

This year following my redundancy (again!) and a very unexpected, expensive house move we'd resigned ourselves to the fact that we wouldn't be going on holiday for a while. Imagine our surprise when out of the blue came some generosity from kind family members. So thanks again, we just can't thank you enough. There was only one condition though, that we had to go somewhere special. It was an instant and unanimous decision... The Highlands of Scotland!

Even though we love Norfolk we have both wanted to see the Highlands for a long time and Scotland was somewhere Wendy had never been. Without even considering the amazing scenery the wildlife possibilities are endless. Bottle Nosed Dolphin, Pine Marten, Otter, Deer, Red Squirrel, White Tailed and Golden Eagle, Osprey, Red Kite, Slavonian Grebe, Black & Red Throated Divers, Black & Red Grouse, Ptarmigan, Capercaillie, Crested Tit, the list goes on....and on.

I looked at the journey up there... 4 hours on the boat then 7 hours driving..... Wuff! To make matters worse we'd booked the 7.45pm boat so wouldn't be setting off until midnight haha :). Hardcore! After planning some places to visit using Gordon Hamletts excellent book "Best Birdwatching sites in the Scottish Highlands" and organizing some journey stop off points we were ready to go. I used a program on my mac called Knapsack to group together locations into day trips and printed off the itinerary to keep in the car....21st century or what? :). My old planning skills haven't gone to waste. We just needed to practise our Scottish accents.... "Och aye the noooo wee jimmy, there's a moose loose about this hoose"... sorted! :D With a week to go I checked the weather forecast to plan if shorts and T-shirts were needed but was gutted to see rain forecast for every single day. Just our luck! I really hoped they'd got it wrong or our trip could be ruined :(.

#### Friday 13th May

On Friday 13th (:O) we arrived at the Sea Terminal super late, saw our first few birds of the trip **Herring Gull**, **Feral Pigeon**, **Shag** and **House Martin** and were boarding within about 15 minutes! On the journey across we kept nipping outside to seawatch but it was soooo cold! About an hour out we came across some **Manx Shearwater**, **Gannet**, **Eider** and we heard a **Meadow Pipit** flying past, vis mig..... Woo! Then I spotted a large dark bird quite far off and flying towards the IOM, thoughts of a Pomarine Skua crossed my mind especially since loads had been streaming through the Solway that week. This was different though and its size, shape and flight style were identical to the Osprey we saw last month in the IOM. I really couldn't see the bird being anything else but it was just too far off to be certain.....Grrrr. Luckily we were off to Scotland so we shouldn't have any problems seeing an Osprey or 2 :).

After that we thought we'd better try to get some sleep as we had a long night ahead. We managed about an hour, if that, and disembarked at 11.16pm. I'd driven a massive 200 yards before Wendy needed her first coffee fix but we eventually left Heysham dock at 11.24pm and headed off on our epic drive.

#### Saturday 14th May

By 1am I felt ok but we had our first planned stop at Annandale services anyway. It was very quiet there and it was funny to see a group of **Mallard** approach us begging for food at this time of the morning. Wendy had another coffee and I got a lovely pain au chocolate....om nom nom. We left at 1.40am and carried on northwards. Wendy spotted a **Barn Owl** on a roadside post a bit further on but after that we saw nothing until we got up to our first proper morning stop off at 3.44am.

Loch of Lowes is a Scottish wildlife trust nature reserve near Perth consisting of deciduous woodland surrounding a large Loch which has breeding Ospreys. On the approach road to Loch of Lowes we came across 5 deer in the road but it was too dark to tell what they were. By the time we'd arrived at the car park we were both desperate for a WC break and I'd hoped this reserve would have 24 hour toilets which it sort of did.... ish. At the visitor centre (to our horror) there was a sign telling us that the toilets were being renovated and to use the portaloos. So we wandered off with a key ring torch (in a temp of about 1 degree!!) and found them. It was pitch black so one of us had to hold the torch through the door while the

other fumbled around inside. Phew, mission accomplished but when I spotted a bloke coming out of the visitor centre, shining a torch up towards us, we legged it! :) Back at the car we dived into the suitcase, dug out our base layers and put them on, as it was so cold. We hadn't thought for a second that we'd need them but had packed them just in case, little did we know that they'd be our wardrobe essentials for the whole week! Before we dozed off we heard **Oystercatcher**, **Rook**, **Robin**, **Pheasant** and **Blackbird** but at 4.40am the bright dawn light woke us up. Before continuing on our journey towards Aviemore we'd planned to have a look around. It seemed to have become even colder as we got out of the car but it was still nice to hear a **Cuckoo** in the distance. On the little track leading to the 2 hides we heard **Wren** and **Willow Warbler** and saw a **Carion Crow**. In some nearby bushes we could hear a song that sounded familiar. We realized it was a **Garden Warbler** but try as we might we couldn't see it.....Grrrr. Behind the visitor centre were some feeders and this area was full of life. There were **Siskin** everywhere, a nice Male **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and a **Yellowhammer**!? We weren't quite sure what it was doing there but we weren't going to complain. Also there were **Starling**, **Great Tit**, **Coal Tit**, **Blue Tit**, **Wood Pigeon** and (what would become an all too familiar friend) a **Chaffinch**. We had a quick look out over the Loch from the hide



and could see the 'famous' Osprey nest but there was no sign of the birds. Elsewhere on the Loch were some **Whooper Swans** (were these feral or something?) and 2 **Great Crested Grebes** swam right in front of the hide but it was still too dark for a photo. There wasn't much else happening here so we left. Back at the feeders a **Red Squirrel** appeared and better still was a singing **Wood Warbler** that Wendy needed to see for her first lifer of the trip. Unfortunately though we just couldn't find it.....Arrrrghhh! I wasn't too worried about it as we were heading somewhere that was supposed to be covered in them.... famous last words? On my map there was supposed to be a walk around the Loch but we could only find one entrance to it and the wood appeared to be pretty dead apart from a **Chiffchaff** so we turned back to the car. At the car we had a **Buzzard** go over followed by a few **Redpoll**. It was now 6.15am so we decided to head off. On the way back to the main road another Red Squirrel ran out in front of us and we identified the Deer herd from earlier as **Fallow Deer**. Further on, were some **Sand Martins** zooming about and I spotted a nice female **Bullfinch**, which flew across the road. In the bush where it landed there was also a **Greenfinch** and back on the main road we picked up some more common birds in the form of **Collared Dove**, **Black Headed Gull** and **Swallow**.

About an hour later we passed the sign for the Cairngorms NR and we were totally blown away by the scenery. Although there wasn't much bird life around, apart from the odd Buzzard, the landscape certainly made up for it.

We didn't have any set time or plans for our arrival in the Aviemore area as we thought we'd just stop off wherever looked interesting on the way. Our first stop was RSPB Insh Marshes where there was supposed to be about 1000 breeding waders on a big freshwater marsh area. We parked up at 7.35am just as it started raining..... Arrghhh! By now we were flagging again so we had another nap :). This one was only for about 10 minutes but it did the job, as I was bright as a button after. It was still chucking it down so we didn't even bother to go and look at the reserve. We carried on instead and spotted a **Goosander** flying into a river as well as some **Goldfinch**, **Curlew**, **Lapwing** and **Common Gulls**. We didn't get very far along that road when we found Lynachlaggan RSPB. I'd seen this mentioned in the Scotland book and it was supposed to be great for woodland birds like Redstart and Wood Warbler as it was full of Birch trees (I think) over a boggy area.

We parked up.....and nodded off again :D. About 30 minutes later we woke up and went out to have a gander. Near the entrance we spotted a cracking male Bullfinch and there were Great spotted Woodpeckers everywhere. Further along the walk we found a nice Spotted Flycatcher perched in the open.



This area was really nice although we reckoned it would be horrific for midges a month down the line. We wished we could have explored it further but we needed to crack on and try to find some breakfast! We left at 9.20am and I set the location in the satnav for Inshriach Nurseries, which had been noted on Birdforum as being the best Cake Shop in the world :). On the way we stopped at the end of Loch Insh





and had a look from the layby where we saw **Osprey, Common Sandpiper, Goldeneye** and **Teal** which all breed in this region. We got chatting to a very nice couple who were also on holiday but had been for a week on Mull first (we weren't jealous....honest). We left at 10am and still had loads of time to kill so we checked in the book and found somewhere nearby called Uath Lochans, which was supposed to be really good for Crested Tit.

This area was like proper looking Caledonian Pine forest surrounding some small Lochs. Again, it looked like midgie heaven and in a strange way we were glad it was cold as they were nowhere to be seen....phew! In the car park there was a group of very loud foreign women kitting themselves out like they were about to climb Ben Nevis. One of them looked my way and gasped at the size of my massive..... lens :P. They then proceeded to walk down the track we were heading for so we binned the idea of seeing any shy birds.



We did manage to see (an obviously deaf) **Treecreeper** here and a **Raven** went over. Further on there was a nice little reed bed behind the first Loch and in here was a **Sedge Warbler** singing. We didn't see anything else so moved on to the Potting Shed Cafe at Inshriach Nurseries.



We arrived there at 11.35am and sure enough there were tons of lovely looking cakes on the counter. I was drooling over the gorgeous looking choccie cake and turned around to see that Wendy had already disappeared. She'd got bored, after discovering that they didn't do cappuccino, and had gone to look at the feeding station at the back of the shop. I bought myself a cake after Wendy "claimed" she didn't want anything. Luckily the clever shop assistant had given me two spoons and sure enough Wendy helped me polish it off! We were both in total agreement that it was the nicest cake we have ever eaten....om nom nom :). After that we headed off to the village of Nethybridge where we would be staying at An Ti Ghur Cottage. On the way we saw a few **Swift** flying around and a **Song Thrush**. We finally reached what was to be our H.Q for the next week at 1pm and what a stunning place it was.

