

Autumn Gold

26th September – 1st October 2016



Leader: Steve Duffield

Participants: Karen and Dave Hedley, Mark Clay

Summary: An excellent tour full of quality birds that finished on a high when we took an unscheduled trip to Barra for UK's first Eastern Kingbird. We also managed to find a few things ourselves including a 1st winter Citrine Wagtail at Stinky Bay on the first day which

eventually showed very well. The following day we had a fly-by, juvenile Surf Scoter at Ardvule which was also a nice surprise. On the 29th we had an impressive flock of 40+ Lapland Bunting on the Range and found an elusive Yellow-browed Warbler at Loch Eynort. The following day was our twitch to Barra with all three species of diver picked up from the ferry and great views of a small pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins on the way back to Eriskay. Our final morning didn't let us down either with a final surprise when we bumped into the over-summering Crane that had been missing during the week and promptly flew south after we had enjoyed some great scope views. Other goodies during the week included 2 Sooty Shearwaters and all 7 species of resident raptors with both eagles seen on two dates, Hen Harrier on 4 dates and Merlin on 3. We also got good views of an Otter at Loch Eynort and heard our first rutting Red Deer of the autumn. It was a week full of quality birds and a good mix of both east and western species.

Daily Dairy:

26th September:

Weather – A moderate south, south-westerly wind with showers in the morning, followed by sunny spells although cool.

Dave and Karen dropped their car off at the B&B in Nunton and we headed for a spot of birding at Stinky Bay before picking up Mark off the 11 am flight from Glasgow. We began scanning through the mix of waders in the bay which included Sanderling, Dunlin, Turnstone, Ringed Plover and Bar-tailed Godwits. Steve spotted a couple of Snipe partially hidden amongst the seaweed on the shore and hopped out to put them in the scope. As he did this a strident buzzing call came from behind us as a wagtail flew across the stubble field and dropped into a shallow runnel. It remained hidden for a while, showing occasionally briefly before dropping out of view again. It was looking good for a Citrine Wagtail but was not showing for long enough when suddenly it took to the air once more, calling as it headed away. Luckily it dropped into another stubble field and after a cautious approach we got some great scope views of a 1st winter Citrine Wagtail. The field also contained a few Reed Buntings, Skylark, Meadow Pipits and Snipe which kept us busy. After half an hour or so we returned to the car and headed to



Balivanich to meet Mark off the flight from Glasgow. We had a look at the airport beach where we found a Red-throated Diver, Eiders, a Swallow, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin and Sanderling. We then heard the plane coming in so drove the short distance to the airport where Mark arrived in good time. We returned to the field to look for the wagtail once again although unfortunately it was nowhere to be seen. After searching Stinky Bay as well, we still drew a blank so we headed south, stopping for lunch at Druidibeg plantation. A pair of Sparrowhawks were sparring with a pair of Kestrels over the plantation although they soon became distracted when an adult Golden Eagle came over low along the hillside providing great views as it circled round giving us all ample time to enjoy it before it drifted off.

After lunch we had a look in the trees which were characteristically quiet with just a few Goldcrests, Robin, Wren and Blackbirds seen. We decided to have a go for the Swainson's Thrush that had been in a garden in Bornish although with a clear night the previous evening there was a good chance that it had gone. We spent about an hour and a half in the garden, patiently waiting although all we spotted were a couple of Goldcrests, a Blackcap and a family of Goldfinch. We decided to cut our losses and headed to Stoneybridge, picking up a fine male Hen Harrier on route. A walk along the coast here produced Curlews, Dunlin, Sanderling, Turnstone, a juvenile Grey Plover, Eiders and Shag. We continued north pulling up at Ardkenneth where the church car park provides a good area to scan the north-west of Loch Bee. A huge flock of around 1,000 Greylag Geese flew in off the machair providing a dramatic sight. We also had 4 – 500 Wigeon, Teal, a couple of Whooper Swans, 3 Black-tailed Godwits and Golden Plover. Nearby Balgarva was quiet with a distant Red-throated Diver and Slavonian Grebe noted off-shore. We next had a scan from Hebridean Jewellery where we found Knot, Bar-tailed Godwits, Dunlin, Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Grey Plover; some of the latter were still in breeding plumage. Finally on the way home we stopped off at Stinky Bay just in case the wagtail had returned. Shortly after entering the field we'd last seen it in we spotted again, feeding in a damp area. We got some great views and Mark managed a few shots creating a fitting end to a good first day.

