



The newspaper of the Bird Watching and Wildlife Club

The Watcher



January 2012

NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...



Anagach Woods

FIRST OF THE YEAR?

Many birdwatchers spend New Year's Day trying to get a head start on their year lists. I don't keep any lists personally, but I will be enjoying a spot of wildlife watching with some of the Guests staying at the Grant Arms for our 'Hogmanay in the Highlands' break. The BWWC Team begin the New Year with one of our regular walking routes through **Anagach Woods (BWWC Map Site 21)**, albeit at a slightly later time than usual to allow for any Hogmanay headaches to subside! At this time of year we expect to see our usual pinewood residents and our first sighting of the New Year is more than likely to be a common species such as the Chaffinch or Coal Tit. For me it doesn't matter what we

see on January 1st, or on any other of our guided walks for that matter. I can't deny that it's always great to be able to show Guests some of the local specialties like the Crested Tit or Capercaillie, but what makes Anagach such a wonderful place is that there's always something to see and hear. The flash of colour from a male chaffinch against the snow or the noise from a flock of Coal Tits is all part of the experience. For me, close-up views of a tiny feeding Goldcrest or spending time watching a Treecreeper explore an old Scots Pine is just as rewarding as seeing some of the more 'sought after' species. I know some of our Guests will entirely disagree with the above statement and that's fine—we all get something different from wildlife watching. For some it's ticking off lists and achieving 'lifers' but for others it's about enjoying being outside and watching the wildlife world go by. However you 'watch' this year and whatever you happen to see first in 2012 shouldn't matter, as long as you are responsible, respectful and take pleasure in it.

Don't Miss!



© Greg Morgan

WINTER WILDLIFE

The best thing about wildlife watching in the Highlands is that you can do it all year round. Granted, the Scottish weather occasionally leads us to believe we're experiencing all four seasons in the space of one day, but whatever the conditions or time of year there's something to see. January offers snow-covered hillsides with camouflaged Ptarmigan and Mountain Hare to discover. You could explore the coast looking for a variety of waders and seaduck, or admire winter migrants like Waxwings and Whooper Swans. The scenery is spectacular and the winter wildlife wonderful, but it won't be long before it's all change and we head into spring once more. If you have yet to discover the Highlands in winter you won't be disappointed—it really is a magical time to visit, but then I could say the same for any time of year!



The Bird Watching & Wildlife Club and the rest of the Team at the Grant Arms Hotel would like to wish *Watcher* readers all the best for 2012—we hope you have a great year with lots of wonderful wildlife sightings!



© Lucy Evans



What's on



One off Events

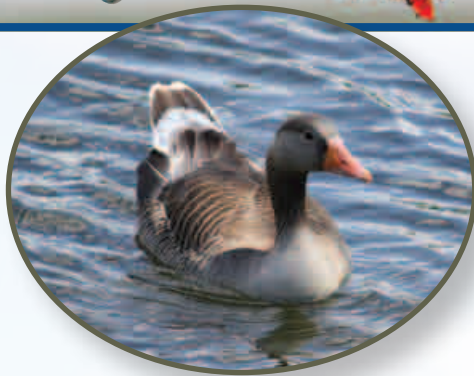
Sun 1st & Mon 2nd January STEAM RAILWAY MINCE PIE SPECIALS 11am & 2pm: Enjoy your hot mince pies and a drink from the bar on the Strathspey Steam Railway as the train steams through the crisp winter landscape. Departs Aviemore for 1½ hour trip. Adults £11.50/Conc. £10/Child £5.75, booking essential (01479)810725. **Near BWWC Map Site 15.**

Fri 20th January 'THE BIRDS OF STRATHSPEY' TALK 7:30pm: Join Kirsty Holtby as she gives an insight into the world of birds that exists in this area and provides tips on identification aimed at beginner birdwatchers or those who just fancy learning a little more about the birdlife they encounter on a day-to-day basis. Free and open to all at the **Grant Arms Hotel.**

Sat 21st & Sun 22nd January AVIEMORE SLED DOG RALLY 9:15am-4pm: Organised by the Siberian Husky Club of Great Britain the rally is run on Forestry Commission trails around Loch Morlich. Over 1000 sled dogs will be hoping for plenty of snow to make it a real arctic experience, with races running throughout the day. Free event—spectators are very welcome with viewing areas clearly signposted. **BWWC Map Site 19.**

Sat 21st & Sun 22nd January AVALANCHE AWARENESS COURSE 9:30am-4pm: SAIS and Snowsport Scotland have once again teamed up to bring practical training sessions that are tailored towards Scottish skiers and snowboarders venturing off piste. Call (01316)254405 for more information and booking. **BWWC Map Site 17.**

