

# Fife SOC

**Newsletter No. 203**

*Compiled by Elizabeth Irwin*

**September 2021**



*Lapwing: Allister Todd*

***Our next Newsletter will be Issue No. 204 for December 2021. Articles, letters, reports, and photographs in jpeg or tiff format for publication should be sent, by Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December 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 back: to SOC members old and new, to a new season, to outings restarting, to a new round of virtual meetings, and to the birds who are streaming back to Fife as they sense the change in the weather. That means of course farewell to our summer visitors, many of whom have already reached warmer climes. I want to thank everyone who has contributed the interesting articles and great photographs for this month's newsletter. I thought there would be nothing to write about, but as usual you have proved me wrong. I hope you all enjoy reading it.

***Elizabeth Irwin***

## **Planned meetings via Zoom:**

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> October**

*Rick Taylor: South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project*

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November**

*Nora O'Hanlan: Birds and Debris*

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December (date to be confirmed)**

*Members' Night*



*Long-eared Owl: Allister Todd*

NB: You will realise that the Fife SOC committee came to the difficult decision to postpone plans for face-to-face meetings and keep to meetings on Zoom, shared with Tayside SOC group. This is the reason that we are alternating the first Thursday of the month (Tayside's pattern of meetings), with the second Wednesday of the month.

We made this decision for several reasons:

The SOC has decided to keep to virtual meetings for the 21/22 round of talks and have arranged speakers accordingly. You will also have seen that the November conference will be held virtually. Given the prevalence of the Covid and other viruses this autumn, and as we have an excellent alternative that worked very well last year, this does seem sensible to us.

In addition, our usual venue of the St Andrews Town Hall Supper Room is out of action with repair works. We have been offered the use of the Chambers upstairs, but there is no ventilation and there are other constraints that make it less suitable. As a committee we will keep an eye on how things are developing, but we expect to keep Zooming over the winter. Do let me know if you have any views about this.

You can find information about how to connect to Zoom on the branch pages at [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk), or I can email you a help sheet if anyone needs one. Mailchimp reminders and log ins will be sent from Waterston House in the usual way.

**Planned Outings:** *(Please let group leaders know if you plan to go on the outing at least 3 days in advance. Details will be sent out via the SOC mailchimp)*

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> October**

*Fife Ness and Kingsbarns (Rob Armstrong)*

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November**

*The Angus Coast (Caroline Gordon)*

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> December**

*Lunch at The Fairways Restaurant, Elmwood Golf Course*





*Yellowhammer: Allister Todd*

### **Fife Planning Applications: Mountcastle update.**

Many members have been interested in the planning applications for the Mountcastle site and I know that several of you submitted comments on the proposals.

The current situation seems to be unclear. To date, I have not had any feedback from Fife Council planning on the proposals and the website seems to still show that it is pending. However, anecdotally there seems to have been considerable work at the site already.

I am personally finding the Fife planning website very hard to navigate. Perhaps some of you understand it better than me: I'd love to hear from you! In the meantime, I think that usual advice to monitor wildlife and submit all your records either to our county recorder, Graham Sparshott, or via *Birdtrack*, is even more important. The same holds true for any other sites that are subject to planning proposals.

### **Fife Bird Club Site Guide**

Congratulations to the editorial team at *Fife Bird Club* for their handy *Fife Site Guide*, which has just been sent out to their members. The guide works well for anyone who likes a printed rather than an electronic guide, and it complements the SOC App well because it introduces some sites that are a bit less well known. If anyone not a FBC member would like to buy a copy, email [chairman@fifebirdclub.org.uk](mailto:chairman@fifebirdclub.org.uk) for information.

***Elizabeth Irwin***

## **SOC Fife Branch Field Trip to Ferryhills**

***Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup> 2021***

Despite dire warnings about the weather, 11 people arrived safely at Ferryhills by various routes, to be greeted by a pleasant warm morning with scattered clouds and the sun trying to peep through occasionally.

Graham Sparshott had kindly extended his early morning vigil to help us. He was soon onto an arctic skua, which was spiralling above the Forth. To keep us entertained, a few meadow pipits and a siskin flew through and a few swallows by the rail bridge. A grey heron and a buzzard were also seen and kittiwakes on the Forth along with sandwich terns. A close fly past of a group of gannets was nice to see. A flurry of feral pigeons alerted Graham to a peregrine, which patrolled back and forth by the rail bridge.

