

Fife SOC



Newsletter No. 204

Compiled by Elizabeth Irwin

December 2021



A Glossy Ibis in Fife: Allister Todd

Our next Newsletter will be Issue No. 205 for March 2022. Articles, letters, reports, and photographs in jpeg or tiff format for publication should be sent, by Monday 7th March at the latest, to Elizabeth Irwin at Drumcarrow Cottage, Pettycruik, Strathkinness KY16 9XP or email: fifechair@the-soc.org.uk

FROM THE CHAIR

Who will take on the challenge of becoming our next Fife SOC Chair and our next Fife SOC secretary? Caroline Gordon and I have been in these roles for some years now and we both feel it is time for someone with fresh ideas to take over the running of the Branch. We will be standing down at the next AGM in April 2022.

Fife SOC has a long and distinguished history in the national organisation. We don't want to see that disappear. The Branch is thriving with healthy membership numbers and a healthy financial position. If you have any questions about what either role entails, please get in touch with one of us and we would be happy to chat to you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Elizabeth Irwin

Planned meetings via Zoom:

Thu 6 Jan **Les Hatton** - *Bearded Reedlings and the Tay Reed Beds*

Wed 9 Feb **Sara Frost** - *The Wildlife of St Kilda and the Scottish Hebrides*

Thu 3 Mar **Mark Newell** - *Isle of May Storm Petrels and recent seabird discoveries*

Wed 13 Apr *AGM & Members' Night*

You can find information about how to connect to Zoom on the branch pages at 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.



Male Bearded Tit: Dave Heeley

Planned Outings:

Sun 16 Jan Eden Estuary and Morton Lochs (Elizabeth and John Irwin)

Sat 12 Feb Scone Palace (Andy Falconer)

Sat 12 Mar Gartmorn Dam and Torry Bay (Elizabeth and John Irwin)

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

Fife Planning Applications: Mountcastle update.

The Fife Council planning meeting on 17th November rejected the company's planning application for this site. They also instructed that works already undertaken without permission should be removed. As usual if you visit the site, please record all the birds you see in the usual ways as this will help to monitor any disruption (or otherwise) to birds.

Elizabeth Irwin



Brambling: Allister Todd

SOC Fife Branch outing to the Angus Coast

13th November 2021

Our outing started at Balmossie, between Broughty Ferry and Monifieth. The footbridge over the railway takes you straight onto the path above the shoreline. It was a very calm and bright morning, but with just enough high cloud to avoid being dazzled by the sun as we scanned the shore and out across the river.

With the tide almost full, groups of birds were feeding close in along the shore including a group of Wigeon, Carrion Crows, Turnstones, and a solitary Dunlin. A large group of Redshank and Turnstone had flown to roost on a concrete pier/outflow just below the path. There was one bird amongst them which was neither of these species. As they were all crowded together and all had their heads tucked in, we ran through several possibilities before it finally moved and was identified as a Knot. Further out in the river, there were Red-breasted Mergansers, a Goosander, Eider and Goldeneye.

We drove further along the coast, all arriving safely at Westhaven at the east end of Carnoustie, despite my satnav taking me down a short detour into the station car park. A Spotted Redshank out

at the edge of the rocks was a great find by Jonathan. Other waders were Redshank, Curlew, Ringed Plover and a single Bar-tailed Godwit while a few Grey Plover were well camouflaged amongst the rocks. We also added Red-throated Diver, Common Scoter, Razorbill and Grey Heron to the list.

Easthaven is another couple of miles on. Just a couple of the group managed to pick up Manx Shearwater and Little Gull well out to sea. However, everyone got good views of a Long-tailed Duck which was quite close in. We also saw our only raptors of the day, Buzzard and Kestrel. A skein of Pink-footed Geese flew over and other additions included both Grey and Pied Wagtails, Meadow Pipit and Linnet.

We didn't have the time/daylight to continue to Arbroath which had been the original plan, so we ended the outing with a short walk along the coastal path from Easthaven towards Hatton wastewater treatment works, seeing Stonechat on the way while a small pool just across the railway line held a couple of Snipe, which were clearly not bothered by the frequent trains passing at speed.

Anne Reid, chair of SOC Tayside, and Jonathan Pattullo, chair of the Angus and Dundee Bird Club (www.angusbirding.com) had both joined us on the outing and their local knowledge was much appreciated.

