

Fife SOC

Newsletter No. 188

Compiled by Elizabeth Irwin

November 2017



Immature Barred Warbler at Kilminning; Allister Todd

Our next Newsletter will be Issue No.189 for February 2018. Articles, letters, reports and photographs in *jpeg* or *tiff* format for publication should be sent, by Monday, 5 February 2018 at the latest, to Elizabeth Irwin at Drumcarrow Cottage, Pettycruik, Strathkinness KY16 9XP or email: elizabethjirwin@hotmail.com

FROM THE CHAIR

I write this as the wind switches round from the North and the temperature has dropped: winter is on the way. However, for bird watchers this season brings anticipation rather than dread. The geese have returned, and we have the winter waders and ducks to look forward to. I hope you have all been enjoying some of the fine Autumn weather to get out and watch some birds, as well as enjoying the beautiful leaf displays.

We have lived in Fife since 1985, so I thought I knew most of the local bird-watching hotspots. However, one of the pleasures of being involved with Fife SOC is that I regularly learn about new places to visit – or reminded where to revisit. I have only recently discovered where The Walled Garden and The Stinky Pool are! In that spirit, I wanted to write about my favourite local walk, 'Outhead', further down in this newsletter. I hope that some of you will respond with favourite places that you are happy to share with other members. I am happy to receive items for the next newsletter at any point!

If you would like to get involved in any aspect of Fife SOC, or you have ideas or suggestions, please feel free to contact me or any member of the committee. They are: Elizabeth Adams, Rob Armstrong, Norman Elkins, Caroline Gordon (Secretary), John Irwin (Treasurer), Andrew Riches and Paul Taylor (Representative on Council).

Elizabeth Irwin

Forthcoming Meetings at The Town Hall:-

Wed 6 th December	Members' night. Come along on this first Wednesday of December for members' presentations and mince pies. If you are looking for Christmas presents, or just something nice, Mary McIntyre will be selling bird themed belongings to raise funds for SOC.
Wed 10 th January	Christian Rutz – Tool-use behaviour in New Caledonian and Hawaiian Crows.
Wed 14 th February	Ian Poxton – Merlins in the Lammermuir Hills 1984-2014: how birds and fieldworkers get by on heavily kept grouse moors.

Forthcoming outings:-

Members wishing to go on outings must let the leader know that they intend to attend by the Thursday before the outing at the very latest.

Sat 11 th Nov	Lochs of Kinnordy and Lintrathen	Rob Armstrong	07979065078
Sun 14 th Jan	St Andrews and Guardbridge	Caroline Gordon	01592750230
Sat 17 th Feb	Carsebreck and Ardgaty	Elizabeth and John Irwin	01334850244

Members are reminded that neither the Club nor its branches or individual leaders of outings can accept any responsibility for any injury suffered by individuals taking part in these outings, or any loss or damage to their property.

Forthcoming Events: Christmas Dinner and Branch Raffle

We will again be holding our annual Christmas dinner at The Fairways Restaurant, Elmwood Golf Club, Cupar on **Saturday 16th December** 2017, 7.00 for 7.30pm. The cost of the meal is £22 for 3 courses or £18.50 for 2 courses, and this includes a gratuity for the staff.

Payment can be made at the meetings in November or December or please send a cheque, payable to **Fife SOC**, to the Treasurer John Irwin. Could you also let John know whether you want to order 2 or 3 courses? You can see the menu online at The Fairways site. John's contact details are Drumcarrow Cottage, Pettycruik, Strathkinness, Fife KY169XP, email jirwin735@gmail.com.

The **raffle prize** this year is a lovely silver-plated book mark that incorporates the SOC Crested Tit motif. The maker, Joanna Thomson, jeweller, (www.jewellery-scotland.com) made a generous donation to allow us to purchase this prize. Tickets are £1 for a strip of 5 and can be purchased at meetings or the dinner, or you can purchase by contacting John Irwin. Proceeds from the raffle go to Fife SOC funds.