27th September:

Weather – Strong south-westerly winds becoming gale force later in the day. Regular sunny spells in the morning gave way to heavy showers in the afternoon.

This morning we headed straight for Ardvule for a spot of sea-watching. It was rather breezy out at the point although at least it wasn't raining so we settled down on the north side of the point with our backs to the wind. It was fairly quiet for many of the specialist seabirds although during our watch we noted around 15 Red-throated Divers, Razorbill, Guillemot, a juvenile Kittiwake and Gannets as well as a few small flocks of Golden Plover heading south. We were just about to go when a scoter was spotted heading south just past the edge of the tideline. Expecting a Common Scoter we were delighted to see that it was indeed a juvenile Surf Scoter – a great bird to pick up on a sea-watch. On the way back we walked along the north side of the headland picking up lots of



Rock Pipits, Curlew, Redshank and Turnstone whilst on the loch were Shoveler, Teal and Mallards. As we got towards the base of the headland a flock of at least 160 pale-bellied Brent Geese flew south, taking a short cut overland. Once back at the car we drove back across Bornish machair picking up a juvenile Hen Harrier as well as Golden Plover, Wigeon and Little Grebe. It was lunchtime by now so we found a bit of shelter at South Loch Eynort where we could enjoy our lunch along with 5 Red-breasted Mergansers, Greenshank, Stonechats and a few Swallows who were also enjoying a bit of shelter.

After lunch we made our way around to North Loch Eynort but recorded very little here which was probably due to the strong wind. We returned to the west coast and Aird Michael. A Goldcrest was feeding on the northern edge of the cemetery wall and a small flock of Golden Plover came in off the sea as we arrived. Off-shore Gannets were still

passing whilst a Red-throated Diver and Eiders were resting on the water. We had a brief stop at nearby Peninerine before continuing north to the Range. The pools here were also quiet with the usual Redshank, Snipe, Bar-tailed Godwits, Curlew, Golden Plover and Dunlin. We moved on to the most north-westerly point of South Uist at Ardivachar where we located large numbers of gulls feeding along the shoreline. 2 Sooty Shearwaters were seen lingering off the headland to the west for a few minutes, apparently struggling against the wind. As we were scanning, the beach erupted when a Peregrine sailed in, picking off a wader on the beach in front of us with apparent ease. We moved on to Balgarva where we found most of the waders sheltering in the lee of the dune towards Hebridean Jewellery. A Curlew Sandpiper was just visible whilst other waders included Dunlin, Turnstone, Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Grey Plover. As we were scanning a Merlin hurtled after a passerine in front of the car where it showed well in its aerial pursuit before hurtling off once again. We finished the day with a brief stop at Coot Loch and Stinky Bay.

28th September:

Weather – Light southerly winds and rain, becoming heavier and more persistent throughout the day with winds increasing from the south-east to south-west and becoming strong.

