

Fife SOC

Newsletter No. 207

Compiled by Elizabeth Irwin

December 2022



Fife SOC outing to Ruddons Point: Elizabeth Irwin

FROM THE EDITOR

Thank you to everyone who joined the outing on Sunday 13th November. It was great to meet both 'old' and new members. An outing report follows below.

We also have some plans for next year and we are beginning the new year with an online **Gull ID workshop** on 11th January: details on P3.

If you are interested in any Fife Branch activities, Kathryn Cox at Waterston House keeps the branch page of the website up to date for us, so it is worth checking. In addition, if you have signed up for email alerts, you will get email notification from Waterston House whenever we arrange something. NB It is worth adding that to your safe senders list as I know some of these alerts get missed in junk boxes.

Finally: I hope everyone has a joyful Christmas – however you are spending it – and we look forward to seeing you next year.

Elizabeth Irwin

Fife Branch Event: Gull ID

Wednesday 11th January 2023: online with Zoom starting at 8pm (log on for what's about chat at 7.30).



Mark Lewis, the SOC's birding and scientific officer, is going to lead us through some gull ID pointers. He is going to help us find ways of differentiating those 'tricky' gulls and there will be lots of good pictures to try our skills. The session will last around an hour and is free for Fife SOC members. We will probably ask for numbers ahead of the event, so if you are interested, look out for a mailing from Waterston House early in January.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (I think!): Elizabeth Irwin

Who is it aimed at? Anyone! Whether you are a beginner and thinking “that is just another gull” (that was me a few years ago!), or whether you are an experienced bird watcher, I think you will enjoy this event.

Branch outing to Ruddons Point, Sunday November 13th.

We started at 9.30 in the car park at Elie Holiday Park: grey, a haar – in other words not bad for November in Fife. While we were making introductions and welcoming new participants, we were entertained by the first birds of the day: a curlew calling as it flew overhead, a group of vocal pink footed geese, robin, blackbird, yellowhammer, kestrel, chaffinch, carrion crow, and the required wood pigeon of the day.



The walk out to the Point is easy and follows the edge of the caravan site, so there was a lot of sociable chat as we all caught up with each other's news. Despite this we managed to see 2 reed bunting, a blue tit, herring gulls, 2 stonechat and a magpie.

Yellowhammer: Les Kingstone

We got down to serious bird watching when we reached the mouth of the Cocklemill Burn. We could make out good numbers of waders and ducks, and a goldfinch perched obligingly on the rocks, but unfortunately the mist was quite dense, and we were all peering through our telescopes and struggling to identify those ‘faraway’ birds. This was exemplified perfectly when Stewart examined my “grey heron” more closely and discovered it was an artistically arranged large piece of white paper flapping in the breeze: complete with a pointy ‘beak’.

At this point we decided to try our luck by moving to higher ground further along the point where the sun was poking through: good decision. The clouds lifted and we basked in sunshine. The birds revealed themselves below, behind, in front, on the shore as the tide began to come in, and further out to sea where for once the waves were calm and we had perfect views.



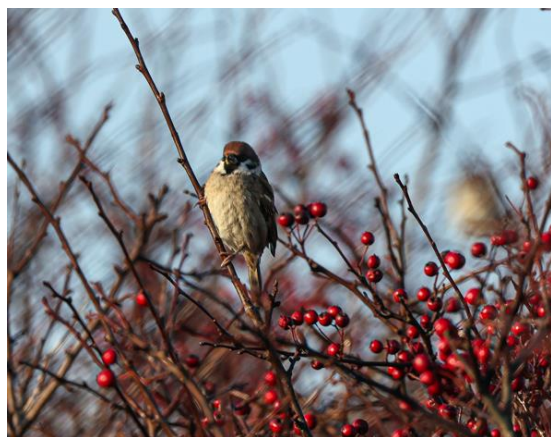
waders on the shore: Elizabeth Irwin

On the shoreline we added: grey heron (definitely this time), great black-backed gull, black headed gull, cormorant and shag, oystercatcher, grey plover, ringed plover, sanderling, bar-tailed godwit, dunlin, redshank, purple sandpiper, knot, turnstone, meadow pipit and rock pipit. In the bay were 50+ mallard, large

flocks of red-breasted merganser, good numbers of wigeon and 5+ shelduck. There were also a small number of eider and we saw a beautiful red-throated diver close in. Further out were active groups of common scoter, and we could see plenty of velvet scoter when they moved around. Long-tailed duck were mingling in the flocks, and we saw 2 Slavonian grebe.

