

Lothian Bird Bulletin

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of Lothian SOC
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Editorial

Hot off the press, I've just heard that Nuthatches have successfully bred in Lothian for the first time this year - possibly at more than one site. Not entirely unexpected, but welcome news all the same. I wonder what species will be next? In early May, I was beginning to wonder if some of the city centre Waxwings had decided to stay in Edinburgh for the summer, but I'm sure this was never really likely to happen. Perhaps a better bet is Fieldfare, as one of two late individuals have been noted. Look carefully next time you see a young thrush!

Thanks very much to regular correspondent David Atkins for the account of his holiday in Lesvos, and to Graham Checkley for donating yet another picture for the cover. (If you have access to the internet, I'd strongly recommend a visit to Graham's Wildlife website: <http://www.pbase.com/grahamcheckley>.)

Please send me your articles for future issues of LBB. (If every Lothian SOC member writes a one-page article, I'll have enough material to last for over 10 years!)

Finally, a few words of advice: never work with children, animals, or computers. Especially computers. After 3 weeks of problems I narrowly resisted the urge to throw mine (computer, that is) out of the window. Fortunately I managed to complete this issue of LBB. I hope you enjoy it.

Stephen

News

Lothian Bird Race

Sadly Lothian SOC failed to put together a team for this year's Bird Race on 21st May, and so we were unable to extend our one year spell as champions. East Lothian Ranger Service won the race with 118 species seen or heard in 24 hours. Congratulations to Ian Thomson and the rest of the East Lothian Rangers...but we'll make sure it isn't so easy in 2006! (Looking on the bright side, LSOC did still finish in joint second place with the RSPB, who were also unable to find a team for the event. This was a better performance than our third-place result in 2003.)

Branch Meeting

The first LSOC branch meeting after the summer break will be at Meadowbank Stadium on Tuesday 13th September at 7pm. The first Discussion Group meeting will be a special event at Waterston House - the new SOC HQ - in Aberlady, on Wednesday 7th September. I hope you can join us at one or even both.

Swift Survey

Why not take part on the 2005 Edinburgh Swift Survey? See the Lothian SOC website for details.

Springtime on the Greek island of Lesvos

Do you fancy a week's guaranteed good birding, not too far away, blessed by lovely scenery and with a distinct lack of tourists? Then you should head for the island of Lesvos in springtime. Lesvos, the second largest Greek island after Crete, is situated in the northern Aegean Sea less than ten miles from the Turkish coast. It has become something of a birding Mecca in recent years, although remains largely unspoiled.

Jacky and I, first timers to Lesvos, teamed up with Colin and Ros who had visited the island several times before. We chose a week in late April/early May, right in the middle of the peak migration time. Lesvos is such a good place to be for birds because it is right on the spring migration route for many different species, and it is also about as far east as you can go in southern Europe, so is home to a number of species which normally only occur from Turkey eastwards.

Our base was in Skala Kalloni, a small village on the edge of a large almost-enclosed sea inlet, roughly in the centre of the island. The area immediately around the village contains several superb bird sites, including two rivers, a large but now overgrown pool (right opposite our hotel), a couple of interesting valleys and a huge area of salt pans. Several birding groups were on the island at the same time, mostly in Skala Kalloni, and the bush telegraph worked well – everyone was happy to share news and sightings, whether or not you happened to be in their tour party or not.

Species we found in and around Skala Kalloni included great white egret, little bittern, squacco heron, greater flamingo, glossy ibis (some 15 on the pool outside the hotel!), stone curlew, olivaceous warbler, Temminck's stint, tawny pipit, short-toed lark and white-winged black tern. We also picked up a terek sandpiper, a real rarity even for Lesvos. Corn buntings, reed warblers, Spanish sparrows, wood sandpipers and nightingales were everywhere, including one of the latter which seemed to sing all night and all day long in the grounds of the hotel! We eventually found the resident white pelican down by the harbour on our last morning.

We saw a long-legged buzzard in the Potamia Valley, while the nearby 'Hidden Lake' produced lots of whiskered terns and, literally, hundreds of terrapins of all sizes. Napi Valley to the other side of Skala Kalloni turned up orphean warbler and sombre tit for us. The Napi Valley visit ended with a once-in-a-lifetime experience of up to seven red-footed falcons flying into and out of a small dead tree quite close to where we had parked the car – magical!

