



# Lothian Bird Bulletin



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# Editorial

Welcome to another issue of the Lothian Bird Bulletin. This time I've taken the slightly risky decision to feature white birds on a white background on the cover. Please accept my apologies if all you can see is a trio of bills floating in mid-air. (I'd like to thank the Linlithgow Swans for posing for the picture, as none of the other birds I tried to photograph seemed very keen to appear in the LBB.)

The main article in this edition is John Law's excellent account of his trip to Iceland earlier in the year. Thanks very much John - it's good to have a new name on the credits. I hope my rather basic sketch map is okay, and all the sites are in the right place!

*Stephen*

## News

### **Musselburgh Lagoons**

Birdwatchers will have to wait to find out the fate of Levenhall Links, after registering their opposition to East Lothian Council's plans to develop the area adjacent to the lagoons. The latest proposals involve the extension and upgrading of Musselburgh racecourse into a floodlit all weather facility. Details can be found on the ELC website at <http://www.planning.eastlothian.gov.uk/WAM/search/pas/index.htm> (search for Application No 05/00661/FUL). The "Hands Off Our Links" campaign has a website at <http://www.hool.org.uk>. Note that the deadline for objections has now passed.

### **Dalkeith Bypass**

A significant area of Dalkeith Country Park is under threat following the decision of the Scottish Executive to approve the construction of a Dalkeith bypass. Building is due to start next summer. Local residents are fighting the decision. More information can be found at [www.save-dalkeith-park.org.uk](http://www.save-dalkeith-park.org.uk).

### **Branch Meetings**

Just a quick reminder that branch and discussion group meetings have both restarted after the summer break. Branch meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month, 7.30pm, at Meadowbank Stadium. The Discussion Group meets on the first Wednesday of each month, 7.30pm, at Newhailes House, Musselburgh.

## Lothian Bird Report

Copies of the current (2003) report are still available from Charles Frank, Rose Street, Edinburgh for £7.50, or we can post a copy to you: send a cheque for £8.80 (inc p&p), made payable to *SOC Lothian Branch*, to  
*John Hamilton, 30 Swanston Gardens, Edinburgh, EH10 7DL*



### Waterston House

I can thoroughly recommend a visit to the new SOC headquarters at Aberlady, which should very soon be open to SOC members. (Please check with staff at HQ before setting out - contact details are on page 2.)

## A Drive Round Iceland - With a Few Walks

This is being written in response to the editor's cri de coeur for material; as an editor myself I know how he feels, and how little response he may get.

We were on holiday in Iceland from June 16-30 '05. It was not a birdwatching holiday and birds were not the top priority, but a good second. We did not have a 'scope but we scarcely went out of doors without our binoculars. The package included flights from Glasgow (2 hours), car hire, hotel bookings, and a suggested itinerary which took us all around the country by "Route 1" (900 miles), plus various extra branches, some quite long, a total of 1500 miles.

Birdwatching in Iceland, at least in the breeding season, is much simpler than in Scotland. Only about 60 species are normally present in any numbers or at more than a single site. All terns are Arctic, all swans are Whoopers, all thrushes are Redwings, all corvids are Ravens, all curlews are Whimbrels, there are no warblers, the only finch is the Redpoll, and the only other LBJs are the Meadow Pipit and the Wren. Others may turn up as vagrants - we even saw one or two ourselves. For some this may mean boredom, but for others it will come as welcome relief. The commonest bird is probably the Redwing, which gets everywhere. It is the dominant songster with a confusing variety of phrases. Redshank, Snipe, and Arctic Tern are widespread and abundant. Golden Plover are very common right down to sea level, as is the vegetation we associate with it on Scottish hills. Other birds frequently seen included Fulmar, Whooper, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Red-necked Phalarope, the more common gulls (BH, GBB, LBB), Pied Wagtails and Wheatear.

