

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club

Scotland's Bird Club

Highland Bird News No 124

January 2015



NEWS

The first indoor meeting in 2015 of the 2014-15 session was postponed at the last minute due to weather conditions. It will now take place on Tuesday 20 January at 7:30pm in the usual place, Culloden Library, Keppoch Road, Inverness IV2 7LL.

Al McNee will give a talk on *A Birding trip to central Thailand*.

Full information on the remaining meetings is given on page 2 of this HBN.

Please also note that the Field Trip to Strath Dearn & Strath Nairn, scheduled for Saturday 7 March, has been put back to Saturday 9th May.

A weekend trip (Friday – Monday) to the Solway is being planned for March. The particular weekend will be chosen after the Branch meeting on 20 January. Anyone interested should get in touch with Alex Joss or David Bain. Contact details inside this issue.

Editorial

2015 has started with a bang! Severe weather has battered our region and I hope you all escaped injury and major damage to property. The continuing snow cover and low temperatures makes life difficult for our birds so, please do keep feeding and providing drinking water.

Birding too has got off to a good start with an Ivory Gull at Ullapool harbour and Lapland Buntings on the Black Isle and east of Inverness.

This issue has articles describing field trips which I hope you will find interesting. A summary of rarities reported in the last four months of 2014 is also included. It makes interesting reading and should encourage us all to be vigilant; you never know what might turn up on your favourite patch!

Now is the time to draw attention to submission of records. Please do enter these on Birdtrack if you use the system or send them to the Highland Bird Recorder: Peter Gordon, 2 Craigmere Crescent, Nethy Bridge, Highland PH25 3RA Email: gordon890@btinternet.com

Articles for inclusion in future issues of Highland Bird News are always welcome, even in long-hand. My thanks to all who have contributed material for this edition.

David Bain, Editor

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SOC Highland Branch Programme to April 2015

INDOOR MEETINGS

- 2015 Tuesday Jan 20th: Al McNee – A birding trip to central Thailand.
- Tuesday Feb 3rd: Mark Newall – Seabirds studies on the Isle of May: spreading our wings after 40 years.
- Tuesday Mar 3rd: John Calladine – Breeding waders of the Uist machair: land use and predators, past, present and future.
- Tuesday Apr 14th: AGM followed by Sinclair Dunnett – What's in a name? Some thoughts on European bird names.

FIELD TRIPS

- 2015 Sat Jan 17th 2015: Inverness East or West (Al McNee)
- Thurs Jan 29th: Local Birding (Lynda Graham)
- Sun Feb 8th: Burghead Area and Moray Coast (Simon Cohen)
- Thurs Feb 19th: Local birding (Lynda Graham)
- March:
- Date tbc: Weekend (Friday – Monday) trip to the Solway
- Thurs Mar 19th: Local Birding (Lynda Graham)
- Sun April 19th: Strath Glass and beyond (leader tbc)
- Thurs April 30th: Local Birding (Lynda Graham)
- Sat May 9th: Strathdearn and Strath Nairn (Alex Joss)

MEETING PLACES and CONTACTS

Indoor meetings are held at Culloden Library, Keppoch Road, Culloden, Inverness IV2 7LL at 7:30pm on the stated dates.

Field Trips: the usual meeting place is Inverness Retail Park by Burger King. Full day trips depart at 9am; Thursday morning trips depart at 9:15am. Please contact the trip leader for other meeting place options.

Contacts:

Alex Joss, Branch Chairman: tel. no: 01463 221661 or email: ejoss99@btinternet.com

Kathy Bonniface, Branch Secretary: tel: 01808 511740 or email: kathybonniface@aol.com

Lynda Graham, Thursday morning field trip leader: tel. no. 01463 791292 or email: ljgraham50@btinternet.com

David Bain, HBN Editor: tel: 01463 772539 or email: bainrock@btinternet.com

Highland Bird Report 2012

Copies of the Highland Bird Report 2012 are still available and will be on sale at the January meeting. Otherwise please contact Lynda Graham, by telephone or email – details on previous page.

