

Winter Birds of Dumfries & Galloway

Naturetrek Tour Report

18 - 22 November 2019



Red Kites by Richard Farr



Willow Tit by Richard Farr



Common Scoter by Richard Farr



On Belymack Hill by Chris Rollie

Report compiled by Chris Rollie
Images courtesy of Richard Farr and Chris Rollie



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Summary

Due to its central position in the UK, Dumfries & Galloway is home to the northernmost of southern species and the southernmost of northern species of a whole range of biodiversity, including several birds. The Solway Firth, Wigtown Bay and Loch Ryan are renowned for their wintering waterfowl, while the mosaic of farmland and low-lying moorland attract a range of raptors in winter, including Hen Harriers. Blessed with dry weather, the group enjoyed a wonderful few days birding that delivered a total of 96 species.

In addition to the magnificent and recently arrived Svalbard race of Barnacle Geese, exclusive to the Solway, wonderful views of Greenland White-fronted and Pale-bellied Brent Geese were enjoyed, together with a few Pink-footed Geese and Icelandic Greylag Geese for good measure. Whooper Swans were still arriving, but enough were present to make the famous swan feed at WWT Caerlaverock a sight to remember, whilst RSPB Mersehead Reserve provided a range of species from Pintail to Tree Sparrow. Stunningly close views of Willow Tits were enjoyed at RSPB Ken-Dee Marshes as a prelude to the breath-taking spectacle of well over 100 Red Kites swooping down for food at the nearby feeding station.

Loch Ryan was a delight and superb views were obtained of some 200 Pale-bellied Brent Geese feeding alongside more numerous Wigeon and a host of waders on the shore, with striking Greater Scaup just behind. Moving round to deeper water, we were thrilled by several Slavonian Grebes, with Common Scoter and Eider close inshore and Red-Throated Divers further out. A cracking finale was provided by close views of more Greenland White-fronts and five or six Hen Harriers in aerial interaction over their communal roost.

Historical attractions in the passing included the Mote of Urr, Sweetheart Abbey, Threave Castle, Southernness Lighthouse, Devorgilla's Bridge and Parton Privy! Comfortable accommodation, cuisine and hospitality were all enjoyed at the award-winning Clachan Inn, and all combined with stunning birdlife and scenery to deliver a truly memorable few days in good company.

Day 1

Monday 18th November

Four of the party were met in early afternoon at the railway station in Dumfries and we were soon heading west towards Galloway and our accommodation in St John's Town of Dalry, a small village nestling among the hills in the Glenkens. The sky was cloudless blue and there was barely a breath of wind, while hoar frost still lay thick in the shade of drystone dykes and hawthorn hedges. Turning north at Crocketford, we were soon into a more interesting farmland mosaic, with rough areas of scrub pasture, Bog Myrtle and deciduous trees. Belted and black Galloway cattle were soon spotted, as were several Buzzards and Red Kites, despite the lack of wind assistance on this perfect late-autumn day. As we approached the Glenkens towards Balmaclellan the lofty hills of the Rhinns of Kells stood out against the cloudless blue sky and we were soon meeting the rest of the group and checking into our comfortable accommodation at the Clachan Inn, Dalry.

From there, we drove south through New Galloway and alongside Loch Ken to frozen Loch Stroan and the splendid granite viaduct that carried the old 'Paddy line' to Portpatrick before Beeching's infamous railway closures in the mid 1960s. Passing through some of the most ruggedly beautiful country in Galloway, this line

was the setting of Hannay's escape in John Buchan's celebrated novel: *The 39 steps*. It was also an area favoured by the late wildlife artist and author, Donald Watson, who painted many of his classic Hen Harrier and waterfowl pictures here. Sadly, no Hen Harriers were spotted this evening, but a few Crossbills were heard chipping characteristically to their roosts and late Coal Tits and Chaffinches were still busy making the most of the fading light. A distant, but unmistakable, Red Deer stag was picked out on a ridge, his magnificent antlers perfectly silhouetted against the shimmering sky; and soon a hind was seen nearby. Venus glowed triumphantly to the west of Airie Hill as we packed up and headed back to the open log fires of the Clachan and their superb cuisine and hospitality.

