

Tour Report

Scotland – Whales & Dolphins of the Outer Hebrides

21 – 26 August 2022

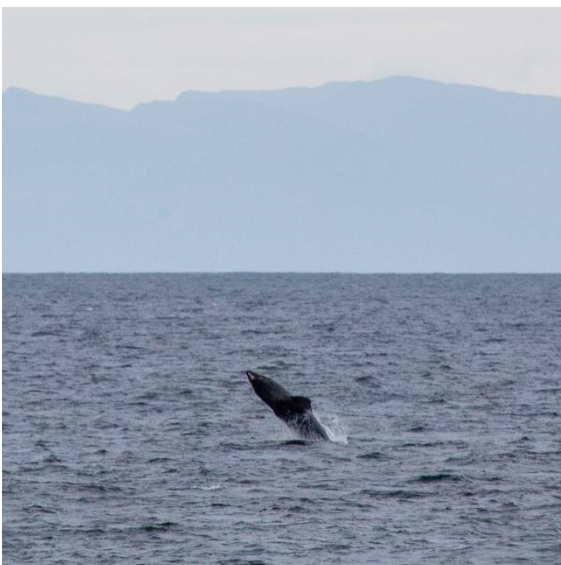
Humpback whale



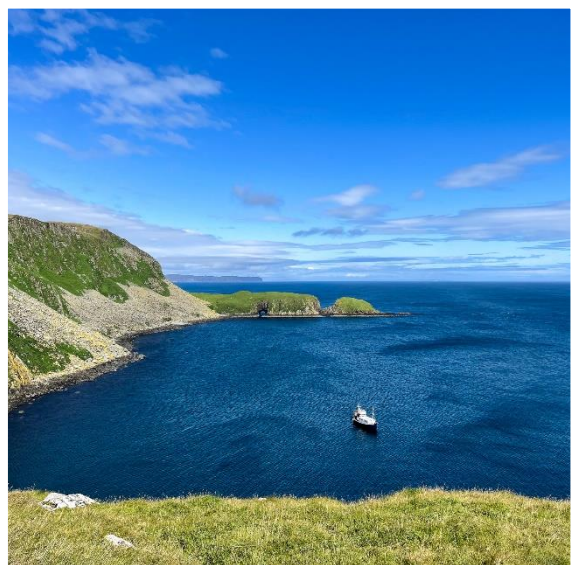
Fin whale



Basking shark



MV Monadhliath



Compiled by Alexa Kershaw

Tour Leader: Alexa Kershaw with 7 participants

Day 1: Ullapool to Stornoway

Sunday 21 August 2022

Alexa met with the seven guests for the late-morning ferry from Ullapool to Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis. With the sun shining and the sea calm, we crossed the North Minch onboard MV Loch Seaforth and had our first opportunity to scan for wildlife from the Observation Lounge. We were soon rewarded with a sighting of a small group of common dolphins heading in to bow ride, and then as we approached Stornoway, we encountered a group of Risso's dolphins breaching clear of the water while seabirds flew overhead.

On arrival in Stornoway, we were met by Julie, our guide, who drove us the short distance to the harbour where we boarded the MV Monadhliath. Our chef, Robyn, and skipper, Tony welcomed us on board. After settling into our cabins, Tony gave an introductory briefing outlining our plans for the week ahead. We then set off for our first cruise exploring the Outer Hebrides, heading south to our overnight anchorage in the sheltered waters of Loch Erisort. Enjoying the sunshine, some of the group had our first glimpse of two harbour porpoises, the smallest cetacean found in these waters. We also spotted a white-tailed eagle and various seabirds during our passage. Our first evening was rounded off with a delicious three-course meal prepared by Robyn.

Day 2: Isle of Harris East Coast

Monday 22 August 2022

After breakfast, we left the anchorage, and although it was overcast, it remained dry and warm, and the morning's breeze dropped through the day. It wasn't long before we encountered two sei whales, the third-largest whale (after the blue whale and the fin whale), distinguished by its size and the fact its tall blow is visible at the same time as the dorsal fin when it surfaces to breathe. As we made our way north, we were accompanied by several large groups of common dolphins, enchanting us as they approached the boat to bow ride. While some of the group enjoyed the fantastic views from the top deck, others made their way down to the boat's bow to get a closer look at the dolphins as they played in the bow wave.

After stopping for lunch on board in Portnaguran, Broad Bay, we made our way south past Tiumpan Head Lighthouse, and our day became increasingly spectacular. A huge basking shark breached clear of the water, and shortly afterwards, we encountered two fin whales, one surfacing very close to the boat. In the distance, we spotted the distinctive, bushier blows of a humpback whale, and we were able to spend time watching it feeding against the backdrop of Lewis. By submitting the fluke photographs to Happy Whale, we later confirmed that the whale is a known individual in the Scottish Humpback Whale ID catalogue named Pi. The rich seas in the area also provided us with wonderful sightings of common dolphins, harbour porpoises and some distant Risso's dolphins.

As we headed to Loch Shell, where we would anchor for the night, we spotted a very small minke whale and a large group of harbour porpoises feeding. Before settling for our evening meal, we saw a juvenile golden eagle and two white-tailed eagles and watched grey seals hauled out on the shore while Arctic and great skuas harassed kittiwakes and gulls.

