

# **ORIOLE ADVENTURES & CELTIC BIRD TOURS**



**TOUR REPORT  
SOLWAY COAST  
31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY – 3<sup>RD</sup>  
FEBRUARY 2008**

TOUR LEADER: ASHLEY SAUNDERS

WEATHER: Gale force winds almost cancelled the tour! Perhaps astonishingly we stayed dry throughout despite heavy overnight rain and frequent precipitation while driving between sites! A very strong south-west then northerly wind prevailed throughout and hence it turned very cold on Saturday with snow over the hills.

### **Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February**

The winds had abated somewhat this morning and the sun was shining as we set off for Loch Ken RSPB just a short drive away from Castle Douglas. Virtually our first bird was a RED KITE which drifted over the road, the first of several sightings involving perhaps 4 birds. Flocks of Icelandic Greylag Geese were feeding by the roadside and we also noted Common Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Little Grebe, Northern Lapwing, Common Goldeneye, Great Cormorant and a nice mixed flock of Fieldfare, Redwing and Mistle Thrush. Further along towards Mains of Duchrae Farm, we located a flock of approx 75 GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GEESE grazing by the loch shore. Despite the distance, good scope views were obtained of these rare geese, and a male European Sparrowhawk flashed through. The walk from the RSPB car park down to the hide yielded three Common Buzzard, two Common Treecreeper, Song Thrush, Reed Bunting and a large mixed flock of approx 100 Chaffinch and 50 Linnets. A Red Squirrel gave superb close views and three Bullfinch included a nice male. From the hide, several Coal Tits and an obliging Common Nuthatch were seen, with two Common Goldeneye, Great Crested Grebe and Common Teal on the river Dee. Two further RED KITE sightings were had over the far hillside. On our walk back to the car park, we had what could only be described as amazing views of a pair of WILLOW TITS just a few feet away from us, showing beautifully all the salient features to separate them from the similar Marsh, including an example of their distinctive buzzing call. We then headed back towards Dumfries and down to the WWT reserve at Caerlaverock, where after lunch we spent a couple of hours visiting the various hides. Good views of TREE SPARROW were had around the car park and large flocks of Chaffinch and Greenfinch yielded a few each of Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Goldfinch and a single superb male BRAMBLING. Down by the Saltcot Hide, flocks of Barnacle Geese entertained us and we also noted Common Kestrel, Shelduck and Pink-footed Goose. Many WHOOPER SWANS were on the main pool from the Peter Scott hide along with Common Pochard, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon and more close ups of Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrow feeding on the spilt grain. Finally Gadwall, Grey Heron and some impressive flocks of Barnacle Geese were seen arriving off the marsh before we headed back to base.

### **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> February**

The day dawned dry though with the prospect of heavy rain moving in off the Atlantic we made haste for Stranraer on the west coast and in particular the fabulous Loch Ryan. Arriving at our first stop on the eastern shore just north of the Cairnryan ferry terminal, we were soon scoping typical birds of the loch such as Common Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, GREATER SCAUP, European Shag, Common Goldeneye, Razorbill and Red-throated Diver. In the south-east corner of the loch the rising tide had encouraged 100+ European Oystercatcher to roost under the sea wall along with Common Redshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit and Ringed Plover. 250 Greater Scaup and 100 Common Goldeneye were also seen here, along with our first two SLAVONIAN GREBE, Common Scoter and Rock Pipit. Along the southern shore seven Pale-bellied Brent Geese were seen as well as 20 Red Knot and 10+ Dunlin, more Ringed Plover, Common Redshank and Ruddy Turnstone. Another 100 Greater Scaup here included some birds very close inshore. Great Crested Grebe and Red-throated Diver were also seen. On the west side of the loch we endured strong winds