Sun 22nd January GLENSHEE SNOW FESTIVAL: Enjoy a day of sledging, taster ski lessons, ski and board demos and snowman/ice sculpture competitions! Weather dependent—at the Glenshee Ski Centre. **BWWC Map Site 49.**



Wed 25th January MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND: WINTER SAFETY LECTURE SERIES: 8pm: Join Di Gilbert as she shares lessons learnt during her journeys in the great outdoors. In the past 12 months, Di has climbed all the Munros, squeezed into a GB lycra suit for the World Ski Mountaineering Championships and killed off a few more brain cells for the great cause of high altitude mountaineering. Free—at the Mountain Café, Aviemore. **Near BWWC Map Site 15.**

Sat 28th & Sun 29th January WINTER RACE SERIES: LECHT OPEN: Annual winter race series held at Lecht Seeding: BASS. For more information call (01975)563359. **Near BWWC Map Sites 22 & 47.**

Day by Day

TUESDAY

ROTHIEMURCHUS EXPERIENCE SAFARI 10am: Join a Ranger to learn about life on the Estate, lasts approx. 3 hours, £30pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**

'HAIRY COO' SAFARI 11am: Join the Rothiemurchus Rangers for a walk to meet our Hairy Highland Cows. Lasts approx. 1 hour, £8pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**

'MAKING TRACKS' GUIDED WALK 9am: Join Glenlivet Wildlife for a guided walk in Clash Wood where you can follow the exploits of woodland wildlife through their tracks, feeding signs, dens and resting places. Last approx. 2½ hours, £10pp. Book on (01807)590241. **BWWC Map Site 22.**

WEDNESDAY

ROTHIEMURCHUS EXPERIENCE SAFARI 10am: Join a Ranger to learn about life on the Estate, lasts approx. 3 hours, £30pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**

HIGHLAND LADY SAFARI 11am: Explore the Rothiemurchus Estate by Land Rover and step back in time to estate life in the early 1800s, lasts approx. 2 hours, £20pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**

THURSDAY

ROTHIEMURCHUS EXPERIENCE SAFARI 10am: Join a Ranger to learn about life on the Estate, lasts approx. 3 hours, £30pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**

Every Day

REINDEER HILL VISIT 11am: A short walk on Cairn Gorm Mountain to see and feed Britain's only wild Reindeer herd. Adult £10/Conc. £7.50/Child 6-16yrs £5/Child 0-5yrs free. Book on (01479)861228. **BWWC Map Site 17.**

EVENING WILDLIFE WATCH (start time dusk dependant): Look for Badger, Pine Marten and other evening wildlife from Speyside Wildlife's comfortable hide. For available dates and to book see: www.speysidewildlife.co.uk (£18pp) or call: (01479)812345 (£20pp). **Near BWWC Map Site 16.**



RED SQUIRREL SAFARI 11am: Join the Rothiemurchus Rangers for a walk to watch Red Squirrels. Last's approx. 1 hour, £8pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**

MOUNTAIN HARE SAFARI 12:30pm (from 19th Jan 1pm): A Land Rover safari and short walk with Glenlivet Wildlife looking for winter wildlife and learning how they cope in winter conditions. See Mountain Hare in their white winter coats and discover how Roe Deer and Red Grouse find food even under snow. Lasts approx. 3½ hours, £30pp. Book on (01807)590241. **BWWC Map Site 22.**

FRIDAY

ROTHIEMURCHUS EXPERIENCE SAFARI 10am: Join a Ranger to learn about life on the Estate, lasts approx. 3 hours, £30pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**

SUNDAY

MOUNTAIN HARE SAFARI 12:30pm: (from 22nd Jan 1pm): A Land Rover safari and short walk with Glenlivet Wildlife looking for winter wildlife and learning how they cope in winter conditions. See Mountain Hare in their white winter coats and discover how Roe Deer and Red Grouse find food even under snow. Lasts approx. 3½ hours, £30pp. Book on (01807)590241. **BWWC Map Site 22.**

ROTHIEMURCHUS EXPERIENCE SAFARI 10am: Join a Ranger to learn about life on the Estate, lasts approx. 3 hours, £30pp. Book on (01479)812345. **Near BWWC Map Site 18.**





What's on

What to do if it's Wet

If the weather's not so great for wildlife watching, there are plenty of other things to do in the North East of Scotland. Granttown-on-Spey is close to many visitor attractions and there's something for everyone to enjoy. For those in search of a wee dram, remember that the Grant Arms Hotel is close to the World's only Malt Whisky Trail!

