

# Lothian Bird Bulletin



**Newsletter of the Lothian SOC Branch  
2008: No. 3**



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Linnet (I think) © 2008 David R. Rowley

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## 1 Autumn is here again

Well Autumn is here again and summer, well summer hasn't really happened. However, it has been a good summer for me and my husband when it comes to bird watching.

With good intentions we decided to go camping in Argyll. Many thought we were insane considering the wind and the rain that was August in Edinburgh. However, we knew it would turn out alright.

On a slightly rainy morning we decided to take the boat from Oban to Mull. On the boat out to the island we saw Arctic Skuas and Juvenile Kittiwakes. We had never seen these before and Juv. Kitts, as we learnt to call them, are amazing, almost like dipping an adult Kittiwake in jet black ink.

Back at forest at the campsite near Oban we sat and watched a Tree Creeper wander round and round a Spruce. At the Sealife centre there was a small forest walk and to our delight we saw a group of long-tailed tits and one very little but very sweet Goldfinch, the yellow crest unmissable!

However, the best was yet to come. Staying down at Muasdale we decided to take a trip to Tarbert. Passing the head of West Loch Tarbert I spotted what I thought was a Little Egret from the car, I don't have the nickname 'Hawk eyes' for nothing. We wandered around Tarbert for a while and then heading back to the car was amazed by a female Sparrowhawk that flew straight past us. We decided to push our luck and stop off at the Loch and see if the Little Egret was still there, to our amazement it was, then to make a great day better two more flew in. We couldn't believe it!

The next again day the weather was very bad and we had no idea what we could do to pass away the day. After a few minutes of scratching our heads we decided to head out to Machrihanish Seabird and Wildlife Observatory ([www.machrihanishbirds.org.uk/location/](http://www.machrihanishbirds.org.uk/location/)).

The observatory is in Machrihanish, about six miles west of Campbeltown, Kintyre (B843). It is straight through the village and is about a mile west of the Golf Club, just past the University research post.



We sat for a few hours with John and Eddie, two of the guys who watch all the birds and record

those flying past. We were honoured to see Manx Shearwaters in huge numbers, flying past the observatory, Gannets young and old, Juvenile Kittiwakes and Balearic Shearwaters, which thanks to the guys I now know how to tell the difference. There were also Linnets and Twites jumping outside the window. It was an amazing morning. We mentioned about the Little Egrets and it turned out that no-one else had spotted these birds fly in. Turns out four birds were seen that day, equalling the Scottish record! Thanks to Jim Dickson for the great photo, much better than our attempt!

Our day didn't end there. We decide to go visit the Scottish Owl Centre (the other SOC), not really knowing what to expect. We were blown away by the sheer number and variety of owls on display and the knowledge of the owners. Visit [www.scottishowlcentre.com](http://www.scottishowlcentre.com) for more information. Here are a few photos of the day (and yes that is me holding a Barn Owl!)



The day then ended by seeing 9 Red Grouse in a hill walk. All-in-all I would highly recommend a trip to watch wildlife in Kintyre. The scenery is amazing, the people friendly and the birds are great! If you have any recommendations, please send these in to me at [jagrowley@googlemail.com](mailto:jagrowley@googlemail.com). I would also recommend that readers in the Lothians subscribe to [lothianbirdnews@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lothianbirdnews@yahoo.co.uk), this has daily (occasionally hourly) updates of bird sightings in the the Lothians. The most recently posted items include the White Shag at Musselburgh and Icterine Warblers at Torness.

If anyone is interested, we use a Canon 20D camera with a Sigma 28-70mm f2.8 lens and a Cannon 70-300mm f4-5.6 lens (which needs upgrading!). I hope you enjoy the rest of the issue!

Julie



## 2 Meetings

Reminder for all SOC Members in Lothian of the following Indoor Meetings:

### 2008

14 Oct	Mike Thornton	Andalucian nights and their top avian predator: The Eagle Owl
11 Nov	David Catt	Malawi and Eastern Zambia: Birds and other wildlife (Waterston House)
09 Dec	Jacqui Kaye	Surveys and bird recording

### 2009

13 Jan	Bob McGowan	The Tiree Frigatebird and other unusual specimens
10 Feb	Mike Martin	Great Auk in May? What next?
10 Mar	Derek McGinn	Birds in Western Australia (Waterston House)
14 April		AGM and Members' Night

