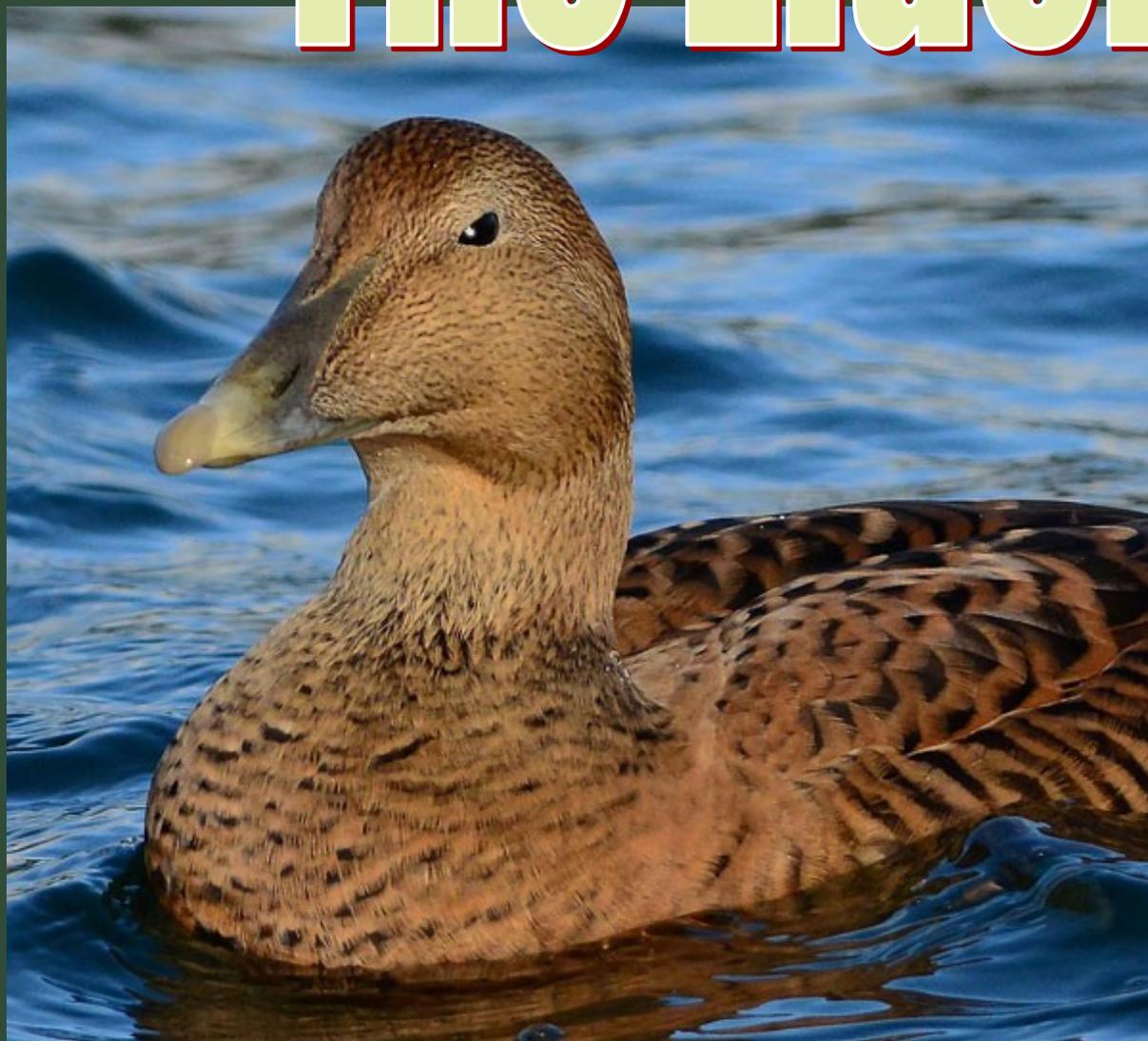


**December
2015
Number 114**

The Eider



A female Eider. An appropriate photo for the front cover, as it's the club's logo (in our 30th year), the title of the newsletter, the subject of a talk by Chris Waltho at the autumn meeting (page 26), and the title of Chris's book *The Common Eider* that has recently been published (pages 14-15). ©Eddie Maguire

Recent bird sightings, pages 19-23

Mixed clutches at seabird colonies in Argyll, pages 15-18

Overland passage of Gannets in Argyll, pages 12-14

The ABC's 30th anniversary dinner, page 29

To receive the electronic version of *The Eider* in colour, ABC members should send their e-mail address Bob Furness (contact details on back page). Past issues (since June 2002) can be downloaded from the club's website.

Editor: Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR

Phone 01369 810024—E-mail stevepetty@btinternet.com

Editorial

Welcome to this bumper issue of the Eider. It's good to see so many contributions in the 30th year of the club. In fact, it's the largest issue I've ever edited. So please keep the articles coming. Wet and windy weather provides the ideal climate for writing about your birding experiences during the past year!

As always, the autumn meeting at the Cairnbaan Hotel was a great success, even though the weather was pretty atrocious. The tail-end of storm Abigail prevented one of our speakers from leaving Tiree, and heavy rain overnight after the meeting left the road to Lochgilphead flooded the next morning, marooning those who had stayed overnight at the hotel. Because of the awful weather forecast, the field trip that morning was also cancelled, although some hardy folk still took off in the direction of the Add Estuary. All in all an eventful weekend!

Our thanks go to Nigel Scriven for organising the programme, although for some unknown reason he preferred to be in Nepal rather than at the meeting! Our chairman organised the highly successful anniversary dinner, and very ably took on board almost hourly fluctuations in the number of members attending as some dropped by the wayside due to a bug that was circulating! David Palmar had very kindly agreed to take photos both at the meeting and the dinner, the results of which appear throughout this issue. Thanks David.

The AGM provided some surprises. We actually had volunteers to fill all the vacant positions. No arm-twisting was necessary! Anne Archer is our new Secretary and Gordon Holm joins the committee, which is now up to full strength. Thank you both.

Finally, the officials of the club wish you all a fantastic Christmas and a bird-rich 2016! And, thank you all for your continuing support.

Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following folk for their contributions to this issue: Ian Black, John Bowler, Malcolm Chattwood, Clive Craik, Stuart Crutchfield, Ken Davison, Jim Dickson, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), Mike Harrison, David Jardine, David Jarrett, Eddie Maguire, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Andy Robinson, Doug Shapley, Margaret Staley and David Wood.

Inside this issue

Editorial	Page 2
Club news	Pages 3-4
ABC field trip to Colonsay	Pages 5-7
The BTO NEWS survey	Page 7
ABC field trip to Appin	Pages 8-9
ABC field trip to Gigha	Pages 9-10
2015 Black Gouse survey results	Page 11
Overland passage by Gannets	Pages 12-14
Book review— <i>The Common Eider</i>	Pages 14-15
Mixed clutches at seabird colonies in Argyll	Pages 15-18
Recent bird sightings—August to October	Pages 19-23
Autumn meeting—summary of talks	Pages 24-29
30th anniversary dinner of the ABC	Page 29
Club information	Page 30



©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Professor Des Thompson giving the after-dinner speech at the 30th Anniversary Dinner (also see page 29).

Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2016

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

Saturday 30 January. Ormsary. Meet at the estate office car park (gid ref. NR741724) at 10.00hrs. Bring your own lunch. Led by Stuart Crutchfield (e-mail stu.crutchfield@gmail.com phone 01880 770267).

Saturday 27 February. Luig. Meet at Kilbrandon Church, Isle of Seil (grid ref. NM757155) at 09.40hrs. A visit will be made to the Atlantic Islands Centre at Cullipool for lunch. Led by David Jardine (e-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com phone 01546 510200).

Saturday 2 April. Sound of Gigha. Led by Malcolm Chattwood (e-mail mal-

colm.chattwood@lineone.net phone 01546 603389) and Mike Harrison (E-mail jmharri-son@iee.org Phone 01631 710656). Meet at Rorachan Point Car Park on the A83 (grid ref. NR741548) at 10.00hrs. Lunches will be available at the hotel on Gigha.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2016

Spring Meeting. Saturday 5 March 2016 in the Seil Island Community Hall, Ellenabeich, Seil (www.seilhall.org.uk). The programme is shown below. Directions: Take the A816 south from Oban or north from Lochgilphead. At Kilninver take the B844 to Easdale. Follow this road which passes a converted tin church on the left at the summit of the road, then descend to the shore. Continue on past the primary school and An Cala garden. The hall is clearly visible on the left hand side of the road. Catering: Coffee and tea will be available on arrival and at breaks during the morning and af-

Programme for the ABC's Spring Meeting

Saturday 5 March at the Seil Island Community Hall, Ellenabeich, Seil, Argyll

Time	Session
0930	Doors open, coffee and tea
0950-1000	Welcome and introduction— <i>Mike Harrison</i> , Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club
1000-1030	Recent bird sightings and photographs— <i>Jim Dickson</i> , Argyll Bird Recorder
1030-1100	Blubber and birds— <i>Kerry Froud</i> , Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust
1100-1130	Coffee/tea
1130-1200	The use of DNA in raptor studies— <i>Phil Whitfield</i> , Natural Research
1200-1230	Using social media to encourage wildlife recording, <i>Richard Wesley</i>
1230-1400	Lunch (soup & sandwiches available in the hall)—local birdwatching tips available
1400-1440	Looking after birds in the forests of Argyll— <i>John Taylor</i> , Forest Enterprise Scotland
1440-1510	Update on Greenland White-fronted Geese— <i>Benjy Wilcock</i> , GWFG Study Group
1510-1530	Tea/coffee
1530-1550	BTO surveys and updates— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
1550-1605	Raffle and closing remarks

ternoon sessions. Lunch of soup and sandwiches will be provided in the hall at a cost of around £7.50 per person.

Autumn Meeting and AGM. Saturday 12 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel (<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>), near Lochgilhead (Tel: 01546 603668). The programme and further information will appear in the March or June *Eider*.

Raffle prizes. Donations of raffle prizes for indoor meetings are always welcome.

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 25 (2013)

This report was published in March 2015. If anyone would like to purchase additional copies, these can be obtained from Bob Furness (address on back page). The cost is £8.00 plus £1.50 for post and package. Please make your cheque payable to the Argyll Bird Club. Previous years' copies of the bird report can also be purchased from Bob.

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 26 (2014)

Plans are well underway for the next bird report. It is hoped the text will be completed by the end of this year, with the report being available in time for the spring meeting.

THE ARGYLL BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

(www.argyllbirdclub.org)

Do visit our website to find out about up-to-date arrangements for meetings, recent sightings and photographs of birds, and lots more.

Bob Furness has recently analysed just how often the website is visited.

A general analysis using Google Analytics provides lots of metrics on visits. Here are the fundamental results. The club's website had 37,195 page

visits during the year September 2014 to August 2015. During the previous year there were 31,988 visits, so use of the web site is going up. Sixty-five percent of visits were return visits by users who had been to the pages before, but 35% were first-time visits, indicating a considerable interest from people new to the web pages.

