

Lothian Bird Bulletin



**Newsletter of the Lothian SOC Branch
2008: No. 4**

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1 Jingle Bells

Welcome to the Christmas edition of the Lothian Bird Bulletin and my one year anniversary as editor.

I'll keep this editorial short as you can see we have a packed issue. I had hoped to get an article on the Sea Eagles of the east coast but that fell through. However, as you can see I wouldn't have had space anyway!!

Thanks to everyone who has contributed, it is really great to see so many different articles. Keep them coming please!! I've even one article held over for March from Keith on Changed Days.

Also please check out the RSPB campaign:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/birdsofprey/index.asp>

Let me take this opportunity to wish you all a very merry Xmas and a prosperous new year.

Julie

PS I saw my very first wild Barn Owl at Loch Awe on Sunday 30th November.

2 Meetings

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

2008

09 Dec	Chris Wernham	Surveys and bird recording
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2009

13 Jan	Bob McGowan	The Tiree Frigatebird and other unusual specimens
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10 Feb	Mike Martin	Great Auk in May? What next?
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10 Mar	Derek McGinn	Birds in Western Australia (Waterston House)
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14 April		AGM and Members' Night
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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 Lothian SOC Field Trip to Hogganfield Loch and Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve

Saturday 15th November 2008.

The weather was warm and sunny as we arrived at Hogganfield; 15 of us in all. The day started well with close views of Goosander, Whooper Swan, Goldeneye and many other wildfowl at the entrance to the park together with other ducks and swans waiting to be fed. Walking round the loch we saw large numbers of Teal and, as we were just about back to our cars, our leader, John Pringle, found a Lesser Scaup (pictured on front cover). Great excitement all round and eventually we all had really

good views of the bird. It was in among Tufted Duck and 8 Ruddy Duck but distinguishable by its purple peaked head and size.

On to Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve, not an easy place for everyone to find, Buzzard flying over, winter thrushes in the trees and Shoveler and Gadwall on the lakes as well as large numbers of other ducks.

All in all a splendid day. The weather held up well and, as ever, the company was most congenial.

Roll on the next trip.

James Main.

43 species seen (largely waterfowl) giving a cumulative total of 69 for the last two outings.

John Pringle.

4 Lothian SOC

Excursions and Tours Spring 2009

Sun 18 Jan 09	Linlithgow & Kinneil Kerse	John Pringle
Sat 14 Feb 09	Largo Bay	David Atkins
Sun 22 Mar 09	Walk from Gullane to North Berwick	Jacky Robinson
Sun 26 Apr 09	Aberlady Bay	John Harrison
Sun 24 May 09	Bowhill, Kelso	Keith Macgregor
Sat 27 Jun 09	Perthshire Walk	Tom Gillies
Sun 12 Jul 09	Bird Race	Stephen Hunter

5 Branch Outing on 19/10/08

This was optimistically billed as "East Coast Migrants" but evidently all the LBJs had read the weather forecast (wild & windy) and decided on a low (invisible?) profile.

Despite their battering from the weather Keith Macgregor led a band of 19 'hoodies' to Barns Ness, Thorntonloch and Belhaven Bay.

OK, our final list was not brilliant at 49 species but the conditions provided a good exercise firstly in finding the birds and secondly in identifying them.

Thank you Keith, so we didn't find any rarities but the fact that you still kept a full group until the end shows that, perhaps perversely, we all enjoyed our 'breath of fresh air'.

PS from this start we hope to keep a running total of species seen on our branch outings. These will be listed in due course.

6 Waterston House Gardens

Visit W.H. at any time and you are sure to meet volunteers helping permanent staff in many ways.

On Wednesday mornings the majority may be seen in the gardens – when not monopolising the tables indoors for noisy coffee breaks fuelled by homemade goodies (shortbread, cakes & more).

The regular team, Bill, Colin, Jamie, Marj, Sheena, Sid & Stan, are always happy to chat to visitors. Well, we cannot work *all* morning.

