

# **LOTHIAN BIRD BULLETIN**

The Newsletter of Lothian SOC



# **March 2003**



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**Cover Picture:** Greylag Geese and Whooper Swans at Fenton Barns, February 2003

**For all you need to know about birds and birding  
in the Lothians, visit.....**

## **LOTHIAN BIRDING**

**The Website of Lothian SOC—Lothian's Bird Club**

*Completely re-vamped for 2003!*

**[www.geocities.com/lothianbirding/](http://www.geocities.com/lothianbirding/)**

# Editor's Comment

**A very belated Happy New Year! It's hard to believe that it's March already – the Skylarks are singing, the first flowers are appearing and we've hardly had any rain for a month!**

**This is another important year for the SOC. If all goes well, work will start on building our new HQ at Aberlady – an exciting project with lots of new and innovative ideas to take the club forward .**

**As a branch, we approach the end of another session of indoor meetings at our new venue at Meadowbank. We've had a good selection of speakers, and full houses at most meetings. Our most important get-together, the AGM is almost upon us. It's your chance to have your say on how you think the branch is doing and what we should be aiming for in the future. As well as branch business, there will be a talk about the spread of the Buzzard, plus the annual quiz, which I can promise will be a little different from usual this year.....**

**So please give us your support and come along on 8<sup>th</sup> April.**

**To contact me (either as LBB editor or your representative on the Club's Regional Committee):**

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# The Lothian List

## **Part 2: Geese and Ducks**

This is the second part of an annotated checklist for all the species that have been recorded in the Lothians, currently totalling 342. It is aimed at providing a very general guide as to the status of these species in the area and thus your chances of seeing them!!

<b>Bean Goose</b>	Formerly common, now rare winter visitor. Recorded less than annually.
<b>Pink-footed Goose</b>	Abundant passage and winter visitor, with main roost in area at Aberlady Bay (22,000 in 2002).
<b>Greater White-fronted Goose</b>	Scarce winter visitor. Usually with Greylag or Pink-footed Geese.
<b>Greylag Goose</b>	Abundant winter visitor and feral breeder.
<b>Snow Goose</b>	Rare winter visitor. A blue-phase bird in Jan 2002 was first since 1990.
<b>Canada Goose</b>	Uncommon feral breeder. Moults migration through area in summer.
<b>Barnacle Goose</b>	Abundant passage and scarce winter visitor. Numbers peak in early Oct.



<b>Brent Goose</b>	Uncommon passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.
<b>Common Shelduck</b>	Common and widespread resident breeder in coastal areas.
<b>Mandarin Duck</b>	Rare visitor or escape.
<b>European Wigeon</b>	Common and widespread winter visitor. Occasional breeder.
<b>American Wigeon</b>	Very rare vagrant, usually seen in winter.
<b>Gadwall</b>	Uncommon passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.
<b>Eurasian Teal</b>	Common & widespread winter visitor. Scarce breeder.
<b>Green-winged Teal</b>	Very rare vagrant. Three records.
<b>Mallard</b>	Abundant and widespread resident and winter visitor.
<b>American Black Duck</b>	Very rare vagrant. One record of a long-staying bird 1985-86.
<b>Northern Pintail</b>	Uncommon passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.
<b>Garganey</b>	Scarce spring and autumn passage visitor.
<b>Blue-winged Teal</b>	Very rare vagrant. Two records.
<b>Northern Shoveler</b>	Uncommon spring and autumn passage visitor. A few winter.
<b>Red-crested Pochard</b>	Rare visitor. Origins uncertain.

**Common Pochard**  
**Ring-necked Duck**  
**Ferruginous Duck**  
**Tufted Duck**  
**Greater Scaup**  
**Common Eider**  
**King Eider**

Common winter visitor and scarce breeder.  
Very rare vagrant. Four winter/spring records; one in 2002.  
Very rare visitor. Origins uncertain.  
Common and widespread winter visitor.  
Uncommon spring and autumn passage visitor. A few winter  
Abundant coastal resident breeder.  
Very rare visitor. A female has appeared at Aberlady in spring  
1995-2002.



**Long-tailed Duck**  
**Common Scoter**  
**Surf Scoter**  
**Velvet Scoter**  
**Common Goldeneye**  
**Smew**  
**Red-breasted Merganser**  
  
**Goosander**  
**Ruddy Duck**

Common winter visitor to outer Forth.  
Common non-breeding resident - numbers peak in Mar-Apr.  
Scarce winter visitor. Recorded annually at Musselburgh.  
Common winter and passage visitor to outer Forth.  
Common winter visitor to coastal and inland waters.  
Rare winter visitor recorded less than annually.  
Common non-breeding resident - numbers peak in spring and  
autumn.  
Uncommon autumn and winter visitor. Occasionally breeds.  
Scarce summer visitor. Occasionally breeds.

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## **DEVELOPMENTS AT MUSSELBURGH LAGOONS**

A plan has recently been published proposing a large development at Musselburgh Lagoons, one of the Lothians', and Scotland's, most important roost sites for waders and terns. The plans include a new 9-hole Golf Course, an extension of the racecourse, a football academy and a centre for golf tourism. Oh, and there's a few bits for birds too.