An Ti Ghur was down a half mile track surrounded by woods. As we pulled into the driveway we saw a Roe Deer bounding out of the front garden, followed by 2 Red Squirrels running around in the back garden....smart! Unfortunately for us, as by now we were feeling like a pair of zombies, the house needed a clean and the wifi needed a bit of tinkering (including having to buy a PINK network cable from nearby Aviemore....PINK!!). After we'd sorted out these minor problems the place was perfect. Our holiday nearly came to an abrupt end as while I was cleaning, I cracked my head off the corner of the cooker hood and nearly knocked myself unconscious. What a muppet haha! The rest of the day was spent unpacking our stuff but after tea I had a wander around the plantation, which bordered the house.



Unfortunately it was pretty dead so I went back to H.Q and breathed a sigh of relief to find I hadn't picked up any ticks on my travels!

Sunday 15th May

Any normal person would have slept in today to recover from the long day yesterday but we were both up by 8am! The weather didn't look too clever though, it was overcast and threatening rain but at least the wind had dropped slightly. In the back garden there were several peanut feeders and on them were the usual garden birds like **Blue Tit**, **Coal Tit**, **Great Tit**. There was a **Blackbird** on the ground and a **Pied Wagtail**, **Greenfinch** and a **Rook**. A **Lapwing** and an **Oystercatcher** also flew over the fields. We managed to tear ourselves away from the garden and left at 10.20am. I'd only driven about 1 mile up the road before realising we'd forgotten our base layers! Easy mistake though as we hadn't needed them at home for months but up here it was only about 6 degrees!!! We left for the second time at 10.30am and outside the house was a **Mistle Thrush** feeding away.



We had no actual plan for our first day, as I didn't know how tired we would be, so we thought we'd try the walk in the local woods, which the owner of the cottage had mentioned yesterday. It wasn't mentioned in the book so it would be an interesting place to explore for our selves. On the way to the local village we saw a **Common Buzzard** flying over and then we crossed this really old wooden bridge that went over a river (the Spey I think).



I thought it might be good for Dipper so we parked up and we walked down to the waters edge. There were hundreds of **Sand Martins** flying around and we noticed that they were nesting in a bank colony about 200 meters away. It looked very close to the river level so we hope that it doesn't flood very often. Whilst watching these Wendy spotted a bird flying low over the water and disappear under the bridge on the other side. We had a look and sure enough there was a **Dipper**....excellent. It was perched nicely on a stick so with the help of the bridge I was able to approach it without being seen and managed to get a shot I'm pleased with.





We got to Dell woods behind Nethybridge village at 11.15am and as soon as we stepped out of the car we could hear a strange, high-pitched song. Before we came to Scotland my mate Steve Round ([stevenroundphotography](#)) told me to make sure that we learned the calls of Crested Tit, which we duly did. Now this was sounding pretty good for one but we couldn't find it amongst the millions of Coal Tits. After about 5 minutes all the birds cleared off and the singing stopped.....Arrghhhh.....so near yet so far. This made me pretty optimistic though as there was no mention of Dell woods in the book as a Crestie location. We'd ventured in not quite knowing where we should be going so I called up my O.S maps in my iPhone to find a path to follow....gadget-tastic! :) I found a nice looking loop path that was about 2 miles long so off we went into the beautiful ancient caledonian pine forest.



Straight away Wendy clocked a **Red Squirrel** scampering around a tree.....smart! A few hundred meters further on she spotted a movement high up in a tree and shouted, "**Crested Tit!**" I got onto it as well just before it flew off. Wahey.....a lifer for us both :). On our return back to the car we reached a clearing in the trees where we could hear a couple of birds cheeping away. We spotted the culprits perched on top of the distant pines and could see that they were **Crossbills** but they were too far away to tell if they could potentially be Scottish Crossbill. On the path back we met a few locals (but not Scottish), out walking their dogs. They were all very friendly and interested in where we were from and what we were hoping to see. One guy told us that there were some Cresties just a bit further down the path so off we went. Sure enough we found another two, this place was caked in them. This time though the birds were a lot lower in the branches so I attempted a shot. It was virtually impossible as they were moving so quickly and didn't stop for a second but I reckon this one is a keeper. :P



Yet another National Geographic candidate to rival my Weasel shot!

After a really nice walk and a great start to our stay in Speyside we left at 12.25pm. Again we didn't know where to go next so after a quick check in the book we saw there were some woods at nearby Grantown on Spey so headed there. On the way we saw another 3 Roe Deer. These woods were the same type as Dell woods and I think they are both part of the massive Abernethy forest. Unfortunately though we managed to get about a mile into the woods without seeing anything of note. We did see several 'NO ENTRY' signs across some of the paths to help reduce disturbance of Capercaillies. It's great to know that their 'special' birds have so much protection up here. This bird was something we both desperately wanted to see, even just to hear one would do. Unfortunately we didn't hear anything vaguely resembling a Caper but we did start seeing a few pipits and a quick check of them confirmed **Tree Pipit**. It was nice to see them in their natural habitat instead of flying straight through the Ayres on migration. Yet again my skills tank was on zero and I messed up a cracking photo opportunity. The bird was feeding on the ground in the nice green, moss and bilberry carpet, which cover all the plantations up there, and it was only about 20 feet away! Eventually I managed to get a shot but as it had moved a lot further away it's only for record purposes.





Whilst I was making a pigs ear of my photos we heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker and some more Crossbills calling. After we wandered aimlessly for another 30 minutes we decided to turn back but with so many different paths it was quite confusing as to which one we needed to take. Luckily for us we met yet another friendly local who guided us out of the maze. As we walked with him he told us all about the woods and how they are so much quieter now compared to 20-30 years ago. He said there used to be Capers everywhere and Cresties calling non stop. Nowadays he sees no Cresties and hadn't seen a Caper in years! On the way back it started to rain, which made the path lethal with the now wet and slippery tree roots. That's my excuse for tripping over about 20 times on the way back anyway. We eventually made it out at 2.30pm, had some lunch and drove aimlessly towards Tomintoul as I had read somewhere that the road was really scenic and great for Red Grouse.

The road climbed up and opened out onto heather hills on the left and a marshy valley on the right. It did look really nice and sure enough it didn't take us long to spot some **Red Grouse**. Also there was a **Common Snipe** down in the marshy area. Further along the road we went through Kirk Michael! where we crossed a bridge and spotted an adult Dipper feeding two juveniles. I didn't have a clue where I was going so just aimed north thinking that it would make a nice loop. On this small road we went through some arable farm fields (very unexpected in this part of Scotland) and in one of the fields we spotted a few **Red-legged Partridge**, a bird I hadn't expected to see on this holiday at all. After what seemed like hours on this road I gave up and checked the satnav to get us back on track. This sent us parallel to a river, which was bordered by trees. In this section we saw **Grey Wagtail**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Treecreeper** and then an **Osprey** flew up river and landed in a tree (the tree was out of sight though). We hoped this would be our first Osprey of many. We finally got back to the main road and headed back towards Nethybridge. We were thinking about stopping for the day but decided to just have a quick look at the small Loch at the village of Boat of Garten nearby. The book said that a community project had built a hide next to a small Loch. We got to the hide at 4.55pm and after reading all the hilariously rubbish graffiti like 'Sally has a big ass' and 'Jim is gay' we had a scan of the Loch.



It was dead but just as we were about to leave we heard a familiar call. Sure enough a lovely summer plumage **Little Grebe** appeared. Also we finally saw a **Coot** and **Grey Heron**. We gave up there and moved on to the nearby floods. This was in the book as a place to see Slav Grebes and yet again the book was spot on and we could see 2 **Slavonian Grebes** in the middle of the flood. They were a bit far off though, which was a shame so we left at 5.15pm and headed back to An Ti Ghur. Halfway back we spotted a smart looking Loch on our right and amazingly there was a junction up ahead so I thought we should at least go and have a look. This instantly looked like a bad idea as the road quickly turned into a dirt track but then we rounded a corner and were driving right next to the Loch. We could see 3 **Common Sandpiper** running around on the near shore then our jaws nearly hit the floor as a totally stunning summer plumage Slavonian Grebe swam past about 20 meters from the car. What a bird. There was no way I could get a shot though as the sun was right in my face so I didn't even attempt it but that didn't matter as we were so happy with the view. As we turned round to leave another Osprey flew over the Loch, threatened to dive in (but didn't) and flew off. Wow!!! :). It was only day one up here and we were already having experiences like this. We left at 5.45pm to finally go home for tea. Back at H.Q we added to the great day by finding a Spotted Flycatcher on the garden fence and of course the cute Red Squirrels were still there :).

Monday 16th May

Looking at the weather forecast for the week was a bit depressing, every day was forecasting rain bar one. Today was overcast and windy so this meant our itinerary had to be rejigged, as we needed sun for the day we were going up into the mountains, so we put the Abernethy area plan into action instead. First up was to head out early to see if we could find ourselves some Black Grouse. This would mean another lifer for us both so..... we got up at 4.30am! I went out into the back garden at 5.30am to try and get some decent shots of the 4 hyperactive Red Squirrels. This time of day really is the best time to see anything as wildlife is more active very early on but I failed to get anything decent. We left H.Q at 6.05am, saw yet more Roe Deer and headed off to nearby Tulloch Moor.

When we arrived at 6.25am we had the place to ourselves but it was bitterly cold and very windy. We were soon joined by another birder (who yet again was very friendly and helpful) then another and another until there were 6 of us all looking desperately, with watery eyes and running noses, at the moorland ahead. Tulloch Moor was a strange area as it was quite flat and the moor itself, rather than being all heather had lots of grassland, Cotton grass and trees dotted about.