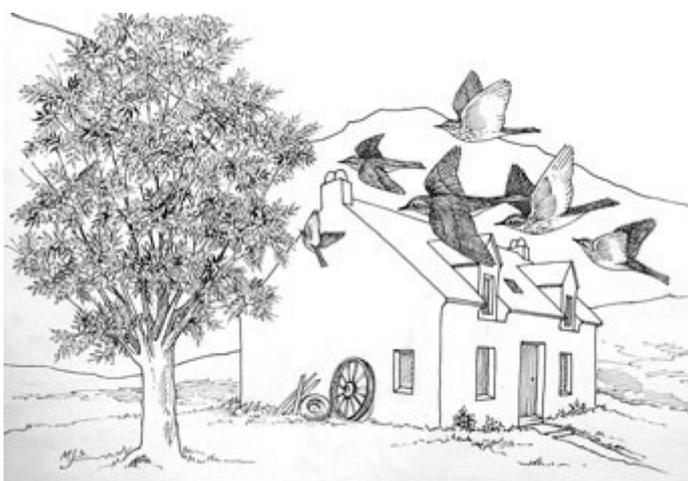
As might be expected, most web site visitors were from UK addresses (89.5%). However, 2.1% were from USA, 1.4% from Netherlands, 1% from Brazil, 0.5% from Spain, 0.4% from Germany, 0.3% from Italy and 0.2% from France. It would be interesting to know how many of these were people planning to visit Argyll, but that metric is not available.

The most visited page on our web site was the '2015 Sightings' page (41%). Then came the 'Home page' (24%), 'News' (4%), 'Mid-Argyll' (3.2%), 'Islay & Jura' (2.6%), 'Mull' (1.5%), 'Kintyre & Gigha' (1.5%) and 'Coll & Tiree' (1.4%). So visits to '2015 Sightings' probably explains many of the repeat visits, with folk in the know going straight to the '2015 Sightings' page rather than finding it via the Home page. While the 1.4-3.2% for visits to pages about Argyll areas is a low percentage, these values equate to about 1000 visits to each of those pages over the last two years, so a substantial use of that part of the web site, presumably mostly by people from outwith the local area.

Visits to the web site were slightly more during spring than the rest of year, and lowest in November-December, then increasing to the spring peak. This may reflect interest in the 2015 sightings with more visits when more may be happening, but possibly also people visiting the web pages in anticipation of summer holidays in Argyll.

The least visited parts of the web site are the pages on our publications and membership. However, even those pages were visited several hundreds of times per year.

So the statistics are very impressive and show a strong interest in the web site, and especially in the Recent Sightings. This is all very encouraging, and we should thank those looking after the web pages - especially the considerable effort put into keeping the Recent Sightings page up to date. That is clearly of great interest to many people.



Redwings by Margaret Staley

ABC field trip to Colonsay on 29 August



Club members birding on The Strand Colonsay. ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

A group of thirteen ABC members (or past members) gathered at Kennacraig to make use of a change in the Calmac timetable, which allowed a day-trip to Colonsay. There was a fresh south-westerly blowing with an overcast sky, which along with a decidedly dodgy forecast, meant the ABC crew embarked on the 'Hebridean Isles' more in hope than in expectation!

However, overcast skies can lead to good birds and this had already been proven before we sailed as two folks watched a late Swift fly over their car at the ferry terminal—an excellent start to the list! Others, mainly gulls and a few waders, were added before the ropes were cast off, but Bullfinches found in the car park at Kennacraig by Stu and Errol Crutchfield, and a Robin, were good additions given that much of the day was to be spent at sea, or on the coast.

The strong breeze made viewing difficult as we sailed down West Loch Tarbert, and it was perhaps a little surprising that it wasn't until we reached Eilean Tighe that the first 'real' seabird of the day was sighted, when an adult Gannet was found fishing in the entrance to the loch. To the north there was a large group of Harbour Seals loafing on the rocks.

Once out into the open sea, a few more seabirds

were found, including Common Guillemots with their attendant chicks, indicating a reasonable breeding season locally—but which colony these birds were from (Rathlin, Sanda, Colonsay or further afield?) remained conjecture. A few foraging Kittiwakes were seen and just after passing the north end of Gigha the only Puffin of the day was sighted off the starboard bow—an adult still with its bright summer bill, .

Good progress was being made and soon a few Manx Shearwaters were seen skimming the waves as they passed by quickly in the fresh breeze. As the ferry approached the tidal race associated with the entrance to the Sound of Islay the numbers of auks increased, and before long, blacker-looking Razorbills were being picked out.

Once in the Sound of Islay, a greater range of species were soon found, with pairs of Mute Swans picked out along the shores of Jura (a total of nine were logged). At Eilean Glas a Peregrine was seen hunting along the shore. This was the first of five species of raptor seen during the day, several of which were hunting, perhaps reflecting the poor weather the previous day. As we approached Port Askaig two Black Guillemots were seen close to the Jura shore. Things looked black to the north west. Colonsay wasn't even visible, indicating wet weather ahead! However, as the ferry discharged the Islay traffic and picked up new passengers for Colonsay and Oban, things im-

Red Knot feeding on Colonsay. ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



proved and Colonsay appeared out of the gloom and the skies brightened to the west.

We were soon on our way again, with a House Martin over Caol Isla distillery and Raven and Rock Dove being added to the list. Those who thought the Swift seen at Kennacraig earlier would be the only one of the day were proved wrong when two flew past the ferry just west of Rhuvaal Lighthouse. It looked like there was a 'movement' taking place, which was later confirmed by other sightings around Scotland, including some impressive numbers in the northern isles. Shortly after this, a second Peregrine was seen flying south along the coast of Jura and onto Islay, and, if further evidence of migration in progress was needed, a Whimbrel, identified by its 'seven whistler' call, flew south over the bows.

The short crossing to Colonsay was disappointingly quiet for seabirds, but as it was now afternoon this was perhaps less surprising. Before long the party had disembarked in Scalasaig and was en route to The Strand in the island minibus driven by Kevin. Richard elected to walk across the island on the road and to rendezvous with the others at the airfield later in the afternoon. This allowed him a stunning view of a Hen harrier hunting at close range and also a sighting of the only Song Thrush of the day.

The Strand was busy with people crossing to Oronsay and dogs being exercised, but in a quieter corner good views were afforded of around 100 Dunlin feeding on the mud and on the merse, along with around 40 Ringed Plover and one Redshank. The cross-country route to Traigh nam Barc did not quite go according to plan! The overnight rain meant ditches were wetter than normal, but everybody managed to get across. A quick look at Loch Bhreac flushed eight Mallard and four Teal.

A small shower was threatening, so shelter was sought on the shore of Traigh nam Barc, but it

never materialised and cleared to a glorious afternoon. There were lots of waders on the shore. Working through the flock of around 200 Ringed Plovers and 100 Dunlin, other species were soon being picked out—14 Golden Plovers close to the gulls, and 15 Sanderling and six Knot out on the sand. As we crossed the bay their confiding nature indicated they had recently arrived, which allowed close views. On the merse at the mouth of the burn were around 140 Lapwings and good flock of Starlings. Amongst the gulls were six Black-headed Gulls—a good count for Colonsay. The 'chow' call of Choughs was a signal that some of Colonsay's special birds were around. Soon, three were found feeding in the seaweed on the far shore of the bay.

Strupach was in warm sunshine on the Ardskenish shore of the bay, where there was a Wheatear 'perch-hunting' from one of the fence posts. Time, however, was moving on and we had to leave to walk round to Machrins. A few butterflies were seen in the dunes, including a Grayling on the track from the coast. A few more Mallard were found at Port Lobh, where 80 Oystercatchers were roosting on rocks on the north shore. Graham, bringing up the rear, was fortunate to get distant views of a Golden Eagle.

After rendezvousing with Richard and Kevin's bus, the group travelled to Kiloran Bay. We had a brief view of a Chough as it fed by the road at Machrins. House Sparrows were eventually added to the day's list at Port Mor (late runners at number 56!). A scan of West Loch Fada found two Little Grebes and a Sparrowhawk flipped over the road in front of the bus. A better view was later had of another Sparrowhawk at our next stop at Kiloran Bay, where its presence in the dunes was announced by scattering a flock of 120 Starlings and around 30 Rock Doves. The birchwood above the bay added Willow warbler and Redpoll and the

first geese of the day, five Greylags, flew over.

The last stop before returning to Scalasaig was for a brief scan of East Loch Fada, which on first impression looked quiet, but close scrutiny found two Little Grebes, and an immature Moorhen, a former breeder, but now a rare bird on Colonsay, with few seen this century. Scalasaig offered the opportunity for some brief refreshment before the ferry arrived, but there were still birds to be found; a pair of Goldfinches were at The Pantry, a couple of Woodpigeons flew north and there were some Coal Tits in the spruce trees behind the shop. Before boarding Stu picked out a returning Great Northern Diver flying south past the pier.

Some dined on the ferry, while others, who had

eaten on Colonsay in order to stay on deck in the fading light as we crossed to Islay, saw few seabirds for their efforts, but did enjoy the sunset (photo below) and picked out large numbers of Red Deer moving shorewards on Jura.

As the tide was flowing with us on both directions through the Sound of Islay, the ferry kept good time during the day—even arriving back in Kenacraig 20mins ahead of schedule. It was a long day, but fortune favoured the brave in respect of the weather and everyone agreed it had been a good day, which found 51 species on Colonsay and 65 during the day.

David Jardine



Sunset at Rhuvaal Lighthouse, Islay. ©David Jardine

Argyll birders needed for BTO coastal surveys

This winter, the BTO are co-ordinating a winter coastal bird survey across the UK, and we need your help to improve survey coverage around the vast coastlines of Argyll!

In winter, Argyll's coastal habitats support significant populations of Turnstone, Ringed Plover and Purple Sandpiper. These birds favour the open coast, so are not well monitored by the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) which largely covers estuarine areas, lochs and wetlands.

To fill this gap in our knowledge, the Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) has been carried out once a decade since the mid-80s. Previous surveys have identified declines in wintering populations of Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone. The forthcoming survey will shed more light on how these species are faring.

The survey is easy to take part in, needing just a single visit to a 2km stretch of coastline in your

area to record all birds that you see, anytime from the start of December until the end of January. It's a great reason to get out of the house and might take you to some new parts of Argyll's beautiful coastline.

Argyll has the longest coastline of any region of the UK, so good coverage in Argyll is key to the overall success of the survey. We've had a fantastic response from Argyll birders so far, but we still have many more sectors to fill. You don't need to be an 'expert' birdwatcher to take part because relatively few species will be recorded, often at reasonably close quarters.

For more information about the NEWS survey, or to take part, please send an email with your location to the e-mail address below. All help will be gratefully received!

David Jarrett

david.jarrett@bto.org

ABC field trip to Appin on 26 September



Club members on the Appin field trip. ©Mike Harrison

A calm, mild morning with a dry forecast was a great improvement on the weather experienced on the last few field trips to North Argyll, and the cloudy sky provided ideal conditions for viewing birds.

