

Fife SOC

Newsletter No. 191

Compiled by Elizabeth Irwin

September 2018



An arriving Whitethroat eyes a tasty snack at Fife Ness: Elizabeth Irwin, May 18th

Our next Newsletter will be Issue No. 192 for December 2018. Articles, letters, reports and photographs in *jpeg* or *tiff* format for publication should be sent, by Monday 3rd December at the latest, to Elizabeth Irwin at Drumcarrow Cottage, Pettycruik, Strathkinness KY16 9XP or email: fifechair@the-soc.org.uk

FROM THE CHAIR

We have a bumper issue this month, with reports and photographs from four different outings and a great write-up about bird watching in the Howe of Fife from Norman Elkins. It is amazing to think that when I was writing this item for the last issue in April, spring migration was just starting: remember "The Beast from The East!!" Now we have enjoyed a beautiful summer and our exciting autumn passage migrants are coming through.

Please note that we are changing the dates for sending out the newsletter so that we will get a more even spread through the year. You should get the next newsletter in December. Anyone who is interested in guest editing the next edition – please get in touch.

If you have received this newsletter then you are one of the 84 Fife memberships who have consented to receive communications from the SOC - (or you have contacted me directly to ask for the newsletter). If you have opted in, you will also get notifications about meetings and outings, and I do hope to meet you at some of these events.

If you meet a member who says they are not getting this information, they must be one of the 60 Fife memberships who haven't consented. I am told that this level of opting in is about average across Scotland, but if members decide they now wish to get newsletters and notifications, they should contact Kathryn Cox at The SOC to get their preferences changed. Of course, you can also get all the information directly on the Fife page of the SOC website, which may suit some members better.

Elizabeth Irwin

Forthcoming meetings at the Town Hall: -

Wed 12th Sept	<i>PhD students from St Andrews are returning to give us presentations on their research projects</i>
Wed 10th Oct	Stan da Prato – <i>The changing wildlife of the East Lothian Coast</i>
Wed 14th Nov	Jeremy Brock – <i>Overland to the Caucasus for birds</i>
Wed 12th Dec	<i>Members' night</i>
Sat 15th Dec	<i>Christmas LUNCH at The Fairways Restaurant Cupar 12.30 for 1 pm.</i>

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.

Sunday 16th Sept

'What's about in Fife?': Caroline Gordon
sweetbank101@gmail.com

Saturday 13th Oct

Torry Bay and Gartmore Dam: Eliz and John Irwin
fifechair@the-soc.org.uk

Sunday 18th Nov

Slamannan and Kinneil: Paul Taylor and Rob Armstrong

Advance notice: trip to Islay 15th – 18th March: co-ordinated by Elizabeth and John Irwin. NB We will not have enough drivers to take a mini bus this time, but we hope to car share. Please contact Elizabeth on the above email address if you are interested so we can start to organise this trip.

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.

Can you identify Dave Heeley's mystery bird? Answer following bird sightings on page 16



The Howe of Fife Wetlands

Following my short presentation on the above at the AGM in April, Elizabeth asked me to put this on paper to guide birders to the various sites. Showing maps of all sites is not possible due to copyright, although I have included a sketch map of sites 1 and 2. All the sites below have grid references so that, with a copy of OS Landranger map sheet 59 (St Andrews), it should be simple enough to find them all. The grid refs shown are of the most convenient parking places (except no. 8). Sites 1 to 6 all lie within 4 km of the Melville Lodge roundabout where the A92 and A91 cross west of Cupar.

All sites are accessible, although parking at some needs care. Open access rules apply, but most sites have easy birding with optics, so it is best to avoid entering fields. Do not disturb the birds more than necessary, or stock, and do not climb fences/walls. If scarce or rare breeding birds are encountered, think twice before releasing the news to anyone other than the Fife Bird Recorder or BTO Regional Rep.

B = breeding season, W = winter.

1. Letham pools (NO 315138)

Fields subject to winter flooding 2002-2007 became permanently flooded from 2009.

Ducks and geese (B+W), Water Rail (B), grebes, migrant waders (mostly when water levels permit).

Park sensibly at roadside, do not access fields (see map)

2. Mountcastle (NO 307135)

Working quarry until 2012, extraction now finished. Next to Letham pools. Ringing takes place here, so be aware of mist nets!

Wildfowl (B+W), grebes, woodland passerines (especially warblers)

Park at main entrance on A92, care taken for fast traffic. Quarry closed so access now possible along tracks (some overgrown) (see map). Beware electric fences if sheep grazing.



3. Wilderness (NO 320103)

Former gravel pit subject to occasional reclamation work.

Wildfowl (B+W), migrant waders, woodland passerines

Park in forest layby, remain on road side of wall but beware of fast traffic

4. Birnie/Gaddon lochs (LNR) (NO 284125)

Former quarry closed in 1982. Now local nature reserve.

Wildfowl and woodland birds.

Large car park, Circular path round both lochs gives access, although Gaddon route restricted during breeding season.

5. Angle Park (NO 295113)

Former quarry NE of Charlottetown, now flooded.

Wildfowl and often huge gull flocks (well worth searching) from adjacent landfill site (W). Woodland to south (Cairnfield Muir) good for passerines (B).

