

Midsummer Special

20th – 25th June 2016



Summary: A week of mixed weather but with some superb wildlife sightings. The trip around Mingulay and along the western cliffs was spectacular and a highlight which we'll hope to repeat on future trips as it was simply stunning. We got great views of all the regular seabirds and up close and personal with a wheeling mass of Puffins on Mingulay as well as good views of White-tailed Eagle and a brief Corncrake. Red-necked Phalaropes were seen well at their regular site which also provided us with good views of lekking Ruff. All three species of diver were seen well including a summer plumage Great Northern Diver and a pair of Black-throated Divers with a chick. We also saw Otters on four occasions during the

week and some interesting flowers including Lesser Twayblade, a fine display of Lesser Butterfly Orchids, Water Lobelia and the scarce Lesser Water Plantain. A healthy mix of mammals, birds and flowers as well as some stunning scenery made this trip a great success.

Leader: Steve Duffield

Participants: Andrew and Kate Trowbridge, Diana and John Westmorland, Liz Duthie, Malcolm Mackay, Keryn Kay.

Daily Dairy:

20th June:

Weather: A brisk westerly wind, cloudy with occasional showers in the morning was followed by brighter, sunnier conditions in the afternoon.

John, Diana, Liz, Andrew and Kate were already in Benbecula and as we had a bit of time before meeting Malcolm and Keryn we visited Loch Mor. The birding got off to a flying start here with good views of Red-necked Phalarope as well as 4 Ruff including 3 males. All the males were in stunning summer plumage and periodically 2 of them would set at each other



leaping in the air and fluttering their wings in their characteristic lekking display. Snipe were also displaying with birds drumming overhead whilst other birds seen here included Dunlin, Redshank, Arctic Tern, Tufted Duck, Buzzard and a distant male Hen Harrier. We then headed for the airport in Balivanich to pick up Keryn before heading for Lochmaddy to meet Malcolm. There had been some confusion on Malcolm's whereabouts but we eventually managed to find him

waiting outside the guesthouse in Nunton. It was now lunchtime so we drove towards the east side of Benbecula although hadn't gone far when a huge bird flying over the road turned out to be the long-staying Common Crane that had been in the area for a few weeks.

It went down on the machair near Borge but wasn't there long before it flew back inland. A Corncrake was heard calling on the nearby machair so we had a quick detour to see if we could find it. Unfortunately it went quiet as we drove down the track although a line of 7 Redshanks on consecutive fence posts was quite a sight. Lunch was calling so we re-joined the main road and headed to Peter's Port.

We settled into the picnic area to enjoy our packed lunch although before it was over a couple of Golden Eagles appeared over the summit of the neighbouring island of Wiay. They circled around for a while before disappearing over the summit to be shortly followed by the bulk of a White-tailed Eagle that flew west over the island and across eastern Benbecula. At Peter's Port we also found a Kestrel, Common Terns and Red-breasted Mergansers whilst Steve spotted a couple of distant Arctic Skuas. After lunch we made our way onto South Uist and Ardkenneth / north-west Loch Bee. We picked up Little Tern, Arctic Tern, Red-breasted Mergansers, Cormorants, Teal and a striking, male (black) Ruff on the bank by Loch an't-Saile. We finally took a look at Loch Skipport where we picked up at least 3 Hen Harriers, Buzzards, a couple of Red-throated Divers, 2 Twite and a calling Cuckoo (not seen) to round off an excellent first day.

21st June:

Weather: Strong south to south-westerly wind and cloudy with rain in the afternoon.

