

Lothian Bird Bulletin



**Newsletter of the Lothian SOC Branch
2009: No. 2**



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1 Editorial - June 2009

Welcome to the June version of LBB. At the time of writing I only have 2 weeks until my baby is due so please continue to send in your articles.

Electronic version of LBB

If you would prefer to receive an electronic version of the bulletin, please send in your preferred email delivery address to mail@the-soc.org.uk and we can send you the PDF instead of the paper copy. Please state your name and membership number, if known, in your email message. Thank you.

Projector Screens Give-away

Anyone who is interested in used projector screens (free-standing tripod mounted and measure 4ft x 4ft) from Waterston House, please contact Wendy at the office.

2 Nest Box Challenge

The 2009 breeding season seems to have got off to a fantastic start. The first Blackbirds and Robins have fledged already and many more birds, including Blue Tits and Great Tits, are just starting to incubate their eggs.

The third year of the BTOs Nest Box Challenge is now underway, so if you have a nest box in your garden, please have a look inside and tell us what you find by visiting their dedicated website at www.bto.org/nbc. Not only is it fascinating to follow the progress of the nesting attempt, but you'll also be helping us to understand more about the value of nest boxes for our garden birds.

And its not just nests in boxes that we're interested in. If you find a Dunnock nest in your hedge or a Blackbird nest in your tree, why not monitor it for BTOs Nest Record Scheme (www.bto.org/survey/nest_records/index.htm).

Summer has finally arrived along with its first migrants have arrived. Spotted Flycatchers are one of the last to arrive back from Africa, typically around the end of April. If Spotted Flycatchers nest in your garden this year Mike Toms, Head of Garden Ecology at the BTO, would like to hear from you, so drop him a line at michael.toms@bto.org

3 Haddington Swift project

I thought you would like to know that our swift nest boxes (discussed at winter SOC Lothian Discussion Group meetings over the last few sessions) were installed at John Muir House, HQ of East Lothian Council, on May 1st.

There is a news release on the Council website

http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/site/scripts/news_article.php?newsID=257

If anyone would like to take part in the Haddington swift survey, please do get in touch and we will pass your details on to Abbie Marland. As well as the local Haddington initiative, Concern for Swifts (Scotland) is urgently looking for records of Swift nest sites in Scotland. The information received is vital for protecting current sites and creating new habitat. For more details and a survey form, please visit <http://www.concernforswifts.com/Survey.html> or contact Clare Darlaston, 287 Onslow Drive, Dennistoun, Glasgow G31 2QG.

4 Art Exhibitions at Waterston House

William Neill (Paintings). Runs from Saturday 25 July until Weds 26 August 2009

William Neill has been interested in natural history since about the age of eight, when his family moved from town to country, and has been painting for even longer. He taught in both Britain and Australia before moving to South Uist in 1980, where these two main interests were put together. The landscape and wildlife of the Hebrides is a constant inspiration, and he works as often as possible in the field, mainly using watercolour.

Coming soon....

Paul Bartlett (Paintings). Runs from Saturday 29 August until Wednesday 7 October

Donald Watston Gallery, Waterston House, Aberlady. Mon-Fri 10am-4pm, Sat/Sun 12noon-6pm

5 SOC Garden open day - Sunday 5 July

Scotland's Gardens Scheme is a well-known charity whereby property owners open their gardens to the public, usually on a Sunday, in aid of a range of charities.

Details can be found in the scheme's established 'yellow book' and also online. In East Lothian, there is a tradition of villages opening a variety of small gardens together. On the afternoon of Sunday 5 July this year, it is the turn of Aberlady and the SOC garden at Waterston House will be taking part (open 12noon-6pm, as usual). On the open day you can expect to see a yellow sign at the entrance and we shall have some small interpretation boards explaining the wildflower meadows, pond and rock garden at the back.

