



# **Loch of Strathbeg Annual Bird Report 2010**



a million voices for nature



## Contents

Front cover. *Early morning on the Low Ground* by Jack Ibbotson

1. Introduction to the Annual Bird Report 2010  
Notes on the Annual Bird Report 2010
2. Map of the reserve, (showing areas mentioned in the text)
3. Photographs
5. Key to species accounts  
Species accounts
- 38 Species not on the reserve list
- 39 Selected sightings of other taxa
- 40 Decisions affecting previous reports

## **Introduction to the Annual Bird Report 2010**

It seems amazing to be writing about another record breaking year, with 206 species recorded and another four species added to the reserve list (taking it to 266 subject to acceptance by the relevant committees). An annual report is always a good chance to look back at the highlights of the year and there are many to choose from again. My personal favourite was the Caspian tern, a top class rarity and a stonking bird, although it might have been the 'steppe' grey shrike if it had been me that had found it rather than my daughter (she's still reminding me about that one!). The plantation again produced a good run of scarce species and some impressive numbers of common migrants, birding at its best.

Pleasingly, there were several other birders who visited the plantation through the autumn, although the whole coastal strip of the reserve remains seriously underwatched – we can't find all the birds ourselves, we need your help as well please! One visitor tried regular seawatching at traditionally quiet times of year and discovered that black guillemots were far more regular offshore than we realised, just think what you could discover if you spend sometime exploring the reserve...

Scarce water bird visitors were impressive again, we have become spoilt for spoonbills, egrets (great white and little), cranes and many others in recent years and there is a real feeling of anticipation in the spring as it often feels like the next good bird could be just around the corner. Sadly, breeding waders had a desperately disappointing year, hopefully things will improve in 2011, especially as we will soon have Konick ponies to help manage the wetlands.

The geese had an unusual season, although the arrival was still a spectacular one and our visitors for Goosewatch events all went away happy. It just goes to prove that there is always something different happening at the Loch of Strathbeg, who knows what it will be in 2011.

Many thanks to the RSPB members, supporters, reserve visitors and the reserve team of staff and volunteers who have helped make it another great year on the reserve.

**Dominic Funnell**  
**RSPB Grampian Reserves Site Manager**

### **Notes on the Annual Bird Report**

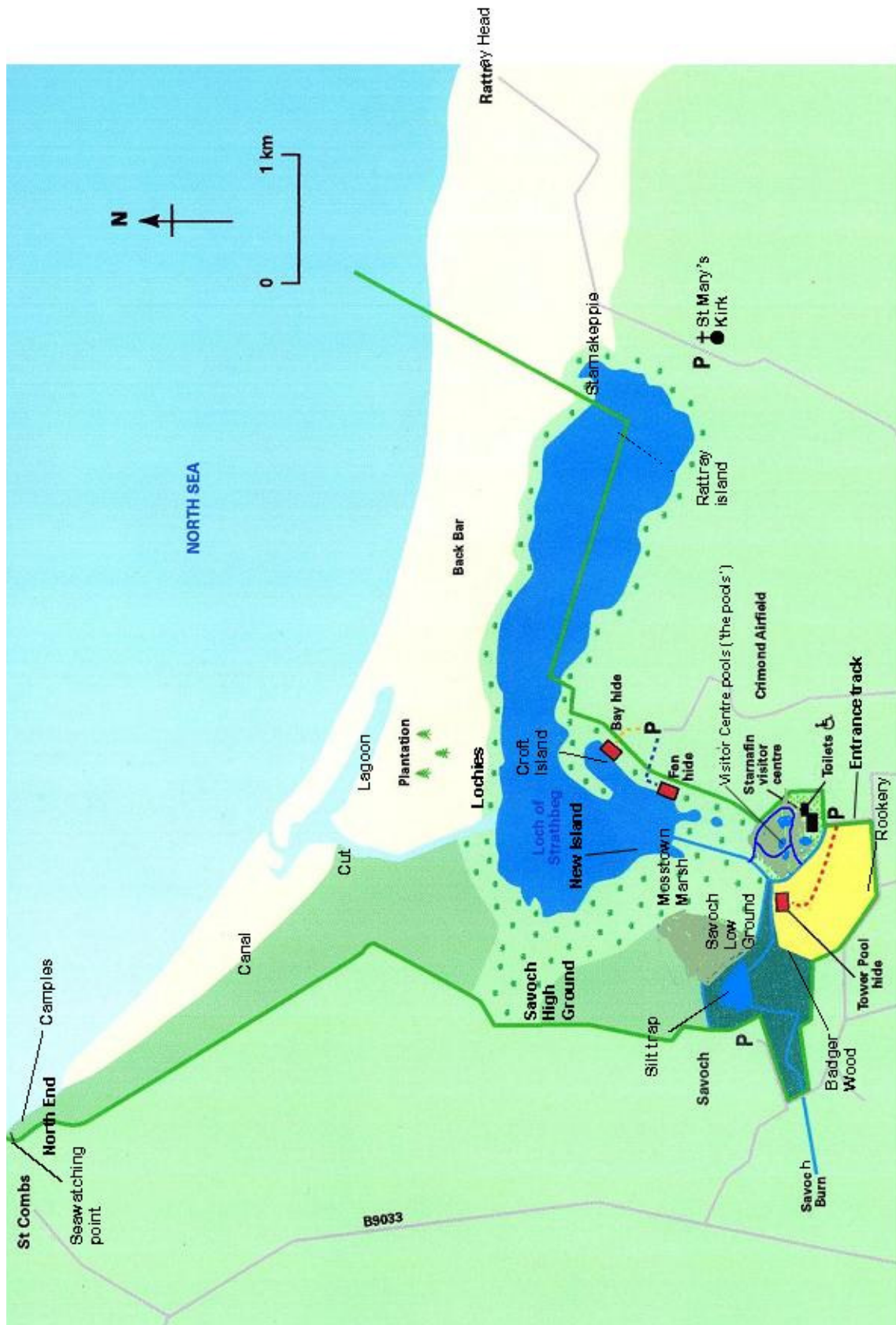
The classification and taxonomy follows that of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU), although species names are usually those commonly in use rather than the 'official' names.

The reserve recording area includes the land managed by the RSPB, the entire Loch (although the RSPB owns only 146 of its 206 hectares) and birds offshore from the reserve.

The Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) classification comes from a major review of the status of birds occurring in the United Kingdom. The Red, Amber and Green lists are based on assessing the latest data on: global conservation status; historical and recent population declines (in numbers and range); European conservation status; rarity; localised distribution and international importance of populations (Eaton, M.A., Brown, A.F., Noble, D.G., Musgrove, A.J., Hearn, R.D., Aebischer, N.J., Gibbons, D.W., Evans, A. & Gregory, R.D.; 2009; Birds of Conservation Concern 3. The population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man; British Birds 102: 296-341).

Subspecies that can be readily identified in the field are shown separately. Some subspecies have differing classifications from their parent species. For most species, only one subspecies occurs on the reserve; where this has a different BoCC classification to their parent species it is shown at the top of the species account. Some species have no classification; these are either introduced species or those that occur only rarely in the UK. For further details on the BoCC classification, including criteria for each species' classification, see Eaton *et al* 2009 or [www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguides/status\\_explained](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguides/status_explained) .

Map of reserve showing areas mentioned in text



**Green line** = reserve boundary.  
The recording area includes the whole of the Loch.





**Previous page:**

**Top:** spoonbills and Caspian tern (in the rain), June. Southern birds in northern weather!  
*David Parnaby*

**Middle:** white-tailed eagle and teal, March. 'Ralf' completed a year on the reserve then headed south shortly afterwards.  
*Alan Sinclair*

**Bottom:** cormorants, black-headed gulls, common terns and a wigeon, May. Croft island was colonised by cormorants in 2010.  
*T. Keith Bruce*

**This page:**

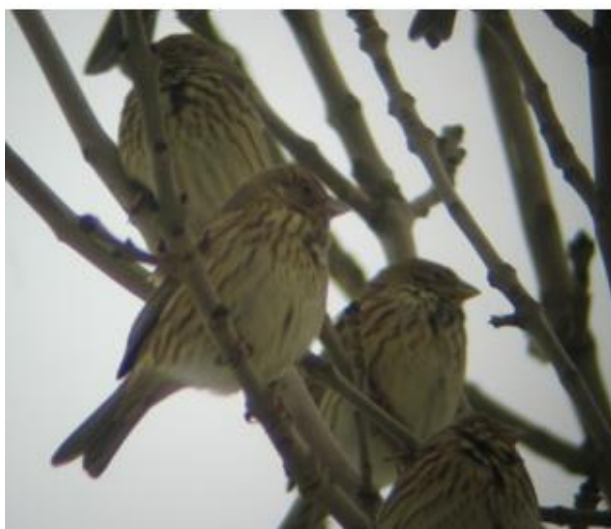
**Top left:** southern grey shrike, October. The rarest vagrant to be found on the reserve in 2010.  
*Mark Sullivan*

**Top right:** swallow, May. One of the birds that breeds in the barn surveying his territory having recently arrived 'home'  
*David Parnaby*

**Above right:** whooper swan, November. One of the record breaking number present at this time. This male bird was fitted with a darvic ring in Iceland in August 2007. It usually winters in Cambridgeshire and was seen in Ireland and on Islay in March 2008.  
*David Parnaby*

**Bottom left:** corn bunting, February. Part of the largest flock ever recorded on the reserve.  
*David Parnaby*

**Bottom right:** tree sparrow, September. Another good year for this farmland species that is often the first bird visitors see.  
*Chris Jones*



## Key:

**Species** *Scientific name* **CONSERVATION STATUS** (including details of subspecies occurring on the reserve where these have a different conservation status to their parent species. See page 3 for details of Birds of Conservation Concern).

\* indicates a species for which a description is required. Unless otherwise stated the records in this report will be subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

*Status on reserve (number of records refers to pre 2010).*

**'Identifiable Subspecies'**

WeBS = Wetland Bird Survey

## Species Accounts

### **Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* **GREEN**

*Common resident. A few pairs breed. Large numbers gather on the Loch in late summer.*

Numbers in the first winter period were generally less than 30, with an increase in the spring seeing up to 118 recorded in May. Another impressive breeding season saw seven pairs nesting, with at least 22 cygnets fledged. The usual summer build up saw up to 223 recorded in July and numbers kept increasing into the autumn with the peak of 247 recorded on 19<sup>th</sup> September. Larger numbers than expected remained after this, with 160 present until freezing conditions in December saw birds depart, with only about 40 remaining to the end of the year.

### **Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* **AMBER**

*Common autumn passage migrant and winter visitor, injured birds sometimes oversummer.*

Monthly maxima

nc = no count

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
nc	66	148	37	1	1	1	1	52	870	1025	83

Counts in the first winter period were typically unremarkable with only small numbers seen. Numbers rose in spring as birds headed north on passage, with some turnover taking place during this time. A flock of 82 was seen taking off from the Loch and heading north on 31<sup>st</sup> March, the last count of over 40 noted. The final flock was 22 on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, with just three birds noted the next day (displaying on the pools). One bird summered on site again. It is not known whether this is the same bird that has spent recent summers on the reserve or whether different individuals are involved (photographs of the bill may help determine this in future). Ten on 17<sup>th</sup> September were the first returning birds with 52 present by 19<sup>th</sup> September. Numbers remained quite low until the third week of October when large flocks were seen arriving on several dates, with 639 recorded leaving the Low Ground on 24<sup>th</sup> and 870 counted at roost on 30<sup>th</sup> October. Good numbers remained the following month, with 1,025 counted leaving the roost on 7<sup>th</sup> November, a reserve record and one of the highest ever counts in Scotland. Good numbers remained through most of the rest of the month, although freezing conditions at the end of November saw many of the birds move off.

### **Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus* **AMBER**

*Very common winter visitor (September – May). Peak numbers usually occur in October. A few individuals oversummer.*

An unusual year for this iconic species of the reserve. In January the WeBS count produced 10,889, a reasonable figure considering the weather conditions at the time. Numbers rose during the next few months, with 14,333 in February and a spring peak of 18,570 on 14<sup>th</sup> March, with 17,184 still present on 18<sup>th</sup> April. The last few hundred departed in the first week of May, with a late flock of 28 passing through on 16<sup>th</sup> May. The usual stragglers spent the summer on the reserve, with seven recorded through June and July. The first returning migrants were six seen on 6<sup>th</sup> September (a relatively early date but only a day earlier than in 2009). The first flocks involved 90 birds arriving on the afternoon of 12<sup>th</sup> September, with 500 present by the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, increasing to 850 by that evening. Arrivals continued virtually daily with 3,550 present on 18<sup>th</sup> and 7,500 on 19<sup>th</sup> September. The sight of skein after skein dropping in from the north always provides one of the finest experiences of the year and this autumn the arrival was a dramatic one at times, with an impressive peak for the month of



32,882 leaving the roost on 24<sup>th</sup> September. Bizarrely, that turned out to be the peak count for the year, with the majority of geese carrying on further south immediately after arriving in Scotland. The peak count in October was only 17,036 on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, around 40,000 less than would be expected! Early November saw similar figures, with 17,800 counted on the 7<sup>th</sup> but heavy snow at the end of the month caused the birds to head off looking for food and a mere 195 were counted on the goose count on 5<sup>th</sup> December. By the end of the year numbers had struggled up to around 500, far below the December count in 2009 of 37,500!

**White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons* **GREEN**

**'Greenland' White-fronted Goose** *A.a.flavirostris* **RED**

*Scarce but regular winter visitor in small numbers, October – April.*

Following on from a poor year in 2009 there were again few sightings on the reserve of this declining species. In the first half of the year the only sightings were singles on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 23<sup>rd</sup> February and 6<sup>th</sup> March, with two on 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March. A single on the Visitor Centre pools on 14<sup>th</sup> April was the last of the spring. The autumn was very disappointing with singles on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 23<sup>rd</sup> (wearing an orange collar) and 27<sup>th</sup> November. There were no records this year of 'European' white-fronted goose *A.a.albifrons*.

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* **AMBER**

*Common autumn and winter visitor with small numbers seen throughout the year.*

Numbers at the start of the year were low with a peak of just 70 on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. A few lingered into the summer, with a couple of pairs lurking around the Silt Trap and Low Ground, and ten on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, with 12 from 11<sup>th</sup> August. The first arrivals weren't recorded until 14<sup>th</sup> October when 14 were on the Loch, with numbers building up to over 240 by the end of the month. As usual the main arrival was later than that of pink-footed goose, with a peak of 570 on 20<sup>th</sup> November, and 426 were still present on 12<sup>th</sup> December.

**Snow Goose** *Anser caerulescens*

*Vagrant, one or two noted most winters in pink-footed goose flocks. Also occasional spring passage migrant. Some sightings may relate to escapes from captivity.*

A good start to the year saw two (one each of white and blue phase birds) on 10<sup>th</sup> January, with these joined by a second 'blue' bird on 17<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> January. A single blue-phase bird was seen on 9<sup>th</sup> March. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March a white-phase arrived and remained until 11<sup>th</sup> May, presumably departing north with the last of the pink-footed geese. Unusually, none were seen in the latter half of the year in a generally poor winter for the species in the UK.

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*

*Generally scarce with small flocks from the feral British population sometimes seen in early summer. Birds seen with pink-footed geese in autumn and winter may be transatlantic visitors and may include Lesser Canada Geese *Branta hutchinsii* (although this species is yet to be formally admitted to the British list).*

Another year with several sightings of this erratic visitor to the reserve. The first was from 4<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> March with another on the Low Ground from 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> May. A flock of 30 arrived on 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> June, with 25 still present the next day. At least one was present daily after this, with five on 11<sup>th</sup> and two on 26<sup>th</sup> June. The same summering bird was probably responsible for sightings until 24<sup>th</sup> September, with another bird arriving with greylags from 18<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> October. A small bird was also present in the pink-foot flock on 19<sup>th</sup> September, a presumed vagrant of either this species or lesser Canada goose. The final record was of one that arrived on the Low Ground on 30<sup>th</sup> December and lingered into 2011.

**Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis* **AMBER**

*Common autumn passage migrant in variable numbers, with smaller numbers seen throughout winter. Small peak again in spring as birds return north. Birds at Loch of Strathbeg are mostly from the Svalbard breeding population that winter on the Solway Firth.*

Small numbers were wintering on the reserve, with a peak of just 22 through January and February. By late March numbers started to rise slightly and by late April 45 were present. Early May often sees a day or two of heavy passage as birds pass north (often without stopping) and this year 1<sup>st</sup> May had around 300 birds moving north. Smaller groups were seen on a few dates later in the month, with 30 on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 10 on 24<sup>th</sup> May the last flock. Singles on 26<sup>th</sup> May, 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> June may have related to a bird of dubious origin (an

escaped bird was present last summer). The first returning birds were 16 on the typical date of 24<sup>th</sup> September, with 130 the following day and 200 on 30<sup>th</sup> September (50 of which flew straight inland). Around 90 remained in early October and the year's peak count occurred on 12<sup>th</sup> October when 562 flew inland in several flocks during the day. At least 150 were on the reserve the following day, with around 40 remaining at the end of the month. Numbers then declined with just a couple in early November and none remaining by the end of the year.

