

Birds in Moray & Nairn

2003

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MORAY & NAIRN BIRD REPORT
No.19 – 2003

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Compiled by Martin Cook, with assistance from John Mackie (waders) and Bob Proctor (wildfowl).

Edited by Martin Cook (Scottish Ornithologists' Club Recorder for Moray & Nairn).

Cover photograph: Razorbill pair with chick, Portknockie, 25 June 2003 (© Martin Cook)

INTRODUCTION

Review of the year

This, the 19th annual report on the birdlife of Moray & Nairn, describes a busy year focussed in spring and summer around the Breeding Bird Atlas, of which more below. The start of the year was marked by the appearance of our first Nuthatch, a species currently expanding its range in Scotland. Unusual wildfowl in the first winter period included two long-staying Smews, up to five Surf Scoters and a Green-winged Teal. Waxwings were widespread in small numbers and the first of two Mediterranean Gulls for the year was a striking adult on Loch Spynie.

Spring arrivals continued the early trend of recent years with record early dates for Swift, Cuckoo, Sedge Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher. The 8th Bluethroat for the area was briefly at Hopeman in April and, if the record is accepted, a Short-toed Lark at Kingston will be the first for Moray & Nairn.

Most significant events of the breeding season were the first breeding by Razorbills and the first discovery of a Little Ringed Plover's nest. Cormorants built nests but failed to breed. Among our other scarce breeders, Shags continued their upward trend while Slavonian Grebes, despite rearing an encouraging number of young, become increasingly focussed on a single site. Little Terns had a reasonably successful year but Arctic Terns suffered further breeding failure. Black Guillemots continue to consolidate slowly in the east. At Loch Spynie, the tiny population of Bearded Tits persists and a Great Crested Grebe appeared in spring but failed to attract a mate.

The start of autumn migration was marked by exceptional numbers of Manx Shearwaters passing off shore but, other than briefly in late August, autumn was quiet for seabirds. Hobby and Yellow Wagtail visited in September and, during an October influx onto the east coast of Scotland, the first Pallas's Warbler for Moray & Nairn was seen in a garden near Urquhart. A Hoopoe in early November was unusually late. Autumn wader passage was unexceptional, with species such as Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper moving through in small numbers.

Highlights of the second winter period were the 2nd ever Ring-necked Duck, on Loch Oire and Loch na Bo, the 2nd Green-winged Teal of the year and a Lapland Bunting in December. Waxwings again appeared in small numbers, mostly in Forres and Elgin.

The Breeding Bird Atlas

2003 was the second year of this exciting project in Moray and NE Scotland. We are attempting to map the breeding distribution of all species in the area on a 2km X 2km (tetrad) grid over a period of 5 years. Moray contains 652 tetrads and the following statistics relate to the first two breeding seasons, 2002-03, combined:

- 314 tetrads have been covered, 231 of them to a good standard
- 13555 records have been received
- 44 observers have taken part
- 103 tetrads have 'scores' of 50 or more species
- 22 tetrads have 'scores' of 70 or more species
- Top tetrad is NJ26I (Loch Spynie) with 97 species recorded
- Most prolific observer is Alastair Young with 4379 records from 58 tetrads

All this represents very good progress, especially in the ‘lowland’ areas of Moray. Many inland and upland parts of the region, however, remain thinly covered and it is here that we shall need to concentrate our efforts in the second half of the project. If you have not so far been involved and would like to take part in the highly enjoyable and rewarding fieldwork, please contact Martin Cook (martin.cook9@virgin.net), who is organising the Moray effort, or Ian Francis (ifnp@clara.co.uk) who is organising the rest of north-east Scotland.

The records database

The system for collating the records at the end of the year was changed for 2003 with the introduction of an Excel spreadsheet system. This allows observers with computers and Excel to e-mail records to the Bird Recorder and they can then be dropped directly into the year’s database. The many hours of manual record entry are thereby significantly reduced. A further benefit of the Excel database is the facility to extract groups of records very simply for analysis or transmission. In this way it allows closer examination of the year’s data set.

For 2003, 8405 records were received, excluding those on the Breeding Bird Atlas cards. The top ten species for which records were received, and the top ten sites, are shown below:

	Species	Records received	Sites	Records received
1	Buzzard	225	Loch Spynie	1150
2	Goldeneye	188	Lossie estuary	768
3	Mallard	178	Kinloss	632
4	Mute Swan	172	Lossiemouth	388
5	Tufted Duck	171	Nairn & Culbin Bars	338
6	Wigeon	170	Kingston	319
7	Blackcap	155	Findhorn Bay	288
8	Kestrel	152	Burghead	192
9	Cormorant	137	Loch na Bo	184
10	Dunlin	123	Cloddach Quarry	183

Jay is 15th in the order with 104 records – changed times compared with only 10 years ago when four records were received for 1993.

Clearly we like visiting wet places and counting water birds. It is revealing that only one passerine, Blackcap, enters the top ten – it would be valuable to have a lot more counts of winter thrushes, finch flocks etc. It would also help to provide a more complete picture of the birdlife of the area if we could visit some sites ‘off the beaten track’ a bit more often.

The monthly spread of records through the year (% of total records received) was as follows:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
8.6	9.1	8.4	11.2	10.1	5.8	5.7	8.7	7.3	9.8	7.9	7.4

The dip in September is strange – surely this is one of the most exciting months to be out in pursuit of the unusual.

A table for individual observers is probably inappropriate, but suffice to say that John Mackie's total of 1837 records has a very clear lead over his nearest challengers who submitted 1158 and 1076 respectively. Number 10 in the league provided 211 so the great majority of records are coming from quite a small core of observers.

Interesting as these statistics may be, we should of course we should of course be spending our time with birds not as a form of work or duty but as a relaxation and an interesting and rewarding recreational activity. Attempts to document our bird life need to fall within these criteria.

Submission of records

The area covered by this Report is Moray and that part of Highland which corresponds to the former Nairn District. Lochindorb, formerly at the southern tip of Moray, now falls outside the revised Moray boundary which runs along the A939. A small part of the former Nairn District boundary lies along the western shore so records from the loch continue to be included in the Report.

All records for inclusion in the 2004 Report will be welcomed by the Moray & Nairn Bird Recorder at the following address:

Martin Cook
Rowanbrae, Clochan, Buckie, Banffshire AB56 5EQ
Tel. Clochan (01542) 850296

Important records do not have to be of unusual birds. Every local bird watcher can help because many more records of common species are needed. For example, a much greater sample size of summer migrant arrival dates would be valuable. Please submit your records at regular intervals or in a single batch as soon as possible in January 2005.

Once again the Editor is very pleased to acknowledge the generous financial support of Walkers Shortbread Ltd, Aberlour and Dr Melvin Morrison, Keith.

The Editor gratefully acknowledges the help of John Mackie and Bob Proctor in the preparation of the species accounts. Once again Bob has produced the Ringing Report. Thanks to Duncan Gibson for his photographs.

ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL RARITY RECORDS

The Moray & Nairn Rarities Committee exists to consider records of local rarities which do not fall within the scope of the British Birds Rarities Committee or the Scottish Birds Rarities Committee. There follows a list of those species (or subspecies) which are considered by the Moray & Nairn Rarities Committee. If you see one of these species please contact the area Recorder as soon as possible for a description form.

Black-necked Grebe	Crane	Richard's Pipit
Balearic Shearwater	Little Ringed Plover	Yellow Wagtail
Leach's Petrel	Temminck's Stint	Bluethroat
Bittern	Pectoral Sandpiper	Lesser Whitethroat
Little Egret	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Icterine Warbler
White Stork	Grey Phalarope	Yellow-browed Warbler
Spoonbill	Red-necked Phalarope	Firecrest
Bewick's Swan	Long-tailed Skua	Bearded Tit
Bean Goose	Mediterranean Gull	Red-backed Shrike
Green-winged Teal	Sabine's Gull	Great Grey Shrike
Garganey (not ad.M)	Roseate Tern	Hawfinch
Ring-necked Duck	Black Tern	Common Rosefinch
Ruddy Duck (not ad.M)	Turtle Dove	Lapland Bunting
Surf Scoter (not ad.M)	Nightjar	
Honey Buzzard	Hoopoe	
Hobby	Wryneck	
Spotted Crake	Shore Lark	
Corncrake	Water Pipit	

Subspecies:

Cormorant (*P.c.sinensis*) Rock Pipit (*A.p.littoralis*)
 Chiffchaff (*P.c.tristis/abietinus*)

Also records in the following categories:

All 'firsts' for Moray & Nairn

The first five records for any species in Moray & Nairn

Out-of-season records for a species (e.g. Willow Warbler in December)

Significant out-of-habitat records for a species (e.g. coastal Ravens).

OBSERVERS CONTRIBUTING TO 2003 REPORT

I.M.Addis, H.Addlesee, F.Antley, I.Barker, S.Benn, W.R.P.Bourne, J.Brighthouse, P.&I.Brown, D.Butterfield, G.Cadger, K.Cairns, P.C.Campbell, R.P.Campbell, M.Canham, D.&S.Chaplin, W.Cloney, J.Cobb, A.Comerford, D.Connelly, M.J.H.Cook, S.Coomber, I.Cooper, R.Copeland, B.Cosnette, J.K.Craib, G.Cross, J.Darroch, P.Day, M.Dearman, R.H.Dennis, C.Donald, A.Dunbar, J.Dunbar, S.Durno, S.Eaves, A.Edward, B.Etheridge, H.Farquhar, T.Finnemore, I.Ford, I.Francis, J.&M.Fraser, R.Fraser, D.&M.Galloway, D.Genney, C.A.Gervaise, D.A.Gibson, P.Gordon Smith, N.G.Greatholder, N.Hancock, E.Harwood, R.F.Hewitt, A.Hinchliffe, P.T.Hirst, M.Holling, Mrs Hotson, J.Jamieson, D.Jardine, O.Jenkins, A.Jensen, P.Johnston, M.Jones, J.D.Law, A.J.Lawrence, A.Leitch, J.&H.MacDonald, M.MacGarvin, J.D.H.Mackie, H.Maggs, P.Majendie, R.A.Mavor, I.McDonald, H.McIntosh, C.Mclean, S.McLennan, H.Mills, T.Moodie, P.Moore, L.Morrison, M.Morrison, R.Morrison, A.&I.Munro, S.Munro, T.Murdoch, S.Murphy, A.R.Murray, M.Newell, S.Nicolson, C.M.Ormston, L.Patch, J.D.H.Paterson, K.Paterson, R.F.Paton, A.Perkins, I.Phillips, R.Phillips, O.Pierce, R.Piper, J.Poyner, R.Proctor, D.M.Pullan, C.Ross, C.Round, I.Rowlands, R.A.Shewan, L.&R.Simpson, D.Slater, R.Smith, H.A.Stewart, R.Suddaby, M.Sutcliffe, I.S.Suttie, R.Swann, H.Swift, W.G.Taylor, D.Thorn, J.Watson, D.Wheeler, M.Whitton, J.Willet, A.Young.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF THE YEAR

JANUARY

1st 9 Mandarin Elgin, 1 Smew Loch Spynie, 1 Iceland Gull Portknockie, 2nd 1 Smew Loch Flemington, 5th 27 Pintail Findhorn Bay, 296 Scaup Culbin Bar, 1 Surf Scoter Culbin Bar, 17 Grey Plover Nairn/Culbin Bars, 10 Jack Snipe Kingsteps, 1 Jack Snipe Portknockie, 1 Black-tailed Godwit Findhorn Bay, 13 Twite Nairn Bar, 110 Snow Bunting Nairn/Culbin Bars, 6th 48 Brent Goose Nairn Bar, 9th 1 Iceland Gull Loch Spynie, 10th 1 Great Crested Grebe Burghead Bay, 1 Iceland Gull Lossie estuary, 1 Glaucous Gull Hill of Spynie, 11th 43 Waxwing Lossiemouth, 12th 1 Iceland Gull Urquhart, 1 Kingfisher Loch Spynie, 15th 13 Waxwing Buckie, 15 Waxwing Mosstodloch, 17th 88 Brambling Auchindoun, 680 Goldfinch Croftmore, 19th 2 Pintail Loch Spynie, 1 Greenshank Findhorn Bay, 1 Glaucous Gull Loch Spynie, 143 Goldfinch Roseisle, 25th 11 Waxwing Nairn, 26th 1 Kingfisher Caysbriggs.

FEBRUARY

1st 1 Chiffchaff Nairn, 3rd 86 Twite Findhorn Bay, 4th 6 Waxwing Fochabers, 18 Twite Kinloss, 6th 1 Nuthatch Mosstodloch, 50 Brambling College of Roseisle, 21 Twite College of Roseisle, 8th 1 Glaucous Gull Spey Bay, 13th 1 Great Crested Grebe Tugnet, 1 Iceland Gull Speymouth, 14th 6 Short-eared Owl Findhorn dunes, 16th 40 Brent Goose Nairn, 26 Brent Goose Findhorn Bay, 42 Pintail Findhorn Bay, 5 Surf Scoter Culbin Bar, 207 Sanderling Nairn/Culbin Bars, 5 Jack Snipe Kingsteps, 24th 2 Red-necked Grebe Burghead Bay, 10 Slavonian Grebe Burghead Bay, 2 Surf Scoter Burghead Bay.

MARCH

2nd 33 Whooper Swan Penick, 10th 1 Great Crested Grebe Loch Spynie, 13th 1 Great Crested Grebe Fogwatt, 1 Red-necked Grebe Burghead Bay, 1 Iceland Gull Speymouth, 20th 1 Gadwall Loch Spynie, 1 Iceland Gull Brodie, 23rd 1 Ruff Lossie estuary, 24th 1 Wheatear Portknockie, 1 Wheatear Kinloss, 25th 1 Sand Martin Boat o'Brig 4 Waxwing Forres, 28th 2 White-fronted Goose Wester Buthill, 25 Waxwing Elgin, 29th 1 Mediterranean Loch Spynie.

APRIL

1st 1 Swallow Auchindachy, 5th 3 Waxwing Hopeman, 200 Brambling Montgrew, 6th 1 Green-winged Teal Kingston, 8th 1 Surf Scoter Burghead Bay, 1 Jack Snipe Portknockie, 10th 64 Red-throated Diver Findhorn, 50 Red-throated Diver Spey Bay, 1 Kingfisher Elgin, 12th 1 Willow Warbler Loch Spynie, 13th 19 Black-throated Diver Burghead Bay, 2 White Wagtail Findhorn Bay, 16th 3 Black-tailed Godwit Montgrew, 4 House Martin Garmouth, 18th 52 Red-throated Diver Spey Bay, 20th 2 Ruff Cloddach quarry, 1 Sedge Warbler Loch Spynie, 21st 1 Iceland Gull Nether Dallachy, 23rd 1 Glaucous Gull Portknockie, 4 White Wagtail Forres, 24th 1 Cuckoo Daless, 25th 1 Great Crested Grebe Burghead Bay, 1 White Wagtail Elgin, 26th 1 Little Auk Portknockie, 29th 1 Mandarin Loch Spynie, 30th 1 Hen harrier Scarffbanks, 1 Little Gull Findhorn Bay, 2 Swift Loch Spynie.

MAY

1st 1 Waxwing Kinloss, 4th 140 Sandwich Tern Tugnet, 1 Wood Warbler Elginshill, 1 Spotted Flycatcher Gordonstoun, 6th 1 Raven Birchfield, 9th 1 Gadwall Loch Spynie, 10th 3 Gadwall Loch Spynie, 11th 2 White Wagtail Montgrew, 13th 1 Little Gull Findhorn Bay, 1 White Wagtail Lossie estuary, 15th 2 Green Woodpecker Drynachan, 17th 2 Little Ringed Plover Kingston, 1 Dotterel Corryhabbie, 21st 1 Kingfisher Bogmoor, 23rd 1 Glaucous Gull Spey Bay, 25th 3 Black-tailed Godwit Kingston, 26th 1 Green Sandpiper Loch Spynie, 28th 1 Kingfisher Forres, 29th 40 Manx Shearwater Findhorn, 30th 15 Canada Goose Loch Spynie, 31st 1 White Wagtail Glenlatterach.

JUNE

2nd 28 Canada Goose Burghead Bay, 1 Black-tailed Godwit Montgrew, 2 Black-tailed Godwit Nairn, 5th 24 Canada Goose Aberlour, 7th 1 Quail Nether Enoch, 8th 2 Raven Carn Mheadhoin, 9th 1 Waxwing Fochabers, 14th 2 pairs Little Ringed Plover Garmouth, 15th 2 Little Stint Kingston, 16th 10 Whooper Swan Findhorn Bay, 20th 20 Manx Shearwater Lossiemouth, 27th 4 Greenshank Findhorn Bay, 29th 2 Whooper Swan Lochindorb.

JULY

9th 9 Bearded Tit Loch Spynie, 11th 24 Common Sandpiper Findhorn Bay, 13th 25 Common Sandpiper Kingston, 17th 1 Green Sandpiper Inchstelly, 21st 2 Little Tern Burghead, 23rd 1 Little Stint Spey Bay, 27th 1 White Wagtail Lossie estuary, 29th 1 Quail South Darkland, 7 Black-tailed Godwit Kingston, 25 Whimbrel Kingston, 31st 1 Red Kite Moray, 1 Spotted Redshank Covesea.

AUGUST

3rd 3 Ruff Kingston, 13 Black-tailed Godwit Findhorn Bay, 4th 1 Hen Harrier Mosstodloch, 2 Quail Keam, 8 Little Stint Findhorn Bay, 1 Ruff Montgrew, 6th 2 Storm Petrel Strathlene, 7th 4 Little Stint Findhorn Bay, 8th 6 Ruff Spey Bay, 1 Ruff Findhorn Bay, 9th 1 Green Sandpiper Kingston, 1 Kingfisher Firhall, 11th 12 Greenshank Findhorn Bay, 12th 1 Ruff Lossie estuary, 13th 1 White Wagtail Lossie estuary, 15th 2 Pomarine Skua Lossiemouth, 1 Mediterranean Gull Garmouth, 17th 1 Great Crested Grebe Loch Spynie, 27 Black-tailed Godwit Findhorn Bay, 1 Red Kite Moray, 19th 6 Black-tailed Godwit Kingston, 1 Black-tailed Godwit Lossie estuary, 1 Little Tern Hopeman, 21st 440 Sanderling Nairn/Culbin Bars, 22nd 2 Gadwall Loch Spynie 4 Ruff Lossie estuary, 24th 20 Manx Shearwater Findhorn, 1 Little Gull Findhorn Bay, 26th 1 Curlew Sandpiper Findhorn Bay, 28th 1 Pintail Loch Oire, 29th 300 Manx Shearwater Lossiemouth, 1 Little Stint Lossie estuary, 29 Arctic Skua Lossiemouth, 28 Great Skua Lossiemouth, 1 Little Gull Lossiemouth, 150 Sandwich Tern Lossiemouth, 30th 1 Sooty Shearwater Lossiemouth, 137 Manx Shearwater Lossiemouth, 2 Ruff Kingston, 3 Ruff Lossie estuary, 1 Pomarine Skua Lossiemouth, 1 Little Gull Lossiemouth, 31st 24 Manx Shearwater Lossiemouth, 1 Pomarine Skua Lossiemouth.

SEPTEMBER

1st 148 Sandwich Tern Burghead, 2nd 140 Sandwich Tern Findhorn Bay, 5th 1 Hobby Loch Spynie, 6th 1 Little Stint Kingston, 7th 10 Black-tailed Godwit Findhorn Bay, 266 Sandwich Tern Culbin Bar, 9th 1 Kingfisher Firhall, 2 White Wagtail Lossie estuary, 10th 5 Ruff Kingston, 11th 1 Ruff Windyridge, 1 White Wagtail Loch na Bo, 12th 140 Goldfinch Balnacoul, 13th 2 Ruff Lossie estuary, 14th 2 Pintail Kingston, 8 Scaup Kingston, 15th 1 White Wagtail Lossie estuary, 16th 1 Red-necked Grebe Burghead Bay, 2 Curlew Sandpiper Findhorn Bay, 18th 2 Red-necked Grebe Burghead Bay, 6 Brent Goose Lossie estuary, 2 Little Stint Lossie estuary, 19th 1 Ruff Findhorn Bay, 20th 1 Sooty Shearwater Findhorn, 1 Little Stint Findhorn Bay, 1 Little Stint Kingston, 2 Curlew Sandpiper Kingston, 4 Ruff Lossie estuary, 1 Green Woodpecker Elgin, 22nd 1 Pomarine Skua Lossiemouth, 23rd 1 Sooty Shearwater Burghead, 1 Pomarine Skua Burghead Bay, 28th 24 Ptarmigan Ben Rinnes, 29th 18 Little Grebe Binsness, 1 Osprey Binsness.

OCTOBER

2nd 1 Red-necked Grebe Burghead Bay, 3rd 21 Barnacle Goose Lossiemouth, 45 Brent Goose Lossiemouth, 8th 2 White-fronted Goose Burghead, 15 Barnacle Goose Burghead, 10th 60 Barnacle Goose Altonburn, 12th 1 Pintail Portgordon, 52 Snipe Kingsteps, 1 Spotted Redshank Kingston, 1 Kingfisher Kingsteps, 13th 20 Slavonian Grebe Burghead Bay, 15th 48 Snipe Lein, 18th 4 Waxwing Inchberry, 20th 1 Ruddy Duck Loch Spynie, 22nd 1 Kingfisher Firhall, 25th 1 Waxwing Brodie, 27th 1 Green-winged Teal Loch Oire, 17 Waxwing Kinloss, 28th 3 Little Auk Lossiemouth, 29th 1 Red-necked Grebe Burghead Bay, 30th 74 Cormorant Tugnet.

NOVEMBER

1st 1 Hoopoe Drybridge, 6th 74 Scaup Nairn, 1 Waxwing Clochan, 8th 1 Iceland Gull Lossie estuary, 10th 55 Waxwing Forres, 11th 40 Waxwing Elgin, 16th 1 Ring-necked Duck Loch Oire, 20th 21 Great Northern Diver Nairn/Culbin Bars, 13 Slavonian Grebe Nairn/Culbin Bars, 1 Surf Scoter Culbin Bar, 21st 1 Ring-necked Duck Loch na Bo, 23rd 1 Hen Harrier Blervie, 24th 1 Black-tailed Godwit Findhorn Bay, 30th 1200 Brambling Greenbog.

DECEMBER

3rd 1 Hen Harrier Spynie Palace, 8th 7 Pintail Findhorn Bay, 1 Little Auk Burghead, 13th 1 Iceland Gull Loch Spynie, 1 Kingfisher Aberlour, 14th 8 Jack Snipe Kingsteps/Bars, 64 Snow Bunting Nairn/Culbin Bars, 60 Snow Bunting Lossie estuary, 17th 1 Lapland Bunting Tugnet, 26th 1 White-fronted Goose Mosstowie, 12 Brent Goose Nairn, 28th 2 Jack Snipe Inchberry, 29th 1 Greenshank Lossie estuary, 30th 1 Great Crested Grebe Burghead Bay.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

The following terms are used at the start of each species account to denote relative abundance:

Breeding species:

Occasional	has bred but none in most years
Rare	1-10 pairs in most years
Scarce	11-50 pairs
Fairly common	51-200 pairs
Common	201-500 pairs
Very common	more than 500 pairs

Non-breeding species:

Rare	1-20 records in total
Very scarce	not rare but less than 10 in most years
Scarce	10-50 in most years
Fairly common	51-200 in most years
Common	201-500 annually
Very common	more than 500 annually

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Rare breeder. Common autumn and winter visitor offshore.

Summer: In the traditional summering/breeding area were two adults 5 Apr and one 9 Jul behaving in a territorial manner – no proof of breeding however (MJH C). At a different site, one adult 31 May (DAG). At the coast, single figures Burghead Bay (max 9 on 15 Aug) and Spey Bay (5 on 6 Jul, 7 on 31 Aug).

Good counts in spring when 64 Findhorn 10 Apr, 50 Spey Bay (Boar's Head Rock-Kingston) 10 Apr and 52 Spey Bay (off Lein) 18 Apr.

Best monthly counts offshore in each winter period were:

	Jan	Feb	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Delnies	2	3	nc	nc	5	4
Nairn/Culbin Bars	7	19	nc	29	33	1
Burghead Bay	1	9	21	16	8	nc
Spey Bay	4	1	22	nc	27	4

nc = no count received

Only small numbers along rocky coasts away from the shallow bays, e.g. 6 Bow Fiddle Rock 17 Feb, 7 Burghead-Lossiemouth 21 Feb and 4 Portknockie 22 March.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

Rare breeder. Scarce autumn and winter visitor offshore.

As usual, most were to be found in Burghead Bay. Monthly maxima here were as follows:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	4	10 (27 th)	19 (13 th)	4	0	0	0	3	4	0	0

The spring build up, detected in previous years, was again apparent although autumn numbers were smaller than usual.

Very few elsewhere e.g. 2 Spey Bay 27 March and 7 other reports of single birds along the coast.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

Scarce visitor offshore.

An exceptional assembly of 21 off Nairn & Culbin Bars 20 Nov and 5 at nearby Findhorn the previous day (DB) – the most seen at one site in Moray & Nairn for 10 years. In Burghead Bay, 3 on 15 Oct and 1-2 on many winter dates. Also a scatter of reports of 1-2 at various coastal localities between Sept-Apr. 1 in Burghead harbour 16-26 Nov. In late spring/summer, 1 Spey Bay 13-24 May and an unusual summer record of 2 in summer plumage flying past Covesea 8 June.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Scarce breeder, scarce on the estuaries in winter.

