

# Western Scotland and Mull Trip - June 2018

## Part 1 – Lochaber

Last year we'd decided to do something completely different and had been to Hampshire and South Wales for our 2week summer holiday. Our first week in Hampshire had been a bit hampered by the sun only putting in a brief appearance in between it being grey and overcast. This meant that we didn't get the opportunity to see most of the insects we'd hoped for, but the weather certainly made up for it in Wales where it was far too hot for my liking! After our disastrous summer trip to Scotland two years ago where the weather was so bad it rendered the majority of the trip useless, we were very apprehensive about trying it again. We knew all too well that if the weather was bad again then we'd be wasting our time, but we really wanted to give it another shot. Having spent my 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday on Mull we kept saying that we'd love to go back and spend a week there, so that was one of the two weeks sorted. I didn't want to go back to the Speyside area again because it was too far away from all the places I wanted to visit for the special Scottish Dragonflies and Butterflies, so I had to look for somewhere more central to the locations I'd bookmarked. We still had some unfinished business to deal with in Scotland and having dipped on so much last time I really wanted a 3rd chance to try for Northern Emerald Dragonflies. Not only that but if we found the right areas we could try for Azure Hawker, Marsh Fritillary and Mountain Ringlet Butterflies before they were gone for good due to climate change, especially Azure Hawker and Mountain Ringlet. Another White-faced Darter would've been nice having only seen the one at Abernethy forest as would another Chequered Skipper having jammily spawned a rather worn specimen at Ariundle at the end of the last day 2 years ago. With Golden and White-tailed Eagles as well as Otters being resident on Mull we couldn't resist chancing it and just crossed our fingers for some better weather conditions this time around.

The next issue was cottages and yet again we'd left it far too late to book and everywhere on Mull was booked up. It seems it's a very popular place and the only ones available looked like 2star old fisherman's cottages that we'd probably catch TB in. I gave up looking at Mull and concentrated on the first week and found a cottage right up near Loch Maree (towards Ullapool). My only issue with this one was whether there'd be enough to do for a week all the way up there and I doubted it very much. After what seemed like an age I finally settled on a much more central area, which was practically directly west of Speyside and near the West coast. This would give us the opportunity to visit several different areas over the week to maximise our chances of seeing our targets. There were two cottages available, neither of which passed Wendy's high seal of approval and 1 looked like it had bad internet. In the end I just booked one as I couldn't be bothered messing around any longer. It looked like it was right next to the owner's house, which I never like but it had a pond nearby and it looked like we could put the moth trap out, so that swung it for me. With that sorted I had another random look at Mull and suddenly found cottage that was free for the second week and was right on a Lochside! Ehhh, where had this one been hiding when I looked before? Inside it looked rather old school but the view was stunning, so Wendy gave the thumbs up and I got it booked with a good old 10% off for 2person discount :). Apparently, someone had cancelled and it was the only week available right up to November :O! I could finally relax after weeks and weeks of stressing out but then Wendy noticed there wasn't a washing machine in the Mull cottage for the second week.....Noooooooo!

When I went to book the boat, I was gutted to see that there were no dog cabins for the Saturday morning sailing or the Sunday one for our return :O! The only one available on the return was for the Friday morning, which meant cutting our stay on Mull even shorter but with no other options we had no choice but to book it :( . Instead of our usual overnight stay in Dumfries, which is a bit out of the way, I took my Dad's advice and tried somewhere different and more direct. He reckoned that Days Inn in Lockerbie was much better and it just so happened that it was at Annandale Water Services, which we already knew. There was a lake out the back where we could take Lyca in the morning and we'd also be able to get breakfast from the services, so it was something to consider. When it came to booking the Days Inn it was rather more complicated than I'd expected and I started to wish I'd just gone with our tried and tested Travelodge in Dumfries. Due to having to

book a dog as well, that didn't seem possible on the website so I had to phone up. They put me through to America and to someone who could hardly speak English. He reckoned he got it booked so I was happy enough. A week later I still hadn't got a confirmation email so phoned up their helpdesk who didn't care less and told me to phone the Lockerbie Days Inn direct. I phoned them and the lady said it was booked and she would send me confirmation. Needless to say I never got confirmation so had to phone again!!!  
ARRGHHHHH! Finally, I got confirmation weeks after booking. Ridiculous!

This time I wasn't going to make the same mistake as the Hampshire/Wales trip and did my research beforehand. Luckily, I got some invaluable help from the Scottish County Dragonfly recorder who gave me grid refs for the 4 target species. Some of the areas were only about 10 miles from the cottage! How lucky was that? With that info and everything else I'd gathered together, I'd saved more walks into my online OS maps account than we could possibly do in both weeks :). Sorted!

We'd been having a prolonged spell of really hot weather, as had Scotland, but we didn't hold any hopes that it'd last for our 2 weeks away. We were just waiting for it to break but there didn't appear to be any changes forecast for a while, so we kept our fingers crossed. The wind decided to pick up big time and showed no sign of dying down in time for our sailing, which even though it was summer was just typical of our luck! A few days before we were due to leave, I had a phone call from the letting company for the Lochaber cottage to let us know that there was going to be builders working on an extension to the owner's house but they'd try and keep disruption to a minimum. That didn't sound too bad but next he went on to say that apparently a bad thunder storm had wiped out the entire network in the area so there'd be no wifi.....Nooooooo! Why is there always something? He asked if it'd be problem and although I told him it was one of the things on my list of essentials I didn't want to risk him offering us another cottage in a rubbish location, so I said I could work around it. With this in mind I decided to spend £35 on an unlimited data 4g top up from Three to try and get round the problem. Whether it'd work or not was anyone's guess and only time would tell. Tesco didn't deliver to either of the cottages because they were too far away, so we'd have to grab what we could from Morrison's at Fort William on our way. Not wanting to leave Lyca in the car on her own in the UK I said I would go in and pick up what we needed. This was a huge pain in the arse but not a total disaster. Sick of lugging my huge tripod around with me I'd bought a monopod to see if it'd make life easier for me and I was really looking forward to testing it out. I'd intended to give it a test run before going away, but the chance never came up, but I still had high hopes. I'd been keeping my eye on the Steam Packet website to see if a dog cabin became available on the Saturday or Sunday, so we didn't have to cut our trip short. Nothing had changed until one became available for the Monday morning sailing, which would mean taking an extra day off work and staying in a Travelodge or similar on the Saturday night but would be totally worth it. Wendy wasn't best pleased at having to ask for the extra day off at work at such short notice, but I reckoned it was too good an opportunity to miss. It took days of persuading, but Wendy finally agreed to ask on the last day before we went.

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> June

As always, the trip had crept up on us and I hadn't done nearly enough research as I should've. Wendy on the other hand had actually finished packing the night before, which for her was nothing short of a miracle! When she got into work, she reluctantly asked her Practice Manager if she could take the extra day off and luckily, she was very understanding and gave her the go ahead. She'd have to pay the time back though but there's always plenty of opportunity when another member of staff is off ill or on holiday. She let me know as soon as she knew and then started to worry about how she was going find time during her lunch break to sort out 3days worth of extra meals for Lyca as well as more clothes etc for us. Her worry was unnecessary because when I went to change our booking my heart sank when I saw that it'd already gone. That scuppered that plan and I felt pretty deflated after that :( I worked through my lunch, so I could leave at 4.15pm and the hygienist was running a bit late, so I picked Wendy up at 5.25pm so she'd have a bit more time to get ready. As she was rushing around I remembered that the Steam Packet had recently changed the evening sailing time to 8.15pm, so we had an extra 30minutes to play with.....Doh! This was good in that respect but would also mean that we wouldn't be getting to the Days Inn until later than we'd expected. Getting ready was a pretty laidback affair after that and we breezed down to the Sea Terminal for 7.25pm. We had to wait at the ticket booth for

a bloke to finish talking on his phone before he could tell us where to park up and it looked as though we were the last car to arrive. It was really busy, but it was a lovely sunny evening and unbelievably the wind had completely died down, so at least our crossing would be pleasant despite our initial fears. As we sat in the car waiting to board we saw **Herring Gull** and up on Douglas Head there were loads of **House Martins** zooming around and toing and froing from their nests. A **Pied Wagtail** was running around the car park and we were boarding at 8.10pm. We let ourselves into the cabin, Wendy started painting her nails blue and before we knew it we were departing at 8.20pm. The Captain came on with his usual announcement and then told us that he was expecting a force 4-5 for the sailing, which confused us. The sea looked flat calm and there wasn't even a hint of any wind, so we'd just have to wait and see. As we headed out into the bay we waited for any signs of it being rough but as we'd expected it was nice and smooth for the entire crossing. Wendy called for room service and ordered my tea but remembering the last time when it came without any condiments at all she specified that she wanted salt, pepper, vinegar and tomato sauce. She felt stupid saying it, but it wasn't worth the risk and the bloke looked at her like she was mad and said, "Yeah, obviously!" She kept her mouth shut, resisted the temptation to back herself up and took the hit :P. Shortly after and my chicken burger and chips arrived complete with all the condiments, so we were both happy. Wendy helped me out with the salad and although I didn't need any help with them the chips too. Lyca also had some chips when I dropped some on the floor, so she must've been pleased as punch with that. We settled down to watch some TV and as usual Wendy and Lyca fell asleep while I was fully awake. She snored her way through the remaining journey until I took Lyca out for a wee when we were nearly there.



Blackpool

We docked at 11.54pm, which was later than we'd have liked but at least we didn't have too far to go before getting our heads down.

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June

We didn't disembark until 12.12am, so it was full steam ahead to get up to Lockerbie as quickly as possible. It was a boring drive with no wildlife apart from a **Rabbit** but we cheered when we saw the 'Welcome to Scotland' sign at 1.30am. Shortly after we pulled into Annandale Water Services and parked up outside the Days Inn at 1.52am....Phew! We got all our stuff together and made our way over to the front door, which we found to be locked.....Errr? We rang the buzzer and waited for ages but there was no sign of anyone coming to let us in. I thought I could see an entrance from inside the services so thought maybe we had to go that way when it was late. I rang the buzzer again just in case and finally woman came out to let us in. She didn't seem to be in any hurry and had obviously just been woken up by us ringing the buzzer and was doing the nightshift on her own. It took ages for us be checked in especially as I hadn't been able to pay for Lyca when I'd booked it online and the woman kept asking us over and over, "It is just the one dog?" so Wendy started to wonder if

she should be taking it personally.....Hahahaha! Finally, she handed us the key and a paper bag with a bottle of water and a Kit-kat in it and we headed up to the room. Yet another black mark for Days Inn. We didn't need that amount of faff at nearly 2 in the morning and at Travelodge we just go straight in! Typically, our room was upstairs and the furthest one away from the door, so I had to carry all the stuff, which at such an ungodly hour felt twice as heavy as it was. The room looked OK apart from having one dead light bulb and a bag over the smoke alarm, which I found quite disconcerting!!! The room would do the job though and the bed was comfy, so at 2.30am after we'd done our teeth and got changed Wendy went out like a light while I struggled to doze off. Lyca had already taken pride of place and was snoring before we'd even got near!

I woke up at 7.30am but Wendy was dead to the world until my alarm went off at 8.30am. We could hear a **Willow Warbler** singing outside as well as **Great Tit** and **Oystercatcher**. I went out onto the balcony and it was a nice view considering.



Balcony view

Seeing as I'd been awake for ages I took Lyca out to stretch her legs around the lake while Wendy woke up. The Oyc was kicking off about something and there were House Martins flying around everywhere including up under the eaves by balconies.





House Martin nest outside the room

Wendy looked out of the window and saw me walking Lyca round the lake and wished that she was with us. There was a **House Sparrow** on the patio and she spotted another Cockerpoo trotting past with its owner underneath the room. My walk with Lyca wasn't as idyllic as it appeared to be due to the amount of dogs running around off their leads. They were difficult to negotiate, so that Lyca didn't get too freaked out but we met another Cockerpoo that she seemed to like. There were House Martins nesting all over the Hotel and I was shocked to see that 3 of the nests had been predated and that there were 2 very dead chicks lying on the path :(. I added **Blackcap**, **Chiffchaff**, **Swallow**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Mallard**, **Wood Pigeon**, **Tufted Duck**, **Mute Swan** and **Little Grebe** but I got so far and found that the path was shut, so I couldn't do a loop walk and had to turn around.



Annandale Water Services

On the way back, I added **Chaffinch** and **Goldfinch** and Lyca performed (twice!), so my short walk around the lake had been quite productive and much better than the usual one around the grassy edges of a car park. I was flabbergasted to find that Wendy was well on her way to being ready by the time I got back but there's a first for everything :P. She asked me where the paper bag we'd been given last night was and wasn't very impressed when I said I'd thrown it away. She had plans for it and was going to use it to carry our food out in, seeing as she usually struggles to carry it all. After I'd fished it out of the (clean and unused) bin we did a final check that we hadn't left anything behind and left at 9.40am.

While I loaded up the car Wendy went to see what she could pick up for breakfast in the services. Firstly, she got herself a cappuccino from Costa, which took ages and then found a small outlet which said "Breakfast Bar" that looked like her only option. She joined the queue and scanned the menu only to be pleasantly surprised that they did Linda McCartney sausage baps as well as normal sausage baps.....Happy days! After she'd put her order in she stood around waiting for the 3 women behind the counter to put together several all day breakfasts, breakfast wraps and baps but it looked as though hers was the only thing not already cooked in the heated cabinet. Hers predictably took ages but eventually she reappeared with the paper bag in one hand and a coffee cup in the other. She'd spotted a Red Hot Chilli Pipers mini bus in the car park, which she wanted to get a photo of to send to someone who's a massive fan even though the band were nowhere to be seen. A **Collared Dove** flew in and landed on the roof of the Hotel and after we'd eaten our very nice and piping hot breakfast we were totally stuffed and probably fuelled for the entire day. Before we left I drove closer to the bus so that Wendy could take her photo but her heart sank when it failed to send because there was no 4g signal.....Doh!



Red hot chilli pipers van

Driving past the petrol station I noticed that it was 14.5 per litre cheaper than the Isle of Man....Grrrr!

As we drove away we added a **Blackbird**, **Rook** and a pair of **Song Thrushes** to our list and that was it until we had our first **Buzzard** of the trip over the motorway. We'd be heading the same way as we normally do going to the Highlands but near Stirling we'd be turning west and heading out towards the west coast and Skye. Next up was **Carrion Crow** and we hit the South Lanarkshire sign at 10.40am. We had **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** over the River Clyde, **Black-headed Gulls** over the road and **Lapwing** and **Jackdaw** in the fields. Some **Starlings** flew over and we spotted a **Kestrel** hovering over a field and just before North Lanarkshire there was a **Magpie** seemingly with a death wish hopping about at the side of the busy road. We spotted some **Swifts** as well as the first Learner Driver we'd ever seen on a motorway since the law changed. The temperature had risen to 17c by then and Wendy, being overdressed, was boiling in the car. We saw **Feral Pigeon** and our first **Red Kite** just before we got to Crianlarich, near Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, at 11.53am. When we got to Callender we saw a Cockerpoo and then another 2 more, so they're obviously slowly creeping further up north. The scenery changed when we reached Lochlubnaig and we were now driving through a valley with huge Mountains either side of us. We admired the scenery as we drove past Glen Ogle and Loch Lubhair and finally saw the 'Welcome to the Highlands' sign at 1.06pm. Yey! This seemed like a milestone but, in reality we still had a long way to go and a lot to cram in before we reached our final destination. The view was reminiscent of The Hebrides and totally different to what we're used to on our Speyside route. We saw a **Meadow Pipit** on a fencepost as we approached the Glencoe area and this time we could fully appreciate the scenery. Last time we'd been there was on our way back from Ardnamurchan in July 2016 and it'd been throwing it down and dark! The Glencoe Ski Resort car park was full of cars and there were still tiny patches of



snow lying up in the highest corries despite the recent good weather. All of a sudden, the sun disappeared and the temperature dropped to just 15c, which was the last thing we needed. I had a walk planned, our only walk of the day, where we had a chance of finally seeing Azure Hawker. Someone had seen them there the week before but obviously we needed the sunshine to bring them out or it'd be pointless! We added **Common Gull** to our list before we arrived at An Torr car park at 1.25pm.



Hmmm.....this looks a bit old.

I parked up and we looked around at the worryingly low clouds that shrouded the hill tops and wondered what had happened to the sun. Surely not even we could be that unlucky, could we? As we got out of the car we could hear loads of **Redpoll** calling as they flew around in the woods. It quickly became apparent that we'd need to put our coats on for this walk as it felt decidedly chilly....Uh oh!



Not going up there!

Heading down the footpath we found a **Silver-ground Carpet Moth**, which are common as muck but there were a few **Chimney Sweeper Moths** further along, which are always nice to see. The path led us through some trees and to our right we could see a river at the bottom of the bank. Predominantly we could hear the calls of baby **Great Tits** and **Blue Tits**, but I picked up on the call of a **Treecreeper** as well as we went over a small bridge which had a stunning view.



