



## Northern Isles Migration

Dates: 16<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2018



This exciting autumn trip will visit some of the best sites in the northern part of the Outer Hebrides for passage seabirds, waders, raptors and passerines. It begins with the ferry crossing between Ullapool and Stornoway on the Saturday morning where we could potentially catch up with some great passage seabirds including Storm and Leach's Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Sabine's Gull and skuas. There's also a chance of spotting the odd cetacean with Common Dolphin, Harbour Porpoise, Risso's Dolphin and Minke Whale regular and increasing sightings of Humpback Whale.

Once ashore we'll be exploring headlands, marshes and any cover we can find for an array of birds. The islands are very under-watched and although they don't have the number of migrants that places like Shetland and the east coast can produce, they have still held many scarce passerines in the past despite very little coverage. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the tour though is the potential to catch up with scarce seabirds and waders. The Butt of Lewis is a superb site for watching seabird passage with thousands of birds passing during certain conditions and with the added advantage of allowing some protection against the worst of the weather by the lighthouse car park. Sooty Shearwater and Sabine's Gull are regular whilst occasional Great Shearwater are picked up most autumns. The Butt actually holds the Scottish day count record for Great Shearwater when a staggering 7,114 past in 11 hours on 8th September 2007. The Butt and northern part of Ness have also turned up an enviable list of waders including Least Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs and Semipalmated Sandpiper whilst American Golden Plover, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Pectoral

Sandpiper are recorded yearly. Passerines are also a possibility with Lapland Bunting being a regular passage migrant whilst many scarcities have been seen. If the weather happens to be calm there's also the chance of picking up cetaceans with regular sightings of Bottle-nosed Dolphins, Risso's Dolphins and the outside chance of Orca.

Lewis is much more than just the Butt though and we'll be exploring areas that experience virtually no coverage in autumn from one year to the next so you never know what we could find. Other sites we'll be visiting include Loch Barvas, Loch Ordais, Tiumpan Head and a trip out to the far west at Uig Sands and Mangersta Head. We'll also be visiting Harris one day where we have a very good chance of picking up both White-tailed and Golden Eagles whilst the scenic splendour of the Sound of Taransay holds a flock of Common Scoters that occasionally have the odd Surf Scoter hidden amongst them.

On the return journey to Inverness we'll also have a second shot at picking up seabirds from the ferry as we return to Ullapool on the afternoon sailing.



**Short list of species:** Common Scoter, Surf Scoter, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Manx Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Storm Petrel, Leach's Petrel, White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle, Merlin, large flocks of Golden Plover, American Golden Plover, Grey Phalarope, Pectoral Sandpiper, Ruff, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Great Skua, Arctic Skua, Pomarine Skua, Sabine's Gull, Lapland Bunting. Risso's Dolphin, Bottle-nosed Dolphin, Common Dolphin, Harbour Porpoise, Minke Whale, Otter.

Day 1: This morning we set off from Inverness for the ferry crossing between Ullapool and Stornoway. As with all ferry crossings there's always an element of luck involved but there's also a good chance of getting some decent views of seabirds such as Manx and Sooty Shearwater, Storm Petrel (maybe Leach's), Kittiwake, Sabine's Gull (if we're lucky), Great Skua, Arctic Skua, Pomarine Skua as well as Gannets, Fulmar etc. This crossing has also produced a number of good cetaceans which have included Humpback Whale and Orca although Minke Whale is more likely. Once in Lewis we should have a chance to look around the Braighe where we usually find Black-throated Diver, Red-throated Diver, Black Guillemot and a handful of freshwater ducks on Loch Branahue. Depending on what time we arrive in Stornoway we may have more time to explore the area and possibly visit Tiumpan Head which is building a reputation as an excellent place to spot cetaceans.

Day 2: We head off early to the Butt of Lewis where we'll spend some time looking for seabirds and marine mammals but also to explore around the lighthouse, cliffs and pools for any migrant waders or passerines that may have arrived. In most years this is a good time to look for the first returning

Lapland Buntings as well as trans-Atlantic waders such as Pectoral Sandpiper, American Golden Plover and Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Off-shore you can often find Sooty Shearwater and maybe the odd petrel or Sabine's Gull with a bit of luck. There's also a chance of spotting Harbour Porpoise, Bottle-nosed Dolphin and Common Dolphin or even the outside possibility of seeing Orca. There's also likely to be Great Northern Diver passing the head but part of the excitement of being here is the not knowing what could be around the next corner. Near the Butt lies Loch Stiapabhat with its newly appointed hide. This freshwater loch and surrounding machair usually offer a range of waders and wildfowl which should include Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits, Snipe, Golden Plover, Ruff and many more. The migrant waders often attract birds of prey and there's a good chance we'll catch up with Merlin and maybe Hen Harrier here. We'll also check out Port of Ness in case there are any migrant warblers or thrushes around.