Mid-winter: Very few inland, including 1 Loch Flemington 5 Jan and 14 Dec, 1 Cloddach 13 Dec, 2 Loch na Bo 26 Jan and 3 there 13 Dec.

Present in spring/summer (*italics* = proved breeding) at Altyre, Auldearn (Newmill), Brodie, *Cloddach quarry* (2 pairs), *Dava* (2 pairs), *Fochabers Lake*, *Inchstelly*, Loch Belivat, *Loch na Bo*, *Loch Loy* (2 pairs), Loch of Blairs, *Loch Oire* (3 pairs), *Loch Park* (4 nests on 19 Apr), *Loch Spynie*, Lochs of Bogmussach, Lossie Forest (north pool), Nether Dallachy, Newton of Dalvey and Windyridge.

Best post-breeding congregations in late summer/autumn were at Loch na Bo where 19 on 24 Aug, 18 on 28 Sept and 19 on 20 Oct. Also numerous at Loch Spynie where max 22 on 10 Sept.

Coastal in winter: A notable concentration, as usual, around the Kincorth/ Binsness area of Findhorn Bay where 9 on 5 Jan, 6 on 16 Feb, 18 on 29 Sept, 8 on 30 Nov and 7 on 17 Dec. Elsewhere, 1 Culbin Bar 16 Feb, 2 Kingston 9 Sept rising to 5 by 15 Oct, and 1 Nairn 6 Nov.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Rare breeder and very scarce offshore in autumn and winter.

One Loch Spynie 10 March-18 May (many obs). This is the first at Loch Spynie, a former breeding site, since 2000 but unfortunately it remained unmated. It, or another, visited a pool at Fogwatt 13 March (CAG) and was on Loch Spynie 17 Aug (HF).

More coastal records than usual; single birds in Burghead Bay 10 Jan (AH), 25 Apr (AJL) and 30 Dec (RP), and off Tugnet 13 Feb (DMP,SE).

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegina*

Very scarce migrant and winter visitor.

As usual, only in Burghead Bay where seen on 24 Feb (2), 13 March, 16 Sept, 18 Sept (2), 2 Oct and 29 Oct (AJL,NH,JDHM).

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

Rare breeder. Scarce offshore in winter.

Breeding: A drop to 8 territorial pairs but of greater concern is the increasing dependence of the species in Moray & Nairn on a single breeding site.

The table below shows, for the last 10 years, the number of sites holding at least one territorial pair, the number of sites where at least one pair attempted to breed, the total number of pairs (both categories combined) and the total number of young reared to fledging.

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Sites holding pair(s)	5	4	3	4	3	3	2	3	4	2
Sites holding breeding pair(s)	3	4	2	3	3	3	1	3	3	1
Pairs	11	13	8	12	9	8	3	7	10	8
Young	7	12	2	2	5-6	1	3	11	6	9

Site 2 - First three back 30 March. Seven pairs were present – the best ever. Four pairs were successful, raising broods of 4, 3, 3 and 1 to fledging. Last juvenile seen 16 Oct.

Site 3 - One pair 19 Jun, but not seen subsequently.

Site 4 - One pair present in spring but no nest was built.

Site 8 - One adult 6-10 Apr.

Site 11 - One adult on one day in early June.

In autumn/winter on freshwater was 1 Loch Spynie 11-28 Sept (many obs.) and 1 there 29 Dec (CAG,RP,RAM).

Coastal: Monthly maxima in Burghead Bay were:

Feb	Mar	Apr	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
10 (24 th)	8 (13 th)	4 (8 th)	9 (30 th)	20 (13 th)	7 (19 th)	2 (30 th)

(many obs.)

Elsewhere, 2 Boar's Head Rock 28 Nov and 5 Dec, 13 Nairn & Culbin Bars 20 Nov, 1 Delnies 11 Jan and 8 Dec, 1 Kingston 27 Jan and 5 Dec, 1 Nairn 8 Dec (all DB), and 1 Lossiemouth 1 Nov (DAG).

Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Common breeder, very common offshore.

Only significant counts of birds passing offshore were heading west in late August when 99 Lossiemouth in 40 mins on 28th, 400 there in 2 hours on 29th and 34 Strathlene in 10 mins on 31st.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Very scarce migrant in late summer and autumn.

Only three records, each of a single bird passing offshore; Lossiemouth 30 Aug (EH), Findhorn 20 Sept (DMP) and Burghead 23 Sept (IF).

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

Scarce offshore in summer and autumn.

An exceptional year with record numbers, especially in late August.

In early summer, 'several' Lossiemouth 30 Apr (IF), 40 Findhorn 29 May (NH), 5 Boar's Head Rock 19 June (TM), 20 Lossiemouth 20 June (EH). In July, 1 Kingston 26th (AJ) and in early August, 1 Lossiemouth 14th (DAG). Impressive late August passage first noted on 24th when 20 Findhorn (AH). Most subsequently passing Lossiemouth where 14 west on 28th (JDHM), c300 mostly east on 29th (CAG,AH,DAG), 137 west on 30th (DAG,JDHM) and 24 west on 31st (DAG). Elsewhere at this time, singles Kingston 26th and 27th (AJ), 12 east Strathlene on 29th (MJHC) and 2 there 31st. Later, 1 Findhorn 20 Sept (DMP), 1 Tugnet 20 Sept and 5 Strathlene 22 Sept (MJHC), and last 2 Lossiemouth 4 Oct (DAG).

Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

Summer and autumn visitor offshore, probably very common at night.

Tape-luring at Strathlene attracted 2 birds to mist nets on 6 Aug (MJHC).

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Very common offshore in summer and autumn, fewer in winter.

Best spring count 40 Burghead Bay 25 Apr. Strong westward passage past Lossiemouth in late August when 105 in 1 hour on 27th and 600 in 2 hours on 29th (JDHM,AH). Twenty minute counts at Strathlene at this time gave 40 on 29th, 44 on 30th and 74 on 31st (MJHC). Subsequent passage counts past Lossiemouth were 72 (58W,14E) in 30 mins on 22 Sept, 52 (38W,14E) in 15 mins on 24th, 287 west in 1 hour on 4 Oct, 109 west in 40 mins on 11 Oct, 110 (4W,106E) in 30 mins on 19 Oct and 99 (97W,2E) in 30 mins on 25 Oct (RP,JDHM,DAG). Good numbers fishing in the west in October when 300 (mostly juvenile) Burghead Bay 7th, 350 there 10th and 200 on 13th (AJL). Nearby, 205 Culbin Bar (and 36 Nairn Bar) 12th (DJ,AL) and 130 Findhorn 15th (DB). Flying west past Nairn, 60 juveniles 3 Oct (RPC).

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Scarce resident and common winter visitor.

Breeding: At Covesea cliffs on 8 June were 5 adults with 2 partially constructed nests. No trace of these nests remained on 10 July (MJHC). The only breeding in Moray & Nairn was by one pair, also at Covesea, in 1962, so this attempt is encouraging.

Most numerous during the year at Covesea/Halliman Skerries and along the Buckie foreshore between Portgordon-Strathlene where monthly maxima were:

Covesea/Halliman Skerries:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
nc	28	8	24	nc	nc	29	42	46	nc	43	nc

Portgordon-Strathlene:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
38	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	31	33	54	55	36

Best counts elsewhere were 74 Tugnet 30 Oct (usually c30 here), 20 Burghead 28 July, 18 Culbin Bar 12 Oct and 16 Boar's Head Rock 28 Nov.

Inland, monthly maxima at Loch Spynie were:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
5	5	4	4	4	2	1	0	3	5	6	8

Birds showing the characters of Continental race *P.c.sinensis* were again present, on 25 Apr and 21 Dec (RP).

Other inland Cormorants (all singles) were at Aberlour (24 Feb, 4 March, 13 Dec, 28 Dec), Loch na Bo (18 Jan, 6 March, 26 Oct), Loch of Blairs (3 March), Lochindorb (1 Jan, 13 Jan), Rothes (24 Dec) and Sanquhar Loch (13 Feb).

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Scarce breeder and common visitor, chiefly in winter.

Breeding: Further (small) increase on the Portknockie cliffs opposite the Bow Fiddle Rock where 43 occupied nests on 14 June (31 in 2001 and 40 in 2002) (MJHC). Five pairs were nesting at Tronach Head on 13 July (one more than in 2002) and five pairs at Covesea on 8 June (unchanged) (MJHC).

Winter counts: Common in winter eastwards from Buckie to the Moray boundary at Cullen, where 480 Strathlene 12 Apr and 174 Buckie harbour 12 Oct. Elsewhere the only count exceeding 20 was 23 between Burghead-Hopeman 16 Sept.

(Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Rare visitor.

1 Loch Flemington 25 Jan (RS) but it was not seen to enter the Nairn section of the loch.)

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Scarce resident breeder.

Heronries: Numbers of occupied nests were 24 Binsness (in 3 groups of 13, 7 and 4) (IP,WRPB), 14 Loch Spynie (RP,MJHC), 5 Nether Dallachy (MJHC), 2 Claggan (AE,IP), 2 Connage (MJHC,IP), 1-2 Gardenhead (DC), 1 Auchbreck (IP) and 1 Balnellan (IP). Previously occupied sites which were checked in 2003 and found to be vacant were Craigroy Wood (NJ173342), Ballindalloch (NJ178365), Loch Park, Parkmore Woods (NJ327416) and Miltonduff (NJ182599) (WRPB).

Monthly maxima on Lossie estuary were:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
nc	nc	nc	nc	8	5	8	10	12	14	6	10

In Findhorn Bay, 21 on 16 Feb and 22 on 25 Aug. At Speymouth, 14 on 8 Aug and 9 on 14 Nov. Elsewhere, 7 Orbliston 18 Aug, 6 Nairn Bar 5 Jan, 5 Cloddach 29 June, 5 Nairn 22 Oct, 4 Loch Flemington 14 Dec and 4 Loch Loy 13 Aug. Several records of 1-2 on rocky shores around Burghead and Buckie.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Scarce resident breeder and short-distance migrant. Common in winter.

Breeding: A total of 20 pairs were reported on territories this year. Of these, 11 pairs produced 61 young: 52 young probably fledged. All pairs were at established sites except a pair at Newmill, Auldearn.

Mean number of young probably fledging from those pairs known to have produced young:

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Pairs	9	14	10	14	16	15	15	15	12	17	11
Young fledged	44	61	24	35	50	31	68	51	54	56	52
Mean	4.9	4.4	2.4	2.5	3.1	2.1	4.5	3.4	4.5	3.3	4.7

Maximum monthly counts of local flocks (excluding breeding birds in May-August) were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Loch Flemington	2	6	nc			Breeders			nc	2	nc	10
Findhorn	8	4	4	13	24	nc	nc	4	nc	nc	nc	nc
Lossie estuary	3	2	1	4	5	0	0	0	0	1	4	2
Loch Spynie	79	61	12			Breeders			6	24	29	40
Cloddach quarry	7	11	4			Breeders			2	6	12	11
Kingston	nc	nc	nc			Breeders			11	11	nc	nc

Non-breeding flocks were counted at Nairn harbour (33 on 6 Jun) and Tugnet (7 on 23 & 31 Aug).

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Common migrant and winter visitor.

Winter-spring: In Nairn District, 2 sites were used in the Auldearn area: Boath (19 on 21 Feb) and Penick (present from 26 Feb – 5 Apr; max. 33 on 2 Mar). In Moray, flocks were present at 8 sites and were typically small groups: Connage, Buckie (7 on 1 Jan), Loch Spynie (2 Jan – 5 Apr; max 15), Loch Oire (2 on 21 Jan), Wester Colfield (5 on 10 Feb), Culbin Bar (20 on 14 Feb, may have been the Auldearn flock), Wester Buthill (4 on 26 Feb & 7 Mar) and Bruntland, Roseisle (4 on 5-6 Mar).

Spring: An individual was still present at Loch Spynie on 18-20 May and at Lossie estuary on 29 May.

Summer: Two summer records involved 10 flying west Burghead Bay 16 Jun, and more intriguingly, 2 Lochindorb 29 Jun.

Autumn: An early record from Binsness 11 Aug – 6 Sep, suggests an injured or summering individual, rather than an early migrant. First flock was seen on 30 Sep at Loch Spynie, followed by 9 Kingston 5 Oct, 9 Loch Spynie 6 Oct (Kingston flock?) and 13 Loch Spynie 7 Oct. No mass arrival of flocks was evident. In Oct, birds were seen at Cloddach (1 on 11th & 26th), Findhorn (19 on 15th), Loch Spynie (max 18 on 28th), Lossiemouth (2 west on 28th) and Tugnet (9 on 30th). Another, injured individual was seen on the River Spey at Aberlour on 29th and Rothes on 31st. In November, flocks with 10 or more individuals were seen at only 1 site: 10 Montgrew on 9th.

Winter: Only 2 flocks reported in December; 6 Kintessack 22nd and 4 flying over Loch Spynie on 30th.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Common migrant, increasing in winter.

Winter (January-mid March): No flocks were reported during the period in Nairn District; the only record from here was 1 Nairn Bar 5 Jan. In Moray, the only large flock was seen in the Roseisle area: 3000 on 10 Jan, 1200 on 17 Feb and 1000 on 24 Feb. Much smaller flocks were generally reported from elsewhere, the largest were 350 Coxtan Tower 18 Jan and 700 Wester Colfield 3 Mar.

Spring passage: Several flocks were recorded on migration around mid Apr: 1600 north west on 8 Apr, 48 west on 12 Apr at Clochan, 2000 on 15 Apr and 100 west Loch Spynie on 20 Apr. The only sizeable flock in May was 250 Netherton, Findhorn Bay on 9th.

Summer: A small group was present around Findhorn Bay: 7 on 19 Jul and 6 the following day. At the Lossie estuary 2 together on 7 Jun. These records are similar to occurrences in 2002.

Autumn: The first autumn record was a single at Kingston 14 Sep. Two flocks on 16 Sep: 36 in off the sea at Hopeman and 50 east at Longmorn. 19 flocks followed these over 17-24 Sep: skeins during this early period mainly consisted of small groups. Turn-around at sites may have been rapid, as a group of 5 landed at Loch Spynie 19 Sep very briefly before continuing south. Typically, the main autumn arrival was in October. Large counts reported from Findhorn Bay in October (AJL) were slightly higher than recent years, and included the largest flocks recorded in Moray & Nairn (18000 on 17th and 20th):

13 th	14 th	15 th	16 th	17 th	20 th
5000	8000	10000	16000	18000	18000

Numbers at Loch Spynie were lower during this period though increased in Nov before declining again (DAG, JDL):

October		November			December	
18 th	26 th	8 th	16 th	22 nd	7 th	27 th
3100	3500	12000	11100	11200	6100	2050

No large flocks were reported in Oct from other sites.

Winter: The only substantial flocks during the period included; 3000 Inchbroom 2 Nov and 500 Muirton 8 Nov.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Scarce winter visitor.

All birds were of the Greenland race. Only 4 reports were received for the year in Moray, and again from locations in the Alves area: 2 Wester Buthill 28 Mar (RFH), 2 Burghead 8 Oct (MN) and 1 juvenile Viewhill, Mosstowie 26 Dec (RFH).

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Common winter visitor.

Winter-spring: Flocks containing 500 or more birds were seen at 8 sites (max. counts only); 2000 Roseisle 10 Jan, 1400 flying toward Loch Spynie 23 Feb, 850 Wester Calcots 28 Jan, 800 Garmouth 7 Jan, 750 Inchberry 20 Feb, 650 Shempston 1 Feb, 600 Kinneddar 19 Jan and 550 Miltonduff 23 Mar.

Summer: Breeding again confirmed at Lochindorb; 196 present on 9 Jul included 92 young (ISS). Other summer records included 2 Findhorn Bay 18 May, 5 Windyridge 23 May, 2 Dava 24 May and 25 Hillhead, Forres 1 Jun. A single present on Loch Spynie 7 May – 5 Jul, max count 4 from 31 May – 2 Jun.

Autumn: 2 (with a Canada Goose) at Binsness on 6 Sep were considered to be feral/summering birds rather than early migrants. The first flock was 8 Loch Spynie 21 Sep. The next recorded flock was 80 over Findhorn Bay 30 Sep. The main arrival appears to have been in early Oct (flocks described as ‘substantial’, ‘several hundred’ or ‘several small skeins’), though few skeins actually counted. Large counts from Oct included: 200 Pitairlie 6th, 500 Loch Spynie 10th, 1000 Windyridge 12th and 1200 Mid Mains 22nd. The roost at Loch Spynie was counted in Oct, Nov and Dec (DAG, JDL).

October		November			December	
18 th	26 th	8 th	16 th	22 nd	7 th	27 th
1400	3200	2500	2200	1900	1800	1260

Winter: Flocks over 500 included; 650 Wester Greens 27 Nov, 700 Duffus Castle 24 Dec and 800 Newton 28 Dec.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Scarce migrant in summer, rare in winter.

Winter-spring: Singles at Bruntlands 2 Mar and Newton 7 Mar (RFH).

Migrants bound for the Beaully Firth moulting area included: 1 Spey Bay 9 May (AH), 15 Loch Spynie 30 May (MN), 28 flying west Burghead Bay 2 Jun (AJL), 24 southwest Aberlour 5 Jun (AE) and 3 Spey Bay 11 Jun (KP). Another at Binsness on 6 Sep (DAG).

Winter: Records of a single seen at Duffus 28 Oct, North Alves 5 Nov, Newton 25 Dec and Brodie 26 Dec were considered to be of a small/medium form (RFH).

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

Scarce migrant and winter visitor.

Winter-spring: Present at 4 sites; Bruntlands (1 on 2-5 Mar, 4 on 2 Feb), Easter Greens (4 on 5 Jan, 3 on 2 Feb), Wester Greens (3 on 5 Feb) and Roseisle (4 on 1-16 Feb). A single in April was seen near Kinloss on 17th.

Autumn: First flocks were seen on 20 Sep; 5 flying east at the Lossie estuary, followed by another report (same group?) of 5 at Tugnet 1-2 hours after the Lossie group. The largest groups in October were 40 on 9th and 60 on 10th at the mouth of the Altonburn, Nairn. Other records in October were 21 west on 3rd, and 6 west on 4th at Lossiemouth, 3 Lossie estuary 5th, 15 Burghead 8th, 1 Loch Spynie 15th, 8 west Kingston on 18th, 2 Milltown airfield 23rd and 1 South Darkland 25th.

Winter: Small groups were seen in November and involved 1 Loch Spynie 1st, 1 Inchbroom 2nd, 3 Easter Calcots 6th, 3 Inchberry 12th and 7 Hillhead, Forres 28th. Only three December records: 2 Blinkbonny, Brodie 26th, 4 Earlsmill, Brodie 27th and 1 Feddan 30th.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

Scarce migrant and winter visitor.

The majority of records assigned to race concerned the pale-bellied form *B.b.hrota*:

Winter: In the Nairn area, a wintering group was again present off the west beach; present from 5 Jan – 5 Apr, the maximum count during this period was 48 on 6 Jan. The same flock also used the Nairn Bar (48 on 5 Jan & 34 on 16 Feb). Other records that may have involved some of this flock included 40 Nairn-Whiteness Head and 26 Findhorn Bay both records on 16 Feb.

Autumn passage period (Sep-Oct): At the Lossie estuary, regular from 18 Sep– 1 Nov. A small group of 6 was present on the estuary from 18-20 Sep, with one count of 7 on 19th, reducing in number to 2 on 22nd and 1 on 26th. An influx occurred in Oct with records on 3rd (11 & 34) and 4th (7 & 5 flying past). A 1st-winter remained from 26 Sep – 1 Nov.

Winter: The now regular flock reappeared in the Nairn area, in December records included 7 on 18th, 12 on 26th and 11 on 31st. Also 7 Nairn Bar 14 Dec. Elsewhere, 1 Hillhead, Forres 28 Nov.

Records of birds belonging to dark-bellied race *B.b.bernicla* were:

Winter-spring: Records involved two singles (same?) at Nairn 11 Mar (RPC) and Roseisle 30 Mar (AH).

Autumn passage period: One record of a single on the Lossie estuary 6 Aug (DAG, JDHM, HF).



Brent Geese, Nairn 15 Feb 2003 (© Duncan Gibson)



Brent Goose, Nairn 15 Feb 2003 (© Duncan Gibson). The rings show that this bird was ringed in Denmark in April 2001 – see ringing section.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Numerous spring and summer visitor and breeder.

Breeding: Broods were seen at Findhorn Bay (8 young) and Kingston (2 young). A potential breeding location was at Kinloss, where 8 were seen in the dunes on 28 Mar.

Best monthly counts at coastal sites were as follows:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	81	82	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	2	nc	25
Findhorn Bay	15	42	75	136	105	nc	nc	8	6	0	12	7
Lossie estuary	3	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kingston	1	nc	18	15	18	nc	6	4	2	0	0	0

Inland: Seen at 4 sites; Miltonhill (2 on 4 Mar), Roseisle (2 pairs on 6 Mar), Windyridge (2 on 18 Mar) and Montgrew (2 on 18 Apr)

Mandarin *Aix galericulata*

Probable escape or feral origin.

The group of 9 from 2002 were still present in Elgin on the River Lossie, mainly around the Morriston-Boroughbriggs area and the Cooper Park pond, but also as far downstream as the Cathedral. All 9 were seen on 1 Jan (DAG) at Boroughbriggs, with 6 there on 5 Jan (RP, CD). By 19 Jan, a pair had moved slightly downstream and was seen near the Cathedral (MJHC). Records from the Cooper Park area included a male on 25 Apr (RP), a female flying upstream on 29 Apr (RP) and 6 in eclipse together 24 Jun. A male was present on Loch Spynie from 29 Apr – 4 May (MN, SE, ARM).

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Common winter visitor and scarce breeder.

Breeding: In the traditional breeding area of west Moray and east Nairn 1 brood was seen, involving one chick on 9 Jul (MJHC).

Non-breeders in summer (Mar-Jul): The furthest inland was a male at Milltown, Cabrach 9 May (IF). At Loch Spynie, there was a continual presence throughout Apr-Jul. The largest count was 3M, 1F on 6 May. In Jul, numbers increased rapidly from 17 on 24th to 43 on 26th. Elsewhere: 6 Kingston 4 May (followed by 9 on 6 Jul) and 12 Binsness 27 Jun.

Winter: Monthly maximum counts at main coastal sites were;

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	1318	640	nc	nc	nc	58	nc	1142
Findhorn Bay	820	1005	nc	nc	58	5000	nc	565
Lossie estuary	2100	1604	nc	48	91	867	1532	1715
Kingston	nc	260	44	10	130	nc	nc	nc

Numbers at the Lossie estuary seem to have stabilised at around 2000. The aberrant 'white-headed' female returned to the Lossie estuary for its 3rd winter.

On freshwater:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Loch Flemington	111	155	nc	nc	nc	nc	247	nc	126
Loch Loy	nc	392	nc	nc	nc	nc	53	nc	nc
Loch Spynie	320	195	308	6	1	nc	500	69	74
Cloddach quarry	271	875	377	nc	nc	6	118	156	522
Loch Oire	190	95	133	nc	3	30	35	37	18
Loch na Bo	192	129	107	nc	0	3	43	41	91

Counts over 100 at inland sites included; 120 Tarras 26 Feb and 144 Miltonduff distillery 2 Mar.

[Chiloe Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix*

Escape.

An adult male was present among the Wigeon flock at the Lossie estuary on 25-26 Oct (HF, CAG, DAG), it was photographed on the 26th. It later moved to the Cloddach quarry between 23 Nov-13 Dec (DAG,MJHC).]



Chiloe Wigeon, Lossie estuary 26 Oct 2003 (© Duncan Gibson)

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Scarce visitor.

Only recorded in the Loch Spynie area. A male present on 20-22 Mar (JDHM, DAG), 9-11 May (RS, ARM) with another male and a female also present on 10 May (CAG, DMP, EH). Later in the year a male was again present from 19 Aug – 5 Sep (M&DG). On 22 & 28 Aug, a male and female were seen together (EH, JDHM).

Teal *Anas crecca*

Scarce breeder and common winter visitor.

Breeding: Confirmed at Lochs of Bogmussach where three broods (2, 2, 1) were seen on 24 Jun (JDHM) and Aitnoch (fledged young) (MJHC).

Potential sites occupied during the breeding season included Loch Belivat, Kingston, Montgrew and Loch Spynie. Mating was observed at the flooded field, Fogwatt on 3 May.

Monthly maximum counts from the main coastal/inland sites outside the breeding season were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	315	120	nc	nc		nc	nc	0	nc	24
Findhorn Bay	445	565	nc	49		nc	380	0	nc	425
Lossie estuary	2	0	0	0		0	7	1	7	0
Loch Spynie	200	25	42	6		2	0	20	30	500
Spynie Canal*	nc	445	34	49		5	16	123	132	148
Cloddach quarry	122	127	70	8		13	74	122	330	503
Loch Oire	40	0	14	9		nc	8	69	169	0
Loch na Bo	24	20	5	6		nc	0	12	2	0
Kingston	nc	60	28	50		125	178	nc	nc	nc

* Spynie Canal counts were from the old railway bridge to Gilston.

Other inland sites holding over 50 birds were; Loch Loy (52 on 26 Feb) and Calternach, Mulben (68 on 24 Oct).

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

Vagrant.

A single male was present at Kingston 6-10 Apr (NH, MJHC), and another male was seen at Loch Oire 27-28 Oct (EH). These are the 8th and 9th records for Moray & Nairn.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Numerous resident breeder and common winter visitor.

Breeding: The mean brood size from 13 broods was 6.3 chicks. Two breeding sites away from the coastal strip were used; Inchstelly and Montgrew. Potential breeding sites included a pool at Altyre, Lochs of Bogmussach, and the Dava lochans.

