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The Eider



The Eider no. 102 – December 2012

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Cover photo – Waxwing in Lochgilphead, by Jim Dickson.

Editorial

Last winter will be remembered as the year of the White-winged Gull invasion, this autumn just passed may well be referred to as the autumn of the Nearctic Waders. Though the name isn't as snappy, and the number of birds wasn't as large, nevertheless an impressive influx of American waders turned up over the autumn. Argyll didn't miss out either, with Tìree picking up some nice birds, including a juv. Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and American Golden Plover.

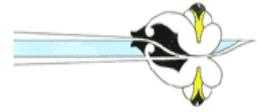
Argyll also enjoyed more additions to its species list this autumn: Citrine Wagtail and Buff-bellied Pipit were added, after being found on the same day, 27th of Sept., on Tìree. For more details on this excellent day for birding in Argyll, see the Recent Reports section of this issue.

Thanks as always go to everyone who submitted articles, photographs or advice, for what is only my second issue as editor... I think I'll get the hang of it!

Stuart Crutchfield, editor.



ARGYLL BIRD CLUB
Saturday 16th March 2013
Provisional SPRING MEETING
PROGRAMME



Royal Marine Hotel, Hunters Quay, Dunoon

- 0930 **Doors** open and coffee/tea
- 0950 - 1000 Welcome & introduction
- 1000 - 1030 **Recent birds sightings and photographs** - Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder
- 1030 -1100 **Bute Bird Atlas - Ron Forrester**
- 1100 - 1130 Coffee/tea
- 1130 - 1200 **Yellowhammers** - Dawn Thomson, Glasgow University
- 1200 - 1240 **Seabird tracking on your doorstep: The secret lives of Argyll seabirds** - *Tessa Cole, RSPB*
- 1240 - 1350 Lunch (available in the hotel)
- 1350 - 1420 **Gannets/Marine Renewables** - James Grecian, Glasgow University
- 1420 - 1500 **The Langholm Raptor Study** – Cat Barlow
- 1500 - 1530 Tea/coffee
- 1530 - 1600 **Duck Fishing** – Bernie Zonfrillo
- 1600 - 1615 Raffle and end of meeting

Forthcoming ABC Field Trips

Saturday, 26th January 2013 – Ormsary, led by Stuart Crutchfield.

Saturday, 23rd February 2013 – Bute, led by Ian Hopkins.

ABC Loch Gilp, Add Estuary & Ulva Field Trip 2nd December 2012

A field trip in winter is always a bit of a gamble weather wise and with the possibility of some snow during a rather cold spell there was some concern that our birding would be adversely affected. As it turned out on the day however we need not have worried as we enjoyed lovely light, little wind and tolerable cold.....although the ten participants were all suitably well 'layered'.

We met at 10 am at the Corran Car Park where the Cuilarstich Burn flows into Loch Gilp at Lochgilphead. I arrived about half an hour earlier with the idea of trying to locate any Waxwing in the area to show to the group and after a few minutes search found two birds high up in trees on the road up to the Mid-Argyll Hospital....probably not the best place for several cars to stop on the bendy hill! As we all met and made our introductions and just about to explain the route for the day a dozen or so Waxwing flew past us just a few feet over our heads! I was somewhat relieved that we had started with a quality species and could avoid a tricky search for them elsewhere. Stuart Crutchfield kindly offered to keep the days tally of species seen and Waxwing was logged as No. 1.

With scopes at the ready we headed from the Corran car park towards the front green of Lochgilphead to look for waders and gulls. A couple of minutes later a Kingfisher zoomed past us perched at the side of the river, crossed the river and then headed up a small creek..... another quality bird within a short space of time. There was now a distinct possibility of making it three in a row as Bill Allan saw an adult Mediterranean Gull at the head of the loch just the previous afternoon. We moved on in hope and checked out the gulls and waders around the river and mud. Someone shouted out 'geese flying up the loch' however this was quickly rectified to Goosander....a nice tight group of six females which flew right over our heads and then inland. Various species of wader were pointed out including a nice tight flock of Red Knot, although not very red at this time of year! Several Bar-tailed Godwit, Dunlin and Ringed Plover were on the mud and Wigeon and Goldeneye on the river. With enthusiasm running high a Greenshank was claimed but reassigned as a Curlew! Other species around us included Rooks, Jackdaws, Starlings, Chaffinch, Blue Tit, Robins, Dunnock and further sightings of the Kingfisher. Four species of gull were seen but alas no Mediterranean.....at least for now!

We moved on courtesy of a bit of car sharing to Ardrishaig on the west side of Loch Gilp. Here we added more Goldeneye, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Shag, Black Guillemot and Grey Heron. Moving further round past Ardrishaig we stopped to get views down Loch Fyne and across to Otter Ferry. Despite the calm sea it appeared very quiet bird wise and it was suspected the expected divers were probably feeding well out at sea, however with a bit of patience single Black-throated and Great Northern were seen as well as two Red-throated and a Razorbill appeared about 50 metres in front of us. Heading back towards Lochgilphead a few Turnstone were seen at a favoured spot in front of the West Coast Motors depot but more unusual was Tom Callan's Kingfisher sighting, very likely a different bird from the earlier one over a mile

away. As Tom tried to get a photo it flew off.....as they do!

