

## **PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS**

### **THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS**

**23 JUNE – 10 JULY 2014**

#### **TOUR REPORT**

Our tour to the Scottish Highlands and Islands was a most enjoyable tour and thanks to the very capable leadership of Russell, it went smoothly from beginning to end. The weather was surprisingly good, the accommodation was good throughout and the food excellent, especially the haggis and black pudding! Just some of the many highlights of the tour included four stunning, very close Red-throated Loons, in full breeding plumage, on a small loch on the island of Hoy, the many nesting seabird cliffs we visited were a real treat, the Whooper Swan was an unexpected bonus, the Golden Eagles in the Findhorn Valley were a real treat, Hen Harriers and Short-eared Owls, quartering the moorland and farmland on the Orkneys was sensational, to see the waders in full breeding plumage was particularly memorable, Twite are hard to find anywhere in the world and scope views of Scottish Crossbills, Britain's only endemic bird, is almost unheard of. However, perhaps the greatest highlight of them all, was seeing the three Arctic tundra specialities, of the Scottish Highlands, Rock Ptarmigan, Eurasian Dotterel and Snow Bunting, memories that will last a lifetime. We did exceptionally well for mammals, non more so, that the super looks we enjoyed, of the rarely observed Pine Martin.

Members of the tour group arrived at Edinburgh airport, where they met up with the local guide Russell, who was to drive and guide us throughout our time in Scotland. Unfortunately, I missed my flight from London, and caught up with the group later in the afternoon. From Edinburgh airport the group drove to Aberlady Bay and did some birding before continuing on to North Berwick, for a boat trip around Bass Rock, where a staggering 11,000 pairs of Northern Gannets breed. I then joined the group for a second visit that day to Aberlady Bay, on the southern shore of the Firth of Forth. Birds observed that day at Aberlady Bay included a family party of Little Grebes, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, large flocks of Greylag Geese, a few Common Shelducks, Mallard, a stunning Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Coot, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Northern Lapwing, Common Redshank, Eurasian Curlew, a solitary Whimbrel, a surprise find, at this time of year, Black-headed, European Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Rock Dove, our only Stock Dove of the tour, Common Wood-Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Common Swift, Common Skylark, Common Sand and House Martins, Barn Swallow, Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail, European Robin, Common Blackbird, Common Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Great Tit, Common Magpie, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Common Starling, House Sparrow, Common Chaffinch, European Goldfinch, European Greenfinch, Eurasian Bullfinch and Common Reed Bunting. We also saw our first of many Western Roe Deer.

Along with thousands of Northern Gannets during the boat trip around Bass Rock, we also saw Northern Fulmar, Great Cormorant, European Shag, Common Eider, Great Black-backed Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, the delightful Atlantic Puffin, Common Guillemot and Razorbill. We also observed a number of Grey Seals swimming around the island. We spent the night at nearby Gullane.

The following day we spent a very pleasant morning birding at the RSPB reserve at Lock Leven. Lock Leven has one of the largest breeding populations of ducks in Britain. We were not to be disappointed, new birds here included our only Great Crested Grebes of the tour, a few Gadwall, a small flock of Eurasian Wigeon, a large flock of Eurasian Teal, good numbers of Tufted Ducks, our first of many sightings of Common Buzzard, Common Moorhen, Dunnock, Sedge Warbler, Blue Tit, our only sighting of the very uncommon Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Common Linnet and Eurasian Siskin. We also saw our first European Rabbit of the tour.

In the afternoon we headed north, towards the famous Scottish Highlands. We stopped along the way to do some birding at Moulin Moor, where we enjoyed good looks at our first Common Kestrel and super scope views of a perched Peregrine Falcon. We also enjoyed good close looks at a few Willow Ptarmigans and several Mistle Thrushes. We then drove to Kindrogan Field Centre, near Pitlochry, where we were to stay for the night. A little birding in the grounds of the lodge turned up Common Pheasant, Common Gull, Great Spotted Woodpecker, our only Grey Wagtails of the tour, both Spotted and European Pied Flycatchers and Russell and myself saw a pair of Common Crossbills in flight, as we were parking the mini-van. We also saw the very attractive Red Squirrel at the feeders and just on dusk, we were rewarded with good looks at a superb Pine Martin and a Wood Mouse, at a feeding station, in the grounds of the lodge. Ken saw Common Pipistrelles, flying around the field centre.

The following morning we undertook a little more birding in the grounds of the lodge, where we saw a Eurasian Wren, enjoyed great looks at a singing Garden Warbler, saw Coal Tits at the feeders and Russell and Michael saw the only Blackcap of the tour. We then continued northwards towards the Scottish Highlands, but not before doing some birding in the Killiecrankie Nature Reserve, where a walk along the river produced our only Goosander of the tour and we also found the only Eurasian Jay of the tour, looking for food below one of the bird feeders. Following our picnic lunch at Killiecrankie, we drove to our accommodation in Speyside, in the famous Scottish Highlands, where we settled in, before engaging in a little more birding in the afternoon. Our first birding stop was at the RSPB reserve at Loch Insh, where we saw a Common Goldeneye, discovered a breeding pair of Ospreys and saw our first Common Sandpipers of the tour. We then visited a small loch called Avielochan, where we found two breeding pairs of the very rare Slavonian Grebe.

