

THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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Tour Report

Scotland – Autumn in the Scottish Highlands

6 - 13 November 2021

Wildfowl



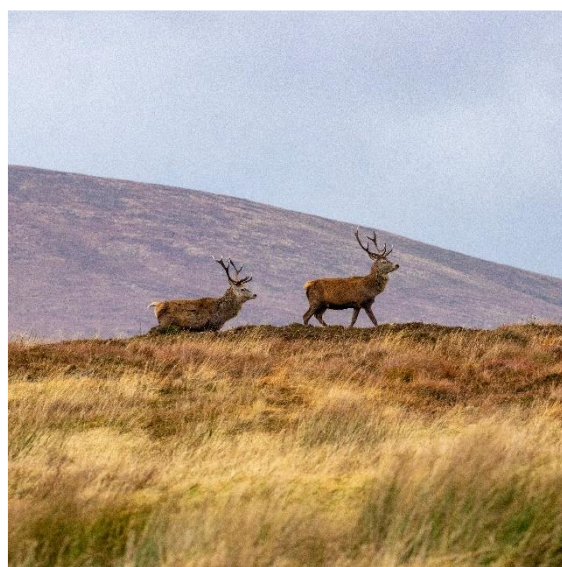
Greylag & snow geese



Eurasian and American green-winged teal



Red deer



Compiled by Mike Dilger

Day 1: Saturday 6 November 2021

Convening in the comfortable surroundings of the Grant Arms bar, Mike welcomed all six guests to the hotel. This briefing was not just to get to know each other, but also an opportunity to talk through Covid protocols, discuss the itinerary of the week and for Mike to answer any of the guests' questions. A brief tour of the hotel's facilities then followed, before the group then tucked in to a delicious three course dinner.

Day 2: Sunday 7 November 2021

RSPB Loch Garten, Nethy Bridge, RSPB Udale on the Black Isle, Jemimaville, Cromarty, Chanonry Point

With Loch Garten closing the following day due to planned building works, Mike was keen for all the guests to get the up-close and personal coal tit experience offered nowhere else. And despite the weather being less than ideal, the reserve also tends to be the easiest place to catch up with crested tits. Arriving at the car park, the sunflower hearts were immediately brought out, enabling the guests to have an intimate experience hand-feeding this common Caledonian bird. A lucky few also had an additional species - great tit - coming to feed from the hand, with chaffinches and robins attracted to any spilt food. A brief appearance by a treecreeper in the surrounding trees was also appreciated by those who saw it.

However the unseasonably mild weather was probably the reason why no cresties made an appearance, as food must still have been plentiful elsewhere, thereby reducing their reliance on free handouts. So Mike suggested the group take a walk up to the Visitor Centre, for both a change in scene and to try their luck in a different location. The forest around the sculpted bench is considered probably the very best location for cresties, and on the walk up to this spot a female great spotted woodpecker was seen and a raven also spotted calling away as it flew past. Coal tits, great tits and chaffinches were common here too, with a red squirrel eating pine cones a delightful bonus for those in attendance. Large flocks of redwings were also on the move, with many of the guests able to watch them passing overhead and hear their 'psst' contact calls as the birds continued their perennial search for berries.

However, once again, the cresties were not playing ball. But one guest who had walked back earlier to the car park for another opportunity to feed the coal tits, was lucky enough for a brief sighting of a single bird coming down to the feeders - and additionally managed to secure photographic evidence! Stopping then for a brief refreshment stop in the forest village of Nethy Bridge, the group were able to observe yet more redwing moving through in huge droves, with a sparrowhawk flying over the River Nethy also spotted.

The plan for the rest of the day was to drive straight up to the Black Isle, in order to take advantage of the supposedly better weather forecast and favourable state of the tide. On approaching RSPB Udale situated at the northern end of the peninsula, large numbers of both pink-footed and greylag geese were observed feeding away in the barley stubble on either side of the road. Mike explained that the pinks were a winter visitor from breeding grounds in Greenland and Iceland while the greylags were probably a combination of either Scottish wild-breeding birds or visitors also from Iceland.

