



THE GREAT PORTMOAK BIRD WATCH

APRIL 2021

Bird song

If you go out with an experienced bird watcher you'll be amazed at how many birds they can identify without even seeing them. But we all know some bird songs don't we? Like the **cuckoo** for instance - which you're much more likely to hear than see.

We're lucky to have **green woodpeckers** on Portmoak Moss and Kilmagad Wood. Once you know the call you'll never miss it again. It's called **yaffling** and it sounds like a laugh. We also have **great spotted woodpeckers**. They don't laugh. They drum - very fast - and lots were reported doing that.

If you're a beginner, start with something easy. **Blackbirds** are everywhere and easy to identify, being black with a yellow beak and a yellow ring round the eye. The female is actually a brown bird. Blackbirds are great singers. Watch one fly to a tree and with luck it'll strike up a tune.

We've got a lot of **greylag and pink-footed geese** here. They're not too bad to tell apart on the ground - look at the beak. Greylag: big yellow beak. Pink-footed: much thinner with a black tip. But if they're flying? Well, the greylag makes a very loud honking but the pink-foot gives a quieter "pink pink" call.

Why not try to learn a couple of bird songs? In your garden you've probably got robins, chaffinches, great tits and blue tits. Spot them moving around and listen to their calls. Try to remember them, then see if you can identify one without actually looking at it. Then check to see if you got it right.



Photo: Stu

We invited everyone to spend a week looking out for birds and telling us what you saw. Great response!

74 species were reported
by **18 people**
in a total of **453 sightings**

There were some huge flocks of geese, over a thousand strong, as well as many solitary individuals. Some of the sightings were of quite unusual species, like yellowhammers and linnets, while others are familiar to us from our back gardens and bird feeders. Blackbirds, blue tits, great tits, chaffinches and robins seem to be everywhere.

It's the beginning of the summer migration. Many birds are year round residents in Portmoak but others arrive here in springtime to breed. The first arrive in late March and by mid-April the birdsong of species like the willow warbler and chiffchaff are amongst the most commonly heard. These birds make long and perilous journeys from West Africa to get here and some will continue on to Scandinavia.

April has also seen the first swallows arrive while at the same time we're saying goodbye to winter visitors like the pink-footed geese and most of the greylags. The swallows arrive after completing a four week flight from southern Africa, including a treacherous crossing over the Sahara Desert. The geese are heading north to Iceland and Greenland.

Later in the year Portmoak Moss is home to large numbers of wintering woodcock, while the fields around Grahamstone are visited by fieldfare and redwing feasting on winter berries.

There's a list of everything we saw at the back: it's a bird table!

All too Lovey Dovey for you? Read on - there's even a section of bird-hate.

Swallows, swifts and martins

These are all summer migrants, flying in from Africa to raise their young and feast on insects snatched from the sky.

Swallows It always seems like summer begins when the swallows start nesting in the out-buildings and the first ones of the year were seen during our bird watch. They have a long, forked tail, a red throat and white underside. They dart and glide low over the fields where there are lots of insects to be scooped up. You often see two of them chasing each other around.

Swifts have a forked tail too, but not as long a swallow's. Their wings are crescent shaped and they are a dark sooty brown. They fly high up and they have the fastest level flight of any bird. They spend their lives in the air sleeping, mating and drinking on the wing and won't land, avoiding coming anywhere near the ground.

House martins are smaller than swifts or swallows. Their tail is forked too and they have blue-black upper parts with a white rump. House martins are most active in mornings and evenings. They zoom around at mid-height, usually in flocks, coming down low over water and fluttering in and out of house eaves, chirruping softly.

Sand martins are the smallest of this group. They have dark brown upper parts and dark under wings contrasting with pale under parts divided by a distinctive dark chest bar. Agile fliers, feeding mainly

"Sand martin. The air was thick with them. First of the year for me and the largest group I have ever seen together. Swallow amongst the sand martin - also first of the year"

over water, they will perch on overhead wires or branches. They dig tunnels in dry sandy banks to make their nests. They are very gregarious in the breeding season.