Day 3: The Shiant Isles

Tuesday 23 August 2022

After breakfast, we set off for The Shiant, a small group of uninhabited islands four miles off the coast of Lewis and one of the most important breeding colonies for seabirds in Europe. Through the mist and light rain, we spotted harbour porpoises and were soon joined by a small group of common dolphins before they returned to foraging. As we took the tender ashore, ravens and a peregrine falcon were mobbing a white-tailed eagle above us. Once ashore, we explored Adam Nicholson's family bothy, while listening to wrens singing. As the weather improved, some of the group stayed on the shore enjoying the sunshine while others climbed the small peak to enjoy 360° views over the isles of Lewis and Skye. After lunch back on

board, we explored the basalt cliffs by boat, marvelling at the grey seals on the rocks and the shags and kittiwakes lining the cliffs.

Crossing the Sound of Shiant, the sea was a little 'lumpy', before we reached the sheltered waters of Loch Shell. We were mesmerised by diving gannets, plunging into the water for food alongside hurries of feeding seabirds and a single common dolphin breaching. As we approached our anchorage, a majestic juvenile white-tailed eagle swept past us, our last sighting for the day, before we settled for another delicious meal.

Day 4: Scalpay & East Loch Tarbert

Wednesday 24 August 2022

After a rainy start to the morning, the sun shone as we left Loch Shell while watching a small group of harbour porpoises and several white-tailed eagles. Heading into the Minch, the sky was filled with feeding gulls, auks and diving gannets. A pair of white-tailed eagles accompanied us as we made our way into Loch Bhrolluim, before we were treated to beautiful views of a golden eagle. Harbour seals were hauled out along the shores of the loch. We continued following the coastline towards the Isle of Scalpay, crossing under the Scalpay Bridge before stopping for lunch in sheltered waters. After lunch, we were briefly joined by a group of common dolphins as we continued to East Loch Tarbert, a safe harbour where we could shelter from the forecast storm. The group went ashore, heading over the isthmus to the western shore, where we scanned for birds and had some wonderful views of stonechat. The rest of the afternoon was spent exploring Tarbert, the distillery and the Harris tweed shop before returning to MV Monadhliath for dinner. Before dinner, we had a magical sighting of two otters fishing, and after the rain and wind passed earlier than expected, we were treated to a beautiful sunset.

Day 5: Tiumpan Head Lighthouse

Thursday 25 August 2022

During a briefing, Tony explained that we wouldn't be crossing the Minch due to the sea conditions and would return to the mainland by ferry tomorrow instead. After breakfast, we made our way north along the east coast of Harris, scanning for cetaceans along the way. We had wonderful views of several groups of common dolphins, harbour porpoises, and a basking shark just as we neared Stornoway.

In the afternoon, we went ashore and drove by minibus out to Tiumpan Head Lighthouse to see if we could spot any larger whales out at sea. Although we didn't see any large blows from the observation point, we had a great afternoon exploring the Eye Peninsula, walking along the shore and scanning the small lochs for bird life before returning to the boat for a delicious last evening meal together.

Day 6: Stornoway to Ullapool

Friday 26 August 2022

After an early start this morning and saying goodbye to the crew, Julie drove us to the ferry terminal in Stornoway, where we joined the MV Loch Seaforth for the three-hour crossing back to Ullapool. We enjoyed breakfast on board while scanning for cetaceans from the Observation Lounge and the outside deck. Our efforts were soon rewarded with a wonderful sighting of three fin whales, a perfect ending to our week in the Outer Hebrides. On arrival in Ullapool, we said our goodbyes to each other before heading home.

Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
	BIRDS	AVES						
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>					✓	
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>					✓	
3	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					✓	
4	Red-breast merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓					
5	Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
6	Great northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>					✓	
7	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Sooty shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>		✓				
10	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓					
14	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓		✓		



15	White-tailed eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>					✓	
17	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>					✓	
18	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					✓	
19	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓			
21	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Glaucous gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	✓					
23	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
25	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
26	Great skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>			✓			
27	Arctic skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		✓				
28	Pomarine skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
29	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
31	Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>		✓		✓	✓	
32	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓			
33	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>					✓	

34	Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>			✓		✓	
35	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓			
36	Coal tit	<i>Parus ater</i>			✓			
37	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>					✓	
38	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓	✓	
39	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>					✓	
40	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				✓		
41	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				✓	✓	
42	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓	✓	✓	
43	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>				✓		
44	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			✓	✓	✓	
45	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓			
46	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓			
47	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>				✓		
48	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>				✓		
49	Storm petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>		✓	✓		✓	
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA						
1	Minke whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	✓	✓				
2	Sei whale	<i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>		✓				

3	Fin whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>		✓				✓
4	Humpback whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>		✓				
5	Harbour porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Common dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Risso's dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	✓	✓				
8	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
9	Harbour seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
10	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓	✓	
11	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓			
	CARTILAGINOUS FISH	CHONDRICHTHYES						
1	Basking shark	<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