Branch News:-

1. Fife Branch Award



Congratulations to Stewart Neilson (pictured here enjoying a picnic on a branch outing). He was presented with a Branch Award by SOC president James Main, at the SOC annual conference in Pitlochry in October. The citation read: 'Stewart has contributed to the branch over many years. Notably, he was Chair for the period 2001 – 2004, and until this year he has carried out the annual audit of the branch accounts and has supported the branch treasurer by providing the working Excel spreadsheet to record all financial transactions. He continues to play an active role in the branch, attending meetings and outings on a regular basis'.

2. Past copies of Branch newsletters

Susan Horne, the new librarian at Waterston House, has worked with the archivist to manage our past copies of branch newsletters and as a result the SOC now holds a comprehensive run of the Fife newsletter.

My Favourite Patch: 'Outhead', St Andrews.

'Outhead' is the most northerly point of the West Sands Beach in St Andrews. The grid reference is NO494191. It is part of the Eden Estuary LNR and looks across to Tentsmuir. To reach it, follow signs coming into St Andrews to 'West Sands' and 'The Links'. Follow the road round to the left past the Golf Museum and the R and A clubhouse. Continue along the Links Road, where there is free parking giving access to the beach at regular intervals. There are toilets (usually open!) near the Golf Museum and further along by the coach park. You can find refreshments at The Shell Café or there is a café at the Golf Museum and of course all the usual shops, cafes, restaurants and museums in St Andrews.

We usually drive up as far as the barrier across the road, from where it is a short walk to Outhead. From there, you can continue left along the edge of the golf course, and head down to the beach along the Eden Estuary (access depends on the tides). Alternatively, you can walk right along the beach or the dunes towards St Andrews.

It is not a place particularly for rarities, although serious counting delivers serious numbers of birds. I love Outhead as a place to go at any time of the day, or year, and in any weather. It is an 'easy' walk, perhaps to be combined with a trip to the supermarket. I am comfortable there on my own, but it is also great with visitors. The road past the barrier makes easy and safe access for wheelchair users and little people on scooters and bikes! Most of all, it is a place to be aware of the changing seasons and the different birds that come with this. There is always something to see, and over the years we reckon we have seen about 85 different species there

My last visit was on a quiet, rather grey, calm, early November day. (The main purpose was to collect some free Fife compost. There is a big heap near the end barrier). We saw 6 Stonechats, a Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Reed Bunting, a mixed Linnet and Redpoll flock, and on the estuary Curlew, a large flock of Oystercatcher, Cormorant, Black-Headed Gull, a single Red-Breasted Merganser, Kestrel and a White-Tailed Eagle sitting on its post. Out to sea in St Andrews Bay there were large flocks of Common Scoter and Eider. Nothing special then!



Sanderling on Christmas Day and a Skylark enjoying the sunshine: both at Outhead: Elizabeth Irwin

Elizabeth Irwin

Trip Reports:-

Fife Ness area 16th September 2017

Eleven intrepid members met in the Crail golf car park to explore the Fife Ness area. We started by heading for Balcomie Beach. On the way we had fantastic and close views of a male Kestrel hunting; a good start to the day. There were also a Magpie, Carrion Crows, Swallows and Woodpigeons around the golf course.

The beach had small numbers of waders, but we were again able to get close to Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Ringed Plover, a Bar-Tailed Godwit and a Turnstone. At one point everything scattered from the beach as a pair of Sparrowhawks flew over. The beach also had Common and Black-Headed Gulls, Pied Wagtails and a Meadow Pipit, whilst the adjacent golf course produced Linnets, Goldfinches, Starlings and brown hares.



Kestrel at Fife Ness: Stewart Neilson

Off-shore the brisk wind made things a little difficult but there were fine views of a flock of female Eiders, Cormorants, a Common Tern, Gannets, three Red-Breasted Mergansers, Greater Black-Backed Gulls and a Red-Throated Diver.

