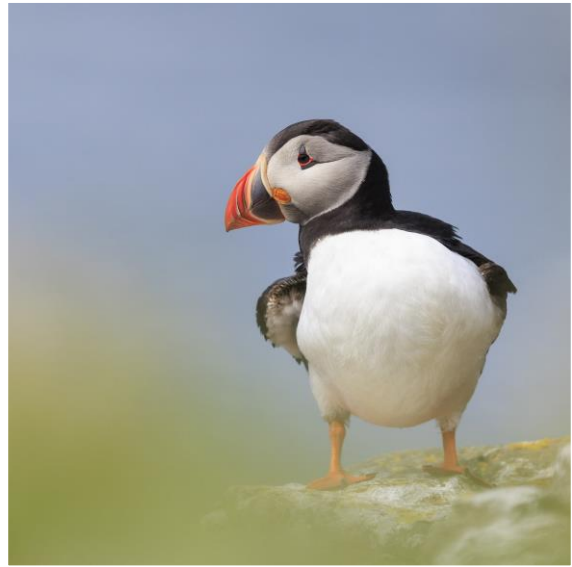


Tour Report Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography 26 May – 2 June 2024

Eas Fors Waterfall



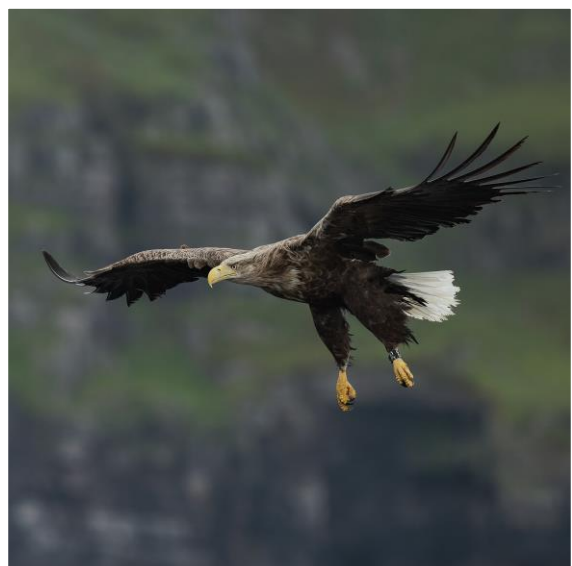
Atlantic puffin



Green hairstreak



White-tailed eagle



Compiled by Bret Charman

Day 1:**Sunday 26 May 2024**

Oban to Craignure; on to Knock House

Today myself, and fellow photography tour leader Sean Weekly, were due to meet three clients at the ferry terminal in Oban. It was a drizzly and rather cold day on the west coast of Scotland, but the ferry left on time and we were soon across the Forth of Lorn and offloading into the community of Craignure.

We had two vehicles for the group and were soon driving the 20 minutes or so to Knock House, on the Benmore Estate. Benmore is situated underneath the mountain from which it takes its name, nestled on the shores of Loch Na Keal. The house itself is a spectacular place from which to base ourselves with plenty of space for everyone.

The rest of the group met us at the house, where our local naturalist Alex Kershaw was also waiting. As soon as we had unloaded the bags and shown everyone to their rooms, it was time to head to the dining room for what was the first of many spectacular meals.

It was a wonderful first evening and we explained the followings days' itinerary – we were heading off to the Treshnish Isles.

Day 2:**Monday 27 May 2024**

Treshnish Isles

The group met in the dining room for an amazing breakfast (you'll realise there is a theme here when it comes to the meals provided by our wonderful chef – Poppy), before reconvening at the front of the house for our departure. Grabbing our packed lunches, we loaded the bags into the vehicles, before setting off on the short journey around the loch to the embarkation point for our boat trip.

There was quite a swell on the water and our first stop was the island of Staffa. The island is famed for Fingal's Cave and the dramatic basalt columns on show along the cliffs. With the large swell today, there was no chance we would be able to land on the island for a closer look. We would have to make do with the views from the boat on this occasion.

