

**THE STATUS OF BIRDS AT LOCH SPYNIE**  
(based on available information to the end of 2014)

**Mute Swan**

At least two pairs breed annually and there were four in 1999. Wintering numbers exceeded 100 in the 1960s and 1970s (maximum 148 in December 1973) but after that, until around 2002, 25-50 was the usual range. More recently numbers have increased again with 70-80 in 2003-2005, 94 in December 2006, 103 in winter 2007-08 and up to 115 in 2012-13.



**Bewick's Swan**

There have been no confirmed sightings since the historical record of 2 in March 1853.

**Whooper Swan**

An annual winter visitor in varying numbers. They arrive from late September, and autumn numbers tend to be highest; largest flocks to be seen in the vicinity of the loch in recent years were 116 in November 2008, 121 in November 2009 and c.150 roosting in November 2011 - but around 20 is more typical. They roost on the loch, feeding in nearby fields. Usually very few in late winter.



**[Black Swan**

An escaped bird visited the loch on 17 March 1996.]

**Bean Goose**

Apparently common autumn and spring migrants to the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they are now very scarce. The only recent occurrence at the loch was of a single bird on 29 April 1993.

**Pink-footed Goose**

Until the mid 1990s most Pink-footed Geese passed through Moray rapidly on autumn migration and usually only a few hundred roosted on the loch in October, with very few later in the winter. Between 1995 and 2005, much larger flocks remained to feed in the area through October-November with, as a result, a much larger roost on the loch. The peak late autumn roost count during that period was:

1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
3000	?	2300	2000	?	8000	?	11,700	12,000	27,000	23,000



Pink-footed Geese 5/4/14 (MC)

Since 2005, numbers roosting at the loch have declined dramatically and very few, if any, have roosted in recent autumns. Substantial numbers of Pink-feet can still be seen in Moray between autumn and spring but most roost in Findhorn Bay. Flocks sometimes come down onto the loch to drink and bathe e.g. 500 on 29 March 2014. A few birds, of unknown origin, are sometimes seen around the loch in summer e.g. 3 in July 1992, 2 in June 1993, 3 in June-July 1999 and 1 in June 2006.

### **White-fronted Goose**

A scarce species in Moray. Birds of the Greenland race have over-wintered in very small numbers with other geese in the Lossiemouth area, and roosted on the loch. Between 1990-2004, the number of birds involved was less than five in four winters, and between five and ten in six winters. The best winters were 1989-1990 (up to 17 birds), 1992-1993 (up to 14) and especially 1995-1996 when up to 27 were roosting on the loch in October-November and this rose to 39 by February-March. No Greenland White-fronted Geese were seen on or around the loch during 2005-13 but one was present on 22 November 2014. In 2011 an influx of European race White-fronted Geese to Scotland resulted in a record of 10 on the loch on 26 November, with 9 the following day.

### **Greylag Goose**

Formerly a substantial winter roost, Loch Spynie now hosts very few Greylags. During 1970-1985, late autumn numbers at the roost were usually 1000-2000 but during the late 1980s there was a dramatic increase to a maximum of over 13,000 in October 1988. Numbers then declined to 4000-5000 by the turn of the century and continued to reduce until, since 2006, only very few birds have roosted on the loch. In recent years, one or more birds have lingered around the loch all summer; breeding took place for the first time in 2013, and again in 2014.

### **[Bar-headed Goose**

Two escaped individuals were seen on the loch on 6 June 1991.]

### **Snow Goose**

One roosted with other geese between 6-20 October 1990.

### **Canada Goose**

Occasionally one or two birds have joined the goose flocks in winter and roosted with them on the loch; this has happened in six winters since 1990. Another source of birds is flocks from England making their annual summer moult migration to the Beaully Firth and stopping off en route at the loch e.g. 12 on 6 June 1993, 10 on 16 June 1994, 15 on 30 May 2003 and 24 on 3 June 2010. In July-August 1990, 11 birds stayed at the loch to moult.



Canada Goose 22/4/13 (GB)

### **Barnacle Goose**

In most years a very few accompany the local goose flocks in autumn-winter and roost on the loch. Sometimes rather more appear e.g. 12 in October 1991, 13 in October 1993, up to 20 in October-November 1997 and 25 in October 2005 - but these migrant flocks seldom linger. A flock of 450 flew over the loch on 30 September 2001 but did not land.

### **Shelduck**

A scarce visitor to the loch, seen in 13 years since 1990. Most occur in March-May, with two records in January, one in February and one in June. Usually only 1-2 birds but 4 in March 1993 and May 2001, and 6 on 10 March 2002.

### **Mandarin**

A male present between 29 April-4 May 2003 is the only record.

### **Wigeon**

A winter visitor with large numbers sometimes on the loch between October and March. Fewer in early autumn and spring and only occasional birds in summer months. Average winter maximum during the 1960s was 378, during the 1970s it was 628 and during the 1980s it was 733. Then, as now, numbers fluctuated considerably and, exceptionally, around 3000 were counted in October 1978.

Peak counts in each three-winter period since 1990-91 have been:

1990/1-1992/3	1993/4-1995/6	1996/7-1998/9	1999/00-2001/2	2002/3-2004/5	2005/6-2007/8
800	1170	1200	1400	2500	1300

This increase is related to the substantially larger flock now present on the Lossie estuary, from where birds regularly move to the loch. Since 2006 however, numbers have been much lower on the loch – maximum 800 in December 2007 but only 400 in November 2009. This decline has continued and it is now unusual to see more than 20 so 102 on 14 September 2014 was unusual.

### **American Wigeon**

Single males have visited the loch on three occasions, between 19-26 June 1999, between 1-3 January 2000 and on 11 February 2001.

