

# Fife SOC



**Newsletter No. 200!**

*Compiled by Elizabeth Irwin*

*December 2020*



*Balcomie Beach: Elizabeth Irwin*

***Our next Newsletter will be Issue No. 201 for March 2021. Articles, letters, reports and photographs in jpeg or tiff format for publication should be sent, by Monday 1st March at the latest, to Elizabeth Irwin at Drumcarrow Cottage, Pettycruik, Strathkinness KY16 9XP or email: [fifechair@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:fifechair@the-soc.org.uk)***

## FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to a special bumper edition of the *Fife SOC newsletter*: our 200<sup>th</sup>. Although we have no outings to report I hope you will find plenty to interest you. There is an index at the end if you don't want to scroll through.

We look to the future with an article by Will Cresswell about the community buyout of land at Kilminning, their plans for its development for wildlife and people and how we can all help them. We all want something positive to work towards in 2021, and I am delighted to tell you that Fife SOC committee made a unanimous decision to donate £500 from branch funds to this excellent project. We are looking forward to watching progress and seeing how we can continue to help with practical support. This donation still leaves branch funds in a healthy position, so do contact the committee if you know of other ornithological projects we should be supporting.

We also reflect on the present with an account of lockdown bird watching by Erica Hollis, and the 'bird outing that wasn't', by Andrew Riches. Both accounts highlight just how much you can see with very keen observation and without travelling too far.

With the excuse of Christmas approaching, I am also indulging in some nostalgia, with extracts from earlier landmark *Fife SOC newsletters*. I found Ian Cummings' account of his bird watching memories in St Andrews from the 1940s really interesting. I hope you do too. I also want to pay tribute to all the people who have contributed to Fife SOC since its inception in 1950. Some of them are mentioned in this issue, and of course many more are not. I hope it brings back memories to some of you and inspires a new generation to ensure that the work and the spirit of Fife SOC continues – in whatever form members determine.

I hope to see many of you soon, either out bird watching (I will wave at a distance for now), or on *Zoom*: see planned talks below. In the meantime, I wish you all a happy Christmas and a good New Year.

***Elizabeth Irwin***

## Planned meetings

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December

*Social and fun quiz*

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January

*David Steel from the Isle of May*

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February

*Alasdair (Ally) Lemon talking about Corn Buntings*

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March

*Justin Grant on Scotland's White-tailed Sea Eagles*

An invitation with a link to the *Zoom* meeting will be sent out a few days before the event via email mailchimp. To receive this notice, please ensure that you are on the appropriate mailing list held by HQ. You may need to check your junk box and add this to your safe senders list. If you are unsure, you can check your mailing list preferences by emailing [Kathryn Cox](#) or if you know you do not receive branch notices but would like to, you can sign up [here](#).

For instructions on how to use *Zoom*, please click [here](#), or see the information sheet at the end of this newsletter.

The meetings will start at 7.10pm for participants to log in, a meet and greet and What's About Chat, and the talks will start at 7.30pm. We join up with Tayside SOC for the meetings and as usual we also welcome young birders and students to the meetings.

We have already held some successful talks, so if you are new to *Zoom* I hope you will consider trying out this format. You can bring your own friends / family / pets / drinks and food and the dress code is casual! Alcohol is allowed because you do not need to drive home!

## Planned Outings

*At the time of writing, outings are cancelled because of government restrictions. We hope to be able to start up again in the Spring, and we will let you know when this happens, via mailchimp. If you want guidance about what is permitted in terms of more formal bird surveys, there is information on the SOC website and on the BTO and Scottish Government websites.*



*Sparrowhawk: Elizabeth Irwin*



*Robin: John Irwin*





*George Smith and Peregrine Falcon*

**George Smith gave a fascinating talk via Zoom** on Wednesday October 14: *Peregrines in South Scotland: a long-term study*. George has been co-ordinator for peregrine falcon monitoring in south east Scotland since 1995 and they monitor around 60 pairs. Since 2002 they have been able to make a detailed study of the demography of the population using PIT tags. He explained that they had three hypotheses to verify:

1. Natal dispersal would increase with increased density. *Answer:* dispersal distance in the study area showed no significant difference during the two study periods, though it did so at a National level.

2. Age of first reproduction would increase with increased density. *Answer:* Age of first reproduction was delayed during high density period.

3. Productivity would increase with increased density. *Answer:* Productivity is higher during high density period. They also found that survival rates are higher during high density period.



*Peregrine Falcon: George Smith*

# Outing Reports

## *“That was the walk that wasn’t”: Balgove Bay, Sunday September 13<sup>th</sup>*

The committee of the Fife branch of the SOC had planned an interesting and diverse range of field outings for 2020-2021.

June and I were to lead the trip in September to Ferryhills. It soon became clear in the early spring that this would not be possible. However, if we had gone this is what you would have seen - if you were as experienced a birder as **Graham Sparshott**. However, in view of the weather conditions on Sunday where we had 40 mph winds at ground level in St. Andrews, we would have been roping members together and issuing lead weights to strap to your feet. Even Graham didn't venture out on Sunday, so these are the *Fife Bird News* reports from Saturday and Monday: (editor's note: this is also a model of how we record our observations).

### Saturday 12 September 2020

Counting period: 06:30-08:45

Count type: all species

Weather: Fresh SW wind, squally showers second hour

Observers: **Graham Sparshott**

	SW	NE		SW	NE		SW	NE
Pink-footed Goose	165	-	<b>Raven</b>	<b>4</b>	-	Greenfinch	6	-
Shelduck *	-	6	Swallow	11	-	Linnet	2	-
Mallard *	1	-	House Martin	5	-	Lesser Redpoll	12	-
Tufted Duck *	4	-	Starling	-	13	Crossbill	14	-
Red-throated Diver *	1	-	Grey Wagtail	10	-	Siskin	257	-
Black-headed Gull *	1	-	alba wagtail sp.	4	-	Yellowhammer	3	-
Lesser Black-backed Gull	5	-	<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<b>648</b>	-	Reed Bunting	3	-

Present: Red-throated Diver 1\*, **Arctic Tern 60\***, Great Skua 2\*

Totals: 1175 individuals, 21 (+2) species, 2:15 hours

Comments: Much better than expected in squally conditions. A lovely flock of 60 Arctic Tern lingering over the Forth, occasionally rising up high in a tight formation as if about to go overland.

