



Midsummer Special

25th – 30th June 2018



Summary: The weather was very kind to us this week and we experienced plenty of sunshine and often calm conditions. Most importantly the weather was superb for our visit to Mingulay which was really the highlight of the tour with wall to wall sunshine; masses of seabirds, including plenty of Puffins and bonus of some superb views of Bottle-nosed Dolphins on the way back to Barra. An adult Rose-coloured Starling also delighted us along the west side of Barra; our second of the week following one the previous day at Callernish in North Uist. We also managed to catch up with a Corncrake on Mingulay which is never easy this late in the summer as the vegetation is quite high generally. There were some superb floral displays on the machair whilst the biggest surprise amongst the plants was the Marsh Fragrant Orchids we found flowering at a new site in South Uist. We had some great views of otters at Loch Eynort along with plenty of Harbour Seals with pups. Birds included all 3 regular divers, White-tailed Eagle and Golden Eagle on 3 days as well as Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl virtually daily. All in all it was superb week with great company.

Leader: Steve Duffield

Participants: David and Susie Lee, Bob and Maureen Turner, Joan and John Hart, Madeline and John Osborn

Daily Dairy:

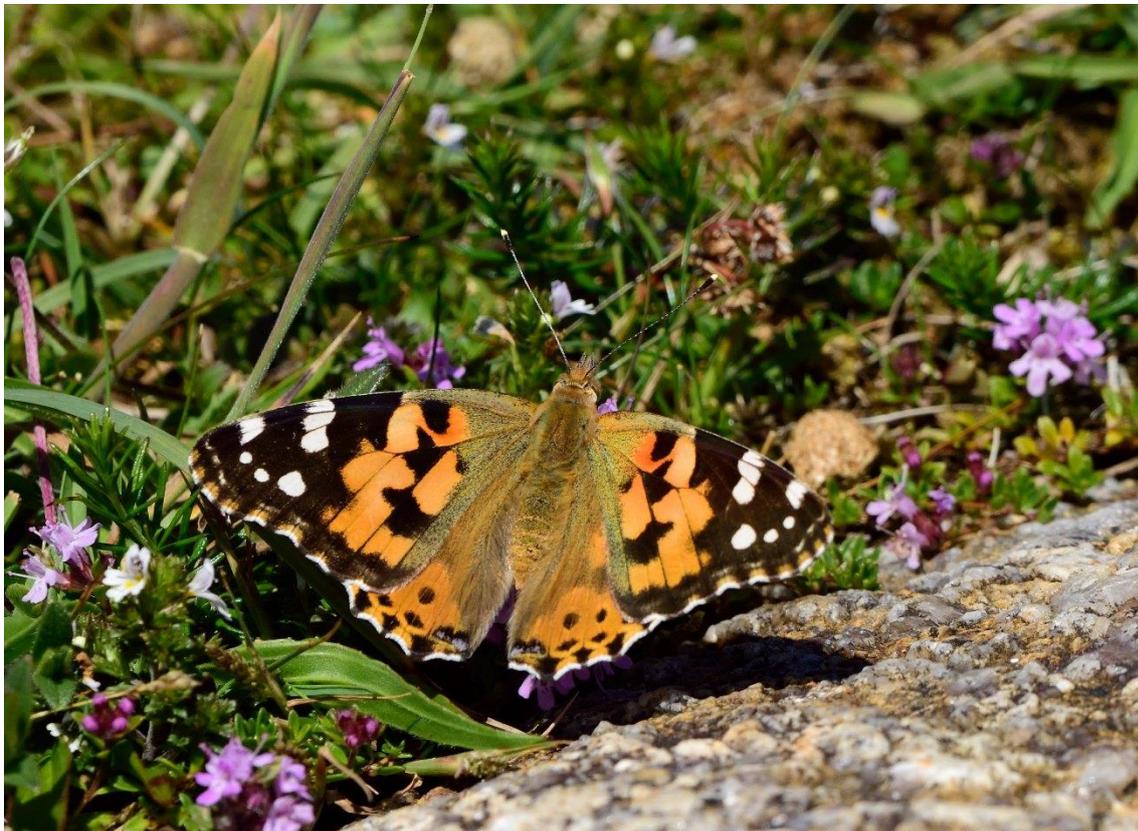
25th June:

Weather: Light to moderate south-westerly winds, cloudy with occasional light showers.

