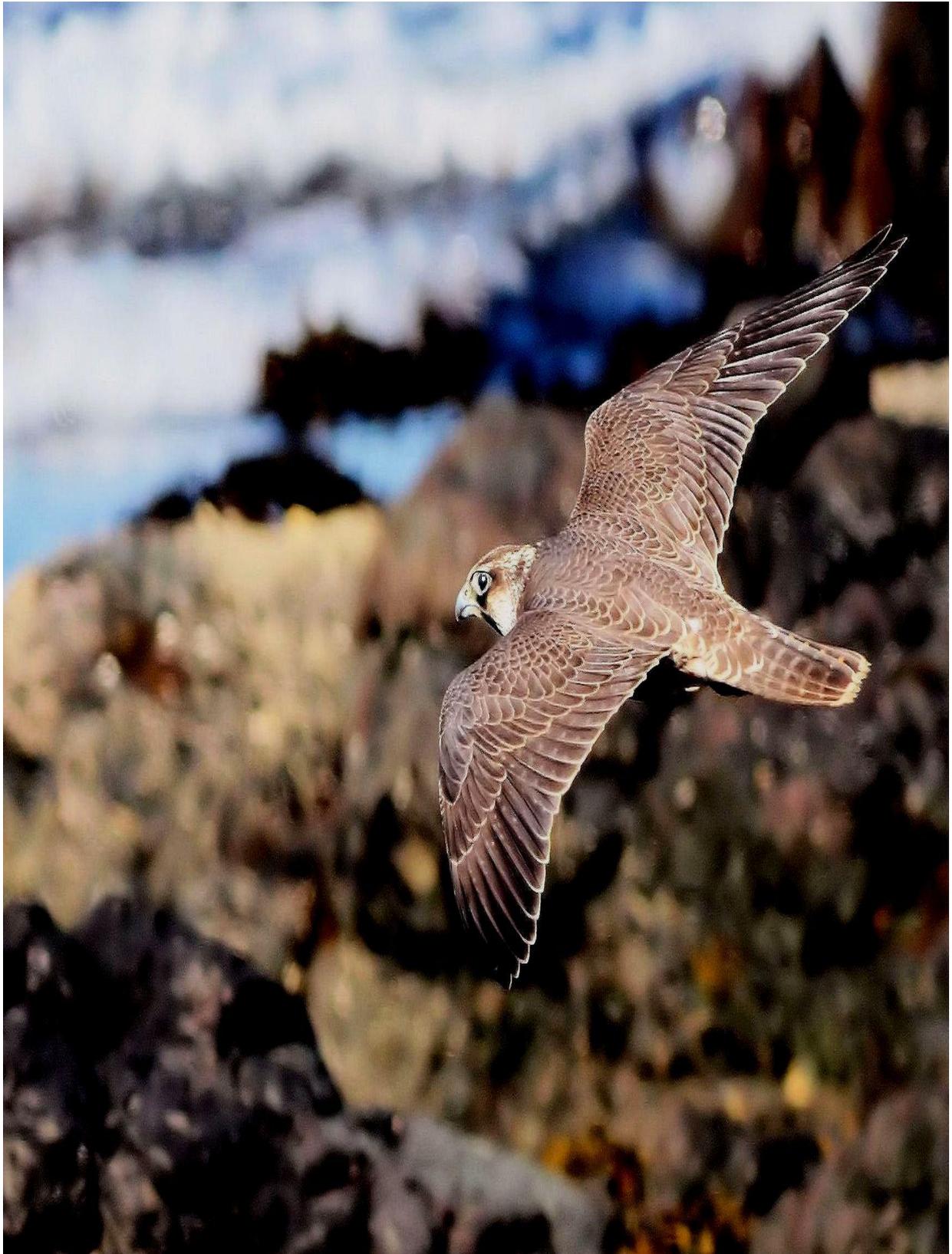


The Eider.
Issue No. 101 September 2012



juvenile Peregrine Falcon @ MSBO - © Eddie Maguire

Editorial

My first task as interim editor for the *Eider*, is to thank our outgoing editor, Mark Williamson, for his hard work over the last few years. My second task is to thank all those who have helped me in preparing this, my first issue. Thanks also go to all those who submitted articles, reports and notices: those which have not appeared in this issue only did not do so due to space constraints, and they will appear in the next issue.

This summer has so far turned up some intriguing sightings, and the odd unseasonal arrival (with further afield, a Western Palearctic first in the Co. Mayo Black Skimmer!), so here's hoping also for a good autumn of birding!

Stuart Crutchfield – interim *Eider* Editor.

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Upcoming ABC Field Trips

Saturday 29 September 2012 - Islay Ferry – Sea-watching from the Islay Ferry. Meet at 12.30hrs at Kennacraig ferry terminal for the 13.00hrs sailing to Port Askaig, returning to Kennacraig at 17.15hrs. Contact: Mike Harrison (Tel 01631 710656. e-mail jmharrison@iee.org)

Saturday 27 October 2012 - Ledaig Point, Dunstaffnage Bay and Benderloch. Meet at the north end of Connel Bridge at 1000hrs. Park on the piece of old road accessible from the unclassified road to Bonawe (NM911348). Bring your own lunch. Contact Mike Harrison for details jmharrison@iee.org

Saturday 1 December 2012 - Loch Gilp and Loch Sween. Meet at Corran Bridge car park, Lochgilphead (NR858879), at 1000hrs. Bring your own lunch. Contact Jim Dickson for details j.dickson@tiscali.co.uk

ARGYLL BIRD RECORDER – Job vacancy

I took over the duties of Argyll Bird Recorder from Tristan ap Rheinallt in the summer of 1997. I've found the experience fascinating in many ways, if somewhat time consuming. But after 15 years I feel it's time for me to retire from the post and make way for someone new. I notified the ABC Committee of my decision at their meeting on 23 August 2012.

I should like my replacement to be appointed by the end of May 2013 so that the new Recorder's details can be included in the next edition of The Birdwatcher's Yearbook, which usually appears in October.

The duties are mainly concerned with compiling the data base of bird records from which the Annual (or Biennial) Bird Reports are produced. Other tasks include dealing with enquiries about Argyll's birds from various sources and helping to compile the Argyll Bird Reports.

The post is voluntary of course (i.e. unpaid). There are however one or two perks of the job: you are among the first to hear about anything interesting happening (e.g. rarities) regarding birds in Argyll, you have free membership of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and you're entitled to a subsidised subscription to the magazine *British Birds* (currently this means you pay £24.50 rather than the full £51.00 per annum).