We made our way to North Uist this morning picking up a male Hen Harrier in Carinish which gave some great views of as it hunted over the boggy ground. On the Committee Road we pulled over a couple of times to scan the moor with the first stop producing around half a dozen Red Deer. The second stop turned out to be very quiet for raptors, which was unusual for this site so we continued to the north of Ben Risary Plantation. Here we noted a single ringtail Hen Harrier, along with a Whimbrel, Curlews, around 40 Bar-tailed Godwits in flight and heard a Greenshank. We continued to Grinish Pier in search of the elusive Otter and soon picked one up feeding in the channel. It was fairly distant but once it came out on the rocks we managed to get some decent scope views of it. A second Otter, as well as a Harbour Seal were also noted further west in the channel as we walked towards Callanish House. Bird wise we spotted Little Terns, Common Terns and Arctic Terns as well as Sand Martins, Wheatears and a female Sparrowhawk. Returning to the bus and the main road we continued around the north-west of the island picking up 2 Whooper Swans at Scolpaig and Wigeon, Tufted Ducks and Little Grebe on Loch na Reivil, Hougharry. We called in at Balranald and had our lunch here in the shelter of the visitor centre.

In the afternoon we drove out to the coast and walked out onto the headland at Aird an Runair. Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin and a single, male Ruff were on the seaweed although our exploration was cut short due to the heavy rain that came in. We quickly headed back to the bus in the worsening weather and made our way to Loch Sandary where we found numerous Sand Martins hawking over the water as well as Whooper Swan, Tufted Ducks, Little Grebe, Teal, Dunlin and Ringed Plover. We then called in at Baleshare although we saw little in the rain and moved on to Loch Mor, Benbecula. The latter site was much better and produced very good views of a female Red-necked Phalarope by the road as well as Snipe and a displaying Dunlin. Nearby Coot Loch was also good with 2 more Red-necked Phalaropes feeding in the weed in the middle whilst wildfowl included 12 Gadwall, Teal, Tufted Duck and of course Coot. The weather hadn't improved any so we retired slightly early before heading out for our evening meal at Stepping Stones.

22nd June:

Weather: A moderate southerly wind with cloudy conditions and occasional sunny spells.

We headed south today, stopping on the side of the main road just north of Loch Bee where we got great views of a hunting Short-eared Owl that was quartering the ground either side of the road. It eventually drifted off and we headed for Rubha Ardvule. A walk to the point produced a couple of close Manx Shearwaters heading south along with 2 Razorbills, Gannets and a Kittiwake over Loch Ardvule on the way back. Other birds here included 2 Whimbrel near the car park, around 12 Turnstones at the point, Arctic Terns, Eider with ducklings and several broods of Tufted Duck. Both Grey and Harbour Seals were seen along with 2 Otters in Loch Ardvule that showed well briefly before heading into the reeds. On the way back across Bornish machair we picked up several Skylarks and Sand Martins. We continued to the main road and then across to the east side of the island and Loch Eynort.

We had our lunch at the small parking area at the end of the road before taking a walk along the well maintained paths here. 2 Red-throated Divers were calling from the loch whilst other birds included Willow Warbler, Goldfinch, Robin etc. as well as Red-breasted Mergansers and Grey Herons. Lots of Harbour Seals and a single Grey Seal were in the loch as well as an Otter which we got decent scope views of on our way back to the bus. We left Loch Eynort and popped down to Kildonan where we managed to obtain some quite prolonged views of a Golden Eagle that was hunting over the moorland to the north of the café. We even managed to get scope views of the eagle as it hung in the brisk wind. It eventually flew



to the hillside behind the café and landed out of view so we headed north, spotting a Cuckoo in flight that shot across in front of us just south of the Ormiclate turning. We took the next turning and pulled over by a small freshwater loch at Stoneybridge to admire the Water Lobelia as well as several Lesser Butterfly Orchids, Marsh Cinquefoil and Bog Pimpernel. A little further north

we heard a Corncrake calling and spent some time waiting for it to appear. Unfortunately he remained stubbornly hidden amongst the deep grass and foiled our attempts once again. We continued towards Benbecula calling in at the south end of Loch Bee where we had good looks at a Black-tailed Godwit on the mud before we made our way along the west side towards Ardivachar. 12 Red-breasted Mergansers and Bar-tailed Godwits were seen in nearby North Bay before we finally made our way to the guesthouses and our evening meal at Stepping Stones.

