

Tour Report

UK – The Shetland Islands with Mike Dilger

25 June – 2 July 2022

Red-necked phalarope



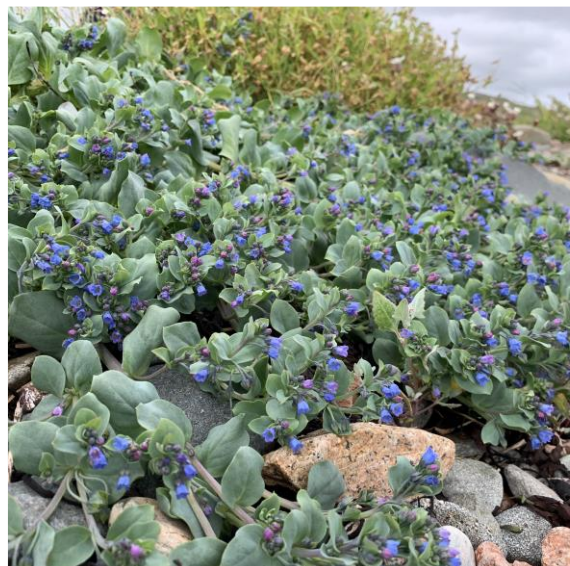
Atlantic puffin



Otter



Oysterplant



Compiled by Mike Dilger
Images by Paul Nicholson, Charles Kinsey & Mike Dilger

Tour Leader: Mike Dilger & Tim Stenton with 12 participants

Day 1: Meet up at Sumburgh Hotel and trip to Mousa

Saturday 25 July 2022

Mike met up with Tim and eight out of the 12 guests at the Sumburgh Hotel located on Shetland's south mainland. The weather on rendezvous day was clear and windy, but with the airport having previously been fog-bound for two days, this meant that four guests had been stranded back at Aberdeen. Having opted to take the ferry instead, they would instead be joining the group the following morning.

After introductions by one and all and a discussion about the week's itinerary from Mike & Tim, the group enjoyed a delicious three-course meal. The plan was to hit the ground running and so all guests reconvened by the minibuses at 21:45 for the drive to the quay at Sandsayre, from which the boat would leave for the island of Mousa. Being only four days after the summer solstice, Shetland was still experiencing 'Simmer Din', making it 'dusky' for little more than a couple of hours before dawn would then begin to break. With Skipper Rodney at the helm, a contingent of around 60 folk left the docks for the short trip across to the island. The strong southwesterly winds led to a somewhat choppy crossing, but scanning the sea on the voyage across resulted in good views of fulmar, gannet and arctic tern.

Landing on the island was relatively straightforward, and upon disembarkation, the group then took the 20-minute walk to Mousa Broch, from where the evening's entertainment would commence. A few species were seen along the way including wheatear and meadow pipit, with some commentating how bizarre it was to hear skylark singing so late! Snipe were also both seen and heard drumming as the broch came into view. The Pictish broch is believed to be around 2,500 years old and as the group entered the central atrium Tim gave a summary of what is known about the history, use and importance of the Iron Age structure. A number even managed to walk up the central staircase (in between the two walls) to the top of the broch and were serenaded during their ascent by numerous calling storm petrels. Famed as the broch's most famous residents - these diminutive seabirds nest in the building's numerous crevices during the breeding season.

All then took their positions outside to await the birds' return but did not have to wait for long before Mike spotted the first storm petrel returning at around midnight. Mike & Tim then gave the group a potted history on the lifecycle of these mercurial birds, explaining those observed were birds returning from foraging trips out to sea. Due to the residual light in the sky, Tim was also able to show the guests some of the petrels arriving back across the water in the adjacent bay. Steadily numbers began to build up, and before long an astonishing spectacle ensued with all watching mesmerised by hundreds of birds whizzing around the broch against the backdrop of a clear sky. At Mike's suggestion, a number of the guests also enjoyed lying down at the base of the broch, to experience the spectacle of birds streaming just above their prostrate figures!

Whenever birds landed on the broch, as a precursor to squeezing into their burrows, this allowed the guests to see the birds' white rumps, and the accompanying chorus of calling petrels was equally memorable. So entranced were the guests with this charming bird that few could believe it to be almost 02:00 when finally pulling into the hotel's car park. What a way to start their week in Shetland!

Day 2: Sumburgh Head, West Voe Beach, Boddam, Clumlie Loch, Pool of Virkie and Compass Head.

