



Plate 43. Jenny Bhatia with grandson Cozmo feeding the ducks, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 February 2018. © Zul Bhatia

## Birds in Lochwinnoch during Lockdown 2020

### Introduction

During the first part of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, being unable to drive anywhere, I did a lot of bird watching in Renfrewshire, in and around my home village of Lochwinnoch on the banks of Castle Semple Loch and the River Calder. The village is about 20 miles south-west of Glasgow and ten miles from the coast. I was so pleasantly surprised by the number and variety of birds in the village that I decided to try and quantify them. I recruited a few volunteers to assist me. Although we recorded all birds we saw or heard, we concentrated on finding evidence of breeding. A full-scale breeding survey would have required detailed maps of the village (which we didn't have), much more planning, starting earlier in the year, involving more observers, more visits to all areas, etc. Permission would have had to be sought from many householders with larger properties too.

### Methods

We walked every public road in the village at least once between 9–27 May, recording what we saw and, more importantly, what we heard singing. The fine spring weather helped, of course. Visits were mostly in the very early morning. These records were topped up by what we ourselves saw or heard in the village from 1 April to 31 July and, importantly, what other people reported to me. I let people know that the survey was happening mainly via the village Facebook page (Lochwinnoch Community Chat), and regularly asked there for records of particular species. I also contacted people who I knew were interested in birds. The villagers could have reacted adversely to us wandering about the village in the very early morning with a pair of binoculars, but we had no problems. Often people stopped to tell us about what wildlife they had seen, and at least 75 people

shared breeding season records with me. Without their contributions, our understanding of the birdlife of Lochwinnoch would be so much poorer. Unfortunately, not all the records I received could be used here, since some were from outwith the survey area and others were outside the survey period.

### Survey area

The area surveyed is outlined on the map. It was quite difficult to decide exactly where to draw the survey boundaries. Many outlying properties rightly consider themselves to be part of Lochwinnoch and sent me many good bird records. In the end, I decided to confine the main survey to the built-up areas at the heart of the village. It can be seen from the map that some significant green spaces have also been included, notably at the west end. This was to take in some of the immediately outlying houses away from the heart of the village. We didn't linger long at those green spaces, so they were only lightly covered by the survey. Most of the survey area is built up, albeit with a good variety of trees and shrubs. Additional habitats within the survey area include some woodland, scrub, grassland (rough and improved), fringing marsh, swamp and fen (adjacent to the Sempole Trail), open water (at Castle Sempole Loch) and the mainly fast-flowing River Calder. Only the edges of these additional habitats (where they abutted public roads and paths) were surveyed, and

then only from those roads and paths. As this was a survey of Lochwinnoch village, areas of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and the RSPB Lochwinnoch Reserve were excluded.



Plate 44. Lochwinnoch Village from Golf Course, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 26 August 2007. © Zul Bhatia



Plate 45. Lochwinnoch Village from Crawfurds View, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 27 May 2007. © Zul Bhatia



Figure 1. Map of Lochwinnoch showing the survey area.



Plate 46. Chaffinch, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 25 March 2007. © Zul Bhatia

### Results

Well over 2,000 records were contributed by over 75 observers for the period April to July. My own records constitute about 80% of the records. All bird records received (whether within our defined survey area or not) were submitted to the SOC database of birds recorded in the Clyde area. There is probably a significant bias in the records collected towards the central part of the village where several of the most active observers live. Another very obvious source of bias is not receiving information from people who didn't see my requests for information on Facebook. As we didn't access private properties, many birds will

have been missed, especially from large gardens, back gardens, properties bordering onto wild areas, etc. Due to time constraints, no special effort was put in to try and prove breeding for secretive species, such as Buzzard and Sparrowhawk which almost certainly bred in the survey area. With this limited survey, little information on breeding success or productivity was possible. Even with incomplete data, however, much useful information has been gained and the following table summarises what we found. These figures should be seen as minimum numbers of pairs/territories for most species. Fifty-one species were confirmed breeding in the survey area with two others probably breeding. Thirty-two other non-breeding species were also recorded in the survey area during the same period. On walks out of the village when driving was banned, a further 17 species were added to the 'Lockdown list' making a total of 102 species: a very respectable number for an inland site.

A full systematic list with species accounts has been produced with a summary given here. The most numerous breeding species in the survey area were Rook (68 pairs), Blackbird (50), Starling (40), House Sparrow (40) and Chaffinch (28). The table below lists all species recorded breeding in 2020. Notable amongst those was the small heronry, seven



Plate 47. Male Blackcap, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 May 2017. © Zul Bhatia



species of warbler with Blackcap the most numerous (25 territories), Tawny Owl, Swift, Nuthatch, and more Bullfinch territories than I would have expected. The Nuthatches are particularly interesting as they were only first noted breeding in Lochwinnoch in 2015. Apart from the four Nuthatch territories estimated in the survey area, there were also reports of birds in eight other places within a mile of the village. The stretch of the River Calder through the village provided breeding records of Goosander, Dipper and Grey Wagtail. A pair of Barn Owls nested just inside the survey area and fledged five young. This was a very good brood size and probably related to it apparently being a very good 'vole year'.



Plate 48. Barn Owl, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 30 June 2020.  
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Plate 49. Nuthatch, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 May 2017.  
© Zul Bhatia



Plate 50. Swallow chicks about to fledge, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 7 June 2020. © Zul Bhatia



Plate 51. Dipper, River Calder, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 20 April 2008. © Zul Bhatia



Plate 52. Grey Wagtail, River Calder, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 25 May 2008. © Zul Bhatia

**Table 1.** Summary of breeding birds of Lochwinnoch village, April–July 2020.

Species	Pairs	Species	Pairs	Species	Pairs
Grey Heron	5	Pied Wagtail	2	Blue Tit	24
Greylag Goose	2	Wren	25	Great Tit	18
Mallard	3	Duncock	18	Nuthatch	4
Goosander	2	Robin	16	Treecreeper	1
Moorhen	1	Blackbird	50	Magpie	7
Stock Dove	1	Song Thrush	23	Jackdaw	25
Woodpigeon	20	Mistle Thrush	4	Rook	68
Collared Dove	25	Grasshopper Warbler	1	Carriion Crow	8
Feral Pigeon	1–5	Sedge Warbler	7	Starling	40
Barn Owl	1	Whitethroat	3	House Sparrow	40
Tawny Owl	4	Garden Warbler	1	Chaffinch	28
Swift	6	Blackcap	25	Greenfinch	5
Great Spotted Woodpecker	8	Chiffchaff	12	Goldfinch	12
Swallow	2	Willow Warbler	17	Siskin	2
House Martin	3	Goldcrest	8	Lesser Redpoll	1
Dipper	2	Long-tailed Tit	3	Bullfinch	10
Grey Wagtail	3	Coal Tit	10	Reed Bunting	2

Notable amongst the non-breeding birds recorded in the survey area were Shelduck, Osprey, Peregrine, Black-tailed Godwit, Cuckoo (normally rare in the village proper, although numerous in the surrounding hills) and Kingfisher. The following six species were not seen but were recorded flying over the village at night: Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Whimbrel, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Arctic Tern.



**Plate 53.** Sarah Gordon carrying out a bird survey, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 May 2011. © Zul Bhatia

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