

## ***Birds & their Habitats on Balmacara Estate***

The Balmacara Estate is comprised of a wide variety of habitats that are frequented and used by a great diversity of bird life. Since 1998 around 150 species have been recorded. This leaflet summarises those records and provides a very brief description of the main habitats.

### ***Coastline***

The bays at Kirkton, Reraig, Balmacara and to a lesser extent Camas Dubh-aird are important for a wide range of birds throughout the year and are good spots to visit.

### ***Offshore Islands***

Eilean a' Mhal is the largest of the islands and contains the most important heronry in Lochalsh with 13-18 nests. Black guillemot is reckoned to be the most significant breeding bird on the islands. Recently the islands have been found to be important wintering sites for purple sandpiper and turnstone.

### ***Saltmarsh***

Kirkton Bay is the only significant area of saltmarsh on the estate. While the saltmarsh is not of great importance for birds, it plays a role in the overall attraction of Kirkton Bay to wildfowl and waders and wandering and migrating flocks of passerines.

### ***Crofts and Farmland***

The agricultural land is of particular importance within the context of Lochalsh by providing a habitat that has largely disappeared elsewhere in the district. Drumbuie & Dubh-aird are important in spring for skylarks, linnets and twite. In summer they are important for whinchat, grasshopper warbler, sedge warbler and whitethroat. The locally scarce reed bunting breeds in both areas. The extensive patches of seed heads in flower-rich meadows, particularly knapweed and devil's-bit scabious, attract flocks of goldfinches, linnets and twite in late summer and autumn. Wintering Greenland white-fronted goose were regularly recorded at Dubh-aird but have declined with none being recorded since 2003.

### ***Freshwater Lochs***

Some of the small lochs are used for breeding by red throated divers, usually 3-4 pairs. They achieve varying degrees of success, but appear to be capable of maintaining the current population.

### ***Native Semi-natural Woodland***

This is a major and important dimension to the estate as the woodland mix offers habitat for a wide range of interesting species. Woodcock may be breeding in the Coille Mhór, if so this could be the only breeding site within the wider area. Willow warbler, while declining nationally is abundant throughout the woodlands of Lochalsh.

### ***Plantation Woodland***

The plantation woodlands add to the diversity of bird species found on the estate, most notably including goldcrest, coal tit and crossbill, although they also are found in the mixed native semi-natural woodlands on the estate. The main area for crossbills on the estate is at Strathie where they spill over from the neighbouring plantations. They are also present in Lochalsh Woodland garden. It is assumed that they are all common crossbills as opposed to the Scottish crossbill.

### ***Lochalsh Woodland Garden***

A typical range of garden birds have been recorded in the garden, perhaps most notably spotted flycatcher, crossbill, bullfinch and great spotted woodpecker. A good haunt to hear tawny owls calling in the evening.

### ***Villages***

The diverse structure of the various villages has produced attractive habitats for birds. Song thrush decline is causing concern nationally, but there is a healthy population in Lochalsh.

### ***Moorland***

This makes up the largest area of the estate, but has conversely attracted the least amount of survey work. Hen harrier is potentially the most important bird of the moorland, being present in the Scalpaidh area between 1992 and 1998, but breeding has never been confirmed. Golden plover was recorded as possibly breeding in 2004.

**So why not take the time to explore the area and you may be lucky to see a good variety of different species. Happy Birding!**

**Red-throated diver** Occurs round the coast in winter in small numbers.

**Black-throated diver** Occasionally seen on Loch Lundie & Loch Achaidh na h-Inich in spring.

**Great Northern diver** Annual winter visitor to coastal waters from Kyle to Plockton.

**Little grebe** One or two pairs breed on small inland lochs.

**Great crested grebe** Rare vagrant.

**Slavonian grebe** Rare passage migrant, mainly seen at Kirkton & Balmacara Bays, occasionally at Drumbuie & Port an Eoma in winter months.

