



## Introduction

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This was primarily an organised trip Ultimate Shetland run by [Shetland Wildlife](#), [Tim Stenton](#) was the leader on the tour.

This is not a hardcore wildlife trip like I usually do, it has a more leisurely pace with most days 8am-6pm in the field with a couple of evening / nighttime excursions. But there is free time to do things yourself.

It does cover the major species and sites you could wish for including some endemic plants to the spectacular seabirds and the holy grail of British cetaceans – Orca which was what I hoped for most.

I flew from Aberdeen to Sumburgh and return with Loganair.

All accommodation transport (minivan, pretty comfortable) and meals (packed lunch during the day) were included in the tour, there were 8 in the group.

Temperatures were unseasonably warm and dry, with mist and only light drizzle on two mornings apart from that it was mostly warm and sunny.

The trip was well organised and had some flexibility in the schedule to alter the order of sites to accommodate weather, orca sightings etc.

The photos are hyperlinked to larger versions.

# Diary

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7<sup>th</sup> July 2018

I arrived at Sumburgh airport after an uneventful flight and was picked up by Tim from Shetland nature and my stuff was dropped off at the hotel, I had the rest of the day to myself as meeting the rest of the group was not until 6pm. I walked up to Sumburgh head slowly in the heat. There was plenty to see on the way, **arctic terns**, **black guillemots** and some confiding **Shetland wrens**. A cool drink was in order at the café at the top and I spent several hours watching the **puffins**, **guillemots** and **fulmars** as well as the marauding **skuas** both **arctic** and **great**. A few **twite** were about along with large numbers of **starlings**. I wandered slowly back where an injured **gannet** was in one of the fields; it had already been reported. I popped into Jarlshof for a look before heading to the hotel.

8<sup>th</sup> July 2018

The weather was not as hoped for, some light drizzle and mist for our boat trip. I had already taken a cocktail of seasickness tablets but I needn't have bothered the sea conditions were incredibly calm and not at all as I expected. We headed to Noss to see the seabird colonies, large numbers of **guillemots** and **gannets** with a few **shags** and **razorbills**, the rain stopped and as we headed away from the cliffs we started to feed the **gannets** and **bonxies** which was a great spectacle which I never tire of seeing despite having done it several times. We toured round Bressay back to the harbour where we had our sandwiches. We drove round the rest of the afternoon searching for otters but only found **whooper swans** and **Great Northern divers** but **Shetland monkey** flower was of note. Mousa Broch was visited late night to see the **storm petrels**, it is a great trip well worth visiting.



Black Guillemot



Fulmar



Wheatear



Wren (Shetland)



Guillemots





Orca

## 9<sup>th</sup> July 2018

We headed to Sumburgh head for the morning, there were loads more **puffins** than on Saturday and the sun was shining it was perfect sea conditions for cetaceans but no sign of any. We took our time photographing the seabirds and then wandered back to the minivan, the guide Tim was driving up and told us to get in as there were Orca further North, we collected the rest of the group and headed off. Just over 40 mins later we were parked on a small road overlooking a Nesting bay watching some distant **Orca**. They headed into the bay and we spent the next 2 hours or so following them as they hunted seals in the bay. At times they came incredible close to the shore and we got amazing views, it was a brilliant and prolonged encounter but eventually they headed round a headland to an area with limited viewing so we left them to it. Time for a very late lunch still buzzing from the **Orca** encounter. We then took a tour of some local bays and Lochs encountering an **otter** in one of the bays which showed quite nicely if briefly before we headed back after a cracking day of **Orca** and **Otter**, obviously the highlight of the trip.



Orca



Orca



Otter

10<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Amazing technology webcams are and I had been using my phone to monitor the one in Lerwick Harbour for the last couple of days. This morning I could see the long staying Bearded seal on the slipway, so on our way north we popped in to see it. It was looking very healthy and fully moulted so was very photogenic. We had limited time, so had to rush off after 15 mins to make the ferry across to the Northern Isles, our first crossing to Yell produced a **harbour porpoise**, we made it to our first real stop on Fetlar for **Red necked Phalaropes**, none at the first stop but then we visited the famous Loch of Funzie where we drew a blank also. Time for lunch but still no luck so we took a drive along the airfield (if you can call it that) here we had a few **arctic skuas** and **golden plover**. We did pass a patch of copper monkey flower an established escapee. Back to Loch of Funzie where a couple of **red necked phalaropes** did drop in but most of the group had wandered off.

We headed to Unst where we would be staying for the next two nights. Here we took a drive to a few pools where we located some very close **Red necked Phalaropes** safely viewed from the road. We headed to the hotel to check in and have some dinner. After dinner we took a drive in search of otters but no luck in perfect conditions. We headed up a moor land road where some **ringed plovers** were in the middle of the road with some tiny chicks and they showed really well despite their camouflage and lack of movement, we left them in peace and headed further up the road we had several **arctic skuas**, **golden plover** and **whimbrel** showing nicely before heading back.