Arriving at RSPB Udale, it was somewhat of a surprise to see the tide much further in than expected, with the result that large number of wigeon had already been ousted off the saltmarsh and onto the water. The teal, by contrast, were largely confined to the upper saltmarsh creeks while the occasional quacking female mallard could also be heard above the cacophony of other birds present too. Further out into the bay at least 300 shelduck were also observed either upending for food in the shallows or quietly waiting for the waters to recede. Waders are always well represented on this stretch of the Cromarty Firth, and it was pleasing to see the large flock of oystercatcher and curlew present in their usual location. Redshank were also present in large numbers and were interspersed with both dunlin and a small flock of seven ringed plover, which due to their close proximity to the viewpoint, presented an excellent opportunity for the photographers within the group.

Small numbers of bar-tailed and black-tailed godwits were also present in amongst the more numerous waders, with Mike right in the middle of pointing out the key identification features between these two closely related species when all the birds suddenly erupted in a huge dread. By scanning the skies the culprit was quickly spotted in the form of a stooping peregrine. Obviously a female due to its large size, the peregrine then delighted group watching on as it stooped low across the estuary, before eventually giving up empty handed - or taloned. The birds slowly settling back down again only once the coast was clear. Gulls were present in the mix too, as common, black-headed, herring and a single greater black-backed gull were all added to the week's tally. Finally before moving on, a couple of buzzard were also noticed crossing the estuary, causing large numbers of birds to once again take to the wing until the perceived threat had receded.

By now the tide had covered virtually all of the available mud and so Mike suggested they move further along the coast a few miles to Jemimaville. Probably the best and easiest to see lesser scaup in Britain, the lay-by just to the west of the small hamlet once again delivered as a flock of at least 150, were observed in a large raft no more than 50 metres offshore. This gave the guests the perfect opportunity to clearly see the differences between this species and the far more familiar tufted duck.

Taking the top road around to Cromarty, via the arable fields, a couple of yellowhammers were identified on the telephone wires, in addition to a large flock of linnet observed feeding in a field of freshly sown barley. Despite the deteriorating weather a single red kite was also seen as they dropped back down to the coast. Upon arrival at the port of Cromarty, the strengthening wind meant that the only obvious place for lunch to be enjoyed was inside the minibus itself! However those keen to continue birdwatching out of the windows during their lunch break were rewarded with three rock pipits and a male pied wagtail, all of which were seen along the port's jetty. Out to sea, two male and a female eider were also observed while flying past the minibus too.

With the wind whipping up the water surface thereby making sea-watching trickier, Mike suggested the group drive into the harbour in an attempt to find some shelter. Eventually by hiding behind the cinema, the telescope out of the wind meant that the group were then able to quickly find a guillemot, a red-throated diver, a Slavonian grebe and four long-tailed duck. Further out to sea lots of gannets could also be seen moving and the distinctive inky wingtips of kittiwakes were also noted. In addition, a number of feeding cormorants and shags closer to shore enabled the group to familiarise themselves with the features used to separate these two superficially similar species.

Once all the group had satisfied themselves, they had seen the key species well Mike suggested they drop into Chanonry Point before heading back to the hotel. Famed as the best location to see bottlenose dolphins from mainland Britain, the dolphins are generally much more difficult to see outside the summer months. However, on this occasion the group's luck held as we quickly latched onto two or three fins breaking the surface towards Fort George upon arrival at the point. At Cromarty a number of guests had previously struggled to see the red-throated divers clearly at Chanonry, however, there could have been no such complaints here as a bird just beyond the breakers enabled all to see the species' trademark 'snooty' appearance due to its upturned bill and pale colouring. A Slavonian grebe, a red-breasted merganser and a large number of gannets were also noted here before the group then piled back into the minibus with the promise of hot showers and a three-course dinner awaiting the group back in Grantown.

Day 3: Monday 8 November 2021

Lek on the road to Ferness, Anagach Forest, Old Spey Bridge, Spey Dam, Bridge at Garva, General Wade's Military Road

Gathering in the hotel foyer before dawn, the weather had improved sufficiently for a trip to the black grouse lek before breakfast to be made. Driving to the 'lek lay-by' in the dark, a woodcock *en route* was undoubtedly a bonus bird for those lucky enough to see it flushed from the road. Arriving at the lek while still dark, the sound of calling males could immediately be heard, making it clear that the grouse had

already arrived. In the slowly improving light a grand total of eleven males were eventually counted on the arena, and with plenty of fighting observed by the delighted guests it soon became clear that the birds meant business as well. While watching the males displaying, a lesser redpoll was also heard and then seen flying over, and despite a lack of any sightings red grouse could clearly be heard telling us to “go back!” from deep within the heather. More than satisfied with a fine display the now ravenous group returned for a full Scottish breakfast.

