

Scotland Trip – May/June 2014

After what could only be described as a couple of weeks from hell for Wendy involving a death in the family (amongst other things) it was time for our 1st proper holiday of the year. We'd chosen to go to Scotland again for our 4th time and this would be Lyca's 1st holiday, so we didn't really know what to expect. We'd wanted to go a bit earlier in the year but couldn't find any cottages for the times when the Ben wasn't either out of service or mega expensive. I was about to completely give up trying until my Mum told me there was a TT getaway deal and I couldn't believe it when I saw that it was nearly half price! Even though June was a lot later than when we wanted to go, it occurred to us we'd have a chance of seeing some of the Highland insect specialties like Northern Damselfly, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, White-faced Darter, Small Blue and Northern Emerald, so I manically got to work hunting down a cottage. None of our old shortlisted cottages were available but eventually I found a new cottage on the outskirts of the Spey Valley area that looked suitable. We knew it was going to be tricky trying to balance birding and photography while trying to hold Lyca still on her lead and we didn't fancy our chances very much. I'd finally splashed out and bought a new fold down Skinner trap so we could see what weird and wonderful Moths we could pull in from the garden of the cottage. This idea totally depended on whether it was even possible to put the trap out without keeping the neighbours awake with the bright bulb. It was the 1st time we'd be able to take a proper trap on holiday too, as the other traps aren't transportable and won't fit in the car as well as all the other gear, which was quite exciting.

I'd picked a cottage in Feshiebridge that was both very nice and dog friendly. It was set in the Inshriach Forest, overlooking the river Feshie and boasted tons of wildlife in the garden including Red Squirrels as well as being really close to the best cake shop in the world :P. The only problem was that Feshiebridge is situated on the outskirts of the western edge of the Speyside area. The additional distance between places, which would normally be on our doorstep, concerned me.

Looking at the weather forecast it was predicting rain for the majority of the time we'd be there, so we made sure we'd packed our waterproofs even though it was nearly June! This time, just for a change, we weren't worried about the crossing being rough, as the forecast was for very light winds.....Happy days :).

Thursday 29th May

After a long day at work and working through my lunch hour, so I could leave early, I was free to go home and finish off the last of my packing. Wendy had been off all day so had done most of it by the time I got back. Lyca's box was packed including her leads, treats and all her dinners, which were weighed out into bags to keep things simple. We just hoped that she wasn't going to make a complete show of us when we were boarding. Surely all those people would kick off a hyper, big time? Sure enough just as forecast there was no wind at all and we headed off to the Sea Terminal, hardly believing our luck.

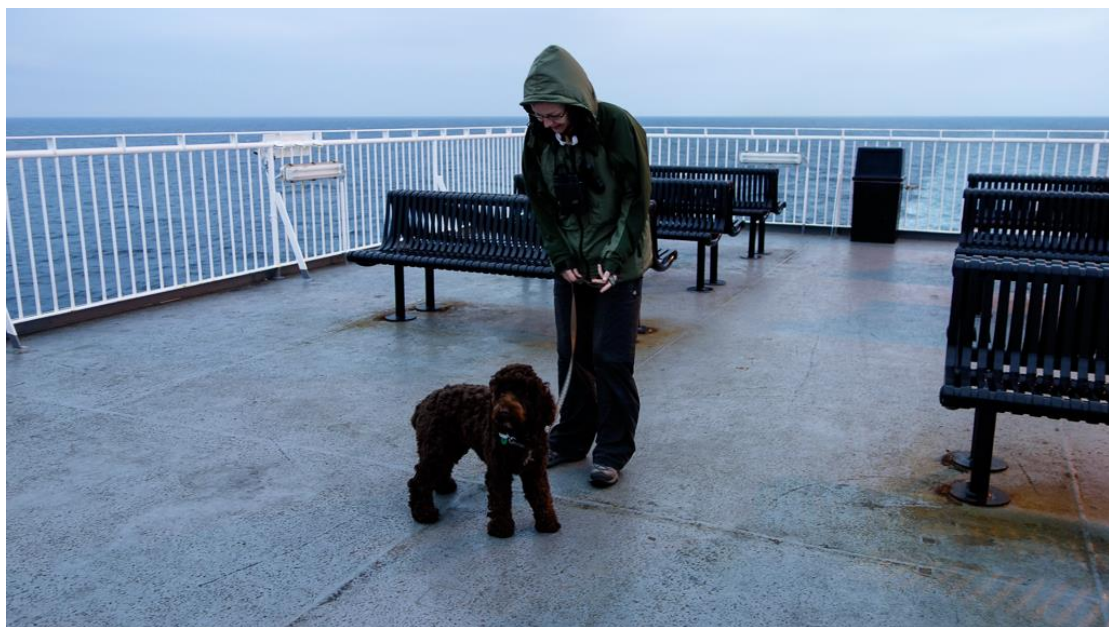
We arrived at 6.56pm and from the car park we, not surprisingly, saw **Herring Gulls, Feral Pigeon, House Sparrow** and there were good numbers of **House Martins** zooming about. There were a lot of Bikers leaving the Island already, which puzzled us, as it wasn't even the end of practice week! At 7.15pm we embarked and left at 7.34pm, which was nice and early. Wendy walked Lyca straight up to the cabins while I got the key to avoid any embarrassment, which

worked really well. Although she was pretty hyper she soon settled down in the cabin and curled up on the bed next to Wendy.



Slicked!

I hadn't had time for tea, nor was there anything in for me to eat at home, so I'd planned ahead and was going to get food on the boat. We watched a bit of TV while we waited to get further out, so we could go outside to Seawatch. From the cabin we only found an **Eider** and when we went outside we strangely saw absolutely nothing and returned to the cabin quickly.



Brrrrrr!

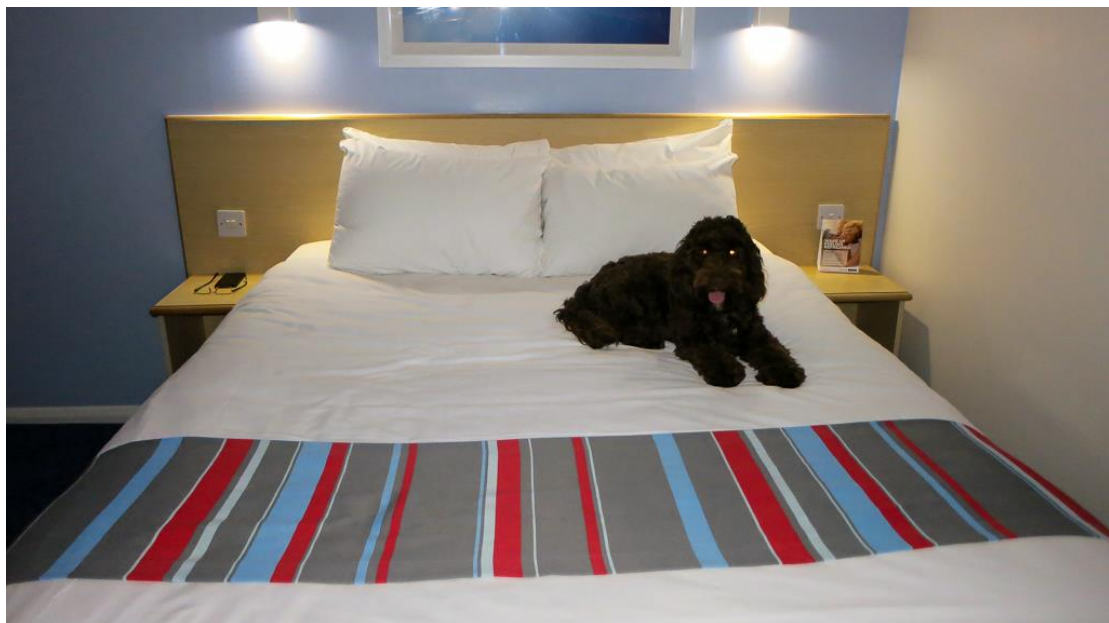
Straight away I pressed the bell for room service but nobody came, so I ended up having to do it again. Shortly after there was a knock on the door and Wendy went over to order the food. I'd gone for my usual chicken burger and chips and Wendy, knowing that there wouldn't be enough of mine for her to pinch, ordered herself some chips too. When the bloke came back with our stuff Wendy couldn't believe how massive her portion of chips was, there was easily enough to feed a small army! Lyca had to be restrained when he came into the cabin and put the tray on the table and was just a bit too excited by the whole thing. I was slightly

embarrassed when I noticed Wendy's Heat magazine was on the same table and left open on a page showing some woman's naked bum.....Dohhh! After our food we were both totally stuffed and Lyca remained nice and calm during the unbelievably smooth crossing. Amazingly by 10.45pm we were docking at Heysham and at 11pm we were disembarking, so we were well ahead of schedule. There were loads of Bikers waiting for the next sailing at the Terminal and they'd even set up a stage with a band playing the usual Biker stuff and a burger van for them outside the café area. At 11.10pm we drove away from the chaos and were on our way to our 1st port of call, the Travelodge at Dumfries.

The 'Duke of Rothesay' pub seemed to be doing well out of the surge of Bikers flocking to the Isle of Man, the car park was full of bikes. Seeing as there'd been a biker arrested coming off the boat for drink driving just that morning we hoped they were all taking it easy.

Friday 30th May

The journey up to Dumfries was uneventful and apart from a **Rabbit** just after the 'Welcome to Scotland' sign there was nothing else. We breathed a sigh of relief to have arrived at the Travelodge at 12.47pm, which was so much earlier than we'd estimated. After getting our bags out of the car and letting Lyca have a wee we went inside and were greeted by a very spritely bloke considering the time. He asked us where we'd travelled from and it turned out that although he was originally from Merseyside and had also lived in Scotland, he'd lived on the IOM for 10yrs before returning to settle up in Scotland. I couldn't help but notice a woman in VERY short shorts checking in just after us and wondered where on earth she'd come from. It wasn't exactly warm at 1am up in Scotland! In the room Lyca had a quick drink and then jumped up onto the bed, to make herself comfortable.



Bed time

After doing our teeth we crawled into bed too and I think we all went out like lights!

It was 7.43am when we woke up and it was a lovely sunny day outside. From the window we could see **Blackbird, Starling, Sparrow** and **Rook** before Wendy went downstairs to let Lyca out. Outside there was **Blue Tit, Collared Dove**, she

could hear **Chiffchaff** and **Willow Warbler** and more importantly Wendy spied a place next door called 'The Curly Coo' where she hoped to get a coffee fix from in the not too distant future. There was also a baby **Robin**, **Swallows**, **Goldfinches** and I discovered a Starling nest in the roof just above the room. When we'd woken up and got ourselves together we wasted no time in getting going and I started to load the car up while Wendy headed over to the café. She read the menu outside and was horrified to see that they didn't do cappuccino and that it looked like a bit of a greasy spoon, so she decided to give it a miss. Although we were hungry and had packed cereal bars, in case of emergency, we were saving ourselves for later when we got to Gatehouse of Fleet and made do with a smoothie to keep us going. Wendy had been so impressed by the Galloway Lodge chutney she'd bought that we were taking a giant detour from our Northward journey so she could stock up and while we were there we could also get breakfast from the café. When I went to get Lyca's Flexi-lead from her box I couldn't find it but Wendy was certain she'd packed it. Neither of us could find it and Wendy was very confused as she'd had it laid out with everything else of Lyca's before packing it all. She'd checked the sides on the kitchen before we locked up and left too....Uh? Luckily she'd brought her short lead for the boat and Travelodge, so we'd have to make do with that until we tracked down a Pet Shop. With our 1st plan of the day firmly set in stone and not too taxing we set off at 8.42am.

The temperature in my car was reading 12.5c but it felt decidedly chilly as we headed off. Driving past some fields we saw **Carrion Crow** and spotted a **Song Thrush** while we sat in traffic. There were **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** nesting on the roof of a warehouse and they certainly hadn't been there during our March trip. Further on there were **Jackdaws**, a poor dead **Badger** at the side of the road, which would please the Tories and UKIP no end and **Lapwing** displaying over the fields. We saw a fair few **Buzzards**, a **Great Tit** and passed a Llama farm! As we drove past Threave we couldn't resist giving it the finger and recalled our experience with the most unwelcoming woman ever! Keeping our eyes peeled for anything that moved we picked up **Mallard**, a **Moorhen** with babies, **Pied Wagtail** and the ever prevalent **Chaffinch**.

At 9.39am I parked up in the car park in Gatehouse of Fleet and we breathed a sigh of relief. By now we were starving so Wendy jumped out to go into the Galloway Lodge shop while I took Lyca for a quick leg stretch in the park.



The park

There were a good few **Swifts** zooming around over the river and just as last time the town had a nice relaxed feel to it. It was nice to be back even if it was only for a flying visit to get some food before our 1st walk of the day. Wendy seemed to be gone for ages and after she'd deliberated about how many chutney's she could feasibly buy and what to get for her breakfast, as mine was easy peasy, she finally emerged. Obviously mine was an Irn Bru and square sausage bap while she'd gone for a cappuccino and a cheese and tomato toastie. We needed all the energy we could get for the long day ahead and our yummy food went down a treat. Wendy was again very impressed by how friendly the staff were and was more than a bit relieved to have not been followed round the shop by store detectives after nearly leaving without paying last time. After we'd finished and our bellies were full Wendy nipped into Spa for some water and before we left we took a wander down to the river to check for Dipper. My Mum and Dad had seen Dipper there, a few of weeks beforehand, so we were quietly confident. We edged our way down the bank and had a scan.....no Dipper!



River

All was not lost though as we had plenty of places up in the Highlands where we were certain we'd see them. While Wendy was taking some pics I spotted a lovely **Kingfisher** whizzing up the river but it didn't stop and was gone in a flash. Wendy was gutted! We then had a nice **Grey Wagtail** on the riverbank but not much else, so we headed back to the car.

We left at 10.39am and made a beeline for the nearby woods we'd pinpointed in March for all the woodland species we'd never see at home. It supposedly had Pied Fly, Wood Warbler and Redstart breeding there in summer and we reckoned it was well worth a visit. We saw a **Whitethroat** on the way and just as I thought I knew where I was going I decided that I was actually lost. After thinking about it for a while I realized that I'd been right all along so the panic was over....Doh! Just 7mins later we were there and I parked up in the layby at Carlstramon Woods and Lyca was raring to go. As we stood by the car getting our cameras and Lyca on her lead Wendy chirped up that she could hear a Wood Warbler. I had a listen but couldn't hear anything different at all, so we started our walk up the footpath seeing **Coal Tit** and hearing loads of **Siskin** high up in the trees surrounding us. There was a couple of dodgy looking people, on the

track ahead of us, with two scummy looking dogs off the lead. I worked out that we could enter the wood further up to avoid them but just as we set off we noticed that they'd completely vanished.....Spooky! On the 1st stretch of the walk up the hill we spotted a male and female **Bullfinch** in a bush quite close to us but they never came into the clear for us to get a shot. There were small birds flitting around all over the place but with all the leaves now on the trees it was incredibly hard to pin one down.



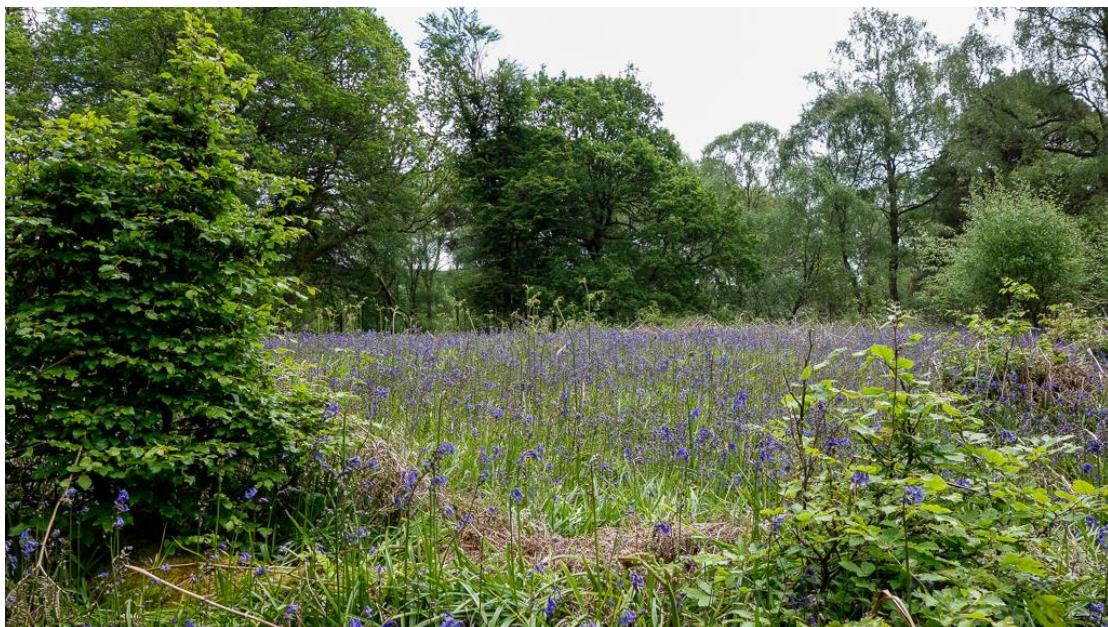
Carlstramon Woods

We had our eye on a bird, which was behaving like a Flycatcher but we couldn't get a clear view. I presumed Spotted Fly until Wendy got a better view and announced, "**Pied Flycatcher!**" Nice one! It was a brown female but still nice to see. We then heard a **Cuckoo** calling loud and clear from somewhere we knew we'd never find. We tried to call it in like they do on TV but it only resulted in the bird ending up further away and us two looking like a pair of idiots. There were Willow Warblers singing from everywhere and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** flew in above our heads. We were surprised to see a large number of **Silver-ground Carpet Moths** flying around over the undergrowth and then we came across another Pied Fly, this time a lovely male. We stopped to try for some shots of the bird but it never posed how I wanted it to :(.



Pied Flycatcher

I was quite pleased when I picked up a **Nuthatch** on call but it was getting quite warm by then and there were a fair few midgies out already, which we hoped wasn't going to be a problem during the week. At the top of the hill, where there was a sunny clearing, there were a lot of **Green-veined White Butterflies** as well as a small yellowy orange Butterfly. The Bluebell carpet must've looked amazing a few weeks earlier but they were all pretty much past it, which was a shame.



Bluebell carpet

We didn't know what the Butterfly was and it was so quick it made it virtually impossible to get it in our bins for a better look. There was a possibility that it could've been a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary owing to the habitat and its size but it didn't settle and flew so fast we just couldn't pin it down, so it drove us mental for a long time. I texted Andy who knows his Butterflies inside out and he said it could've been one, going off my description. Ooooo exciting! Finally we got a fleeting glimpse of dark brown markings on its yellow wings and I managed

a very blurred in-flight record shot. Looking back at the pic Wendy recognized it from an ispot photo she'd confirmed a couple of weeks ago but had to refer to the book later to remember its name. It wasn't a Butterfly at all and turned out to be a **Speckled Yellow Moth**, which we couldn't grumble at, as it was a lifer for us both. We were both feeling disappointed that we'd only managed to find 1 of the 3 birds we'd set to and started to worry that we'd be leaving without the rest. It'd been worth a trip to this wood though just to see Lyca's reaction. She was having a wail of a time with all the new smells and was happily keeping herself entertained.



