

Midsummer Special

21st – 26th June 2014



Leader: Steve Duffield

Participants: Philip and Cheryl Gentle, John and Susan Hazell, Deborah Hart, Emma Dilnut and Jane Sellek,

The week went well with mostly good weather and lots of wildlife creating some great days out in the field as well as a very pleasant boat trip on the Lady Anne. We had all the regular species including **Golden Eagles** on 4 days and **White-tailed Eagle** on 2; whilst **Hen Harrier** and **Short-eared Owl** were seen every day of the trip. All 3 species of diver were seen well and we had good scope views of **Red-necked Phalarope** on our first and last day. We even managed a **Corncrake** on our last day when it was seen calling from a field opposite Liniclate School. An eclipse drake **American Wigeon** at Loch na Reivil was probably the rarest visitor we saw whilst both **Scaup** and **Whooper Swans** were found over-summering in North Uist. Add to that single Otters on 3 consecutive days, masses of Red Deer on Ronay; plus some superb floral displays making the inaugural tour a diverse and a very enjoyable week.

Daily Dairy:

21st June:

Weather: Warm, dry with sunny spells and a light north-westerly breeze.

We all met up in the morning at either Hestimul or Ceann na Pairc in Benbecula and started the tour with a trip to nearby Loch Mor. We parked at the western end of the loch and within no time at all were getting good scope views of 2 male and 2 female **Red-necked Phalaropes** in the south-west corner of the loch. These dainty waders were constantly on the move, nipping in and out of the semi-emergent grasses whilst energetically feeding. On the far side of the loch we could hear a Corncrake calling from a dense area of iris whilst other birds nesting in the area included **Dunlin**, **Redshank** and **Arctic Terns**. After the good views at Loch Mor we headed north along the main road through Benbecula where we came across a **Short-eared Owl** hunting close to the road. This was quickly followed by a male **Hen Harrier** to the rear of a loch and another more distant **Short-eared Owl**; not a bad start to the day.

Once on North Uist we called in at Loch na Reivil, Hougharry where we found a good variety of wildfowl including **Gadwall**, **Wigeon**, **Shoveler** and **Tufted Duck**; the latter two species also had ducklings. A couple of **Little Grebes** were also visible whilst on a mostly hidden arm of the loch we could see 20 – 30 **Bar-tailed Godwits** and a single **Black-tailed Godwit**. In the bay across the road



from the loch a **Little Tern** flew past whilst **Dunlin**, **Sanderling** and **Ringed Plover** were feeding along the beach. Nearby at Balranald we briefly stopped at the visitor centre before driving out to the coast where we enjoyed our lunch. En route to the coast we picked up a couple of **Corn Buntings** singing from tufts of Marram Grass. After lunch we had a walk around the headland at Aird an Runair. In the first bay we found a few **Turnstones** with **Dunlin** feeding in the seaweed. On the headland a busy colony of **Arctic Terns** were feeding young, occasionally coming across to let us know they were nearby. Off-shore we

spotted passing **Gannets**, **Shag**, **Cormorants** and a **Great Skua**. As we slowly wandered around the outer edge of the headland we came across a female **Eider** incubating amongst rocks on the edge of the path. She remained totally still as we admired her, relying on her camouflage and hoping that we hadn't seen her at all. We also had the company of either **Rock Pipits** or **Wheatear** almost constantly as we continued on the circular path. The flora was somewhat different around the headland than on the machair with Scots Lovage and Sea Campion growing in the gravel and loose rock whilst on the machair we found some fresh Frog Orchids amongst many other plants.

Once back at the vehicle we started to make our way back towards Benbecula, pausing at Loch nam Feithean near the visitor centre to look at a couple of over-summering **Whooper Swans** before moving on to Loch Sandary where we found a drake **Scaup** with a few **Tufted Ducks** and another 3 **Whooper Swans**. We could clearly hear Corncrake calling near Kyles Paible but it remained

stubbornly hidden in the vegetation. Passing Clachan we spotted another male **Hen Harrier** shortly before a brief and final stop by a small loch opposite Carinish School which held 3 **Tufted Duck** broods and a **Teal** with 3 ducklings.

