

Tour Report

UK – Early Spring in the Scottish Highlands

18 – 25 March 2023

Black grouse



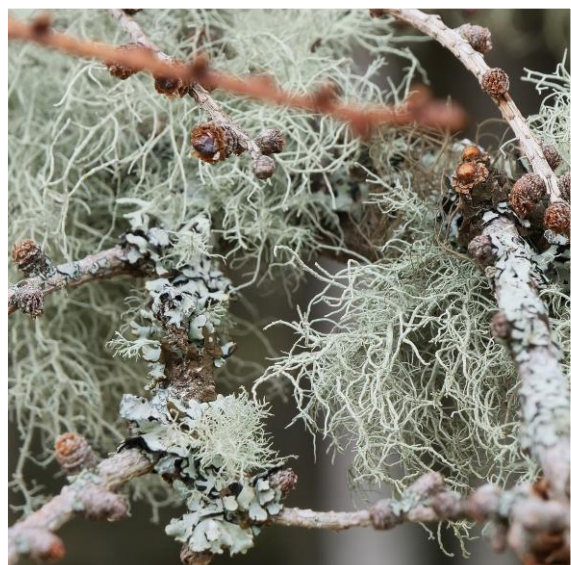
Golden eagle



Slavonian grebe



Lichen-covered branches



Compiled by Mike Dilger

Day 1: Saturday 18 March 2023

Convening in the comfortable surroundings of the Grant Arms restaurant, Mike welcomed four guests to the hotel. Two extra guests were due to join the group after the first full day. We held a briefing, which was an opportunity to talk through Covid protocols, discuss the itinerary of the week (and ask any questions), and to start getting to know each other. A brief tour of the hotel's facilities followed, before we tucked into a delicious three course dinner.

Day 2: Sunday 19 March 2023

Boat of Garten Golf Club, Carrbridge, Strathdearn, RSPB Loch Ruthven, Dalnahaitnich

The group woke up on their first full day, to calm, cloudy and relatively mild conditions. After a full Scottish Breakfast, we gathered at the minibus, just outside the hotel, to set off for a full day's Highland wildlife watching.

After a tip-off about a waxwing feeding in the berries near the Boat of Garten Golf Club, Mike set off with the group via Nethy Bridge. We spotted a flock of geese while travelling over the Spey, via Broomhill Bridge. Mike parked up by the roadside and, after a quick look through the scope, declared the majority to pink-footed geese, with a few greylags thrown in for good measure. Mike explained that the pink-footed geese were overwintering birds that had descended from breeding grounds in Iceland or Greenland. With the greylags close by, it was a bonus to be able to compare and contrast the two species. A few oystercatcher were also seen feeding in the fields behind the geese, and a grey heron flew past.

Back in the minibus, Mike and a couple of guests, who just happened to be looking in the right direction at the right time, spotted a stoat running across the road. The stoat's movements flushed a brown hare out of the long grass, which everyone managed to see! Buoyed by these terrific mammal sightings, the group travelled on towards Boat of Garten, where they saw the aforementioned waxwing preening itself in the trees of the golf carpark. While watching the waxwing, the group were also treated to excellent views of a few greenfinch, a species which has become scarce in large parts of Britain, due to its susceptibility to trichomonosis.

Stopping off briefly for a refreshment break at the toilets in Carrbridge, Mike took the group for a quick walk to see the famous packhorse bridge, which on this occasion was immeasurably improved by the sudden and welcome appearance of a dipper on the stonework at its base. Collared doves were also noted on the street-side roofs during the walk back to the minibus.

With rain absent, it looked like potentially the best day for raptor-spotting, so Mike took the group over to Strathdearn. On the way, more geese were seen, along with carrion crows, rooks and jackdaws, which are seemingly omnipresent species across large swathes of Speyside. Stopping first close to Corrievorrie Farm, which sits on the Findhorn River's floodplain, we saw our first raptor: a red kite. This was soon joined by a few more, then a passing kestrel and a few buzzards were quickly added to the list. We also picked up a peregrine falcon in the distance, over the low hills to the east. Curlews feeding in the farm-fields were somewhat easier to see, and we could hear more curlews calling in order to lay down their territories. This encounter served as a reminder to us all that spring was well and truly underway.