Woo Hoo!

On the way back down we finally saw a **Spotted Flycatcher**, which we'd have bet money on before a Pied Fly, and I stopped in my tracks when I heard a song I'd been hoping to hear since we'd arrived. I turned around to Wendy, who's ears had already pricked up, to confirm what she'd thought she'd heard back at the car. Thankfully we were hearing the 2nd of our target birds.....**Wood Warbler** :). There were actually a few of them in the woods, which was even better than we'd expected but as usual it was impossible to get a view of one. The heat was on to get the last one but we didn't fancy our chances much, as we hadn't heard anything resembling its song. We carried on looking even though we'd started to lose all hope and found nothing more than a **Treecreeper** and a **Blackcap**. It would just be too much to ask for to get everything we wanted, so resigning ourselves to the fact, we carried on. We didn't give up trying though and we stopped again to check out a movement in the branches. We looked up and with great relief Wendy called out, "**Redstart!**" Phew! It was a male too, which is always a bonus and with that we were done and free to carry on with our journey north. A **Raven** flew over calling and on the way back we had to stop every few steps to check the numerous moths for anything different. Back at the car it was 12.20pm and we were more than happy to have come away with all 3 species we'd set out to and that we'd managed to find such a brilliant place during our March trip.

A **Pheasant** was the only new bird we saw until we hit Laurieston and it felt like only 5mins ago that we were there last time. The scenery in the area is superb, so the drive doesn't feel like a chore.



Laurieston

There was a lot of noisy **Meadow Pipits** doing their parachute display over the fields. We found a male **Wheatear** then I pulled the car in to a layby when we spotted some small Butterflies/Moths. We had high hopes for a Skipper Butterfly but try as we might we couldn't get them in our bins and again they didn't settle for a second.....Grrrrrrr! After what seemed like ages we had all the details we needed and although we'd hoped for something more interesting we ended up with loads of **Common Heath Moths**. Ah well, at least we finally understood why they were called 'Common' as back at home they're anything but! We heard another Cuckoo calling and spotted an **Orange Tip Butterfly** before we had our 1st **Red Kite** of the trip going over the exact same field as last time. I was kept on my toes on the single track windy roads, as the locals don't seem used to seeing oncoming traffic. I narrowly avoided 2x head on collisions in just 100yds!

Our next stop was another familiar place, which we'd never been to in summer. On one of the narrow roads leading to the reserve we came across a power line being repaired. The bloke must've been Manx as he continued to fix the line and left the road completely blocked for about 10mins.



Take your time!

Luckily we weren't in a rush and are Manx, so live by the rule of 'time enough' :P. After he'd finished and moved out of the way we carried on and parked up at Ken-Dee Marshes at 1.15pm.



Entrance

Still full from our late and rather large breakfast we decided to have lunch after we'd visited the reserve and got our stuff out of the car. Wendy found a micro moth on the car so I grabbed a quick record shot to ID it later. First off we heard a flock of **Redpoll** flying over and heading down the footpath we had **Common Blue** and **Large Red Damselflies** resting on the bushes. Further down we had another Spotted fly, **Black-headed Gulls** and a **Red Admiral Butterfly**. We'd really hoped for more Wood Warblers in the woods but it was all very quiet.



Woods

When we reached the hide Wendy was 1st to go in, as we had Lyca with us and dogs aren't allowed in Hides, which makes things a bit tricky.



Ken-Dee Marshes

She joined the 4 other people in there and sat down for a scan picking up **Grey Heron** and a pair of **Shoveler**. There was a colony of Black-headed Gulls on the Island, which had chicks, **Oystercatcher** and she watched 2x male Great Spotted Woodpeckers chasing each other. Next it was my turned, so I handed Lyca over to Wendy while I went in. I managed to add **Common Gull** to the list and was lucky to hear and then see a **Common Sandpiper** flying in. There was no sign of the Willow Tits, so we saw no point in sticking around and headed off back to the car hearing yet another Cuckoo and a **Curlew** calling.

We found a **Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly** on the way and were back by 2.32pm feeling quite peckish and very thirsty. Wendy rummaged round in the boot and produced Lycas bowl and a bag of food, which she absolutely wolfed down before she drank more water than both of us put together! Our lunch consisted of a bag of crisps and a cereal bar, as that was all we had.....Hahahaha! Before we left Wendy had a quick look at Loch Ken and added **Mute Swan** and **Canada Goose** and prepared herself for the biggest stretch of our journey. When she asked me, "How long's it gonna take?" I had a quick check on my Sat Nav. It was saying I had a 215mile drive ahead of me, which would take 4hrs 31mins and our eta was 7.20pm. Urrrrrrggghhhhhh! The prospect didn't fill Wendy with joy but I was feeling good and was pretty sure I could do the drive in one go, since it was daytime.

At 2.47pm I pulled away and we were on our way with Lyca curled up asleep on the back seat. The two walks had worked a treat! :) We had more Red Kites than you could shake a stick at and a **Jay** just after Ken-Dee and a **Magpie**, **Mistle Thrush** and some **Greylags** on a small Loch further on. There were 6x Buzzards flying around together and one of them sickeningly flew at the same level as us alongside the car. Needless to say there was nowhere to pull over and our best chance of brilliant Buzzard shot went straight down the drain :(To keep us amused we had another Wheatear and some Lapwings mobbing a Common Gull.

At 4.09pm we hit the M74 to Glasgow.....Phew! There was a **Kestrel** hovering at the side of the motorway and by then Wendy thought that herself and Lyca needed to get out to stretch their legs and have a wee. Having deliberately driven past all the available Services, so I could just keep going, we had to keep our eyes peeled for a layby somewhere on route. Finally at 5.18pm, after we'd

turned off the motorway and got on the Perthshire tourist route, I found a suitable spot and parked up.



Are we there yet?

We all got out into the sunshine and Wendy instantly picked up the sound of a **Yellowhammer**. While she was trying to be discrete behind the car so as not to be visible to the other car drivers I tried to get close enough to one of the birds, which was singing from a bush nearby. I got very close but there was a branch right across the bird so I never bothered to even press the shutter.....Booo :(. After our short break we carried on and it wasn't long before we got into the mountains and the awesome scenery of the route.



Scenic route

Wendy all of sudden asked me to stop the car so she could check out a bird she'd spotted flying high up against a hill. I had to keep driving until I found a layby, which didn't go down well, as it was now further away and would be harder to see. I wondered what all the fuss was about until she casually said it might be an Owl! She jumped out of the car, quickly followed by me and sure enough there was a **Short-eared Owl** out hunting in the hills.....very nice :). Further up the

road we spotted a **Roe Deer** and then I pulled out a **Common Snipe** sitting motionless in the long grass. We were then into Grouse territory and in no time at all we had 2x **Red Grouse** complete with 3x tiny fluffy chicks. There was no sign of any Black Grouse though :(Next up was a **Brown Hare** followed by some **Tufted Ducks** flying over a Loch but then we saw a small brown bird sitting on a fence. We quickly got our bins on it before it flew off and were very pleased to find that it was a male **Whinchat**! Wendy spotted a **Red-legged Partridge** next to the road and a Redstart flew over the road in front of us. The tiny road climbed up and up to a height of 1764ft at its highest point and the view down into the valley was amazing.



Wow!

It was already 7.05pm but was still a very pleasant 19c but our calmness soon turned to panic when I realized that I didn't have enough petrol left to get us to Feshiebridge! Not only that but our eta of 7.20pm was way off and we still had quite a way to go. I wasn't worried though, as the tourist route would end in the Pitlochry area back on the A9 and surely there'd definitely be a petrol station there.....? As the lovely road worked its way down to Kenmore my Sat Nav said to continue on to the north side of the valley and then head east towards the A9. "Fair enough" I thought, although last time we did this route we travelled on the south side. After about 10 miles I realized that it wasn't right, as we were heading in the wrong direction completely. When we finally joined the A9, after having wasted a load of time, miles and petrol, I realized we were well north of Pitlochry! I didn't want to waste more time heading the wrong way and just assumed there would be a petrol station on the A9 somewhere.

Eventually we saw the "Welcome to the Highlands" sign and we knew we'd broken the back of the journey. We still had the very real possibility of running out of petrol hanging over us to take away the usual feeling of great relief. Our arrival into the Highlands was followed by the sky turning very dark and it looked like it could rain at any moment too. I programmed the nearest Petrol station into my Sat Nav and to our delight it wasn't far away in Dalwhinnie. When we saw the sign for local services including petrol we were laughing.

Dalwhinnie was shockingly small, smaller than Ballasalla and as I drove down the street we found the petrol station, which sure enough was closed! I stopped and programmed in the next nearest petrol station. This was at a Spar in

Newtownmore, so I was pretty sure it'd be open. It was showing as 10 miles away and I had now 10 miles left in the tank.....Uh oh! 5 miles later we reached the turn off for Newtownmore and imagine my shock to see a road closed sign sitting in the middle of the road.....Nooooo! We had no choice but to continue on and hope that another turn off wasn't far away. Five miles later at Kingussie we turned off and then had to head back 5 miles to Newtownmore. My petrol display was now showing 0 miles and my gauge was showing as completely empty, so I went into James May hyperdriving mode to eek out as many miles as possible. If this petrol station wasn't open we were goofed. Unbelievably when we arrived in the town it was much bigger and looked more civilized, so when we spotted the petrol station AND it was open we let out a cheer.....Phewwwww! As it was so late Wendy went into the shop but there was nothing in there that we needed. After filling up, I drove to the local 'Co-op Food' and Wendy went in to get all our basics for breakfast and lunch the next day, so at least our big Tesco shop could wait until tomorrow when we weren't so tired and desperate to get to the cottage. Phew! Unfortunately there was no Lactofree milk for my breakfast and not much that we could quickly rustle up for our tea with but it was better than nothing.

Imagine our relief when at 8.57pm and way later than expected (stupid Sat Nav) we finally arrived at 'Ord Cottage' in Feshiebridge, which was to be our HQ for the coming week.



Ord Cottage

All we had to do was lug all our gear in, unpack, have tea, baths and hopefully find a few minutes to chill out before going to bed. Now imagine our surprise when a woman from the house next door, who had our key, came over to the car and asked us if we were staying there because her son was inside revising! Apparently she knew the owners and was staying next door, which was why she'd been given our key to look after. Wendy's face was a picture but I tried to be calm about it even if it was slightly odd. She then proceeded to let herself in, toddler in tow and help her teenage son remove all his stuff while we stood outside looking at each other in disbelief. All we wanted to do was get inside to get everything sorted so we could finally put our feet up. It took them a few of trips with a lot of hanging around in the process, so we started to bring our bags in anyway. We felt more than a bit awkward really with 3 strangers milling around in there, seemingly having made themselves quite at home, who surely

shouldn't have been in there at all? Hmmmmm how bizarre! They finally left and we carried on about our business with Wendy unpacking while I brought our heavy bags in. Lyca's lead was still nowhere to be seen and it was definitely not with us, how strange :/. Disappointingly the feeders were nearly empty and the bird food bin in the utility room had nothing in it, so we'd need to buy some more as soon as possible. On the positive side though it looked like I had a good place to put the moth trap out that wouldn't annoy the neighbours and it was right next to a Scots Pine forest. :)

Lyca, after a good sniff around, seemed to settle in quickly but when Wendy ran a bath and found it to be cold she was less than happy. She couldn't believe that it had happened again and went off for a cold bath anyway.....Brrrrrrrrrr! I reset the boiler and checked the timer and sure enough, the hot water was set to off... Grrrrrrr! When she'd finished she poured herself a Spritzer and picked up the phone to ring her Mum and let her know we'd arrived safely. Yes, we actually had a phone this time :). She wasn't so happy to find that when she lifted the handset there was somebody on the line already, so hung up straight away. Confused, I tried again and got the same, so I said, "Hello?" and he stopped talking. It turned out to be the teenage son who'd been in the house when we arrived and my only guess was that he'd taken one of the handsets from our cottage by mistake as there was one missing from the kitchen. "Sorted!" I thought. When he came round we compared our numbers it turned out that theirs was the same, so we were on a shared line! I explained that Wendy needed to phone her Mum and said in future we will have to do first come first served. Wendy phoned her mum and during the conversation her Mum said, "How come I've got Lyca's Flexi-lead?" Her Mum had taken Lyca for a walk with her and Trixie on Thursday afternoon and must've picked her lead up and taken it home by mistake when she dropped her back off! Mystery solved but it was going to be hard work walking Lyca on the short lead, as she pulls like mad on it! By then it was too late to even think about cooking tea so we both made do with some toast.



Kitchen

Wendy took Lyca outside before we went to bed and was surprised not to hear any Tawny Owls calling. It looked like the perfect place for them but then again maybe they were busy breeding and didn't have time. It had been a very long

day so after I'd put both the Moth trap and camera trap out and baited some tree stumps with hazelnuts it was definitely time for bed!

Saturday 31st May

Wendy woke up feeling very spritely with sunlight streaming into the bedroom, so she thought it was time to get up. When she looked at her phone and saw that it was only 4am she was really surprised and went back to bed to get some more bonus time sleep. When she woke again it was 7.30am, which was more like it but she felt absolutely knackered and worse than she had at stupid o'clock. It was a lovely day again, so when I got up I went straight outside to have a look at what we'd caught in the traps.



Top of the garden

All you could hear were the calls of loads of **Siskins** in the forest behind the house and a male Greater Spotted Woodpecker came to the nut feeder, scaring all the smaller birds away.

The moth trap had done very well and there were even moths, drawn in by the reflection of light, resting on the white wall of the house. It took ages to get them all into pots but we ended up with 40+ in total and a lot of them I had to let go. Some were unidentified and others were the same as the ones I already had but I also ran out of pots. Doh, I hadn't expected that to happen! There were a good few I didn't recognize, so we set about trying to ID them before putting them all in the fridge, so we could go out.



Anyone for breakfast?

Wendy found the 1st ones pretty quickly, which were 2x Nut-tree Tussock and 1x Bordered White (both lifers for us) but the rest were proving to be tricky, so we left them in the fridge for later :P.



Nut-tree Tussock

One of them was very interesting and I reckoned it was a Saxon, which is classed as nationally scarce, so I put a quick picture on ispot and hoped we'd get a confirmation sooner rather than later. The camera trap made my heart sink, there was nothing on it at all and to top it all off the hazelnuts were all still there. There was no evidence to suggest that we had Red Squirrels visiting the garden never mind Pine Marten! We weren't too worried though because we'd be spending plenty of time in forests, so we'd catch up with some Squirrels sooner or later. Wendy was toing and froing from moths to making sarnies and getting ready for the day. Lyca wolfed her breakfast and was eating better than she had

for months at home. We thought we'd better slap some SPF 30 on, topped off with 'Skin so Soft' to repel any midgies before we left, which made us look pretty greasy.....Yuk! After the hectic start to our 1st morning at the cottage we were ready to go and as we loaded up the car we could hear another Wood Warbler singing from the other side of the river.



Bottom of the garden

We left at 9.35am and headed to our 1st stop of the day, nearby Insh Marshes, passing a **Red Deer** Roe on the way. I parked up at 9.46am and straight away we heard another **Cuckoo** but as usual it was too far away for us to be able to see it. With Lyca pulling like mad on her short lead we walked over to the picnic table and read the info board to get our bearings, as we'd never been there before. I was looking for the Visitors Centre so we could pay and get going but there didn't seem to be one and all we found was a hide/view point that looked over the vast marshes.



Insh Marshes

We saw nothing of note from there so after going round in circles for a while we followed our noses onto a track. The track took us through a birch wood where

there were so many insects about we didn't know where to look. After a while we ended up high up on a bank overlooking a river.....with nothing on it. Boooooo! The track eventually lead us down to a heath with some small trees scattered amongst the heather.



Too hot for me!

It wasn't easy with Lyca pulling so much on her lead and having to carry my camera on one shoulder as well as trying to look through my bins was challenging to put it mildly. We found a Dragonfly, which we hoped would be something interesting but turned out to be just a **Four-spotted Chaser**, but when it landed deep inside a bush Wendy grabbed a quick record shot anyway.



Four-spotted Chaser

Further along we were heading towards a stand of trees on a hill and could hear the distinct song of a **Tree Pipit** and very nice to hear it was too. It was definitely too warm for my liking and to make matters worse my camera strap wasn't doing its job and kept annoying me by slipping off my shoulder.....Grrrrrrrrr! I started to throw a bit of a Karl Pilkington strop, which Wendy found hilarious because it's normally her! I'm not very keen on hot

weather at all and hadn't prepared for it, so was trying to keep cool in just my T-shirt (and trousers obviously :P). Wendy was slightly worse off and had a long sleeved T-shirt and a fleece on under her coat and although she wasn't complaining she was definitely boiling! There were Willow Warblers and Tree Pipits singing everywhere and oodles of Common Heath Moths flying over the heather. We found a **Common White Wave Moth** and when we reached the end of the path there was a Tree Pipit sitting on an overhead cable so I grabbed a distant record shot.



Tree Pipit

Wendy was starting to feel the strain of the last couple of weeks, so we took some time out and sat on a bench to take in the views.



Nice

Lyca was panting and looked like she needed a drink so having left her pop-up bowl in the car I had to pour water into my hand for her to drink. Messy!

It was so hot that we had to have a drink as well but while we were sitting there I realized that we'd taken the longest route by accident! We weren't exactly lost but I didn't know where we were, so we just followed our noses and set off in what I guessed was the general direction of the car park. There were so many Common Heaths around that we were nearly standing on them. With it being so sunny they were all sunbathing on the path and there must've been 1000's of them! After what seemed like ages we rejoined a path we'd been on

originally.....Skillzz. The walk had ended up being way longer than I thought it would be but it had been a new and pleasant one.

Back at the car it was 12.06pm, so we decided to have lunch before we set off to our next place. The only problem was that I'd had to put a bag of Lycas poo in the boot before we started the walk, as there were no dog bins and neither of us fancied carrying it around, so the car stank.....Bleurrghhhh! It was too hot to sit in the car anyway so we decided to sit on the grass with Lyca tethered to a rail and all the car doors and boot open :P.



Picnic time

As we ate lunch we concluded that Insh Marshes was definitely more about habitat protection than your normal nature reserve with hides and wildlife on show, that's not to say it was a bad place though. The only real negative was that it was in desperate need of some bins. There were a few people having picnics and it was good to see that there was no litter, so everyone must be decent enough to take it home with them.....unlike back at home! As we cleared away and were getting back into the car the temperature was reading 23.5c but it felt much hotter out in the sun.

We left at 12.31pm and with it being such a warm and sunny day it was perfect conditions for our next stop. As we drove past a forest something big whizzing through the trees caught our eye and made us stop quickly. Unfortunately it was just a Buzzard being attacked by a Mistle Thrush and we couldn't help but wonder why it couldn't have been a Goshawk. Bah! All of a sudden the sun disappeared behind some thick clouds and it didn't look like it was going to show itself again for some time. This was really bad news, as we needed the sun to bring out the Dragonflies we were hoping to find at our next stop.