Day 2

Tuesday 19th November

After a hearty breakfast we set off in buoyant mood towards the Solway and its wintering waterfowl. The night had been the coldest of the winter so far and probably considerably below the -2.5°C on our departure this morning. All was hoary frost, though with still a hint of the flaming sky to the south that had welcomed the sunrise. Groups of winter thrushes, mostly Fieldfares, charged about amongst the Hawthorn scrub of the rough wood pasture alongside Loch Ken, while a pair of Red Kites lazily circled over a mature deciduous wood as we crossed the River Urr and headed south through Haugh of Urr. Galloway is renowned for its mottes (flat-topped mounds) of various sizes that are thought to date from Norman times, but are now entirely devoid of their presumed former wooden fortifications. Unquestionably, the most magnificent of these remaining in Scotland is the Mote of Urr, with its associated earthworks, and we slowed to take in its grandeur on the way past.

We were soon through the grey granite town of Dalbeattie and taking the hill road through some delightful rough country towards the hamlet of Caulkerbush and RSPB Mersehead Reserve beyond. Recently extended, this reserve now comprises some 460 hectares of open freshwater, various wetland habitats, managed farmland, saltmarsh, woodland and dunes, together with an additional 700 hectares of intertidal mud and sandflats. The site has good numbers of breeding waders and wildfowl in spring and is home to thousands of Barnacle Geese and other northern wildfowl in winter, whilst a traditional arable rotation ensures good numbers of farmland passerines throughout the year. We could hear distant geese as we arrived and a Snipe or two zig-zagged overhead as we made our way between screening hedges to the Meida hide, Song Thrushes, Blackbirds and Fieldfares zipping about before us. The near pond was frozen and empty, but just beyond was open water and an array of waterfowl including good numbers of Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler, Mallard, Lapwing, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Curlew, with a few Mute Swans, Greylag and Canada Geese. One or two Herons and Buzzards flapped over and around the marshes, but any displaced smaller birds soon resettled. In addition to the spectacle before us, the back of this hide holds two large murals of waterfowl in wetland painted by well-known wildlife artist, John Threlfall. The group were greatly impressed by these and indeed, they are worth a visit on their own.

Half a dozen or so Roe Deer showed well in the goose pasture, which was just as well as initially there were no geese to be seen in the fields, whereas they can hold thousands in winter. Stopping briefly at the RSPB office and volunteer accommodation, we made our way down to the Bruach hide. Some Linnets and Goldfinches tinkled about, while calling Robins, Wrens and Dunnocks were ever present. A Great Spotted Woodpecker chipped loudly as we reached the wet woodland strip towards the hide, but we never did see it against the strong, low sun. Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits were seen through the trees, but nothing was seen or heard of Willow Tit, which is seen here occasionally. Nothing new was added from the hide, but again all were enthralled by the

original Threlfall waterfowl mural running the entire length of the back wall of this relatively long hide. As we neared the warm comfort of the visitor centre, we were at last treated to groups of Svalbard Barnacle Geese, which took off from the merse (saltmarsh) and made their barking way around and over us to settle on the water and fields between the hides. Some 40,000 of these geese, the entire population of this race, overwinter on the Solway and provide such a stunningly distinctive and memorable spectacle, with their black, white and grey plumage and noisy clamouring.

We were met by RSPB's Calum Murray and were soon feasting our eyes on a group of mixed small passerines at the feeding station behind the centre, including a good few Tree Sparrows, House Sparrows, Greenfinches, Chaffinches, one or two Dunnocks and a lone Yellowhammer (they all count!). With its year-round attractions, education and residential volunteering, this site has such potential to stimulate and nurture the young people we need to take on the care of our environment in the future. Moving on, we drove past the eastern end of the reserve at West Preston, where perhaps a thousand Barnacle Geese were crowding a single field and forming a solid long line of black, white and grey, punctuated by a wee group of around six grey-brown Pink-footed Geese that provided a nice contrast. In the field before them and just in front of us there were around 100 Lapwing on the short pasture, feeding and walking slowly forward into the easterly wind. Here and there amongst them were Golden Plover, almost all of which took off together and flew across right in front of us as we scoped the geese and Lapwings. On to Southerness Point and one of Scotland's oldest lighthouses (1748), which tried its best to shelter us from the biting east wind that swept across the Solway from the snow-fringed Lakeland Fells clearly visible beyond. A few Redshank, Turnstone, Curlew and Oystercatchers got up as we approached, and a distant Little Egret dropped down out of sight behind seaweed. This is a good spot for Purple Sandpiper, but none were seen in the few minutes we gave it before our fingers gave up in the cold and we walked the short distance back to the vehicle. Various groups of Rooks and mixed corvids were seen, but Magpies were conspicuous by their absence, much to the surprise of many.

