

March 2011
Number 96

The Eider



An increasingly rare sight of lekking Blackcock courtesy of © Jim Duncan

ABC Spring Meeting

Black Grouse status Report

Birding in China and India

Digiscoping at MSBO

Recent Sightings

Editor

Mark Williamson: Port Ban, Kilberry,
Argyll PA29 6YD

Phone: 01880 770 162

E-mail: me41.williamson@btinternet.com



Inside this issue

BiodiversityHeritage Library	1
Wild Argyll DvD	1
Field Trips	2
ABC Spring Meeting	2
Field Trip Report: Ormsary	3
Field Trip Report: Appin	5
Birding in China	7
Birding in India	12
RSPB survey work: Farmland	13
RSPB survey Black Grouse	14
Digiscoping at MSBO	16
A Close Encounter	18
Recent Reports	19
ABC details	



What is the bird? See back page for the answer

Acknowledgements:

Thanks as ever to all the contributors: your efforts make all the difference to the quality of this newsletter: Richard Allan, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Jim Duncan, Ann Harrison, Mike Harrison, Andy Hay, Brian John, Eddie Maguire, Zoe Lawrence, Will Miles, Lesa Ng, Dave Palmar, Katie Pendreigh, Jodie Randall, Andy Robinson RSPB, Rev Jonathan Robinson, Nigel Scriven,

Editorial

I thought it would be good idea to continue the biodiversity theme this quarter. Below is an extract from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. If anyone would like the full version of the document with all the archived records listed, please do not hesitate to contact me.

On a completely different note, please do not hesitate to contribute to the Eider. Typed and written contributions are always most welcome.

As a member of the Argyll Bird Club, you may be interested in accessing historical biodiversity literature? If so, you should try the [Biodiversity Heritage Library for Europe](#) .

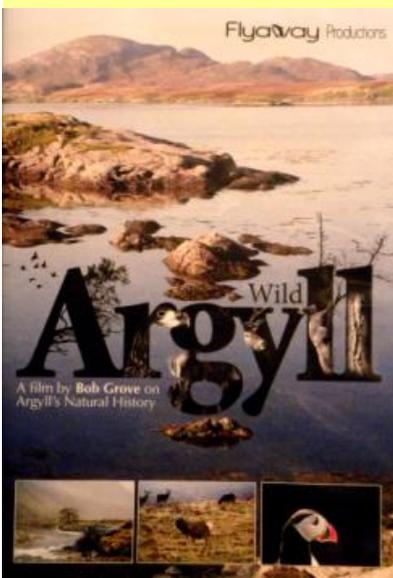
The Biodiversity Heritage Library for Europe (BHL-E) is a three year project funded by the European Commission, involving 28 major natural history museums, botanical gardens and other cooperating institutions. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is one of the participating partners.

The project aims to develop a digital open- access library of European taxonomical and biodiversity literature. Content from BHL-E will include rare texts on animals, plants, and original work by scientists such as Charles Darwin or Alexander von Humboldt, as well as artwork in publications from the 17th or 18th century.

Examples of Scottish content that can currently be accessed through the US-based [Biodiversity Heritage Library](#) (BHL) includes such titles as Gaelic names of plants (1883), The Annals of Scottish Natural History (1892-1911), Catalogue of the Coleoptera of Scotland (1853), Flora Scotica (1821), Mussel culture and bait supply, with reference more especially to Scotland (1895), and birds of Ayrshire and Wigtownshire.

Lesang
BHL-E Project Worker Library.
Royal Botanic Garden
Edinburgh
20a Inverleith Row
Edinburgh, EH3 5LR

Graham Hardy
Serials Librarian (BHL-E Co-ordinator at RBGE)
Library Royal Botanic Garden
Edinburgh
20a Inverleith Row
Edinburgh, EH3 5LR



Wild Argyll is a pleasant review of Argyll's amazing flora and fauna. From birds to bees, animals to wild flowers, butterflies and dragonflies, this dvd admirably captures the essence of Argyll's amazing biodiversity.

Copies of the dvd can be ordered by contacting Bob Grove at 'Flyaway Productions' robertgrove23@live.co.uk and by sending a cheque for £11.00 (£10 for the dvd and £1.00 postage)to Robert Grove at Briarbank, Glencruitten Road. Oban. PA34 4DN.

Robert has kindly offered to donate £2 for each copy sold, to Argyll Bird Club.

Field Trips

Sunday 13th March: **Holy Loch and Broxwood**—Nigel Scriven

16th April: **Sound of Gigha**– Paul Daw

21st May: **Skipness**—Katie Pendreigh

26th June: Possible outing to **Sanda Island**- Nigel Scriven

30th July: Possible outing to **Jura** from Tayvallich

Indoor Meeting Autumn 2011: this will again be held at Cairnbaan Hotel, Saturday 5th November 2011

ABC indoor meeting 2011

**Argyll Bird Club Spring Meeting. Royal Marine Hotel. Dunoon
Saturday 12th March 2011**

0930	Doors open and coffee/tea
0950 - 1000	Welcome & introduction - <i>Nigel Scriven, Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club</i>
1000 - 1015	Recent birds sightings - <i>Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder</i>
1015 – 1100	Andy Robinson. Wind Farm Issues.
1100 - 1120	Coffee/tea
1120 – 1220	Ron Forrester “Birding in Africa”
1220 - 1400	Lunch (available in the hotel)
1400 - 1445	Chris Waltho – Where have all the Eider gone?
1445 – 1515	Gemma Jennings – Industrial Common Terns
1515 - 1540	Tea/coffee
1540 - 1600	Paul Daw’s ID Workshop
1600 - 1615	Raffle and end of meeting

Royal Marine Hotel, Dunoon: This is a 3 star hotel with prices for accommodation ranging from £65 for a single room, £89 for a double/twin room to £109 for a family or premier double room. For more information www.royalmarinehotel.co.uk. Contact details: email info@royalmarinehotel.co.uk Telephone 01369 705810

Field Trip Reports

Ormsary and Ardpatrick Estates: 29th January 2011

A group of 15 people gathered to blow away the winter cobwebs and enjoy a good days birding. As always it was good to catch up with the gossip whilst waiting for everyone to arrive. The day started at Ormsary hall car park, with a walk down to the shore to view Loch Caolisport and the fish farm. Unlike last year it was not possible to walk through the estate as the



Looking across West Loch Tarbert ©M Williamson

annual gamekeepers shoot was taking place. However, the small amount of woodland on the way to the shore produced the expected Blue Tit , Great Tit , Starling, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Chaffinch and less common Mistle Thrush. All the group enjoyed the challenge of spotting a single Ringed Plover with Oystercatchers- some of us initially thought we were being wound up (or needed our eyes testing) as it had the uncanny knack of blending in with its background. The relative calmness of the water on Loch Caolisport provided good conditions for sighting seabirds and we were soon observing

all three divers, Black Guillemot and Goldeneye. On the way to the fish farm and mouth of the river more woodland birds were seen at a garden feeding station including Treecreeper and Sparrowhawk. Birds seen at the fish farm included Turnstone, Shelduck, Eider and Goldeneye and further out on the loch, a couple of Common Scoters were noted. The Gulls at the fish farm did not include anything unexpected, although good numbers were present.

Lunch was spent on the shoreline at Port Ban. Having commented earlier that Cormorant were quite rare in these parts it was no surprise to find one or two flying past showing their typical white thigh patches. There were also three Black Guillemots offshore. Another uncommon bird – a Kestrel, put in an appearance before we headed off to Ardpatrick estate. The first birds to greet us were Raven, Red Breasted Merganser and Wigeon. We were then treated to a Dave Palmar master-class in photography as he captured numerous birds on camera and explained the importance of correct composition and lighting. Unfortunately, the tide refused to come in with any urgency and the hoped for waders, bar a small group of Curlews did not materialise. As



Red -Throated Diver. Loch Caolisport
©Dave Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

the birding quietened down during the afternoon the group were left with the challenge of trying to lift Dave Palmar's camera and tripod (no mean feat), or daring each other to cross over An Doirlinn to Eilean Traighe and back before the tide came in. On the way back to the cars, the group managed to catch up with Goldcrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Long Tailed Tit and to marvel at Dave's photos of Treecreeper as it held and then swallowed a grub. Quip of the day came from Richard Allan as he asked for the identity of the bug the Treecreeper had just eaten- digital bug recognition software is being patented as we speak. All in all, it was an enjoyable days birding- and as always happens, birds such as Jay, Woodcock, Greylag Geese and Goosander were only too happy to put in an appearance once the official field trip had ended.