Photo: Dave

Some birds with a lot of yellow about them



Goldcrest



Green woodpecker



Yellowhammer
Photos: Gordon

Corvids: crows, rooks and ravens

They can be tricky to tell apart, but it can be done! We've got lots of the first two all over the farmlands so there's plenty of opportunity to practice.

Carrion crows are fairly large, fully black, with black feathers covering the face all the way up to a black beak.



They are fairly solitary. This is the corvid you are most likely to see visiting your garden.

Rooks are a similar size to crows, but their defining feature is a grey beak.



Photo: Dave

They are very sociable so you're unlikely to see a rook on its own. You'll often see them feeding in flocks on fields (There might be the odd crow amongst them). There's a rookery near the Scotlandwell Wash House. Many young have just hatched and if you want to know what a rookery sounds like, you won't have difficulty locating it!

Other corvids you might see are hooded crows (hoodies), jackdaws and magpies.

Ravens are distinguished by their huge size. They have thick necks with shaggy throat feathers and a thick, black bill. They are less common here, they don't usually go to urban areas but they often gather in flocks.



Attracting birds to your garden

Want to see more birds about the place? Try putting some food out for them. Sunflower seeds always go down well - see how many different birds you can get on a feeder at once.



Long tail tits like fat balls or blocks. They go around in gangs. You'll see half a dozen at once then the next moment they'll all be off somewhere else.



Peanuts are also popular and great spotted woodpeckers seem to appreciate the change from banging their heads against tree trunks.

You might find some of your shrubs attract particular birds. Bull finches seem to enjoy the berries on hypericum for example.



Photos: Jeff

2 swans

31 March: One sitting on nest but no obvious eggs yet

4 April : One sitting on nest and not moving from it

5 April : Eggs now in the nest

8 April : The water level has risen - the nest is looking precarious

13 April : All is looking well with the swans. The water level has gone back down and the nest is still occupied.



Photo: Gordon

“Bloody Heron - every day - at the pond. Hate them. Cost me a fortune! In 2018 I stocked the pond with 60 quids worth of goldfish - three days later Bloody Heron had taken every last one!! One day, 3 of them were standing at the side while a fourth was balanced on anti-heron netting covering the pond - picking fish out through the net!!!!” (Anonymous report, to provide protection from the bird vigilantes)



Photo: Gordon

“Magpie chased across the lawn by a red squirrel - 3 times!”

“A sparrow hawk sitting on its prey (our Mrs Blacky, aged about 5 years) and would not budge”

