



**Great places to
bird watch & explore
around Loch Ryan**

Loch Ryan – a safe haven

Loch Ryan is Scotland's most southerly sea loch. Its sheltered waters have been used by man since prehistoric times and it is the start of the shortest sea crossing between Britain and Ireland. For thousands of years Loch Ryan offered an ideal safe stopping-off place on the main west coast sea route.

While ferries travel to and from Ireland, the sheltered waters also provide a safe haven for thousands of birds and a safe anchorage for fishing and sailing boats.

shag



Visiting the Loch Ryan coast

In Scotland you have the right to enjoy the outdoors for recreation providing you act responsibly and follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code www.outdooraccess-scotland.com. You can walk along the coast even when there are no marked footpaths but please remember to take your litter home and dispose of it responsibly.

Loch Ryan is teeming with wildlife, most notably birds, so try to avoid disturbing them especially shore-nesting birds in spring and feeding flocks of waders in winter.



Key to symbols
on site pages



For explorers

There are many historic and archaeological sites around Loch Ryan from the remains of the World War II flying boat base at the Wig to the medieval motte at Innermessan and Iron Age Standing Stones, Long Tom and the Taxing Stone, on the Laight Moor. You can discover more about Loch Ryan's past at Stranraer Museum.

For the adventurous there are opportunities to go sailing on the loch or take a boat trip to go fishing or wildlife spotting.



For bird watchers

Loch Ryan is one of the most important wildlife sites in the UK. It is a significant location for wild birds throughout the year and holds nationally important populations of several species.

The majority of the loch side is accessible by car making it easy to see a wide variety of waders and wildfowl from car parks and roadsides. It is one of the best places to watch scaup, a spectacular diving duck which breeds in the high Arctic and spends the winter in only a few sites around the coast. Other attractions in winter are regular sightings of the Slavonian and the rarer red-necked grebes, great-northern, red-throated and the rare black-throated divers and a range of ducks including wigeons and goldeneyes. In late summer/early autumn flocks of moulting eider ducks congregate on the loch. At any time of year, flocks of greylag geese are present and in winter these are joined by large numbers of pink-footed geese and small numbers of pale-bellied brent geese.

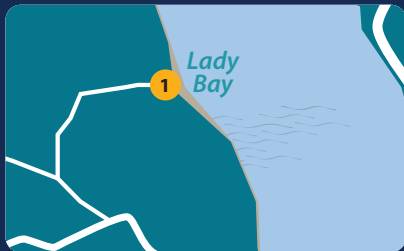
This guide is a good start for places to birdwatch around Loch Ryan and further afield in Wigtownshire but why not ask people who know the area about other sites to visit?



Slavonian grebe - in March/early April

Lady Bay

Lady Bay has a small, attractive beach with informal car parking for up to 5 cars. It is popular in summer although the track down to the bay is long, winding and rough. There is a slipway for launching boats which is well used. At low tide the exposed rock pools are a great place to look for small crabs, fish, molluscs and sea anemones.



Lady Bay



Winter

Small numbers of lapwings, oystercatchers, curlews, turnstones and redshanks may be seen feeding on the shores of the loch.



Summer

The cliffs just south of Lady Bay at Jamieson's Point are used by breeding fulmars. Waders such as oystercatchers breed locally and may be seen around the bay. The scrub areas surrounding the bay hold good numbers of breeding birds including stonechats and a range of warblers.



All year round

From the beach you may be able to spot cormorants, shags, various gulls and an occasional gannet diving into the loch.

gannet



oystercatcher



shag

lapwing



The Wig

The Wig is a popular bird watching site with a large car park. The track from the car park is the start of a circular coastal walk around Wig Bay giving views across Loch Ryan and up the coast to Ailsa Craig. A left turn at the lookout point takes you along the beach, littered with large oyster shells, followed by another left to the woodland path and the village of Kirkcolm. The car park is then reached by a short walk along the road.