Species list for Ormsary and Ardpatrik

TY	Black Guillemot	CA	Great Cormorant
B.	Blackbird	ND	Great Northern Diver (rbbp)
BH	Black-headed Gull	GS	Great Spotted Woodpecker
BV	Black-throated Diver (rbbp)	GT	Great Tit
BT	Blue Tit	H.	Grey Heron
BZ	Common Buzzard	GL	Grey Wagtail
CH	Common Chaffinch	GJ	Greylag Goose
CR	Common Crossbill	HG	Herring Gull
E.	Common Eider	HC	Hooded Crow
GN	Common Goldeneye (rbbp)	HS	House Sparrow
CM	Common Gull	LT	Long-tailed Tit
K.	Common Kestrel	MA	Mallard
PH	Common Pheasant	MP	Meadow Pipit
RN	Common Raven	M.	Mistle Thrush
RK	Common Redshank	OC	Oystercatcher
CX	Common Scoter (rbbp)	PW	Pied Wagtail
SU	Common Shelduck	RM	Red-breasted Merganser
SG	Common Starling	RH	Red-throated Diver (rbbp/lss)
D.	Dunnock	RP	Ringed Plover
SH	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	R.	Robin
TC	Eurasian Treecreeper	RC	Rock Pipit
WN	Eurasian Wigeon	SA	Shag
GC	Goldcrest	ST	Song Thrush
GO	Goldfinch	TT	Turnstone (rbbp)
GB	Great Black-backed Gull	WP	Wood Pigeon
		WR	Wren

Mark Williamson

Appin, 26 February 2011

Ten members met on a fine sunny morning at the Castle Stalker View tea room car park. Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tits were seen and the fine though slightly hazy view over Loch Laich to the Firth of Lorn was admired before we set off by car to the south shore of Loch Laich. Parking at the end of the footpath to the Jubilee Bridge (Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, 1898, since you ask) we eagerly scanned the loch and shore. Plenty of Canada Geese



Peregrine ©Brian John

were present and a good number of Wigeon. A pair of Shelduck were spotted on the west shore and a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers were fishing towards the castle. A few Goldeneye and Mallard completed the roll of wildfowl before we turned our attention to the waders.

A large flock of Curlew, about 65 strong, had a mystery companion; smaller and greyer but with its head under its wing and at extreme telescope range. Grey Plover was considered and rejected (wrong breast marking), as was Dunlin (too small). Accepting that the bird had won, for the moment, we set off along the path and across the bridge to the north east shore of the loch. Four species of gull were present and a number of Hooded Crows were foraging on the saltmarsh. The cycle track along the old railway track provided a good walk along to the Castle Stalker jetty with fine views out into Loch Linnhe. Chaffinch and Siskin were seen, attracted to the feeders at a lineside cottage. A Redshank was found with the Curlew and a Dabchick was seen feeding just off the castle, but the mystery wader was still just that, a mystery.

With a large shower approaching from the Kingairloch hills we retraced our steps towards the bridge. A Buzzard was perched on a pole and a horseman rode through the shallows, scattering ducks and



waders. The shower divided and passed to the north and south with only a few spots for us, just enough to provide a nice rainbow with, instead of a crock of gold, a good view of the mystery wader – a Bar-tailed Godwit. With that we returned to the tea room for an excellent soup and sandwich lunch.

The lunch break ended in a bit of a scramble as an eagle cruised across the view from the tea room window. Once outside it was identified as an immature White-tailed Eagle,

Argyll bird club members enjoying the Jubilee trail, Appin ©Ann Harrison

apparently a regular visitor. We then set off by car to Port Appin for the second part of the trip, a circumambulation of the large outcrop of Appin quartzite which lies to the south west of the village. A couple of Raven flew over as we walked towards the pier. Scanning the sea Malcolm Chattwood noticed two large raptors flying north towards Shuna Island. They eventually rose and soared over the forested hills behind Appin House, their white tails clearly visible in the sunshine. A pair of adult White-tailed Eagles no less, making three for the trip. Back down to earth, and sea, we saw Shag and Cormorant perched on rocks near the Lismore shore and a few Eider were present. We walked down the track towards Clach Thoull and were having a general look-around when a Peregrine was spotted approaching from the north east. It was soaring in the up-draught at the top of the hill and, very obligingly, just hung in the breeze nearly above us while its picture was taken. The rocks off Rubha Clach Thoull are a good spot to see Otter but none were seen on this trip. A few Robins and Blue Tits were present in the woods as we walked up the west shore of Airds Bay. Three Greylag Geese were feeding in the field at the head of the bay, along with three more Canada Geese. A Great Spotted

Woodpecker was heard, and a Treecreeper was seen, in the woods as we approached the village. Finally, a female Bullfinch was found.

The Club's first foray into North Argyll for some time featured good weather, a good lunch, good company and 41 species. An enjoyable and memorable day.

Species List

Little Grebe	Peregrine Falcon	Blackbird
Great Cormorant	Eurasian Oystercatcher	Robin
European Shag	Bar-tailed Godwit	Long-tailed Tit
Grey Heron	Eurasian Curlew	Coal Tit
Greylag Goose	Common Redshank	Blue Tit
Greater Canada Goose	Black-headed Gull	Great Tit
Common Shelduck	Common Gull	Treecreeper
Eurasian Wigeon	Herring Gull	Hooded Crow
Mallard	Great Black-backed Gull	Common Raven
Common Eider	Wood Pigeon	House Sparrow
Common Goldeneye	Collared Dove	Chaffinch
Red-breasted Merganser	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Siskin
White-tailed Eagle	Pied Wagtail	Bullfinch
Common Buzzard	Duncock	

Mike Harrison

Birding in China

Birdwatching at Beidaihe, China, May 2010

In May 2010 I was fortunate to be able to make a 19 day trip to Beidaihe and surrounding area of north east China with the prospect of seeing around 250 species of birds. For many years I have been keen to go there after reading about its reputation among western birders for the exciting spring migration and fact that it can boast about 40% of species on the British and Irish list. Although this small area around Beidaihe has only 11 resident species it has a species list of well over 400 covering virtually all of the far eastern vagrants to Britain and the Western Palearctic.

As a fledging Scottish birder in the 1970's I remember hearing about far eastern vagrants, or 'Sibe's' as we affectionately called them, turning up in Britain. For me this triggered a fascination with such rarities turning up here, but also the realisation that getting to grips with the Siberian Rubythroat or Oriental Turtle Dove or Yellow browed Bunting would be a rare event indeed. Fortunately, aided by spells working on Fair Isle and Shetland and elsewhere I was able to notch up species like Pechora and Olive-backed Pipits, White's and Black-throated Thrush, Needle-tailed Swift and Lanceolated

Warbler- memories of which are all still fresh. Indeed, one of the most memorable was a late October day on Fair Isle in 1982 when up to 11 Pallas Leaf Warblers were found mixed in with a huge fall of Goldcrests. A trip to China to see these species again- and the many more vagrants that have occurred in Britain- in big numbers was for me a very exciting prospect. In recent years stories of habitat destruction due to the ever expanding population and industrialisation have caused international concern. Coastal marshes and staging posts for the several species of Crane have been destroyed, estuaries have been dredged- increasing pressures on wading birds- and declines in many passerines have also been noted. With this in mind, a trip to witness what is left of this world class migration hot-spot was given greater impetus.

I travelled with a group of ten other like-minded birders with the tour group Wildwings - led by the hugely experienced Mark Andrews who knows the area and its birds very well. Our journey to Beijing via Amsterdam was problem- free however, getting to Amsterdam from Glasgow was a non- starter due to the volcanic ash- cloud and a quick dash to Newcastle was made to catch a connecting flight.

We stayed in Beijing for a couple of days, giving us a chance to check out the wooded areas and ornamental lakes of the Summer Palace and to introduce ourselves to the resident birds such as Azure-winged Magpies, White-cheeked Starlings and Crested Mynas, a splendid Crested Kingfisher and to sample our first migrating birds, with 15 Taiga Flycatchers, 15 Pallas's and 5 Yellow-browed Warblers and an obliging Claudia's Warbler noted. A two hour journey into the hills north of Beijing took us to an area where Ibisbill was likely. On the way, two late Swan Geese were observed, and flocks of buntings were noted as well as some raptors -with views of Pied Harrier, Eastern Buzzard and Grey-faced Buzzard. In the hills we found two Russet Sparrow and a flock of 14 Hill Pigeon and sorted out some of the buntings- with Siberian Meadow, Godlewski's, Pallas's Reed and Japanese Reed identified.