Sunday 26 June 2022

Mike & Tim arose early to collect the four remaining guests from the Lerwick ferry terminal before then enjoying a late breakfast at the hotel. Having opted for a late start, the full complement of guests were then able to acquaint themselves with one another before heading for the first stop of the day - that being the cliffs of Sumburgh Head. This famed birding location is just a short drive from the hotel, and upon

arrival at the main car park, skylarks, meadow pipits, oystercatchers and the occasional curlew were all observed in quick succession. Reaching the cliff edge, the first seabirds to be admired were the puffins nesting on the grassy slopes just a few metres away, as everyone indulged in some much-needed 'puffin therapy'! Slightly further down the cliff-face, fulmars could be seen occupying any available crevice, with the ranks of guillemots largely restricted to the main body of rock. The keen-eyed guests were also able to see that the kittiwakes present tended to nest on the most vertical of all the precipices. Further out to sea, gannets and great black-backed gulls could also be seen, while the occasional menacing bonxie patrolled along the cliffs looking for an easy meal. The first Arctic skua of the trip was also seen here when a dark-phase bird drifted along the clifftops. Being a rare breeding bird in south Shetland, Tim speculated that this skua could easily have been a bird breeding on Fair Isle, some 22 miles away to the south and where population density is higher than that found on Shetland's mainland. Upon taking a walk towards the lighthouse the cliffs, if anything, became even more dramatic, while amongst the Japanese roses that surround the lighthouse's small garden a couple of linnets were picked up. Here too, the distinctive call of a single twite was heard as it flew past.

Looking over the seawall to the south-west, a bonxie was then spotted in the water down below while tucking into the remains of a dead puffin. Casting our eyes back to dry land, a willow warbler was the next bird to be observed in amongst the Japanese roses as it caught flies, before a pair of wheatears were then spotted along the garden's fence-line. Twite had - up to this point - been tricky to see, but upon returning to the minibuses Tim finally managed to pick up a couple of birds as they fed along a drystone wall. This represented the very first views for a number of the guests of a species which is declining rapidly, with Shetland one of its few strongholds.

Driving back to the hotel for a quick refreshment stop, the group then took a most enjoyable lunch at West Voe Beach. By now the sun was beating down, but the wildlife sighting continued unabated as the group enjoyed at least three parties of female eiders with their chicks while tucking into their sandwiches. Curlew and redshank were also noted in the adjacent fields here. Lunch finished, the group then took a drive around the back roads to Clumlie. This allowed the group to see some of the finest moorlands on Shetland, and all were soon rewarded with excellent views of a pair of golden plovers looking decidedly nervous. It was only when a couple of large chicks were spotted that the reason for the adults' agitation was belatedly realised. Arriving at a small roadside loch, Tim announced that this location is considered a good spot for red-necked phalaropes, but on this occasion, none were observed despite a careful scan. Recompense came in the form of a pair of whooper swans at the back of the loch, certainly one of less than a dozen pairs pair that are thought to breed in Shetland - and indeed the whole of the UK. Arctic terns were in evidence here too, with a few sub-adult birds identifiable from their distinctive white foreheads. And as a couple of bonxies drifted over this caused a huge dread from agitated birds below. Mike then spotted a noisy red-throated diver while it flew past the group towards the sea. More breeding waders, in the form of lapwing and snipe, were also present here.

Pool of Virkie is one of the best estuarine bays in Shetland, and upon our arrival, several waders quickly began to reveal themselves. Curlew and redshank were among the first to be picked up, with several summer-plumaged turnstone discovered as they fed amongst the seaweed. Ringed plover was also picked up while feeding along the shoreline, before a small, distant flock of summer-plumaged sanderling were then spotted. Most commonly encountered in winter, Mike was able to explain how unusual it was to see sanderling in a British Summer. Closer inspection of this flock also revealed the presence of a few dunlin - which were also in full summer plumage. Tim then shouted out 'Arctic!' as a beautiful light-phase Arctic skua flew straight past the group, with all able to enjoy surely one of Shetlands' most handsome birds before eventually disappearing out of sight. Refocussing back on the estuary, Mike then picked up a winter plumaged bar-tailed godwit in amongst a flock of redshank, which was seen from much closer once the minibuses had been repositioned. Further off to the east more 'barwits' were then spotted, including a couple of birds in full 'cinnamon-coloured' breeding plumage. In this new location, the previously seen summer-plumaged sanderling were again picked up, but on this occasion from much closer quarters. A

couple of bonxies were also observed here, in addition to a variety of gull species, that included back-headed, common, herring and great black-backed gull.