The long term weather forecast was not particularly good, the weather was to steadily deteriorate, during our time in the Highlands and we made the decision to make the walk to the top of the Cairngorm Mountains the following day, in order to search for the three Arctic tundra specialities of the Scottish Highlands, Rock Ptarmigan, Eurasian Dotterel and the aptly named Snow Bunting. A quick look at the small stream that flows through Nethy Bridge, where we were staying, produced a splendid White-throated Dipper and during the short drive to the Cairngorm Mountains National Park, we saw a Song Thrush along the roadside. At first the weather was kind to us, as we trudged steadily onwards and upwards, but on arriving on the tops the weather began to deteriorate and a heavy mist settled all around us and visibility was down to a few metres. So we made the decision to make a halt and eat our picnic lunch and hope that the mist lifted while we were doing so. As we sat there we became very cold, however, fortunately for us, the mist did rise, and we made a quick commando-style raid up onto Caenlochan, where we were immediately rewarded with great looks at a pair of Rock Ptarmigan, in recently acquired spring plumage. As we continued our search, we flushed a covey of five more Rock Ptarmigans, that were so well camouflaged amongst the heather, we never saw them until they took flight. Right on queue, we stumbled onto a small flock of Eurasian Dotterels and not wanting to disturb them, enjoyed fairly distant, but good looks at them. We then headed for a large patch of nearby snow, which is the preferred habitat of Snow

Bunting. At first it looked quite empty, then suddenly a stunning male Snow Bunting, flew above the patch of snow, in pursuit of a small insect and we watched a small flock of these super birds, for quite some time. On the mammal front, we did enjoy watching a few Mountain Hares. Mission accomplished; we trudged back down the mountain, after a very tough but rewarding day in the fabulous Scottish Highlands.

The following morning, after breakfast, a walk through ancient pine forests in the Anagach Forest produced fine looks at the diminutive Goldcrest, the highly localised Crested Tit, and a Field Vole, ran across the track in front of us. In the afternoon we made a visit to Lochindorb Loch, where we found a female Northern Wheatear perched on some discarded fencing wire and a pair of Common Redpolls flew over our heads. On our way home, a quick stop at Ellen Wood, close to Carrbridge, produced our first Eurasian Treecreeper.

The following day, our first birding stop was at the famous Loch Garten RSPB reserve, where new bird for us included a fine Common Cuckoo and the beautiful Common Redstart. Careful observation of the ground below the bird feeders, produced splendid looks at two new species of mammals, a Bank Vole, and the rarely observed Common Shrew. Continuing onwards, a stop at Loch Morlich, produced a fairly distant Red-throated Loon and in the car park of the Cairngorm Mountains National Park, we watched a breeding pair of the decidedly uncommon Ring Ouzel.

The whole of the next day was spent birding in the scenically attractive Findhorn Valley, bathed in beautiful, and much appreciated, sunshine. Here we found a superb Red Kite flying above our heads, a covey of very colourful Red-legged Partridges, a pair of far less common Grey Partridge, a pair of displaying Common Snipe, several Common Terns and best of all, a pair of immature Golden Eagles flying across the valley. We also enjoyed distant views of a large number of Red Deer. We then continued north, leaving the Highlands behind, before stopping at the Cromarty Firth, where we found a large gathering of Common Seals, which had hauled themselves out onto nearby sand banks. We spent the night at nearby Alness.

The following day we met up with Clare, who was to be our local guide for the day, and we set off to do some birding in a forested area, close to Boath. Here we enjoyed good looks at Hooded Crow, several splendid Yellowhammers and best of all, a delightful Tree Pipit. We then did a little birding along the edge of Cromarty Firth, where to our delight, we observed a family party of adult Stoats, with well grown young, not more than a few metres away from us. We then drove out to Tarbat Ness, where some time spent sea-watching produced a pair of Common Scoters and in the surrounding bracken, we found a splendid pair of Common Stonechats. Continuing northwards along the coast, we stopped to fill up our mini-van with diesel, where we cornered a rather hapless House Mouse, along the outside wall of the service station. A final birding stop at Loch Fleet National Nature Reserve, produced a solitary Bar-tailed Godwit amongst a very large roosting flock of well over 200 Eurasian Curlews. We then spent the night a little further to the north at Golspie.

