

Birds of the Howe of Fife

and surrounding area

S.T. Buckland

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A selection of photos illustrating some of the bird species of the Howe of Fife and of the higher ground surrounding the Howe. I have taken the boundaries of this wider area to be defined by the coast of the Firth of Tay from Newburgh to Balmerino, then through Gauldry, Logie, Dairsie, Pitscottie, Ceres, Teasses, Kennoway, Glenrothes and Auchmuirbridge, then along the Fife boundary back to Newburgh.

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21/November/2026

Index

American wigeon....21
Barn owl....100
Barnacle goose....6
Blackbird....141
Blackcap....130
Black-headed gull....76
Black-tailed godwit....60
Blue tit....119
Brambling....158
Bullfinch....159
Canada goose....5
Carrion crow....114
Caspian gull....83
Chaffinch....157
Chiffchaff....127
Coal tit....118
Collared dove....44
Common buzzard....99
Common crossbill....163
Common gull....79
Common sandpiper....70
Common tern....86
Coot....48
Cormorant....87
Crane....49
Cuckoo....40
Curlew....59
Curlew sandpiper....64
Dipper....148
Dunlin....66
Dunnock....151
Egyptian goose....15
Feral pigeon....41
Fieldfare....142
Gadwall....19
Garden warbler....131
Garganey....17
Glossy ibis....88
Goldcrest....133
Golden plover....55
Goldeneye....31
Goldfinch....164
Goosander....33
Goshawk....94
Grasshopper warbler....129
Great black-backed gull....80
Great crested grebe....52
Great spotted woodpecker....105
Great tit....120
Great white egret....90
Greater scaup....29
Green sandpiper....71
Green woodpecker....106
Greenfinch....160
Greenshank....75
Green-winged teal....25
Grey heron....89
Grey partridge....36
Grey wagtail....152
Greylag goose....8
Hen harrier....96
Herring gull....82
House martin....124
House sparrow....150
Hybrid crow....115
Iceland gull....81
Jackdaw....112
Jay....110
Kestrel....107
Kingfisher....104
Knot....62
Lapwing....54
Lesser black-backed gull....84
Lesser redpoll....162
Lesser scaup....30
Linnet....161
Little egret....91
Little grebe....50
Little gull....77
Little ringed plover....57
Long-eared owl....101
Long-tailed tit....125
Magpie....111
Mallard....22
Marsh harrier....95
Meadow pipit....154
Mediterranean gull....78
Merlin....108
Mistle thrush....139
Moorhen....47
Mute swan....13
Nuthatch....135
Osprey....92
Oystercatcher....53
Pectoral sandpiper....67
Peregrine....109
Pheasant....37
Pied wagtail....153
Pink-footed goose....10
Pintail....23
Pochard....26
Raven....116
Red grouse....35
Red kite....97
Red-breasted merganser....34
Red-legged partridge....38
Red-necked grebe....51
Redshank....72
Redwing....140
Reed bunting....168
Ringed plover....56
Ring-necked duck....27
Robin....144
Rock pipit....156
Rook....113
Ross's goose....7
Ruff....63
Sand martin....122
Sandwich tern....85
Sea eagle....98
Sedge warbler....128
Shelduck....16
Short-eared owl....102
Shoveler....18
Siskin....165
Skylark....121
Smew....32
Snipe....69
Snow bunting....166
Song thrush....138
Sparrowhawk....93
Spotted flycatcher....143
Spotted redshank....74
Starling....137
Stock dove....42
Stonechat....146
Swallow....123
Swift....39
Taiga bean goose....9
Tawny owl....103
Teal....24
Temminck's stint....65
Tree pipit....155
Tree sparrow....149
Treecreeper....136
Tufted duck....28
Tundra bean goose....11
Turnstone....61
Turtle dove....45
Water rail....46
Waxwing....117
Wheatear....147
Whimbrel....58

Whinchat 145
White-fronted goose.....12
Whitethroat 132
Whooper swan 14
Wigeon..... 20
Willow warbler..... 126
Wood sandpiper 73
Woodcock 68
Woodpigeon 43
Wren.....134
Yellowhammer.....167



Canada goose

Flocks pass through Fife in June to moult on the Beauly Firth, returning in August. The single bird was at the Wilderness in August 2019. The birds below were part of a flock of 77 at Letham Pools in early June 2022. The birds above were part of a flock of 13 at Luthrie in late December 2023.