Bearded Seal



Arctic Skua



Red necked Phalarope



Red Throated Diver



Ringed Plover



Red necked Phalarope



Copper Monkeyflower



Gannet

11<sup>th</sup> July 2018

We headed to Hermaness NNR first thing to beat the crowds, the weather was once again hot and sunny as we walked through the **bonxie** colony complete with many fluffy chicks and angry parents. We made it to the top, here we could see the most northerly parts of the UK, but apart from the amazing views we were here to see the seabird colonies, lots of **puffins**, a few **guillemots** and razorbills and a whole load of **gannets**. We spent the morning here before heading back down to the beach for lunch in rather too hot weather. We visited several bays in search of otters without any luck but took another drive up the moorland road where we had **whimbrel and ringed plover** chicks and a nice golden plover.

Last stop was Keen of Hamar a place I was looking forward to visiting for some rare plants, the unusually hot and dry summer had caused havoc with the plants. But we managed to find one **Edmundson's Chickweed** in full flower, **Northern rockcress** was still in good condition but the **Arctic sandwort** was very dried out, and it was time to head back for dinner with a quick look at the famous bus shelter.



Bonxie Chick



Edmundson's Chickweed



Northern rockcress

## 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018

The weather was misty with drizzle so our excursions round the north of Unst were not as scenic as they could have been. We visited a few sites seeing mostly bonxies. We visited a beach site for oysterplant and had a nice Shetland wren here along with nesting fulmars, we made a stop to move a **hedgehog** out of the road. Eventually we headed to the ferry and across to Yell for a quick look. But nothing much of note, we made our final ferry trip back to the mainland, we had a brief **otter** by the ferry terminal but it would not show again. Then we headed to Sullom Voe to visit an Arctic tern colony there were plenty of chicks present and a few common gulls also with chicks as well and a few ringed plovers mixed in. Time was getting on so we headed back to Sumburgh.



Sea Sandwort



Arctic Tern

## 13<sup>th</sup> July 2018

After breakfast we visited Loch Spiggie and some other southern sites, some whooper swans were spotted and we had some really nice views of a curlew family which were the highlights before heading further north. Here we stopped for a shelduck family in a bay before visiting an area of bog for the diminutive bog orchid, several were in flower, marsh lousewort was also present.



Hedgehog

Next stop was lunch on the beach further north, here was a large colony of oysterplant growing at the top of the beach. Next we visited Hillswick where I had an ice cream in the pleasant weather before we made a short visit to the wildlife rescue centre. A grey seal was currently the only patient we could visit. We then visited the spectacular cliffs of Esherness, here we took a walk and spent some time watching fulmars feeding their chicks, it was a great place. A quick stop at some small lochs produced some red throated divers.



Fulmar

We made one last stop at Mavis Grind where the Atlantic is separated from the north sea by a narrow isthmus before heading back to Sumburgh.

## 14<sup>th</sup> July 2018

I flew out on the 7.35am flight back to Aberdeen despite the thick mist.



Bog Orchid

# Checklists

## Mammals - 9



Orca	Brown Rat	Rabbit
Harbour Porpoise	Otter	Bearded Seal
Harbour Seal	Grey Seal	Hedgehog

## Selected Others

Moss Carder bee (Shetland form)	Oysterplant	Northern Rockcress
Edmundson's Chickweed	Marsh lousewort	Northern Marsh Orchid
Heath Spotted Orchid	Bog Orchid	Shetland Monkeyflower
Copper Monkeyflower	Sea Sandwort	Alpine Ladies Mantle



Shetland Monkeyflower



Oysterplant



Marsh Lousewort

## Birds - 58

Skylark	Northern Wheatear	Raven
Dunlin	Rock Dove	Wren ssp
Collared Dove	Starling ssp	Robin
Curlew	Whimbrel	Red necked Phalarope
Red Throated Diver	Great Northern Diver	Eider
Red Brested Merganser	Whooper Swan	Mute Swan
Mallard	Greylag Goose	House Sparrow
Arctic Tern	Great Skua	Arctic Skua
Puffin	Guillemot	Razorbill
Black Guillemot	Gannet	Common Gull
Herring Gull	Lesser Black Backed Gull	Greater Black Backed Gull
Meadow Pipit	Hooded Crow	Kittiwake
Fulmar	Storm Petrel	Shag
Twite	Cormorant	Rock Pipit
Snipe	Common Scoter	Shelduck
Tufted Duck	Blackbird	Rook
Coot	Oystercatcher	Redshank
Moorhen	Ringed Plover	Golden Plover
Lapwing	Turnstone	Black Headed Gull
Swallow		

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