

With 2018 having been such an amazing year for holidays, 2019 certainly had a lot to live up to! We tried to book a different week to visit the Highlands but due to Wendy's work calendar already being full it wasn't possible. The only week that was available was the 1<sup>st</sup> week in March, which we had to grab but meant that yet again Wendy would be away for her birthday, which she wasn't very happy about. I was quite excited to test out my new super lightweight camera gear having bought a Panasonic GH5 and 100-400 zoom lens, so I decided to put all my eggs in one basket and leave my big lens at home. I wasn't going to miss carrying that everywhere with me but was I going to be compromised on the quality and sharpness of the pro equipment? I'd also invested in an Osmo pocket to get video of our walks, which I'd experimented with before going away and had been very impressed with the results.

After the worst start to a new year yet, March crept up on us and Wendy felt anything but like raring to go. The weather in Scotland had been unseasonably mild and sunny all the way up but there was a weather front coming in on Friday so, the forecast for the first three days was for strong winds and rain.....Typical :(. Wendy was gutted, so I reminded her that she'd previously said that she didn't care if it rained for the whole week because we could stay in and watch the Squirrels and Cresties from the kitchen window. This went down like a lead balloon :P. There was very little wind during the run up to our sailing but with it set to change on the Friday I decided to keep an eye on it and if need be I'd have to move our sailing to the Thursday, which would probably mean losing our dog cabin.

On the Monday before we were due to leave, I got a phone call out of the blue, from the owner of Rymore. He was warning me that the electricity would be off for an hour on the Tuesday, which I told him wouldn't affect us, as we'd be out. He then went on to tell me that there are wildlife cameras set up outside which we could watch from the comfort of the living room on the TV.....Whaaaat? There were Badger and Pine Marten visiting daily, but they'd also captured an Otter running across the garden :O! It turned out that they'd been there last time, but I'd presumed them to be just security cameras.....Doh! He also said that on the Monday he'd be there with a guy to put up more Pine Marten nest boxes and was possible meeting a BBC cameraman, who had worked on Winterwatch, to help improve his camera set up. It was a good job there was plenty of inhouse entertainment available at the house because on the Wednesday my throat started to get really sore and my nose was running.....Nooooooooooooo!

Luckily it came to nothing and by Friday I was symptom free, so after working through my lunch I was home at 4.30pm to start getting ready. For the first time ever, we had loads of time on our hands and were pacing around looking for things to do, as we didn't want to get to the Sea Terminal too early. We finally left at 6.50pm and on the way we noticed that having been totally still all day the wind was picking up.....Typical! I handed over my ticket to the girl and was then ushered into the searching bay.....Urrghhhhh! Considering this used to be a regular occurrence we couldn't complain too much seeing as it hadn't happened for a while. After that I was told to park up in lane 4, which I duly did and we waited to board. Finally our lane was waved to go but myself and another car were told to pull over while the other cars, that hadn't been searched, drove onto the boat....Eh? I can only think they got confused and thought we had been put in the searched lane by accident Grrrrr! It was 7.20pm when we were eventually told to board and when we got up to the cabin I found that the TV wasn't working. After a bit of tinkering I got it up and running and we embarked early at 7.37pm. As the Ben rolled its way out of Douglas Bay, we wondered how we could be so unlucky, having had no wind at all for the past week, it's like the weather knows we are going away and picks up just for the 3 hours. Although it was slightly

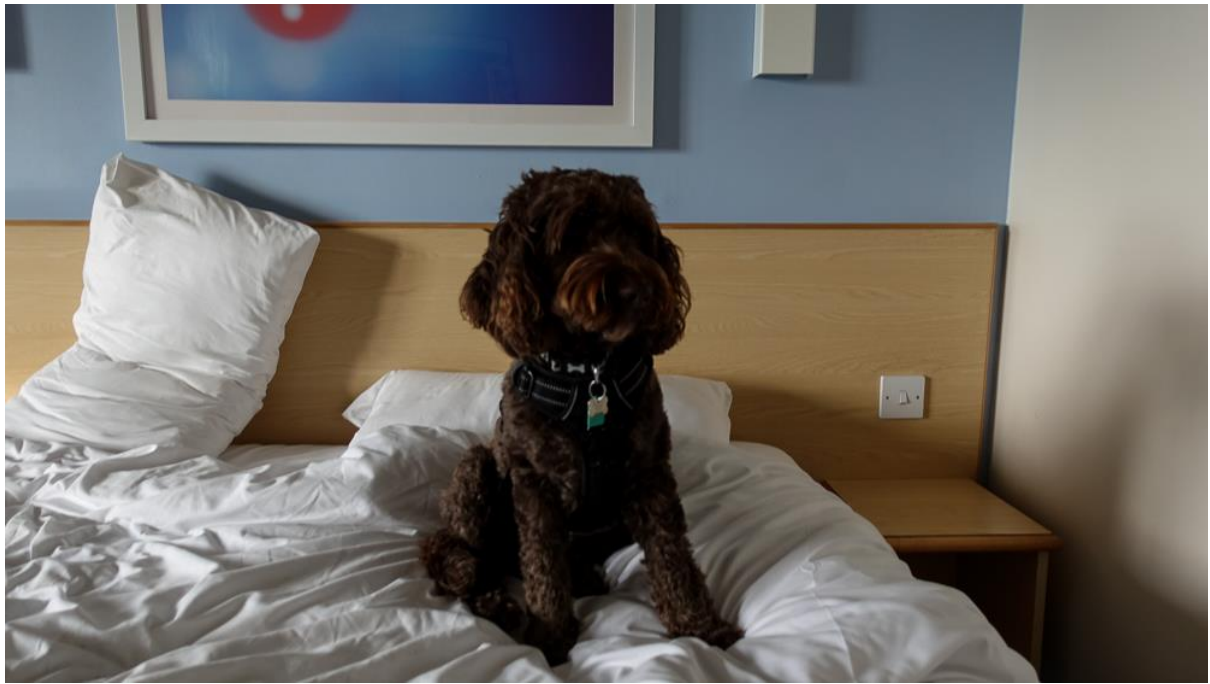
rough, I still needed my tea, so Wendy got up and rang the bell for room service. Normally there's a knock on the door within a few minutes but after about 15 minutes Wendy got up and pressed it again thinking that maybe she hadn't pressed it hard enough the first time. Again, we waited for ages and there was still nothing, so I got up and pressed it again making sure that I'd done it hard enough. Unbelievably there was still no sign of anyone coming to take my order, so I told Wendy that I'd just forget about it. Obviously, she wasn't having that and offered to go down to the café to see if they could bring it up to the cabin. It was too rough for Wendy to even think about carrying a tray of food herself, so with her finger crossed she staggered out of the cabin and down to the café. She asked the guy on the till if it was possible, which it was, so she ordered and paid. To my utter amazement she navigated herself back to the cabin without getting lost and within a couple of minutes there was a knock at the door and it was my tea.....Om nom nom :). Wendy had ordered it without salad or coleslaw this time, so there was nothing to contaminate the edible bits with, which made a nice change. Lyca sat at our feet looking longingly up at us hoping that we'd drop a chip for her to snaffle but her luck was out this time. Wendy gave in and gave her a couple anyway seeing as she was on holiday too :P.

It had taken so long to get that by the time I'd finished it was already 8.40pm, so it had wasted a nice amount of time already. After that Wendy got me to switch the big light off and we settled down on the beds to watch some TV and as usual she went to sleep. When I thought we were getting close enough I took Lyca out for a wee, so we could just head to the Travelodge after driving off. I opened the door onto the decks and we both got a shock when 2x dogs started going nuts at Lyca! There was a woman who looked as though she had been there for the entire journey huddled outside on the floor with them. What the? Maybe the dog lounge was full or her dogs didn't get on with the other dogs in there or something but although it was relatively warm under the air vents I didn't envy her much and it's another indication that there are not enough Dog cabins on the ferry. I walked Lyca around until she performed and I decided to test out my Osmo Pocket's capabilities in the dark and took some video of our approach to Heysham. Wendy was still sleeping when I got back to the cabin and our eta was saying 11.15pm, which would have been very nice but sounded far too good to be true. Unbelievably this estimation was nearly spot on and we docked at 11.17pm, which was nice and early.....Yes! I peered through the curtains in disbelief and saw **Herring Gulls** flying around in the darkness. We disembarked at 11.32pm and I hit the road to get us up to Dumfries as quickly as possible, so we could get to bed.

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March

The drive wasn't too bad and we reached the 'Welcome to Scotland' sign at 12.45am having seen absolutely no wildlife at all. We hadn't even seen a Rabbit on a verge by the time I pulled up outside the Travelodge at 1.09am, which was unusual. Lyca barked at the woman behind the reception desk, so we hurried her up to our room, so she could settle down for the night. We were all really tired by then and more than ready for bed, so after we'd got changed and done our teeth we went out like lights.....Zzzzzzzzzzz :).

Lyca decided that at 7.10am she'd wake us up and did a very good job of achieving her goal. We were having none of it though, so she gave up and went back to sleep until 8.10am, which was a much more respectable hour after the long day before.



Raring to go!

She was full of beans and raring to go, so I found myself pacing around outside with her 10 minutes later. The **Rooks** were busy building their nests in the trees behind our room and some were flying in with twigs while others were down on the grass stuffing their beaks full of soft green moss.



Rookery

I could hear a very noisy flock of geese flying over that I didn't pay much attention to, and there was a **Robin**, **House Sparrows**, a **Wren** and a **Blackbird** in the trees and bushes. Back at the room Wendy reminded me that I'd forgotten to add **Chaffinch** to my list and although she hadn't been outside, she'd seen and heard all the birds from the room including the Geese. She reckoned the Geese were **Pink-footed Geese** and played the calls on her phone app to confirm that they weren't Greylags. Although the sun was out and there wasn't a breath of wind the forecast for later wasn't good, so I told her that we needed to be leaving by 9.30am at the latest. She looked suitably annoyed, but we really needed to get our only

walk of the day at Ken-Dee done as early as possible before the strong wind and rain came in at around mid-day.

We were doing things a bit differently this time and seeing as there had been nothing reported from Carlingwark Loch we decided it would be a waste of time going there. Wendy was no longer eating cheese, so our traditional visit to Galloway Lodge in Gatehouse of Fleet for breakfast wasn't required either. This did pose us with the huge problem of what we were going to do for breakfast, but we had a cereal bar each in case of emergencies. The neighbouring Café to the Travelodge had been closed down last March but it had been replaced by a Starbucks. I had a look at their menu online and was really surprised to see that, amongst other things, they did a vegan all day breakfast burrito. This had tofu scramble, smoky chipotle beans and spinach in it, so Wendy's face lit up. She didn't hold her hopes up that they would have one in such a remote outlet but trotted off to see what she could do anyway and reappeared shortly after looking very happy indeed. She had snaffled the only vegan burrito in the cabinet and been able to get an oat milk cappuccino, so she was well sorted. She had got me a sausage bap but there was no tomato sauce and as it was reheated, it wasn't a patch on a fresh Galloway Lodge one, but it filled a hole and was better than nothing. My deadline of 9.30am had already been and gone, so by the time we were ready to leave it was 9.54am.....Grrrrr! I stopped at the garage to get petrol before setting off to hopefully tire Lyca out for the long drive ahead of us.