Best monthly flocks in regularly counted areas were:

Freshwater:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Loch Flemington	56	47	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	47	nc	92
Loch Loy	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	68	nc	32	nc	nc
Loch Spynie	180	100	3	4	nc	18	77	nc	5	30	41	190
Cloddach quarry	108	28	12	nc	nc	53	77	215	232	139	164	124
Loch Oire	82	64	25	8	8	nc	nc	33	17	61	nc	110
Loch na Bo	89	112	71	4	4	33	72	80	42	90	74	115

Other freshwater sites holding more than 50 birds included: Brodie castle (80 on 10 Feb), Sanquhar Loch (60 on 13 Feb), Loch of Blairs (88 on 10 Feb), Fochabers lake (80 on 17 Oct), Lower Bogrotten (210 on 25 Oct), Clochan (150 on 2 Nov) and Spynie Canal (52 on 15 Dec).

Coastal sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	305	105	nc					nc	nc	154	nc	94
Findhorn Bay	278	302	nc					nc	109	108	nc	109
Lossie estuary	29	1	nc					nc	nc	3	18	31
Portgordon-Buckpool	nc	51	nc					nc	4	43	34	31
Portgordon-Strathlene	95	nc	nc					nc	nc	18	nc	3

Other coastal sites holding more than 50 birds included: Nairn (55 on 15 Oct), Burghead Bay (144 on 27 Jan and 118 on 21 Feb) Lossie west beach (63 on 7 Jan) and Kingston (86 on 23 Aug and 133 on 3 Sep).

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Scarce winter visitor and migrant. Has bred.

Present at 8 sites (11 in 2002).

Nairn Bar: 3 on 5 Jan (DJa, AL).

Culbin Bar: 2 on 5 Jan (AY).

Loch Flemington: 1M on 26 Jan (RP, DAG, MJHC)

Findhorn Bay: 27 on 5 Jan had increased dramatically to 42 by 16 Feb (CD). Later in the year, lower numbers were recorded 25 Nov – 14 Dec, maximum was 7 on 8 Dec (AJL).

Loch Spynie: Present from 16-25 Jan, maximum count was 1M, 1F on 19th (JDHM), then on 31 Oct (1M, 1F) (RP) and 28 Dec (1M) (CAG, DAG).

Loch Oire: 1F on 29 Aug (MN).

Kingston: Females or eclipse males were seen on 31 Aug (1), 14 Sep (2) and 20 Sep (1) (AJ).

Portgordon: 1F was at the mouth of the Gollachy Burn 12 Oct (MJHC).

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Rare breeder and scarce migrant.

Best monthly counts at Loch Spynie for each sex are given below.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Males	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
Females	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	3	0
Sex?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Max. total	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	6	4	1

Elsewhere, 1M Hillhead, Forres 29 Mar and 2 Kingston 6 Sep.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Common winter visitor and occasional breeder.

Maximim monthly counts were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Loch Spynie	17	13	6	2	0	0	6	1	0	6	12	12
Cloddach quarry	5	5	4	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	0	2	0	1
Loch Oire	6	7	1	nc	nc	1	nc	nc	0	1	0	0
Loch na Bo	22	0	2	nc	nc	nc	nc	1	0	6	2	5

Winter maxima at Loch Spynie since 1987 are given below:

1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
33	54	58	36	65	65	99	56	64
1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
33	17	36	69	61	27	66	17	

After two blank years, seen at Loch Flemington on 5 Jan (2) and 14 Dec (1).

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

Vagrant.

An adult female was present on Loch Oire from 16-20 Nov (MJHC *et al.*), before moving to Loch na Bo 21-23 Nov. This is the second record for Moray & Nairn, following an adult male, present on the Dava lochans on 5-6 Jun 1999.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligala*

Scarce breeder and common winter visitor.

Breeding: The mean brood size from 11 broods was 4.9 chicks. Broods were seen at Newmill, Auldearn (3), Dava, Loch Spynie (5) and Loch na Bo.

Other records during summer months included a pair Altyre 5 May, 24 Cloddach quarry 29 Jun, 15M, 5F Cooper Park, Elgin 18 May and an anxious male Lochs of Bogmussach 24 Jun.

Monthly maximum counts (excluding ducklings) at main sites were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Loch Spynie	39	53	43	78	131	9	80	101	61	130	128	149
Cloddach quarry	45	16	19	14	nc	12	16	nc	24	43	10	10
Cooper Park	12	15	13	18	20	10	nc	nc	nc	7	nc	15
Loch na Bo	26	44	18	36	nc	28	nc	48	46	46	54	75
Loch Oire	13	13	6	20	9	51	nc	7	28	30	29	4
Kingston	nc	nc	3	3	1	nc	nc	13	37	50	6	nc

Maximum counts exceeding 10 individuals at other sites included; 16 Altyre 2 Mar, 13 Brodie castle pond 10 Feb, 16 Loch Flemington 16 Feb, 14 Loch Loy 26 Feb, 13 Fochabers lake 23 Feb, 24 Newmill, Auldearn 25 Mar and 10 Windyridge 26 Dec.

Scaup *Aythya marila*

Scarce winter visitor.

The only inland records occurred at Loch Spynie where 1M present from 16-22 Jul, 1F on 12 Aug, 1M & 1F on 6 Oct (JDHM) and a 1st-winter on 13 Dec (DAG). Coastal records were from the east beach, Nairn (74 on 6 Nov) (EH), Nairn Bar (2 on 16 Feb) (DJ, AL), Culbin Bar (296 on 5 Jan and 6 on 16 Feb) (AY), Findhorn (1M on 2 Sep) (JDHM) and Kingston (20 Jul – 14 Sep, max. 6M, 2F on 14 Sep) (AJ, JDHM).

Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Scarce breeder, common offshore.

Breeding: Another apparently poor breeding season with only 5 'broods' reported, of which the mean brood size was 2.4 chicks. This is slightly below the average (2.9) for the previous 10 years.

Mean number of chicks calculated from distinct broods 1993-2003:

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Broods	3	5	9	8	19	16	10	9	8	12	5
Mean	2.0	3.0	3.3	3.9	3.2	3.4	2.1	3.2	2.4	2.9	2.4

Maximum counts over 100 were 1080 Burghead 19 Nov, 104 Burghead-Hopeman 16 Feb, 230 Covesea 8 Apr, 192 Culbin Bar 20 Nov, 138 Cullen Bay 21 Mar, 172 off Findhorn 16 Feb and 126 Portknockie 25 Mar.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

Common winter visitor offshore.

One summer record of a male at Kingston 17 Jun.

Maximum monthly counts were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn Bar	62	87	nc	nc	15	462	310
Culbin Bar	1671	1140	nc	nc	15	1280	34
Burghead Bay	460	370	nc	50	3	550	35
Burghead	nc	nc	nc	251	nc	1280	2540
Burghead-Hopeman	8	25	nc	nc	nc	nc	2135
Lossiemouth	nc	nc	nc	7	500	nc	nc

Other sites holding over 100 birds included Cullen Bay (750 on 21 Mar), Lossiemouth (500 west on 25 Oct) and Spey Bay (250 on 2 Nov).

The only inland record was 1F Loch Spynie 25 Oct.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Common winter visitor, small numbers in summer.

Maximum counts were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn Bar	741	402	nc	nc	nc	355	884	2790
Culbin Bar	7542	5435	nc	nc	nc	12	2400	274
Burghead Bay	nc	nc	440	1500	nc	935	600	nc

The huge flock off Culbin Bar is the largest in Moray & Nairn waters since the 1970s when there were 14000 in Burghead Bay in 1974 and 7000 in Spey Bay in 1978.

In summer, records included 4 west Lossiemouth 7 Jul, 1000 Burghead 21 Jul and 33 west Kingston 26 Jul.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*

Rare, but regular, visitor.

A typical series of records of males in Burghead Bay and the Nairn/Culbin Bars area.

Burghead Bay: 2M on 24 Feb (NH) and 1M on 8-15 Apr (AJL, DMP).

Culbin Bar: Max. 5M on 16 Feb (AY), and singles on 5 Jan, 17 Feb, 20 Nov (MJHC, AY, DB). It has not been unusual to have 2-3 individuals in the scoter flocks in recent years but 5 has been matched only once before, when 7 were in Spey Bay on 3 Jan 1979.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca**Common winter visitor.*

Maximum counts for main areas were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn Bar	61	93	nc	nc	35	194
Culbin Bar	2507	4293	nc	nc	675	6
Burghead Bay	nc	146	nc	nc	42	nc

The February count off Culbin Bar has been exceeded only once, by 5000+ in Spey Bay in April 1978. Summer records included reports from Kingston (2 east on 26 Jul, 1 east on 28 Aug) and Lossiemouth (1 west on 26 Jul).

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula**Rare breeder and common winter visitor.*

Breeding: No reports received from the traditional breeding site.

Inland summer records included individuals at Loch Spynie from 3 May – 11 Jul. Well inland were 2M, 4F on the River Spey, Rothes 1 Apr.

Displaying males were recorded at Loch Spynie 4 Apr and 2M Lossie estuary 5 Mar.

Coastal summer records included 1M Kingston 15 Jun.

Maximum counts on most frequented lochs were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Loch Flemington	12	5	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	4
Loch of Blairs	nc	13	11	3	nc	nc	14	13
Loch Spynie	14	47	21	62	2	27	70	2
Cloddach quarry	3	4	5	nc	nc	nc	nc	2
Loch na Bo	7	13	9	5	2	5	7	12
Loch Oire	4	3	5	2	nc	nc	1	3

Inland winter records were from Aberlour (3M, 2F on 3 Feb), Glenfiddich distillery (5 on 5 Feb), Fochabers lake (2F on 23 Feb) and Inchstelly (29 Dec).

Highest monthly counts in coastal areas were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	11	2	nc	nc	0	2	10
Findhorn Bay	26	42	20	nc	0	nc	5
Burghead Bay	nc	10	10	nc	0	2	7
Burghead-Hopeman	9	10	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc
Lossiemouth	17	7	1	nc	nc	7	16
Lossie estuary	2	2	2	0	0	2	1
Kingston/Tugnet	3	nc	11	2	10	46	42

Smew *Mergellus albellus**Rare winter visitor.*

Seen at 2 sites:

Loch Flemington: The returning male was seen 2-31 Jan (DJ *et al.*).

Loch Spynie: A female was present 1 Jan – 12 Apr (RAM, DAG, *et al.*).



Smew 'redhead' with male Goldeneye, Loch Spynie 6 Apr 2003 (© Duncan Gibson)

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Scarce local breeder and common visitor.

Summer: Breeding confirmed at only one site for the third consecutive year; F+b7 at Binsness 11 Jul (JDHM). Findhorn Bay has been the most consistent breeding site with confirmed broods seen here annually since 1987.

Mean number of chicks calculated from distinct broods 1993-2003:

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Broods	5	6	9	4	8	7	2	5	3	1	1
Mean	7.0	7.2	10.6	4.3	7.0	5.6	5.5	7.8	8.7	8.0	7.0

Two pairs in a suitable breeding area at Broom of Moy on 21 May.

Maximum monthly counts of coastal flocks outwith the mid-summer period were as follows:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Delnies	4	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	6	2
Nairn/Culbin Bars	5	5	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	127	4	5
Findhorn Bay	8	38	7	2	nc	nc	10	nc	nc	16
Burghead Bay	nc	7	17	8	nc	nc	nc	5	6	nc
Burghead	1	nc	8	3	nc	nc	nc	nc	2	5
Burghead-Hopeman	2	6	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	2
Lossie estuary	2	1	0	0	nc	nc	0	1	1	0
Spey Bay	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	27	9
Kingston	6	nc	11	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	8	6

Records inland in winter were from Loch Flemington (1 on 14 Dec), Loch Spynie (1M on 1-9 Feb and 1F on 22 Feb).

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

Widespread but scarce breeder.

Breeding: No confirmed breeding was reported.

Birds in potential breeding areas included 2 pairs River Devron, Cabrach 22 Mar, a pair on the River Spey 1 Apr and a pair Glenlatterach reservoir 19 Apr.

Maximum monthly counts at the main sites were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cloddach quarry	1	2	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	5	nc	8
Loch Spynie	3	3	1	nc	nc	nc	nc	5	nc	1	6	4
Lossie estuary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	9	0	0
Speymouth	nc	nc	nc	nc	60	75	nc	108	84	nc	2	nc

The peak counts of moulting birds at Speymouth 1985-2003 are:

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
50	60	148	87	122	140	10	29	133	192

1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
118	62	125	59	158	93	100	98	108

The mean count for 1985-2002 is 99 birds, therefore the 2003 count is slightly above average.

Large counts were also received from Burghead Bay (17 on 30 Sep), Portgordon (46 on 1 Aug) and Portgordon-Strathlene (34 on 1 Jul).

Inland sites occupied in winter included the River Lossie, Elgin (1M on 4 Jan, 1F on 5 Jan, 1M on 13 Dec) and the River Livet (1F on 2 Dec).

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Rare visitor.

A female was present at Loch Spynie 20-21 Oct (JDHM).

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Formerly common breeder, now being reintroduced in North Scotland.

One flying west in central Moray 31 July and one in north-east Moray 17 Aug were the only reports. Another disappointing showing and nothing to indicate colonisation of the area.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Very scarce visitor, usually in spring.

Records from one Moray & Nairn locality between 25 March-11 Sept.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Scarce resident breeder, migrant and winter visitor.

Breeding: Ten pairs were located of which nine were successful, fledging 36 young between them at a mean of 4.0 young per successful pair. Clutch size (from 6 clutches) was 4.7. The fledging rate was well above the long-term average for the area (2.7-2.8) due probably to good weather during the breeding season (JC).

Breeding success over recent years has varied as follows:

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Pairs located	16	8	6	6	12	10
Pairs laying	14	8	6	5	10	10
Mean clutch size	4.6				5.12	4.7
Pairs fledging young	8	4	6	5	8	9
Total young fledged	26	11	14	16	22	36
Mean young / successful pair	3.25	2.75	2.3	3.2	2.75	4.0

Records away from breeding areas (ringtails unless stated) were 1 Scarffbanks 30 Apr, 1 Mosstodloch 4 Aug, 1M Blervie Castle 23 Nov and 1 Spynie Palace 3 Dec.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Rare resident breeder.

Present in at least 8 localities in spring/summer with breeding proved in at least 3.

At other times/localities, 1 Culbin Bar 5 Jan (AY), 1 Culbin Forest 10 Sept (DG), 1 Loch Oire 20 Nov (EH) and 1 Brodie 29 Dec (ISS).

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Common resident breeder.

Breeding season (Apr-July) records included birds/pairs at Aberlour, Altyre, Bauds Wood (Portknockie), Binsness, Brodie, Cloddach, Covesea, Findrassie, Fleenas, Forres, Gordonstoun, Kirkhill (Alves), Longmorn, Lossiemouth, Mannoeh Hill and Newmill (Auldearn).

Birds noted in town centres of Lossiemouth (Aug) and Forres (Oct). One was seen to catch a Great Spotted Woodpecker in an Inchberry garden in Dec.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Fairly common resident breeder.

Now by far the most commonly encountered raptor in Moray & Nairn and no longer generating the same volume of reports that was once the case. Most together at one time were 10 Cabrach 14 Sept and 7 Kinloss Feb-March. Although Buzzards frequently follow ploughs to catch worms, 6 together in a field near Forres on 23 Feb is noteworthy.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Rare resident breeder.

The three usual/most recent breeding sites were checked: i) no sign of any breeding activity but one immature bird in the area 6 July, ii) a pair reared two young, iii) no information received. (MJHC).



Golden Eagle chicks, Moray 29 June 2003 (© Martin Cook)

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Scarce summer visitor and breeder.

No meaningful arrival dates but breeding sites reoccupied in early April. Regular fishing on the estuaries; greater use of the Lossie estuary than in recent years. Last was 1 Binsness 29 Sept (JDHM), equalling the latest ever.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Widespread but scarce resident breeder.

Breeding season (April-July) records included birds/pairs at Ballachraggan, Brokentore, Clarkly Hill, Covesea, Drainie, Eachrach, Findhorn, Forres, Kinloss (where 2 pairs bred on the RAF station), Miltonhill, Portknockie, Roseisle, Shempston and Tarras.

Singles on Nairn/Culbin Bars 5 Jan, 12 Oct and 14 Dec.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Scarce resident breeder and migrant.

Breeding: 44 sites were checked; 25 of these were occupied by pairs of which 24 laid clutches. Mean size of eight clutches was 4.25. Twenty one pairs were successful, raising a total of 73 young at a mean of 3.5 young per successful pair. Good spring weather enabled early establishment of breeding territories and early laying as a consequence. Observer effort was good in 2003. A high rate of site occupation was found, with pairs breeding in some areas where nests had not been noted for several years (JC,BC).

Outside the breeding season, single birds were seen in the coastal plain as follows: Calcotts 2 Jan and 20 Dec, Cummington 8 Dec, Duffus 29 Nov, Findhorn Bay 30 March and 27 July, Kinloss 7 March, 20-21 Aug and 5 Sept, Loch Spynie 8 Feb, 5 Apr and 15 Sept, Nairn Bar 12 Oct and Orton 7 Oct.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo**Rare visitor.*

1 juvenile flying over Loch Spynie 5 Sept (JP,MN). This record awaits submission to Moray & Nairn Rarities Committee. If accepted this will be the 10th Hobby in Moray & Nairn.

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus**Rare visitor.*

One was seen near The Buck, Cabrach on 28 July (NH,RH et al.). This record is still under consideration by British Birds Rarities Committee. In view of the most unusual date, the possibility of an escaped bird is very real. The only accepted records of this species to date are near Duffus in Nov 1977 and on the Cairngorm plateau in April 1993.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus**Scarce resident breeder.*

Breeding: Four home ranges were checked in the west. Only one was occupied but this failed at the egg stage (JC,MJHC). No information received from the eastern uplands.

In the coastal plain, away from breeding sites, the seasonal distribution of records was:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1	2	4	3	0	0	0	1	4	3	3	1

16 localities yielded records, with Findhorn Bay featuring most frequently.

Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus**Very common resident breeder.*

Still a few surviving on Aultmore at Black Hill where 3 on 9 Apr. 6 Brown Muir 30 Dec. An extraordinary occurrence of one on Portknockie bowling green on 15 March. This bird was watched for 10 minutes at distances down to c5m, and even called occasionally (L&RS). Presumably it was displaced from the Aultmore population but under what circumstances is very hard to imagine.

Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta**Common resident breeder.*

Record numbers, at least in recent times, on Ben Rinnes where 24 on 28 Sept (AE) and 23 on 11 Oct (MJHC). Elsewhere, female with nest and eggs Clach Choutsaich 5 June (MMacG), 2 Cairngorm summit 3 May and 3 pairs Cairn Lochan 25 March (AE).

Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix**Scarce resident breeder.*

More reports than usual, many generated by fieldwork for the Breeding Bird Atlas. In spring/summer 2 (MF) Beatshach 29 Apr (AE), 3F Carn na Bruar (Glenlivet) 2 March (AE), 1F Glacks of Balloch 28 Apr (IF), 1M Inchnacape 17 Apr (DC), 1M Mannoch Hill 23 Apr (IF) and 1M Sheadow (Corryhabbie) 17 May (AE). Other breeding season encounters at Altvounnie (JC), Corse of Garbet (NH), Glenarder (JC), Lynemore (JC), Nether Howbog (NH), Slack of Myrack, Straangalls (JC) and Tervieside (MC). At other times of year, 1 Cairn Uish 13 Dec (HF) and 1M Dava 23 Oct (ISS).

Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*

Scarce resident breeder.

In this and future Reports, Capercaillie records will be given under the broad geographical areas used in the 1999 Report. These areas will cover the same woodland blocks from year to year and will thus be comparable.

Area	Records in 2003
South-east Nairn	Minimum 3M and 3F at one lek
West Moray	9M and minimum 1F at three leks
North central Moray	No records received
South central Moray	Birds seen in 9 areas, including 2 small leks
East Moray	1M,4F and a nest in one area, sight records in 5 other areas

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Introduced scarce breeder. Commonly released.

Proved breeding at Ballantruan (Strath Avon) where an adult with 4 small chicks 6 July (MMacG). Also in spring/summer were 1 Bridge of Avon 14 Jul and 2 there 1 Aug, 1 pair Bridgehaugh (Glenfiddich) 23 Apr, 2 Dufftown 18 Apr, 1 pair Gateside 20 Apr, 1 Glacks of Balloch 30 May, 2 near Forres 24 May, 4 displaying Speyslaw 22 March and 2 pairs Tombae 6 July. Other Breeding Atlas records from Aldunie, Milltown of Auchindoun, Mundole and Nether Howbog. Winter records were 7 Blairfindy 19 Dec and, unusually, 3 Culbin Bar 14 Dec.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Common resident breeder.

Largest coveys counted during the year were 21 Roseisle 6 Feb, 18 Myreside 31 Jan, 15 Scarffbanks 18 Aug, 14 Shempston 3 Oct, 13 Kintessack 8 Jan, 12 Kinloss 16 Jan, 12 Duffus Castle 12 Dec, 11 Inchberry 14 Nov and 11 Kinneddar 27 Nov

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Rare summer visitor and breeder, occasionally more numerous.

A poor year with only 4 calling birds heard: 1 Nether Enoch 7-10 June (NH), 1 South Darkland 29 July (JDL) and 2 Keam 4 Aug (HM).

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Very common resident breeder.

Late breeding at Rafford where small chicks on 17 Aug. Present again on Culbin Bar where 1 on 12 Oct. A black individual at Gilston 11 Oct.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Fairly common breeder and winter visitor.

Heard in the breeding season at Calternach (Mulben) (AY), RAF Kinloss (AJL), Lein (Kingston) where 3 pairs in reedbeds (PGS), Loch Loy (JDHM) and Loch Spynie (MJHC). Doubtless greatly under-recorded due to the secretive nature of the species.

Winter reports from Kingsteps, Loch Loy and Loch Spynie.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Fairly common resident breeder.

Breeding proved (*italics*) or probable at *Altyre*, Balnalon (Strath Avon), Brodie Castle, Cloddach quarry, *Fochabers Lake*, Fogwatt, *Forres golf course*, Inchstelly, Loch na Bo, *Loch Oire*, Loch Park, *Loch Spynie*, Lochs of Bogmussach, *Montgrew*, Nether Dallachy, *Newmill (Auldearn)*, Sanquhar Loch and Standingstone. Best counts of full-grown birds were 10 Cooper Park (Elgin) 22 Nov, 8 Loch Flemington 12 Oct, 8 Loch Oire 28 Sept and 7 Fochabers Lake 17 Oct.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Scarce resident breeder and fairly common winter visitor.

Breeding proved (*italics*) or probable at *Altyre*, *Cloddach quarry (5 broods on 27 July)*, Gilston, Inchstelly, *Loch Loy (2 pairs)*, *Loch Spynie*, *Montgrew*, Nether Dallachy, *Newmill (Auldearn)*, *Newton of Dalvey (2 pairs)* and Windyridge.

Maximum monthly counts on main lochs were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
L.Flemington	6	7	nc	nc	nc	2	nc	1
Loch Spynie	58	26	40	nc	nc	20	29	84
L.Oire/na Bo	11	8	8	4	4	1	1	1
Cloddach	6	14	16	nc	22	20	15	9

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Very common resident breeder, winter visitor and migrant.

Breeding: Inland in Feb were 17 Cloddach Quarry 9th, a pair on the roof of Elgin Academy 10th, 30 Aberlour 24th, 15 on the Loch Spynie platform 25th, 36 Mundole 26th and 60 Craigellachie 26th. Birds were back in the Dufftown area by 7 March. Subsequent increases to 96 Mundole 2 March and 155 Cloddach 23 March.

On Elgin Academy roof, 4 pairs nested. Two had their clutches predated by Herring Gulls, one brood of chicks was predated and the fourth pair raised one young to fledging (ISS).

Post breeding flocks recorded were confined to 30 Cloddach Quarry 27 July.

Spring, summer and early autumn counts on the coast:

April: 48 Burghead 26th, 30 Findhorn Bay 15th, 39 Lossie estuary 17th.

May: 96 Burghead 5th, 42 Lossie estuary 5th and 50 there 18th.

June: 170 Burghead 14th, 37 Lossie estuary 7th (down to 2 by 16th).

July: 80 Burghead 15th, 12 Lossie estuary 10th rising to 261 there 26th, 33 Portgordon-Strathlene 1st.

Aug: 63 Burghead 27th, 415 Findhorn Bay 16th, 392 Nairn Bar 16th, 136 Lossie estuary 2nd.

Sept: 62 Burghead 6th, 1080 Culbin Bar 7th, 101 Lossie estuary 15th.

Winter maxima at the coast were:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	1528	1249	1667	1169
Findhorn Bay	620	740	908	435
Burghead-Hopeman	147	202	195	92
Lossiemouth	5	57	22	38
Portgordon-Strathlene	109	50	48	71

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Rare summer visitor and breeder.

In the Kingston/Garmouth area, one pair was first located on the estuary on 17 May (MJHC) and seen at a muddy pool in fields near Cunninghaugh on 30 May (HM). On 4 June a pair with a nest was found on the Spey shingles near the viaduct (MJHC). Two tiny chicks were seen on 22 June (DAG, HF) but the two adults were alone next day. On 14 June a second pair was located nearby but there was no evidence of breeding (MJHC, NH).



Little Ringed Plover on nest, River Spey at Garmouth 14 June 2003 (© Martin Cook)

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Scarce resident breeder and very common migrant.

