

St Marys Loch

The Ring of the Loch

Bird Life

The area around the Loch boasts a wide range of habitats including grassland, moorland, wetland, deciduous woodland, ancient scots-pine woodland and conifer plantation as well as the Loch itself and its shoreline.

This range of habitats allows a variety of birds to make the Loch their home. A few of the birds you may encounter on your visit are described opposite, illustrated by paintings generously donated by artist and friend of the Ettrick and Yarrow Valleys, Alan Pearson.

We ask that you follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code while walking the Loch, both to protect wildlife and to preserve the walk for other visitors. This includes:

- Keeping dogs under control
- Taking litter home with you
- Leaving gates as they were found
- Not disturbing nesting birds. Oystercatchers nest on the shoreline between the months of April and June. Please give them a wide berth

The Ring of the Loch is a highly recommended circular walk for those wishing to experience the beauty and tranquillity of St Mary's Loch and the wildlife around its shores. The 7 mile (11 kilometre) walking route was opened in 2015 by the Ettrick and Yarrow Community Development Company and is clearly signposted. Look out for the red arrows.

The trail is mainly on rough but fairly level paths and includes the old drove road along the hillside between Kirkstead and Cappercleuch, fisherman's paths through woodland at the waterside, open shingle and shoreline, and the chance to discover poetry inscriptions hidden amongst the ancient pines in March Wood.

The Ettrick and Yarrow Community Development Company exists to create opportunities for people of all ages in the Ettrick and Yarrow Valleys. For more information about this and other projects please contact: info@ettrickandyarrow.org.uk For visitor information on the valleys please visit: www.ettrickandyarrow.co.uk Facebook: [Visit Ettrick and Yarrow](#)

Enjoy your visit!

Osprey

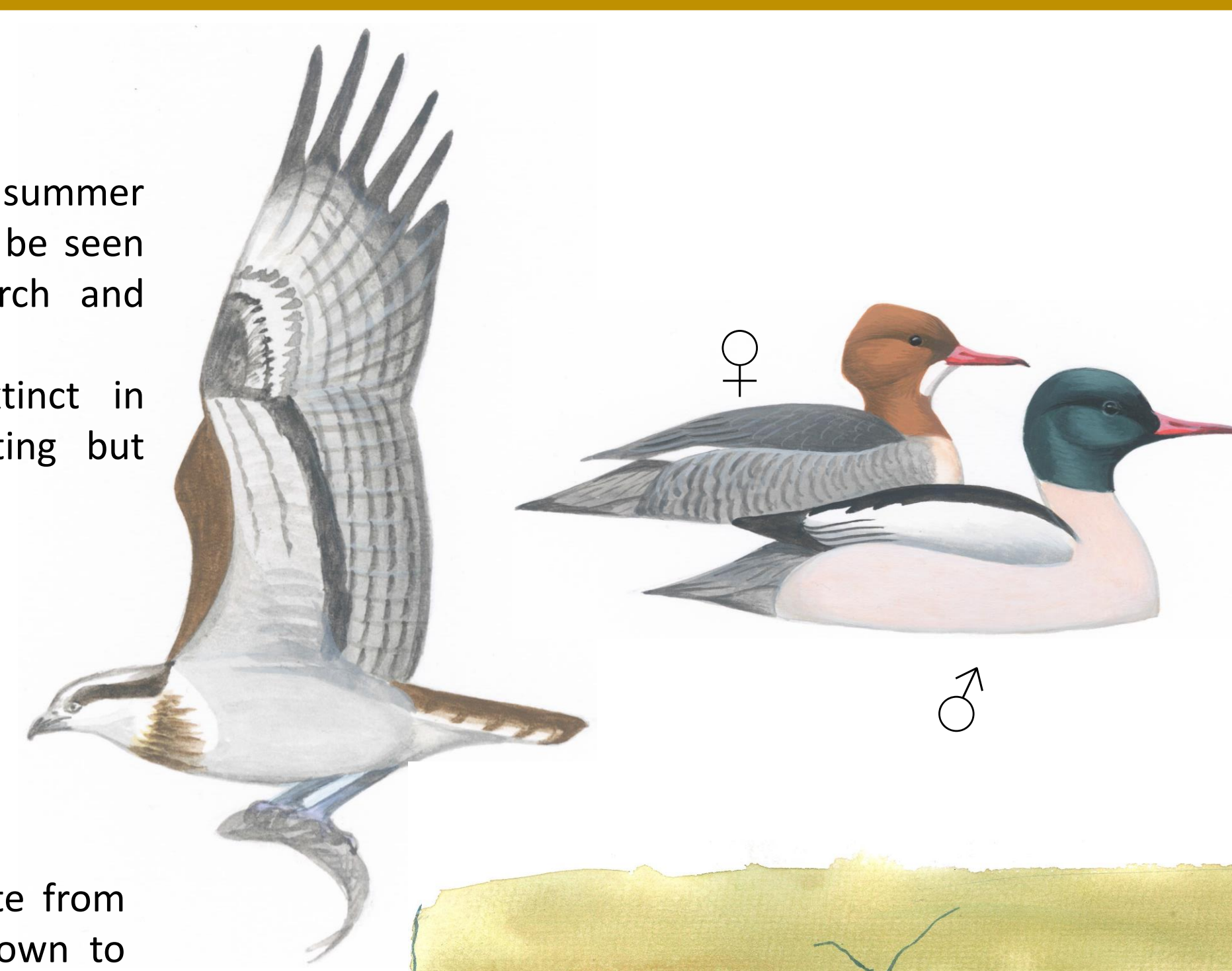
The osprey is an impressive summer visitor from West Africa and can be seen around the Loch between March and September.

