

Tour Report

Isle of Mull Wildlife Extravaganza with Mike Dilger

6 – 13 June 2025

Common dolphin



Razorbill



Adult white-tailed eagle



Puffin



Compiled by Mike Dilger

Friday 6 June 2025

Day 1:

Glasgow to Oban Ferry Terminal and Mull

With the itinerary changing from a meeting in Oban to pick-ups in Glasgow, Mike Dilger (MD) collected up four guests from the main train station, while Alexa Kershaw (AK) met the remaining six at the city's airport. The full compliment of ten guests were then driven out of Glasgow and to The Green Welly Stop in Crianlarich, where they had the first opportunity to meet each other and grab some lunch to eat on the way.

Heading onwards, the next stop was at the Oban Ferry Terminal, with the group all gathering on the open deck to search for wildlife on the crossing. The weather was best described as 'mixed', with intermittent sun and a fresh breeze from the west. Common and herring gulls were abundant all around the harbour, and a single black guillemot in breeding plumage was picked up in the bay while departing the ferry terminal. As the weather was reasonably clear, Alexa was able to point out the summit of Ben Nevis away to the north, while the summit of Mull's only Munro - Ben More - could also clearly be seen away to the west.

During the crossing, a few gannets were picked up, with AK suggesting these individuals would probably have come from the breeding colony at Ailsa Craig, while any located in the north of Mull would probably be emanating from St. Kilda. Out on the water, a good number of feeding shags could also be seen, as MD pointed out the very characteristic jump that shags make when diving down, which distinguishes them from cormorants. Arriving at Craignure, we then took the short drive to Salen and across to our new accommodation at Killiechronan on the shores of Loch Na Keal. Once everyone had settled into their rooms, we reconvened at 6.30 pm so MD & AK could formally welcome the group onto the trip. After introductions, MD ran through the week, while AK talked about both the itinerary and the need for flexibility during the week, as very changeable weather conditions looked to be on the cards.

We were then ready to dine, with our new chef Joss having prepared a delicious three-course meal for the guests to enjoy. It proved to be a thoroughly enjoyable first evening, and after long travel journeys, everyone was ready to get to bed in preparation for their first full day on the trip - where MD and AK had brought forward the day out with Sealife Mull to reflect the calm conditions.

Saturday 7 June 2025

Day 2:

Tobermory, The Sound of Mull and the Sea of Hebrides

Meeting for a 7.30 am breakfast, we were delighted to see calm conditions, and crucially little wind for our day out with Sealife Mull. This was evidenced by the fact that midges were very much evident as we quickly loaded up the minibus for an 8.30 am departure. Upon leaving Killiechronan, we could feel a little rain in the air, but the hope was that the forecasts would indeed be correct, and we'd hit fine weather later on.

Heading out to Tobermory, we parked up in the harbour car park before walking down to meet the boat team of Jimmy, Andy and the captain. Deciding to sit up top, the boat then headed out of the harbour and into the Sound of Mull, where we were greeted with virtually flat conditions - perfect for cetacean spotting! Almost immediately, we started spotting fins breaking the calm water surface, as a number of harbour porpoises were spotted.

Moving out into the Sound, we next approached Ardmore Point, where at least a dozen female harbour seals could be seen hauled out on the rocks, with most, if not all, heavily pregnant. And upon reaching the point itself, a pair of adult white-tailed eagles up on the cliffs became immediately obvious. Jimmy explained that these birds were the new resident pair for Ardmore, but unfortunately, hadn't managed to breed successfully this year. Apparently, the previous male eagle had been found with a broken wrist and taken in for rest and rehab. However, in the interim period, the resident female had decided to take on a new and younger partner, so when the older male was eventually released, he was simply driven out of the territory.

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Perhaps the inexperience of the new male had ultimately been the reason why breeding had failed, with hopes higher for 2026.

Now moving out into the Sea of Hebrides, we began observing more seabirds, as a few common guillemots were picked up on the water and a trickle of gannets flew past. MD then picked up a red-throated diver high over the boat, with this being a species he sees a lot in both his Scottish Highlands and Shetland trips. Now heading out into open water, occasional harbour porpoises continued to be spotted, until the focus moved back to feathers with the location of a huge raft of at least 500 Manx shearwaters resting on the sea.

Obviously belonging to the breeding population on Rum, MD explained that after long foraging trips out to sea, the birds were reluctant to return to their breeding burrows during the day. This was primarily due to the fact that Manxies are not particularly mobile on land, which leaves them vulnerable to predation. But as far fewer predators ply their trade at night, a return under the cover of darkness invariably meant a much safer passage. A few of the shearwaters then took to the wing, enabling all in the group to see their distinctive flying style, which shows off their black topside and white underside to the best possible effect.