6 SOC LOTHIAN BRANCH AGM 2008/09

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It seems rather strange to think this is actually my sixth Chairman's report. Little did I think seven years ago that I might be writing this. How the time has flown (I must have been enjoying myself!). But it's now also a good time to be stepping down and handing the reins over to someone else.

Branch indoor meetings continue to be well attended, with 40+ members most months, including the two meetings held each year at Waterston House, Aberlady. The latter seem to attract different members from those regularly attending Meadowbank Stadium, Edinburgh. The committee think that the two Waterston House meetings per season are successful and should be continued. We are still getting new members to both indoor meetings and outdoor trips. I think that's largely down to

the warm welcome that visitors get from you, the existing members. I like to stop and listen, before the meeting starts or, more particularly, during the tea/coffee interval – there's a real buzz about the place.

We've had talks on such varied and interesting subjects over this year, from Bob McGowan with his detective story about the rare bird specimens at the National Museum of Scotland to Mike Thornton and eagle owls in Andalucia, from Mike Martin and the evidence of great auk from the middens on the Isle of May, to Derek McGinn and his hugely popular photographs of birds in Western Australia (with my apologies to those other speakers not mentioned by name). Although 4 of our speakers each season are arranged by SOC HQ, the other 4 are arranged locally so if you have suggestions for subjects you would like to hear about, or of speakers you could recommend, please mention them to any committee member. We also like to encourage our own members to contribute to the 2 members' meetings – this one in April is no exception, and then our first of the season in September.

Our monthly outdoor meetings right throughout the year have been equally popular. Special thanks go to those members who lead these outings. This is a great way if you are new to birding or new to the area to get help with what you might be seeing. Many of our venues are regular ones visited each year, but we try to introduce new ones too. Again, if you have suggestions of new places to visit please pass them on to a committee member, or better still, offer to lead an outing there. This year we tried running some outings on Saturdays as well as the usual Sundays. Feedback from those attending, is that they very much prefer the latter, so next year we will revert to Sunday-only outings.

The 2006 Lothian Bird Report courtesy of Stephen Hunter and his team of writers/editors will soon be available. Our thanks go to them for their input in this very time consuming piece of work. New writers/editors will be needed for the 2007 LBR edition, so if you have talents in that direction don't hide your light!

Finally I want to thank you, the members, for supporting and encouraging me when I started (and was very nervous about taking on the role of chairman), and for sticking with me over the years. Thanks also to all the committee members, past and present (who really do all the work). It's been great working with such a dedicated team. My best wishes to you all. Happy bird watching!

Jacky Robinson
April 2009

LBR 2006 is now available and copies can be purchased from Waterston House in Aberlady, Viking Optical in Rose Street, Edinburgh or copies can be ordered and sent by post. Please contact Wendy in the office for details.

7 Lothian Branch outing – Tentsmuir and north-east Fife, 20 September 2008

My previous visit here a couple of months earlier had been almost birdless. But I like this place, so wasn't prepared to change the plan!

Around a dozen group members met up at the Tentsmuir forest car park, among the pines. The weather was already warm, dry and calm, and it got steadily warmer as the day unfolded.

We walked slowly along the beach and sand dunes for over a mile, looking along the edge of the pinewoods and out over the sea. We were rewarded with large numbers of birds and plenty of different species – gulls, ducks, auks and gannets on and over the sea, and larks, pipits, wagtails and finches in the sandy areas and along the littoral.

Just as we headed inland to enter the forest, some of us almost stepped on two knots snoozing at the edge of a large pool. Remarkably, they didn't fly off. Syd had a field day with his photographic equipment, while the rest of us studied these endearing birds at extremely close quarters and in brilliant light. We also found a huge group of grey plover resting on the sand, probably 100-200 birds – most unusual for a species which is normally only found in ones and twos. With the tide well out, lots of seals were hauled out on the distant sandbanks. On the way back to the car park, we added siskin, goldfinch and long-tailed tit to our list.