We then all headed to the Moine Mhor area and en route we added Common Buzzard, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Meadow Pipit and Stonechat. At Crinan Ferry we had a good look at the Add Estuary however we were looking into the light although the usual Wigeon flock was reasonably close. To add in a bit of woodland birding we moved round to Duntrune and the gardens there which are maintained by the Malcolm family. Surprisingly most of the group had never been there before and were impressed with this little hidden gem. Within minutes we had Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldcrest and various tit species. We then did a short loop around Barsloisnoch looking for geese and saw Canadas and Greylag but not the traditional wintering Greenland White-fronts and is feared that this dwindling flock may have disappeared from this area. At the Islandadd bridge we added Eurasian Teal with a flock of about 100 and also a single Little Grebe. A drake Goosander was busily feeding on the river.

Our next venue was the Ulva Puddle south of Tayvallich where there were small numbers of Mute and Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Redshank and a single Shelduck. On the way we had passed bird club member Morag Rea who told Tom she had just seen a Greenshank however it appeared to have moved on by the time we looked for it. John and Helen Anderson had to leave us at this point and head back to Connel. At the causeway leading onto the Isle of Danna we got good views of a rather nervous flock of about 40 Greenland White-fronted Geese however never saw the Grey Plover that has been in this part of Loch na Cille, a regular haunt of this species. With the light starting to fade slightly we decided to make tracks back to Lochgilphead and try for the icing on the cake in the form of Mediterranean Gull. I have found over the last few winters that often the best time to see this species is late afternoon when a good number of Black-headed Gulls come into the loch to roost after feeding out in Loch Fyne.

We assembled at the 'Tesco' corner of Loch Gilp with scopes lined up, much to the bemusement of passers-by and proceeded to look through the accumulating gulls resting on the water. With a bit of effort the adult Mediterranean Gull was found and shown to the group, although to fully appreciate this species it is best seen in flight, nevertheless a great way to end a successful trip with a tally of 63 species. Many thanks to all who ventured out.

Jim Dickson

ARGYLL BIRD CLUB – Field Trip Report

Ledaig Point, 27 October 2012

It was a cold crisp morning when five members met near Connel Bridge on the morning of Saturday 27 October. Several Shag could be seen from the bridge and a couple of Cormorants were on the reef in Loch Etive. The first of the day's many Grey Herons was fishing from the shore of the loch and a few Wigeon could be seen off the mouth of the Lusragan Burn. Very few of the bridge's resident Jackdaws and Feral Pigeons were around, though both species made it onto the day's list along with a Bullfinch and some Redwings and Blackbirds feeding in a Rowan tree. We walked down the old road through the woodland to the loch side, disturbing

Chaffinches as our footsteps swished through the newly fallen leaves. The tide was still ebbing from Loch Etive although it would soon be at its lowest out in Ardmucknish Bay, where the spit at Ledaig Point was ominously long. A Buzzard was being mobbed by a couple of Hoodies as we emerged onto the shore and walked towards the old ferry slip. Starlings and House Sparrows were found near the houses in North Connel followed by a Dabchick close to the shore by the airfield. Numerous Dunnocks and Robins were dodging about in the gorse bushes across the end of the airfield but the airfield itself produced only a couple of Hoodies. Three Greenfinches flew off as we approached the end of the bushes at the point. My worst fears about the tide were confirmed as we reached the corner of the airfield fence - the water's edge was nearly out of sight. However, that meant that the furthest point of the spit was sufficiently far from the dog-walkers (and birdwatchers) for a couple of White-tailed Eagles to be loafing there. Curlew and Oystercatcher could be seen on the exposed shore and a small group of Ringed Plover was eventually picked out. Two Red-breasted Mergansers were fishing the shallows while small groups of Eider were diving further out in the bay. As the cloud thickened over Mull and Morvern we returned through North Connel, adding a Collared Dove to the list as we went, and set off for Dunstaffnage Bay.

The woodland at Dunbeg, normally alive with small birds, was partially cleared by a dog-walker just as we were about to enter. Nevertheless, Goldfinch, Song Thrush and Wren were added to the list, soon followed by Blue and Coal Tits. A few thrushes flew quickly across the open ground between the trees – too quickly for definite identification. Acres of mud in Dunstaffnage Bay appeared to be yielding only a few more Grey Herons, Oystercatcher and Curlew until a small group of sleeping Wigeon were spotted. Black-headed Gull was also added to the list here alongside the Common, Herring and Greater Black-backed Gulls seen earlier. A Buzzard flew past as we returned from the shore and a Great Tit was found in the woods.

A short stop in the car park of Poppies Garden Centre, just east of the marina, revealed two unusually pale Buzzards perched on rocks on the promontory to the east of the bay. Very few waders were present here as the winkle pickers had been active on the foreshore at low tide while we had been at Ledaig Point.

