

## Running for Whinchats

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This autumn I undertook the challenge of running a marathon and 45 miles in a weekend (including another marathon) to raise money for whinchats. After 3 months of training I travelled up to Inverness for my first marathon - the Loch Ness marathon. The day of the marathon dawned – heavy rain! I sat through an hour bus ride deep into the Scottish hills hoping the weather would change. This picture is from the wait at the start line. Luckily I had bought some old jumpers from a charity shop to keep warm but I definitely did have slight reservations at this point!



However as soon as the race started and we dropped down from the hills the weather brightened up. The course was absolutely stunning and I met some really interesting and friendly people on the route. This is what I like about marathons, I don't think there are many other events where you can make friends and swap stories on route. In the end I finished the marathon 40 minutes faster than my previous best in 3 hours 45 minutes and loved every minute of it- even the long hill at mile 18!



So just the 45 miles to go.....The day after Loch Ness I found I could hardly walk due to stiff legs and started having reservations about the next challenge of running 20 miles the day after a marathon! I had about a month to prepare. Luckily I found a local ultra-running group to train with, with their support I ran 200 miles that month including several back to back long runs.



Arriving at the start of the Norfolk coastal marathon the weather and scenery were very different to Loch Ness, it was sunny but cold with incredibly strong winds. This marathon was much smaller than Loch Ness with only 100 runners instead of 2000. It also was based almost entirely off road going through shingle, woodland paths, sand dunes and board walks. This marathon was really hard going, mainly due to the wind. There were lots of very exposed sections and as the route followed the coast west the entire way we were fighting against the wind the whole way! The course was also a mile longer at 27.2 miles and I'd run an extra 1.6 miles at the start from my B and B in Blakeney to the course start line. By the time I reached the finish line at 4 hours and 45 minutes, an hour slower than my Loch Ness time, I was telling my husband that this was it for ultra-running- no more after this weekend (this resolution didn't last long- I did a 50K ultra 2 weeks later...).



I got up the next day ready to do my final miles to finish the coastal path and make it up to 45 miles in a weekend. There was still a really strong wind this morning but this time I was running east to finish off the coastal path so I had the wind behind me. Despite the marathon the day before my legs felt fine and I actually really enjoyed the run far more than I'd enjoyed the marathon the day before. The path took me through shingle beaches, salt marshes and small coastal villages. By the time I arrived in Cromer- my final destination I didn't want to stop! So I did a few more loops of the village and ended up running 50 miles in the weekend rather than 45.



Overall I really enjoyed my autumn running challenge. **I got to see some beautiful areas of the country and raised £913.62 for whinchats!** This money is going to pay for some geo-locators to go on a Scottish whinchat population so we can understand more about the pathways whinchats use for migration and fill some of our current knowledge gaps. It was also great to meet Grégoire Schau from Switzerland who did his bachelor degree on whinchats and by a bizarre coincidence was also running the Loch Ness marathon, it just goes to show- whinchats are awesome!

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