

Shetland

10 - 17 June 2006

Trip Report

Leader:

Paul Harvey

Saturday 10 June Force 4-5 south east winds with fog.

A day of fog meant that only Jo and Anne who had been in Shetland for the previous week, and Betty and Daphne, who had elected to take the overnight steamer from Aberdeen, arrived on schedule. After a few phone calls we were able to reorganise both the Noss and Mousa trips and take advantage of the opportunity for an unexpected early night.

Sunday 11 June Force 4-5 south-south east winds foggy at first but brighter later.

The omens were not good at first with little sign of the fog rising but Steve and Alwyn were shipped up from Aberdeen courtesy of British Airways. After collecting them in Lerwick and a brief pause at the Sumburgh Hotel, the seven of us set off to Sumburgh Head. Here we were treated to superb close up views of Puffins and Razorbills and to witness the amazing flying skills of the Fulmars – the fog certainly had less impact on them than British Airways!

We were glad that both Rosemary (late morning) and Irene (early afternoon) eventually made it north and we collected them from Sumburgh airport. Lunch was taken at Spiggie where we were joined briefly by a Hummingbird Hawkmoth and then watched a female Marsh Harrier hunting over the marsh - a real Shetland rarity! Even more surprising was a second female Marsh Harrier at nearby Hillwell, which spread panic among the waterfowl which included our only Shovelers, Coots and Moorhens of the trip.

Late afternoon we received news of a Marsh Warbler trapped in a Virkie garden and just a few minutes later we were able to see the bird in the hand and then watch it skulking in the garden. A brief stop at the nearby mudflats revealed 39 Sanderling and 2 Bar-tailed Godwits – a fine end to the day.

Monday 12 June Force 4-5 southerly winds. Heavy rain from 1000 to 1400 then showers and some sunny periods.

The day started brightly so we headed off to hunt for Otters at South Nesting. On route we counted a flock of 22 Wigeon – a very unusual number for Shetland in June. We soon located an Otter and had the added bonus of 2 Sandwich Terns but then the heavens opened! A short detour to the Weisdale café proved unproductive, it being the only day of the week the café was closed! We did, however, add Rook and Wood Pigeon to the trip list at Kergord.

Heading north we enjoyed fine views of a Common Sandpiper at our toilet stop and then a superb male King Eider at Dales Voe. We travelled back over the high tops from Voe to Bixter with the weather improving rapidly. Later in the afternoon we were treated to a flock of 7 Whooper Swans on Tingwall Loch and excellent views of Arctic Skua, Whimbrel and Golden Plover at Virdi Field.

In the evening we were again prevented from getting to Mousa by the stiff southerly breeze.

Tuesday 13 June Force 6 south-west winds. A sunny morning but clouding up during the afternoon.

An early start was called for today as the wind had finally moved out of the south-east meaning we could at last take our trip aboard Dunter III to Noss. It was certainly bouncy and a couple of the team were looking slightly worse for wear as we approached the massive seabird cliff at the Noup. Fortunately, with a bit of skilled seamanship, we were able to enjoy the stunning (and deafening) spectacle of thousands of seabirds on the 600 foot cliff at the Noup in relative calm. Gannets were all around us, Kittiwakes called from the cliffs and we sailed gently through rafts of Guillemots and Razorbills.

Back ashore we grabbed a quick coffee in Lerwick and headed north and took the ferry across to Yell. With the weather deteriorating we stopped for a welcome coffee and homebake and a quick look around the exhibitions at the Old Haa at Buravoe. Then it was on to Unst and directly to our base there – the Baltasound Hotel.

Wednesday 14 June Force 2 south-easterly wind slowly increasing to force 5 by late afternoon. Bright and sunny all day.

The early risers were treated to fine views of a Turtle Dove and a good opportunity to compare Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff. After breakfast we had a quick look at Muness Castle before heading off to Fetlar for the day. Here, our main target was Red-necked Phalarope, now almost restricted to Fetlar as a British breeding species. We weren't to be disappointed with a single male and several more colourful females showing off just after our arrival at the Loch of Funzie – some approaching to within just a few feet of their admirers. Even rarer by Shetland standards was a Canada Goose although it had little chance of competing for attention with the phalaropes! Red-throated Divers too performed well allowing us to observe the finer points of their summer dress.

Eventually we managed to tear ourselves away for lunch on the beach at Funzie. A Turtle Dove, more great views of Golden Plover and a fine walk along the beach at Tresta were highlights of the afternoon.

Back on Unst we were fortunate indeed to find two superb summer plumage Black-tailed Godwits (no, not goblets Alwyn!) at Uyeasound before heading back to Baltasound. It was after dinner though, I am told, that the real highlight of the day occurred! Anne and Jo, Daphne, Irene and Rosemary all headed for the dance at the Baltasound Hall. The Unst folk are still talking to this day about the palais glide and, rumour has it, are trying to find the funding to bring the Travelling Naturalist dance troupe back for another performance!