Black Grouse are another protected species so there was a screen at the viewpoint that has been built so as not to disturb the birds. We could hear a Common Snipe but could see nothing. With the early morning disappearing quickly we were starting to fear that it was now too late in the day for Black grouse and after talking to the others birders it seemed like we were too late in the year as well! Then out of nowhere I spotted a black blob moving behind a clump of grass. The “object” was approx 500 meters away so a long way off but I kept my bins up and then saw some white. At last a **Black Grouse**.....Yes! I got Wendy onto it easily but trying to get the others to find it was a challenge. “It’s there behind the purple looking grass that’s behind the light green grass.... “ Eventually everyone could see what turned out to be 2 birds walking around and lekking, we even saw one jump in the air. One bloke from America, who was a really nice guy, just couldn’t work out where we were looking. Wendy took him under her wing and spent about 5 minutes trying numerous different ways of getting him onto the birds. Finally he found them..... Phew! Although our view could at best be described as a black blob with a white and red bit it was still brilliant. I even managed a 2400mm record shot, well sort of.



We could have easily gone away empty handed so we left very happy at 7.45am.

Our next stop was going to be Loch Garten RSPB for the early morning Caper Watch hide. We arrived at 7.59am and our hearts sank when we read the sign telling us that the hide was already closed for the day.....Grrrrr! We found out later that it was open from 5.30am to 8am every morning dohhh.

Depressed, we headed for the RSPBs HQ in Abernethy called Forest Lodge, which wasn't far away but supposedly very hard to find. Baring this in mind I'd planned the location meticulously, having put it in my satnav and a flag on the OS map in my phone. Of course none of this worked and we couldn't find it for toffee. Eventually, as we drove round and round in circles, we passed a dirt track with no mention of it being private so we went for it. The track seemed endless but suddenly, like an oasis, a lodge type building appeared. I pulled over and sure enough we'd eventually arrived at RSPB Abernethy HQ...Bingo :). We got out and in the hundreds of trees that surrounded us





we could hear an unusual song being belted out about 20 meters from us. The fact that we couldn't put a name to this song made us determined to spot the culprit and spent about 20 (very long) minutes staring into the trees. We couldn't stay there all day so we had to give up and move off onto the forest path. We couldn't help but think that this might come back to haunt us, which it certainly did! On the path we heard more Crossbills and saw more Tree Pipits until eventually the path left the forest and opened out into hilly unkempt fields. Straight away we heard a **Cuckoo** calling but we couldn't see it. We carried on walking until we realised we were lost..... Hahahah. There was no indication of any paths on my OS map so in the end we just turned north in the direction I thought we had came from. This was a masterstroke as we instantly saw the Cuckoo fly over and land on a fence. It was giving good views in the bins but I thought about getting a pic as well. Only problem was there was no cover at all so in the end I attempted holding my camera up and walking towards it. Sometimes this works as the birds can't see your eyes and I managed to halve the distance and got this shot.





which is still a bit distant but not bad. Unfortunately after holding the lens up for a few minutes I finally buckled under the weight and the second I did the Cuckoo flew. We carried on in the general direction and spawnily got back on the main path... Skillzzz :D. After that little bit of excitement not much else happened, yet again there was no sign of any Capercaillie or Cresties. Still it was a nice walk of 2.8 miles and we left at 10.20am.

The remainder of the planned stops for today had been squeezed into yesterday so we had to think on our feet again. We were quite close to Aviemore so thought we would head towards the fish farm where the Ospreys feed as that was one thing we were dying to see. It was a nice drive on the small back roads through the forest to get there and at the first junction we came to we noticed a puddle in the road. We could see a small blob at the side of it which, as we got about 10 meters away, turned out to be a big headed, heavy billed, female crossbill which was highly likely to be a **Scottish Crossbill**. While I tried to park safely (on a junction) the bird managed to fly off.....Arrghhh. We thought that maybe it would come back so we sat there and waited and I got my camera ready. It would make a brilliant photo as we were so close and there was even sunlight on the puddle! We waited for 10 minutes but realised we were flogging a dead horse so I put the camera back on the back seat. I'd only managed to move the car about 5 feet when a stunning red male flew down, had a drink of water (while me and Wendy sat horrified) and then flew off before I could even turn round to retrieve my camera.....Arrghhh! If only I had waited 30 more seconds I could have had a beautifully lit photo of a male Scottish Crossbill drinking....Urrghhh. We waited for a while but after 20 minutes of nothing we gave up (again) and this time we moved off without any more amazing bird incidents.

At 11.20am on the way to Aviemore we drove past a big Loch that had some laybys next to it so we pulled in and had a look. This was Loch Mallachie and I remembered reading about it in the book and how it was good for Cresties so we got out and had a walk around. We quickly saw **Long Tailed Tits**, **Treecreeper**, **Goldcrest**, Siskin and then heard a **Chiffchaff** which we didn't think was unusual until we found out later that Chiffchaffs are very rare up in that region. A bit further in we heard the now familiar Crestie call and found 2 of them flitting about high up in the trees. On the Loch itself were several **Goldeneye** and quite a few Common Sandpiper dotted around the edge. At the end of the path it met another smaller Loch, which I've forgotten the name of, but the scenery there was beautiful.



Whilst we were taking in the views I noticed a massive yellow and black wasp, we don't know if it was a Hornet but it was huge! Talking about insects, on the walk back to the car we noticed a mound of leaves and twigs, which on closer inspection was a writhing nest of **Wood ants**. Cool!! After notching up another walk, this time of 1.5 miles, we left at 1pm just in time for lunch. After a nice lunch and a coffee for Wendy in Aviemore we went into the Rothiemurchus Fishery. We were looking forward to just waltzing in, seeing some great



action in comfort and leaving when we had filled our boots but (back in the real world) the lady in the shop told us that it didn't open for birders apart from between 8.30am till 9am..... great. Not.

We were scratching our heads as to where to go next so I thought we'd go back along the small roads and do the touristy thing and visit the Loch Garten Osprey Centre since we had nothing more obvious to do. We got there at 2.45pm and it was very busy for such a small place. Amazingly we saw the couple that we'd met on Saturday at Loch Insh and the bloke with his American friend from Tulloch moor, what a small world! :). There were supposed to be Redstarts around the hide but we saw none, or anything else for that matter unless you count an Ospreys head at 500meter range. 2 over friendly and over enthusiastic RSPB workers then jumped on us and started talking so we quickly left. This was a shame as I was of the opinion there was a Redstart and Wood Warbler carpet up here and even relatively common UK birds like that were going to be a real treat for us. We couldn't think of anywhere else to go so headed home. We were tired and hungry so we thought we'd pop across the road from H.Q to the world famous Cloutie Dumpling Restaurant. Wendy had a proper (and vegetarian) Cloutie Dumpling with custard but I had to try and outdo her on the crazy food stakes and went for.... scampi and chips. When in Rome and all that :). We were back at base for 5pm so decided to give up and relax for the rest of the day.

Tuesday 17th May

It was a 5.20am start for Wendy and while I was still snoring she was watching the Red Squirrels, another Roe Deer in the garden and listening to the dawn chorus. It was an overcast and grey day (shocka) so the Mountain trip was delayed again and instead we chanced going out to the east coast. When we left HQ at 7.35am it started to rain....grrr! Our first stop was Lochindorb, which my mate said was a good place for Black-Throated Divers. He also said Redstart and Red Grouse were a dead cert too. Lochindorb is a big Loch high up in the hills north of the Speyside area, which is surrounded by heather as far as the eye can see. We arrived in the hills at around 8.15am and scanned the heather for Red Grouse. Before long we had our first, then our second and then a third.....brilliant. I really wanted a better photo of one while I had the chance so I grabbed my camera and even with the very poor light got an ok shot.



We then spotted a flock of geese flying over, which turned out to be 60+ **Pink Footed Geese** (we weren't expecting that in May) before we carried on to view the Loch itself and Lochindorb was huge!



There didn't seem to be any birds on it, or around it for that matter, so we started to feel pessimistic about even seeing BTDs let alone get a good view. After a while Wendy saw a very distant black and grey blob on the far bank which on inspection was indeed a **Black-Throated Diver**.....Phew! She then found a second bird in the water but still about 1 billion miles away.. Booo. With no chance of getting any photos we headed off to find the fence that bordered the forest along side the Loch. This was our Redstart location and it looked good. 2 cuckoos were flying around the trees and there were some **Redpoll** about but there was no sign of what we were looking for. We couldn't believe that it was turning into such a nightmare trying to find or even hear a Redstart especially as we had seen tons of perfect habitats already on this holiday. After one of us (mentioning no names) had an urgent call of nature in a roadside ditch (not number 2s!) we gave up and headed back down to the lovely little road that ran along the edge of the Loch. Here we saw another Common Sandpiper, maybe one of the birds that passes through the IOM each spring :). We also got a good view of the weird castle ruins that were on the island in the middle of the Loch.



As we drove away we noticed a gull colony in the heather, which surprised us. On one side there were **Common Gulls** and on the other **Black-Headed Gulls**, they were totally divided!



There were some **Golden Plover** in the area too so it was nice to see these birds where they actually breed. By this point we thought we'd better head off to our next destination, which was Chanonry Point on the East coast. As we drove off we couldn't help but notice the complete lack of Hen Harriers in the area. The area looked perfect for them, like Druidale but 100 times bigger, so it was a bit depressing to think that it's persecution by gamekeepers that's preventing them from colonising an area they should be thriving in.

