



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

## **Clyde branch outing to St Abbs and Lothian Coast**

28 August 2022 (1000-1850)

Leader: **Donald Wilson**



By the Lighthouse at St Abbs (Zul Bhatia)

Nine of us met at the National Trust (NT) St Abbs car park at 10.00 am and were soon on our way. We walked from the NT visitor centre along the quiet single track road heading towards the St Abbs light house. Along the way and from the car park itself we started clocking the species such as **Collared Dove, Rook, Carrion Crow, Robin, Starling, Swallow, House Martin, Pied Wagtail etc.**

As we were walking, to our right along one of the fence lines, and what looked like hawthorn bushes, a flock of **Tree Sparrows** were spotted with up to eight birds showing at any one time but more likely at least 30 birds present. We were reliably informed by Neil Hammatt who lives locally that the winter flock can number two hundred or more!



We soldiered on to the light house via the top road past Mire Loch which is a well known site for passerine migrants and can produce some extreme rarities such as back in the 1990's the UK's second Marmora's Warbler. Other "rares" over the years have included, Western Bonelli's, Subalpine, Sardinian, Yellow browed and Pallas's Warblers, Woodchat, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrike, Collared Flycatcher and Red-flanked Bluetail, to name a few! In fact whilst writing this a Paddyfield Warbler was found today! However no such luck for us as there was virtually no migrants present until we picked up a **Chiffchaff** by call. Along the top road a couple of **Yellowhammers** were a welcome sight!



Mire Loch, St Abbs (Donald Wilson)

The plan was to do some seawatching from the lighthouse as this part of the borders can produce good views of passage sea birds due to the protruding position in the North Sea. After some scanning we picked up a couple of very distant **Puffins**, **Razorbill**, closer **Guillemot**, fly by **Gannet**, **Kittiwake**, **Fulmar** and a single **Red-throated Diver**. It was evident that unfortunately the sea passage wasn't going to yield anything out of the ordinary such as a skua or shearwater so it was decided to press on.

The lighthouse walled garden is always worth a check as you never know! Again disappointingly after a good walk around the overgrown area not a bird was to be seen but a couple of **Small Copper** and a **Wall Brown** butterfly was nice to see and most of the group had good views.



We next headed to the Mire Loch dam wall where I had been informed a Migrant Hawker and Southern Hawker dragonflies had been present lately but alas no sign. We however heard a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, saw some **Chaffinches**, **Blue** and **Great Tits**, **Dunnock** and a **Kestrel** all adding to the day's species total.

The last spot to check again on advice from Neil was Millers Marsh pond. This produced a few more trip birds including 4 **Snipe** (flushed), **Tufted duck**, **Teal**, **Mute Swan**, **Wigeon** and what we were told was a good record for the borders of two **Shoveler**. On the walk back to the visitor centre we heard the unmistakable call of **Whimbrel** and sure enough we viewed four birds flying overhead, a nice surprise and addition to the day's bird list.

St Abbs Head, National Trust for Scotland (Donald Wilson)

We got back to the visitor centre, had a seat and some lunch with the first leg of the trip concluded.

The plan then was to proceed up the coast stopping off at one or two places along the way in order to find some more additions to the day's bird total including autumn Lothian specialties at this time of year such as Arctic Skua, Mediterranean Gull and passage waders.



To that extent the decision was made to drop into Aberlady Bay LNR reserve. However some of the group decided to pop into Waterston House the SOC headquarters, and so those remaining party members decided just to bird the area around the wooden bridge at Aberlady and then everyone to reconvene at the Musselburgh scrapes.

At the Aberlady wooden bridge we viewed **Little Egret** ( x3), **Redshank**, **Lapwing**, **Dunlin**, **Greylag** with numbers reaching the hundreds, good numbers of **Pied Wagtail**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Curlew**, and **Teal**.

If time had allowed it would have been good to have walked to the Aberlady Bay sand bar which can be superb for terns, skuas and waders on an incoming tide and recently has had Long-tailed and Arctic Skuas, a rare White-rumped Sandpiper and Little Stint.

