

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club

Scotland's Bird Club

Highland Bird News No 119

January 2013



Editorial

May I take this opportunity to wish you a happy and healthy New Year, with lots of good birds/birding too!

The unseasonal temperatures seem to be causing confusion amongst some of our birds. I heard Oystercatchers calling over Inverness around midnight on 6th January and on the 7th, I noticed Blue Tits collecting feathers, presumably for nest building?

Inverness seems to have largely missed out on Waxwings so far this winter, though there are still a few about. From the region, the largest flock I have heard of was of 1000 birds, seen at Kyleakin by people on their way to attend the Skye Conference on 17 November.

I have had up to 3 males and a female Brambling coming daily to my feeders since before Christmas. They were joined on 3rd January by two Waxwings which demolished an apple put out for the Blackbirds and also by a male Blackcap, the first I have seen in the garden at this time of year.

The mini conference held at the Gaelic College on Skye on Saturday 17 November 2012 was a great success. A write up will appear in a future issue of Scottish Birds. Thanks are due in large measure to Bob McMillan for promoting the idea, choosing the venue, inviting speakers and for making the arrangements which together, make a bird conference so enjoyable.

For anyone wishing to obtain a copy of the 2010 Highland Bird Report, details are given elsewhere in this issue.

A weekend trip to Fife, taking in a visit to the Isle of May was announced in the last HBN. Transport arrangements have changed since then, with travel now being by private car. See page 4 for further information.

The Club's Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference will be held on Saturday 16 March 2013, at Our Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh. Details and a booking form were included with the December 2012 issue of Scottish Birds. Please contact Waterston House (Tel: 01875 871330 or by email: mail@the-soc.org.uk) if you need further information.

And finally, now is the time to look through your notes for 2012 and submit records to the Local Bird Recorder, Hugh Insley, 1 Drummond Place, Inverness IV2 4JT (email: hugh.insley@btinternet.com)

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David Bain, Editor

Annual Dalry Bird Festival
St. John's Town of Dalry, Dumfries & Galloway,
21-23 September 2012
Including Watson Raptor Science Prize Lecture

I picked up on this festival during one of my regular log-ons to the Raptor Persecution Scotland website. The events and attractions caught my eye so, in spite of the distance to get there, I decided I would try and set up the trip. After I discussed it with fellow raptor monitor and local member of the SOC, Adam Ritchie, there were two of us going. As word spread about the trip we were contacted by another raptor monitor and member of the SOC, Vanessa Halhead, who had already arranged to go. With our eco-friendly hats on we agreed to go down in one car. Through Vanessa's strong links to the Watson Bird Centre she arranged to have Adam and myself invited to Friday evening's formal launch of the Watson Bird Centre and Celebration Project fund-raising campaign. The plan is to develop Dalry Bird Town as a celebration of the lives of probably its most famous resident, bird artist and ornithologist Donald Watson and his son Jeff Watson, an acknowledged expert on the Golden Eagle.

It was a long trip down especially the last leg on the A702 from the A74(M) to St John's Town of Dalry. It was worth it as we arrived at this lovely little town that time has almost passed by.

After checking into the Lochinvar hotel we went to the Town Hall to view an extensive display of bird art. Artists exhibiting included Malcolm Davies, John Hills, Bill Neill, John Threfall, Lisa Hooper, Paul Collin and Suzanne Stuart Davies. After this, AR and DM repaired to a local hostelry, the Clachan Inn, for some liquid refreshment.

The Town Hall was the venue for the formal launch of the Project fund-raising campaign. It was introduced to a large invited audience by Roger Crofts, Project Director and formally launched by Dame Barbara Kelly, one of Watson Birds Patrons. After this, a fair number of us went back to the Clachan Inn for a very good evening meal and a pint or two. Ooops! – nearly locked out of the Hotel.

Saturday morning was bright and clear when a group of us met up with RSPB Area Manager Chris Rollie for a bird watching field trip. On the walk out of town and along part of the Southern Upland Way we had sight of Swallow, House Martin, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, G.S.Woodpecker, Red Kite, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and Raven to name but a few. There had been sight and sound of a Nuthatch but I've yet to see my first Nuthatch in Scotland!!

The venue for the Watson Raptor Science Prize Lecture was the Lochinvar Hotel, and the lecture title was "The Plight of the Hen Harrier". Des Thompson, Principal Adviser (Biodiversity Development) at SNH, introduced the speakers starting with Chris Rollie who gave us a comprehensive history of Hen Harriers in the South of Scotland. This was followed by Eric Meek who covered the status of Harriers in Orkney. Clearly a success story. Next up was Aly McCluskie who brought us up to date with the very tetchy subject of the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project. After tea and coffee, Brian Etheridge covered Harriers in Scotland today and what the future holds for them. The clue is in the title of the lecture. A lot of frustration came down from the floor. It's hardly surprising given the critical situation that Hen Harriers are in as they face ongoing widespread illegal persecution.