Breeding: Pairs with chicks located at Covesea 31 July (JDHM), Findhorn 10 Aug (ISS) and Kinloss 24 Apr (AJL) (one of 3 pairs here). Other territorial pairs were at Broadley (Clochan), Cloddach Quarry (3 pairs), Tugnet, Findhorn dunes (3 pairs), Garmouth, Kingston (Lein) (brood hatched but chicks died) and Lossiemouth east beach (3-4 pairs).

Winter maxima at the coast were:

	Jan-Feb	Nov-Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	34	0
Findhorn Bay	nc	17
Burghead-Hopeman	10	8
Lossiemouth	23	19
Portgordon-Strathlene	6	0

Elsewhere 32 Kinloss 12 Nov.

Spring passage (April-early June): Best monitored on the Lossie estuary where counts were made on 24 Apr (32), 6 May (28), 16 May (37), 17 May (27), 7 June (31) and 9 June (14). Counted at Burghead on 11 May (20), 13 May (41) and 30 May (31) and at Kingston on 17 May (8), 25 May (36) and 15 June (27).

Autumn passage (July-Sept): Consistently reported throughout August on the Lossie estuary where 14 on 5th, rising to 23 on 16th, 40 on 18th, 64 on 20th and 70 on 21st with a decline thereafter. Counts elsewhere included 49 Nairn Bar 16 Aug, 36 Culbin Bar 7 Sept, 68 Findhorn Bay 4 Aug (12 on 16 Aug included a leucistic bird) and 19 Portgordon-Buckpool 1 Aug, rising to 26 there on 20 Aug.

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

Scarce summer visitor and breeder.

Fledged young seen Mullach Lochan nan Gabhar and Stob Bac an Fhurain (Ben Avon area) (JJCH). 1 Corryhabbie Hill 17 May (AE) but none seen there 6 July.

Golden Plover *Charadrius apricaria*

Common breeder, migrant and winter visitor.

Breeding: A pair Ben Rinnes 16 March and 17 birds there 26 July. 3 pairs Corryhabbie Hill 17 May (AE). An anxious pair Dava 16 March but absent from the Lochindorb area on 8 June where 5 pairs have been found in the past (ISS). Numerous in Cromdale Hills from Creagan a'Chaise to Creag an Tarmachain in June (MMacG).

Back at the coast in July were 1 Kingston 16th, 1 Burghead 21st and 10 over Spey Bay 24th. In August, 19 Portgordon-Buckpool 1st, 49 Nairn Bar 16th and 26 Portgordon-Buckpool 20th. Best Sept counts were 22 Kinloss on 8th and 14 Portgordon-Buckpool on 14th.

Winter coastal maxima were:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Nov	Dec
Kinloss/Findhorn Bay	235	580	12	290	8
Lossiemouth/Covesea	95	22	40	80	nc
Burghead	12	84	0	0	30
Portgordon-Buckpool	0	0	428	370	nc

Other winter counts were 115 Nairn west beach 12 Oct and, at Wester Greens near Lossiemouth, 103 on 27 Nov and 58 on 6 Dec.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Scarce autumn migrant and winter visitor.

A very poor year; the third in succession. Counts at Nairn/Culbin Bars (often the Moray & Nairn stronghold) were 17 on 5 Jan, 8 on 16 Feb, 5 on 24 March and 7 on 14 Dec. On the Lossie estuary, 1 early bird on 14-15 Aug, 1 on 20 Sept and present on six dates in October with max. 3 on 27th. Still 1 there 1-8 Nov. Elsewhere, 1 Buckpool 10 Sept, 1 Findhorn Bay 20 Sept and 1 Portgordon 18 Dec.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Very common migrant breeder, small numbers in winter.

Breeding: 2 pairs on territory Standingstone 27 Feb. Forty birds had reached Bridge of Avon by 20 Feb and back on Dufftown hills by 7 March. Territorial pairs in March were at Gilston 18th, Covesea 20th, Cloddach 23rd, Miltonduff (2 pairs) 23rd and Foresterseat (Pluscarden) (5 pairs) 31st. Later reports of several pairs together included 4 at Dallas, 5 at Badcheer (Cabrach) and 5 at Hillhead (Forres). Only one pair Windyridge area was less than usual. One pair with two chicks Hopeman 21 June.

Mid winter: Very few in January when 40 Loch Spynie 23rd was the only sizeable count. Otherwise only groups of 1-4 birds. In December, 85 Loch Flemington 12th, 30 Loch Spynie 12th and 37 Lhanbryde 26th.

Pre-breeding flocks:

February: 106 Windyridge 15th, 100 Miltonhill 18th, 180 Auldearn 26th.

March: 30 Lochhill 7th, 112 Hardhillock 9th.

April: 16 Portknockie 8th.

Post-breeding flocks:

July: 28 Binsness 11th, 300 Cloddach 26th.

August: 77 Kingston 8th.

September: 80 Findhorn Bay 14th. At Cloddach, 220 on 7th, 300 on 21st, 160 on 28th.

October: 30 Loch Spynie 11th, 40 Kingston 12th, 85 Findhorn Bay 15th, 43 Hardmuir 22nd.

November: 150 Loch Spynie 15th, 72 Montgrew 30th, 85 flying west out to sea off Portgordon 18th.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

Very common migrant and winter visitor.

Winter maxima were:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	48	345	100	nc	106
Findhorn Bay	195	295	nc	480	600
Burghead-Hopeman	120	83	170	176	192
Lossiemouth	110	107	11	nc	39
Portgordon-Strathlene	130	0	0	nc	1

Counts in other months were:

Spring passage: 160 Burghead 1 Apr, 300 Nairn 6 June.

Late summer/autumn passage:

July: 7 Kingston 20th, 8 Burghead 21st, 6 Culbin Bar 26th (most July birds in summer plumage).

August: At Burghead, 46 on 4th, 34 on 14th, 62 on 17th, 21 on 25th. 1 Kingston 2nd and 23rd.

September: At Burghead, 20 on 12th, 83 on 16th, 110 on 20th. 19 Kingston 12th.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Scarce migrant and fairly common but very localised winter visitor.

Monthly maxima at the two best sites were:

Winter-spring:

Monthly maxima at the two best sites were:

Winter-spring:

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May
Nairn/Culbin Bars	47	207	nc	nc	nc
Lossiemouth	61	28	34	nc	10

Late summer-autumn:

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	43	440	nc	118	nc	94
Lossiemouth	44	60	41	39	20	40

The count of 207 at the Bars on 16 Feb (DJ,AY,AL) narrowly exceeds the previous highest wintering total there of 203 in Oct 2000. The remarkable flock of 440 there on 21 Aug (BE) was clearly composed of passage birds, calling excitedly and heading off in groups high towards the south east.

Spring passage observed in May at Burghead where 7 on 11th, 5 on 13th and 36 on 30th. In autumn, 10 Covesea beach 17 Aug and 22 there 21 Aug. At Kingston, 5 on 3 Aug, 1 on 19-25 Aug and 2 on 12 Sept.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta**Scarce migrant, mostly in autumn.*

Small numbers again but some improvement over the previous four years.

On an unusual summer date were 2 Kingston 15 June (MJHC). In July, 1 on the shore opposite Boar's Head Rock 23rd flew off west (JDHM). Subsequently recorded at three sites in August-September. In Findhorn Bay, 8 on 4 Aug, 4 on 7 Aug (AJL) and 1 on 20 Sept (DMP). On the Lossie estuary, 1 on 29 Aug, 2 on 18 Sept and 1 on 19 Sept (JDHM,CAG). At Kingston, 1 on 6-12 Sept and a different bird on 20 Sept (MJHC,AJ).

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea**Scarce autumn migrant.*

Another very poor year. In Findhorn Bay, 1 on 26 Aug, 2 on 16 Sept and 1 on 18 Sept (AJL,DMP). Also 2 Kingston 20 Sept (AJ).

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima**Common winter visitor.*

Main winter site maxima were:

	Jan-March	Oct-Dec
Burghead-Hopeman	6	36
Lossiemouth	73	16
Portgordon-Strathlene	67	126*
Cullen	12	nc

* comprising 61 Buckpool and 54 Portessie on 27 Dec.

In spring, 50 Lossiemouth north pier 26 Apr with last 3 remaining there 12 May. Also 3 Portknockie 9 Apr. No reports from the Nairn area.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina**Scarce breeder, very common migrant and winter visitor.*

Breeding: Possible breeders located in two areas of the Cromdale Hills in June. Also calling birds in two areas of the Ladder Hills on 30 June (MMacG).

Winter monthly maxima at the main sites were:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	686	434	171	365
Findhorn Bay	1028	1110	nc	755
Lossiemouth	253	120	33	239
Portgordon-Strathlene	85	75	1	30

Spring passage: As usual best monitored by a series of counts at Lossie estuary. There were only 3 on 24 Apr but numbers rose quickly in May when counts were made on 5th (36), 6th (34), 10th (48), 11th (143), 13th (38), 18th (25), 19th (32) and 29th (5). Little information from elsewhere; counts such as 20 Findhorn Bay 15 Apr, 10 Kingston 25 May and 14 Burghead 30 May are unlikely to represent true spring maxima.

In summer at the coast, 15 Lossiemouth 7 June and 9 there on 9 June.

Autumn passage (July-September): Numbers generally low, apart from Kingston in mid July. On the Lossie estuary, 1 on 3 July, rising steadily through the month to 10 on 10th and 25 on 31st. In August, 37 on 2nd but 20 not exceeded again all month. In September, 36 on 19th and 12 on 20th. At Kingston, 56 on 13 July had risen to 210 on 16th. In August, 65 on 2nd, 85 on 3rd, 144 on 11th, 78 on 23rd and 37 on 25th. Best in

September were 28 on 6th and 47 on 20th. Elsewhere, 18 Findhorn Bay 30 July, rising to 100 on 4 Aug and 114 on 15 Aug. 42 Nairn Bar 16 Aug.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring.

Two spring records (only the 6th-7th for Moray & Nairn) and an average number, mostly in coastal areas, in autumn between 3 Aug-20 Sept.

Spring: 1 immature male Lossie estuary 23-30 March (DAG et al.) and 2 Cloddach quarry 20 Apr (JDHM).

Autumn: At Kingston, 3 on 3-8 Aug, 2 remaining 9-10 Aug, 2 others 30 Aug, 1 on 7 Sept and 5 on 10 Sept (MJHC,AJ). On Lossie estuary, 1 on 12-27 Aug with 4 on 22 Aug (DAG), 3 on 30 Aug (CAG), 2 on 13 Sept (DAG) and 4 on 20 Sept (RP). Elsewhere, singles in Findhorn Bay on 8 Aug (MJHC) and 19 Sept (AJL), 6 Spey Bay 8 Aug (MN), 1 Montgrew 4 Aug (MM) and 1 Windyridge 11 Sept (AJ).

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Scarce migrant and winter visitor.

Winter-spring: As usual, Kingsteps held largest numbers with 10 there 5 Jan (and 2 more at Nairn Bar) and 5 there (1 at Nairn Bar) 16 Feb (DJ,AL). Only 1 on 16 Jan (DMP). Nearby, 1 Culbin Bar 5 Jan (AY). Elsewhere, 1 Portknockie 5 Jan and 8 April (L&RS).

Autumn-winter: 1 Kingsteps 12 Oct (DJ,AL) and 15 Oct (MJHC), 1 Culbin Forest 28 Oct (AY), 1 Lein (Kingston) 2 Nov (MJHC), 5 Kingsteps/Nairn Bar and 3 Culbin Bar 14 Dec (DJ,AL,AY), and 2 Inchberry 28 Dec (AY).

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Common breeder and migrant.

Breeding: Display at Achlichnie and Badcheer Farm (Cabrach) 30 May and at Coxtton 5 May. One on nest Cairn Eney 4 June.

Counts early in the year were 22 Kingsteps/Nairn Bar 5 Jan and 12 there 16 Feb. In autumn/winter, 52 Kingsteps 12 Oct (33 there 14 Dec) and 48 Lein (Kingston) 15 Oct (20 there 20 Sept and 12 on 2 Nov).

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Common resident breeder, scarce migrant and winter visitor.

Breeding: Roding at Carron 21 Apr, Forres 27 Apr, Lhanbryde 6 June and Crooked Wood 16 June. Adult with fledgling Little Aitnoch 10 May. Present RAF Kinloss in June.

Winter: 1 Garmouth 7 Jan, 1 Wellheads (Clochan) 10 Jan, 1 Coral Peel (Caysbriggs) 12 Jan, 1 Kingston 16 Jan, 1 Burnside of Enzie (at roadside in snow) 5 Feb, 2 Maryfield 7 Feb and 1 Nairn Bar 16 Feb. Seen RAF Kinloss 3 Jan, 9 Jan, 25 Feb (dead), 13 March, 12 Nov and 20 Nov.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Scarce migrant.

Spring: 3 Montgrew 16-20 Apr (IP,MJHC), 3 Kingston 25 May (MJHC), 1 Montgrew 2 June (EH) and 2 Nairn 2 June (RPC).

Autumn: Present in Findhorn Bay on 20 July (1), 27 July (1), 3 Aug (13), 11 Aug (4), 17 Aug (27), 23 Aug (14) and 31 Aug (10). In September, 2 on 4th, 10 on 7th, 3 on 16th and 4 on 20th (AJL,DMP,JDHM et al.). At Kingston, 7 between 29 July-3 Aug (AJ) and a different group of 5 on 15 Aug rising to 6 on 19 Aug (AJ,AP,MJHC). Also single birds there 11 Aug and 20 Sept (MJHC). On the Lossie estuary, 1 on 19 Aug (RP) was the only record.

Two unusual winter records concerned single birds in Findhorn Bay on 5 Jan (CD) and 24 Nov (AJL).

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Very common winter visitor and migrant. Small numbers in summer.

Monthly maxima at main sites were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	155	221	nc	16	1	nc	124	124	nc	265
Findhorn Bay	115	247	nc	nc	0	5	26	2	5	64
Burghead	85	113	0	1	22	9	9	24	8	nc
Lossiemouth	16	12	1	0	1	4	1	2	2	3

Elsewhere, 26 Cummington 13 Oct, 17 Nairn-Whiteness Head 16 Feb, 4 Kingston (in summer plumage) 13 July, 1 Tugnet 31 March and 1 Portgordon 6 Sept.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Scarce migrant.

Spring: Single birds in April were at Lossiemouth on 14th and 19th, and at Shielburn (Drybridge) on 26th. In May, 1 Elgin 7th, 1 Lossie estuary 9th and 1 Strathlene 25th.

Autumn: 50 records were received between 8 July-20 Sept, 147 birds in total. This represents a considerable increase over the 34 records received in 2002.

Distribution of flock sizes was:

Flock size	1	2	3	4	9	10	12	13	21	25
No. of flocks	31	6	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	1

The largest flock was 25 Kingston 29 July (AJ).

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Common breeder. Very common migrant and winter visitor.

Breeding: In the coastal belt, 1 pair Newton, 1 pair Milltown airfield and a territorial bird at Shempston. Upcountry, 5 pairs Badcheer Farm (Cabrach), 1 pair Donal Bridge (Dallas), 3 pairs Rhinagoup (Dallas) and 2 pairs Tombreck. Adult with a juvenile at Birchfield (Tomintoul).

Largest flocks in summer/early autumn were:

June: 27 Binsness 27th and 49 Cloddach quarry 29th.

July: 17 Kingston 13th and 27 Wester Coltfoot 23rd.

August: 108 Portgordon-Buckpool 1st, 65 Cloddach quarry 3rd, 300 Findhorn Bay 4th, 340 Kingston 8th (380 there 25th), 50 Roseisle maltings 10th, 59 Windyridge 12th and 85 Lossie estuary 19th.

Coastal winter maxima were:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	272	490	296	402
Findhorn Bay	385	290	120	95
Burghead-Hopeman	4	238	6	87
Lossiemouth	6	30	4	184
Portgordon-Strathlene	12	20	40	6

Additional winter flocks were:

Jan: 300 Windyridge 16th.

Feb: 48 Cloddach Quarry 23rd, 26 Miltonhill 9th, 48 Portknockie 15th.

March: 57 Windyridge 8th, 240 Cloddach Quarry 9th, 30 Speyslaw 22nd.

Oct: 205 Kingston 5th, 210 Gilston 20th, 165 Easter Greens 25th, 63 Cloddach Quarry 26th.

Dec: 40 Garmouth 2nd, 231 Westerfolds 7th, 182 Pitairlie 19th, 120 Newton 28th.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Very scarce migrant.

One flying west at cliff-top height Covesea 31 July (JDHM). Later, 1 Kingston 12-13 Oct (AJ,NH).

Annual totals (different birds as far as is possible to judge) since 1985 have been as follows:

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
5+	5	8	12	2	2	8	8	2	5
1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
6	0	5	4	4	0	1	0	2	

Although never common, the species has become something of a rarity in recent years.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Scarce breeder, very common migrant and winter visitor.

Breeding: Territorial pairs located in the lowlands at Hillhead (Forres) 23 Apr, Binsness 5 May, Tarras Moss 4 June and Kingston 13-15 July. Upcountry, at Badcheer Farm (Cabrach) 30 May, Lochindorb 8 June (2 pairs) and Birchfield (Tomintoul). At Montgrew, 1 on 16 Apr and 2 on 11 May but no suggestion of breeding, this applying equally to 1 Cloddach 27 July.

Spring (March-early June) at the coast: On the Lossie estuary, 155 on 23 March, 25 on 17 Apr, 10 on 28 Apr, down to 1 by 19 May. At Burghead, 37 on 5 March, 61 on 5 Apr, 1 on 6 May and 3 on 16 June.

Late summer/autumn (July-Sept):

Lossie estuary: In July, 16 on 3rd and rising steadily thereafter to 34 on 18th, 70 on 26th and 91 on 29th. Further increase in August to 109 on 18th and 129 on 21st.

Burghead: 11 on 10 July, 37 on 25 Aug, 43 on 29 Aug, 49 on 12 Sept.

Also 5 Portgordon 1 July and 21 there 14 Sept.

Winter: Monthly maxima at the coast were:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars	259	140	126	237
Findhorn Bay	368	296	365	198
Burghead-Hopeman	38	80	46	15
Lossiemouth	57	226	43	160
Portgordon-Strathlene	140	15	131	110

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Scarce migrant, very scarce in winter.

Spring: In April, 1 Lossiemouth 23rd, 1 Findhorn Bay 3rd and 2 there 23rd-25th.

Summer: 4 Findhorn Bay 27 June.

Late summer/autumn (July-October): In Findhorn Bay (where most birds inhabit the river and creeks in the south-west corner), birds were seen on 19 July (2), 27 July (2), 1 Aug (1), 11 Aug (a high count of 12) and 28 Aug (1). On the Lossie estuary, 1 on 9 July, 22-26 July, 23 Aug and 25 Sept. The latter bird remained on the estuary until the end of the year. 1 overflow Lossiemouth 21 Aug. Elsewhere, 1 Gilston 26 Aug, 1 Portknockie 3 Sept and 1 Loch Spynie 16 Aug and 24 Aug.

Winter: 1 Binsness (Findhorn Bay) 19 Jan and, as stated above, 1 Lossie estuary 25 Sept-29 Dec at least. Overwintering has not been reported since 1999 but prior to that year wintering Greenshank were regular in Findhorn Bay.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Very scarce migrant, occasional in winter.

An unusual spring record of 1 over Loch Spynie 26 May (RP). At more typical times were 1 Inchstelly pond (Alves) 17 July (JDHM) and 1 Kingston 9 Aug (AJ).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: Singles Banchor and Dulsie Bridge 18 Apr, Cloddach quarry, Drynachan and Lochindorb 20 Apr. Typical dates; earliest was 11 Apr 2001.

Breeding: 6 pairs River Findhorn between Lower Meads-Findhorn Bay 6 June (JDHM), 4 pairs River Nairn between Howford Bridge-Hangman's Hill 4 July (only 1 pair below the bridge 23 May) (JDHM), 3 pairs River Spey between Ordiquish-Fochabers 12 June (JDHM), 4 pairs Lochindorb 6 June (ISS) and 2 pairs Cloddach Quarry 22 June (CAG). First proof of breeding Loch Spynie where an adult with a chick on 26 July (CAG). Anxious birds Newmill (Auldearn) 20 July (JDHM).

Late summer/autumn: Largest coastal aggregations, as usual, were at Kingston and Kincorth (Findhorn Bay). At Kingston, 25 on 13 July, 16 on 26 July, 12 on 2 Aug and only 1 left by 25 Aug. At Kincorth, 19 on 27 June and 24 on 11 July. Only one report from Lossie estuary – 1 on 25 Aug. No September records received.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Common winter visitor, small numbers in summer.

Winter monthly maxima at main sites were:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Nov	Dec
Findhorn	nc	21	51	52	9
Burghead-Hopeman	46	48	43	nc	38
Lossiemouth	38	24	8	10	44
Portgordon-Strathlene	200	42*	136	nc	163

*Portgordon-Buckpool only

On other rocky shores in winter, 33 Cullen 27 Dec and at Nairn, 29 on 18 Feb, 16 on 22 Oct and 17 on 6 Nov.

Spring-summer:

April: An exceptional 99 Burghead 5th, 15 Findhorn Bay 15th, 8 Lossiemouth 26th.

May: 24 Burghead 5th, 12 Lossiemouth 12th, 3 Hopeman 13th.

June: 15 in summer plumage Burghead 16th.

July: 3 Portgordon 15th, 23 Burghead 14th, 1 Lossie estuary 19th, 1 Culbin Bar 26th.

August: 12 Portgordon-Buckpool 1st, 6 Burghead 5th and 29 there 10th rising to 37 on 25th. 8 Findhorn Bay 25th, 47 Lossiemouth 16th.

In September, 41 Burghead 8th and 9 Kingston 12th.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Scarce migrant offshore in summer and autumn, rare in winter.

Only six birds seen: 2 west past Lossiemouth 15 Aug (DAG), 1 on Lossiemouth beach being mobbed by Sandwich Terns 30 Aug (EH), 1 west Lossiemouth 31 Aug (JDHM), 1 west Strathlene 22 Sept (MJHC) and 1 west in Burghead Bay 23 Sept (IF).

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Fairly common migrant in summer and autumn.

2 flying west Buckpool 20 June (MJHC), 2 east Lossiemouth 4 July (DAG) and 3 east Kingston 5 July (AJ). All other records came in the late summer-autumn period between 13 July-4 Oct. In total, 95 birds were seen of which 66 were passing Lossiemouth, where most sea-watching takes place. Peak time was the final days of August when counts at Lossiemouth were 29 on 29th, 6 on 30th and 5 on 31st (CAG,DAG,AH,JDHM). Most other reports were of 1-3 birds.

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

Scarce migrant in summer and autumn.

In spring/early summer, 1 Lossiemouth 21 Apr (DAG), 1 Spey Bay 30 Apr (IF), 1 Tronach Head 15 May (L&RS) and 1 Lossiemouth 17 May and 18 May (DAG). Late summer-autumn passage noted between 26 Jul-7 Oct, 74 birds in total. Usually only 1-2 on any day but a surge in late August, when birds passing Lossiemouth totalled 28 on 29th and 7 on 30th (DAG,CAG,AH, JDHM,EH), and 6 Lossiemouth 5 Oct (DAG,JDHM).

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Rare visitor.

One adult Loch Spynie 29 March (DAG,CAG,AJL et al) and one 3rd summer/adult at Corskie (Garmouth) 15 Aug (AP). These birds, the 9th and 10th records for Moray & Nairn, include the first ever adult.



Mediterranean Gull adult, Loch Spynie 29 March 2003 (© Duncan Gibson)

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

Very scarce visitor.

In Findhorn Bay, 1 2nd summer 30 Apr (AJL), 1 1st summer 13-18 May (DMP,MJHC) and 1 adult 24-31 Aug (AY,DMP). 1 juvenile Loch Spynie 21-31 Aug (CAG,DAG et al) and single juveniles passing Lossiemouth on 29 Aug (DAG) and 30 Aug (JDHM).

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Very common resident breeder and winter visitor.

Breeding: Few colony counts reported in 2003. Only 21 pairs Lochs of Bogmussach 24 June (JDHM) where 85 pairs in 2002. 2-3 pairs between Tips of Corsemaul-Hill of Mackalea 11 May (WRPB) and 15-17 nests on the Loch Spynie 'tern platform' (many obs.). None at Fleenas 6 June (JDHM).

Highest flock counts were 930 Findhorn Bay 16 Aug and 850 Pitairlie 22 Jan. Unusually numerous at Loch Spynie due to the presence of the adjacent pig farm: 400 on 6 Jan, 500 on 16 Feb, 378 on 3 Apr, 244 on 30 Oct and 775 on 23 Nov. Counts of 100 or more elsewhere were 180 Dallas 17 Apr, 107 Cooper Park (Elgin) 28 Oct, 157 Lossie estuary 20 Sept (and 180 there 29 Dec) and 110 Nairn 6 Nov.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Very common resident breeder and winter visitor.

Breeding: Birds back on the Tips of Corsemaul hills 7 March. On 11 May, c1800 pairs Tips of Corsemaul-Hill of Mackalea – average size of 52 clutches was 2.37. On 5-6 July, following poor weather, there were some new nests but only 13 flying/running chicks and 11 dead ones. At the same time on nearby Tom Mor, only 100s of adults remained – 13 well-grown dead chicks were found but only 4 live ones (WRPB). At other colonies, 38 nests RAF Kinloss 2 June, 1 nest Lossie Forest rifle range 27 May and at least 10 pairs bred on roof of Milne's High School (Fochabers) where 4 newly-fledged juveniles on 13 July.