Barnacle goose



Flocks can occasionally be seen or heard flying to or from wintering grounds. The above bird is probably an escape. It paired up with a greylag, and one of their young is shown below left. The bird bottom right was with a flock of pinkfeet near Ladybank, and the one on the right flew over Angle Park in a skein of pinkfeet.







Ross’s goose

A rare vagrant from North America — and an occasional escape from a wildfowl collection. This bird was with pinkfeet in the Balmalcolm area in late February 2022.





Greylag goose

A few resident birds are joined by larger numbers in autumn and winter.









Taiga bean goose

A rare bird in Fife, this one was at Letham Pools in March 2026. The second bird shown in three of these photos is a tundra bean goose.









Pink-footed goose

Occurs in large numbers in autumn and winter, flying out to feed in fields each morning from roosts.









Tundra bean goose

A rare winter migrant. The bird bottom right was with pinkfeet near the Wilderness on 5 March 2022. The other bird was with greylags at Letham Pools in March 2026.









White-fronted goose

Occasionally occurs in winter. All these were recorded at Letham Pools. The Greenland whitefront above was there with pinkfeet in March 2018, the one below right was with pinkfeet and greylags in February 2019, the Russian whitefronts (right) were with greylags in March 2026, while the one below left was with pinkfeet and greylags in February 2014.









Mute swan

Common on the lochs and pools of the Howe of Fife.









Whooper swan

A regular winter visitor. The above birds were at Clatto Reservoir. A large flock can sometimes be seen at the Letham Pools. This family (right and below) received a hot reception from the local mute swans when they arrived there ...









Egyptian goose

Populations have established in parts of England, but an unusual visitor to Fife. This bird was at Letham Pools in late May 2021.





Shelduck

Occurs regularly at Luthrie, Letham Pools and the Wilderness.