Frequently asked questions are:-

Q Who is in charge?

A It depends! Assume whosoever is speaking to you is I.C. They all think they are!

Q More Gardeners required?

A Present staffing OK but no offers refused.

Q Surplus plants from my garden welcome?

A We would prefer native species or those particularly attractive to birds or insects. But please discuss with gardeners first.

Q How often are flower meadows cut?

A Once yearly in late Autumn when flowering plants should have shed their seed.

Q Is waste composted?

A Until recently all such waste was taken to recycling depots to be composted for council grounds and public sale. We are now trialling some splendid bins (thanks to Stewart Lee's handy work). Eventually the resultant compost should be useable on flower beds. However, perceived wisdom dictates that it is not suitable for the meadows, with poorer soil in fact encouraging better wild flowers.

Q What are the proposals for the pond and surrounds?

A This is largely Stan's fiefdom – well, he is the only one with waders. Stocking of suitable water plants and removal of blanket weed continues. Hopefully any animal life will be introduced naturally. The surroundings will generally be allowed to develop as a wild garden.

Q Is old garden equipment of use?

A Probably not, unless in spanking condition for relatively heavy use. We did inherit a nucleus of decent tools, adding some castoffs in view of finances at that time. These are gradually being replaced with more suitable items as conditions allow. Subject to Management Committee approval a small Gardens Fund relying on financial donations could be useful.

The team are always pleased to respond to enquiries on “what, why and how” but questions re names of specific plants are best avoided – unless you are happy with eight answers several of which are of the “errraa oh” genera.

John Pringle.

7 Birdwatching in the Netherlands - Blue Tits in Bussum and other Dutch misdemeanours!

As our family was expecting another baby later in the year, and as my friend Mike's wife was also expecting, we were not sure if we would be able to get away on a foreign bird holiday this year. However, our respective wives kindly consented to us getting away to the Netherlands for a few days birdwatching, but only on the condition that the birds were of the feathered variety only!

Why choose the Netherlands? Well as Mike lives in Dorset and I stay in East Lothian it is as cheap or expensive to fly to Amsterdam as it is to travel across the length of Britain to meet up. The Netherlands also has a number of European birds either absent from or difficult to see in the UK. Although it is a densely populated country it does have areas set aside, and managed, for wildlife, and there is also an active network of birdwatchers and guides that assists in finding new or rare species.

In late April Mike and I met up at Schipol Airport on a Sunday morning. We approached the train ticket office and asked for two tickets to the town of Bussum, with the possibility of stopping off in Amsterdam. We were told by the jovial railway official that the ticket would be cheaper if we were a couple. When we explained that we were not married to each other we were told; "In Amsterdam anything is possible!"

An hour later we found ourselves on a canal boat, called "Lovers", enjoying the sights of Amsterdam. We even had time to sample a few Amstel beers next to the River Amstel. Mike spotted a Ring-necked Parakeet as it flew overhead.

We managed to tear ourselves away from the sights of Amsterdam and to catch our train to Bussum. Here we were collected by Taco, our guide from FlevoBirdwatching, who took us to our bed & breakfast accommodation in the town of Huizen. It was very comfortable and in easy walking distance of a yachting marina where we had a good evening meal.

The bird watching started in earnest the next morning when Taco collected us bright and early and whisked us away across to the island of Flevo to a forested carpark near to a reedbed site not far from the town of Almere. This formed part of the impressive Oostervardersplassen Reserve. The air seemed alive with the noise of bird song but it took a while to adjust to our surroundings and a stiff breeze appeared to keep the birds down and out of sight.

Slowly but surely the birds began to reveal themselves with Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler both singing from within the trees. A drainage canal revealed our first Great White Egret of the day as well as Coots and Moorhens. Out on a point overlooking the reedbed we could see Marsh Harrier and Black Tern flying in the near distance, and on a muddy spit a Greenshank was prominent amongst a small group of waders.