Local Birding on 18th September led by Lynda Graham

A small group of members met at the usual place and headed east along the Moray coast. Our first stop was at Milton of Culloden where scanning over the sea we found Slavonian and Little Grebes, Great Cormorants and Red-breasted Mergansers. Along the shoreline were Oystercatchers, Redshanks, Curlews and several species of commoner gulls. In the trees lining the lane were Robin, Chaffinch, Great, Blue, Coal and Long-tailed Tits. Looking through the Mallards, Wigeon and Teal eventually produced a solitary female Pintail. At Alturlie, we found similar species of wildfowl, waders and gulls with the addition of Goosander and Eider.

Moving on to farmland in the Wester Dalziel area we passed four Buzzards loafing in a newly cut barley field and a pair of Stonechats was seen. At an untidy area of derelict farm machinery and weeds there was a good sized flock of Tree Sparrows along with a few House Sparrows and Yellowhammers. A Great-spotted Woodpecker called from a nearby wood.

Our next stop was at Ardersier where there were Gannets and Shags over the sea and Grey Heron, Lapwings and a lone Whooper Swan on the shore. A Sandwich Tern was heard calling but we were unable to locate it. We drove through Ardersier to the 'long hedge' in the hope of finding some migrant passerines. Our only warbler was a singing Chiffchaff. Song Thrush and Blackbird were also seen in the hedge and a Sparrowhawk and Kestrel were also recorded as well as a flock of about 80 Linnets.

Lunch was taken at Kirkton Cemetery where Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Swallow were added to the day's list. From here we headed to the pig farm at Delnies where there had recently been a good selection of waders on a flooded field, including a Pectoral Sandpiper. Unfortunately most had moved on and all we saw were a single Black-tailed Godwit and four Ringed Plovers. A Magpie had been seen on the way.

Our final stop was at Hilton of Delnies. We walked to the shore where Red-throated Diver, Kittiwake, Common and Black Guillemots and Razorbill were added to the list, bringing the final total to 66 species. Thanks to Lynda for leading an entertaining trip.

Keith Barnes

The ones that got away, South of Aberdeen - 10 - 12 October 2014

Perhaps because of the late confirmation of the event, only six members set off down the A9 on a bright Friday morning. Only two cars were required, with Greta Fraser and Margaret Collis in David Reid's car and Lynda Graham in Alex and Liz Joss's one. Hoping in vain for Red Grouse at Drumochter, a rendezvous was arranged at Dunkeld before moving on to Loch of the Lowes. Not everybody agreed that it was worth the money to get into the hide and sure enough, whether viewed from outside or in, there wasn't much to see. The Ospreys had gone, but, nevertheless, Great Crested Grebes (3) were good to see along with a few Goldeneyes. Redpolls were heard in the woods and assorted Tits and Chaffinches were on the feeders. The Lochs of Butterstone, Clunie and Drumellie on the way to Blairgowrie were very briefly looked at, the short stops dictated by lack of good parking spots (even for two cars) on the busy, twisty road and the screens of trees between road and water. Soon a beeline was made for the Loch of Kinnordy, the haste brought on by the prospect of lunch as much as the prospect of seeing birds. However, there were beautifully-lit Gadwall and Shoveler, and masses of colourful Teal

in the channels through the reeds, although one less than the previous day, when one or two lucky observers had witnessed one being plucked from the water by a White-tailed Eagle. Also the Bittern, purportedly lurking in the reeds, managed to lurk successfully out of view all the time we were there.

Kirriemuir proved to be a successful toilet stop, only if, as one lady did, you asked to see the facilities in one of the hotels as part of a pretend investigation of its potential as a wedding venue! After Forfar, heading for Montrose, two lochs on the south side of the B9113 provided some late afternoon entertainment. The first was stocked for fishing and, apart from some Coots, Mute Swans, Grebes, both Little and Great Crested, Tufted and other Ducks, an interesting feature was the considerable number of bales of straw floating in it to suppress the algae. The second loch had a similar range of wildfowl, in smaller numbers, but also offered a convoluted path/boardwalk along the south shore to a hide, from which Bullfinch and Great Spotted Woodpecker were heard. The insistent, but unrecognised, call of some rare “warbler” heard in the fading light fooled one member for some time until reference to the tapes proved it to be an infrequently heard part of the repertoire of the Little Grebe. A brief visit, en route, to the now closed, SWT hide on south side of Montrose Basin allowed Redshank and Curlew to be identified on the near shore, but the Gulls and Geese offshore were fading into the evening haze. Our accommodation, the Links Hotel, proved surprisingly easy to find and comfortable, with good food.

