

**June 2014**  
**Number 108**

# **The Eider**



Common Snipe, RSPB Gruinart, Islay on 21 April 2014 ©Jim Dickson

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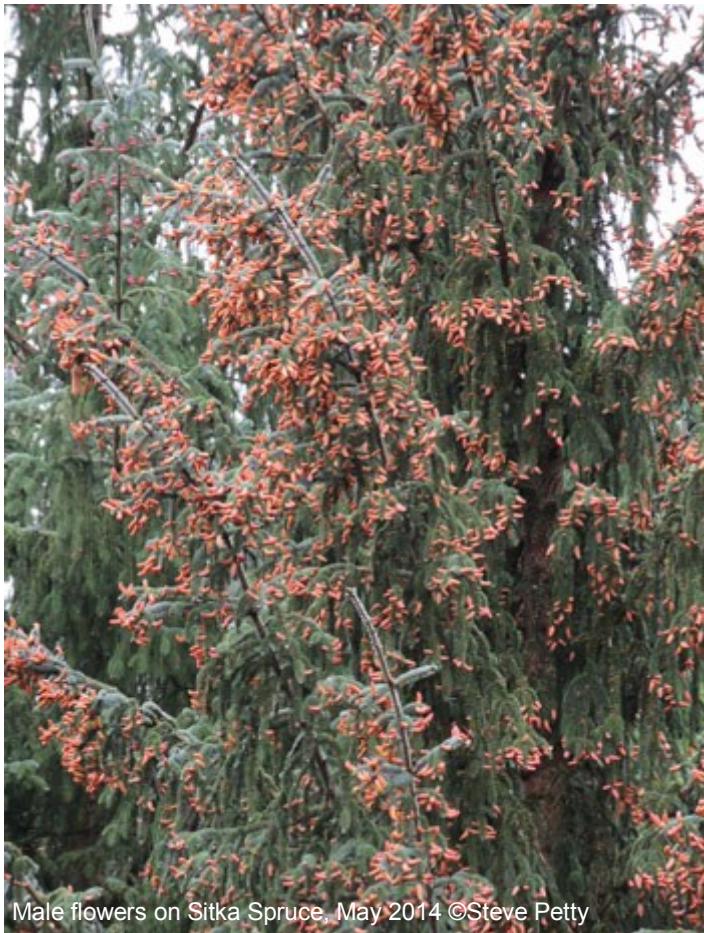
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## Editorial

**Looking out of our window across to the trees and hills beyond, you would think some horrendous disease was in the process of devastating the forest of mainly Sitka Spruce.**

Over the last 10-15 days (early May) the upper tree crowns have turned a red-brown colour. But, there is no need to worry. This is due to the trees producing a massive amount of male flowers. If you walk along forest tracts, many of the puddles are covered in a yellow scum, the result of colossal amounts of pollen being released by the male flowers, and in the process fertilising the far less conspicuous female flowers. Over



Male flowers on Sitka Spruce, May 2014 ©Steve Petty

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the next few weeks the male flowers will shrivel and fall off, while the female flowers will develop into cones, initially very small and red/green in colour, then turning to green and finally by late summer turning golden brown, by which time the tree crowns will brown again. This periodic process of producing enormous amounts of seed is called masting, and with Sitka Spruce such events occur every 3-5 years. The trigger for the mass flowering this year was the exceptionally hot summer last year encouraging trees to form flower buds rather than leaf buds in the autumn. The production of so much seed at irregular intervals is a highly successful anti-predator strategy by trees. So much seed is produced that it swamps any loss to seed predators, of which there are many, including numerous insects, birds and mammals.

Masting bodes well for birders too. Instead of many birds departing from the forest in late summer/early autumn, many will overwinter and many more will be attracted into the forest. Conifer seed will provide a food bonanza for up to nine months, commencing from late summer this year. Crossbills and squirrels are

## Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Malcolm Chattwood, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Andy Francis, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), Mike Harrison, Keith Hoey, Angus Hogg, Domonic MacCafferty, Eddie Maguire, Ruedi Nager, Katie Pendreigh, Linda Petty (proof reading), Jonathan Platt, Nigel Scriven, Margaret Staley and Blair Urquhart.

the first to start as they have the equipment to extract the swelling seed from inside the fully formed, but still green cones. Other birds have to wait until the cones mature. Thereafter the weather dictates when the seed becomes available. Sunshine and drying winds allow cone scales to part and seeds to start dispersing. Such conditions allow some birds to reach between the cone scales and remove seeds; those species with pointed beaks do best. Siskins are one of the most abundant, but a range of other species feed on conifer seed. Coal Tits will spend the winter not only eating seed but storing it in a multitude of sites for retrieval during damp periods when cones scales are closed. Goldfinch flocks also feed on spruce seed when the cone scales are open. Chaffinches often forage on the forest floor eating seed that has fallen out of the cones, but they are also able to pull the seeds out from between the cone scales. I vividly remember one early spring when Sitka Spruce trees were full of cones and the forest was alive with finches, all busily extracting seed from cones. As well as the species mentioned above, there were numerous flocks of migrating Bramblings, many in full song in between gorging on seed. Even Lesser Redpolls with their short stubby beaks are able to extract seed from the flimsy cones of Sitka Spruce.

Such abundant food allows conifer-seed-eating species to breed earlier than usual. Crossbills are a prime example. In the best cone years they will produce some autumn broods, with the main breeding season commencing very early (from February) the following year. There are some fascinating examples in the literature of the hardiness of this species. In one account, during a Russian winter, the nestlings became torpid while the parents were away collecting food, and had to be brooded, to bring them back to life, before the parents could feed them! Siskins also breed earlier when conifer seed is plentiful. The occurrence of early broods in these species has an impact higher up the food chain. In bumper cone years Sparrowhawks are often more abundant and produce larger broods than in normal years. So, it will be well worth while spending more time birding in Argyll's conifer forests later this year and throughout next winter. All crossbills are worth a second look, as there is just a chance that species other than Common Crossbill may be present.

Now back to the *Eider*—you will notice this issue is the smallest for a while. So please let me have some articles for the September issue. Many of you will spot something over the summer that will be of interest to other members. It doesn't take long to put pen to paper!

## Club News

### Field trips

If there is a possibility of adverse weather that might lead to the cancellation of a fieldtrip, please check the club's website or contact the organizer the night before or prior to setting off.

**Saturday 31 May 2014. River Add Estuary and Taynish.** Led by Jim Dickson (contact details: phone 01546 603967: e-mail [meg@jdickskon5.plus.com](mailto:meg@jdickskon5.plus.com)). Meet Jim at Islandadd Bridge, Ballanoch at 10.00hrs.

**Sunday 29 June. Skipness.** Led by Katie Pendreigh (contact detail: phone 01583 441359: e-mail [katiependreigh@aol.com](mailto:katiependreigh@aol.com)). Meet Katie at the entrance to car park beside the main entrance to Skipness Castle grounds at 10.00hrs.

**Saturday 26 July. Clachan (Kintyre).** Led by Katie Pendreigh. Meet Katie at the Clachan Village Hall Car Park at 10.00hrs (contact details: phone

01583 441359: mobile 0787 611 3756: e-mail [katiependreigh@aol.com](mailto:katiependreigh@aol.com))

**Saturday 30 August. Seabirds from the Islay Ferry.** Led by Mike Harrison (contact details: phone 01631 710656: mobile 07731 197722: e-mail [jmharrison@iee.org](mailto:jmharrison@iee.org)). Meet Mike at the Kennacraig Ferry Terminal at 12.00hrs. The ferry departs to Islay at 13.00hrs, arriving at Port Askaig at 14.55hrs. The return ferry leaves Port Askaig at 15.30hrs and arrives back at Kennacraig at 17.25hrs.

**Saturday 27th Sept—4th October. Tiree (provisional).** Led by Nigel Scriven (contact details: phone 01505 706652: e-mail [njscriven@gmail.com](mailto:njscriven@gmail.com)). Arrangements are still at an early stage. The intention is to book Morton Boyd House again. Accommodation around £18 pppn + food + ferry costs. Contact Nigel for further details and booking. It may be possible for individuals to book part of the week if you can't

do the whole week. Great time for autumn migrants!

### Indoor meetings

**Autumn meeting (plus AGM) 2014.** On Saturday 22 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead. The programme will appear in a September issue of the *Eider*.

**Spring meeting 2015.** On Saturday 7 March at the Argyll Hotel, Inveraray.

**Raffle prizes.** Raffle prizes are always welcome at indoor meetings.

### ABC Anniversary Event

The club is 30yrs old next year and the committee is considering ways of celebrating this event, such as a dinner and ceilidh (possibly at the autumn meeting at Cairnbaan) or a weekend outing to an island (possibly Mull for 30/31 May). If you have any other suggestions, please send these to our secretary, Katie Pendreigh (contact details on back page).

### Argyll Bird Report 24 (2012)

We have a stock of the latest report, so if anyone can suggest shops or other outlets that might be willing to stock it, please contact Bob Furness (contact details on the back page).

