

New Years Day Bird Race 2012

Keeping up with tradition it was decided that we'd give the NYD Bird Race a go again. As usual the weather was against us (gale force winds and rain) so even the amount of birds in the garden had dropped to virtually zero. It was beginning to look like a pointless exercise and our chances of equaling, never mind beating, our previous scores seemed unlikely. Last year we got 85 and the year before we ended up with the worst score ever of 80! Hahaha :/. I was adamant that we'd struggle to match a pitiful 80 birds this year especially when we realized we couldn't even link the Langness visit in with high tide. We were seriously considering ditching the race but after we'd found a Great Crested Grebe and some Grey Plover at Derbyhaven 2 days before we bit the bullet and it was on. At the very least we'd learn what the worst score possible would be :).

This decision meant that on New Years Eve somebody had to tear herself away from her mates' party early.....Boooo! After listening to the very loud fireworks being let off, just outside the house at midnight, we dozed off. Hopefully we could get in enough sleep to be able to get up at stupid o'clock on New Year's Day!

Fortunately Wendy was indeed woken up by her alarm at 6.30am and heard the first bird of 2012 singing, which was of course, a **Blackbird**. We were pleasantly surprised by the weather as it wasn't raining and there was only a slight wind so it had to be a good start to what was going to be a very long day.

After breakfast we packed up the car and set off, in the dark, at 8.09am to our first destination seeing **Herring Gull**, **Raven** and **Rook** from the car park behind the house. Although it was supposed to be our first stop, it was too early for anything to be in Brian's garden on his feeders so Wendy suggested paying Tromode Dam a visit. I instantly thought, "Oooo great idea." I hadn't even considered it, as it had been ages since we had seen anything decent there, but with the slight wind and it still being pitch black it was worth a shot. We arrived at 8.17am, looked out over the water and were totally shocked to find 3x **Goosanders**.....best start to the Bird Race ever! :). One of them was a cracking male too, so it looks like a different group to the 3 that had been on Eairy Dam until recently. This find was good news as without the Eairy birds we thought we didn't stand a chance. We fed the **Mallards** who were joined by the now single **Mute Swan** and a **Coot**.



We were hoping for Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit & Treecreeper there but the only other birds we picked up were **Jackdaw, Robin, Magpie, Hooded Crow** and **Blue Tit**. We drove away at 8.30am and it was still too dark so our next stop was going to be very hit and miss.

We pulled up at the back of Brian's house at 8.35am and had a quick look at his feeders. He'd told us that the Redpolls were back but we were doubtful that any birds would be there, this early in the morning. Straight away though we heard **Siskin** in the trees above us and a flock of **Goldfinch** flew in but there was nothing on the feeders and no sign of his Treecreeper either. We gave up at 8.45am and headed off to our next stop seeing a **Woodpigeon** at the Quarterbridge.

Driving along Douglas Quay we saw **Feral Pigeon** and on our way up Douglas Head we saw **Chaffinch, House Sparrow** and **Wren**. We parked up at Marine Drive at 9am and got out of the car just as a small flock of **Chough** flew by. We walked the short distance to a spot where you can view a cove used by various sea birds, dodging the millions of piles of dog muck as we went....Bleugh! There's literally more dog muck than tarmac up there, it's absolutely disgusting.



We'd made a good move by doing this though as the first bird we saw was **Fulmar**. We'd never seen Fulmar on a NYD Bird Race but we were pretty confident that we'd get them here so we could now definitely ditch Peel off and save ourselves loads of time. We also saw **Linnet** and **Greater Black-backed Gull** and after Wendy had removed the dog poo from her boot we left at 9.10am. On the way back down Douglas Head we stopped to view Douglas Bay. While we were there we saw a **Pied Wagtail** scurrying across the road and eventually we found a **Shag** in the bay. We then drove on for about another 500metres and were at Leigh Terrace by 9.11am. Usually we'd desperately be trying to find ourselves a Goosander there but having already seen them at Tromode we were now sweating over Grey Wagtail! We scanned the banks but there was no sign of anything apart from a **Cormorant** under the bridge. Just as we were about to leave Wendy squealed, "Look, look under the bridge on the concrete!" Thankfully she had just found us a **Grey Wagtail**, another bird we thought we'd struggle to get...Phew! Happy with that we left at 9.14am to make our way down south which was going to be very frustrating as it would be low tide so our chances of seeing anything weren't good. We managed to pick up a **Mistle Thrush** heading out of Douglas, a **Pheasant** driving through Port Soderick and as we approached the airport Wendy spotted a **Peregrine** zooming over. This was another bird we doubted we'd see as we'd failed to on the past 2 Bird Races.

