



IN CONVERSATION WITH...

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MV Monadhliath





## Many people probably haven't heard of The Minch, can you tell us where it is and what it's got to offer?

The Minch is the stretch of water that separates the dramatic west coast of the Scottish Highlands from the islands of the Outer Hebrides. It is an extension of the Atlantic with strong tidal flows that tend to

concentrate bait fish in certain areas, which in turn attracts cetaceans and seabirds that feed on them.

## What's the backstory to the MV Monadhliath, how did it go from fishing boat to wildlife liveaboard?

The Monadhliath started life as a well-known fishing vessel based in the Moray Firth. She was bought by a retired German submarine commander who partially converted her and then moved to a fisherman on the Isle of Lewis but was never used. The current owner, David Lambie, bought the Monadhliath, which otherwise would probably have been condemned to scrap, and undertook to save and re-purpose her, initially



for offshore wildlife survey work. This meant re-doing all the cabins, adding a saloon lounge on the front deck, and two purpose-built observation platforms with seating.

### **Staying on a liveaboard in the west coast of Scotland must be a pretty unique experience, what's the benefit of sleeping at sea?**

Much of the coastline of the Highlands and Islands is very remote and well away from any road access, not to mention the small islands offshore that play host to internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds. We choose our anchorages carefully to capitalise on this remoteness and spend our nights surrounded by the beauty of the mountains or perhaps in a sheltered bay at the beautiful Shiant or Summer Isles.

There's nothing quite like being out on deck in the peace and quiet watching the sun set with a drink in your hand, listening to the splashing of seals.

### **It's probably fair to say that a lot of people won't have realised how rich Scotland's waters can be, what's been your most enjoyable experience?**

I think you are right. We are trying to educate people to the fact that the North Minch is actually one of Europe's top recognised cetacean watching locations. The regular species seen in the area include short-beaked common, Risso's, bottlenose and white-beaked dolphins, plus minke, humpback and fin whales and even the fabulous orca.

My favourite experience was last year when a very young minke came right to the boat to check us out. It swam right under the boat, slipping over onto one side so it could get a better view of us as it swam past. I don't think I will ever forget that. Eye to eye with a whale!

### **This retreat isn't just focussed on life beneath the waves, we make a couple of stops at the Shiant and the Summer Isles, can you tell us what makes these islands special?**

The Shiant Isles are home to the second largest colony of puffins in the UK during the breeding season, alongside thousands of other seabirds. These islands attract peregrine falcons, skuas and even white-tailed eagles too. Anchoring below the boulder field where the puffins nest is absolutely amazing, giving the best views you could ever hope for at water level where you can watch them swimming around.

Being on the edge of the Minch, the Summer Isles act as a great breeding ground for the tiny storm petrel which has a large colony on Priest Island. With several rocky and secluded beaches, they are also great places to find seals hauled out on the shore. We also find that harbour porpoise and common dolphins are often seen feeding between the islands.





**All sea life sightings by guests contribute to citizen science, this is a great marry up between ecotourism and conservation, can you tell us what happens?**

We work very closely with the local Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust (HWDT) who gather sightings data. This includes identifying individual animals by matching fin photographs and also logging behaviour patterns of different species. We use their Whale Track app to log all our sightings live – true citizen science at its best.

We also work closely with Whale & Dolphin Conservation (WDC) and the Sea Watch Foundation, both benefitting from our sightings data. The WDC has a long-term

Risso's dolphin research project. We host their researcher each season and help them access their study population. Being able to ID individual whales and dolphins adds another interesting element to any trip out on the Monadhliath, especially for keen photographers.

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**Join us for a  
Wilderness Weekend  
in The Minch**