I will, of course, be happy to assist the new post holder in any way I can. If you think you might be interested in taking on this rewarding task please contact me by phone 01546 886260 or e-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk and we can talk it over.

Paul Daw

Autumn meeting – Cairnbaan Hotel - Saturday 17 November 2012

0930	Doors open and coffee/tea
0950 - 1000	Welcome & introduction - Nigel Scriven, Chairman of Argyll Bird Club
1000 - 1030	Recent birds sightings and photographs - Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder
1030 - 1100	Historical Changes in Colonsay & Oronsay's birds – David Jardine
1100 - 1130	Coffee/tea
1130 - 1150	Puffins on Mingulay, Fair Isle and St Kilda – Adam Cross
1150 - 1220 BTO Scotland	Population-trend differences: Scotland & England -Chris Wernham,
1230 - 1350	Lunch (available in the hotel)
1350 - 1420	AGM
1430 - 1455	Conservation of urban nesting terns - Gemma Jennings
1455 - 1520	Argyll's geese - TBA
1520 - 1540	Tea/coffee
1540 - 1600	Birdwatching in South Africa's Western Cape – Bob Furness
1600 - 1610	Raffle and close

Cairnbaan Hotel, Cairnbaan, by Lochgilphead PA31 8SJ www.cairnbaan.com

Mull Without Eagles?

Towards the end of July 2011, in glorious summer weather, we were fortunate to be able to arrange a long weekend on Mull at short notice. Mention Mull & most people immediately think of golden and white-tailed eagles and would count not seeing either as a bit of a failure. As we headed for Craignure the weather forecast was encouragingly optimistic & we resolved that we would enjoy the landscape & views & if the birds turned up that would be a bonus. After all, the last two Argyll Bird Club field trips I had been on to Appin & Gigha had turned up good views of both eagle species in any case. There had been fairly recent reports of bee eaters & a roller on the island but even in the unlikely event that they were still around the chances of seeing them whilst driving a car & staying on the road would be remote.

Although we were heading ultimately for accommodation in Calgary we turned left at the ferry slip towards Glen More and left again at Strathcoil towards Loch Spelve. We stopped alongside the Loch to eat our picnic lunch & watched an otter just offshore eating his lunch which was rather fresher than ours & still wriggling. We continued along the road to pass through the valley occupied by the fresh Loch Uisg and ended up by the cairn at Lochbuie. There are a few houses scattered along the approach to the Loch and Lochbuie House round the bay to the east. As soon as we stopped the car the chaffinches arrived in anticipation of titbits followed by a tame female blackbird that perched on the open car door in a very bold fashion. I then heard a very familiar chattering call and was astonished to see a colony of house sparrows flitting about in the bushes round the nearby house. Perhaps I shouldn't have been so surprised but it is such an isolated and remote spot I wondered where the next colony was & whether the birds stayed there year-round.

The second birding highlight (literally) of the weekend didn't involve either of Mull's eagle specialities either. We took an evening walk through the sculpture trail near the Farmhouse Tearoom at Calgary which is well worth a visit just to see the oystercatcher sculpture made out of beach litter. The distinctive call of a woodpecker could be heard quite close and scanning the trees to the west revealed a bird clinging to the trunk of a large tree and was readily identified as a greater spotted woodpecker with its head on fire. Head on fire? After bringing the binoculars to bear the identification was confirmed except that its head wasn't on fire but the red cap of a juvenile bird was catching the setting sun at just the right angle to give the impression of flames. It was one of those coincidences that birders are sometimes lucky enough to experience that can never be repeated as they bring together seemingly random occurrences of bird, weather, time, light and a host of other possibilities. It was no time to try for a photograph, just for the image to be committed to memory before the light changed or the bird moved.

I can't imagine that many birders would be happy to leave Mull without seeing an eagle and to admit that one of the highlights was seeing a few house sparrows but unpredictability is one of the great attractions of our interest and I sometimes think we get a bit hung up on the "signature" species at the expense of simpler but equally pleasurable experiences.

Malcolm Chattwood

ABC Machrihanish Field Trip, 25th August 2012

A core of birders met on the pier in Campbeltown at 10 am to rationalise transport before heading west to the Seabird Observatory, not knowing how many other cars might be at the car park. The party comprised Graham and Danielle Clark, Steve Bowie, Nigel Scriven, and Stuart & Errol Crutchfield, joined later by Ian Hopkins. We need not have worried, as there was plenty of space, though we did save a few grams of carbon emissions. We were warmly welcomed by Warden Eddie Maguire, who proudly showed us round the recently extended facilities. This includes extensive display space of wildlife photographed from the hide. Many of these are included in Eddie's DVD 'Machrihanish Wildlife Showcase' which is for sale at £10, and raises funds for the observatory.

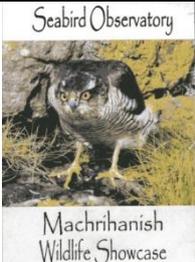
It was a bright day, with a brisk northwest wind coming straight in the front viewing windows, making it rather chilly looking out to sea. The new extension has created an L-shaped footprint, with the considerable benefit of a sheltered sun-trap in its lee. This was just the place to savour coffee and set up the tripods as the platforms for both scopes and binoculars.



Bird Club members listening avidly to Eddie Maguire's news of recent sightings.

Early sightings before we arrived that day were Greenshank and Arctic Skua. Not long after arrival we did have Red-throated Diver and Osprey fly past southwards. With the wind conditions not blowing much more of great interest inshore, attention wandered to the east to what could be seen over the fields and hills. This included Buzzard, Peregrine and Golden Eagle. With attention turning back to the shore, a couple of Turnstone signalled the return of migrants from the north, endorsed by Sanderling and a flock of 65 Redshank. Sizable flocks of Starlings were constantly on the move, splitting and joining, but probably numbering several hundred if they could have been gracious enough to let them be counted. A juvenile Herring Gull sporting a readable BTO ring GV91326, was most likely from Sanda, but still to be confirmed.

Eddie is at the Obs most days until 3 or 4 pm, weather permitting. Sometimes the worst weather is best, as it blows exciting seabirds close in shore. So if you're in the area, it will often be worth the trip to find out what has been about, and with luck, see some of it yourself.

	Eddie's DVD, to raise funds for the Observatory, featuring folk music composed himself, available from the Observatory for £10.
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After leaving the Observatory we independently found ourselves at the Dorlinn looking over Stinky Hole to see what was about. We were just thinking not a lot, and then we cast our eyes towards the south side of Davaar, where there was something in the water, about 20m from the

shore: a basking shark. It was circling back and forth feeding in relatively shallow water. A thrilling end to a glorious day.

