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TRIP REPORT

birdingtours group

SATURDAY 15 – SATURDAY 22 JUNE 2024



German Guide:

Rainer Stoll

Heatherlea Guide:

Holly Page



Saturday 15 June

The group assembled in Inverness, meeting up with local guide, Holly, at the airport. We were soon on our way but not before admiring the Herring and Common Gulls in the airport car park. Heading south we passed through beautiful countryside before arriving at our first birding stop - the lovely moorland loch of Lochindorb. Parking at the side of the loch we scanned the water's edge finding Redshank, Common Sandpiper and Curlew. A Peregrine was spotted perched on a ridge behind us but it flew away before we could get a telescope on it. We drove a little further along the road before a Red Grouse was seen by the roadside. We were able to stop and get out to see it although it was difficult at first because it was so well camouflaged. Getting the scope on it we could see a female Red Grouse with a single chick. Further down again another female Red Grouse was seen much closer to the road and she had 5 chicks with her! At the northern end of the loch we scanned again from a new vantage point and picked up one of the pair of Black-throated Diver which breed here. A lovely Willow Warbler was seen carrying food to a nest too. We made our way down from the moorland, through Grantown-on-Spey and to Old Spey Bridge where we had good views up and down the River Spey. Grey Wagtail was seen here along with Common Sandpiper and Goldeneye. Overhead were House Martin, Sand Martin and Swift.

Sunday 16 June

The forecast for today wasn't great but we were determined to make the best of it. We drive down south of Aviemore to the RSPB reserve of Insh Marshes. It was windy and raining but we managed to get good views of Grey Heron, Curlew and Lapwing plus Chaffinch, Siskin and Greenfinch on the feeders. Working our way back north we stopped on the banks of the River Spey where it flows out of Loch Insh. The Osprey nest here has been productive over the last few years, and it was looking like this year would be no exception as we watched an adult feed 3 hungry chicks. Next, we took a walk in Craigellachie Nature Reserve which is a lovely, peaceful birch forest. There were few birds about but we found a Bullfinch posing nicely in the blaeberry, lots of Robin, including lots of fledglings, and Song Thrush. As it was still raining we took the opportunity to visit a distillery, taking a tour around the newest distillery along the River Spey – The Cairn. The tour, including the whisky tasting afterwards, was greatly enjoyed by all. The weather had finally begun to clear up and we had time to do some more birding before the end of the day. We visited Deshar Pool on the edge of Boat of Garten finding Teal, Wigeon, Coot and Moorhen. Over at the back of the pool we found Shoveler and a few Stock Dove were feeding in a recently ploughed field. We moved a little further down the road to get a different perspective on the pool, where we could see further into the corner, and found pair of Slavonian Grebe with one sitting on a nest. A few



smaller birds were found in the trees surrounding us including Lesser Redpoll, Goldfinch and Long-tailed Tit.

Monday 17 June

It was an earlier start today as we drove out to the Aberdeenshire coast. At Bullers of Buchan we walked along the coastal path to look down into a collapsed sea cave which hundreds of seabirds have now made their home. The majority of the birds on the cliffs were Kittiwake but there were a few Herring Gull and Shag too. On the outside of the collapsed cave the seabirds stretched along the cliffs in either direction with Guillemot, Razorbill and Fulmar too. At the far end a few Puffin could be seen darting in and out of their burrows. Offshore a few Gannet flew past and a few of us had views of a lovely Arctic Skua. We stopped in the village of Cruden Bay for tea and coffee, alongside the river. We watched House Sparrows having a bath in the shallows and we also caught a glimpse of a Weasel. Our next stop was at Meikle Loch where we found a very showy Sedge Warbler singing from the top of the reeds. Plenty of photos were taken as it showed off, occasionally performing a song-flight before returning to its perch. Out on the loch were several duck species including Tufted Duck, Goldeneye and, new for the trip, Gadwall. We spent the rest of the day working our way down the River Ythan estuary, taking lunch at the Walkmill Hide. A number of Shelduck were on the far side of the water – some on the shore and others snoozing in a field. A single Ringed Plover darted in and out of the gulls assembled on the near shore. From a viewpoint further down towards the sea we started to see evidence of the nearby tern colony with Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns all flying close-by and fishing in the river while an Osprey did the same. A few waders were here too with Oystercatcher, Curlew and a single Whimbrel. Our final stop of the day was at the river mouth, closer to the tern colony. As well as the three species mentioned before we also saw a single Little Tern. A large number of Eider were loafing around here including one female with a train of small ducklings following behind. Right near the mouth itself a large number of Grey Seal were hauled out on the shore, at least a couple of hundred, and they were calling to each other – quite an eerie sound! After a cup of tea and some flapjack back at the bus we made our way back to Nethy Bridge.

