

The image features two whales swimming in deep blue water. A large, semi-transparent 'IHW' logo is overlaid on the left side of the image. The text 'Science & Education Report' is centered in white. The whale in the foreground is larger and more detailed, showing its eye and skin texture. The second whale is smaller and positioned behind it, partially obscured by the 'IHW' text.

# Science & Education Report

# MS Spitsbergen

7–17 May 2026

The Scottish Isles –  
Island Hopping in the Hebrides





# Science & Education Programme

Our Science and Education Team accompanied you during your expedition to discover the remote communities and spectacular nature of the islands of Scotland's Hebrides.

We had the opportunity to explore our destinations' natural beauty, exceptional wildlife, and rich history together. To do so, we organized lectures and interactive activities on board. We explored these destinations through various expedition experiences: excursions, Zodiac cruises, nature walks, and from the science boat.

# History & Culture

We had the unique opportunity to share with you some remains of the many different influences that have shaped the Scottish Isles. Celtic, Pict, Christian, and Norse culture merge in the language, architecture, and the ways of life in the Hebrides, enriching the history of settlements with stories of conquests, clan fights, independence uprisings, and the Highland Clearances along the way.

You learned about the survival, adaptation, and resilience that the Isles of the Hebrides represent.



# St Kilda

A remote archipelago shaped by both nature and human resilience, St Kilda tells the story of a once-thriving island community living at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. Surrounded by dramatic cliffs and seabird colonies, the islands offer a powerful glimpse into a unique way of life that endured for centuries before the final evacuation in 1930.

Walking among the restored stone houses and ancient cleits, we explored the legacy of the islanders and reflected on the challenges of isolation, survival, and change in one of the most remarkable cultural landscapes in Scotland.





## Iona

Known as the 'Cradle of Christianity' in Scotland, Iona has been a place of pilgrimage, learning, and spirituality for over 1,400 years. Founded by St Columba in AD 563, the island's abbey and monastery became an important centre of religion and culture throughout the medieval world.

During our visit, we explored the abbey, cloisters, and historic ruins while learning about the island's turbulent past, from Viking raids to centuries of restoration. Today, Iona remains a peaceful and inspiring place where history, architecture, and spirituality come together.

# Arts & Crafts

Throughout the voyage, our open art sessions invited guests to slow down, unwind, and get creative while surrounded by the landscapes and wildlife of the Scottish Isles. Inspired by seabirds, island life, and the colours of the North Atlantic, many guests transformed reusable water bottles and keepsakes into personalised souvenirs of the journey.

From painting puffins to sharing stories over brushes and sketchbooks, these relaxed sessions created a welcoming space to connect, reflect, and celebrate creativity on board.





# Geological History

We investigated a variety of rocks from the varied landscapes across the Hebridean Islands along our journey. Throughout our nature walks we shared more about these landscapes, both today and in the distant past.

We saw Lewisian gneiss dated at 3 billion years old. We saw evidence of volcanic activity from just 60 million years ago. And we experienced landscapes that were formed within the Ice Age: just 100,000 years ago.



# Isle of Arran

The Isle of Arran is described as 'Scotland in miniature' by geologists since it exposes rocks of many different types formed in a variety of ways across an expanse of geological time. This is why Arran is visited by geology students and enthusiasts alike: to experience and handle a remarkable set of rocks in a relatively small area.

The Isle of Arran is dominated by a famous peak to its north: Goat Fell, created from a massive granite block called a batholith.

# St Kilda Archipelago

Explosive volcanic eruptions created this unique and wonderful landscape on tiny isolated islands in the North Atlantic Ocean.

These eruptions occurred around 60 million years ago. The volcanoes have long since ceased to exist and as a result the archipelago of islands is slowly being eroded away by the action of sea waves pounding at their base. Today we see the steep cliffs and strangely shaped stacks that are today the home for thousands of seabirds.





## The Isle of Staffa & Fingal's Cave

While not unique to the Isle of Staffa, the columnar jointing (vertical columns of basalt rock) makes this tiny island world famous.

Fingal's Cave inspired composer Felix Mendelssohn to write the concert overture 'The Hebrides' after visiting in 1829.

