

Participants

Rob Gaze, Adrian Meredith, Paul Marshman, Tim Adcock, Graham Powell, Trevor Fletcher, Gareth Jenkins, Linda Noble, Stuart Hardcastle, Andrew Bevan, Anne Wilson, John Wilson, Alan Rosney, Ceri Jones.

Accommodation

Nethy Bridge Station Bunkhouse www.nethy.org

Transport

To/From Scotland - Easyjet flights – Bristol/Inverness

In Scotland – 17 seater minibus – collect/return Inverness Airport

Thursday 4th May

Our group of 14 met at Bristol Airport in good time for the noon Easyjet flight to Inverness. It was on time, and we were soon collecting our bags at Inverness airport. After picking up our minibus at the airport, we headed for nearby Fort George and Whiteness Head, where a drake King Eider had been recently seen.

Parking roadside near Kirkton, we made the long walk out through varying habitat to Whiteness Head. Birds seen en route included Yellowhammer, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Spotted Flycatcher. The tide was well out, but whilst the waters looked rough out to sea and a few Gannet were seen, there was a long stretch of calmer water sheltered by Whiteness Head. Here we found Long-tailed Ducks, and hopes of seeing King Eider rose as we started to find Eider. Sadly it was not to be, despite an extensive search. We headed back to the minibus and on to our bunkhouse accommodation in Nethybridge in a converted railway station.

Friday 5th May

Keen to see some Scottish specialities, we headed early to the RSPB reserve at Loch Garten. No sign of Capercaillie from the RSPB hide, and after a while we decided to walk to Loch Mallachie. This proved a good decision as we had great views of Crested Tit close to the path. We also heard and had very brief views of 2 Crossbill (species unknown).

On to Cairngorm and the car park at the funicular base station, where we quickly saw Red Grouse and eventually had excellent views of Ring Ouzel. We soon headed up to the top station and from its viewing terrace picked out Dotterel, Ptarmigan and another Ring Ouzel.

From Cairngorm we headed up the A9 towards Tomatin and into Strathdearn, hoping to see eagles. Despite extensive searching along the valley and seeing Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel, we drew a blank on eagles and decided to press on over the Farr road towards Loch Ruthven. The Farr road was mostly the same width as our minibus, so an “interesting” drive over the moorland. Few birds here, though we did see Red Kite (our only sighting of the trip) and we had fine, close views of a pair of Red Grouse.



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Our last stop of the day was Loch Ruthven. It was a very rewarding visit, and in less than an hour we saw breeding plumage Slavonian Grebe and Black-throated Diver and two Ospreys (including one carrying fish).

Saturday 6th May

This morning we headed to the Moray coast via Lochindorb. The clear weather at the bunkhouse didn't last, and before long we weren't sure if we were driving over the moorland in low cloud or mist. Either way, we weren't seeing much of anything when all of a sudden a Short-eared Owl appeared out of the gloom and flew close and parallel to the minibus for a mile or so (at about 19mph!). A fine, fine sight.

Lochindorb was mostly hidden in the gloom so we pressed on to Findhorn bay and then Findhorn beach. A good selection of waders in the bay including Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot, Curlew, Whimbrel, Dunlin and Ringed Plover. At the beach a Hooded Crow, and offshore Red-breasted Merganser, Common Scoter and Kittiwake.

On to Burghead for a short sea-watch which produced Guillemot, Razorbill, Eider and close views of Fulmar.

Next up was Lossiemouth and another sea-watch. Within just a few minutes John Wilson was getting us all on to a White-billed Diver, loafing offshore. This was a lifer for most of the group. As we watched the diver, several of the group also saw 2 Black Terns pass directly behind it. Common Scoter, Eider and Gannet were also seen.



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We stopped for lunch at Spey bay and had excellent views of Common and Arctic Terns. We also saw Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Oystercatcher and a breeding pair of Common Sandpiper.

In the afternoon we headed a few miles inland to the RSPB reserve at Loch Spynie. From the approach road we saw a pair of Grey Partridge, and in the reserve itself were Cuckoo, Goldeneye, Wigeon, Common Gull, Sparrowhawk and Yellowhammer.

Sunday 7th May

After drawing a blank on eagles on Friday, we decided to try our luck on the west coast today. First stop en route was the RSPB hide at Udale Bay, where we hoped to see an American Wigeon reported there a few days earlier. Sadly Eurasian Wigeon only on this occasion, but even before we'd parked Graham Powell had spotted an Osprey on a post. Flight views of the Osprey from the hide along with Pink-footed Geese.

Further west we stopped roadside at Loch Droma, where Tim Adcock soon found a Black-throated Diver in full breeding plumage and which gave great scope views. Just a few minutes later we stopped again, this time admiring a pair of breeding plumage Red-throated Divers in a roadside lochan.

We reached the west coast at Little Loch Broom. We scanned from the roadside picking up Black Guillemot, Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, Greenshank and Red-breasted Mergansers. No luck with raptors though.

By now the weather was sunny but breezy. We continued west, stopping periodically to scan the ridges for raptors. We had lunch at the beautiful beach at Mellon Udrigle, whilst watching Twite on the grass and Shag, Red-throated and Great Northern divers in the waters just off the beach.

On our way back east we made numerous stops to scan Gruinard Island and the mountain ridges. Whilst we did find Hooded Crows and Rock Doves, we couldn't locate any eagles.

Monday 8th May

When planning the tour, we'd decided the tide times on this day were the best for visiting the Aberdeenshire coast.