**Brent Goose** *Branta bernicla* **AMBER**

**'Pale-bellied Brent Goose'** *B.b.hrota* **AMBER**

*Small numbers recorded in autumn passing along the coast and winter goose flocks.*

Regular sightings of singletons in the first winter period involved records on 18 dates until the last on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, with at least three individuals probably involved. A quiet autumn involved sightings of adults on the Low Ground on 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> September and 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> October, with two on 20<sup>th</sup> November. The only record from offshore involved five moving south then north on 16<sup>th</sup> October.

**'Dark-bellied Brent Goose'** *B.b.bernicla* **RED**

*Rare winter visitor, less than annual.*

An adult was seen on the Low Ground on 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> April (and was seen with a pale-bellied bird on the latter date), the only record of this always scarce visitor.

**Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* **AMBER**

*Common resident, with a few pairs breeding.*

Small numbers were present at the start of the year and by the end of January 11 were present. Numbers increased in February to 18 and the highest count of the year was during WeBS on 14<sup>th</sup> March when 21 were present. Five pairs were thought to have bred although only four fledged young were noted, a poor return. There were no large counts in the latter part of the year with very few remaining on the reserve.

**Mandarin** *Aix galericulata*

*Vagrant, two previous records (males in October 2005 and August – September 2008).*

A female was discovered on one of the islands in front of Bay Hide during a WeBS count on 14<sup>th</sup> November and was also seen on the Visitor Centre pools on 18<sup>th</sup> November and the Loch on 22<sup>nd</sup> November. As the species continues to establish a breeding presence in Scotland we can perhaps look forward to more records of this colourful duck.

**Wigeon** *Anas penelope* **AMBER**

*Present all year, although only small numbers of non-breeding birds in summer. Very common in winter.*

Monthly maxima

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
727	1479	449	105	17	9	34	120	450	1030	2571	1007

Although numbers did not reach quite the same high levels as 2009, counts were reasonable in both winter periods. The highest numbers were in the autumn, with the year's peak count of 2,571 occurring on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, a typical date. As usual small numbers lingered in the summer and, although birds were seen mating in February, there was no suggestion of breeding taking place on the reserve.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera* **AMBER**

*A summer visitor in relatively small numbers, with a few pairs breeding. In recent years, small numbers have started to overwinter.*

Monthly maxima

nc = no count

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
10	13	36	34	17	36	5	Nc	74	30	26	8

The general increase in this lovely little duck continued, with good numbers wintering, a noticeable spring passage and another very strong autumn showing. The count of 74 on 24<sup>th</sup> September represents the second consecutive year that the regional record count has been

broken on the reserve. Several pairs were around the reserve in the spring, with at least three broods seen and a minimum of 16 ducklings fledged.

**Teal *Anas crecca* AMBER**

*Common throughout year, although largest numbers usually in autumn and winter. Very rare occasional breeder.*

Monthly maxima

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
310	507	290	151	54	51	43	300	300	482	391	442

The peak count this year on 22<sup>nd</sup> February was over 200 less than the 2009 peak count (also in February), which in itself was not a good year for the species. Although getting accurate counts of this diminutive duck can be difficult as they skulk in the reedbeds, it does seem that a real decrease in wintering birds has taken place in recent years. A pair were mating on the pools in early February but there was no evidence of breeding on the reserve.

**Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis* \***

*Vagrant, first recorded in 1978 then seen annually from 1993 (except 2007). Most records in January and December, with records in all other months except July – September (when eclipse plumage is likely to make them unidentifiable). Returning birds make assessment of numbers of individuals involved extremely difficult, with records conceivably relating to as few as two individuals.*

A drake was on the Loch in front of the Fen Hide on 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November. A typical record for the reserve of this transatlantic vagrant.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* AMBER**

*Common throughout year, with largest numbers in winter. Several pairs breed.*

Monthly maxima

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
341	487	266	30	48	114	86	450	294	nc	668	398

nc = no count

Another fairly typical year, with numbers in the latter half of the year showing a slight improvement on the relatively low peak in 2009. The first ducklings were noted on 14<sup>th</sup> May and several broods fledged successfully across the reserve.

**Pintail *Anas acuta* AMBER**

*Winter visitor in reasonable numbers, occasional in summer.*

A reasonable start to the year saw peaks of 24 in February and 30 in March, with at least 20 remaining into April. A pair lingered into mid May, but one on 4<sup>th</sup> June was the only further record until 25<sup>th</sup> August. Numbers were slow to build up, with 14 by the end of September and the peak for the latter half of the year of 21 occurring on 10<sup>th</sup> December.

**Garganey *Anas querquedula* AMBER**

*Scarce spring passage migrant (mostly May), with small numbers sometimes seen in summer and pairs occasionally breeding.*

A quiet year for this small, summer-visiting duck. The first, a drake, was seen on the relatively early date of 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> April, with possibly a new bird (also a drake) from 29<sup>th</sup> April – 2<sup>nd</sup> May. From 14<sup>th</sup> May – 1<sup>st</sup> June a drake was seen virtually daily, although usually only early morning and late afternoon. An eclipse-plumaged drake from 1<sup>st</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> July was the last sighting of the year. Garganey tend to prefer the habitat along the Savoich Burn, with most sightings this year coming from the Visitor Centre pools when the birds emerged into open water to feed.

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata* AMBER**

*Scarce breeding resident, with larger numbers seen in autumn and winter.*

Only small numbers were present in the first winter period, with a peak count of just 11 on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. Reasonable numbers were recorded during the summer, with 24 noted on June WeBS and three pairs breeding, although not successfully. A couple of records offshore in August coincided with the usual autumnal build up, although the peak was just 41 (on 19<sup>th</sup>

September) until late November when 99 on 22<sup>nd</sup> was the highest count on the reserve since the winter of 1995/96. Thereafter only low numbers were recorded until the end of the year.

**Pochard *Aythya ferina* AMBER**

*Declining winter visitor, peak numbers usually in autumn. Small numbers sometimes present throughout summer, but does not breed on reserve.*

Very small numbers were present in the first winter period, with a peak count of just 14 on 10<sup>th</sup> February, until spring passage saw numbers rise to 40 on 14<sup>th</sup> March. At least three lingered until mid May, with one on 1<sup>st</sup> June and then regular records from 4<sup>th</sup> July when the first returning birds were noted. Numbers were slow to increase, with a maximum of 25 in July, 36 in August and 45 in September, until October when 106 were counted on 19<sup>th</sup>. There were also 106 on 15<sup>th</sup> November, representing the largest count on the reserve for some years.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* AMBER**

*Common visitor, with peak numbers in late summer/early autumn. Several pairs breed.*

The numbers at the start of the year were unremarkable with a winter peak of just 102 on 21<sup>st</sup> February. Breeding was late to commence this year with the first ducklings not recorded until early July, although productivity seemed reasonable amongst the ten or so broods noted. Two birds passing south offshore on 9<sup>th</sup> July heralded the start of the late summer build up of the species on the Loch, with around 500 present by mid-month and the peak of 591 noted on 15<sup>th</sup> August. This is almost double the peak count in 2009, but significantly lower than the recent high count of 939 in August 2007. Numbers for the rest of the autumn tended to be around 200 – 300, until late November when freezing conditions coincided with counts dropping to only a few dozen.

**Scaup *Aythya marila* RED**

*Uncommon visitor, usually in winter, to the Loch. Occasionally seen into the spring.*

Early in the year the only record was of a female flying south offshore on 8<sup>th</sup> January. Three (a male and two females) appeared on the Loch on 10<sup>th</sup> May with one male lingering throughout June with possibly the same bird seen on 8<sup>th</sup> July. Three were on the Loch on 16<sup>th</sup> August with one to three seen irregularly on the Loch until the end of the year. Away from the Loch the only record was of two flying north offshore on 16<sup>th</sup> October.

**Eider *Somateria mollissima* AMBER (all records are of race: *S.m.mollissima* RED)**

*A few breed in the dunes and around the Loch. Present offshore throughout the year in variable numbers, usually peaking in winter.*

A few dozen were offshore at the start of the year with numbers rising in spring to a peak of 285 on 21<sup>st</sup> March. These unusually large numbers coincided with strong southerly winds and possibly involved birds displaced from the Ythan estuary. Around 100 lingered until April but there were no further large counts offshore. The peak number on the Loch was 12, with three females nesting on the islands, although no chicks were seen.

**Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* GREEN**

*Present offshore in small numbers throughout the winter. Small numbers seen on the Loch, usually in the winter, although has been recorded up to late spring.*

In the first winter period there were a few records of birds offshore, although no more than 15 were seen. A similar number were recorded from late March to April on the sea amongst the large numbers of common scoter and eider. None were recorded after 27<sup>th</sup> April until 3<sup>rd</sup> October after which small numbers were regularly seen passing, peaking at 17 heading south on 18<sup>th</sup> November. There were few records from the Loch this year with one or two recorded on just a few dates after 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

**Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* RED**

*Small numbers seen offshore throughout the year, very rare visitor to the Loch.*

There were only a couple of records early in the year but in March a flock built up offshore from the North End, rising to 165 on 27<sup>th</sup> March and then 300 on 24<sup>th</sup> April, an impressively large count for the reserve. Small numbers during the rest of the summer and autumn were probably moving to and from the moulting flock at Blackdog and no more than 30 were seen on one date. After September there were only single figure counts on a few dates.

**Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* **AMBER**

*Occasional records offshore, usually in autumn or late summer. Very rare vagrant to the Loch.*

An unusual spring record concerned a flock of four flying north on 25<sup>th</sup> May. Singles moving north on 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October were more expected.

**Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* **AMBER**

*Common visitor to the Loch and offshore, with peak numbers in winter, but flocks present in summer. Displaying regularly observed, but no breeding activity noted on the reserve.*

Monthly maxima

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
28	217	183	153	51	47	214	184	69	60	244	26

Numbers in early winter were disappointing, although by 21<sup>st</sup> February they had risen to a reasonable 217. Numbers remained high in the spring before tailing off into the summer. By late June birds were returning from their breeding grounds and numbers built up to over 200 by mid July. The year's peak of 244 on 14<sup>th</sup> November was an improvement on the very low numbers recorded in autumn 2009, but still well down on the November 2008 peak of 420.

**Smew** *Mergellus albellus* **AMBER**

*Previously a regular winter visitor in small numbers to the Loch, but now a vagrant.*

With no records since 2006 it was a major surprise when a drake was found on the Loch on 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> June, the first summer record for the reserve. A redhead on the Loch on 16<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> August, 19<sup>th</sup> September and 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October was presumably the same drake in eclipse plumage and this appeared to be confirmed when a drake moulting into breeding plumage was seen from 2<sup>nd</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> November. Whether it was present elusively on the reserve throughout or wandered elsewhere was unclear, but a drake on Loch Leven, Fife from 15<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> June was interesting given the species rarity in summer in Scotland and may have been related to the Loch of Strathbeg sighting. A female on the Low Ground on 31<sup>st</sup> December was a more typical record and hopefully signalled a return to form for this delightful duck.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* **GREEN**

*A visitor to the Loch in very small numbers throughout the year, larger numbers are found offshore, especially in winter.*

The first four months of the year produced counts of 12, 26, 21 and 31 on WeBS. Twelve remained on 10<sup>th</sup> May but the species was then absent during the summer, with the first returning birds turning up in late September. Small numbers were then seen offshore and on the Loch until the end of the year, with a peak of 14 on 19<sup>th</sup> October.

**Goosander** *Mergus merganser* **GREEN**

*A winter visitor in relatively small numbers to the freshwater areas of the reserve.*

The peak in the first winter period was 13 on 17<sup>th</sup> February, with an impressive count of 29 on WeBS on 14<sup>th</sup> March presumably relating to birds on spring passage. Up to 13 remained until late May with one still present on 1<sup>st</sup> June. As usual birds were absent during the summer, but more unusual was a lack of autumn records, with just one on the Visitor Centre pools on 28<sup>th</sup> October and an unusual coastal record of one flying south offshore on 18<sup>th</sup> November. Three arrived on the Loch on 30<sup>th</sup> December as the ice finally started to melt.

**Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*

*Formerly very common, when large numbers were released locally for shooting. In recent years, has become less than annual on the reserve. Records may relate to birds released recently, rather than a locally established population.*

The only record of the year was of a single seen in the dunes during a goose count on 14<sup>th</sup> March. Two rather tame birds regularly seen running along Starnafin Road resisted attempts to corral them onto the reserve!

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* **RED**

*Resident in small numbers in the farmland areas of the reserve, largest numbers are usually recorded in autumn when coveys of family groups can be seen.*

A covey of 13 on 5<sup>th</sup> January by Tower Pool path was the largest count of the year. A pair and

their two fledged chicks were regularly seen along the entrance track in the spring and three other pairs also nested across the reserve, representing an increase of two pairs on 2009. Ten birds lingered near the Visitor Centre in the autumn and a very unusual record involved up to four birds regularly foraging under the feeders in snowy conditions in December.

**Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

*Resident in small numbers.*

As expected, seen throughout the year with no significant counts or records.

**Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellata* **AMBER**

*Extremely rare on Loch (five records). Present offshore throughout the year, with most in spring and autumn and rarer in summer.*

At the start of the year there were reasonable numbers offshore, with a peak of 14 on 10<sup>th</sup> February. After 12 on 21<sup>st</sup> March there were no more double figure counts in the spring and between 31<sup>st</sup> May and 7<sup>th</sup> September the only records were singles on 14<sup>th</sup> June and 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Autumn passage saw regular records of birds passing and feeding offshore with a peak of 16 on the sea on 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

**Black-throated Diver** *Gavia arctica* **AMBER**

*Rare visitor offshore, mostly September–April. Extremely rare on Loch (two records).*

The only record of the year concerned an individual in breeding plumage flying north offshore on 24<sup>th</sup> September.

**Great Northern Diver** *Gavia immer* **AMBER**

*Regular visitor offshore in variable numbers. Usually October – May, sometimes in large numbers in late winter.*

Small numbers were offshore early in the year, with an increase later in the winter resulting in a peak of 36 on 17<sup>th</sup> February. Good numbers remained during the early spring, although counts fluctuated as birds moved up and down the coast. Some of the flock were attaining breeding plumage by mid April and 29 still remained on 27<sup>th</sup> April. By early May small numbers of breeding plumaged birds were lingering on the sea, often close inshore, until the last three were seen on 25<sup>th</sup> May. The first returning bird of the autumn was on 27<sup>th</sup> October with small numbers seen until the end of the year, peaking at eight on 21<sup>st</sup> November.

**White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* \*

*Vagrant. No previous records.*

An adult in breeding plumage was observed flying north then landing on the sea during a seaway on 25<sup>th</sup> May. The species has recently been discovered to be a regular spring passage migrant in very small numbers off the Western Isles but still rare in the North Sea and this is the first record for the reserve (and has been accepted by the SBRC).

**Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* **AMBER**

*Common offshore visitor, although scarce in winter. Small numbers nest on islands on Loch.*

Recorded offshore in all months, with 25 moving south in 20 minutes on 16<sup>th</sup> February a typical sign of birds starting to return to the coast. By the spring numbers had increased and a typical count of passage involved 100 moving north in half an hour on 25<sup>th</sup> May. Larger numbers were recorded passing in the autumn, with the peak of 510 moving north in two hours (estimated from sample counts) on 11<sup>th</sup> August. There were very few records from the Loch this year, although a pair did nest on one of the islands. Sadly, as is generally the case for the species on the reserve, the attempt was not successful. An unusually late freshwater record involved a bird over the Savoich Burn on 29<sup>th</sup> August.

**Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* **AMBER**

*Scarce offshore visitor from August – October.*

The first of the year was an early bird moving north on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Northerly winds in mid August produced sightings of 3N on 15<sup>th</sup>, 8N on 16<sup>th</sup> and 2N on 18<sup>th</sup> August. In September there were 6S on 7<sup>th</sup>, 1N on 15<sup>th</sup>, 12N 4S on 23<sup>rd</sup>, 19N on 24<sup>th</sup> and a record count for the reserve of 140N on 25<sup>th</sup> (including 133N in three hours from 7.10am). During October there were 2N on 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, with one flying south on 24<sup>th</sup> the final record of the year.

**Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus* **AMBER**

*Common offshore visitor April – October, with peak counts usually June – September.*

**Table:** Manx shearwater numbers seen offshore

Month	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Dates recorded	3	3	6	11	6	1
Total	14 <sup>N</sup>	14 <sup>N</sup>	164 <sup>N</sup> 2 <sup>S</sup>	92 <sup>N</sup> 8 <sup>S</sup>	27 <sup>N</sup> 5 <sup>S</sup>	1 <sup>N</sup>

The first of the year was seen on the late date of 24<sup>th</sup> May, with low numbers generally recorded and only two counts above 30 all year; 141 north on 9<sup>th</sup> July and 31 north on 11<sup>th</sup> August. The last of the year flew north on 16<sup>th</sup> October.

**Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus* **AMBER**

*Vagrant, one previous record (August 2003).*

One was observed from the North End heading north in a relaxed manner close inshore on 15<sup>th</sup> August. Although never a common species off the Aberdeenshire coast, increased seawatching from the reserve would presumably result in more records.