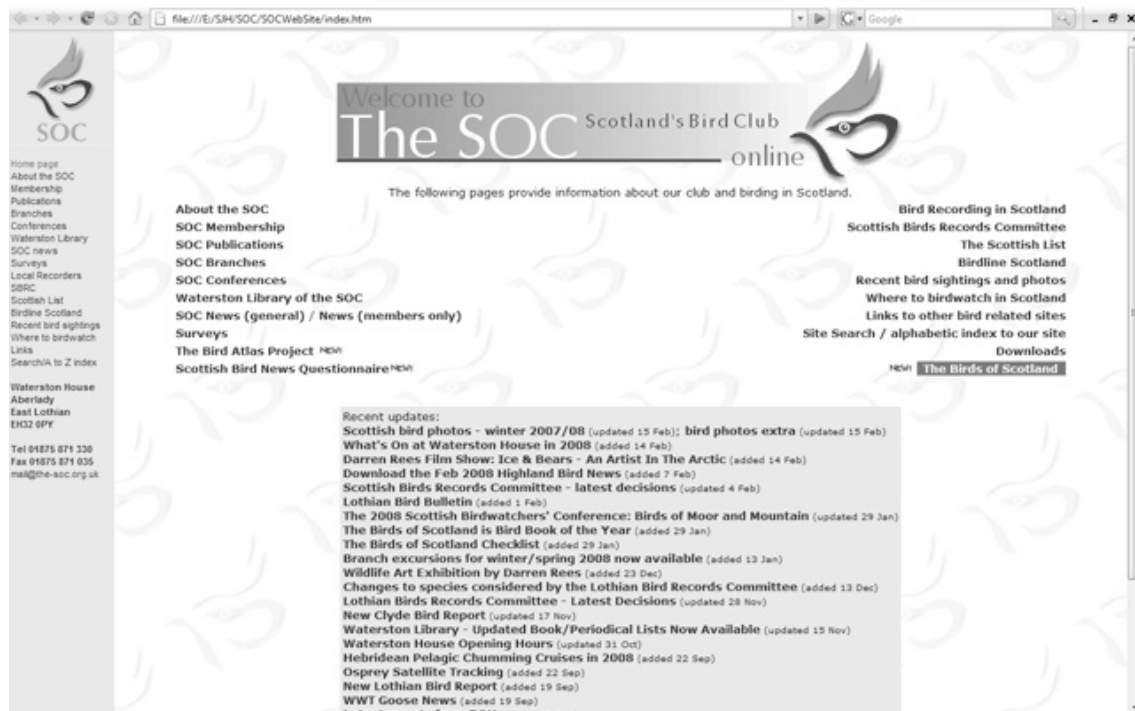
Time: 7:30 pm

Unless otherwise stated, the venue is: Lounge 3, Meadowbank Sports Stadium, Edinburgh  
 All Welcome (Donation of £2 requested to help defray costs)  
 Further details from Colin Beckett on 0131 663 4143



### 3 SOC Website Moults into Fresh Plumage

Some of you will (I hope!) have noticed that the SOC website at [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk) recently acquired a new look. This replaced the original 2000 model, which had served the club extremely well, but had started to look slightly dated. Website-years are a bit like dog-years (only much shorter) so the previous version had actually lasted to a ripe old age - a testament to Ian Andrews design.



Work to redesign the website actually started in 2006, and a prototype was duly produced; this can still be seen at [www.the-soc.org.uk/soctest](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/soctest). Unfortunately I wasn't altogether happy with the results of my work, and decided against taking the idea any further. A year later I started again from scratch.

There were no formal requirements from the SOC, but I had a number of objectives for the new design:

**Appearance** My first objective was to produce something that was eye-catching, and a bit different from the typical 'corporate' website. I decided to start with a background image of the sky. (Not completely original I have to admit, but fairly appropriate for a bird club!) I had assumed it would be easy to take a suitable picture, perhaps with a few distant birds flying past, but after several evenings spent wandering around photographing the Edinburgh sky (and some puzzled looks from passers-by), I still hadn't succeeded. Eventually I obtained a couple of useable photos, but not really as good as I'd hoped for, so I'm still on the lookout for a perfect sky... An early website prototype featured the text displayed directly over the sky, but this proved difficult to read for some of the reviewers. Instead I decided to go for a 'frosted glass' look. (Despite appearances, this isn't actually a transparent background - it's a separate opaque image obtained by blurring the original sky, and adjusting the brightness and contrast.) Another design decision was the adoption of a 'liquid' layout, meaning that the content area stretches or shrinks as the browser window is widened or narrowed. This is in contrast to the majority of websites today, which are known as 'fixed-width' layouts. These typically feature content placed within a central area that stays the same size, even as the window width changes. A liquid design brings with it a number of challenges, as the page has to look good for any window size. (Why do I always pick the difficult options?)



