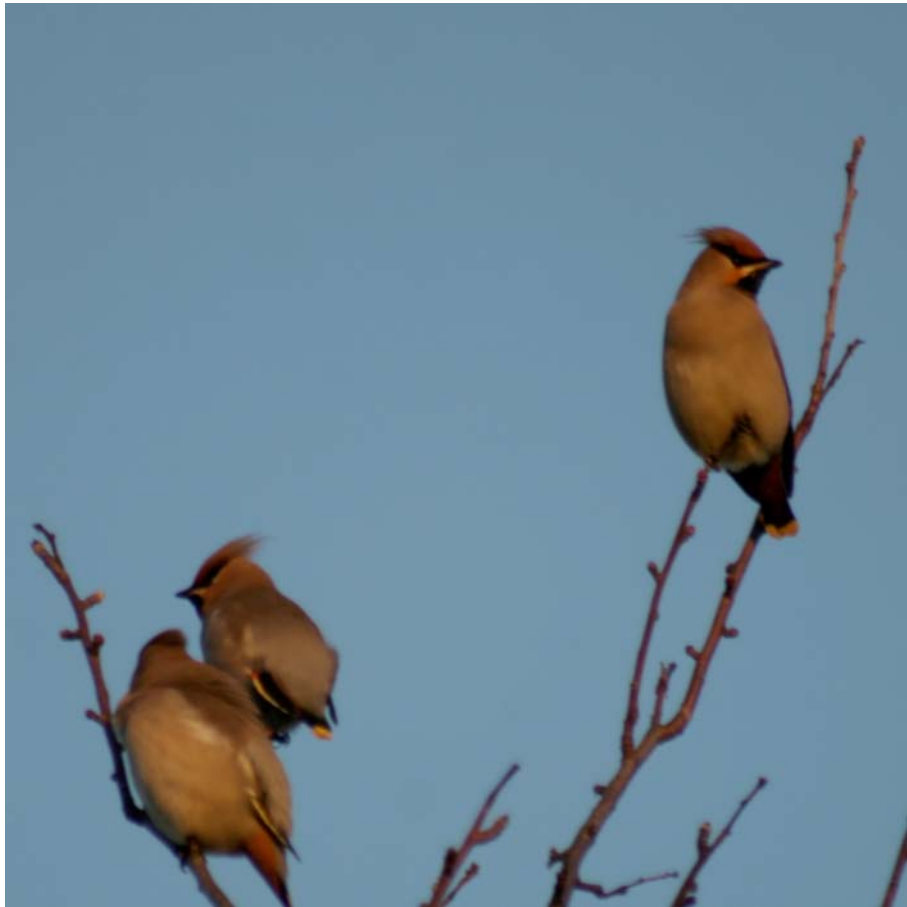


# Lothian Bird Bulletin



**Newsletter of the Lothian SOC Branch  
2009: No. 1**



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## 1 A new year dawns

I hope you enjoy the issue. Thanks to everyone who has contributed, it is really great to see so many different articles. Keep them coming please!!

My plea for articles is even more important than before as I am having my first baby in July and won't be able to spend a lot of time chasing articles. I'm still looking for articles by children, including drawings, so if you have anything please send it in to me or Wendy at the SOC headquarters.

Julie

## 2 George Waterston Library Vacancy

A half- or part-day position for a librarian at SOC HQ will be available from 1st July 2009. Details regarding hours and rate of pay are still to be finalized but the Club would like to hear from anyone who feels they may be interested. Ideally, applicants should have some knowledge of ornithology and good computer skills.

To register your interest, please contact Wendy on 01875 871330 or email: [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk)

## 3 Two bird surveys need to be covered

Due to new commitments in the coming months April to June this year, I will not be able to do two surveys which have been ongoing for years.

*First:* A Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), part of a national survey run by the BTO, in the grounds of Penicuik House; good variety of woodland birds (adequate bird-call knowledge desirable), involves one visit in April/May and a second in May/June, 1-1.5 hours in early morning.

*Second:* A WeBS count of water birds on shore and sea from Cramond to Hound Point, done once a month near high tide over 12 months, but needing someone to cover April-May-June this year. Count takes about 3+ hours, telescope very useful, Cramond ferry not now operating; I can discuss access.

Count forms and method instruction sheet for both surveys will be available. It is very desirable to keep these surveys ongoing. Anyone interested in helping with either survey can get in touch at [harry\\_dott@hotmail.com](mailto:harry_dott@hotmail.com).