Continuing north-west, we crossed over to Lunga which was to be our main focus for the day. Lunga is home to a thriving population of Atlantic puffin, razorbill and common guillemot, and other highlights here include fulmar, great black-backed gull and even great skua. We arrived to seabird nirvana. The clouds were clearing and the sun was occasionally breaking through. The wind was still blowing, but we couldn't have asked for a better day for it.



Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

We were blessed with the perfect conditions to photograph the puffins as they sat in the lush cliffside vegetation, and the razorbills too. Both these birds are incredibly photogenic and allow a plethora of outstanding photography opportunities. The group spread out along the cliff tops, working on different subjects. Building up an impressive portfolio in the four hours or so we had on the island, the group were able to revel in all that lay before them. The more adventurous of the group wandered along the narrow cliff path to the rocky islet of Dun Cruit where thousands of common guillemots were busy nesting.

There were also a number of shags nesting close to the accessible areas and they posed brilliantly for portraits. The light was cooperative too. What more can you ask for?



After a fabulous day filled with fantastic seabirds and associated wildlife photography, it was time to head back down to where the boat was picking us up. As we navigated our way through the Treshnish Isles, we saw our first grey seals, common eiders and black guillemots on the water. It wasn't long before we were back at the Ulva jetty and slowly making our way back to Knock House.

Arriving back at the house in the evening, we had time to freshen up before dinner. Reconvening in the dining room, we were treated to yet another delicious meal by Poppy. After a long day on the water, it wasn't a late night, the group slipped away to bed after tea and coffee, ready for another busy day.

Day 3:
Loch Na Keal & Loch Scridain

Tuesday 28 May 2024

We awoke to a very different day today. The drizzle and low cloud was back and forecast to linger for much of the day. We informed the group at breakfast that we planned to follow the coastal road around the southern edge of Loch Na Keal and then across to the north coast of Loch Scridain. There was a good chance that we would be able to see otter here, alongside a host of other species including waders and even white-tailed eagle.

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Otters are a major draw to Mull, but there is an increasing problem with disturbance. With that in mind, we told the group we wouldn't be putting a lot of emphasis on photographing these shy creatures, but if the opportunity arose, we would do our best to get some images.

As we started our drive from Knock House, we stopped in a parking spot to one side of the road with views over Loch Na Keal. Within only a few moments, a white-tailed eagle flew right by us, while some birdwatchers had their scopes trained on the mountain above where a golden eagle had been spotted. The rain started to fall more consistently as we continued on further down the coast.

We worked our way further along the loch, stopping periodically to scan for wildlife. We turned inland, over the pass to Loch Scridain and stopped at a patch of remnant plantation forest where a pair of white-tailed eagles were nesting. We could see a bird on the nest, but at some distance and so carried on down to the coast where we continued to look for wildlife.



After all our hard work, we were finally rewarded as we found a pair of otters sleeping on a rocky outcrop, covered in seaweed. Parking the vehicles off the road, we worked our way closer to the otters, eventually ending up at a point where we didn't disturb them and we were able to capture some lovely environmental shots. Spending a prolonged period of time (in between the showers), we were able to photograph them as they woke from their slumber and groomed themselves in the seaweed.

The morning had come and gone, and so we moved a little further down the coast to find a suitable picnic spot, while some of the group worked their way along the shore to where we stopped. We enjoyed the packed the lunch before getting a last glimpse of the otters off of the rocky shoreshore. With the weather meant to be closing in after lunch, we had arranged a short talk for when we returned with the RSPB Officer for Mull and specialist on white-tailed eagles – Dave Sexton.

To ensure we got back to Knock House in time, we started to make our way back along the loch's coastline. Within around 20 minutes, we spotted another otter swimming along, quite close to the shore and one of

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

our vehicles got out to get some pictures. However, we had to get back to the house, and so we gathered everyone up and drove back round to the Benmore Estate and on to Knock House. Dave helped explain the success of the project on Mull with the white-tailed eagles and gave us a wealth of information about how adaptive these species are. With a dedicated boat trip focusing on the white-tailed eagles the following day, we thought would be the perfect way to whet the group's appetite. With yet another three-course meal for dinner, we were well fed and retreated to our rooms feelings very content.