Caroline Gordon



Redshank: Allister Todd

WeBS counter needed for St Andrews coast

One of the stretches of coastline counted at high tide for the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) in Fife is that from the Bruce Embankment to the East Sands – a stretch known as St Andrews Rocks. This has become vacant due to the retirement of the volunteer who has counted since 2005 and who has provided guidance notes for any successor.

The coast here is rocky and includes small high tide roosts of waders. Wildfowl offshore are also counted, while counts of seabirds are optional but welcome. The guidance notes describe the best viewing points. Counts are monthly on fixed dates (or thereabouts) from September to March, although counts in other months are welcome. Counts can be uploaded online or entered on paper forms.

Further information on WeBS can be found at www.bto.org/our-science/projects/wetland-bird-survey/taking-part.

Anyone prepared to take on this valuable survey should contact:

Norman Elkins

Tel. 01334 654348

Email: jandnelkins@btinternet.com.

NB from the Chair. Norman gave an excellent talk to Fife/Tayside SOC groups on the 1st of December. If you missed it, he said that much of the data and information is available of the BTO website. The recently published *Climate Change Report* is also available there.

www.montrosebasin.org.uk has additional information about wildlife along the coast further north from Fife.



Fieldfare: Dave Heeley

Paul Blackburn, Fife and Kinross BTO Regional Representative has sent this note to members:

“Many thanks to all Fife SOC members who took part in this year’s BBS. I have attached a summary of the results.

Anyone interested in taking part in the 2022 BBS survey can find details at [Taking part | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#) or by contacting me directly.

Thanks
Paul”

The table below shows the most numerous and most widespread species recorded in Fife BBS squares in 2021. Species in Italics are colonial-nesting.

Species	Most Numerous				Species	Most Widespread	
	Total	Density				Number of Fife Squares	% of Fife Squares Surveyed
Woodpigeon	1483	29.66			Woodpigeon	50	100
<i>Herring Gull</i>	647	12.94			Carrion Crow	49	98
Carrion Crow	626	12.52			Wren	49	98
House Sparrow	558	11.16			Blackbird	48	96
Starling	551	11.02			Chaffinch	47	94
Blackbird	536	10.72			Song Thrush	45	90
<i>Rook</i>	512	10.24			Great Tit	44	88
<i>Jackdaw</i>	492	9.84			Blue Tit	43	86
Chaffinch	473	9.46			Goldfinch	43	86
Wren	346	6.92			Robin	43	86
Skylark	330	6.6			Pheasant	41	82
Blue Tit	262	5.24			Willow Warbler	41	82
Pheasant	242	4.84			<i>Herring Gull</i>	38	76
<i>Lesser Black-backed Gull</i>	236	4.72			Skylark	38	76
Willow Warbler	233	4.66			Yellowhammer	38	76
Robin	230	4.6			Dunnock	37	74

Wood Pigeon was the most numerous and most widespread species which was expected.

Look to Nature

I missed the October meeting because of a timetable clash. The University had organized a two-hour for the same evening, a two-hour seminar on the power of nature-based solutions to tackle climate change. It proved to be both stimulating and informative as the host, Sir Ian Boyd (Professor of Biology and Co-Chair of the First Minister's Environmental Council), supported by three presentations, provoked the attendees into probing discussions.

Bill Austin (Chair of the Scottish Blue Carbon Forum and Professor in the School of Geography & Sustainable Development) started us off by introducing something that most of us had perhaps not previously thought of: that there are habitats on the edges of the sea that sequester carbon ("blue carbon") – saltmarshes (such as on

our own Eden Estuary), mangrove swamps and sea grass beds. And they can do so in impressive quantities: mangroves can store 10 times more carbon per acre than tropical rainforests. But we need to base their management on sound science if we are to reap the full benefits. Of course, as Bill reminded us, nature-based solutions are not an alternative to cutting CO² emissions but are an important tool in our armoury for limiting the increase in atmospheric CO².