There were **Carriion Crows** and **Woodpigeons** in the fields and Wendy spotted a **Grey Heron** down on the River Nith, as we drove over the bridge. A flock of **Starlings** flew over and we found our first dead Badger at the side of the road and shortly after we saw another one :(. We noticed some **Jackdaws** and on the Loch at 'Inn on the Loch' there were **Black-headed Gulls**, **Coot** and **Mute Swan**. As we approached Castle Douglas, we were surprised to see our first **Red Kite** of the trip, as we normally wouldn't see one until we'd got nearer to Ken-Dee. There was a **Pheasant** at the side of the road as well as yet another dead Badger.....Hmmm suspicious! We spotted 2x **Common Buzzards** in a tree, a **Mallard** on the river that joins Loch Ken and some **Greylag Geese** in a field. There were Buzzards displaying over all the groups of trees on the hills we passed, which was nice to see.

When we arrived at RSPB Ken-Dee Marshes it was 10.37am and even though it was very grey and overcast it wasn't raining yet. We'd both gone for waterproof trousers and Lyca had her coat on, so we were all prepared in case it did. Lyca led the way down the path with her tail held high and nose to the ground with as much familiarity as if it was her local patch that she walks regularly.





My patch!

We heard it call first and then saw a **Long-tailed Tit** flitting through the bushes along with a **Blue Tit** and we noticed that the wind had already started to pick up. We heard the high-pitched trilling of a **Goldcrest** and we stopped at the woods, which is always a reliable spot for Nuthatch, not to mention the only spot! We stood around looking and listening but there was nothing until we heard a feeble call and I called out, "**Bullfinch!**" We saw the 2 white rumps of the culprits flying off into the trees and then I heard the call I'd been hoping for and added **Nuthatch** to our list.....Phew! If we hadn't got one there then we'd have had to forget about Nuthatch completely, just like we'd have to do with Willow Tit if we failed to see one at the feeders. Next, I found a **Song Thrush** and Wendy pointed out a **Raven** calling as it flew over before she stopped dead in her tracks and pointed to the ground. When I looked down there was a **Toad** walking across the path, which couldn't have been long out of hibernation. I started to set my camera up to get some shots of it but then Wendy noticed that it had no back feet and on even closer inspection its back left leg had literally been skinned too and the poor creature was walking on bare bones.....Ouch!





Injured Toad

I wondered if it had been whalloped by a Grey Heron but got free, so I moved it off the path anyway and put it in the grass to hopefully go and spawn before it croaked (see what I did there?.... :) ). While I was trying to get photos I noticed that the new lens focus was shifting even without focusing, which was an issue...but I think it was my issue as it looked like a wrong setting somewhere rather than a hardware fault. uh oh! I'd already decided that we were only going to go as far as the first hide and as we walked down the boardwalk, we spotted a **Great-spotted Woodpecker**.



Great-spotted Woodpecker

Wendy poked her head inside to check that the couple who had been ahead of us weren't in there before I brought Lyca in and luckily it was empty. We went inside and shut the door before sitting down on the benches to see what was about. Some other people were in the furthest hide that's the best for Willow Tit, so we had a horrible feeling that we were wasting our time and needed to be over there. Scanning around there wasn't much about at all and it was probably the quietest we'd ever seen it. We added **Coal Tit** on the feeders and there were some **Teal** on the Loch and **Oystercatchers** and **Canada Geese** on the bank over on the far side but that was about it.



Ken Dee

Looking at the reports book there had been a Pintail but there was no sign of it, so I started trying to get some shots of the birds coming to the feeder in front of me to familiarise myself with my new camera set up. While I was busy Wendy found some **Common Snipe** feeding at the edge of a small island and when they all lifted and flew to the opposite bank, she counted 9 in total. Disappointingly there was no sign of any Willow Tits and with so little action Wendy was starting to get bored, so I reluctantly packed up and we left. On the way back Wendy, who was up ahead, stopped to check a couple of small birds she could see flitting around in a bush. She raised her bins but couldn't re-find them and instead was looking at the right place just at the exact time a **Stoat** popped up and ran along the moss covered wall. She squeaked in excitement, but it all happened so quickly that it was long gone before she could even say, "Stoooooat!" I was gutted that I'd missed it but at least she'd finally seen something on the wall which we've always said looks good for Stoat or Weasel. The silence was broken by the loud rattle of a **Mistle Thrush** and a bit further up I saw 3x Red Kites flying around a tree calling, so I saw that as a good opportunity to get some video. By the time I'd got myself into a position where I had a clear view they'd all landed amongst the branches miles away, so I carried on walking.....Urrghhhh! As we rounded the corner for the last stretch of path we could see a big group of Paramo clad birders up ahead who were all staring into a field with their bins.

When we had walked past them all we turned around and had a look to see what they were looking at and saw a flock of **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, which we wouldn't have noticed had the Paramo birders not been there.....Oooops! It was 12.22pm when we got back to the car and we breathed a sigh of relief that we weren't soaking wet and covered in mud already like we had been last year.....Phew! We had a drink and ate some crisps and a

cereal bar before setting off at 12.36pm hoping to arrive at the cottage while it was still daylight for a change. Not long after driving off I noticed a Red Kite overhead, so I had to pull over and get out to try for some shots. A bit further on the same thing happened and again it was too good an opportunity to miss, so I stopped again. Wendy was getting annoyed by this point and just wanted to get going and needless to say I didn't get anything decent from my efforts. When I looked at all my videos I realised that I had all the settings wrong, so no wonder they were all useless.....Grrrrrr! The weather all of a sudden took a turn for the worse when it went dark and started to rain. It was later than had been forecast, so we had been lucky to have dodged it while we were on our walk and at least it softened the blow of the long drive ahead.

We left for the third time at 12.59pm and I had no intention of stopping again. Even though the rain was torrential there were still loads of blokes sitting out on a Loch fishing. They must be mad! We added **Cormorant** there but didn't see anything else until we were driving through New Galloway and I spotted a pair of **Collared Doves**. I made a pitstop in Monaiave to use the WC's and the rain was going from bad to worse, so we hoped it wouldn't ruin the scenery for the rest of the drive. Wendy spotted a flock of **Whooper Swans** in a field near Hamilton just before we reached Glasgow at 2.57pm. Wendy was bored already, so I put the same podcast on that had kept us amused during the drive up from Cornwall in October, so that helped. Suddenly, the traffic slowed right down and we were stuck in a huge tailback doing about 5mph.....Nooooooo! We could see blue flashing lights up ahead and when we finally got closer we saw that it was 2x Policemen brushing gravel back into the central reservation, so they must've been clearing up after an incident earlier. Luckily it didn't hold us up for too long and we were on our way again quickly. Since the weather was so bad I had decided to go straight up the A9 this time instead of the slower but more scenic Perthshire tourist route. We added **Common Gull** to our list going past Perth and it was still raining. The sign for The Cairngorms National Park was a very welcome sight at 4.23pm, so we cheered in the knowledge that we had broken the back of the journey. When we saw the 'Welcome to the Highlands' sign it was 4.44pm and with it still being light we couldn't help but notice the complete lack of snow as far as the eye could see. We spotted some **Lapwing** in a field and then a **Tufted Duck** on a small roadside pool and chilled out for the last leg.

It was 5.15pm when we drove into Aviemore and the first thing on my agenda was getting petrol and something for my tea. The petrol station is now an M&S Simply Food, so I grabbed a pizza with chicken on it, safe in the knowledge that Wendy wouldn't want any. We still had a bit of a drive to get to the cottage and on the dark and winding roads it was slow going. It was still absolutely chucking it down and when I had to swerve to avoid something small walking across the road ahead of me it took me a while to register that it was a Common Toad. It was 5.41pm when I parked up outside Rymore Wood Lodge and it felt so familiar it was as though we'd just arrived home. All the lights were on, so it looked very welcoming but the first thing I had to do was find the keycode to get in, so I rummaged around and found it. With it being so wet I planned to carry Lyca up the steps to avoid her getting muddy paws and making a mess of the house but first I had to unlock the front door. Wendy followed me up the steps with her rucksack and some other stuff and I let Wendy in while I went back to the car to start the thankless task of lugging all the bags up the steps and in.....Urrghhhhh! Carrying Lyca worked a treat but I was absolutely soaked by the time I had finished and finally shut the door.....Yuk! The first thing Lyca did was run into the kitchen licking her lips, so she wanted a drink. She drank so much water Wendy had to refill her bowl and then she wolfed down her tea. There was a bottle of Prosecco in the fridge plus a loaf of fresh bakery bread, some fresh coffee and a small jar of jam and honey on the kitchen table, which was a very nice welcome pack.





Love a welcome pack!

I looked out at the feeders and saw that they were all empty, so my heart sank. If there was no food then maybe nothing was visiting the cottage anymore and our high hopes were just about to be shattered. I grabbed what food was in the tubs in the kitchen and went outside to fill them up in the hope that we could entice back tomorrow. While Wendy whizzed around unpacking our stuff I put the oven on for my pizza and waited for it to heat up. Tesco was booked for 8-9pm, so we still had a while to wait yet and we were hungry. Wendy had brought a fancy tin of soup with her and with the addition of the fresh bread it was just what she needed. My pizza was really nice but after tea I started to worry that Tesco wouldn't be able to find us and that they wouldn't be able to phone either, as there was no signal. Wendy went for a bath and I set about reading the instructions to get the live camera feed from the garden. In no time it was working nicely! While I went for a bath Wendy phoned her Mum and as they chatted, she saw a **Badger** waddle onto the TV screen and start eating the peanuts I'd put out earlier.....Yes! I was still in the bath at that point, so she crossed her fingers that it'd stick around for me to see. Fortunately, it seemed more than happy to stay for the free all you can eat buffet, so was still munching away when I came back.



Badger!

All I wanted to do was chill out, so when Wendy started asking me about fitting the electric blanket it was the last thing I fancied doing. All Wendy could say was that I'd appreciate it later, but I wasn't so sure. When we noticed the headlights of the Tesco van coming up the drive, I shut Wendy and Lyca in the living room and went out to the porch to get our shopping. After it was all put away we watched the TV screen and although Badger had been a great start we watched with bated breath hoping for a Pine Marten to pay us a visit. I'd brought my trail camera again, so I went out and set it up facing the feeding station in the hope that we'd get a nice surprise in the morning. Not entirely to our surprise we'd had no such luck by the time we decided that we were tired and went off to bed. When I got into the warm bed I had to admit that Wendy had been right and all the effort of fitting the electric blanket had been worth it.

