



Birds of Bankhead Moss

S.T. Buckland

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A selection of photos illustrating some of the bird species of Bankhead Moss. All photos were taken on the reserve since January 2024. I have included species that only fly over the site.

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Greylag goose

Although common in much of Fife, greylags are seldom seen at Bankhead Moss. This single bird flew over the Moss in early February 2025.



Pink-footed goose

Skeins often fly over the reserve from autumn through to spring.





Mute swan

A current lack of open water means that mute swans are just occasional visitors to the reserve. The above pair were in front of the hide in late March 2025, possibly the same pair below right were on the marsh in late January 2025, and the single bird below left was on the marsh in late February 2024.





Mallard

There are usually a few mallards on the marsh.





Teal

Teal often occur on the marsh, but can be difficult to spot, given the height of vegetation.





Tufted duck

This pair was in front of the hide in early May 2024.





Grey partridge

Occurs in the fields around the reserve, and often visits the edge of the marsh on the reserve. The photos above and below were of birds that had flushed from the marsh. The one on the right was hiding behind the gate that marks the reserve boundary, near the start of the board walk.





Pheasant

Pheasants use the reserve for cover and for roosting. A few also breed. The female below left was on eggs in the mixed woodland.





Swift

Swifts can occasionally be seen hawking for insects over the marsh. These were there in mid-May 2024.





Feral pigeon

Feral pigeons can occasionally be seen flying over the reserve.



Stock dove

A few pairs breed on the reserve, and are often seen in mature trees in the southern half of the reserve.





Woodpigeon

Very common on the reserve.





Water rail

Often heard but seldom seen on the marsh in front of the hide. Four were present in mid-March 2024 when these photos were taken.





Moorhen

A pair can sometimes be seen on the marsh in front of the hide.





Oystercatcher

Not often recorded on the reserve. This one flew over the marsh in early April 2024.





Lapwing

Occurs in the marsh in front of the bird hide, although usually where the marsh extends beyond the reserve into a heavily-grazed field, which provides more suitable habitat for feeding. A few pairs breed in fields surrounding the reserve.





Curlew

Curlews can occur on the marsh, although usually just outside the reserve, where the marsh extends into a heavily grazed field, which gives a more suitable habitat for curlews to feed in. The birds above and below were part of a flock that grew to around 140 birds in March 2024.





Woodcock

A few woodcock occur on the reserve from autumn through to spring. These poor photos show a typical view of a bird weaving between trees before rapidly disappearing!





Jack snipe

Smaller and less common than the snipe. The two above and below were flushed from the fen habitat south of the boardwalk once in late November and again in mid-December 2024. Possibly the same two were on the raised bog in early March 2025; one of these is shown on the right.





Snipe

Often present on the reserve, but usually hidden in the vegetation of the marsh.





Black-headed gull

Occurs in the marshy area in front of the bird hide.



Mediterranean gull

This species is increasing its range northwards, and is now recorded regularly at some coastal sites. This immature bird was at Bankhead Moss on 11-14 November 2024.





Common gull

Often seen flying over the reserve.





Great black-backed gull

Mainly a marine species, with a few wandering inland. One bird was present most of March 2024, and these shots show one of two birds present in mid-April. It is holding a twig or stalk in its beak.





Herring gull

Often seen flying over the reserve.





Lesser black-backed gull

Largely absent in winter, birds start to return in late February. These flew over the reserve in March 2024 and April 2024.





Cormorant

Not a species that you would expect to encounter at Bankhead Moss, but the one above flew over the Moss in mid-April 2024, and the two below in late April 2024.





Grey heron

Attracted to the marsh especially when frogs are spawning.





Sparrowhawk

A sparrowhawk can often be seen hunting on the reserve. The one below right is being pursued by a carrion crow over the Moss.





Goshawk

The goshawk is becoming more common in Fife. This one was photographed over the marsh.





Hen harrier

A rare visitor to the marshy area in front of the bird hide. The female above and below left was hunting over the marsh in late March 2025. Although the shot below right was taken from the hide, the birds were beyond the reserve, over the hill at Bruntshiels. The image shows a crow harrying a ringtail (female or immature hen harrier) and what is probably an immature male. They were taken in early January 2024.





Common buzzard

A common sight over the Moss.





Tawny owl

This recently-fledged bird was near the top of a tall pine tree in mid-June 2024. Photos taken at night with the macro lens I use for moths, hence the poor quality!





Great spotted woodpeck-

Can often be seen or heard in the mixed woodland on the south side of the Moss, or in the birchwood to the north and west of the Moss.





Kestrel

One can occasionally be seen hunting over the reserve.