This bird of prey became extinct in Scotland in 1916 due to hunting but returned to breed in the 1950s.

The bird glides above the Loch and plunges down to catch surprisingly large fish in its strong talons. They often dive beneath the surface so can close their nostrils to stop water from rushing in.

Ospreys are faithful to their mate from year to year and have been known to return the same nest to raise chicks for up to twenty seasons.

The Tweed Valley Osprey Projects Watch Centres at Kailzie Gardens and Glentress (both near Peebles) offer close up views of ospreys and their chicks with live video footage of their nests.



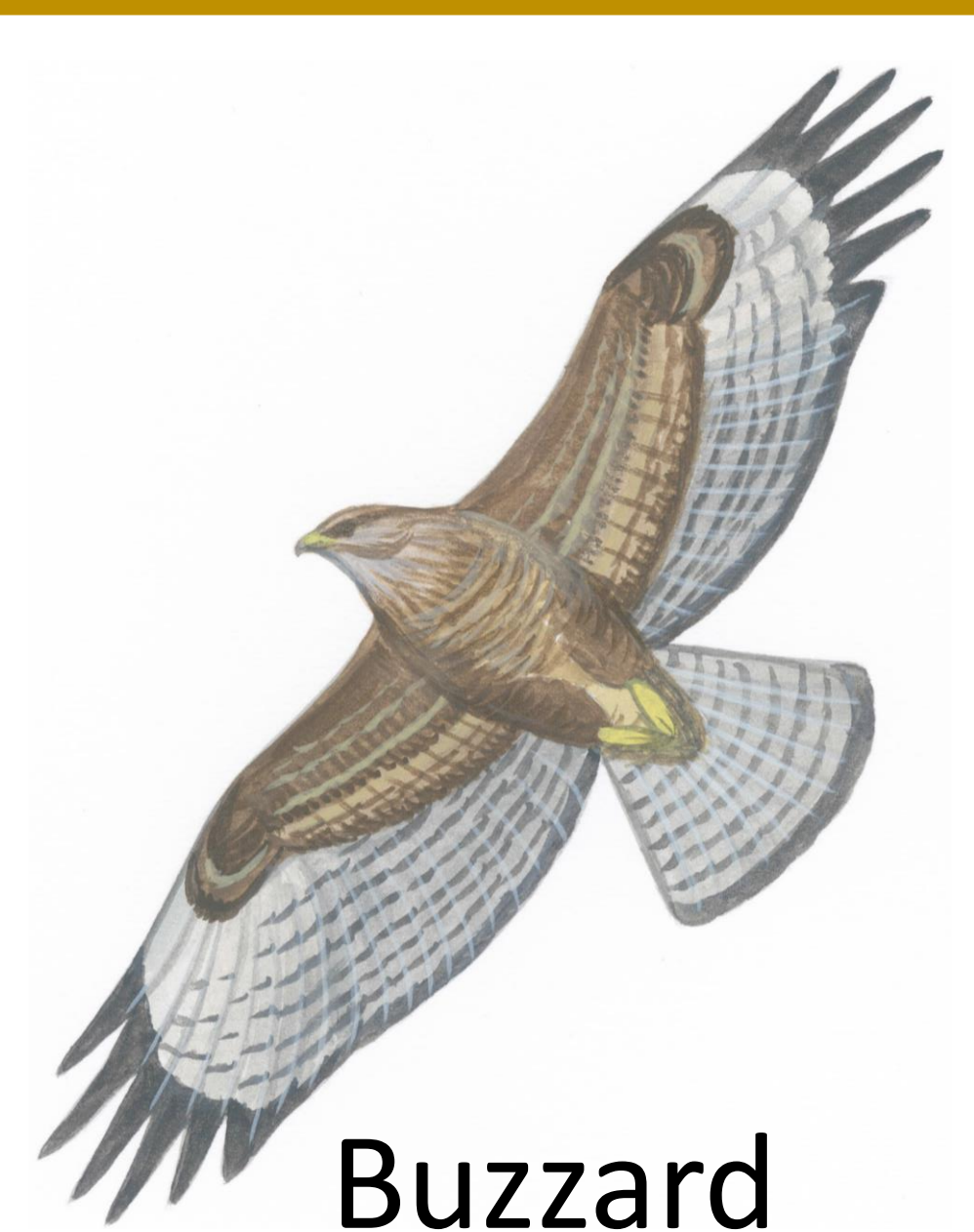
Goosander

The goosander is a member of the sawbilled duck family, so named for their serrated beaks that help them grip on to their main prey of fish. Its effective hunting of salmon and trout has caused the bird to be illegally persecuted in some areas. After breeding, male and female goosanders congregate separately to moult when they can become flightless for over a month.