We then headed off to the harbour at Tayport to have our packed lunch and possibly to spot one of the white-tailed sea eagles known to occur in the area. Alas, no eagles, but while we were gathered on the grassy mound alongside the harbour entrance, we were treated to a wonderful natural spectacle – a large pod of dolphins arrived to feed just off the harbour right in front of us. It was difficult to estimate the numbers as they criss-crossed and regularly broke the surface of the sea as they hunted together, but there must have been around 20 animals. It was a marvellous and unexpected experience – we were mesmerised for what must have been almost half an hour.

Our final destination was Morton Lochs, just to the south of Tayport. This was a new site for most of the party, and it turned out to be a very good place indeed. The light was still excellent as we watched plenty of different duck species – mallard, gadwall, pochard, wigeon and tufted duck. The place also seemed to be alive with little grebes – there were at least 8-10 individual birds scattered across the main loch.

All in all, we had a “lovely day out” – good weather, good company, good birds (47 species in total) and some good coastal walking. Plus, of course, that wonderful bonus of watching all those dolphins.

David Atkins

8 SOC Lothian outing to south Fife – 14 February 2009

13 SOC members, including 2 from Dumfries, met at the shore car park at Leven on a cold bright sunny day after a week of snow and frost, with lots of lying snow still in Fife. Leven produced the usual variety of waders, ducks, gulls, and passerines. Our next stop was to have been Lower Largo but a road closure with diversion signs forced us on a truly wild goose chase inland into relatively unknown countryside, over many miles with frequent dead ends and 3-point turns in drive ways with a five-car convoy! The air in the lead car became a little blue between the driver (him) and navigator (me). However, snowy fields added their own charm and several further species - flocks of pinkfeet and greylags, and a low flyover of several hundred pinkfeet gave us spectacularly close sight and sound of this species.

We then abandoned thoughts of Lower Largo and headed for Ruddons Point via Kilconquhar Loch. We anticipated the loch would be frozen and therefore devoid of water birds. However, there was sufficient open water for it to hold a good selection including several species of duck not seen elsewhere, grey heron, little grebe, coot and moorhen. Then on to Shell Bay and Ruddons Point, where

we knew the state of the tide would not be in our favour. However, conversation with birders leaving the site assured us that the bird we were seeking had been seen some time earlier. Almost immediately we located said bird – a very handsome male surf scoter close in to the rocks, giving everyone good views. We also saw further wader and duck species, though the latter in quite small numbers; alas, though, no divers.

Our final port of call, minus 3 of the group who wanted to try to see the long-staying king eider at Earlsferry (and succeeded), was Loch Ore Meadows. At this point our species count was into the fifties. Whilst admiring a single whooper swan, a small group of pochard and a pair of scaup, along with some 'dodgy' possible tufted/scaup hybrids on a patch of open water close to where we were standing, we got onto a small black and white bird flying towards us with a distinctly different jizz. What could it be? It landed immediately in front of the group, and though it only remained a few seconds, it was unmistakably a drake smew. A truly magical moment! As we left the loch we believed our total for the day was 59, increasing to 60 as we got back to the cars with a flock of circling lapwing. However, on going through the trip list again at home we realised we'd missed recording a further 3 species, so the final tally for the day was 63, including all three sawbills. (John Pringle and I have the full list if anyone is interested.) Altogether an excellent winter day's birding. Many thanks to David Atkins for leading, and to the rest of the group for making it such a good day.

Jacky Robinson

9 Lothian SOC Field Trip to Aberlady Bay Nature Reserve Sunday 26th April 2009

The weather was warm and sunny as we arrived at Aberlady; 15 of us in all. We met the Local Ranger Paul Johnson who was keen to know what we would like to see. With the influx of migrants we suggested that Whitethroat or Lesser Whitethroat would be good but we would be happy to see whatever was around.

