



This newsletter has been designed to enable you to get an idea of what kind of experience you will have should you join us on one of our cruises.

Fri 1 Jan | Happy New Year Wishing all our previous and prospective guests a Happy and Healthy New Year. If you haven't yet experienced one of our cruises check them out and see what we have on offer. We've our usual mix of 4-night to 9-night cruises, all delivered aboard Hjalmar Bjorge this year and we hope to welcome you onboard soon.

Fri 1 Jan | International Year of Biodiversity 2010 has been declared International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) by the United Nations – this is the year that celebrates the diversity of life on Earth, including every plant, animal and micro-organism. The campaign was launched at The Natural History Museum on 25 November 2009 and has over 200 UK partners. The IYB team would like everyone to make one small pledge (or New Year's resolution) to do one small, attainable thing for biodiversity this year. Why not get some inspiration at <http://www.biodiversityislife.net/?q=do-one-thing?>

Thu 7 Jan | Local research news The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust's work has been included in two pieces of research recently published. Check out the BBC News website — http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8440000/8440002.stm — for information about Dr Andy Foote's work which indicates there may be two types of killer whale in UK waters, not just one as previously thought. And visit <http://planetearth.nerc.ac.uk/news/story.aspx?id=619> to read about Dr Clare Embling's research into harbour porpoise habitat preference, which was undertaken aboard HWDT vessel Silurian.

Fri 9 Jan | Thank you from GMRT Received today, a letter of thanks from Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team for the donation we sent them toward the end of last year. Our donation of £798, from Hannah and Mark and guests who chose to double our donation of £5 per head, will help towards the construction of a garage which will store all-terrain vehicles plus ongoing costs of training and equipment replacement. Visit Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team's website (currently under construction) — <http://glencoemountainrescue.org.uk/> — or see details of our charity donations.

We also received a wee note from Argyll Animal Aid (<http://www.smallpaws.co.uk/>) thanking us for the £352.50 donation and for keeping them in our thoughts.

Fri 22 Jan | Wildlife Photographer of the Year After further debate the winner of last year's competition has had his image banned and for the first time in 46 years there is now no Wildlife Photographer of the Year (2009). There had been question marks about whether the "storybook wolf" was indeed a wild animal or one which could specifically be hired for photographic purposes. Although photographer José Luis Rodríguez strongly denied the photo was staged the judges disagreed and his image will now be removed from the exhibition and tour. An alternative winning image will

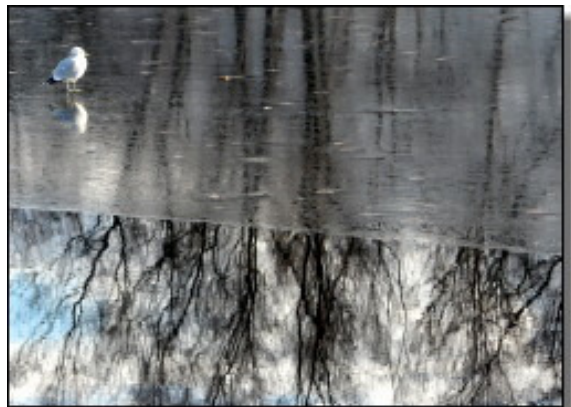


not be chosen as the identities of the photographers have all been revealed and judging is a strictly blind process. The Telegraph has comment and debate on this subject at <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/kateday/100006327/wildlife-photographer-of-the-year-stripped-of-award-oh-so-easy-to-be-wise-after-the-event/>.

There is a fee of £20 per entry for the Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2010 competition. Closing date for entries this year is 5 March 2010.

Sat 23 Jan | Save Scotland's seals Time is running out for our seals. On Thursday 4 February a new Marine Bill will be agreed by the Scottish Parliament. 90% of the UK's globally important seal populations are in Scottish waters and these creatures currently do not enjoy the same levels of protection as other marine mammals. The Conservation of Seals Act (1970) allows the shooting of seals all year round, even during breeding seasons, which means dependent pups could be left to starve to death.

Sun 24 Jan | Chilly canal walk Hannah, Kirsty, Daisy and Seven enjoyed a stroll along the Caledonian Canal today. It was pretty cold, but bright and sunny too. A few pictures are shown below.



The photos on the previous page show (top row, L-R) clouds reflected in the canal surface; Hjalmar Bjorge and a snowy Ben Nevis (middle row, L-R) trees reflected in the canal; a seagull on the frozen surface of the water (bottom row, L-R) two views of the railway bridge beside the canal. Photos by Hannah Thompson

A newspaper article published today claims that the worst cold spell in decades has left Scotland facing a wildlife crisis. Experts say weeks of freezing weather have left many species struggling to survive as food supplies dry up and energy reserves run low.

Birds such as buzzards, ospreys, swans and kingfishers are expected to suffer a drop in numbers and the Scottish Wildlife Trust said some small mammals have had to resort to gnawing bark and twigs for food. Last night, James Reynolds, of RSPB Scotland, said the freezing weather would have been hardest on smaller birds.

With temperatures plunging to -20c in parts of the Highlands, there are also fears that deer will have struggled to find food. Robbie Kernahan, of the Scottish Deer Commission, said: "We are concerned but it will be early spring before we can really begin to assess how the weather has affected deer."