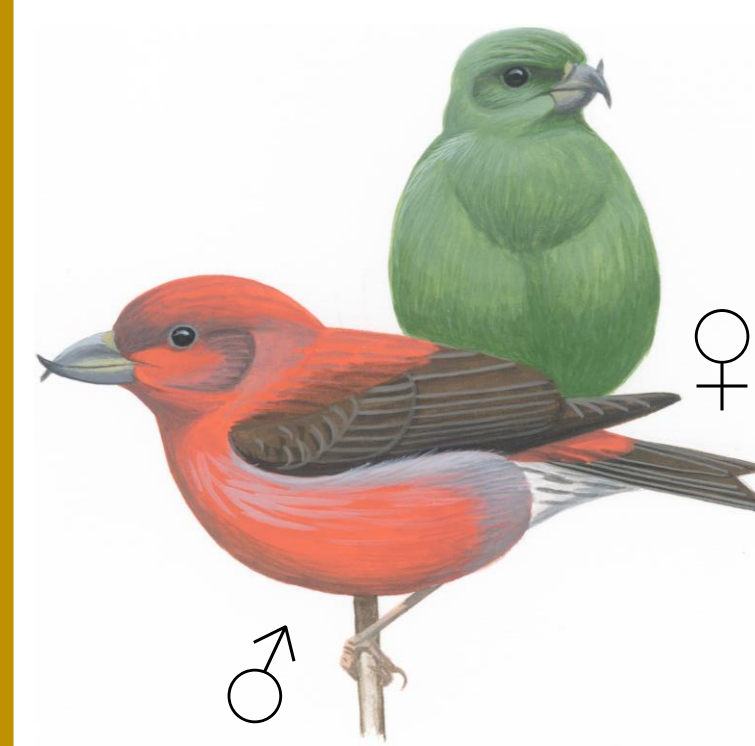
Wheatear

This small summer visitor breeds in rock crevices or abandoned rabbit burrows in stony upland areas of Britain, Canada and Greenland. Come October, the wheatear journeys back to its winter home of central Africa, undertaking one of the longest known migrations of a small bird.



Buzzard

The buzzard is the UK's most common bird of prey and can often be seen soaring above the hills surrounding the Loch where it feeds on carrion or small birds and mammals. Buzzards are often mistaken for Golden Eagles but can be identified by their "mewing" call and smaller size. Buzzards mate for life and attract a partner with an elaborate mid air display known as the "rollercoaster".



Crossbill

Crossbills are named for their beaks which are crossed over at the end. They are found in conifer forests and their bill shape makes them especially effective at feeding on the seeds inside pinecones. Crossbills will travel between forest patches depending on the cone crop and are often found near water as their dry diet of pine seeds makes them thirsty.

