



**SCOTLAND: Highlands & Inner Hebrides**  
**June 10-23, 2017**  
**Trip Report and Photos by Toby Green and Adrian Binns**

**Day 1 / Saturday 10th June**

Johnny met Rochana and Adrian at Inverness Airport at midday, but sadly Linda and Elaine missed their connection. We proceeded into Inverness where we collected Marcia, Brooke and Tom and with three of our group assembled Johnny suggested we go see if we could find a Woodchat Shrike, a rare migrant from southern Europe. For the previous couple of days the shrike had been seen on the Strath Dearn, as since Marcia had been in Inverness for those day she had already been to see it! Unfortunately it seemed that we were a day late as neither us nor those that had been there all morning had seen it. However, we enjoyed our first looks at Eurasian Curlews (*right*), Oystercatchers, Redshank, Red-legged Partridge and Pheasant.



Arriving mid afternoon at Nethy Bridge we checked into the Mountview and enjoyed a cup of tea! A short walk into the village and along the Nethy River produced Blue Tit, Eurasian Collared Dove, Common Swift and House Martin. Meanwhile, after a long roundabout journey Linda and Elaine had finally made it, much to their relief.

**Day 2 / Sunday 11th June**

The first full day of our trip was concentrating on the local area and we began by heading to Broomhill Bridge where we had two male Wigeon in the flooded fields and several Lapwing and Oystercatcher. Down by the river we had a large number of Sand Martins and a Grey Wagtail. Best of all, we had good views of a Dipper which flew into its nest, followed by a great sight of a Dipper with food landing on the small island just out from us. We also spotted three Brown Hare on the opposite side of the river.



We arrived at Inverlaidnan and drove round the whole wood but unfortunately didn't find any Capercaillie, but we did see Tree Pipit and Spotted Flycatcher. A quick stop at Tomatain gave us good views of an Oystercatcher family with two young chicks and a brief Red Kite sighting. We drove to Garbole in Strath Dearn and had lunch where we saw a Common Tern, several Red-legged Partridge and Mistletoe Thrush. The fields had a number of Curlew and Oystercatcher. On the drive back down the glen, we had a Sparrowhawk and Kestrel.

We got a call from another guide to say he had seen a female Capercaillie (*left*), so we drove back to Inverlaidnan and were soon enjoying views of a stunning female - she had a chick but we were unable to get views of it. Very pleased with seeing one of our main targets we set off to Carrbridge to see the old packhorse bridge built in 1717, before walking down the Dulnain River and up to the woods. On the walk we spotted Willow Warbler, Song Thrush and Goldfinch. Toby's garden had good numbers of Siskin on the feeders along with Goldfinch and Greenfinch and several Coal Tit. The woods had a family group of Treecreeper and a juvenile Crested Tit - although we all saw it we agreed we would like better views!

We finished the day up at Dorback where we had good views of Mountain Hare and Red Grouse along with a number of calling Curlews. We headed back to the Mountview already looking forward to tomorrow's birds.

### Day 3 / Monday 12th June

This morning we took advantage of the sunny weather despite the still high winds and went for a walk through the Abernethy pinewoods. We stopped at some feeders and were immediately rewarded with a fine male Bullfinch and at least two Crested Tit (*right*) which showed really well, even allowing scope views. A Red Squirrel came into the trees by the feeders but didn't come down to them. On the walk we had an elusive Jay which showed in flight several times. We came to a small clearing where two Spotted Flycatchers and a stunning male Redstart showed but quickly disappeared into the denser trees. A Tree Pipit was in full song here and two Crossbills were heard flying over. We visited the RSPB reserve at Loch Garten where a Treecreeper showed well and we had a Bank Vole run in front of us. Up at the Centre a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were well appreciated as they came to the feeders allowing prolonged views. Good numbers of Siskin, Chaffinch and Coal Tit were also present here.