We had four sightings of Red-throated Diver and at least eight of Great Northern, two of these from the car on Route 1. Black-throated Diver does not occur. Slavonian Grebe were seen at several spots around Myvatn. This lake lived up to its reputation both for ducks and insects, with fair numbers of Tufted, Scaup, Wigeon, Mallard (not the commonest for once), Teal, Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-tailed, Red Breasted Merganser,

Harlequin, and Greylag. Harlequin turned up elsewhere as well and liked fast-flowing rivers. The only other goose we saw was Pinkfoot. A party of four walked up a steep bank of the widespread black gravel close to Route 1, appearing a warm brown in comparison with their background and with very pink feet. Beside them walked a large bundle of golden fluff, probably 6 to 8 young.

Of seabirds, Fulmar are widespread, Kittiwake are numerous, and Puffins were found in modest numbers at a good many places. Eiders were also common, with several large rafts of 1000+ males on the south coast. We did not get to many seabird colonies on cliffs, and when we did we could have done with a 'scope. We saw only a few Shags, Razorbills and Guillemots, one of which could have been a Brunnich's. Glaucous Gulls were seen several times from the road on the north side of the Snaefellsnes peninsula, Herring Gull at only a few south coast spots, and Common Gull only at Akureyri, again from the road. Dunlin were sighted occasionally on the coast, Whimbrel and Black-tailed Godwit were seen several times, two parties of 16 and 22 of the latter being seen from Route 1. We saw one party of Grey Phalarope, perhaps non-breeders; Icelanders are now very secretive regarding sites for this species. Arctic Skuas were not uncommon but Bonxies were fewer, all near the south coast.



Redpolls were heard and seen several times, always in the very few wooded areas, which are largely birch and conifers. Contrary to common belief these trees do now grow above a man's height. Goldcrest are said to have colonised them since '95 but we saw none. Wrens are said to be widespread and not uncommon, but in two weeks I thought I heard three and saw none. But their songs could have been obscured by all the Redwings. Starlings, formerly present only in SE Iceland, have now adopted Reykjavik instead, as

have town pigeons, which accompany the Scaup, Whoopers and Arctic Terns at the city centre lakes. Male Snow Buntings were seen twice very close to Route 1, in one case feeding a young one in the car park.

Sadly we saw no raptors or owls. The only species are Merlin, Gyr Falcon, and Short-eared Owl. No Snowy Owl nests have been found for several years. Goosander is another species now very scarce (we saw none), though Red-breasted Mergansers are quite plentiful. We did hear and then saw several Ptarmigan, all on low level, well vegetated lava fields.

Arctic Terns attended us as usual near their colonies, but the boldest bird was a Redwing which repeatedly flew at my head one evening at Myvatn.

As for vagrants, our best sighting in Icelandic terms was a Wood Pigeon, squatting on a side road in front of the car at Skaftafell on a cloudy evening. Officially this is described as "passage migrant - has bred". I also suspected a possible House Martin.

At least two areas, one close to Myvatn and the other at Dyrholaey on the south coast, have restricted access in the breeding season, but we only found one "Bird Reserve". This was on flat grassy ground at Eyrarbakki, near the coast south of Selfoss. There was no signpost but we'd seen it on a local map. A farm track led in 2km to a "scrape" for a carpark, where trails were marked only by very short posts, barely visible from one to the next with binoculars, and no path at all. If ever some RSPB or SWT duckboarding was needed it was here - the grass was quite long and very wet. But with Red-throated and Great Northern Divers on adjacent pools and a Black-tailed Godwit flying around, who could complain.

Despite the distances, once out of the Reykjavik suburbs, which do go on a bit, it was the most relaxing driving I can recall. Traffic is very light, apart from weekends returning to the capital on Sunday evenings. Most of Route 1 is tarmac, as are numbers of other stretches, and dirt roads are mostly fine at (say) 30 to 40 mph, the road to Dettifoss being a notable exception. Excellent English is very widely spoken. Meals are about double our prices, but VISA and other cards are accepted everywhere.

We enjoyed Iceland very much and warmly recommend it. We hope to return.

