



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to Culter Glen

17th June 2023 (1030-1530)

Leader: **Scott Black**

Birding Clyde in June can be tough! All the migrants have arrived and in some cases have been on territory for months with breeding well under way if not complete, and in fact many species having fledged young. So to this extent I personally felt that Culter Glen was going to be a tough ask to see some quality birds, especially with it being mid-June, many birds having stopped singing and a relatively late start time. How wrong was I!

I have known Scott for a number of years and it would be fair to say I badgered Scott into leading a walk in his beloved South Lanarkshire and so I promised him I would tag along to support. Within this huge county there are some real gems and Culter Glen is one of them. Not only for some of the specialist birds that can be found there, but also for the lovely, general easy walk on a tarmac road up the glen leading to Culter dam. Generally late April into mid May is the optimum time to bird this glen, but here we were.



The group at Culter Glen (Photo © Zul Bhatia)

The night before I was at a 21st birthday party. I think I must have convinced myself it was my 21st and as a result I was a bit worse for wear this morning, and so I, along with Fiona my non birding wife were the last to arrive! By the time we arrived Zul was in mid flow, and coming to the end of his usual pre outing chat and introductions, and so my timing was perfect! (Only kidding Zul!). So off we went.

Scott along with some other local birders such as Derek Smith, birdwatch at Culter Glen and other areas in the county quite hard and regularly. With their shared knowledge, we as a group had some real detailed explanation of what could potentially be seen and where, even down to the individual tree!!!! The beauty of dedicated patch birding!

As usual, Scott, Zul, I and others started taking notes or putting records straight into the BirdTrack app as they appeared by sight and call. We started racking up the commoner species such as **Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Wren, Jackdaw, Goldfinch** and then a **Stock Dove** flew past. We walked only about fifty metres and down a private drive which Scott had discussed with the agreeable owners to view an area of mature deciduous woodland. Scott said this was a good spot for **Spotted Flycatcher**. True to his word, within a few minutes a **Spotted Flycatcher** appeared, flicking about from branch to branch with the whole group getting nice views.



Juvenile Crossbill (photo © Rick Bolton)

We then walked past a thin belt of conifers and in the explanation by Scott of what can be seen, Crossbill was on the radar. We were walking at a very slow pace as it can bear fruit and we didn't want to miss anything. A small flock of eight **Crossbill** flew over with their unmistakable call and landed high up on the conifers. We spent a good twenty minutes or so scanning and scrutinising the tops of the tall pine trees. We eventually got views of an adult male, female and a streaky juvenile through the telescope. The group was delighted, as for some this was a lifer, meaning the first time they had ever clapped eyes on one. Behind us, someone spotted two Crossbills perched in a tall mature beech tree. We all turned around and had again, cracking views of an adult pair. We also had **Song Thrush** here.

Then there was the unmistakable call of a **Common Sandpiper** which was playing hard to get but then flew right in front of us and banked around back towards the river, giving a brilliant flight view.

We continued on and were clocking up the usual suspects like **Meadow Pipit, Oystercatcher** (on breeding territory), and then a little further up the road Scott picked up the call of a male **Whinchat**, and what an absolute stunner of a bird! The scope set up again and for many of the group this was their first view of Whinchat, and if not certainly their best view, there were plenty of "Oooo"s and "Ahhh"s"! For me now, anything else was a bonus but I suspected there was more to come having been up the valley before but with birding you never take anything for granted!

Our next nice find was a juvenile **Dipper**. It was feeding in the river as they do, bobbing up and down with again all the group getting onto it as it behaved itself. We were meandering up the road when we spotted a stunning male **Wheatear** and soon afterwards we got superb views of several very confiding juvenile birds.



Male Whinchat (Photo © Donald Wilson)



Juvenile Wheatear (Photo © Donald Wilson)

I was slightly ahead of the group and when I turned around I could see the group scrutinising the hillside to our right. Scott again had heard a male **Ring Ouzel** but as it was distant and we couldn't initially get on it. Then Sarah said she could see it. With some great direction from her, I got onto it and then we all managed onto this real upland specialist, again with scoped views. Another lifer for some! Culter Glen is undoubtedly the best place in Clyde to see this locally scarce species but can't always be guaranteed, so I for one was elated.



Male Ring Ouzel (Photo © Donald Wilson)

We continued on and then Gary Brown pointed ahead and said to me, "What's that in the field?" I put my bins up and couldn't believe we had a male **Ring Ouzel** feeding not too far away in a small field and grass embankment, wow! We were nearing the dam and we added **Common Gull**, **House Martin** and then the unmistakable call of **Lesser Redpoll**, with a couple of birds whizzing about above our heads and then darting into the nearby pines where one perched in view briefly.

Time for a rest and more importantly, lunch.

Fiona and I had another pre-arranged engagement and so after a quick bite and drink we bid our farewells. It had been a superb birding walk. On the way down I added a different singing **Ring Ouzel**, **Greenfinch**, **Kestrel** and **Grey Wagtail**. I informed Scott by text of my sightings so they could look out for these trip additions.

Later on Scott messaged me to say that they had another two singing **Ring Ouzel**, a **Buzzard**, the **Grey Wagtail**, and to cap it off, an amazing sight of a **Raven**, being mobbed by two **Merlins** (presumably a pair)! I know for sure this last sighting would have made Scott's day as he had previously told me he had put in many, many hours of walking the South Lanarkshire hills as part of his commitment to then South West Raptor Monitoring Team and had not come across any Merlin. Merlin is definitely on the decline in Clyde and other areas of the lowlands, and so recording this pair was a superb find!

So in short we were all blown away by the quality and quantity of birds to be seen and I certainly ate some humble pie!! More importantly SOC members had a superb day out in an area most had never been to, learned loads, saw new birds and it was an absolute team effort! For five people, it was their first outing with Clyde SOC, bringing the total number of people who have joined our outings after we resumed them after Covid to 142 people. Three of the 53 species we recorded were new to the outings list (Ring Ouzel, Spotted Flycatcher and Crossbill). The total number of species now recorded on our outings is 154.

Thanks to all those who came along to make it such a fantastic experience and thanks to Zul for his enthusiasm and Scott for such a Wonderful insight to the superb Culter Glen!

Donald Wilson, June 2023

No of bird species recorded: 53

Mallard
Goosander
Pheasant
Grey Heron
Buzzard
Oystercatcher
Lapwing
Curlew
Common Sandpiper
Snipe
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Feral Pigeon
Stock Dove
Woodpigeon
Kestrel
Merlin
Magpie

Jackdaw
Carrion Crow
Raven
Goldcrest
Blue Tit
Coal Tit
Sand Martin
Swallow
House Martin
Willow Warbler
Blackcap
Nuthatch
Wren
Starling
Dipper
Ring Ouzel
Blackbird
Song Thrush

Mistle Thrush
Spotted Flycatcher
Robin
Whinchat
Stonechat
Wheatear
Dunnock
Grey Wagtail
Pied Wagtail (yarrellii)
Meadow Pipit
Chaffinch
Greenfinch
Lesser Redpoll
Common Crossbill
Goldfinch
Siskin
Reed Bunting