The following morning we made a visit to Balblair Wood, our main aim here was to see the Scottish Crossbill, Britain's only endemic bird. Within half an hour or so, we were enjoying outstanding scope views of a flock of five immature Scottish Crossbills, some were preening while others were feeding on pine cones. We had been extremely fortunate, it is not a species that you would expect to be able to see in the scope. While walking along a track in the same area of woodland, a Weasel ran across the track, just a few metres ahead of us. In the afternoon, we made a visit to a different part of Loch Fleet National Nature Reserve and new birds for our ever growing trip list, included a couple of Red-breasted Mergansers, a beautiful Dunlin in full breeding plumage, a large flock of Sandwich Terns and our first of many Arctic Terns. Unfortunately, the weather then

changed dramatically, and in strong winds and constant heavy rain, we drove through the Flow Country, to Thurso, on the far north coast of Scotland, where we spent the night.

The following morning we boarded the car ferry at nearby Scrabster, for our boat trip to the spectacular Orkney Islands. While still in the harbour, we saw our first Black Guillemots of the tour. During the one and a half hour crossing, we saw six Manx Shearwaters, several Great Skuas and I saw a Northern Minke Whale. On our arrival at the Orkneys, at Stromness, we drove to nearby Kirkwall, the main town of the Orkneys, which would be our base during our time in the Orkney Islands. In the afternoon, we visited the Cottisgarth RSPB Reserve, where we sat in the hide, which overlooks a large stretch of high moorland. New birds for the tour included Hen Harrier, Arctic Skua, Common Raven and we also enjoyed much better looks at Common Cuckoo. Moving on, we paid a visit to the small coastal village of Evie, where we found a couple of Common Ringed Plovers. We then did some birding at Birsay Moor, where we watched a stunning Short-eared Owl, hunting for voles above the open farmland, it was a super look, at a very special bird. Our final birding stop was at the Loons RSPB Reserve, where we found two new species of wildfowl, Northern Shoveler and Common Pochard. We also saw a new mammal today, the lovely Brown Hare.

The following day we continued birding on the Mainland Island of the Orkneys; visiting the Lock of Harry, where we found six Black-tailed Godwits, in full breeding plumage. We also visited the historical sites of the Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar. We then paid a visit to Newark Bay, where we enjoyed very close looks at a pair of Rock Pipits.

The following day, we took the car ferry to the Island of Hoy, there is less agricultural land on this island and far more moorland. We drove to the main settlement on the island, Rackwick, and it was here that we found the only new bird of the tour for the day, the diminutive Twite. Fortunately, we managed to enjoy very close scope views, of a pair of birds, as they were eating the seeds, on a large plant.

After breakfast the following day, we birded around the small village of Birsay, where Ken pointed out a Red Knot, in full breeding plumage. This was a real treat for Australian birders, who only see this species in Australia, in non-breeding plumage. In the afternoon we drove to Tankerness Loch, where a thorough search of a very large flock of Mute Swans, produced an adult Whooper Swan. This was a great find, as this bird should have been on its breeding grounds in Iceland!

On the final day of the tour we visited the islands of Burray and South Ronaldsay, but failed to add a new bird to our trip list, but Aileen did observe a Brown Rat.

On this very enjoyable tour, we observed 131 different species of birds and 19 species of mammals. The tour had achieved its goal; we had indeed observed almost all of the birds of the Scottish Highlands and Islands and had a very enjoyable time while doing so.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### LOONS *GAVIIDAE*

**Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* An uncommon breeding summer visitor, we saw it in the

Scottish Highlands, on the ferry crossing to the Orkneys, and best of all, on a small loch, on the island of Hoy.

#### GREBES *PODICIPEDIDAE*

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* A common breeding bird throughout Scotland, which we only saw on two occasions. Firstly, at Aberlady Bay, and secondly, at Tankerness Loch.

**Slavonian Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* In Britain the Slavonian Grebe only breeds on a few lochs in the Scottish Highlands, where it is a rare, summer breeding visitor. We saw a couple of breeding pairs at Avielochan, in the Scottish Highlands.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* An uncommon breeding species in Scotland, we saw a few birds at the Loch Leven RSPB Reserve.

#### PETRELS AND SHEARWATERS *PROCELLARIIDAE*

**Northern Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* A hundred years ago, Northern Fulmars barely had a toehold in Britain. They bred only on the island of St. Kilda, the furthest north island of the Outer Hebrides. It is now a common breeding bird throughout the whole of Britain, with the exception of the southeast corner. We enjoyed super close looks at this species nesting on sea cliffs throughout the tour.

**Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus* This species is an uncommon summer breeding visitor, in the Scottish Outer Hebrides and Shetland Islands. We were very fortunate to observe six individuals during the ferry crossing, from Scrabster, to the Orkney Islands. On the return crossing, Russell and I did not see any!

#### GANNETS AND BOOBIES *SULIDAE*

**Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* A common breeding summer visitor to offshore islands of Scotland, we saw it well on many occasions, particularly so, during the boat trip around Bass Rock.

#### CORMANTS *PHALACROCORACIDAE*

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* A common breeding resident throughout Scotland, which we saw well on many occasions.

