

# THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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## SCOTLAND

### Autumn in the Scottish Highlands

### 22 – 29 October 2016

#### TOUR REPORT

**Leader: Mike Read**

#### **Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October**

Just before breakfast, a few birds were seen close to the hotel and these included coal and blue tits, as well as European robins. After a leisurely breakfast we drove to Loch Garten seeing goosander (common merganser), chaffinch, siskin and European goldfinch by the Spey near Grantown and then finding plenty of fieldfares, a few common pheasants and three roe deer during the rest of the journey. Beside Loch Garten there were a couple of Eurasian treecreepers, coal, treat and a lone crested tit, as well as one or two jays. We walked to the Osprey Centre where we saw dozens of coal tits and at least three crested tits, as well as a couple of chaffinches.

From here we drove to Loch Pityoulish where we saw red-legged partridge and great cormorant but little else. During our picnic lunch in Abernethy Forest we added winter wren and goldcrest.

After meeting up with the later arriving clients back in Grantown, we drove to Lochindorb seeing a pair of stonechats as soon as we turned off the A939, and a little further on we saw the first of many red grouse along this minor road. In a couple of fields there were a few rabbits including one black individual; a pair of mistle thrushes were perched in a tree where a small group of linnets were also seen. Out on the Loch itself were a few mallards and tufted ducks, one female common goldeneye and four greater scaup. A small group of greylag geese flew off southwards from the end of the Loch.

Flocks of redwings and fieldfares were seen during the journey towards Carrbridge (as they were throughout the rest of the tour!) and we then turned towards Grantown-on-Spey and saw some wildfowl on Loch Mòr. These included five or six whooper swans, a small flock of Eurasian wigeon, as well as a few coots and mallards. Taking a smaller road that would lead us through to Carrbridge itself, we found more redwings and fieldfares, two roe deer, a flock of greylag geese, plus numerous corvids. The A95 eventually took us back to our hotel where we arrived in plenty of time to relax before a superb evening meal – the first of many!

### **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> October**

We woke to a frost which still lingered at 9am when we left for Strathdearn. The journey to this lovely valley produced sightings of roe deer, common buzzard and flocks of greylag geese in flight, as well as more common species like common pheasants, rooks and a couple of collared doves.

We turned off of the A9 and saw a common kestrel, another buzzard and a short way alongside the River Findhorn we located a group of 14 red-legged partridges plus many common pheasants. Various thrushes included a few mistles and there were about a dozen mallards on the river itself. With raptors being much sought after in this valley, we were pleased to find a couple more common buzzards and a kestrel before hearing a red deer stag roaring from the hillside just beyond a woodland. From this stopping point we scanned the slopes and hilltops and located at least 30 more red deer, as well as a roe deer amongst gorse on a lower slope. A possible golden eagle was seen in flight with prey but sadly it disappeared over a ridge before we could be sure of its identity. On the river we saw three goosanders before we reached the parking area at the end of the valley.

Once parked, we strolled a little further into the valley and counted a further eight common buzzards and a juvenile golden eagle spooked a red grouse into flight above the ridge. Half a dozen common ravens flew around calling, at least six long-tailed tits moved along through some trees and a dipper was seen on rocks in the river. A raptor appeared above the sky-line and at first was thought to be a hen harrier but as it came closer, the white at the base of its tail was on the underside not the upper. Overhead its true identity was revealed – a goshawk. It drifted along for a while and then it disappeared over the ridge. As we returned to the vehicle, another golden eagle was seen and this was promptly mobbed by two peregrines. By now the 18 feral goats that we had seen on a ridge to the south of the river had moved along and we watched these animals off and on throughout our lunch break.

From here we began a very slow journey out of the valley and close to a bridge over the river we found another dipper and a grey heron. Further on a great spotted woodpecker flew into some trees, then two adult golden eagles were seen flying together making at least four different eagles for the day. More thrushes were seen, as was a kestrel and a couple of rabbits.

During a detour on our journey back to the hotel we passed through some areas of coniferous woodlands and happened upon a male capercaillie almost on the roadside, making a fabulous end to a super days birding. After dinner we were invited to join a quiz set by the BBC Wildlife group that were also staying at the hotel. Thanks to some knowledge and some inspired guesswork(!) we won and had a couple of bottles of wine to share at the next evening's dinner.

### **Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October**

A misty start to the day meant that some of the early walk to Anagach Woods was taken in near darkness but it was not too early for a couple of robins to be singing close to the hotel. At the woodland itself, a female tawny owl was heard calling in the distance but birds were hard to find until the light improved. Just before turning back towards Grantown a group of redwings flew out of the woodland and a winter wren alarm-called unseen from the scrubby woodlands. At the BWWC feeders a red squirrel was devouring peanuts and a few coal tits were also seen.

After breakfast we began the journey towards the Black Isle seeing groups of wintering thrushes and a great spotted woodpecker before we reached Carrbridge. Once on the A9, the northwards journey produced little except a common kestrel and a couple of jays. Once we had turned off the A9, we noted a common buzzard sat on a hay bale in a field and as we drove through a village, a collared dove was seen in flight.

