



## Uist and Barra Autumn Migration

**(Includes a day trip to Barra)**

Dates: 8th - 14th September 2018

The southern isles of Uist and Benbecula are one of the best places in the UK for connecting with migrant waders from both the east and west and this week is often the peak for certain species appearing such as Buff-breasted Sandpiper, American Golden Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. It is also an excellent time to connect with passing seabirds such as Sooty Shearwater, Leach's Petrel and Sabine's Gull when there are strong winds from the west. Each year is different but it's never short on action with plenty of regular migrant waders and lots of raptor action with Merlins, Peregrine and Hen Harrier all concentrating their activity on the machair and coast. Combine this with regular sightings of both Golden and White-tailed Eagle as well as 3 species of diver and a week in Uist and Barra at this time of year can't fail to impress.



We explore a variety of habitats although birds can turn up anywhere and regularly do which adds to the excitement. Regular sites such as Rubha Ardvule, Balgarva and Ardivachar in South Uist are excellent for waders whilst Loch Eynort, Howmore and Druidibeg plantation sometimes hold migrant warblers and flycatchers. Benbecula also has its productive sites with the freshwater loch complex around the west side attracting good numbers of waders and wildfowl whilst the machair here has produced such gems as Upland Sandpiper. Eiders gather off Stinky Bay and Slavonian Grebes should

be arriving back now too at their regular wintering grounds off Balivanich etc. North Uist and Berneray although similar to South Uist and Benbecula have quite a different feel but are no less productive. Balranald is always worth a look with the bays and shores turning up waders and gulls. Nearby Loch Paible has a track record of rare waders with Baird's Sandpiper being particularly attracted to this site whilst Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint are regular. Loch Sandary is also nearby and often holds wildfowl and acts as a resting / bathing site for gulls.



We'll also visit Barra for the day where we'll take a circular route around the island calling in at various plantations, bays and beaches to look for migrants. We'll also visit Vatersay, the most southerly, inhabited island in the Outer Hebrides with some stunning beaches. We get to and from Barra by taking the ferry from Eriskay to Armhor which is often good for divers and the main wintering site for Black-throated Divers in the southern isles. It should also provide us with the opportunity to see White-tailed Eagle and an outside chance of Bottle-nosed Dolphin which gather here to catch salmon when they're running.

The anticipation and excitement of being here when masses of waders and seabirds are passing can rival anywhere in the UK and you pretty much have the place to yourself with just a handful of local birders searching the expansive habitat. Coupled with the high density of raptors and a very good chance of seeing otters up close a week in Uist in autumn is a must.

### **Itinerary:**

The following is a guide to where we'll be going on which day as we will make the most of the prevailing weather conditions.

**Day 1:** The first day we'll explore Benbecula where we'll pick up a decent variety of birds that should include Hen Harrier, Merlin and Golden Eagle amongst the raptors whilst a good variety of waders are normally present along the west coast and fields including large flocks of Golden Plover that often have Black-tailed Godwits and Ruff amongst them. The first of the wintering population of Slavonian Grebes should be arriving on the sea off Balivanich which is a regular haunt for them along with Eiders and various divers. There will be plenty of Wheatears and wagtails around along with the chance of picking up a Lapland Bunting on the machair or along the coast. If we have time later in the day we'll pop across to the north side of South Uist and take a walk onto the machair there which is a regular spot for both Pectoral Sandpipers and Buff-breasted Sandpipers and another good area for birds of prey.

**Day 2:** We'll concentrate our efforts on North Uist today and make our way out to Balranald which is an excellent site for passage waders and seabirds. Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint are often found along the shore whilst American Golden Plover can occasionally be found on the machair. Manx Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater and Leach's Petrel are often seen during onshore westerly winds along with large numbers of Gannets and Fulmars. It's also the last area in the Outer Hebrides that holds Corn Buntings and we should be able to find them around the visitor centre. Lapland Bunting is a strong possibility here too. Nearby lochs usually hold a variety of wildfowl that normally include Shoveler, Teal, Tufted Duck and Wigeon as well as the odd Whooper Swan. For variety we'll also visit the plantations around Langass which often hold the odd warbler as well as Siskin and Lesser Redpolls. The nearby island of Baleshare is attached to the main island of North Uist by a causeway and is often a good site for raptors such as Hen Harrier, Merlin and White-tailed Eagle. It also regularly supports good numbers of waders including Buff-breasted Sandpiper and American Golden Plover amongst masses of Golden Plover.

**Day 3:** Today we'll make our way to Eriskay to catch a morning ferry across to Barra. The stretch of water separating Barra from South Uist usually holds a good variety of birds including Great Northern, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers. Eiders are common and we should also pick up some commoner seabirds such as Kittiwakes, Arctic Tern and auks that often feed in the tidal waters here. There's also a chance that we'll spot Bottle-nosed Dolphins during this crossing although they do roam over a large area and aren't always present. Barra itself is fairly compact and dominated by hills in the centre which provide enough shelter for small plantations to become established and we'll stop at a few of these to see what we can find. Small numbers of flycatchers and warblers can be present but you never really know what you might find here. A visit to this lovely, small island is enhanced by the splendid beaches on Vatersay and at Eoligarry where incoming flights still land on the tidal sands.

