

## Scotland (United Kingdom) and a cruise to the Spitsberg (Svalbard)

May 13<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> 2018

I had booked a cruise from Aberdeen to the Spitsberg (from May 20<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>) but decided to visit Scotland before (1 week) as I had never birdwatch or mammalwatch in UK.

### SCOTLAND

The weather was pleasant, even sometimes warm and without any rain. I visited the Cairngorms, the Ardnamurchan peninsula and the Ytran estuary north of Aberdeen. I saw several dead Western Hedgehogs.

The Cairngorms were spectacular with many Ptarmigans (both species), Eurasian Dotterels...I saw a few Roe Deers, 3 Mountain Hares at close quarters +1 dead.

Even I don't like this near Aviemore I went on a tour with Speyside at a place where they feed 2 Badgers and 1 Marten. The Badgers were in bad health (maybe because of inadequate food). There were also 1 Wood Mouse, 1 Bank Vole and a group of released Red Deers.

At Loch Garten a Wood Mouse come regularly at feeders. In the forest I saw a Red Squirrel of the british subspecies (greyer with a nearly white tail).

In Ardnamurchan I got 3 sightings of Eurasian Otter: a cooperative one feeding on crabs along Loch Linnhe north of Coran and 2 at a hide along Loch Sunnart. In the later at low tide I saw 2 groups (10 and 15) of Harbor Seals. I didn't try for Wild (?) Cats. The extremely narrow road being dangerous if you spotlight as driving. In addition I saw a few Roe deers and more than 220 Red deers. By the contrary Red Fox are severely hunted and during 1 week I never saw one (something impossible in France).

In the Moray Firth I saw 5 Bottle nose Dolphins said to be the largest of the world.

Close to Aberdeen in the fields I got a European Hare.

Finally as I was waiting for Badger and Marten with Speyside there was a book with distribution of mammals in east Scotland and the Cairngorms and I got informations where to see a huge haul-out of Grey Seals: the Ytran estuary north of Aberdeen. I don't regret to have been there. At low tide there were at least 1700 Grey Seals, the largest concentration of any seal I have ever seen.

### THE CRUISE

I boarded the Ortelius boat of Oceanwide Expeditions in Aberdeen. But I regret not to have begun my cruise in Vessilgen (Holland) because White beaked Dolphins where seen only between this place and Aberdeen.

The cruise from Aberdeen was 10 days. The weather was particularly bad, with lot of wind, fog and rain. Of course we saw very little during the many stormy and foggy days.. We had to land in Fair

Isle, Jan Mayen and finally in the Spitsberg. But due to the bad weather we were not able to land on Fair Isle and Jan Mayen. Instead of Fair Isle we stopped in Musa Island in the Shetlands (a disappointing place for birds and mammals). Concerning the mammals we saw just a handful of Grey Seals and Harbor seals at the last place.

During the rest of the cruise we saw:

Bearded seals: 2 young on the ice pack near Greenland and circa 10 at a glacier on the Spitsberg.

Hooded Seals: 1 adult and 1 juvenile at the pack ice. A splendid male was photographed by others close to the Spitsberg..

Ringed seal: at least 20 at the pack ice.

Walrus: 35 at a haul out at Poolepynten (Spitsberg) and 1 at sea at Ymerbukta.

Harp seals: possible juveniles at the pack ice.

Arctic Fox: 1 Spitsberg.

Reindeer: more than 100 on the Spitsberg at different places including close to Longyarbeen.

Orca: 2 groups

Long finned pilot whale: at least 25 by small groups

Atlantic white sided dolphins: 2 close to the boat

Bottle nose dolphins: group seen by others when we sailed out of Aberdeen harbor.

Humpback whales: 2 very distant close to the Spitsberg

Blue whale: 1 very close to the boat close to the Spitsberg

Minke whales regularly seen in the first days of the cruise

Fin whale: 3 seen

Bottle nose whale: at least 15

Finally I must thank all the mammalwatchers on the boat as more eyes mean more sightings.

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