

Birds of Carphin

S.T. Buckland

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Carphin Farm lies between Luthrie and Norman's Law. An ongoing rewilding programme is creating varied habitat which attracts a wide variety of wildlife. Illustrated here are the 87 species that I have photographed at Carphin. I have also recorded, but not managed to photograph, a further four species: quail, grey partridge, common sandpiper and cuckoo. I'm grateful to Stuart Paul, Briony Harcus, Ross Stuart and Billy Walker for welcoming me to Carphin, and giving me free access.

Steve Buckland

steve@st-andrews.ac.uk

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Greylag goose

Skeins of greylags can quite often be seen over Carphin.







Pink-footed goose

Often seen over Carphin, flying to or from the Tay Estuary, where many roost at night, or flying between feeding locations, or migrating in autumn or spring.





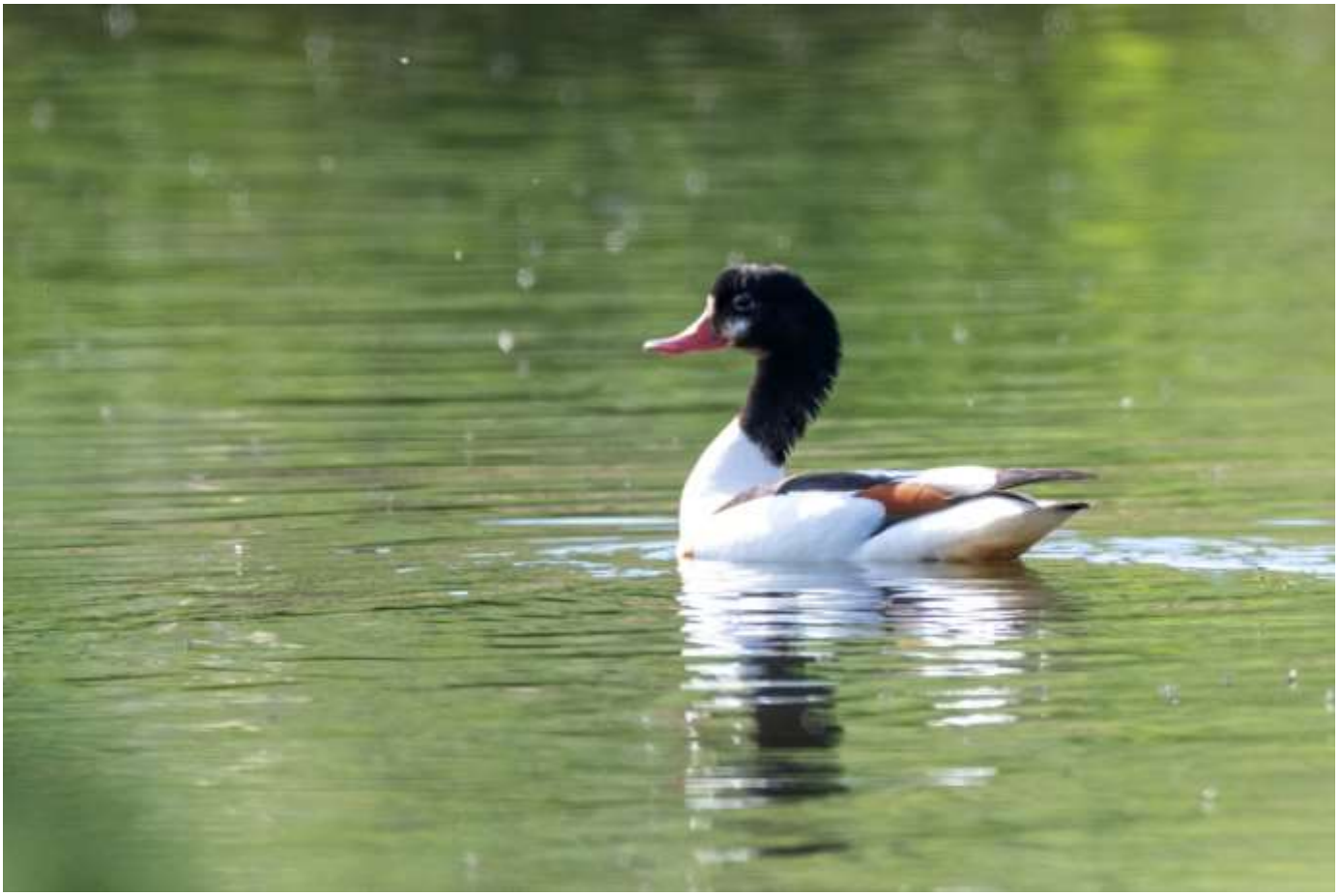


Mute swan

This lone bird was at Nancy’s Pond in early March 2026.







Shelduck

The bird above and below right put in an appearance in mid-May 2025. It landed briefly on the duck pond before taking off again. The three below left flew over Carphin in early May 2026.