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March

After a disturbed night due to the really strong wind we were awake at 7.30am and Lyca was raring to go as usual. It was still raining and very windy and peering out through the curtains there were no Red Squirrels, or even birds for that matter, at the feeders.....Uh oh! I just hoped that they hadn't all found somewhere else to go with the feeders having been empty when we'd arrived. It was a slow process but eventually we started to see some birds coming in and we soon had Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Robin, **Siskin**, **Great Tit** and **Goldfinch** in the garden. I was really annoyed to find that my camera had been knocked over by the wind and had taken hundreds of shots of the trees as they moved.....Grrrrrr! I also noticed that it hadn't gone off when the Badger was right in front of it either, so I was going to have to rethink my set up before putting it out again later. We'd planned a relaxed start to the day, so Wendy cooked her usual lentilly, beany concoction as well as Lyca's cauliflower for tea and then made our sarnies to take out with us while I tried to find us a walk or two. When the rain stopped, I started to wonder if we should do the local walk from the house again, but then it started again, so I scrapped the idea. It was forecast to rain all day, so we'd be lucky if we didn't get soaked at some point. By 10.46am we were ready to go out and as we walked down the steps to the car we heard a **Crested Tit** calling from the trees out the front and wondered why it hadn't been to the feeders earlier.

It was a very mild 5.5c when we headed off and first up, I thought we could go and see if the Waxwings were still around on McKenzie Crescent in Nethybridge village and put it into my sat nav. Wendy spotted a **Red Deer** in a field and a rainbow had appeared after the rain. When we got to where the Waxwings had been reported we were really surprised to find that it was the exact same spot that we'd had them last year! I drove slowly through the estate with my windows down in case we could hear them but there was no sign. I carried on driving and we ended up on a road we'd never been on before and finally saw a **Red Squirrel** on someone else's garden feeder.....Bah! The road eventually looped back to Nethybridge and up ahead of us was a huge flock of finches. They seemed to be feeding in the middle of the road and the grassy hedge bordering a field, so we stopped to see what they were. They were all Linnets and there must've been at least 60 of them, so we started to wonder if we were near to where the Wildflower field that was featured on Winterwatch was. It'd been on our 'to do' list to find it because I was interested to see if a similar project could be done in the Isle of Man. We kept going and eventually Wendy spotted a small plot of land that was totally overgrown and full of brown dried up grass. I drove past slowly and she spotted a small sign on the gate, which confirmed that it was indeed the field we'd been hoping to see. I turned the car around and we went back and parked up by the gate, which was right opposite the Nethy Hotel and not in the middle of nowhere like we'd imagined. It was such an underwhelming roadside plot that was relatively small and if we hadn't known better we'd have presumed it to just be neglected.



Winterwatch field

We'd have loved to have seen it in the summer when it was full of plants to provide seed to keep the birds fed during the winter. After that we stopped at the Spa to see if we could get some bird food but there wasn't any. Somebody had forgotten to add Rekorderlig to the shopping list, so I didn't have any drinks in the fridge for later. I picked one up from the fridge and was abruptly told by the woman behind the counter that she couldn't sell alcohol until after 12.30pm. Whaaaaat? That was a new one on us and Wendy threw her one of her looks, but to be fair she wasn't exactly the most friendly person we've ever come across :P. After driving away from the Spa I realised that I'd gone the wrong way, so had to turn round again.....Doh! We'd dipped on Waxwing and seemed to be going up and down the main road through Nethybridge, getting nowhere fast, so it hadn't been the most productive start to the day! We still needed bird food, so I headed to the Heather Centre to see if it'd been rebuilt yet after 2 years. We found some **Curlew** in a field just before going



over the old bridge, but the river was way too high for Dipper, but we had a great new spot for them nowadays and weren't worried. We pulled into the entrance to the Heather Centre and were surprised to see that it still wasn't finished :O!



Getting there

They were making progress though, so hopefully next year it will be done and we'll be going to check out the new place. I decided not to bother getting bird food from the little shed bit there and I carried on to Carrbridge, where I had a new walk planned.

I parked up at the side of the road at a gate into a forest surrounded by Deer fencing with the caper bits in them, so it looked promising. It was already 11.55am, so we decided to chill out for a bit and have our lunch before heading out. It was raining finely, so we were in no hurry anyway and luckily it didn't last too long. By the time we'd finished and had got our stuff together it was 12.16pm when we set off up the track through the trees. We both felt lethargic, so luckily the walk looked as though it was all on the flat and not too taxing.



Nice and flat



It was really quiet in the forest and there were hardly any birds calling around us never mind to look at! It was dead! One of the side tracks had what looked like a shooting platform at the side of it, which considering there was Caper fencing up seemed to be a total conflict of interests. We kept going anyway and turned off to the left where we would have to cross a ford and then loop back to the car. The path went downhill and we groaned when we saw that the ford was really high and there was no way of crossing it without wading through the middle and getting absolutely soaked.....Urrghhh!



Come on you wussies!

As we stood there defeated we heard some **Crossbills** flying over but we had no choice but to turn around and go back the way we'd come. There was a small furry caterpillar on the path, which Wendy reckoned was a **Ruby Tiger**, so I stopped to take some photos to test out the macro capabilities of my new set up.





Ruby Tiger caterpillar

Suddenly we heard voices and looked up to see a couple of women on the path above us who were heading our way with a Black Lab off the lead.....Noooooo! Obviously, we had to think quickly and took Lyca off-roading, up the side of the muddy bank and stood up on top to wait and see if they were going to go back. We thought they might let the dog play in the river or something, so we waited until the coast was clear. They must've been local and had gone prepared with wellies because they never reappeared, so they must've crossed the river and continued on the walk I'd had planned and now couldn't do.....Bah! We waded through the heather to get back onto the path and seeing as the walk had been cut short, I decided to turn off at the shooting platform to check out what was at the end.



Looks good but was dead :(



It was equally as dead down that path and at the end was a gate overlooking what I thought would be a nice view but was nothing special. Suddenly I thought I saw something flying quite high up through the trees to our left, then out of the corner of my eye saw something moving on the floor, which could've been a Caper as it was too small to be a Deer. I handed Lyca over to Wendy and went in to investigate and as I wandered around, I heard the cracking of a branch above me but there was no Caper poo on the ground anywhere and no Deer poo either. I don't know what I'd seen, but whatever it was, was keeping a low profile. Wendy, who'd walked to the gate to get a photo was starting to get worried. I'd been gone ages and there was no sign of me. Lyca was being annoying too and pulling her like mad along a ditch she had become obsessed with sniffing. We hadn't seen or heard any wildlife, so we can't imagine what it was she was so interested in! When I finally emerged from the trees, Lyca went nuts and went up on her back legs and started dancing frantically.....Hahahaha! We headed back down the seemingly endless path and were back at the car at 1.45pm. It was still early, so I had planned another walk nearby where there had been a Hawfinch reported the day before. We've never successfully twitched a Hawfinch before and it hadn't been reported today, so we weren't hopeful, but it was worth a shot.

I parked up at Glencharnoch and Ellan Wood car park and set off into the trees. There were some really good wooden sculptures dotted around and at the top of a bank was a brilliant one of a Barn Owl.



Wow!

From a distance I bet it's had many people fooled into thinking it's a real Barn Owl! We walked through the woods until we came out onto a road, which we had to cross. After walking down a track we found a house that was surrounded by wooden sculptures, so must've belonged to whoever had done the ones in the woods.

After stopping to admire them we carried on down the track through some deciduous trees and heard a **Treecreeper** calling nearby. It was working its way up the trunk right next to us, so I handed Lyca over to Wendy and got into position to try for a shot of it. I was then given the run around for the next 5 minutes and ended up with absolutely nothing to show for my efforts.....Grrrrr! Next, we found that we had to cross a river over a suspension bridge,

which didn't look very inviting to me. I thought it might make an interesting bit of video footage, so I decided to film it with my osmo pocket. I went ahead with Wendy behind me and very quickly I realised that with every step we took the whole thing moved.....Eeek! I was NOT a fan, to put it mildly and protested the fact loudly all the way across!



Bridge view

This amused Wendy no end, but she wouldn't have been laughing if we'd been walking through a field of cows! Relieved to be back on solid ground we carried on along a riverside path where the Hawfinch had been reported from one of the Bird Cherry trees a bit further down. Suddenly, there were people coming our way with a 3-legged Greyhound off the lead. Seeing as Lyca's fear of other dogs stems from a Greyhound grabbing her around the neck when she was young, we thought it best to avoid it. I took her off the path, down the bank and picked her up while I waited for them to go past. A while later and there was still no sign of them, so Wendy went to investigate. They had stopped short of us and were talking to someone and even though the Greyhound only had 3 legs it was running around like a nutter chasing after a little Jack Russell, so it was probably a good move to keep Lyca away. We stood there for ages and started to get impatient but eventually after about 15 minutes they finally walked past and we were free to carry on.....Phew! We walked back along the river and scanned the trees on the other side for the Hawfinch but there was no sign. It hadn't been reported again and we weren't even sure what a Bird Cherry looked like anyway, so we weren't entirely surprised.





Bird Cherry tree?

We walked back to the car along the road and I drove to the Carrbridge Spa to hopefully pick up a drink for myself later. When I drove up to the shop we noticed that although the sign on the door said it was open it looked pretty much closed to us. Because of this I didn't stop outside but I regretted it instantly, turned around and parked up opposite for a second look. I looked at the opening hours on the door through my bins and just to confuse matters even more it said it was closed all day on a Sunday.....Eh? Just as we were about to leave a car pulled up outside, a woman got out, opened the door and went into the Spa.....Whaaaaat? After a few choice words Wendy got out and went over the road wondering why on earth she hadn't just done that in the first place.....Doh! She grabbed me a Rekorderlig and was served by a young girl who obviously had a weekend job in the shop with her friend that neither of them seemed to be very keen on. My next plan was to visit Lochindorb seeing as we were in the vicinity and there'd been a Great Grey Shrike reported a couple of days ago at a place on the way. Before we left, we got an obligatory shot of the old Packhorse Bridge.



Carrbridge - Packhorse Bridge



Trying for the Shrike meant that we were approaching Lochindorb from a different side to usual, so the scenery was totally different and made a refreshing change. There was a plantation on the hill to our right and as I glanced at it, I saw a large raptor floating over the trees. I told Wendy, who said it was probably just another Buzzard, but I stopped the car to check it out anyway. It was a good job I hadn't listened to her because when I got the bird in my bins, I could hardly believe what I was seeing. I knew it was too big and said it was too dark to be a Buzzard, but I hadn't expected to find a **Golden Eagle** anywhere other than Findhorn Valley! Saying that though, Findhorn is becoming a less reliable site for them anyway, but this was a real surprise. Wendy had to eat her words and I thought I'd better at least try and get a distant record shot for the article. I climbed out of the car and raised my camera to try and find the bird, but it was so far away it wasn't easy. As soon as I got it in my viewfinder it dropped down behind the trees before I could even focus on it.....Grrrrrr! I waited in the hope that it'd come back up again but it was just my luck that it didn't and we didn't clap eyes on it again :(.