From the south of Ardmucknish Bay we now travelled round to the northwest corner and viewed the bay from the rocky ridge at the west end of Tralee Beach. A group of Red-breasted Mergansers were diving just offshore, but one of the birds which looked at first glance to be a Shag turned out, on closer scrutiny, not to be a Shag. Twenty minutes later there was still no agreement as to what it was, although another one had by now been found even further out into the bay. One of the party said it was a Red-throated Diver, one said it was a Great Crested Grebe, one couldn't make his mind up and two wouldn't comment! Leaving the mystery bird, and a Tystie which had appeared from nowhere, we walked round the point and across to An Sailean, the muddy creek to the west of Tralee, passing a group of Mallard asleep on the seaweed. A Raven croaked from across the water near Lochnell House and a Pheasant could be heard in the woods. Fortunately, the tidal conditions were favourable and there was a good mix of water and mud for the birds to use. Oystercatcher and Curlew were the first waders to be seen, soon followed by three Redshank. As we walked up the shore of An Sailean we could hear the noise of many birds coming from the woodland which covers Ard Bhatan. Eventually a

large flock of thrushes, mainly Redwing, flew up out of the woods and broke up, some birds going across to the woodland on the other side of the creek, some returning whence they had come. As we approached the ford across An Sailean a Greenshank showed itself near a group of Black-headed Gulls and a couple of Mistle Thrushes perched obligingly on the tops of some spruce trees. Returning to Tralee we passed a hen Pheasant feeding from spilt seed below a garden bird feeder before coming across two Robins locked in physical combat on the road. After much rolling about they eventually separated, the victor chasing the vanquished down the road and over a hedge. Returning to the cars as the clouds thickened ominously we passed under the local rookery, but only one bird was seen.

Although we had had a couple of short, light showers earlier in the afternoon the real rain held off until after we had set off for home after an enjoyable, if rather quiet, day's birding.

Species List

Little Grebe, Great Cormorant, European Shag, Grey Heron, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Common Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, White-tailed Eagle, Common Buzzard, Common Pheasant, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Dunnock, Robin, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Western Jackdaw Rook, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Common Starling, House Sparrow, Common Chaffinch Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Greenshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Feral Pigeon, Woodpigeon Collared Dove, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Wren.

Mike Harrison.

ARGYLL BIRD CLUB – Field Trip Report

Sea-watching from the Islay Ferry, 29 September 2012

Heavy showers were still sweeping across North Argyll as I set out for Kennacraig but the forecast was for them to die away and for the wind to ease through the day. The waters of West Loch Tarbert at midday indicated that the easing had still some way to go. Sure enough, by the time ten ABC members had boarded *MV Finlaggan* and were awaiting departure there was hardly a whitecap to be seen on the loch and the showers had all passed. Several gull species and a Tystie were seen around Kennacraig along with Oystercatcher and Curlew on the mudflats and a Robin in the woods. As the boat set off a Cormorant identified itself by flying high over the loch while a Shag continued diving beneath the surface. Some ducks could be seen close inshore; one group were probably Wigeon but others were just beyond binocular range. Several Grey Herons were feeding along the north shore and a group of five Common Scoter were found towards the south shore near the entrance to the loch. Seals were hauled out on the sands between the skerries off Eilean Traighe.

Once clear of West Loch Tarbert the ferry was sailing almost directly into the full force of the wind and members dodged into various nooks and crannies around the deck to get some shelter. There seemed to be very few birds about as we made our way towards the Sound of Islay and the sea state made spotting those that were present quite difficult as the eye was constantly drawn to the white foam of breaking waves. The ferry was remarkably smooth with passengers subject to only a slight pitch and roll. A few Guillemots and Eider were seen as was a single Razorbill and a couple of Tysties in their winter plumage. The first Gannet appeared about halfway across. A fishing vessel in the sheltered water south of Jura had several Gannets and gulls in close attendance and a trail of well-fed birds sitting on the water marking its recent course. There were probably 20-30 Gannets there and somewhat more gulls, mainly Greater Black-backed but also some Herring Gulls. Into the Sound of Islay and the white waters were generated by reefs rather than the wind. Shags, and a couple of Cormorants, lined up shoulder to shoulder on the fast-disappearing reef near Am Fraoch Eilean. Just as a small group of Canada Geese were seen on Glas Eilean a large raptor was spotted over the Jura shore ahead of the boat. Good views were obtained of this juvenile White-tailed Eagle as it glided over the moorland, pursued for a while by a male Hen Harrier, before it landed amongst the heather. A pair of Mute Swans with a single cygnet were also seen close to the shore before we transferred to the Islay side of the boat to check whether there were any White-tailed Eagles in the same pine tree as last year. Alas, there were not but, after most of us had given up checking the rest of the woodland, one eagle-eyed member did find a single adult perched in a pine tree before it was lost from view as the ferry berthed at Port Askaig.

A few gulls were hanging around the harbour and a Buzzard flew out of the trees to the north as we waited for the ferry to depart for the return journey. Once clear of the berth all eyes were on the woodland to the south of Port Askaig and, sure enough, the Eagle was still there, facing out towards the ferry and very difficult to see. The Jura side of the Sound of Islay seems to be more favoured by the birds and a Red-throated Diver was soon identified here together with a Raven which flew across to Glas Eilean. With the wind now astern we moved from the upper deck to the forward deck below the bridge and had a very pleasant run back to Kennacraig. The fishing vessel had taken its attendant birds further north into the Sound of Jura and hardly any birds were seen until we were to the north of Gigha when a couple of Guillemots were nearly run down by the boat. A Razorbill flew past, closely followed by, rather unexpectedly, a Golden Plover. A short burst of afternoon sunshine brought a Kittiwake and a couple of Tysties, followed by a single Petrel which, unfortunately, was lost from view before it could be identified. A Great Northern Diver and a small group of Eider marked our approach to the sheltered waters of West Loch Tarbert.