Thursday 15 June Force 4-5 south-westerly winds. Overcast but with occasional sunny spells.

There were a few stiff bodies this morning as we headed out after breakfast to look for Otters. The aches and pains though were soon forgotten as we first enjoyed rather short and distant views of a female and cub at the pier but then stunning and prolonged views of a big dog Otter in Balta Sound.

Then it was on to Hermaness where we were treated to the spectacle of 16,000 pairs of Gannets, some very intimidating Great Skuas and a host of other seabirds, including yet more 'tame' Puffins. The day did not end there though as we were able to find a female Red-backed Shrike a little way along the road to Britain's most northerly house at Skaw.

Friday 16 June Force 1-3 south-westerly winds becoming calm in the evening. Foggy all day.

We took a pre-breakfast jaunt to the Keen of Hamar National Nature Reserve where we were gradually able to acquaint ourselves with all the special plants of this serpentine debris site, including the endemic Edmondston's Chickweed at one of its only two British sites, the other lying just across the road!

After taking successive ferries from Unst to Yell and Yell to Mainland the leader decided that we would try and escape the fog by heading out to the north Mainland. First stop was at Urafirth where we enjoyed Oysterplant and yet another Otter. We then headed for the spectacular coastline of Eshaness but in the end had to make do with looking at photographs of it in the Eshaness café! Still the good homebakes and coffee did much to lift spirits. At the Eshaness lighthouse we took a short walk in the fog, which did, however, lift enough to allow us to see the arch through Dore Holm. It was soon time to head back to Sumburgh.

SPECIES LISTS

BIRDS

Red-throated Diver:	Up to six seen on all but one day.
Northern Fulmar:	Common
European Storm Petrel:	Several hundred came ashore on Mousa with many flying around the 2,000 year old broch. An experience well worth waiting for!
Northern Gannet:	Seen daily with vast numbers at both Noss and Hermaness
Cormorant:	One on Loch of Spiggie on 11 th and 3 flying over Mavis Grind on 16 th .
Shag:	Common, seen daily.
Grey Heron:	Singles seen at Loch of Spiggie on 11 th and along the road from Voe to Aith next day.
Mute Swan:	Six on Loch of Spiggie on 11 th , 2 at Loch of Houster on 12 th and one on 16 th .
Whooper Swan:	A single seen at Spiggie on 11 th , 7 at Tingwall Loch and 2 at Loch of Freester on 12 th and one at the Houb of Urafirth on 16 th .
Greylag Goose:	The breeding population of this species is rapidly increasing in Shetland and good numbers were seen on several days.
Canada Goose:	One at Loch of Funzie on Fetlar. Despite being an island rarity it did little to excite the party!
Shelduck:	Two at Loch of Spiggie on 11 th and one at Boddam next day.
Eurasian Wigeon:	A male at Hillwell and a pair at Loch of Spiggie on 11 th , a flock of 22 at Loch of Freester (a very high count for June) and a female with a brood of 3 at a site in the central mainland on 12 th and a male at Baltasound on 13 th -14 th .
Common Teal:	Four at Hillwell and one at Loch of Spiggie on 11 th , and 2 on Fetlar and one at Uyeasound on 14 th .
Mallard:	Seen daily.
Shoveler:	Two males on the Loch of Hillwell on 11 th .
Tufted Duck:	Seen most days in reasonable numbers.
Common Eider:	Seen daily.
King Eider:	A superb adult male with a flock of 100 Eiders at Dales Voe, Delting, on 12 th .
Long-tailed Duck:	One with the same flock as the King Eider – a very late bird.
Red-breasted Merganser:	Seen on four different days, with a max of 8 on Fetlar on 14 th .
Marsh Harrier:	Two different females seen on 11 th , one at Loch of Spiggie and one at Loch of Hillwell. A real rarity in Shetland.
Moorhen:	Two at Hillwell on 11 th .
Eurasian Coot:	A few including a large brood at Hillwell on 11th.
Oystercatcher:	Seen daily and often with chicks.
Lapwing:	Seen daily
Golden Plover:	Seen daily in the north isles (Yell, Fetlar and Unst) and 2 at Virdi Field on 12 th .
Ringed Plover:	Seen daily
Black-tailed Godwit:	Two summer plumage individual at Uyeasound on 14 th .
Bar-tailed Godwit:	Two non-breeding adults at Virkie on 11 th .
Whimbrel:	Two individuals seen displaying at Virdi Field on 11th.
Eurasian Curlew:	Seen daily with chicks seen and a nest located by accident.
Common Redshank:	Seen daily
Common Sandpiper:	One at Voe on 12 th .
Turnstone:	Seen on three days, with 2 at Grutness and one at Scord on 11 th , 6 at Boddam on 12 th and 4 seen by Anne on 15 th .