All members should have received this latest bird report, if not please contact Bob Furness.

### Argyll Bird Recording Scheme

Since the last edition of the *Eider* you should have received a copy of *Argyll Bird Report (ABR)* No 24 which covers the year 2012. I hope, like me, you've found it interesting and have enjoyed dipping in and out to check the status of our birds and discovered the earliest sightings of our summer visitors. Have you ever wondered how *ABR* is put together and how you might contribute in some simple way?

The species reports are compiled by a number of willing volunteers using records from a number of sources including formal regular surveys such as the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) or those undertaken by the Argyll Raptor Study Group. However, many entries are drawn from information provided by club members submitted in the form of casual records via Birdtrack or direct to the club's own database via our recording system. Such records are vital to ensure maximum geographic coverage of our area and to fill in gaps that are not covered by regular surveys or the

really keen "out every day" birders. If you're taking the dog out for a walk and see a blackbird feeding its recently fledged chick then that's a valuable sighting—please record it. Many of my sightings are made from the windows at home—the number of Greylags in the field across the road, the number of Starlings in the late summer flock flying round the village. It's not all about rarities—it's about recording things like the first Swallow or Cuckoo, evidence of probable breeding of common species, in fact anything that you consider important or unusual when you're out and about or just on your own patch—however large or small that may be.

There are a number of ways to submit details of your sightings. The preferred way, if only because it makes my life a lot easier, is to use the club's excel spreadsheet recording system, available from me at the email address on the back page of the *Eider*. Records entered via Birdtrack will also end up in our database so it isn't necessary to duplicate submissions. If computers don't do it for you then I can send you a simple log sheet which you can complete and return to me by whatever means works for you—at an indoor meeting, via another member or post if there's no other option. The most important thing is for you to give us your sightings and give the species compilers lots to work with for *ABR* No 26! **Malcolm Chattwood.**

### Gift aid your bird club subscription?

Some members have already completed Gift Aid forms so that we can claim back tax on subscriptions. Thanks to those who have done so. Because the Argyll Bird Club is registered as a Charity, with the remit of encouraging interest in birds, the Inland Revenue provides the bird club with the opportunity to claim a tax refund for each bird club member who pays UK Income Tax. If you are a tax payer and you fill in a Gift Aid Declaration form and return it to me, I can claim 28 pence for every pound you pay this year in bird club subscription, as the Inland Revenue classifies our annual subscription as a gift to the club. Not only that, but I can claim retrospectively for up to six previous years of subscription if you have been a member for that long. This represents a significant extra source of funds for the bird club, and all you need to do is to fill out a few details and email or post the form to me. Then I'll reclaim the tax from the Inland Revenue. This

Gift Aid arrangement will remain in effect only as long as you continue to pay a subscription, and you continue to pay tax. The form is included with this issue of the Eider. If you have not previously sent me a Gift Aid form (or if you might have done but can't remember) please take the few minutes required to fill it out and send it to me. If you sign it and can scan it, or can add an electronic signature, the form can be sent as an email attachment to bob.furness@glasgow.ac.uk which avoids any

cost and would suit me very well, or it can be sent by post (my full postal address is on the form). Many thanks. **Bob Furness**

### Journals for disposal

I have a run of the *Ibis* (the journal of the British Ornithologists' Union) from the 1950s until recently, which I no longer have room for. If any ABC members would like these, please contact me. They are free of charge—all they need is a good home! **Steve Petty, Editor.**

## Summaries of talks from the ABC's Spring Meeting

**Arrochar 8 March 2014**

### Introduction

The spring meeting this year visited a new location, the Three Villages Hall in Arrochar. Despite difficulties with the main road over the 'Rest and be Thankful' about 50 members gathered in this excellent venue to hear a variety of talks arranged by Bob Furness. Jim Dickson, the Argyll Bird Recorder, gave the usual round-up of recent sightings and photographs. This was followed by seven talks; summaries of which appear below.

#### **Tracking Basking Sharks in Argyll—Ruth Abernethy, University of Glasgow (summary by Bob Furness)**

Ruth Abernethy from Glasgow University described how a sample of Basking Sharks that feed in Argyll waters in summer were being tagged in order to learn about their seasonal movements and to define a possible Marine Protected Area in Argyll waters for this iconic species. The work, funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, is being carried out by researchers from the University of Exeter together with local marine biologists. Tagging involves locating basking sharks off Tiree in mid-summer, carefully approaching the animal with a small boat, delicately checking whether it is male or female, estimating its size, obtaining a skin mucus sample for DNA analysis, and attaching a tag that will transmit the position of the animal over the next few months. Most tagged sharks remained in a 'hot spot' off Tiree throughout the summer, where the density of sharks is probably as high as found anywhere in UK waters. Although the battery life of tags did not indicate the migration routes of all animals, some were tracked

in autumn moving south to a warmer water wintering area such as off the Canary Islands. The work provides strong evidence that there is an important local population of basking sharks off Tiree in summer, and is being used to support the plans for a Marine Protected Area covering the core feeding grounds of these animals. Further details of the tagging work can be seen on the internet at <http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/species/fish/sea-fish/shark-tagging-project/>

#### **RSPB's seabird tracking and research (STAR) in Argyll—Tessa Cole, RSPB (summary by Nigel Scriven)**

2013 was the third summer that RSPB researchers have been using modern tracking technology to determine where our breeding seabirds forage. When Tessa first gave us a presentation the project had European funding and was known as the FAME project (Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment). When this funding stream ended, the project continued as the STAR project (Seabird Tracking and Research). As one of the teams was based on Colonsay, Argyll Bird Club contributed £1000 towards funding the study. Tessa was leading the Colonsay team, and gave us an outline of what the fieldwork involved and some of the results so far.

The species concerned were Shag, Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake and Fulmar. The birds were caught and fitted with a GPS tag. This stores positional information, and to retrieve the data, the birds need to be recaptured. Not always very easy.

The results so far have been very revealing, and have demonstrated the importance of the local tidal currents to bring fish near the surface,

making them accessible to the birds. For Colonsay birds, this particularly means foraging around the Gulf of Corryvreckan. The project continues in 2014, with work extending to include Rathlin Island (and Black Guillemots on Sanda).

**Thermography: from counting birds to assessing their moods—Dominic McCafferty, University of Glasgow (summary by Blair Urquhart)**

Dominic McCafferty described how recent advances in thermal imaging cameras have provided an opportunity to develop novel and non-invasive methods of assessing the ecological and behavioural responses of birds to their environment. Thermal imaging, otherwise known as infrared thermography, records the surface temperature of an animal by measuring the heat it emits. Dominic highlighted the remarkable thermoregulation abilities of emperor penguins in Antarctica. Thermal images of the penguins revealed that these warm-blooded animals can have a colder surface temperature than the surrounding air due to radiative cooling. Dominic went on to describe advances in the understanding of animal welfare using thermal imaging techniques. Changes in surface temperature caused by stress can be measured without physical contact and there is evidence that this method may be able to distinguish between negative and positive mental states in animals. Rapid advances in thermal imaging tech-



nology would appear to be opening new avenues for future research and monitoring of birds using such methods.

**Argyll Bird Club's trip to Tiree—David Palmer, [photoscot.co.uk](http://photoscot.co.uk) (summary by Nigel Scriven)**

David was so keen to be part of the Bird Club trip to Tiree in September that he arrived days be-

fore anyone else, thereby capturing photos of a Pacific Golden Plover in amongst the large flocks of European Golden Plovers that were spread across the machair and fields. His first day with the group's walk down to Happy Valley from Hynish was curtailed by Janet's toothache time-out, but after that he was able to join in the fun exploring the island's many birding spots, and photographing them.

David's enthusiasm for seeing the birds is only exceeded by his drive to get photographs, although never to the detriment of the birds, unlike some photographers. His talks never disappoint, and I'm continually impressed how he manages to get such great images, especially compared to mine (on the same day, at the same place). I don't need any encouragement to go to Tiree, but I suspect that David's account of the trip will have encouraged others to make the pilgrimage.

**Ringing Jack Snipe and gulls in the Clyde area—Iain Livingstone, Clyde Ringing Group (summary by Andy Francis)**

Iain Livingstone discussed with us the work of the Clyde Ringing Group with their two longest running study species with over 20 years of ringing: the widely adored Jack Snipe and the unjustly reviled Lesser Black-backed Gull.