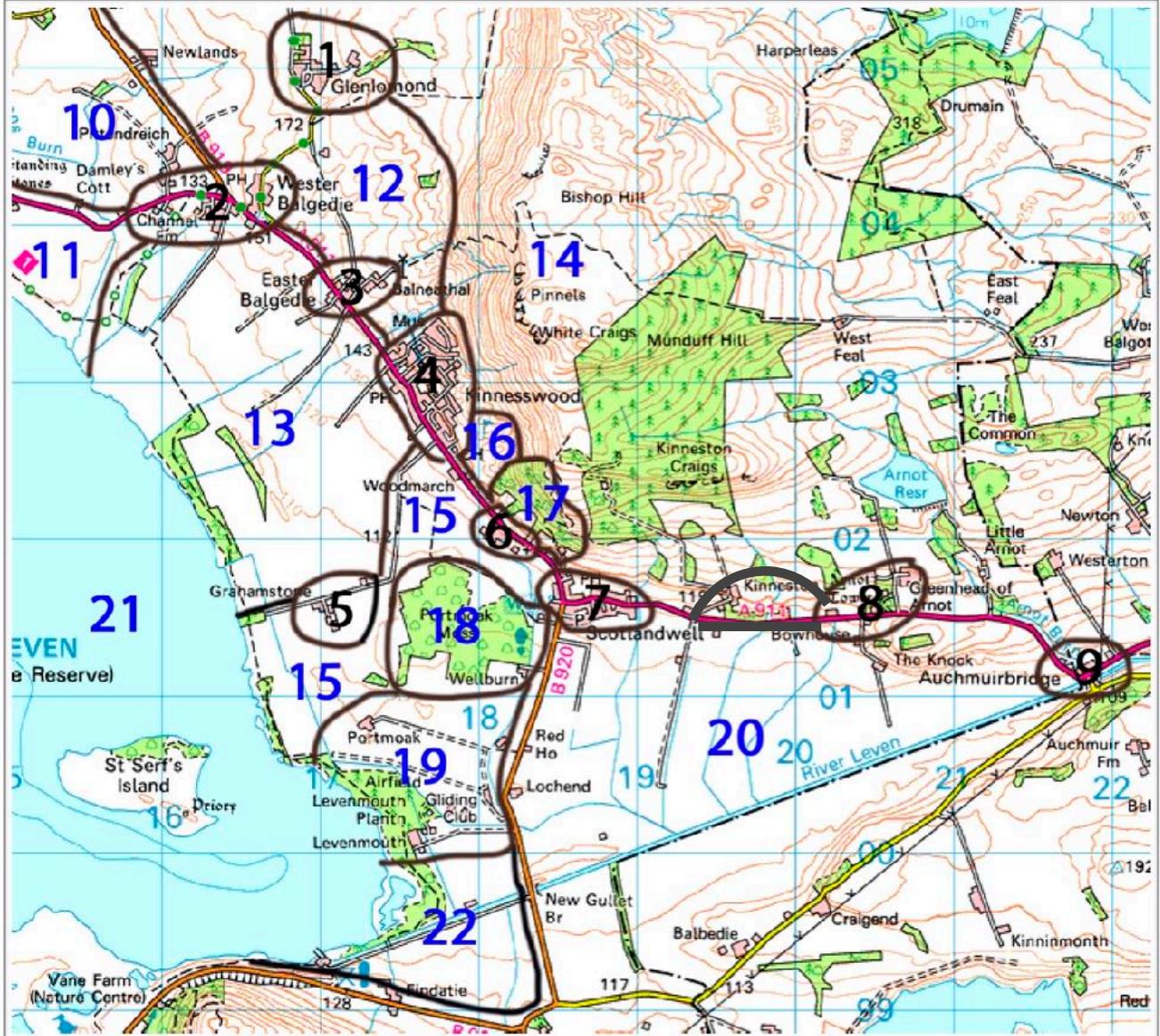
“Goldfinch. We’ve had loads of them this year for the first time”

“30 curlew feeding across the field. And one pheasant amongst them, pretending it’s a curlew too”