The Wig



Winter

Wig Bay supports a large flock of wintering wigeons; waders roost on the Scar and along the western shoreline and the sheltered offshore waters are important for wintering divers and grebes. Variable numbers of pale-bellied brent geese from Arctic Canada are also often seen in the bay.

Look out for shelducks, oystercatchers, curlews, turnstones and redshanks feeding on the muddy shores of Wig Bay together with knots, dunlins and larger numbers of golden plovers. The farmland north of Wig Bay is important for wintering twites, linnets and many other small birds.



Summer

One of the largest moulting flocks of eiders in the UK, often over 1000 birds, can be seen from the end of the track at the Wig between July and September each year. You can see locally breeding oystercatchers, shelducks, ringed plovers and red-breasted mergansers. Occasional redshanks may also be seen along the edge of the shore. Sandwich, common and Arctic terns are often seen feeding close to the shore together with occasional sightings of the rarer little terns.



All year round

The bay to the east of the lookout point provides good roosting and feeding areas for waders, eiders and red-breasted mergansers. Many species of duck, diver and grebe can be seen in the sheltered waters of Wig Bay.

pale-bellied brent geese



twite

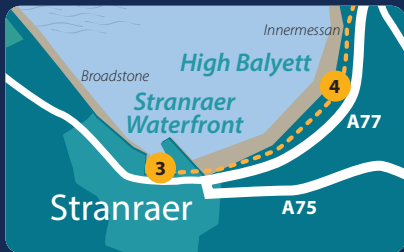


shelduck drake



Stranraer Waterfront

The waterfront at Stranraer has great views up the loch to Ailsa Craig. Adjacent Agnew Park offers a range of activities and a café (opening spring 2016) on site. While sailing takes place on the most sheltered southern part of the Loch, the harbour marks the starting point of numerous wildlife watching and fishing trips.



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Stranraer Waterfront



Winter

The western shoreline of the loch up to Wig Bay is an important wader and wildfowl feeding area. Look out for feeding eiders, grebes, common scoters and scaups in the sheltered waters. You may also see Slavonian grebes and divers with occasional long-tailed ducks.



Summer

Look out for large numbers of eider ducks 'rafting' up in late summer to start moulting. You may also find small numbers of early returning scaups, great-crested grebes, red-throated divers and goldeneyes.



All year round

At any time, a good number of both waders and wildfowl can be found along this shoreline, especially on the southern shore of the loch at stream outlets where they bathe in the fresh water. Look out for cormorants and shags over the loch.

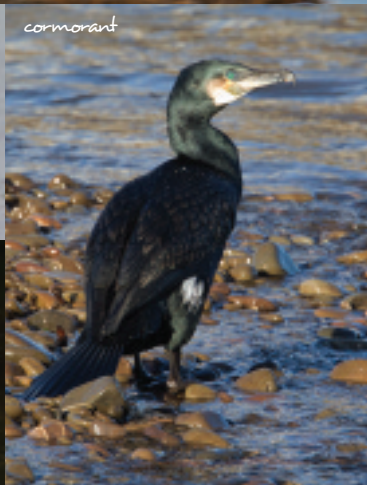
great-crested grebe



eider drake



cormorant



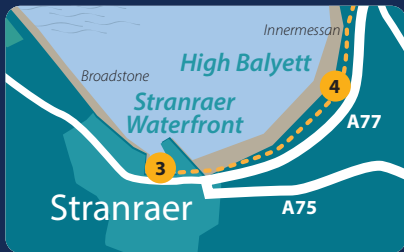
goldeneye drake



High Balyett

The gateway to Stranraer at High Balyett has car parking and good access onto a narrow shell beach with great views up the loch to Ailsa Craig and towards Stranraer to the west.

At low tide the shore turns into a vast expanse providing a great space for walking and riding.



