

# **Lothian Bird Bulletin**



**Newsletter of the Lothian SOC Branch  
2008: No. 1**

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## 1 Happy New Year

Let me start the first issue of 2008 by wishing you all a Happy New Year!

I started off my bird watching year on a good foot, 7 waxwings on St John's Road. Since then I have been out and about trying to spot some more elusive species.

A few days ago I was down in Dumfries and Galloway and I saw my first Yellowhammers, Teals, Northern Shovelers, Whoppers, Barnacle Geese. However, the best was yet to come. At 5.30pm, from a very cold and busy service station just outside Gretna I watched the starlings swarming. It was amazing, it took my breath away, the structure and number of birds. I would recommend it to anyone.

In this issue I have an update on the bird species list, an article about raptor poisoning and AGM information.

In the middle of January I picked up my copy of *Birds of Scotland* and I was very impressed with the publication. It is packed with lots of information that bird watchers of all ages can use. I would recommend it if you haven't already bought your copy. I will review it in a later issue.

I hope you enjoy this issue and please continue to send me your articles.

Julie

## 2 Birds of Scotland

The publication was the subject of a motion in the Scottish Parliament on 17th January:

"That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *The Birds of Scotland*, the definitive two-volume work on Scottish birds, which has been drawn up over five years under the auspices of the Scottish Ornithologists Club (SOC) with the support of a range of organisations and individuals including Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the Forestry Commission and the RSPB; commends the work of all its editors, authors and illustrators; recognises that the million words in the two volumes of the work represent an extraordinary achievement which will contribute greatly to national and international knowledge; is pleased that Scotland leads the world in studying its own bird life and its own environment with a view to ensuring sustainability and a healthy biodiversity, and express its gratitude to the SOC for the copy of the book which it presented to the Minister for Environment at the books launch on 9 January 2008 in the Royal Museum of Scotland with the request that it be placed in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre."

### 3 Volunteering at Waterston House

If you have some time to spare and would like to help out at SOC HQ, there are many ways you can get involved; from greeting visitors and helping in the library to odd DIY jobs and assisting with the myriad of general office tasks.

Guaranteed warm welcome, refreshments and stunning views of Aberlady Bay!

For more information, please contact Wendy on 01875 871330

### 4 Annual Book Sale

Saturday 10th May 10am – 4pm.

Visitors to the SOC's annual book fair find a treasure trove of second-hand natural history books and journals as well as titles covering more general interest areas such as travel and topography. In addition to SOC stock, a number of guest specialist book dealers are present.

### 5 Lothian Branch AGM

Tuesday 8th April 2008 at 7:30 pm. Meadowbank Sports Stadium, 139 London Road, Edinburgh.

The SOC's Constitution requires that nominations for any vacancy on a branch committee must be received by the branch secretary not later than one week before the AGM of the branch. In view of this tight deadline, it is not possible to incorporate a detailed Agenda for the AGM in Lothian Bird Bulletin, so please accept this reminder as Notice of the AGM. A detailed Agenda will be available at the AGM.

Under the Constitution, branch committee members hold office for three years and are then eligible for re-election. The branch committee members retiring this year are Jacky Robinson, Chairperson, and Colin Beckett, Indoor Meetings Organiser. Both these committee members intend to offer themselves for re-election.

But do not let that put you off. The Branch needs new blood on the Committee from time to time. So if you have appropriate skills, you may wish to consider joining the Branch Committee. If so, please speak to any present Committee Member who will be pleased to assist.

Each year the Branch elects a representative to SOC Council. Last year, your representative was John Hamilton, who intends to offer himself for re-election.

Finally, I would like to encourage all Lothian members to come along to "your AGM" and help influence Branch and Club matters by expressing your opinion and voting.

John Hamilton  
Branch Secretary

## 6 Dealing With Wildlife Crime, and How You Can Help

In 2006, there were 42 confirmed cases of bird of prey poisoning in Scotland. 2007 saw 12 Red Kites poisoned. In addition, 2007 saw a further 51 reports of bird of prey persecution in Scotland: nest destruction, shooting and trapping.