We next walked past the stinky pool (one Black-Headed Gull and a Redshank) to the Fife Bird Club hide at the Ness. Some of us had lunch here whilst we watched the passing Gannets and Cormorants. At regular but intermittent intervals, we saw Common Scoter, a group of three and then a single Manx Shearwater, one Bonxie, at least 15 Red-Throated Divers (and a probable Great Northern Diver), Razorbills and Wigeon.

On the way back to the car park we added Blackbird to our list. We drove to Kilminning where the rest of us lunched. Whilst eating we saw Carrion Crow, Robin, Goldfinch, Redshank, Gannets, Cormorant, male Eider, Black-Headed and Greater Black-Backed Gulls.

The plan was to walk along the shore towards Fife Ness and then drive back to the end of the Kilminning road to scout the vegetation there, and then visit the walled garden. Unfortunately, the cold wind increased, the heavens opened and we gave up and finished the trip at this juncture.

A day that was not promising with regard to the weather and which had to be curtailed, nevertheless yielded a total of 35 species.

John Irwin



Dunlin on Balcomie Beach: Stewart Neilson

OUTING TO UPPER FORTH: 15 OCTOBER 2017

We met at the Hawes car park early in the hope of ensuring that we could find a parking space before the usual Sunday crowds descended on South Queensferry. The plan was to drive along the track under the Forth Bridge to the Long Craig gates and then walk from there to Hound Point. However, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley" for we found that the car park was almost full and the track out to Hound Point was barricaded off. Why? Because there was a charity event on which involved abseiling from the Forth Bridge. So we decided on a change of plan and headed off to Kinneil Kerse. (Jean and I had done a recce the previous day and had seen nothing much from Hound Point so we were not too disappointed at the change).

We arrived at Kinneil Kerse at the ideal time – a couple of hours before high tide. On the exposed sand banks and mudflats were big flocks (no, we didn't try to count them) of Lapwing, Redshank and Shelduck. Some keen-eyed observers found a Ruff among the Redshanks. There were smaller numbers of Teal, Wigeon and Mallard, a few Dunlin and Golden Plover, a single Ringed Plover and half a dozen Cormorants. Further out on the Forth were two Red-throated Divers, Great Crested Grebe, a small group of Pintail and some Tufted Ducks.

As the tide came in and the mudflats and sandbanks were covered, the waders were pushed further in and eventually onto the lagoon. As we walked along the shore line a Greenshank was found in the usual place, the channel leading from the lagoon. (Well done Anne, who identified its call before finding it). We saw two more Greenshanks on the lagoon itself. By now the flocks of Lapwing, Shelduck and Redshank had moved there along with Golden Plover. On the grassy banks were two Little Egrets. No doubt attracted by the concentration of waders a Peregrine flew in and headed into the sun, a classic hunting technique for this raptor. However, instead of stooping on some unfortunate wader as expected it casually flew off towards Grangemouth, where Peregrines are known to roost occasionally on the oil tanks. The wind was beginning to become stronger, thanks to the tail end of Hurricane Ophelia, so we headed back to the cars and off to RSPB Skinflats.

Once again, "The best laid plans etc." for we found that the gate into the car park was locked although there were two cars inside. Phone calls to RSPB contacts asking for the code to open the combination lock did not prove successful so we parked on the verges. Several Pink-footed Geese flew over while we were having lunch on the picnic benches. From the foreshore we saw several juvenile Gannets sitting on the Forth and a Mistle Thrush and a Swallow flew past.

It had been a good day in spite of the enforced plan changes and we saw a total of 41 species of birds.

Paul Taylor



Lapwing against the industrial landscape of Kinneil Kerse: Elizabeth Irwin

FIFE BIRD SIGHTINGS:

September 2017

Highlights: Yellow-browed Warblers were recorded in the last half of the month at Roome Bay (first record on 17th), Balgove GC, Balcomie, Fife Ness, Kingsbarns (four on 28th), St Andrews, Tayport and Boarhills.

