

SOC - SCOTLAND'S BIRD CLUB

Highland Bird News

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EDITORIAL

Here we are in the midst of the most exciting time in the birding year - autumn and migration! As I key this in, there are many geese passing overhead, heard but not seen, and sounding to my imperfect ear like Pink-feet. Right on time, we have been invaded by the usual large numbers of geese, doubtless backed up by hordes of waders and passerines. Two weekends ago, I was sitting at Tarbat Ness with Dave Tanner, watching well over 100 Barnacle Geese passing by. One group skirted the point very closely indeed and what an excellent sight it is to have such superb birds so untypically close. Rather fewer Pink-feet were seen that day, but the numerical tables will have been turned by now.

The first outing took place a few weeks ago and ten of us enjoyed ourselves in the most glorious and warm weather. This trip coincided with the highest tides for 25 years and it certainly looked that way at Nigg Bay. Dave Tanner led our group on an outing for the first time and he took us to a range of sun-blessed locations. To some of us, both the leader and a couple of the locations were "new". It was a really enjoyable day, with some good birds. Many thanks, Dave, for the excellent, well-prepared outing. Dave has written the trip report himself and you will find this on the following pages. Another trip report about the branch's visit to Corrimony is also featured.

If you would like to have other items featured, why not drop me an article and I will try and include any new items? Better still, why not send me a piece of your own and it will feature in the December newsletter? Go on - get writing.

How are we enjoying using the Chieftain Hotel? Any comments or suggestions would be welcomed.

Al McNee, 2 October 2006

Welcome to our speaker, Bob MacMillan.

SEPTEMBER OUTING - TARBAT NESS TO NIGG

This was the first of the Autumn/Winter 2006 outings for the Highland Branch. The programme involved visits to Tarbat Ness, Portmahomack, Inver and the RSPB reserve at Nigg and hoped to take advantage of some of the highest tides for 25 years. Ten members took part including the SOC President, Janet Crummy. Also taking part were Jenny and Al Mc Nee, Maureen and Gib Weir, Margaret Colles, Lynda Graham, Mike Strickland and Dave and Mary Tanner.

The majority of the group met in Inverness with the remainder going directly to Tarbat Ness. The weather proved to be very kind throughout the day, starting with a slightly cool but sunny Tarbat Ness (16°C) and finishing with 21°C at Nigg.



Our first port of call was Tarbat Ness at 10am and, after cordial greetings, the serious business of 'birding' started. **Fulmars**, and **Kittiwakes** were by far the most common birds along with the usual hordes of **Herring Gulls**, smaller numbers of **Gannets** were present mostly juveniles with the odd adult and sub-adult. A few **Sandwich Terns** passed the point and two Arctic Terns flew over south and into the Dornoch Firth. Small numbers of auks were present, **Razorbill** being the more numerous of the two commoner species. The odd **Manx Shearwater** passed, but not the large numbers wished for, due mostly to the fine weather and the fresh southerly breeze. A

distant **Arctic Skua** flew east but unfortunately was not seen by everyone, though a pair of much closer **Bonxies** was some compensation. A pleasant surprise was a fly-past of 17 **Common Scoters**. Waders were in short supply - apart from **Curlew** and **Oystercatcher**, one **Knot** and a few **Turnstones** were the only others seen. A **Grey Seal** swimming past the point was our only sea mammal. By 11:45 things had quietened down so the group departed back to the car park a **Yellowhammer** and **Coal Tit** put in an appearance on the telephone wires. A short walk around the walled garden failed to produce the hoped for migrants, despite excellent phishing by Al Mc. It did however; produce a **Dunnock** and three **Goldfinches**. A female **Kestrel** hunting over the fields was our final bird at Tarbat Ness.

A short stop was made at Balnabruach (Portmahomack), which is an excellent location to view the inner Dornoch Firth and the mouth of Inver Bay. Lots of **Swallows** and **House Martins** were evident, feeding over the farm fields. A nice find here were four **Red-throated Divers**, one still in summer plumage. New birds here were a small but distant flock of moulting **Common Eider**. Time was pressing, as we wanted to take advantage of the high tide at Inver and one or two members were by now very keen on lunch so we decamped to Inver Bay.