We made our way out past the Marl Loch with many Willow Warblers singing and after a little while we heard Sedge Warbler singing – on the other side of the loch. There were quite a few Reed Buntings calling and some Wheatears.

Paul knows the Reserve very well and is very good on bird calls. He took us to scrub near the point where he picked up a Whitethroat scratching away and then a Lesser Whitethroat singing. It is likely that both birds were new arrivals and were not showing – probably exhausted. It was also quite windy by then.

The wind began to get quite strong and it was time to find a sheltered spot for lunch. Since we had a reasonable view of the sea there were various birds in view: - Red Throated Diver, Long-tailed Duck, 200+ Common Scoter as well as Gannets, Guillemots and Eider Ducks.

We then walked west along the beach after that and there were a small group of Sanderling on a sandbar. In the distance we saw Ringed Plover, Knot, Godwits (probably Bar-tailed but they were too far away), and Grey Plover.

The wind by this point was a lot stronger and thankfully it was not in our faces. A fairly uneventful walk back with a few Stonechats until we were nearly back at the bridge. Someone's pager beeped

– the Little Egret is back at Aberlady – sure enough there it was.

A most enjoyable trip. Our thanks to Paul for being a very congenial and informative leader.

James Main

27 April 2009

Total species seen - 48.

Cumulative total last 7 outings - 106.

10 Lothian Bird Bulletin – My Life with Birds: Keith Macgregor



Keith (pictured on the right) started his bird watching days around Cardiff where he was born. He moved to Edinburgh in 1942. His travels include 12 European countries, Dubai, South Africa and North America (Florida, Arizona & British Columbia), mostly since retiring in 1994. For over 50 years, he gave evening classes on birds before later forming his own birding group, which he took to sites around the UK and Europe. He met his wife Dorothy through the SOC and they married in 1960. Today, along with Dave Allan, Keith leads guided walks as part of HQ's Birdwatching for Beginners programme.

How did your birdwatching start?

By nest hunting with school friends and forming a small egg collection; a common practice in those days. But watching a blackbird nest building in our garden and finding a robin's nest in an old kettle led to a more in-depth interest.

What was your first pair of binoculars?

First serious binoculars were Barr and Stroud 8 x 30. Saved £1 a week to be able to raise the £23 required.

...and your first bird book?

The *Observers Book of British Birds* received for my 7th birthday.

When did you join the SOC?

Signed on by George Waterston in 1946 at the Poole's Synod Hall, Edinburgh, where the club held their meetings then.

Describe your local/regular patch.

Dalkeith Country Park is a regular walk with Dorothy. Good-looking habitat but sometimes lacking and still only few nuthatch records. Also, often at the Hermitage in Edinburgh, first visited in 1944.

What's your dream birdwatching location?

Seychelles would rank high along with Galapagos.

Birdwatcher or birder?

Birdwatcher, as that is what it's all about.

Your most embarrassing birdwatching moment?

Insisting a bird of prey near Dunkeld was a buzzard though an amateur in the group insisted goshawk- she was right.

What makes your blood boil?

Photographers who just have to get closer and closer and yet have an enormous lens.

The most unusual or rare bird you've found?

Wilson's Phalarope at Rosyth in 1954 with Frank Hamilton. The first for Europe so did not appear in any bird book but Dougal Andrew had an American field guide and along with George Waterston the identification was confirmed the next day.

...and your most memorable sighting?

The sight and sound of hundreds of migrant cranes on the Baltic coast of North Germany. They were attracted to grain specially put out in fields overlooked by a hide.

Your most wanted species?

Broad-billed Sandpiper followed by Snowy Owl, the latter just missed on Orkney this year.

Do you have a 'bogey bird'?

Probably that Snowy Owl.

11 UKBS FOR LOTHIAN MARCH RECORDS

FERNY NESS

Single Black-necked Grebe, Red-necked Grebe and 15 Slavonian Grebe were noted (1st). The (6th) saw 26 Slavonian Grebe, single Red-throated Diver, Black and Red-necked Grebes and 38 Long-tailed Duck. Slavonian Grebe reached 39 by (15th). On the 29th 23 Slavonian Grebe, 1 Black-necked Grebe and 1 Crossbill SW were noted.

