Birds of Tentsmuir

S.T. Buckland

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A selection of photos illustrating some of the bird species of Tentsmuir. All photos were taken either in Tentsmuir or within two miles of the forest.

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Brent goose

A small flock arrives on the Eden Estuary each autumn. The above birds were at Outhead, and the flock below was by the estuary near Kincaple.

Canada goose

Occurs at Morton Lochs and on the Eden estuary.

Barnacle goose

Many barnacle geese overfly Fife on passage. These birds stopped off at the Eden estuary for a few days in October 2021. The images were taken at Edenside.

Greylag goose

A regular visitor to Morton Lochs.

Pink-footed goose

Many thousand roost on the Eden Estuary or at Tentsmuir Point in autumn and winter, flying out to feed in stubble fields each morning. The birds above and to the right were at Tentsmuir Point at dawn. The bird below landed on the beach at Tentsmuir Point.

Mute swan

A regular at Morton Lochs and on the Eden Estuary. The cob above was pursuing intruders that had taken refuge up against the railway hide at Morton Lochs. The bird below took off from in front of the Berry hide at Morton Lochs.

Whooper swan

A regular winter visitor at the Eden Estuary, with birds occurring occasionally at Morton Lochs (bottom right) and Tentsmuir Point (above).

Shelduck

Common on the Eden Estuary and occurs along the sand dunes of Tentsmuir.

Garganey

A very scarce migrant to the Tentsmuir area. The drake above was at Morton Lochs at the end of May and start of June 2021, while the pair below were at the North Haugh Pond in late March 2022.

Shoveler

Not common at Tentsmuir. Two pairs were south of Kinshaldy in late March 2021. This is one of the drakes.

Gadwall

Small numbers occur regularly at Morton Lochs.

Wigeon

Common on the Eden Estuary and at Morton Lochs. Also occurs on the sea.

American wigeon

A rare visitor to Britain. This young male was on eht Eden Estuary in late April 2023.

Mallard

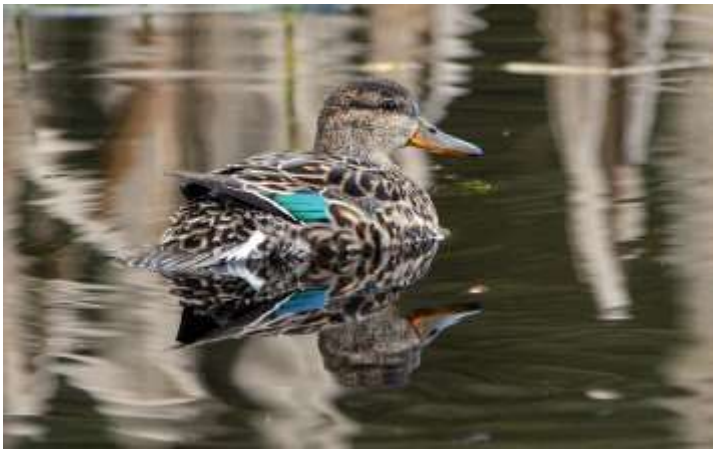
Common at Morton Lochs and the Eden Estuary, and also occurs on the sea.

Pintail

Pintail usually only occur in small numbers in Fife, but the birds below were part of a group of around 110 birds in Balgove Bay on the Eden Estuary in early March 2023. The pair above were at Morton Lochs in November 2024.

Teal

Common at Morton Lochs and the Eden Estuary, and also occurs on the sea.



Green-winged teal

A North American species that is very similar to the Eurasian teal. The green-winged teal is seldom recorded in Fife. The drake below left was at Morton Lochs in November 2024. The other photos are of a drake on the Eden estuary in late April 2026.

Tufted duck

Common at Morton Lochs.

Scaup

The above birds were in the large flock of sea ducks off the West Sands. Those below were in the Eden Estuary by Guardbridge.

