompanied by some Dunlin, feeding in the short grass. Four Lapwing displayed – probably not happy with us walking through what they considered their territory. Once we were in the hide they quietened down.

Greylag Geese dominated the view from the hide – a couple of hundred of them. However we slowly began to see other birds including a pair of Pink-footed Geese, two Whooper Swans, Tufted Duck, Wigeon, Shoveler, Mallard, Redshank, Moorhen and a Pied Wagtail. We then spotted our third White-tailed Eagle, once again high in the sky being mobbed by a Hooded Crow. Once we decided that we had seen everything that was showing we went back to Ness Harbour for a second comfort break. Scanning the bay we found a number of Red-throated Divers and a couple of Black Guillemots.

Our final stop of the day was at the RSPB Reserve at Loch na Muilne. We parked at Arnol Blackhouses (closed for renovations) and walked out to the viewing point with the hope of seeing the Red-necked Phalarope. However the water was so rough and with the viewing point set a long way back we didn't take long to decide we were never going to see phalaropes. We did find a lone Shelduck and a Raven put in an appearance as we walked back to the van.

It was now late in the afternoon and time to return to Stornoway where we called in to Tesco's (parking the minibus was a nightmare) in order to get some lunch for the next day – shops being shut on a Sunday on Lewis. Then it was back to the hotel in order to get showered and changed ready for our evening meal.

We finished the day with a discussion of where we had been and what we had seen. A bird count of 46 seemed reasonable given that we had really only been looking in coastal and inland water habitats.

## Day 3

Sunday 11th May

We started the day with an early morning walk through the grounds of Lew castle. To begin with it was very quiet but soon the bird songs began and we were able to pick up on a number of species. We mainly heard the small birds, hiding away in the leafy canopy but with some persistence we managed to see Robin, Greenfinch and Blue Tit.

Down on the shore we found a Heron fishing and in the outer harbour two Red-breasted Mergansers were busy. Mick knew where the heronry was, so we walked along the shore road listening out for the noisy squeaks of the herons on their nests. Most of the nests are well hidden in the trees well back from the road but a large area of white droppings just off the road indicated activity above. Looking up there was a nest with two adults in attendance. They took no notice of us looking up at them.

By now it was getting time to head back to the minibus in order to make an 8am breakfast. The final tally of birds was Cuckoo, Wren, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Greenfinch, Blue Tit, Robin, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Hooded Crow, Raven, Heron, Mallard and Red-breasted Merganser.

Today we were joining Stornoway Seafaris for a RIB trip along the coast south of Stornoway. We weren't leaving until 11am so Mick suggested that we went looking for the Black-throated Divers that sometimes nest on Loch Orasaigh. It was only a ten minute drive from the hotel and we were soon parked up and, standing in the lee of the minibus, scanning the loch for any sign of the divers. There was a fresh breeze blowing which was kicking up some waves and that didn't help. No sign. Then a White-tailed Eagle was spotted away in the distance. It was high up but slowly coming towards us so most of us were watching it. Fortunately one of the group was still looking for the diver and called out that she had found it. Loch Orasaigh is quite large but the diver wasn't too far away and through the 'scope all the group got reasonable views.

Having satisfied ourselves with this sighting we moved on to Loch Liurbost (a sea loch) in the hope of an Otter. No luck but we did see a Song Thrush and had a brief Cuckoo fly-by. A Buzzard was also spotted.

And so back to Stornoway to join the RIB Our Lilly. Chris took us out of the harbour and into some bumpy water before making the relatively calm waters close in to the shore. We paused at the cliff that held a White-tailed Eagle's nest long enough for everyone to see one of the adults on the nest and then we carried on down towards Loch Mharabhigh. We paused once again because some large black dots had been spotted in the sky. They turned out to be three White-tailed Eagles climbing high in the thermals. Sailing into The Witch's Pool, Chris told us all about the practice of throwing in suspected witches to see if they drowned. If they did they were deemed innocent but if they survived they were guilty and put to death!