Before the rain set in we visited Loch Paible, on the west side of North Uist in the hope that we might see the Common Crane that had been recently in the area although we drew a blank here so moved on to nearby Loch Sandary. A few bits of wildfowl were present including Teal, Wigeon and Tufted Duck whilst 3 Black-tailed Godwits were also feeding on the bank. We moved on to Balranald, parking at the coast near Aird an Runair before taking a walk across the machair where we managed to get pretty decent scope views of 4 out of the 12+ Lapland Buntings feeding in the stubble along with Skylarks, Linnet and Meadow Pipits. On the coast we picked up Sanderling, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Redshanks, Turnstone, Golden Plover, Lapwings and Curlew. We had a brief look at Loch Hosta and Loch na Revil in the steadily worsening conditions before we stopped off at Grinish Pier. A few Bar-tailed Godwits were in the channel separating us from the island of Vallay but little else. It appeared that the wind and rain

had eased a bit so we took a walk to Griminish House. This must have been the cue for the weather as the rain came on heavier than before and we got a decent dousing on our walk with few birds seen. We returned to the vehicle and carried on eastwards, stopping at Vallay Strand where we spotted various finches, Goldcrests and Collared Doves in a garden; whilst Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwits and a few Greenshanks were along the shore. More Bar-tailed Godwits were spotted at Malacate before we stopped at Grenitote for our lunch. 27 pale-bellied Brent Geese were resting on the sands along with more Grey Plover and Bar-tailed Godwits.

Post lunch we called in at Lochmaddy harbour although worsening conditions with low cloud and strong winds meant we didn't see too much. We called in at Baleshare where we picked up a couple of Gadwall as well as Tufted Ducks, Wigeon, Golden Plover, Curlew, Lapwings and lots of Snipe that were enjoying the wet conditions a bit more than we were! Finally we visited the Range at West Gerinish to see what we could find on the flood pools here. Lots more Snipe were feeding and flying up around us as well as good numbers of Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwits and 4 Black-tailed Godwits. We headed back to the guesthouse picking up more Golden Plover in the fields at Torlum as well as the usual array of waders and gulls in Stinky Bay.

29th September:

Weather – Calm with heavy rain clearing around 10 am. A moderate north-westerly wind picked up as the rain cleared with sunny spells and showers finally clearing towards the end of the day.

It was a bit wet at the start of the day although once we arrived at Ardkenneth, overlooking north-west Loch Bee there were signs that the rain might ease soon. Wigeon and Teal were present in good numbers along with a Whooper Swan. A Chaffinch calling from a nearby building was a migrant to these parts and as the rain stopped we had a flock of at least 300 Pink-footed Geese heading south-eastwards almost overhead. We drove down a nearby track and walked out on to the machair to scan through the 100's of Golden Plover present. Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Turnstone and masses of Snipe were present along with an impressive flock of 40+ Lapland Buntings.

A flock of around 100 grey geese heading south over the sea were most likely more Pink-feet although were too distant to be sure. After our walk we took a brief look at Balgarva where we spotted an adult White-tailed Eagle across the ford on the Benbecula side. We headed south, calling in at Druidibeg where we enjoyed our lunch at the plantation.

After lunch we had a look around the trees at Druidibeg although they were very quiet with just the odd Robin and Goldcrest seen. We continued south and got excellent views of a White-tailed Eagle, flying low over the road and almost over the bonnet of the car at Howmore as it made its way towards the west coast. We parked up at North Loch Eynort and had a walk around Archie's trees. It was pretty quiet for birdlife although we did get good views of an Otter and heard a Red Deer roaring in the distance which was the first one this autumn. As we headed back to the car a Yellow-browed Warbler called from an area of dense cover. We got fleeting glimpses although eventually all managed to catch up with it as it scooted around the trees and shrubs in the company of a couple of Goldcrests. We left Loch Eynort and made our way to Howmore, parking by the church before walking across the machair. Before we set off a large raptor appeared over Tharsal which turned out to be a fine adult Golden Eagle. The circular walk at Howmore produced lots of Pied Wagtails by the river mouth as well as Sanderling, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Turnstones. Meadow Pipits were also common whilst both Linnet and Twite were in a mixed flock and a couple of Swallows were hawking over the marsh. As we headed back to the main road we paused by a small patch of trees and scrub behind the bike shop. A quick pish brought out a Willow Warbler, a Chiffchaff and a couple of Goldcrests rounding off a fine day in the field.