Our last stop of the day was that of Compass Head, where bright and breezy conditions afforded the most wonderful views of Sumburgh Head just a touch further south. Here, strong winds meant that some puffins and fulmar could be seen flying straight past and almost within touching distance. Leaving the seabirds to their cliffs, Mike & Tim then drove back to the hotel, to allow for a quick break before checklists were compiled and dinner was taken.

Day 3: Grutness, Boddam, Clumlie, St Ninina's, Scousburgh, RSPB Loch Spiggie, Hillwell, Clumlie

Monday 27 June 2022

Reconvening at breakfast the following morning, the sunny and windy weather looked set to continue for the group's second full day. Once replete, the group headed out for a short drive to Grutness. Here, a large Arctic tern colony nests on a shingle bank, close to the small quay for transport to and from Fair Isle. Dotted in amongst the terns were a few pairs of common gulls, with the occasional bonxie or great black-backed gull causing panic in the ranks whenever passing close to the colony.

Looking out to sea, large numbers of gannets could also be seen, while a close-up view of razorbill was obtained just off Grutness Voe. Surely one of Britain's most northerly breeding swifts was briefly seen from here as well, and the rising temperature even encouraged a painted lady to take to the wing as the group returned to the minibuses.

Tim then received a call from Hugh Harrop concerning the discovery of a white-tailed eagle up at Boddam. Considered too good to refuse, both minibuses then raced straight up there, where Hugh was waiting to point out to the group a sub-adult bird that he had located close to the carcass of a dead sheep. White-tailed eagles are considered something of a rarity on the island, and this individual also represented a new species for a number of the guests, as all enjoyed great views through the telescopes on offer. After thanking Hugh for the call, the group then travelled on to Clumlie to once more look for the pair of resident red-necked phalaropes. However, none were spotted, as the group settled instead for a couple of dunlin and the previous pair of golden plover first observed the day before on the adjacent moorland. The same pair of whooper swans were still at the loch, while snipe, oystercatcher and curlew all made an appearance during the group's brief visit.

Stopping off at the small coastal village of Bigton, a refreshment stop also allowed the discovery of a small number of red admirals and large whites feeding on some dame's violet along the roadside. Suitably refreshed, the group then went on to have lunch looking over St Ninian's Isle, with Tim explaining how the island had recently become joined to the mainland via a sandy bridge, leading to the formation of a geological feature called a 'tombolo'. While taking our lunch here, Mike spotted a single common tern passing close by, while a red-throated diver was additionally picked up while feeding out in the bay, just to the north of the sandy bridge. The weather was by now glorious, and with all revelling in the sunshine, a walk on the beach then ensued. Mike & Tim then took the group over to St Ninian's and up to the remnants of an abandoned church.

Back at the minibuses, the group carried on further south along the coastal road, before then stopping off at Scousburgh to gaze down on a remote sandy beach well known for hosting both species of seal. This precipitated a masterclass in seal identification, as Mike & Tim helped the guests get to grips with the key features separating our two resident seal species. Looking down into the clear blue waters, a few recently-born harbour seal pups could also be seen, with one pup even observed suckling from its mother. At this point a couple of twite were picked up on call when flying over, leading to the same two individuals being observed through a scope when landing to feed on a vegetated slope.

Here too, more invertebrates were seen enjoying the fine weather - with the pick of the bunch being a Shetland bumblebee - a sub-species of moss carder bee that is only found in Shetland and the Outer Hebrides. After filling their boots with seals, bumblebees and twite the guests were then taken even further south to the freshwater loch of Loch Spiggie. Driving along the loch's western shore, the windy conditions meant little could be seen on the water, apart from a pair of whooper swans with no less than six cygnets - surely the most productive pair in all of Britain! A touch further down the loch, a club of at least 20 bonxies were then observed on the water, with Mike explaining that any unsuccessful or immature bonxies will often hang out together during the breeding season.