Travelling further up the valley, the next area to scan was close to the Farr Road. After a patient wait, a sub-adult golden eagle drifted into view, to the delight of all the group. All were able to see its immense size, and watch while it was mobbed by first a buzzard and then a raven. Due to the amount of white in the tail and underwing, Mike estimated the eagle to be around two to three years old. The group celebrated the week's first eagle sighting with a hot drink and biscuit. While taking on the refreshments, one guest spotted a grey wagtail, then we clearly observed siskin in the trees behind. From the same vantage point, we could also pick out both red deer and feral goats on the surrounding fells.

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Travelling still further towards the Forest car park, another golden eagle was seen, briefly, through the minibus windows. While we stopped to watch the eagle, we could also clearly see a fine pair of goosander on the river below, before they flew off upriver. On reaching the car park, unfortunately we were unable to relocate the eagle, but recompense was provided by red kites, buzzards and a distant sparrowhawk. Another new bird for the list was spotted on the bridge, a pied wagtail. We also noted a gravid common frog in the roadside vegetation.

While at this site, another member of the public, pointed out a mountain hare on the large crags to the west of the road. Mike helped all the guests to view this must-see animal, courtesy of his scope. The hare was still largely white, and with so little snow on the hillside, it stuck out like a sore thumb -even from 500 metres away!

Taking the road to Farr, our next location was RSPB's Loch Ruthven, to see whether Slavonian grebes had returned to their breeding grounds. Arriving in the car park, meadow pipits could be observed performing their parachute display in the surrounding grassland. When walking the group to the loch's shoreline, two male and one female goldeneye were spotted, before a summer-plumaged Slav was picked up fishing in the middle of the loch. Walking around to the hide, we found a second Slav. The two birds approached each other and our delighted group was able to observe some of their distinctive courtship behaviour. While walking back to the car park, satisfied that the number one target species was already in the bag, one of the guests briefly observed a stonechat.

We had time for one last visit before returning to the hotel, so Mike suggested visiting Dalnahaitnich to look for roosting raptors. Down in the valley, oystercatchers and greylags could be seen, with the former obviously keen to establish breeding territories. A singing song thrush was then heard, which we located at the top of a conifer. We also saw a single female crossbill in the scope. Mike was just at the point of suggesting the group return to the hotel, when he managed to pick up an adult white-tailed eagle to the south. This enabled the group to get prolonged, if distant, views of an adult bird soaring high, which made for a brilliant end to our 'two eagle day'!

Day 3: Monday 20 March 2023

Finhorn Bay (east & southwest side), Findhorn Bay Dunes, Burghead Harbour & promontory, Lossiemouth Harbour and East Beach, RSPB Loch Spynie & Spey Bay

With the weather far better than predicted, and light winds, Mike decided to take the group up to the Moray Coast for their second full day. The plan was to start in the west, at Findhorn Bay, before working steadily eastwards. Due to bird flu transmission concerns, which prohibited walking out onto the estuary, it was more important than ever to time our visit to Findhorn to take advantage of the rising tide. The birds would be a very long distance away at any other time other than a the brief window either side of high tide.

Arriving at the nature reserve car park, the group were easily able to see oystercatcher, redshank and curlew out on the mud, while also spotting three distant shelduck to the north, and some red-breasted mergansers out on the water. Skylarks could be heard singing over the saltmarsh too. Unfortunately the unscheduled appearance of the sun meant that viewing any of the bird flocks away to the south-west was proving difficult, so Mike took the group around to a lay-by on the southern side for a better viewing angle.

From this vantage point, and with the tide well in, a single little egret could be seen. Egrets are considered a rare bird for the Highlands, but this sighting was quickly trumped by the sighting of a solitary avocet quietly roosting at the edge of the saltmarsh. Representing a new Highlands bird for Mike, this encounter was greeted with much excitement. We heard another bird's distinctive song in the roadside trees, and Mike was able to point out a male yellowhammer. All the guests enjoyed great views of this farmland speciality.

Driving back around to Findhorn Dunes to use the facilities, we saw a magpie near the Findhorn Foundation, then another was seen close to the car park. Magpies are still rarely encountered in the

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Highlands, and this part of the Moray Coast is considered the local stronghold for a species that is virtually ubiquitous across the rest of England. In the adjacent gorse vegetation, both greenfinch and goldfinch were spotted. Mike then took the group around to Burghead Harbour, a little further along the coast.