*John Law, August 2005*

# Mammals in Lothian

Forgive me for digressing, but I was surprised recently to find out that Lothian has a Mammal Recorder as well as a Bird Recorder. The Mammal Society operates a network of county recorders who collect records from around the country. Records of Red Squirrel, Otter, Water Vole, and Badger are of particular interest, but all records (what, where, when, and who) are appreciated.

More information - including a form for submitting records - can be found on the Mammal Society website at [www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal). Note however that Peter Reynolds has recently stepped down as recorder for Lothian. Until a permanent replacement is found, records can be sent to

Bob Saville  
Lothian Wildlife Information Centre  
Caretaker's Cottage,  
Vogrie House  
Vogrie Country Park  
Nr. Gorebridge  
Midlothian  
EH23 4NU  
([info@lothianwildlife.co.uk](mailto:info@lothianwildlife.co.uk))

Thanks to Liz Barclay for providing the above information.

## Charles Frank



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# Lothian SOC Outings

## Aberlady, 24th July

This was the annual *Birds, Beasties, and Botany* visit to the reserve at Aberlady. Sadly my knowledge of the last two hasn't improved since last year, so I won't attempt to list our sightings. Suffice to say that Aberlady is an important site for rare plants and insects, and there was an impressive selection identified on the day by those in the know. Bird-wise things were fairly quiet, with a lone Greenshank and an early appearance by a Long-tailed Duck.

## Tynninghame, 21st August

Sunday morning, and far fewer members than expected had assembled at the Tynninghame Links car park. And where was tour leader Ian Thomson? Perhaps he'd found an exciting rarity somewhere en route. Fortunately we managed to extract his mobile phone number from a passing East Lothian ranger.

"Where are you Ian? We've been waiting for 30 minutes at Tynninghame Links."

"No you haven't - you're at the East Links."

Oops. We hastily reassembled at the real Tynninghame Links and began our walk around the bay.

The advance party had already recorded Greenshank and Jay, and to that we added a respectable list of species including Sparrowhawk, Whimbrel, Peregrine, and Kingfisher. (I don't think the Snow Goose really counted.) Moving round to the other side of the bay, we added Grey and Golden Plover, and an impressive count of 74 Goosanders.

Rather inconsiderately, the Buff-breasted and Pectoral Sandpipers didn't turn up until later in the week.

## Coming Up...

- 9th Oct: East Coast Migrants
- Nov (date TBC): Weekend trip to Dumfries & Galloway
- 11th Dec: Christmas Lunch at Aberlady

Contact Gillian Herbert on 0131 337 0767 for details.



# Lothian Bird Sightings

## AUGUST

At *Aberlady*, up to 2 **Whimbrel**; a juvenile **Little Ringed Plover** on 22nd-23rd and 31st; a juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** on 23rd; male **Ruff** on 23rd and 1 on 29th; 2 **Arctic Skuas** on 25th; 155+ **Ringed Plovers** on 29th; a juvenile **Marsh Harrier** overhead on 31st.

At *Barns Ness*, up to 3 **Whimbrels**; 9 **Manx Shearwaters** (north) on 7th, 6 on 13th, 5 (4 north and 1 south) on 14th, 13 (12 north and 1 south) on 19th; a **Sabine's Gull** on 13th; a **Cory's Shearwater** on 13th; 2 **Black Terns** on 13th; a **Long-tailed Skua** on 13th and 14th; 15 **Arctic Skuas** on 13th, and 8 (south in 3 hrs) on 14th; 3 **Great Skuas** on 13th, 3 (north) on 14th, and 2 on 20th; 3 **Sooty Shearwaters** on 13th, 2 (north) on 14th, 1 on 19th; 5 **Whimbrels** on 14th; a **Reed Warbler** from 19th-20th.

At *Cramond*, all on the 31st, a **Great Shearwater** (east) off **Cramond Island**; 7 **Arctic Skua** (west); 4 **Great Skuas** (west); 33 **Manx Shearwaters** (mostly east); 2 **Greenshanks**; a **Ruff**; 7 **Curlew Sandpipers**.