### **Gadwall**

A regular visitor in very small numbers in most months of the year. The largest groups to have been seen together were 7 on 17 February 1980, 6 on 22 April and 14 May 2005, and 5 on 16 September 1973 - although 1-2 is more normal. Birds have been seen in 17 years since 1990. A pair displayed briefly in June 1999 but there has been no suggestion of breeding.



### **[Baikal Teal**

A female was shot on 5 February 1958 but it is now considered that the bird was likely to have been an escape from captivity.]

## Teal

A common winter visitor although true numbers can be hard to ascertain as many birds frequent the reeds in preference to open water, and flocks often move from the loch onto the canal. During the 1990s, the highest count in each winter ranged from 220 to 820 (average 427) but then numbers increased, with 1046 in December 2000 and 1700 in November 2002. Recent counts have been somewhat lower – maximum 500 in January 2005, c.250 in January 2008, 250 in December 2009, up to 400 in early 2011 and 408 on 22 November 2014. Although a few are sometimes seen in summer there has been no evidence of recent breeding.

## Green-winged Teal

Formerly considered to be the North American race of our 'Eurasian' Teal, Green-winged Teal is now treated as a full species. All records at the loch concern males. The first occurrence was one from 18 November-23 December 2000 with another from 10 November-8 December 2001. In 2002, single birds were seen on 12 & 21 February, 12 May and 1-2 June. There were 3 on 2 November, one of which remained until 1 December. In 2004, 2 were present on 9 January with one staying until 13 January. Singles were present between 4-11 December 2005 and 4-5 March 2007. In 2008, there was one on 20 January and 2 on 13 December. One was again present between 31 January-15 February 2009, between 6 December 2009-12 February 2010 and between 13 November 2010-2 January 2011.



## Mallard

Common on the loch in all seasons. During 1960-1990 the average maximum in winter was 467 (with an exceptional peak count of 1360 in October 1981). Between 1990-2004 the average was a little lower, at 356. Since 2004 numbers have fallen further; the winter maximum has ranged from 112 to 410, average 205. Many pairs breed and a large mid summer moulting flock often assembles – 200-300 in most years with 610 in 1991 and 461 in July 2009.

## Pintail

There is one historical record of breeding (prior to 1914). Pintail are now annual visitors in very small numbers, usually in winter but with a scatter of records in most months. A notable exception was in 1995 when a flock of 23 on 20 September increased to 86 by 7 October before dwindling to 2 by the end of the month. Also unusually numerous in January-March 2010 with a maximum of 23 in late February.

## Garganey

A spring migrant to the loch, which has been seen in 14 years since 1990 and almost annually since 2005. There has been a total of 24 birds of which 22 have been males. All have been seen in the period 25 April-22 May with the exception of one on 17-18 July 2008. Two birds occasionally appear together and there were 3 males on 3 May 2009.

## Shoveler

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were apparently regular breeders but the only recent evidence has been a female with ducklings in 1989 and a female with a flying brood in August 2007. Most Shovelers are seen in late autumn and in spring with fewer in most years in mid winter. During the early-mid 1990s the most seen together in any winter was 10-15 but they have been less regular and usually in smaller numbers since then. Since 2010 there has never been more than 4 at one time. Autumn 1995 (as with Pintail) saw unprecedented numbers on the loch, with 49 on 19 September, 61 on 24 September and 71 on 20 October, with a rapid decline thereafter.



### **Red-crested Pochard**

One male from 19-22 September 1992.

### **Pochard**

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Pochard were regular breeders with as many as 10-12 pairs in 1920. The most recent breeding took place in 1977 and 1978, and only occasional birds are now seen in summer. Pochard are now scarce winter visitors, seen mostly between September and March. Formerly, peak numbers were usually present in October and November, sometimes later if the loch remained unfrozen. During the period 1960-1974 the average annual peak was 52 (range 7-141) but during 1975-1989 the average was 118 (range 32-380) with a record high of 380 on 12 November 1978. The situation during 1990-2004 resembled the earlier period with the average being 49 (range 9-99). Since 2004, however, numbers have dwindled rapidly and since 2006 it has been unusual to see more than 1-2 birds – maximum 4 in September 2008.

### **Ring-necked Duck**

A female of this North American species was present between 4-24 April 2004.

### **Tufted Duck**

During most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were rare visitors to the loch but they subsequently increased and were breeding regularly by 1936, as a few pairs do today. They are often numerous on the loch in late summer with counts of 150 possible (max. 179 in August 1999). The average maximum count in winter between 1960-1990 was 88 (range 35-194) but since then they have increased with the average winter maximum between 1991-2004 being 143 (range 54-274), with a record high of 274 in December 1998. The situation during 2004-09 was little changed with an average winter maximum of 146. Since 2010 numbers had not exceeded 100 until 111 were present on 15 April 2014.

### **Scaup**

Prior to 1990, visits to the loch by this sea duck were extremely rare. Since then however they have been almost annual in very small numbers. They can occur in any month, usually only 1-2 individuals at a time but there were 5 in September 1992 and 4 in October 1999. Early 1992 was exceptional when a flock built up on the loch in late winter and spring; 17 on 22 February increased to 22 by 7 March. A slow decline saw 18 on 22 March, 13 on 26 April and 3 on 18 May.

### **Lesser Scaup**

One record: a female during 21-26 November 2006.

### **Long-tailed Duck**

Since the first record in Oct 1981, Long-tailed Ducks have visited the loch on a further 20 occasions in 15 winters, all in the period Oct-Jan except for single birds in March-April 1987 and March 2005. Four of the records concern two birds (most recently on 24 January 2007), otherwise only singles. A few individuals have stayed for several weeks, others for only one day.

### **Common Scoter**

One male 19 May 1973 and a pair, occasionally displaying, from 9 April-6 May 1989.

## Velvet Scoter

The only record concerns a male on 29 January 2014.

