Scotland – The Isle of Coll in Summer

Naturetrek Tour Report 9th – 16th June 2023



Dark Green Fritillary



Hogh Beach



Loch à Mhill Aird



Puffin

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Tour participants – Greg Smith (tour leader and local naturalist) with seven Naturetrek clients

Summary

Eight of us enjoyed a glorious week of uninterrupted sunshine and unusually warm temperatures on this Hebridean jewel of an island. We visited wild flower-rich sand dunes and boggy moorlands, farm fields with Corncrakes and waders, rocky islands with thousands of seabirds, and bays and beaches full of wildlife riches. We clocked up 75 different species of bird, including daily Cuckoos and Hen Harriers, a White-tailed Eagle, and Great and Arctic Skuas. We saw ten different types of orchid among a fantastic array of wild flowers which in turn were home to dozens of different insects, among them Dark Green Fritillaries and 15 species of day-flying moth. We also saw a surprising diversity of archaeological and geological delights and every day we were treated to some very fine dining experiences. All in all, an unforgettable introduction to an extraordinary isle.

Day 1 Friday 9th June

Oban

A group of eight (seven eager clients plus our guide) met in Oban. We discussed what we were all hoping for from the week and the motto "go to great places and see what comes along" seemed to sum it up well. Despite the glorious weather, we were urged to expect cooler, windier and wetter conditions when we reached the Isle of Coll. Thankfully this was the only misjudgement our guide made during the week, for the weather was to prove warm and sunny, at times even hot, for the entire week!

A short woodland walk before supper presented us with some lovely mature Wych Elms, with their distinctive asymmetric leaf bases, and clump-planted Beeches exhibiting 'inosculation' (poetically rendered as "fused by a kiss"); all this to the accompaniment of singing Blackcaps and chattering Long-tailed Tits, set against a backdrop of ancient sea cliffs cut from the 400 million year old lumpy Devonian conglomerates and sandstones.

Day 2 Saturday 10th June

Oban ferry to Coll, walks around Arinagour village and Cliad beach

The next morning we were up bright and cheery for the early morning ferry to Coll and Tiree. We all spent the crossing outside on the top deck, bathed in glorious sunshine, though the cool north-easterly breeze made us grateful for the extra layers we'd been encouraged to bring.

One of our first birds was a fly-by Great Northern Diver soon followed by a small party of Manx Shearwaters and a couple of immature Gannets. The broiling waters between Lismore and Morvern gave us our first cetaceans in the form of two Harbour Porpoises (with the briefest double appearance at the surface before disappearing, which is their trademark).

On the Morvern shore, at Inninmore, we were shown the fault line which marks a near billion year gap between the Moine gneisses to the east and the young stepped basalt lavas to the west. The difference in landscape character either side of the fault line was striking, as were the high walls of basalt dykes standing proud along the shoreline.

Passing Ardnamurchan, the bird activity picked up with small parties of Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins, and regular Kittiwakes. Sadly, none of this activity at the surface prefaced the appearance of larger cetaceans but we lived in hope!

As we approached Coll, a Red Admiral flew around the deck, the first of a steady stream of these migrant lepidopterans that we would see through the week. We finally landed beneath the towering resin jaw bones of a Fin Whale, while a Rock Pipit watched all the sudden activity nervously from the overhead wires.

We were driven up into the village of Arinagour where we explored An Cridhe, the community centre where a local market had just got under way. Lesser Redpolls, Greenfinches and Whitethroats were all singing their hearts out in the centre grounds while some topiaried golden cypress trees caught the eye of Keith, the arboriculturalist in the group.

Shopping bug sated, we headed up the hill behind the church to get our first proper views across the island: a rolling landscape of moorland, peatbogs, lochs and lochans. In the bay below us, a party of Red-breasted Mergansers had gathered, while in the sunshine a Brown Silver-line moth flitted around the Bracken. The lump on which we were standing had stories to tell of ancient duns and burials, as well as 20th Century memorials.

We had lunch at the splendid Coll Hotel - the first of many excellent culinary experiences through the week. After checking in at Tigh na Mara, the guest house which we would call home for the week, with our host the bubbly and attentive Paula, we headed out across the island to experience some Scottish machair and a Hebridean beach.

As we walked across the machair, we were greeted by Early Marsh Orchids in the dune slacks (growing with Marsh Pennywort and Bog Pimpernel) and Pyramidal Orchids on the drier dunes (with Crested Dog's-tail and Sweet Vernal Grass). Clouds of tiny grass moths (*Chrysoteuchia culmella*) were flitting round, occasionally joined by Small Heath butterflies and the plain but specialised Crambid moth *Anania fuscalis*.

Down on the beach, we watched a flock of Ringed Plovers accompanied by a few small Dunlins and clockwork Sanderlings, all still on their way further north to breed. A Black-headed Gull crossing the bay got our guide excited (a bit of a rarity out here on Coll), but of more interest to the group was the shreeping Little Tern which fished along the shoreline. At the head of the beach, among the Sea Couch and Sand Sedge, we studied a variety of animal tracks. The surprising star of this show was the distinctive frilly linear mark left by a Common Lizard.

Later, having packed ourselves away into the minibus, we were hurriedly ushered back out to watch a drumming Snipe give a mesmerising performance over the marsh, while Lapwings and Redshanks (the two other classic waders of wet grasslands) joined us in watching the show. The drive back to the village gave us decent views of Brown Hare and Cuckoo and a couple of lumbering bulls being ushered along the road.

Day 3 Sunday 11th June

Village walk, boat trip to Lunga and the Treshnish Islands

We began this morning back in the grounds of An Cridhe where a Chimney Sweeper moth flitting among the Pignut caused great excitement - a first for Coll, no less! We also watched, at very close quarters, a Song Thrush

carefully wiping the slime off a slug on a mossy stone.