Once fed and watered Mike suggested the group should head to the community-run forest of Anagach, situated between Grantown and the Spey River. Positioning themselves next to the hotel’s feeders it was not long until a couple of squirrels were enticed down to the free handouts. Alongside the squirrels, a male great spotted woodpecker was seen, along with the usual suspects of coal, great and blue tits. At one point a calling crestie was also heard at close quarters too, but to the frustration of all flatly refused to come down from the tree tops. While waiting in vain for the star bird to turn up, the group did however manage to catch up with both treecreeper and goldcrest, which were observed on the trees surrounding the feeders. Finally, crossbills were also heard, and briefly seen, as they flew past.

Leaving the feeders behind, Mike then took the group for a walk along the green route, and down to the River Spey, where he was able to show the guests a range of classic understory Caledonian plants, like bilberry, cowberry and juniper. A number of the guests were also fascinated with the vast array of epiphytic lichens, mostly from the genera *Cladonia* and *Usnia*, which indicated the patently very low levels of air pollution present in Speyside. Taking the steps down to the river, a quick scan revealed three female goosander on the river and a very pleasant subsequent walk along the Spey produced a flock of long-tailed tits and a bullfinch calling from the understory. Additionally all guests enjoyed views of a lone female siskin feeding on birch seeds. After a scan from atop the Old Spey Bridge however, no dipper could be located, so the group instead headed back in the direction of the minibus.

After a quick cuppa back at the minibus, and with mammals the key focus for the rest of the day, the group then headed off towards Laggan and the moorlands surrounding Spey Dam. While passing Kingussie a number of flocks of pink-footed geese were seen, with a single adult whooper swan also observed on Lochain Uvie, just southwest of Newtonmore. A brown hare was also noticed close to the road, but by the time we reached Spey Dam the weather had once again begun to deteriorate, necessitating another minibus lunch! On the loch created behind the dam two male goldeneye were then picked up, and as a raven passed overhead and a flock of goldfinch were also observed along the vegetation near the water’s edge.

The first red deer of the trip were then seen on the hills surrounding Garva Bridge, and as the stags and hinds had already separated it was immediately obvious that the rut had already finished for another year. Crossing the bridge, and with red deer present in very large numbers, the plan had been to look for sika deer in the plantation. On this occasion, however, these forests drew a blank, but upon driving out of the glen the guests were thrilled to chance upon a couple of hinds warily standing at the forest edge. With the light by now rapidly diminishing, a couple more brown hares were then picked up on the drive back out of the glen and the additional sighting of a single roe deer close to Insh Marshes on their drive back to the hotel took the count of different deer species spotted that day to an impressive total of three.

Day 3: Tuesday 9 November 2021

Strathdearn, Corrievorrie, the road to Farr, Forest car park, top car park, the road to Farr and Lochindorb via Dava Moor

At breakfast the group were delighted to find that the rain had finally stopped, and with a windy and partly sunny day forecast Mike suggested the group should seize the moment by heading for Strathdearn to search for raptors. Taking the A9 initially northwards, the turn-off then crosses the River Findhorn, before then following the road back south and along the river up into the heart of the Monadhliaths.

The first stop was at the Farmstead of Corrievorrie to look over the lower hills to the north-east, where the first bird to be recorded was that of a mistle thrush. Buzzards and red kites were then picked up which the group took to be a promising sign once Mike had reminded the group that “raptors lead to raptors”. While waiting for more birds of prey to appear, both lesser redpoll and siskin then made an appearance in the birches alongside the road, while a couple of pairs of ravens also flew across the valley - calling away in the process.

Mike then saw a couple of crossbills drop into a ditch running alongside the road, no doubt to have a drink. To the delight of everyone, the male and female then flew up to the top of a tree close by, before the male dropped on to a fence, giving everyone outstanding views of his brick-red plumage. Probably a common crossbill, due to the birds' distance from the Scottish crossbills' core area, it was nevertheless the best view all the guests had ever seen of any of the members of this charismatic, but closely related suite of species.

Moving up to the lay-by close to the road to Farr, a dipper could be heard singing before then being tracked down to a small stretch of riffles in the river, enabling the whole group to enjoy this classic bird of upland rivers. More siskin were picked up feeding in birch trees here too. After a brief stop at the forest car park to enjoy the finest display of fly agarics in many a year, the group then moved up to the top car park, still desperately waiting for their first eagle of the week.

