

ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT
SOLWAY &
LANCASHIRE 4TH —
8TH FEBRUARY 2013

Monday 4th February

We met in Great Ryburgh, Norfolk at 1000 to begin our long journey North to Dumfries and Galloway, arriving just after 1700 following a hassle free drive.

Tuesday 5th February

We awoke to several inches of snow today and this coupled with strong Northerly winds caused us a few transport problems. The minor roads around Castle Douglas leading to Glenlochar and the RSPB car park at Mains of Duchrae were very tricky with a thick layer of snow and hardly any vehicles having passed along them. The first route was blocked by a fallen tree so we had to take a detour, and we eventually arrived at the car park around 0930. Several RED KITES were seen along Loch Ken, as well as Common Buzzard and our first flocks of Icelandic Greylag Geese and a few Common Teal. It was extremely cold as we walked along the track towards the hides, though our target bird fell approximately thirty seconds into the walk, as a superb WILLOW TIT was feeding on lichen covered branches right by the path! A further two were seen really well a bit further on where a stream crosses beneath the track and typical damp scrubby woodland is found. We watched these birds for about ten minutes, with the male even giving us a burst of song despite the snow now falling heavily. Heavy snow continued throughout the half hour we spent in the hide, but the feeders entertained us with dozens of Coal, Blue and Great Tits, European Nuthatch and two Great-spotted Woodpeckers. A couple more RED KITES were seen on the walk back, along with five Bullfinch feeding along a snowy hedgeline, looking absolutely stunning. After a welcome cup of coffee, we headed towards the Solway coast and the RSPB reserve at Mersehead, and now the snow was already thawing and the roads improving. A stop at Laurieston allowed us to get fantastic close views of a Common Raven. Once at Mersehead, the fields along the entrance road held over two hundred Fieldfare and a few Redwing and Mistle Thrush, while sizeable flocks of Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Linnet around the visitor centre also hosted a Reed Bunting. Three superb Brambling were feeding on a fallow field with part of this flock, and the adjacent meadow was swarming with birds – we estimated at least three hundred Skylark here! Redwings, Starlings, Northern Lapwings and three European Golden Plover were in the same field and with all these birds about, a raptor sighting was inevitable. A fine male HEN HARRIER ghosted across in the background, allowing us to get some stunning scope views. From one of the hides, we added Common Goldeneye, four Northern Pintail, one hundred Common Teal, four Gadwall, ten Northern Shoveler and twenty Eurasian Wigeon, as well as our first Barnacle Geese and Common Shelducks. The walk back added a fine Tree Sparrow, sharing a section of hedge with four Yellowhammer. It began to rain heavily now and we were glad to be back in the bus, so we headed for nearby Southernness to look for geese. A large flock of Barnacle Geese was feeding in fields around Loaningfoot, but we couldn't find the Todd's Canada Goose seen here recently. Seeing and hearing the flock wheeling about against a backdrop of snow-dusted hills, the expanse of the Solway Firth and shafts of sun beaming down out of the clouds, was quite a sight however. And just along the road we picked up a real bonus as a female MERLIN was perched on a roadside post, and even though we inadvertently flushed it without seeing it, it landed in the field just a short distance away so we could get good views. Down at Southernness itself, we walked down onto the shore in the hope of seeing waders on the rising tide. A few thousand European Oystercatcher were here along with small numbers of Common Redshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Red Knot, European Golden, Grey and Ringed Plovers. Our target bird was PURPLE SANDPIPER with about four birds seen, and we also added a female Red-breasted Merganser and a lone GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE flying west along the shore. From here we headed back to base, arriving about 1730.