We walked back to the Middle Pier where Struan was waiting with his RIB to take us on a boat trip down to the Treshnish Islands. It took us thirty minutes at full throttle to get down to Lunga where, with the assistance of the skipper, we clambered ashore with relative ease and made our way carefully across the bare rocks.

The first birds to greet us here were a family party of Eiders and a very obliging Oystercatcher but we quickly left them behind and ascended to a raised platform where we joined a couple of dozen Puffins who were loafing around at the entrances to their burrows. Occasionally a bird would return with a bill full of sand eels, running across the turf and straight down into its burrow.

What a special place - and, for now, we were the only people here! We gazed out upon a seascape of offshore volcanic islets with clouds of seabirds all around: mainly Puffins, Guillemots and Razorbills, but also plenty of Kittiwakes, Shags and Fulmars. Above them cruised a couple of Arctic Skuas, who would occasionally single out an auk and piratically pursue it until it gave up the food it was carrying in beak or crop.

After taking our fill of the Puffins, we headed further up along the coastal path, past quarrelsome Fulmars on the cliffs and statuesque Shags and Razorbills beside their pathside nests. At the end of the path, we were confronted by the sights, sounds and smells of Harp Rock - a vast sea stack covered in seabirds. Most remarkable of all, in this veritable high-rise apartment block, were the hundreds of Guillemots sat cheek-by-beak on an angled slab - each somehow managing to keep their single eggs from rolling off. Here and there this task had been successfully completed - with the egg now replaced by a round fluffy ball of black feathers. Scanning across the wall of birds, Robert managed to pick out a couple of 'bridled' Guillemots, looking like someone had graffitied a pair of white spectacles onto their grey-black faces.

A Herring Gull was patrolling the cliff, on the look-out for any untended eggs or hatchlings. At one stage it landed among the Guillemots, who backed away and joined in a chorus of jeers and boos as if greeting a pantomime villain.

The return walk along the clifftop path was rather trickier as we were met by a steady stream of visitors coming towards us. Back on the Puffin platform, a large crowd had gathered, sitting in the sun munching on sandwiches or sun-bathing (one pair even asleep), as if they were on some Costa del Sol beach rather than an internationally important bird reserve. One couple, sitting right among the Puffin burrows, had two yappy dogs with them. Our guide politely asked them to move away from the burrow entrances - an approach which set the dogs barking but which yielded the desired result.

By way of distraction, our guide then showed us the two forms of Primrose flowers, whose different arrangements of stigma and stamens ensure that they can't self-pollinate themselves. A pair of Twite danced along the rocky shore singing and calling - and giving a visiting Dutch photographer the chance for some excellent snaps, which she willingly showed to our group.

Back on the boat, we took a leisurely tour of the neighbouring islands where drake Eiders, big Grey Seals and Great Black-backed Gull families were present in good numbers. On the Cairn na Burghs we saw the striking remains of Napoleonic era fortifications and an astonishing natural sea-arch, like the eye of a vast needle.

Our return to Coll across a glassy sea was uneventful but, when we were a short way out of the harbour, a party of Common Dolphins came to greet the boat. Struan killed the engine, and we had a magical 15 minutes in their company - as they swam around and beneath the boat, sometimes leaping from the water in unison like a synchronised swimming team. The display culminated in a series of coordinated leaps and then everything went quiet (like the big ending at a firework display, someone said) as the troupe drifted away and we finally returned to shore.

Some of us took a stroll up to the hotel for a pre-prandial snifter while others took five minutes for a rest and brush up. As the latter group gathered to follow the vanguard up to the hotel, a noisy flock of Greylags took to the air and flew low over the guest house. Behind them flew the cause of their alarm: a White-tailed Eagle. We were disappointed that the others had missed it so we hurried to share our news, only for them to regale us with their sighting of the same eagle as it passed over their end of the village.

Dinner in the Coll Hotel was excellent, as was the view from the window, which provided another highlight as we watched a male Hen Harrier hunting through the village gardens.

Day 4 Monday 12th June

Loch Ronard, RSPB Totronald and Hogh Beach, evening walk through the village

This morning we drove down to the RSPB reserve at the west end of the island, stopping en route to watch a Red-throated Diver on a roadside loch - only for a male Hen Harrier flying along the far bank to flush it. A Large Heath butterfly nectaring on the roadside Bird's-foot Trefoil offered itself for photographs, while an Arctic Skua came over to see what we were up to.

But we didn't stick around here for long as we had a Corncrake to find! Down at Totronald, it was clear that we were in the right place, as two Corncrakes were already performing their rasping call in the fields immediately below the viewing platform. Sally quickly picked one up through her binoculars ("There in front of the Cow Parsley") but at first the rest of us struggled to identify which particular stand of Cow Parsley it was standing in front of! Cries of "Got it!" began to ring out as the rest of us managed to track it down and the scope was lined up on it. Our views were fairly typical of Corncrake watching: we knew where the bird was and could see it as it tentatively raised its head, but all too quickly it shyly withdrew it again back into the vegetation. As we hunted around for a bird offering better views, we soon discovered that the drooping flower heads of Yorkshire Fog bear a striking similarity in shape and colouration to these birds and we were increasingly frustrated as possible Corncrakes repeatedly resolved themselves into grass. Then one bird made a short flight above the grass, showing off its subtle chestnut and honey colouration and dangly legs, but it landed in deep cover, and we failed to relocate it. On the other side of the fence below our viewing area the same thing happened again. But the birds continued to call, in time encouraging others further away to call in response. By now we had had up to five different calling males but no extended views following Sally's opening success.

