

# HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

## SOLWAY

5-10 March 2015

**Guide:** Chrissie Nicholson

**Guests:** Ray Burgess, Morag & Norman Rea

**Day 1** Arriving at the hotel a warm welcome is given and we are shown to our rooms.

Chrissie has a quick walk down to Carlingwark Loch, minutes away from hotel, the water is fairly choppy, but a great start with Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Goosander, Mute Swans and a pair of Oystercatcher. Song Thrush sing from the tree tops, a Wren is feeding in amongst the reeds on the edge of the loch, it is lovely sitting watching from a sheltered bench.

Meeting just before dinner which is eagerly awaited for after the journey's we have all made, and it was not a disappointment, with tea and coffee afterwards Chrissie runs through the places we were to visit over the next few days.

**Day 2** After a hearty breakfast we head out for the day, the first place we stop is Carlingwark Loch in Castle Douglas. We watch Black-headed Gulls bobbing in the waves as a raw wind blows. Further round the loch Tufted Duck swim along with a good number of Goldeneye in fabulous breeding plumage.

Driving on we catch sights of Red Kites flying and Buzzard, Greylag are feeding in the fields, we make sure we check through them in case a Greenland White-fronted is among them, but no luck yet. Canada Geese are next on the list and we arrive at Ken Dee Marshes to walk to the hide. Along the way a large flock of Fieldfare, Redwing and Starlings fly along the trees, Reed Bunting fly up from the stubble crop and away.

As we turn the corner Chrissie hears a Willow Tit, we are able to stop and watch a couple feeding on the hedgerow, joined with Coal, Great, Blue and Long-tailed Tits, what a sight, brilliant.

At the hide feeding station Norman, first in, has seen a Great-spotted Woodpecker but as we creep into the hide it flies off.... On the feeders

a Nuthatch joins the feeding Tit flock, on the loch in front of us are great views of Pintail, Teal, Lapwing and Chrissie spots a well camouflaged Snipe which everyone sees, when it moved!!

Lunch is spent by another loch side trying to avoid the wind, not really possible but we are joined with a very close fly by of a Red Kite whilst we eat, great views. Chrissie hears Crossbills but could not find them until they fly away calling, it looks like they had been to the loch side but out of view over the dam wall.

Driving on we go to Ballymack Farm for the Red Kite feeding time, as we enter the converted barn the Kites are circling around and calling, then all of a sudden in they sweep over the top of the building and down picking up the food and eating on the wing, what a fantastic sight, really fast though, and hard to photograph as they glide then dive, with the sound of the wings rushing when they swoop. Norman counts at least 70 birds in the air, an amazing experience to witness.

Eventually pulling ourselves away we visit a local nature reserve and walk to the hides looking over a couple of lochans. A pair of Goosander come into view out of a channel below us, and more Wigeon, Teal and Shoveler feed. A lovely end to our first day out and about, we head back for dinner and checklists.

### Day 3

The hotel is on the edge of town and first thing, Chrissie listens to a Song Thrush singing, a nice start to the day. After breakfast we drive to the biggest Local Nature Reserve in the British Isles estuaries including the rivers Cree and Bladnoch. A great place to visit with saltmarsh on one side of the hide and lochan on the other. The saltmarsh holds Redshank, Curlew, Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese, and Red-breasted Merganser which are in the sheltered side of the channel as the tide rises.

The lochan holds good numbers of Pintail, Shoveler, Teal and Wigeon, with a Buzzard flying over a flock of Pink-footed Geese alarming some but not all. A Little Egret appears from behind the tall rushes and starts to feed, what a fantastic place, but as the tide is rising fast we make our way back to the van in case the path floods. In the town they have an information centre for the reserve and in the season an Osprey nest is watched and recorded, it is a great view from the top floor of the centre.

Moving on we travel along the coast and stop for a walk at Garlieston, the coastal path is a productive place for birdwatching. The harbour is very calm but around the corner the wind blows hard, so the shelter of Rhododendrons is quite welcome and stops the telescopes from blowing over. Along the shore Chrissie spots Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Redshank

foraging, Morag spots a Greenshank, fabulous, the bird we were hoping for. Further around on a wee island Curlew roost, Pale-bellied Brent Geese feed and on the shoreline more Greenshank are seen, seven in total. A brilliant sight as they try to roost while the tide is high. While watching all of these birds Snipe are flying by in good numbers, some stopping on the grassy tussocks, but we must have witnessed 20+ flying, it's not very often these birds are seen flying in these numbers.

