



## SCOTLAND ISLAY TOUR FEBRUARY 24th – 4th MARCH 2017

**Tour participants – Brian Buffery, Peter leach, Keith Barker, Adrian Roach, Philippa Randall and David Pelling**

**Norfolk Birding Tour Guide – Chris Mills**

### **24<sup>th</sup> February Premier Inn Glasgow**

I collected most of the group in Norfolk, plus two others in Newark and met up with the rest in Glasgow. We drove the minibus up to the outskirts of Glasgow where we spent an overnight stay in the Premier Inn at North Stepps.

### **25<sup>th</sup> February Glasgow – Kennacraig – Islay**

We left Glasgow Premier Inn on the Saturday morning at 7am. En-route we encountered plenty of **Herring** and **Common Gulls**, **Eider**, **Grey Heron**, **Oystercatcher**, **Curlew** and **Red-breasted Merganser** our first **Hooded Crows** of the trip all seen from the windows of the minibus. We had a good journey and arrived at Tarbet, just short of the Kennacraig ferry with plenty of time to spare. After a hearty full Scots breakfast, we had a walk around the harbour. It was a rather grey overcast morning with damp weather, though the heavier rain had abated and we had a nice introduction to the birding with good views of **Eider**, **Red-breasted Merganser** and some lovely close **Black Guillemot**. Above the harbour several **Buzzards** and a **Raven** were up and soaring.

We then headed to the ferry terminal, and with a bit of spare time before the ferry arrived we set about scanning the channel. An excellent selection of birds were to be found – several **Great Northern Diver**, **2 Red-throated Diver**, **3 Slavonian Grebe**, a **Common Scoter**, a group of **12 Red-breasted Merganser**, **1-2 Black Guillemot** and a very obliging **Rock Pipit** showed to a few feet.

The ferry crossing is always interesting for seabirds at this time of the year. It started off slowly, but totals by the time we reached Islay were good. Totals of **10 Red-throated Diver**, **25 Great Northern Diver**, **12 Black-throated Divers** all in a tight raft, **30+ Red-breasted Merganser**, also **Shag**, **Black Guillemot**, **Common Guillemot**, **Goldeneye**, **Kittiwake** and a selection of commoner waders, **Curlew**, **Redshank** and **Oystercatcher**.

Once on the island we stopped off several times to look through **Barnacle Geese** flocks, and also for the first groups of **Greenland White-fronted Geese**. **Ravens** and **Buzzards** were numerous! We made a brief stop in Bridgend for provisions and we eventually arrived at Kilchoman House and settled into our lovely big house and accommodation for the week. A quick walk before sunset provided the first **Chough**, around **30 Chough** were noisy and announcing their presence overhead, also several **Buzzard**.

We finished the day off with a good evening meal in Lochside Hotel, Port Charlotte.



Above © Black Guillemot Tarbet harbour 2017– Chris Mills  
Below © Common Eider Islay 2017– Chris Mills



Above © Red Deer Tarbet harbour 2017– Philippa Randall  
Below © Paps of Jura 2017– Philippa Randall

## **26th February Islay, Scotland**

The weather today started dry, but we had showers from late morning through till 3pm, but drier late afternoon.

A quick early morning walk around Kilchoman, produced the flock of **Choughs** again. There was a great flock of around **c100 Chaffinch** on Ian Brooke's feeders, also **Goldfinch** and several **Song Thrush** singing, the latter a very numerous bird on Islay. We then searched around Kilchoman, Ballinaby and Sanaigmore areas, several thousand **Barnacle Geese**, plus **Greenland White-fronted Geese** and also **Greylag Geese**. Several **Brown Hares** posed for us, and suddenly we were admiring a ringtail **Hen Harrier** as it swept across the road in front of us. Several **Stonechat**, plus **Lapwing** and **Ringed Plover**. There was a nice party of **Rock Pipits** along with a few **Meadow Pipits** on the roadside pools. The nearby ridge provided several **Raven**, **Buzzards** and **Hooded Crow** but Eagles remained elusive for the moment!