At *Musselburgh*, a juvenile **Little Ringed Plover** (pictured) on 2nd-6th; up to 13 **Ruff**; up to



11 **Black-tailed Godwits**; 2 **Black-throated Divers** all month; a juvenile **Mediterranean Gull** on 2nd; up to 22 **Whimbrels**; an adult **Pomarine Skua** (west) on 7th; 2 adults and a juvenile **Roseate Tern** on 8th; 1-2 **Greenshanks** on several dates; a peak count of 83 **Snipe** (passing through on 18th); an **Osprey** (south) on 17th; a juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** on 23rd; 2 (adult + juvenile) **Red-necked Grebes** on 20th and 30th, and 1 on 23rd; a **Spotted Redshank** on 31st; 11 **Curlew Sandpipers** on 31st.

In the *Pentlands*, 2 **Greenshanks** at *Bavelaw* on 4th; 2 **Crossbills** at *Harperrig* on 4th; 11 **Crossbills** at *Camilty* on 11th; 3 **Ravens** on 10th; an **Osprey** at *Gladhouse* on 27th.

At *Tynninghame/Belhaven*, up to 11 **Greenshanks**; an **Osprey** (south) over Seafeld Pond on 5th; up to 74 **Goosanders**; 8 **Black-tailed Godwits** on 17th; up to 5 **Jays** on 21st; a **Pectoral Sandpiper** from 24th-25th; a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** from 25th-29th; a **Little Stint** on 27th-28th; an adult **Mediterranean Gull** on 27th and 31st, with 2 on 28th; a juvenile **Spotted Redshank** on 28th; a **Curlew Sandpiper** on 28th; 2 **Quails** on 28th; a **Ruff** on 28th.

In *Edinburgh*, 3 **Whimbrels** at *Hound Point* on 20th.

In *Midlothian*, a **Swift** over *Gorebridge* on 31st.

In *East Lothian*, up to 22 **Red-necked Grebes** in *Gosford Bay*; an adult **Sabine's Gull** (pictured) at *Seafield* on 12th and 13th; a **Greenshank** at *Port Edgar* on 15th; a **Marsh**



**Harrier** (south) over *Seton Mains*, **Longniddry** on 21st; a juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** in *Whitesands Bay* on 27th; 2 **Yellow Wagtails** at *Skateraw* on 28th; an adult **Little Gull** in *Gosford Bay* on 31st.

In *West Lothian*, 16 **Crossbills** at *Beecraigs Loch*; 3 **Black-tailed Godwits** at *Blackness* on 4th; a **Green Sandpiper** on *River Almond Pools* on 7th; a **Cuckoo** over *Broxburn* on 14th; a **Green Sandpiper** at *Bathgate Bog* on 7th.

## JULY

At *Aberlady*, 13 **Crossbills** over *Craighielaw* on 5th; 15 over *Waterston House* on 14th; 24 (south-west) on 18th; a **Manx Shearwater** (west) on 7th; an adult **Mediterranean Gull** on 10th; up to 11 **Black-tailed Godwits**; an adult **Black-throated Diver** on 17th.

At *Barns Ness*, a **Balearic Shearwater** (south) on 17th; a **Yellow Wagtail** on 17th; 66 **Manx Shearwaters** (in 3 hrs) on 25th; 9 on 31st; a **Storm Petrel** (north) on 31st.

At *Cramond*, a **Greenshank** on 10th and 20th; 7 **Crossbills** on 12th; 20+ on 20th; 12 **Common Sandpipers** on 20th; 5 **Manx Shearwaters** (east) on 20th.

At *Joppa*, a **Great Northern Diver** on 10th; 13 **Manx Shearwater** (west) on 10th; 5 (east) on 23rd; 12 **Crossbills** (west) on 23rd

In the *Lammermuirs*, 20 **Crossbills** in *Hopes Valley* on 2nd; 2 on 13th; 8 **Jays** in *Hopes Valley* on 13th.

