



Village Bay, Mingulay

Midsummer Special

19th – 24th June 2017



Summary: As is often the way in the Outer Hebrides we had a mix bag of weather although this didn't stop us seeing the wildlife including a few surprises. The first day produced the rarest bird of the trip, a splendid adult White-winged Black Tern as well as Red-necked Phalarope which we all managed to gain great views of at some point during the tour. Our trip to Mingulay on the second day was superb with plenty of warm sunshine and calm conditions; at least on the east side of the islands which allowed us to spot a couple of Harbour Porpoise on route. The Puffins performed well and we also heard both Corncrake and Water Rail calling from around the village whilst a striking summer plumage Great Northern Diver was in Village Bay. Raptors were a feature during the week with White-tailed Eagle and Golden Eagles seen on a couple of occasions whilst Hen Harriers were spotted almost daily. A male Merlin was noted on Benbecula and a couple of Peregrines showed well on the final day. We had some great views of Short-eared Owl on three days with four on 22nd; the same day we had a very obliging Red-throated Diver at Loch Skipport. Three male Ruff resplendent in their summer plumage were a real bonus as was a summer plumage Purple Sandpiper at Balranald. We had the usual array of mammals and managed to spot otters on a couple of days although unfortunately they never came close. We also found a nice variety of plants and insects including plenty of orchids and the rare Great Yellow Bumblebee on Barra. All in all it was an excellent week.

Leader: Steve Duffield

Participants: Mark and Diane Cunningham, Julie Angerer and John Hamblin, Tom and Julie Lupton, Vic and Rosie Kolodziejczyk.

Daily Dairy:

19th June:

Weather: Rain and showers early morning gave way to brighter conditions with sunny spells and a north-westerly wind, force 4 in the afternoon.

Vic and Rosie spent the previous night at the Lochboisdale Hotel so once we had them on board we made our way north to meet Julie and John at Nunton. The rest of the group were coming on the afternoon flight from Glasgow so we headed out for the morning to see what we could pick up. A look at nearby Loch Mor produced excellent views of a female Red-necked Phalarope on the pool closest to the road. We also spotted 2 male Wigeon, Snipe, Common Tern, Arctic Tern and a Buzzard with 3 well-grown chicks. A shower swept in from the west whilst looking over Loch Mor so happy

with what we'd seen we made our way to the sunnier South Uist. On route we picked up our first Short-eared Owl that circled around our vehicle at Griminish before heading off to hunt. Once on South Uist we paused at North Bay where we had great views of a summer plumage Great Northern Diver and a few Eiders before continuing to Ardivachar. There were large numbers of gulls feeding amongst the seaweed on the shore here which included a juvenile Glaucous Gull and a juvenile Iceland Gull that both showed well. A few Grey Seals were bobbing off-shore and a Great Skua flew south past the headland. We returned to Benbecula and took the road east towards Peter's Port where we enjoyed our packed lunch in the picnic area there.



Heath Bumblebee

After lunch we moved to the slipway at Peter's Port, looking across to the island of Wiay. In no time at all we picked up our first Golden Eagle over the island which was quickly followed by a second and a third with the first, immature bird eventually driven away by a pair of resident birds. Shortly after this another two Golden Eagles appeared making an incredible tally of 5 Golden Eagles in half an hour, with 4 being seen in the air at the same time! Heading back across the island we stopped to have a look at a Rock Pipit on the roadside and a Harbour Seal with a new pup. Vic and Rosie spotted a dog otter clambering over a small rocky island which Steve just managed to get the scope on before it slipped off and disappeared. We also noted Kestrel, Buzzard and Grey Heron here before making our way to Borve machair at the south-west end of Benbecula. A walk around the shore and

machair produced lots of Early Marsh and Northern Marsh Orchids as well as masses of Grass Rivulets. We also found a Shelduck with ducklings, Eider, Lapwings and Skylarks. It was then time to meet the others so we headed to the airport and picked up Tom and Julie and Mark and Diane. We returned to Loch Mor to look for the phalaropes again and as we pulled up a couple of visiting birders mentioned they had seen a White-winged Black Tern earlier in the day. They left and shortly after we spotted the tern hawking over Loch Fada where we got some great views of this stunning adult bird. After a good look at this beauty we returned to scanning Loch Mor where we did manage to pick up 2 distant female Red-necked Phalaropes, 2 male Ruff, Dunlin, Curlew, Common Tern, Moorhen, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal and a male Hen Harrier circling over the moor. Finally just before we retired a female Hen Harrier flew over the loch being pursued by Redshank, Lapwings and a couple of aggressive Oystercatchers rounding off an excellent first day.