An Torr

A flock of **Long-tailed Tits** made their way noisily past us and a **Wren** was singing its heart out somewhere. Suddenly, a large Hawker sized Dragonfly whizzed over our heads and disappeared down the path. We had to try and find it, as it could be our Azure but although we went back down the path there was no sign of it, so we hoped we might catch up with it again on our way back. Another moth caught our eye and this time it was a **Yellow Shell** and we carried on up a steep bank through the woods. I'd expected to be heading in a different direction to what we were but having seen no other paths I presumed it to be right and dismissed my thoughts. When we started heading downhill I looked at the path and saw that it just went straight back up again and I knew that I'd skillfully got us lost....Ooops! Wendy, who was feeling anything but energetic, was cursing at the steep hills we were having to climb and even I wasn't exactly thrilled. I couldn't believe it but with the sun being totally hidden behind the thick dark clouds there was no chance of Dragonflies flying apart from the mad one at the start, so we just headed back to the car. We'd given Lyca a walk at least and we still might be able to re-find that Dragonfly from earlier. Needless to say, there'd been no sign of it by the time we got back to the car at 2.27pm and the sky was blacker than ever!

I suppose that could've been classed as our 1<sup>st</sup> dip of the trip but I didn't count it given that the sun wasn't out, so we were flogging a dead horse from the start. I put the nearest petrol station into my sat nav, which was the one we'd been to 2 years ago near Fort William and headed off. We were starting to feel a bit peckish by then and just 1 mile down the road Wendy did her classic skill of spotted a sign (for a Craft Café) right on the junction so I had to act quickly. I practically had to handbrake skid into the layby or I'd have driven straight past it and Wendy bailed out to see what she could find. She had a browse around the gift shop first and then poked her head round the door of the café only to find a huge queue of people waiting to be served. There was no way she was waiting in that for the next hour, so she left empty handed. There was a pretty cool Stag sculpture on the corner, so she got me to grab a photo of it before I pulled away from the junction.





Deer sculpture

Not much further on we got to the petrol station, so I filled my car up and headed off to our next stop, Morrison's in Fort William. We passed the sign for the Corran Ferry and drove alongside a huge Loch where something caught my eye. I looked up to see 2 very large birds soaring high up at the side of the Loch near the road. It took my brain a moment to process what I was seeing but then I called, "OMG 2x **White-tailed Eagles!**" to Wendy who was equally as slow to realise. We couldn't believe that we'd already seen WTE on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of our trip! We were gutted that there were no laybys to park in and the birds quickly disappeared out of view upwards. There were 2x **Red-breasted Mergansers** on the Loch and Fort William was just around the corner, so I parked up in Morrison's car park at 3.20pm and I went in to do the shopping. I wanted Wendy to stay in the car with Lyca and all our stuff just to be on the safe side and with it being a Saturday afternoon it was busy and I didn't have a clue where everything was, so it took me longer than I'd bargained on. After getting everything on our list I tried to fit it into the back of the car as best as could with there being very little space left as it was. Lyca looked more than a bit put out at having to share her back seat with a load of bags and boxes but there wasn't a lot I could do about it. At least we'd broken the back of the journey by then and we were on the last leg.

We drove past a weird place called The Great Glen Cattle Ranch, which was huge but there wasn't a single cow to be seen. On the final section all we saw was a **Hooded Crow** and we heard a **Goldcrest** singing going past a huge Loch, which I think was Loch Laggan. Next up was Loch Oich and the scenery was stunning as we entered Invergarry at 4.34pm. The post office we'd been told about for groceries was absolutely tiny and closed, so we couldn't see it being of much use to us. We had a bit of a giggle when we spotted a load of locals playing Shinty on a pitch.....very Scottish :P. All of a sudden, I had to turn off the main road onto a single-track winding road and I had a feeling that my sat nav was having a laugh. I said to Wendy, "I bet we don't need to go on this road" and low and behold we ended up back on the main road we'd just come off. Grrrr. After our utterly pointless diversion we found ourselves driving alongside Loch Garry which was in the valley we were staying in so we were getting very close. It looked lovely in the sunshine. The scene was ruined by coming across a dead Red Squirrel in the road but having had a couple of near misses myself in Boat of Garten I wasn't entirely surprised. I was just pleased that it hadn't been me that'd hit it and if it had been I think I'd have wanted to turn around and gone home! We turned off at Tomdoun where our cottage was and there was a bird bobbing about in the road that Wendy casually presumed to be a Pied Wag but by that stage in the day she could hardly spit the words out and said, "S S S S Sandpiper!" What she meant was **Common Sandpiper** but it had been a long day.....Hahahaha. By then we'd noticed that all the forest on the hill had been cleared of all the Pines and that there was just the odd spindly and branchless trunk of a random Birch left standing. It looked awful and so barren it was surely devoid of any wildlife? It just so happened to be the forest that our cottage was set in, so we started to get a bit worried. There were houses dotted along the Loch side of the road and we caught the flash of the white rump of a bird flying down the road and quickly realised that it was a nice male **Bullfinch**. The tree clearance stopped abruptly, and the forest started again at that point and we were very pleased to hear the uncannily loud song of a **Wood Warbler** opposite a house that had loads of shiny



wheel hubs adorning the outside. Quirky! A bit further down and we saw the sign we'd been looking for and turned up a track to our cottage. We saw a Dragonfly flying around and a **Grey Heron** flew over, but the track seemed to go on forever and we wondered if we'd ever get there! Eventually we turned a corner and saw the huge pond and then 2 wooden buildings, one of which was our cottage Lochan Tor. They were quite close together but there were no cars outside the owner's house. We breathed a sigh of relief when I finally parked up at 4.56pm and we couldn't wait to get in for our first glimpse inside our HQ for the next week. The location was amazing with the pond and there was nothing but hills and trees surrounding us.



Lochan Torr

There were loads of Swallows feeding over the pond too, which was nice to have on our doorstep. Inside the cottage was clean and the main area downstairs was open plan and modern enough with a small bedroom and shower room.



Living room

Wendy was gutted that there wasn't a bath because a long soak was just what she fancied at the end of the long day. Wendy put the oven on to heat up for our pizza and started to cook Lyca's broccoli while she unpacked the food and tried to find a place for our shopping, which was difficult seeing as all the cupboards were full already. A bit of reshuffling soon sorted it out though and Lyca had eaten her tea and had her Dentastick before ours had even left the fridge. While I was having a look at our view I spotted a baby **Robin**

hopping about outside and then I went to investigate upstairs and moved the cases up there into the very large and nice bedroom. The stairs were wooden and Lyca slipped on them as she followed me up there, so as there was no additional bathroom or toilet either we didn't want to risk any mishaps and settled on staying downstairs. Meanwhile, Wendy had been so engrossed in sorting the shopping out that she forgot about the pizza and announced that it was burnt.....Ooops! We'd been looking forward to that too! After we'd eaten our rather crispy pizza Wendy asked me to put the heating on because she was cold and then put the heated towel rail on to warm the room up before she went for her shower. She'd only got as far as rinsing her hair when the water went luke warm and didn't heat up again, so the rest of her shower wasn't pleasant. As if she wasn't unhappy enough, when she stepped out of the shower she found that the towel rail was still stone cold so the room was freezing while she got dry. I found out the towel rail was controlled separate to the main heating.....Doh! There was no way she could warm up either having only brought a very thin summer dressing gown to save on space, so she had to put a zip up hoodie on over it. While she'd been having fun freezing in the shower I'd been having fun too. I'd found that there was still no wifi. Annoyingly the router must have been in the main house, so I had no chance to log on and check if the network was actually down as was said or if they had actually hit their monthly limit which is what I suspected. Even more annoyingly I couldn't find anywhere in the house where I could get a 4g signal so my great plan of using my phone as a mobile hotspot to provide wifi was in the bin! I kept trying and eventually I discovered that I could get the 4g signal up to 1 bar if I opened up the top half of the back stable type doors and held my phone outside, which was as good as useless! With all this going on Lyca was more than happy and had made herself quite at home and was curled up asleep.



Living room

Wendy was still feeling as though she was moving from the boat and drive up and I'd read the cottage manual/instructions which said we had to shut the gate at the bottom of the track when we arrived.....Urrghhhh! All I wanted to do was put my feet up too, but I put my shoes on and headed off down the never-ending track to shut it. On the way down, I noticed the ace looking ditches at the side of the track, which looked great for Dragon/Damselfies. Down at the gate there was a ginormous Red Deer Stag standing behind a fence at the neighbour's house, which was called Moonshine and turns out was a Deer Farm!





Massive Red Deer Stag

I also found the track to small local Lochan, so we'd have to go and explore that at some point tomorrow.

When I got back and finally sat down I realised just how tired I was and I wasn't the only one! We loaded up the dishwasher with everything in sight because the glasses, cutlery and dishes weren't the cleanest and put it on before we had to use any of them in the morning. Wendy had washed a glass before pouring herself a spritzer and then moaned about how she couldn't phone her Mum on whatsapp to let her know we'd arrived OK. I tried again at the back door but I couldn't stand there holding my phone for an hour so I fashioned a makeshift 6 foot high phone balancing system (a chair, a couple of wicker baskets on top of each other, a cushion on top of that and then sat my phone on top).

This worked a treat and Wendy's phone was able to connect to the mobile hotspot and she was able to whatsapp her Mum after all.....Phew! The more we thought about it the less convinced we were that a storm did wipe out the network and was sure my theory was correct and the internet was down because some previous guests had already used up the allocated data for the month and the owners didn't want to cough up any more cash for the extra few days.....Grrrrr! I found out that the mass tree felling that we'd been worried about was actually going to be a good thing in the long term. The Forestry Commission had to get rid of the non-native conifers to enable them to plant Scots and Caledonian Pines to get the forests back to how they would've originally been years ago and like Abernethy is. By 10.07pm we'd had enough and headed off to bed, which luckily was very comfortable.

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June

For some unknown reason Lyca decided that we didn't need a lie in and got us up at 7.30am! It was a sunny start to the day although it was quite windy, which we hadn't expected. When I took Lyca out I decided to walk down the track to the Lochan I knew was down from the cottage. I heard **Crossbills** flying over as well as a **Tree Pipit** singing from somewhere. It was a short walk of only about 500yards with a nice looking ditch at the side of the path near the Lochan.





Nice bog surrounding the lochan

It looked interesting, so I had a look and found some **Common Blue**, **Blue-tailed** and **Azure Damselflies**, which was a good start. At the Lochan there were more of the same but there wasn't much happening with it being so early in the day.



Lochan Torrs Lochan

I headed back for breakfast and then went out to check the pond while Wendy got ready. It was pretty quiet but that wasn't surprising as it was only early and all I found there were some **Large Red Damselflies** and **Four-spotted Chasers**. We'd decided to stick with our newly found tradition and keep things local today, so there was no need for Wendy to make any sarnies, as we'd be home by lunchtime I reckoned.

Armed with my new monopod set up (with all my gear in my rucksack) we headed out at 9.28am but Wendy quickly realised that she'd forgotten the notebook, so I had to put everything down and run back to get it. As we left for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time we spotted a **Spotted Flycatcher** and had a fleeting glimpse of quite a large Dragonfly, which we couldn't ID from such a poor view. We headed down the track towards the Deer Farm and saw a white moth, which was a **Common White Wave**.





Cottage driveway :O

There was a male **Great-spotted Woodpecker** up in one of the trees, which we watched for a while before carrying on. We stopped again for another moth and as we tried to re-find it something else caught my attention. I'd spotted a Dragonfly flying about 30 yards off the track in the trees. It definitely wasn't a Hawker and looked suspiciously like an Emerald type. It was patrolling a boggy area in a clearing in the trees, but we managed to keep up with it and got it in our bins. My eyes couldn't quite believe what I was seeing but there was absolutely no doubt this was a **Northern Emerald**! We'd dipped on them too many times in the past including on an entire week's holiday aimed at seeing one so this was more than just a lifer for us both. This was a brilliant find, so next I had to try to get a photo of it, which wasn't going to be easy considering it wasn't landing and was in a boggy area! I passed Lyca over to Wendy and started to wade through the long grassy tufts and boggy bits, willing it to just stop and land on something. While I was desperately trying to follow it another Dragonfly flew straight in and landed on an exposed boulder about 3 feet from me. My eyes nearly popped out of my head when I saw that it was an **Azure Hawker** that was identifiable with the naked eye as it was sooooo close (too close to focus on with bins)! I excitedly called it to Wendy, so she didn't miss out. This was unbelievable, we'd just got our 2 most wanted Dragonflies of the trip, which were both lifers and we hadn't even got to the end of our HQ drive! It lifted and flew off giving Wendy just about enough time to get it in her bins before it disappeared into the trees. OMG! With both Dragonflies gone we'd hung around for long enough, so we carried on down the track. We spotted another Hawker but quickly lost it, so we had to let that one go and we finally made it out onto the road. We hadn't walked far when we spotted another Spotted fly perched on a dead tree and we looked down over the Loch below us and took in the view. It really was a fantastic location, which we couldn't have chosen better if we'd had a million cottages to choose from.





Where River Garry meets Loch Garry

We heard a high-pitched call that I recognised as definitely different and looking down we found 2 very distant Sandpipers flying around calling noisily over the loch. I could only presume them to be Wood Sandpiper but when Wendy played me the call on her phone app it wasn't right. It did however fit perfectly with **Green Sandpiper**, which I didn't think bred in the UK, so hadn't expected at all. A quick check of the app on the phone showed Green and Wood Sandpipers do breed in the remote places of Scotland, so you learn something new every day!

There were more Spotflies dotted around and when we came to a small outbuilding/woodstore we saw a bird fly in, so we waited to see what it was. When it came out again, we saw that it was a lovely male **Common Redstart**, which was obviously feeding its young in there. Nice :).



Redstart house

Just past that we turned off the road onto the track to Loch Loyne which was our destination for today's walk, although it'd already been eventful enough already! We walked towards a house and saw more Spotflies and Dragonflies and then the door opened and we heard the voice of a woman who spoke with a Thai type accent. We subconsciously glanced over like you do but all of a sudden we were very conscious of what we were seeing. The woman was standing in the doorway dressed in a tight black top, the shortest black mini skirt



we've ever seen and black stockings and suspenders....Errrrr? What really make us raise an eyebrow and consequently nearly split our sides with laughter was when she proceeded to bend fully over and start sweeping the floor with a dustpan and brush. We staggered off up the path holding our aching sides with tears streaming down our faces desperately trying to look normal and failing miserably. What was going on there? Did the bloke that lived there hire "Kinky Cleaners" to come and do his cleaning every week or something?



Kinky Cleaners house

Our speculations ended abruptly when we spotted a **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** and normality (as we know it) was resumed once more :P.



Golden-Ringed Dragonfly

Wendy stopped to have a scan around and as I looked round a Dragonfly landed on the path just next to her feet. I quickly checked it and was made up to see that it was another Azure :O! Azures are always described as being very curious and will come and check you out but having never seen one until that morning we'd never actually witnessed it and both of them had been true to form. This made me less disappointed that we hadn't pinned the Dragonfly down at An Torr because that didn't come anywhere near us, so was most likely just a Common Hawker. I asked Wendy not to move and I tried to approach to get a photo but couldn't get a shot from a decent angle before it flew off. You can tell it's an Azure though.





Azure Hawker

There was another Golden-ringed further up as well as a **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** and a **Highland Darter**, which is basically a Scottish race of our Common Darter. There was a Golden-ringed resting on a branch really close, so I had to take the opportunity to get a photo, while I could. When another Hawker came in we noted that it didn't come and check us out and it was indeed another Common, not the Azure that I still needed to get a decent shot of.



Common Hawker

There was so much going on and we still hadn't gone very far from HQ, not that we were complaining. Another SPB Frit flew past and then a Northern Emerald landed on the bank by a fence, so we stopped again. Behind the fence was the best boggy field we'd ever seen and there were Dragonflies everywhere. I'd failed to get a shot again but there was another one flying around, so I kept an eye on it until it landed on the path in front of me. My heart sank when I realised that it was totally head on to me, so I didn't even bother. When it



flew off I followed it back down the path where it eventually landed and I was able to get an ok shot of it.....Phew!



Northern Emerald

We didn't know where to look there was so much going on around us and the sun had come out, so it was starting to get pretty hot. We were both totally spoilt when an Azure and Northern Emerald landed so closely together that they were in the same binocular view :O! Our 1<sup>st</sup> **Large White Butterfly** flitted past and then we found an interesting looking Darter. It was pretty non-descript but when we got a view of its face it turned out to be another one I'd wanted to see on this trip, a **White-faced Darter**! It was a female, so not the more colourful male that I'd have liked but yet again it would only let me be face on, so I just had to settle for a record shot. I had no idea they were in this area at all and the habitat was nothing like where we saw our only other White-faced Darter in Abernethy forest.



