



Hello and welcome to our first newsletter. We have been exploring the beautiful west coast of Scotland for almost 10 years now. These regular newsletters have been designed to enable readers to follow our progress and thus get an idea of what kind of experience you will have should you join us on one of our cruises — we very much hope you will.

Tue 10 May | Hello St Kilda Although we have been busy running charters since the beginning of April this was the first scheduled trip to St Kilda, with Rob, taking Elizabeth G and his full complement of 10 guests out on a "Focus on St Kilda Expedition". A good time was had by all including two passengers who came to Oban all the way from Sweden.

Thu 12 May | Happy birthday to you We were delighted to welcome back regular cruise guests Ronnie and friends, from Edinburgh, for the first non-diving charter aboard Hjalmar Bjorge this season. A second reason for celebration this week was Dale's birthday whilst onboard. Heather did us proud with a huge chocolate cake (though we're not revealing how many candles were on top...).

Sat 14 May | Laurel & Hardy? We were pleased to see a few familiar faces aboard Hjalmar Bjorge's first "Focus on St Kilda Expedition" this season including "Laurel & Hardy" (aka Micky and Martin) and Eva from Sweden. Coincidentally these three guests were all on the same cruise last September.

An unexpected guest appeared onboard Chalice during the aptly named "Scenic Seabird Cruise." This trip saw four days of unbroken sunshine and the weather was so glorious that, unusually, the entire crew accompanied the guests for a walk on Canna leaving the vessel on anchor. Upon returning to the boat the evidence showed that an uninvited guest had been flying around inside the saloon and wheelhouse. Chris may have been heard to mutter, "Oh sh**," under his breath but thanks to the professionalism of the crew, and some hasty tidying up, none of the guests were any the wiser. So we're admitting it now. :-)

Sun 15 May | Puffins aplenty Apart from the feathered vandal the "Scenic Seabirds Cruise" aboard Chalice was about as perfect as it gets. Fantastic weather, active porpoises, loads of puffins on Lunga, some amusing bridled ("spectacled") guillemots, a visit to Fingal's cave on Staffa and the guiding expertise of John Anderson. John has been sailing local waters for 40 years and what he doesn't know about boats, birds and wildlife could be written on the back of, erm, something very small indeed.

Tue 17 May | First NTS work party to St Kilda Departing Mallaig on Monday 16 May Rob safely delivered the first National Trust for Scotland workparty to St Kilda on the morning of Tuesday 17. He was assisted in Village Bay by Mark and the crew of Hjalmar Bjorge who were there with 12 guests on a "Focus on St Kilda Expedition." Rob brought Elizabeth G straight back to Tobermory (as the first return journey is empty of course) but Mark stayed at St Kilda for three nights.

Fri 20 May | Droopy whooper As usual, the week long "Focus on St Kilda Expedition" guests saw a variety of birds including puffins, gannets, skuas, kittiwakes and golden and sea eagles at Canna on the return journey. Oddest bird spotted at St Kilda was a whooper swan, pair of, one of whom had a damaged wing which was receiving attention from the Ranger on Hirta.



Sun 22 May | Triple whammy Hjalmar Bjorge, Chalice and Elizabeth G are all at St Kilda. Hjalmar Bjorge sailed out overnight from Oban, a journey which is undertaken in exceptionally good conditions, arriving in Village Bay at 0800. Chris' guests aboard Chalice enjoyed a more leisurely journey to Hirta with the previous day and night spent at the beautiful island of Taransay. Photo: Chris Jackson

Tue 24 May | Corncrakes seen and heard! Guests aboard Chalice today not only heard multiple corncrakes calling at Eriskay, they actually saw a corncrake with a chick!!! High spirits alone possibly propelled the boat to the Cairns of Coll where a minke whale was spotted with porpoise. Wall to wall sunshine (or should that be "horizon to horizon" sunshine?) with flat calm seas. What a day.

Thu 26 May | Peregrine buzzes goldie Passengers on Hjalmar Bjorge were absorbed by the sight of a fearless peregrine falcon buzzing (attacking) a golden eagle. The most likely explanation for this is that the goldie had strayed into the peregrine's territory.

Mon 30 May | Life's a whirl Chalice departed Oban on Sunday 29 May and sailed South to Jura where a red breasted merganser was spotted at their overnight anchorage. The next morning they ventured to the Corryvreckan whirlpool where the tide was really racing. Guests were amused by the sight of seagulls sitting on the surface of the water, slowly spinning in circles, before being sucked underneath and flying out again. Either they were enjoying this or are very stupid indeed. Chalice, which normally cruises at about 8.5 knots, flew as if turbo-charged through the whirlpool, exiting at about 13.5 knots. Wow!