But first, we all wanted to try for a decent view of Black Grouse. We'd had a tantalising glimpse through early morning murk earlier on the tour. This morning the weather was much better, so we headed out early to the lek site. As we approached we could see we had the place to ourselves. We

were soon out of the minibus and watching a group of male Black Grouse strutting their stuff. A fantastic start to the day, and a sight to remember.

From here we headed towards Aberdeen and the coastal site of Blackdog, a few miles north of the city. The sky here was rather grey and it was cold in the stiff breeze, but there were clearly plenty of birds offshore and we set up for a short sea-watch.

A raft of 200 or so Common Scoter were close inshore. Every now and then a small group would take off and checking them over we eventually got decent views of a Velvet Scoter in flight. A few in the group also got on to an Arctic Skua heading north further out to sea.

From Blackdog we headed a few miles up the coast to Newburgh and the Ythan Estuary. Our main targets here were a summering drake King Eider and the large numbers of Terns which breed in the immediate area. We started near the river mouth, and with high tide approaching there were long lines of Eider resting on the opposite riverbank. We scanned them thoroughly but no luck with the King Eider, which also eluded us at various other sites upstream from the river mouth.

We had much better luck with the Terns, seeing Roseate (unusual this far north), Sandwich, Common, Arctic and Little, as well as Long-tailed Duck and Red-breasted Merganser. After lunch at the Waulkmill hide (Pink-footed Geese) we headed north to the RSPB's Loch of Strathbeg reserve. After a brief visit to its Starnafin visitor centre (Tree Sparrows on the feeders and Peregrine and Great White Egret in view) and the Tower Pool hide, we drove through Crimond Village and the former airfield to visit the Fen and Bay hides. These proved very productive and we saw Marsh Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese and a second Great White Egret.

Tuesday 9th May

Half the group had a lie-in on this our last day in Scotland. The rest made a final visit to the lek site and were rewarded with more great views of Black Grouse.

After loading the minibus we headed for Strathdearn for a last attempt at seeing eagles. As we drove past a small plantation south of Tomatin we spotted a Woodcock, which obligingly stayed in close view for several minutes giving everyone the chance to see it well.



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We stopped several times along the valley and at last we got on to a Golden Eagle. A very timely spot by Alan Rosney. At the top of the valley another visiting birder told us he'd seen White-tailed eagle back down the valley less than half an hour earlier. We stopped at the spot he'd mentioned, but it was not to be.

By now it was time to head for the airport, where we returned the minibus and walked over the road to the terminal and our return flight to Bristol. Overall we'd had a lot of fun over five very full days birding, and we'd seen or heard over 140 species. See the full trip list below.

Thanks to Alan Rosney for his sterling efforts in putting this tour together.

Ceri Jones

Glamorgan Bird Club - Scotland Tour – 4th to 9th May 2017

Trip List

Mute Swan	Pink-footed Goose	Greylag Goose	Barnacle Goose
Shelduck	Mandarin Duck	Eurasian Wigeon	Gadwall
Eurasian Teal	Mallard	Northern Pintail	Northern Shoveler
Tufted Duck	Greater Scaup	Common Eider	Long-tailed Duck
Common Scoter	Velvet Scoter	Common Goldeneye	Red-breasted Merganser
Goosander	Red Grouse	Ptarmigan	Black Grouse
Red-legged Partridge	Grey Partridge	Pheasant	Red-throated Diver
Black-throated Diver	Great Northern Diver	White-billed Diver	Northern Fulmar
Little Grebe	Slavonian Grebe	Grey Heron	Great White Egret
Northern Gannet	Shag	Cormorant	Red Kite
Marsh Harrier	Sparrowhawk	Common Buzzard	Golden Eagle
Osprey	Kestrel	Peregrine	Moorhen
Coot	Oystercatcher	Ringed Plover	Dotterel
Northern Lapwing	Knot	Dunlin	Common Snipe
Woodcock	Bar-tailed Godwit	Eurasian Whimbrel	Eurasian Curlew
Common Sandpiper	Greenshank	Common Redshank	Turnstone
Arctic Skua	Great Skua	Kittiwake	Black-headed Gull
Little Gull	Common Gull	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull	Little Tern	Black Tern	Sandwich Tern
Common Tern	Roseate Tern	Arctic Tern	Common Guillemot
Razorbill	Black Guillemot	Rock Dove	Stock Dove
Woodpigeon	Collared Dove	Common Cuckoo	Short-eared Owl
Common Swift	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Magpie	Jay
Jackdaw	Rook	Carrion Crow	Hooded Crow
Raven	Blue Tit	Great Tit	Crested Tit
Coal Tit	Skylark	Sand Martin	Swallow
House Martin	Cetti's Warbler	Long-tailed Tit	Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler	Sedge Warbler	Reed Warbler	Blackcap
Common Whitethroat	Goldcrest	Wren	Treecreeper
Starling	Dipper	Ring Ouzel	Blackbird
Song Thrush	Mistle Thrush	Spotted Flycatcher	Robin
Common Redstart	European Stonechat	Northern Wheatear	Dunnock
House Sparrow	Tree Sparrow	Grey Wagtail	Pied Wagtail
Tree Pipit	Meadow Pipit	Rock Pipit	Chaffinch
Greenfinch	Goldfinch	Siskin	Linnet
Twite	Crossbill sp.	Yellowhammer	Reed Bunting

144 species