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Scotland's Bird Club Ayrshire Branch

We are always on the look-out for more articles, cartoons and photographs to include in the future editions of **Stonechat**. Please think about contributing and send any work for publication to me: Tony Scott / Editor, at 4 Hilltop Place, AYR KA7 3PB - or e-mail me at dascott4@outlook.com

Sightings to: Ayrshire Bird Recorder Fraser Simpson. E-mail: recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk

For all local birding info: please go to www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk Thanks go to Kevin Waite for his excellent work in keeping this superb website on the go.



A chough at
Turnberry Point
in early 2019

Photo:
Angus Hogg

Hello and welcome to our autumn 2019 edition of 'Stonechat'. Brian Dodson has organised another great selection of talks for you this season, and Jim Thomson has a line-up of field trips on offer, plus we hope to organise a **long weekend** to some top class Lancashire birding hotspots in November, including Leighton Moss, the Ribble Estuary reserves and Martin Mere. **(15 - 17 November 2019)**, by coach from Ayr. **Our new Chair, Brian Lennox** has an introductory article for us, and **Angus Hogg** has written a piece about the Ayrshire chough, with some excellent photos. I have written a **trip report** based on last November's long weekend to Tayside and Grampian. All this plus the dates of indoor meetings and field trips, and we have included articles from leading journalists on a number of wildlife issues. We hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter, and we hope you all had an enjoyable summer.

Tony Scott newsletter editor

Random musings from the Chair

Brian Lennox



It's with great pleasure that I send you greetings in this my first Musings from the Chair. To have been given this honour is a privilege and I hope I can rise to the challenge of guiding SOC Ayrshire Branch to another superlative session of evening and outdoor meetings.

My first task is to thank our outgoing Chair, Pat Gibbs, for his sterling work. His will be difficult shoes to fill, not least because they are covered in mud from his allotment! I can only hope that I will be able to exercise a degree of the humour and wisdom which Pat dispensed from the podium during his tenure. Also, last session saw the retirement from the office of Branch Treasurer by Ian Clark. Ian had given legion service to this post for more years than he cares to remember and I'm sure you will join me in thanking him for this.

Anne Dick continues as Branch Secretary and it's because of her efficiency that the machine runs smoothly. Brian Dodson is continuing to look after the arrangements for evening meetings and when you see the programme later in this newsletter, I'm sure you'll agree that we'll be well-rewarded for his efforts. David Rackham keeps us informed of the matters of SOC Council, Jim Thomson will lead outdoor meetings, and Roger Hissett and Tony Scott will remain on the committee. It was a great pleasure to see Norman Lawrie, Branch Honorary President, at our last committee meeting, although his jokes don't get any better!

That brings me to new committee members. John Drummond has manfully stepped up to the plate and taken on the office of Treasurer and Andy Shand has volunteered to be Vice Chair. You'll have gathered thus far that there is some new blood on your committee this session so I'll ask for your forbearance in advance!

Like a swan crossing a pond gracefully propelled by frantic sub-aqua paddling, our Branch activities flow apparently effortlessly due to the hard work of the committee members. I'm sure you'd join me in thanking them for this. I would like to think that our branch could increase its membership and to that end, if you feel that you know of anyone who might like to come along to any of our meetings as a guest, please invite them and hopefully we can tempt them into our circle.

A word or two on the highlights of my birding Spring/Summer. We've had magpie, wood pigeon, house sparrow, blackbird and coal tit nesting in our garden this year. For the first time in several years there are tawny owls calling in the area around Midton Road/Rosebank Crescent in Ayr. Unfortunately, a planned trip to Isle of May had to be cancelled due to the weather and a jaunt to Ailsa Craig was similarly postponed. We did eventually get on to the Craig however and that never fails to impress with a circular trip round to inspect the gannetry. Our OIR Birding Group did get to North Berwick and Aberlady and it was a treat to visit Club HQ at Waterston House.

It would be remiss not to mention the superb flourish of butterflies this summer has produced. I'm writing this on Thursday 8th August and today my Big Butterfly Watch in my garden produced eight painted ladies, four peacocks, one small tortoiseshell, one green-veined white, one large white, two red admirals and one common blue. God bless buddleia (named after Adam Buddle and English botanist but first collected in the Caribbean by William Houstoun a Scottish botanist and surgeon)!