We then headed to Gruinart RSPB and had good views of many **Barnacle Geese** and **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, plus on the pools **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Wigeon**, **30+ Shoveler**, **Teal**, **50+ Pintail**, **Shelduck**, **Snipe** and **c2500 Golden Plover** were especially attractive as they twisted in the skies lit by the sunlight, along with **c500 Lapwing**. A nice group of **8 Whooper Swan** were also present and we had great close views of them from the hide.

After a lengthy period of searching, plus a false alarm, I eventually located the long-staying **Green-winged Teal** and we all had good scope views! By late morning the weather was not so good and closer to the forecast with heavy showers! It was time to head to the RSPB Gruinart centre and have a dry, warm lunch!

After lunch the rain had eased a little, though the skies looked threatening, so we headed down towards Ardnave Loch. We had a nice group of **c25 Reed Bunting** and a nice surprise was a **Jack Snipe** that was flushed. On Ardnave Loch there was a group of **Goldeneye**, **Tufted Duck**, **Teal** and **Wigeon**.

The weather improved late afternoon and we headed towards Kinnabus. As we were scanning we were treated to a beautiful male **Hen Harrier**, it drifted by nice and close, giving stunning views. A flock of **c100 Skylark**, were flushed and en-route back we had a few **Redwing** and **Fieldfare**.

Just as we arrived back at the accommodation, a superb immature **Golden Eagle** soared above the hillside, it disappeared briefly and then reappeared with a second **Golden Eagle** – a great end to the day!

We enjoyed an evening at the accommodation with an evening meal, and a glass of wine or beer!



Above © Oystercatcher Tarbet harbour 2017– Chris Mills  
Below © Purple Sandpiper Islay 2017– Chris Mills



Above © Brown Hare Islay 2017– Chris Mills  
Below © Common Seal Islay 2017– Philippa Randall

## **27<sup>th</sup> February Islay, Scotland**

By the morning, the weather had improved, dry but windy. For those who joined the early morning walk, the day started very well with a **Merlin** rushing by, but this was nothing compared with the unbelievable views of a young **Golden Eagle**. It soared past us at low level, it then dropped over the ridge, but appeared to have landed. A careful walk over provided exceptional views at around 30m, the **Golden Eagle** then took flight and drifted by at close range – fantastic views!

After breakfast we headed to the Loch Indaal bay. The water was not perfect due to the wind but we had an good selection of smaller numbers of birds, **Great Northern Diver**, **Red-throated Diver**, **Slavonian Grebe**, **Eider**, **Red-breasted merganser** and several **Goldeneye**. Along the shoreline there was **Wigeon**, plus **Dunlin**, **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Turnstone**. Along the shoreline there was a couple of **Pale-bellied Brent Geese**,

There was, of course thousands of **Barnacle Geese**. After a couple of hours of indulgence watching this fine array of wildfowl, we headed to Bunnahabain, in fine weather. This proved to be an excellent decision, Ken Reeves an Islay regular had already told us that Otters had been showing and on arrival we were not disappointed! There was **2 Otters**, feeding, rolling and out of the water – we had uninterrupted views for around 45 minutes. Whilst enjoying these wonderful mustelids, we were momentarily distracted as Tony picked out a pair of **Golden Eagle**. Which way to look!? After the Otters eventually disappeared, we lunched and also picked out **3 Goosander**, **3 Black Guillemot** and a young **Peregrine**. A brilliant morning of wildlife and birds!

We then headed out on the smaller roads at the north end of the island, we just couldn't stop bumping into **Golden Eagles**! We had at least **4+ Golden Eagles** including a great view, as one bird flew straight over our heads! Quite a few **Red Deer** were noted, including a small bachelor party of young stags. Several thousand **Barnacle Geese** took to the skies and provided a beautiful and audible spectacle! Another **Peregrine** dashed by and a larger flock of **c20 Fieldfare** were encountered!

An all round brilliant day! We enjoyed an evening at the accommodation with an evening meal, and a glass of wine or beer!

## **28<sup>th</sup> February Islay, Scotland**

We awoke to a big change in the weather with heavy showers in the morning, although it was much brighter and sunny in the afternoon

In the morning rain, we decided on a visit to Bruichladdich, the tide was about right and we were able to park up and scan. We soon found **5 Purple Sandpipers** in their favourite spot! Also in this area **Turnstone**, **Ringed Plover** and **Redshank**. Further along the shoreline we had several of the **Pale-bellied Brent Geese**. Plus a sprinkling of **Great Northern Diver** and **Red-breasted Mergansers** on the sea.