Leaving the Manxies behind, it was not long until our first minke whale was located, with this individual appearing to be quite young. As the whale's rostrum broke the surface, followed by a long back and a small dorsal fin, we estimated it to be no longer than five metres in length. However, a much larger individual was then quickly spotted a touch further north. As conditions were so good, another couple of minkes were then picked up close by, making for at least four records in a relatively small patch of water. We also managed to see a couple of minke whales lunge feeding, which is when they thrust across the surface of the water, in an attempt to catch their fishy prey.

A couple of bonxies were next to join the fray, with certainly one eating something in the water. Continuing in a northwesterly direction and towards Coll, we were then joined by a large pod of common dolphins, to the delight of all. These extroverts of the cetacean world were suddenly seen all around the boat, with some dolphins bow-riding, while others leapt clear of the water or blew bubbles underwater. In fact, there was so much action that the guests scarcely knew where to look, with one highlight being when a few dolphins began bow-riding one of the minke whales - a sight that not even AK had seen before in all her years watching cetaceans!

While the whales appeared to come and go, the dolphins seemed keen to stay for most of the rest of the trip, with a guesstimate of well over 500+ seen. We could also see baby dolphins swimming alongside their mothers, while some of the group could also hear the dolphins' clicks of communication as they swam alongside the boat. But soon the focus was switched back to birds as a few razorbills were picked up in the water, followed by the trip's first puffins, with the promise of many sightings of this charismatic seabird later in the week.

With the sudden appearance of the sun, we were also able to properly take in our surroundings, with AK pointing out the islands of Lunga, Muck, Eigg, Rum and Coll, while even the Cuillin Ridge up on Skye was clearly visible away to the north. Steaming slowly back towards Mull, after a scintillating few hours, Jimmy reckoned that we could have seen up to twelve different minkes during the course of the morning, but one last surprise was to come while passing Ardnamurchan Point on the mainland. Andy, one of the crew on the boat, then picked up a pair of golden eagles soaring high over the crags, while a few ravens could be seen lower down along the cliffs. Apparently, this pair of goldies had also failed to breed this year, making 2025 a decidedly underwhelming one for improving the eagle population.

Arriving back to Tobermory in beautiful weather, MD & AK undertook a bit of shopping, which gave the guests the opportunity for some sightseeing along the town's picturesque seafront. Reuniting a touch later back at the minibus, the group then returned back to Killiechronan House for a short break and a hot drink, before taking the guests on a short walk around the house's gardens and down to the shore of Loch Na Keal.

As we gathered on the drive, house martins were busily bringing in food to their young under the eaves of the house, while swallows could be seen swooping above the mown lawn. Greenfinch and siskin could also

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be heard calling from the trees surrounding the house. Upon crossing the road we immediately heard at least a couple of willow warblers singing, along with the songs of both chaffinch and wren. One of the guests then located a spotted flycatcher feeding from some willows, but on this occasion, this unusual summer visitor could not be relocated.

Out in the fields just north of the loch, a couple of distant red deer were then seen, along with a large flock of geese, consisting mostly of greylags, but with a few larger Canadas mixed in amongst them. While scanning the skies, MD then picked up an adult white-tailed eagle soaring high up on thermals just to the south of the loch, with the iconic Mull landmark of the Cliffs of Griburn clearly visible in the background. Taking a short walk along the road to the loch shore, we were serenaded by a song thrush singing its heart out, while a number of goldfinches flitted past. And down on the shoreline, we all took great delight in watching the comings and goings of a pair of whitethroats as they fed their young in a nest located somewhere in the middle of a large bramble patch.

Now with a view over the small estuary here, we quickly picked out common gulls and oystercatchers, before MD located a solitary ringed plover on the shingle spit. Also close by, the group recorded their first wild rock doves - which MD explained were the ancestors of the feral pigeon currently plying their trade across the world's towns and cities. And finally a common sandpiper's piping, shrill voice could also be heard, but on this occasion chose not to make an appearance. Walking back to the house, we then took the opportunity to relax, before meeting up once more to compile the day's checklist and enjoy a fine three-course dinner cooked by our in-house chef.

Sunday 8 June 2025

Day 3:

South shore of Loch Na Keal, Tiroran, north shore of Loch Scridain, Pennyghael & Glen Mor - Southern Loop

Following an 8.30 am departure, the group then boarded both minibuses before taking the road that led along Loch Na Keal's southern shore. Unlike the previous day, the weather looked to be more mixed, and with the threat of rain later, it was important to maximise the morning when conditions undoubtedly looked better.

Stopping at the first parking spot, we all enjoyed watching a common sandpiper displaying on a rock down by the water, while a few common terns could be seen fishing further out in the loch. A male wheatear was also picked up here, while on the other side of the road a meadow pipit with food could be seen returning to a nest somewhere in amongst the bog myrtle. Driving further along, MD then spotted an adult white-tailed eagle sitting on a tiny skerry out in the middle of the loch, alongside four or five nervous-looking harbour seals. Also present along the loch edge were a few oystercatchers and a hooded crow. While watching the eagle, it then took off, but only to fly to an adjacent skerry before then temporarily disappearing out of view around the back of the island.