But it's not just birds of prey that are affected by wildlife crime. The RSPB report "Birdcrime 2006" outlines some of the 1109 incidents reported to the Investigations team throughout the UK during that year. This includes nest robberies, taxidermy offences, disturbance, finch-trapping and a host of other offences. In 2006, RSPB assisted in 62 prosecutions, of which 55 were successful. Fines for the year totalled £26,650 and there were 5 custodial sentences.

### The RSPB Scotland Investigations Team:

Carries out fieldwork to collect evidence of crime against wild birds and identify the perpetrators. Receives wildlife crime reports from RSPB staff, other fieldworkers and members of the public.

Provides expert assistance and support to police, Scottish Government officials, SSPCA and other authorities in assisting the detection and prosecution of offenders. Maintenance of up-to-date database of confirmed, probable and possible wildlife crime incidents. Dissemination of information to RSPB colleagues, police, other statutory authorities and the media.  
Please help us to continue this work.

What to do if you find, see or hear about an incident.

Please record as much information as possible, but particularly:

- What is the incident?  
e.g. A dead Buzzard has been found — try to give an exact description of what was seen or heard.
- Where was the incident?  
4 or 6 figure Grid Reference/site description — imagine trying to find a site you've never been to.
- When was the incident?  
Date (or range of dates e.g. 1–10th May 2007) and if possible, time.
- Your details:  
Your contact details will be held confidentially or recorded as anonymous if you wish. Please also let us know if you are happy for us to keep your details on our database? Are you happy for us to call back? Are you happy for us to pass on your details to the police?
- Can you tell us about any suspect/s?  
Who was it? Name? Male/female, age, description, vehicle reg no./make/colour.
- Did you get any photos?  
If yes, can you email them to us?
- Have the police been informed?  
Can you let us know the name of the officer/police station dealing with the case.
- Lastly, don't touch anything - this may be a crime scene and may involve very toxic chemicals!

**PLEASE TREAT ANY INFORMATION AS CONFIDENTIAL AND FORWARD TO THE INVESTIGATIONS TEAM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

We would like to hear about all incidents involving:

- Nest destruction or disturbance (maybe a suspicious nest failure, probable or possible persecution).

- Dead things (especially Birds of Prey, particularly if circumstances are unusual i.e. not a road kill or collision).
- Crow cage traps or Larsen Traps (particularly if there is any doubt about legal use or welfare of captive birds).
- Spring traps (if they are being used in the open or on a post).
- Baits (any dead animals, birds or eggs found in unusual sites or circumstances) .
- Rumours and Gossip! Anything you hear that sounds a bit dodgy, who's new 'in town' etc!

## IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE INVESTIGATIONS TEAM

Bob Elliot - 0131 311 6515 or 07769 687758. *Email: Bob.Elliot@rspb.org.uk*

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Elsie Ashworth - 0131 311 6556 or 07803 955204. *Email: Elsie.Ashworth@rspb.org.uk*

## Please help us to eradicate bird of prey persecution!

For further information, also see:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/wildbirdslaw/index.asp>

## 7 Lothian Bird Records

As most of you will be aware, for species considered rare at a local level to appear in the Lothian Bird Report, they have to be assessed by the Lothian Bird Records Committee (LBRC). The list of species the Committee considers has undergone some minor revisions in recent years e.g. the removal of Mediterranean Gull and Nuthatch and addition of some species dropped by Scottish Birds Records Committee. However it has long been realised that a more thorough review was required, not only to reflect the changing status of some species locally, but also in recognition of recent taxonomic changes. To this end, the Committee met recently and reached a number of conclusions.

The Committee felt that a more statistical approach was required to determine those species considered as opposed to the current somewhat 'ad hoc' species list. Analysis of the data produced some interesting results, and the Committee decided that the list should comprise of all species with an average of three records or less in the most recent five-year period for which data was available i.e. 2001-05. This is broadly in line with a number of other local records committees in the UK.