White-faced Darter

By then I was starting to get pretty frustrated, as I was really struggling with the weight of all my camera gear. Not only was it hard to carry but I was finding my plan of using a monopod for videoing had been miles too optimistic and to top it all off I was way too hot.....Grrrrr! It was 11.40am by then and we still hadn't made much progress on our walk, but we'd just found the best track for Dragonflies ever! We carried on along the path through a more densely forested area, so there was a bit of shade from the sun at least. At the side of it were 100's of Large Red Damselflies and a Golden-ringed landed right in front of us. That was too good an opportunity to miss but as I went in for the shot my camera crashed.....Nooooooooo! I tried to sort it out and in doing so I noticed that it looked as though all my shots so far were messed up, so I was totally gutted! There were even more Golden-ringed and it seem unreal that we'd struggled so much to finally find our 1<sup>st</sup> one 2years ago! They were like buses now. Further on we spotted a **Silver-Y Moth** and at a practically dried up ditch we had yet more Northern Emeralds, Golden-ringed, Four-spotted Chasers plus Common Blue and Large Red Damselflies.....Crazy! There was also **Sundew** everywhere but eventually we reached the top of the forest and to our right we could see a small Loch with a Red-breasted Merganser on it.



Lochan

The view up there was stunning and Wendy didn't think we'd ever beat it and we clocked up another 3x SPBFrits. We could hear some kind of raptor calling from above us, so we looked up into the bright blue sky for a scan. We were blown away to see that it was a **Golden Eagle**, which was calling continuously as it circled round and round in a thermal before it was so high up we couldn't see it anymore. WOW! Was there anything that this walk didn't have? We had another 3x SPBFrits and then turned a corner where we could see a massive Loch ahead of nestling amongst the mountains. This was Loch Loyne that I'd planned on getting to and we could see why other guests at the cottage had also recommended taking the walk there. It blew the socks off any of our views earlier in the day and as we made our way down to it Wendy said, "Did something happen to us on our way up here and we've ended up in heaven?" It's not that she's remotely religious or even believes in heaven or hell but I knew what she meant at least. It really was something else!





This is normally covered by Loch Loyne

As we wandered round Wendy took so many photos knowing fine well that not one of them would come close to doing it justice. There were 3x RBM's down on the Loch and a Common Sandpiper kicking off somewhere and Wendy, of course, started 'momenting' and wanted to stop the clock and stay forever. To think that this was our local walk from our HQ was unreal and blew all the others into oblivion. There was some sort of wrecked road running through the middle of the Loch, so we crossed it over onto the island in the middle. Wendy reckoned that it would've been a perfect spot to sit down and have lunch, so we could stay all day but neither of us would've been happy to have carried it all the way there. On the far side of the island was a completely collapsed bridge but we could see there was still a proper track on the far side that went right round the hill opposite and I wondered what on earth it was and where it went.



Collapsed A87 bridge

When we got home later I found out it was the old A87 which headed north to Cluanie and was in use up until the 1950s. The area was dammed and flooded and only when the water is low can you walk on the track to the island like we had (the water level looked desperately low). The collapsed bridge was still intact until 2002. More interesting info about this road is at this link [Loch Loyne A87](#). Lyca pulled me all the way down to the water and stood there with her tail wagging like she was the happiest dog alive. She didn't want to get out but eventually I had to drag her out as well as tear Wendy away to start heading back.



Paddle in Loch Loyne

Back up on the top path we found 2x Northern Emeralds mating, more SPBFrits and then Wendy spotted something else. If we hadn't known any better, we'd have put it down as a Meadow Brown but luckily we did and we were looking at a **Large Heath**. We've only ever seen one before on Mull and I'd expected not to see another until we were back there next week, so that was an unexpected find. She then spotted a black and white moth that was totally unlike anything we'd seen before. Something was telling Wendy that she knew what it was though, but she just couldn't put a name to it. All of a sudden Lyca stopped in her tracks and started pawing her mouth frantically. Wendy bent down to investigate but Lyca wouldn't let her look, so she couldn't see anything. Lyca just wouldn't leave her mouth alone and we were really worried that she'd been stung or something. Remembering when she got stung on her paw by a bee and how she was trembling in pain we started to calm down, as she wasn't doing that at least. We were miles away from anywhere and had no idea where the nearest Vet was, which is probably why we panicked so much. After a minute or so Lyca stopped and trotted off as though nothing had happened, so we had no idea what was going on. We could hear another Tree Pipit singing and Wendy found it at the top of one of the conifers. There were definitely more SPBFrits on the wing and Wendy found another of the black and white moths. She had the name of what she thought it might be on the tip of her tongue and finally said, "Argent and Sable?" It certainly rang a bell with me too and if it was then it would be another lifer for us. I grabbed some shots, as it was in the ditch to the right of us. We found 5 of them in the end and Wendy couldn't wait to get back to have a look in the book. We'd also started to feel pretty hungry by then and Wendy was down to the last couple of swigs of water, which wasn't good with it being so hot.

Back on the woodland path we took advantage of the shade again and found a **Green Carpet Moth** and further down a nice **Common Blue Butterfly**. Our relaxed walk turned stressful when we spotted a Red Deer ahead of on the path. Obviously Lyca was quick to catch on and although it ran off she was onto its scent and pulled uncontrollably all the way back. I thought she was going to rip my arm off and it was destroying my back! Eventually it must've hopped over a fence back into the forest because Lyca lost the scent and started to behave again....Phew!





Where's the Deer gone?

Something green flew up from the path ahead of us and it was a **Green Tiger Beetle**. Thinking it might be a different type to the ones we get at home I took a photo and also asked Andy about it but unfortunately it was the same type as we get at home.



Green Tiger Beetle

Our feet had started to pound in our boots by then and we knew we must've been out for quite a while but had no idea how far we'd walked. There was another Azure on the path as we approached 'Kinky Cleaners' house and a Tree Pipit with a Northern Emerald in its beak....Noooo! The Azure gave me the run around especially when Common hawks would fly in and confuse me but eventually, after what felt like hours (but was probably only 10 mins), it landed on an old fence post and I was able to get a shot.





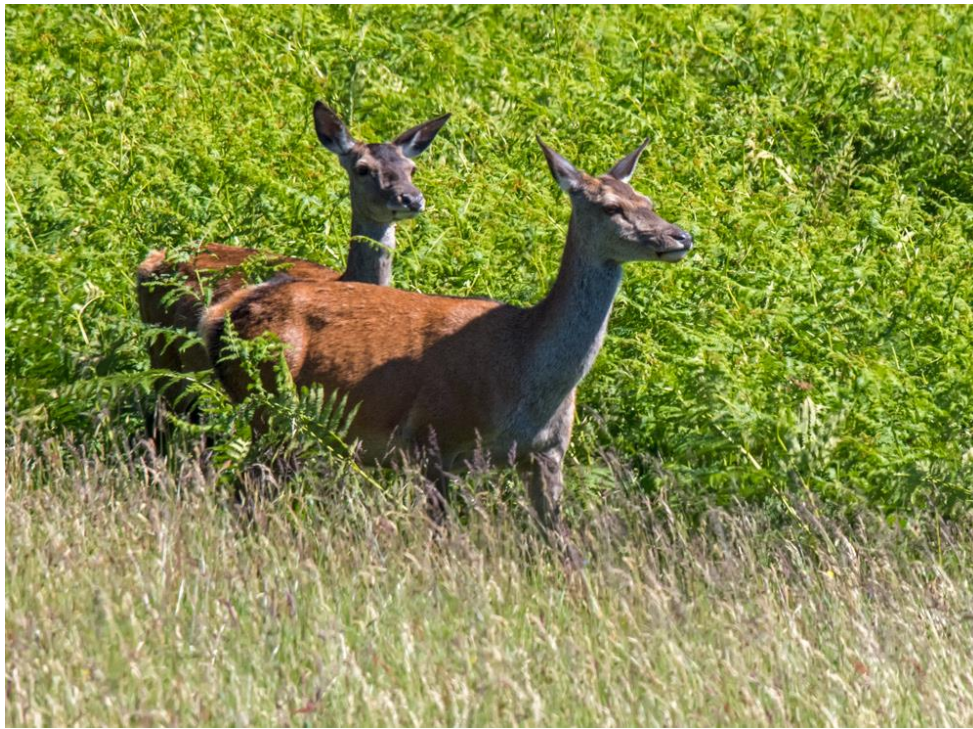
Azure Hawker

Nearby, Wendy spotted a micro moth flying past and luckily for us it landed in an accessible position. We had no idea what it was off the top of our heads so I grabbed a photo of that too.



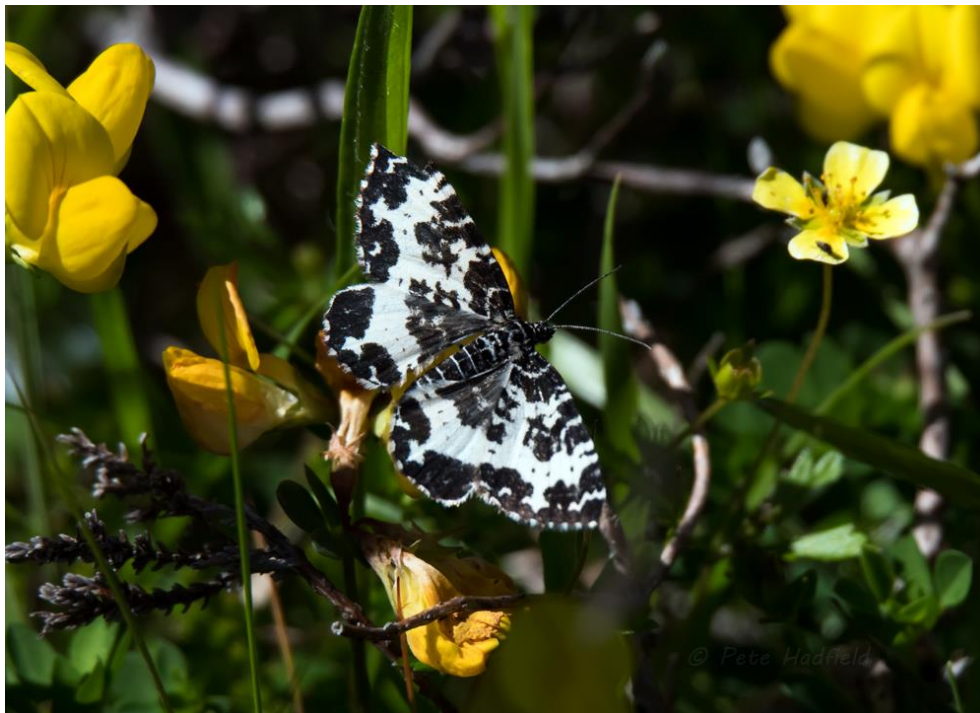
Micro Moth

Back on the “main road” there was a **Red Admiral Butterfly** by the shed and the Redstart was still going in and out. Walking back along the road we spotted 4x Red Deer in a field, which all looked very twitchy. They were acting very strangely but all was revealed when a fawn emerged from the bracken and they all ran off.



Red Deer

When we got back to HQ we were shocked to see that it was 3.30pm! We'd walked 12km, which equated to 17,000 steps and had burned off 759kcal! We'd also been out for 6hrs 5mins, so no wonder our feet were sore! It was boiling in the house, so Wendy gave Lyca some nice cold cucumber and then quickly rustled up some lunch, which we devoured as though we hadn't eaten for weeks. She had a look at my iPad to ID the moth and was bang on with **Argent and Sable** (ssp hastata), which as well as being a lovely little moth is a nationally scarce B.



Argent and Sable Moth

Wendy's back was sore and our feet were on fire so we took our socks off in an attempt to cool them down, but the tiled floor wasn't as cool as it could've been having been heated up by the sun all day. I had a quick look through the pics I'd taken while Wendy went into the bedroom, which was the coolest room in the house and lay down. Lyca, who'd been asleep since we'd got back suddenly woke up at 4.55pm and trotted into the bedroom to find Wendy and ask for her tea. She got up and fed her and then sat down at the table and did some colouring in one of her poncy Mandala's for meditation book that a friend had given her at Christmas. She'd only brought it with her for something to do in case it rained and we were house bound! Even though



we'd had lunch late we were quickly hungry again and sat down to eat our tea at 6.30pm. Wendy couldn't be bothered cooking anything, so she cracked open the tin of Fava Bean Dhal she'd brought as a backup and nicked some of my rice/quinoa mix that I had to go with my Smokey BBQ Chicken and Potatoes. It was very quick and we both enjoyed it but after I'd let it settle for a while I decided to go and see if there was any more action at the Lochan with it being later in the day. Wendy thought I was mad and went off for a shower while I headed out at 7.05pm.

It was still absolutely boiling outside and disappointingly there was nothing at the Lochan, so I walked down the driveway track to shut the gate again. Strangely there was nothing down there either after all the action and excitement of finding our 2 lifers that morning. Back at HQ I went for a shower and then messed around with another adaptor on my monopod to see if it'd fix my problem. I was so annoyed to find that it didn't and the camera was still wobbling around on it, so the whole experiment had turned into a total failure. I cursed at it and told Wendy that I was going to send it back and get a refund as soon as I got back home. Outside the cottage we noticed that the Spotted Flycatcher had food in its beak, so it must've had a nest nearby. I set my phone up at the back door again for a 4g signal so that Wendy could phone her Mum, catch up with Facebook and then we watched some TV. It was such a nice evening that after I'd taken Lyca out for a wee I thought it'd be worth putting the moth trap out. I rigged it up outside the back door, fighting off the midgies and saw a **Bat** flying around but couldn't eek out enough energy to get the Bat Detector out to see what type it was. After that we headed off to bed at 10.30pm and listened to 15mins of Sarah Pascoe's audio book *Animal* before we fell asleep, hoping that Lyca wouldn't wake us up too early.

Monday 25<sup>th</sup> June

It was 7.30am when we woke up and it looked as though it was going to be another really sunny and windless day. This was handy though, as I had another long walk planned for a Butterfly that apparently doesn't fly if there's even a hint of wind! I took Lyca out and then went to see what we'd caught in the moth trap in such a fabulous location. Imagine my total surprise when I'd checked all the egg boxes and only found 2x **True Lover's Knot**! What the....? There was no shortage of midgies though, so I was quite relieved that I didn't have to spend ages out there potting hundreds of moths after all but I baffled as to why there wasn't there any moths....wierd. It was so hot and still even at such an early hour, so I dreaded to think how hot it was going to be later on. After we'd had breakfast and Wendy had made our lunch we headed out at 9.19am and it was already 21c, but felt like way more....Uh oh! I had to let 3 cars go past before I could pull out of the driveway, which having not seen any cars on that road so far was a bit weird. Driving past Hub Cap Cottage we heard the Wood Warbler again and then we saw a BT Openreach van coming towards us. Having been there before in Wales it gave us déjà vu and even though we didn't want to get our hopes up and didn't even believe there was a problem with it, we willed them to go and sort our network out! We heard another Wood Warbler as I drove past Loch Garry and then another one down near the main road, so they're obviously doing OK in the area. It'd taken us a whopping 18minutes to get to the main A road from HQ, which was the only problem with our location. I'd never have booked it if I'd known that but then we wouldn't have had the amazing day yesterday if I hadn't! Fortunately, the drive was very scenic, so the time passed quickly and we arrived at Creag Meagaidh at 10.30am.

We'd been to Creag Meagaidh reserve twice before, both times on the way out of The Highlands but only walking the low level short circuit. We'd been in March when it'd been cold and grim as well as June when the weather wasn't so great and it actually rained. There didn't look like much chance of that happening today though, as the sun was shining and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. We set off with our 1<sup>st</sup> plan being to use the WC's before starting our walk and there were Chimney Sweepers everywhere, like when we were there in June 2 years ago. We were already boiling by the time we'd got up the toilets and Wendy looked up at the steep hills that lay before us and looked anything but raring to go.



Creag Meagaidh HQ

At this point I don't think she realised how far the walk I'd planned was, but I've learnt its best not to let Wendy build up a head of anger at the idea of difficult walks but instead to spring it on her so she has no choice.....Hahaha :P. The 1<sup>st</sup> section of the path was quite hard going as there are steep steps to go up and we saw our 1<sup>st</sup> **Green-veined White Butterfly** of the trip. The next section was pretty steep as well and with the ground being so dry our feet were losing their grip on the loose gravel. There was a cracking view at the viewpoint so we stopped for a nano rest before continuing.



Looking back down from the viewpoint

We found a huge **Fox Moth Caterpillar** before we finally got up onto the flat path that ran all the way along the valley. The path was lined with small Birch and Mountain Ash trees and we started to notice that we were being followed by some horseflies but after the trees they seemed to disappear....Phew!