Chanonry Point is on the "Black Isle" just NE from Inverness and is famed for its Bottle-Nosed Dolphins as it's a peninsula that juts out into the Moray Firth. We'd read 2 different reports as to the best time to see them though so were a bit confused. One said to go an hour before low tide but the other 2 hours after and to make matters even worse somebody we'd spoken to on our travels had told us that bang on high tide was best.....Urrghh! All agreed that the time of day needed to be after midday for the sun (what sun?) to be in a good position. In the end we had no choice but to aim for the 2 hours after low tide and on the way towards Inverness the sun finally made an appearance....Woo hoo :). As we approached Inverness the landscape changed into flat farmland, very different to what we'd become used to, it looked more like Norfolk or somewhere. We picked up **Stonechat**, **Goldfinch**, **Sparrowhawk**, **Tufted Duck** and **Hoody** on the way but even though we drove through the "Black Isle" (which is supposed to be caked in Red Kite to a point where we hadn't even considered not seeing one) we didn't see one Red Kite... not even a sniff... Grrrr!

We arrived late at Chanonry Point car park at 10.45am and it was busy. We could see a crowd of people standing on the stony beach to the left so surely this was a good sign. Some had bins and others had cameras but they all seemed to be watching something out in the bay. High tide was at 1pm so we had our fingers crossed that we hadn't come too late and just missed the show otherwise this would be a waste of our morning. As I was getting my camera gear out the car Wendy saw **Cormorant**, **Fulmar** and a **Common Seal** then she caught a flash of a very distant fin so we legged it across the stones towards the shoreline.



Sure enough there were about 10 **Bottle-Nosed Dolphins** breaking the surface but quite far off and we instantly feared that they were heading back out to sea. It then went still for a few minutes so we sat down dejected. Suddenly, out of the blue (quite literally) a Dolphin jumped clear of the water no more than 50 meters off the beach!!! The crowd went, "Ooooo" and "Ahhhh" but Wendy drowned them all out with a monster, "OOOOOOOOO." Hahah. The Dolphins performed for the next 5 minutes and I found out that it's very hard to guess where a Dolphin might surface so most of my images were of the sea but I finally managed to get one that I am happy with.



After all this excitement and close up action the Dolphins completely disappeared. How lucky were we? If we had arrived 10 minutes later we wouldn't have seen anything at all. Walking back to the car we heard more **Yellowhammer** singing from the gorse bushes by the nearby Links Golf Course. If only it was such a common sound at home, wouldn't it be lovely if they lived in the gorse bushes at Langness golf course!

We left at 11.15am to find somewhere to eat our lunch and ended up in a town called Fortrose, up a side street, outside a public toilet! Scenic or what? Hahah. We had our lunch and watched some strange looking locals going by including a couple of blokes in pink shirts, sporting identical 'his and his' greasy comb-overs.....nice. After they disappeared into the toilet together we quickly moved off! We decided that next we would try and find RSPB Fairy Glen, which was in the book and quite nearby. It wasn't long before we were approaching the glen and in true style I drove straight past it..... so we carried on to nearby Udale Bay (also in the book) in the hope of seeing some different waders or maybe something more unusual.

We arrived at 12.20pm and our first impressions were good.





The tide was high and there was a hide but looking out over the nice looking shallow bay we could only come up with **Mute Swan, Shelduck, Black-Tailed Godwit** and another **Yellowhammer** but at least we'd seen the area. We didn't see much point in staying though so left for Fairy Glen (take 2) and on the way I nearly crashed into the hedge as a huge bird floated by the side of the car... a **Red Kite!!** We watched it for a while and noticed that it had 2 perfectly round holes straight through its left wing. Hmmm I wonder what caused those? Grrrrrr!

We reached Fairy Glen at 12.45pm and could hear plenty of bird song. Walking along the river, bordered with deciduous woodland, we saw a **Treecreeper, Blackcap, Wren** and a **Spotted Flycatcher**. When we came across a smart big pond in the middle of this glen we fully expected to see stacks of birds and insects here but to be honest it was dead. I then realised that the interesting insects wouldn't be about yet this far north... Whoops.



We had a nice walk but were disappointed with the lack of birds and as usual there were Chaffinches everywhere doing impressions of more interesting species just to confuse us. We were quickly realising Chaffinches are like the plague in Scotland! On the way out of the

Glen we managed to miss the exit and carried on walking down the river. After noticing we had gone past the car park I said we needed to turn back. Wendy on the other hand had decided she was Lara Croft and was suggesting we jumped the river, clambered through someone's back garden then presumably break into the house then walk through and out the front door... :-\ I couldn't see any lanes by the houses and luckily she snapped out of her Indiana Jones mode and we walked back along the path to the car park.

Before we came to Scotland, whilst I was researching where to go, I spotted a SWT reserve on the Black Isle called Belmalduthy Dam. This was a dried up lake that had formed a big marshy area and according to the SWT website it held the second biggest biodiversity of any SWT site....Wuff! No one seemed to have been there recently, which was a bit strange so we were quite excited about exploring new territory. We quickly found out why no one was visiting there... it was impossible to find. Before we came away I couldn't find it on Google street view and it was no different in real life. The vague description on the SWT website was useless! We drove around for a bit but just couldn't find it... Grrrr sort it out SWT! Since we didn't spend any time at Belmalduthy it had chopped about 2 hours off our day trip so we decided to go back via Chanonry Point again. We wanted to check out the 2 hours after high tide theory but there was no sign of them. This confirmed how lucky we had been earlier in the day as all was quiet apart from 10 **Ringed Plover**. It was now 3.27pm and we needed to head back to HQ to be ready for this evening's trip to the Mammal Watch Hide, which we'd pre-booked beforehand. On the way home we went back through the Lochindorb area but the only new bird we could find was a **Redshank**.

After tea and a measly 5 minutes of chilling out we left HQ at 8.20pm. By this point we would normally be half asleep and relaxing but not tonight. Somehow we'd managed to stay awake, as the excitement of what we might see later had taken over. I thought we could stop off at Tulloch Moor on route to see if we could get another view of the Black Grouse as I had read they can be seen at dusk as well as dawn but it was windy, raining and dead... Bah!

We arrived at Loch en Eilein at 8.55pm to find our guide standing by the gate that lead up a track to the hide. It was freezing and raining so we put our hoods up, got out of the car and introduced ourselves. He told us that he was expecting a few others so we stood in the rain and waited....and waited....and waited. Eventually, after giving them 20 minutes he gave up and we headed off. We couldn't believe that 4 other people had paid in advance and then not turned up....crazy! All the better for us though :). Fortunately the hide was heated which was a relief and there were lights outside so we could see out into the woods. Our guide was an unlikely looking, softly spoken guy who was about 6ft 2 with piercings, a ponytail and a cowboy hat! He was really nice though and had enviably just taken over the job but already knew tons of stuff. We sat and chatted to him watching nothing but the rain pour down and he assured us that if we saw no mammals tonight then we could try again tomorrow....for free. The thought of doing it all again didn't seem very enticing when we were soooo tired but it was looking like it was on the cards. We were thinking that the rain must have been putting everything off going out tonight but finally after about 2 hours the guide got us onto some Red Deer. Not exactly what we were hoping for and it meant no freebie the next day. Pants! The normal end time for the hide was 11pm and at 10.30pm we were both feeling totally depressed when suddenly Wendy said, "**BADGER!**" Brilliant. For the next 5 minutes the Badger ate peanuts so close to the hide we nearly couldn't see it. It eventually waddled off but I was so pleased to have finally seen a Badger properly.





Wendy wasn't as chuffed though as she's seen tons of them. The guide then called us over to see a **Wood Mouse** scurrying about on the rocks just outside the window....Awwwww :). A lifer for me but Wendy had been lucky enough to see them in her garden in the past. Another Badger then emerged from the darkness, soaking wet and looking for peanuts, closely followed by another....lovely. It was absolutely throwing it down and although seeing the Badgers was pretty cool we'd lost all hope of seeing our reason for being there. Then suddenly Wendy said, "I think there's one behind that tree." My adrenaline levels went through the roof and we all looked out of the window, but staring into the darkness we could see nothing. Dejected we all slumped back into our seats. About 15 minutes later (it felt like an hour) the guide started to get twitchy and then called out, "**PINE MARTEN!**" We just couldn't believe our eyes.....a Pine Marten had crept in onto the table and was picking up the egg which had been placed there for it. Absolutely superb!!! To see such a rare and impossible to see animal was amazing even if it was at a baited hide. It jumped off the table pretty quickly and disappeared into the night. We resigned ourselves to the fact that after hours of waiting, that was that and sat watching the Badgers. We couldn't leave the hide until they had finished feeding because as the guide explained, if we scared them off they might not come back. Every night, without fail, he has to sit there until they have had enough, waddled back into the woods and the coast is clear. Talk about patience and dedication! Unfortunately for him a big herd of Red Deer then trotted right up to the hide to finish off the food!! While we sat around waiting for them to finish, Wendy suddenly (but quietly) shouted, "Pine Marten's back!!!" Amazingly a second animal had appeared on the table and was munching away at the jam. This one kindly hung around so we got good views of it, even allowing me to get some bad video but all too soon it became alert and jumped off the table, scared off by a challenging Badger. The Deer then left and, in turn, scared the Badgers off so we were finally able to leave....Phew! As the guide locked up for the night the rain got even heavier and we knew we'd get soaked walking back down the track. Luckily for us he offered us a lift! Well nice or what? We thanked him profusely and let him know what a brilliant experience we'd had before getting back in the car. We eventually arrived back at H.Q at 12.30am very tired but far too hyper to sleep. What a day :).

Wednesday 18th May

Despite our late night Wendy was up at 5.30a.m watching the Red Squirrels in the garden again! The sun was moving in but the mountains were covered by thick cloud so this meant that we'd have to scrub the Cairngorms trip again and go with the Findhorn Valley plan

instead. This area was supposed to be the best place in mainland Scotland to see Golden Eagle so we headed off optimistically at 7.45am. After an hours drive we arrived in the valley and found ourselves on a narrow winding road with a river on the left and some seriously steep, high hills either side. It looked brilliant for Ring Ouzel so when we got to the end of the track we stopped for a scan. This was somewhat hampered by the heavens opening (again!) but on the tops of the hills were hundreds of Red Deer and also some Feral Goats. We also saw 2 x **Wheatear** and a **Kestrel** but nothing else of note and by now we had our doubts that we'd see any Eagle in the valley, especially in the rain. Also, any birds we could see, were tiny specks against the sky, it was vast!