Moving further along, we stopped to scan for otters once again, but picked up little more than a couple of grey herons and a very close rock pipit. Glancing back at the skerry where we had seen the eagle, we could immediately see that it had reappeared, before then being promptly joined by a second eagle - undoubtedly its mate. A pair of wheatears then flew along the shore, enabling all to see the difference between the masked male and the somewhat drabber female. As both disappeared out of view, we could also see the diagnostic white rump of this charming and characterful bird.

Back in the minibuses, we then moved a little further along, before then passing over a small burn, where a pair of grey wagtails proved to be an excellent find for a species that is not common on Mull. And on the other side of the road, all were delighted to see an adult oystercatcher feeding two chicks in the pasture. Parking at the next large lay-by a few hundred metres beyond the bridge, and with the water close to low tide, we immediately picked up an otter on a tiny skerry, just a few metres offshore. No sooner had we trained our binoculars on the animal than it promptly jumped straight into the water to start feeding. Constantly up and down, it was almost a game of 'cat and mouse' as we attempted to get a decent view at

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the surface before it then disappeared back down under. On several occasions it popped up with what looked to be small butterfish, with MD stating that "we'll only see it well when it's caught something big' as that would force the otter to bring its prey back onto dry land to consume. And then, seemingly having heard MD's comment, it promptly surfaced with a huge eel in its mouth that must have been close to a metre long. Dragging the eel back to the same, small skerry on which we'd initially found it, the otter then proceeded to eat its catch, with the eel initially squirming before eventually succumbing to the inevitable!

Now static, this enabled everyone to get great close-up views as it proceeded to consume the huge meal. Then a second otter suddenly turned up out of nowhere, with their behaviour instantly indicating them to be mother and cub. After attempting to beg off its mother, the subordinate otter then went off fishing, only to catch an eel for itself. Taking its wriggling prey back to the same skerry, it then proceeded to eat this second eel, right alongside the animal we presumed to be its mother. It was a wonderful sight, with the group utterly entranced for the best part of an hour. So absorbed was everyone that even when a sub-adult white-tailed eagle flew straight above the group, they barely gave it a second glance!

As the tide had, by now, turned, it slowly began pushing the otters back into the water, leaving us little option other than to tear ourselves away and in the direction of the Cliffs of Griburn. With the road below the cliffs almost directly above the water, we were able to look down and see a large number of moon jellyfish in the water below. Moving yet further along, we gazed across the loch to the Island of Inch Kenneth, and the famous house where Unity Mitford, one of the Mitford sisters, exiled herself after attempting to commit suicide. Close by another small skerry held a few shags drying their wings, while a shelduck, a few ringed plover and an oystercatcher were all noted in the small adjoining estuary.

Just before heading both uphill and away from the coast, MD noticed a number of sand martins feeding along the roadside, with a breeding colony patently located somewhere close by. While driving up, a couple of male pheasants were observed along the road verge, with AK also indicating that the land away to the right, which is called Ardmeanach - or The Wilderness - is considered the wildest and remotest part remaining on Mull, with footpaths the only way either in or out. Reaching the head of the pass, we then began dropping down into Glen Seilisteir with Loch Scridain now clearly visible away to the south. The once extensive Tiroran Forest had historically been planted as a pine plantation, but most has already been harvested, with the exception of a single block of around a hectare, which has been saved due to the presence of a pair of nesting white-tailed eagles nesting in one particular tree along the edge. This pair have been present on the same nest for close to 20 years, and upon stopping in the adjacent lay-by, we set up the scope to see how they were doing.

As a number of other eagle nests appeared to have failed elsewhere, it was terrific to see an adult still sitting on the nest, before a chick's head then completed the image by popping up into shot! While watching the eagle and its chick, we could also hear a whitethroat singing from some scrub close by, while the occasional buzzard drifted past. And before leaving, MD managed to point out a single female goosander as it flew up the valley.

Dropping down to Loch Scridain, we then slowly followed the northern shore eastwards, where we spotted a juvenile common sandpiper en route, before stopping once again at the Pennyghael car park for lunch. Looking over the wet grassland and salt marsh here, we could also hear and see a pair of displaying curlews. MD then took a walk along the road, before managing to find a singing whinchat, but this proved elusive, with only a few members of the group able to briefly see it. Redshank and snipe could also be heard calling from this terrific wader habitat as well

Stopping around by the Pennyghael Stores, we took a moment to look across the open wetland, where MD located a couple of feeding greenshank, along with redshank, ringed plover, oystercatcher and curlew. Lots of greylag geese and their young were also present here, while all additionally enjoyed seeing a herd of highland cows feeding out on the edge of the estuary. Moving a little further along the southern shore, we then observed the day's sixth wader - in the form of a lapwing - chasing off a hooded crow.