The Cave is 72 metres (236 feet) deep and 20 metres (66 feet) high.



# NASA GLOBE Cloud Observer

Together with our Environmental Scientist, David, you observed the clouds and submitted your observations to NASA GLOBE Observer on two occasions.

These cloud observations help NASA improve our understanding of Earth's atmosphere and climate by providing valuable data for scientific research and climate modelling.

[View our data](#) on the global map

# Nature Walks

On several occasions throughout the voyage, guests joined our Expedition Team to explore destinations in small groups on guided nature walks in St Kilda, Vatersay, and Colonsay.

From geology and birdlife to local history and island culture, these walks offered a closer look at the landscapes, wildlife, and stories that make each destination unique.





## Exploring Intertidal Pools

During our stop in Iona, we explored the intertidal zone: a habitat shaped by changing tides and challenging conditions.

Among the rock pools, we discovered anemones, crustaceans, periwinkles, and other shoreline life specially adapted to survive exposure, heat, and changing salinity, offering a fascinating glimpse into this dynamic coastal ecosystem.

# iNaturalist

Throughout our expedition, we documented the flora and fauna of the Scottish Isles and uploaded all our findings to the iNaturalist biodiversity platform.

During our voyage, we submitted **462** observations of **195** different species. This effort contributes to a better understanding of the geographical distribution of species and aids researchers in their ongoing studies and conservation efforts to protect them.

View our data submitted on our [iNaturalist project](#)





# Science Boat

**15** eager participants joined our **3** Science Boat outings in **Tobermory and Colonsay** to study plankton and the hydrography of each destination.

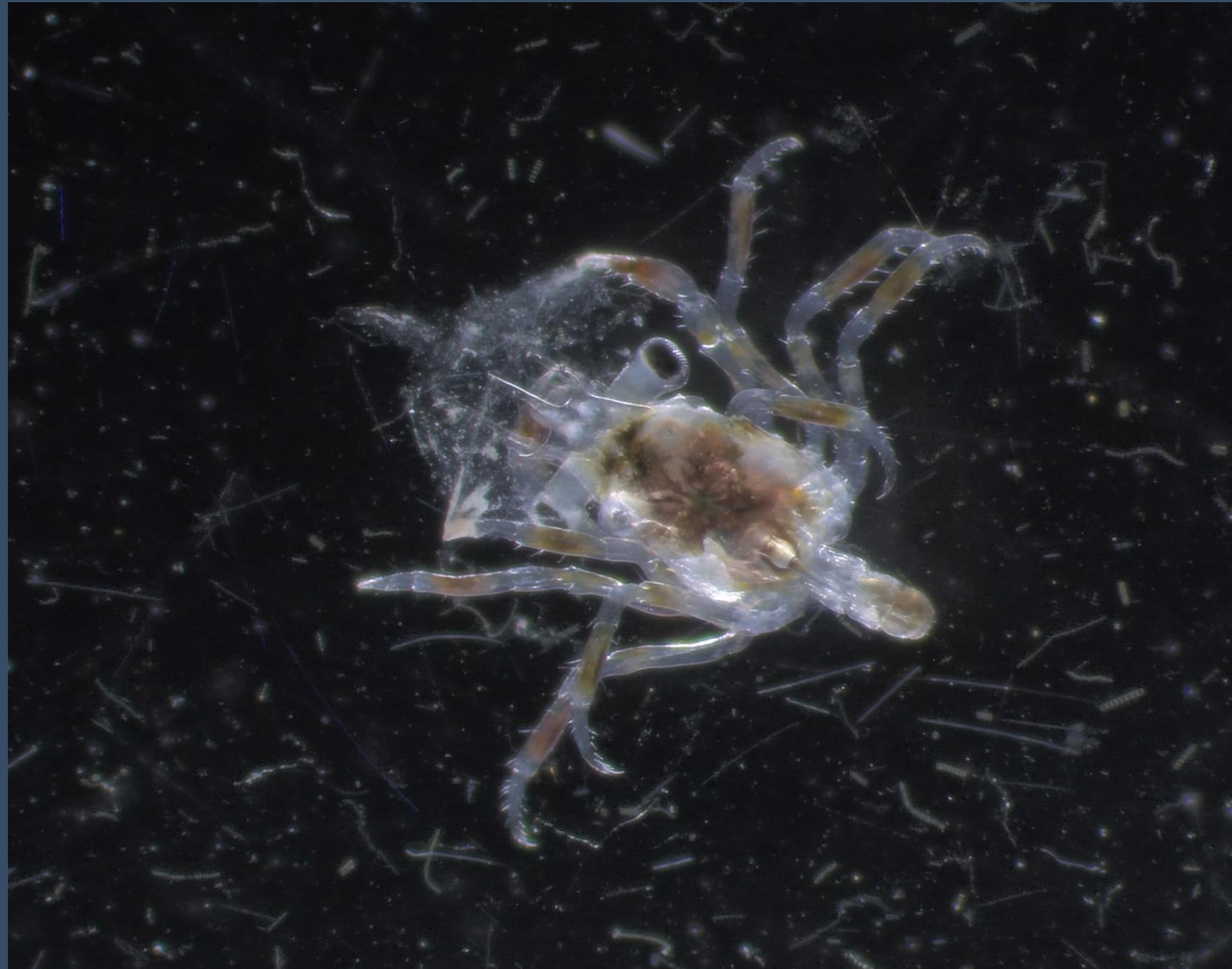
We monitored and reported ocean clarity through participation in the Secchi Disk Citizen Science project, contributing to important research on the distribution of phytoplankton blooms.