22nd June:

Weather: A moderate west to south-westerly breeze today and mostly cloudy.

This morning we headed onto South Uist and Loch Eynort picking up a **Short-eared Owl** by the road just north of Loch Bee and a **Greenshank** at the head of Loch Eynort. Once at North Loch Eynort we took a walk through Archie's trees and along a path providing a good vantage point over the sea loch and surrounding hills. Here we picked up a good variety of birds including a perched **White-tailed Eagle**, a distant **Golden Eagle** over a ridge, 2 distant **Peregrine Falcons** followed by a close individual, heading low west; as well as **Common Tern**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Chiffchaff**, **Willow Warbler** and **Blackcap** (heard only).

Continuing south we got to our most southerly point in the trip on Eriskay. **Gannets** could be seen fishing in the Sound of Barra whilst a couple of **Stonechats** were obvious, by the pier for the ferry to Barra. At Acairseid we had a walk along the harbour and out towards the east side where we spotted both, **Arctic** and **Common Tern** as well as a couple of **Fulmars** nesting on a crag. A couple of Harbour Seals were seen and in a drain by the road we located the scarce Water Parsnip.

Moving on we drove back across to South Uist and took a short walk to the south-west tip of the island at Smerclate. A few Grey Seals were hauled out on the rocks along with **Cormorants**, whilst off-shore **Gannets** were heading past in small groups and a few **Rock Pipits** were located on the shore. We headed north from here, pausing at Boisdale to admire the Lesser Butterfly Orchids growing in the old peat cutting by the main road. Further up the west side of the island we took the track across Bornish machair for Ardvule. Around 20 **Sand Martins** and a few **Swallows** were hawking over the crops near the coast whilst on the rocks at the end of the track we found 5 **Whimbrel** looking very smart with their humbug head patterns. More **Gannets** were seen passing off-shore and both Grey and Harbour Seals were observed on the south side of the peninsula.

23rd June:

Weather: Light westerly winds increasing to a moderate west-south-westerly with cloud and some drizzle; becoming brighter later in the day

Our first site today was on Benbecula where we found a **Black-throated Diver** brooding a chick, a **Cuckoo**, a **Red-breasted Merganser** with chicks and both **Short-eared Owl** and **Peregrine Falcon** perched on fence posts. Not a bad start to the day!

We continued our circuit of Benbecula with a **Short-eared Owl** showing very well on a fence post at the roadside south of Market Stance followed by a visit to Coot Loch where we spotted **Shoveler**, **Wigeon**, **Coot**, **Little Grebe**, **Arctic** and **Common Tern**. We parked on the machair nearby and took a walk out to Borve Point. **Dunlin** and **Curlew** were seen on the shore whilst off-shore we spotted a

Little Tern and good numbers of **Arctic Terns** carrying fish. **Linnet** and **Rock Pipit** were found along the dunes but the star of the show was an Otter that was seen running down the shore from the dunes as it headed to the sea where it started fishing in a tidal pool before moving further out and disappearing behind the rocks.

We had our lunch at Peter's Port where we picked up a couple of **Common Terns**, **Twite** and more **Rock Pipits** before we made our way to Grimsay for our boat trip from Kallin on the Lady Anne. As



we were waiting to board the boat a **White-tailed Eagle** was spotted over Ronay. This immature bird then glided out over the water towards us and Kallin giving us a great profile view of this huge raptor. Setting off we sailed around the south side of Ronay, along the east shore popping into various inlets before entering the northern channel between Ronay and Eaval and back down the sheltered stretch of water between Ronay and Grimsay. Red Deer were almost constantly on

view during the 2 hour trip and we got some great, close up views providing some good photo opportunities. At the southern tip we got brief views of a **Golden Eagle** over the hilltop before it