Lanceolated Warbler © Jim Dickson

Little Bunting © Jim Dickson





White's Thrush © Jim Dickson

Eye-browed Thrush © Jim Dickson



We got excellent views of two Ibisbill on a braided river system. Just how much longer this species can hold on with construction work going on all around is doubtful.

At this site we had nesting Long-billed Plover as a bonus. At a park in Beijing later on we had our first glimpses of a Siberian Rubythroat and Olive-backed Pipit- with species like Bluethroat, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Pallas's and Dusky Warbler being more co-operative. After an excellent Chinese meal and well-earned beer we looked forward to rising early for our bus journey to Beidaihe some 280km to the east, on the Gulf of Bohai, at the northern end of the Yellow Sea. What makes Beidaihe such an excellent place to study migration is the fact that it lies on a coastal plain with an inland range of hills combining to funnel migrants into a bottleneck. The town is a holiday resort made popular by Communist party members who used it as a summer resort to get away from the hot and humid capital. More recently Beidaihe has vastly expanded with the consequential loss of habitat and is barely recognisable from the area that western birders first came to en masse some 15-20 years ago. Migrants can turn up just about anywhere and birders soon learn where the hotspots are about the town which are often around the hotel grounds, sandflats or lighthouse point. We stayed in the lowrise Jin Shan Hotel which was ideally located to walk to several good areas or jump into a taxi for the sandflats or reservoir. A great area next to the hotel was an open field about the size of a couple of football pitches- an absolute magnet for passing migrants with the bird species constantly changing. The 15 or more Bluethroats, Wrynecks and Richard's Pipits present in the morning would be replaced by different groups of 50 or so later in the day as birds moved through. A highlight here on our first visit was a very obliging Little Whimbrel, normally only seen distantly or flying over. We left our base in Beidaihe half way through our trip to travel south to spend four days on Happy Island and surrounding areas. Towards the end of our trip we headed north into the mountains at Old Peak for some speciality birding and an experience of the Great Wall.

In total we saw just over 250 species, obviously too many to go into detail here. However, there were many highlights and special days particularly when we had classic fall conditions of overnight rain giving rise to huge numbers of warblers, flycatchers, buntings and thrushes.

In Beidaihe, on our first walk to lighthouse point we found a Chinese Egret- a now endangered species. A small dot of a bird coming in off the sea was memorable as it struggled into the wind and rain and headed straight for us to make land fall. As it got closer, it revealed itself as a Grey Nightjar- landing exhausted on a tree near to us.

After a few days, thrushes began to arrive in small numbers with Eye-browed being the most common and a notable carrier species for rarer thrush species, just like Redwing is the carrier species in the UK. The excitement of checking through these thrushes was just great as they dropped nervously out of the trees onto the ground amongst the leaf litter. Gradually, we were able to spot Siberian and White's Thrushes. This gave us the feeling of seeing rarities in a British park! Other species such as Dusky, Naumann's, Grey-backed, Grey-sided, Pale and Chinese Song Thrush all put in appearances. Each morning we were greeted by calling Oriental Scops Owls and calling Common Rosefinches outside our hotel. Memorable visits to the Jin Shan field and surrounds produced 30 Siberian Rubythroats, 20 Siberian Blue Robins, 100 Bluethroats, 200 Yellow-browed, 100 Pallas's, 50 Radde's, 25 Dusky and 100 Black-browed Reed Warbler, 100 Brown Shrikes, 30 Oriental Turtle Doves, 100 Siberian Stonechats and 400 Pacific Swifts. Lesser numbers of species like Lanceolated, Eastern Crowned, Arctic, Thick-billed and Pallas Grasshopper Warblers, Rufous-tailed Robins, Red-flanked Bluetails, Mugimaki, Yellow-rumped, Siberian, Brown, Dark-sided, Taiga Flycatchers, Tiger Shrike along with oddities like Watercock, Yellow-legged Button Quail, Von-Schrenk's Bittern appearing at random, show that migration here can at times be quite mesmerising though exhausting with birding lasting for up to 14 hours a day. Fortunately, the evening meals were a splendid banquet of magnificent Chinese food and of course were washed down with celebratory beers.

Also during our stay in Beidaihe our group took part in the International Bird Race, a competition to help promote birdwatching and conservation in China and the teams from several countries including several Chinese teams were closely followed by Chinese national TV crews. During the evening we were all guests of the Chinese government who hosted a banquet for the participants in a grand hall. High ranking Chinese party officials gave lengthy speeches to an audience of around 200 people with the bird teams constantly being filmed and photographed by several teams of photographers and TV film crew. All very surreal- especially when our group became the focus of attention after being announced as the winners of the bird race! As a consequence, we were followed by film crews the following day to the Lotus Hills migration watch point where birding was combined with our group leaders giving interviews to the nation on TV. Later, we were once again the guests, this time of a tourist arm of the government, and were again given a free Chinese banquet in return for being filmed looking around a new town development. Again very surreal and a bit difficult to show interest in this development aimed at attracting western tourists. However, the free beers helped to ease things a bit and the whole episode was quite a laugh.

Various coastal locations produced highlights of many waders and gulls. Great views of a wide range of species were seen including many that are sought after as rarities in the UK including Red-necked and Long-toed Stints, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek Sandpipers, Asiatic Dowitcher Pacific Golden Plovers, Little Whimbrel, Far-eastern Curlew and Great Knot along with interesting races of things like Dunlin and Bar-tailed Godwit to sort through. Altogether we managed a total of 41 wader species not including herons, egrets and the like. Notable Gulls observed were the rare Saunders and the rarer still Relict Gull along with *Heinei* and Kamchatka Common Gulls- with Vega, Heuglins and Mongolian Gulls allowing for a 'grilling' which for gull enthusiasts is seventh heaven.

On our four day trip to Happy Island and the mainland, the coastal woods at times produced spectacular falls of warblers, flycatchers and buntings. Spreading out as a group and working our way



Siberian Blue Robin © Jim Dickson

Yellow-Browed Bunting © Jim Dickson



through one small wood in particular, aptly named 'Magic Wood' gave us encounters with hundreds of *phylloscopus* warblers to work through. This made for slow, but exciting progress, as each bird had to be closely observed in order to check for eye stripes, crown stripes, wing bars, tertial markings and so on to identify them correctly. The majority of these warblers were Yellow-browed, a small species of *phylloscopus* which in recent years birders have been finding increasingly on Tiree in early October. Just how many of these far travelled gems to Argyll's shores go unseen at that time of year is anyone's guess. Amongst these birds were smaller numbers of the even smaller and brighter Pallas Leaf Warbler and still fewer numbers of Two-barred Greenish, Eastern Crowned, Arctic, Raddes and Dusky Warblers. Also in these woods were several species of bunting, thrush, flycatchers and chats with, just for good measure, several species of heron and egrets nesting in the trees above!

Memorable birds on our trip to Old Peak included things like a pair of Northern Goshawk flying overhead, very active Chinese Nuthatches, singing Hume's and Chinese Leaf Warblers, a Chinese Hill Warbler that gave us the run-around with Yellow-streaked, Manchurian Bush and Blunt-winged Warbler as a side show- surrounded by Siberian Meadow and Godlewski's Buntings and several Daurian Redstarts. High in the hills we had spectacular view of the Great Wall going off into the distance as far as the eye could see. At least in this mountainous terrain human development and environmental destruction would seem unlikely- but who knows what things will look like in another 10 or 20 years- such is the manic pace of development in this great country. Hopefully, people like Mark Andrews can continue to visit and put forward the argument for conservation to a government that now appears to be increasingly sensitive to outside criticism of its environmental policies. Let's hope so before irreversible damage is done to species like the migrating cranes, which find fewer and fewer places to stop off and refuel on their once traditional routes.

Jim Dickson

Birding in India



Storks courtesy of © Reverend Jonathan Robinson

The Grail Trust is a small, local charity that my wife and I have supported for the last 20 years. Its director, Rev Jonathan Robinson was at one time a parish priest in the diocese of Bath and Wells—hence the name, since nearby Glastonbury has a strong Grail association. The Trust's raison- d'être is to run a home for orphaned and otherwise disadvantaged children in a remote rural part of south India. I have stayed in the home, in the village of Chinnammalpuram, on three occasions— most recently in early 2010. On my return, Rev Robinson asked if I would write a piece on birdwatching for the trust's newsletter and the following article is the result.