Brian Lennox

Chair / SOC Ayrshire



‘Devil birds’ brought back from extinction to soar again in the Alps

Simon Birch



This article appeared in **The Guardian** on 03 August 2019

This summer, as the snows melt across the Alps, a record 35 bearded vulture chicks are expected to leave their nests and take to the skies in one of the most successful wildlife comebacks of recent times.

“Bearded vultures were hunted to extinction in the Alps in the early 20th century,” says Théo Mazet, who works for Asters, a French wildlife organisation helping to bring the birds back to the Alps. “People referred to them as the devil bird, believing they would carry off small children.”

But attitudes have changed and the vultures have made a dramatic return, albeit with a helping hand.

“A captive breeding and reintroduction programme began in the late 1980’s and there are now a total of 250 birds, including 50 breeding pairs of bearded vultures in the Alps,” says Mazet, who works at the forest-based breeding centre above the alpine town of Sallanches.

Here he prepares food for seven vultures housed in a massive aviary, carefully weighing chunks of freshly butchered sheep’s and goat’s legs for the birds - the only avian species to live on a diet of animal bones.

“Bearded vultures are scavengers and act as the rubbish collectors of the natural world, which helps to eliminate potentially harmful bacteria and the spread of diseases,” he explains.

Key to the project’s success has been the 100 captive vultures held in breeding centres throughout Europe.

José Tavares, the director of the Vulture Conservation Foundation, which is spearheading the reintroduction of bearded vultures across Europe, says it only uses birds bred in captivity rather than capturing and relocating wild birds.

The vulture project has so far cost tens of millions of euros but Tavares says it is helping to achieve wider conservation and rewilding goals.

“The bearded vulture is an umbrella species so that the work we do in improving the mountain habitat for the bearded vulture benefits other mountain wildlife too, such as black grouse, golden eagles and ibex.”

Local enthusiasm for the vulture project has helped conservationists collaborate with stakeholders to reduce threats to the birds.

“They won’t kill cattle or game species such as chamois, so uniquely there are relatively few conflicts with people - unlike wolves or bears,” Tavares says. “Everyone works with you - so for example, we’ve been able to talk about banning the use of lead bullets with hunters. If we’d been working with wolves we wouldn’t even be able to sit in the same room as the hunters.”

The Vulture Conservation Foundation is also working with hydroelectric companies and alpine resorts to install visual deterrents on power lines and ski cables, which kill one to two vultures through collisions each year.



Return of the chough

Angus Hogg



The discovery of a chough just North of Turnberry lighthouse on January 30th 2019 came almost 90 years after the last totally reliable record of the bird in Ayrshire. A once widespread bird in Scotland, the numbers today have declined to the point where it hangs on in places such as Islay, Jura and Colonsay, with all of the former Scottish mainland haunts now unoccupied by breeding pairs.

In South-west Scotland, it would appear that the writing was on the wall from around the middle of the 19th century, when significant declines were noted by the ornithologists of the day. One comment made at the time stated that it had been abundant on all the rocky headlands of Scotland in 1835 but “had vanished nearly everywhere by 1865.” Choughs weren't restricted to coastal Scotland as is exemplified by records of birds from inland localities such as Assynt, Glen Lyon, Glen Clova and the Ochils. These inland locations had, however, mostly been abandoned by the early 19th century.

In the mid 1800s some coastal cliffs still provided nesting sites for choughs, and the South-west of Scotland continued to play host to the species. Robert Gray, in 1871, noted that the chough could still be seen sparingly in the Rhinns of Galloway, along with Burrow Head and the Kikcudbright-Wigtown border. The cliffs around Portpatrick seemed to be a particular stronghold. However, Jack Gordon notes that, by 1870, the bird had vanished from Burrow Head, although it was still to be found on the Rhinns, which appeared to be its “headquarters.”

Within Wigtownshire, nesting pairs were still recorded from locations like Port Logan and the Mull of Galloway until 1919, with an estimate of seven pairs claimed for the former site. The fate of the Ayrshire coastal birds mirrored that of their Wigtown cousins, since the bird was obviously showing a sharp decline in numbers by the middle of the 1800s. Gray comments that it had still been present at Culzean until at least 1850, but Charles Berry of Lendalfoot paints a gloomier picture. In 1908, he stated that he had seen nesting birds not far from Lendalfoot just a few years before, but that it was fast disappearing.

