

THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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SCOTLAND

Autumn in the Scottish Highlands

25 October – 1 November 2015

TOUR REPORT

Leader: Mike Read

Sunday 25th October

Occasional light showers otherwise hazily bright, cooling westerly wind force 4 – 5

After collecting two clients from Inverness Railway Station and two more from Inverness airport, we then took a leisurely drive to Grantown-on-Spey. During the drive we saw three or four common buzzards, two common kestrels and a few woodpigeons. After a brief meeting we made our way to the dining room at 7.30pm for the first of many superb evening meals.

Monday 26th October

Fine with occasional sunshine, maximum temperature 11°C.

We began the day with a stroll to the local Anagach Woods. As we approached the golf course there were three male common pheasants on the 16th tee but they had obviously forgotten their clubs as they scuttled off as we approached! As we entered the woodland, one or two crossbills flew off unseen and a little further on we came to the BWWC feeders where we encountered good number of coal tits, a couple of great tits, two or three chaffinches and a red squirrel. A little further on there was a European Robin singing. As we returned to the hotel for breakfast we had good views of another robin, saw a small group of greenfinches perched in the top of a conifer and also added western jackdaw, collared dove, woodpigeon and starling to the list.

After collecting our picnic lunches, we set off north towards Nairn. We saw a few red grouse as we passed the end of the Lochindorb Road and a little further on we nearly had to come to a stop as a common buzzard had landed on the road just in front of us! Luckily the bird saw us coming and promptly took off again. Continuing our journey we added hooded/carrion crow hybrids to the list as well as rooks, more Jackdaws and plenty of common pheasants. As we headed west toward the A9, a peregrine was seen flying to the north of the road. At North Kessock we scanned the sea and the shoreline and added common redshanks, oystercatchers and Eurasian wigeon as well as a couple of species of gull to the list. Behind our parking location we saw a group of long-tailed tits passing through an area of gorse bushes.

We continued on up the A9 and made a brief visit to the 'inner' Cromarty Firth where we saw about 620 greylag geese and at least 150 pink-footed geese as well as a few more Eurasian wigeon. Also noted at this

spot were black-headed and common gulls, a lone mute swan, two or three cormorants flying low over the sea and a European goldfinch that flew past at close range. A short drive east had us parked at Newhall Point from where we saw a few skeins of pink-footed geese in flight over the hill to our south. A pair of red-breasted mergansers, a lone male eider and two golden plovers flew past as we drank some welcome coffees and teas and then a loud clamouring of geese urged us to head for the Udale Bay hide. Here we found 10,000 or more pink-footed geese spread out on the mud and retreating shallow water of the bay. Many of the geese were at close range offering superb views. Eventually, a lone tundra bean goose was located among the flock. Also noted here were a couple of Ruffs feeding on the mud, Eurasian oystercatchers and northern lapwings roosting on the grassland, a large flock of golden plovers and a small flock of bar-tailed godwits standing out on the increasing areas of mud plus a few dunlins and curlews. Ducks were represented by mallard, common teal and more wigeon and there were four species of gull present namely black-headed, common, great black-backed and herring.

After eating lunch in the comfort of the hide we drove to Cromarty seeing more waders and ducks as we went including a few more common eiders. From here we drove west to Chanonry Point where we found a few cormorants and a couple of shags, at least four red-throated divers, a single razorbill, 11 long-tailed ducks and a feeding group of pied wagtails. There was also a grey seal that was feeding offshore and giving occasional views. As we left the Black Isle, a grey heron was standing among seaweed-covered rocks patiently stalking a meal!

During the drive back to Grantown we saw a couple of common buzzards in the fading early evening light and a few woodpigeons were in flight too.

Tuesday 27th October

About 50% cloud cover and some sunny spells; maximum at least 12°C

During an early drive towards Lochindorb we searched unsuccessfully for black grouse but saw plenty of their red cousins. Very little else was noted before breakfast.

