

# CAITHNESS BIRD CLUB

## The Caithness Branch of the Scottish Ornithologists Club

### Chair's Report 2020-2021

The branch AGM was deferred until August 2020, by which time members were getting used to the idea of gathering electronically using software such as Zoom and Teams. Rob Hughes kindly gave a talk at the AGM of the visit that he and Nina O'Hanlon made to Costa Rica, giving us a vivid impression of the mind-boggling variety of species to be encountered there.

The pandemic meant that planned club activities such as a Rook count and a visit to Stroma did not go ahead, however a good number of county records were submitted via Birdtrack as well as submissions to Sinclair Manson, the county bird recorder, and a 2020 Caithness Bird report was duly produced – thanks again to those involved. We did manage to have a socially-distanced, stay-local alternative bird race in January, clocking up 110 species, which was a welcome bit of birding during the lockdown.

The normal winter programme of talks went ahead using Zoom, thanks to SOC HQ's support, and were run as joint talks along with SOC Orkney and Highland branches. Speakers such as Bob Swann, John Calladine and Kenny Taylor are all very weel-kent figures in the north, and their topics of Red-Breasted Geese, Short-Eared Owls and Puffins respectively were all fascinating. Other talks covered the amazing results that "Noc Mig" can bring, and also talked about the activities of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Several members tuned into the BTO/SOC Spring Conference via Zoom. Whilst physical meetings at branch talks and SOC conferences are missed by many, there is also a feeling that the electronic meetings can be a boom for members who find it a pain to travel considerable distances for those physical meetings, so there are benefits to Zoom etc! The developing list of training sessions by other wildlife charities such as the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Buglife, Shorewatch, and BTO's bird ID training have been well received and may help county records for other taxa.

We had planned to dedicate more effort to monitoring our two local Greenland White-front flocks (at Westfield and at Mey), but lockdown meant that were unable to do this, so we have deferred that activity until the 2021-22 season. We still plan to hold a survey of members to see what they would like from the club in Caithness, including suggestions for events and outings, and thoughts on how we can recruit more members. As I write this note, we are getting closer to an easing of the pandemic lockdown in Scotland, hopefully just in time for us to get out and about to catch a good spring migration!

Finally, thanks again to our Office Bearers for their efforts this year, without which our wee branch would cease to exist.

*Donald Omand (4/4/21)*