

# HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

## ST KILDA

13-23 JUNE 2024

**Guide:** Sally Nowell

**Guests:** Judith & Mike Smith, Robin & Adrienne Mace, Richard Wright and Charlotte Broms, Lynda Niccolls, Carol Dow

**Day 1** We all arrive in Oban and at 12 noon drop off our bags at the meeting point by the harbour. Everyone then occupies themselves with a stroll around Oban or lunch before meeting Sally and Alasdair our skipper at three to board the Elizabeth G.

After boarding we are given a glass of prosecco, a delicious scone with strawberries and cream and a safety briefing.

After everyone has been shown to their cabins we go on deck as our boat departs Oban pontoons. We sail out towards Lismore and then up through the Sound of Mull, passing a few familiar sites including Duart Castle and the Isle of Mull Hotel. Sally spots a distant perched White-tailed Eagle which is perched up on a Larch tree but very difficult to locate from a moving boat. Further along we pass the colourful houses of Tobermory and then another much clearer adult White-tailed Eagle perched on a rocky outcrop near a timber yard.

We continue into Loch Sunart and to our anchor for the evening, a peaceful Loch na Droma Buidhe. We have no sooner arrived than our first delicious meal cooked by Charlie is served by Perry our bosun. After dinner we hear from Alasdair about our boat and our plans for the next day and soon we are off to spend our first night aboard the Elizabeth G.

**Day 2** We leave our anchorage and make our way straight towards the island of Canna. We first pass the Ardnamurchan peninsula spotting diving Gannets on route.

After heading round the Ardnamurchan lighthouse, the most westerly point in the UK we pass Muck, Eigg and then the magnificent cliffs of Rum. We are often surrounded by feeding Manx Shearwaters and a constant stream of auks and finally the occasional Puffin as we near Canna.

As we arrive at Canna the sun comes out and we enjoy a delicious lunch followed by a gentle walk along the shore. We are all slightly anxious about our first trip in the tender BUT with the help and patience of Alasdair and Perry we all get both on and off the boat with very little trouble. Our time here is limited because of the distance to our final destination, so we press on with a walk we hope will lead us to an area where we might hear Corncrake. We enjoy watching two young Oystercatchers, a family of Mallards and a Rock Pipit on route. Charlotte pops into the 24 hour shop but none of us have cash with us so can't support the local store selling homemade jams and tempting Wild Garlic salt. We watch a group of Red-breasted Merganser before leaving the coast and following a grassy track in search of Corncrake to no avail, but we enjoy the walk and make tracks back to the boat.

We are soon on board to find that Charlie has rustled up a coffee cake and we enjoy a cup of tea before heading off towards Skye. Before we do we follow the coast to enjoy and admire the magnificent sea stacks and seabirds especially the noisy Kittiwakes. We leave the shelter of the Canna coastline and head into open sea. Judith soon spots something ahead, it's a group of Common Dolphin heading towards us, they spend some time by the boat but are soon off and sadly Carol missed them. We continue and are joined briefly by a curious and bold Bonxie who approaches the boat. Lynda points up at the curious bird and Sally fears the bird might mistake Lynda's finger for a tit bit! The Bonxie gives us an excellent opportunity to watch it before it realizes its not going to get fed and heads off, this time its Robin who has missed the spectacle and now none of us want to leave the deck! But as the sun is shining and warming our bones we are all happy to stay where we are. We spot an Arctic Skua and then another Bonxie and as we watch we see dolphins coming toward us at speed, Alasdair tells us there are more ahead, we are soon surrounded by Common Dolphins!! They are coming from all directions, beside and under the boat, there are squeals of joy as we watch a pod of around 30 dolphins so close we could reach out and touch them. They stay with us for 20 minutes or more, filling us with joy and apparently they seemed to be pretty joyful too. We are all high from this amazing experience and relax as we continue towards the north west corner of Skye. The cliffs look beautiful in the late afternoon sunlight and we pass another spectacular lighthouse at Neist Point Below it we see more Manx Shearwater, Fulmar, Puffins and more delicate Kittiwake.