Other wildlife kept our spirits up: a tatty Raven flew overhead and alarmed Redshanks chipped from fence posts while, in the grasses around where we were standing, a Common Carpet moth fluttered uncertainly. Snipe-flies had taken an interest in our clothing and, following Paula's injunction to us all to "Be the reason someone smiles

today", Keith caused some amusement by photographing Robert's backside, where one was briefly stationed. Keith also got the prize for 'bizarre nest box of the day' as a pair of Starlings dived in and out of the spout of a large chipper while their hungry youngsters squawked from somewhere in its depths.
We enjoyed lunch in the RSPB warden's garden where we kept the wildlife list ticking over with Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Chaffinch and a stand of Russian Comfrey fed the local Honey Bees and White-tailed and Red-tailed Bumblebees. An interesting flower among the tall grasses was identified as Dame's Violet.

After lunch, most of us headed out to the airport for a loo stop, where a male Hen Harrier flew over our heads carrying food up into the moorland, back to its hard-working mate at the nest.

Meanwhile back at base Keith (who had declined the loo break) had had an amazingly close encounter with a Corncrake in the car park where we had all been standing earlier. His plant-shooting macro lens gave it its best shot but the photo, while clearly showing a Corncrake, wasn't going to win any prizes!

Next, we headed out into the machair. Here, a lovely assemblage of colourful flowers revealed themselves, including Bloody Cranesbill, Lesser Meadow-rue, Yellow-rattle and Wild Carrot. Through the vegetation a few butterflies and moths sauntered (among them 6-spot Burnet, Purple Bar, Dark Green Fritillary and several Common Blues - some, as our guide put it, 'in cop'). In the dune slacks, the two forms of the Early Marsh Orchid (var *incarnata* and var *coccinea*) were joined by Northern Marsh Orchids (never very common here) and the hybrid between them.

We made our way down onto the beach where the water was so inviting (and the day so hot) that one of our number went for a swim. A perfect combination of blue sea, even bluer sky and almost white sand! Along the shore we picked out the shells of tiny orange Queen Scallops and even smaller Spotted Cowries, while a pair of Shelducks flew around. As we reached the end of the beach and our swimmer had got himself dry, we found Sea Bindweed and False Fox Sedge both in flower (the latter on exaggerated triangular stems supporting the old adage that "sedges have edges"). The juxtaposition of Dandelion and Burdock made us smile, though the sickly sweet smell of the crushed leaves of the Burdock caused a range of reactions - "Decadent" was Sally's conclusion.

Later, after dinner, some of us took a walk through the village to the plantation where a family of Spotted Flycatchers was a nice find. In the conifers Goldcrests sang and a female Cuckoo bubbled, while the heady scent which filled the air all around us seemed to emanate from a single Honeysuckle clambering up a tiny tree deep in the wood.

Day 5 Tuesday 13th June

Loch Ronard, Fiskary and Fishing Gate

Another glorious day on the Isle of Coll saw us heading up into the central moorland area around Loch Ronard. Here we enjoyed views of a sleek pale phase Arctic Skua and a scruffy, streaky Great Skua, both perched on rocks low in the water.

We walked part way round the loch to take in the moorland vegetation, which included both Common and Hare's-tail Cotton-grasses, Round-leaved and Intermediate Sundews and Deer-grass and Purple Moor-grass. The heat of

the sun had brought out lots of insects including a mass emergence of Magpie moths, Common Heath moth, Large Heath and Meadow Brown butterflies, three species of damselfly and several Four-spotted Chasers. We watched a female of the latter ovipositing in the loch margins, with a male in close attendance. A male Reed Bunting perched up on a clump of shrubby Rowans.

The mossy vegetation crunched under our feet, the shallow margins of the loch were exposed and the boggy hollows regularly crossing the path were parched, all signs of how little rain had fallen in recent weeks and the tinderbox dryness the current heatwave had caused. Out on the loch a Red-throated Diver had popped in for a break from nest-sitting duties and gave us all fantastic and prolonged views through the telescope. The sharp colours and contrasts were a complete transformation from the distant plain grey birds of a winter coastline.

We headed back across the road and down a track towards the coast. The presence of Timothy grass growing along the track margins told the forensic botanists among us that the construction material for the track had been brought in from the mainland, as Timothy is not a native grass on Coll.

A glade of elderly Aspen trees showed how well trees can do on Coll if given some respite from grazing. These 6-8 stems were all connected under the surface and growing from a shared root system thus representing a single organism rather than several individuals. Flitting among the Bracken below them we found a Clouded Border moth - a species whose larvae feed on Aspen.

We picked out the three different species of heather which typically grow on British moorlands (Ling, Bell Heather and Cross-leaved Heath) and both Eared and Creeping Willows, the latter hosting the gall of a sawfly *Euura collactanea* and also an orange rust (*Melampsora* sp).

The walk from the track down to the bay gave us Bog Asphodel (since it grows in calcium-poor conditions, its scientific name translates as bone-breaker), Pale Butterwort (very different from its starfish-like relative) and several big specimens of Royal Fern (with fleshy spore-bearing spikes among its leaves).

Down in the delightful bay we were shown an array of interesting archaeological features dating from the Mesolithic to Viking times. One of them, a fish trap (or fishing gate) created by constructing a wall across the intertidal, piqued Keith's interest and he clambered along the shore to get a closer view. In so doing he came across another archaeological feature: a series of 'littoral depressions', also known as 'bait holes', on the rocks. We engaged in animated discussion as to how they might have been made and their potential use.

The return to the minibus gave us another male Hen Harrier, the delicate Slender St John's-wort and a big, floppy Drinker moth that somehow evaded the clutches of our guide and disappeared in the undergrowth. The heat drove us back to the guest house for lunch and some respite - but a shout of "Dolphins!" from the garden interrupted our somnolence. A small group of Common Dolphins were working their way north across the mouth of the bay - perhaps the same pod we had seen from the boat yesterday?