drifted north and out of view. Along the east side we spotted plenty of **Arctic Terns** as well as **Black Guillemots**, a few 1st summer **Kittiwakes** and a lone **Razorbill**. The northern arm of the trip was even better with good views of an adult **White-tailed Eagle** perched and then in flight as it moved up to the nearby hilltop. A tight flock of 9 **Black-throated Dives** showed well before we spotted a **Greenshank** in flight and a **Golden Eagle** circling over Ronay. Our fourth eagle of the trip perched on the top of a crag

which we managed to sail under as we entered a very narrow passage. As we entered the inlet we flushed a **Common Sandpiper** which flew out before we too carefully manoeuvred back out the way we had come. The last leg of the trip back to the harbour turned up 2 **Red-throated Divers** and rounded off a very good 2 hours on board.

It was getting late in the afternoon once we had returned to land so we took a trip to the north-west tip of South Uist at Ardivachar where we heard another Corncrake that remained well hidden in the long vegetation whilst on the shore we found large numbers of gulls feeding in the seaweed as well as **Red-breasted Mergansers** and **Eider** off-shore.

24th June:

Weather: A light north-easterly was blowing today with low cloud and drizzle in the morning clearing later to become warm and bright.

The morning began well when we spotted a **Short-eared Owl** hunting by Ceann na Pairc guesthouse whilst picking up Cheryl, Philip, John and Sue. Once we had everyone together we headed north, picking up a male **Hen Harrier** by the road to Lochmaddy and a **Cuckoo** on the wires by Bogach Loch Steinabhat plantation.

We reached Berneray around mid-morning where we spotted our second **Short-eared Owl** of the day by the road near the Lobster Pot café. We continued around to the north-east shore at Rushgarry and had a short walk along the beach. On the sand we found 30 **Bar-tailed Godwits** (including one bird in summer plumage), 3 **Sanderling**, **Ringed Plover**, **Rock Pipits** and **Pied Wagtail** whilst both **Little** and **Arctic Terns** were fishing just off-shore. Leaving the shore we drove around to the north end of Loch Brusda and took a walk out to the Sound of Pabbay, across the machair. A **Dunlin** must have been nesting nearby as it called and ran along the track near where we parked, showing very well. The machair was also alive with terns as both **Little** and **Arctic Terns** flew back and forth carrying fish. The walk was also good for plants and we spotted lots of Frog Orchids, Adder's-tongue Fern and Common Centaury amongst many others. The Sound of Pabbay was also busy with birds with lots of **Gannets** flying through whilst a few **Kittiwakes** and hordes of terns fed in the clear blue waters. A couple of **Arctic Skuas** flew by whilst both **Great Northern Diver** and



Razorbills were seen in the distance. It was good to see so many birds successfully fishing as during most recent summers very few young terns had fledged due to a lack of fish during this critical period in their breeding.

Leaving Berneray we drove down to Clachan Sands where we had lunch with the luxury of a picnic table and a superb view. After lunch we headed for Lochmaddy where we spotted numerous **Common Terns** and had good views of **Red-throated Diver**. After some searching we also managed to find a

distant Otter feeding behind a rocky reef. Eventually it came out on top of the rocks providing some

good views through the scope before it re-entered the water to fish once again. We watched the Otter for around 30 minutes before heading back to Benbecula where we had another male **Hen Harrier** at Gramsdale and 2 males together, circling over Nunton rounding off another great day.

25th June:

Weather: Light south-easterly wind, cloudy with drizzle in the morning, becoming drier and brighter in the afternoon.

This morning we did a circuit of the west side of North Uist starting on the Committee Road where we spotted 2 **Short-eared Owls** before pulling over at the eagle watch near Griminish. Here we spotted 2 **Golden Eagles** perched on the hilltop providing some nice scope views whilst in the boggy area between us and the eagles we spotted another 3 **Short-eared Owls** and 2 male **Hen Harriers** with a **Greenshank** mobbing one of the latter. Nearby we moved to Griminish Pier where we took a walk along the water's edge to Callernish House. **Little** and **Arctic Terns** were fishing in the stretch of water separating us from the island of Vallay whilst the garden held a singing **Sedge Warbler**. We returned to the minibus and stopped at a viewpoint over-looking Loch Scolpaig. A small flock of **Twite** were showing well near the road whilst below us we had great views of 3 **Golden Plover** including a male in full summer plumage stood on a grassy mound close by.