At Chanonry Point we scanned the sea in the hope of finding bottle-nosed dolphins but sadly none appeared. However, plenty of birds were noted including starlings, robin and a pied wagtail along the shore while out over the Moray Firth we saw at least a dozen long-tailed ducks, perhaps 15 cormorants, a

few common eiders and northern gannets, common, herring and black-headed gulls, a red-throated diver in flight and a couple of common guillemots were difficult to find as they frequently dived for food. There were at least four Atlantic grey seals present too. As we left the Fortrose area, a few pink-footed geese were seen in flight.

Once on the 'B' road towards Udale Bay, several skeins of pink-footed geese were seen in the distance. From the RSPB hide overlooking Udale Bay there were masses of birds to be seen on the short grassland and, especially, on the intertidal mud. These included at least 8,000 pink-footed geese, a few greylag geese, hundreds of Eurasian wigeon and six grey herons. Waders were represented by black and bar-tailed godwits, curlews, redshanks, knots, dunlins, 19 golden plovers, northern lapwings, Eurasian oystercatchers and a single common snipe. Having had our fill of massed birds (and sandwiches etc!) we drove to Newall Point and on the way there paused to view some smaller birds including robin, chaffinch and blackbird, as well as a flock of long-tailed tits, together with one or two blue and great tits. At the point itself we located a couple of great cormorants, a grey heron and two little grebes.

We then drove to Cromarty seeing groups of four and then five greater scaup, a few redshanks and curlews, a couple of pairs of red-breasted mergansers, a group of common eiders, 15 turnstones and two skylarks.

After a brief pause in Cromarty we took the southern route out of town and headed westwards before turning on to a smaller road towards Navity and Upper Eathie. Along this road we located a further 30 or more greylag geese, three common buzzards (two of which were perched on bales), a couple of mistle thrushes and a few wood pigeons. We returned to Udale Bay and in particular to Newall Point and again searched the bay lined with oil rigs in for repair. The mud flats again held waders including over 100 knots and lots of oystercatchers while the incoming tide was bringing a long-tailed duck and a red-necked grebe with it. Just as we were about to leave, a merlin dashed past just above our heads and away towards Invergordon on the far shore.

We drove to the A9 seeing a Red Kite in flight over fields near Culbokie and headed south towards Inverness. A brief diversion to North Kessock had us searching the sea beneath the A9 bridge. Here we found some more red-breasted mergansers, a common guillemot and, best of all, an otter feeding close to the far bank. Our journey back to the hotel took us past Loch Mòr where once again we saw half a dozen whooper swans.

## **Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> October**

Another misty dawn greeted the day and after breakfast we set off for the Cairngorm area. During the drive we saw a small flock of greylag geese in flight plus the usual redwings and fieldfares. Our first stop on the mountain was at the 'lower' skiing car park but a considerable amount of work was taking place in the area and wildlife was no doubt reduced as a consequence. A helicopter even landed at the cordoned off end of the car park while we were there. However, from this area we did see one roe deer and four red deer, a few red grouse and a group of 6 bullfinches flew past. Further up the road we paused to overlook the reindeer enclosures and could see at least 60 individuals.

Three of the group walked out towards Cairngorm from the upper car park. Alpine lady's mantle and tormentil both sported occasional flowers and red grouse were frequently encountered but sadly no ptarmigan were found. The other two members of the group took the funicular railway to the top of Cairngorm and visited the only ptarmigan of the day, the Ptarmigan Restaurant! The views from the top and also the views that the walking group had were quite spectacular with mist lingering in the Aviemore area.

We all gathered back at the minibus and drove down to overlook Loch Morlich while we ate our picnic lunch. Here, again, birds were in rather short supply with six mallard coming close (no doubt on the lookout for food) and a further 30 or so were much further out on the loch.

After a visit to the Rothiemurchus Gift Shop for some retail therapy we began the drive towards Insh Marshes. During this journey there were numerous common pheasants and a few wood pigeons seen, as well as a couple of mistle thrushes, about 10-12 red-legged partridges and a red squirrel. Some fly agaric fungi and aspen trees were seen around the Insh Marshes car park. From the platform overlooking this reserve we could see coal, blue and great tits on the feeders just below us, while chaffinches foraged on the ground below them. A couple of rabbits were seen on the raised area of land in the middle of the marsh and a common buzzard flew in and landed on a small shrub in the same area presumably hoping for an easy meal. Out on the marsh we located a total of nine roe deer, some of which were feeding in an area of small pools. These same pools held a few wildfowl including mallard, Eurasian wigeon and Eurasian teal. A great spotted woodpecker flew past our viewpoint, as did occasional mistle thrushes and flocks of redwings and fieldfares and a small group of greylag geese.

From here we drove to the far side of the marsh and headed north to begin the journey back to the hotel. A couple of stops on the 'B' road produced further views over the Insh Marshes and Loch Insh itself. Wigeon, teal and mallard were seen again but added to the list of wildfowl were two mute swans and three or four goldeneye.

We completed the journey back to Grantown-on-Spey with nothing new to add to the day's bird list which we completed before another fine evening meal.

### **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> October**

Overnight westerly winds had brought warmer temperatures and as we headed out northwards, the vehicle's exterior gauge was already registering 11 degrees – warmer than at any time the previous day.

