

ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT
SOLWAY &
LANCASHIRE 3RD —
7TH FEBRUARY 2011

Thursday 3rd February

The group arrived at our base for the next three nights in Castle Douglas. It was a stormy night with gale force winds and heavy rain, so we were all hopeful that the weather would improve tomorrow! After a hearty dinner we retired early ready for our first full day in the field.

Friday 4th February

A very wet and miserable start to the day saw us head just up the road to the RSPB reserve at Ken Dee Marshes. Following the minor road along the Western edge of the Loch, our first stop was for a small party of WHOOPER SWANS and flocks of Icelandic Greylag Geese. Northern Pintail were also seen here and a Reed Bunting was at Mains of Duchrae. Heading down the track through the rain, some Fieldfare were noted but little else until we reached the woodland fringe. Here a small roving party of tits included three superb WILLOW TITS and we had great views as they fed low down in the lichen-covered bushes. Buoyed by this success we pressed on towards the hide, noting two nice male Bullfinch and a Eurasian Jay on the way. From the hide, the feeders were mobbed with birds and we had great views of two European Nuthatch, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Coal Tit, Treecreeper and a RED SQUIRREL from here. A male Eurasian Siskin also put in a brief appearance and we saw two or three RED KITES quartering the fields on the other side of the loch. The rain began to ease considerably as we walked back to the car park where we had a welcome cup of coffee before heading South towards the Solway Coast at Southernness Point. As we drove back along the loch shore, a ringtail Hen Harrier flashed past low over the fields. At Southernness, the wind had really picked up again but with the tide in, we didn't have to do much searching to find our target species, PURPLE SANDPIPER. About twenty individuals were among a large flock of Common Redshank, Ruddy Turnstone and European Oystercatcher roosting on the beach, and we had decent views. The sea was too rough to note anything on the water so we moved on to nearby Mersehead for lunch. Our first flocks of feeding Barnacle Geese were seen, including a remarkable albino bird. Around the visitor centre, Tree Sparrows were easily seen and a female Brambling was picked out among the throng of feeding Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Linnet. Three Yellowhammer were also in the hedges here and more large flocks of Barnacle Geese were seen as we made our way across the reserve. From the furthest hide. Large numbers of Northern Pintail were seen along with a few Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Teal, Northern Shoveler, Little Grebe and Tufted Duck. Three Common Goldeneye were also present. Heading back to the car park the weather hadn't improved so we headed back to base after a successful first day, noting Redwing and Common Buzzard on the way.

Saturday 5th February

An excellent days birding on the West coast at Loch Ryan, by Stranraer. We arrived at Cairnryan on the eastern shore about 0945 after the trip westwards from our base in Castle Douglas, and with light winds, calm water and overcast skies the conditions were ideal for viewing seafowl. One hundred Common Eider and a Red-throated Diver were seen distantly from here, along with the first Common Guillemot and four Common Buzzards overhead. Most of the birds seemed to be sheltering along the western shore following the recent gales, so we headed back towards the town. The next stop allowed us to view the south-east corner where five hundred GREATER SCAUP were present, and five SLAVONIAN GREBES were also present in this area. One hundred Common Goldeneye, four Common Scoter, two Northern Pintail and good numbers of Eurasian Wigeon and Common Shelduck were also on the water here, with a large European Oystercatcher roost containing a remarkable looking leucistic individual. Rock Pipit was on the shore here feeding with the Ruddy Turnstones and Common Redshanks, and our first groups of Red-breasted Merganser were also noted. Moving closer to the town, our coffee stop afforded superb close range views of the Scaup flock and we also noted twenty Ringed Plover, fourteen Red Knot, five Bar-tailed Godwit, twenty Dunlin and twenty Common Teal from here, as well as our first Great Crested Grebes. After eventually finding the public toilets in Stranraer, we headed along the western edge of the loch pausing to view a small flock of Pale-bellied Brent Geese, close Common Goldeneye and our first decent view of a BLACK GUILLEMOT, a bird in full breeding plumage. Moving on to the very productive area known as The Wig we stopped for lunch overlooking this sheltered bay. Immediately we picked up LONG-TAILED DUCK with somewhere between seven and ten birds present, though the fine adult drake that landed right in front of us stole the show. Many SLAVONIAN GREBE took the day tally to fifteen and we saw further Red-breasted Merganser and Common Goldeneye. In the nearby fields, small numbers of Skylark, Linnet and Goldfinch were joined by around one hundred TWITE, and we had superb close views of these birds perched on the fence preening and showing their pink rumps. Offshore from here, at least ten Red-throated Diver gave good views and we had closer views of the Common Eider flock. A Razorbill was new for the trip and a few Bar-tailed Godwit were roosting on the spit. About thirty Pale-bellied Brent

Geese and a few overhead Pink-footed Geese were also noted here before we returned to the van for a coffee. A final check of the southern shoreline and outfall failed to produce the recently sighted Iceland Gull, and with heavy rain beginning to fall and light fading we decided to finish off by looking for geese near West Freugh. We soon located a nice flock of sixty five GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GEESE feeding by the roadside with a single Pink-footed Goose, and enjoyed good views until a combination of gloom and rain forced us to head back to base.