And this final location did not disappoint when an adult Goldie was finally spotted while drifting across the valley further to the south. The only other raptors noted here were a couple of buzzards and a red kite. Taking the Farr road up and over the moorland, Mike then suggested the group drop into Carrbridge to admire the old packhorse bridge, before then finishing the day on Dava Moor. Along the high street of Carrbridge a few pairs of collared doves on root tops provided another addition to the week's list, these were eclipsed however by the huge numbers of redwings passing through the village, with flocks seemingly clothing every berried bush. And by carefully scanning these flocks, Mike also managed to pick out and show the group a single brambling feeding in amongst the flocks.

Jumping back into the minibus, Mike then took the group for a drive across Dava Moor from the Ferness side. On this occasion however, it was relatively quiet for birds, with the only species of note being a couple of red-legged partridge crossing the road, and with the light quickly fading the group then decided to quit while ahead for a thoroughly deserved break back at the hotel before dinner.

Day 4: Wednesday 10 November 2021

Glascarnoch Dam, Dundonnell, Gruinard Bay, Second Coast, Jetty at Laide, Melon Udrigle, Aultbea

A day on the west coast always needs relatively good conditions, and with the best weather of the week predicated, the group were keen to take an early breakfast to make the most of the day. Driving up to Inverness, before then heading west, the first stop is usually at Glascarnoch, where the huge hydro-electric dam has created a huge loch behind. This is also one of the few locations where Canada geese can be regularly observed in the Highlands, and after a quick scan a few geese were picked up on this occasion too, alongside a small party of whooper swans on the water's edge.

Moving on to the head of Little Loch Broom, Mike parked up again to have a cuppa and enjoy the dramatic scenery best viewed from the car park of the Dundonnell Hotel. As the spring tide was virtually covering the saltmarsh this meant the oystercatcher and curlew had bunched together to form high tide roosts, and were interspersed with eight or nine turnstone. This part of the world is also hooded crow country and a number could be seen dotted along the water's edge along with a couple of grey herons. Common gulls were also loafing around in the adjacent fields while waiting for the tide to drop. Out on the loch itself a small number of red-breasted mergansers were spotted in between diving for their lunch. Dundonnell can also be an excellent place to look for large raptors, but on this occasion just a couple of buzzards were spotted above the crags. The only other birds of note here were a couple of meadow pipits observed crossing the saltmarsh and a flock of fieldfare seen feeding in bushes behind the hotel.

Once the guests had jumped back into the minibus, Mike set off for Gruinard Bay, but not before enjoying some great views of the local herd of feral goats along the way. Despite being an ancient introduction, these handsome beasts always impress the onlookers, and all were able to enjoy great close-up views of the billies, nannies and youngsters as they fed on the decidedly unpalatable gorse that peppers the roadside verge here. Pulling into the lay-by overlooking both Gruinard Island and the bay, Mike explained this precise location was one of the best places in Britain to spot overwintering divers, and as if to illustrate this exact point at least 30 black-throats were then picked up in just a short space of time. In addition to the divers and diving shags, a black guillemot was also picked up loafing on the water surface and a common seal swimming close to shore was also spotted.

The “eagle!” shout then went up as an adult Goldie was picked up above the island. To the excitement of the group it then flew across the bay and past the group, enabling all to see its flat profile, long tail and fingered ends to the wings - all classic features of this most wonderful bird of prey. While digesting the simply brilliant views, Mike was also able to point out the overwintering population of barnacle geese which always tend to base themselves on the improved fields to the east of the bay. And before moving further along the coast, the diminutive duo of goldcrest and wren were also seen in the roadside scrub.

Lunch was planned at the Laide jetty, however a quick stop at the coastal hamlet of First Coast enabled the guests to all enjoy and photograph the sight of common seals hauling out on the rocks just beyond the beach. With the tide now finally beginning to recede, a small flock of ringed plover were also noted on the beach, in addition to a few redshank and curlews feeding on the rocks behind. Moving then round to Laide the first great northern diver was quickly identified as it fed just off the jetty. A new bird for all the group, Mike explained that distinctive band around its neck meant that this particular individual was already moulting into its breeding plumage. And finally while tucking into lunch a female common scoter was also observed up feeding close to land too.