Moving on to Hillwell, the freshwater loch here is often good for a variety of wildfowl not seen elsewhere on the islands and that was indeed the case here. At least twenty wigeon and a similar number of tufted duck were observed loafing on the water, while mallard and the occasional hooded crow were also added to the day list. Whilst watching the wildfowl a small flock of four ravens were observed to fly past, with a fifth posing for the group on a nearby fencepost. Before heading back to the hotel the group once more dropped into Clumlie Loch to look for phalaropes. Despite the third no-show at this location in a row of this rare breeding wader, the visit was made worthwhile by the presence of a family of ringed plovers spotted right next to the road, which included both parents and at least three recently-hatched chicks. Looking just like cotton wool balls on cocktail sticks, it was great to see this charming wader seemingly having a successful breeding season. At the loch itself, the group were then able to enjoy two bar-tailed godwits in full summer plumage, before these were dramatically trumped by the arrival of two dark phase Arctic skuas which landed right in front of the group. Patently keen to have a rest and a bathe, the skuas were continually dive-bombed by the resident Arctic terns until eventually driven away from the loch by the terns' incessant attacks.

Arriving back at the hotel, the guests then had the opportunity to freshen up before a fine dinner ensued. Later that same evening Mike also took the final four members of the group out and across to the island of Mousa who'd missed out on the first trip due to cancelled flights. Undoubted highlights of this late evening excursion included the appearance of black and common guillemots on the voyage across, while the storm petrels and twite at the broch once again performed to a high standard.

Day 4: Clumlie, Lax Firth Pier, Tingwall, Laxo?, West Lunna Voe, Kirkhouse Loch, Ura Firth, Helga Water, Esha Ness

Tuesday 28 June 2022

Checking out of the Sumburgh Hotel, and with the good weather set to continue, the plan was to steadily drive to the north mainland while taking in a variety of sites along the way. Driving up again to Loch Clumlie, the golden and ringed plover families were present in their by-now familiar locations, but the phalaropes had once again done a disappearing act. So not wanting to waste time here, Mike & Tim took the group straight on to explore a few new locations further north.

The first stop was to look for coastal plants at Tingwall, where a walk along the loch produced several base rich-loving plants including marsh cinquefoil, northern marsh orchid, common spotted orchid, horsetail, meadowsweet, marsh marigold and tufted forget-me-not. After a delightful walk along the loch, the group then headed straight to the coast at Lax Firth.

Parking up, the group initially walked along the pier near the oyster farm, before then scanning both north and south along the firth for otters. Mike managed to pick out two great northern divers from here, with one in summer plumage, while the other was in eclipse, giving all the opportunity to see this rare non-breeding bird through the scope. Then Tim took the group to the end of the pier where he'd previously discovered a huge otter spraint pile, and while Tim was talking about the behaviour of this much sought-after mammal Mike managed to pick up an otter in the water and just south of the pier. Feeding away in the water, the otter steadily came closer and closer until it was no more than 5 metres from the astonished

group. Initially oblivious to our presence it eventually spotted us, before then quickly ducking under the pier and out of sight. A few lucky guests had their cameras with them at the time, resulting in some superb photos of this shy and retiring Shetland speciality.

Buoyed by this stellar sighting the group then set off to the small village of Vidlin for a hot drink and a well-deserved break. Lunch was taken shortly after at West Lunna Voe on the Lunna Peninsula and all were able to enjoy their sandwiches while watching a distant red-throated diver, eider ducklings, Arctic terns and a particularly noisy pair of oystercatchers with a chick. Bonxies were also observed from the group's vantage point here. West Lunna Voe is also considered a good spot for otters, but none were picked up on this occasion, so Mike & Tim headed back towards Laxo again. On the way, they stopped briefly at a small roadside loch, where another pair of whooper swans were spotted, this time with a single small chick.

Turning west the group then passed through the narrow isthmus at Mavis Grind before heading up to Ura Firth. Parking up alongside the loch, Tim was then able to take the group to see a rare coastal plant, oysterplant, that has been vastly reduced by habitat change, loss and trampling. The fleshy blue-grey plant was easily picked out from amongst the other shingle-loving plants such as sea sandwort, silverweed and sea campion. Mike in particular was thrilled to have seen it growing in such profusion and delighted in taking several pictures of this Shetland speciality. While enjoying the oysterplant, yet another red-throated diver was picked up on the water here too.