Harry Dott

## 4 Changed Days

A selection of notes on 3 areas in the Lothians from over 50 years ago makes interesting reading in a variety of ways. All reflect changes some good, some not so good and some highlighting changes in distribution.

Indiscriminate shooting of birds is now thankfully in the past but on 13th January 1949 at pre Reserve Aberlady things were certainly different. A walk along the tide line then produced a long casualty list of shot birds namely 3 Curlew, 1 Redshank, 2 Knot, 2 Dunlin, 1 Sparrowhawk, 5 Herring Gull, 1 Shag, 2 Common Scoter and 3 Wigeon all mostly dead but some injured.

Today we flock to Musselburgh to check what's about but in the early 1950s the place to go was the Corstorphine Pool, unfortunately long gone with the space now occupied by the large hotel at the Maybury. The pool was really a marsh near the railway line conveniently overlooked by an embankment and quite often used by cattle. A summary of species in those days could include breeding Reed and Corn Bunting, Sedge Warbler, Coot, Moorhen, Redshank (3 prs), Lapwing (12 prs), Snipe (4 prs) with possible Yellow Wagtails as pairs were present in May. Passage produced an interesting variety such as Black Tailed Godwit, Ruff, Green and Common Sandpipers, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Pintail, Teal and Shoveler just showing what a quite small habitat could attract even though steam-hauled express trains regularly passed close by. All this within the City boundary!

Lochend Pond still exists but was more important then for certain species. A visit on 7th November 1948 produced 52 Scaup, 17 Wigeon and 10 Pochard but 25th February excelled with 223 Pochard, 23 Tufted Duck and 2 Scaup. A Black Tern on 17th August 1948 was obviously a major excitement and a Water Rail could sometimes be found wintering, something that still does occur nowadays. However the numbers of Duck now are relatively insignificant as is the case on most fresh water in the Lothians.

Keith Macgregor

## 5 LSOC Field Trip to Gosford Woodlands followed by Christmas Lunch at Craigielaw G.C. Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> Dec 2008

A dreadfully dreich Saturday night thankfully cleared by 10am on Sunday until the sun shone on 31 hungry souls.

But firstly the aim was to build up appetites with a stroll through rather damp paths of the estate finding a few feathered friends on the way. Both aims succeeded starting with a covey of 6 grey partridges followed by the area specialities of Nuthatch (probably 4), Treecreeper and G.S. Woodpecker.

But now the priority was FOOD for humans! And what a splendid lunch the G.C. provided for us. Indeed one of our (very) senior members in thanking the staff confided that this had been "the best Christmas lunch out I've ever had". I think that most, if not all, of our cheerfully noisy group would agree. Our thanks to Stephen H. for leading the walk and Gillian Herbert for such a well-organised lunch.

John Pringle.

31 species seen – cumulative total for last three outings 75.

## 6 New Year starts with a bang!

Every year I try and see how many species I can see on New Year's Day and this year was a record 86. Out of interest I put a note out to Yahoo's Lothian Bird News and several folk wanted a list of what I saw. Then Willie Prest suggested I do a note for this Newsletter when he heard I have been doing this count on New Year's Day since 1983 and have only missed three years. The aim is to get out and have fun without it becoming too serious. Counts vary from 47 species (this was in 1984 and only did two hours — clearly the night before had an effect!) up to 86 this year. Average is 71. So why was this year the best? Read on but don't get too excited.

The count started at 0845 having my cereal looking out at the garden and its feeders. The first bird was a Herring Gull, then Wood Pigeon and by 0910 I had House Sparrow, Robin, the four tits, Goldfinch, Dunnock, Greenfinch, Blackbird and Chaffinch. Leaving my house in Longniddry, things were livening up as the sun rose on a still clear day though a little chilly i.e. 0°C.

I drove to Musselburgh via the coast road and this was far better than expected. Carrion Crow and C. Dove were easy but Mistle Thrush is one I have often missed in the past. As I reached the main road there were about 15 Waxwings in the tall trees in Gosford Estate. Great. Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie were picked off but Fieldfare was nice as they have been very scarce in East Lothian this year.

A dozy Buzzard in a tree was next and then I stopped and looked at some horses in a field and, sure enough, Redwing were there. Next, Bullfinch crossed the road, followed by Song Thrush and Pied Wag., while Starling and B-h Gull were in Port Seton. As I drove into where the lagoons are I was surprised, and pleased, with a flock of Siskins on the scrub.