After a gentle passage up the loch, observing more or less the same birds as on the outward passage, we were greeted at Kennacraig by a Rock Pipit which flew up from the terminal area as the ferry approached her berth. Whilst the sea certainly had not been teeming with birds we had had an interesting and enjoyable day.

Species List

Red-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Petrel Sp., Northern Gannet, Great Cormorant
European Shag, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Greater Canada Goose, Eurasian Wigeon

Common Eider, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, White-tailed Eagle
Hen Harrier, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Oystercatcher, European Golden Plover
Eurasian Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Guillemot, Razorbill
Black Guillemot, Rock Pipit, Robin, Hooded Crow, Common Raven.

Mike Harrison

BTO Winter Thrush Survey

Data pours in from winter walks, but not much from Argyll, as yet.

Despite some teething problems with the online data recording, and a slow arrival of thrushes from the Continent in most parts of the country, the response of volunteers to the Winter Thrushes Survey has been phenomenal! Across the UK:

- 1,503 people have chosen squares (583 people more than one square)
- 504 visits were made to 456 squares in September
- 1,331 visits were made to 946 squares in October
- Data entered so far cover around 37,250 thrushes, 26,950 Starlings and 5,650 other birds

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE WINTER THRUSH SURVEY

WHEN Mid September 2012 to Early Aril 2013 and again in 2013/14.

WHERE Anywhere in the UK where thrushes are likely to occur.

BIRD SPECIES All 6 thrushes:

Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Fieldfare, Redwing, Ring Ouzel
and supplementary information on rarer thrushes, Waxwing and Starling.

HABITAT The presence/absence of key habitats and winter foods will be recorded using simple tick-boxes and drop-down menus.

WHO Argyll organiser is Nigel Scriven: njscriven@gmail.com 01369840606

HOW Choose your own 1 kilometre square, or opt for a 'core' square
Choose your own route to take round the main habitats, between 1.5 to 3 km
(1 to 2 miles), taking 1 to 2 hours, during mid to late morning.

HOW OFTEN Once a month is ideal (but anything you can do is better than nothing).

FIND OUT MORE www.bto.org/winter-thrushes-survey or ask Nigel Scriven

If you're not sure, please give it a go. If you're not happy about your results, don't worry. Negative results are useful too. You will also gain the confidence to repeat it another time.

Gannet Foraging Focus

Such is the development of technology that now it is possible to know where individual gannets go and what they do when you can't see them out at sea. The reason this has become so important is that the EU directives now require that 20% of its energy must come from renewable sources by 2020. The pressure is on for governments to develop offshore tidal, wave and wind generation. Environmental Impact Assessments are also required, but until recently it was almost a stab in the dark trying to predict what the impacts might be on seabirds when out of sight of land.

A team of researchers from Plymouth University followed Gannets from Grassholm in west Wales using GPS trackers and analysis of blood and feathers to find out where they went and what they ate. They found that outside the breeding season there was no difference between males and females or young and older birds. But during breeding, females with young travel much further than the males, who spend more time defending the nest. Curiously the females longer journeys only spend a little more time away despite their longer journeys. Examining the ratios of stable isotopes revealed some secrets of their diets too. Males eat more whitefish than females. Since these fish live deeper than a Gannet's dive, it is thought they are likely to be fishing boat discards.

Another team of scientists, from Liverpool University, used GPS tags to follow Gannets from Les Etacs in the Channel Islands. Their Gannets foraged in three different territorial waters, and their combined home ranges included 9 potential offshore renewable developments.

Meanwhile an RSPB team have been using satellite tags on Gannets at Bempton Cliffs in Yorkshire to see where in the North Sea these birds forage. For the 14 birds tagged in July 2010, most trips were within 50 – 100 km of the colony. Their trips took them into several of the wind energy development area in the southern North Sea.

The concern in all these studies is how wind turbines at sea will affect seabirds. These could be

1. Disturbance displacement, leading to effective habitat loss
2. Collision mortality
3. Habitat change influencing prey availability
4. Barriers to movement potentially increasing flight energy demands.

5. Combinations of the above leading to cumulative effects.

Nigel Scriven

The FAME Seabird Project

The Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment (FAME) project, which in the UK, monitors and tracks 5 species (shag, kittiwake, fulmar, razorbill and guillemot) is an attempt to identify crucial at-sea locations where birds feed to ensure they are adequately protected.

Key objectives of the FAME project are:

- To establish a transnational evidence base to inform decisions on the Atlantic marine environment
- To make specific recommendations on designating and managing Marine Protected Areas
- To communicate effectively with decision makers, scientists, NGOs, marine professionals and the public about the importance of the Atlantic marine environment and role they can play in protecting it.

Initial results have revealed that the birds travel considerably greater distances than had been anticipated. The implications for designating Marine Protected Areas are still being puzzled over.

The Argyll interest is from the birds that have been tagged on Colonsay: Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake and Shag. This will be the focus of a talk by Tessa Cole at the next Bird Club meeting on March 16 in Dunoon.

For more information from the web:
www.fameproject.eu

Nigel Scriven

Eagle Competition Question Resolved?