Leaving two cars at Appin the nine members and guests drove along past Loch Laich, where the tide was nowhere to be seen, to Port Appin and parked at the village hall before walking through the village to the shore of the Lynn of Lorn. Robins were singing from posts and treetops in the village and a Collared Dove was spotted on an overhead wire. Curlews could be heard calling before we reached the shore where we found the tide well out, revealing an expanse of mud and shingle across which a few Oystercatchers and Herring Gulls stalked. Also revealed were the skerries between the mainland and the island of Lismore and we could see that one particularly favoured rock was occupied by 23 Shags. A succession of calling Rooks flew south along the shore. Two Red-breasted Mergansers were soon found feeding in the shallows and a party of 30 Eiders were spotted further across the channel towards Lismore. As we continued towards the ferry pier a pair of House Sparrows flew up onto a sign board and a Great Black-backed Gull paddled slowly along the shore. We then took the path which leads to Clach Thoull, a natural rock arch which lies a short distance southwest of the village of Port Appin. Several Blue Tits were flitting about in the Rowan and Hazel bushes and

more Robins were proclaiming their territories. A croaking Raven attracted our attention as it flew overhead, followed some time later by a silent Buzzard. A head that was briefly spotted in the water just off the shore, but some distance from where we were standing, was thought to be an Otter, which are frequently seen here, but unfortunately a closer sighting could not be obtained to confirm the identification. A side path led us down towards Appin Rocks from where we had an excellent view of the Firth of Lorn, the Argyll coast, Lismore and the hills of Mull and Morvern. Seals could be seen hauled out on several of the islets which were also occupied by more Shags. Our first, and only, Tystie of the day was seen here.

Returning to the main track we rounded Clach Thoull and walked through the woodland, between the impressive quartzite cliffs, and the shore of Airds Bay. The view of the bay was badly obstructed by vegetation but we did see a Grey Heron fly past us with typical measured wingbeats. Concentrating on the woodland allowed us to see several Bullfinches bathing in a puddle on the track before flying up into a Rowan to preen. The vegetation was less obstructive nearer the head of the bay and allowed us to see a group of Red-breasted Mergansers close to the far side and some Mallard which were feeding amongst the weed. Herring and Common Gulls were patrolling

the foreshore while a few Pied Wagtails and a few more Meadow Pipits were feeding along the banks of dry seaweed on the beach. We noted that, from time to time, a Pied Wagtail would chase a Meadow Pipit across the beach although, to our eyes, there seemed to be plenty of room for all. In contrast to this behaviour, about 30 Pied Wagtails were feeding across the field above the beach alongside a few Meadow Pipits without any apparent conflict. Some Canada Geese were feeding in the next field and a flock of Starlings was observing events from the top of a Sycamore tree overlooking the bay. From the head of Airds Bay we followed the path through the woods and out onto the road in the village, noting a few Greylag Geese amongst the rushes in the field behind the hotel.

One late arrival and one early departure maintained our numbers as we made our way past Skunk Cabbage, Himalayan Balsam and Gunnera down to the shingle beach below the hotel for a picnic lunch. The rising tide was now beginning to spread across the foreshore and a lone Redshank was spotted feeding in one of the flooded areas. Two Rock Pipits landed on the stones just in front of our lunch spot and were added to the list.

After lunch we drove back to Loch Laich and parked near the hide at the start of the path to the Jubilee Bridge. The tide had risen sufficiently for the waders to be within telescope range, though not yet easy binocular range, and Oystercatcher and Curlew were seen. The busy feeding style of two slim waders was also noted and they were quickly confirmed to be Greenshank, soon joined by a Redshank and a third

Greenshank. There were gulls aplenty, until a dog-walker flushed them. Herring, Common, Great Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls were all present but, apart from a few Mallard and some Red-breasted Mergansers, ducks were largely absent. A flock of Canada Geese was feeding on grassland near the bay, sharing the field with Rooks and Jackdaws. More Canada Geese arrived noisily in the bay, possibly flushed from the north side by the dog-walker. We followed the path to the recently refurbished bridge and boardwalk across the saltmarsh. Unfortunately, the tarmac path now has to be shared with cyclists, so birders need to be careful where they stand before getting absorbed by the birds. From the cycle path on the north side of the bay we could see yet another flock of Canada Geese but, alas, no other birds. We retraced our steps across the saltmarsh and along to the hide where a Wren shot across the path into the undergrowth. With the tide rapidly approaching the bay shore we set off back to Appin after an interesting and enjoyable day.

Species List. Greylag Goose, Greater Canada Goose, Mallard, Common Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, European Shag, Grey Heron, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Curlew, Greenshank, Common Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Collared Dove, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Blue Tit, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Robin, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Common Chaffinch, Bullfinch

Mike Harrison

ABC field trip to the Sound of Gigha and Gigha Island on 31 October

After a week or so of unsettled weather the forecast for our trip looked more favourable with the wind easing and rain clearing. We met at the Ronachan Point Car Park where we endured the tail end of the wet conditions making viewing conditions a bit unpleasant, so we decided to drive a couple of miles south. Here at the area near 'West Coast Salmon' looking north into the Sound of Gigha we were joined by Gordon and Janet Holm making it their first ABC trip. So with a good turnout of eleven folk we set about scanning the sea and shore.

Two male Long-tailed Ducks were seen just offshore giving great views with another two much further out. Later in the day a further six males were seen from the Gigha ferry, giving a good total of ten birds for the day. Great Northern divers were spread out across the sound and surprising for some folk was that most were still in summer plumage. A few were very close in and gave great views. This area is usually a hotspot for scoter species however today we could only manage small groups of Common Scoter. Several Slavonian Grebes were seen, all in very contrasting winter plumage with the largest group of six together in an area with good number of Red-

breasted Merganser. A few winter-plumaged Tysties were seen and we had a group of Lapwings fly over the sea and around 70 Turnstones on the beach not far away. As we were getting into our cars to head off for Tayinloan we could hear Goldcrests calling, and while looking for these a female Blackcap was spotted where Malcolm had seen a Jay earlier.

Travelling along the road towards Tayinloan we could see good numbers of geese in flight that turned out to be Greenland White-fronted. Stopping briefly we could see lots more in the fields along with Greylags and more surprisingly we spotted five Pink-footed Geese tucked away at the back of a field. More Lapwings were seen here along with a few Curlews. At the Tayinloan Ferry Car Park a flock of 40+ Twite and a few Linnets were flying around. We got the 12 noon ferry to Gigha and on the crossing saw a few more Great Northern Divers and single Red-throated and Black throated Divers.

Once on Gigha the weather brightened up helping to make our walk towards Achamore Woodlands very pleasant and the sun encouraging a Peacock Butter-

fly. A male Kestrel was seen and we added several woodland species with Blue, Great, Long-tailed and Coal Tits, some more Goldcrests than small groups of Redwings and Song Thrushes. However, Blackbirds were much more numerous. We ate our packed lunches then headed back for the ferry seeing some Goldfinches and Meadow Pipits on the way. The crossing back over to the mainland turned out to be very productive with a tightly packed group of eight Great Northern Divers seen very close to the ferry followed by sightings of Tystie, Common Guillemot, Razorbill and a close group of four male Long-tailed Ducks with another two a bit further away. A group of 30+ Black-headed Gulls were seen as we neared the Tayinloan Jetty and these were closely checked for the possibility of Little Gull, and as good fortune would have it, a nice winter plumaged adult duly obliged and gave us good flight views.

Some of our group had to head off, but the remaining five were kindly invited for tea/coffee and cake at Katie's house, from where a group of Red-legged Partridge was seen in the grassy field outside, which made a great end to a fine day. A reasonably good tally of 61 species for the day was our final total.

Species list: Mute Swan, Pink-footed Goose, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Greylag Goose, Mallard, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Pheasant, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Northern Gannet, Great Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Slavonian Grebe, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Oystercatcher, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew, Turnstone, Black-headed Gull, Little Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Eurasian Jay, Western Jackdaw, Rook Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap, Wren, Common Starling, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Common Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Twite

Jim Dickson



Members on board the ferry to Gigha (above) and a group of Great Northern Divers (below). ©Jim Dickson



Drake Long-tailed Ducks in the Sound of Gigha. ©Jim Dickson

The 2015 Black Grouse lek survey in Argyll

A total of 95 displaying males were recorded at 34 lek sites throughout Argyll in 2015.

This article aims to keep you up to date with progress in black grouse monitoring and conservation in Argyll. The spring conditions of 2015 made for a successful and enjoyable black grouse survey season. Again many dedicated volunteers, contract surveyors and staff from Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and RSPB Scotland provided results from lek counts in Argyll. A huge thank you to all involved and landowners who permitted access to complete the surveys.

This year's survey was completed with reduced effort compared to previous years due to the end of the RSPB's Black Grouse Officer post in 2014. The surveys therefore focused on repeating a sample of core sites and repeating co-ordinated searches at two sites. The largest leks recorded this year were nine lekking males at Fiargall on Forestry Commission Scotland land and five lekking males on a farm, NE Loch Awe side.

At a sample of 16 sites that were monitored in 2014 and 2015 the population decreased from 52 to 49 lekking males, a 6% decline (Figure below)

In the Central Scotland Black Grouse Study Group a similar decline was also observed. These are of course only minor changes and may not necessarily represent a significant change. However, longer-term data does show that overall numbers have declined following a peak in 2011 and 2012.

Declines

Reasons for decline can be varied and often depend on local conditions. Poor weather during the breeding season, a key driver of population, varies

across the region. The data collected over the past few years provided us with a great insight into where black grouse occur but it is difficult to say for certain whether the declines are a serious concern. In other areas of Scotland, such as highland Perthshire there have been significant increases between 2014 and 2015 with the population almost doubling at one site.

The majority of records collected are through the annual lek surveys but if you have records of black grouse sightings I would like to hear from you. Casual observations can provide valuable information on the location of populations that cannot be monitored regularly and can help target conservation action.

Beyond 2015

In 2016, it is proposed that a repeat of the co-ordinated survey areas should be completed. This method is efficient in covering large areas, and by repeating it, results are comparable between years. It is also great fun working as a team to complete the counts. Outwith these areas, standard lek recording will take place with a focus on repeating counts at leks that have been covered in the past couple of years, to provide comparisons between leks and years

A huge thank you to all the staff and volunteers involved in the monitoring of black grouse in Argyll. Many hours of dedication, early mornings and relentless counting are involved. A big thank you also to the landowners who allow access to their land to complete the surveys. I am sure the sight of a black grouse is reward enough for your efforts but also rest assured that the information collected in these surveys provides valuable information that is used to help conserve this iconic species of conservation concern. Black grouse remain a priority for conservation action in Argyll and it is with this data that targeted conservation can take place and ensure the long term survival of this great bird.

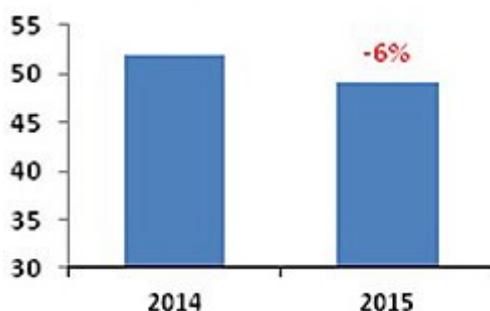
Finally, if you know anyone who would be interested in volunteering to survey black grouse please pass on contact details below.

