



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to Dumfries and Galloway

25th and 26th March 2023

Participants: 12 **No. of bird species recorded:** 73

Weather: 6 degrees to 9 degrees, mainly overcast with some bright spells, little wind but intermittent heavy rain Saturday afternoon

Saturday 25th March

As usual I was up with the lark on the Saturday morning at 6am and looking forward to the weekend ahead. After sorting my packed lunch for both days and loading my kit into the car, I set off from Glasgow for Dumfries at 08.00 and arrived at Caerlaverock at 09.30.

After everyone had gathered, brief introductions were made, monies paid for those non-members of the Wetland & Wildfowl Trust (WWT), and a chat with reception staff to know the ins and outs of the site etc, we got cracking into our birding at 10.20.

First, we climbed the observation tower just behind the reception area. That gives a panoramic view of the top part of the reserve. We were soon observing a good selection of waterfowl including **Moorhen, Shoveler, Teal, Wigeon, Mallard**, etc, which were all in their breeding finery, as well as a few winter plumaged **Redshank**. The views over the fields produced plenty of **Barnacle Geese**, one of our main target species. We did manage to see large numbers in flight at times during the day, the sight and sounds making this an amazing ornithological spectacle.



Barnacle Goose © Rebecca Dickson

We then headed back into the car park area to watch the feeders, and soon we were seeing an array of garden species including **Chaffinch, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Blackbird, Starling** and one of the other speciality species of this site, **Tree Sparrow**. Then a **Chiffchaff** decided to belt out its distinctive call "*Chiff Chaff, Chiff Chaff*".



River Nith and Criffel from the Nith Hotel © David Palmar



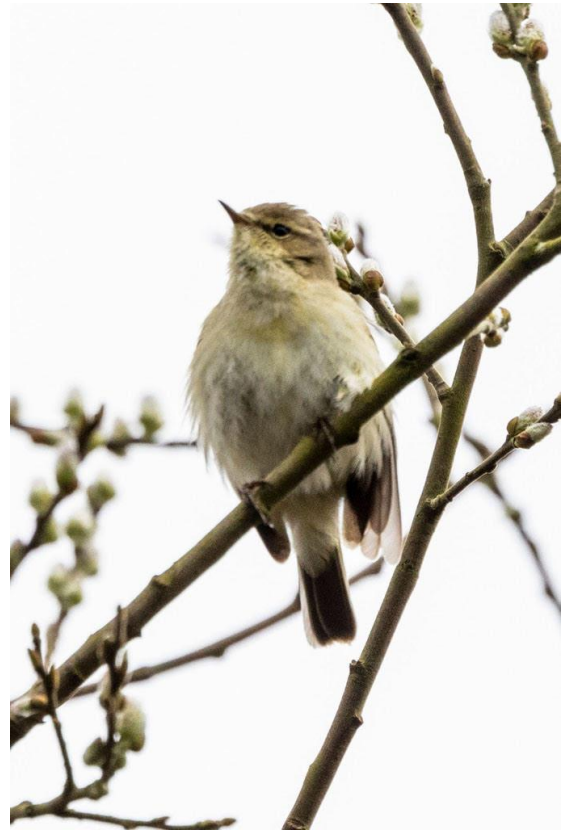
The group at Caerlaverock © David Palmar

We then headed down the main avenue when one of the group spotted a male **Yellowhammer**, another speciality for the site of this not so common bird any more. The **Chiffchaff** decided to follow us and eventually we got good views of this active small warbler, and pleased to see our first spring migrant.

We entered the Sir Peter Scott Hide, (Peter Scott being the world-famous ornithologist and bird artist, amongst many other accolades and founder of the WWT). This hide is usually excellent for close views of a good selection of wildfowl and Whooper Swans, but alas they had stopped putting feed out, and so it was a bit a damp squib as they say, but we added **Tufted Duck** to the bird species list.

Onward down the main avenue, which has small hides spaced down it on both sides, and always worth a check. Not much on show but then as a couple of us were looking from one of these small hides hundreds of geese and wildfowl took to the air. When this happens, it is usually a sign of a raptor in the area and for those of the group present, I said "scan for a bird of prey". We were hoping for one of the rarer raptors such as Hen Harrier, Peregrine or even Merlin which can all be seen at this reserve, especially in winter. Then the culprit flew into view and headed straight for us, a **Sparrowhawk**.

The next small hide down I scanned with my binoculars and picked out some distant **Pintail**. I communicated this to those that were nearby and explained we would most likely get better views from the Avenue Tower hide. Caerlaverock and this general area of Dumfries & Galloway is typically very good for **Pintail**, one of my favourite ducks.