| Maximum number of birds reported by area | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|------|----|---|------|------|------------------------|------|------|----|------|-----|------|
| | Around settlements | | | | | | Open country and hills | | | | | | |
| | 2 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 20 | 22 |
| Barn owl | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Black headed gull | | | | | | | | | | | | | 18 |
| Blackbird | | 2 | 1 | 2 | 4 | Some | | | | | 2 | | |
| Blackcap | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Blue tit | | 2 | | | 2 | 5 | Some | | | | | 5 | Some |
| Brambling | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Bullfinch | | | | | 5 | 1 | | | | | | 2 | |
| Buzzard | | | 2 | | 2 | 2 | | 1 | | 2 | 1 | | |
| Carrion Crow | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chaffinch | | Some | 1 | 1 | 14 | Some | | Some | | | 12 | | |
| Chiffchaff | | | | | | 3 | | | | | 4 | | 3 |
| Coal tit | | Some | | | 1 | 4 | | | | | 8 | | |
| Collared dove | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Cormorant | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Crow | | 8 | | | 3 | Some | 40 | | Some | | 9 | | |
| Curlew | | | | | | | | | 80 | | | 50 | |
| Dipper | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Dunnock | | Some | | | 4 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| Fieldfare | | | | | | | | | | | | | 6 |
| Goldcrest | | | | | | Some | | | | | Some | | 1 |
| Goldfinch | | 2 | | | 5 | 10 | | | 2 | | | | Some |
| Goosander | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 2 |
| Great spotted woodpecker | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | 3 | | |
| Great tit | | 1 | | | 2 | 2 | Some | | | | 2 | | Some |
| Green woodpecker | | | | | 1 | | | | | | 3 | | |
| Greenfinch | | | | | 3 | 4 | | | | | | | |
| Grey partridge | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Greylag goose | | | 60 | | Some | Some | | | 100 | | 16 | 22 | 100 |
| Gull: (unidentified species) | | | | | | | | | 30 | | 1 | | |
| Heron | | | | | | | 4 | | 1 | | | 3 | 6 |
| House sparrow | | Some | | | Some | 14 | Some | | | | | | |
| Jackdaw | | 3 | | | | 3 | 40 | | | | | | |
| Jay | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | | 2 |
| Kestrel | 1 | | 2 | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Kingfisher | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Lapwing | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| Lesser redpoll | | | | | | 5 | | | | | | | |
| Linnet | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Long tailed tit | | | | | | 6 | | | | | 4 | 10 | 2 |
| Magpie | | 2 | | | 2 | 2 | | | | | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Mallard | | | | | | | 2 | | | | | 2 | 6 |
| Meadow pipit | | | 3 | | | | | | | | 4 | | 30 |
| Moorhen | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Mute swan | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | |
| Oystercatcher | | | | | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| Pheasant | | | | | | Some | | | 1 | | 1 | | |
| Pied wagtail | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | 1 | 8 |
| Pink-footed goose | | | | | | | | | | | | 100 | 1000 |
| Raven | | | | | 2 | | | | | | 3 | | |
| Redpoll | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 4 | | |
| Redwing | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Reed bunting | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Robin | | Some | | | 3 | 4 | Some | | | 2 | 7 | | |
| Rook | | | | | 2 | 100 | 40 | | | | 6 | | |
| Sand martin | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 500 |
| Shoveler | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Siskin | | | | | 1 | 6 | | | | | 6 | | 10 |
| Skylark | | | 2 | | | | | | 3 | | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Song thrush | | | | | 1 | | 2 | | | | 4 | | |
| Sparrow | | | | | 3 | Some | | | | | 1 | | |
| Sparrow hawk | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Starling | | | | | 6 | 20 | | | | | 5 | | 60 |
| Swallow | | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | 6 | | 10 |
| Swan | | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | 20 |
| Tawny owl | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | | |
| Teal | | | | | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| Tree creeper | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | | |
| Tree sparrow | | Some | 6 | 6 | 10 | Some | | | | | | | |
| Tufted duck | | | | | | | | | | | | | 40 |
| Willow warbler | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Wood pigeon | | Some | | | 2 | 2 | | | Some | | 24 | | |
| Woodpecker | | | | | | Some | | | 2 | | 2 | 1 | |
| Wren | | | 1 | | | | | | | | 6 | | Some |
| Yellowhammer | | | 3 | | | 6 | | | 6 | | | 15 | |



THE GREAT PORTMOAK BIRD WATCH



| Settlements | | Fields | |
|-------------|-----------------|--------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Glen Lomond | 10 | The Toll |
| 2 | W. Balgedie | 11 | Loch Leven's Larder |
| 3 | E. Balgedie | 12 | Bargedies |
| 4 | Kinnesswood | 13 | Towards the Loch |
| 5 | Grahamstone | 14 | Bishop Hill |
| 6 | Kilmagadwood | 15 | Towards the Moss |
| 7 | Scotlandwell | 16 | Golf Course |
| 8 | Arnot | | |
| 9 | Auchmuir Bridge | | |
| | | 17 | Kilmagad Wood |
| | | 18 | Portmoak Moss |
| | | 19 | Gliders |
| | | 20 | That big area on the right |
| | | 21 | Loch Leven |
| | | 22 | Sluices |