We continued down the west side of North Uist calling in at Loch na Reivil, Hougharry where we spotted the eclipse, drake **American Wigeon** as well as **Wigeon, Shoveler, Tufted Duck** a flock of **Bar-tailed Godwits** and a few **Ringed Plover**. We moved on to Loch Sandary where we found a few **Tufted Ducks** and 3 **Whooper Swans** before calling in at Claddach Kirkibost for lunch. After a fine lunch in the café we took a walk to the stone circle at Langass. A male **Sparrowhawk** shot across low, into the trees as we were walking past the plantation which also contained **Willow Warbler** and **Goldcrests**. **Stonechats** were feeding and calling amongst clumps of heather whilst out on the sea loch we spotted a couple of **Red-breasted Mergansers**. Whilst at the stone circle an Otter was seen feeding on the opposite side of the sea loch. We got some decent scope views of it before it climbed



out on the bank whilst some of us were moving back down the path to get a closer look. The Otter then began to make its way under the seaweed, close to the far bank, occasionally popping its head out but mostly moving very unobtrusively and often hidden under the weed until we lost it from view altogether. As we were leaving Langass we spotted a female **Hen Harrier** over the moorland.

A couple of miles to the south we took the turn for Baleshare and after looking at a couple of lochs pulled up at the coastal car park. A couple of **Red-throated Divers** were floating off-shore along with a

summer plumage **Great Northern Diver**. **Common** and **Arctic Terns** were flying back and forth as were good numbers of **Gannets**. After a restful half an hour looking out to sea we returned to the road where a female **Hen Harrier** was causing pandemonium amongst the nesting waders flushing **Snipe**, **Lapwings** and **Oystercatchers** as it went.

26th June:

Weather: Light east-south-easterly winds, sunny and warm.

Our final morning started well when a calling **Corncrake** in the field opposite Liniclate School actually



showed itself to us. Luckily the field by the minibus was a little less dense and the vegetation lower compared with most others so at one point we could pick it out calling in the open with the naked eye. It still wasn't easy to see as it blended in well and it soon returned to form as it moved into deeper vegetation so just its head (or less) was visible. Eventually after around 20 minutes we moved on and left him in peace to his "crexing".

We drove a couple of miles around to Loch Mor where we had great

views of at least 5 **Red-necked Phalaropes** at the south-west end. They were showing very well in the calm, sunny weather providing a fitting end for Jane who was heading for the late morning flight to Glasgow but not before scoping a winter plumage **Great Northern Diver** in Culla Bay.

We said our goodbyes to Jane at the airport and headed for the Rueval track where we took a walk to the first loch. A **Short-eared Owl** and **Hen Harrier** were seen together at the far side of the loch whilst Steve had brief views of a **Merlin**. A distant **Red-throated Diver** was seen in flight whilst along the track we found **Stonechats** and a few **Twite**. We headed south for lunch at Peter's Port before heading on the road to Uskivagh. A male **Hen Harrier** was seen en route close to the road before we stopped at a high point to scan. A **Great Skua** flew over to the north and on Wiay, 2 **Golden Eagles** were seen circling back and forth around a crag, rounding off a very good week's birding in Uist.

Species List:

