



TOUR REPORT
SPEYSIDE
3RD - 10TH APRIL 2026

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FRIDAY 3RD APRIL – *a mixed day of weather with some brighter spells and some very heavy showers. Bright and clear by the time we reached Inverkeithing. 12C*

Despite some long Good Friday traffic jams, our drive from Norfolk up to Dunfermline went quite smoothly. We had time to stop at Inverkeithing on the way where a couple of **White-billed Divers** had been lingering in recent weeks. We arrived to a nice bright evening which was a relief after some heavy showers as we drove around Edinburgh! It didn't take long to pick out the two **White-billed Divers** which gave really nice scope views in the evening sun, with a nice backdrop of Edinburgh Castle and Arthur's Seat too! We picked up a few other nice birds too including a pair of **Red-breasted Mergansers**, **Razorbill**, lots of **Eiders**, and a few **Fulmar** and **Shags**, before heading on to our hotel and an excellent Italian meal in Dunfermline.



White-billed Diver

SATURDAY 4TH APRIL – *a sunny and calm morning followed by heavy rain and snow in the afternoon. 4C*

Today was very much a day of two halves weather-wise with a beautiful morning and a very wet and snowy afternoon! We were keen to make the most of the morning though, and after picking up some breakfast due to the hotel restaurant being closed, we headed east from Dunfermline to look for scoters off the Fife coast. We began at East Wemyss where a drake **Stejneger's Scoter** had been lingering in recent weeks and arrived to find many small groups of **Velvet** and **Common Scoters** scattered across the bay. We started to scan the flocks and picked up a few smart **Long-tailed Ducks** in the process, plus a single **Slavonian Grebe** and plenty of **Eiders**, **Gannets**, **Razorbills** and **Red-throated Divers**. After a while we picked up the drake **Stejneger's** and it wasn't too far offshore. The only problem was that it swam straight into the sunlight reflecting off the sea!

We changed angle and were unable to see it in the dazzling water, and it was only after another short walk that we picked it up again and started getting some really nice scope views of it alongside some **Velvets**. Being a second-winter bird, it only had a small white eye patch, but we could easily make out the pronounced lump on the bill, plus reddish bill markings and you could even just about see the small hole in the bill too! An unexpected bonus came in the form of a striking **Velvet Scoter** with a white head, presumably a leucistic bird.



Stejneger's Scoter (right) with Velvet Scoter

We weren't done yet and made our way over to Methil to look for another rare scoter – this time an adult drake **White-winged Scoter**. There were hundreds of **Common** and **Velvet Scoters** offshore here, but we got lucky and picked out a good candidate for the **White-winged** fairly quickly. Closer views were needed though so we headed around to another vantage point where the birds were indeed much closer. The views of the **Velvets** were superb and, sure enough, we found the drake **White-winged Scoter** among them. It showed well too, and it was great to compare it with the Stejneger's earlier in the day, with the White-winged having a less pronounced knob on the bill. Being an adult, it also had a nice prominent white eye stripe. There were more **Long-tailed Ducks** and **Red-throated Divers** here too and a single **Rock Pipit** landed in front of us on the seawall. The weather soon began to close in, and we made the drive to the Grant Arms (with a brief and unsuccessful look for Dippers during our lunch break). It had been quite the day!



White-winged Scoter

SUNDAY 5TH APRIL – *a clear and crisp day with a cold wind and plenty of snow on the tops.*
4C

We awoke to a beautifully clear morning and thankfully the wind wasn't as strong as the forecast. With lots of yesterday's snow still lying, we spent most of the morning birding the moors north of Grantown. We drove slowly, scanning the surrounding moorland as we went. The first highlight was driving through a **Common Gull** colony with plenty of birds on both sides of the road, and they looked great as the snow reflected the sunlight back underneath them. We picked up several **Red Grouse** too and, carrying on, we noted a male **Stonechat** and a few waders along the edge of a loch including **Redshanks**, **Oystercatchers** and **Lapwings**.