Nigel Scriven

ABC Sanda Field Trip, 26th August 2012

On Sunday morning nine members met at the pontoon in Campbeltown for the second part of the South Kintyre double-header: a repeat visit to Sanda for the ABC. The visit had been ably organised by Nigel Scriven, who in addition to being the Chairman of the ABC is also the Treasurer of Sanda Bird Observatory, and led by him and the Sanda BO Chairman, Rab Morton.

After introductions and getting kitted up with waterproofs and life-jackets we boarded the Mull of Kintyre Seatours' RIB operated by Michael Taylor (<http://www.mull-of-kintyre.co.uk/tours.html>) for the twenty minute trip out to the island, which is now under new ownership. This was an energetic crossing with a fresh south-easterly breeze, which was eventually to blow away the morning cloud and bring glorious sunshine from lunchtime. Around 70 Shags were on the Doirlinn to Island Davaar and there were some Guillemots and Razorbills, still accompanied by recently fledged young, in Campbeltown Loch, but once out into the Firth few seabirds were seen other than the ever present Gannets which were finding good feeding inshore and in the tidal rips around Sanda itself.

With the coast of Northern Ireland clearly visible, the saltire on the flagpole at the jetty at Sanda was presumably to help visiting sailors know they had successfully crossed the North Channel; more incongruous was a bright blue plastic sheep on the harbour wall! A small mixed flock of 30-40 Linnets and Twite to the back of the hotel were amongst our first finds on the island. Here too was our first stop as Nigel ringed a late brood (b/2) of Swallows in the chicken shed. As we moved along the shore Rab pointed out the nesting sites of Manx Shearwater on the slopes above; carefully monitored each year. The accessible ones were marked with white markers and the burrows were clearly visible under a nearby nest under a clump of Woodrush. These wonderful seabirds have thrived on Sanda, where until recently there have been no ground predators. However, in the last few years Mink have been noted which had resulted in a complete failure of the Razorbill colony on the south-east shore of the island, consequently no young Razorbills had been ringed in 2012. This is surely a priority for conservation action at one of Argyll's premier seabird sites.

A short visit was made to St Ninian's Chapel, allowed the group to find Wall Pennywort and Black Spleenwort growing on the walls and to see the Pied Wagtail's nest, the brood of which is ringed every year by the BO.

In increasing warmth the party made its way up the central valley and erected (and furled) a mist-net in one of the scattered blocks of native woodland now established on the island, before crossing to the light-house on the south coast by the impressive 'elephant rock'. The Observatory is currently based here, in one of the old buildings beside the lighthouse accommodation. The change in ownership of the island is leading to some uncertainty over the future of the Obs which has collected an impressive long-term dataset on the breeding seabirds and migration on the island. The group were shown the boulder field where Storm Petrel and Shearwaters breed, sadly the accessible Shearwater nests had been predated by Mink this year, but Rab was able to take the group round to another burrow beyond the lighthouse where a late fluffy chick was duly brought into the sunlight for ringing before being carefully placed back in

its nest. Manx Shearwater breeding performance has been reasonable this year with over 70 chicks ringed.

Following lunch we retraced our steps back to the scrub woodland in the central valley where the mist net was unfurled and another erected. While this was going on a pair of Ravens were spied on the ridge near the trig point; beside them was a small falcon. Views were brief and its pugnacious swipe at the Ravens as it flew off out of sight suggested it might have been a Merlin, living up to its reputation of being the 'Jack Russell of the raptor world'.

Despite the strong sunlight on the nets suggesting they might remain empty, 5 birds were caught and ringed -Robin, Blackbird, Siskin and 2 Blackcaps; a mixture of local birds and migrants. The sunshine, however meant it was good for butterflies with sightings of Green-veined White, Grayling, Meadow Brown and Peacock being noted.

The fair weather suggested there may have been raptors on the move, with Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and a close fly-by from the resident Peregrine all adding to the list. The afternoon was wearing on; but there was just enough time for alfresco drinks outside the Hotel with views before we re-boarded the RIB.

The return crossing was much smoother as the wind had dropped and swung to the west; this allowed our skipper to spy a Basking Shark and bring his craft gently alongside and allow super views of this giant of the sea, before returning us safely to Campbeltown, complete with close views of a feeding group of around 60 Manx Shearwaters close to Island Davaar.

A visit to a small island was never going to produce a long species list, so the total of 37 on Sanda itself on sunny day in late summer was a creditable outcome. Our thanks go to Nigel and Rab for an interesting visit and we wish them well in their discussions over the future of the Observatory.

David Jardine

BTO Winter Thrush Survey

Starts 12 September 2012

The UK countryside supports large numbers of several thrush species through the winter. The Winter Thrushes Survey aims to find out more about their numbers and distribution, and the resources that they need to survive to spring and the next breeding season.

Are we good hosts to these birds? What are the key resources that they need? Over the two winters 2012/13 and 2013/14, the Winter Thrushes Survey will be collecting data to help answer such questions quantitatively for the first time.

There are several important gaps that the Winter Thrushes Survey can address:

How does thrushes' use of habitats (including gardens) vary, by species, geographically and through the winter? How do feeding behaviours vary, again by species, geographically and through the winter?

What is the relative importance overall of key habitats such as farmland, gardens and orchards and of the various feeding resources? In what ways do thrush numbers, distribution and feeding behaviour differ between successive winters?

The more information we can gather on these topics, the better we will be able to promote the conservation of these birds.

This will be an online-only survey operating through the BTO website. Observers will be invited to set up routes, based loosely on 1-km squares, for repeated winter walks. Locations of all thrushes observed, with their habitat and activity will be recordable online on a map of the survey route. Walks can be made at any time from mid September to mid April.

A randomly selected set of squares will be set up for synchronised coverage in midwinter. This element of the survey will be organised through the [BTO's Regional Network](#). If you would like to be involved in this part of the survey, please [contact your Regional Rep](#) to offer your help. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) observers are welcome to use their [BBS squares and transect routes](#) as Winter Thrushes Survey walks – provided that this will have no impact on their normal BBS spring surveys. Please include the journey between your two BBS transect lines as part of the Winter Thrushes Survey route.

More information on the survey methods can be found at:
www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thrushes/survey-methods

Recent Reports (June - August 2012)

from Paul Daw

(Tel. 01546 886260)

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

BTO Bird Atlas 2007-2011.

