

Central Scotland: Insects and birds

31st May–7th June 2021



Chequered Skipper, Altit Mhuic

This was a trip primarily timed and centred around observing **Chequered Skipper**, a species that had previously eluded us during our previous visit to the Fort William area (admittedly at the wrong time of year and in poor weather!). Below I've given grid references in the format they appear in Google Maps, so simply paste them into that platform and it should take you straight to the relevant site.

Accommodation: we stayed in a self-catering apartment (the Summerhouse) at Ardgarry Farm Invergarry. <https://www.ardgarryfarm.co.uk/> (57.06921, -4.82229). This was clean, comfortable and an excellent base for reaching all the relevant sites, while the hosts next door, Kevin and Angie, were very friendly, helpful and knowledgeable about the local area. In short, they come highly recommended. If you want to eat out, within walking distance are two pubs, one of them specialising in Indian-style cuisine.

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Weather: obviously for seeing insects—and Chequered Skipper in particular—it is essential to have sunny weather, so try to arrange this in advance! We were very fortunate and during the whole week only had (overnight) rain on one occasion.

Itinerary: a drive up leaving Cambridge on 28th May, visiting family in Durham (where a short visit to Tunstall Reservoir produced our only **Redstart** and **Pied Flycatchers** of the trip) and Edinburgh. The return trip involved visiting more family—who conveniently lived close to where a **Red-necked Stint** was present on the Blyth Estuary in Northumberland.

31st May: Edinburgh to Invergarry, via Logierait. Glengarry Native Pinewoods in the evening.

1st June: Allt Mhuic Butterfly Reserve, Glen Loy.

2nd June: Glasdrum Wood NNR.

3rd June: Cairns by Loch Loyne, Loch Bran, Loch Ruthven.

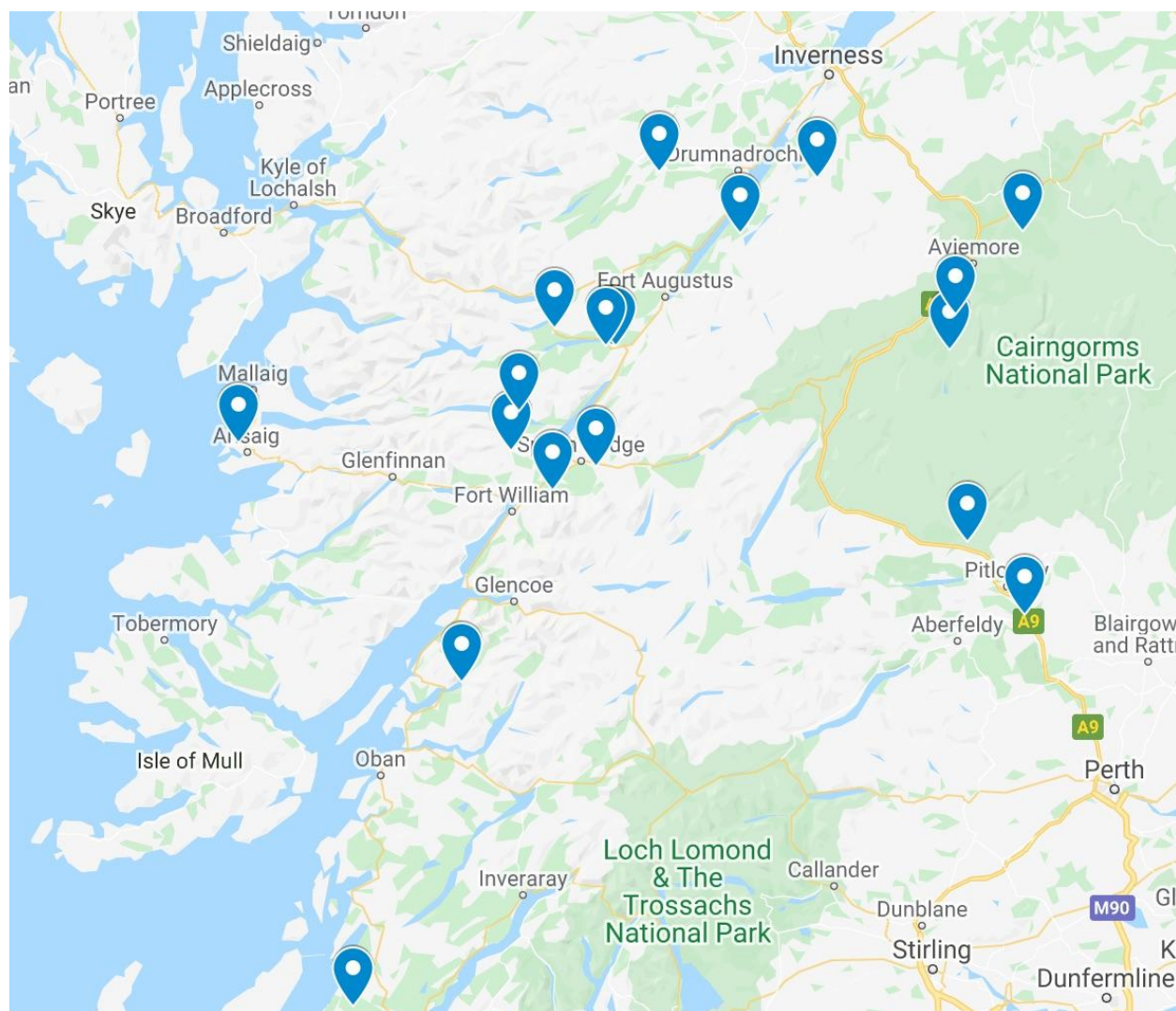
4th June: Carn Ban Mor, RSPB Abernethy Forest Reserve.