A nice, sunny Saturday morning brought heightened optimism that rare migrants were waiting to be discovered at Scurdie Ness and Mains of Usan, south of Montrose. Much activity in a neep field en route brought the scopes out to search for Olive-backed and/or Pechora Pipits, but we had to make do with the Meadow variety and a few Skylarks. At the two farms, there were well-lit views of Tree Pipits, Linnets, Goldfinches and Yellowhammers, and good vantage points for some seawatching. The optimism was justified by the number of local birdwatchers also there, all regaling us with tales of the “masses” of Yellow-browed Warblers about just yesterday. One (of the birdwatchers) darted off in mid-sentence in his car on getting the message that a few Cranes had just flown over Arbroath, but a bit of realism at last stopped us from following that far south. Nevertheless, more local advice took us to a couple of “migrant-favoured” trees at the end of a street opposite Montrose harbour, where some searching eventually furnished a Greenfinch and a Robin or two.

Just before lunch was deemed the ideal time to (re)visit the SWT hide, and the one who stumped up the entry fee without demur was the only one to get to the windows in time to see the Kingfisher sitting just outside by a pond. It didn't come back. Still there was a lot to see, including Greenshank, Pintail, Mergansers and a sandbank full of well-camouflaged Golden Plovers, but not the Y-bW that had been flitting in the tree nearest the window the day before.. Lunch was had in the smaller hide, from where a few Bar-tailed Godwits were glimpsed prospecting among the small dunes and then a Merlin came and obligingly perched in full view on one such knoll. A brief visit to the cul-de-sac opposite Rossie Island brought us nearer to the huge congregation of Pink-footed Geese near the entrance to the basin, so densely packed on a small sandbar, which was rapidly disappearing in the rising tide, that they proved impossible to count and also completely obscured the two Barnacles we had been assured were among them. We did see a flock of Knot and Dunlin flying near the shore. A three point turn or two took us back and off to the far end of the basin to find Old Montrose Pier and the Lurgies, where even more complicated manoeuvring was required to get us parked off the side road. Setting off muttering that such a well-known venue deserved a proper carpark, we almost immediately found it tucked behind a wall at the start of the raised footpath, which afforded views into the basin on one side and into a reedbed on the other. The reedbed was of course intensely scanned, by eye and ear, in the hope of some of these Bearded Tits which have irrupted this autumn from the Tay reedbeds. However, only the Great, Blue and Long-Tailed variety were on offer. Still the path provided a very pleasant afternoon walk and good views of more Mute Swans, Greenshank, Little Grebe, a couple of Snipe, Treecreeper, Stonechat, Reed Bunting and, on a distant tree, a “Goshawk” which transformed into a mere Buzzard when seen down the barrel of the scope. A final visit to the Scurdie Ness area failed to catch out any Y-bWs that might have sneaked back.

On Sunday, on another wonderfully bright morning, a walk through the dunes at St Cyrus and along the beach, furnished some good, calm seawatching seeing Common Scoter and a few Red-throated Divers, interspersed with a flypast of three southbound Swallows and an obliging Peregrine from the facing cliffs. On the return walk through some saltmarsh, one person had just been heard to sigh for the presence of a certain ex Highland

Branch chairman, who might plunge wellie-clad into the marsh in the chance of putting up a Jack Snipe, when the mere mention of his name caused one to get up and fly low over the boardwalk in front of us. A rapid transit via the A90 and Aberdeen ring road took us to the Donmouth for lunch, where intense car and dog walker traffic restricted the birds on offer. Apart from a colony of assorted Black-headed and Common Gulls, there was a mystery long-tailed pale-bellied small bird which rose from a bush making an insistent monosyllabic pinging sound, but flew around like a lark and so remains unidentified.