The Clyde area has the largest Jack Snipe counts in Scotland, peaking during their autumn migration. Unfortunately it seems that despite a great deal of effort there is only a single overseas recovery of a Scottish ringed bird, a bird recaptured in the Netherlands. This paucity of data is due partly to the relatively short lifespan of these birds (the oldest known bird was only 4 years old, which is very young for a wader) and the comparative rarity of ringing this species in other parts of the world. These birds are comparatively easy to catch because they sit tight until the last moment and can be encouraged to fly into mist nets dragged over suitable habitats by ringers and birds are now being rung more frequently in Poland, a trend encouraged there as increasingly mild winters have reduced the trend towards westward migration of these birds. The lack of recoveries may make Jack Snipe a potential candidate for some of the modern tracking methods, and geolocators (which record day length and timing of day to estimate latitude and longitude) are now small enough to have recently

been successfully fitted on Red-necked Phalaropes which are of a similar weight. On the other hand low site fidelity between winters (at best 5%) might make it hard to recover birds fitted with such devices to allow the analysis of data. It is hoped that GPS trackers, which transmit their data to satellites, will eventually be miniaturised enough to fit these diminutive waders. Work on stable isotope concentrations in feathers could also yield further information on the habits of this elusive and little understood bird. In the meantime the Clyde ringing group is catching the lion's share of UK's ringed Jack Snipes, with as many as 81 birds rung in a single year. This work is yielding information about the condition of birds caught, the ratios of first winter birds to adults and of male to female birds whilst engaging public interest in these charming creatures.

In contrast, the ringing group has had a remarkable 47% success in obtaining ringing recoveries of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Metal rings which allude to the identity of individual birds are now supplemented with coloured rings which, whilst referencing less specific information, are readable by telescope. The enthusiasm of naturalists overseas is facilitating regular recoveries of birds in Spain and Portugal and even some records for Morocco, Mauretania and even Gambia. Photographs of live birds and the recovery of corpses (often after winter storms) and the availability of information regarding ringing schemes are all helping to shape our understanding of this attractive, but persecuted gull.

#### **Catching and tracking Cuckoos: are Scottish Cuckoos different—John Calladine, BTO Scotland (summary by Jim Dickson)**

John Calladine, BTO Scotland senior research ecologist, described his study on the satellite tagging of Cuckoos in the Loch Katrine area, as part of a wider BTO UK study over the last three years. Once widespread across Britain, Cuckoos are declining markedly in lowland areas but are stable or even increasing in highland areas. This study looks for the reasons behind this and also the implications for Cuckoo conservation. Prior to satellite tagging there had been only one trans-Saharan recovery. John described, with humour, the methods used to catch adult male birds in spring using a stuffed decoy bird and tape lures. State of the art solar powered GPS tags were used and his five birds were part of the 30 UK-

wide birds caught and tagged in 2011-13. GPS data, giving at best 500m position accuracy, was mapped out and showed that birds used either a shorter, west of Sahara route, or crossed over by a longer more eastern route. South of the Sahara birds would spend 2-4 months (Jul-Nov) in arid zones and then winter (Nov -Feb) in the wetter Teke Plateau of the Congo Basin, which was likened to Loch Katrine! Birds were tracked heading north back to Britain and noted to make stops and feed for 2-3 weeks, in places where the conservation importance of such areas was pointed out. Most Cuckoo mortality takes place in autumn. It was found that birds from the Scottish highlands were heavier and therefore perhaps fitter than lighter lowland birds. They took the longer more eastern migration route but suffered less mortality than lighter birds taking the western route in autumn. It was thought that highland birds could be heavier due to the more scrubby, less grazed habitat they inhabited during their stay in Scotland. John concluded by noting the Cuckoo's flexible and opportunist nature, the well-defined migration patterns, with conservation importance of the stopover habitats and the implications of how birds might respond to climate change.

#### **Wind, wave and tidal power: threats to birds in Argyll—Bob Furness, MacArthur Green (summary by Mike Harrison)**

Bob Furness gave the final presentation, which questioned whether wind, wave and tidal power posed a threat to birds in Argyll. After listing the main areas of concern regarding onshore windfarms, namely barrier effects, collision risk, disturbance and displacement, Bob reviewed the experience so far. White-fronted Geese had been thought to be at risk of collision with turbine blades but they appear to be able to avoid this. Casualty rates have been lower than expected and lower than for other species. Red-throated Divers are birds which fly fast and straight on regular routes between the nest site and feeding areas and do not seem able to manoeuvre particularly well. While there are no major concentrations of these birds in Argyll there are many individuals and the effect of windfarms on this species is not yet known. White-tailed Eagles are suffering more collisions than would be expected; although it is not known why this is so, it may be because they have no predators and so do not need to keep a good lookout when looking for food. Of the other raptors, Golden Eagles appear to suffer from displacement rather than direct impact; Hen

Harriers normally fly below blade height but the males can suffer collisions when displaying in the spring. Black Grouse have been noted to disappear from historic areas when windfarms are constructed. Crossbills can be disturbed by forest operations associated with windfarm construction but, being highly mobile, this may not have a long-term effect.

Turning to offshore renewables, Bob did not regard wavepower devices as a potential problem, indeed birds use them as roost platforms and the devices may attract fish. The impact of tidal flow turbines is less clear and may depend on the individual designs. Given these devices are placed in areas of strong currents their effect on the Tysties which feed in such strong currents is a cause for concern. Areas off Tiree, Islay and Kintyre were zoned for offshore windfarms by Marine Scotland, though Kintyre has been dropped and Tiree is in abeyance for now. The same concerns

surround offshore as onshore wind devices but the ability of seabird populations to withstand losses is lower due to their long life and lower productivity. Seabirds tend to fly at low level, which should reduce the risk of collision, but some recent designs for floating windfarm structures may increase the risk of collision and facilitate deployment in hitherto difficult areas. The issues surrounding offshore windfarms tend to be species-dependent due to the different manoeuvrability of individual species but, with most seabird species in decline, we should be cautious about offshore windfarms.

### Conclusion

After drawing the raffle the chairman, Mike Harrison, thanked Bob and the speakers for the excellent programme of talks, and the hall staff and helpers who had made us so welcome in Arrochar.

## Report of the ABC trip to the Sound of Gigha on Saturday 29 February

Including those who joined us later in the day, at least 15 people turned up for this year's field trip to the Sound of Gigha. The weather was rather uncertain at first but at least it wasn't raining at 10.00hrs and as the brisk breeze was from the east it didn't cause too much trouble with conditions at sea.

We immediately caught sight of a winter plumage Great Northern Diver (the first of many seen during the day) close inshore, providing excellent views. When seen close up it's always striking what bulky birds they are.

However, we were soon distracted from birds by an Otter messing about on one of the small islets there. It soon caught a fish and landed on an islet to eat it. Not long afterwards a second otter appeared to entertain us.

Otherwise Rock Pipits were on the shore and Common, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a few Shags, Common Eiders and Red-breasted Mergansers were around the offshore rocks. A pair of Greater Canada Geese flew over as well as a Common Raven and Pied Wagtail, but the only waders noted were Oystercatchers. The most unexpected sighting was a Muscovy Duck just to the north.

When we first arrived at 'West Coast Salmon' there seemed to be little around but as always,

patience paid off. We soon had good numbers of Common Scoter (in small groups) out in the Sound and several Great Northern Divers were recorded as well as a couple of Common Guillemots. Eventually we picked up at least five Slavonian Grebes bobbing about in the waves; most in almost complete breeding plumage. Two Razorbills were on the water, two Greylag Geese flew past and a Northern Gannet was spotted in the distance. At least two members present picked up an unusual looking grebe with a longer neck and flattish head. It could have been Great Crested Grebe, but was just too far away to be certain. Then the rain started and we decided to move on early to our next stop.

Many Greenland White-fronted Geese could be seen feeding in the fields to the west of the main road as we drove down to Tayinloan.

Although we arrived in good time for the 12.00hrs ferry to Gigha the wind and light rain made picking up birds tricky but a pair of Common Shelduck could be seen on the shore and a few Greenland White-fronted Geese in the field. Sadly no sign of the two Snow Geese that have frequented the area since last autumn. A pair of Collared Doves were on the bird table at the farm.

The rain stopped once we were on the ferry and

despite the slightly choppy conditions we picked up many more Great Northern Divers, some swimming close to the vessel. Also one or two Black Guillemots, a few Common Eiders and flocks of up to 30 Common Scoter.

With an easterly blowing the island was quite exposed to the wind and it was very difficult to hear any bird song on Gigha as we walked up to the hotel; just a few noisy House Sparrows. We all enjoyed the good conversation and food at the Gigha Hotel, not to mention the warmth and shelter from the wind!

Given the weather most of us decided to catch the 14.30hrs ferry back to the mainland, where it would be more sheltered. Three Common Snipe were picked up in the reeds opposite the Gigha Hotel. We just had time for a quick walk through the woods towards Achamore House in the hopes of finding some sheltering passerines and possibly an early migrant. More noisy House Sparrows were seen along the road and Chaffinches and Blue Tits near the fire station. In the shelter in the woods we picked up all the common tit species (Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed) as well as singing Dunnock, Song Thrush and Blackbird, but no migrants. As we walked back to the ferry two Common Buzzards were seen hanging in the wind. A cock and three hen Common Pheasants were seen on the island by those who stayed behind for the next ferry.

