

## Tour Report

### Scotland – Early Spring in the Scottish Highlands

1 – 8 April 2022

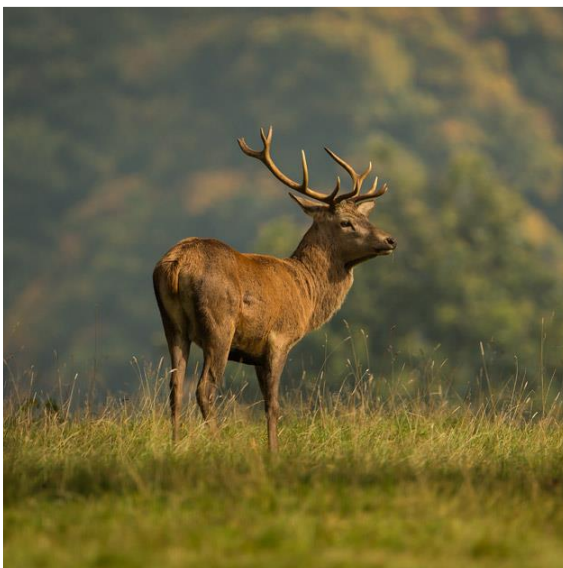
Bottlenose dolphin



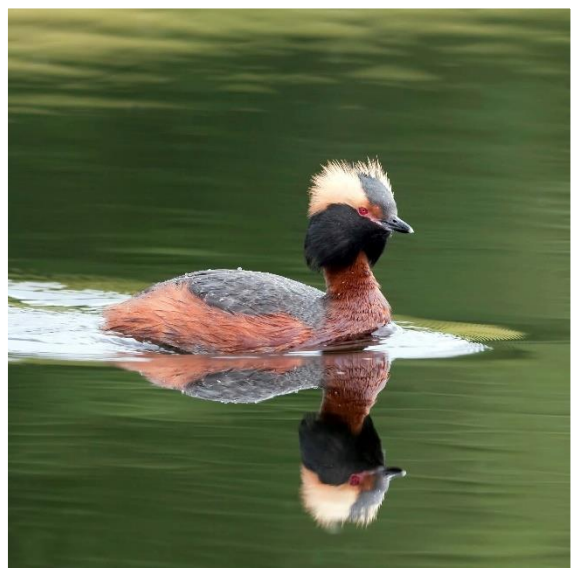
Red squirrel



Red deer



Slavonian grebe



## **Day 1: Friday 1 April 2022**

### **Arrival day**

Convening in the comfortable surroundings of the Grant Arms restaurant, Mike Dilger welcomed five of the six guests to the hotel. Due to the late arrivals of some of the guests, the normal briefing was somewhat truncated and so held at the dining table before the group then tucked in to a delicious three course dinner.

## **Day 2: Saturday 2 April 2022**

### **Findhorn Bay Nature Reserve, Findhorn dunes, Burghead harbour & point, Roseisle, Hopeman Point & RSPB Loch Spynie**

The group woke up to their first day of the tour and after a leisurely breakfast headed off to the Moray Coast. The first day promised possibly the best weather of what looked like a very changeable period, with rain and snow predicted for later in the week. And despite an overcast start we had been promised that the sun would make an appearance by lunchtime.

Parking in the car park of the Findhorn Bay Local Nature Reserve five of the six guests joined Mike Dilger out on the mud, but only after he'd promised them that high tide was still some time off! After walking out a couple of hundred metres, the birds began to show themselves. The first flock to be admired was a flock of around 200 knot, which put on quite a display while constantly searching for new feeding opportunities. Mike explained that this high Arctic wader's most distinct feature was its indistinctive appearance. A number of dunlin were also observed on the mud behind the knot flock, together with many curlew, whose plaintive calls could be heard ringing all around the bay.