We took a short coffee break, to allow the weather to calm down! It eventually eased and we then explored the east shore of Gruinart from the minor road, using the minibus as a portable hide, it was now dry, but quite windy! Several stops and scanning produced a good selection of birds, **c100 Curlew**, **c100 Dunlin**, **6 Sanderling**, **c20 Turnstone**, **50+ Redshank**, plus numerous **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **4 Great Northern Divers** in the channel. Suddenly a large "lump" was found out on the mudflats, a check with the scope proved it to be a **White-tailed Sea Eagle!!** After some time it took to the air, with wildfowl

and geese scattering everywhere! Along the track, there was also **c20 Reed Bunting** and **c50 Skylark**, plus a small group of **Goldfinch** in the fields.

Just as we got the junction with the main road a female **Merlin** whipped across, and fortunately it landed up on the fence posts and posed nicely!

With all this raptor action happening, we decided to head over to the viewing platform on the opposite side at RSPB Gruinart. It proved to be a good decision! We scanned the ducks and found a pair of **Gadwall**, new for the trip. Next a lovely ringtail **Hen Harrier** jinxed along the floodbank, before returning back, and past us much closer! Next a **White-tailed Sea Eagle** moved slowly overhead, disturbing many birds in the distance! It eventually drifted off into the hills, letting the **Lapwing**, **Golden Plover** and wildfowl settle back down – but not for too long! Very soon another large bird of prey appeared, albeit well to the west of us, this time a **Golden Eagle**! A remarkable afternoon for raptors, but it still hadn't quite finished on arrival back at the accommodation, several **Buzzards**, a **Peregrine** and a quite amazingly **3 more Golden Eagles** an immature and 2 adults!

We celebrated with an evening meal in the Lochside Hotel bar at Bowmore, joining the Islay “bird nerds”, a gathering of birders and RSPB staff of Islay in an informal get together over a meal and a drink. Thanks to Ian and Margaret Brooke for asking us to join them see <http://islaybirds.blogspot.co.uk/>



© Golden eagle Kilchoman 2017– Chris Mills



Above © Golden Eagle 2017 – Chris Mills

Below © White-tailed Eagle with Buzzard 2017 – Chris Mills

## **1<sup>st</sup> March Islay, Scotland**

After breakfast we headed to the Loch Indaal bay. The water was like a glass mirror with no wind and perfect for looking for sea-duck, divers and grebes. We were not disappointed and had lovely views of an excellent selection of birds, **30+ Great Northern Diver**, **5+ Red-throated Diver**, **c20 Slavonian Grebe**, **c100 Eider**, **100+ Common Scoter**, **30+ Red-breasted merganser**, we had stunning views of **10 Long-tailed Duck** and several **Goldeneye**. Along the shoreline there was **Wigeon**, **Dunlin**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Turnstone** and **Pale-bellied Brent Geese**.

We stopped off at Bowmore for lunch and shopping. A scan from the pier produced good views of **9 Scaup**, a species that has massively declined in its wintering numbers on Islay.

We next headed towards Loch Skerrols, the road leading there had had Yellowhammer in the past, but no sign today. But a walk around the woodland in the sunshine was productive with **Goldcrest**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Coal Tit** and good views of **Treecreeper**. Also a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was drumming away. The loch hosted several **Goldeneye** and some **Tufted Duck**. A **Sparrowhawk** rushed by as we reached the Loch and 2 **Mistle Thrush** were in nearby fields, along with a big flock of **Chaffinch** plus **Meadow Pipits**, but no Yellowhammers! Incredibly another **Golden Eagle** an adult moved along the ridge, plus **Ravens** and **Buzzards** were much in evidence.

We next looked for Dippers at the woollen mill, but the previous weeks rain had forced the water levels too high, we had lunch at marvelled at the hundreds of tits and **Chaffinches** visiting the feed station.