Eider

Common around the coast. Large numbers congregate off Tentsmuir Point for much of the year (below).

Surf scoter

Rare winter visitor. These two drakes were in the flock of scoters, long-tailed ducks and scaup off the West Sands in January and February 2019.

Velvet scoter

Many join the large common scoter flock off Kinshaldy and the West Sands. The image on the right shows the difference between a drake velvet scoter and a drake common scoter.

Common scoter

Very large numbers occur in winter off Kinshaldy and the West Sands. The male below was at Tentsmuir Point.

Long-tailed duck

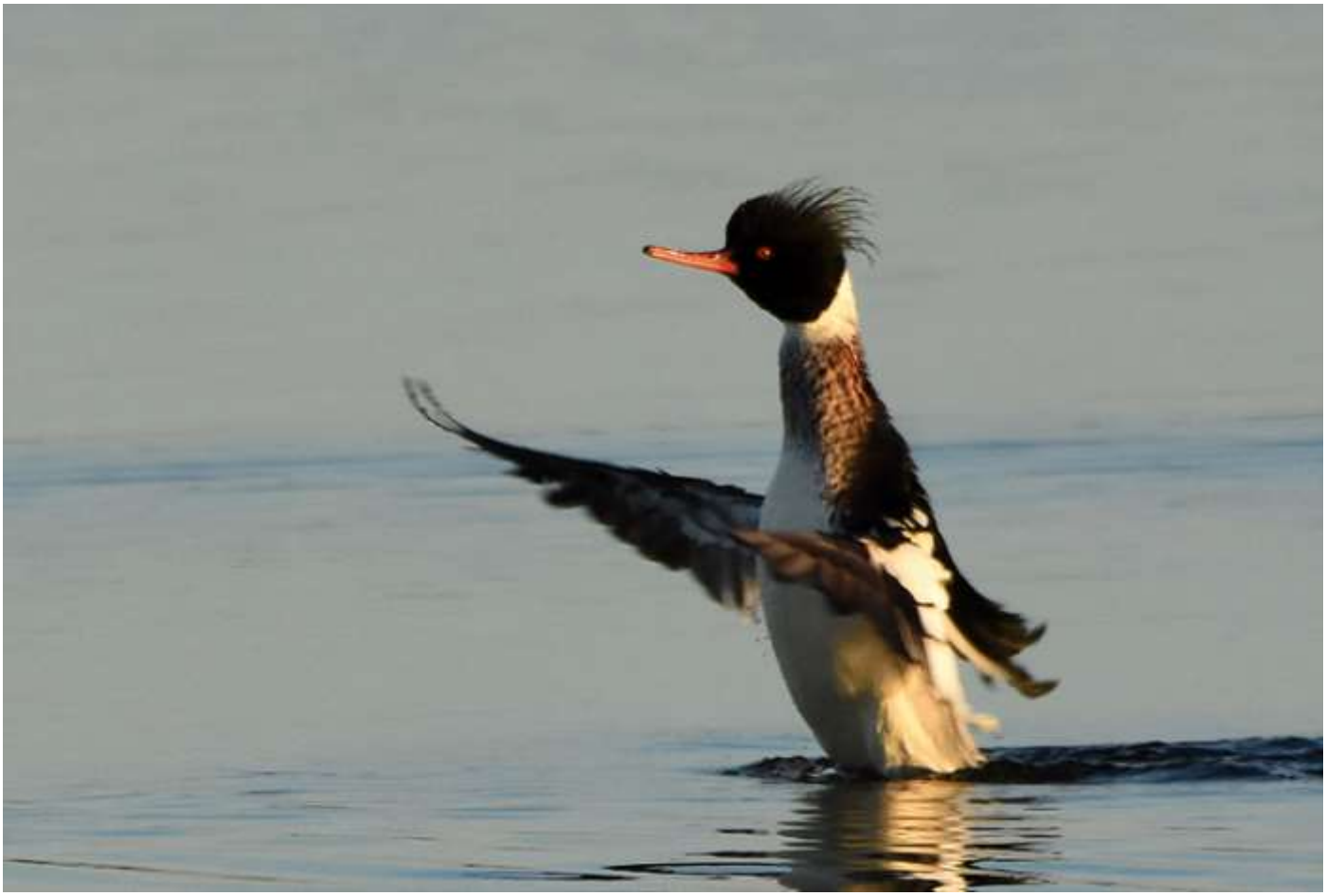
Usually seen on the sea off Tentsmuir Point (above and right), Kinshaldy, Eden Mouth or the West Sands, but a few enter the Eden Estuary (below).