Driving up the Nith Estuary, we were soon passing lofty heather-clad Criffell on the left and the impressive ruin of Sweetheart Abbey on the right. Established in the late 13th century by Lady Devorgilla, wife of John Balliol, this Cistercian seat gave rise to the name of the adjacent village of New Abbey, which has been so-called ever since! With some of the party having already seen Goosander on the River Nith in Dumfries, and with more sure to follow, we continued on through town to WWT Caerlaverock and lunch in the café before the swan feed at 2pm. Grain is put out twice daily in front of a large, heated centre, much to the delight of an impressive assemblage of wildfowl and admiring visitors. The wildfowl are truly wild, and many have come from as far as Iceland and Arctic Russia to take advantage of this welcome provision. Dozens of Whooper Swans were the presiding stars, with a supporting cast of Wigeon, Mallard, Teal, Moorhen and a few Tufted Duck – all coming to deliver a noisy, colourful and animated spectacle as the grain was dished out to them. Just before we left the centre an adult Peregrine flashed past, to the delight of several of us who saw it.

We moved on down to the original tower hide, which is now quite dated in terms of facilities, but which nonetheless provides a marvellous elevated and all-round panorama of the reserve. A Peregrine on a fencepost was called, but on close inspection with the scope turned out to be a beautiful female Merlin, which obligingly turned to face us and revealed its delightfully delicate facial features, including tiny bill and creamy crown sides. Several Little Egrets and Herons were also seen, and a great distant mass of Barnacle Geese on the merse. We ended the daylight in the Folly Pond Hide, where a fine male Kestrel was perched on a long low island. Presently, another appeared, and both moved off to commence hovering in the fading light. Several noisy

Whoopers were among the wildfowl on the pond and probably helped to attract what may well have been a new arrival, so unsure of itself was the bird that skid-landed on the thin ice at the far end. After a good few minutes of sizing up its own situation and that of its established peers, we watched supportively as it slowly made up its mind to attempt to join them. This it was forced to do on foot through the ice as take-off was impossible. Slowly and painstakingly, it successively mounted and broke through the thin ice, ever edging towards the others who honked encouragingly at the other end of the pond. At length it at last reached a stretch of open water and sailed majestically across to the flock as if the effort of the previous 10 minutes was nothing. This was our cue to quit the hide and head back to Galloway, catching a glimpse on the way of the floodlit Devorgilla's Bridge over the Nith in Dumfries, Scotland's oldest multiple arched bridge (under construction in 1431).

Warm fires and another superb dinner at the Clachan were enjoyed by everyone.

Day 3

Wednesday 20th November

Frost had largely lifted from the fields by dawn, though it was still quite cold and a light south-easterly breeze strengthened through the morning. Early Red Kites and one or two Buzzards made the most of the shortening daylight as we motored south towards Castle Douglas and nearby National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) Threave Wetlands Reserve. We stopped briefly on the way to look at the listed Parton Privy, locally the 'Hooses o' Parliament', a remarkable Edwardian octagonal building that communally served the cottages of this attractively quaint hamlet overlooking Loch Ken/River Dee.