As a result, the following species will no longer be considered by the Committee as of Jan 2008:

- Greater White-fronted Goose
- Roseate Tern

Written details should be submitted for the following species/sub-species:

- Bewick's Swan
- Bean Goose
- Snow Goose
- Mandarin Duck
- American Wigeon
- Green-winged Teal
- Garganey (not adult males or pairs)
- Red-crested Pochard
- Ring-necked Duck
- Surf Scoter (not adult males)
- Black Grouse
- Black-necked Grebe

- Balearic Shearwater
- European Storm-petrel
- Leach's Storm-petrel
- Great Bittern
- Little Egret
- White Stork
- Eurasian Spoonbill
- Red Kite
- Northern Goshawk
- European Honey-buzzard
- White-tailed Eagle
- Golden Eagle
- Eurasian Hobby
- Common Quail (sight records)
- Corn Crake
- Spotted Crake
- Common Crane
- Avocet
- Little Plover
- Eurasian Dotterel
- Temminck's Stint
- Pectoral Sandpiper
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper
- Grey Phalarope
- Red-necked Phalarope
- Long-tailed Skua (juveniles only)
- Sabine's Gull
- Iceland Gull
- Glaucous Gull
- Little Owl
- European Nightjar
- Black Guillemot
- Turtle Dove
- European Bee-eater
- Hoopoe
- Eurasian Wryneck
- Horned (Shore) lark
- Richard's Pipit
- Yellow Wagtail (except British race *flavissima*)
- Bluethroat
- Eurasian Reed Warbler
- Icterine Warbler
- Barred Warbler
- Wood Warbler (non-singing birds only)
- Yellow-browed Warbler
- Pallas's Leaf Warbler
- Firecrest
- Red-breasted Flycatcher
- Bearded Tit
- Willow Tit
- Marsh Tit
- Red-backed Shrike
- Great Grey Shrike
- Hooded Crow
- Rosy Starling
- Eurasian Golden Oriole
- Common Redpoll
- Hawfinch
- Common Rosefinch
- Corn Bunting

Unfortunately, it is a sad reflection on the status of some previously regular species in Lothian that they now appear on this list. It is vital therefore that we document properly all records of these species so that their true status can be accurately recorded. To this end, the Committee would urge all observers to submit descriptions for those species considered. These need not necessarily be lengthy and detailed, feather-by-feather accounts - a few lines outlining the main features seen will

normally be sufficient for acceptance. Photographs often make the assessment of records significantly easier and are welcomed, with or without accompanying notes, depending on their quality. It is the intention of the Committee that further reviews will take place at five-yearly intervals to keep abreast of both changes in species' status as well as possible future taxonomic changes.

A full list of those species considered by LBRC will soon be available on the SOC website at: <http://www.the-soc.org.uk/lothian-branch.htm>

The preferred method of description submission is via email to the Secretary, Brendan Doe. Electronic copies of forms for submission are available from him and are also available at the SOC website <http://www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm>. The Committee will also endeavour to assess those records where photographs appear on websites such as the SOC and Birdguides, but have not been submitted directly. Such records will therefore not be 'lost' and will then appear in the Lothian Bird Report (subject to acceptance). In such circumstances however, the record will be credited as e.g. 'per Birdguides.com', i.e. the finder will not be acknowledged.

It is hoped that these changes will help reflect more accurately the current status of those locally rare and scarce species in Lothian, as well as making the workings of the Committee more transparent.

We look forward to receiving your submissions in the near future!

The Lothian Bird Records Committee comprising of B. G. Doe (Secretary), A. Brown, C. N. Davison, K. Gillon, M. Griffin and M. Wilkinson will consider local rarities. The Scottish Birds Records Committee will consider Scottish rarities (details on the SOC website) and the 'British Birds' Rarities Committee will consider national rarities. Occasionally, the Recorder may request notes for species or sub-species not appearing on this list, when they occur outside their normal range or on unusual dates.

## 8 The 36th Report of the BOU Records Committee

The BOU Record Committees (BOURC) 36th Report has recently been published in the BOUs journal *Ibis* <sup>1</sup>. The full report can viewed online at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1474-919X.2007.00792.x>

The 36th Report covers the period April to October 2007 and is the third report to follow publication of the most recent checklist: The British List: A Checklist of Birds of Britain (7th edition) that appeared in *Ibis* **148**: 526-563. The 35th Report appeared in *Ibis* **149**: 652-654.