23rd June:

Weather: The wind was from the south-east today and cloudy with intermittent sunny spells.

We started today with an exploration closer to our base in Benbecula and began with style with a pair of Black-throated Divers with a small chick, a fly-over Red-throated Diver and 2 Short-eared Owls. Another Short-eared Owl was spotted from the bus, close to the road as we made our way to Market Stance. We parked by the recycling plant and headed along the Rueval track. The mile long walk was rather quiet with a distant male Hen Harrier, Golden Plover and Curlew whilst the only diver noted was a Red-throated Diver which flew virtually overhead carrying a fish. We returned to the bus and headed onto North Uist where we soon noted a female Hen Harrier, hunting at Carinish and another ringtail Hen Harrier nearby at Claddach Baleshare. It was fast approaching mid-day so we called in at Kyles Paible and had our lunch near the shore here. A couple of Little Terns were feeding off-shore and a Corncrake was calling from a vegetated area in the dunes nearby. After lunch we took the bus closer to the Corncrake and spent some more time trying to spot this secretive species but once again to no avail. The Corncrake eventually went quiet after around 20 minutes but

as luck would have it a Corn Bunting began singing close by. We hopped out and got good views of this declining species as it sang from the top of a dock stem.

We left our lunch spot and headed around the north-west coast of North Uist. At Loch Scolpaig we spotted 3 Whooper Swans and a female Wigeon with 7 ducklings whilst further along at Malaclate a dark-phase Arctic Skua gave good views as it flew over the road just ahead of the bus. We eventually came to Loch Portain where we drove along the small, winding road towards Cheese Bay. On route we had another close Arctic Skua by the bus and good views of a male Hen Harrier nearby. We parked in a small parking area and walked the last section to Cheese Bay picking up another male Hen Harrier hunting by the roadside as well as Kestrel, Snipe, Common Sandpiper, Twite and Greenfinch. A Cuckoo was also heard calling and 2 Great Skuas spotted in the distance on the way back to the bus. We also picked up several Harbour Seals and Red Deer whilst perhaps the most notable sighting was of 3 spikes of the Lesser Twayblade growing in the open. This diminutive orchid normally grows well hidden in the shade of tall heather so to find it flowering in the open is quite remarkable. We returned to the bus and headed back to Benbecula, picking up another Short-eared Owl hunting the rough grassland at Clachan na Luib before reaching the guesthouses.

24th June:

Weather: Very light winds with low cloud and rain for the first part of the day although this gradually cleared with the cloud breaking up during the early evening.



We had planned a trip earlier in the week around the island of Ronay although unfortunately this was cancelled due to the lack of some vital paper work that the boat man needed to carry passengers so we arranged a trip to Mingulay. This turned out to be very fortuitous and we had a superb day out.

We had to catch the early ferry to Barra from Eriskay first which meant an early start although it also

provided us with views of 2 Short-eared Owls hunting by the road on the way south. The

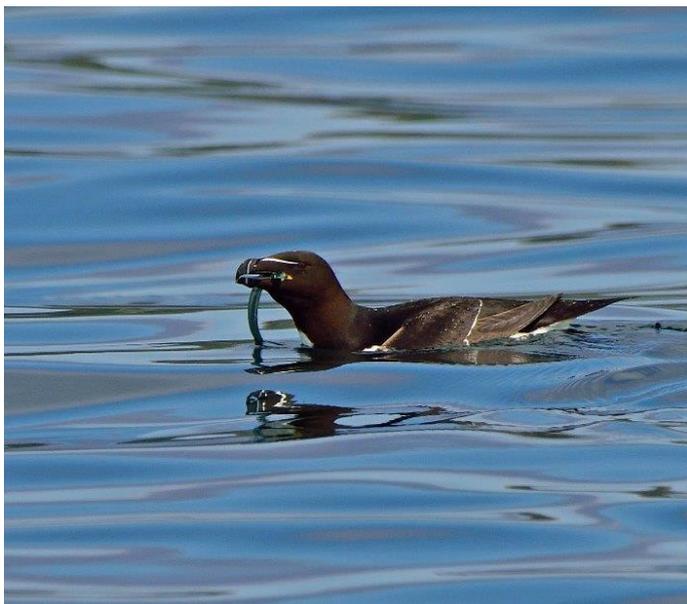
crossing of the Sound of Barra produced sightings of Guillemot, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Common Tern and a summer plumage Great Northern Diver close to Ardmhor, Barra. We also had good views of several Grey Seals on the small rocky island just before docking. We headed across Barra to Castle Bay where we met up with Donald, the skipper for the Boy James and our ride to Mingulay. Although low cloud covered the tops, the sea was calm with little swell so Donald took us under the cliffs on the west side of Mingulay. The grey weather for once actually enhanced the experience creating a