When White-tailed Eagles were re-introduced to Scotland, there was speculation whether they would eventually displace Golden Eagles from coastal ranges by direct competition. It was thought this competition would most likely be for food and nest sites. In Norway it was found that Golden Eagles were behaviourally dominant where the species came together at carrion food resources. Initial studies soon after the reintroduction of white-tailed eagles suggested that they used a similar, and scarce, food resource. On this basis it wasn't difficult to speculate that Golden Eagles might be displaced.

However more recent studies have shown the species tend to be segregated by habitat, which

would mitigate for the overlap in food resources. If there is direct competition, it would be expected that one species would in time exclude the other.

Collecting data from across the range of co-existing eagles, Whitfield *et al*¹ tested out these ideas by looking at distant and neighbouring pairs to relate their diets and their distance apart. They examined whether the diet overlap was less in close proximity species pairs compared to more distant species pairs. This new dietary data from Mull and Skye, collected between 1992 and 2002, has enabled a re-assessment of the evidence for competition, and its implications for conservation. Regurgitated pellets and prey remains at nests were gathered. Large items that would still be eaten were documented but left at the nest, so as not to deprive the nestlings of food. The 106 classes of food items included birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and cephalopod.

The results showed that the breeding season diet of the two species were substantially different. Golden Eagles were more likely to take game birds, rabbits and hares, and other non-ungulate mammals. White-tailed eagles were more likely to take seabirds (mainly Fulmars but also gulls and auks), waterfowl and waders, sheep and fish. This means that in general Goldies take prey from higher terrestrial altitudes, while White-tails feed more on aquatic species or from low altitude with some connection with water. The previous observation of the shared habit of feeding on sheep is likely to involve altitudinal segregation, as sheep are found at all altitudes in the study areas.

There are examples of Golden Eagles nesting at low altitudes, where they tended to specialise on seabirds, or took a broad range of prey. When nesting close to White-tailed Eagles and the diet does substantially overlap, they are sharing an abundant food source, and competition is not an issue.

Pity the poor seabirds!

Nigel Scriven

¹ D. Philip Whitfield, Mick Marquiss, Robin Reid, Justin Grant, Ruth Tingay & Richard J. Evans (2012): Breeding season diets of sympatric White-tailed Eagles and Golden Eagles in Scotland: no evidence for competitive effects, *Bird Study*, DOI:10.1080/00063657.2012.742997

Photographic record of NE Greenland Sanderling chick re-found on Mull.

Whilst photographing a group of juvenile Sanderling at Langamull, Mull, on 4th September 2012, I noticed one had four colour-rings and a colour tag on its legs. It was present until at least the 7th of September. I later found out this bird was ringed as a chick on 27 July 2012 at Hochstetter Forland, NE Greenland. Incredibly Jeroen Reneerkens and team of the University of Groningen who ringed the bird as part of the Sanderling Project of the International Wader Study Group (IWSG) also photographed the very same bird.

Birds of Argyll (Rheinallt et al. 2007) states 'the origin of our passage and wintering populations is still the subject of debate (Migration Atlas). Nevertheless, it seems probable that many

Sanderlings seen in Argyll during autumn have come from Greenland via Iceland, the same route being followed in reverse in spring.' Indeed, there is no evidence for a Siberian origin of British wintering Sanderling (Reneerkens et al. 2009).

Since this was written Jeroen Reneerkens and his collaborators have been colour ringing Sanderlings in NE Greenland. Initially 105 adult and 22 chicks were colour ringed in the breeding seasons of 2007 & 2008. Re-sightings confirmed that Britain is an important stop over site to their southerly wintering grounds in Namibia and Mauritania (Reneerkens 2009), but also Sanderlings of the wintering populations of mainland Europe (especially France and Portugal) stop in Britain on their way to and from the Greenlandic breeding grounds (Jeroen Reneerkens in litt. Sept 2012). Since the initial ringing, the Sanderling Project <http://www.waderstudygroup.org/res/project/sanderling.php> was set up and, lead by Jeroen Reneerkens, has continued the colour-ringing at various sites on the flyway.

John Bowler (in litt. Sept 2012) has records of 'over 100 colour-ringed birds on Tiree over the last 4 years including birds ringed in Greenland, Iceland, Orkney, Jersey, Chichester Harbour, Portugal, Mauritania and Ghana' with one of the Tiree birds re-sighted at The Wash. Later John wrote 'we have also had one bird that had been ringed in Poland but it was still felt to be a Greenland breeding bird i.e. all of the birds we've seen on Tiree appear to breed in Greenland/Arctic Canada rather than Siberia. We see largest numbers of ringed birds on their way north in May/early June, with smaller numbers in August/September plus up to six or so regulars which winter annually on the island. At passage times, we often see the same bird on the same beach at more or less the same date each year! Many birds passing through in May are then seen staging a few days later in SW Iceland, although in May 2012 it seems northerly winds caused them to hang back in the Hebrides for longer and then many apparently headed straight to Greenland without visiting Iceland'.

The Mull bird seems insignificant in comparison to these Tiree records but not only are the dual photographs of interest but it is the future re-sightings of all these individual birds which will shed more light on the migration pattern of Sanderlings. This summer seems to have been a very productive breeding season for Sanderlings, as more juveniles than in previous years have been reported on various locations (Jeroen Reneerkens in litt. Sept 2012).

