

New Year Birdwatch

Trip Report - Belfast Lough North Shore – 9th January 2022

On a cold Sunday morning the group met at Hazelbank, Newtownabbey, for its first field trip of the year. The weather was chilly and the light, which was at first variable, became much better, affording good views of the birds on the shore. The tide was beginning to recede, so the birds were reasonably close, permitting good views. Initially we paused at one of the stepped platforms leading down to the path along the shore. This provided some shelter from the wind and also gave a good elevation from which to view the lough.

The receding tide had created a few rock pools and a scan with the telescope revealed a range of waders. Most prominent were Oystercatchers, Redshanks and Bar-tailed Godwits. Further inspection turned up some Turnstones and Curlews. A solitary Greenshank was also fleetingly seen. Moving down to the path, we walked a short distance to the first of the turrets along the walkway. From here, it was possible to scan the lough. The first bird of interest to be seen was a male Goldeneye, a visitor from the boreal forests of Northern Europe. This tree-nesting duck arrives on our shores in small numbers in winter. Further study turned up two more males and a female. On a rock exposed by the tide, two male Eider Ducks sat in the sun, and a Red-breasted Merganser was fishing nearby.

Further out on the lough, a Great-crested Grebe was busily fishing. Its frequent dives made it difficult to locate at times, particularly as its grey and white plumage perfectly matched the colour of the waves. At this time of year, these birds lose their chestnut-coloured tippets, and are quite drab by comparison with their breeding plumage.

Returning to our cars, we set off for the promenade at Whitehead. On arrival, the light was still good and we were rewarded immediately by the sight of four Ringed Plovers on the rocks straight in front of us. Looking along the far side of the wall, we could see Pied Wagtails hunting for small invertebrates. They were joined by the visiting Black Redstart, which could be seen intermittently as it too hunted along the wall. Along the rim of the redundant outdoor swimming pool, a line of Shags was poised.



Ringed Plover



Redshank

Moving in the direction of the boatyard, we paused once more to look at the exposed wrack on the shore. Small numbers of Redshanks gave close-up views, their legs glowing in the sun. They were

accompanied by a party of Turnstones and a small flock of Dunlin. This allowed the group to make comparisons between the various waders.



Turnstone



Dunlin

It had been my intention to move from here to approach the fence at the boatyard, with a view to seeking the small party of Twite which frequents this area in the winter. In the event, I was saved the trouble, as one of the party drew my attention to a small flock of finches which had perched on telephone wires immediately above our heads. Sure enough, the Twite had very obligingly come to us! These are handsome little finches, sparrow-sized, with a yellow bill. The males have a pink rump.



Twite

By now, the weather had changed for the worse. There was still a cold wind, but as it had started to rain, we decided to draw a close to the proceedings. All in all, I was very pleased with the range of species which we had seen over a couple of hours.

Species List:

1. Cormorant
2. Curlew
3. Dunlin
4. Eider
5. Bar-tailed Godwit
6. Goldeneye
7. Brent Goose
8. Great-crested Grebe
9. Greenshank
10. Black-headed Gull
11. Common Gull
12. Herring Gull
13. Magpie
14. Red-breasted Merganser
15. Oystercatcher
16. Wood Pigeon
17. Rock Pipit
18. Ringed Plover
19. Redshank
20. Black Redstart
21. Robin
22. Shag
23. Starling
24. Turnstone
25. Twite
26. Pied Wagtail

Robert McDowell

12 January 2022