



Introduction

This report is my take on a group trip, focussing on what I saw and did, others on the trip did and saw different things. The trip was focussed on seeing just one UK mammal the black rat. Now limited to one small group of islands the Shiant islands between Skye and Harris the black rat is one of the most difficult mammals to catch up with. With a few previous attempts to get this trip organised failing James Hanlon assembled a group keen on seeing this mammal, consisting of John Dixon, Simon West, Mike Richardson and Mike Robinson in addition to James and Myself. The boat charter was quite expensive so splitting the cost was the only way to make the trip viable.

With the major target organised we devised a plan to take in some of Scotland's best wildlife paying particular attention on mammals with beaver, pine marten and wildcat high up on list of targets.

This was to be my last terrestrial UK mammal and I was looking forward to the trip and hoping that I would not have any car issues that always seem to blight my Scottish trips.

The photos are hyperlinked to larger versions

Diary

27th July 2013

Picking up James Hanlon a flyover **hobby** during loading of note we headed north to Arnside Knott for a spot of butterfly watching with Simon west and John Dixon. A **common lizard** and the first **Scotch argus** of the trip. We managed to separate the **Dark Green Fritillaries** from **High Browned Fritillaries** and had a nice haul of species in the hot and humid conditions. Mid afternoon the crew of Mike Richardson, John Dixon, Simon West, James Hanlon and myself we met up at Mike Robinson's house to organise the cars before heading up to Tayside. After an uneventful trip we had a quick chip stop before upsetting the locals initially by driving down the wrong track (yes all the sat navs fault) and upsetting the new owners of the usual parking spot thinking we were up to no good. With all the locals placated we settled in for some **beaver** watching, dipper and kingfisher spotted during the wait. I got the first view but eventually we all got onto 2 adults and two kits which showing well at times but mostly under the bank we were stood on. One tail slapping a couple of feet from me was a real experience, what a top encounter, we also had some great views of **daubenton's bats** low over the river. With the action over, we all headed for Ardnamurchan with **Rabbits** and **fallow deer** seen on the way. We grabbed a few hours sleep. (Mammal count 4)



Scotch Argus



Scotch Argus



Dark Green Fritillary



Large White



High Brown Fritillary



Grayling

28th July 2013

After a brief sleep we headed down to Ardnamurchan point to do a spot of sea watching, rain hampered things initially but when it did stop we located at least one possibly two **minke whales**. Simon and Mike Richardson joined us and we located a couple of **harbour porpoises** including a mother and calf which were very nice. A steady passage of **manx shearwaters** the birding highlight but no sign of any palmate newts despite our resident herp expert being present. We headed to Resipole to set up the tents and had yet more **harbour porpoises** in the Loch. After some sleep and a quick bite to eat with a **soprano pipistrelle** for company we decanted into two cars for the night drive. Our first stop was for the first **otter** of the trip but it was elusive so we continued a couple of **Natterer's bats** on the way to the car park to get organised. Here we had another otter and as dark fell we headed off for our night drive, two spotlights in each car one on the nearside and one on the offside. Mike Richardson drove the lead car and I the second car and with some walkie talkies we were well organised. However within a minute John had spotted a **wildcat** and despite radio contact the lead car had not stopped in time and missed it. The second car crew had some nice views as it headed up the slope and disappeared over the ridge as the first car crew arrived. Despite an extensive drive we only saw a **fox** and **red deer** before getting some sleep. (Mammal count 13)

29th July 2013

We awoke to find Mike Richardson had moved his tent during the night apparently our little cluster had a significant number of snorers. Our first stop was to the otter hide where a group of **common seals** were resting along with a lone **grey seal**. The third **otter** of the trip entertained if a little distantly and after a long stint we headed back to Ardnamurchan point. Little birds and mammals of note a few **porpoises** and a brief **minke whale** but we did see a cracking **giant wood wasp**. We overheard a small child talking about a fish like a lizard in a small pool and our herp expert investigated and it was indeed a **palmate newt**. We headed back to Resipole and into some heavy rain so it was time for some sleep. We awoke and packed all the gear and assembled for the second night drive. The same crews as before headed off, **fox** and **red deer** again plentiful, but down a side track I alone had a **wildcat** cross the road but we could not relocate it.