A few kilometres along the road we paused for a scan of the hillside and found four male black grouse plus a couple of red grouse. A little further on, a common kestrel was hovering beside the road then we had a surprise when we saw another male black grouse which this time was somewhat closer. It was actually feeding on the roadside grass verge!!

Soon many more kilometres passed as we headed for Forres with sightings of redwings, fieldfares plus numerous corvids and a few gulls.

Just after Forres we took the Findhorn road and saw a number of Eurasian curlews in a stubble field. The tide was high when we pulled into the car park overlooking Findhorn Bay but still there were plenty of birds to be seen. There were groups of Eurasian curlews and Eurasian oystercatchers out on the grassland, while along the water's edge there were flocks of Eurasian wigeons and about 20 northern pintails. In the far distance there were a couple of whooper swans and two more flew in a little later. A group of 31 golden plovers flew overhead and landed some distance away and a European goldfinch flew over the car park.

A short drive through Findhorn took us to the beach area where we saw a male stonechat, a few house sparrows, starlings, dunnock and wren in the car park bushes. We walked the short distance to the beach from where we could scan the Cromarty Firth for birds. Northern gannets were very numerous as were long-tailed ducks. We estimated there were at least 500 of each! Many of the gannets were feeding just off shore. Other species noted here included one common scoter, one red-throated diver, a couple of razorbills and a few common guillemots, various gulls including common and six velvet scoters. There were also a few grey seals in the sea and as we returned to the vehicle a few linnets flew past and a common kestrel hovered in the strong breeze.

We returned to the car park overlooking the Findhorn Bay and by now areas of mud were exposed as the tide began to fall. Groups of waders were spread out along the edge of the water with one area holding a variety of species including oystercatchers, redshanks, golden plovers, knots, dunlins and bar-tailed

godwits. Careful studies of this group also revealed a few sanderlings, half a dozen ringed plovers and three little stints.

Later we drove towards Roseisle seeing little except corvids and a few wood pigeons en-route. Compared to the seabirds at Findhorn, the beach and sea here were very quiet with three oystercatchers and a flock of mainly herring gulls a couple of hundred yards away. By now, light rain had arrived so we returned to the minibus seeing a few species of fungi as we went.

We then drove to Burghead and around the harbour we found three rock pipits, one grey heron and four grey seals, while just beyond the harbour entrance was a red-throated diver and a feeding flock of over 300 common eiders. With a strong westerly breeze now blowing we decided to go to the east side of the headland and from here we saw a few more common eiders, two European shags, one great cormorant, about 20 northern gannets, three ruddy turnstones and another single common scoter. Eurasian curlew and common redshanks were also present.

There were many more Eurasian curlews during our drive to Lossiemouth, including groups of at least 50 and 100 feeding in stubble fields. Around Lossiemouth Harbour we found another rock pipit and a pied wagtail, while offshore were more northern gannets and a couple of great cormorants. Nothing new was added from Lossiemouth car park and by now it was time to begin the journey back towards Grantown-on-Spey.

Along the coastal A96 we saw many skeins of pink-footed geese etched across the windy skies. Beyond Forres there were the usual flocks of redwings and fieldfares, a hovering common kestrel and a 'ringtail' hen harrier drifted above the road and out over a mixture of moorland and woodland. Our view of this bird was, sadly, very brief despite turning back to try and relocate it.

With a little time to spare we detoured out to Lochindorb but only saw a couple of red grouse and a mistle Thrush but during the completion of our return to the hotel we found three roe deer. With a good forecast for Aurora Borealis that evening, we again drove out to Lochindorb to be away from the town lights. Out on this narrow side road we became aware of why we had seen so many dead mountain hares along the various local roads as one crossed just in front of us. Luckily we managed to avoid it and everyone secured views this living individual. Apart from a very minor possible showing of the Northern Lights as soon as we arrived, nothing else (except thousands of stars on this mostly clear night) was seen and soon the cold wind drove us back into the vehicle and then back to the hotel.

#### **Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> October**

A short drive took us to Anagach Woods where we began our search for wildlife. Fungi were frequent and included wood bluet and false chanterelle. One red squirrel was seen near the BWWC feeders and in the same area we noted many coal tits. A passing group of birds included a Eurasian treecreeper, three bullfinches, great and long-tailed tits, while a little further on a winter wren was seen and overhead were a couple of groups of redwings and two or three common crossbills. We returned to the minibus and drove to a small road beside the River Spey. Here we found a juvenile grey heron, four goosanders and a few mallards, as well as seeing occasional salmon jumping.

Apart from the usual groups of redwings and fieldfares, little was seen on the way to Loch Garten. We visited the feeders at the Osprey Centre and even though there were less birds present than during the colder days at the previous weekend, we still saw lots of coal tits, a few blue and great tits and a lone crested tit. Back at the car park we saw a goldcrest and a common crossbill flew over.

