

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

Isle of Mull 6th to 12th June 2015

Report



Photos courtesy of Gordon Bain

Leaders: Mike Russell and Dave Greenhalgh

#	DATE	LOCATIONS & NOTES
1	6 th June	Tobermoray - Salen
2	7 th June	Knocke Bridge – Ulva – Eagle Boat Trip
3	8 th June	Staffa and Lunga
4	9 th June	Salen, Garmaney, Grasspoint, Ardura Forest, Duart Castle, Garmaney
5	10 th June	Hen Harrier spot, Iona
6	11 th June	Dervaig, Calgary, Lucy's Garden
7	12 th June	Salen, Garmaney

June 6th

Various forms of transport brought us all to the Oban Ferry Terminal with those of us catching the early morning train from Brighton making it on to the ferry with a very comfortable 90 seconds (!!) to spare before it departed! Having found each other and been comforted by a welcome cup of coffee, a few hardy souls braved it up to the deck in the strong breeze and squally rain and started to pick up some birds for the list, particularly **black guillemot**, **gannet** and **kittiwake**.

The 50 minute crossing brought us to Craignure where we met the very affable Dave our driver and guide for the week and we drove north to the Salen Hotel where we dropped off our bags, before heading out in the increasingly rainy and windy weather to have a look around Tobermory. The weather was not very conducive to birdwatching though the harbour had a few interesting birds, principally a **common sandpiper** probing the seaweed for tasty morsels, a pair of **red-breasted mergansers** bobbing in the water. Also a dozen **sand martins** quartered over the seaweed picking off the insects as they did so.

Dodging the rain, some headed for the museum, some took advantage of prospective limited shopping opportunities in the coming week while others headed to the nearest coffee shop. Four of us headed up the hill to walk alongside the water torrents hopefully looking for dipper but no success, but did pick up a **willow warbler** and a **garden warbler**. Eventually we all re-grouped and headed back to the hotel, which I think we all thought not brilliant but quite adequate, with the proprietor Gerry a very good host. After dinner most of us went for a walk down to have a look at Salen Bay and hopefully otter but no luck here, setting the pattern for the week! But the 3 **eider** were nice to see.

June 7th

With better weather promised, there was an early morning walk where we started to make inroads into the bird list with a number of more common birds around, including **common gull**. There were a number of **siskin** that were common around the hotel and a **sedge warbler** was a nice addition.

After breakfast, Dave took us off to Ulva, stopping at First Knocke Bridge where some of us got out into the rain to look for a speciality but only Charles got a view. However, shortly after one did fly up and under the bridge and then sat on a convenient rock and eventually everyone got excellent views of a **dipper**, soon to be joined by another one. The first of many **spotted flycatchers** was seen here as well.

Buoyed by this early success, Dave suggested we head a little further up the road where another Mull speciality was sometimes seen. Out the bus we got, surrounded by the majestic landscape of Mull and after a little while, a large, very large shape drifted along the edge of the mountains, a little distant but unmistakably a **golden eagle**. Ulva beckoned, so we headed off to the Ferry point, slipped across the signal to attract the ferryman and over he came to ferry us across the short crossing and straight into the lovely café for excellent coffee and cake, a theme for the coming week, and lunch ordered.

Unfortunately, we only had a short time on the Island but a lovely walk around meant that we added some new birds with particular good views of **common whitethroat**, **linnet** and **mistle thrush**.

Back across on the Ferry and straight onto another boat, the Eagle Charter Ferry which we had to ourselves and provided one of the great wildlife spectacles in the UK. As we passed along the cliffs of Loch Na Keal the excellent captain gave a good commentary about the geology, wildlife and general life of the area. After a little while he started to throw fish into the water and we didn't have to wait long for the show to begin. A large dark shape came serenely towards us, closer and closer until the huge **white-tailed eagle** was right on top of us and then scooped the fish up. This was repeated about half a dozen times and to see this magnificent bird so close that you could see every detail of its feathers was just so memorable, and therefore not surprising that both Lindsay and Gordon proclaimed it their memorable moment of the trip while Mike made it his favourite bird.

On the way back we stopped at Killiechronan, a renowned spot for seeing otters... alas, not for us, but we did see two more eagles, with one possibly being the one coming to the fish thrown from the boat. Other notable birds recorded today included **cuckoo** and **tree pipit** while **common seals** were seen in numerous places and **red deer** were rarely out of sight, though today was the only day we saw **fallow deer**.