brooding atmosphere to the dramatic, towering cliffs, covered in seabirds. We were skilfully guided within metres of the rocks and taken through caves and geos that had to be seen to be believed, allowing us an up close and intimate view of the life of the seabirds; something none of us will forget.

We moved around to the east side of Mingulay and were ferried ashore in a tender where we climbed up the rocks to the old village. We then crossed

towards the Puffin colony but not before seeing a Corncrake that scuttled out of the door way of an old cottage where it had been vigorously calling. It took flight a little later heading towards the main village where another bird was calling. A few Snipe were displaying as we



made our way across to the north side of village bay and enjoyed our lunch on the slopes near the Puffins. After lunch we spent some time in the colony as Puffins flew in carrying Sandeels, wheeling around us as they came and went from the aquamarine sea below. As we were perched on the slopes an immature White-tailed Eagle flew past attracting the attention of a couple of angry Great Skua before it landed on the

slope above the village. Seabird wise we got excellent views either from the boat or on the

island itself of Fulmars, Gannets, Shag, Cormorants, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills, Black Guillemots and of course, Puffins. We also spotted several Wheatears, Wrens, Rock Pipit and heard 3 Corncrakes as well as brief views of one. Donald ferried us back on board the boat around mid-afternoon and we made our way back to Castle Bay. We had a bit of time spare so we headed around the west side of Barra, stopping to admire the views along the west coast before pulling over to enjoy great scope views of a Red-throated Diver on the islands reservoir.



We caught the ferry in the early evening back to Eriskay and made our way to the Politician for dinner, although not before spotting another Short-eared Owl on the way. Finally as we dropped Liz, Diana and John at Hestimul a male Hen Harrier came through the garden chasing Starlings; a fitting end to a superb day.

25th June:

We all said our goodbyes on the evening of the 24th as most of the group either left early to catch a ferry or arranged transport for the late morning flight from Benbecula to Glasgow. I gave Malcolm a lift to Lochmaddy and the hostel where we said our goodbyes after an excellent and entertaining tour.

Species List:

Mute Swan	Common and seen every day
Whooper Swan	A couple were seen on 2 dates
Greylag Goose	Common
Shelduck	Common with a few broods seen
Mallard	Common
Gadwall	12 were seen on Coot Loch
Shoveler	Noted on 20 th only
Wigeon	Small numbers were seen on two dates
Teal	Small numbers seen on two days
Tufted Duck	Common and seen every day
Eider	Common
Red-breasted Merganser	Seen most days in small numbers including a couple of broods
Red-throated Diver	Seen on 4 days
Black-throated Diver	A pair with a chick were seen well on 23 rd
Great Northern Diver	A summer plumage bird was seen in the Sound of Barra from the ferry
Little Grebe	Fairly common and seen on two dates
Fulmar	Large numbers seen around Mingulay
Manx Shearwater	A couple were seen heading south off Rubha Ardvule, 22 nd
Gannet	Common off-shore
Cormorant	Common
Shag	Seen well around Mingulay
Grey Heron	Common, breeding at Loch Eynort
White-tailed Eagle	One was seen in east Benbecula, 20 th and an immature on Mingulay, 24 th
Golden Eagle	Seen on two dates during the
Hen Harrier	Seen virtually daily in small numbers