From Nethy Bridge we took the side road towards Broomhill and saw a flock of greylag geese feeding in a stubble field. One white-fronted goose of the Russian race was found amongst them. We parked overlooking the River Spey to eat our picnic lunches. Here again we saw fairly frequent salmon jumping while along the bank of the river there were two white-throated dippers. Two little grebes frequently dived

along the edge of the river while a few groups of greylag geese passed overhead. We then drove to Abernethy Forest reserve and on the way into Forest Lodge another crested tit was seen but otherwise nothing else was seen and there seemed little prospect of adding more to the days list so we drove out again.

A visit to the Heather Centre for a cuppa, some feeder birds and a little retail therapy. On arrival there we were alarmed to see that a fire had wrought destruction of the former centre earlier in the year. However, a new, much smaller building was being used as a temporary tea room and gift shop and thus both needs were satisfied. Feeders were being improved while we were there and a few coal and great tits were present, as were chaffinches and a couple of blackbirds.

Later we drove to Carrbridge seeing one common buzzard, mistle thrushes and redwings on the way. At Carrbridge the old bridge was duly photographed (once the exhibitionist had left!) and there were a few mallard on the river. We headed back towards Grantown a little early as we were having an earlier than usual dinner. However, we did see a couple of common buzzards and a grey heron during the journey.

### **Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October**

We left the hotel and began the journey towards the Black Isle once more. Roe deer, greylag geese and common buzzards were soon on our list along with a few more common species.

Once beyond Fortrose we saw many skeins of pink-footed geese in flight and a flock of small birds on overhead wires proved to be Twite. In all we estimated that there were over 200 perched on the wires and then a merlin came dashing past and swooped towards the far side of the field scaring up another 150 or so! The merlin left with empty talons! Also seen here were a few chaffinches, one more common buzzard and a red kite.

At the hide overlooking the RSPB Udale Bay reserve, the tide was high and consequently many of the waders were roosting on the grassland along with good numbers of wildfowl. The waders included 530 oystercatchers, 140 knot, 140 redshanks plus smaller numbers of lapwings, dunlins, golden plovers and bar-tailed godwits. Three whooper swans drifted away on the tide and a further 14 flew past a little later on. Eurasian teal and Eurasian wigeon were present in good numbers and the 1,000 or so pink-footed geese roosting on the grassland were later joined by perhaps another 4-5,000 that flew in presumably having been disturbed on their feeding grounds. Amongst the arriving Pink-feet was one white-fronted goose of the Greenland race. There was also a lone Canada goose and a single shelduck present. There was little of note at the nearby Newall Point so we drove to Chanonry Point to have our lunch overlooking part of the Moray Firth.

As before there were quite a few common starlings and a European robin present, plus two pied wagtails in the grounds of the lighthouse. Birds on or over the sea included four turnstones, about 30 northern gannets, 40 or more long-tailed ducks, five red-breasted mergansers, two red-throated divers, one male eider, cormorants, shags, guillemots and two Atlantic puffins. There were at least four Atlantic grey seals to be seen and not long before we left, a group of at least three bottle-nosed dolphins passed by heading westwards.

We eventually left at about 2pm and drove to Strathdearn in the hope of more raptor sightings. Whilst still on the Black Isle we saw a few skylarks and a group of about ten stock doves. Into Strathdearn itself and we began with a roadside kestrel and a common buzzard. We soon saw two more of the latter species plus two goosanders on the Findhorn River itself. A red kite was soaring over a hillside to the south while on the northern slopes there were many red deer. We paused to watch salmon spawning in the shallows and then watched a sparrowhawk passing overhead. More red deer were noted further into the valley and we then saw an adult golden eagle being mobbed by at least five common ravens. By now it was time to head back out of the valley and as we went we saw many fieldfares and common pheasants, at least a dozen red-legged partridges and a grey heron.

On the rest of the journey back to Grantown-on-Spey we saw more fieldfares in various locations, greylag geese in a stubble field, a common buzzard on a roadside tree and a few tufted ducks on Loch Mòr.

Also seen during this day were two male capercaillies – a very exciting find! – but the exact location is withheld due to the sensitivity of this declining species.

### **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October**

Having packed before breakfast, we loaded the minibus, bade farewell to the hotel staff and left a little after 9am. After a brief visit to the River Spey where we saw some mallard, half a dozen goosanders, one white-throated dipper, a couple of winter wrens and a few other common species. Back in Grantown a brief visit to one particular shop paid off when a song thrush was heard singing. This was our first record of this species for the tour!

After passing Carrbridge we drove northwards on the A9 for one final visit to Strathdearn in the hope of finally seeing a white-tailed eagle. During the drive on the A9 we noted many redwings and fieldfares plus a common kestrel. As we passed through Tomatin a red squirrel was seen.

Into the Findhorn Valley and we were soon seeing raptors with one, then four, then two, then a further three common buzzards. Three goosanders flew ahead of us along the river, a few common ravens circled over various hilltops, with a couple of these large members of the crow family seen mobbing a passing peregrine. A lone golden eagle was seen at the head of the valley and a couple more goosanders were noted. We drove part of the way back towards the A9 and paused for lunch overlooking shallows where perhaps 20 salmon were spawning. Here we also saw a common kestrel then two adult golden eagles rose above a hillside. We watched these for some time and eventually one drifted high across the valley. As it did so, a third eagle was spotted even higher up and flying westwards. At this point the original eagle began a 'switchback' display to demonstrate it was the territory owner. The upper bird carried on west!

