



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde Joint Outing with SOC Central Branch to RSPB Black Devon Wetlands and RSPB Skinflats Sunday 21st April 2024

Weather: Patches of rain with occasional heavy downpours.

Leader: Toby Wilson

A small and select group of 16, made up of 9 from the Clyde Branch and 6 from the Central Branch, braved the inclement weather and met at RSPB Scotland's Black Devon Wetlands reserve, in Alloa, the first stop of the two-site outing. The reserve could reasonably be described as a 'hidden gem', slightly tucked away as it is on the Forth Estuary. Whilst it can host some very nice birds, it tends to be visited more by locals out for a walk or birders living nearby, than those travelling from further afield, so it was great to introduce it to everyone.



© Billy McKellar

Hawthorn bushes and back gardens at the path into the reserve yielded the usual crop of garden birds, including the gentle 'pews' of a **Bullfinch**, which is always nice to hear and even better to see. The path continues past the rather unappealing electricity substation and then next to a recently planted woodland, where a **Song Thrush** was in full rhapsody.

After a bit of a walk, the site opens up and the proper reserve begins. It was here that the warblers – which are one of the specialities of the reserve – started to make themselves heard and **Chiffchaffs** and **Willow Warblers** sang from the woodland edge and scrub. As we came closer to the wetlands themselves, we were all subject to a natural hearing test, with one and then two **Grasshopper Warblers** reeling away from the reeds. There were lots of ‘can you hear it?’ ‘is it singing now?’, followed by vain attempts by all the group to spot this notoriously skulking bird. Where you get Grasshopper Warblers, you often get **Reed Buntings** and sure enough, at least two males put on a good show for the photographers.



Reed Bunting © Billy McKellar

With large skeins of **Pink-footed Geese** flying over-head, we moved to the beautiful viewing screen at the reserve, which looks out over the main freshwater pool. There we were joined rather nicely by a young man who had recently started getting interested in birding and had learned about the reserve through his RSPB membership. Zul did a great job pointing out birds to him and many in the group. The RSPB had recently done work increasing the wetland edge of the pool and this seems to have paid off, with us seeing **Redshank** and **Lapwing**, which looked to be breeding and **Little Egrets** hunting small fish in the shallows. Waterbirds included **Mute Swan**, **Coot**, **Teal** and **Shoveler**.

We followed the boardwalk past the pond dipping platforms, back to the cars and on to the second site of the day, which was RSPB Skinflats, about 20 minutes drive from Black Devon Wetlands and also on the Forth Estuary. RSPB Skinflats isn't a promoted reserve and we tend to only encourage visits by invitation, as the track in to it isn't owned by the RSPB and the site is easily disturbed.

After a restorative lunch, tea and cake in the reserve office, the group heard a little about the managed realignment at the Skinflats, where RSPB deliberately breached the flood embankment to allow the Forth to inundate part of the reserve and transform it from a rough grassland to intertidal habitat. Breeding **Oystercatchers** and **Redshank** were seen on the realignment site, along with the unmistakable sound of singing **Skylark**.



Three Little Egrets © Billy McKellar

We walked along the new flood embankment and out to the estuary 'proper' to look over the mudflats. Being April, most of the waders and wildfowl had left for their breeding grounds in the north but there were still some nice birds about with small groups of **Ringed Plovers**, **Dunlin**, **Oystercatchers** and good numbers of **Shelduck**.



Five Shelduck © Billy McKellar

As the rain grew heavier, we decided to call it a day and retreat to the cars and home but not before Stuart heard and then saw a **Tree Pipit** singing in the trees behind the reserve.

April can be a bit of a betwixt and between time for birding – too early for the full range of summer migrants and too late for the waders and wildfowl, however because we covered two sites, with a variety of habitats, we managed to tick off a very respectable 46 species for the day.

Toby Wilson April 2024

Number of species recorded: 46

Mute Swan	Ringed Plover	Grasshopper Warbler
Pink-footed Goose	Dunlin	Sedge Warbler
Shelduck	Redshank	Wren
Teal	Black-headed Gull	Blackbird
Mallard	Common Gull	Song Thrush
Shoveler	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Robin
Tufted Duck	Herring Gull	Stonechat
Pheasant	Woodpigeon	White / Pied Wagtail
Little Egret	Kestrel	Tree Pipit
Grey Heron	Magpie	Meadow Pipit
Little Grebe	Carrion Crow	Chaffinch
Buzzard	Great Tit	Bullfinch
Moorhen	Skylark	Goldfinch
Coot	Long-tailed Tit	Reed Bunting
Oystercatcher	Chiffchaff	
Lapwing	Willow Warbler	