Flock counts of 300 or more were 420 Hilton of Delnies 18 Nov (310 there 8 Dec), 380 Loch na Bo 20 Feb, 347 Loch Oire 30 Aug and 500 Loch Spynie 16 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Summer visitor and fairly common breeder. Very scarce in winter.

Arrival: Birds seen prior to the start of March are very likely to have been overwintering so, from early March, arriving birds included 1 Cooper Park (Elgin) 5th rising to 16 by 22nd, 1 Portknockie 8th (3 there 25th), 3 Wester Calcotts 18th, 2 Lossie estuary 18th and 7 Cloddach quarry 23rd.

Breeding: At Tips of Corsemaul c20 pairs on 11 May but only 2 anxious birds remained on 6 July (WRPB). On rooftops, 3+ pairs Auchroisk distillery (Mulben) 2 June where not previously noted (MJHC). Up to 32 adults around Cooper Park (Elgin) were doubtless from local rooftop nesting pairs although no census was undertaken.

Flock counts away from Cooper Park were relatively small, best being 35 Cloddach quarry 27 Apr (still 31 on 8 June), 47 Loch Oire 7 June, 12 Loch Spynie 28 June, 15 Lossie estuary 17 Apr and 18 there 8 July (of which 1 adult showed characters of southern Scandinavian race *L.f.intermedius* (JDHM)).

As usual, only a very few in mid-winter: 1 Urquhart 24 Jan (EH), 1 Elgin 6 Feb (CAG) and probably the same bird Lossie estuary 8-11 Feb (DAG,CAG,EH). Records of 1 Loch Spynie 13-22 Dec (EH,DAG) and 1 Lossie estuary 16-22 Nov (DAG,EH) and 29 Dec (JDHM) also probably relate to one individual.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Very common resident breeder and winter visitor.

Breeding: Only inland breeders reported. 10+ pairs Auchroisk distillery (Mulben) roof 2 June, at least 8 pairs Elgin Academy roof, 5 pairs on roofs Mosstodloch Industrial estate 15 June, 2 nests RAF Kinloss 2 June and c5 pairs Tips of Corsemaul 11 May (none on 6 July).

Counts at Lossie estuary and Loch Spynie revealed the following numbers:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Lossie estuary	1430	271	nc	250	175	1851	869	700	1340	950	280	365
Loch Spynie	200	700	1900	1300	350	nc	nc	nc	160	nc	nc	nc

Exceptional numbers at Loch Spynie were attracted by the nearby pig farm. No doubt many of these birds commute between the pig fields, the loch and the nearby estuary. Small numbers of Scandinavian race *L.a. argentatus* were often on Loch Spynie and Lossie estuary.

Flocks of 300 or more elsewhere were 620 Cullen 16 Feb, 1800 Findhorn 30 Sept, 850 Hilton of Delnies 8 Dec (745 there 18 Nov), 1400 Hopeman pig fields 26 March and 10 Apr (1200 there 30 July and 420 on 19 Nov), 1859 Nairn 11 Jan, 2000 between Nairn-Whiteness Head 16 Feb, 1500 Tugnet 6 Aug (800 there 14 Nov) and 850 Williamston pig farm 18 Feb.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus (argentatus/cachinnans) michahelis*

Rare visitor.

Two adults were seen, and photographed, on the Lossie estuary on 12 Aug and 23 Aug (RP,DAG). Decisions on these birds, together with others in 2002 are still awaited from Scottish Birds Rarities Committee. Two sub-adult gulls, also at Lossiemouth, on 30 May were possibly of this species but they possessed some anomalous features and the possibility of hybrids (possibly Herring X Lesser Black-backed) could not be ruled out (SE,JP).

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*

Very scarce winter visitor.

Back to normality after the exceptional influx in 2003.

Winter-spring: 1 adult Loch Spynie 9 Jan-22 Apr (many obs.). This bird visited the Lossie estuary on several occasions during this period. A 2nd winter bird was there on 10 Jan (NH). Elsewhere at the coast, 1 2nd winter Portknockie 1 Jan (L&RS), 1 1st winter Speymouth 13 Feb (DMP,SE) and at nearby Nether Dallachy 21 Apr (MJHC), and 1 adult Speymouth 13 March (TM). Inland, 1 2nd winter Brodie Castle pond 20 March-10 Apr (DW et al.) and 1 adult (not the Loch Spynie bird) Urquhart 12 Jan (RP).

Autumn-winter: 1 adult Lossie estuary 8-9 Nov (CAG) and 1 adult Loch Spynie 13-31 Dec (many obs.).



Iceland Gull adult, Lossie estuary 8 Nov 2003 (© Duncan Gibson)

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus**Very scarce winter visitor.*

1 adult provided many records at Loch Spynie and nearby Lossie estuary 19 Jan-30 Apr (many obs.). Other records were 1 1st winter Hill of Spynie pig farm 10 Jan (NH), 1 2nd summer Portknockie 23 Apr (EH) and, near Spey Bay, 1 following a plough 8 Feb (WRPB) and it or another there 23 May (IF).



Glaucous Gull adult, Lossie estuary 16 March 2003 (© Duncan Gibson)

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus**Scarce resident breeder and common visitor.*

Breeding: 1 pair Craig Head (Findochty) 26 Apr and 1 pair Tronach Head 12 July.

Counts: Monthly maxima on the Lossie estuary were:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
9	nc	nc	22	4	67	60	116	625	700	228	43

Counts of 50 or more elsewhere were 980 Culbin Bar 7 Sept, 653 Tugnet 14 Nov (100 there 15 Oct and 214 2 Dec), 260 Hilton of Delnies 18 Nov (135 there 8 Dec), 170 Portknockie 4 Oct, 100 Kingston 15 Oct, 90 Nairn 11 Jan, 65 Burghead 24 Sept and 60 Binsness 29 Sept.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Common breeder and very common migrant.

Breeding: 347 apparently occupied nests Covesea 8 June, continuing the slow decline there in recent years. A slight increase at Portknockie however where 122 a.o.nests on 14 June, of which 25 were on the Bow Fiddle Rock and the remainder on the adjacent mainland cliffs (MJHC).

Substantial offshore passage only noted on 29 Aug when 1000 west past Lossiemouth in 2 hours and 200 east past Strathlene in 20 mins. This curious difference in flight direction between these two sites (only 21km. apart) has been noted before. Best counts of 'stationary' flocks were 900 Burghead Bay 18 Sept and 350 Kingston 9 Sept.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Very common summer visitor and occasional breeder.

Arrival: 8 Burghead and 2 Lossiemouth 26 March, and 10 Findhorn 27 March were the first.

Best spring counts thereafter were 80 Burghead 24 Apr and 140 Tugnet shingles 4 May. More numerous than usual in late summer/autumn. A large congregation built up at Burghead where 31 on 4 Aug and 35 on 15 Aug, increasing to 148 (including 45 juveniles) on 1 Sept. Still 40 on 16 Sept (JDHM). Other big flocks in west Moray were 266 Culbin Bar 7 Sept (ISS) and 140 Findhorn Bay 2 Sept (48 there 28 Aug and 10 Sept) (AJL). Strong westerly passage off Lossiemouth on 29 Aug when 150 passed in 2 hours (AH). On 24 Sept, 26 (25 east, 1 west) past Lossiemouth in 15 mins. Other counts included 50 Lossiemouth 7 Sept and 62 Portgordon-Buckpool 17 Sept. Last of the year, in October, were 2 Findhorn 14th, 2 Lossie estuary 16th and 2 Lossiemouth west beach 17th.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Summer visitor and fairly common breeder.

Arrival: First was 1 Loch Spynie 15 Apr.

Breeding: A repeat of 2003 at Loch Spynie where Common Terns took over the artificial platform after the Black-headed Gull colony had finished in late May. Counts of 34-37 adults were frequent between 5 May-5 Aug and there were at least 17 nests on 19 July (CAG et al.). Fledging success was disappointing – probably only 5 young. No proof of breeding elsewhere but possible at Aberlour, where 1 pair 27 Apr-23 May (AE), Broom of Moy, where 2 pairs 21 May (JDHM), and Mundole, where 2 pairs 20 June (JDHM).

Inland later in the year, 6 Cloddach quarry 6 Aug. Only small numbers at the coast where 15 Lossie estuary 16 June, 10 there 27 July, 5 Portgordon-Strathlene 1 July and 6 Tugnet 31 Aug.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Summer visitor and common but local breeder.

Arrival: First 1 Portknockie on the early date of 9 Apr, followed by 1 Spey Bay 10 Apr.

Breeding: Another very poor year. At RAF Kinloss, 20 adults on 8 May. c50 birds apparently incubating late May but only 7 birds and one nest on 2 June. A flock of 140 adults on 20 June but no further nesting and no young reared (AJL,MJHC). At Garmouth viaduct, on the Spey shingles, 83 apparently incubating birds on 2 June had all gone by 14 June (MJHC). At Lossiemouth east beach, up to 23 birds and at least 4 nests but no young reared. On Kingston rivermouth shingles, 4-5 pairs apparently breeding 15 June but the breeding area was deserted by early July, although 69 were loafing at the rivermouth on that date. No young have fledged from nests in Moray & Nairn since 2001.

Last of the year was 1 Lossie estuary 20 Sept.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

Very scarce summer visitor and rare breeder.

Breeding: Site 1 – 1 on 13 May (DMP) was the only record. Site 3 – First 2 back 3 May. Numbers rose steadily with 13 on 20 May and 22 on 27 May. On 8 July, 2 pairs each had one chick, 2 adults were incubating and 3-4 others dropped into hidden areas of the dunes suggesting nests there. On 27 July a flock of c30 on the foreshore included 7 juveniles. (DAG,CAG,MJHC). Last report of 7 on 19 Aug. Elsewhere, 2 Burghead 21 July (JDHM) and 1 Hopeman 19 Aug (CAG).

Guillemot *Uria aalge*

Very common offshore.

Most numerous offshore in autumn. In September, counts of birds on the water were 500 Lossiemouth 12th (150 on 19th), 80 Findhorn 12th, 350 Hopeman 16th and 120 Burghead Bay 18th. In October, 200 Burghead Bay 10th, 229 Nairn/Culbin Bars 12th and 240 Findhorn 15th. No heavy passage movements noted, best was 189 west in 1 hour off Lossiemouth 28 Oct. On 12 Oct, 4 in Buckie harbour and 13 corpses along Portgordon-Strathlene tideline.

At other times of year counts were generally small e.g. 31 Nairn/Culbin Bars 16 Feb (52 there 20 Nov and 16 on 14 Dec), 12 Burghead Bay 8 Aug,

Razorbill *Alca torda*

Very common offshore.

Breeding: Following the presence of birds on the cliffs at Portknockie in 2002, breeding took place there for the first time in 2003. On 14 June an adult was incubating an egg, a second pair was occupying a nearby ledge and another pair was on the water below the cliff. On 25 June, three pairs were on the cliff, including the incubating bird. On 12 July only the breeders and one other pair were there. In addition, 5 birds were ashore on the seaward side of the Bow Fiddle Rock but they did not appear to be breeding and they were not there in early August. On 2 Aug the breeding pair had hatched one chick which was around two-thirds grown. Two weeks later all were gone, the chick apparently having fledged successfully (MJHC). This is the first breeding by Razorbills in Moray & Nairn.

Best offshore counts during the year were in early spring when 85 past Lossiemouth in 15 mins on 29 March (DAG) and on 1 Apr, 291 west past Burghead in 1 hour and 261 west past Lossiemouth, also in 1 hour (JDHM). Other counts of 30 or more through the year were 44 Nairn/Culbin Bars 16 Feb (and 109 there 12 Oct), 40 Burghead 27 Feb, 35 Findhorn 3 Apr, 33 Lossiemouth 10 Apr, 35 Strathlene 12 Apr, 180 Burghead Bay 8 Aug and 200 Findhorn 20 Sept (DMP).



Razorbill pair with egg, Portknockie June 2003 (© Martin Cook)

Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle*

Scarce offshore, rare breeder.

Breeding: One pair bred Tronach Head in the usual crevice for the 18th successive year, raising two young. The total number of young reared in this crevice now stands at 32 (4 broods of 1, 14 broods of 2, no failures). For the first time a second pair nested here c200m west of the traditional site (MJHC). Six adults were on the sea close inshore on 12 July and there were 10 on 20 July (L&RS). At Portknockie there were 10 adults on 7 Feb and 9 May, and as many as 17 on 25 March. At least two pairs bred here and perhaps more (L&RS,MJHC,PMcD,AH). To the west, 1 adult off Clashach Quarry (Covesea cliffs) 5 May (EH) raises breeding possibilities here for the future.

At other seasons only a few reports of birds passing offshore, mostly at Lossiemouth, and never more than two together.

Little Auk *Alle alle*

Scarce winter visitor.

Only three records: 1 in Portknockie harbour on the unusual date of 26 Apr (L&RS), 3 swimming around the edge of Lossiemouth harbour 28 Oct (JDHM) and 1 Burghead 8 Dec (JDHM).

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

Scarce offshore.

A very poor year, with most birds no doubt passing too far offshore to be noticed. At Lossiemouth, 1 on 16 Oct (DS), 1 dead on west beach 16 Feb (HF) and 2 from a boat c4km offshore 24 May (DAG). Elsewhere, 2 Nairn Bar 12 Oct (DJ,AL) and 1 Portknockie 8 Nov (EH).

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Very common resident breeder.

Counts of 50 or more were 220 Elgin town centre 13 March and 23 Nov, 180 Burghead 25 Dec, 90 Buckie harbour 27 Dec and 80 Lossiemouth 5 Dec.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Scarce resident breeder, formerly common.

Breeding season: Records in the period late March-July included birds at Aldunie, Ardoch (Dallas), Cabrach, Caysbriggs, Chapelton, Cloddach, Duffus, Easter Oldtown, Elgin, Findhorn, Fochabers, Fogwatt, Kellas, Kinloss, Loch Spynie, Lochhills, Long Head (Portknockie), Pitairlie, Pitgaveny, Salterhill, Scarffbanks, Urquhart, Wester Moy and Windyridge.

Elsewhere at other times, 10 Meft 8 Feb and 3 Salterhill 8 March.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Very common resident breeder.

Largest flocks reported were 700 Pitairlie 21 Oct, 650 Alves 27 Feb, 600 Salterhill 15 Dec, 500 Newton 28 Dec, 360 Lhanbryde 18 Dec, 183 Inchberry 16 Nov and 140 Moss of Barmuckity 18 Dec.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Very common resident breeder.

Breeding: In Lossiemouth, one pair laid first egg in a nest on a TV aerial on 9 Feb. Subsequently 10 pairs found breeding in central Lossiemouth (JDHM). First song Lein, Kingston 13 Feb.

Best flocks were 19 Burghead 2 Nov, 18 Middlefield (Forres) 17 Oct, 14 Clochan 15 Feb and 13 Dec, and 10 Logie 27 Oct.

Following a period of increasing flock sizes up the mid 1990s, subsequent groups have been smaller:

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: First reports in late April when 1 Daless 24th, 1 Archiestown 27th and 1 Auchness 28th. The Daless bird is, by one day, the earliest ever in Moray & Nairn. In early May, 1 Ballindalloch and 1 Brown Muir 3rd, and 1 Whiteash Hill 7th.

Last was 1 Lein (Kingston) 13 Aug.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Scarce resident breeder.

Breeding: Confirmed breeding at 8 sites and birds seen in 7 other localities in April-July.

Outside the breeding season, and away from known breeding sites, single birds were seen at Auchenhalrig (March), Burgie (Feb), Clochan (March), Coxtown (Nov), Forres (Feb), Garmouth (Nov), Glenlivet (Dec), Inchberry (Jan,Oct,Dec), Kinermony (Oct), Linkwood (Nov), Maryhill (Dec), Marypark (Oct,Dec), Mill of Tynet (Oct), Overton (Jan), Portknockie (Feb), Spynie canal (Nov), Spynie Wood (March), Strathlene (Feb), Wellheads (Clochan) (Feb) and Westertown (Dufftown) (March).

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Common resident breeder.

Breeding proved up country as far as Ballantruan (Strathavon).

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Scarce resident breeder.

Breeding: Confirmed at Aldunie (fledged young (NH)), Burnside (Drummuir) (fledged young (WRPB)), Cabrach (fledged young (NH)), Cassieford (young calling 27 June (JDHM)), Drainie (young calling 24 June (JDHM)), Kingston (adult with food for young (PGS)), Kinloss (2 pairs on RAF ground raised broods of 2 and 3 respectively (AJL)), Muiry Wood (Forres) (young calling 18 June (ISS)) and Teindland Wood (young calling (AY)). A long-dead juvenile dead by the road Glacks of Balloch 1 Aug (WRPB). Elsewhere in the breeding season, 1 Mayne 29 June, heard Corse of Garbet (Cabrach) and 1 Dalestie (Glen Avon) 26 June.

At other times, 1 Aberlour 4 Jan.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Rare breeder and very scarce migrant.

Breeding: For the second successive year one pair bred near the coast in the RAF base at Kinloss. They hatched three young but unfortunately these were killed by grass cutters on 2 June (AJL). A further six pairs were located on inland moors during the breeding season.

In late summer-winter, 6 Findhorn dunes 14 Feb (EH), 1 Urquhart 31 July (AJ), 1 Kingston 3-26 Aug (MJHC,AJ), 1 Lossiemouth 14 Oct (DS) and 1 Dufftown golf course 2 Dec (AJY).

Swift *Apus apus*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: The first ever April records in Moray & Nairn involved 2 birds at Loch Spynie on 30th (DS,IF). Next reports, in early May, were 6 Loch Spynie 4th, 2 Elgin 7th and 1 Carron 9th. Five other observers noted their 'firsts' between 10th-16th, including as far upcountry as Tomintoul where 2 on 14th.

At least four pairs bred central Lossiemouth. Largest aggregation of the summer was c200 feeding over a newly harvested rape field at Longmorn on 21 July. Last of the year were 1 Elgin 23 Aug, 1 Clochan 31 Aug, 1 Loch na Bo 2 Sept and 2-3 daily at Loch Spynie until the last 2 on 5 Sept.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Very scarce visitor and occasional breeder.

An encouraging spread of records involving all major lowland rivers but nothing to suggest breeding. On the River Spey, 1 Bogmoor-Fochabers on three dates between 21 May-7 Aug (EH,PGS,TF) and 1 Aberlour 13 Dec (AE). On the River Lossie, 1 Caysbriggs 26 Jan (IB) and 1 Elgin 10 Apr (RM). Nearby, 1 Loch Spynie 12 Jan (RP). Elsewhere, 1 Firhall (Nairn) 9 Aug, 9 Sept and 22 Oct (JD,AJL), 1 Forres (River Findhorn) 28 May (NH) and 1 Kingsteps 12 Oct (DJ,AL).

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Rare visitor.

1 Whitegate (Drybridge) 1 Nov (D.Gordon,MJHC). This is the 16th record in Moray & Nairn, but the first for 11 years. Hoopoes were seen in nine years during the period 1981-1992 but this is the first record since that time, despite a considerable increase in the number of observers. By a strange coincidence (presumably) 5 birds have been found in the Buckie area and, of these, no fewer than 3 have been in or near Drybridge. Months of arrival for 15 of the birds are shown below:

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
2	3	1		1	2	5	1

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Very scarce resident, scarce breeder in recent years.

1 Drynahan 11 May and a pair there 15 May (CAG) was the only breeding season record. In autumn, 1 in woodland at south end of Elgin golf course 20 Sept (CAG). Still no sign of a return to the status in the mid 1990s when 10-15 sites were occupied in summer. This despite increased observer activity in suitable habitat during fieldwork for the Breeding Bird Atlas.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Common resident breeder.

This species continues to make increasingly frequent use of garden peanut feeders and the habit is now widely reported through the area. A pair with three juveniles were coming to nuts in a Rafford garden in August.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

One was reported on the Lein at Kingston on 17 Apr (WKB). This is potentially the first record of the species in Moray & Nairn but the record awaits acceptance by Scottish Birds Rarities Committee.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Common breeder and migrant.

First song heard, in February, at Longmorn on 11th, Covesea on 12th, Findhorn Bay on 16th and five at York Tower on 26th. Ten singing East Bank/Clarkly Hill/ Cummingston area 24 Apr.

Cold weather movements apparent on 3 Feb when 220 flew in off the sea in 2 hours at Kinloss (AJL) and c100 heading west in heavy snow at Portknockie (L&RS). Other notable counts were 68 Kinloss 31 Jan, 45 Mundole 1 Oct, 40 Salterhill 11 Oct, 40 over Inchstelly 22 Oct and 115 Kinloss 30 Dec.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: First was 1 Boat o' Brig 25 March, followed by 1 Glenlivet and 5 Fochabers 27 March. Good numbers by the end of March when 80 Loch Spynie 29th and 'dozens' Loch na Bo 31st. Increase to 200 Loch Spynie 25 Apr.

Colony counts (apparently occupied burrows) were 4 Ballachraggan, 28 Bodnastalker (Kellas), 25 Easter Gauldwell, 10 Half Davoch, 16 Howford (Nairn), 15 Pittendreich, 12 Wellheads (Clochan) and, in coastal dunes, 16-18 Covesea lighthouse and 20 Findhorn. Other colonies were reported at Milton (Strath Avon) and Todholes. None at Corbiewell due to landslips in the sandpit.

Last to leave were 1 Loch Spynie 22 Sept and, extremely late, 1 Burghead 15 Oct.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Summer visitor and very common breeder.

Arrival: Another year with an early vanguard well ahead of the main April arrival. First was 1 Auchindachy 1 Apr (2 there on 2nd), with no others until 2 Loch Spynie 12th and 1 Lein 13th. Thereafter, observers reported their 'firsts' on 17th, 18th (5), 19th (4) and 20th.

Breeding: In the Lhanbryde barn, 5 pairs bred. Details were:

	No. of pairs	Av. clutch	Av. brood hatched	Av. brood fledged
First brood	5	4.8	3.8	3.8
Second brood	5	4.8	4.4	4.2

Clutch sizes were a little smaller than in 2002 – perhaps surprising in view of the good spring weather in 2003 (RP).

Post-breeding flocks were 158 Pitairlie 5 Aug, 65 Forres 8 Aug, 100 Windyridge 24 Aug and 60 Lossiemouth 15 Sept. Birds lingering from mid October onwards were 1 Forres 16 Oct, 1 Loch na Bo 20 Oct and 2 Findhorn 24 Oct. Most exceptionally a group of Swallows remained in Lossiemouth throughout November and into mid December. First to be noticed, in November, were 4 on 5th and 7 on 9th. There were 6 on 12th and up to 6 were seen almost daily until 5 Dec. Only 4 remained on 7th – 10th with 2 remaining on 13th-14th and nothing thereafter (DAG,CAG,JDHM et al.). The previous latest in autumn was 1 Milltown airfield 30 Nov 1997.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: Early by comparison with recent years were 4 Garmouth 16 Apr. Other April arrivals were 1 Loch Spynie 20th, 1 Forres 21st, 2 Lossiemouth 23rd, 1 Elgin 24th, 3 Portknockie and in Pilmuir (Forres) 26th and in Portgordon 28th.

Breeding: Further reduction in the Buckie High School colony to only 3 occupied nests. There has been a dramatic progressive decline here from 45 nests as recently as 1999. Elsewhere, only 2 nests Milne's High School (Fochabers) where 15 in 2000 and 8 in 2001-2002. Breeding also reported on Tomintoul distillery and the distillery building at Chapelton, Glenlivet.

Reduction in population also noted in Nairn town. Still unfledged young in a nest Alves 19 Sept.

Large late-summer flocks in Forres where 150 over the town on 27 Aug and as many as 500 on wires on 6 Sept. Gathering as usual on wires at Clochan (where only 1 pair bred in 2003) e.g. 188 on 26 Aug. Last of the year was one very late bird at Findochty on 1 Nov.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Breeding habitat records came from Birchfield (Tomintoul), Brackenslack (Rothies), Carn Meilich (Glenlivet), Cragganmore, Culbin Forest, Curlusk (Mulben), Dallas, Delavorar (Tomintoul), Delmore (Kinermony), Delnabo Lodge, Grange, Heldonside (Monaughty), Little Conval Wood, Loch Belivat (where 1 on 18 Apr was the first of the year), Loch Kirkaldy, Scoot More, Shiel Muir, Slorach's Wood, Strathendean (Archiestown), Tom a Chor (Glenlivet) and Wester Gaulrig.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Very common breeder and migrant.

Breeding: In south-west Moray a triangular walk between Bantrach-Bogeney-Feakirk revealed about 45 pairs (JDHM). Near Dallas, 11 pairs Moss of Delnahaugh.

Best counts of the year were 173 Nairn/Culbin Bars 5 Jan, 48 Lossiemouth 15 Apr, 40 Scarffbanks 6 Sept and 30 Windyridge 21 Apr. Still 28 upcountry between Bantrach-Bogeney 10 Sept.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

Scarce breeder, fairly common in winter.

Breeding: One nest near Portgordon 1 July (JDHM).

Winter counts: Along the rocky shore between Portgordon-Strathlene were 26 (of which 14 at Portgordon) on 4 Jan, 56 on 12 Oct and 28 (of which 15 at Strathlene) on 27 Dec. Elsewhere, 15 Cullen 27 Dec, 8 Nairn Bar 5 Jan, 8 Hopeman harbour 24 Feb and 6 Lossiemouth harbour 2 March. Of 8 birds at Lossiemouth west beach on 6 Apr, 3 showed characteristics of Scandinavian race *A.p.littoralis* (NH).

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Rare migrant.