On arrival at Inver we were greeted by what can only be described as a 'People Invasion' for this normally sleepy village. A local artist, Paul Taggart was holding an exhibition at the village hall and the car park was almost full. However, we managed to squeeze our four cars in and take over the picnic table. A very pleasant 1½ was had over lunch and some leisurely birding. Unfortunately the very high tide had defeated us and we were unable to walk to the estuary mouth and most birds seemed to have deserted to the far side of the bay and onto Morrish More. However, the best bird of the day so far, was found by Lynda G a superb female **Peregrine**, which appeared to be sunbathing on the far side of the bay. This was closely followed by a single **Black-tailed Godwit**. Just as we were ready to depart a small party of **Dunlin** flew over.



On to Nigg RSPB and our final port of call. We decided not to visit the hide instead we went to the north west side of the reserve, an area usually frequented by wildfowlers, near to where the 'sea wall breach' has been made. This proved to be a good choice, firstly to see the effects the management plan has had and secondly it allowed us to view the bay from completely different perspective. We arrived just on high tide 2pm and the bay was just like a mill pond, flat calm. Large numbers of waders were present, several hundred Curlew and **Oystercatchers**. A large but mobile flock of **Golden Plover** kept teasing us by always landing in the long grass. The area now flooded by the sea wall breach seemed to be

favoured by **Wigeon**, **Teal** and **Shelduck** with a few **Mallards** for company. Four **Buzzards** sat expectantly on the posts. By 3:30pm the tide had begun to recede and the waders started to show. A few **Bar-tailed Godwits** were joined by three or four **Black-tails**. A couple of **Knot** and **Dunlin** put in an appearance along with two **Ringed Plovers**. Four 'Grey Geese' appeared which were originally identified as **Pink-feet** however Al Mc corrected us all with one being a **Greylag**. At least two and possibly three juvenile **Ospreys** flew over the reserve each time putting everything up. The Golden Plover flock were up again this time being harassed by a poorly seen **Merlin**. This had the added effect of mixing everything up, giving us all the opportunity to start scanning again. Just before the group broke up, the best bird of the day was found - superb **Ruff** quietly feeding along the edge of a grassy bank.

A total of 67 birds were seen during the day. Everyone enjoyed a good day and the added bonus was the weather.

DAVE TANNER

Species and site list

Tarbat Ness – TN	Balnabruach – BA
Inver – IN	Nigg RSPB – NG

Red-throated Diver - (BA)
Fulmar – (TN)
Manx Shearwater – (TN)
Gannet – (TN)
Cormorant – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Shag – (TN, BA)
Grey Heron – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Mute Swan – (NI)
Pink-footed Goose – (NG)
Greylag Goose – (NG)
Shelduck – (BA, IN, NG)
Wigeon – (NG)
Teal – (BA, NG)
Eider – (BA)
Common Scoter – (TN)
Common Buzzard – (TN, NG)
Osprey – (NG)
Kestrel – (TN)
Merlin – (NG)
Peregrine – (IN)
Oystercatcher – TN, BA, IN, NG)
Ringed Plover – (NG)
Golden Plover – (NG)
Lapwing – (NG)
Knot – (TN, NG)
Dunlin – (IN, NG)
Ruff – (NG)
Black-tailed Godwit – (IN, NG)
Bar-tailed Godwit – (NG)
Curlew – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Redshank – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Turnstone – (TN, BA, NG)
Arctic Skua – (TN)
Great Skua – (TN)
Black-headed Gull – (BA, IN, NG)
Common Gull – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Herring Gull – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Great Black-backed Gull – (TN, NG)
Kittiwake – (TN, BA)

Sandwich Tern – (TN, BA)
Arctic Tern – (TN)
Guillemot – (TN, BA)
Razorbill – (TN, BA)
Wood Pigeon – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Collared Dove – (TN, BA, IN)
Skylark – (NG)
Swallow – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
House Martin – (TN, BA)
Meadow Pipit – (TN, IN, NG)
Pied Wagtail – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Wren – (TN, BA, NG)
Dunnock – (TN, NG)
Robin – (TN, BA, NG)
Blackbird – (TN, BA, NG)
Coal Tit – (TN)
Blue Tit – (TN)
Jackdaw – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Rook – (TN, NG)
Carrion Crow – (TN, NG)
Hooded Crow – (TN, NG)
Starling – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
House Sparrow – (BA, IN)
Chaffinch – (TN, BA, NG)
Greenfinch – (TN, IN, NG)
Goldfinch – (TN, NG)
Linnet – (TN, IN, NG)
Yellowhammer (TN)