Gib Graham wrote that the bird had once been “very common” on Knockdolian Hill in the mid 19th century and placed the blame for its decline on the jackdaw. The 1920s still provided a few Ayrshire records but usually of just one or two birds. Sadly, by 1929, Richmond Paton reported that “one, occasionally two pairs of chough continue to breed in Ayrshire”— this was at a site which they, wisely, did not name, perhaps providing a clue as to one of the contributory factors in the bird's disappearance.



So, just why did the chough disappear from Ayrshire, and much of the rest of Scotland? Like most cases of extinction, the causes may be unclear and much-debated, and it's often difficult to identify the main culprit. However, some factors do stand out as candidates leading to the chough's downfall. The jackdaw was seen as a potential competitor by many ornithologists in the 19th century. Graham clearly points the finger at it. However, it seems unlikely to have been solely to blame.

For whatever reasons, game-keepers were said to have accounted for some birds, while the gun most definitely did remove birds from areas of the Rhinns of Galloway where choughs were said by local farmers to be responsible for damage to their crops and “stooks.” It may be that the fashion for bird “collection” and egg-collecting, prevalent in the mid 1800s simply added the final nail in its coffin in areas where the bird's numbers had dwindled seriously.

Undoubtedly, one of the most serious threats to the chough came with the rapid changes experienced within farming as we entered the 20th century. Farm boundaries were extended further out, towards the edges of cliffs, removing the availability of rough, grassy swards on which choughs could probe for invertebrates. Improvements in cattle rearing practices also meant that livestock would frequently be housed indoors now, and not allowed to feed outside in winter, removing yet another food source from the chough – cow-pats. Probing within cow-pats could provide choughs with access to parasites, passed through the guts of cattle. But, this source was also to be removed, with the arrival of new chemicals which killed off these “bugs.”

By the end of the 20th century though, choughs still clung on in areas where the nature of both landscape and land use still afforded them a living: much of Wales, the Isle of Man, North and West Ireland. They are largely sedentary which raises the obvious question of where the Turnberry bird came from. It seems unlikely that choughs will make a comeback any time soon in the South-west of Scotland, given the pressures they face, and the current Turnberry specimen provides us with yet another clear example of a beautiful bird which, like corncrake and corn bunting in Ayrshire, can disappear all too suddenly from our lives.

Angus Hogg 7 February 2019.

The Solace of Birds in Winter

Nature offers its own consolations in the darkest days of the year

Margaret Renkl

Contributing Opinion Writer for
The New York Times



Black-capped chickadee
Mill River Woodlands
Northampton MA

NASHVILLE - In the search for comfort in the age of so many 21st century dangers - to democracy in the age of fake news, to the natural world in the age of climate change - I don't normally think of winter as offering much in the way of consolation.

Many of the most interesting creatures have gone to ground now. The cheery chipmunks are asleep in their tunnels beneath my house. The queen bumblebees have made themselves a little sleeping chamber deep in the soil of my garden. Somewhere nearby, the resident rat snake is also sleeping underground, and, at the park, the snapping turtles and bullfrogs have settled themselves into the mud at the bottom of the lake.

All the loveliest insects are gone now, too. The honeybees are huddled up in their hives, vibrating their wings to keep warm and feeding on the honey they've stored for just this reason. The monarch butterflies have long since migrated to their Mexican wintering grounds. My flower beds are nothing but a jumble of dried stems and matted clumps, a collection of dead vegetation I've left undisturbed for my tiniest neighbors to shelter in. But even remembering the purpose behind this untidiness, I take no comfort from my garden anymore.

I miss the singing most of all. During winter we still have songbirds in Middle Tennessee, some of them yearlong residents and some of them visitors passing time until they can return to their nesting grounds in the north. But songbirds rarely sing in winter.

Yes, the fussy chickadees still call out to defend their claim on feeders in my yard. And the Carolina wrens that nest every summer in the hanging ferns under the eaves will sometimes stand on a fence post and chirrup their own irritation into the gray sky. But it's not the same as waking into a morning full of bird song. A walk in the woods is an exercise in near silence now, the only sounds my own lumbering footfall and the huff of my breath on an uphill path. And yet....