Driving further north towards Esha Ness a small lochan close to the water held another pair of red-throats, this time with a large chick, which afforded great views through the scope. Continuing further across the moorland, several breeding waders were seen, such as curlew, redshank, lapwing and oystercatcher. A pair of Arctic skuas drifted past, and due to one being of each distinct phase, this enabled an easy comparison to be made of the natural variability within this polymorphic species. A little further west even more excitement was to be had when a whimbrel was firstly spotted and then heard calling close to the road. Parking up close by, all the guests were then treated to fabulous views of this rare breeding wader and also allowed observation of the key, distinctive features which help distinguish this species from that of its commoner cousin - the curlew. As many of the guests had never seen this bird before, an extra buzz was added to this great find.

Tearing ourselves away from the whimbrel, Tim had one last treat for the group, in the form of the sea cliffs at Esha Ness. Here, anyone with a fear of heights needed to be a touch wary close to the edge due to the towering, dizzying nature of the cliffs, but this didn't seem to faze the fulmars in the slightest as they drifted past without a seeming care in the world. Returning to the minibuses, the group then headed back east and down to Hillswick and the St Magnus Bay Hotel, which would be their base for the subsequent couple of nights. Suitably freshened up, the group then reunited for a three-course meal, with all keen to share their particular highlights of a packed day's wildlife watching.

Day 5: Yell Sound, Bulemull Sound, Hemaness NNR, Ordale Pools, Keen of Hamar, Sullom Voe

Wednesday 29 June 2022

With a big day on the Isle of Unst ahead of them, the group took an early breakfast before heading northwards. Reaching the most northerly island of the Shetlands requires the use of two ferries, as the minibuses were firstly taken across to the island of Yell, before then travelling onwards to Unst. The weather on the trip up was more overcast than on previous days, with a strong southeasterly wind bringing the threat of showers later in the day.

Hermaness National Nature Reserve comprises a huge seabird colony and adjoining moorland at the very northerly tip of the British isles, and upon parking up, all the group proceeded to walk on the newly-lain boardwalk across to the reserve's famed cliffs. Along the way, meadow pipits and skylarks could be heard singing, as the first territorial bonxies of the trip were also observed. Close to the halfway mark, the group

were particularly enchanted with a very tame golden plover, which enabled the photographers to take some fine pictures of this handsome moorland wader. Arctic skuas were also seen while traversing the boardwalk, with mostly dark phase birds observed.

The walk across was not all about the birds, however, as Mike was also able to point out a range of classic moorland plants, such as tormentil, common cottongrass, common butterwort, round-leaved sundew and heath milkwort. Also, it was sobering to see several bonxies that had succumbed to avian flu along the way. Upon reaching the cliffs the scale of the flu pandemic suddenly became even more apparent with many dead gannets observed at either the base of the cliffs or in the water. Hundreds of corpses were present, resulting in a sombre mood amongst many of the guests. However there were still many more seemingly free of the virus on the cliffs, and all enjoyed watching the healthy birds either displaying to one another or flying past on the strong up-draughts. Several puffins were noted on any grassy slopes along the cliff edges as well.

Trekking back to the minibuses across the moorland, the group then went for a hot drink at Baltasound before moving round to the pools at Ordale. Close to the old airport, these pools are famed for red-necked phalaropes but upon tucking into lunch none could be seen. However, while Mike & Tim were chatting a female dully drifted into view with all enjoying sensational views of this terrific rarity - made all the sweeter after having missed them on no less than four occasions at Clumlie! The females of this polyandrous species are more brightly coloured than the males, and as such Mike & Tim were able to enlighten the guests about the amazing lifestyle of this exceptionally rare breeding bird. A couple more were then seen flying around the reedy ponds before breeding dunlin was spotted here too.

Thrilled with this sighting the group then travelled up to Keen of Hamar NNR, a special location that is as close to the Arctic tundra as Britain possesses. Renowned for being a habitat that looks more like the surface of the moon, it is famed for an astonishing assemblage of plants, with a number immensely rare, and upon arriving at the reserve the group set off to track down as many as possible. Slender St John's wort and mountain everlasting were encountered in abundance, alongside sea campion, before one guest then found northern rockcress- the first key target. A short distance further up, Tim then found the reserve's star plant - Edmonston's chickweed. The flower was in perfect condition as all the guests crowded around this stellar rarity, which is only found at one other site (apart from the Keen of Hamar) in the world. A few more chickweeds were then found nearby, in addition to sea plantain and early purple orchid, but the other botanical mage - the Arctic mouse-ear - could not be found, possibly due to having already gone over. One guest also managed to photograph the only frog orchid encountered, but unaware of its rarity, was the only one to see it!