Ardnamurchan



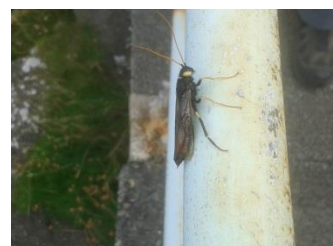
Common Seal and pup



Hooded Crows



Common Seals



Giant Wood wasp



Red Deer

A **pine marten** crossing the hillside was very welcome but with no further wildcat sightings we returned to our cars and headed off through the night to Uig, **roe deer** and **badger** en route. (Mammal count 18)

30th July 2013

With a couple of hours sleep along the way we got to Uig in plenty of time for the ferry. After a full cooked breakfast we headed outside but there was not a great deal of note. On arrival in Harris we followed up a good tip for Golden eagles. Under an hour later we screeched to a halt, a **golden eagle** flew right over us with **raven** and **buzzard** in attendance. We continued and located another **golden eagle** perched and had even more amazing views as it took off and gave us several close flyby's. We started picking up a few **rock doves** here and there on the way to Callanish to see the impressive stone circle. A welcome ice cream and a rest in the tea shop before we headed back to Tarbet.

A few stops on the way produced little. In Tarbet we organised some accommodation and get some food, but also to organise the transfer to the Shiant islands which had been moved by the boat skipper to accommodate his plans not ours and this would not allow us to visit St Kilda. For accommodation we opted for a campsite a few miles south where the communal areas were converted from blackhouses. It was excellent, had a loch aspect but had some serious midge issues. We relaxed for the evening drinking some warm lager Mike has in the truck and taking stock of the trip so far. (Mammal count 18)



Palmate Newt



Golden Eagle



Callanish Stone Circle



Rock Dove

31st July 2013

A rather leisurely start allowed me to catch up on some sleep which was well received. We had to pick up James from his accommodation a little to the north of Tarbet. A **mink** crossed the road on the way and in the village we spotted the most unusual coloured piebald **rabbit** as well as a **golden eagle** on the way back to Tarbet a good little trip. We headed south to search for corncrake at a couple of sites without success but had a nice cup of tea and relaxed a little in the café. The weather was less than ideal but did not rain much. With no luck with corncrakes we headed to Lewis stopping at a few sites but connected with little of note. We were scratching around for stuff without too much luck but made a stop at Loch na Muilne. We were too late for the red necked phalaropes but **great yellow bumblebees** and a couple of **moss carder bees** were present as well and we also located a **black darter dragonfly**.

The close proximity to the Butt of Lewis was too much to resist so we headed north. Conditions were good for seawatching and within a minute of arriving Mike Richardson picked up some dolphins and we were quickly on them they were **white beaked dolphins** and then they were **Risso's dolphins** actually it was a mixed pod of both hence the initial confusion. At least half a dozen of each that showed nicely for quite some time and we had a few **harbour porpoises** as well for good measure. Not much in the way of seabirds but some **black guillemots** were quite nice and a large amount of **jellyfish** close in shore. After quite a bit of time we headed off to nearby Loch Stiapavat with its plentiful '**Hebridean**' **starlings**. We had brief views of distant **corncrake** amongst several **black rabbits** and some closer calling **corncrakes**.

A visit to Stornoway was in order to stock up on provisions for the next day and for some quality ale for the evening. The local chip shop was still of high quality and I at my fill before wandering around the harbour for the resident **grey seals** that make a living from the fishing boats. Some nice **hooded crows** were a bonus in the evening light before we retired to our campsite for those beers.