For the past three or four months I've been busy checking through the Argyll sections of the provisional maps for the 2007-2011 BTO Atlas of Birds in Britain. As most of you will know this will map the current distribution of all our birds both in winter and during the breeding season. As well as being very time consuming this has been a fascinating process. As well as the inevitable declines in some of our breeding birds (e.g. Willow Tit, Yellow Wagtail and Corn Bunting) there are plenty of success stories, with species like Barn Owl and Wood Lark recovering lost ground and others like Hobby, Eurasian Nuthatch, Cetti's Warbler, Dartford Warbler and Reed Warbler extending their ranges. Nuthatches have already made it to Argyll and I'd hazard a guess that Reed Warblers might be here before too long. It's hoped that the atlas will be published sometime next year.

Paul Daw

WILDFOWL (and GAMEBIRDS):

Mute Swan: a large brood of 8 cygnets are on upper Loch Fyne at present. This photograph of them was taken by Tom Callan at Inveraray on 24 June:



They were all still thriving when I saw them at Furnace (where they are being fed regularly by Reverend Dr. Roddy Macleod)

on 26 August. Such a large surviving brood is pretty unusual although Clive Craik reminds me that this is not a first for Argyll. In 2005 a disabled male on the lake at Angus's Garden, Barguilean, near Taynuilt bred with a female that had originally arrived with a different mate (later driven off!). This pair also had 8 young and a photograph of them appeared in the Oban Times (2 June 2005). They were seen later in the year by Clive; when the fully grown cygnets and the female (F11) flew in to Ganavan near Oban (see Eider Dec 2005 for more details). Clive suggests that feeding by visitors to Inveraray may have contributed to the survival of the current brood. These birds and the brood of 6 surviving cygnets at Tarbert harbour, Kintyre could be making an important contribution to the future of Mute Swans in Argyll as Clive also tells me that he and Rob Lightfoot have not seen a single cygnet this season in the whole of the large area of Mid/North Argyll that they cover for seabird monitoring. We'd be interested to hear of any other surviving broods of cygnets in Argyll this year.

Greylag Goose: numbers in Argyll continue to increase, Tom Callan counted 133 (virtually all in family parties) on Loch Assapol, Mull on 17 July and 206 at Ardalanish on 23 August. The goose count at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve found 1,277 on 28 August (James How).

Red-breasted Goose: on 5 June, an adult among [Greylag Geese](#), at Ardachuple Farm Fields at the top of Loch Riddon, Cowal was an exciting find for Graham Clark. Jim Dickson, who saw it there the following day, says there is a good chance it could have been the same bird as at Southernness Pt., Dumfries & Galloway on 1st May also one at Brora (same?) until 28 April - so a good chance it is wild. It was seen by other observers until at least 8 June.



6 June 2012 © Jim Dickson

Ring-necked Duck: a drake was on Loch Finlaggen, Islay from 18 June to at least 26 June (Peter Roberts et al).

Tufted Duck: a drake at Dalvore (Moine Mhor) on 24 June was behaving territorially and could have been breeding nearby (Jim Dickson). A female was with a brood of 5 young at Ardencaple, Seil Island on 28 August (David Jardine).

Greater Scaup: a drake flying south at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 22 June was unusual for the time of year (Eddie Maguire).

Common Quail: one was heard at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay on 14 June (James How) and one was calling at Drumlemble (nr. Machrihanish) on 19 June (Andy Robinson). Another was calling near Dunadd (Moine Mhor) on 25 June (John Halliday) and again on 7 July (Jim Dickson). There were several records on Oronsay and Colonsay in late May and June, which David Jardine considers represented at least 4 individuals and one was reported at Haunn, Treshnish, Mull on 12 June. There was also a good showing on Tìree, where calling birds were heard at 4 separate sites in June and one was flushed from dunes at Traigh Thodhrasdail on 11 August (Keith Gillon/John Bowler). It seems to have been a 'Quail Year' - Arran had their first record since 1995.

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

Red-throated Diver: a pair and two singles were at Otter Ferry on 11 August (Tom Callan).

Black-throated Diver: an adult in breeding plumage off Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 11 June was unusual for the time of year (Eddie Maguire) and a pair was seen on Loch Grogport, Kintyre on 5 July (Stephen Redwood per Sue Furness).

Great Northern Diver: an adult in breeding plumage was photographed on a fresh water loch near the Crinan Canal on 8 June – an interesting date... (Jackie & Dave Wedd).

Manx Shearwater: on 21 August a single group of 420 were seen in Loch Fyne off Inverneill (Jim Dickson), 12 headed up Loch Long off Shepherd's Point, Ardentinny at 16:20 on 27 July (James Towill), a foraging pack of 1,400 in Machrihanish Bay on 15 July all eventually flew off S (Eddie Maguire) and at least 200 were at the mouth of Loch Caolisport, Knapdale on 16 July (Stuart Crutchfield).

European Storm-petrel: A total of 67 flew S past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in 7hrs on 22 June in poor visibility and a near gale and twenty or more were foraging offshore on 8 July (Eddie Maguire).

Northern Gannet: Anyone who has spent time in summer at the southern tip of Kintyre will have noticed the constant stream of groups of Gannets flying back and forth through the North Channel. Just how many birds are involved was shown when Eddie Maguire monitored their movements off the Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse recently. In 3 hours (10:30-13:30) on 8 August he logged no fewer than 4,709 birds flying N and 7,584 flying S. Eddie reports that "the northerly movements were found to be very regular, singles and small flocks (largest 20-40). However, the southerly movements were much more coordinated with flock sizes much larger; 20-60 were frequent but many parties were 80- 150 strong and some extraordinary flights ranged from 150 – 240 birds. Most of these birds were heading for Ailsa but some small flocks were noted up

to several km S of the Mull continuing on a southerly bearing; this indicated that some of the birds heading S at MOK (Mull of Kintyre) originated from the more southerly Scar Rocks breeding colony (ca 2000 pairs).”

Little Egret: there were several reports of single birds in Kintyre and the Lochgilphead area during June, all of which may refer to the same individual. A description was provided of the bird at Kennacraig, Kintyre on 11 & 12 June (Steven Black/Jim Dickson).



© Jim Dickson.

White Stork: one was seen by Valerie Wells and David Bridge flying over their house at Spion Kop from the direction of Arran towards West Loch Tarbert at height of ca400 m. A description has been provided and if accepted by SBRC, this will be the first Argyll record since 1978 and only our fourth ever! There have been records of up to four White Storks in various parts of England during the summer. A nice addition to their garden bird list!

RAPTORS, RAILS etc.:

Red Kite: one was reported by visitors at Bunnahabhainn, Islay on 24 July (per I. & M. Brooke).

