Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to Kinneil Lagoon and Bothkennar Pools, Skinflats

Sunday 23rd March 2025 (1030-1440)

Participants: 16

Weather: Overcast with light northerly wind

No of bird species recorded: 54 (see list below)

Leaders: Billy Thomson and Scott Wotherspoon.

The massive Grangemouth oil refinery and chemicals complex might not appear to be an attractive place for a day out, but it is in fact a great place for birds. There are extensive tidal mudflats at the mouth of the river Avon, where it joins the Forth, and the area around the refinery has been left undeveloped. Billy told us that, if there are low clouds, the light from the gas flares of Grangemouth bounces off the clouds and lights up the mudflats sufficiently for the birds to forage at night, which is obviously a huge advantage.

We met at Kinneil Kerse Sewage works and soon everyone had found a spot on the high bank from which to scan the mudflats to identify the many waders, gulls and ducks. It was a real treat to see flocks of **Black-tailed Godwits**, many already in their beautiful russet-headed summer plumage, with smaller numbers of **Bar-tailed Godwits** among them, mostly still in winter plumage. There were **Knot** and a few **Dunlin** hiding among the Godwits, and, of course, **Redshank**. The star attraction was a single **Spotted Redshank** in winter plumage, which flew away to the other side of the Avon. After a while we found it again, in the company of a couple of **Greenshank,** and everyone managed to see it. The tide was going out, and as more mud became exposed the birds were further and further away, except for the **Teal** that favour the area around the outfall of the sewage works. There were numerous **Shelduck** and **Wigeon**, and a single **Red-breasted Merganser**. There was also a very nice flock of **Scaup** fairly close to us and we had great views. Keen-eyed David spotted a hybrid amongst them which had a dark back and a hint of a crest. You can see these features in the nice photo from Mark. This area of the Forth is a stronghold for Shelduck. They find places to nest in the north bank of the river, and in the autumn thousands gather here to moult, whereas the rest of the UK Shelduck population flies over to the Wadden Sea for the moult.

Scaup (including hybrid, centre) © Mark Hartshorne

Kinneil Lagoon is an interesting feature. Separated from the Forth by an artificial bund, the lagoon fills up with water through sluices when the tide is high, and then slowly drains when the water in the river drops. However, it takes time for the water to get through the sluices, and this delay is such that even when the tide is high, there is still exposed mud in the lagoon, which is advantageous for the birds. There were a few **Oystercatchers** on the lagoon, but most of the waders were on the exposed mudflats.

Greenshank © Mark Hartshorne

We ate our sandwiches beside the sewage works (!) and then drove to the other side of the industrial complex to check out the Bothkennar Pools (often also called Skinflats after the village nearby). The first of these is fresh water, fed by a spring, and the second is brackish. The first pool was busy with **Little Grebes** and quite a few ducks: **Pochard, Shoveler** and **Gadwall**, as well as the ubiquitous **Mallard**. It was interesting to see that Falkirk Council staff had just re-installed several floating Tern rafts. These attract a breeding colony of Common Terns each year, and occasionally a passing Black Tern or a White-winged Black Tern can be seen among them.

There were fewer birds on the second pool – **Mute Swans**, a **Grey Heron** and a couple of **Curlew**, but scanning the neighbouring fields we spotted a vivid male **Yellowhammer** in the distance, with a **Stonechat** beside it. Over the field next to where we had parked our cars, **Skylarks** were singing.

Black-tailed Godwit © Mark Hartshorne

It was an excellent day, thanks to Billy and Scott's intimate knowledge of the area and its birds.

Ania Owsianka

No of bird species recorded: 54

Mute Swan	Coot	Magpie
Pink-footed Goose	Oystercatcher	Jackdaw
Shelduck	Ringed Plover	Carrion Crow
Wigeon	Curlew	Goldcrest
Gadwall	Black-tailed Godwit	Blue Tit
Teal	Bar-tailed Godwit	Great Tit
Mallard	Knot	Skylark
Pintail	Dunlin	Long-tailed Tit
Shoveler	Spotted Redshank	Chiffchaff
Pochard	Greenshank	Wren
Tufted Duck	Redshank	Blackbird
Scaup	Black-headed Gull	Robin
Goldeneye	Common Gull	Stonechat
Red-breasted Merganser	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Dunnock
Pheasant	Herring Gull	Pied Wagtail (yarrellii)
Grey Heron	Great Black-backed Gull	Chaffinch
Little Grebe	Feral Pigeon	Goldfinch
Moorhen	Woodpigeon	Yellowhammer