We headed back out towards the north-east end of the island for the afternoon to an area known as the Fishing Gate (a name which gives a clue as to a past use of the bay). On the beach, Moon and Compass Jellyfish on the strand-line proved to be no deterrent to our valiant swimmers (two today!) while the rest of us discussed the geology of the rocks and tried to establish whether their blackness was a result of a blanket of lichens or their

basaltic composition. The lichen theory won through when pictures of *Verrucaria* lichens were examined. Two large drilled stones on the beach also caused some debate, leading to a tentative conclusion that they may be old ships' anchors.

Offshore a vast raft of Manx Shearwaters were gathered, while the coastal turf around the bay was alive with Six-spotted Burnets. Also, several 'twelve-spotted burnets' were in evidence, ie six-spotters busy creating the next generation.

Day 6 Wednesday 14th June

Emptying moth trap at Ballyhaugh, walks on the machair and moorland at Killunaig

Our fifth day dawned once again in glorious sunshine, with a very welcome cooling breeze, as we headed out to our guide's cottage to help empty his moth trap. A lovely array of moths were in evidence, showing the great diversity of moth sizes, colours and shapes: Elephant and Poplar Hawk-moths, numerous Drinkers and the closely related Fox, Map-winged Swifts and Flame Shoulders, and Brooms and Knot Grasses. Sarah offered us tea and scones on the 'sitooterie' beside the cottage which we polished off with ease despite our substantial breakfast. Before leaving we were shown some nice examples of Northern Marsh Orchids growing on the edge of our guide's drive.

Our base for the rest of the day was the churchyard at Killunaig from where we walked first into the coastal dunes, via a field of gone-over Daffodils, evidence of a short-lived experiment in commercial bulb-growing from the 1950s. Among the Marram grass, we found a Bronze Age cist tomb, overlooking a dune slack, and the rosette of a Frog Orchid among the delicate white flowers of Fairy Flax and the Dolly Mixture pink and yellow of Common Centaury.

The next wonder revealed to us was a broad basalt dyke extending through the Lewisian gneiss on the foreshore and out to sea. The rectilinear blocks created as the magma solidified had left a series of irregular steps across the rocks - known locally as the Queen's Staircase. It was a bit of a precarious walk but we all wanted to see it up close. Sue studied the surface of the rock and drew our attention to the sockets where feldspar crystals had been eroded out of the basalt, the differential size of which, between edge and centre, showing how the basalt had cooled quickly towards the margins but more slowly in the middle (allowing the crystals more time to grow before the whole thing set). An additional "Oooh!" of delight was triggered by the metre-deep hole where a rolling stone caught in the angle of the rock had (over several millennia) worn away the basalt to create a virtual well.

We all sat against the shady side of the van, with a pleasant cooling breeze blowing underneath, while we had our lunch. Our afternoon walk was another contrast as we headed up into the moorland to a sinuous loch full of interesting plants. We paused regularly along the way, to admire, on one occasion, the different reproductive strategies of the Marsh and Creeping Thistles and, on another, the hardy resistance of the tiny Mountain Everlasting.

The archaeological wonders continued to delight - this afternoon it was a pair of cairn burials high on a hill overlooking the rolling moorland to the north. Two new orchid species presented themselves up here: the ivory-coloured Lesser Butterfly Orchid and the 'grandma's perfume-scented' Heath Fragrant Orchid - best enjoyed by

cupping your hands like a bowl around the flower and breathing deeply in.

We also had plenty of insect company as the day got hotter, the migrant lepidopterans (Red Admirals and Silver Ys) and the resident diners (Cleg-flies and Deer-flies). The latter were savage in their attempts to get a free meal from any exposed flesh so we didn't spend long around the loch, but long enough to enjoy the spectacle of flowering White Water Lilies in their wild home and the more subtle delights of Water Lobelia and Pipewort (one of the rarest plants in Britain). As our guide, seemingly impervious to the biting insects, began to extol the virtues of the tiny Lesser Marshwort and thread-like Floating Club-rush, we decided it was time to beat a strategic retreat.

The journey home provided today's sighting of a male Hen Harrier - a special bird which we had seen more or less daily since we arrived.

Day 7 Thursday 15th June

The Feall machair, Feall Bay and Crossapol Beach

Before breakfast this morning, a walk down from the guest house provided some excitement as a group of angry Arctic Terns repeatedly dived on something off the skerries. We couldn't make out the target of their attentions but were convinced it must have been an Otter. A small group of Harbour Porpoises offshore were small compensation.

We drove down to the RSPB carpark at Crossapol, first via a briefly glimpsed Wood Pigeon at Acha - a Coll rarity - and then via a roadside knoll covered in the dried remains of this spring's Early Purple Orchids - our tenth orchid variety of the week! As we got our rucksacks on, the obligatory Hen Harrier put in an appearance and a Corncrake rasped from the marshy grassland behind us. A harrow parked up on the side of the road was home to a family of Wheatears - competition with Monday's shredder for the oddest nest box of the week!

We spent the hot and sunny morning walking in the machair - some of the finest dune grassland in Europe. Again insects were making the most of the sunny conditions - several Dark Green Fritillaries gave us decent views, revealing, in their green underwings, the reason for this brown and orange butterfly's unlikely name. Later, clouds of Yellow Shell moths fluttered up as we brushed through the vegetation. New flowers included the delightful Dune Pansy, the blobby Hop Trefoil, the yellow star-like flowers of Biting Stonecrop and the white-flowered form of Wild Thyme.

