

## Tour Report

# Scotland – Islay & Jura in Autumn

28 October - 3 November 2018

Golden eagle



Otter



Barnacle geese



Merlin



Compiled by Louise Hughes

Tour Leader: Louise Hughes with 7 participants

**Day 1: Arrive Glasgow**

**Sunday 28 October 2018**

*Weather: Clear & cold*

We all met at the Premier Inn, in Glasgow, introducing ourselves and sharing what we wanted to see from this Islay trip and what made us want to come.

**Day 2: Leave Glasgow for Islay**

**Monday 29 October 2018**

*Weather: Clear, cold but sunny. -1°C in the morning, increasing to 4°C later. A pleasant ferry crossing, with cloud gathering after 3.30pm*

Our first morning saw us heading out of the busy Glasgow area and making for the ferry terminal at Kennacraig. The morning was bright, crisp and had us all raring to get going.

We made our way along Loch Lomond, stopping briefly at Tarbet to take in the view and spot a few species, including redwing, fieldfare and long-tailed tits; we also heard a nuthatch. Louise got quite excited about seeing a magpie ... everyone else didn't!

We continued through the stunning, rugged landscape to Ardrishaig, where we collected our lunch and again spotted a few birds. The highlight came at Kennacraig when, after seeing common redshank, ruddy shelduck and Eurasian curlew, Louise spotted something unfamiliar on the water by the jetty. It was a gull, that was for sure, but it was quite unusual. Although Louise was fairly sure she knew what it was, confirmation came from Lynn's photograph that it was a Sabine's gull. This is a species more used to being on the other side of the Atlantic.

Once on the ferry, after seeing the majority of materials for a new house loaded on, we spent time on deck where it was, surprisingly, warmer than expected. We managed to see black-legged kittiwakes, black guillemots in winter plumage, common divers and distant northern gannets. Coming into Port Askaig, there were stags with their hinds on the slopes of Jura, seemingly still rutting.

At Loch Finlaggan, the centre for the Lord of the Isles, we spied a buzzard quite quickly that put up a smaller raptor; however, we couldn't get out of the van fast enough to catch sight of it. We did see it later – and it turned out to be a Eurasian sparrowhawk. We saw a pair of European stonechats perching perfectly on top of long stems of grass, and there were two whoopers on the loch. There were hundreds of geese further out (that were spooked by white-tailed eagle) and, suddenly, there was an explosion of calling from the geese as the eagle flew over the loch and right overhead. Some of the group were lucky enough to catch a fleeting glimpse of a female hen harrier, with another Eurasian sparrowhawk above her, flying speedily over the loch and behind the forestry.

We saw a lonely brown hare, in a field. Then on the road to Bridgend –our destination and home for the week – there was a flock of about 50 greater white-fronted geese.

**Day 3: Loch Gruinart**

**Tuesday 30 October 2018**

*Weather: Bright, sunny & chilly*

The day started with a productive stop just outside Bridgend, looking over Loch Indaal. In the morning sunshine we saw hundreds of barnacle geese, a common diver, and a raft of greater scaup, which was a first for some, and along the shore in front of us, bar-tailed godwits, Eurasian oystercatchers, common ringed plover and dunlin.

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We continued towards our destination of Loch Gruinart, along the way stopping to look at redwing, fieldfare and European stonechat. Further along, a couple of roe deer were feeding together. We got our first glimpse of big groups of geese as we started through the Gruinart flats, with barnacles and greater white-fronted geese in the fields. A stop at the RSPB Visitor Centre gave us a great view over the flats at the different groups of geese settled on the fields, before we investigated the hides on the edge of the loch. At the first hide we got cracking views of northern shoveler, northern pintail, Eurasian teal, northern lapwing, common snipe and whoopers, amongst others. We did have a fleeting view of a female hen harrier whizzing across in front of the hide.

The walk back from the second hide was most productive with Catherine spotting a Eurasian sparrowhawk above, then brambling at a feeder outside another RSPB building, along with European greenfinch, European goldfinch, tits and common chaffinch. The highlight was a golden eagle flying by being mobbed by some corvids.