The loch was very choppy, and we couldn't see much on the water although we had a great flypast from an adult **White-tailed Eagle** with its tail lit up brilliantly by the sun (likely one of two large eagles we'd seen disappearing behind a ridge shortly before). The wind was biting cold here, so we continued to some other watchpoints. We paused briefly to admire a female **Wheatear** by the road, before picking up a distant raptor hanging in the wind over a distant ridge. It looked interesting, and we soon had the scopes set up and confirmed our second eagle species of the morning – an adult **Golden Eagle**! It soon began gliding towards us and gave a nice scope view before disappearing behind a ridge.

We continued scanning the moors with the thermal camera in the hope of Mountain Hares when behind us, Babs did well to spot a pair of **Black-throated Divers** on a distant loch. They taunted us for a while as they were diving almost constantly, and tricky to spot in the rough water. Eventually they drifted out into the middle of the loch, so we drove closer and sure enough the views were much better from here, and helpfully they'd stopped diving! They really looked stunning in their full summer plumage! Another bonus here came in the form of a group of six male **Black Grouse** which made for a slightly unusual sight as they flew low across the loch and landed on the far shore. They were distant but the scope views were

good and we were even able to see the red wattle above the eye thanks to the excellent light.

It was soon time to head for a loo stop in Carrbridge and then on to a small loch where the Grant Arms Hotel has access to a private bird hide. We hoped to find Slavonian Grebes here but sadly didn't have any luck on that front. Several **Goldeneyes** were present though, and a couple of **Little Grebes** briefly got our hopes up! We spent the rest of the afternoon slowly wandering through the woods near Loch Mallachie where **Crested Tit** was our main target. It didn't take us long to begin hearing them but getting a view was another matter! There were good numbers around and we probably heard around ten different birds. Eventually we found a pair which, despite being rather mobile, gave some nice views in the tops of some Scots Pines. There were also quite a few **Siskins** around and we heard **Crossbills** briefly. We enjoyed watching a **Treecreeper** as we walked back to the van, and a few **Goldeneye** looked great on Loch Garten as a heavy snow shower moved in. It had been a great day but we wrapped up here and headed back to the hotel for a bit of a rest before dinner.

MONDAY 6TH APRIL – *bright and clear for most of the day with light winds. 9C*

The mountain forecast was very promising for this morning so decided this would be our best day to try and find Ptarmigan. Sure enough, it was a beautiful morning when we left the hotel with the tops of the mountains completely clear and light winds. We soon arrived at Cairngorm where the car park was already nearly full. Clearly we weren't the only people to have noticed the good forecast! We hoped that the snow would have brought some **Snow Buntings** down to the car park, and sure enough at least ten showed brilliantly as they hovered up seed just a few metres in front of us.



Female Snow Bunting

The views were spectacular as we rode the funicular up to the aptly named Ptarmigan restaurant and started scanning. In the excellent conditions it only took us a few minutes to find our first **Ptarmigan** quietly feeding on a rock slope. There were several others nearby too and we had really good scope views of these birds in their intermediate plumage. It was great to see them so easily and be able to watch them for a long time. We were soon very cold though, and after a hot drink in the restaurant, we made our way back down to the bottom car park, for a largely unsuccessful look for Ring Ouzels (although Lou did see one in flight briefly).



Ptarmigan

The time had flown by, and it was soon time to find a spot to have our lunch. We opted for a drive to a good watchpoint west of Carrbridge. A flock of very smart summer plumage **Golden Plovers** greeted us when we arrived, and we also added **Mistle Thrush** to the trip list. It didn't take long for us to pick up our first **Golden Eagle** of the day over a distant ridge, and over the hour or so we stood there, we saw at least three **Golden Eagles** including one relatively close. A male **Black Grouse** also burst out of a tree close to where we were standing and a Raven was new too. Several large flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** also flew past while we were scanning, presumably making the most of the calm weather to continue their northwards spring migration.

For our final birding of the day, we slowly wound our way across the moors near Grantown where we had birded yesterday. The **Black-throated Divers** had increased to three on the loch, and views were somewhat closer than yesterday, and a single **Red-throated Diver** put in a very brief appearance. A flock of 13 **Whooper Swans** had dropped in, likely moving in the same good weather window as the **Pink-footed Geese** earlier in the day. We made

further stops to admire **Stonechats** and breeding **Common Gulls** by the road before ending with close views of a **Red Grouse**. We returned to the hotel tired but happy after a very successful day out!