Finishing the day at Melon Udrigle, a second great northern diver could be seen feeding just beyond the breakers off the beach, in addition to a couple of black-throated divers. With everyone up to speed on diver identification the group then took a walk to the viewpoint where the whole of Gruinard Bay and north-west coast of Scotland was laid out before them. With the light ultimately beginning to fade the group had one quick opportunity to take a few photographs of the hauled-out seals at First Coast, noting a few wigeon and teal here too, before re-boarding the minibus for the long drive back to Grantown-on-Spey and a 7pm dinner appointment.

Day 5: Thursday 11 November 2021

Dell of Abernethy, Findhorn Bay, Loch Spynie, Hide at Inishriach (Speyside Wildlife hide)

After breakfast Mike suggested that the group make one last attempt to see cresties, so they headed off to the community feeders at the Dell of Abernethy to try their luck. Normally this species is relatively easy to see between autumn and spring, but the continuing mild weather obviously meant that with food still abundant elsewhere, this made trips down to the feeders far more infrequent. Despite the cresties' nonappearance, a number of other species, such as blue, great and coal tit, managed to keep the guests entertained.

Deciding to cut the group's losses, Mike suggested they resort back to their original plan of a day on the Moray coast and so whisked the group off to Findhorn Bay Nature Reserve, where the river of the same name empties into the firth. At low tide, it is quite safe to walk out over the mud and into the estuary. This not only allows guests the opportunity to enjoy the birds' world at first-hand but also provides the opportunity for much closer views of many species that are most frequently viewed from a distance. Walking out, the usual trio of oystercatcher, redshank and curlew were the first to greet us, but as soon as we approached the channel all manner of different species began to appear.

The first flock to receive the group's attention were around 250 knot which put on quite the display each time they took to the air. Alongside this flighty knot flock a separate grouping of around 170 golden plover seemed far more relaxed, and when the sun briefly came out the guests were able to understand why this special wader is so aptly named. Both species of godwits were also be picked up feeding along the channel edge, with the shorter and streakier bar-tailed godwits often spotted feeding singly, while the far more sociable black-tailed godwits preferred to hang out in a small flock. While a large number of dunlin feeding out in the estuary was no surprise, the discovery of a single sanderling was a much more unusual find. In addition to a plethora of waders, wildfowl were well represented on the estuary too. Findhorn Bay, for example, is the best place to see large numbers of pintail along the Moray coast, with at least 150 present on our visit and in addition to the large numbers of wigeon, teal and mallard were also spotted, while three shoveler was considered another very good find.

Mute swans could also be seen closer to the saltmarsh on the western side of the bay, along with large numbers of pink-footed geese, and before heading back across the estuary the group were treated to the noisy fly-by of a family of bugling whooper swans. Finally just as the group were reflecting on what had been a very immersive experience, a couple magpies - which are rare Highlands bird - were spotted in the bushes on the other side of the road.

With the mammal hide booked for early evening Mike was keen to ensure the group did not return too late for the hotel's high tea and so suggested that RSPB Loch Spynie might be a good last port of call. Situated just inland from Lossiemouth, the drive to the reserve's car park takes you across farmed fields. And on the drive in the guests had great views of a hunting sparrowhawk, which was using the hedgerows as cover in its attempt to catch any out unwary birds. The car park also has a feeding station and an impromptu stop here resulted in wonderful views of two red squirrels. The star bird here was undoubtedly tree sparrow, with at least eight or nine spotted coming down to the feeders, in addition to the commoner tit species like chaffinch, goldfinch & great spotted woodpecker.

Taking a walk down to the loch, the group were excited to all hear the soft 'pee-uu' call of bullfinch before entering the hide that overlooks the reed-fringed loch. Three snow geese had intermittently been seen here during the previous month, but for the guests to see them upon opening the flaps was undeniably a great moment. The three snow-white geese on this occasion were hanging around with 30 or 40 greylag geese, while the pink-footed geese were presumably still feeding in the surrounding fields.

Ducks were well represented on the loch too, and in addition to seven or eight goldeneye, tufted duck and teal were also picked off with ease. A grand total of ten goosander which had obviously just moulted into full breeding plumage was another pleasing find here, and a couple of coot also represented another new species for the week's list. Loch Spynie also has small starling murmuration during the winter months, but as the mammal hide was waiting for us in the evening this would have to wait for another visit as we headed back to the hotel.