Bill also pointed out that there is a disjunct between the climate debate and the biodiversity debate, a theme taken up in a *tour de force* review by Dr Clive Mitchell (Outcome Manager: Nature and Climate Change at NatureScot). Clive considers (and one must agree with him) that nature conservationists "have a bit of a blind-spot" about how their activities could and should contribute to dealing with the climate problem; current conservation methods do not do enough to help the climate emergency at the same time as they address the biodiversity emergency. We need a holistic approach,

Taking up Bill's point on the need for sound science, Clive reminded us that much of that science cannot be based on experiments to test ideas because that will take too long. Instead, we need to put our current ideas into practice, rigorously assess the outcomes and through that assessment modify both ideas and practice – adaptive management.

Anne Magurran (Professor of Ecology and Evolution in the Centre for Biological Diversity and Scottish Oceans Institute at St Andrews) addressed further the difficulties of using nature-based methods for reducing climate-change to also work for biodiversity. As tree-planting in Scotland exemplifies, it is not always easy. The original benefit of planting trees was mainly timber production but today the trees are also seen as carbon sinks. Species that grow rapidly are best for both timber and carbon sequestration, so in these terms it is best to plant species that grow rapidly, which happen to be non-natives. Unfortunately, these generally support far fewer insects than our native trees. So, although trees are good for both climate and biodiversity, the climate crisis calls for Sitka Spruce and the biodiversity crisis for Scots Pine, Birch and Oak. This makes decisions on exactly what to plant far from easy.

Jeremy Greenwood

A recording of the meeting can be found on Youtube at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QXCJmy_Ovw



Curlew: Allister Todd

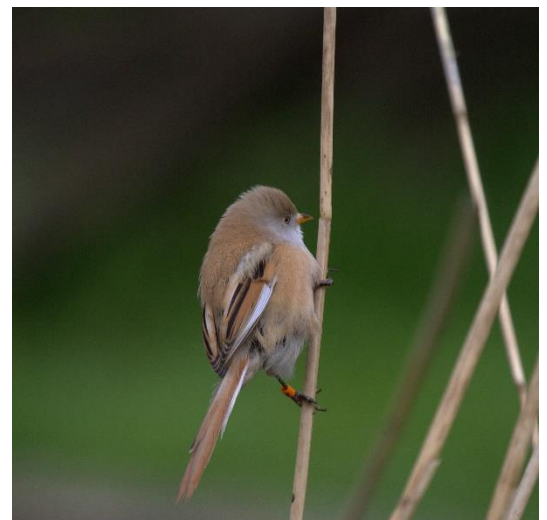
Fife Bird Sightings:

September 2021

Ferry Hills vis mig logs included Long-tailed, Pomarine, Arctic and Great Skuas, Red-throated Divers (76 on 17th), Black-throated and Great Northern Divers, Pink-footed Geese (3900 on 25th), Whooper Swans, Pintails, Scaup, Ospreys, Mediterranean and Little Gulls, Meadow Pipits (1559 on 25th), Tree Pipits, Dunlins, Grey and White Wagtails (38 on 29th), Spotted Flycatchers, Golden Plovers and Siskins. Fife Ness recorded Sooty and Manx Shearwaters, Pomarine, Long-tailed, Arctic and Great Skuas, Little Gulls, Velvet, Surf and Common Scoters, Brent and Barnacle Geese, Red-throated, Great Northern and Black-throated Divers, Red-breasted Mergansers and Golden Plovers. A Pallid Harrier came in off the sea at Kilminning on 19th; a Grey Phalarope passed there on the same date. There were large counts of Guillemots and Razorbills close inshore in the St Andrews area. Skeins of > 1000 Pink-footed Geese were noted over Glenrothes, Cellardyke, the Eden Estuary at Outhead and Dunfermline. Whooper Swans were at Morton Lochs; Brent Geese were at Seafield, Pathhead, Kilminning, Outhead, St Andrews Bay, Balcomie, Levenmouth, Tayport and Kinghorn; Kilconquhar Loch held two Scaup; a number of Slavonian Grebes were at Outhead. Barns Farm recorded an unusual group of 18 Grey Herons together on 4th. White Tailed Eagles continued in the Eden Estuary. There were Ospreys at Newburgh, Eden Estuary, Outhead and Tayport; Marsh Harriers at Rossie Bog, Newburgh, Wilderness, Letham Pools and Wormiston (all juveniles) and a juvenile Goshawk at Lochgelly on 24th. Hobbys were noted at Wilderness (1st), Morton Lochs and Fife Ness. Merlins were over Kilmany, Ferry Hills, Rossie Bog, Outhead, Lower Largo and Cullaloe, and on the ground at Kilrenny. Purple and Curlew Sandpipers were at Fife Ness. Common Sandpipers were noted at Cameron Reservoir, Loch Gelly and the Eden Estuary. Curlew Sandpipers were also at Balcomie and Loch Gelly. Outhead, Newmills Bay and Seafield held Grey Plovers. Single Spotted Redshanks were at the Eden Estuary and Loch Gelly. Whimbrels visited Sauchope, Crail GC, Fife Ness and Balcomie Beach. There was a covey of seven Grey Partridges at Cellardyke (3rd). A Jack Snipe was found at Loch Gelly, and there were reports of Ruff from Wilderness, Angle Park, Eden Estuary, Crail, Kilminning, Anstruther and Loch Gelly. Little Gulls were off Kingsbarns (90), St Andrews Bay, Balcomie, Eden Estuary, Kilminning, Crail, Kinghorn and Dalgety Bay; East Wemyss recorded a peak count of 62 Mediterranean Gulls at the roost on 30th. St Andrews Bay held a Sabine's Gull on 6th. There were Little Terns at Outhead (14th) and Leven (30th); Roseate Terns at Seafield, Outhead, Burntisland and Dalgety Bay; and Black Terns at Outhead (four on 24th). A Short-eared Owl was hunting at Crail (13th) and there were reports of juvenile Yellow Wagtails (sp) from Kilrenny, Boarhills, Kingseat and Dunfermline. Wheatears were noted from ten locations in the more eastern part of the county. Pathhead and Barns Farm held Whinchats; a Garden Warbler was at Kilminning from 6 - 19th; a Wood Warbler was at Kittock's Den (10th) and a Bearded Tit was a good sighting at Newburgh foreshore on 3rd. Nuthatches continued in Pittencrief Park (two), ten Ravens were at Lindores Loch (27th) and early Bramblings were at Balcomie Beach, Boarhills and Kilminning. Six Crossbills were at St Andrews Bogward on 2nd.

October 2021

A Dusky Warbler was at Kilminning 19th - 22nd. Two Spoonbills were in the Eden Estuary on 16th. Three Common Cranes flew over the Wilderness. White-billed Divers were noted over Fife Ness (23rd) and past Fairmont (24th). Grey Phalaropes were logged at Fairmont and Fife Ness (five on 22nd). Fife Ness logs also included Pink-footed, Brent and Barnacle Geese (2900 on 12th), Common and Velvet Scoters, Great Northern Black-throated and Red-throated Divers, all four species of skuas, Little and Mediterranean Gulls, Balearic, Sooty and Manx Shearwaters, a Hobby, Merlins and Sparrowhawks in off the sea, Puffins and Little Auks, Purple, Common and Curlew Sandpipers, Long-tailed Ducks and Black Guillemots. The Eden Estuary held Dunlins, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits,



Female Bearded Tit: Dave Heeley

Curlew Sandpipers, Common Sandpipers, Spotted Redshanks, Greenshanks, Knot, Golden Plovers (c1000 on 27th), Pintails, White-tailed Eagles, Kingfishers, Scaup, Red-breasted Mergansers and Little Egrets (10 on 8th). There were widespread reports of Whooper Swans from inland sites. 14 Taiga Bean Geese were over Craigtoun Park on 9th, 200 Barnacle Geese were over Kirkcaldy (12th) and 10 Brent Geese were at Tayport. Black-throated Divers were noted at Pathhead, Outhead, Fairmont and Ferry Hills and Great Northern Divers were at Pathhead, Kincaig and Fairmont. Great White Egrets showed at Cullaloe on 9th, with two at Moor Loch 11th - 15th. White Tailed Eagles were seen at Shawsmill (15th) and Arncroach (5th) and a Red Kite showed over Auchtermuchty. Marsh Harriers continued at Newburgh. Ring-tailed Hen Harriers were at Cameron Reservoir and Kingsbarns and a juvenile Goshawk was a good record for Kincaig (10th). Merlins were at five coastal sites and also at Cameron Reservoir. Kilrenny and Anstruther held good numbers of Golden Plovers, whilst Curlew Sandpipers in ones or twos were at Balcomie Beach and Fife Ness. Woodcocks came in at Kilminning, Fife Ness patch and Fairmont, and there were reports of Jack Snipes from Letham Pools, Fife Ness, Kittocks Den and Kilminning. St Andrews Bay recorded 200 Little Gulls on 8th. Kinghorn held a Black Tern. A Barn Owl showed at Rosyth. Short-eared Owls were at Outhead and Kilminning. A flock of 4600 Redwings stopped off at Kilmany on 18th. Fairmont, Kittocks Den and St Andrews Bogward all logged Ring Ouzels. A Lesser Whitethroat (poss Easter race) was found at Fairmont on 12th and a Yellow-browed Warbler was at St Andrews (15th). There were several reports of Bramblings but mostly in small numbers. Twite were again at Kingsbarns Beach as were Snow Buntings and there was a Lapland Bunting at Kilminning on 18th.