The Boating Pond had some thin ice but mainly clear and yielded up Tufted Duck, Goldeneye and Wigeon. Walking to the lagoons added a Meadow Pipit flying over. The Lagoons were frozen solid and were useless. A wee walk on the grass gave me a Skylark. I did not go to the seawall and it is a balance between how much time it will take versus what species it will produce that I could get more easily elsewhere. As I got into the car a Mute Swan popped into view plus a Reed Bunting.

I decided to try the Esk mouth and at last got a wader – a Redshank. However Greylag, Common Gull, Goosander, Mallard and a overhead Peregrine made the journey worthwhile. A wee carpark at east end of ash workings had a couple of Grey Wags. and a Velvet Scoter off the sea wall. Next stop was Port Seton but the very low tide here was hopeless for waders, just O'Catcher and Turnstone but Cormorant, Shag, Eider, RBMerganser, LTDuck, Slav. Grebe, Common Scoter were rounded off with a GBBGull.

Finally a stop where the wee stream joins the sea opposite the caravan site gave me the waders I was after: Curlew, Bar-t. Godwit, Grey, Golden and Ringed Plovers, and Lapwings.

Back home at 1045 for a desperately needed coffee and a cake. Nothing new in the garden. Leaving at 1115 it was nice to be joined by my wife, Kathleen, and we had a quick stop at No 3 carpark where we saw Knot, Dunlin and a Red-t.Diver. We then hurried to the carpark at Kilspindie side of Aberlady Bay.

A glance added Shelduck and in the undergrowth by the house Tree Sparrow, Wren and a useful Tree Creeper, a species often missed on previous counts. A Goldcrest was seen in scrub over the wall just outside the village opposite the Bay. Drove to Drem pools which is accessed by the Disabled Horse Riders place. I expected the water to be frozen over but 20 Mute Swans had kept it free and Teal, Coot, Moorhen and Snipe bit the dust. A Heron got up and there were Yellowhammers.

On the way out added Kestrel.

As we drove on saw Pheasant and in a six foot gap in a hedge, both of us saw two running fat bodies, Grey Partridge. Another bird easily missed in the past. We drove towards Whitekirk and had Whooper Swans and Pink-feet at Prora and a Sparrowhawk further on. Carried on to Belhaven Pond and again swans kept some water open and Little Grebe and a female Pochard were on the list. We had some sandwiches and coffee overlooking Belhaven Sands and with all the people milling about we did not expect to add anything.

Wrong. Rock Pipit! I did think of turning back then as it was 1.45 but decided to add Sanderling at Whitesands, south of Dunbar. Easy, plus Stonechat. More Waxwings on wires on the old A1 near Knowes Farm Shop. The light was fading but as we made our way back I stopped just past the bridge over the Tyne at East Linton where I used to see Dippers years ago. It only took 10 seconds and the last species was on the list.

I use a dictating machine to add the birds as it's much quicker than writing but I have no idea what the final total is until I write it down at home. We got back at 2.40. After a tally the record of 86 was the final count, beating 1998 by one. This year was one of the best because several species you should see, we saw. Often the odd common species goes missing such as Pheasant or even Eider. Also the small birds can be hidden if the weather is wet and/or windy.

I could go over some of the past highlights such as Desert Wheatear but I think it would be boring. So go on and try it next year but the main thing is make it fun and enjoy yourself.

Frank & Kathleen Hamilton

PS For anyone thinking we were seriously polluting the countryside, I drive a low-emission car and did 65.6 mpg on this trip.

## **7 LSOC Outing to Linlithgow Loch & Kinneil Kerse. Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2009**

The weather forecast promised a sunny, very cold morning turning to sleet and rain by 3pm. Pretty accurate apart from the sunny bit ending around 1pm.

Despite this 14 members arrived at the Loch to be met with rather frisky waterfowl who obviously thought spring was on the way, unaware of the afternoon's surprise in store.

Mallard, Goldeneye, Tufted, Great-Crested Grebe, Coot and Moorhen were well into breeding plumage and courtship. Whilst numerous Dabchick amused us, bringing many catches up and then juggling to get them in the right position for swallowing.

As 'promised' the (probably female) Smew was waiting at the east end, again very active but seen by all.

A comfort stop before moving to Kinneil. Then Winter arrived.

Time for a quick viewing which gave several more duck species including Pintail, Scaup and nu-

merous Shelduck. A very large flock of Lapwing circled over the chemical works whilst a rather drookit group scuttled back to the cars – and home.

