



**Scottish Ornithologists' Club**  
*Scotland's Bird Club*  
Established 1936

## **Clyde branch outing to North Ayrshire coast**

11<sup>th</sup> February 2023 (1000-1430)

**Leader:** Marco McGinty

It was a very well attended outing with 26 participants. It was particularly good to have a young family with two children (aged 3 and 10). It brought our average age down significantly! The 10-year old was probably the keenest birdwatcher in that family and had previously attended one of our indoor evening meetings (about Visible Migration) with her dad. I was most impressed that she maintained her interest throughout that session lasting over an hour. As usual, there was a very good mix of people on the outing with some beginners as well as some very experienced birdwatchers.



*Checking out Southannan Sands (David Palmar)*

The weather stayed dry throughout and although it was mild at about 9 degrees, there was a cold wind at times, especially towards the end.



*Little Egret (Robert Wall)*

Our first stop was at the small car park at Fairlie Sands from where we recorded 26 species. Four gull species were present (Black-headed, Common, Great Black-backed and Herring) and we spent some time helping those not familiar with them about the id features. Waders were represented by Oystercatcher, Curlew and Redshank. Our highlights were **Guillemot**, **Razorbill**, **Black Guillemot** (good views of a breeding-plumaged bird), **Great Crested Grebe**, **Red-throated Diver** and **Little Egret**. This last species has undergone a rapid increase in numbers in recent years and we also saw it at Southannan and Hunterston Sands. From the wee car park where we were watching from, we also saw **Kestrel** and **Raven** over the nearby hills (the Three Sisters).

We then got back into our cars, sharing where convenient and drove the short distance to Southannan Sands. After squeezing our cars in to the limited parking, we stopped on the path to the bay (Largs Avenue) and checked out the fields alongside. **Redwing** were present in very good numbers (150+) and we also saw all the other thrush species – **Song Thrush**, **Mistle Thrush**, **Fieldfare** (only one) and **Blackbird**. A short walk brought us to the bay where unfortunately, the tide was well out making getting good views of some of the species difficult. Surprisingly, the normal very large flocks of **Wigeon** and **Teal** were absent – something our



*Pink-footed Goose (David Palmar)*

leader Marco had also noted on his last visit to this area a few days ago. **Shelduck** were plentiful though; a fine male **Red-breasted Merganser** was seen well, one **Goldeneye** was seen, gulls were abundant (although we didn't find any unusual species amongst them), and waders were represented by **Oystercatcher**, **Curlew** and one distant **Greenshank**. Unusually, although normally seen in groups, a single **Pink-footed Goose** was seen both on the water and flying over us. A **Buzzard** seen soaring was our second raptor of the day. A **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was heard calling from the adjacent woodland.

Next, we drove to the end of the power station road and had our packed lunches in the car park below Hawking Craig. Just before we got to the car park, there was a **Stonechat** perched close by the road. The hoped-for Peregrine wasn't showing at Hawking Craig (regular there) but we did see the **Raven** flying into its nest (a former Peregrine site).

Our next stop was overlooking Hunterston Power Station and Bay. After a minor hassle with a power station worker who objected to us parking in their staff car park, despite it being pretty empty, we checked out the bay there. The platform off shore held both **Cormorant** and **Shag**, so a useful comparison could be made. Other species noted there included **Eider**, **Turnstone**, **Redshank**, two **Red-throated Diver**, another **Little Egret**, another **Stonechat** and **Rock Pipit**. Both **Canada** and **Greylag Goose** were in the fields next to the power station. About 10 **Teal** on the small roadside pool besides the main road were the only ones we saw all day. We had a second look at Southannan Sands as the tide was much more favourable for seeing birds closer, but we saw nothing new.



Buzzard (Robert Wall)

Unfortunately, the best bird of the day was seen after everyone except Marco, Graham and I had left. Marco suggested going back to Hunterston to have a final look. We didn't see much else, but as we drove back to leave, Marco slowed down and stopped by a bird perched on a low roadside wall. It was a **Merlin** less than 10 metres from us! It stayed long enough for us to wind windows down and savour the experience before it flew off (not flushed by us). It was the best views that Graham, Marco and I have ever had of this lovely falcon.

A total of 55 species were recorded. We did poorly for small birds /passerines compared to our outing to these same areas in January 2022 when we recorded 67 species. All sightings were submitted to BirdTrack.

Our thanks to all that attended the outing. It was particularly good to see ten people on their first SOC outing. We have now had 121 different people attend our outings since we restarted them in October 2021 after Lockdown. Merlin was new to our outings list which now stands at 147 species of birds.

**Zul Bhatia, 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

#### **No of bird species recorded: 55**

Mute Swan	Curlew	Raven
Pink-footed Goose	Turnstone	Blue Tit
Greylag Goose	Greenshank	Great Tit
Canada Goose	Redshank	Coal Tit
Shelduck	Black Guillemot	Starling
Wigeon	Razorbill	Blackbird
Teal	Guillemot	Fieldfare
Mallard	Black-headed Gull	Song Thrush
Eider	Common Gull	Redwing
Goldeneye	Herring Gull	Mistle Thrush
Red-breasted Merganser	Great Black-backed Gull	Robin
Red-throated Diver	Feral Pigeon	Stonechat
Cormorant	Woodpigeon	House Sparrow
Shag	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Pied Wagtail
Little Egret	Kestrel	Rock Pipit
Grey Heron	Merlin	Chaffinch
Great Crested Grebe	Magpie	Greenfinch
Buzzard	Jackdaw	
Oystercatcher	Carrion Crow	