An immature gannet flew past, and a mistle thrush proclaimed from the tops of the pine trees behind us while a wren sang below, and a pied wagtail flew past.

We had stayed there longer than planned, until the thought of lunch and the need to use 'the facilities' urged us to return to the car park via the café in the caravan site (toilets available when open in return for the purchase of tea/coffee or their very good homemade soup).



We had originally planned to move to Lower Largo and/or Leven in the afternoon, but we realised that car parks there might be busy and as we were enjoying the views and weather so much at Ruddons Point, we changed our plans and instead had a lovely walk up the hill to the viewpoint over the bay. We missed the tree sparrows that Les had seen earlier, but added starling, pheasant, and a flock of 30+ linnet to our tally for the day.

We were undoubtedly fortunate to have such good weather, but this was also a very friendly way to share a walk, in beautiful surroundings – and get amazing views of 49 different species of bird (and a red admiral butterfly).

Tree sparrow: Les Kingstone

We plan to hold our next outing at the end of January or early February. Everyone is welcome on outings – whether you are a novice or experienced, a new or a long-standing SOC member and whether you live in Fife or are a member elsewhere. Our outings are relaxed and friendly, so do look out for the notices and come along.

Elizabeth Irwin

The Wetland Bird Survey (WEBS)

Every month over 3,000 WEBS volunteers count coastal and inland wetland sites which gives information on the population and trends in abundance and distribution of the non-breeding waterbird population. Waterbirds includes wildfowl (ducks, geese and swans), waders, rails, divers, grebes, cormorants and herons. Gulls and terns are optionally included. The WEBS year runs from July to June, but the most important counts are from September to March. More information on WEBS can be found at [Wetland Bird Survey | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#).

I recently became Local Organiser for WEBS counts on the Tay and Eden estuaries and am looking to recruit counters for 2 vacant sections and to extend the pool of back up counters. The Tay is counted from Errol to Buddon Ness on the North shore, and from Newburgh to Kinshaldy on the south shore. Sections requiring backup on the Eden are St Andrews Bay South, and St Andrews Rocks.

Currently the vacant sections are Dundee to Brought Ferry (Stannergate) and Tayport to Lucky Scalp. If you are interested in taking on these sectors you can do so via this link from the WEBS pages on the BTO site. [WeBS Online \(BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC\)](#), or contact me for more details.

If you are interested in becoming a back up counter or would like more information do get in touch

Paul Blackburn, WEBS Local Organiser for Tay / Eden

Email p.blackburn89@btinternet.com Tel 01382 542826



Sparrowhawk with a meal (his 3rd goldfinch): Nigel Duncan

Branch Award

Thank you very much to SOC for presenting me with a Branch Award. Wendy Hicks had secretly liaised with Caroline Gordon so that it could be given to me at lunchtime on our outing: a lovely surprise and much appreciated.



Updated BTO Birdtrack App

If you haven't updated your Birdtrack recently, give it a try: the new version is very user friendly. It is much easier to find and to add places, and easier to add the birds you see as you go along. You will get logged in automatically and can see all your old lists and records. Well done to all the clever people who have done the planning – and to the software designers.

Fife SOC Branch has donated £250 to support young birders to attend the annual SOC Conference at the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry in November.

We are delighted that this event has been able to resume after two years of restrictions. Fife Branch wanted to support some of our (very) enthusiastic young birders who would like to attend the conference but for whom the cost makes this difficult. These young people bring such energy as well as new skills and knowledge. We wish them every success.