Tuesday 7 May

Today we headed for the west coast. Leaving Nethy Bridge and heading north to begin with, we passed through Inverness and across the Kessock Bridge before turning west. We had a comfort stop at Black Water Falls in pretty steady drizzle. The falls were still beautiful despite the weather but birdlife was notably sparse with just a single Common Sandpiper



seen. We drove on through breathtaking scenery to the village of Dundonnell where we stopped at the head of the sea-loch, Little Loch Broom. Three Greenshank were quickly located as they fed on the edge of the water and several Oystercatcher were around too. A Red-breasted Merganser was seen just offshore and, further out, a Red-throated Diver. We drove around the edge of Gruinard Bay, stopping next at the viewpoint overlooking an offshoot of the bay, imaginatively known as Little Gruinard Bay. Again birds were thin on the ground but we all had good views of two Red-throated Diver. Moving on we headed further along Gruinard Bay and pulled in at a suitable spot for scanning the stretch of water between us and Gruinard Island. A couple of Black Guillemot were the highlight during another quiet stop. We had our lunch at Aultbea, still with the rain coming down but the time we had finished eating it had stopped and the cloud lifted, improving the visibility dramatically. Now we were able to see better we found a pair of White-tailed Eagle perched over on the Isle of Ewe, one in a tree and the other on the ground. We checked in on them periodically and they didn't move the whole time we were there! Hen Harrier was the next bird added to our list with a lovely male seen cruising over the island. We alternated between scanning the island and the sea, on the latter we found another Red-throated Diver plus a couple of Eider. A Short-eared Owl was then sighted, its languid flight unmistakable as it drifted over a field. Before long a second one was seen and we watched as it dropped down into the grass and came up with prey. It didn't take long for the Hooded Crows to see this and they were soon mobbing the Owl, hoping to steal lunch. We were amazed when seemingly out of nowhere a female Hen Harrier came up from the ground and tackled the Owl, causing it to give up the meal it had worked hard for. What an incredible thing to witness! Both owls continued to hunt over the grass, occasionally perching on fence posts before the finally drifted over to the far side of the island and out of view. Our second to last stop of the day was at Gairloch harbour where a few of the group took advantage of being in civilisation to buy postcards from the shop. Those who chose to continue birding didn't really see much to make the others feel they had missed out on anything - a Gannet sat on the sea and a couple of Pheasant sat on someone's porch! After driving through the magnificent scenery along the shores of Loch Maree we finished the day with tea and cake in Achnasheen. By now the sun was out although it was still quite windy. A distant Golden Eagle was a lovely way to finish a challenging but rewarding day.

Wednesday 8 May

The weather had finally improved and become more what we'd expect in June. We decided to take advantage of the good conditions to head up Cairngorm mountain. We crossed a few streams before taking the steep path up to Sarek's Meadow, some 1070m above sea



level. Although incredibly enjoyable there was very little to see bird wise with only Meadow Pipit for company. As we reached the edge of the Meadow we stopped for lunch, taking time to appreciate the fantastic view across to Aviemore and right up to the Moray Firth. Once we made our way onto the meadow itself we could hear a Snow Bunting singing. It took some time but eventually we had brief views as it flitted in and out of crevices on a large rockface. The walk back down was equally enjoyable if a little tougher on the knees, something that some of the group remedied with a beer from the bar at the base station! In the evening we went into nearby Grantown-on-Spey for our evening meal and to watch Switzerland play Scotland in Euro 2024. A lovely way to immerse ourselves in Scottish culture and made even more enjoyable by Switzerland coming out as the victors!

Thursday 9 May

We made our way north and east to Macduff on the Moray Coast. Here we boarded a boat, The Seacat, for an expedition along the coast to view seabird colonies. Not far out of harbour we found a few Eider and the first nesting birds in Cormorant, most with quite large chicks. Further along we reached Troup Head, Scotland's largest mainland Gannet Colony, and we were mesmerised by the sheer number of birds. Thousands upon thousands of Gannet mixed with Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill while Fulmar also flew low over the water. Beyond this colony we passed the village of Pennan with a flyby Great Skua before reaching the Puffin colony. There were a good number on the grassy cliffs but also plenty on the water and flying in and out of their burrows. We began the return journey a little further out to sea but stopped alongside the Gannet colony where our skipper, Harold, threw out some fish. What an incredible sight to see so many Gannet round the boat, diving within inches of us. It was simply breathtaking! Back on dry land we drove west to Spey Bay where we had lunch. We sifted through the gulls at the river-mouth but found only common species. On a shingle bank a large number of Goosander were roosting while on a nearer sandy spit were a few Dunlin and Ringed Plover. As we headed back towards the main road we had good views of a Corn Bunting on a wire. For a complete change of pace we went to twitch a rarity - a very unseasonal American Wigeon which had been hanging out with some Eurasian Wigeon on a large pool on a pig farm. After pausing to admire some very cute piglets, we scanned the area and it didn't take long to find our target. Heat haze made it tricky to get a really clear view but everyone really enjoyed seeing this rarity. We finished the day at Loch Spynie where we had tea and coffee at the bird feeders. Chaffinch, Blue Tit and Great tit were the commoner species here but we also had Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer. A beautiful Red Squirrel came to feast on the peanuts creating a great photo opportunity!