Winter can be the best time of year for backyard bird-watching. The mockingbirds are finally interested in the suet balls they disdained all summer, and the gorgeous blue jays, their bright colors even bluer against the sepia backdrop of winter, carry away the unshelled nuts I set along the deck rail for squirrels. The tiny dark-eyed juncos that spent all summer in the Far North are back now, hopping around the leaf litter, picking up the safflower seeds the tufted titmice push out of the feeder in their search for the sunflower seeds they prefer. Now the downy woodpeckers, with their striped wings and their tidy red caps, come and go from the peanut feeder, not nearly so cautious in my presence as in the days of summertime plenty. They swoop to their feast with the characteristic undulating flight of their kind. If I ever get around to hanging Christmas garlands this year, I will try to arrange it in a way that mimics the exact arc of their flight.

On especially cold mornings, when bitter temperatures overnight have frozen all the puddles, every songbird in Middle Tennessee, it seems, comes to my back deck to enjoy the heated birdbath. One morning last week I looked out the window and saw six bluebirds gathered in a ring around the edge of it, dipping their beaks into the bowl over and over again while the air above the heated water puffed into fog in the cold. In winter the neighborhood hawk sits still in the bare branches of the trees, a perch where she is invisible to me at any other time of year. Now I can see even the claws on her great yellow feet extending beyond the fluffed feathers she has drawn around them. The neighborhood crows know very well that she is there, and they have a few furious words for her as she waits, calmly surveying them as they swoop around her head, close but not too close.

Despite their legendary intelligence, I have my issues with crows. Opportunistic omnivores, they will poach the young from songbird nests. In the spring and fall migrations, they will even devour the exhausted songbirds themselves, But in winter, the crows become my favorites again. They are perfectly designed for this season, black against a gray sky, a three-dimensional silhouette. Unlike other birds, crows continue to speak to one another throughout the coldest days.



Hairy woodpecker



Chipmunk, Hampshire College MA

American crows remain together as a family throughout the seasons, with the parents and the young from several nesting years cooperating to find food and fend off predators. I stand in my yard and watch them grooming one another in the high branches: One crow will nibble at another crow's head or neck, and the other crow will tilt its face this way and that, presenting the itchy places for attention, one by one. Sometimes they simply sit in branches and call out, one to another, deep in conversation, a talk that continues even as they fly toward their roost in the last light of these short days. The crow's "Caw!" is immediately recognizable to the human ear, but the birds actually have more than 20 different calls, not even counting the "subsong" sounds they make: clacking and cooing and rattling and clicking.

I don't know what the crows are saying to other crows, but I like to listen in anyway. It's a gift to watch them living their intricate lives so visibly now that the trees are bare again. This is their world, though it overlaps with mine, and I have no trouble understanding what they are saying to the red-tailed hawk: "Away! Go away!" It may be their message to me as well.

Margaret Renkl is a contributing opinion writer who covers flora, fauna, politics and culture in the American South. She is the author of the forthcoming book "Late Migrations: A Natural History of Love and Loss." @MargaretRenkl

*This article was suggested by **Dr. Kenneth Mills** who sent us the online link. Thanks Ken.*



Blue Jay
Sunderland,
Massachusetts



Common grackle
Hadley MA



American robin
at Warfield Place
Northampton MA



Downy woodpecker
Smith College
Northampton MA

Wet weather causes record low in swifts returning to nest in UK



Patrick Barkham

The lowest number of swifts on record have returned to Britain this spring from their wintering grounds in Africa.

Cold wet weather in the Mediterranean delayed their arrival by two weeks, and experts fear recent rain will hit their numbers further.

Swift numbers have fallen more than 50% in Britain since 1995. This week more than 100 walks, talks and visits to witness swifts' aerial "screaming parties" will be held to raise awareness of the plight of the unique migratory bird.

Nick Brown, co-ordinator of Swift Awareness Week, which starts tomorrow said: "The very cool and wet weather we have had for most of May and June does not suit swifts. They are either incubating eggs or trying to feed young and need warm dry conditions to find the insects and spiders floating in the air on which they feed."

He said the week aimed to raise the profile of swifts and show how easy it was to put up nest boxes for them. The poor weather has meant that some adult swifts are unable to fly and have become emaciated from the lack of opportunities to feed on insects.

Edward Mayer, who runs the Swift Conservation website, said: "There has been some appalling spring weather this year in Italy, France, Spain and the Balkans. Temperatures should have been in the 30s but were in the low teens, with prolonged rain storms making things even worse.

The RSPB sold more than 1,000 swift nest boxes in the spring to people wanting to help the birds.