Taco had hoped for us to see and hear a Bluethroat at this spot but we had to admire a small group of migrating Wheatears and a solitary Whinchat instead. We were slowly building up an impressive day list but we could sense that Taco wanted us to see the birds on our wishlist and was keen to move on.

Our second stop took us to a layby next to a lagoon on a road that runs along the Markermeer. Taco produced tea, coffee and biscuits at this stop as we listened out for the distinctive chirr of a Savi's Warbler. There must have been a good few of them out there skulking in the reeds, but the wind kept them out of sight. A pity as they would have been life birds for both Mike and myself.

I walked down to the waters edge and caught sight of two Bluethroat working their way through the reeds. These would have been a life bird for Mike but by the time that he had put down his cup of coffee they had disappeared. I felt a little bit guilty that I had seen the birds and Mike had not.

However, there were other good birds on offer at further stops along the way such as Spoonbill, Yellow Wagtail and Mike managed to find a life bird for me in the form of a Lesser Whitethroat, which was sharing a tree with a small group of the northern race of Long-tailed Tits (with white heads). Taco explained that they were an unusual sighting in the Netherlands.

We moved across to the other side of the island of Flevo and picked up on a flock of mixed birds fishing on a current in the river. These included Common and Black Terns, as well as Black-headed and Little Gulls.

Our next stop was the newly established wetland at Harderbroek. We sat out of the breeze and scanned the wader scrape through our scopes. The sheer number of birds was fantastic with over wintering ducks such as Wigeon and Smew mixing with newly arrived waders in the form of Little Ringed Plover, Ruff and Green, Wood and Common Sandpipers.

Taco was determined to find us one of the birds missing from our lists, namely a Red-crested Pochard. Despite stopping off at various locations on the eastern side of Flevoland, and obtaining excellent views of Black Terns, we could not locate any of the ducks in question.

Somewhat daunted we headed back inland, past nesting White Storks and an obliging fly-by from a male Marsh Harrier. Our last stop overlooking the Oostervadersplassen Reserve produced another life bird for both of us in the form of an over flying Goshawk. Taco was on the look-out for a Ring Ouzel that had been reported earlier. It would have been life bird for him but we have assured him that if he came across to Scotland in the summer we would try and find the bird for him over here.

Our final stop of the day took us to a lake near to Huizen where Taco found, with a flourish, a pair of Red-crested Pochard. We were able to obtain close up views of the male offering pond weed to the female, all bathed in the warm sunlight of an early evening.

We had seen 89 birds on the day, with a few more heard but not seen. Taco went home for a well earned rest with his family whilst Mike and I, after a bit of searching, sat down to a banquet of Indonesian food washed down with local beer.

Taco returned early the next morning. If the Monday had been spent in and around the wetlands of Flevoland Tuesday was to be spent in the Veluwe forests near the German border. Our quarry today was the Black Woodpecker, a bird that neither Mike nor I had seen.

Skirting the early morning commuter traffic we listened to Taco's bird CD and especially to the call and hammering of a Black Woodpecker. Taco took us near to the town of Appeldoorn and then to a car park in the forest at a site called Hoog Buurloo.

Our car was the only vehicle present. In a densely populated country like the Netherlands it was encouraging to note that there were areas that attracted fewer people. A walk along a forest road produced a fair number of common species. One bird that I missed, but seen fleetingly by Mike and Taco was a Hawfinch.

We walked deeper into the birds listening out for any signs of the elusive woodpecker. Taco was very

good at distinguishing between the drumming of different species. Finally we heard a Black Woodpecker and approached with caution. From behind a beech tree a large black bird with drooping wings flew across the forest clearing and disappeared into a thick stand of trees. We were afforded one more fleeting glimpse of it before it was lost to the forest.