With the improved weather, the evening walk was accompanied by an increasing number of midges and an increasing diverse array of anti-midge clothing which must have frightened the residents of Salen residents to death had they looked out their windows!

June 8th

After breakfast, off we went to Ulva again, this time to catch a larger boat and a time to explore the Treshnish Islands and particularly Staffa and Lunga for another absolutely splendid day. We headed out to the Isle of Staffa, famous for the geological strata and as you approach it is a fabulous spectacle. We all disembarked and made our various ways, most heading into Fingal's Cave, made famous by Mendelssohn. After about an hour it was back on board and off to Lunga, and as we approached the number of birds bobbing in the sea increased the nearer we got to the island. As well as the number of birds we also saw plenty of seals as well and while we saw **common seals** every day, this was the only day we saw a **grey seal**.

Now getting on to the island required a certain degree of athletic dexterity, but boy was it worth it. As soon as you get on the island you are among the stars of the show, the **puffins**. These beautiful and comical but sadly declining birds are breeding on Lunga in their thousands and are completely unconcerned by anyone moving amongst them and to spend an afternoon in their company is a sheer delight. Both Claire and Lesley voted them as their favourite bird.

But it wasn't just the puffins that made this such a wonderful experience, the cliffs were stacked full of **guillemots** and **razorbills** as well as **kittiwakes**. We could wander up to breeding **shags** sitting on their nests and they wouldn't worry at all. It was a real privilege to

be in this marvellous environment and Lesley, Jo and Annette all voted it their most memorable moment as did Sylvia who added that the geology of the whole day was just fantastic. Unfortunately I was the only one to see a **great skua** passing along the edge of the cliff just as I was answering the call of nature! Overlooked by the grandeur of this amazing seabird colony were a few **rock pipits** quietly going about their business on the rocks by the sea.

A lot of happy customers made their way back on the boat and another stop to look for otters but had to make do with more views of the white-tailed eagles. We did see **curlews** on the way back which Michael decided was his favourite bird of the holiday.

June 9th

The number of pre-breakfast walkers were decreasing but those who made it were treated to the delightful song of a **wood warbler** and also the lovely lilt of two Welsh women who delighted in telling us that they often seen otters here and then told us of a spot where they saw four only yesterday...

So, after breakfast off we went to Garmany Point where there were four fewer otters than were there yesterday but we had good views of a colony of **Arctic terns** and also picked up **ringed plovers** as well. Heading south, the beauty of driving on Mull, well at least being driven, is that single track roads mean you go pretty slowly and therefore have more time to enjoy the incredible scenery that unfolds before you, as we did all the way to Grasspoint.

A very enjoyable hour or so walking up the track to the coast produced a few new birds namely **stonechat**, **reed bunting** and **lesser redpoll** while down by the see there were a few **dunlin** and **turnstone** picking up food along the shore. It was now warm enough and still enough for a few dragonflies to take to the air, so on the walk back to the bus we managed to see 3 species, **large red damselfly**, **four-spotted chaser** and the magnificent **golden-ringed dragonfly**. Two distant large raptors turned out to be a couple of golden eagles, the last we were to see of them on the holiday.

Time for lunch so Dave took us to a spot where there was a possibility that we might 'see something interesting'. So we found a spot on the side of the road and overlooking some splendid moorland. It seemed empty but there was a 'lump' in the middle of a patch of grass which seemed to move occasionally and in the end, thanks to the leader of another group, it was decided it was a female **hen harrier** sitting at the nest. The male was just about made out in the distance as well. A little further on we had a walk in the Ardura Forest which was lovely and afforded great views of a spotted flycatcher and a party of **long-tailed tits**, but few other birds.

One last stop to look round Duart Castle and some more coffee and cake as if we needed it, before heading back to the hotel. Now at dinner, a Wildlife Travel legend was born. For those that were there it is simply known as 'Jo's Joke' and a knowing smile will appear on those faces whenever it is mentioned in the future. It made such an impact that both Charles and Claire nominated it as the most memorable moment of the holiday! After the excitement, a few decided that we needed to go for a walk again, so the midge scaring gear was put on and down we went to the Bay. Utterly otter-less again but we did glimpse a distant **harbour porpoise**.