**European Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* A fairly common breeding resident throughout Scotland, this species only occurs on the coast, where we frequently saw it very well.

#### HERONS, EGRETS AND BITTERNES *ARDEIDAE*

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* A common breeding resident, we observed small numbers throughout the tour.

#### SWANS, GEESE AND DUCKS *ANATIDAE*

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* A common breeding resident throughout Scotland, we saw small flocks throughout the tour and then a particularly large flock, of over 200 birds at Tankerness Loch, in the Orkney Islands.

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* An uncommon winter visitor to the east coast of Scotland and the Orkney Islands. Therefore, it was very much a surprise to find an individual of this species amongst the large flock of Mute Swans, at Tankerness Loch, in the Orkney Islands.

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* A common breeding resident in Scotland, we enjoyed watching adults with goslings, on a few occasions.

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* A common resident in Scotland, which we saw well on several occasions.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* In Britain this species is mainly a winter visitor, from breeding grounds in Iceland, Russia and Siberia. In the Scottish Highlands and the Orkneys it breeds

in small numbers on isolated lochs, where we saw it well on a few occasions.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera* In Britain this species is also mainly a winter visitor, from breeding grounds in Iceland and continental Europe. It breeds in small numbers in southeastern Scotland, where we saw a pair very well at the Loch Leven RSPB Reserve. We also saw small numbers in the Orkneys.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* In Scotland this is a resident breeding species, we saw it well both on the mainland and in the Orkneys.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* This species is a very common resident throughout Scotland.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* An uncommon resident in Scotland, we observed small numbers at The Loons RSPB Reserve, in the Orkneys.

**Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina* This species is also an uncommon resident in Scotland and once again, a pair of birds was observed very well at the The Loons RSPB Reserve, in the Orkneys.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* A common resident species in Scotland, which we saw on several occasions.

**Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* A common resident species along the coasts of Scotland, which we saw very well, on many occasions.

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra* Mainly an uncommon winter visitor to Scotland. We were very fortunate to observe a single bird close inshore, off Tarbat Ness.

**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* Mainly a winter visitor to Britain, up to 10,000 Common Goldeneye spend the winter in Britain. Small numbers now regularly breed on lochs in the Scottish Highlands, where we saw small numbers.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* An uncommon resident bird throughout Scotland, which we saw well on a few occasions.

**Goosander** *Mergus merganser* Another uncommon resident of Scotland, we were very fortunate to enjoy good looks at a pair of birds swimming on the river that flows through the Killiecrankie Nature Reserve.

#### OSPREY *PANDIONIDAE*

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* In Britain the Osprey nests only in the Highlands of Scotland, and only in very small numbers. We saw it very well on five separate occasions throughout the tour.

#### KITES, EAGLES AND HAWKS *ACCIPITRIDAE*

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* In the 1960s just a handful of Red Kites were hanging on in Britain, in a remote valley in central Wales. This species has been a great conservation success story. Following a great deal of hard work by the RSPB and other bodies, it now occurs in small numbers throughout the British Isles. Even so, we were very fortunate to observe a single bird flying directly overhead, during our time in the beautiful Findhorn Valley.

**Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* This species is an increasingly uncommon breeding resident in Britain. In England, there were only two breeding pairs this year, unfortunately, both were unsuccessful. There are approximately 200 breeding pairs in Wales and Scotland. They are more common on the Orkney Islands, than anywhere else in Britain and we observed small numbers on a daily basis.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* This species is a common resident in Scotland, somewhat surprisingly, we enjoyed six sightings of this species during the tour.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* This species is a very common resident in Scotland, which we observed on most days of the tour.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* An uncommon breeding resident of Scotland, we were very fortunate to observe two immature birds, flying together, in the Findhorn Valley.

#### CARACARAS AND FALCONS *FALCONIDAE*

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* This species is a common resident in Scotland, which we saw well on several occasions.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* This species is an uncommon resident in Scotland, which somewhat surprisingly, we saw well on four separate occasions.

#### GROUSE, PTARMIGANS AND PRAIRIE-CHICKENS *TETRAONIDAE*

**Willow Ptarmigan** *Lagopus lagopus* A common resident in Scotland, which we saw exceptionally well on several occasions.

**Rock Ptarmigan** *Lagopus muta* In Britain this uncommon resident is confined to the highest mountains of Scotland, where they occur only on the highest, most barren mountain tops and are seldom seen below 750 metres. We were very fortunate to enjoy good close looks at several of these birds at Caenlochan, high in the Cairngorm Mountains National Park.

#### PARTRIDGES AND PHEASANTS *PHASIANIDAE*

**Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa* Ancestors of the British stock were introduced into southern England, from France, over 200 years ago. Since that time, they have been spreading slowly northwards and have only recently reached the Highlands of Scotland. We enjoyed good sightings of a few birds in the Findhorn Valley.