We pushed on through the forest to a more open area of heathland. Along the way we picked up Tree Pipit and a beautiful singing male Common Redstart. A further bonus for Taco was a Pied Flycatcher, a bird that he had not seen for a few years.

We drove across to another area of woodland, at Orderbos also near Appeldoorn, to try and locate another bird on my wanted list, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Alas, we had plenty of sightings of Greater Spotted Woodpeckers but their diminutive cousins were nowhere to be seen. Mike picked up a new bird for the trip in the form of an obliging Marsh Tit.

Taco still wanted to find a Bluethroat for Mike and we reluctantly agreed to leave the forest behind and to head further north to a small wetland reserve at Diependal. It took a little while to get there but it gave us an opportunity to view a bit more of the flat countryside. The Netherlands is served by a good network of motorway standard roads but it is not until you get onto the secondary roads that you can appreciate the full extent of the network of canals and the intensive cultivation of the intervening fields.

To access the hide at Diependal you have to walk through a damp tunnel of almost 500 metres, not attractive to those who may suffer from claustrophobia. This last bird watching spot of the trip certainly produced birds in good numbers including both Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes in breeding plumage. Taco was encouraged by seeing a number of Yellowhammer, not all common in the Netherlands, but the real prize came in the form of a stunning brightly coloured Bluethroat walking along the waters edge just below our viewing point. Mike was very pleased and you could see that Taco was relieved.

Our birding expedition drew to a close and we caught a train back to Schipol (from Bussum, where we picked up a Blue Tit in the car park). A respectable list of 104 birds seen over two days, with five new lifetime firsts. I can heartily recommend Taco and FlevoBirdwatching for the care and attention, and the knowledge of bird watching sites, displayed.

As a postscript both babies duly arrived and are in good spirits. Bird watching outings are on hold for the time being!

Richard Leslie

8 Lothian Bird Bulletin – My Life with Birds: Wendy Hicks



Born 1971, Lincolnshire (RAF Wittering). Grew up in Dunbar. Graduated in 1993 from Edinburgh university with MA (Hons) Spanish (fluent Spanish & Portuguese speaker) and completed a postgraduate diploma course in European Marketing with languages in 1996. Spent time living, working and/or travelling in Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Galapagos, the US...and the rather less exotic London & South East Essex! Prior to taking up the post of Office Manager at Waterston House in January 2007, I worked in various fields including publishing, marketing, teaching and the travel industry. Hobbies include playing guitar, salsa dancing, cycling, volunteer conservation work and going to see live music (esp. rock/blues).

How did your birdwatching start?

I saw a bloke with a scope on my usual estuary route in Essex – when I enquired what he was looking at, he pointed to the chaos above us and informed me that a ‘Peregrine Falcon’ had just put all the ‘waders’ up. When he let me have a look through his scope, the spooked birds had settled down and I remember being fascinated by the variety of species out there on the mud. I couldn’t believe I’d walked along this way so many times oblivious to all this fantastic birdlife. Although, admittedly, until that moment, I was more of a mammal and spider watcher! It still intrigues me that it never really occurred to me to watch birds, despite my interest in wildlife in general.

What was your first pair of binoculars?

Nikon 10 x 25 - a surprise Christmas present. I was delighted at first but soon got frustrated when I realised that I couldn’t see enough detail to be able to ID things properly (before I knew about giz!) so I borrowed a very trusting friend’s car and drove round the M25 (for the first time!) to an Optics field day in Kent where I sat for an entire day trying out just about every pair of binos they had. I finally settled for Opticron Imagic 8x32. Six years on, I still have the same pair.

...and your first bird book?

I’ve got a horrible feeling it may have been Bill Oddie’s Introduction to Birdwatching!

When did you join the SOC?

When I got the job! I lived in London and Essex (where my birdwatching started) for eight years before coming back to East Lothian four years ago so I only discovered the SOC shortly before applying for the job.

Describe your local/regular patch.