We next searched for Geese, hoping to locate one of the Cackling Canada Geese but without success. But a large looking silhouette was on the skyline! It had us grinding to a halt and was a worthwhile stop! An immature **White-tailed Sea Eagle** flew overhead and it was then found perched on the ground, great scope views before it took to the air. Another **Peregrine** dashed by and a flock of **c100 Skylark** also held a single **Linnet**.

We finished the day off very successfully with a lovely short walk

We enjoyed an evening at the accommodation with an evening meal, and a glass of wine or beer!

## **2<sup>nd</sup> March Islay, Scotland**

The weather was a mixture of sunshine and showers today, but nothing too heavy!

We had a drive around Port Charlotte trying to locate the Cackling Canada Goose, seen the previous day, but despite looking through several large flocks of Barancl Geese, we still failed to see it! Though a stop off at freshwater pools near Port Charlotte bagged us the only **2 Moorhen** of the trip!

We the headed south to "THE OA", an area we had yet to visit. Twite had managed to avoid us up at the north end of the island, so they were a definite target species. They weren't too faraway, we only had to walk a short distance to the dedicated "fodder raddish" crop field, grown by the RSPB! A superb flock of **c120 Twite**, were present and they were up and down feeding in and out of the crop, also **40+ Skylark** were also enjoying the area. Suddenly, I heard a "ripple" call, initially it sounded like a Snow Bunting, a species we occasionally see on Islay. However, the second ripple was harsher and called out "**Lapland Bunting**". It sounded as if it had come down in amongst the flock of other birds. Brian located it in his scope and we were all able to get good views of the **Lapland Bunting** a scarce Islay visitor. A quick call to David Woods RSPB manager and he arrived complete with a couple of other members of staff, we left them admiring a really smart **Lapland Bunting**, just starting to acquire some summer plumage.

We then headed down towards the cliffs, after a short while we saw a **Golden Eagle**. It was just above the ridge, it then dropped down and landed and we were able to watch it, as it sat majestically peering across it's domain!

Down below on the cliffs many **Fulmars** were back at their nesting sites, as were several fearless **Mountain Goats**, whilst overhead **Chough** and **Raven** flew over calling. We walked back to the car park very satisfied and had lunch.

After lunch we then explored the SE road from Port Charlotte, we had lots of good views of **Great Northern Diver**, plus **Shag**, lots of **Curlew**, **Oystercatcher**, **Wigeon** and smaller numbers of **Black Guillemot**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Redshank**, **Turnstone** and **Rock Pipit**. Also several **Common Seals** were hauled out on the rocks.

We enjoyed our final evening in the Port Charlotte Hotel with a nice meal.

## **3rd March Islay, Scotland**

It was a leisurely drive to the ferry in more fine weather.

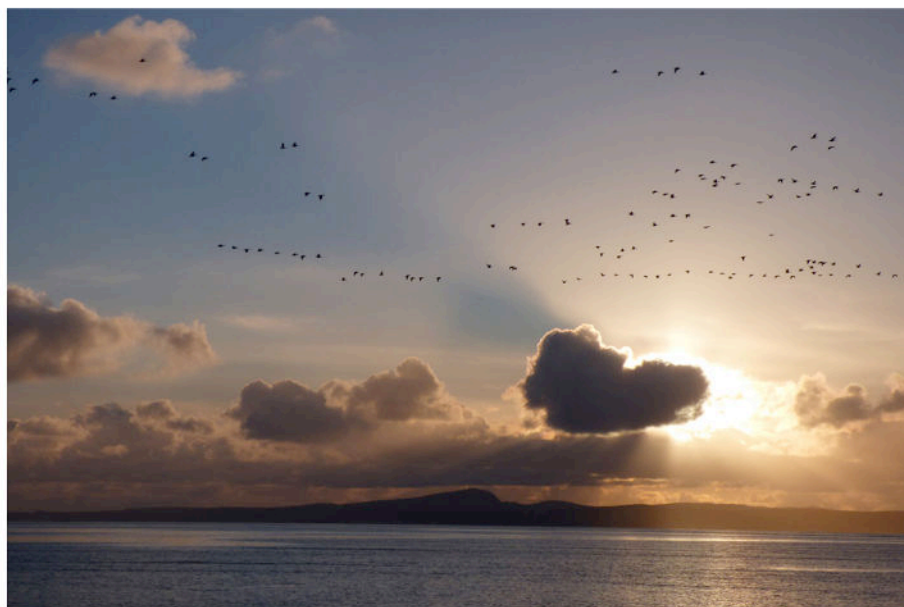
We boarded the ferry at 9.45, had a full breakfast and scanned the sea and channel on our return ferry journey. Birds were notably less numerous on the return leg but **6 Great Northern Diver**, **3 Red-throated Diver**, **Shag**, **Guillemot**, **Black Guillemot**, **Fulmar**, and several **Kittiwake**.