## Goldeneye

Winter numbers seldom exceed 20 (often fewer) but autumn (Oct-Nov) and spring (March-Apr) passage brings most Goldeneye to the loch. Between 1990-2004 the spring peak averaged 51 (range 27-79) and the autumn peak averaged 33 (range 9-70). During the five years 2005-09, the spring peak averaged 60 (with an exceptional 112 on 7 April 2007) and the autumn peak 44. During 2010-13, winter numbers were sometimes greater, with maxima of 70-80 birds. Display is commonly seen in spring but breeding has not taken place.

## Smew

Formerly a very uncommon visitor to the loch but now more regular. Since 1990 single 'redhead' (female/juvenile) birds have been present in seven winters, often staying for several weeks or even months. The only record of an adult male was on 9 November 2010.



## Red-breasted Merganser

A rare visitor although a little more frequent since the late 1990s, with 1-2 in most years since 1999. Mostly females, but one male on four dates in March-May 2005 and a pair between 28 February-15 March 2009. Unusually, 5 females were present in February 2013.



## Goosander

A sizeable wintering flock was regular during the 1980s and early 1990s; 30-40 were usual, sometimes 60+. An exceptional 114 gathered in late November 1994. Since then, numbers have dwindled and 29 on 5 May 2004 was the first count to exceed 10 in any year since 2000. Since 2004, no more than nine (in 2006) have been present together, and no more than six in the period 2007-14.

## Ruddy Duck

First seen on 6 May 1984 and again in May 1992. Since then they have been recorded in nine years, a total of 22 birds (some remaining for several weeks), mostly in the period April-July. Most together were 3 males and one female on 6 May 1999. The most recent records are 2 males 23 April-6 May and 7-8 July 2006, one female 28 September 2007 and one male 11 July-23 August 2008. Following the recent cull of Ruddy Ducks in the UK, few further records can be expected.

## Quail

Single birds were heard calling from fields close to the loch in the summers of 1989, 1990 and 2010.

## Red-legged Partridge

One or two occasionally seen around Scarffbanks Farm since 2010.

## Grey Partridge

At one time, coverts (max. 24 in 2004, 18 in 1990 and 1997) could be seen in surrounding fields where breeding took place. Since 2009 there has been no evidence of breeding, and only occasional sightings of adults.

## Pheasant

Very common breeder in the surrounding countryside.

## Red-throated Diver

Two records: single birds on 19 April 1998 and 16 July 2005.

## Great Northern Diver

An adult in breeding plumage visited the loch for one day on 24 May 2013. The only other record is of one found dead on 21 February 1988.

## Gannet

One on the canal on 20 February 1987.

## Cormorant

Can be seen at the loch in all months although fewer in mid summer. The maximum count on any one day in recent years increased until 2008 but numbers have been rather lower since:

1990-1993	1994-1997	1998-2001	2002-2005	2006-2009	2010-2014
5	7	11	12	15	9

Birds showing characteristics of Continental race *P.c.sinensis* have been seen in 15 years since 1994. Usually only 1-2 are present at one time but up to 6 individuals were seen during the year in 2002 and 8 in 2006.

## Shag

Two records: One between 1-7 March 2007 and one on 4 September 2007 which was found dead the following day.

## Bittern

There are historical records from 'before 1863' and in February 1879. More recently, one was seen on 24 January 1985, and another on 24 January and 3 March in 2013.

## Great White Egret

In 2009, one was seen at Pitairlie on 22 November and near the loch on 24 December.

## Grey Heron

The heronry moved to the trees at Loch Spynie from Caysbriggs in 1975. There are usually 10-12 nests, maximum 14 in 2003. One pair nested in the reed bed in 1981.

## Purple Heron

One stayed for five days during 19-23 April 2011.



### **Glossy Ibis**

Two birds stayed for several weeks in April-June of either 1936 or 1937.

### **Spoonbill**

One on 11 July 1984.

### **Little Grebe**

Breeds in small numbers. Easiest to see in autumn when more than 20 are often present. Best recent counts have been 35 in September 2005, 36 in September 2006 and 38 in September 2013. Usually only 1-2 in mid winter.



Little Grebe 19/4/13 (AB)

### **Great Crested Grebe**



Great Crested Grebe 15/5/14 (GA)

Single pairs have bred in 1913-1929, 1954-1956, 1984-1987 and 1990-1998. In some other years, single birds have been present in summer, most recently in May 2014. Autumn or winter records are unusual; most recently, singles in February 1996, October 2000, January 2004, December 2006 and February 2010.

### **Red-necked Grebe**

Five records, each of a single bird, on 18 May 1993, 6 March-12 April 1994, 23 March-2 April 1996, 10-29 December 2000 and 19 October 2002.

### **Slavonian Grebe**

An uncommon visitor, although seen in most years. Since 1990, recorded in 19 years and in every month. Mostly single birds but 2 in April 2000, 2 in August-September 2001 and 3 in April 2002 and November 2006. Stays are usually brief although one remained for six weeks in January-March 1996, one for six weeks in April-June 2004, another for seven weeks in August-October 2001 and one for 10 weeks in October-December 2006.

### **Black-necked Grebe**

One in June 1919.

### **Marsh Harrier**

First recorded in 1969. Following an increase in the number, and length of stay, of birds in spring, successful breeding took place in 2005 and 2006, but not again until 2012.

In other recent years the species is best described as a scarce visitor in spring.



Marsh Harrier 17/7/12 (MC)



### **Hen Harrier**

Occasionally seen hunting over fields around the loch but less than annual in recent years. Usually in winter but one on 20 July 2001. Two roosted in the reed bed for several weeks in January-March 1982.

### **Goshawk**

A very uncommon visitor. Single birds have been reported on 25 February 1979, 4 November 1995, 21 November 1996, 18 October 1999, 14 January 2001 and 9 March 2002.

### **Sparrowhawk**

Breeds in woods near the loch. Seen frequently at other seasons, often hunting the pre-roost flocks of starlings.