I parked up at Uath Lochans at 12.45pm and (talk about small world) there was the woman from next door, peddling along the path on a bike with the toddler in a cart on the back. We didn't get out of the car until she'd gone, as we'd had such an awkward 1st meeting the night before. We walked down to the Loch where there were some baby **Goldeneyes** swimming around and diving for food. We were watching some moths flying around and wondered if they were China Marks, as they kept dropping down and touching the water. There was no way we were getting them in our bins though, as they were just too fast! I spotted a

moth drowning in the water, so I grabbed a fallen branch and fished it out. I put it safely on the bank so it could dry off but the moth had other ideas and flew straight back out over the water. It must've had a bad day! With it now being so cloudy we got the distinct impression that we were wasting our time but carried on regardless. Heading over the boardwalk, towards the pools and bogs we were aiming for, I shrieked at Wendy when she nearly accidentally stood on a huge **Frog!** As expected there was nothing flying around the pools and we couldn't believe our bad luck. The area looked perfect but we must have been just a little bit too early in the year.



Uath Lochans

Lyca then decided to fall into a deep, mossy and very boggy ditch, which took her by surprise, and came out looking like a Bog Monster! Wendy could see that the 1st thing she'd be doing when we got home was to give her a good scrub. We saw another Four-spotted Chaser, which was laying eggs in a ditch and added **Common Blue Damselfly** to our list before heading back to the car. There'd been 3 specialities we'd gone there for, White-faced Darter, Northern Damselfly and Northern Emerald but we'd failed to see any of them.....Urrghhhhhh! It was 1.53pm when we got back to the car and after we'd all had a much needed drink I looked at the temperature. It was 19.5c, the cloud cover had dropped the temp quickly at the exact time we needed it as hot as possible.....Arrghhhhhh!

Next up we thought we'd go and check whether there was any action at the Osprey nest at Loch Insh and we arrived at the car park at 2.02pm. We wandered through the cemetery and had a look at the nest, which you can just about make out at the top of the tree, to the left of the dead tree, on the Island.



Loch Insh

We could just about make out the back and tail of presumably the female lying very low. The male was nowhere to be seen and probably out fishing somewhere nearby but it was still nice to know that they were there. We walked down to the waters edge too to see if we find him or get a better view of the nest but it was probably worse from there. There was a family of Goldeneye on the Loch but apart from that it was very quiet. When we got back to the car it was nice to finally find a dog poo bin but at 20c it was still too hot for me and my narkiness was returning. There was only one thing for it.....cake :P.

As it was nearby and not out of the way I parked up and Wendy ran over the road to The Potting Shed Café at Inshriach Nurseries.



Inshriach Nurseries

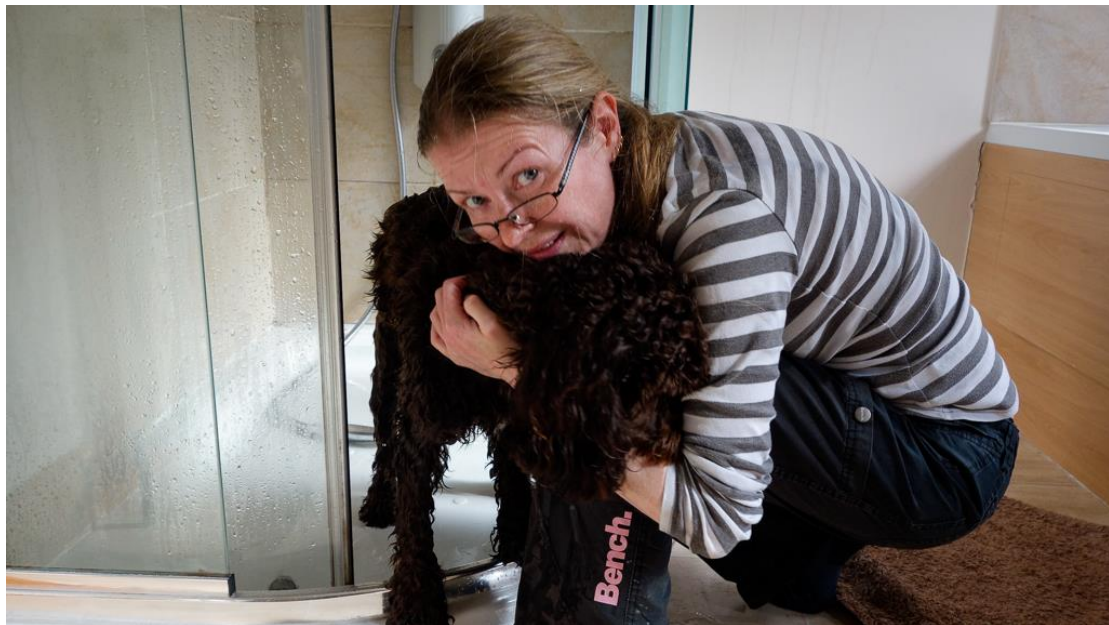
This has been deemed as the best cake shop in the world by the many reviews and blogs I've read about the area and it never lets me down. Wendy came back with a box and some drinks and my face lit up, Lindt chocolate cake.....Om nom nom :). I had it demolished in no time, with a bit of help from Wendy and she'd even bought a bit for later too.

As it was only down the road and en-route to our next stop I decided to go back to the cottage to get changed. To be honest I was starting to flag by then and could quite happily have gone in for a nap but we still had things to do. Some "Happy Birthday" banners and tables and chairs had appeared in the garden of the other house next door. It looked like they were preparing for a party and we just hoped that it wasn't going to be for a load of rowdy teenage lads. OMG we must be getting old :(! While I was inside our neighbour returned on her bike with the kid asleep in the back. To break the ice and make things less awkward from the night before Wendy smiled and said, "Someone's tired!" to which she replied with a big grin and a thumbs up.....Phew! Our next plan was to pop into the Heather Centre for some bird food and to try and find a Flexi-lead for Lyca. It was a bit of a trek out to Nethybridge but we could also pop into Aviemore Tesco on the way back. The journey didn't seem to take that long by the time we parked up at the Heather Centre, so I was pleased because I'd been worried that Feshiebridge would be miles away from everywhere. I grabbed some bags of peanuts and seed while Wendy looked at the pet section of the shop. There were no Flexi-leads, so having no idea where any Pet Shops were we'd have to get our thinking caps on. I couldn't decide what to do next and threw it to Wendy. Should we go to nearby Loch for Slav Grebe or go to the River Spey for Dipper? She made an instant decision, Slav Grebe was much more exciting than Dipper.

We know that the Loch has a member's only sign at the entrance but we've never had any problems there before. Scotland also has a right to roam law in place, so you can't get in trouble anywhere really, apart from Military bases I suppose! We always assumed the signs were there to stop every Tom, Dick and Harry going in and I drove in at 3.47pm. Straight away we picked up 2x Common Sandpipers, **Sand Martins** feeding over the pool and 2x **Little Grebes** swimming about close to the reeds. We then spotted what we wanted and a lovely summer plumage **Slavonian Grebe** popped up quite close to us. I tried to move the car so we could get a view without the sun in our face but a serious faced bloke appeared and started to walk towards us. He came over and asked us if we were staying at the Hotel. I just acted innocent and said, "No?" to which he said, "Are you visiting someone?" to which I also said "No." Looking back, I'm not sure who or what I could've been visiting up the track apart from a Cow or farm trailer or something. He then told us that we'd have to leave.....Boooooooooo :(In hindsight going at a weekend was probably taking a risk of a busy body being about and now we couldn't chance going again, so that was that, our best Slav Grebe site was a no go zone.

Tesco was our only other plan for the day and we went in at 4.01pm to find it very busy. We did our shopping quickly but we couldn't find a lead nor did they have any tealights, so Wendy asked one of the staff if he knew of anywhere that would sell either. He told her where there was a shop that would sell both so we headed straight there. After having to ask directions we eventually found the place and Wendy went inside. Looking around she couldn't find anything so asked the lady behind the counter who directed her to their hardware shop next door. When she found that the only Flexi-lead they had was for a large dog and cost £32 she again asked if they had any others. They'd totally sold out of medium but she was told that next door had tealights. Back she went and picked up a big bag of them, which was all they had. We were a bit gutted that we couldn't find a lead and didn't fancy spending the entire week with Lyca pulling with all the excitement!

We were back at HQ at 5.15pm and sure enough there was a party going on next door, including the woman from the other house with her youngest kid. It looked like a pretty quiet and civilized affair, which was a relief. The cover on the back seat was absolutely filthy and Lyca's legs were covered in green moss and who knows what else, she was a mess! Wendy's 1st task after unpacking the shopping was to shower Lyca and fortunately it was only her legs that needed doing. While she was busy doing that I put the oven for my tea. A few minutes later I heard a shriek and then heard Wendy cursing and eventually a spluttered, "Help!" When I opened the door to the bathroom I nearly wet myself laughing. Wendy was soaked through and had water dripping off her face, her hair etc....Hahahahahaha! Apparently she couldn't turn the shower spray off and had accidentally turned the jets, which ran down the back, on. They'd managed to drench her as well as hitting as far away as the opposite wall by the sink and just to top it off it'd been cold water! I reached over to turn it off and unbelievable did exactly the same thing and gave her a 2nd soaking.....Ooooooops! Luckily she took it well and although she didn't exactly enjoy it she was laughing so much she could hardly move let alone speak.



Soaked!

After drying Lyca and also the floor and wall of the bathroom we set about doing tea.

Wendy was going to knock up a quick Tofu Stir-fry while all I had to do was peel off a plastic lid and put the entire meal on a baking tray and slam it in the oven.....easy peasy, even I could manage that! Mine was going to take 18mins so I walked away and left it to cook. When I went back for a look after 6mins my jaw hit the floor when I saw that the plastic packaging had melted into a shiny black puddle and that the chicken seemed to be done :O! I quickly got it out and wondered what I'd done wrong but after reading the instructions again and again I'd done everything right.....Uh? Luckily the plastic was still solid and hadn't touched the chicken and the sauce compartment was still intact. The sauce was still pretty cold and although Wendy told me to microwave it I just couldn't be bothered and ate it as it was, with some microwave rice. I ate it tentatively and just hoped that I didn't get salmonella or something worse! Wendy had her stir-fry and went off to get out of her still soaking clothes and have a nice hot bath.

While we sat watching TV we both realized that our faces were tingling from the sun and that we were slightly burnt. Wendy phoned her Mum without any interruptions from next door and chilled out with a Spritzer. I started to go through our photos before we went outside to put the moth trap out again. There was still no sign of any Tawny Owls calling but a **Woodcock** flew over the house with a high pitched, "Squeak!" There were also 2x **Bats** flying around the trees but we'd gone and forgotten the Bat detector again (we've forgotten it on every holiday so far) so we had no idea what type they were. As I set the trap up I had to go inside and put the midgie net hat on, as they were out in force and eating me alive! Next doors party was still going strong, albeit quietly and they were all now huddled around what looked like a fire they'd lit in a barbeque. With all those midgies they'd have needed it! Our moth from earlier was confirmed on ispot as a Saxon, so we were pretty chuffed with getting such a scarce moth on our 1st attempt.



Saxon

By 11pm we were totally done for and went off to bed for a well earned sleep.

Our moth list from the mornings catch is as follows, with the lifers in bold:

Nut-tree Tussock x5
Brown-silver lines x3
Peppered Moth x1
Lesser Swallow Prominent x3
Swallow Prominent x1
Red-green Carpet x2
Bordered White x1
Saxon x1
Flame Carpet x1
Ochreous Pug x4
Garden Carpet x1
Grey Pine Carpet x1
Spruce Carpet x1

Sunday 1st June

It was 6.36am when we woke up and it was grey outside but we went straight out with Lyca to check the moth trap. It'd obviously been less successful than the previous night, as there was nothing on the walls of the house for starters. I brought the trap in and opened it up to find just 9x moths inside. I then checked the camera trap and although we hadn't caught any Red Squirrels on it again, strangely it had captured loads of moths flying around. If they'd been around then why hadn't they gone into the trap? Weird! It was still quite early so it was nice to hear all the bird song around us. The Wood Warbler was still singing from somewhere near the bridge over the river, there was a Chiffchaff, **Goldcrest** and some **Redpoll** flew over. Just like at home.....NOT! The male Woodpecker was back on the nut feeder too, which was nice to see. Lyca wolfed all her breakfast down enthusiastically again so she must've been hungry! The sun started to make an appearance but as it did the wind started to pick up too and the forecast for every day from tomorrow onwards was bad :(While I was packing up the car up I couldn't resist trying to track down that Wood Warbler, so off I went over the bridge. I aimed for where I could hear it coming from and even though it was half way up a river valley cliff I managed to track it down and was rewarded with a brilliant view but I didn't have my camera with me NOOOOO! I didn't think for a second that I'd need it, as they're notoriously hard to see never mind having a clear view.....Urrghhhhhh! I could've kicked myself but then again if I'd taken my camera I probably wouldn't even have caught a glimpse of the bird and probably would have fell off the cliff anyway.

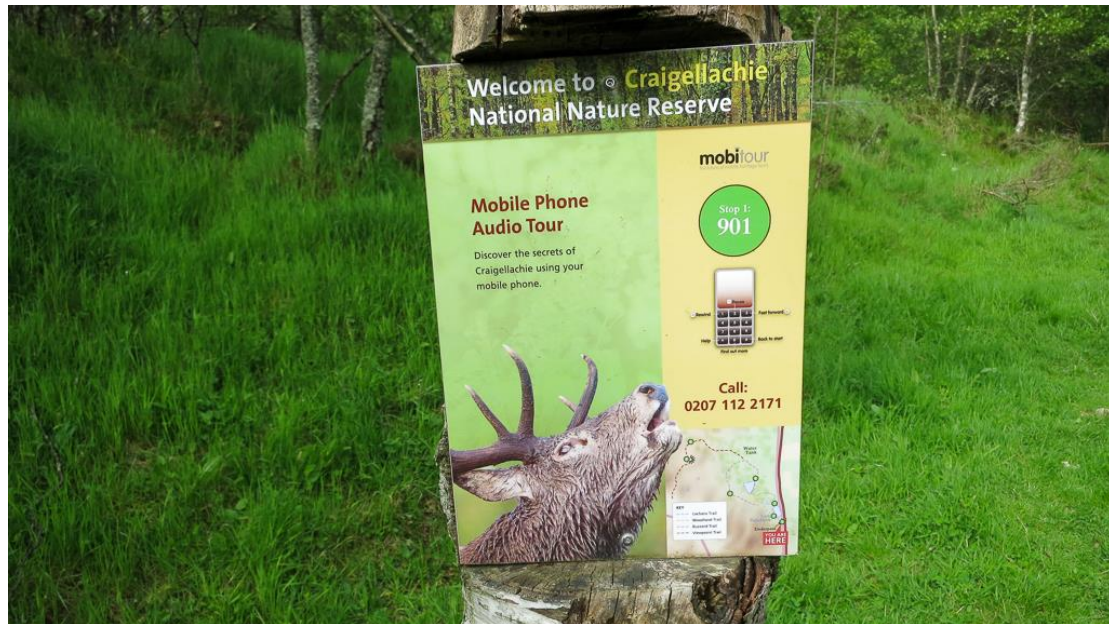
We left HQ at 9.05am passing a dead Deer at the side of the road :(My aim was to see how long it would take us to get to our 1st port of call in Aviemore, as I was still a bit worried that Feshiebridge was a bit too out of the way. Thankfully it was only 13mins away, which was way closer than I'd expected, in fact it seemed to be working very well for all the places we'd been to so far. I parked up in the car park by the Youth Hostel and we piled out for our 1st walk of the day.

Craigellachie was another new place for us and bizarrely, although we'd been in the area many times before, we'd never actually visited it.



Tunnel under the A9

At the entrance was an info board and a number to dial to get an Audio Tour of the entire route.....Cool!



Info board

I followed the instructions and was up and running in no time and best of all it was using my free Giff Gaff minutes :). We wandered through the deciduous woodland for a look at the 1st pool for Dragon/Damselflies but there was nothing flying around it.

We were after the 3 specialties again but were seriously starting to worry that yet again we'd gone on holiday just before everything started to get interesting. We found a couple of Spot Fly's in the woods and Wendy brilliantly managed to mess up every single shot she took....Doh! Remember to check your settings next time! :P. We carried on through the trees and onto a path, which climbed up the craggy hill to our left.



Where are we?

I hadn't planned on going this way but I decided that we might as well follow the Audio Tour route instead :).

Yet again there were Moths everywhere but more interestingly a small Butterfly like a Skipper. It was way too fast for us and was gone before we could get any kind of detail, so an ID was impossible. Our ears pricked up, when we heard some familiar high-pitched but feeble calls above us, and Wendy looked up to find a family of **Long-tailed Tits**. As usual they were all flitting about deep in the bushes and getting a clear shot was totally out of the question. Wendy wasn't happy, as she really wanted a pic of a LTT especially one of the babies.....maybe next time hahahahaha! Further up still we stopped again when we heard a song, which rang a bell. We thought it might be a Redstart, as it was one we don't hear at home, so we hung around and tried to find it amongst the leafy branches. After a while there was a bit of movement and a bird appeared, so I got my bins on it. "It's a male Pied Flycatcher!" I shrieked and Wendy got it in view too. That was it Wendy raised her camera and started to edge her way through the undergrowth to try for a shot. Another bird appeared and we ended up with 2x male Pied Fly's neither of which were playing ball. When I heard Wendy firing off some shots, I wondered how, as I couldn't see either of the birds at all. She naughtily was keeping it all to herself but ended up with her 1st ever Pied Fly shot and a decent one at that.



Pied Flycatcher

After that she kindly pointed out that we might've got ticks from the deep heather as she'd seen a Deer in the woods earlier....Cheers Wendy! Straight after that she decided to take some pics of a pretty little white flower, which seemed to be popping up everywhere. It turned out to be Arctic Starflower (or Chickweed Wintergreen), which is a woodland indicator species.



Arctic Starflower

All the moths we'd been noticing turned out to be more Common Heaths and when the track opened out onto heathland they were absolutely everywhere!



We'd heard yet another Cuckoo and finally managed to pin it down, giving us our 1st view of a Cuckoo for the trip despite having heard loads. It was miles off on top of a tree but I grabbed a record shot anyway because I didn't hold much hope of us actually seeing any more.



Blurry Cuckoo

Next we found a really good boggy ditch and I crossed my fingers for a Golden-ringed Dragonfly to appear but all we got was another Four-spotted Chaser. Golden-ringed is becoming our new Wryneck! After that I'd eventually pretty much resigned myself to the fact that it was just too early for any decent insects to be out. An orange Butterfly blasted past, and again we couldn't ID it so we carried on with our never-ending climb upwards. We got chatting a very nice guy who'd moved to Scotland 9yrs ago and when he found out that we were from the IOM he was amazed. He said he'd been an Army Cadet at Jurby when he was young and that although he'd met loads of people from all over the world up the hill he'd never met anyone from the Island before. We exchanged notes about what was about and he reckoned he'd seen a Slow Worm under the road bridge at the entrance and Mountain Hare up at the top. As we went our separate ways we couldn't help but envy him, as he was going down and we were still plodding upwards! He was definitely going the right way! Eventually we hauled ourselves up to the top and stood there admiring the brilliant views looking down over Aviemore.