Day 4:

Wednesday 29 May 2024

Otters & White-tailed eagle photo charters

The forecast for the day ahead was meant to be a little better. The one continuity throughout the week was that it remained unseasonably cool. It was overcast but dry for our day on the water with the eagles. We had two boat trips organised for the day, splitting the group into two, allowing everyone to have more space for photography. With one boat trip first thing, and the other straight after, we decided to use the time on shore scanning the coastline for otters.

After breakfast, my vehicle set off along the northern coastline of Loch Na Keal to the embarkation point at Ulva Ferry, while Sean and Alexa's vehicle set off in search of the island's mustellids. The otter watchers struck gold with a single otter and then a mother and her cub. As always with the otters, it is very difficult to approach them responsibly and so all the shots were at a distance. Still, what a fantastic way to spend the morning.

Out on the water, the first of the eagle charters had their first eagle encounter within 10 minutes, allowing people a little practice before the next session (around an hour into the charter). The eagle swooped in with remarkable agility and speed before plucking the provided fish from the water.



Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

The next 'session' with the eagles was even better with the dramatic sea cliffs and mountains on the south-side of the loch. We had a further five opportunities to photograph the eagles as they came in to pluck the fish from the water. It is important to note that this trip is organised in conjunction with the RSPB and is not detrimental to the health or well-being of the eagles.



The group were able to capture some stunning imagery with each dive. Having multiple opportunities to photograph these impressive eagles enabled the group to build up a small portfolio of breathtaking imagery.



With the first trip coming to an end, the second half of the group boarded the vessel. The weather improved as the morning turned into afternoon and they were also rewarded with exceptional photographic opportunities. A calmer sea than a few days earlier meant it was possible to photograph without too much movement, but it is still challenging to combine composition and technical settings to capture that perfect moment.

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

The first eagle group started to make their way back toward Knock House for lunch. We hadn't ventured too far down the road, when we spotted an otter resting on the shore. The group were able to capture some images until it slipped away to feed before finding another spot to haul-out on a rocky island a couple of hundred yards away. There was also a grey heron feeding in the shallows, which provided further entertainment and photography delights.



Both halves of the group reconvened after lunch with an opportunity to work through some Lightroom processing with Sean (and one individual who did Photoshop with myself). Very much gentle introductions to the digital darkroom, it allowed the group to think about how they might process one of their own images from the trip in the coming days.

With the weather improving all the while, we decided to wander directly from the house down to the shore of the Loch. We hoped we may find some cooperative wildlife which we could photograph, without having to get everyone in and out of the vehicles.

Alas, apart from some meadow pipits and noisy oystercatchers, it was a relatively quiet wander. I always think that the opportunity to walk and explore the patch close to where you are staying can allow for the best encounters though – it is always worth the effort. We ambled back toward the house and sat down for another evening feast.

Day 5:
North-west circuit of Mull

Thursday 30 May 2024

With a more promising forecast for today, Alexa, Sean and myself planned for a day exploring the north-west of Mull. We would be able to combine a spot of landscape, macro and more traditional wildlife photography within the stunning landscapes presented to us.

Starting off by driving along the north shore of Loch Na Keal, we made our way to Eas Fors Waterfall. This spectacular set of falls is right by the road, but it provides a wonderful spot to practice some long exposure work. By slowing down the exposure, we were able to capture the motion blur in the water and the rich colours of the surrounding vegetation.



With several different parts of the falls, we spent a prolonged period playing with different compositions before meeting back at the road and climbing back into the vehicles. The clouds were starting to break up more and more, providing blue skies and more of a spring feel. Journeying on up over the moorland, we hoped we may catch a sight of hen harrier or even short-eared owl. We parked up and enjoyed some welcome tea and coffee, before continuing on to the magical Calgary Bay. It was here that we decided to stop and eat our lunch, while also enjoying the magnificent machair habitat which lies behind the dunes. This coastal grassland is

home to a wealth of botanical delights and accompanying invertebrates.