Common Gull

TUESDAY 7TH APRIL – *warm and sunny with a strong breeze higher up. 18C*

We were up early this morning for a look at the **Black Grouse** lek not too far from the hotel. We arrived just before 6am to our first lek site but other than an unidentified black blob all was quiet. One of the wardens arrived and told us that unfortunately there had been a lot of disturbance from people getting too close and the lek is rarely used anymore. Thankfully we had a backup, so worked our way around there while scanning the moors in the process. This produced our first **Mountain Hare** of the trip, still largely in its white winter coat, plus a **Red Squirrel** which ran in front of the van in a small woodland.

Thankfully things were much better at our second lek site with at least five male **Black Grouse** strutting about on the grassy fields. The light was superb, and despite being at some distance, we could hear them making their distinctive calls. A few **Red Grouse** were around too, and we picked up another **Mountain Hare**, this time a browner one. It was a great start to the day, and we soon headed back for some breakfast.

Our second birding location of the day was the Findhorn Valley. We arrived mid-morning and slowly worked our way further into the valley birding as we went. There was no shortage of **Buzzards** up, plus a few **Red Kites** and **Ravens**. Reaching the car park at the end of the valley, some went for a short and unsuccessful walk for Ring Ouzels, then we all assembled by the van and started scanning for raptors. Again, we saw lots of **Buzzards** and a couple of **Kestrels**, and after a while the first **Golden Eagle** of the day drifted over being escorted by a

Raven. A second bird appeared a short while later, this time an immature, and was also intercepted by an angry **Raven!** While eating our lunch, we were told that our next birding stop along the road to Farr was inaccessible due to snow drifts, so we made the longer journey around to Loch Ruthven via the A9.

We arrived at the loch about 40 minutes later, and were pleased to be told that there were several **Slavonian Grebes** back on territory. We made our way down to the hide and paused to admire a very showy male **Grey Wagtail** on the way. We were soon onto some stunning summer plumage **Slavonian Grebes**. There were two pairs present with both breaking into display and calling on a few occasions. Great stuff. We admired them for a while before heading back to the van where we planned to head back to the hotel as it was already late afternoon. We were halfway back when a report came through of a small group of Waxwings in Rothiemurchus. We diverted there and had a look around but sadly they seemed on have moved on. We did have nice views of several **Goldcrests** and **Siskins** though which was a nice way to end a productive day!



Slavonian Grebes

WEDNESDAY 8TH APRIL – *warm and sunny with a moderate breeze on the coast during the afternoon. 20C*

Given a very promising weather forecast today, we headed north today to bird some coastal areas and make the most of what we hoped would be calm seas. We began at Loch Fleet where a first-winter male **King Eider** had been hanging out recently. It was a beautiful morning when we walked out to the mouth of the estuary and began scanning. Hundreds of **Common Eiders** were present, and, after a bit of scanning, we picked up the **King Eider** among a group loafing on the beach on the north side of the bay. Given it spent most of the time asleep and being smaller than the Commons, it was pretty hard to pick out, and it took

time for everyone to be able to get a clear view. Eventually it did get up and join a group fishing on the water and views were much better here. The orange bill base could be seen but otherwise the bird was largely brown with a bit of white on the chin.

There was plenty of other birds to look at too. Perhaps the highlight was the number of **Long-tailed Ducks**, with over 100 present, including a group of over 50 and a couple very close to where we stood. Several divers were offshore including both Black and **Red-throated**, a number of **Red-breasted Mergansers** were floating about, and a single **Slavonian Grebe** made a very brief appearance. It was also nice to watch several flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** fly north calling. We ate lunch in a very scenic car park by the west end of the estuary and managed to pick up trip ticks in the form of a **Greenshank** and **Common Sandpiper**.

We spent rest of the afternoon scanning the sea from Chanonry Point. The breeze had picked up and the sea was now quite choppy, and sadly the hoped for Bottlenose Dolphins didn't play ball today. A number of seabirds were flying past quite close though, and highlights included a drake **Scaup**, **Red-throated Diver**, three pairs of **Long-tailed Ducks** (including a very smart summer plumage male), **Kittiwakes** and several **Gannets**. There were lots of **Guillemots** and **Razorbills** on the water too, and the good light made for unusually good views from land. Time was soon pressing on though, and we had to leave to make it back to the hotel in time for a short break before dinner.