All of this eagle activity had stirred a few Red grouse into flight and just before our departure a group of about 20 long-tailed tits passed through the area. We began our drive towards the A9 and saw a passing sparrowhawk being mobbed by fieldfares, there was another white-throated dipper on a rock in mid river and there were quite a few red-legged partridges close to the road plus two red squirrels playing chase-around-a-tree.

At Carrbridge we reunited two of the group with their car and as we did so, two common crossbills flew past; a parting gift at the end of a highly successful tour in which we had seen a total of 107 species of birds – but sadly, still no white-tailed eagle! Perhaps next year.....

## SPECIES LIST:

### BIRDS

<b>Red-throated Diver</b>	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	1 on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Chanonry Point, 1 off Findhorn Beach and 1 at Burghead on 26 <sup>th</sup> and 2 together at Chanonry Point on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Red-legged Partridge</b>	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	1 on 22 <sup>nd</sup> near Loch Pityoulish, 15 in Strathtearn on 23 <sup>rd</sup> and also seen in that valley on 29 <sup>th</sup> and 30 <sup>th</sup> . Also seen on 24 <sup>th</sup> & 25 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Pheasant</b>	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Common. Seen every day of the tour.
<b>Red Grouse</b>	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	9 seen near Lochindorb on 22 <sup>nd</sup> then seen on a further 4 days.
<b>Capercaillie</b>	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>	1 male seen in Caledonian Pine Woods on 23 <sup>rd</sup> then 2 males in the same area early on 28 <sup>th</sup> and one of the same ones later that same day.
<b>Black Grouse</b>	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>	4 males seen to the north of Grantown-on-Spey on 26 <sup>th</sup> and another on the roadside verge a little further north still on the same day.
<b>Greylag Goose</b>	<i>Anser anser</i>	Seen every day except 26 <sup>th</sup> & 29 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Greater White-fronted Goose</b>	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	1 of the Russian/European race near Broomhill on 27 <sup>th</sup> and 1 of the Greenland race at Udale Bay on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Pink-footed Goose</b>	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	Probably in excess of 10,000 at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> and half that number there on 28 <sup>th</sup> . Smaller numbers seen to the east of Forres on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Canada Goose</b>	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	About 30 seen near Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> and 1 there on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Mute Swan</b>	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	2 seen at Insh Marshes on 25 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Whooper Swan</b>	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	5 or 6 regularly seen on Loch Mor as we passed then 3 at Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> and finally groups of 3, 14 and 20 seen from the Black Isle on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Shelduck</b>	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	5 at Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> and a single bird at Udale Bay on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Eurasian Wigeon</b>	<i>Anas penelope</i>	25 seen at Loch Mor on 22 <sup>nd</sup> then hundreds seen at the coast on 24 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup> . On 25 <sup>th</sup> there were a few at Insh Marshes.
<b>Mallard</b>	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Noted every day of the tour.
<b>Northern Pintail</b>	<i>Anas acuta</i>	About 20 seen during the high tide visit to Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Eurasian (Common) Teal</b>	<i>Anas crecca</i>	First seen on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Udale Bay then noted on a further 3 days with the largest numbers also at Udale on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Pochard</b>	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Just 1 or 2 seen on Loch Mòr on 22 <sup>nd</sup> .
<b>Greater Scaup</b>	<i>Aythya marila</i>	4 were on Lochindorb on 22 <sup>nd</sup> and there were 9 on the sea between Udale and Cromarty on 24 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Tufted Duck</b>	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	A few were on Lochindorb on 22 <sup>nd</sup> and there were 4 on Loch Mòr on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Eider</b>	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	At least 10 seen on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Chanonry Point and between Udale and Cromarty then a flock of over 300 just outside Burghead Harbour a couple of days later. Also noted on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Scoter</b>	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	1 flew West at Findhorn Beach on 26 <sup>th</sup> and another headed east at Burghead later that day.
<b>Velvet Scoter</b>	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>	6 (1 male and 5 females) flew west at Findhorn Beach on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Long-tailed Duck</b>	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	30+ seen mainly from Chanonry Point on 24 <sup>th</sup> then 500 or more seen off Findhorn Beach on 26 <sup>th</sup> .