By now it had started to rain, and so after using the local facilities we turned round and headed east up the

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glen at Glen More. Stopping to enjoy the views and take photos of the three lakes of Eilein, Ellen & Àirde Glais, we didn't linger due to the weather, but instead headed on towards the coast and Loch Spelve. By now, it was raining consistently, making it impossible to look for raptors, so we headed back to Killiechronan for a slightly earlier finish, with a couple of red deer the sole wildlife of note.

Meeting up once again to compile the day's checklist at 7.15 pm, the conversation flowed during a fine dinner before everyone then turned in for the night.

Monday 9 June 2025

Day 4:

A849 South of Craignure, Glen More, Loch Don & the south shore of Loch Na Keal.

The group woke up to wet weather, with the threat of rain all day. But headed out undeterred after breakfast and across to the moorland south of Craignure, where the plan was to look for owls and raptors. Leading off in convoy, those in AK's minibus were lucky enough to see an otter crossing the road just south of Craignure.

Stopping to scan across the moorland, we managed to pick out a single lesser redpoll as it flew past, while the songs of whitethroat and willow warbler were also picked up. However, our raptor-spotting then came to an abrupt end when it began raining hard, forcing our retreat to the sanctuary of the minibuses. MD & AK suggested it might be drier further west, so headed back down the Glen More glen, before stopping at a viewpoint just east of Loch Scridain. As the rain had temporarily abated, we jumped out and immediately picked up a couple of buzzards.

While scanning the surrounding moorland, MD then managed to pick up a single ringtail (female) hen harrier, which was also taking advantage of the brief pause in the rain to hunt. Constantly circling over the land, the bird gave good, if distant views for at least ten minutes, before we were once again defeated by the rain. Back in the minibuses, we then returned to Craignure to use the facilities.

After a short break, where many bought a 'posh coffee', we headed south once more, before turning off on the minor road that follows the northern perimeter of Loch Don. With the weather threatening a downpour at any moment, we passed the few houses looking over the loch, where we noted at least three collared doves and a colony of house sparrows. The tide was also at its lowest ebb, meaning many of the birds were a touch more distant than we would have liked, but nevertheless we managed to pick out curlew, redshank, two shelduck and a female mallard on the mud.

Moving further along, we then found a buzzard eating a dead sheep across the water, while a second dead sheep was being picked at by a few hooded crows, with a couple of great black-backed, common and herring gulls waiting their turn. But with the arrival of the rains again, we decided the smarter move would be to return to Killiechronan House for lunch, and give the guests some downtime while waiting for the low pressure to pass.

Having rained hard all afternoon, the weather had finally improved sufficiently for the group to take a short drive along the southern shore of Loch Na Keal before dinner. Reuniting at 5.30 pm, we passed Knock House, where the week's first fallow deer were noted, as three were picked up in an adjacent field. Reaching the loch at high tide, the water was surprisingly still due to the lack of wind, with mist covering the fells higher up.

Oystercatchers and common sandpipers were once again the commonest waders around the loch edge, while three female goosanders out on the water represented a good find. Along the water's edge, plenty of greylag geese with goslings were noted before we hit a stretch of land where plenty of waders were feeding out on the grass. Spotting a curlew first, we then caught sight of its two chicks, alongside plenty of oystercatchers with chicks of different ages. And a little further along, we also came across both a baby ringed plover with an attendant parent and a family party of wheatear feeding by a burn. A pair of lapwings was also noted here too.

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All agreed, it was terrific to see so many wader chicks in such a short space of time, with 'wader productivity' a good indication of the health of a habitat. Heading back to Killiechronan, somewhat later than planned, a very short turnaround before dinner, then proceeded, with the day's checklist and a discussion on the following day's activities being saved until after the cheese and biscuits.

Tuesday 10 June 2025

Day 5:

Mull Charters boat in Loch Na Keal, Eas Fors Waterfall, Treshnish Headland, Calgary Beach, Dervaig & Glen Aros

Taking the slightly earlier breakfast of 7.15 am, we were all loaded up by 8.15 am for the short drive to the Ulva ferry and our appointment with Mull Charters. On the way, we saw the usual mix of wheatears, oystercatchers and hooded crows, along with a pied wagtail and a couple of distant red deer. Despite a northerly wind, making it a chill day, it was terrific to see far more blue sky than cloud, with the promise that conditions would further improve as the day proceeded.

