



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to Cashel Native Forest Centre

29th April 2023 (1000-1400)

Leader: Ian Fulton

The oakwoods of East Loch Lomond have a long history and represent some of the largest remnants of semi-natural woodlands in the country. There are about 24 hectares of such remnant oakwood at Cashel. In the 18th century, the woods were systematically managed and converted to oak coppice with the smaller timber used for bark for leather tanning and charcoal, and the larger timber for more general domestic use.

In the latter half of the 19th century this industry collapsed and at Cashel, sheep farming became the predominant land use and remained so until Cashel Farm was purchased by the Royal Scottish Forestry Society in 1996 with a grant from the Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust. The Society set up the separate Cashel Forest Trust, a registered charity, to help deliver the native woodland restoration project.



The entrance to Cashel (Joe Timmins)

From a birding point of view, the oakwoods at Cashel support the same spring migrant woodland species as the nearby Sallochy & Ross Woods although probably in smaller numbers. With the current parking difficulties at Sallochy, Cashel offers a convenient alternative.

The weather was not ideal for woodland birding with a cool, brisk breeze and a little rain which fortunately eased off as the day went on.

The group numbering 34 participants assembled in the car park. For nine people this was their first SOC outing, and they were particularly welcome. It had been planned that the Cashel Ranger would meet us to give some information about the site and the management plans. Unfortunately, she was unable to join us.

After a welcome by Zul we set off. The plan was to spend the morning walking and birding two of the well-marked paths which would give the best chance of finding our target species. Almost before we left the car park we heard then saw a **Mistle Thrush** which perched high up on a tree and could be seen well. A pair of **Pied Wagtails** scurried about on the roof of the farm building and a **Duncock** sang strongly from a flowering bush.

The first path called the Alder Path was a very short loop up the side of the Cashel Burn. This gave a good introduction to some of the commoner species. A **Chiffchaff** sang strongly from the cover of a tree but was quite tricky to actually see. **Blackcaps** could be heard singing in the trees by the burn, a **Nuthatch** called and sang from close by and we saw the first of the many, many **Willow Warblers** that we would encounter. A surprise sighting was that of a **Sparrowhawk** which cruised past high overhead pursued by corvids. The path looped back down the main track which can be an excellent place to see Adders which are a feature of Cashel. Unfortunately, the cool, rainy conditions were unlikely to draw any adders out.

The second path called the Oak Path was a much longer loop up the hillside to the north of the Cashel Burn. This leads through Ardyle Wood, the largest area of oakwood at Cashel. The path initially runs uphill beside the burn before looping back round through some more recently planted woodland. A **Song Thrush** was singing what seemed like a familiar call which turned out to be a mimic of a Nuthatch call. Several **Blackcaps** were singing, again being tricky to see. The path led up hill along the edge of the steep rocky slope above the Cashel Burn. We found a large and active **Badger** sett with several entrances and lots of recently disturbed earth. A **Red Squirrel** delighted us with its presence.



Nuthatch (Robert Wall)

A **Wood Warbler**, one of our target species, suddenly sang from quite close by but drifted off without being seen. Then a **Redstart**, another of our target species, could be heard but from quite far away. Its call was to accompany us through the wood, but it was always distant. At this time of the year, male **Redstarts** will often sing from the highest twig of the tallest tree to advertise their presence.

Having reached the highest point, the path gradually descended through an area of ancient oaks. To our surprise, a **Wood Warbler** was heard singing quite close to the path but in an area of birch wood, not its usually preferred oak wood. After a little perseverance everyone in the group got a reasonable view of the bird.

Moving on, we soon heard the distinctive song of a **Tree Pipit**, again a target species. An open area around a power line tree break gave a good viewpoint to observe the Tree Pipit's characteristic 'parachute' display flight whilst singing its whooping song. All too soon we were back at the car park where the group had lunch in the Cashel visitor centre.



Blackcap (Ian Fulton)



Watching a Tree Pipit (Joe Timmins)

After lunch, some of the group headed off home. Others were keen to explore Salloch Wood so a few cars were organised to drop them off at the camp site entrance and they made their own way back to Cashel. They saw some lochside birds including **Goosander**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Grey Wagtail** and **Common Sandpiper**. The remainder of the group walked another of the Cashel paths, the Aspen path which gives a 4km loop up the hillside above Cashel farm. This is a very pleasant walk with fine views over Loch Lomond, but not particularly birdy. We gave up counting **Willow Warblers**, they were just everywhere. A **Reed Bunting** was a late addition to the day's bird list.

This is a composite bird list from several people's personal records.

No of bird species recorded: 42

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|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Canada Goose | Great Tit | Blackbird |
| Greylag Goose | Sand Martin | Robin |
| Mallard | Swallow | Redstart |
| Goosander | Long-tailed Tit | Dunnock |
| Red-breasted Merganser | Wood Warbler | Pied Wagtail |
| Woodpigeon | Willow Warbler | Grey Wagtail |
| Oystercatcher | Chiffchaff | Meadow Pipit |
| Common Sandpiper | Blackcap | Tree Pipit |
| Sparrowhawk | Goldcrest | Chaffinch |
| Buzzard | Wren | Greenfinch |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | Nuthatch | Bullfinch |
| Carrion Crow | Treecreeper | Goldfinch |
| Coal Tit | Song Thrush | Siskin |
| Blue Tit | Mistle Thrush | Reed Bunting |