Doug Shapley, RSPB Scotland, South and West Scotland, Regional Office, 10 Park Quadrant, Glasgow G3 6BS

Phone: 0141 331 0993

E-mail: douglas.shapley@rspb.org.uk

Lekking males at 16 sites
Argyll 2014/15



Westerly overland passage of Northern Gannets in south Argyll—2007-2014

Gannets in flight. ©Eddie Maguire

Away from a breeding colony, it is rare to see a Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* flying overland. Casual observations in south-east Kintyre, Argyll have revealed that adult Gannets periodically fly high over Campbeltown and disappear overland to the west. This seasonal behaviour was initially thought to be a random crossing from the Clyde to Atlantic foraging grounds, but recently it became evident that the one-way westerly movements by Gannets could be motivated by visual stimuli. Indeed here was an opportunity to investigate and perhaps validate what was an unusual phenomenon.

Introduction

Overland westerly movements of Gannets from Campbeltown, were first suspected in summer 2007 (Saunders Girvan *pers. comm.*), and has been noted every year up to 2014. All sightings occurred between May and August and always during the early evening period. Most records involved single birds, but several were of two birds (Maguire 2007-2014 *pers. obs.*).

As records accumulated, a possible explanation came to light. In early summer 2012, two large cranes were installed at Campbeltown Harbour for dredging and piling operations. One was a massive 54m high; the other was a bit shorter. Given that observers at MSBO could see both cranes, it was likely that Gannets foraging at or above jib height in Campbeltown Loch must have been aware of plunge-diving birds off Machrihanish, thus provid-

ing a visual stimulus for Gannets to undertake an 8km overland crossing from Campbeltown to the Atlantic.

Area of observations and methods

All observations were from the southern end of the Kintyre peninsula in Argyll. There is a constriction in the landmass between Campbeltown on the eastern (Clyde) side of Kintyre and Machrihanish on the western (Atlantic) side. The land between these two locations (The Laggan) is mostly below 50m altitude, in contrast to much higher ground to the north and south. Observations were of a casual nature and were made mainly in the evening.

Results from Campbeltown

During 2007-2014, a total of 38 adult Gannets were seen flying west over the town until lost to sight, on 30 dates (Table). All sightings occurred during May-August. The increase in the number of adult birds apparently crossing Kintyre as the months progressed, perhaps indicated the greater demands on breeding adults to locate rich food sources. Large Gannet chicks nearing fledging at the nearest colony on Ailsa Craig would require more food in August than in earlier months. First fledging dates on Ailsa reach a peak during mid-late September (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

All Gannets observed flying west over Campbel-

Table. Number of adult Gannets observed flying west over Campbeltown by month—2007-2014

Year	May	June	July	August	Total
2007	0	0	0	2	2
2008	0	0	0	2	2
2009	0	0	0	1	1
2010	0	1	4	4	9
2011	0	0	1	3	4
2012	1	5	0	4	10
2013	0	0	2	3	5
2014	1	0	0	4	5
Total	2	6	7	23	38

town were adults, all were >100m above the town and all were logged during periods of westerly winds. The flight direction (around 270deg) was steadfast and unwavering, accompanied by steady wing beats, until lost to sight. Only one was seen returning, possibly discouraged by an approaching squall. Although these possible overland crossings were recorded only in the evening, such behaviour could have occurred at any time of day.

Results at Machrihanish

Initially it was difficult to be sure if any Gannets arriving at Machrihanish had flown overland from Campbeltown. The inner bay area between MSBO and the village often held foraging seabirds of many species, thus potentially masking the arrival of Gannets from the east. In addition, adults flying south through Machrihanish Bay apparently on their way to Ailsa Craig often arrive in the inner bay and, to complicate the situation, they orientate west to get around Uisaed Point. But some adults with knowledge of the area regularly cross the point up to 50-60m inland, but no sub-adults have been observed doing this.

Over many years Gannets have been observed arriving at Machrihanish from the east. Birds slope-soaring over the adjacent eastern uplands (500-1000m inland) and over a nearby estate (more than 200m inland) may have crossed the peninsula from Campbel-

town Loch (Maguire *et al.* unpublished data). But additional observations were needed to support this assumption.

On 1 September 2015, an adult was noted c.1km inland flying west. Following this a systematic watch was initiated by MSBO observers over the village and the bay to Westport c.6km to the north. This watch was different from others undertaken over the past few years. Unusually on this date there was no Gannet foraging activity off MSBO and none were present in the inner bay. The watch, from 14.14hrs to 15.15hrs produced an unexpected result. A further eight birds arrived from the east, thus making a total of nine adults flying west in 1hr including three together. These high-flying Gannets appeared from the direction of The Laggan and had almost certainly crossed from Campbeltown Loch.

Discussion

There are accounts of Gannets possibly making overland journeys from elsewhere in Scotland. Taylor (1977) reported observations of mainly first-year Gannets heading several miles inland from the Firth of Forth in west to south west directions, which if maintained, would have brought them to the Clyde coast. However, Forrester *et al.* (2007) noted that inland records in Scotland were rare, and ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2007) gave no such instances from Argyll. Neither was overland passage noted in recent Argyll Bird Reports (Callan *et al.* 2006-2013).

In Kintyre, adults appear to exploit the narrowest part of the peninsula to cross over from the Clyde to the Atlantic coast. Although the catalyst for this previously unrecorded behaviour was originally thought to be mass diving/foraging activity by other Gannets off Machrihanish, it now appears that this narrow part of the peninsula could simply provide a gateway to foraging grounds in the Atlantic, possibly by adults with previous experience of such journeys.

An overland flight from the Atlantic (Machrihanish) east to the Clyde (Campbeltown) over Aros Moss would be particularly advantageous to Gannets breeding on Ailsa Craig. This shortcut would reduce the journey from the Atlantic to the Clyde colony by some 32km and the flight time by around 40mins. But, curiously the overland passage reported here was exclusively by adults and only from Clyde to the Atlantic. Perhaps overland journeys in the opposite direction would have been much more difficult when adults were carrying food back for their chicks on Ailsa Craig?

References

ap Rheinallt, T. *et al.* (eds) 2007. **Birds of Argyll**. Ar-

gyll Bird Club, Lochgilphead.

Callan, T. *et al.* (eds) **Argyll Bird Report**. Vols. 21-25 (2006-2013). Argyll Bird Club.

Forrester, R. W. *et al.* (eds) 2007. **The Birds of Scotland**. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.

Maguire, E. (ed). **Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Reports 2007-2014**.

Taylor, I. M. 1977. Overland passage of Gannets from the Forth. **Scottish Birds** 9 (6):298-299.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to David Jardine for much encouragement and some interesting, lengthy suggestions on how to present these observations. I took three more years to think about it and then went on to accumulate more casual data. Many friends shared this experience with me, several independently reporting Gannets flying west over Campbeltown. These



Gannet taking off. ©Eddie Maguire

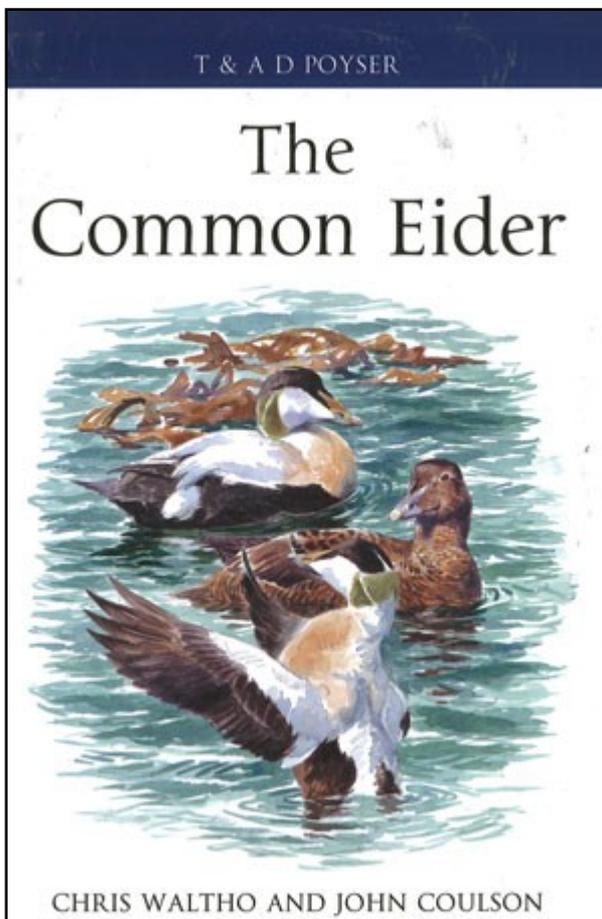
included Dave Armour, Kenny Brown, Derrick Goode, Saunders Girvan, Rab Morton, John McCallum, Iomhar McMillan, Davie Robertson and Tom White *et al.*

Eddie Maguire, The Auld Shop, George Street, Campbeltown, Argyll PA28 6EJ

E-mail: msbowarden@gmail.com

Phone: 07919 660 292

Book review—The Common Eider



It would be remiss of *The Eider* not to include a review of this book! Particularly given the importance of this duck in Argyll and Argyll to this duck. One of its gaelic names is Lach Colasa (Colonsay Duck) and the authors describe how the population on Colonsay, which was protected by the then owner, became a centre of expansion throughout the west coast of Britain during the 19th century.

I found this a very interesting book as it combined Chris Waltho's recent work, which involved several ABC members, on the population decline of Eiders in the Firth of Clyde along with earlier, very detailed, studies by John Coulson and colleagues on The Farne Islands and Coquet Island off the Northumberland coast.

Following introductory chapters on the key features of Eiders, their origin, taxonomy and differentiation, there is a detailed description of the distribution, movements and numbers of Common Eider. With our relatively sedentary population it easy to forget that more northerly populations of Eider are highly migratory. However, our local expressions of

this, seen at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, is not overlooked in this volume. The following chapters are on food and feeding, predators, parasites and disease. The next section has six chapters relating to the breeding biology of the Common Eider, where the authors pose the question whether this species should be seen as a colonial nester and be given greater credence as a seabird.

The last section of the book contains a chapter on mortality, survival and non-breeding and then a very interesting one on exploitation, management and conservation. Have you thought about where your duvet or eiderdown comes from when you snuggle in on a cold winter's night? If not, this book will give you some insights into man's

relationship with the largest duck. The final chapter is an interesting comparative study of all Eiders (Common, King, Spectacled and Steller's) provided by the Russian ornithologist, Diana Solovyeva.

Over forty years ago, as a teenager, I was involved in counting Eiders off Ardmore Point, in the Clyde Estuary, with Chris Waltho, I would never have guessed at that time he would become a world authority on the species, and along with John Coulson, produce another excellent monograph for the Poyser series. Take time to enjoy it yourself.

David C Jardine

The Common Eider (2015) by Chris Waltho & John Coulson, published by T & AD Poyser, London. ISBN 978-1-4081-2532-8 (hardback), 352 pages.



Photo 2. Eider nest with five eggs of Eider and one of Herring Gull. Dunstaffnage, 19 May 2013.