About 1300 species of birds have been recorded from the Indian sub-continent. During my visits to the Grail home, I succeeded in seeing and identifying 45 species— not very impressive, but an enjoyable and satisfying activity nonetheless.

The terrain beyond the village consists of about 100 acres of low-lying ground, surrounded by a man-made embankment which is designed to provide irrigation to the nearby cultivated fields. After a succession of dry seasons the low- lying ground becomes a dry, dusty plain; but when there are good rainfalls, the plains fill with water and become something of a magnet for waterbirds. Elsewhere, around the village there are cultivations, bare dusty ground and dense patches of scrub which are criss-crossed by farmers tracks. There is an outcrop of rocky hills some four miles from Chinnammalpuram, called Mylapidor. There are also a number of smaller villages within a 5 mile radius of the orphanage.

Rev Robinson asked me to share my enthusiasm for birding with the children in the orphanage, so we devised a system which would work well for us all. Jonathan would call for volunteers to accompany us into the countryside near the village— the group usually consisting of 12 to 15 young people. From this group one person was appointed to record the observations, one to carry the identification guide and two to carry the binoculars. I would urge the group to move along quietly and stay as close together as possible. Both instructions were usually ignored within minutes of setting off.

Our birdwatching expeditions would usually last up to two hours and as a rule we would wander through the scrub (which made bird identification difficult) and onto the man-made embankment. The embankment gave us views over the scrub and the small lake. We would wander along the bank, noisily, excitedly- with much shouting of “ uncle, uncle, come quick; bird,bird,” until we reached a point where the lake disgorged its water into the irrigation channels and out onto the fields. Here, the children would bathe for a while before making the return journey through the fields and scrub to the orphanage. I was almost always without binoculars when I needed them most- the field guide had to be shouted for- then the child recording the observations needed to be located. It was all unlike any birding I have ever done before or since.

The enthusiasm and excitement of the children made these expeditions amongst the most vividly memorable and worthwhile experiences at the Grail Home. Not that the birds were bad either. What could surpass the turquoise- blue flash of an Indian Roller’s wings, or the aerial ballet of the Green Bee-eaters as they danced around the summit of Mylapidor, or just standing under a tree whose branches hosted a dozen or more nests of the Painted Stork? The Tailor- Bird, a bird immortalised by Kipling in his tales about two cobras Nag and Nagira was also often seen around the Grail Home.

Simply writing about these experiences has been a pleasure as it has again evoked memories of the sheer delight the children bequeathed to me at the Grail Home.

Ian Teesdale

RSPB Survey Work

Would you like to make the most of your bird ID skills and take part in one of the UK’s most important conservation projects?



Lapwing by Jodie Randall (rspb images.com)

RSPB’s Volunteer & Farmer Alliance Project (V&FA) is a UK wide project which offers farmers and crofters free farmland bird surveys. Since it first started more than 10 years ago, over 5000 farms have been surveyed across the UK. Over 500 farms have been surveyed in Scotland, and we look to survey approximately 120 farms in Scotland each year.

We have only been able to offer and carry out these surveys due to the invaluable contribution of more than 2000 volunteers across the UK and over 200 in Scotland, but as demand for surveys grows we require more volunteers!

Volunteers are matched to a farm within 20 miles and they undertake an initial visit to meet the farmer and go over any health and safety issues. They then visit the farm to carry out three or four early morning surveys between April and July. The area surveyed is usually a maximum of 80 hectares and visits take between 3 or 4 hours. Please note that not all volunteers are asked to carry out surveys every year, as there may not be a farm within the 20 mile radius.

Volunteer observations allow project staff to construct a picture of the birds of conservation concern on the farm. The farmer receives an A3, laminated colour map with these findings, a report, full species list and the latest advisory information on how to help farmland birds. Volunteers also receive a copy of the farm map and a report.

Currently in Argyll we have few volunteers, so if you would like to undertake a survey or know of any farmers who may be interested we’d be grateful if you encouraged yourself and them to take part. Farmers have nothing to lose, as it is free and there is no obligation on them to take action afterwards!

If you take part, the project officer is available with help and advice throughout.

For more information and/or to become a volunteer please visit our website:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/vandfa/index.aspx>

Alternatively, please contact your local V&FA Project Officer:

Katie Berry

katie.berry@rspb.org.uk

Tel: 0141 3310993

Mob: 07894 480897

RSPB Scotland

South & West Regional Office

10 Park Quadrant

Glasgow, G3 6BS



Skylark by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Andy Robinson

Can you put another dot on the Argyll & Bute Black Grouse map?

The accompanying map shows Black Grouse records in Argyll & Bute from 2005-2010. Leks with 3+ males in 2010 are highlighted as red dots. Due to the large amount of ground, remoteness and terrain within Argyll, it is impossible to survey all areas each year – there is no doubt that there are still a few more dots to be added to the map!

During the 2010 lek season 3 fieldworkers covered under-recorded parts of the Cowal, Oban and Lorne areas; 33 volunteers checked existing lek sites and searched for new ones; and 4 'co-ordinated counts' were organised, where between 4-10 volunteers were out within specific areas trying to locate leks and estimate numbers. And all this took place between 4 – 9am in the morning (the best time to see lekking Blackcock)!

This combined effort led to 218 males being recorded across Argyll & Bute in 2010. Single displaying males made up 70 of these records. 38 leks of two or more males held a total of 148 males.

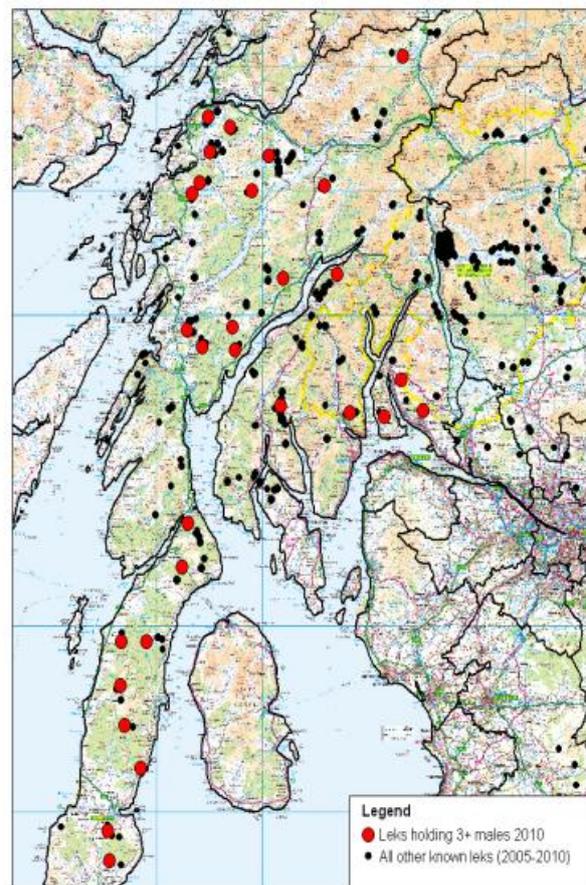
Survey coverage was significantly higher in 2010 than in previous years making comparisons difficult. However, Table 2 below allows comparison between 20 lek sites that were all surveyed in 2005, 2009 and 2010. Although numbers of comparable leks are low, this at least gives an indication of the status of Black

Black Grouse Recovery Project

Argyll and Stirling



Argyll Black Grouse Records



Reproduced from the digital Ordnance Survey map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. RSPB license 180021787

Grouse in key areas.

Lek	2005	2009	2010
Kintyre (4)	17	28	25
Mid Argyll (4)	4	11	13
Lorne (4)	13	14	13
Cowal (5)	10	4	1
Helensburgh (3)	22	16	24
Total (20)	66	73	76

Table 2: Results from 20 comparable lek sites.

A mixed picture has emerged from the survey results in 2010. There have been slight increases in Mid-Argyll in comparison with 2005 and 2009 data, while Lorne, Kintyre, Helensburgh/Lomond populations seem to have remained relatively stable. Within Cowal, decreases have been seen within former key areas although intensive survey work has located three main lekking areas where positive habitat management could help to stabilise and increase numbers. Further survey effort is needed in Knapdale, as with only four males recorded in this area in 2010, the area is at risk of becoming isolated from other Argyll populations.