Butterflies

Large White – (TN, BA, IN, NG)
Small White – (TN, NG)
Green-veined White – (NG)
Red Admiral – (TN, NG)
Painted Lady – (TN)
Peacock – (NG)
Speckled Wood (NG)

Mammals

Atlantic Grey Seal – (TN)
Common Seal – (NG)

CORRIMONY AND BEYOND - APRIL 2006

It was a leaderless group that left Inverness to rendezvous with others at Corrimony Cairns car park. Alex Joss was unwell, so we were off to see how we could cope on our own. On the way we started the day list with sightings of the likes of **Rook** and **Herring Gull**, **Mallard** and **Tufted Duck**, **Blackbird** and **Blue Tit** - and **Pheasant**, both live and dead. A single **Swallow** was seen near Lochend. At the Cairns CP we met the rest of our group and the returning RSPB party who had been in early to see the lek - they had had a successful morning despite some heavy rain, so we were hopeful that some birds would still be around by the time we had walked in.

Having spotted **Lapwing** and **Buzzard** from the CP we set off walking towards the reserve. As we neared the avenue of trees leading to what remains of the old Corrimony house, we saw a large flock of LBJs in a nearby field. They proved to be **Meadow Pipits** - over 100 of them. In their midst was a solitary **Fieldfare**. As we walked along the avenue we were delighted by the sight of two **Grey Wagtails** flitting along the burn alongside us and looking superb in the intermittent sunshine.

Onward and upward, we ambled on into the reserve, seeing **Great Tit**, **Coal Tit** and **Treecreeper** on the way. The woodland proved disappointing. We had hoped for **Crossbill** and **Crested Tit** but saw mainly **Chaffinches**. Some of the group glimpsed **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and a **Red Squirrel**. As we came out of the woodland, we scanned the larches for **Black Grouse** but to no avail. We walked on to the first lek site but all we saw were more pipits, a splendid male **Wheatear** posing on a rock and a **Skylark** in the grass with its crest on display. We continued on slowly to Loch Comhnard where we saw 4 **Greylag Geese**, 2 **Stonechat** and a **Common Sandpiper**, while all the time keeping our eyes open for **Black Grouse**. Only Greta was lucky - she spotted a female emerging from the undergrowth and then retreating never to be seen again. A scan of more distant lek sites did not look promising so we decided to start the return journey. The wood was again quiet although a **Wood Warbler** was heard. We stopped for lunch in the trees by the burn and were watched by **Great Tits** and a single **Siskin**. Then it was back to the cars where we were entertained (?) by the sight of a mini-bus load of tourists being bullied into Scottish country dancing in the car park.

The next place on Alex's itinerary was Loch Laide, near Abriachan, so we headed in that direction stopping en route to view a stunning pair of **Slavonian Grebes** on a roadside lochan along with **Common** and **Black-Headed Gulls** and another **Common Sandpiper**. Loch Laide was new to most of us and we spent some time in the hide watching a pair of **Little Grebes**, a female **Goldeneye**, ten+ **Tufted Duck** and several fishermen. The group split here, some deciding to explore the area further while the rest headed off towards Inverness stopping at Blackfold on the way. However all we saw there were more **Siskin** and 3 **Roe Deer**.

Our total number of species for the day was 39. It was a pity we weren't more fortunate with sightings of **Black Grouse**, but thank you to all the group for rallying round and making the outing so enjoyable.

Ann Sime

SOME GOOD HIGHLAND BIRDS - DID YOU SEE THEM?

Hobby



Laughing Gull



Common Crane



Red-backed Shrike



THIS MONTH'S OUTING - SATURDAY, 7 OCTOBER

Sutherland - Brora etc

Leader - Simon Cohen

Meet opposite the Pizza Hut, Inverness Retail Park, at 9am.

THIS MONTH'S CONFERENCE - 20-22 OCTOBER

A Tour of Scottish Islands

Duke of Gordon Hotel, Newtonmore

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING - TUESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER

Mike Carrier - A Look at Migration

Chieftain Hotel, 7.45 pm

NEXT MONTH'S OUTING - SATURDAY, 11 NOVEMBER

Gruinard and surrounding area

Leader - Al McNee

Meet opposite the Pizza Hut, Inverness Retail Park, at 9am.