Jane Allison writes: Thank you to everyone who joined us in Pitlochry at the weekend - either in person, or virtually



- for another fantastic conference celebrating Scotland's birdlife! We were treated to some fascinating talks from excellent speakers on species from Kestrel to Golden Eagle, Merlin to Goshawk. It was a true celebration of our raptors, made all the more special because 2022 marks the 20th anniversary of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS)! <https://raptormonitoring.org/>

Mentoring session in Pitlochry for young birders: Ruth Briggs

One of the many highlights for us over conference weekend was to have so many young bird enthusiasts in attendance, made possible by the generous support of this year's Conference sponsor, Swarovski Optik <https://www.swarovskioptik.com/gb/en/birding>, and our own **Fife** and Lothian branches of the Club <https://www.the-soc.org.uk/local-branches> whose contributions went towards subsidising the young people's attendance.

On Saturday evening we held a networking event (pictured), kindly sponsored by Environmental Consultants, MacArthur Green <https://www.macarthurgreen.com/>, which allowed those early on in their careers the opportunity to chat to professionals about how they got to where they are, and for them to offer some advice on pursuing a career in wildlife conservation/ornithology. We hope it proved an inspiring session for both 'mentees' and 'mentors'!

A reminder about the South Kilminning Rewilding Project:

You probably remember that Fife SOC Branch donated £500 to the first phase of this exciting project being run by Crail Community Partnership.

The project continues with a new funding target for the next phase of the development. You can click on the link below to see an update.

“South Kilminning - Rewilding Project

Please note this exciting new development project at South Kilminning and our new funding target to enable this to happen.

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/south-kilminning-rewilding-project>

With thanks,

Crail Community Partnership”

Fife Bird Sightings:

September 2022

A Red-flanked Bluetail was between Fife Ness and lower Kilminning on 10th; an Arctic Warbler was at Craighead (14th); a Black Kite was at Outhead (12th); a Red Kite as at Dalgety Bay (13th); a Leach's Petrel passed Kinghorn on 9th. Fife Ness totals included nine Great Shearwaters, 380 Sooty Shearwaters, 3914 Manx Shearwaters, three Balearic Shearwaters, four Cory's Shearwaters, 315 Arctic Skuas, 54 Great Skuas, 18 Pomarine Skuas, 20 Long-tailed Skuas, 252 Red-throated Divers, four Black-throated Diver, eight Great Northern Divers, four Sabine's Gulls and 1086 Little Gulls. Kinghorn records included all four species of Skua; Manx and Sooty Shearwaters; Black-throated and Red-throated Divers; Little, Black, Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns; Mediterranean and Little Gulls (440 on 30th); Common Scoters; Whimbrels; Goosanders and Red-breasted Mergansers. Yellow-browed Warblers were at Fife Ness 'Patch', Lower Kilminning, Crail and Chance Inn. Kilminning also logged Garden Warblers, Reed Warblers, Redstarts, Pied Flycatchers, Spotted Flycatchers, Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Siskins, Whitethroats, Lesser Whitethroats, Tree Pipits, Redwings, Merlins, and Golden Plovers (220 on 29th). Two Black Swans were at Loch Gelly on 27th. 2048 Meadow Pipits passed over Ferry Hills on 20th. A Red-necked Grebe was off Ruddons Point, two Common Cranes were over St Andrews on 20th. Morton Lochs held 13 Little Egrets on 3rd. Marsh Harriers were at Letham, Angle Park, St Monans and Caipie; Goshawks at West Quarry Braes, Cellardyke, St Andrews and Crail; and Merlins were at Cellardyke, Fife Ness and Balcomie. Little Stints visited Ruddons Point, Balcomie and Ballo. Curlew Sandpipers were noted at Guardbridge (15 on 11th), Outhead, Fife Ness ('Stinky Pool'), Balcomie Beach and Letham; with Wood Sandpipers at Letham, and Cambo Ness. Anstruther, Kinghorn and Lindores Loch held Common Sandpipers and there were 20 Ruff feeding on Craighead GC on 14th. Long-tailed Skuas passed St Andrews, Kinghorn, Ferry Hills and Boarhills. East Wemyss gull roost held a notable 105 Mediterranean Gulls on 26th. Yellow Wagtails (sp) were at Anstruther GC and Kilrenny Mill; Redstarts were at Balcomie, Kilminning, Fife Ness 'Patch', Craighead and Cambo; Wheatears at Kilrenny Mill and Ruddons Point; Whinchats at Balcomie, Fife Ness and Wormiston; and Lesser Whitethroats at St Andrews Bogward, Wormiston, Spinkie Den and Craighead. Fife Ness 'Patch', Denburn Wood, Cambo, Boarhills, Balcomie, Wormiston, Kilminning and Fairmont all had Pied Flycatchers. Twite showed at Dalgety Bay and there were Crossbills and a Common Rosefinch