**Gannet** *Morus bassanus* **AMBER**

*Common offshore visitor in all months, although scarcer in winter.*

Seen offshore in all months of the year, although only small numbers were recorded at the start of the year. By March larger numbers were on the move as birds returned to their breeding colonies, with around 200 moving north in 30 minutes on 12<sup>th</sup> March for example. Good numbers were feeding offshore during the summer and were seen passing by the reserve on several autumn dates. By far the most remarkable record was an adult fishing in the Loch on 24<sup>th</sup> May, almost certainly the first freshwater record for the reserve.

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* **GREEN** (all records are of race *P.c.carbo* **AMBER**)

*Common throughout year, both offshore and on the Loch. A small colony breeds on the Loch.*

Only small numbers were present early in the year, such as the eight recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> January WeBS. A slightly unusual breeding season saw the colonisation of Croft island, where twelve nests were recorded in early May, with at least eleven of these apparently producing young. Displaying and stick carrying was also noted on other islands on the Loch, although the only other confirmed successful nesting was the regular Rattray Island colony. The reserve total of 39 nests was virtually the same as 2009, suggesting that the Croft island birds had been displaced from the usual colony by high spring water levels. Productivity seemed good, with many juveniles noted and the peak count of 97 on 16<sup>th</sup> July presumably including many of these birds. One on Fen island was sitting on a nest in late August but was not successful. As usual small numbers were offshore throughout the year.

**Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* **AMBER**

*Common throughout the year offshore, extremely rare on the Loch (one record).*

Although noted offshore throughout the year there were no large counts.

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* **RED** \*

*Very rare winter visitor. Around 17 recorded since 1988, with records annual since 2001 (except for 2007). Numbers clouded by their elusive nature, long-stayers and returning birds. Winter visitor (mostly November – February) with very few recorded at other times of the year.*

After no records in the latter half of 2009, it was a pleasant surprise when one was seen in flight over the Loch on 2<sup>nd</sup> February before landing in reeds to the left of Fen Hide. It showed very well in the same area on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> and then again on 17<sup>th</sup> February. The final views were of the bird seen in flight on 27<sup>th</sup> February and 5<sup>th</sup> March. What was thought to be a different bird was seen feeding in reeds near the tower from the Tower Pool hide on 8<sup>th</sup> April.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* **AMBER**

*Former vagrant, but annual since 2002, with about 13 recorded in total. The first for the region was on the reserve in 1974, with the next not recorded until 1993. All in May – June, except for singles from December 2007 – May 2008 and June – September 2009.*

Maintaining the recent run of records on the reserve two were seen this year. A single was on the Visitor Centre pools on 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> June (arriving the day after the great white egret was last

seen!). and again on 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> June when it was on the Low Ground. A more unusual record was of one that appeared on the Visitor Centre pools on 31<sup>st</sup> October, where it lingered until 3<sup>rd</sup> November. It became the first record for both October (just!) and November and continued a recent trend for birds to arrive later in the year on the reserve. Despite being an annual visitor since 2002, it is possible that some of the recent records may relate to a single bird returning annually to Aberdeenshire, as there is still only one multiple record from the reserve.

#### **Great White Egret** *Ardea alba* \*

*Vagrant, eight previous records; one in 1978, then all others after 2000. All from April – June except one in November 2009.*

The two recorded in 2010 take the total seen on the reserve in the last three years to an amazing seven birds, making this stately visitor commoner at the Loch of Strathbeg than little egret or bittern on current form. With an increasing number of records in the UK, and colonisation being a distinct possibility, this recent trend will hopefully continue. This year's first was discovered feeding at the edge of the Loch on 21<sup>st</sup> April and it lingered in the area until 2<sup>nd</sup> May. It was not reported on some dates but this was presumably to do with its tendency to inhabit the mouth of the Savocho Burn, Mosstown Fen and other areas that were not easy to view, although it was seen to fly high to the north on 1<sup>st</sup> May, so it could have also been using other areas along the coast. The second was found on the Low Ground on 30<sup>th</sup> May, where it remained until 4<sup>th</sup> June. At various times during its stay it could be seen feeding alongside two cranes and a spoonbill, although it missed the little egret by a day! Both records have been accepted by the SBRC.

#### **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* **GREEN**

*Common non-breeding resident.*

As usual small numbers were seen across the reserve throughout the year. For the third year in succession the peak count was recorded in May, with slightly higher numbers this year when 18 were counted on 17<sup>th</sup> May. A count of 16 on 17<sup>th</sup> June on the Visitor Centre pools included several juveniles, presumably from a local heronry. Smaller numbers were recorded during the rest of the year including a bird seen heading north about a mile out to sea on 16<sup>th</sup> August. These movements have been recorded in previous autumns; do some Scottish birds head to the Northern Isles for the winter perhaps?

#### **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* **AMBER**

*Vagrant, c43 individuals recorded, some birds returning in successive years. Mostly May – August, with some seen later in the year. Recorded in 15 of the last 19 years.*

Two arrived during a heavy rain shower on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and stayed until the following day. In June there were a series of records of birds moving between the reserve and the Ythan estuary, 20 miles south as the spoonbill flies. A single was seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> June, with two seen from 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> then again on 21<sup>st</sup> June (feeding alongside a Caspian tern!), with a third bird joining them in the evening. All three remained on the 22<sup>nd</sup> with two lingering on the Low Ground and Visitor Centre pools until 25<sup>th</sup> June. A total of five birds during the year made for another good season for this exotic looking visitor.

#### **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* **AMBER**

*Can be seen throughout the year, although commoner in summer. One or two pairs breed.*

Birds were wintering on the pools and Savocho Burn, with at least three seen early in the year. By March displaying was heard regularly and three pairs were thought to have bred successfully, the largest number recorded nesting in recent years. As expected, small numbers lingered into the winter both along the Savocho Burn and on the Loch.

#### **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* **GREEN**

*Summer visitor to the Loch where small numbers nest. Rare in winter.*

The first of the year returned to the Loch on 21<sup>st</sup> February and birds were then present throughout the year. The peak count was 11 on 18<sup>th</sup> April with five pairs summering and fledging at least four chicks. At least three birds lingered on the Loch into October, with the last seen on 19<sup>th</sup> October.



**Slavonian Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* **AMBER**

*Scarce winter visitor to Loch, mostly September – March.*

Following on from a poor year in 2009 there were none seen in the first winter period. Passage birds occasionally appear in the spring, presumably as they head to breeding grounds elsewhere in Scotland or northern Europe and the first record this year was a pair in breeding plumage on the Loch on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. The first autumn bird was on the Loch on 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> August with one on the sea on 18<sup>th</sup> August. Two (including a juvenile) were on the Loch in early September, by mid October three were present and another was seen offshore on 16<sup>th</sup> October. The peak count was of six from Fen Hide on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, at least four lingered into early November with two until the end of the month and the last on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

**Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* **AMBER** \*

*Vagrant, five previous records. Four from 1979 – 1983 then one 1992, all June – September.*

One was seen over the car park on 5<sup>th</sup> June as it drifted low overhead heading inland. One of several rare raptors seen during the spring, it was fortunate timing for the two visitors who had just got out of their car when it flew over them!

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* \*

*Vagrant, one previous record in May 1979.*

This southern raptor was recorded for only the second time on the reserve when one was seen drifting in from the coast before apparently dropping down onto the Low Ground on 19<sup>th</sup> May. Unfortunately, it managed to slip away unnoticed and what may have been the same bird was seen later in the month on Deeside.

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* **AMBER**

*Vagrant, four previous records (1975, 1980, 1996, 2003), in March (2), June and November.*

One was watched feeding at the back of the Loch on 10<sup>th</sup> April. The bird was seen to be untagged and this, along with the timing of the record, suggests that it may have been a migrant from mainland Europe. What may have been the same bird was seen a couple of hours later over Glendaveny (11km to the south west of the reserve) as it flew over the house of a reserve volunteer! The sixth for the reserve was seen over the dunes on 25<sup>th</sup> July where it lingered until 19<sup>th</sup> August. The bird, a male, was tagged ('Blue 55') as a nestling near Fortrose on the Black Isle just a few weeks previously and is likely to have made the 130km journey to Loch of Strathbeg on its first flight away from the nest!

**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* **RED**

*Vagrant, five records. Untagged birds (October 2000, March 2007), a Finnish ringed immature (March 2004) and birds from the Fife reintroduction (October 2007 and from March 2009).*

The popular immature ('Ralf') from the 2008 reintroduction remained on the reserve in the early part of the year and was seen virtually daily until 16<sup>th</sup> March, completing just over a year on the reserve. He regularly used the Low Ground where he was seen to catch wigeon and even knock a whooper swan out of the sky. He was also seen interacting with foxes on several occasions, with neither side being sure who should be the hunter and who should be the hunted! On 3<sup>rd</sup> January he stole food from a carrion crow and ate it on the ice covering the Visitor Centre pools. On 23<sup>rd</sup> February, a bird with missing primaries on the left wing was seen coming in off the sea at the North End. Photographs of 'Ralf' taken around the same time suggested that this was a different bird. A third bird was seen on 8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> April, when an individual from the 2009 reintroduction (with turquoise tags) was seen at the south end of the Loch then circling over the Low Ground, although unfortunately the tags could not be read. For more information about the reintroduction project, visit:

[www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/projects/eastscotlandeagles/index.asp](http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/projects/eastscotlandeagles/index.asp)

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* **AMBER**

*Annual summer visitor (March – September) in small numbers. Has shown signs of breeding behaviour, but has not yet nested successfully on the reserve. Autumn passage regularly includes birds wing-tagged at the Tay Estuary.*

The first bird of the year, a female, was seen on 7<sup>th</sup> April, later than last year but still a fairly typical arrival date. This began a good series of records with virtually daily sightings until late September, although sadly there was no evidence of any breeding activity. There were never more than three seen on any date, but the actual number of birds will have been higher, for

example in late April when two males were seen, with two females a few days later. Most sightings referred to females and immature birds, with very few adult males seen. A female was seen taking a teal on 5<sup>th</sup> May in an exciting encounter. The teal was brought down by a peregrine, the harrier tried to get in on the act, which attracted the attention of an osprey that joined in the fight! Whilst the osprey and peregrine were fighting each other, the harrier dealt the final blow to the teal by holding it underwater for several minutes, before sneaking off into a juncus patch, presumably for a quiet meal! The first juveniles appeared in early August and included one with a white rump patch, with the last of the year on 25<sup>th</sup> September.

**Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* **RED**

*Scarce winter visitor (mostly September to May) with occasional summer records.*

Regular sightings at the start of the year involved at least four birds, an adult male and three ringtails, with at least three remaining until February and a pair lingering until the last of the spring was seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. A ringtail harrier by the entrance track on 21<sup>st</sup> August was not positively identified, but was probably this species. From 25<sup>th</sup> September a juvenile was seen irregularly until the end of the year and was joined occasionally by a male from 1<sup>st</sup> December.

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* **GREEN**

*Regular visitor throughout the year with several individuals usually seen during the winter.*

Birds were recorded throughout the year with at least three individuals present in the first winter period. A pair bred successfully on the reserve, fledging at least two chicks. It may have been one of these juveniles that stooped at a mallard sat on one of the Croft islands on 25<sup>th</sup> August, needless to say, it was not successful!

**Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* **GREEN**

*Common resident with a few pairs nesting. Sightings in autumn may involve some migrants.*

A daily sight on the reserve throughout the year, with no particularly large counts noted. Territorial birds were seen at several locations across the reserve, with two or three pairs probably breeding. A very pale bird seen circling over the North End of the reserve before drifting inland on 27<sup>th</sup> October may have been a continental migrant.

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* **AMBER**

*Scarce summer visitor, usually from May – September.*

In recent years it has been normal to see ospreys on about a dozen occasions during the summer, so this year proved to be one of the best for this species on the reserve. The first was fishing in the Loch on 4<sup>th</sup> May. Singles on five other May dates included birds fishing in the Loch and catching a pike in the Silt Trap. The first half of June saw sightings on three dates including the first multiple record when two were recorded on 5<sup>th</sup> June. Three were seen together on 27<sup>th</sup> June which started a series of virtually daily records until 11<sup>th</sup> August. Sightings were usually of one or two birds, but four were seen together on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. During this time birds regularly perched on posts on the Low Ground to feed and preen and singles were seen tussling in the air with a red kite on at least two occasions! The final sighting was a bird seen from 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> August, completing a memorable year for this spectacular raptor.

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* **AMBER**

*Present throughout the year in small numbers. Family parties usually seen in late summer.*

Birds were noted throughout the year across the reserve, with a popular pair regularly seen feeding close to the Visitor Centre, with one of them seen to catch a vole on 21<sup>st</sup> February. More unusual prey was noted on the Low Ground on 2<sup>nd</sup> June when a female was seen catching bees! Five birds in the dunes on 16<sup>th</sup> August again hinted that breeding may have taken place locally.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius* **AMBER**

*Scarce visitor, mostly in winter (August – May).*

The large flocks of farmland birds on the reserve early in the year attracted at least three of these dashing hunters. By March sightings were tailing off and the last of the spring was seen on 22<sup>nd</sup> April. The first of the autumn were two at the south of the Loch on 11<sup>th</sup> August with a few sightings, mostly in the dunes, through into September. By October sightings were regular across the reserve with at least two individuals involved. The only prey item seen being caught was meadow pipit, but a variety of other species were seen being pursued.

**Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus* **GREEN** (all records are race: *F.p.peregrinus* **AMBER**).

*Recorded throughout the year, with several individuals often present on the reserve. Most sightings occurring during August to March.*

Sightings were regular in the first part of the year, with at least three individuals present until the last spring record on 27<sup>th</sup> May. The first 'autumn' sighting was on 27<sup>th</sup> June, with at least two present by the first week of July. Sightings were then regular until the end of the year, with at least four present in September – October. A juvenile stooping at rabbits on 25<sup>th</sup> August was probably just practising, with several more typical prey species seen being chased, including various ducks and waders. A large falcon first seen on 10<sup>th</sup> March on the Low Ground and lingering in the area until early May caused some discussion about its identity. A pale fore crown and supercilium, white cheeks and pale mantle colour invited a range of suggestions from peregrine to lanner or some sort of falconer's hybrid. Given the size, build and other plumage features it seems most likely that the bird was a peregrine, possibly of the northern subspecies *F.p.calidus*, although identification in the field is not possible due to the variation amongst individuals.

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus* **GREEN**

*A breeding resident, found in reedbed areas throughout the reserve.*

This typically elusive resident was again recorded in several areas across the reserve, although most birds were just heard calling. The remains of one were found by the Fen Hide boardwalk on 21<sup>st</sup> March, apparently having been killed by a raptor, showing one of the reasons that they generally stay hidden! A series of sightings from Fen Hide in mid August included the appearance of a chick on 25<sup>th</sup>, with three adults also there late in the month.

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* **GREEN**

*Common resident with several pairs nesting on the reserve.*

Present throughout the year but typically under-recorded, with the peak of just seven on WeBS on 18<sup>th</sup> April being an obvious undercount. The first chick was noted on 14<sup>th</sup> May on the Visitor Centre pools, with at least two families being raised on the island and a brood of six new chicks here on 16<sup>th</sup> August, a rather late date. Other broods were on the Savocho Burn and several areas of the Loch, although there was no indication of the total population.

**Coot** *Fulica atra* **GREEN**

*Present throughout the year, with several pairs breeding. Large flocks are present on the Loch in late summer and early autumn.*

Following the good numbers recorded at the end of 2009 there were still 241 on the Loch on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, although numbers declined after this. Another successful breeding season saw several broods reared across the reserve, with the Savocho Burn and pool in front of the Visitor Centre again proving favoured areas. The autumn build up of numbers saw peaks of 186, 293 and 309 from August to October and an impressive 754 on 14<sup>th</sup> November, the largest ever count on the reserve (just beating the previous record of 750 from September 1978). The freezing of the Loch in December saw the vast majority of the birds move on.

**Crane** *Grus grus* **AMBER** \*

*Vagrant, around 22 records involving about 34 birds. Most recorded March – June, with a secondary peak in August – September and occasional summering. Passage birds are regularly seen displaying. Since 1996, there have been only three years without records.*

A typical series of records started with one on the 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> April, which was seen flying off west late morning on the latter date. A pair then arrived during the afternoon of 30<sup>th</sup> May and provided a spectacular sight as they strode around the Low Ground. What were presumably the same pair were then seen again on the Low Ground on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and what could also have been the same two birds were seen flying off from the Low Ground on 26<sup>th</sup> June.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* **AMBER**

*Common resident, breeding attempted annually, but productivity usually poor.*

There were good numbers on the coast early in the year, with 56 on the Camples on 28<sup>th</sup> January. By 7<sup>th</sup> February, the first birds had returned to the pools and pairs were soon displaying at various locations across the reserve, although some may have been passing through to inland breeding grounds. The peak count at this time was 49 on 18<sup>th</sup> March. After many years of failures, no birds attempted to nest on the Visitor Centre island, but a pair

elsewhere on the reserve were successful and fledged two chicks. High counts in August included 54 on 7<sup>th</sup> and 50 on 18<sup>th</sup> (flying south offshore in one flock) with the autumn peak of 60 recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> September. Only small numbers were recorded thereafter.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* **GREEN**

*Scarce passage migrant (April – August). The first for the reserve occurred in 1991 and was only the second record for North-east Scotland this century. There have now been around 40 seen on the reserve, with records annual since 2001.*

The first was seen on the Visitor Centre pools on the typical date of 27<sup>th</sup> April. An unspectacular spring passage saw single birds on 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> June, presumably relating to just two birds. The only autumn record was of a single on the pools on 20<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> August.