I don’t actually have a regular patch. I tend to cycle about in the countryside around East Linton/North Berwick, stopping whenever I see or hear anything interesting. From Spring to early Autumn, I often cycle to/from work so the stretch between North Berwick and Waterston House could probably be classed as my ‘patch’ – my favourite bit for birds is part of the John Muir Way between Luffness and Gullane (farmland/thick coppice/brambles).

What's your dream birdwatching location?

OK, you did say 'dream' location – it would be up in the air with migrating geese or camouflaged in the middle of a roosting site of any species!

Birdwatcher or birder?

Just a regular 'bird' actually, who takes her binos everywhere! I like to spy on bird behaviour when I am out and about. I can sit for ages watching a solitary crow's efforts to crack open shellfish by dropping it from a great height. Of course, it's a bonus to come across a species that I'm not used to seeing but I don't have a list (yet!).

Your most embarrassing birdwatching moment?

The chaos I managed to cause on the A198 outside North Berwick earlier this year was mildly embarrassing. While cycling to work one morning, I spotted a distressed Herring Gull by the roadside with its wing hanging off and decided to try to 'rescue' it – no easy task as, despite its injury, it was very mobile on its legs! We practically ended up in Dirlerton by the time I'd managed to get a friend with a car to come out and pick it up for the SSPCA (who subsequently put the creature to sleep!)

What makes your blood boil?

Speeding motorists! I wish everyone would slow down, particularly at night. It really upsets me to hear about Barn Owl fatalities or to see birds and other wildlife splattered by the roadside.

The most unusual or rare bird you've found?

I haven't yet 'found' anything unusual or rare myself here in the UK. But things that I have 'spotted' myself that were unusual for me (but not so in their native territory, where I found them!) were a Griffon Vulture in the mountains outside Madrid and an Oropendola during a brief visit to a small bird reserve on Tobago.

...and your most memorable sighting?

I used to go birdwatching along the Tyne during my lunch breaks when I worked in Haddington. I regularly saw a pair of Kingfisher and used to enjoy tracking them down until one day I noticed one disappear into a hole in the riverbank! It's such a thrill to come across a nest unexpectedly.

Your most wanted species?

I would really like to see White-tailed Sea Eagle

Do you have a 'bogey bird'?

White-tailed Sea Eagle!!! I cycled across Mull in the summer sure that I would spot one there but no luck. And anytime I have the Isle of May in sight from the East Lothian shore, I will eagerly scan the cliffs and surrounding skyline with my binos ever hopeful that one day, I'll see a large, soaring spec! Just a spec – that's all I ask!

In the next bulletin, you can read about Dave Allan's Life with Birds!

9 Lothian September Records

An Icterine Warbler and Wryneck were at Torness (7th) with an Icterine Warbler and Wryneck at Thorntonloch and an Icterine Warbler at Skateraw all (7th). A Red-backed Shrike was at Scoughall, a Barred Warbler at Barns Ness and an Icterine Warbler at Skateraw all (8th). A Red-backed Shrike was at Skateraw (10th) with a Wryneck seen (13th). Wryneck and Icterine Warbler were seen at Torness (14th – 15th) and Barred Warbler and Icterine Warbler at Skateraw the same dates. A Hobby was at Thorntonloch (15th) with Yellow-browed Warbler at Barns Ness (15th) and Wryneck at Barns Ness (15th – 28th). A Honey Buzzard flew over South Gyle (19th). A Greater Sandplover was on the east beach Dunbar (19th – 20th). A juvenile Rose-coloured Starling was at South Queensferry (25th).

ABERLADY

A Spotted Redshank and a Ruff were present (2nd) with Curlew Sandpiper and Whimbrel (9th). Nine Ruff and 51 Pink-footed Geese were noted (17th) with four Little Stint, four Curlew Sandpiper and a Spotted Redshank (18th). Eleven Ruff were present (23rd) with a Spotted Redshank and 1189 Pink-footed Geese noted (24th). Five Brent Geese were present (29th) with Pink-footed Geese numbering 23129 (30th) and 159 Barnacle Geese present.