Willow Tit and European Nuthatch, RSPB Loch Ken 5th February 2013

Wednesday 6th February

We headed west today for a full days birding in the Stranraer area, centred around the superb Loch Ryan. We arrived at Cairnryan about 0945 and despite the strong, cold Northerly winds whipping up the waves, the sun was shining and the light superb. Our first Common Eiders and European Shags showed well on the water here, and up to four Red-breasted Mergansers looked absolutely cracking in the excellent light. Two Common Guillemots were also seen and just as we were about to leave, a stunning GREAT NORTHERN DIVER drifted into view right in front of us. Heading back south past the ferry terminal, we stopped briefly by the jetty as another GREAT NORTHERN DIVER was fishing in the sheltered waters really close to the road. A Red-throated Diver was also here, along with Razorbill, several Common Eiders and Red-breasted Merganser. Moving down to the south-east corner of the sea loch, the tide was out meaning plenty of waders could be viewed on the exposed mud. Hundreds of Eurasian Oystercatcher were the main species involved, but we also saw a single bar-tailed Godwit and a few Ruddy Turnstones. On the water, our first small flock of GREATER SCAUP were seen, as well as more Common Eider and two stunning drake Red-breasted Merganser, a SLAVONIAN GREBE, about thirty Great Crested Grebe, twenty Common Goldeneye, four Red-throated Divers, Razorbill and BLACK GUILLEMOT. Heading along the southern shore of the loch and passing through Stranraer, we paused to check the gulls but quickly retired back to the vehicle as the icy North wind went straight through the thermal layers here! The south-east corner of the loch was more sheltered, and here we had better views of about 150 GREATER SCAUP, fifty Common Eider, twenty Common Goldeneye, three Common Scoter, one hundred Ringed Plovers, one Pale-bellied Brent Goose and a small flock of European Golden Plover. Moving North along the West coast of the loch, we stopped at Soleburn and had our best views so far of BLACK GUILLEMOT with two birds close inshore. A SLAVONIAN GREBE also showed very well with at least another three further out, and we also noted two Red-throated Divers, ten Common Goldeneye, twenty Eurasian Wigeon, twenty Common Scoter and a distant flock of over four hundred Common Eider. After lunch our main port of call was the extremely productive area on the western side of the loch known as The Wig. Here a flock of about four hundred GREATER SCAUP was present and giving good views close inshore, and amongst them we were able to easily pick out a fine adult drake SURF SCOTER. Ten or more Red-breasted Merganser, three superb LONG-TAILED DUCKS, three GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS, five SLAVONIAN GREBES, half a dozen or so BLACK GUILLEMOTS and about twenty Pale-bellied Brent Geese were also in this area, creating a fantastic mix of quality birds. With the afternoon now wearing on, we began to head back towards Castle Douglas though with two further stops in mind. The first was Souleat Loch just East of Stranraer, though in trying to find this small freshwater lochan we stumbled instead across an even smaller one which had partly flooded and closed our route to Souleat. However, we didn't mind, as floating on the water in the middle of this tiny expanse of water was a smashing BLACK-THROATED DIVER! There was nothing else here other than a few mallard [we later discovered the lochan had a name, and was in fact known as Loch Magillie] so we consulted the map and found an alternative route towards Souleat Loch. There were distinctly more birds here, and in fact the water was peppered with over one hundred Common Teal, fifty Tufted Duck, ten Common Goldeneye, ten Common Coot, two Little Grebe, fifty Eurasian Wigeon and a lovely redhead SMEW along the wooded edge of the loch. The light was fading fast, so we took a route back towards the A75 across the grazing marshes of West Freugh, and had nice views of a roadside herd of twelve WHOOPER SWANS and a couple of flocks of Pink-footed Geese to round off the day.



Black-throated [left] and Great Northern Divers, 6th Feb 2013

Thursday 7th February

We started the day in Castle Douglas with a quick check of Carlingwark Loch, which is walking distance from our hotel. We were very glad we did, as we quickly found our target bird, GOOSANDER, with up to seven present including some fine males. A Common Kingfisher whizzed across the water, which was peppered with up to one hundred displaying Common Goldeneye, many Common Coot, Tufted Duck and Eurasian Wigeon, and a redhead SMEW. The real highlight though were the three OTTERS fishing at the far end of the loch, which we watched through the scopes for a good fifteen minutes or more – a good start to the day! Moving on to the Solway Coast we spent the rest of the morning at WWT Caerlaverock reserve, and saw large numbers of wildfowl including some nice mixed flocks of Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese along the approach road, grazing right next to the van. In the car park, a fine male Brambling was feeding with large numbers of other finches, and along the main track over seventy Yellowhammer and a couple of Reed Bunting were coming down to seed. From the Observation Tower, we picked out the drake GREEN-WINGED TEAL present here for some time, and had great views of it displaying vigorously to its commoner cousins. From Saltcot Hide, we picked up a distant perched Peregrine but then a juvenile female landed on an adjacent fenceline giving much better views. Finally we spent some time photographing the herds of Whooper Swans at very close quarters before enjoying a nice lunch in the cafe. From here, we set off for Lancashire arriving ahead of forecast snow at around 1600.