White-winged Black Tern

20th June:

Weather: Very light north-westerly winds, increasing a little in the afternoon. Initially it was cloudy although it became sunny and hot in the afternoon.

We had an early start this morning to catch the first ferry to Barra so that we could connect with our ride to Mingulay from Castlebay. As we headed through South Uist to Eriskay we picked up a few

birds on route including a Short-eared Owl, Buzzard and a Cuckoo perched on wires at Askernish. We arrived in good time and caught the 08:10 sailing for Ardmhor, Barra. The crossing was fairly quiet bird wise with Eiders, Shag, Cormorants, Guillemot, Black Guillemot, Gannet, Kittiwake and a distant Arctic Skua. Lots of Grey Seals were also seen at close range as we neared Barra. Once on the island, we took the road around the west side, pausing by the reservoir where we picked up 2 Whitethroats, a Common Redpoll and a couple of Common Sandpipers. Another Common Sandpiper was seen at Allasdale along with a Black Guillemot and Eiders. We met the Boy James and left Castlebay before 10 am for the trip to Mingulay. Lots of auks were seen on the way down including Razorbills, Guillemots, Black Guillemots and a whole raft of Puffins as we neared the island. Fulmars, Gannets, Kittiwakes, Shags and Eiders were also noted plus a couple of Harbour Porpoise that surfaced fairly close by. Once in Village Bay Francis ferried us ashore and we were soon all back on dry land. A summer plumage Great Northern Diver was spotted in the bay below the village before we took a walk across the island towards the chapel where we could hear a Corncrake calling. Some of the group stayed in the village rather than taking the hike up to the cliffs which the rest of us did, picking up calling Water Rail from an area of dense reeds. A Willow Warbler was singing somewhere nearby in the open and was later seen at the mouth of a small burn running into Village Bay. The walk up to the cliffs produced more Wheatears, Stonechats, Twite and of course lots of Great Skuas. Once on top of the island we enjoyed our lunch in the light winds before heading over to a gully where we could see Guillemots, Razorbills, a few Puffins and Kittiwakes lined up on the narrow ledges. A couple of Rock Pipits were noted picking around on the short turf here too before we headed back towards the Puffin colony to the north of the village. A few birds were present on arrival with others wheeling around in ever-increasing sized flocks. We left happy with the views although John hung on a little longer and had a wonderful experience with Puffins all around him, landing within feet and wheeling around his head.

The return trip on the Boy James back to Castlebay produced a similar array of seabirds as the journey down and as we had a bit of spare time before the return ferry to Eriskay we took a ride up to Eoligarry in the north of the island. The sun was beating down and good numbers of bees were feeding on the plentiful flowers including a single Great Yellow Bumblebee. We also spotted a small party of Twite that perched on the wires for a while before we had to head for Ardmhor and the ferry. The return across the Sound of Barra was fairly quiet and once on Eriskay we only had a short journey to reach the Am Politician and our dinner. We headed back to Benbecula and the accommodation in the evening which in the fine weather was great for owls and we spotted 3 Short-eared Owls from the roadside as we made our way home.



Razorbill



Puffins and Razorbills



Great Skua

21st June:

Weather: It was sunny and warm throughout much of the day accompanied by moderate to strong south and south-westerly winds. Increasing cloud in the afternoon eventually gave way to drizzle in the late afternoon.

The first birds of the day were 5 Twite that were showing well on the track after picking up Tom and Julie at Nunton. We then made our way next door to collect the rest of the group before heading off to North Uist and across the Committee Road (which was quiet) to Griminish Pier at the north-west corner of the island. A couple of Little Terns were showing well along the near shoreline from time to time whilst other birds here included a winter plumage Great Northern Diver and a summer plumage Red-throated Diver; as well as Red-breasted Merganser, Gannet, an Arctic Skua, Kestrel and around 40 – 50 Bar-tailed Godwits. We also enjoyed some lively Garden Tiger caterpillars or “woolly bears” as they’re often known. From here we headed east pausing at Athmore where a Whooper Swan was feeding by the roadside and a female Wigeon was on the open water of the freshwater loch. We also spent some time photographing the Lesser Butterfly Orchids which were dotted along the roadside and in very fresh condition. A little further along we paused at Oban Trumisgarry where we spotted a Grey Heron, Common Tern and Cormorant before moving on to Clachan Sands. Here we soon found some rather unobtrusive Frog Orchids growing on the edge of the picnic area whilst