<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b>	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Finally about 50 seen on 28 <sup>th</sup> again from Chanonry Point.
<b>Goosander</b>	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Small numbers seen at the coast on 24 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Goldeneye</b>	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	First seen on the River Spey at Grantown on 22 <sup>nd</sup> then noted there or on the Findhorn River on a further 4 days.
<b>Little Grebe</b>	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1 female on Lochindorb on 22 <sup>nd</sup> then 3 or 4 were on Loch Insh on 25 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Red-necked Grebe</b>	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	A single bird seen twice on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Newall Point and there were 2 there on 28 <sup>th</sup> . There were also 2 on the River Spey at Broomhill on 27 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Grey Heron</b>	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	One well seen at Newall Point on 24 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Northern Gannet</b>	<i>Sula bassana</i>	Small numbers seen every day from 23 <sup>rd</sup> with 6 at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> being the largest gathering.
<b>Great Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	10 or more seen from Chanonry Point on 24 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> but the largest quantity was seen off Findhorn Beach on 26 <sup>th</sup> where we saw in excess of 500 individuals.
<b>European Shag</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	2 at Loch Pityoulish on 22 <sup>nd</sup> were our first and then seen at the coast on 24 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Hen (Northern) Harrier</b>	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	At least 3 seen on 26 <sup>th</sup> at Burghead then also seen on 28 <sup>th</sup> at Chanonry Point.
<b>Eurasian Sparrowhawk</b>	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1 'ringtail' seen briefly as it flew across the A940 on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Northern Goshawk</b>	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Singles seen in Strathdearn on 28 <sup>th</sup> & 29 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Buzzard</b>	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	One seen high over Strathdearn on 23 <sup>rd</sup> was in an area with very little woodland.
<b>Golden Eagle</b>	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Seen most days of the tour with perhaps a dozen or more in Strathdearn on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common (Eurasian) Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	4 on 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 1 on 28 <sup>th</sup> and 4 on 29 <sup>th</sup> all in Strathdearn.
<b>Merlin</b>	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	3 seen on 23 <sup>rd</sup> on the way to and in Strath Dearn then noted on a further 4 days.
<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Singles seen at Newall Point on 24 <sup>th</sup> and near Raddery on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Eurasian Coot</b>	<i>Fulica atra</i>	2 seen mobbing a Golden Eagle in Strathdearn on 23 <sup>rd</sup> then a single bird seen in the same area on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Eurasian Oystercatcher</b>	<i>Himantopus ostralegus</i>	1 or 2 seen on 22 <sup>nd</sup> on Loch Mòr then a few were on a pool in Strathdearn on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Northern Lapwing</b>	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Good numbers seen at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> and also at Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>European Golden Plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Many at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>[Common] Ringed Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	19 at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> and that had risen to about 80 birds there on 28 <sup>th</sup> . Also at least 40 seen at Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Snipe</b>	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1 on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Udale Bay and at least 6 on 26 <sup>th</sup> in Findhorn Bay.
<b>Black-tailed Godwit</b>	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Just a single bird seen at Udale bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Bar-tailed Godwit</b>	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	The 3 seen in flight at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> was our only sighting.
<b>Eurasian Curlew</b>	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Seen in small numbers at Udale bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup> and also seen at Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Redshank</b>	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Good numbers seen at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup> and also at Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> . On the latter of these dates we also saw flocks of Curlews feeding in stubble and grass fields.
		Highest count was at Udale Bay on 28 <sup>th</sup> when at least 140 were seen. The species was also seen at

<b>Dunlin</b>	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	the same location on 24 <sup>th</sup> and at Findhorn Bay and other coastal locations on 26 <sup>th</sup> . Seen at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> and also in Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Red Knot</b>	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Seen at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> and also in Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Sanderling</b>	<i>Calidris alba</i>	A group of about 25 seen at Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Little Stint</b>	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	At least 3 seen in Findhorn Bay on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Ruddy Turnstone</b>	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	15 seen along the shoreline between Udale and Cromarty on 24 <sup>th</sup> then 3 or 4 seen at Burghead on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Noted on each of our 3 coastal days.
<b>Common (Mew) Gull</b>	<i>Larus canus</i>	Just seen on our 3 coastal days.
<b>Greater Black-backed Gull</b>	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Small numbers seen on our 3 coastal days and also inland at Lochindorb on 22 <sup>nd</sup> and Loch Insh on 25 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Herring Gull</b>	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Common. Noted in large numbers at the coast on 24 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> . Also seen inland on 22 <sup>nd</sup> and 23 <sup>rd</sup> .
<b>Atlantic Puffin</b>	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	Just 2 seen at Chanonry Point on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Guillemot</b>	<i>Uria aalge</i>	Seen at Chanonry Point on 24 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> and also at Findhorn Beach and Burghead on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Razorbill</b>	<i>Alca torda</i>	2 seen on 26 <sup>th</sup> from Findhorn Beach.
<b>Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)</b>	<i>Columba livia</i>	Seen every day mainly in Grantown-on-Spey.
<b>Stock Dove</b>	<i>Columba oenas</i>	A group of about 10 individuals seen in a field close to the A832 on the Black Isle on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>(Common) Wood Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Small numbers seen every day.
<b>Eurasian Collared Dove</b>	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Odd ones and twos seen most days but some folks found them harder to see than others!!
<b>Tawny Owl</b>	<i>Strix aluco</i>	A female was heard giving her 'kee-wick' call during the early walk on 24 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Singles seen on 3 successive days from 23 <sup>rd</sup> and also on 29 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Eurasian Jay</b>	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	First seen on 22 <sup>nd</sup> on the way towards Loch Garten then encountered on a further 3 occasions.
<b>Eurasian Magpie</b>	<i>Pica pica</i>	Seen on 22 <sup>nd</sup> close to Abernethy Forest reserve and the only other sightings were on 26 <sup>th</sup> when at least 8 were noted from Findhorn to Lossiemouth.
<b>Western Jackdaw</b>	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	Common. Seen every day.
<b>Rook</b>	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Common. Seen every day.
<b>Carrion Crow</b>	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Common. Seen every day.
<b>Hooded Crow</b>	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Pure looking 'hoodies' were seen at Udale Bay on 24 <sup>th</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Northern (Common) Raven</b>	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Seen on the first 3 and the last 2 days of the tour with a sprinkling of individuals in Strathdearn on 24 <sup>th</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup> and 29 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Coal Tit</b>	<i>Periparus ater</i>	Noted on each of the first 6 days with especially good numbers seen at the Loch Garten car park and feeders.
<b>Crested Tit</b>	<i>Parus cristatus</i>	3 seen at the Loch Garten feeders on 22 <sup>nd</sup> and single birds were seen there and in Abernethy Forest on 27 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Great Tit</b>	<i>Parus major</i>	Noted on 5 days.
<b>Blue Tit</b>	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Noted on 5 days.
<b>Long-tailed (Bush) Tit</b>	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	6 seen in Strathdearn on 23 <sup>rd</sup> , a small flock was seen as we approached Newall Point on 24 <sup>th</sup> then not noted again until 29 <sup>th</sup> when a few were again in Strathdearn.