*This article appeared in **The Guardian** on Friday 21 June 2019.*

SOC/RSPB Ayrshire Birders winter weekend in Tayside and Grampian

Report and photographs
by Tony & Gerda Scott
& Angus Hogg

Friday 16 November 2018

Our group of 18 gathered at Dodds coach depot in Ayr for 07.50 and an 08.15 departure. Derek, our driver, loaded up the comfortable Volvo integral 50-seater for our maximum of 21 passengers. We had three more to collect in Kilmarnock and then it was on via the M77 to Glasgow and beyond. Weather-wise it was a most pleasant day with a fair amount of sunshine and temperatures up to 14 Celsius. Not at all bad for November. We carried on north over the Kincardine Bridge and the A977 via Rumbling Bridge to KINROSS services where we enjoyed coffees and a Danish pastry, bacon rolls or whatever else was on offer. Here from 10.10 to 10.45. All aboard again and northwards along the M90 to Perth, before passing Scone Palace grounds (where we have seen hawfinch in the past), Meiklour beech hedge, Blairgowrie, New Alyth and Kirriemuir before arriving at RSPB's LOCH OF KINNORDY reserve for 12 noon. The soft sunlight enhanced an already beautiful landscape with the rolling hills reflected in the water. We spent time in the three hides (which also served as our lunch stop). We saw a variety of species including grey heron, mute swan, whooper swan and flocks of pink-footed geese. We heard the call of more pink-feet and a larger flock descended on to the loch setting off a cacophony of calls from the first flock. Greylag and Canada geese were also present, along with mallard, gadwall, teal and tufted duck, moorhen and coot. At 13.15 hrs we moved on, returning through Kirriemuir and the A926 for Padanaram, Forfar, Friockheim and the A934 to our next destination - SWT's MONTROSE BASIN reserve and visitor centre for 14.00 hrs.





Little grebe

At SWT's Montrose Basin reserve, we met one of our birding colleagues from Broughty Ferry, Mike Groves. Great to see him again, and he could share his local knowledge on what bird species are usually around on the Basin. There was great excitement today, as a hoopoe had been seen close to the visitor centre. A number of our group went out to join a few other birders who were searching for it. Sadly, all the effort was to no avail today, but it had been around for a while. However, there were plenty of waders along the shoreline and on the water. Little grebe, cormorant, shelduck, northern pintail, wigeon, eider, goldeneye and red-breasted merganser were visible. A large flock of pink-footed geese were lined up close to the town on the eastern edge of the reserve. Other sightings included oystercatcher, lapwing, turnstone, dunlin, redshank, greenshank, black-tailed godwit and curlew. The gull species consisted of black-headed, herring and lesser black-backs.

Other sightings of the day included common buzzard, kestrel, and sparrowhawk. Pheasant, wood pigeon, collared dove, great-spotted woodpecker, pied wagtail, wren, dunnoek, robin, redwing, fieldfare, blackbird, goldcrest, great, coal, blue and long-tailed tits were also seen, some in woodland surrounding Loch of Kinnordy and then around the visitor centre at Montrose Basin. A good number of tree sparrows were sharing the feeders at the centre, with tits, chaffinches, goldfinch and greenfinch. A few of our group also saw knot. We had intended to stay at the reserve until dusk, but left a little earlier as a thick haar had rolled in from the North Sea to obscure almost everything, so our departure was at a premature 15.30 hrs.

We boarded our coach and drove on via Arbroath, Monifieth to Broughty Ferry and our delightful residence for two nights, the Best Western WOODLANDS HOTEL, checking into our comfortable accommodation at 17.20 (just one hour earlier than planned).



Pink-feet



Black-tailed godwit



Redwing



Long-tailed tit



grey heron



Following a little relaxation, we all met in the hotel lounge for drinks from around 18.45. It was Gerda's birthday today, so we had something to celebrate as we enjoyed our pre-prandial refreshments with Angus and Mary, Brian and Maureen, Eleanora, Fionna, Anne and others, before dinner at 19.30. We found a good selection of dishes on our table d'hôte menu, including Scottish smoked salmon, herb Hollandaise with capers; Carrot and lentil soup and more. Mains included fillets of sea bass with tomato and red chilli sauce; or slow-cooked featherblade of beef with rosemary gravy, plus another two choices. Desserts included lemon tart with red berry coulis and vanilla ice cream. A cheese board and other choices were also available. The evening was rounded off by Jim calling the bird list and our total count for the day stood at 62 species.