Park in layby. No entry to waterside (piggery). Track to east of quarry partly accessible. Path loops round Cairnfield Muir.

6. Rossie Bog (NO 277115)

Former 18C loch now drained but extensive reedbeds with pools.

Wildfowl, scrub and reedbed birds.

No access, view only from road, park sensibly. Right-of-way past E. Kilwhiss farm leads to Rossie drain with good views over marsh. Do not enter fields.

7. Lindores Loch (SSSI) (NO 271159)

Natural glacial lake used for fly-fishing.

Wildfowl (W), woodland, scrub and reedbed birds.

Limited parking place (1-2 cars only) on track at southern end of loch, also layby at northern end, both off B937. Do not use fishermen's car park. Track continues part way round west side of loch parallel to railway.

8. Dunbog (SSSI) (NO 277165)

Extensive reedbeds surrounded by farmland and woodland.

Woodland and reedbed birds (B).

Park at Lindores loch, track to right north of fishermen's car park. No access to reedbed. Track leads east up hill above reedbeds but a path leads left through woodland to south of reedbed.

9. Luthrie (NO 333195)

Pasture with semi-permanent wetland/pool. Fields often grazed. Floods west of road dry out in summer.

Wildfowl (wigeon/geese) (W).

Park in laybys on minor road, No access to fields.

Norman Elkins



Common Sandpiper: Dave Heeley

SOC Bird App

The SOC is working with a software company to produce an app that will provide both local birders and visitors with information about Scottish birding sites. The aim is that the app will be free and will also engage people new to bird watching, encourage more people to take an interest in birds, and raise the profile of the SOC.

At this stage, Martin Cook, the bird recorder for Moray and Nairn, is organising local co-ordinators in each SOC area, and I am delighted that Graham Sparshott, Fife's bird recorder, has agreed to take on that role here. The next stage will be to look at the national templates for the app and then to identify suitable sites to include from Fife. The material is also going to dovetail with Fife Bird Club's plans for a site guide. It all sounds exciting!

Elizabeth Irwin

BTO Project Owl

From August 2018 to March 2019, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) are embarking on Project Owl, a volunteer-based survey to find out more about our Tawny Owls, which do not lend themselves to be monitored by other surveys.

I am calling for volunteers to take part in this project. Fieldwork is not onerous, based mainly on listening for calling birds at and after dusk. Full details can be found at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/about-project-owl.

There are two parts to the survey. The first, running from August 15th to October 15th, consists of counting calling Tawny Owls from certain points in Fife and Kinross for 10-30 minutes after sunset. The survey sites are based on those used in previous Tawny Owl surveys in 1989 and 2005. Priority tetrads (2km x 2km) are targeted, counting from a point as close as possible to the tetrad centre. In our region, the tetrads involved are in the 10 km squares NO00, NO30 and NO50. Targeted tetrads can be found at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-point-survey. Here, you can find available tetrads and sign up for the survey.

The second part takes place from September 30th to March 31st 2019. This is ideally carried out once a week, therefore from a place that you are able to visit regularly, such as your garden. Further details for this survey will be issued later.

Ideally, the results are entered online, but paper forms and instructions can be provided if necessary. If there are any questions, please contact me (below)

Norman Elkins

E: jandnelkins@btinternet.com

T: 01334 654348

Scottish Lowland/Farmland Curlew Workshop by Mary Colwell

Alan Lauder has sent the SOC details that may be of interest to you about a free conference in Perth on Thursday 27 September 2018 (09:30 – 16:00) at Battleby House, Perth PH1 3EW. Alan writes as follows:

“Mary Colwell, of Curlew walk fame, has got me involved, through my Irish curlew work, in organising a conference on curlew conservation in Scotland. This is supported by RSPB, SNH, working for waders etc but is to be an independently run workshop.

I wonder if you would be kind enough to circulate this registration link to SOC branch chairs. We would particularly welcome active SOC members who have involvement with Curlew conservation or survey or have strong knowledge of Curlew in their area and importantly who would be willing to participate actively in the workshop discussion.”

If you follow the link below, it will lead you to the conference details:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/scottish-lowlandfarmland-curlew-workshop-tickets-46527402714>

Committee News

We are saying farewell to Paul Taylor, who has made such a big contribution to Fife SOC over many years. Paul is going to be spending most of his time on the other side of the Forth (and is a very busy grandparent now). However, although we will not see him at meetings or on the committee he does hope to keep in touch at some of the outings and we will see him at national events. I am sure everyone wishes him all the best for the future.

Paul was the Fife representative on Council, and at our recent committee meeting it was agreed that as current chair, I will take over that role.

Also at our recent committee meeting, we welcomed two new committee members: Rodger Neilson, who was appointed at the AGM in April, and Andy Falconer who was co-opted in September. We are delighted to have two such experienced birders to join us.

Elizabeth Irwin

Trip reports

Norfolk and Suffolk 31st May – 4th June

Thursday 31st / Friday 1st

Five of us travelled to Norwich on different routes and settled into our accommodation. On the way to the restaurant some of us watched the Peregrines flying around the Cathedral tower. We were treated to an excellent meal at Trattoria Rustica and afterwards, much to our surprise, two of us saw a pair of Egyptian Geese on the river bank just outside our hotel: a good start to the trip.