A few Redpolls and various tits were seen and heard as we made our way up through deciduous woodland to the hides overlooking Blackpark Marsh. From a grassy knoll behind the hides we could at first see only a small group of three Pink-footed geese, but with the telescopes were able to pick out several Greenland White-fronted Geese, which had just emerged from a hidden hollow, and which they are most adept at finding. Although quite distant, we could discern the distinctive black bars on their bellies and white around the base of their orange bills, the latter becoming even more distinctive as they took off and flew towards us for a bit before heading west over the River Dee. The marsh itself was frozen solid and so we didn't linger in the hides but continued on a pleasant circular walk down to the river, connecting with a male Bullfinch and Reed Bunting on the way, whilst small parties of Pinkfeet moved here and there overhead. A raptor raised hopes of harrier by apparently dropping down into the rank vegetation, but presently we could see that it was in fact a Buzzard that had perched on a hidden fencepost. From a third hide on the riverside we picked up a good few Teal, Wigeon and both male and female Goosanders, sheltering in open water in the lee of some reeds. A Little Grebe busily dived and surfaced just downstream and closer to us, while across the river to the west we could clearly see two Osprey nest platforms provided by the local Raptor Study Group, and one of which a few months before was successful in fledging three chicks that will hopefully now be spending the winter in tropical west Africa; contrast indeed!

In spring and summer this site is very popular with visitors who can watch the Ospreys from a wooden platform, often in the company of NTS volunteers who help to interpret the site. Just downstream on an island in the river is the magnificent and imposing rectangular stone tower that is Threave Castle, established by Archibald the Grim, Third Earl of Douglas, in the 14th century. In recent years Peregrines have bred in a recess on the far side of the tower and they can often be seen perched up or in flight, but unfortunately not today. However, a couple of Roe Deer hinds were well spotted, lying in long grass in the lee of a wee knoll with only the tops of their heads and ears betraying their presence. Back at the car park, those not in the facilities or interpretation room at

last connected with Redwings, a small group of which wheezed over and obligingly perched atop a big, bare deciduous tree within scoping distance.

From Threave we soon covered the few miles back up the River Dee to RSPB's Ken-Dee Marshes Reserve, stopping at Fininness Bay to see a female Goldeneye and a big group of Greylags on the loch. The open water and marshes here and at Threave are designated Special Protection Areas under the European Birds Directive on account of their important populations of wintering Greenland White-fronted and Icelandic Greylag Geese. A little further on we stopped to check through some more Greylags and Canada Geese, but no sign of the elusive White-fronts. We continued on to the first hide at RSPB Ken-Dee and were immediately rewarded by at least three different Willow Tits, all three being seen concurrently on several occasions as they fed on and around peanut feeders right in front of us. This is one of the fastest declining species in England and Wales, whilst in Scotland it is now found only in the southwest, with Ken-Dee Marshes having the highest density. The extensive and continuous wet woodland and scrub here provide a continuity of habitat that is now very rare throughout the UK. We were all enthralled by these special birds as they flitted around showing their black bull necks, strong bibs and light wing panels. Now and then we were also treated to their distinctive buzzing calls as they scolded each other in the birch and willow scrub nearby. Two Nuthatches, Coal, Blue and Great Tits were also about the feeders, while a few Teal, Mute Swans and Goosanders moved around the lagoon behind. Red Squirrels are often seen here, but not in the freezing conditions of late and not on this day either.

One member of the group's favourite and most hoped-for birds was Dipper, but this would be very difficult given our planned itinerary. However, word came through from the RSPB Assistant Warden that a Dipper had been seen some time earlier that day not too far away. On our way back to the reserve entrance we stopped on a bridge over a tiny but fast-flowing burn and within a few seconds a Dipper was seen standing on a wee boulder midstream. Not only that, but it sang heartily, its captivating if understated warbling song rising and falling against the background sough of the burn. We were all absolutely thrilled by this, and one of us especially. Still no Magpie though!

More Red Kites, Buzzards and a nice group of Belted Galloways were seen from an attractive single-track road that took us the mile or two to Laurieston and nearby Bellymack Hill Farm Red Kite Feeding Station, where we arrived in good time to enjoy our packed lunches, refreshments and cakes in the spacious visitor centre, before feeding time at 2pm. The feeding station had modest beginnings and was established back in 2003 as part of the highly acclaimed and award-winning Galloway Kite Trail, established by the RSPB in partnership with Forestry Commission and local businesses, with funding support from Scottish Natural Heritage etc. Such has been the success of the project that the original hide was extended and eventually replaced with the visitor centre, in front of which owner Anne Johnstone puts out scraps of meat for the kites at 2pm on nearly every day of the year. The ensuing spectacle is simply spellbinding as over 100 Red Kites come swooshing down to deftly grasp these morsels and sweep back up in a succession of mesmerising dives. When not actively engaged in this amazing tumbling display, provided there is a breeze as there was on this occasion, the kites hang effortlessly overhead calling to each other. As things settled down, we followed a trail to the top of Bellymack Hill, which provided panoramic views over the mosaic of farmland, forests and lochs of the surrounding area. Ravens had been fairly elusive up until this point, but we heard and then saw one above the mass of kites overhead. There were also several varieties of sheep, comical Magpie(!) Ducks and Kunekune pigs around the feeding station, much to the delight of the group.