Most of the group were already on the islands so we met up at 9 am and made our way to Lochmaddy to meet the final two participants, John and Madeline off the ferry from Skye. On route we managed to pick up 3 Short-eared Owls and a male and female Hen Harrier between Carinish and the ferry port. We also stopped for a walk along the old road where we spotted a Red-throated Diver with a small chick on a lochan, before arriving at Lochmaddy harbour around 11 am. There was a bit of time before the others arrived and we found a female Wigeon on the edge of town, as well as a Kestrel, Common Terns and an Arctic Skua which flew low over the bay. Once all on board we made our way straight up to Berneray for our packed lunch which we enjoyed overlooking the coast at Rushgarry.

A couple of Sanderling and Ringed Plover were spotted along the shoreline on the north-east coast before we made our way to the north end of Loch Bhrusda and took a walk across the machair to the Sound of Pabbay. 2 or 3 pairs of Little Terns were flying around over the machair whilst Arctic Terns were washing and resting on the freshwater loch here. A Tufted Duck was also seen with

ducklings whilst both Ringed Plovers and Dunlin were also on the sandy edge of the loch. The walk across to the north-west coast produced a nice array of plants including lots of Adder's Tongue Fern, Early Marsh Orchid, Northern Marsh Orchid and Common Centaury amongst many others. The views looking over the Sound of Pabbay were stunning and we managed to spot a few Gannets flying low over the water here as well as a Painted Lady on the dune edge. On the way back to the minibus we spotted a distant Short-eared Owl flying high south over the dunes being mobbed by various waders and gulls. We returned to North Uist and took a circular route towards Benbecula stopping at Malaclate where we spotted 3 Golden Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits, a Turnstone and 3 Golden Plover roosting amongst the rocks. Once back on Benbecula we parked up and took a walk across some boggy moorland to a couple of freshwater lochs where we spotted 2 Black-throated Divers feeding a small chick and rounding off a great first day.



26th June:

Weather: Light easterly winds, cloudy but warm.

We started the day with a look at the traditional phalarope loch in Benbecula and did manage to see a female in the distance although she was playing hide and seek a bit as she drifted in and out from the bank. 2 Buzzards were sat on fence posts by a neighbouring loch whilst other birds included Dunlin, Snipe, 20 -30 Bar-tailed Godwits and a single Black-tailed Godwit. From here we moved on to Peter's Port where we spotted a Golden Eagle perched on the island of Wiay. A Black Guillemot was

in the bay and we also noted a couple of Rock Pipits as well as a few Harbour Seals. We left Benbecula and made our way south, stopping at Ardkenneth at the north-west corner of Loch Bee. 32 Black-tailed Godwits were resting on a muddy spit whilst a Whooper Swan was also present amongst the Mute Swans. After scanning for some time we suddenly became aware of an immature White-tailed Eagle that was perched on one of the smaller islands where it provided us with some good scope views. We also spotted a male Hen Harrier flying low to the north before we headed back to the main road and on to Druidibeg for our lunch.



A short wander along the road at Druidibeg plantation produced Hebridean Wren, Willow Warbler and a couple of Goldcrests before we returned to the bus and continued south to North Loch Eynort. A walk along the well maintained paths produced a good array of birds including a female Hen Harrier, a Peregrine, Buzzard, Red-throated Diver, Red-breasted Merganser and Grey Herons. Smaller birds were represented by redpoll, Siskin and Goldfinch although the highlight for many was the 3 otters that showed well along the north shore of the loch on our return to the vehicle. Butterflies were also beginning to turn out in good numbers with migrant Red Admirals and Painted Ladies seen. As we made our way north we passed East Loch Ollay which held a breeding pair of Whooper Swans with a family with 5 cygnets that showed well on a brief stop off the main road. A quick look in Stinky Bay before dinner produced plenty of Eiders although rather more curiously a Shoveler too. Finally after dinner Susie managed to spot a Short-eared Owl behind the guesthouse.

