Birds of the East Neuk of Fife and the Isle of May

S.T. Buckland

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A selection of photos illustrating some of the bird species of the East Neuk of Fife and the Isle of May. I have taken the East Neuk to be the area bounded by the coast from East Sands (St Andrews) to Leven, and inland by a line along the Lade Braes, through Magus Muir, Pitscottie, Craigrothie, then along the main roads south to Leven.

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Brent goose

Small numbers pass through on migration. The above pale-bellied bird was at Dumbarnie Links on 27 Oct 2017. The group below left was there on 29 August 2020. Those below right flew past Fife Ness on 17 September 2023.







Canada goose

Occurs on passage mostly in June and August. These were part of a large group of 112 birds at the mouth of Kenly Water by Boarhills on 24 August 2020.



Barnacle goose

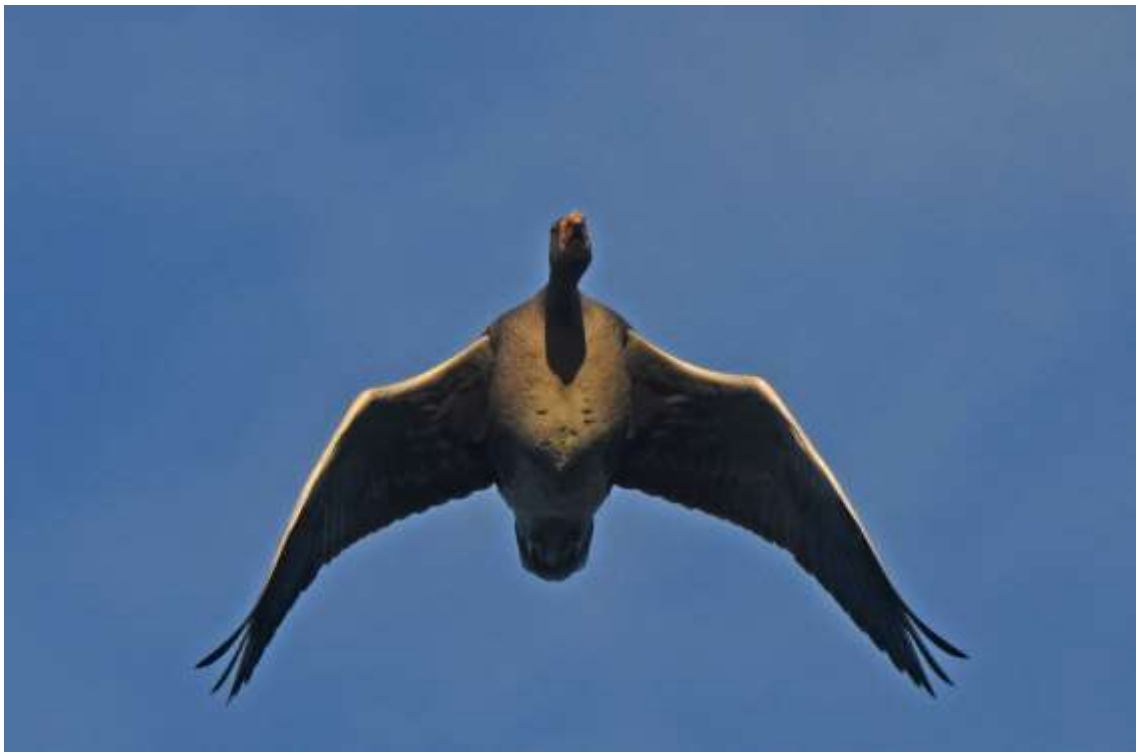
Although they do not winter in the area, passage is sometimes observed. These were some of several thousand that passed Fife Ness on 4 October 2020.





Greylag goose

Often encountered outside the breeding season, sometimes with pinkfeet. These birds were at Cameron Reservoir.





Pink-footed goose

Large numbers arrive in autumn, with many over-wintering in milder winters.





White-fronted goose

A scarce visitor to Fife. These birds were at Cameron Reservoir in early March 2025, and are of the Russian race.





Mute swan

Good numbers occur at Kilconquhar, where the above birds were disputing territory, and at Cameron Reservoir, where the birds below were.





Whooper swan

The birds below right were part of a group of 19 migrating north past Fife Ness on 22 March 2020. The other images were taken at Cameron Reservoir, a regular site for them.