Total species seen - 50 giving a cumulative total of 82 (last four outings).

John Pringle.

## 8 My Life with Birds: Dave Allan



*Dave has worked for the SOC at Waterston House, Aberlady as Events Co-ordinator since it opened in 2005.*

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

I've had a general interest in wildlife since I was a child. I became interested in birds more specifically when I was fortunate to work with the ospreys as a Ranger at Loch of the Lowes from 1992-94. But it wasn't until I became the Ranger at Musselburgh Lagoons in 1995-2000 that I really got the bug for birds.

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

A pair of Greenkat binoculars, which I inherited from my father.

### **And your first bird book?**

The Observer book of birds.

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

1997 or thereabouts.

### **Describe your local patch**

Probably Musselburgh lagoons. Having worked there I have an obvious attachment to the place and it is such a great place to see a wide variety of birds at close quarters and you never know what is going to turn up.

### **Where is your dream birdwatching location**

Too many to mention. Having said that I would like to visit the Shetlands during autumn migration (providing the conditions are correct) and if I had the money I would love to go to New Guinea.

### **Birdwatcher or a birder?**

Whatever!

**Your most embarrassing birdwatching moment?**

Although perhaps not a story about birdwatching in the usual sense, when on Osprey night watch at Loch of the Lowes (in the days before cameras were installed), I was awoken around 3am by a call warning that egg thieves might be near the nest site. The procedure was to jump in the electric powered boat and go out to the nest area. However, it had been raining heavily and the boat was full of water, so when I tried to pull it into the loch it didn't budge and my back gave in badly leaving me completely doubled over. In my haste there had been no time to get properly dressed, so I had to crawl back up to the visitor centre on my hands and knees in my vest, boxers and wellies before being taken to Perth Infirmary where they wheeled me into A&E in a wheelchair - still in the same attire!

**What makes your blood boil?**

The negative impact of grouse moorland on raptors and other wildlife, the lack of good, undisturbed wetlands and, in my view, generally there not being nearly enough good habitats e.g woodland, meadows of substantial size in Scotland - the priority so often seems to be about making money with wildlife being of secondary consideration. Also where there is a lack of recreational activity management or guidelines in sensitive wildlife areas.

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

My most enjoyable finds have been a Broad-billed Sandpiper in North Uist and a Red-necked Phalarope at Musselburgh simply because I had seen neither of those species before and I really like waders.

**And your most memorable sighting?**

This is a difficult one – possibly my first Osprey taking a fish.

**Your most wanted species?**

There are lots, but I'd love to see a Gyr Falcon.

## **9 UKBS LOTHIAN NOVEMBER RECORDS**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

A Grey Phalarope was feeding off Musselburgh (1st). A Pallas's Warbler was seen at Torness (5th) with a Pallas's Warbler in a Dunbar garden (6th) and another one in Dunbar from (7th – 10th). A second winter Kumliens Gull was present at Skateraw (13th – 15th).

**ABERLADY**

A Black-necked Grebe was noted (9th, 14th & 27th). A Spotted Redshank was present (9th) with one present (21st – 29th). Four Short-eared Owl were hunting (12th & 16th). A single Snow Bunting was noted (12th).

**BARNS NESS**

A count of 40 Snow Bunting was made (1st). A Long-eared Owl and seven Crossbill were noted (2nd). Three Snow Bunting were present (15th).

**BELHAVEN**

A Black-throated Diver was present (4th). A first winter Mediterranean Gull was present (15th).



### **CRAMOND**

A count of six Greenshank and an adult Mediterranean Gull was made (9th).

### **FERNY NESS**

Three Red-necked Grebe and 36 Slavonian Grebe were counted (4th). A Black-necked Grebe and eleven Slavonian Grebe were noted (29th).

### **GOSFORD ESTATE**

130 Fieldfare flew over (2nd). Five Nuthatch, three Great Spotted Woodpecker and six Treecreeper were counted (30th).

### **TYNINGHAME**

A count of 35 Twite was made (4th) with 60 counted (8th). A count of 300 Fieldfare were near Dirlton (4th). A Spotted Redshank was present (8th).

### **WHITESANDS**

The (16th) saw three Short-eared Owl, single Merlin and single Snow Bunting.