Finally we reach our sheltered cove for the evening and retire to the lounge as Alasdair and Perry drop anchor. Into the evening we enjoy dinner with our skipper who praises everyone for managing the rather rough conditions at sea today, nobody seemed to even notice the boat pitching about, apart from one rather unexpectedly large wave which sadly seemed to have spilt dinner in the kitchen and Carol and Lyndas cups of tea.

We also hear that the weather is not looking good for the forthcoming week and that our trip to St Kilda is looking doubtful. Naturally we are all disappointed but understand and remain optimistic that the weather forecast may change and that hoped for window to go might open up.

**Day 3** We wake to blue skies and flat calm water with the sun beating down on the boat deck. Early risers have a cup of tea in hand and binoculars at the ready. Breakfast is served promptly as we plan an early get away and in fact are on the move from our sheltered location in the north west tip of Skye as a delicious breakfast is served.

We are soon steaming along the coast of Skye, eventually leaving the coast and heading north towards some unusual looking islands called the Cleats. Linda identifies a flat topped one as 'Lord Macdonalds Table'. On route we spot Common Dolphins but they are uninterested in us so we continue on to the beautiful Shiantis. Before we arrive Judith spots our first Storm Petrel dancing over the waves, it appears and disappears in a flash, but what a delightful little bird.

As we approach The Shiantis we see a large pod of Common Dolphin feeding in the flat calm water but we are focused on dropping anchor and getting ashore for fear the weather changes before lunch. We are dropped at a small beach where we are surrounded by huge basalt boulders covered in lichen which provide perches for Puffins and a very vocal Wren, a somewhat surprising bird to see in a seabird colony. We all comment it seems larger than our usual Wren, not unlike the St Kilda Wren which is thought to be larger.

We are entertained by the Puffins and Shags and after an hour Alasdair and Perry return with the tender to pick us up. We are then taken through a cave as if transported to another world, on the other side of the cave we are out in the open sea where there is a large swell, we are all pleased to return safely to the sheltered waters of the calm Shiant Bay. Alasdair spots a White-tailed Eagle over the hillside and it lands on the cliff top sending all the birds into the air. We continue to follow the line of the coast admiring the seabirds on the water but also on the rocks beside us. Robin takes some super images of the shags who show off their green eyes and glossy green plumage in the warm sun of the afternoon. An Arctic Skua flies by and circles overhead giving us some excellent views. Its bliss drifting along amongst the birds who seem pretty un-phased by our presence.

We return to the boat and then take a turn round the bay. We stop below the cliffs to admire the Puffins on the water, a huge number here but then someone notices that the grassy hillside is covered with Puffin burrows and Puffins, there are hundreds of them here. We continue on and leave the bay following the line of islands where Adrienne spots an Eagle, we then see that there are two White-tailed Eagles circling over the hillside, at first we can't see their white tails but as they move into the sun it's clear these are two magnificent adult White-tailed Eagles. They are mobbed by gulls and a Bonxie but neither are a match for the eagles who just soar away out of sight. We float on past the islands and then encounter open water towards Harris. The afternoon sun sends some to sleep as they relax on deck after a glorious afternoon.

We enter Loch Seaforth and admire the steep sided fjord finally entering Loch Maraig where we lay anchor for the rest of the afternoon and night. It's a great place to scan out and enjoy a gin and tonic. We have a Red-throated Diver fly in and some of us are determined to make every rock into an Otter, but our search for Otter proves fruitless this evening and it's time for dinner so we retreat to the dining room for a fun filled evening of chat, laughter and excellent food.

**Day 4** We wake to a rather dreich morning, but after breakfast most of us board the tender and head out onto Harris for a walk. We are soon at a pontoon where we start a walk up a steep road through some rough grass sheep fields. Immediately we come across a family of Stonechat but we hear a shout "eagle" and see a huge White-tailed Eagle soaring over the hillside towards us, it passes over us without flapping its wings once and disappears across the bay, we continue to watch the Stonechat family but then spot another large bird which this time is a Golden Eagle, it flies and looks to land on a stony outcrop not far along the road. We continue our walk up a quiet single track road stopping to look at the plant life and being particularly interested in the trees by the road side, they are willows but have glossy almost evergreen looking leaves with a dense growth and rather stunted trunks, we later find them to be Bay Willow.