Shelduck

Occurs in small numbers mostly at the coast. The male on the right was at Cocklemill Burn, while the other shots were taken at Wormiston near Fife Ness.









Garganey

A rare migrant in Fife. This male was at Cameron Reservoir in late March and early April 2022.









Shoveler

Occurs in small numbers at Kilconquhar Loch.







Gadwall

This species is becoming more common in Fife. These two birds were part of a small group at Cameron Reservoir in November 2018.



Wigeon

Common outside the breeding season in suitable habitat. These birds were at Cocklemill Burn.







Mallard

Common in suitable (and often unsuitable) habitat.





Pintail

Not often recorded in the East Neuk, the male above was at Kilconquhar Loch in December 2023, while the one below was at Cameron Reservoir in January 2024.





Teal

Common in suitable habitat.









Red-crested pochard

A rare winter visitor. This male was at Kilconquhar Loch in February 2018.







Pochard

Occurs in small numbers at Kilconquhar Loch.







Ring-necked duck

A rare vagrant from North America. This female was at Cameron Reservoir in late November and December 2020.









Tufted duck

Common in suitable habitat.







Scaup

These birds were at Kilconquhar during the winter of 2016/17.







King eider

A rare visitor to the Fife coast. This drake was off Earlsferry in late April 2023.



Eider

Common around the coast. The flock on the right was flying past Fife Ness, while the other birds were in Pittenweem Harbour.









Surf scoter

A rare visitor outside the breeding season to Fife. This drake was with common and velvet scoter off Ruddon's Point in mid-April 2023.





Velvet scoter

The birds below right were passing Fife Ness, while those below left were flying past Ruddons Point into Largo Bay. The above males were off Earlsferry.







White-winged scoter

A rare vagrant from North America. These birds were at Lower Largo in late April and early May 2023.





Stejneger’s scoter

An extremely rare vagrant from Siberia. This bird (centre right) was at Lower Largo in late April and early May 2023.





Common scoter

Common around the coast, and a large flock winters in Largo Bay. These birds were off Ruddons Point.









Long-tailed duck

Winters at sea, although it occasionally occurs on fresh water, as for the bird above and below left, which was at Kilconquhar in mid-November 2017. The male bottom right was off Dumbarnie Links, while the group of two males and two females (right) were passing Fife Ness.









Goldeneye

Common outside the breeding season in suitable habitat. The above birds were displaying at Kilconquhar in late February 2019.









Smew

Scarce winter visitor. The above two "redheads" were at Cameron Reservoir in late November and early December 2018. The redhead below right was at Kilconquhar in early December 2018. The male below left was one of two males at Cameron Reservoir in December 2019 and January 2020 and the immature male on the right was there in December 2020.









Goosander

Occurs outside the breeding season in suitable habitat.









Red-breasted merganser

Common outside the breeding season around the coast. It also occurs in small numbers at Kilconquhar Loch, which is where the image below was taken.









Grey partridge

Present in suitable farmland habitat.







Pheasant

Common, and frequently released for shooting.







Red-legged partridge

Sometimes released for shooting by land owners in the East Neuk. These were part of a covey near New Gilston.





Swift

A late-arriving summer migrant. The above shot was taken at Cameron Reservoir and those below at Kilconquhar.







Feral pigeon

Widespread. Many birds breed in caves and crevices in cliffs, behaving much like their wild ancestors.









Stock dove

Present in small numbers throughout, especially where there are trees with suitable nest-holes.







Woodpigeon

Common throughout.







Collared dove

Common, but patchily distributed, favouring suburban habitats.





Moorhen

Common in suitable habitat.





Coot

Numerous at Kilconquhar, where these territorial disputes were shot.







Crane

These two birds were displaying near Peat Inn on 24 April 2016. Unfortunately, they didn't stay long.







Little grebe

Common in suitable habitat.







Red-necked grebe

Occasionally recorded on the sea. This juvenile was at Ruddon’s Point in mid-July 2021.





Great-crested grebe

Several pairs breed at Kilconquhar. These shots were taken from the Fife Bird Club hide there.







Slavonian grebe

A few occur along the coast, and rarely inland. The one above and below right was at Cameron Reservoir in January 2024, while the one below left was at Kilconquhar Loch in December 2023.







Black-necked grebe

A scarce species in Fife. These images were taken at Elie in February and April 2019.









Stone curlew

A rare vagrant to Fife. This one was at Lower Kilminning on 24 May 2024.







