

THE SOLWAY FIRTH

2ND - 5TH FEBRUARY 2006
TOUR REPORT



CELTIC BIRD TOURS

TOUR LEADER

Ashley Saunders

PARTICIPANTS

Brian Hill
Jane Parkinson

WEATHER - Dry and sunny with fog patches.

TOTAL SPECIES - 101

FRIDAY 3RD FEBRUARY, RSPB LOCH KEN AND WWT CAERLAVERLOCK

09.00: Birding around Airs Farm B&B produced Coal Tit, Siskin and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

09.30: Glenlochrae to Mains of Duchrae, west side of Loch Ken: Looking for geese along this stretch proved productive with several flocks of Icelandic Greylags encountered and notably two Pink-footed Geese were amongst them. Two Goldeneye, Wigeon, Teal, Common Buzzard, Reed Bunting and superb views of Red Kite were other highlights.

10.00: RSPB Loch Ken: Walking from the car park to the hide produced Stonechat, Red Kite, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Long-tailed Tit and a superb Red Squirrel feeding quietly in the fork of a Beech tree. From the hide, another Red Squirrel was visiting the peanut feeders just feet away, alongside tits and a Nuthatch. Teal, Pintail, three Goldeneye and Great Crested Grebes were also seen here.

13.00: On our way back to Glenlochrae, we had good views of roadside Common Snipe and Redwing and found a flock of approximately 75 Greenland White-fronted Geese, which gave excellent views by the side of the road.

14.00 - 16.00: WWT Caerlaverock: A large flock of Barnacle Geese were feeding by the entrance road, as were sizeable numbers of Lapwing and Golden Plover, and around the car park, the finch flock held a few Yellowhammers and a Song Thrush. Around the reserve, we had no problem getting good views of Whooper Swans, Shoveler, Gadwall, Teal, Wigeon, Tufted Duck and plenty more Barnacle Geese, while out from the Saltcot Hide flocks of waders on the estuary included Dunlin, Knot, Grey Plover, Redshank and Curlew. The highlight here was a distant Peregrine perched on a fence post.

SATURDAY 4TH FEBRUARY, LOCH RYAN

10.30 Cairnryan, eastern shore of Loch Ryan: Beautiful sunny and still conditions made birding here a treat this morning and we took no time to enjoy good views of Eider, Shag and Red-breasted Mergansers. With patient scanning, a few Black Guillemots and single Common Guillemot and Razorbill, 5+ Red-throated Divers, Fulmar and Rock Pipit were noted, with the star bird being a superb Great Northern Diver. We drove a little further on to get closer views of this bird, which we achieved, along with ten more Black Guillemots and a Raven that was heard calling briefly.

12.00 South Shore, Stranraer: With an incoming tide, a variety of waders and wildfowl were visible on the mud. Ringed Plover numbered at least one hundred, and Dunlin [10], Bar-tailed Godwit [7], Knot [15], Golden Plover [3] and a completely albino Oystercatcher added further interest. The star attraction here however, was a flock of Greater Scaup that totalled 400+ - an amazing count! Two Slavonian Grebes, two Pale-bellied Brent Geese, 5+ Great Crested Grebes and 100+ Eider were also seen here.

13.30 Stranraer: We had lunch down by the loch shore on the western side, enjoying some excellent views of two Slavonian Grebes and a preening Red-throated Diver at the same time. More Scaup, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Shag, Cormorant, Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Great Crested Grebe and Eider were also present.

14.15 The Wig: An excellent site on the western shore. We enjoyed a variety of birds starting with a gorgeous drake Long-tailed Duck, which was accompanied by two females. Two more Slavonian Grebes, four more Red-throated Divers, Eider, Red-breasted Mergansers and large numbers of Wigeon were also feeding in the bay. On the beach, 30 Pied Wagtail, two Rock Pipit and 30 Turnstone were feeding, while in the fields behind at least 50 Twite were dancing around, flushed by a Merlin that was seen heading off by Ashley carrying what was presumably a Twite in it's talons. Unfortunately, it could not be relocated. The Twite settled to give views down to just a few metres and a few Linnets were also picked out amongst them. Two Stonechats and 40 Sky Larks were in the same field. Two Golden Plover and a splendid flock of around 1000 Pink-footed Geese were other highlights.



5TH FEBRUARY, RSPB MERSEHEAD & SOUTHERNESS POINT

10.00 Mersehead: Barnacle Geese featured strongly here with some impressive flocks around the reserve, and eight Whooper Swans flew over. Feeders around the visitor centre were attracting large numbers of finches, buntings and a single Tree Sparrow. Large numbers of Yellowhammers and a quite remarkable number of Reed Buntings were testament to the efforts of the RSPB here with conservation sensitive farming. Other passerines included Goldcrest, seven Brambling [including a very smart male], Meadow Pipit and Goldfinch, while we had great views of a Great Spotted Woodpecker in the woodland belt. From the hides, Ruff, Dabchick, Snipe, Scaup, Gadwall, Teal, Shoveler and Pintail were seen, while Ashley also saw a flyover Green Sandpiper.

13.15 - 15.00 Southerness Point: The large area of rocks, mussel beds and inter tidal mud flats here gave us a chance to look for more waders - Oystercatchers seemed to reach epidemic proportions! Grey Plover, Knot, Redshank, Turnstone, Great Crested Grebe, two Red-breasted Mergansers, Sparrowhawk and Shag were also seen, while the best birds here were the three Purple Sandpipers that eventually gave themselves up as they fed on a rock by the shoreline. We enjoyed suoper views of them to provide us with a fitting end to what had been a super three days of birds, weather, scenery and company on our inaugural visit to south west Scotland.