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* **AMBER**

*Common visitor, with largest numbers in spring and autumn.*

The first was not seen until 5<sup>th</sup> March which started a series of regular sightings, presumably of birds heading north to breeding grounds. From late April numbers began to increase and there were 46 on the coast on 1<sup>st</sup> May, with flocks also using the Low Ground and Visitor Centre pools around this time. A noticeable influx later in the month saw a peak of 220 in the Lagoon on 27<sup>th</sup> May. Up to nine were present through the summer, although breeding was not thought to have taken place on the reserve. Autumn passage was light with a peak of just 30 on 11<sup>th</sup> August (28 of which were flying south offshore).

**Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* **AMBER**

*Currently a scarce spring passage migrant due to a regular 'trip' that has been seen annually since 2003 (except 2007). Prior to that, the only records were four in spring 1852 and autumn singles in 1976 and 1999.*

The regular spring 'trip' occurred again at the North End of the reserve, with numbers building up to a joint highest count for the reserve and the flock lingering for a record length of time. The first were seen on 4<sup>th</sup> May (the earliest record for the reserve), when eight were discovered. Numbers during May increased to ten on 10<sup>th</sup>, 16 on 11<sup>th</sup> before peaking at 30 on 14<sup>th</sup> with numbers then declining to 17 on 15<sup>th</sup>, 16 on 16<sup>th</sup> and finally 12 on 17<sup>th</sup>. The weather at the time was cold, with a northerly wind and extensive snow on higher ground and it was speculated that this was preventing the dotterels from returning to their breeding grounds.

**Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* **AMBER**

*Common passage visitor with large numbers in late summer and autumn.*

The coastal fields often prove attractive to this species and in the early winter period the largest count came from here when 250 were present on 28<sup>th</sup> January. Similar numbers lingered until late March and by April parties of birds could be seen heading north, with 200 passing over on 24<sup>th</sup> April for example. Few were seen later in the spring, although up to 22 in breeding plumage could be seen alongside the dotterels at the North End in early May. By mid July 150 were back on the reserve, but autumn counts were disappointing with generally just 50 – 80 recorded, although there were 500 on WeBS on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* **AMBER**

*A common passage visitor in small numbers in spring and autumn, with a few sometimes seen in winter. Regularly recorded from the coast and freshwater areas.*

The first record of the year was of two on 23<sup>rd</sup> February on the Camples with five on the beach three days later. The only spring record was six on the Visitor Centre pools on 25<sup>th</sup> April. Between 26<sup>th</sup> September and 17<sup>th</sup> October up to five were on the reserve, usually around the lagoon but with the occasional visit to the pools. The only other records were of birds passing offshore, with six north on 24<sup>th</sup> October and one north on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* **RED**

*Breeding resident, with large flocks in autumn and winter.*

The highest count in the early part of the year was 600 in a mixed flock with golden plover in the coastal fields on 28<sup>th</sup> January. The first birds were seen displaying on 15<sup>th</sup> February and, although good numbers were around, only 15 pairs were thought to have bred (two less than 2009) and no chicks were reared as poor weather (possibly resulting in birds being in poor

condition for the breeding season) and predation affected success. Over 300 were back on the pools by the end of June, with numbers increasing through the autumn and peaks of 347 in July, 567 in August, 945 in September, 750 in October and 990 on 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

**Knot** *Calidris canutus* **AMBER**

*Common passage visitor, with largest numbers on the coast from July – August. Small numbers regularly use the freshwater areas in the autumn.*

The first of the year were typically seen on spring passage, although the number involved was impressive, with 300 breeding plumaged adults on the Camples and a further 20 in the Lagoon on 10<sup>th</sup> May. On 14<sup>th</sup> May an adult was on the Low Ground, the only other spring record. Autumn passage commenced with 30 on 16<sup>th</sup> July. On 10<sup>th</sup> August 22 flew south, preceding a series of records until 17<sup>th</sup> September, with a peak of five on the coast and three on the Visitor Centre pools. The final record was one on the Low Ground on 3<sup>rd</sup> November.

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba* **GREEN**

*Common passage visitor, mostly between May – September. Almost exclusively coastal.*

The first record was of four flying north on 2<sup>nd</sup> February with 12 on the beach on 26<sup>th</sup> February. A typical spring record concerned 25 on the beach on 27<sup>th</sup> May. Ten flying south on 18<sup>th</sup> August saw the start of autumn passage, with regular records on the beach until 10<sup>th</sup> September, peaking at 20 on 21<sup>st</sup> August. A very unusual record concerned one feeding (with four turnstone, a knot and a bar-tailed godwit) on the Low Ground on 31<sup>st</sup> August. The last of the year were on 23<sup>rd</sup> October when two were on the beach and one flew north.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* **GREEN**

*Uncommon passage migrant May – June and August – September, commonest in autumn.*

Spring records are not common so two this year was good, with individuals recorded on the Low Ground on 17<sup>th</sup> May and 3<sup>rd</sup> June. A very quiet autumn for this diminutive wader saw just two records, with one on the Visitor Centre pools on 12<sup>th</sup> September and two juveniles in the Lagoon on 30<sup>th</sup> September.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* **RED** \*

*Vagrant, 23 individuals previously recorded. Most in May – June, with two July records.*

A record breaking year for this unassuming wader with a series of sightings in the spring thought to relate to five separate individuals. The first sighting was of two found together on the Low Ground in the evening of the 1<sup>st</sup> May. The next sighting was not until 23<sup>rd</sup> May when one was found on the pools and this was assumed to be one of the two birds on the Low Ground on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> May. The Low Ground still held two on 26<sup>th</sup> May, with singles seen on 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May and 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> June thought to relate to one of these birds lingering. The fifth bird was on the pools on 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> June, a relatively late date for a spring passage bird. Given that only twice in the past have birds lingered on the reserve for more than three days it is possible that the series of records from 23<sup>rd</sup> May to 3<sup>rd</sup> June may have involved a greater turnover of individuals than the conservative estimate of just two birds.

**Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* \*

*Scarce passage visitor (April – October), mostly in autumn (peak in September) although increasingly in spring. Previously a vagrant, but c57 have been seen to end of 2009 and sightings have been annual since 1999 (with several multiple records, including a flock of seven in autumn 2008). A pair may have bred in 2004.*

A single on the Low Ground on 5<sup>th</sup> May made this the fourth consecutive spring the species was recorded on the reserve. There were no further records until an elusive individual (which may have been commuting to the nearby coast) was seen on 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> September. What was probably a second bird was present on the Visitor Centre pools on from 24<sup>th</sup> September, with virtually daily sightings until early October when two were present on 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>, then three were seen together on 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> October. The sixth of the year was on the Visitor Centre pools on 16<sup>th</sup> October, completing another good year for this American and Siberian species.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* **GREEN**

*Scarce passage visitor in spring and autumn.*

A relatively quiet year, with the only spring record on the Low Ground on 27<sup>th</sup> May. In the

autumn there were just two records of juveniles; singles on the Low Ground on 22<sup>nd</sup> August and in the Lagoon on 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

**Purple Sandpiper** *Calidris maritima* **AMBER**

*Uncommon winter visitor to rocky coastal areas of the reserve.*

Although never a common visitor to the reserve, this year proved exceptionally quiet for this rocky coast specialist. The only records were two on the Camples on 6<sup>th</sup> March with one there on 18<sup>th</sup> March.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* **RED**

*Common passage visitor (March – November) with small numbers present in winter.*

Good numbers were around on the reserve early in the year, with flocks using the Low Ground and coastal areas and a peak of 83 on 28<sup>th</sup> January. At least 74 lingered in February, but by March only 48 remained and by April most counts were in single figures as birds returned to their breeding areas. Several waves of migrants in May saw peaks of up to 40, with only a few still passing through in June. The first returning autumn birds appeared from 4<sup>th</sup> July with the first juvenile on 9<sup>th</sup> July. Birds were present throughout the autumn with peaks of 34 in August, 66 in September and 25 in October. Small numbers were seen throughout the autumn and in December there was a peak on the 30<sup>th</sup> of 55 on the Low Ground.

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* \*

*Vagrant, three previous records (of five birds), all in September and October.*

The first spring record for the reserve occurred when one was seen on the Low Ground on 17<sup>th</sup> May. Although it was not seen again, a record of buff-breasted sandpiper from nearby Rattray Head later in the month may perhaps have related to the same individual, which could easily have been lurking somewhere undiscovered in the intervening period.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* **RED**

*Common passage visitor from April to November. Spring passage peaks in May, with largest numbers in August or September. Passage birds have been noted displaying in spring.*

Small numbers in spring began with two on 11<sup>th</sup> April, with one remaining the following day. There were further singles in spring on 17<sup>th</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> May, then eight arrived on 24<sup>th</sup> May, with three lingering until 29<sup>th</sup> May. A male was seen on 4<sup>th</sup> July and then from 26<sup>th</sup> July birds were present virtually daily through the autumn. Several waves of arrivals during this time saw peaks of 18 on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 40 on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 31 on 19<sup>th</sup> September and the year's highest count of 47 on 6<sup>th</sup> October. Eight remained until the end of October, with two present until 22<sup>nd</sup> November. Three on 15<sup>th</sup> December were an unusually late record.

**Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus* **AMBER**

*A scarce passage migrant and winter visitor, its cryptic colouration and behaviour mean it is almost certainly under recorded, with most records of birds flushed during management work.*

Two in the burn at the North End of the reserve on 8<sup>th</sup> January were birds fleeing to the coast from harsh weather conditions. Two were flushed from the Low Ground on 15<sup>th</sup> March, one was seen from the Tower Pool path on 16<sup>th</sup> March and two were on Mosstown Marsh on 6<sup>th</sup> April, all possibly spring passage birds. The first returning bird was flushed from the Visitor Centre pools during grass cutting on the 19<sup>th</sup> August, with further migrants seen flying over the Cut on 29<sup>th</sup> September and near the Tower Pool path on 14<sup>th</sup> October and 3<sup>rd</sup> November.

**Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* **AMBER**

*Present throughout the year, with largest numbers usually in autumn (July – October). Display often noted in spring but breeding not proven in recent years.*

Small numbers were seen early in the year, with eight along the beach and at the North End seeking unfrozen habitat on 8<sup>th</sup> January. An apparent spring influx saw 40 on the pools on 14<sup>th</sup> April, but very few lingered after this, with up to three staying into mid May. One over the marsh on 4<sup>th</sup> June was the only summer record before autumn migrants were noted from 8<sup>th</sup> July. Up to 30 were present by early August and a large influx later in the month saw a count of 109 on 31<sup>st</sup> August. Good numbers remained into early September and later in the month migrants were seen coming in off the sea and moving south along the coast. During the rest of the year counts were generally of less than 20, with freezing conditions probably forcing many birds to leave the reserve.

**Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* **AMBER**

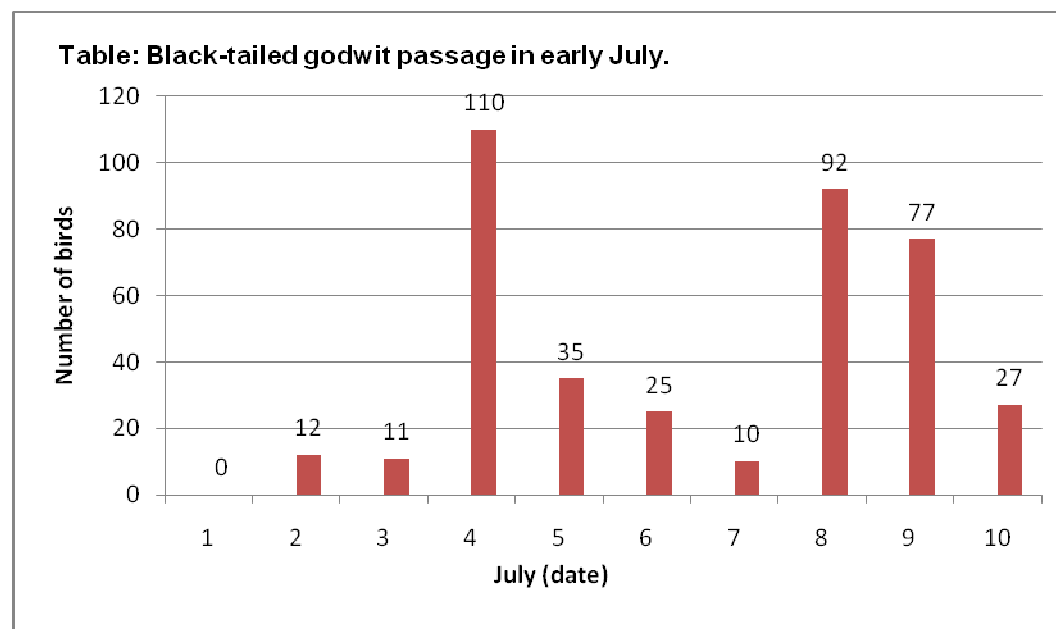
*Regular winter visitor in small numbers, also recorded on passage in spring and autumn. Influxes can occur in October – November and in hard weather in winter.*

Heavy snow forced birds to the coast in the first two weeks of January, with birds noted in several areas of the reserve. At least 20 were seen (although many more may have been present in low densities across the reserve), with a peak of eight in the plantation on 11<sup>th</sup> January. Small numbers continued to be recorded until 27<sup>th</sup> February after which there were none seen until the autumn. The first returning migrant was noted at dusk over the car park on 15<sup>th</sup> November and singles were noted on several dates until the end of the year from this area, the Fen Hide boardwalk and the plantation. The only larger counts were an impressive 14 in the plantation on 30<sup>th</sup> November and two in the Rookery the following day.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* **RED** (all records likely to be: *L.l.islandica* **AMBER**)

*Common passage visitor from April to October, with peak counts usually in May and August.*

The first of the year was on the Visitor Centre pools on 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> March. In early April one or two were recorded on several dates, with the first flocks arriving from mid-month, peaks during this time included 19 on 17<sup>th</sup>, 24 on 20<sup>th</sup> and 23 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, with smaller numbers in between these dates suggesting a turnover of birds. May passage was light, with a peak of just nine between 4<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May. The first returning autumn migrants arrived on 2<sup>nd</sup> July and heralded a record breaking passage early in the month (see table). Unfortunately all the birds were adults, suggesting they were failed breeders leaving the breeding grounds early.



Numbers in the rest of July were unremarkable, with peaks of 45 on 17<sup>th</sup> and 28 on 28<sup>th</sup> July. Between one and eight were seen on the pools between 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> August (including the first juvenile on 9<sup>th</sup> August) and ten flew south offshore on 10<sup>th</sup> August. Another small wave between 21<sup>st</sup> August and 6<sup>th</sup> September peaked at 14 from 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> August. Between 25<sup>th</sup> September and 6<sup>th</sup> October birds were seen almost daily, with a peak of 20 on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, then three were on the pools on 12<sup>th</sup> October and a late bird was seen on 27<sup>th</sup> October.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* **AMBER**

*Uncommon passage visitor from April to October, usually on the coast, although also seen on the freshwater pools. Occasional winter visitor.*

A single was with curlews on the Low Ground and Visitor Centre pools on 27<sup>th</sup> January and 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> February. Spring passage was restricted to one on the beach on 10<sup>th</sup> May. Autumn passage commenced with a surprising record of four adults on the Visitor Centre pools on 17<sup>th</sup> July. Further adults flew south over the Loch on 10<sup>th</sup> August and south offshore on 20<sup>th</sup> August. A juvenile was on the Low Ground on 20<sup>th</sup> August where it lingered until 22<sup>nd</sup> when it was joined by a second bird. Another was on the Low Ground on 30<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> August and two

birds flew north offshore on 25<sup>th</sup> September. The only late winter record was one in the Lagoon on 7<sup>th</sup> December.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* **RED**

*Common passage visitor April – September with largest numbers in spring (April – May).*

The first of the year were recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> April, when three flew east. Passage continued throughout late April and into May with small numbers seen (and heard) across the reserve, particularly at the North End where the peak of 21 was recorded on 10<sup>th</sup> May. The final spring record was on 27<sup>th</sup> May and autumn passage commenced with one on 16<sup>th</sup> July WeBS. One or two were recorded on five dates from 7<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> August in a quiet autumn for the species.