Sunday 6th February

Another day of rain ahead of us but we still managed to see quite a few new trip species starting in Castle Douglas at Carlingwark Loch only a short walk from our hotel. Here we enjoyed good views of a first-winter drake SMEW amongst twenty Common Goldeneye, and two GOOSANDER were also present including a fine drake. WWT Caerlaverock was our next stop and we spent a couple of hours birding here before lunch. The feeders near the visitor centre were attracting large numbers of finches including one or two Eurasian Siskins and a flock of Pink-footed Geese was by the entrance road. From the tower and Folly Pond Hides we added Common Snipe and two Black-tailed Godwits to the list, while the usual selection of wildfowl was feeding around the pool including Barnacle Geese, Whooper Swan and Northern Shoveler. From the main observatory close ups of large numbers of Whooper Swans was possible, and in the surrounding hedgerows we saw sixty Yellowhammer along with a few Reed Bunting. Down at the Saltcot Hide, the views across the merse allowed us to view more feeding flocks of Barnacle Geese. Large numbers of Eurasian Curlew, six Grey Plover and ten European Golden Plover were in the fields here and big flocks of Red Knot were wheeling over the estuary. The highlight though was a male MERLIN perched on the fencelines on the merse, which eventually flew a bit nearer and gave some decent views. After lunch we began the journey south to our final stop near Carnforth in Lancashire.

Sunday 7th February

The weather really turned the screw on us today for our final mornings birding around RSPB Leighton Moss in Lancashire. High winds and rain made for a challenging time and really very few birds were around in these conditions. From Lillian's Hide we picked up our first Little Egret and Common Pochard of the trip and six Common Goldeneye included a fine drake right outside the hide. Five Common Redshank and a Common Snipe were roosting on the far bank and two Eurasian Siskin were in the adjacent Alders. Moving round to the Grizedale Hide two more Little Egret were seen along with small groups of Common Teal, Gadwall and Eurasian Wigeon. Forty Common Redshank and two Eurasian Curlew were also roosting here. At the visitor centre, the feeders attracted three superb Bullfinch, European Nuthatch, Great-spotted Woodpecker and our first Marsh Tit of the tour while Redwing and Mistle Thrush were also about. Finally at the Eric Morecambe pools the wind was really whipping across the bay but a juvenile Whooper Swan was on the saltmarsh and a group of Greylag Geese which dropped in from high to the north contained two Barnacle Geese. Large numbers of Northern Pintail gave some lovely views as they flew around buffeted by the wind and several Northern Shoveler were also present. We wrapped things up at lunchtime to allow for the onward journey home.

Systematic List

Birds

1. Red-throated Diver
2. Little Grebe
3. Great Crested Grebe
4. Slavonian Grebe
5. European Shag
6. Great Cormorant
7. Grey Heron
8. Little Egret
9. Mute Swan
10. Whooper Swan
11. Greylag Goose
12. Canada Goose
13. Barnacle Goose
14. Pink-footed Goose
15. Pale-bellied Brent Goose
16. Greenland White-fronted Goose

17. Common Shelduck
18. Mallard
19. Common Teal
20. Eurasian Wigeon
21. Gadwall
22. Northern Shoveler
23. Northern Pintail
24. Common Goldeneye
25. Tufted Duck
26. Common Pochard
27. Greater Scaup
28. Red-breasted Merganser
29. Goosander
30. Smew
31. Common Eider
32. Common Scoter
33. Long-tailed Duck
34. Common Pheasant
35. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
36. Common Kestrel
37. Merlin
38. Hen Harrier
39. Common Buzzard
40. Common Moorhen
41. Common Coot
42. European Oystercatcher
43. Northern Lapwing
44. Purple Sandpiper
45. Dunlin
46. Ruddy Turnstone
47. Common Redshank
48. Eurasian Curlew
49. Red Knot
50. Ringed Plover
51. Grey Plover
52. European Golden Plover
53. Bar-tailed Godwit
54. Black-tailed Godwit
55. Common Snipe
56. Black-headed Gull
57. Common Gull
58. Herring Gull
59. Great Black-backed Gull
60. Common Guillemot
61. Black Guillemot
62. Razorbill
63. Great-spotted Woodpecker
64. Woodpigeon
65. Collared Dove
66. European Robin
67. Dunnock
68. Rock Pipit
69. Meadow Pipit
70. Pied Wagtail
71. Skylark
72. Common Blackbird
73. Redwing
74. Mistle Thrush
75. Fieldfare
76. Blue Tit
77. Great Tit

78. Coal Tit
79. Marsh Tit
80. Willow Tit
81. Treecreeper
82. European Nuthatch
83. Rook
84. Carrion Crow
85. Western Jackdaw
86. Magpie
87. Eurasian Jay
88. Common Starling
89. House Sparrow
90. Tree Sparrow
91. Chaffinch
92. Brambling
93. Greenfinch
94. Goldfinch
95. Linnet
96. Eurasian Siskin
97. Twite
98. Bullfinch
99. Reed Bunting
100. Yellowhammer