Friday 10 May

For our final day we took a pre-breakfast outing to visit a Black Grouse lek site. As we crossed a stream near the entrance to the car park we briefly saw a Dipper zoom along and out of view. Once in the parking area we set up our telescopes and was soon watching 11 male Black Grouse on the lek site, with a few fanning up their tails in display and showing off to each other. A couple of Mountain Hare were also seen here but they were fairly tucked down in the long grass and it took patience to be able to see them. After breakfast we took a walk through the beautiful ancient Caledonian Pine Forest which is one of the things which makes this area of Scotland so special. The open nature of the forest allows a wonderful understorey of heather, bilberry and cowberry and the remote nature of the area means all you can hear is the birdsong! We found a couple of Crested Tit moving around in the branches of pine tree. They never stayed still for more than a few seconds at a time which was a little frustrating and the light wasn't great but eventually everybody had a decent view. Generally speaking the forest was rather quiet although we managed views of a Spotted Flycatcher and fly over Crossbill. We moved on to a different area of forest to have our morning tea and coffee where, again, it was rather quiet with just a few common birds around. We had our lunch up in the moorland near one of the ski centres. Almost as soon as we arrived a Red Grouse was located, silhouetted against the sky above us and we then found a fairly well grown Red Grouse chick just on the edge of the parking area. Once we'd finished lunch we quickly moved on so we didn't cause any distress to the young grouse. We drove a little further down the road and took a stroll through the heather getting views of more Red Grouse to the delight of everyone in the group. We also had a lovely Curlew which flew past us calling. To finish the week we returned to the pine forest near Nethy Bridge where we enjoyed the peace and quiet and, on the shores of Loch Garten, we had great views of a Common Sandpiper.



Guest Highlights

Highlights were as follows:

- Phillip** The boat trip was very nice, I liked the whole tour – very well organised. Liked the hotel, the food, everything!
- Favourite bird – Great Skua
- Andrea** I liked the mountains and the sea – a good contrast. Loved the shortbread and the after-dinner mints!
- Favourite bird – singing sedge Warbler
- Irene** We had an excellent guide who took very good care of us. Liked the hotel, the boat trip, the woods. Liked all the food and the sandwiches. Liked that we didn't produce much waste. Very happy with the group.
- Favourite bird – Red Grouse
- Daniel –** Hotel was a great place to stay! The whole trip was well organised.
- Favourite bird – Sedge Warbler
- Sarah** The boat trip, never seen so many seabirds in one place. Bullers of Buchan – the collapsed sea cave with all the Kittiwakes and other sea birds. The walk up the mountain – we didn't see many birds but it was nice to be in the mountains and really get a feel for the country. The Osprey nest with 3 chicks. Good guide and good food.
- Favourite bird – all of them!
- Oliver** The boat trip, the guide with competency, taking care of us and lots of humour. The landscapes are unbelievable.
- Favourite bird – the Red Grouse chick



Rainer The group! Felt like we'd been travelling together for years. Really had good conversations and everyone got on very well. The boat trip was also extremely good. Good guide and impressive you learned so many German bird names so quickly!

Favourite bird - Red Grouse

Holly The boat trip. Seeing how excited the group were to see Red Grouse. It was nice to learn the German bird names.

Favourite bird – Gannet.

































