

Scotland 12th - 16th March 2018

Trip Report by John Wright. Email: johnpw2@tiscali.co.uk

Decided a few days wildlife watching away from my local patch in S.E. Essex was called for. So on **Monday 12th March** I flew with a friend, Paul Baker, from London Southend to Glasgow. We travelled light (and cheap) with hand luggage only with Flybe airlines. We picked up our Alamo hire car and headed out. On the outskirts of the city in fields adjacent to the M80 we saw three **Roe Deer**.

By late morning we had arrived at the Loch of the Lowes where we paid the modest entrance fee at the visitors centre. On the feeders outside there was a **Red Squirrel** and from the hide on the loch edge we could see a white **Fallow Deer** feeding amongst the trees. The Loch of the Lowes is a very good place to see European Beaver so we decided that we would return later in the day to try for them. We headed north on the A9 spotting small groups of **Red Deer** stags on the adjacent hills. We stopped a little while at Loch Garten - famous for its breeding Ospreys. But apart from some decent views of Crested Tits we saw little of note here including no mammals. However by now we had seen a few **Rabbits** in various locations as we drove along. We then called in at our B&B in Grantown-on-Spey to drop our bags off and introduce ourselves before driving south back to the Loch of the Lowes where we arrived at 17:15.

The visitors centre closes at 17:00 but that's not a problem as a gate is left open and you just follow the path at the side of the building to the hide that remains open for Beaver watchers - the other hides are locked up. There is no charge to look for the Beavers after the visitors centre is closed. At 18:05 a **Beaver** swam along the opposite bank to the hide affording us decent views and was particularly nice

to see it out of the water and up on the bank at one point. In all I suppose it was on view for about 5 minutes. We also had good views of a buck **Roe Deer**, its antlers in velvet, feeding along the loch edge. In the fields by the car park there were at least 30 **Fallow Deer** which we saw as we were leaving at around 18:30 just as it was getting dark. Beaver watching at the Loch of the Lowes in the summer is quite popular but at this time of the year you usually have the hide to yourself - as we did.

Tuesday 13th March. On an 06:30 pre-breakfast drive around the Lochindorb area we found 15 **Mountain Hares** which were all still in their white winter coats. There was plenty of snow on the slopes and the loch was 90% frozen but there was also patches of dark moorland in-between the snow so some of the Hares stood out in their white coats against the dark patches.

After breakfast we drove to various sites seeing a variety of bird species but apart from **Rabbits** saw no other mammals. In the middle of the afternoon we drove the Findhorn Valley where we saw at least 40 **Red Deer** stags in small groups on the surrounding hills along with a couple of **Mountain Hares** and a feral Goat - a fine looking billy. Lower down amongst the trees, close to the road, were seven **Sika Deer** and a number of **Rabbits** in fields in the valley bottom.

We had pre-booked a session in the Speyside Wildlife hide in the hope of Pine Marten. As we approached the meeting place we saw four **Roe Deer** in a roadside field. At 19:00 we met the two guides who took us to the hide a stone's throw from Loch Eileen on the Rothimurchus estate. We saw a couple of **Red Deer** hinds on our short walk to the hide. The hide takes up to 12 people and is apparently full most evenings in the summer when there are more tourists around. But on this night the only visitors were me, Paul an

ecologist from County Durham and the two guides. Unfortunately no Pine Martens appeared but we did see six different **Badgers** and a couple of **Wood Mice**. The Badgers gave incredibly close views coming right up to the hide to scoff peanuts and peanut butter. We had to leave the hide at 21:30 - the opening times change through the year depending on day light levels. For more information on visiting the hide see the *Evening Mammal Watching* section at: <http://www.speysidewildlife.co.uk/>