Anand Prasad

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Sanderlings using African–Eurasian flyways: a review of current knowledge: Reneerkens, J., Benhoussa, A., Boland, H., Collier, M., Grond, K., Günther, K., Hallgrimsson, G.T., Hansen, J., Meissner, W., de Meulenaer, B., Ntiamoa-Baidu, Y., Piersma, T., Poot, M., van Roomen, M., Summers, R.W., Tomkovich, P.S. & Underhill, L.G. (2009). Wader Study Group Bull. 116(1): 2–20.



juvenile Sanderling at Langamull, Mull, on 4th September 2012. Photo Anand Prasad.



The same Sanderling, as a chick, ringed on 27 July 2012 at Hochstetter Forland, NE Greenland. Photo Jeroen Reneerkens.

Recent Reports (September – November 2012)

from Paul Daw

(Tel. 01546 886260)

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

NEW SPECIES FOR THE ARGYLL LIST

Melodious Warbler: at approx. 13:30 on 8 June 2012 a singing male was found at Totronald garden, Coll by Ian Lycett. It became increasingly elusive as the afternoon wore on and had disappeared by the following day. Sadly it was not possible to obtain good photographs but a detailed description was obtained and this has just been accepted by SBRC – a first for Argyll.

Citrine Wagtail: On 27 September 2012 Jim Dickson was on Tiree when he was approached by visiting birder Natalie Weldon. She was keen to find someone to confirm that a bird she had seen and photographed earlier at Loch a 'Phuill was a Citrine Wagtail as she had never seen one before - although she was sure it was not an *alba* wagtail. She had obviously asked the right person (!): as soon as Jim looked at the images she had taken he was able to confirm the bird as a first winter Citrine Wagtail - a first record for Tiree and Argyll. The broad pale supercilium that wraps around the ear coverts is characteristic of this species and distinguishes it from Yellow Wagtails of the same age. They re-found the bird later in the afternoon at the mouth of the little river running into the loch and Jim managed a few photos. Later on John Bowler arrived and also saw the bird.



Photo © Natalie Weldon



Photo © Jim Dickson

They saw it again on the next day and the day after but after that it appeared to have moved on.

Buff-bellied Pipit: also on 27 September 2012 Jim Dickson was checking through a flock of Meadow Pipits at Ruaig (Tiree) when he came across 'something completely different'! After a brief view it flew off but Jim was pretty sure it had been a Buff-bellied Pipit. After a 20 minute search he was very relieved to find it again at the opposite end of the field. Having got closer and obtained some good photos he was sure that it was indeed a Buff-bellied Pipit. Being careful not to disturb the bird any further he contacted John Bowler and Natalie Welden the only other birder on the island at this time. They soon arrived and were able to watch the pipit for 30 minutes or more before it flew away to another field and they lost sight of it. Two firsts for Argyll (and Tiree) in one day! It was not seen again.



Photos © Jim Dickson

The two species on Tiree are rarities considered by BBRC and detailed descriptions with photographs have been submitted for consideration. There is a good chance they will both be accepted and together with the Melodious Warbler will bring the new total of species recorded in Argyll to 342. It's getting to the stage where if Tiree in autumn *didn't* produce a new species for

the county we'd be disappointed!

WILDFOWL (and GAMEBIRDS):

Whooper Swan: all the 45 birds at The Puddle, Loch Sween on 24 November were adults (Paul Daw) and 164 (incl. 17 juveniles) were at Sunderland Farm, Islay on 19 October (per I. & M. Brooke).

Lesser Canada Goose: every so often small Canada Geese appear in Argyll, often among flocks of other species like Barnacle Geese and Greenland White-fronted Geese. These are presumed to be 'genuine' migrant birds from North America although there are currently no accepted records for Argyll as the whole question of their identity is still under review by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) and by the British Ornithologists' Union's Records Committee (BOURC), who maintain the official list of birds recorded in Britain. To this end they are anxious to collect as many detailed descriptions (and photographs) of birds that might qualify. The whole question of Canada Goose taxonomy is too complex to go into here (and probably best left to the specialists!) but among the many races that have been identified in North America one group (comprising the smaller races) has for some time now been considered a separate species: Lesser Canada Goose *Branta hutchinsii*. The majority are found on the islands but a good candidate was found by John Nadin on 1-2 November 2012 in a field just north of the track to Point Sands holiday-park, close to Rhunahaorine Point, Kintyre. It was with two large Greater Canada Geese, and 400 or more Greenland White-fronted Geese.



Note the small size compared to the Greylag Goose in the first photo and the two Greater Canada Geese in the second.

Greylag Goose: 520 were at Gortan, Islay on 20 October (Peter Roberts) and at least 150 were SW of the village on Iona on 24 November (Tom Callan).

Snow Goose: two were with Greylags on Islay during September-October (per I. & M. Brooke).

Barnacle Goose: a total of 195 birds were counted at Barsloisnoch (Moine Mhor), Mid-Argyll on 24 October (Jim Dickson). The count at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 7 October found 25,125 birds (per I. & M. Brooke).

Pale-bellied Brent Goose: a total of 920 were at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 7 September (per Jim Dickson).