White-tailed Eagle: there have been several recent records in the Keills (Loch Sween) and Tayvallich area. John Aitchison reports “we saw two flying W together, both adults, near the Vodafone mast above the Point of Knap last week (12-18 August), two, again both adults, flying E over Loch na Cille the day before, one a day later, from

Taynish narrows, flying E across Loch Sween... the one from Taynish flew a very direct line which, if continued, would have taken it somewhat to the N of Ellary. Mark Smith had an untagged adult flying S down the peninsula today, passing over the Tayvallich shop.” And in mid-June Andy Robinson made the following fascinating observation, also near Keills: “I was scanning across the sound of Jura and picked up a WTE flying SE from Jura - it headed to the McCormaig Islands where I lost it in the general noise of birds. I scanned back North and picked up another WTE on a similar flight route but slightly closer I followed this and kept scanning to the south and picked up the first bird returning across the sound with a gull chick (brown bundle) - the birds passed each other mid-sound. Needless to say the second eagle was met with by a lot of angry gulls and carried on up Loch Sween. I suppose for WTE the gull colony is a convenient fast food resource - once they get their eye-in. This was all quite distant with bins/scope on a calm evening with good visibility.” It’s also possible that a pair may be at least prospecting for a nest site along the mainland coast. We are keen to hear of any sightings of White-tailed Eagles in the area – or anywhere else on the mainland for that matter. Two adults with yellow tags on right wing with single black character were near Uisken, Mull on 17 August: one O, the other X or P (Tom Callan). Two adults flew across from Ard Luing to Shuna Island on 19 August (Mike Harrison) and two were seen at port Askaig, Islay on 28 Aug (Andy Robinson).

Hen Harrier: a pair was sky-dancing over Skerry Fell Fad, nr Machrihanish on 5 June (Eddie Maguire).

Golden Eagle: two were riding thermals over The Rinns, Islay on 8 August (Bob Davidson).

Osprey: one was causing consternation among local gulls at Otter Ferry on 28 July (per Tom Callan), another was circling and drifting down Loch Awe on 12 August (Paul Daw); an Osprey glided across the lagoon in Loch Craignish on 18 August but did not

appear to be actively fishing (Mike Harrison) and one was flying over Loch Crinan on 22 August (Jim Dickson). Two birds flew past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (one a.m., one p.m.) on 25 August (Eddie Maguire) and two at Otter Ferry spit on 26 August put at least 400 gulls and waders to flight: one caught a fish (Tom Callan) and two were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on the same day (per I. & M. Brooke).

Merlin: a male was disturbing small waders at Fidden, Mull on 21 August (Tom Callan) and one came in off the sea at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, carrying a Starling prey, on 28 August (Eddie Maguire).

Hobby: Unusually there were three recent records - one was seen flying N past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 26 June (Eddie Maguire), one was reported at The Broad-billed Sandpiper Islay on 6 July (Clive Thomas Mycroft) and an adult was seen at Port Charlotte, Islay on 16 July (Bob Davidson). Descriptions have been provided for all three and are under consideration by ABRC. The continued spread northwards indicated by the provisional BTO Atlas map may mean that we see this dashing falcon more frequently in Argyll.

Corn Crane: The final total of calling males on Tìree this season was 371, slightly down on some recent years (John Bowler). At least 5 were calling from St Columba Hotel garden to north end of Iona on 19 July (Tom Callan).

Common Crane: two were photographed flying over Lochgoilhead, Cowal at lunchtime on 17 May (Keith Hoey). There are only eight previous Argyll records, the last on Coll in 2004. However, as well as the small breeding population in East Anglia they are now being re-introduced in Somerset (Great Crane Project), so we may eventually see them more frequently here.

WADERS:

Oystercatcher: a total of 295 were counted at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 27 July (per I. & M. Brooke).

Ringed Plover: Several fledged broods were noted around Tìree in what appears to

have been a good breeding season and no less than 325 migrants were at Loch a' Phuill on 16 August (John Bowler). At least 200 were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 20 August (James How) and 78 were around Otter Ferry spit on 27 Aug (Tom Callan).

Dotterel: one was seen at Ardnave, Islay on 14 June (Michal Sur).

Northern Lapwing: Many broods seen on Tìree in June, indicating a good breeding season (John Bowler). Four at Otter Ferry on 11 June were unusual for this site (Tom Callan).

Red Knot: a single in breeding plumage was with Turnstones at Otter Ferry on 23 July and 22 in non breeding plumage were there on 25 August (Tom Callan),



Knot and Turnstone
Killail, Otter Ferry, Cowal
23 July 2012

31 were at Loch a' Phuill, Tìree on 16 August (John Bowler) and a total of 105 were with godwits and Ruff at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 19 August (Nick Wilkinson). A total of 50 flew S past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 19 August part of a monthly total of 246 (Eddie Maguire).

Sanderling: Late passage on Tìree in early June found 400 at Hough Bay on 2 June and at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory a large flock estimated to be around 230 was swirling frantically around the point / offshore on 7 June. Eventually the flock disappeared flying N. Four flocks totalling 52 flew S there on 19 July (Eddie Maguire). Five were seen in the Add Estuary on 21 August together with a couple of Bar-tailed Godwits and a flock of Curlews (Jim Dickson). As Jim says, that's an unusually

large number of Sanderlings for this site! A total of 35 flew past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 22 August (Eddie Maguire). One at Otter Ferry on 13 August was also unusual but at least 100 were at Camas Cuil an t-Saimh, Iona, Mull on 20 August (Tom Callan).

Little Stint: four adults at three sites on Tiree in early June (John Bowler/Keith Gillon).

White-rump Sandpiper: An adult was found at Gott Bay, Tiree on the morning of 6 August and photographed by John Bowler:



© John Bowler

It was seen again at Gott Bay on the evening of 7 August (Keith Gillon per John Bowler).

Pectoral Sandpiper: one photographed at An Fhaodhail Tiree on 29 June was either an early or a late migrant (!) (John Bowler).

Curlew Sandpiper: four were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 3 and 6 June (Keith Gillon).

Purple Sandpiper: At Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, one rested briefly on the point early on 6 June then flew N. Unusual record for this time of year (Eddie Maguire).

Ruff: four were at two sites on Tiree on 12 August (John Bowler), a total of 11 were at Loch Indaal, Islay on 18 August (Nick Wilkinson) and 13 were seen on Tiree during WeBS / mowing survey on 20 August (John Bowler). A flock of 8 on floodwater at Machrihanish Campsite on 20 August had increased to 15 by the following day (21 August) (Eddie Maguire).