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* An increasingly uncommon resident throughout Scotland. We were very fortunate to have a quick look at a pair of birds feeding in the same farmers field, where we saw the Red-legged Partridges.

**Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus* Introduced into Britain a few years before the Norman Conquest. Every year, gamekeepers release thousands of reared pheasants into woods in preparation for the shooting season, which begins on the 1<sup>st</sup> October. We enjoyed daily sightings throughout our time in Scotland, of what is, without doubt, one of the world's most beautiful birds.

#### RAILS, GALLINULES AND COOTS *RALLIDAE*

**Eurasian Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* A common resident throughout Scotland, which we saw well on a few occasions.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra* In Scotland it is a common resident, which we saw well on many occasions.

#### OYSTERCATCHERS *HAEMATOPODIDAE*

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* A common resident throughout Scotland, which we saw on every day of the tour.

#### LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS *CHARADRIIDAE*

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* A fairly common, though declining resident throughout Scotland, which we saw on most days of the tour.

**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* A common breeding resident throughout Scotland; we saw it on almost a daily basis, during our time in the Orkney Islands.

**Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* The long hike up to Caenlochan, high in the Cairngorm Mountains National Park, paid off handsomely, when we observed five birds, at fairly close range. This very beautiful bird, is one of Britain's rarest breeding birds, with no more than 50 breeding pairs. It is not surprising that this species was voted 'Bird of the Tour', by tour participants.

#### SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES *SCOLOPACIDAE*

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* The Common Snipe is cryptically camouflaged and is an uncommon resident throughout Scotland. We observed a couple of birds in the Findhorn Valley, in the Scottish Highlands. We were very fortunate to watch a bird performing its

courtship display flight, known as ‘drumming’. Males fly to height of approximately 100 metres and then dive down at a 45 degree angle with wings beating and tail fanned, with the outermost feather on each side of the tail visibly standing clear, these feathers effected by wing movement produce the drumming sound. We also observed small numbers during our time in the Orkney Islands.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* In Scotland this species is an uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor. We were very fortunate to observe a flock of six birds, in full breeding plumage, at the Loch of Harray, in the Orkneys.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* In Scotland this species is a common passage migrant and winter visitor, from breeding grounds in northern Scandinavia and northern Russia. We enjoyed prolonged scope views of a single individual, in non-breeding plumage, at the Loch Fleet National Nature Reserve, amongst a very large flock of Eurasian Curlews.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* In the lowlands of Scotland the Whimbrel is an uncommon passage migrant, mainly migrating at night, and so seldom seen. We were extremely fortunate to find a solitary bird at Aberlady Bay, on the first day of the tour.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* In Scotland this species is a common resident and we saw it on many occasions both in farmland and on open moorland.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* In Scotland this species is a common summer breeding bird, which we saw well on several occasions.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* The Common Redshank is a common resident throughout Scotland, we saw it well on many occasions, mainly in the Orkney Islands.

**Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* In Scotland the Red Knot is a common winter visitor, but breeds far to the north, on the very north coast of the Arctic. Therefore, we were very fortunate that Ken pointed out an adult bird, in full breeding plumage in Birsay Bay, in the Orkneys.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* In Scotland this species is a common resident, somewhat surprisingly, we only observed one bird, in full breeding plumage, in the Loch Fleet National Nature Reserve.

#### GULLS *LARIDAE*

**Common Gull** *Larus canus* In Scotland this species is a common resident, which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

**Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* In Scotland this species is an uncommon resident, which we saw well on many occasions, particularly in the Orkneys.

**European Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* In Scotland this species is a common resident, which we saw on almost every day of the tour.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* A common summer breeding migrant to Scotland, which we saw well on many occasions.

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* In Scotland this species is an abundant resident, which we saw on every day of the tour.

**Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* In Scotland this species is a common resident of sea cliffs and rocky islands, which we saw well on many occasions.

#### TERNs *STERNIDAE*

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* A common summer breeding migrant to coastal Scotland, which we saw well on many occasions.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* In Scotland this species is a common summer visitor and passage migrant. Unlike the Arctic Tern, this species also breeds far inland, as well as along the coast. We enjoyed very good looks at a few birds on their breeding grounds, in the Findhorn Valley.

**Sandwich Tern** *Thalasseus sandvicensis* In Scotland this species is an uncommon summer breeder visitor, we enjoyed good looks at a large flock, in full breeding plumage at Loch Fleet National Nature Reserve.

#### SKUAS AND JAEGERS *STERCORARIIDAE*

**Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua* In Scotland this species is an uncommon summer breeder, chiefly in the Orkneys and the Shetland Islands. These birds spend most of the year on the ocean, only coming to land to breed. In common with other species of skuas, the Great Skua is a pirate; who harries gulls and other seabirds until its victims disgorge their last meal. We encountered several birds on the ferry crossing between Scrabster and the Orkney Islands, and then it became a common bird in the Orkneys.