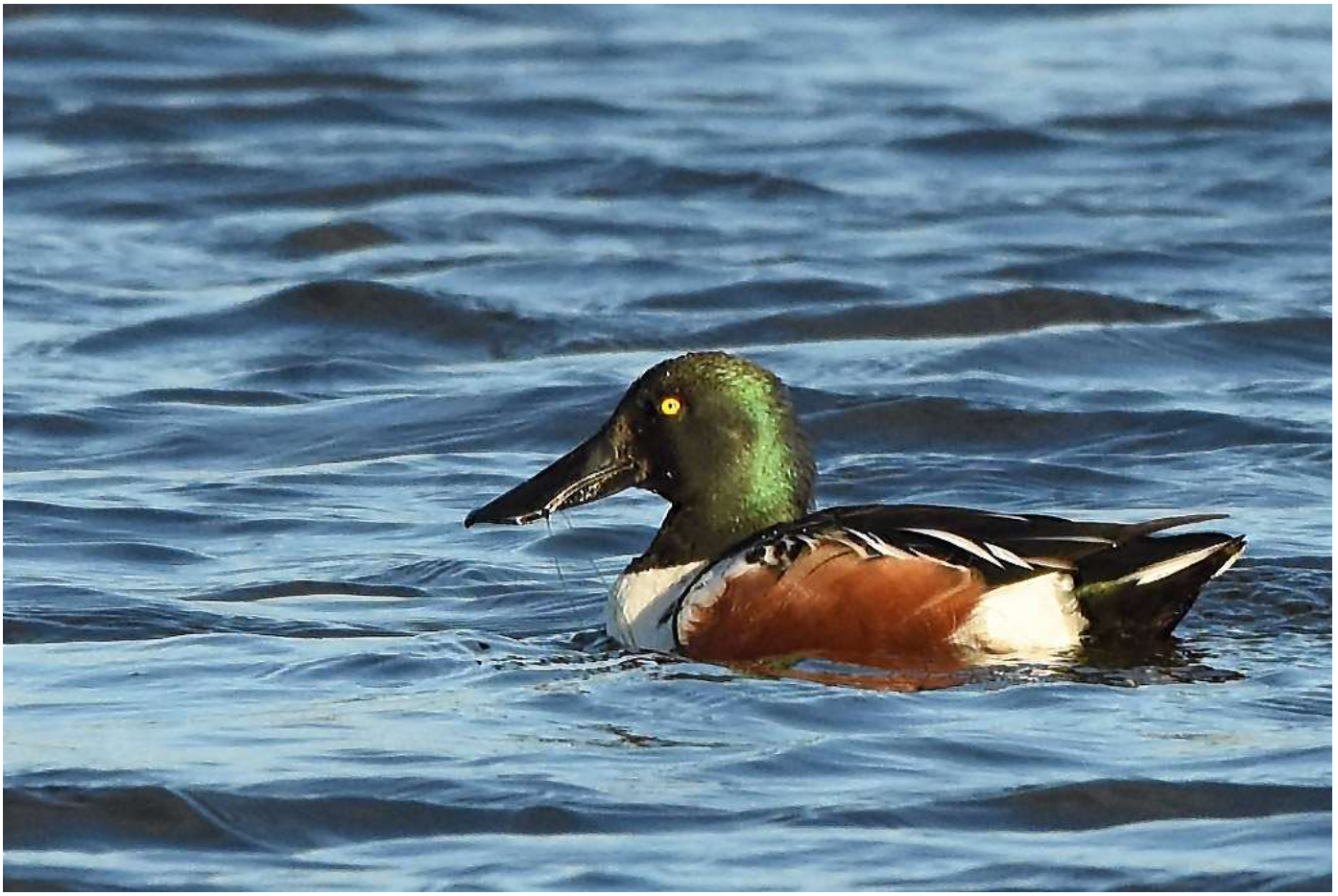
Garganey

A scarce migrant in Fife, occurring mostly in spring. These males were at Letham Pools, on 10 May 2021 (below and right) and on 21 May 2022 (above).









Shoveler

Occurs in small numbers. Unusually, many were present at Letham Pools in October 2018, when the shots above and below were taken. The shot on the right was taken in October 2020.









Gadwall

This species is increasing, and is common at Letham Pools and Angle Park.









Wigeon

Common in autumn and winter. Below was a feeding frenzy on 8 Feb 2015 at Birnie Loch, which was mostly frozen over.







American wigeon

A rare vagrant from North America. Presumably the same bird was at Gaddon Loch in the winters of 2015/16 and 2016/17.







Mallard

Common in suitable—and sometimes unsuitable — habitat.









Pintail

Not common in the Howe of Fife. The drake above and below right was one of five birds at the flood waters by Luthrie in early March 2017, the drake below left was at Letham Pools in mid-January 2023, and the pair on the right was at the Wilderness in late February 2023.









Teal

Common in suitable habitat.









Green-winged teal

A North American duck that is a rare migrant in Fife. The drake is very similar to the European teal, but with a vertical white stripe on its side. This bird was at Letham Pools in mid-May 2021.







Pochard

Not often seen in the Howe, despite apparently suitable habitat. These images were taken in early November at Birnie Loch.







Ring-necked duck

A rare visitor from North America. The drake below was at the Wilderness in late May 2022, while the female above was at Birnie Loch through the winter of 2022/23.





Tufted duck

Common on suitable lochs and ponds.









Greater scaup

Scaup are a marine duck and are very rarely recorded in or near the Howe of Fife. These were part of a group of five birds at Newburgh on 28 November 2021.







Lesser scaup

The lesser scaup is a rare vagrant from North America. This female was at Angle Park in late December 2024.