5th June: Glengarry Native Pinewoods.

6th June: Arisaig, Glengarry Native Pinewoods.

7th June: Blair Atholl Estate, Blyth Estuary to Cambridge.

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Map showing relative location of sites mentioned below.

Sites

All sites we visited are within a 90 minutes drive of Invergarry apart from Achlean (for climbing Carn Ban Mor), the dragonfly hotspot of Glen Affric and the Beaver reintroduction site (neither of which we visited on this trip).

Logierait (56.66099, -3.68624).

We visited this site en route to Invergarry—it is conveniently just off the A9 and is a well-known stake out for **Northern Damselfly**. Park just off the minor road (56.654606, -3.680807) and follow the track to the forest pool where Northern Damselfly is found in small numbers in vegetation around the edge. We were clearly rather early in the season (31st May) and only found two after an hour or so searching.



Male Northern Damselfly, Logierait

Blair Atholl Estate, Glen Tilt car park (56.77426, -3.84349).

We called in on this site on the way home since we had (to our surprise) not seen **Red Squirrel** anywhere else on our trip. One was quickly found on the short Red Squirrel Trail that loops around the Glen Tilt car park. Several **Wood Warblers** were in song here and a **Spotted Flycatcher** seen. Clearly the Blair Atholl Estate has a number of interesting species and the area would be worthy of more thorough exploration.

Glengarry Native Pinewoods, car park (57.07121, -4.83343).

This was an excellent area of old pine plantations and broadleaved woodland managed by Forestry Commission Scotland within walking distance of our accommodation. If driving, leave the A87, drive across a bridge to the car park (where overnight campervan stays are permitted). The river has **Dipper** on it, **Wood Warbler** is common and the woods apparently hold **Crested Tit**. From the car park, take the track south a short distance then go past the gate on the right (57.069939, -4.833387), almost immediately bear left and follow the winding forestry track. Where a line of telegraph poles crosses it (57.066305, -4.839613), check the poles for **Azure Hawker**, which sunbathe on the pale wood especially in the morning. We saw four perched on the closest pole at this point, and two more on the next pole up the hill at about 09.30 one morning. One evening there was still one Azure Hawker perched on the pole at 22:00. We also

saw a **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** here. Carry on following the track and at (57.070286, -4.851113) you will see a small track on the right, do down here about 30 yards and on your left through the trees you will see a sphagnum pool. During our visit in warm sunshine this pool was absolutely teeming with odonatas—dozens each of **Four-Spotted Chaser** and **Large Red Damselfly**. Also present were at least 5 male **White-faced Darters** and a single **Azure Hawker**. Along the track we saw several piles of **Pine Martin** droppings (said to be a common species in this area), while **Wild Cat** and **Otter** are also said to occur. The only mammal we saw was a **Roe Deer**.



Basking Azure Hawker, Glengarry

Cairns by Loch Loyne, car park (57.096942, -4.995137).

Although there are boggy pools visible on the hillside below the car park, we found them unproductive, perhaps because they were too exposed. Much better was an area of sphagnum bog close to the pine trees (57.094832, -5.000072) reached from the Forestry Commission track that leaves the A87 at (57.096266, -4.995094). Although visiting on a cloudy, rather cool day, we saw several **Four-Spotted Chasers** and two **White-faced Darters** here. **Azure Hawker** has been reported while later in the season **Northern Emerald** is said to occur. Our only **Osprey** of the trip flew past here, while we also had several groups of crossbills fly over.

Allt Mhuic Butterfly Reserve, car park (56.973103, -5.094136).