Goldeneye

Common at the Eden Estuary, at Morton Lochs, and on the sea.

Goosander

Common in the Eden Estuary and occurs at Morton Lochs.



Red-breasted merganser

Common off the beach at Kinshaldy and around Tentsmuir Point. The birds above and below were on the lagoon at the southern end of Tentsmuir Point NNR. The one to the right was fishing in Tayport harbour.

Grey partridge

Resident in small numbers in suitable habitat. These were between West Sands beach and the golf courses.

Pheasant

Common resident.

Red-legged partridge

Released by some farms and estates for shooting. Occasionally, birds make their way to the western edge of Tentsmuir Forest. The two below left (the above bird was one of these) at Morton Lochs, while the two below right were near the road to Kinshaldy, at the edge of the forest.

Swift

The swifts shown here were feeding above the dunes at Kinshaldy.

Cuckoo

Now an unusual sight at Tentsmuir. This juvenile was just north of Eden Mouth in early September 2020.

Feral pigeon

Feral pigeons are present in the farmland and built-up areas west of Tentsmuir Forest. These birds were at Tayport Harbour.

Stock dove

Not common at Tentsmuir. The birds below were at the western edge of the forest by the road to Kinshaldy, while the above bird was at Edenside by Guardbridge.

Woodpigeon

Very common in and around Tentsmuir. The bird below right is newly-fledged.

Collared dove

Common in the built-up areas around Tentsmuir. These were at Tayport.

Water rail

Often heard at Morton Lochs, but rarely seen. This bird passed in front of the Berry hide in December 2020.

Moorhen

Plentiful at Morton Lochs.

Coot

Numerous at Morton Lochs.

Crane

A rare migrant in the Tentsmuir area. This one was by the Eden Estuary in mid-February 2026.

Little grebe

Common breeding bird at Morton Lochs, and common outside the breeding season on the Eden Estuary and around Tayport.

Great crested grebe

A few birds, including the juvenile below right, feed off Kinshaldy outside the breeding season. The juvenile above was on the lagoon at Tentsmuir Point. The adult was in the Eden Estuary by Outhead.

Slavonian grebe

A number winter off the Tentsmuir coast, with some entering the Eden Estuary.

Oystercatcher

Very common.

Avocet

A rare visitor to Fife. This one was on the Eden Estuary in late February 2025.

Lapwing

Common outside the breeding season in the Eden Estuary, and may be seen in fields or flying over elsewhere.

Golden plover

A large flock appears on the Eden Estuary in late autumn and winter, and can sometimes be seen in nearby fields.

Grey plover

Up to 150 birds occur along the beaches of Tentsmuir Point NNR and in the Eden estuary in autumn and winter.

Ringed plover

Common along the beaches of Tentsmuir and West Sands.

Whimbrel

Passage migrant in small numbers. These were four birds at Edenside by Guardbridge in late April 2019.

Curlew

Common outside the breeding season on the Eden Estuary, along the beaches of Tentsmuir and West Sands, and on fields, especially at high tide.

Bar-tailed godwit

Small numbers occur outside the breeding season along the sandy beaches of Tentsmuir and the West Sands. The birds below left were part of a high-tide roost of around 2000 birds at Tentsmuir Point, of which nearly 200 were bar-tailed godwits.