Golden Eagle was here

Ah well, we'd seen Golden Eagle on our first day, so we couldn't grumble at that! I carried on driving along the road, which encompassed a much bigger area than I'd anticipated and with no idea where the Shrike had been reported from, we quickly realised that it was a pointless exercise. I carried on to Lochindorb and we both had our eyes peeled for a Red Grouse sitting out in the open at the side of the road.



Lochindorb

I was really interested to see how my new set up would compare to all my previous shots taken with my big lens. As we started getting closer and closer to the Loch, we still hadn't seen a single Red Grouse yet, which was unusual to say the least. This was just typical of my luck and I started to think that for the first time ever I would be leaving without having taken a single shot. Eventually Wendy spotted a **Red Grouse**, but it was too far away to even think about raising my camera for, as were all the others we started to find.....Uh oh! Finally, I got a nice male close enough and stopped the car and started to fire off some shots.



Red Grouse



There was a female nearby too, so he was calling and strutting around her, which was great. When I was happy enough with what I had got we were free to leave and on the way home we spotted some **Stock Doves** in a field.

It was 4.45pm when we arrived back at HQ and I went straight outside to top up the feeders, put peanuts out for the Badger, some raisins that were already at the house and a couple of eggs for the Pine Marten and set up the trail camera again. Wendy gave Lyca her tea and while she was doing ours, she heard the Crestie calling and looked out to see it on the feeder. I got my camera and sat down hoping to get some shots of it, but it was too dark by then, so I gave it up as a bad job. We were just getting to the end of our tea when the phone rang and we remembered that the owner wanted to call round to get the stuff he needed for tomorrow. We left it but I phoned him back as soon as I had finished and he reckoned he would be round within 30 minutes. Wendy went for a quick bath before he arrived so that she could be around to keep Lyca away when he came in. There was still no sign of him when she had finished and neither of us could settle but he finally arrived and Wendy took Lyca into the bedroom and started to dry her hair. This distraction didn't have the desired effect and Lyca knew there was a stranger in the house and barked until he'd gone.....Urrghhhh!

The owner was really nice and it was the first time we had actually met him. He explained about the wildlife cameras and I told him how I got it working no problems. He also talked about how he was trying to wire up some nest box cameras in the roof to a network switch. I said that's right in my wheelhouse as that's my job and I talked him through how it would be possible. He showed me in his garage where he had a good stash of network cabling and said he can make cables fine, so I said he was sorted then. Hopefully next year the cameras will be working although we will always be there too early in the year to see what is using them. He also said that the bloke from the BBC couldn't make it down so he will look at the Pine Marten box cameras at a later time. He then left us to it but what a really nice man. I normally hate meeting the cottage owners but was very happy to have met him.

When he had gone Wendy was able to come out of the bedroom with Lyca and normality was resumed. Now I knew all about the live cameras I was able to go back to the recorded footage of the night before to see what went on. I was very surprised to see that, even though my trail camera hadn't recorded anything, at 8.48pm we had had a visit from a **Pine Marten**....Yes! It had left empty handed as I hadn't put an egg out, so we really hoped that it wouldn't be put it off from coming back tonight. There was no sign of any Badgers and we started to give up on them until 8.27pm when one waddled in and started stuffing its face. Wendy was feeling really cold and had a headache all evening, so was a bit worried that she was going to end up getting a cold just in time for her Birthday. We had done 17,364steps, which was pretty good going for our first day and by 9.47pm Wendy couldn't stay awake for much longer and said she wanted to go to bed. I let Lyca out for a wee and noticed some moths in the porch and on the window outside. Although I initially thought some of them were different when I showed them to Wendy she ID'd them all as **Pale-brindled Beauty** and said the book says they are very variable.





Pale-brindled Beauty

Wendy went out like a light as soon as her head hit the pillow and I don't think it took me long to go to sleep either, so we must've needed it.

Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March

I don't know how long we would have slept for if we hadn't been woken up by Lyca at 7.15am. She was as usual full of beans and raring to go, but first we peered out of the curtain to check the feeding station only to see that both eggs were still there. This wasn't a very good start, so I put my coat on and took Lyca out while Wendy got her breakfast ready. It was Wendy's Birthday, so after being out with Lyca, I went off to get her pressies and cards from the wardrobe while she made herself a cappuccino. Luckily she was very pleased with her cards and the great (haha) presents I had got her from the Hunt Sab Association but she was especially taken by her adopted Donkey, Zena, from the Donkey Sanctuary in Sidmouth :). Just to add some more niceties to her morning the Crestie came back and shortly after a **Brambling** turned up as well as our first and long overdue visit from a Red Squirrel :). What more could she possibly want? I checked the trail camera and was really annoyed to find that it hadn't worked at all again and there was no footage of anything.....Grrrrr! The eggs were still there, so at least we knew we hadn't missed the Pine Marten, so that was our only consolation. After breakfast Wendy made the sarnies while I tried to get some video out of the window. I was having a great time until a **Sparrowhawk** shot through and flushed every single bird around.....Urrghhh! I packed up after that and started to get ready to go out, although Lyca was being very lazy and didn't look as though she wanted to go anywhere.

It was 9.55am by the time we were driving away from HQ and firstly we went to find Old Nethybridge Station where there'd been Waxwings reported the day before. We had never been there before, but I found it easily and we got out of the car for a look around.



Nethybridge Old Station

It felt relatively warm at 4.5c and although there was no sign of any Waxwings Wendy found a nice **Yellowhammer** and I heard a **Greenfinch** flying over. We didn't hang around and hoped that we would catch up with some Waxwings later in the week although the reports were few and far between, so we didn't feel optimistic. Driving over Dipper bridge we spotted a pair of **Goldeneye** but the river was much too full and angry to be accommodating any Dippers at the moment.

By the time I parked up in the car park at Carrbridge it was 10.27am but I had another new walk planned for us. After making use of the WC's we headed off up the road and found the sign for the Carr Plantation Trail. It was very quiet in there and there wasn't much bird activity at all but our hopes were raised when we found a sign telling us that we were in a Caper area.....Oooooooo :). We looked around and it did look promising, so we kept our eyes peeled as we wandered down the path through the trees.



Prime area



We could hear the high-pitched call of a Treecreeper, so having failed to get a shot of the one yesterday I was keen to give it another go. There were 2x birds ahead of us, so I handed Lyca over to Wendy and started to creep slowly towards them but typically they both flew off and disappeared before I had even got close enough never mind raised my camera.....Grrrrrr! The path came out next to a Railway Line, which we walked alongside for a while and were even treated to a train going past which is always exciting for a Manxie :).



Choo choo!

There was an old guy with his dog off the lead heading towards us, so we took Lyca into the trees to avoid any stress. As we did, we flushed a **Crossbill** from the ground, which flew up to the top of a tree and started calling constantly. We couldn't see the bird but found that it must've been drinking from a puddle in a ditch that'd been out of our view. We finally found the bird, which was a nice male and after the coast was clear we carried on along the Railway Line until the path turned off back into the woods. We saw nothing else of note apart from we found some more ace sculptures.



Funky Wood Ant sculpture



At 12.07pm we were back at the car and it was lunchtime. Our walk had only been 3.77 miles but with big plans for tomorrow and then rain forecast for the rest of the week this was our only chance to visit Findhorn, so we should make up for the lack of steps. Even though we had already seen Golden Eagle it's one of those places that no Scotland trip is complete without, so that was our next plan and after our lunch we headed straight there.

Just as I turned off onto Garbole Road it started to rain.....Urrghhhhh! The weather is always unpredictable in Findhorn Valley, so this wasn't a surprise and wasn't going to put me off. It was 4c and there was absolutely no snow on the hills this time, which was the complete opposite to last year when even the river was frozen over. By the time we got to the car park it was 1.08pm and it was blowing a gale and still raining, so we stayed in the car and waited for it to pass over.



Looks nicer that way!

Looking out of Wendy's window you'd have been forgiven for thinking it was a nice day while my side was being battered by the wind and rain! The contrast was ridiculous and looking up the valley it didn't look as though it was going to improve any time soon. There was no chance that we were going to see any Eagles and Wendy was adamant that she wasn't going for a walk in it, so it was looking like a wasted journey. Seeing as it looked a bit better back down the valley a bit, I reckoned we should try a different walk, which we had never done before but seems to be popular with walkers as there is always cars parked down there. Wendy wasn't convinced but having driven all that way I refused to be defeated and drove back down the valley. I parked up by the bridge where we usually see loads of cars but, for some reason, today mine was the only one. All of a sudden there was another downpour, so we had to sit tight in the hope that it'd stop. I managed to scratch my windscreen while we were waiting, just to make matters worse. Lethargy set in and we had no choice but to sit back and listen to the sound of the wind and rain on the car. The next thing I was aware of was that Wendy was laughing and I woke up with a jump, which is never pleasant and saw Wendy sniggering at me, so I realised that I had managed to doze off.....Oops! The rain had stopped so I saw it as our cue to get going, which didn't go down very well with Wendy at all. She dragged herself out of the car and we all set off into the wind, towards the bridge at 1.48pm.

When we got there, we found that there were gaps between the wooden planks, which was a bit disconcerting. At least our feet were big enough not to go through the gaps unlike Lyca who's paws went through a couple of times causing her to pull Wendy to get across as quickly as possible. We walked along the path through a field until we came to a derelict barn building next to the river and a plantation.



No wonder its derelict!

We admired the view from a different angle for a change, which only reinforced how barren and wild the valley is. We turned back and with the wind behind us and the sun out it actually felt quite warm, even though it was only 3c. It was too windy to fly my drone, which was disappointing, but the rain held off and we stayed dry for our short walk.



View down river

It was 2.24pm when we got back to the car and we realised we had seen no Red Deer, no wild Goats and no Mountain Hares never mind any Eagles! Looking at the sky when we left at 2.35pm it looked as though there was more rain heading our way, so we had timed it to



perfection. I pulled over for a final scan and an old bloke with a young lad drove past us in a Land Rover and parked up in a field. The lad jumped out and started to dig a hole in the ground, while the old bloke donned some blue gloves and picked up some sort of blue box and put it down the hole.....Errrrrr? We don't know what they were up to, but we guessed it was to do with Moles and didn't want to know any more. As I drove back up the valley Wendy finally spotted a **Mountain Hare**, so it was nice to see that they still exist in the area and the utterly pointless cull hasn't completely eradicated them although to be fair we had read that the owners of Findhorn Valley don't do the persecution of wildlife that happens in other areas in Scotland. Two **Red-legged Partridge** ran out and crossed the road ahead of us and Wendy spotted what she initially thought was a cat. As we got closer, she noticed that it was in fact a Buzzard, which was posing very nicely at the side of the road. It would've been my best ever Buzzard shot....had there not been another car coming towards us so I had to drive straight past it.....Urrghhhhh! Tesco had failed to deliver my pasta, so I took a spin through Grantown-on-Spey and Wendy nipped into the Coop to get me some for my tea.