October 2022

A Stejneger's Stonechat (ID to be accepted) was between Crail and Kilminning 22nd - 25th. Two Pallid Swifts were over Tayport on 31st. Two Todd's Canada Geese were briefly at The Wilderness on 4th. A drake American Wigeon was at Ballo Reservoir (13th). Kilminning held Red-flanked Bluetails (20th, 22nd), Chiffchaffs, a Siberian Chiffchaff, Goldcrests, Yellow-browed Warblers, Siskins, Common Redpolls, a Black Redstart, Golden Plovers, Merlins, Sparrowhawks, a Peregrine, Kestrels, Bramblings, Twite, Blackcaps, Redwings (680 on 30th), Fieldfares, Woodcocks, Common Snipes, a Jack Snipe, Great-spotted Woodpeckers, Short-eared Owls, a Long-eared Owl, Ravens, a Black Redstart, a Barred Warbler, Ring Ouzels, Lesser Whitethroats and a Waxwing (over). Fife Ness logs included Merlins, Red-throated, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers, Common and Velvet Scoters, Puffins, Little Auks, Whooper Swans, Sooty and Manx Shearwaters, Arctic, Long-tailed, Pomarine and Great Skuas, Little Gulls, Sabine's Gulls (juv), Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Pink-footed Geese, Barnacle Geese (461 on 14th), Long-tailed Ducks, Goldeneyes, Red-breasted Mergansers, Little Egrets, Greenshanks, a Short-eared Owl and a Snow Bunting in off the sea. The 'Patch' at Fife Ness held Bramblings, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Siberian Chiffchaffs, Goldcrests, Redwings, large numbers of Blackbirds, Fieldfares, Lesser Whitethroats, Red-breasted Flycatchers (20th), Redstarts, Yellow-browed Warblers, Woodcocks and Common Redpolls. Kinghorn logged Great Northern and Red-throated Divers, Arctic and Great Skuas, Common Scoters, Barnacle Geese, Long-tailed Ducks, Little Gulls, Mediterranean Gulls, Kittiwakes and Siskins. 175 Mediterranean Gulls were at the East Weymss roost on 10th. Two Black Swans remained at Loch Gelly; a Spoonbill was at Dalgety Bay (2nd). Marsh Harriers continued at Newburgh (Mugdrum Island) and Hen Harriers were noted at Holl Reservoir and Boarhills. Goshawks showed at St Andrews Bogward. There were Merlins at Colinsburgh, Cameron Reservoir, Luthrie and Guardbridge. Guardbridge held eight Curlew Sandpipers on 6th. Woodcocks were seen at Crail, Denburn Wood and Balcomie and there was a good number of Jack Snipes with records from Kinshaldy, Crail airfield, St Andrews, Cocklemill Marsh, Cameron Reservoir and Tayport. A Black Tern was briefly in Balgove Bay (1st). Outhead held two Short-eared Owls on 27th. A single Waxwing was noted at Crail (20th); there was a Black Redstart at Dunshalt (25th) and Ring Ouzels at Pipeland Farm and St Andrews Bogward (in a tree). Lesser Whitethroats were at Balcomie, Craighead and St Andrews; Yellow-browed Warblers were at the Eden Estuary Centre, Crail, St Andrews, Kittock's Den, Denburn Wood and Balcomie Cottages; two Bearded Reedlings were spotted on Mugdrum Island (29th); a hybrid Hooded Crow was at Ladybank (19th); Ferry Hills logged a Hawfinch over on 15th; three Northern Bullfinchs were noted in St Andrews (22nd); Twite were at Cocklemill Marsh, Boarhills, Pipeland Farm and upper Fairmont; Snow Buntings appeared at St Andrews, and Tentsmuir; and Lapland Buntings were at Wormiston and St Andrews. A Ring-necked Parakeet was at Guardbridge on 11th.

