

Mid and East Sutherland

Ian Paterson

Ferrycroft Countryside Centre
Ferrycroft
Lairg
Sutherland
Tel: 01549 402638
ian.paterson@highland.gov.uk

The two estuaries at Dornoch and Loch Fleet support a wealth of waders and wildfowl. Dornoch Point is worth a visit for views of **pintail**, **long tailed duck** and **common scoter**. Flocks of **knot** and **dunlin** provide a dramatic aerial display. Loch Fleet may have **red-breasted merganser**, **bar-tailed godwit** and **ringed plover**. A careful search of the sea at any location on the east coast may reveal **red**, **black** or **great northern divers**.

Moving north to Brora you will have arrived at the premier site in the north for viewing **little gulls**, just off the mouth of the River Brora. If gulls are your thing then a visit to Helmsdale harbour may turn up an **Iceland gull** or two.

Waxwings may well be the feature of this winter with flocks of 100 already seen at Lairg and Golspie. Any flocks of birds feeding amongst rowans will be worth a second look and they are surprisingly approachable.

North Sutherland

Paul Castle

Durness Visitor Centre
Durness
Sutherland
Tel: 01641 521884
paul.castle@highland.gov.uk

Check coastal sites such as Strathy Point for passing flocks of **waxwings** looking for any leftover fruit on trees such as elder and rowan further inland. Along the coast in many estuaries there are good numbers of **long tailed ducks** and **elder ducks**. There are lots of waders in the estuaries of the major rivers (Borgie, Naver & Halladale) such as **curlew**, **redshank** and **turnstone**. Loch Eriboll offers very good chance of winter sightings of **great northern divers** and possibly **red** and **black-throated divers** also. Even **white-billed divers** have been seen here on several occasions.

On the slopes of Ben Hope or Klibreck there is the chance of spotting **ptarmigan** and around the smaller quiet inland roads there is always the chance of seeing **golden eagle**. Best time is late afternoon on a fine day keep checking those hill tops. On the inland hills and peatland there is the chance of spotting **white-tailed sea eagles**.

A train journey from Thurso to Inverness takes you right through the peatlands with good views of herds of **red deer** now down off the high hills in search of better grazing.

North West Sutherland

Donald Mitchell

Durness Visitor Centre
Durness
Sutherland
Tel: 01971 511756
donald.mitchell@highland.gov.uk

Far north we may be and the daylight shorter, however it is still a worthwhile time to be out and about in the hills and along the coastal fringes. One of the most spectacular sights is the **grey seals** at Whiten head. Still at their breeding sites well into November, the white seal pups 'hiding' like rocks on the shore. It is a long walk out though but a bothy is nearby for a Spartan overnight stay.

It is still possible to see **otters** on the shorelines and offshore in the many bays and Loch Eriboll in particular small flocks of over wintering **red** and **black throated divers** may be seen in winter plumage, quite often their larger relative the **great northern diver** too. Inland are still the **red deer**, **ravens** and birds of prey supplemented by influxes of Scandinavian redwings and **fieldfares**. 7-800 **Greenland barnacle geese** frequent Eilean Hoan and the boggy fields of Balnakeil, where **greylag geese**, **golden plover**, **wigeon** and **mallard** also feed.

In the absence of obvious wildlife look to the archaeology or remarkable geology that becomes more visible as the plants die back. If it does get dark early – good! Look to the unobstructed starry skies, on clear nights there can be spectacular displays of the Aurora Borealis. It is a fine time to be in the north!

Watch how you watch our wildlife; their welfare comes first!

- Wear muted colours and blend into your surroundings.
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Use binoculars to get clear views while still distant enough to avoid disturbance.
- Use hides when possible (your car is a good hide).
- Be particularly careful during the breeding season.
- Dogs and wildlife don't mix.