**Day 4:** We'll explore the northern half of South Uist today with a variety of habitats producing a good daily bird total as well as providing many sites that we may see otters in. We'll start at the headland of Ardvule where we may pick up passing shearwaters, skuas and even petrels if the winds blowing from the south-west. Bays on the north and south side of the peninsula often hold a good variety of waders and maybe some pale-bellied Brent Geese taking a rest on their way to their wintering grounds in Ireland. It's a magic spot and between here and the neighbouring Bornish machair we have a very good chance of picking up some scarce birds such as Lapland Bunting or American Golden Plover. Large numbers of Lapwings and Golden Plover as well as lots of Skylarks and Twite will also be found in the fields. We shall also pay a visit to a wooded area at Loch Eynort where there's more chance of spotting the odd warbler as well as birds of prey with all 8 resident species being a real possibility.

**Day 5:** Berneray lies at the far northern end of North Uist and has only been connected to the main island since 2001. It's a lovely island positioned in the Sound of Harris and bounded on the west side by a superb beach set to the backdrop of the Harris hills. Common Scoters and Great Northern Diver are likely to be present whilst Harbour Porpoise may also be seen. The adjacent machair often has good numbers of waders on it as does the shore on the north-east of the island where we may also find Slavonian Grebe or even an early Long-tailed Duck. Making our way back to North Uist we'll make roadside stops to check creeks and lochs for Greenshank and Wigeon as well as other wildfowl and waders before making our way out to Loch Portain. This remote area on the north-east side of

the island is very good for Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle and Hen Harrier whilst isolated patches of cover may hold warblers and finches. We'll also call in at Lochmaddy to have a look for otters and check the cover here for warblers, flycatchers and finches as the gardens in the village often hold birds from further afield.

**Day 6:** The South Ford is an intricate area of tidal pools and sands that are excellent for good numbers of waders with regular flocks of Grey Plover and Knot joining the flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits and Dunlin. The area regularly holds scarcer waders such as Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint as well as the occasional rarity. It is also a regular hunting area for Peregrine Falcon and Merlin which come for the smaller waders. Geese often gather in this area including nearby Loch Bee which holds lots of Wigeon and Teal and maybe an early returning Scaup. The large numbers of wildfowl also attract White-tailed Eagle that can often be found sitting on the smaller islands. After exploring Loch Bee we'll move on to Druidibeg plantation where we'll take a look for warblers and flycatchers all the time keeping an eye on the skies for raptors such as Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier. We'll also make a visit to the Howmore - Stoneybridge area along the west side which is a lovely stretch of coastline often full of waders as well as Eiders and Great Northern Diver off-shore.

**Day 7:** On the final morning we'll explore the west side of Benbecula once more as the machair, lochs and coast is constantly seeing birds moving through at this time of year and anything might have dropped in or changed since the start of the week. A good variety of wildfowl, waders and raptors are sure to be seen. If you would like to get an idea of what you may see at this time of year please visit the [sightings page](#) on the website that also has a link to an [archive](#) of sightings from past years.

**Short list of species:** Brent Geese, Whooper Swan, Eider, Gadwall, Shoveler, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, American Golden Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Great Skua, Sabine's Gull, Arctic Tern, Sooty Shearwater, Storm Petrel, Leach's Petrel, Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Peregrine, Merlin, Red-throated Diver, Great Northern Divers, Black-throated Diver, Black Guillemot, Barred Warbler, Corn Bunting, Lapland Bunting, Twite, plus many more. Red Deer, Grey Seals, Harbour Seals and Otters are the most likely mammals although we may also see Bottle-nosed Dolphins. If the weather's calm enough we will set a moth trap to have a peek at some of the local night life.

**Dates:** 8th - 14th September 2018

**Tour duration:** 6 nights / 7 days on the islands.

**Cost:** £800 per person

Accommodation is provided in some of the best local guesthouses for 6 nights.

All meals are provided with evening meals taken in local hotels. If you have special dietary requirements please let us know when booking.

**Group size:** 8 (maximum)

**Booking:** Please email: [steveduffield70@gmail.com](mailto:steveduffield70@gmail.com)

**Where to meet:** The tour begins and ends in Uist. If you arrive by plane or as a foot passenger off the ferry we will be there to meet you and take you to your accommodation. If you arrive early and are already in the islands on the first day then you'll be picked up in the morning and we'll explore local habitats and wildlife whilst others arrive during the morning. On the last day we'll continue to search for wildlife until everyone has departed on their various flight / ferry connections.

**Getting here:** It's possible to reach Uist by either flying or by ferry. [Loganair](#) operate regular flights from Glasgow to Benbecula although the earlier you book the cheaper the fare. Alternatively [Calmac](#) operate ferries between Uig, Skye - Lochmaddy, North Uist and from Mallaig - Lochboisdale, South Uist.