After that it was hotfoot to Girdleness for an intense afternoon of migrant-hunting. The bushes on the slopes south of the harbour and the allotments opposite were thoroughly scoured without success. Further towards the point proved a good spot for setting up the scopes and detailed study of the array of gulls all along the harbour walls resulted in the quote of the weekend. "I think I've found a Kittiwake." "Oh, where?" "Over at the right-hand end." All scopes wheel round. "Ah, yes, got it." A long pause, then. "I think there's another one just beside it, ...and another one." Soon it was difficult to find any of the hundred or so gulls that weren't Kittiwakes, apart from the obvious Great Black-backs, however, there were also Shags, Cormorants, Turnstones and a single Razorbill, in the harbour entrance channel. A Kestrel and Sparrowhawk were coursing over the golf course and towards the lighthouse, a Common Sandpiper briefly joined a group of Ringed Plovers on a shoreside rock. Seawatching right out at the point eventually resulted in some sightings of Arctic and Great Skua. A final trawl along Nigg Bay in fading light as the rains started, for the first time in an otherwise glorious weekend, failed to find any Little Gulls. It was time to retreat and find some food, in an excellent Indian restaurant near the station, before the journey home. Not a single Owl flew across the headlights on the way along the A96, so we were left to reflect on a respectable total of 97 species for the weekend. A mere fraction of the aforementioned imaginary species would have brought up the century.

We were all grateful to David Bain who did so much preparatory work in providing very detailed notes on the prime sites to visit, along with a comprehensive range of maps for the whole area. So we're happy to accept his excuse, getting married, for not being there in person.

Thursday morning field trip.

Thursday 23rd October saw 7 members meet for the mornings birding session. This was the first time I have joined a group wander but hopefully it won't be my last. The weather was reasonably kind to us, mostly dry but overcast and a cool wind with the occasional very light drizzle of rain. Nothing to prevent a pleasant day....I say day because the morning lasted until about 15.30! About usual I am told.

Lynda had organised a grand tour of the Black Isle having checked tide times in advance.

From Burger King base we headed over the watter, through Munloch and then took the back road into Avoch over Bennetsfield. This proved relatively quiet but we did pick up 2 Red Kites, Buzzard and Skylark. Onwards to Rosemarkie and the B road to Udale Bay where our intention was to find the elusive American Wigeon (it eluded me on two previous visits!). This morning was no exception either but as usual, Udale provided a good selection of waders and a spectacular fly past of Black Tailed Godwits over the field behind the hide. Seven or eight Grey Heron, Pink-footed geese, the usual gulls, Knot, Lapwing and Curlew also provided interest. The road side car park just past Jemimaville showed similar birds with Scaup and Guillemot adding to the list. Then eagle-eyed Alex spotted a nice group of Turnstones, well camouflaged by the sea wall doing what aptly describes their name. Ringed Plover also obliged at this site along with good views of Grey Wagtail and Long Tailed Duck.

Onwards to Cromarty and on the way we added to the list with Mute Swan. Distant views of Lon-tailed Duck and Eider were about the best at what was a fairly quiet Cromarty.

Lynda had a plan. From Cromarty we headed back over to Udale for a late lunch whilst Am Wig spotting. The route from Cromarty took us on the quiet road through Peddeston..good move...Lynda found her first winter thrushes with loads of Fieldfare and Redwing feasting on Rowan berries and Elderberries. The fields here also

showed good numbers of Mistle Thrush, the odd Stonechat and several Yellowhammer and Linnet perched on the 'phone wires. The bonus was a nice Golden Plover, unusually a single bird but close scanning by all showed up another bird as well. Back to Udale bay hide. The Heatherlea team from Nethy Bridge were guiding a group and were very helpful when asked about the Am Wig. One of guides I asked had had "very distant fleeting glimpses". Sadly none of us even managed that. In our defence I would say that the bird would be far easier to spot if it wasn't in amongst a thousand or two other moving wigeon. But Barwits, Shovelers, Dunlin etc., made for a pleasant lunch break. Next stop was round to the other side of the bay to try for the Yank from a different viewpoint even though the light would probably be against us. Another "no show". Then off round to "the point" where Slavonian grebe and Cormorant boosted the total.