A real surprise here was to see around seven or eight sanderling together, which stood out for being far paler than the other small waders, and the fact this species always tends to move like a wind-up like clockwork toy. Redshank were abundant in and around the main channel, with oystercatcher very much in evidence as well. Further across the estuary, a few shelduck could also be picked out sifting the mud for Hydrobia snails. Suddenly the weather began deteriorating rapidly, and being in such an isolated location the group decided to beat a hasty retreat back to the car park, to join the remaining guest who patently had more sense! From here, a quick toilet stop in the Findhorn Dunes car park allowed the group to have fabulous views of a male and female stonechat sitting up on the European gorse, while a singing song thrush was a good find here too. Pied wagtails were also observed before the group then headed for Burghead, with a pair of magpies seen along the way - which is a Highlands' rarity - and an additional bonus.

The next stop was for a cuppa at Burghead harbour where the worst of the weather had by then passed through and a quick look across the bay revealed plenty of razorbills, a couple of eider ducks and a pair of bed-breasted mergansers, alongside the usual gulls. A large flock of turnstone, flanked by a few redshank, then flew past, and Mike was also able to scope up a high tide roost of redshank on the other side of the sea wall. Finally, before moving on, a common seal was picked out in the bay. Driving round to the point, the tide was by now coming in rapidly, but as soon as we got out a couple of bottlenose dolphins were observed towards Fort George. In addition to the cetaceans, the occasional gannet was picked up, with razorbills once again the dominant seabird out in the bay, but with a little searching a few common guillemots were picked up as well. Much closer to the group was a flock of eiders just off the rock platform, before Mike then found a winter-plumaged red-throated diver for all the group to enjoy. More turnstone, curlew, redshank and oystercatchers were additionally observed along the rocks, with close views of a couple of rock pipits as they flew past and landed just in front of the group. Just before leaving the point a hooded crow was spotted right alongside a carrion crow, enabling the group to see the difference between these two closely related species, which are also capable of hybridising.

By now the day had been transformed into one of blazing sunshine and the group enjoyed sitting out on the picnic benches while lunching at Roseisle. A brief post-prandial walk in the forest could not eke out a crested

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tit, but a male siskin feeding in birch was an admirable substitute, while the group also enjoyed listening to a singing goldcrest. Positioning ourselves up on the dunes, we then began a telescope session and in glorious weather managed to pick out more red-throated divers, razorbills and red-breasted mergansers, as well as another common seal. With the light behind us the group were also able to pick out both common and velvet on the water, with the latter species by far most numerous of these two closely-related sea ducks.

To his huge excitement Mike then picked out a white-billed over, a huge rarity that had been intermittently recorded at this site over the last week. This vagrant was not only a first for all members of the group, but Mike too, and the best moment was watching the bird's white bill gleaming in the sunlight - a truly brilliant moment. Retiring back to the minibus, Mike then drove the group around to Hopeman Point to look for purple sandpipers. While these winter waders were on this occasion absent it did present an opportunity to look at the differences between cormorant and shag with both species observed at close range. Kittiwakes were also present here, with a gull masterclass then ensuing as we looked at the difference between this maritime species and that of the common gulls in the harbour. More turnstone were seen flying around the harbour here too.

The final stop of the day was at RSPB Loch Spynie, where in the car park the group were treated to great views of tree sparrow and yellowhammer coming down to the well-stocked feeders here. Chaffinch, greenfinch and goldfinch were all observed here in quick succession as well as well as a fly-by from a grey heron. Walking down to the loch spring was definitely in the air as a great spotted woodpecker was heard drumming, before the first chiffchaffs of the week were picked up with by their monotonous calls too. A brief call of raven was also heard above the trees as the group walked down to the loch. Reaching the water, all managed to squeeze into the hide, where a duck-fest ensued. Both male and female goldeneye were enjoyed whilst diving for dinner, alongside a couple of female goosander. Also present were teal, wigeon, tufted duck and mallard. Mute swan and a couple of moorhen were also observed here as well, while a water rail was briefly heard 'sharming' from the reeds. Best of all, however, were the displaying shoveler doing their yin and yang courtship display, before heading off to their breeding grounds.