Bird Check List

	Name	Wissenschaftlich	Englisch	15/6	16/6	17/6	18/6	19/6	20/6	21/6	22/6
1	Kanadagans	Branta canadensis	Canada Goose	X							
2	Graugans	Anser anser	Greylag Goose	X	X	X	X				
3	Hockerschwan	Cygnus olor	Mute Swan		X	X			X		
4	Brandgans	Tadorna tadorna	Common Shelduck			X			X		
5	Löffelente	Spatula clypeata	Northern Shoveler		X						
6	Schnatterente	Mareca strepera	Gadwall		X	X					
7	Pfeifente	Mareca penelope	Eurasian Wigeon		X	X			X		
8	Stockente	Anas platyrhynchos	Mallard	X	X	X	X		X		
9	Krickente	Anas crecca	Eurasian Teal	X	X	X					
10	Reiherente	Aythya fuligula	Tufted Duck		X	X			X		
11	Eiderente	Somateria mollissima	Common Eider			X	X		X		
12	Schellente	Bucephala clangula	Common Goldeneye	X	X	X					
13	Gansesäger	Mergus merganser	Common Merganser			X			X		
14	Mittelsäger	Mergus serrator	Red-breasted Merganser				X				
15	Moorschneehuhn	Lagopus lagopus	Willow Ptarmigan	X						X	
16	Birkhuhn	Lyrurus tetrix	Black Grouse							X	
17	Jagdfasan	Phasianus colchicus	Common Pheasant	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
18	Mauersegler	Apus apus	Common Swift	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19	Kuckuck	Cuculus canorus	Common Cuckoo	X			X				
20	Felsentaube	Columba livia	Columba Livia		X	X			X		
21	Hohltaube	Columba oenas	Stock Dove	X		X					
22	Ringeltaube	Columba palumbus	Common Wood Pigeon	X	X	X	X		X	X	X

23	Turkentaube	Streptopelia decaocto	Eurasian Collard Dove	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
24	Teichhuhn	Gallinula chloropus	Common Moorhen		X						
25	Blabhuhn	Fulica atra	Eurasian Coot		X	X			X		
	Name	Wissenschaftlic h	Englisch	15/6	16/6	17/6	18/6	19/6	20/6	21/6	22/6
26	Zwergtaucher	Tachybaptus ruficollis	Little Grebe		X						
27	Ohrentaucher	Podiceps auritus	Horned Grebe		X						
28	Sandregenpfeifer	Charadrius hiaticula	Common Ringed Plover			X	X		X		
29	Kiebitz	Vanellus vanellus	Northern Lapwing	X	X	X	X		X	X	
30	Regenbrachvogel	Numenius phaeopus	Eurasian Whimbrel			X					
31	Brachvogel	Numenius arquata	Eurasian Curlew	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
32	Knutt	Calidris canutus	Red Knot				X				
33	Alpenstrandläufer	Calidris alpina	Dunlin			X	X		X		
34	Flüßuferläufer	Actitis hypoleucos	Common Sandpiper	X	X				X	X	
35	Rotschenkel	Tringa totanus	Common Redshank	X		X					
36	Gruenschenkel	Tringa nebularia	Common Greenshank				X				
37	Schmarotzerraubmowe	Stercorarius parasiticus	Parasitic Jaeger			X					
38	Skua	Stercorarius skua	Great Skua						X		
39	Papageitaucher	Fratercula arctica	Atlantic Puffin			X			X		
40	Zwergseeschwalbe	Sternula Albifrons	Little Tern			X					
41	Küstenseeschwalbe	Sterna paradisaea	Arctic Tern			X			X		
42	Flußseeschwalbe	Sterna hirundo	Common Tern			X	X		X		
43	Brandseeschwalbe	Thalasseus sandvicensis	Sandwich Tern			X					
44	Dreizehenmowe	Rissa tridactyla	Black-legged Kittiwake			X			X		
45	Lachmowe	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	Black-headed Gull	X	X	X	X		X		
46	Sturmmowe	Larus canus	Common Gull	X			X		X	X	
47	Silbermowe	Larus argentatus	European Herring Gull	X		X	X		X		
48	Mantelmowe	Larus marinus	Great Black- backed Gull	X		X	X		X		