As we were heading home a phone call from Barra set the wheels in motion with news of an Eastern Kingbird – a first for the UK!

30th September:

Weather – Light westerly wind, dropping to almost flat calm conditions during the day. It was mostly sunny with occasional cloud and a light shower.

Today we headed south for Eriskay to take a morning ferry to Ardmhor, Barra. In the light winds we spotted a decent variety of birds including 22+ Black-throated Divers, around 15 Red-throated Divers and 1 Great Northern Diver as well as 2 Slavonian Grebes, Black Guillemot, Guillemot, Kittiwake, Shag, Cormorants, Eiders and a single pale-bellied Brent Goose as we set off. Once on Barra we headed straight for Eoligarry where we found just a single observer watching the Eastern Kingbird.



It performed very well hawking in a small garden below the cemetery where we watched it for around an hour. This large American flycatcher has been seen a couple of times on islands off the west coast of Ireland but also has a reputation of disappearing just hours after being seen so we felt very fortunate to be able to enjoy this dramatic bird during its second day. A ringtail Hen Harrier was also seen to the north whilst a trip around the rest of the island produced 3 Merlins, Buzzard, 50 pale-bellied Brent Geese, 40 Golden Plover, Lapwings, Rock Pipits, White Wagtails and a scattering of Wheatears. The return

ferry journey produced a similar array of birds to the south-bound trip including 10 Black-throated Divers, 15 Red-throated Divers, a Great Northern Diver, Guillemot, Black Guillemots, Gannets and Eiders. The real highlight of the ferry journey came as we were approaching Eriskay when around 12 Bottle-nosed Dolphins were spotted in front of the boat. The skipper cut the engines and we enjoyed some superb views of the pod with a mother and small calf passing below the boat and clearly visible under the water from anyone positioned above; a superb way to end an exciting day.



1st October:

Weather – Light south-westerly winds and sunny.

We had a couple of hours in the morning before Karen and Dave headed south back to Barra and Mark caught his flight to Glasgow so we started with a look at Aird and Culla Bay. Lots of Skylarks were in the stubble fields along with Golden Plover whilst Eiders and a couple of Red-throated Divers were spotted on the sea. We headed a little further south stopping by Coot Loch where we managed to spot a perched Merlin as well as Coot, Moorhen, Gadwall and Tufted Duck on the freshwater loch. A short distance further on we pulled up on Liniclate machair where amazingly we bumped into the Common Crane that we had missed earlier in the week on North Uist.



We got some excellent scope views and once fully satisfied with the bird started our walk towards Borve Point. The Crane took to the air shortly after we started towards the shore and headed south across towards South Uist and hasn't been seen since. Another lucky encounter! The walk produced 4 Lapland Buntings in flight as well as Greenshank, Curlew, Snipe, Sanderling, etc. along the shore whilst off-shore we found a couple of Razorbills, Eiders and Red-throated Divers. We also spotted a male Merlin hunting over the machair and had some great views of a female Hen Harrier on the dune edge; all in all a great way to end the tour.

Species List:

Mute Swan	Seen daily and in large numbers on Loch Bee
Whooper Swan	Seen on a couple of days including the first migrants on 29 th
Pink-footed Goose	Good numbers seen on 29 th and 1 on 30 th
Greylag Goose	Common with huge numbers on the west side of Loch Bee
Brent Goose (pale-bellied)	160+ at Ardvule, 27 th , 27 at Grenitote, 28 th and around 50 on Barra
Mallard	Common
Gadwall	Small numbers seen on 3 dates
Shoveler	Noted on 27 th only
Wigeon	Very common
Teal	Sightings almost every day of the trip
Tufted Duck	Common
Eider	Common
Surf Scoter	A juvenile flew south at Ardvule, 27 th
Red-breasted Merganser	Seen virtually every day
Crane	An adult on Liniclate machair, 1 st October
Red-throated Diver	Common and seen almost every day