Here though, for me anyway, the highlight of the day. A fishing cat !! A local ginger moggy brazenly down at the water's edge rockpools scooped out a small fish, carried it in its mouth back to a garden opposite, dropped the fish and came back for another go!

Thanks must go to Lynda for organising a great extended mornings birding which along with the usual Blackbird, Coal tit, Chaffinch, Rook, Hoodie and Carrion crow etc., gave us a respectable 58 species for the day.

Rob Greenwood.

OUTING TO STRATHSPEY, SATURDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2014

Leader - Pete Gordon

It was a coolish, but dry morning as a fair number of us assembled at the Retail Park, ready for an interesting day's birding. Alex advised that we were to meet our leader at Carrbridge but we had enough time to make a stop en route. A brief discussion ended with us settling for Shenachie off the A9, south of Moy, and it did not take the small convoy long to re-assemble at the bridge a few hundred metres from the main road. Bright and sunny now, still cold in the shade, we began to nudge the bird list up. Both **Skylarks** and **Fieldfare** were obviously present, joined by calling **Lesser Redpolls**, **Goldfinches**, possibly up to five **Buzzards** circling near and far, plus a modest number of **Greylag Geese** were heading for a food stop somewhere.

On to Carrbridge and the full complement of participants was now gathered, an exceptional seventeen! Pete gave us a plan of action, walkie-talkies were issued and some species were added – just a few such as **Collared Doves**, **House Sparrows** and **Robin**, but they all count. Pete guided us along the back road that follows the River Dulnain, a wide strath offering good views on both sides. Diligence from the group brought us a few more species and so **Pheasant**, **Starling**, **Redwing** made the notebook and a group of about 40 **Teal** were seen flying across the flooded fields. A distant group of **Mistle Thrushes** flew over some conifers, **Coal Tit** and **Wren** were noted and the occupants of a couple of cars got good views of a handsome male **Stonechat**. This species is clearly making a good comeback from near obliteration due to severe winters in recent years.

The group had made a few stops along the strath and despite using 6 cars, no parking or overtaking problems had arisen. Parking at Carr Wood was less straightforward, though the minor road at the entrance to Curr Wood was, helpfully, very quiet. It was here that the party had to show their mettle and patience as the smaller woodland species were not wholly accommodating. Everyone worked at it and got views and sounds of **Treecreeper**, **Great Tit**, **Goldcrest** and, best of all, **Crested Tit**, of which there may have been ten or more eventually. One scarce species this autumn was glimpsed, a "green" **Crossbill** [ʃɪ, as they say!] perched on the top of a Scots Pine, but not everyone got on to it. A local house and garden gave us cracking views of a Red Squirrel on the feeder, **Pied Wagtail**, **Blue Tit**. Probably a good hour was spent in and close to the wood and it was now time for a change of scene and so we moved on and watched the river at several places, **Goldeneye** and **Goosander** being our reward. At Broomhill Bridge we all got out of our cars, had spot of lunch and watched the river. A Dipper might have been heard, but was not seen. This is a regular birding spot of Pete's, but even

he was surprised to see one and then a second **Little Grebe** diving close to the heavily vegetated bank. Oh, and we had **Mallards!**



Our last and much anticipated final stop was at Insh Marshes where it was hoped that Hen Harrier would be seen, however one car pre-empted the proceedings by spotting one en route! Not that any of the rest of us were unduly miffed! Autumnal light was beginning to turn to autumnal dark after a good spell on the observation platform had given more species including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Lapwings, Wigeon and a single Grey Heron. Pete now announced that we would give it five minutes more and, after three of those five, in drifted a female harrier, distant but showing very well with care. It put up quite a lot of birds though it didn't seem to catch any late supper for itself. This brought our excellent day to a conclusion. The final total of 50 species was very creditable for the time of year and locations and we were all extremely grateful to our well organised and extremely informative leader who gave us a really splendid day's birding.

Al McNee

Thursday morning field trip 20 November 2014

Eight birders in 3 cars headed east from Inverness Retail Park on a glorious, still, autumn morning, the day brightening as we sped along the A96. Pinkfeet on fields, Buzzards perched and enjoying the sun, flocks of Curlew feeding in stubble; all were noted, along with Rooks, Carrion and Hoodie Crows.