**Curlew** *Numenius arquata* **AMBER**

*Common throughout the year, but doesn't breed. Largest flocks August – March.*

Monthly maxima

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
160	545	435	150	24	42	212	240	109	102	420	52

A fairly typical year in terms of the pattern of records, although the February and November counts were significantly higher than the winter peaks in 2009. A bird carrying out some half-hearted display in early spring raised hopes briefly of a breeding attempt but the species again stubbornly refused to contemplate nesting on the reserve.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* **AMBER**

*Common passage migrant, April – September.*

A quiet year for this bobbing denizen of upland streams. The first was on the Visitor Centre pools on 15<sup>th</sup> May (one day earlier than 2009's first) with the only other spring record also here on 24<sup>th</sup> May. The first of the autumn was on New island on 8<sup>th</sup> July, with one on the pools on 17<sup>th</sup> July and three on the Low Ground on 20<sup>th</sup> with one remaining to 23<sup>rd</sup> July.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* **AMBER**

*Scarce spring visitor and common autumn passage migrant.*

The first of the year was on the early date of 9<sup>th</sup> April on the Low Ground with other spring records consisting of two on the Cut on 24<sup>th</sup> April and one over the Wildlife Garden on 28<sup>th</sup> April. Autumn passage commenced with one on the Visitor Centre pools on 11<sup>th</sup> July. One on the pools on 23<sup>rd</sup> July started a good run of records, with birds seen on 13 further dates to the end of August, peaking at four on 30<sup>th</sup> July, with two recorded on several dates. The final birds of the year were again on the pools, with two on 9<sup>th</sup> and one on 12<sup>th</sup> September.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus* **AMBER**

*Scarce passage visitor, most common in autumn (August – September) with fewer in spring.*

A smart summer-plumaged adult was on the Low Ground on 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> May. The first autumn record was on 14<sup>th</sup> August, then on 25<sup>th</sup> two arrived on the Low Ground, with both remaining the next day and one until 27<sup>th</sup> August. Singles were on the Visitor Centre pools on 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> September, with a very late bird on 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November.

**Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* **GREEN**

*Common passage migrant in spring and autumn.*

The first was on the early date of 17<sup>th</sup> April, with further spring birds on 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> April, 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> May, 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> May (with two on 27<sup>th</sup>) and 7<sup>th</sup> June. Autumn passage commenced on 3<sup>rd</sup> July with birds then present virtually daily until the last of the year on 29<sup>th</sup> October. A noticeable increase in numbers was noted from mid July, with the peak count of 17 occurring on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. Numbers tailed off until late August when up to 11 were present, then throughout September numbers peaked at just four.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* **AMBER**

*Scarce passage visitor, mostly May – August, with peak numbers usually in spring.*

Another excellent year for this delicate species, with the Loch of Strathbeg undoubtedly the best site in the region to connect with wood sandpipers on migration. The first was on the Low Ground on 5<sup>th</sup> May, with four together here on 10<sup>th</sup> May the peak count for the year. The next



was a single on 14<sup>th</sup> May, with three elusive birds present from 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> May. The last of the spring was a single from 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> May which was seen display flying on one occasion. The only early autumn record was one on 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> July. One on 12<sup>th</sup> September was followed by three on 19<sup>th</sup>, a single from 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>, with two on 23<sup>rd</sup> and singles on 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September, an unusually strong late autumn showing.

**Redshank *Tringa totanus* AMBER**

*Present throughout the year (largest counts usually in autumn) with winter records mostly from coastal areas. Breeds in small numbers.*

Numbers were higher in all seasons than in 2009, with larger flocks generally using the coast. In January 58 were present on 28<sup>th</sup>, the peak count for the year. Good numbers were present in the spring, with 52 on the Visitor Centre pools on 17<sup>th</sup> April for example, and up to eight pairs seemingly holding territory. Although five pairs were thought to have attempted breeding, no chicks were seen in what was generally a poor year for breeding waders. Thirty flying south on 9<sup>th</sup> July were a sign of autumn passage, with several counts of over 40 in July and August, peaking on 18<sup>th</sup> when 56 were on the coast. Numbers were generally in single figures during the rest of the autumn, although 41 were on the Camples on 21<sup>st</sup> November.

**Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* AMBER**

*Present throughout the year along the coast, usually in quite low numbers. Very rare on the freshwater areas of the reserve.*

Although recorded on the coast until May and then again from August, there were no notable counts. Southerly passage was recorded on the coast on 10<sup>th</sup> August with 13 passing in two hours along with various other waders. For the third consecutive year there was a freshwater record, with four feeding on the Low Ground on 31<sup>st</sup> August providing an unusual sight.

**Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* \***

*Vagrant, six previous records involving eight individuals; five on freshwater (two in July, singles in September, October and November) and three at sea (October 2008).*

Recorded for the third successive year on the reserve when one was seen moving north offshore on the morning of 14<sup>th</sup> November. This is the latest record for the reserve, although it is not an atypical date for this species to be recorded offshore if there are northerly winds.

**Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* RED**

*Vagrant, two records of five birds in autumn 2009.*

Greater seawatching effort is starting to reflect the true status of this species on the reserve and this year there were four more records of this powerful pirate from the seawatching point. The first occurred on 17<sup>th</sup> August when an adult moved south, an immature moved north on 20<sup>th</sup> August, an adult went north on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and the final record of the year concerned an adult passing close inshore as it headed south on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

**Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* RED**

*A common summer visitor (May – October) offshore, with peak numbers usually in late summer when several may linger and harry terns on the coast*

A poor year for this lithe summer visitor. All records came from the seawatching point at the North End of the reserve. The first record was on 25<sup>th</sup> May when three moved north. Three were seen on 19<sup>th</sup> June, with July records consisting of five north on 9<sup>th</sup>, eight north and one south (the peak count of the year) on 21<sup>st</sup> and five north on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. A total of just 45 birds (20 north and 25 south) were reported passing on 13 dates in August, with a peak count of just eight on 13<sup>th</sup> August. Only two were reported in September and the last record was two moving south on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

**Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* AMBER**

*Common summer visitor (April – October) in small numbers offshore.*

**Table:** Great Skua numbers seen offshore

Month	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Dates recorded	1	1	1	6	13	5	1	1
Total	1 <sup>N</sup>	4 <sup>N</sup>	2 <sup>N</sup>	12 <sup>N</sup> 1 <sup>S</sup>	80 <sup>N</sup> 8 <sup>S</sup>	32 <sup>N</sup>	1 <sup>N</sup>	1 <sup>N</sup>

Records fell between 21<sup>st</sup> April and 17<sup>th</sup> November with most moving in August, but there were no large counts; the peak was just 18 on 13<sup>th</sup> August. The only record away from the seawatching point was of one over the Low Ground and Loch on 29<sup>th</sup> August.

**Sabine's Gull** *Larus sabini* \*

*Vagrant. No previous records.*

With more seawatching taking place on the reserve, it was perhaps not a surprise that this scarce visitor to the North Sea from its Canadian Arctic breeding grounds made its debut on the reserve list, although two in one year was not expected. The first was a juvenile seen drifting south early in the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> September, with the second seen flying north on 24<sup>th</sup> September. Both were seen from the seawatching point at the North End.

**Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* **AMBER**

*A common summer visitor offshore, with a few lingering throughout the winter. A less than annual visitor to the freshwater areas of the reserve.*

Small numbers were offshore in the early part of the year, with around 200 moving north in half an hour on 12<sup>th</sup> March indicating spring passage to breeding areas. Although strong passage was noted on some dates during the summer and autumn, there were no further counts. A first summer was on the pools on 25<sup>th</sup> May, the only freshwater record of the year of this almost exclusively marine species and just a day after a gannet was fishing on the Loch!

**Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus* **AMBER**

*Common resident, breeds in good numbers.*

There were no significant counts in the winter. Numbers started to rise in the spring as birds returned to their breeding areas, with well over 400 on the Visitor Centre pools by the end of March. A good breeding season saw a similar number of nests to 2009, with 292 recorded (239 on the Visitor Centre island and 53 on the Croft islands). Little predation was noted and 247 fledged juveniles were recorded on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. There were no large counts in the winter as birds generally moved away from the reserve.

**Little Gull** *Larus minutus* **AMBER**

*Passage migrant in variable numbers from April to September. In recent years, some immature birds have summered.*

The first of the year was a first-summer bird discovered on the Visitor Centre pools on 21<sup>st</sup> May. This marked the start of an almost constant presence on the reserve of this species until early July, with two first year birds regularly recorded and peaks of three on 24<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> June. There were no records for a fortnight in mid July, but from 23<sup>rd</sup> until early August up to two young birds were again present. During this time there were also adults noted on the Visitor Centre pools on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July. Later in their stay birds were often found feeding over the Loch, with the last here recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> August. Two late records may have related to the same bird, a second-winter bird on the beach on 26<sup>th</sup> September and 10<sup>th</sup> October.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* **AMBER**

*Scarce, year round visitor, most records in early spring. c20 seen since first record in 1996.*

A disappointing spring saw just one record, an adult with a damaged right leg on 8<sup>th</sup> March. The first two weeks of March have been the best time to catch up with this species on the reserve in recent years and the limping adult seems to be a regularly returning bird. July provided three records, with adults on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> and a tatty second-summer at the south end of the Loch on 8<sup>th</sup> July. A second-summer was also briefly on the Visitor Centre pools on 8<sup>th</sup> August. With multiple records in the last four years, it seems likely that this species has become a regular fixture on the reserve year list.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus* **AMBER**

*Common throughout the year, with peak numbers in winter. Birds passing through in spring are sometimes noted displaying.*

In the early part of the year 400 were on the pools on 7<sup>th</sup> February, although this is likely to be only a fraction of the number of birds using the reserve. In late April several groups were moving through the pools, presumably on spring passage, and displaying was noted although breeding was not attempted.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* **AMBER**

*Common non-breeding summer visitor in variable numbers, usually from March – September.*

The first of the year was on the typical date of 8<sup>th</sup> March, again turning up on the same date as the first Mediterranean gull! At least eight were present by the end of March, with very few large counts during the year and a peak of 22 on 29<sup>th</sup> May. Although a pair were seen copulating in early June, there was not thought to have been a breeding attempt on the reserve. Small numbers lingered into the autumn, with the last of the year on 24<sup>th</sup> September.

**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* **RED**

*Present throughout the year, often in large numbers, although does not breed on the reserve.*

A generally under recorded species, the first count of any significance was 150 on the beach on 27<sup>th</sup> May. Breeding occurs less than annually on the reserve, so the pair that nested on New island and fledged two young represented a good record. During the summer large numbers used the Visitor Centre pools for loafing, with 592 counted on 23<sup>rd</sup> July.

**Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* **AMBER**

*Scarce winter visitor (September – April), virtually annual in recent years.*

Two, an adult and immature, were on the Loch on 29<sup>th</sup> January and an adult was on the Loch on 14<sup>th</sup> March. A reasonable year for this northern brute of a bird.

**Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* **AMBER**

*Common, particularly in winter, when large flocks often gather during stormy weather.*

Present throughout the year with 120 on the Visitor Centre pools on 21<sup>st</sup> January and an impressive 600 at the mouth of the Cut on 27<sup>th</sup> May. Small numbers lingered on the reserve during the summer and breeding was confirmed for the first time on the reserve when a pair raised one chick on New island. Numbers increased in the autumn, with 289 on the Low Ground on 27<sup>th</sup> September. Stormy conditions often see flocks of this usually maritime species shelter on the reserve and strong northerly winds on 8<sup>th</sup> November brought 1,560 to the fields, a very large count. One on 15<sup>th</sup> December was seen to catch and kill a wigeon.

**Little Tern** *Sterna albifrons* **AMBER**

*Vagrant, seen in four years, with seven records of eleven birds. All between May and July except for a late record of two birds in September 2008.*

At least one was heard flying north offshore on 1<sup>st</sup> July, a typical date and location for this predominantly coastal species which remains very rare on the reserve.

**Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* \*

*Vagrant, one previous record (August 1974).*

An appearance of one of these monster terns on 21<sup>st</sup> June was one of the highlights of the year. Having initially been seen over RSPB Meikle Loch nature reserve (on the Ythan estuary) at around 8am, it was relocated fishing over the Loch of Strathbeg at 10.40am before spending several hours on the pools. As is typical for the species it did not linger for long and had left the reserve by 3.45pm and was not seen again.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* **AMBER**

*Rare visitor, May – June and autumn (mostly September). Virtually annual in spring in the 1970s, but now much scarcer, with records in only four years since 2000.*

A good year for this elegant marsh tern saw three recorded during the autumn, which is now the best time to see this species on the reserve; the last spring record was as far back as 1997. The first was recorded offshore from the North End on 7<sup>th</sup> September as it moved south. The next was a juvenile feeding over the Loch from 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> September. The final sighting was a juvenile over the Loch on 9<sup>th</sup> October, the latest to arrive on the reserve since 1984 (although one discovered on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2000 lingered until 12<sup>th</sup> October).

**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis* **AMBER**

*A common summer visitor, arriving from late March. Most records are from the coast, but small numbers are regularly seen on the pools. A former breeder on islands in the Loch, small numbers are seen around the tern colonies on the reserve, but no nesting currently occurs.*

The first of the year were six seen moving north on a seawatch on 27<sup>th</sup> March, a typical arrival date. There were no large counts during the spring, with small numbers regularly noted on the

coast and Visitor Centre pools. Up to seven used the pools during May with at least two pairs observed mating and, on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, a pair circled the nesting island carrying a fish with one landing briefly. Although birds were present throughout the summer they were not thought to have bred on the reserve and an adult and juvenile on the pools on 5<sup>th</sup> July were assumed to have come from the Ythan estuary colony. The highest autumn count along the coast was 140 on 7<sup>th</sup> August, which included a pleasing proportion of juveniles. Several dozen birds lingered through September, with the last seen moving south offshore on 5<sup>th</sup> October.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* **AMBER**

*A common breeding summer visitor (April – September).*

The first birds were two on the Visitor Centre pools on the typical date of 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Numbers built up late in the month, with the first birds landing on the island in early May. By mid May, the first eggs had been laid and numbers on the pools built up to over 200. A successful breeding season saw around 95 pairs nesting across the reserve, although exact numbers were hard to gauge as a protracted breeding season saw some birds still incubating on the island in early July (presumably birds that had lost their first broods). The first chicks were noted in early June, with some chicks still present well into August. Although a few youngsters were predated by herring gulls, overall productivity seemed good.

**Roseate Tern** *Sterna dougallii* **RED** \*

*Vagrant, four previous records of five birds (late April to July).*

An adult was seen briefly on the pools on 1<sup>st</sup> July, the first on the reserve since 2007.

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* **AMBER**

*A common summer visitor (May – October) that has recently started breeding in large numbers. Large numbers can congregate on the beach in late summer.*

The first two arrived on 29<sup>th</sup> April when they were seen in with common terns on the Visitor Centre pools. Numbers were generally quite low in the freshwater areas, with no large flocks recorded, presumably as a result of the very low breeding numbers on the reserve. Only around eight apparently occupied nests were noted on the Loch islands, although other pairs were seen prospecting elsewhere. Offshore larger numbers were seen throughout the summer, with a very impressive 1,000 birds feeding on 1<sup>st</sup> July.

**Guillemot** *Uria aalge* **AMBER**

*Regular visitor, mostly in summer, with small numbers seen offshore throughout the year.*

There were no large counts made of this species, although birds were present offshore throughout the year and some heavy passage was noted in summer and autumn.

**Razorbill** *Alca torda* **AMBER**

*Regular offshore visitor, with largest numbers in summer months.*

An occasional bird was noted offshore early in the year, with 30 moving north on 12<sup>th</sup> March and 60 on 10<sup>th</sup> May indicating birds heading back to their breeding areas. There were no large counts made later in the year, although birds were regularly seen.

**Black Guillemot** *Cepphus grylle* **AMBER**

*Scarce winter visitor, with small numbers noted offshore between October and March.*

A year in which the status of the species on the reserve was completely rewritten, it will be interesting to see if this was a one-off or whether year round records become the norm. An unremarkable start to the year saw one offshore on 10<sup>th</sup> January with two on 11<sup>th</sup> February. There were then records on three dates (of four birds) in March, three dates in April, two dates in May (including five north on 25<sup>th</sup>), and three dates in June (until the 19<sup>th</sup>). One on 31<sup>st</sup> July preceded regular autumn sightings with six birds seen on four dates in August (including three adults on a very calm sea on 25<sup>th</sup>) and two sightings in September. In October there were sightings on five dates (12 birds) and six flew north during a 75 minute seawatch on 6<sup>th</sup> with two on 14<sup>th</sup> and one on 21<sup>st</sup> November. Any interpretation of these records must take into account the amount of effort that goes into seawatching as it is likely that birds will have been present offshore on many more dates than were reported.

**Little Auk *Alle alle* GREEN**

*Rare offshore visitor from October – December, typically following strong northerly winds. Very few records, probably due to lack of seawatching at suitable times of year.*

Northerly winds in late autumn saw some spectacular movements of this outrageously dinky seabird in the North Sea and, whilst the majority of large counts occurred further south, the reserve recorded its best ever year. The first were four moving north on 16<sup>th</sup> October (including one that flew right over a basking shark, a combination of species not often seen in the UK!), with a further four north and one south over three dates later in the month. There were records on eight dates in November, all of one to three birds except 212 north in 75 minutes (a record count for the reserve) on 14<sup>th</sup>, 31 north in an hour on 21<sup>st</sup> and 12 south on 17<sup>th</sup> (in one hour).

**Puffin *Fratercula arctica* AMBER**

*An apparently scarce visitor offshore in summer and autumn, possibly overlooked.*

Another year with very few records, all of which came from the seawatching point. The first was on 20<sup>th</sup> March, with a handful of sightings during the summer, peaking at just five flying north on 25<sup>th</sup> May. Two late records concerned birds seen on 16<sup>th</sup> October and 7<sup>th</sup> November.

**Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* GREEN**

*Present throughout the year in small numbers, often including lost racing pigeons.*

As is typical, birds were present throughout the year but with very few records of note. The only large count during the year was 85 in the wild bird cover on 29<sup>th</sup> May.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas* AMBER**

*Common resident, although fewer noted in winter. Small numbers probably breed on reserve.*

Birds were seen between 30<sup>th</sup> March and 26<sup>th</sup> September, with one or two seen on many dates, although there seemed to be generally fewer around than in 2009. Breeding probably occurred on the reserve, with birds seen in the Rookery in the summer and the occasional records from the dunes suggesting another possible nesting location.

**Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* GREEN**

*Common breeding resident with larger flocks forming in winter.*

The hard weather early in the year caused movement of birds and large gatherings in areas where feeding was possible. On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 137 moved over the car park, 250 were in wild bird cover on 5<sup>th</sup> and 400 were at the North End of the reserve on 8<sup>th</sup> January. The latter count included birds moving south, some of which appeared to have come in off the sea. In late May a pair built a nest in the lobby of Fen Hide and although they got as far as egg laying the nest failed. Several other successful pairs were however noted from across the reserve. Concentrations at the end of the year included 250 in wild bird cover on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* GREEN**

*Uncommon visitor with small numbers seen around the buildings at any time during the year.*

Birds were generally scarce around the feeders in the early part of the year, with the first not seen until 8<sup>th</sup> January and sightings generally sporadic throughout the year. In the autumn up to three were around the feeding areas but there were generally few records of note.

**Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* RED**

*Scarce summer visitor but declining in numbers, occasionally breeds on the reserve.*

Another poor year, with just two records (the same as 2009). A migrant was causing considerable consternation amongst the local meadow pipits in the plantation on 15<sup>th</sup> May and a singing bird was heard from Tower Pool hide on 1<sup>st</sup> June.

**Barn Owl *Tyto alba* AMBER**

*A scarce breeding resident, sightings are commonest in winter and late summer evenings.*

There were several records throughout the year, most of which were singles hunting over the reedbeds and the fields by the entrance track, although two were hunting in front of Tower pool hide on 15<sup>th</sup> November. A pair again bred on the reserve with two young fledging. Birds occasionally roosted in the buildings, so it is always worth checking the car park for pellets.

**Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* GREEN**

*Scarce resident, although due to its nocturnal nature, it is probably under recorded.*

The first record was slightly unusual in that it consisted of an imprint, apparently of this species, on the office window in early March, with fresh pellets found underneath! Two chicks were heard begging for food from woodland in mid May and a bird calling from the scrub near Fen Hide in September suggested that more than one pair may be resident on the reserve. Unusually, one was seen roosting in the car park rafters during the day on 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

**Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* AMBER**

*Recorded annually on the reserve, although irregular in its appearances. Occasional breeder, sometimes winters in small numbers and often noted on autumn passage.*

A very poor year for this enchanting *Asio* with just four records. One was over Mosstown Marsh on 14<sup>th</sup> January, another was seen from the Visitor Centre on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, one came in off the sea on 23<sup>rd</sup> October and one was in the lagoon on 30<sup>th</sup> November.

**Swift *Apus apus* AMBER**

*A common, non-breeding, summer visitor (late April/early May – September).*

Amazingly, the first of the spring occurred on the same date as the first record in the previous two years when one was seen over the Visitor Centre on 30<sup>th</sup> April. Numbers increased rapidly through May, with the largest spring count of 150 recorded on 25<sup>th</sup> May. Good numbers were recorded throughout the summer, usually feeding over the Loch, with 150 seen on 9<sup>th</sup> July. July also saw the start of movements being recorded over the reserve, with one seen coming in off the sea on 9<sup>th</sup> and four moving south at sea on 23<sup>rd</sup> for example. Numbers dwindled during August but the last was on the very late date of 6<sup>th</sup> October.

**Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* RED**

*Vagrant, four previous records, two in spring (May) and two in autumn (August – September).*

One was found in the dunes at the south end of the reserve on 14<sup>th</sup> September but, after popping up briefly on the path, this distinctive but unusual woodpecker flew off over a large dune and was not seen again. It was possible that it had been lurking unseen along the coast for several days following a fall of birds the previous week. It was the first record on the reserve since August 2004 when one was also seen in the dunes.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* GREEN (race: *D.m.anglicus* AMBER)**

*A regular visitor in small numbers, usually recorded at the feeders in winter, but can occur at any time of year. Family parties sometimes noted in summer.*

Very scarce in the first half of the year, with just a handful of sightings on the feeders. Drumming was noted three times in February – March in the Rookery but an absence of sightings in the summer suggested that breeding had probably not taken place on the reserve. The first sighting of the autumn was one flying inland across the Low Ground on 21<sup>st</sup> September, having to dodge incoming skeins of geese as it did so! In October a male started coming to the feeders regularly and on 12<sup>th</sup> October a juvenile was in the wildlife garden (feeding on lupins) and another was by the Fen Hide path. Up to two birds were regularly seen around the feeding station and gardens in the latter part of the year.

**Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* RED**

*Vagrant, nine previous records, all between 19<sup>th</sup> May and 10<sup>th</sup> June.*

With no records since spring 2000 the two seen this autumn were a pleasant surprise. The first was a juvenile found on 7<sup>th</sup> September in the plantation. It frequented the brash pile in the large clearing and showed well during the day. It was still present the following morning, but was not seen after this. The second bird, also a juvenile, was found in the gorse near the Cut on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. Surprisingly, these represent the first autumn records for the reserve.

**Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* \***

*Vagrant. No previous records.*

The rarity highlight of the year for many observers was the appearance of this pallid, powerful shrike, which was found in the Wildlife Garden on 14<sup>th</sup> October. Only the seventh Scottish record (and the first for the mainland), it was discovered by the Site Manager's eight year old daughter just a couple of hours before the RSPB Chief Executive visited the reserve! After going missing the following day, it was discovered late in the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup> October in

the garden of the house opposite the reserve where it showed very well throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> to many visitors. By the 18<sup>th</sup> October it had returned to reserve, where it became typically confiding. Despite the provision of dead mice that had been trapped in a visitor's attic it was not seen after this date! As with all previous British records, it was of the eastern subspecies *L.m.pallidirostris* colloquially known as 'steppe grey shrike'.

**Magpie** *Pica pica* **GREEN**

*A breeding resident in small numbers.*

Thinly spread throughout the reserve during the year, but no significant records.

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* **GREEN**

*Common, with large wintering flocks and a few breeding pairs.*

There were no counts of the wintering flocks this year, but good numbers were present. Several pairs nested across in the reserve, including a pair using the tern shelter on the island in front of the Visitor Centre for the second consecutive year.

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* **GREEN**

*A common breeding resident, with large numbers wintering.*

Large numbers are regularly seen in winter in the Rookery in a mixed corvid roost and this is also the location of the regular breeding colony. The count of 266 nests was an increase of 34 nests on last year's population.

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone* **GREEN**

*Common breeding resident.*

Present in good numbers, with the usual small numbers of breeding birds and large flocks using the dunes. Predation on the gulls and terns was only noted very occasionally, although a small number of adult black-headed gulls were again killed in the spring.

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* **GREEN**

*Rare, although true status clouded by hybrids, with at least one apparently 'pure' hooded crow breeding with a carrion crow just off the reserve in recent years.*

The only record of an apparently 'pure' bird was one seen on a few dates early in the year, which then paired to a carrion crow and was seen nest building near Fen Hide, although the breeding attempt was not thought to be successful. A small number of birds during the year were seen which appeared to be hybrids.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* **GREEN**

*Common autumn passage migrant (September – November), small numbers often overwinter and occasional summer records suggest a very small resident population.*

Unsurprisingly, considering the weather conditions of the previous winter, there were no records at the start of the year, with the first not seen until 18<sup>th</sup> March when one was in the plantation. There were no further records until three in the plantation on 6<sup>th</sup> September. Thereafter there were virtually daily records in the plantation, with several waves of migrants seeing peaks of eight on 10<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> September, 40 on 10<sup>th</sup> October (with five also in the dunes), 25 on 9<sup>th</sup>, 12 on 21<sup>st</sup> and 18 on 30<sup>th</sup> November. There were also small numbers in the car park and by the Loch during the autumn and a few lingered in these areas into the winter.

**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* **GREEN** (all records of race: *C.c.obscurus* **AMBER**)

*Common breeding resident.*

Present throughout the year, with few notable records, although flocks of 12 in February, 15 in October and 25 in December were seen in the reeds by Fen Hide. Successful breeding occurred in the plantation where small numbers were present throughout the year.

**Great Tit** *Parus major* **GREEN** (all records of race: *P.m.newtoni* **AMBER**)

*Common breeding resident, with possible passage birds noted in spring and autumn.*

Present throughout the year across the reserve, although there were no counts or details of breeding success. Small numbers were noted in the plantation in the autumn, although these were probably all locally bred birds.

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* **GREEN** (all records of race: *P.a.britannicus* **AMBER**)

*Generally scarce on the reserve, although breeds nearby. Variable numbers can be seen in winter and a large invasion took place in autumn 2008.*

An amazingly quiet year for this tiny visitor, with the only record being one in the Rookery on 10<sup>th</sup> February. Although still present as a breeding resident in areas adjacent to the reserve, it is possible that the very hard winter in 2009/10 had an impact on numbers locally.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* **RED**

*Common breeding resident, although some birds may move south in winter. Flocks moving south are often noted on autumn passage.*

A large concentration of farmland birds in the wild bird cover during hard weather at the beginning of the year included 150 skylarks on 7<sup>th</sup> January. During freezing temperatures the following day at least 30 moved south in an hour over the beach, with a further ten feeding on the ground. The first singing bird was heard on 6<sup>th</sup> February, with breeding birds scattered across the reserve. Migrants in the autumn included 40 coming in off the sea on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 100 moving south on 30<sup>th</sup> September. As snow fell heavily birds were again concentrated into arable areas on the reserve, with 110 counted on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* **AMBER**

*Common summer visitor (April – September), breeding just off the reserve.*

Cold conditions and northerly winds held up migration of this species, which is usually one of the earliest arriving spring migrants, with the first not seen until 5<sup>th</sup> April when seven were over the Loch. Numbers then built up rapidly with 80 present by 11<sup>th</sup> April along the Savocho Burn. In mid May, large numbers of hirundines were feeding over the Loch, with at least 400 sand martins amongst them. The small breeding colony on the reserve expanded slightly, with 22 burrows noted although there were no details of breeding success. As usual numbers petered out during September, with three on the 15<sup>th</sup> the last record of the month, although a rather late bird was seen flying south along the coast on 4<sup>th</sup> October.

**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* **AMBER**

*Common breeding summer visitor (April – October).*

Two over the Loch on 6<sup>th</sup> April were the first of the year and were two days earlier than 2009, despite the generally slow spring migration. Numbers gradually increased during the month with 150 over Badger Wood by 23<sup>rd</sup> April. Two days later the first breeding bird had returned to the wires in the car park. In early May a large flock of hirundines feeding over the Loch contained at least 600 swallows, the largest count of the year. The birds around the steading seemingly had a good breeding season, including a pair that snuck into the workshop when it was left unlocked and started a late nest in early August! By late that month family flocks were gathering on the wires including 90 on 21<sup>st</sup> August. By the third week of September there was a noticeable decrease in swallows, with flocks seen moving south on several dates. As has become the norm in recent years, an absence of several weeks was followed by an isolated late record, when seven were seen on 27<sup>th</sup> October.

**House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* **AMBER**

*Common non-breeding summer visitor (April – September).*

The first was observed on 18<sup>th</sup> April, a typical date. The large hirundine feeding flock over the Loch in early and mid May contained at least 200 House Martins, although there were few other counts during the year. An unusual record on 25<sup>th</sup> September concerned a single bird clinging to the rafters in the car park during strong northerly winds. The last record of the year was four over the Visitor Centre on 12<sup>th</sup> October.

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos cadatus* **GREEN** (all records of race: *A.c.rosaceus* **AMBER**).

*Regular visitor in variable numbers.*

Two were heard in the office garden on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, but the lack of sightings during the early part of the year may have suggested that the species had suffered in the hard winter conditions. The scrub near Bay Hide hosted 25 on 25<sup>th</sup> October and records of smaller numbers from widely scattered areas of the reserve (including 12 in the plantation on 9<sup>th</sup> November) during the following few weeks may well have been from this group.



**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* \*

*Vagrant, two previous records (August 2008 and September 2009).*

Amazingly one of these delightful eastern warblers turned up in the plantation for the third year running. During a large arrival of birds in suitable 'fall' conditions one was discovered on 8<sup>th</sup> September and, although often elusive, it did occasionally show well.

**Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

*Vagrant, five previous records all in October – November. Annual since 2007.*

As befits the recent rise in records in the UK, this once extremely rare visitor to the reserve was recorded for the fourth year running. Two were discovered in the plantation on 28<sup>th</sup> September, with two then recorded here through until 10<sup>th</sup> October. Given the turnover of other migrants at the time it seems highly likely that more than two individuals were involved, but this could not be proven. A third individual was in the Wildlife Garden area from 30<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> October, where it could often be heard calling. Three in a year is a record showing on the reserve for this tiny Siberian gem.

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* **GREEN**

*Uncommon visitor, recorded in spring (April – May) and autumn (September – November). Occasionally recorded singing and summering. Rare in winter.*

The first record was of two in the plantation on 26<sup>th</sup> March, a slightly early arrival date. A single in the plantation from 30<sup>th</sup> March to 2<sup>nd</sup> April was singing on the latter date but there were no more records until one in the plantation on 25<sup>th</sup> and one at the North End on 27<sup>th</sup> April. The only other spring records were two on 1<sup>st</sup> May, one on 7<sup>th</sup> May and one on 1<sup>st</sup> June. Autumn records commenced in the plantation with one on 23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> August, one on 6<sup>th</sup> September and one on the 12<sup>th</sup>, with another in the car park on the latter date. One in the garden on 27<sup>th</sup> September was the precursor to a larger arrival, with two to three regularly in the plantation into early October. Numbers rose to seven by 9<sup>th</sup> October (with another in the car park on the same date) then 14 the following day (12 in the plantation and two in the dunes). Only four remained in the plantation on 12<sup>th</sup>, although two were also by Bay Hide on the same date. This species is often one of the latest migrants to pass through and one or two were in the plantation until 21<sup>st</sup> November.

**'Siberian' Chiffchaff** *P.c.tristis*

*Status unclear, several previous reports but none confirmed as P.c.tristis.*

One bird giving the distinctive call of this pale subspecies was in the plantation on 10<sup>th</sup> October. Recent reviews of the identification and taxonomy of the chiffchaff group suggest that 'Siberian' chiffchaff is probably a vagrant to the UK and many previous reports probably referred to pale birds of other subspecies, particularly *P.c.abietinus*.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* **AMBER**

*Common breeding visitor (April – September). Passage birds noted in spring and autumn.*

The first of the year was on the path to Fen Hide on 13<sup>th</sup> April, one day earlier than the first in 2009. The main influx occurred late in the month, with peak counts at this time including at least ten singing along the Fen Hide boardwalk on 25<sup>th</sup> April, with two newly arrived migrants also in the plantation on the same date. There were few significant counts during the summer and no breeding information recorded. From early August small numbers were noted in the plantation and also around the car park, with nine on 11<sup>th</sup> August. The fall conditions in early September produced several in the plantation, with the peak count of six on 8<sup>th</sup> (although more may well have been present in the large number of migrants). Numbers then decreased with none noted after 12<sup>th</sup> September until two late birds were in the plantation on 9<sup>th</sup> October.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* **GREEN**

*A scarce passage migrant in spring (March – May) and particularly autumn (August – November). Occasionally recorded in winter.*

There were no spring records and autumn passage was relatively quiet this year. Most records came from the plantation, with the first on 7<sup>th</sup> September, three the next day and one lingering until 9<sup>th</sup> September. One was seen on 26<sup>th</sup> September, then a light flurry of records in October started with two on the 2<sup>nd</sup> (with one still the following day), one on the 8<sup>th</sup>, nine the following day and one still on 10<sup>th</sup> October. The only record away from the plantation was a male feeding on apples at the feeding area on 16<sup>th</sup> November.

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* **GREEN**

*A scarce passage migrant in spring and autumn. Occasional singing birds noted in spring.*

In a disappointing spring generally for passage migrants, there was only one record in May, when on the 15<sup>th</sup> a singing bird was in the plantation. A good run of records in the autumn saw two birds appear on 7<sup>th</sup> September, with three the following day and a peak of four on 9<sup>th</sup> September, with two remaining the next day. Another was found on 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> September and a late bird was seen on 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> October. As has been the pattern in recent years, all the records were from the plantation.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* **GREEN**

*Regular but scarce spring (April – May) and autumn (August – September) passage migrant.*

There were no spring records this year and, despite good conditions for migrants, there was just one autumn record when a single was in the plantation on 8<sup>th</sup> September. This is another species that has been recorded exclusively in the plantation in recent years.

**Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* **AMBER**

*Uncommon breeding summer visitor and passage migrant (May – September).*

The first of the year was a singing male on the very early date of 9<sup>th</sup> April, around a month before they are usually expected. Indeed the main arrival did not take place until 17<sup>th</sup> May, when several were recorded singing around the reserve. As usual, the species was generally under recorded on the reserve during the year, although juveniles were noted around the Visitor Centre, with the last seen in this area on 26<sup>th</sup> September.