1 Lein (Kingston) 28 Sept 2003 (NH). The pattern of occurrence of Yellow Wagtails in Moray & Nairn is curious. The first well documented record was in 1968 at Covesea. During the 16 year period 1968-1983, 13 birds were seen, with records in 8 separate years. In the 19 year period 1984-2002, there were no further records, despite a lot more observer activity.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Summer visitor and common breeder. Scarce in winter.

Breeding: Counts of occupied territories along rivers were counted as follows: Five between Ballachraggan-Tombreck (nr. Dallas) 3 July, three along River Findhorn between A96-Waterford 26 May, 3 Howford Bridge-Hangman's Hill (Nairn) 4 July and five along River Nairn between the estuary and Howford Bridge 23 June (JDHM). Nest with young Darnaway 17 Apr.

Winter records were 1 Cullen beach 11 Feb, 1 Sleepieshill Wood 25 Nov and 9 Dec, 1 Clochan 27 Nov and 13 Dec, 1 Fochabers 13 Dec and 2 Orton 28 Dec.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Very common breeder and migrant.

Passage: Most records of 'White Wagtails' *M.a.alba* were from the Lossie estuary where 1 on 13 May (DMP), 1 on 27-29 July (DAG), 1 on 13 Aug (MJHC), 2 on 9 Sept and 1 on 15 Sept (JDHM). Elsewhere, in spring, 2 Findhorn Bay 13 Apr (ISS), 4 Hillhead (Forres) 23 Apr (ISS), 1 Elgin 25 Apr (DAG), 2 Montgrew 11 May (MJHC) and 1 Glenlatterach 31 May. In autumn, 1 Loch na Bo 11 Sept (JDHM). A greater time-

spread of records than usual – typically the great majority of ‘Whites’ in Moray & Nairn are seen during the period mid Apr-mid May, with a few in autumn.

Counts of Pieds were 167 in a pre-roost gathering at Pinefield (Elgin) 12 Sept, 148 roosting Mosstodloch 9 Sept, 70 Loch Spynie 15 Apr, 64 Fochabers 8 Sept, 55 Lossiemouth west beach 13 Sept, 42 Covesea 31 July and 30 Garmouth 12 March.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*

Irruptive winter visitor, scarce in most years but occasionally common.

Good numbers seen in both winter periods.

Winter-spring: 1 Archiestown 26 Jan (SN), 13 Buckie 15-16 Jan (JJ), 3 Elgin 30-31 Jan followed by 23 on 16 March rising to 25 on 28 March-5 Apr, down to 17 on 10th and last 4 on 23 Apr (RP,DS), 6 Fochabers 4-5 Feb (TM), 4 Forres 25 March (RP), 3 Hopeman 5 Apr (PTH), 15 Mosstodloch 15 Jan (MJHC) and 11 Nairn 25 Jan (RPC). Most numerous in Lossiemouth where continuously present 10 Jan (1) until 23 Feb (12) with highest daily counts on 11 Jan (43), 9 Feb (41) and 22 Feb (28) (JDHM,CAG,DAG et al.). Lingering latest in early summer was 1 Fochabers 9 June (RPh).

Autumn: The autumn influx was centred chiefly on Elgin and Forres. In Elgin, first was 1 on 29 Oct, rising to 15 on 31 Oct, 23 on 4-6 Nov and 35-40 on 7-11 Nov. No further records until late November when 7 on 27th-30th (20 briefly on 28th) and last 1 on 10 Dec (AJ,CAG,ISS et al.). In Forres, first 3 on 24 Oct, rising to 16 on 27th, 21 on 28th, 35 on 1 Nov and 55 on 10-12 Nov. Down to 16 on 16 Nov and final report of 17 on 18 Nov (AJL,AJ et al.). Waxwings were also seen in Brodie (1 on 25 Oct (DW)), Clochan (1 on 6 Nov (MJHC)), Inchberry (4 on 18 Oct (AY)) and Kinloss (17 on 27 Oct-4 Nov, 12 on 5 Nov (AJL)).

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

Common resident breeder.

One on eggs Altyre 1 Apr. A pair on River Lossie near Elgin’s Cooper Park in January. Two Mosset Burn, Forres 23 Feb. Six Nairn harbour-Firhall and 1 Loch Flemington 14 Dec.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Very common resident breeder.

First song Lein 10 March. In Forres a nest with eggs was sited at ground level in a Buddleia bush. Counts of 10 or more were 19 Nairn/Culbin Bars 16 Feb, 11 by River Lossie at Dallas 14 Oct, 15 along old railway track at Easter Greens (Lossiemouth) 25 Oct, 10 Garmouth-Spey Bay via the viaduct 14 Nov and 11 along Spynie canal, Gilston 20 Nov (10 there 11 Oct). Two in snowy conditions on open moorland at summit of Brown Muir 30 Dec.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Very common resident breeder.

Brief song Easter Greens 5 Jan. Five Nairn Bar 5 Jan, 5 Culbin Bar 12 Oct and 7 between Lossiemouth cemetery-Windyridge 6 Dec.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Very common resident breeder and migrant.

First spring song Lein (Kingston) 8 Feb. Autumn song at Loch Oire 30 Aug and Lossiemouth 1 Sept.

Autumn counts: 10 Loch of Blairs 26 Sept. In October, 13 Windyridge-Lossiemouth cemetery 5th, 22 along old railway line Lossiemouth 12th, 21 Nairn/Culbin Bars 12th, 17 Cooper Park (Elgin) 18th and 16 Cott’s of Innes wood 26th. 12 Findhorn village 7 Nov.

In a Lossiemouth census during November, 43 winter territories were located in the built-up area of the town, excepting the RAF housing and Seatown.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Rare migrant.

1M Hopeman 4 Apr (M. Winnie). This is the 8th record for Moray & Nairn, of which six have been in spring and two in autumn.

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Summer visitor and scarce breeder. Very scarce migrant.

Many more located in the breeding season than usual as a result of fieldwork for the Breeding Bird Atlas. Records received from Aitnoch (1M), Ballindalloch (pair feeding young), Banchor (1M), Benrinnes Wood (pair feeding young), Birchfield (Glen Avon) (F+juvs at one site, 2M 1F at another), Craggan, Cragganmore (fledged young), Lein (fledged young), Leonach Burn (Dulsie) (song), Lynemore (a pair), Mount of Haddoch (song), The Bodach (song), Tombreck (Dallas) (1M) and Wester Gaulrig. Most unexpected were the newly fledged young (still flying weakly) on the Lein (Kingston) 7 July (PGS).

No coastal migrants reported.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Summer visitor and scarce breeder. Very scarce migrant.

Another species benefitting from increased attention during Atlas fieldwork. Reports in breeding habitat came from Cairn Eney (2 pairs), Carn Meilich (Glenlivet), Culbin Forest (3 juvs on 9 Jul), Dinnyhorn (song), Glenlatterach (min. 2 pairs – 1 feeding young), Knockan (song), Lochbuie and Sandyhillock (song). More likely to have been a spring migrant was 1 Clashach Quarry (Covesea) 4 May (EH).



Whinchat male, Glenlatterach 14 June 2003 (© Duncan Gibson)

Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*

Scarce resident breeder and probable migrant.

Breeding: Inland moorland pairs (or territorial males) located at Aitnoch, Ben Rinnes (near Scurran of Well), Bogeney, Burn of Towie, Cabrach, Cairn Eney, Corse of Garbet, Craig Balnafuaran, Dava, Dog's Craig (Glenlivet), Drummuir Moor, Dry Know (The Buck), Elrick, Gateside, Glacks of Balloch, Glenlatterach, Kynadrochit Lodge, Milton Burn (Cromdales), Moss of Delnahaugh (Dallas), Nether Howbog, Scottackleys and Slack of Myrack.

Coastal/lowland pairs at Balgreen, Binsness, Burghead, Culbin Forest (min. 4 pairs), Findhorn dunes, Hopeman, Kingston, Kinloss, Lake of Moy, Loanhead, Long Head, Lossiemouth (west) and Tronach Head. Four pairs in the Lein/rifle range area (west of Kingston) averaged 2-3 young in six broods (PGS).

Inland in winter, 1M Glack Harnes (Ben Rinnes) 6 Nov. Records widely spread along the coast in winter months but never more than 2 together.

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Summer visitor, fairly common migrant and local breeder.

Arrival: Very early arrivals were 1 Portknockie and 1 Kinloss 24 March, and 1 Spynie canal 25 March. Other March records were 1 Spey Bay 27th and 1 Lein (Kingston) 28th. Later multiple spring counts at the coast were 3 Scarffbanks 4 Apr, 3 Lossie estuary 17 Apr, 4 Findochty 18 Apr, 5 Kinloss 1-2 May, 4 Kingston 10-11 May with 9 there 12 May. 1M of Greenland race *O.o.leucorhoa* Findhorn 13 May (DMP).

Pairs reported during the breeding season at Aldunie, Allanreid, An Sgoran (Cromdale Hills), Balnellan Burn (Cromdale Hills), Big Garvoun, Birchfield, Burn of Little Fergie, Ca du Ford (Ailnack), Coire Grealach, Craig Bhuilg, Cross of Knockando, Eachrach, Foal's Craig, Glen Builg, Glenlatterach, Inchroy, Lurg, Mount of Haddoch, Muckle Laprach, Mullach Lochan nan Gabhar, Nether Howbog, Scurran of Well (Ben Rinnes) and Stob Bac an Fhurain.

First back at the coast in July were 1 Kinloss 7th, 3 Lein (Kingston) 10th and 1 Scarffbanks 16th. Best autumn counts subsequently were 5 Kinloss 18 July and 15 Aug. No late autumn migrants; last of the year was 1 Ardivot 15 Sept.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

Summer visitor and scarce breeder.

A more complete pattern of the distribution of breeding Ring Ouzels is emerging as a result of fieldwork for the Breeding Bird Atlas. Birds were found at 16 sites during summer 2003: F+1juv near Lochan Uaine (Ailnack Gorge) 18 June (MMacG), 4 juvs Ballnellan Gorge (Cromdale Hills) 24 June (MMacG), 1 Beinn Mheadhoin (CM), fledged young Big Garvoun (JJCH), 1 anxious F Birchfield (Tomintoul) 18 June (IF), 1 Burn of Little Fergie (Glen Avon), 2 Ca-du Ford (Ailnack Gorge) 9 June (AC), fledged young Coire Grealach (JJCH), 1 Craig Bhuilg, 1M above Inverlochty (Cromdale Hills) 8 June (MMacG), 1 anxious M Eachrach (Glen Fiddich) 6 July (MJHC), 1 Glen Builg, family group Knockando Burn (Cromdale Hills) 7 June (MMacG), 1 Linn of Avon, 1 Meall Gaineimh and 1 The Castle (Ailnack Gorge) 29 June.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Very common resident breeder, winter visitor and migrant.

First song Hopeman 21 Feb and Clochan 25 Feb.

In winter, 19 Nairn/Culbin Bars 5 Jan. Migrant arrivals evident in mid October when an increase noted in Elgin gardens on 13th and around Dufftown on 15th.

23 Cooper Park (Elgin) 28 Oct.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Very common migrant and winter visitor.

Winter-spring: Only small numbers reported. Flocks of 30 or more were 35 Hopeman 4 Jan, 35 Westerfolds 27 Jan, 80 Wellheads (Clochan) 1 Feb, 40 Kirkhill Quarry 16 Feb, 120 Westerton) Inchberry, 40 Innes House Farm 7 March and 30 Craigroy 12 Apr. Last were 9 Nether Enoch 17 Apr, 14 Loch Spynie 23 Apr and 6 Shielburn (near Buckie) 26 Apr.

Autumn: First arrivals in mid October when 6 Portknockie, 1 Kinloss and many over Elgin 13th, 40 Fochabers, 8 Clochan and 2 Lossiemouth 14th, and 12 Drummuir Moor 15th. Hundreds flew over Dufftown during the few days starting 15th. Large flocks elsewhere from 18 Oct e.g. 140 Balnacoul 18th, 60 Todholes and 36 Burgie 20th, 60 Loch Spynie 21st, 250 Westerfolds and 40 Nairn 22nd, 100 Kinloss 23rd, 130 Scarffbanks and 80 Clochan 24th, 120 Easter Greens and 50 Drybridge 25th and 250 Duffus 26th. Flocks of 30 or more subsequently were 95 Montgrew 30 Nov, 80 Corskie (Garmouth) 2 Dec, 72 Glenlivet 2 Dec, 80 Pitgaveny 7 Dec, 245 Bogton (Lhanbryde) 12 Dec, 200 Loch Spynie 19 Dec and 50 Newton 29 Dec.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Very common breeder and migrant.

In the mid winter months, early January records were 1 Elgin 2nd, 6 Nairn/ Culbin Bars 5th, 1 Easter Greens 5th and 2 Lossiemouth west beach 7th. In December, 1 Nairn Bar 14th and 1 Aberlour 12-31st.

First song, from mid February, at Forres 10th, Elgin 11th, Rothes 12th, Lein 12th, Lossiemouth 18th, Dufftown 19th and Clochan 27th.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Very common migrant and winter visitor.

Winter-spring: Apparently scarce with max. flock only 80 Miltonduff 9 Feb. Otherwise only 6 flocks of 10-40. Last in spring were 16 Craigroy 12 Apr.

Autumn: First were 9 in off the sea at Lossiemouth 9 Oct. Main arrival 13-16 Oct. On 13th, 100+ over Elgin, 14 Portknockie and 1 Kinloss. On 14th, 100 Lyne of Carron, 6 Dallas, 2 Clochan. First birds over Dufftown 15th, with hundreds passing WSW next day. Subsequent flocks of 50 or more were 60 Westerfolds 22 Oct, 50 Kinloss 23 Oct, 200 South Darkland late Oct and 60 Inchbroom 21 Nov.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Common resident breeder and migrant.

Early in the year, 14 Wester Greens 15 Feb and 9 Kinloss 17 Feb. Largest late summer/autumn flocks were 23 Kinloss 18 July, 28 Clochan 29 Aug, 14 Wester Greens 5 Oct and 16 Sluie 27 Oct.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

Summer visitor and scarce breeder.

Singing birds in 13 sites (an annual record 22 birds in total): 3 Rannas marsh 24 June (MJHC), 1 Blackburn (Hill of Maud) 26 Apr (MJHC), 2 Curlusk 2 June (MJHC), 3 Daugh of Kinermony 30 May (AE), 5 Derrybeg (Ben Rinnes) 30 May (AE), 1 Hopeman 4 May (EH), 1 Knockan (AY), 1 Mains of Edinvale (Dallas) 31 May (JB), 1 Milton (Strath Avon) (MMacG), 1 Nether Enoch 4 June (NH), 1 Oldmill of Mayen 11 May (JB), 1 Shiel Muir 26 Apr and 1 Tom of Ruthrie (AE).

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: First was 1 Loch Spynie 20 Apr (MJHC) – by 2 days, the earliest ever in Moray & Nairn. Also early at Lein (Kingston) where first song on 25 Apr.

Subsequently, furthest up country were songsters at Burn of Favat (Glen Rinnes) (several), Chapelton (Glenlivet) and Corryhabbie Burn (several). One Hatton (Dallas) 3 June was singing in a damp field with clumps of small rushes.

At Loch Spynie ‘Constant Effort Site’ only 12 adults were trapped for ringing, compared to 26 in 2002. This suggests a poor return rate to the site after spring migration, possibly as a result of cold, wet weather in the Mediterranean in April. The number of juveniles trapped rose however, from 9 in 2002 to 21 in 2003. Most of these were caught late in the season and may well have been migrants rather than locally bred individuals (RP).

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: First singing birds in early May when 1 Kinloss 1st, 1 Ballindalloch 3rd, 1 Elginshill, 1 Portknockie and 1 Findrassie 4th, 1 Kintrae Bridge 5th, 1 Clackmarras 7th and 1 Clochan 8th.

Subsequent counts of singing birds were 5 along River Findhorn between A96-Findhorn Bay 21 May, 7 Kirkhill area 29 May, 3 in a small part of Lossiemouth golf course 12 May (JDHM) and 3 Tarras 1 June (ISS).

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Summer visitor and scarce breeder.

Singing birds (singles unless stated) were located at Auchlunkart in May (2), Bogmoor, Brodie 1 June, Broom of Moy 26 May, Cloddach Quarry 29 June, Cloddymoss in May, Ditch-head (Dallas) 28 May, River Findhorn below A96 bridge 21 May, Garmouth viaduct 21 June, Gordonstoun 4 May, Howford (Nairn) 4 July (2), Inchberry in May, Kirkhill 29 May, Maggiecknockater 13 May, Muirside in May, Rathven 15 June, Snab of Moy in May, Chapelton (Glenlivet) and near Bridge of Avon. Many of these were located during Atlas fieldwork in areas seldom otherwise visited by birders.

Later, 1 Loch Spynie 29 Aug was the only record.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Summer visitor and fairly common breeder. Scarce migrant and winter visitor.

January-March: 1 Drumduan (Forres) 13 Feb, 1M Lossiemouth 8-19 Jan, 1M,1F Mosstodloch during Feb and 1 Nairn 10 Jan. In an Elgin garden (Academy St), regular visits by 1M 4 Jan-30 March (2M on 11-21 March) and by 1F 4 Jan-15 Apr (CAG). In a garden in Forres, 2 birds on 20 Jan increased steadily to 3M,1F on 16 Feb, 4M,1F on 2 March and a remarkable 5M,2F on 9 March (per ISS). Clearly many winter Blackcaps go unreported these days.

Spring/summer: An unprecedented total of 116 singing birds were found, in 77 localities. Singing birds were found at Aberlour, Aikenway, Bin of Cullen (3), Binsness (2), Birnie, Blackhills, Blervie, Bodnastalker (Kellas), Brodie Castle and lake (3), Burn of Fochabers, Burntack (1), Cairnty, Glen Brown, Clochan, Cloddach quarry (2), Cloddymoss, Conicavel (3), Craigroy Mill (Dallas), Crooked Wood, Dallas Lodge, Drumduan (Forres), Dundurcas, Dyke, Elginshill, Findhorn River between A96-Waterford (6), Fochabers, Fogwatt, Garmouth, Garmouth viaduct, Ianstown (Buckie), Gordonstoun (3), Half Davoch (2), Hazelbank, Heldon Wood (2), Hill of Spynie, Howford-Handyman’s Hill (Nairn) (2), Innes House (4), Kellas House, Kellas oakwood, Kinloss, Kirkhill (4), Knockando House, Lein (Kingston), Lhanbryde (2), Limekilns (Darnaway Forest) (2), Loch Loy, Loch na Bo (3), Loch Oire (3), Loch Spynie (4), Lossie Forest (east end), Low Wood, Maggiecknockater, Maryhill, Meads of St John, Millbuies, Miltonduff, Monaughty Forest (3),

Moy House, Muirside, Mundole, Nairn-Howford (R.Nairn) (3), Newbold (Forres) (2), Newton of Dalvey, Newtyle (Rafford), Ordiquish-Fochabers (along R.Spey) (2), Pluscarden, Rathven, Sanquhar Loch, Scotshill, Slorach's Wood, Tearie (Darnaway), Tomore (Knockando), Torrieston, Wester Elchies, Wester Manbeen, Whiteash Hill Wood and Woodpark.

Autumn: The only coastal migrant reported was 1 Findochty 22 Oct. 2F Clochan 8 Nov and 1 Scarffbanks 12 Nov.

Late November-December: 1F Academy St., Elgin 21 Nov-31 Dec with 2F on 10 Dec and 3F on 15 Dec.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Summer visitor and scarce breeder.

1 singing Elginshill 4 May (JDL) was a new site.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Summer visitor and scarce breeder. Scarce migrant and rare winter visitor.

Winter: 1 Nairn 1 Feb (PCC).

Arrival: First song, in March, was heard at Lein (Kingston) 21st, Garmouth viaduct 22nd, Brodie 23rd, Loch na Bo and Findrassie 26th, Elgin (Quarry Wood) and Caysbriggs 28th, Tugnet and Cloddach 30th and Maryfield 31st. Subsequently a record total of 91 singing birds were found, in 57 localities. Singing birds were heard at Altonside, Altyre, Bin of Cullen (Rannas-Woodside) (5), Binsness, Blackhills, Bogmoor, near Montgrew, Brodie Castle and pond (2), Burntack, Caysbriggs, Cloddach quarry, Conicavel, Coston Wood (Altyre), Cranloch, Darnaway, Quarry Wood (Elgin), Fairy Hillock, Findhorn River (below A96), Findrassie (2), Fogwatt, Garmouth viaduct-Tugnet (2), Hazelbank, Heldonside, Hill of Maud (above Connage) (3), Hill of Spynie, Hill of Urchany, Inchberry, Innes House (3), Kincorth House, Kingsteps, Lein (Kingston) (min.7), Limekilns (Darnaway) (2), Loch Loy, Loch na Bo (6), Loch of Blairs (5), Loch Spynie, Mains of Craigmill, Maryfield (2), Meads of St John (3), Millbuies, Monaughty Forest (5), Muirside (Culbin), Muiry Wood (Forres), Mundole, Nairn, Newton of Dalvey, Newtyle (Rafford), Ordiquish, Pindler's Croft, Pitgaveny, Rathven, Remichie, Slorach's Wood, Todholes, Torrieston, Wellhill (Culbin) and Whiteash Hill Wood.

In late summer/autumn, 8 were trapped for ringing at Loch Spynie during July-August and singles were ringed at Clochan on 15 Sept, 15 Oct and 24 Oct. Very late song was heard in Darnaway 1 Oct and Clochan 14 Oct.

A very late migrant or, more likely, an overwintering bird was 1 Loch Oire 19 Nov (EH).

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Summer visitor and very common breeder.

Arrival: Singing birds quickly widespread from mid April onwards. First were 1 Loch Spynie 12th, 1 Lein (Kingston) 14th, 1 Kinloss 15th, 3 Craigellachie and 1 Elgin 16th, many Dallas, Elgin, Kellas, Lossie Forest, Calcotts and Cloddach 17th, several Allanreid (Glenlivet) 18th and several Loch Park, Forres and Sluie 19th.

A census on the Lein (Kingston) in May revealed c25 singing birds (PGS). On 4 June, 6 singing on Cairn Eney moorlands from small clumps of gorse.

At Loch Spynie 'Constant Effort Site' the number of adults ringed was only 10, half the number trapped in 2002. Productivity, however, was better with 57% of 23 birds being juveniles, compare with productivity rates of 38% in 2002 and 46% in 2001 (RP).

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Very common resident breeder and scarce migrant.

Best counts were 12 Nairn Bar 5 Jan (5 there 12 Oct) and 32 Drumin Woods 2 Dec. 4 Forres 6 Sept were drinking/bathing at a garden hose in very dry conditions.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Summer visitor and common breeder.

Arrival: 1 Gordonstoun 4 May (EH) was the earliest recorded in Moray & Nairn. Next was 1 Dallas 7 May. Reported in the breeding season at Achlichnie (Glenlivet), Altyre, Benrinnes Wood, Bodnastalker (Kellas), Carn Meilich (Glenlivet), Dallas, Delavorar, Forres, Gordonstoun, Kinloss, Loch na Bo, Maggieknockater, Oakenhead Wood, Pitchroy and Tom a Chor (Glenlivet).

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Rare breeder.

One pair of adults and up to 7 juveniles were seen regularly in one part of Loch Spynie reedbed between 9-22 July (MJHC, CAG et al.). Despite a lack of records in 2002 the small population present during 1998-2001 has clearly persisted.



Bearded Tits, Loch Spynie 9 July 2003 (© Martin Cook)

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus**Very common resident breeder.*

Flocks of 15 or more were 29 Balnacoul 16 Sept, 27 College of Roseisle 16 June, 26 Spey Bay 14 Nov, 26 Inchberry 12 Nov (and 23 there 17 Aug), 24 Kirkhill Quarry 16 Feb, 21 Glenlivet 2 Dec, 20 Lochloy Wood 16 Aug, 20 Loch Oire 13 Oct, 18 Binsness 4 Sept, 16 Meads of St. John 20 July, 16 Loch of Blairs 25 Nov, 15 Loch Spynie 19 Feb, 15 lower River Findhorn 5 May and 15 Loch na Bo 11 Sept. Six taking peanuts at a garden feeder Aberlour 20 Jan.

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus**Fairly common resident breeder.*

Nest boxes:

	Pairs	Average clutch	Average fledged brood/pair	
Lossie Forest	5	5.3	4.6	(MJHC)

In 1997, 100 deep nest boxes filled with wood-shavings were introduced in Lossie Forest. Since that time breeding success has been as follows:

Year	Pairs breeding in boxes	Average clutch	Successful pairs	Average fledged brood/ successful pair	Average brood/pair
1997	6	5.8	5	6.0	5.0
1998	1	6.0	1	6.0	6.0
1999	8	5.4	8	5.1	5.1
2000	12	5.7	12	5.3	5.3
2001	6	6.0	4	5.5	3.7
2002	6	5.7	6	5.5	5.5
2003	5	5.3	5	4.6	4.6

Outside 'core' areas in the breeding season were fledged young Kerrow (Dava) 9 July (MJHC), adult with young Little Conval Wood 15 June (JB), 1 Scoot More 1 June (JB). Also present at Slorach's Wood (Fochabers) (1), Millbuies (pair) and Woodside (Forres) (pair). At other times, 2 Elchies Forest 14 Sept, 3 Loch na Bo 14 Aug, 1 Newtyle 3 Dec and 1 Ordiquish 3 March.

Coal Tit *Parus ater**Very common resident breeder.*

Largest flock counts made during the year were 68 Balnacoul 18 Nov, 55 Culbin Forest 3 Dec, 30 Leonach (Dallas) 14 Oct and 25 Maryfield 7 Feb.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus**Very common resident breeder.*

Nest boxes:

	Pairs	Average clutch	Average fledged brood/pair	
Lossie Forest	15	7.7	?	(MJHC)
Loch Spynie	10	9.1	8.5	(RP,CAG)

Good fledging success due, presumably, to favourable spring weather.