In the afternoon we'll call in at various spots along the north-west coast including Loch Barvas that should add further variety to our list of waders. If there's time we'll also drop in to Loch Ordais at Bragar.

Day 3: Uig lies in the far west of Lewis and nearby at Ardrol is Uig Sands where we'll start the day looking for any waders that may be using the area to roost or feed. It also usually has a handful of freshwater ducks hiding in the small river that flows out here. It is rarely visited by birders and being one of the few places suitable for waders to rest and feed in the west of Lewis it has great potential to turn up something unusual. It's also the site that the famous Lewis Chessmen were discovered in 1831. Not far from here lies Mangersta Head which provides a great vantage point for looking out over the Atlantic for shearwaters and other passing seabirds. There's also chance of finding an early Snow Bunting and almost certainly a Merlin or two. Once we've finished in this area we'll start heading back east stopping at the very scenic Berie Sands where we should be able to find all three regular species of diver as well as Eiders and a handful of waders on the shore. Golden Eagle are frequent in the area and there's a good chance we'll pick them up either here or on the route back towards Stornoway.

Day 4: This morning we'll head for Harris and the Sound of Taransay which holds a regular flock of Common Scoter, amongst which is often the odd Surf Scoter. They're not always easy to see and the scope will certainly come in handy at this site. Other birds are likely to include Great Northern Diver, Red-throated Diver, Eider, Slavonian Grebe and maybe a late Arctic Tern. It's another stunningly scenic area that is becoming more popular with the wealthy for setting up holiday homes. A little further south is Northton where we'll explore the small area of machair and sands for Twite, pipits and waders before making our way back towards Tarbet. The sheltered gardens around Tarbet regularly hold a handful of passage warblers and we'll have a look around the hotel gardens for anything that may be taking a break here. A little further north a minor road heads off towards Uisinish and we'll have a look part way along this road which is excellent for both Golden Eagle and White-tailed Eagle. If time allows we'll also take a walk up one of the valleys to see if we can spot any Dippers and more eagles. As we head back towards Stornoway we'll pause again on the border of Lewis and Harris as this is another excellent area for both species of eagle.

Day 5: We'll return to the Butt of Lewis this morning and have a look from the lighthouse for any passing seabirds before exploring the cliffs and flood pools for any migrant passerines and waders. Things can change very quickly at this most northerly point of mainland Outer Hebrides and if we're

lucky we may experience birds arriving in off the sea as we wander around. This will give us another chance at spotting shearwaters and petrels as well as maybe a few dolphins which are a regular sight here. We'll check Port of Ness and Loch Stiapabhat once again with the help of the semi-resident local birder who spends each spring and autumn in the area. As we head south in the afternoon we'll call in at a couple of small sites along the north-west coast before our final stop at Loch Ordais, Bragar. This sheltered freshwater loch regularly holds a variety of wildfowl as well as providing a welcome stop for migrant waders. Otters are a regular sight in the loch which lies adjacent to a small area of cultivated machair; a rare habitat these days in Lewis.

Day 6: We'll take a run across the Pentland Road through Stornoway checking out the tidal area at Stenis before spending some time around Tiumpan Head where we'll be looking for seabirds and cetaceans. This has proved an excellent site for whales and dolphins with regular sightings of Common and Risso's Dolphin as well as Minke and Humpback Whale in recent years. Seabirds often include skuas and passage shearwaters as well as the regular auks. Being on the east side of the island it could also be the first landfall for any eastern migrant warblers and chats although very little work has been done looking for migrants here. The small freshwater loch nearby usually holds small numbers of wildfowl and bathing gulls too. We shall also check Broad Bay for divers, grebes and seaduck. We'll head south of Stornoway later in the day checking out the moorland at Arnish where we get regular sightings of Golden and White-tailed Eagles. It is also on the way to Crossbost and Ranish which are two small villages situated on the east side of Lewis which have lots of potential for picking up migrant birds.

Day 7: This morning we'll take the ferry back across to Ullapool and keep an eye out for seabirds and cetaceans as we cross the northern Minch. We'll then head to Inverness and say our goodbyes in the capital of the Highlands.

**Dates:** 16<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2018

**Cost:** £1,050 per person.

The price also includes accommodation, all meals (if you have special dietary requirements please let us know when booking) and transport to and from Inverness.

**Accommodation:** 6 nights in the Doune Braes Hotel, Carloway.

**Group size:** 8 maximum

**Booking:** Please email: [steveduffield70@gmail.com](mailto:steveduffield70@gmail.com)

**Where to meet:** We can either pick you up from Inverness around 08:00 am on 16th or meet you in Ullapool for the morning sailing to Stornoway. On the return journey there will also be transport to Inverness. If you prefer you can fly to Stornoway and we'll pick you up from the airport.

**Western Isles Wildlife Contact Address:** 7 Carinish, Isle of North Uist, Western Isles, HS6 5HL

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