On the north side of Loch Arkaig, about 45 minutes drive from Invergarry, this reserve is managed jointly by Forestry Commission Scotland and Butterfly Conservation and is an excellent site for **Chequered Skipper**. A short circular walking track starts at the east end of the car park, climbs to a forestry track then descends back to the car park. We saw about a dozen Chequered Skippers around boggy areas on both the uphill and downhill sections. Although we saw several **Argent & Sable** moths here, there were far more numerous at nearby Glen Loy. Although we didn't see them, this is also a noted location for **Azure Hawker**, **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth**, **Pearl-bordered** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**. More information: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/reserves/allt-mhuic-loch-arkaig>

Glen Loy, turning (56.890653, -5.041888).

This is a traditional site for **Checkered Skipper**, although we didn't find them as numerous as at Allt Mhuic. The Glen Loy valley is a particular hotspot for **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth**. Turn off the B8004 (56.890653, -5.041888) and follow the narrow minor road northwest towards Glen Loy. We concentrated on the riverside bogs 3.5 miles along this road, where there were flowering Bluebells growing under the trees. **Green Hairstreak** and **Argent & Sable** were abundant, while we saw about a dozen **Checkered Skippers** and one **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth**, feeding on a Bluebell. In the woodland at the start of the road **Wood Warbler** and **Spotted Flycatcher** were both seen. Apparently Pine Martins are fed at Glenloy Lodge and can be seen by those staying there. More information: <https://glenloywildlife.co.uk/>

Glasdrum National Nature Reserve, car park (56.558342, -5.253891).

Said to be the best butterfly wood in Scotland and about 90 minutes from Invergarry, north of Oban (where **Black Guillemots** are easily seen in the harbour). From the car park, take a short walk uphill to post 1. The boggy track off to the left under the telegraph wires is the main area for **Chequered Skipper** (we saw dozens), also many **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** and a few **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**. **Marsh Fritillary** is said to occur although we saw none (but met a family who told us where they'd seen this species earlier in the day near Arisaig—see below). Most of our time at Glasdrum was spent along the telegraph pole clearing, where a **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** put in an appearance. We did walk the whole loop trail plus a track that leads off at post 2 through the trees into a boggy clearing where more **Chequered Skippers** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** were seen. **Wood Warblers** were common.

Arisaig, limited car parking (56.921423, -5.878340)

Situated on the coast about 80 minutes drive from Invergarry, we visited this site for **Marsh Fritillary**. There is (very) limited parking alongside the sandy bay from where you can walk onto the small boggy peninsular where we soon found 4 Marsh Fritillaries at ca. (56.924702, -5.876602). Also in the area was a **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth** feeding on Bird's-foot Trefoil and two teneral **Keeled Skimmers**.



Marsh Fritillary, Arisaig

Loch Bran, car park (57.238891, -4.474854).

As we were passing we called into Loch Bran, a well-known site for **Brilliant Emerald** although we were clearly too early in the season.

Loch Ruthven RSPB, car park (57.322645, -4.263203).

It is worth calling in here to see **Slavonian Grebes**, several pairs of which breed and can be viewed from the RSPB viewing hides—we saw half a dozen.

Carn Ban Mor, Achlean car park (57.063277, -3.897223).

This is a traditional, relatively easily accessed site to get **Ptarmigan** and **Dotterel** on the high tops. Achlean car park is about 100 minutes drive from Invergarry. From the car park, walk south down the road towards Achlean where the track up Carn Ban Mor is well signposted off to the left. It first goes through some pine plantations where **Crested Tit** is said to occur. It then climbs through open moorland where **Red Grouse** occurs (we didn't see any) then after a col climbs more steeply to where the track to the summit of Carn Ban Mor itself goes off (57.049365, -3.827046). Sarah heard a Dotterel calling from this point, somewhere southwest towards (57.047287, -3.829403) but we were unable to locate it. However, while sheltering behind the summit cairn at Carn Ban Mor, we were delighted when a calling female **Dotterel**

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flew past and landed briefly with some **Golden Plovers** and a **Dunlin**. A search of the scree between Carn Ban Mor and Sgor Gaoith to the north soon produced a male **Ptarmigan** at ca. (57.056357, -3.825825). We returned the same way to the car park. Total walking time ca. seven hours.

RSPB Abernethy Forest Reserve, car park (57.245949, -3.706174).

After Carn Ban Mor we visited the RSPB Abernethy Forest Reserve at Loch Garten where a walk in the pinewoods to Loch Mallachie produced a pair of **Crested Tits** feeding two young.

Other sites not visited by us.

Spean Bridge (56.88782, -4.87759)

The area south of the River Spean just east of Spean Bridge is another traditional **Chequered Skipper** site and is also a good area for **Narrow Bordered Bee Hawk-moth**.