Having lots of fun

A Butterfly with a distinctively strong flight pattern caught our eye and weirdly it turned out to be a **Painted Lady**, what was that doing up at this altitude? There were loads of **Small Heaths** and Fritillaries on the wing, but it seemed a bit on the windy side up there for our liking. From everything I'd read the Butterfly we were after needed totally calm conditions and an altitude of above 350meters on a south facing slope to fly. In the ditch that ran alongside the path was more Sundew and also Butterwort, which Wendy recognised from our walk up Carn Ban Mor.



Butterwort

When we got up to 532meters we came across an area that looked good. I checked to see if it was south facing and it was, so we stopped for a scan. I spotted a very small dark Butterfly, which flew off up the slope, so I went off to investigate leaving Lyca with Wendy.





Desperately trying to re-find the butterfly

By my reckoning I'd found the right spot that I'd read about from Butterfly Conservation, so I was quite hopeful. I saw nothing else, so had to admit defeat but when I came back down the path my Butterfly turned out to be yet another Chimney Sweeper Moth.....Urrghhhh! It still seemed a bit too windy, so we both resigned ourselves to the fact that we wouldn't be seeing what we'd hoped.

Wendy would've happily turned around at that point (it hadn't sunk in that I planned to walk all the way to the corrie at the end of the valley) and gone back to the car, but I really loved the look of the corrie up ahead and it would be a nice walk for Lyca.



Coire Ardair

Lyca all of a sudden jumped into the grass at the edge of the path and stuck her snout deep into it. She was Voling again, which made us laugh but when we heard a high-pitched, "Squeak!" I quickly pulled her out before she did any damage. I set the target of walking to where the path got to the ridge just to see what was round there and we carried on. Lyca was making use of every stream she could find to have a drink from and dip her paws in but then my heart was in my mouth as I saw a practically black Butterfly fly past and this time I was sure and shrieked in excitement, "**Mountain Ringlet!**" Wendy hadn't seen it and it'd gone down into the grass and was nowhere to be seen. I checked my phone and we were now at 546meters, so all I had to do was



get Wendy onto it. I handed Lyca over to her again and went up the slope to try and find it for her but there was no sign of it anywhere. All I could think was that it'd be terrible if Wendy didn't see it after I had :(.

Luckily, she re-found it herself, but it was much further right than where we thought it'd gone down. Phew! At least we were both able to leave happy with another lifer and one that we didn't think for a moment we'd get :). I went in to try and get a shot of it but that was easier said than done because when it landed it completely disappeared into the grass or heather and I'd be practically on top of it before it flew!



Mountain Ringlet

We continued on a bit and as we rounded a corner, I said, "Ooo this sheltered area looks nice." Just as I said those words, we saw a Mountain Ringlet in flight over the grass! Surely I could get a photo of this one? (no was the answer). Wendy was keeping an eye out and telling me when it was up again and then she noticed that there were at least 2 of them. Neither would stray very far from where I'd seen the first one, so we hung around. What made it feel even more special to us was that Butterfly Conservation had been there last year and only found 3x Mountain Ringlets with 20 people looking and this was the first record of Mountain Ringlet this year! While I was being given the run around by the Butterflies, Wendy noticed that there were Tadpoles in shallow water left in the ditch next to her.



Tadpoles

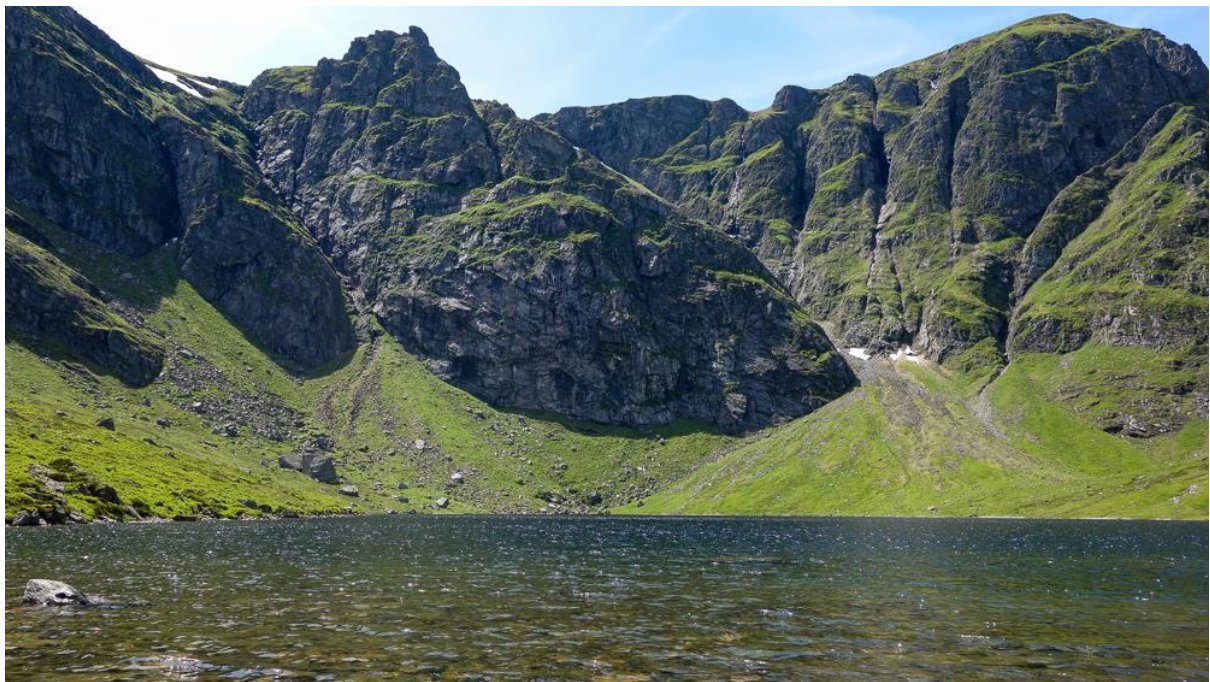
Surely they were doomed if it didn't rain soon? The Butterflies came out again and one of them flew straight past Wendy while I was trying to get a shot of the other. Lyca was obviously beginning to get bored and started to dig out a bed for herself in the heather at the side of the ditch. She curled up in it like a wild animal and then fell into the ditch with her back legs, giving herself a bit of a shock and leapt out like a rocket. What a muppet! I gave up and we carried on towards the corner but when we saw a large orangey brown moth flying very fast and low over the ground we were stumped. It was far too big for a Fox Moth and too late to be an Emperor, so what was it? I don't know why but I instantly said, "I bet that was a Northern Eggar." Wendy gave me look funny look as I don't think she believed that I knew what one was and to be fair I'm not sure I did, but something was telling me that's what this was. It didn't matter though as it was gone and there was no way to confirm it. We spotted another Mountain Ringlet, so I went in with my camera and waited for it to land. I could've kicked myself again because it landed 3 times and I missed it every time....Aarrghhh! There was a very posh young couple with southern accents with a dog running around off the lead coming up behind us, so we had to get Lyca off the path and up onto the slopes before it caught us up. This was annoying because there was a sign at the car park telling people to keep dogs on leads due to the wildlife, but I suppose some people think it doesn't apply to them.....Grrrr! We let them get way ahead of us as it seemed a shame to give up at the corner when there was a Corrie and supposedly a Loch just ahead of us. I told Wendy that we might as well continue and finish what we'd started and predictably she had a bit of a moan about how it was lunch time and we didn't have much water left but in the end she lost the vote....Hahahaha!





Mountain stream from Coire Ardair

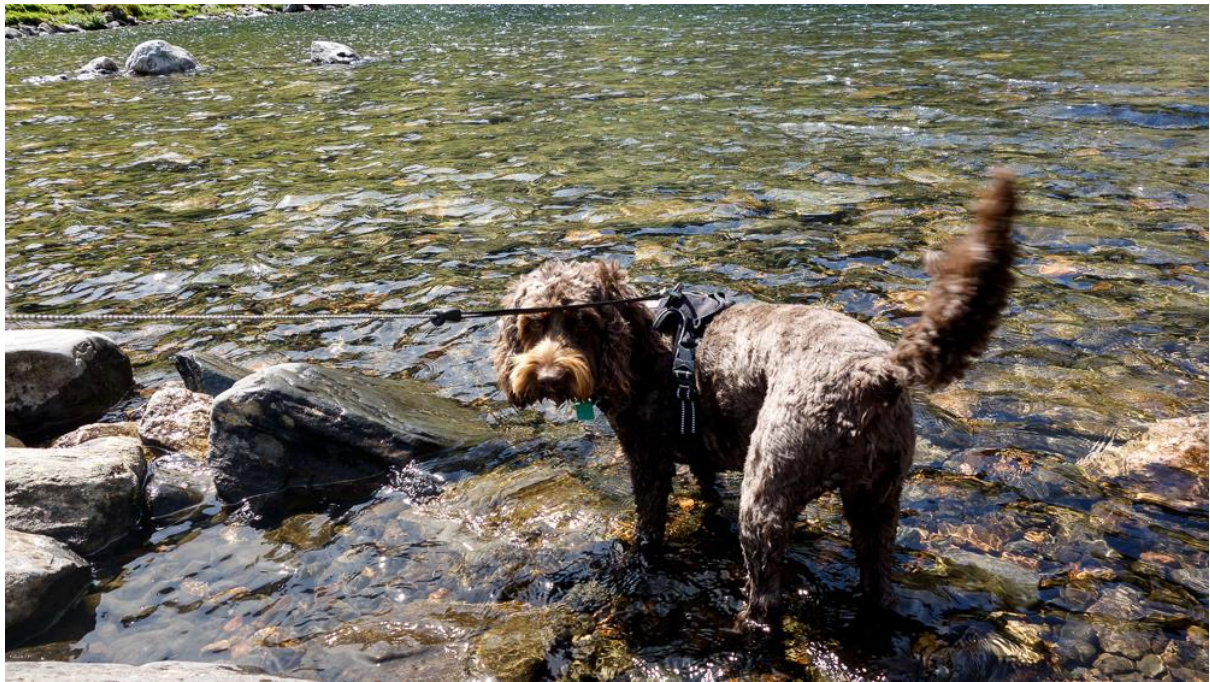
The path became quite rocky and with a steep downward slope and she started to notice that her dodgy knee was beginning to kick off. This was the last thing she needed knowing that there was a steep downhill slope all the way back to the car park and to injure herself on day 2 would ruin the rest of our trip.....Uh oh! Luckily it levelled out again but having thought that it was only short distance the path seemed to go on forever! We thought we'd never get there but when we got to the top of the last section all was revealed and it was amazing.



Lochan a' Choire

Even Wendy agreed that it'd been totally worth the extra mileage, but we hung back until the couple with the dog had stopped taking selfies and had cleared off. They were going further than us and we didn't envy them when they started climbing up the huge hill. There was still snow up in the highest corries and when the coast was clear Wendy said, "My feet are going in that!" and we headed down to the edge of the Loch. It was baking hot so Lyca was straight in there paddling around with her tail wagging and Wendy sat down and took her shoes and socks off.





Not cold at all

She dunked her feet into the crystal-clear water to cool them down and made a relevant noise that suggested that it was very nice and refreshing. About 3 seconds later she started to grimace and then shrieked in pain as the ice-cold mountain Loch water penetrated her bones and made them ache.....Hahaha! It was so cold that she couldn't bear it for more than a few seconds at a time. Wendy dared me to do it so for some bizarre reason I agreed instead of telling her where to go! I lowered mine in and the cold hit me straight away and the pain was quick to follow.....Oowwwwww!



Absolutely freezing!!!

How anyone can swim in lochs like this is beyond belief! Wendy had brought the remains of a bag of vegan gummy bears, so we shared them out and had a drink to keep us going for the walk back.





Good acting from Wendy

Again, it would've been a perfect spot for lunch, but we hadn't brought it with us and had no idea we'd have been so long. There were loads of crazy little insects flying around and the view was so lovely that it was hard to leave. We put our wet feet back into our socks and made the most of the fact that wouldn't feel like they were on fire for the next few minutes. I dragged Lyca out of the Loch and Wendy looked around for the last time wishing she could stop the clock, but it was already 1.40pm and time to get going. Wendy's knee continued to be a problem on the downward path and she was getting really worried. Back at the Mountain Ringlet spot they were still flying around but kept dropping down into the heather again. I managed to climb up the bank and onto the slope and got some better shots but there was still a lot of room for improvement, so I wasn't going to give up. Wendy walked up the path and found a suitable place where I could get down and just as I stepped towards the edge a **Lizard** jumped out from in front of my foot, flew off the bank and landed in some long grass. It looked so funny but what a totally hardcore Lizard! When we got back to the first Mountain Ringlet spot we had another look and there were now 5 of them flying around. This was my last chance of getting a better shot, so I went in to try again. It was getting seriously hot by then and we were both feeling pretty hungry but it's not every day you've got 5x Mountain Ringlets in front of you and I didn't know if I'd ever have the chance again. After several attempts including messing up one that was had its wings open and was completely in the clear on a leaf, I finally got an OK-ish shot.



Mountain Ringlet

We found more Mountain Ringlets and started to wonder if they really were as rare as we'd been led to believe or whether we'd just been incredibly lucky to have been in the right place at the right time. We saw more Golden-ringed Dragonflies and another Mountain Ringlet surprisingly low down, which was almost mocking us at the amount of effort we'd had to put in to find the ones further away.



Golden-ringed Dragonfly

We had now seen 13 Mountain Ringlets, which was unbelievable having started the walk with no confidence that we'd even see one!





Nearly back!

As we approached the viewpoint we heard a sound that we initially ignored being so common at home but then we realised that it was our first **Stonechat** of the trip. Wendy took it slowly and hobbled her way down the hill and back to the Visitor Centre.

She grabbed a survey sheet from the info board and gave it to me to fill in while she went into the WC. Next, she tried to add our 13x Mountain Ringlets to the recent reports board, but the marker had practically run out of ink, so you could hardly see it :(. While I nipped into the loo, she had a quick scan of the Reserves comments book and was shocked to see that the last entry was really bad. Some bloke had written that there was no wildlife at all, the paths weren't maintained to his standard, there shouldn't be any Deer there but implied that they were farming them to make a profit and then went on to complain about some toilets in another part of the country being closed down and left a link so that everyone could sign the petition. What the....? I added my entry, which was very positive and drew an arrow up to the idiot above and wrote, "This guy is talking pish!" I chuckled to myself and showed it Wendy who had a giggle too. How anyone could be so horrible is beyond us, it's a great Reserve AND FREE! and he obviously walked round with a blindfold and ear plugs in! Some people just can't help but moan.

It was 3.47pm when we got into the car and firstly we opened all the doors because it was like a furnace then ate our well-deserved and long overdue lunch. We'd walked 12.3km, done 21,000 steps, burnt off 700kcal and it'd taken us 5 hours 3 minutes. Obviously, we'd been stopping a lot, which was why it'd taken so long but we'd come away with 13x Mountain Ringlets, which couldn't be sniffed at. We also had a very tired dog in the back seat but with the temperature in the car reading 29c we were too hot to hang around. We left at 4.04pm to try our 2<sup>nd</sup> plan of the day, which was another shot at Allt Muic. We'd been there 2 years ago looking for Chequered Skipper, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Azure Hawker but had come away with none of them. We did get Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Golden-ringed Dragonfly, which were lifers back then and we'd been tripping over them everywhere we went ever since! With the weather being much more favourable and we were a week closer to Chequered skippers flight time I was really hopeful, but Wendy wasn't so sure and was also too tired to be bothered by then. I stopped off at Spean Bridge Spa at 4.27pm and Wendy ran in to get some more drinks having finished what we'd brought with us. While I waited for her, Lyca and I were falling asleep, but I heard a **Mistle Thrush** in the background. There was no way I was ditching the plan off, as we weren't going to be in the area again and was too nearby to ignore. The remaining drive was on single-track roads and reminiscent of Arnamurchan on the road round Loch Archaig. We remembered it when we saw the caravans parked up on the private sites at the side of the Loch and it felt like only yesterday that we were there last. Lyca was puffing and panting in the back just like she did when we in Ardnamurchan, she hated those roads so much! There were some **Greylags** out on the Loch and shortly after we arrived at Allt Muic car park and I parked up at 5.10pm.

It was at that point that Wendy remembered the walk and how it was all uphill, which she wasn't very happy about. It was all downhill on the way back and with her knee being sore she felt reluctant to say the least. I was a bit disappointed as I really wanted to put some effort into this small reserve but knew that if Wendy pushed her knee too much now it could wreck the rest of the holiday for her. I came up with a compromise and said that we'd only do the 1<sup>st</sup> bit where we'd seen all the Butterflies last time, which was better than nothing. We started heading up the hill and a large Fritillary whizzed past us but didn't land and it was now even more boiling than before! There was just no getting away from the sun and I felt really uncomfortable. There were Chimney Sweepers flying and we found a **Straw Dot Moth** but there was very little on the Butterfly front compared to last time. We went past the Chequered Skipper area without seeing anything apart from a horsefly and had only added **Speckled Wood Butterfly** to the list by the time we got to the top of the lowest section.



