Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to St Abbs Head

7th June 2026 (1000-1530)

Weather: Dry. Overcast and blustery day initially, warming to 17 degrees, with some sunshine in the afternoon.

Leader: Kevin McCormick **Participants**: 8

After an early start, and having left heavy rain behind in Glasgow, everyone seemed happy when it was dry on arrival at the National Trust for Scotland car park at St. Abbs.

As we all gathered, made use of the toilet facilities, paid for parking and got our walking boots on, we noted the species in the car park including **Robin, Swallow, House Martin,** a **Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldfinch** and **Woodpigeon.** There was also a **Humming-bird Hawkmoth** on the red Valerian in the carpark. One of our group had seen a **Red-legged Partridge** not far from the carpark so our list for the day was off to a good start.

Group photo at the lighthouse, St Abbs Head (© Kevin McCormick)

We set out, past the café, and on to the main track and quickly reached the first view of the cliffs. We set up the telescopes, and on the guano-stained rock faces we could make out **Fulmar, Guillemots** and **Razorbills,** all on nests. Overhead we saw a **Swift** and as we started the climb up the path for a better view of the cliffs, we saw **Reed Bunting, Whitethroat** and **Linnet.** We also heard the unmistakable 'little bit of bread and no cheese' call of a **Yellowhammer** but it remained hidden.

As we got closer to the cliffs, we got better views of the auks and watched the **Fulmars** making the most of the windy day to stretch their wings. There were a couple of **Shag** nests with good-sized young and most of the group got good telescope views of the juveniles that had not yet fledged. We could hear **Skylark** nearby, and then we watched a pipit with its parachute flight and call. When it landed on one of the yellow-lichen covered rock stacks, we could see this was a darker, more grey bird, so we agreed it was a **Rock Pipit**, whereas in the grassy fields nearby there were also **Meadow Pipits** which were much more warmly coloured.

Some of the group watched a **Buzzard** as we made the steep descent down to a cove, where we saw the first **Gannet** of the day. We carried on our walk towards the lighthouse, with good numbers of **Rook** and **Jackdaw** in the fields and soon reached the best site for Northern Brown Argus butterflies. Sadly it was too cool and blustery today, so we didn't see any of these rare butterflies which are on the wing from early June. A consolation was a single **Brown Hare** in the nearby field.

We battled against the strong winds as we climbed the steepest section of the path to the Head, soon arriving at the lighthouse. There, we found a sheltered spot out of the wind and settled down for lunch. As we enjoyed our sandwiches, we were treated to a spectacular view: **Kittiwakes** called from their cliffside nests, **Gannets** soared and wheeled effortlessly over the sea, while hundreds of Auks commuted back and forth between the cliffs while others took a break on the water below. The constant chatter of cliff-nesting **House Martins** provided a wonderful soundtrack to the scene. With a few breaks in the cloud starting to appear, we saw the sun and several **Painted Lady** butterflies added a splash of colour to our lunchtime stop.

Razorbills © Ania Owsianka

The busiest of the cliffs are just beyond the lighthouse and, refreshed from our lunch, we took in some more distant views. Knowing we could get closer we walked back into the wind and moved round to a grassy area overlooking these cliffs which were teeming with life. We set up the scopes again (holding on to them so the wind didn't blow them over!) and got great views of a couple of

rocky stacks where **Gannets** have been colonising the tops. The local NNR Rangers kindly took a break from their seabird counts to come and say hello and explained that the Gannets have been displacing **Guillemots** on these stacks. It had started with one pair in 2016, but at the last count in 2025 had now exceeded 130 pairs of these elegant large white seabirds with their pale-lemon wash on their heads. This is an over-flow from the Bass Rock colony, which is not too far away, and shows how successful these birds have been.

Turning to the cliff face nearest to us we had wonderful views of **Razorbills** at close range and more **Kittiwakes, Shags** and **Guillemots**.

Kittiwakes © Ania Owsianka

We could have spent longer here but we still wanted to see what we could find at the renowned Mire Loch. Earlier in the spring (and again in the autumn) this area often holds rare migrants that have overshot or been blown off course. The Rangers had mentioned that earlier in the year they'd had Melodious Warbler and Cetti's Warbler there, but those species had now moved on.

Gannets and Guillemots © Ania Owsianka

We found the access road and started walking down towards the Loch and a cove called Pettico Wick where we admired the extraordinary rock formations on show.

The main attraction at the Loch today were a couple of **Reed Warblers** which, after a few false starts, called nicely for us and everyone heard them (these birds tend to skulk in the reeds, so we weren't too surprised not to see them).

We did have further good views of **Reed Bunting**, and a male **Stonechat**. We could hear both **Chiffchaff** and **Willow Warbler** in the trees beside the Loch, and in a scrubby area we also heard a **Sedge Warbler**. On the loch we heard **Little Grebe** and we could also see **Coot**, a **Mute Swan** and some **Tufted Ducks**.

We kept an eye out for Spotted Flycatcher in the woods as they had been seen there regularly in the last few days, but we didn't manage to see one. However, with the sun out now we did see a few more butterflies with a couple of **Red Admirals** and a **Speckled Wood.**

View from Pettico Wick © Kevin McCormick

We rejoined the main path and retraced our steps back, up and over the headland, before descending back down to the café area for a well-deserved cuppa and some sweet treats for all our hard work. We checked over the bird list, adding a few that we'd seen but not recorded on foot, before the group dispersed to the cars for the journey back to Glasgow. Great company, and the sights, sounds and smells of these Borders seabird colonies, had made for another excellent Clyde SOC outing!

Kevin McCormick

View towards St Abbs © Kevin McCormick

Species seen - 45

Red-legged Partridge
Mute Swan
Tufted Duck
Swift
Feral Pigeon
Woodpigeon
Coot
Little Grebe (heard)
Kittiwake
Great Black-backed Gull
Herring Gull
Common Guillemot
Razorbill
Fulmar
Gannet
Shag
Buzzard
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Blue Tit
Skylark
Swallow
House Martin
Willow Warbler
Chiffchaff (heard)
Sedge Warbler (heard)
Reed Warbler (heard)
Blackcap (heard)
Whitethroat
Wren (heard)
Starling
Blackbird
Robin
Stonechat
House Sparrow
Pied Wagtail
Meadow Pipit
Rock Pipit
Chaffinch
Linnet
Goldfinch
Yellowhammer (heard)
Reed Bunting