FALLS OF SHIN VISITOR CENTRE

OPEN: Daily Jun–Sep 9:30am–5pm / Oct–May 10am–5pm (Phone for Jan–Feb opening hours). Views of the forest from the restaurant, viewing platform to watch the Atlantic Salmon leap, forest walks and gift shop. **DIRECTIONS:** Off B864, via A836 between Bonar Bridge and Lairg. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES: 1, 2**

INVERNESS MUSEUM

OPEN: Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Explore Scottish history and discover how the Highlands are linked with the rest of the world. Exhibitions, art gallery and coffee shop. Parking available nearby, free entry. **DIRECTIONS:** Castle Wynd (off B861/B862), Inverness city centre. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE: 11**

LOCH NESS EXHIBITION CENTRE

OPEN: Daily Nov–Jan 10am–3:30pm / Feb–May 9:30am–5pm / Jun–Sep 9am–6pm / Oct 9:30am–5pm. Learn about the history of the famous monster by exploring Scotland's geological past, its folklore and the various research projects carried out on the loch. £6.50 Adult/£5.50 Conc./£4.50 Child. **DIRECTIONS:** On the A82 at Drumadrochit. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE: 12**

TOMATIN WHISKY DISTILLERY VISITOR CENTRE

OPEN: Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 12pm–4:30pm. Tours available Mon–Fri £3pp or experience the Whisky Presentation and Tasting Tour for £30pp (booking advisable for tours). Visitor Centre with DVD presentation and sample of 12yr single malt and gift shop open daily. **DIRECTIONS:** Just off the A9 at Tomatin. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES: 12, 13**

HIGHLAND WILDLIFE PARK

OPEN: Daily Apr–Oct 10am–5pm / Jul–Aug 10am–6pm / Nov–Mar 10am–4pm (last entry 1hr before closing). Experience Scottish



wildlife as well as international endangered animals of mountains and tundra. Gift shop and coffee shop on site. £13.50 Adult/£11.50 Conc./£10 Child. **DIRECTIONS:** Turn off A9 (south) onto B9152 and through Kincaig. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES: 14, 15, 16, 18**

GLENMORE FOREST PARK VISITOR CENTRE

OPEN: Daily 9am–5pm. Presentations and exhibition about the native pinewoods. Forest Shop, café and walks to enjoy if there's a dry spell! Free entry. **DIRECTIONS:** Opposite Glenmore Caravan Site, east end of Loch Morlich. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES: 16, 17, 18, 19**

CAIRNGORM FUNICULAR RAILWAY

OPEN: Trains run daily 10am–5pm (9am–4pm in winter dependant on weather/daylight hours) and run approx. every 20mins. Take the funicular railway up to the Ptarmigan Station to the viewing terrace (the only outside access if you take the train up), exhibitions, the UK's highest restaurant and shop. £9.75 Adult/£8.45 Conc./£6.15 Child. You can also walk up and buy a downhill ticket: £7.00 Adult/£6.15 Conc./£4.50 Child. **DIRECTIONS:** Runs from Base Station at Coire Cas—turn left off the B970 at Coylumbridge. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES: 16, 17, 18, 19**

SPEYSIDE HEATHER VISITOR CENTRE

OPEN: Mon–Sat 9am–5:30pm / Sun 10am–5pm (Phone for Jan–Feb opening hours). Experience

21 different ways to enjoy a cloutie dumping in the restaurant! Exhibitions, wildlife viewing stations, gift shop, boutique, art gallery, garden centre and antiques shop. Free entry. **DIRECTIONS:** Skye of Curr—just off the A95 between Aviemore and Granttown-On-Spey. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES: 20, 21**

SPEYSIDE COOPERAGE

OPEN: Mon–Fri 9am–4pm. Discover the ancient art of coopering and the lifecycle of a whisky cask. See skilled coopers at work, try for yourself with mini casks and enjoy the gift/coffee shop. £3.30 Adult/£2.70 Conc./£2 Child. **DIRECTIONS:** On the A941, ¼mile south of Craigellachie. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE: 22**

FORT GEORGE

OPEN: Daily Apr–Sep 9:30am–5:30pm/Oct–Mar 9:30am–4:30pm (last entry 45min before closing). Active 18th Century military base. Take an audio tour, visit the museum, arms collection, barrack rooms and walk more than a mile of ramparts (keeping a lookout for seals, dolphins and birdlife at sea). £6.70 Adult/£5.40 Conc./£4 Child. **DIRECTIONS:** North of Ardersier on the B9006. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE: 24**

CULLODEN BATTLEFIELD VISITOR CENTRE

OPEN: Daily Apr–Oct 9am–6pm / Nov–Mar 10am–4pm (phone for post Xmas & Jan opening hours). Visit the restored battlefield and learn about the last hand-to-hand battle fought on British soil with interactive exhibitions and displays. Hire of a battlefield tour PDA included. £10 Adult/£7.50 Conc. **DIRECTIONS:** Off the A9 (north) on the B851. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE: 24**