Eventually, we emerged from the dunes onto Feall beach where we sheltered for half an hour in the cool shade of the high fore-dune. There was no swimming today on what Robert called the "Costa del Coll", though the sea looked mightily appealing. Out in the bay, a more northerly vibe was restored by the presence of Eiders and two pairs of summer-plumage Great Northern Divers. At one point, two of the latter displayed and warbled mournfully to each other. Their presence triggered a discussion between us as to which cultural treasure the Loons called to mind, Arthur Ransome or Jane Fonda? At the top of the beach Ray's Knotgrass, Babbington's Orache and Coltsfoot were in flower while on the walk back to the minibus we found a dead Great Skua and a live Frog.

We drove back to the village in order to take lunch in the cool shade of the guest house followed by 40 winks

before heading out again. Later, we received news of a Humpback Whale being seen at lunchtime just beyond the village - close but another mammal species we failed to add to our list!

We went back out to Crossapol again for the afternoon - this time heading south from the car park, where dainty Common Gulls were picking at flies on the short sward. A stand of Phacelia had attracted dozens of bees - mostly Honey Bees but also some White-tailed Bumbles, Common Carders and a small colletes variety, probably the Northern Colletes.

We walked down to Crossapol beach via a standing stone on the edge of the dunes. On the beach, we found several dried grass balls: what in the Mediterranean would be called "nun's farts" made from the sea-grass *Posidonia*. Here on Coll there is no *Posidonia* (and no nuns for that matter!) but plenty of Eel Grass in the bay and Marram eroding from the dunes to provide the raw materials for the sea to roll into these striking balls.

Several families of Greylag Geese were loafing on the beach, but on our appearance they all headed into the sea to join a family of Eider ducks. Some of us wandered up to the MacLean mausoleum which overlooks the beach. This castellated gothic structure was erected by the laird of Coll in the 1820s following the death of his wife. The building is slowly crumbling into the sand on which it was built - I'm sure the Bible has something to say about the folly of such constructions!

This evening we dined at the Island Cafe in Arinagour and afterwards enjoyed a pleasant stroll back to our guest house, admiring en route the large number of yachts in the bay attracted to the island by the settled weather.

Day 8 Friday 16th June

Ferry to Oban and disperse

Our final day - and another glorious one. After packing our bags, we hurried up to the village to make last minute gin and wool purchases. But still the wildlife came to us, in the form of a flyover Red-throated Diver carrying a fish back up to its moorland nest. We watched a steady stream of Arctic Terns flying out of the bay and returning with fish to feed their young on the nearby rocky skerries. A couple of Harbour Porpoise also appeared as we waited for the ferry to arrive.

Once on board and out in the Hebridean Sea, we enjoyed regular Kittiwakes, Puffins and Guillemots on the glassy sea but the hoped for cetaceans eluded us, until we were in the Sound of Mull where a distant party of unidentified dolphins appeared. Further east in Loch Linnhe, we were treated to repeated sightings of Harbour Porpoise in small groups of 3-5 and finally a large gathering of c30 Gannets.

Back onshore, as we said our farewells, Beatrice noted a few wispy clouds in the sky and observed that these were the first we'd seen all week!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

		June 2023							
Common name	***Scientific name***	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
Canada Goose	*Branta canadensis*			✓		·			
Greylag Goose	*Anser anser*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shelduck	*Tadoma tadoma*		✓		✓	·	✓		
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*		✓	✓	·	✓	✓	·	✓
Eider	*Somateria mollissima*			✓	·	·	·	✓	·
Red-breasted Merganser	*Mergus serrator*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rock Dove	*Columba livia*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woodpigeon	*Columba palumbus*				·			✓	·
Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Corncrake	*Crex crex*			·	✓	·	✓	✓	
Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oystercatcher	*Haematopus ostralegus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*		✓	·	✓	·	·	✓	·
Curlew	*Numenius arquata*		·	·	✓	·	·	·	·
Sanderling	*Calidris alba*		✓	·					
Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*		✓	·	✓	·	·		
Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*		✓	✓		·	·	·	
Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Redshank	*Tringa totanus*		✓	·	·	✓	✓	✓	·
Kittiwake	*Rissa tridactyla*		✓	✓			·	·	✓
Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*		✓		✓		·	✓	
Common Gull	*Larus canus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	*Larus marinus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Herring Gull	*Larus argentatus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Tern	*Sternula albifrons*		✓	·	✓		·		

		June 2023							
Common name	***Scientific name***	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*		✓					·	·
Arctic Tern	*Sterna paradisaea*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Skua	*Stercorarius skua*		·	·	·	✓	·	✓	·
Arctic Skua	*Stercorarius parasiticus*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Guillemot	*Uria aalge*		✓	✓		·		·	✓
Razorbill	*Alca torda*		✓	✓				·	✓
Black Guillemot	*Cepphus grylle*		✓	✓	·	·	·	✓	✓
Puffin	*Fratercula arctica*		✓	✓	·			·	✓
Red-throated Diver	*Gavia stellata*		·	✓	✓	✓	·		✓
Great Northern Diver	*Gavia immer*		✓	·	·	·	·	✓	·
Fulmar	*Fulmarus glacialis*		·	✓		·		✓	·
Manx Shearwater	*Puffinus puffinus*		✓	✓	·	✓	✓	·	✓
Gannet	*Morus bassanus*		✓	✓	·	✓	·	·	✓
Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*		·	✓	·	·	·		·
Shag	*Gulosus aristotelis*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hen Harrier	*Circus cyaneus*		·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	·
White-tailed Eagle	*Haliaeetus albicilla*			✓					·
Buzzard	*Buteo buteo*		·	·	✓	✓	✓	·	
Hooded Crow	*Corvus cornix*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Raven	*Corvus corax*		·	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	·
Sand Martin	*Riparia riparia*		✓	·	·	✓	✓	✓	·
Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	*Aegithalos caudatus*	✓		·	·			·	
Willow Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochilus*		✓	·	✓	✓	·	·	·
Sedge Warbler	*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*			·	✓			·	
Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapila*	✓	·	·	·	·	·	·	·
Whitethroat	*Curruca communis*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	·
Goldcrest	*Regulus regulus*		·	·	✓	·	·	·	·
Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	·	✓
Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	*Turdus philomelos*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blackbird	*Turdus merula*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa striata*		·	·	✓	·			
Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*		·	✓	✓	·	·	·	·
Stonechat	*Saxicola rubicola*		✓	·	✓	✓	✓	·	
Wheatear	*Oenanthe oenanthe*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	*Motacilla alba yarrellii*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	*Anthus pratensis*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rock Pipit	*Anthus petrosus*		✓	✓	✓		·	·	·
Chaffinch	*Fringilla coelebs*		·	✓	✓	·	·	·	·
Greenfinch	*Chloris chloris*		·	·	✓	·	·	·	·
Twite	*Linaria flavirostris*		·	✓	·	·	✓	·	·
Linnet	*Linaria cannabina*		·	·	·	✓	✓	✓	·
Lesser Redpoll	*Acanthis cabaret*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*		·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reed Bunting	*Emberiza schoeniclus*		✓	·	·	✓	·	✓	·