Walking, swiftly, back to the ferry we just had time to pick up a mixed gathering of thrushes in a field near the fire station including Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Mistle Thrushes. We just made it to the ferry in time and the crew kindly held it long enough for us to get on board. On the return ferry crossing we had close views of more Great Northern Divers, more Common Scoters and one or two Common Guillemots, Razorbills and Black Guillemots. Also a distant unidentified Shearwater (presumably Manx), a drake Goosander and two drake Long-tailed Ducks which flew over the ferry and landed nearby.

The weather had brightened a good deal by then and we decided to walk north along the shore from the ferry landing instead of south as we usually do. This turned out to be a good decision as we added several extra species to the day's list. An adult Mute Swan with three juveniles were near the landing and a little further north we came across a couple of Ringed Plovers on the

shore with some Oystercatchers. On the flooded fields inshore we noted Wigeon, Teal, Common Shelduck, Curlew, Northern Lapwing and Grey Heron. On the fields above them were smallish flocks of Greenland White-fronted Geese and Greylag Geese as well as the odd Greater Canada Goose. Further along towards Rhunahaoine Point we came across our first Northern Wheatear and between us we'd soon picked up four or five. A single Common Redshank on the shore added to our list of waders, a Mallard flew over and a Sky Lark singing high overhead lifted our spirits and completed our species list. Sadly several sea bird corpses were found along the shore, including Common Gull and at least five Razorbills, presumably victims of the winter storms.

Despite the cold wind it was mostly dry and we enjoyed a varied list of birds (as well as the otters) and the good company. At least 59 species were seen in all.

**Species list:** Mute Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Greylag Goose, Greater Canada Goose, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Common Pheasant, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Manx Shearwater, Shag, Slavonian Grebe, Northern Gannet, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Feral Pigeon/Rock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Rook, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Sky Lark, Common Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Northern Wheatear, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Rock Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Common Chaffinch.

**Paul Daw (with thanks for comments and additions from Mike Harrison and Steve Redwood)**



## Report of the ABC trip to Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on Sunday 27 April

Five members converged at the observatory around 10.00hrs—Nigel Scriven, Rab Morton, Malcolm Chattwood, Chris Todd and Richard Green. It was a bright day, but the brisk north easterly wind kept it cool outside the building, with the wind turbines turning in the distance. As usual, warden Eddie Maguire made us very welcome, and the mugs of coffee were much appreciated.

Birds trickled past at a slow but steady rate, the early excitement provided by Great Northern Divers a moderate distance out, and disappearing in the troughs between the waves. Jackdaws were collecting wool for their nests from the grazing nearby, and a Pied Wagtail was carrying nest material to a site under a boulder in the rubble bank below the car park. Other thrills were groups of Whimbrel on their passage north stopping for a rest on the shore. It was hard to be sure of their numbers, but it was approaching 30. There were a few Twite and Goldfinch coming to the nyjer seed bait on the ground outside the hide window, but not in the numbers that will be found in the late summer.

Unusually there seemed to be no raptors around, and by lunch our species tally was only in the high 30s, so we bade farewell to Eddie and headed for Aros Moss. Here we did pick up Buzzard, warblers and other passerines, despite the noise from the nearby field being mown for silage by a huge and very noisy new tractor and mowing rig, taking our tally to over 50. We then made for Campbeltown and the



Whimbrels at MSBO, Kintyre ©Nigel Scriven

chance of something new at Stinky Hole. We picked up Blue Tit on the way through Kilkerran by the cemetery, and Raven and Red-breasted Merganser were new at the Dorlin, finally adding Common Sandpiper at Kildalloig, before calling it a day, with a tally of 58.

**Species list for Machrihanish:** Shelduck, Mallard, Eider, Great Northern Diver, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Whimbrel, Turnstone, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Woodpigeon, Sand Martin, Swallow, Rock Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wheatear, Blackbird, Willow Warbler, Great Tit, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Goldfinch, Twite.

**Species added at Aros Moss:** Buzzard, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Song Thrush, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Rook, Chaffinch, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll.

**Species added at Kilkerran Cemetery:** Blue Tit

**Species added Stinky Hole (Dorlin pool):** Red-breasted Merganser, Raven

**Species added Kildalloig:** Common Sandpiper

Nigel Scriven



Machrihanish Seabird Observatory with the warden (Eddie Maguire) talking to visitors ©Nigel Scriven

## Feathers from gulls and eiders wanted

Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull populations in the UK have undergone substantial declines over the last four decades. Such large scale declines in the population size and distribution of hitherto abundant species are generally indicative of substantial environmental change. A possible hypothesis of the cause of these marked changes in gull populations could be changing availability of food resources the gulls use.

In order to evaluate this hypothesis we need to characterise the foraging niche from gulls in the past and now, and in different parts of the annual cycle. We can assess the foraging niche of gulls in the past using feathers from museum specimens, but we also need feather samples from the present. To account for temporal and spatial variation in background condition we also require feathers from Eider Ducks as a reference indicator.

The analysis of natural ratios of stable isotopes in animal tissues provides a very valuable method of studying the foraging niche in wild animals. Feathers are now widely used to study diet in seabirds, which provide a non-invasive method to study resource utilisation. Keratin is metabolically inert after synthesis and preserves the isotopic composition of the diet at the time the feather was formed, and even feathers from dead birds provide valuable information.

In order to obtain information from different parts of the bird's annual cycle we will collect feathers or parts of feathers that have grown at different times of the year. As the pattern of moult is relatively well-understood in Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, sampling feathers that grow at different times will allow us to study the foraging niche in the breeding and the non-breeding seasons.

If you collect whole feathers from dead birds, we would love to have primaries P1

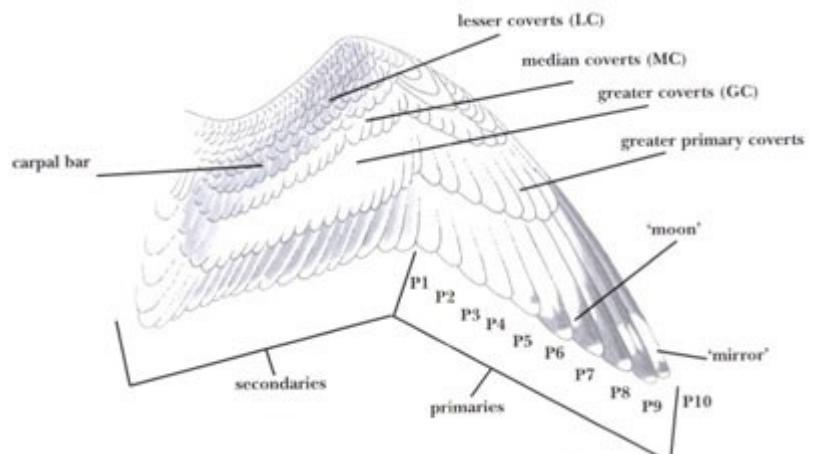


Figure. Collection of the two primary feathers. P1 which is the innermost primary and P10 is the outermost long primary. We can only use the white(ish) parts of the feather. Black melanin based feathers interfere with the stable isotope assay, so if you cut barbs they should come from the white(ish) portion only.

and P10 (figure) from both wings and five feathers from the brood patch and the head. If you collect parts of feathers, for example when you collect from a live bird (ringers only), you can very carefully cut individual barbs from each of the four feathers. Barb sampling causes minimal damage to the flight ability of the birds and the Home Office Inspector has agreed this is not considered a regulated procedure, but ringers still require a licence endorsement from the BTO. We have established that 10 barbs give an accurate representation of the whole feather's stable isotope composition. So, from each feather we need 10 individual barbs evenly spaced over a suitable area of the primaries. The figure above illustrates the location of the primary feathers we would like samples from.

**Eider Feathers:** Feather from Eiders are required to correct for regional difference in baseline natural isotope levels. We require body feathers from dead eiders (five white body feathers) or five down feathers from any eider nest that can be collected without disturbing the incubating bird.

Any feathers that you might be able to collect with information on location and collection date would be most welcome.

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# Recent sightings

## February to the end of April 2014

Golden plover, Ballinaby, Islay on 23 April  
© Jim Dickson



by Jim Dickson, Argyll Bird Recorder

Many thanks to everyone who has sent in records and in particular for the comprehensive reports from Islay (Ian Brooke), Tiree (John Bowler), Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (Eddie Maguire) and Mull (Alan Spellman). Also, many thanks to Morag Rea and Tom Callan for inputting vast amounts of information onto the Argyll Bird Database and Malcolm Chattwood for managing the database. Paul Daw continues to assist with the club website, which gives sightings in chronological order. Monthly WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey) counts and the spring migrant table can also be viewed on the club website.

(Note: Machrihanish Seabird Observatory = MSBO, Kintyre. ABRC = Argyll Bird Records Committee and BBRC = British Birds Rarities Committee).

### Swans, ducks, geese and game-birds

**MUTE SWAN.** The WeBS count on Tiree found a total of 29 on 17 Mar. A single on Oronsay on 17 Apr was unusual for the island.