From Skala Kalloni, we were also able to easily explore key areas and sites to the west, the north and to the south-east, each sector with its special variety of birds.

We went to the far west twice during the week. At Ipsilou Monastery we found pied wheatear, blue rock thrush and rock nuthatch sharing the same rock, little owl and our only sighting of one of Lesvos's star birds - cinereous bunting. A pair of charming Turkish (or were they Persian?) squirrels entertained us for a few minutes. This spot is known for its falls of warblers, but it was almost devoid of warblers on our visits.

The river near Sigri, on the west coast, is a real gem. Our two visits to the site produced Levant Sparrowhawk, pallid harrier, Montagu's harrier, thrush nightingale, roller, bee-eater, red-throated pipit, alpine swift, and three species of shrike.

Open countryside in the area produced Isabelline wheatear, black-eared wheatear and Cretzschmar's bunting, one of our favourite birds of the trip. From the long back road back to our base we added purple heron, chukar, collared flycatcher and short-toed eagle, amongst others, to our list.

Our one foray to the north, including the two main tourist towns of Petra and Molivos, provided Audouin's gull, middle-spotted woodpecker, black stork and another of the island's star birds – Ruppell's warbler.

We made two visits to the south-east: in the area known as 'Derbyshire' we found ruddy shelduck and that other star bird of Lesvos, Kruper's nuthatch – on the very dead tree trunk we had been directed to! Oh, and a rufous bush robin on the way back from here. Further on, beyond Agiassos and Mount Olympus, was a lovely region of deep, mixed woodland. Here we saw serin, subalpine warbler and even found our own pair of Kruper's nuthatches.

Space does not permit a list, but the wild flowers and butterflies were numerous, varied and very attractive.

Our grand total for the week was 135 bird species. Because this was my first-ever visit to the eastern Mediterranean, I amassed a staggering 21 lifers. Not bad for someone who has been birding in Europe for 20 or 30 years!

All in all, we had excellent birding on Lesvos, with a wonderful range of species on offer – although Colin thought it was a quiet week! It's an easy destination from the UK, and it's a lovely island to explore – as long as you hire a car. If you like fish, the food's great, and there are even some decent Greek wines to be found – but that's another story! We certainly hope to return to Lesvos before too long, and if you want a new European birding destination, I can thoroughly recommend a visit.

David Atkins, June 2005

A Weekend In Sutherland

On 1st April, four car loads of Lothian SOC members set out for a long weekend of birdwatching 'up north' in Sutherland.

We were to be based at Inchnadamph (about 30km north of Ullapool), with Ian Thomson as tour leader.

For the occupants of 'my' car, the first bird of interest was seen well before we reached our destination. At a site in Speyside we had stopped to view an Osprey nest, and when we arrived a parent bird was in residence. But this wasn't any old Osprey - it was a PINK Osprey. Perhaps due to an unusual diet in the bird's wintering grounds, the underparts and head were bright salmon pink instead of the usual white. Obviously a female! (When we returned on Sunday en route to Edinburgh, her normal-coloured partner was also present.)

After a further stop in Speyside, where we spotted a breeding plumage Slavonian Grebe, we continued north to our prearranged rendezvous at Munlochy in the Black Isle. Here we were treated to views of several Red Kites, before our little convoy headed west. After a brief stop in Ullapool to look for gulls (there weren't any) we continued to our hotel, stopping on the way to view a Peregrine. After unpacking, we ventured into the hills behind the hotel, but the thought of dinner and a pint of beer was too much for some of us, and we were soon heading back to the hotel.



Saturday morning, and the more restless members of the group took an early morning stroll around the hotel. Birdlife included a breeding plumage Black-throated Diver, and a pair of Greenshank skimming the surface of Loch Assynt in a perfectly synchronised display flight,.

After breakfast, we drove west to the village of Lochinver (where some very tasty pies were purchased), then further up the coast to the Stoer Lighthouse. On the way we had good views of Red- and Black-Throated Divers, but disappointingly there was little of interest at sea. There were no complaints about the scenery however.

In the afternoon we left the cars behind and embarked on a cross-country walk to the south of Ben More. Here we saw a displaying Golden Eagle, repeatedly plummeting towards the ground and then climbing again as if suspended on elastic.