Aviemore

We could see Aviemore clearly and the mountains in the distance still had un-thawed snow in their Corries, which was hard to believe with the temperature being so high. A couple then emerged and the woman laughed when she heard Wendy calling Lyca by her name and said, "Lyca?" "First dog in space?" Wendy then had to explain the origins of it, which aren't entirely related! Lyca spent the entire time very chilled out and even found a stick to chew, oblivious of the attention she was getting.



What view?

When we'd got our breath back we set off back down the hill hearing another Tree Pipit and finding a Moth, which we got slightly excited about but it was just an **Early Thorn**. Although seeing all these different moths flying in the daytime was a new experience for us.

It was a very steep climb down and the ground was uneven, so in many ways it was even harder than going up! I skillfully managed to slip on some loose gravel and jolted my knee, which hurt quite a bit. Having 2 dodgy knees is no fun and the only thing I had to look forward to when I got home was an operation to repair the torn meniscus in my right knee. Oh joy! The last thing I needed was to make matters worse in my left one, which is only just, the better of the two. At the bottom there was a young couple with 2 dogs, which they put on leads when they saw us coming. We passed them and said, "Hi" and they then carried on walking. We hadn't realized but they were waiting for us to go past them and we should really have thanked them but obviously we're not used to such courtesy at home. Further down we found the other Dragonfly pool but again there was nothing on it.



Dragonfly Pool

Both pools looked like they would be excellent at the right time of year though. Wendy's dodgy back had started to give her a bit of bother by then and like a pair of old crocs we made it back to the car at 12.26pm and were ready for our lunch.

I drove to the river opposite The Old Bridge Inn where we'd seen Ospreys fishing when we stayed in the cottage down the road previously. We ate our lunch in the car looking over the River Spey but there was no sign of any Ospreys :(.

Where were they all? We'd been positive we wouldn't be struggling for Osprey but so far we'd been unable to find any.....Urrghhhhh! Wendy then chirped up with, "It's on nice sunny days like this that you just fancy a ½ Shandy outside the pub." I can't say I agreed with her but I went along with it anyway :/. She skipped off over the road while I got Lyca out of the car and took her up the bank to one of the picnic opposite the pub.



Inviting

Wendy soon emerged with a Shandy and an Appletiser for me and sat down to chill out. Shortly after, the sky turned grey and there were little spots of rain starting to fall. Typical! We'd nearly finished our drinks when it started to get

heavier so we drank up and went back to the car. Where to go next was the question.

At 1.27pm I parked up at the Boat of Garten Trails where I thought my Mum and Dad had Red Squirrels and Cresties coming to the feeders in June last year. We needed a Squirrel fix and with no positive outcome so far I thought it sounded perfect. The walk was simple, just go straight up a level track, find the cross roads and the feeders were just there.....Sorted!



Boat of Garten Woods

We walked up the track, listening out for Cresties and heard a high-pitched trilling coming from just in front of us. Wendy found that it was a family of **Wrens** and the parent birds looked like they had their work cut out feeding about 5 babies! A bit further up and we were both very happy when we heard the call we'd been hoping for. It was very distant but even 15 months since we'd heard it last we knew that it was the unforgettable sound of a **Crested Tit**. At last! We'd started to wonder if we'd have any during the week, so this was great. Now to see one hahahahahaha! The next thing we found was a huge bustling **Wood Ants** nest, which was practically moving with the sheer number of Ants on and around it. We eventually found the cross road, where the feeder was, but there was absolutely no sign of anything at or even around it. By then we'd kind of realized that, with it being summer, Cresties and Squirrels were proving very difficult to track down. There was a brilliant Capercaillie sculpture made out of Willow, or something, so Wendy stopped to get some pics.



Caper art

I had to practically drag her away from the thing but even I had to admit that it was pretty good. While she was busy admiring it I heard some **Crossbills** going over, so got her onto them but we couldn't find them. The path through the forest turned left so we followed it round coming across even more Wood Ants. They were all over the path coming and going from the nest and we couldn't help but worry about Lyca who seemed to be very interested in them. While I took some video of the Ants, which had actually worn a track across the path, Wendy sat with Lyca on a boulder to keep her out of their way. After that we hurried her along to avoid any accidents, as we didn't know where the nearest Vets was!



Escaping the Wood Ants

I was ahead of Wendy and when we heard another Crestie we stopped to try and find it. While we were looking I saw something small land on the path in front of me. It was tiny and very hard to relocate with my bins but when I did I had to look twice, as I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I called out to Wendy, "**Green Hairstreak!**" and she came running over. I tried to tell her where about on the path it was but it was well camouflaged and she couldn't find it. She was totally convinced that it was going to fly off without her having seen it but kept on

looking frantically. Luckily it flew and disappeared behind the bushes, so she saw it but it was a very brief view and she didn't get it in her bins. Her heart sank and she didn't consider it to be a good enough view to claim it as a lifer. We hung around and finally it flew back with another one and settled, so Wendy could finally get a proper look.....Phew!



Green Hairstreak

Happy with that we left and not long after we spotted a bird quite high up above. We'd been hearing a Crestie close by for a while, so we stopped to check it out. Wendy was 1st to get a good view of it and squealed, "**Crestie!**" so we both watched it flitting between branches feeding. It disappeared into an old nest from possibly a Wood Pigeon and seemed to be getting lots of food from inside and around it. We stood there for ages until it flew off and vanished into the woods. Finally we'd actually managed to pin one down :). On the way back the Scots Pine changed into Birch wood and there were Treecreepers everywhere but neither of us managed to get any shots. We found another Spottfly and Wendy spotted a moth, which she stopped to get a record shot of, as she didn't recognize it. It turned out to be just a Common Carpet, which was disappointing.

At 3pm we got back to car just in time before a local football team started kicking the ball around the playing field I'd parked right next to. I didn't fancy gaining any dents in my cars bodywork and we left quickly with Red Squirrels on the agenda.

Our best place for Red Squirrels never fails us, even if they are at feeders, so that was our next plan. About a mile away I parked up and Wendy jumped out to take the short walk to the feeders while I stayed in the car with Lyca. She returned very quickly with a sad face, so we'd failed to see them again. The Crestie we'd had in the forest earlier was our only consolation and it wasn't a bad one at that. She'd also checked the pool in the field opposite for any Slavs, as it's a known spot, but the pool had totally dried up and was no longer there. We really wanted to see Red Squirrels, so I wondered about RSPB Loch Garten and headed straight there. When we arrived at the car park there was no food in the feeders, which said it all. The Squirrels and birds obviously just don't go to feeders in the

summer but we hoped that we could find a nice Redstart in the trees by the Visitors Centre instead. We'd been there loads of times before and hadn't checked if dogs were allowed or not, so Wendy asked the woman in the car next to us, who also had a dog and she said, "No Dogs." Great! We heard another Cuckoo and wondered what to do next. My best idea was to go and check out our best Dipper spot, as we still needed Dipper, at Nethybridge.

I stopped so that Wendy could nip into the Spa nearby and she emerged having just bought a new dog poo bag holder with bags. Lyca's Flexi-lead had ours clipped onto it and, as we didn't have it we were having to carry a roll of bags in our pocket, which was a bit of pain. Sorted.....all we needed now was a lead! We decided to leave Lyca in the car while we went over the stile and down to the bridge to look. The river was really high compared to last year when we'd been there in March and it didn't look Dipper friendly at all. We couldn't hear anything coming from under the bridge either, so we had to presume that they'd already bred and had cleared off :(The Sand Martin colony was doing well though and they were all zooming around feeding over the water. Further up the river a **Goosander** lifted up and flew off and round the corner. We left empty handed again and passed a pair of **Wigeon** on a pool next to the road. It started to rain, so we'd timed the day to perfection at least and headed for home.

Back at HQ it was only 4.20pm but we were absolutely knackered, so we set about trying to ID some of the moths we'd caught that morning. We started to feel hungry so stopped for tea at 5pm and Lyca totally demolished hers again. She was a very tired dog all evening and hardly moved from her comfy settee. The male Greater Spotted Woodpecker was putting on a good show for us from the living room window and even landed on next doors roof. The forecast was saying it was going to rain, so I reluctantly decided not to risk putting the moth trap out. After Wendy had spoken to her Mum, I'd gone through the day's pics, and we'd watched a bit of TV we were totally zonked and hit the sack at 11pm.

Our moth list from the morning is as follows:

Nut-tree Tussock x2
Bordered White x1
Pug x1
Lesser Swallow Prominent x2
Glaucous Shears x1
Garden Carpet x1
Grey Pine Carpet x1
Spruce Carpet x1



Glaucous Shears

Monday 2nd June

It was 7.50am when we all woke up and looking outside it had rained overnight, so it was a good job I hadn't put the trap out after all. I'd seen that the forecast was dodgy but it looked as though we might be lucky and could be in for a mainly dry day. Lyca scoffed all her breakfast again while we were in no great hurry and had a relaxing start to the day. While I was outside packing the car up I got talking to the neighbour who'd had the party. She told me that she had no idea where the Red Squirrels had gone but said that there were Otters on the river and that an Osprey and Buzzard nest in the glen. Not only that but there was a Pine Marten, which she described as, "Terrible!" as well as a Wild Cat living in the forest somewhere! She said that the Buzzard would sometimes take one of her Chickens but the Pine Marten would take the lot in one go! Uh? When I told Wendy she was very skeptical but I reckon she was telling the truth.

We left at 9.55am and drove via Loch Insh Woods and stumbled across our local stores, which would come in handy. There was also a Hotel called The Ossian Inn that advertised that it served meals daily. We already had a place pin-pointed for eating out with Lyca, which Wendy had found before we went away but we made a note to google it later for future reference. Not long after we'd left it started to rain (stupid forecasters!) but we hoped that we'd be driving away from it and not into it! When passing through Carrbridge Wendy spotted the Old Bakery Café so I offered to stop for her coffee fix which, to be fair, she'd managed well to suppress this holiday. She'd been there before and although she was anything but taken by the owner, who was from down south and very aloof, she really fancied a cappuccino. She went in and sure enough the same bloke served her without so much as a, "Hello" and she reckoned that if he ever smiled his face would probably crack! While she was inside I realized that I'd forgotten the folder with all my info in it....Uh oh! This meant that I'd just have to cross my fingers that I'd remember the way to everywhere I'd planned to visit.

Luckily my memory served me well and we hit the road to Lochindorb, which was my 1st plan of the day. A Kestrel was hovering at the side of the road and we

watched it drop into the heather and fly off with a Meadow Pipit, which was pretty cool, although perhaps not for the unfortunate pipit! With luck anything but on our side we were starting to worry that with it being summer the Red Grouse would be lying low too. Thankfully it wasn't long before we passed a pair of Red Grouse in amongst the heather, which stretched for miles. When we reached Lochindorb itself I stopped in a suitable layby so we could have a scan.



Lochindorb

At 1st glances there was nothing out on the water and we started to wonder if the birds we wanted to see had already bred and cleared off. A Common Sandpiper noisily flew past, so at least there was some kind of life around the Loch. We carried on and came across a pair of Red Grouse with chicks, which were very cute and very fluffy. Wendy wanted to get a pic of them but as soon as I stopped the car they were off. I pulled over into the next layby for a scan and yet again the Loch appeared to be totally dead.....Urrghhhhh! Our hearts sank and depression set in, as we didn't have another location for our target birds. It was a lovely place to be though and we set about getting some pics. I had another desperate scan and finally I found what we wanted and called it out to Wendy, "**Black-throated Diver!**" Phew! It was distant but not as distant as when we'd been there 2 years ago in May and Wendy found one on the far bank presumably on a nest. This bird had obviously been under water for most of the time while we'd been looking. It was nice to know that they were still there on their breeding grounds and also to see a BTD in summer plumage. We don't know if it was the same bird as we'd seen earlier but a Kestrel zoomed past low over the water and then disappeared out of sight over the moorland. With that we carried on to the end of the road finding the raucous Common Gull colony, which was way too close to the Grouse chicks we were coming across everywhere.



Common Gull

I had to slow right down, as the chicks were running around in the road and seemed anything but aware of the dangers of traffic! I managed to get a shot of one in the end but they were so quick that by the time I'd stopped the car and got my camera up most of them had gone.



Red Grouse chick

I checked my Sat Nav for directions to our next stop only to find that Sygic had deleted all the favourite locations I'd inputted! Every single location that I'd ever inputted before we'd been on holidays or had found while we'd been away had gone. This meant all of Scotland, Dumfries and Norfolk.....Nooooooooooo! Coupled with the fact that I'd also left the folder at home this wasn't a good thing. There were even more Grouse chicks in the road as we left and we heard yet another Cuckoo, funnily enough it was explained on Springwatch that, although Cuckoo

sightings are dropping in most areas in the UK, Scotland and Norfolk seem to be maintaining a healthy population.

I had to stop in Carrbridge again, so we could both use the WC's and I waited in the car while Wendy went in hearing our 1st **Greenfinch** of the trip calling. I was next up and when I came back she was sitting on the pavement getting some shots of a very close and tame Song Thrush.



Song Thrush

I grabbed my camera from the car and sat down behind her, for my best and easiest every Song Thrush shot, just as she stood up and flushed the bird! It turned out that it'd come so close to her that she couldn't get any more shots but she'd had no idea that I was back and sitting behind her....Doh! We left at 12.15pm and on the way to our next stop we saw a yellow Butterfly hurtling over the road at speed, which could only have been a **Brimstone**.

Arriving in the Findhorn Valley it was 12.25pm and we were starving, so our 1st plan when we got to the car park was lunch. The sky over the huge hills was looking very dark, it started to rain and we were heading straight into it.....Brilliant! Looking down over the river I said, "Where's all the Common Terns?" Seconds later Wendy said, "**Common Tern!**" OK, maybe I hadn't given it long enough! When we got to the bridge we had a good look for Dipper but again there was no sign. Where were all the Dippers? We hadn't thought for a second that we'd be struggling to see one but their absence was very obvious in every single reliable site we'd visited so far. There were plenty more Sand Martins though and we had another 2x Wheatears but the area was completely Dipperless :(The **Wild Goats** with their kids were close to the road with one kid standing in a tree looking quite funny but by the time Wendy had her camera raised it jumped off!



Run!

Wendy then spotted a large bird really high up over the hills on the opposite side of the valley, which was being mobbed by a smaller bird. When she said that it looked rather long winged, like an Osprey I stopped the car for a look. We both got out and when we had it in our bins we saw that it was indeed an **Osprey** but also that it was being mobbed by a comparatively tiny, **Peregrine**. We've only seen Peregrine there once or twice before and usually struggle for them anywhere in Scotland, so this was good. Golden Eagles are our main reason for visiting Findhorn usually but we knew that they were very difficult to see there in summer, so they weren't on the agenda. The hills were absolutely caked in Red Deer and a lot of them were down very low, which was unusual, as they're always tiny specks high up on the tops. Another bird we hadn't struggled for on this trip was Kestrel and we had another out hunting in the valley.

I parked up in the car park at 1.01pm and we grabbed lunch and started eating, hoping that the rain we could see up the valley would pass through quickly.



Urrghhhh!

I could only manage ½ of my sarnie and that was a struggle. My IBS had kicked off big time although I hadn't eaten anything I shouldn't have, so I had no idea why! Maybe it was my subconscious reminding me that a week after I got back home I was going into Nobles for a knee op? Typically the rain started just as we set off down the footpath and it looked like it was going to be a showery walk. We heard another Tree Pipit and then a really strange echoing call, which made us stop. Wendy was convinced that it was a Ring Ouzel, which would be handy seeing as that's one of the reasons we were there. We weren't 100% sure though, so we carried on in the direction of the call, hoping to see something. Lyca was amusing herself while we stood staring at the mountain and we had to laugh at what she was doing. She was burying her snout into the moss and trying to dig out vole holes!



Voling

She'd done this a few times already but seemed to be enjoying it even more at Findhorn. There were more Mountain Pansies at the side of the path, so Wendy stopped for some pics.



Mountain Pansy

While she was doing that we could hear the Common Gulls kicking off, which is always a sure sign that something is going on. We turned around and saw an Osprey flying up the river, so we followed it in our bins. The bird started to hover but I had Lyca's lead in one hand and my bins in the other and it was all a bit tricky. She was pulling a lot on this walk and now was no exception, so I had to lower my bins. Just as I did Wendy shrieked, "It's dived, it's dived!" but I'd missed it by seconds.....Grrrrrrr! We watched it come up again from behind the bank and fly off back down the river with a huge Brown Trout in it's talons.....Cool! It was too far away for her set up but Wendy was trying desperately to at least get a record shot but in blind panic hadn't changed her settings from getting shots of the pansies....Doh! This is the best she ended up with out of a shamefully bad bunch. Yet again I was kicking myself for being lazy and not having brought my heavy gear.



Osprey

Excitement over I decided we'd take a right turn and follow the track up a hill into some trees, instead of doing our usual flat walk up the valley.



Going up – again!

Seeing as this holiday had been all about trying new places and having no chance of seeing any Eagles it seemed like a good move. The showers persisted and the hill was quite steep, so Wendy wasn't impressed. We climbed upwards and sheltered under a tree while the heaviest of the showers passed over. By the time we'd got to the top, having found nothing other than another Spotted fly, and seen that the track was never-ending there seemed little point in us going any further.



Stop raining!

On the way back down to the car that echoing call was really bugging us and we couldn't see any bird to put the call to. We stood for ages scanning and scanning the craggy exposed rocks but still found nothing.



Needle in a haystack?

It started to feel like a hopeless task until Wendy spotted the tiny black silhouette of a bird really high up. When it moved she managed to see the quick flash of a white bib before it vanished again and was camouflaged against the rocks. There was nothing else it could've been, especially as they are known breeders in the area, so she'd finally nailed the pesky **Ring Ouzel** down. Coming towards us on the path was what looked like a school trip and Lyca had spotted them. She was getting a bit excited but the kids all just looked a bit bored really. It was raining and they were out binocularized up with a couple of teachers.....Hahahahahaha! The teacher came over to us and asked what we were looking at. We had to explain that there was a Ring Ouzel somewhere up there but it was distant. He told us that he'd seen them there before and thanked us before carrying on with his less than enthusiastic group.



Poor kids!

We were back at the car by 3.38pm and by then I felt OK, so I ate the rest of my lunch. There were a couple of cars parked up next to us and they were chatting about what was about. One of the blokes was busy explaining the whereabouts of a Wheatear and then went into great detail about its diagnostic features. When I checked out the guys he was telling I had to look twice at one of them. I reckoned it was none other than David Lyndo aka 'The Urban Birder.' Wendy had a quick look but wasn't convinced, so she got me take a sneaky pic before they left, so we could ID him later :P. Looking back at the pic and also checking out his blog about being in the Highlands on the same dates it most certainly was.