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* In Great Britain the Arctic Skua is a locally common summer breeding visitor to the far north of Scotland and its northern offshore islands. We observed small numbers of this species during the ferry crossing between Scrabster and the Orkney Islands, and then it became a common bird in the Orkneys.

#### AUKS, GUILLEMOTS AND PUFFINS *ALCIDAE*

**Common Guillemot** *Uria aalge* In Scotland this bird is a common resident, we saw it very well at sea and also at their sea cliff nesting sites.

**Razorbill** *Alca torda* Not quite as common as the above species, however, it is a common resident throughout Scotland. Once again we observed them at sea and at their cliff nesting sites.

**Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle* In Scotland the Black Guillemot is a locally common resident. We observed small numbers of this species during the ferry crossing between Scrabster and the Orkney Islands, and then it became a common bird in the Orkneys.

**Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica* This very comical but attractive species of auk, is a fairly common resident of coastal areas of Scotland. Once again we observed them at sea and at their cliff nesting sites.

#### PIGEONS AND DOVES *COLUMBIDAE*

**Rock Dove** *Columba livia* Feral pigeons were very much in evidence in Scotland. However, we also observed wild populations of Rock Doves, breeding on rocky sea cliffs in the Orkneys.

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* In Scotland, this species is an uncommon resident, we saw one individual in flight, at Aberlady Bay.

**Common Wood-Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* In Scotland, this species is an abundant resident, which we saw on every day of the tour.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* This species is an abundant resident in virtually all locations throughout Scotland, it is especially common near human habitation.

#### CUCKOOS *CUCULIDAE*

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* In Scotland the Common Cuckoo is a fairly common summer breeding bird. Some members of the group observed a bird at the RSPB Reserve at Loch Garten, in the Scottish Highlands and we all saw it very well indeed, during both visits to the Cottisgarth RSPB Reserve, on the Orkneys.

#### OWLS *STRIGIDAE*

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* This species is a locally common resident of Scotland, becoming common in the Orkney Islands, where we enjoyed many good sightings.

#### SWIFTS *APODIDAE*

**Common Swift** *Apus apus* The Common Swift is a very common summer breeding bird throughout the mainland of Scotland, where we saw it on every day of the tour. In sharp contrast to the mainland, it was very scarce in the Orkneys.

#### WOODPECKERS AND ALLIES *PICIDAE*

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* A fairly common resident of Scotland, we saw it very well on a number of occasions.

#### LARKS *ALAUDIDAE*

**Sky Lark** *Alauda arvensis* A fairly common but declining species throughout Scotland, which we saw well on a few occasions.

#### SWALLOWS *HIRUNDINIDAE*

**Common Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* In Scotland this species is a common summer breeding species, which we saw well on many occasions.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* An abundant summer visitor and passage migrant to Scotland, which we recorded on every day of the tour.

**House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* This well known species is a very common summer visitor to Scotland, which we recorded on most days of the tour.

#### PIPITS AND WAGTAILS *MOTACILLIDAE*

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* A very common resident throughout Scotland, which we saw on every day of the tour. It is the favourite host of the Common Cuckoo.

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* A spectacular song-flight and parachute display makes up for the rather dull plumage of this fairly common summer visitor to Scotland, from wintering grounds in tropical Africa. We enjoyed super scope views of an individual in a clearing in a forest at Boath. This was our only sighting of this species.

**Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus* A fairly common resident and breeding bird of rocky shorelines throughout Scotland. We saw small numbers in the Orkneys, where we recorded it along the shoreline, on a daily basis.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* This is a very common resident species throughout Scotland. We recorded it on every day of the tour.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* This very attractive species of wagtail is a fairly common resident species in Scotland. We saw it very well along a fast flowing stream, close to the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

#### KINGLETS *REGULIDAE*

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* Lively and fearless, the Goldcrest is Scotland's smallest bird, we saw it well on a number of occasions in conifer woodlands throughout the tour.

#### DIPPERS *CINCLIDAE*

**White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* This species is a fairly common resident of Scotland and one of the highlights of the tour was watching this species tumbling in and out of a fast-flowing mountain stream at Nethy Bridge.

#### WRENS *TROGLODYTIDAE*

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* In Scotland the Eurasian Wren is a common and widespread resident, which we saw on most days of the tour.

#### ACCENTORS *PRUNELLIDAE*

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis* This species of accentor, is a common and widespread resident in Scotland, which we saw well on several occasions.

#### THRUSHES AND ALLIES *TURDIDAE*

**Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* This species is an uncommon summer breeding bird in Scotland, it winters mainly in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco and in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. We were very fortunate to stumble upon a breeding pair in the car park of the Cairngorm Mountains National Park, enabling us to see this species very well.

**Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* A common and widespread resident throughout Scotland, which we saw on every day of the tour.

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* This is a very common resident in Scotland, where we enjoyed many good observations.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* The largest of Britain's breeding thrushes, it is a fairly common resident throughout Scotland, which we saw well on many occasions.