Back at HQ it was only 3.55pm, so I went out to fly my drone, but it was a bit too windy to do much.....Boooooooo :(.



Looking south over the cottage

When I had finished, I went out to put the food out for the Badger and Pine Marten, but I couldn't find the bag of raisins for the life of me! I knew I hadn't used them all and that there was still some left in the bag, but the bag had vanished. Weird! After tea Wendy got a Whatsapp call from her Sister, who was in Manchester for the night with her Mum before going off to Thailand on a cruise. While she spoke to her Sister with one eye on the live camera action, she was gobsmacked to see a Dog run up the side of the house and through the garden. What the...? She was a bit worried that if that was running around the woods then it would put the Pine Marten and Badger off visiting us.





What the heck!

Her sister passed the phone over, so she could speak to her Mum until she was distracted at 7.30pm by me making a shocked noise and exclaiming, “**Pine Marten!**” Wendy quickly told her Mum to wait, put the phone down and ran into the kitchen with me to see if we could see it through the window.



Piney!!

It had run off with an egg, but it came back twice and on its last visit, having cleaned up on the bird table, it jumped onto the windowsill right in front of us and even though it was dark we could actually just about see it in the flesh...Wow! Wendy having been very rude, considering it was the last time she'd be speaking to her family for nearly 3weeks, felt bad for making her Mum wait and hurried back to resume the conversation. At 8.21pm Wendy noticed the trail camera flash and looked up to see that the Badger had come back.



Badger

We were tired, so we watched TV and relaxed until we packed up and went to bed at 10.06pm. Unfortunately, my guts were playing up and I had bad acid indigestion and my heart was racing, so I couldn't get to sleep :{.

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March

Although she tried to get us up at 6.55am, which wasn't good considering I had had such a bad night, I managed to get Lyca to go back to sleep until 7.45am. There was no wind at all, but the garden was covered in frost when I took Lyca out, so it was no wonder that the Brambling was still hanging around at the feeders. I went out to refill them and heard the Crestie calling in the tree above me, but it flew off and didn't come back. We needed to get a move on because this was the day when the weather was going to be at its best and our only chance of going up Cairngorm for Snow Bunting and Ptarmigan. We needed to get out there as early as possible to try and get there before it got too busy, so of course the Crestie decided to come back and I didn't have time to get any shots of it.....Grrrr!

By the time we left it was 9.15am and 0c but according to the trail camera it was only -4c at 7.36am!!!! In typical Wendy fashion, when we are in a rush to go somewhere, she decided that she wanted to stop for a 'moment' at Loch Garten. Knowing she would throw a strop like a 3 year old if I didn't stop, I knew what was good for me so I pulled over.





It does look nice to be fair

Wendy did a speed 'moment' and we were on our way again quickly. We spotted a **Yellowhammer** flying down the road and when we got to Boat of Garten everywhere was white with a thick covering of ground frost. I stopped at the shop to get some bird seed for Cairngorm as well as some much needed Gaviscon and Wendy saw a sign for vegan sausage rolls. After the huge success of the Greggs ones it seemed as though everyone was trying their luck, so she asked if she could have one. The woman behind the counter said, "It's not the vegan one today, it's spicy chickpea" which was a bit confusing given that chickpeas are vegan! It turned out that she meant to say that it wasn't the soya one, so Wendy settled on giving the chickpea one a go anyway. For such a small shop in the middle of nowhere they had a great vegan selection and we hope they do a roaring trade. Back at the car Wendy demolished half of the pasty but I had to leave my half for later when my stomach pain had passed.

At 10.07am we arrived at Cairngorm car park and we were slightly concerned at the lack of snow. We needn't have worried though because we looked up at the picnic tables to find a bloke with a camera pointing at 2x **Snow Buntings**.....Phew!

Wendy nipped to the WC's before we set off and I went up to bait the picnic tables with seed to attract the Snow Bunts in. Wendy heard a flock flying over on her way back and when she got back into the car, they'd all landed on the wall of the steps in front of us.



They're behind you!

There were 9 birds in total and they were so tame and close that she was able to get a point and click shot of them. Much as I love photographing Snow Buntings I really wanted to get up the mountain to hopefully catch up with some Ptarmigan, so that would have to wait until we got back. Although I did get a shot of them on the table. I was very impressed with the quality of my lightweight kit compared to my pro kit.



Snow Bunting

There was enough seed to keep them going for a while, so hopefully they weren't going to go far anyway. We set off at 10.26am and headed down to the lower car park to approach the path from that angle.





In before it got busy :)

This was a great move because Lyca performed (twice!), so we didn't have to worry about carrying any unwanted items around with us. I went back up to the to put the bags in the bin by the Visitor Centre but found that for some reason it had been cordoned off and I couldn't get to it. I had no choice but to go and put them next to the car to take away with us when we left. There was absolutely no snow on the path and it was much warmer than we had expected, so Wendy had to take her hat and gloves off as well as unzip her coat.

As we started to climb higher a big black cloud descended over the tops and the temperature dropped considerably.



Uh oh

It then started to snow lightly, which we hadn't expected and it was starting to look doubtful that we would be able to get high enough for Ptarmigan. It's always a real downer when we fail to see them, but the conditions seem to be different every year, so it's never a

given. When the snow finally started to get deeper we were still seeing and hearing Red Grouse and with visibility looking poor up ahead it didn't look good. I wanted to get as high up as possible, so when we realised that we were the wrong side of the stream and it was too wide to jump we had a bit of a problem.



Checking the map to see how far off the normal path we were... whoops

If we carried on going we would end up in the corrie and wouldn't be able to get up to where we wanted to be...Uh oh! I'd pretty much given up any hope of seeing Ptarmigan by then, so decided to go and check Coire an Lochain out seeing as we had never done it before. Luckily, as we headed into the boulder field, there were a couple of blokes ahead of us, so they had already created a visible track through the now very deep snow. This was great because we knew that we were walking on firm ground and weren't going to lose a leg down a drift at any given moment. Because it was much thicker up there Lyca was having so much fun running and jumping around in it. She loves snow and Cairngorm must be her favourite walk of all time. Suddenly, we heard a call which was much croakier than that of the Red Grouse, so we stopped for a scan. We couldn't see anything and decided to keep going and when I heard it again, I finally spotted the culprit, a lovely male **Ptarmigan**, sitting on top of a rock!! Yes!!! I got Wendy onto it, then handed Lyca over to her and started making my way closer to it so I could hopefully get some video. Neither of us had spotted it at first but there was a perfectly camouflaged female bird sitting hunkered down to the left of the rock. Wendy was hoping I would turn around, so she could tell me but fortunately I had clocked it too. I took a very wide approach to ensure I didn't flush them but by doing this I was knackered by the time I had to get into a crouch/crawl. After what felt like ages of dragging myself along, I got behind a nice boulder and set up there. I got a lot of video I was very happy with then remembered that I should probably get a photo as well....Hahaha. The male by now had wandered off but the female was out and about so I got a photo of her.





Ptarmigan

Wendy was very relieved when I finally came back as her fingers and toes had gone numb from standing around for ages. Apparently the 2 blokes we saw earlier had been joking with her about how she should have brought lunch with her and should at least get a nice meal and a bottle of wine out of me later.....Pfft! Wendy's face quickly fell when I told her that I was going to fly my drone next, so she would have to stand around for a bit longer.....Hahaha. It was the first time I had ever had the chance to get drone footage up on Cairngorm, so I wasn't going to let it pass me by. I had carried it up in the rucksack and with my super light new camera over my shoulder it had worked a treat. There's no way I'll be going back to having to lug my big lens everywhere with me ever again! I was really excited about the drone, but when I realised that I didn't have a filter that could cope with the snow and sun and that all the footage was going to be over exposed, I could've screamed! Nooooooooooooo! I carried on anyway and although it looked awful it was still interesting to see that there was a Loch in the Corrie that we never would've seen otherwise. We headed back down after that and this time neither of us felt like we were going to conk out but just to be sure Wendy stopped to eat a banana halfway down.



Heading back

It was 1.54pm when we got back to the car and having done 16,000 steps and 4.6 miles we were pretty tired and ready for our lunch. The Snow Buntings were still up at the picnic tables, so despite being starving, I put my sarnie down and got out to go and get some video of them while I had the chance.

When I got back to the car one of them had decided to eat the seed I had spilt earlier at the bottom of the steps. This meant that it was right next to the car, so I could shoot from my seat, which worked really well until some people came down the steps and flushed it. I packed up after that and we set off to our next stop of the day, which we reckoned was a pretty much nailed on spot for Dipper.

Having only found it last year Hayfield had come up with the goods and we saw no reason why it wouldn't deliver again. I parked up at 2.33pm, by which point it was 5.5c and wandered over to pay for my ticket at the machine. I put my money in, but it spat one of the £1 coins straight out, so I went back to the car to see if Wendy had another. She didn't have any more change at all so I went back to try and pay with my card, which it didn't like either, so in the end I gave up and decided that I would have to risk parking without a ticket. When I was walking back to the car I had a horrible feeling and remembered that we had forgotten to pick the poo bag up from next to the car in the Cairngorm car park.....Nooooooooo! There was no way I was going to drive back up there to get it and hoped that the attendant who works there didn't mind picking it up on his next round too much. You would never have guessed that Lyca had just been up Cairngorm, as she was making a right racket in the back of the car and acting as though she had not had a walk for weeks. She leapt out of the car and was raring to go as we headed down the path through the trees to the river.





Allt Mor burn (more like a massive river for us Manxies!)

We heard a Crossbill calling above us and looked up to see a nice male sitting at the top of the tree. I was just getting my camera ready for action when the little \*\*\* flew off.....Grrrrrr! Worryingly the river looked a bit high for our liking and there was no sign of any Dippers all the way up to where it meets Loch Morlich....Uh oh! So much for our reliable Dipper spot! Lyca knew exactly where she was going and pulled me all the way to the edge of the Loch, so that she could have a paddle.



Paddle time

This seems to be her favourite paddling spot of them all and she gets very excited every time we go there. Wendy walked up and down with Lyca looking like all her Christmases had come at once while I set my drone up for a flight. I have always wanted to fly it over Loch Morlich, as it's such a lovely spot, so this was a great opportunity.





Spot us :)

I flew it over the water and even captured Lyca chasing after sticks in the Loch, which was funny. By the time I had finished, Lyca was absolutely soaking and we checked the river for the second time on the way back but there was still nothing on it. When we got back to the car it was still only 3.38pm and I wondered if there were any Goldeneye to video down the road, so I drove down to the main car park for a look. Needless to say, that although there's always one there, there wasn't this time just when I needed it!