LINLITHGOW

The female Smew was present until (12th) when three pairs of Great Crested Grebe were also seen. On the 23rd 6 Sand Martin were seen at Linlithgow Loch.

MUSSELBURGH

Two male Snow Bunting were noted (1st) with 2 male and five female present (3rd - 5th) when a Sparrowhawk took one of the females. A Kingfisher was beside the boating pond (2nd). A summer plumage Red-necked Grebe, a Black-necked Grebe and two Red-throated Diver were present (6th). Two early Sand Martin were noted (15th) also two pairs of Stonechat and a summer plumage Mediterranean Gull. A male Scaup, male Northern Wheatear and 5 Slavonian Grebe were noted (20th). Eleven Slavonian Grebe, 4 Whooper Swan and a male Shoveler were noted (21st).

WAXWINGS

A count of 25 Waxwing was made in Penicuik (1st). Dalkeith Park had 40 Waxwing (2nd) with 30 at Duddingston Road West (9th). A count of 30 was made at Pentland Avenue (16th) and 30 at Penicuik (18th). A count on 20 Waxwing was made at Penicuik (23rd) and on the 24th at Corstorphine 50 Waxwing were seen.

OTHER SITES

A count of 105 Whooper Swan was made at Drem (3rd) and 84 at Fenton Barns (16th). Six Purple Sandpiper were at Prestongrange (10th) when two Black-necked Grebe were also seen. Two Snow Bunting, two Black-throated Diver, six Twite and a Greenshank were at Tynninghame (15th). Four Snow Bunting were seen at Torness (14th). A male White Wagtail was at Barns Ness (13th). A Chiffchaff was singing at the River Esk (16th). At Fasnay Bridge (20th) Ring Ousel and 4 Wheatear were seen. On the 20th at Torness a male Wheatear and 2 Snow Bunting were noted. At Barns Ness (21st) White Wagtail and a Peregrine were seen. At Seafeld Pond (21st) 18 Whooper Swan were seen and on the 22nd at Port Seton there was a Red-necked Grebe present. At Port Seton (25th) there was an imm Iceland Gull in roost. At Torness (29th) female Wheatear was present and on the 31st at North Berwick there was 1 Swallow, a male Shoveler and 1 Black-tailed Godwit.

12 UKBS AREA LOTHIAN APRIL RECORDS

HIGHLIGHTS

A Little Egret was at Musselburgh (24th) before moving to Aberlady (25th- 30th). A Marsh Harrier flew over Kilspindie (27th).

ABERLADY

Single Swallow, Sand Martin and Wheatear were noted and 12 Crossbill flew west (5th). Three Short-eared Owl, eight Wheatear, single Black-throated Diver and two Red-throated Diver were noted (11th).

BARNS NESS

A Black Redstart and two Scandinavian Rock Pipit were seen (2nd). A Little Gull, nine Sandwich Tern, two Puffins, five Swallow and 30 Sand Martin were seen (16th). Ten Whimbrel and 18 White Wagtail were present (23rd) with 30 White Wagtail, 12 Whimbrel and a Common Sandpiper (24th).

FASENY LAMMERMUIRS

Four Ring Ousel and a Wheatear were seen (3rd) and two Ring Ousel and five Wheatear (9th). A Snow Bunting and a Common Sandpiper were noted (12th).

FERNY NESS

A count of 83 Long-tailed Duck was made (18th) and a male Surf Scoter was noted (19th -22nd). A male King Eider was offshore (28th).