Great Tit *Parus major**Very common resident breeder.*

Nest boxes:

	Pairs	Average clutch	Average fledged brood/pair	
Lossie Forest	20	7.4	?	(MJHC)
Loch Spynie	16	6.6	5.6	(RP,CAG)

Clutch sizes much larger than usual in the coniferous Lossie Forest. In broadleaved woods around Loch Spynie, considerably smaller clutches than in 2002 but fledging success unchanged.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea**Rare visitor.*

1 in a Mosstodloch garden c3 Jan (OJ). This is the first record in Moray & Nairn of a species which is steadily expanding its breeding range in southern Scotland.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris**Very common resident breeder.*

First song Newbold (Forres) 22 March.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius**Scarce resident breeder.*

Breeding season: April-July reports came from Aberlour, Allaloth, Arndilly, Bauds Wood (Portknockie), Bin of Cullen, Burnside of Ballintomb, Caysbriggs, Cloddymoss, Conicavel, Corsekell Moss, Cranloch, Croftmore, Drynahan, Dundurcas, Dyke, Gedloch, Gownie (Aberlour), Hills (Stynie), Kintessack, Ben Aigan, Limekilns (Darnaway), Loanhead (Culbin), Loch Oire, Loch Spynie, Low Wood (Culbin), Meads of St John, Muirside, Newlands, Old Fir Hill, Quarrywood (Elgin), Rathven, Scarffbanks, Scotch Hill, Sleepieshill, Sound Moor, Wellheads (Clochan), Whitefield, Whiteknowes and Wood of Dundurcas. The total of 39 occupied sites contrasts with only 4 such sites 10 years ago in 1993. Although Jays are clearly breeding widely through Moray's plantations, proof of breeding (nests or newly fledged young) is very seldom obtained.

At other seasons, Jays were seen in the following additional sites: Aultmore Hill (Nov), Lossie Forest (Nov), Binsness (Sept,Nov), Brodie Castle (Oct), Cairnty (Sept), Clatterinbriggs Wood (Oct), Cotton Hill (Jan), Ferness (Nov), Findrassie (Oct,Dec), Fochabers (Jan), Loch na Bo (Sept-Dec), Loch of Blairs (Sept, Oct), Maryfield (Dec), Maryhill (Teindland) (Oct), Newtyle (Nov), Spynie Palace (Oct), Torrieston Wood (Oct) and Wellside (Kincorth) (Dec).

In addition to the expanding range, Jays are becoming quite numerous in some areas e.g. 12 Muldearie 27 Aug (MM) and 10 seen on a pheasant shoot Darnaway 27 Jan (per ISS).

Magpie *Pica pica**Fairly common resident breeder.*

Reported to be increasing south of Forres and on the Lein. Largest groups were 7 Allaloth 16 March and 7 Lein 1 Oct.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula**Very common resident breeder.*

Away from the vicinity of night roosts, largest flocks reported were 42 Covesea 12 Feb and 40 in an alarmed flock over central Cullen which probably represented the local breeding population.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus**Very common resident breeder.*

Rookery counts (apparently occupied nests) included 113 in two groups at Bridge of Tynet (nr. Clochan). Young hatched in Dufftown rookery by 7 Apr. On Lossie estuary, 30 feeding 3 Oct. 150 Nairn-Whiteness Head 16 Feb.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone**Very common resident breeder.*

Best monthly counts on the Lossie estuary were:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
78	39	54	23	22	80	84	47	75	71	46	75

Elsewhere, 147 at a pre-roost gathering Loch na Bo 29 Dec, 129 Findhorn Bay 14 Sept (70 there 18 May) and 58 Urquhart 2 Apr.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix**Scarce visitor.*

Hooded Crows or hybrids were seen on the Lossie estuary as follows:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Hooded	3	0	2	0	0	3	1	2	3	2	1	2
Hybrid	4	1	2	1	1	4	3	6	5	4	3	3

Other Hooded Crows (singles unless stated) were seen at Alves 27 Feb, Auldearn 14 Feb, Burghead 1 Apr, 30 Jul and 15 Nov, Burgie 2 Sept, Cassieford 3 March, Cloddach quarry 23 March and 2 Nov, Covesea 12 Feb, Culbin Bar 4 on 5 Jan (1 on 14 Dec), Cummington 24 Apr, Elgin 21 Oct, 22 Nov and 9 Dec, Findhorn Bay 4 on 17 Dec, 2 on 16 Aug and 14 Sept (1 on 18-21 May and 2 Sept), Nairn 23 June and 6 Nov, Nairn Bar 2 on 14 Dec, Pitairlie 30 Apr, Portknockie 13 Apr, Urquhart 2 on 2 Apr, and Windyridge 22 July.

A breeding pair in Portknockie consisted of one Carrion and one Hooded.

Raven *Corvus corax**Scarce visitor, formerly widespread breeder.*

1 Birchfield (Tomintoul) 6 May (IF) and 2 Carn Mheadhoin (Lochindorb area) 8 June (ISS).

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris**Very common resident breeder and winter visitor.*

Nestboxes: 7 out of 9 nestboxes at Clochan were occupied, with broods fledging from 6. Average brood size at fledging was 3.8, a little smaller than in recent years (MJHC).

Many thousands roosting Loch Spynie 1 Sept. Away from roosts, largest flock counts were 1000 Easter Greens 25 Oct, 1000 (mostly juveniles) Findhorn Bay 1 July, 650 Covesea pig farm 4 Sept, 250 on moor

grassland Suie (Glenlivet) 6 July, 200 Kinloss 31 March and 200 (many juvs) Leonach Moor (Dallas) 15 June.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Very common resident breeder.

Nestboxes: Another poor breeding season in Clochan. 7 out of 10 boxes were occupied but only 4 pairs raised young. Average clutch was 4.0 eggs and fledged broods were very small, averaging 2.8 young (MJHC).

Flock counts: 93 Ben Romach distillery (Forres) 8 Aug, 80 Lossiemouth harbour 8 Aug (45 on 18 Nov), 66 Buckie harbour 27 Dec and 65 Burghead 18 Aug.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Fairly common resident breeder.

Breeding season: At Longmorn, nest building commenced mid March and seven nest boxes were occupied. First hatching noted 17 May. Eleven broods of 2-3 young were fledged, the last brood leaving the nest on 9 Aug. Eggs or dead young were found in four boxes at the end of the season, perhaps failed third broods (J&H MacD) Single pairs bred in nest boxes Clochan and South Darkland. In other artificial sites, 2 pairs bred under the eaves of a toilet block at Newton Nursery (MW) and 1 pair in girders of an iron shed at Gordonstoun (JDHM).

Flock counts: 25 Balormie 29 Aug, 23 Longmorn 20 Dec (14 there 8 Jan), 10 College of Roseisle 6 Feb, 7 Balnacoul 13 Nov and 6 Sherrifston 5 May.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Very common resident breeder, migrant and winter visitor.

First song, in February, Lein 7th, Urquhart 11th and Lossiemouth 23rd.

Flock counts of 100 or more were: Winter-spring - 365 Balnacoul 14 March, 180 Cunnunghaugh 12 March, 170 Corskie (Garmouth) 7 Jan and 2 Dec, 150 Wester Greens 15 Feb, 140 Lhanbryde 16 Jan, 100 Bruntlands 17 Jan.

Autumn-winter: 1000 Greenbog 30 Nov, 680 Inchberry 28 Dec, 425 Wellhill (Culbin), 260 Brandston 5 Nov, 250 Lochhills 28 Nov, 200 Pitgaveny 7 Dec, 200 Wellheads 13 Dec, 120 Maryfield 18 Sept and 120 Wester Greens 6 Dec.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Fairly common winter visitor and migrant.

Winter-spring: 1 South Darkland 16 Jan and 1-3 Apr, 88 Auchindoun 17 Jan (single stragglers still there 3 Apr and 9 May) (NH), 1 Elgin 30 Jan, 1 Dufftown 31 Jan (2 on 5 Feb), 6 Pindler's Croft 2 Feb, 2 Urquhart 3 Feb (1 on 5-6 Feb), 2 Kinloss (in off the sea) 3 Feb, 1 Clochan 3 Feb, 50 College of Roseisle 6 Feb, 1 Geddes (Nairn) 9 Feb, 200 Montgrew 5 Apr (down to 120 on 7-9 Apr and 20 on 10 Apr) (JB,MM) and 2 Ballindalloch 26 Apr. Most of the records of small numbers in late January/early February were of birds visiting garden feeders during a period of snowfall.

Autumn-winter: A huge finch flock in a weedy 'neep' field at Greenbog (Grange) in November consisted largely of Bramblings. As the result of several counts and estimates it became apparent that, on 30 Nov, c1200 Bramblings were present (MM,MJHC). This is the largest flock in Moray & Nairn for 20 years, exceeded only by 2500 Elgin Feb 1983, 2000 Elgin Dec 1976 and 1300 Cawdor Apr 1983. Other reports during the winter period were 3 Portknockie 15 Oct, 2 Balnacoul 12 Nov, 1 Spynie Palace 16 Nov, 9 Corskie (Garmouth) 2 Dec and 1 Aberlour 28-31 Dec.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Very common resident breeder.

First song Lein (Kingston) 11 Feb.

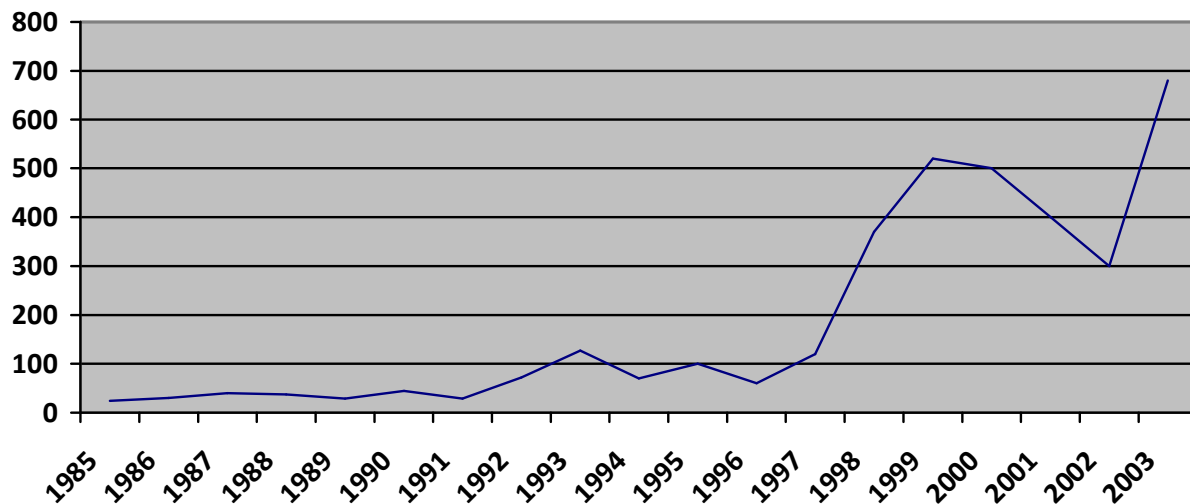
Best flock of the year was 180 Balnacoul (Mosstodloch) 12 Sept and 28 Dec. Also, 50 York Tower 1 Jan, 42 Blairfindy 21 Dec, 40 Portknockie 11 Jan and 32 Middlefield (Forres) 17 Oct.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Common resident breeder.

Once again the record for largest flock of the year has been broken – this time by a flock 680 feeding on linseed at Croftmore (Muldearie) on 17 Jan. Still 200 there 4 May (AY,MM). Other flock counts of 10 or more were 143 Mid Bank (Roseisle) 19 Jan (80 there 10 Feb), 140 Balnacoul 12 Sept, 75 also at Croftmore 16 Sept, 60 Pitgaveny 7 Dec, 55 Corskie (Garmouth) 2 Dec, 40 College of Roseisle 6 Feb, 26 Kinloss 2 Oct (also 16 on 21 Aug), 20 Clarkly Hill 30 Sept and 18 Lein 27 Aug.

Since 1985 the largest flock each year has varied as follows:

**Siskin *Carduelis spinus***

Very common resident breeder and migrant.

Singing Loch Spynie 19 Feb.

Good numbers Clochan in spring where 143 ringed – the best for 5 years. Best flock counts were 100 Loch Oire 21 Aug, 80 Cotts of Innes Wood 26 Oct, 70 in alders Orton 28 Dec, 55 Loch na Bo 22 Nov, 50 Binsness 17 Dec, 46 in birches Forres 21 Dec, 40 Maryfield 8 March, 30 Findrassie 24 Feb and 20 Elginshill 27 July.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Very common resident breeder.

Flocks of 100 or more were 450 Easter Manbeen 9 Feb, 400 Cullen 22 Oct, 200 Kinloss 15 Sept, 200 Mossyards 26 Sept, 200 Cunninghaugh (Tugnet) 17 Dec, 150 Spynie Palace 7 Feb, 150 Gilston 24 Feb, 120 Drainie 11 Jan, 120 Corskie (Garmouth) 15 Aug and 100 Roseisle 17 Jan.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*

Scarce resident breeder, a few on the coast in winter.

Recorded in the breeding season at Aldunie and Cabrach (NH).

In coastal areas in winter were an impressive 86 Findhorn Bay 3 Feb (AJL), 21 College of Roseisle 6 Feb (AH), 18 RAF Kinloss 4 Feb (AJL) and 13 Nairn Bar 5 Jan (DJ,AL). The Findhorn/Bars/Kinloss area has proved the only reliable area for a winter flock in recent years.

Lesser Redpoll (Redpoll) *Carduelis cabaret*

Common resident breeder and migrant.

Breeding: Juveniles seen Muckle Shank Wood (Ben Rinnes) 30 June, 5 singing Bluebauds 20 Apr. Also in the breeding season at Delavorar-Birchfield (Tomintoul), Burn of Corries (Glenlatterach), Carn Meilich (Glenlivet), lower Findhorn River, Hazelbank, Hill of Stob (Elchies), Loch Oire, Lossie Forest, Scoot More and Tombreck Wood.

Flocks at other times were 25 Kingsteps 12 Oct, 10 Loch Loy 6 Nov, 6 Loch Oire 6 Dec and 6 Sleepieshill Wood 15 Dec.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Irregular scarce visitor and probable scarce breeder.

Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*

Probable common resident breeder.

Crossbills, mostly indistinguishable as to species, were recorded during breeding season fieldwork for the Atlas in 51 tetrads.

Groups of 10 or more were 100 Ballindalloch 26 Apr (birds with apparently small bills feeding on larch) (EH), 60 Milton (Tomintoul) 29 Jan, 40 showing display Feith Musach 12 Jan, 30 Tapp 24 June, 30 Kinloss 21 March (25 on 31 March), 30 (probably Common) Fogwatt 4 Apr (RP), 26 Daugh of Edinville 21 Nov, 20 Roseisle Forest 17 March, 20 Urquhart 22 May, 16 Loch na Bo 6 March, 15 Tips of Clunimor 1 March, 12 Lossie Forest 24 March, 12 Knock of Gownie 15 Oct and 10 Loch of Blairs 25 Nov.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Common resident breeder.

Only small groups were encountered e.g. 12 Loch Loy 6 Nov, 10 Cotts of Innes Wood 26 Oct, 10 Loch Spynie 22 Nov, 9 Limekilns 1 Oct and 8 Loch na Bo 17 Nov.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*

Rare visitor.

1 Cunninghaugh (Tugnet) 17 Dec (AP). This is the 10th winter record for Moray & Nairn.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Common winter visitor and rare breeder.

First back in autumn were 2 Ben Rinnes 11 Oct and 1 Findhorn 14 Oct.

Winter counts: Best monthly counts at regular Snow Bunting sites on the coast were:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Nov	Dec
Nairn/Culbin Bars (& E.Nairn)	110 (5 th)	40	nc	nc	64 (14 th)
Lossiemouth east beach	37 (26 th)	20 (1 st -2 nd)	3 (2 nd)	62 (30 th)	60 (14 th)

Elsewhere, in the lowlands 25 Muirton 13 Dec, 21 Kinloss 17 Nov, 2 Spey Bay 23 Nov, 1 Whiteash Hill 29 Oct and 1 Moss of Birnie 13 Dec. In the hills, 60 Cairn Lochan 25 March and at the Lecht (Tomintoul) 55 on 9 Feb and 20 on 16 Dec.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Very common resident breeder.

In summer, 7 territories Hopeman village-Inverugie House 21 June (JDHM).

Autumn/winter flocks were 80 Corskie (Garmouth) 7 Jan, 80 Cunninghaugh (Tugnet) 17 Dec, 60 Windyridge 15 Feb (and 45 there 15 Feb), 40 Portknockie 11 Jan, 30 Mid Mains (Roseisle) 27 Dec and 25 Pitgaveny 16 March.

Days per year when Yellowhammers were sighted in the Urquhart area (with comparable effort) by EH have decreased as follows:

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
206	157	144	115	90

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Common resident breeder.

Breeding: Nest found Loch Belivat 18 Apr (JDHM).

In the winter periods, 38 Corskie (Garmouth) 2 Dec and 30 Cunninghaugh (Tugnet) 12 March were the only counts to exceed 10.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Scarce resident breeder.

In the Nether Dallachy/Cunninghaugh/Tugnet area were 12 singing males on 30 May (HM). Single singers elsewhere were at Lochhills, Longmorn, Portgordon and Scotsburn.

Winter flocks: 57 Clochan 8 Feb (MJHC) was the largest flock in Moray & Nairn since 90 Findochty in Feb 1990. Birds were also seen around Clochan (where they never breed) on 19 Jan (7), 8 March (10) and 15 Nov (14). Elsewhere, 14 Cunninghaugh 17 Dec and 12 Lochhill 7 March.

DECISIONS OF BRITISH BIRDS RARITIES COMMITTEE
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The following record **has not** been accepted:

Gyr Falcon	Portknockie	Feb 2003
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DECISIONS OF MORAY & NAIRN RARITIES COMMITTEE
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The following records **have** been accepted:

Green-winged Teal	Kingston	Apr 2003
Green-winged Teal	Loch Oire	Oct 2003
Ring-necked Duck	Loch Oire/na Bo	Nov 2003
Little Ringed Plover (4)	Garmouth viaduct	May-June 2003
Mediterranean Gull	Loch Spynie	March 2003
Mediterranean Gull	Garmouth	Aug 2003
Hoopoe	Drybridge	Nov 2003
Yellow Wagtail	Kingston	Sept 2003
Bluethroat	Hopeman	Apr 2003
Nuthatch	Mosstodloch	Jan 2003
Lapland Bunting	Tugnet	Dec 2003

The following records **have not** been accepted:

Bean Goose	Coltfield	Jan 2003
Lapland Bunting	Nairn Bar	Oct 2003

GRID REFERENCES OF MAJOR LOCALITIES MENTIONED IN THE SPECIES ACCOUNTS
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Aberlour	NJ265428	Hopeman	NJ145695
Auldearn	NH918555	Invererne	NJ033606
Ben Rinnes	NJ255355	Kellas	NJ172543
Binn Hill	NJ305655	Kellas oakwood	NJ157540
Bin of Cullen	NJ480643	Kinermony	NJ254420
Binsness	NJ030628	Kingsteps	NH903573
Bogmoor	NJ357629	Kingston	NJ337655
Bow Fiddle Rock	NJ495688	Kinloss	NJ065618
Brodie	NJ978572	Kinneddar	NJ223693
Broom of Moy	NJ020593	Knockando	NJ182429
Buckie	NJ425657	Lecht	NJ245133
Buckpool	NJ412653	Lein, Kingston	NJ334657
Burghead	NJ114689	Lhanbryde	NJ275615
Burghead Bay	NJ080670	Loch Flemington	NH810520
Burgie	NJ093595	Loch Loy	NH933587
Cabrach	NJ385270	Loch na Bo	NJ283600
Califer Hill	NJ083570	Loch of Blairs	NJ023557
Carron	NJ222414	Loch Oire	NJ886608
Cawdor	NH845500	Loch Spynie	NJ235665
Caysbriggs	NJ248669	Lochindorb	NH975365
Clochan	NJ402608	Lossie estuary	NJ243700
Cloddach quarry	NJ200591	Lossie Forest	NJ270680
Cloddymoss	NH982599	Lossiemouth	NJ235710
College of Roseisle	NJ138665	Milltown airfield	NJ265655
Coltfield	NJ117637	Milton Brodie	NJ092627
Covesea	NJ186705	Miltonduff	NJ182599
Craigellachie	NJ290450	Miltonhill	NJ099630
Cran Loch	NH945590	Monaughty Forest	NJ132595
Culbin Bar	NH965627	Montgrew	NJ453517
Culbin Forest	NH990620	Nairn	NH883567
Cullen	NJ513671	Nairn Bar	NH922603
Cummingston	NJ133690	Portgordon	NJ395642
Dava	NJ005387	Portknockie	NJ490685
Delnies	NH845563	Roseisle	NJ138666
Drainie	NJ215687	Sanquhar Loch	NJ041581
Drynachan	NH865397	Scarffbanks	NJ237663
Dufftown	NJ325400	Spey Bay	NJ354653
Dulsie	NH932416	Speymouth	NJ345656
Elgin	NJ215625	Strathlene	NJ449674
Findhorn	NJ040645	Tarras	NJ062597
Findhorn Bay	NJ045625	Tomintoul	NJ170185
Findochty	NJ463680	Tugnet	NJ348655
Fochabers	NJ345585	Urquhart	NJ286627
Forres	NJ035585		
Garmouth	NJ338644		
Hempriggs	NJ103638		

**NUTHATCH IN MOSSTODLOCH –
NEW TO MORAY & NAIRN**

MARTIN COOK

In early January 2003 (probably about 3rd) Mrs Olive Jenkins was looking out of the kitchen window into her Mosstodloch garden when she noticed a small grey-backed bird working its way up and down a wooden fence and trellis. She recognised the bird as a Nuthatch and called her husband to see it. It remained on the fence, which held some climbing plants, for about ten minutes, moving around in little hops and jumps. The bird was only a few metres from the window and Mrs Jenkins was able to note all the important identification features in a written description which resulted in the acceptance of the record by Moray & Nairn Rarities Committee. Unfortunately it was never seen again.

This, the first record of a Nuthatch in Moray & Nairn, is of particular interest as the species is undergoing a steady northward expansion of its range through Scotland. Between 1963-1983 there were 23 Scottish records, mostly in the south, all of single birds and with no suggestion of breeding (Thom 1986). Twelve years later, by 1995, Nuthatches were breeding in Borders (12+ pairs) and seen in Dumfries & Galloway. During 1997-98 sightings came from Fife, Lothian, Ayrshire and, remarkably, Caithness. By 2000 there were about 60 pairs breeding in Borders at 34 sites, and breeding was also under way in Dumfries & Galloway. New regions involved in the spread were Forth and Argyll. During 2001-02 there were additional records from Perth & Kinross, Angus & Dundee and Highland (Easter Ross) but no extra breeding areas were identified. More recently, Nuthatches have been seen in Clyde and Lanarkshire with two further Highland records in 2003 (Maxwell 2004).

In the context of this northward spread through Scotland over the last few years it is perhaps not unexpected that Moray & Nairn would become involved. We now await events. It will be intriguing to see whether more Nuthatches are seen in our area and whether at some point in the future they establish themselves as breeders. A helpful feature of Nuthatch behaviour is their fondness for garden peanut feeders. A well stocked feeder, regularly watched, probably provides the best chance of our next record.

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**THE STATUS OF THE LITTLE RINGED PLOVER
IN MORAY & NAIRN**

MARTIN COOK

Little Ringed Plovers were first recorded in Moray & Nairn at Speymouth in 1996. One adult and four juveniles were seen together regularly in August and it was considered that they had bred locally, probably on the river shingles somewhere upstream (Rowlands & Cook 1997). There were no further records until 1999, when two juveniles were seen on the estuary in August, and 2000, when one adult was seen in June and three juveniles in August. These records again suggest local breeding. In 2001, two adults were courting

in May and in 2002 an adult with two juveniles was seen in July. Clearly Little Ringed Plovers were a regular feature of Speymouth in summer but as all juveniles had been strong fliers there was no positive proof that breeding was taking place on the Speymouth shingles. In 2003, following the sighting of a pair on the estuary on 17 May, I decided to search the river between Garmouth viaduct and the mouth.

On 4 June my wife and I embarked on our search and descended from the end of the viaduct onto the shingle bank below. We had only walked about 30 metres when a Little Ringed Plover flew low past us and landed on the stones nearby. This seemed promising so we carefully retreated back to the viaduct where we sat and watched. We were initially disappointed that we were unable to relocate the bird but after a few minutes Jenny spotted it sitting tight on a nest. The search had been a lot less arduous and time consuming than we had anticipated!

The bird remained sitting until 22 June when two tiny chicks were seen by Duncan Gibson and Henry Farquhar. The following day, however, only the adults were present and it seems likely that the chicks had succumbed to some form of predation.

During one of my regular visits to the viaduct, on 14 June, a second pair of Little Ringed Plovers was feeding at the edge of a pool about 100 metres downstream from the nest site. There was no evidence that this pair had attempted to breed, but there is plenty of suitable habitat to accommodate more than one pair.