### **Buzzard**

Breeds in woods near the loch, soaring overhead in suitable weather. On 19 September 1995 as many as 18 were visible over various woods at one time.

### **Osprey**

An infrequent visitor between April-September, occasionally stopping to fish.

### **Water Rail**

Numerous breeder in the reed beds but very secretive and seldom seen. Around the loch were 12 pairs in 1996 and 10 pairs in 2000. In 1999 there were 15 pairs in the marsh below the palace. So 25-30 pairs in any year seems a realistic estimate. An unknown number is present in winter but birds can often be heard calling from the reeds. Good views can sometimes be obtained when birds visit feeding trays close to the hide - 3 fed together on 24 December 2013.



### **Spotted Crake**

Single calling birds were heard on 9-10 June 1997 and 25 May 1999. The species may be more regular than these two records suggest as it normally only calls in the middle of the night and can easily remain undetected in daytime hours.

### **Corncrake**

Formerly widespread in the area, the most recent record is of one in marshy ground on 29 September 1982.

### **Moorhen**

Resident breeder in small numbers; up to six pairs in 1996. In winter their secretive nature makes an accurate count very difficult but when the loch is frozen large numbers can sometimes be seen out in the open on the ice – as many as 58 on 6 January 2009 and 61 on 3 January 2010.

### **Coot**

One or two pairs breed and they were formerly numerous in winter. In the 1970s and 1980s, flocks were frequently close to 200 with best counts of 256 on 4 January 1976 and 270 on 18 March 1979. During the period 1990-2004 maximum flock counts were usually around 100 but during the winters of 2006-09 no more than 30 gathered on the loch. Since then, numbers have declined further and winter numbers now seldom exceed 10.

## **Crane**

Two flew close to the loch on 20 May 2010.

## **Oystercatcher**

A common sight flying over the loch, sometimes in small groups. Most frequent in late winter and early spring when they may gather on the tern platform e.g. 25 on 9 March 2002 and 20 on 25 March 2004. Breeds in local fields.

## **Golden Plover**

Flocks of 100 or more are regular in the Lossiemouth area and occasionally fly over the loch or rest in nearby fields. Most recently, c.100 flew over on 17 January 2004.

## **Grey Plover**

Seen at, or over-flying, the loch on five occasions – in 1906, c.10 on 5 October 1967, one on 20 September 2000, 2 flying over on 15 August 2009 and another on 22 November 2014.

## **Lapwing**

A few pairs sometimes breed in neighbouring damp fields. Late summer-autumn flocks of 100 or more gather in the same fields, and winter flocks have become more regular in recent years. In 2009, an exceptional 555 were counted in loch-side fields on 8 November, but 200-250 is more normal.

## **Whimbrel**

An uncommon, but annual, passage migrant. The distinctive stuttering whistle attracts attention to over-flying birds, usually one or two together in late summer or early autumn (max. 5 on 25 August 2004). There have been four spring records, of single birds, on 26 April 1993, 12 May 1995, 1 May 1998 and 3 May 2008.

## **Curlew**

A flock of 100-200 (max. 250 on 26 August 2002) is regular in damp fields near the loch from late summer into the winter.

## **Black-tailed Godwit**

Recorded on migration on 12 occasions since the mid 1970s. Four records have been in spring (April-early May) and eight in autumn (July-mid September). Most records involve birds flying over - usually only 1-2 but larger groups have included 12 on 25 August 1995, 14 on 15 August 2009, 11 on 17 April 2010 and 40 on 9 July 2010. In 2014 a remarkable flock built up in a flooded field in Scarffbanks pig farm, peaking at 74 on 6 September.

## **Ruff**

Recorded on only three occasions, 2 on 15 September 2001 and 3 flying over on 20 August 2004. In 2014 a flock on floodwater on Scarffbanks pig farm peaked at 16 on 6 September.

## **Dunlin**

Only three records: single birds flew overhead on 30 September 1994 and 18 December 1996, and 2 flew low along the length of the loch on 26 May 2013.

## **Little Stint**

Three were on a pool in a field at Scarffbanks pig farm on 6 September 2014.

## Pectoral Sandpiper

One visited floodwater on Scarffbanks pig farm for four days during 6-9 September 2014.



## Common Sandpiper

This common summer visitor to Moray's rivers is only occasionally seen around the loch margins. Exceptionally, one pair bred in 2003. Four were present on 2 July 2007.

## Spotted Sandpiper

On 25 May 1999 a summer-plumaged bird of this American species spent several hours around the rocks immediately in front of the hide.

## Green Sandpiper

A very scarce passage migrant, seen around the loch margins or along the canal. Single birds have appeared in spring on 14 April 1989, 26 May 2003 and 29 May 2005. Autumn records of single birds have been on 15-17 August 1985, 7 September 1985, 29 July 2006, 8 August 2006, 22 July 2009, 1 September 2011 and 17 October 2013. There were 2 on 8 August 1996.

## Spotted Redshank

One flew over the loch on 9 July 1989.

## Greenshank

An uncommon, but almost annual, passage migrant. All records are of 1-2 birds except 3 on 14 August 2002, 29 April 2007 and 7 September 2014, and 4 on 23 August 2012. Of 50 birds since 1990, 34 have occurred during the early autumn migration period between 6 July-7 September. Spring records are becoming more common – until 2003 there was only a single record but since then they have occurred in April-May on ten occasions in six years. There are only two mid autumn records – of single birds on 12 October 2002 and 8 October 2012.

## Wood Sandpiper

There are three records of birds flying over the loch, on 4 August 2002, 1 August 2004 and 10 August 2007.

## Redshank

Considering how common Redshanks are at nearby Lossiemouth it is surprising that the only recent records at the loch are 2 on 19 December 1999, 3 on 24 February 2000, 1 on 23 August 2002, 1 on 5 September 2006, 3 on 19 April 2007, 1 on 20 March 2011 and 2 on 15 April 2012.