**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia* **RED**

*A summer visiting breeding bird in variable numbers.*

The first was heard singing on the typical date of 27<sup>th</sup> April on Mosstown Marsh and one was still singing here on the late date of 4<sup>th</sup> August. An even later bird was reported from the Bay Hide on 12<sup>th</sup> August, which was the last of the year. As is typical for the fluctuating nature of the population of this species, slightly lower numbers were recorded 'reeling' this year (with a maximum of five possible territories).

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* **GREEN**

*A common breeding summer visitor (April – September).*

The first of the year were heard singing from the Savoch Burn area on 26<sup>th</sup> April, six days later than 2009. An influx in the last few days of the month saw singing birds recorded from most areas around the reserve, although there were no counts of this common species. The final record of the year was of two seen from the Fen Hide on 19<sup>th</sup> September.

**Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* **GREEN**

*Vagrant, eight previous records (of 12 birds): passage migrants in May and August – September (four birds), singing birds in June 1987, July 1989 and June 2009 and a party of four in September 2008, which may have bred locally.*

Continuing the recent good run for this northward-expanding species on the reserve there were three birds recorded this year. The first was singing in front of the Tower Pool hide on 10<sup>th</sup> June, the second consecutive year for singing at this location. Two autumn migrants were recorded in the plantation with singles seen on 24<sup>th</sup> August and 29<sup>th</sup> September.

**Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus* **GREEN**

*Vagrant with only eight previous records (of 26 birds), although this possibly represents under recording. Most records October – November, with two in January.*

An unusual early winter record concerned one flying over the car park on 23<sup>rd</sup> February. A large invasion in Scotland in the autumn saw the reserve register several records, most of apparently newly arrived migrants heading inland. The first was eight flying west over the Tower Pool path near dusk on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. The same area saw two flocks (of 19 and 30) also head inland on 28<sup>th</sup> October, whilst at least two were in trees by Fen Hide earlier that morning. The final record saw two briefly in the garden before heading west on 7<sup>th</sup> November.

**Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* **GREEN** (all records of race: *C.f.britannica* **AMBER**)

*An uncommon breeding resident and possible autumn passage migrant.*

This species seems to have been hit by the hard weather of the previous winter with the first

record not occurring until 22<sup>nd</sup> February when one flew into the office window (and was later released unharmed after coming round in the office and scaling the walls for a short while!). The first record from the Fen Hide boardwalk, where the species is usually resident, was not until 27<sup>th</sup> February and, although four were reported there the following day, it is unlikely that breeding occurred on the reserve. One was in the garden on 18<sup>th</sup> March but the next record did not occur until 23<sup>rd</sup> September when one was in the plantation, with regular records of one here until late November and a second bird from 17<sup>th</sup> November. The only other records were near Fen Hide on 12<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October and in the Rookery on 5<sup>th</sup> December.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* **GREEN** (records likely to be of race: *T.t.indigenus* **AMBER**).  
*Common breeding resident.*

Despite the very hard winter numbers did not seem to have been badly affected, with records from across the reserve. The species adaptability may have helped it to survive, with a bird entering the toilet block to look for insects on 13<sup>th</sup> February an example of this. Breeding was recorded in several areas including a pair that successfully raised young from an old swallow nest in the byre. The extended breeding season was demonstrated by recently fledged juveniles in the plantation on 7<sup>th</sup> August. Seven in the plantation on 9<sup>th</sup> October may have involved some migrants.

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* **RED**

*Flocks seen throughout the year, with huge numbers in winter. Breeds in small numbers.*

In early January there were at least 3,000 roosting in the reeds. The autumn roosting flocks provided an interesting spectacle at the south end of the Loch, with numbers estimated at eight to ten thousand in October to December.

**Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* **GREEN**

*Vagrant. No previous records.*

The first record for the reserve of this predominantly upland species occurred on 12<sup>th</sup> July when one was seen flying down the Cut. The species is quite widespread in Aberdeenshire and it has long been hoped that a bird may wander further from its usual haunts and appear on the reserve, especially as one had made it as close as the wrong side of the roadbridge on the Savoch Burn in February 1986!

**Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* **RED**

*A rare passage visitor, most records occurring in April to May and October.*

Recorded for the second successive year when one was seen in the dunes on 29<sup>th</sup> September during easterly winds and heavy rain.

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula* **GREEN**

*Common breeding resident, large numbers often arrive from northern Europe in autumn.*

Up to two in the plantation on several dates in late March and early April were probably birds heading back to northern Europe. Birds were present throughout the year, although there were no notable records in the summer. Autumn passage was noted in the plantation from late September until mid October, with a peak of just seven on 10<sup>th</sup> October, and again in the following month, with a peak of 25 in the plantation on 17<sup>th</sup> November. Good numbers lingered in the garden later in the year with up to ten regularly seen.

**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* **RED**

*Common autumn migrant (October – November) with smaller numbers seen throughout the winter and early spring. Hard weather in winter can result in larger influxes.*

As with several species, large numbers moved onto the reserve at the start of the year to escape freezing conditions inland. Several waves of arrivals were noted, with peaks including 50 in the first week of January, 300 on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 100 on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 200 on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 150 on 8<sup>th</sup> March and 40 on 15<sup>th</sup> March. The first autumn arrival was in the car park on 8<sup>th</sup> September, with no more seen until six on 9<sup>th</sup> October. There were only two more records (of three birds) in October with an increase in November peaking at 45 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, with smaller numbers thereafter.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* RED**

*Scarce breeding resident, larger numbers in autumn include continental migrants.*

Two wintered in the office garden, with one singing here in the spring and another heard in the Rookery. Light spring passage saw a peak count of nine in the plantation on 30<sup>th</sup> March. There were very few records during the summer, although at least one pair is thought to have bred on the reserve. One at the North End on 8<sup>th</sup> August was probably a local bird and occasional records here during the rest of the year were thought to be from the locally wintering population in St Combs. A good autumn passage included peak counts of 20 on 28<sup>th</sup> September (eight on the plantation and 12 around the Visitor Centre), ten on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and 30 on 8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> October (20 in the plantation and ten around the Visitor Centre, with birds heard arriving in the dark during a Goosewatch event at the same time). A late bird in the plantation on 17<sup>th</sup> November showed that passage was continuing well into the autumn. A few were scattered around the reserve during the second winter period.

**Redwing *Turdus iliacus* RED**

*Common autumn migrant (September – November) with smaller numbers seen during the winter (until March – April).*

Good numbers were on the reserve in January as birds fled to the coast, with a peak of 130 on 30<sup>th</sup> January. Thereafter there were generally smaller numbers until the last two birds of the spring were seen in the gardens on 28<sup>th</sup> March. The first returning migrants were two that arrived in the birches by the Visitor Centre at dusk on 28<sup>th</sup> September, with a large wave of migrants two weeks later providing the year's peak with 200 on 9<sup>th</sup> October. During this time flocks were heard heading inland in the dark during Goosewatch events, so the actual number of birds passing over can only be speculated. After this there were small numbers of newly arrived migrants on several dates, with a peak of just ten on 17<sup>th</sup> November.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* AMBER**

*A scarce year round visitor to the reserve, commonest in autumn and winter.*

Singles were seen around the car park on 8<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> January and four were by the Tower Pool path during February. A pair was in Badger Wood on 12<sup>th</sup> March, with possibly the same pair on 15<sup>th</sup> by the office, although there was no evidence of breeding on the reserve. Autumn migration was limited to the plantation with one on 28<sup>th</sup> and six on 30<sup>th</sup> September and the last of the year was over Tower Pool hide on 1<sup>st</sup> December.

**Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* RED**

*Scarce passage migrant in spring (May) and autumn (August – September). Formerly bred on the reserve and locally raised families are sometimes seen in late summer.*

There was just one spring record again this year, with one in the trees outside the Visitor Centre on 21<sup>st</sup> May. Dispersal of local breeding birds probably provides some of the early autumn records on the reserve and one outside the Visitor Centre on 16<sup>th</sup> August may have fallen into this category. The fall in early September produced good numbers of this species, with the plantation producing daily records from 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>, peaking at six on 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> September. One was also seen by the Visitor Centre on 8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> September. The final record of the year was a rather late bird on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula* GREEN**

*Breeding resident, with numbers in autumn augmented by immigrants from the continent.*

Birds were seen across the reserve through the year and a strong showing of migrants was noted on the plantation. In the spring, ten arrived at the end of March increasing to 12 on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Occasional birds were noted from early September with waves of arrivals seeing peaks of seven on 30<sup>th</sup> September, six on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 27 on 9<sup>th</sup> October and five on 9<sup>th</sup> November.

**Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* AMBER**

*An uncommon visitor in spring (April – May) and autumn (mostly September – October).*

Following last year's sole record of a passage migrant in May there were no spring birds this year. A good autumn passage began with a single in the plantation on 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> September, with a fall on 8<sup>th</sup> September producing a total of six birds in the plantation and dunes, with one lingering until 10<sup>th</sup> September. The last two birds of the year were also in the plantation with one on 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> September and a late bird on 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> October.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* **AMBER**

*A scarce passage migrant, mostly August – September, less common in spring.*

A single at the North End on 30<sup>th</sup> May was the only spring record and was on the same stretch of fence line as the only record of this species last year! A good autumn showing started with one on 30<sup>th</sup> August, with September producing records of one on 7<sup>th</sup>, three on 8<sup>th</sup>, five on 10<sup>th</sup> (the year's peak count), and one on 14<sup>th</sup>, with birds scattered across the reserve. The final record was of a very late bird on the Tower Pool path on 13<sup>th</sup> October.

**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquatus* **GREEN**

*Breeding resident, with several pairs found across the reserve. Numbers showing an upward trend but still susceptible to hard winters.*

Although one was feeding on the Camples at the start of the year, a noticeable feature of the spring was a total lack of stonechats from the reserve, with the hard winter presumably having caused birds to flee or perish. A male by the cut on 1<sup>st</sup> June may have been a migrant. Thankfully, the species was able to recolonise from other local coastal populations and in August two family parties were seen on the reserve (by the Lochies and at the North End), each with two chicks. Small numbers remained across the reserve until the end of the year.

**Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* **AMBER**

*Summer visitor (March – October) and passage migrant in variable numbers. Probably breeds annually in small numbers in the dunes.*

The first was a male in the dunes on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, a later date than usual as befitted the generally 'slow' spring. Numbers remained very low until later that month when the last week saw a general arrival along the coast, with a peak count of 19 on 27<sup>th</sup> April. After early May there were few records and there was no evidence of breeding, although the record of a female with four recently fledged young in the dunes on 7<sup>th</sup> August may have related to a local family. Small numbers were recorded in the dunes throughout August and September and the last record involved three in the dunes and lagoon on 8<sup>th</sup> October.

**Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* **AMBER**

*Scarce passage migrant, most August – September, occasionally in spring (usually May).*

There were no spring records this year with the first birds not arriving until 6<sup>th</sup> September when four were in the plantation. The peak count for the year was 7<sup>th</sup> September when there were seven on the reserve (six in the plantation and one at the North End). Five remained in the plantation the following day, with two on 9<sup>th</sup> and one on 12<sup>th</sup> September. During this time there were also two by the Visitor Centre on 9<sup>th</sup> and one on 12<sup>th</sup> September. Another arrival in the plantation at the end of the month saw two on 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, three on 30<sup>th</sup> September and the last of the year on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

**Duncock** *Prunella modularis* **AMBER**

*Breeding resident in reasonable numbers, birds along the coastal strip in spring and autumn may include Scandinavian migrants.*

A series of records in the plantation in autumn, including one on 6<sup>th</sup> September, two in late September, a peak in early October of four on 9<sup>th</sup>, and a peak in November of four on 30<sup>th</sup>, coincided with arrivals of northern and eastern migrants. Otherwise the species was thinly scattered around the reserve during the year with no notable counts, although it was the most notable absence from the 94 species recorded on the reserve on 'Big Sit' day on 15<sup>th</sup> May!

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* **RED**

*A scarce bird on the reserve that no longer breeds around the buildings. Flocks sometimes stray onto the reserve at the North End and at the west of the Savoich Burn.*

Up to three were around the feeders early in the year as this familiar species continued its comeback on the reserve. In late March a male was seen with nesting material in the car park and successful breeding occurred in one of the nestboxes with another pair possibly breeding in the buildings, the first confirmed nesting on site for several years. Numbers built up in the autumn and on 4<sup>th</sup> November an impressive peak of 30 were around the feeders.

**Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* **RED**

*A common breeding resident, with numbers having increased dramatically since the early 1990s thanks to the provision of food and nestboxes.*

Another good year for this ever popular species, with at least 15 pairs occupying nestboxes, 51 chicks colour-ringed and several other broods also fledging without being ringed. Good numbers remained around the feeders late in the year with a peak of 80 on 4<sup>th</sup> November.

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* **RED**

*Vagrant. Formerly spring and autumn migrant but only recorded in three years since 1998 and not since 2006. 'Blue-headed' and 'grey-headed' races recorded on several occasions.*

With a declining British population and a dramatic decrease in records at the reserve, the four seen this year were a surprise. The first was an adult male of the British 'yellow' race on the Low Ground on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> May. The second, an elusive male seen on the pools and Low Ground on 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> May was a slightly more puzzling individual, with a pale blue head and white throat, but views were never good enough to confirm the subspecific identity. A 'grey-headed' male was on the Low Ground on 19<sup>th</sup> May and was the first of this Scandinavian race on the reserve since 2004. The final record was of one on 29<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> June, when one was on the Low Ground, although again it was too distant to be certain of the race involved.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* **AMBER**

*Primarily a summer visitor (March – November). Family parties are often noted, probably from nesting sites just off the reserve.*

One was seen flying over on 7<sup>th</sup> April, the only sighting in the first part of the year of this species, which may well have been affected by the hard winter. A reasonable showing in the autumn started with two on the pools on 12<sup>th</sup> September, with five seen heading south on 19<sup>th</sup> September. Between 22<sup>nd</sup> September and 5<sup>th</sup> October sightings on four dates around the car park may have involved the same bird and another headed south over the plantation on 29<sup>th</sup> September. One was on the Visitor Centre pools on 26<sup>th</sup> October, with two here on 30<sup>th</sup> October and one on 16<sup>th</sup> November.

**Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* **GREEN**

**Pied Wagtail** *M.a.yarrelli* **AMBER**

*Common breeding resident, although scarcer in winter.*

Small numbers were seen in the early winter period, with an increase in records from early April as passage birds moved through. Up to nine were on the Camples at this time, with passage increasing at the end of the month, peaking at around 50 on the Low ground on 1<sup>st</sup> May. The first fledged juveniles were recorded on the Visitor Centre pools on 29<sup>th</sup> May and a pair were still feeding young in the byre on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Small numbers were recorded in the dunes and flying south in the autumn, but there were no large counts.

**'White Wagtail'** *M.a.alba*

*Scarce spring passage migrant. Status in autumn obscured by difficulties in identification.*

The first of the year was on the beach at the North End on 7<sup>th</sup> April, with one in the dunes the following day. One was on the Visitor Centre pools on 18<sup>th</sup> April and a small influx arrived on the pools and Low Ground late in the month with two from 23<sup>rd</sup> April peaking at five on 1<sup>st</sup> May, with the last seen on the pools on 16<sup>th</sup> May.

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* **RED**

*Vagrant, three records (May) although possibly under recorded in the past.*

Recorded for the second successive year, which perhaps gives a truer indication of the species' status on the reserve than the previous paucity of records would suggest. One flew over the plantation on 10<sup>th</sup> September during fall conditions, which is the first documented autumn occurrence on the reserve.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* **AMBER**

*Common breeding resident, although fewer recorded in winter. Southbound migrants are often noted passing overhead in autumn.*

At the start of the year birds were forced to the coast by freezing temperatures, with flocks feeding on the beach and a particularly cold snap forcing birds south on 8<sup>th</sup> January when 20 were counted flying south in an hour at the North End. Birds bred in the usual areas of the reserve and by August migration was in full swing, with groups moving south from mid month

and a flock of 60 in the fields on 15<sup>th</sup> August. Southerly passage was regularly noted in the autumn with a peak of 150 on 30<sup>th</sup> September. Hard weather at the end of the year again forced birds to the coast with 29 in the Lagoon on 30<sup>th</sup> November.

**Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus* **GREEN** (all records probably of race: *A.p.petrosus* **AMBER**)  
*Scarce, although possibly under recorded. Very rare away from the coastal strip.*

There were very few records in the first half of the year with one on 3<sup>rd</sup> and two on 28<sup>th</sup> January, then two on 7<sup>th</sup> April. There were no further records until one on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, with two from 15<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> November. As usual, all records were from the Camples.