BARNS NESS

A seawatch (7th) produced 138 Sooty Shearwater north, 34 Great Skua, seven Arctic Skua, a single Storm Petrel and 25 Brent Geese. Two Pied Flycatcher were present (8th). A Yellow-browed Warbler, Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Redstart and Pied Flycatcher were among a fall on (13th). A Black Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and three Whimbrel were noted (19th).

BELHAVEN

Three Curlew Sandpiper noted (16th – 28th). A Black Tern was present (17th) and five Brent Geese were noted (16th – 17th). A Hobby was seen (19th).

CRAMOND

Two Spotted Redshank and two Greenshank were noted (22nd).

DUNBAR

Four Yellow Wagtail, Merlin, Peregrine and Whimbrel were seen from Dunbar golf course (17th). Two Blue-headed Wagtail were noted (20th). A Black Redstart was present (20th). A Long-tailed Skua, six Great Skua and four Arctic Skua flew past (22nd).

MUSSELBURGH

Two Curlew Sandpiper, one Whimbrel and five Black-tailed Godwit were noted (1st) with two Ruff and two Greenshank (2nd). A Spotted Redshank was present (12th – 14th). Two Curlew Sandpiper, two Little Gull and five Swift were noted (16th). A Hobby flew over (20th). A count of 83 Little Gull was made (24th).

SKATERAW

The (14th) saw a fall of Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat and Pied Flycatcher. Two Pied Flycatcher and five Redstart were present (15th).

TORNESS

Pied Flycatcher, Lesser Whitethroat, Redstart, two Whimbrel and two Swift were noted (14th) and three Redstart (15th).

TYNINGHAME

A Wood Sandpiper and four Greenshank were noted (1st) with four Curlew Sandpiper, four Greenshank and a Peregrine (2nd). Four Curlew Sandpiper, four Ruff and a Little Stint were noted (10th) also one on (20th).

OTHER SITES

Three Swift were over Linlithgow Loch (1st) and five over Gulland (14th). A Purple Sandpiper was at Joppa (2nd). A seawatch from Seacliff produced a single Sooty Shearwater, seven Great Skua and 58 Manx Shearwater. Two Redwing were at Livingston (24th).

10 Bird Records: October - BirdGuides.com

Bird	Location	Date
Arctic Skua	Hound Pt	3/10
Black Redstart	Gullane	20/10
Black-necked Grebe	Aberlady	31/10 & 29/10
Black-tailed Godwit	Musselburgh	5/10
Curlew Sandpiper	Musselburgh	14/10
Curlew Sandpiper	Tynninghame Bay	11/10, 8/10 & 7/10
Great Skua	Dunbar	30/10
Greenland White-fronted Goose	Aberlady	12/10
Hen Harrier	Gladhouse Reservoir	29/10
Little Auk	Dunbar	3/10
Little Gull	Musselburgh	13/10 & 4/10
Mediterranean Gull	Musselburgh	11/10 & 4/10
Mediterranean Gull	Cramond	19/10
Mediterranean Gull	Torness	21/10
Pale-Bellied Brent Goose	Aberlady	28/10, 12/10 & 9/10
Pomarine Skua	Hound Pt	30/10 & 28/10
Red-necked Grebe	Ferry Ness	20/10
Scaup	Linlithgow Loch	21/10 & 19/10
Short-eared Owl	Musselburgh	10/10
Short-eared Owl	Aberlady	27/10
Slavonian Grebe	Musselburgh	31/10, 17/10, 14/10 & 5/10
Snow Bunting	Musselburgh	31/10
Spoonbill	Belhaven Bay	30/10
Spotted Redshank	Aberlady	11/10
Whooper Swan	Musselburgh	16/10

Records provided by Ian Andrews from BirdGuides.com.

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