Following the coastline, we took a route past a large field of curlews before arriving at Burghead Harbour. Here, everyone was delighted to find a male long-tailed duck feeding right in the harbour, alongside the fishing boats. Normally this duck is only found way out at sea, so this represented a great opportunity for both the birders and the photographers in the group to get close to a species which is normally only observable through a telescope. A male common seal, which was fishing in the harbour, provided the group with a good supporting act. As high tide approached, a few turnstone were noted on the far harbour wall, and several house sparrows were seen hopping around the empty crabbing baskets.

Moving around to the promontory, and with the tide now almost entirely in, a flock of eider provided excellent entertainment for us by diving down for mussels, then bobbing back up like corks. We picked up a couple of razorbill around half-way to the horizon, then a summer-plumaged black guillemot was seen feeding just off the point. Mike explained to the group that this species is generally far easier to find on the west coast. While sea-watching, there was an opportunity to observe cormorants and shags, so the guests took their time looking out for the key features distinguishing these two closely related species.

The rocks were now almost entirely submerged, and a pair of displaying rock pipits were keeping the group entertained. A small flock of common scoter then drew everyone's attention back to the sea, as many had never seen this sea duck before. Finally, after a cuppa, Mike found a red-throated diver out on the sea, with most of the group managing to get half-decent views of the bird in between its dives below the waves in search of a meal. Further out to sea, gannets could be seen flying west in the direction of Troup Head, along with a single fulmar, which was a good spot at this location too.

Jumping back in the minibus, and with the tide now fully in, Mike took the group to Lossiemouth, to see which waders might be roosting on the harbour walls. Here the group were lucky enough to spot a group of at least 80 purple sandpipers perched on the wall, along with a couple of sanderling and around 25 turnstone - possibly the largest roost in Britain and certainly the most Mike had ever seen in one spot.

While the group were mentally processing the vast numbers of birds, Mike took them to an estuary looking over East Beach. Here plenty of wigeon, teal and gulls were roosting, while wader interest was provided by curlew, redshank, a small flock of dunlin, and two winter-plumaged bar-tailed godwits. The godwits flew towards the estuary mouth, granting us all excellent views of this high-Arctic breeding wader as we departed Lossiemouth.

Heading inland to RSPB Loch Spynie, all were thrilled to find a red squirrel on the car park feeders. The feeders were also busy with birds and the group had fun distinguishing a variety of finches, as chaffinch, goldfinch, and greenfinch were all spotted in quick succession, along with a steady stream of yellowhammers. A single dunnock was feeding on the ground, representing another addition to the group's burgeoning species checklist.

We took a stroll down towards the loch-side hide and had a scan of the water, we picked up at least five goosander, in addition to a single mute swan and both sexes of goldeneye. A few tufted duck were also present, at the back and towards the reed-edge, with coot also observed here. The familiar, whinnying call of little grebe was also logged, then one of the guests spotted a marsh harrier, and a single whooper swan drifted into view at the far end of the loch.

Walking back to the car, Mike suggested the group take the opportunity for one last stop before returning to the hotel. Stopping at the small village of Bogmoor, we kept our eyes peeled for tree sparrows, but, despite this being a well-known breeding colony for this species, we were out of luck this time. We arrived at the car park, next to the Dolphin Centre. Walking across to the viewpoint to look out over the braided

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mouth of the river, we quickly counted three species of gulls - including black-backed gulls and a number of teal.

By now the wind had begun to pick up, so we decided not to linger on the shingle ridge looking over the sea. However, before leaving, we did manage to see a couple of small flocks of common scoter, some passing gannets, and a single black-throated diver that was fishing just beyond the breakers. As it was still in winter plumage, Mike suggested this indicated that the bird would probably return to the continent, where both spring and the breeding season commence later than in Scotland. It was now raining, and we had plenty of great sightings under our belt, so a decision was made to quit while we were ahead and return to the hotel. This would allow the group to enjoy some rest time before reviewing our checklist and enjoying dinner.