Small islands in the sealochs of Argyll hold a characteristic community of ground-nesting bird species. The most numerous is Herring Gull and there are good numbers of four other gulls (Common, Black-headed, Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed) together with Com-

mon Tern. There are smaller numbers of Oystercatcher, Eider, Arctic Tern, Shag, Cormorant, Black Guillemot, Mute Swan, Mallard and Red-breasted Merganser. Numbers of breeding Canada Goose and Greylag Goose have increased enormously in the last twenty years or so.

Every May-June for 25 years (1990-2014) I visited about 100 such small islands in the area. One aim was to record the breeding numbers and species of ground-nesting seabirds, wildfowl and waders by counting their nests. Early on I found that some nests contained the eggs of two bird species, and recording these mixed clutches soon became an interesting part of the work. During the 25 years I examined 113,120 clutches. Of these, 195 contained the eggs of two species (0.17%). Twenty-two species-pairs were recorded, of which the most numerous were Common Gull-Oystercatcher, Herring Gull-Eider, and Common Gull-Black-headed gull. These three species-pairs formed 54% of all the mixed clutches. Photos 1-4 (opposite and page 15) show some examples.

As might be expected, species with eggs of similar size tended to form mixed clutches more frequently than those with eggs of different size. More surprisingly, almost all the above species were involved in mixed clutches. The two exceptions were Mute Swan and Black Guillemot, probably because there were many fewer nests of these two species. Like the Herring Gull-Eider examples in Photos 2 and 3, almost all these species could be donors (laying into nests of other species) as well as recipients (accepting eggs of other species).

Mixed clutch formation is found in many, probably most, bird groups. The habit is best known among wildfowl but there are also records from various pairs of wader species and from woodland species using nestboxes (tits and flycatchers). There are records from other closely related species-pairs, such as Moorhen with Coot, and from unrelated pairs, such as Moorhen with Little Bittern, Long-eared Owl with Magpie, Long-eared Owl with Kestrel, and Barn Owl with Kestrel. Steve Petty tells me that, in his Tawny Owl study, he has come across Tawny Owl with Goosander, Tawny Owl with Mandarin, and Goosander with Mandarin.

To understand why interspecific mixed clutches like these occur, it is helpful first to consider birds that lay in nests of others of their own species. Genetic fingerprinting has revealed the almost unbelievable extent to which this intraspecific "egg dumping" can occur. In four different studies, 34% of 160 Black-headed Gull clutches contained the eggs of more than one female, as did 31% of 86 Eider clutches, 42% of 153 Eider clutches and 36% of 86 Barnacle Goose clutches. But we don't need elaborate laboratory tests to show this; sometimes the evidence can be plainly visible. Nigel Scriven's sharp eyes spotted a nest in which the three eggs had been laid by three



Photo 1 (upper). Common Gull nest with two eggs of Common Gull and one of Black-headed Gull. Loch Gilp, 25 May 2010. ©J.C.A. Craik

Photo 3 (middle). Herring Gull nest with two eggs of Herring Gull and one of Eider. Loch Etive, 19 May 2015. ©Ken Davison

Photo 4 (lower). Mallard nest with four Mallard and three Eider eggs. An Eider flew from this nest. Loch Etive, 20 May 2011. ©J.C.A. Craik

different Herring Gulls, as shown by the different shell patterns (Photo 5, opposite). Similarly, the clutch of six eggs in Photo 6 (opposite) was laid by three Common Terns.

So, intraspecific egg-dumping is common in colonial species like gulls and terns, and in more loosely colonial species like some wildfowl. It is not hard to understand why. If a bird lays in the nest of another of its own species, there is a good chance that its own chick(s) will be raised at no expense to itself, other than the minor costs of egg formation. All the hard work of incubation and rearing is avoided, and the young will be in addition to any that may be raised in the normal way. Evolution favours any process that increases the number of viable offspring that an individual can produce. If a chick is successfully reared from a dumped egg and itself goes on to breed, any genes promoting this behaviour will be selected and the parasitic habit will propagate from generation to generation. This holds true even if parasitic eggs are laid into the nest of another species. Such interspecific parasitism is more likely to succeed if the two species are closely related or have similar feeding habits.

In 2007 a pair of Roseate Terns in France hatched a Sandwich Tern egg and reared the chick to flying, while in 1939 a pair of Common Terns in Germany did the same with a Herring Gull. In 1995 a pair of Oystercatchers in east Scotland hatched a Herring Gull egg and reared the young to flying; and, in 2015, a pair of Blue Tits hatched seven Blue Tit and two Pied Flycatcher eggs in a nestbox in Devon and reared all nine young to flying.

For various reasons, I never followed the detailed progress of any of my interspecific mixed clutches, but I did note that parasitic eggs were often left unhatched in the nest while the host pair raised their own young normally. This was probably because the parasitic egg was laid too long after the host had laid its own eggs, obviously a crucial factor. I can believe that some of the parasitic eggs that I found might have gone on to be successfully reared. For example, it is not hard to imagine that a Common Gull might raise a Black-headed Gull chick, and vice versa; or that a Herring Gull might rear chicks of Lesser or Great Black-backed Gull and vice versa. But other donor eggs that I found seemed doomed to failure. At a mixed colony, I saw a Shag fly from a



Photo 5 (upper). Herring Gull nest with three Herring Gull eggs, each apparently laid by a different bird. Kyles of Bute, 16 May 2012. ©J.C.A. Craik

Photo 6 (lower). Common Tern nest with six Common Tern eggs, apparently laid by three birds. Tern Raft, Loch Creran, 27 June 2011. ©J.C.A. Craik

Shag nest that contained three Shag eggs and a hatching Herring Gull egg (unfortunately I didn't carry a camera in those days). It certainly appeared that the Shag had incubated and hatched the gull egg. At another mixed colony I found a Herring Gull nest with two Herring Gull eggs and one Shag egg. The two species feed their young so differently that it is difficult to believe that either of these two young guests could have survived. Shag chicks force their bills far into the throat of the parent to take undigested fish from its gullet, whereas Herring Gull chicks take food that the adult gull has regurgitated onto the ground. Unsurprisingly, the Shag-Herring Gull combination is rare, forming only 1% of all mixed clutches in the area.

Some other species-pairs look equally unpromising but are frequent enough to suggest otherwise. The



Photo 7a (left). Oystercatcher nest with three Oystercatcher eggs and two Common Gull eggs that slightly resemble the Oystercatcher eggs in the same nest. Loch Leven, 19 May 2011.

Photo 7b (right, compare with 7a). Normal eggs of Common Gull. Dunstaffnage, c.1982.



Photo 8a (left). Common Gull nest with two Common Gull eggs and one Oystercatcher egg that slightly resembles the Common Gull eggs in the same nest. Sound of Luing, 15 June 2010.

Fig 8b (right, compare with 8a). Normal eggs of Oystercatcher. Sound of Mull, 5 June 2009.



All photos ©J.C.A. Craik

Herring Gull-Eider combination (Photos 2 and 3) is the second most abundant in the area, forming about 20% of all mixed clutches. These are usually found at dense colonies where the two species nest close together among thick vegetation. Successful outcomes of Herring Gull-Eider mixed clutches have never been recorded, as far as I know, but imagine the following. A day-old Eider chick in a Herring Gull nest hears the contact calls of a nearby Eider duck with its own young and runs to join them—and a just-walking Herring Gull chick from an Eider nest is adopted by a nearby Herring Gull adult (adoptions of orphaned or stray Herring Gull chicks are not unknown).

The parasitism involved in mixed clutches like these is, of course, crude compared with the highly adapted behaviour of Cuckoos, but it does give us a glimpse into how Cuckoos might have evolved. There is a final intriguing twist to this tale. As part of her deception, a female Cuckoo produces eggs similar in colour to those of her intended host. Thus Cuckoo eggs in Redstart nests tend to be plain blue, while those in Meadow Pipit or Reed Warbler nests are suitably coloured and speckled, and so on. The Oystercatcher nest in Photo 7a (above), which I saw being incubated by an Oystercatcher, contained three Oystercatcher eggs and two Common Gull eggs. Do the parasitic Common Gull eggs perhaps look a bit like the eggs of the Oystercatcher whose nest is being parasitized, and a bit unlike normal Common Gull eggs like those shown in Photo 7b

(above)? Vice versa, the Common Gull nest in Photo 8a (above) held two Common Gull eggs and one Oystercatcher egg. Does the parasitic Oystercatcher egg look somewhat like the Common Gull eggs alongside it and somewhat unlike normal Oystercatcher eggs (Photo 8b, above)? In other words, is it possible that normal birds laying parasitically can produce eggs that tend to resemble those of their intended host, just like Cuckoos do, but less convincingly? Much more evidence would be needed to establish this. But, remember, you read it here first!

Clive Craik

clive.craik@sams.ac.uk

The following two excellent books were written by the expert on this fascinating subject:

Davies, N B (2000). *Cuckoos, Cowbirds and Other Cheats*. T & A D Poyser, London.

Davies, Nick (2015). *Cuckoo*. Bloomsbury, London.

The following two papers give more details about the mixed clutches that I found at seabird colonies in the Argyll area, with references to most other findings described above.

Craik, J.C.A. (1997). Frequency of mixed clutches in seabird colonies. *Seabird* 19:3-11.

Craik, J.C.A. (2010). Mixed clutches at seabird colonies in west Scotland 1996-2009. *Seabird* 23:41-52.

Recent bird sightings

August—October 2015



Ruff, Tiree, 28 September. ©Jim Dickson

Presented here are records of a wide range of rare and unusual species as well as counts and movements of more common species in Argyll. Many thanks to everyone who sent in records and apologies for any errors or omissions. More information about recent sightings can be found on the ABC website under 'recent reports'. In addition, Paul Daw has compiled a 'spring migrants' table which gives a complete list of migrants records.

Ideally records should be submitted using the Argyll bird recording system or by using the BTO BirdTrack system. Please email: abcrcorder@outlook.com for more details.

(note: Machrihanish SBO=Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, Kintyre).

Swans, ducks, geese & gamebirds

WHOOPEE SWAN. Six were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree during Aug with ten newly arrived on 29 Sep and a record count there (and for any Argyll site) of 402 on 28 Oct. The first returning birds were four adults flying past Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 27 Aug. A high count of 191 was made at Ardnavave Loch, Islay on 27 Oct.

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE. A count of 579 was made at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 30 Oct.

LESSER CANADA GOOSE. A single Todd's Canada Goose was seen around Islay during Oct, and two more were noted there during the island goose count on 19 Oct.

BARNACLE GOOSE. There were 21,055 at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 14 Oct.

AMERICAN WIGEON. An eclipse drake was at Arnave Loch, Islay from 14 Sep until 20 Oct (Jim Dickson *et al.*). A drake was at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 21-22 Oct then at Loch a' Phuill on 23-31 Oct (John Bowler).

GREEN-WINGED TEAL. A drake was at RSPB Gruinart Reserve, Islay on 23 Oct (Roger Broad).

SHOVELER. Outwith Islay and Tiree there was a small flock at Strath Farm Pool, Laggan, Kintyre with a maximum of seven fem/imms on 3 Aug.