Allt Muic

This was the flat, grassy area which had been where all the action had been last time, so we stopped to look. A **Meadow Brown** was next but there wasn't any sign of anything else, which was disappointing. I thought I'd go and explore further, left Lyca with Wendy with and started to wade through the long grass hoping to kick something more interesting up as I went. A **Light Emerald Moth** flew in and landed next to Wendy, which was the only thing of interest to happen. I gave it up as a bad job and started to wonder why there was so few Butterflies flying, there were much fewer than 2 years ago :-\). The only thing I could come up with was that it was just too late in the day for them to be out in numbers. Wendy spotted a **Giant Horsefly** sunning itself on some bracken, so we upped the pace before it realised we were there.

Depressed with Allt Muic and having our 1<sup>st</sup> proper dip of the trip, we headed for home at 5.44pm but overall we had another good and very eventful day. Wendy couldn't resist stopping for a pic of the views towards the Ben Nevis range of mountains (I think).





Ben Nevis range I think

Going over the Caledonian Canal and the river further along were loads of **Sand Martins**. There were proper Hooded Crows everywhere and we both spotted the white belly of a **Dipper** standing on a rock in the middle of the river. We heard the Wood Warbler again as we drove past Hub Cap Cottage and we were both pleased when I parked up outside HQ at 6.52pm.....Phew!

It'd been a long and hot day, so we were pretty tired again and it was like an oven in the house. Wendy made me get changed and take our clothes out to the garage to be washed while she did Lycas tea. I loaded up the machine and then discovered that there was no detergent, so I left it all in there. When I told Wendy she wasn't too pleased because she didn't have a spare pair of trousers, so I had to go and fish them out for her. While I was out there I did a 4g speed test and laughed when I saw it as 8.66mbps down and 0.5mb up :O! Their actual internet (when it worked) was only 2mbps down, so they really needed to change to a 4g modem if they're going to keep any of their techy guests, like me, happy. Wendy had been busy doing our tea, which had to be something quick and was cooking my pasta to have with a new Dolmio Express Meatballs in sauce pouch I fancied trying. I'd bought wholemeal penne to be healthy but very quickly regretted my decision as the entire thing was horrible! It wasn't just the wholemeal pasta either and the sauce was just as minging.....Bleurrghhh! Wendy was very happy with her just add water pot of Itsu Vegan Glass Noodles and said she'd definitely buy it again to have when she didn't have time to cook. Bah! I ended up having a crisp sarnie in the end, as I couldn't face any more of my pasta. It was way too hot in the house and our feet were pounding with the heat and the effects of our walk. Wendy said she needed a Loch to stick them in to cool them off but worse than that was that we were both bright red from sunburn :O! We'd both put factor 50 on before we'd left but it must've sweated off us over the course of the day. Poor Lyca was flat out on the tiled floor over by the open window next to the front door, which we doubted was much help. She was absolutely pooped and wasn't the only one! We both had showers and sat down to watch TV but felt absolutely knackered all night. I put the moth trap out again but this time I positioned it at the side of the house to see if it'd make any difference and by 10.16pm we went to bed to listen to 15mins of Sarah Pascoe before falling sleep.

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June

Lyca must've been feeling the effects of the past 2days and allowed us to sleep until 7.50am, which I think we deserved. It was sunny again with no wind and peering out of the window at the trap I could see a big Hawk Moth, while Wendy could see loads of Caddisflies...Uh oh! I took Lyca out while Wendy got her breakfast ready and then we both went out to see what we'd caught. The egg boxes were all full of midgies and we had to ignore the Caddisflies but at least we'd caught some Moths this time. The midgies were out in force, so we

were being eaten alive but at least it didn't take us too long to empty it and pot up any of the interesting ones. We'd done better than the night before but still had disappointingly low numbers. We went back inside feeling decidedly itchy and started to check the ones we were unsure of.

The list is as follows (with the lifers in bold) :-

1x Map-winged Swift

1x Poplar Hawk-moth

1x Gold Spot

4x Ingrailed Clay

1x Common Marbled Carpet

1x Apple fruit Moth

1x **Barred Red**

Total = 10x Moths (x7 sp)

It was hardly the best catch ever having had high hopes of our great location but some of the Moths we did get were quite decent. While I had the book open, I checked out Northern Eggar (ssp Oak Eggar) as I still had a hunch that it could've been that we'd seen at Creag Meagaidh, it looked very good, but we still couldn't say 100%. Due to our hardcore start to the holiday I had the longest drive of the week planned for today as well as four very short walks to give our feet a bit of a rest. Wendy thought it seemed like a waste of a day given that the weather was so good, but this was the main reason for going to this area in Scotland in the first place and I'd originally planned to stay much closer to it, as it was that important. The weather looked perfect and stable for the foreseeable future, so I stuck to my guns.

With 97miles ahead of me to drive we left at 9.40am and the local Wood Warbler was still singing its heart out opposite Hub Cap Cottage. When we reached the 'Welcome to Skye and Lochalsh' sign it was 10.16am but the scenery was again absolutely amazing, so it didn't feel too bad being in the car. There was a car parked up at the side of the road with a DIY sign on the back window saying, "Be patient I'm a European driver." What a good idea! We passed another car that had pulled into a verge and saw a bored looking bloke standing around and then a woman lying on the ground with another woman holding her legs in the air. The only thing we could think had happened was that the poor woman had fainted or her back had gone and we could both sympathise with that. What a place for your back to go! We had a bit of a surprise when we turned a corner only to find 3x **Wild Goats** casually lying at the side of the road at the base of the cliff. They didn't look fazed by the traffic at all and were totally chilled out. There was another lovely Loch and then all of sudden I pointed up ahead to let Wendy know that we were approaching Eilean Donan Castle. She'd never seen it before, but I had and can never see what all the fuss is about, it's not that good! She wanted me to pull into a car park, so she could get a photo, but it was full so I didn't want to stop and said I would on the way back as it might be quieter then. This annoyed her and she said that it would've been better then as the sun was out and we'd probably forget later. The best she could do at the time was grab one as we went over the bridge.





Eilean Donan Castle drive by

It was 10.49am when I joined the Wester Ross Coastal Trail, which was nice and scenic and we hit Ross and Cromarty at 11am. Driving along Loch Carron Wendy decided that she needed a wee, so when we saw a sign for some toilets and a Spa it seemed a good bet. It also meant taking a 3mile detour, which obviously added 6miles onto the journey.....Urrghhh! Carron seemed quite nice and had a cracking view over the Loch.



View from Carron

I parked up outside the Spa and Wendy nipped in to get something to wash our clothes with as well as a sieve, so that she could rinse lentils and rice at HQ and finally cook something.

The shop was huge and the layout was a bit random, so she couldn't find a sieve and had to resort to asking the girl at the checkout. She told her to go upstairs into the hardware section, which for a Spa was pretty weird. Then again there probably were no other shops around for miles, so for the residents of Carron would be really good. Having got everything she needed she dumped it all in the car and then went off to the WC's, which she said were pretty nice. We left at 11.17am to hopefully get to our destination before the sun went down :P. When we saw Kinlochewe we knew we were nearly there and I parked up in Slatterdale car park, next to Loch Marree at 12.31pm.





Loch Maree

It was bang on lunchtime so with it being so hot in the car we took our lunch bag over to a bench and admired the view. Loch Maree was certainly very pretty, but we were being harassed by horseflies, which took the shine off an otherwise perfect picnic. They were so annoying we couldn't wait to finish in the end and we went back to the car and watched a couple, that had been getting ready when we'd arrived, finally get into their kayaks and start paddling out into the Loch.



Nice area for Kayaking

We set off on our walk at 1pm and the horseflies followed us along the footpath through some woods, which wasn't very nice. The whole area round Loch Maree is one of the best places in the whole of Britain for Dragonflies, so I was really excited. We couldn't fail with the weather like this. It was so boiling we were sweating buckets already especially on the climb up the hill. Climbing up I started to get a bit worried at the massive amounts of cleared trees.





Deforestation

I wasn't quite sure what the affect would be on the local Dragonflies but the fact they were there when the plantations were standing made me think that removing plantations would mean that it would no longer be favourable for the special Dragonflies in the area? At the top we had a cracking view over Loch Maree and Wendy wanted a photo but there were power lines in the way all the way along ruining the shot. We followed the path along the top of the hill where there was a ditch, which I'd been told about, that was good for all the Dragonflies we were after.



Track with dried up ditch to the left

This place was meant to be amazing, so I was optimistic that the drive there was going to be worth it. A Golden-ringed was flying up and down the ditch and we found a Four-spotted Chaser sunning itself on a twig, so at least that was a start. A Golden-ringed actually flew over Wendy's head and grabbed a horsefly, so we were pleased with that and just hoped it was particularly hungry today and would take them all out. I stopped to try for some video, but it was giving me the run around big time, so I gave up. Wendy was still banging on about wanting to get a photo of the view, but I told her that it was a loop path and that she'd be able to get a shot without the unsightly power lines when we got further down. I found the track that would take us back to the car park, but Wendy wasn't convinced.





Path looks fine to me...

I wandered down to explore it further and shouted up to Wendy to follow me as it definitely was the path according to the map. As I got further down it was strewn with dried up bits of trees and didn't look passable, which wasn't the best. Wendy reluctantly followed me a bit further, still concerned about her knee, but was still adamant that we'd be better off going back the way we'd come as the path was starting to get more difficult to negotiate and also seemed to disappear further down. I poo pooed her suggestion, as it made no sense to turn around when we could do a loop and carried on regardless. All of a sudden the path vanished and all that was ahead of us was waist high bracken and tree stumps.....Errrrrr!



Where's the path gone?

Wendy said, "I told you so!" and got annoyed because we'd walked so far down the steep hill that she didn't fancy walking all the way back up it. I started to wade my way through the bracken with Lyca but by then Wendy was really fed up and was in full on Karl Pilkington mode so said that there was no way she was doing it and was going back the way we'd come. I told her I'd meet her back at the car and let her get on with. I trudged on more out of annoyance than anything because there was a track on the map and it looked like it had been destroyed with all the deforestation. Some bits were a real struggle to get through with big stumps to negotiate and then big patches of bramble to get me and Lyca through. I was getting my legs and ankles cut to bits so had to carry Lyca over a lot of it. After what felt like about half an hour but was probably more like 5 minutes we crossed a big overgrown ditch and clambered onto the Loch side path.....Yes!



Unfortunately due to my annoyance it didn't feel like a victory at all. I quickly brushed and patted Lyca down in case any horrible ticks had latched on to her then I took her into the Loch so she could have a well earned paddle.



Cooling off in Loch Marree

As we walked back to re-join the path it suddenly hit me that Wendy's sense of direction is absolutely horrendous so wasn't confident she would be back at the car. Even though she easily should have been by then, there was no sign of her.....Urrghhh! I turned Lyca round and we went back on ourselves expecting to see Wendy coming around each corner we turned but she didn't. What on earth? Wendy had trudged all the way back up the steep hill and retraced her steps along the top. All of a sudden, she'd realised that she seemed to have been walking for an awfully long time and looking around she didn't recognise any of the landmarks. She'd been keeping her eye out for the path back down the hill but hadn't seen it, so carried on. A wasp started buzzing round her face just to annoy her even more and then she saw that she was heading up a hill towards a road and knew that she was lost....Doh! She tried to phone me but there was no signal, so she turned around and started to head back desperately trying to work out where the path was. She finally found it and it was no wonder she'd gone straight past it because it was totally hidden by long grass and bracken. There were loads of horseflies but at least she was back on track. I'd wandered back to the little bridge over the stream to meet her oblivious to anything. When she emerged she was shaking her head, grinning and said, "Hmmmmmm, no prizes for guessing what happened to me?" I put 2+2 together and said, "Oh let me see, you got talking to that stranger with the dog? She wasn't very pleased with my answer as she'd only said, "Hello" to him in passing and told me to guess again. She was very disappointed that the most obvious answer had evaded me and had to tell me herself. I told her about Lyca and I's adventure on the way back, which made her even more pleased that she'd done her own thing, even if she had got lost. She managed to get a photo too minus the power lines.





Loch Marree

Back at the car it was it was again like an oven and the horseflies were all lying in wait on the outside of it. We waved our hands around to shoo them off and shut the car doors, so they couldn't get us. We left at 2.36pm for our next stop but by then it'd started to cloud over, which considering we were going to look for White-faced Darter was a problem....Urrghh!

I missed the turning and drove straight past where I was supposed to stop for my second walk at Bridge of Grudie, but there were no spaces anyway, so I just carried on going. This was a massive mistake as I found out later this is the best place for Dragonflies in the Loch Marree area.....Doh! I carried on to our next stop of Beinn Eighe and parked up at 2.51pm. I wandered over to get a leaflet and was interested to read that in 1951 it became Britain's first National Nature Reserve. We set off up a hill at 2.54pm kicking up a **Chevron Moth** from the path.



Beinn Eighe small walk

At the top it turned very boggy which was exactly the habitat we needed but depressingly the sun had totally gone! I couldn't believe it :( This was our biggest drive of the trip and it'd taken nearly 3 hours to get there but there'd been no suggestion there was going to be a break in the hot weather :( If I'd known I would've delayed the trip until later in the week and all I could do was cross everything that the clouds would only be temporary.





No Dragonflies :(

We found another Moth, which in daylight looked like something interesting but on closer inspection was just a True Lover's Knot. One dragonfly whizzed past, but it was just a Common Hawker and when the path started to climb uphill again we decided to turn back. We were back at the car at 3.27pm and I reckoned that the last walk I had in my plans was still worth a shot just to see the area in the flesh. I was pretty dejected, but I drove down the road to the Visitor Centre car park anyway, which only took 4minutes.

There was no sign of the Visitor Centre nearby but what we did see was a couple of parking spaces that had been designed to be in the shade for dogs in cars. What a good idea!



Dog Shade area

The only confusion surrounding it was that I wondered why on earth you'd leave a dog in the car when you were in such a great area for walking. Wendy suggested it might be so you can leave them while you go to the Visitor Centre and toilets. I'd read in my book that a good area to try was a boggy wooded clearing by the car park, but we didn't see it. Heading into the trees we came across a lovely little seating area.





Pine cone made out of flat stones

We walked up and through woods and found a pond with another Common Hawker flying around it.



Nice pond

The path then went more uphill, much to Wendy's delight (not!) and across the top of the wood. Even though it was cloudy it was still very hot and muggy which made me doubly annoyed. I can just about handle the ridiculous heat if there's Dragonflies about but this was just pain without any gain.....Grrrr! :( The walk climbed up, past the trees and out to a perfect bog land habitat.





Great Dragonfly habitat

I was gutted the sun wasn't out as I could fully imagine the insects that would be flying around this area. We trudged up to the viewpoint which I think looked at the Beinn Eighe Mountain. Hiking up that is one of the main reasons people come to this area apparently. No thanks!



Looking towards Beinn Eighe Mountain

Luckily the walk turned back at this point as I couldn't take much more depression, so we were quickly coming back down and heading back. On the way back, we finally found the Visitor Centre and they'd really pushed the boat out to make the place look good.





Beinn Eighe visitor centre

The picnic benches that were dotted around weren't your bog standard run of the mill affairs. Oh no, these were all individually sculpted with local wildlife and were certainly different.



Funky picnic area

It was a lovely Reserve, which we hadn't been able to really do justice due to Wendy's knee and the scourge of the horseflies. We headed back to the car and left at 4.20pm to head to our last location. We were all hot, and tired by then, so I don't think any of us shed any tears when I accidentally drove past the spot. That was the second time I'd done it and we'd only managed to visit 2 of the 4 places I'd planned to.....Doh! I stopped off to get petrol and I got a cornetto to cool me down whilst in there I chatted to the bloke behind the counter. He said there wasn't any midges about because it was too hot, so I asked if they'd they been replaced with horseflies because it was horrendous and he said, "Yes." Great! I'm not sure which is worse, tons of midgies and midgie bites or getting harassed and bitten by horseflies.....Urrrghhhh!

There was another nice Loch just before the River Bran and Wendy spotted a **Black-throated Diver** on it. Finally! Knowing that they breed in the area they'd been strangely difficult to find until then. Wendy reminded me to stop, so she could the photo she wanted and then as though timed to perfection it clouded over even more and we could see fine spots of rain on the windscreen. Great! Once we were off the horrible single-track road Lyca stopped puffing and panting. By this point we were quite keen to get home, so of



course the traffic ground to a standstill when a huge lorry and a coach tried to get past. There was a queue of cars ahead of us and it looked like there was no way there'd be enough room for either to squeeze through. I reversed back into a layby as did a couple of others, but a bloke had to get out of his car to gesture to the rest to go back.