Storytime over we slowly cruised into Loch Marabhigh to watch the Harbour Seals hauled out on the rocks. There were quite a few, some swimming close by so we all got good views. A diver was spotted and as we got closer Mick realised it was another Black-throated Diver and not at all expected. With the RIB's engine cut we drifted about getting wonderful views and photo opportunities. All too soon it was time to make our way back to Stornoway. We motored out a little way into The Minch to give ourselves the chance of spotting some cetaceans but the seas were quiet. Back in the outer harbour we found a couple of Red-throated Divers to round the trip off. Once we were back on dry land we drove back to the hotel for a late lunch.

After lunch we decided to explore “The Road to Nowhere” or at least the road that takes you to the Bridge to Nowhere. This was the road Lord Leverhulme wanted to build from Stornoway to Ness but he never finished it. It ends at a concrete bridge over a small ravine. We parked here and then walked out along the rough track to an area Mick knew was good for Stonechats and sure enough we found at least two females and a male. We also found a male Wheatear and a couple of Meadow Pipits. After spending some time enjoying the views of two spectacular beaches we set off back towards Stornoway. On the drive we picked up yet one more White-tailed Eagle – our sixth of the day and ninth of the trip.

Once back at Stornoway we drove out towards the Eye Peninsular but parked up overlooking the broad bay of Bràigh na h-Aoidhe to scan for divers. We soon spotted one quite close into the shore. It turned out to be a splendid Great Northern Diver in summer plumage which completed our list of possible divers. A very satisfactory way to finish the day. All that was left was a short drive back to the hotel in time to get ready for our evening meal.

## Day 4

Monday 12th May

### Eagles and Archaeology

A slightly dull start to the day but we set off to go and visit the famous stone circle at Callanish. We arrived to find that the visitor centre and most of the car park was closed. It is all getting a major makeover – a £10 million makeover! As a result it would seem that coaches are not really able to visit and when we walked up to the Stone Circle we were amazed and delighted to have it to ourselves. Eventually other people arrived but Mick, the tour leader, delighted in the ability to take some photographs with nobody in the way. Finally it started to get crowded – at least ten people had arrived – so we made our way back to the van and spent some time searching Loch Ròg for otters. No joy but we did see Curlew, Black Guillemot and Red-throated Divers. A rather surprising sighting as we pulled away in the van – a Brown Rat ran across the road. Even more surprising it featured in the Naturetrek checklist of mammals we might see! Sticking to the archaeological theme, we drove up to Dùn Carloway to visit the broch there, and to make use of the toilets at the small visitor centre. There were coaches here but they soon left for the next stop on their itinerary again leaving us as almost the only people at the broch.

From Dùn Carloway we retraced our steps back to the main north-south road and drove as far as a minor single track road leading down to Eishken. This was a road known to Mick who had seen Golden Eagle here on previous visits and Golden Eagle was our target species for the day. We drove along as far as Loch Sgiobacleit where we pulled off the road for some lunch. We all interspersed our eating with scanning the ridges and skyline but nothing was seen. Once we had all finished eating, Mick suggested that we move on and we were just about to get into the minibus when someone called out that they had spotted a large bird high up above the ridgeline. It was our first Golden Eagle. We tracked its progress down across the hillside until it disappeared from view behind a large bluff, not to reappear. We waited patiently to see if it was going to appear again but unfortunately it didn't. Time to move on.

The next location, again looking for an eagle, was the walk around the North Harris Trust Ardvorlie woodland project. A circular walk takes you up to a beautifully designed observatory overlooking Gleann Bhiogadail and Loch Seaforth. By now the sun was out and the wind had dropped so we had a very pleasant walk, a bit of a pull up to the observatory it has to be said, but we saw Willow Warbler in the now well established birch trees. From the observatory we scanned the skyline and checked the glen but found nothing. However we had not long left

the observatory and begun the pull up and over towards the car park when a member of the group called out and there was our second Golden Eagle, once again circling high above the hillside. We all got good views of it before it disappeared again. The walk back to the van produced no more excitement but we decided to go to one more location to try for number three.