Mute Swan	Common and seen every day
Whooper Swan	Regular sightings of birds in small numbers
Greylag Goose	Common
Shelduck	Common with many pairs seen with young
Mallard	Common
Gadwall	Seen on Loch na Reivil, Hougharry
Shoveler	Fairly common and noted on 3 dates during the week
Wigeon	Fairly common breeding species seen on 3 dates
American Wigeon	An eclipse drake was on Loch na Reivil, 25 th
Teal	Noted on the first two days
Tufted Duck	A common breeding species
Scaup	An over-summering drake was on Loch Sandary, 21 st
Eider	Common and many females seen with young
Red-breasted Merganser	Small numbers seen most days
Red-throated Diver	Seen almost daily in small numbers
Black-throated Diver	An adult was seen with a single, small chick, 23 rd
Great Northern Diver	Singles were seen on 3 dates during the week
Little Grebe	Fairly common
Fulmar	Seen on Eriskay and Berneray
Gannet	Common off-shore
Cormorant	Common
Shag	Common
Grey Heron	Common and seen every day including birds breeding at Loch Eynort
White-tailed Eagle	Seen on 2 dates with 2 on 23 rd
Golden Eagle	Seen on 4 dates during the week
Hen Harrier	Good numbers with birds seen daily
Buzzard	Common
Sparrowhawk	A male was seen briefly at Langass Lodge
Kestrel	Seen on the 26 th (Steve only)
Peregrine	Noted on 22 nd and 23 rd
Merlin	One seen in distance on 26 th (Steve only)
Corncrake	Many heard and one seen at Liniclate on the last day
Coot	Only seen on 'Coot Loch'
Oystercatcher	Very common

Ringed Plover	Common
Golden Plover	Seen at Scolpaig on 25 th
Lapwing	Common
Sanderling	Small numbers seen on 2 dates
Turnstone	Seen at Balranald on 21 st
Dunlin	Common and seen almost daily
Common Sandpiper	Fairly common
Redshank	Very common
Greenshank	Small numbers seen on 3 dates
Black-tailed Godwit	A single was on Loch na Reivil, 21 st
Bar-tailed Godwit	Non-breeding birds were seen at a couple of sites
Curlew	Fairly common
Whimbrel	3 were at Rubha Ardvule, 25 th
Snipe	Common
Red-necked Phalarope	4 were seen on the first day and 4 or 5 on the last day at Loch Mor
Great Skua	Seen on 3 different days during the week
Arctic Skua	Seen on two dates
Black-headed Gull	Common
Common Gull	Very common
Herring Gull	Common
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Fairly common
Great Black-backed Gull	Common
Little Tern	Fairly common
Common Tern	Common
Arctic Tern	The commonest tern, seen daily with many carrying fish
Black Guillemot	Noted on 23 rd only
Razorbill	Seen on 23 rd only
Rock Dove	Very common
Wood Pigeon	Seen on 2 dates in small numbers
Collared Dove	Fairly common
Cuckoo	Sightings on 23 rd and 24 th
Short-eared Owl	Good numbers seen with birds recorded every day of the trip
Skylark	Common
Swallow	Fairly common
Sand Martin	Seen on 2 dates during the week
Rock Pipit	Seen on 4 out of 6 days

Meadow Pipit	Common
Pied Wagtail	Seen every day
Hebridean Wren	Common in certain areas
Hebridean Dunnock	Common in the right habitat
Robin	Seen on 2 dates
Wheatear	Common and seen daily
Stonechat	Seen on most days in small numbers
Hebridean Song Thrush	Not uncommon around gardens
Blackbird	Common
Blackcap	Heard singing at North Loch Eynort
Sedge Warbler	Seen on 4 days with one singing at Hestimul
Willow Warbler	Common but localised
Chiffchaff	One seen at North Loch Eynort
Goldcrest	Seen on 2 dates
Hooded Crow	Seen every day and increasing in the islands
Raven	Common
Hebridean Starling	Very common
House Sparrow	Common
Chaffinch	Seen around plantations
Linnet	Fairly common
Twite	Common
Goldfinch	Heard calling at Loch Eynort
Greenfinch	Noted on 3 dates
Reed Bunting	Seen on one date only
Corn Bunting	This declining species was seen on 21 st at Balranald

Mammals:

Otter	We had sightings on 3 consecutive days
Grey Seal	Common
Harbour Seal	Common
Red Deer	Common
Rabbit	Common

Insects:

Red Admiral

Common Blue

Meadow Brown

Large White

Small Heath

Northern Eggar

Garden Tiger

Magpie Moth

Common Blue Damselfly

Large Red Damselfly

Four-spotted Chaser

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