Stopping by a river we have a walk looking for Dipper, (none to be seen), but while scanning, bits are falling from the trees and on further inspection we see that Nuthatch are picking off moss and dropping it to the ground obviously searching for insects underneath, a sight never witnessed before by anyone, amazing.

Driving on we visit a view point but as the weather starts to close in, there actually is no view... but we have a nice drive down through the forest and then around Loch Ken, and back to the hotel for another dinner and checklist.

#### Day 4

Song Thrush singing before breakfast is lovely, after we head out for another day, the weather is kinder today and although windy it is not gale force, so we drive to Loch Ryan, calling into a wee loch for a reported Goose, which was amongst the Canada Geese, it is not long before we spot a 'Ridgway's Cackling Goose' an Amercian bird a great add in on our list... a flock of Greylag feed in a field nearby.

Arriving at Loch Ryan we watch Eider and Black Guillemot swim about in the harbour, a Gulliemot is spotted while we scan the water in front of us. Further along we stop and shelter behind some bushes to scan, Oystercatcher and Shelduck roost on a rocky outcrop, with a large flock of Wigeon and Red-breasted Merganser on the water. A small number of Common Scoter are spotted by Chrissie, and then two Kestrel hover in the wind over the cliff edge. Suddenly a flock of Curlew come into view and fly along to join the other birds on the outcrop, great sightings this morning.

The road follows the coastline hugging the sea, so as we stop and scan every so often, we catch sight of a distant flock of Scaup and as we follow the line there is a lot more than we first see, brilliant numbers, with more Eider swimming with them. At lunch time the wind seems to have dropped a little and Morag spies a Great-crested Grebe and Chrissie finds a Slavonian Grebe, then a Red-throated Diver or two. It is much easier with the water calming down to spot the birds bobbing in the water. Further along a pair of Long-tailed Duck are spotted, the male in full breeding plumage, tail rising in the air, lovely birds.

The walk along the Wig is always eventful, especially when the wind is blowing again. Linnet fly up as a dog walker goes before us, but it joins a flock of flighty Twite, trying to get a good view of the Twite as they land is not easy, but among the cattle Skylarks feed also, we could just hear them singing when they fly up, a beautiful sound, maybe spring is here. Pale-bellied Brent Geese feed in the field always with at least one bird with its head up watching for danger. At the point a Greenfinch sits singing in the middle of a Gorse bush with Chaffinch on the edge, Rabbits feed on the fence line and Gull species roost on the far edge, joined by the geese from the field.

Visiting another loch we find Pink-footed, Canada and Greylag Geese and Wigeon are feeding on the grassy bank. On the loch edge Cormorant sit one with a visible breeding patch, we then catch sight of a Smew a female on the far side of the loch, what a great sight. We drive in among the fields watching for Hen Harrier and find Buzzard, Brown Hare, Lapwing, no Hen Harrier. Along the hedgerow a flock of Fieldfare are spotted, beyond them 16 Greenland White-fronted Geese are feeding in the field, brilliant as this is another species to be ticked off.

The Fieldfare come and land in the hedge nearby so great views, then a few Twite join them singing away. Driving past the Geese and along the road we keep stopping to scan some more and Ray sees a field full of Swans, checking through them we find Whooper and Mute feeding together. Before heading onto the main road, a large flock of Pink-footed Geese are feeding we have a great time stopping to watch but we do have to head back to the hotel as dinner time is looming, what a lovely day.

## Day 5

Just as we set off for our last day, the rain starts, not a deterrent as we are going to the Wildfowl & Wetland Centre at Caerlaverock, with plenty of hides and sheltered avenues to walk between them. En-route we stop and watch Goldeneye, Curlew on the muddy river banks. Another field full of Whooper Swans is spotted by Ray, great views.

Arriving at Caerlaverock and getting out of the van, the first thing you can hear are the Whooper Swans on the pond. We visit the small hides first and the feeding station, and all the usual little birds are feeding, a Water Rail calls but we do not see it. Along the hedgerow Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting feed on the grain, as soon as we get in the main hide the feeding time for the birds begins. Whooper, Mute Swans, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Wigeon, Teal and some winter visitors a Scaup and Pochard wait eagerly. There is a Mute Swan that has arrived from Windermere and is very friendly to the warden feeding out of the barrow and his hand, very used to people.