Although Black Grouse remain relatively widespread throughout Argyll, numbers are precariously low in the majority of areas, and therefore vulnerable to local extinction. Survey work enables the identification of areas within Argyll & Bute where positive habitat management work would help to stabilise and increase numbers. The Argyll & Stirling Black Grouse Project uses this information to encourage landowners within key areas to carry out positive habitat management work for the species. A number of landowners have successfully applied for funding available through the Scottish Rural Development programme to improve habitats for Black Grouse. Management work currently being put into place across Argyll & Bute aims to provide suitable nesting and brood-rearing habitat, along with a varied food source. Depending on the condition of moorland, management measures may include a reduction or increase in grazing pressure, introducing summer cattle grazing, muirburn/heather swiping and native woodland planting/regeneration. As Black Grouse are closely associated with commercial forestry in Argyll, incorporating beneficial measures into Long Term Forest Plans is also extremely important so that more open ground and suitable woodland edge habitat becomes available for Black Grouse at felling and re-stocking stages. Hopefully as this management is carried out on the ground, we will begin to see a gradual recovery of the species within Argyll & Bute.

To measure the success of these schemes, and to identify new areas where habitat management work would be beneficial, it is vital that we continue to monitor the populations within Argyll & Bute. With so much ground to cover, it is impossible to survey all areas of the region each year. It may be that you've seen Black Grouse in your local area and these don't seem to be represented on the map, or would be interested in helping out with the Black Grouse survey this coming lek season. Survey work does involve very early morning starts and some sites may be quite remote and on rough ground so a reasonable level of fitness is required. However, once the hard part of getting out of bed is over, the chance to see the sun-rise and possibly see some Black Grouse strutting their stuff really is worth the effort. If you would be interested in helping out, or would like to report some Black Grouse sightings please get in touch with Alison Phillip (Argyll & Stirling Black Grouse Officer) on 0141 331 0993 or email alison.phillip@rspb.org.uk.

Andy Robinson

Notes

Digiscoping at Machrihanish Sea bird Observatory

Many recent enquiries to Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) have highlighted the upsurge of interest in digiscoping fly-by seabirds and this has prompted me to describe the precise method employed at MSBO.

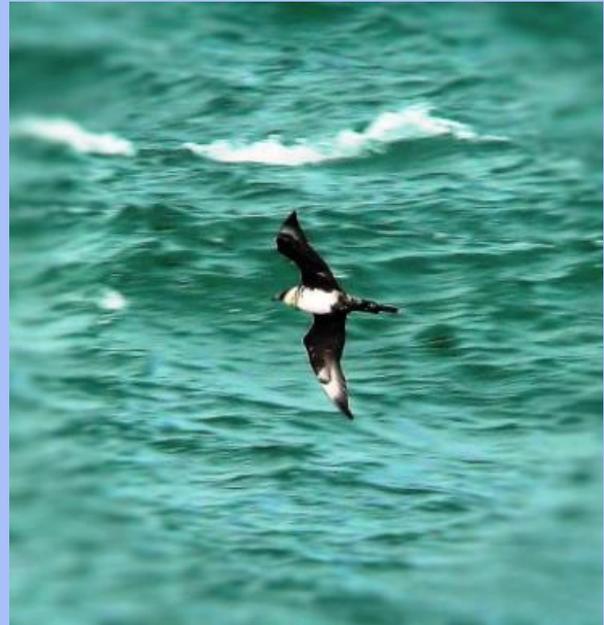
Digiscoping is unquestionably a dynamic tool for taking record shots of fly-by seabirds & recently the technique was instrumental in confirming the occurrence of a vagrant seabird. The identity of a fly-by first-winter Ross's Gull 300m off MSBO was firmly resolved from digiscoped images; these revealed significant unambiguous plumage detail, that in reality, observers had absolutely no prospect of documenting fully!

Throughout summer 2010, I improved my aptitude for digiscoping fly-by seabirds off MSBO by spending literally *hundreds of hours* practising on a handy source –**Gannets** and **Manx Shearwaters**; it was not too long before I grasped the fact that telescope magnification (X20), unaided by any camera optical zoom, vastly boosted the likelihood of more acceptable images.

This method is a very exciting and unique way of obtaining record shots of seabirds from a land-based vantage point- especially as most species are often observed at medium to long range. Now, when an interesting seabird is seen approaching MSBO the latest procedure is... *jpeg it!*

For example; during a severe WNW gale event on 14th September 2010, loads of seabirds were going south, thick & fast! A shout of '*incoming Pom*' by Rod Angus from the exterior viewing platform alerted me and I quickly lowered and activated the compact digital camera that is attached (permanently) to a tripod-mounted Swarovski telescope. The bird appeared some 200m offshore and was soon showing well on the monitor (see accompanying image).

This electrifying gale event also provided on-going opportunities to capture additional agreeable



Pomarine Skua Sept 2010 © Eddie Maguire

Leaches Petrel MSBO Sept 2010 ©Eddie Maguire



images of other seabirds including a **Great Northern Diver**, several **Leach's Petrels** (see accompanying image), a **Bonxie**, a **Sabine's Gull** (hooded adult) and a juvenile **Black Tern** - all against the backdrop of a violent sea (see www.argyllbirdclub.org - September Gallery 2010).

Method...

Digiscoping equipment.

Camera – Samsung MV100HD / 14.7 MP / 3.7 optical zoom.

Telescope - Swarovski 80 HD/ 20X WW lens.

Camera settings – routinely set on P (program); this allows various other settings (especially light) to be manipulated. There are many other useful settings on this wee ace compact including *macro* and *scene*. The latter setting is also outstanding for fly-by's.

Important Notes - on a fly-by, the camera optical zoom is *never* engaged. It follows that a wide field of view is permanently available on the monitor and with loads of practice, it soon becomes pretty easy to locate all intended targets, although the most favourable range is 100-200m (very challenging trying to locate a fly-by <100m as the bird usually flies through too quickly).

Also, vignetting (the telescope effect) is always apparent and all targets appear tiny on the monitor. However, using this technique (at least with this gear) allows the camera auto focus mode to function exceptionally well and with a whopping 14.7 megapixels, careful cropping/enhancing on the computer later, produces really acceptable images (obviously with vignetting removed).

The Ross's Gull...

The retrospective discovery of this vagrant Arctic gull off MSBO highlighted the tremendous value of digiscoping as an aid to identification by capturing important plumage details that observers could not hope to glean adequately owing to fleeting views at medium/long range.

On 12th November 2010 a WNW storm battered western Scotland.

At MSBO, the morning seawatch was *slow*; however, at 13:05hrs, immediately after a squall went through, the seawatch of a lifetime began to unfold. A 'wee gull' was seen briefly 500m away to the north; it was moving south hugging the contours of the wild sea and not showing very well at all. A fleeting glimpse had already revealed a striking black and white upperwing pattern, just before it rudely disappeared below wavecrest height. This prompted me to suggest '*possible Little Gull*'. The digiscoping gear was activated in the hope that it would get close enough, or perhaps even show long enough, for a decent record shot (the '*jpeg it*' policy) that could help elevate it to species level.

Suddenly it showed for a few seconds as it approached 12 o'clock and was promptly digiscoped, but at range (c 300m)- it was a minute target indeed. Once more, it abruptly appeared, still low and still just over wavecrest height- an additional image was hastily taken (see accompanying image).

Incredibly, a few seconds later the seabird was identified on the camera monitor as a most sought after Arctic species; a first-winter **Ross's Gull!**

This vagrant was not digiscoped by chance; methodical vigilance and the '*jpeg it*' policy at MSBO ensured that images were secured. Just as well; throughout this observation, there was absolutely no time or opportunity for observers to document any essential plumage details- to provide concrete evidence of such a brief appearance by such a rare bird. However, the evocative jpeg images *do clearly* reveal crucial, species level, plumage detail!

Presenting these images along with a detailed account of the occurrence to *British Birds Rarities Committee* will most likely result in acceptance of this sighting.

With loads of practice, obtaining reasonable digiscoped images of fly-by seabirds is achievable, though

perhaps only within controlled conditions (such as at MSBO).
The method is highly unlikely to be successful when sheltering by a rock on a storm-battered headland!



Ross's Gull off MSBO 12th November 2010© Eddie Maguire

Acknowledgements...

Many thanks to Tristan ap Rheinallt, John Bowler, Jim Dickson, Paul Daw, Clive McKay, Angus Murray and many others for positive feedback concerning the digiscoped images of Kintyre's first & Argyll's fourth record of **Ross's Gull**.