Day 4: Tuesday 21 March 2023

Glascarnoch Dam, Loch Droma, Dundonnell, Gruinard Bay, Laide, Aultbea, Mellon Charles & Loch Maree

With the weather looking fairly bleak on the west coast for the rest of the week, Mike decided to move the 'west coast day' up the schedule, which necessitated an early start in what is always a packed day.

The weather was overcast and raining as the group headed up to Inverness after breakfast. The scene became ever wilder with each passing mile, so the group took their first stop at Glascarnoch. Here it was relatively quiet for wildlife, but the group was relieved to see the weather finally improving, which would helpfully bode well for locations further west, at Contin and Garve.

After seeing swans on Loch Droma, Mike found a convenient lay-by from which to view them. The group was delighted to discover three overwintering whooper swans. However, these were quickly trumped by a stunning pair of black-throated divers a little further back, which looked scintillating in their full breeding plumage. The group was also treated to a spot of calling, as the pair cemented their bonds for the oncoming breeding season. It was a totally unexpected and yet brilliant find, which thrilled everyone present.

Reaching Dundonnell, everyone took the opportunity to stretch their legs and take in views of the crags and estuary at this stunning location. The small hamlet marks the head of Little Loch Broom, where we delighted in the blue skies which greeted us there. With the tide well out, Mike scanned the shoreline, identifying curlew, oystercatcher, redshanks, and eventually a greenshank. One of the eagle-eyed guests then picked up another. We were also able to hear their distinctive 'choo-choo-choo' call, and Mike shared that this almost certainly signified a breeding pair. We also saw more red-breasted mergansers out on the water at Dundonnell.

On the saltmarsh nearby, we observed house sparrows and meadow pipits, but apart from a distant kestrel and a few buzzards, no raptors could be seen. However, we did see a few red deer stags straddling the ridge-lines to the east and west. Deciding that it might be too early in the day for eagles to take wing, Mike suggested the group move on to Gruinard Bay.

Arriving in one of the best lay-bys for birding in Britain, overlooking both Gruinard Bay and the Black Isle, we saw a group of barnacle geese fly past before we had even had a chance to begin the serious business of diver-spotting. The abundance of black-throated and great northern divers enabled Mike to give a masterclass on the differences between the two species. A couple of summer-plumaged black guillemots were also found on the water, while a stonechat was picked up in the roadside gorse.

Moving further along to Laide, hauled-out common seals were seen at their regular low-tide spots, along with ringed plover, redshank, curlew and oystercatcher. Mike had previously been lucky in spotting otters at this location too, but on this occasion they were nowhere to be found.

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After a very agreeable lunch down at the Laide Jetty, accompanied by entertaining sightings of three great northern divers, the group boarded the minibus for the short trip across to Aultbea to use the facilities. When scanning with his scope, Mike thought he saw an eagle further north towards Mellon Charles, so the group drove slowly along the coast keeping an eye out as they went. The conditions were excellent, and while the group were busy enjoying a group of five red-breasted mergansers close to the road, a shout of 'eagle!' went up.

Quickly parking at the south of the hamlet, the group watched, flabbergasted, as a pair of golden eagles drifted right over the houses and past them. At one point, they were at a distance of no more than 50 metres. Then, a hooded crow then dive-bombed one of the pair, enabling the group to appreciate the immense size of these fabulous birds, with their flat wing profiles and prominent primaries clearly visible for all to see. It was a simply breathtaking moment. The group was even able to pick out the golden nape on the birds' necks, and Mike declared that this sighting was his best ever views of goldies.

By now, time was against us, so we headed for Gairloch, whereupon we briefly linked up with the same eagles. After another brief, but unsuccessful attempt to find otters, we reluctantly headed for home, via the incredibly dramatic Loch Maree and Mount Slioch. Once again, the west coast had delivered a superb day's wildlife watching.

Day 5: Wednesday 22 March 2023

Anagach Woods, Old Spey Bridge, Dava Moor to Lochindorb, Loch Vaa, Avielochan, Kincaig, Loch Insh, Spey Dam - Garva Bridge

With wet and windy conditions predicted, Mike suggested the best plan of action would be for the group to stay in Speyside for the fourth full day of the trip. So, after breakfast, the group took a walk down to Anagach Woods to admire the fine Caledonian Forest, which was only a stone's throw from the hotel.