#### OLD WORLD WARBLERS *SYLVIIDAE*

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* The Sedge Warbler is a common summer breeding species in Scotland. We first observed this species at the Loch Leven RSPB Reserve and then we saw it well on both of our visits to The Loons RSPB Reserve, in the Orkneys.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* In Scotland, the Willow Warbler is a very common summer breeding visitor, which we saw well on a few occasions.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* The Blackcap is a very uncommon summer breeding visitor to Scotland, Russell and Michael were fortunate to observe a single bird at the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* The Garden Warbler, is a common, though shy summer breeding visitor to Scotland. We were very fortunate to enjoy good close looks at a singing bird, in the grounds of the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* This species is also a common summer breeding visitor to Scotland, we saw it very well at Aberlady Bay and again in farmland, close to Boath.

#### OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS *MUSCICAPIDAE*

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* This species is an uncommon summer breeding visitor to Scotland, which we saw surprisingly well, on several occasions.

**Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* In Scotland, this species is a recent coloniser, with small numbers now breeding in southern and central Scotland. We very much enjoyed watching a pair which were nesting in one of the nest boxes, in the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* This attractive species, is a common resident in mainland Scotland, where we saw it on every day of the tour. However, in the Orkneys it is a very uncommon resident, and we were fortunate to observe a family party in the garden of our lodgings.

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to Scotland, which we only saw on two occasions. The first sighting occurred in the Loch Garten RSPB Reserve, and the second, took place in the Abernethy Nature Reserve.

**Common Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola* In Scotland, this species is a fairly common resident, which we saw well, on several occasions.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* In Scotland, this species is a common summer breeding visitor, which we saw very well on numerous occasions.

#### TITS AND CHICKADEES *PARIDAE*

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* A common and widespread resident of conifer plantations throughout Scotland, we saw it well on several occasions.

**Crested Tit** *Lophophanes cristatus* Extensive felling of woodland in Scotland during the 17<sup>th</sup> and

18<sup>th</sup> centuries drove the Crested Tit into a small area of the Scottish Highlands. Due to recent re-forestation the species is slowly moving back into areas to which it was once lost. We enjoyed great looks at a family party in the Anagach Forest and this was followed by a second sighting of another family party in the Aberethy Nature Reserve. These sightings were undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip.

**Great Tit** *Parus major* A common and widespread resident throughout mainland Scotland, which we saw on a daily basis. It does not occur in the Orkney Islands.

**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* This closely related species is also a common and widespread resident throughout mainland Scotland and once again, we saw it on almost every day of the tour. It does not occur on the Orkney Islands.

#### CREEPERS *CERTHIIDAE*

**Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* In Scotland, this species is a common resident, which we saw well on a few occasions.

#### JAYS, MAGPIES AND CROWS *CORVIDAE*

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* This species is an uncommon resident of the southern half of Scotland. We were fortunate to find one scavenging on the ground, below bird feeders, in the Killiecrankie Nature Reserve.

**Common Magpie** *Pica hudsonia* A fairly common resident in southern and eastern Scotland, which we saw well on a few occasions.

**Western Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* In Scotland this species is an extremely common resident, which we saw on almost a daily basis.

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* This species is an abundant resident in both mainland Scotland and in the Orkney Islands, we observed very large flocks feeding in farmland, during our time in the Orkneys.

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone* The Carrion Crow is a common and widespread species throughout the mainland of Scotland, but is absent from the Orkney Islands.

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* In Scotland, it is a common resident of western Scotland, but only becomes common in the east, in the far north and in the Orkneys.

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax* In mainland Scotland this species is an uncommon and highly localised resident, however, it proved to be common in the Orkneys, where we saw it on a daily basis.

#### STARLINGS *STURNIDAE*

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* In Scotland this species has become an inescapable part of life, even in the Orkneys.

#### OLD WORLD SPARROWS *PASSERIDAE*

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* A common and widespread resident, throughout both mainland Scotland and the Orkneys.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* An increasingly uncommon resident throughout Great Britain, particularly so, in Scotland. We were very fortunate to observe a few birds of this species, at the bird feeders in the Loch Leven RSPB Reserve.

#### SISKINS, CROSSBILLS AND ALLIES *FRINGILLIDAE*

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* An abundant and widespread species throughout mainland Scotland, but absent from the Orkneys.

**Scottish Crossbill** *Loxia scotica* Britain's only endemic bird, it is confined to the ancient

Caledonian Pine Forests of the Scottish Highlands. We saw a pair in flight in woodland close to Boath, and then enjoyed good scope views of a flock of five immature birds feeding and preening in conifers, in Balblair Wood.

**Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra* An uncommon resident of Scotland, Russell and I observed a pair in flight, while parking our bus, in the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

**European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris* A common and widespread resident throughout Scotland, which we saw well on many occasions.

