



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.

Wed 3 May | Alderney ahoy! We got an update from Gordon today saying that Hans Hansson has left Fowey (Cornwall) and is now at Alderney in the Channel Islands. They have a few tasks to complete here and expect to arrive in Oban around 20 May. The interior work has all been completed (the saloon and galley - complete with Jan the cook - are shown below) and the vessel is looking ship shape and ready for her cruising season which begins with an Orkney cruise starting on 3 June. An exciting season continues with Shetland, the Faroes and Iceland then Norway later in the year including Northern Lights, Eagles & Killer Whale cruises which extend our cruising season into November. All photos: Gordon Fitton



Sat 6 May | Canna to Kilda Today Chalice, Elizabeth G and Hjalmar Bjorge all collected guests in Oban before setting off for various locations throughout the Hebrides.



Chalice is running a "Lochs & Bens" cruise aiming to visit Lochs Sunart, Drumbuie, Nevis,

Scavaig, Buie and Spelve with stops at Canna, Treshnish and Mull to name but a few destinations. Hjalmar Bjorge has a private charter (welcome back Lyndon and friends!), the route of which will be determined by weather and the preferences of the guests. Elizabeth G is aiming for St Kilda which will be our first visit this year. The forecast is okay - not brilliant but not bad - so fingers crossed. Photo: Hannah Thompson

Sun 7 May | Mucky little dog Hjalmar Bjorge visited the Small Isles today with Mark, Izzy (the cook) and Nara (crew) taking a long walk on Muck. They were followed all the way round by a hairy little terrier who had greeted them on the pier. After the walk he joined Izzy for a spot of beachcombing. Rob is heading west today in preparation for his journey out to St Kilda and saw three minke whales west of Rum, about 12 miles south of Canna. A good start to their cruise as it is still a bit early for cetacean sightings.

Wed 10 May | Animal antics Chalice guests, on their "Lochs & Bens" cruise have visited some lovely destinations this week and been rewarded with some good wildlife sightings. They visited Castle Tioram from the sea and spent a night anchored alongside Hjalmar Bjorge in Inverie, with a visit to the remotest mainland pub in Britain. Guests saw a golden eagle here before travelling the next days to Lochs Scaviag and Coruisk for a perfect (flat calm and sunny) day under the magnificent Cuillin Hills. Canna rewarded with eider ducks, another golden eagle plus a minke whale viewed from the shore. Later a group of about 16 common dolphins feeding west of Muck then five more (big!) minkes between Coll and Mull. A visit to Lunga saw the first puffins of the season arriving with today ending in Cragaig with a drop-dead gorgeous sunset. Hjalmar Bjorge guests also got a great sighting of a golden eagle at Canna over the boat at lunch time today. However, Bill - who ventured for a walk up the hill by himself - had the closest encounter as a sea eagle swooped close over his head!

Fri 12 May | St Kilda cruise Elizabeth G completed our first St Kilda expedition today. The week was sunny to start with albeit a bit windy. Sarah, the new ranger on St Kilda confirmed on Monday that conditions were okay, with a good forecast for the next few days, so Rob went for it despite it still being a bit choppy in the Minch. The overnight mooring in Village Bay on Monday was a bit uncomfortable but guests awoke to a perfect day on Tuesday. It was warm and sunny and they got a full day's exploration of Hirta. On Wednesday they had a flat calm meander around the islands and stacks with a beautiful journey down to Mingulay where they enjoyed a morning's walk on Thursday. Sightings of note include tons of puffins, red-throated divers and four separate sightings of minke whales.

Ricky, one of our guests comments, "I doubt if such a perfect week of weather could be equalled for many a year," adding, "Rob was great and please thank him for his guidance, patience and education - a smashing guy and a credit to the company. The cook - bless her little heart was fantastic and the food surpassed all expectations - I'm sure I put on weight in the week - my son likewise. If she was cooking for me on a permanent basis I'm sure I'd double my body weight in a very short time - and die of obesity. Finally, Nicola - a veritable jack of all trades, great worker and a wonderful personality - the three of them made a wonderful crew and obviously enhanced our holiday tremendously."