Walking along one avenue to the next hide Barnacle Geese are really close, with Shoveler, Teal and Wigeon further away, a few Whooper Swans are in this area also. From the tall hide we see Roe Deer in the corner of the field, Golden Plover flock flying over and joining Lapwing in the field. Sitting on the top floor the wind is now howling through the windows and we only have showers, which are easily avoided with hides.

Back at the van for lunch, then into the cafe for a hot coffee before heading out again, the wind is getting worse as we head down to the coastal hide. It is a shame as we could only open certain windows and scan, the wind making it impossible to open the others.... A few waders fly along the shore line, and more Barnacle Geese feed nearby, with more Roe Deer in the fields. We retreat back up the avenue and as we get closer to the main hide the warden is off to feed the birds again, so we go into the hide for shelter. Its great to see the Swans actually waddling to the gateway in anticipation of the warden and the barrow with grain, as if they have not been fed before.

The last hide we visit is a treat as very close Shoveler span around feeding, with good numbers of Teal and Wigeon on the grass feeding. They keep waddling over to the edge of a crop to feed in the mud, but every now and again something spooks them and they all fly to the water, eventually one brave Teal starts the walk back to the crop edge, we could not see what was in amongst the crop but the way they reacted there was something. We scan all the Teal for the Green-winged and Chrissie finds it and explains where it is so everyone sees it. Scanning further away and turning back to the near water, the Green-winged is actually right in front of us, so camera's clicking away we all get good pictures of this lovely bird.

Black-tailed Godwits are feeding in among the Wigeon and then go to roost on the pond edge with a few Redshank. A flock of Skylark fly by and in the distance a flock of Barnacle Geese feed, as we sit, more and more join them, before we leave the whole field is nearly full of Geese, fantastic watching the flock grow as they fly in. The Whooper Swans are coming onto the pond from the main one, it is brilliant watching them flying across the path and landing feet first onto the water, calling as they come down. This is definitely a place where the day goes fast as there is always plenty to see and increase our checklist at the end of the day. Driving back for our last dinner and checklist, we have had a fabulous day, regardless of the weather.

## Day 6

After breakfast we all go our separate ways, new friends made and wishing all safe journeys home, hoping to see all again in the future.

**Species of the trip:** Red Kite, Pintail and Green-winged Teal

**Place of the trip:** Kite feeding farm, Wigtown Hide, Caerlaverock

**Magic Moment:** Sight and sound of the Barnacle Geese as they flew over the hide, Nuthatch picking and dropping moss from trees. (Hippo discovery!!)

## BIRDS

Red-throated Diver	Snipe
Little Grebe	Black-tailed Godwit
Great-crested Grebe	Curlew
Slavonian Grebe	Redshank
Gannet	Greenshank
Cormorant	Black-headed Gull
Shag	Common Gull
Grey Heron	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Mute Swan	Herring Gull
Whooper Swan	Great Black-backed Gull
Pink-footed Goose	Guillemot
Greenland White-fronted Goose	Black Guillemot
Greylag Goose	Woodpigeon
Canada Goose	Collared Dove
Barnacle Goose	Great-spotted Woodpecker
Pale-bellied Brent Goose	Skylark
Shelduck	Meadow Pipit
Wigeon	Rock Pipit
Teal	Pied Wagtail
Mallard	Wren
Pintail	Duncock
Shoveler	Robin
Pochard	Blackbird
Tufted Duck	Song Thrush
Scaup	Mistle Thrush
Eider	Long-tailed Tit
Long-tailed duck	Coal Tit
Common Scoter	Blue Tit
Goldeneye	Great Tit
Red-breasted Merganser	Willow Tit
Goosander	Nuthatch
Red Kite	Treecreeper (h)
Common Buzzard	Magpie
Kestrel	Jackdaw
Red-legged Partridge	Carrion Crow
Pheasant	Raven
Water Rail (h)	Starling
Moorhen	House Sparrow
Coot	Chaffinch
Oystercatcher	Brambling
Ringed Plover	Greenfinch
Golden Plover	Linnet
Lapwing	Twite
Dunlin	Common Crossbill

Bullfinch  
Yellowhammer  
Reed Bunting  
Little Egret  
Ridgway's Cackling Goose  
Smew  
Green-winged Teal  
Fieldfare  
Redwing  
Rook

**Total Birds: 98**

**MAMMALS**

Rabbit  
Brown Hare  
Badger (D)  
Roe Deer

**Total Species: 102**