Common Twayblade and Pugsely's Marsh Orchid were also added to our orchid tally for the day in a nearby dune hollow. The latter species has had a chequered history in the island and was formerly known as the endemic Hebridean Marsh Orchid. After a good scout around the area we headed along the long, secluded road to Loch Portain where we got superb views of a Golden Eagle low down. It appeared to come off a roadside cutting as we rounded a corner in the bus but hung around, circling nearby and provided us all with excellent views.

We found some shelter at Cheese Bay for lunch before taking a walk along the road where we spotted Twite, Common Redpoll, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Robin and Dunnock as well as plenty of Magpie Moths. We retraced our route back to the main road before taking a look around Lochmaddy bay for the elusive otter which unfortunately remained elusive although Steve managed to flush a Cuckoo that flew across the bay. We also spotted an Arctic Skua, Common Tern, Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper and Goldfinch amongst others. We continued south along the old Lochmaddy road although the low cloud and drizzle had started to make viewing difficult and only Steve managed to spot the male Hen Harrier over the moor. As we passed Carinish we took a side road and had close up views of a hunting ringtail Hen Harrier before heading back to Benbecula. Our final area of the day was the collection of lochs in the south-west of the island that produced a nice array of birds with Gadwall, Teal, Red-breasted Merganser and Snipe at Loch Mor whilst Coot Loch produced Little Grebe, Tufted Duck (with 10 ducklings), Wigeon (with 3 ducklings), Curlews, Sand Martins and Swallows rounding off the day nicely.

22nd June:

Weather: Fairly light south to south-westerly winds increased to strong in the afternoon with mostly dry condition although some murk and drizzle for a short time around midday.

Our first stop today was at Loch Mor where we got great views of a female Red-necked Phalarope on the near pool as well as Snipe and Arctic Tern in the same area. We moved on and took the main road south through the centre of the island getting great views of 2 Short-eared Owls by Loch Olabhat with a wee skirmish ending in one owl being taken to the ground before escaping off over the moor. We continued on to South Uist and picked up a further 2 Short-eared Owls by the main road north of Loch Bee and enjoyed some more great views on route to Loch Skipport. Once at this long, tidal loch we spent some time scanning from the old pier before picking up a distant otter that was feeding in the water well inland from our position. After eating various morsels in the sea loch it climbed out onto the seaweed covered rocks where we managed to watch it through the scope before it headed off un-noticed. 2 Red-throated Divers were also loafing on the same loch with one

of these eventually drifting towards us as it started fishing. It eventually appeared very close to where we were stood and provided excellent photographic opportunities as it appeared a couple of times at close range between dives. It must have decided that it was better further up the loch as it then flew inland somewhat, to join its mate to the west. We also noted various Shags and Gannets also fishing here. We returned to the main road and made our way to Rubha Ardvule via Peninerine which held a few Eiders along the shore.



Red-throated Diver

We enjoyed our packed lunch at Ardvule where we also found a couple of Whimbrel, as well as Tufted Ducks, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser and plenty of gulls along the shoreline. We also got the chance to compare Grey and Harbour Seals here hauled out together on the rocky shore. Back on the main road we turned north and immediately picked up a male Hen Harrier over the moor, quickly followed by a female close by. A short distance further on we turned east and made our way to South Loch Eynort which was full of Harbour Seals with pups. At the end of the road we managed to spot an otter feeding in the middle of the tidal loch. It was a bit distant so after we'd all seen it we headed to the north side of the loch where we re-found it a little closer. It tantalisingly looked like it was going to make its way closer to us but in the end headed off further away after we'd been watching it for around half an hour. We continued to the end of the road and took a walk around the trees at North Loch Eynort where we found good numbers of Willow Warbler as well as Siskin,

Redpoll, Goldfinch, Red-throated Diver (on the loch) and a distant White-tailed Eagle perched on the eastern hills. After our pleasant stroll at Loch Eynort we began to make our way back towards Benbecula calling in at the southern end of Loch Bee on route. Here we found Dunlin and Ringed Plover feeding along the muddy margins as well as 3 summer plumage Greenshank that provided us with great views and the opportunity to compare them side by side with Redshank. We finally had a look at Coot Loch which held Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Little Grebe whilst good numbers of both Swallows and Sand Martins hawked over the surface.