Gadwall

Gadwall numbers in Fife have increased in recent years, though relatively few breed. Two pairs were on Nancy's Pond in mid- March 2026, and one pair remained for several months. The drake on the right was one of four there in October 2026.









Wigeon

A common winter visitor in Fife. These were at Nancy's Pond in November and December 2025.







Mallard

One of the species to benefit from the wildlife ponds on the estate.







Teal

Teal occasionally visit wildlife ponds on the estate. This pair was at Nancy's Pond in late November 2026.









Tufted duck

Tufted ducks are seen mostly at Nancy's Pond during the breeding season. The above brood was one of two there in late June 2026.







Pheasant

Pheasants are reared on the estate and released in autumn.







Red-legged partridge

Birds were released on the estate in autumn 2025.







Swift

Swifts often fly over the estate in summer.







Feral pigeon

Birds will occasionally wander onto the estate from a nearby farm.







Stock dove

A few pairs breed, and small numbers are present in winter.







Woodpigeon

Very common on the estate.







Water rail

This bird was at the duck pond (Nancy's Pond) in early October 2025, showing itself just as the light was failing.





Moorhen

Moorhens breed at Nancy's Pond. One of the young is shown below right.







Coot

The above bird was on Nancy's Pond in mid-April 2025, while the pair below raised a single young in 2026.







Little grebe

Little grebes breed at Nancy's Pond. In 2026, they hatched four young, despite building their nest in the open (right).









Curlew

This bird flew over Carphin in mid-March 2025.





Woodcock

A few occur in autumn and winter, mostly in woodland or open moorland.







Snipe

Snipe occasionally occur on the estate, mostly in late Autumn or winter during cold weather. This was one of two that flushed from the ditch by the boundary wall between Carphin and Norman's Law in late November 2026.

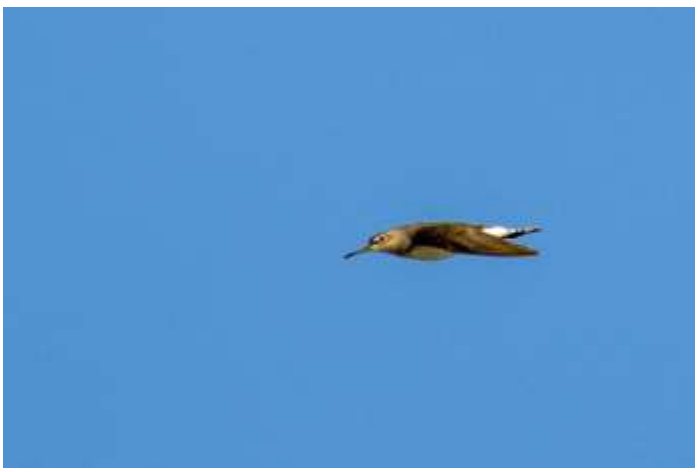




Green sandpiper

A passage migrant in small numbers in Fife. This one briefly visited the duck pond in early September 2025.







Black-headed gull

Often seen flying over the estate. Birds sometimes feed on grazing land on the estate, as for the mixed flock of common and black-headed gulls above.







Common gull

Often seen flying over the estate, and sometimes feeding in fields on the estate.







Great black-backed gull

Mostly a species of marine habitats, a few great black-backed gulls venture inland. This immature flew over the estate in late February 2025.



Herring gull

A frequent sight flying over the estate. A few will sometimes land, usually with common gulls. The one bottom right was ‘dancing’, to get worms to surface. The pattering of the feet is thought to mimic the sound of rain, which worms respond to.







Lesser black-backed gull

Lesser black-backed gulls are mostly absent in winter, returning from late February. The one above flew through in October 2026, and those below were present in April and May 2025.







Grey heron

The wildlife pools that have been created on the estate attract the occasional heron, especially in spring when frogs are active.







Sparrowhawk

Sparrowhawks are most evident at Carphin outside the breeding season, when there are mixed finch flocks present.







Common buzzard

A common sight over the estate.







Barn owl

Barn owls bred on the estate in 2025. Although barn owls sometimes hunt in daylight, I have only seen them hunt in darkness at Carphin. These shots were taken in the pre-dawn gloom after a night of mothing.





Long-eared owl

This long-eared owl was hunting at Black Craig at around 10pm one evening.







Tawny owl

This tawny owl came to investigate when I was recording moths. Photos taken with a macro lens and ring-flash turned up to maximum.





Great spotted woodpecker

Occurs mostly in areas with mature deciduous woodland.







Green woodpecker

A rare visitor to the estate, but one which may stay to breed as the habitat improves. This one first appeared in November 2025 and stayed through to late winter.







Kestrel

A frequent sight over Carphin.







Peregrine

A few peregrines winter in Fife, and wander widely. This juvenile flew through Carphin in mid-January 2026.





Jay

Jays are most numerous on the estate in autumn, when they come in search of acorns. At other times of the year, they are not always in evidence. These birds were gathering acorns in October 2025.







Magpie

Magpies occasionally wander onto the estate. The ones above and below left flew through, heading towards Norman's Law, while the one below right was at Wester Kinsleith.