We hung around for what seemed like ages until the rain stopped but still nothing so (depressed!) we headed off, back down the road, the way we'd come in. Half way out Wendy spotted something high up in the sky that was flying noticeably slowly so I screeched to a halt. She got me on to it and we were ecstatic to see a first winter **Golden Eagle** hunting over the hill tops....Woo Hoo! It was also a lifer for Wendy and she was pretty chuffed to have found it :). Even though it was quite far away it was obvious, it dwarfed every other bird around including the **Raven** who was having a good go at mobbing it! We even saw it swoop down and scare off a Grouse and what was possibly a Ring Ouzel (;)) from the hilltops. I managed to grab a mega long range record shot while I had the chance, you can tell what it is but hopefully one day I'll get something better :P.





After a while it vanished so we left at 10.20am only to come to another emergency stop when we came across 2 x Common Sandpipers in the middle of the road...cool. Further on Wendy saw another Osprey flying up the river being mobbed by an Oystercatcher. It landed in a nearby dead tree but by the time I'd got my camera out of the car it'd gone....Grrrrr! Great day for birds, bad one for pics! We then noticed a bridge and both thought the same thing.... and sure enough there was a Dipper and this time it was a juvenile. We were also quite surprised by the appearance of a **Common Tern** flying up the river.

Our next stop was going to be further north at RSPB Loch Ruthven but the weather was getting worse and the sky was looking very dark. The rate in which weather changed up in the Highlands was like nothing we'd ever seen, it could go from sunny to raining and back to sunny within 5 minutes!) Part of the journey there was on Farr Road, which is a very long and narrow, winding road over the moors and the scenery up there was out of this world.



Yet again there were a lot of Red Grouse about and at the end of the road there was supposed to be a lone Black Grouse but we couldn't spot him, although I think it was a bit late in the season. After Farr Road we arrived at Loch Ruthven car park at 11.40am and yet again the heavens opened so we had no choice but to wait in the car until it passed over before making a break for it between showers. Only 100 metres down the track we saw an Osprey flying slowly into the wind and staring at the water. We both stopped and from its actions we fully expected to see the spectacle of an Osprey hunting. Our excitement grew as it got even closer then..... it just turned and flew off! Nooooooooooooo!!! :( We ran to the hide and arrived depressed but dry. We found two very friendly women in there, who were SWT volunteers, talking to another bloke. We could see a Slav Grebe right in front of us then a Little Grebe swam out from the reeds. We found another 3 Slavs, a **Reed Bunting** and a very distant **Red-Breasted Merganser**, another great bird to see breeding in the UK. We got chatting to the ladies and they gave us some sites for Short Eared Owl and Redstart (flipping impossible Redstart ... Grrr). Unfortunately all the sites they gave us were too far away but even so it was very nice of them. We were between showers again so decided that this would be our chance to leave and see if the Osprey had returned. The SWT volunteers had said that they always favour the spot near the car park for fishing and only ever flew past the hide. There was no sign of the Osprey though and it had started chucking it down again. We quickly jumped back in the car and ate our lunch while it threw it down. What with all that water and coffee we decided that as we were right next to a road without any suitable bushes nearby we'd have to move off to find the nearest W.C!

The closest thing to civilisation was a town called Dores by Loch Ness and even though it hadn't been included in any of our holiday plans at 1.30pm we pulled up in 'The Dores Inn' car park alongside the Loch. After taking advantage of their public conveniences we thought it looked like a nice place to stop off, do the touristy thing and relax for a few minutes before going for a look at the Loch. Wendy had the urge to sample some more local produce and fancied half a Shandy with 'Tennants' lager so we sat in the Beer Garden in the sun.....and gale force wind! After our drinks we fought our way through the wind down to Loch Ness, which on a nice sunny day must be a lovely sight but today it was covered in low cloud and resembled Douglas sea front on a day that the Seacat is cancelled! Although the scenery was dramatic the weather was just too awful to stick around.



After I'd taste tested some local ice cream, which passed with flying colours, we left at 2.10pm and headed off to Loch a Chlachain where we heard a **Blackcap**. Dunlichity was next and we saw another Cuckoo but neither place produced what I'd been told we'd see there, Black and Red throated Divers. We headed back towards H.Q via Findhorn Valley to chance our luck with the Eagles again. Maybe later in the day would work better. We should've known that we couldn't possibly be that lucky and we'd had our 'fleeting glimpse' for the day but we never give up! On the way out of the valley suddenly we saw 2



**Woodcock** fly across the car and land at the side of the road literally 10 metres away! I slammed on the brakes and reached to the backseat for my camera. This was the best opportunity I was ever going to get for a brilliant woodcock shot so I knew I had to be quick. In the panic, as I grabbed the lens foot, my finger got stuck in one of the holes and I just couldn't get it out! My arm was also at a crazy angle so I needed to take the pain and twist the 6kg of gear round to the front seat. This only resulted in me jamming my finger further and by now I was panicking I was going to miss the Woodcocks. Wendy thought I was panicking about my finger being stuck so she started shouting at me to, "CALM DOWN!!" Hahaha. Despite this very helpful 'assistance' after about 5 minutes of trying to work out the puzzle I managed to twist my finger back and got it out of the hole!!! Phew....the thought of calling out the Scottish Highland Fire Brigade to cut me free of my lens was too horrific to contemplate. Needless to say that during all the commotion, the birds flew off and I'd totally missed the moment.....Grrrrrrrr :( I know full well an opportunity like that will never happen again. Poo! Further down the road there were 2 x **Red Legged Partridge**, another Cuckoo and something neither of us had ever seen before. A Jackdaw with a struggling Chaffinch, in its beak.....pretty gruesome! One less Chaffinch can't matter though as nearly every bird we'd seen, everywhere we went, was one.

On the way home we stopped at the famous layby 151. This is a place where 'year listers' can almost guarantee picking up a Ring Ouzel or two. We stopped, got out and scanned the scree slope and saw absolutely nothing. What is going on with Ring Ouzels and us?! After shopping for tea at Tesco in Aviemore we stopped at a roadside Loch on the way back. There were Common Sands there but I had no chance of getting any pics so we didn't hang about. We found a **Wigeon** in another roadside pool approaching Nethybridge, which was a bit unexpected and arrived back at H.Q at 5.30 where a **Treecreeper** had decided to pay us a visit.

By now I'd realised that if I was going to get any good shots of the Red Squirrels I was going to have to set up a natural looking feeding station. I went off into the woods and dragged a huge fallen branch back with me to build it with. After some careful construction work I'd done it and hoped that I could now get pics without a nut feeder in sight. That evening Wendy heard a Redshank and called me outside to listen to a **Snipe** drumming in the dark very close to the house.

Thursday 19th May

Wendy was up 5.50am and as usual went straight to the kitchen for her first coffee fix and to watch the squirrels. She found out they had taken very well to my new feeding station and that while we'd been asleep they had totally destroyed it. The nut feeders were lying empty on the ground so they'd had the easiest breakfast ever....Urrghh! My first job of the day was to rebuild it and I optimistically thought I could defeat them. Only time would tell but also time was running out for me to get a decent shot!

It had started off sunny this morning but then the rain came in. Not long after it cleared up and the sun appeared again, it was going to be another one of those days. We didn't have much time left and after checking the weather forecast it looked like today was going to be the best day to go to the Cairngorms. We looked out of the living room window and for the first day since arriving we could actually see the tops of the mountains, although by the time I took this picture you couldn't!



So, it was eventually the day for our big walk and after the Squirrel incident we left H.Q (later than planned) at 7.40am for our first stop at Anagach Woods. It was only 15 minutes away but totally dead so we were on our way again by 8.25am. As we drove down the road the sun appeared again so I thought we'd make a quick detour to the Slav Loch. This would be my last chance to get a decent photo, as we wouldn't be going back there again. We pulled up at the usual spot and the light was perfect for taking pics. Sure enough there was the Slav Grebe with the sun shining down on its perfect summer plumage....happy days. I could picture the image that was possible in my head as I reached for my camera but by the time I turned round it had dived....Urrghh!!! Why didn't I have my camera ready to go? I really need to design a foam protector for my lens so it can sit at the side of my legs when I'm driving. The amount of photos I've missed over the years because my camera wasn't ready! To add insult to injury by the time it surfaced the sun had gone in.....you just couldn't make it up. I took one shot in the gloom,





which, I'm still happy with but as we couldn't afford to waste time today we left quickly at 9.05am. Talking of wasting time, mentioning no names of course, somebody had forgotten the cup for their 10litre flask of coffee this morning. We had to make a diversion into Aviemore to buy a take out cappuccino so that the disposable cup could be used instead.....fftttt Women! Whoops I was mentioning no names wasn't I? ;).

Our next stop was another place I'd read about that's supposed to be a hotspot for Cresties. Apparently you just pull into a layby and walk into the trees.....easy money :). Driving up and down the road we could see no sign of any layby so I just stopped at the side of the road where we could see a footpath in the trees. We wandered in and before long we heard, then saw, another Spot Fly but then Wendy squeaked, "Crestie!" It was on the ground foraging for food in the under growth.....smart! Before I could get my camera on it though it had flown so while it was away I tried to get myself into a better position in case it came back. I spotted it feeding in some trees then it flew right and seemed to disappear really close to where I was. As I was scanning around to work it out Wendy, looking very excited, called me back to where she was standing and the mystery was solved. She had just watched the bird fly into a hole in the tree right next to me! Flipping heck.....we'd just found a nest site. Knowing not to disturb the nest site of a bird like this we moved well back and watched them going in and out with food. Being so far away meant no photos for me but I didn't mind as I was happy to just watch them going about their business and learning how they forage and stuff. Half of me wished they weren't nesting there, so I could have tried for a decent shot as I still didn't have a good Crestie photo, but the other half of me didn't mind as I never dreamed we would be able to watch them like that. After about 10 minutes we decided to leave them to it and we were gone at 9.55am. By 10am we were at Lochmorlich where we saw nothing but another Common Sand and some more Goldeneye miles out.