We arrived at Derbyhaven at 9.32am and on first glances our hearts sank. As it was low tide all we could see was the vast and very flat sandy beach....Uh Oh! The first and most obvious birds we found were the wintering **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** out in the sea and feeding on the beach. We found a group of **Oystercatchers, Curlew** and luckily a flock of **Dunlin** and **Ringed Plover** lifted up and flew across the sand.

As we approached Langness at 9.38am we saw a **Starling** flock but the first area to check was Sandwick.



In no time at all we'd seen a **Stonechat** and heard a **Reed Bunting** from deep in the bracken. Two ridiculously difficult birds to see in winter, especially Stonechat, as they'd seemed to have taken a hammering last winter when it snowed. Next, a **Rock Pipit** flew in and landed on the seaweed and we found a **Grey Heron**, miles out at the shoreline. In the pools there were **Shelduck** and over at Stinky Dubh there were loads of **Teal**. Depressingly it looked like that was just about it.....until a small flock of **Golden Plover** flew over. This was extremely lucky as our last few visits to Langness had resulted in zero GPs and we definitely didn't have the time to walk out to the lighthouse to see if they were in the field there. Over at the Dubh it continued its barren spell and just gave us a **Redshank** and a **Dunnock**. Try as we might we couldn't even find one of the two Little Egrets that we've seen every time we'd been to Langness recently. I knew they'd be in a gulley somewhere but they were obviously just out of sight. This was a real kick in the teeth as it was our first big deffo we hadn't found. We left at 10.05am by which point the wind was picking up, making it feel extra cold so we were both regretting not wearing warmer gear.....Oops!

We were approaching Fort Island by 10.10am and as we crossed the causeway I stopped to desperately check the small beach in case the Grey Plover were feeding there....they weren't. I knew it would be an uphill struggle finding them at low tide as they only use Fort Island as a high tide roost :(Just as I was about to drive off a brilliant white bird lifted off from behind some rocks. We couldn't believe our luck as a **Little Egret** flew up and headed off towards Langness..... Wahey! :). How lucky was that? At Fort Island Wendy brilliantly found the **Great-crested Grebe** still out in the bay.



The decent birds were racking up now and we were starting to feel a bit more confident but there was one bird we had to find here, especially with Peel being ejected from the plans. We scoured and scoured for what seemed like ages then eventually I saw a bird fly and it was a tantalizing few minutes later that Wendy picked it out in the rough seas, a **Black Guillemot**. Phew! We also picked up **Eider**, some **Wigeon** and then Wendy found the male **Goldeneye** when it conveniently popped up from a dive miles away. On the other side of the bay Wendy was watching some **Black-headed Gulls** over by the fish farm, which appeared to have been flushed by something. She then spotted some Lapwing above them but before I could get on to them they'd all settled back down on the rocks and disappeared from view. We decided to leave and head over to the Flying Club to try for the Lapwing and unfortunately, with all the effort going into the Black Guillemot, we'd completely forgotten to look for the Snow Bunting that had been seen at Fort Island recently. It was seen all day the next day plus another bird in the car park between Derbyhaven and Langness...Arrghhhh! As we drove over the causeway we had another quick look and found **Turnstone** and from out of nowhere a solitary **Grey Plover** had appeared! Maybe our luck was in?