The report includes the following items -

- Changes to the British List
- Wilsons Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
- Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*
- Allens Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni*
- Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica*
- Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
- Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*
- Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes*
- taxonomic sequence of shanks
- Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

<sup>1</sup>British Ornithologists Union. 2008. *Ibis* **150**: 218-220



- American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*
- Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*
- Bonapartes Gull *Chroicocephalus Philadelphia*
- Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
- Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutes*
- taxonomic sequence of gulls
- Long-billed Murrelet *Brachyramphus perdix*
- Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*
- Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*
- Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*
- Willow Tit *Poecile montana*
- Revised British List totals reflecting changes
- The position of flamingos and grebes
- Other species considered
- Kermadec Petrel *Pterodroma neglecta*
- Files under consideration
- *Erratum*: The British List (7th Edition)
- Publications by members of BOURC and BOURC-TSC

Steve Dudley from the British Ornithologists' Union

## 9 My Life With Birds

Brian Etheridge is a member of the SOC and RSPB and is the editor-in-chief of the Scottish Raptor Report.

### How did you start birdwatching start?

When I was 10 years old - my father used to take me on countryside walks pointing out birds and searching for nests.

### What was your first pair of binoculars?

A pair of exWW2 German Liebermann & Gortz 8x40 via mail order, given to me by my father.

### ... and your first bird book?

Eye-spy book of Birds.

### When did you join the RSPB/SOC?

I joined both in 1969.

### Describe your 'local patch'

Munlochy Bay on the Black Isle. In the winter it supports 1000s of wildfowl & waders and in the summer there are terns, Ospreys and lots of tranquillity, plus the unexpected such as Black Stork or White-tailed Eagle.

### Where is your dream birdwatching location

Roebuck Bay near Broome in NW Australia, for the sheer numbers and variety of migratory waders, for the warm tropical sun, the azure-blue water and orange-red sands.

### Birdwatcher or a birder?

Neither - I am a bird lover and enthusiast.

### What was your most embarrassing birdwatching moment?

There hasn't been many - misidentifying a easy bird when leading a members' group or forgetting my bins on a field trip were more annoying than embarrassing.

### What makes your birdwatching blood boil?

The pointless and illegal persecution of raptors on Scottish sporting estates.

### What is the most unusual bird you've ever found, and where was it?

A male Pallid Harrier in Perthshire in May 1993 whilst monitoring breeding Hen Harriers - the 2nd Scottish record and the first for over 60 years. In recent years, Pallid Harriers, mostly in juvenile plumage, have appeared almost annually.

### What was your most memorable sighting?

A flock of 2.88 million Oriental Pratincoles resting on the shore at '80-Mile Beach' in Western Australia on 7th February 2004. The count was made from a light aircraft flying at a fixed height of 60m at 150kph. A truly amazing spectacle.

### What is your most wanted species?

I do not have a "most wanted list", but if you pushed me for an answer, I would say an adult Stellers Sea-Eagle would be near the top of the list.

## 10 Did You Spot?

Species	Number	Location	Date
<i>November</i>			
White-fronted Goose	1	Aberlady	2nd
Barnacle Geese	100	Aberlady	2nd
	48	Tynninghame	1st
Siskin	100	Aberlady	2nd
Pintail	6	Aberlady	2nd
Snow bunting	3	Aberlady	2nd
Jack Snipe	1	Aberlady	2nd
Pink-fronted Geese	2000	Bavelaw	
Whooper Swan	50	Bavelaw	18th
Pomarine Skua	1	Cramond	20th
	28	Silverknowes	3rd & 11th
	10	South Queensferry	19th
	19		19th
	31	Hound Point	3rd
	51		4th
Artic Skua	1	Cramond	20th
	1	South Queensferry	19th
	1	Hound Point	4th
	4	Silverknowes	3rd
Whimbrel	1	Cramond	20th
Greenshank	1	Cramond	20th
Little Gull	75	Gosford Bay	3rd