Black-throated Diver	Seen from the Eriskay – Barra ferry
Great Northern Diver	2 seen from the Eriskay – Barra ferry
Little Grebe	Noted most days and common on lochs adjacent to the machair
Slavonian Grebe	2 were seen from the Eriskay – Barra crossing
Sooty Shearwater	2 lingered off Ardivachar, 27 th
Gannet	Common off-shore
Cormorant	Common
Shag	Common
Grey Heron	Common
White-tailed Eagle	1 on the 28 th and 2 on the 29 th
Golden Eagle	Noted on 2 dates during the week with excellent views on 26 th
Hen Harrier	Seen on 4 out of 6 days
Buzzard	Common
Sparrowhawk	2 were seen on 26 th
Kestrel	2 sparring with Sparrowhawks at Druidibeg on 26 th
Peregrine	Seen on 2 dates
Merlin	Noted on 3 dates including 3 on 30 th and 2 on 1 st
Moorhen	Seen at Coot Loch
Coot	Only seen on “Coot Loch”
Oystercatcher	Very common
Ringed Plover	Very common
Grey Plover	Seen on 3 dates and in summer plumage
Golden Plover	Common
Lapwing	Common
Knot	Small numbers on 2 dates
Sanderling	Very common
Turnstone	Very common

Dunlin	Common
Curlew Sandpiper	1 on the South Ford, 27 th
Redshank	Common
Greenshank	Fairly common
Black-tailed Godwit	Small numbers seen on 2 dates
Bar-tailed Godwit	Common
Curlew	Common
Snipe	Common with good numbers passing through
Black-headed Gull	Common
Common Gull	Very common
Herring Gull	Common
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Fairly common
Great Black-backed Gull	Common
Kittiwake	Single birds seen on 27 th and 30 th
Black Guillemot	Good views from the Eriskay – Barra ferry
Guillemot	Small numbers seen on 27 th and 30 th
Razorbill	Small numbers on 3 dates
Rock Dove	Very common
Collared Dove	Seen every day
Skylark	Common
Swallow	Fairly common and seen daily
Rock Pipit	Noted on 3 days
Meadow Pipit	Very common
Pied Wagtail / White Wagtail	Seen every day with a few White Wagtails noted
Citrine Wagtail	A 1 st winter was found by Stinky Bay on 26 th and eventually showed well for everyone
Hebridean Wren	Common
Hebridean Dunnock	Seen daily
Robin	Seen daily

Wheatear	Common
Stonechat	Seen every day
Hebridean Song Thrush	Fairly common around gardens
Blackbird	Common
Blackcap	A male was seen on 26 th
Willow Warbler	Seen at Howmore, 29 th
Chiffchaff	Seen at Howmore with the Willow Warbler, 29 th
Yellow-browed Warbler	1 was seen at North Loch Eynort, 29 th
Goldcrest	Seen daily
Eastern Kingbird	This 1 st for the UK was seen very well at Eoligarry, 30 th
Hooded Crow	Common
Raven	Common
Hebridean Starling	Very common
House Sparrow	Common
Chaffinch	Noted on 2 dates
Linnet	Seen almost every day in small numbers
Twite	Seen in decent numbers on 4 dates
Goldfinch	Seen on 2 days
Greenfinch	Seen almost daily
Reed Bunting	Fairly common
Lapland Bunting	Seen on 3 days with at least 40 at Eochar, 29 th

Mammals:

Otter	Seen well at North Loch Eynort
Harbour (Common) Seal	Common
Atlantic Grey Seal	Common
Red Deer	Heard rutting at Loch Eynort
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	A pod of around 12 were seen well from the Barra – Eriksay ferry, 30 th

Other:

Red Admiral

Silver Y

Nettle-tap Moth

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