We drove back north to Balalen and then drove out along the road on the south side of Loch Eresort. First stop was at Ravenspoint. There were no Ravens nesting on the cliffs here this year, much to Mick's disappointment as he had enjoyed watching them last year, but the shop keeper was glad we had stopped. When we left his stock of Magnum ice creams was eight lighter than before we arrived! Onwards and Mick took the minor roads that lead to Marvig. Here we were able to look down over Loch Mharabhig where we had visited with Stornoway Seafaris. It was now getting late and time to turn around and head for home. But... It wasn't all over. Within a few minutes of leaving Marvig, a large bird was spotted ahead of us. We stopped and checked and yes ... Golden Eagle number three. Finally it did not fly off but eventually came into land on the top of a hill. Mick was able to set up the 'scope and everyone got good views of it bathed in afternoon sunshine.

Time really was running away with us so we left it still sitting on the top of the hill and made our way, swiftly but safely back to Stornoway and our hotel. We just had time to get showered and changed before our evening meal. We finished the night with our run through of where we had been, what we had seen and what the plan was for the next day.

## Day 5

Tuesday 13th May

### Stunning beaches but no eagles.

Another dull start to the day but the forecast came good and by mid-morning the sun was back out and the afternoon was positively Mediterranean. Today we explored the western side of the Isle of Lewis with its rugged landscapes, single track roads and stunning beaches. We drove out almost to Callanish and then headed along the B8011 which would eventually become a dead end at Mealasta. As we approached Loch Surstabhat, Mick spotted two Red-throated Divers not very far away so we stopped and with the 'scope got some good views. Then we spent some time scanning Loch Ròg Beag, a sea loch, in the hope of finding an Otter. Nothing was moving so we carried on, checking other likely Otter spots as we went.

The road curved inland and we kept watching for raptors but by the time we reached Gleann Bhaltos we had seen nothing more than a Buzzard and a Raven. Once through Gleann Bhaltos we joined the minor road south down to the carpark at Traigh Uig, an amazing area of sand, particularly as we were experiencing very low tides. We had sat in the minibus for quite long enough so we stretched our legs out across the sand to look at some of the wonderful rock formations further along the beach. Back at the van we heard a Cuckoo and a Sedge Warbler but couldn't locate either of them. A few hundred yards back up the track we stopped at the carving of one of the Lewis Chessmen which marks the spot, roughly, where they were discovered. Mick heard a Snipe drumming, a sound new to the rest of the group and we finally spotted it high in the sky. Here we also saw a pair of Lapwing and a pair of Redshank and a couple of chicks. It was never clear to us who owned the chicks.

From there we continued slowly on to the end of the road, constantly drawn on by the magnificent beaches as they unfolded along the road. When we couldn't go any further we got out and spent some time scanning both the

sea and the hills. The hills were quiet but the sea had both Red-throated and Great Northern Divers on it as well as a couple of Black Guillemots and a Shag. It was nearing lunch time so we drove back to Mealasta Beach, the perfect spot for lunch. As we sat eating our sandwiches we were entertained by diving Gannets and some more divers in the bay. Still no eagles so we retraced our steps and then diverted up on to the headland at Mangersta where Mick had found a pair of Red-throated Divers on a small lochan the year before. They had been easily viewed from the minibus but this year there was no sign of them. Back down through Gleann Bhaltois and then we did the loop around the Valtos peninsular. More stunning beaches and a Kestrel which was a bonus.