From there we returned to Laurieston and briefly overlooked the Red Kite roost at Retreat Wood, where we saw a few late stragglers gliding effortlessly in to the communal roost as only kites can. Twenty minutes or so later saw us back and relaxing before another superb dinner at the Clachan, which recently received a first-class review from Giles Coren of *The Times*. So ended another cracking day birdwatching in excellent company.

Day 4

Thursday 21st November

High cloud and a bright frosty start promised another dry day and so it proved. Our destination was Loch Ryan at Stranraer and heading west from New Galloway along the Queen's Way, which follows the route of the old Edinburgh to Portpatrick road, one of the ancient pilgrims' ways to Whithorn, we were soon into rough grass, Bog Myrtle and willow scrub along the roadsides and open areas of Galloway Forest Park. Beyond these reared the heather-clad slopes of Black Craig o' Dee, Bennigineia and Craignell. A light dusting of snow adorned the very top of Meikle Millyea at the foot of the Kells range as we looked across the unrippled surface of Clatteringshaws Loch. We stopped briefly at Craigdews wild goat park but saw neither Wild Goats nor a Peregrine that sometimes takes the first rays of the sun perched atop the eponymous dark crags. However, Crossbills were about, and we could hear them chipping loudly towards Craignelder. Two small unidentified passerines perched up for a few seconds at the back of a tall willow bush, but all a few of us got on them against the strong light was the hint of a white face and collar and warm brown caps. This would be a most unusual place for Tree Sparrow, but then the weather has been very cold, they are increasing, and they can turn up just about anywhere. A probable, then, but none of us could think what else they might be.

We crossed the River Cree into Wigtownshire and continued west across The Moors, as this part of 'the shire' is called. A variety of corvids (though no Magpies...) and gulls were seen along the way, together with a few Buzzards here and there. Encouragingly, Rooks were seen attending their nests by the roadside in a welcome reminder that, as we slip into winter, spring draws ever nearer. Wigtownshire has some of the most extensive peatlands in Europe, sadly many of them planted over with alien conifers in the 1970s and 80s, but a few of the remaining open blanket bogs have been now been protected as SSSIs and Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive. Most have colourful names, like Derskelpin Moss, which we passed by.

After a brief comfort and provisions break at Morrisons, we were soon down on the seafront of Stranraer at the celebrated Bishop's Burn, which often attracts a good array of birds, and today was no exception. Over 100 Pale-bellied Brent Geese were strung out along the edge of the water, providing fantastic views in good light. We were later told that there was a dark-bellied individual amongst them, but nobody seemed to mind that we hadn't picked this one out from the crowd. There was a supporting cast of literally hundreds of Wigeon, a few Mallard, Red-breasted Mergansers, Shelduck and, a bit further out, a fair number of Scaup bobbing up and down characteristically. On the shore feeding right in front of us were Oystercatchers, Redshank, Turnstone, Curlew and several Knot and Dunlin and we at last added Great Black-backed Gulls to our list, which were in company with more common Black-headed, Common and Herring Gulls. We didn't see any Mediterranean Gulls, but they are often seen here, as are other rarer gulls. This was great birding and there was a buzz of excitement as everyone took their fill of the birds in front of them. This continued as we drove a little further east along the seafront, stopping to spot a party of Ringed Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits and lots more of the species we'd already seen, together with over 50 Mute Swans and a Cormorant or two on the sea. The birds just kept going as we continued east and stopped again in a big lay-by to gain a bit of elevation on the grassy sea wall. However, a

raw south-easterly wind got up and penetrated the warmest of gloves, and this and the falling tide prompted us to continue on a mile or two to the balmy shelter of the heughs and deeper water to the east.