Red-necked Phalarope

23rd June:

Weather: A strong westerly wind with showers in the morning gave way to south-westerly winds and sunny spells in the afternoon.

We made our way to North Uist this morning calling in at Loch Sandary first where we found a juvenile Glaucous Gull loafing on the bank and a splendid male Ruff in breeding plumage. We also had a couple of Dunlin on the bank whilst the loch held a Whooper Swan and a few Tufted Ducks. We popped in to old Balranald where a Reed Bunting was showing very well before making our way to the visitor centre where a Corncrake was calling from dense vegetation at very close range. It remained stubbornly hidden although we did get views of Corn Bunting singing in the same area.

From here we drove out to the coast and had a walk onto the headland at Aird an Runair. Off-shore we spotted passing Gannets and a couple of Razorbills whilst a very active Arctic Tern colony were busy feeding young close by. On the shore we picked up a good variety of waders including Turnstone, Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Dunlin whilst the biggest surprise was a summer plumage Purple Sandpiper that was showing very well. We returned to the visitor centre where we had our lunch to the rasping calls of the Corncrake.

After lunch we called in at Loch na Reivil, Hougharry which held a Shoveler, Tufted Ducks and a couple of Little Grebe before heading off around the north-west of the island. We crossed the Committee Road and made our way back to Benbecula where we took a walk along the Rueval track. Here we picked up 2 Golden Eagles, a male Hen Harrier and a male Merlin as well as plenty of Stonechats and the odd Wheatear. We popped in at Peter's Port before making our way back around the south-west of Benbecula finishing the day in style with a male Hen Harrier near Coot Loch.



Arctic Terns



Purple Sandpiper

24th June:

Weather: Strong to gale force westerly winds with showers in the morning become less frequent with sunny spells in the afternoon.

We called in at Balgarva this morning where we picked up a few Ringed Plover and Dunlin before moving on to Ardivachar. Lots of gulls were feeding on the rotting seaweed here and included both a juvenile Glaucous Gull and a 1st summer Iceland Gull whilst off-shore we noted passing Gannets, a couple of Eiders and a few Grey Seals “bottling”. Returning the way we had come, we stopped at Loch an’t-Saile where we picked up a Black-tailed Godwit roosting on the bank as well as Dunlin, Wigeon and Sedge Warbler. Nearby Ardkenneth was quiet so we headed back to Benbecula, pausing by Coot Loch on route to the airport, where we picked up Little Grebe, Tufted Ducks and plenty of Sand Martins and Swallows hawking over the water. We dropped Tom and Julie at the airport where we said our goodbyes and went to Peter’s Port for lunch. On our way there we suddenly saw the large bulk of a Peregrine appear above the houses as it was making its way westwards, creating pandemonium in its wake.

After our packed lunch 6 Golden Plover were spotted in flight in east Benbecula on our way back to the airport where we dropped off Mark and Diane so they could pick up their vehicle for their next

week in the islands. Vic and Rosie had another night at the Lochboisdale Hotel so we headed south stopping on the way there at Mid Loch Ollay. An Arctic Skua flew over shortly after arriving whilst on the water we found a pair of Whooper Swans with 4 cygnets; a rare breeding bird in the UK. Finally we took a walk along the shore at Kildonan which produced another Peregrine and 8 Whooper Swans on the loch near Roe Glas. We said our goodbyes to Vic and Rosie around mid-afternoon before finally dropping off John and Julie in Balivanich so they could do a bit of shopping and so rounding off another excellent trip.



Iceland Gull



Greater Sundew



Lesser Water Plantain

Species List:

Mute Swan	Common and seen every day
Whooper Swan	Seen on 3 dates, including a pair of cygnets in South Uist, 24 th
Greylag Goose	Common
Shelduck	Common with a few broods seen
Mallard	Common
Gadwall	Noted on 19 th and 21 st
Shoveler	Seen on two dates
Wigeon	Small numbers were seen on three 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
Red-throated Diver	Seen on three days
Great Northern Diver	Single birds were seen on three days including a summer plumage bird in North Bay and one in Village Bay, Mingulay
Little Grebe	Fairly common and seen virtually every day
Fulmar	Large numbers seen around Mingulay
Gannet	Common off-shore
Cormorant	Common
Shag	Seen well around Mingulay
Grey Heron	Common
White-tailed Eagle	Two were seen on 20 th and one on 22 nd
Golden Eagle	Seen on three dates during the week with an amazing five over Wiay on 19 th
Hen Harrier	Seen virtually daily in small numbers
Buzzard	Common
Kestrel	Seen on three days
Peregrine Falcon	Two were picked up on the last day
Merlin	A male was seen near Rueval, Benbecula
Corncrake	Heard calling on four days during the week
Pheasant	Seen on a couple of days

Moorhen	Only seen on 19 th
Water Rail	One was heard calling persistently from a reed bed on Mingulay
Oystercatcher	Very common
Ringed Plover	Common
Golden Plover	Seen on 21 st and 24 th
Lapwing	Common
Sanderling	A few were on the coast at Balranald, 23 rd
Turnstone	Small numbers were seen at Balranald, 23 rd
Dunlin	Seen virtually every day
Purple Sandpiper	A summer plumage bird was at Balranald, 23 rd
Common Sandpiper	Noted almost every day
Redshank	Very common
Greenshank	Four were noted at the south end of Loch Bee, 22 nd
Black-tailed Godwit	One was at Loch an't-Saile, 24 th
Bar-tailed Godwit	Winter plumage birds were seen on 21 st
Curlew	Fairly common and seen most days
Whimbrel	Two were at Ardvule, 22 nd
Snipe	Common
Ruff	Two males were at Loch Mor, 19 th and another male was at Loch Sandary, 23 rd
Red-necked Phalarope	Good views were had on two dates
Great Skua	Seen on 19 th and 20 th with good views on Mingulay
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
Glaucous Gull	A juvenile was seen at Ardivachar and another at Loch Sandary
Iceland Gull	A 1 st summer was at Ardivachar
Kittiwake	Common around Mingulay
Common Tern	Seen daily
Arctic Tern	Common with chicks seen at Balranald

Little Tern	Small numbers were seen on 21 st
White-winged Black Tern	An adult was seen well on Loch Fada, 19 th
Black Guillemot	Seen well on 20 th
Guillemot	Seen well around Mingulay
Razorbill	Occasionally seen off-shore with good views around Mingulay
Puffin	Superb views on and around Mingulay
Rock Dove	Very common
Collared Dove	Fairly common
Cuckoo	Noted on 20 th and 21 st
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 most days
Meadow Pipit	Common
Pied Wagtail	Seen every day
Hebridean Wren	Common
Hebridean Dunnock	Noted at 21 st and 22 nd
Robin	Seen on two dates
Wheatear	Common with some juveniles spotted
Stonechat	Seen every day
Hebridean Song Thrush	Not uncommon around gardens
Blackbird	Common
Whitethroat	One was seen singing on Barra, 20 th
Sedge Warbler	Seen on 22 nd
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 on 21 st

Linnet	Common
Twite	Fairly common
Redpoll	Seen on three dates in small numbers
Siskin	One was seen on 22 nd
Goldfinch	Seen on three dates
Greenfinch	Small numbers were noted during the week
Reed Bunting	Seen well at old Balranald, 23 rd
Corn Bunting	Seen and heard at Balranald

Mammals:

Otter	We had sightings in east Benbecula and at Loch Skipport and Loch Eynort
Grey Seal	Common
Harbour Seal	Common in more sheltered bays / lochs
Harbour Porpoise	A couple were seen from the boat heading to Mingulay
Red Deer	Seen on 20 th
Rabbit	Common
Short-tailed Field Vole	Seen on 22 nd

Insects:

Green-veined White
Common Blue
Grass Rivulet
Common Blue Damselfly
Great Yellow Bumblebee
Moss Carder Bumblebee
White-tailed Bumblebee
Heath Bumblebee

Plants:

Bog Pimpernel

Common Centaury

Spring Squill

Marsh Cinquefoil

Mountain Everlasting

Common Butterwort

Pale Butterwort

Round-leaved Sundew

Water Lobelia

Lesser Water Plantain

Creeping Willow

Lesser Butterfly Orchid

Common Spotted Orchid

Heath Spotted Orchid

Northern Marsh Orchid

Early Marsh Orchid

Pugsley's Marsh Orchid

Frog Orchid

Common Twayblade

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