Other vertebrates

		June 2023							
Common name	**Scientific name**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
Mammals									
Brown Hare	*Lepus europaeus*		✓				✓	✓	
Rabbit	*Oryctolagus cuniculus*		✓	·	·	·	·	·	
Common Dolphin	*Delphinus delphis*		·	✓	·	✓	·		
Harbour Porpoise	*Phocoena phocoena*		✓				✓	✓	✓
(an unidentified species of Dolphin)	*Delphinidae*		·				·	·	✓
Harbour Seal/Common Seal	*Phoca vitulina*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Seal	*Halichoerus grypus*		·	✓	·		·		
Amphibians									
Common Frog	*Rana temporaria*						✓	✓	
Fish									
Small-spotted Cat-shark (egg case)	*Scyliorhinus canicula*		✓				·		
Spotted Ray (egg case)	*Raja montagui*		✓		✓			·	

Others

			June 2023							
	Common name	**Scientific name**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
Hymenoptera										
1	Red-tailed Bumblebee	*Bombus lapidarius*	·			✓				
2	White-tailed Bumblebee	*Bombus lucorum agg*	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	·
3	Common Carder Bee	*Bombus pascuorum*	·			✓	✓		✓	
4	Tree Bumblebee	*Bombus hypnorum*	✓							
5	Northern Colletes	*Colletes floralis*	·	·					✓	
6	Honey Bee	*Apis mellifera*	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	·
7	(a sawfly gall)	*Euura collactanea*	·				✓			
			·							
Lepidoptera										
Butterflies										
1	Small Heath	*Coenonympha pamphilus*	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Large Heath	*Coenonympha tullia*	·			✓	✓	✓		
3	Green-veined White	*Pieris napi*	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Common Blue	*Polyommatus icarus*	·			✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Dark Green Fritillary	*Speyeria aglaja*	·			✓		✓	✓	
6	Meadow Brown	*Maniola jurtina*	·				✓	✓	✓	
7	Red Admiral	*Vanessa atalanta*	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
			·							
Moths (in the field)			·							
1	Timothy Tortrix	*Aphelia paleana*	·					✓		
2	(a grass moth)	*Chrysoteuchia culmella*	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	(a Crambid moth)	*Anania fuscalis*	·			✓			✓	
4	Six-spot Burnet	*Zygaena filipendulae*	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Drinker	*Euthrix potatoria*	·				✓			
6	Common Carpet	*Epirrhoe alternata*	·			✓	·			
7	Yellow Shell	*Captogramma bilineata*	·					·	✓	
8	Purple Bar	*Cosmorhoe ocellata*	·			✓				
9	Chimney Sweeper	*Odezia atrata*	·		✓					
10	Magpie	*Abraxas grossulariata*	·				✓	✓	✓	

			June 2023							
	Common name	**Scientific name**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
11	Clouded Border	*Lomaspilis marginata*	·				✓			
12	Brown Silver-line	*Petrophora chlorosata*	·	✓			·			
13	Common Heath	*Ematurga atomaria*	·	·			✓	✓		
14	Large Yellow Underwing	*Noctua pronuba*	·			✓	✓			
15	Silver Y	*Autographa gamma*	·			✓	✓	✓	✓	
			·							
In trap			·							
16	(a species of Tortrix moth)	*Eana penziana*	·					✓		
17	Map-winged Swift	*Korscheltellus fusconebulosa*	·					✓		
18	Fox	*Macrothylacia rubi*	·					✓		
19	Drinker	*Euthrix potatoria*	·					✓		
20	Magpie	*Abraxas grossulariata*	·					✓		
21	Poplar Hawk-moth	*Laothoe populi*	·					✓		
22	Elephant Hawk-moth	*Deilephila elpenor*	·					✓		
23	White Ermine	*Spilosoma lubricipeda*	·					✓		
24	Buff Ermine	*Spilosoma lutea*	·					✓		
25	Heart and Dart	*Agrotis exclamationis*	·					✓		
26	Flame Shoulder	*Ochropleura plecta*	·					✓		
27	Northern Rustic	*Standfussiana lucernea*	·					✓		
28	True Lover's Knot	*Lycophotia porphyrea*	·					✓		
29	Shears	*Hada plebeja*	·					✓		
30	Broom	*Ceramica pisi*	·					✓		
31	Bright-line Brown-eye	*Lacanobia oleracea*	·					✓		
32	Knot Grass	*Acronicta rumicis*	·					✓		
33	Dark Arches	*Apamea monoglypha*	·					✓		
34	Clouded-bordered Brindle	*Apamea crenata*	·					✓		
35	Dusky Brocade	*Apamea remissa*	·					✓		
			·							
Coleoptera										
1	Garden Chafer	*Phyllopertha horticola*	·	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Diptera										
1	(a Cleg-fly)	*Haematopota sp*		·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Snipe-fly	*Rhagio scolopacea*		·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	(a species of Deer-fly)	*Chrysops relictus*		·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	(a species of Hoverfly)	*Eristalis horticola*		·	·	✓	·	·	·	
				·	·	·	·	·	·	
Odonata										
1	Large Red Damselfly	*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*	·				✓			
2	Common Blue Damselfly	*Enallagma cyathigerum*	·				✓	✓		
3	Blue-tailed Damselfly	*Ischnura elegans*	·				✓	✓		
4	Common Darter	*Sympetrum striolatum*	·				✓	·		
5	Black Darter	*Sympetrum danae*	·				·	✓		
6	Four-spotted Chaser	*Libellula quadrimaculata*	·				✓	✓		
			·				·	·		
Mollusca			·				·	·		
1	Heath Snail	*Helicella itala*	·			✓	·	✓	✓	
2	Brown Garden Snail	*Cornu aspersum*	·			✓	·	✓	✓	
Cnidaria										
1	Compass Jellyfish	*Chrysaora hysoscella*	·				✓			