Heading back we scanned all the Otter spots again with no success and so decided to take the road across the bridge and on to Great Berneray. The narrows at the bridge looked perfect for an Otter but still no joy. We drove out to Valasay, another potentially good Otter spot but luck was not on our side. The afternoon was slipping away and it was time to start heading back. Once on the main road, Mick diverted north and on to the Pentland road, a long single track road heading across wild moorland to Stornoway. It's known as a good place for raptors, especially Hen Harriers but not today. A Raven was the best we could do. We finally drove in to Stornoway, tired but full of sunshine and wind, having seen some spectacular scenery made all the more special by the sunny weather. We had in fact recorded a good number of species even though the list didn't include any eagles. Two Cuckoos had been seen and a third heard, the Snipe and the Kestrel were new birds and as was the Sedge Warbler that was heard but not seen. Another Common Sandpiper, baby Redshank, or were they baby Lapwing, Red-throated and Great Northern Divers and many other birds that we had also recorded on other days. Mammals were the usual Rabbit, Harbour Seal and Red Deer. Perhaps not such an exciting day as yesterday in terms of birds but the landscapes more than made up for it.

## Day 6

**Wednesday 14th May**

### The Shiantas – Puffins, more Puffins and even more Puffins – and some eagles!

The Shiantas are a small group of islands lying off the eastern coast of Harris – well known for their seabird population including thousands of Puffins, Razorbills and Guillemots. This was the day we were booked on a trip out from Tarbert with Kilda Cruises to visit them. We were due to sail at 9.30am and with an hour's drive to get there it was a relatively early start. Breakfast at 7am, down to Spar to buy our lunch and we were away just before 8am. In fact the run down was very clear and we were parking in Tarbert just before 9am. A quick toilet stop and then we walked down to the pontoons to meet Angus and Fred aboard the 55ft Hirta.

We cleared the pontoon and set off out of Loch Tarbert. Soon we were passing under the bridge across the Scalpay narrows and heading out to sea. It wasn't long before we were seeing the occasional Guillemot as we scanned the seas for cetacean. We were about half way into the crossing when Fred spotted a Minke Whale just rising to the surface. It came up twice more allowing some of the group to see it before it disappeared from view. The Hirta is a pretty speedy boat and the Shiantas were coming ever closer. Now the Guillemots were being joined by a few Puffins and the odd Gannet.

The first group of islands we came to were the Galtachan islets and cruising past Galta Mor we saw our first White-tailed Eagles of the trip as two rose up from the cliffs, circled around and then disappeared behind the island. Rafts of Guillemots, Razorbills and some Puffins drifted along, diving if they felt threatened by our approach. As we sailed around Garbh Eilean two more White-Tailed Eagles appeared and then we rounded the corner to be met

by a sea covered in birds. There were thousands of auks and Puffins in a raft stretching right across the bay. We landed in amongst the boulder strewn cliffs where we enjoyed close up views of the birds for about twenty minutes before the inflatable came back for us. Then we sailed on to the narrow spit of land joining Garbh Eilean to Eilean an Taighe where once again we were put ashore for an hour's exploration of the island. Mick had said this was a place that we might find Eiders, a bird that had so far eluded us, and sure enough there were a couple of pairs in the bay. Great Skuas patrolled the skies and a noisy Wren competed with the sounds of the sea birds. The sun shone, the seas were a beautiful blue – it was a totally magical place to spend some time.

Eventually, with rumbling stomachs, we rejoined the Hirta for our lunch and a hot drink made by Fred. We sat, eating sandwiches, idly watching yet another White-tailed Eagle as it circled lazily above us. We then set sail as Angus took us for a slow cruise right around the islands. We saw hundreds of nesting Kittiwake and finally amongst a group of Shags we spotted our first Cormorant of the trip. Two more White-tailed Eagles appeared and then landed on a small bluff high up on the clifftop. They weren't easy to see but as we sailed around the island, Mick spotted them again and this time they appeared on the skyline giving lovely views. Finally it was time to head back towards Tarbert. We had seen at least eight eagles we think – it wasn't easy to work out if we were seeing the same birds on more than one occasion but we certainly saw a few different individuals.