27th June:

Weather: Light winds, sunny and hot.

We started the day by checking the light traps that Steve had set in his garden, which held a decent variety of moths including Poplar Hawkmoth, Drinker, Buff Ermine, Map-winged Swift and Campion amongst many more. From the garden in Carinish we made our way across the Committee Road where we spotted 2 Wood Pigeons in flight although the show was somewhat stolen by a sparring Short-eared Owl and female Hen Harrier which provided some excellent views before the harrier flew off into the plantation. We continued on to Griminish Pier and walked over to Callernish House where most of the group managed to catch up with an adult Rose-coloured Starling that was perched in a bush with its commoner cousins. It showed well for a while before disappearing into the depths of the cover here. The walk also produced a fly-by Artic Skua over Vallay Island, Little Tern, Artic Terns, Sand Martins and at least 10 Painted Lady and 5 Red Admiral butterflies. We returned to the bus and made our way around the west side of the island to Hougharry and Loch na Reivil which held Little Grebe, Wigeon, Tufted Ducks and Shoveler amongst others whilst on the shore 2 Whimbrel flew off from the beach. A Corncrake was heard calling by the nearby Balranald visitor centre and a Corn Bunting was singing from the overhead wires.



We drove out to the coastal car park by Aird an Runair and enjoyed our packed lunch here before walking onto the headland. A 2nd summer Glaucous Gull was asleep on the rocks amongst other large gulls whilst offshore a Kittiwake flew past and a couple of Shags were in the distance. Steve

also spotted an otter in Loch a' Roe although it dived amongst the semi-emergent vegetation and wasn't seen again. The Arctic Terns were busy feeding their young and a Dunlin with a chick was seen amongst them. Eider, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Sanderling and Turnstones were also spotted as well as 3 Little Terns in the bay to the south. We moved on in the afternoon for a brief look at Loch Sandary although it was quiet so we returned to Benbecula and took a walk along the Ruabhal track from Market Stance. A Red Deer was also seen by a small loch and a very distant, displaying Golden Plover was over the low lying ground to the south. About a mile down the track, looking east we picked up a Golden Eagle that spent at least 15 – 20 minutes circling around providing us with some decent scope views as it hunted over the moors and rounded off another excellent day in the field.

28th June:

Weather: Calm and sunny with light winds from the north-west later in the afternoon when some sea fog rolled in.

It was an early start for the 08:10 am sailing from Eriskay to Barra although 3 Short-eared Owls picked up on route whilst heading south were some compensation. The ferry produced Guillemot, Razorbills, Gannets and Grey Seals before we arrived at Ardmhor, Barra. We took a quick spin around the west side of the island before we met up with Francis and his boat, the Boy James. The conditions were excellent and we were treated to some nice boat handling as Francis took us down the west side of the island into small bays and through the arch under the towering cliffs of Mingulay. Loads of seabirds were on the water and we enjoyed some superb views of Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins, Fulmars, Shags, Great Skuas and Kittiwakes as well as a few passing Gannets before we reached the east side of the island and were ferried ashore. We enjoyed our lunch in the hot sunshine and were treated to a couple of brief views of a calling Corncrake and a pair of adult White-tailed Eagles circling over the cliffs to the north. We spent the rest of the afternoon around the Puffin colony at the north side of the sandy bay and got some excellent views as birds whizzed past at high speed carrying beaks full of sandeels. Great Skuas were seen drifting over with many birds present higher on the grassy slopes of the island whilst lots of butterflies were evident with masses of Dark Green Fritillaries, Painted Ladies and Red Admirals flitting about as well as Common Blue, Meadow Browns and Green-veined Whites; there was probably no better words to describe the scene than idyllic. Francis picked us up again around 3 pm and we made our way back to Castlebay although there was still more in store as a pod of around 12 Bottle-nosed Dolphins appeared just east of Sandary. The skipper turned the boat around and the dolphins came right up to us, bow riding and swimming so close you could see them underwater. They put on a superb performance for a while before we had to continue on our way leaving them playing around the