By 10.20am we'd arrived at the Cairngorm Visitor Centre car park and the weather was still looking temperamental. We felt slightly unsure about the walk, as it looked so high and very steep near the top.



We had two choices here, to walk up or take the railway. If we took the railway we would only be allowed onto the viewing platform at the 'Ptarmigan Restaurant'. The restaurant also wasn't at the Cairngorm summit so meant the chances of seeing our target bird 'Ptarmigan' would be severely limited. If we walked up we would not only have a chance of seeing them on the way at a spot I'd been told about but we would also be able to walk higher up behind the restaurant, where the lazy bums were banned, and even up to the summit of Cairngorm if we wanted. The trouble was we would also be very knackered and probably get blown to

bits! The decision was made quickly, you only live once and all that, so we started the walk at 10.27am thinking to ourselves that if we could do (the notoriously difficult) Blakeney Point in Norfolk then this would be easy. Well you know what they say? "No pain, no gain" :P.

First up was a dead cert. I hadn't been too worried about not seeing Ring Ouzel up to this point in the holiday, as there's a well-known breeding site near to the Visitor Centre. We walked over to the 'Alpine Garden' and scanned the fir trees..... nothing, absolutely nothing....I was well gutted. I had been so optimistic about these birds and was thinking I would be getting my best ever Ring Ouzel photo and we would finally get to see a male. After getting home we found out that these breeding birds haven't been back for a few years..... Urghh! Disappointed, we set off upwards and in no time at all we'd reached the half way cafe, which was shut, and carried on quite happily. Every time a bird flew from the hills we panicked but at this height they were all Red Grouse. The path was really busy and when we saw some elderly women making the walk up our confidence was boosted even more. I'd been told a few areas to check on this walk but they all mentioned 'The Corrie', which wasn't as high up as the Restaurant. I had been warned Ptarmigan are hard to see but once found are quite tame. Once we'd got to the more level area covered with boulders we started to stop every 20 yards and scan. Try as we might though we just couldn't spot anything and as we reached the impressive corrie, complete with snow by the way,



I was still optimistic as we now had this area of massive boulder scree to scan. When we found some poo that must have been from a Ptarmigan our optimism levels soared! 30 minutes of constant scanning later and with the temperature dropping as the wind increased we realised we couldn't continue for much longer. We hadn't dressed for zero degrees or even brought clothes on the trip that would do for that kind of temperature! The question now was could we get ourselves up the next steep bit to be up level with the Ptarmigan Railway Station and be able to walk on the plateau? This would give us the best chance of finding our target bird as the Corrie had failed so miserably. I was really keen, as it would be an experience in itself to see the Cairngorm plateau, but I was freezing and knowing that Wendy can't handle the cold as well as me I knew she must have been suffering. It was a no brainer and we set off back down.

Back at the car we noticed that it was only 12.50pm, so we decided that after eating our lunch we would be proper tourists again and go up on the railway. It cost a tenner each at which I just couldn't resist saying, "that's a bit steep!" Arf arf..... Get it? ;) At 1.40pm we were the last to get on and were crammed into the train like sardines. It was a very weird experience as it's a cable car type system, and after only about 15 minutes we were at the top. Much quicker than the walk, which had taken 1hr 30 minutes just to get to the Corrie. Walking out onto the viewing platform was a bit disappointing for us as you could only view



back down the hill not onto the plateau. Saying that though, there were several other birders looking as well. As we scanned the vista it was amazing to see every type of weather in a single 180 degree view. It was snowing on the left then it was raining then it became overcast and finally, lovely and sunny on the right!



When the snow came in (IN MAY!!) I went to the sheltered side of the platform and scanned the ridgeline in the distance. Within seconds of looking I noticed 4 white birds that wheeled over the ridge, flying very close together, and then disappeared. My view must have lasted 3-4 seconds maximum but they literally couldn't have been anything other than Ptarmigan, I'm pretty sure you don't get white Pigeons at a height of 3000 feet ! Wendy came running over but there was nothing to see. After another 30 freezing minutes of looking, everyone gave up so we went inside to defrost and get Wendy attached to a coffee intravenous drip. Even though I must have seen Ptarmigan I'm not going to claim my lifer on that view alone. We spoke to a few birders and photographers in the restaurant and they were all saying that it has become harder over the years to see Ptarmigan up there due to so much human disturbance. Not only that but the birds had moved higher up, as it was so mild (mild!? :O) and none of them had seen anything either. Grrrrr! We'd even noticed one bloke, with a scope, who'd been wandering around outside for at least 2 hours! He looked pretty depressed too so that told us everything. After Capercaillie, Ptarmigan was a bird we really wanted to see on this trip so this was a severe downer. We tried to put a positive spin on it by thinking that it gives us the perfect reason to go back for another holiday. After we'd thawed out, refuelled with some disappointingly dried up chips and watched the snow we took the sardine tin train back down. This time we were one of the first people to get on and sat at the back like rebels. This was a very bad move and we soon spotted that the front section of the train was the most popular place. When we left the underground station at the top and went over the edge, the view from the front panoramic window must have been unreal. Us idiots at the back could only see the back of people's heads.... Dohhhh. Once back down we slumped into the car at 3.30pm feeling pretty worn out and glum but.....hey ho, we'd had an interesting day if nothing else.

We thought we'd pay the Cresties another visit on the way home and while we were there 2 birders from Essex appeared. One of them hadn't been on holiday for 2 years following a stroke and neither of them had seen a Crestie yet on their trip. They picked them up, on call, for themselves and not wanting to give the nest location away we tried to divert their attention to one of the birds foraging in the trees far to the left. They were pretty pleased to have seen it but then one of them pointed out something that made us want to kick ourselves! A **Redstart** singing! We couldn't believe it but we'd been hearing that sound everywhere but as it sounded nothing like the Redstart song I'd heard in Wales I'd ignored it.

The worst incident was at Forest Lodge where it was this exact song that we couldn't identify from only metres behind the car.... Noooooooooo! At least we'd finally caught up with one even if it was at such a late stage (shame we didn't get to see it) and we weren't going to let ourselves forget it in a hurry. Another Crossbill flew over and just before we left we had a chat with the blokes about their holiday. It sounded like we were doing better than them until they said they'd had a Caper at the Caper watch that morning! That settled it then, on Saturday we would get out early and go there for one last attempt before we left. It meant our travel day would be even more horrific but hopefully it would be worth it.

We couldn't get enough of Cresties so we headed home via Loch an Eilein again but I still couldn't get a decent shot, as they were too high up again. This is supposed to be the most photographed Loch in Scotland.... we couldn't see the attraction ourselves but still took a pic anyway :).



It just looked like all the other Lochs with a derelict wall on an island, but maybe we'd just been spoilt :). By 5.40pm we gave up and after having had such a long day we headed back to H.Q. We were back for 6pm but after tea and a long soak in the bath we were done for.

Friday 20th May

At 6am the alarm went off for the first time since we'd been here. Every other morning so far Wendy had been up way earlier so we must have needed it after yesterday! Looking out the window it was absolutely chucking it down and a horrible day but today was our last chance of trying for White-Tailed Sea Eagle on the West Coast. The west coast was where I had pinned my hopes on seeing an Otter too so it was a big day. This was the longest day trip of the holiday where we would cover about 100 miles just to get out there. We would even have to head back out to Inverness on the east coast before being able to head west! We got ourselves together, loaded up the car and left at 7.50am hoping that the rain would stop at some point. It was only 4 degrees when we left but had dropped down to 2.5 when we were on the A9 North bound. There had been a fresh covering of snow on the Cairngorms overnight too so we were pleased we'd stuck to our plan and been yesterday and weren't heading there today in the rain.

By 8.55am we were in the middle of nowhere when Wendy declared that the morning coffees were calling, which worried me a bit as I knew there were no towns nearby. Like some miracle as we rounded the next corner I spotted a sign saying W.C ... Brilliant! We pulled into the car park and were amazed to see the area surrounded in deciduous trees. I started to think that this place could be good for Wood Warbler or Redstart. As I waited for Wendy I wondered if there are any walks round there. Luckily this place was a Scottish



Forestry Reserve called Rogie Falls. It had also stopped raining so I suggested we might as well go for a walk, as it could be the only dry spell we would have all day. Literally 1 minute in we heard (another) Wood Warbler but this one was more important to find as it had become apparent over the holiday they aren't as plentiful as we first thought. Wendy still needed to see one for her lifer too. After standing around scanning the trees for about 15 minutes and seeing a movement several times, but never managing to get bins on the bird, it finally came out into the open and we both had our bins on a lovely little **Wood Warbler** singing it's heart out :). I tried to get a record shot but the trees were too dense to get a clear picture. We carried on along the path to see if we could find any other woodland specialities and came across what must have been 'Rogie Falls' and very impressive it was too.



All in all our little WC stop had ended up being one of the best experiences of the holiday. Back at the car park a coach pulled up with a party of very elderly people who all disembarked, headed straight to the W.C then wandered off to go on the walk. Some were blind and others obviously had mobility problems so we couldn't help but wonder who had the bright idea to put this in their itinerary as it wasn't an easy walk at all! The paths were steep and treacherous with wet tree roots and even we'd tripped up a few times, possibly because we were looking upwards rather than where we were going though. We didn't reckon any of them would make it to the waterfall, which seemed a shame. We had to make a move and left at 9.45am. As we made our way west across the centre of Scotland we were seeing the most stunning views of the holiday so far. The massive snow covered mountains bordering U shaped valleys were my favourite.