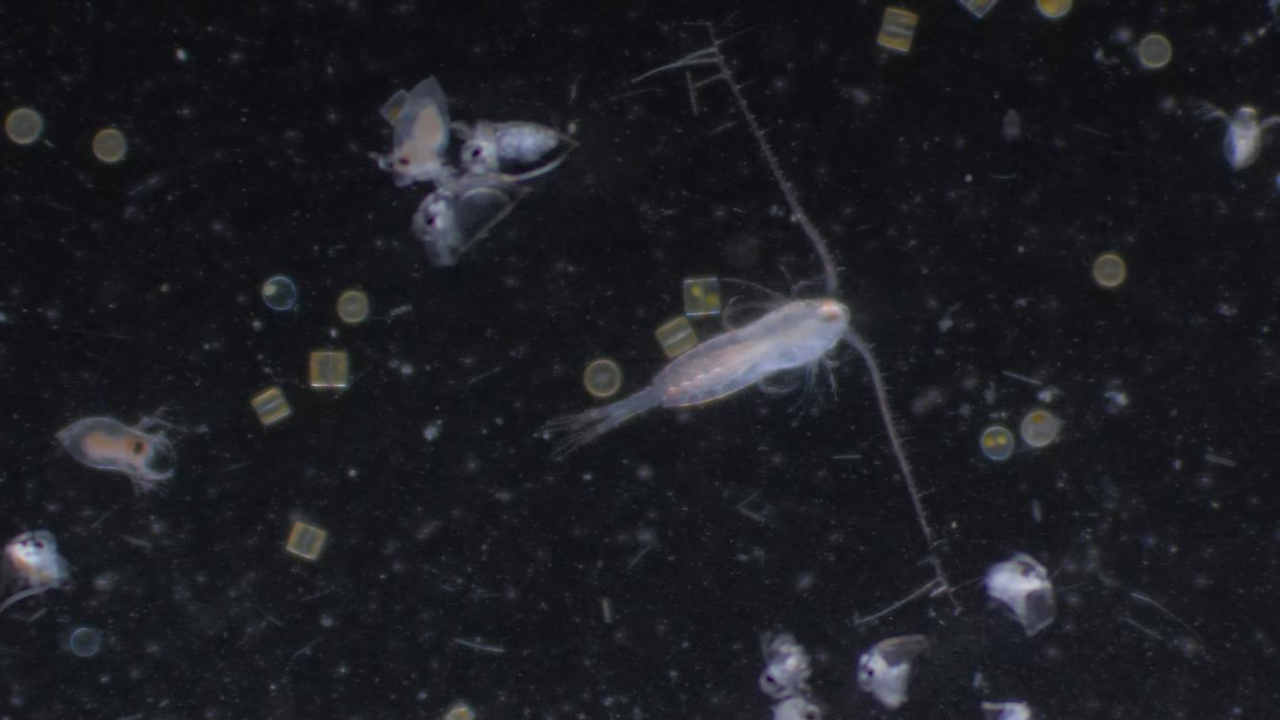
[View our data](#) submitted to the Secchi Disk Project

