



Early Spring Migration (New)

Dates: 13th - 18th April



Early spring in the Outer Hebrides is an exciting time as north-bound wildfowl and waders begin to flock through the islands. Geese heading for Greenland such as White-fronts and Barnacles begin to move through whilst waders bound for Iceland such as Black-tailed Godwit and Golden Plover, resplendent in their summer plumage can occur in large numbers as they pause before they cross the North Atlantic. Many other birds associated with winter are also still around with Long-tailed Duck, Glaucous Gull and Snow Bunting all likely. It's also a good time to pick up the scarce Lapland Bunting as they head back north. Wheatears, White Wagtails and the first of the warblers are also often on the move whilst many scarce birds have also been found or have hung on until this time of year; and have included Snowy Owl, Pied-billed Grebe, Harlequin, Richardson's Cackling Goose and Glossy Ibis. The supporting cast of residents is very strong with 8 species of resident birds of prey which are often very active at this time of year as well as Corn Bunting, Twite and all 3 species of diver. Otters are often easier to find than in the summer whilst both Grey and Harbour Seals are common. Smaller delights include the rare Belted Beauty moth that shows a very broken distribution throughout Western Europe despite the females being flightless.



Itinerary:

The following is a guide to where we'll be going on which day as we will make the most of the prevailing weather conditions.

Day 1: Once the group have all gathered we'll head to Balranald and explore Loch nam Feithean, the machair and shore. We should pick up a good selection of birds as geese could well be on the move with White-fronts, Barnacles and of course Greylags regularly seen. Brent Geese may also be present on the coast where we shall also pick up waders such as Purple Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit etc. We may also see a few seabirds off-shore such as Gannets and Kittiwakes as well as Great Skua and possibly an early Pomarine Skua. Back on the machair we should be able to find flocks of Twite as well as Skylarks and maybe Lapland Bunting. Balranald is also the last stronghold of Corn Buntings, in the Outer Hebrides and the whole west coast of Scotland. All this activity attracts the attention of raptors and Merlin, Peregrine and Hen Harrier are all likely whilst the magnificent Gyrfalcon has been seen at this time of year in the past. We shall check the bay at Hougharry which is a good spot for otters, as is the adjacent Loch na Reivil which often holds small numbers of wildfowl and Little Grebe. Next we head to Loch Sandary; a small loch situated to the south of Balranald and an excellent site, easily viewable from a track which runs along the east side. It regularly holds a decent variety of wildfowl including the odd Scaup whilst at the south end, gulls drop in to bathe and we may find a few waders such as Snipe and Curlew. From here we'll head back to Benbecula and explore the west side including the delightfully named Stinky Bay. The latter site should hold Purple Sandpipers and good numbers of Eider as well as Long-tailed Duck and Great Northern Diver. For the rest of the afternoon we'll explore some of the freshwater lochs and take a walk to Borve Point to finish off a varied first day.

Day 2: This morning we'll head south to the (relatively) well-wooded area of Loch Eynort. The garden here regularly holds small numbers of migrant warblers whilst the tidal loch is good for Red-throated Diver, Black Guillemot and Red-breasted Mergansers. Large numbers

of Harbour Seals will be present and this is an excellent site for otters. The dramatic scenery of moorland and hills offers a superb backdrop as we scour the sky for birds of prey with all 8 resident species of diurnal raptors possible. This is a good site for both White-tailed Eagle and Golden Eagle with both breeding in the area. By contrast we'll follow Loch Eynort with a look around the headland of Rubha Ardvule. This can be another good location for passage waders and seabirds so we'll carefully check both, north and south bays as well as walking out to the point. Otters are regularly seen; seals are common and occasionally we pick up Bottle-nosed Dolphins. Gannets will be passing off-shore whilst we should also be able to find Great Northern and Red-throated Divers in quieter waters. Purple Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwits and maybe an early Whimbrel could be found amongst many other waders. Long-tailed Ducks and Eiders will be on the sea whilst freshwater lochs could offer Wigeon, Teal and Goldeneye amongst others. Twite, Skylarks and maybe Snow Buntings may also be found feeding in the stubble on the machair. We'll head back north and along the west coast calling in for a short walk at Stoneybridge before finishing the day with a wander around Peninerine and the Howmore River. It's an excellent area for waders and gulls whilst off-shore we should be able to find Great Northern Diver.

Day 3: This morning we head north to the small island of Berneray that is connected to North Uist via a causeway completed in 2001. The freshwater, Loch Bhrusda lies in the centre of the island and should hold wildfowl such as Tufted Duck and Whooper Swans whilst the machair often hosts large flocks of Barnacle Geese. We'll take a walk across the northern end of the loch to the Sound of Pabbay where with a bit of luck and maybe some calm conditions we'll find Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Common Scoter, Great Northern Diver, Black Guillemot, Razorbill and passing Gannets and Kittiwakes. We may also see Harbour Porpoise off here if conditions are suitable. We'll return to the vehicle and head to the north-east side of the island to look for Slavonian Grebe, divers and maybe an early Arctic or Little Tern. The foreshore will hold more Purple Sandpipers as well as Ringed Plover, Turnstone and Sanderling amongst others. Occasionally Golden Eagle and Peregrine are seen heading over so we'll need to keep an eye on the sky too. Finally before leaving the island we'll take a drive across the machair at the south end of the island where we'll hopefully locate a few Snow Buntings. Leaving Berneray we'll head around the north side of North Uist to Grenitote, stopping en route to look for Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier. At Grenitote we drive down to a tidal area and scan the machair in case a Snowy Owl has taken up residence. This is one of the most frequent sites for Snowy Owl in Uist and although the chances of bumping into one are thin, there are plenty of other birds to keep us amused. Good numbers of waders including Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Knot should be present as well as Barnacle Geese and Shelduck. We'll finish with a trip across the Committee Road where we hope to pick up Short-eared Owl, Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle.

