

Mull

23rd - 30th April 2011 – Chris Barlow



A long overdue birding holiday to Mull spending a week with the family based in a self catering cottage (Kellan Mill) on the shore of Loch Na Keal. Rain on the first morning, dry warm and sunny although windy for the week except 28th when still and cloudy.

Sites visited during the week

Loch Na Keal, 24th & 25th

Pulling in anywhere round the loch often proved rewarding, each bay held a pair of Great Northern Divers in the first part of the week, the scrub and small patches of reeds held increasing numbers of vocal warblers and Cuckoos were heard regularly. Oystercatchers and Whimbrels were common but the star of the area was undoubtedly the White-tailed Eagles, with 2 adults and a 1st year juvenile both seen in flight together one afternoon and another seen regularly especially when the wildlife cruise boat was around on the Friday morning when it went to the boat 4 times, we opted out of paying £30 for the trip after watching from the shore on Monday when it went for a single fish and took that a long way from the boat.

Calgary, 25th & 26th

2 Great Northern Divers from the old ruined pier was the highlight here. A very vocal Song Thrush sang throughout the morning of the 26th and a male Whitethroat made his presence known at the foot of the cliffs by the pier. Sand Martins were nesting in the dunes.

Tobermory area & Aros Park 26th & 29th

North of Tobermory gave us our first glimpses of Hen Harriers while the Forestry Commission site of Aros Park just south of the town gave outstanding views of Wood Warblers which favoured the area around the south of the loch and a singing Tree Pipit in the open area found by following the path up the hill just past the play area at the northern end. 4 Treecreepers on the same tree on the 29th was the only time we saw them on the trip.

Iona, Uisken Bay, Loch Scridain 27th

The longest trip of the holiday saw us drive to Iona, the roads resulting in a 35 mile journey taking around 1 ½ hours to get the 9.30am ferry. Strong winds on the island initially saw no success looking for Corncrakes but as we passed St Columba Hotel we heard one calling and looking over the wall into the garden found it stood just off the edge of the grass. It was accompanied by another non calling bird and they headed into the field below the hotel. During the rest of the time on the island a further 4-5 birds were heard calling without further sightings, despite in one case being probably less than 10 feet from it. Returning by the same route we detoured to Uisken Bay where a very confiding male Twite was singing from the lobster pots. At Loch Scridain we found the most confiding male Wheatear I've ever encountered and in the space of 1 mile we saw 1 White-tailed Eagle, 2 Buzzards and 2 Golden Eagles.

Ulva – 28th

A short trip on the ferry took us onto Ulva, by reputation an excellent place for Hen Harriers, Wood Warblers and Tree Pipits although the latter two if present were silent. Grasshopper Warblers were briefly seen in one location and heard in a further four. Blackcaps were also widespread. After reaching the moorland areas near to Livingstone's Cottage we were finally rewarded by views of a pair of Hen Harriers while a further female was performing the sky diving display at the male constantly.

29th - Loch Ba

An afternoon visit brought an equally confiding female Wheatear and two very vocal Common Sandpipers. A strong wind whipping down the loch forced an early end to the walk although 2 Golden Eagles were being mobbed by 2 Buzzards high above the path. Stopped to watch a Cormorant struggle with a huge fish and was rewarded by the only sighting of the week of an Otter which then came on shore and ran to within touching distance of where I was lying before returning to the water for 30 minutes when a group of walkers scared it off. A scarcely believable end to an excellent week as Mull lived up to its reputation as one of the top wildlife locations in the UK.



Species List

Great Northern Diver –8 were in the bay in front of the cottage at dusk on 27th but all seemed to disappear from Loch Na Keal after that. Two in Calgary Bay on 26th



Great Northern Diver – Calgary Bay

Black Throated Diver - 1 on 27th with the Great Northern flock
Gannet - 1 on 30th from the ferry leaving Craignure
Cormorant - small numbers most days
Shag - daily in Loch Na Keal
Grey Heron - daily everywhere
Pink-footed Goose - Flock of 30+ flew north past Ulva on 28th
Greylag - flock at Loch Na Keal
Shelduck - pair in Loch Na Keal
Mallard
Eider - Bunessan on 27th
Red-breasted Merganser - daily in Loch Na Keal

Hen Harrier - pair near Tobermory on 26th, 3 (1 male) on Ulva 28th



Female Hen Harrier – Ulva 28th

Sparrowhawk - Loch Na Keal 25th, Ulva 28th
Buzzard

White-tailed Eagle - seen around Loch na Keal most days, with 3 birds seen in the air together on afternoons of 23rd and 25th, another near Loch Scridain on 27th



White-tailed Eagle – Loch Na Keal, 29th April

Golden Eagle - Loch Na Keal on 24th & 25th, 2 over the Gruline cliffs on 27th



Golden Eagle – Loch Na Keal, 25th April



Gruline Cliffs, 27th April

Osprey - Salen on 23rd

Kestrel - 24th mobbing Golden Eagle

Pheasant

Corncrake - 2 seen on Iona on 27th, 4 others heard calling at different places around the island



Corncrake – Iona, 27th April

Oystercatcher

Lapwing

Curlew

Whimbrel - 2 in Loch Na Keal the whole week, 2 at Fishnish on 30th

Redshank

Common Sandpiper

Snipe
Black Headed Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Black Guillemot - 3 in Oban harbour on 23rd
Woodpigeon

Rock Dove - pair at the cottage at Loch Na Keal with 'genuine' plumage, ferals around Craignure



Rock Dove – Loch Na Keal

Collared Dove
Cuckoo - numbers increased during week, seen once at Loch Na Keal
Skylark
Sand Martin - colony at Calgary Bay
Swallow
Rock Pipit - Loch Na Keal

Tree Pipit - 1 singing at Aros Park 26th and 29th A



Tree Pipit – Aros Park 26th April

Meadow Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Wren
Dunnock
Robin

Northern Wheatear



Northern Wheatear – Male Loch Scridain, 27th April



Female – Loch Ba, 29th April

Blackbird
Song Thrush - 1 at Calgary Bay 26th
Mistle Thrush
Grasshopper Warbler - heard at Loch Na Keal 25th and on Ulva on 28th
Sedge Warbler - Loch Na Keal

Whitethroat



Male Whitethroat – Calgary Bay

Blackcap

Wood Warbler - singing and displaying at Aros Park 26th & 29th



Wood Warbler – Aros Park 29th April

Willow Warbler
Chiffchaff - one calling near Ulva Ferry the only one all week
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Coal Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Trecreeper – 4 together in Aros Park on 29th
Starling
Jackdaw
Raven - 2 on cliffs between Ulva Ferry and Kellan, others seen on various days
Hooded Crow
Rook - only noticed on Iona 27th
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Siskin
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Bullfinch - female at Fisnish 30th

Twite - 2 (1 male) at Uisken Bay 27th



Twite – male at Uisken Bay, 27th April

Linnet
Yellowhammer

Total: 78 Species

Otter on 29th at Loch Ba
Seals in Loch Scridain and Loch Ba