

PERTSHIRE: 3-4 MAY 2015

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INTRODUCTION

Mammal watching in the UK does not quite live up to the excitement of trips elsewhere in the world but you can still see several species in a couple of days if you make the effort. Scotland is one of the better areas of the UK with areas like the Ardnamuchan Peninsula being quite well known.

However the relatively recent discovery of a sizeable population of Eurasian Beavers, now thought to possibly be in excess of 300, in Tayside has made a stopover in Perthshire potentially rewarding particularly as the area is within an hour's drive of Edinburgh Airport. **Note:** this is an unofficial introduction of beavers and is not to be confused with the official releases in Knapdale in western Scotland.

I stopped over in the Blairgowrie area for one night on my way back from a couple of days' birding in Scotland at the beginning of May 2015.

BLAIRGOWRIE.

An ideal base for exploring the area. I stayed at <http://www.rosebank-blairgowrie.co.uk> which is only two doors away from where Bob Smith lives (see below). Rosebank can be highly recommended. The owners were very helpful during my stay there, providing waterproof over-trousers after heavy rain and even printing off boarding cards for me. The rooms are very comfortable and the breakfast (served when you want it) was excellent.

MAMMALS

SPECIES SEEN ON THIS TRIP.

Eurasian Beaver

As mentioned above a population of European Beavers has become established in Tayside with as many as 300 thought to be present. Bob Smith runs the website <http://scottishwildbeavers.org> which provides a lot of information on beavers in Tayside.

There is also a very useful report on the status of European Beavers in Tayside at http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/540.pdf. Although I had details of where to look for beavers I did go out with Bob for the evening which proved beneficial because river levels had risen 3-feet in 24 hours due to a mixture of heavy rain and snow and the two beavers we saw were not in the main river but in a small tributary at the back of East Mills. He can be contacted at r.smith50@sky.com. He doesn't actually charge for going out but do give him a small donation towards the work of the group at the end of the evening.

I would strongly recommend going out with Bob but for those of you averse to being guided and wanting to look for beavers yourselves the best known site is as follows.

From the centre of Blairgowrie head east on the A926 and cross the River Ericht. Shortly afterwards turn right opposite a church and follow this road around until you reach a T-junction. Turn right and follow this for 2-3 kilometres. Pass West Mill and at the sharp left hand bend park up and walk down the track straight ahead of you. Follow this until you reach East Mill and then walk either right or left around the property. **DO NOT ENTER THE MILL ITSELF.** If you walk right it will take you down to the river which is the best area for the beavers. If you walk left along the main river you will come to a footbridge over a side stream at the back of the mill. We saw beavers in this side stream.

Beavers also occur in several other rivers in the area and at the nearby Loch of Lowes reserve, occasionally being seen from the hide set up to view the nesting Ospreys.

Eurasian Otter

Otters also occur on the River Ericht and we had great views of one for upwards of 20 minutes as it hunting, in and out of the river, just downstream of East Mills. We saw it between the first and second footbridges east of East Mill.

Mountain Hare

In large areas of the Scottish Highlands Mountain Hares seem to be declining in numbers at an alarming rate due to widespread culling on grouse moors. The hunting fraternity are clearly not happy simply killing birds of prey, they see hares as fair game as well, if you pardon the pun.

I had tried a site along the A9 that formerly held large numbers of hares but did not see a single hare. I did however see several grouse that I had not seen there previously!

Fortunately Mountain Hares can easily be seen in Glenshee along the A93 about 25 miles north of Blairgowrie. I saw several both north and south of the ski centre including one close to the road a couple of hundred metres north of the ski centre. Most however were higher up the slopes and needed to be scanned for.

Red Grouse were also common here demonstrating that they can survive alongside hares. For birders (Rock) Ptarmigan are often easy to find along the road just south of the ski centre. I saw a pair easily to the west of the road from the large parking lot immediately south of the ski centre despite heavy rain/snow. It was the first time I had looked for them here since 1997 and they were within 50 metres of where I had seen them 18 years earlier!

Red Deer

Red Deer can also be commonly seen in Glenshee, particularly north of the ski lift.

Fallow Deer

Easily seen around Loch of Lowes. I saw at least 10 in fields along the A923 to the north of Loch of Lowes.

Roe Deer

Roe Deer are widely distributed throughout the area so should be easily seen. I saw them at the beaver site.

ADDITIONAL SPECIES NOT SEEN DURING THIS TRIP.

Northern Water Vole

Water Voles also occur in the ditches at the beaver site but I did not have time to look for them.

Red Squirrel

Red Squirrel occurs widely in the Blairgowrie area including the town itself. You even see signs warning you to be careful to avoid squirrels when driving through the town. The owners of the B&B can give you up-to-date information on where squirrels can be seen in the town but I actually looked around Loch of Lowes c.10 miles west of Blairgowrie where squirrels are frequently seen, often around the feeders at the visitor centre, see <http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/visit/loch-of-the-lowes> , I spent a morning at Loch of Lowes and unfortunately missed the squirrels so perhaps I should have looked in the town itself.

Red Fox, Brown (European) Hare & Eurasian Rabbit

All occur widely in lowlands around Blairgowrie.

Pine Marten

Pine Martens occur in Blairgowrie itself but there is apparently a hide set up at the nearby Kindrogan Field Centre to see them. Bob Smith should be able to provide further details. They are also occasionally seen around the visitor centre at Loch of Lowes although recent deforestation nearby has reduced the frequency of sightings.