Walking down the jetty, a rabbit was added to our mammal list, but most eyes were on the common terns as they fed offshore and close to their breeding colony on a small skerry a touch further to the west. Shags were also busily feeding in the water, as we boarded the Lady Jayne, with skipper Alex alongside Blair. We then set off into the loch, with Ulva to our south, and almost immediately picked up our first gannet.

We had barely time to prime our cameras before the first white-tailed eagle was upon us and waiting for its free handout. And in the space of a busy half hour, we counted five different eagles coming to the boat, with the birds attracted from at least three territories across the loch. In addition to the close encounters, which were a dream for all the photographers in the boat, we were also able to watch the eagles interacting with one another, exciting those who just preferred to watch their behaviour. As we moved further into the loch, MD then picked up a very distant golden eagle soaring above the Griburn Cliffs, while Skipper Alex pointed out a peregrine, as it flew along the cliffs on the small island of Aorsa.

After a scintillating period of non-stop action, we then headed west and past some of the larger skerries south of Ulva. Here we were able to spot great black-backed, lesser and herring gulls in a small breeding colony, along with a fair pairs of shags, while a number of heavily pregnant harbour seals could also be seen basking down on the rocks below.

Passing yet more skerries, we noted basalt columns along a stretch of Ulva's southern coastline, with the promise that we'd be seeing more of this geological phenomenon during our impending visit to Staffa. On the water in front of these columns, five or six summer-plumaged black guillemots were also noted while loafing around in the water. Heading back in the direction of the Ulva Jetty, we were treated to the spectacle of at least 25 or 30 gannets diving down in the water ahead of us, and with plenty of shags, guillemots and razorbills also present, this suggested they'd collectively encountered a large shoal of fish.

On our return, we had one more visit from 'a white-tail', which Blair identified as being one of the birds belonging to the 'wilderness pair'. Flying straight over the boat, we could see its flight profile perfectly and also understood why these birds have been labelled as 'a flying barn door'. As the eagle then flew down to retrieve a fish, we realised we'd managed an impressive grand total of six eagle passes in total. While close to the boat, the eagle was also being constantly mobbed by a herring gull, enabling us all to clearly appreciate the astonishing size difference between these two species. And finally, before docking back at the jetty, Alex made a short detour to give us a closer view of the busy common tern colony, with most birds present either still incubating or guarding tiny chicks.

Thanking the guys for a super morning out on the water, we then drove around to Eas Fors Waterfall, where all enjoyed their packed lunch in the most delightful of surroundings. During our lunch break, the wildlife-spotting didn't stop, as we watched sand martins busily collecting food, while a couple of pairs of common

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whitethroats sang heartily from nearby scrub-patches. One guest also managed to find and successfully photograph a golden-ringed dragonfly, which also holds the record for being the 'longest species of dragonfly' in the UK.

Heading off once more, we then drove up and over onto Treshnish Headland, where MD picked up two dark green fritillary butterflies along the roadside. By now, the wind had dropped, and as the temperature began to rise, we stopped to admire the view right across the moorland. Skylark and goldfinch were soon picked up, before we all watched a pair of kestrels hunting close by. While scanning, one of the guests then spotted a male hen harrier further down the valley, whose brief appearance was most appreciated, with all taking the time to catch the pearl-grey plumage, white rump and black wingtips of this sublime bird of prey. While waiting for the hen harrier to return, a small heath butterfly and a common green grasshopper were both recorded next to the minibuses.

Flushed with the success of having found a male hen harrier, we then dropped down to Calgary Bay on Mull's northwest coast. Surely one of the most beautiful beaches on all of Mull, the coral white sand here gives way to a small amount of machair grassland behind, and has become a popular spot with locals and tourists alike. With the sun now out, the beach was quite busy, and after parking up, we bought an ice cream before taking a stroll on the beach. Just offshore, we delighted in a few small creches of female eiders and their duckling, while further out in the bay, MD managed to pick up singles of both great northern diver and a red-throated diver. Here too, we also picked up a few black guillemots and the far more numerous shags.

After a most delightful hour on the beach, we continued the short distance to Dervaig, which boasts boats, a small salt marsh and a reedbed. Looking over the salt marsh first, we immediately located a few redshank and shelduck, while oystercatchers and greylags were far more common. Also present here were at least three lesser black-backed gulls, with this species being an uncommon breeding bird this far north. Moving next across to the reedbed, we quickly found at least two sedge warblers and a single male reed bunting, which both represented new species for our trip-list.

Heading off once again, we turned inland via the Glen Aros, before then stopping to enjoy a fine patch of melancholy thistles along the roadside. While photographing this fine Scottish emblem, we also found a small pearl-border fritillary, while a siskin called from the sitka spruce trees on either side of the road. Reaching the coast at Aros, we finally managed to catch up with the trip's first mute swans, when a couple were seen on the sea. And after stopping briefly at Salen, we then drove back to Killiechronan, which gave everyone a short while to rest and refresh, before the compilation of the day's checklist proceeded to a fine three-course dinner.