			June 2023							
	Common name	**Scientific name**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
2	Moon Jellyfish	*Aurelia aurita*	·	✓	✓	·	✓	·	✓	✓
3	Lion's Mane Jellyfish	*Cyanea capillata*								✓

Flora

DAFOR abundance rating D=Dominant, A=Abundant, F=Frequent, O=Occasional, R=Rare

	Scientific name	**Common name**	**DAFOR**
Machair and Dunes			
	Achillea millefolium	Yarrow	O
	Anacamptis pyramidalis	Pyramidal Orchid	O
	Anthriscus sylvestris	Cow Parsley	LA
	Anthyllis vulneraria	Kidney Vetch	O
	Arabis hirsuta	Hairy Rock-cress	R
	Arenaria serpyllifolia	Thyme-leaved Sandwort	R
	Arctium nemorosum	Wood Burdock	O
	Bellis perennis	Daisy	LD
	Cardamine pratensis	Cuckooflower	O
	Centaurea nigra	Common Knapweed	O
	Centaurium erythraea	Common Centaury	O
	Cerastium fontanum	Common Mouse-ear	O
	Chrysanthemum leucanthemum	Oxeye Daisy	O
	Coeloglossum viride	Frog Orchid	R
	Conopodium majus	Pignut	LA
	Crepis capillaris	Smooth Hawk's-beard	O
	Dactylorhiza fuchsii	Common Spotted Orchid	O
	Dactylorhiza purpurella	Northern Marsh Orchid	O
	Daucus carota	Wild Carrot	F
	Euphrasia sp	Eyebright	O
	Galium verum	Lady's Bedstraw	F
	Geranium sanguineum	Bloody Cranesbill	LA
	Hesperis matronalis	Dame's Violet	R
	Hydrocotyle vulgaris	Marsh Pennywort	LA
	Hypochaeris radicata	Common Cat's-ear	F
	Lathyrus pratensis	Meadow Vetchling	R
	Linum catharticum	Fairy Flax	O
	Lotus corniculatus	Bird's-foot Trefoil	A
	Myosotis arvensis	Field Forget-me-not	O
	Myosotis discolor	Changing Forget-me-not	R
	Phacelia tanacetifolia	Phacelia	LA - seeded in field margins for bees
	Pilosella officinarum	Mouse-ear Hawkweed	O
	Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort Plantain	O
	Polygala vulgaris	Common Milkwort	F
	Polygonum persicaria	Redshank	O
	Potentilla anserina	Silverweed	F
	Prunella vulgaris	Self-heal	O
	Ranunculus acris	Meadow Buttercup	F
	Ranunculus bulbosus	Bulbous Buttercup	A

	Scientific name	Common name	DAFOR
	Ranunculus tricophyllus	Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot	O
	Rhinanthus minor	Yellow-rattle	F
	Rosa pimpinellifolia	Burnet Rose	R
	Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel	O
	Saxifraga hypnoides	Mossy Saxifrage	O
	Scilla verna	Spring Squill	R - Lunga only
	Sedum acre	Biting Stonecrop	R
	Silene latifolia	White Campion	LA - introduced in seed mixes
	Stellaria media	Chickweed	O
	Symphytum x uplandicum	Russian Comfrey	O - introduced
	Thalictrum minus	Lesser Meadow-rue	F
	Trifolium campestre	Hop Trefoil	O
	Trifolium dubium	Lesser Trefoil	O
	Vicia sepium	Bush Vetch	O
	Ammophila arenaria	Marram Grass	D
	Avenula pubescens	Downy Oat Grass	F
	Carex arenaria	Sand Sedge	F
	Carex flacca	Glaucous Sedge	O
	Carex hirta	Hairy Sedge	LA
	Catapodium marinum	Sea Fern-grass	R
	Cynosurus cristatus	Crested Dog's-tail	O
	Equisetum palustre	Marsh Horsetail	O
	Festuca arundinacea	Tall fescue	LA
	Koeleria macrantha	Crested Hairgrass	A
Moorland and Bog			
	Anagallis tenella	Bog Pimpernel	O
	Angelica sylvestris	Wild Angelica	O
	Antennaria dioica	Mountain Everlasting	O
	Apium inundatum	Lesser Marshwort	R
	Calluna vulgaris	Ling Heather	D
	Caltha palustris	Marsh Marigold	O
	Cirsium palustre	Marsh Thistle	O
	Cirsium repens	Creeping Thistle	LA
	Dactylorhiza incarnata	Early Marsh Orchid	LA - var *coccinea* and var *incarnata*
	Dactylorhiza maculata	Heath Spotted Orchid	LA
	Drosera rotundifolia	Round-leaved Sundew	LA
	Drosera intermedia	Oblong-leaved Sundew	LA
	Empetrum nigrum	Crowberry	O
	Erica cinerea	Bell Heather	A
	Erica tetralix	Cross-leaved Heath	F
	Eriocaulon aquaticum	Pipewort	LA
	Filipendula ulmaria	Meadowsweet	F
	Galium palustre	Marsh Bedstraw	O
	Galium saxatile	Heath Bedstraw	O
	Gymnadenia borealis	Heath Fragrant Orchid	R
	Hypericum elodes	Marsh St John's-wort	R
	Hypericum pulchrum	Slender St John's-wort	R