MACDUFF MARINE AQUARIUM

OPEN: Daily 10am–5pm (last entry 4:15pm). Features the marine life found in the Moray Firth, exhibits lead you from the coast to the underwater kelp reef. £5.65 Adults/£3.50 Conc./£2.80 Child. **DIRECTIONS:** On High Shore in Macduff, east of Macduff harbour. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES: 34, 35**





Walks Walks Walks



Viewpoint Walk

CRAIGELLACHIE RESERVE: A mix of rocky outcrops and birch woodland, Craigellachie Reserve is home to Peregrine Falcons. A walk around the lower hillside takes you past a pond where you may see Goldeneye. A walk up the hill to the viewpoint rewards you with stunning views across Strathspey on a clear day. **BWWC Map Site 15.**

LOCH AN EILEIN: Walk around this beautiful loch on the Rothiemurchus Estate and admire the ruined castle on the island in the middle. Try to catch a glimpse of Crested Tit, Scottish and Parrot Crossbill, Redstart, Wood Warbler, Tree Pipit and fishing Osprey in summer. **BWWC Map Site 16.**

GLENMORE FOREST PARK: Look for Red Squirrel, Crested Tit, Redstart and Scottish Crossbill along the forest trails. Or take a wander around Loch Morlich to try and spot Sand Martin, Swallow, Red-throated Diver and Osprey in the summertime. Views of the snow-capped Cairngorms from the shores of Loch Morlich in winter are incredible. **BWWC Map Site 19.**

LOCH GARTEN & ABERNETHY: Wander around Loch Garten and Loch Mallachie looking for Goldeneye, Wigeon, Common Sandpiper and Otters. Watch for Osprey fishing in summer and Greylag Geese, Pink-footed Geese and Whooper Swans in winter. Crested Tit, nesting Swift, Capercaillie, Scottish and Parrot Crossbill, Black Grouse and Red Squirrel can often be

seen on a walk around Abernethy Forest. **BWWC Map Site 20.**

ANAGACH WOODS: Just a short stroll from the Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown-on-Spey, these woods boast Capercaillie, Crested Tit, Scottish Crossbill, Buzzard, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Roe Deer and Red Squirrel. Wander by the River Spey to look for Grey Wagtail, Dipper and Common Sandpiper. Also keep a look out for Osprey in summer. **BWWC Map Site 21.**

VIEWPOINT WALK: A 3 mile round walk from the Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown-on-Spey, this walk results in some spectacular views of the Cairngorms, the Lairig Ghru Pass and the Cromdale Hills on a clear day. You might encounter Buzzard soaring overhead or Red Squirrel and Roe Deer feeding in the woodland. **BWWC Map Site 21.**

SPEYSIDE WAY: Start this walk from Grantown itself or one of many points across the 80mile trail. Look for birdlife, Red Squirrel and Roe Deer amongst the trees or Water Voles and Otters at the edge of the River Spey. Why not stop at one of the whisky distilleries en route for some refreshment? **Start from BWWC Map Site 21 or 32.**

GLENLIVET ESTATE: Try spotting Blackcaps and Sand Martin in summer, and Waxwing and Snow Bunting in winter. Red and Black Grouse, Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Kestrel, Dipper, Red and Roe Deer, Mountain and Brown Hare and Red Squirrel

are all resident here. Spectacular viewpoints are encountered on certain trails, with 11 waymarked routes to choose from. **BWWC Map Site 22.**

CULBIN FOREST: Look for Crested Tit, Crossbill, Treecreeper, Redpoll, Sparrowhawk, Dunnock, Bullfinch and Mistle Thrush. You could climb the tower and enjoy the magnificent views across the Moray Firth, or walk out to Culbin Sands to look for Waders, resident Common and Grey Seals and Ospreys in summertime. **BWWC Map Site 25.**

ROSEISLE FOREST: Walking through the trees in Roseisle you may encounter Treecreeper, Great Tit, Goldcrest, Crested Tit and Crossbill. Keep a look out for Red Squirrel too. Follow a sandy trail down to the beach and watch for Common, Velvet and Surf Scoter, Long-tailed Duck and various Waders, Divers and Grebes. **BWWC Map Site 27.**

Various routes and length of walk are available in many locations around the Grant Arms Hotel—leaflets and information can be obtained from BWWC staff.

Following the success of our Wildlife & Walking Break this September, we'll be running another one in 2012 to coincide with the **Tomintoul & Glenlivet Walking Festival** (www.tgwfw.co.uk) from Thursday 6th to Monday 10th September. See the back page for details.