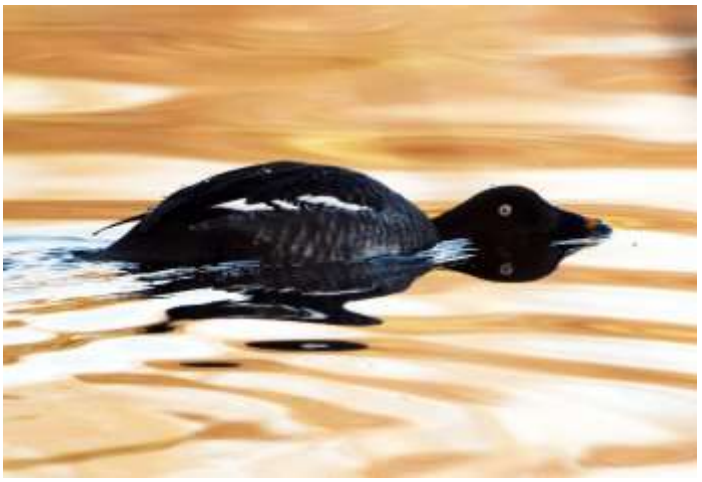




Goldeneye

Common. These shots were taken at Birnie and Gaddon Lochs, and the bird bottom right was at Newburgh.









Smew

A scarce winter visitor in Fife, and only rarely recorded from the Howe. This female was at Angle Park in late January 2024.





Goosander

Common in winter, especially at Birnie and Gaddon Lochs.









Red-breasted merganser

Red-breasted mergansers are common at the mouth of the Tay, but are not often recorded upriver of the Tay Bridge. These distant shots were taken from Balmerino in early November.





Red grouse

Small numbers are resident in the Lomond Hills. This bird was on the slopes of East Lomond that look across to the Howe of Fife.







Grey partridge

Common, mostly in arable fields.







Pheasant

Common, with large numbers released for shooting.







Red-legged partridge

Small numbers present, as a result of releases for shooting.





Swift

A summer visitor that breeds in the towns and villages.







Cuckoo

Once a common summer visitor, now mostly a migrant. This bird flew from Balmerino across the Tay, pursued by a crow, on its journey north in early May 2021.





Feral pigeon

Occurs mostly on farms and in urban areas.









Stock dove

Small numbers breed.







Woodpigeon

Very numerous throughout.







Collared dove

Common in suitable habitat.





Turtle dove

The UK turtle dove population is in sharp decline, and Scottish records are now rare. This one was at Burnturk in early July 2024.





Water rail

Sometimes occurs in good numbers at Letham Pools (below left); some will come out into the open if the water level is low. The bird above and below right was at Birnie Loch in April 2021.







Moorhen

Common in suitable habitat. There are usually birds near the car park at Birnie Loch.





Coot

Common on the lochs and former gravel pits of the Howe of Fife.







Crane

A very rare species in Fife, occasionally recorded on passage. These three birds flew high over the Wilderness on 12 October 2021.





Little grebe

Breeds in small numbers. The bird below was at Letham Pools, the pair below right and the winter plumage bird above at Gaddon Loch, and the pair on the right at Clatto Reservoir.









Red-necked grebe

Very unusual in the Howe of Fife. This bird appeared at Letham Pools on 1 June 2021.





Great crested grebe

The bird above and below was at Gaddon Loch, while the two on the right were at Edensmuir (Mountcastle), where a pair breeds each year. The bird bottom right was at the nearby Letham Pools in November 2021.









Oystercatcher

Occurs inland from late winter through the breeding season.









Lapwing

Common passage migrant and some birds breed.









Golden plover

Occasionally encountered in the Howe of Fife. The birds below right were at Forret Hill near Kilmany in early February 2022, while those below left were part of a flock of 70 at the Wilderness in early October 2019. Those above and right were part of a flock of 160 on East Lomond in early January 2024.









Ringed plover

A scarce passage migrant inland in Fife. The juvenile below left was at Wilderness in mid-September 2019 and the adult below right was one of two at Letham Pools in May 2022. Those above and on the right were in a group of five at Balmerino in mid-November 2025.









Little ringed plover

Very small numbers breed in the Howe of Fife, and it occurs as a scarce passage migrant. The adult above and right was at Letham Pools, while the juveniles were at the Wilderness.









Whimbrel

Seldom recorded in the area covered here, this bird was on the foreshore at Balmerino in mid-September 2025.



