Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to Cramond Island

13th September 2026 (0915-1400)

Weather: Clear and warm with light SW winds. Temperature 17c

Leader: Donald Wilson **Participants**: 10

September and October are prime sea-watching months and a visit to the coast in the right conditions can be rewarding in terms of scarcer sea birds such as gulls, skuas and shearwaters.

Back in 2024 I ran an outing to Cramond but unfortunately the conditions weren't what was needed for sea-watching and it was a bit of a damp squib on that front; this is just a result of having to do the necessary forward planning for an organised outing - but you can't order the weather and so you need to work with what your given on the day.

As we set off, I felt again that the weather might let us down – bright and sunny, with light SW winds - but we pushed on. The 0915 start for the outing at Cramond was arranged to avoid being stranded by the tide, and ever mindful of these warnings, I encouraged the team to "crack on" to get to the viewpoint on the island as soon as we could.

Group photos showing the crossing to Cramond Island both © Donald Wilson

Cramond island has a fascinating World Wars history, and the 1km causeway to the island is flanked by concrete pillars which were strung together as a barrier to shipping during WW2. On this beautiful morning the island looked green and welcoming framed by a holiday atmosphere blue sea.

We saw **Greenshank**, **Redshank** and **Great Black-backed Gulls** on the way across the causeway and when we got to the east (far) side of the island and I was pleased to see two of the experienced Lothian based sea-watchers already set up. They'd been there at least an hour before us and told us they had already seen several Great Skua (Bonxie), Arctic Skua and a probable Long Tailed Skua which is the second rarest of the Skua species to be seen in UK waters (South Polar being the rarest).

So at least there were Skuas about.

View out to the Firth of Forth, from Cramond Island © Donald Wilson

Greenshank © *Donald Wilson*

Record shot of Arctic Skua © Donald Wilson

Our view out to sea was of a lighthouse, a small island (Cow and Calves) a bigger fortified island (Inchmickery) and a cruise ship. Further right towards the mouth of the Forth we could see Inchkeith. We set up the 'scopes, and people used these landmarks to share what they found, or to call each

other over to see individual birds as they were found in their scopes. It wasn't long before someone shouted out "Arctic Skua". Over the next couple of hours we had as many as 22 **Arctic Skua** sightings with everyone connecting and being able to ID the bird. Unfortunately, we didn't get any of the other rarer species. The numbers of Skua sightings probably meant we saw some of the same birds going up the Forth and then back down. Some were flying overhead on migration, but we definitely had double figures. The birds we saw around the Forth were continually harassing **Sandwich Terns** for their quarry which was brilliant to watch. Quite a few were distant and so scopes were needed but we did have a few that were closer.

Other birds we saw including were some sizeable flocks of **Kittiwakes**, **Red-throated Diver**, **Cormorant**, **Shag**, **Fulmar** and all the commoner **gull species**.

At around 12.30 it was time to go so we could safely navigate back over the causeway before the tide came in and cover it.

On the other side we set up camp to watch the tide come in which, in turn, pushed a wide variety of waders towards us and was great fun to watch and pick out the various waders including **Knot, Dunlin, Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ringed Plover, Redshank, Turnstone** and eventually eight **Black-tailed Godwit** and an amazing eighteen **Greenshank**!

We also had a paler coloured **Lesser Black-backed Gull** which had us watching it for a while incase it was actually a Yellow-legged Gull but we decided it didn't have enough of the critical features for us.

Lesser Black-backed Gull © Donald Wilson

We also watched as people less conscious than us of the tides and time attempted to cross – wading in well over their knees. Remarkably 13 people failed to even get started and were stranded and to our surprise the RNLI collected them.

By now the tide was fully in and it was time to go. I suggested we drop into Frankfield to see if we could pick out the not so obvious **Garganey** which we managed to do. Luckily there were some of the larger **Mallard** in the same field of view for size comparison. This made for a great end to another enjoyable Clyde SOC outing.

Garganey © Donald Wilson

Report by: Donald Wilson & Dee Gaffney

Species seen: 46

Mute Swan
Wigeon
Mallard
Teal
Eider
Goosander
Red-breasted Merganser
Stock Dove
Woodpigeon
Great Crested Grebe
Oystercatcher
Lapwing
Ringed Plover
Curlew
Bar-tailed Godwit
Black-tailed Godwit
Turnstone
Knot
Dunlin
Redshank
Greenshank
Common Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Sandwich Tern
Arctic Skua
Red-throated Diver
Fulmar
Gannet
Shag
Cormorant
Grey Heron
Magpie
Jackdaw
Carrion Crow
Raven
Blue Tit
Sand Martin
Swallow
Wren
Blackbird
Meadow Pipit
Chaffinch
Linnet
Goldfinch

Plus the following at Frankfield Loch

Shoveler
Garganey
Wigeon
Mallard
Cormorant
Grey Heron
Jay
Chiffchaff

Turnstone © Donald Wilson