On the way we spotted a bird on the Airfield fence, we couldn't believe how jammy we were being when we saw it was a **Meadow Pipit**! Never a bird you can count on in winter. At the Flying Club it was now 10.45am so we would have to be quick. I instantly found Wendy's **Lapwing** sitting in the Wigeon Pool but nothing else so we left at 10.50am. Normally we incorporate Port St Mary for Purple Sandpipers in our NYD but with the tide so low it was pointless so continued on our long journey up north.....but first we needed to make a quick detour. By now we were both in need of a W.C break so we headed into Castletown only to find that the toilets were locked.....Nooooooooo! This meant we would have to hang on until we were somewhere remote and we knew just the place, which was luckily our next stop ;). Driving along the Ballamodha straight we saw a **Great Tit** in the hedge at the side of the road.

We pulled up at South Barrule Plantation at 11.09am and set off for the fire pool.



Castletown toilets would have been better but we would have to make do with the bushes for a 'wild wee' although Wendy was looking quite nervous after her last escapade in Norfolk! After relieving our bladders we had a scan around us. I had pinned my hopes on finding Goldcrest there but it was totally dead and looked like a waste of time until Wendy said grumpily, "Why the poo did we come here?" About a second later I heard a call which confused me for a nano-second until I got the birds in my bins.....4x **Crossbills** flew over the top of the trees! Now this was good. Another bird never seen on a NYD Bird Race before. Wendy then chirped up with, "Looks like the weathers taking a turn for the worse." Straight after that the clouds cleared and the sky turned blue.....good work :P. We left at 11.22am.

We'd reached Eairy Dam by 11.25am and found only **Moorhen** and **Tufted Duck** to add to our list.



There had been 3x Goosanders until about a week ago but they seem to have abandoned ship after more work had been done on clearing the bank on the south side. We left at 11.32am and luckily we didn't need Goosander anyway.

We still hadn't seen or heard a Song Thrush but I knew that there would be one outside my work as it sang (annoyingly) all day, everyday outside my office. We arrived in the Skanco car park at 11.40am and listened. Wendy could hear something instantly but I couldn't so she told me to get out of the car....which made sense and sure enough there was the **Song Thrush** singing away from a tree nearby. I hear Goldcrests a lot in the trees outside work too but like elsewhere it was very quiet on the Crest front. We left at 11.42am and realized that we'd not seen a very common bird at all yet so we headed back to the car park behind our house, found a **Collared Dove** and left at 11.50am.

We still needed Treecreeper and as we were passing our old house Kirby Cottage we thought we'd have a quick look in the garden. There was again the possibility of Goldcrest too but we got neither.

We then drove through West Baldwin and were in Druidale by 12.09pm. Half way up a hill we noticed a man with a whistle shouting and throwing his arms around. We stopped to watch him thinking he was a Falconer or something but we quickly spotted that he had a dog (absolutely miles away) that appeared to be the most disobedient dog ever. However much he whistled and shouted his dog just carried on wandering up the hill....Hahaha! I'm sure there's method in this apparent madness though...who knows? We carried on and quite soon after found a flock of Thrushes and had our fingers crossed for Fieldfare and Redwing as the number of these birds this winter seems to be down. Sure enough there were **Fieldfare** but not a Redwing in sight.....Urrghhh! We were going to be lucky to see any now. Driving through Ballaugh Wendy spotted some birds on the telegraph wires to our left. I slammed on the brakes and backed up hoping that they might be Redwing. They weren't but they were just as good.....a small flock of **Greenfinch**, another bird that I was worried about seeing.

Pulling up at Bishop's Dubh at 12.40pm we quickly found our target birds, 7x **Common Snipe** feeding on the near edge of the Dubh. We then headed off into Ramsey but stopped at the Whitebridge first, added **Long-tailed Tit** and carried on to Ramsey Bakery by 1.05pm. We'd had Waxwing there, last New Year but knew we had no chance this time, as there have been none over here at all. We had a look up the river hoping to see a Kingfisher but there was no sign. As luck would have it though there was a **Little Grebe**, which saved us time (as well as more dog poo on our boots) we didn't have, to walk up the Poyll Dooey footpath to find it. With nothing else to gain there we headed over the Bridge and into Ramsey Harbour at 1.15pm.