Curlew

Occurs regularly outside the breeding season at suitable sites. The bird above was at Newburgh, the one on the right was at Rossie Bog, which sometimes holds a large flock, the bird below left was at Balmerino, and the one below right at Luthrie.









Black-tailed godwit

Frequent especially at Letham Pools and the Wilderness, with largest numbers in late summer and autumn.









Turnstone

A bird of the rocky shore, these were at Balmerino.









Knot

Rarely recorded inland, these birds were at Angle Park on 10 September 2025.







Ruff

Occurs on spring and autumn migration at the Wilderness and the Letham Pools, provided the water level is not too high.









Curlew sandpiper

An uncommon passage migrant. The bird above and below (with a dunlin) was at Letham Pools in mid-September 2013. The birds on the right were at the Wilderness at the end of August 2019.









Temminck’s stint

A very rare passage migrant, this bird was at Letham Pools on 7 May 2022.







Dunlin

Inland, a passage migrant in small numbers. The birds below, shown with a curlew sandpiper, were at Letham Pools. The other birds were at Balmerino.







Pectoral sandpiper

A rare vagrant from North America. The bird below (pictured with a ruff below right) was at Wilderness in mid- September 2018. The bird above and right was at Letham Pools in mid-July 2022.









Woodcock

Although quite common in winter, the woodcock is a difficult species to photograph. Usually, it is not seen until it flushes, when it rapidly flies away. The above out-of-focus shot and the shots below are the best I have managed for the Howe of Fife area. The above bird was one of four flushed on Darklaw Hill near Rathillet in late January 2024, the one below left was flushed from a stubble field at Kedlock Feus a few days later, and the one below right was flushed from moorland on Black Craig near Norman's Law in mid-January 2025.







Snipe

Common in late summer, autumn and winter in suitable habitat. The birds above and below were at Letham Pools in late August, while the one on the right was at Luthrie in December.









Common sandpiper

Scarce migrant in the Howe of Fife. The bird above and below left was at Edensmuir (now called Eden Springs) near Letham in mid-April 2019. The birds right and below right were on the foreshore at Balmerino in September 2025.









Green sandpiper

A passage migrant in small numbers in the Howe of Fife. The two distant birds below left were at Luthrie in late April 2022, while the one below right was at the Wilderness in mid-August 2022. The two above and the one on the right were at Angle Park in late July 2025.









Redshank

Inland records are not common in the Howe of Fife. The bird below right was at Luthrie, while the bird below left was at Letham Pools. The species is common along the shoreline at Balmerino, where images above and on the right were taken.









Wood sandpiper

Uncommon migrant. These birds were at Letham Pools in mid-May.









Spotted redshank

A scarce migrant. This juvenile was at Angle Park in early September 2025.





Greenshank

A passage migrant in small numbers. The birds above and on the right were at the Wilderness, the one below at Balmerino, and the one below right at Letham Pools.









Black-headed gull

Common in open habitats.









Little gull

Not often recorded in the Howe of Fife. These adults were at the Wilderness by Ladybank in late June 2019 (below left), Letham Pools in May 2022 (below right), and Letham Pools in May 2023 (above).







Mediterranean gull

Rare in the Howe of Fife, but is likely to become regular, given the spread northwards of this species, which is now relatively common along the shores of the Firth of Forth. This immature bird was at the black-headed gull colony at Letham Pools in late April 2021.







Common gull

Common in open habitats.







Great black-backed gull

A mainly coastal species, although small numbers occur in the Howe of Fife. These birds were at the Letham Pools in late 2018.









Iceland gull

Rarely recorded inland, the Iceland gull is an uncommon winter visitor to Fife. This immature was at Luthrie in late November 2022.





Herring gull

Common in open habitats.









Caspian gull

A rare vagrant in Scotland. These two young birds were at Angle Park in October 2025.







Lesser black-backed gull

Common in spring and summer but unusual in winter. The winter-plumage bird below right was with herring gulls at Angle Park in January 2020.







Sandwich tern

These birds were fishing off Balmerino in late August 2025.









Common tern

This bird flew past Balmerino in late August 2025.