It was pleasant to meet SOC Fife members binoculars to binoculars, so to speak, in a fresh outdoor environment. It was nice to be able to talk and catch up with friends.

While it wasn't a spectacular day for birds, the invigorating fresh breeze, and views down the Forth and of the bridges was most welcome.



***Andrew Riches***



***Sanderling: Allister Todd***



## **Plea for WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey) volunteers**



***Cormorant: Allister Todd***

counts due to other commitments. The Firth of Tay also includes count sectors along the north shore in Angus, Dundee and Perthshire. Guidance notes on counting each sector on the Tay can be provided. Inland counts take place on or as close as possible to the dates identified by the BTO.

Every few winters, coastal stretches are counted at low tide between November and February, necessitating a larger group of counters. If anyone is interested in these surveys, designed to locate the best feeding sites for waterfowl, please get in touch. The next count on the Firth of Tay will be during the coming winter, beginning in November 2021.

Coverage in our WeBS region is good, but LOs are always seeking birders who are a) competent in identifying and counting wildfowl and waders, b) able to commit to regular counts on or near the due dates and c) ideally willing to commit for more than one season. However, standing in at short notice is always welcome.

The WeBS website shows maps of vacant sites in our area and much more detail about the survey can be found there, at <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/wetland-bird-survey/taking-part>. Counts are ideally uploaded online but paper forms are available if preferred. If any readers are willing and able to participate in WeBS, please get in touch with me in the first instance. Let me know your skill level and where you would prefer to count, and I will direct you to the correct LO. Alternatively, you can record your interest to count a site via the link above and the BTO will forward your request to the relevant organiser.

Please consider taking part in this vital, long-running, survey, whether long- or short-term.

***Norman Elkins***

WeBS LO, Firth of Tay

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From time to time, the Local Organisers (LO) of WeBS counts (administered by the BTO on behalf of RSPB, JNCC and WWT) appeal for counters. As many of you might know, Core Counts of waterfowl are undertaken on specific dates each month between September and March. They are coordinated throughout the UK so that numbers are monitored monthly and annually, thus tracking changes in wildfowl and wader populations. Some volunteers also count during the other months and, indeed, for inland sites this is encouraged as summer use by waterfowl at many locations can be very different to winter and can provide valuable local data on breeding populations such as nesting and broods.

There are three LOs in Fife, responsible for administering counts on the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuaries, the North Forth (Fife) shore (LO post currently vacant) and inland Fife waters respectively. Counts on the first two areas are timed for high tide, when waders are roosting and easier to count. Most counters commit long-term and are out in the field on the due date each month. At times, though, some retire from counting, or miss

## Recent Records of Roseate Terns in Fife.

The *WhatsApp* group “*Fife Bird News*” provides a valuable resource and record of bird sightings in Fife. The table below shows the records of Roseate Terns reported between late July and September this year.



23rd July	1	Ruddens Point	22nd August	4	Burntisland
24th July	1	Ruddens Point	23rd August	1	Burntisland
26th July	1	Ruddens Point	24th August	4	Pettycur Bay
4th August	1	Balcomie beach	24th August	3	Tenstmuir lagoon
4th August	1	Balcomie beach	25th August	9	Burntisland
5th August	1	Fife Ness	26th August	1	Fife Ness
12th August	1	Tentsmuir lagoon	26th August	2	Tentsmuir lagoon
13th August	1	Outhead St.Andrews	27th August	3	Fife Ness
14th August	1	Fairmont St.Andrews	29th August	3	Dalgety Bay
19th August	1	Elie	31st August	8	Dalgety Bay
20th August	1	Elie	2nd September	1	Seafeld
20th August	1	Goosepools	2nd September	1	Burntisland
20th August	2	Tentsmuir Point	3rd September	3	Burntisland
21st August	5	Burntisland			

**Andrew Riches**

## **FifeBirdNews WhatsApp Group**

I know that many Fife SOC members are already part of the *FifeBirdNews WhatsApp* group that is run by Malcolm Ware. The group is a great way of sharing information about what birds can be seen 'now' – and where to go. Members both gain from and contribute to this information.