# Plankton Samples

During a Science Centre discovery session, we explored the microscopic world of plankton using samples collected in **Tobermory and Colonsay**

In samples from Tobermory, we identified the cladoceran *Evadne nordmanni* and several copepods, while samples from Colonsay revealed plentiful diatoms and crab larvae like the specimen pictured here.







# Beach Clean-Up

Many of you demonstrated your dedication to protecting nature by taking part in our organised beach clean-up.

Working alongside Monty Halls and his Big Blue Bag initiative, we removed approximately **25 kg** of litter from beaches on the Islands of Islay and Vatersay, while also carrying out some sand sampling to identify microplastic pollution.

A huge thank you to all those involved!

# Monty Halls

During our voyage, guest lecturer and HX Brand Ambassador Monty Halls joined us on board, sharing stories from his time living in the Galápagos, working as a crofter in the Hebrides, and researching the wartime history of the commandos connected to the regions we explored.

Monty also introduced guests to The Big Blue Bag, an HX Foundation-supported project empowering coastal communities to monitor and document the health of their local shorelines.



# Wildlife List — Seabirds



# Wildlife List – Seabirds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	<b>northern fulmar</b>	Eissturmvogel	fulmar boréal
<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	<b>Manx shearwater</b>	Atlantiksturmtaucher	puffin des Anglais
<i>Morus bassanus</i>	<b>northern gannet</b>	Basstölpel	fou de bassan
<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	<b>Arctic skua (parasitic jaeger)</b>	Schmarotzerraubmöwe	labbe parasite
<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	<b>great skua</b>	Große Raubmöwe	grand labbe
<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	<b>black-headed gull</b>	Lachmöwe	mouette rieuse
<i>Larus canus</i>	<b>common gull</b>	Sturmmöwe	goéland cendré
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	<b>herring gull</b>	Silbermöwe	goéland argenté
<i>Larus fuscus</i>	<b>lesser black-backed gull</b>	Heringsmöwe	goéland brun
<i>Larus marinus</i>	<b>great black-backed gull</b>	Mantelmöwe	goéland marin
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	<b>common tern</b>	Flusseeschwalbe	sterne pierregarin
<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	<b>Arctic Tern</b>	Küstenseeschwalbe	Sterne Arctique
<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	<b>Sandwich Tern</b>	Brandseeschwalbe	Sterne caugek
<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	<b>Black-legged Kittiwake</b>	Dreizehenmöwe	Mouette tridactyle
<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	<b>Atlantic Puffin</b>	Papageitaucher	Macareux moine

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Uria aalge</i>	<b>common guillemot (common murre)</b>	Trottellumme	guillemot marmette
<i>Alca torda</i>	<b>razorbill</b>	Tordalk	petit pingouin



# Auks

The Auks are the members of the family alcidae, which comprises 25 species of puffins, murrelets, razorbills, and guillemots, exclusively distributed in the Northern Hemisphere.

They are considered seabirds, as they spend most of their life at sea and only go to land to breed. By pursuit dives using their wings as propellers, they catch fish, squid, and krill. They are as agile at sea as they are clumsy on land, and they are fast, direct fliers.

Some species like the Atlantic puffin are facing conservation challenges as climate change and sandeel fisheries are modifying their environment.