Not Goldeneye

There was a bloke with a camera looking very serious and we wondered what he was looking at. He was with 2 women who were pointing and jumping up and down with excitement, so we had a scan. We couldn't see anything other than a red-head **Goosander** so I gave up and drove off. Before going home, we stopped off at the Rothiemurchus Centre to find some nice pressies to take back with us.



We were absolutely pooped when we got back to HQ at 4.31pm and in total we had done 21,657 steps over the day. I had been looking forward to my tea but when Wendy went to put the cooker on the display was flashing and it wasn't responding. We remembered that the electricity had been off for a bit that morning, so I set about resetting the clock, which was no easy task without a manual I can tell you! I managed it in the end though and I breathed a sigh of relief that I was going to get my tea after all. After tea I put the trail camera out with some new batteries, which I had bought earlier, in it to see if they would help improve its performance. I was sick of it not going off and when it did the image was blurred in the middle where it should be sharp and wondered if it was to do with having rechargeable batteries in it since all the adverts say that. While we were sitting in the living room watching the live cameras we noticed that the Pine Marten came in really early at 6.45pm. I went to the kitchen window and reckoned that it was still just about light enough to be able to see it, so Wendy waited for it to come back onto the live camera before logging it into the kitchen. We both peered out of a gap in the curtains and we both saw it through the window just in front of us. We never imagined they would come to the feeder so early, so this was a real surprise and a treat to see again with our own eyes and not just on camera footage :).



Big Piney

The Badger was late coming in and didn't put in an appearance until 7.35pm but it seemed happy as ever to stuff it's face with the peanuts we'd put out for it. By 9.56pm we were so tired we couldn't stay up any longer and headed off to bed....Rock 'n' roll!

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March

Having had an early night we were really shocked to find that it was 8.30am when we woke up. It was forecast to rain but it wasn't, so we hoped they had got it wrong and that it would stay dry. After I had been out with Lyca we noticed that it was really noisy outside and looked out at the feeding station. All of a sudden it was caked in Siskin and there were 4x Brambling amongst them, so we stopped to pay it a bit more attention. It must've been a flock on the move because there must've easily been at least 50x Siskin and then we started to clock up more Brambling too. We managed to count 16 in total, which was a great count, so I sat on the chair in front of the window with my camera to see what I could do. A Greenfinch came in, which was new for the garden and by then it was raining, so there was

no way we were going to go out, so we resigned ourselves to a quiet morning in the house. Wendy went into the living room and lay on the settee and was quickly joined by Lyca. She ended up going to sleep until I woke her up shouting that there was a **Redpoll** on the ground under the feeder with the Siskins.....Oops! Looking back over the trail camera footage it was interesting to see that I captured 15 of the Bramblings at once and that the Pine Marten came back at 4am.



Find the 15 Bramblings!

The Red Squirrel had turned up at 7.54am but even though I had put proper batteries in the camera it was depressing to see that it was still blurred in the centre of the screen. Urrghhhh! Must purchase a new one :D. Wendy went back into the living room and the Squirrel came back for some nuts. Lyca was sitting in the chair watching everything that was going on and started to bark at the Squirrel....Hahahaha!



Lyca the wildlife watcher



The Crestie came back but again it was alone and there was no sign of any others with it. A second Squirrel turned up and this one knew how to use the Squirrel feeder box, unlike the other one. I decided to go to the shop before lunch at 12.08pm and as I left I heard Wendy saying, "No more food!" as she doesn't think I can be trusted to go shopping on my own. I obviously returned with absolutely no treats at all....just to prove a point of course :P. The only additional thing I had bought was a bag of raisins to replace the ones I'd lost. While I checked the rest of the camera footage as I ate my lunch it showed that it dropped to a chilly -5c at 12.45am, so no wonder the Pine Marten came back to chance its luck at 4am!

By 1.30pm it was raining even heavier than it had been earlier and it looked as though tomorrow was going to be even worse :( Lyca still hadn't been out for a walk, so I took her down the drive to the recycling bins and it was so horrible out that we ran all the way back! Yuk! As it was going to be raining again tomorrow, I had planned to drive to the East coast again, so when I saw a report of a White-billed Diver just 20 miles further east from where we were going to be going anyway so I started to do some research. It was something to fill in time seeing as we wouldn't be able to get out and about much. Everything had been quiet on the bird front compared to earlier, so we thought they must've all moved off. That was until it all kicked off again at 3.50pm and the back garden was a noisy feeding frenzy of Siskin and Brambling again. I tried to get some photos but one of the photo limitations of smaller gear is low light performance is very bad as it can't bring in the light the big gear can. This isn't an issue with video as the required shutter speed is so much lower.



Brambling

Even the Crestie came back briefly, so I got my camera and had another go at getting some video. I was getting some footage of a Brambling when I noticed it suddenly hunker down onto the branch. In a split second a Sparrowhawk shot through the garden and grabbed something causing chaos amongst the other birds. They all dispersed quickly while alarm calling and one of the Siskins unfortunately flew into the window with a, "thud" and dropped down onto the path. Nooooooooooo! Wendy looked down and saw a male sitting there soaking wet and looking stunned, so I ran to go and check to see if he was OK. He

wasn't looking good, so I decided to pick him up and brought him into the house to see if I could warm him up.



:(

As I scooped him up in my hand I noticed that he had a ring, so I took down the number which was ARF6813. The bird started to wriggle but his eyes were closing and he looked as though he was on the way out. I didn't want to cause him any further stress and took him back outside and placed him in a dry spot on the step at the back of the bedroom door. I was convinced he was a gonner, but Wendy was watching him intently and reckoned he was coming too slowly. I was totally shocked when she said that he was standing up and shortly after that he flew off up into the trees.....Phew! Just as we were celebrating his miraculous recovery another Siskin flew into the window, so our hearts were in our mouths as we peered down to assess the damage. Luckily there was nothing there, so it had obviously just flown away and was OK, which was a relief and after that I closed the curtains to try and stop it happening again. We had an early tea at 5pm and I went out to put some eggs out for the Pine Marten and peanuts for the Badger. The whereabouts of the bag of sultanas was still an absolute mystery and I can only guess that something found it and dragged it off somewhere. After a very lazy day, we sat down to watch some TV with one eye on the live cameras as usual. The Pine Marten came in early again and took an egg, so we turned the lights off and went to sit at the window. It came back again at 6.45pm from the lefthand side of the house and sat outside the window where we watched it eating something. It then took another egg and ran off with it to the left again. Thinking that it wouldn't be back we went back into the living room and watched the live camera. Unbelievably, it came back at 7.10pm, walked right in front of the trail camera, which failed to go off again and sat down to eat something. It was there for ages and the camera did nothing until it walked out of shot and then went off...Whaaaat? I just didn't understand what was going on with it and that just proved it was nothing to do with battery type. The Badger came in 20 minutes after it had left and then it started to snow. Lyca was very tired, despite having done next to nothing all day and was snoring loudly and twitching as she dreamt. It was 10.08pm when we finally called it a day and went to bed and for some reason we were tired too.

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> March



It was 7.30am when we woke up and looking outside it was indeed very dark and wet looking. There were still loads of Siskins at the feeder and after I had taken Lyca out I went through the trail camera footage. I was horrified to see that it had failed to go off 4 times when the Pine Marten had been right in front of it, but it had enjoyed the raisins, so I was glad I had bought more. A male Blackbird came down to feed, which was another new bird for the garden and one which we never understood why we had never seen there before. I had seen it on the live camera footage early one morning a couple of days ago but forgot to note it. The Crestie, Redpoll, Brambling and Squirrel all came back so it looked as though it was going to be another busy day at the feeding station. We just hoped that we weren't going to have any more casualties! Annoyingly, the Crestie was flying straight into the feeder with the cage around it, so there was no chance of me getting any decent shots or video of it. After Wendy had made our sarnies and we'd had breakfast and got ready to go out it was 9.36am and Lyca looked anything but ready. She looked as though she'd have been happier staying in to watching the comings and goings at the feeding station again rather than going out!

My first port of call was Nethybridge to put our glass in the recycling bins, which is always a bit of a pain. Not even the normal household rubbish collection will take it and they charge you if they find any in the bin. My sat nav decided to go a bit mad again, which was really bad timing seeing as we were going somewhere new! We saw our first Red Kite away from Ken-Dee at Mains of Dalvey and a **Grey Wagtail** in the road in the middle of nowhere. When we reached the coast we drove into Portgordon and couldn't believe how rough the sea was. It didn't feel that windy back in Speyside



Like being back at home!

Despite that we found 4x **Long-tailed Ducks** riding the waves. There was also a **Greater Black-backed Gull** but nothing else of note until we drove through Buckie.



Niceee.... :|

The sea seemed rougher there and there was a group of **Eiders** and a **Shag** bobbing up and down in the shelter of the small harbour.



Buckie pier

Wendy was on the lookout for a WC by then and found one nearby. When she came back I was busy videoing the Eiders but Wendy didn't realise and said, "OMG they stank.....of fish!" really loudly over it.....Hahahaha! Hopefully, a bit of editing would be all that was required! Next, we found ourselves in the small village of Portessie, which was a strange place. There wasn't much there apart from rows of small terraced houses that were so close to the sea that the residents must get soaked going out during a storm. I followed the signs for the Moray Coastal Path down a narrow road which ended in a nice car park to view the sea. There were 2x Long-tailed Ducks and a **Red-breasted Merganser**, so I parked up in the hope that I would be able to get some video. It was so choppy that the birds weren't viewable for the majority of time, but when a flock of **Ringed Plover** flew in and landed on the grass I saw it as the best chance I was going to get. I grabbed my camera, zipped my



coat up and headed out into the wind and rain down to the coast. I sat on the rocks down by the sea and noticed that the Long-tailed Ducks were too far away to bother with, but they looked as though they were coming in a bit closer for shelter. While I waited a flock of 30x waders lifted and flew in front of me, landing on the beach to my left. They were all **Purple Sandpipers**, which was funny because we had only just been saying that you'd expect them there, but we had never seen any at all of the places we had been on the east coast. I got some video and some photos of them while they were being so obliging and then started to make my way back to the car.



Purple Sandpiper

When I looked back I saw that the Long-tailed Ducks were close enough in to get footage of, so I went back for round two! Wendy groaned and sat back in her seat to wait for me again and luckily the Purps all lifted and flew high enough above the ridge for Wendy to finally be able to see them. A juvenile **Gannet** flew past and when I had finished I went back to the car not only absolutely soaked but finding that I had also stood in dog poo.....Grrrrrr! I just hoped that I hadn't sat in it and got Wendy to check for me, but it looked as though I'd been lucky and had got away with it. After dragging my boot through the grass to remove the offending matter as best as possible I got back into the car to dry off.

Carrying on east along the coast I drove through Findochty, where we stopped for a quick scan of the harbour.