The group is open to all, and Malcolm has contributed this article about how it works for any SOC member who doesn't know about it. I have also attached the group guidelines at the end.

If anyone is interested in joining the *FBN WhatsApp Group*, please contact Malcolm directly at [malware74@icloud.com](mailto:malware74@icloud.com)

**Elizabeth Irwin**

***FBN (FifeBirdNews)*** was started by myself 11 years ago when Rab Shand the then Fife County Bird Recorder was going to Asia for a period of time and it was felt that a continuation of what was, at that time, a text group would continue. This group evolved to the stage where it was difficult to ensure that any sightings news, especially in busy periods, were hard to keep relevant. So, in 2018 I spoke with a few friends who were used to WhatsApp groups and thought that this would be the way forward. The *FBN Group* has proved very popular, not just with locals in Fife but further afield. All the sightings posted are of those that are thought to be locally scarce, rare or of notable interest. It has never been the intention that FBN would be used to post sightings of commoner species.

WhatsApp is a free download on either your mobile or as a desktop application. It is very easy to get set up on and is based on your mobile phone number. Coverage when out and about appears to be very good, unlike SMS texts in some areas. To become part of the *FBN WhatsApp Group* requires you to pass on your mobile number to myself, as the administrators of the group must have members of that group as a contact on their phone also.



The *FBN WhatsApp Group* is open to birders of any ability, it is **NOT** for the elite only and we have some of Scotland's top birders on it as well as complete novices. The ethos behind FBN has always to encourage birders to pass on any sightings they have and using WhatsApp means that this news is put out instantly. Obviously, there are times of the year when discretion should be used eg breeding season. When I receive a request to join FBN and have added that person to the Group, I send them a message on WhatsApp detailing the expectation of posting sightings, some guidelines and the rules. There's always rules!

### ***Short-eared Owl: Allister Todd***

And more importantly, FBN is a completely independent service, although as I'm a current Fife Bird Club Committee Member there is a very strong link up with Fife Bird Club. If you're not a member of the Fife Bird Club, you can find out more at [www.fifebirdclub.org.uk](http://www.fifebirdclub.org.uk)

Please contact me on email: [malware74@icloud.com](mailto:malware74@icloud.com)

Thanks

Malcolm

FBN

## How it works:

Hi ....., I've added you to the Fife Bird News WhatsApp Group.

Please follow the Group to see what has been posted and to get a 'feel' for it.

Here's a few bits of info and "the rules" for the FBN WA group!!

### FBN WhatsApp Group

Sighting information should be e.g. rarities (!!), scarcer birds (!), large passage movements, unusual counts and unusual locations for a species and also first & last dates for migrants

NB: This Group covers the **BIRDS OF MAINLAND FIFE ONLY**.

However rare, or very scarce (in a local context) Butterfly, Dragonfly or Cetacean sightings are welcome too.

Please have a look over the Fife Bird Reports (available on the FBC website) to see what sightings are relevant, as well as information on locations.

### **\*\*PLEASE FOLLOW THE FORMAT BELOW WHEN POSTING SIGHTINGS\*\***

DATE:

LOCATION:

TIME: (OPTIONAL)

COUNTS: (**IMPORTANT** - Counts **FIRST**)

i.e. 1 Sooty Shearwater, 1 Manx Shearwater, 1 Common Tern, 40 Knot, 1 Bar-tailed Godwit.

OBSERVER(S) NAMES: (**IMPORTANT** - **BOTH** Christian & Surname)

And importantly, please post your sightings **IMMEDIATELY** to ensure others who may well be nearby a chance to see the bird(s).

Images are also very welcome.

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### FBN WhatsApp Group Rules:

1. Inappropriate or abusive language aimed towards any posting will not be tolerated and that member will be removed from the group.
2. Please **NO CHAT** or comments, this group is for sightings information **ONLY!!**
3. Any derogatory comments regarding images will result in that member being removed from the group.
4. If at any time a member wishes to leave the group, you can do this yourself at any time. (Please contact us if you wish to be re-instated at any point).