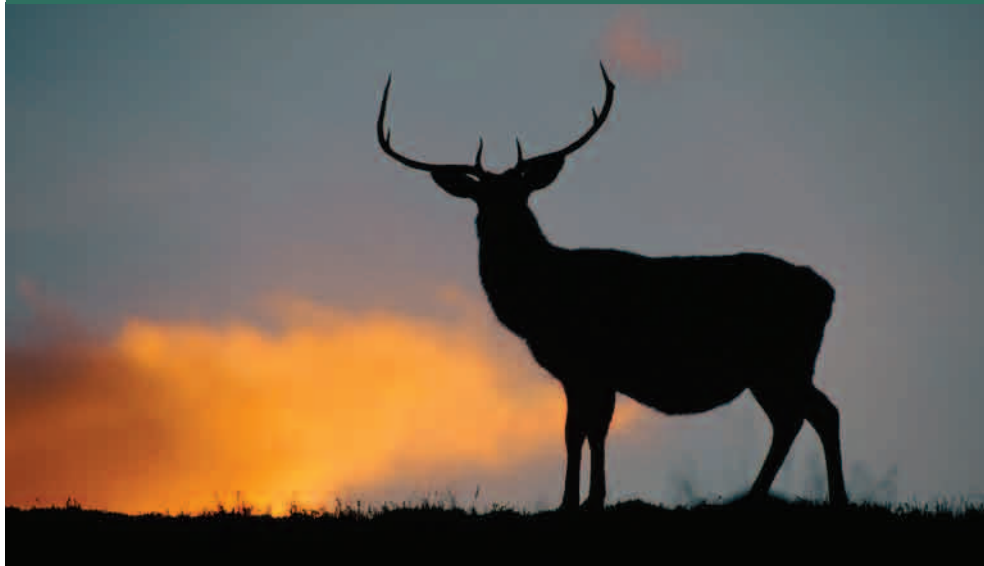




What's on



Tea Rooms



ROSEMARKIE—CROFTERS BISTRO

OPEN: 11am (12:30pm on Sundays)–3pm daily. Overlooking Rosemarkie Bay and the Moray Firth with a range of fresh food (soups, sandwiches or larger meals available 12–3pm) and a take-away menu if you fancy sitting down at the beach. **DIRECTIONS:** Marine Terrace Rosemarkie, off the A832. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 6, 7, 8.

FOULIS FERRY—STOREHOUSE OF FOULIS

OPEN: Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sunday 10am–5pm. Within visitor centre with wildlife/history exhibitions and scenic views over Cromarty Firth. **DIRECTIONS:** On A9 Northbound, after Cromarty Firth Bridge. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 6, 9, 10.

NORTH KESSOCK—WHITE COTTAGE TEAROOM

OPEN: Summer 10am–7pm, Winter 10am–4pm daily. Overlooking the Kessock Channel, this is home to dolphins, seals, otters and birds. **DIRECTIONS:** Main Street North Kessock, off the A9 Northbound, after Kessock Bridge. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 7, 8, 11.

LOCH INSH WATER SPORTS CENTRE—THE BOATHOUSE RESTAURANT

OPEN: 10am–8pm daily (Phone for winter opening hours). The restaurant has a sheltered balcony and overlooks the wildlife-rich Loch Insh. Wildlife Boat Tours available, book on (01540)651272. **DIRECTIONS:** South of Kincaig, near junction for B970. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE:** 14.

KINGUSSIE—THE POTTING SHED

OPEN: 9:30am–5pm daily. Without the famous feeding station that the Potting Shed at Inshriach Nursery has, but with all of the same delicious cakes! **DIRECTIONS:** Kingussie High Street (A86). **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE:** 14.

AVIEMORE—THE MOUNTAIN CAFÉ

OPEN: 8:30am–pm daily. Situated above the Cairngorm Mountain Sports shop, this café is a favourite with the locals and the BWWC Team for its selection of fresh homemade meals and cakes

(gluten, dairy & wheat free options available), as well as good views of the Cairngorms. **DIRECTIONS:** Grampian Road (B9152) Aviemore—opposite 'pay & display' car park. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE:** 15.

GLENMORE—GLENMORE CAFÉ

OPEN: 8:30am–4:30pm daily (evening meals served during Summer). On the shore of Loch Morlich and frequently visited by Red Squirrels and an array of birdlife including Crested Tits. There's also a chance of spotting one of the elusive local Pine Martens! Check out their squirrel & bird camera at: www.sledges.co.uk **DIRECTIONS:** On the Ski Road from Coylumbridge to Cairngorm Mountain. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 17, 19.

CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN—PTARMIGAN RESTAURANT & THE CAS BAR

OPEN: Summer 10am–5pm daily, Winter 9am–4pm daily (dependant on daylight hours). 'Ptarmigan': spectacular views and chance to spot Ptarmigan and Mountain Hare. 'Cas Bar': a cosy place close to the Mountain Garden, try looking for Ring Ouzel in summer. **DIRECTIONS:** 'Ptarmigan': Walk up or take the funicular railway. 'Cas Bar': At the Base Station. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 17, 19.