Eddie Maguire (warden MSBO)

A Close Encounter



Stoat photo © Zoe Lawrence

On the 19th of September 2010, I set off to photograph some waders and shags which were perched on some rocks opposite the quay outside my house in Lochgilphead. I stood and watched the birds making for their roost sites at high tide through my dad's telescope and camera viewfinder. There were six Knots (Red Knots) and about 20 Oystercatchers standing on the quay. Out of the corner of my eye I saw movement on the quay and one of the oystercatchers literally seemed to fall off, giving a distressed call at the same time. I thought it was a squabble between neighbouring birds and later the whole flock left the quay. I walked over to get a better view of the shags and sat in the wet grass watching through the camera viewfinder. As I raised my head slowly from the camera I found myself almost face to face with a small Stoat. I was delighted and clicked away with my camera. The Stoat quickly bobbed back into its rocky den, in the edge of the quay. But I was keen to lure it back out, so I made squeaking noises to try and fool it into thinking I was a small animal in distress and sure enough its little head popped up again. The Stoat stared at me for about 40 seconds as I continued to take pictures.

After I had the pictures I ran to my dad and showed him the action shots of the Stoat. This intrigued him as he had observed the same Oystercatcher frantically flapping and squawking to escape from the edge of the quay earlier. It looks like the Stoat was trying to take a wader for its tea by ambushing it from its hole. It was lucky that all the waders including the Knot made the quick exit, as otherwise one of them might have made the 1700km journey down from Iceland (or possibly even further from Baffin island in Canada) for nothing!

Zoe Lawrence S4 pupil

Recent Reports

November 2010
to
January 2011

Paul Daw

(Tel. 01546 886260)

e-mail:

monedula@globalnet.co.uk

The latest news on bird sightings in Argyll is available on the Argyll Bird Club website at www.argyllbirdclub.org See 'Click here for latest bird reports' on the home page.



Will Miles RSPB was lucky enough to photograph this Killdeer on Islay at the end of January, beginning of February

Rarities. A fly-by juvenile/first-winter **Ross's Gull** was seen flying S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory during a WNW gale on 12 November. Fortunately, although only seen briefly it was digiscoped and the key ID features were noted (Eddie Maguire/Derrick Goode). If accepted by BBRC this will be only the fourth record for Argyll and the first for Kintyre.

Waxwings. Following the major Waxwing influx during October/November reported in the December **Eider** there were an unusual number of later records (see below).

Bramblings. Following the Waxwing influx, an exceptional number of Bramblings were reported from gardens in Argyll from November onwards. See table below.

GARDEN BIRDS. Mark Williamson had an unusual bird feeder experience in early December

Having left a pheasant hanging on his verandah, he came out an hour later to find a **Buzzard** sitting on the verandah table ripping the pheasant to pieces. He let the Buzzard have the rest and it has since been regularly visiting his garden.

LATE MIGRANTS. A lone late **Barn Swallow** was at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 4-5 November (John Bowler).

Wildfowl (and Gamebirds):

Whooper Swan. Twenty two flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 4 November, 29 at Strath, The Laggan, Kintyre on 5 November included 5 juveniles and 8 adults flew S over Machrihanish Dunes Golf Course on 24 November (Eddie Maguire). Fifty flew over Arinagour, Coll in two hours on the morning of 3 November (Simon Wellock), 5 were at Otter Ferry on 10 November (Tom Callan) and 130 were at Loch Skerrols, Islay on 1 December (I & M. Brooke). Numbers on Tiree peaked at 234, including 49 juveniles, on 13-14 December (John Bowler).

Pink-footed Goose. Unusually, a few appear to be wintering at The Laggan, Kintyre. Six were by Drumlemble School on 30 November and 8 were at Langa/Westport Marsh on 3 December (Eddie Maguire). Nine were at Cornaigmore Tiree on 14-22 December (John Bowler).

Greenland White-fronted Goose. At least 800 were at West Parkfergus, The Laggan on 8 November (Eddie Maguire), 210 were at Tayinloan, Kintyre on 19 November (Katie Pendreigh), numbers on Tiree peaked at 898 on 15-16 November (John Bowler) and 6,384 were counted on Islay on 17 January (per I & M. Brooke).

Greylag Goose. Numbers on Tiree peaked at 2,743 on 15-16 November (John Bowler) and 147 were at Ardyne Farm, Cowal on 1 December (Tom Callan).

Greater Canada Goose. Counts included; 160 at Barran, Kilmore (nr Oban) on 24 November (Mike Harrison) and 122 at Ardyne Farm, Cowal on 1 December (Tom Callan).

Snow Goose. The Snow Goose was around the Craobh Haven, Mid-Argyll turnoff of the A813 on 13 November and had been present there for a week or so (Bill Allan).

Barnacle Goose. Numbers on Tiree peaked at 3,456 on 18-19 January and a bird at Whitehouse on 22 December had been ringed as a juvenile at Caerlaverock and was thus likely to be of the Svalbard race. (John Bowler). On Islay, 44,843 were counted on 17 January (per I & M. Brooke).

Gadwall. A drake was at Westport Marsh, Kintyre on 24 – 25 November and possibly the same drake was at Machrihanish Water on 5 December (Eddie Maguire). Three males and one female were on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 9 December (John Bowler).

Green-winged Teal. A drake was seen on several dates in November on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (John Bowler).

Common Pochard. Four were on Loch Skerrols, Islay on 4 January (I & M. Brooke) and five males and 3 females were on Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 2 January (John Bowler).

Greater Scaup. A total of 253 were found on Loch Indaal, Islay on 1 December (per I & M. Brooke).

Common Eider. Approx. 500 were at Otter Ferry on 29 December (Tom Callan) and at least 210 were in Campbeltown Harbour on 25 November (Paul Daw).



Goosander © Dave Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Long-tailed Duck. Eight were in Hough bay, Tiree on 4 December (John Bowler), nine were off Tayinloan on 19 November (Katie Pendreigh).

Goosander. One 'redhead' was an unusual visitor at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory during a gale on 12 November (Eddie Maguire). Ten were involved in courtship display on Loch Riddon, Cowal on 10 November and 8 were at the head of West Loch Tarbert on 23 November (Tom Callan).

Black Grouse. At least 4 Black Grouse, including 3 males were seen just north of Loch Tulla, North Argyll on 5 December (Bill Allan).

Red-legged Partridge. Nineteen were in a walled garden at Kilchoman, Islay on 18 January (per I & M. Brooke).

Seabirds – divers, grebes, shearwaters, herons etc (and other seawatch species):

Red-throated Diver. A total of 9 flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 2 November (Eddie Maguire).

Great Northern Diver. One on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 10-16 November was a rare freshwater record and 23 were off West Hynish on 12 December (John Bowler).

Little Grebe. Ten were on Loch Riddon, Cowal on 10 November (Tom Callan) and 20 were on Linne Mhuirich, Mid-Argyll on 24 January (Paul Daw).

Great Crested Grebe. Two sailed past Blairmore, Loch Long, Cowal on 5 November (Peter & Margaret Staley).

Slavonian Grebe. Fourteen were in the Sound of Gigha at West Coast Salmon, Kintyre on 14 November (Tom Callan).

Fulmar. At least 200 were on the cliffs at Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree on 16 November (John Bowler).

Leach's Storm-petrel. Three flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory during a gale on 12 November (Eddie Maguire).

Raptors, rails etc.:

Red Kite. An exceptional number of records in Argyll this winter.

One (no wing tags) was seen in the Aros Moss (The Laggan) vicinity at dusk on 29 November (Eddie Maguire/Derrick Goode), one was at Loch Assapol, Mull on 1 December (per Alan Spellman) and a red tagged bird flew over Carnan Dubha, Isle of Coll, at 15:00 on 3 December being harried by two Buzzards (Simon Wellock). Two near Hyne, Isle of Coll, on the afternoon of 8 December, included a red-tagged adult (both wings), presumably the same as a few days ago, and the other a non-tagged immature bird (Simon Wellock). Two reported from Mull at about the same time could possibly have been the same birds (per Alan Spellman). Two were on Oronsay on 7 December (Mike Peacock). On Islay, one was at Kilchoman on 7 December, a blue tagged bird at Loch Gorm on 14 Dec and an untagged bird at Rockside on the same day. With other records it was thought up to four birds could have been on Islay during Dec/Jan. A Red Kite flew up the Lusragan valley (Connel) on 21 December (Mike Harrison).