We drove just a short distance down the road before stopping to listen for Crossbills, but instead had a superb male Redstart which this time sat for us giving us a chance to admire it through the scope, also two Spotted Flycatchers and a singing Wren were seen well at this spot.

Our next stop was the lovely Craigellachie National Nature Reserve. We walked up through the Birchwood and soon had our first target species, a Wood Warbler collecting food - it showed well but was soon flying back to its nest. Along the top Lochan we had Common Spotted Orchid and the loch was busy with many Four-spotted Chasers. We reached the area for our next target species and did not have to wait long before a cracking male Pied Flycatcher turned up, it eventually gave good views to all the group. We also heard a distant Cuckoo calling but it was too far away to try to pin down. We found a very strange fungi which was later identified as the species *Lycogala epidendrum* with several clusters of strange reddish spheres on some rotting Silver Birch.



The afternoon we had a complete change of scenery as we headed up onto the Dava Moor. We had several good views of Red Grouse (*left*) and a very close look at a family group, the tiny chicks clambering around in the dense grass and heather. At Lochindorb we had good views of a pair of Black-throated Diver - nice to see them both but unfortunately a sign that their nest had probably failed, as usually at this time only one bird would be out fishing. As we drove along the loch we had young Lapwing and a single Redshank; a male Reed Bunting was unusual at the loch side. Our day was coming to an end but we had a couple of stops, one to watch a Red Squirrel digging up a stashed Acorn and another stop to watch a Dunnock feeding out in the open, sometimes a difficult bird to see so well.

Another good day came to an end but we were looking forward to a trip up Cairngorm in the morning.

### Day 4 / Tuesday 13th June

Thankfully the weather was looking good this morning, so after breakfast we headed straight up to Cairngorm and started our walk up the mountain. We soon had our first Ring Ouzel, a fine male but he flew and we lost sight of him. We continued up the access track seeing several more Ring Ouzel and at least three Mountain Hares allowing us really good scope views. At the top of the Zigzags we had a very confiding male Ptarmigan which sat on the snow fence for some time - we were able to approach it closely, enjoying its lovely summer plumage of mottled greys and flecks of brown and the clean white underparts. A number of Black Mountain Moths were on the wing and we had a high flying Osprey overhead.





We reached the Ptarmigan cafe and top station (*above*) and walked over the plateau for a while climbing up towards the summit of Cairngorm. We stopped to scan and Toby picked out two lovely Dotterel (*right*). We stayed where we were and were rewarded with one bird, a female walking towards us giving us very close views! We were very happy with this so we decided to head down but were stopped in our tracks by another pair of Dotterel, this time both birds crossed the path in front of us and we enjoyed even closer views of these stunning mountain birds! It gave us the chance to compare the male and female plumage, with the male having a duller tone and less colourful belly than the female but both sporting the distinctive white supercilium meeting at the back of the head. Some of the plants seen on the mountain included Dwarf Cornel, Cloudberry, Butterwort and Sundew.



We were able to get the train back down the mountain after our strenuous walk and our timing was perfect as the rain came on just as we arrived back at the van. We drove back to Nethybridge but on route stopped at the wildflower Meadow near Street of Kincardine where we had Lesser Butterfly, Small White, Common Spotted and Heath Fragrant Orchids, there were also a number of Mountain everlasting near to the fence.

We spent the afternoon in the forest looking for Crossbills but although it was quiet, we did enjoy the stunning old Caledonian Pine woods around the Forest Lodge area. We retired back to the Mountview after a fantastic day's birding.

Day 5 / Wednesday 14th June

A total change of scene today saw us driving up to Macduff. The drive was fairly uneventful with a brief stop at a roadside pool gave us views of a couple of Common Teal and a singing Sedge Warbler. We stopped at the Deveron river mouth to scan the Gulls and were amazed to see a second year Iceland Gull in amongst them. A very late bird indeed!