Random celeb spot

I don't know how David Lyndo kept a straight face when he had to listen to some know it all tell him about how to ID a Wheatear when I'm sure he could've taught him a thing or two! After that we headed off via Farr Road and again there were more Grouse with chicks than you could shake a stick at. As always the Farr road's scenery was breathtaking.



Farr Road

It took longer than I'd anticipated but we arrived at Loch Ruthven at 4.44pm and it was sunny but very windy. It was still better than rain though and after checking that dogs were permitted we headed out towards the Loch.



Loch Ruthven

Just by the entrance was a Little Grebe family and a **Common Toad** on the path, which Lyca had a good sniff of. Wendy went into the hide 1st and had a scan seeing more Little Grebes and Goldeneye but nothing else. She heard the woman near her excitedly saying, "I've got one!" so she had another look thinking she'd missed something. We were there for Slav Grebes, as they breed there and we'd had them there before. She looked again but the bird they were talking about was just another Little Grebe. I was still outside with Lyca listening to another Cuckoo, so she came out to swap hoping that I'd have better luck. I went in and found nothing either, so I read the recent reports book, which said that the Slavs hadn't been seen for 4 days and even then they were over on the far side.....Urrghhhhh! I didn't hang about either and as we were heading back to the car I chirped up with, "We could do with a Reed Bunting" just as a bird flew across the path in front of us. We both shrieked, "**Reed Bunting!**" and started to

laugh at our totally jammy find. Lyca then found us our 2nd Toad by accident by standing on it! It was fine if not a little stunned and posed nicely for a photo shoot :P. This one is Wendy's, which she's quite pleased with.



Toad

By the time we were back at the car it was 5.27pm and Wendy was starving and wanted some food. Because of my Sat Navs breakdown earlier it took us back via a crawl along the Farr Road again.....Grrrrr! When there's even signage saying 'Slow – chicks in road' you know there's a problem! My car started to make a high-pitched squealing noise, which was very odd but I hoped that it was just something I'd driven over earlier stuck in the brake disk.

Before we'd gone away Wendy had looked into dog friendly pubs so we could go out for food with Lyca. Unfortunately she'd struggled to find many places in our vicinity and we'd both agreed that the 'Winking Owl' in Aviemore was our only option. As it was getting late and neither of us felt like cooking we decided to head straight there. We arrived at 6.17pm and Wendy went in to check that it was OK for Lyca to go in before we inflicted her on them. We went up to the bar to get our drinks 1st and were greeted by the local bar fly who was dancing and singing with himself. After getting our drinks we sat down at a table well away from him, as Lyca was slightly hyper in this new and strange environment. She'd never been in a pub before because the IOM is NOT dog friendly in the slightest and she wouldn't settle.



Pub dog

Every time the door opened she barked at the customers and none of them had dogs with them, which was slightly embarrassing. Wendy ordered our food and it was nice to sit down to relax (when Lyca wasn't barking) while someone else cooked tea. Bar fly carried on performing for as many as the others as he could and the couple sitting nearby actually turned away. He was harmless enough but neither of us fancied getting stuck with him, it would've been a long night! Eventually after our food arrived Lyca decided to settle down on the seat in between us with her head on Wendy's lap. This was less than ideal for Wendy, who was trying to eat her, slightly too salty, Leek and Potato Soup but if it kept Lyca quiet she wasn't going to complain. While I was eating my chicken burger I started to notice that my face was tingling and when I asked Wendy if I was red she laughed and said in no uncertain terms, "Yes!" Grrrrrrrrrr I'd been sunburnt despite wearing SPF 30 every day! Having refueled all we wanted to do was get home and chill out before our planned long walk the next day.

It was 7pm when we got into the car and on the way back a Roe Deer bounced over the road in front of us. We finally pulled up outside HQ at 7.17pm and Wendy went straight in to give Lyca her dinner, which she wolfed down and then went off for a bath.

I decided to go out for a walk along the river and although I'd planned to take Lyca she was yet again flat out and asleep on the sofa, so I left her behind. I knew that there was a colony of Small Blue Butterflies at Glen Feshie, so I set about walking up the Glen to see if I could work out where they'd be. I was a bit worried about the midgies since it was evening but the Skin so Soft seemed to be working well. Within a few minutes I heard a Cuckoo and Wood Warbler calling which was very nice. I'd hoped the path went by the river but it quite quickly veered away and headed into the forest.



Forest track

Up there I had Tree Pipit on the wires and when the path dropped down to a nice looking boggy area there was a young **Tawny owl** calling from a tree somewhere. Eventually the path met up with the river again and by this point I'd been walking for 30mins, so decided to turn round and head back. I hadn't even found any of the Small Blues larval foodplant, which was a bit of a shame.



River Feshie

The walk was pleasant on the way back but without adding anything and eventually I approached the cottage just as I was starting to get a bit tired.



HQ

It started to rain later in the evening and after watching Springwatch, which was recorded from earlier, we went to bed very tired at 11.15pm. This was the 1st time we'd ended the day with a wet dog and we hoped that it wasn't going to be how every night was going to end from then on but it looked like it could be on the cards.

Tuesday 3rd June

It was 7.10am when we woke up and Wendy was anything but looking forward to the day ahead. It was a bit grey and cloudy outside but that was ideal weather conditions for my plan.....Mwahahahaha! It'd been too hot so far but the forecast for every day that remained was pretty wet, which was the last thing we needed, so we had no choice but to bite the bullet and go for it. Wendy went to get dressed and found a male Bullfinch outside the window in the tree. It hopped down onto the grass and stayed for ages but neither of us was ready to get any pics. Lyca must've been getting used to all the walking and wouldn't eat her breakfast for the 1st time since we'd been away. Maybe we just hadn't walked her enough the day before! After breakfast, while Wendy was getting everything ready, I went out to see if I could find and get some shots of the Wood Warbler, which was singing down by the river. By the time I got there it had totally shut up and since they're almost impossible to see even when they're singing, I gave it up as a bad job. It was also starting to rain by then, which was bad news. The Bullfinch was back on the path when I returned but typically it flew off before I got near enough.

Before going away I decided that instead of going up Cairngorm again we'd try another new place for Ptarmigan and Dotterel, which I'd read about and it was just up the road from our cottage. The theory was that it was less popular than the Cairngorms, so there was supposed to be more wildlife about, but the walk being harder offset this. No pain no gain! This mountain was called Carn Ban Mor and was also a Munro, or so we thought! Afterwards I found out that some people don't classify it as a Munro anymore because it's too close to another one but some people still do, so take your pick as to which you chose to believe. We are sticking with it being a Munro, as it's our 1st Munro and probably our last!

We left at 9.27am while it was still raining and Wendy was as enthusiastic as a slug just about to be dropped into a bucket of salt! It was 11.5c and cooler than it'd been, which was good, we didn't want it to be too hot! There was a massive Brown Hare in the field down the road and we passed the Caper forest from last year. We'd never seen the bird there but we'd felt that it was a dodgy spot after our conversation with Neil from next door about its welfare due to human disturbance. It wasn't far to the car park from HQ and after I'd parked up we looked up towards the mountains in the distance, still complete with snow on the highest slopes, and thought, "Uh oh!"



Daunting scene

After much contemplation I decided to bring my heavy camera gear, which I'd never taken up a mountain before and carried Wendy's rucksack with our drinks and food in it. I say food but all I'd brought was a packet of 2 Walkers Shortbread rounds! Wendy brought her camera too, so we just hoped that being prepared for anything wouldn't be the nail in the coffin for us seeing what we wanted.....it usually is!

We set off at 9.50am with Lyca raring to go and totally oblivious to the daunting looking walk we had ahead of us. The 1st stretch of the walk was along the road but eventually it branched off to a footpath through the heather.



Getting nowhere fast!

We heard another Cuckoo and carried on up the path and through a small forest. There was a stream running down the side of the steep path, which had Common butterwort growing along it, so Wendy stopped to take some pics.



Common Butterwort

When we emerged from the trees we found ourselves in open moorland with a dry gravelly path leading upwards.



What have we let ourselves in for?

The view was lovely but the top was still too far away for our liking. By now Wendy's already dodgy back was playing up, so I offered to take her camera and gave her the rucksack in the hope that it would be better balanced. We stopped for a scan every now and again but apart from loads of Mipits there wasn't much about, which was very strange. It was starting to get very warm so we had to take our fleeces and coats off and Wendy wondered if it had been total overkill to pack her hat and gloves.

It wasn't until we were about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up that Wendy finally found some Red Grouse and we heard a Buzzard calling.



Hurry up!

Next up was a Wheatear, sitting in the middle of nowhere on top of the heather. It was at this point that we started to feel a bit tired and typically was where the steepest hardest stretch started.....Aarrghhh!



Urrghhhh!

Wendy was having several Karl Pilkington's on this walk but who could blame her, this was definitely the hardest walk we'd ever done.

As we approached the top we were level with the snow and all of a sudden the temperature plummeted.



Brrrrr!

It was bitterly cold, so it was back on with the fleeces and coats and Wendy eventually had to dig out her hat and gloves. We really didn't expect that to happen and I started to wish I'd brought mine. I'd noticed that the heather carpet had gradually become lower and lower until it changed completely into a very short grass/lichen/stone cover. Very peculiar. By the time we were at about 1,000meters Wendy spotted some Marigolds growing by the stream. They had to be Marsh Marigolds but they were very small and sparse unlike how you see them at lower altitudes, so she took some pics to confirm the ID later.



Marsh Marigold

We were probably on about our 10th wind when the path started to level off just before the summit and all of a sudden Wendy stopped dead in her tracks, pointed to her right and said, “What the **** was that?” I hadn’t heard anything so had no idea but then I heard it too and couldn’t place it all. It was a very strange call indeed and one that neither of us was familiar with. I caught a quick flash of bird with a brief view of black underneath and wondered if it was a Golden Plover but that wasn’t what was calling. We had a look around on the flat grassy plain and eventually I nearly dropped my bins when I spotted one of the birds we’d gone all that way for.



It’s there somewhere – honest!

I excitedly shouted out to Wendy, “**Dotterel!**” and she got onto it. It was a female too so that was an added bonus, as the females are the most colourful in the case of Dotterel. We could see it running around even without our bins and tried to get closer to it thinking we’d have no problems there, as they’re notoriously

tame. We sat down on the grass and I took a distant record shot just in case but having imagined lying down and letting the bird come ridiculously close to us for some cracking pics we were very disappointed when it ran further away.



Dotterel (record shot)

This bird wasn't hanging around for anything and carried on running until we'd lost it completelyBooooooooooo :(Ah well, we'd only climbed a Munro to see it but a single twitchy Dotterel was better than nothing. This still didn't solve my mystery bird with black underneath puzzle though. At this point Wendy thought it would be a good time to crack open the biscuits, so we both had our frugal energy boost and took in the amazing view.



Above the clouds

There were loads of weird and wonderful lichen's and mosses up there and Wendy was filling her boots with pics to ID later. She was particularly taken with the lichen, which resembled Stag horns and another type, which were more cup like.



Lichen



Lichen

Mission accomplished we carried on to the summit, which we reached at 12.50pm.



Phew!

It'd taken us 3hrs to get there but my App had only recorded the time we'd spent moving, so if we hadn't stopped to scan around so much it would've taken us 2hrs 15mins. The book had said it would take between 2-3hrs to get there, so we'd done pretty well all things considered. I thought it'd be quite funny to record the occasion and set my camera up to get a shot of all of us by the cairn on top of Carn Ban Mor. Obviously it was very hard to run back into the shot before the shutter went as well as trying to keep a straight face and look natural but this is the best one I ended up with.....Hahahahaha :P.



Cheesy!

On the ground was loads of what we can only presume was Ptarmigan poo but it was very dry, so we reckon the birds had been there at some point but had cleared off to higher ground. This was pretty much typical of our luck having just climbed for 4miles to 3,477feet! Grrrrrrr! We could hear more Dotterel calling in the distance and I reckoned I heard a Ptarmigan, so we wandered a bit further along to have a scan of the mountains surrounding us.



Vast

We didn't find anything else but it'd undoubtedly been an experience and although it'd been hard going at times it had also been quite pleasant too. It was really cold up there and I'd lost all feeling in my fingers, so we called it a day and started to head back towards the footpath. Something caught Wendy's eye and when she looked in her bins she found a **Dunlin**, which finally explained the mystery bird I'd seen earlier and the flash of black I'd seen.

We started our descent at 1.10pm and just wanted to get back to the car for our lunch and drinks. Lyca had made good use of the lovely clear water trickling from the mountain streams but our water supply was running a bit low.



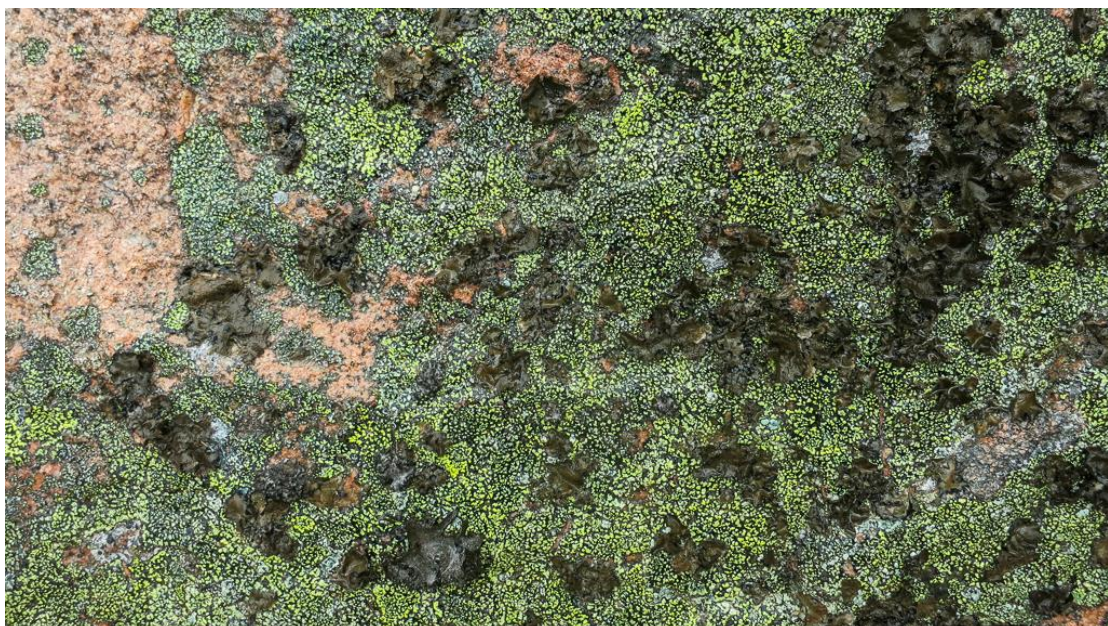
Going down :)

All of a sudden and out of nowhere we found ourselves total engulfed in thick cloud and the heavens opened. Visibility was terrible and down to about 20ft, so Wendy was really paranoid that Lyca would run off and we'd lose her, so we had to get her back on her lead.



Where's the view gone?

Wendy let out a groan as she felt the cold water trickling down her feet inside her shoes and started to squelch her way down the path. My feet weren't much better either, our trousers were sticking to our legs and additional to the thick cloud around us we couldn't see out of our rain soaked glasses either.....Urrghhhhh! We'd always thought the kit you're advised to take with you on walks like this due to changeable weather conditions, was totally over the top but all of a sudden it made complete sense. If we'd gone further and across the tops from the cairn on top of Carn Ban Mor we'd almost certainly have lost all our bearings and would've stood a very good chance of getting into trouble. Luckily we weren't feeling quite that spritely and it's a good job we'd left when we did. The rocky path was lethal on the way down, making it even trickier than going up, although obviously less tiring. Wendy found some crazy Lichen, which looked almost luminous, so we grabbed a record shot to see if we could ID it later. The photo just doesn't show the intensity of the colours we were actually seeing with our naked eyes though.



Lumi lichen

The path was steep and the rocks were loose underfoot, so there were a few slips and skids on the way. When the clouds lifted the rain fizzled out we had amazing views all around us again and with the help of the wind we luckily dried out pretty quickly.



Squelch!

Lyca who'd looked like a drowned rat had also returned to her usual curly self by the time we reached the gate at the bottom. There was a group of kids with a couple of leaders sitting at the side of the path and they all had their legs stretched out blocking the entire path. The leaders had to tell them to let us through in the end and they all reluctantly and very slowly moved their legs out of the way so we could get past. None of them looked very happy and no doubt didn't want to be there at all. When we approached the inhabited house near the road we could hear a bird calling and found a lovely male Wheatear sitting on the fence.



Home stretch

I stopped to get a shot but I had Wendy's camera on my shoulder so she had to just stand there watching me firing them off :P. Its best pose was against a shed roof so it gave the shot a weird look to it.



Wheatear

We then noticed that there was a juvenile bird sitting on the roof of the house, so we left them to it, as the adult was getting quite agitated. We'd totally dried out by then and I don't know why but I just had this feeling that it was going to rain again just before we got back to the car. My instincts had been right and as we were on the final home stretch, with only about 400m to go, it started to chuck it down...Aaaaarrghhhh! We were absolutely soaked to the skin again and had the joys of sitting in the car with cold wet clothes on to look forward to after all :(.

It was 2.45pm when we got back and Lyca hopped onto the back seat and fell asleep instantly. She looked such a mess and so tired that Wendy had to get a pic. She reckons it looks like one of those RSPCA adverts for an abused and neglected pet, who'd been rescued cold, wet, starved and beaten ½ to death from someone's backyard.



Broken dog

As we ate our well-deserved lunch I worked out that we'd burned 689kcal and walked 8 miles in total. We were well and truly knackered and could feel our feet pounding in our soggy shoes. We were very disappointed in the lack of wildlife up on Carn Ban Mor and had expected to see much more than we did.