### Monday 14 September 2020

Counting period: 06:30-08:30

Count type: all species

Weather: Moderate SW wind, high cloud

Observers: **Graham Sparshott**

	SW	NE		SW	NE		SW	NE
Red-throated Diver *	34	-	Spotted Flycatcher	1	-	Linnet	6	-
Cormorant *	8	-	Tree Sparrow	1	-	<b>Lesser Redpoll</b>	<b>105</b>	-
Whimbrel *	1	-	Grey Wagtail	9	-	Crossbill	11	-
Great Skua *	2	-	alba wagtail sp.	7	-	Goldfinch	19	-
Sand Martin	10	-	<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<b>1390</b>	-	<b>Siskin</b>	<b>293</b>	-
Swallow	14	-	Tree Pipit	2	-	Yellowhammer	1	-
House Martin	13	-	Chaffinch	19	-	Reed Bunting	1	-
Starling	1	2	Greenfinch	6	-			

Totals: 1956 individuals, 23 species, 2:00 hours

Comments: Busy for MPipits and Siskins again. Red-throated Divers included an impressive flock of 22 heading high inland.



The suggestion to replace this trip was to have a local outing to Balgove Bay and Outhead in St. Andrews. With the restrictions at the time, we would have split the group of potentially 11 into 2 to conform with the 5 households rule. However, late in the day the First Minister changed the rule to 2 households only. It was a pity we had to cancel the trip but felt it important to adhere to the guidelines as there was a strong steer to comply immediately.



*Golden Plover: Andrew Riches*

June and I were undeterred and set off at 9.00 to see if we could find anything. On the way across the golf course there were several small groups of pied wagtails and all the swallows hadn't yet left Fife. The wind by now had reached its full force. As the tide came in there were the usual large groups of oystercatchers and sleepy groups of curlew. Shelducks were scattered across the mud and small groups of wigeon followed the tide in. There were very few other waders: just a few redshank but no dunlin flocks. Sandwich terns were resting on the edge of the water also. As we walked along the corner of Balgove Bay, a group of 10 ringed plover arrived. The juveniles were trying to mimic a Kentish plover. We had previously seen white wagtails and golden plover in this corner but not today.

All in all, a bad hair day for June but the cobwebs were certainly blown away.

*Andrew and June Riches*



*Oystercatchers: Andrew Riches*



## Kilminning – help us make one of Scotland’s best sites for migrant birds into a proper nature reserve

Kilminning is a wildlife site on the coastal path between Crail and Fife Ness. Although covered in a large part by tarmac left over from its use as an airfield, trees and shrubs have begun to take over, making Kilminning a magnet for migrant birds, as one of the only bits of wooded habitat on Fife Ness. The site is well known to birders and gets scarce migrants regularly such as red-backed shrike, barred warbler, greenish warbler, red-breasted flycatchers and rosefinch. It occasionally gets spectacular rarities like the long staying eastern olivaceous warbler a few years ago and the Siberian thrush of this year.



Kilminning is also valued by locals and coastal path walkers as a little bit of nature in the midst of the industrial farmland of the East Neuk. But the area could be much better for both wildlife and people. The Crail community has just regained ownership of the land from Fife Council, through a community land asset transfer, and now plans to restore Kilminning’s full potential as a wildlife site, and to do something positive for the biodiversity and climate emergency.



We plan to create a much more interesting and biodiverse space for nature and for people. We plan to remove much of the tarmac (although leaving enough for access and parking) to create space for more trees, for water and so for more wildlife. We plan to greatly increase the tree and shrub cover, and to connect Kilminning to other sites around Crail via a network of wooded paths. Over the next thirty years we want to have



Kilminning as part of a network of wildlife sites so that a person could walk all day around Crail in biodiverse, beautiful habitat. And of course, this will all make the area better for migrant and resident birds. Addition of wetland habitat to the East Neuk, where there is none at all, would greatly increase the attraction of the area to birds.



Although we have already obtained ownership of the site from Fife Council for £1 (subject to legal completion), we need to pay the legal fees for Kilminning (land transfers might be cheap but lawyers are not). We need to do some prompt infrastructure work to manage access to prevent off road driving and fly tipping. We need to consult (and pay!) professionals who can advise us about the hydrology of the site and the engineering needed to remove the tarmac and to create a loch and flooded meadow instead. We need to do surveys to determine what other wildlife is on the site.

Then we will create a full plan for Kilminning and start a second round of fund raising to make the habitat improvements. This may be as simple as breaking up the tarmac and planting trees, or as complicated as diverting and damming the existing burn that runs through the site to create a loch and other wetland habitats. Whatever the exact outcome, we will end up with a rewilded site, better for wildlife

and people. And a much better birding site, secure forever in community ownership against future development.

We need your help on the first steps of this exciting project to restore the natural environment at Kilminning. We are fund raising at:

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/south-kilminning-community-ownership#start>

Help us start the process of making things better for biodiversity and for climate change and for us all. And we can also all look forward to some more great Scottish birding in the future.



**Will Cresswell** (Kilminning is my local patch) **on behalf of Crail Community Partnership**, the charity we set up after the Crail charrette (a 2 year consultation period) identified a strong community desire for local environmental improvements. We have also gained ownership of land to extend Denburn Wood and land around Roome Bay.