High Balyett



Winter

Large numbers of waders and wildfowl feed and roost on the muddy foreshore with scaups, great-crested grebes, red-throated divers, eiders and goldeneyes being found further out. Long-tailed ducks, red-breasted mergansers and red-throated divers can also be spotted here. At Bishopburn an inflow of fresh water attracts many species, notably a flock of mute swans and a variety of seabirds including occasional Mediterranean and Iceland gulls. Flocks of lapwings, curlews and oystercatchers can be seen roosting in adjacent fields.



Summer

Look out for gulls and terns inshore and on the water. You should also be able to spot oystercatchers, curlews and redshanks along the foreshore, joined by returning ringed plovers, turnstones and dunlins from July onwards.



All year round

Look out for the large numbers of waders and wildfowl feeding on the eel grass (*Zostera*) beds and roosting on the muddy shore. Large numbers of wigeons and nationally important numbers of scaups feed here. Groups of lapwings, curlews and oystercatchers can be seen roosting in adjacent fields. The surrounding fields are also used by twites.

wigeon drake



oystercatchers



goldeneye duck



Cairnryan

The village of Cairnryan lies on the eastern shore of Loch Ryan with easy access to the water and great views over to the Old Pier and the west of the loch. The Loch Ryan coastal path runs alongside the village down to Stranraer. There is a large car park between the ferry ports with good picnicking facilities. The car park has access down to the water for boat use. A footbridge connects the car park to the village.



Cairnryan



Winter

This is a great place to look for red-throated divers and occasional great-northern divers. You may see waders such as oystercatchers, curlews, turnstones and redshanks feeding along the shoreline when the tide is out and eider ducks in rafts towards the middle of the loch.



Summer

The Old Pier at Cairnryan is used as a nest site by 15-20 pairs of black guillemots.



All year round

Eiders and red-breasted mergansers may be spotted roosting in the middle of the channel and towards The Wig.

black guillemot



curlew



redshank



turnstone



red-breasted merganser



Innermessan to Leffnol Point

Look out for the large numbers of waders and wildfowl feeding on the eel grass (*Zostera*) beds and roosting on the muddy shore at Innermessan. Large numbers of wigeons feed here. Further towards Leffnol Point you should see large numbers of curlews and oystercatchers roosting while red-breasted mergansers and red-throated divers often feed closer to shore at high tide. Common scoters and Slavonian grebes can be seen from this point with long-tailed ducks also occurring in small numbers.



redshank



mute swan



Broadstone to Soleburn

The whole length of this muddy shoreline is an important wader and wildfowl feeding area. The sheltered off-shore water is also used by feeding eiders, grebes, tufted ducks, teals and scaups along with Slavonian grebes and divers. Look out into the middle of the loch to see common scoters and great-crested grebes.



common gull



teal drake



ringed plover



Other sites to visit in the Rhins

Mull of Galloway

Why not visit Scotland's most southerly point? Climb to the top of the lighthouse for amazing views over the cliffs, visit the RSPB visitor centre and reserve or just take a walk around the heathland. There is even a café, the Gallie Craig Coffee House, which is open most of the year.

For more information on the Mull of Galloway visit www.mull-of-galloway.co.uk or for bird watching contact RSPB www.rspb.org.uk/mullofgalloway

Portpatrick

Portpatrick is a pretty seaside village set around a small bay. It is a great place to visit to see black guillemots close up as several pairs nest in the harbour wall. This is also the start of the Southern Upland Way and it's only a short walk to the dramatic ruins of Dunskey Castle.

Corsewall Point

The main feature at Corsewall is the lighthouse, now a hotel and restaurant. The headland and rocky shore is particularly good for spotting gannets, storm petrels, skuas and shearwaters, especially during and after north-westerly gales.

Mull of Galloway



Portpatrick



Corsewall Point





Dumfries
& Galloway



Solway Firth
Partnership



giving
nature
a home

For more information on local bird watching contact
the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, West Galloway Branch
www.the-soc.org.uk/whats-on/local-branches-2/west-galloway/

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