Possibly Findochty

There were 2x **Rock Pipits** on the wall and what I reckon was a drug deal taking place as we drove out. Next, we went through Portknockie and Cullen, but I eventually got to Sandend. It didn't look like the right place but it was called Sandend, so I double checked my info and found I had gone to the wrong part of Sandend.....Whoops!



Bit windy like

I turned round and eventually found the right place where the White-billed Diver had been reported. The car park was in the middle of some fields, so no wonder I didn't find it.

It was blowing a gale and chucking it down, so Wendy's face was a picture! Admittedly, going out in it wasn't the most inviting prospect but I reminded her that she would be very annoyed if I saw the bird and she didn't. After lunch we all got out, some more reluctantly than others, and set off through the rape field. It wasn't pleasant but we battled against the wind and staggered down a muddy track eventually coming out at a viewpoint. The

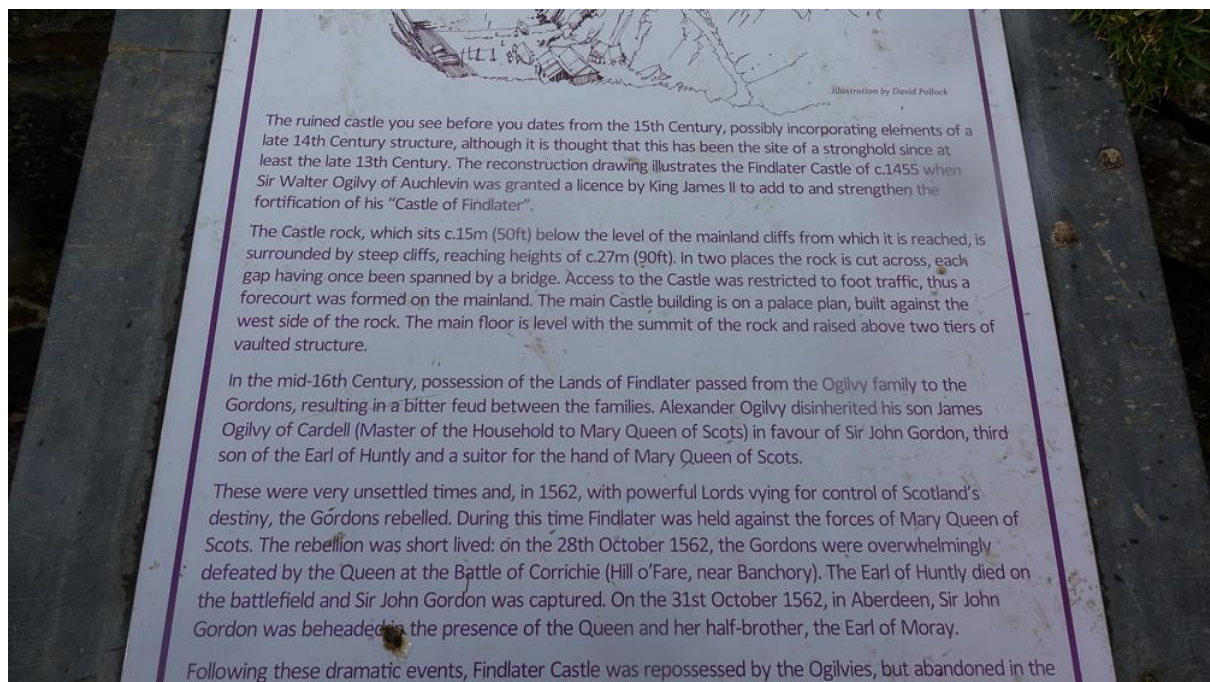


viewpoint looked down over Findlater Castle, but it was so windy that we couldn't stand up let alone see anything!



There's a Castle down there

We hunkered down behind the wall where it was sheltered and began to realise that we stood absolutely no chance of finding the Diver, even if it was still there :( . It was just too rough out at sea, but I had to at least give it my best shot, so I wriggled around the side of the viewpoint wall, staying close to the ground and had a scan. My bins were being battered by the wind, so it wasn't easy but as I expected there was no sign of our target bird. The castle history was pretty interesting though.



Smart

Wendy began to wish she had stayed in the car after all, but it was a bit late for that now.....Hahahaha! It was so unpleasant that we didn't stick around apart from when Wendy made me stand up for a photo!



Lovely weather

After that we hurried back to the refuge of the car. We were glad to be back inside when we shut the doors at 1.38pm and for all our efforts we had only managed to add **Fulmar** to our list.....Urrghhh! As I drove away, we spotted a field of pigs with loads of Gulls amongst them. Hoping we could dig out something interesting to try and salvage the day we were disappointed and had no such luck.

The sun finally came out at around 2pm, which was a welcome sight. I had been keen to visit Spey Bay for ages, but with the wind being so strong the conditions weren't exactly favourable and we couldn't really do it justice. We arrived at about 2.09pm and Wendy jumped out of the car to go and get a photo.



Spey Bay

A flock of **Dunlin** flew off as I parked up and we could just about see the bay from where we were, so we didn't stick around. My next plan was to go to Burghead but on the way I ended up driving through the middle of Elgin, which was much busier and bigger than either



of us had imagined. When we got to Burghead I parked up, so that we could view the sea and despite the dreadful weather there was a woman standing at the railings, facing the sea and taking the full hit of the freezing cold wind, doing Thai Chi :O!



Whatever floats your boat

We can think of better ways of relaxing but then again it takes all sorts! When she had finished, she casually headed back over the road presumably to go home and wasn't even in any hurry. A quick scan out to sea produced a flock of **Common Scoter** but nothing else, so I drove down to the other car park, we'd stopped at last time, by the old boat.



Too rough :(

A Eurofighter flew over, but the sea was dead and with no other ideas up my sleeve we headed for home. We went past Kinloch Barracks but for some reason my sat nav took us straight through Forres, which I hadn't expected. We were glad to get back into familiar territory in Speyside and I stopped in Grantown-on-Spey to fill my car up with petrol in preparation for the long drive tomorrow. We needed more peanuts for the Badger, so I

stopped in Nethybridge only to find that there wasn't any. We didn't want to let the Badgers down on our last night, so I carried on the Boat of Garten where we finally managed to get some....Phew!

It had been a cold, wet, windy and somewhat disappointing last day, so we were glad to get back to HQ at 4.40pm. It snowed while we ate our tea, which didn't surprise us at all and before putting the dishwasher on Wendy made the sarnies for tomorrow. After she had been for a bath, she started to pack up what she could of our stuff and put the final load of washing on. We kept an eye on the live camera footage as we watched TV, which had been really good and had given me the motivation to set something similar up back at home. The Badger came in before the Pine Marten at 7.50pm and ate one of the eggs, then started stuffing its face with peanuts. A second Badger came in to join it and after it took the second egg, they both ran off into the woods. Just 3 minutes later the Pine Marten came in and took an egg from the bird table, which was all we could've asked for on our last night. I started planning what to do tomorrow and obviously a visit to The Potting Shed at Inshriach Nurseries for some cake before we left was a must. Wendy remembered that it had been closed last time we had gone there on our way out, so suggested I googled it to check the opening hours. I couldn't believe it when I found that it had closed down because the owners had retired due to ill health after 19 years of running it.....Noooooooo! Apparently, they were still making their amazing cakes for people to buy on request, but I was absolutely gutted. The best cake shop in the world was now closed forever :( Wendy wanted to leave Scotland early and drive down to the Travelodge in Cumbria again, but I didn't want to waste our last day having had just had the last 2 days ruined by rain, so I was going to have to hatch a plan. I wrote some comments down and Wendy copied them over into the Visitors book before we switched everything off and headed off to bed at 10.10pm.

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March

It was 7.20am when we woke up and instead of the relaxing start we had become used to, there was no time for that and it was all systems go. I took Lyca out but walked her down to the bin at the end of the drive with the last of our recycling to get at least one job done. The 2 Squirrels came to the feeders at 7.50am and for the first time my trail camera had actually gone off when the Pine Marten came in the night before and recorded some video. Yey! The temperature had only gone down to -2c even though it had snowed at teatime compared to -5c the night before. After we had breakfast, Wendy started to tidy up and packed the rest of our stuff up while I started to load the car. Luckily the boiler room, where the washing machine and tumble dryer is, is like a sauna so our clothes were bone dry and ready to just hang up when we got home. There was no sign of the Crestie coming in to say, "Bye" but we had a visit from a Great-spotted Woodpecker and Dunnock, which were new for the garden. Lyca spent the morning curled up on the bed sulking, which didn't help us feel any better about leaving and we were sad to close the door and drive away for the last time at 9.50am :(.





Bye bye cottage

Having not had any rewards for our Capercaillie attempts earlier in the week I decided that we would focus on that today starting off at Forest Lodge. It was only 1c when we got out of the car at 10.03am and this time I had decided to do the walk backwards for a change. There was nobody else there so it would mean that we would get to the area we've seen Caper in before quicker and before anyone else turned up and disturbed them. We hadn't been walking long when we heard a Crestie, which wasn't usual for Forest Lodge at all. We had to presume that they were already in their breeding sites and hoped that explained why there was only a single bird coming to the feeders at Rymore. As usual it looked perfect and with every corner we turned, we could just imagine a Caper flying across the path ahead of us, but the best we could come up with was some Caper poo!



Must be one in there somewhere

We could hear Crossbills calling up in the treetops and I caught a tantalising glimpse of something flying through the trees but didn't see enough to say whether it was a Caper or not, so we'll never know. Bah! On the last stretch of the walk back to the car park there



was an RSPB worker in the woods and his dog came hemping towards Lyca barking...Uh oh! This freaked her out, but she wasn't too bad and the dog cleared off pretty quickly after defending its territory. It was 11.37am when we got back to the car and we were both dying to get to a WC, so I made a beeline for Nethybridge. Wendy ran in first, so I wandered over the road to have a last-ditch attempt at finding a bird that had proven somewhat difficult to find this year. As soon as I looked down I could see a **Dipper** bobbing about on a rock and then I noticed that there were actually 2 birds.....Yes! I told Wendy and she had a look while I tried to get some shots before we left at 12.07pm.



Dipper

It was already lunchtime when I parked up next to the riverside walk in Grantown-on-Spey, so we ate our first sarnie of the day before going anywhere. We headed out at 12.42pm and went down the steep steps that lead to the footpath and noticed how cold it had become. It was freezing!





Brrrrrrrr

Wendy was too cold to stand around and took Lyca off down the footpath for a walk to try to keep warm. We didn't walk too far as we didn't have time, so we turned round and headed back. I had brought my drone with me and as soon as there was no sign of any other people, I started to set it up. I reckoned it would be another great place to get some footage then remembered that it had a 'follow me' mode so it could literally fly above me wherever I went without me having to do anything. This was great in theory, but unfortunately, I forget to set it to record it, so I have no footage of that.....Doh! To add insult to injury I then couldn't get the 'follow me' mode to work so I ended up having to do it manually which didn't work half as well.