### **Jack Snipe**

The only documented records since 1990 are of singles on 12 November 1993, 6 December 1996, 18 December 2002 and 13 April 2008. The species is however very secretive and is only flushed by a close approach so it is likely that birds are present in marshy areas in winter a lot more regularly than the few records would suggest.

### **Woodcock**

The 'roding' display flight over the treetops can be seen at dusk in loch-side woods during spring, starting in early March. Often present in the same woods in winter especially following periods of cold weather.

### **Snipe**

Common in autumn and winter in marshy ground. Highest count was 12 on 6 September 1997.

### **Great Snipe**

Two historical records concern birds shot in nearby marshes on 15 October 1898 and 20 October 1915.

### **[Pratincole**

A pratincole of undetermined species was seen at the loch on 17 August 1923.]

### **Arctic Skua**

In 1994, 2 flew over the loch on 29 April and another was on the canal on 15 September.

### **Little Auk**

One storm-driven bird was found near Pitgaveny, presumably at or near the loch, in 1879.

### **Black Tern**

One on 5 October 1967.

### **White-winged Black Tern**

The first, on 15 May 1993, was followed a year later by another on 20 July 1994.

### **Common Tern**

Only an occasional visitor to the loch until the mid 1990s when the platform was built in front of the hide. Initially, breeding was prevented by the presence of Black-headed Gulls but in 1999 two pairs bred after the gull colony had departed, and 17 adults were present on 23 July. Since then, numbers have increased steadily to 5 pairs in 2001, 17-18 pairs in 2002-2004, 20 pairs in 2008 and 24 pairs in 2013, with as many as 50 adults present on 12 July 2002, 52 on 12 July 2009 and 51 on 7 June 2014.

### **Arctic Tern**

Two adults among the Common Terns on 7 July 2002 is the only record.

### **Kittiwake**

There have been only two records – a first-winter bird on 21 October 2007 and an adult on 22 June 2008.

### **Bonaparte's Gull**

One record: a first-summer bird between 23-26 May 2007.



### **Black-headed Gull**

Formerly the loch was the site of a huge breeding colony with mention of 'great numbers' and 'thousands' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1885, 1200 eggs were reported to have been collected in one day. There were still 500 pairs in 1938 but this declined to 100 pairs in 1958 and only 20 pairs in 1988. Following desertion of the reed bed colony, a few pairs have recently returned to breed on the platform in front of the hide. Numbers here increased from two pairs in 1994 to eight in 1999, 17 in 2000 and 21 in 2008, but only 10-15 pairs since then. The largest flocks counted in winter have been 900 on 17 December 1992, 829 on 13 November 2005, 800 on 23 December 2007 and c.1000 on 20 December 2009.

### **Little Gull**

There is an old record of one shot in April 1847. More recently, single birds have been seen on 28 September 1987, 7 September 1991, 2 June 1999, 21-31 August 2003, 12 April 2006, 3 July 2006 and 10 June 2007. There were 2 on 2 June 2002.

### **Mediterranean Gull**

An adult was on the loch with Black-headed Gulls on 29 March 2003. Single immature birds have occurred on 19-20 July 2006, 1 November 2006, 9 & 22-25 February 2007, 16 June 2007 and 23-31 March (and 19 April) 2014.

### **Common Gull**

A frequent visitor to the loch, usually in small numbers but sometimes more e.g. 500 on 16 February 2003, 600 on 29 December 2007, 813 on 12 January 2008 and 1500 on 21 February 2010.

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull**

Formerly a scarce summer visitor but numbers have increased with the onset of breeding in Elgin. Until 2004, 12 was the highest count (on 28 June 2003) but there were 70 on the loch on 18 July 2008. There have been six mid winter records: single birds on 13-22 December 2003, 1 January 2009, 2 February 2009, 7 February 2010, 8 January 2011 and 5-11 February 2012.

### **Herring Gull**

Although always common flying over the loch and resting in adjacent fields, large flocks roosting on the water have been a recent consequence of nearby pig farming operations. There were 420 on 17 June 2002, 1900 during March-April 2003, 3130 on 29 January 2004, 2240 on 11 February 2006, 2800 on 10 February 2008 and 2500 on 20 February 2010. A few darker birds of the Scandinavian/ Baltic race can often be seen among winter flocks.

### **Iceland Gull**

Prior to the year 2000, the only records were of single birds on 6 March 1983, 5 February 1984 and 30 December 1992. Since that time individuals have appeared more regularly, accompanying the Herring Gull flocks, sometimes for extended periods: 1 on 21 February 2000, 1 on 29 December 2001, 1 on 11 April & 22 June 2002, 1 between 9 January-22 April 2003, 1 between 13 December 2003-27 May 2004 and 1 from 24 December 2004 until the year's end and beyond. Since 2004 they have become even more regular with 3-5 different birds visiting the loch annually.

### **Glaucous Gull**

Not recorded until 1990 when one was seen on 18 November. No further occurrences until 2003 when an adult was present intermittently between 19 January-30 April. In 2004 there was an adult during 8 March-11 April and an immature bird on 28 April. In 2005 there was an adult on 28 March and an immature between 6 March-1 May. Subsequently, immature birds have been seen on 29 November 2006, 27 May 2007, 13 February-23 April 2008 (two birds on this final date), two intermittently between 1 January-6 April 2009, and singles on 30 January 2010, 28 January 2012 and between 25 January-5 March 2014. Adults were recorded on 3-5 April 2007 and on 12 December 2009 (2).



Glaucous Gull 25/4/14 (MC)

### **Great Black-backed Gull**

Formerly a scarce but regular visitor in very small numbers. In recent years, much more numerous in winter e.g. 73 on 6 January 2012 and 42 on 24 January 2013.

### **Feral Pigeon**

A few around farm buildings near the loch.