Strumpshaw Fen

On Friday seven of us assembled at Strumpshaw Fen, which was a new reserve for all of us. This RSPB reserve has a variety of habitats including copious reed beds, woodland and heath. We soon saw a variety of birds including members of the tit family, warblers and Jay. Raptors were soon



visible, and several Marsh Harriers were seen during our visit and a Hobby flashed past as we walked round. Further round the trail, we had a good view of a Sedge Warbler singing, (picture by Elizabeth Irwin) and a solitary Black Swan (picture by Dave Heeley) was at home amongst the Grey Heron and Mute



Swans. In the meadow a Chinese water deer was seen, and a stoat ran across the path. Further additions to the list were our first Water Rail calling, our first Kingfisher, Buzzard, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Greylag Geese, and Cetti's Warbler. At the Tower hide, the pool had Great-crested Grebes, and several duck species. Along the bush lined track, we heard Garden Warbler, but the highlight here was the evocative sound of a Bittern booming in the reed beds and shortly after, excellent views of a Reed Warbler, which for a change sat exposed on the reed stalks. A total of 39 species was a good start to the trip.

A signature bonus on this reserve were a couple of swallowtail butterflies nicely posing for the cameras as well as numerous common lizards on one of the boardwalks, dragonflies and orchids.

Winterton on Sea

We visited Winterton in the hope of finding Little Terns and on our way there we saw our first group of Red-legged Partridge. On arrival we set off up the dunes hoping to find the breeding colony and found a yurt staffed by a lady from the RSPB. We had excellent views of Little Terns sitting on eggs and returning with sand eels. The area in which the terns are nesting is roped off with an electric fence and is being monitored by the RSPB. We returned to Norwich and enjoyed a French meal at the Cote Brasserie.



Little Tern: Elizabeth Irwin

Saturday 2nd

The weather forecast for Saturday included very heavy rainstorms with thunder. Elizabeth and John had not packed waterproof trousers, so we ventured into Norwich Market in search of black bin liners to protect ourselves on the boat trip. One result of this was chatting to the stall holder about why we needed them, led him to tell us some of the birding hotspots locally including pointing out where a Black Redstart sang every morning from a variety of perches around the market square. Right on cue we were treated to several bursts of his song.

Hickling Broad

Dave had found another amazing place for the now nine of us to visit, Hickling Broad. This is a Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve bought with large donations from the Cadbury family. We included a 2-hour trip to two hides only accessible by boat and a climb up a tower to view the landscape. The hides overlook two scrapes with a multitude of waders as well as the by now usual Marsh Harriers, gulls, ducks and warblers.

The rain only started on our way back to the visitor centre, so we did not need the bin liners after all. Lunch in the centre was accompanied by the forecast heavy rain and we waited until it eased a little before we decided to abandon the rest of the reserve and head to Wheatfen. Hickling yielded a total of 44 species and we saw our only Egyptian Goose outside of Norwich, our only Dunlin (in full summer plumage) and Pied Wagtail here.

Ted Ellis Reserve Wheatfen

There were several quite deep floods on the roads leading away from Hickling that were not there when we arrived, which made the first part of the journey a little exciting for those of us in low slung cars.

This excellent reserve is run by the Ted Ellis Trust and covers a variety of habitats including the river Yare, Wheatfen Broad and Surlingham Wood (none of which we visited – see below!) as well as the usual reedbeds and marshes. We set off past a field where, until 1918, grass was cut for hay and then taken to London to feed the taxi cab horses. This is another reserve where butterflies are advertised as common and easy to see but as elsewhere the weather made it difficult for the butterflies to fly and we only saw a solitary Brimstone.

Our tour of the reserve was cut short by the re-appearance of the torrential rain, but we did manage 25 species in a short walk, including Cetti's Warbler, Tree creeper and both Reed and Sedge Warblers.

On the way back to the hotel after another good meal we saw the pair of Egyptian Geese again and we also saw a Kingfisher on the river.

Sunday 3rd

Minsmere

The day dawned with the promise of dry, if not sunny, weather but some of the time we had a haar in case we were feeling homesick! The mist did give us some very atmospheric views of a male Marsh Harrier hawking the reed beds whilst drifting in and out of view.

Minsmere is an iconic RSPB reserve with extensive marked trails and a variety of habitats. Before lunch we walked the 3.4km circular coast trail which includes shingle beach as well as several scrapes and reed beds. This is where we saw the offshore Scoter flock. It was too distant and misty to scan properly for other Scoter species and we settled for all Common. The scrapes yielded a fantastic variety of birds. As well as the expected Avocets and ducks there were Black-tailed Godwits, a magnificent Grey Plover in full summer plumage, breeding Mediterranean Gulls, Kittiwakes, Barnacle Geese, Sandwich Terns and Common Terns. There is also a large Sand Martin colony.

After lunch we ventured onto the 2.4km island Mere trail, which includes the Bittern Hide. As we had been travelling around Norfolk we were constantly told that if we sat in this hide for 30 minutes we would be guaranteed Bitterns. By 20 minutes we were getting a bit anxious, but the first bird flew past 25 minutes in. Thereafter we saw several, as well as the ubiquitous Marsh Harriers. A total of 57 species on the day was a pretty good return.

As is usual, despite spending 6 hours in Minsmere we did not have time to cover all of the reserve, but it was definitely worth the trip.