## A Garden Bird Watch

As lockdown began back in March and birding outings and holidays were cancelled, I decided to sign up for the BTO Garden birdwatch – apologies in advance for poor quality photos mostly taken through the windows.



We had finally found somewhere to site a couple of bird feeders back in January – as I have two cats, my initial thought was to site them in the front garden out in the open and high up out of reach of the cats but the birds seemed very reluctant to use them. I found out why later! Anyway, we relocated the feeders (one peanuts, the other seed mix) to the back garden hung fairly well up in holly trees and they soon started to empty. I can still see birds from the front window – mostly woodpigeons and carrion crows plus a few herring gulls interspersed with small flocks of house sparrows and starlings that both seem to nest in the ivy covered frontage of the house diagonally opposite. There is a hawthorn in my next door neighbour's garden which I include in my counts and has hosted

**Woodpigeon: Erica Hollis** quite a few “domestics” both between woodpigeons which have attempted to nest both there and in my back garden but are frequently disturbed by a third woodpigeon who wants to muscle in on the action. There is also a local pair of carrion crows (recognisable as one has a slightly twisted beak) which come swooping in to chase off any magpie that dares to enter their territory. Another bird that comes swooping in, over or round the house towards the back garden is a sparrowhawk – which probably explains the lack of popularity of the feeders out in the open!



A song thrush crashed into the lounge window one day but quickly recovered enough to stagger into the nearby flowerbed where it encountered a very large snail and spent a good 15-20 minutes bashing the snail around until it could get in to eat it. We rather hoped he'd tell his mates as we have rather a lot of snails but I never saw any more being consumed and now the rowan berries are the main attraction. A lovely little flock of long tailed tits flitted about in the hawthorn (which had provided plenty of caterpillars in the spring for the bluetits) but obviously found little to interest them as they quickly flew on and I've not seen them around since.

In the much more sheltered back garden the seed feeder is much more popular than the peanuts although most of the birds are tits, the blue and great tits occasionally have a go at peanuts if the seed feeder is getting low but the coal tit that I see most days never does. He or she is a real character and likes the black sunflower seeds – if they are not immediately in reach, the tit pulls out seed after seed and throws them disdainfully to the ground until a sunflower seed appears, which it takes to a nearby branch and holds carefully while stripping the outer case off to access the seed inside (the blue tits do this peeling too). We also get robins, house sparrows and dunnocks on the seed feeder but the coal tit is as bold as brass and will chase off most things although it draws the line at robins! Today I saw three blue tits gang together to chase off the coal tit, but it was back as soon as they were gone.

### **Song Thrush: Erica Hollis**

Blackbirds and the occasional song thrush are busy stripping the rowans round about – they must have stripped mine while we were out as it is suddenly bereft of berries. There is at least one wren that skulks about below the feeders and my heart is in my mouth every time I see it as, as well as my two cats, there are another 4 cats at least that regularly wander through.

So while nothing rare or unusual has visited my garden, getting to know some individual birds and watch their behaviour week after week has been a different kind of birding but very enjoyable none-the-less.

**Erica Hollis**



## ***Fife SOC Newsletters: a retrospect***

The first *Fife SOC newsletter* was on September 12<sup>th</sup> 1990 – so over 30 years ago. It recorded its rationale as follows:

### **SOC FIFE BRANCH**

### **NEWSLETTER NO 1**

12th September 1990

For the SOC as a club it is important that members are kept informed about various club issues as well as bird news, outings etc. There is often much to tell and this is both time-consuming and tests the memory of many of us. Therefore, in order to cut down on preliminary notices and information given out at the branch meetings, it has been decided that a newsletter would be of real benefit to members. The newsletter will be available for members to pick up at meetings and, in case anyone cannot make a meeting, arrangements will be made on request to have the newsletter posted. The aim is to ensure that anyone who so wishes can be kept in touch with what goes on.

This is not very different from the purpose of our newsletter today, and much of the content is comparable, with similar meetings and outings. The committee was Anne-Marie Smout (chair), David Bell (vice-chair), Anne Davidson (secretary), and committee members Norman Elkins, Mike Gardner, Jean Horobin, Nigel Mann and Neil Robertson. There were details of the November SOC conference and AGM to be held at the Marine Hotel in North Berwick and I wondered how many of you had attended. Also familiar was Norman Elkins' update on tetrads surveyed for the *BTO/SOC Atlas* (68.5% of all tetrads in Fife and Kinross with 128 species recorded). They were about to start work on the *Fife Breeding Atlas* and on a guide to bird watching in Fife – both successful ventures. Mike Gardner was promoting to North Fife District Council the idea of a new bird hide nearer to the salt marsh at the Eden estuary and as Ranger was working with local farmers and landowners of the area to promote wildlife conservation.

What did strike me as different from today was their involvement in campaigning for conservation. They made comments on the proposed splitting of the Nature Conservancy Council and they had received consultative plans for a Regional Park to be designated about Lochore Meadows. It was noted that "Mr William G Taylor, Director of Economic Development and Planning, will be pleased to discuss this (document) with anyone who might wish to raise the topic." I do not think this would happen today. They added "As a committee we feel very strongly that it is important that our voice is heard in matters of conservation and anything else affecting birds and their habitat". Since I became involved with SOC there has been a clear steer that we do not campaign and must not voice anything that could be construed as political. I wonder how that evolved and would be interested in your views.