Walking down to the forest feeders, Mike pointed out some of the key plants in the understory, including bilberry, cowberry and heather. The group positioned themselves next to the feeders to see what would turn up, hoping that a crested tit would make an appearance at some point. Coal tit was by far the most numerous bird, followed by blue and great tit, with treecreeper showing well on a couple of occasions as well. Eventually our persistence paid off and, much to everyone's delight, the crested tit eventually made an appearance, enabling everyone to get great views of this fine Caledonian specialist repeatedly dashing in for food.

We then left the feeders and walked down to the River Spey. While taking the steps down from the road to the river bank, Mike showed the group a small flock of goosander on the river. The group counted three individuals, which were all busy fishing in the fast flowing waters. While watching the goosander, Mike noticed a male siskin calling from the river-side trees, which then proceeded to sing. The group also enjoyed commanding views of the Spey River from above, with the wild highlight here being a pair of grey wagtails, which looked as though they were making a nest on the bridge's ramps.

Our next destinations were Dava Moor and Lochindorb, where the group could view a large common gull colony which breeds on the moor each year. Despite the wind, red grouse were also showing well, with both males and females seen at close proximity, and on a number of occasions, during the slow drive around to Lochindorb. A male stonechat was also seen well close to the road. By now the wind was strong and biting, so the group carried on to where the moorland joins back up with the main road to Ferness. Here, everyone was able to enjoy the spectacle of numerous pairs of mating toads at one of their breeding ponds, while a couple of meadow pipits also flew past.

Mike had received reports about the presence of a male ring-necked buck on Loch Vaa, and as this was on the way to Laggan (our next port of call), the group decided they'd like to stop for a quick look. It was very windy at loch-side and, after a thorough scan of the water, the only birds that could be identified were

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goosander, little grebe, goldeneye and tufted duck. Deciding that the bird was either hidden or simply not present, the group travelled on the short distance south to Avielochan - currently the only site in Speyside that hosts a pair of breeding Slavonian grebes.

Arriving at the loch, we immediately found an adult in full summer plumage at close quarters, enabling all to see its magnificent golden fan and laser-red eye. The photographers in the group were thrilled to have such a close encounter with a rare breeding. Mike was equally thrilled to find a moorhen, which is not only an unusual bird to find in Speyside, but was one more to add to the total seen during the week!

The plan for the rest of the afternoon was to drive to Spey Dam to look for deer, but Mike decided to stop off briefly in Kincaig to see if osprey had returned to their regular breeding site. However, despite a few individual birds having been reported from elsewhere, it seemed this did not include the Loch Insh pair, as the nest looked unoccupied.

Our onward journey to Spey Dam resulted in a number of brown hare sightings, often at very close quarters. A dipper was also seen on the river, before the group arrived at Garva. All around here, simply huge numbers of red deer were seen, with the vast majority being stags. This represented the most wonderful photo opportunity for the photographers in the group, as they all attempted to take the ultimate 'Monarch of the Glen' shot. A single sika deer was seen at the edge of the forest too, representing the first opportunity for many in the group to see this introduced species. Here, Mike was able to talk about the potential problems of hybridisation between sika and red deer, and how this might impact the genetic impurity of the native species moving forward.

Just beyond the bridge, another herd of red deer was seen crossing the River Spey. These included both a male and female sika deer, as if to illustrate Mike's point. It was also strange to see what is usually such a shy woodland animal so far from the cover of trees. After a brilliant mammal session, and with a reasonably long drive back ahead, Mike turned the minibus round, but with dusk approaching, one more treat was awaiting the group. No fewer than nine brown hares appeared in a field, just as dusk was beginning to settle in.

Day 6: Thursday 23 March 2023

Black grouse lek near Ferness, Avielochan, Loch Morlich, Cairngorm car park, Ptarmigan restaurant, Loch Vaa, and the mammal hide at Inishriach (Speyside wildlife hide)

Mercifully, the wind dropped for the fifth full day of our Highlands trip. The group met up early before breakfast to visit the Dava Moor black grouse lek, before driving 20 minutes to the moorland site where these birds display. Upon arrival, it was immediately obvious we had chosen the right morning to get up early, as we were able to count nine males displaying in the gorgeous early morning light. The group watched the birds lekking, a specific type of behaviour which is designed to establish a pecking order, while the males' calls could clearly be heard ringing across the moorland, making the spectacle even more special.