Our next destination was at the massive Loch Maree. The book had listed several places to stop on the shore of this loch so we started at Beinn Eighe just as the heavens opened again! Looking at the Loch from the car we could only see 2 x Common Sands but then a pair of Red-Breasted Mergansers swam by really close. There was no way I could get out and get a shot of them in the torrential rain.....Grrrrr. We were supposed to go for a walk in the woods here, which was good for woodland birds again. Not only did the rain stop us but also the footbridge across the small stream was closed for repairs! That knocked that on the head so we headed for the next stop, which would be ok in the rain as it was a hide by the side of a Hotel, cool. Maybe it would be a lovely heated hide with a carpeted floor and electric windows? :P. When we arrived we realised we could forget about that as the Hotel had very obviously been closed for some time. It was pretty derelict and we could see no sign of the hide so presumed it had gone along with the Hotel trade. Suddenly I had a call of nature so disappeared into the bushes onto an overgrown track. I followed it down for about 50 yards and found the (ahem) 'hide'. I called Wendy over and we went in. It might have been nice about 50 years ago but now it stank of damp, was full of dead spiders and there was a mouldy old logbook which I was too scared to touch in case I caught something. It was clear that nobody used it so we concluded that it was probably because there were no birds and left at 11.35am.

Next up was the fishing harbour town of Gairloch on the west coast. The west coast of Scotland is supposed to be THE place for Otters so from now on we were going to have to scan all the coastal areas intensively. It did look great for otters here but all we saw were 2 x **Gannets**, 2 x **Terns** and a **Shag**. After watching some more weird looking locals go by while having our lunch we left at 12.20pm. We arrived at the next town up the coast called Poolewe (or Poowee as I called it) at 12.35pm





and saw a **Greenshank** and more Ringed Plover but still no sign of an Otter. We were on our way again 3 minutes later to our main site of the day and on the journey we saw what was probably a proper **Rock Dove** rather than the Feral Pigeon we get back home.

We arrived at Little Gruinard at 1.20pm and the weather was worse than it had been all week. Looking out over to Gruinard Island, which you could only just see through the mist, we felt that sinking feeling and realised that today was not going to be our day. We both scanned the Island, I'd read that the Eagles like to sit on the beach when they're not out and about, and scanned and scanned! The rain was lashing down and the wind was very strong so getting out of the car was not going to be an option. We could see several **Great-Northern Divers**, a **Black Guillemot** a **Cormorant** and another Wheatear but nothing even vaguely resembling a Sea Eagle. Another car of birders appeared and they got out with scopes, so our chances of seeing one had gone up, but as time went on we knew it was going to be unlikely. After coming all this way we weren't going to quit that easily though and stuck it out until 2.20pm when reality hit us like a ton of bricks and we gave up :(. This was awful, not only had we failed to see Caper (on several attempts) and Ptarmigan but now Sea Eagle! .....Urrghhh! To show how quickly the Highlands weather changes, this was the view over the island as we were driving off!



We carried on round the lovely scenic loop route to Dundonnell where we found 3 **Red-Throated Divers** and 4 **Red-Breasted Mergansers**. By now it was getting late and we had a long drive back to H.Q ahead of us so we headed off. The journey home was interesting and 20 miles from Inverness I slammed on the brakes to watch another **Red Kite** flying over the road. This area was brilliant and on the approach to Inverness we spotted another 2 together followed by another lone bird. Just past Inverness we saw another! That was more like it.

We arrived back at H.Q at 5pm and we were far too tired to start cooking tea so we decided to treat ourselves to a Pizza at an Italian Restaurant called 'La Taverna' we'd spotted in Aviemore. This was a good idea, as we had to pack up our stuff and plan for our big day tomorrow. Back at base there was another Deer in the garden, an Osprey flew over and the Snipe was out there drumming again.

Saturday 21st May

This was our final day of the holiday and despite the early starts every morning we were still running on adrenaline so Wendy was up at 5.15am. For the first time since we'd arrived the sun was out and the light in the back garden was perfect for getting good Squirrel shots. Typical! I had no time this morning though as we had to get going if we wanted to see anything before we left. We went out at 6.30am and our plan was to pay the Loch Garten Osprey Centre another visit before going back to H.Q to pack the car up and leave Scotland. This time we would arrive early enough so that the hide would actually be open for the Caper watch. This was our last chance of trying to see a Caper and we were bang on time. I pulled into the car park and to our horror there was a barrier and a big sign up saying....."The Caper Watch Hide is now closed for the year!" Aaarrggghhhhhhh!!!!!! We read it again in disbelief and just couldn't believe our bad luck :( We tried to save our bad start to the day by going back to Tulloch Moor for better Black Grouse views but this was a waste of time too as there was no sign at all. I suppose, looking at it another way, we were lucky to have seen them when we did, as we'd not seen them since. A few other birders we'd spoken to, who were up there that week, hadn't seen them at all. It was now blowing a gale, which we didn't want for the ferry crossing later and the sun had vanished already.

I thought we could try Rothiemurchus Fish Farm for Osprey but when we got to the car park the shop was also shut so we couldn't get in. We couldn't resist a final visit to 'our' Cresties though and we were pleased to see that they were still there, foraging like lunatics to feed



their young. We were sad to have to leave them as they'd been one of the highlights of the trip. On our way out of Abernethy forest on the single-track road I caught a glimpse of a large brown bird flying low across the road and into the trees. It was well over 200 yards away and I only had a split second view but just like the Ptarmigan incident I couldn't think what else it could be other than a female Capercaillie. Wendy was obviously still annoyed at our non-productive early start and shot me down claiming it was a Mistle thrush! :-\ It obviously wasn't but it didn't matter anyway as it was too short a view to claim anything let alone a lifer. After that short burst of excitement we went to say bye to the Slavs and spent all of 2 minutes at the Loch, where they were being their usual selves by keeping just out of range and in crap light. No chance of some last minute pics then. We were back at H.Q by 8.20am where there were 2 Deer in the garden and a cat, which looked more than a bit like a Scottish Wildcat...well it had a black tip on its tail! Bah ha ha dream on :P



The lovely Red Squirrels were still there so I tried for the last time to get a picture (out of the kitchen window) and managed to get an ok shot. I'm glad I did though as it's better than any of the others I'd taken of them all week.





We packed up the car reluctantly, said our last goodbyes to our much, loved Squirrels and left, depressed at 9.35am. What a fantastic base it had been for the week made even better by the views and the wildlife right on the doorstep. This was the view from the front of the house as we left.



We stopped at Dipper Bridge down the road and instantly noticed how quiet it was. There were no squeaks coming from where the nest was so we presumed that they must have fledged, very recently too. We popped into Loch Garten and realised that our lesson with Redstart song had been learnt as we could hear one clear as a bell in the trees, we still couldn't see the flipping thing though. How can a bright red bird be so hard to see? We left there at 10.40am and decided that we'd have to go back to 'The Potting Shed' for more of that amazing cake so headed straight there. The single-track road was interesting and lined with trees so we got out of the car for a look. Wendy very excitedly called out, "**Redstart**" and was looking at a lovely male bird nearby. It didn't hang about long enough for me to see



it though so I was gutted to have missed the first and only sighting of these strangely scarce birds. We then saw a **Blackcap** and a pair of Spotfly, who we discovered were nesting in one of the trees...nice. There was only one thing for it now.....cake! It was just as good as last time and Wendy decided to buy her own and not eat mine...om nom nom :). On the way out we saw a nice male Bullfinch and headed off to Loch Insh for one last look at the Ospreys. I still hadn't got a decent Osprey shot on this holiday which was pretty disgraceful so was pinning my hopes on Loch Insh. There was no sign of any Ospreys there and I couldn't believe I was just about to leave the Highlands without a decent Osprey photo... flipping heck! The only other bird we picked up here was a **Kestrel** so we headed off at 12pm.

We got onto the A9 and started to head out of the Cairngorms. Probably another mile down the road we spotted an Osprey flying parallel to the road and really close. Normally there would be no places to stop on this A road but amazingly I could see a layby about 100 yards down the road!! We screeched to a halt and bailed out nearly forgetting my camera in the excitement. Back up the road we could see the Osprey was hovering over a roadside small lake. OMG would we get to see one dive for a fish on our last day? Well, no.....it didn't dive in but it did fly towards us letting me get a decent shot finally! :)



Hurrayyyy! I had the biggest grin on my face after that and it won't win any awards but I was as happy as Larry!

I hadn't worked out where to stop on the journey back down so I'd asked on a bird forum. Someone had suggested a place called Killicrankie, which was supposed to be good for woodland birds. Since we'd failed so miserably with them during the entire week we decided to give it a go especially as it was only 1 hour away making it perfect for breaking up the 6 hour drive. We arrived at 1pm and the weather was still bad so we ate our lunch in the car park and waited for yet another downpour to pass over. When it eventually stopped we ventured out of the car and instantly heard another Wood Warbler, which was well hidden in the dense branches but right by the car park. We thought we might have a chance of seeing it if we followed the footpath down onto the lower level so off we went. We couldn't even get a glimpse of it so we carried on for a walk around the place. I was curious to see the 'Soldiers Leap', which is why the Killicrankie tourist place is there. I wanted to see if it was a myth like an unfeasible gap of 20 feet or something. We found it and it actually looked like it may have been just about possible for a soldier to jump it to escape the enemy.





