Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to WWT Caerlaverock

1st February 2025 (1000-1700)

Leader: Donald Wilson

Participants: 10

Weather: 3.5 to 6 degrees, clear, bright, skies with sunshine and a gentle breeze.

No of bird species recorded: 70 (see list below)

The last time I was at Caerlaverock was while leading a SOC outing back in 2023. We had a good visit then, and I was confident today would not disappoint - and what a day it was!

Our group of ten, plus myself, arrived at the WWT reserve car park for opening time at ten o'clock. Once we were all sorted - boots on, optics ready for action - we headed to the main visitor centre, paid our dues, and then moved to the seated area.

Teal © Ania Owsianka

We were met by the reserve warden and seasonal assistant, who gave us an overview of the whole site, detailing their biodiversity management efforts and recent changes to the reserve, which were impressive, to say the least. This included ongoing conservation efforts to maintain and increase the fragile Natterjack Toad population, which last year totalled fifty adults and 200 tadpoles! Additionally, as an organisation, they are working on making the entire site more diverse by creating different wetland habitats and new scrapes.

As with any of our outings, the bird count started as soon as we set off. On the way down, the group in my car spotted a **Common Buzzard** and a **Mistle Thrush**, while one of two other cars picked up a **Red Kite** and a **Kestrel -** great additions to the trip list.

Tree Sparrow © Ania Owsianka

At the Caerlaverock car park, it's always worth stopping for a quick scan, and soon, the local resident birds were being briskly added to BirdTrack. These included **Collared Dove, House Sparrow, Jackdaw** and **Starling**, but the star bird was the constant chirping and comings and goings of numerous **Tree Sparrows -** a bird I never tire of seeing and watching.

We then headed up to the Farm Tower. With eleven of us, it was a bit cramped, so after a quick scan and a shout-out of some of the common wildfowl such as **Teal, Wigeon, Mallard** and **Moorhen**, some people moved out to explore other parts of the reserve. I remained, along with a couple of others, as I felt I hadn't given the views and the birds proper scrutiny.

Looking behind me at a field holding a large flock of **Barnacle Geese** (the area holds around six thousand who breed in Svalbard and come here for the winter), I scanned through them and picked up a **Dark-bellied Brent Goose**! At the time, I didn't realise how scarce it was, and only after bumping into the warden - who ran to see the bird - did I learn that last year, they had only one record of a Brent Goose, and this was the first record for this winter! A great start!

From early on, I wasn't really leading the group, which was fine, as we all ran into each other enough to share news and keep everyone in the loop.

Water Rail © Ania Owsianka

We were told that in the marshy area around the Tree Sparrow bird box colony, if we were lucky, we might encounter a Water Rai**l**. While I was enjoying the Brent Goose, others were treated to crippling, point-blank views of a **Water Rail**!

Hen Harrier © Ania Owsianka

We were also given a heads-up that high tide was around two o'clock, so we decided to have lunch and meet at the Saltmarsh Hide at around one o'clock. Other than that, we generally did our own thing.

Another easy-to-see bird at the reserve is the **Yellowhammer**, and this was made even easier thanks to the staff putting seed down at one of the path junctions. At least eight birds came down to feed, including several cracking

males, which everyone got to see. Walking around the reserve, it was a real treat to see large flocks of **Golden Plover** wheeling above our heads, their plumage catching the sun.

Barnacle Geese © Ania Owsianka

At around one o'clock, we all gathered inside the Saltmarsh Hide, most of us having something to eat and drink while watching from the large windows overlooking the saltmarsh.

At first, it seemed a little quiet, but soon, various species were being called out, including a superb close flyby of a male **Hen Harrier**, with everyone getting onto this magical bird! Soon after, David called out a probable **Merlin**. It flew and then settled on a log, where it sat for about twenty minutes. Although distant, we all had satisfactory scope views—another cracking addition to the day!

As the tide rolled in, more and more birds were added to the day list, including **Dunlin, Knot, Grey Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Shelduck**, a fly-past **Red-throated Diver**, and various species of gulls.

A scope is a must from this hide. The viewing from downstairs wasn't great through the windows, and the birds were mainly distant. In my view, the upstairs level was better.

We headed back for a coffee and a debrief, and it would be safe to say we all had a cracking day's birding!

Golden Plover (& Lapwing) © Ania Owsianka

We amassed a total of 67 species for the reserve and 70 for the day, with everyone seeing most of the birds, especially the key ones!

It was great fun!

Donald Wilson, February 2025

No of bird species recorded: 70

1. Pheasant
2. Greylag Goose
3. Brent Goose (Dark-bellied)
4. Canada Goose
5. Barnacle Goose
6. Pink-footed Goose
7. Mute Swan
8. Whooper Swan
9. Shelduck
10. Shoveler
11. Gadwall
12. Wigeon
13. Mallard
14. Pintail
15. Teal
16. Tufted Duck
17. Goosander
18. Red Breasted Merganser
19. Feral Pigeon
20. Woodpigeon
21. Collared Dove
22. Water Rail
23. Moorhen
24. Little Grebe
25. Oystercatcher
26. Grey Plover
27. Golden Plover
28. Lapwing
29. Curlew
30. Black-tailed Godwit
31. Redshank
32. Knot
33. Turnstone
34. Dunlin
35. Snipe
36. Black-headed Gull
37. Common Gull
38. Herring Gull
39. Great Black-backed Gull
40. Red-throated Diver
41. Little Egret
42. Grey Heron
43. Buzzard
44. Kestrel
45. Sparrowhawk
46. Merlin
47. Hen Harrier
48. Peregrine
49. Red Kite
50. Magpie
51. Jackdaw
52. Rook
53. Carrion Crow
54. Blue Tit
55. Great Tit
56. Skylark
57. Wren
58. Nuthatch (heard)
59. Starling
60. Blackbird
61. Mistle Thrush
62. Robin
63. Tree Sparrow
64. House Sparrow
65. Dunnock
66. Chaffinch
67. Bullfinch
68. Greenfinch
69. Goldfinch
70. Yellowhammer