Walking back to the car park, a dunnoek was seen, before a guest then spotted a male reed bunting close to the feeder - a difficult bird to see in the Highlands. Driving back to the hotel via Dava Moor, no red grouse could be seen on this occasion, but a close-up meadow pipit represented the very last bird of an incredibly successful first day.

### **Day 3: Sunday 3 April 2022**

#### **Strathdearn - Corrievorrie, Forest car park, Top car park, Cairngorm upper car park, Kincaig Church, Avielochan & Lochindorb.**

With the weather looking to significantly deteriorate later in the week, Mike suggested the group take advantage of the second morning's good weather to head to Strathdearn or 'Raptor Valley'. So, after breakfast the group headed across to the A9, seeing a number of brown hares along the way, before heading north for Inverness. Turning off the main trunk road, they then crossed the Findhorn Bridge before heading southwest and into the heart of the Monadhlaith's.

The first stop was near Corrievorrie Farm, where we were treated to spot of sunshine which was trying its best to keep the cold easterly winds at bay. This did not seem to bother the buzzards though as three were picked up in quick succession. More buzzards were observed across the valley before a much larger bird was seen being mobbed by a buzzard, enabling the guests to see the difference between a 'tourist eagle' and a 'proper eagle'. The Goldie, appeared to be a third-year bird, as it still had white in its tail, and eventually landed on the hillside, enabling all to gain a 'scoped up' view of the bird sitting on a rock. Finally, before moving further up the valley, a V formation of birds passing overhead proved in fact to be a mixed flock, with pink-footed geese on one arm of the 'V' while the other arm comprise eleven whooper swans!

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The next stop was at the forest car park, where the bridge crosses the Findhorn River. Almost immediately Mike picked up another golden eagle, this time an adult bird passed directly overhead before drifted off in a northeasterly direction. In the distance a herd of feral goats was also enjoyed by the group, while a small number also watched a very distant peregrine soaring above the distant fells in the strengthening wind. A pied wagtail was also spotted in the car park here too, but no dippers were picked up on the river.

A cuppa was then taken at the top car park, but by now the sun had become obscured by heavy cloud and the biting wind meant that standing out for long was proving challenging. Deciding to quit while ahead, the group headed back down the valley, only stopping along the way to enjoy a close-up view of a red kite, before then heading back south. The next planned stop was Cairngorm Mountain, whereupon the group were able to enjoy at least 11 snow bunting upon their arrival, as the birds constantly flitted between the car park wall, where the food had been left out, and that of the roof of the visitor centre. A raven was also seen and heard crossing the valley here, with the occasional meadow pipit and pied wagtail spotted along the edge of the car park too.

After a lunch, and with it now sleeting, a number of the group walked up and around the back of the visitor centre and near the Alpine Garden to look for ring ouzel, but the only bird of note in the by now snowy conditions were a pair of stonechat. Beating a hasty retreat off the mountain Mike then took the group to the church at Kincaig where a pair of osprey have been recorded nesting on an island to the north of Insh Marshes in previous years, but on this occasion no bird was to be seen. However while driving back up the A9 an osprey was then seen by most members of the group as it flew directly over the minibus with a large fish in its talons. Spotted close to Aviemore, Mike suggested that this particular bird may well have taken a fish from the farm at Rothiemurchus before then leaving to consume it elsewhere.

On the way back to the hotel Mike then took the group to Avielochan, which is currently the only site for breeding Slavonian grebes in the whole of Speyside. This location is strictly private to most folk but Mike had pre-arranged access through the hotel, and the group were immediately rewarded upon entering the reserve with a summer plumaged adult no further than 50 metres from the minibus. In order not to disturb what is a Schedule One breeding bird, the group used the car as a hide, which provided stellar views, and was especially exciting when the bird began calling for its mate!