Nevis Range Mountain Gondola (56.85239, -4.9981)

A mountain gondola facilitates access to the high mountain tops, in particular Aonach Beag where **Ptarmigan** occurs and **Dotterel** has been recorded.

Corrimony RSPB (57.33279, -4.70322).

An RSPB reserve for birds typical of the highlands such as **Black Grouse**, **Crested Tit** and **(Scottish) Crossbill**.

Glen Affric (57.273371, -4.961992).

Said to be the best area for dragonflies in Scotland, this area holds **Azure Hawker**, **White-faced Darter**, **Northern Emerald**, **Downy Emerald** and **Brilliant Emerald**.

Feshiebridge, pool at (57.11713, -3.87888).

This small pool just east of Feshiebridge in Speyside is said to be good for **Northern Damselfly**.

Argyll Beaver Centre, car park (56.06084, -5.5513).

A location where reintroduced Beavers can be seen. More information:

<https://www.argyllbeavercentre.co.uk/>

Richard and Sarah Thomas, June 2021

Birds recorded:



Male Pied Flycatcher, Tunstall Reservoir, Durham

Mute Swan

Greylag Goose

Canada Goose

Shelduck

Wigeon

Teal

Mallard

Tufted Duck

Eider

Red-breasted Merganser: *1 Loch Garry*

Goosander

Ptarmigan: *1 Carn Ban Mor*

Pheasant

Little Grebe

Slavonian Grebe: *6 Loch Ruthven*

Cormorant

Shag

Grey Heron

Sparrowhawk

Buzzard: *remarkably few owing to illegal persecution of raptors in Scotland*

Osprey: *1 Cairns by Loch Loyne*

Kestrel

Moorhen

Coot

Oystercatcher

Ringed Plover

Dotterel: *1 female Carn Ban Mor*

Golden Plover: *5 Carn Ban Mor*

Lapwing

Dunlin: *1 Carn Ban Mor*

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Red-necked Stint: *adult Blyth Estuary, Northumberland*
Little Stint: *adult Blyth Estuary, Northumberland*
Snipe
Curlew
Redshank
Common Sandpiper
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Sandwich Tern
Common Tern
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon: *1 "pure bred" looking bird near Mallaig*
Stock Dove
Woodpigeon
Collared Dove
Cuckoo: *Common*
Swift
Green Woodpecker: *Tunstall Reservoir, Durham*
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Skylark
Sand Martin
Swallow
House Martin
Tree Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Grey Wagtail
Pied Wagtail
Dipper
Wren
Dunnock
Robin
Redstart: *male Tunstall Reservoir, Durham*
Whinchat: *female Glen Loy*
Stonechat
Blackbird

Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Sedge Warbler
Blackcap
Garden Warbler
Whitethroat
Wood Warbler: *fairly common*
Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler
Goldcrest
Pied Flycatcher: *pair Tunstall Reservoir, Durham*
Long-tailed Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Crested Tit: *pair feeding young Abernethy*
Coal Tit
Treecreeper
Jay
Magpie
Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow: *pair comprising one and a hybrid with Hooded Crow at our accommodation*
Hooded Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Chaffinch
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Siskin: *abundant*
Redpoll: *common*
Linnet
Crossbill sp. *several parties*
Bullfinch
Yellowhammer

Odonata recorded:



Keeled Skimmer, Arisaig

Northern Damselfly: 2 *Logierait*
Azure Damselfly
Common Blue Damselfly
Blue-tailed Damselfly
Large Red Damselfly
Azure Hawker: 7 *Glengarry Pinewoods*

Golden-ringed Dragonfly: 1 *Glengarry Pinewoods*, 1 *Glasdrum Wood*
White-faced Darter: 5 *Glengarry Pinewoods*,
2 *Cairns by Loch Loyne*
Four-spotted Chaser
Keeled Skimmer: 2 *Arisaig*

Butterflies and moths:



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Glasdrum Wood

Chequered Skipper: *Allt Mhuic, Glen Loy, Glasdrum Wood*

Green Hairstreak: *Allt Mhuic, Glen Loy, Arisaig*

Green-veined White

Marsh Fritillary: *Arisaig*

Orange-tip

Peacock

Pearl-bordered Fritillary: *Glasdrum Wood*

Small Copper

Small Heath

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary: *Glasdrum*

Speckled Wood: *Glasdrum Wood*

(subspecies *oblita*)

Argent & Sable

Barred Umber

Brown Silverline

Clouded Buff: *Arisaig*

Clouded Silver

Common Heath

Cream Wave

Mother Shipton

Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth: *Glen Loy, Arisaig*

Peacock Moth: *Glengarry*

Small Purple-barred

Speckled Yellow