Saturday 17 November 2018

North to RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve and the Ythan Estuary: or to the new V&A museum and galleries in Dundee.

We met for breakfast at the Woodlands Hotel from 07.30 hrs. David and Helen Rackham were staying locally with family, and joined us for the day, swelling the numbers in the birding group to 17 for the trip north. Gerda and I, Eleanora, Susan, Deone and Ingrid opted to visit the remarkable and innovative newly opened V&A Museum in Dundee today. An international centre for design, V&A Dundee presents the brilliance of Scottish creativity and the best of design from around the world. The building itself is a masterpiece of architecture, designed by the renowned and award-winning Japanese architects, Kengo Kuma and Associates. This extraordinary three-storey building is itself a testament to great design. Within this awe-inspiring structure there are many exhibitions and displays worthy of a visit. We chose to see a marvellously curated exhibition following the story of Ocean Liners as well as the Scottish Design Galleries which includes Charles Rennie Mackintosh's oak room reconstruction. So much to see and we were here from 10.00 until 16.00 hrs.

Our main birding group, as already mentioned, headed north via Laurencekirk, Bridge of Dee (where lunch was purchased at an Asda supermarket) before driving on via Aberdeen and Ellon and the village of Crimond, to access the RSPB's Loch of Strathbeg reserve at Starnafon farm, arriving around 12 noon. The Loch of Strathbeg is the UK's largest dune-slack loch and was formed in 1720 when a great storm moved millions of tons of sand to block the mouth of the bay. Huge numbers of pink-footed geese roost on the loch and in the dunes. Up to 10,000 greylag geese have also been noted here as well as over-wintering barnacle geese. Our group of birders were pleased to see little egret as well as pinkfoot, greylag and barnacle geese. Pintail, shoveler, wigeon, eider and red-breasted merganser were also on the reserve. Excitement broke out when a ring-tailed hen harrier was located, as well as merlin. Other raptors included buzzards, sparrowhawk and kestrel. Golden plover and lapwing were seen as well as common snipe and ruff. Other species seen today included corn bunting, yellowhammer, reed bunting, greenfinch, goldfinch, linnets, fieldfare and redwing.

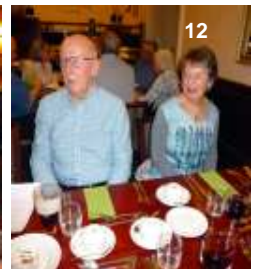


At 14.30, the party drove south to Newburgh and the Ythan Estuary. No king eider was seen today, but common eider, goosander, ringed plover, black-tailed godwit, curlew and other waders. Cormorant and little egret were also noted. After about one hour, Derek did a straight run-through to Broughty Ferry (with just one comfort stop en route). The group were back at the Woodlands Hotel for 18.00 hrs, ahead of the planned schedule.

Our party was expanded tonight with David and Helen joining us for dinner, as well as Mike and Gill Groves who stay in Broughty Ferry. So in total there were 26 of us dining tonight and the atmosphere was decidedly festive. The chef had devised another excellent menu. Starters included delicious panko-breaded king prawns with a sweet chilli dip; vegetable and lentil soup, or leek and potato soup, chicken liver paté with red onion chutney and oatcakes. Mains included chicken breast stuffed with haggis and wholegrain mustard; paprika-roasted salmon with red pepper coulis; butternut squash, brie and beetroot tart with red pepper coulis and mixed salad leaves. Desserts featured mango and passion fruit cheesecake; chocolate and coconut tart in a date and mixed nut casing with chocolate sauce and ice cream; or the chef's cheeseboard. Coffee and mints to follow. Once again, we rounded off the day with the bird count, led by Jim, and the total for the two days was 80.



A convivial evening at the Woodlands Hotel



Photos:1: Gill & Mike Groves. 2: Fionna Ferguson, Eleanora Forrester, Gill & Mike Groves, Jim Thomson. 3: Jim Thomson. 4: Mary & Angus Hogg. 5: Deone Finlayson & Ingrid Swanson; 6: Angus Hogg and Gerda Scott. 7: Hugh Conner & Anne Dick. 8. William McKie and Helen Rackham. 9: Helen & David Rackham. 10: Derek Murdoch, Maureen & Brian Dodson. 11: Susan Porteous, Brian Lennox and Bob Yates. 12: Kenneth & Sheila Smith.