Thrilled with this top-notch sighting, Mike then took the group back towards the hotel, by way of the famous packhorse bridge at Carrbridge and across Dava Moor towards Lochindorb. On the road to Ferness a small pool revealed both lapwing and teal before they then crossed over and onto the moorland. Here the first bird of note was a male red grouse close to the vehicle, but with it now raining steadily, the group had to satisfy themselves with views from inside their mobile hide. Tufted duck, mallard, goldeneye and greylag goose were all recorded on the loch here, with the highlight being a pair of mistle thrush feeding in a field, which were observed alongside a lapwing and a colour-ringed oystercatcher. Finally a female kestrel was seen hunting over the moor before Mike then turned the group around for the short journey back to the hotel.

#### **Day 4: Monday 4 April 2022**

##### **Anagach, Old Spey Bridge, Dell Woods, Kincaig, Spey Dam, Garva Bridge**

Day three was the first of a run of days with the weather looking decidedly mixed. The original plan had been to go to Black Isle, but with rain and a freshening breeze forecast Mike suggested the group change tack and instead head inland. So, after a full Scottish breakfast the group headed off to the community-run forest of Anagach situated in between Grantown and the Spey River.

Upon walking down to the forest's feeders the group were instantly treated to their first red squirrels of the trip as a first animal and then a second animal turned up to feed, before then chasing each other around the trees. The bird feeder alongside was sporadically busy with three species of tit and chaffinch, while siskin were heard and then seen feeding among the pine cones above. Both lesser redpoll and crossbill were heard

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briefly but not seen, and then rather frustratingly, the dry, distinctive trill of a crested tit was clearly heard on a couple of occasions but could not be enticed down to the feeders. With suggestions that this Scottish rarity has now gone into full breeding mode, sightings have suddenly begun to prove very difficult for this much sought-after species.

Great spotted woodpecker was then briefly seen and heard calling before a treecreeper then turned up to entertain the guests by working a number of the trees around the feeders. Returning the short distance back to the minibus Mike then took the group round to the Old Spey Bridge where a dipper was almost immediately located on the rocks at the base of the bridge. It then put on an admirable show as it fed underwater and obligingly posed on various rocks in full view of the appreciative audience. A grey wagtail was then heard flying overhead, before then being located at the base of the bridge on the other side, as all agreed with Mike's assertion that this must be one of our most poorly-named of birds - surely yellow-bottomed wagtail is far more appropriate! Looking upriver, two female and a male goosander were then located feeding in the middle of the river, before yet another closer and more obliging treecreeper was picked up in the trees close to the river.

After a brief stop at Nethy Bridge, Mike then took the group into Dell Woods, to have one last attempt at locating crested tit. Despite the continued absence of this bird, four siskin on the feeder provided a welcome surprise, giving all the guests the opportunity to see the difference between the males and females. With lunch approaching Mike then drove the group to the north end of Insh Marshes, where on this occasion the group successfully managed to catch up with one of Kincaig's ospreys. The osprey entertained the group royally entertained as the bird alternated its' time between sitting on the nest and flying down to pick up sticks from nearby in order to carry out running repairs to the nest. From the shores of the loch here a jay was also observed feeding below a number of oak trees while the ubiquitous goldeneye were out on the water.

After lunch the group then headed off to Spey Dam with the promised rain finally arriving. In the loch created by the dam both goldeneye and goosander could be seen on the water, and a couple of brown hares were also spotted in the adjacent fields. Moving up towards Garva Bridge a couple of red deer were spotted, but this just proved to be the warm-up act as the group then caught up with a large bachelor herd further along the road. Many of the stags still had their antlers, with a few having cast theirs, while a few looking decidedly lop-sided with just one remaining. By driving carefully past the large blocks of conifers the group were eventually able to find around six female sika deer on the edge, with this Asiatic introduction representing a mammal tick for all the members of the group. Through the scope, all were able to appreciate their smaller stature, shorter legs and the distinctive black surrounds to their white rears.

With the rain now coming down steadily and long drive back to the hotel, Mike suggested they begin to return, only to be confronted with another herd of stags which crossed both the river and the road right in front of the group - what a view! With all agreeing it to have been a superb mammal day, the group returned to the hotel for a short break before once again reuniting for dinner.