Black-tailed Godwit: at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, a flock 17 adults flew in off sea / then S in poor visibility on 4 July (Eddie Maguire). On 17 August, 14 were

seen in the Add Estuary (Jim Dickson), a total of 54 at Loch Indaal, Islay on 18 August included a colour ringed bird (Nick Wilkinson), a flock of 53 were on floodwater at Machrihanish Campsite on 20 August (Eddie Maguire), 15 were seen on Tiree during WeBS / mowing survey on 20 August and 15 were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree alone on 24 August (John Bowler). The putting green at Lochgilphead was an unusual location for one seen on 17 August (John Halliday).

Bar-tailed Godwit: seven were at Otter Ferry on 6 June (Tom Callan), a total of 9 were in Loch Gilp on 22 August, with 4 in the Add Estuary (Jim Dickson) and 54 were at Loch Indaal, Islay on 19 August (Nick Wilkinson).

Whimbrel: eight were at Eilean Nostaig, Islay on 3 June (Mary McGregor).

Wood Sandpiper: one of these scarce migrants was seen in the Add Estuary by Roger Broad during an (unsuccessful) visit in search of the [Bonaparte's Gull](#) (see below) on 13 August, two were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 13 - 14 August (John Bowler) and one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 16 August (James How) .

Common Sandpiper: A total of 18 (including a loose flock of 8) flew S past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 19 July (Eddie Maguire) and 8 were in the Add Estuary on 22 August (Jim Dickson).

Green Sandpiper: one was flushed from a small bog pool by the Roadside lochs, Coll on 5 August (Ian Lycett), one was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 14 August (John Bowler) and one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 24 August (James How).

Spotted Redshank: a juvenile was on floodwater at Machrihanish Campsite on 20 and 21 August (Eddie Maguire).

Greenshank: a total of 15 were seen on Tiree during WeBS / mowing survey on 20 August (John Bowler), two were on floodwater at Machrihanish Campsite on 20 August (Eddie Maguire) and one was at Loch Gilp on 22 August (Jim Dickson).

Common Redshank: a total of 34 were in Loch Gilp on 22 August (Jim Dickson) and a flock of 65 flew in off the sea at

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 25 August (Eddie Maguire).

Turnstone: An adult that appeared at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 15 July was the first of autumn (Eddie Maguire). A total of 100 were counted around Otter Ferry on 27 August (Tom Callan).

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

Pomarine Skua: one flew towards Hynish from Scarinish, Tiree on 14 June (Toby Green).

Arctic Skua: Three were seen on Tiree during WeBS / mowing survey on 20 August (John Bowler).

Great Skua: one was 'cruising' among Gannets, Manx Shearwaters and Kittiwakes that were foraging around the point at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 7 July (no interaction occurred) and one flew past S on 22 August (Eddie Maguire).

Long-Tailed Skua: A juvenile was reported flying south over the Add Estuary during gales on 27th August (Stuart Crutchfield)

Mediterranean Gull: an adult arrived at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 21 July (obvious outer wing / tail moult in progress) and another adult flew past S on 10 August. A juvenile was there on 1 Aug with two juveniles present on 17 August (Eddie Maguire). A juvenile was seen in Machrihanish Bay on the evening of 26 August (David Jardine).

Glaucous Gull: this (first summer?) bird was photographed at the ferry slip on Iona on 19 July by Tom Callan.



Iceland Gull: the long staying individual was still at Loch Crinan on 24 June and at Dunadd Hill on 3 July (Jim Dickson). One seen briefly off the sea-lock at Crinan Canal on 17 August was presumably the same bird (Stuart Crutchfield).

Great Black-backed Gull: A juvenile colour-ringed by Clyde Ringing Group at Troon, Ayrshire on 15 July 2012 was photographed flying S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 27 July (just 12 days later) (Eddie Maguire).

Little Gull: a first summer bird flew across The Reef and landed on Traigh Bhagh, Tiree on 7 June (Keith Gillon) and a juvenile flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 28 August (Eddie Maguire).

Bonaparte's Gull: on the morning of 1 August, Jim Dickson found a splendid summer-plumaged adult [Bonaparte's Gull](#) among a group of loosely scattered Black-head Gulls on the Add Estuary. It remained until at least 12 August, providing some other observers with excellent views. There are only two previous Argyll records of this transatlantic visitor, both on Islay in 1975, and just a couple of dozen or so Scottish records.



Bonaparte's Gull 2 August 2012 © Jim Dickson

Kittiwake: A foraging pack of 400 or more was ranging widely over Machrihanish Bay on 15 July (many much-worn first-summer birds were present); all eventually flew off to the S (Eddie Maguire).

Sabine's Gull: a summer-plumaged adult was photographed flying S past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 27 July (Eddie Maguire). This date equals the earliest ever autumn record for the County. Weather – NW 4 with poor visibility at times / several heavy squalls.



Sabine's Gull © Eddie Maguire

Little Tern: a good breeding season on Tiree with at least 42 pairs raising chicks at three sites (John Bowler).

Sandwich Tern: A surprising arrival occurred at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 13 July; a total of 42 (including 3 juveniles) were found resting by Big Scone Island at 14:00hrs (very few (13) were present next day) (Eddie Maguire). Two adults were in Loch Crinan on 16 July (Jim Dickson) and four adults were at the Otter Ferry spit on 26 July (Tom Callan). Four adults and a juvenile were at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 17 August. Eddie Maguire comments that they have been scarcer than usual this year.

Common Tern: an unusual influx of 33 Common Terns (mostly juveniles) was found on Tiree during the WeBS / mowing survey on 20 August (John Bowler). An adult and a juvenile flew past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 29 August (Eddie Maguire).

Clive Craik informs me that the tern raft at Loch Creran “broke all its previous records this year. We had almost doubled the nesting area, and about 600 pairs fledged about 500-600 young, but they are still (27 August) rearing young so these are provisional 2012 figures.”

Arctic Tern: during a walk from Bowmore to Gartbreck, Islay on 21 July, 55 were counted (Bob Davidson). An adult and 4 juveniles flew S past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 22 August (Eddie Maguire).

Roseate Tern: One was near the Big Scone Common /Arctic Tern colony, Machrihanish on 30 June (Eddie Maguire).

Common Guillemot: Small (up to 10) groups totalling at least 100, all incl. juveniles, were seen from the Gourrock – Dunoon ferry on 23 August (Tom Callan).

Black Guillemot: at least 24 were on the shore and on the water round about on at Liath Eilean, Loch Fyne on 1 June (Tom Callan).

Puffin: a total of 30 or more were foraging off the point at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 8 July (Eddie Maguire).

DOVES, OWLS, WOODPECKERS etc.:

Turtle Dove: a moribund bird at Kilkenneth, Tiree died on 4 June (John Bowler).