Wednesday 11 June 2025

Day 6:

Treshnish Isles - Staffa & Lunga

Leaving Killiechronan House at 8.30 am, we took the short drive, once again, along the north shore of Loch Na Keal to the Ulva Jetty, from where we'd be catching the Turus Mara boat to the Treshnish Isles. During the night, the prevailing wind had moved around to a south-easterly direction, and while initially cloudy, the forecast indicated that it would clear up by around midday.

Common terns were present, as per usual, while leaving the harbour, with the plan for skipper Fergus to take us to Staffa first, before then dropping us off at Lunga for the rest of the day. Up on the top deck, all the guests were suitably attired for the bracing conditions, but the cold was more than compensated for by the uninterrupted views of the sea all around us, enabling us to pick out a few Manx shearwaters, gannets and shags on the way, with all four auk species seen in ever increasing numbers as we approached Staffa.

As Fergus took the boat around to the west of the island first, we were immediately able to appreciate the geological wonder that is Fingal's Cave. And with Mendelssohn's music blaring from the boat's speakers, we all took in the tablature, hexagonal columns and tuff that point towards Staffa's volcanic origins. Getting

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remarkably close into the cave given a not inconsiderable swell, we then steamed straight over to Lunga, for the day's main activity - puffin-watching.

As the tide was low upon our arrival, it took quite some time to ensure that all member of the group were able to successfully negotiate their way both off the boat and up to 'Puffin Platform', but it was deemed 'well worth the effort' as we were instantly confronted by huge numbers of puffins along the cliff ledge. As if to celebrate our arrival, the sun then came out, as everyone revelled in these pint-sized sea birds, which is also one of Britain's most iconic birds. When adults began arriving back with sand-eels, it was also immediately obvious that the first pufflings had also begun to hatch in their underground burrows. This then became a challenge for the photographers in the group as they attempted to catch the ultimate shot of a puffin arriving back with a beak-full of sand-eels, before them promptly disappearing below ground to feed their waiting chick.

Also present along 'Puffin Platform' were a sprinkling of razorbills, and whenever a bonxie drifted past the cliffs, the puffins quickly took to the sanctuary of the water. While watching the puffins, a couple of linnets were heard, before we had brief sightings of a couple of twite, which were easily identified by their wheezy, twanging calls. These first two twites were then quickly followed by another couple of singletons, but unfortunately, none settled close. Out to sea, a few fulmars were also noted, as they whizzed past both the cliff edge and our position on their characteristically straight wings.

Taking a puffin break, AK then led MD and a number of the group along to the old abandoned buildings where she'd previously heard and seen corncrake a few weeks earlier, but with it already deemed a little late in the breeding season, none could be heard or seen on this occasion. However, a complete bonus came in the form of at least two storm petrels, which we discovered calling from within the walls of the ruined houses on the walk back. Despite calling out of sight, all were able to enjoy the quite remarkable call of this mercurial pelagic species, with MD describing the call akin to that of 'fairies being sick'!

Returning back to the platform, five of the guests then followed MD & AK along to Harp Rock, leaving the rest blissfully happy among the puffins. Along the way, the plants of alexanders along the path and roseroot on the cliffs were pointed out by MD. While undertaking the fifteen minute walk, were also able to enjoy fabulous close-ups of shags and razorbills nesting in amongst the path-side boulders. Arriving at Harp Rock, the seabird colony was nothing short of spectacular, with thousands of guillemots jammed onto the large slab of rock opposite. Also present was a small kittiwake colony, along with lower numbers of razorbills, shags and fulmars. While delighting in a whole variety of birds constantly flying up and down the gully, we were also able to find one of the very first guillemot chicks to hatch while being carefully shielded by its parent at all times. A few of this species' characteristically pointed eggs were also observed whenever a pair of incubating birds changed position.

Walking back to join the rest of the group, we were then treated to slightly better views of a single twite on the rocks above the path. And with all reunited, we enjoyed excellent views of a pair of Arctic skuas flying past and along the cliffs. Descending back down to the boat, we sat in the sunshine to watch a couple of displaying rock pipits and a family of wheatear before boarding the boat for the return journey.

Before heading back to Ulva, Fergus took us past the isle of Fladda, which AK informed us was the most important breeding colony for shags in all of Europe. Additionally, the trip's first male eiders were roosting at the edge of the water on the northern tip of the island, while half a dozen grey seals could also be seen 'periscoping' as they stuck their heads out to watch us pass by. Heading back towards Mull, the only other bird of note on the crossing was a single adult white-tailed eagle, which was perched on a rock up from Ulva's northern shore.

Thanking the boat team for a simply brilliant day, we then headed back to Killiechronan House to enjoy a short break before compiling the day's checklist and a four-course meal. Happy and full, the guests then headed to their rooms in the knowledge that only one full day remained.