**Web Standards** Nowadays the creation of a website is a fairly scientific process. An organisation called the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) publishes recommendations, which, if followed, should allow the website to be displayed sensibly and consistently on just about any browser, including hand-held computers and even mobile phones. A key aspect of these recommendations is referred to as 'the separation of content and presentation'. Below is a simple illustration of this principle.

Website pages are coded in a language called HTML (Hypertext Markup Language, or just 'markup' for short); the most up-to-date use XHTML (Extensible HTML). In the bad old days before web standards, the markup for a web page would have included not only the text of the page, but instructions for setting the appearance of each element. For example a top-level heading might have been specified like this:

```
<h1><font color="red" face="Helvetica, sans-serif" size=6>
<bold>The SOC - Scotland's Bird Club</bold></font></h1>
```

Nowadays this would be regarded as a serious crime in the world of web design, as the content (ie the heading text) is mixed up with the presentation details (font size etc). Modern websites remove this presentation information from the markup, and instead store it in a file known as a Cascading Style Sheet (CSS). Returning to our example, the HTML file now contains only

```
<h1>The SOC - Scotland's Bird Club</h1>
```

and the style sheet contains the font size, colour, etc. This means that the appearance of the top-level heading on *every* page of the website can be altered simply by editing the style sheet.

You're probably falling asleep by now, so I won't bore you with any more technical stuff... but I'm sure you'll believe me that website design can be a complicated subject. (Since starting this project I've acquired a small collection of Web textbooks, totalling over 3500 pages. Some day I might even get around to reading them.)

**Usability** I hope that you find the new website easy to use. Navigation has changed only slightly from Ian Andrews' original design, with a main menu on the Home page, and a set of links on the left side of each page. One difference is that the left-hand links are now tailored to each page individually, and so should be more relevant to the current topic.



**Maintenance** Another objective was to produce a website that would be quick and easy to maintain. Following the W3C recommendations mentioned above has helped in this respect, and there have been a number of other behind-the-scenes improvements. As a result, Kathryn at Waterston House is now able to deal with many of the day-to-day updates, leaving me more time to read my textbooks...

**The Future** With the new design, we now have a solid platform for developing the SOC website over the coming months and years. I don't expect to be short of work for a long time...

## 4 My life with Birds - Stephen Hunter



*Born 1963 in Irvine, Ayrshire. Lived in Kilmarnock until 1984, when I moved to Edinburgh to work for the IT department at Standard Life. Lothian SOC committee member since 2003. Edited the Lothian Bird Bulletin from 2003–2007. Currently Lothian Bird Report co-editor with Keith Gillon. Took over running the SOC website in 2004. Other hobbies: Kilmarnock FC season ticket holder. Fan of indie/pop music - still go to see bands, despite being much too old...*



## **How did your birdwatching start?**

In 1996, when I 'did' the West Highland Way with a couple of friends, one of whom brought along a small pair of binoculars. Star bird for the trip was a Goldcrest! Not long afterwards the first series of "Birding With Bill Oddie" was broadcast, at just the right time to get me hooked. I know Mr Oddie's style isn't to everyone's taste, but for me they were inspirational programmes.

## **What was your first pair of binoculars?**

"Miranda" pocket binoculars — £35 from Curries on Princes Street I seem to remember. Optical quality fell slightly short of Leica or Swarovski standard, but they did at least make things look bigger. I'm still a fan of pocket binoculars; sometimes it's good not to have to lug around a heavy pair of 8x42s.

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

The Larousse Pocket Guide: Birds of Britain and Ireland.

## **When did you join the SOC?**

2001 I think. After having bought the Lothian Bird Report for two or three years, curiosity got the better of me.

## **Describe your local/regular patch.**

I have a (leisurely) two-hour circuit that goes from Canonmills to Newhaven via the Water of Leith and Victoria Park, then along the coast to Granton, and back via the Goldenacre cyclepath. If I'm feeling energetic I sometimes extend the walk to Cramond, or take in the Botanic Gardens. I used to be a regular at Musselburgh, but rarely seem to have the time nowadays.