## **Day 5: Tuesday 5 April 2022**

### **Chanonry Point, Cromarty, Jemimaville, RSPB Udale Bay, Rosemarkie**

The group tucked into their breakfast on the fourth full day while watching the snow steadily falling. After a brief snatch of spring, the wintry conditions had well and truly returned, but as the wind had crucially dropped Mike suggested the group head off to the Black Isle.

As high tide was due later in the day, the first port of call, after a brief stop at the coastal village of Avoch, was that of Chanonry Point. At the coast the snow had been replaced by sleet due to the warming effect of the sea, but being undeterred by these conditions the group walked around the lighthouse, before then tucking in behind the sea wall to inspect what might be present in the bay. Even in the wet conditions large numbers of common guillemots and razorbills could be seen either on the water or flying past the point as

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they presumably fed up before returning to their breeding colonies at Troup Head. Gannets were also picked up flying past the point too, with the black wingtips of a number of kittiwakes clearly visible even further out. While the group continued to tuck themselves out of the worst of the weather, a couple of rock pipit was also seen passing along the shoreline here.

Moving out to the point and into the elements, a few dolphins were seen briefly away in the distance towards Fort George, but just when the group were beginning to give up any hope of seeing dolphins at close hand, an animal suddenly breached just off the point itself. Repositioning ourselves right at the end of the point, all were then treated to the most marvellous display as eight to ten dolphins, including young born in 2021, fed just 15 or 20 metres offshore for the next twenty minutes. The only other sighting of note here was the first sandwich tern of the season, which was picked up by Mike as it flew around the point out to sea.

With the weather beginning to deteriorate even further, the cold, wet and thrilled group returned back to the car to warm up and dry off. Driving then to the north of the Black Isle a brief coffee stop along the sea front at Cromarty enabled the group to obtain terrific views of a male and female long-tailed duck feeding on the sea but at relatively close quarters for a bird that is often only seen from a distance. Cormorants and shags were also observed further out in the Cromarty Firth, while Mike was additionally able to show the guests a large raft of eider through the scope that were resting close to the moored-up oil rigs out in the Firth.

Following the coast westwards, the group then stopped in the lay-by close to Jemimaville to observe the raft of scaup which overwinters here each year. Through the scope all were able to enjoy watching them diving down for mussels while appreciating the very obvious plumage differences of both the sexes. Mike Dilger explained that that the Cromarty Firth is probably the best place to see this marine version of a tufted duck in all of Britain, with a quick assessment giving the overwintering population of several flocks present to be close to a thousand. As the rain continued unabated, Mike then suggested the group move a touch further down the coast, this time to RSPB Udale, where the birds could be appreciated while taking in the dry hide.

As high tide was at least an hour away, the group then tucked into their sandwiches as the birds were slowly pushed towards the tide. As per usual, oystercatcher, curlew, lapwing and redshank were abundant across the estuary, with the dominant wildfowl appearing to be wigeon, teal and mallard. But after a long scan a number of scarcer species were picked up in amongst the more numerous birds. Three or four ringed plover were the first to be observed sprinkled along an ever decreasing patch of mud just in front of the hide and further out a single bar-tailed godwit could also be seen headed and shoulders above a small, milling flock of dunlin. Further out into the bay a few shelduck were seen feeding out on the mud alongside a small number of pink-footed geese, while a female red-breasted merganser was also spotted close to the hide. Perhaps the best bird was picked up by Mike just as the group began returning to the minibus in the form of a single black-tailed godwit, which was observed on the grazing marsh - this being the rarer of the two overwintering godwit species regularly seen in the Highlands. With the tide now fully in, a single lesser black-backed gull was observed in amongst the herring and common gulls on the water.

Finally, before moving on, a couple of wild-looking rock doves were spotted feeding on the grazing marsh, as Mike explained that these birds appeared pretty close to the original wild ancestors of all feral pigeons. As the rain showed no signs of abating, and a bitter wind to boot, the group then made the decision to travel back to the hotel via Rosemarkie, where Mike bought all the group a warming cuppa before everyone retired back to the hotel to both warm up and dry off before dinner.