**WHOOPER SWAN.** A total of 75 were around

Tiree on 18-19 Feb and a big influx on 22 Mar with nine at Salum, 118 at Loch A' Phuill and 62 at Loch an Eilein. On 17 Mar there was a flock of 16 at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll and 11 in the Moine Mhor area on 21 Mar.

**BLACK SWAN.** One appeared at the Mishnish Lochs, Mull on 7 Mar and later relocated to Lochdon, Mull.

**PINK-FOOTED GOOSE.** There were several reports of single birds, then four at Kilmichael, Kintyre on 11 Feb with five there on 22 Feb and again five there on 2 Mar with four nearby at East Chiscan on 10 Mar. On 19 Apr a total of 480 were seen flying north over Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll. Three were at Totronald, Coll on 26 Apr.

**BEAN GOOSE.** Four birds of the tundra race were at flooded fields near Kilmichael, near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 22-23 Feb and again on 2 Mar (Tim Cowley, Eddie Maguire *et al.*).

**WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE.** On 5 Feb there were 471 in the Tayinloan area, Kintyre. On 16 Feb there were 158 on Lismore, North Argyll. On Feb 18 some 1,320 were counted at the Laggan, Kintyre. An all Tiree goose count on 18-19 Feb



Bean Goose near Campbeltown on 23 Feb  
©Eddie Maguire

gave a total of 772 birds, with 739 there on 17-18 Mar.

**LESSER CANADA GOOSE.** One 'Richardson's' was reported from near Loch Skerrols, Islay in Feb. A Todd's type was found near Kilmichael, Kintyre on 5 Feb and was still present in the area until at least 18 Mar. Another Todd's was seen and photographed at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 1 Mar. A 'Lesser' *parvipes* type was seen and photographed on Iona on 10 Mar.

**CANADA GOOSE.** 465 were counted around Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll on 15 Feb.

**BARNACLE GOOSE.** On 18-19 Feb 4,410 were counted on Tiree with 4,369 there on 17-18 Mar and 2,190 at Balephetrish Bay on 14 Apr. At RSPB Gruinart Islay, 260 birds were still present on 30 Apr.

**PALE-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE.** Numbers on Islay peaked at 30 birds in Feb with a single still at Bowmore until the end of Apr. Eleven spent the day at Skipness, Kintyre on 15 Apr and 133 were newly arrived at Balepheterish Bay, Tiree on 17 Apr, including five colour-ringed birds. On 18 Apr 150 were seen heading NW at Crossapol with another 50 still at Balepheterish Bay, Tiree.

**SNOW GEESE.** Two 'Greater' of unknown provenance were on Iona, Mull from 16 to 25 Mar at least. The two 'Lessers', from last autumn, remained in the Tayinloan area, Kintyre until at least 24 Apr. An elusive 'Lesser' blue morph, paired with a Greylag, first seen on Tiree on 22 April appeared to show some hybrid features.

**AMERICAN WIGEON.** A drake found at Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 21 Apr relocated to Loch a' Phuill

the following day (John Bowler).

**MANDARIN.** Maximum count reported was of 14 at the Ford Lochs, Mid-Argyll on 16 Feb.

**TEAL.** On 18 Feb 253 were counted on Tiree with 70 at An Fhaodhail on 10 Mar. On 16 Mar 441 were at RSPB Gruinart, Islay. An unprecedented record flock of c. 90 was ranging off MSBO, Kintyre all morning on 4 Apr.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL.** A drake was seen from the RSPB Gruinart hide, Islay from 25 Mar until 14 Apr (Peter Roberts).

**PINTAIL.** Most birds were recorded as usual on Islay and Tiree. However, two were at Kilmichael, near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 22 Feb.

**SHOVELER.** High counts noted were 16 at RSPB Gruinart, Islay on 2 Feb with 35 there on 16 Mar, 24 at Tiree on 18 Mar during a WeBS count. Two were on floodwater near Campbeltown, Kintyre in Feb/Mar.

**POCHARD.** A male was recorded at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 1 Mar and 21 Apr.

**GREATER SCAUP.** On 1 Feb 50 were recorded at Loch Indaal, Islay and a group of seven were on Loch Gorm, Islay on 21 Apr.

**TUFTED DUCK.** On 18 Feb 92 were recorded during the WeBS count on Tiree.

**RING-NECKED DUCK.** A male was at Loch Ballygrant, Islay from 19 March (Chris and Tony Johnson).

**LONG-TAILED DUCK.** Most reports were of singles. However, the highest counts came from Tiree with 10 at Hough Bay on 21 Feb, 16 on 25 Mar and 14 on 15 Apr. Five were at the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 13 Feb and six on 25 Apr.

**COMMON SCOTER.** Most noted were 30 at Loch Indaal, Islay on 20 Apr.

**SURF SCOTER.** A female was reported via Bird-guides at Campbeltown Loch, Kintyre on 1 and 2 Apr (please can the finder provide more information).

### Seabirds (divers, grebes, petrels and shearwaters), egrets and herons

**BLACK-THROATED DIVER.** Unusually small numbers were recorded in this period with a high of only three noted at Loch na Keal, Mull on 30 Mar.

**GREAT NORTHERN DIVER.** Thirty were noted offshore between Milton and Caoles, Tiree on 14

Mar and 21 were offshore between West Hynish and Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree on 5 Apr. On 20 Apr 62 counted in Loch Indaal, Islay and 423 counted between Machrihanish and Ronachan Point, Kintyre on 25 Apr were considered to be an undercount.

**MANX SHEARWATER.** The first bird of the year flew past MSBO, Kintyre on 14 Mar. The first off Tiree at Hynish was seen on 24 Mar and regularly offshore in small numbers thereafter, but there were 5-6,000 feeding at dusk off the east side of Tiree and Coll from the ferry on 10 Apr.

**LITTLE EGRET.** A report of one at Ulva, Mull on 22 Apr (per BirdTrack, please can the finder provide more information). One seen and photographed at Dunstaffnage, Mid-Argyll on 24 Apr (Steven Benjamins and Joanne Allday).

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE.** One was seen at West Loch Tarbert, Kintyre on 20 Feb and one at Port Ellen Bay, Islay on 4 Mar.

**RED-NECKED GREBE.** A winter plumaged bird was seen and photographed at Ardrishaig, Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 3 Apr (Chris Griffin).

**SLAVONIAN GREBE.** Only small numbers recorded in this period with maximum counts of 12 at Loch na Keal, Mull on 16 Feb and 12 at Loch Indaal, Islay on 21 Mar. Five were seen on the ABC trip to the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 29 Mar.

**LITTLE GREBE.** Outwith the usual strongholds one was seen at Loch Riaghain, Tiree on 18 Feb and one on Oronsay 21 to 25 Apr.

## Raptors to rails

**RÜPPELL'S VULTURE.** A female called 'Gandalf' that had 'flown off' during a display in central Scotland turned up on Islay ten days later and was captured on 1 Apr and returned to a very relieved owner at World of Wings at Cumbernauld (Malcolm Ogilvie, Peter Roberts).

**OSPREY.** First report was of one on 13 Mar seen flying towards the Burnt Islands at Colintraive, Cowal having been seen on Bute the previous day. Next one was seen over Minard, Mid-Argyll on 20 Mar.

**WHITE-TAILED EAGLE.** One to two imms. were seen on Tiree between 15 and 18 Apr and one seen feeding on a dolphin at Coll on 21 Apr. An imm. flying north of MSBO, Kintyre on 22 April was only the second record from there.

**GOLDEN EAGLE.** An adult bird drifted high over Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll on 26 Mar.

**MARSH HARRIER.** A female type was reported from Hough, Tiree on 25 Apr (per John Bowler).

**CORNCRAKE.** First report was of one at RSPB Gruinart, Islay on 16 Apr with arrivals on Tiree and Iona on 18 Apr.

**COOT.** Singles were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 1 Mar and at Loch Bhassapol, Tiree on 17 and 28 Apr.

**COMMON CRANE.** On 18 Apr the distinctive trumpeting call attracted attention to two birds flying south over Tullochgorm, Mid-Argyll. They were last seen banking over towards the eastern shore of Loch Fyne. This was almost exactly the same place as two Common Cranes were photographed last November by Graham Clark (Paul Daw).

## Waders

**GOLDEN PLOVER.** Highest numbers recorded were 1,240 at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 11 Feb, 3,700 at The Reef, Tiree on 1 Apr and 4,400 there on 17 Apr.

**GREY PLOVER.** One at Salum Bay, Tiree on 16 Apr (Mike Bell) and one near Gartbreck, Islay on 25 Apr (Bob Davison).

**RINGED PLOVER.** Big numbers on Tiree in Apr with the highest single count of 420 at Sorobaidh Bay on 16 Apr.

**LAPWING.** An all island count on Tiree of 2,220 on 18-19 Apr.

**KNOT.** A single at Oronsay on 1 Feb was an unusual record there. On 13 Apr there were 20 at Loch Indaal, Islay and two at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 10 Apr.