We aim for a spot at the high point of the road but having reached it want to go further. We stop and admire an old derelict settlement now overgrown with Flag Iris. The road keeps tempting us on until we reach a small lochan where we hear birds calling. We identify them as Greenshank, they seem very upset by our presence and after admiring them at a distance we decide we have walked far enough and retrace our steps, this time going downhill a great deal faster than we came up. We stop once again at the old settlement and spot a Northern Marsh Orchid and another plant we are unsure of but later identify it as Piri Piri an invasive species from New Zealand. As we enjoy the plants, a flight of waders fly in, five Golden Plover, but they disappear from view over the hillside. Alasdair and Perry are at the pontoon to collect us just as we arrive, so we head back to the boat for a warm up with a hot drink and lunch.

After lunch we make our way slowly back up Loch Seaforth spotting Harbour Porpoise on route. There are a number of gulls, gannets, auks and Kittiwakes feeding as we go and finally we leave the loch to make our way to shelter from the incoming strong winds around Scalpay. We lay anchor and head to warm up inside after a rather chilly journey. We decide to spend the rest of the afternoon resting. Some spy from the boat whilst others read or knit or chat and look things up. After dinner we spend 40 minutes back on deck enjoying some fabulous evening light, whilst two Red-throated Divers feed around a neighbouring boat and Common and Arctic Terns fly overhead. We are really hoping to see Otter but to no avail and eventually as the sun drops away we all head to bed.

**Day 5** We waken to calm seas and as usual a delightful breakfast. We are soon underway leaving the sheltered south harbour of Scalpay and making our way south along the east coast of Harris. We pass flocks of Razorbills and Guillemots on the water and have fly pasts of Razorbills in formation. The waters seem littered with auks including delightful Puffins. Out to sea Carol spots Common Dolphin leaping clear of the water. We stop in a small bay at Loch Fhionnsabhaigh. We ready ourselves with lifejackets and are soon in the tender, we are really getting the hang of this now. Alasdair and Perry drop us on a slipway and leave us to explore for a couple of hours.

First we head to a small gallery with some beautiful paintings but a rather unwelcoming gallery owner who tells us off for having a back pack, leaving the gate open and Sally then causes offense by suggesting she's 'just' the sales person! We then walk along the quiet roads hearing that Mike and Judith have had a holiday cottage here in the past. There is a sheltered bay where we hear and see Redshank, Curlew and are treated to some close views of Shelduck.

We leave here passing and visiting another gallery and then take a narrow road leading away from the sea through a moon like landscape, a rocky terrain interspersed with lochans. It's an easy walk along the road where Mike spots a Stonechat and we hear a loud and very active Common Sandpiper. Along the road we spot numerous plants including some glorious Great Sundew. We walk to the head of a small loch and then retrace our steps and overhead notice a kafuffle, gulls calling and Shelducks disturbed and Judith spots a raptor, it's a Sparrowhawk.

Our tender is waiting so we head back to the boat for lunch before heading off again for a short hour long steam to Loch Rodel where we will spend the night. The anchor is dropped and we are soon ready to board the tender again. We head this time to a small and delightful harbour and slipway where we are dropped off to explore once again for two hours. We head straight to St Clements Chapel. On route we see young Ravens, Wheatear, some rather late Primroses and Cotoneaster Verticilis that we surprisingly encounter throughout our trip. The road we follow is flanked by Flag Iris and when we arrive at the church, Charlotte enjoys its beautiful simplicity and Carol seeks out the war graves. Richard decides to head back but the rest of us venture up a grass covered hill where we have spectacular views over the Sound of Harris across to North Uist.

We sit for a time to admire from our elevated position where we look down towards the Elizabeth G in the bay. By 5 o'clock its time to return and we meet up with Richard, Alasdair and Perry back at the harbour. At dinner Alasdair tells us the news that we are after all going to try for St Kilda tomorrow. Everyone is delighted but we know the crossing could be rough and that if it's too rough we will turn back. But to make the most of the weather window we have, we must start the day promptly so its an early night for us all.