Wednesday 14th March. The B&B garden backs on to Anagach Forest so we weren't too surprised to see a **Red Squirrel** from the window as we were eating our breakfast. After breakfast we drove to Loch Lomond to look for the Red-necked Wallabies out on Inchconnachan Island. On the drive there we saw a few **Red Deer**, a couple of **Brown Hares** and some **Rabbits**. We had pre-booked a two-man canoe from a tourist adventure business based at Loch Lomond see: <http://www.lochlomondshores.com/> for information. It only took 30 minutes to paddle out to the island and was pretty easy going in calm conditions. We spent around 2.5 hours on the island and only had very brief views of two **Red-necked Wallabies**. This was rather disappointing but I guess the heavy culling has taken its toll. We only saw two Wallabies last year but had much better views. Whilst at Loch Lomond I had contacted Bob Smith to see if his Pine Marten hide was free that evening as we could do a diversion to Blairgowrie on our way back to Grantown-on-Spey. Fortunately the hide was available and we met Bob there at 19:00. At 20:05 a male **Pine Marten** appeared in front of the hide and stayed around for about five minutes eating the scattered peanut bait put out for the Martens. It ran off rather suddenly as if spooked by something - maybe the wind in the trees as it was starting to blow a bit by early evening. Bob then went home and left us to it and at 21:05 the **Pine**

Marten re-appeared and hung around for nearly 10 minutes before again being spooked by something and running off. We called it a day then as we were both rather tired and still had a 1.5 hour drive back to the B&B.

For a fee you can visit Bob's hide for Pine Martens if you contact him in advance and he can also show you European Beavers around the River Tay area if you want. Contact Bob on: r.smith50@sky.com.

Thursday 15th March. We watched a pair of **Red Squirrels** whilst we had breakfast. After three days of fine almost spring like weather things took a turn for the worse with strong winds and rain/sleet. However on a drive visiting various locations through the day we did manage **Red Deer**, **Roe Deer** and a **(Least) Weasel**. We also had **Mountain Hares** up Glenshee and in the Cairngorm mountains. Suffice to say the Hares were viewed from the shelter of the car as the driving rain and sleet was horizontal in the very strong winds.

We had again pre-booked another visit to the Speyside Wildlife hide and met the guides at 19:00 for the short walk to the hide. Again plenty of room for us as the only other visitor was the ecologist who joined us on the visit on Tuesday. Although it was raining the wind had abated somewhat. We had better luck this time as apart from a **Wood Mouse** and up to four **Badgers** a male **Pine Marten** appeared for five minutes at 20:15 - all critters giving excellent close views.

Friday 16th March. A **Red Squirrel** put in a final appearance for us again whilst we had breakfast. Another windy day, the weather deteriorated as the day went on with yellow warnings for snow over the following days. In fact in the afternoon we tried to drive the Glenshee road but it was closed due to the snow. Anyway we drove around most of the day but seeing very little mammal wise apart from a **Roe Deer** and a few **Rabbits**. We did spend a couple of hours

at North Kessock on the Moray Firth looking for Otters without any luck but did manage a **Common Seal** a **Grey Seal** and an all too brief view of a **Bottlenose Dolphin**.

Late afternoon driving south along the A9 towards Glasgow for our flight home we must have seen at least a 100 **Red Deer** close to the road, no doubt brought down from the high hills by the inclement weather.

Mammals seen (16): Red Squirrel, Wood Mouse, European Beaver, Rabbit, Brown Hare, Mountain Hare, Badger, Pine Marten, (Least) Weasel, Roe Deer, Red Deer, Sika Deer, Fallow Deer, Common (Harbour) Seal, Grey Seal, Bottlenose Dolphin. Plus a Feral Goat.

Best Birds: Slavonian Grebe, Red-throated Diver, Guillemot, Razorbill, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Red Grouse, Black Grouse, Golden Eagle, Goshawk, Buzzard, Red Kite, Peregrine, Scaup, American Wigeon, Goldeneye, Whooper Swan, Greylag Geese, Pink-footed Geese, Dipper, Crested Tit, Crossbill, Siskin, Snow Bunting.

For your information Paul and I visited Scotland last year, 27th - 30th June. The report on that Scottish trip is incorporated in my trip report *Mammal Watching in Great Britain, 2017* and is posted on mammalwatching.com.

END