Cormorant

Becoming increasingly common at inland waters. The bird above is of the continental race, *sinensis*.









Glossy ibis

A rare vagrant in Fife. These two were at Angle Park in October 2025.





Grey heron

Common. These shots were taken at Letham Pools.







Great white egret

A rare migrant in Fife. The shots below and above are of a long-staying bird at Angle Park, taken in early September 2024 and early January 2025. The one on the right was at Gaddon Loch in mid-February 2025, and may have been the same bird.









Little egret

This species is spreading rapidly through Scotland. In Fife, it is still mostly coastal, but this bird was at Rossie Bog in late March 2023.





Osprey

Often recorded in or around the Howe of Fife in spring and summer.









Sparrowhawk

Low numbers but widespread.









Goshawk

Scarce and not often seen, but becoming more common in Fife.





Marsh harrier

Marsh harriers breed in the Tay reed beds, and are now frequently recorded in the Howe of Fife.









Hen harrier



Not often seen in the Howe of Fife, the ringtail above and below left was at Rossie Bog in mid-December 2023, the male right was east of Rathillet in mid-January 2024, and the male below right was at Wester Forret south of Kilmany in mid-November 2024.







Red kite

A scarce visitor to the Howe of Fife. This one was by Mount Hill near Cupar in early April 2023.







Sea eagle

After reintroduction, a pair bred at Tentsmuir for several years, and this is probably one of those birds, wandering inland a few miles on 22 January 2021.





Common buzzard

After its recent return to the area, it is now common throughout the Howe of Fife.









Barn owl

Small numbers occur in suitable habitat.







Long-eared owl

Not often encountered in the Howe of Fife area. This bird was at Carphin.







Short-eared owl

Occasionally recorded in winter in the Howe of Fife area. This was one of four on East Lomond in late February 2024.





Tawny owl

Sparsely but widely distributed. The bird below left was just out of the nest. The other bird arrived to check up on me when I was recording moths.







Kingfisher

Surprisingly scarce in the Howe of Fife, given that apparently suitable habitat is plentiful. This one was at Gaddon Loch in early March 2026.





Great spotted woodpecker

A regular visitor to many bird tables.







Green woodpecker

Not often recorded in the Howe of Fife area, this bird was at Carphin through the 2025/26 winter.







Kestrel

Once the most common bird of prey, its numbers have declined while sparrowhawks and buzzards have increased.









Merlin

A scarce species in the Howe of Fife. This female was at Rossie Bog in mid-November 2020.





Peregrine

Occurs in the Lomond Hills and down in the Howe outside the breeding season. The bird above and below left was at Luthrie on 21 September 2020, while the bird below right was at Letham Pools on 1st December 2019.







Jay

Present in small numbers in suitable woodland. The bird below left was at Mountcastle (now called Eden Springs), while the flying birds were at Carphin.







Magpie

Until recently, the magpie did not occur in the Howe of Fife. It is now common.







Jackdaw

Very common, often outnumbering rooks in mixed flocks.





Rook

Very common, a communal species that often flocks with jackdaws.









Carrion crow

Very common. While they can be very tame at the coast, on a nature reserve or in a town, where they are unlikely to be shot, they are wary in most of the Howe of Fife.





Hybrid crow

A bird with both carrion crow and hooded crow ancestry. They are not often recorded in Fife. This one was at Kedlock Feus in mid-March 2026.







Raven

This species has shown a rapid increase in Fife, especially in the hills of northern Fife. The bird below right was at Luthrie, and shows the difference in size between the raven and the rook.









Waxwing

Uncommon winter visitor in variable numbers. These two birds were at Ballantager Farm, Letham in early January 2019.





Coal tit

Common woodland species, with large numbers in coniferous plantations.







Blue tit

Very common and one of the most frequent visitors to bird tables.









Great tit

Common woodland species.







Skylark

Common in suitable habitat







Sand martin

Common migrant and breeds in suitable habitat.









Swallow

Common migrant and summer visitor.









House martin

Common migrant and summer visitor.







Long-tailed tit

Fairly common resident.









Willow warbler

Common summer visitor in woodland.