Later two Crossbills were spotted close to the path - probably an adult female (left picture) and a duller immature bird (right picture). The female had a heavy bill that suggested Scottish Crossbill, but the bill of the younger bird looked even larger. After studying the photos, Ian has concluded that this was a Parrott Crossbill.



Sunday morning before breakfast I had a wander into the spectacular Inchnadamph NNR, only a short distance from the hotel. An enjoyable walk, but rather quiet in terms of wildlife. Perhaps we were a bit too early to catch many of the spring migrants. On my return I was able to watch a pair of Black-throated Divers from my bedroom window - not a facility offered by many hotels!

After breakfast we packed up and headed eastward. Birds sighted on the journey included two male Hen Harriers.

Back on the west coast, we stopped for lunch by Loch Fleet, a tidal basin to the north of Dornoch. After a while an Osprey was spotted over the inner section of the loch. After two trial runs we watched it plunge into the water and - accompanied by a cheer from the onlookers - emerge with a large fish. The perfect end to our Sutherland visit (but a very bad day for the fish).

Thanks to Ian Thomson for organising the trip, and to Colin Beckett for acting as chauffeur for the weekend.

Book Review

***On The Wing* by Alan Tennant**

This fascinating book tells of the attempts by the author and veteran pilot George Vose to follow radio-tagged *tundrius* Peregrine Falcons on their migration between the Arctic Circle and South America. It is a unique mixture of natural history and adventure. The 300 pages are crammed full of interesting detail – from the wildlife and history of the places visited, to the dangers of transcontinental travel in a clapped-out old plane, to advice on why you should never attempt to walk across Arctic tundra. I'd thoroughly recommend *On The Wing* if you're interested in Peregrines - or if you just enjoy an entertaining story.

Lothian SOC Outings

Sutherland Weekend, 1st-3rd April

An extended report is above.

Aberlady at Dawn, 8th May

Every spring a group of mad LSOC members meet at Aberlady reserve, at a ridiculous time of the morning, to listen to the dawn chorus. This year - worryingly - I found myself crawling out of bed at 3.15am on a chilly Sunday morning in order to join them. Still, our walk across the reserve did turn up an excellent selection of warblers. For a start, this was a rare opportunity to hear the Lesser Whitethroat's Chaffinch-like song. (Personally I don't think the usual "rattling" description is very helpful.) Even better, I got to see my first ever Grasshopper Warbler - an unusually obliging bird that reeled for several minutes in full view of the group.

At the end of our visit, we retired to the superb Craighielaw Golf Clubhouse for some well-deserved bacon butties and coffee. John Pringle, the LSOC bacon butty expert, declared the morning a great success...and I have to agree.

Braco Moor and Glen Lednock, Perthshire, 5th June

Keith Macgregor led this visit to the area around Comrie, and it turned out to be the most productive day trip we've had for some time. Our route took us north west from Braco village along the B827, then into the more mountainous area north of Comrie. The list of birds for the day was extremely impressive, and included 2 Ospreys, a ringtail Hen Harrier, a Raven, 3 Jays, a Cuckoo, 2 Short-eared Owls, a singing Snipe, Whinchats, a displaying Tree Pipit, 2 Peregrines, 2 singing Ring Ouzels, and a Golden Eagle! I look forward to Keith's next outing...

Coming Up...

24th Jul: Aberlady - Birds, Beasties, and Botany

21st Aug: Tynninghame

Contact Gillian Herbert on 0131 337 0767 for details.

(Note that the August visit to Pencaitland has been cancelled, as nobody could remember why we wanted to go there at that time of the year.)

Lothian Bird Sightings

MAY

At Aberlady, a **Curlew Sandpiper** on 1st; a **Little Stint** on 1st; a **Manx Shearwater** (east) on 4th; 2 **Arctic Skuas** (west) on 8th; a **Great Skua** (west) on 8th; a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 8th; a **Wood Warbler** on 12th; a **Quail** heard on 21st.

At *Barns Ness*, 4 **White Wagtails** on 1st; a **Grey-headed Yellow Wagtail** in 2nd; a male **Snow Bunting** from 22nd-26th.

At *Musselburgh*, a male **Surf Scoter** on 21st; a **Little Stint** on 21st; a pair of **Garganey** on 27th-28th; a **Black-throated Diver** on 27th; up to 3 first year **Little Gulls** from 28th; a **Lesser White-fronted Goose** on 29th; a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 29th.