The *Fife SOC newsletter* reached the 100<sup>th</sup> edition milestone in April 2003. Stewart Neilson was chair and reading his '*From the Chair*' made me realise that my own opening remarks are not original! However, he did note that the "size is greater than anticipated and will probably never be repeated". Our 200<sup>th</sup> edition issue is much bigger!! Again, the newsletter reflects their continued involvement in influencing environmental issues along with the more mundane but no less interesting tasks of organising meetings and outings – and the annual coffee morning that was mainly needed to finance the costs of printing and posting the newsletters. I have copied Stewart's '*From the Chair*' below along with a photograph from the outing to Glenfeshie in June 1997 that appeared in the newsletter. I have also copied below a list of office bearers from 1950 to 2003 that appeared in the newsletter. However, perhaps the most fascinating article is *Memories of Birding in St Andrews* by Ian Cumming. Ian still contributes a great deal to Fife SOC and has been involved since its inception in 1950. I hope you enjoy reading these articles:

## Early Memories of Birdwatching in St Andrews

I began birdwatching in the early 1940s. At that time it was not even thought of as a minority hobby or pursuit and I seemed to be the only one in town who ever went birdwatching. St Andrews was very different in those days. There was no road out the West Sands and what is now the Jubilee Golf Course was an army firing-range which was often closed to public access. As a consequence of that there were large colonies of Common and Arctic Terns at Outhead and even on the firing-range, although the soldiers took their eggs occasionally. Ringed Plovers nested above high-water mark at the end of the West Sands and round Outhead into the Eden estuary. Fulmars began prospecting the cliffs by the Witches' Lake (out from the Sealife Centre) during the war and began breeding in 1948.

Because of my interest in birds my father took me to meetings of the University Natural History Society and, when an interesting ornithologist came to talk, our house was offered as his accommodation. As a result I met such eminent people as James Fisher, Kenneth Williamson, Morton Boyd, Fraser Darling and George Waterston. Professor D'Arcy Thomson also took me birdwatching and showed me his lantern-slides which, if my memory serves me right, were mainly of birds-of-paradise.

In 1949 I went out to the Isle of May with the University club for a week in late March. I remember rushing over to the cliffs on the first morning to see my first real seabird colony. To my dismay there were no birds present; however, the next day the cliffs were teeming with Guillemots and Razorbills. During that visit I saw my first Black Guillemot. I also saw a raft of six Puffins on the sea (another first) and thought "wouldn't it be wonderful if they were to nest on the May!" They did eventually do so in 1960 and now number at least 55,000 pairs.

In 1950 the SOC formed a branch in St Andrews. This was mainly as a result of the efforts of Ian Munro; he was an honours student at the University and hailed, I think, from Tayport. He was a very active field ornithologist and had placed many nest-boxes in Tentsmuir forest for woodpeckers. Tentsmuir and Earls Hall Muir had breeding populations of Eider (ca. 500 pairs), Shelduck (200-300 pairs) and large numbers of Teal and Mallard and Black-headed Gulls (1,000 - 2,000 pairs). On the beaches there were colonies of Common, Arctic and Little Terns and there was also a large colony of Sandwich Terns on the Muir. Mr Skinner, the gamekeeper on the estate, took me under his wing and taught me a lot. I saw my first Jays, Magpies and Buzzards hanging from his gibbet. Ian Munro recruited me to help with the wildfowl counts on the Eden estuary in 1949 and, although I have been continuing the counts since the 1960s, I have never seen the large numbers of Pintail we saw in 1949.

At the inaugural meeting of the St Andrews SOC in 1950 I was elected to the committee as junior member. Ian Munro, I think, was elected chairman and Dunmore Hotchkiss, T B Mitford and the Misses Baxter and Rintoul were also, I think, on the committee. At that time I did not realise the esteem in which the two ladies were held. In my arrogance I found them always bickering and disagreed with them on the year that Fulmars had first bred here. I reckoned that, as I had spent a lot of time climbing the cliffs and hadn't found any young, they couldn't have found them before me. However, on re-thinking it, I realise they had access to cliff-top gardens which I couldn't get into and they also had binoculars which I didn't!

Not long after that birdwatching had to take a temporary back seat as girls and rugby took over.

*Ian Cumming*



**From the Chair** Well, here it is, our bumper, special 100<sup>th</sup> edition of the Branch Newsletter. Its size is greater than anticipated and will probably never be repeated. However it is special, thanks to the work put in by Donald Stewart and Ian Cumming in producing the historical perspective of the Branch since its inception. I am also grateful that Martin Dean has put pen to paper, or should I say finger to keyboard, and submitted another of his comical pieces. And again photographs have enhanced the issue even although the quality of some of those submitted may not have reached the desired standard

It was a beautiful Spring morning on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March when we held our annual Coffee Morning in St Andrews. Fiona Butler has given me preliminary financial details and we have raised £396 so far. David Waddell will sell plants over the next month or so and we hope to raise a little more when we dispose of the books and bric-a-brac which were left. So, although we might not reach the £500+ profit figure of the last two years, I think the work put in by many people has been well rewarded. Thank you all who contributed in any way.

Jean Stewart has given me advance notice of a meeting organised by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (Fife & Kinross) in association with Scottish Environmental LINK. The meeting, to be held in the Age Concern Hall, Provost Wynd, Cupar on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> April at 5.30pm, has been arranged to give members of the voting public the opportunity to put questions on environmental matters to a number of election candidates. Environmental issues are receiving an increasingly higher profile these days, with the latest controversy being the possibility of using the Cliffe Marshes in North Kent as the site of a proposed new airport. (I hope you have all expressed your support to the RSPB or written to your MP about the scandal of ignoring all the previously designated protection labels). So if you have any local concerns please go along on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Stewart Neilson**



### **Recognise the people?**

#### **Outing to Glenfeshie, June, 1997**

From left to right: Our guiding gamekeeper Donnie Ross, Jr; Joan Lambert; Stephen Lambert; Rob Lambert; Fiona Butler; Judy Dean; Jonathan Dean; Stewart Neilson; Mike Walton; Donald Stewart; and Sheila Taylor in front.