**Day 6** We wake to the sound of the engines starting at 5.30am and all are immediately into action. The anchor is lifted and in no time at all we are off out of the shelter of Rodel Bay and into the Sound of Harris where the sea is already quite rough, we are all wondering if our Skipper will continue or if he'll decide to abandon the idea of going to St Kilda. But we press on and as we leave the sound, the swell becomes greater leading to a couple of us feeling rather poorly. A lesson is learnt though, staying down in our rooms isn't a good idea. We have all been told not to go on deck, so we sit and chat in the lounge throughout the journey. Eventually we hear that Alasdair can see St Kilda on the horizon, that makes us feel optimistic that we are slowly getting nearer our destination, our spirits are lifted.

Afterwards we discuss just how big were those waves? 10ft, 12ft, 14ft, 15.5ft or 20ft, who knows but they looked pretty big to us!

We really do start to feel excited when we see the stacks of St Kilda come into view through the windows, its quite an emotional experience to have steamed for so long seeing nothing but the sea and then to suddenly see the immense rocks surging out of the waves is quite amazing.

We finally arrive at Village Bay, St Kilda and what a surprise, the sun has come out!! We have some lunch and then head ashore. It's a bit busy at first as we arrive at the same time as another large group. We gradually disperse enjoying being on St Kilda at our own pace and in our own ways. Adrienne and Robin are the most adventurous, heading up to 'The Gap' and whilst Mike and Judith decide they want to explore in the other direction. The rest of us focus our time in the village and around the amazing cleats, far more than we imagined and many of them occupied by resident and defensive Fulmars. Overhead we see and hear Bonxie and Arctic Skua, the air is filled with the sight and sound of seabirds, mainly Fulmar and surprising birds such as Collared Dove, Willow Warbler and several Snipe. How did they all find their way to St Kilda??

We visit the museum on Main Street and sit and soak up the atmosphere as most of the visitors disappear and we have the place to ourselves. We all meet up at the quay and hear that Richard and Charlotte have seen the St Kilda Wren and Robin has heard one, success all round, and we made it to St Kilda. For Lynda and Judith and Mike this is their second attempt, making it all the more of an achievement and a bit of a relief too.

After dinner we hear we have another early start which will offer us the chance of visiting Stac Lee and try to get back to the Outer Hebrides in the relative calm. No problem to us getting up early, especially if it's to see more of the St Kilda archipelago and to avoid another rough crossing!

**Day 7** This morning we wake to grey skies but calm sea around us in Village Bay, St Kilda, what a place to wake up. It's an early start today as we have a long steam to get back to the Outer Hebrides and out of the teeth of the forecast high winds. We leave Village Bay behind us and have a light breakfast of toast and some rather delicious spiced cookies that Charlie has rustled up. We head towards Stac Lee and everyone is called from the breakfast table to admire the sight ahead of us. It looms huge above the water and the top face is covered with nesting Gannets, the nearer we get, the more small white dots we can see, and eventually we see that the rock is dripping with Gannets. They fly from the stac top and all around us, the sight is breathtaking and amazing, how do the birds stay on the cliffs in a gale, how do they find their way back to the right nest, how do they manage to space themselves out so evenly?

Alasdair carefully steers us around the stac as we gaze up at the unbelievable number of birds. Even without the birds the high cliffs are incredible but we must leave the birds and St Kilda and return to the Sound of Harris.

After yesterdays rough seas we are a bit more prepared, we make sure everything in our rooms is secure, take a precautionary sea sickness tablet and ensure we have everything with us so that we don't need to go below deck. The water is calmer today, so we all stay on deck watching the passing Gannets and large numbers of Fulmars sailing past us with the greatest of ease, they almost seem to be showing off as they cruise effortlessly over the surface of the water. Adrienne is delighted to spot a Storm Petrol and several pass by as we make our way. It's a little chilly on deck so we intermittently pop back inside for a warming drink. The journey seems to pass in no time and we are soon enjoying our lunch as we cruise back through Harris Sound and then south down North Uist taking a westerly turn into Loch Nam Madadh.