White-tailed Eagle. An untagged first year bird at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 28 November was at Balephuill on 29 November (John Bowler). A juvenile landed briefly in a tree at the lay-bye s of Benderloch village -Ardmucknish Bay, North Argyll on 19 December - before flying off again across the bay and a juvenile/sub-adult flew across Ganavan Bay, Oban on 20 December, heading towards Connel (no tag seen) (Bill Allan). Three (2 adults and a juv.) were near Ensay, Mull on 25 December (Anand Prasad), one was seen near Ardchattan, North Argyll during a WeBS count (Mike Harrison) and one was at various locations on Islay during January including at Bunnahabhainn on 23 January (per I & M. Brooke).

Hen Harrier. At least one male and two ring-tails were seen regularly at The Laggan, Kintyre during November although the Aros Moss roost seems to have been abandoned (Eddie Maguire). Four ring-tails were coming to roost at dusk at Carnan Mor/Balephuill, Tiree on 1 January (John Bowler).

Common Kestrel. One at Milton, Tiree on 30 January was killed and eaten by a Peregrine!

(John Bowler).

Golden Eagle. A single sub-adult bird at Ben Hynish on 5 November later moved to Beinn Hough (John Bowler).

Gyr Falcon. A white morph bird was reported over Breachacha Castle on the afternoon of 6 December, being pursued by female Peregrine and a Raven (Simon Wellock).

Water Rail. On 2 December a dead Water Rail was brought in by a cat at Taynuilt, although unclear if it was already dead/dying when the cat found it (Fiona MacRae per Clive Craik).

Corn Crake. A very late bird at Main Road Farm, Balephuill, Tiree on 8 December had a damaged wing (John Bowler).

Common Coot. Numbers on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree reached 10 on 10 January – good number for Argyll these days! (John Bowler) and 8 were on Loch Skerrols, Islay on 2 January (per I & M. Brooke).

Waders:

Oystercatcher. Larger counts included 385 in Holy Loch, Cowal on 10 November (George Newall), 410 at 'Stinky Hole' Campbeltown Loch on 25 November (Paul Daw), and 185 at Loch Riddon, Cowal on 10 November (Tom Callan).

Ringed Plover. A total of 24 were in Machrihanish Bay on 2 December (Eddie Maguire). The peak count on Tiree was 140 at Balephetrish Bay on 17 January and 25 at Balephetrish Bay on 10 November included a bird colour-ringed as a breeding male at Coigach, Wester Ross on 18 May 2006 – returning for its third winter on Tiree (John Bowler).

European Golden Plover. An exceptionally large flock of ca2,500 were at West Parkfergus, The Laggan on 9 November (Eddie Maguire). An all-island count on Tiree on 15-16 November found 3,625 birds (John Bowler).

Northern Lapwing. Approx. 100 were at West Parkfergus, The Laggan on 9 November and approx 500 were in the Langa/Westport Marsh area from 29 November – 4 December (Eddie Maguire). An all-island count on Tiree on 15-16 November found 2,125 birds (John Bowler). During an Atlas TTV near Kilbride bay, Cowal 34 were counted (Tom Callan) and 150 were at Rockside, Islay on 29 December (per I & M. Brooke).

Red Knot. A single Knot was an unusual winter visitor at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 3

December (Eddie Maguire), two were at Kennacraig, Kintyre on 30 November (Bill Allan), one was at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 5 December (John Bowler), 4 were at Airds bay, Appin, North Argyll on 23 December (David Jardine) and one was at Otter Ferry on 16 January (Tom Callan).

Sanderling. A monthly maximum of 22 were at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 2 November and at least 44 were in Machrihanish Bay on 29 November and 3 December (Eddie Maguire). The peak count on Tiree, of 245 at Balephetrish Bay on 6 December, included 3 Icelandic leg-flagged birds.

Purple Sandpiper. A monthly maximum of 20 were at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 3 November (Eddie Maguire), 5 were at Eriska, North Argyll on 7 November (David Jardine), 39 were seen near the crazy golf course, Dunoon on 29 November (George Newall) and 96 were counted between Hough Bay and Rubha Chraiginis, Tiree on 4 December (John Bowler).

Dunlin. The largest count was 145 at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 17 January (John Bowler), 32 were counted at Ardrishaig on 23 November (Bill Allan) and 41 were in the Add Estuary on 29 December (Jim Dickson).

Jack Snipe. Unexpected birds sometimes turn up in gardens during very hard weather.

A Jack Snipe visited the garden at The Manse, Whitehouse, Kintyre on Boxing Day (26.12.2010) at 12.55pm. It was watched closely for approx. 3 minutes – plenty of time to confirm the ID (Hugh Macdonald). Would that all Jack Snipes were so obliging...

Woodcock. One was watched being chased and killed by a Buzzard at West Hynish, Tiree on 28 January (John Bowler). During the prolonged spell of cold weather there were many reports of Woodcock feeding in gardens, especially in Kintyre and Mid-Argyll. Three were in Airds Bay, Appin, North Argyll on 23 December (David Jardine), 5 were along the track to Langamull, Mull on 25 December and 12 were counted during a 2 hour walk at Kilbride bay, Cowal on 26 December (Tom Callan).

Bar-tailed Godwit. Ten were in Loch Crinan on 29 December (Jim Dickson) and 250 were found at Loch Gruinart on 8 January (per I & M.

Brooke).

Eurasian Curlew. The maximum count at Langa / Westport Marsh, Kintyre was 233 on 29 November (Eddie Maguire). The highest count on Tiree was 75 at Kilmoluaig on 27 January (John Bowler).

Turnstone. Approx. 40 were counted at Largiemore (Otter Ferry) on 2 November (Tom Callan).

Grey Phalarope. One was seen at Craignure, Mull on Tuesday 9 November (Robert Irvine).

Skuas, gulls, terns and auks (see also Seabirds above):

Pomarine Skua. A juvenile was seen over Arinagour, Isle of Coll at 16:00 on 12 November (Simon Wellock).

Little Gull. A first winter bird was at Tayinloan on the morning of 2 November (Katie Pendreigh).

Ring-billed Gull. The returning adult was with the other gulls at Dunstaffnage Bay, Dunbeg, near Oban at 13.00 hours on 13 November: it was in Oban again during November and December (Bill Allan). A smart adult bird was at Traigh Bheag (east of Balephetrish Bay), Tiree on 16 January (John Bowler).

Iceland Gull. An adult at Bunnahabhainn on 23 December was one of very few reported so far this winter (per I & M. Brooke).

Glaucous Gull. A juvenile was at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 7 November (John Bowler), and a first winter was at Frenchman's Rocks, Islay on 8 January (per I & M. Brooke).

Ross's Gull. A fly-by juvenile/first-winter was photographed flying S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory during a WNW gale on 12 November (Eddie Maguire).

Razorbill. Approx. 100 flew N in groups up to 30 in 10 mins, mid-morning on 29 December (Tom Callan).

Black Guillemot. Nine counted in calm weather off Hough on 27 January hint at higher wintering population off West Tiree than expected (John Bowler).

Little Auk. One was feeding in Gunna Sound, Coll/Tiree on 30 December (John Bowler).

Doves, owls, woodpeckers etc.:

Long-eared Owl. One in a garden at Balephuill, Tiree on 20 November was a great surprise and caused pandemonium amongst the garden birds! (John Bowler).

Short-eared Owl. One was over the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 20 November (Jim Dickson), one at Loch Gorm, Islay on 10 December was an unusual winter visitor and one was seen hunting at dusk near Druimbuidhe, Cornaigmore, Tiree on 25 January (John Bowler).

Common Kingfisher. One was at Loch Riddon, Cowal on 10 November (Tom Callan) and another was near the top of Loch Fyne, quite



Waxwing © Richard Allan

close to Ardno, on 14 November (Glyn Toplis). Other single birds were seen at Dervaig, Mull on 8 December (and only the second record this year for the island) (per Alan Spellman), Gartmain, Islay on 7 January (Peter Roberts) and seen catching small fish, at the head of Caol Scotnish (Loch Sween), on 24 January (Paul Daw).

Passerines:

Barn Swallow. One was at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 4-5 November (John Bowler).

