



WATSON BIRDS



DONALD WATSON BIRD WALK AROUND ST JOHN'S TOWN OF DALRY

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WALKS, PROVIDING A GOOD SELECTION
OF BIRDS AND GREAT VIEWS OF THE
COUNTRYSIDE AROUND THE VILLAGE



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Donald Watson was an internationally renowned wildlife artist and author who lived in Dalry from 1951 until he died in 2005. This was one of Donald's favourite walks, providing a good selection of birds and great views of the countryside around the village.

The suggested route begins at the Town Hall (see the interpretation board in the garden) and descends to the Water of Ken by the 'Boat Weir' (way). Turn left through the gate just before the footbridge and follow the flood bank downstream to the cottage at Boat Knowe. From there, turn left and proceed up the track and across the main road (A713) to enter a field through the kissing gate. Ascend the hill through mature oak trees, roughly following the burn (stream) until a pedestrian gate is reached in the dry stane dyke on your right hand side.

Once through the gate, turn left and follow the dyke uphill to a stile and farm gate which provide access to the highest point on the walk at the top of Mulloch Hill. Small, circular directional arrows help to confirm the way. From the concrete 'trig point' on top of the hill, walk north towards the village through several farm gates, looking out for the directional arrows to confirm the way. The entire route is easily walked in two hours by the able-bodied, and in just over an hour at a brisk pace.

Spring

The flood bank scrub holds a number of breeding songbirds, which provide an attractive chorus, especially in early morning and evening. Regular songsters include chaffinch, willow warbler, garden warbler, whitethroat, song thrush, blackbird, sedge warbler, wren and various tits. There is usually a pair or two of piping oystercatchers along the river or on the adjacent farmland. In May, the unimproved pasture between the bank and the river is a mass of wild flowers, including pignut and knapweed, while the hawthorn, broom and wild rose blooms brighten the bank. Skylarks and wheatears breed on the hill and reed buntings at its foot, and there are often one or two red kites and buzzards circling overhead.

Wheatear



Wren



Oystercatcher
with chick

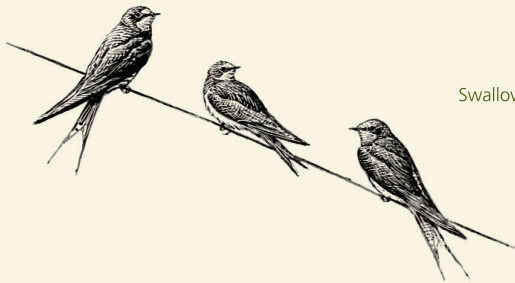


Summer

Songbirds are much quieter now, but look out for families of spotted flycatcher on the mature trees along the river and swallows, house and sand martins catching insects over the water and nearby fields. Ringlet butterflies are common in sunny weather, and in late July and early August the dark Scotch Argus is possible in rougher places. Ospreys can sometimes be seen flying above the river, while fledged young buzzards mew constantly and urge their parents to feed them. Kites are much quieter and the adults can be quite elusive at this time during their moult.



Young spotted flycatcher



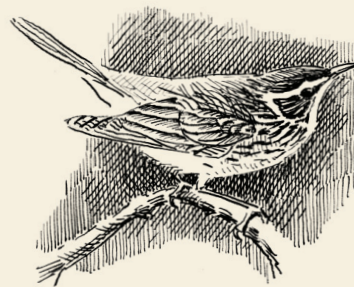
Swallows

Red kite



Autumn

The flaming yellows, browns and reds of native trees are a delight, especially viewed from the flood bank across the Ken to Garroch Glen and Glenlee. More distant views of these and other attractive broadleaved woods can be seen from the top of Mulloch Hill, which also provides a beautiful prospect of the Rhinns of Kells and Carsphairn Hills to the north, and glistening Loch Ken to the south. Large flocks of Scandinavian fieldfares and redwings arrive at this time, feeding on hawthorn berries along the flood bank, while tinkling, bouncing flocks of goldfinches plunder the knapweed and thistle seeds in the rough grasses. The flashing orange breasts of migrant robins seem perfectly in keeping with the patchwork colours, as do their metallic autumn songs.



Redwing



Goldfinches

Winter

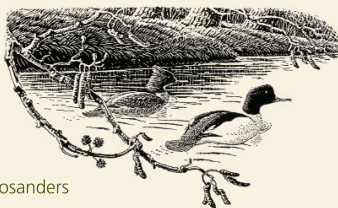
Two of Donald's favourite birds, siskins and redpolls, are best seen in winter, feeding on the tiny alder cones along the river side. These are joined by tribes of beautiful long-tailed tits, which move through the alders and hawthorns, feeding on tiny creatures and keeping in touch with each other through constant contact calling - never staying still. Goosander, cormorant and heron are more easily seen on the river through leafless trees, while the barn owl can sometimes be seen in the gloaming over rough grass near the Ken's confluence with the Garroch Burn. From the Mulloch, fine views of kite and buzzard are seen regularly, while the grating calls of greylag geese drift up from the wet meadows below.



Siskins and redpoll



Long-tailed tits



Goosanders

Indicative Walk Map

See OS Explorer sheet 320 for details

Follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, especially keeping dogs under tight control



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