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* **GREEN** (resident birds of race: *F.c.gengleri* **AMBER**)  
*Common breeding resident, numbers augmented by migrants in autumn and winter.*

A common species on the reserve with up to 20 regularly around the feeders early in the year. On 8<sup>th</sup> March three singles, possibly migrants, were seen heading high west over Bay hide, although there were no large counts from the plantation in the spring. Autumn passage saw several records from the plantation, although the peak was just nine on 30<sup>th</sup> September. The feeding station attracted 39 on 30<sup>th</sup> November during cold conditions.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* **GREEN**  
*Scarce passage visitor, mostly March – April and October.*

Following on from the small arrival in late December, birds were regularly at the feeding station and in the wild bird cover until 13<sup>th</sup> January, with a peak on the 7<sup>th</sup> of seven. A male was at the feeding station on 29<sup>th</sup> April, a typical spring record. Autumn passage began on 7<sup>th</sup> September when one was in the garden. There were no further records until 28<sup>th</sup> September when a series of sightings from the plantation and gardens saw 35 birds recorded over seven dates until 16<sup>th</sup> October, peaking at 14 on 8<sup>th</sup> October. Heavy snow saw three arrive at the feeders on 30<sup>th</sup> November with at least two of these lingering into late December, completing a good year for this charismatic northern finch.

**Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris* **GREEN**  
*Common breeding resident, with migrants sometimes supplementing numbers in autumn.*

An average year with no large flocks reported. Fledged youngsters around the feeding area in late summer proved that successful breeding had taken place locally.

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* **GREEN** (records likely to be of race: *C.c.britannica* **AMBER**)  
*Common breeding resident, with largest numbers noted in the autumn.*

Small numbers were at the feeders in the first winter period, not a regular sight at the reserve. Flocks built up in the autumn, with the peak count of 60 recorded in the wild bird cover on 5<sup>th</sup> October. Six seen briefly in the plantation on 9<sup>th</sup> November may have been migrants.

**Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* **GREEN**  
*Uncommon passage migrant, seen from late summer, with largest numbers usually in September – October. Scarce spring migrant.*

A good year for this colourful little finch, starting with two in the office garden on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, an unseasonable date. More typical records concerned birds on spring passage in the plantation on 26<sup>th</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> May and birds in the car park area on 6<sup>th</sup> April and 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> May (up to two). A bird probably dispersing from local breeding areas was heard over the car park on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, with a male here on 6<sup>th</sup> August and a group of three juveniles here from 8<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> August. Autumn passage began with one over the car park on 26<sup>th</sup> September, with a total of 12 in the plantation on three dates between 28<sup>th</sup> September – 10<sup>th</sup> October, with one over the car park on 4<sup>th</sup> October. A late wave of migration included 15 birds on four dates between 4<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November and two in the garden on 16<sup>th</sup> December.

**Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina* **RED**  
*Very common breeding resident, with largest numbers seen in winter.*

This twinkling little species faced a tough start to the year, with any available areas of seed-bearing vegetation utilised. Up to 350 were counted in early January, with 450 present on 20<sup>th</sup> February. Birds were also noted heading south during this period, with 40 moving south in small groups along the beach in an hour on 8<sup>th</sup> January. Small flocks in several areas in late summer indicated successful breeding on the reserve. By late November, as the conditions

again became wintry, the small flocks around the area bonded together to form larger concentrations, with a peak of 310 on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

**Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris* **RED**

*Rare visitor, a less than annual autumn passage migrant and winter visitor.*

The wild bird cover attracted large numbers of birds in the hard weather in the first part of the year and small numbers of twite were observed amongst them, with around ten on 9<sup>th</sup> January and a single on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. Hard weather at the end of the year also attracted birds to the wild bird cover, with four on 1<sup>st</sup> December.

**Lesser Redpoll** *Carduelis cabaret* **RED**

*Summer breeding visitor in small numbers with some migrants observed in autumn and occasional winter records. Redpolls seen flying over are usually assumed to be this species, although some (especially in late autumn) may be common redpoll.*

The first of the year was around the car park on 22<sup>nd</sup> March. There were few records during the spring although breeding obviously took place on or near the reserve as a family party of at least four juveniles were around the car park in mid August. One overhead on 12<sup>th</sup> September heralded the start of a reasonable autumn passage, with up to eight near Bay Hide in mid September, six in the plantation on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, up to six in the garden in early October and ten in the plantation on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

**Common Redpoll** *Carduelis flammea* **GREEN**

*Rare passage migrant (especially in autumn) and winter visitor, although some may be overlooked (see comments under lesser redpoll). Identification issues cloud this species with previous reports in summer perhaps hinting at a more complex status than is currently recognised on the reserve.*

One was on wires in front of the Visitor Centre on 4<sup>th</sup> September, one was in the plantation on 29<sup>th</sup> September and two were in the car park on 5<sup>th</sup> December. Others may have been present in the autumn and early winter when passage redpolls were noted overhead during a large influx of common redpolls into Scotland.

**Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra* **GREEN**

*Scarce migrant, usually between July and October, sometimes commoner in invasion years.*

The only record was a bird that flew over the reserve on 16<sup>th</sup> March which, as is usual for this species, attracted attention to itself by its distinctive flight call.

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* **AMBER**

*A scarce visitor, usually in winter when small flocks can occur.*

A group of four was present by the Fen Hide in February and March, with five seen on 27<sup>th</sup> February and the final bird here on 8<sup>th</sup> March. In the autumn a single was seen by the Visitor Centre on 21<sup>st</sup> September with two on 26<sup>th</sup> September. One by the Visitor Centre on 4<sup>th</sup> December had increased to seven on 5<sup>th</sup> and four were by the Bay Hide on 12<sup>th</sup> December.

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* **AMBER**

*Winter visitor (October – March) in variable numbers.*

The wild bird cover held small numbers of birds in cold and wintry conditions early in the year, with up to 30 at Mosstown and ten by the Tower Pool path. The southerly passage of passerines fleeing the worsening weather conditions on 8<sup>th</sup> January included 18 snow buntings in an hour (with four more feeding on the beach), there were no more sightings after 11<sup>th</sup> January. The first returning birds were four inland over the plantation on 8<sup>th</sup> September. From 23<sup>rd</sup> September there were singles on five dates on the coast until the end of November, with two on 26<sup>th</sup> September and three seen coming in off the sea on 3<sup>rd</sup> October. The wild bird cover areas again attracted birds in the second winter period with four on 28<sup>th</sup> November.

**Lapland Bunting** *Calcaeus lapponicus* **AMBER**

*Vagrant, nine previous records (of 21 birds) in five years from September – December (most October and November) with one in May.*

A large influx of this species into the Northern Isles from late August filtered down through the country during the autumn and saw the reserve claim its first records since 2007 in what went on to become a record breaking year for the species at Loch of Strathbeg. The first was heard



flying over the car park on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, with another single bird over the plantation on 6<sup>th</sup> September. On 30<sup>th</sup> September three were recorded flying south, with another three in the lagoon. Numbers increased on 8<sup>th</sup> October with nine in the lagoon and another bird flying south. By the following day, numbers had risen to a record count for the reserve, with 38 in the dunes in the area of the plantation (although numbers may have been larger as smaller flocks seen on the same day were assumed to be from the larger group). Just four were counted in the Lagoon on 10<sup>th</sup> October. There were no further records until the following month when one flew north at the North End on 13<sup>th</sup> and one was over the plantation on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella* **RED**

*Breeding resident, with largest numbers seen in winter.*

As with several other farmland species, the early part of the year saw large concentrations in farmland bird cover crops, with up to 200 in early January, although numbers tailed off rapidly after this. Birds were present through the summer in several areas of the reserve, including a pair feeding beneath the garden feeders. Small numbers in the autumn included occasional birds in the dunes or heading south, which may well have been migrants. As temperatures plunged late in the year large flocks again formed in the crops, with a peak of 120 on 29<sup>th</sup> November, although birds dispersed as the crops were covered by snow.

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* **AMBER**

*Common breeding resident, with larger numbers in autumn.*

The wild bird cover held good numbers in the early part of the year, with 150 in early January and a very impressive 350 on 20<sup>th</sup> February, providing an amazing spectacle on the walk to Tower Pool hide. Birds were present throughout the year although there were no counts of breeding numbers. The build up of farmland species late in the year did not include as many reed buntings, but there were still 80 counted on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* **RED**

*Scarce resident, with relatively healthy populations still existing on farms surrounding the reserve. Breeding occurs on reserve and wintering flocks can be found in arable fields.*

Following on from the small gathering in the farmland bird flocks at the end of 2009 there were still at least four by the Tower Pool path in early January. Further hard weather caused a huge concentration of these charming chubby birds, with 30 on 20<sup>th</sup> February increasing the next day to 200, a record count for the reserve. The birds commuted between the wild bird cover and the trees and feeding area around the car park, providing a fantastic welcome to the reserve! The flock had dispersed by the end of the month and small numbers were scattered around the reserve as birds dispersed to breed. An encouraging year saw four apparently occupied territories on the reserve (up one from 2009), with two nests discovered. In the autumn, small numbers were at the North End and a farmland bird count on 29<sup>th</sup> November produced ten birds using wild bird cover crops.

## **Species not on the reserve list**

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*

A flock of nine that were first seen on the Loch on 12<sup>th</sup> July spent the next couple of weeks commuting between the Low Ground, Loch and Visitor Centre pools. The flock consisted of nine females or juveniles and turned up after southerly winds before departing (in light northerly winds) to the Montrose Basin, Angus on 29<sup>th</sup> July. There are six previous records for the reserve since 1981 (involving eight birds) with arrivals in April, June, July (two), August and October. Although their origins couldn't be proven they generated quite a lot of interest due to the possibility they may have derived from feral populations on the European mainland.

**Ringed Teal** *Gallinetta leucophrys*

A drake of this species, which is commonly kept in captivity and a frequent escape, was on the Visitor Centre pools on 20<sup>th</sup> April. This is apparently the first record of this South American species on the reserve.

## **Selected sightings of other taxa**

The Loch of Strathbeg is home to a wide variety of wildlife. The following is a selection of some of the more noticeable species and unusual records.

### **Basking Shark** *Cetorhinus maximus*

*Only one previous record from reserve, a dead animal washed ashore in September 2005.*

An amazing series of records from the North End of the reserve took place between 24<sup>th</sup> September and 20<sup>th</sup> October with sightings on several dates. The peak count occurred on 16<sup>th</sup> October when six were seen in the afternoon, an unprecedented North Sea record in recent decades.

### **Minke Whale** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

*Regular summer visitor (mostly June to September) in small numbers, occasional at other times of year.*

Recorded on three dates between 24<sup>th</sup> June and 16<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Bottle-nosed Dolphin** *Tursiops truncatus*

*Occasional visitor with most records in summer (although this may represent observer effort).*

Three moved south close to shore on 11<sup>th</sup> June. In October at least 15 were seen on the 16<sup>th</sup>, when they were fishing distantly offshore, and two headed south on 20<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Harbour Porpoise** *Phocoena phocoena*

*Seen offshore in small numbers, could be seen throughout the year but most records in summer.*

There were not a lot of records this year, although sightings were frequent in late August. The last was seen on 20<sup>th</sup> October.

A typical year for cetaceans, although the basking shark sightings were quite amazing. The only other cetacean on the reserve list is Risso's Dolphin (one group seen in summer 2008). Both common and grey seals were regularly present offshore and on the beach, although there were no significant counts made.

### **Brown Hare** *Lepus europaeus*

*Very rare visitor to the reserve, only one previous record in recent years.*

One at the North End on 16<sup>th</sup> May was a lucky sighting for one fortunate observer.

### **Otter** *Lutra lutra*

*Scarce and elusive resident.*

There were a typical handful of sightings this year, with records from Fen hide, Tower Pool hide and the entrance track. Getting a glimpse of an otter is always a bonus, with no particular location, weather conditions or time of day proving most reliable for sightings. Mink also appeared to be present on the reserve in low densities, although it was unclear if they are resident or merely transient visitors.

### **Weasel** *Mustela nivalis*

*Probably scarce resident, although rarely seen.*

One was active in the spring in the car park when it was seen raiding a mouse nest in the barn and predated from nestboxes in the garden.

### **Stoat** *Mustela erminea*

*Common resident, seen regularly around the reserve.*

Stoats are present right across the reserve and provided regular sightings again this year. Interestingly, the family resident in the office walls retained brown pelts throughout the winter, whilst those living in the Visitor Centre moulted into full ermine. Most prey items noted were rabbits, although a fieldfare was caught in the reeds by Fen hide in February.

The usual common mammals were well represented, with rabbit, roe deer and fox regularly noted along with a variety of small mammals and bats.

## Decisions affecting the 2009 Annual Report

BBRC            British Birds Rarities Committee  
 SBRC            Scottish Birds Rarities Committee  
 NESRC          North East Scotland Records Committee

Bean Goose	31 <sup>st</sup> October	Accepted by NESRC
Red-breasted Goose	31 <sup>st</sup> May - 4 <sup>th</sup> June	Identification accepted by BBRC but considered an escaped bird
Green-winged Teal	26 <sup>th</sup> April - 5 <sup>th</sup> May	Accepted by NESRC
King Eider	4 <sup>th</sup> May	Found 'not proven' by BBRC
Bittern	23 <sup>rd</sup> Jan & 11 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Accepted by NESRC (as 2008 bird)
Great White Egret	30 <sup>th</sup> April - 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	Accepted by SBRC
Great White Egret	28 <sup>th</sup> June - 2 <sup>nd</sup> July	Accepted by SBRC (revised dates)
Great White Egret	11 <sup>th</sup> & 17 <sup>th</sup> November	Accepted by SBRC
Glossy Ibis	9 <sup>th</sup> - 26 <sup>th</sup> Oct & 24 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Accepted by BBRC
Rough-legged Buzzard	19 <sup>th</sup> May	Accepted by SBRC
Hobby	17 <sup>th</sup> May	Accepted by NESRC
Hobby	19 <sup>th</sup> June	Accepted by NESRC
Corncrake	1 <sup>st</sup> July	Accepted by NESRC
Crane (3)	20 <sup>th</sup> April	Accepted by NESRC
Crane	29 <sup>th</sup> May	Accepted by NESRC
Temminck's Stint	12 <sup>th</sup> & 20 <sup>th</sup> May	Accepted by NESRC
White-rumped Sandpiper	1 <sup>st</sup> - 9 <sup>th</sup> October	Accepted by SBRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	11 <sup>th</sup> April	Accepted by NESRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	25 <sup>th</sup> April - 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	Accepted by NESRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	23 <sup>rd</sup> May	Accepted by NESRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	9 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup> July	Accepted by NESRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	30 <sup>th</sup> July - 10 <sup>th</sup> August	Accepted by NESRC (adult bird)
Pectoral Sandpiper	23 <sup>rd</sup> - 25 <sup>th</sup> August	Accepted by NESRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	18 <sup>th</sup> September	Accepted by NESRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	27 <sup>th</sup> - 30 <sup>th</sup> September	Accepted by NESRC
Stilt Sandpiper	9 <sup>th</sup> - 11 <sup>th</sup> July	Accepted by BBRC
Lesser Yellowlegs	16 <sup>th</sup> - 18 <sup>th</sup> September	Accepted by BBRC
Grey Phalarope	17 <sup>th</sup> July	Accepted by NESRC
Grey Phalarope	10 <sup>th</sup> October	Accepted by NESRC
Long-tailed Skua	11 <sup>th</sup> July	Found 'not proven' by NESRC.
White-winged Black Tern	29 <sup>th</sup> August - 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sep	Accepted by SBRC
Richard's Pipit	17 <sup>th</sup> October	Accepted by NESRC
Citrine Wagtail	28 <sup>th</sup> August	Found 'not proven' by BBRC
Greenish Warbler	4 <sup>th</sup> September	Accepted by SBRC
Bearded Tit	17 <sup>th</sup> January	Accepted by NESRC (as 2008 bird)

## Decisions affecting the 2008 Annual Report

Black-necked Grebe	10 <sup>th</sup> February	Found 'not proven' by NESRC
Green-winged Teal	3 <sup>rd</sup> , 25 <sup>th</sup> Jan, 16 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	Accepted by NESRC
Little Egret	Dec 2007 - June 2008	Accepted by NESRC (as one bird)
Great White Egret	21 <sup>st</sup> - 24 <sup>th</sup> April	Accepted by SBRC
Great White Egret	23 <sup>rd</sup> - 24 <sup>th</sup> April	Accepted by SBRC
White-winged Black Tern	11 <sup>th</sup> August	Accepted by SBRC
Greenish Warbler	21 <sup>st</sup> August	Accepted by SBRC
Hume's Warbler	12 <sup>th</sup> - 15 <sup>th</sup> November	Found 'not proven' by BBRC.
Firecrest	6 <sup>th</sup> February	Accepted by NESRC
Bearded Tit (11)	18 <sup>th</sup> October - 2009	Accepted by NESRC

As a result of these decisions Hume's Warbler, King Eider, Long-tailed Skua and Citrine Wagtail are removed from the reserve list, which was 262 at the end of 2009.

---

The RSPB relies on your support to carry out its vital conservation work at the Loch of Strathbeg and over 200 other reserves across the United Kingdom.

You can help by becoming a member of the RSPB, giving your time as a volunteer or visiting the reserve and reporting your sightings. Contact the reserve on [strathbeg@rspb.org.uk](mailto:strathbeg@rspb.org.uk) or 01346 532017 for details.

Visit [www.rspb.org.uk/lochofstrathbeg](http://www.rspb.org.uk/lochofstrathbeg) for latest sightings, events, blogs, galleries and the chance to have your say about the reserve.

---