**Fulmar** Occasionally seen from coast between Kyle & Plockton.

**Manx shearwater** Very rare sightings in Loch Alsh & Loch Carron.

**Storm petrel** Very rare sightings in Loch Alsh & Loch Carron.

**Gannet** July to Sept. offshore from Balmacara to Plockton.

**Cormorant** Present, but not breeding, in coastal waters around the estate.

**Shag** Numerous, but not breeding, in coastal waters around the estate.

**Grey heron** Common resident, large heronry on Eilean a'Mhal, off the Plock of Kyle.

**Whooper swan** Rare passage migrant & winter visitor, mainly on Loch Achaidh na h-Inich.

**Pink-footed goose** Very occasionally seen in winter flocks of graylag goose.

**White-fronted goose** Has been a small wintering flock of the Greenland race at Dubh-aird, Plockton for many years, but not recorded since 2003.

**Greylag goose** Common resident throughout the year on croft land, and at Kirkton Bay, breeding on the islands.

**Barnacle goose** Very occasional birds with graylag geese at Kirkton & Dubh-aird.

**Brent goose** Very rare vagrant.

**Shelduck** Scarce late spring visitor to Reraig & Kirkton Bay.

**Wigeon** Common winter visitor to Balmacara & Kirkton Bays.

**Teal** Regular winter visitor to Kirkton Bay & Reraig

**Mallard** Common resident at coast and on inland waters.

**Scaup** Only one record at Camas Dubh-aird, Oct 1991.

**Eider** Present around the coast throughout the year, probably breeding on islands.

**Common scoter** Very rare winter visitor.

**Goldeneye** Regular winter visitor to coast between Port an Eorna & Plockton, occasionally on Loch Achaidh na h-Inich & Loch Iain Oig.

**Red-breasted merganser** Common resident around the coast.

**Goosander** Rarely seen from Aug-Sept, more common in Lochs Long & Duich.

**Hen harrier** Very occasional sightings on heather moorland.

**Sparrowhawk** Common resident.

**Buzzard** Common resident in all areas of moorland, woodland and the coastal strip.

**White-tailed sea eagle** Very rare sightings off-shore, visitors from Skye.

**Golden eagle** Very rare sightings of birds from further east.

**Kestrel** Surprisingly scarce, but occasionally seen at Kirkton & Drumbuie.

**Merlin** Very few records at Kirkton & Drumbuie, possibly at Dubh-aird.

**Peregrine** Most frequently seen hunting around Dubh-aird area.

**Red grouse** Scarce resident, mostly recorded on near Loch Scalpaidh.

**Pheasant** Occasional records, probably released from other estates.

**Water rail** A rare winter visitor, a skulking secretive bird.

**Corncrake** One record near Plockton Aerodrome in May 1999.

**Oystercatcher** Common resident along the whole coastline of the estate.

**Ringed plover** Small numbers breed at a few sites, mainly seen Aug to Dec.

**Golden plover** Breeds on Auchtertyre Hill, migrants usually seen early spring at Dubh-aird and occasionally at Balmacara Bay.