### **WAXWINGS**

The large influx of Waxwings started on (2nd) with small flocks seen at coastal sites the largest being 30 at the SOC headquarters at Waterston House Aberlady (2nd) and flocks of 10 and 20 over North Berwick the same date. A count of 106 was made at Belhaven (9th) with 100 on (10th) and another 100 nearby. Towards the end of the month large flocks were noted in Stockbridge with 100 seen (26th).

A flock of 120 were in Joppa Terrace (27th) and a count of 380 was made in Whitehill Gardens, Musselburgh (28th) with 350 present (29th). The (28th) saw a count of 230 at the rugby club Musselburgh, 150 at St Albans Road, 163 in Wester Broom.

The (29th) saw 350 in Stoneybank Road, Musselburgh, 100 at Linlithgow Academy. The (30th) saw 200 at Linlithgow Primary school, 100 at Fairmilehead and 80 in Joppa.

### **OTHER SIGHTINGS**

Three late Swallows were over Longniddry (2nd) with two seen (12th). Two Swallow were over Seton Sands (14th). A count of 124 Whooper Swan was made at Fenton Barns (9th). A Black-throated Diver was off Scoughall (29th).

## **10 UKBS LOTHIAN DECEMBER RECORDS**

### **ABERLADY**

A count of 454 Pink-footed Geese was made (8th) when a Kingfisher was also seen. Four Short-eared Owl were hunting (14th). A Black-necked Grebe was present (14th, 20th & 21st). A count of 100 Fieldfare was made (20th). A Richardson's Canada Goose was noted (28th - 30th).

### **FERNY NESS**

A Black-necked Grebe was seen (4th - 11th & 28th) with a single Red-necked Grebe (4th) and two red-necked Grebe noted (11th) when 22 Slavonian Grebe and a Black-throated Diver were also seen. A Great Northern Diver was noted (14th). Three Brent Geese were present (26th).

**LINLITHGOW LOCH**

A female Smew has been present (11th – month's end). An adult Mediterranean Gull was noted (14th).

**MUSSELBURGH**

A Chiffchaff was in a Musselburgh garden (4th). A Great Northern Diver was noted (26th & 30th). The same Great Northern Diver was seen off Prestongrange (26th - 28th).

**SETON SANDS**

An adult Mediterranean Gull was in the roost at Seton Sands (27th). Three Red-necked Grebe and four Slavonian Grebe were noted (28th).

**WAXWINGS**

The (1st) saw a count of 10 Waxwings in Penicuik, 80 in Linlithgow and 60 in Buckstone Terrace. On the (2nd) there were 200 in Dalry Road, 150 in St Albans Road, 80 in Comely Bank and 40 at Meggetland with many smaller flocks seen.

Counts on the (3rd) were 120 in Queensferry Road, 80 at Comely Bank and 50 in Orchard Brae with 400 in Grange Road (4th). A count of 450 was made in Dalry Road (5th) with 300 roosting there (9th). Some 210 were in Joppa Terrace (11th), 176 at Musselburgh (17th) and 120 at Longniddry (19th). The (31st) saw 90 in Liberton Brae, 20 at Straiton, 15 in Livingston and 15 at Tynninghame.

**OTHER SITES**

A possible Rough-legged Buzzard was noted on the Bypass at Straiton (5th). A Black Guillemot was off Yellowcraig (7th) and one was noted off Seafield (21st). A count of 150 Linnet, eight Jay and five Great Spotted Woodpecker was made at Gifford (7th). Five Purple Sandpiper were noted at Port Seton (11th). A male and female Blackcap have been visiting a Currie garden. Three Brambling were at Rosebery (21st) with one visiting the feeders at Bavelaw Marsh.

An adult Mediterranean Gull was at Skateraw (30th). A Black Redstart, a Black-throated Diver and three Purple Sandpiper were at North Berwick (28th). A male Pintail was on Bavelaw Marsh (28th). A Black-throated Diver was off Prestonpans (28th).

**11 UKBS LOTHIAN JANUARY RECORDS****ABERLADY AND KILSPINDIE**

A Black-necked Grebe was noted (1st). Two Short-eared Owl were hunting (5th) with three seen (26th). Five Snow Bunting, 100 Sanderling and two Peregrine were present (13th). A male Shoveler was noted (24th).

**BAVELAW MARSH**

A Kingfisher and two Brambling were noted (8th). A count of 18 Whooper Swan and 25 Mute Swan was made (17th).

**CRAMOND**

Two Greenshank were noted (1st) with five present (18th).