The main outing for today was to be to Strathdearn. During the journey there we saw common kestrel, rooks and jackdaws, chaffinches and redwings. As we entered the Findhorn Valley a few mistle thrushes were seen in the fields and a buzzard took off from just in front of the vehicle. In a side valley we noted European robin and on returning to the main valley we quickly found a white-throated dipper and a female goosander on the river. Close to some superbly coloured autumn birch wood a red kite was drifting along on lazily-flapped wings. As we drove on along through the valley we found three or four more common buzzards and a couple of common kestrels and then four more goosanders on the river. From the furthest car park we walked on into the valley where a few buzzards featured again and there were a couple more common kestrels. We began to see occasional groups of red deer upon the high ground and these probably totalled about 60 individuals with occasional distant roaring from the stags. Also on the high ridges a group of at least 15 feral goats were seen. Some considerable distance ahead of us a golden eagle was seen but sadly our views of it were only brief and not every member of the group saw it. Common ravens were frequently encountered during this walk but perhaps it was the general scenery and the gorgeous autumn colours that were most enjoyed here.

We returned to the minibus for lunch and again we were seeing common buzzards and ravens from the car park and also a goshawk drifted across the width of the valley. After moving to the river bridge to park we began a walk up the hill and promptly found at least three large salmon in a pool in a side river. Overhead were more common buzzards and ravens and we eventually managed to locate on lone mountain hare, the main purpose of this particular walk. Scanning around from our higher view point we could now make out even more red deer than earlier on perhaps because it was heading towards late afternoon and they were anticipating descending into the valley later on. In all well over 200 individual animals were noted and by now there was quite a bit more roaring from the stags. This completed a most enjoyable day out so we returned to the hotel in good time for the dinner.

Wednesday 28th October

Fine day but with 90% cloud cover; maximum temperature 12° C

We began the day with a walk to Anagach woods where coal, great and long-tailed tits were the most frequently encountered birds. There were also at least two red squirrels at the feeders. Walking along a different track in the woodlands enabled us to see a goldcrest, siskin and treecreeper and then a tawny Owl was found partially because its feathers were being ruffled by the breeze. As we headed back through the woods to the hotel a crested tit was heard and in Grantown, jackdaws were added to the list.

After breakfast we headed for Loch Garten where coal and great tits and a lone red squirrel were occasionally joined at the feeders by a single crested tit. Also in this area were a few chaffinches, goldcrest, wren and two great spotted woodpeckers. However, the most delightful thing about this visit was that a number of coal tits were happy to feed from peoples' hands even though the only food on offer was crumbled Scottish shortbread! After visiting the feeders we walked out to the side of the loch from where we could see two male common pochards and four female/juvenile goldeneyes. Over the far side of the loch there were two whooper swans to be seen. As we left the area a roe buck was noted in the woodland.

Our next port of call was Abernethy Forest where, despite our best efforts, very little wildlife was found. The only birds noted were goldcrest, coal tit and two red grouse. The latter birds were seen when 1 member of the group sought the shelter of the denser part of the woodland! However everyone agreed that with the occasional splashes of sunlight that were coming through a visit to this part this ancient Caledonian pine forest was worthwhile. After a rather late lunch we journeyed to Glen Feshie where we hoped for better luck with the bird life but unfortunately our luck did not change and the only species we found during a brief walk was goldcrest. The rather gloomy weather perhaps had counted for our lack of birds and so we felt it best to call it a day and we headed back to the hotel to ready ourselves for another sumptuous evening meal.

Thursday 29th October

A fine morning with a brief spell of rain around lunchtime then fine and sunny after that; maximum 14° C

We set off for the coast after breakfast and drove through more glorious Autumn colours on the way to Findhorn Bay. Here the first new bird we found was a male yellowhammer that perched on a dead gorse stem for everyone to see. Across the road from the car park was the first of two common magpies while out in the bay there were plenty of waders and wildfowl to be seen. The ducks included Eurasian wigeon, northern shoveler, northern pintail and red-breasted merganser while waders were represented by Eurasian oystercatchers, Eurasian curlews, common redshanks, red knots, and dunlins. A few mute swans could be seen over the far side of the bay and on some of the mud flats were many hundreds of pink-footed geese. These were soon joined by many skeins that flew in and glided down to join the clamouring throng. Also noted here were a few passing woodpigeons, a European robin perched among the gorse around the car park and 2 butterflies one of which was seen at close range and was clearly a red admiral.

From here we drove the short distance to the beach car park and a short stroll over the dunes produced good views of sea ducks including a single common scoter and two velvet scoters flying west, a pair of common eiders on the sea not far from perhaps 30 or more long-tailed ducks. Much further out there were good numbers of northern gannets, both juvenile and adults, flying around and diving into the sea while the usual common, black-headed and herring gulls were joined by a passing kittiwake. Shags and cormorants passed by occasionally and here we also added a couple more red admiral butterflies and another European robin that seemed to have a preference for perching in gorse.