On the crossing back a couple of the group caught a glimpse of a Harbour Porpoise and then as we were detouring in to see Loch Bhalamuis Mick spotted an eagle flying in from the sea towards the coast. A quick inspection confirmed it was a Golden Eagle. It disappeared over the hills and we motored on into Loch Bhalamuis to see the Harbour Seals hauled out on the rocks. As we came out of the loch one of the group spotted another Golden Eagle sitting up on the cliffs making it our 22<sup>nd</sup> eagle of the trip (probably, depending on the count of White-tailed Eagles on the Shiant). Nothing else was spotted and as we passed under the Scalpay Bridge Fred handed out a tot of the local whisky to the group. The Tour Leader had to do without as he was driving!!

Soon we were saying goodbye to Angus and Fred and making our way back to the minibus. There was still some time left before we needed to head for home so Mick suggested a couple of short detours to look, once more, for Otters. First we drove along the road towards Hushinish and stopped near where the walk up to the eagle observatory is. The coastline looked perfect for Otters but all we found was a Heron, a Common Sandpiper, a Redshank and what was probably a Curlew but it was very distant and hidden amongst the seaweed. The second detour took us down a narrow road to the shores of Loch Seaforth, giving good views of the Shiant as we dropped down to the end of the road. Once again we failed to find any Otters. By now it was time to head for home and we climbed our way up and over the mountains of North Harris, on to Lewis and finally back to Stornoway. A day full of sights, sounds and smells it has to be said. Wonderful weather, lots of eagles – what could be better?

## Day 7

Thursday 15th May

### Wall to wall sunshine and final forays

With such a lovely morning it was an easy choice to take another early morning walk through the grounds of Lew Castle. The harbour was flat calm and we had hoped to get some good views of the divers that we had seen on our return from the Stornoway Seafaris trip. No divers. In fact apart for a couple of gulls there was nothing on the water. To make up for it the woods were alive with bird song and we saw Blackbird, Robin, Wren, Siskin, Blue Tit and Chaffinch and heard Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Goldcrest and Raven. At the heronry we could just make out



one Heron on the nest but nearby sat another with its wings apart sunning itself. We made this our turning point and wandered back to the minibus ready for breakfast.

Our first excursion was to drive south to the Aline Community Woodland walk out to Loch Seaforth. This is a gentle one mile walk through mainly pine woodland where we found Siskin and Coal Tits. The view as we reached Loch Seaforth was spectacular. The water was mirror calm, there wasn't a sound (until the cuckoo got going!) and conditions looked perfect for finding Otters. We spent perhaps half an hour there scanning and watching but no Otter showed its whiskery face. The Cuckoo flew across the loch, two Red-throated Divers flew in and a couple of Grey Seals pretended to be Otters. It was difficult to leave such a special location but we decided that waiting probably wasn't going to give us an Otter. As we turned to leave a Brown Rat was spotted running across the rocks - our second of the trip.

We then drove to the 'eagle road' – the minor road leading eventually to Eishken – a location we had seen a Golden Eagle a few days before. We drove all the way down to Eishken without seeing anything but on the way back a Golden Eagle was spotted in the distance. We all got out of the van and spent a few minutes watching it drift slowly away. As we had got to drive towards where it went anyway we set off with the vague hope of seeing it again. Surprisingly we did and we were able to watch it fly down into the cliff face where we saw the previous Eagle. Mick got the 'scope out but none of us were able to find it again. Had it flown? We didn't think so. Perhaps it was tucked down on its nest. We decided to sit and have our lunch just in case it appeared again. That wasn't to be but we enjoyed seeing the Drinker Moth caterpillar wandering across the road. We took our time over lunch – it was a very peaceful spot and the sun was warm on our backs but eventually it was time to move on.

We then drove down the B8060 along the side of Loch Erisort as far as Kershader and the Ravenspoint shop, café and toilets. We 'paid' for the use of the toilets with another order of eight magnums! Then it was on towards Marvig. As we moved on to the single track road we spotted a car parked and three people staring into the distance through binoculars. We pulled in just ahead of them and soon picked up on our second Golden Eagle. This one really was in the distance so we didn't spend long watching it but drove on down to Marvig to look over Loch Mharabhig in the hope of seeing an Otter. Harbour Seals were all we saw. We then drove the loop all the way round, through Calbost and Gravir without picking up anything else of interest and then we started to retrace our route back to the main north-south road.