Fiona McLean and I headed on to Seaton Sands burn. This again is a good place to view gulls, especially Mediterranean Gull, terns and other sea birds. Alas we didn't find a Mediterranean Gull but we did add **Eider**, **Common Gull** and **Goosander**. Some of the others following us also stopped here and were rewarded with excellent views of at least a dozen **Bottle-nosed Dolphins** (one of the other observers there [not part of our group] estimated 20-30!).

We headed off up the coast to Musselburgh and timed it approximately an hour before high tide. This is the best time to maximise the feeding and roosting waders and gulls on the three scrapes. Of course the Musselburgh stalwart Dave Allan was, as always, present and his knowledge, experience and keen eye means you don't ever miss anything when he is around. Dave is so obliging and helpful and really enjoys helping birders to see all the birds species present.

Today was a good day with August and September being prime months for good numbers of waders, especially scarcer species. We were soon looking at a smart **Curlew Sandpiper**. Next at last we had excellent views of an adult **Mediterranean Gull** and on then last scrape there was a juvenile bird going into first winter plumage and it was good to compare the differing plumages. Other species seen on the scrapes were **Dunlin**, **Shelduck** (all juveniles), **Oystercatcher** (hundreds), **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Canada Goose**, **Knot**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Grey Heron** and **Ringed Plover**.



Mediterranean Gul, Musselburgh (Donald Wilson)

Most of the group had to make tracks home at this point but Fiona McLean and I decided to look for the juvenile **Yellow Wagtail** that Dave Allan said was frequenting the cut field behind the scrapes. We soon found the flock of **Pied Wagtails** with at least thirty birds, and after a bit of scrutiny we found the **Yellow Wagtail**, preening in one of the nearby trees. We then, for our last stop, visited the sea wall for a quick scan. We soon had some **Sandwich Terns** flying past and on the water we recorded some **Velvet Scoter** and a **Great Crested Grebe**, but otherwise it was quiet.

In summary the east coast rarely disappoints and today was no exception despite St Abbs being generally very quiet in terms of passage migrants. However at this time of year a well timed visit to Musselburgh usually produces a good selection of birds, especially waders and again today didn't disappoint.

Thanks to all those who attended, Neil Hammatt and David Allan for sharing their enthusiasm, knowledge and experience and here's to the next visit of the 11th of September to the east coast and Musselburgh.

No less than twelve new species were added to the SOC Outings list (Velvet Scoter, Whimbrel, Black-tailed Godwit, Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Puffin, Sandwich Tern, Kittiwake, Tree Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail & Yellowhammer) taking our list since outings list since we resumed them after Covid to 133 species

Donald Wilson.

**82 species of birds were recorded on the SOC outing to St Abbs Head and Lothian coast on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2022**

Mute Swan	Whimbrel	Magpie
Greylag Goose	Curlew	Jackdaw
Canada Goose	Black-tailed Godwit	Rook
Shelduck	Bar-tailed Godwit	Carriion Crow
Wigeon	Turnstone	Blue Tit
Teal	Knot	Great Tit
Mallard	Curlew Sandpiper	Sand Martin
Shoveler	Dunlin	Swallow
Tufted Duck	Greenshank	House Martin
Eider	Wood Sandpiper	Chiffchaff
Velvet Scoter	Redshank	Wren
Goosander	Snipe	Starling
Red-throated Diver	Puffin	Blackbird
Fulmar	Razorbill	Robin
Gannet	Guillemot	Stonechat
Cormorant	Sandwich Tern	Dunnock
Shag	Kittiwake	House Sparrow
Little Egret	Black-headed Gull	Tree Sparrow
Grey Heron	Mediterranean Gull	Yellow Wagtail
Little Grebe	Common Gull	Grey Wagtail
Great Crested Grebe	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Pied Wagtail (yarrellii)
Sparrowhawk	Herring Gull	Meadow Pipit
Buzzard	Great Black-backed Gull	Chaffinch
Moorhen	Feral Pigeon	Linnet
Coot	Woodpigeon	Goldfinch
Oystercatcher	Collared Dove	Yellowhammer
Lapwing	Great Spotted Woodpecker	
Ringed Plover	Kestrel	

**Other species recorded**

Small Copper butterfly  
Wall Brown butterfly  
Bottle-nosed Dolphin