#### **Day 6: Wednesday 6 April 2022**

#### **Black grouse lek near Ferness, Tomvaich Woods near Grantown-on-Spey, Lochindorb by way of Dava Moor and the mammal hide at Inishriach (Speyside Wildlife hide)**

After the frankly dreadful weather of the previous day, the group convened at 06:30 for a quick pre-breakfast trip to the nearby black grouse lek. Fortunately, the worst of the weather appeared to have passed, and with

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both wind and rain mercifully absent, all were keen to make up for lost time. Early spring is an important time of year for lekking black grouse males, as this is when the females will tend to make their choice of mate and upon our arrival it was immediately obvious the birds were keen to make up on lost time as well. A total of nine males were seen on the lek, with ongoing battles between adjacent birds occurring right across the grassland. The males' distinctive calls could also be clearly heard from the guests' vantage point as each bird sought to elevate its position in the pecking order.

Returning back to the hotel after an invigorating start to the day and with the weather certainly for the first half of the day looking far more favourable, Mike suggested that as the group would have a late finish due a planned evening visit to the badger and pine marten hide then it might be best for the group to stay local. Following a relaxed breakfast the group headed out to a lesser known part of the woods near Grantown to look and listen for crossbills and crested tits.

Finally joined by the sun after an absence of at least a couple of days the group firstly took to an easy trail running perpendicular away from the road. But despite this being a most enjoyable walk, wildlife sightings were a touch thin on the ground, with the only birds noted being that of mistle thrush, chaffinch and robin, with the latter two species singing in numerous locations. Taking a moment to enjoy the forest's lichens, Mike was able to point out the distinct genera of *Cladonia* and *Usnea*, whose presence is testament to the clean air present across virtually all of the Highlands. Excellent views were also obtained here of both goldcrest and coal tit enjoying the sunshine as the group returned back to the road before then trying their luck in the forest across the road. Walking up a gently ascending slope, a small flock of crossbill was suddenly heard just an instant before all then watched them passing overhead. Fortunately, the flock of three birds then landed in view for just long enough for Mike to scope them up, revealing in the process a single brick-red male and two females before all the birds then quickly dropped out of sight. As to whether these birds were common crossbills or the endemic Scottish species is anyone's guess, as current scientific thinking is leading towards the decision of downgrading the Scottish crossbill to that of subspecific status. Irrespective of this decision it was great to obtain excellent, if decidedly brief views, of these pine forest specialists.

Returning back to the minibus, and with Dava Moor the next stop of the day's planned itinerary, the group were then forced to drive the long way round to reach the moorland due to the continued road closure from the moor's eastern side. After a glorious start to the morning, the cloud cover and wind had steadily begun to build once again, meaning the air temperature was barely above zero. Driving around the loch, a comprehensive search was conducted for the pair of resident black-throated divers, but on this occasion they were nowhere to be seen. However recompense arrived in the form of a numerous goldeneye, a single goosander and a few mallards, that were either feeding or resting on the loch. While driving around the perimeter road a number of red grouse were also observed, with the highlight being when a pair were enjoyed very close to the road, allowing the group to note the obvious plumage differences between male and female.

Eventually reaching the large common gull colony that breeds across the moorland, Mike had been given a tip-off as to the recent presence of a mountain hare, a species which has become decidedly difficult to see in recent years. And sure enough, after a lot of searching a single animal was finally picked up. Initially quite distant, the hare steadily came closer, allowing all to enjoy their first ever view of this iconic animal and Britain's only native lagomorph. The animal was steadily on the turn to its springtime greyish coat, but large parts of its flanks were still white and the group obtained fabulous views as it became spooked possibly by a buzzard before then sprinting across the moorland. Thrilled with such a good sighting, and the first Mike had seen in a couple of years, the group then headed back to the hotel for a delicious high tea.