As the first rains of the week set in the group then headed slowly back towards the hotel, with the ferry ride between Yell and the mainland revealing good views of common guillemot, black guillemot and razorbill. Finally heading back via Sullem Voe, one more treat was in store, as a group of 31 red-breasted mergansers were encountered on a sandbank, marking a great end to a fascinating day.

Day 6: Yell - West Sandwick, Gutcher, Fetlar - Ponsil, Mires of Hooby, With, Loch of Funzie, Everland and Fetlar airstrip

Thursday 30 June 2022

After fine but windy weather for the first half of the week, the group awoke to overcast weather and the threat of rain for much of their day on the island of Fetlar. Undeterred, Mike & Tim drove the group from Hillswick across to Yell Sound, before then taking the ferry across to Yell. Due to a delayed ferry time across to Fetlar, the group took the opportunity for a detour to West Sandwick, where an ultimately unsuccessful hunt for otters took place, before the short crossing to Hamars Ness.

On the voyage across, the full complement of all four British auks were seen, in addition to fulmar, gannet and kittiwake. A short, foggy drive then saw the group take a rough track across the moorland to Ponsil mast. Here golden plover was picked up by call and a particularly close dunlin was enjoyed by both groups. Bubbling curlews could also be heard close by, in addition to the omnipresent skylarks and meadow pipits. Driving back onto the main road, the next stop was at the Mires of Hooby, which is considered one of the best sites for red-necked phalaropes in the UK. Parking in a lay-by, the group were able to obtain brief views of a female when it briefly emerged from the vegetation. But after a couple of minutes, the bird could not be relocated, and as it was by raining heavily, the guests instead took an early lunch in the dry refuge offered by the minibuses.

By now the sunshine of the previous days had begun to seem a distant memory, so the group decamped instead to The Final Checkout Cafe for cake, hot drinks and to sit out the worst of the weather. The cloud level had also descended even further but determined to get out the group went for a drive past the circular walls called 'planticrubs' which were used for cultivating plants in days gone by and along the road towards the Loch of Funzie. This is another site famed for red-necked phalaropes, but as the weather was by now so poor, the group instead carried straight on to Everland. The drive up this dead-end road was rewarded by close views of a succession of snipes sitting on fence posts before the group returned south and towards the main road.

The last stop of a wet and foggy day on Fetlar was to visit the old airstrip on the island. Here, snipe, golden plover and ringed plover were all briefly seen through the fog, with redshank, hooded crows and wheatears observed back down on the main road. Some of the domesticated animals during the drive back also proved an irresistible draw for a number of the guests, with one particular ram singled out by the photographers in the group for a fine set of horns that had even curled beyond the full 360 degrees.

Taking the two ferry rides back onto Shetland's mainland, the group then drove down to Sumburgh Hotel for the final two nights of the week.

Day 7: West Voe, Lax Firth, South Nesting Bay, Skellister, Loch of Bellister, Vidlin Harbour, Sand Water, Sandsayre - Noss

Friday 1 July 2022

Waking up for the last full day of the trip, it looked like rain would be forecast, but the group set off undeterred with 'finding more otters' the group's prime focus. The first stop was at West Voe Beach, just to the north of the hotel, with perfectly flat water indicating that the wind had completely died down overnight. One of the guests had seen an otter here on a stroll the previous evening, but on this occasion, it had patently decided not to make a reappearance. Recompense, however, came in the form of a couple of great northern divers out in the bay. Here one of the birds was in winter plumage, while the other was still in summer plumage, making it difficult to believe for those guests unfamiliar with this bird that the two individuals indeed belonged to the same species. Bonxies were seen flying past here too, with the ever-present Arctic terns also feeding in the bay.

Moving onto Lax Firth, where an otter had been picked up earlier in the week, the conditions could not have been more different between both visits, as the lack of wind turned the water into glass. A quick scan for mammals up and down the Firth here only produced harbour seals, before Tim then received a call from a colleague who had located otters close by.

South Nesting Bay was just to the north of our current location, and so after a short drive, the group were instantly rewarded with three otters. Initially spotted while swimming along the coast, the animals were constantly on the move, and only paused whenever one surfaced with food. It quickly became obvious that the otters were a family grouping, comprising a female and two nearly full-sized cubs. Despite looking

down on the otters, all the guests ultimately managed to obtain super views of them either swimming or feeding in amongst the rocks before they eventually disappeared around a headland and out of view.