## SOC Fife (St Andrews) Branch Office-Bearers 1950-2003

I had hoped, for this 'centenary' edition of the Newsletter, to produce a complete list of Branch Chairmen and Secretaries since the foundation of the Branch in 1950. However, my researches for the early years have been partly thwarted. For one thing, those who remember the early days of the Branch can remember the names of some of the office-bearers but not their exact periods of office or even the order in which they served. Normally I would have been able to plug the gaps by consulting the records at head office but the Club's archives are at present stored in cardboard boxes in the temporary HQ in Musselburgh, pending the final move to Aberlady, and are not accessible. The lists below are not therefore as complete as I would have liked them to be; they are complete and correct, I think, from the 1960s on but there are gaps and uncertainties for the early years. I would be very pleased to hear from any member with a long memory (or even old syllabus cards) who could help fill any of the gaps.

**Donald Stewart**

### **SOC Fife Branch**

#### **Chairmen**

Ian Munro	1950-
Terence Mitford	
..... McKenzie	
Dunmore Hotchkis	
Bryan Nelson (?)	
Wm. Cunningham	1969-72
Gillian Falconer	1972-75
Ian Cumming	1975-78
John Wiffen	1978-81
Pete Kinnear	1981-84
Frank Spragge	1984-87
Donald Stewart	1987-90
Anne-Marie Smout	1990-93
Jim Reid	1993-95
Jean Horobin	1995-98
Les Hatton	1998-2001
Stewart Neilson	2001-

#### **Secretaries**

Mrs N. Grace	1950-51 (?)
Mrs D. Hotchkis	
Maggie Spires	? 1956-79
Betty Rowling	1979-88
Anne Davidson	1988-92
Brian Downing	1992-97
Donald Stewart	1997-2002
Fiona Butler	2002-



**Maggie Spires**

**Finally, an item from issue 150 in December 2006.** Rob Armstrong was the chair then. Paul Taylor was editing the newsletter and asked people to start emailing articles to him if possible and they had an email address! They had had to cancel the planned November weekend in Dumfries because of floods. However, it was an article by Mary McIntyre that caught my eye. Perhaps some of you have seen the recent report from John Wilson on the *Fife Bird News* about a woodcock straying into a hallway in Crail. This is what Mary wrote in December 2006:



## Woodcock in the library – searching for book worms?

On Friday 30th Oct at 11.15 in the morning I walked into the St Andrews Public Library to find one of the librarians holding a Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*). It looked alert and healthy and stunningly beautiful. She had opened the main library door for some fresh air and the bird had flown straight in. I helped her to put it into a large plastic box with a lid with air holes and I carried it to my car to take it to my local wood a couple of miles out of St Andrews where most years I flush a woodcock, so I knew it was a good release site. I know that woodcock migrate here at this time of year from Scandinavia to avoid the harsh winters. I assume that this particular bird had just flown in that day over the North Sea and would be tired and disorientated. It had not fed for a while because there were no faeces in its all white dropping. In handling it had struggled in my hand and felt strong. I also gave it a quick check to see if there was any sign of blood which there wasn't. I felt its breastbone and it felt quite fleshy so no problems of starvation. Not wanting to cause the bird any more distress inadvertently, I phoned the SSPCA who put me through to Colin, the Assistant Manager, at their Middlebank Wildlife Centre near Inverkeithing. He informed me that the best way forward was to release the bird there and then near the wood and see if it flew away. Should the bird not fly away, I was to retrieve it and it would be picked up by SSPCA staff, taken to Middlebank and given a tray of earthworms in muddy soil until it regained its strength. I am happy to say that it flew immediately and strongly into the wood. All I have left are 8 ethereally beautiful little feathers.

If I had not entered the library at that precise moment the librarians would have released the bird into the street - an obvious and kindly thing to do with most birds. (Alison Norcross the librarian in question told me later that she would have not released the bird into the street but phoned the SSPCA centre at Middlebank just as I had done) However, I think the chances of this secretive and nocturnal woodcock surviving would have been diminished. Not only the noise and traffic - we have a rather famous ginger town cat here in the centre of St Andrews called Hamish who wanders from shop to shop to see where he can obtain food and a bed. I assume that a woodcock lunch would have been very acceptable.

Thank you to Rosie Filipiak, the librarian at Waterston House. For finding these newsletters and sending them to me.

**Elizabeth Irwin**



*Bar-tailed Godwit: Elizabeth Irwin*



## Fife Bird Sightings:

### September 2020

A first year female Siberian Thrush was found at Lower Kilminning on 30<sup>th</sup>, with a Common Rosefinch also there. Kilminning held Yellow-browed Warblers from 23<sup>rd</sup> as well as Garden Warblers, Pied Flycatchers, Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Fieldfares, Redwings, Goldcrests, Lesser Redpolls, Chiffchaffs, and a 'kettle' of 13 Common Buzzards on 27<sup>th</sup>. Yellow-browed Warblers were also at the Fife Ness Patch. Logs from Fife Ness included 376 Sooty Shearwaters on 26<sup>th</sup> (and 312 on 25<sup>th</sup>), Manx Shearwaters (43 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Arctic Skuas, Great Skuas, Great Northern Divers, Red-throated Divers (87 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Barnacle Geese, Pale-bellied Brent Geese (82 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Black Guillemots, Little Gulls (285 on 26<sup>th</sup>), Common Sandpipers, Purple Sandpipers and two Yellow-browed warblers (20<sup>th</sup>). The Wilderness held Whooper Swans, Ruff, Snipe, Pintails (14 on 6<sup>th</sup>), Shovelers (50 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Green Sandpipers and Curlew Sandpipers. The Mediterranean Gull roost at East Wemyss reached a monthly maximum of 54 on 11<sup>th</sup>. The Eden Estuary held two Spoonbills on 8<sup>th</sup>, Scaup (22 on 28<sup>th</sup>), Curlew Sandpipers, Common Sandpipers, Spotted Redshanks, Ospreys, Little Egrets (11 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Little Stints, Ruff, Whimbrels, Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Pintails, White-tailed Eagles, a group of 250 Swallows on 6<sup>th</sup>, a juv. Hobby (9<sup>th</sup>), Cuckoos, Mediterranean Gulls, Yellow Wagtails (*ssp flava*) and Sandwich Terns. Vis Mig highlights from Ferry Hills included 1545 Siskins and 1222 Meadow Pipits on 6<sup>th</sup>, and 278 Lesser Redpolls and 17 Red-throated Divers on 10<sup>th</sup>. 250 Pink-footed Geese were at Dunshalt on 6<sup>th</sup>; a Bar-headed Goose was noted at Ladybank with 600 Greylag Geese on 15<sup>th</sup>; Brent Geese were at Levenmouth (seven) and Tayport (15 on 27<sup>th</sup>). Kinshaldy held 485 Goosanders and 100 Red-breasted Mergansers on 12<sup>th</sup>. 12 Sooty Shearwaters passed Crail (26<sup>th</sup>). Little Egrets were at Morton Lochs (eight on 28<sup>th</sup>); a juvenile White Tailed Eagle was noted at Tentsmuir; an Osprey was over Dysart and Marsh Harriers were at Newburgh (7<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>). A male Hen Harrier on passage was on the Lomond Hills and another was at Crail (8<sup>th</sup>). Merlins were at East Lomond (27<sup>th</sup>), Roome Bay and Boarhills. Reports of waders included 40 Ringed Plovers at Dysart,