After retuning to the hotel for a full Scottish breakfast, the group set off for a morning at Cairngorm Mountain. The guests were very keen to revisit Avielochan and have another look at the summer-plumaged Slavonian grebe, which dutifully showed magnificently once again for the photographers in the group. Taking a stroll to the hide, the group were also able to add greylag geese, goldeneye, tufted ducks and moorhen to the day's checklist.

Later, we stopped off at Loch Morlich, primarily to enjoy the view, and the group spotted a snow bunting pair in the Cairngorm's upper car park. The birds were moulting into their full summer plumage, so the whiter, brighter male starkly stood out from his mate. Another six or seven snow buntings were located on the wall at the back of the car park, and everyone was able to get very close to this famously tame species.

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With the funicular finally open, after having been closed for the best part of two years to allow for the concrete stanchions to be replaced, Mike could take the entire group for the ride up to the Ptarmigan restaurant. This represented our only opportunity to look for the eponymous ptarmigan from the terrace looking out on the upper slopes. But, despite intense scanning from the group and magnificent, clear views from the top, none could be picked up. The area was also busy with skiers, and this disturbance may be the reason this bird was still thin on the ground in Coire Chais. Despite the no-show, it was still a very enjoyable experience for all concerned, and everyone enjoyed a hot drink in the restaurant before returning by funicular to the car park.

After taking a very late lunch back down in the car park, Mike took the group back to Loch Vaa to see if they could spot the male ring-necked duck. Initially it was not showing, but with reliable reports it had been seen earlier in the day the group waited patiently. They were eventually rewarded when it drifted into view in the company of a small flotilla of tufted ducks. It did look distinctly different and was a just reward for the group's efforts in tracking it down. Thrilled to have finally caught up with this fascinating American vagrant, the group returned to the hotel early and enjoyed a high tea.

Feeling very full after this delicious food, which comprised scampi, macaroni cheese, caesar salad, and numerous cakes, the group boarded the minibus for the trip to the Spey Wildlife hide near Inshriach. After the stage had been baited, badgers quickly began to arrive, with a total of eight arriving at different points in the evening. However, the evening's main entertainment was a very charismatic wood mouse, which managed to climb up onto the pine marten's table to steal the nuts. Sadly however, the pine marten gave the evening a miss. The group were not too disheartened however, enjoying an elegant feast of cheese and wine upon their late return to the Grant Arms.

Day 7: Friday 24 March 2023

Black Isle: North Kessock, RSPB Udale Bay, Jemimaville, Cromarty, Chanonry Point, Dalnahaitnich

On our final full day of the tour conditions were good for wildlife spotting. After a full breakfast, Mike took the group to the Black Isle for their second coastal day of the week.

Driving over the North Kessock Bridge, we dropped down into the small village of North Kerssock, situated on the northern shore of the Beaully Firth. Here a slowly rising tide and calm waters gave us the ideal conditions for otter spotting. Starting under the bridge, the group scanned the firth, finding grey heron, oystercatchers, a curlew, a few redshanks and some wigeon in the process. Grey seals were also seen feeding out in the firth but, despite the incredibly calm conditions, no otters could be seen.

Mike took the group a touch further west and close to the pier. He was able to find an otter in the distance, which was fishing towards the Inverness docks. Despite the distance, the totally flat conditions allowed for perfect otter viewing with the help of the telescope. The animal continually dived, then resurfaced with various tidbits of food. Delighted to have finally caught up with an otter, the group moved even further west, where they encountered a second individual! This animal was much closer, and everyone watched entranced as it continually dived along the edge of the kelp at a distance of no more than 80 metres. The group spent at least 30 minutes watching the otter, then Mike pointed out that they would need to reach Udale before the high tide covered the saltmarsh.

Eventually reaching the RSPB reserve on the north coast, Mike could immediately see very little of the saltmarsh remained uncovered by the advancing tide. Fortunately, there were still plenty of wildfowl and waders to be seen. Wigeon and shelduck were picked out on the water, while teal were largely confined to the creaks. Waders were also abundant, including a large high-tide roost of oystercatcher and lapwing, with curlew roosting further back. At least 40 bar-tailed godwit were also present, along with a small flock of dunlin and a few knot.