### **Stock Dove**

Sometimes seen feeding in fields close to the loch. Usually no more than five, but 33 on 18 February 1995, 17 on 21 January 2004 and 27 on 3 November 2007. Three pairs bred in nest boxes round the loch in 2008, and two pairs in 2009 and 2013.

### **Woodpigeon**

Common breeder in the woods and willow scrub around the loch, where active nests may be only 20m apart. Largest flock counted on nearby farmland was c.2000 in February 2009.

### **Collared Dove**

Often present in small numbers around Scarffbanks farm and the loch car park e.g. 11 on 29 December 2013.

### **Cuckoo**

Remarkably few recent records - song was heard on 11 May 1992, 4 May 2002, 19 May 2011 and 4 May 2014.

### **Barn Owl**

Regularly breeds close to the loch and birds are sometimes seen hunting over the marshes and damp fields.

### **Tawny Owl**

Common breeder in the area, occupying tree holes and nest boxes. Sometimes hoots in daylight hours.

### **Long-eared Owl**

One beside the canal on 28 July 1998. Breeding has taken place within 1km of the loch so the species must visit the surrounding fields and woodlands during darkness more often than this single record would suggest.

### **Short-eared Owl**

Four birds were watched hunting together on 9 November 1969 and also on 19 January 1975. Since then, the only records are of a single bird on 10 January 1993 and 2 on 21 February 2010.

### **Swift**

First arrivals usually in 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> week of May, earliest was 1 on 22 April 2010. Up to 250 may subsequently gather to feed over the loch, especially in poor weather.

### **Hoopoe**

One was shot near the loch on 26 April 1902.

### **Kingfisher**

First seen on 6 January 1993. Almost annual occurrence since 1998 has resulted in records in September-December 1998, May 1999, April & September 2000, August-October 2001, August & October 2002, January 2003, October 2004, August-September 2005, July 2006, July-September 2009, June 2010, October 2011, August-October 2013 and September & December 2014. All were single birds except 2 between 29 September-7 October 2001.



### **Green Woodpecker**

During the brief period when this species became established as a breeder in Moray & Nairn, birds were seen or heard annually from 1985 to 1989, in 1992 and in 1995. None have been reported since.

### **Great Spotted Woodpecker**

Breeds in woodland close to the loch. Most easily seen by following up the distinctive short, sharp 'kik' call.

### **Kestrel**

Sometimes seen hunting over adjacent farmland.

### **Merlin**

A very scarce winter visitor to the vicinity of the loch, seen in ten years since 1990 – most recently in October 2008, November-December 2009 and November 2013.

### **Peregrine**

A regular but infrequent sight flying over the loch and occasionally pursuing prey. Usually, but not exclusively, seen in winter.

### **Golden Oriole**

One was heard and seen briefly in the birch woods close to the north-east corner of the loch on 19 May 2011.

### **Red-backed Shrike**

One in a scrubby area at the north end of the loch on 17 August 1988 and a male beside the track close to Scarffbanks farm on 28 May 2007.

### **Great Grey Shrike**

One in Hawthorns along the track leading to Scarffbanks farm on 11-12 October 2000.

### **Magpie**

Quite often encountered around the vicinity of the loch, breeding nearby. Outside the breeding season usually in very small groups, never more than 5 Scarffbanks 22 February 2001.

### **Jay**

First recorded on 14 February 1997 and annually since then (except 1998). Breeding doubtless takes place in nearby woodlands – largest groups have been 11 together on 12 August 2005, 9 on 3 November 2007 and 10 on 9 November 2013.

### **Jackdaw**

Most often heard flying over the loch, sometimes with Rooks. Also in mixed flocks in adjacent arable fields. A sizeable population bred in the Palace before it was roofed. Others nest in tree holes.

### **Rook**

There is a rookery about 1km from the loch and the species is common in nearby fields and flying overhead, sometimes in flocks of hundreds.

### **Carrion Crow**

Breeds close to the loch and is present in surrounding countryside at all seasons. Large numbers are sometimes attracted to the pig fields at Scarffbanks farm e.g. 63 on 26 January 2010 and 87 on 26 December 2013.

### **Hooded Crow**

Single crows considered to be pure Hooded have been reported on seven occasions: 15 March 1998, 10 January 1999, 19 January 2001, 7 April 2007, 26 January 2010, 2 May 2011 and 26 December 2013 (2 birds).

### **Goldcrest**

Common breeder in conifers around the loch. Feeds among willows in late summer and autumn.

### **Blue Tit**

Common breeder making extensive use of nest boxes - as many as 34 in 2012.



### **Great Tit**

Common breeder occupying 12-15 nest boxes in most years but as many as 27 in 2005.

### **Crested Tit**

There have been six records in the woodlands close to the loch. Two birds have been trapped and ringed (on 22 July 1989 and 3 July 2008) and others have been seen on 30 January 1999, 18 January 2006, 22 June 2007 and 28-29 December 2010.

### **Coal Tit**

Common breeder, especially in the conifer woodlands. Gathers into mixed flocks with other tits and Goldcrests in winter.

### **Bearded Tit**

Bearded Tits were first found at Loch Spynie in 1998 when three birds remained in a small area of the reed bed for two weeks in late May and later, in September, a party of eight was seen. From that time until 2009, birds were seen at the loch in most years. Breeding was proved in 2003 (one pair of adults with up to seven



juveniles), 2004 (adults carrying food in July), 2005 (adult carrying a faecal sac in June), 2006 (adults carrying food in late May) and 2007 (adult carrying food in June). In September 2007, a party of 18 birds was seen - the largest flock reported. After 2009, there were no further reports and it appears that the population died out, possibly as a consequence of severe winter weather. In 2014, however, c.5 Bearded Tits were found on 19 November and at least one was still present in December.

### Skylark

A numerous breeding species, heard singing in spring high over grazing and arable fields close to the loch. Flocks may be found in stubbles during the winter.