Oystercatcher

Common, especially around the coast.









Lapwing

Common in suitable habitat. A few breed.





Golden plover

A large flock forms in autumn near Crail. These birds were on the rocks at Fife Ness.





American golden plover

This bird was at Fife Ness in early November 2025.









Grey plover

A few occur mostly on sandy beaches. These were at Ruddons Point and Fife Ness.









Ringed plover

Small numbers occur on suitable beaches. The ones above and below were at Kings Barns, while the birds on the right were at Balcomie Beach.









Little ringed plover

Uncommon migrant. This bird was in a potato field near Kilconquhar in late September 2019.





Dotterel

An uncommon passage migrant at the coast. These eight birds were at Pittenweem in May 2021.







Whimbrel

Passage migrant in small numbers around the coast.









Curlew

Common around the coast.









Bar-tailed godwit

Small numbers occur outside the breeding season along the sandy beaches of the East Neuk. The birds on the right were at Ruddon's Point, and the others were at Dumbarnie Links.









Black-tailed godwit

Small numbers occasionally occur at some coastal sites. This was one of four birds at Balcomie beach in early May 2019.



Turnstone

Common along the stretches of rocky coast.









Knot

Small numbers occur in suitable coastal habitat. The winter-plumage birds were at Ruddons Point. The others (right and below right) were at Balcomie Beach.









Ruff

A migrant in small numbers. The flock was on the golf course at Fife Ness in September 2022, while the male was at flood water by Drumcarrow Hill in late May 2021.







Curlew sandpiper

A scarce migrant, this long-staying bird (seen here with a dunlin) frequented Balcomie Beach and Fife Ness in late September and early October 2021.





Sanderling

Often seen in groups on sandy beaches. They can be very confiding.









Dunlin

Small groups occur outside the breeding season in suitable coastal habitat. These photos were taken on Balcomie beach.







Purple sandpiper

Fairly common along the rocky sections of coast, often with turnstones. The flock of 55 on the right were at Earlsferry in late April 2023.









Little stint

Uncommon passage migrant. The bird above and below left was on Balcomie Beach in mid -September 2025, while the bird below right was with dunlin and ringed plovers at Fife Ness in mid-September 2019.







White-rumped sandpiper

Rare vagrant from North America. This bird was at Kilrenny in early August 2022.





Woodcock

Most often recorded when birds arrive from across the North Sea in autumn. These photos shows the usual view: a bird rapidly disappearing after being flushed.







Jack snipe

Appreciably less common than the common snipe, but also often overlooked. The bird on the right was at Bankhead Moss in December 2024, while the others were at the Cocklemill Burn by Dumbarnie Links in November 2020 and 2021.









Snipe

Occurs outside the breeding season in suitable habitat. The two birds above and below left were in the Cocklemill Burn by Dumbarnie Links in October 2018, while the bird bottom right was one of three at Cameron Reservoir, also in October 2018.







Common sandpiper

Passage migrant in small numbers.









Spotted sandpiper

A rare vagrant from North America. This juvenile was at Cameron Reservoir in late September and October 2024.









Green sandpiper

Uncommon passage migrant. This bird was at a flood pool in a potato field near Kilconquhar for much of September 2019.







Redshank

Very common along the coastline.









Wood sandpiper

A scarce passage migrant. This one was at Lower Kilminning in July 2025.







Greenshank

A migrant and winter visitor in small numbers in the East Neuk. The birds below were at St Andrews Harbour, while the one above and right was at Fife Ness.









Kittiwake

Large numbers breed on the Isle of May. The birds below right were part of a large passage of kittiwakes past Fife Ness.







Sabine’s gull

A rare visitor to Fife. This bird passed off Fife Ness on 17 September 2023.



Bonaparte’s gull

A rare vagrant from North America, this bird was with black-headed gulls at Anstruther at the end of August 2026.







Black-headed gull

Common in open and water habitats.







Little gull

Occurs on passage. Large numbers are sometimes recorded passing Fife Ness, mostly far out at sea.









Mediterranean gull

This species is spreading into Fife from the south. The birds above and below were at Kilrenny in August 2022, while the juvenile on the right was at Anstruther at the end of August 2026.









Common gull

Common around the coast and inland, often with black-headed gulls.









Great black-backed gull

Common around the coast.









Iceland gull

A rare winter visitor. This bird flew north past Fife Ness on 27 November 2021.