Once out of the wind we set up the telescopes and enjoyed some brilliant views of at least 10 Slavonian Grebes, many more Red-breasted Mergansers, a few Common Scoter, Eider, Shags, a pair of Goldeneye and, a bit further out, several Red-throated Divers and Great Crested Grebes. All were delighted by the quality of the views and each concentrated on what caught their fancy, from the stunningly contrasting plumage of the Slavs, deliciously close views of a pair of scoters or the vigorously displaying antics of male mergansers. It is fair to say that this was all enhanced by the lack of wind and a welcome burst of sunshine! Following a tip-off from a local birder, we walked out on to Leffnoll Point, but just couldn't make three distant bobbing white birds into the three male Long-tailed Ducks that were reported around there, and in any case we were booked into the Driftwood Café for lunch and had to get going! The Driftwood is situated in Agnew Park, overlooking the small marina at the west end of Stranraer seafront, and it certainly lived up to its growing reputation for good food, well-served at reasonable prices.

Although the tide was now quite low, no birding trip to Loch Ryan is complete without a visit to the Wig, near Kirkcolm on the western shore. During WWII this was the site of a seaplane base and its flat hinterland often attracts Lapwing and Golden Plover, while Wig Bay is renowned for a variety of waterfowl including various grebes. Some 70+ Pale-bellied Brent Geese were scattered along the shore as we arrived, as were good numbers of Wigeon and an assortment of waders including Turnstone, Redshank, Lapwing, Oystercatchers, Curlew and Dunlin. On a calmer day we would have walked along the track to the Scar at the seaward end of the bay, but the biting east wind and sinking sun suggested the better strategy of driving slowly out to the wee car park by the WWII lookout bunker. We braved the wind for a few minutes and were soon rewarded by excellent close views of a pair of Stonechats, which glowed in the afternoon light. A happy wee band of Goldfinches also tinkled past, but it wasn't until we were back in the vehicle and trundling back that a group of a dozen-or-so Twite got up characteristically from the weedy scrub and bounced way in front of us. It was too cold and against the light to risk time going through the plethora of birds on and off-shore, and given the shorebird riches we'd already seen, we had more pressing business ahead.

We left Stranraer and were soon overlooking some fields often favoured by geese. A quick stop soon revealed that there were indeed some Greenland White-fronted Geese in a ploughed field before us. They were, of course, very well camouflaged, but we got fairly good views before something put them up. Several of the fields in the area had good numbers of Lapwing and a Kestrel hovered over some rough ground nearby. We shifted our position a wee bit and soon had telescope-filling views of the whitefronts, so scarce in mainland UK and greatly appreciated by all. As we were looking at them a brown ringtail Hen Harrier came flashing past on the wind, banking now and then to check for prey and showing its white rump and majestic powers of flight. We then drove on to overlook a favoured communal roosting area and were soon treated to a quite mesmerising and spectacular last 20 minutes or so of daylight. At least three adult grey male Hen Harriers, all seen together at least once, and at least two brown ringtail Hen Harriers, were all seen successively interacting and swooping over the roost in the moderate south-easterly wind. In truth, there could easily have been another few individuals around, such was the ground they covered and the speed of their directional shifts. In calm conditions it takes much more effort to fly a distance to roost and they are usually in low numbers or even absent. The spectacle this evening was simply superb, and they are such fantastic birds to watch. As we prepared to leave, someone

thought they may have heard the faint chacking of Magpie in the distance, but not enough to be listed and the quest continues.

Some light purring of contentment was heard on the drive back to St John's Town of Dalry, and no wonder, we'd had a superb day of birdwatching on yet another dry day, if a bit nippy in the wind. Another reason may have been the eradication of some vehicle squeaks by the judicious application of a little baked bean juice, but that is another story.