Stuffed after a delicious high tea, the group reconvened for the 25-minute ride to our evening appointment, where we were met by David. Almost immediately the badgers turned up to entertain the group, with a total of five recorded, and despite wood mice also making an appearance, on this occasion no pine martens appeared in our allotted timeslot. However, in no way could this have taken the shine off a good day's wildlife watching, with many reconvening in the bar for a drink before bed.

Day 6: Friday 12 November 2021

Spey Bay, Lossiemouth, Burghead, Hopeman Point

The final full day of the trip had arrived, and with plenty still to see on the Moray coast Mike suggested they head north after breakfast with seabirds the main focus. The forecast indicated it would be raining on and off for most of the day with temperatures still surprisingly mild for this time of year, but with the wildlife on the coast more robust to the vagaries of the weather, a good day was still on the cards.

The first port of call was Spey Bay, where the River Spey discharges into the firth and upon arrival the group walked straight to the viewpoint looking out over the braided channel of the river itself. On the raised banks a large gull roost was observed, with herring, common, black-headed and greater black-backed all picked out with relative ease. Wigeon and teal were also present on the far bank, with three red-breasted mergansers and a single goosander presenting the opportunity to see the key differences between these closely related species. These were then joined by a flock of ten goldeneye which had obviously come straight in off the sea and a female long-tailed duck was also picked out close to the river's mouth. In addition to the gulls and wildfowl a number of waders were also present with the ubiquitous redshank and curlew both seen and heard. Finally, a pied wagtail was seen feeding along the shingle bank on the eastern side of the river.

Moving onto the ridge overlooking the sea, which also happens to be the biggest shingle ridge in Scotland the group then began scanning the inshore waters to see what they could turn up. Once everyone got their eye in, it was obvious there was quite a variety out there, with first species to come under the group's collective gaze being the long, thin line of long-tailed ducks looking resplendent in their full breeding plumage. The squat appearance of a few guillemots could also be picked out on the water's surface, but the star bird here was undoubtedly a red-throated diver, which was still bizarrely in its full breeding plumage and feeding just beyond the breakers. While most of the cormorants were drying their wings on the point the shags were busily feeding in the water, and at this point a black-throated diver was also observed - a species not commonly seen on the Moray coast, as most of the overwintering population prefers to head further west.

With the rain still coming down steadily the group decided to retreat to a less exposed location, with a single rock pipit picked up while heading back to the car park. A last quick look over the river then revealed a single little grebe, which is another relatively uncommon bird across the Highlands, before Mike then took the group for both a warming drink and an opportunity to dry out at the Scottish Dolphin Centre run by Whale and Dolphin Conservation. Rejuvenated by a half-hour in the dry, the intrepid group were then ready to go again and on driving out of the car park caught up with yellowhammer when a few individuals were observed on the telephone wire.

Having received a tip-off about a rare duck picked up by a local birder earlier in the day Mike suggested a slight change to the itinerary that would include a brief stop at the Lossiemouth Caravan Park. Overlooking the point where the River Lossie enters the Moray Firth, the estuary here is considered similar habitat to Spey Bay - only on a smaller scale. Upon arrival, and after another cuppa Mike set about scanning the large flock of wigeon and teal, before eventually spotting a single American green-winged teal. Looking very similar to its Eurasian cousin, the green-winged teal has a vertical white bar at the front of the wing and such an exciting find not only represented a new species for all of the guests, but for Mike as well! With all the other usual suspects also present, once the group had all seen the rare American vagrant they then departed for Burghead and lunch.

The small fishing port of Burghead juts out into the Moray Firth, making it a great place to look for sea duck, diver and waders from autumn right through to spring. Joining a number of other birdwatchers at this famed location, the group were soon enjoying their first velvet scoters, as three males were scoped up relatively close to shore, periodically showing their characteristic white patches under the eye and on the wing. As a group of ten common scoters then flew in to join them, this presented the perfect opportunity to enjoy both specialist sea ducks side by side. A number of guillemots could also be picked up and a winter-plumaged red-throated diver also flew past the point to the delight of all. With the tide still receding, plenty of turnstone, oystercatchers and redshank were also observed on the rocks surrounding the point, but on this occasion no purple sandpipers could be found.

This was soon corrected however at the nearby Hopeman Point where a grand total of four 'purple sands' were counted feeding in amongst a larger flock of turnstone. In addition to the 'purps' a couple of sanderling and at least ten ringed plover were additionally picked up on Hopeman's picturesque beach. But with light beginning to fall, perhaps the best spectacle of all was the flock of at least 250 eider feeding

offshore. Often appearing to both dive and surface in seeming synchrony, this sight seemed a fitting full-stop to a busy, action-packed and enjoyable week for all the group.