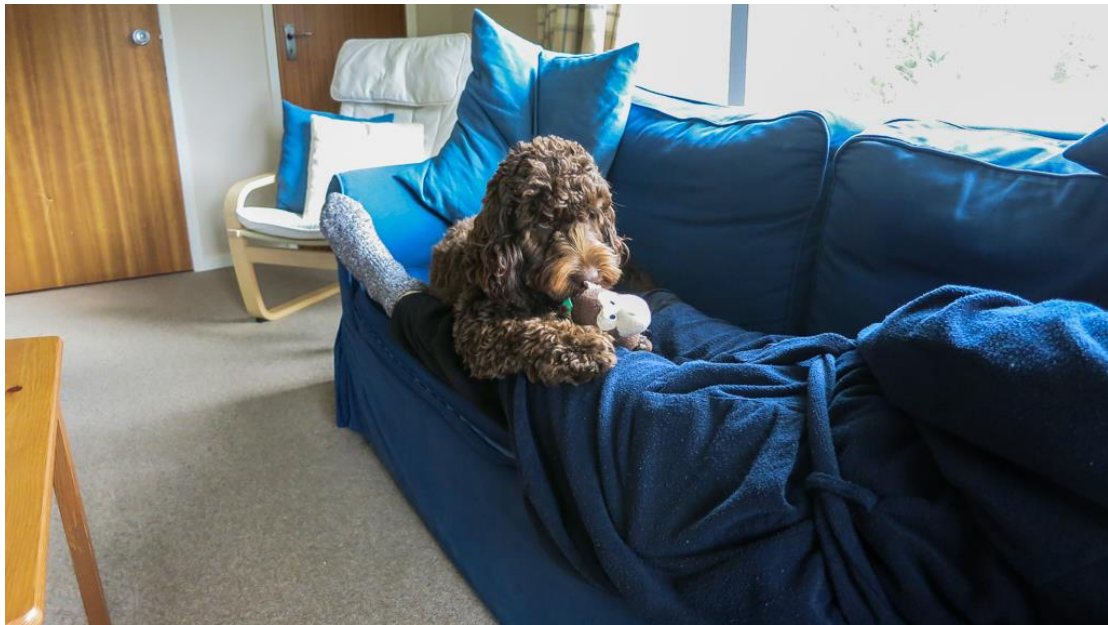
We left at 3.15pm without any other set plans and it was 15c, which was far more civilized than it had been at 3,477ft! I thought we could have a look at Invereshie and Inshcriach forest but the 1st section looked too taxing after our walk so we carried on to the next section instead. I parked up at 3.35pm and Lyca instantly woke up and was raring to go again. The 1st thing we saw was a huge pile of fresh dog poo and further up the path was an elderly couple with a massive Husky and Border Collie, which were both off the lead! Obviously it was breeding season and we'd always been vigilant in keeping Lyca on her lead in all the areas enforcing it. It's just a shame that wherever you go there's a select few who think they're immune and ignore it. The Husky was looking quite aggressively at Lyca, so we decided to turn back and ditch it off.



Looked good

It wasn't a hard decision either, so we weren't exactly heartbroken.....Hahahahaha! It annoyed me a bit though, as I knew that the main track ran into the forest, which is good for wildlife. Next I drove to the Caper spot we'd passed earlier and I parked up. There were new signs up telling people to completely stay away during the breeding season but we did notice that the signage directed at a 'certain tour guide' had been taken down. It was strange that the signs were there and not where we'd just been as it's the same forest, just a different section! Either way, we complied with the signs and didn't enter the forest. Wendy spotted an Osprey flying up the river and then noticed that it was satellite tagged.....Cool! We really couldn't be arsed with any more walking and, as it was already 3.55pm, we decided to pull the plug early and call it a day. We needed a few bits so stopped at our local, Kinraig Stores on the way and Wendy picked up some strawberries, which were cleverly placed next to the counter. They'd been grown at Alvie Gardens in nearby Kinraig, so she figured you couldn't get any more local if you tried. We passed a pair of Bullfinches flying over the road on the way and were relieved to be back at HQ very early compared to usual at 4.20pm.

The 1st thing on Wendy's agenda was to blow dry Lyca, as she was still absolutely soaking. After that she then went on to Hoover the house, as Lyca had made a right mess with moss and dry grass that she'd obviously dragged in with her. I have no idea where Wendy got the energy from to it but just watching her was enough for me and I ended up dozing off with Lyca keeping me company!



Chill out time

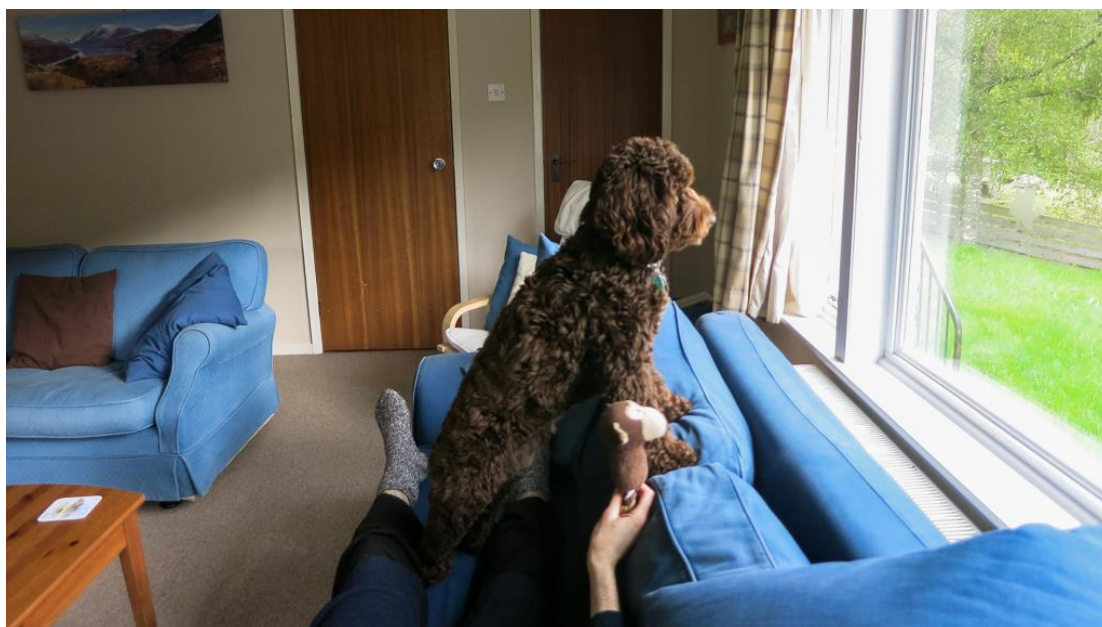
When I woke up I googled the Ossian Inn in Kinraig with a view to going there for food the following evening but unfortunately it was for residents only and wasn't dog friendly either. We were now stumped as to where to go tomorrow night and the Old Bridge Inn by the river in Aviemore had a really poncey menu, which appealed to neither of us. The only place left was The Grantown Hotel but that was a bit out of the way, the only thing we knew was that we weren't going back to The Winking Owl! After we'd had tea Wendy went off for a bath and when she emerged she looked a bit flustered. When she'd turned the knob to lift the plug to drain the bath it'd fallen off in her hand leaving the plug still in place. Oooops! I went in, scratched my head for a bit, realized that although I couldn't fix the knob I could lift the plug with a knife.....Sorted!

After that it was finally time to put our feet up and chill out, so Wendy poured herself a spritzer and phoned her Mum. She then treated herself to some of the Alvie Gardens Strawberries and was totally blown away. She said they were the nicest thing she'd eaten since she'd been away especially after living off Tofu Stir-fry and cheese sarnies! They certainly knocked the socks off any strawberries she's had for a long time. She just wished she could take a whole crate of them home with her.

I wracked my brains as to what to do the next day and remembered Andy's suggestion of going to the West coast for the rare Checkered Skipper and Marsh Fritillary Butterflies. When Springwatch was on it did a feature on them, so I was very tempted. The timing would've been spot on for when they'd be around but (and it was a big but) the forecast for the rest of the week was for rain, which would make the 5hr journey there and back a complete waste of time and petrol.....Urrghhhh! I ended up ditching the idea off completely, which was a real shame and trying to find a dog friendly pub nearby was beginning to make our brains hurt too. It was the coldest night so far but I put the Moth trap out anyway and this time I put it round the corner in the garden, as the neighbours had gone. After that it was definitely bedtime and we all crashed out at 11.15pm.

Wednesday 4th June

It was 6am when we heaved ourselves out of bed and it looked pretty grim outside. After yesterdays walk our legs were aching slightly and we could definitely feel it. It was raining and freezing cold, so I wasn't at all surprised to find absolutely nothing in the Moth trap. It was typical that we were up so early on the worst day of the holiday too and we could've done with it being on one of the better days. Lyca wolfed her breakfast down in no time and then as usual went to check out the action from the living room window.



What's going on?

We decided to try to get out early in an attempt to beat the rain, which was forecast to start at around 9am.

When we left at 7.57am and it was only 7c and we appeared to be heading straight into the low and grey looking clouds already. It'd been a good job we'd done Carn Ban Mor yesterday and if we'd stuck to my original plan, to do it

today, we wouldn't have done it at all. Instead I thought 1st we could give the place I'd read about for the Small Blue Butterflies, which was one of just a few sites in Scotland for them, and there was Dingy Skipper there also. Luckily I'd pinpointed the exact location and it was just down the road but I'd accidentally left my phone cable back at HQ so I couldn't even plug it in to use the Sat Nav, which I might just need. Driving down the track through the trees a large bird caught my eye and when it landed on a branch we had a great view of a Tawny Owl. Wendy grabbed her camera and tried to get a record shot but it was dark, there were branches in the way and the bird was facing away from us. This is the best she came up with in the less than ideal circumstances.



Tawny Owl

The bird had probably had such a bad nights hunting due to the rain that it was having to go out in the day to provide enough food for it's chicks. It could well have been the parent of the juvenile I'd heard screeching on my evening walk on Monday.

We arrived at the layby at Glen Feshie at 8.16am and got out of the car to get our bearings. We looked down the bank I'd read we had to go down but there was no track and it was really steep.



Hmmmmmm?

Not only that but there seemed to be no way through the trees to get down onto the river bank to view the Island in the middle. Uh? I was definitely in the right spot going by the grid reference and description of the steep riverbank, so we gave it a go anyway. The midgies were out in force, which made it doubly unpleasant, and we'd been lucky to have had no problems with them so far. Wendy found a single Bird's-foot-trefoil but there was no sign of any Kidney Vetch, which are both larval food plants and a good way of finding the Butterflies themselves. She was also being a bit Karl Pilkington and saying, "This is pointless, it's raining and we're wasting our time here!" We scrambled down the bank and hit the line of trees, which was like a brick wall. There was no way we could get through and the riverbank didn't seem negotiable either, so we ditched it off. We left at 8.29am but I went straight back to HQ to get my cable and grabbed the Snickers bar from the side.....Om nom nom :). By the time we left for the 2nd time it was already 8.51am but we didn't have far to go for our next stop of the day.

I wanted to give the massive Grantown (Anagach) Wood a try for Dragonflies, as it boasted 13 species including 3x specialties. This time I wanted to tackle it from a different angle, seeing as this holiday had been all about trying new places. We arrived at Grantown-on-Spey and Wendy had her eyes peeled for the Pet Shop we'd been told about by the lad in Tesco on Friday. I drove down the main street and Wendy found it but it was still closed, so we'd have to go back later. I parked up in the car park by the Golf Club at 9.31am and we wandered down towards the woods with Lyca pulling really badly on her lead.

Grrrrrrrr.....we just needed to find a Flexi-lead and things would start to become a lot easier. Our main worry about this plan was that even though the rain had stopped, there was no sun, so the likelihood that any insects would be flying was practically zero. We just had to hope that it would improve, even if it was just for a few minutes. There was a fenced off concreted area with a weird shallow stagnant pool in it and a couple of small huts, so we stopped to have a look. I spotted a Spotted Fly on top of a floodlight and after I'd checked on the map, I found out that it was a Curling Centre. AHA!



Curling Centre

We could feel our big walk from yesterday, so neither of us felt particularly energetic to start with whereas Lyca was apparently unaffected by the whole thing and raring to go as usual. I think we were both relieved that this walk was mainly flat and easy going.



Woods

In the wood itself it was strangely quiet with not much bird life at all but there were loads of people around walking their dogs, running and cycling. We heard Crossbills flying over while we were looking for the Dragonfly pools but the signage for the different routes weren't exactly comprehensive. We eventually found several pools but there was nothing over or even resting around them, which was hardly surprising considering the weather.



Pool

On the way back we found a male Blackcap singing from deep inside a tree, which was hard to find amongst the leaves. We were back at the car, quite disappointed, by 11am and thought we'd give the Grantown Pet Shop another go.

As we approached the shop we were pleased to see the sign up outside on the pavement. It was open, so I parked up outside and Wendy ran in with her fingers crossed she could get what she wanted. When she came out she was grinning like a Cheshire cat and grabbed her phone. While she'd been in there a very well behaved little puppy, which belonged to the young girl who worked there, had come over to say, "Hello!" Wendy thought it looked familiar and asked her what breed it was. The girl, who was really friendly, confirmed her suspicions and told her that she was a 10wk old Cockerpoo, so they ended up comparing notes and chatting about Cockerpoos. She'd taken a photo of it to show me and I had to admit it was rather cute.



Cockerpoo puppy

The thing that worried Wendy was that this puppy was really placid and not a bit like mental Lyca and it was only 10wks old! We've always said that she must've

been the naughty one of the litter :P. She'd also managed to get a Flexi-lead, so hopefully Lyca would be less of a handful, even if it was only for the last 2 days of the week.

Wendy needed some money, so we went over to the cashpoint then to the bakery, as we were both feeling a bit peckish. I got a chicken slice but after the woman had put it in a bag for me I spotted some square sausage sitting there all ready to be put in a bag with some tomato sauce.....Nooooooo! Wendy, who wanted a cheese and onion pasty, ended up with a cheese and vegetable slice and a cappuccino and we took it all back to the car to eat. My chicken slice wasn't the best and the fact that I could've had something much better made it taste even worse. Wendy's cappuccino was from a machine and her pasty wasn't what she wanted either but Lyca reaped the benefits and ended up eating ½ of it! We thought that before we left we'd make use of the WC's. While I was in the men's I had to take a photo of the very amusing graffiti scribbled on the wall to show Wendy, which unfortunately is too risqué to put in the article :P. We wondered if the bloke who'd written it ever gets any phone calls from the men reading it! Meanwhile, Wendy had been chatting to some woman outside who said that the weather was awful but it was going to be nicer tomorrow, which was the complete opposite of what we'd seen forecast. We left at 11.47am with my next plan being to head to the Black Isle to visit Chanonry Point for our second time ever. As we had time to kill before 3.30pm, which was 2hrs before high tide and the best time to go according to the many reports I'd read, I'd found some other new places to visit in the meantime.

At 12.35pm I parked up at Monadh Mor and there seemed to be a big black cloud hanging over us and everywhere else was clear.....Urrghhhhhh! The footpath was very wet and flooded but we quickly found a **Large Red Damselfly**, so at least we knew that something was out and about.



Flooded path?

While we walked up the track Wendy stopped and said, "Woah what's this?" and pointed out a tiny and very interesting Micro moth on the ground. I've got no idea how on earth she'd spotted it but it was pretty funky, so I took some pics to ID it later.



Eulia ministana

The path branched off through some trees and past some more small pools but even with a bit of sun trying to peak through there was nothing on them. You could tell the area would be very good at the right time of year though.



Pool

As we headed into the boggy area it was so flooded in one section that someone had put some wood down to use like steppingstones. I crossed it and turned around just in time to watch Wendy's foot slip off the wood and splat straight into the deep mud.....Bahahahaha! It was so funny I couldn't stop laughing but Wendy, although she did eventually see the funny side, was very annoyed that her shoes were caked in mud and soaking again having only just dried them out after yesterday. The best bit for me was that it's usually the other way round and I've lost count of the times I've come a cropper and it's been Wendy doubled up in stitches laughing at me :P. Hilarity over, we looked up to see a Red Kite flying over, which was great, as we hadn't seen any on the way to The Black Isle. Considering that not long ago 15-17 Red Kites and Buzzards had been illegally

poisoned in the area it was a relief to see that there was one around at least. Further up the path we saw a Large Butterfly, which looked the size and colour of a White Admiral, which aren't resident in Scotland, so we were stumped as to what it was. We then found a **Clouded border moth** and there were **Speckled Wood Butterflies** everywhere plus another Four-spotted Chaser. We'd already worked out that we were too early for any of the interesting things to be out, so we weren't entirely surprised not to see anything else. On the walk back the habitat changed from wooded bog to open heath. The footpath was bordered with Broom, which was in flower and there was a bit of gorse thrown in for good measure.



Broom lined path

We were back at the car by 2.10pm and while we had our lunch I counted up my midgie bites. I'd been eaten alive and had 7x bites, 3 of which were on my face, whereas Wendy had none! Where's the fairness in that? We left at 2.35pm and saw a Sparrowhawk zooming over the road on the way to our next stop.

It was 2.55pm when we arrived at Chanonry Point and the car park was heaving, so it looked like we wouldn't get a space. I drove in anyway and had a look around, luckily finding the very last space and parked up....Phew! There was a woman, getting back in her car with her dog, who seemed to be rather taken by Lyca and made a big fuss of her. While we were chatting she mentioned that the Dolphins were already there and had been putting on a great show...Uh oh! We practically legged it from then on and headed down across the sand to the point. I could hear Wendy behind me shouting, "**Sanderling!**" so I had a look and found the 5 birds running along the waters edge.



The crowd

Luckily we caught our 1st sight of one of the **Bottlenose Dolphins** and carried on to find ourselves a good spot. There were also Common, **Sandwich** and **Arctic Terns** flying around as well as **Fulmar** and we could see that the Dolphins were pretty close in. There were a lot of people at the point including a handful of Photographers but we had a bad feeling that we were too late and had missed the main action. I didn't understand it, we were actually 35mins early for the 2hrs before high tide time theory and they'd already been around for ages, which went against everything I'd read! Luckily the Dolphins stuck around for us, although a bit further out and this was Wendy's 1st attempt at trying to get a Dolphin shot, so she was a bit nervous. Having watched me last time we were there she knew how difficult it was trying to predict where they were going to pop up next. She went and stood at the edge of the water where she had a clear shot and started firing but out of nowhere a woman came and stood right in front of her! She wasn't a Photographer either so Wendy was a bit annoyed with her, considering there were loads of other places to stand to watch from. Wendy decided to move to another clear space and sat down on the sand hoping for the best. As she was firing off the shots a young girl decided to stand in front of her too....Grrrrrrr! She stopped firing and looked up at the girl, who gave her a stare that would burn holes in your head! She then proceeded to walk backwards and forwards in front of Wendy, kicking her feet in the sand and staring at her as she went. Obviously Wendy was fuming and she turned to me again and gave me a look, which could only mean some choice expletives. The girl's parents were watching the situation but never once told her to stop walking in front of the person taking photos, which was incredibly rude we think. Nevertheless Wendy had managed to get her 1st Dolphin shot, which she was pleasantly surprised with.



Bottle-nosed Dolphin

I had Lyca on her lead and was sitting on the handle so she couldn't run off but with all the excitement around her and all the attention she was getting was making her a bit hyper and barky. Wendy had taken a break when she turned around to see an old guy putting something in his mouth, which he then took out and gave to Lyca. It was a bone shaped dog biscuit, so he was giving her treats and had probably put it in his mouth 1st to soften it. Wendy laughed and thanked the kind man but then he produced another for her straight from his pocket, which she also gobbled up in no time. This was a lovely thing to do but Wendy all of a sudden had a horrible thought that maybe the biscuits were poisoned! Hahaha. The 1st one had been in his mouth but the 2nd hadn't and went straight to Lyca! She was uneasy after that and her back was killing so with the Dolphins having moved further away and looking as though they were heading back out to sea she ended up taking Lyca off the beach and went to sit on the picnic benches. A lot of the others decided to follow suit and headed off back to their cars but I carried on with the very few 'hardcore' people who remained :P.