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

After enjoying our lunch, everybody went for a wee walk, exploring the bay and focusing on a number of different species. There was a profusion of long-horn beetles, which were busy making the most of the warm, sunny weather. It was great fun to photograph them with a macro lens, while the machair was filled with wild buttercup and was a wonderful sight.

After a minor diversion, that being an ice cream, we got underway once again. It wasn't long before we arrived at the marshes of Dervaig. This rich reedbed is often home to a myriad of species, but with the high winds it seemed to be quiet today. Despite the bright sunshine, it was still actually rather cool and perhaps that was a reason for the relatively low levels of activity.



Continuing on toward the town of Tobermory, we found a parking space and gave the group an hour to explore this picturesque, waterside community. It had started to cloud over now and with the afternoon passing by, it was time to make our way back to Knock House and await this evening's culinary delights.

Day 6:
Macro Photography on the Benmore Estate

Friday 31 May 2024

After a fantastic night's sleep in the comfort of the house, we awoke to a slightly overcast day. With another incredible spread set out for breakfast, we were fueled for a busy day ahead. This morning we planned to head a little way down the southern coast of Loch Na Keal, where we hoped to find and photograph the colony of sundews. These tiny carnivorous plants make wonderful macro subjects and so, after arriving at the site, there was suddenly a wave of people looking directly down on the boggy ground beneath their feet.



Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Photographing the world in miniature is always a delight, as people see the world in an entirely new way. You start to notice the details in every aspect of your surroundings, from the textures and shapes of mosses and lichens, to minute flowers that inhabit every nook and cranny. Of course, the primary focus here were the sundew plants, but there was plenty more to discover and photograph. This was an incredibly rich habitat, filled with a myriad of wonderful plants.

Everybody spread out and started to bring out their inner macro photographer. Sean and Alexa managed to find a particular sundew that was the perfect subject and so the group took it in turns to focus their attention on that specific specimen. There was also a flowering example of bristly haircap moss.

We spent a couple of hours embracing our inner macro nerds, before working our way along the shoreline, seeing if we could find anymore exciting subjects to photograph.



With a fabulous morning out in the field with our macro lenses. We returned to the house to enjoy our lunches. This afternoon I was giving a short presentation to try and inspire the group with different types of wildlife photography, combining light, the environment and the subject itself to create striking imagery which will stand the test of time.



After the talk, we took the opportunity to enjoy the grounds of Knock House, focusing on the macro life in the rich meadows and hedgerows of the extended grounds. One of the great draws is an old farm yard wall where maidenhair spleenwort was growing out of every little crack and crevice. These remarkable plants are masters of their environment, clinging onto the vertical face of the wall and thriving.

There were also a number of orchids scattered in the meadow, adding a further splash of colour to the fading bluebells and the growing grasses. The group spread out, focusing their efforts on a range of different plant species and invertebrates. A heath spotted orchid was standing proud and was particularly photogenic.

The temperature had dropped quite drastically as we were enjoying ourselves, and so it was soon time to return to the warmth of the house. After freshening up, we were treated to yet another gastronomic masterclass by Poppy.

Day 7:
Southern Circuit of Mull

Saturday 1 June 2024

We awoke to another fabulous day on Mull. Except for the colder temperatures, we had been incredibly lucky. We must have been in favour of the weather gods this week. Our plan for the last day on Mull was to head east and then complete the southern circuit.

Driving first to Salen, on the island's north coast, we then headed east toward Craignure, continuing south

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

toward Lock Don. We stopped here with views across the mud flats (the tide was out), with curlew on the edge of a pool, and a white-tailed eagle flying over. The eagle then landed on the far side of the loch, only visible with binoculars. The sun was still beating down on us as all the birdlife seemed to be enjoying the warmer weather (as were we).

From here, we continued down and skirted the northern edge of Loch Spelve (where we saw a number of red deer down by the river), before entering the spectacular Glen More. This rugged landscape would have once been covered in forest, like much of the Highlands, but is now mainly moorland. The high rocky crags are home to nesting golden eagles, while the floor of the glen showed us marsh fritillaries. As we stopped for tea, underneath a known nesting site for golden eagle, the fritillaries kept us busy until they were usurped by a golden eagle flying in above the cliffs.