**SANDERLING.** Max. count was of 455 at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 18 Apr.

**PURPLE SANDPIPER.** Numbers on rocks near the Crazy Golf, Dunoon, Cowal reached 29 on 7 Feb and 30 on 1 Apr. On Tiree, max. counts were 55 at Balepheterish Bay on 18 Feb and 35 on 28 Feb.

**DUNLIN.** Good numbers around Tiree shores with a max. count of 340 at Salum on 18 Apr. On Islay 758 were counted on the mud at Loch Gruinart on 25 Apr.

**RUFF.** One was seen at RSPB Gruinart, Islay during 16 to 22 Apr (James How, Jim Dickson).

Bar-tailed Godwit, Tiree on 1 May ©Jim Dickson



**JACK SNIPE.** On Tiree, one at Balephuil on 1 Mar and one at Traigh nan Gilean on 10 Mar. One was flushed from a pool in west Iona on 10 Mar and one at Fidden, Mull on 27 Mar.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT.** A single on 28 Mar was first of year on Tiree. Max. count was of 164 at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 17 Apr.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT.** The wintering flock at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll remained at 23 in Feb, 17 in Mar and 15 in Apr. Peak numbers on Islay were 147 at Loch Indaal on 5 Mar and 76 on 24 Apr.

**WHIMBREL.** First report of the year was of 12 flying past MSBO, Kintyre on 4 Apr. A single was at Ornsay on 17 Apr then more widespread thereafter with peaks of 59 on Tiree on 30 April and a total of 113 on Islay on 30 Apr.

**COMMON SANDPIPER.** The wintering bird at Ma-chrihanish was seen at least until 24 Mar. There was a

very early report of two birds at Bellochantuy, Kintyre on 5 Apr, with main arrivals from 13 Apr with one at Portnahaven, Islay and then one at Loch Nell, Mid-Argyll and one at Fishnish Bay, Mull on 15 Apr.

**GREENSHANK.** One or two birds noted across Argyll, with three birds at Pennygael, Mull on 1 Mar being the most reported together.

**TURNSTONE.** On 7 Feb 64 birds were counted at the crazy golf area, Dunoon, Cowal and 94 were at Balepheterish Bay, and 177 at Hough Bay, Tiree on 18 Apr.

### Skuas, Gulls, Terns and Auks

**POMARINE SKUA.** One was seen off the north coast of Mull on 20 Apr (Ewan Miles per Alan Spellman).

**ARCTIC SKUA.** A dark phase adult flew past MSBO, Kintyre on 17 Apr and two dark adults were there on 24 Apr. Two were seen off the north coast of Mull on 20 Apr.

**GREAT SKUA.** First reports were of one off MSBO, Kintyre on 18 Mar and two off Tiree on 22 Mar.

**SABINE'S GULL.** A first-winter bird was seen and photographed at Loch Scridain, Mull on 6 Feb (Bryan Rains).

**KITTIWAKE.** A total of 470 flew past MSBO, Kintyre on 9 Feb and 230 birds were sitting on the sea off Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 4 Apr.

**BONAPARTE'S GULL.** A winter-plumaged adult was found at Ornsary, Mid-Argyll on 2 Mar (Keith Hoey, Dave Abrahams) (photo next page). This well-watched individual spent its time between Ornsary and the head of Loch Caolisport until 12 Mar at least.

**LITTLE GULL.** Four (three first-winter birds and an adult) were at Rhunahaorine Point, Kintyre on 7 Mar (Andy Robinson) with four first-winter birds nearby at Tayinloan on 7 Mar (Katie Pendreigh).

**MEDITERRANEAN GULL.** An adult at Loch Gilp on 16 Feb (Jim Dickson) (photo next page) and presumably the same again on 1 Mar (Duncan Watson *et al.*) and again possibly the same bird at Inverneil, Mid-Argyll on 2 Mar (Keith Hoey, Dave Abrahams).

**COMMON GULL.** Large numbers seed around fields in south Kintyre in Feb and a count of 720 birds in fields near Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll on 15 Feb.



Whimbrel, Tiree on 1 May ©Jim Dickson



**Left photo:** Adult Bonaparte's Gull, Ormsary on 2 March ©Keith Hoey

**Right photo:** Adult Mediterranean Gull, Loch Gilp on 16 February © Jim Dickson

**RING-BILLED GULL.** A second-calendar-year bird was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 16 Apr (John Bowler), a second-summer bird at Ornsay on 17 Apr (Mike Peacock) and a first-summer bird at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr (Jim Dickson, Chris Griffin).

**ICELAND GULL.** Many reports from the middle of Feb with a concentration of records from around the Laggan in south Kintyre where two second-winter birds were seen on 18 Feb and a first and second-winter on 21 and 22 Feb. Totals in Mar in this area were one adult, one third-winter, one or two second-winters and two first-winters. In April there was a first-winter at Westport Marsh on 6 Apr and a first-winter at Machrihanish Village on 24 Apr and another first-winter at Bellochantuy also on 24 Apr. On Islay an adult was at Duich from 22 Feb and a first-winter bird near Kilmeny on 1 Mar. On Tiree, a first-winter bird was at Loch a' Phuill on 19 Feb and a second-winter at Clachan Mor on 16 Apr. The only other report was of a third-summer bird at Loch Gilp on 19 Apr. Unusually, there were no reports from the Oban area.

**KUMLIEN'S GULL.** Distinct examples of this Iceland Gull sub-species were noted. A juvenile at Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll on 13 Feb. In south Kintyre; a juvenile and a third-winter near Drumlembie on 18 and 21-22 Feb, a first-winter at the Laggan on 4 and 18 Mar with a third-winter there on 18 Mar and again at MSBO on 19 Mar. A long staying, first-winter bird (first seen in Jan) was again at MSBO on 11 Apr. On Tiree a juvenile was at Traigh nan Gilean on 10 Mar.

**THAYER'S GULL.** A bird originally thought to be

a dark juvenile Kumlien's Gull was seen and photographed at Gartbreck, Islay on 27 Feb (Adam Cross, Sean Jacques), it reappeared at Bruichladdich on 2 Mar (Kriss Gibb, Dennis Morrison, Mark Wilkinson) and has since been submitted to the BBRC as a Thayer's. It was seen there again on 11 Mar (Bob Swann, Al McNee) and now in first-summer plumage was seen again at Bruichladdich on 20 and 25 Apr (Jim Dickson).

**GLAUCOUS GULL.** A first-winter was near the Oyster Bar, Loch Fyne on 3 Feb, an adult was feeding on a dead seal on Colonsay on 6-7 Feb, another adult was feeding on a carcass on the beach near Glenbarr, Kintyre on 7 and 10 Feb, a juvenile in Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll on 13 Feb, a minimum of 11 (five adults/six juveniles) between Sandaig and Hough, Tiree on 21 Feb, three (two adults/first-winter) seen at Laggan Point, Islay on 27 Feb, three juveniles on Tiree on 9 Mar and an adult on 10 and 16 Mar with an adult at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 16 Mar. A first-winter bird was near Drumlembie, Kintyre on 27 Mar. Further juveniles on Tiree on 23 Mar, 28 Mar, 31 Mar and in Apr juveniles were seen at five localities until the last on 23 Apr. Second-calendar-year birds were seen at Ulva, Mull on 11 Apr and at The Oa, Islay on 29 Apr. Unusually, there were no records from Oban or North Argyll.

**LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL.** An adult flying past MSBO, Kintyre on 20 Feb was the first sign of arrivals and three were nearby at Drumlembie the next day with six on the 22 Feb. The first adult at Tiree was on 19 Feb.

First-winter American Herring Gull, Campbeltown Harbour on 15 February ©Eddie Maguire



**YELLOW-LEGGED GULL.** An adult was found with Herring and Lesser Black Backed Gulls near Drumlembie, Kintyre on 21 Feb and seen again the following day (Jim Dickson, Eddie Maguire). Another adult was found in the fields around Barbreck House, Ardfearn, Mid-Argyll on 4 Mar (Jim Dickson). A bird was seen and photographed at the sewage treatment plant, Tobermory, Mull on 25 Feb and appeared to show features of the Atlantic race of Yellow-legged Gull known as Azorean Gull (Stuart Gibson).

**AMERICAN HERRING GULL.** A first-winter bird was found at Kimichael near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 6 Feb by Dan Brown and was seen by Jim Dickson the following day. The bird was next seen by Eddie Maguire on 15 Feb (photos above) and settled into a pattern of going between the flooded fields at Kilmicheal and Campbeltown harbour. This bird was only the second record for the Scottish Mainland and attracted up to 300 birders from all over the UK before it was last seen on 27 Mar.

**ARCTIC TERN.** First report was of two near Bowmore, Loch Indaal, Islay on 13 Apr followed by two at Gott Bay, Tiree on 17 Apr and one off MSBO, Kintyre on 25 Apr.