22 Golden Plovers at Kilrenny Mill, and Little Stints at Kinshaldy and Kingsbarns. Grey Partridges were seen at Kilrenny Mill (10 on 12<sup>th</sup>); a Jack Snipe was flushed at Balcomie Bay. Pomarine Skuas passed Carlingnose Point, St David's Harbour and Kinghorn. There were notable flocks of Little Gulls at Kingsbarns (690) and Balcomie Beach (350). Mediterranean Gulls showed at seven coastal locations; there was a completely leucistic Herring Gull at Leven on 13<sup>th</sup>. Roseate Terns again visited Dalgety Bay (three on 15<sup>th</sup>) and a Black Tern was noted at Pathhead (13<sup>th</sup>). A late Common Swift was over Crail on 14<sup>th</sup>. 32 White Wagtails dropped in to Boarhills on 20<sup>th</sup>, with others at Sauchope Beach and Balcomie. A Yellow-browed Warbler was an unusual inland record at Falkland (26<sup>th</sup>); a Nuthatch showed at Aberdour; Ravens were at East Lomond (six on 6<sup>th</sup>) and Morton Lochs (two); an early Brambling visited St Andrews (18<sup>th</sup>) and a Lapland Bunting was heard calling there on 27<sup>th</sup>.

## October 2020

A Siberian Thrush offered brief views at Kilminning until 4<sup>th</sup>. Good numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers showed up to the 14<sup>th</sup>, mainly at coastal sites between Boarhills and Crail with one or two records from more inland areas. A Glossy Ibis visited Tayport on 16<sup>th</sup>. Kilminning logged Common Rosefinches, Short-eared Owls, Hawfinches, Bramblings, Lesser Redpolls, Common Crossbills, Redstarts, Chiffchaffs (incl. Siberian race), a Garden Warbler, a Barred Warbler, a Dusky Warbler (heard), Willow Warblers, Lesser Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Goldcrests, Woodcocks, Jack Snipe, Ring Ouzels, Spotted Flycatchers, a Greenshank (over), a Black-throated Diver (over), Grey Wagtails, Grey plovers (over), Siskins, Northern race Bullfinches, Twite (14 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Mealy Redpolls, Merlin, good numbers of winter Thrushes and a Red-backed Shrike (26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>). The Fife Ness 'Patch' logs included an Arctic Warbler, a Byth's Reed Warbler, a Radde's Warbler, a Siberian Chiffchaff and a Short-eared Owl. Ferry Hills records included Arctic Skuas, Long-tailed Skuas, Great Skuas, Red-throated Divers, Black-throated Divers, Great Northern divers, Whooper Swans, Taiga Bean Geese, Brent Geese, Kittiwakes (110 on 4<sup>th</sup>), Little Gulls and a Merlin. Nocturnal sound recordings at Ferry Hills included White-fronted Geese over on 10<sup>th</sup>. Valleyfield Lagoons held Bar-tailed Godwits, Black-tailed Godwits, Greenshanks and Slavonian Grebes. There were significant movements of Pink-footed Geese including a count of 4000+ at Crombie on 11<sup>th</sup>. Whooper Swans were at Rossie Bog (22 on 12<sup>th</sup>), Angle Park, Wilderness, Outhead, Barns Farm, Kinghorn Loch and were sighted over Dunfermline, Cellardyke, Anstruther and Ferry Hills. Skeins of Barnacle Geese were noted at Kilminning (350 on 4<sup>th</sup>), Boarhills (2281 on 4<sup>th</sup>), Kingsbarns, Wormiston, Fife Ness, Crail, Ferry Hills and Crombie with Brent Geese seen at Kilrenny Mill, Outhead, Tayport and over Ferry Hills. There was a count of 14 Red Grouse on the Lomond Hills NNR on 11<sup>th</sup>. Cameron Reservoir, the Eden Estuary and Kilconquhar Loch held Greater Scaup. Two Surf Scoters were at Kinshaldy (21<sup>st</sup>); Slavonian Grebes were off East Wemyss, Leven, Kinshaldy and Dalgety Bay; 18 Sooty Shearwaters passed Crail on 13<sup>th</sup>. Little Egret numbers on the Eden Estuary built to 11 on 16<sup>th</sup>, with others recorded at Tayport. White Tailed Eagles were at Kinshaldy (two on 16<sup>th</sup>), Marsh Harriers were at Newburgh (two) and at Rossie Bog (three), a Hen Harrier was at Cameron Reservoir, and Merlins were noted at Charlottetown, Ferry Hills, Pathhead, Morton Lochs and Crail. Purple Sandpipers were seen at Fife Ness (seven on 18<sup>th</sup>), Spotted Redshanks at the Eden Estuary (two on 15<sup>th</sup>); an overwintering Whimbrel returned to Ruddons Point for the season. Woodcocks were at Fife Ness by the coastal path, coveys of 9 and 11 Grey Partridges were recorded at Cellardyke and Jack Snipe were at their usual winter quarters at Boarhills (three on 4<sup>th</sup>) and Cocklemill Marsh (two on 18<sup>th</sup>). Dalgety Bay recorded three Pomarine Skuas on 20<sup>th</sup>; Little Gulls lingered at Pathhead, Guardbridge (two on 16<sup>th</sup>) and Roome Bay. Mediterranean Gulls continued along the Forth coast with 21 at East Wemyss on 2<sup>nd</sup>. A Long-eared Owl showed at Boarhills Pond with two Short-eared Owls at Outhead on 12<sup>th</sup>. Boarhills held Redstarts, Reed Warblers and Garden Warblers. Other Redstarts were at Wormiston and Outhead. Ring Ouzels stopped briefly at St Andrews and Kincaig Hill; Lesser Whitethroats were at the Fife Ness coastal path and Dunfermline; a Siberian Chiffchaff was heard at Kinconquhar cemetery, Balcomie held a Dusky Warbler and a Spotted Flycatcher, with a Red-breasted Flycatcher nearby on the Fife Ness coastal path. Hawfinches were noted at Lochmill (two on 25<sup>th</sup>), Elie, and Kittocks Den. Twite flocks showed at Kingsbarns (27 on 11<sup>th</sup>), Boarhills (50 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Fife Ness, and Morton Lochs. Common Redpolls were at Angle Park and Fairmont GC, Crossbills were at Rathillet (15 on 30<sup>th</sup>), St Andrews and Kingsbarns, Snow Buntings appeared at Crail (eight on 6<sup>th</sup>), Tayport and Kingsbarns, and Lapland Buntings were at Kilrenny (five on 30<sup>th</sup>), Fife Ness and Crail.