During the journey to Roseisle we saw a couple of fields containing many Eurasian curlews and one of these fields also contained a few hundred greylag geese. A little further on a merlin was seen chasing a small bird and these flew over the road just in front of us. The small bird towered upwards and was obviously too fleet for the merlin which gave up the chase and headed off to find easier prey. Once at Roseisle we had a quick look over the sea where a male goosander flew by and a number of gannets were seen off shore.

However, while we watched, rain could be seen drifting in from the north and so we beat a hasty retreat to the vehicle where we ate our picnic lunches.

With perfect timing the rain stopped just as we began the journey towards Burghead and at the headland itself we could see one common scoter on the sea, well in excess of 30 Long-tailed ducks and 40 common eiders either diving for food or just loafing about on the water. Northern gannets were again noted from here with one or two coming in fairly close and giving us the best views of the day, while down at Burghead Harbour there were a number of common redshanks and ruddy turnstones resting out the high tide on the sea wall. A grey seal was seen in the harbour at close range. We then drove to Lossiemouth where again we saw curlews in a couple of fields but in a pig field there were literally hundreds of gulls to be seen including some great black back as well as the previously noted species for the day. Just before reaching Lossiemouth there were well over 200 linnets perched on an overhead wire and these flew around in smaller groups before settling on a field to feed. At Lossiemouth itself there were a dozen or more whooper swans on the sea and perhaps these were recent arrivals. However, with little else to be noted in the area we made the return journey to Grantown-on-Spey seeing a few more fields of curlews as we went.

Friday 30th October

Cloudy and a strong wind on Cairngorm, fairly still lower down. Rain at noon then skies clear. Max 11° C.

After an early breakfast we drove directly to the lower slopes of Cairngorm where we found that a strong and biting wind was blowing. However, this did not prevent us from searching for our main objective, black Grouse. While we searched there were three close reindeer to entertain us and eventually a lone male black grouse was sighted standing on the moorland some distance away below us. Unfortunately there was no activity from this bird except that it hunkered down to escape the wind! From here we drove up to the main Cairngorm car park but decided that our planned walk was out of the question due to the strength of the wind and its chill factor. As we left the mountain we saw a few flocks of fieldfares keeping low over the heather and probably searching juniper bushes for berries while from one viewpoint we could see perhaps 50 reindeer in the enclosure where they are kept.

A brief pause at Loch Morlich produced sightings of mallard and a few goldeneye on the lake plus a Goldcrest in the conifers. Having been told of crested tits at the Heather Centre, we drove there and after warming ourselves with hot drinks, we went outside to watch the feeding area for birds. Coal tits were common and a few great and blue Tits were also present; all were busy feeding or taking bits of food away to hide it for later. One feeder contained niger seed and this attracted a couple of siskins but half a dozen more were feeding on the spilt seed below. Also seen in this area were blackbird, robin, chaffinch, goldfinch and a treecreeper. As we drove out of the car park here, a red squirrel was briefly seen close to another feeder.

We next headed back to Loch Garten in the hope of better luck with crested tits and this proved to be a good move ... eventually. Out at the osprey centre there were just the usual coal, great and blue tits and a great spotted woodpecker but food placed on some trees in the car park proved a good move when we returned there. Whilst we ate our picnic lunches, we were treated to frequent visits from at least two crested tits plus lots of the rest of the local tit family including long-tailed. Also seen here were wren, treecreeper and chaffinch.

On our way towards Loch Insh we made a brief detour to see some beautiful Autumn colours with the Cairngorm massif as a backdrop. We also saw a couple of mistle thrushes in this area. At the platform overlooking the southern end of Insh Marshes reserve we could see a few birds visiting the feeders including a Dunnock. Out on the marsh there were a good number of dabbling ducks resting on small islands in the pools. There were only two species involved and these were mallard and common teal but on a much more distant stretch of water we could see a few goldeneyes diving for food. A group of greylag geese flew around and a grey heron landed at the edge of a shallow pool causing a little consternation among the few teal resting nearby. On a small hill in the middle of the marsh a number of rabbits could be seen and a pair of red-legged partridges put in a brief appearance while at least eight roe deer could be

seen resting or feeding in the surrounding wet grassland. With a final fly-past of a couple of ravens, we decided to head on back to the hotel and arrived there at about 17.35.