We could also see and hear skylark in the arable fields behind the car park and across the road. Then a few meadow pipits passed overhead. A single pied wagtail also flew over the group, then Mike spotted a single

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stock dove in the sky. After a cuppa, Mike took the group a touch further along to the lay-by just east of Jemimaville; here scaup were showing well, along with a few Slavonian grebes. Mike revealed that scaup are a marine variant of tufted duck, and this represented a new species for many in the group.

Leaving Jemimaville, the group were driven across the arable fields to the south of and above Cromarty. Everyone enjoyed plenty of sightings of yellowhammers, and one keen-eyed guest spotted a single male reed bunting. The highlight, however, was a large flock of linnets feeding in a recently ploughed field. Members of the group were able to see the birds through the scope whenever they flew up to land on the telegraph wires. A brown hare was also observed in the fields, here before we headed for lunch down in Cromarty. Over our meal we observed shags, long-tailed ducks and eiders.

The tide was now well in, so Mike then took the group over to Chanonry Point. This often represents the best location from which to see bottlenose dolphins from mainland Britain. At Chanonry Point, the dolphins chase salmon re-entering the freshwater after a number of years at sea. However, they are often difficult to see outside of the summer months, and on this occasion none put in appearance. However, the group was more than happy to settle for a few 'periscoping' grey seals instead. A number of guillemots and razorbill were also out on the water, in addition to long-tailed ducks and eider.

With only a little time left, Mike suggested the group finish off their last day at Dalnahaitnich, where earlier in the week the group had picked up a white-tailed eagle. However, we were thwarted by the rain, and the only birds of note comprised a sparrowhawk and a female stonechat. Brown hares were seen here as well.

Deciding they would like to relax before compiling their final checklist and having dinner, Mike took the guests back to the hotel. There, we finished a week that had been nothing short of superb, delighted that the whole group had gelled beautifully.

Day 8: Saturday 25 March 2023

All members of the group had different travel plans, with some needing to catch early flights, while others were catching later trains or driving home. So fond farewells were bid after a leisurely breakfast, marking the end of one of the best spring Highland trips Mike could recall.

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Checklist



	Common name	Scientific name	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>						
1	Barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>			✓			
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓				✓
7	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
8	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓				
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓				✓
11	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
12	Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>						✓
13	Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		✓				✓

14	Common scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>		✓				
15	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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>		H		✓	✓	
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	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓				
27	Slavonian grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
28	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		H		✓	✓	
29	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
30	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓				
31	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓				

32	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		✓	✓			
33	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
34	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	✓		✓			
35	White-tailed eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	✓					
36	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓		✓			✓
37	Marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓				
38	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓		✓			✓
39	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					✓	
41	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓				
42	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓				
45	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
46	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓				✓
47	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>						✓
48	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓				✓
49	Purple sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>		✓				

50	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓				
51	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓				
52	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			✓			
53	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓			✓
54	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓			✓
56	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
57	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>						✓
59	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓			✓
60	Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>		✓				✓
61	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>						✓
63	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Rock dove, feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓			
65	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓			✓	
66	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		✓			
67	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓					

68	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓				
69	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
73	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
74	Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>	✓					
75	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
77	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
78	Crested tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓	✓	
79	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓				✓
80	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				✓		
81	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
82	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓				
83	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	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>	✓			✓		✓
88	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
89	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
90	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
91	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	✓			✓		
92	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓			✓
93	Tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>						
94	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓				✓
95	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓		✓	✓		
97	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
98	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓				
99	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>						✓
101	Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		H				
102	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
103	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

104	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓			✓		
105	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓					
106	Snow bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>					✓	
107	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓				✓
108	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						✓
109	Ring-necked duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>					✓	
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA						
1	European mole	<i>Talpa europaea</i>	✓					
2	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
3	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
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	Stoat	<i>Mustela erminia</i>	✓					
10	Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>					✓	
11	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>						✓

12	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓			✓		
13	Sika deer	<i>Cervus nippon</i>				✓		
14	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>				✓	✓	✓
15	Wild goat	<i>Capra hircus</i>	✓		✓	✓		
	AMPHIBIANS	AMPHIBIA						
1	Common frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>	✓					
2	Common toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>				✓		