Black-tailed godwit

Numerous on the Eden Estuary outside the breeding season.

Hudsonian godwit

Only the fourth British record, this bird, shown below left with a black-tailed godwit, was on the Eden Estuary in November and December 2020.

Turnstone

There is little suitable habitat along the shores around Tentsmuir, but the rocky areas between Tayport Heath and Tayport Harbour (where these images were taken) can hold good numbers, and a few occur on the rocks along the south shore of the Eden Estuary, by the golf courses.

Knot

Winters in good numbers on the Eden Estuary. The birds above and below right were coming into the high-tide roost in front of the Fife Bird Club hide, while the bird below left was at the Coble Shore. The bird coming out of summer plumage on the right was at Tentsmuir Point in mid-August 2021.

Ruff

A scarce passage migrant. The above bird was one of three on the Eden Estuary in early November 2022, while the one below was there in late September 2025.

Curlew sandpiper

Scarce migrant. The above bird was with dunlin and ringed plovers at the lagoon at Tentsmuir Point in mid-September 2020, and the others were on the Eden estuary by Guardbridge in early September 2020.

Sanderling

A few remain for much of the year along the sandy beaches of Tentsmuir and the West Sands. They are usually very confiding, running past within a few feet if you stay still.

Dunlin

Numerous outside the breeding season on the Eden Estuary, with smaller numbers on the sandy beaches of Tentsmuir and in the Tay Estuary.

Purple sandpiper

The coastal habitat at Tentsmuir is unsuitable for this species, but there is suitable rocky habitat at Tayport and at the southern end of the West Sands. These birds were on the rocks between the harbour and the castle at St Andrews.

Little stint

A scarce migrant on the Eden Estuary. These three birds were at the lagoon at the southern end of Tentsmuir Point NNR on 14 October 2017.

White-rumped sandpiper

A vagrant from North America. This was one of two on the Eden Estuary at Guardbridge in early October 2025.

Woodcock

A common but largely nocturnal wader. These were at Tentsmuir Point. The one in flight below was photographed doing its roding display flight.

Snipe

Sometimes recorded among the dunes. The flying bird was one of three birds just north of Edenmouth in November 2018. The other bird was by the railway hide at Morton Lochs in April 2019.

Common sandpiper

Common sandpipers are seldom recorded in the Tentsmuir area, and rarely occur in Scotland in winter, but this bird was at Edenside on 2 December 2021.

Lesser yellowlegs

A wanderer from North America. This bird was at St Andrews in July 2024.

Redshank

Very common on the Eden Estuary and along the coast.

Spotted redshank

A scarce migrant. The two birds on the right were on the Eden Estuary in October 2020, while the single bird in the other photos was there in September 2020.

Greenshank

A regular migrant on the Eden Estuary, and the occasional bird may stay for much of the winter. Possibly the same bird wintered at Tentsmuir Point for three successive winters, 2016/17 to 2018/19 (above and below right).

Kittiwake

Common out at sea, but usually only small numbers, mostly juveniles, visit Tentsmuir. These juveniles were by the lagoon in August 2020 (below right) and off the beach just east of the lagoon in September 2020.

Black-headed gull

Very common in open habitats. The above bird has caught and is eating a scorpion fish.

Little gull

Sometimes occurs on migration. The above birds were at Tentsmuir Point in late July 2020. while those below were there in mid-July 2018. The bird on the right was there in late December 2020.

Common gull

Very common in open habitats. (There is one black-headed gull in the above shot.)

Great black-backed gull

Common around the coast and in the Eden Estuary.

Glaucous gull

A very scarce species in Fife. This juvenile was at Tayport in mid-January 2026.

Iceland gull

A scarce winter visitor in Fife. This one was at Guardbridge in late February 2026.

Herring gull

Very common around the coast and on farm-land.