**Lapwing** Rare visitor, mainly at Dubh-aird and occasionally at Kirkton Bay.

**Knot** Rare passage migrant.

**Sanderling** One record at Balmacara Bay in Aug 2004.

**Purple sandpiper** Winter visitor, off-shore islands, particularly Eilean a' Mhal.

**Dunlin** Uncommon migrant and winter visitor to Balmacara Bay.

**Jack snipe** Annual winter visitor in small numbers at Kirkton Bay.

**Snipe** Resident breeder mostly in Kirkton Bay and at Drumbuie and Dubh-aird.

**Woodcock** Annual winter visitor in good numbers both inland and coastal.

**Black-tailed godwit** One record at Kirkton Bay in Feb 2003.

**Bar-tailed godwit** Rare autumn/winter visitor at Dubh-aird & Kirkton.

**Whimbrel** Regular spring migrant in April/May in small numbers.

**Curlew** Common throughout the coastal areas but not known to breed locally.

**Redshank** Widespread all around the coast but in small numbers from Jul-Apr.

**Greenshank** Most likely to be seen on passage in Kirkton Bay.

**Green sandpiper** One record at Kirkton Bay in Aug 1996.

**Common sandpiper** Breeding in coastal areas and freshwater lochs.

**Turnstone** Winter visitor from late Aug-March, mainly Balmacara Bay & islands from Kyle to Plockton.

**Arctic skua** Rare migrant occasionally seen in outer Loch Carron.

**Great skua** Annual migrant in outer Loch Carron, rarely seen elsewhere.

**Little gull** Only two records off Avernish and Glaick (both Jan) 1998 & 2002.

**Black-headed gull** Occurs all around the coast outside the breeding season.

**Common gull** Common resident, breeding on islands from Kyle to Plockton.

**Lesser black-backed gull** Summer visitor in small numbers.

**Herring gull** Very common resident breeding on many of the coastal islands.

**Iceland gull** Rare winter visitor recorded at Balmacara bay Jan 2005.

**Glaucous gull** Rare winter visitor recorded at Balmacara bay Jan 1998.

**Great black-backed gull** Common resident, breeds on the coastal islands.

**Kittiwake** Present in Loch Alsh and outer Loch Carron, not breeding locally.

**Sandwich tern** Very rare passage migrant.

**Common/Arctic tern** Uncommon summer visitor, less regular in recent years.

**Guillemot** Present in Loch Alsh and Outer Loch Carron for much of the year.

**Razorbill** Present in sea lochs, most commonly from Jan-Apr.

**Black guillemot** Resident around the coast from Balmacara Bay to Plockton.

**Little auk** Winter visitor in small numbers, especially in outer Loch Carron.

**Puffin** Occasionally in Apr/May during influxes of other auks, rather irregular.

**Rock dove** Mostly seen outside the breeding season in the Dubh-aird area of Plockton.

**Stock dove** Rarely recorded vagrant.

**Collared dove** Resident in the villages around the estate.

**Cuckoo** Common summer visitor to woodland and moorland areas, rarely seen after June.

**Barn owl** Rare resident but no confirmed breeding. Mainly seen around Kirkton.

**Tawny owl** Common resident in woodland and large gardens.

**Roller** One near Erbusaig in July 1995.

**Great spotted woodpecker** Resident breeding bird in wooded areas.

**Skylark** Common breeding bird in the Kirkton, Drumbuie and Dubh-aird areas & on moorland.

**Sand martin** Migrants can be seen with swallows or house martins.

**Swallow** Common summer visitor. Breeds in most of the villages.

**House martin** Uncommon summer visitor within the Estate.

**Tree pipit** Summer visitor to wooded areas, particularly Coille Mhór.

**Meadow pipit** Most common & widespread breeding bird in Lochalsh, largely absent in winter.

**Rock pipit** Resident breeding bird all around the coast.

**Grey wagtail** A local breeding bird along the larger burns and at Loch Achaidh na h-Inich.

**Pied wagtail** Common breeding bird, mostly in coastal areas and villages, but scarce in winter.

**Waxwing** Irregular winter visitor which occurs almost entirely in villages feeding on berries.

**Dipper** Breeding bird but more conspicuous at mouths of rivers outwith breeding season.

**Wren** Very common resident in all habitats.

**Dunnock** Common resident breeding bird.

**Robin** Very common resident in all habitats except open moorland.

**Redstart** Uncommon summer visitor, mostly recorded in Coille Mhór.