Saturday 31st October

A blanket of cloud helped to keep the overnight temperatures up at around 15° C and after a little light rain after breakfast, the skies cleared and the temperature dropped to 7° C for most of the rest of the day.

We began the day with a pre breakfast drive to the Lochindorb area in the hope of seeing more close red grouse and we saw at least eight to ten individuals. We also saw three roe deer and a common kestrel during our drive back towards the hotel. After breakfast we drove down to the River Spey and parked in the Anagach Woods car park. Before heading into the woodland we strolled out on to the Spey bridge and from here we could see a couple of goosanders and a white-throated dipper which was busily feeding its way along from rock to rock. During a lengthier walk than we had done during any pre breakfast stroll, birds started to be seen fairly quickly with goldcrest, coal tit, robin and treecreeper being seen in the first few yards. Further on we had repeat sightings of most of these species plus common starling, chaffinch and wren and a crested tit was heard. Unfortunately it seemed that the light rain was keeping the rest of the birds fairly quiet.

We decided to head for Strathdearn and took the 'scenic route' via Lochindorb and Carrbridge. Out on the moorland we saw plenty of red grouse and this included a quite approachable one that we were able to see and photograph in all of his finery. Close to Lochindorb Lodge we also saw a pair of red-legged partridges on the roadside. After a brief pause at Carrbridge to look at the ancient, stone bridge, we headed out northwards along the A9 and then into Strathdearn. Along this minor road there seemed to be lots of common blackbirds feeding, more than we had seen in the whole previous part of the tour. At the far end we parked in the parking area and ate our picnic lunches with some of the group preferring to do so inside the minibus due to the strongish wind that was now blowing. An 'eagle watch' was maintained throughout our stay but every sighting turned out to be a 'tourist eagle' or what birders would normally call common buzzard! Of these, we probably saw just 2 or 3 individuals. Also noted here were a couple of common ravens, a few red deer scattered on various hilltops and occasional redwings passing by. With such a cold wind blowing and few birds to be seen, we decided to move to an area we had not previously visited and as we drove back out of the valley, we saw a few groups of fieldfares and one, or possibly two red kites.

A few miles to the south we entered a back road leading out of Newtonmore having seen a skein of about 20 greylag geese plus more redwings and fieldfares during the journey. Along this minor road we parked up in much lighter winds than experienced earlier on. The lighting and the Autumn colours here were quite fantastic. However, birds were still somewhat few and far between but we did see a couple more common buzzards, at least a dozen ravens, three red deer stags on the skyline and a single Eurasian Jay as we left the area as the sun disappeared behind the mountains.

Sunday 1st November

Mist hung in the air before breakfast but soon cleared to leave a fine morning before our after-lunch finish to the tour.

We thanked the Grant Arms staff for their kindness and good service before we left for our final morning of wildlife watching. As we headed towards the A9 a male capercaillie was spotted in a roadside woodland. We had excellent views of this bird before it eventually flew off across the road. During the northward drive for a repeat visit to Udale Bay, occasional skeins of geese (probably pink-footed) were seen in the distance. At the reserve itself, the tide was some way out so many of the birds were rather distant. However, many common teal were resting along the bank of the small stream nearby and there were plenty of Eurasian oystercatchers and northern lapwings on the field to the left of the hide along with at least five grey herons. Also close to the hide were a good quantity of greylag and pink-footed geese but most of the latter species were far out on the mud flats. Eurasian curlews were spread out before us and in the middle distance we could make out three grey plovers, a few bar-tailed godwits and some dunlins. western jackdaws, crows and common starlings were visiting the freshwater stream to bathe while a common shelduck wandered into view among the close geese and many Eurasian wigeon could be seen at

the edge of the tide. Across the road from the hide there were a few pink-footed geese and common starlings and two rock doves that may well have been pure bred rather than being descended from 'town pigeon' stock.

As we headed back towards the A9, a small group of common skylarks flew up from a roadside field giving us brief views and there were groups of redwings and fieldfares feeding in the grassy fields. At Charlestown there was a cooling breeze off the sea but cormorants, shags, common redshanks, Eurasian curlews, wigeon and a lone grey heron seemed impervious to the temperature. Splashes out in the sea raised hopes of an otter but it turned out to be a different 'new' species for the tour, common seal. In fact there were four of them and two seemed to be playing as they writhed and splashed around. We ate our picnic lunches under the A9 bridge where a few common, herring and black-headed gulls were seen and a European robin hopped about among the sea wall rocks.