\*\*\*\*\*

There is also another local WA Group, "Have I Got Chats For You" which is where there's usually discussions, banter, ID info and site info also. Sightings of commoner species of Birds, Butterflies, Dragonflies, or Cetaceans should ideally be posted on there.

If you would like to be added to this Group too, just let me know and I'll put you on.

If you're unsure about anything on FBN News, get in touch and I'll try to sort it for you.

Cheers

Malc

FBN





*Razorbill: Allister Todd*

## **Fife Bird Sightings:**

### **June 2021**

The Eden Estuary held Little Gulls, Barnacle Geese, Black-tailed Godwits, Ospreys and Little Egrets. Ospreys were seen on several inland water bodies. Passages of Manx Shearwaters included 268 at Fife Ness (19th), 131 at Crail, 84 at Anstruther and 27 off Dalgety Bay. Drake Garganeys were at the Wilderness and Morton Lochs, a Quail was singing at Kingsbarns, a Little Egret flew over Balcomie, a Red Kite was at Burntisland. Marsh Harriers were logged at Golden Hill, Angle Park, and Kilconquhar; Valleyfield Lagoons held 10 Black-tailed Godwit (3rd). A Whimbrel continued at Cellardyke. Small numbers of Great Skuas and Arctic Skuas were noted past Anstruther, Kinghorn and Dalgety Bay. Little Gulls were at Letham Pools and Kinghorn. A Reed Warbler was seen at Kilconquhar Loch. Seafield held a Lesser Whitethroat, Kilrenny Mill held a Grasshopper Warbler, a pair of Spotted Flycatchers were unusual at Rankeillor Estate. Seven Ravens fledged at the monitored nest at Letham. A Crossbill was seen at Dunino.

### **July 2021**

Outhead logged Bar-tailed Godwits, Black-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels, Sanderlings, Ringed Plovers, Dunlins, Little Gulls and Ospreys. Ferry Hills vis mig included a Nuthatch, Pomarine Skuas and Tree Pipits (first of year on 17th). An eclipse drake Garganey was at Wilderness until 19th; 118 Goosanders were off Pathhead and 257 were logged at Tentsmuir NNR. A Quail was singing at Chance Inn; Red-throated Divers were noted at Cellardyke, Tentsmuir and Ruddons Point with a Red-necked Grebe also there. Passages of Manx Shearwaters included 92 past East Wemyss (22nd), 103 logged at Fife Ness (1st), and 116 at Anstruther (5th). Sooty Shearwaters were seen off Cellardyke (27th) and Fife Ness (31st). Ospreys were over Kilmany, Outhead, Tentsmuir, Tayport and in the Eden Estuary. Marsh Harriers visited Black Loch, Crail airfield, Drumoig and Kilrenny; Merlins were at Barnsmuir and Wormiston. A Grey Plover as in Cocklemill Burn; a

Green Sandpiper was at Wilderness; Common Sandpipers were logged at Cameron Reservoir, Cellardyke, Cocklemill Burn (4), Eden Estuary (6), Ruddons Point, St Margaret's Marsh, Newmills Bay and Loch Gelly. There were widespread sightings of Whimbrels at coastal sites. There were records of Great Skuas from Pathhead and Fife Ness, and Arctic Skuas at Tentsmuir Point, Cellardyke, Fife Ness and Burntisland. An adult Long-tailed Skua was over Kinghorn on 20th. Mediterranean Gulls continued at the East Weymss roost, with 20 there on 20th., others were at Pathhead, West Weymss, Buckhaven, Outhead, Leven and Dalgety Bay. A Roseate Tern was with Sandwich Terns at Ruddons Point (24th - 26th). Juvenile Cuckoos were noted at Wormiston, Crail, Pittenweem and Cameron Reservoir. A Long-eared Owl was seen hunting by day in the RuddonsPoint / Cocklemill Marsh area 17th - 20th. Glen Vale and Seafield continued to hold Whinchats. A flock of 15 Mistle Thrushes was at Kilmany (30th). A Lesser Whitethroat continued at Seafield until 6th, a Grasshopper Warbler sang at North Flisk, Spotted Flycatchers were at Kilmany and Craighall Den, and a Nuthatch remained in Dunnikier Park.