Traffic jam cause. This should have traffic lights really

The lorry and coach got past but it seemed like a ridiculously small road for them to be driving on in the first place. After the blockage had been sorted we noticed an old campervan up ahead that was really struggling to get up the hill. It was tedious and we kept willing it to pull into a layby to let everyone past but it didn't. Eventually a rental van pulled in and the camper followed, so they must've been together and we were on the move again. It started to rain again at Kyle of Lochalish, so obviously when we got to Eilean Donan Castle it was raining there too. Wendy said, "I told you so!" and got out and took some photos, which as she'd predicted, weren't as good as they could've been had she taken them when it was sunny earlier.



Eilean Donan Castle

In my defence I had to say that if she'd taken them earlier she'd have been shooting into the sun, so they'd have been rubbish too. Ha! I reckoned a zoomed in photo would look better but Wendy disagreed, so I had a go anyway. (and it definitely looks better :P)



Eilean Donan Castle

There were loads of people milling around the Castle and again I couldn't see the attraction. Its not a patch on Castle Rushen :).

It was 6.40pm when we finally got back to HQ and Wendy fed Lyca straight away and sent me back out to the washing machine with the clothes we'd been wearing now we had detergent. Lyca put herself to bed pretty quickly after the long day.



Tired Lyca

Wendy went for a shower and I tried to send the cottage company an email to enquire whether the wifi was any nearer to being fixed. Yet again it was too late for Wendy to be bothered cooking, so she heated up the other portion of Fava Bean Dhal and rice while I thought I'd play it safe and had the Dolmio Bolognese sauce that I knew I liked and hoped it'd work better with the wholemeal penne. Needless to say it didn't although it was slightly more edible than with the other sauce, so I didn't need another crisp sarnie. The baby Swallows had fledged from the nests on the owner's house next door, so it was nice watching them flying around outside. It hadn't been the most eventful day and it was a good job we'd luckily seen our 3 biggies on the 1<sup>st</sup> day having driven 196miles for nothing!! We'd seen a lot of Tesco delivery vans driving around over the course of the day and couldn't help but wonder why they didn't deliver to our neck of the woods, as it wasn't



nearly as remote! I decided not to put the Moth Trap out again, as we weren't catching very much at all and we went off to bed at 10.16pm to listen to more Sarah Pascoe.

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> June

We were so tired when we got up at 7am and only for the fact that the room was like a sauna and Lyca had decided to wake us up at 6.38am I think we could've slept all day! It was another sunny day and already too hot for my liking when I took Lyca out.



Lochan Torr pond

It was going to be a scorcher, so we made sure we'd absolutely caked ourselves with factor 50 and topped it off with a liberal dousing of Smidge to try and repel the horseflies after yesterday. I'd planned a return visit to Glen Affric for today to see if we could see Brilliant Emeralds at Coire Loch after only seeing Downy there last time when the weather wasn't the best. The builders turned up at 8.30am, which was the 1<sup>st</sup> time we'd seen them, so Lyca started barking and being annoying. Luckily, we were nearly ready by then and were leaving HQ at 8.45am, so we hoped they'd be gone when we got back.

The trusty Wood Warbler was singing at Hub Cap Cottage and then Wendy spotted a large bird flying along the edge of the cleared area of forest. She had to do a double take and just about spat the words out to say, "Tawny Owl.....baby!" Obviously, she hadn't gone all Austin Powers on me, she was telling me that it was a baby Tawny Owl...Hahahaha! We watched it flying alongside the road and couldn't believe what we were seeing. Initially we thought it was brilliant but were then saddened at the fact that it had no cover as half of its forest had gone :( The long-term benefits of replanting the forests would obviously be beneficial but what about the impact on the local wildlife in the mean time? Wendy pointed out that maybe that was why they'd left big sections in between cleared areas but even so, it was still fragmented habitat and surely not good. It landed in a tree, so I reversed back up to admire it and when it flew off and vanished we wished it luck especially with it being so hot and dry. The Loch was flat calm with a reflection like a mirror, so Wendy made me stop so she could take a photo.

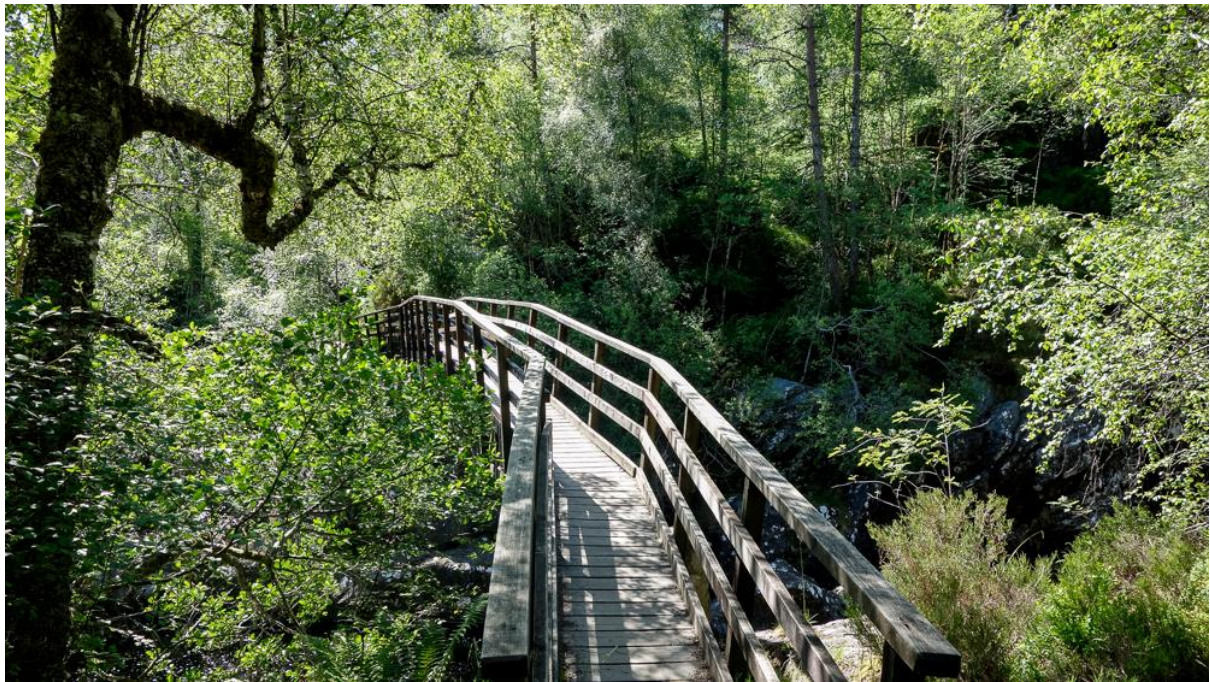


Loch Garry

When I pulled off my car made a horrible clunking noise, which sounded bad. I was a bit worried seeing as we had another week left as well as having to get back down to Heysham. I decided to see how it went before getting too worried, as I had no idea where the nearest garage was. Approaching Fort Augustus, we spotted a Cockerpoo and we had to in queue at the bridge to let 2 boats on the Caledonian Canal through. As we waited we watched a few people leave their cars and walk to the bridge to watch and loads of recently fledged baby Swallows flying around. We drove alongside Loch Ness but this time we were on the opposite side to what we'd been on before and it seemed nicer. We'd got to Lewiston by 9.54am and we recognised the campsite from last time we'd been there in June 2016. I filled the car up and we carried on hearing another Wood Warbler while I drove down the narrow winding road to Glen Affric. I parked up at Dog Falls car park and tried to position the car under some trees, so hopefully it wouldn't be so hot when we got back.

As soon as I parked the car up there were swarms of horesflies landing on it, lying in wait for us probably. Aargghhhh even in dense woodland? Flipping heck! Wendy bit the bullet and ran over to the toilets and heard another distant Wood Warbler. While we got ready to go the horseflies were instantly round us and we noticed that the couple in the car next to us were spraying each other in some kind of insect repellent and were practically engulfed in a cloud of it. Not the best advert for Glen Affric.....Hahahaha! We set off at 10.33am and having been before we knew to ignore the footpath signs that took you up a steep slope and back down again for no particular reason and instead, we headed straight up the road to join the riverside path. It was already boiling, so I was dreading how hot it was going to get later. When we got to the bridge it all came flooding back as to how much I totally dislike it. It's narrow, really high and the 'handrail' is at knee height, which is perfect to catapult you over the edge if you were to trip!





Horror bridge

Wendy started walking across it, so not wanting to think about it too much I just went for it too. Everything was going fine until she decided to stop suddenly in the middle to take a photo, so I had to stop behind her in the middle of the bridge.....Nooooo! She casually looked around admiring the view of the river while, not having a very good head for heights I felt anything but happy. "You're joking?" "Oh, come on, don't stop here!" "Just keep going!" I protested, not wanting to look down. Wendy, on the other hand seemed to be taking her time until she'd got the message and finally took her photos and crossed the rest of the bridge.



Looking down river from horror bridge

Glad to be back on solid ground we had to climb up the steep hill, which in the searing heat was hard going. Wendy reckoned that it felt more like we were in Spain or somewhere not Scotland and I had to agree. We spotted a nice **Small Copper**, which had us confused for a while until it landed and we got a view of it. By the time we got to the top we were sweating buckets and looking down at Coire Loch it looked as though we were going to bake down there!





Looking down on Coire Loch

This was probably the best chance we'd ever get to see the Loch at its best, so we needed the sun. Last time it'd been hit and miss due to it being cloudy for the majority of the time we were there but this time the Dragonflies had no excuses and had to be out. The walk down was just as steep as we remembered it but we took it easy and got to the bottom unscathed, which was a good start.....Phew!



Coire Loch

There was a Tree Pipit calling and Dragonflies whizzing around everywhere, so we really had our work out. We didn't know where to start but there were loads of Downy Emeralds, Four-spotted Chasers, Common Blue and Large Red Damselflies just on the near edge and the further out we looked, the more we could see!





Downy Emerald

We started to go through the nearest ones and having only seen our 1<sup>st</sup> ever Downy Emerald here two years ago we were already starting to ignore them, favouring the challenge of trying to pick out a Brilliant Emerald. Terrible! Every time we thought we had one it flew past so quickly that it was virtually impossible to get it in our bins.....Aarrghhhh! Lyca was obsessed with going in the water but the ground was so boggy that Wendy wasn't letting her near, so she was playing up. Wendy started wandering around with her to distract her and found an orangey moth with lines across its wings resting on some heather. She called me over to get a record shot, so we could ID it later but before I could 2x French girls came down to join us, so we had to move to let them past. One of them, who had a camera and tripod started taking photos, so we hung back so as not to be in her way. They were both really friendly, but the moth was long gone by the time we went back, so we'll never know what it was. Back on track we both scoured through the Emeralds desperately trying to pin down the 2 that looked good. We could see the yellow markings just behind the thorax so knew we had **Brilliant Emerald** there. All I had to do was get a photo but typically could only get a National Geographic standard one which doesn't show any detail whatsoever.....Dohhhhh!



Brilliant Emerald... LOL

We heard a **Little Grebe** while I spent a frustrating 15 minutes failing to get any shots of either of them and the huge number of flies buzzing around our faces were starting to get a bit more than slightly annoying. A Golden-ringed put in an appearance as well as a Silver-Y but then our peace was shattered.

We could hear voices and looked up to see a group of people with 2x dogs running around all over the place heading our way. We decided to give up and get away from there before they got down there, so we hurried off. We tried to view the back of the Loch from the path but it was really overgrown and we couldn't get near enough, so I decided to go off-roading. The 2 dogs were Spaniels, so they obviously plunged themselves into the Loch as soon as they got there, so that would've put a spanner in the works for us anyway. While I was making my way back through the waist high undergrowth Wendy had spotted a Dragonfly that looked suspiciously like a White-faced Darter. She called me over for a look and sure enough it was, albeit a dull immature male and not the lovely red and black male we were really desperate to see.



White-faced Darter

I was going to get a better shot of it but the people with the dogs were heading our way, so we had to get off the path and into the trees to let them go past and needless to say, it'd gone when we went back to re-find it :(. Walking up the path through the woods we spotted a **Bordered White Moth** and instead of going back on ourselves like last time I'd planned to do a loop back to the car park.



Dog Falls walk



When we got to the top we found ourselves on a flat path, which looked down over the trees.



This section was at about 1 billion degrees C

There were some more people with dogs ahead of us and they weren't in a hurry, so we tried to hang back to avoid having to go past them with Lyca. As with all the best laid plans it didn't work and when they stopped completely to read the signs we found ourselves having to go past them but luckily Lyca was OK and didn't create a scene. One of the dogs was a young Springer Spaniel and for the rest of the walk it was behind us, yelping and pulling on its lead to get to Lyca. The heat along this path was absolutely terrible and I was really struggling. I was sure it was over 30c but it was impossible to wear shorts with the amount of horseflies on you constantly. It was hard enough keeping an eye on your arms to bat them off, so there's no way I could have managed it for my legs as well. The walk seemed to have taken us forever, but we finally spotted the car park at the bottom of the path and back over the river.



Dog Falls walk

It was 1.05am when we got back to the car, so after Lyca had been given a drink it was time for lunch. It was 23.5c in the shade., which was far too hot to be comfortable. Due to all the horseflies outside we had to stay in the car to eat our lunch but despite having been parked in the shade was still like being in an oven, so we didn't enjoy it in the slightest. Wendy was worried about Lyca overheating, so we didn't waste any time and left at 1.19am before we all melted.



This time round I had learnt that there was another good Dragonfly area at the end of the road much further along so the Glen so that was the next stop. Driving alongside Loch Beinn a Mheadhain we noticed some signs for construction traffic. Next a massive lorry came hurtling around a corner and was heading straight for us! Luckily I was only doing about 20mph on the narrow winding road and stopped quickly but the lorry driver was going way too fast and our hearts were in our mouths as he got closer and closer to us. It looked highly likely that we were just about to be involved in a head on collision with him but right at the last moment the vehicle stopped just yards away from us.....Phew! Both of us cursed loudly and sighed in relief as we looked at each other, still fuelled up with the sudden rush of adrenaline. It'd been a very close call and just a bit too close for comfort by our standards, but the lorry driver didn't look bothered at all. Happy to still be in one piece we carried on and heard a Wood Warbler but although the scenery was amazing there was literally nowhere to pull in to get any photos.

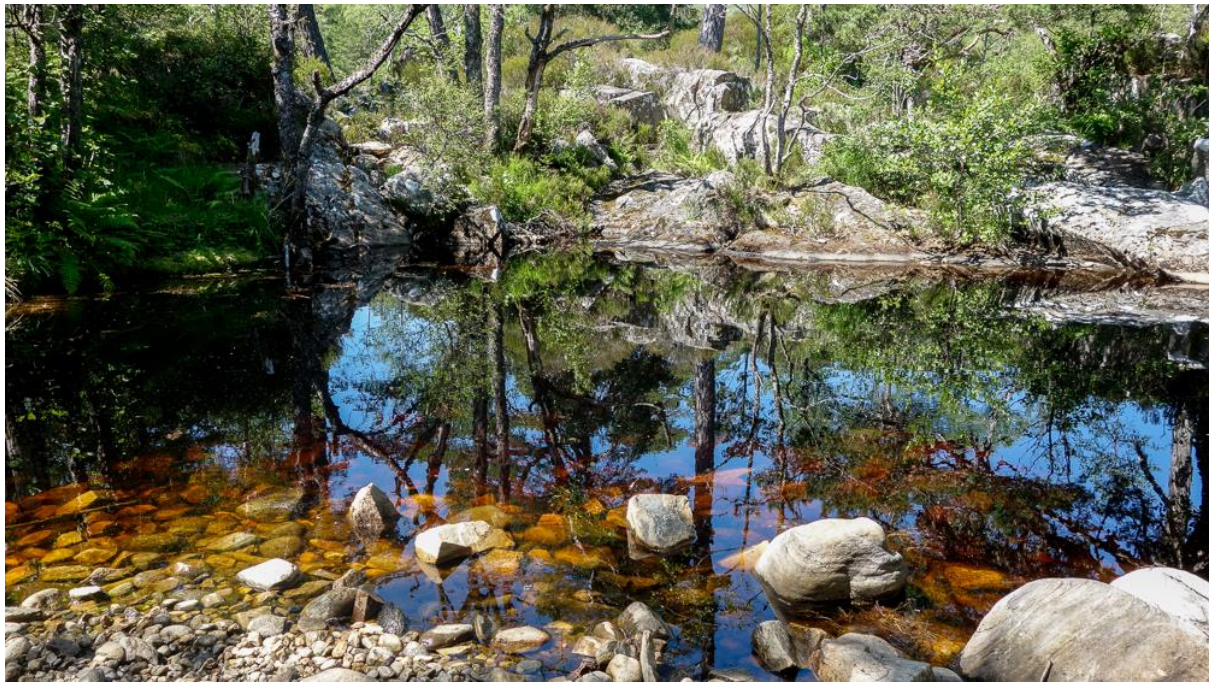
We arrived at the River Affric car park at 1.46pm and it was even hotter, if that was even possible! It seemed the "Great Glen" was very popular with the tourists as all the car parks seemed chocka. We took a short walk through some trees to the river, which was very impressive.