as we walked out to Kirkholm point alongside Wig Bay. A flock of around 50 TWITE, a few Reed Bunting and 100 Sky Lark were feeding in the fields here, and while we had great flight views the whole flock disappeared into the crop on landing! Around the point many more shorebirds and Pale-bellied Brent were seen, though the star birds were two GREAT NORTHERN DIVER offshore. Around Wig Bay a further seven SLAVONIAN GREBE and our first BLACK GUILLEMOTS were noted, along with more Red-breasted Merganser, Common Eider, Common Goldeneye, Red-throated Diver and Great Crested Grebe. 500+ Pink-footed Geese, 150+ Eurasian Curlew and 100+ European Golden Plover were in adjacent fields. After a late lunch we headed back towards Stranraer with the forecast rain now lashing down! Birding from the minibus we were able to obtain fantastic close range views of a further five SLAVONIAN GREBE, 100 Greater Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser and three BLACK GUILLEMOTS in the harbour. Finally, we pulled into the lay-by by the southern shore of the loch for one last scan of the assembled gulls and wildfowl. Our extra effort was rewarded with a stunning first winter ICELAND GULL which we found loafing on the beach with Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. A great end to a successful day at this magical destination. Our approx totals of seafoal for the day were as follows: Greater Scaup 500, Common Goldeneye 200, Red-breasted Merganser 50, Common Eider 200, Great Crested Grebe 15, Slavonian Grebe 15, Common Scoter 15, Red-throated Diver 5, Great Northern Diver 2, Black Guillemot 10, Razorbill 1, European Shag 50, Eurasian Wigeon 500.

### **Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> February**

A very windy day again. We headed down to RSPB Mereshead and walked out to the hide, picking up passerines such as Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Bullfinch and Common Treecreeper en route. A nice mixed flock of wildfowl included our first Northern Pintails of the trip, and in the field behind a pair of adult PEREGRINE were sat on the grass, giving splendid close views. From the hide Common Goldeneye, Little Grebe, Common Teal and flocks of Northern Lapwing were seen, as well as the ubiquitous Barnacle Geese. Back by the visitor centre, we relocated the Peregrines while watching a large mixed flock of Pied Wagtail and Meadow Pipit. The female brought in prey and landed in the field in front, shortly followed by the male. We then watched the birds devouring their meal through the scopes while enjoying our own coffee break! Brilliant! A Hen Harrier was glimpsed too briefly for all to see though Common Buzzard and Red Kite were also noted. Moving along to nearby Southernness, the high winds here were quite unlike anything any of us had attempted to walk in before and hence birding was extremely difficult. A glimpsed Purple Sandpiper could not be relocated though we did see two Sanderling, Great Crested Grebe and four Red-breasted Merganser. After collecting our things from the hotel our final stop was a windswept Castle Loch by Lochmaben, where we scoped four GOOSANDER as a nice bird to end the trip.

Red-throated Diver  
Great Northern Diver  
Little Grebe  
Great Crested Grebe  
Slavonian Grebe  
Great Cormorant  
European Shag  
Grey Heron  
Mute Swan  
Whooper Swan  
Greylag Goose  
Canada Goose

Pale-bellied Brent Goose  
Barnacle Goose  
Pink-footed Goose  
Greenland White-fronted Goose  
Common Shelduck  
Eurasian Wigeon  
Mallard  
Common Teal  
Gadwall  
Northern Shoveler  
Northern Pintail  
Common Pochard  
Tufted Duck  
Common Eider  
Common Scoter  
Greater Scaup  
Common Goldeneye  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Goosander  
Eurasian Sparrowhawk  
Common Buzzard  
Red Kite  
Common Kestrel  
Peregrine  
Red-legged Partridge  
Common Pheasant  
Common Moorhen  
Common Coot  
European Oystercatcher  
Ringed Plover  
European Golden Plover  
Northern Lapwing  
Dunlin  
Ruddy Turnstone  
Bar-tailed Godwit  
Eurasian Curlew  
Red Knot  
Sanderling  
Common Redshank  
Black-headed Gull  
Common Gull  
Herring Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Great Black-backed Gull  
Iceland Gull  
Wood Pigeon  
Collared Dove  
Razorbill  
Black Guillemot  
Great-spotted Woodpecker  
Sky Lark

Meadow Pipit  
Rock Pipit  
Pied Wagtail  
Northern Wren  
Dunnock  
European Robin  
Blackbird  
Song Thrush  
Mistle Thrush  
Redwing  
Fieldfare  
Coal Tit  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Willow Tit  
Common Treecreeper  
Common Nuthatch  
Eurasian Jay  
Black-billed Magpie  
Rook  
Carrion Crow  
Common Raven  
Eurasian Jackdaw  
European Starling  
House Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Brambling  
Eurasian Greenfinch  
European Goldfinch  
Linnet  
Twite  
Bullfinch  
Reed Bunting  
Yellowhammer

Total species: 98