## November 2020

A Hudsonian Godwit was at the Eden Estuary from 10<sup>th</sup> until at least 27<sup>th</sup>. A Richard's Pipit was found at Ruddons Point on 28<sup>th</sup> and remained in the area until at least 29<sup>th</sup>. Reports of Whooper Swans were widespread and included 123 at Wilderness on 13<sup>th</sup>. Brent Geese continued in Balgove Bay (30 on 20<sup>th</sup>) with others noted past Boarhills and Lower Largo. Pintails were at Rossie Bog, Angle Park and Edenside; a female Ring-necked Duck was on Cameron Reservoir (28<sup>th</sup>); 122 Scaup were logged on the Eden Estuary (12<sup>th</sup>); Long-tailed Ducks were at St Andrews Bay, Lower Largo, Balgove Bay, Outhead, Kingsbarns and Loch Fitty. A flock of 350 Goldeneye was seen at Newburgh (13<sup>th</sup>) and a female Smew was over Ferry Hills. Red-throated Divers were at nine coastal sites including 23 at Fife Ness and 35 over Ferry Hills (6<sup>th</sup>). Buckhaven, Fife Ness and Balgove Bay held Black-throated Divers; there were Great Northern Divers at Pathhead, Fife Ness (seven on 19<sup>th</sup>), Balcomie Beach, Kingsbarns and Ferry Hills; Slavonian Grebes were seen in Largo Bay, Balgove Bay, Dalgety Bay and off Kingsbarns. A single Manx Shearwater passed Dysart. A notable eight Little Egrets continued at the Eden Estuary with White Tailed Eagles there also. Marsh Harriers continued at Rossie Bog and Mugdrum Island Newburgh. Merlins were noted at Anstruther, Kingsbarns, Crail, Newmills Bay and Ferry Hills. Loch Gelly held 11 Water Rails. Ruddons Point held Golden Plovers and a flock of 23 Grey Plovers on 26<sup>th</sup>. Seven coastal sites held Purple Sandpipers. A single Spotted Redshank lingered in the Eden Estuary. There was an influx of Woodcocks around the 27<sup>th</sup> with records from seven locations including eight logged at Kilminning and one seen flying down the middle of road at Melville Lodges. A covey of Grey Partridges was at Pittenweem; Jack Snipe were seen at Kilmany, Cairnsmill, Cocklemill Burn, Cameron Reservoir, Balgove Bay, Barnyard Marsh, Inch Farm, and Valleyfield Lagoons (eight on 13<sup>th</sup>). 36 Little Gulls were over Ferry Hills on 15<sup>th</sup>; Mediterranean Gulls continued along the Forth and there were Iceland Gulls at Fife Ness and Kingsbarns. A Little Auk came in off the sea St Andrews West Sands; a Long-eared Owl visited Balcomie Beach and there were two Short-eared Owls at Lower Largo. Several reports were received of late Barn Swallows and House Martins. Single Waxwings were at Cellardyke and Guardbridge; Siberian race Chiffchaffs were identified at Crail and Kilminning, and there were Bramblings at Crail (12 on 7<sup>th</sup>), St Andrews and Ferry Hills. Other notable records included 156 Twite at Kingsbarns on 29<sup>th</sup>, 81 Snow Buntings at Tenstmuir Point NNR on 27<sup>th</sup> and 11 Lapland Bunting at Kingsbarns on 30<sup>th</sup>.