Common Cuckoo: On 6 June Jim Dickson saw no less than 10 in the Moine Mhor area – seven along Crinan Ferry road together and 3 on the rest of the moss. Here are just some of them:



© Jim Dickson



© Jim Dickson



© Jim Dickson

Now we know why there's such a decline in Cuckoo numbers in England – they've all come to Argyll...

Short-eared Owl: none were seen on Tiree in June or July following a presumed breeding attempt in May (John Bowler).

Common Swift: five feeding over Strone Road end near Otter Ferry at 21:30 on 28 June were an unusual sight for this location (Tom Callan). Two were flying over near the head of Loch Striven, Cowal on 2 July (Graham Clark) and six were over the A & B hospital in Lochgilphead on 14 July (Jim Dickson). The peak count over Burnside Square, Campbeltown was 25 on 20 July (Tomhar McMillan per Eddie Maguire), one flew over Miodar, Tiree on 2 August (John Bowler) and two were over Grainel, Islay on 3 August (James How). The last sighting at Connel was of 2 on 13 August (Mike Harrison) and one flew S past Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse on 15 August (Eddie Maguire). Eddie comments on late arrival and low summer numbers in Campbeltown and this pattern seems to have been true of much of Argyll.

Common Kingfisher: one was on the Old Pier at Lochgilphead at 14:00 on 30 August. It followed the river up to the Corran Bridge direction and out of sight: probably an immature female. Interestingly it seemed to have a deformed bill it was unable to close properly but seemed to be catching fish okay. It was there again the following day (Jim Dickson).



© Jim Dickson

PASSERINES:

Golden Oriole: one was reported from The Oa, Islay on 25 May (David Wood).

Red-billed Chough: at least 72 were counted at Ardnave, Islay on 6 July (Mary McGregor).

Magpie: records outwith the usual range in Argyll included one at Loch na Cille (Loch Sween) on 12 July and one visiting a well-stocked feeding station at Feorlin, Mull of Kintyre on 25 July (Eddie Maguire / Iomhar McMillan et al).

Eurasian Jay: two records from South Kintyre, at Dalbuie, Conie Glen on 14 June (Davie Robertson per Eddie Maguire) and three sightings in the area above High Lossit (nr Machrihanish), Kintyre on 30 August (Steve & Sue Walker) may indicate an extension of their range in Argyll. Until recently Jays were only scarce visitors to Mull but survey work for the BTO Atlas indicates that they are also now breeding in the N of the island.

Coal Tit: one at Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse on 5 July was a real surprise (Eddie Maguire / Iomhar McMillan).

Sand Martin: 30 were flying around the spit at Otter Ferry on 22 July (Tom Callan).

Barn Swallow: a pair was still feeding 5 recently fledged young at Craig Cottage (Loch Riddon) Cowal on 30 August (Tom Callan). Several people have remarked on smaller numbers of breeding Swallows this summer.

Wood Warbler: five were singing in the area near Lephinmore (Loch Fyne), Cowal on 5 June (Tom Callan). We are keen to receive all records of this species, which is in serious decline nationally but seems to be holding on in parts of Argyll.

Willow Warbler: at least 50 were in the Balnamoil/ Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse area on 8 August (Eddie Maguire).

Common Whitethroat: four singing males were heard around Ulva Lagoons (Loch Sween) on 18 June, 8 were seen along the Crinan Ferry Road (Moine Mhor) on 31 July (Jim Dickson) and 3 were at Otter Ferry Fish Farm on 3 August (Tom Callan).



Common Whitethroat © Jim Dickson

James How reports an increase in numbers at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve this summer and they have been more widely reported than usual in Argyll as a whole.

Subalpine Warbler: a male was seen briefly (and photographed) in John Bowler's garden at Balephuill, Tiree during the afternoon of 28 May. **If accepted this will be a new species for the Argyll list:** and for John Bowler's garden bird list! It has so far been attributed to the Eastern race *Sylvia cantillans albistriata*.

Grasshopper Warbler: at least 6 were singing near Ardmarnock, Farm, Cowal on 20 June, mainly in open shore-side vegetation and one was seen along the Crinan Ferry Road (Moine Mhor) on 18 August (Jim Dickson).

Sedge Warbler: two family parties (8 birds) were seen in Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll on 12 July (Tom Callan).

Reed Warbler: a Reed Warbler was caught at the Aros Moss Constant Effort (near Campbeltown) ringing site on the morning of 23 August, a first for the site (Neil Brown).

Eurasian Nuthatch: one was seen in Tom Callan's garden (his first ever there) on 30 June and was seen there regularly until at least 23 July.



© Tom Callan

They are obviously still spreading in Argyll. **Mistle Thrush:** a group of 25 were at Otter Ferry on 28 August (Tom Callan).

Spotted Flycatcher: three recently fledged young were at Keillbeg, Loch na Cille (loch Sween) on 18 June (Tom Callan) and a pair raised at least two young in an old Dipper's nest beside the Lusragan Burn in Connel. The young birds fledged around 5 July (Mike Harrison). Three territories were identified in Crinan Wood and at Cairnbaan on 28 June (Jim Dickson). My own impression is that Spotted Flycatchers have been rather thin on the ground this year, certainly around Minard. Has anyone else noticed this?

Common Redstart: adults with food for young were seen at Goirtein Croft, Loch Fyne, Cowal on 26 June and at Druim Buidhe, Keills (Loch Sween) on 12 July (Tom Callan).

Whinchat: it seems to have been a good year for Whinchats in Argyll with a minimum of 11 pairs in the Moine Mhor area, including 3 pairs around Dunadd, on 20 June (Jim Dickson).



© Jim Dickson

At least 8 males with a couple of females were found near Kilfinan, Cowal on 25 June, no less than 8 juveniles were seen along the Crinan Ferry Road (Moine Mhor) on 18 August (Jim Dickson) and at least 20 were in a garden at port Charlotte, Islay on 10 August (Bob Davidson).

Common Stonechat: they are still missing from some favourite haunts after the recent cold winters but this juvenile at Loch na Cille (Loch Sween) may be a sign of recovery:



© Andy Robinson

Two adults and 4 juveniles at Crinan Ferry on 31 July looked like a second brood and at least 20, including many juveniles, were in fields at the back of the bay at Ardalanish, Mull on 22 August (Tom Callan). At least 30 were in the Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse area on 8 August (Eddie Maguire).

Pied Flycatcher: one arrived at Balephuill, Tiree on the afternoon of 24 August (John Bowler).

White Wagtail: the first juvenile arrived at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 11 August and eight flew past S on 29 August (Eddie Maguire).