We drove on to Macduff and after a cup of tea we boarded the *Sea Cap* and headed out along the coast towards Troup Head. It wasn't long before we were seeing our first groups of Guillemot and a few Black Guillemot. As we passed Gardens Town nearing the head itself the numbers increased dramatically, with colonies of Shag, Cormorant, Fulmar and Kittiwake. Hundreds of Razorbills and Guillemot were on the water and flying around and as we approached the headland the noise and commotion from the Gannetry (*right*) filled the air along with the unmistakable smell of guano! We were blown away by the sheer numbers of birds on show here with literally thousands of birds in the air and surrounding us on the water!



We left the Gannetry behind and spent some time surrounded by more Razorbills and Guillemots, but the stars here were the tiny Kittiwake chicks up on the nest ledges not far above us.

We motored further east enjoying the spectacular rock architecture before slowing again with good numbers of Puffins around us although they weren't as keen on the boat as the other auks so the views were not as close. We had an enjoyable trip back further out with some close Gannets before we berthed again in Macduff.

The next part of our day was a drive down to the Ythan Estuary. On the way we had a couple of good sightings of Corn Bunting with one singing right outside the van. We arrived at the Ythan and scanned from Inches point where we had close views of Sandwich, Arctic and Little Terns and several Eiders.



We drove round to the golf course and walked out to the fishermen's huts spotting Yellowhammer on route. On the opposite shore we had hundreds of Arctic and Sandwich Terns mobbing the warden who was probably ringing (banding) the chicks. There were hundreds of Eider here and we soon had our main target, the drake King Eider (*left*) in our scopes, now all we needed was for it to wake up! Eventually it did, showing us its fine orange shield above its bill and the lovely grey head pattern. We were also treated to close Little Terns fishing just metres away and both Grey and Common Seal were in the river. A muddy section of shore gave us a chance to get good views of Dunlin and Ringed Plover along with Oystercatchers and a couple of Shelduck.

We had a long drive ahead of us so we set off stopping at the Speyside Cooperidge to photograph the huge stacks of Oak barrels in their yard. We arrived back at the Mountview ready for a good meal and relaxing evening.

## Day 6 / Thursday 15th June

We started the day with an early drive to Dorback (*right*) where after a short time we managed to see a single Black Grouse, it was looking like it had well and truly started moulting. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was on the feeders by the roadside.



We returned to the Mountview for a good breakfast before loading the van ready to head to Mull. We drove west over Laggan-side stopping to admire Ardverikie Castle (*left*) and Laggan dam on the way and finding two Slow Worms basking in the sun. We stopped for tea overlooking Loch Linnhe before boarding the Corran ferry. Once on Morven we stopped to watch the Black Guillemot colony at the old pier and also had our first Rock Pipit of the trip.



We continued on to Seal Bay where we had lunch watching the Common Tern colony and all the Harbour Seals (*right*) hauled out on the islands. The sea was fairly quiet with only a single Red-throated Diver being seen. We drove on down to the minor road towards Kingairloch seeing Red-breasted Merganser and Ringed Plover and also Wheatear and Rock Pipit on route.

We spotted a Buzzard mobbing something on a ridge and setting the scopes up saw it was an adult White-tailed Eagle sitting, we watched it until it eventually flew off and over the ridge line. The weather was by now turning very wet and misty but we had a brief stop to look at Lesser Butterfly, Heath Fragrant and Heath Spotted Orchids and Butterwort and Bog Asphodel before dropping down to Lochaline. We had female Goosander on the river Aline before arriving for the ferry ready to drive on and depart.



The journey over to Fishnish on Mull was relatively quiet with visibility now limited in the rain and mist so we headed straight to the hotel to check in. With a slight break in the weather we decided to head back out for an hour or so up to Loch na Keal. We had a good scan of the bay where we picked out a Greenshank which we walked closer to and got good views. An adult White-tailed Eagle sat on a pine in the woods behind us showing well but a distant Golden Eagle being mobbed by two Buzzards didn't stick around so was only seen by a few of the group. Our final notable bird here was a Whitethroat which sat up for us just long enough to get decent views before disappearing into the thick scrub. We returned to the Glen Forsa hotel ready for a meal and relaxing evening.