(Mammal count 21)



Moss Carder Bumblebee



Hebridean Starling



Black Darter



Risso's Dolphins



Grey Seal



Jellyfish

1st August 2013

I awoke early and had a look at the campsite Loch, an **otter** was feeding and I watched it for a while as the others popped along for a view. All the gear was packed and repacked for today's trip to the Shiant Islands. Assembling at the harbour in Tarbet our gear and then us were transferred to the Sea Harris boat – Enchanted Isle via a rib. We headed off under the Scalpay bridge and headed to the Shiant's, I was suitably full of sea sickness medicine and played it safe staying outside watching the horizon and was fine. As we approached the Shiant's the number of **puffins** increased and we passed some of the small islets they reached plague proportions, this sort of spectacle continues to impress me despite seeing it many times. We landed on the beach near the bothy on Eilean an Taighe using the small tender and transferred our gear to our camping area in front of the bothy and set up our tents. It was during this process that we saw the first **white tailed eagle** harassing the seabird colonies on Garbh Eilean the next island connected by a small causeway. A steady stream of seabirds came over the causeway often harassed by the resident **gulls** and **skuas**. We got busy with setting the traps we brought and baited some likely sites. We settled down for some food as the heavens opened with a torrential downpour. At dusk Mike Richardson and I checked all the traps getting very wet in the process. We lit a fire to dry out as James came in with a tripped trap. I extracted the contents and we had the mammal the whole trip was about a **black rat**. We had a photo shoot before letting it go. Mike Robinson elected to watch the bait in heavy rain while we all retreated to the Bothy as the tents were full of water. The rain eased and we got a message that rats were coming to the bait. We joined Mike and watched at least 3 rats coming to the bait. Torrential rain and high winds again appeared and we all retreated to the bothy to shelter from the storm and get a little sleep. (Mammal Count 22)



Otter



Me on the Shiant's



Puffin



Eilean an Taighe



Great Skua

2nd August 2013

I awoke at dawn, the first to rise and I checked the close two sets of traps 8 from the 20 traps we had set here were tripped I waited for the others taking some photos of the island before we all gathered to open the traps and had a photo shoot while letting the rats go. The third set of traps were all empty. We packed up all the gear as we had made contact with the boatman and were able to leave the island later in the morning. Another white tailed eagle put in a brief appearance but otherwise it was much the same as the previous day.



Black Rat



Black Rat



Black Rat



Black Rat



Garbh Eilean



Mike Richardson and I

Leaving the island was a little more difficult than arriving due to the poorer conditions, but we made it safely off and had a tour round the islands before getting safely back to Tarbet. With no prospect of getting to St Kilda we organised getting back to the mainland via North Uist. On arrival to North Uist we unsuccessfully searched for the Buff breasted sandpiper in a large flock of **golden plover** and successfully put two cars in a ditch avoiding oncoming vehicles on a single track road, including the 4x4 truck. We were rather concerned we were in a bit of trouble as the 4x4 truck had a rear wheel off the ground and a front wheel deep in a ditch, but some excellent use of our rather generous physique enabled the rear wheel to return to tarmac and some good driving got the truck out and it easily pulled my car out – crisis over. We searched for snowy owl, hen harrier and short eared owl also unsuccessfully before heading to the ferry terminal in Lochamaddy a **white tailed eagle** the only bird of note. Some fish and chips and some sleep were in order in what was a little choppy crossing. We got almost to Fort William before stopping for some sleep, **roe deer** on the way. (Mammal Count 22)

3rd August 2013

With Mike Richardson homeward bound Simon joined John and myself and after a quick visit to Tesco for supplies in Inverness we completing our journey to Channonry point. We arrived early which was very well timed as the **Bottle nosed dolphins** put on an amazing show for us. With plenty of dolphins about close in and performing acrobatics it was difficult to know where to look at times



Bottle nosed Dolphins



Feral Goats



Creeping Ladies Tresses



Siskin

Onward to the Findhorn Valley where we searched for **feral goats** which are usually easy to find but today rather elusive, but four were found at the bottom of the valley with little else apart from a few **red deer** we headed to Speyside. A search for Mountain hare proved fruitless and all we could rustle up were a few **red grouse**. Lochindorb was like the Atlantic so no chance of seeing anything there so off to Loch Garten. No red squirrels but a **crested tit** and a couple of **bank voles** of note and the obligatory **osprey**. We checked out some sites for dragonflies but had timed it badly for the specialities and the weather conditions were far from ideal, but we did see a **common hawk** ovipositing and a newly emerged **highland darter**. After a brief stop for **creeping ladies tresses** we made a bee line for Glenshee. The weather holding we located large numbers of red deer at several places before stopping at the car park and scanning the slopes where we quickly located about a dozen **mountain hares** but could not string the **red grouse** into ptarmigan. We had had our fill so headed towards our last top for the evening, on the way we added **brown hare** to the trip list.