Day 7: Saturday 13 November 2021

Loch Flemington, North Kessock Bridge & farewells

With four members of the group driving home, fond farewells and emails were exchanged at the hotel before the remaining two members took advantage of Mike's offer of a quick trip to Loch Flemington before then being dropping off themselves in Inverness. Alongside the mute swans and tufted ducks, this is one of the few places in the Highlands where both moorhen and coot reside. With moorhen still need for the week's list this was duly 'ticked' off before one final stop at North Kessock Bridge, which straddles the entrance to the Beaully Firth.

Renowned as a good location to catch sightings of otters, Mike took the last two guests on the coastal drive along to Redcastle more in hope than expectation, as this species had scarcely been seen over the previous couple of months. So imagine the delight when the "otter!" call went up, after which it was quickly realised it should have been "otters!", as Mike and the last two standing were treated to fabulous views of a mother and two cubs feeding and playing in the seaweed. What a fitting finale to a frankly fabulous week up in the Scottish Highlands!

Checklist

THE TRAVELLING
NATURALIST

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	BIRDS	AVES							
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>				✓			
2	Barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>				✓			
3	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		
4	Snow goose	<i>Anser caerulescens</i>					✓		
5	Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
6	White-fronted goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	✓						
7	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>					✓		
8	Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓		✓	✓		
9	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓						
10	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>					✓		
11	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>						✓	
14	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
15	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓				✓		

16	Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	✓						
17	Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓					✓	
18	Velvet scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>						✓	
19	Common scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>				✓		✓	
20	Long-tailed duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	✓					✓	
21	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓			✓	✓	
22	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓			✓	✓	
23	Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓					✓	
24	Black grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>		✓					
25	Red grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>		✓			✓		
26	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓	✓			
27	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	✓					✓	
29	Black-throated diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>				✓		✓	
30	Great Northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>				✓			
31	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>						✓	
32	Slavonian grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	✓						
33	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓					✓	
35	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓			✓		✓	

36	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
37	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>			✓	✓			
38	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓			✓		
39	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓		✓				
40	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
41	Water rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>					H		
42	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>							✓
43	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						✓	✓
44	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
45	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓						
46	Golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>					✓		
47	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓			✓		✓	
48	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓				✓	✓	
50	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓				✓		
51	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				✓	✓	✓	
52	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>					✓		
53	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>					✓	✓	
54	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓				✓		
55	Purple sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>						✓	

56	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		✓					
57	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓						
59	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
60	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓			✓		✓	
62	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓					✓	
64	Black guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>	✓			✓			
65	Rock dove / feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓		✓			
66	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>					✓		
67	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
68	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	
69	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓			✓		
70	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓					✓	
71	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓						
72	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓			✓		
73	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>					✓	✓	
74	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

76	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
78	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
79	Coal tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓			✓		
80	Crested tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	✓	H					
81	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓			✓		
82	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓			✓		
83	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓			✓		
84	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>					H		
85	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	H	✓		✓	H		
86	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	✓		✓	✓	✓	
87	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓	✓			✓		
88	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
89	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓			✓	✓	
90	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓			✓			
91	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓					
93	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓		✓		
94	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
95	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>					✓		

96	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			✓				
97	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
98	Tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>					✓		
99	Dunnoch	<i>Prunella modularis</i>					✓	✓	
100	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓					✓	
101	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>				✓	✓		
102	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓					✓	
103	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		
104	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			✓		✓		
105	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		H	✓				
106	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓				✓	✓	
107	Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		✓	✓				
108	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		H	✓				
109	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓			✓	✓	
110	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓		✓		
111	Corn bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>							
112	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓					✓	
113	Green-winged teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>						✓	
	MAMMALS	MAMMILIA							
1	European mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>		✓	✓			✓	

2	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>			✓				
3	Red squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓			✓		
4	Wood mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>					✓		
5	Common seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	✓			✓		✓	
6	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	✓						
7	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>					✓		
8	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>							✓
9	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓		✓			
10	Sika deer	<i>Cervus nippon</i>		✓					
11	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓	✓			✓	
12	Goat	<i>Capra hircus</i>					✓		
13	Brown long-eared bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>						✓	