**Common Redpoll** A fairly common resident of Scotland, which we only saw twice in flight, and once perched.

**Eurasian Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* A fairly common resident of conifer plantations in Scotland, we saw it well on many occasions.

**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* Common and widespread throughout the Scottish mainland, but absent from the Orkneys.

**Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris* An uncommon resident of Scotland, we were very fortunate to enjoy very close scope views of a pair of feeding birds, at Rackwick, on the Island of Hoy, in the Orkneys.

**Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina* In Scotland, the Linnet is a widespread and common species, which we saw well on numerous occasions.

**Eurasian Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* In Scotland, this species is a fairly common resident, which we saw well on a few occasions, we saw it particularly well on the first day of the tour, at Aberlady Bay.

#### BUNTINGS, SPARROWS, SEEDEATERS AND ALLIES *EMBERIZIDAE*

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella* Unfortunately, this attractive species is declining rapidly throughout Britain. In Scotland it is now an uncommon resident. Fortunately, we saw it very well on a few occasions in farmland, close to Boath.

**Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* A common and widespread resident throughout the whole of Scotland, we enjoyed several good looks at this attractive species.

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* This stunning looking species breeds in the high Arctic from Scandinavia to Alaska and Canada to Greenland. They spend the winter months approximately 1,500 kilometres south of their breeding range. In Britain the Snow Bunting is predominantly a winter visitor, from breeding grounds in Greenland, Iceland and Scandinavia. Approximately 10,000 to 15,000 birds winter in Britain each year, staying predominantly along the coast, but numbers vary greatly, from year to year. In sharp contrast, it is estimated that only 60 pairs breed in Britain each year, and only at the tops of the highest mountains in the Scottish Highlands. Therefore, it was a tremendous thrill, to observe a few pairs in full breeding plumage, feeding along the edge of snow fields, at Caenlochan, high in the Cairngorm Mountains National Park.

#### MAMMALS

**European Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus* An abundant and widespread mammal throughout Scotland, which we saw on most days of the tour.

**Brown Hare** *Lepus europaeus* A fairly common resident of Scotland, we recorded it on every day of the tour in the Orkneys, but not on the mainland. It is obviously far more common on the Orkneys, than in mainland Scotland.

**Mountain Hare** *Lepus timidus* A fairly common resident on the higher mountains of Scotland, we only saw it in the Cairngorm Mountains National Park.

**Eurasian Red Squirrel** *Sciurus vulgaris* Unfortunately, this species has experienced a huge decrease in numbers, since the introduction of the Grey Squirrel. However, the stronghold in Britain for this species, is the ancient Caledonian Pine Forest, in the Scottish Highlands, where we enjoyed good close looks at this very attractive species of squirrel.

**Field Vole** *Microtus agrestis* A common resident throughout Scotland, one ran across a track just ahead of us, while we were birding in the Anagach Forest, in the Scottish Highlands.

**Western House Mouse** *Mus domesticus* We watched one of these creatures at very close range, running along the outside wall of a petrol station, close to Boath.

**Wood Mouse** *Apodemus sylvaticus* One of these mammals was also taking advantage of the Pine Marten feeding station at the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

**Bank Vole** *Clethrionomys glareolus* We enjoyed super close looks at one of these little creatures, who was feeding on the ground, below the bird feeders in the Loch Garten RSPB Reserve.

**Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus* Aileen saw a Brown Rat running into dense cover, while we were birding on South Ronaldsay Island, in the Orkneys.

**Common Seal** *Phoca vitulina* In Scotland this small species of seal, is less common than the Grey Seal, however, we saw it well on the mainland and in the Orkneys.

**Grey Seal** *Halichoerus grypus* A common resident throughout Scotland, we enjoyed many sightings of this large species of seal, it was particularly numerous in the Orkneys.

**Pine Marten** *Martes martes* We enjoyed scope views of one of these very beautiful mammals at a feeding station, in the grounds of the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

**Stoat** *Mustela erminea* One of the highlights of the trip was seeing a family party of this delightful animal. The four young animals were almost as large as the parents, they moved in unison like synchronised swimmers as they ran across the road in front of us and disappeared over a small bridge and into dense cover. The sighting took place along the edge of the Cromarty Firth, near Alness.

**Weasel** *Mustela nivalis* The following day, while birding in Balblair Wood, a Weasel ran across the track ahead of us.

**Common Shrew** *Sorex araneus* We enjoyed super close looks at one of these little creatures, who was feeding on the ground, below the bird feeders in the Loch Garten RSPB Reserve.

**Common Pipistrelle** *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* Ken saw this diminutive species of bat, flying around the Kindrogan Field Centre, at Pitlochry.

**Northern Minke Whale** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* I saw one of these quite well, during the ferry crossing, from Scrabster, to the Orkneys.

**Red Deer** *Cervus elaphus* We saw a large distant group, during our time in the Findhorn Valley.

**Western Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus* A common resident in Scotland, we enjoyed many good sightings during the tour.