A stop in Blairgowrie for some chips, before heading off to see the beavers once more. This time we tried to find access to the other side of the river which proved a little more difficult than expected. But eventually we found a route and got to a good area when the heavens opened. This kept the **beavers** out of site until it was properly dark and the photo opportunity was lost. But we had a few views but they were mostly downstream out of site so we called it a night however John tripped over a **hedgehog** on the walk out, but it seemed OK. (Mammal Count 28)

4th August 2013

A night in the car during heavy rain during which I slept particularly well. We had slept at Loch of the Lowes and had the reserve to ourselves, we quickly found a few **red squirrels**, a couple of **osprey** and a **spotted flycatcher**. We drove to Mike Robinson's to sort the cars and go our separate ways, and I was home in time for a birthday meal after a great trip.

(Mammal Count 29)



Common Hawker



Red Deer



Sundew



Mountain Hare



Osprey



Spotted Flycatcher

Birds – 101

Red Throated Diver	Little grebe	Great Crested Grebe
Fulmar	Manx Shearwater	Storm Petrel
Gannet	Cormorant	Shag
Grey Heron	Mute Swan	Greylag Goose
Mallard	Scaup	Tufted Duck
Eider	Red Breasted Merganser	White Tailed Eagle
Osprey	Golden Eagle	Buzzard
Kestrel	Merlin	Red Grouse
Corncrake	Pheasant	Moorhen
Oystercatcher	Ringed Plover	Golden Plover
Lapwing	Dunlin	Common Sandpiper
Redshank	Curlew	Great Skua
Arctic Skua	Black Headed Gull	Common Gull
Herring Gull	Lesser Black Backed Gull	Greater Black Backed Gull
Kittiwake	Sandwich Tern	Common Tern
Arctic Tern	Puffin	Guillemot
Razorbill	Rock Dove	Woodpigeon
Collared Dove	Tawny Owl	Swift
Kingfisher	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Sand Martin
House Martin	Barn Swallow	Meadow Pipit
Rock Pipit	Pied Wagtail	Wren
Dipper	Dunnock	Robin
Wheatear	Stonechat	Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush	Blackbird	Whitethroat
Grasshopper warbler	Willow Warbler	Chiffchaff
Spotted Flycatcher	Great Tit	Coal Tit
Blue Tit	Crested Tit	Magpie
Jay	Jackdaw	Rook
Carrion Crow	Hooded Crow	Raven
Starling	House Sparrow	Chaffinch
Greenfinch	Goldfinch	Siskin
Linnet	Lesser Redpoll	Twite
Bullfinch	Reed Bunting	Yellowhammer
Hobby	Goosander	

Mammals – 29

Grey Seal	Common Seal	White Beaked Dolphin
Minke Whale	Harbour Porpoise	Rabbit
Risso's Dolphin	Bottlenose Dolphin	Otter
Bank Vole	Wood Mouse	American Mink
Red Deer	Roe Deer	Fallow Deer
Pine Marten	Wildcat	Black Rat

Soprano Pipistrelle	Natterer's Bat	Daubenton's Bat
Red Fox	Badger	Feral Goat
European Beaver	Red Squirrel	Brown Hare
Mountain Hare	Hedgehog	

Misc - 24

Large White	Grayling	Gatekeeper
Meadow Brown	Small Skipper	Small White
Green Veined White	Common Blue	Scotch Argus
Dark Green Fritillary	High Brown Fritillary	Small Heath
Common Toad	Common Frog	Palmate Newt
Great Yellow Bumblebee	Giant Wood wasp	Creeping Ladies Tresses
Common Hawker	Northern Emerald	Emerald Damselfly
Red Admiral	Common Lizard	Moss Carder Bee

Notes

The Shiant Islands are the last site for Black Rat in the UK, and with increasing scrutiny of rats on seabird breeding islands the possibility of eradication is real. This is despite the fact that their numbers are kept in check by the lack of food during the winter, go and see them soon. Just one note an overnight stay will be required to see them and this is expensive, not for the stay but for the boat transfers. If you go good luck and feel free to contact me for and advice.