Buzzard	Common
Sparrowhawk	One was seen at Callanish House
Kestrel	Seen on two days
Corncrake	Heard on three occasions and one seen briefly on Mingulay
Coot	Only seen on 'Coot Loch'
Common Crane	One flew over the road at Borve, Benbecula, 20 th
Oystercatcher	Very common
Ringed Plover	Common
Golden Plover	Seen on 23 rd
Lapwing	Common
Turnstone	Small numbers were seen on two dates
Dunlin	Noted on two days
Common Sandpiper	Noted on three dates
Redshank	Very common
Greenshank	One was heard calling on North Uist, 21 st
Black-tailed Godwit	A summer plumage bird was at the south end of Loch Bee, 22 nd
Bar-tailed Godwit	Seen on two days
Curlew	Fairly common and seen on three days
Whimbrel	Seen on 21 st and 22 nd
Snipe	Common
Ruff	4 were seen at Loch Mor including displaying males; another was at Loch an't-Saile, 20 th and a male was at Aird an Runair, 21 st
Red-necked Phalarope	Good views were had on two dates
Great Skua	Seen on 23 rd and 24 th with lots of birds around Mingulay on the latter date
Arctic Skua	Small numbers were 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
Kittiwake	Seen on 22 nd and 24 th with large numbers seen around Mingulay
Common Tern	Seen daily
Arctic Tern	Common with chicks seen at Balranald
Little Tern	Small numbers were seen on three dates
Black Guillemot	Seen on two dates
Guillemot	Seen well around Mingulay
Razorbill	Occasionally seen off-shore with good views around Mingulay
Puffin	Superb views on and around Mingulay with many birds coming ashore with sandeels
Rock Dove	Very common
Collared Dove	Fairly common
Wood Pigeon	Seen on 21 st and 23 rd
Cuckoo	Heard two dates and seen in flight on 22 nd
Short-eared Owl	Good views on three dates
Skylark	Common
Swallow	Common and seen daily
Sand Martin	Seen virtually every day
Rock Pipit	Small numbers seen on two dates
Meadow Pipit	Common
Pied Wagtail	Seen every day
Hebridean Wren	Common
Hebridean Dunnock	Noted at Loch Eynort
Robin	Seen on two dates

Wheatear	Common with some juveniles spotted
Stonechat	Seen on three dates
Hebridean Song Thrush	Not uncommon around gardens
Blackbird	Common
Sedge Warbler	Seen on three dates
Willow Warbler	Fairly common at a couple of locations
Goldcrest	Seen at Loch Eynort
Hooded Crow	Seen every day and increasing in the islands
Raven	Common
Hebridean Starling	Very common
House Sparrow	Common
Chaffinch	Seen around plantations
Linnet	Common
Twite	Fairly common
Redpoll	Seen on two dates in small numbers
Goldfinch	Seen on two dates
Greenfinch	Seen most days in small numbers
Corn Bunting	Seen and heard at Kyles Paible

Mammals:

Otter	Sightings off Griminish Pier, at Ardvule and Loch Eynort
Grey Seal	Seen on two dates
Harbour Seal	Common in more sheltered bays / lochs

Red Deer Seen on three days

Rabbit Common

Insects:

Green-veined White

Painted Lady

Large Heath

Common Blue

Magpie Moth

Northern Eggar

Large Yellow Underwing

Large Red Damselfly

Blue-tailed Damselfly

Other:

Common Frog

Lesser Twayblade

Lesser Butterfly Orchid

Common Spotted Orchid

Bog Pimpernel

Water Lobelia

Lesser Water Plantain

Pale Butterwort

Steve Duffield

Western Isles Wildlife

7 Carinish, Isle of North Uist, HS6 5HL

Email: steveduffield70@gmail.com

Tel. 01876 580619 / Mobile 07867 555971