Central Fife



Three Scaup visited Beveridge Park, Kirkcaldy on 3rd, juv Marsh Harriers were at Rossie Bog (9th) and Coaltown of Weymss (27th). The Wilderness held Golden Plovers, Little Stints (two on 12th), Dunlin, Curlew Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwits and Ruff with a notable 31 there on 29th. Little Gulls were at East Weymss and St Andrews with 125 in the bay on 27th. Mediterranean Gulls were logged at Dysart (one Danish ringed bird was noted on 1st); East Weymss (with a record count of 10 together on 14th – 17th), Pathhead and Buckhaven. A Black Tern was at East Weymss, a Barn Owl at Kirkcaldy, a Yellow Wagtail (sp) at Cupar (23rd) and a Whinchat at Letham Pools.

Curlew Sandpiper: Andrew Riches

East Fife

The Eden Estuary held Pintails, Little Egrets (five on 8th), White Tailed Eagles, Ospreys, a Peregrine, an Avocet to 5th, Curlew Sandpipers, Greenshank (10 on 19th), Black-tailed Godwits (40 on 3rd), a Whimbrel (12th), Ruff (45 on 30th) with a Whinchat at Coble Shore on 16th. Fife

Ness logged Red-throated Divers, Great Northern Divers, Manx Shearwaters (31 on 17th), Sooty Shearwaters (10 on 17th), Great Skuas (eight on 17th), Arctic Skuas (12 on 17th) and Little Gulls. Kilminning held a Whinchat, a Garden Warbler (30th), a Barred Warbler (from 23rd onwards), Lesser Whitethroats, Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Spotted Flycatchers, Bramblings, Lesser Redpolls and a Common Rosefinch (22nd). Six Whooper Swans were at Newburgh on 19th, Brent Geese were past Ruddons Point and Anstruther. A drake Mandarin Duck was briefly at Newburgh, a Quail was seen at Balcomie. Curlew Sandpipers were at Balcomie Beach, Little Gulls were at Outhead, St Andrews (125 on 27th), and off Fairmont.



Barred Warbler: Allister Todd

Mediterranean Gulls were noted at Kilconquhar Loch, Kilrenny and Anstruther. Balcomie beach held three Roseate Terns (3rd) . Wheatears were noted at Balcomie (four on 10th) and Boarhills with Whinchats there also. Ring Ouzels were at Fairmont GC and Kingsbarns (26th), a Reed Warbler was at Boarhills, Spotted Flycatchers passed through Boarhills and Balcomie, a Pied Flycatcher showed well at Balcomie on 28th, four Crossbills were noted at Tentsmuir on 15th and Lapland Buntings were over Boarhills and Guardbridge at the end of the month.

West Fife

A Ross's Goose was seen past Ferryhills on 3rd, presumed to be the same bird noted at Pleasants Farm in August. Kinghorn logged Red-throated Divers, Black-throated Divers, a Great Northern Diver, Manx Shearwaters, an Osprey (23rd), Great Skuas (16 on 16th) Pomarine Skuas (juv on 7th adult on 16th), Arctic Skuas (35 on 16th), a Long-tailed Skua (juv on 16th), a Little Gull and a Black Tern. Elsewhere a Little Egret was at Dalgety Bay, Great Skuas were past Ferryhills (3rd) as were Spotted Flycatchers. A Raven was noted at Inverkeithing (3rd), and there was a vis mig count of c1700 Meadow Pipits over Ferryhills in 3 hours on 30th.

October 2017

Central Fife

The Wilderness held two Whooper Swans (7th); 19 were noted passing Kirkcaldy on 22nd. Two Bewick's Swans also passed Kirkcaldy going W (27th). A Hobby was logged at Pitlessie, the Wilderness held Golden Plovers (59 on 7th) and Little Stints (three on 6th). Green Sandpipers showed at Angle Park and Black-tailed Godwits stopped off at the Wilderness as did a flock of 18 Ruff (4th). A late season Little Gull was noted at West Weymss (14th). Mediterranean Gulls were at Methil, Pathhead, Dysart, East Weymss and Buckhaven. A Barn Owl was a good sighting at Lindores Loch on 25th. A post-breeding dispersal flight of eight Bearded Tits was recorded at Mugdrum Island on 20th. Five Twite were logged at Dysart.