Herring gull

Common throughout the area.





Lesser black-backed gull

Common. These birds were on the Isle of May, where they breed in large numbers.







Sandwich tern

A common migrant on the coast.









Bridled tern

A rare vagrant. This bird was at Elie in late August 2025.









Roseate tern

A scarce migrant at the coast. This adult was at Fife Ness in late August 2025.





Common tern

A migrant at the coast. These birds were at Ruddon's Point in August 2020.









Arctic tern

Good numbers breed on the Isle of May, where visitors to the island must run a gauntlet to and from the boat.







Black tern

A scarce migrant. This juvenile was at Carnbee Reservoir in mid-September 2025.









Great skua

Recorded on passage, most often at Fife Ness.









Arctic skua

Often seen passing Fife Ness.







Little auk

Occurs offshore, and in the right conditions, birds can be seen from coastal seawatching points. These birds were at Fife Ness.







Brünnich’s guillemot

This young bird appeared in Anstruther Harbour in Sept 2016. Unfortunately, it did not survive.





Guillemot

Large numbers breed on the cliff ledges of the Isle of May (above). The bird below right is a bridled guillemot, fishing off the Isle of May.









Razorbill

Breeds on the cliffs of the Isle of May and is often recorded off the coast of Fife.









Black guillemot

Occasionally recorded off Fife, this bird was at the Isle of May in late July 2015.







Puffin

Breeds in large numbers on the Isle of May. Birds are often seen passing Fife Ness, which is where the shot on the right was taken.









Red-throated diver

Common outside the breeding season around the coast.









Black-throated diver

Small numbers occur on passage and in winter. The bird above and below left flew past Fife Ness in mid-October 2019, while the bird below right was at Leven in late January 2023.







Pacific diver

Just the second Scottish record, this bird was off Leven in January 2023.







Great northern diver

Small numbers occur outside the breeding season, mostly flying past Fife Ness.









White-billed diver

Usually a rare vagrant in Fife, this bird was at Fife Ness in late February 2026, and was one of at least 12 recorded along the Forth coast of Fife at that time.









Fulmar

Breeds on cliffs around the coast.





Sooty shearwater

A passage migrant, often recorded passing Fife Ness.







Manx shearwater

Passage occurs and is occasionally heavy.
These birds were passing Fife Ness.









Gannet

Commonly seen passing or fishing. The large Bass Rock colony is only a few miles to the south.









Cormorant

Common around the coast and increasingly inland.









Shag

Common around the coast and large numbers breed on the Isle of May.







Grey heron

Common, often seen fishing along rocky coasts, around edges of lochs, or in burns.







Great white egret

A rare vagrant that is becoming a regular visitor to Fife. This one was at Cameron Reservoir in early October 2024.





Little egret

Until recently, a rare vagrant. It is now often recorded. These birds were at Cocklemill Burn by Shell Bay.









Osprey

Mostly a passage migrant in small numbers in the East Neuk. These photos were taken at Cameron Reservoir using a macro lens, as I was recording insects at the time!





Sparrowhawk

Widespread but not numerous.







Goshawk

The goshawk is becoming more common in Fife, and has now been recorded from a few sites in the East Neuk.









Marsh harrier

An occasional visitor on migration. This female was at Kilconquhar.





Hen harrier

An occasional winter visitor. This immature male was at Cameron Reservoir in mid-March 2022.







Common buzzard

Widespread, following its return to the area in recent decades.









Barn owl

This bird hovered over me as I was recording moths at Bankhead Moss. Photos taken in nearly complete dark with a macro lens, hence poor quality!







Long-eared owl

An occasional migrant and scarce breeding bird. This bird unusually was hunting in day-light at Ruddon's Point in mid-July 2021.









Short-eared owl

A migrant in small numbers. These birds were at Kilminning.







Tawny owl

Resident in suitable woodland. The adult above was at Magus Muir, while the young birds below were at Keil's Den. Photos taken with a macro lens while mothing!







Kingfisher

A scarce species in the East Neuk. This female was at Cocklemill Burn by Shell Bay in cold weather in late November 2023.





Great spotted woodpecker

Widely distributed, and often visits bird tables.









Green woodpecker

Unusual in the East Neuk. This bird flew over Kilminning 0n 28 Apr 2019.



Kestrel

Kestrels have become relatively uncommon, but still occur in small numbers, especially around the coast.