We anchor out of the wind which sadly catches up with us and our plans to go ashore are scuppered. Alasdair is fearful that getting into the dinghy will be tricky and that getting back will be even more challenging so we settle in to an afternoon relaxing onboard. Some stay on deck scanning out to see what's about, Sally spots a White-tailed Eagle which quickly disappears and a lone Red Deer hind appears ashore. During dinner we reflect on the last two days and guess the size of the waves we encountered, they seemed pretty big to us but our skipper assures us they were mere 10 ft high. After dinner we have a Chinook helicopter fly past and everyone has a guided tour of the engine room. After our early start we are all ready for bed and are looking forward to the next day when we head down to Rum.

**Day 8** We wake to a calm peaceful morning off North Uist. Robin, Lynda and Sally are on deck scanning for Otter, eagles or whatever is about. Sally spots something on the grass at the other side of the bay, is it a Brown Hare? No, its an Otter grooming itself, Lynda manages to get onto the Otter but no sooner has she done so it moves away into a small depression which looks like it might be the Otters holt. Along the bank we see a group of Red Deer hinds still in their winter coats one hind has a small calf with it. On the hillside across the bay a silhouette of a White-tailed Eagle sitting on a rock is visible on the horizon.

Elizabeth G is soon on her way as we enjoy breakfast aboard. We steam out of the sheltered bay and into the Small Minch to continue our journey. We make our way across to Skye, on route seabirds continually lift off the sea, a mix of Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Gannet, Puffins, Shags, Razorbills and Guillemots. As we make our way across Alasdair spots a fin, it looks like it's a Minkie Whale, it comes back to the surface once but then disappears and we lose sight of it. We continue on and as we approach the cliffs surrounding Neist lighthouse we start to see a lot more activity. Common Dolphins are everywhere, they come past the boat and join us for a short time under the bow, they are so close it feels we could just reach out and touch them, they fill us with delight as four adults dodge back and fore just below us as we lean over the prow to enjoy the show. They soon lose interest and off they go but more dolphins appear all around us. A loud Common Gull calls over head, its being chased by an Arctic Skua trying to steal a meal.

As we continue our journey we can see Rum ahead of us, we start to see more and more Manx Shearwaters, small rafts on the water lift as we approach but we get very close to some birds before they drift away from us. Before we reach Rum we have lunch and finally we turn in to Loch Scresort where we put down anchor for the night.

We go ashore for the rest of the day, exploring Rum on a day when there is no ferry is delightful as we have the place to ourselves. We head along the shore enjoying being

amongst some woodland on one side and the loch on the other. We see Curlew, Oystercatcher, an Eider with a chick and a Red-breasted Merganser along the shore. We also see Grey Wagtail amongst the Thrift and Swallows feeding up and down the burn as it comes into the loch. We decide to take a walk along one of the recommended trails but lose the trail before we start. A local soon puts us right and we commence our walk. The sun is out and we are peeling off the layers that we have needed for the boat.

Our walk takes us through woodland and beside a piece of heathland, we spot Golden-ringed Dragonfly and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, they have all come out in the sunshine. We continue admiring some new plant species as we walk and when we check the map we are slightly uncertain how much longer the path goes on for. We are soon reassured as it starts to head down beside a stream and finally back onto a main track. We have surprise new birds for the trip on day eight, Coal and Great Tit along with some stunning Grey Wagtails. We make our way past the castle and back to the jetty taking a detour to the Otter hide where we don't see Otters but do see Grey Heron, Eider and Common Sandpiper. At dinner we hear about plans for the next day and spy Male Eider and Black Guillemot from the dinner table.

**Day 9** We wake in the bay of Rum and after breakfast leave the shelter of this beautiful bay and head south towards Eigg, on route we swing west around the south coast of Rum to admire the high tops of Rums mountains which remain covered in cloud and as we steam, the clouds become gloomy but atmospheric none the less. The great glen of Dibberdale sweeps up in front of us and waterfalls cascade down the hillsides after last night's heavy rain.