# Wildlife List – Shore birds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Cygnus olor</i>	<b>mute swan</b>	Höckerschwan	cygne tuberculé
<i>Anser anser</i>	<b>greylag goose</b>	Graugans	oie cendrée
<i>Branta canadensis</i>	<b>Canada goose</b>	Kanadagans	bernache du Canada
<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	<b>common eider</b>	Eiderente	eider à duvet
<i>Mergus serrator</i>	<b>red-breasted merganser</b>	Mittelsäger	harle huppé
<i>Gavia immer</i>	<b>great northern diver (common loon)</b>	Eistaucher	plongeon huard
<i>Gavia stellata</i>	<b>red-throated diver (red-throated loon)</b>	Sterntaucher	plongeon catmarin
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	<b>great cormorant</b>	Kormoran	hrand Cormoran
<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	<b>European shag</b>	Krähenscharbe	cormoran huppé
<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	<b>grey heron</b>	Graureiher	héron cendré
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	<b>Eurasian oystercatcher</b>	Austernfischer	huître pie

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	<b>common ringed plover</b>	Sandregenpfeifer	pluvier grand-gravelot
<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	<b>European golden plover</b>	Goldregenpfeifer	pluvier doré
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	<b>ruddy turnstone</b>	Steinwälzer	tournepierre à collier
<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	<b>common sandpiper</b>	Flussuferläufer	chevalier guignette
<i>Numenius arquata</i>	<b>Eurasian curlew</b>	Großer Brachvogel	courlis cendré
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	<b>whimbrel</b>	Regenbrachvogel	courlis corlieu
<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	<b>common snipe</b>	Bekassine	bécassine des marais
<i>Eudromias morinellus</i>	<b>Eurasian dotterel</b>	Mornellregenpfeifer	pluvier guignard
<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	<b>white-throated dipper</b>	Wasseramsel	cincle plongeur





## White-tailed eagle

With a wingspan of 2.5 m, the white-tailed eagle is the largest eagle in Scotland. It inhabits aquatic habitats like rivers and cliffs on the coast where it catch fish, its main prey. It was persecuted by humans for its reputation as a 'lamb killer' until it was almost extinct in Europe in 1800s.

The last white-tailed eagle was hunted in Scotland in 1918, and it was brought back from extinction by the end of the century, after several successful reintroductions on some islands of the Hebrides. Today it is estimated that 150 breeding pairs are thriving in Scotland and hopefully the population will continue to increase.

# Wildlife List – Land Birds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	<b>ring-necked (common) pheasant</b>	Fasan	faisan de colchide
<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	<b>white-tailed eagle</b>	Seeadler	pygargue à queue blanche
<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	<b>golden eagle</b>	Steinadler	aigle royal
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	<b>common buzzard</b>	Mäusebussard	buse variable
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	<b>Eurasian (common) kestrel</b>	Turmfalke	faucon crécerelle
<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	<b>feral pigeon</b>	Stadttaube	pigeon domestique
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	<b>common wood pigeon</b>	Ringeltaube	pigeon ramier
<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	<b>Eurasian collared dove</b>	Türkentaube	tourterelle turque
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	<b>common cuckoo</b>	Kuckuck	coucou gris
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	<b>Eurasian skylark</b>	Feldlerche	alouette des champs
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	<b>barn swallow</b>	Rauchschwalbe	hirondelle rustique
<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	<b>western (common) house martin</b>	Mehlschwalbe	hirondelle de fenêtre
<i>Riparia riparia</i>	<b>sand martin (bank swallow)</b>	Uferschwalbe	hirondelle de rivage
<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	<b>Eurasian rock pipit</b>	Strandpieper	pipit maritime
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	<b>meadow pipit</b>	Wiesenpieper	pipit farlouse

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	<b>pied wagtail</b>	Trauerbachstelze	bergeronnette de yarrell
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	<b>grey wagtail</b>	Gebirgsstelze	bergeronnette des ruisseaux
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	<b>dunnock</b>	Heckenbraunelle	accenteur mouchet
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	<b>European robin</b>	Rotkehlchen	rougegorge familier
<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	<b>northern wheatear</b>	Steinschmätzer	traquet motteux
<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	<b>European stonechat</b>	Schwarzkehlchen	tarier pâtre
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	<b>redwing</b>	Rotdrossel	grive mauvis
<i>Turdus merula</i>	<b>Eurasian (common) blackbird</b>	Amsel	merle noir
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	<b>song thrush</b>	Singdrossel	grive musicienne
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	<b>Eurasian blackcap</b>	Mönchsgrasmücke	fauvette à tête noire
<i>Sylvia communis</i>	<b>common whitethroat</b>	Dorngrasmücke	fauvette grisette
<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	<b>sedge warbler</b>	Schilfrohrsänger	phragmite des joncs
<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	<b>Eurasian (common) reed warbler</b>	Teichrohrsänger	rousserolle effarvate
<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	<b>common chiffchaff</b>	Zilpzalp	pouillot véloce
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	<b>willow warbler</b>	Fitis	pouillot fitis

