



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to Lothian coast

11 September 2022 (0730 - 1645)

Leader: **Donald Wilson**



Group shot at Esk Mouth (Donald Wilson)

The decision was made some weeks ago to organise another visit to Lothian during September as although we have some superb birding in Clyde, it's a well known fact that the east coast of Scotland always attracts a wider variety and indeed generally more scarce and rare birds than the west coast. The peak migration times May through to June in the spring and September through to October in the autumn, can be the most productive.

With that in mind, the anticipation of bumping into, or indeed even finding a "good" bird or two was very high due the news networks reporting a good variety of scarce migrants associated with this time of year, exactly in the places we planned to visit (mainly the early morning session), following a spate of easterly winds on the prior Thursday and Friday.

Between White Sands, Barns Ness and Torness which are all a few miles apart, birds such as Barred Warbler, Wryneck, Red Breasted Flycatcher, Icterine and Subalpine Warblers had all been found on the Saturday as well as a good selection of common passerine migrants, so as mentioned the anticipation of seeing some scarcer birds, and generally some good birding was high!

On that note for those who know me, know that in the main I like to bird (a bit of an understatement!) and therefore if travelling to a location such as Lothian I like to make the most of the day. I fully understand that not everyone is as keen (and some are keener), can't perhaps rise as early, especially on a Sunday morning and so I decided to split the day in to two halves with an early session, with a meet at 08.30 at Torness Power Station and an afternoon session, meeting at Goose Green at the River Esk Mouth, Musselburgh at 1300.

I left the house at 05.40 and picked up Davie Abraham in Motherwell at 06.00 as agreed and got to Torness at about 07.20. I forgot to mention that if ever birding in Lothian it's a very good idea to go early to beat the traffic which is more of a problem midweek, and if caught up in rush hour it can be a nightmare! No such problems for us though!

I wanted to get to Torness early in order to have a quick recce of the area in order to get a feel for what was about and upon arrival there was already a Lothian birder on site!

Surprisingly within 15 minutes there were nine of us present and then shortly afterwards two other Clyde birders arrived who were making their way to Lindisfarne or the Holy Isle which wasn't a bad shout as it had some good birds also and a fall of common migrants on the Saturday. There were also a few Lothian birders about, so with so many birders searching, there was some chance of some migrants being found?

We split up with a view to meeting back at the car park for approximately 09.30.



Checking out the sea at Torness (Zul Bhatia)

At Torness there are two public car parks which are lined with various bushes, trees and scrub and it's a case of walking around looking for movement and hopefully getting views. It soon became apparent that there had been a "clear out" as there were few birds about however the collective effort produced a **Lesser Whitethroat, Wheatear, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Blackcap**, but alas no sign of the Wryneck that had been present the day before. Also noted were two resident **Peregrine** that frequent the main Torness building and other common passerines such as **Duncock, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Robin, Skylark** etc.

A quick visit to the shoreline produced **Dunlin, Gannet, Curlew, Pied Wagtail** various gulls but with the tide being fully out it wasn't ideal.

We reconvened at the main car park and the collective decision was to head to Barns Ness after news broke that the Subalpine Warbler had been located again and yes we were now on an actual twitch, brilliant! Although general birding was on the cards too!

At the car park at Barns Ness the finders and subsequent re-finders of the Subalpine Warbler pointed us in the direction of its general whereabouts so again we split up and headed off in that direction where there were a few other local birders. It soon transpired that the bird was extremely elusive which is their nature, and so it was a stake out job for those who wanted to, but most of us decided just to bird the general area which has loads of trees, bushes and cover so you just never know what you might find?

Soon a few common migrants were seen by most including **Spotted Flycatcher, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff**. Several **Hummingbird Hawk Moths** on the **Vipers Bugloss** plants were much appreciated by all.

I then got a call from Zul to say that some of the group had noticed a tree with several migrants including more than one **Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler** and a showy **Redstart**. Keen to see the Redstart, I headed over but alas it had gone into deep cover. Then Jim and I saw a bird pop up on top of a bush but my view was partially obscured. It then alighted on a closer bush but immediately flew towards us and over our heads. Jim shouted "**Icterine Warbler**". I saw the bird in flight and it was a very elongated warbler and I noted the head shape but to be honest it was only after the shout that I twigged, the penny dropped and the ID in my mind fell into place. Unfortunately the bird didn't play ball

and never gave itself up but it was again later reported that day. Some of the group also had some very nice views of a **Lesser Whitethroat** in that same area.

As ever time was tramping on and when you're so engrossed, time just evaporates. So we headed off in order we wouldn't be late for the afternoon session. We didn't really give Barns Ness the time it deserved with loads of areas not checked but the clock was against us. However just along the road there is Whitesands Quarry which is worth a check with a telescope and opposite is the "Triangle Wood", where Pied and Red-breasted Flycatcher had been reported the previous day.

Five of us headed into the small copse and then split. Mike and I walked along the small pond and the others climbed up an incline to view a small valley and woodland. The report back from Scott Black was loads of warblers in the small valley with many phylloscopus warblers, such as **Chiffchaff** and **Willow Warblers** but Tony had a lovely view of a smart **Redstart**. Mike and I had another female type **Redstart** fly over our heads and land right beside our cars. We also saw a **Yellowhammer**, **Tree Sparrow** and a nice family group of **Stonechat**.

All in all whilst there were not as many birds as hoped it was still great fun and had some nice passage migrants and the excitement of what might be found, captivating!