LINLITHGOW

The (8th) saw eight Swallow and six Sand Martin over the loch and five Swift were noted (30th)

MUSSELBURGH

A male Wheatear was present (2nd). A Little Ringed Plover was present (5th – 7th) and one also seen (26th). Two Swift were noted (26th). The 8th saw 21 Siskin, 93 Meadow Pipit, two Swallow and three Sand Martin west. Two Sandwich Tern were noted (10th) with three Slavonian Grebe, 12 Long-tailed Duck and single House Martin and White Wagtail noted (12th). A Long-eared Owl was roosting (17th). A count of 19 Black-tailed Godwit was made (20th) with Whinchat and grasshopper Warbler noted (21st). A Blue-headed Wagtail and 11 Black-tailed Godwit were present (23rd). A male Garganey was on the scrapes (25th - 29th).

TORNESS

Ten Sandwich Tern were on the beach (15th). Two Yellow Wagtail and three White Wagtail were noted (24th) with two Yellow Wagtail (29th).

OTHER SITES

A count of 30 Waxwing was made at Danderhall (5th) with 22 at Stoneyburn (6th), 30 at Duddingston (12th) and 10 at Leith Links (22nd). A walk from Gladsmuir to Pencaitland produced 15 Chiffchaff. Black-throated Diver, Red-throated Diver, three Slavonian Grebe and 31 Long-tailed Duck were off Joppa (9th). An Osprey flew over Edinburgh (12th). A juvenile Iceland Gull was at Cramond (14th). A Cuckoo was at Bavelaw Marsh (26th). A count of 98 Swallow past Longniddry was made (26th).

13 UKBS AREA LOTHIAN MAY RECORDS

HIGHLIGHTS

A White Stork flew over Luffness (2nd) with one over Musselburgh (10th) and one west over South Queensferry (24th). A Dotterel was on Scald Law Pentland Hills (5th). A Marsh Harrier flew over

Aberlady (10th). A Bee-eater was on the wires near the lighthouse at Barns Ness (18th) and presumably the same one was seen over Dunbar (20th). A Black Kite was over Asda in Dunbar (25th) and a Common Crane over Tynninghame the same date.

ABERLADY

A Short-eared Owl was seen (2nd & 10th) A male and female Surf Scoter were noted (10th). Four Sandwich Tern were on the beach (17th).

BARNS NESS

Four Whimbrel were present (6th). A female Black Redstart was noted (14th) with a Black Tern and Wood Sandpiper present (16th). A Spotted Flycatcher and a Lesser Whitethroat were seen (15th).

BAVELAW

A Little Ringed Plover was noted (1st). A count of 24 Wheatear was made in a field beside Red Moss (6th). A male Garganey and a Cuckoo were present (10th).

MUSSELBURGH

Five Swift were over the River Esk with a Wood Warbler beside the weir (4th). A pair of Gadwall and a Swift were seen (8th) with three White Wagtail, a Cuckoo, 30 Swift and a Whimbrel (10th). A male Surf Scoter was seen (10th & 12th) and two Wood Sandpiper were present (11th). A Blue-headed Wagtail and a Little Gull were noted (12th). A Little Ringed Plover was present (25th & 26th).

SKATERAW

Six Whimbrel and two White Wagtail were noted (9th). An Icterine Warbler and Pied Flycatcher were noted (16th). A winter plumage Great Northern Diver was offshore (21st).

TYNINGHAME

A Little Tern was seen (9th). Two first summer Little Gull were present (21st).

OTHER SITES

A single Waxwing was seen at Queensferry Road (6th). A walk from Ormiston to Cousland (10th) produced 23 Willow Warbler, 17 Sedge Warbler, ten Chiffchaff, eight Whitethroat, Five Blackcap, three Garden Warbler, one Lesser Whitethroat, one Grasshopper Warbler and a single Spotted Flycatcher. 40 Swift were over Linlithgow Loch (8th). A Wood Sandpiper was in Belhaven Bay (16th). Three Cuckoo and 18 Wheatear were seen at Loganlea Reservoir Pentland Hills (7th).