**LITTLE TERN.** First report was of two at Gott Bay, Tiree on 15 Apr.

**SANDWICH TERN.** First report was of five seen near Port Ellen, Islay on 1 Apr. Two were off MSBO, Kintyre on 3 Apr. Ten were at Stinky Hole, Campbeltown Loch on 6 Apr, four at Carradale Beach, Kintyre on 11 Apr, two at the fish farm Ormsary, Mid-Argyll on 15 Apr, one at Gott Bay, Tiree on 16 Apr, two Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr and 22 on rocks at Machrihanish, Kintyre on 28 Apr.

**LITTLE AUK.** Four were seen in Loch Fyne off Crarae Gardens, Mid-Argyll on 6 Feb and one was reported off Glenbarr Beach, Kintyre on 10 Feb.

**STORM-BLOWN AUKS.** Following severe storms in February large numbers of seabirds, particularly auks with a high proportion of Puffins have been washed ashore. Large numbers of dead birds were first noticed on French shores but

Red-billed Chough, Islay on 27 March ©Angus Hogg



then numbers in the UK increased. Many of the Puffins are from sites including Sule Skerry (40km west of Orkney), the Shiant Islands (Outer Hebrides), the Treshnish Islands (near the Isle of Mull), Great Saltee (off Co Wexford) and Skomer Island (Pembrokeshire). This wreck appears to be approaching the large numbers recorded in the UK in 1983 when 34,000 birds were washed up along the North Sea coast.

### Doves, Cuckoos, Owls, Swift, Kingfisher and Woodpeckers

**WOODPIGEON.** A single bird was new in at Tiree on 12 Mar with two there on 18 Apr. A count of 100 birds at Ardyne, Cowal on 12 Mar.

**COMMON CUCKOO.** First report was of one calling at Croggan, Mull on 15 Apr. One was heard at Gallanach, Minard, Mid-Argyll on 16 Apr and widespread arrivals noted on 19 Apr.

**TAWNY OWL.** One was calling at 11.00hrs at Ormsary, Mid-Argyll on 11 Mar.

**COMMON SWIFT.** An early report of four over Campbeltown, Kintyre on 28 Apr were about a week earlier than usual.

Skylark, Islay on 24 April ©Jim Dickson



**KINGFISHER.** Singles at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 19 Feb and 1 Mar.

### Passerines (Larks to Buntings)

**RED-BILLED CHOUGH.** On 30 Mar one was flying around and calling constantly over Balephuil at 14.35-14.40hrs before heading off north towards Sandaig. This was the first on Tiree since 1987 (John Bowler)! This follows reports of a lone Chough from the west end of Coll over the previous week (per Ben Jones). Sadly, on 16 Apr a dead colour-ringed bird was found at The Green, Tiree. It had been ringed on Islay in 2012 and was presumably the same bird that was at Balephuil on 30 Mar. On 27 Apr a single bird was seen in the evening at Haunn, Mull (Liz Summers).

**MAGPIE.** The long staying bird at Tobermory, Mull went on to build a nest (Mike Shepherd per Alan Spellman). In Mar and Apr there was an unusually strong influx of birds into areas of Argyll where they don't nest with one reaching Islay at Port Ellen on 29 Mar and seen again at The Oa on 2 Apr and this or another at Loch Gruinart and Ardnave on 7 Apr. One was at Cairndow, Mid-Argyll on 1 Mar, one at Carradale, Kintyre on 31 Mar, one at Cruachan visitor centre, North Argyll on 9 Apr, one at Furnace, Mid-Argyll on 11 Apr, one over Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll on 14 Apr, one at Mausdale, Kintyre on 17 Apr, one at Peninver, Kintyre on 19 Apr and two together at Barsloisnoch and Drimvore, Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr.

**JACKDAW.** A count of 90 birds at Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll on 4 Apr.

**RAVEN.** A count of 26 birds at Balevullin, Tiree on 28 Apr.

**GOLDCREST.** Three were at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 28 Mar with a max. of seven there on 5 Apr.

**BLUE TIT.** A single bird was at Totronald, Coll on 15 Apr (Ben Jones).

**SKY LARK.** Flocks of birds noted on the move in Feb and a count of 90 at Tayinloan on 28 Feb and 230 birds counted near Grainel, Islay on 7 Mar.

**SWALLOW.** First report was of one in Kilichael Glen, Mid-Argyll on 30 Mar. One was at Saligo Bay, Islay on 31 Mar. First bird on



Chiffchaff, Islay on 27 March ©Angus Hogg



Black Redstart, Tiree on 29 April ©Jim Dickson

Tiree was at Ruaig on 8 Apr.

**HOUSE MARTIN.** First report was of two at RSPB Gruinart, Islay on 9 Apr then one at Strathlachlan Caravan Park, Cowal on 15 Apr. One was seen at MSBO, Kintyre on 16 Apr.

**SAND MARTIN.** First report was of one at Carradale, Kintyre on 12 Mar then a gap until the next with four at Skeroblin Loch, near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 26 Mar.

**GRASSHOPPER WARBLER.** An exceptionally early bird was heard at Aros Moss, Kintyre on 17 Mar and is about three weeks earlier than the previous earliest Scottish record. The next noted was one at RSPB Gruinart, Islay on 15 Apr and widespread reports from 19 Apr.

**SEDGE WARBLER.** The first report was of one at Portnahaven, Islay on 25 Apr with three at RSPB Gruinart on 26 Apr and a bird at Loch Leathan, Mid-Argyll on 26 Apr was already nest building. A bird was singing at Benderloch gravel pits, North Argyll on 27 Apr and first noted from Mull at Dervaig on 28 Apr, and three at Balephuil, Tiree also on 28 Apr.

**CHIFFCHAFF.** First reports from The Oa, Islay on 12 Mar and newly-arrived birds on Tiree at Balephuil from 24 Mar. One was singing at Bishop's Glen, Dunoon, Cowal on 26 Mar and also Arduaine Gardens, Mid-Argyll on 29 Mar with widespread arrivals thereafter.

**WILLOW WARBLER.** An early bird at Balephuil on 31 Mar was also the earliest for Tiree with one reported from Totronald on Coll the same

day. One was at Kilmicheal Glassary, Mid-Argyll on 1 Apr and reports were more numerous from 4 Apr.

**WOOD WARBLER.** The first report came from Barnluasgan, Knapdale, Mid-Argyll on 21 Apr with the next report of one singing in Minard Woods, Mid-Argyll on 27 Apr.

**COMMON WHITETHROAT.** Single migrant birds were at Balephuil, Tiree on 18 and 25 Apr and one was singing at Tullochgorm, Mid-Argyll on 27 Apr.

**BLACKCAP.** Single migrant birds were at Balephuil, Tiree on 2, 3 and 18 Apr with another at Meningie, Tiree on 3 Apr. One was at Kilmichael Glassary, Mid-Argyll on 6 Apr and records were more widespread from mid-Apr.

**GARDEN WARBLER.** First report was of one singing at Loch Laich, North Argyll on 23 Apr followed by a bird singing near Minard, Mid-Argyll on 29 Apr.

**NUTHATCH.** One was seen at Taynuilt, Mid-Argyll on 2 Mar (Claire McSorley via BirdTrack). On 13 Apr one was watched for an hour feeding on peanuts at Blarighour (Loch Awe), Mid-Argyll (Delys Marks). On 26 Apr one visited a garden at Lochawe, Mid-Argyll (Julia Holmes & Andrew Thorley).

**FIELDFARE.** Smaller numbers compared to earlier in the winter with largest counts being 330 at Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll on 15 Feb, 100 at Balephuil, Tiree on 9 Mar, and 170 near Port Charlotte, Islay on 4 Apr with 100 at the Sound of Islay on the same day.

**REDWING.** Again smaller numbers compared to earlier in the winter with around 200 birds on Tiree in mid-Feb and 250 in mid-Mar, 40 at Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll on 15 Feb and 65 near Port Charlotte, Islay on 4 Apr.

**RING OUZEL.** On 18 Apr a male at Carnan Mor, Tiree (John Bowler) and one calling at Clachan, Loch Fyne (Roger Broad).

**REDBREAST.** A migrant male at Balephuil, Tiree on 15 Apr and another at Scarinish on 28 Apr. A pair at Dunnamuck, Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll on 18 Apr. One at Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr. One at Calgary, Mull on 20 Apr. Two at Barnluasgan, Mid-Argyll on 21 Apr. A female was at The Oa, Islay on 28 Apr.

**BLACK REDSTART.** A female/immature male was found between Balinoe and Balemartine, Tiree on 29 Apr (Jim and Fiona Dickson, John Bowler) (photo previous page).

**WHINCHAT.** First report was of one near the Islanddadd Bridge, Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr. A male was at Ardnave Loch, Islay on 27 Apr and a female by Strone Road, Otter Ferry, Cowal on 28 Apr.

**WHEATEAR.** First report was of one near Stewarton, Campbeltown, Kintyre on 7 Mar. Other early records were of one at Loch na Keal, Mull on 13 Mar, one at West Hynish, Tiree on 15 Mar, one at Rhunahaorine Point, Kintyre and one near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 17 Mar.