November 2021

Fife Ness logs included Grey Phalaropes (28 on 4th), all four species of Divers (White-billed on 5th and 28th), Little Auks (1252 on 7th), Puffins, Black Guillemots, a Brünnich's Guillemot (28th), Common and Velvet Scoters, Manx and Sooty Shearwaters, Little Mediterranean and Iceland Gulls, Pomarine Arctic and Great Skuas, Whooper Swans, Long-tailed Ducks, Pintails, Red-breasted Mergansers, Merlins, Peregrines, Goldcrests, Bramblings, Woodcocks, Snow Buntings, Fieldfares and Redwings. Other sea-watching sites on the Forth returned similar if less bountiful records. The Eden Estuary held Great-crested, Little and Slavonian Grebes, Red-throated Divers, Pintails, Scaup, Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Goldeneye, Black-tailed Godwits, Common Sandpipers, Dunlins, Golden Plovers, Little Egrets (nine), Greenshanks and White-tailed Eagles. Craigluscar held 28 Whooper Swans on 5th, 2500 Pink-footed Geese passed over Ferry Hills on 12th, Taiga Bean Geese were noted over Ferry Hills and St Andrews. Scaup moved up the Tay to Newburgh with five there on 28th. A Smew was at Cameron Reservoir. A White-billed Diver was seen off St Andrews pier (9th) and a European Storm Petrel was seen off Crail (27th). Tentsmuir NNR held four Little Egrets; an ad. fem. Marsh Harrier hunted at Mugdrum Island 5th - 12th. A Goshawk (1cy.) was recorded at Anstruther. There were Merlins at Auchtermuchty, Fife Ness, Cameron Reservoir, Kilrenny and Cocklemill Burn. 20 Golden Plovers dropped in to Anstruther on 8th. There were Purple Sandpipers at St Andrews, Ruddons Point, Fife Ness, Kingsbarns (32 on 13th), Anstruther and Kinghorn. A late season juv. Little Stint was noted at Edenside (1st). Woodcocks were at Kirkcaldy, Fife Ness (16 on 1st), Cellardyke and Kilminning. Coveys of Grey Partridges were logged at Crail and Cellardyke (30 in three coveys). Jack Snipes were at Drumcarrow and Cocklemill Marsh. Grey Phalaropes were good records from St Andrews (two on 9th) and Kilminning (6th). Mediterranean Gulls continued along the Forth. There was a Short-eared Owl at St Andrews (7th), and lingering Swallows were noted at Cellardyke, Fife Ness and Leuchars 9th - 16th. Bramblings showed at Kilmany, Fife Ness, St Andrews and Ferry Hills (64 on 5th). Twite continued at the reliable sites at Boarhills and Kingsbarns (70 on 8th) with others at Cellardyke and Earlsferry. Eight Lesser Redpolls were noted at Newburgh (23rd). Crossbills showed at Cameron Reservoir and passed over Ferry Hills, and there were Snow Buntings on the Lomond Hills, and at Boarhills, Fife Ness, Outhead, Tentsmuir (10 on 25th) and Kinshaldy (18 on 25th). Corn Buntings were still at Boarhills, and there now appear to be two Ring-necked Parakeets in Kirkcaldy.

(Records of bird sightings for December to February 2022 for inclusion in the March newsletter, should be sent by Monday 7th March at the latest to David Heeley at dw.heeley@btinternet.com or 50 High Street, Newburgh, Fife KY14 6AQ.)



Pink Feet over Strathkinness: John Irwin

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