Not much happened after that, so it looked like they were done for the day, so I walked up to where Wendy and Lyca were. A couple of blokes came over and started to talk to us and one of them told us about his Chanonry Point blog and all the photos he's taken over the years. This was quite interesting but he then spent the next 45mins telling us a load of stuff, which we thought consisted of a fair bit of artistic license. Furthermore his mate started to feed Lyca treats out of his rucksack too, which fuelled Wendy's paranoia into overdrive that there was a team called 'The Chanonry Point Dog Poisoners'! She knew fine well that most normal people would be thinking, "Awwwww how kind." and felt quite ashamed of her thoughts. The guy actually said, "You may be wondering why I've got dog treats in my bag but it's because I usually meet my mate with his Newfoundland here and they're not here today" so he must've been reassuring her that it wasn't anything weird. We got the impression that the pair of them were on long-term incapacity benefit and this was their daily haunt to get out and talk to people. They were both very friendly and harmless enough though but we had to question one of their theories that ½hr after low tide was the best time to be there, amongst many other things. It was like the main guy was making out he was best mates with Bear Grylls and Lofty Wiseman, who are both ex SAS, so we couldn't believe much he said after that. After about our 5th attempt of trying to leave we were finally freed and made our way back over what little remained of

the beach. Amazingly another couple of Dolphins appeared in front of us, so we stopped for our 2nd round of the afternoon :).

Just then I noticed the blokes heading towards us and panicked that they'd think we'd left to get away from them and didn't fancy being talked to for the next hour, so we quickly legged it. I was a bit disappointed to have not bettered my shot from last time and it was far from what I'd envisaged in my head. Despite my research, we'd unfortunately arrived after the main close in action had happened but I ended up with this one.



Bottle-nosed Dolphin

We were back at the car at 4.33pm and Wendy pointed upwards and said, “**Skylark!**” Sure enough our 1st Skylark of the trip was singing away high up in the sky. We left at 4.38pm with our only plan being to go home via Tesco. We'd been really lucky with the weather and had dodged most of the bad stuff, so my plan of doing most of the driving today had worked a treat. I'd come away with loads of midgie bites and Wendy had avoided getting bitten entirely. I went to Aviemore petrol station to fill the tank up and although we'd planned to eat out we hadn't found anywhere suitable so decided to forget it. We then went to Tesco, so Wendy could run in for some food for tea and to keep us going for the next couple of days and by the time we left the rain had finally caught up with us.

When we eventually arrived back at HQ it was 6.13pm and we were starving, so got cracking with tea. I was having the quickest tea I could think of, beans and sausages on toast, so I put my bread down to toast when my beans were nearly done. It was taking ages and when Wendy walked in and said, “It might help if you put the toaster down!” I was confused because I had! I tried again and nothing happened, the toaster had broken! I thought that was the end of that until Wendy pointed out the obvious and told me I could just grill it instead....Doh! After we'd had our baths I went to lift the plug with a knife again but it just wouldn't budge. We now had a bath full of water we couldn't drain away, so after coming up with no better solutions I set about emptying it into the shower with a plastic jug again. Not only was it taking ages, but the shower didn't seem to drain very well either, so I was pleased when Wendy appeared with another jug and chipped in to help. In the end the bath was empty and

Wendy used the water on the floor to get it clean to save her a job before we left on Friday, but the plug still was stuck fast though.

While I was sitting down going through the pics and watching TV I decided to email the owner about the bath and toaster. I didn't hold my hopes that either would be fixed in a hurry but with only 1 more night to go it didn't really matter. We were both really tired and the aches and pains from the Carn Ban Mor walk were finally starting to kick in big time. We decided to call it a day and went off to bed at 11.30pm knowing that the forecast for the next day was the worst so far.

Thursday 5th June

Getting out of bed at 7.20am it was very apparent that we were more tired and sore than we'd been yesterday....Ouch! Wendy hobbled into the kitchen for her coffee fix and swore that there was no way we were rushing to get out early. It was raining outside and everywhere was soaked, which made Wendy's heart sink having just dried her shoes out for the 2nd time running. There was a lot of activity out on the feeders with our 1st sighting of the female Greater spotted Woodpecker, followed by the male, more Siskin than ever and a male Bullfinch outside the bedroom window. We had a look at our pics from yesterday and looking at the Dolphins we noticed that there were approximately 4-5 different individuals including an adult with a juvenile swimming alongside it. I also had a look for dog friendly pubs (for our Journey home) near Silverdale, as our usual local The Albion in Arnside wasn't, but couldn't find any.....Boooooo :(I found absolutely loads in the Lake District though, so hopefully we could still retire to the pub before driving to Heysham for our sailing home. Leighton Moss is also not dog friendly, so our days of killing time there for a couple of hours were over too. After our very relaxed start to the wet and miserable day we managed to pull out a few dregs of enthusiasm and got our stuff ready to go out.

It was 10.20am when we left and only 11.5c but feeling colder with the rain and totally absence of the sun. The only thing I could think of doing was going into a forest where we'd hopefully be a bit sheltered from the worst of the rain. I thought that Forest Lodge was worth a shot for a last ditch and feeble attempt at finding a Caper but we weren't hopeful, as it was so late in the day. I'd planned on going there at some point anyway and had chosen the open walk instead but had to scrub that and stick to the usual forest walk.

When we arrived at 11.11am it was still chucking it down and the footpaths were very wet and muddy. We took a detour down to the bridge over the river desperately trying to find a Dipper, only to fail again.



Fast flowing river

The path further on was really flooded and we had to walk on the grassy ridges in the middle created by 4x4's driving up the track. A moth caught our eye and when Wendy said it was just another Bordered White I wasn't convinced. On 2nd glances though, she'd been right and it was nothing new or exciting, even though that type of moth had been a lifer at the start of the week! As we squelched our way round the whole walk we were very surprised as to how dead the place was and we hadn't seen any other walkers or birders either.



Grrrrrrrr!

All of sudden a load of kids came round a corner fully clad in waterproofs, carrying humungous bright orange waterproof rucksacks on their backs. I reckoned they were Army Cadets while Wendy thought they'd be Duke of Edinburgh school kids.



Soggy students

Near the end of the walk we caught up with them standing by a gate, so when they said, "Hello." to us Wendy asked if they were doing their D.O.E. They were and had started their walk at Nethybridge with a map to follow for directions. They were all soaking and looked knackered, so it was a shame the weather was bad for them, especially as the rest of the week had been so lovely. We left them all standing confused by the gate and got back to car with a soaking wet Lyca at 1pm, where the teachers were all standing around waiting for them outside a hut. They were also kitted out in waterproofs and sat waiting patiently while we ate our lunch in the shelter of the car. After what seemed like ages the kids appeared and all sat down to eat their soggy sarnies in the rain.....nice :/. My next plan had been to go to Loch Mor, near Loch an Eilien, which was supposedly brilliant for Dragonflies but the weather was anything but Dragonfly friendly, so we made the decision to ditch it off. Instead we thought we'd try the Boat of Garten feeders for Red Squirrel again on our way past.

We left at 1.28pm and headed straight there but this time I went for a look while Wendy stayed with Lyca in the car. Needless to say there were no Squirrels and not even the squeak of a bird but there were 2x **Redshank** standing on posts over the road next to the dried up Slav pool. Next up was to go back to the hardware shop in Aviemore to see if we could find a plunger to hopefully remove the plug from the bath. Luckily they did have plungers but they also had some great looking socks, which had fleecy lining so we both picked up a pair that would fit us. We put our stuff on the counter and the woman started to scan them but she then stopped and said, "You do realize that these socks are a children's size?" I nearly burst out laughing but Wendy had to keep a straight face and say, "Yes.....I have children's sized feet!" Bahahahahaha! :P. The sun had made an appearance by the time we'd done that, so I reckoned that Craigellachie was worth a last ditch attempt to see if anything had decided to emerge before we left tomorrow.

At 2.41pm we arrived at the Youth Hostel car park and headed into the woods. The rain had stopped, which meant that the midgies were out in force.....Urrghhhh! As we reached the 1st pool we could hear the sound of a Common Sandpiper kicking off big time and found 2x birds flying around. We wondered if we could get some shots of them but they were very twitchy. There was also a **Blue-tailed Damselfly**, which was new for the trip, over the water

but try as we might we couldn't find any other type of Dragonfly. One of the Common Sands was standing on the footpath, so I held Lyca while Wendy crept over using a huge bush to hide behind to get closer. She ended up really close and fired off loads of shots, while being eaten alive by the midgies. When she'd done we swapped over and I had a go but the midgies were getting even worse, which I didn't need due my already impressive collection of bites! I couldn't stand it anymore, so gave up but at least we'd both come away with some shots. This is my best one out of the lot.



Common Sandpiper

I was hoping that the Pied Flycatchers would still be hanging around up the hill, as I hadn't got any shots from last time. We made the most of seeing Spotfls and hearing Wood Warblers before we returned to the birdless void that is the IOM and then it started to rain again.



Craigellachie

Wendy, having already got some pics wasn't enjoying herself at all with the midgies and was still sore from Carn Ban Mor but although I felt the same I just

had to give it one last try. In keeping with our luck they were nowhere to be seen, so the walk had been a waste of time....apart from for Lyca that is! On the way down we found some Heath-spotted Orchids, so Wendy stopped for a pic.



Heath-spotted Orchid

We were back at HQ by 4.42pm and Wendy took Lyca straight into the bathroom for a shower. After she'd been thoroughly scrubbed we spent nearly an hour blow drying her and trying to brush the mats out of her coat. We had tea next and Wendy went for a bath before I tested out the plunger, which needed ninja like reactions to get the knife under the plug once plunged but it worked a treat. Wendy, although she just wanted to relax, spent the rest of the night washing, cleaning and packing as much as she could before the morning and I took job of chief Hoover man with the worlds worst Hoover. When we'd booked the cottage we chose not to pay extra for the cleaning service and opted to do it ourselves. This worked great financially but we were paying for it in other ways now. It was hardly spotless when we arrived but Wendy was, as usual, leaving it cleaner than how we'd found it.

Wendy did finally sit down with a Spritzer and while she was speaking to her Mum she couldn't believe what she'd just seen on the TV. Springwatch was on but I'd muted the sound because I was recording it but she'd spotted them having a very brief few words with the guy who we always meet at Kelling Heath in Norfolk! Having seriously doubted his existence and having had him down as the 'Ghost of Kelling Heath', due to his unfeasibly uncanny knack of popping up EVERY time we went there, she was totally speechless. When we got to watch the full program later on, it turned out that it was indeed him. He was part of a survey of ringed Blackbirds in his hometown of Holt and was part of a group called Holt Blackbird Observers aka HoBOs! So he does exist after all! Hopefully when we go back we'll meet him again, so he can tell us all about what we've been missing and we can tell him that we'd seen him on TV :P. By the time we'd watched Springwatch it was 11pm and we were really tired, so because we had a very long day ahead of us in the morning we went to bed.

Friday 6th June

When Wendy woke up at 7am all she wanted to do was roll over and go back to sleep but she had far too much to do before we had to leave at 10am. It was Lycas 1st Birthday, so after wishing her a Happy Birthday, Wendy got to work starting with washing the bedding and hanging it up to dry in the utility room. There was a list on the wall telling guests to wash the bed sheets and towels, wash the kitchen and bathroom floors as well as all the usual stuff.....Urrghhhh! Wendy always cleans before we leave and strips the bedding but neither of us has ever come across a request to do our own washing before! It was a grey start to the day but by 9.30am the sun was beginning to poke through the clouds. After breakfast I took Lyca out for a walk on the track from the cottage that headed down river while Wendy cleaned and packed. I'd noticed when I'd driven past on most days that there was a sign posted car park and a walk just up from the cottage so I headed for that. I was shocked to see it costing £2.50 to park in there so felt quite smug that I could walk there from HQ :).



Info board

After checking the walks I decided on the small river side walk and set off. It was nice but the grass was very wet so Lyca and I got soaked within minutes. Down at River Feshie there were Common Sandpiper, Sand Martins but still no Dipper! Arrrrghhhh!



River Feshie

On the track back I had a Tree pipit out in the open right in front of me and a male Bullfinch posing beautifully but again I hadn't brought any camera.....Doh!

Lyca was as usual having a wail of a time, which was handy, as we really needed to tire her out as much as possible before the long journey south.



Too much to sniff

When I got back things were more or less done but Wendy's face fell when she saw the state of Lyca. She was absolutely soaking and needed a good drying off with her towel before she went on the settee in the living room. The hallway floor was covered in a fresh coating of dry grass too, so the Hoover made its 2nd appearance. Finally Wendy loaded up the washing machine with all our towels and put it on for its 2nd load and had a quick check around to make sure we hadn't left anything. I started to load the car up while she took some photos of the inside of the house and to say we were sad to leave would be an understatement.



Living room

Having worried that it was too far out of the way and after a few minor hiccups, Ord Cottage had been a brilliant HQ for the week. It was homely, warm, clean enough, well equipped, comfortable and in a great location for everywhere we'd been. We'd enjoyed watching the entertainment at the feeders from the

windows but it was sadly lacking in any Red Squirrels, which was one of the reasons I'd picked it. Ah well you can't have it all!

At 10.38am we waved a fond farewell to our HQ and headed off for what was going to be a very long day indeed. I had no plans for the day whatsoever, so was just going to wing it depending on what happened with the weather. If it looked like it was going to be ok we'd stay in the area but if it rained we'd clear off and head south. First things first though, thinking that we'd need some extra energy for the day ahead and a bit of consolation, our 1st stop was The Potting Shed for some cake :).



Best cake shop in the world :)

I wanted to know what other cakes they did, so went in as well and after I'd chosen 2 slices from the amazing selection Wendy wandered off to the viewing window at the back of the shop while our cake was boxed up. Unbeknown to me she'd had a brainstorm and had gone for a last ditch look for one thing in particular. She poked her head round the corner and was grinning from ear to ear saying, "**Red Squirrel!**" Finally and despite all our forest walks we'd caught up with one on our last day again, which seems to be case recently. I got my point and click out of my pocket and took a quick pic, which was absolutely terrible.



Finally a Red Squirrel!

Wendy was chatting to some women about our week long search for Red Squirrels and concluded that we should've just sat there for the week eating cake and filling our boots :P. It was very tempting to stay there to eat our cake especially when Wendy found a table and chair with her name on it :P.



Perfect!

Unfortunately there was no time for indulgence and we had to get going. As the weather was still holding out I decided we'd give Loch Mor a go, as I really wanted to see the place at the very least. We'd had to ditch it off until then and by the car park you also get Red Squirrels, so we set off.

It was 11am already when I parked up at Loch an Eilien but it was looking as though it was going to rain.....Noooo! Of course the 1st thing we did was eat our cake in the car, while Lyca whinged to get out for another walk. While Wendy ran over to the loos I took Lyca over to the Loch and sat on a bench admiring the view.



Loch an Eilein

This time I'd pinpointed a different walk again in the opposite direction and luckily it wasn't long before the sun started to appear. The footpath was busy with families on bikes but we didn't expect to see anything amazing as it didn't seem hot enough. Wendy found a Silver-ground Carpet moth and there were more Common Heaths flying around everywhere.



Woodland walk

We passed the spot where we'd met the guide who'd taken us to the Pine Marten Hide a few years ago and even went past his house, so we wondered if he still worked there. We ended up walking through the woods where we found another Bordered White Moth and stopped when we heard a confusing call. We knew we'd heard it before but couldn't put a name to it so we stuck around to try and find the culprit. It seemed like we were there for ages and although the bird wasn't far away we couldn't detect the faintest movement up in the canopy never mind see it. Eventually Wendy called out, "Redstart!" which solved the mystery and allowed her get what was very likely to be the last view of a male Redstart for a while. Despite my efforts I couldn't locate the bird at all and after a while it made its way further back into the trees and out of sight.....Grrrrrrrr! The walk

didn't have the best signposting we've ever seen and sure enough we missed the turn off. I had to consult my phones OS map app several times but eventually we found Loch Mor.



Loch Mor

Loch Mor is famed for its Dragon and Damselflies and in particular we were hoping for the specialties Northern Damselfly, White-faced Darter & Northern Emerald. The week hadn't been very productive for insects and everything seemed a bit late, so we weren't hopeful. There was a baby Goldeneye swimming around and I spent ages trying to get a shot of it in the open water. Eventually I gave up empty handed but Wendy turned around and said, "Oh a Goldeneye chick!" and fired off about 2 shots getting a nice one of it out in the open water! Aarrghhhh.....jammy swine!



Baby Goldeneye

Before long we started to spot small Damselflies flying around and eventually some of them landed to rest, which instantly picked me up, as there were more flying than we'd seen all week. We set about scanning them all just in case but they were all the usual Common Blues but then a big Dragonfly caught our eye. I

had thoughts of White-faced Darter, so we couldn't let it go without a check. This was easier said than done as it was on the move but when it did settle we were disappointed to see yet another Four-spotted Chaser. We went straight back to the Damselflies and when we saw a paler and smaller specimen, resembling a Blue-tailed at 1st glances, I got very excited. It finally settled and let me check for the spurs on the side, amongst other features, and sure enough there it was! I was confident but Wendy double checked it in her ID app on her phone before we were able to confirm a lifer. It was a **Northern Damselfly**, which is only found at a handful of sites in the Highlands...Brilliant! :). We had to get some pics and set about taking it in turns, while one of us held Lyca with Wendy getting the better shot.



Northern Damselfly

After we'd filled our boots I just wished that I'd brought my macro lens out with me and could've kicked myself for leaving behind. Wendy found the old larval case of a Dragonfly, which we have no idea what type it was but suspect it was from a Four-spotted Chaser. She thought it looked quite funny and alien like so took some pics of that too.



Dragonfly larval case

I spotted an Osprey flying over a hill in the distance and it had a fish, so was obviously taking it back to its nest. We then heard a familiar call but again couldn't place it and when we found the bird it was a female Bullfinch. It was feeding on the seeds in a tree above us, so we tried to get some pics of that too. Unfortunately it was really dark in the trees and the bird wasn't in the clear either, so neither of us managed to get anything worth keeping. Wendy was getting twitchy by then and was thinking that we'd spent too long there and could do with making a move but I could've stayed there all day!

Back at the car it was 1.45pm and the walk had worked perfectly for Lyca as she absolutely knackered, so we had our lunch. We'd been so lucky to have finally been able to visit Loch Mor just when the sun managed to peak through. We'd found our 1st Northern Damselflies, having believed that we'd have to forget all about any decent Dragonflies. We were just annoyed that all the interesting stuff looked like it was just starting to emerge on the day we were leaving and knew that if we'd gone a week later we'd had more luck and more lifers to go away with. We left at 2.10pm and finally headed out of Cairngorm National Park to start our journey south proper. I had a planned stop about an hour away, to break up the travel, at another place we'd been before. It was good for a last minute Wood Warbler fix and would be our last chance to visit a café and WC's for a while.