Chiffchaff © David Palmar

We headed into the Tower Hide where we did get better views of **Pintail** and again good views of a selection of waterfowl, **Curlew**, which were worth scrutinising as the odd overwintering Whimbrel has been known, but unfortunately one didn't materialise, and some **Roe Deer**.



Whooper Swans © David Palmar

We then retraced our steps and headed back to the main building, but then decided to have a quick look at the Sir Peter Scott trail as we were told there may be a chance of a Water Rail feeding on spilled seed from the hanging feeders. Alas no show. However, the group enjoyed watching, again, a good selection of common garden and woodland birds and admiring the dapper **Tree Sparrows** visiting, and hanging about the nest box colony put up for them. Tree Sparrows are colonial nesters and as such like to gather and nest as a community.

It was time for lunch and the reserve staff allowed us to eat our packed lunch in the gallery in the main centre which was good of them and so we all refuelled and got warmed up.

Our first main site visit (Caerlaverock WWT) produced 50 species of bird – a decent start to our weekend.

The basis of my plans was to mainly use the free SOC App 'Where to Watch Birds in Scotland' and the next nearest place that was suitable for birding at this time of the year was Newbie which was a 20 minute or so drive east.

We tried to time our visit to Newbie for high tide which we did but it was just too high! Very few birds! It then started to rain and it came down hard! Being the leader, I felt duty bound to check out the 3 spots highlighted in the SOC app as worth a look, so off I trundled, though Dee and Ron endured the rain with me and I was glad of the moral support, while the others kept dry in their cars. The three brave hearts walked along a few hundred metres and I lifted my bins to clock some **Ringed Plover**, **Oystercatcher** and **Redshank**. It was a bit of a letdown! However, in birding you just never know and things can change very quickly.



Shoveler © Rebecca Dickson



Reed Bunting © Rebecca Dickson

Whilst we were away on our non-event adventure, Zul got speaking to a local, as he does, and was informed that if we waited a bit when the tide recedes, more birds would appear. So, to that extent myself, Zul, Dee and Ron (I think), stuck it out. The rain eased off, the tide went down and birds miraculously appeared with 100+ **Oystercatcher**, a good number of **Redshank**, **Cormorant**, **Wigeon**, **Teal** and **Curlew**. Ok, not a mega list of birds but I'm sure this site at the right time of day and year could produce a good selection of waders and maybe the odd scarcity?

On the way back I noticed as did Dee and Zul a couple of fields loaded with over 200 **Whooper Swan**, which for me was the most Whoopers I've seen together, and it was some sight! Then beyond the Whoopers hundreds of **Pinkfeet** rose into the air. A scan of the surrounding fields and fence lines produced a couple of **Mistle Thrush**, 17 **Lapwing** on breeding territory, a male **Stonechat** and a **Brown Hare**.



The group at the Nith Hotel © Donald Wilson

I got back to the hotel car park for 17.10 and as dinner was at 18.30 I decide to check out the river Nith which the Nith Hotel, our accommodation for the night looked onto. Dee joined me as she was in her camper van. Just before Dee joined me, I spotted a couple of **Rock Pipits** flitting around the harbour wall. Lots of fly over gulls were seen including **Common**, **Black-headed**, **Herring** and a couple of **Greater Black-backed**. The river had a few **Wigeon** mainly at the river edges and at least 30 **Teal**.

The Nith Hotel I would say on behalf of the group was very good value for money both in terms of accommodation and our dinner. The staff were excellent with the hotel being run for many decades by the same family.

Sunday 26th March

A couple of miles down the road from the hotel there is the main car park for Caerlaverock NNR (National Nature Reserve), so off we headed. After parking up, we headed along the main path that runs parallel to the salt marsh. Along the walk we picked up trip species such as **Coal Tit**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, heard **Nuthatch** and had views of other common woodland species. After about half a mile or so you come across a fairly new hide. Unfortunately, the tide was fully out as expected and so the scanning of the salt marsh only produced some of the common waders already seen and distant **Shelduck**, and distant singing **Skylark**. Again, here it is always worth checking the fence posts and fence lines for raptors and Stonechats etc but no joy.

We headed back as we had other sites to visit and wanted to cover as many as possible.

Carsethorn was the next place to visit. As soon as we arrived and got out of our cars the first birds on show were over 20 **Scaup**, a very nice bird to observe at reasonably close range. We were hoping to bump into Sand Martin, as just along the beach here there is a breeding colony but there were none about. We added **Red-breasted Merganser** to the trip list but nothing else as the other birds on show we had seen at other spots.