GULLS NESTING INLAND IN MORAY AND NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND

W.R.P. BOURNE

The occurrence of gulls breeding inland in the north-east of Scotland first appears to have been remarked upon by Dr J.O. Wilson (1889-90) in a report of a talk on the bird life of the Huntly district:-

"Another innovation in the bird life of the district was the large number of Common Gulls breeding on their moors... It was only within the past twelve or fifteen years that they had done so to any extent. He believed the Herring Gull and the Lesser Black-backed Gull also nested with them, as he saw a few pairs about their rivers every summer, but he had not had time to clear up the matter. Many people in the district were still unaware of the facts, and were constantly referring to the appearance of these gulls on the low grounds, where they came to feed, as a sign of storm at sea. One word as to the probable cause of the extension of range of these sea birds, did the Sea Birds Preservation Act and the Gun License explain it?"

It was said afterwards that William Wilson, Terpersie, also reported Common Gulls bred in the Correen Hills north of Alford. This was confirmed by George Sim (1903), who said they were "plentiful" and that he was shown three nests on the Hill of Drumbarton in June 1890 (hardly "plentiful" by recent standards). Harvie Brown (1897) and Harvie Brown & Buckley (1896) reported that they bred on the Gartly Hills, the Carn hills between the Deveron and Bogie near the summit of Carn Gruamach, and in the Correen and Cromdale hills. Following a decline in the number of people on the land, gulls appear to have multiplied on the scattered, bare (at that time), heathy hilltops of the area during the first half of the 20th century, and especially during World War II. Their recent status in Moray and Nairn is reviewed by Cook (1992), and in Aberdeenshire by Bourne & Smith (1978), and other records are listed by Adam Watson (1998 and in litt.), in the ringing records and in Moray & Nairn Bird Report 1988-98 and Birds in Moray & Nairn 1999-2003. It may be useful to list these records; the more important sites are then discussed in detail.

Clunas Reservoir (NH860460): Recently up to 320 pairs Common and 300 Black-headed.
 Forres (NJ045597): 90 pairs Common in nursery in 1999.
 Buinach (Elfhill): 40 pairs Common 1988-9.
 Mill Our (NJ200525) and Pikey Hill (NJ214513): c370 pairs Common in 1977 had gone by 1980, when 15-20 pairs on nearby Carn na Cailliche. Up to 16 pairs Common Glenlatterach reservoir 1990s.
 Cloddach Quarry (NJ200593): 5-10 pairs Common in recent years.
 Monaghty Hill (NJ135585): 100+ pairs Common – presumably the site where hundreds of supposed Lesser Black-backed were nesting in 1889 (Cook 1992). Now afforested.
 Newton (NJ162635): 23 pairs Common in forest nursery 1993.
 Hunt Hill (NJ235468): Fairly big colony of Common in the 1960s – now afforested.
 Jock's Hill (NJ315363): Now afforested.
 Blacksboat (NJ184390): 5-10 pairs Common in 1990s, exceptionally 52 in 1995.
 Teindland Hills: Common Gull site in the 1930s (A.J.M.Smith).
 Ordiequish (NJ345564): 100+ pairs Common and a few Greater Black-backed). Now afforested.
 Gow Moss (NJ380530): sizeable Common and Lesser Black-backed colony (Cook 1992) – now afforested.
 Aultmore (NJ475575): Now afforested.
 Broadley (NJ394620): c10 pairs Common in forestry nursery in recent years.
 Braes of Enzie (NJ391600): 20 pairs Common in St Ninian's Cemetary 2002-03.
 Fochabers (NJ343583): c15 pairs Common on roof of Milne's High School 2002-3.
 Elgin (NJ223623): up to 27 pairs Common in old railway yards in Ashgrove area.
 Meikle Balloch (NJ472495): 1000+ pairs Common, 400 Herring and c50 Lesser Black-backed in 1960s – afforested and deserted in 1970s (Cook 1992).
 The Hill of Towie (NJ382472): 100+ pairs - now afforested.
 Wishach Hill (NJ575333) and Corskie Hill (NJ545325): 100+ Common and also Lesser Black-backed. Now afforested.
 Knock Hill (NJ538552): birds ringed in early 1970s.
 Greenness Hill (NJ782470): 20 Common in 1945 - now afforested.
 North Waggle Hill (NJ805465): many Common and Lesser Black-backed, hundreds of Black-headed and a few Greater Black-backed in the 1930s) and South Waggle Hill: 14 Common and one Greater Black-backed in 1945 - now afforested.
 Loch of Skene (NJ775073): Hundreds of pairs in 1970s – afforested, now a few pairs on islets.
 Leuchar Moss (NJ782045): tens in 1970s, depleted by gamekeepers (Bourne & Bourne 1974), now c70 pairs flourishing in a gas pipeline inspection enclosure with fox-proof fence.
 Blackburn Moss (NO783903): small colony Common 1960s-70s. Now afforested. The birds moved around, at one stage hundreds, still some in adjacent gas pipeline inspection enclosures.
 Fetteresso: 100+ pairs - now afforested.
 Glen Clunie: birds ringed several sites in 1970s.

In the early 1970s Bob Swann (1974a,b), Andrew Ramsay and other members of Aberdeen University Bird Club rediscovered the Correen Hills colony, which now numbered thousands of pairs of Common, and some other, gulls, and I found a colony of hundreds of pairs of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls, lesser numbers of Common Gulls and a few Greater Blackbacks on St Fergus and Crimond Mosses north of Peterhead (Bourne & Dixon 1974). I then searched further west during a return flight to survey the inland gull colonies in the Outer Hebrides in 1977 (Bourne & Currie 1983). This revealed a large remote colony at Craigwatch (NJ383355), and when I investigated this on the ground I found others at the Tips of Corsemaul, Ben Main and Auchindoun. I have usually tried to visit the larger colonies when in the area in summer ever since, although I was away for several years in the 1980s. First I would estimate the number of occupied sites from a distance, which should produce a minimum total, and then checked it by the number of birds flying about overhead at close quarters, expected during incubation to be 1-2 times the

number of sites (Bourne & Smith 1978, Bourne et al. 1978). While this method may not produce such large totals as some others, notably those used on these colonies by the Joint Nature Conservation Council (JNCC) and their successors (Tasker et al. 1991), and the results vary with the date, it is at least consistent. The situation has developed as follows, starting in the west.

DAVA (NH995385)

This is a shallow valley in moorland which has had up to 80 pairs Common, three pairs Lesser Black-backed and 135 Black-headed in recent years. On 3 June 2000 there were c100 pairs of Common Gulls on the north side of the road to Lochindorb, and c250 pairs of Black-headed on the south side.

MOSS OF DUNPHAIL (NJ020483)

This is an old-established colony where there has been up to 340 pairs Common, four of Greater Black-backed and one of Lesser Black-backed. Ringing has taken place in the past. It is now becoming overgrown with scrub. There were over 250 pairs of Common Gulls on 3 June 2000.

BEN MAIN AND AUCHINDOUN (NJ350358 and NJ351370)

Ben Main is a bare conical hill overlooking Auchindoun Castle. There has been ringing here in the past, but I did not find it until July 1987, when there were some 500 pairs of Common Gulls high on the south side and 250 pairs low on the north side opposite the castle. They have wasted away for no obvious reason in recent years.

Table 1: Gulls at Ben Main & Auchindoun colonies (pairs unless stated)

	Ben Main			Auchindoun
	Common Gull	LBB Gull	Herring Gull	Common Gull
5 July 1987	500			250
24 July 1988				100?
19 June 1991	1000	1	2-3	250
16 June 1992	750			100?
2 May 1993	1000			175?
19 June 1994	500			110?
25 June 1995	150			25
16 June 1996	750			25
17 May 1997	550			12
6 June 1998	200?			8
30 May 1999	180+			20+
3 June 2000	100			14
5 Apr 2002	20-30 (distant)			
2 June 2003	4 (distant)			
23 May 2004	10 (distant)			

CRAIGWATCH (NJ385355)

This was a very remote site on a patch of marsh in a shallow valley in the centre of the plateau between the Fiddich and Deveron Rivers. There was much vegetation suggesting a long-established colony. The site was afforested, and the birds had gone by the time the trees were 3m high.

Table 2: Gulls at Craigwatch colony (pairs unless stated)

	Common Gull	LBB Gull	Herring Gull	BI-headed Gull
23 July 1977	hundreds	1-2		50+
24 July 1988	500	1 subadult		1 subadult
19 June 1991	750		1 subadult	
5 July 1992	250			
3 May 1993	400+			
25 June 1995	40 birds			
7 June 1998	none			

TIPS OF CORSEMAUL (NJ395395)

This was found on 23 July 1977. It was still located in heather around the slope of a hill, suggesting a fairly recent origin. The birds' success has varied greatly with the weather, and in one year some chicks were killed in a peripheral gulley, possibly by a mink.

Table 3: Gulls and terns at Corsemaul colony (pairs unless stated)

	Common Gull	LBB Gull	Herring Gull	GBB Gull	Black-headed Gull	Common Tern
23 July 1977	1500	1-2	10-20			3 birds
5 July 1987	2750	20	1+			1 bird
24 July 1988	left colony	200+	50+			
9 July 1991	750	60+	10+			
5 May 1992	100+	80	20			
5 July 1992	1500	200	50			
15 June 1993	2000	120	12			
7 June 1994	2150	100	50			
20 June 1995	2500	190	60	1		
25 May 1996	2500	200	50	1		
1 June 1997	3000	170	80			
7 June 1998	2750		300			
9 July 1999	1500		400			
9 May 2000	2500	130	70		10	
7 June 2002	2000	150	50		3-4	
11 May 2003	1800	20	5		2-3	
6 July 2002	500	1				
25 June 2004	2100	1				

TOM MOR (NJ403384)

This is the hill east of Corsemaul. Common Gulls were ringed here in the late 1970s, and some 250 pairs of Common Gulls were noticed nesting on its west side in 1987, but I did not examine the far side until 1992, when it already held a colony of thousands nesting on grass, so they had probably been there a long time. Occasional Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls were seen overhead that may have come from Corsemaul.

Table 4: Gulls at Tom Mor colony (pairs unless stated)

	Common Gull	LBB Gull	Herring Gull
5 July 1987	(250+?)		
10 July 1992	2500		
20 June 1995	2500		
5 June 1996	5000?		
29 June 1997	5-10000		
7 June 1998	2500	3 birds	
21 May 2000	4000	8 birds	2 birds
7 June 2002	1500		2 birds
5 July 2003	Hundreds		
28 June 2004	1500		

THE CORREEN HILLS (Including Drumbarton Hill NJ545213 via the Mire of Midgates NJ520320 to Edinbanchory Hill NJ495203)

This was one of the first colonies discovered (Wilson 1890). According to a local farmer in 1994 the gulls had increased five times since he arrived in 1942. When it was first seen in June 1972 (Swann 1974a,b) the area was very bare, with short, heavily-grazed grass and heather and bare earth, and colonies of many Common and some Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls scattered all along the ridge, and four pairs of Common Terns on Edinbanchory Hill, feeding in the River Don below. Some gulls were found shot and some poisoned with mevinphos at that time. In 1977 a number of chicks had been killed in a small area, possibly by a Stoat. By 1981 forestry was starting in the east, and eventually extended halfway along the ridge to the Mire of Midgates; the gulls continued nesting here at first, indeed the big ones preferred it, but left as the trees grew. By 1987 the west was becoming overgrown with long heather, and increasing numbers of fox scats were seen. In June 1993 there had been a breeding failure after bad weather, with few active nests and many broken eggs being taken by corvids. In late May 1994 there were few active nests, and the birds had gone by mid July. The population has since continued to decline.

Table 5: Gulls at the Correen Hills colony (pairs unless stated)

	Common Gull	LBB Gull	Herring Gull	GBB Gull	CommonTern
5 July 1973	2-3000	30	20		6
9 June 1974	3-4000	60-70	10+		4
5 June 1976	4000	82	38		4
19 June 1977	4500	35	8	3	1
30 June 1979	4500+	50	few		3
June 1981	c4500	100?	12?		
7 July 1987	4350	26	7	10	
2 July 1991	4000				
24 May 1992	3500				
12 June 1993	1-2000	1			
28 May 1994	500-1000?	1			
13 June 1995	1000				
2 June 1996	1100	3			
24 June 1997	250				
15 May 1999	200				
2 July 2000	25 birds	1			

BOULTENSTONE (BLUEMILL or TOM BEITH: NJ420125)

According to the local farmer there was a colony on top of Tom Beith hill here 45 years ago, but the birds went away, returning again in large numbers lower down the hill from the late 1980s. Since then they had been increasing steadily. Ian Francis reports there were over 1000 pairs on heathland in July 1993, and our subsequent counts are compared below:

Table 6: Gulls at Boultenstone colony (pairs unless stated)

	Common Gull	LBB Gull
14 July 1993	1000 (IF)	
25 Apr 1995	2200+ (IF)	
May 1996	2700 (10 th IF), 2000 (21 st WRPB)	1
May 1997	3000+ birds (1 st IF) 1500+ (25 th WRPB)	3 birds
July 1997	3000+ adults (5 th IF)	
25 June 1998	2000 (WRPB)	

ST. FERGUS and CRIMOND MOSSES (NK055535 and 035545)

These lie behind the coast in an area with no cliffs. They were first visited in May and July 1971, when afforestation was starting on Crimond Moss. There were hundreds of Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed and some Common Gulls (Bourne & Dixon 1974). In May 1976 and 1977 there were about 600 pairs of Herring, 300 Lesser Black-backed, 3 Great Black-backed and 100 Common Gulls. By 1986 the commercial extraction of peat had begun on St Fergus Moss and there were only about 50 young 'large' gulls, with a dozen pairs of Common Gulls where there were no trees on Crimond Moss. A much smaller number of gulls, including Black-headed, later started breeding within the fox-proof fence of St Fergus gas terminal (NK095540) where there were 500 pairs of Arctic Terns, 100 pairs of Common Terns, 25 pairs each of Black-headed and Common Gulls, and at least three pairs of Herring Gulls in 1998. Most of the Common Terns and a Common Gull were nesting on one of the roofs (Bourne 1990).

DISCUSSION

These sites are of particular interest because according to the JNCC counts (Tasker et al 1991) they may include some of the largest Common Gull colonies in the world, though these are also some large ones around the Baltic Sea. They appear to have developed as many smaller colonies were displaced by forestry and in one case peat extraction, and to have expanded until they attracted the attention of predators, including Foxes, Mink and Stoats, and gamekeepers, though these may have been more important as a source of disturbance than mortality - there is little obvious adult mortality. The Common Gulls appear to prefer short heather, and move elsewhere when grass and long heather develop. The birds from Boultenstone possibly moved to the Correen Hills and then back again, for example, though so far there have been no ringing recoveries to confirm this. Ringing recoveries do suggest that the Lesser Black-backed Gulls, which seem to prefer longer herbage, are particularly prone to move long distances and some of the big gulls may have moved to nest in towns (Bourne 1979, 1990, Birds in Moray & Nairn). I have not considered the Black-headed Gulls, which breed in many small colonies on inland waters throughout the area, in detail; most breed on Deeside, where two of the largest colonies of hundreds on the Lochs of Park (NO770988) and Leys (NO770988) were displaced by drainage in the 1970s, but there is still one of over 1000 pairs at the Black Moss (NJ455010) in the Dinnet National Nature Reserve.

The most important factor affecting the birds' welfare appears to be the weather. Storms when they are incubating in May may wipe out the year's production, as in 1992, 1993, 2003 and 2004, and drought when they are feeding chicks as in 1977 seems nearly as bad. The mortality may extend beyond fledging, and now include adults as well as young birds on the shore, as shown by beach surveys in the late summer in 2003 (Bourne 2004, Table 6). Concentration of many birds into few colonies may increase the impact of these food shortages - at this time when the ground is dry and invertebrates may be hard to find, the adults cruise around high overhead, descending to feed where silage is being cut or there is ploughing. If scraps are put out on the lawn dozens may appear out of the sky and start fighting over them within minutes. Thus exceptionally large colonies may be an unnatural and unstable phenomenon.

Table 6: Adult/immature birds and seals found dead on the shore between the Deveron and Findhorn river mouths between July and October (updated from Bourne 2004).

	2002	2003	2004
Shore examined (km)	3.5	5.5	16
Fulmar	4/3	0/1	3/0
Gannet			1/0
Shag			2/1
Great Black-backed Gull	0/1	3/2	1/1
Herring Gull	1/2	4/13	10/4
Common Gull	2/4	7/13	4/9
Black-headed Gull	0/1	0/1	0/1
Kittiwake	1/3	4/9	5/8
Razorbill	4		0/3
Guillemot	70 (3/62)	12 (0/7)	7/4
Black Guillemot		0/1	
Puffin	1/0		
Birds/km	28	12	4
% immature	87	72	48
Common Seal			1/3

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RINGING REPORT

BOB PROCTOR

Numbers of birds ringed in Moray & Nairn during 2003:

	Full Grown	Pullus	Total		Full Grown	Pullus	Total
Storm Petrel	2		2	Goldcrest	27		27
Sparrowhawk	1		1	Spotted Flycatcher	3		3
Golden Eagle		2	2	Long-tailed Tit	9		9
Oystercatcher		1	1	Crested Tit		23	23
Common Gull		4	4	Coal Tit	27		27
Herring Gull		3	3	Blue Tit	139	93	233
Little Tern		2	2	Great Tit	49	95	144
Black Guillemot		2	2	Treecreeper	3		3
Collared Dove	4	1	5	Jackdaw	2		2
GS Woodpecker	1		1	Starling	536	19	555
Swallow	5	52	57	House Sparrow	155	12	167
Grey Wagtail	2		2	Tree Sparrow	13	2	15
Pied Wagtail	2		2	Chaffinch	213		213
Wren	44		44	Brambling	1		1
Duncock	31		31	Greenfinch	154		154
Robin	70		70	Goldfinch	16		16
Blackbird	56	8	64	Siskin	175		175
Fieldfare	5		5	Lesser Redpoll	3		3
Song Thrush	19		19	Bullfinch	14		14
Redwing	42		42	Yellowhammer	4		4
Sedge Warbler	49	1	50	Reed Bunting	16		16
Whitethroat	10		10				
Blackcap	6		6				
Chiffchaff	12		12				
Willow Warbler	87		87				
				GRAND TOTAL	1344	322	1666

Recoveries in 2003:

All ringing recoveries reported for 2003 are included in this section with the more interesting ones given in full. Information was supplied by M.J.H.Cook, D.Gibson, R.F.Hewitt, R.Proctor and from Highland Ringing Group bulletins. Anyone finding a ringed bird in Moray or Nairn is asked to pass the details to Martin Cook.

Ringing details are given on the first line and recovery data on the second line. The age when ringed is given according to the EURING code, note however, that these numbers do not represent age in years:

- 1 Nestling or chick
- 2 Fully grown, year of hatching unknown
- 3 Hatched during year of ringing
- 4 Hatched before year of ringing, exact year unknown
- 5 Hatched in the previous year
- 6 Hatched before the previous year, exact year unknown

m = Male f = Female J = Juvenile CES = Constant Effort Site

Recovery symbols: V Caught and released with ring
 VV Ring number read in field, or sight record of a colour-ringed bird
 VB Breeding when trapped
 + Shot or killed by man
 X Found dead or dying (F = Fresh, L = Long dead)
 ? Unknown circumstances

CORMORANT

5209235	1	080603	North Sutor	
	X	310803	Findhorn Bay	24 km

SHAG

1137833	1	070702	Craigeith, North Berwick, Lothian	
	XF	050103	Lossiemouth harbour	187 km

MUTE SWAN

U0716	6	110192	River Lossie, Lossiemouth	
	VV	220703	Low Hay Bridge, <i>near</i> Bouth, Cumbria	384 km

This is the second movement to northwest England of a Moray-ringed Mute Swan and is similar to U1156, ringed at the Lossie estuary on 13 November 1991, and found in Chester in 1997. As local birds remain within the coastal strip from approximately the Black Isle to Aberdeen, both of these movements to northwest England were unexpected. As both were ringed in the same winter (1991-92), one possible explanation would be that these birds originated in northwest England and were involved in a movement of Mute Swans into Moray, and then returned to their natal area.

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE

Several Pink-footed Geese with colour-rings or neck-collars were seen around Moray in the early part of 2003. Two different wintering strategies were shown to exist. Firstly, short distance movements around northeast Scotland as individuals winter locally. Secondly, considerable movements undertaken within a winter, and that these birds may not return to the same wintering in subsequent years.

GREYLAG GOOSE

5207611	4f	241000	Loch Eye	
	+	081103	Montgrew, Keith	68 km

BRENT GOOSE (PALE-BELLIED)

The colour-ringed individual from the Svalbard/northeast Greenland population was seen again at Nairn in January-February. This individual was a juvenile male ringed at Hornsgard Ron, Nibe Bredning, Limfjorden, Denmark on 24 April 2001.

WIGEON

FP21950	3m	231200	Alturlie	
	+	300103	Lossiemouth	57km

MERLIN

DB67915	1m	020702	Dallas	
	X wires	150203	St.Laurent, Charente-Maritime, FRANCE	1294 km

This is the first foreign recovery of a locally bred Merlin. The majority of British Merlins found overseas are recorded around the Bay of Biscay, particularly in Charente-Maritime and adjacent areas of France.

OYSTERCATCHER

FP11486	5	310199	Findhorn Bay	
	V	260303	Hoxa Head, South Ronaldsay, Orkney	134 km

Also, a local recovery of a roof-reared chick: ringed and found dead in Elgin.

KNOT

SX24419	6	110197	Lossiemouth	
	X raptor	030103	Arbroath Abbey, Tayside	137km

REDSHANK

DB01845	5	200497	Findhorn	
	X	190303	North Wooton Marsh, Norfolk	594 km

Also, a local recovery at Buckpool, Buckie, 9 years after ringing.

BLACK-HEADED GULL

EP47881	3	181290	Elgin	
	VV	060803	Lossiemouth	8km

ES63177	1	080700	near Cawdor	
	X	220903	Cummingston	33 km

HERRING GULL

GH02995	1	250702	Isle of May	
	VV	271203	Cooper Park, Elgin1	70 km

GN26146	1	250601	Berriedale	
	X raptor	151203	Spey Bay	62 km

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

347782	Ad	280501	Sleneset, Luroy, Nordland, NORWAY	
	VV	181003	Lossie estuary	

HT19031	1	260786	Ord of Caithness	
	VV	201103	Burghead	49 km
HT93420	1	160603	Mull Head, Deerness, Orkney	
	X	130903	Kingston	147 km
MA03193	1	290602	Rothiesholm Head, Stronsay, Orkney	
	X	020802	Lossiemouth	157 km
MA08595	1	280703	Eileann Hoan, Durness	
	VV	291103	Lossie estuary	126 km
Colour-ring				
AGM	1	--0601	North Rona	
	VV	190803-201003	Lossie estuary	

The Norwegian individual is the first from Norway to be found in the Districts.

GUILLEMOT

X09750	1	200694	Ceann Ousdale	
	X	140501	near Burghead	48 km

BLACKBIRD

CL48113	3Jf	060902	Clochach, Buckie	
	Xcat	151003	Mosstodloch	8 km
RK74996	3f	271000	Isle of May	
	V	141003	Clochach, Buckie	162 km

The Isle of May bird was presumably a Continental Blackbird arriving to winter in Britain. One found dead in Elgin, a year after ringing, had hit a window.

SEDGE WARBLER

R507793	3J	030803	Loch Spynie CES	
	V	170803	Icklesham, Sussex	794 km
R507815	3J	270703	Loch Spynie CES	
	V	060803	Haverton Hill, Cleveland	363km

Both of these birds show relatively quick movements south. The Sedge Warbler caught at Icklesham is the second movement to there.

BLACKCAP

P878100	5f (=B)	220602	Loch Spynie CES	
	V	111003	Icklesham, Sussex	794 km

This is the first movement of a Blackcap ringed in Moray. A previous movement in 1980 involved an individual ringed in Devon on 25 October moving to Moray and subsequently found at Lossiemouth on 7 December.

BLUE TIT

P594899	1	240502	Loch Spynie	
	V	291002	Lossiemouth	6 km

STARLING

7386084	1	290503	Jomna, Elverum, Hedmark, NORWAY	
	V(=m)	211003	Bishopmill, Elgin	923 km
CF89063	6m	200101	Bishopmill, Elgin	
	XF=cat	261103	Burnopfield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne	321 km
CT05454	4m	121202	Bishopmill, Elgin	
	?	040403	Rothbury, Morpeth, Northumberland	276 km
CT21944	5f	080103	Bishopmill, Elgin	
	XF	230403	Perth	143 km

The Norwegian individual is only the second from that country to be trapped here: the first was at Hopeman in 1993. There have been three movements to Norway of birds ringed in Moray & Nairn. Two ringed in Bishopmill, Elgin were found dead locally.

HOUSE SPARROW

VF55553	3J	120700	Clochan, Buckie	
	X	140703	Cullen	14 km

A significant movement for such a sedentary species.

GREENFINCH

VF72165	5F	260701	Golspie	
	V	120103	Clochan, Buckie	71 km

GOLDFINCH

P788999	3F	261202	Clochan, Buckie	
	V	270403	Newburgh, Aberdeenshire	68 km

SISKIN

P275129	5f	290400	Clochan, Buckie	
	V	300303	Dingwall	86 km
R435519	5m	020103	Clochan, Buckie	
	V	030403	Logie Hill, near Kildary	67 km
P275129	5f	290400	Clochan, Buckie	
	V	300303	Dingwall	86 km

R101627	5m	030103	Bishopmill, Elgin	
	V	030403	Logie Hill, near Kildary	47 km
	V	260503	Logie Hill, near Kildary	
R435519	5m	020103	Clochan, Buckie	
	V	030403	Logie Hill, near Kildary	67 km

Presumably, R101627 was near its breeding area.