The tide was at a weird stage so trying to work out where the Kingfishers might be proved too tricky so we had to give up but we did see the **Canada Geese** (woopy doo) so we carried on to our next stop.

In the field across the road from Glascoe Dubh were the 2 wintering **Whooper Swans**



but when we pulled over at the Dubh itself at 1.21pm the sun was right in our faces making it really hard to view. In the field behind we managed to find a **Carrion Crow** and after what seemed like ages I finally found the **Gadwall** (trying to hide from us) asleep on the far bank.....Phew! We left at 1.28pm and thought we'd try for Yellowhammer and Buzzard in Bride. There was no sign of either but we stopped off at a gate, which overlooks Andreas Airfield. We've seen Red Legs there in the past so we thought we'd give it a go or we'd be struggling for them too. As I was parking up Wendy jumped out of the car, ran down the path and climbed up onto the gate. She instantly saw one, which quickly disappeared behind a bush. I knew we had little hope of seeing them elsewhere so I hopped over the gate and quickly re-found the **Red-Legged Partridge**.....Phew!

At 1.38pm we were at Bride toilets (probably the best kept toilets on the entire Island) and to our relief they were open, unlike the ones in Castletown. By now we were absolutely starving but we knew there was no time to stay in the car park for lunch.

We hit the Point of Ayre at 1.53pm but first we stopped off at Wrights Pit to check for Twite over the fence. There had been loads there for ages while they were part of a ringing project but they have all cleared off now. We saw a **Common Gull** sitting on one of the fence posts but nothing else until (by an amazing stroke of flukiness) Wendy spotted a **Sparrowhawk** whizzing past. About 10 seconds later I spied another very fast moving bird and we were totally amazed to see a **Merlin** chasing a flock of finches.....jammy again or what? :O.

After that excitement we headed over to the small lighthouse and parked up to have a look out to sea where we could chill out a bit and finally refuel.



It looked totally dead but then you never know what's going to turn up out there and the first bird we saw was **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. What was that doing here? It should be down in the Med! Wendy had made a packed lunch so while I ate my good old standard sarnie she was struggling with her poncy 'Edamame and Broad bean salad with mixed leaves and Cous cous' (the whaty what what?). I think most of it ended up on my car seat.....Hahahaha! While we were there Sean Gray pulled up for a chat and even he commented on her choice of lunch :P. We weren't feeling very confident of adding much there as it was so quiet but fortunately we spotted another bird, which we'd normally go to Peel for, **Kittiwake**. As with every NYD Bird Race there wasn't a Razorbill or Guillemot in sight and no Divers either so we decided to go over to the dunes to try our luck viewing a small section of the Gravel Pits from a mile away. As we climbed up onto the top of dunes we saw a brilliant male **Hen Harrier** hunting over the land behind the fence and we could just about make out **Pochard** on the small section of pool that's visible.....pretty cool :). We were really racking up the raptors now and although we had no chance of seeing a Buzzard at this late stage we hoped to get Kestrel at some point....normally we would! That was pretty much it there but we couldn't leave without going back to lighthouse for a 2nd look :P. This could've been a real waste of time but luckily we were at the right place at the right time and saw a single **Red-throated Diver** (normally we'd see a few on a typical weekend) and yet another dodgy bird for winter, a **Gannet**. We then noticed a flock of small waders, which had taken off from behind the shingle ridge and were relieved to see that they were **Sanderling** :). In a matter of 2 minutes we'd seen 3 species that we hadn't on the last 2 NYD Birds Races! Our luck was definitely in this year and we were even starting to think that we might be close to our best total of 85! The light was now starting to fade though and we still had loads of places to go so we left at 2.45pm.

As we drove through Smeale we were totally chuffed to finally see some **Redwing** in the Hawthorn hedge, which was another big PHEW! Blue Point didn't deliver so we only stayed for 5 minutes, leaving at 3.10pm.



We were at The Lhen by 3.15pm but all we could see from the gate to Cronk-Y-Bing was the huge group of Eiders so I ran down to the beach for a look out to sea. I looked around and could swear I saw a Black-throated Diver so I called Wendy down. She'd literally just found the group of **Common Scoter** out with the Eiders so I went back to the gate to see them while she tried to relocate my Diver.