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Thursday 12 June 2025

Day 7:

Craignure, Pennyghael, Ross of Mull, Iona, Loch Na Keal

Setting off at our usual departure time of 8.30 am, we headed south, in overcast conditions, to our final destination of Iona. Stopping off at the moorland south of Craignure, we then took a short while to scan across the moorland. Lesser redpoll flew over almost immediately, while our ears picked up the seemingly omnipresent songs of willow warbler and whitethroat. Then MD suddenly picked up a distant short-eared owl, before finding a pair of hen harriers too. Despite being tricky to spot, most of the guests managed at least fleeting glimpses of both species - with the owl being particularly well overdue!

Passing through Glen More, one of the guests saw our third male hen harrier of the week from the rear of the minibus, while a young red deer stag crossed the road in front of us. Reaching Pennyghael once again, a couple of the group were keen to secure a photo of the 'otter crossing' road sign, but not before AK picked up our second short-eared owl of the morning. Watching it from a distance, it then perched on a rock, allowing us to drive much closer along the road and ultimately attain fine views of this much-sought-after species through MD's scope. While watching the owl, we also enjoyed watching two adult white-tailed eagles over distant crags. And with a pair of stonechats observed nearby, we were only delighted with our terrific haul.

Continuing our journey along the south of Loch Scridain, AK then picked up another pair of otters out feeding in the bay. Stopping to enjoy this stellar Mull species, we watched as the otters were constantly diving for food, with their behaviour and making a good contrast to the pair of otters we'd seen out of the water earlier in the week. But with a ferry to catch, we left the otters after around 30 minutes and carried straight down to Fionnport for the short ferry ride across to Iona.

Reaching the most westerly point on the Ross, the weather had by now improved substantially, and while waiting for the boat, we all took great delight in watching a wren sunbathing on a post. Catching the 11.45 am ferry, the journey lasted no more than ten minutes, and upon our arrival headed straight to the back of the fire station to listen for corncrakes. This is usually a reliable spot from which to hear this iconic summer visitor calling from deep within the grassland, but on this occasion, none could be heard as we had to make do with a singing sedge warbler instead.

Some of the group were keen to pass their time just around the harbour, to enjoy a spot of shopping, but half the group joined MD and AK as they walked around towards the abbey, en route to the beach in the north. En route, we both saw and heard jackdaws and rooks, which tend to be very scarcely distributed on mainland Mull, before we all suddenly heard the familiar rasping call of a corncrake, which appeared to be calling from the field adjacent to the abbey. Moving into the pub garden of the Columba Hotel, it was immediately obvious that two males were present in the field, with one sounding very close and calling constantly. But despite spending 20 minutes endlessly searching, none were seen. It was, however, wonderful to hear the call of one of Britain's rarest breeding birds, with only around 800 heard each summer.

Continuing onwards, we were serenaded along the way by both singing wheatears and skylarks, before eventually walking through the dunes and onto the beach. Sitting down and out of the wind, we could see a dead common dolphin washed up on the beach and made sure we were upwind from this, so as not to ruin our lunch! While tucking into our sandwiches, we also managed to find a couple of ringed plovers and a single dunlin along the water's edge.

Reuniting back at the jetty for the boat back to the mainland, everyone had enjoyed a wonderful time on an island famed for its peace and serenity. Back on Mull, we then drove straight back along the Ross, with a displaying snipe the sole bird of note near Pennyghael. Instead of driving back through Glen More and past Craignure, the group took both minibuses along the northerly shore of Loch Scridain, in the hope of catch a sight of the golden eagles at an eyrie near the cliffs of Griburn, where up to that point a visit had been prevented either due to poor weather or a lack of parking.

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Reaching the cliffs, there was only room for one minibus, so a few guests jumped into MD's minibus while the rest would take a slow drive back to Killiechronan with AK. Scoping up the cliff, we could immediately see an adult goldie sitting on the nest, with a chick's head spotted a moment later! The adult then promptly left, while its mate then flew in first along the cliffs, before then spilling the air to reach the eyrie. It appeared to be either carrying nesting material or food, which immediately garnered the attention of the chick as it stuck its head over the eyrie once again.

What a way to end the week! Returning to Killiechronan, all retired to take a well-earned break and pack their bags prior to our departure the following day. Reconvening for our final checklist and dinner, we were able to enjoy each other's company for the final time, while one of the guests had even written a poem, which was read out, to much hilarity from the rest of the group. Retiring early after a day where we'd seen Mull's 'big five' of both eagles, otter, short-eared owl and hen harrier, it had been a fitting last day of a superb week, in the finest of company.

Friday 13 June 2025

Day 8:

Craignure to Oban, before onwards to Glasgow Airport and train station.