#### Day 7 / Friday 16th June

Today we were travelling to the Ulva ferry slipway to head out to the Treshnish Isles of Lunga and Staffa. But before that, we had a walk before breakfast where we had a singing Blackcap, two Spotted Flycatchers and a family party of Great Tit, a number of Goldfinch were flirting about and a juvenile Willow Warbler flew past us. On the shore we had a large number of Greylag and a couple of Canada Geese. Three Red-breasted Merganser were fishing in the bay and a distant Buzzard was spotted sitting on a very thin dead tree.

After breakfast we drove along the south shore of Loch na Keal where we had a family group of Stonechat and a couple of Wheatear. We had Shelduck and Ringed Plover on the rocky shore and a hybrid Canada Greylag Goose. As we drove back towards the Ulva turn off we found a group of Redpoll which showed well on the roadside trees and telephone wires, several birds were sporting fine red breasts and bright red foreheads.

Unfortunately once again the visibility was bad and rain was ever present, a very dreich [Scottish for dull, depressing] day. The trip out to the islands was spent inside the cabin out of the foul weather except to view a White-tailed Eagle which was perched up close to its nest site.



We arrived at Lunga and after negotiating the slippery rocks we made our way up to the Puffin colony. With the visibility so bad we stayed around the Puffins, as we were unable to even see the sea bird cliff! But we had a great time watching the Puffins come and go and digging out the burrows, we only saw a handful of birds come in with Sand Eels, possibly a sign of a poor breeding season? There were a number of Razorbills amongst the Puffins and a good number of Rock Pipits. We did get views of Wheatear but the only Great Skua was seen by just two of the group.

We reboarded the boat and headed down to Staffa (*right*) which was very impressive today with the heavy swell and dark moody skies. We had an hour or so to land and all of the group did the walk along to the entrance of Fingal's Cave enjoying the sound of the waves crashing into the large cavern. Bird wise the highlight was a displaying Snipe and the Shags nesting in a small cave by the pier.



The journey back to the Ulva slipway was much calmer than the outward trip and we were soon back in the van heading to the hotel to warm up and dry out and looking forward to another excellent meal!

Day 8 / Saturday 17th June

We awoke to grey skies and very low cloud and drizzle again but our pre-breakfast walk turned up a small group of Long-tailed Tit, a single Grey Wagtail and once again a Blackcap was singing but didn't show for us. After a filling breakfast we jumped in the van and drove towards Glen More. The visibility and rain was against us again so we just headed to the road down to Iona. The weather cleared a little for us and we managed to get our best views so far of Red-throated Diver which came quite close to the shore at one point, giving us a chance to really see the red throat patch. Further on we had a male Stonechat sitting on a fence and a fly-over female Hen Harrier.



We parked up and boarded the ferry to Iona (*above*) on foot. We walked up through the nunnery and on past the Abbey to the croft land beyond; the weather had really come in again and we didn't hear a single Corncrake calling, but we did see many Wheatear with lots of young birds and a brief flock of Linnet.

We walked back toward the Abbey and a few of the group went in for a look around. The rest of the group walked down to the meadows near the village but again the weather was against us and we didn't hear any birds, most unusual but probably down to the prolonged bad weather. We did however get good views of Linnet which showed well on the fence round the field.



We returned to Mull and stopped at Loch Poit na h-I where a Whooper Swan was a nice surprise. Back at the head of Loch Scridain we had very close views of a family group of Redshank (*left*) which were perched along the roadside fence posts. With the weather once again closing in we decided to head back to the hotel to dry out and enjoy another fantastic meal.