	Scientific name	Common name	DAFOR
	Iris pseudacorus	Yellow Flag Iris	LA
	Lobelia dortmanna	Water Lobelia	LA
	Lychnis flos-cuculi	Ragged Robin	O
	Mentha aquatica	Water Mint	O
	Menyanthes trifoliata	Bogbean	O
	Montia fontana	Blinks	R
	Myrica gale	Bog Myrtle	LA
	Narthecium ossifragum	Bog Asphodel	R
	Nymphaea alba	White Water Lily	LA
	Orchis mascula	Early Purple Orchid	LA
	Parnassia palustris	Grass of Parnassus	R
	Pedicularis sylvatica	Common Lousewort	O
	Pinguicula lusitanica	Pale Butterwort	O
	Pinguicula vulgaris	Common Butterwort	O
	Platanthera bifolia	Lesser Butterfly Orchid	R
	Polygala serpyllifolia	Heath Milkwort	F
	Potamogeton polygonifolius	Bog Pondweed	F
	Potentilla erecta	Tormentil	F
	Potentilla palustris	Marsh Cinquefoil	R
	Ranunculus flammula	Lesser Spearwort	O
	Rosa sherardii	Sherard's Downy-rose	R
	Salix repens	Creeping Willow	O
	Samolus valerandi	Brookweed	R
	Sedum anglicum	English Stonecrop	O
	Thymus polytrichus	Wild Thyme	F
	Vaccinium myrtillus	Billberry	LA
	Veronica serpyllifolia	Heath Speedwell	R
	Viola canina	Heath Violet	R
	Viola riviniana	Common Dog Violet	O
	Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal Grass	A
	Blechnum spicant	Hard Fern	F
	Carex binervis	Green-ribbed Sedge	F
	Carex rostrata	Bottle Sedge	LA
	Carex nigra	Common Sedge	A
	Eleocharis palustris	Common Spike-rush	F
	Eriophorum angustifolium	Common Cotton-grass	LA
	Eriophorum vaginatum	Hare's-tail Cotton-grass	LD
	Festuca rubra	Red Fescue	F
	Festuca vivipara	Viviparous Fescue	F
	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire Fog	A
	Melampsora sp	(a rust on Creeping Willow)	R
	Molinia purpurea	Purple Moorgrass	D
	Osmunda regalis	Royal Fern	O
	Phleum pratense	Timothy Grass	R
	Phragmites australis	Common Reed	O
	Pteridium aquilinum	Bracken	LA
	Schoenus nigricans	Black Bog-rush	O
	Trichophorum cespitosum	Deergrass	A
Gully Woodland			

	Scientific name	Common name	DAFOR
-	*Alnus glutinosa*	Alder	O
-	*Erinus alpinus*	Fairy Foxglove	R
-	*Fagus sylvatica*	Beech	O - in Oban only
	Hedera helix	Ivy	R
	Hyacinthoides non-scripta	Bluebell	LA
	Lonicera periclymenum	Honeysuckle	O
	Populus tremula	Aspen	O
	Primula vulgaris	Primrose	O
	Salix aurita	Eared Willow	A
	Sambucus nigra	Elder	R
	Sorbus aucuparia	Rowan	F
	Ulmus glabra	Wych Elm	O - in Oban only
	Asplenium adiantum-nigrum	Black Spleenwort	LA
Rocky Shores, Beaches, Saltmarsh and Streams			
	Armeria maritima	Thrift	LD
	Atriplex glabriuscula	Babington's Orache	O
	Atriplex laciniata	Frosted Orache	O
	Cochlearia officinalis	Common Scurvygrass	O
	Calystegia soldanella	Sea Bindweed	R
	Glaux maritima	Sea Milkwort	O
	Honkenya peploides	Sea Sandwort	O
	Plantago maritima	Sea Plantain	O
	Polygonum oxyspermum	Ray's Knot-grass	O
	Ranunculus sceleratus	Celery-leaved Buttercup	R
	Raphanus maritimus	Sea Radish	R
	Silene uniflora	Sea Cmpion	LA
	Carex otrubae	False Fox Sedge	R
	Elytrigia juncea	Sea Couch	R
	Juncus gerardii	Saltmarsh Rush	O
	Verrucaria sp	(a crustose lichen on rocks)	LA
	Xanthoria sp	(a crustose lichen on rocks)	LA
	Zostera marina	Common Eelgrass	R - washed-up on tide line
Seaweeds			
	Ascophyllum nodosum	Egg Wrack	LA
	Enteromorpha intestinalis	Gutweed	LA
	Fucus spiralis	Spiral Wrack	LA
	Fucus vesiculosus	Bladder Wrack	LA
	Himanthalia elongata	Sea Spaghetti	O
	Laminaria digitata	Oar Weed	R
	Laminaria hyperborea	Cuvie	O
	Laminaria saccharina	Sugar Kelp	O
	Pelvetia canaliculata	Channeled Wrack	LA
	Ulva lactuca	Sea Lettuce	O