A few farewells then we headed north after a very interesting and enjoyable time at St. John's Town of Dalry.

Doug Mainland

A field trip to the Black Isle on 18 October 2012, led by Lynda Graham.

Nine of us set off from Inverness on a dreich, rather unpromising morning. Our determination was rewarded as the light rain soon stopped, and although overcast, the rest of the morning remained dry.

At Munloch Bay Overlook there were good views of **Black-tailed Godwit**, helpfully stretching their wings among the **Bar-tails** and the large numbers of all the expected ducks and waders, along with a fleeting view of a **Sparrowhawk**. Close by, we saw the first of several **Yellowhammers**, still bright yellow, and inland there were passing thrushes, including some **Redwing** and **Fieldfare**. All the while, ragged skeins of thousands of geese passed overhead. Where they went remained a mystery, as despite our later extensive search of their usual fields we didn't find them.

En route through Corrachie to Avoch there were flocks of finches in the roadside trees and in the harvested fields, mostly **Chaffinch**, but also good numbers of **Linnets**, **Twite**, **Goldfinch**, **Greenfinch** and **Siskin** (though no **Brambling**). There were excellent views of a pair of **Kestrels**, perching on the wires and hay bundles and hunting low.

At Chanonry Point we saw the dorsal fins of dolphin close in to land, and there were **Guillemot** in small numbers and a **Red Throated Diver**.

We then drove along the narrow by-ways of the Black Isle, along the Eathie road and over by Peddieston, stopping whenever there was bird activity. There were many of the small birds, including a single **Tree Sparrow** on a muddy track and a further highlight was a flock of 370+ **Golden Plover** in a nearby field.

We reached Udale Bay, with its new hide, at just the right time, with high tide approaching and the tide coming in remarkably rapidly. This was rich with birdlife; **Wigeon, Scaup, Teal**, and closer to the hide **Lapwing, Godwit** (still with some colour), **Curlew, Oyster-catchers**, and a single **Little Grebe**.

From there we drove to the other side of the bay, where repair work was stabilising the ruined church, whose roof had collapsed in a recent storm. A **Slavonian Grebe** and several **Eiders** were seen from Newhall Point itself. There were also better views of the **Wigeon** and **Scaup** (the latter present in large numbers, in several different groups, but all formed up in long lines). We were surprised to see three **Swallows** (one adult with streamers and two young) despite the recent cold weather and apparent lack of insects.

Lynda counted 59 species for the day.

Our thanks go to Lynda Graham for making this such an interesting and enjoyable trip.

Frank Johnstone

Some Recent & Not So Recent Sightings

A juvenile Reed Warbler was mist-netted and ringed at Castle Stuart on 27 August, followed by another on the 29th. A juvenile Black Tern was seen off Tarbat Ness on the 29th, followed by 4 off Dornoch beach on the 31st. Five birds were seen there on 1st September, 4 of which were definitely juveniles.

On 29 September, a Barred Warbler was reported from Tarbat Ness.

On 14 October, a Yellow-browed Warbler was found at Ardersier. Towards the end of the month, a Barred Warbler was found at Chanonry Point on the 26th.

A Grey Phalarope was found at Culkein Bay, Assynt on 24 November.

A Bittern, unfortunately dead, was found on 20 December, on the main road between Fort William and Torlundy. A Black Duck was reported from Loch Sunart, at Strontian on 23 December and was still present on the 28th.

Other more recent notes of interest include a Short-eared Owl on Fortrose Golf Course. The bird has been present since before Christmas. Chanonry Point has also had one or two Great Northern Divers, often on the Avoch side. The American Wigeon was still at Udale Bay on 6th January and a 1st winter Iceland Gull was amongst roosting gulls at the junction of the B9161 (Munlochy to A9 via Munro's Nursery) with the secondary road to Tore, also on the 6th.

Indoor Meetings and Field Trips

Members wishing to attend meetings and/or field trips should note that if Scotland or the Highlands are experiencing severe weather, anyone travelling a distance is advised to telephone the Branch Secretary or another Committee member to ascertain if the meeting/trip is going ahead.

Indoor Meetings are held in Culloden Library, Keppoch Road, Inverness IV2 7LL starting at 7:30pm. The syllabus for the remainder of this session is as follows:

2013

- 8 January Kenny Kortland – wildlife management on a National Forest estate
- 5 February Jeremy Brock – Spanish Steppes: birds of the Laguna de Gallocanta
- 5 March Edmund Fellowes – some bird photography adventures in Dumfries-shire
- 16 April Branch AGM + Bozena Summers – birds of Poland, Hungary, Estonia and Norway

Field Trips: contact Kathy Bonniface (01808 511740) or the leader. Meet at 9.00am (9.15 am on Thursdays) at Inverness Retail Park, near Burger King, unless otherwise stated. Weekend outings are full day, Thursdays are usually morning only.