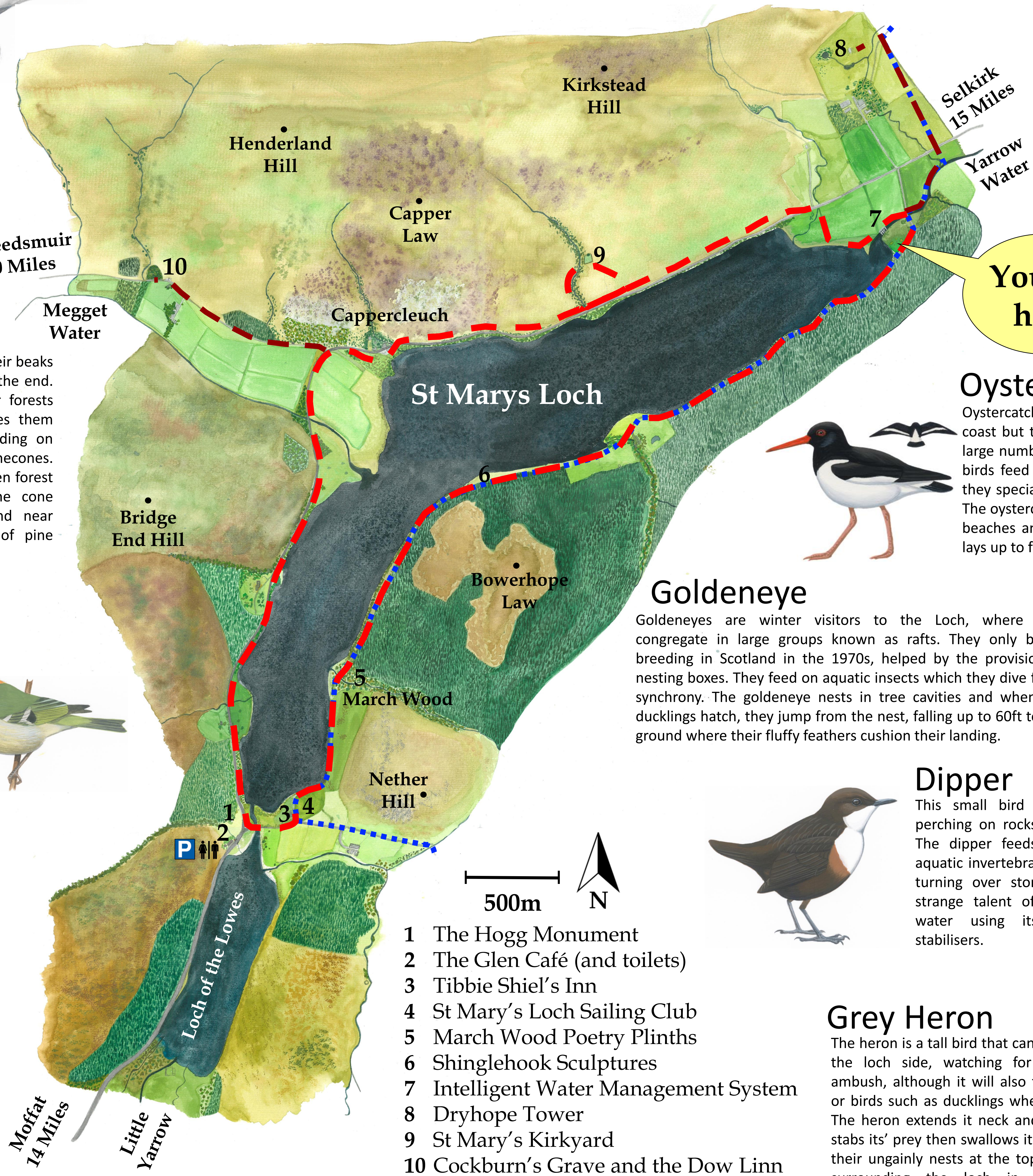
Goldcrest

The goldcrest is Europe's smallest bird and is named for the bright yellow patch of feathers on its head. They use their tiny pointed beaks to pick insects from between pine needles in their preferred habitat of Scots Pine forest. The male goldcrest attracts a female by bobbing his head and raising his crest. These tiny birds have a song so high pitched that many people cannot hear it.