creels by the island of Sandary. We got back to Barra around 4 pm and once again made our way around the west side of the island although this time we found the Rose-coloured Starling that showed very well feeding amongst some cattle by the road. We watched it for around 15 minutes as it fed with the Common Starlings and managed to get a few images before we had to continue to Ardmhor to catch our ferry back. The crossing was once again very pleasant if somewhat foggy in patches although we still picked up a Little Tern when leaving Barra, Common Tern, Guillemots and a Red-throated Diver. 2 Short-eared Owls rounded off an excellent day as we headed north to Benbecula.



29th June:

Weather: Light north-north-easterly winds with some fog and cloud clearing to become sunny and warm.

A quick stop at Stinky Bay produced plenty of Eiders and gulls feeding amongst the rotting seaweed whilst nearby Coot Loch held 2 broods of Gadwall, a brood of Wigeon and several Tufted Ducks as well as Little Grebe and a single Coot. We continued south, leaving Benbecula for South Uist where we hadn't gone far when we spotted a Short-eared Owl close to the road near Loch Carnan road end. 4 Teal were seen on Howmore River before we stopped for a look at the Lesser Butterfly Orchids at Stoneybridge. Not only did we find lots of these in full bloom but also 8 spikes of Marsh Fragrant Orchid which was a new site for this scarce and local species. The lush vegetation here was rich in variety with many Heath Spotted Orchids, Common Spotted Orchids, Marsh Ragwort, Marsh

Cinquefoil and Adder's Tongue Fern amongst many others. A short walk on the coast nearby produced a few Eiders and a winter plumage Great Northern Diver which was a new bird for the trip. We continued south and made our way to the headland at Rubha Ardvule for our lunch stop.



A small flock of Bar-tailed Godwits and 4 Knot were feeding along the shore at Ardvule whilst Dunlin, Eiders, Tufted Ducks and Sand Martins were also seen. We were also able to compare both Harbour and Grey Seals side by side here. Following our lunch break we returned to the main road and made our way across to South Loch Eynort. We pulled over off the side of the road and hadn't been out of the vehicle long before an immature White-tailed Eagle dropped in along the shore. We couldn't see it from our position so made our way up the road to the end which was slightly elevated and allowed us some excellent views of the eagle and the bonus of 2 otters feeding in the sheltered arm of the sea loch nearby. We also picked up Red-breasted Merganser, Buzzard, Common Sandpiper, Willow Warbler, Goldfinch and Twite in the same area. Happy with our visit we began to make our way back north calling in at Loch Skipport where a calling Red-throated Diver showed very well as it drifted past, joining a second bird that was loafing on the loch. Finally we visited Uskivagh on the east side of Benbecula and scanned the surrounding moorland from a slightly elevated spot. This produced a Great Skua that came overhead, an Arctic Skua, a male Hen Harrier, Kestrel and Buzzard. We also heard Red-throated Divers calling and managed to spot a Cuckoo in flight as we made our way back to the guesthouse after another, wildlife filled day.