THURSDAY 9TH APRIL – *cool and overcast with spells of heavy rain. 13C*

For our final day's birding of the tour we decided to spend the day birding locally and try and see a few final target species which we'd missed earlier in the trip and improve on our views of a couple too. We began with a look at an **Osprey** nest. We arrived to find what was presumably the female sitting on the nest, and after just a minute or two the male arrived carrying a fish. The views were spectacular through the scopes with nest being so close. We also heard our first **Blackcap** and **Willow Warbler** of the trip, and at least 20 **Sand Martins** headed over calling. It was a really nice way to start the day.



Ospreys

Unfortunately, the rain soon arrived and made finding birds much more tricky. We did call in at a nearby lochan and had a nice view of another stunning summer plumage **Slavonian Grebe**, before heading onto Nethy Bridge. The feeders were rather quiet here with no sign of any Crested Tits, and we didn't have any luck with Dippers either. We had lunch near Dorback scanning over some woods and moorland. Several **Curlews** were flying about and their calls sounded great in the calm, if cloudy, weather. A couple of **Buzzards** were the only raptors seen.

We spent the rest of the afternoon birding the woods around Loch Garten and Loch Mallachie. Just as we parked up, a female **Crossbill** landed in a dead tree right above where we stood giving excellent views. The taxonomy of crossbills is getting increasingly complicated but we felt it looked most like a **Common Crossbill**. We later saw a male perched too and several flew over calling as we wandered through the forest. We heard several **Crested Tits** too but they stubbornly refused to show for longer than a few seconds! The feeders around the visitor centre were busy with common woodland birds, and it was great to be able to watch **Siskins**, **Chaffinches**, **Coal Tits** and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** at such short range. While the weather had made our final day a bit of challenge, we headed back to the hotel reflecting on the many great birds we'd seen over the previous week, and all with a backdrop of spectacular Scottish landscapes.

Oriole Birding Tour - Spring in Speyside - 3rd to 10th April 2026

Species order, names and taxonomy follows - Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2018. The eBird/Clements checklist of birds of the world: v2018. Downloaded from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>

#	Common Name	Scientific name		3	4	5	6	7	8	9		Comments
1	Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)											
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
3	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>					X	X	X	X		
4	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>										
5	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>					X					
6	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		X	X							
7	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>					X					
8	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		X	X				X			
9	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>										
10	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>										
11	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>										
12	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>					X		X			
13	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
14	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>										
15	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				X		X	X	X		
16	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>										
17	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>								X		
18	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>							X			
19	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		X	X				X			
20	Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>			X							
21	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>			X							
22	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>			X							
23	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>				X	X	X	X	X		
24	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>						X				

48	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			X					X			
49	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>											
50	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			X								
51	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>											
52	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>											
53	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>											
54	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>											
55	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>											
56	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>											
#	Common Name	Scientific name		3	4	5	6	7	8	9			Comments
57	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>						H		H			
58	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>							X				
59	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>											
60	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>											
61	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>							X				
62	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			X	X	X	X	X				
	<i>Alcidae (Auks)</i>												
63	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			X				X				
64	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		X	X				X				
65	Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>											
	<i>Laridae (Gulls and Terns)</i>												
66	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		X	X				X				
67	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
68	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
69	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		X	X	X		X	X	X			
70	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		X	X		X						
71	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		X	X				X				
	<i>Gaviidae (Divers)</i>												
72	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		X	X		X		X				
73	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>				X	X		X				

140	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>									X		
141	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
142	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>											
143	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		X	X		X						
144	Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>					H	X					
145	Parrot Crossbill	<i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>											
146	Scottish Crossbill	<i>Loxia scotica</i>											
147	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>				H		X		X			
148	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
149	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
	Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)												
150	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>					X						
151	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>											
152	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		X					X				
153	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						X	X				
	Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)												
154	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
155	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>							X				
#	Additional Species												
156	White-billed Diver			X									
157	Stejneger's Scoter				X								
158	White-winged Scoter				X								
159	King Eider								X				
160	Sandwich Tern								X				
161													
#	Other wildlife												
1	Brown Hare			X				X	X				
2	Rabbit			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
3	Roe Deer				X	X		X					
4	Mountain Hare							X					