*(Records of bird sightings for December to February for inclusion in the March newsletter, should be sent by Monday 1st March at the latest to David Heeley at [dw.heeley@btinternet.com](mailto:dw.heeley@btinternet.com) or 50 High Street, Newburgh, Fife KY14 6AQ.)*

**Please see the Zoom guidance that follows for problem free connection!**





# SOC: Guidance for Using Zoom Part 1 – for all users

## Introduction:

During the current COVID19 pandemic, SOC is encouraging branches to continue holding local meetings. Advice on running outings has already been circulated to branches. To help branches hold “virtual” indoor meetings, SOC has purchased subscriptions to Zoom, the popular video-conference software. Many members will be familiar with Zoom; but for those who are not, it is straightforward to use. Further technical support may be provided if required – contact your branch committee for this.

This short guide is Part 1 of a three-part guide. In this part, aimed at all users new to Zoom, we introduce the key features and functions of the Zoom platform. Part 2 contains additional guidance of relevance to anyone hosting a Zoom meeting and Part 3 is for speakers delivering a presentation at a Zoom meeting.

## A word on hardware:

Zoom will run on desktop or laptop computers (Windows or Macs), tablets (e.g. iPads) and smartphones (iPhone, Android). If you want other participants to see you, you need a webcam. A webcam is built-in to most laptops and all tablets and smartphones and can be added to a desktop computer. We would recommend using a desktop computer, laptop, or tablet – smartphones will work but the small screen size will not give a comfortable view of the meeting. The instructions that follow are written for **Windows**; but the general look and feel of Zoom is similar on all platforms.

## A word on software:

If using a tablet or smartphone, before using Zoom for the first time you will need to download the (free) Zoom “app” from the Appstore (iPad) or the Google Play Store (Android). This is best done in advance of your first Zoom meeting. You can also download an app for your Windows desktop or laptop PC.

## Joining a meeting - by invitation email:

Allow 5 minutes in advance of the start of the meeting to set up and open the Zoom platform. Ideally, allow a bit more time if this is the first time you have used Zoom.

- **Locate your invitation email** and click on the link in the text of the email. You may need to copy and paste the link to your internet browser window. This link should not be shared publicly - to ensure there are no “unwanted guests”.
- If you have used Zoom before on your device, follow the instructions. A small box may appear saying: **[Open Zoom.US]**. Click on this.
- If you have not already downloaded the software, you will be prompted to do so. Click on **[Download and Run Zoom]**. Your computer will then download the Zoom software. Once the download is complete, click on **[Run]**. The Zoom software will now be installed and then run on your computer.
- This should take you directly to the correct meeting. If not, you will need to enter the **meeting ID** and **password** shown on your invitation email.
- If asked as you join, type in your name, and allow audio and video.
- If the host hasn’t started the meeting yet, you will see a box on your screen with the message “**Waiting for host to start the meeting**”. While you are waiting, take the opportunity to **check your audio and video** by clicking on the appropriate boxes.
- **Lighting**: try to avoid strong lighting to one side or behind you. A desk lamp close to the screen but turned towards you should help. Another suggestion to provide front lighting is to turn up your screen brightness.
- Once your meeting host has started the meeting, they will most probably need to **admit you to the meeting**, though this might have been set up to happen automatically. When admitted to the meeting, you should be able to see the host and any other participants already admitted.

## Meeting controls:

Along one edge of your screen are some “icons” (clickable symbols) – usually hidden until you touch the screen with your finger (touchscreens only) or move the mouse cursor. The icons are generally self-explanatory.



The first icon is for **Audio**. Your audio may already be muted (shows with a line through the icon). The host has an option to “**mute all**” when setting up the meeting, or during the meeting. If you want to speak to the meeting, click on the audio icon to **unmute**. Click again to **mute**. It is a good idea always to be on mute unless you are speaking as this cuts out background noise. On Windows, the up-arrow alongside this icon gives access to all your microphone and speaker settings, including the volume setting.



The next icon is for **Video**. **If you are using a webcam, you should turn video on.** Click on the icon to toggle between video on and off. On Windows, the up-arrow alongside the video icon gives access to other video settings.



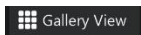
Clicking on the **Participants** icon will list the names of all those participating in the meeting. Selecting a name on the list will allow you to “chat” (*see below*) individually with this participant.



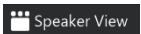
On Windows you have a **Chat** icon, which enables you to type a message either to another participant or to the whole meeting. To access Chat on a tablet, select [\[More\]](#).



Selecting More on a tablet also accesses “**Reactions**” – generally available is just a thumbs up (“I agree”) or a waving hand (“Hi, I’m here!”). On Windows, there is a separate icon (*see left*) for Reactions.



Somewhere on your screen will be the icon to switch to **Gallery View**, which shows you all participants in a grid, though the number of participants visible is limited by your screen size. Selecting the icon again toggles the screen back to **Speaker View**. For more on setting up Gallery view see Zoom support at : <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360000005883-Displaying-participants-in-Gallery-View>



## Further help:

Help information and helpful “how-to” videos are available at the Zoom Help Center at: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>

If you will be **hosting** a Zoom meeting, further guidance appears in “SOC: Guidance for Using Zoom Part 2 – for meeting hosts”.

If you are a **speaker**, please refer to “SOC: Guidance for Using Zoom Part 3 – for speakers”.



## INDEX

Planned meetings and Outings	P2
George Smith: <i>Peregrines in South Scotland: a long-term study.</i>	P3
<i>That was the walk that wasn't</i> (Andrew Riches)	P4
Kilminning (Will Cresswell)	P6
<i>A Garden Bird Watch</i> (Erica Hollis)	P8
<i>Fife SOC Newsletters: a retrospect</i>	P9-13
<i>Memories</i> (Ian Cumming)	P10
<i>Fife Bird Sightings</i> (compiled by Dave Heeley)	P14
<i>Zoom Guidance</i>	P16



*White-tailed Eagles on the Isle of Wight: Ian Pratt (via Andrew Riches)*