30th June:

Weather: Light – moderate southerly winds; sunny and hot

Our final day started with a visit to Stinky Bay with lots of gulls still present as well as plenty of Eiders and a pair of Shelduck with young. We headed onto North Uist from here picking up a Short-eared Owl by the road near Aird Heisgeir before taking the road to Clettrevall. As the road began to climb up the hill another Short-eared Owl was seen hunting by the road which was shortly followed by a Golden Eagle not far from the summit. We decanted from the bus and spent the next 15 – 20 minutes watching the eagle hunt over the surrounding moorland with a regular entourage of mobbing birds that included Oystercatchers, Curlew, gulls and a Short-eared Owl from time to time. A female Hen Harrier past us at close range and we also spotted another Short-eared Owl as we descended along the road. Balranald was full of birds on the coast once again with many Arctic Terns now feeding even larger juveniles whilst the 2nd summer Glaucous Gull was resting amongst the rocks once again. We also picked up 2 Sandwich Terns calling and flying north from the point, plus Little Tern, Turnstones, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Corn Bunting. We made our way back past the visitor centre and towards the north-west side of the island, pausing by Loch na Reivil when we heard a Greenshank calling. We actually spotted 2 Greenshank and a Black-tailed Godwit on the side of the loch as well as the usual array of ducks and Little Grebe.

We had our lunch at Griminish Pier with a couple of Little Terns seen fishing between us and Vallay Island before we continued to Grenitote where we walked out to the shore at Traigh Iar. The sun was baking by now although a slight breeze on top of the dunes helped a little as we scanned the sea. 2 winter plumage Great Northern Divers were seen half way out whilst further out another couple were busy fishing. We wandered back to the bus and continued towards Lochmaddy, taking the Loch Portain road for a couple of miles where we spotted 5 Red-throated Divers together, loafing on the sea loch. We reached Lochmaddy around 4 pm and said our goodbyes to Maureen and Bob as well as Madeline and John who were catching the ferry to Skye. Finally we said a fond fair well to Joan and John in Balivanich at the end of an excellent week.



Species List:

Mute Swan	Common and seen every day with large numbers on Loch Bee
Whooper Swan	A single on Loch Bee and a pair with 5 cygnets were on East Loch Ollay
Greylag Goose	Common
Shelduck	Commonly seen with broods of ducklings in tow
Mallard	Common
Gadwall	Noted on 3 dates

Shoveler	Seen on 3 days
Wigeon	Small numbers were seen almost daily
Teal	Small numbers seen on 2 days
Tufted Duck	Common and seen every day
Eider	Common
Red-breasted Merganser	Noted on 3 dates during the week
Red-throated Diver	Seen on 4 days
Black-throated Diver	2 were seen in east Benbecula
Great Northern Diver	Small numbers were seen on 2 dates
Little Grebe	Fairly common and seen regularly
Fulmar	Seen around Mingulay
Gannet	Common off-shore
Cormorant	Common
Shag	Seen on 3 dates with lots seen on the Mingulay trip
Grey Heron	Common
White-tailed Eagle	Seen on 3 dates
Golden Eagle	Seen on 3 dates
Hen Harrier	Seen in small numbers almost daily
Buzzard	Common
Kestrel	Seen on 4 days
Peregrine Falcon	1 was seen at North Loch Eynort, 26 th
Corncrake	1 put in a couple of brief appearances on Mingulay
Moorhen	Noted on 3 days
Coot	1 was seen on Coot Loch
Oystercatcher	Very common
Ringed Plover	Common
Golden Plover	Seen on 2 days
Lapwing	Common
Knot	4 were seen at Rubha Ardvule on 29 th
Sanderling	A few were seen on 2 dates
Turnstone	Small numbers were seen at Balranald and at Malaclate
Dunlin	Seen in small numbers most days