At *Tynninghame*, 2 **Little Terns** on 6th; a probable ringtail **Montagu's Harrier** (south-west) on 12th; a pair of **Garganey** on 22nd; an **Osprey** (west) on 22nd, another present for 15+ mins on the same day.

In the *Lammermuirs*, a **Fieldfare** near *White Castle* (Garvald) on 4th.

In the *Pentlands*, a **Fieldfare** at *Loganlea* on 5th; 2 **Dotterels** on *Carnethy Hill* on 2nd; 2 **Ravens** on 14th; an **Osprey** fishing over *Bavelaw Marsh* on 14th

In *Edinburgh*, a **Lesser Whitethroat** in the *Braid Hills* on 4th. **Waxwings** were reported from Glenogle Road, Royal Circus Gardens, Fettes Row, Eyre Crescent, Goldenacre, Jamaica Street, Craighall Road, Victoria Park, Ferry Road/Chancelot Crescent, and The Meadows. The final sightings were on 10th at The Meadows, Fettes Row, and Glenogle Road.

In *West Lothian*, a **Grasshopper Warbler** at *River Almond Pools* on 13th.

In *Midlothian*, a **Wood Warbler** near *Hawthornden Castle* on 7th.

Around *East Lothian*, a **Cuckoo** at *Whiteadder* on 1st; a **Lesser Whitethroat** at *Yellowcraig* on 13th; a **Redwing** at *Balgone* main pond on 13th; a male **Surf Scoter** in *Gosford Bay* on 15th; a **Marsh Harrier** near *MacMerry* on 18th; an **Osprey** (west) over *Port Seton* on 22nd; a **Grasshopper Warbler** at *Gullane Point* on 24th; **Lesser Whitethroats** at *Seton Dean*, *Yellowcraig*, and *Berwick* on 24th; a male **Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail** between *Barns Ness* and *Skateraw* on 26th; a **Honey Buzzard** (west)

over *Dunbar* on 28th; a **Subalpine Warbler** at *White Sands Bay* on 28th; a **Red-footed Falcon** between *White Sands* and *Broxmouth* on 28th; a **Red-backed Shrike** at *Torness* on 28th.

APRIL

At *Aberlady*, a female **Merlin** on 6th; an **Osprey** (north) on 7th; a **Black-necked Grebe** on 9th; a **Little Tern** on 12th; a male **Mandarin Duck** on 14th; a **White Wagtail** on 17th; 27 **Snipe** on 20th; a **Great Skua** (W) on 23rd; a **Lesser Whitethroat** on 25th and 27th, 2+ on 30th; a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 27th, 2 on 30th; a **Greenshank** on 29th; a **Redstart** on 30th; a **Tree Pipit** (west) on 30th.

In the *Lammermuirs*, 5 **Ring Ouzels** at *Faseny* on 2nd.

At *Musselburgh*, a **Black-throated Diver** on 13th; a **Greenshank** on 14th and 27th; a 1st year **Mediterranean Gull** on 15th, 21st, and 30th; a **White Wagtail** on 21st; a **Green Sandpiper** on 22nd; a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 23rd; a **Tree Pipit** on 24th; a drake **Scaup** on 24th.

In the *Pentlands*, a **Brambling** near *Marchbank House* on 9th.

Around *East Lothian*, a **Nuthatch** at *Grange Road, North Berwick*, on 3rd; 7 **White Wagtails** between *Barns Ness* and *Skateraw* on 10th; a 1st winter *Mediterranean Gull* at *Port Seton* on 15th; a **Grasshopper Warbler** west of *Gullane Bents* on 16th; a first summer female **White Wagtail** at *Torness* on 21st; a **Ring Ouzel** at *Woodhall* on 23rd; a **Brambling** in *North Berwick* on 26th; a **Grasshopper Warbler** at *Crossgatehill* (Ormiston railway path) on 30th. **Waxwings** were reported from the A196/A1 junction at *Tranent* and *Tesco, Musselburgh*.

In *Edinburgh*, an adult male **Yellow Wagtail** (NE) at *Cramond* on 22nd. **Waxwings** were reported from *Mardale Crescent*, *Merchiston*; *Dean Village*, near *Hawthornbank Lane*; *Pinegrove Gardens*, *Barnton*; *Bruntsfield Links*; *Dean Terrace*, *Stockbridge*; *Fettes Row*; *Glenogle Road*.