LONG-TAILED DUCK. The highest count was ten males in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 31 Oct.

POCHARD. A male was on Loch Gorm, Islay on 9 Oct.

GOOSANDER. The highest count was of 143 at Loch Riddon, Cowal on 18 Aug.

QUAIL. A very late bird was calling at RSPB Gruinart Reserve, Islay on 17 Oct (Mike & Elspeth Anderson).

Seabirds (divers, grebes, shearwaters, petrels also egrets & herons)

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER. High counts included 13 in Loch Indaal, Islay on 17 Sept and 167 at the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 28 Oct.

SOOTY SHEARWATER. Around Tiree there were 13 off Hynish on 8 Aug, four off Hynish on 9 Sep, two were seen from the ferry (SE Tiree) and 10 were off NW Tiree on 10 Sep. Two were off Hynish in the morning and 12 were there in the afternoon on 27 Sep, with one off Aird on 22 Oct and two off Hynish on 30 Oct.

MANX SHEARWATER. Max. counts included 730 off Hynish, Tiree on 8 Sep and 710 there on 20 Sep. A total of 350-400 headed up Loch Long past Ardentiny, Cowal on 26 Aug.

BALEARIC SHEARWATER. One was seen from the Islay Ferry on 3 Sep (Mark Lewis) and one was off Hynish, Tiree on 27 Sep (John Bowler).

STORM PETREL. Higher counts included 12 off Gunna Sound, Tiree on 5 Aug, nine off Hynish, Tiree on 8 Aug, and 25 off NW Tiree on 10 Sep.

LEACH'S PETREL. During the first NW gales of the autumn four passed Aird, Tiree on 22 Oct and six passed Hynish, Tiree on 22 Oct. At Machrihanish SBO 29 flew past in 7hrs on 22 Oct. A single bird was at Loch Indaal, Islay on 23 Oct.

LITTLE EGRET. One was at Fidden, Mull on 4 Oct (Martin McDerby, Arthur Brown) and one was nr. Barcaldine, North Argyll on 15 Oct (Dave Higgins).

GREAT WHITE EGRET. One was seen on Glas Eilean, Sound of Islay, Jura from the Islay Ferry on 11 Aug (Alisdair Paterson).

GREAT CRESTED GREBE. One was on Loch Gorm, Islay on 9 Oct.

SLAVONIAN GREBE. High counts included eleven off Uiskentuie, Loch Indaal, Islay on 15 Sept and 23 at the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 28 Oct.

Raptors to rails

RED KITE. Singles were seen at Loch Frisa, Mull on 5 Oct, Ormsary, Mid-Argyll on 10 Oct and Cluanach, Islay on 19 Oct.

GOSHAWK. An adult was reported from Gribun, Mull on 19 Aug (Nathan Albias *et al.*) and another was reported flying east across Balephetrish Bay on 18 Sep (Philip Harvey).

HOBBY. A first-summer bird was photographed

at Dervaig, Mull on 4 Aug (Ewan Miles), an adult was seen from the Islay Ferry at the entrance to West Loch Tarbert, Kintyre on 19 Aug (Bob Davison) and one was seen flying across the Sound of Mull towards Glengorm on 30 Sep (Ewan Miles).

COOT. A single was on a lochan nr. Glenfeochan House, Mid-Argyll from 27 Aug to 3 Sep. Sightings of Coot in Argyll are becoming increasingly scarce.

Waders

GREY PLOVER. High counts included four juvs at Salum Bay, Tiree on 28 Sep and 12 at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 16 Oct.

RED KNOT. High counts included 80 flying past Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 29 Aug, with 90 there on 4 Sep, and 30 at Gott Bay, Tiree on 1 Sep.

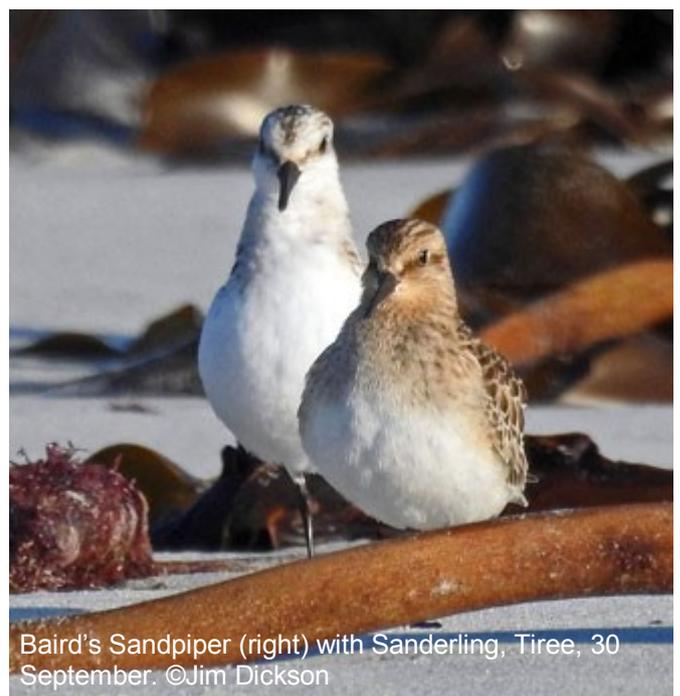
PURPLE SANDPIPER. Three early birds at Hynish, Tiree on 18 Aug and a single at Cullipool, Luing on 12 Sept were the the first reports of the autumn.

LITTLE STINT. Single juvs were at Eilean Glas, Jura on 5 Aug and at Clachan, Tiree on 30 Aug.

CURLEW SANDPIPER. One was seen at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 6 Aug.

COMMON SANDPIPER. High counts included nine at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 4 Aug and 12 flying past Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 12 Aug.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER. A juv was at Hough Bay, Tiree on 29-30 Sep (photo below) and again at So-robaidh Bay, Tiree on 2 Oct (John Bowler, Jim Dickson, Jerry Wilson).



Baird's Sandpiper (right) with Sanderling, Tiree, 30 September. ©Jim Dickson

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER. A juv was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 12 Sep (John Bowler).

RUFF. Very strong autumn passage throughout the islands and coastal mainland Argyll from early Aug through to early Oct with c.60 around Tiree at the end of Aug with a maximum of 25 juvs at Balephuill on 27 Aug. A maximum daily count of 12 juvs was made at Strath Farm pool, Laggan, Kintyre on 5 Aug and a maximum of 13 were at Gruinart Flats, Islay on 20 Aug.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT. Good passage of adults in early Aug, then juvs from late Aug with c.70 juvs on Tiree on 25 Aug, a maximum of 14 at Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 21 Aug and 39 at Gruinart Flats, Islay on 20 Aug.

WOOD SANDPIPER. Singles were at Strath Farm pool, Laggan, Kintyre on 6 Aug (photo opposite), at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 7 Aug and at Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 25 Aug.

GREEN SANDPIPER. Singles were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 14 Aug and at Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 25 Aug.

GREENSHANK. High counts included four at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 24 Aug, seven at Croig, Mull on 27 Aug and six at Ardencaple, Mid-Argyll on 8 Sep.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS. A juv was on a flooded field at Cornaigmore, Tiree on 21 Oct (photo opposite) and again at a pool near Heylipol Church on 24 Oct (John Bowler).

SPOTTED REDSHANK. A juv was at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 24 Aug (John Bowler) and another juv was at the RSPB Gruinart Reserve, Islay on 9 Sep (James How).

GREY PHALAROPE. Two were seen from the ferry NW off Tiree on 10 Sep, one was in Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 12 Sep, one was SW of Coll on 13 Sep, two were off Glengorm, Mull on 21 Sep, two passed Vaul, Tiree on 12 Oct and one flew past Aird, Tiree on 22 Oct.

Skuas, gulls, terns & auks

POMARINE SKUA. On Tiree two were seen off Hynish on 27 Sep, one off there on 28 Sep, three off Aird on 22 Oct and two off there on 23 Oct.

GREAT SKUA. Highest counts noted were four hunting off Traigh Bhi, Tiree on 20 Aug, four off NW Mull on 21 Aug, four off Hynish, Tiree on 9 Sep and three off Coll on 25 Sep.

SABINE'S GULL. An adult was reported off Balemartine, Tiree on 9 Aug (Nick Wall). Two juvs were off Hynish, Tiree on 27 Sep (Jerry Wilson), one was reported between Mull and Coll on 24 Sep (per BirdGuides) and two juvs were off Aird, Tiree on



Upper photo: Black-tailed Godwit, Strath Farm, Kintyre, 16 August. ©Eddie Maguire

Middle photo: Wood Sandpiper, Strath Farm, Kintyre, 6 August. ©Ian Black

Lower photo: Lesser Yellowlegs with Redshank, Tiree, 21 October. ©John Bowler





Upper photo: Yellow-browed Warbler, The Oa, Islay, 10 October. ©David Wood

Lower photo: Great Grey Shrike, Dalmally, 20 October. ©Andy Robinson

22 Oct (John Bowler).

KITTIWAKE. A total of 464 passed Machrihanish SBO on 16 Aug of which 70% were juvs. A max count of 2,814 passed there during a WNW gale on 22 Oct and samples indicated around 44% were juvs (Eddie Maguire).

LITTLE GULL. An adult was at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 10 Aug, a third calendar-year (3CY) was at Gott Bay, Tiree on 24 Aug, a 3CY was at the Strath Pool, Laggan, Kintyre on 12 Sep, a 1CY was at Crinan Ferry, Mid-Argyll on 28 Sep and an adult was off Tayinloan, Kintyre on 31 Oct.

CASPIAN GULL. The long-staying 2CY at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll was last seen there on 21 Aug.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL. A 2CY was at Blackmill Bay, Luig, Mid-Argyll on 12 Sep and 10 Oct and colour-rings showed it was ringed as a nestling on 20 May 2014 in NE Poland (at Ryn, Wejdyki,

Warminsko-Mazurskie). This represents a movement of 1,735km in a direction of 289 degrees (west north west) over 480 days. It was also seen at Orfordness, Suffolk on 17 July 2014 (David Jardine). An un-ringed adult was at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 23 Sep (Jim Dickson).

ICELAND GULL. One (age not recorded) was at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 10 Oct.

Doves, cuckoos, owls, swifts, kingfishers & woodpeckers

CUCKOO. A very late imm was at Balephuill, Tiree on 18-19 Sep.

LONG-EARED OWL. One was at Balephuill, Tiree on 18 Sep.

SHORT-EARED OWL. One at the Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll on 29 Oct was the first recorded there since 2011.

COMMON SWIFT. Twenty-five were over Oban, Mid-Argyll on 10 Aug and four were seen on Islay on 21 Aug. The last report was a single bird at Kennacraig, Mid-Argyll on 29 Aug.

KINGFISHER. One was at Saddell Water, Kintyre on 4 Aug, one was at Kilmun Pier, Holy Loch, Cowal on 12 Aug and one was at Loch Cuin, Mull on 25 Aug. One was seen at Aros River, Mull on 14 Sep and one was reported from Port Charlotte, Islay on 16 Sep. One was at Machrihanish SBO on 7 Oct (first record there), one was at Loch Skerrols, Islay on 14 Oct and one was near Bowmore, Islay on 20 Oct.