**TREE SPARROW.** One was an unexpected visitor to Tom Callan's garden at Otter Ferry, Cowal on 25 and 26 Apr. Another was reported from a garden in Carradale, Kintyre on 1 May (Steve Redwood).

Mealy Redpoll, Tiree on 30 April ©Jim Dickson



**GREY WAGTAIL.** Several reports of singles and three together on the Crinan Canal near Cairnbaan on 17 Mar (Steve and Christine Redwood).

**WHITE WAGTAIL.** First report was of three males at MSBO, Kintyre on 20 Mar then one at Crossapol Point, Tiree on 2 Apr. Six were at RSPB Gruinart, Islay on 15 Apr with 20 there on 20 Apr and at least 10 along the shore at Tiretigan, Mid-Argyll on 21 Apr. Passage then increased dramatically on 23 Apr with a pre-roost gathering of ca. 140 *alba* wagtails at Balephuil which included at least 100 White Wagtails. On 24 Apr this pre-roost gathering was conservatively estimated to be at least 170 wagtails. The majority of these were White Wagtails—roughly 50 Pied Wagtails to 120 White Wagtails (John Bowler). On 24 Apr, 30 were in the Drum area, Kintyre and nine were at Oronsay on 25 Apr.

**MEADOW PIPIT.** Counts of 80 at Westport Marsh, Kintyre on 11 Mar and 160 at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 2 Apr.

**TREE PIPIT.** First report was of one at Tullochgorm, Mid-Argyll on 15 Apr followed by one singing at Ormsary, Mid-Argyll on 16 Apr, one at Kilberry, Mid-Argyll on 18 Apr and singles at Taynish NNR and near Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr.

**BRAMBLING.** Five were in with a large mixed finch flock at Corsapol, Islay on 8 Feb. One was at Killiechronan, Mull on 17 Feb and a single in a Lochgilphead garden, Mid-Argyll on 17 Apr.

**BULLFINCH.** Two pairs at Tullochgorm, Mid-Argyll on 6 Apr.

**HAWFINCH.** One was seen and photographed feeding at Uragaig, Colonsay on 22-26 Apr (per Mike Peacock/David Jardine).

**SISKIN.** A flock of 30 counted at Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll on 13 Mar.

**REDPOLL.** A mixed finch flock near the Moine Mhor on 13 Feb was thought to contain mainly Lesser Redpolls. However, a very pale Mealy Redpoll was picked out by Dan Brown. Four Common (Mealies) and four Lesser Redpolls were at Balephuil, Tiree on 28 Apr (John Bowler).



Snow Bunting, Ardnave Islay on 19 March ©Angus Hogg

**TWITE.** One hundred and twenty birds were counted at Hynish, Tiree on 19 Feb.

**CROSSBILL.** Small groups noted, including eight in

Cairnbaan Forest on 13 Feb and 20 at Glen Bellart, Mull on 12 Feb.

**YELLOWHAMMER.** Small numbers noted, mainly on Islay with the most together being six at Kildalton on 25 Mar.

**SNOW BUNTING.** One at Ardnave, Islay on 2 Feb and one there on 19 Mar was colour-ringed and turned out to have been ringed in Calais, France on 23 Feb 2014 (per Ian Brooke). One at Ballinaby, Islay on 25 Mar, and one in nice summer plumage at Claddich, Islay on 17 Apr.

**LAPLAND BUNTING.** Three birds were found at Kilmichael, near Campbeltown on 22 Feb (Neil Brown), a male on Lismore, North Argyll on 1 Mar (David Jardine) and a report of one from Ardnave, Islay at the end of Mar but no further details for this.

## STOP PRESS

**BLACK KITE.** One was seen and photographed (photo opposite) at Leckuary, Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll on 3 May (Jonathan Platt).

**HONEY BUZZARD.** One was seen flying north over Lismore, North Argyll on 3 May (David Jardine).

**DOTTEREL.** A single bird on Oronsay on 5 May (Mike Peacock).

**HAWFINCH.** One at Killiechronan, Mull on 6-7 May (Jan Fuller) and another at Kilchoman Schoolhouse, Islay on 7 May (Mary Redman).

**GARGANEY.** A pair on the sea, to the south of Toboronochy, Isle of Luing on 10 May (David Jardine) and two males on Oronsay on 11 May (Mike Peacock).

**LITTLE EGRET.** David Jardine found one at Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll on 16 May.

**Jim Dickson**

Black Kite, Kilmichael Glen on 3 May  
©Jonathan Platt



Little Egret, Loch Melfort on 16 May ©Jim Dickson

## BTO NEWS (SURVEYS)

The BTO have generated additional new survey squares for mainland Argyll, from Campbeltown to Appin, for the Breeding Bird Survey and the Waterways Breeding Bird Survey. For more information on the survey methods check the BTO website [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org). For square availability contact BTO Regional Representative for Argyll South, Nigel Scriven (contact details on back page).

Also, if you're going to the hills, don't forget the opportunity to contribute to the What's Up? upland bird survey.

More details on the BTO Scotland website: [www.bto.org/national-offices/scotland/our-work/whats-up](http://www.bto.org/national-offices/scotland/our-work/whats-up)

**Articles for the September issue of the *Eider*  
should with the Editor before the  
24th August 2014**

**Officials and Committee of the Argyll  
Bird Club (2013/2014)**

**Chairman:** Mike Harrison, 8 Ferryfield Drive, Connel,  
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Urquhart (Kilmichael Glen)

**Editor of the Argyll Bird Report:** Jim Dickson (contact  
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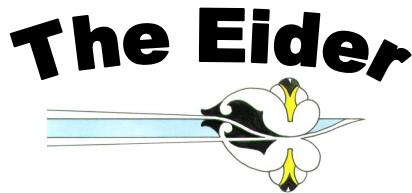
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**T**he *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book reviews, press releases and letters. Whenever possible, contributions should be submitted to the editor as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word or rtf format. But, this should not deter potential contributors, as hand-written scripts are also acceptable. If in doubt about whether an article is suitable, please contact the editor for advice.

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and unedited digital photographs (jpeg files preferred) of birds and their habitats to the editor. Please do not embed digital images in word files. Digital photographs of Schedule 1 species taken at or near the nest will not be accepted for publication unless the photographer was covered by an appropriate SNH licence.

The *Eider* is published during the first week of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor **before** the 24th day of the month prior to publication. However, it greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline dates. Contributions are accepted in the order they are received, which may result in some late submissions being held over until the next issue.

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the author/s and not necessarily those of the **Argyll Bird Club**.

**Advertising rates:** £80 for a full page, £20 for a quarter page, 7p per word for smaller adverts. Payment must accompany adverts, with cheques made payable to the **Argyll Bird Club**. Contact the Editor for further information.

**More about the Argyll Bird Club**

The club was established in 1985 and has around 400 members. Its main role is to encourage an interest in wild birds and their habitats in Argyll; an area of outstanding natural beauty and biological diversity.

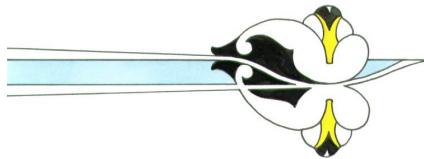
The club endeavours to provide a friendly and sociable forum for members of all ages, to meet and enjoy their common interest. This in itself provides a challenge as the human population of Argyll is relatively small and widely dispersed. The club hosts two one-day meetings each year, in spring and autumn. The venue of the spring meeting is rotated between different towns, including Dunoon, Oban and Lochgilphead. The autumn meeting/AGM is held in a convenient central location, usually near Lochgilphead. The club organises field trips for members. It publishes the *Argyll Bird Report*. Additional or past copies can be purchased from the Treasurer. Your annual subscription entitles you to one copy of the *Argyll Bird Report*, four issues of the *Eider* and free admission to the two indoor meetings. New members are always welcome, whether you live in Argyll or not. Membership categories and rates are:

Ordinary	£10
Junior (under 17)	£3
Family	£15
Corporate	£25

Subscriptions are due on 1st January and can be paid by cheque or standing order. New members joining after 1st October are covered until the end of the following year. Further information can be obtained from the Membership Secretary (see the box opposite).

# ARGYLL BIRD CLUB

Charity Number SC008782



*Please return this form, when completed, either by post to:*

Bob Furness  
The Cnoc,  
TARBET,  
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Dunbartonshire G83 7DG  
or by email as an attached file to: [bob.furness@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:bob.furness@glasgow.ac.uk)

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Name of Charity: Argyll Bird Club; Charity number: SC008782

Details of donor:

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I certify that I pay Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax within the UK at least equal to the basic rate of tax. I want the charity to treat all annual membership subscriptions I have made in the past 6 years and all future membership subscriptions from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations.

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Notes:

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- ⇒ If you pay tax at the higher rate you can claim further tax relief in your self assessment tax return.
- ⇒ Please notify Argyll Bird Club if you change your name or address.

E-mail: [bob.furness@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:bob.furness@glasgow.ac.uk)

Bird Club web page: <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>