A great trip with 106 species of birds, with incredibly at least **30 Golden Eagle** sightings, **6 White-tailed Sea Eagles** plus lovely prolonged views of the **Otters**!

A list of birds seen on Islay and includes species seen en-route from Glasgow and during the ferry crossing from Kennacraig.



Above © Barnacle Geese adult & youngster Islay 2017– Chris Mills  
Below © Greenland White-fronted Goose Islay 2017– Chris Mills



Above © Barnacle Geese flocks Islay 2017– Chris Mills  
Below © Sunset & barnacle Geeselslay 2017– Philippa Randall

## Birds Systematic List

	Bird Species
1	Red-throated Diver
2	Black-throated Diver
3	Great Northern Diver
4	Little Grebe
5	Slavonian Grebe
6	Fulmar
7	Kittiwake
8	Northern Gannet
9	Great Cormorant
10	Shag
11	Grey Heron
12	Mute Swan
13	Whooper Swan
14	Greenland White-fronted Goose
15	Greylag Goose
16	Barnacle Goose
17	Pale-bellied Brent Goose
18	Shelduck
19	Eurasian Wigeon
20	Eurasian Teal
21	Green-winged Teal
22	Mallard
23	Pintail
24	Shoveler
25	Tufted Duck
26	Pochard
27	Greater Scaup
28	Common Eider
29	Long-tailed Duck
30	Common Scoter
31	Goldeneye
32	Goosander
33	Red-breasted Merganser
34	Golden Eagle
35	White-tailed Sea Eagle
36	Hen Harrier
37	Sparrowhawk
38	Buzzard
39	Kestrel
40	Peregrine
41	Merlin
42	Pheasant
43	Water Rail
44	Moorhen
45	Oystercatcher
46	Ringed Plover
47	Grey Plover
48	Golden Plover
49	Lapwing
50	Sanderling
51	Purple Sandpiper
51	Dunlin

52	Sanderling
53	Snipe
54	Jack Snipe
55	Bar-tailed Godwit
56	Curlew
57	Redshank
58	Knot
59	Turnstone
60	Black-headed Gull
61	Common Gull
62	Herring Gull
63	Great Black-backed Gull
64	Lesser Black-backed Gull
65	Kittiwake
66	Guillemot
67	Black Guillemot
68	Rock Dove
69	Woodpigeon
70	Collared Dove
71	Great Spotted Woodpecker
72	Skylark
73	Meadow Pipit
74	Rock Pipit
75	Grey Wagtail
76	Pied Wagtail
77	Wren
78	Dunnock
79	Robin
80	Stonechat
81	Blackbird
82	Song Thrush
83	Redwing
84	Fieldfare
85	Mistle Thrush
86	Goldcrest
87	Coal Tit
88	Blue Tit
89	Great Tit
90	Long-tailed tit
91	Treecreeper
92	Magpie
93	Red billed Chough
94	Jackdaw
95	Rook
96	Carrion Crow
97	Hooded Crow
98	Raven
99	Common Starling
100	House Sparrow
101	Common Chaffinch
102	Greenfinch
103	Goldfinch
104	Linnet

105	Twite
106	Bullfinch
107	Reed Bunting
108	Lapland Bunting

	<b>Mammals</b>
1	Common Seal
2	Grey Seal
3	Otter
4	Roe Deer
5	Red Deer
6	Mountain Goat
7	Brown Hare
8	Rabbit

**Next tour February 2018 – please contact us for details.**

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