Day 9 / Sunday 18th June

We abandoned the pre-breakfast walk as the rain was quite hard but after breakfast we drove up to Loch na Keal as the weather finally looked like it was going to break. We stopped at the head of the loch and were soon enjoying good views of two Golden Eagles, one landed on the ridge and we were able to scope it and really see the golden head and rich brown body plumage. The Redpolls were flying around again and a couple of Snipe were displaying over head. The Eagles flew off over the ridge so we jumped back in the van and drove on down the loch side. We stopped as an Otter had been spotted on a small island so we set up the scopes and had lovely views of three Otters rolling around in the seaweed, surely a mother with two well grown cubs!

Further down the loch we had two Red-throated Divers and three Red-breasted Mergansers and another two Otters, although they were feeding non-stop, moving further away from us on the incoming tide. We stopped for tea overlooking Inch Kenneth and views out to the Treshnish Isles clearly seeing where we had been two days ago.



We headed over the pass and into Glen Scridain where Adrian spotted an Eagle over the ridge, it was an adult Golden Eagle and as we got out of the van it landed and we were able to get really good scope views while it was being mobbed by Ravens, showing clearly the sheer size of the Eagle. What a day for Eagles! As we dropped down the Glen we had two perched White-tailed Eagles, both adults which showed really well, looking like they were drying out while the weather was better. We dropped down to Loch Scridain and drove up to the head of the loch where we spotted another Otter - this one a big dog. It swam to a small island and pulled out onto it giving us fantastic views as it rolled around and then sprinted before slipping back into the water and disappearing. As we ate lunch a female Hen Harrier flew over briefly and a number of Red-breasted Merganser were fishing further out on the loch.

Moving on into Glen More we had two male Whinchat, one was very close to the road, which gave us the chance to really see the clean white supercilium and the orange flush to the breast. Also here were a male Reed Bunting and Stonechat. With the weather closing in again we drove off but stopped for a very wet but very confiding Short-eared Owl sitting on a close fence post. We had one more White-tailed Eagle which disappeared into thick cloud in a corrie so we headed on to the ferry at Fishnish and back to the mainland.

As we came into Lochaline we had a dog Otter fishing not far from the ferry, our seventh Otter of the day. We stopped briefly by the road to look at Greater Butterfly and Northern Marsh Orchid before driving along Loch Sunart and on to Strontian. We stopped for tea there but it was fairly quiet with only a few of the hybrid Mallard/Black Duck and a female Goosander of interest. We drove onto Acharacle and checked into our hotel.

After dinner we reboarded the van back to Strontian and then over the high pass to Polloch, hoping to see the elusive Pine Martens (*right*). We parked up over looking the feeding area and amazingly within ten minutes we had our first sighting which looked like a female, she took some food then disappeared under the van. In no time at all she was back but we had to wait another forty minutes for our next sighting and then had four visits in quick succession! We left very pleased with our day but feeling quite tired and ready for a restful night back at the hotel.



Day 10 / Monday 19th June

Today we had another boat trip arranged, so after breakfast we drove up to Arisaig to catch the *Sheerwater* out to Eigg and Muck. The weather was much better today with the promise of blue skies later on. We arrived early so spent a little time at the Back of Keppoch where we had Lapwing, Redshank and a Skylark singing from a post. We drove back over to the marina and after a cup of tea we boarded the boat and were soon under way.

As we passed the Skerries (small islets) we had good views of the Harbour Seal colony and a few Arctic Terns flew over us. We motored out into the open sea which was fairly calm with only a small swell. The views really began to open out as the cloud lifted revealing the impressive An Sgurr, the large sugar loaf rock stack on Eigg and behind, the Rum Cullin mountains. We had a few distant views of Manx Shearwater and several Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin, a brief pod of Harbour Porpoise were also spotted. We berthed on Eigg for a short while, spotting Arctic Tern and a Red-throated Diver and a displaying Rock Pipit.