Common Sandpiper	Noted virtually every day
Redshank	Very common
Greenshank	2 were on Loch na Reivil, 30 th
Black-tailed Godwit	32 were on Loch Bee and a single was seen at Loch na Reivil
Bar-tailed Godwit	Winter plumage birds were noted on 3 dates
Curlew	Fairly common and seen every day
Whimbrel	2 were seen on 27 th
Snipe	Common
Red-necked Phalarope	A female was seen in the distance at their regular site, 26 th
Great Skua	Common around Mingulay; also 1 in East Benbecula
Arctic Skua	Noted almost every day in small numbers
Black-headed Gull	Common
Common Gull	Very common
Herring Gull	Common
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Fairly common
Great Black-backed Gull	Common
Glaucous Gull	A 2 nd summer was seen at Aird an Runair, Balranald, 27 th and 30 th
Kittiwake	Seen around Mingulay
Sandwich Tern	2 were off Aird an Runair, 30 th
Common Tern	Seen daily
Arctic Tern	Common with chicks seen at Balranald
Little Tern	Small numbers were seen on 4 dates
Puffin	Common on Mingulay
Black Guillemot	Seen well on 2 dates
Guillemot	Seen in the Sound of Barra and on Mingulay
Razorbill	Common around Mingulay
Wood Pigeon	A couple were seen over the plantation by the Committee Road
Rock Dove	Very common
Collared Dove	Fairly common
Cuckoo	1 was seen on 29 th
Short-eared Owl	Seen almost every day of the trip
Skylark	Common

Swallow	Common and seen daily
Sand Martin	Seen every day
House Martin	1 was seen on 25 th and another on Mingulay
Rock Pipit	Small numbers seen every day
Meadow Pipit	Common
Pied Wagtail	Seen every day
Hebridean Wren	Common
Hebridean Dunnock	Noted on 2 days
Robin	Seen on 3 dates
Wheatear	Common with some juveniles spotted
Stonechat	Seen every day
Hebridean Song Thrush	Not uncommon around gardens
Blackbird	Common
Whitethroat	Heard singing in Castlebay
Sedge Warbler	Occasionally with birds seen on 26 th and 27 th
Willow Warbler	Fairly common at a couple of locations
Chiffchaff	Heard calling in the passing at Ardmhor plantation, Barra on 28 th
Goldcrest	Seen at North Loch Eynort
Hooded Crow	Seen every day and increasing in the islands
Raven	Common
Hebridean Starling	Very common
Rose-coloured Starling	An adult was seen at Callernish, 27 th and at Borge, Barra, 30 th
House Sparrow	Common
Chaffinch	Seen at Loch Eynort
Linnet	Fairly common
Twite	Small numbers noted on 5 dates
Lesser Redpoll	Seen at Loch Eynort
Siskin	Noted at North Loch Eynort, 26 th
Goldfinch	Seen on 3 days
Greenfinch	Noted on 1 day although not uncommon
Reed Bunting	Only seen on 26 th
Corn Bunting	Seen and heard at Balranald

Mammals:

Otter	Noted on 3 dates during the week
Grey Seal	Common
Harbour Seal	Common in more sheltered bays / lochs
Harbour Porpoise	2 were spotted off Balranald, 27 th
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	At least a dozen were seen from the boat on the way back from Mingulay, 28 th
Red Deer	Seen on 2 dates although quite common
Rabbit	Common
Short-tailed Field Vole	1 was seen scuttling across the road

Insects:

Green-veined White
Meadow Brown
Large Heath
Small Heath
Painted Lady
Red Admiral
Common Blue
Six-spot Burnet
Pretty Pinion
Silver-ground Carpet
Straw Dot
Purple Bar
Clouded-bordered Brindle
Large Yellow Underwing
Poplar Hawkmoth
Drinker
Campion
Map-winged Swift
Buff Ermine
Dusky Brocade
Dark Arches

Garden Tiger (caterpillar)

Common Blue Damselfly

Large Red Damselfly

Four-spotted Chaser

Common Hawker

Common Darter

Great Yellow Bumblebee

Plants:

Bog Myrtle

Common Centaury

Tansy

Pale Butterwort

Water Lobelia

Bog Asphodel

Common Spotted Orchid

Heath Spotted Orchid

Northern Marsh Orchid

Early Marsh Orchid

Lesser Butterfly Orchid

Marsh Fragrant Orchid

Adder's Tongue Fern