In *Midlothian*, a **Nuthatch** at *Roslin* around 19th.

Around *West Lothian*, a **Water Rail** at *Bathgate Bog* on 4th; a **Jack Snipe** at *Ravencraig, Bathgate Hills* on 3rd; 250 **Kittiwakes** circling over *Forth Road Bridge* on 13th; 2 **Grasshopper Warblers** at the *River Almond Ponds* on 24th, 3 on 30th; 2 **Nuthatches** near *Armadales*; 4 **Tree Pipits** at *Tailend Moss* on 27th; a **Jack Snipe** at *Tailend Moss* on 27th. **Waxwings** were reported from *Dedridge*, *Livingston*; *Stoneyburn*; *St John's Hospital*, *Livingston*.

MARCH

At *Aberlady*, 2 **Shore Larks** on 2nd; a **Snow Bunting** on 17th; a **Jack Snipe** on 17th; a female/immature **Merlin** on 17th; 3 **Barnacle Geese** on 17th.

At *Duddingston Loch*, a drake **Smew** all month; a **Whooper Swan** on 22nd; a pair of **Ruddy Ducks** on 29th.

In the *Lammermuirs*, a **Raven** at Faseny on 19th; at least 3 (2m+1f) **Ring Ouzels** on 20th/21st; 8+ **Bramblings** at Mayshiel, near Whitadder on 21st.

At *Musselburgh*, 3 **Lapland Buntings** on 19th; a female **Merlin** on 19th; a drake **Gadwall** on 22nd; up to 5 (3m+2f) **Shovelers** from 22nd-26th.

In the *Pentlands*, a female **Crossbill** in *Harperrig/Colzium* area on 13th; 4 **Bramblings** in *Harperrig/Colzium* area on 13th.

At *Tynninghame*, 3 **Bramblings** on 2nd; 2 **Greenshanks** on 2nd; 2 **Shorelarks** from 5th-12th at least.

In *Edinburgh*, an adult **Mediterranean Gull** at *Eastfield* on 1st; an adult **Mediterranean Gull** at *Silverknowes* on 1st, and a different one there on 2nd; a 1st winter **Glaucous Gull** at *Cramond* on 25th; 2 **Greenshanks** at *Cramond* on 26th. **Waxwings** were reported from Bangholm Bower Avenue, Goldenacre; Asda, The Jewel; Sciennes Road.

In *West Lothian*, a 1st winter **Mediterranean Gull** at *South Queensferry* on 10th; a **Jack Snipe** in the *Bathgate Hills* (Ochiltree/Bridgend area) on 16th; 2 **Greenshanks** in the *Bathgate Hills* on 18th; a **Brambling** in *Blackridge* area on 20th; a **Greenshank** at *Blackness* on 24th. **Waxwings** were reported from St John's Hospital, Livingston; Howden Park Centre, Livingston; Stoneyburn Primary School.

In *Midlothian*, 50 **Bramblings** in *Gifford* area on 7th; 230 **Pied Wagtails** roosting in the *New Royal Infirmary* car park on 4th and 6th.

In *East Lothian*, at least 2 **Nuthatches** at *Smeaton* (East Linton) on 2nd and 6th, with 1 on 19th/20th and 22nd; a **Black Redstart** by the Seabird Centre, *North Berwick* until 7th at least; a **Black-necked Grebe** in *Gosford Bay* on 10th; 2 **Greenshanks** at *Belhaven* on 21st; a drake **Shoveler** at *Sheriffhall* (North Berwick) on 23rd; a **Great Grey Shrike** at *Barns Ness* wire dump on 30th and 31st; a male **Ring Ouzel** at *Torness* on 30th; 2 **Snow Buntings** at *Whitesands* on 31st; a **Nuthatch** at *Dunglass Dean* on 31st. **Waxwings** were reported from Dovecot Brae, Tranent; Haddington, opposite Jet service station; Tranent/Longniddry junction of A1; Milton Rd, Musselburgh; Kingston, nr North Berwick; Carberry Road, Musselburgh.

Thanks to Eleanor Hurley and everyone who contributed to these records.

Mystery Bird

Identify the species pictured below. (Another easy one - the next will be much harder.)
The answer will be published in the next issue, and on the LBB page of the LSOC website.



The last mystery bird was a Goldeneye, photographed at Duddingston.