A quick conflagration in the minibus and we decided to drive back to Stornoway and then drive out on the Barvas road where we had briefly seen a female Hen Harrier on our first day. Since then we had had no more sightings so this was to be a last ditch effort. A slow drive all the way to Barvas revealed absolutely nothing so we drove down to Loch Barvas in the hope of hearing a Corncrake. Talking to a local crofter, he said he hadn't heard any this year. Whilst we were there we scanned Loch Barvas and spotted two children making sand castles, a young lady blowing up her paddleboard, some Arctic Terns and a few Dunlin.

Back in the bus we started back up the Barvas road, diverting into the small industrial estate because the crofter we had talked to said that Corncrake were sometimes heard there. We didn't hear Corncrake but a singing Chiffchaff gave us a new bird. Heading back along the Barvas road a cry came from the back of the minibus and our eighteenth and final White-tailed Eagle. It was our twenty fifth eagle in total. Not a bad way to finish the trip. We made Stornoway before rush hour giving the group a little time to start their packing as we have a very early start the next day.

## Day 8

Friday 16th May

### Early start and a calm crossing

We were all up early this morning and away from the hotel by 6am. The drive to the ferry terminal was quick and soon we were waiting our turn to board the Loch Seaforth, one of CalMac's newer boats. Once on board some of the group headed for our first coffee but the mirror calm waters of Stornoway harbour encouraged the rest of us up on deck. Promptly at 7am we set off for a very relaxed, easy crossing to Ullapool.

Watching from the deck was a joy – the now familiar sights of the coast of Lewis slowly slipped away and we were treated to magnificent views of the Shiant, away in the distance. Guillemots, a few Red-throated Divers and the occasional Puffin slid by and soon we were enjoying watching the mountains of the NW Highlands come into view.

Our group of watchers was joined by a couple who had spent two weeks travelling through Skye, the Uists and Harris and Lewis and we swapped travellers tales and sightings. This was interrupted with a shout – a Harbour Porpoise had been spotted. We were then treated to several views of small pods of Short-beaked Common Dolphins and a few more Harbour Porpoise.

As we sailed into the outer reaches of Loch Broom a couple of Great Skuas joined us briefly and then, only five minutes away from docking, finally, we spotted an Otter swimming along the coastline. It was a brief and tantalising view but soon, with the boat moving on and the Otter swimming in the opposite direction we lost sight of it.

We were almost last off the boat and then first stop was the main Ullapool carpark where we said goodbye to two of the group. On from there it was an hour's drive back across to Inverness. The hills looked spectacular but we saw little else in terms of wildlife. However, as we drove along the side of the Blackwater river, two of the group spotted a Dipper – our last new bird of the trip.

Once in Inverness it was only left to make the two drop offs at the railway station and then out to the airport. Mick then set off on the journey south, back to Glasgow to return the minibus and then finally south again to Dumfries. The end to a spectacular week in the most northerly of the Western Isles.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		✓						
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓					✓	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓					✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓						
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓						
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</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	✓	H	2	✓	3	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓		✓				
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓						
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓						
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		7						
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓					
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓						

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓						
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓					✓	
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓						
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓			
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	
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>		✓	✓					
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>Cephus grylle</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>						✓		✓
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			✓					
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>			✓		✓	✓		
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</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>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓							
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				3		2	2	
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓						
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		3	6			8+	1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>					✓			
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓							
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>							✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓				✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	H	H	H		
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				✓			✓	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	H		H	✓	H		✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>							H	
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>					H			
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			H				H	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>							H	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			H			H	✓	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	✓				
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			✓				✓	

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		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓		H			
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>								✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</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>			H	✓			✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓					
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>							✓	

## Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025							
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>								
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>						✓	✓	
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>								✓
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>						✓		
Short-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>								✓
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	✓					✓		✓
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>				✓			✓	