While I was looking at the gap Wendy called out, “**Pied Flycatcher!**” She had just seen a male moving through the trees right next to us and tried to get me on to it. This really was the last chance I was going to get to see one on this trip, but it was too late and he’d moved further back and further away before I could even say, “B@\*\*@%S!” Urrghhhh! By now it was raining again so we decided to give in and went back to the car. On the way we heard at least another 2 Wood Warblers, which was good. Back at the car park Wendy bought a coffee from the café, drank that followed by the coffee in her flask!! :O. I wasn’t looking forward to her caffeine downer later on! While she was drinking herself stupid I thought I would try the car park Wood Warbler again. It was still singing away and I spoke to a couple of birders who were wondering what I was looking for, but they didn’t seem interested! Maybe I needed to say, “Oh, I’m looking at a Mopopolese Warbler” or something...! I was really struggling to pin the WW down for a shot again when suddenly it appeared on a clear branch. Even though the light was terrible and it was raining I managed to finally capture the little bugger to get my first ever Wood Warbler shot. :)





I knew I wouldn't get a chance like that again, as they are so quick, and the clock was ticking so we left at 3.05pm.

The next leg of the journey was a big one. I aimed to drive for over 3 hours to reach Annandale services again as it seemed like a good one to stop at but our bladders had other ideas. I wonder why Wendy's bladder didn't last? Haha. So at 5pm we turned in at the next services we saw and stopped off for 20 minutes to stretch our legs and to get some more coffee and food. The weather during the journey so far had been horrendous. The rain was torrential making the visibility dire and it was blowing a gale so driving was hard going. Passing every lorry was dicey to say the least, I literally couldn't see anything and just aimed to hold the car in a straight line and hope I'd come out the other side! Thank god the really nasty weather had held off during the week we'd been there. Yes it had been amazingly cold for late May but we'd never had an entire day washed out.

At 6pm we reached the "Welcome to England" sign and we had to laugh because the rain suddenly stopped and the sun was shining from there on! Phewwww! As the ferry didn't leave until 2.15am the next morning we still had a lot of time to kill. Our plan was to go to Leighton Moss and Silverdale until it was too dark to bird anymore, if we were still awake by then!

We pulled up in Leighton Moss car park at 7.10pm and surprise, surprise it was raining. It felt like we were being followed or something. This was only fine drizzle though so compared to the short but heavy downpours we'd experienced in Scotland we could easily handle it. Even though we were absolutely knackered by this point we were looking forward to seeing some new birds in a different habitat. At the feeding station by the car park there were loads of birds but nothing new to our trip. We'd hoped to pick up Marsh Tit on the feeder by the Visitors Centre entrance but we must have been too late for them. We walked down the footpath to the first hide and saw **Pochard, Shoveler, Gadwall** and **Tufted Duck**. The second hide was pretty dead (as always) so we set off to the last one where a Great White Egret had been seen the day before. We gave it a few minutes but there was no sign of anything here apart from some Red Deer settling down for the night. Leighton Moss was proving to be a disappointment but we still had the Silverdale hides to check. When we got back to the car I checked Birdguides for any more reports from here recently and it said there had been an Otter from the public hides! It was like a sign from the gods, a beaming light to follow. I'm sure there was a giant hand coming out of the clouds beckoning us to walk (stagger) the 1.5 kilometres to the public hides. I think our tired state had made us delirious as we decided to ditch Silverdale for the Public section of Leighton Moss instead.

It was now raining again, was starting to get pretty dark and we were just about to walk to the furthest away hide of them all. On the never ending footpath Wendy spotted a **Tawny Owl** fly out in front of us, from the bordering trees, which was a real bonus as our energy levels were now at an all time low. Nice to see a Tawny while there's still some light for a change. When we got to the hide there were a few people already there so we slumped onto the bench in the corner and looked out, bleary eyed, over the misty, drizzly scene. My hopes were lifted by the presence of a few others and I wondered if maybe they were also looking for the Otter :). Wendy, by now, was so tired she was getting narky (I reckon it was the caffeine downer I'd been dreading kicking in) and had decided she was going to quit birding forever and wanted to go and do something more normal instead, like go and sit in a nice warm pub. Before I could work out how to deal with her tantrum she spotted a very distant **Hobby** sitting on a dead tree at the other side of the pool. Nobody else in the hide had seen it but the excitement from her last two good finds lasted all of about 30 seconds before she was growling again and wanting to go to the pub. By now it was too dark to even think about going to Silverdale and I was finding it hard to stay awake as well so we gave in and headed back to the car park. On the way we heard **Reed Warbler, Bearded Tit** and Wendy spotted a **Marsh Harrier** but we finally got back to the car at 9.20pm and packed up our bins and gear for the last time.

We pulled up outside The Silverdale Hotel at 9.30pm and walked in only to receive the clichéd 'looks' from the locals. We spent the next hour trying to relax but failed miserably. Even though we were both nearly nodding off we managed to pick ourselves up to move to

another pub, The Albion in Arnside, and arrived at 10.20pm. This was more like it, really quiet and no locals, so we found ourselves a darkened corner and breathed a sigh of relief. If there was ever a time where we could've done with some matchsticks to hold our eyes open then this was it! We were finding it unbelievably hard to stay awake never mind hold a sensible conversation and enjoy a drink in a public place. Still, it was better than sitting in the car park in Heysham for hours waiting to board. At 11.30pm we'd definitely had enough and left for the port, our holiday was well and truly over. Wendy went into the Terminal for a coffee in an attempt to perk herself up a bit and what a welcoming sight it was at 12.15am. Everyone knows that Heysham port is letting the passenger terminal go a bit because they can't be bothered but this was well funny. Yeah, ok, it was really windy and the rain was lashing down but still...?



The strength of the wind would have normally worried us sick but we were so tired I don't remember caring about it at all! We boarded at 1.30am and went straight to sleep.....until 4am when we were woken up by the banging and crashing going on all around us. Let's just say it was a rough crossing and we were very pleased to disembark at 5.50am and go home to.....unpack and for me.....to start the long and slow process of editing all my photos. What do you mean most normal people would have gone straight to bed? :)

We had both dreamt about visiting the Highlands for years and it didn't let us down. Even though it was a massive job getting up there our holiday was absolutely brilliant and we're dying to go back already. We were expecting the scenery to be good but we weren't prepared for how good, everywhere we went was stunning. The people we met were so friendly and I was never given any angry looks, which seem to be thrown around liberally in Norfolk, when people look at photographers. Over our week in Scotland we managed 129 species, which is amazing considering they were all resident birds. 'Bird of the trip' for us both has to be the Cresties. :) We hadn't realised just how hard it is to see them in May so to find so many and get the views we did was amazing. On the down side there were way too many Chaffinches and the lack of raptors (when there should be hundreds) was obvious. There were no Foxes or Grey Squirrels and we didn't see a single Rat either. After worrying ourselves silly about being eaten alive by midgies or getting covered in ticks and dying of Lyme disease we didn't have a single bite.....until the 2 hours we spent at Leighton Moss when Wendy was bitten 3 times! The only thing we'll change next time is to go in April rather than May and remember to bring warmer clothes. Going in May seemed to make it too late



for the Cairngorm specialities of Ptarmigan and Capercaillie but that just gives us an excuse, as good as any, to go back again! :)

Red-throated Diver	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Hooded Crow
Black-throated Diver	Herring Gull	Common Raven
Great Northern Diver	Great Black-backed Gull	Starling
Little Grebe	Black-legged Kittiwake	House Sparrow
Great Crested Grebe	Common Tern	Chaffinch
Slavonian Grebe	Arctic Tern	Greenfinch
Northern Fulmar	Razorbill	Goldfinch
Manx Shearwater	Black Guillemot	Eurasian Siskin
Northern Gannet	Rock Dove	Linnet
Atlantic Great Cormorant	Woodpigeon	Lesser Redpoll
European Shag	Collared Dove	Common Crossbill
Grey Heron	Cuckoo	<b>Scottish Crossbill</b>
Mute Swan	Barn Owl	Bullfinch
Whooper Swan	Tawny Owl	Yellowhammer
Pink-footed Goose	Common Swift	Reed Bunting
Greylag Goose	Great Spotted Woodpecker	
Canada Goose	Skylark	Bottle-nosed Dolphin
Common Shelduck	Sand Martin	Grey Seal
Eurasian Wigeon	Barn Swallow	Common Seal
Gadwall	House Martin	<b>Pine Martin</b>
Common Teal	Tree Pipit	Red Squirrel
Mallard	Meadow Pipit	Wood Mouse
Shoveler	Grey Wagtail	Badger
Common Pochard	Pied Wagtail	Rabbit
Tufted Duck	Dipper	Red Deer
Common Eider	Wren	Roe Deer
Common Goldeneye	Dunnock	
Red-breasted Merganser	European Robin	
Goosander	Common Redstart	
Red Kite	Stonechat	
Marsh Harrier	Northern Wheatear	
Sparrowhawk	Blackbird	
Common Buzzard	Song Thrush	
<b>Golden Eagle</b>	Mistle Thrush	
Osprey	Sedge Warbler	
Common Kestrel	Reed Warbler	
Hobby	Common Whitethroat	
Red Grouse	Garden Warbler	
<b>Black Grouse</b>	Blackcap	
Red-legged Partridge	Wood Warbler	
Common Pheasant	Common Chiffchaff	
Moorhen	Willow Warbler	
Coot	Goldcrest	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Spotted Flycatcher	
Ringed Plover	Pied Flycatcher	
European Golden Plover	Bearded Tit	
Lapwing	Long-tailed Tit	
Dunlin	<b>Crested Tit</b>	
Common Snipe	Coal Tit	
Eurasian Woodcock	Blue Tit	
Black-tailed Godwit	Great Tit	
Eurasian Curlew	Common Treecreeper	
Common Redshank	European Jay	
Greenshank	Magpie	
Common Sandpiper	Jackdaw	
Black-headed Gull	Rook	
Common Gull	Carrion Crow	