After Minsmere some of us headed back to Norwich for another good meal whilst some headed for **Dunwich Heath** and successfully found the target bird – the Dartford Warbler.

Monday 4th

Our leader, Dave Heeley, used all his charm, ornithological skills and field craft combined with the local knowledge from the B&B owner to run down a species that had so far eluded us - the House Sparrow, which he succeeded in doing in the proprietor's garden. This was the only one seen all trip!

Sculthorpe Moor Reserve

We all met at this reserve which is run by the Hawk and Owl Trust, a new venue for most of us. As we entered the reserve a Great Spotted Woodpecker flew by. This is a small but beautiful reserve with excellent woodland, hides and feeders. On one of the feeders we saw our only Bullfinches. On the way to the next feeders, June spotted two hares which disappeared into the undergrowth. At the next feeders, we had excellent views of our first Marsh Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, a Jay and two Mallard nonchalantly walking past. In the open areas, we saw Red Kite and Swifts. The next hide gave views of a Marsh Harrier, brown rats under the feeder, Collared Doves, and a Long-tailed Tit. On the path away from the hide, a Tree creeper's nest was pointed out to us with fine views of an adult carrying food to the chicks. We also saw the reported Honey Buzzard. This reserve yielded 32 species, 6 of which were only seen here.

Wheating Heath Reserve

On to the Wheating Heath Reserve a known site for Stone Curlews. This is another reserve managed by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Because of time constraints we only visited one half of the site but in the hide, we quickly located 2 Stone Curlews, which showed well if at a distance.

Lakenheath Reserve

To round off a busy day we finished at the nearby Lakenheath RSPB reserve, which again was new to some of us. This is another fine fenland reserve with a 3-mile circuit around the long narrow landscape. Highlights included Cetti's Warbler, a very loud Water Rail and a Kestrel eating his high tea on a dead tree stump. We were all also charmed by a family of Great-crested Grebes with youngsters taking a ride on mum's back. Cuckoos were very numerous here, calling throughout our visit with a burst of sound from the female also. At the furthest point of the reserve saw a Kingfisher passing backwards and forwards with fish to feed young in a nearby nest and the final finale was a fly past of a Bittern giving superb views of this most attractive bird.



Bittern: Elizabeth Irwin

Many thanks to Dave Heeley for putting the trip together and for selecting the evening dinner outings to a wonderful range of restaurants. Everyone really enjoyed the whole experience and we were much appreciative of Dave's efforts.

We identified a total of 99 bird species (see table) in addition to seeing mammals, butterflies, damsel and dragonflies and many wildflowers in these beautiful reserves in Norfolk and Suffolk.

John Irwin and Andrew Riches

St = Strumpshaw, LH = Lakenheath, SC=Sculthorpe, ER=only seen En route, M= Minsmere, TE =Ted Ellis, Wi=Winterton, N=Norwich, HB=Hickling Broad, WH=Wheating Heath, DM=Dunwich Moor			
Bird	Where seen	Bird	Where seen
GC Grebe	St, LH	Feral pigeon	ER
Cormorant	HB, Sc, Wi, LH	Collared dove	HB, Sc
Bittern	M, St, LH	Cuckoo	HB, TE, LH
Little Egret	M, LH	Swift	Sc, St
Heron	HB, TE, St	Kingfisher	N, LH, St
Mute swan	M, HB, St, Sc	G spotted woodpecker	Sc
Greylag	HB, St, LH	Skylark	M, Wi, WH
Canada goose	M, HB, LH	Sand martin	M
Barnacle goose	M	Swallow	M, HB, TE, St, LH
Shelduck	M, HB, St, LH	House Martin	M
Egyptian goose	N, HB	Pied wagtail	HB,
Mallard	M, HB, St, Sc, LH	Wren	M, HB, TE, St, Sc
Gadwall	M, LH, HB, St	Dunnock	M, HB, TE, Sc, St
Shoveller	M, HB, St, LH	Robin	M, HB, TE, Sc, St
Teal	M, HB, St	Black redstart	N
Pochard	St, LH	Stonechat	M
Tufted duck	M, St, LH	Song thrush	TE, St, Sc
Scoter	M	Blackbird	HB, Sc, TE, LH, Wi
Red Kite	Sc	Garden warbler	M, TE, St
Marsh Harrier	M, HB, St, Sc	Blackcap	M, HB, St, LH
Buzzard	M, St, WH	Whitethroat	M, LH, WH
Honey Buzzard	Sc	Dartford Warbler	DM
Kestrel	M, LH	Sedge warbler	M, HB, TE, St
Hobby	M, HB, St	Cetti's Warbler	TE, St, LH
Peregrine	N	Reed warbler	M, TE, St, LH
Red-legged Partridge	ER	Willow warbler	M, HB, TE, St, LH
Grey Partridge	ER	Ciffchaff	M, HB, Sc, St, WH
Pheasant	M, HB, LH, Sc, TE, St	Goldcrest	WH
Water rail	St, LH	Great tit	M, HB, TE, Sc, St
Moorhen	M, HB, St, LH	Blue tit	M, HB, St, Sc
Coot	M, HB, St, LH	Marsh tit	M, Sc, WH
Oystercatcher	Wi, Sc	Long-tailed tit	Sc
Avocet	M, HB	Bearded tit	St
Stone curlew	WH	Tree creeper	TE, Sc
Ringed plover	M, HB, Wi	Magpie	M, LH
Grey Plover	M	Jay	TE, St, Sc
Lapwing	M, HB, Sc	Jackdaw	M, TE, St, Sc
Dunlin	HB	Rook	Wi
Redshank	M, HB	Crow	TE, St
Bk-tailed godwit	M	Starling	Sc
B headed Gull	M, HB, Sc, Wi, St	House sparrow	N
Med Gull	M	Chaffinch	M, HB, TE, St, Sc
Herring Gull	M, Wi	Linnet	M
LBB Gull	HB, St, Sc	Goldfinch	HB, LH
GBB Gull	M, N	Greenfinch	TE, St, Sc, LH
Kittiwake	M	Bullfinch	Sc
Little Tern	Wi	Reed Bunting	M, HB, TE, Sc
Sandwich tern	M		
Common tern	M, HB, LH	Peacock	HB, TE
Wood pigeon	M, HB, TE, St	Black swan	St