Day 4: Today we head first to Loch Druidibeg to look for Black-throated Diver, Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier. We may also connect with an early Cuckoo around the small plantation which regularly attracts small numbers of migrants. Other birds could include Merlin and

Red-throated Diver whilst continuing to the end of the road we should be able to find Twite and maybe otters. We return to the main road before taking the turning at Stilligarry and explore the western edge of the loch where we should find a good variety of wildfowl. From here we do a loop walk across the machair to the coast and back via the Sand Martin colony on Drimsdale machair. This should provide a good variety of wildfowl and waders as well as Great Northern Diver along the coast. We'll continue north to Loch Bee which holds nationally important numbers of Mute Swans as well as plenty of other wildfowl such as Goldeneye and Scaup. We may also find summer plumage Slavonian Grebe here if we're lucky. Waders will include Lapwing, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Snipe, Redshank and Oystercatcher which all breed as well as Wigeon and Teal. Black-tailed Godwits are likely to be seen and large flocks sometimes congregate in this area whilst the machair can be alive with Golden Plover in their fine summer dress. White-tailed Eagle often venture over to the loch to hunt whilst Peregrine can also be seen. We head around the west side coming out at Ardivachar which regularly holds lots of migrant waders as does nearby North Bay and Balgarva. The whole area is excellent for migrant waders and we should also see a good variety of ducks and geese.

Day 5: On our last full day we'll head on to North Uist and take a walk out to Rubh' Arnal across the machair at the south-west end of North Uist. This area along with Balranald currently supports virtually all the remaining Corn Buntings in the Outer Hebrides and is also good for Twite and Skylark. Flocks of the latter winter here and attract other species such as Snow and Lapland Bunting which may be passing through at this time of year. On the coast we're likely to find pale-bellied Brent Geese as well as Great Northern Diver and possibly both Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. Merlins are often a feature here and we'll probably encounter large flocks of Golden Plover and Barnacle Geese. We'll take another look at Loch Sandary in the passing before calling in at the area around Balranald visitor centre just in case an early Corncrake has returned. Continuing around the north-west side of the island we'll pause at various sites to look for Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier as well as any migrant geese that may be refuelling in the area. Finally we'll cross the causeway to Baleshare on our way back to Benbecula to take a look at the freshwater lochs, fields and coast of this small island. We can expect to pick up Gadwall, Shoveler, Barnacle Geese, Black-tailed Godwit and Golden Plover amongst many others. White-tailed Eagles also spend a lot of time on the island so they could make a fitting end to a great day out.

Day 6: On our final day we'll try and pick up anything that we might have missed during the week so the day is flexible but if we already have cleaned up we shall take another look at Loch Eynort where we're sure to enjoy a good variety of raptors as well as Red-throated Diver and maybe otters.

Short list of species: Pale-bellied Brent Goose, Barnacle Goose, White-fronted Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Whooper Swan, Black-tailed Godwit, Golden Plover, Glaucous Gull, Iceland Gull, Pomarine Skua, Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Peregrine, Merlin, Red-

throated, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers. Black Guillemot, Corn Bunting, Snow Bunting, Lapland Bunting, Twite, plus many more. Red Deer, Grey and Common Seals, Otters. If the weather's calm enough we will set a moth trap to have a peek at some of the local night life. We may also catch up with the local and scarce Belted Beauty moth.

Dates: 13th - 18th April

Tour duration: 5 nights / 6 days on the islands.

Cost: £670 per person

Accommodation is provided in some of the best local guesthouses for 5 nights.

All meals are provided with evening meals taken in local hotels. If you have special dietary requirements please let us know when bookng.

Group size: 8 (maximum)

Booking: Please email: steveduffield70@gmail.com

Where to meet: The tour begins and ends in Uist. If you arrive by plane or as a foot passenger off the ferry we will be there to meet you and take you to your accommodation. If you arrive early and are already in the islands on the first day then you'll be picked up in the morning and we'll explore local habitats and wildlife whilst others arrive during the morning. On the last day we'll continue to search for wildlife until everyone has departed on their various flight / ferry connections.

Getting to the islands: It's possible to reach the islands by both air and by sea. Flybe operate regular flights from Glasgow to Benbecula although the earlier you book the cheaper the fare. Alternatively Calmac operate ferries between Uig, Skye - Lochmaddy, North Uist and from Oban - Lochboisdale, South Uist. Once on the islands I will be there to meet you and take you to your accommodation before we head into the field.

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