Reconvening back at the minibus a couple of hours later with very full stomachs, Mike then took the group to the hide southwest of Aviemore, near Inshriach, for an evening's mammal viewing. Almost immediately the first mammal spotted was that of a wood mouse, coming out in search of peanuts, and this was then followed by a steady stream of badgers arriving to clear up on the food left out, with a grand total of eight counted at one point. Then Mike noted one of the badgers suddenly running off, and as the group watched

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it became obvious it had caught a wood mouse! Keeping the competition from another badger at paw's length, it then proceeded to eat the poor mouse in just a few seconds!

This was certainly the first time our 'guide in the hide' Harris had seen this behaviour, but sadly this proved to be the highlight of the evening, as on this occasion the pine marten decided not to make an appearance. Nevertheless, the group were delighted with the show put on by the charismatic badgers and returned happily to the hotel to tuck into the cheese and wine laid out for the hungry and thirsty spotters.

## **Day 7: Thursday 7 April 2022**

### **West coast day: Glascarnoch Dam, Dundonnell, Gruinard Bay, Laide Jetty, Mellon Udrigle Beach, Aultbea**

With the weather having been so changeable the much-anticipated west coast trip had been in jeopardy all week, but a brief break in the incessant rain finally permitted the opportunity for the group to travel across on the last full day of the tour. Travelling up to Inverness, the group then travelled across the Black Isle, observing a red kite along the way, before then heading due west.

The first stop was at the far western end of Glascarnoch Loch, which was created by construction of a dam downriver. Often this can be a good place to look for Canada geese and whooper swans, but on this occasion the only new bird the group were able to add to the list was redwing, when a couple flew past while calling as they went. The views from the loch side were sensational however, and as much of the ground was coated with a dusting of snow it making the terrain appear less Scottish Highlands and more Norwegian fjords!

Climbing back in the minibus, the first proper stop was that of Dundonnell where the group enjoyed a hot drink while watching and listening to at least two greenshank flying around the saltmarsh. Here too were oystercatcher, redshank and curlew, with red-breasted mergansers on the water, but as most of the group were scanning the horizons looking for eagles, these birds were relegated to that of the role of supporting artists! After a few false starts with buzzards, ravens and hooded crows, a golden eagle was then picked up above the crags behind the hotel. All were then treated to a spectacular show as this sub-adult bird was observed in full display mode, as it folded up its wings as a precursor to plummeting down the rock face, only to then put on the brakes before then racing back up again to repeat the same manoeuvre. What a performance!

Moving on to Gruinard Bay, the strengthening wind made picking birds out difficult on the choppy waters, but all could clearly see the devastation caused by a recent fire on Gruinard Island that had recently made the national press. Mike then spotted a black guillemot very close to the shore in full summer plumage, which represented yet another new bird for all the group. Constantly diving for food, the group were clearly able to see the bird's blood red legs as it powered below water in its perennial search for food. A number of black-throated divers could also be seen across the bay, with most still in winter plumage, but the regular barnacle geese were conspicuous by their absence from their usual position in the improved fields away to the northeast of the bay.

Driving around to the jetty at Laide for lunch. Most of the group ate their sandwiches in the minibus due to the biting, chill wind, but were coaxed out to see the occasional common seal in the water and across the bay to where they haul out at low tide. A stunning summer plumaged red-throated diver was then picked up just off the jetty, with a couple of greater black-backed gulls also observed while lounging away on the rocks. Further out to sea a number of gannets and kittiwake could also be seen, alongside the occasional gannet diving for food.

Driving the short distance to Mellon Udrigle beach, the group were treated to the fine views of a spring male wheatear feeding in the short turf, with another tow birds then located feeding adjacent to the car park. Feeding alongside the wheatears, a number of meadow pipits were also noted here, as a few linnets additionally passed overhead and in the direction of the dunes behind the caravan park. In the sheltered bay another summer-plumaged red-throated diver was seen very close in before the group then drove to Aultbea

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on the west coast for their last stop of the day. While the facilities were used, Mike found their fourth species of diver that week, in the form of a winter-plumaged great-northern diver, which was then promptly eclipsed by a stonking pair of summer-plumaged back-throats no further than 50 metres out. A couple of summer plumaged Slavonian grebes were also picked up in the scope out towards the harbour, before Mike then spotted a ringtail hen harrier feeding along drystone walls right across on the other side of the bay.