Red-breasted Goose: one with Barnacle Geese near Loch Gorm, Islay on 30 October was our second Red-breasted Goose this year (Jim Dickson).



Photo © Jim Dickson

Common Pochard: four pairs (8 birds) were on the Powder Dam lake, Cowal on 25 October. An unusual number for Argyll these days (Tom Callan).

Long-tailed Duck: two females in Loch Gilp off Ardrishaig on 31 October were unusual here (Jim Dickson).



Photo © Jim Dickson

A female off Otter Ferry offshore at Killail on 15 November was possibly one of the above (Tom Callan). And 13 were in Loch Indaal, Islay on 24 November (Paul Beresford). According to the latest WeBS Count report Long-tailed Duck is now Red-listed as a '**Vulnerable**' species. As such, **all records in Argyll are welcomed.**

Common Scoter: Tom Callan found no less than 15 (all females) at Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 11 November: very unusual for this location. They had increased to 22 by 16 November. The three below were photographed flying past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, where they are seen more frequently, on 30 October.



Photo © Eddie Maguire

Velvet Scoter: One was seen on the Mull of Oa, Islay on 27 September (per I. & M. Brooke).

Common Goldeneye: ten were in Loch Fyne off Ardrishaig on 31 October (Jim Dickson).

Black Grouse: five males were seen roosting in a young conifer plantation at Feochaig between Campbeltown and South End, Kintyre (Kevin Hamilton).

SEABIRDS – divers, grebes, shearwaters, herons etc (and other sea-watch species):

Great Northern Diver: an impressive count of 95 was made off Glas Aird, Colonsay on 30 November (David Jardine). This is another indication of the large numbers wintering in Argyll waters.

European Storm-petrel: one was seen from the Colonsay - Oban ferry on 7 September (David Jardine).

Slavonian Grebe: at least 25 were off Blackrock, Islay on 19 October (Andy Greenwood).

Great Crested Grebe: one was off Otter Ferry on 26 October (Tom Callan).

RAPTORS, RAILS etc.:

Red Kite: one was reported at Balemartine, Tiree on 24 October (John Bowler).



Photo © Morag Rea

White-tailed Eagle: On 18 October, from a vantage point above Loch Striven, Graham Clark spotted a White-tailed Eagle attacking a Cormorant with a fish near a mussel farm on the loch on the east side south of Artaraig. When he went closer he was lucky enough to see 2 White-tailed Eagles fly over and get some photos against the light. This is the first record of White-tailed Eagle in this area.



Photo © Graham Clark

Two more were seen flying west over Loch Etive on 29 October (Mike Harrison) and two more were at the head of Loch Indaal, Islay on 30 October (Jim Dickson). There were several reports in the Loch Sween area including Tayvallich and Keills (Morag Rea/John Aitchison) and an adult was seen flying towards the top of Loch Shira, Inveraray on 27 October (Chris & Tony Johnson).



White-tailed Eagles at Loch Indaal, Islay 30 October - Photo © Jim Dickson

Golden Eagle: Kevin Hamilton had a close encounter when he came across two juveniles feeding on sheep carrion at the side of the road at Balnabraid Glen, south of Campbeltown, Kintyre on 24 November. They were only 12 feet or so from his car.

Osprey: one was seen at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 8 September (per I. & M. Brooke).

Merlin: usually seen flashing past at low level, this one at Otter Ferry on 3 October stopped long enough for a portrait (Tom Callan).



Common Crane: one was reported at Octofad, Islay on 24 September (Bob Davidson).

WADERS:

Mystery wader: found on Islay 4 September 2012. Waders, especially in winter plumage can often be a tricky ID challenge. This one had even the experts guessing for a while. See if you can work out what it is – the answer is at the end of this report *.



Red Knot: Unusual numbers of waders have been seen in Loch Gilp this autumn and 21 Red Knot and 20 **Bar-tailed Godwits** on 31 October had been there a while (Jim Dickson). Good numbers have also been seen at Otter Ferry, Cowal:



Pectoral Sandpiper: a first year bird was found at Ardskenish, Colonsay on 8 September (David Jardine) and one was at Loch Gruinart on 22 September (James How).

Greenshank: singles were seen at the head of Loch Gilp on 16 October (Jim Dickson), at Benderloch, North Argyll on 27 October (Mike Harrison) and at Linne Mhuirich (Loch Sween) on 24 November (Paul Daw).

SKUAS, GULLS, TERNs and AUKS (see also Seabirds above):

Pomarine Skua: one was reported at Coul Point, Islay on 15 October (Bob Davidson).

Little Gull: a first winter brought in by strong S winds was at the head of Loch Gilp on 20 November (Jim Dickson).

Mediterranean Gull: an adult was seen at Otter Ferry with Black-headed Gulls on 14 October (Tom Callan).

Iceland Gull: an adult was at Bunnahabhainn, Islay on 13 November (per I. & M. Brooke).

DOVES, OWLS, WOODPECKERS etc.:

Tawny Owl: several people have remarked to me on the lack of calling Tawny Owls in the past year, especially in Mid-Argyll. I'd be interested to hear if any others have noticed this. Or, for that matter, if you've heard plenty of them where you are!

Common Kingfisher: one has been seen regularly around the head of Loch Gilp since early September (Jim Dickson/David Jardine *et al*) and one was seen at Holy Loch, Cowal on 17 September (George Newall).