<b>Eurasian Skylark</b>	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	2 seen on 24 <sup>th</sup> as we drove towards Cromarty and then a single bird was seen on 28 <sup>th</sup> as we left the Black Isle.
<b>Goldcrest</b>	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Heard on 22 <sup>nd</sup> in Abernethy Forest and then 1 seen at the Osprey Centre by Loch Garten on 27 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>(Winter) Wren</b>	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Heard, mainly alarm notes, every day from 23 <sup>rd</sup> but with only a couple of sightings.
<b>White-throated Dipper</b>	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	2 on 23 <sup>rd</sup> in Strathdearn and another 2 there on 29 <sup>th</sup> . Also 2 on the River Spey at Broomhill on 27 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Eurasian Treecreeper</b>	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	2 beside Loch Garten on 22 <sup>nd</sup> and a single bird in Anagach Woods on 27 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common (European) Starling</b>	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Small numbers seen every day of the tour.
<b>Common Blackbird</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Seen every day in small numbers.
<b>Fieldfare</b>	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Many nomadic flocks noted every day with some birds feeding on the abundant Rowan berry crop while others fed on the ground when the temperature was slightly warmer.
<b>Redwing</b>	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Many flocks seen every day.
<b>Song Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	We left it until the final morning to find this species when we heard one or two singing in Grantown-on-Spey.
<b>Mistle Thrush</b>	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Small numbers noted every day.
<b>European Robin</b>	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Noted every day of the tour often before we had even left the hotel as birds were fairly frequent in built up areas as well as in their traditional woodland homes.
<b>European Stonechat</b>	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	2 on 22 <sup>nd</sup> on the narrow road towards Lochindorb then noted on a further 2 days.
<b>House Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Noted every day in built up areas except 23 <sup>rd</sup> .
<b>Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)</b>	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	2 on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Chanonry Point and also seen at Findhorn Beach car park on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Pied Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	1 on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Chanonry point and 2 there on 28 <sup>th</sup> . A couple were also seen at Lossiemouth on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	At least 6 on 24 <sup>th</sup> at Udale Bay, 2 or 3 at Findhorn Beach car park on 26 <sup>th</sup> and 2 at Udale Bay on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Rock Pipit</b>	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	3 seen around Burghead Harbour and a single bird at Lossiemouth Harbour all on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common Chaffinch</b>	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Small numbers seen every day of the tour.
<b>European Greenfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Just a single bird seen to fly past the Findhorn Bay hide on 26 <sup>th</sup> . There may have been other birds in the area too.
<b>Eurasian Siskin</b>	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	4 seen beside the River Spey at Grantown on 22 <sup>nd</sup> – our only sighting.
<b>European Goldfinch</b>	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Small numbers noted on the first 3 days of the tour then not seen again.
<b>Common Linnet</b>	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Noted on the first 3 days then seen at the Findhorn Beach car park on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Twite</b>	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Not seen until 28 <sup>th</sup> when a flock of more than 350 birds were seen in a field of oil seed rape and burdock beside the B9160 on the Black Isle.
<b>Common (Red) Crossbill</b>	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	1 flew over Anagach Woods on 27 <sup>th</sup> and 2 or 3 flew past us at the Osprey hide at Garten later that morning. Finally 2 flew over Carrbridge car park at the end of the tour on 29 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Eurasian Bullfinch</b>	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	6 flew past the lower car park on Cairngorm on 25 <sup>th</sup> and 3 were in Anagach Woods on 27 <sup>th</sup> .