The detailed plans are available for scrutiny at Brunton Hall in Musselburgh and on East Lothian Council's website. This could have huge implications for birds using this important site, part of which is included in the Firth of Forth Special protection area. If anyone has any comments to make regarding this development they should be sent as soon as possible to:

The Head of Planning, East Lothian Council, Council Buildings, Haddington, East Lothian

# THE LOTHIAN YEAR-LIST CHALLENGE

The 2002 Lothian Year-list Challenge was launched on the branch website with the idea to get as many folk as possible looking closely at birds in the Lothians, rather than dashing off on the latest twitch and to get those already doing so to "own up" and publish their year-list totals online.

If it was a good year, then someone might just get close to breaking Lothian's long-standing year-list record of 212. Running totals for each participant would be published on the website at the end of each month. While not meant as a competition, it was hoped that folk would try to reach their own targets. By my reckoning, there are about 155 species that you can see every year in the Lothians without too much effort and another 50 or so "tricky" species that are either relatively scarce visitors or are very restricted in range. If you are going for the record, that leaves you needing to see at least 8 species that are totally unexpected!

By the end of December, the time of reckoning had arrived. 2002 had been one of the best years for birding in the Lothians, with a total of 235 species recorded. How many of these would have been missed had it not been for the dedication (or some would say, obsessiveness) of some of our participants will never be known. Suffice to say that six people broke the 200 barrier, three had eclipsed the previous record, and a new mark of 220 had been set (or 219 if you don't count the slightly dubious Red-crested Pochard at Linlithgow Loch!).

All of us who took part enjoyed the challenge, I think. It required single-mindedness, patience, dedication, luck and the co-operation of fellow birders. We all went through that familiar range of emotions associated with birding – happiness, frustration, jealousy, boredom and occasionally, exhilaration. Some local birders, who despite their denials, always keep a year-list, kept their totals secret, but they kept tabs on the rest of us.

In 2003, there is a new challenge, again featured on the Lothian Birding website. To join in, all you need to do is contact me with your cumulative total at the end of each month. So if you have been out there loitering around the marshes of West Lothian trying to see a Jack Snipe, or freezing on some headland near Dunbar, trying to get a Little Auk for your year-list, maybe you should be taking part as well!

# Bird News: Dec 2002 - Feb 2003

DECEMBER was a fairly quiet month after a hectic year, although numbers of seaduck in the Forth were very high. A few small parties of **Brent Geese** were noted, with **Jack Snipe** and **Water Rail** seen occasionally at Aberlady. This site also held an impressive 7 **Short-eared Owls** on 21st. A **Ruddy Duck** at Whiteadder was unexpected, while at the end of the month an **Iceland Gull** and a **Water Pipit** at Barns Ness just made it on to some folks' year lists.

2003 began with pouring rain, with the few hardy souls who braved the elements on 1st & 2nd JANUARY being rewarded with **Mediterranean & Little Gulls** at Musselburgh, **Scaup & Brent Geese** at Aberlady and a **Black-throated Diver** in Gosford Bay. The **Water Pipit** at Barns Ness was still present on 4th, while a few **Blackcaps** were seen in gardens and the coastal Sea Buckthorn thickets in East Lothian. A few finch flocks were found, with 50 **Twite** and a few **Brambling** at Whiteadder with 8 of the latter at Carrington. Twite were also noted at Mountlothian, with 30 at Aberlady; two **Mealy Redpolls** were also seen here, with a small group of **Lesser Redpolls**. An immature **Greenland White-front** in the Silverknowes area lingered for several days. A mini-influx of **Waxwings** began on 9th, with small flocks in Edinburgh and Haddington, with the areas most consistent site for the species over the years, Clayknowes in Musselburgh coming up trumps with the largest flock of 49 on 13th. Small parties were still present in several areas by the end of the month. A pair of **Gadwall** and a drake **Mandarin** were good finds at Gladhouse, while a couple of wintering **Green Sandpipers** were noted at Bavelaw. Elsewhere inland, the occasional **Raven** was seen. Numbers of seaduck off Aberlady and Gullane were high throughout the month, with 1500 **Common Scoter** & 600 **Velvets**.

FEBRUARY began with the continued northerly winds bringing a large influx of **Little Auks** including over 700 in 1 hour at Barns Ness on 1st. Stragglers remained in the Forth for several days. Small parties of **Waxwings** were present for most of the month, particularly around Musselburgh. A large mixed flock of Swans & geese at Fenton Barns proved popular, with at least 100 **Whooper Swans**, 3000 **Pink-footed Geese** as well as single **European White-front**, **Barnacle** and **Brent**. More elusive was a group of **Bean Geese** and a **Black-necked Grebe** off Fernyness on 15th. A scattering of scarcer duck included **Scaup**, **Pintail** and **Gadwall** at various sites while **Snow Buntings** were also reported from a few coastal sites. An **Iceland Gull** put in a brief appearance at Cramond at the end of the month.



Large numbers of **Little Auks** were seen off coastal headlands in early February.

# Mystery Photo: No. 5

**Identify the species featured below. Answers in the next issue.**

Answer to Dec 2002 photo: **Kestrel** (by Ian Thomson)



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(All photos © Ian Thomson)  
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