Reaching Forres, we headed along Waxwing alley, carefully checking for Waxies, but no sign. We headed left, on to minor roads leading out to the edge of Findhorn Bay, sighting more Pinkfeet and Curlew en route. The Bay was mirror calm, allowing us to see Shelduck, Mute Swans, Wigeon and Common Gulls. Over the salt marsh,

flocks of Linnet and some Yellowhammers were active. Wrens and Dunnock called from the whin bushes while skylarks flighted overhead, calling as they do.

At Roseisle, we headed through the pines to the edge of the dunes, accompanied by the calls of a Crested Tit or two and Goldcrests. The sea in the bay was a flat calm, with small groups of Common and Velvet Scoter, good numbers of Slavonian Grebes, several Red-breasted Merganser, Long-tailed Duck, Red-throated Divers and a single Black-throat. The Sutherland hills on the northern horizon stood out against the blue sky, a magnificent backdrop!

Burghead harbour did not yield any white gulls but we did see Turnstone and Redshank on the harbour wall. On the east side of the point there was a bit more of a sea running. Here we found Cormorant, Shag, Common Eider but no sign of the elusive King! A serious look at the wave-washed rocks eventually yielded a couple of Purple Sandpiper.

From Burghead we set off for Loch Spynie, where Bearded Tits had recently been seen. Unfortunately these also proved as elusive as the King Eider.

At this point, one car had to head back to Inverness but the remaining two headed to Lossiemouth for a look at the River Lossie estuary. Here, Bar-tailed Godwits and Sanderling were added to the list along with Med Gull, giving a total species list for the day of 66. Thanks to Lynda for giving us yet another grand day out!

David Bain

Some recent and not so recent sightings.

These are some of the records received for the period 1 September through to 31 December 2014. Many are still subject to acceptance as appropriate by the local, national or British rarities committee.

September

On the 2nd, a single Sooty Shearwater was seen passing Tarbat Ness and a Crane was found at Udale Bay. The next day, birders travelling to Udale for the Crane also got Ruff, a Knot, 4 Greenshank and Osprey. On the 8th, flooded 'fields' at Wester Delnies pig farm yielded a Pectoral Sandpiper, Little Stint, 6 Ruff and 8 Black-tailed Godwits. A juvenile Little Egret was found at Loch Ewe the same day. c200 Brent Geese headed west over Torrin, Skye on the 11th and next day, a Ruff was found on Rum, a scarce record for the Small Isles. The 12th saw the return of the usual Ring-billed Gull to Dingwall.

A Mediterranean Gull was at Broadford Bay on the 15th (also on 13-14 December and two 1st winters on 17 December. A 1st winter bird was at Kilmory, Rum on 1 November, another at Dornoch Point on 9 November; two at Loch Portree on 12 November and yet another at Sligachan on 31 December).

3 Pied Flycatchers were at Tarbat Ness on 15 September. Two days later, folk on a Hebridean Whale watching cruise enjoyed Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, 5 Sabine's Gulls, 2 Storm Petrels as well as Black-throated Divers and Sea Eagles. On land, a juvenile Barred Warbler was found in a garden at Morar and 2 Yellow-browed Warblers were at Tarbat Ness. Next day at Tarbat Ness a single Y-b Warbler was noted along with Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Redstart, Brambling and Chiffchaff.

On the 30th, Munloch Bay had 54 Black-tailed Godwits + 4 Bar-tails along with Greenshank and Pintail.