Inversnaid 6th May 2018

What an excellent day out. With this year's late spring, we were hoping that the birds of these oak woods would have finally arrived and I'm glad to say that they had. We also had spring weather with some welcome warmth and sunshine.

Our first stop was at Loch Arklet, just a few miles from Loch Lomond where we had terrific views of a pair of Black-throated Divers in full summer plumage close in to the shore. Dave had spotted them when he'd done a recce for the outing a week or so earlier (picture by EI).



Among the other birds along this stretch of road were Cuckoo, a pair of Common Sandpipers, House Martins and Sand Martins, Willow Warbler, Raven, Common Gull, Stonechat, Reed Bunting, Song Thrush, Mute Swan, Canada Goose and Grey Heron.

From the hotel at Inversnaid, we walked north on the West Highland Way along the banks of Loch Lomond for a short distance, before taking the trail that leads up through the woods of the RSPB reserve. We heard, and the eagle-eyed in the group saw, Redstart near the start of our walk with better views later of another bird, perched on top of a tree, in the sunshine, against a backdrop of the Arrochar hills. Everyone had views of Pied Flycatcher with a male flitting among the trees just below the path and making occasional visits to a nest box. Wood Warbler, Nuthatch, Tree Pipits, Blackcap, Grey Wagtail and Treecreeper (and more Cuckoos) were all added to the list. Greylag Geese flew over. Fair chuffed by all of that, we strolled back to the cars, adding Sedge Warbler along the way.



Dunnock: Dave Heeley and Reed Bunting: Elizabeth Irwin

We had lunch in the sun at Garrison Farm, a short distance back up the road where there were Raven, a couple of Buzzards, Tree Pipit, Coal Tit, Willow Warbler and Dunnock - and Cuckoo - before heading back to Aberfoyle and on to the southern end of Loch Lomond and the RSPB reserve there. There's a small information centre from where a short walk through the alder woodland takes you to a pond. The reported Grasshopper Warbler was not to be heard but Goldfinch was new for the day. It's also possible to do a longer walk around the reserve which takes you down to the loch shore – one for another day.

Thanks to Dave for leading an enjoyable and successful outing to this lovely part of the country.

Caroline Gordon

Birnie Loch and District 24th June 2018

Only four members met in glorious sunshine at Birnie Loch, three ladies and Alan, a new member to the Fife Group. Trees were approaching full leaf so finding birds in the canopy was difficult, but birdsong was everywhere. At the loch car park there were Greylag Geese with many goslings, Black-headed Gulls, Pied Wagtail juvenile and Mallard ducks. A Buzzard floated over the tree tops just to annoy the Carrion Crows and Jackdaws and Robin, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Wren made their presence known.

LETHAM POOLS

On station for all to see was the Water Rail, maybe it should be made an honorary member of the club as it is so obliging. Coots were in numbers and disturbing the peace. Heron, Lapwing [80], Oystercatcher, Tufted Duck, Moorhen, Gadwall, Wigeon and Mallard, one female with many tiny ducklings, Mute Swan, House Martin, Swallow and Sand Martin, one of which perched close to us on the wire fence allowing us to study it in detail which is very rarely possible and special to the day. Reed Buntings were there and Sedge Warbler, House Sparrow, Starlings, Skylark and noisy Black-headed Gulls on the island. A Buzzard appeared, and Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were wheeling high above us on the thermals.

MOUNTCASTLE

Here we identified many birds by song only, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Wren, Greenfinch and a potential Garden Warbler. Blue Tits were active and a Yellowhammer called from a dead branch, there was Song Thrush, Chiffchaff, Sedge and Willow Warbler, Reed Bunting, and Lapwing [30], Swallow and Sand Martin and a Skylark called attention and on the water were Mute Swans with cygnets, Great Crested Grebe with 3 young, adult and juvenile Herons, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Coot, Blackbird, Woodpigeon and yet another Buzzard. At this site were lots of Common Blue butterflies, Ringlets and Meadow Brown butterflies, Red-tailed bumblebees, a grasshopper and two green beetles (not Bottles), Common Blue and Large Red Damselflies so here we had to look down as well as up. It was wonderful to see such an abundance of insects.