It was about a thirty minute drive to Musselburgh and we made it just on time!

Upon arrival it was great to see more people joining us, making the afternoon group eighteen strong. Again the legendary David Allan, a stalwart of Musselburgh, tore himself away from his beloved scrapes to join us and assist with bird watching the river Esk Mouth and Musselburgh sea wall sections before getting to the scrapes. It was really nice to be joined by Alfie (aged 11) and his dad Alistair who Dave Allan and Zul had met at the hides yesterday and had invited them.



Kittiwake bathing (Janusz Turlewicz)

It was a true team effort with various people pointing birds out such as **Gadwall**, **Wigeon**, **Shoveler** (not a particularly common bird for this site), **Goosander** and **Eider**. Then Irene pointed out a **Little Gull**, with superb views, made even more special with views of **Kittiwake** and **Black-headed Gull** right beside each other, great for picking out the various identifying features. Then another two **Little Gulls** joined the first and so it was even more special.

Then Davie Abraham shouted "**Arctic Skua**". Dave Allan and myself then got onto it and started giving directions. When sea watching and to be honest generally bird watching it's always important to try and give good directions and information of a bird so others can get onto it. In this case "mid distance flying low over the water left to right, now past the red tanker coming up to some wind turbines" etc. , etc. I believe most of the group got onto this dark phased form with its sleek pointed wings and unmistakable skua flight action, such brilliant birds!

There was a lot to see until someone who had no social awareness or consideration for a high tide roost walked right out to where all the birds were with her dog flushing everything and therefore it was time to move on! The dog walkers I know are a constant bug bear and problem in Lothian and with that kind of inconsiderate behaviour it's no wonder why!

We walked along the sea wall, stopped off several times and allowed everyone to see the birds on offer by sharing telescopes with birds such as **Red-throated Diver**, rafts of **Velvet Scoter**, the odd **Razorbill**, **Guillemot** and **Great Crested Grebe** noted. Unfortunately no sign of the 2nd calendar year King Eider that has been in the area for months and was reported today whilst typing this report!

Off to the Musselburgh scrapes we trundled with high hopes of some good wader action.



Curlew Sandpiper, Musselburgh lagoon (Janusz Turlewicz)

We split into two groups and we were not disappointed with fabulous views of **Curlew Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Ruff** and **Mediterranean Gull**. Of course the spectacle of hundreds of other waders is always special to see at this amazing high tide roost and included **Oystercatcher, Curlew, Knot, Black-tailed** and **Bar-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Snipe** and **Lapwing**.

It was now four o'clock(ish) and time to head back with one or two of the party already departed. Back along the sea wall with it being high tide, a peer over the wall produced our first **Turnstone** of the day. A couple of hundred meters further along Davie shouted **Whimbrel** calling. No sign and I couldn't hear it as my hearing is not the greatest. Then Davie a bit further along "there it is again" and this time I could hear it as could others and then, zoom it flew fairly high, circled and then reasonably low calling all the time and even the white crown stripe could be picked out in flight! Another good addition to the day.

Back at the car the six remaining member's were winding up, some (including myself) were having a cup of tea when Davie again (some lad that!) said "can anyone hear a **Kingfisher**?". We all heard it and then Davie said there it is on the wall opposite and safe as houses there it was perched, a quick call, and then zoom, up the Esk it went.

Nine new species were added to the SOC Outings list (Little Ringed Plover, Ruff, Little Stint, Arctic Skua, Little Gull, Skylark, Lesser Whitethroat, Icterine Warbler and Wheatear) taking our list since outings list since we resumed them after Covid to 142 species. What a day!!!!!!

Thanks to all those who attended and I'm fairly sure all who went had a great time whether it was the full or half day.

Donald Wilson

87 species of birds were recorded on the SOC outing to Lothian coast on 11TH September 2022

Mute Swan	Bar-tailed Godwit	Blue Tit
Greylag Goose	Turnstone	Great Tit
Canada Goose	Knot	Coal Tit
Shelduck	Ruff	Skylark
Wigeon	Curlew Sandpiper	Swallow
Gadwall	Little Stint	House Martin
Teal	Dunlin	Chiffchaff
Mallard	Common Sandpiper	Willow Warbler
Shoveler	Redshank	Blackcap
Tufted Duck	Snipe	Garden Warbler
Eider	Arctic Skua	Lesser Whitethroat
Velvet Scoter	Razorbill	Icterine Warbler
Goosander	Guillemot	Wren
Red-throated Diver	Sandwich Tern	Starling
Gannet	Kittiwake	Robin
Cormorant	Black-headed Gull	Pied Flycatcher
Shag	Little Gull	Redstart
Grey Heron	Mediterranean Gull	Stonechat
Little Grebe	Common Gull	Wheatear
Great Crested Grebe	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Dunnock
Sparrowhawk	Herring Gull	House Sparrow
Moorhen	Feral Pigeon	Tree Sparrow
Oystercatcher	Woodpigeon	Pied Wagtail (yarrellii)
Lapwing	Kingfisher	Meadow Pipit
Little Ringed Plover	Kestrel	Chaffinch
Ringed Plover	Peregrine	Greenfinch
Whimbrel	Magpie	Goldfinch
Curlew	Rook	Yellowhammer
Black-tailed Godwit	Carrion Crow	Reed Bunting

Other species recorded

Hummingbird Hawk Moth
Green-veined White butterfly