Try as she might it was nowhere to be seen....typical! We gave up and left at 3.30pm.

We were at Ballaugh Curraghs by 3.39pm and it was definitely lighter than when we were doing the same thing last year. As we walked down the road ALL the birds from the best feeder on the island dispersed! We scratched our heads wondering if we'd flushed them but it all became clear, seconds later, when a Sparrowhawk blasted through. This was worrying but within a few minutes we started to hear the chirping of the birds we were after. We weren't going to

settle for that though and we wanted to see them, as it's the only place to get guaranteed views. Fortunately we found them deep in the ivy growing on a tree and could now breath a sigh of relief that we'd seen **Tree Sparrow** :). We then heard a sound, which is typical of the area at this time of day, **Greylag Geese** heading back, to what was our last stop of the day, to roost. We weren't looking forward to this finale at all as it was absolutely freezing by now but we jumped back in the car at 3.47pm.

Pulling into Close Sartfield car park at 3.48pm we could see 2 other cars parked up. The people were probably at the hide waiting for the Hen Harriers coming in for the night. Usually we'd be doing the same but we'd already seen one at the Point, although it was still worth doing as there were a few other species we could pick up. Last year we were kitted out like we were going skiing but with the mild spell we were having we weren't dressed for the falling temperatures at this time of the day.....Brrrrrr! As it was so cold we went straight inside the hide, opened the shutters and started to scan around. Apart from the drive home this was our last shot at getting any Owls so we'd have to sit tight until it was dark.



We were definitely feeling a bit worse for wear now having been on the go non stop since just after 8am and we just wanted to add something, anything to our final total. Our options were limited but just as we thought we'd had enough we heard a **Water Rail** squealing from somewhere! That was it, job done but worryingly there were no Hen Harriers coming in to roost again, just like last year! It was dark and cold and we were tired and hungry so we left at 4.36pm and walked back to car.....still hoping for an Owl or Woodcock!

The drive home was unproductive too and I finally dropped Wendy off at her sister's at around 5pm so she could say Happy New Year to her family and sit down to thaw out in front of the wood burner with a glass or 3 of wine :P. I think she deserved it though.

I arrived home at 5.15pm but by the time I'd scraped the dog poo off my shoe it was actually 5.25pm..... Grrrrr! After I'd had tea I finally sat down to do a count of the birds we'd seen. I was really shocked to see that we'd totally battered our best score of 85 and ended up with 89 which is the 2nd highest total ever that I am aware of.

Black Guillemot	Tree Sparrow	Magpie
Blackbird	Wigeon	Mallard
Black-headed Gull	Golden Plover	Meadow Pipit
Kittiwake	Robin	Merlin
Blue Tit	Shag	Mistle Thrush
Brent Goose	Feral Pigeon	Moorhen
Carrion Crow	Fieldfare	Mute Swan
Chaffinch	Gadwall	Fulmar
Chough	Gannet	Lapwing
Coal Tit	Goldfinch	Peregrine
Collared Dove	Goosander	Pied Wagtail
Eider	Great Black-backed Gull	Red-legged Partridge
Goldeneye	Great crested grebe	Red-throated Diver
Common Gull	Great Tit	Redwing
Pheasant	Canada Goose	Reed Bunting
Pochard	Greenfinch	Ringed Plover
Raven	Grey Heron	Rock Pipit
Redshank	Grey Plover	Rook
Common Scoter	Grey Wagtail	Sanderling
Shelduck	Greylag Goose	Song Thrush
Snipe	Hen Harrier	Sparrowhawk
Teal	Herring Gull	Starling
Coot	Hooded Crow	Stonechat
Cormorant	House Sparrow	Tufted Duck
Crossbill	Jackdaw	Turnstone
Dunlin	Lesser black backed gull	Water Rail
Dunnock	Linnet	Whooper Swan
Curlew	Little Egret	Woodpigeon
Oystercatcher	Little Grebe	Wren
Siskin	Long-tailed Tit	