By now it was time to take two clients to Inverness train station and two to Inverness airport and for the leaders to begin their drive south. Everyone agreed that with the range of wildlife seen, the superb Autumn colours and the fantastic food at the hotel, this had been an excellent inaugural tour to the wonderful Scottish Highlands having seen 89 species of birds.

SPECIES LIST:

BIRDS

Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	2 Insh Marshes on 30 th & 2 near Lochindorb on 31 st
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Seen every day
Red Grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	Many noted to the north of Grantown on various days plus 2 in Abernethy Forest on 28 th
Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>	A single male was close to the roadside as we drove out of Carrbridge on 1 st ; a really good viewing!
Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>	1 distant male seen near Cairngorm on 30 th
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Good numbers seen on 7 successive days from 26 th
Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>	A single bird was well seen among the Pink-feet at Udale Bay on 26 th
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	At least 10,000 at Udale on 26 th , 4,000 at Findhorn Bay on 29 th and hundreds in the distance at Udale Bay again on 1 st
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	A single bird was on the 'inner' part of the Cromarty Firth on 26 th and there were about a dozen at Findhorn Bay on 29 th
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	2 on Loch Garten on 28 th and 12 – 15 birds were on the sea near Lossiemouth on 29 th
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	A single bird was seen at Udale Bay on 1 st . Was this the first bird to return to the area after their moult in Holland?
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Good numbers at Udale Bay on 26 th and 1 st and also at Findhorn Bay on 29 th
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Small numbers on 26 th then every day from 28 th
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	A flying group of 11 seen near Lochindorb on 27 th and a few more were at Findhorn Bay on 29 th
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Perhaps half a dozen seen in Findhorn Bay on 29 th
Eurasian (Common) Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Good numbers seen at Udale Bay on 26 th & 1 st and also at Insh Marshes on 30 th
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	2 males on Loch Garten on 28 th was our only sighting
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	A male then a pair at Udale Bay on 26 th then a flock of at least 40 on the sea at Burghead on 29 th
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	1 on the sea at Findhorn, 1 in flight at Roseisle and 1 on the sea at Burghead all on 29 th

Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>	2 flying east over the sea at Findhorn on 29 th
Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	14 seen in the Udale/Cromarty area on 26 th and two flocks of well over 30 birds (each) at Findhorn Beach and Burghead on 29 th
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	5 females/juveniles in Strathdearn on 27 th , 1 on Loch Garten the following day, a male flew west over the sea at Roseisle on 29 th and 2 on the Spey at Grantown on 31 st
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Seen on the sea on 26 th , 29 th and 1 st
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	4 females/juveniles at Loch Garten on 28 th then seen on the following 2 days
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2 seen on the Black Isle on 26 th then seen at Findhorn on 30 th and 5 at Udale Bay on 1 st
Northern Gannet	<i>Sula bassana</i>	At least 50 seen at all coastal locations on 29 th . Sightings included both adults and juveniles and many were diving into the sea to catch fish.
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Seen at coastal locations on 26 th , 29 th and 1 st
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Also seen at coastal locations on the same days as Great Cormorant
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Just one sighting of a high flying individual in Strathdearn on 27 th
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Small numbers seen on 6 days of the tour
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Just a single brief sighting in Strathdearn on 27 th which sadly not everyone saw
Common (Eurasian) Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	A few were seen on 5 days of the tour
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	A single sighting of this diminutive falcon chasing a small bird near Roseisle on 29 th
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	One seen flying over fields to the west of Nairn on 26 th
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	One seen running up a roadside bank near Loch Pityoulish on 30 th
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Good numbers seen on each of our three coastal days namely 26 th , 29 th & 1 st
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	A couple of hundred individuals were at Udale Bay on 26 th & 1 st and there were smaller numbers in a field close to Findhorn Bay on 29 th
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	250 – 300 seen at Udale Bay on 26 th ; our only sighting
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	At least 3 distant birds seen at Udale Bay on 1 st
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	A few seen in the Udale Bay area on 26 th & 1 st
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Seen on each of our 3 visits to the coast both on the mud flats and also in various fields along the way
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Seen on the same 3 days as the previous species but usually on the intertidal mud or, in the case of a few birds, resting on the harbour wall at Burghead at high tide
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Noted at Udale Bay on 26 th & 1 st as well as in Findhorn Bay on 29 th
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Just identified at Findhorn Bay on 29 th but there may well have been some at Udale though they were too far out to be identified
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	3 near Cromarty on 26 th and about 15 resting on Burghead Harbour sea wall on 29 th
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Noted on our three coastal days
Common (Mew) Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	Noted on our three coastal days
Greater Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Noted on our three coastal days
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Large numbers noted on our three coastal days
(Black-legged) Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Just a single adult seen flying west along the Findhorn Beach

Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	One seen flying into the Moray Firth on 26 th was, unusually, our only auk sighting!
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>	Noted on 6 days mostly as 'town' pigeons but 2 seen near the Udale Bay hide on 1 st were pretty close on being true Rock Doves
(Common) Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Noted every day in small numbers except 25 th
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Seen every day except 25 th & 27 th mostly in town areas
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	A single individual seen in Anagach Woods during the pre-breakfast walk on 28 th
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	2 on 28 th at Loch Garten then one seen at the same place on 30 th and another seen on 31 st beside the A9 north of Carrbridge
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Singles seen on 26 th , 30 th & 31 st all while driving and unable to stop
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	2 seen close to the hide overlooking Findhorn Bay on 29 th and a single sighting the following day
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	Seen every day of the tour
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Seen every day of the tour
Hooded/Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Seen every day of the tour
Northern (Common) Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	A few in Strathdearn on 27 th were our first ones then we saw 2 on 30 th at Loch Insh and at least 10 were close to Newtonmore on 31 st
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	Found in most of the pine forests including birds that would feed from the hand at Loch Garten
Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>	At least 2 at Loch Garten on 28 th & 30 th and heard in Anagach Woods on 31 st
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Noted on 5 days including at Loch Garten and at the Anagach Woods feeders
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Noted on 4 days at Loch Garten, Anagach Woods and Loch Insh
Long-tailed (Bush) Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Just seen on 3 days; beneath the A9 close to North Kessock, in Anagach Woods before breakfast on 28 th and near Loch Garten on 30 th
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	A few were seen to fly up from a field on the Black Isle on 1 st
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Fairly frequently encountered in Scots pine woodlands on 28 th , 30 th & 31 st
(Winter) Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Just noted on 3 days
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	3 seen in Strathdearn on 27 th and one feeding in the Spey at Grantown on 31 st
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Our first two were on 28 th at Anagach Woods and Loch Garten and then we also saw the species on 30 th & 31 st
Common (European) Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Seen every day except 25 th
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	seen on the final 6 days of the tour mostly in ones and twos
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Seen every day from 28 th including high on Cairngorm where there were groups probably feeding on juniper berries
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Seen every day from 27 th except 29 th , often in the company of the previous species
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Usually seen as singletons and only noted on 27 th , 30 th & 31 st
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Noted every day from 26 th
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	2 seen at the start of the Lochindorb road on 29 th
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Seen in various town areas on 26 th , 29 th , 31 st and 1 st
Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Noted on 27 th in Strathdearn then also seen on 29 th & 30 th

Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	A few were feeding on the lawn of the lighthouse at Chanonry Point on 26 th
Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	1 on 26 th at Chanonry Point and another beside Burghead Harbour on 29 th
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Regularly seen near or on feeders in Anagach Woods, Loch Garten and Loch Insh and in a few other locations on 5 days of the tour
European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	About 6 seen to perch in the top of a garden conifer on our way back from Anagach Woods on 26 th
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	One or two seen in Anagach Woods on 28 th and at least 8 seen on 30 th at the Heather Centre
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	One flew past us as we watched geese on the 'inner' Cromarty Firth then also seen on 30 th & 31 st
Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	A group of about 10 flew past us at the Findhorn beach car park on 29 th then later the same day we saw a flock totalling perhaps 200 individuals near Lossiemouth
Common (Red) Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	The only 'contact' was of a bird heard flying over Anagach Woods on 26 th ; a decided lack of sightings for this species and its close relatives!
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citronella</i>	One male well seen close to the Findhorn Bay hide on 29 th