Jackdaw

Common on the estate.







Rook

Common, mostly on or near the arable fields.







Carrion crow

A common species on the estate. The above two were mobbing the buzzard.







Raven

Ravens can often be seen on or flying over the higher ground on the estate.







Coal tit

Common in the wooded areas of the estate.







Blue tit

Common, especially in the areas of woodland.







Great tit

Common, especially in the areas of woodland.







Skylark

Occurs mostly from late February through the breeding season. It can often be heard singing high above fields on the estate.







Sand martin

This bird was hawking for insects with swallows and house martins, flying over Black Craig and the eastern slopes of Norman’s Law.



Swallow

A common summer migrant that can often be seen hawking for insects at Carphin. A few pairs breed on the estate.







House martin

House martins can often be seen hawking for insects over the estate.







Long-tailed tit

Small numbers occur on the estate throughout the year.





Willow warbler

A summer migrant. Climate change is causing declines in willow warbler numbers, and a corresponding increase in chiffchaff numbers, and chiffchaff numbers now exceed willow warbler numbers in some parts of Fife, a remarkable change from a few decades ago.







Chiffchaff

A summer migrant that arrives early in spring.







Blackcap

A summer migrant that arrives in early April. Female above and males below.







Garden warbler

Similar to the blackcap with a similar song. It is less common than the blackcap. Two birds arrived at the end of April 2025 and established territories. In 2026, there were at least three holding territories in May.





Whitethroat

A common summer migrant.







Goldcrest

A few breed in suitable woodland areas on the estate, with more arriving in autumn.







Wren

Common throughout the year on the estate.







Treecreeper

Occurs in woodland on the estate.







Starling

Common on the estate.







Song thrush

A few pairs breed, usually arriving on their territories in late February. The bird on the right was singing in the rain in late evening, with the light almost gone.









Mistle thrush

Small numbers occur on the estate.







Redwing

Common in autumn feeding on the estate or flying over, with a few staying into winter.









Blackbird

Common throughout the year.







Fieldfare

Common in autumn. Many just fly over on migration, while others stop to rest and feed, with some staying into winter.









Spotted flycatcher

Widespread in Fife as recently as the 1990s, the spotted flycatcher is now a rare summer visitor. A parent and three recently-fledged young were present in early August 2026. The photo below left shows the parent dealing with a wasp before feeding it to one of the young. Parent above, fledgling below right.







Robin

Common throughout the year on the estate.





Stonechat

Birds can sometimes be seen at Berry Brae, usually in spring or autumn. Male above and female below.





Tree sparrow

Seen mostly at the lower parts of the estate. The bird below right was one of a pair that bred near Carphin farmhouse in 2025.







House sparrow

Common in Luthrie, and occasionally, birds wander onto Carphin estate.







Dunnock

Common throughout the year.







Grey wagtail

Birds can sometimes be seen at Nancy’s Pond, Vale Pond or around Carphin farmhouse.







Pied wagtail

Most likely to be seen on the estate between late February and autumn. The fledgling below left was near Carphin farmhouse.







Meadow pipit

Occurs mostly in spring and autumn, with a few breeding on or near Black Craig.







Tree pipit

A few pairs breed in the far west of Fife, but otherwise, singing birds seldom occur in Fife. This one was near Wester Kinsleith on 20 April 2025. There was also one on the slopes of Berry Brae two days later. Both were doing frequent song flights.







Chaffinch

Common on the estate.







Brambling

A winter visitor to Fife, usually in small numbers. This one was in a mixed finch flock in early November 2025.







Bullfinch

A common species on the estate. Many arrive on the high ground around Black Craig in winter to feed on seeds of heather and other plants.







Greenfinch

A few occur, mostly on the lower parts of the estate in spring and summer, and in mixed finch flocks in autumn and winter.







Linnet

Linnets are typically associated with habitats where gorse grows. A few occur on the estate in summer, and a large flock forms in autumn and winter, to feed on various weed seeds. A number of goldfinches join the flock, together with a few chaffinches and greenfinches. A goldfinch and a greenfinch can be seen in the photo on the right.









Lesser redpoll

A patchily-distributed breeding species in Fife, and occurring a little more widely in winter, often with siskins.







Common crossbill

When pine cone crops fail in Scandinavia, large numbers of crossbills sometimes arrive in Scotland. These were at Carphin in October 2025.





Goldfinch

Common and sometimes numerous on the estate, benefitting from the abundant weed seeds.







Siskin

Like the lesser redpoll, a patchily-distributed breeding species in Fife, occurring a little more widely in winter. The ones below were with a goldfinch flock in December 2025. The male above was singing, and one of two males seen at sunset in late May, suggesting that they may have been breeding.







Yellowhammer

Common on parts of the estate close to arable fields. The birds below were part of an unusually large flock of about 60 birds at the north boundary of the estate, well away from any arable fields.







Reed bunting

Associated with wet habitats during the breeding season, the reed bunting often moves into dry habitats in winter. These were photographed in February and March.