REVACK ESTATE—REVACK RESTAURANT

OPEN: 10am–5pm daily. Set in 350 acres, with an abundance of wildlife, 10miles of walking trails and a gift shop. **DIRECTIONS:** Off the

B970 between Speybridge and Nethy Bridge. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 20, 21.

CRAGGAN OUTDOORS—CLUBHOUSE CAFÉ

OPEN: 10am–4pm daily. Enjoy delicious hot food and keep an eye on the water outside for a variety of wildlife. Short nature trail and bird hide available. **DIRECTIONS:** Off the A95 towards Aviemore, 1 mile south of Granttown-on-Spey. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE:** 21.

LOGIE STEADING—LOGIE STEADING CAFÉ

OPEN: Jan–Mar 10:30am–5pm Friday–Sunday, Apr–Dec 10:30am–5pm daily. Enjoy fresh food and home baking, explore the River Findhorn Walk & Heritage Centre, Book Shop, Farm & Garden Shop or take a wander by the river in search of wildlife. **DIRECTIONS:** On B9007, off the A940 between Granttown-On-Spey and Forres. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITE:** 23.

FINDHORN BAY—THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE

OPEN: Summer 10am–5pm daily, Winter 10am–4pm daily. Enjoy a wonderful view of the bay. Enjoy a wonderful view of the bay whilst watching for various waders and waterfowl and even a seal hauled out on the sandbar. **DIRECTIONS:** At the harbour, following one-way system of the B9011 in Findhorn. **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 25, 26, 27, 28.

BALLATER—BROWN SUGAR CAFÉ

OPEN: 10am–5pm daily. A good range of soups, sandwiches and daily lunch specials as well as delicious cakes, a chocolate cabinet and small gift selection. Outdoor seating is also available. **DIRECTIONS:** 8 Bridge Street, Ballater (A93). **NEAR BWWC MAP SITES:** 46, 47, 48.

These tearooms can be accessed on foot from the Grant Arms Hotel—either option would involve a round trip of approx. 2 hours walking, with great scenery and wildlife watching opportunities en route.

Don't forget you can always order a packed lunch from the Hotel if you're off out for the day. We offer a range of sandwiches, soups and hot drinks—just order at Reception the evening before you'd like your lunch to be ready.



tripadvisor.co.uk

If you want to see what Guests think about the Grant Arms Hotel, why not check out our reviews on Trip Advisor? If you've stayed with us recently and want to share some feedback with those who might be considering a visit, please add your review!



Gordon's Top Tips

This month *Best Birdwatching Sites in the Scottish Highlands* author, Gordon Hamlett, gives readers some tips on identification along the Moray Firth coastline:

The Moray Firth is one of the best places to see birds throughout the year, and a trip to the coast in winter should be on the 'must-do' list of everyone staying at the Grant Arms Hotel. If the weather is changeable, **Nairn Harbour (Near BWWC Map Site 24)** or near the Maltings in **Burghhead (Map Site 28)** are good choices as you can drive right to the water's edge and watch from the comfort of your car if it starts to rain.

If the weather looks set fair, then **Findhorn Bay (Map Site 26)**, **Burghhead Bay via Roseisle (Map Site 27)**, or **Spey Bay (Map Site 32)** are all good choices. One of the problems with birdwatching on the coast in winter though is that many of the birds have moulted into their drab winter plumage, making identification that bit more difficult. So here are a few identification tips I have found useful over the years.

Divers are stunning birds—in breeding plumage. In winter, they are all grey above, and white below. The commonest bird—Red-throated Diver—is best told by its uptilted bill, a feature that shows well even on birds in flight. Great Northern Divers are big birds, and have a dark half-collar round their necks which is usually very obvious. For Black-



throated Divers, I look for a white flash on the birds, just in front of the tail. Just accept that some distant divers will be beyond specific identification.

Slavonian Grebes are fairly small grebes, but they are very contrasty birds, appearing almost black on top and pure white underneath. Velvet Scoters are usually mixed in with large flocks of Common Scoters, and not easy to pick out. Fortunately, they do flap their wings a lot, and you are looking for a large flash of white on the wings, something the Common Scoters never show. By far the best way to pick them out though, is to wait until the flock flies; the white speculum on the wing shows really well.

If you are looking at gulls, check the wing tips. All our native gulls show black in the wings. So, if you see a gull with no black, the chances are that you have found one of the

so-called 'white-winged gulls', a Glaucous Gull or Iceland Gull. These birds are rare but annual visitors to our coast in winter.

Waders are another group of birds to cause identification headaches, especially in flight. Godwits buck the trend though and are easier in flight than on the ground. Black-tailed Godwits show large white wing bars, and a square, white rump, tipped with black on the tail. On a Bar-tailed Godwit, all you really have is the long straight bill that tells you that you have one of the godwits, and a white wedge going up the back.