PASSERINES:

Red-billed Chough: a single Chough seen under Gribun Cliffs on the afternoon of 25 October by Ewan Miles was the first found on Mull since 2001. A pair had attempted to nest unsuccessfully for several years up to this date. A coloured ringed bird seen at Scoor, Mull in 1999 had been ringed the same year as pullus on Colonsay so this is possibly where this bird came from.



Photo © Ewan Miles

It has been seen again since, most recently at the sea cliffs at the south-eastern side of Reudle valley on 5 December (Anand Prasad).

Barn Swallow: the last report on the mainland so far was one under the canopy at the Oyster Bar, Loch Fyne on 3 October (Mike Harrison). An even later bird was at Sorobaidh Bay creek, Tìree on 24 October (John Bowler).

Long-tailed Tit: a flock of 22 were seen at Duntrune Castle (Loch Crinan) on 14 October (Jim Dickson).

Yellow-browed Warbler: one was reported at Port Charlotte, Islay on 26 October (per I. & M. Brooke).

Lesser Whitethroat: can be tricky to ID but not when seen as well as this individual at Main Road farm, Balephuil, Tìree on 16 October (Simon Wellock).

Common Whitethroat: four were still present at Upper Kilchattan, Colonsay on 8 September as were single **Grasshopper Warbler** and **Sedge Warbler** (David Jardine).



Photo © Simon Wellock

Waxwings: the influx to Argyll this autumn has been large but patchy. The first we've heard of was a single at Balephuill, Tiree on 28 October 2012 (John Bowler). This was followed by 14 in Connel on the afternoon of 31 October (Mike Harrison), 9 at Arinagour, Coll on 4 November (Ian Lycett), 42 in a garden in Dervaig, Mull on 6 November (Rod & Gill Little), 50 in Lochgilphead on 9 November (Stuart Crutchfield), 70 around the Tesco car-park Oban on 10 November (Bill Allan), 32 at Bridge of Orchy, North Argyll also on 10 November (Tam Stewart) and 9 by Barrahornmid on the road to Keills (Loch Sween) on 11 November (Morag Rea). As usual they provided some excellent photo opportunities:



Photo © Andy Robinson



Photo © Jim Dickson

Just when I thought I missed out on them, a flock of at least 150 landed in the beech tree in my back garden at Tullochgorm, Minard on 19 November. When they re-appeared the following day I managed a hazy photo of the whole flock:



Some I've asked have counted more than 200 birds... (Paul Daw). One at Beinn nan Gudairean, Colonsay on 3 December was the latest record I've heard of so far (David Jardine).

Eurasian Nuthatch: the spread of Nuthatches in Argyll appears to be continuing. One was seen and photographed at Inverawe (near Taynuilt), in the beechwood next to the smokery on 8

November. The first record we've had from this area (Simon Pinder).

Common Starling: a pre-roost flock of 1,070 was seen on 8 September at East Loch Fada, Colonsay (David Jardine).

NB. I've had request from BBC Winterwatch for information about large Starling roosts in connection with filming opportunities. To the best of my knowledge there are relatively few in Argyll. The only one I know about is in Campbeltown. If you know of any that are currently used please let me know a.s.a.p.

Redwing and Fieldfare: on 14 October Mike Harrison has a mixed flock of 500 flying E at Connel and on 20 October Jim Dickson had **thousands** in Mid-Argyll including 800+ Fieldfare with 350 Redwing at Duntrune/Barsloisnoch (Moine Mhor) and 1,350 Redwings, 280 Fieldfare and smaller numbers of Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Mistle Thrushes mixed in with them. Since then smaller numbers have been seen more locally.



Photo © Jim Dickson

Spotted Flycatcher: a late bird at Balinoe, Tiree on 24 October was still there the following day (John Bowler).

Tree Sparrow: one at Hynish, Tiree 24 October has been seen several times since (John Bowler). Despite the recent breeding records on Islay this is still a rare bird in Argyll. However, odd birds or even small flocks do turn up on the west coast or on the islands from time to time. It's something of a mystery where they come from. All records are very welcome but should be accompanied by a description (or better still a photo) – partly due to their rarity here but also because occasional House Sparrow/Tree Sparrow hybrids appear from time to time.

Brambling: a flurry of reports earlier on included 2 males near Loch Avich, Mid-Argyll on 14 October (Steve Dean), 3 at Totronald, Coll on 17 October (Ian Lycett) and 8 with Chaffinches on Islay on 30 October (Jim Dickson).



Photo © Jim Dickson

Lapland Bunting: one was seen at Hynish, Tiree on 31 October (John Bowler with Andy Robinson).

Yellowhammer: as a breeding bird Yellowhammers seem to be on the decline in Argyll (in common with many other areas). However there seems to be a small arrival of birds on the west coast of the mainland in autumn/winter. Good numbers are seen by Jimmy Kinloch in his garden at Carsaig (Tayvallich), Mid-Argyll, they are regular visitors to Brian John's garden near Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll and 22 were counted at New Danna (Loch Sween), Mid-Argyll on 15 October (Jim Dickson).

* **Mystery wader:** thought by the finder to be a Little Stint, then considered as potentially a Semipalmated Sandpiper but finally being identified as a juvenile Sanderling!