	20	Musselburgh	3rd
	3	South Queensferry	19th
Black-throated Diver	1	Gosford Bay	3rd
Red-throated Diver	17	Musselburgh	14th
Brent Geese	9	Musselburgh	2nd & 11th
Mediterranean Gull	2	Musselburgh	17th
	1		18th
	1		25th – 27th
Manx Shearwater	3	South Queensferry	19th
Great Skua	1	South Queensferry	19th
Artic Tern	1	South Queensferry	19th
Little Auk	27	South Queensferry	19th
	1500	Scoughall	11th
	800	Torness	11th
	3475	NW past Dunbar harbour	11th
	109	Musselburgh	14th
	79	Port Seton	25th
Black Redstart	2	Torness	25th – 27th
Glaucous Gull (1st winter)	1	Torness	25th – 27th
Lapland Bunting	1	Torness	29th
Shore Lark	1	Torness	30th
Whooper Swan	46	Tynninghame	1st
Merlin	1	Tynninghame	1st
Snow Bunting	1	Holyrood Park	7th
Waxwing	9	Auldhouse	16th
	40	Granton	25th
Water Pipit	1	Skateraw	20th
	1	Skaterow	26th
American Golden Plover	1	Aberlady	3rd
Iceland Gull	1	Haddington	4th

*December*

Black-necked Grebe	1	Aberlady	6th
	1	Gosford Bay	11th – 14th
Short-eared Owl	3	Aberlady	16th
Lapland Bunting	3	Barns Ness	7th – 8th
	4	Torness	2nd
Snow Bunting	8	Barns Ness	7th – 8th
	5	Arthur's Seat	10th – 16th
Shore Lark	1	Barns Ness	12th
	1	Torness	1st – 4th
Whooper Swan	62	Bavelaw	-
	164	Drem	9th
Mute Swan	18	Bavelaw	-
Teal	84	Bavelaw	7th
Tufted Duck	16	Bavelaw	7th
Wigeon	82	Bavelaw	7th
Mallard	87	Bavelaw	7th
Slavonian Grebe	10	Gosford Bay	19th
Black Redstart (adults + immature female)	2	Torness	1st – 4th
	1	Torness	11th
Little Auk	1	Torness	1st
Purple Sandpiper	4	Torness	1st
	2	Torness	2nd & 8th
Waxwing	2	Torness	1st

	55	Brunstfield Links	1st
	50	Western General Hospital	24th
	7	St John's Road	31st
Peregrine	2	Torness	2nd
Slavonian Grebe	1	Gladhouse Reservoir	9th
Kingfisher	1	Gladhouse Reservoir	9th
Glaucous Gull	1	Dunbar	10th
Scaup	1	Linlithgow Loch	12th
Pomarine Skua (juvenile)	1	Seafield	24th
<i>January</i>			
Purple Sandpiper	6	Dunbar	6th
	20	Dunbar	14th
Black Redstart	1	Dubar	19th
Black-necked Grebe	1	Gosford Bay	2nd – 17th
Slavonian Grebe	21	Gosford Bay	2nd
	23	Gosford Bay	15th
	32	Musselburgh	4th
Red-necked Grebe	1	Gosford Bay	2nd
	1	Gosford Bay	15th
Black-throated Diver	1	Gosford Bay	2nd
Scaup	1	Gosford Bay	2nd
Black Guillemot	1	Gosford Bay	6th
Brent Geese	5	Gosford Bay	19th
	11	Seton Sands	1st & 2nd
Long-tailed Duck	25	Musselburgh	4th
Gadwall (male)	1	Musselburgh	4th
Stonechat	1	Musselburgh	4th
Little Auk	1	Musselburgh	6th
Mediterranean Gull	1	Musselburgh	14th
	1	Seton Sands roost	most days
	2	Seton Sands	19th
Single Kingfisher	1	Musselburgh	17th
Woodcock	1	Musselburgh	17th
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	Musselburgh	17th
Shore Lark	1	Torness	12th
Twite	120	Tynninghame	5th
	130	Tynninghame	19th
Greenshank	6	Tynninghame	19th
Shore Lark	1	Tynninghame	19th
Slavonian Grebe	1	Tynninghame	19th
Waxwings	3	Crewe Toll	2nd
Smew (female)	1	Linlithgow Loch	5th – 19th
Tree Sparrow	130	Fenton Barns	6th
Great Northern Diver	1	Silverknowes	11th
Yellowhammer	20	Harperrig	12th
Brambling	15	Harperrig	12th
Reed Bunting	20	Harperrig	12th