The eagle put on quite a show (admittedly at distance) before a second eagle joined it. Soaring high above the glen, making the most of the strong thermal, they soon disappeared over one of the ridgelines. What an incredible sight.

Lunchtime was fast approaching and so we carried on through the glen, coming down to the Loch Beg Bridge in the gorgeous sunshine. As we tucked into our sandwiches and peripherals, we headed down to a section of the river bed that was exposed and covered in wild thyme. The wild thyme was buzzing with the sounds of several species of bee and a tiny, but spectacular, species of butterfly – the green hairstreak.



Several members of the group joined me as we watched the butterflies and we did our best to carefully make our approach. With the warm afternoon sun, the light was fabulous. The warm tones brought out the best of the butterfly's green wings, while its striped antennae and curled proboscis provided further interest and intrigue. The green hairstreaks, much like the bees, were making the most of the profusion of wild thyme. It was a magical scene and we were rewarded with some wonderful imagery of this gorgeous species.

With a fair bit of ground still to cover, it was time to climb back into the vehicles and make our way back to the house. It wasn't long though before a pair of curlew were flying overhead, putting on quite a show.

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

A little further along the road, there was another curlew posing on a rise to the side of the road. Meadow pipits flew up from the surrounding grasses, while oystercatchers called from the foreshore. Mull's soundtrack is equally as impressive as its visuals and we had definitely been treated to some wonderful sounds as well as sights over the past week.

As we continued along the coastal road, there were a number of people stood watching something down on the rocks. There was a mother otter and her cub, sat right out in the open, enjoying an afternoon siesta in the warm sun. The light was awful for photography, but we dropped everybody off and went and found somewhere to park.



By the time Sean and I reached the spot where the group were photographing the otters, they were just starting to stir. They weren't at all bothered by the people watching. They nuzzled and groomed, but with the harsh light it was very challenging from a photographic point of view.

After a little while, the otters slipped into the water, almost immediately catching a fish and feeding on the edge of the seaweed. They

disappeared for a little bit and we suggested to the group that maybe it was a good opportunity to sneak back to the vehicles. The otters seemingly had other plans though. As we walked back along the road, they came swimming around the rocky headland and then worked their way along the beach.

Both the mother and cub stayed in the water, until they reached a small burn flowing into the sea. Here, they both emerged from the water and started to make their way up the beach. They disappeared down into the channel, most likely washing their coats in the fresh water, before returning back down to the beach and into the water once more.

Our group were rewarded with excellent views of the two otters, right out in the open in broad daylight. It was really quite extraordinary, even for Mull, to have such prolonged views of otters going about their business without a care in the world.

We encouraged the group to return to the vehicles so that we could continue the journey round the peninsula and work our back along the shores of Loch Na Keal. After a long day out in the vehicles, and the blazing sun, we returned to Knock House. There was a final opportunity for the group to go over some Lightroom tips and tricks with Sean before dinner.

Now what can we say about our final meal. Quite simply, it was sensational. Poppy is certainly a master of her craft and the whole group were treated to another masterclass. With the group all together, we passed our thanks on to Poppy, and the rest of the team who'd been helping over the week. We raised a glass to our local expert and naturalist extraordinaire Alexa, and said a big thank you to the group for their wonderful company and enthusiasm throughout the week.

What a week on a fabulous island with wonderful people.

Day 8:
Leaving Mull

Sunday 2 June 2024

Sadly, after breakfast, it was time to say goodbye. It was now very gloomy and rain was falling. With all our things packed, those that caught a lift with us on the ferry headed off with Sean. The others, who'd made their own journeys across to Mull made their onward journeys home. Finally, I said goodbye to

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Alexa and made my own way off of Mull, driving back across the Highlands to my home in the Cairngorms.

Sign up to our e-news

Sign up to our e-news to find out more about our tours, events, late availability, offers and tour reports at <https://www.wildlifeworldwide.com/subscribe>

Find out more about our [Isle of Mull Wildlife Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com