Merlin

Occurs in small numbers outside the breeding season. Above and below left is a female hoping to surprise a bird on the beach at Kings Barns in late August 2020. The one below right was hunting at Bankhead Moss in mid-November 2025.







Peregrine

The above bird was on the Isle of May in September 2021. The bird below landed in front of the Fife Bird Club hide at Fife Ness, and stood looking out to sea for some time.







Red-backed shrike

A rare migrant that used to be recorded more frequently. This immature was at Kilminning in late October 2020, an unusually late date for the species.







Long-tailed shrike

A bird from Asia that has only been recorded once in the UK previous to this one, which was by Crail in July 2026.







Woodchat shrike

A very rare migrant to Fife. This one was by the Dreel Burn north of Pittenweem in late April 2025.







Jay

Occurs in small numbers in suitable habitats. Keepering activities probably keep numbers low.





Magpie

A relatively recent arrival in the East Neuk, and now a common resident.









Jackdaw

Common throughout.





Rook

Common, especially in farmland.







Carrion crow

Common. Timid in farmland, but approachable on the coast and in the villages.









Raven

Currently spreading in Fife, and now frequent in the East Neuk.





Waxwing

Autumn migrant and winter visitor in small numbers. These were at Upper Kilminning on 28 October 2023.





Coal tit

Common in woodland, and migrants often occur at the coast.





Blue tit

Common in woodland, hedgerows and gardens.





Great tit

Common in woodland, hedgerows and gardens.





Skylark

Common in arable farmland and in coastal habitats.









Sand martin

Common migrant and summer visitor.







Swallow

Common migrant and summer visitor.









House martin

Common migrant and summer visitor.









Long-tailed tit

Common in woodland, and increasingly coming to bird feeders.









Wood warbler

A rare migrant in the East Neuk. This bird was singing at Denburn Wood on 26 April 2019.







Yellow-browed warbler

A regular arrival at the coast in small numbers in autumn.







Pallas's warbler

A rare migrant at the coast. This one was at Lower Kilminning on 30 October 2023. The above shot shows it pursuing a tiny fly.









Dusky warbler

A rare migrant in Fife. This bird was at Kilminning in October 2021.





Willow warbler

A common migrant and summer visitor.









Chiffchaff

A common migrant at the coast, with an increasing breeding population. Occasionally recorded in winter. These birds were October migrants at Kilminning.









Arctic warbler

A rare migrant on the east coast of Scotland. This one was at Fife Ness on 11 Sept 2022.







Sedge warbler

A common summer migrant in wetland and farmland habitats.







Reed warbler

A rare passage migrant. This bird was apparently holding territory at Kilconquhar in late May and early June 2021.





Icterine warbler

A scarce migrant. This was one of two birds at Lower Kilminning on 22 May 2021.







Grasshopper warbler

A scarce summer migrant. This was a newly-arrived bird in late April 2024 in the ungrazed marshy field south of the Moss.





Blackcap

Breeds in small numbers and is often recorded as a migrant. A few winter. The male below right was singing at Kilconquhar, while the females/immatures were October migrants at Fife Ness.







Garden warbler

Breeds in small numbers and occurs at the coast as a migrant. This bird was at Kilminning in early October 2020.







Barred warbler

A rare migrant. The bird above and to the right was a long-staying bird at Kilminning in late Sept 2017. The one below was in the same bush on 1st October 2019!









Lesser whitethroat

A scarce passage migrant at the coast. These birds were at the Patch at Fife Ness in October, and the one on the right at Lower Kilminning in May.









Whitethroat

A common summer migrant to farmland and the coast. The bird on the right is shaking off raindrops.









Goldcrest

Most common as an autumn migrant in the East Neuk.









Firecrest

A rare passage migrant and winter visitor to Fife. This one was at Kilminning in late October 2023.









Wren

Common throughout.









Treecreeper

Small numbers in suitable habitat. These were at Bankhead Moss.





Starling

Very common throughout the year. These birds are in winter plumage.







Siberian thrush

Rare vagrant. This elusive bird was photographed at Kilminning on 2 October 2020.



Song thrush

Common but declining breeding bird, and some migrants occur at the coast.





Mistle thrush

Widespread but not numerous in both summer and winter.







Redwing

Large numbers arrive in autumn, with some birds over-wintering.







Blackbird

Common resident and winter visitor.