Chiffchaff

Summer visitor in woodland, and becoming more common.







Sedge warbler

Summer visitor, breeding mostly in wet habitats with thick vegetation cover.









Grasshopper warbler

A rare breeding bird in the Howe of Fife area, and a few pass through on migration. This bird was at Kilmany in early May 2021.







Blackcap

Common summer visitor in woodland. A few winter.







Garden warbler

Scarce breeding bird. The above bird was at Edensmuir (Mountcastle), while the one below was at Gaddon Loch.





Whitethroat

Common summer visitor in farmland hedgerows.







Goldcrest

Common, mostly where conifers are present. Numbers increase in winter with continental migrants arriving.







Wren

Very common resident.







Nuthatch

The nuthatch is currently spreading into Fife. These images were of two birds at Rankeilour in late February 2023.







Treecreeper

Small numbers present, mostly in deciduous woodland.







Starling

Common throughout the year, with increased numbers in winter.









Song thrush

Small numbers occur in suitable habitat. Less common than it used to be.







Mistle thrush

Present in small numbers throughout the year.









Redwing

Common autumn migrant and winter visitor, often flocking with fieldfares, as in the image on the right.









Blackbird

Common throughout the year.







Fieldfare

Migrant and winter visitor, sometimes in large numbers.









Spotted flycatcher

Once a common species, the spotted flycatcher is now rarely recorded in and around the Howe of Fife. These images show a parent and two of three recently-fledged young present at Carphin on 1 August 2026.







Robin

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









Whinchat

Whinchats were until relatively recently a regular breeder on high ground around the Howe of Fife, but have now become rare in summer. Migrants are mostly coastal, but these birds were at Letham Pools in late August 2024.





Stonechat

Scarce in and around the Howe of Fife. These birds (female above, male below) were on Berry Brae, Carphin.





Wheatear

A few occur on migration. The above male was at Luthrie in early May 2024. The birds below (male left, female right) were west of Gauldry, on the high ground above Balmerino, in early May 2021.







Dipper

Uncommon in and around the Howe, occurring on the Eden and some of its tributaries. These birds were at Kilmany.







Tree sparrow

Patchily distributed but can be quite numerous where it occurs.







House sparrow

Common around human habitation.







Dunnock

Common resident.







Grey wagtail

Present in suitable habitat in small numbers.









Pied wagtail

Present in variable numbers throughout the year.









Meadow pipit

Breeds on high ground around the Howe, and is often encountered on low ground, mostly outside the breeding season. The bird below left was on East Lomond, the one below right near Logie, the one on the right at Balmerino, and the one above at Luthrie.









Tree pipit



A few pairs breed in the far west of Fife, but otherwise, singing birds seldom occur in Fife. The one above and below was near Wester Kinsleith on 20 April 2025. The one on the right was on the slopes of Berry Brae at Carphin two days later. Both were doing frequent song flights.







Rock pipit

Although common on rocky coasts around most of Fife, they are seldom seen in the area covered here. These were at Balmerino in late September 2026.







Chaffinch

Common throughout the year.







Brambling

A winter visitor in variable but usually low numbers.







Bullfinch

Common throughout the year.









Greenfinch

Resident in suitable habitat.







Linnet

Occurs throughout the year. Large flocks sometimes occur in winter. Part of a flock of around 400 birds is shown above and below left.









Lesser redpoll

Small numbers in summer, with more in winter, but not common.







Common crossbill

Variable but generally very low numbers. The birds above and on the right were at Darklaw Hill by Rathillet in January 2021, while the birds below came down to drink at the Wilderness in September 2018.









Goldfinch

Common throughout the year.







Siskin

Small numbers in summer, more in winter, when they often visit bird tables.









Snow bunting

Unlikely to be encountered in the Howe, but it is occasionally recorded on the Lomond Hills. These birds were in a flock of 20 on the east slope of West Lomond on 6 March 2020.







Yellowhammer

Common throughout the year in arable farmland.









Reed bunting

Breeds in suitable wetland habitats. In winter, birds will sometimes join flocks of finches, buntings and sparrows away from wetland habitats.