Up at Ardnave, after lunch, we walked a little way along the footpath giving us a wonderful view down Loch Gruinart but also to the Isle of Colonsay and then Mull in the distance. A little further we found red-billed chough dancing in the wind then feeding amongst the bracken. With them were redwing and common starlings, then a flock of twite came towards us, perching up on the fence lines and giving us beautiful views.

Driving back towards Gruinart, Louise spotted another eagle and managed to park as it perched on a rock on a high point. Then a male hen harrier materialised, flying towards the eagle before doing an about turn and flying off into the distance.

We positioned ourselves in a hide for the setting of the sun, hoping to see the geese coming in to roost. A huge number of barnacles (we counted 5,954, to be exact!) came in to feed to our left, slowly inching ever closer to us. We got some stunning views of whooper swans flying in to land and taking off from the small pools. Northern lapwings displayed in front of us, then every now and again the large flocks of geese sitting on the loch itself would take off with a roaring sound, then flying around a bit before settling back again.

#### **Day 4: The Oa & Kildalton Cross**

**Wednesday 31 October 2018**

*Weather: Rather wet & windy*

Our day began with a walk at the Oa, an RSPB reserve. It was a bit damp and very windy at the top but the monument was impressive with the dramatic landscape and crashing waves below. The circular walk took us along the cliff end overlooking the site of an Iron Age fort where Louise spotted a golden eagle perched on the side away from the wind and rain. As we circled back, Louise then spotted a peregrine flying in the distance. It disappeared behind a hill but came back into view, putting up a flock of common linnet and twite. But the most remarkable sight was once the peregrine was sat up, a merlin also put the flock of finches up, catching one. It started to make off with it but was intercepted by the peregrine. The merlin dropped its prey and the sneak peregrine dashed to catch it and made off with it!

After a well-deserved hot drink we made our way through Port Ellen to Kildalton Cross. On the way, we stopped to see Eurasian rock pipits, red-breasted merganser and some greylag geese. At Kildalton, watched by redwings, we marvelled at the 8th century cross and the ruins of the church, with some fascinating grave stones inside. We continued to the end of the road at Claggain Bay, where we saw common divers, grey herons and, the highlight of the day, an otter. We watched it feed, 50m or so out to sea, then swim back to shore and hide behind some rocks.

On the way to the woollen mill, we made a brief stop just outside Bridgend overlooking Loch Indaal, for the huge flocks of barnacle geese that were gathering on the flats in beautiful sun light. A grey wagtail at on the stream by the woollen mill was a nice spot for the end of the day.

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**Day 5: Jura****Thursday 1 November 2018**

*Weather: Cold & rainy. Some breaks in the weather through the day*

The day began in the rain. We made our way to the ferry for Jura, making to detour to the Caol Ila distillery that sits right on the sound of Islay. Once across, we journeyed on the only road towards Craighouse, scanning as we went. Not far from Feolin, we saw European shags, a greater black-backed gull and then five common snipe flew overhead, calling; they were being flushed by a female hen harrier which a couple of people glimpsed. We started to spot lots of red deer, with some stags having poorly developed antlers and again we caught a fleeting view of the female harrier. Barbara called out 'big bird' up on the skyline as the rest of us looked at a fieldfare perched on top of a willow bush. The 'big bird' turned out to be a white-tailed eagle sitting up on a rock, allowing us great views through the scope.

Jura distillery allowed us (well not the driver!) to taste from their selection before we continued on the road following the shoreline. Suddenly Barbara shouted 'otter!' and, sure enough, an otter was swimming away from the shore where it fished for a while. A common kestrel was spotted quickly before a golden eagle made off over the brow of the hill. Luckily we were able to walk the majority of our route to the Sound of Jura in the dry, but at the Sound the wind picked up and the rain fell. However, this did mean we got some beautiful, intense rainbows. Along the route we saw a female reed bunting, obliging European stonechats and some red deer. Before turning back we were able to get close to two stags that were by the roadside giving Lynn the opportunity to get a few good photos. Before our journey back on the ferry we saw a pair of common kestrels cruising in a valley.