Passerines (larks to buntings)

GREAT GREY SHRIKE. One was at Dalmally, North Argyll on 20-28 Oct (Andy Robinson *et al.*, phot this page).

JAY. Outwith usual areas, one was at Whin Park, Islay on 18 Sep and one flew in off the sea in misty conditions at Baugh, Tiree on 1 Oct (first Tiree record).

FIRECREST. One was seen in a garden nr. Barcaldine, North Argyll on 25 Oct (Andy Dale).

HOUSE MARTIN. Two adults and two imms at Meningie on 5 Sep represented the first confirmed breeding for Tiree.

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER. A good showing on Tiree—one at Balephuill on 16-17 Sep, and new birds there on 19-20 and 20-21 Sep. Also one was at Balemartine on 19-20 Sep, at Carnan Mor

on 20 Sep and at Balephuill on 30 Sep (John Bowler). On Islay there were singles at Ballygrant on 30 Sep (Gary Turnbull) and at Kinnabus, The Oa on 10 Oct (David Wood, photo previous page).

CHIFFCHAFF (Siberian). A classic *tristis* bird was at Balephuill, Tiree on 7 Oct (John Bowler).

GARDEN WARBLER. Singles were at Balephuill, Tiree on 15 and 17 Sep.

BARRED WARBLER. A 1CY was at Balephuill, Tiree on 6-7 Sep (John Bowler).

LESSER WHITETHROAT. One was at Balephuill, Tiree on 3-4 Oct (John Bowler, Jim Dickson).

NUTHATCH. One was at Keillmore near Keills, Mid-Argyll on 17 Aug (Iain Coucher). One was on feeders at Pennyghael, Mull on 20 Sep and again on 21 Oct when it fell down the chimney! (Nigel Burch and Loki). One was in woodland by Eilean Traighe, Ormsary, Mid-Argyll on 26 Oct (Jim Dickson).

ROSE-COLOURED STARLING. An adult was seen near Machir Bay, Islay on 20 Aug (Richard Scott) and seen again occasionally around the Loch Gorm area until 20 Oct (photo above).

RING OUZEL. One was seen in flight at Ardtun, Mull on 19 Aug. A pair was at Allt Coire an t-Sith, Cowal on 19 Aug and a first-winter bird was near Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 10 Oct.

FIELDFARE. Widespread arrivals from late Oct. At Strath Farm, Laggan, Kintyre there was a high count of c.2,500 on 29 Oct and 400 at Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll on 29 Oct.

REDWING. Widespread arrivals from late Oct. A high count of c.1,500 at Strath Farm, Laggan, Kintyre on 29 Oct.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. A late migrant was at Gortantaoid, Islay on 13 Oct.

PIED FLYCATCHER. An imm was at The Glebe, Scarinish, Tiree on 1 Sep, one was at The Oa, Islay on 7 Sep and an imm was at Balinoe, Tiree on 19-20 Sep.

BRAMBLING. Small numbers were noted from early Oct with a maximum count of seven at Rockside, Islay on 29 Oct.

TWITE. The Twite ringing season commenced at Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 26 Aug when 14 birds were colour ringed. A pair ringed during autumn 2013 was re-trapped, possibly with one of their youngsters. The Oct colour-ringing total was

Rose-coloured Starling with Common Starlings, Machir Bay, Islay, 19 September. ©Jim Dickson



16 birds and the total trapped/ringed during Aug-Oct was 110 birds. Fifty arrived at the feeding station on 30 Oct (Eddie Maguire, Rab Morton).

YELLOWHAMMER. High counts included eleven at Black Mill Bay, Luig, Mid-Argyll on 24 Oct.

SNOW BUNTING. One flew over Balephuill, Tiree on 16 Sept. Two were on The Oa, Islay on 22 Sep. One was at Ardnave on 29 Sep. Ten were at Ardnave, Islay on 22 Oct and one was at Scarinish, Tiree on 24 Oct.

LAPLAND BUNTING. On Tiree, one was at Upper Kenovay on 21 Sep, one flew south at Barrapol on 26 Sep and one was at Balepheterish on 11 Oct. One was at Keils, Jura on 28 Sep.

Jim Dickson

Argyll Bird Recorder (contact details on back page)

STOP PRESS

FIRECREST. One was seen at Knock, Mull on 1 Nov (Sue and David McDowell).

BLACK REDSTART. A fem/imm was near Loch A' Phuill, Tiree from 7 Nov (John Bowler).

WAXWING. Small numbers were noted on Islay on 13 Nov.

LESSER SCAUP. An adult female was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 16 Nov (John Bowler).

AMERICAN WIGEON. A drake was on floods at Kilmichael Farm, near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 17 Nov (Chris Bradshaw, Andy McKee). The drake on Tiree was still there during Nov.

Summary of talks from the ABC's spring meeting



Chairman, Mike Harrison welcoming everyone to the meeting. ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Introduction

The autumn meeting was held on 14 November at its usual venue, the Cairnbaan Hotel near Lochgilphead. The gale associated with storm Abigail had blown through Argyll two days before the meeting leaving one of our speakers stranded on Tiree, so it was a slightly modified programme of talks that club chairman Mike Harrison introduced after welcoming 52 members and guests for the meeting and the Club's AGM. Argyll Bird Recorder, Jim Dickson, reported on some of the more unusual birds which have been seen and photographed in Argyll over the past few months before the first of our visiting speakers was introduced.

House Martin survey now and next—Ben Darvill, BTO Scotland (summary by Malcolm Chattwood)

Although the title of Ben's talk suggested it would be about the 2015 House Martin survey, it was a touch surprising to hear Ben's opening remarks that it would be too boring to limit the talk to the survey, as there wasn't enough to talk about yet! That decision was to the audience's advantage as he presented us with many diverse and interesting facts about House Martins,

which are regularly seen locally, but about which little is known once they head south at the end of the summer. Nesting habitats include buildings, bridges, cliffs and quarries. Nests are constructed with over 1000 mud pellets collected in around 10 days. Colonies are typically small—an average of five, but occasionally they can be huge. Assuming martins aren't displaced by House Sparrows, their nests are lined with grass and feathers collected



Ben Darvill, BTO, giving his presentation. ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

on the wing. One pair can produce up to three broods of four to five chicks each year. The species is also quite unusual as young of the first brood may help their parents to feed subsequent broods. Research has discovered that House Martins feed within 500m of the nest at around 21m above the ground, thus much higher than Swallows, which feed closer to ground level. The extent of their feeding range was questioned by the audience. Perhaps it was tailored to individual nesting habitats, especially when away from fresh water. There also appears to be a significant degree of infidelity among adults, as 15% of nestlings may be unrelated and 32% of nests contained a chick whose father is different to the other nestlings.

On migration it is known that birds cross the Mediterranean on a wide front, but are rarely seen in winter, with only one ringed bird recovered in Nigeria. It is possible that birds may roost on the wing and feed high over sub-Saharan rain forests, thus remaining elusive from observers. Scientists in Belgium and Sweden have carried out programmes of tagging birds, but the small tags used rely on birds being recovered in future to download the recorded information. With adult mortality varying between 25% and 70%, it is disappointing, but perhaps understandable, that there have been no recoveries. The BTO have no plans to undertake similar research until smaller tags are available.

In the UK, 30% of the House Martin's range is in Scotland with 19% of the abundance there too. While House Martins have shown a 27% decline in the British Breeding Bird Survey Index for England there has been a 120% increase between 1994 and 2014 in Scotland.

Ben said there was great interest in the current survey from folks with martins' nests on their properties, as well as a general fondness for the species. The nesting survey undertaken by volunteers during 2015 showed that in Argyll, of 17 allocated sites 11 were surveyed with 82% benefitting from one visit and 55% from two, resulting in the identification of eight colonies. A further survey was planned in 2016 that involves selecting a particular breeding site and making regular 10min observations of activity, such as nest building and feeding. The BTO are keen to recruit volunteers, and interested members were invited to approach Ben during the meeting or log on to the

BTO website for further details.

Birding in Costa Rica—Ron Forrester (summary by David Jardine)

Most folk who visit Costa Rica on a birdwatching holiday do so with a wildlife tour operator and spend 1-2 weeks in a country whose avifauna boasts a total of 885 species (or about 8-10% of the bird species in the world depending on which taxonomic authority you use). Around 700 are breeding species. Ron decided to do things differently and went with Edith, his wife, on a self-drive tour for four weeks. Having done his homework by researching the avifauna and reading up on the best birding spots he was able to be more selective about accommodation and to restrict his use of guides to key points in his itinerary.

What was the result of this different approach? Ron saw 360 species during his visit, which is in the 'ball park' for a tour operator's visit to Costa Rica, which usually see 350-400 species. During the



Ron Forrester
©David Palmar photoscot.co.uk



Flame-coloured Tanager, male, San Gerardo de Dota, Costa Rica.
© Ron Forrester

early part of Ron's talk I wondered if this more relaxed approach to birding in Costa Rica had allowed Ron to 'learn' the species he was encountering in a more thorough manner, as he reeled off a whole series of exotic species he had found—Black and White Owl, Mangrove Swallow, American Pigmy Kingfisher, Orange-collared Manakin, White-throated Mountain Gem, Volcano Junco etc. Then he confessed! He was working from notes and like me had difficulties remembering names, especially the myriad of hummingbirds, of which 70 species occur in Costa Rica!

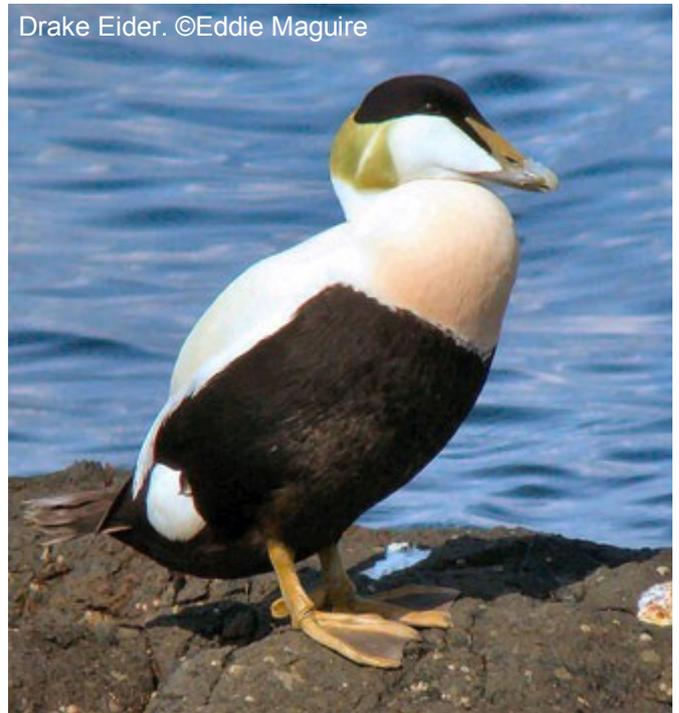
Ron explained why Costa Rica, which is situated in Central America between Panama and Nicaragua, is so good for birds. Its avifauna is made up of birds from both North and South America and being divided by a central mountain range (which reaches 4000m) has different bird assemblages on its Pacific and Caribbean coasts. His tour took in a wide range of habitats from coast to high in the mountains, visiting Bosque del Rio Tigre, Heliconias Lodge, Arenal Volcano, La Selva, Carara National Park (NP), San Gerardo de Dota, Palo Verde NP, Chomes and Monteverde Cloud Forest.