### August 2021

Fife Ness rarities were: Fea's Petrel (30th), Great Shearwater (22nd) and a Sabine's Gull (22nd, also seen at St Andrews 25th). Monthly totals there included 344 Manx Shearwaters, 120 Sooty Shearwaters, 128 Great Skuas, 53 Arctic Skuas, one Pomarine Skua, two Long-tailed Skuas, 409 Little Gulls and Roseate Terns. Vis mig at Ferry Hills included 1047 Sandwich Terns on 7th, 53 Arctic Terns on 8th and 219 Tree Pipits on 16th. Kilminning held Tree Pipits, Spotted Flycatchers, Willow Warblers, Blackcaps, Whitethroats, Ringed Plovers, Garden Warblers and Cuckoos. Letham Pools and Wilderness (to 22nd) held Garganeys. There were 111 Goosanders in Kirkcaldy Harbour (7th) and 115 at Pathhead (11th); Manx Shearwaters were logged past Pathhead, St Andrews Bay, Boarhills (157 on 8th), Goosepools, Anstruther, Crail and Kinghorn. Numbers of Little Egrets in the Eden Estuary increased to 11. A White-tailed Eagle was also there. Ospreys were noted at Angle Park, Buckhaven, Eden Estuary, Tayport, Outhead, Buckhaven, Tentsmuir NNR and Blairadam; a Red Kite was over Dunfermline. Marsh Harriers (mostly juveniles) were at Auchtermuchty, Wilderness, Rossie Bog, Crail, Cornceres, Guardbridge and Loch Gelly. There were sightings of Goshawks at Letham and Anstruther, and a Merlin was at Crail airfield. A Little Ringed Plover was at Boarhills, with Golden Plovers at Cellardyke (15 summ plum on 8th) and Fife Ness; Grey Plovers at Tayport and St Andrews; a Curlew Sandpiper at Fife Ness; Wood Sandpipers at Tentsmuir NNR and Fife Ness; and Green Sandpipers at Wilderness, Angle Park, Boarhills, St Margaret's Marsh, Loch Gelly, Ferry Hills and Cullaloe. Common Sandpipers were reported from ten sites including Newmills Bay with a flock of nine. Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits continued in numbers in the Eden Estuary. Ten coastal sites held Whimbrels. There was a covey of 12 Grey Partridges at Ceres (25th); Ruff were in the Eden Estuary and at Tentsmuir NNR, Loch Gelly and Wilderness. Reports of migrating skuas included Great Skuas off Pathhead, St Andrews Bay, Boarhills, Anstruther, Kingsbarns, Tentsmuir NNR, Kinghorn, Ferry Hills, Dalgety Bay; Pomarine Skuas at Anstruther, Pathhead, Balcomie, Boarhills, Carlingnose Point; Arctic Skuas at Pathhead, Balcomie, Ruddons Point, Cellardyke, Boarhills, Kinshaldy, St Andrews, Carlingnose Point, Ferry Hills, Kinghorn, Burntisland, Dalgety Bay; and Long-tailed Skuas at Carlingnose Point and Ferry Hills. Little Gulls were noted at Pathhead, Boarhills (285 on 18th), St Andrews Bay and Anstruther. Mediterranean Gulls were logged at 19 coastal sites, including a count of 40 at East Weymss on 13th. Roseate Terns were at Balcomie, Tentsmuir NNR, Outhead, St Andrews, Elie, Goosepools, Burntisland, Pettycur Bay and Dalgety Bay. A Black Tern was found at Pathhead (23rd). Balcomie and Newmills Bay held juvenile Cuckoos. Two Short-eared Owls were seen hunting at Crail on 23rd; Yellow Wagtails (sp) were at Balcomie Beach (four on 27th), Boarhills and Fife Ness; Spotted Flycatchers were in Balgownie Wood (five), and at Burntisland, Ferry Hills and Hill of Tarvit. Beveridge Park continues to host at Rose-ringed Parakeet.

*(Records of bird sightings for September to November for inclusion in the December newsletter, should be sent by Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December at the latest to David Heeley at [dw.heeley@btinternet.com](mailto:dw.heeley@btinternet.com) or 50 High Street, Newburgh, Fife KY14 6AQ.)*

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