## **What's your dream birdwatching location?**

Up a big hill somewhere, watching eagles soaring overhead. I had a rare (for me) trip abroad last year: the Spanish Pyrenees were fantastic (scenery and vultures), but I'm quite happy in Scotland most of the time. East Anglia was a great birdwatching area too, despite the lack of hills.

## **Birdwatcher or birder?**

Birdwatcher - birder sounds too American. (No disrespect to Americans, obviously.)

## **Your most embarrassing birdwatching moment?**

I was once showing off my bird call identification skills to a non-birdwatching friend, and pointed out the strange variety of noises made by a singing Starling in Edinburgh city centre. It was only when I looked up that I realised it was somebody scraping paint off a balcony railing...

## **What makes your blood boil?**

The relentless disappearance of our wildlife habitat under roads, houses and, now, wind farms. (If the detestable Mr Trump gets his way, I'll soon be adding golf courses to the list.)

## The most unusual or rare bird you've found?

I once found a Great White Egret on the wader scrapes at Musselburgh. I'm sure most people thought I'd been hallucinating, but it really was there!

## ...and your most memorable sighting?

A close encounter with some young Tawny Owls along the Water of Leith, and my first ever Kingfisher sighting. (When I started birdwatching, I didn't think I'd ever see anything as exotic as a Kingfisher, and certainly not so close to home.)

## Your most wanted species?

I've never had much luck (or perhaps patience) looking for Skuas, Shearwaters, and Petrels. I'd love to see - and be able to identify - more of these.

## Do you have a 'bogey bird'?

Jack Snipe. I once saw one in the Moorfoots, but my attempts to track them down in more typical winter habitat have always ended in disappointment.

# 5 Lothian Birdwatching Report for June

**HIGHLIGHTS** A first summer Red-footed Falcon showed very well from the viaduct at Almondell Country Park (1<sup>st</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup>). A Honey Buzzard flew over Penicuik (12<sup>th</sup>).

**ABERLADY** A male Kentish Plover was at Aberlady (1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>). A male Ruff was present (12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>). A single Little Gull was noted (14<sup>th</sup>).

**BAVELAW MARSH** A pair of Garganey have been present (13<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> at least). Osprey were noted (15<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>). Two Spotted Flycatcher were noted (15<sup>th</sup>) and two Grasshopper Warbler were reeling (16<sup>th</sup>). A Little Ringed Plover was present (29<sup>th</sup>) and five Crossbill were seen the same date.

**MUSSELBURGH** Two Shoveler were present (9<sup>th</sup>). A Little Ringed Plover was present (25<sup>th</sup>) with two seen (27<sup>th</sup>). An Arctic Skua was noted (27<sup>th</sup>).

**TYNINGHAME** Ten Crossbill were seen (24<sup>th</sup>) and 30 counted (28<sup>th</sup>)

**OTHER SITES** A Quail was calling near Penicuik (1<sup>st</sup>). A Roseate Tern was at Port Edgar (10<sup>th</sup>). A Black Guillemot and six Manx Shearwater were noted at Dunbar (14<sup>th</sup>). A count of 14 Black-tailed Godwit was made in Gosford Bay (24<sup>th</sup>).

# 6 Lothian Birdwatching Report for July

**HIGHLIGHTS** A Red Kite was seen over the Edinburgh by-pass (13<sup>th</sup>). A male Ring-necked Duck was on Linlithgow Loch (19<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>). A Red-footed Falcon flew over South Queensferry (26<sup>th</sup>).

**ABERLADY** A summer plumage Spotted Redshank was noted (2<sup>nd</sup>). Single Black-tailed Godwit, 84 Sanderling, two Wheatear, one Arctic Skua and two Manx Shearwater were seen (19<sup>th</sup>).

**BAVELAW MARSH** Three Blackcap were singing (1<sup>st</sup>) and six Crossbill and two Spotted Flycatcher were seen (5<sup>th</sup>).

**FERNY NESS** A count of 18 Red-necked Grebe was made (23<sup>rd</sup>) rising to 22 on (25<sup>th</sup>).

**HOUND POINT** Six Arctic Skua and a Whimbrel flew past (9<sup>th</sup>) with five Arctic Skua and 12 Manx Shearwater (17<sup>th</sup>).