Red-necked Phalarope:	At least 5 (one male and 4 females) seen on Fetlar. They gave some fine, close views, it being a super sunny day with abundant insects available for them to pick off the half-submerged rocks.
Common Snipe:	Seen daily.
Sanderling:	Good numbers seen and all in summer attire. 18 at Scord and 39 at Virkie on 11 th and 2 at Boddam on 12 th .
Dunlin:	Seen daily, with all birds in summer dress.
Great Skua:	Seen daily and some encounters of the close kind, notably when we were enjoying close views of some young chicks.
Arctic Skua:	Seen daily but in far fewer numbers than the previous species.
Common Gull:	Seen daily
Herring Gull:	Seen daily.
Lesser Black-backed Gull:	Seen daily in small numbers.
Great Black-backed Gull:	Seen daily.
Black-headed Gull:	Seen daily in small numbers although 100+ on Loch of Tingwall on 12 th .
Kittiwake:	Seen daily in small numbers
Sandwich Tern:	Two seen in South Nesting Bay – a scarce visitor to Shetland.
Common Tern:	Seen on three days with 6 at Hillwell on 11 th .
Arctic Tern:	Seen daily in good numbers.
Guillemot:	Seen daily and in large numbers at seabird colonies.
Razorbill:	Seen daily.
Black Guillemot:	Seen daily in small numbers
Puffin:	Entertained us on an almost daily basis.
Rock Dove:	Seen daily
Wood Pigeon:	Singles at Kergord on 12 th and 16 th .
Turtle Dove:	Singles at Haroldswick and on Fetlar, both on 14 th .
Collared Dove:	Up to 6 seen on four days.
Skylark:	Seen daily.
Swallow:	Two at Virkie and one at Sumburgh Head on 11 th and 4 on 15 th .
Pied Wagtail:	Single males at Grutness on 11 th and Fetlar on 14 th and a pair on 12 th . All were Pieds (i.e. <i>M. a. yarrelli</i> .)
Meadow Pipit:	Seen daily.
Rock Pipit:	Seen almost daily.
Wren:	Birds of the endemic Shetland race seen on four days.
Blackbird:	Seen daily in small numbers.
Northern Wheatear:	Good numbers most days.
Marsh Warbler:	We were very fortunate to see one very close up in a garden at Virkie on 11 th .
Willow Warbler:	One at Skaw, Unst, on 14 th
Chiffchaff:	Two at Skaw, Unst, on 14 th . All three warblers were in the same spearmint patch enabling some good comparisons between this tricky species pair.
Red-backed Shrike:	A female at Skaw, Unst, on 15 th and another female in the leader's garden at Virkie on 17 th .
Rook:	Many at Kergord on 17 th .
Hooded Crow:	Seen daily in small numbers.
Raven:	Seen daily including some fine close views.
Starling:	Seen daily in large numbers.
Twite:	Trickier than usual but two at Sumburgh Head on 11 th , one on 12 th , 4 on Unst on 15 th and 2 on 16 th .
House Sparrow:	Seen daily in small numbers.

MAMMALS

- European Otter:** One in South Nesting Bay on 12th. A female and cub seen briefly at Baltasound on 15th, were followed soon after by glorious views of a big dog foraging in wrack, little over 20 yards away. Finally a female at Urafirth on 16th.
- Common Seal:** Seen daily in small numbers including one or two pups.
- Grey Seal:** A female at Scord on 11th and 25, including some large bulls, at the north end of Lerwick Harvour on 13th.
- Rabbit:** Far too numerous.

BUTTERFLIES

- Large White:** Seen on two days.
- Red Admiral:** Seen on 11th and 13th.
- Painted Lady:** Recorded on 11th, 12th and 13th.

OTHERS

- Hummingbird Hawkmoth:** Great views of one hovering at Red Campion flowers during our lunch stop at Spiggie on 11th.
- Map-winged Swift:** One at Haroldswick fresh from a moth trap.
- Silver Y:** Seen on several days.
- Shetland Bumblebee:** One on Fetlar on 14th.
- Moon Jellyfish:** Plenty seen from the Dunter on our trip to Noss on 13th.

Flowers (only those in flower, and in rough order of appearance)

Birds-foot Trefoil
Kidney Vetch
Red Campion
Sea Campion
Spring Squill
Thrift
Marsh Marigold
Common Lousewort
Cuckoo Flower (Lady's Smock)
Heath Spotted Orchid
Bogbean
Bog Cotton
Northern Marsh Orchid
Silverweed
Thyme
Butterwort
Tormentil
Heath Bedstraw
Meadow Buttercup
White Clover
Dandelion
Daisy
Common Mouse-ear
Pignut
Cow Parsley
Sea Sandwort
Moonwort
Stone Bramble
Scurvy Grass

Edmondston's Chickweed (Shetland Mouse-ear)
Norwegian Sandwort
Fairy Flax
Northern Rock Cress
Frog Orchid
Early Marsh Orchid
Early Purple Orchid
Mountain Everlasting
Moss Campion
Heath Milkwort
Common Violet
Heath Violet
Hoary Whitlow Grass
Alpine Meadow Rue
Lesser Clubmoss
Round-leaved Sundew
Primrose
Common Chickweed

Paul Harvey, June 2006

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