We strike off towards Eigg with the magnificent mountain sides sweeping down to the sea. We spot a White-tailed Eagle high above the mountain tops but it does not linger. We follow the east coast of Eigg eventually arriving at the pier. We disembark with our packed lunches and start to explore our options regarding which path to take. After enjoying so much time at sea we are keen to be in woodland so take a path up through a woodland garden. Robin takes a bit of a lead having taken a photo of the Eigg paths and now Sally and Robin track our route on their os apps. The gardens are old and somewhat overgrown but the woodland is lush with some exotic planting. We are soon back out in the open with views over the bay. We hear a Whitethroat but though we scan for it over the bracken its nowhere to be seen, further on Judith thinks she hears a Chiffchaff but that proves elusive too.

We decide we need to stop for lunch and find an area of grassland filled with flowers where we settle to our delicious brie and cranberry sandwiches. Richard decides to walk back down the road but the rest of us continue along rough tracks that lead us a bit more uphill than we expected (and wanted) but we soon see the path leading down through a lush meadow and finally back to the pier where we pop into the shops. Robin continues down the pier to photograph the birds on the shore and we eventually catch up and get ready to board the tender, a process we had all been so anxious about but now manage almost like clockwork with patience and care from Perry and Alasdair.

As we arrive back at the boat we spot that preparations have been made for a little surprise tea party for Lynda's birthday. We all busy ourselves cleaning boots, removing waterproofs etc, Lynda is the last one to enter the lounge to a splendid chorus of Happy Birthday. A gorgeous chocolate cake awaits and some cucumber sandwiches. We have balloons and flowers and prosecco, it all looks beautiful and Lynda is both surprised and delighted.

We continue on deck to Ardnamurchan. The air has warmed considerably, though the sea is still a little choppy. We have heard that Orca have been seen in the area so we keep our

eyes peeled. As we go, Manx Shearwaters are our constant companions, wheeling about in front of the boat or sitting calmly on the water as we sail on by. We can see our destination ahead, it looks like it's the only place bathed in glorious sunshine but actually it's the golden sand of Kentra Bay. We anchor and are soon lining up to board the tender and go ashore. It's our first beach landing but we all manage to keep our boots pretty dry and are quickly up on the beach to try and work out why the beach is also known as the 'singing sands'. As the sun has come out and we are on a beach, it's time to dip our toes in the water we have been sailing on for the past week. It's not freezing but it's pretty chilly, a few of us walk along in the shallows with our trousers rolled up and enjoy the feeling of the water and the sand between our toes. After  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour it starts to look like rain is heading our way so Sally radios the boat to come and collect us and our rescue party is soon on its way. We have a hilarious session getting back on the boat and Charlotte wins the prize for the most surprising way of getting back on the tender from the beach. We all almost lose control with laughter, but then start to worry we'll make a worse job of getting back, but we all manage it fine and Charlotte takes our joking in good humour.

We are back on the boat for showers and gin and tonic to cheer Lynda's birthday again and then once again an imaginative and incredible spread by Charlie along with more of Alasdair's entertaining stories. What an action packed day, nobody is late to bed and we are all prepared for our final day on the Elizabeth G who we have all become so fond of with her wonderful and caring crew.

**Day 10** It's a stunningly beautiful flat calm morning with rainbows and sunshine to greet us as we emerge onto the deck. Sally, Robin and Lynda enjoy the short time this lasts as sadly the sun disappears and a light breeze starts to break the water's surface. We are entertained by a lone Gannet who keeps circling the bay seemingly indecisive about what it wants to do. We have breakfast and then make our way along the north coast of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula. We are once again surrounded by Manx Shearwaters as we head past Sanna Bay and the Ardnamurchan lighthouse where we encounter large numbers of feeding seabirds. Alasdair has exciting news, Orca have been seen in an area not far from where we are, we decide to change plans slightly and head straight for the area in which several other boats are already searching for the two Orca that travel in these waters.