Tony & Gerda, Woodlands Hotel



Bob, Derek, Tony, Angus & Jim



Jim ready to leave the Woodlands Hotel

Sunday 18 November 2018

From the Woodlands Hotel, Broughty Ferry, to the Eden Estuary at Guardbridge and RSPB Loch Leven Reserve



Breakfast from 08.00 hrs provided us with a large selection of fresh fruit, yoghurts, cereals, and all the usual cooked breakfast items with made to order poached or fried eggs. There were floury rolls and toast plus a variety of sweet pastries, fruit juices, jams and marmalades, tea and coffee. Enough to keep us going for a few hours. Our planned departure at 09.15 was delayed by 15 minutes due to an inappropriately parked car on Panmure Terrace, the exit from our hotel. Derek didn't have enough space to swing out the coach, so the only solution was to ring the bell of the house where the car was parked. It transpired the car belonged to one of the hotel staff and Angus kindly ran back up the drive to the hotel reception to find the culprit. Profuse apologies were given and accepted, and eventually we were free to go!

The weather was mainly sunny today, with temperatures around 11c. We were soon entering Dundee and across the Tay road bridge, enabling good views of the new V&A building. We drove on to Leuchars and the Eden Estuary at Guardbridge where there is a small visitor centre with hide and toilet. Here from 10.05 to 11.15. Three little egrets were seen from the hide, plus little grebe, cormorant, grey heron, mute swan, mallard, wigeon, teal, tufted duck, golden eye, black-tailed godwit, redshank, tree sparrow, greenfinch and the highlight - a common kingfisher with its bright colours gleaming in the morning sunlight.





We moved on from Guardbridge along the A91 through Dairsie, Cupar, the Bow of Fife, Collesie, Burnside and the B919 to Scotlandwell. Then the B9097 to RSPB Loch Leven reserve for 12.05 hrs. Time for lunch in the café and then to all three hides, Gillman, Waterston and Carden. We had more little egret sightings from the hides, plus whooper swans, teal, goldeneye, little and great-crested grebes and a variety of other species. Eventually, most of the group headed back to the area around the visitor centre with a pathway through the woods known as the 'leafy loop'. At this time of the year it was the 'leafless loop'. Red squirrels were the main attraction here and were very confiding. We also had a good selection of woodland birds, such as great, blue and coal tits, tree sparrow, blackbird, dunnock, goldfinch, greenfinch and bullfinch. Raven, carrion crow, magpie and jackdaw were also noted. There was still time for a coffee and a scone before departure at 16.15, heading straight for the M90 and the new Queensferry Crossing which got our bus to Livingston and our dinner stop at the Deer Park Restaurant for 17.00 hrs, giving us time for a leisurely meal before leaving for Ayr at 19.30 hrs. We said 'Auf Wiedersehen' to Ingrid, Maureen and Brian in Kilmarnock before driving on to Dodds coach depot in Ayr for 21.30. Our thanks to Derek for his safe driving and good company. The total bird count for three days was 86.

Golden eagle deaths fuel calls for grouse shooting regulations

Severin Carrell *Scotland editor* This article was in *The Guardian* on 02 July 2019

Conservationists have urged the Scottish government to regulate grouse moors after two golden eagles disappeared within hours of each other on a shooting estate in Perthshire. The two juvenile eagles were fitted with satellite tags that abruptly stopped sending out signals on 18 April - the latest in a spate of cases where birds of prey have disappeared or been found dead in the same area, known as Strathbraan, near Dunkeld. One of the eagles was tagged last year by Andy Wightman, a Scottish Green Party MSP who is the golden eagle "species champion" in Scotland, as part of a bird of prey conservation project led by broadcaster Chris Packham and Ruth Tingay, who blogs for Raptor Persecution UK. Wightman had named the bird Adam after the revered Scottish mountain ecologist Adam Watson, who died in January this year. Wightman, an expert on land reform, said the eagle's disappearance had left him distraught, and he had written to Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister, asking her to outlaw grouse shooting. "I was gutted. Very, very angry," he said. "This latest outrage should be a wake-up call to the Scottish government that for all their reviews, inquiries and reforms, rampant criminality remains in place across many of Scotland's driven grouse moors." There are several areas of the Highlands with no breeding eagles present. These "open territories" attract large numbers of juvenile eagles which are looking for new territories, food and nesting sites, yet fail to colonise them.

