



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Patch Gold! The Frankfield Lesser Yellowlegs 4th June 2022



Lesser Yellowlegs at Frankfield Loch, Andrew Russell

During April 2014, after six months of observing various sites reasonably close to my home in Tannochside, Uddingston, I decided to adopt the local area around Gartloch as my patch for recording birds. This is no more than a 10-minute drive from my house. The recording area is two square kilometres, not one, which I originally intended (never was very good at maths!), but it worked out well, as the centre of the recording area is what I call Gartloch Main Pool, otherwise known to the local anglers as the “puddle”.

The reason it worked out well was that my “patch” includes three of the lochs within the Seven Lochs Wetland Park namely, Gartloch, Bishop Loch and Frankfield Loch. The area is wild with some Seven Lochs paths, old disused hospital paths and deer tracks. It has proven to be a superb place to observe, photograph, record, insects, mammals, flowers and of course birds.

It took me at least seven months to find my way around and during this time I never gave Frankfield Loch too much attention as I felt it was well covered, at my peril! I then learned Frankfield Loch had a good pedigree for attracting the odd “special” bird and by around 2017 I started to incorporate a visit more regularly on my rounds. It paid off!

From 2017 till now, Frankfield has added considerably to the annual and total “patch” species count, with birds such as Redshank, Greenshank, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Sandwich Tern, Garganey (autumn birds found over three separate years), Little Gull (found by Chris McInerny), Mediterranean Gull (Found by Keith Hoey and Chris McInerny, separate birds on differing years), Little Egret, Osprey, Cuckoo (this June), Wood Sandpiper, Iceland Gull, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Black-tailed Godwit, a fly over Gannet (again recorded by Keith

Hoey and Chris McInerney) and of course the spectacular event last year of the four Pectoral Sandpipers kicked off by Gary Brown. And all less than 5 miles as the crow flies from George Square in the middle of Glasgow and with Frankfield itself being a very urban site!

But nothing prepared me for the events of 4th June 2022. The previous night (Fri 3rd) I had friends visiting from down south and was up longer than I usually am, and as such I was late getting up. My intention was to start my patch rounds at Frankfield, as on the Friday morning I had noticed that some exposed mud was starting to appear and there was a small party of Lapwings on one of the mud flats -these being the first of the "bird" autumn. That triggered in my mind that from this point onwards I would definitely make Frankfield my first port of call and if possible, to visit every day. I work a constant backshift at the moment and so I am able to get out and bird every morning whilst giving Bruno, my short haired Collie, and my trusty birding companion his daily walk.

June can be interesting, and interesting birds can turn up, for example the Blue-winged Teal from 2019. It's also a time that non breeding waders can start to appear and the drake Mallards numbers start to build up, eclipsing into their winter plumage. As mentioned, I was later than usual arriving at Frankfield, about 10.20am, and I was also being a bit lazy, as when I arrived, I just slung my binoculars around my neck and left my scope in the car. I am mainly a bins birder but for most of the lochs I cover a scope is recommended, but I quite often chance it!

Anyway, out I got and walked the 40m or so (good for the lazy birder!) to the start of the spot where you can start to view the loch. I had been counting the Mallards over the past week or so, as the numbers were increasing day on day, and this was my first objective when I first lifted my bins. I was working right to left, and in the foreground, and then started working the middle of the Loch when I noticed a wader.

"Ya beauty" I said to myself, and on my first instant glimpse I though Redshank. I then looked at it a bit more thoroughly and I was still thinking "It's probably still a Redshank", but its overall shape and jizz was puzzling me, and I noticed how slim, elegant and elongated it looked, "Nah, it's still a Redshank"! To put things in perspective at this point I would have been delighted with a Redshank as due to the very high spring water levels, the wader species had been very poor so far to this point during my patch 2022 year, and I was getting kind of desperate for any kind of wader!

As I was mid count of the Mallards, I said to myself, "right finish counting the Mallards and then try and sort out this wader"! The next thought was, "What are you thinking you idiot"! So, I hurried back to the car and got my scope, and then back to the small bay area in the centre of the loch as this would give me the best vantage point to see the "mystery" wader properly, poor wee Bruno, he didn't know if we were coming or going! The scope was hastily set up and then I got the wader in view with it being about 80 to 100 metres away?

So, my birding philosophy which has kept me reasonably on the straight and narrow is always default to the common bird. This time with the scope I could see a pair of bright yellow legs, they jumped out at me! Right, so embarrassingly to say, I was still convincing myself this is a Redshank but a juvenile! Right time of year and juvenile Redshanks do have kind of yellowish legs, right? I looked again. Those legs were mega yellow. So, what other wader has yellow legs???? "Mmmm I thought, no but it can't be, surely" So, my brain at this point was starting to kick in! (Always a bit slow!) A Yellowlegs species was now firmly on the radar and I knew Lesser was the commoner of the two in the UK and Scotland. I have seen at least three in the UK and in the US and two of its larger cousin, the Greater Yellowlegs in the UK and again in the States.

I then went to my next piece of self-advice when trying to clinch an ID of a bird (not always possible), and that is: To find at least three pieces of clear evidence of what you are looking at, is the bird you think it is? For example, bill shape and length, what are the undertail coverts like, leg length and colour, mantle colour, primary projection, jizz etc, etc. So again, I was scoping the bird

and trying to take in as much detail as I could but only after I rattled off a few dodgy record shots with my bridge camera, just in case! By this time Redshank was dropping way off my radar, thankfully, and Lesser Yellowlegs was now at the forefront of my mind.

We had very bright yellow legs, the legs were definitely longer in proportion to the body than that of any common bird I could think of, and the knee joint reminded me of “stilt like”. The overall body was very slim, elongated and the bird appeared dainty in appearance, “Wow I’m looking at a Lesser Yellowlegs surely!” I then clicked on the Collins guide on my phone just to make absolute sure and to see what other features I could pull out. Lack of streaking down the flank, check, a cleaner white underside, check, and the clincher for me with the book pointing out a fine all dark bill, check!

As always, I try to put news out as soon as possible but there was still the nagging doubt of “what if I’m wrong and make a fool of myself!” I get things wrong, even common birds, it’s a part of life and birding for me and I don’t consider myself an expert by any manner of means!

So, it’s handy to know a few local birders who are very, very good with bird ID and so I quickly sent a WhatsApp back of the camera picture to John Sweeney. Then a quick call, “John”, “Yeah”, “It’s Donald, I think I’ve got a Lesser Yellowlegs at Frankfield”, John, “Ok, I’ll have a look”, Of course I forgot in my excitement that John on his own admission is not a Lark by any stretch of the imagination, and I think he was still in his Jim Jams and most likely in his scratcher? John, “Mmmmm yip looks good to me, put it out”. I put the news out at 10.34 on the Clyde SOC grapevine.

Unfortunately, the bird was only a one-day bird but it was last seen (I think) by Fiona McLean at 21.40 and hopefully quite a few of the Clyde birders managed down to view and enjoy it? I’m not sure how many people got to see it but I hope as many as possible did manage to connect as it was only later in the day when Val Wilson, assistant recorder sent me a message to congratulate me on finding a first for Clyde! I was delighted with that news and the Lesser Yellowlegs has become my best local find to date.

Here’s to the next one although this will be hard to beat!

Donald Wilson



Lesser Yellowlegs at Frankfield Loch, Andrew Davies