Thu 4 Feb | Cruise review from Tourdust Last September we welcomed Ben from Tourdust - the cultural and adventure travel specialists - aboard Hjalmar Bjorge. Looks like he has been as busy as the rest of us over the winter as he has only now found time to publish his review of the 4-night cruise!!! Read what Ben has to say on Tourdust's website at <http://www.tourdust.com/blog/2010/02/04/hebridean-cruise-review>.

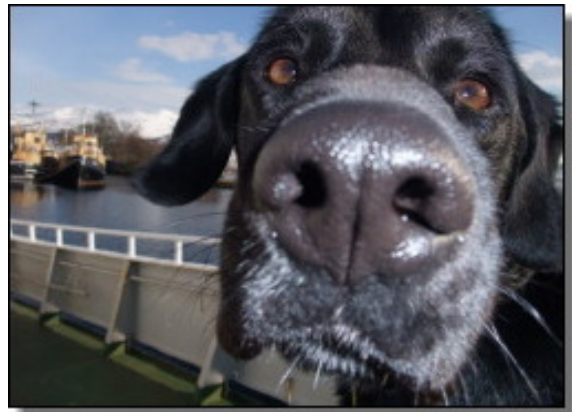
Tue 9 Feb | Scottish Islands Explorer magazine owner dies It is with sadness and shock that we report Jeremy Smith, proprietor of Silver Sea Press and editor of "Scottish Islands Explorer" died unexpectedly and peacefully in his sleep at his home in West Sussex yesterday. He was 35. Jeremy had bought the publication in December 2006 and long-standing readers will no doubt agree that he greatly improved the style and content of the magazine during his time as owner and editor.

Jeremy had bought land on Jura with the intention of building a home and moving the magazine, appropriately, to a Scottish island. Jeremy is survived by his wife, both parents and three sisters.

Fri 12 Feb | New 9-night cruise due to popularity Have a look at our amended list of available cruises for the 2010 season. We have added a new 9-night Outer Hebridean (St Kilda) Explorer from 26 July thru 4 August as the others filled so quickly. Hope we'll see you onboard soon. Don't forget all repeat guests get a modest 5% discount on the cost of their cruise.

Mon 8 Mar | Maintenance underway Prior to the start of the new season there's always maintenance to do onboard any boat and Hjalmar Bjorge is no exception. The vessel has been berthed in the Corpach Basin over what has recently been described as the coldest winter Lochaber has experienced for over 50 years. In fact much of the Canal's length has been frozen since before Christmas and has only recently completely defrosted.

Hjalmar Bjorge's wheelhouse has been repainted and work in the galley is also underway. The forward accommodation is going to be re-carpeted in the next couple of weeks and new radiator valves (providing automatic operation) are going to be fitted. New lighting is going to be fitted in the top shower which will brighten the area considerably.



Michelle has been onboard painting and helping Mark with other pre-season tasks. She has been ably assisted by Alfie, seen here soaking up Hammerite fumes on deck. Mmm. Above (left) sunrise over Ben Nevis on Alfie's walk before work and (right) Alfie on the deck of Hjalmar Bjorge in Corpach Basin by Michelle Baron

Mon 15 Mar | Rare white puffin visits

Scillies Photographed by Barbara Fryer from Devon who was out on a boat trip, a puffin of this colour (or lack thereof) is the result of leucism where colour pigments exist but are diluted. The oddity was seen in the company of more usual black puffins for about 15 minutes who didn't seem to care what it looked like.



Its rarity was confirmed by bird expert Peter Robinson who has worked for the RSPB for 25 years. "I lived on the Isles of Scilly for 12 years and worked ringing puffins in Scotland for a season," he said, "and have never even heard of a white puffin let alone seen one." Above: leucistic puffin by Barbara Fryer

Thu 18 Mar | Elvis no longer lives You may remember Mark got some excellent shots of Elvis the otter in Tobermory. (Go to http://www.northernlight-uk.com/news/august_2008.htm and scroll down to the 24th of the month.) Elvis' name came about because his hair was always "slicked back" and "he was a bit of a performer". Sadly Elvis was reported dead on today's BBC website. The otter drew many visitors to Tobermory and there have been calls for a statue to be erected in his honour.

Fri 19 Mar | Good and bad news for St Kilda's petrels There has, for some time, been concern that the population of Leach's storm petrels on St Kilda was falling fast. Most regular visitors to the islands have witnessed another bird - the great skua or "bonxie" - killing petrels and the popular view is that these much larger and aggressive birds are to blame.

New research has established that this is true: Great skuas are estimated to kill about 20,000 petrels a year. However the research also revealed that, under the circumstances, there were more Leach's petrels on the islands than expected. This begs a new question for research: Where are the new populations of petrels coming from? Read more about Will Miles' research [here](#).

Thu 25 Mar | Oldest osprey returns The Loch of the Lowes Wildlife Reserve today welcomed back the UK's oldest breeding osprey today. The female osprey is estimated to be 25 years old which is over three times the average lifespan of such a bird.

She has once again completed a 3,000 mile migration from West Africa to her summer breeding ground in Perthshire. She is now waiting for her mate to arrive to begin her 20th

breeding season. So far, this one bird has laid 55 eggs, 46 of which have hatched into chicks which have successfully left the nest.

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