ANGLE PARK

Moving to this site we had more of the usual culprits but special was 1 Pochard with Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Carrion Crow, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Gadwall, Mallard, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Coot, Great Crested Grebe and a Yellowhammer perched on yet another dead branch, 2 Goldfinches were drinking from a road side puddle. Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Blue Tit, House and Sand Martins completed the list and the pigs of course, sheltering from the hot sun.

It was a super day in the field even if all the birds could not be seen well but the volume and quantity of song was amazing - soon they will go quiet for another season. Thanks to Caroline for leading and transport and to Jane for accurately taking note of all species seen and heard.

Bertha Govan

EAST LOTHIAN COAST OUTING: 4 AUGUST 2018.

Our first stop was at the Musselburgh Lagoons. One of the good things about looking for waders in late July and early August is that birds are still in the remnants of their summer plumage as they return from their breeding grounds. And so it was that we saw a brick-red Knot, albeit with a greying head, and quite different from the rather drab-looking bird that we are familiar with in winter. Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits also sported similar red plumage, the difference being that the Black-tailed have a white rather than a red belly and vent as their cousins do. The adult Dunlins were also in their summer plumage sporting a black belly but there were a few juveniles with them as well. The most numerous birds at the lagoons were Sandwich Terns with just the odd Curlew, a few Redshanks, Common Sandpipers, Lapwing and Snipe. We did finally manage to find the Wood Sandpiper, which had been reported there for several days and which eventually gave us excellent views.

Moving onto Longniddry Bents we eventually managed to pick out two Red-necked Grebes bobbing among the waves quite far out. On one of these East Lothian outings the tide will be in and the grebes will be closer to shore. Here's hoping!

The next stop was Waterston House for lunch and a coffee. On the bird feeder among the tits and Chaffinches were Tree Sparrow and Greenfinch, once hardly worth a mention but nowhere near so common now.

The tide was out by the time we reached the Peffer Burn bridge on the Aberlady Bay Nature Reserve. We did manage to find three Little Egrets near the burn and a female Reed bunting on the walk back from Marl Loch where we saw two Moorhen. We decided to end the day with a visit to the Gosford Estate, where we saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker high up in a dead tree, two Grey Herons and a flock of an estimated 30 Long-tailed Tits. Then someone jokingly said, "Take us to the tree where the Nuthatch is" which I duly did and there was the Nuthatch in the very same spot as we had seen one on a previous visit.

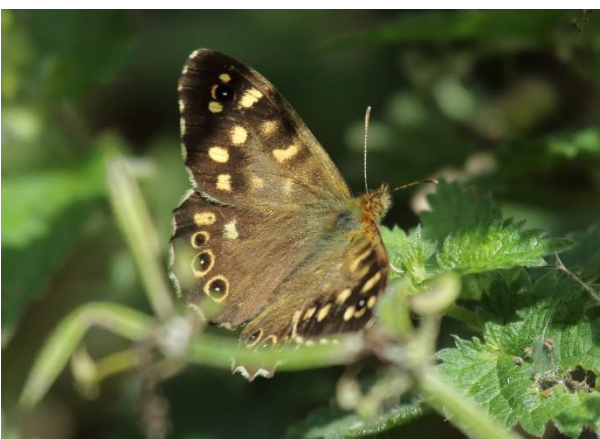
However, the highlight of the visit to Gosford was arguably not a bird but butterflies. On and around a large, south-facing Buddleia bush we counted nine species of butterfly: Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Speckled Brown, Meadow Brown, Peacock, at least four Comma, Small White and Green-veined White. One member, who shall remain nameless, but who regularly but jokingly, I hope, points out that we are on a birding outing, was seen avidly photographing the huge number of butterflies. What next? Liverworts and mosses? "Nature's Home" – all is forgiven!

Going back to birds, we saw or heard (hearing a bird doesn't count in the above-mentioned member's list) 43 species of birds on our outing. It had been a most enjoyable day out.

Paul Taylor

Members' Photographs

Paul noted in his trip report above that Fife SOC members' interests are not limited to birds alone. Here is a selection of what we have been avidly photographing (in addition to birds of course).



From top left: Swallowtail (Andrew Riches), Comma and Speckled Wood (Allister Todd),



Peacock (Stewart Neilson), Four Spotted Chaser (Andrew Riches), male Banded Demoiselle (Elizabeth Irwin).

Fife Bird Sightings:

April 2018

Whooper Swans were at the Wilderness (18 on 8th) and at Letham Pools, a White-fronted Goose (Greenland race) was also at Letham to 8th with a Bean Goose visiting from 5th to 7th. Four Scaup were noted off Outhead with 13 Long-tailed Ducks (8th). The Surf Scoter off Ruddons Point was last seen on 1st. Red-throated Divers were there (seven on 6th) and past Elie (21st) as were Black-throated Divers, with one noted over Ferry Hills (28th). A Great Northern Diver was in Shell Bay (14th) with possibly the same bird seen off Kincaig Point the following day. A Black-necked Grebe (still in winter plumage) offered excellent views at Elie Harbour from 2nd to 29th. Summer plumage Slavonian Grebes were at Ruddons Point (eight on 6th) and surprisingly in the Eden Estuary (11th). Great Crested Grebes arrived at Mountcastle on 7th and Angle Park on 12th, with a Red-necked Grebe in Dalgety Bay on 5th. A Little Egret continued at Tentsmuir NNR. Returning Ospreys were noted at Newburgh, Balmullo and the Eden Estuary (all on 5th). A Common Sandpiper was at Mountcastle and a Black-tailed Godwit at the Wilderness (16th). Whimbrels were logged at Ruddons Point (two on 21st), Kilminning (one over on 14th), Braefoot Point (16th), Letham Pools (one over 22nd), Loch Gelly (22nd), Seafield (seven on 23rd), Culross (24th), Balcomie (12 on 28th), Ferry Hills (one over on 28th) and Elie (two on 29th). An Arctic Skua provided a surprise at Anstruther on 16th, a Mediterranean Gull was an unusual sight at the inland Letham Pools (18th), and an Iceland Gull was at Dysart (16th). Ruddons Point hosted a Short-eared Owl (21st), Tree Pipits were noted over Ferry Hills (28th), a White Wagtail was at Fife Ness (8th) and a Yellow Wagtail (sp) was in the fields outside Crail (19th). Black Redstarts were noted at Fife Ness on 1st, 2nd and 7th with Wheatears there and at Kilrenny (three on 22nd), and a Lesser Whitethroat at Kilminning (14th). A Grasshopper Warbler reeled at Kilrenny Mill on 22nd, Nuthatches continued their invasion of the county with sightings at Dunfermline and Ferry Hills. Fly over migrants were noted at Ferry Hills (Spotted Flycatcher, 29th) and Fife Ness (Hawfinch, 5th). Crossbills were logged at Pitmedden on 7th.

May 2018

A drake Garganey was at Letham Pools 20th – 25th with a Quail calling there (27th) and Kilrenny (18th). Red-throated Divers were past Fife Ness (five on 30th) as were Black-throated Divers. Great Northern Divers were off Ruddons Point (13th) and over Ferry Hills (12th). A Black-necked Grebe continued at Elie harbour to 18th. Manx Shearwaters were logged off Fife Ness (3rd, 13th, 12 on 30th) and Anstruther. A Marsh Harrier visited Mountcastle, a Merlin was in Glenvale (15th), 228 Ringed Plovers were recorded at Tentsmuir Point NNR (20th), 34 Black-tailed Godwit were noted at Letham Pools (21st) and 15 Whimbrels were logged between Crail and Elie on 3rd. Great Skuas and Arctic Skuas were off Fife Ness with Arctic Skuas seen also over Ferry Hills (12th). A Caspian Gull was a good find at Leven staying until 13th. Common Terns and Arctic Terns were past Fife Ness (12 on 30th) with a Black Guillemot passing there on 1st. Tree Pipits were noted at Blairadam on 8th, two Yellow Wagtails (sp) turned up outside Crail on 6th at the same location where this species was logged on 2017. Redstarts were at Balcomie as were a notable 28 Wheatears on 5th. Wheatears were also seen at Gaudry. Whinchats returned once again to Glenvale hopefully to breed. A Reed Warbler was seen at Dunfermline (23rd), Garden Warblers were noted at Kilconquhar, Cullaloe and Town Loch, Lesser Whitethroats were at Kilminning, Grasshopper Warblers were at Kilmany and Kilminning, a Marsh Warbler was heard singing at Fife Ness (12th) and Spotted Flycatchers were seen at Kilminning, Fife Ness and Valleyfield Woods. A Red-backed Shrike graced the walled garden at Balcomie 27th – 29th and Ravens continued in the Lomond Hills, and Glenvale.

June 2018

A pair of Great Crested Grebes were on Lindores Loch, a Spoonbill was at the Eden Estuary NNR on 17th, Ospreys were over Kilmany on 14th and a Marsh Harrier was over Strathkiness on 1st. Black-tailed Godwits were noted at the Wilderness (15 on 19th) with a flock of 84 logged at Culross on 17th. A Tawny Owl was seen at Tayport (16th) and a female Yellow Wagtail (sp) was at the Eden Estuary centre at the end of the month. Whinchats bred in Glen Vale with eight counted on 30th. A Grasshopper Warbler reeled at Fife Ness (2nd), a Spotted Flycatcher visited East Links Wood pond (17th), Ravens continued in Glen Vale, and a Rose-coloured Starling was at Leven for two days (15th).

July 2018

Wilderness held Black-tailed Godwits (21 on 1st), Common Sandpipers (six on 25th), Green Sandpipers, Wood Sandpipers, Spotted Redshanks, Greenshanks, Little Ringed Plovers, Water Rails, Curlews, Whimbrels, Snipe, Crossbills (four on 1st) and Ruff.