Thrilled with such fabulous sightings the group then retraced their steps back to the mainland and headed off towards Skellister. Passing by a small loch en route, three adult red-throated divers were duly spotted here, with the birds so close that all were able to see the birds' burgundy-coloured throats and laser-red eyes through the telescope. After a quick refreshment stop at Vidlin, the group took their lunch down at the harbour. Although the rain continued to steadily fall, the sudden drop in wind meant that the boat trip to Noss would now be going ahead.

Having received this good news, a quick drive down to Sandsayre meant the group were able to jump straight on board the Mousa boat, as the special charter took them this time in a northerly direction towards the cliffs at Noss. Despite a swell still being present, all four auks, fulmars, kittiwakes, gannets and shags were either picked up on the water or as they flew past. On the way, the captain dropped into a sea cave to allow the group to see the cave-nesting shags, before then sailing out through a natural geological arch. Eventually, the steep, towering cliffs of Noss came into view, with immense numbers of guillemots and gannets on the impossibly narrow ledges. Due to the presence of bird flu at Noss too, Tim estimated that the numbers looked far lower than during previous breeding seasons, but to the unfamiliar eye, the spectacle was still awe-inspiring as everyone gazed up at the towering 180-metre cliffs. In addition to the birds on the ledges, thousands were wheeling above the boat, with most guests deciding that getting a little wet was a risk worth taking as the fun, busy and wildlife-filled week ended on a huge high.

Day 8: West Voe

Saturday 2 July 2022

On departure day Mike went for a walk with one of the guests to look for the otters close to the hotel before everyone departed. Despite the tide being at a low ebb, the animal could not be relocated, but both managed to see male eider ducks in moult in the company of females and ducklings. Here too gulls were present, with three lesser black-backed seen, alongside common, herring and greater black-backed gulls. On the walk back to the hotel a couple of ravens were additionally spotted, including a fly-by from single twite whose distinctive, twanging call immediately revealed its identity.

Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>								
1	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓			✓	
3	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓					
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓				✓	
5	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>			✓					
6	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓				✓	
7	Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
8	Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>					✓			
9	Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓					
10	Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Great northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>				✓			✓	
12	Storm petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	✓		✓					
13	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	



14	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>						✓		
17	White-tailed eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>			✓					
18	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
21	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	✓	✓				
23	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓		✓		
25	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓	✓					
26	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
27	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓						
28	Red necked phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>					✓	✓		
29	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	Snipe	<i>Gallinago Gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
31	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	

32	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
33	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓					✓
34	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			✓					
38	Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Great skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Arctic skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
42	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
44	Atlantic puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
45	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓				
46	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
47	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓						
48	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>				✓				
49	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>					✓	✓	✓	

50	Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
51	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
54	House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓					
55	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓						
56	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
57	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
59	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
60	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		
62	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓	✓				
64	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓						
65	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓	✓					✓
66	Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA								

1	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
2	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓			✓	
3	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
4	Common seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
	INSECTS	INSECTA								
1	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓	✓				
2	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓	✓					
3	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>			✓					
4	Shetland bumblebee	<i>Bombus muscorum agricolae</i>			✓					
	PLANTS	PLANTAE								
1	Oysterplant	<i>Mertensia maritima</i>				✓				
2	Edmonston's chickweed	<i>Cerastium nigrescens</i>					✓			
3	Northern rock-cress	<i>Arabis petraea</i>					✓			
4	Slender St. John's wort	<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>					✓			
5	Mountain everlasting	<i>Antennaria dioica</i>					✓			
6	Early purple orchid	<i>Orchis mascula</i>					✓			
7	Sea campion	<i>Silene uniflora</i>					✓			
8	Frog orchid	<i>Coeloglossum</i>					✓			

9	Common dog violet	<i>Viola riviniana</i>					✓			
10	Northern marsh orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>					✓			
11	Heath spotted orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>					✓			
12	Sea plantain	<i>Plantago maritima</i>					✓			
13	Cuckoo flower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>			✓					
14	Round-leaved sundew	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>			✓					
15	Common butterwort	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>			✓					
16	Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Heath bedstraw	<i>Galium saxatile</i>				✓				
18	Ragged robin	<i>Silene flos-cuculi</i>				✓				
19	Marsh marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>				✓				
20	Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>				✓				
21	Yellow flag iris	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	