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	<b>Eurasian wren</b>	Zaunkönig	troglodyte mignon
<i>Parus major</i>	<b>great tit</b>	Kohlmeise	mésange charbonnière
<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	<b>Eurasian blue tit</b>	Blaumeise	mésange bleue
<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	<b>western (Eurasian) jackdaw</b>	Dohle	choucas des tours
<i>Corvus corax</i>	<b>northern (common) raven</b>	Kolkrabe	grand corbeau
<i>Corvus cornix</i>	<b>hooded crow</b>	Nebelkrähe	corneille mantelée
<i>Corvus corone</i>	<b>carrion crow</b>	Rabenkrähe	corneille noire
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	<b>rook</b>	Saatkrähe	corbeau freux
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	<b>European starling</b>	Gemeiner Star	étourneau sansonnet
<i>Passer domesticus</i>	<b>house sparrow</b>	Haussperling	moineau domestique
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	<b>common chaffinch</b>	Buchfink	pinson des arbres
<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	<b>Eurasian cinnet</b>	Bluthänfling	linotte mélodieuse
<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	<b>redpoll</b>	Birkenzeisig	sizerin blanchâtre
<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	<b>European goldfinch</b>	Stieglitz	chardonneret élégant
<i>Chloris chloris</i>	<b>European greenfinch</b>	Grünfink	verdier d'Europe
<i>Spinus spinus</i>	<b>Eurasian siskin</b>	Erlenzeisig	tarin des aulnes
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	<b>common reed bunting</b>	Rohrammer	bruant des roseaux
<i>Crex crex</i>	<b>corncrake</b>	Wachtelkönig	râle des genêts



# St Kilda Wren

The Eurasian wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) is a small but remarkably adaptable bird found across Europe and Asia. Despite its size, it is known for its powerful song and ability to thrive in a wide variety of habitats.

A small population reached the remote archipelago of St Kilda, where isolation over generations led to the development of the distinct St Kilda wren (*T. t. hirtensis*). Slightly larger and with unique vocal and genetic characteristics, it is recognised as a subspecies found nowhere else in the world.

The St Kilda wren stands as a remarkable example of adaptation and resilience in one of Britain's most remote environments.





# eBird

During our wildlife watches and landings, our Ornithologist, Andrés, conducted detailed seabird surveys, recording observations for the Citizen Science platform eBird. We recorded **92** different species of birds in **41** checklists.

This initiative helps contribute valuable data to global bird conservation efforts, enhancing understanding of seabird populations and their habitats.

View our data on our [eBird trip report](#)

# Wildlife List — Marine Mammals



# Wildlife List – Marine Mammals



SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	<b>common minke whale</b>	Zwergwal	petit rorqual
<i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i>	<b>white-beaked dolphin</b>	Weissschnauzendelfin	lagénorhynque à bec blanc
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	<b>common dolphin</b>	Gemeiner Delfin	dauphin commun
<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	<b>harbour porpoise</b>	Schweinswal	marsouin commun
<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	<b>grey seal</b>	Kegelrobbe	phoque gris
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	<b>harbour seal, common seal</b>	Seehund	phoque commun



# Wildlife List – Other Fauna



# Wildlife List – Other Fauna



SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	<b>Eurasian red squirrel</b>	Eurasisches Eichhörnchen	écureuil roux
<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	<b>brown hare</b>	Feldhase	lièvre d'Europe
<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	<b>European rabbit</b>	Wildkaninchen	lapin de garenne
<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	<b>Western roe deer</b>	Reh	chevreuil Européen
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	<b>red deer</b>	Rothirsch	cerf élaphe
<i>Lutra lutra</i>	<b>Eurasian otter</b>	Fischotter	loutre d'Europe
<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	<b>basking shark</b>	Riesenhai	requin pèlerin

THE



Thanks for your participation!