Sun 14 May | Corncrake spied ...on Eriskay today. Perhaps the highlight of the day due to the fact they are rarely seen but plenty of encounters to choose from. Hjalmar Bjorge first travelled from Tobermory to Canna - with a minke whale on the way - where they didn't make landfall but stopped under cliffs to view an eagle's nest with one chick inside. Two sea eagles (perhaps the proud parents) were close by. There were more minkes on the way to Eriskay with another sea eagle sighting over lunch onboard. After

the corncrake sighting the vessel set sail for Lochboisdale. En route a juvenile minke accompanied the boat for about an hour. Not a bad tick-list for one day!

Wed 17 May | A dolphin day Hjalmar Bjorge came across half a dozen bottle-nosed dolphins a mile and a half outside Portree harbour this afternoon. Not realising the dolphins were enthusiastically bow-riding the boat the Harbour Master called Mark up to invite him to berth alongside. When told of the presence of the dolphins the Harbour Master said they were invited too! Sure enough the dolphins happily followed Hjalmar Bjorge into Portree harbour and spent the rest of the afternoon there much to the delight of, not only our guests, but locals and visitors alike.

Fri 19 May | Set of skuas Repeat guests Pete and friends landed back in Oban today, after their week on Hjalmar Bjorge, with a satisfying tick list of birds. This included sightings of all four skuas that occur in Britain which was deemed to be the highlight of the cruise. Brian provides the following summary: "We saw Great Skuas (or "Bonxies") on every boat trip during the week. The best views were between Canna and Eriksay when several came over the boat harassing gulls to whom we'd been throwing the remains of breakfast! Our first Arctic Skua encounter was between Lochmaddy and Skye when one came very close as it was chasing a Kittiwake. We then saw a couple more above heavy seas the following day. Three Long Tailed Skuas flew quite low over us when we were having our picnic lunch on the Balranald RSPB reserve on North Uist. For all of us aboard this was the first time we'd seen these graceful birds and we were highly delighted. To complete the "set" on Saturday just after seeing the Golden Eagle at Spelve (Isle of Mull) Charles saw a bird fly over the boat which he said was like a Frigatebird. Shortly after we spotted a group of 9 similar birds which proved to be Pomarine Skuas migrating northwards, their long spoon like tails showing really clearly."

Surely the Hepburn brothers impressions of John McCririck (or whatever they were doing, I'm too afraid to ask, right) rated as another highlight?!

Photo: Mark Henrys



Sun 21 May | Hark! 1st shark Both Hjalmar Bjorge and Elizabeth G left Oban yesterday bound for St Kilda with a not very promising weather forecast. Both sets of guests (two dive parties) enjoyed the company of a pair of dolphins on the way to Tobermory in the evening. They spent about 20 minutes bow-riding Hjalmar Bjorge before moving off to Elizabeth G. Today, after a dive, both boats anchored for lunch at Canna where guests saw the first basking shark of the season.

Mon 22 May | Wild windy isles What a woeful week of wild windy weather! Chris returned today from what should have been a St Kilda trip. Unfortunately terrible weather conditions prevented Chalice from getting out there. Hjalmar Bjorge and Elizabeth G have fared no better this week either. With gale force winds and snow on the mountains May has turned extremely wintry after a promising start. A call to the base on St Kilda established that conditions were "pretty horrible" and the lumpy journey Chalice made to and from the Shiant islands made guests appreciate the fact they weren't going anywhere any more remote! Instead visits were made to Tobermory, Plockton, Acarseid Mhor on Rona, Loch Kerry, East Loch Tarbert, Loch Ceann Dibig, Canna, Muck, Loch Drumbuie, Oronsay, Ardtornish Bay and Loch Spelve on Mull as well as the Shiants (which have, after all, been called "St Kilda in miniature"). The trip saw lots of bird-life and bow-riding common dolphins and guests very much enjoyed all the new places they had seen.

Wed 24 May | Albatross alert We've had several excitable phone calls this week following the news that a black-browed albatross is making a nest on the exceedingly remote island (rock) of Sula Sgeir. My favourite query was, "Could you nip up to Sula Sgeir this weekend?" The short (and polite) answer is no. It's an extremely long way away...some 60 miles north of the Butt of Lewis. We do visit Sula Sgeir occasionally, usually as part of a North Rona Expedition, and we have two visits planned this year, both as part of our Scotland - Faroes - Iceland cruises. However, at 13 nights and £2000 per person, this wasn't quite what the enquirer had in mind. If it appeals to you though do get in touch!

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