Grey Wagtail

So named for its bobbing stance and grey upper body, the grey wagtail is actually one of the Loch's more colourful residents, having bright yellow feathers on its breast and under its tail. Grey Wagtails feed along stretches of their lochside territory, catching tadpoles and insects – they may even be seen chasing after dragonflies using their long tails to help them turn tight corners while in flight.



You are here

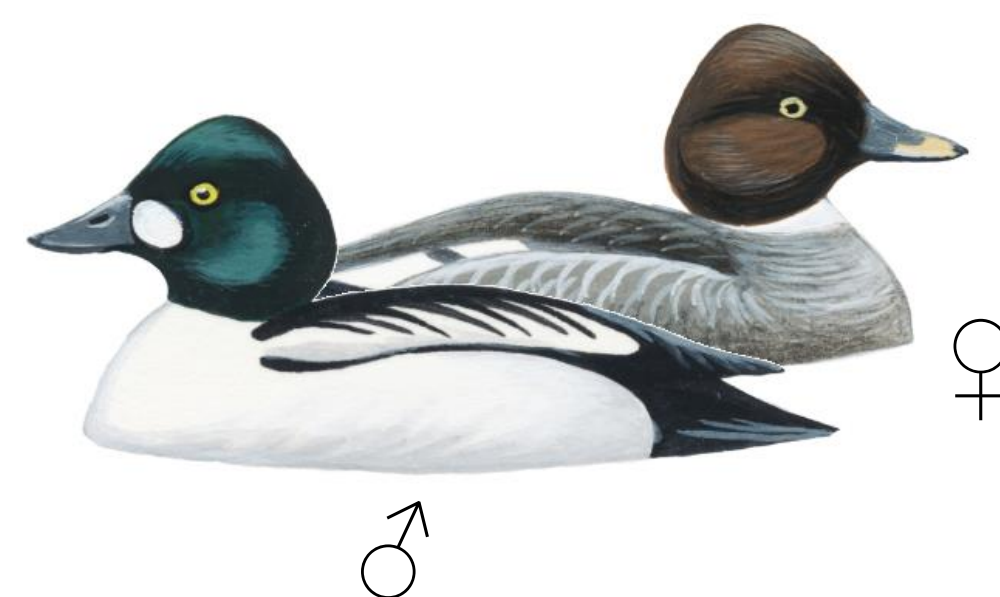
Oystercatcher

Oystercatchers generally spend the winter on the coast but the birds can be seen around the loch in large numbers during the summer. While inland the birds feed on worms and insects but on the coast they specialise in prising or breaking open shellfish. The oystercatcher scrapes a simple nest on the stony beaches and grassland around the loch in which it lays up to four perfectly camouflaged, spotted eggs.



Goldeneye

Goldeneyes are winter visitors to the Loch, where they congregate in large groups known as rafts. They only began breeding in Scotland in the 1970s, helped by the provision of nesting boxes. They feed on aquatic insects which they dive for in synchrony. The goldeneye nests in tree cavities and when the ducklings hatch, they jump from the nest, falling up to 60ft to the ground where their fluffy feathers cushion their landing.



Dipper

This small bird can often be seen perching on rocks on the Loch shore. The dipper feeds on small fish and aquatic invertebrates that it catches by turning over stones. It also has the strange talent of walking under the water using its short wings as stabilisers.



Grey Heron

The heron is a tall bird that can be seen standing by the loch side, watching for fish and frogs to ambush, although it will also take small mammals or birds such as ducklings when given the chance. The heron extends its neck and quickly strikes and stabs its prey then swallows it whole. Herons build their ungainly nests at the top of the tall conifers surrounding the loch in groups known as "heronries".



- 1 The Hogg Monument
- 2 The Glen Café (and toilets)
- 3 Tibbie Shiel's Inn
- 4 St Mary's Loch Sailing Club
- 5 March Wood Poetry Plinths
- 6 Shinglehook Sculptures
- 7 Intelligent Water Management System
- 8 Dryhope Tower
- 9 St Mary's Kirkyard
- 10 Cockburn's Grave and the Dow Linn

- Ring of the Loch
- - - Optional Diversions
- ... Southern Upland Way

For help identifying more birds, download the app "Birds by Colour" by scanning the QR code to the left



Bird paintings by Alan Pearson, copyrights held by Mike Lambert. Board design and map by Jenny Davidson.