Whooper Swans, Caerlaverock, 7th Feb 2013



Yellowhammer and Barnacle Geese, Caerlaverock 7th Feb 2013

Friday 8th February

Much better weather this morning with light winds and a frost for our visit to nearby Leighton Moss RSPB reserve. With favourable tides, we started at the Eric Morecambe Pools, a Common Kingfisher whizzing along the drain by the car park as we arrived. From the hides, a good selection of wildfowl included a few Northern Pintail, two cracking drake Red-breasted Merganser just yards from the hide, a female Goosander and three Common Goldeneye. Four Little Egrets were present and on the fence out on the saltmarsh both Eurasian Sparrowhawk and MERLIN were perched. Two Spotted Redshanks were the pick of the waders present, and the bushes held Long-tailed Tit. On the main reserve, we started at Lilian's Hide and soon added a Water Rail to our list. Much of the open water was frozen but large numbers of Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Common Pochard and Common Goldeneye had kept a large area to the left of the hide free from ice. A Common Raven flew over calling and in the trees behind the hide, a singing Marsh Tit gave nice views. A female Bullfinch was visiting the feeders and as we walked down towards the Public Hide, a drumming Great-spotted Woodpecker was perhaps an early sign that spring is not so far away! From Public Hide, large numbers of wildfowl were again

present, though the highlight was a brief GREAT BITTERN in the reeds to the right of the hide and a juvenile Marsh Harrier over the reedbed. This rounded off the week well, and after a coffee at the Visitor Centre we embarked on the long journey back to Norfolk where the tour concluded.

Systematic List

Birds

1. Red-throated Diver
2. Great Northern Diver
3. Black-throated Diver
4. Little Grebe
5. Great Crested Grebe
6. Slavonian Grebe
7. European Shag
8. Great Cormorant
9. Grey Heron
10. Little Egret
11. Great Bittern
12. Mute Swan
13. Whooper Swan
14. Greylag Goose
15. Canada Goose
16. Barnacle Goose
17. Pink-footed Goose
18. Pale-bellied Brent Goose
19. Greenland White-fronted Goose
20. Common Shelduck
21. Mallard
22. Common Teal
23. Green-winged Teal
24. Eurasian Wigeon
25. Gadwall
26. Northern Shoveler
27. Northern Pintail
28. Common Goldeneye
29. Tufted Duck
30. Common Pochard
31. Greater Scaup
32. Red-breasted Merganser
33. Goosander
34. Smew
35. Common Eider
36. Common Scoter
37. Surf Scoter
38. Long-tailed Duck
39. Common Pheasant
40. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
41. Common Kestrel
42. Merlin
43. Peregrine
44. Hen Harrier
45. Marsh Harrier
46. Common Buzzard
47. Red Kite
48. Common Moorhen
49. Common Coot
50. Water Rail
51. European Oystercatcher
52. Northern Lapwing
53. Purple Sandpiper
54. Dunlin

55. Ruddy Turnstone
56. Common Redshank
57. Spotted Redshank
58. Eurasian Curlew
59. Red Knot
60. Ringed Plover
61. Grey Plover
62. European Golden Plover
63. Bar-tailed Godwit
64. Black-headed Gull
65. Common Gull
66. Herring Gull
67. Great Black-backed Gull
68. Common Guillemot
69. Black Guillemot
70. Razorbill
71. Great-spotted Woodpecker
72. Woodpigeon
73. Collared Dove
74. Stock Dove
75. Common Kingfisher
76. European Robin
77. Dunnock
78. Wren
79. Pied Wagtail
80. Skylark
81. Common Blackbird
82. Redwing
83. Mistle Thrush
84. Fieldfare
85. Song Thrush
86. Blue Tit
87. Great Tit
88. Coal Tit
89. Marsh Tit
90. Willow Tit
91. Long-tailed Tit
92. European Nuthatch
93. Rook
94. Carrion Crow
95. Western Jackdaw
96. Magpie
97. Eurasian Jay
98. Common Raven
99. Common Starling
100. House Sparrow
101. Tree Sparrow
102. Chaffinch
103. Brambling
104. Greenfinch
105. Goldfinch
106. Linnet
107. Bullfinch
108. Reed Bunting
109. Yellowhammer