Lesser black-backed gull

Passage migrant, usually in small numbers at Tentsmuir. The birds above abd below were at Tentsmuir Point. The one on the right was with a great black-backed gull at Guardbridge.

Sandwich tern

A regular migrant. These birds were at Tentsmuir Point NNR.

Little tern

Now quite a rare migrant. This adult and juvenile were at Tentsmuir Point in mid-August 2021, with a large group of sandwich, common and arctic terns.

Common tern

A regular migrant. This juvenile (below left) was at the lagoon at the southern boundary of Tentsmuir Point NNR in mid-October 2017. The adults were with the large number of terns that visit Tentsmuir Point in August.

Arctic tern

This mixed flock of terns was at Tentsmuir Point NNR in August and September 2018. Most of the birds are arctic terns. The adult and young below were at the same location.

Arctic skua

Commonly recorded off Fife. These two birds were taking advantage of a large gathering of terns at Tentsmuir Point in late August and September 2018.

Little auk

Occurs offshore in late autumn and winter, usually too far offshore to be seen from Tentsmuir. The one below flew west past Tayport in mid-December 2022, while the one above flew past the Eden Centre hide during gale-force winds on 20 October 2023.

Guillemot

Small numbers feed off Kinshaldy beach and at Tentsmuir Point. These birds were in the Eden Estuary by Guardbridge.

Razorbill

Small numbers feed off Kinshaldy beach and at Tentsmuir Point. The bird on the right was by the Eden Centre at Guardbridge during gale-force winds, while the other birds were part of an unusually large aggregation in the Eden estuary in September 2021.

Black guillemot

Common on the west and north coasts of Scotland, but rarely recorded on the east coast. This bird was at the west end of the Abertay Sands, in the deeper water at the mouth of the Tay.

Red-throated diver

Red-throated divers feed off Kinshaldy outside the breeding season, and sometimes come close to shore. One of these birds (below right) is wearing a transmitter. Although it is no longer transmitting, the bird is thought to breed in west Greenland. The above bird was fishing in Tayport Harbour, and the one below left was off Tentsmuir Point.

Black-throated diver

Appreciably less common than red-throated divers off Kinshaldy.

Great northern diver

A scarce winter visitor to Tentsmuir. This bird was at Tayport in mid-February 2026.

Storm petrel

These tiny birds are seldom close enough to land to be seen. These were by the Eden Centre at Guardbridge during prolonged gale-force winds on 20 October 2023.

Leach’s petrel

Less common than storm petrels, and recorded from land even less often. This one was by the Eden Centre at Guardbridge during prolonged gale-force winds on 20 October 2023.

Fulmar

Common off of Tentsmuir, and a few birds breed on the cliffs by the aquarium at St Andrews.

White stork

A rare vagrant in Scotland, this one was circling high above Guardbridge on 15 April 2023.

Gannet

Birds from the Bass Rock often feed off Tentsmuir, and birds can often be seen on passage.

Cormorant

Common around the coast and in the Eden Estuary.

Shag

The water habitats around Tentsmuir are more suited to cormorants than shags, but a fewcan occasionally be seen off Tentsmuir Point, which is where these birds were photographed. The ringed bird is from the Isle of May.

Spoonbill

Rare migrant. These birds were on the Eden Estuary in late May 2024.

Cattle egret

This one was at Morton Lochs in mid-August 2026. It was just the third to be recorded in Fife. As it is expanding its range northwards, more are likely to occur.

Grey heron

Common, especially at Morton Lochs and around the coast.

Little egret

Spreading northwards, and is now present in good numbers on the Eden Estuary. It also occurs at Morton Lochs and at the lagoons at the south end of Tentsmuir Point NNR.

Osprey

Often occurs, mostly in late summer, when birds fish on the Eden Estuary.

Sparrowhawk

Present in small numbers. The above bird was at Reres Wood, while those below were hunting along the Eden Estuary.