We were entertained with some wonderful photos of spectacularly coloured birds—motmots, jacamars and guans, many of which were very confiding allowing easy photography, alongside images of cayman, coatis, Collared Peccary and views of forest and wetland habitats. Many of the lodges were set up for eco-tourism, with hummingbird feeders allowing close views, thus assisting identification. With all birding a bit of luck is sometimes required and Ron certainly seems to have had his share, especially when he had a close encounter with a Sun Grebe. Was the tour a success? It certainly seemed to be and I must thank Ron for enthusing Janet who has added Costa Rica onto her travel list!

Eider up and Eider down—Chris Waltho (summary by Bob Furness)

Chris set his personal 40 years of monitoring Eiders in the Firth of Clyde into the historical context of their colonisation as a breeding species in the Clyde around 1920, a long period of breeding range expansion (at an average of about 1 to 4km per year over the last 100 years or more), population growth to a peak of 20,000 birds around 1999, and then an equally spectacular population decline. Numbers now are down from that dramatic peak to around 6,000 birds,

Drake Eider. ©Eddie Maguire



similar to the total in the early 1980s. Counts in different areas all show a consistent picture, whether the counts are of breeding numbers on Horse Island, wintering numbers in Chris' personal study area from Rhu to Coulport, or numbers in other sections of the Clyde. So there is nothing to suggest that a particular area has been more strongly affected. The cause of the recent decline is not known. Changes in food supply resulting from cleaning up of the estuary seem to be the most likely explanation. Reduced discharge of sewage and agricultural nutrients may have led to there being less food for Eiders. Predation by American Mink has undoubtedly affected incubating females at some colonies and the sex ratio in the population is about two males to each female, suggesting an impact of nest predation. However, Eiders elsewhere also seem to be in decline—in Finland, Sweden, Netherlands and Norway the numbers increased to a peak then fell back. So the species is now climbing up the ladder of conservation concern. Good reason to continue the counts of Eiders on the Clyde, so anyone interested in volunteering to help with the September census should contact Chris.

Loch Lomond RSPB Reserve—Paula Baker, **RSPB** (summary by David Jardine)

This talk, which was due to take place last year, had to be postponed to allow the speaker to attend her brother's wedding. It was worth the wait, as Paula was able to describe the successful habitat management work which was now taking place on



©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



©Steve Petty

Paula giving her talk (left) and a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (above), one of the butterflies to have benefitted from the recent management of the Loch Lomond RSPB Reserve.

this new reserve and to describe the developing visitor facilities which will be available from 2016 when the new car park, along with some circular trails, will be opened.

So where is this new reserve? It is a 're-badging' of the area of the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve south of the River Endrick, and perhaps better known to some in the audience as the 'Endrick Mouth'. This area is now in the ownership of RSPB and is being managed in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority. This 'triumvirate' is providing many synergies, with each of the partners bringing their strengths to re-vitalise the area.

Paula's talk described the four main habitats found on the reserve—fens, wetlands, oakwoods and grasslands. The fens, which were formerly cropped for bog hay every year, are the home of some special plants including Tufted Loosestrife. This area has long been the home of a few Spotted Crakes, but they were not found there during the 2012 national survey. However, they were re-found in 2014 and five calling males were found this year. Habitat management work to restore

the fen, which is in 'unfavourable declining' condition, is planned to tackle the expanding area of Reed Canary Grass and to repair sluices which control the water levels.

The latter work will also help other wetland areas (ponds and flats) adjacent to the river and loch. These are important areas for breeding waders which have declined significantly, with only two pairs of Redshank, seven pairs of Lapwing and around ten pairs of Snipe remaining. The wetlands also support breeding Osprey and are designated for two species of parasitic fish—Brook and River Lampreys (not that these are easy to see!)

The Oakwoods have three pairs of Wood Warblers and eleven pairs of Redstart, along with large numbers of Tree Pipits (30 pairs) and are largely unmanaged, unlike the grasslands, where a decline in management had led to a decline in condition. Action to address this is already underway. Areas of rush (*Juncus* spp.) have been targeted with weed-wipes and the re-introduction of cattle grazing. This has led to a reduction of rush cover in some areas from 90% to around 15-20%, which is already providing benefit for a wide range of other flowering plants and special butterflies such as Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (photo page 27).

The change in ownership is helping this important area, with a wide range of people becoming involved in protecting and enhancing it. In closing, Paula suggested that it should be the venue for a club outing—perhaps we should take her up on the offer!

London Airport, Whitehall and The Palace— David Palmar (summary by Bob Furness)

What's this all about? Has our bird club friend DP been down to get a knighthood for his services as a secret agent without any of us knowing? David explained that the real London Airport is on Eday, Whitehall is on Stronsay, and The Palace is at Birsay, on the mainland of Orkney. His talk took us around those spectacular islands with evocative photos of the majestic cliffs and sea stacks, wave energy devices, archaeological sites, iconic plants such as *Primula scotica* at Yesnasby and Hoy, Grass of Parnassus and various orchids, as well as birds. Seabirds on the cliffs (though rather fewer than there used to be), Ravens, a Cormorant colony on the grass, skuas, terns, Red-throated Divers, Gannets at their new colony on Westray, waders in abundance on Sanday (including Purple Sandpipers and Turnstones even in summer), soft-golden images of Short-eared Owls in the late afternoon sunlight, Hen Harriers hunting over the moor. Photos of Fulmar catching on the cliff edge might not go down too well with the H&S officer. But yes, it is a long time until

next summer, although you could almost smell the peat smoke and hear the bubbling of the curlews.

Migrants on Tiree through the year— John Bowler, RSPB (summary by Steve Petty)

Unfortunately, John was storm bound on Tiree and unable to attend the meeting. However, he had kindly sent his PowerPoint presentation to Jim Dickson, who very ably narrated the slides. A number of factors are responsible for Tiree being so good for migrant birds. Its geographic location on the outermost edge of the Inner Hebrides ensures that many birds flying north-south and vice versa through the Minch are likely to pass close to Tiree, if not land on it. In addition, to the west there are no other islands to catch North American migrants being driven across the Atlantic on westerly storms (see article in the September Eider, pages 17-21). On Tiree there are few trees or scrub vegetation, so the few patches that exist, act as magnets for migrant songbirds. The island's reputation for scarce and rare birds has meant that many birders make the journey to the island in spring and autumn in search of such treats, although John often finds them first! It's not only migrants that Tiree is famous for, but also for its wintering wildfowl and waders. Spring and summer can be thrilling times too, with 300-400 pairs of Corncrakes, and other breeding birds that are unusual elsewhere in Argyll, such as Common Redpoll.

Wind swept beach and coastal landscape at Traigh Bhi from West Hynish, Tiree. ©John Bowler



Jim had a very busy day, what with giving the opening talk on birds seen recently in Argyll, then presenting John's talk, followed by an illustrated account of a trip to Extramadura this spring with birders from Argyll and Islay, an account of which can be found in the June *Eider* (pages 15-19). Many thanks for such a sterling effort Jim!

Conclusion

After drawing the raffle and thanking the donors for the prizes, the speakers for their excellent talks and Nigel Scriven for arranging the programme, Mike Harrison closed the meeting with an invitation to the Spring Meeting in the Seil Island Community Hall, Ellenabeich on 5 March 2016 (see page 3).

Photos from the club's 30th Anniversary Dinner at the Cainbaan Hotel



Photo, upper left. At the front, Chris Waltho (right, one of the speakers) and Simon Lawrence (left). At the back, Gordon Holm (new committee member) and his wife Janet.

Photo, lower left. At the front, Prof. Des Thompson (left, the after dinner speaker) with David Jardine (right). At the back, Mike Harrison (Chairman) with Janet Jardine and Anne Harrison).

Photo, above. David Merrie giving a vote of thanks to Des Thompson.

All photos ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Twenty-seven members and guests gathered for dinner later the same evening to celebrate the club's 30th anniversary. After an excellent meal, club chairman Mike Harrison introduced the guest speaker, Professor Des Thompson FRSE (photo above and on page 2), who commended the club for its work over the past thirty years. After describing the breadth and

depth of Argyll's biodiversity, Des urged the club to continue its work to preserve and protect this natural heritage. David Merrie proposed a vote of thanks to Des in a short speech that highlighted his own association with Argyll, both before and after the founding of the Argyll Bird Club, and his links to some of those present, including Des Thompson and his family.

Mike Harrison, Chairman

Articles for the March issue of the *Eider* should with the editor before the 20th February 2016

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2015/2016)

Chairman: Mike Harrison, 8 Ferryfield Drive, Connel, Oban PA37 1SP (phone 01631 710656)

Vice Chairman: Nigel Scriven, 14 Taylor Avenue, Kilbarchan, Johnstone PA10 2LS (phone 01505 706652)

Secretary: Anne Archer, Springbank, Tighnabruaich, Argyll PA21 2EJ (phone 01700 811611)

Treasurer: Bob Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Arrochar, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG (phone 01301 702603)

Membership Secretary: Sue Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG (phone 01301 702603, e-mail sue.cnoc@gmail.com)

Committee: Neil Brown (Campbeltown), Malcolm Chattwood (Lochgilphead), Jim Dickson (Cairnbaan), Gordon Holm (Strone), David Jardine (Kilmartin) Steve Petty (Ardentinny), Andy Robinson (Partick), Blair Urquhart (Kilmichael Glen)

Editor of the Argyll Bird Report: Jim Dickson (contact details under Argyll Bird Recorder below)

Editor of the Eider: Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR (phone 01369 810024)

ABC Website: <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

Argyll Bird Records Committee

Jim Dickson (Secretary, contact details below), John Bowler, Roger Broad, David Jardine, Malcolm Ogilvie & Andy Robinson

Argyll Bird Recorder

Jim Dickson, 11 Pipers Road, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8UF

phone 01546 603967

e-mail meg@jdickson5.plus.com

Assistant Bird Recorder

Malcolm Chattwood, 1 The Stances, Kilmichael Glasary, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8QA

phone 01546 603389

e-mail abcrecorder@outlook.com

BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

Argyll Mainland, Bute & Gigha: Nigel Scriven

phone 01505 706652 mobile 07901 636353

e-mail njscriven@gmail.com

Argyll North—Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern: Geoff Small

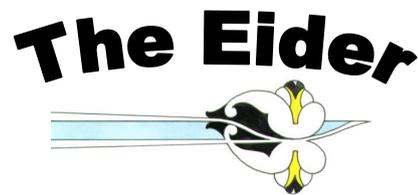
phone 01680 300002

e-mail geoff.small@btoopenworld.com

Islay, Jura & Colonsay: John Armitage

phone 01496 860396

e-mail jsa@ornquest.plus.com



The *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 20th 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).