Peregrine

This bird was around the reserve in March 2024. The above shot was taken just after an unsuccessful chase of a lapwing over the marsh.





Jay

Jays occasionally come onto the reserve. The shot below left was taken when a jay was provoked into showing itself by a kestrel.





Magpie

A species that is rapidly increasing in east Fife.





Jackdaw

Common on the reserve and in the surrounding farmland.





Rook

Often seen flying over the reserve. There is a small rookery where the shelter strip of trees at the south-east corner of the reserve reaches Peat Inn.





Carrion crow

Ever-present on the reserve.





Raven

Ravens are spreading through Fife, following a reduction in persecution, and are often at the reserve.





Coal tit

Common, especially in areas with pine or spruce trees.





Blue tit

Common, especially in the area of mixed woodland.





Great tit

Occurs mostly in the area of mixed woodland.





Skylark

Can often be heard singing high over the reserve.





Swallow

A common summer migrant that can often be seen hawking for insects at the reserve.





House martin

House martins can often be seen hawking for insects over the marsh in late spring and summer.





Long-tailed tit

A small flock can often be seen on the reserve.





Willow warbler

Very similar to the chiffchaff, but with a very different song. These shots were taken just after their arrival on the reserve, in mid-April.





Chiffchaff

A summer migrant that is becoming increasingly common.





Sedge warbler

Several pairs breed in the marshy areas of the reserve.





Grasshopper warbler

A scarce summer migrant. This was a newly-arrived bird in late April 2024 in the ungrazed marshy field south of the Moss.





Blackcap

A summer migrant that is increasing in numbers. The above male and the female below were at the southern end of the birchwood in late April.





Garden warbler

A summer migrant, appreciably more scarce than the blackcap. This male was singing in the mixed woodland for much of June 2024.





Goldcrest

Common where conifers grow. I failed to record any goldcrests at Bankhead Moss in 2024 until late September, when migrants arrived. Some stayed through to December.





Wren

Occurs throughout the year on the reserve.





Treecreeper

This species can often be seen either in the mixed woodland or in the birchwood, sometimes joining a tit flock.





Starling

Common over and around the reserve. A few breed in holes in old trees in the shelter belt linking the reserve to the village of Peat Inn.





Song thrush

A few occur on the reserve. The above bird held a territory in the line of trees linking the reserve to Peat Inn, while the bird below was in the trees just west of the mound of the raised bog.





Mistle thrush

Occasional visitors to the reserve. In autumn a few come to feed on rowan berries, and some pass through or over during winter and spring. This bird arrived in late February 2025 to establish a territory.





Redwing

Common flying over in autumn, with some birds like the one above stopping off to eat rowan berries. Depending on the weather, a few stay into winter, such as the ones below.





Blackbird

A few pairs breed on the reserve, and more arrive in autumn.





Fieldfare

Flocks often fly over or through the site in autumn and winter, and can sometimes be seen resting in trees on the reserve.





Robin

Occurs throughout the year on the reserve.





Stonechat

Fairly scarce in Fife, especially away from the coast. This pair was present through late winter and spring 2024, usually on or around the marsh.





Tree sparrow

This shows two birds in a group of four by the shelter belt of trees that extends the reserve east to the edge of Peat Inn.



Dunnock

A garden bird that is most likely to be encountered on the reserve in autumn.





Pied wagtail

An occasional visitor to the reserve. This one was hunting insects on the Moss in late June. Photos taken with a macro lens that I use for recording insects.





Meadow pipit

A few breed on the marsh and on the moss.





Chaffinch

Common on the reserve.





Bullfinch

One or two pairs breed on the reserve, and many more visit in autumn and winter to feed on seeds of heather, weeds and trees.





Greenfinch

Greenfinches frequently fly over the shelter belt of trees at the eastern end of the reserve, but do not often come onto the reserve. These were with a small flock of mixed finches in the birch woodland by the boardwalk in November 2024.





Linnet

Linnets are typically associated with habitats where gorse grows. The lack of gorse on the reserve probably explains why they are not often encountered on the reserve. These were at the edge of the marsh in late March.





Lesser redpoll

Redpolls occur in winter and spring. In March 2024, the flock grew to around 70 birds.





Common crossbill

An uncommon visitor to the reserve. These (male above and female below) were part of a group present in winter and spring 2024. In March, a few fledglings appeared.





Goldfinch

A frequent visitor to the reserve.





Siskin

Occurs in the mixed woodland along the path to the south car park in winter, and a small number join the redpoll flock.





Yellowhammer

Common in the farmland surrounding the reserve, with birds occasionally occurring on the reserve.





Reed bunting

Occurs throughout the year on the marsh.