Another shorebird that gives up its secret in flight is the Grey Plover. This is a medium-sized wader with a short, stubby bill. When it flies though it has what appear to be black 'armpits'. These are actually the axillary feathers, but they are totally diagnostic. See these, and you've clinched your identification straight away.

NEW BWWC MAP COMING SOON!

All Grant Arms Hotel Guests are offered a copy of the Bird Watching & Wildlife Club's Map during their stay. This map offers a helping hand with suggestions of wildlife hotspots to visit and, of course, finding your way around the area. The BWWC Team has been busy reviewing all the information in the current map in an attempt to ensure our new version is as accurate and up-to-date as possible, as well as providing even more information about the locations and the species found there. Like the existing map, the new edition will feature 50 wildlife watching sites within approximately two hours drive of the Grant Arms. We've removed a couple of the sites previously featured, replacing them with what we think are 'hidden gems' that are rarely mentioned in other guide books. We have also included information about our lovely BWWC Hide, which has provided some wonderful wildlife watching opportunities since we opened it to Grant Arms Hotel Guests in March last year.

Once our new map is back from the printers we'll be featuring the new BWWC Map Site numbers in the Watcher and on our website, so apologies for any confusion that may cause for previous Guests who may still have the current version at home! The new maps will be available for all new Guests and we'll be sure to send out copies to those of you who have already booked a stay with us later this year.





What's Coming Up

We're fortunate here in the Highlands that there is an abundance of wildlife all year round. As the scenery changes with the seasons, so too does our list of sightings. The BWWC Team is often asked 'when's the best time to visit?' and our answer is always 'it depends on what you want to see'. For a quick guide, see the 'Key Species' below, which will let you know which months are good options for spotting some of the Speyside specialities. If the information below still leaves you with questions please feel free to give the BWWC Team a ring or drop us an email – we're always happy to help:

SPRING

KEY SPECIES: Capercaillie, Black Grouse & Crossbills.

March: A chance to see Ptarmigan and Mountain Hare still in their winter camouflage as the mountains begin to lose their snowy covers. Bird song increases as the breeding season begins for most but young Crossbills may already have flown the nest.

April & May: Black Grouse and Capercaillie will be lekking at this time—you can visit RSPB Caperwatch at Loch Garten from 1st April-mid May or book a Black Grouse Watch with Glenlivet Wildlife (www.glenlivet-wildlife.co.uk). Slavonian Grebe and Divers will have moved inland to breed, whilst the local woodlands come alive with the activities of nesting birds.

SUMMER

KEY SPECIES: Osprey, Slavonian Grebe and Black and Red-throated Divers.

June, July & August: The best time for Bottlenose Dolphin watching, either from land or sea (see www.dolphinspace.org for local boat trip operators). Nearby Osprey and Peregrine

pairs will hopefully be rearing their chicks. Butterflies and Dragonflies should be easy to spot and orchids and wild flowers will add colour to the summer scenery. Lapwings, Oystercatchers and Curlew have moved to moorland to raise their young. Thousands of Seabirds will be breeding at the coast, whilst Divers and Grebes reside on inshore lochs. A great time to spot summer migrants like Willow, Grasshopper and Wood Warblers, Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart.



© Kevin Wood



© Margaret Breaks

AUTUMN

KEY SPECIES: Golden Eagle, Red Deer and Red Squirrel.

September: Still a good month for Dolphins, Divers and Grebes, as well as being a great time to view Salmon leaping. The landscape takes on a purple tinge as the heather blooms and it's a great month to test your fungi identification skills! Red Squirrel and Roe Deer forage for food supplies before the colder weather sets in.

October & November: The best two months to experience the autumn colours and a good time for Golden Eagle and raptor watching at Findhorn Valley. Waders & Seaduck are plentiful at the coast and over-wintering Geese move in. The annual Red Deer rut should not be missed—you can book a Red Deer rut safari with Glenlivet Wildlife (www.glenlivet-wildlife.co.uk).

WINTER

KEY SPECIES: Ptarmigan, Mountain Hare and Crested Tit.

December, January & February: Over-wintering Geese and Whooper Swans will be easy to spot. Ptarmigan and Mountain Hare have donned white coats to hide amongst the snow, whilst Snow Buntings are regularly seen around the local ski resorts. A great month to look for Ducks, Divers, Waders and Wildfowl on the coast. In the forests it's the best time to look for Crested Tits, especially around feeders, as well as noisy Crossbills looking to attract mates. Red Deer are easier to spot as they move downhill in search of food. Head to the Highlands to experience a winter wonderland.

New Feeding Station!