2013

- Sun Jan 13th Within Inverness (Al McNee 01463 220493)
- Thurs Jan 24th Local Birding
- Sat Feb 9th Tarradale - Strathpeffer Area (Alex Joss 01463 221661)
- Thurs Feb 21st Local Birding
- Sun Mar 10th Loch Eye (Simon Cohen 01349 865531)
- Thurs Mar 21st Local Birding
- Sat April 20th The Gairloch Loop (Graeme Prest 01463 791575)
- Thurs April 25th Local Birding
- Sun May 5th Speyside Migrant Hunt (Keith Duncan 01479 821124)
- Fri 10th – Mon 13th May Weekend Trip to Isle of May and Fife. The plans for this weekend have changed somewhat since it was originally announced in September 2011. Travel will now be by private car, sharing as much as possible. 13 people had intimated interest in the event (now 11 as two have withdrawn). Hotel accommodation has been booked and a private boat chartered.

However, with the change from mini-bus to private car, the option for more people to go is open. The chartered boat can only take 12 passengers, so any over that number would have to book and travel on the normal service boat. Similarly with the hotel, it is basically fully booked but there are other hotels and B & Bs in Anstruther. The booked hotel is providing dinner, bed & breakfast and it is believed could accommodate additional non-resident guests for dinner.

The trip to the Isle of May is only part of the weekend. Fife has a lot to offer, especially at this time of year. It should be a good weekend. Anyone interested in joining the trip is advised to discuss this further with Kathy Bonniface, telephone number as above.

Useful contacts

Kathy Bonniface, Branch Secretary	Tel: 01808 511740	Email: kathybonniface@aol.com
Hugh Insley, Local Recorder	Tel: 01463 230652	Email: hugh.insley@btinternet.com
David Bain, Newsletter Editor	Tel: 01463 772539	Email: bainrock@btinternet.com

Websites and Blogs about birds and birding in Highland

This list was compiled by Richard Rafe, a branch member who lives at Ullapool and may be of interest to those with access to the internet. Anyone who is aware of other sites is invited to let the Editor know for inclusion in a future issue.

Assynt Field Club – including sections on birds, including recent sightings
www.assyntwildlife.org.uk

Birding ecosse - Guided birding in the Highlands (David Slater) – based in Moray
www.birdingecosse.co.uk

.... also a blog – birdingecosse.blogspot.co.uk

Ebirder - Birds: photography, workshops & tours (Marcus Conway) – based in Ardersier
www.ebirder.net

Handa Island Skua Project - Monitoring and studying arctic and great skuas on Handa Island
www.handaskuas.org

Hebridean Whale Cruises- Cruises out of Gairloch led by Nick Davies, including seabirds and operating some specialist pelagic cruises for birders.

www.hebridean-cruises.co.uk

Heatherlea - Guided birdwatching and wildlife holidays – based in Nethybridge

www.heatherlea.co.uk

Highland and Moray Birds - Bird and wildlife grapevine for Highland and Moray

Highlandandmoraywildlife.freeforums.org

Highland Bird Tours- Birdwatching tours in Sutherland and Caithness (Ian Macpherson)

www.highlandbirdtours.com

Highland Foundation for Wildlife - A conservation charity specialising in species recovery projects including many iconic Highland birds (Roy Dennis)

www.roydennis.org

Pelagic Birder - Pelagic working voyages interspersed with local patch birding and occasional twitch birding news (Andy Williams) – based in Ullapool

Pelagicbirder.blogspot.co.uk

Raptor Study Group – Highland Area

www.scottishraptorgroups.org/areas/highland.php

Ranger news from the island of Rum – news and wildlife sightings from the Isle of Rum Community Trust Ranger Service (Mike Werndly)

Rangerinonrum.blogspot.com

... also a website – www.isleofrum.com

Recent Wildlife Sightings in Glendale, Skye

Part of a wider “Tourist Guide to Glendale, Isle of Skye” (Andy Stables)

www.glendaleskye.com/sightings.php

RSPB – Highland Group

www.rspb.org.uk/groups/highland

RSPB reserves – pages available on the RSPB website specific to each reserve
eg. www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/1/lochgarten

Scottish Ornithologists Club (SOC) – Highland Branch

www.the-soc.org.uk/highland-branch.htm

Skye Birds – a birding guide to the Isle of Skye (Bob McMillan)

www.skye-birds.com

St John’s Pool – premier bird watching in the North of Scotland; bird news from St John’s Pool and wider Caithness

www.stjohnspool-birds.co.uk

2010 Highland Bird Report

The Report was received from the printer at the beginning of December 2012. Copies can be had from Lynda Graham, 9 Burn Brae Terrace, Inverness IV2 5HD (ljgraham50@btinternet.com), price £8.00 or £10.00 inc. postage. Cheques should be made payable to ‘Scottish Ornithologists’ Club HBR.’.