Next on the stop list was Southernness Point, a popular holiday static home resort that looks out over the Solway.



Scaup © David Palmar

Alas by the time we got there, as it was a weekend, the weekender holiday makers were out in force including dog walkers and so we didn't hold out much hope. From the Southernness lighthouse the rocky beach areas were populated with a quite a few people as mentioned and so the only real hope was to scan the Solway for waterfowl, divers & grebes.

After Scanning for a few minutes with the scope I picked out a couple of distant **Red-throated Diver** and not much else, but those of the group that persevered managed to get on them, whilst the rest of the group had headed off to Mersehead RSPB reserve.

Time was pressing on but at Mersehead we had enough time to have our lunch and listen to an impromptu talk from one of the RSPB reserve staff who provided a very informative chat on the work undertaken to improve, expand and increase some of the breeding species on the reserve such as Lapwing. During the talk the room we were in had a large viewing window looking onto a feeding station and it was lovely to watch the flitting about and ground feeding of at least 8 **Yellowhammer**, including some stunning males, **Reed Bunting**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Chaffinch**, **Dunnock** and some of the tit species.

I always try to run my trips in an informal manner and not really into kidnapping people! As a result, the group split up as people wanted to do their own thing including a bit of photography.

Mersehead is worth taking time over as there is plenty to see with hides, mixed habitat including pools, woodland and beach, as well as the feeding station. A few of us headed down the main road towards the beach area and during our walk we had very close views of **Barnacle Geese**. There were fields and pools on either side of the walk, with some of the pools having hides. Along the way we saw again a variety of wildfowl. We headed towards the beach through sparse woodland. At the beach, again the tide was still way out, and all we could see were some distant **Shelduck**, **Curlew** and **Oystercatcher**. On the return to the car park, I noticed a distant bird of prey, lifted my bins and was pleased to note a circling **Red Kite**.

Beforehand I had offered the group to go to Ken Dee Marshes RSPB Reserve to try for Willow Tit, probably our rarest breeding resident bird with Ken Dee being one of the few strongholds, with a steady resident population. Ron and Dee expressed a keenness to have a go, so off we set leaving the others to finish their trip at Mersehead.

At Ken Dee it's a good thirty-minute walk from the car park to the second hide where RSPB have a feeder set up. Unfortunately, due to issues with the landowner, and apparent deterioration of the main hides, both are now closed. At the second hide you can still view the feeder from a safe distance without disturbing the birds. On the way **Treecreeper**, **Jay** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Siskin** and other common woodland species were noted.

However, after at least 45 minutes and with time against us, all we managed to muster apart from the very active **Blue, Great and Coat Tits** and an obliging **Nuthatch** hanging upside down. No Willow Tit which is the first time I have failed to see one at this site and it was a real struggle to call it a day as I knew they were about, but that's birding!

All in all, it was a great weekend and all those who attended I'm sure enjoyed not only birding but learning from each other, the social side and of course the banter!

Here's to the next extended/overnight excursion!

Happy spring birding,

Donald. Wilson, 4th April 2023

No of bird species recorded: 73

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|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Mute Swan | Moorhen | Skylark |
| Whooper Swan | Little Grebe | Long-tailed Tit |
| Pink-footed Goose | Ringed Plover | Chiffchaff |
| Greylag Goose | Oystercatcher | Nuthatch |
| Canada Goose | Lapwing | Wren |
| Barnacle Goose | Curlew | Starling |
| Shelduck | Dunlin | Blackbird |
| Wigeon | Redshank | Song Thrush |
| Gadwall | Snipe | Mistle Thrush |
| Teal | Black-headed Gull | Robin |
| Mallard | Common Gull | Stonechat |
| Pintail | Great Black-backed Gull | Duncock |
| Shoveler | Herring Gull | House Sparrow |
| Tufted Duck | Lesser Black-backed Gull | Tree Sparrow |
| Scaup | Feral Pigeon | Pied Wagtail (yarrellii) |
| Goldeneye | Woodpigeon | Meadow Pipit |
| Red-breasted Merganser | Collared Dove | Rock Pipit |
| Pheasant | Great Spotted Woodpecker | Chaffinch |
| Red Throated Diver | Jay | Bullfinch |
| Cormorant | Jackdaw | Greenfinch |
| Little Egret | Rook | Goldfinch |
| Grey Heron | Carrion Crow | Yellowhammer |
| Red Kite | Blue Tit | Reed Bunting |
| Sparrowhawk | Great Tit | |
| Buzzard | Coal Tit | |

Other sp:

- Roe Deer
- Brown Hare



Sunset © Donald Wilson



Rook © Rebecca Dickson