By the time you read this we should hopefully be seeing lots of visitors at our new feeding station! The Grant Arms Hotel's Maintenance Manager has been busy creating a lovely big squirrel feeder and bird feeder for us to put up in **Anagach Woods (BWWC Map Site 21)**. We're hoping to attract some hungry Red Squirrels and a variety of woodland birds—perhaps we might even get a visit from a peckish Crested Tit. Anagach is a great area to explore for wildlife, with some well used feeders already supplied by the Greenkeepers at Grantown Golf Club. We're putting up our feeders in a different area of the woods, not too far from one of the car parks and just off an all abilities path so that everyone can enjoy watching who comes to visit. Hopefully these new feeders will provide some supplementary food for our local animals, especially over the winter months when snow can cause disruption to natural food supplies.

© David Tolliday





The newspaper of the Bird Watching and Wildlife Club

The Watcher

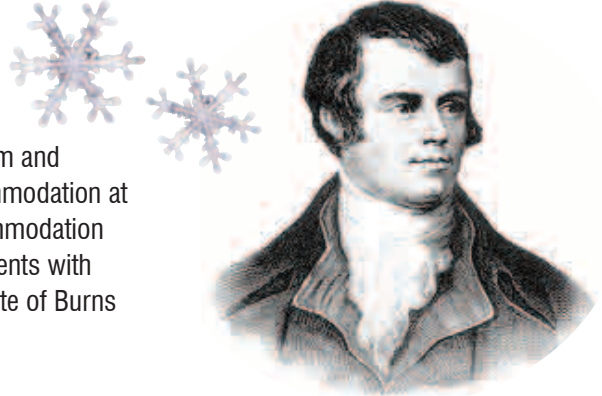


Special Events 2012

BURNS WINTER BREAK

Friday 20th January to Tuesday 24th January 2012

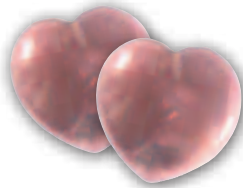
Beat the January blues and combine a winter wildlife break in the Cairngorms National Park with our Burns Night celebrations! This month you can enjoy a warm and friendly welcome in scenic surroundings, with great food and comfortable accommodation at the historic Grant Arms Hotel. Our Burns Winter Break includes four nights accommodation with full Scottish Breakfasts and delicious Dinners, as well as a programme of events with the Bird Watching & Wildlife Club. You'll also be able to enjoy our magnificent Taste of Burns Supper! **4 nights DBB—Only £195pp!**



VALENTINE'S BREAK

Friday 10th to Tuesday 14th February 2012

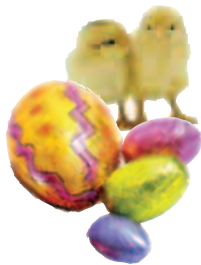
Join us at the Grant Arms for a Valentine's vacation to explore the stunning scenery and wealth of winter wildlife. A romantic Valentine's Dinner and programme of events from the BWWC Team is included. **£195pp DB&B (4 nights)**



SPECIAL EASTER BREAK

**Thursday 5th to Monday 9th April 2012
or Friday 6th to Tuesday 10th April 2012**

Combine an Easter break and some springtime wildlife spotting with the help of the BWWC Team's programme of events. Enjoy an Easter Gala Dinner and our Easter Egg Hunt with a difference! **£225pp DB&B (4 nights)**



WILDLIFE & WALKING BREAK

Thursday 6th September to Monday 10th September 2012

Enjoy the fantastic combination of a wildlife and walking break in an area perfectly suited to those with a love of the outdoors. This break includes a variety of events with the BWWC Team — who'll be on hand to provide information about all the local wildlife hotspots and best walking trails — and a guided walk from the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Walking Festival programme: www.tgwfw.co.uk **£345pp DB&B (4 nights)**



**FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT OUR SPECIAL EVENTS
PLEASE SEE THE BWWC WEBSITE www.bwwc.co.uk**

Special Event prices quoted are for Standard Rooms. Additional nights can be added to any Special Event subject to room availability should you wish to extend your stay—please ask when booking.

STANDARD TARIFF — 2012

DB&B	Jan–Feb	Mar	Apr–May	Jun–Sep
4 NIGHTS – Standard	£195	£225	£365	£345
– Superior	£255	£285	£425	£405
7 NIGHTS – Standard	£325	£395	£585	£545
– Superior	£430	£500	£690	£650

Price per person. Excludes Christmas, New Year and other Special Events.

Other lengths of stay are also available—please contact us for prices.

Single, Twin, Double & Family Rooms available. Four Poster Room supplement £25ppn.

Special Rates for Clubs, Tours and Conferences. Terms and conditions apply

TO BOOK CALL 01479 872526

www.bwwc.co.uk or email bookings@bwwc.co.uk

Grant Arms Hotel, 25 The Square, Granttown-on-Spey, PH26 3HF