East Fife

Barnacle Geese were logged past Anstruther (130), Crail airfield (65) and Fife Ness (400 on 8th). Brent Geese were noted at Tayport, Coble Shore and Shell Bay. Long-tailed Ducks were at Kinshaldy (18 on 26th) and on the inland waters of Kilconquhar Loch (two on 27th). Grey Partridges were noted at Parkhill. Red-throated Divers were past Fife Ness with 14 off Kinshaldy beach on 26th. 13 Slavonian Grebes were also there on the same date. Fife Ness also logged Great Northern Divers and Manx Shearwaters. The Eden Estuary and Tayport continued to hold Little Egrets. Passages of Golden Plovers were at St Monans (350 on 14th) and the Eden Estuary (750 on 23rd). Little Stints visited the Eden Estuary with five there at the start of the month and three at Tentsmuir on 14th. A single Curlew Sandpiper and a single Spotted Redshank provided interest at the Eden Estuary along with Greenshanks. Tentsmuir returned a fine count of 420 Bar-tailed Godwits on 8th. A Woodcock was at Kilrenny (22nd). 40 Ruff stopped on the Eden Estuary on 5th as did a Mediterranean Gull (23rd). Great Skuas, Arctic Skuas and Little Gulls were recorded past Fife Ness. Ring Ouzels were at Kilminning (5th) and Boarhills (20th). A well-watched Barred Warbler stayed at Kilminning 1st – 8th. Siberian race Chiffchaffs were at Kilminning (noted as very vocal on 4th) and the Fife Ness 'patch' (20th). Yellow-browed Warblers continued to appear with records from Kilminning, Fife Ness, Denburn Wood and Cambo (20th). Twite were at Balcomie and Kilrenny (20 on 29th).

West Fife

Ferryhills logged 20 Whooper Swans (29th), 29 (Taiga) Bean Geese, Barnacle Geese (45 on 8th), Great Northern Divers, Great Skuas, a Pomarine Skua, a Ring Ouzel (19th), seven northern race Bullfinches (20th – 29th), Hawfinches, and Bramblings. Kinghorn recorded Common Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Red-throated Divers, Black-throated Divers, Manx Shearwaters (three on 16th), Great Skuas, Pomarine Skuas, Arctic Skuas and a Mediterranean Gull. Elsewhere Whooper Swans were at Valleyfield Lagoons and Culross (15 over on 29th), Brent Geese were in Dalgety Bay (8th), a redheaded Smew visited Loch Gelly (30th –), Red-throated Divers were noted at Dalgety Bay and a Little Egret was at Culross (14th). Great Skuas (24 on 16th), Pomarine Skuas and Arctic Skuas were in Dalgety Bay. Mediterranean Gulls were noted at Dalgety Bay and Culross.

*Records of bird sightings for November, December and January for inclusion in the February Newsletter should be sent by **Friday 2nd February 2018 at the latest** to David Heeley at dw.heeley@btinternet.com or 50 High Street, Newburgh, Fife KY14 6*



Grey Plover: Andrew Riches

The SOC is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation Reg. No SC009859

And finally: contact with SOC Fife members and data protection

In common with other organisations including charities, SOC takes the security of members' details very seriously. You will no doubt also be aware that the laws on data protection are being strengthened. The SOC is reviewing its processes and will contact all members about this in due course. The Fife Branch ensures that you will only be contacted by Caroline Gordon (secretary) and I with emails that are directly relevant to you as a member of Fife SOC, eg notices of Fife SOC events and our newsletters.

This does mean that we cannot circulate any information about other events or wildlife issues. If you have something that you think members would like to hear about, you can let SOC know as they sometimes publish information on the website.

Elizabeth Irwin