**FERNY NESS**

An adult Mediterranean Gull was noted (12th). A count of 27 Slavonian Grebe was made (14th). A Black-necked Grebe and a Black-throated Diver were present (23rd). A Red-necked Grebe and 17

Slavonian Grebe were noted (24th) with a Black-throated Diver and 33 Slavonian Grebe (27th).

### **LINLITHGOW**

A Water Rail and 40 Redwing were noted (2nd). A female Smew has been present all month. A female Scaup was noted (20th – 24th).

### **MUSSELBURGH**

Two adult Mediterranean Gull were noted (7th) with a single adult Mediterranean Gull, four Little Gull, four Slavonian Grebe and one Red-throated Diver present (17th). Two adult Mediterranean Gull were also seen (21st). A Great Northern Diver was seen (22nd) and (26th). Seven Slavonian Grebe were noted (23rd).

### **NORTH BERWICK**

A female Black Redstart has been over wintering beside the Seabird Centre all month. A count of 24 Purple Sandpiper was made (11th).

### **PORT SETON**

A Black-throated Diver and two Red-necked Grebe were noted (11th). Three Purple Sandpiper were in the harbour (26th).

### **WAXWING**

A count of 16 was made at Knowes Farm Tynninghame (1st) with 22 at Musselburgh station (9th). A count of 30 was made at Haddington (7th) and 33 were at Whitehill Farm Road, Musselburgh (10th) and 78 were there on (16th). A count of 36 was made at Waterston House, Aberlady (12th). A flock of up to 80 have been seen most days at the Bankton roundabout Tranent all month. At the bypass junction for Dalkeith, 65 were present (17th) with 46 at Macmerrie (16th).

### **OTHER SITES**

A Water Rail was seen at Duddingston (3rd). A Chiffchaff was seen at Leith Links (23rd). A Yellow-legged Gull was at Belhaven (25th). A count of 120 Whooper Swan was made at Whitekirk (29th) with 40 at Drem (31st).

## **12 UKBS LOTHIAN FEBRUARY RECORDS**

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

A male King Eider flew past Aberlady (2nd) with a male off Fidra (4th & 7th). The first drake in Lothian since 1991. A first winter male King Eider was seen at Musselburgh (21st).

### **ABERLADY**

A Bittern was seen in flight over the Marl Loch (2nd). A Red-necked Grebe was off Gullane Point (2nd). A Water Rail was seen on the path to the Marl Loch (2nd - 13th). A Great White Egret landed at the Marl Loch (3rd) before flying off S-W. A Peregrine, eight Twite and 300 Fieldfare were noted (4th) with 500 Fieldfare (6th) and c1500 counted (8th).

### **BARNS NESS**

A single Little Auk and six Red-throated Diver were noted (1st).

### **BAVELAW**

A male Hen Harrier, a Water Rail, female Brambling and 18 Whooper Swan were noted (5th). A

male Pintail was present (6th - 22nd) with two female also present (22nd).

#### **FERNY NESS**

The (1st) saw a count of 24 Slavonian Grebe, and single Black-necked Grebe, Red-necked Grebe and Black-throated Diver. A Black-necked grebe and two Red-necked Grebe were present (13th). A count of 35 Slavonian Grebe was made (24th).

#### **LINLITHGOW**

A female Smew has been present on the loch all month.

#### **MUSSELBURGH**

A Purple Sandpiper was noted (22nd). A male Gadwall was present (27th) and a male Snow Bunting (28th).

#### **NORTH BERWICK**

The female Black Redstart has been showing well all month on the rocks beside the Seabird Centre.

#### **WAXWINGS**

A count of 47 Waxwing was made at the Bankton roundabout Tranent (1st) with 80 seen (2nd) down to 40 by (19th). A count of 20 Waxwing was made at Dunbar Cement Works (3rd) with 39 at Egglemont Road the same date. A count of 72 was made at Haddington (4th) with 30 at Wester Hailes (9th). A count of 28 was made at Newington (22nd) and 35 at Gilmore Place (22nd).

#### **OTHER SITES**

A count of 60 Whooper Swan was made near Drem (6th). Fields at Inveresk held 400 Skylark (10th). A female Black Redstart was seen on the rocks at Joppa (15th - 16th). A male and female Smew landed on the sea at Blackness Castle (19th). A Short-eared Owl was hunting at Gullane (23rd). A juvenile Iceland Gull was at Cramond (24th). Four Greenshank were at Cramond (27th). Three Purple Sandpiper were on the wall at Port Seton harbour (26th).