At *Musselburgh*, up to 2 first summer **Little Gulls** 1st-4th; a **Greenshank** on 1st-2nd; up to 2 **Ruff**; up to 11 **Common Sandpipers**; up to 38 **Black-tailed Godwits**; a **Temminck's Stint** on 5th; 2 **Black-throated Divers** offshore from 9th; a **Red-necked Grebe** on 10th; 2 **Manx Shearwaters** (east) on 14th; 4 on 23rd; 5 **Crossbills** (south-west) on 16th; 2 on 17th; 9 (west) on 21st.

In the *Pentlands*, 7 **Crossbills** at *Harlaw Reservoir* on 15th.

At *Torness*, 22 **Manx Shearwaters** (in 2.5 hrs, mostly north) on 24th; 12 on 31st; an adult **Mediterranean Gull** on 24th and 31st; juvenile on 31st; a first summer **Little Gull** on 31st.

At *Tynninghame*, a **Green Sandpiper** on 10th; up to 7 **Greenshanks**.

In *Edinburgh*, a **Green Sandpiper** at *Duddingston Loch* on 24th.

In *Midlothian*, 3 **Jays** in *Roslin Glen* on 16th.

In *East Lothian*, a **Quail** calling near *Pencaitland* on 1st; a **Quail** calling near *Longniddry* on a number of dates; at least 1 **Quail** near *Gifford* on 9th and 10th; 2 **Quails** calling near *North Berwick* on 18th and 19th; up to 31 **Red-necked Grebes** in *Gosford Bay*, several **Crossbills** at *Yellowcraigs* on 17th; 5 **Crossbills** at *Gullane* on 31st; 2 adult **Black-throated Divers** in *Gosford Bay* on 31st; a **Storm Petrel** past *Scoughall* on 31st.

In *West Lothian*, a **Green Sandpiper** on *Bathgate Bog* on 16th; 3 **Water Rails** on *Bathgate Bog* on 16th; 5 **Roseate Terns** at *Port Edgar* on 23rd; a **Green Sandpiper** on *River Almond Pools* on 31st.

## JUNE

At *Aberlady*, a **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** on 1st; an **Osprey** (north-west) over the bay on 17th; a **Marsh Harrier** on 20th.

At *Cramond*, a **Long-tailed Skua** (west) on 21st; a 1st-summer **Mediterranean Gull** on 21st and 23rd; an **Osprey** on 22nd; a **Greenshank** on 22nd and 23rd; 25 **Crossbills** (west) on 23rd.

At *Musselburgh*, a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 2nd; up to 4 **Little Gulls** (mostly 1st-year) throughout the month; a **Quail** on 3rd and 5th; a **Water Rail** on 12th; an adult **Curlew Sandpiper** from 18th-21st; a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 19th; a **Green Sandpiper** on 21st; a **Greenshank** on 5th, and from 25th; 2 male **Ruffs** on 28th.

In the *Pentlands*, 7 **Crossbills** at *Harlaw Reservoir* on 21st.

At *Tynninghame*, a drake **Pintail** on 17th; a **Greenshank** on 17th.

In *Edinburgh*, an **Alpine Swift** with Common Swifts over *St Patrick's Square*; a **Red Kite** over *Holyrood Park* on 15th.

In *Midlothian*, a **Yellow Wagtail** near *Gifford* on 3rd; 2 **Nuthatches** (one probably a juvenile) in *Roslin Glen* on 18th.

In *East Lothian*, a **Barn Owl** near *North Berwick* on 6th; 2 **Red-necked Grebes** in *Gosford Bay* on 17th; a **Quail** calling near *Whitekirk* on 19th; 3 **Quails** calling near *Longniddry* from 19th; a **Quail** calling near *North Berwick* on 19th; 2 **Quails** calling east of *Dalkeith* on 28th; a **Barn Owl** at *Gullane* on 19th; a **Marsh Harrier** at *Blindwells* on 22nd.

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

# Mystery Bird

Identify the two species pictured below. The answers will be published in the next issue, and on the LBB page of the LSOC website.



The last mystery bird was a Shelduck, photographed at Musselburgh.