We cross the mouth to the sound of Mull and as we do we are joined by Common Dolphins and a magnificent large Minke Whale who appears several times in front of us, Alasdair thinks there may have been two but we only see one break the surface. The whale gives us an excellent show for several minutes but we decide to turn back after none of the other boats searching for the Orca are seeing them. As we enter the Sound of Mull we see a fabulous White-tailed Eagle nest with a very active chick flapping its wings clearly getting ready to take to the air.

Our onward journey is a relaxing one as we look out for Tobermory and enjoy the views of both the Mull and Morvern coastline and some rather fabulous houses. Judith always has her eyes open for birds though, and her sharp eyes pick up a pair of Red-throated Divers. Near Craignure we have two White-tailed Eagles high above the boat, against the blue sky they look magical. We pass Duart Castle and finally enter the narrow opening to Loch Spelve. Not far in we anchor and are put ashore. We have a walk planned but Lynda almost immediately spots an Otter and our plans are scuppered, but what a treat, we watch the Otter feeding, catching what look like small eels, along with a small group of photographers for 30 minutes or so. We are delighted to have all seen the Otter as the previous sighting was only seen by Lynda.



Time is passing and our plan is to walk up to the head of the Loch to meet the boat. We pass a cottage with a handsome Peacock in the garden which none of us photograph, though its very tempting to do so, but we continue along the road where we see Reed Bunting and Mike comments on the number of Common Sandpipers we are seeing, there must have been a dozen along the three miles stretch of road we've walked. We also spot some new plants which Carol identifies as Pale Butterwort, Lesser Spearwort and Marsh Lousewort.

The road is relatively quiet but a little longer than we anticipated so we are relieved to go round a bend and see Elizabeth G is waiting for us. We find a suitable spot to board the tender but it's the most midgy spot we've come across, so everyone gets a bit desperate to leave. The midges follow us out onto the loch so we have an extra whirl around the boat to get rid of them and then we are all calm and ready to get on board for our final meal cooked by our fabulous chef Charlie. Just as we get onboard the rain starts, we have been so lucky with all our walks that we have nearly always had sunshine and very little rain.

After dinner the crew join us for our final reflections on our trip when we share what we have most enjoyed over the ten days we have been together.

**Day 11** Today we leave Loch Spelve but on our way out we catch a final glimpse of an Otter not far from the boat and as we do, a juvenile White-tailed Eagle surprises us by taking flight from the shore into a nearby tree. Despite its size, so well camouflaged its difficult to spot amongst all the knarled branches.

What we can't miss though, are the rather magnificent but aloof Feral Goats sitting out on the promontory as we leave the Loch.

Its time to return to civilization after being away from it all for the last 10 days so although it's a delight to see Oban Harbor its tinged with sadness that soon we will be saying goodbye to the Elizabeth G, her wonderful crew and to each other.

We leave our boat for the last time, say our thankyou's and goodbye to Charlie, and then are accompanied by Alasdair and Perry off the pontoon. We all head in our different directions hoping we might meet again, having had a wonderful time together on our adventure to St Kilda

On the holiday we did 8 walks of around 3 miles each, these were on:

Canna  
Harris, at Loch Seaforth  
Harris-at Ardvey/ Finsbay  
Harris-Loch Rodel  
St Kilda  
Rhum  
Eigg  
Mull

Alasdair our skipper, Charlie our chef and Perry our boson all joined us to hear our favourite moments and share theirs at the end of our trip.

### Favourite Species

|           |                      |
|-----------|----------------------|
| Adrienne  | Great Northern Diver |
| Judith    | Manx Shearwater      |
| Richard   | White-tailed Eagle   |
| Carol     | Black Guillemot      |
| Mike      | Manx Shearwater.     |
| Lynda     | Manx Shearwater      |
| Perry     | Arctic Tern          |
| Robin     | Great Northern Diver |
| Charlie   | Minkie Whale         |
| Alasdair  | Minkie Whale         |
| Sally     | Common Dolphin       |
| Charlotte | St Kilda Wren        |