**MUSSELBURGH** A Little Ringed Plover was present (2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>). Five Black-tailed Godwit, five Common Sandpiper and a Little Gull were seen (3<sup>rd</sup>). The (4<sup>th</sup>) saw two Green Sandpiper and two Greenshank with 11 Common Sandpiper, four Black-tailed Godwit and two Little Gull (5<sup>th</sup>). A male Blue-headed Wagtail was noted (6<sup>th</sup>) with Mediterranean Gull present (7<sup>th</sup>). Up to 2 Little Gull have been seen daily. A count of 24 Black-tailed Godwit, five Common Sandpiper and five Manx Shearwater was made (17<sup>th</sup>). A Ruff was noted (25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>) with an adult Curlew Sandpiper (26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>) and ten Whimbrel and ten Little Gull (31<sup>st</sup>).

**TYNINGHAME** Four Whimbrel were present (5<sup>th</sup>). A Roseate Tern, Mediterranean Gull, Green Sandpiper, Whimbrel and six Greenshank were noted (24<sup>th</sup>) with a Little Tern noted (27<sup>th</sup>) and two Little Gull and seven Greenshank present (28<sup>th</sup>). 12 Greenshank and a Green Sandpiper were present (31<sup>st</sup>).

**OTHER SITES** 82 Crossbill flew over Gosford Estate (2<sup>nd</sup>). Four Manx Shearwater and one Arctic Skua flew past Portobello (6<sup>th</sup>). Forty-two Manx Shearwater, one Arctic Skua and one Great Skua flew past Dunbar (21<sup>st</sup>). A Quail was calling near Vogrie Country Park (28<sup>th</sup>). 20 Crossbill were noted at Harperrig (26<sup>th</sup>).

## 7 Lothian Birdwatching Report for August

**HIGHLIGHTS** A Pacific Golden Plover was sighted on the evening of (2<sup>nd</sup>) but was not re-located the following day.

**ABERLADY** A Green Sandpiper and two Greenshank were noted (3<sup>rd</sup>). An adult Roseate Tern was present (8<sup>th</sup>). Two Little Egret were present (13<sup>th</sup>). An Osprey flew over (20<sup>th</sup>). A Green Sandpiper, three Ruff and seven Greenshank were present (24<sup>th</sup>) with a Little Stint noted (28<sup>th</sup>). Two Short-eared Owl were hunting (30<sup>th</sup>).

**BELHAVEN** An adult and juvenile Roseate Tern were present (2<sup>nd</sup>) with two adult present (7<sup>th</sup>) and a Wood Sandpiper seen (8<sup>th</sup>). Four Brent Geese were noted (26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>).

**FERNY NESS** A count of 42 Red-necked Grebe was made (4<sup>th</sup>) and 40 counted (8<sup>th</sup>).

**HOUND POINT** Five Pomarine Skua and three Arctic Skua flew past (18<sup>th</sup>).

**MUSSELBURGH** Six Whimbrel and four Black-tailed Godwit were present (1<sup>st</sup>) with two Little Gull, three Whimbrel, 14 Snipe and 51 Kittiwake (2<sup>nd</sup>). A juvenile Little Stint was present (10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>). The (12<sup>th</sup>) also saw 16 Snipe, three Common Sandpiper and a Black-tailed Godwit. A juvenile Spotted Redshank was noted (19<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>). An Osprey flew over (22<sup>nd</sup>) when single Peregrine, Little Gull and Greenshank were also present.

**TYNINGHAME** A count of 64 Whimbrel and three Greenshank was made (1<sup>st</sup>) with 12 Greenshank, 25 Whimbrel and three Ruff seen (4<sup>th</sup>). A Little Egret was present (2<sup>nd</sup>) and again (23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>). An adult Roseate Tern, nine Whimbrel, six Greenshank and a Ruff were noted (5<sup>th</sup>).

**OTHER SITES** An adult Mediterranean Gull roosted at Seton Sands (3<sup>rd</sup>). Two Wood Sandpiper were at Broxmouth (2<sup>nd</sup>). A male Yellow Wagtail was at Barns Ness (8<sup>th</sup>). An adult Little Gull and adult Mediterranean Gull were at Longniddry (9<sup>th</sup>). An Osprey flew over Gorgie, Edinburgh (14<sup>th</sup>). The (18<sup>th</sup>) saw a single Arctic Skua past Skateraw, four past Dunbar and one past Barns Ness. A Wood Sandpiper and a Ruff were at Whitekirk (24<sup>th</sup>). A count of 200 Swallow and 257 Golden Plover was made at Barns Ness (31<sup>st</sup>).

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