Great Crested Grebes were at Mountcastle (four), Ballo Reservoir, and Lindores Loch. Manx Shearwaters passed Anstruther (71 on 9th, 34 on 13th), Fife Ness (25 on 13th, 106 on 28th) and Kinghorn (three on 28th)

with Sooty Shearwaters noted past Fife Ness on 28th and 29th. Little Egrets were seen at Letham Pools (21st), the Eden Estuary, Loch Gelly (five on 17th) and Inverkeithing (22nd). Ospreys continued in the Eden Estuary with four there on 12th. Water Rails continued at Letham Pools, a Green Sandpiper visited Loch Gelly with Common Sandpipers there also. There was a notable passage of Whimbrels at Fife Ness on 28th with 150 logged in two flocks of c70 and c80. A Ruff was at the Eden Estuary. Great Skuas were noted past Anstruther (9th) and Fife Ness with Arctic Skuas past the Ness on 28th. 185 Little Gulls were at Tentsmuir Point NNR (15th) with a single at Charlestown (7th). Mediterranean Gulls returned to the south Fife coast with sightings from Methil (three on 20th, four on 26th), East Wemyss (four on 24th, 11 on 31st), Buckhaven, Leven, Loch Gelly (17th) and Dalgety Bay (20th). Roseate Terns were noted off Fife Ness and in Dalgety Bay (20th), Whinchats continued in Glen Vale, and Crossbills were at Craigmead (eight on 22nd) and passed over Ferry Hills (four over 22nd)

August 2018

Wilderness held Wood Sandpipers, Green Sandpipers, Common Sandpipers, Ruff, Greenshanks, Black-tailed Godwits (29 on 1st, 32 on 4th), Dunlins, Common Snipe, Ringed Plovers, Little Ringed Plovers, Spotted Redshanks, Merlin (4th), Crossbills (11 on 4th) and a Marsh Harrier there on 25th. Brent Geese were past Fife Ness (25 on 31st) with four Pale-bellied Brents returning to Balgove Bay. Flocks of Goosanders were seen in the lower Forth with 126 at West Wemyss on 11th, 39 off Pathhead (12th) and c100 at Kinghorn on 30th. Red-throated Divers were past Fife Ness and Kinghorn, a Black-throated Diver went over Ferry Hills (28th) and a Red-necked Grebe was noted off Pathhead. There were good passages of Manx Shearwaters, with 14 past Seafield, groups past Fife Ness throughout – the most notable being 202 on 12th and 26 were logged at Kinghorn on 29th. Sooty Shearwaters were seen off Fife Ness (six on 12th) and Kinghorn. Little Egrets continued in the Eden Estuary and Loch Gelly. Ospreys were seen off Fife Ness (13th), four continued in the Eden Estuary, and one was at Inchcolm (30th). A Red Kite went over Ferry Hills, a Marsh Harrier briefly visited Loch Gelly (juvenile on 22nd) with a Hobby there also, Peregrines were at Pettycur and Braefoot Point (two on 30th) and a Merlin was at Kilminning. 80 Golden Plovers rested on the rocks at St Monans on 8th, Grey Plovers were at Seafield, Dunlins and Sanderlings were at Balcomie Beach, Green Sandpipers at Loch Gelly (three on 11th), Common Sandpipers at Loch Gelly, Fife Ness and Balcomie Beach, Greenshanks at Fife Ness and Black-tailed Godwits at Loch Gelly (14 on 21st). Whimbrels were logged past East Wemyss, Seafield, and Fife Ness, at Balgove Bay, Kilminning and Balcomie, over Ferry Hills (eight on 3rd) and past Dalgety Bay (47 on 13th). Grey Partridges showed Gaudry on 10th. Ruff were at Fife Ness and Loch Gelly. Great Skuas were noted off Seafield, Fife Ness, Tentsmuir Point NNR, Kinghorn and Pettycur (five on 28th), Pomarine Skuas off Kinghorn (26th, 29th), Arctic Skuas off Fife Ness, Tentsmuir Point NNR (10 on 27th), Kinghorn and Pettycur (four on 28th) with five Long-tailed Skuas seen passing Pettycur on 28th.

Little Gulls were at East Wemyss, Fife Ness (20 from 19th - 23rd), at St Andrews East Sands (a remarkable 780 on 21st), Leven, Levenmouth, Eden Estuary, Kinghorn (14 on 26th) and Pettycur (seven on 28th). Mediterranean Gulls were a highlight at East Wemyss with the count of 62 between 23rd and 27th setting a new county record. Other sightings were at West Wemyss, Dysart, Pathhead, Buckhaven, Fife Ness, Leven, Anstruther and Kinghorn. 200 Common Terns were at Seafield on 11th, Arctic Terns were noted at East Wemyss, Roseate Terns were logged at Buckhaven, Fife Ness, Kinghorn, Pettycur (three on 27th) and Burntisland. Black Terns stopped over at Fife Ness, Pettycur (26th - 31st) and Kinghorn (four on 27th). Kingfishers were again seen at Morton Lochs and the Eden Estuary. Ferry Hills visible migration counts continued including 105 Tree Pipits over on 25th rising to 140 over 28th. Wheatears were noted at East Wemyss, Fife Ness (nine on 25th), Balcomie Beach, Kilminning, and Braefoot Point. A Whinchat was at Kilminning, a Raven was over Melville Lodges (15th), and 10 Crossbills passed Ferry Hills (on 3rd).

David Heeley

Answer to mystery bird on page 2: Juvenile Mediterranean Gull. Dave reports that they were with a load of Black-Headed Gulls at East Wemyss. Easy to overlook them. Black bills and dark legs. A couple of 2nd winter birds there also – one of which was ringed. (Dave Heeley).

*(Records of bird sightings for September to November, for inclusion in the December Newsletter should be sent by **Monday 3rd December 2018 at the latest** to David Heeley at dw.heeley@btinternet.com or 50 High Street, Newburgh, Fife KY14 6AQ)*

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