**Whinchat** Summer visitor, mainly to the Drumbuie and Kirkton areas.

**Stonechat** Widespread resident, although numbers much reduced during winter months.

**Wheatear** Summer visitor to coastal and some moorland areas.

**Ring ouzel** Migrants may be seen occasionally on the coast.

**Blackbird** Very common resident, supplemented by immigrants from Scandinavia in winter.

**Fieldfare** Annual passage migrant and winter visitor in varying numbers oncroft land.

**Song thrush** Common breeding resident.

**Redwing** Common passage migrant and winter visitor, often in flocks at Dubh-aird.

**Mistle thrush** Common breeding resident but fewer than blackbird and song thrush.

**Grasshopper warbler** Scarce summer visitor, mainly coastal areas including meadows, marshes and low scrub.

**Sedge warbler** Summer visitor, most common at Kirkton Bay and Drumbuie.

**Whitethroat** Summer visitor, mainly found in low-lying coastal meadows, scrub & hedgerows.

**Garden warbler** Scarce summer visitor to woodland in the Balmacara area & Lochalsh Woodland Garden.

**Blackcap** Summer visitor in increasing numbers in woodland and large gardens.

**Wood warbler** Uncommon summer visitor, mainly at Coille Mhór.

**Chiffchaff** Uncommon summer visitor. Lochalsh Woodland Garden is a regular site.

**Willow warbler** Abundant summer visitor occurring in all habitats except open moorland.

**Goldcrest** Common resident, especially in coniferous plantations.

**Long-tailed tit** Resident breeding bird present in scrub & mature woodland.

**Coal tit** Common resident in woodlands and gardens.

**Blue tit** Very common resident, especially in broadleaved woodland and gardens.

**Great tit** Very common resident, especially in broadleaved woodland and gardens.

**Treecreeper** Common resident in broadleaved and mixed woodland.

**Jackdaw** Common non-breeding resident in broadleaved and mixed woodland.

**Rook** Non-breeding but mainly seen at Dubh-aird outwith breeding season.

**Carrion crow** Rare visitor, often confused with immature rooks.

**Hooded crow** Very common resident which occurs in most habitats.

**Raven** Resident breeding bird but very thinly distributed both inland and around the coast.

**Starling** Local breeding resident, occurs mainly in Balmacara Square, Kyle & Plockton.

**House sparrow** Common resident, breeding in all the villages but rarely seen elsewhere.

**Chaffinch** Abundant resident found throughout the Estate except on exposed moorland.

**Brambling** Uncommon winter visitor, usually feeding with chaffinches under beech trees.

**Greenfinch** Resident breeding bird which occurs mainly in villages.

**Goldfinch** Primarily a winter visitor, mainly in Drumbuie, but seen throughout the estate.

**Siskin** Very common resident breeding in coniferous and mixed woodland & gardens.

**Linnet** A summer visitor to the Drumbuie and Dubh-aird areas and rarely seen elsewhere.

**Twite** Mainly a summer visitor, mostly in coastal areas like Drumbuie, Dubh-aird & Kirkton.

**Redpoll** A common breeding bird in woodland and scrub, often seen with siskins in autumn.

**Common crossbill** Uncommon resident, mainly seen at Strathie & Lochalsh Woodland Garden.

**Common Rosefinch** One unconfirmed report at Balmacara Square in May 2003.

**Bullfinch** A common resident found in all types of woodland and in gardens.

**Snow bunting** Rare winter visitor. One at Dubh-aird in December 2001.

**Yellowhammer** Scarce resident. More widespread to the east of the estate.

**Reed bunting** Uncommon resident in the Drumbuie, Dubh-aird & Kirkton areas.



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## The Birds of Balmacara Estate



### Report your sightings!

We would welcome your records, ideally with the following details:

Species, Number of birds, Location (Grid Ref. if known), Date seen, Age and sex (if known), and any other relevant details.

#### Contact Details:

Balmacara Estate Office, Lochalsh House, Balmacara, Kyle of Lochalsh, Ross-shire, IV40 8DN.

Tel: 0844-493-2233; Email: [Balmacara@nts.org.uk](mailto:Balmacara@nts.org.uk)

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## Habitats & Species List