Rock Pipit: at least 20 (adults & juveniles) were at Port Uisken, Mull on 18 August (Tom Callan).

Goldfinch: A late pair arrived at Balephuill on 7 June and promptly built a nest in a willow tree, with incubation noted 11-30 June. **This is the first confirmed breeding on Tiree** (John Bowler).

Twite: six were seen at Keills, Loch Sween on 12 July (Tom Callan), 12 along the Crinan Ferry Road (Moine Mhor) on 31 July (Jim Dickson) and a flock of 60 was at Ballinaby, Islay on 20 July (per I. & M. Brooke). Numbers at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory had built up to 30 by 29 August (Eddie Maguire) and 18 were in the Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse area on 8 August (Eddie Maguire).

Lesser Redpoll: a group of at least 6 near Kilfinan on 25 June was among several records in this part of Cowal during the summer. Eight flew over Dunadd (Moine Mhor) on 24 June (Jim Dickson), ten were in moorland up from the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse on 10 July (James Towill) and a flock of 40 flew over Port Charlotte, Islay on 10 August (Bob Davidson). This is another species that seems to be thriving in Argyll in contrast to a marked decline in much of England indicated by the draft atlas maps.

Common Redpoll: a pair again bred on Tiree and raised 4 fledged young (John Bowler): one of the very few breeding pairs in Britain, according to the draft BTO Atlas map.

Common Crossbill: at least 35 were seen in conifers above Otter Ferry on 5 June (Tom Callan) and one flew over Garden House, Uig, Coll on 15 August (Ian Lycett).

Yellowhammer: a male at Duntrune Castle (Loch Crinan) on 10 July (Jim Dickson) is worth recording as this species is now becoming very scarce and local in Argyll

(and elsewhere according to the draft BTO Atlas map). All records are welcome.

Not our area, but just to show what can turn up in the west of Scotland; a **Black-winged Pratincole** was found at Ness, Isles of Lewis on 2 August and delighted observers until at least 6 August (per Tony Marr): maybe a future species for the Argyll list?

Paul Daw: 02.09.2012

Some Thoughts on the Value of Your Bird Records

What could possibly be the value of a bird record? Well, there's a question. Pausing to ponder, it's one that doesn't have a simple answer. It depends on who is asking it, their perspective, and a raft of other variables. These include the species of bird, where it is seen, the observer of the bird, the recorder who collates the records of the birds, and the enquirer who is interested in the database of records of the birds. That will do to get started.

Let's begin with the bird. Are all birds equal? Well, not exactly. Some birds can be more interesting than other birds, but that also depends on who is interested. So, is it possible to identify some parameters on what makes a bird interesting? I am not proposing that common birds can't be interesting, but if we see them most days and at all times of year day, we tend to take them more for granted, and we are less interested in them. Also, just because one observer isn't interested in a bird, doesn't mean it's not interesting to another. There is however, amongst many birders at least, an attraction in the sight of the less common and rare birds.

Most migrant birds we don't see all the year round, so that increases their interest factor. When do they arrive and depart? When does the first one appear, and when do most of the rest appear? When do most disappear, and when does the last one go? There are of course some birds that we see all year round that are partial migrants, but without bird ringing that is a hard thing to study.

Then there are rare birds, which are definitely interesting, with a measure of rarity being a kind of proxy for interest level. At an extreme level though, it could also be argued that extreme rarities are not particularly interesting, since most of us are unlikely to see them, and they may be unlikely to survive for very long. What else can make a bird interesting? Some birds have special legal protection, above the protection that all birds have. What has brought about this special treatment? This may be partly to do with rarity, but also to do with vulnerability and a history of persecution. This legal situation has arisen over a considerable number of years, and now involves two main statutes, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (with subsequent amendments), and the EC Birds Directive (2009).

Another factor raising the interesting index of a bird record is the number. There are many other bird species which have experienced population declines, without immediate threat of disappearing, but are heading in the direction of extinction. Their situation was reviewed in the 1990 book *Red Data Birds in Britain*. The 117 species in this red list, included as demanding care and attention, were selected according to five criteria:

- 1 International significance of British populations
- 2 Scarcity as British breeders
- 3 Declining breeding numbers
- 4 Restricted distribution in vulnerable sites or habitats
- 5 Species of special concern

In addition, the book listed 30 species as possible future candidate species, and regarded the remaining species considered as a green list. Later reviews tightened up the criteria for inclusion, and formalised the grading into red, amber and green categories. In the latest of these reviews, *Birds of Conservation Concern 3*, in *British Birds 102* published in 2009 (often abbreviated to BoCC3), has 52 species on the Red list, 126 on the Amber list and 68 on the Green list. Without records of distribution and abundance it would not be possible to adequately make these assessments.

Bird conservation action is nowadays bundled up with biodiversity action plans, and species action frameworks, and now regional priorities can take account of more local population trends and habitat changes. These trends and changes are now also recognised in guiding the financing of agri-environment and woodland management schemes in the Bird Conservation Targeting Project, which aims to benefit scarce and declining farmland and woodland birds. There are 30 such species in Scotland. The most up to date distribution data from local bird recorders are incorporated into the maps which determine the funding for these agri-environment payments to land managers. In this respect, your records are worth money to someone, and can benefit the birds.

The Argyll and Bute Local Biodiversity Action Plan is action at a local authority level for all taxonomic groups and habitats, but birds and their habitats are an important element in the strategy to maintain and improve biodiversity. Monitoring populations is an integral part of this process.

Threats at a local level can also be assessed at this local level. Developments such as wind farms have an element of environmental assessment that is part of the process of gaining planning consent. These include bird surveys, which are an essential part of determining the likely impact of the development. A component of this process is to dredge through bird reports and databases for records of vulnerable species that might be affected. Some developments have been prevented as a consequence of this assessment.

The threats to the natural world are ever increasing, with insect populations declining alarmingly, non-native species invading, and evidence of climate change increasingly manifest. Our birds are at risk.

So where is this leading? **To a plea to keep sending in your records on a regular basis.** If you look at recent Argyll Bird Reports, you have a context against which to judge the level of observations that are included, and that includes the common species. However, what you read in the bird report is just a summary of the information in the database. There is also an uneven geographic spread of records. North Argyll is a case in point, as are some, but not all, of the Argyll islands.

We can only summarise what is sent in, and the more information we have, the more accurate a picture can be painted of the state of our avifauna. The records are all held in the database, which is available for inspection by bona fide researchers, and therefore they all have a value.

Nigel Scriven

The Eider is the quarterly newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club (www.argyllbirdclub.org) - Scottish Charity No. SC008782