Finally heading back to the hotel after a terrific week, the group were treated to a very close adult golden eagle which flew right over the minibus just east of Aultbea - making the fourth different 'goldie' of the week and a fitting finale to the last full day.

### **Day 8: Friday 8 April 2022**

#### **Loch Flemington**

Bidding farewell to one member of the group, who was driving back home, Mike took the opportunity of showing the remaining five members of the group a small freshwater loch close to Inverness Airport before their departure. This is one of the few places in the whole of the Highlands which holds coot and moorhen, with both species quickly spotted upon our arrival. Also present here were teal, tufted duck and goldeneye, with the highlight being a couple of summer-plumaged little grebes, which were delighted all before departures at both the airport and train station, with fond farewells at the end of a terrific week's wildlife-watching.

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# Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	<b>BIRDS</b>	<b>AVES</b>							
1	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓		✓			
3	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
4	Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓					
5	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓			✓			
6	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓
7	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓						
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓			✓			
10	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓
11	Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>				✓			
12	Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓			✓			
13	Velvet scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>	✓						
14	Common scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	✓						
15	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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16	Red-breast merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓			✓			
17	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	✓	✓					
18	Long-tailed duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>				✓			
19	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Black grouse	<i>Lyrurus tetrix</i>					✓		
21	Red grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>		✓			✓		
22	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓				
23	Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	✓			✓	
24	Black-throated diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>						✓	
25	Great northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>						✓	
26	Slavonian grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>		✓				✓	
27	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	H						✓
28	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
29	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓			✓		✓	
30	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓			✓		✓	
31	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓					✓	
32	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓	✓				
33	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓				✓	
34	Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>						✓	
35	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓			✓	✓	

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36	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
37	Water rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H						
38	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓					✓
39	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>							✓
40	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
42	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓			
43	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓						
44	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
45	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				✓			
46	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				✓			
47	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	✓			✓			
48	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓			✓			
49	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓						
50	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					✓		
51	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
52	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓			✓		✓	
53	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
54	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓	✓		
55	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓					✓	

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56	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				✓			
59	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓			✓		✓	
60	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	✓			✓			
61	Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	✓					✓	
62	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
63	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓			✓			
64	Rock dove, feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Gt spot woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	H		✓				
66	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓					
67	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓					
68	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓				
69	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓						
70	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓				
73	Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓			✓		✓	
74	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	H	✓	H			✓	
75	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓		✓		✓		

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76	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓		✓				
77	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓		✓		✓		
78	Crested tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			H				
79	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓		✓		H	
80	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓						
81	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	H						
82	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	H				✓		
83	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H		H				
84	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			✓				
85	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	
86	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
87	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓		H	✓	
88	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓				
89	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓		✓		✓		
90	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	
91	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>						✓	
92	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			✓				
93	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓			✓	
94	Tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓						
95	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓			✓			

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96	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
97	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓				
98	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
99	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓			✓			
100	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
101	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓				
102	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	H					H	
103	Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>			H		✓		
104	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓				✓	✓	
105	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓		✓			✓	
106	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓		✓			✓	
107	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			H		✓	✓	
108	Snow bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>		✓					
109	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓						
110	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓						
111	White-billed diver	<i>Gavia adamsii</i>	✓						
	<b>MAMMALS</b>	<b>MAMMILIA</b>							
1	European mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓					
3	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			

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4	Mountain hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>					✓		
5	Red squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>			✓				
6	Wood mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>					✓		
7	Common seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	✓					✓	
8	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>				✓			
9	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	✓			✓			
10	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>					✓		
11	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓			✓	
12	Sika deer	<i>Cervus nippon</i>			✓				
13	Goat	<i>Capra hircus</i>		✓				✓	
	<b>AMPHIBIANS</b>	<b>AMPHIBIA</b>							
1	Common toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>					✓		