



Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Scotland's Bird Club
Established 1936

Clyde branch outing to South East Lothian 15th May 2024

Leader: Donald Wilson

Eleven of us met at Hogganfield car park at 07.00. As always, I arrived a little earlier, but one or two of the party were already present. I immediately started the trip bird count and was delighted with six swifts zooming over our heads, a year tick for me!

May birding can be good anywhere, but in particular, with the right conditions, you just never know what can turn up on the east coast. So with this in mind I had planned a Lothian trip. Apart from enjoying general birding, I enjoy the thrill of the chase! Therefore, I am happy to target a particular species or even twitch a scarce or rare bird if one turns up, within reason of course! This was in my mind as a plan for the trip. If I like seeing scarce breeding birds or scarce/rare vagrants or migrants, then I'm one hundred percent sure most people who enjoy the delights of our avian friends are in the same frame of mind.

Upon checking the weather forecast the day before the trip I was happy to see sustained light easterlies and thought, "this could be interesting". The downside to Lothian however is the dreaded M8. Even leaving just after 07.00, it still took us one hour and forty minutes to get to Torness power station, our starting point.



Outings Group photo (Billy McKellar)

We arrived at Torness at about 08.50. Whilst waiting for everyone to arrive and get parked (the visitor car park was unusually busy), I scanned the adjacent field. The first bird I set my eyes on was a female **Peregrine** sitting in the middle of the field! For those assembled I pointed it out and then swung around to

look at the power station itself. Sitting on one of the station ledges were two more Peregrines, so three in total, a first for me here. All the birds remained for everyone to have decent views, so a good start. While that was going on a female **Wheatear** was spotted, most likely from the Greenland race as this is the most common race to pass through in May. In addition, there was a **Ringed Plover** in the field, and other birds seen around the car park were **Swallow, Pied Wagtail, House Martin, Linnets** and some other common species. Unfortunately, the trees and bushes were devoid of any migrants, so we headed on down to the lower car park and sea wall.



Yellowhammer (Billy McKellar)



Skylark (Billy McKellar)

On the way we had a singing **Song Thrush, Reed Bunting, Dunnock** and **Yellowhammer**, with the latter putting on a good show. We scanned the field adjacent to the wall and spotted a **Grey Partridge**, which was a great sighting as it was crouched down in the grass with just its head showing initially. At the corner of the field and sea wall we came across a **Whitethroat**, female **Whinchat** and **Stonechat**.

Bill then called us back to the Grey Partridge which had done the decent thing and moved into one of the field channels making it very visible and not too distant, so we all filled our boots with this typically very tricky bird!



Reed Bunting (Donald Wilson)



Grey Partridge (Donald Wilson)

From the sea wall **Kittiwake, Sandwich Tern, Gannet, Eider**, and **Guillemot** were added among the usual species to be seen but there were very few waders about as most are now on their breeding grounds (although you hope for the odd straggler or even scarcer wader at this time of the year.)

By now it was about 11.00 so I gathered up the troops and headed for the power station approach road and the road to Skateraw for one of the hoped-for targets, Yellow Wagtail.

A good tactic is to drive very slowly along the roads in the hope that a bird pops up on the fence line or along the roadside verges. Alas not today. We drove as far as we could along the blocked-off road to the quarry and stopped there. As we walked along we had two distant **Buzzard, Meadow Pipit** carrying food, singing **Skylark, Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Stonechat, Sand Martin** (a small colony in the bank of the burn). But still no Yellow Wagtail.

By this time we were spread out and I was at the furthest-away point when I heard the unmistakable call of a **Yellow Wagtail**. I looked up and saw it fly over my head and shouted out but unfortunately only one other person saw it.

By now the rumble tums were setting in so we headed down to Skateraw where there are picnic benches and toilet facilities. Skateraw can be superb for migrants but not today. However, we added **Shelduck**, **Cormorant** and had a very showy **Whitethroat** singing away.



Whitethroat (Ania Owsianka)

After some chat it was decided to give the Yellow Wagtails another go so we went back and parked at the same spot. Soon a male **Yellow Wagtail** was spotted on one of the field walls with most of us getting a view albeit a bit distant. Then another was spotted. We were all content.

On the way back two of the group were closer to the nearside road wall. They peered over and saw a female **Yellow Wagtail** reasonably close and then another two males appeared. Everyone saw them. We were now very happy! Then some of the group got onto two **Red-legged Partridge**! Another really good bird for the trip!

Meanwhile I received a message that two Spoonbills had been seen at Tynningame Inner Bay, so we decided on a mini twitch.



Yellow Wagtail (Donald Wilson)

We got to the car park, paid our £2.50 and headed out to the salt marsh. Unfortunately, there was a significant heat-haze and the tide was out but we cracked on. Soon a large white bird was seen through one of the scopes. It was either a Great White Egret or a Spoonbill. It seemed likely that it was the Spoonbill but we needed to get a better look. We got as close as we could without causing disturbance, scope up, **Great White Egret**! We had found our own scarcity, and a good bird for Lothian, I was later reliably informed. Two **Little Egrets** flew out of one of the channels.

As we were a good bit out on the salt marsh it was worth a scope of the river dunes and surrounding area and we counted at least four **Whimbrel**, Curlew, probable **Common Tern**, definite **Sandwich Tern** and a good few **Goosander**. We headed back to the cars as it was now 16:00 and there were some tired bodies, who decided to head off home.

Five of us decided to head to Aberlady Bay in search of the other target bird, Lesser Whitethroat, as there are several pairs breeding between the car park and the beach. The walk to the best area for Lesser Whitethroat is at least a mile from the car park. No joy, despite a good search, but on one of the fairways we had four **Wheatear**, with one cracking male, again probably the Greenland race. We added **Greylag Goose**, **Tufted Duck** and one or two other species to the day's tally. It was now around 17.45 and time to head home.

Another cracking Lothian day, with us only scratching the surface!

Donald Wilson, May 2024

72 Species seen and heard (H)

Mute Swan	Dunlin	Robin
Greylag Goose	Curlew	Whinchat
Shelduck	Whimbrel	Stonechat
Mallard	Black-headed Gull	Song Thrush
Tufted Duck	Kittiwake	Blackbird
Eider	Common Gull	Wheatear
Goosander	Herring Gull	Blackcap (H)
Red-breasted Merganser	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Whitethroat
Grey Partridge	Great Black-backed Gull	Sedge Warbler
Red-legged Partridge	Sandwich Tern	Willow Warbler (H)
Pheasant	Common Tern	Chiffchaff (H)
Fulmar	Guillemot	Coal Tit (H)
Gannet	Feral Pigeon	Magpie
Cormorant	Woodpigeon	Jackdaw
Shag	Swift	Rook
Little Egret	Skylark	Carrion Crow
Great White Egret	Sand Martin	Starling
Grey Heron	Swallow	House Sparrow
Buzzard	House Martin	Chaffinch
Peregrine	Meadow Pipit	Linnet
Kestrel	Yellow Wagtail	Goldfinch
Coot	Pied Wagtail	Siskin
Ringed Plover	Wren	Reed Bunting
Oystercatcher	Duncock	Yellowhammer