Taking a 6.45 am breakfast, we thanked Joss for her terrific work in the kitchen and good humour throughout the week. And taking our packed lunches, we bid farewell to Killiechronan for our 7.30 am ferry. Once over on the mainland, we convoyed to Glasgow Airport to bid farewell to nine of the group, before then transporting the remaining three to the city's train station. All had enjoyed a fabulous time, on a week when the island and its wildlife had delivered in memorable fashion - with hopefully memories to last for a considerable time.

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Checklist for Isle of Mull Wildlife Extravaganza



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	BIRDS								
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓				✓		
4	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	✓	✓		
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>					✓	✓	
7	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			✓	✓	✓		
8	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓	✓			✓
9	Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓			✓		
10	Great northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>					✓		
11	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>						✓	
12	Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		✓				✓	
13	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
14	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
15	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
16	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>					✓		
17	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓			✓		✓
18	White-tailed eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
19	Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				✓	✓		✓
20	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>							H
22	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓
24	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
25	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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26	Dunlin	Calidris alpina							✓
27	Common sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos				✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Greenshank	Tringa nebularia			✓				
29	Redshank	Tringa totanus			✓	✓	✓		
30	Snipe	Gallinago gallinago						✓	✓
31	Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla						✓	✓
32	Lesser black-backed gull	Larus fuscus	✓				✓	✓	
33	Great black-backed gull	Larus marinus		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Herring gull	Larus argentatus			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Common gull	Larus canus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Common tern	Sterna hirundo	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
37	Great skua	Stercorarius skua		✓				✓	
38	Arctic skua	Stercorarius parasiticus						✓	
39	Common guillemot	Uria aalge	✓	✓			✓	✓	
40	Razorbill	Alca torda		✓			✓	✓	
41	Black guillemot	Cephus grylle	✓		✓		✓	✓	
42	Puffin	Fratercula arctica		✓				✓	
43	Woodpigeon	Columba palumbus				✓	✓		
44	Collared dove	Streptopelia decaocto		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
45	Rock dove, feral pigeon	Columba livia		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Short-eared owl	Asio flammeus							✓
47	Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus					✓		✓F
48	Peregrine	Falco peregrinus					✓		
49	Jay	Garrulus glandarius			✓				
50	Magpie	Pica pica	✓						
51	Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula	✓						✓
52	Rook	Corvus frugilegus				✓			✓
53	Hooded crow	Corvus cornix		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Raven	Corvus corax		✓	H		✓		✓
55	Great tit	Parus major			✓		✓		
56	Coal tit	Periparus ater		H				✓	
57	Skylark	Alauda arvensis			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Sand martin	Riparia riparia		✓	✓	✓	✓		
59	Swallow	Hirundo rustica	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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60	House martin	Delichon urbicum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Willow warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus		✓	✓	H	H	✓	✓
62	Sedge warbler	Acrocephalus schoen.					✓		✓
63	Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla		H		H			H
64	Whitethroat	Sylvia communis		✓	H	✓	✓	H	H
65	Goldcrest	Regulus regulus						H	
66	Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		H	H		✓	✓	✓
67	Treecreeper	Certhia familiaris						✓	
68	Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
69	Blackbird	Turdus merula	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Song thrush	Turdus philomelos	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Robin	Erithacus rubecula		✓		✓	✓		✓
72	Spotted flycatcher	Muscicapa striata		✓					
73	Whinchat	Saxicola rubetra			✓				
74	Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola		✓			✓		✓
75	Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	House sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Dunnock	Prunella modularis	✓	✓	H				✓
78	Pied wagtail	Motacilla alba	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	Grey wagtail	Motacilla cinerea			✓				
80	Meadow pipit	Anthus pratensis			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Rock pipit	Anthus petrosus			✓			✓	✓
82	Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs		✓	✓	✓	✓	H	✓
83	Linnet	Linaria cannabina					H	✓	✓
84	Twite	Linaria flavirostris						✓	
85	Lesser redpoll	Acanthis cabaret		✓	H	✓			✓
86	Greenfinch	Chloris chloris		✓	H	H	H	H	✓
87	Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		✓	✓	✓	✓	H	✓
88	Siskin	Spinus spinus		✓	H		✓	H	✓
89	Reed bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus			✓		✓		
90	Storm petrel	Hydrobates pelagicus						H	
	REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS								
1	Common toad	Bufo bufo					✓		

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BUTTERFLIES & DRAGONFLIES									
1	Green-veined white	Pieris napi		✓					
2	Red admiral	Vanessa atalanta							✓
3	Speckled wood	Parage aegeria						✓	
4	Golden-ringed dragonfly	Cordulegaster boltonii					✓		
5	Dark green fritillary	Argynnis aglaja					✓		
6	Small pearl-bordered fritillary	Boloria selene						✓	
7	Green tiger beetle	Cicindela campestris					✓		

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