Back at the Clachan the evening log session saw the species list considerably expanded by the varied ornithological delights of Loch Ryan and its environs, and another delicious dinner was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Day 5

Friday 22nd November

This was our last day and we enjoyed slightly later breakfast before heading out for a leisurely walk down the Water of Ken, just behind the Clachan, on another dry, bright morning that was warmer than of late. The water was reached by way of the Boat Weil, literally 'boat way', which saw hundreds, perhaps thousands of pilgrims including royalty, on their way to St Ninian's shrine at Whithorn in Wigtownshire over a 1000-year period. From the suspension footbridge over the Ken we saw both Siskins and Lesser Redpolls hanging on tiny Alder cones by the waterside. Redwings and Fieldfares moved between Hawthorns laden with berries on the flood bank and riparian Alders, offering decent views now and then. Several Buzzards were about, and a Red Kite sailed over. We could hear a Raven croaking down the glen and presently spotted it circling high above the floodplain. We paid close attention to the confluence of the Ken with Garroch Burn, as this is sometimes a place for Dipper, but not today, though a Heron was seen by those who remained on the bank.

However, we were just about to retrace our steps back upstream towards Dalry when a long-sought-for species, but one which had eluded us all week, was called on a hedge in the middle distance, and sure enough it was a Magpie! The not-quite-universal cry went up: hurrah! A female Goosander flapped away upstream as we reached the footbridge and the foot of the Boat Weil. We took in some of the antiquities in the old kirkyard and soon reached the Clachan by way of a tall avenue of old Limes. Here we offered our respective thanks to our hosts and said goodbye to the couple who departed by car. The first rain of the week arrived as the rest of us left Dalry and motored via Balmacellan, Corsock and Glenkiln byways towards Dumfries. A few more Red Kites and Buzzards were seen along the way, as were several Pheasants, Red-legged Partridges and a second Magpie for the week! All things come to those who wait.

We reached Dumfries Railway Station in good time, just as the rain stopped and the sky brightened again. We said our farewells and went our various ways after a super few days birding in good weather for the time of year. The highlights were many and each had their own, but stunning views of Willow Tits, Slavonian Grebes, Dipper, Hen Harriers, Red Kites, Common Scoters and of course the various geese, were all mentioned – as were the extremely close views of Stonechats in the warm, late afternoon light. Great company, great laughs and great food, too!

Thank you to the staff of the Clachan Inn for their hospitality and delicious food, and of course to all the group for making this such an enjoyable holiday.

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	I=Introduced		November				
	Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22
1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓				✓
2	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Pale bellied Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>				✓	
4	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓		
5	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		✓			
6	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓	
7	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		✓	✓	H	
8	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>			c10	c30	
9	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓	✓	
10	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓			
11	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓	
12	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓			
13	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓	✓	
14	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓			
16	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	✓	
17	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓			
18	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>				✓	
19	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>				✓	
20	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>				✓	
21	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			1	2	
22	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			✓		✓
23	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>				✓	
24	Feral Pigeon - I	<i>Columba livia var. domestica</i>		✓	✓	✓	
25	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓			
27	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓			
28	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	✓	
29	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	
30	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>				c10	
31	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓		✓	
32	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓		✓	
33	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓			
34	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓	
35	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓		✓	
36	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				✓	
37	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓		✓	
38	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>				✓	
39	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓	
40	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓			
41	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓		✓	
42	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Common (Mew) Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>				✓	✓
45	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓		✓	
46	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>				6	
47	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>				✓	

	I=Introduced		November				
	Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22
48	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓	
49	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓			
51	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				6	
52	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	100+	✓	✓
53	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	H	H			
55	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		2		2	
56	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1			
57	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1			
58	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1			
59	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>					2
60	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓		✓
64	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓		✓		
65	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>			3+		
66	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓		✓
67	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓		✓
68	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓		✓	
69	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓		✓		
70	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	
71	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓		
72	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			1		
73	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			✓	✓	✓
77	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓		
79	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
80	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				✓	
81	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			1		
82	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
83	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓			
84	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
85	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓				
86	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			1		
88	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓			
89	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>				c12	
90	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓			
91	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>			✓	✓	✓
92	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	H			H	
93	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	
94	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	H				✓
95	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		1			
96	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	November				
			18	19	20	21	22

Mammals

1	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>				1	
2	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓	✓		
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	2				
4	Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>		1			
5	Mole	<i>Talpa europea</i>			✓	✓	✓
6	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		✓			

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