River Spey walk

Back at the car it was 1.33pm and I only had one more place to visit before starting the long drive down to Heysham. We passed an ace looking pond that I had spotted a couple of days ago, so I pulled over and went to investigate. I was wondering if it would be any good for Dragon/Damselflies in summer, but it also had a nice male Goldeneye on it. Having failed to



get any video at Loch Morlich, I couldn't let the opportunity pass me by. There was another with what looked like a broken wing on the bank and another 2 more appeared on the pond, which I managed to get some video of before they flew off. Driving through Boat of Garten I fancied a pain au chocolat and Wendy wondered if they had any of the vegan sausage rolls in yet, so I stopped outside the shop and Wendy ran in. She came out empty handed, as they had neither, so we had to do without any treats to make up for the monotony of only having 2 sarnies to last us the day. Thinking that I didn't need sat nav to get there I actually went the wrong way and it was 2.38pm when I parked up at Inshriach Woods.....Doh!

It was slightly worrying to see that the small track we would normally walk on had been churned up by some kind of huge vehicle, so all our bearings had gone.



We didn't even know if there were still any Capers in the woods, but it wasn't looking promising with such a dramatic disturbance. Great...not! The new path was much harder going than what we were used to and quite steep in places, so we were both knackered when we got to the top. Luckily, we came out where we hoped we would and as we walked along the path Wendy suddenly stopped and pointed at the ground. I went over to look and saw that she had found some Caper poo, which gave us a bit more optimism to carry on to the end. As usual, we weren't lucky enough to see any at the bottom and there was another huge track that had been made up the bank towards the mound where we found the most poo previously.....Uh oh! We clambered up the bank to investigate and found that the track went all the way through the middle of the woods and that there seemed to have been a lot of trees felled. There was no Caper poo in the usual place either, so we had to presume that the birds had been forced out of their territory and had moved on. To get back to the main track we scrambled down the steep bank, as we didn't want to end up getting lost like we did last year. Instead of going back to the car the way we had come we carried on along the path, which went around the woods instead of through them.





Inshriach

We went past the area where we had seen 2x Capers flying across the track and it looked much better, with no disturbance at all. Next time we go there we'll remember that and save ourselves some time and energy! Then again, they could well do the same there too before we're there again. It was 3.30pm when we got back to the car and Wendy had resigned herself to the fact that we weren't going to chill out in a Travelodge any time soon. My only other plan was to get to the Amulree Road by teatime and hopefully see Black Grouse, so we didn't hang about and set off pretty much straight away.

We saw our first sizeable herd of Red Deer up on the hills when we got to Perth and Kinross. As we got near to Dowally I spotted a large bird flying over the river, but it went behind the trees before I could ID it or get Wendy onto it, but it looked suspiciously like an Osprey to me, but I'll never know. When I turned off to go to Amulree the weather suddenly took a turn for the worse and it went very dark and started to rain. Typical or what? By the time we got there it was absolutely throwing it down and when we spotted some dark coloured Game Bird type heads up on a bank we were keen to check them out. Having had such good luck last year we hoped for the same but there was nowhere for me stop and I ended up having to drive straight past them all.....Grrrrrr! The chances are that they were just wet Pheasants, but frustratingly we'll never know that either! It then started to sleet heavily and visibility was dire, so we gave up all hope of seeing any Grouse.



Pants

At 5.30pm we stopped in our usual spot by the river for tea and Lyca ate hers no problem. We spotted our first **Rabbit** of the trip while we ate our second sarnie of the day and then I drove down the road and parked up in the layby next to the Black Grouse trees. There was nothing there and the rain just got worse, so we weren't entirely surprised. There was a Roe Deer in a field and although I needed to let took Lyca out for a wee the rain was too heavy, so I decided to wait for it to ease off. Wendy was getting impatient by then and just wanted to get going and get the journey over with as quickly as possible, so this didn't go down well. Luckily, I didn't have to wait too long and Lyca performed quickly and then pulled me all the way back to the car, so I don't even think she was enjoying the weather much. Even though it was the last day of our trip as well as the longest we had managed to do 23,587 steps, which was the most we had done all week! We could probably have done with taking a bit easy considering we had to stay up until 2.15am, but we'll never learn :P.

We left Amulree at 6.09pm for the drive down to Heysham and having left empty handed it was lovely to see the fields absolutely caked in Lapwing and Curlew. We didn't stop again until we got down to Annandale Water Services at 8.30pm and I was first to run into the WC's before my bladder bust! Wendy went next and then got some fries to share as a treat. After that I drove over to the grassy area for dogs and let Lyca out again seeing as it was the last time we'd stop before getting to Asda.





Are we home yet?

We still had some time to kill, so I did a quick bird list and came up with a shameful total of 88 birds compared to 100 last year. Oh dear! Wendy went back into the services to get us both a drink and came back very proud of herself having used the self service both times. We had a quick game of eye-spy to put a bit more time in and it took me so long to guess "Grass" that when I did it was time to go.....Hahahaha! We set off at 9.57pm and booed when we passed the 'Welcome to England – Cumbria' sign at 10.23pm. When we got to Asda it was 11.44pm and I filled my car up and noticed that it was much windier than we had expected it to be.

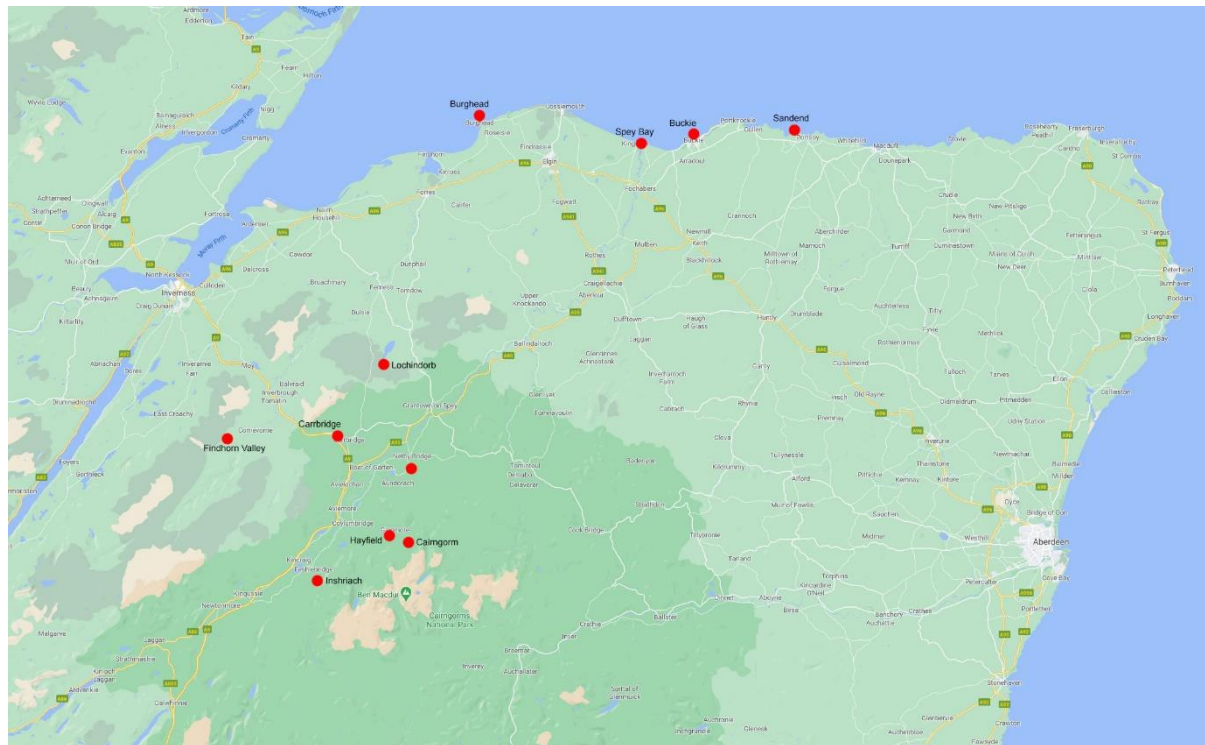
#### Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March

It was 12am on the dot when I parked up in the queue at Heysham and all we had to do now was stay awake until we boarded. I had driven 1035 miles over the week and really hoped that we would be called early, so that we could go to bed. Lyca was very narky at the check in and just wanted to get in the front to sit on Wendy's knee when I parked up, but her luck was out. Time always goes so slowly at this point and the wait seems to take forever. Annoyingly as usual the foot passengers were called at 1.10am but we had to sit it out until 1.36am. Needless to say, we went straight to sleep when we got to the cabin, but Wendy woke up early due the sound effects of it being quite rough. We docked at 5.30am and were driving off 12 minutes later into the pouring rain. Welcome home! We got home at 5.48am and after putting the beds on and unpacking the food we all went back to bed until just before our Tesco delivery was due.

Although the weather had cracked up on the Wednesday it was forecast to be very wet with gale force winds for the next week, so we had actually been pretty lucky. Wendy's highlight had been seeing the Pine Marten in the flesh from the kitchen window instead of just on the camera footage the next day. Admittedly, that had been brilliant, but I have to say that mine was the Ptarmigan. They never fail to impress me and we put so much effort into seeing them that when it pays off it's amazing. The new camera equipment was a revelation and I managed to put together a nice video of our trip here :

[Scotland trip March 2019 - Youtube](#)

## Locations



## Bird list

Mute Swan	Red Kite	Dunnoek
Whooper Swan	Sparrowhawk	Robin
Pink-footed Goose	Buzzard	Blackbird
White-fronted Goose	Golden Eagle	Song Thrush
Greylag Goose	Kestrel	Mistle Thrush
Canada Goose	Moorhen	Goldcrest
Barnacle Goose	Coot	Long-tailed Tit
Shelduck	Oystercatcher	Blue Tit
Wigeon	Ringed Plover	Great Tit
Gadwall	Lapwing	Crested Tit
Teal	Purple Sandpiper	Nuthatch
Mallard	Dunlin	Treecreeper
Shoveler	Snipe	Maggie
Tufted Duck	Curlew	Jackdaw
Eider	Redshank	Rook
Long-tailed Duck	Turnstone	Carrion Crow
Common Scoter	Black-headed Gull	Raven
Goldeneye	Common Gull	Starling
Red-breasted Merganser	Herring Gull	House Sparrow
Goosander	Great Black-backed Gull	Chaffinch
Red Grouse	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Brambling
Ptarmigan	Stock Dove	Greenfinch
Red-legged Partridge	Woodpigeon	Goldfinch
Pheasant	Collared Dove	Siskin
Little Grebe	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Linnet
Fulmar	Rock Pipit	Lesser Redpoll
Gannet	Grey Wagtail	Common Crossbill
Cormorant	Pied Wagtail	Bullfinch
Shag	Dipper	Yellowhammer
Grey Heron	Wren	