### Favourite Place

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Alasdair  | Arriving in Village Bay  |
| Judith    | Stac Lee   |
| Lynda     | The Shiants  |
| Charlotte | The Shiants  |
| Carol     | The Shiants  |
| Sally     | The Shiants  |
| Perry     | The Shiants  |
| Charlie   | St Kilda   |
| Richard   | The whole experience of getting to and arriving at Village Bay |
| Mike      | The St Kilda   |
| Adrienne  | The Elizabeth G  |
| Robin     | The St Kilda Landing   |

### Magic Moment

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Judith    | The dolphins around the boat on day 2.  |
| Carol     | The dolphins around the boat on day 2.  |
| Robin     | The dolphins around the boat on day 2.  |
| Lynda     | The dolphins around the boat on day 2 plus her birthday surprise  |
| Charlotte | Time on our own to soak up the atmosphere on Main Street, St Kilda  |
| Adrienne  | Getting to the top of the Gap and the view from there and Charlies cake   |
| Sally     | Going round Stac Lee  |
| Charlie   | Arriving at St Kilda  |
| Alasdair  | Getting everyone to and on to St Kilda.   |
| Perry     | Visit to the shop on Rum to stock up on supplies!   |
| Richard   | The funny moments:<br>Charlotte throwing herself onto the tender at Kentra Bay<br>Sally's encounter with the grumpy gallery owner<br>The wonderful food |
| Mike      | Sorry I missed Mikes magic moment of the trip, I do know what it wasn't though<br>☺   |

## **BIRDS**

Greylag Goose  
Canada Goose  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Eider  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Goosander  
Red-throated Diver  
Great Northern Diver  
Fulmar  
Manx Shearwater  
Storm Petrel  
Gannet  
Cormorant  
Shag  
Grey Heron  
White-tailed Eagle  
Golden Eagle  
Common Buzzard  
Sparrowhawk  
Merlin  
Oystercatcher  
Ringed Plover  
Golden Plover  
Redshank  
Greenshank  
Curlew  
Snipe  
Great Skua  
Arctic Skua  
Common Gull  
Herring Gull  
Great Black-backed Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Kittiwake  
Common Tern  
Arctic Tern  
Puffin  
Black Guillemot  
Guillemot  
Razorbill  
Rock Dove  
Woodpigeon  
Collared Dove  
Cuckoo (H)  
Skylark (H)  
Swallow  
House Martin  
Rock Pipit  
Meadow Pipit  
Pied Wagtail

Grey Wagtail  
Robin  
Wheatear  
Stonechat  
Song Thrush  
Blackbird  
Blackcap (H)  
Whitethroat (H)  
Willow Warbler  
Goldcrest (H)  
Wren  
St Kilda Wren  
Great Tit  
Coal Tit  
Blue Tit  
Jackdaw  
Hooded Crow  
Raven  
Starling  
House Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Linnet  
Goldfinch  
Greenfinch  
Siskin  
Reed Bunting

## **MAMMALS**

Rabbit  
Otter  
Red Deer  
Minkie Whale  
Harbour Porpoise  
Common Dolphin  
Grey Seal  
Common Seal  
Grey Seal  
Feral Goat  
(Soay and Boreray Sheep)

## **Other things:**

Comb Jelly  
Golden Ringed Dragonfly  
Small pearl bordered Fritillery  
Small Heath  
Burnet Moth  
Violet Oil Beetle  
Plants  
Northern Marsh Orchid  
Heath-spotted Orchid  
Greater Butterfly Orchid

Fragrant Orchid  
Lousewort  
Marsh Lousewort  
Milkwort  
Common Butterwort  
Pale Butterwort  
Heath Bedstraw  
Round-leaved Sundew  
Great Sundew  
Wild Thyme  
Flag Iris  
Tormentil  
Rosebay Willowherb  
Marsh Valerian  
Lesser Spearwort  
Bell Heather

Marsh Marigold  
English Stonecrop  
Thrift  
Birdsfoot Trefoil  
Primrose  
Ragged Robin  
Stichwort  
Meadow Vetchling  
Bog Asphodel  
Dog Rose  
Red Clover  
Daisy  
Yellow Pimpernel  
Self Heal  
Eye Bright  
Pignut