



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to Blackstoun Farm and Newshot Island

7th February 2026 (1000-1530)

Weather: 4-6 degrees, light rain at times and a moderate breeze.

Leader: Allan Russell

Participants: 24

We all met at the Moss Road in Linwood on a damp, grey and chilly morning for the first part of the February SOC outing. The rhubarb fields at Blackstoun Farm were our destination, one of the best sites in the Clyde area for wintering passerines as they are usually attractive to large flocks of Skylarks, finches and thrushes. This was the first SOC outing for at least one of the attendees, while most of the group had never visited this site before. We set off along the Moss Road then turned off onto the turf fields at neighbouring Middelton Farm. From here we got our first birds of the outing, including **Starling, Robin, Blackbird, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow** and a single **Pheasant**. A **Reed Bunting** flying over was only seen by those at the back of the group, which turned out to be the only one noted on the day.

Once we had got past the turf fields, we arrived at the rhubarb fields at Blackstoun. A scan around revealed two **Buzzards** along the edge of the nearby wood and some distant flocks of small birds further out into the fields. Once we got closer it became clear that the flocks were mostly **Chaffinches**, with constant small groups arriving in from the nearby woodland. A couple of group members picked up a **Brambling** landing among the flock while the whole group got good views of a large flock of 120+ **Stock Doves** wheeling around the fields. The doves would give repeated great views over the visit: surely one of our most overlooked birds!



Group photo at the rhubarb fields © Allan Russell

The group moved further out to follow the finch flock, and we started to pick up plenty of **Skylarks** feeding in the fields. Once a hunting **Kestrel** showed up (the first of 3 different ones we saw here) most of the flock took flight, revealing many **Skylarks** that were hidden. Once the flocks settled down, we managed to pick out a few **Linnets**, plus one **Brambling** which was only seen by a couple of group members. We also saw flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** over nearby fields towards the dual carriageway and a flock of **Greylag Geese** flew over. A few group members headed off back, so the rest of the group headed back towards the woods as the **Chaffinch** flock had headed towards there. We got good views of the flock sitting in the trees and most of the group got scope views of a female **Brambling** among the flock. In total there were at least 500 **Chaffinches** on site plus a couple of dozen **Linnets** dotted about among them. A look back across the fields revealed the whole **Skylark** flock up, a rough guesstimate of 300+ of them.

As the group continued to check through the finch flock I decided to scan across the fields again and picked up one of our main target birds today: a **Merlin**! Looking dark coloured so probably a female, everyone in the group was able to get onto it as it flew over the fields carrying off an unlucky victim.

From there we decided to finish our visit. As we headed back to the cars on Moss Road the group added a few more birds to the day list, including a flyover **Grey Heron**, a small flock of **Redwing** and a few other birds such as **Dunnock**, **Wren** and **Blue Tit**. Once back at the cars most of the group said their thanks and headed home, while 5 group members and I headed to Newshot Island for the second part of the outing.

We assembled at the riverside carpark at Erskine and wandered down to the Clyde walkway to view the river. A large ship carrying blades for wind turbines was heading upriver towards Glasgow, flushing almost every bird from Newshot Island. As we walked along the path to get closer to view the site, we all had good views of a pair of **Stonechats** in the abandoned field at Park Quay.



Group at Newshot Island © Allan Russell



*Ship with its cargo of wind turbine blades.
© Patrick Hannigan*

At Newshot Island we waited for a short time for the birds to settle back down. There were over 200 **Wigeon** but despite searching we couldn't pick out the **American Wigeon** that is wintering on-site. We were joined by John Sweeney, who picked up the **Long-tailed Duck** that has been present for a few weeks, allowing everyone to get views of it through the telescope. Other birds seen included three female **Scaup**, a pair of **Goosanders**, an excellent flock of 250+ **Lapwing**, small numbers of **Goldeneye**, **Teal**, **Mallards**, **Cormorants**, **Curlews**, **Redshanks** and **Oystercatchers**, one **Little Grebe** and an assortment of gulls which included a **Great Black-backed Gull**. We also saw singles of **Raven** and **Pied Wagtail** flying over, plus heard a **Water Rail** squealing from the reeds nearby. On the nature trail we had lovely view of five **Bullfinches** and a pair of **Long-tailed Tits** among the common songbirds. At about 15:30 we returned to the riverside carpark and finished a very successful outing. We ended the day on 53 species seen and heard.

Thank you to everyone who attended on the day! It was great to see the birds at the rhubarb fields preform so well and in such good numbers.

Allan Russell

Bird List for the day: 53

Pheasant	Oystercatcher	Long-tailed Tit
Mute Swan	Black-headed Gull	Wren
Pink-footed Goose	Common Gull	Starling
Greylag Goose	Herring Gull	Blackbird
Wigeon	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Mistle Thrush
Mallard	Great Black-backed Gull	Redwing
Teal	Cormorant	Stonechat
Scaup	Grey Heron	Robin
Goldeneye	Buzzard	Dunnock
Long-tailed Duck	Kestrel	Pied Wagtail
Goosander	Merlin	Chaffinch
Woodpigeon	Magpie	Brambling
Stock Dove	Jackdaw	Bullfinch
Feral Pigeon	Rook	Linnet
Water Rail (heard only)	Carrion Crow	Reed Bunting
Little Grebe	Raven	
Lapwing	Blue Tit	
Curlew	Great Tit	
Redshank	Skylark	