Marsh harrier

Breeds at the Tay reedbeds, but only rarely seen at Tentsmuir. This female was at Morton Lochs on 28 December 2013.

Hen harrier

This ring-tail flew up the Eden Estuary pursued by two crows in early October 2025.

White-tailed eagle

An iconic species at Tentsmuir, following its reintroduction. The above shot was of a bird flying over Tentsmuir Point, while the one below left was flying over Morton Lochs. The bird below right had just finished eating a pink-footed goose at Tentsmuir Point.

Common buzzard

The most frequently encountered bird of prey at Tentsmuir.

Short-eared owl

Occasional migrant. This bird was in the dunes north of Eden Mouth in late October 2018.

Kingfisher

Sometimes breeds at Morton Lochs and often occurs in the Eden Estuary outside the breeding season.

Great spotted woodpecker

Resident, and it often comes to the bird feeders at Morton Lochs.

Green woodpecker

Occurs in Tentsmuir, often coming out of the forest to feed on open ground or in the line of alders at Tentsmuir Point NNR.

Kestrel

Less common than it once was, but can occasionally be seen for example at Tentsmuir Point (below right) and by the West Sands (above and below left).

Merlin

An occasional visitor. The two birds below were at Tentsmuir Point, while the bird above and right was at Edenside.

Peregrine

Regularly seen on the Eden Estuary, where the images below and to the right were taken. The above image was taken at the northern edge of Tentsmuir Forest, by the Firth of Tay.

Jay

A species that has spread north in recent decades. It is resident in the area around Morton Lochs.

Magpie

A recent arrival to the area. These birds were at Tentsmuir Point (below left) and Guard-bridge.

Jackdaw

Common in built-up areas around Tentsmuir, although not often see in the forest or along the shores.

Rook

Common. Can be seen foraging in the dunes and on the grass behind West Sands, where it is far more approachable than in farmland. The photo below left was taken at the small rookery at the south end of Tentsmuir, next to Leuchars army base.

Carrion crow

Common. Frequently forages on the beaches and dunes where, like the rook, it tends to be far more approachable than on farmland.

Hybrid crow

Hooded crows are mostly restricted to the north-west in Scotland, but sometimes wander further afield, as do hybrids between hooded and carrion crows. This hybrid crow was at Tayport in mid-January 2026.

Raven

The raven has spread in recent years in Fife, and has now reached Tentsmuir. These birds were hassling a buzzard in February 2019.

Waxwing

Occasional winter visitor, usually during a 'waxwing year'. The bird below was one of a flock at Leuchars in February 2017, and the others were part of a flock at Guardbridge in January 2024.

Coal tit

Common throughout Tentsmuir Forest, as it is more suited to coniferous woodland than either blue or great tits.

Blue tit

Common at Morton Lochs and wherever there is suitable habitat.

Great tit

As for the blue tit, common at Morton Lochs and wherever there is suitable habitat.

Skylark

Common among the dunes and in farm-land.

Shore lark

A rare visitor, these two birds wintered south of the lagoon at the southern boundary of Tentsmuir Point NNR in 2016/17.

Sand martin

Regular migrant and summer visitor. These birds were at a small colony by the Eden Estuary.

Swallow

Regular migrant and summering birds sometimes feed above the dunes.

House martin

Regular migrant, occurring along the dunes and at the Eden estuary.

Long-tailed tit

Resident at Morton Lochs, Kinshaldy and in other suitable habitat, mostly at the forest edge. A few pale-headed birds, like the one shown bottom right, occur and may be continental birds.

Yellow-browed warbler

A species that should migrate to southern Asia, but which turns up in small numbers along the east coast each autumn. This bird was at Morton Lochs on 3 October 2019.

Willow warbler

A common summer visitor to Tentsmuir.

Chiffchaff

Breeds in small numbers at Morton Lochs and in suitable habitat elsewhere.

