

## **Report on bird life on Calton Hill, following the walk on 10 September 2023**

This is a brief summary of the bird walk organised by Friends of Calton Hill as part of a series of mini-blitzes covering birds, plants and invertebrates, in September 2023.

We met bright and early at 06:30hrs, which coincided with sunrise. There were seven of us in total, with most of the group aiming to learn more on local bird life and improve their bird ID skills.

We circulated the hill in an anticlockwise direction starting in the open area by the monument and slowly traversing the woodlands on the north-west slope, via Greenside church, before passing along Regent Walk and then viewing into Regent Gardens and concluding at the Royal Terrace at 09:30hrs.

A couple of minutes after setting off a Peregrine passed rapidly low over the top of the hill just east of the monument, a male on size. This was the best bird seen but unfortunately due to its speed not everyone in the group got onto it (but see below).

There was a light passage of Meadow Pipits moving over high south-west, mainly in ones and twos, totalling 21 birds over the duration. None were seen down on the hill though they may occasionally drop in. Migrant Siskins were also heard passing over.

Some effort was spent in resolving the sources of high pitched squeaking calls in the woodland and scrub and eventually we had reasonable views of a couple of Goldcrests foraging for aphids. More insect feeders were located around the cutting at the south end of Hume Walk with up to 5 Chiffchaffs working through the scrub there (ID by tail dipping, distinguishing from Willow Warbler), along with tit species, Wrens, Robins, Dunnock and Chaffinch.

A party of Long-tailed Tits was moving along the bank below Regent Walk.

We paused at the viewing area on the south side to turn our attention beyond the hill and scan the cliffs opposite, on Salisbury Crags, in hope of perhaps seeing a late Fulmar – several territorial birds having been reported earlier in the season at this traditional inland breeding site – but drew a blank on those. However it was pleasing to see an adult male Peregrine perched high on the cliff there, which gave chance for everyone in the group to have a good view of it through the telescope. There was also a pair of Stock Doves sitting beside a potential nest cavity.

Finally we had a look into Regent Gardens and it was good to hear the loud “qvip qvip” calls of a Nuthatch, still a fairly recent colonist in Lothian, as well as seeing a party of Mistle Thrushes.

Of course, sightings from a single outing can only provide a brief snapshot of bird life on the Hill, pertaining to a particular season, but the SOC does hold a database of bird records including a decent number from the site, submitted via BirdTrack, as well

as the systematic survey data for the tetrad NT27S from the BTO Bird Atlas/South-east Scotland local atlas 2007-13 (<https://www.the-soc.org.uk/birds-in-south-east-scotland-2007-13>). An extract of the database has been provided to Friends of Calton Hill.

Birds we might have hoped to see on another occasion would include Great Spotted Woodpecker, Stock Dove, Treecreeper and Bullfinch, while Kestrel and Sparrowhawk do use the site. Swifts can often be seen over in summer and Waxwing has been recorded recently in winter (19/11/20). Tawny Owl has been noted on nocturnal visits. To more fully document the breeding and wintering birds will require further dedicated fieldwork, but in the meantime all ad hoc records for the site are most welcome.

Stephen Welch

Lothian SOC bird recorder

<https://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network/areas/lothian>

### **Species list**

Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1
Lesser Black-Backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	2
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	1
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	7
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	[1]
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	9
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	21
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	10
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	4
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	7
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	4
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	6
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	2
Long-Tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	2+
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	1
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	3
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	3
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	1
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	9
Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	2
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	3
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	4
Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	2