MAMMALS

Mountain Hare Rabbit	<i>Lepus timidus</i> <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Just a single sighting in Strathdearn on 27 th Seen in Strathdearn on 27 th but we had better views at Loch Insh on 30 th . The species was also noted on 31 st
Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	1 in Anagach Woods on 26 th then at least 4 noted on 28 th and a couple on 30 th
Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	A possible sighting on our final day close to Inverness
Common (Harbour) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	4 seen playing in the sea at Charlestown on 1 st
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	1 on 26 th at Chanonry Point and another in Burghead Harbour on 29 th

Reindeer Rangifer tarandus inclosure all on 30th 3 'feral' ones seen on Cairngorm and a further 50 or more seen in the reindeer

Red Deer Cervus elaphus At least 200 seen high on the hills above Strathdearn on 27th and smaller numbers there on 31st with 3 near Newtonmore also on 31st

Roe Deer Capreolus capreolus Half a dozen seen on 27th in various locations then also noted on a further 4 days

Feral Goat Capra hircus About 15 individuals seen on a hill above Strathdearn on 27th

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

Populus tremula

Betulaceae (Birch family)

Silver Birch

Betula pendula

Downy Birch

Betula pubescens

Alder

Alnus glutinosa

Fagaceae (Beech family)

Beech

Fagus sylvatica

Sweet Chestnut

Castanea sativa

Pedunculate/English Oak

Quercus robur

Turkey Oak

Quercus cerris

Aceraceae (Maple family)

Sycamore

Acer pseudoplatanus

Field Maple

Acer campestre

Aquifoliaceae (Holly family)

Holly

Ilex aquifolium

Tiliaceae (Lime family)

Small-leaved Lime

Tilia cordata

Oleaceae (Olive family)

Ash

Fraxinus excelsior

Polygonaceae (Dock family)

Redshank

Persicaria maculosa

Ranunculaceae (Buttercup family)

Meadow Buttercup

Ranunculus acris

Creeping Buttercup

Ranunculus repens

Rosaceae (Rose family)

Alpine Lady's Mantle

Alchemilla alpinae

Dog Rose

Rosa canina

Bramble

Rubus fruticosus

Raspberry

Rubus idaeus

Creeping Cinquefoil

Potentilla reptans

Rowan

Sorbus aucuparia

Hawthorn

Crataegus monogyna

Wild Cherry

Prunus avium

Bird Cherry

Prunus padus

Fabaceae (Pea family)

Gorse

Ulex europaeus

Broom

Cytisus scoparius

Tree Lupin

Lupinus arboreus

Common Vetch

Vicia sativa

Red Clover

Trifolium pratense

White Clover

Trifolium repens

Elaeagnaceae (Oleaster family)

Sea Buckthorn

Hippophae rhamnoides

Violaceae (Violet family)

Wild Pansy

Viola tricolor

Onagraceae (Willowherb family)

Rosebay Willowherb	<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>
Cornaceae (Dogwood family)	
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>
Ericaceae (Heath family)	
Heather/Ling	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>
Bell Heather	<i>Erica cinerea</i>
Cross-leaved Heath	<i>Erica tetralix</i>
Bilberry	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>
Cowberry	<i>Vaccinium vitis-idaea</i>
Wild Azalea	<i>Loiseleuria procumbens</i>
Lamiaceae (Mint family)	
Spear Mint	<i>Mentha spicata</i>
Scrophulariaceae (Figwort family)	
Common Toadflax	<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>
Monkey Flower	<i>Mimulus guttatus</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Heath Speedwell	<i>Veronica officinalis</i>
Plantaginaceae (Plantain family)	
Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
Caprifoliaceae (Honeysuckle family)	
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Dipsacaceae (Teasel family)	
Devilsbit Scabious	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>
Asteraceae (Daisy family)	
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>
Scentless Mayweed	<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i>
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Ox-eye Daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>
Common Ragwort	<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>
Cyperaceae (Sedge family)	
Common Cotton Grass	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>
Juncaceae (The Rush Family)	
Soft Rush	<i>Juncus effuses</i>
Hypolepidaceae (Bracken family)	
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>
Blechnaceae (Hard fern family)	
Hard Fern	<i>Blechnum spicant</i>
FUNGI	
Snowy waxcap	<i>Hygrocybe virginea</i>
Meadow waxcap	<i>Hygrocybe pratensis</i>
Ashen knight	<i>Tricholoma virgatum</i>
Fly agaric	<i>Amanita muscaria</i>
Birch polypore	<i>Piptoporus betulinus</i>
Butter cap	<i>Collybia butyracea</i>
Yellow stagshorn	<i>Calocera viscosa</i>