Fieldfare

Large numbers arrive in autumn, with some remaining through the winter.









Ring ouzel

Migrant in small numbers, usually at the coast. This bird was at Kilminning in October 2019.





Spotted flycatcher

Migrant and increasingly rare breeder. This bird was a migrant at Kilminning.





Robin

Common resident and migrant.





Red-breasted flycatcher

A rare migrant, the bird above and to the right was at Fife Ness Muir ('The Patch') in late October and early November 2018. The bird below was on the coast path west of Fife Ness in early October 2020, and the one below right at Lower Kilminning in early May 2024.









Pied flycatcher

Mostly an autumn migrant. It is unusual to see a spring male; the one below was at Kilminning on 26 April 2019. The above bird was at Kilminning in mid-September 2020.







Black redstart

Scarce migrant and occasional winter visitor. The immature male bottom left was at Roome Bay, Crail in January 2020. The other shots are all of a male at Elie harbour in December 2020.









Redstart

A migrant in small numbers, mostly at the coast. This one was at Lower Kilminning in mid-September 2025.





Whinchat

Coastal migrant in small numbers. These birds were at Kilminning in late July 2020.









Stonechat

Occurs throughout the year in suitable coastal habitat.







Stejneger’s stonechat

A rare vagrant from Asia. This one was near Crail in late October 2022.







Wheatear

A common migrant around the coast.









Dipper

Sparsely distributed. The bird above and below right was on the Lade Braes, while the bird below left was on Kenly Water.







Tree sparrow

Patchily distributed, but can be numerous where it occurs.







House sparrow

Common resident on farms and in towns and villages.





Dunnock

Common throughout the year.





Yellow wagtail

Scarce passage migrant and has bred. The adult (below right) was near Crail in early May 2019, while the juvenile was at Balcomie Beach in late August 2021.







Grey wagtail

Occurs in small numbers. The male above and female right were at Cameron Reservoir. The bathing female below was at the Lade Braes in St Andrews, and the female below right on the beach at Roome Bay, Crail.









Pied wagtail

Small numbers throughout the area. The bird below left is a continental white wag-tail, one of four at Balcomie beach in early May 2019. The (ringed) female above and the male below right were a pair holding territory at Balcomie Beach in 2020. The juvenile on the right was at Kings Barns.









Richard’s pipit

A rare vagrant from Asia. This bird was at Ruddon’s Point in late November 2020.









Meadow pipit

Common in winter.









Water pipit

Rare winter visitor from the continent. This bird was at the Cocklemill Burn in December 2018 and January 2019.







Rock pipit

Common along the coast.









Chaffinch

Common throughout the year.







Brambling

Occurs as a migrant in autumn, and some stay in variable numbers through the winter.





Bullfinch

Occurs in suitable habitat throughout the year. The above male was one of a small flock at Bankhead Moss, and the one below left was one of a pair at Kilminning. The female below is a northern bullfinch, and was one of a pair at Lower Kilminning in early November 2023.







Common rosefinch

A rare migrant. This bird was at Kilminning in late September and early October 2020.







Greenfinch

Common throughout the year.









Twite

Winter visitor in small numbers. The birds above and below left were at Wormiston in December 2017. The birds right and below right were at Cocklemill Burn by Shell Bay in late November 2023.









Linnet

Common, and can form large flocks in winter, especially near the coast.









Lesser redpoll

Present usually in small numbers in suitable habitat, mostly outside the breeding season. This bird was at Fife Ness in early October 2020.







Goldfinch

Common throughout the year.





Common crossbill

Uncommon and, except when migrating, usually occurs in areas with mature spruce trees. The male above and female below right were part of a flock of seven at Bankhead moss in early February 2024, while the male below left was at Upper Kilminning in late October 2023.







Siskin

Occurs usually in small numbers in the East Neuk. A few birds may breed. The birds above and below left were part of a flock at Kilconquhar in January 2020, while the birds on the right were at Cameron Reservoir in November 2018 and 2023.









Lapland bunting

Scarce passage migrant and a few occur in stubble fields by the east coast in winter. These images were taken by Kenly Water in December 2020.









Snow bunting

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor at the coast. This bird was at Fife Ness in mid-November 2021.





Corn bunting

Decreasing, but still common in arable farmland around Crail, Anstruther and Pittenweem.







Yellowhammer

Common throughout the year in suitable habitat.









Reed bunting

Common in suitable habitat.