**Evening meetings at
Monkton Community Church Hall
and Pioneer Café
Tuesdays 19.00 for 19.30hrs.**

- 10 September 2019 BEN DARVILL (BTO) *Short-eared owls survey feedback*
- 08 October 2019 RICK TAYLOR *Reinforcing south of Scotland golden eagle population*
- 12 November 2019 MICK DURHAM, Photographer *Shetland wildlife*
- 10 December 2019 TARA PROUD (Marine Conservation Society) *Protecting Scotland's marine life: from plastic pollution to sustainable food*
- 14 January 2020 JAMES BLACK, Photographer *Small game hunting: a look at nature from ground level*
- 11 February 2020 PAULA BAKER (RSPB) *RSPB's Loch Lomond reserve*
- 10 March 2020 JIM CASSELLS (BTO / Arran) *Forty years of the Arran bird report*
- 14 April 2020 TOM BYARS *A tiger's tale: the story of the Cape May warbler in Scotland*



**WINTER BIRDING
WEEKEND IN LANCASHIRE**
Friday 15 - Sunday 17 November 2019
visiting Leighton Moss, the Ribble
Estuary and Martin Mere by **COACH**
from AYR **Leader: Jim Thomson**

A joint SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group WEEKEND TRIP. **Leaving Dodds coach depot, East Road, AYR at 08.10hrs on 15 November.** We will be driving to RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS Reserve for the afternoon. **We will stay overnight on a Dinner, Bed and Breakfast basis at a 3* hotel on the Fylde Coast.** Next day we will visit THE RIBBLE ESTUARY RESERVES.

On day three we will visit the WWT MARTIN MERE RESERVE. **Returning to AYR for around 21.00 hrs and stopping enroute for dinner in Dumfries.** Registration will be from September onwards or register earlier by e-mailing Tony Scott on : dascott4@outlook.com or telephone 01292 281 085. **The cost should be in the region of £240.00 per person.** This trip will operate with numbers of 15 to 20 people. **A full information leaflet will be available at the first and subsequent meetings of RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group and SOC Ayrshire. Please book as early as possible in order to obtain the best prices.**

Field Trips and tours jointly with RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group

Field Trips 2019 Leader: Jim Thomson

Saturday 21 September

STRANRAER, LOCH RYAN & WIG BAY

Meet at 10.30hrs at Ballantrae (toilets). On to Stranraer and Loch Ryan. All day trip - please bring a packed lunch or café available locally. Finish around 16.00 hrs.

Saturday 19 October

WWT CAERLAVEROCK RESERVE

Meet at the reserve car park for 11.00 hrs. Please bring a packed lunch, or café (and toilets) on site. All day trip, finish around 16.00 hrs.

Friday/Saturday/Sunday 15/16/17 November. WEEKEND TRIP by COACH from AYR RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS; RIBBLE ESTUARY RESERVES & WWT MARTIN MERE.

Meet 08.00hrs at Dodd's coach depot, East Road, Ayr. Weekend trip with DBB for two nights at a 3* hotel on the Fylde coast. Return to Ayr around 21.00hrs Sunday. Cost including DBB and coach - around £240.00 dependent on numbers.

Saturday 14 December

MAIDENS HARBOUR, CULZEAN AND THE COAST

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Maidens Harbour car park (Toilets available). Move on along the coast to Culzean or south to Girvan. Please bring a packed lunch - trip finishes c.15.30 hrs

Field trips 2020

Saturday 25 January GREENAN SHORE AND DOONFOOT.

Meet at 10.00 hrs Greenan Castle car park. Trip lasts until 12.30 hrs.

Saturday 22 February

IRVINE HARBOUR AND BEACH PARK

Meet at 10.00 hrs. at the old Harbour Masters office, Irvine. Food available at Harbour Arts Centre or the Ship Inn, or bring a packed lunch. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

Saturday 21 March

AUCHINCRAIVE ESTATE

Meet 10.00 hrs at Oswald Hall car park. Café on site or bring a packed lunch. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

Friday 24 April

DUMFRIES HOUSE ESTATE

Meet at visitor centre car park at 10.00 hrs. Please bring a packed lunch, or café (and toilets) on site. NB: Friday trip to avoid crowds. Finish around 16.00 hrs.
