

Outer Hebrides Trip by Sue Walton

In June myself, Jane Hibbert, Jane Wright and Jan Thompson went on a trip to the Outer Hebrides with Chris Mills from Norfolk Birding.

We left Glasgow early morning for the wonderful scenic drive up to Uig on the Isle of Skye where we were to catch the ferry to Lochmaddy on North Uist. Now the birding could really start and we had good views of Hooded Crow and Buzzard on the way and while waiting to board the ferry it was lovely to see Black Guillemot and Eider around the harbour. On board we were out on deck in the sunshine scanning the sea and had good views of Puffin, Razorbill, Gannet, Fulmar and Kittiwake but had to look quickly through the scope to see distant views of Storm Petrel and Shearwater! On the island we soon arrived at our self-catering accommodation for the next 4 nights, - it was right out of Grand Designs! The location was stunning too and also amazingly the weather was good with sun and blue skies and an easterly wind keeping the clouds away! It stayed that way for the rest of our time on the island. Our first stop was the co-op for supplies, where we enquired about the Snowy Owl that had been reported in the area for a couple of weeks and the checkout lady said just look for the Snowman down the track from the shop. After only a short while Chris spotted a white blob through the scope, "the Snowy Owl!" as we got a bit closer for better views it really did look like a Snowman in the middle of a field - what an unexpected bonus on our first day!

The following 3 days were a wonderful, truly memorable experience, from the early starts (6.15am) to see and hear the Corncrake's (we saw at least 6!), all the sounds and sights of waders, Snipe, Dunlin, Turnstone, Common Sandpiper, Curlew, Whimbrel, Redshank, Ringed Plover, Godwits and the beautiful Red-necked Phalaropes, there must be others I've forgotten to mention! On every drive we saw lots of Short-Eared Owls and male Hen Harriers hunting! Around the coasts we had wonderful views of Great Northern Diver in summer plumage and lots of Terns, Common, Arctic and Little, also lots of families of Eider. A big highlight was to see the Golden and White-Tailed

Eagles a first for a lot of us! North Uist is a wonderful place, it felt a bit like going back in time, birds everywhere and amazing scenery.

On Wednesday morning it was time to leave for the ferry back to Skye, but not the end of our holiday as we still had 3 nights on the Ardnamurchan peninsula to look forward to. We drove down to Fort William and from the bridge in town we had lovely views of Dipper.

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After another ferry crossing we drove to our B&B at Strontian and on the way Chris spotted a pair of Whinchat by the side of the road, and we all got good views. The B&B was lovely and in a great spot, with Siskin on the feeders right outside my window, which was good because going outside meant being eaten by the dreaded Scottish midges which were out in force! There didn't seem to be any on North Uist, I think the wind kept them away! The next morning we set off to spend the day on Mull and before we had even reached the ferry we stopped for great views of 3 Golden Eagles soaring low over the top of a hill. Once on the island we drove to a spot where Chris had seen a White-Tailed Eagle nest the year before, seeing more Short-Eared Owl on



the way. When we arrived we could see the nest but no sign of the Eagles, so we all got out and prepared to wait (it could be a couple of hours) but we were in luck after only about 5 minutes the female Eagle appeared carrying prey. The next couple of hours were spent watching her feed 2 chicks and eating our own lunch - we were then treated to her soaring right over our heads and circling high out of sight! We continued on a circular drive around the island, stopping for a walk to an inland loch, where we had good views of Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and Redstart, all to the sound of piping from lots of Common Sandpipers!

Back on the mainland we again looked around the sea loch for Otters, but no luck. Next morning our last day and a change in the weather, rain, wind and much cooler temperatures. We stayed on the Ardnamurchan peninsular and took a short walk to a hide overlooking a sea loch, on the way we had lovely views of really brightly coloured Redpoll. We decided to come back to the hide in the evening as there had been lots of views of Otter spotted there, so after a couple of hours back at the B&B, we headed back after our meal. There were a few seals rolling at the water's edge and Rock Pipits about, but sadly no Otters!

Next morning we set off early for the long drive back home, the weather was pretty miserable and so were we, to come to the end of such a wonderful trip!! If you ever get the chance to visit North Uist, go for it, you won't regret it it's a wonderful place, Mull is also lovely though more commercialised than North Uist. We have to go back, to find the Otters, but that's after we finish planning our next adventure!!