November 2022

Fife Ness had a total of 1097 Little Auks and Kinghorn 88. There were sightings of 16 Grey Phalaropes. Fife Ness also had Brent Geese; Sooty and Manx Shearwaters; Little Gulls; Fulmars; Kittiwakes (705 on 14th); Long-tailed Ducks; Red-breasted Mergansers; Puffins; Great, Pomarine and Arctic Skuas; Red-throated, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers; Common and Velvet Scoters; Black Guillemots; Greenshanks; Knot; Woodcocks (in off sea); Snow Buntings; Merlins; Twite (50); and Little Egrets. Outhead logged Great, Arctic and Pomarine Skuas; Red-throated, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers; Slavonian and Great-crested Grebes; Common and Velvet Scoters; Long-tailed Ducks; Pintails; Scaup; Snow Buntings; Grey and Ringed Plovers; Dunlins and Sanderlings. There were large congregations of Common Scoters in St Andrews Bay. Coastal sites on the inner Forth recorded a similar range of species to Fife Ness. Both a Greenland White-fronted Goose and a European White-fronted Goose were at Kingskettle 20th - 24th. Bean Geese (*Taiga* ssp) were over Ferry Hills; Balgove Bay held 19 Pale-bellied Brent Geese; a Green-winged Teal was at Luthrie floods (22nd). Ring-necked Ducks were at Beveridge Park (male) and Birnie Loch (female). St Andrews West Sands had a drake Surf Scoter (28th) and a drake Smew returned to Cameron Reservoir. Red-throated Divers were at Ruddons Point, Lower Largo, St Andrews, Balgove Bay, Coble Shore and Anstruther. Black-throated Divers were at Kircaldy, Fife Ness, Outhead and Ferry Hills (over). Great Northern Divers were off Burntisland and Kinghorn. A Red Kite at Moonzie was a rarity for Fife. Marsh Harriers continued on Mugdrum Island with another at Kilrenny Mill (25th). Balgove Bay held a ring-tailed Hen Harrier; Merlins showed at Wormiston, Balcomie, Boarhills and Kilrenny; Purple Sandpipers at Kircaldy, Fife Ness, Ruddons

Point (10) and Kinghorn, and two Green Sandpipers were at Angle Park. Woodcocks were noted at Kilminning, Cameron Reservoir, Ferry Hills, Kinghorn and Birnie Loch. Coveys of 16 and 19 Grey Partridges were at Cameron Reservoir and Boarhills respectively. A Jack Snipe was found at Gauldry. Luthrie floods held an Iceland Gull for a brief time. Black Guillemots were off Fife Ness, and Kinghorn. Abden and Auchtermuchty had Barn Owls; Birnie Loch a Long-eared Owl; and Boarhills and Kilminning Short-eared Owls. A Water Pipit was at Cocklemill Burn for the second year running. Waxwings were noted at Newburgh, St Michaels and Crail. Late Ring Ouzels were at St Andrews and Boarhills. 11 Goldcrests were at Kilminning. Bearded Tits were seen on Mugdrum Island (12 on 16th). Two Snow Buntings were at Kinshaldy, and the Ring-necked Parakeet remained in Beveridge Park.

Sightings should be sent to David Heeley at dw.heeley@btinternet.com or 50 High Street, Newburgh, Fife KY14 6AQ.)

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