49	Heringsmowe	Larus fuscus	Lesser Black-backed Gull	X					X		
50	Austernfischer	Haematopus ostralegus	Eurasian Oystercatcher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
51	Gryllteiste	Cepphus grylle	Black Guillemot				X		X		
	Name	Wissenschaftlich	Englisch	15/6	16/6	17/6	18/6	19/6	20/6	21/6	22/6
52	Tordalk	Alca torda	Razorbill			X			X		
53	Sterntaucher	Gavia stellata	Red-throated Loon				X				
54	Prachtaucher	Gavia arctica	Black-throated Loon	X							
55	Eissturmvogel	Fulmarus glacialis	Northern Fulmer			X			X		
56	Basstolpel	Morus bassanus	Northern Gannet			X	X		X		
57	Kormoran	Phalacrocorax	Great Cormorant			X			X		
58	Krahenscharbe	Gulosus aristotelis	European Shag			X	X		X		
59	Graureiher	Ardea cinerea	Grey Heron		X	X	X		X	X	
60	Fischadler	Pandion haliaetus	Osprey		X	X			X		
61	Steinadler	Aquila chrysaetos	Golden Eagle				X				
62	Sperber	Accipiter nisus	Eurasian Sparrowhawk							X	
63	Rohrweihe	Circus aeruginosus	Western Marsh Harrier		X						
64	Kornweihe	Circus cyaneus	Hen Harrier				X				
65	Rotmilan	Milvus milvus	Red Kite	X	X						
66	Seeadler	Haliaeetus albicilla	White-tailed Eagle				X		X		
67	Mausebussard	Buteo buteo	Common Buzzard	X	X	X	X		X	X	
68	Sumpfohreule	Asio flammeus	Short-eared Owl				X				
69	Waldkauz	Strix aluco	Tawny Owl							X	
70	Buntspecht	Dendrocopos maior	Great Spotted Woodpecker	X		X			X		
71	Turmfalke	Falco tinnunculus	Common Kestrel				X				
72	Wanderfalke	Falco peregrinus	Peregrine Falcon	X							
73	Elster	Pica pica	Eurasian Magpie			X	X		X		
74	Dohle	Coloeus monedula	Western Jackdaw	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

75	Saatkrahe	Corvus frugilegus	Rook		X	X	X		X	X	X
76	Rabekrahe	Corvus corone	Carrion Crow		X	X	X		X	X	X
77	Nebelkrahe	Corvus cornix	Hooded Crow	X			X	X	X		
	Name	Wissenschaftlich	Englisch	15/6	16/6	17/6	18/6	19/6	20/6	21/6	22/6
78	Kolkrabe	Corvus corax	Northern Raven				X			X	
79	Tannenmeise	Parus ater	Coal Tit	X	X		X		X	X	X
80	Haubenmeise	Lophophanes cristatus	Crested Tit							X	
81	Blaumeise	Cyanistes caeruleus	Eurasian Blue Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
82	Kohlmeise	Parus major	Great Tit	X	X		X		X		
83	Feldlerche	Alauda arvensis	Eurasian Skylark	X		X		X	X		
84	Uferschwalbe	Riparia riparia	Sand Martin	X		X	X		X		
85	Rauchschwalbe	Hirundo rustica	Barn Swallow		X	X	X		X	X	X
86	Mehlschwalbe	Delichon urbicum	Western House Martin	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
87	Schwanzmeise	Aegithalos caudatus	Long-tailed Tit		X						
88	Fitis	Phylloscopus trochilus	Willow Warbler	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
89	Zilpzalp	Phylloscopus collybita	Common Chiffchaff					X		X	
90	Schilfrohrsanger	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus	Sedge Warbler			X					
91	Monchsgrasmücke	Sylvia atricapilla	Eurasian Blackcap						X		
92	Dorngrasmücke	Curruca communis	Common Whitethroat						X		
93	Wintergoldhahnchen	Regulus regulus	Goldcrest							X	
94	Zaunkönig	Troglodytes troglodytes	Eurasian Wren		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
95	Waldbaumläufer	Certhia familiaris	Eurasian Treecreeper				X			X	
96	Star	Sturnus vulgaris	Common Starling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
97	Singdrossel	Turdus philomelos	Song Thrush	X	X	X	X		X	X	
98	Misteldrossel	Turdus viscivorus	Mistle Thrush		X					X	
99	Amsel	Turdus merula	Common Blackbird	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
100	Grauschnapper	Muscicapa striata	Spotted Flycatcher		X					X	

	Name - Saugetiere	Wissenschaftlich	Englisch	15/6	16/6	17/6	18/6	19/6	20/6	21/6	22/6
1	Igel	Erinaceus europaeus	Hedgehog							X	
2	Eichhornchen	Sciurus vulgaris	Red Squirrel						X		
3	Kaninchen	Oryctolagus cuniculus	Rabbit		X	X				X	X
4	Feldhase	Lepus europaeus	Brown Hare		X				X	X	
5	Schneehase	Lepus timidus	Mountain (Blue) Hare							X	
6	Fuchs	Vulpes vulpes	Fox						X		
7	Mauswiesel	Mustela nivalis	Weasel			X					
8	Seehund	Phoca vitulina	Common Seal			X					
9	Kegelrobbe	Halichoerus grypus	Grey Seal			X	X		X		
10	Rothirsch	Cervus elaphus	Red Deer			X	X				
11	Reh	Capreolus capreolus	Roe Deer			X			X	X	
12	Wildziege	Capra aegagrus	Wild Goat			X					