**Day 6: Rhinns of Islay****Friday 2 November 2018**

*Weather: Cold, crisp morning, slowly turning grey & windy*

This morning we all got up early to head out to the Loch Indaal flats to watch the geese and swans. There were thousands of noisy geese and calling whoopers out on the mud flats before taking off and making for their feeding grounds. After a much needed brew and breakfast, we made our way west to Machir Bay, stopping along Loch Indaal and seeing a couple of horned grebes. Carrying on we stopped at this particular field to marvel at the 250 plus whoopers, hundreds of barnacle geese, some white-fronts, greylags and a lone pink-footed goose. A bit further along there was a big flock of Eurasian skylarks crossing the road, which was unusual for this time of year.

At Machir Bay, there were lots of ringed plover feeding in amongst the sheep and calves, and amongst them one sanderling, bright white in comparison. A few red-billed choughs flew over as we walked down to the beach where ruddy turnstones were spotted in the distance along with a group of common gulls.

On our circumnavigation of the Rhinns of Islay, we had cracking views of two common divers, views of a number of common kestrels, lots of common buzzards, grey and harbour seals in Port Wemyss then, most importantly, a visit to the Bruichladdich distillery. Once a few tasters were sampled, we made our way down to Gruinart in search of more raptors. We were successful in seeing three female hen harriers flying along a ridge towards the flats.

**Day 7: Port Askaig to Glasgow****Saturday 3 November 2018**

*Weather: Windy & cloudy. A few spots of rain*

This morning was spent waiting for the news of whether our ferry would go this afternoon, after our original ferry was cancelled yesterday. On hearing the all clear, we packed up and took one last drive to see what final things we could see. It was fairly quiet but maybe that was to do with the wind. However, we did see a golden eagle skirt the skyline and come into land on a rocky crag, where we were able to get a good

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view through the scope. We also had nice close views of a small flock of white-fronted geese before we headed to Port Askaig for lunch and the ferry.

As we pulled out of Port Askaig, Louise spotted a white-tailed eagle fly from Jura, behind the ferry and over to Islay. The ferry crossing was quite pleasant considering we were bracing ourselves for a rocky ride and we had wonderful views of a fiery sun set over Islay, which made a good end to the trip.

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# Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
	<b>Birds</b>	<b>Aves</b>						
1	Barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			✓	✓	✓	
3	Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>					✓	
4	Greater white-fronted goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓			
6	Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓				✓	
8	Northern shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		✓				
9	Eurasian wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓			
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓				
12	Eurasian teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓			
13	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓				
14	Greater scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>		✓			✓	
15	Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓				✓	
16	Common goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓				
17	Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Black-throated loon	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			✓			
20	Common diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓		
22	Horned grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>					✓	
23	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓		✓			

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25	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	European shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓
28	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓		✓		
29	Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
31	White-tailed eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	✓			✓		✓
32	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
34	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓				
35	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓			✓	
36	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
37	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓				
38	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>					✓	
39	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>					✓	
40	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓		✓	
41	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓		✓		
42	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Black-legged kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓					✓
44	Sabine's gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>	✓					
45	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓		✓	
46	Mew gull	<i>Larus canus</i>					✓	
47	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
49	European herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
50	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓			✓		
51	Common murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓					
52	Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	✓			✓		
53	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓				
54	Common wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	

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56	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
57	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>			✓			
58	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓			
59	Red-billed chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		✓			✓	
60	Western jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓			
62	Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Northern raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓
64	Coal tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓	✓		
65	Eurasian blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓			
66	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓		
67	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>					✓	
68	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓			✓		
69	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓			✓	
70	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
71	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓		✓		
73	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓			✓	
75	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
76	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
77	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓			✓	
78	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
79	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓			
80	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
81	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓		✓		
82	Eurasian rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓	✓		
83	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓		✓	

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84	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		✓				
85	Eurasian bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓				
86	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓				
87	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓	✓			
88	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓			
89	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓			✓	
90	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				✓		
91	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓		✓
	<b>Mammals</b>							
1	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>					✓	
2	Harbour seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓				
4	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>			✓	✓	✓	
5	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓			✓		✓
6	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓	✓			

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