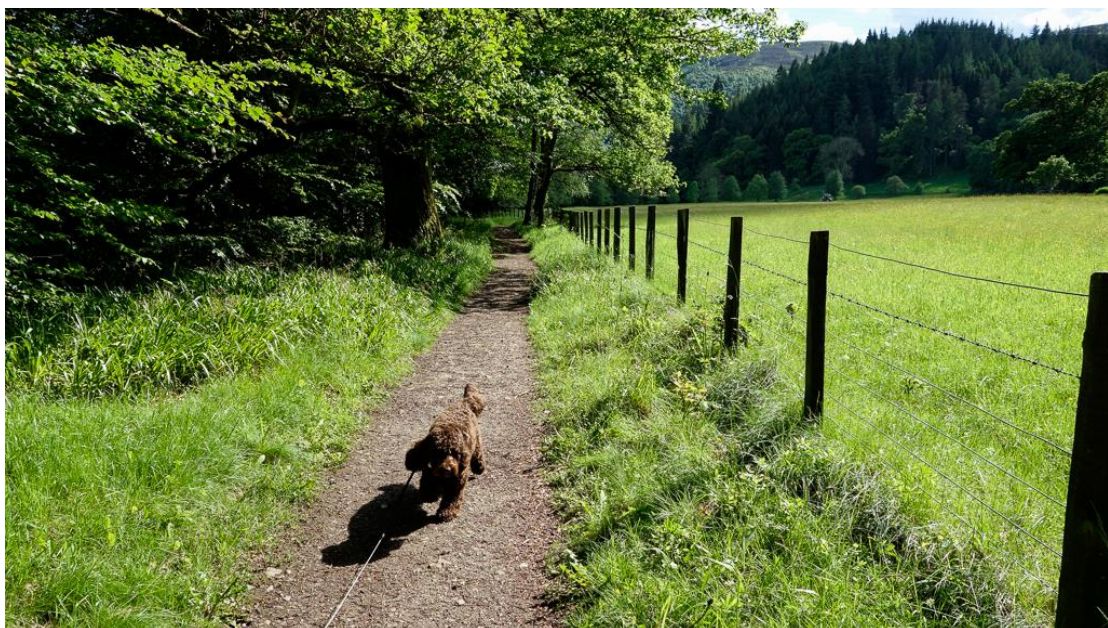
It was 3.19pm when we arrived at Killiecrankie and it was absolutely boiling! The sun was really strong, so it was T-shirt weather again and after removing some layers we were good to go. Last time we'd been there we'd had Pied fly, Redstart and I'd got a shot of a Wood Warbler, which was singing at the car park but there was no sign of anything this time apart from the usual Chaffinches. We wandered past the Visitor Centre and down a track into the woods and it wasn't long before we heard a Wood Warbler. It was so close to us but we couldn't pick it out from the leafy trees, so our hopes of getting a last minute shot went out the window. We had another Spotted fly but nothing else so we called it day.



Killiecrankie

Back at the car it was 19.5c, so I was boiling and got Wendy to go to the café for an ice-cream to cool me down.....om nom nom :). My next new place was very close by and one of the very few decent places for Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Scotland, so off we went at 4.05pm.

Five minutes later I parked up at Linn of Tummel and Wendy was anything but enthusiastic. We were tired and still ached from the walk up Carn Ban Mor, so the prospect of yet another walk made her feel weary. I assured her that it was only 30min walk to where we needed to be, so she dragged herself out of the car and we set off. We crossed over road and went down some very steep steps to a footpath along the river. It was certainly a very scenic walk with the river to our left and fields of wild flowers to our right.



Still eager

Lyca still had tons of energy and god knows where she gets it from! Next, we found ourselves in deciduous woodland, which eventually opened out into fields again. Having held on to the fact that the walk was only 30mins Wendy had started to notice that it was never-ending. It looked as though we'd taken a

wrong turning somewhere along the line but when I checked the map on my phone we were heading in the right direction especially when we came to the river Garry. My directions said to go up to where the Rivers Tummel and Garry meet then it's just a 10min walk up river to the area.



River Garry

I was quietly optimistic about this place especially with such detailed directions but Wendy was anything but, so I was very relieved when I spotted the pylons I'd been searching for.....Phew!



Tired now!

While Wendy stood saying, "This is a complete waste of time and energy, there's no Butterflies around at all!" I carried on my search. All of a sudden I flushed a relatively large orange Butterfly from the grass and it flew off at 100mph. I reckoned it had to be what we were after and wasn't going to give up until I'd seen its features. There was a Hawthorn bush in the middle of the long grass, which was absolutely caked in moths and we'd seen some Silver-ground Carpets and Common Heaths already, so it was warm enough. To make it more exciting

the Speckled Yellow moths we'd been seeing since our 1st day were there too, just to keep us on our toes!



Speckled Yellow moth

Wendy told me that she could hear something sounding like a young Peregrine begging for food but then wondered if it was an Osprey. I had a listen but couldn't decide either and walked further through the field and up the bank. As Wendy was on the verge of another Karl Pilkington I suggested that she stayed put, while I went off for a search. As I went up a ridge covered in dried bracken another large orange Butterfly flew past me and this time there was no doubt in my mind that it was a Fritillary.



Spot the Butterfly!

I managed to follow it for a bit in my bins until I lost it again. Small Pearl-bordered and Pearl-bordered are difficult to separate but after reading about the

habitat types they prefer and the fact we were bang on where the directions said made me relatively happy to claim our lifer of **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**. Mission accomplished and realizing that the Butterflies were not hanging around, so photos would be impossible, we turned round to head back. As we set off back Wendy spotted an Osprey flying over but wasn't expecting what happened next at all. The Osprey flew low over us calling constantly and then landed on its nest on top of the pylon we'd just walked straight under! How we hadn't noticed a humungous structure made of sticks right above our heads, totally defies us!



Osprey nest

We must've been so focused on the ground looking for the Frits that we'd just walked straight past it but hearing the birds calling as we went. At least we now knew what was making all that racket! A 2nd bird then flew in and went to the nest as well and having spent the whole week wanting desperately to find something cool we figured we'd settle for finding an Osprey nest :). Walking back was much quicker without looking for Butterflies and we only stopped briefly while Wendy scrambled up a steep bank to find a moth she'd spotted. It was so well camouflaged against the dried leaves and soil that she never found it again. Back at the river on the final stretch of our walk we could hear Common Sands kicking off very loudly and noticed 2 massive blokes wandering around on the river bank. The birds probably had a nest somewhere nearby and the presence of the blokes was probably freaking them out. The blokes wandered around for ages then one of them picked a massive round rock, swung it up onto his shoulder and they walked off. It must've been for his garden or something because we can't think of any other reason why someone would go to so much trouble to find the perfect shaped rock for anything else.

It was already 6pm when we got to the car, so we'd made the most of our time and spent the majority of the day in Scotland. I was really pleased with this, as I'd had no plans that morning but we'd managed to use our time brilliantly.

Wendy was a bit concerned about how late it was considering we still had the majority of the travel still to do. With Leighton Moss out of bounds because of Lyca we'd seen no point in leaving in a hurry but just hoped we'd make it to the pub in time before they closed! Our plan was to end up in the Lake District where we could go to relax in a pub with Lyca for an hour or so. With so many dog friendly pubs in the area we were spoilt for choice but the night before I finally settled on The Mortal Man in Troutbeck. My original plan had been to stop at Haweswater on the way down but we were far too late for that but still thought we should try the pub anyway. All I had to do now was get us there! Lyca was definitely tired out and was curled up asleep on the back seat, so that bode well for the journey.

I was feeling pretty good when we set off at 6.06pm and thought that doing the 4½hr section in one go was looking doable. We ate our remaining sarnies on the move but boredom set in, in no time at all, so we found ourselves playing guess the lorry :P. The game wasn't going well with Wendy in the lead 4-3, so it looked highly likely that I was going to be the loser. That is until I made an amazing come back and got 2 right in row taking the victory, even with Wendy picking Scania on the last go! :). We had a Red Kite flying over at Stirling and on the M74 Wendy saw 2x Roe Deer Stags having a confrontation on the side of a grassy hill. When Wendy saw the sign for Annandale Services she wanted to stop but I just wanted to keep going and do the whole journey in one. She was adamant and said that Lyca could probably do with a wee, not to mention herself. I pulled up at the services at 8.09pm and Wendy ran in to use the WC's and returned with a small fries for herself while I ate the other slice of cake from The Potting Shed, this time Lemon cake.....Om nom nom. She then gave Lyca her dinner, which she wolfed down, then got out with her so she could do a wee on the grass (Lyca that is, not Wendy!). Lyca then got her Dentastick and having spent longer than we'd bargained on we thought we'd better get a move on and left at 8.38pm.

It was such a relief when we passed the 'Welcome to England – Cumbria' sign at 8.58pm, so we'd finally broken the back of the journey.....Phew! Shortly after that we left the motorway and the roads became narrow and windy, so it was slow going from then on. As we drove past Ullswater Wendy wanted to stop for a pic but there were no laybys in any good spots. I found the next available spot and pulled over while she ran down to the waters edge to get a pic.



Ullswater

It was so scenic round there and she was gutted she couldn't get a pic to do it justice. With the clock still ticking and becoming more and more sick of driving by the second imagine my total lack of surprise when I found myself climbing up a single-track road in the Lake District. Unbelievable! It was starting to get dark and it'd been a long day, oh and my petrol was running out fast. I carried on upwards and although it was a lovely drive we just wanted to stop to relax for a bit before going to Heysham. The never-ending track was tiresome but I was soon alerted by someone flashing their headlights at me. What the...? I thought it was nice of him to alert me to whatever was round the corner, presumably a sheep in the road or something, and cautiously carried on. Having found nothing at all that was remotely a problem I was slightly confused, especially when about 10mins later and in a totally different area another car flashed me. Wendy was starting to worry that it was a problem with my car and that we'd get stuck in the middle of nowhere but I couldn't see it. The screeching noise I'd acquired at Lochindorb was still there but what where they on about? The not knowing bit was slightly unnerving and I kept expecting to turn a corner and get a nasty shock but it never happened. Just when we thought we'd never get there we hit civilization, well of a kind of middle of nowhere small type, so we knew we were nearly there. I hadn't put the exact location into my Sat Nav but the pub couldn't have been far off.....Phew! It was really dark on the country road and when I turned a corner Wendy suddenly said, "OMG fire!" There was a Fire Engine, a car parked across the road and a couple of people standing around with their arms folded but there where HUGE orange flames engulfing the roof of a building...Uh oh! Neither of us had ever seen anything like it before.



Fire!

The car in front of us turned around and drove past, while the woman in the road came over to my car. I wound the window down and she said, "Where are you going?" so I replied, "Err Troutbeck?" She said, "You're in Troutbeck but where exactly are going?" "The pub?" I said with a total lack of confidence, as the whole scenario was a bit weird. She replied to that with, "This is a pub, but it's on fire" but I couldn't think a response to that, as it was believe it or not blindingly obvious! She then told us that if we turned round and turned right we'd find another pub called The Mortal Man, which by total fluke was where we were heading for in the 1st place.

I turned around and drove round the corner arriving at our destination at 10.02pm just in time to catch the bloke who'd been in front us getting out of his car with a dog. Wendy jumped out and checked with him that the pub was dog friendly but he had no idea and presumed so, as most of them in the area are. He went in and didn't come back so we got ourselves together and went inside. Lyca said, "Hello!" to his dog in her lovely barky/snarly way and Wendy ordered some drinks while I sat at a table near the door. This was only Lycas 2nd time in a pub and although it took her a few minutes to calm down she soon settled on the seat in between us. The Birthday girl looked like 'the cat that got the cream' sitting there with her tongue hanging out! When Wendy got her camera out she found that the battery had died, so I took a picture of Lyca having a Birthday drink, which is anything but a flattering one of Wendy!



Birthday girl

The pub was nice and I'd cleverly chosen a seat in the bar area because the posher restaurant bit was full of people eating and I didn't trust Lyca to behave. There was a huge bar with real ales lined up all along it and there was a stall set up with loads of different ciders. They were having a Cider Festival starting the following night and seemed to have a few events lined up like an open mic night and stuff. There were hand painted banners draped all over the place with smiley faces and bright colours and designs. Although she doesn't drink cider Wendy looked very tempted into staying a few days but unfortunately she couldn't.....Hahahahahaha! The young Barman was good entertainment, flirting with the even younger Barmaid. At one point he even told her to touch his side and offered himself up to her. Oooer. She went all girly and giggly, so we kind of got the impression that the feeling was mutual. Shortly after she came in and asked him if he wanted a take away because she was going to pick one up but needed someone to go in for her, as there was no parking nearby. Even though they were supposed to be working? He phoned the order in and she and some lad from outside, who'd been roped into going to collect it with her, rushed off to pick it up.

While the Barmaid went out the Barfly was talking to the Barman about the fire at the pub down the road, which was called 'The Queens Head' and it didn't sound good. It was a 17th century listed building and the whole place was designed around the wooden beams and staircases etc, which had been one of its features. Oh dear! The Barman even started to help himself to samples of a

couple of ciders saying, "Lets make the night interesting shall we?" All of a sudden the up until then quiet bar started to fill up with people and one guy came in clutching a red cushion for dear life. It turned out that they were all refugees from The Queens Head and The Mortal Man had actually offered to take them all in and gave them drinks and accommodation on the house. How nice of them was that? :). Some of them looked OK and totally unfazed but others looked a bit distressed, understandably. From what we could gather, they'd all left the building without ANY of their personal possessions and they'd all lost their cash, credit cards, keys, clothes etc. etc. By then it was getting a bit busy for my liking and luckily quite late, so we decided to make a move but Wendy got chatting to some old bloke outside. Apparently he'd been having a meal in the dining room and had complained about the smell of burning. After a while he could smell burning plastic and was moved into the bar before anyone had even realized the Hotel was on fire. He said the fire alarm wasn't raised until 15mins after that!!! Obviously they all got out unharmed but to lose all your stuff while on holiday is the kind of stuff nightmares are made of.

By 11.23pm it really was time to leave and we had our 1st **Fox** of the trip on the way out. Luckily I'd planned it well and it was only about 1hr to Heysham but the drive there was pretty uneventful.

Saturday 7th June

I filled my car up with petrol from Asda and we finally reached Heysham at 12.24am and as I drove to join the queue I thought I spotted my Mum and Dads car. I wasn't 100% sure though and was so tired I didn't fancy getting out to check. I thought I must be confused, as they'd told me they were going back the next day. By 1.29am we were boarding and there were the usual hold ups caused by people falling asleep in their cars. It's always funny to watch how quickly they wake up and start their engines up after the loud thud on their roof from the Port staff. When I was parking up on the deck I definitely saw my Mum and Dad heading towards the stairs so shouted to my Dad. Even though I shouted about ten times my Dad turned round in a daze and then walked off.....Hahaha! When we went to get the cabin key Mum and Dad were there and we were all looking a bit worse for wear and a bit tired but Lyca had a lot of fuss made of her on the way up. Mum and Dad realized that we were on the same boat when they'd gone to get their cabin key and were asked if they were the Hadfields with or without the dog. Dad was looking more tired than me but had only driven from Penrith! Lightweight :P. By 1.42am we were in the cabin, so I set my alarm for the usual time of 5.45am and all of us went out like lights as soon as our heads hit the pillows.

At 5.20am we were woken up by the announcement for all vehicle drivers and their passengers to go to their cars but when I opened the curtains we were still bobbing around in the bay where we stayed for another 10mins. We finally docked at 5.45am but never found out what the docking delay was for and were home by 6am, a lot earlier than usual. I was thinking of leaving the bags till 7am so I didn't disturb the neighbours but could see a horrible dark grey cloud coming in, so I went and got them while Wendy went off to bed. On my second run I heard a massive rumble of thunder.....EEEEK! That hurried me up no end and I legged it to get all the other stuff in. The second I shut the door behind me the heavens opened. Good timing or what? The thunder was really loud and quite close for a while, so Lyca decided to bark at it, which definitely would've

annoyed the neighbours. Oops! After the thunder stopped Lyca trotted off to bed and I didn't see Wendy or Lyca until 11.30am!

All in all it'd been a great holiday and was even better for having Lyca with us this time. The walks we'd been on had tired her right out (not just her!) and made her eat better than she'd ever done before. Having been forecast to be a mainly wet week we were really lucky with the weather. We only had 1 day that was a wash out and for the rest of week we'd somehow managed to dodge the showers. The fact that there were hardly any decent insects about, was due to us having been just a little bit too early in the year but we took that risk when we booked it. We seemed to have gone too late for any activity from the breeding species of birds too, so it ended up being quite difficult to find a lot of them. As usual we were too late for some things and too early for others but hey ho! It was the first time we had taken a Moth trap away on holiday and it worked well on the nights we could put it out. When going away during summer in future we'll be making sure that the cottage we chose will have somewhere to put a Moth trap!

Despite the weird arrival scenario Ord Cottage was brilliant and we felt totally at home and relaxed from the start. There was everything we needed in there and it was nice to find the well-equipped kitchen and the plates/cutlery spotlessly clean. We'd definitely stay there again and would recommend it to anyone else. Although I'd worried that Feshiebridge was a bit out of the way, it actually worked out to be spot on for everywhere we visited, although it possibly felt that way as we planned lots of our locations around that area. It was hard to find dog friendly pubs in the Speyside area, which was very strange, as it's extremely popular with walkers. Considering practically everywhere seemed to be dog friendly in the Lake District maybe a trip there is on the cards in future. :)

Wildlife sighting of the trip for us was the Northern Damselfly. We'd tried so hard throughout the entire week to find the Highland specialties and failed miserably. To see one on our last day, in a place we'd only decided to go to an hour earlier, made it just that bit more special for me. The highlight of the trip definitely goes to seeing Lyca having so much fun in one of our favourite places! :).

Bird List

Mute Swan	Moorhen	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Pied Flycatcher
Greylag Goose	Oystercatcher	Skylark	Long-tailed Tit
Canada Goose	Dotterel	Sand Martin	Blue Tit
Wigeon	Lapwing	Swallow	Great Tit
Mallard	Sanderling	House Martin	Crested Tit
Shoveler	Dunlin	Tree Pipit	Coal Tit
Tufted Duck	Snipe	Meadow Pipit	Nuthatch
Eider	Curlew	Grey Wagtail	Treecreeper
Goldeneye	Common Sandpiper	Pied Wagtail	Jay
Goosander	Redshank	Wren	Magpie
Red Grouse	Black-headed Gull	Duncock	Jackdaw
Red-legged Partridge	Common Gull	Robin	Rook
Pheasant	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Redstart	Carrion Crow
Black-throated Diver	Herring Gull	Whinchat	Raven
Little Grebe	Great Black-backed Gull	Wheatear	Starling

Slavonian Grebe	Sandwich Tern	Ring Ouzel	House Sparrow
Fulmar	Common Tern	Blackbird	Chaffinch
Gannet	Arctic Tern	Song Thrush	Greenfinch
Cormorant	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Mistle Thrush	Goldfinch
Grey Heron	Woodpigeon	Blackcap	Siskin
Red Kite	Collared Dove	Whitethroat	Lesser Redpoll
Sparrowhawk	Cuckoo	Chiffchaff	Common Crossbill
Buzzard	Tawny Owl	Willow Warbler	Bullfinch
Osprey	Swift	Goldcrest	Yellowhammer
Kestrel	Kingfisher	Spotted Flycatcher	Reed Bunting
Peregrine			