Iberian chiffchaff

A rare vagrant to the UK, it is intermediate between chiffchaff and willow warbler, and has a very distinctive song. This one was holding a territory in Tentsmuir Forest in June 2025.

Sedge warbler

A summer visitor that breeds at Morton Lochs and in suitable habitat elsewhere.

Blackcap

Breeds in small numbers at Morton Lochs and in suitable habitat elsewhere.

Whitethroat

A summer migrant that breeds in small numbers in farmland to the west of the forest.

Goldcrest

The smallest British bird, and common at Tentsmuir, especially in winter, when resident numbers are supplemented by winter visitors.

Wren

Very common resident.

Treecreeper

Common resident in the woods of Tentsmuir. It often joins tit flocks outside the breeding season.

Starling

Common in the built-up areas and farmland close to Tentsmuir.

Song thrush

Small numbers, mostly in edge habitat.

Mistle thrush

Present all year, mostly in edge habitats, such as where the forest meets the dunes at Tentsmuir Point.

Redwing

Migrant and winter visitor, often occurring with fieldfares.

Blackbird

Common resident and winter visitor.

Fieldfare

Migrant and winter visitor. It used to feed in large numbers on sea buckthorn berries at Kinshaldy, but this useful but invasive shrub has now been eradicated.

Spotted flycatcher

Increasingly rare summer visitor. This bird was holding territory at Morton Lochs in 2017.

Robin

Common throughout the year, although numbers increase each autumn with migrant birds arriving.

Whinchat

A scarce migrant. This bird was at Outhead in late July 2020.

Stonechat

Common amongst the dunes of Tentsmuir and West Sands.

Wheatear

Common migrant in coastal habitats.

Tree sparrow

Resident by the Eden Estuary in and around Guardbridge.

House sparrow

Numerous in built-up areas near Tentsmuir (Tayport, Leuchars and Guardbridge).

Dunnock

Common resident.

Grey wagtail

A scarce visitor to Tentsmuir. This bird was at Guardbridge.

Pied wagtail

Present all year. The white wagtail (below right) is an occasional migrant.

Meadow pipit

Regularly winters and breeds amongst the dunes of Tentsmuir. The two birds below were disputing a territory at Kinshaldy.

Red-throated pipit

A rare vagrant. This bird was with meadow pipits and pied wagtails on the beach between Kinshaldy and Tentsmuir Point on 31 October 2019. Identification not certain.

Rock pipit

There is suitable rocky habitat at Tayport and at St Andrews, but this species is less often seen on the sandy beaches of Tentsmuir. The bird below right was at Tentsmuir Point in October 2019, and was accompanied by a meadow pipit, while the bird below left was one of two there in October 2021. The above bird was at Tayport.

Chaffinch

Common throughout the year.

Brambling

Small numbers can occur in winter. The above bird was part of a small flock of chaffinches and bramblings in the beeches at the start of the Morton Lochs track in late December 2018. The bird below was at the forest edge at Tentsmuir Point in late March 2019.

Bullfinch

Occurs throughout the year. Fewer now winter at Kinshaldy, following the removal of sea buckthorn.

Greenfinch

Resident in suitable habitat.

Twite

Not often recorded in the Tentsmuir area. These birds were part of a large flock of around 120 at the Coble Shore in late November 2023.

Linnet

Common, and can form large flocks in winter amongst the dunes or on farmland.

Lesser redpoll

Usually occurs in small numbers.

Common crossbill

Variable numbers occur at Tentsmuir. These birds were at Tentsmuir Point.

Goldfinch

Common throughout the year.

Siskin

This species can be fairly numerous outside the breeding season, but numbers are variable. Occurs regularly at Morton Lochs and Tentsmuir Point.

Snow bunting

A few are sometimes present along the sandy beaches of Tentsmuir and West Sands in winter. Occasionally, a larger flock appears.

Yellowhammer

Occurs on farmland at the west edge of Tentsmuir Forest.

Reed bunting

Common throughout the year in suitable habitat.