## MAMMALS

<b>Bottle-nosed Dolphin</b>	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	3 seen to swim westwards past Chanonry Point on 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Mountain Hare</b>	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	1 seen in the minibus headlights on 26 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Rabbit</b>	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	2 on 22 <sup>nd</sup> , including a black individual, near Lochindorb on 22 <sup>nd</sup> then noted on a further 2 days.
<b>Red Squirrel</b>	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Seen on 4 days in Anagach Woods, Strathdearn and near Insh.
<b>Otter</b>	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	1 seen feeding from North Kessock on 24 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Common (Harbour) Seal</b>	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	At least 1 seen from Chanonry Point on 24 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Grey Seal</b>	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	At least 10 seen at Chanonry Point, near Newall Point and from North Kessock all on 24 <sup>th</sup> . Also noted on 26 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Reindeer</b>	<i>Rangifer tarandus</i>	Plenty seen in the enclosures on Cairngorm on 25 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Red Deer</b>	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Good numbers seen on 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup> and 29 <sup>th</sup> in Strathdearn where the rut seemed to be ongoing as stags were frequently heard roaring. Also 4 seen on Cairngorm on 25 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>Roe Deer</b>	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	Noted on 5 days of the tour with the largest number seen on the Insh Marshes reserve on 25 <sup>th</sup> (9 individuals).
<b>Feral Goat</b>	<i>Capra hircus</i>	18 seen in Strathdearn on 23 <sup>rd</sup> .

## FISH

<b>Salmon</b>	<i>Salmo salar</i>	At least 3 seen rising/jumping in the Spey at Broomhill on 27 <sup>th</sup> then 10+ seen in Strathdearn on 28 <sup>th</sup> and perhaps twice that number there the following day.
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## FLORA

### Pinaceae (Pine family)

Douglas Fir	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>
Norway Spruce	<i>Picea abies</i>
European Larch	<i>Larix deciduas</i>
Scots Pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>
Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>

### Salicaceae (Willow family)

Goat Willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>
Grey Poplar	<i>Populus x canescens</i>
Aspen	<i>Populus tremula</i>

### Betulaceae (Birch family)

Silver Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Downy Birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>

### Fagaceae (Beech family)

Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Sweet Chestnut	<i>Castanea sativa</i>
Pedunculate/English Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Turkey Oak	<i>Quercus cerris</i>

### Aceraceae (Maple family)

Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>

### Hippocastanaceae

Horse Chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>
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### Aquifoliaceae (Holly family)

Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
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<b>Tiliaceae</b> (Lime family) Small-leaved Lime	<i>Tilia cordata</i>
<b>Oleaceae</b> (Olive family) Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
<b>Polygonaceae</b> (Dock family) Redshank	<i>Persicaria maculosa</i>
<b>Ranunculaceae</b> (Buttercup family) Meadow Buttercup Creeping Buttercup Lesser Spearwort	<i>Ranunculus acris</i> <i>Ranunculus repens</i> <i>Ranunculus flammula</i>
<b>Rosaceae</b> (Rose family) Alpine Lady's Mantle Dog Rose Bramble Raspberry Creeping Cinquefoil Tormentil Rowan Hawthorn Wild Cherry Chinese photinia	<i>Alchemilla alpinae</i> <i>Rosa canina</i> <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> <i>Rubus idaeus</i> <i>Potentilla reptans</i> <i>Potentilla erecta</i> <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> <i>Prunus avium</i> <i>Stranvaesia davidiana</i>
<b>Fabaceae</b> (Pea family) Gorse Broom Common Vetch Red Clover White Clover	<i>Ulex europaeus</i> <i>Cytisus scoparius</i> <i>Vicia sativa</i> <i>Trifolium pratense</i> <i>Trifolium repens</i>
<b>Onagraceae</b> (Willowherb family) Rosebay Willowherb	<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>
<b>Cornaceae</b> (Dogwood family) Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>
<b>Ericaceae</b> (Heath family) Heather/Ling Bell Heather Cross-leaved Heath Bilberry Cowberry Wild Azalea	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> <i>Erica cinerea</i> <i>Erica tetralix</i> <i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i> <i>Vaccinium vitis-idaea</i> <i>Loiseleuria procumbens</i>
<b>Lamiaceae</b> (Mint family) Spear Mint	<i>Mentha spicata</i>
<b>Scrophulariaceae</b> (Figwort family) Common Toadflax Foxglove	<i>Linaria vulgaris</i> <i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
<b>Plantaginaceae</b> (Plantain family) Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
<b>Caprifoliaceae</b> (Honeysuckle family)	

Elder

*Sambucus nigra*

**Dipsacaceae** (Teasel family)

Devilsbit Scabious

*Succisa pratensis*

**Asteraceae** (Daisy family)

Daisy

*Bellis perennis*

Scentless Mayweed

*Tripleurospermum inodorum*

Yarrow

*Achillea millefolium*

Ox-eye Daisy

*Leucanthemum vulgare*

Common Ragwort

*Senecio jacobaea*

**Cyperaceae** (Sedge family)

Common Cotton Grass

*Eriophorum angustifolium*

**Juncaceae** (The Rush Family)

Soft Rush

*Juncus effuses*

**Hypolepidaceae** (Bracken family)

Bracken

*Pteridium aquilinum*

**Blechnaceae** (Hard fern family)

Hard Fern

*Blechnum spicant*

**Fungi**

Fly agaric

*Amanita muscaria*

Birch polypore

*Piptoporus betulinus*

Butter cap

*Collybia butyracea*

Wood Blewitt

*Lepista nuda*

False Chanterelle

*Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*

Purple Brittlegill

*Russula atropurpurea*

Common Earthball

*Scleroderma citrinum*

Brown Birch Bolete

*Leccinum scabrum*

Common Inkcap

*Coprinus atramentarius*