We were soon underway again and things started to really hot up with the Skipper spotting a Minkie Whale (*right*). We motored towards the area and had fantastic views of at least two Minkie, their characteristic long back and short fin easily seen as they surfaced a good number of times close to the boat. Around the same area were a number of Gannets and a lone Great Skua.



We finally landed on Muck (*left*) (Isle of Pigs - referring to the Gaelic for Porpoise, the Sea Pig), in bright sun and fantastic warm conditions. We walked up the only road to the meadows. We stopped to listen to the calling Corncrake here for some time but in the long grasses it was going to be difficult to see them. A Spotted Flycatcher was in the roadside trees and several Wheatear families along the fences. Further along the road we had three Corncrake calling, one very close to the road but again the vegetation was so long we had to content our selves with only hearing their rasping calls. Our furthest point of our walk gave us good views out to the Outer Hebrides of the Uists and south Harris and a very confiding pair of Skylark.

Our return journey to Eigg saw us spotting another Minkie Whale but much further out than the previous ones. Berthing again at Eigg we had some time to wait as the boat slowly filled with people that had been at the festival to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the community buyout of Eigg from a private land owner! As we waited we had fantastic views of Peregrine playing with the Herring Gulls and eventually flying away from them effortlessly. A surprise male Hen Harrier also flew in, but not as close as the Peregrine! We arrived back at Arisaig and enjoyed a very scenic drive back to Acharacle with several stops for photos on route as the mountains and lochs looked fantastic in the evening light.

Day 11 / Tuesday 20th June

We gathered before breakfast for a short stroll to the lochside and were greeted by a stunning vista of mirror calm waters and clear blue skies in the fantastic morning light. A few Tufted Duck, three Teal and a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers were on the water, with Common Sandpiper, Sand and House Martin, Song Thrush, Siskin and Redpoll also noted.

After breakfast we drove to the edge of the village where a stunning display of Greater Butterfly (*right*), Heath Spotted and Northern Marsh Orchids were just on the roadside. Our destination today was Ardnamurchan, so we headed west at Salen onto the windy road out to the point. We stopped at Glen Borrowdale Castle for photos of this neo gothic Victorian sandstone building, very impressive but seemingly empty!





At Ben Hiant (*right*) we stopped to scan the hillsides, a few Redpoll were flying around calling and a male Reed Bunting was singing nearby. We netted a Green Veined White butterfly and had a close look at its delicate veined underwings. We drove further up the Glen and before long had two White-tailed Eagles in the scope, an adult and a second year bird. We drove round the north side of Ben Hiant and stopped as an adult White-tailed Eagle flew over the road, the pull in proved rather fruitful with Small Heath Butterfly and Chimney Sweeper moth both being netted, but the star of the show here was a fantastic Beautiful Demoiselle a stunning green and blue dragonfly! It showed well in the fantastic sunshine sitting out in the open for us to admire and photograph. As we drove off two more very distant White-tailed Eagles flew off and then behind the mountains.



We finally arrived at the lighthouse and with an extensive view from Coll to the Outer Hebrides and the small isles, we sat and enjoyed our lunch. A distant Minkie Whale surfaced and a small number of sea birds including a dark morph Arctic Skua flew by. We added Meadow Brown and Common Blue Butterfly, with Toby netting two of the latter allowing very close views. Several Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary flitted about and on our drive back we had a flight of Northern Eggar moths. A very distant Golden Eagle was perched on a ridge and at a small roadside Loch we had a single Tufted Duck and great views of Whinchat, Stonechat and a Reed Bunting. At Kilchoan we stopped to look at some Linnets which were joined by a Twite which eventually everyone managed to see.

The drive back was fairly quiet but with the extensive views to absorb, the lack of birds didn't seem to matter too much. Our final bird spot of the day was a Snipe feeding outside the dining room as we had dinner. Another fabulous day with some of the most stunning views in Scotland!