October

October opened with an immature drake Surf Scoter at Coul Links on the 1st. Four Poms flew west past Chanonry Point on the 4th; two days later, 2 immature Long-tailed Skuas were off Embo with a single off Tarbat Ness on the 8th. In the west, an American Golden Plover was found at Sconser on the 6th when 2 Sabine's Gulls

were in Broadford Bay. Back on the east coast at Embo, 36 Arctic Skuas, 20 Bonxies, 7 Poms and 2 juv Long-tails headed into the Dornoch Firth in a 2 hour watch. In the same area, a drake Surf Scoter was at the entrance into Loch Fleet on the 10th, the same day as a juv Rosy Starling turned up at Balnakeil village on the north coast. Yellow-browed Warblers were at Durness on the 7th, Achnasheen on the 10th and Sheigra on the 11th, the same day as a Reed Warbler was found at Kinlochbervie. The drake American Wigeon was back at Udale on the 12th; four days later a Firecrest was found at Kildary. Clachnaharry had an imm Pom on the 25th and on the 27th, a Little Gull and a juv Iceland Gull were seen in Broadford Bay. A Waxwing was at the South Sutor on the 27th and as the month drew to a close, 2726 Whoopers were counted in the Loch Eye area on the 29th.

November

Skye opened the score for November with a 1st winter Glaucous Gull in Broadford Bay on the 1st. Next day, 6 first winter Med Gulls were seen in the Loch Ainort/Broadford Bay area. 12 Waxwings were at Milovaig, north-west Skye on the 3rd. A Shore lark was at Camusdarach on the 10th. Back to the east coast, 2 Waxwings were in Fortrose on the 11th; a Grey Phalarope was seen off Embo on the 14th. A Snow Goose was in the Muir of Ord area on 15th and 16th. The 17th saw two Firecrests found at Totscore, Trotternish on Skye. A Red-head Smew was on Loch Eye on the 20th, when 19 Brent were near the Nigg hide, the same day as a Nutcracker was reported from Ullapool. Unfortunately, this sighting was not confirmed and the bird did not hang around. A Swallow was at Rosemarkie on the 21st. 2 Red-necked Grebes were on the sea off Embo on the 24th along with 20 Slav Grebes and 400 Eider, the latter including a drake of the race *Borealis*. 2 European Whitefronts were amongst a large flock of Pinkfeet, Greylags and Whoopers at Wester Seafield on the 25th and Durness had 2 Siberian Chiffchaffs on the last day of the month.

December

A report early in the month was of a Willow or Marsh Tit at Rothiemurchus. The Swallow reported last month was seen again at Rosemarkie on the 4th. A Rough-legged Buzzard at Cawdor was seen on the 4th and 5th. On the latter date, a Red-necked Grebe was seen east of Jemimaville, a Sooty Shearwater between Arisaig and Eigg, and a leucistic Common Gull on a Skye sea loch. Mid-Fearn had a Bewick's Swan on the 7th. A juv Black Redstart was on Rum on the 11th, the same day as a Little Auk was found on Loch nan Eala at Arisaig. A Tundra Bean Goose was seen near Nigg on the 14th. A leucistic Starling turned up at Smithton on the 18th; the next day c200 Twite were at Rockfield and a Med Gull was in Broadford Bay. A Scandinavian Rock Pipit was reported from Ardgay on the 20th; two days later, a juv and a 1st W Iceland Gull were off Tarbat Ness. On the 23rd an Ivory Gull turned up at Uig, Skye and remained there until the year end. Muirtown pools had a Kingfisher on the 24th. On Christmas Day a Little Auk and Black Guillemot were on the sea between Cromarty and the South Sutor; further west, near Dingwall a Great Grey Shrike was seen. 3 Tundra Bean Geese were at Balnakeil on the 29th while on the 30th 11 Waxwings turned up at Fairways Golf Course. The last day of the year brought reports of an Eagle Owl at Inverness Airport; a 1st W Med Gull at the head of Loch Sligachan and – if accepted, a first record for Highland – a Marsh Tit at Grantown. What a finish to 2014!

Tailpiece

At this time of year, apart from getting down to submitting records for 2014, thoughts of some at least turn to what to do in the new year.

The March 2014 issue of *Scottish Birds* included an article on the re-colonisation of Angus by Nightjar. I found the account very interesting. At an SOC Council meeting in August the subject cropped up in conversation with a friend from Aberdeen. He informed me that a small group there had been searching suitable habitat in Deeside and elsewhere in the North-east, finding 15 or 16 calling males. The searching had of course to be done at dusk and had involved a considerable amount of time and effort to achieve this result.

So what about looking in Highland?

David Bain