June 10th

Sadly, Barbara had to leave us today, so we said our goodbyes after breakfast and set off for Iona but not before stopping at the harrier spot again, and what a good decision it was. This time we were rewarded with superb views of both male and female harriers flying close by and at one time passing food to each other, with the female taking it back to the nest. This act between the pair was particularly enjoyed by Mike who saw it as his moment of the

holiday. But the entertainment didn't end there as a **short-eared owl** then appeared and floated serenely over the moor giving a breath-taking display! For about 15 minutes we were treated to this display and not surprisingly, Annette, Lindsay and Gordon all nominated it their favourite bird while Michael watching it through his brand new scope thought it his best moment of the trip.

A very contented bus load then enjoyed the beautiful drive to the south west part of the island to catch the ferry to Iona and again a very comfortable three hours enjoying the warm sunshine and people doing their own exploration. The target bird was elusive for a while as we heard one down from the Abbey but it resolutely refused to show itself so some drifted off to visit the Abbey and explore the rest of the Island. Surprisingly, this was the only place we recorded **Rooks** and **Jackdaws** in the whole week. Four of us went searching for the elusive bird at another spot by the fire station and soon heard a very loud 'crek, crek' behind us, seemingly coming from the grass in the roadside verge, which indeed it was. Eventually the perpetrator revealed itself as a **corncrake** stuck his head up just a few metres away. A brilliant view to be equalled by a second bird, a female, preening itself out in the open by a building a bit further around the island. As we gathered to get the ferry back it seemed that most people had caught up with one in the end, and both Charles and I thought the corncrake our best of the holiday.

Dave took us the scenic way back, as if the whole island wasn't one big scenic route, and enjoying various stops at likely looking otter places but no luck, but a **buzzard** hovering close by in the wind was a fine sight, as were the **northern wheatears**, enjoyed so much by Jo as she nominated it as her favourite bird.

July 11th

Our last full day so we were determined not to look for otters and succeeded magnificently in this goal! After breakfast we headed to the north of the island, stopping occasionally to see what was around and admiring more good views of a dipper. As we got nearer to Dervaig we noticed a buzzard swoop down and catch a vole before taking it to a post and eating it and then excitement overran as we clapped eyes on the first **woodpigeon** of the trip. In Dervaig, the only hotel spurned our custom, but we were then pleased to patronise the village shop as they were able to make us coffee and were very pleased to accept our custom.

Back to birding and just on a rocky outcrop we picked up three female **goosander**, our first for the trip, before heading off to the Carthouse Gallery to walk around the grounds and up through the woods enjoying the sculptures and landscaping in the garden and seeing our first **treecreeper** of the holiday. We also managed to find the rare **sword-leaved helleborine** as well, while the grassland was full of **common spotted orchids**. Before heading back for an excellent lunch, Lesley couldn't resist a go on the tyre run and prosecuted the move expertly, but everyone else declined to take up the challenge.

Post lunch a walk along the cliffs around the beautiful white sands of Calgary Beach in search of the elusive *you know what*, but we were rewarded by a relatively distant **peregrine** and even more dramatic, a white-tailed eagle being mobbed by 2 buzzards that looked miniscule alongside the flying barn door. This was a good spot for **raven** as well. For some, it was too good an opportunity to miss, so off came the various footwear and a lovely stroll back, dipping the toes in the cold Atlantic Ocean water was a real trip.

Heading slowly back, Dave stopped the bus at one of the highest points of the island for us to enjoy the magnificent views under the clear blue sky, before dropping down to spend half an hour at "Lucy's Garden", a riot of colour amid the mountains, the result of so much work over a number of years and it was pleasure to walk around.

So to our final meal and reminisces of a great week in Mull and one last fruitless look for that elusive otter.....in vain!

12th June

A faithful few with a 'never-say-die' attitude had one last look before breakfast, but had to make do with a splendid view of a wood warbler. Saying goodbye to Jerry, off we went to Garmony Point again in a last desperate attempt to see the phantom beast. Looking across at a tiny island which seemed to have a brown lump on it that eventually moved, I asked Michael if I could borrow his scope, as he had been the only one sensible enough not to pack his, and lo and behold there it was, an **otter!**

Claire immediately declared her love for me and then for the next 40 minutes or so we watched it fishing, grooming and swimming, just brilliant. Talk about last minute! We said goodbye to the very nice Dave and boarded the ferry and a fleeting view of a harbour porpoise as we crossed to the mainland where went our separate ways to differing destinations, some of us with the ridiculous belief that a return train ticket would actually enable us to get back on the train, but no! However, they did lay on a coach which did get us back to Glasgow in good time.

I think everyone was enchanted with Mull, I certainly was. I know the hotel isn't brilliant but perfectly adequate and it is in a very good position. The otter gave us a run for our money and the eagles, harriers and short-eared owl were all superb. To me, Mull is up there with some of the best wildlife destinations in Europe and I don't think it let us down.



	ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Family Procellariidae (Shearwaters)									
	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	■		■				
Family Sulidae (Gannets)									
	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	■	■	■	■			■
Family Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants)									
	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				■			
	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Ardeidae (Hérons)									
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Anatidae (Swans, geese and ducks)									
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	■	■		■	■	■	■
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Canada goose			■	■	■			■
	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			■		■		
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>						■	
	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	■	■	■		■	■	■
Family Accipitridae (Hawks and Eagles)									
	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		■	■			■	■
	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		■		■			
	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				■	■		
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Falconidae (Falcons)									
	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		■		■		■	■
	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>						■	
Family Phasianidae (Pheasants and Partridges)									
	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	■	■	■	■		■	■
Family Rallidae (Rails and Crakes)									
	Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>					■		
Family Himantopidae (Oystercatchers)									
	Oystercatcher	<i>Himantopus ostralegus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Family Scolopacidae (Sandpipers)									
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				■			
	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				■			
	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		■	■	■		■	■
	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					■		
	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Charadriidae (Plovers)									
	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				■			■
	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>					■		
Family Stercorariidae (Skuas)									
	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>			■				
Family Laridae (Gulls)									
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>				■		■	
	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	■	■	■	■	■		■
	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	■		■	■			■

	ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Family Sternidae (Terns)									
	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			■	■			■
	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>				■			■
Family Alcidae (Auks)									
	Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			■				
	Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	
	Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	■		■	■			
	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			■				
Family Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)									
	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■
	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>						■	
	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Cuculidae (Cuckoos)									
	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		■	H		■	■	
Family Tytonidae (Barn Owls)									
	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>				■			
Family Strigidae (Owls)									
	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>					■		
Family Picidae (Woodpeckers)									
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		■		■			
Family Alaudidae (Larks)									
	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Hirundinidae (Swallows and Martins)									
	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	■	■		■	■	■	■
	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Motacillidae (Pipits and Wagtails)									
	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		■		■	■		
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■
	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			■			■	
	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Cinclidae (Dippers)									
	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		■				■	
Family Troglodytidae (Wrens)									
	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Prunellidae (Accentors)									
	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	■	■	■	■	■		■
Family Turdidae (Thrushes)									
	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		■		■			
Family Muscipidae (Flycatchers and Chats)									
	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	■	■	■	■		■	
	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>				■		■	
	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		■	■		■	■	
	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		■		■		■	
Family Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers)									
	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		■	■		■	■	
Family Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)									
	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		■	■	■	■	■	
	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	■						
	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	■	■		■	■	■	■

	ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Family Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)									
	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>				■	■		■
	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Regulidae (Crests)									
	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					■		
Family Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)									
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				■			
Family Paridae (Tits)									
	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		■		■	■	■	■
	Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>				■	■	■	■
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Certhiidae (Trecreepers)									
	Trecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>						■	
Family Corvidae (Crows)									
	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>					■		
	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>					■		
	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		■	■	■		■	
Family Sturnidae (Starlings)									
	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Passeridae (Sparrows)									
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Fringillidae (Finches)									
	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	
	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			■	■	■	■	
	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		■	■	■	■	■	
	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>		■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Emberizidae (Buntings)									
	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citronella</i>						■	
	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				■			

	ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
LARGER MAMMALS									
Family Leporidae (Rabbits and Hares)									
	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		■	■	■	■	■	
Family Phocidae (Seals)									
	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			■				
	Common (Harbour) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Family Balaenopteridae (Baleen Whales)									
	Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>							
Family Phocoenidae (Porpoises)									
	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>				■			■
Family Mustelidae (Mustelids)									
	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>							■
Family Cervidae (Deer)									
	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	■	■	■	■	■	■	
	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		■					

	ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
DRAGONFLIES									
	Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>				■			
	Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>				■			
	Golden-ringed Dragonfly	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>				■			
BUTTERFLIES									
	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>			■	■	■	■	
	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>				■			
	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>				■		■	
	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		■					
	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>							
	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>				■		■	
MOTHS									
	Drinker	<i>Euthrix potatoria</i>							
	Garden Tiger	<i>Arctia caja</i>							
	Shaded Broad-bar	<i>Scotpteryx chenopodatia</i>							
	Cinnabar	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>							
	Speckled Yellow	<i>Pseudopanthera macularia</i>							
	Clouded Border	<i>Lomaspilis marginata</i>							