### Sand Martin

A common summer visitor, usually first seen hawking for insects over the water in the last days of March. When feeding conditions are difficult elsewhere, large numbers congregate at the loch with estimates of as many as 800 on 12 May 1995 and 700 on 28 April 2002.

### Swallow

The first Swallows return to the loch in early-mid April and several pairs breed around farms and other buildings close by. As with the martins, adverse weather conditions may result in hundreds gathering to feed over the water. In late summer and early autumn evenings, large flocks assemble to roost in the reed beds. Between 5000-10,000 were regular in the 1980s but numbers have been lower in recent years. Few remain by October although there have been stragglers as late as 4 November 1987 and 5 November 2009.

### House Martin

A frequent summer visitor, seen chasing insects above the water. Most common soon after arrival in mid-late April and early May, when up to 50 may be present, or at the end of the breeding season. An estimate of 200 on 16 August 1986 was unusual.

### Red-rumped Swallow

One from 12-14 May 1995, hawking over the loch with large numbers of other martins and swallows.

### Long-tailed Tit



Common breeder, encountered in parties flitting through the trees at other times of year. Groups are usually less than 20 but sometimes more; the largest counted being 45 on 29 December 1987, c.40 on both 13 December 1998 and 17 January 1999 (presumably the same party) and 36 on 5 June 2011.

### Yellow-browed Warbler

One of these vagrants from Siberia was trapped and ringed on 25 September 2001.

### Chiffchaff

Summer visitor. Two or three birds sing in the loch-side woods each year – there were 4 in 2007 and 5 in 2008. Breeding has yet to be confirmed. A few feed in the willow scrub in late summer and early autumn. A bird of Siberian race was trapped and ringed on 12 November 2000. There are three later winter records, of single birds, on 29 November 1988, 6 December 1998 and 17-24 January 1999.

### **Willow Warbler**

Very common summer visitor and breeder, usually arriving in mid April. Abundant in the willow scrub in late summer. Most have left before September.

### **Blackcap**

Summer visitor and breeder, which can be heard singing in the woodlands around the south and east of the loch. Over recent years, numbers have increased substantially from 1-2 singing males to 5-8 during 2004-08 and as many as 11 singing males in 2011 and 2012. Migrants pass through in autumn and there are four records of single birds in winter, on 1 January 1991, 14 December 1996, 29 November 1998 and 12 November 2003.



Willow Warbler 10/8/14 (RP)

### **Garden Warbler**

Summer visitor. Singing birds were reported at the loch almost every year between 1985-1995, and in 2001, 2004-07 and 2010. A few have also been trapped and ringed in the willow scrub to the north of the loch (in 1988, 2008, 2009 and 2011) and they probably occur regularly in this habitat in late summer.

### **Lesser Whitethroat**

One was trapped and ringed in the willow scrub on 26 August 1989.

### **Whitethroat**

Common summer visitor and breeder in drier scrubby areas around the loch, feeding in marshes among willows and reeds.

### **Grasshopper Warbler**

Scarce summer visitor and breeder which can be heard singing most years in the marshes to the west of the loch. Usually only 1-2 but there were 3 in May-June 2007 and 4 in April 2010.

### **Sedge Warbler**

Common summer visitor to the reed beds from late April/early May until September. On 15 May 1995, 34 were singing around the edge of the loch.



Sedge Warbler 29/8/14 (GB)

### **Marsh Warbler**

One was trapped and ringed on 23 August 1983.

### Reed Warbler

In 2008, two juveniles were trapped and ringed - on 3 & 22 August. It is not known whether these were raised in the reed beds round the loch or originated from elsewhere.

### Waxwing

The only records from close to the loch are of 12 on 26 February 1989, 3 on 10 November 1996, 30 flying over on 27 October 2004, 10 on 4 February 2005, 1 on 6 November 2005, 20 on 25 October-1 November 2010, 4 on 2 December 2012 and up to 20 between 3-9 March 2013.

### Treecreeper

Breeds thinly in the woodlands. Often accompanies tit flocks in autumn and winter.



### Wren

Common resident breeder.

### Starling

Although a few pairs breed in buildings and tree holes close to the loch, Starlings are most evident when gathering to roost in the reed beds on autumn and winter evenings. As darkness approaches, flocks wheel and swirl in synchronised patterns before plunging into the reeds. Numbers are hard to estimate but may approach 5000 on occasions – although in recent winters 1000-1500 is more normal.

### Rose-coloured Starling

One was shot near the loch on 21 June 1851.

### Blackbird

Common breeder with numbers augmented in autumn and winter by immigrants from the Continent.

### Fieldfare

Autumn and winter immigrant to the area with large flocks of newly arrived birds sometimes flying over during mid October-early November. Most move on after Hawthorn and Rowan berries are stripped but smaller flocks may be seen, often feeding on stubbles, throughout the winter. In some years, a few are seen in April and even as late as May e.g. 4 on 8 May 2012.

### Song Thrush

Common breeder in loch-side woodlands. Most leave during the early winter but spring return is very early, from mid February.

### Redwing

Autumn and winter immigrant, sometimes descending in large flocks to feast on Hawthorn and Rowan berries in October and November e.g. 300 on 5 November 2005. Normally only small numbers remain around the loch in mid winter although there were 250 on 28 February 2007 .

### Mistle Thrush

Breeds in nearby woodlands. Flocks gather in late summer and autumn e.g. around Scarffbanks where 84 on 11 September 1987, 57 on 16 August 2002 and 48 on 10 August 2005.

### **Spotted Flycatcher**

Very scarce summer visitor to the more mature woodlands. Breeding was proved in 2004 for the first time in recent years.

### **Robin**

Common breeder. Some are resident and many others pass through the area in late summer and autumn.

### **Nightingale**

One was trapped and ringed in willow scrub on 10 August 1988.