River Affric walk

Although Lyca seemed hell bent on going for a paddle we couldn't get close enough to it to be able to let her. Even Wendy was disappointed that she couldn't cool her feet off, but we carried on until we found a weird little pool just to the right of the path. We wandered over for a look and crossed a tiny stream to get to it.





Weird cut off pond

There were Large Red Damselflies flying around and some tiny fish in the pool but not much else, so we didn't hang around for long. As we headed back over the stream Wendy noticed some Tadpoles in it, some of which had small legs. If they didn't hurry up and turn into Frogs or if it didn't rain soon then the water was so shallow it was dangerously close to drying up. We managed to get close enough to the river to let Lyca have a paddle and we decided to take the 'Rocky Trail' back, which turned out to be a good move. Lyca posed on top of the rocks like she owned the place and was surveying her territory, which Wendy thought made for a funny photo.



Mufasa of Affric

We passed 2 girls, who were sitting with their feet in the river at a really nice section and Wendy envied them, until one of them was bitten by a horsefly! This cleared them off, so we were able to get a photo :).





River Affric

Our feet were on fire, not to mention the rest of us so we were very pleased to see the walk was short and we were quickly back at the car.....Phew!

Back at the car it was 2.18pm and 27c in the shade although it felt much hotter than that! When we started moving the temperature rose to 29.5c even with all the windows down but it was only a short drive to Loch Beinn a Mheadhain. I parked up in the car park and Wendy was raring to go and get some photos of the lovely scenery. I, on the other hand, was way too hot for comfort and had even started to feel a bit sick. Wendy doesn't seem to acknowledge heat stroke/exhaustion though, so implied I was just being a big girls blouse! I don't know about it feeling like Spain, but I reckon it was closer to the centre of the earth! Not only that but the car was instantly covered in horseflies, so I decided that I wasn't going anywhere. Wendy got out and trotted off down to the water's edge with the camera and took in the view.



Loch Beinn a Mheadhain

It was also a popular spot and there were people dotted around all over the place enjoying the sunshine and all I can say is, "How?" When she came back the only thing I wanted to do was head for home, so at 2.35pm we left. Interestingly, we spotted a sign saying "All delivery and work force to observe 30mph speed limit" which made us raise our eyebrows. The bloke in the lorry that nearly drove straight into us earlier certainly



wasn't observing a 30mph speed limit! Next we came across Benavean Dam and Wendy wanted to go for a look. God knows where she got the energy from! I parked up and she went off to explore the Dam seemingly unaffected by the disgustingly high temperature. She ended up walking down the concrete walkway to the little sub-station at the end and took loads of photos, so she could show me what it was all about.



Dam spillway



Dam outlet

It felt like she was taking forever but eventually she came back and we carried on the drive home. It was 30c by then and we heard yet another Wood Warbler before we stopped at the Spa at Cannich for some supplies. Carrying on it went up to 30.5c and I couldn't believe that it was forecasting even hotter for tomorrow. When we got to Nessieland it was 31c and I started to think that we'd be staying in the house for the entire day. It was 4pm when we got to Fort Augustus and still 30c, so Lyca was puffing and panting in the back and we started to get a bit worried about her. Luckily the bridge was open, so we didn't have to wait in the car for any boats to go through, which was lucky seeing as it was 31.5c by then! As we drove up the road to HQ the builders were just leaving, so it looked like we'd have the place to ourselves again.

After a long and very hot day we parked up outside HQ at 4.34pm and unfortunately one of the builders was still there. To top it off he had a huge Labrador with him, so Lyca wasn't happy at all. Wendy told him she was



scared of Labs, but he didn't do anything and just said that it was the friendliest dog ever, so I had to carry Lyca into the house.....Grrrr! It was disgustingly hot in the house, so I opened all the windows while Wendy did Lyca's tea. Both Lyca and I curled up on the tiled floor to try and cool down, which I don't think I've ever had to do before!



Very tired doggy

I'd asked Wendy to get me a tin of spaghetti instead of beans but the best she could do was spaghetti and sausages, so I had that on toast while she had the rest of her rice from yesterday and some beans. Not exactly gourmet but it was so hot neither of us would've enjoyed something better anyway. After that Wendy went off for a shower, which was refreshing for a nano second! Looking at the weather we weren't surprised to see that it'd been the hottest day in the UK for 20years! Aviemore had been 31c and where we'd been had hit 32.5 making it the hottest day in Scotland for 5years! Wendy went upstairs to see if there was a fan in the wardrobe but there wasn't and we made a mental note to write in the Visitor Book that it'd be a good idea to provide guests with one in rare event that it was needed.

While we watched TV Wendy found a small lump on Lyca and sent me off to get the tick removers. Lyca was as quick as ever to cotton on and made Wendy lose it, so it took ages to re-find. When we did we were relieved to see that it was just a scab, so there was no tick and probably just a bite...Phew! We were really surprised that she hadn't been caked in them and hoped that it'd stay that way. Wendy wasn't impressed all evening because I was watching football (the world cup!!) and we both felt very tired and frazzled after the hot day. Wendy's Mum, Sister and Trixie had been to White Strand Beach for a picnic and had even been for a swim in the sea, so at least the IOM was having some good weather too. We were really tired and after I'd put the moth trap out in a different place thinking that surely with this heat we should get something, we headed off to bed at 10.23pm, by which point my IBS had started to kick off :(.

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> June

We finally gave in and got up at 7.20am after a rubbish night's sleep. We'd both kept waking up too hot and my IBS had got worse, so I'd been up trying to find some antacid to try and relieve my symptoms. It looked as though the forecast had been right and it was going to be another scorching day too.....Urrghhh! We both went out to see what we had in the moth trap and very quickly became midgie bait while we potted the moths up as quickly as we could. It'd done better than last time but even so, we were disappointed at the low number we'd caught. Maybe it was too hot for moths as well?



1x Drinker (male)  
1x Green Carpet  
1x Flame Shoulder  
2x Common Rustic  
1x Ingrailed Clay  
1x Coxcomb Prominent  
1x Gold Spot  
1x Map-winged Swift  
2x Eudonia mercurella  
1x Crambus ericella  
1x True Lover's Knot

Total = 13moths (x11 sp)



Drinker Moth

We'd been eaten alive by midgies and being in such a great location with the warm nights we'd expected more than 13 so wondered if it was even worth bothering again. The builders turned up again at 8.23am, so we had to shut the curtains to stop Lyca barking at them. My IBS was playing up and it was already too hot for me, but we had to do something to fill the day. I decided that as it was too hot to be out walking all day I'd drive to Kinloch Hourn, Britain's last wilderness, to see what that was all about. Before we came away I found out that this area was just up the valley we were in, albeit 17 miles up the valley! There was a walk there to Loch Hourn with a view out to sea and Skye, so it sounded amazing. Wendy made the sarnies and was annoyed that we'd run out of bread, so we'd have to try and find another shop after being at a good one yesterday. Having spoken too soon last night I found a tick on Lyca's nose, so Wendy got the tick removers and got rid of it asap.....Yuk! We headed out at 9.36am and stopped off at the recycling bins at the bottom of the road on the way. There were horseflies everywhere again, which were starting to get on our nerves. We'd never known there to be so many before. As I slowly drove past the shed at 'Kinky Cleaners' house we noticed that there was no sign of the Redstarts. They must've fledged already, so we'd been really lucky to have seen them when we had. Wendy made me stop for a photo of Loch Quioch as we drove westwards through the East Glenquioch Estate. We already felt as though we were even more out in the sticks and remote.





Loch Quioch

Even the telegraph poles were proper old school with ceramic insulators on them like something you'd see in a documentary on India....Hahahaha! All of a sudden Wendy spotted a **Whinchat** and it had food in its beak, so was obviously feeding young. It wasn't before time either, we'd been to so many places that looked perfect for them but hadn't seen one until then. When we got to 480ft altitude we started to see Stonechats and then a family of Whinchats, so hopefully they were doing OK. We drove through a rocky valley and past some huge Lochs seeing our 1<sup>st</sup> **Raven** of the trip as well as loads of Dragonflies zooming about. It was nice to see an area that hadn't been turned into Grouse Moors and there were no Sheep grazing at all which lead us to wonder why on earth we hadn't seen a single Hen Harrier? It seemed strange that in a place so perfect for them they seemed to be completely absent. Wendy noticed that all the huge rocks at the side of the road were glistening in the sun as though they had glitter running through them. We hadn't met any other cars at all and it really was like being in a wilderness, so it certainly did what it said on the tin! All of a sudden, a car came around the corner and we laughed when the driver pointed at us, smiling and with his window open shouted, "Car!" He was obviously as surprised as we were to see another human being.

It was 10.37am when we arrived at Loch Hourn car park and surprise, surprise there were horseflies everywhere....Grrrrrr!





Approach to Loch Hour car park

There was an honesty box for using the car park at a cost of £2, which I duly paid. Wendy announced that she needed a wee, which was ridiculously bad timing, as we were in the wilderness and it was 100% fact that weren't going to find a nice modern WC block there. She'd gone past the point of caring, so just went next to the car and luckily nobody else turned up unexpectedly. We then spotted a Golden Eagle flying really high up over the hills on the north side. It eventually landed on a rock and was so well camouflaged we could hardly see it. Looking around us the scenery was amazing, so we knew we were in for another impressive walk and we couldn't wait to get to the end to see the view of Skye.



Nice footpath at the start :)

We set off towards the path that ran alongside the Loch with about 50 horseflies in tow and it was also extremely hot, which wasn't the best start. The view was lovely but the horseflies were doing everything they could to ruin it for us.....Grrrrr! As we walked with our arms flaying about all over the place and randomly slapping each other on the back or leg in an attempt to reduce the numbers we heard the familiar call of a **Rock Pipit** and spotted a **Common Seal** out on the Loch. There were Chimney Sweepers and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries flying around and we met another person heading back to the car park. In a weird dark section that was under some big bushes we found an Emerald moth but were a bit disappointed when it was only a Light Emerald which we get tons of at home.





Light Emerald

After clearing the weird dark area we came to a big rock in the middle of the path we had to decide the best way to tackle it without one of us going flying. It was really steep and looked very smooth and slippery, so to err on the side of caution we both went down it on our bums. Lyca, with her 4 paw drive, obviously had no issues and breezed down.



It was worse than it looks!

Wendy picked up a call and we looked out over the Loch to see 2x **Common Terns** flying around and then we had to negotiate more rocks.





Path getting more treacherous

The walk wasn't quite as easy as I'd expected but it'd be worth it when we got to the end. In a lovely boggy open area, I thought it looked good for Dragonflies, so we stopped for a scan. Up the boggy ditch a Dragonfly caught my eye and I was really surprised when I saw that it was a Northern Emerald, as I didn't even know if they'd been reported there. Another walker approached us smiling and he was really friendly and stopped for a chat. He was a very hardy looking Scottish bloke who was wearing a bandana and seemed to be kitted out for some kind of dangerous expedition. He looked down at Lyca and said, "It's too hot for you!" which made us feel a bit guilty, but she was doing fine and seemed to be enjoying herself. He then pulled out a dog treat from his rucksack and asked us if he was OK to give it to her. We gave him the go ahead and Lyca looked very impressed, so he gave her another...Hahahaha! He was such a nice bloke that I think she'd have gone home with him after that :P. As we walked off Wendy as usual went into her, "What if he's a serial dog poisoner?" routine, but so far we've had 3 holiday dog treat feeders and all have been thoroughly nice people!!

After he'd gone we noticed a house on the other side of the Loch that didn't appear to have any kind of road access and just had a gate to the beach and shore. Maybe the owners go there via boat?



Isolated Cottage



There was another house just down the hill on our side that on first glances looked more than a bit derelict. Presuming that nobody lived there we were surprised to see that the greenhouse outside it was full of washing! What the....? I suppose that's one way to dry your clothes quickly, but we wondered who on earth would be living there and how exactly did the owners reach the house? :-\.



Lived in shack but cracking view!

We heard a **Whitethroat** as we stood pondering by a boggy runnel and then spotted more Northern Emeralds, which brought our total up to five! After I'd submitted my reports when we got home I was told that it was another new site for them, so we were doing well! There were also a couple of Golden-ringed Dragonflies and 3x Common Hawkers too, so it looked like a good area. By now it was boiling, Wendy was running out of water and ahead of us was a really steep hill.....Uh oh! Wendy didn't look happy about it knowing that her knee could kick off again at any time, so I offered to go and check it out to see how hard it was as well as what the rest of the walk was like. We were a long way off the end and having expected to just keep walking alongside the Loch it didn't look as though that was the way it was panning out. There didn't seem to be a path anymore and there was yet another hill after the one ahead of us, but I didn't want to give up at the first hurdle and set off with Lyca up the footpath. Wendy watched us getting higher up and could see that Lyca kept stopping and looking back to check that she was still there. The path was horribly slippery as there was just stones and gravel and with the inclination being so steep I was slipping on the way up. I was slightly worried about how I was going to get back down but didn't want to give up. After having to stop twice during the climb up I eventually got to the top. Looking further on was a depressing sight.





Another hill to climb over :(

The path dropped all the way back to sea level only to then climb up again over another hill.....Noooo! Why on earth couldn't they have made the path go round these hills at sea level? Grrrrrrr! I also couldn't see the end of the sea loch where you were supposed to be able to view Skye, so I think I must've got my distances wrong on the map. There was nothing else for it but to turn back and I was so disappointed. There was no time to worry about that though as I now had a horrific descent back to Wendy. Especially knowing Lyca would be pulling me down as well....Uh oh!



Wendy is down there by sea level!

As predicted within about 10 yards I had slipped over and nearly twisted my ankle. It was nerve shatteringly scary. I tried my best to do it slowly but with every move I made the gravel and stones would give way and over I would go again. Three times I fell over, so at the bottom all I wanted to do was sit down and calm my nerves but Lyca was standing there with a big grin on her face loving it. She'd had zero trouble getting down the steep path!

When I got back Wendy couldn't resist saying, "I told you so" but at least I'd given it a shot and we now knew why the nice Scottish bloke had been kitted out so well. I actually felt as though I wouldn't have been happy doing the rest of the walk even if we were both able bodied and it was 10c....Hahahaha! We were disappointed that we hadn't made it to the end to see Skye but at least we were both still in one piece, so we



turned around and started to head back. Back at the boggy runnel we found a Four-spotted Chaser to add to our list. When we got to the bridge, we met a couple in their late 20s, early 30s who were really friendly and eager to stop for a chat. I was reluctant at first, so Wendy had to keep the conversation going. It turned out that they were running the B&B by the car park for the next 6 weeks, then they were off to Skye to run an outdoor centre and were just hoping to keep floating around. Very nice :). While we chatted Wendy noticed what she thought was a heather flower on Lyca's head, so she bent down to brush it off. When she got closer she was horrified to see blood on Lyca's head and that it was actually a huge fat tick and shrieked, "OMG a tick!" The girl bent down as a gesture of help but Wendy got there 1<sup>st</sup> and it must've been full, as it wasn't attached and with a quick flick it was fired well away from us.....Phew! Poor Lyca was oblivious but the whole thing had made our skin crawl....Yuk! The couple were apparently going the whole distance to the end and had to back at the B&B for 2pm to let some carpet fitters in, which sounded a bit ambitious to us but then again they looked about 100 times fitter than us so what do we know.



Nearing the car park with the tide out

We were back at the car at 1.37pm and it was so hot we had to open all the doors and windows, so we had a slightly cooling through draught while we ate our lunch. We just had to put up with the horseflies until we could shut the doors and get going. We'd done 11,200 steps and I'd done a 202m climb and with all the stopping and starting it'd taken us 3 hours to do our walk. How the Irish couple had expected to get back for 2pm was anyone's guess and they still hadn't reappeared by the time we left at 2pm exactly. Driving past a small roadside Loch Wendy spotted a bird out in the middle and was pleased when she got it in her bins and confirmed our 1<sup>st</sup> **Black-throated Diver**. Seeing as they breed in the area we'd been confused as to why we hadn't seen any up until that point. It was 29c when we got to Loch Quoich Dam which I had planned for the next walk. This was about half way back from Kinloch Hourn to the cottage. The "only" problems were that it was far too hot, I had IBS, heartburn and felt sick....and Lyca was puffing and panting in the back like a steam train and didn't look happy at all, so we decided to forget doing the walk and to just head for home. The car was reading 30.5c all the way back and I was so relieved when we pulled up outside HQ at 2.48pm.