Day 12 / Wednesday 21st June

This morning we bade farewell to the Ardnamurchan peninsular and drove round Moidart and onto the dramatic Glen Finnan. We were able to spend a bit of time admiring the view down Loch Shiel from the Jacobite standard monument, where Charles Edward Stuart rallied the Jacobite sympathisers in 1745. We were also treated to a more modern reason for this famous place, the Glen Finnan viaduct (*right*) where the Hogwarts Express passed over in every Harry Potter film and even better, we had a steam train pass over it as we watched!



We drove to the white sands of Morar where we stopped for a cuppa, there was not much doing on the estuary but that was no surprise considering the amount of holiday makers on the beach. At Mallaig we stopped just before the town and viewed the sound of Sleat, where several groups of Manx Shearwaters were going into the mouth of Loch Nevis along with good numbers of Gannet.

The ferry trip to Skye gave us the chance to see more Manx Shearwaters at closer range. We arrived on Skye and drove the Tokavaig loop road; our first stop gave us close views of Ringed Plover but the bay was fairly quiet so we drove to Tokavaig where we had Red-throated Diver, Ringed Plover and two Twite landed close but all too briefly as they flew along the shore and then out of sight. By now the skies had darkened and as we drove round the heavens opened and we decided to head onto Kyleakin and get checked into our hotel.

Day 13 / Thursday 22nd June

We started the day with a moth trapping session at Phil's house at Drumfern where we had an amazing haul of moths (see species recorded list) - in all 52 species with some highlights being Poplar and Elephant Hawkmoth (*right*), Bufftip, the incredible camouflaged Pepper Moth and Shark to name just a few. We were all pretty impressed with the variety and thanks to Phil for his time in doing this for us! We travelled on to Loch Sligachan and the view up into the Black Cuillin with Sgurr nan Gilleann and Am Basteir poking out of the cloud making a stunning sight. Down on the loch side we had a number of Red-breasted Merganser and a single Greenshank along with Oystercatcher and Mallard.



We drove to Talisker where the unhelpful staff told us it would be at least an hour and a half for a tour so we decided to give it a miss but we did enjoy very good views of a pair of Grey Wagtails collecting food. We drove over the Leacan Nighean an t-Siosalaich pass through the centre of Skye, stopping at its high point for lunch before descending into Portree.



We drove round by the Storr (*above*) following the Trotternish ridge along the side of a huge collapsed mountain. At Staffin we spent some time watching the Great Skua colony with several birds flying close overhead. Two Red-throated Divers came very close to the shore allowing really good scope views. Once again the weather was closing in but our time was also running out so we headed back down the island but first up through the impressive Quiraing, an area of incredible rock formations and then back past Sligachan and then Broadford before arriving back at our hotel for our final night together.

Day 14 / Friday 23rd June



We awoke to rain again and after loading the van we drove back onto the mainland and our first stop Eilean Donan Castle where some photos were taken before we all took cover back in the van. The drive up Glen Shiel was very wet and windy so we pressed on to Loch Ness and to Urquhart Castle (*left*). We enjoyed a film and tour round the ruins of this amazing building with a very turbulent past, we heard Chiffchaff singing and a Blackcap as we walked the grounds.



We continued on to Loch Laid where we had views of two Slavonian Grebe and our best views of Red-throated Diver with the light being particularly good. We left and drove down to Beaully and then on towards the firth but stopped just outside the Muir of Ord as a Red Kite was flying close to the road. We lost sight of it so drove on to Red Castle where we had really good views of two female Great Spotted Woodpeckers and two very confident Red Kite (*right*) that kept flying over our heads! A large flock of finches was found and we watched for a time but it contained only Green and Goldfinch so we headed off in search of Tree Sparrows. The second garden we stopped at had at least two Tree Sparrows in it so we all manage to see this species before the end of the trip.



We descended into Inverness and unfortunately this is where we said good bye after a fantastic two weeks of birding the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