### **Pied Flycatcher**

One spring migrant on 11 May 1975.

### **Redstart**

A juvenile was trapped and ringed on 19 July 1989 and another was seen on 20 July 2007. There has been no evidence of breeding in the vicinity of the loch.

### **Stonechat**

Seen on four occasions close to the west side of the loch: 1 in summer 1992, 1 on 2 March 1996, 2 on 12 October 1999 and 1 in January 2010. On 7 January 2007, one was seen near Scarffbanks Farm.

### **Wheatear**

An annual spring migrant in April and early May. Seen in very small numbers along tracks and in bare fields near the loch. Seven on 5 May 1995 is the most counted together.

### **Dunnock**

Common resident breeder.

### **House Sparrow**

Breeds around human habitation near the loch.

### **Tree Sparrow**

A few pairs probably breed in areas close to the loch. Winter flocks of 50-100 fed in adjacent farmland in winter in the 1980s and early 1990s but fewer are now seen - usually up to 20.

### **Grey Wagtail**



Grey Wagtail 25/8/14 (GB)

An infrequent visitor to the few parts of the loch where the shore is exposed. Two juveniles were present on 26 June 2009. There are two recent mid-winter records; on 7-8 January 2006 and 22 December 2007.

### **Pied Wagtail**

Breeds around farm buildings close to the loch. Up to 100 regularly roost in the reeds in autumn and winter, occasionally many more e.g. 600 on 25 March 1993. The late date of this large assembly suggests the presence of returning migrants. Birds of the pale-backed Continental race known as White Wagtail are occasionally seen, usually in late April or early May; 11 were feeding in a field beside Scarffbanks farm on 4 May 1992.

### **Tree Pipit**

The only records are of 3 feeding in a field near Scarffbanks farm on 4 May 1992 and single birds flying over on 26 July & 9 August 2008 and 9 August 2009. There has been no evidence of breeding in the nearby pine/birch woodland but this is a possibility.

### **Meadow Pipit**

Breeds thinly in damp and scrubby ground near the loch. Small flocks may be encountered in winter.

### **Brambling**

An occasional winter visitor. Close to the loch or around Scarffbanks farm were 3 on 10 January 1993, 1 on 8 January 2005, 20 on 3 March 2006, 1-2 between February-April 2009, 6 on 8 November 2010 and 4 on 21 December 2012. Near the Palace were 15 on 12 April 1997 and a single bird on 16 November 2003.

### **Chaffinch**

Very common breeder in all types of woodland. Gathers into flocks on farmland in winter e.g. 200 at Scarffbanks on 30 November 1997 and 400 near Spynie Palace in December 2005.

### **Bullfinch**

A few pairs breed in shrubby vegetation and small groups of 5-6 are commonly encountered in wooded areas in winter. Larger flocks are uncommon but 17 were seen together on 21 January 1987.

### **Greenfinch**

A resident species although there is no recent evidence of breeding in the immediate vicinity of the loch. Mixed finch flocks in winter on neighbouring farmland often contain Greenfinches e.g. 36 at Scarffbanks on 1 December 2002 and as many as 150 near the Palace on 13 February 2000.

### **Linnet**

Breeds along the adjacent old railway line and other areas with gorse. Largest winter flocks in nearby arable land have been 210 in August 1996, 150 in February 2003 and 100 in November 2012.

### **Lesser Redpoll**

Not recently reported in the breeding season but sometimes seen among the birches and on stubbles at other times. Largest recent count was 80 in the trees around Scarffbanks between 23-30 December 1995, and 25 were there on 25 August 2013.

### **Common (Mealy) Redpoll**

Up to 10 among Lesser Redpolls during 23-30 December 1995 and 2 on 24 March 1996.

### **Arctic Redpoll**

Five different individuals were among the mixed redpoll flock at Scarffbanks between 23 December 1995-3 January 1996. Later, 2 on 24 March 1996.

### **Common Crossbill and Scottish Crossbill**

Crossbills are occasionally present in and around the conifer woods on the east side of the loch. Largest groups have been 27 on 13 October 1990 and 26 on 24 December 1997. Both forms have probably occurred but most records cannot be attributed either way.

### **Goldfinch**

Nests in shrubby areas close to open ground near the loch and gathers to feed in flocks where small seeds are available. The largest flocks close to the loch have been 85 on 21 August 1995, 200 on 11 December 2005 and 150 on 15 November 2006.

### **Siskin**

Commonly encountered high in coniferous trees around the loch where it probably breeds although such proof is lacking. Flocks of 50 or more have been seen in seven recent winters (max. 80 on 7 February 1990, 7 December 1992 and 4 December 2005) but numbers are usually lower than this.

### **Snow Bunting**

Three were near Scarffbanks on 30 December 1998 and one flew over the loch on 1 January 1999. A flock of 30 was near Spynie canal on 11 December 2005.

### **Yellowhammer**

Breeds in drier areas with gorse and hawthorn such as along the old railway line. Flocks gather in winter on farmland where best counts have been 74 in December 2005, 54 in March 2006 and 90 in February 2011.

### **Reed Bunting**

A common breeder in all reed beds and marshes. In summer 1997 18 singing birds were counted around the main loch and on 17 June 1999 there were 12 territories in c.40 ha of marsh west of the Palace. In February 2011, up to 40 fed with Yellowhammers in stubbles near Scarffbanks farm.



Reed Bunting 4/5/14 (RSC)

### **Corn Bunting**

Formerly common in the area e.g. 150 roosting in a marsh near the loch in December 1948. In keeping with the national decline, numbers in Moray are now very small and there has been no record close to the loch since 1990.

PHOTOS were all taken at Loch Spynie, by Grahame Anderson (GA), Tony Backx (AB), Gordon Biggs (GB), Martin Cook (MC), Duncan Gibson (DG), David Main (DM), Bob Proctor (RP) and Richard Somers Cocks (RSC).