Although it was still really early I just felt too rough to carry on and inside the house it felt like a sauna, so I had to lie on the tiled floor to try and cool down again. Even the tiles were hot, so it didn't do the job, but it was still the coolest place to be. Wendy opened the back door and sat on a chair in the shade with Lyca at her feet, which provided a bit of cooler air for them and a nice view over the forest. Lyca made no attempt to run off into the garden, so she must've been tired and hot. When Wendy came back into the house she did a tick check on Lyca, which was clear, but she did find something else. Lyca had a bright purple mark about 3/4inch long on her back right inner thigh and we had no idea what it was. The best we could come up with was that maybe she'd caught herself on a stick when she'd been jumping up on a rock or something and it'd caused a bruise? Whatever it was we'd need to keep an eye on it and maybe look into where the nearest Vet was. Looking at the weather it said it was 29c but felt like 31c in Tomdoun, which was where we were!



Temperatures of 32c had been recorded in Cannich, where we'd been yesterday, and was 0.2c short of Scotland's record of 32.2c set in June 1893! We'd really wanted decent weather for our trip, but this was just a bit extreme. There was a Tree Pipit on the dog kennel at the back of the house, which was a pretty good garden tick. All we had in for tea was a Pizza, so reluctantly Wendy put the oven on to heat the house up even more....Bleurrgh! After tea we heard a really loud engine getting closer, so I ran to the back door only to see a Hercules heading our way. It flew straight over the house really low and looked amazing as it flew over the pond and turned with the trees either side. We were so blown away that the thought of getting a shot of it escaped us until after it'd gone...Doh! We both went for coldish showers and then settled down to watch some TV. Wendy had another check of Lyca's 'bruise' and was horrified to see that it'd turned into a perfect bullseye, which is classic of Lyme's Disease from a Tick bite.....Uh oh!



Panicc!!!

Wendy instantly messaged her friend Ciara who's Lyca's Vet and sent her the photo to see what she thought, while I googled Lyme's Disease. Frighteningly, it can be fatal for dogs and symptoms can take 6 months to appear, so we would have to keep an eye on her until Christmas :( Ciara reckoned that Lyca's medication would've killed the tick before it could've transmitted the disease anyway as that's what its designed to do, so we shouldn't worry too much, but even so it was pretty scary stuff! Before going to bed I let the moths from earlier go and was hoping to get some photos. I managed to get one of the Drinker but the midgies were so bad I had leave it at that and just let the others go. I was gutted but no moth is worth being eaten alive for, not even a lifer...Hahahaha! It was 10.30pm by the time we got into bed and by then we'd had to ditch off the quilts and were just sleeping under then fleece throws.

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June

Lyca was raring to go and woke us up at 6.45am after another night of disturbed sleep. It was just too hot in the bedroom to be able to stay asleep until morning, so we were shocked to find that it was grey and overcast outside. I took Lyca out and the midgies were worse than ever and I was being eaten alive, which I presume was because it wasn't so hot. When I went back inside Wendy waved some cards under my nose and said, "Happy Birthday!" I was still worried about Lyca after all the drama last night and had completely forgotten about it....Doh!





Happy Birthday to meee.

All my cards were funny and very appropriate and after that I had my breakfast and watched a very interesting TV program about archaeology and detectorists, which wasn't to Wendy's taste. She made me change out of my PJ's, so she could wash them ready for the next week of our holiday. It was pretty chilly when she went out to the garage, so I kept my fingers crossed for a cooler day to give us all a break from the heat. After she'd hung it all up to dry we started to get ready to go out to get some bread, so that Wendy could make our lunch. When I opened the door to take Lyca out to the car the dog from Moonshine down the road came hemping it towards us with it's heckles up looking very territorial. Lyca freaked, I freaked, Wendy had no idea what all the commotion was and freaked too, until I'd wrestled Lyca back through the door and shut it behind us. The dog was still outside pacing up and down and cocking its leg up all over my car.....Grrrrr! There was no sign of the owner, so we had no idea what to do next. If he'd escaped, then we could be stuck there all morning if he didn't get bored and go home. I shut the curtains so that Lyca couldn't see him, but he was outside the front door wagging his tail and the poor thing was probably just being friendly and wanted a play mate. Unfortunately, Lyca isn't keen on big dogs especially ones that charge at her from nowhere, so his luck was out. They'd been barking at each other every time we'd gone past the house and he obviously knew where she was staying and had gone looking for her. I peered out of the curtains again and luckily his owner was walking up past the pond, so he was probably taking the dog on a walk and we waited for ages until they'd both gone off down the track. When the coast was finally clear we headed out at 9.24am but Wendy noticed that in all the kafuffle I'd somehow knocked the trim off the bottom of the door.....Oooops! We set off to for the shop, seeing 2x Bullfinches flying along the hedge down the road and it was only 14.5c by then but unfortunately it was set to heat up again later.

It took about 30minutes to get to the nearest shop at Fort Augustus but it was quite a big Spa, so we hoped we'd get everything we needed. Wendy went in and browsed the chiller cabinet for something for my tea and found a curry, then grabbed everything else. When she came back she presented me with a Birthday present, which was a tiny plastic magnifying glass for kids.....Hahahahaha! She laughed and said it'd help me ID the micro moths while we were away but the magnification of it was so low we very much doubted it, but it was the thought that counted. By then the sun was starting to come out and the clouds were clearing, so any hopes I had were shattered and I prepared myself for another hot day. The Wood Warbler was still singing at Hub Cap Cottage and we were back at HQ at 10.46am. After Wendy had put everything away and made the sarnies we'd already wasted enough time and headed out for the day as quickly as possible.

Having ditched it off yesterday I reckoned we should go back down the valley to Loch Quoich Dam since this was the no plans day and we arrived at 11.35am. I had pinpointed this area from the grid refs given to me from the Scottish Dragonfly county recorder as good for all our target species. This was the only spot I found with a marked path. so it seemed worth a walk. As soon as we got out of the car we were bombarded by



horseflies again, but we'd started to expect that by then. In the roadside ditch was another Golden-ringed Dragonfly and it seemed like too good an opportunity to turn down, so I grabbed a few shots.



Golden-ringed Dragonfly

We wandered down the road and went through the gate onto the concrete path on top of the dam wall.



Dam Hydro plant?

There were House Martins nesting on the small sub-station building and what baffled us was that there were multiple birds flying to and from the one nest. At the far end we went through another gate and out onto a boggy heath, which wasn't lacking in the horsefly department. They were everywhere! They followed us along the vague suggestion of a footpath that looked down over the Dam.





Loch Quioch

The scenery, lovely as it was, was yet again ruined by the horseflies that relentlessly buzzed around our faces.....Aarrghhhh! We ignored them as best we could until we found the Lochan I was after. There were Golden-ringed Dragonflies, Four-spotted Chasers plus Common blue and Large red Damselflies everywhere but no sign of any of our main targets anywhere.



Target Lochan

Annoyingly there wasn't a path to the edge of the Lochan, so we had to try ID the dragons from afar which is never easy. We went to the far edge and found a little stream that ran into the Lochan.





Stream connection the two Lochans

This stream came from a higher up boggy area with another small Lochan further up. Again there wasn't a path but I could see so many Dragonflies flying over the stream and boggy area I had to go for a look.

Lyca enjoyed a paddle in the stream and Wendy fancied the idea of sitting for hours with her feet in the water, watching Dragonflies but the horseflies were too bad to even consider it as an option. Having failed to see what I'd set out to, I handed Lyca over to Wendy and went off to explore the bog and followed the runnel up.



Amazing boggy runnel

I found another Large Heath Butterfly but couldn't get far enough to view the other Lochan further on due to it being far too boggy, so I gave up and headed back. The only Dragonflies I was seeing were the usuals anyway. There was Sundew in flower everywhere we looked including the oblong shaped one we'd only seen once before and we wondered why it doesn't eat horseflies? There were more than enough of them to go around and they'd be doing everyone a favour if they did!





Sundew flower

We started to walk back but suddenly Wendy stopped and pointed down to a dead moth on the ground. It was definitely a Northern Eggar and looked exactly like the one we'd seen flying at Creag Meagaidh.



Dead Northern Eggar moth

We took a lower path back along to the Dam, more by accident than anything but the peace was soon shattered when Wendy heard a very low-pitched and deep buzzing by her ear.





Loch Quoich

This could only mean one thing and it was indeed what she suspected and we both hurried along when we realised there was now a Giant Horsefly on our trail.....Aaarrghhhh! We walked through a kind of tree graveyard, which looked really cool, but every time Wendy tried to stop to get a photo she could hear the horsefly, so had to keep moving. We found another Large Heath and didn't stop again until we were back at the car at 1.18pm.

By then I was feeling really grumpy because I was far too hot and every walk was being ruined by horseflies. It was 21c (lies!! It was more like 30!) in the car and rising by the minute, so there was no way we could stay where we were to have lunch. I drove further down the road until I found a layby, so I pulled in and we opened all the windows and both the passenger side doors to let some air in. As we ate our lunch Wendy moaned about how gutted she was at not acting quickly enough to get a shot of the Hercules going over the house last night. It would've made for a cracking shot, but it was too late now. All of a sudden, she started flapping around and squeaked in a kind of panic, which had me stumped. Unbelievably I looked up ahead only to see a Hercules heading through the valley towards us really low down!!!! Talk about freaky timing or what? Wendy flapped around and fumbled about for her camera, so it reminded me of the Steam Train incident at Kelling in Norfolk all over again. Luckily this time she didn't turn the camera off but only managed to get herself together in time to get 2 shots of it.....Hahahaha! It was an amazing sight to see.





Hercules low pass

All around us was the most wonderful looking habitat that was totally untouched by man but what really struck me was how little Wildlife was there. It was very strange and even Lyca hadn't done very much Voling all week apart from at Creag Meagaidh. The other thing I'd noticed was that all the manmade Lochs had suffered a huge drop in water level whereas the natural Lochs had hardly dropped at all. I wondered what that was about and could only guess it was due to the bedrock differences. When we left at 1.47pm it was 25c and I really wanted to go back to the local walk we'd done on our 1<sup>st</sup> day to have a last shot of getting some video of Azure Hawker and Northern Emerald before we left tomorrow.

I tried to park by the Kinky Cleaners house but for some reason there were no spaces. Hmmmmm popular house is it? I had to carry on until I could turn around somewhere and go back to find somewhere else. It was so hot and we had so much to do there was no way I was walking back there from the house, so I had to find a park somewhere. As I drove slowly down the road looking, a narky looking bloke in a red car went past us. When I got back to where I thought there was a space I found that he'd parked there, so I had to keep going and turn around again! It was all getting a bit frustrating but when I drove back down the road I found a layby opposite Kinky Cleaners and grabbed it while I could....Phew! We walked past the shed where the Redstarts had been and there was still no sign of them, so they'd definitely fledged and gone. There were more horseflies to annoy us and walking back up the path that'd been so good on the 1<sup>st</sup> day there was nothing apart from 3x Golden-ringed. What the.....? When we got up the ace boggy bit where we'd had all the action we found it to be completely dead, there was literally nothing flying. What was going on? The whole walk started to feel like a waste of time but then further up the path an Azure flew over, checked Wendy out and proceeded to land on my leg! Wow! This was a great Birthday present, when it flew off down the path I decided to go after it and handed Lyca over to Wendy. I watched it chase a Northern Emerald and disappear but at least I knew they were also still around. What had become apparent was that they were all staying high up and landing in the branches of the surrounding trees, so my hopes of getting any video went out the window. A Common Hawker put in an appearance and we watched it go after a moth, but the moth fell from the sky and landed in the grass, so it didn't get its meal. There were some Highland Darters and another male Azure gave me the run around, so I only managed a really short and distant video of that. Next a female Azure came in landed nearby, so I went in for the kill so to speak. Every time I got near it flew off and although it landed 4 times I managed to mess up and ended up with just some poor backlit footage.....Aarghhh! I swore loudly with frustration, as this was my last chance and I'd well and truly failed.....Boooo :( I'd had enough by then and Wendy and Lyca were getting impatient too, so we headed back.





What a track!

Half way back we came across this weird wooden platform that had a view over the forest.



Weird platform

The only conclusion I could come to was that it was a flipping shooters platform. I sort of wished I had a hammer on me so that could have ended up as a nice pile of firewood!

Back at the hamlet of Tomdoun the bloke from Kinky Cleaners came out of the front door and sat on a bench to have a fag, but seeing as there were 2 other cars parked up outside we wondered what was going on inside....Hahahaha! On the way home we saw an Asda delivery van and could've kicked ourselves for not even looking at Asda as an option for a delivery when we arrived. It would've made life so much easier, but at least we'll know for next time.

When we got back to HQ it was 3.55pm and at 21c outside the house felt like a sauna again, so we opened all the windows and back door again. Even though 21c doesn't sound that hot I think the none stop glaring sun was making it feel much worse. Wendy went straight for a shower and then gave Lyca her tea and started doing ours. My Spa Chicken Massala and Rice was horrible and Wendy had the left over beans on toast with



some cheese on top. It'd hardly been a very good holiday food wise especially for me but at least Wendy hadn't had to do any cooking in the boiling hot house.

At 6pm I decided to go for a last look up the track to see if things had improved from earlier. I set off in the car and parked up in the same spot as earlier. By now there were lots of areas in the shade which wasn't good news. Early on there was the resident Golden-ringed Dragonfly and knowing that after another week I wouldn't be seeing my favourite Dragonfly again, for at least a year, I took some more photos. You can't really get enough of Golden-ringed dragonflies!



Golden-ringed Dragonfly

Further on there were just Common Hawkers, which was disappointing, so I turned around after probably about 1km. The difference in the amount of insect activity between the 3 visits was really interesting. Do insects try and fill their boots in the mornings and if they eat enough, they chill out for the rest of the day? Probably not. On the way back, a Northern Emerald made a brief appearance around the trees but was quickly gone. Further on I spotted an exposed rock with some sun on it and thought that if I was a Dragonfly I'd be sitting on it, so I had a look in my bins. Amazingly there was a female White-faced Darter! Get in!!





White-faced Darter

It was a shame it was behind a deer fence so I couldn't get close for a clear picture and I didn't want to stay long as the horseflies were out in force, so I quickly scurried off. I didn't even hang about when an Azure flew past as I assumed it wasn't going to perform and I was right.

It was 7.15pm when I got back and even though it was my Birthday Wendy made me go and have a shower.....Grrrrr! How cruel! Lyca decided to claim the chair over by the window where I'd put our cases for Wendy to pack.



Don't want to go! :(

All week she'd been on the settees or floor by the door, so this was strange behaviour and almost like she knew we were leaving. Wendy did the last of the washing, which was all the clothes we'd worn that day, so it would last us for the next few days without the luxury of a washing machine. Wendy made the sarnies for tomorrow then spoke to her Mum and the reception on whatsapp was the best yet, which was typical! There



was nothing on TV and by 10pm we'd had enough and went to bed in preparation for another long travel day tomorrow.

Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June

Yet again we'd woken up during the night too hot and I gave up at 6.30am but didn't get up until Wendy woke up at 7am. It was grey and overcast again and I took Lyca out for a wee with the midgies. When Wendy went to get our dry washing to wear that day she noticed that my trousers had the remnants of the washing capsule dried solid onto them. It was like glue and she reckoned it was because it hadn't dissolved properly from being on an extremely quick cycle of 20minutes. She had no choice but to hand wash the bits off and then dry my soaking wet trousers with her hairdryer. Why is there always something when you're in a hurry? She had loads to do so I took over after I'd had my breakfast and it took ages to dry them out. Wendy packed the last of our stuff, cleaned and while I loaded up the car she took some photos of what had been a great HQ!



Getting ready to go

The cottage was in an absolutely brilliant location and our now traditional local walk on the first day had probably been the best yet. It was a shame it didn't have Wi-fi but my £35 of unlimited 4g/mobile data and rig up at the back door had done the job well enough to allow us to function. It had been disgustingly hot, so if there'd been a fan it would've made our week a lot more comfortable. It'd been so hot in the house that it was quite unpleasant at times, but we couldn't grumble too much. Everything else, apart from not being able to open a tin of beans due to there being no tin opener, had been spot on. We waved, "Goodbye" to Lochan Torr at 9.30am and set off down the road for the last time.





Lochan Torr

For the first time since we'd arrived we didn't hear the Wood Warbler singing by Hub Cap Cottage but Wendy got me to take a photo of the house just for posterity.



Hubcap Cottage

The sun was out already, so after the gloomy start it was going to be another scorcher for the long drive west!

Continued in part 2.....