Waxwing. There were an unusual number of mid-winter records. The normal pattern is for the birds to more or less disappear following autumn influxes. A lone bird fly-catching on strand-line north of Hough Bay, Tiree on 8 January for example was the first mid-winter record for the island (John Bowler). Up to three were in Connel in the days before 19 December (Mike Harrison), one at Cairnbaan on 26 December was the first Jim Dickson had seen for some time, four were at Glenbranter on the same day (26 Dec) (Helen

Woods) and one was at Craighouse, Jura on 28 December (Louise Muir).

Dipper. One was seen flying onto a rock on the Argyll shore in the Kyles of Bute on 21 November (Graham & Danielle Clark), one was at Inverneill, Mid-Argyll on 14 January (Paul Daw), one was near Ensay, Mull on 14 January and subsequently (Anand Prasad) and three were in Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 21 January (Tom Callan),.

Black Redstart. A male was seen briefly at Hough, Tiree on 1 November (John Bowler).

Common Stonechat. At least 20 individuals were considered to be wintering at various sites on The Laggan, Kintyre during November/December (Eddie Maguire). One hopes that many of them will have survived the exceptionally cold weather this winter. There was a marked reduction in numbers on Tiree during/following the prolonged cold spell with only odd birds noted during January (John Bowler). Two survivors were on Lochgilphead meadows during milder weather on 29 December (Jim Dickson).

Fieldfare. Among those that remained after October's influx were 3 at Balephuill, Tiree on 22 November, a flock of 200 or more at Colintrave, Cowal on 2 November (Graham & Danielle Clark),

Redwing. Larger flocks on Tiree included 400 at Balephuill and 600 at West Hynish on 5 November, 600+ passed through Coll on 4 November (Simon Wellock), Relatively few records in mid-winter, but 20 were at Port Appin, North Argyll on 23 December with two Fieldfares (David Jardine) and 25 were in Connel on 7 January (Mike Harrison).

Blackcap. The relatively few records this winter included: 2 females at Balephuill, Tiree on 14 November (John Bowler), a male in a garden at West Tarbert, Kintyre from 19 – 21 November (Barbara McMillan), a male on 25-26 November and a female on 27 November at Peninver, Kintyre (Steve & Sue Walker), a male in a garden in Lochgilphead on 9 December (Lynsey Gibson) and a male at Ballimore, Cowal on 16 January (Tom Callan).

Common Chiffchaff. Birds of various races were reported on Tiree in November. Single *collybita*-type birds were at Balephuill (3rd-4th and 16th-20th) with an *abietinus*-type bird there (6th-7th) and another at Carnan Mor (10th), followed by a good

calling *tristis* bird at Balemartine (14th) (John Bowler). A '*phylloscopus*' at Connel on 16 November was probably this species (Mike Harrison).

Long-tailed Tit. A loose flock of at least 15 were at Loch Gair, Mid-Argyll on 4 November (Paul Daw) and 8 were at Treshnish, Mull on 20 December (Anand Prasad).

Common Starling. At least 600 were in the vicinity of Machrihanish Seabird Observatory during November and approx. 1,800 were over the Defence Estates, Machrihanish on 29 December (Eddie Maguire).

Siskin. Six returned to the garden at Lagganmore near Oban on 27 December (Bill Allan)

Goldfinch. Up to 50 were at the feeding station at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in the first part of November and numbers increased to 57 on 7 December (Eddie Maguire/John McGlynn).

Twite. Numbers at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory reached just 7 on 11 November and a flock of 40 was noted at Machrihanish Dunes Golf Course on 29 November. Wintering birds at the observatory on 3 December included 3 that were colour-ringed there earlier in the autumn (Eddie Maguire). Six on the Oban esplanade on 23 November were a bit unusual (Bill Allan). The largest flock reported on Tiree was 180 at The Reef on 3 November, only odd groups of up to 20 were recorded in January (John Bowler).

Common Crossbill. There were widespread records of Crossbills during the period including: six near Tarbert on 24 November (Paul Daw), 26 feeding on European Larch near Otter Ferry on 30 November (including at least 4 amazingly bright males), three in Hell's Glen, Cowal on 31 December, three (1 male) at the E end of Loch Awe on 2 January (Bill Allan)

Lapland Bunting. After the autumn influx only small number were reported from Tiree including: 3 on stubbles at Balephetrish on 15 November, 3 at Balephetrish on 13 December, 2 at Middleton on 14 December (John Bowler) and 2 at Ardnave Point, Islay on 9 January (per I & M. Brooke).

Yellowhammer. A male appeared today with the Chaffinches etc. in the deeply snowed garden at Lagganmore near Oban (Bill Allan), six were in a garden in Lochgilphead on 9 December (Lydney Gibson), and a female was in the garden at Connel on 13 January (Mike Harrison).

Snow Bunting. After a good showing on Tiree in November, including 3 flying S over Carnan Mor on 5th and 6 flying S at Loch a' Phuill on 10th, the only sighting there was a single immature bird at Balephetrish on 2 January (John Bowler). Nine were briefly at Port Ban Caravan Park, Knapdale, Mid-Argyll on 8 November (Mark Williamson), one was at Eriska, North Argyll on 7 November (David Jardine) and singles were at 3 locations on Islay during December (per I & M. Brooke)

Bramblings: Argyll records – November 2010 – January 2011

Date	Location	No.	Comments
10/10/2010	Tiree	4	Around island
01/11/2010	Port Ban Caravan Park, Knapdale	1	Male
02/11/2010	Otter Ferry, Cowal	10	Or more with Chaffinches
03/11/2010	Tullochgorm, Minard, Mid-Argyll	1	Female on peanuts
08/11/2010	Port Ban Caravan Park, Knapdale	1	Male – different from previous bird
10/11/2010	Otter Ferry, Cowal	4	Briefly in garden
15/11/2010	Otter Ferry, Cowal	3	Or more regularly during November

21/11/2010	Colintraive, Cowal	2	Females
29/11/2010	Dunoon, Cowal	2	Male and female – first seen this winter
30/11/2010	Otter Ferry, Cowal	4	Or more
06/12/2010	Tullochgorm, Minard, M-Argyll	2	Male and female in garden
06/12/2010	Ballochgair, Kintyre	3	2 male, one female
07/12/2010	Lagganmore, Mid-Argyll	1	With Chaffinches in garden
07/12/2010	Loch Skerrols, Islay	1	Seen
09/12/2010	Lagganmore, Mid-Argyll	2	With Chaffinches in garden
09/12/2010	Dunoon, Cowal	10	With Chaffinches in garden
09/12/2010	Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	2	With Chaffinches and Yellowhammers in garden
10/12/2010	Dunoon, Cowal	21	Increased since yesterday - with Chaffinches in garden
15/12/2010	Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll	1	In garden
15/12/2010	Ardkinglas, Mid-Argyll (NN1710)	1	Male with Chaffinches at car park
18/12/2010	Lagganmore, Mid-Argyll	1	Female with Chaffinches in garden
20/12/2010	Nr. St Catherine's, Cowal	1	Seen
20/12/2010	Connel, Mid-Argyll	3	And at least one each day for past week
20/12/2010	Dunoon, Cowal	35	with Chaffinches in garden – must be a record for an Argyll garden!
21/12/2010	Tayvallich, Mid-Argyll	1	With Chaffinches
25/12/2010	Kirn, Dunoon, Cowal	3	Male and two females in garden
27/12/2010	Kilchoman, Islay	1	On bird feeder
27/12/2010	Lagganmore, Mid-Argyll	2	Male and female
27/12/2010	The Oa, Islay	15	Per Katherine Fotheringham
27/12/2010	Tullochgorm, Minard, M-Argyll	6	Males in garden with Chaffinches
28/12/2010	Dunoon, Cowal	25	Or more
03/01/2011	Nr. Carrick Castle, Cowal	1	With Chaffinches
27/01/2011	Lagganmore, Mid-Argyll	1	With Chaffinches in garden
25/02/2011	Tullochgorm, Minard, M-Argyll	1	Female at bird feeder

Paul Daw: 08.03.2011.

Articles for the June issue of the *Eider*
should with the Editor before the 24th
May 2011

**Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club
(2010/2011)**

Chairman: Nigel Scriven, 2 Allt na Blathaich, Loch Eck,
Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8SG (*phone* 01369 840606 & 01505
843679)

Vice Chairman: Mike Harrison

Secretary: Katie Pendreigh, The Whins, Ferry Road, Tay-
inloan, Argyll PA29 6XQ (*phone* 01583 441359)

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

Membership Secretary: Sue Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet,
Arrochar, Dumbartonshire. (*phone* 01301 702603)

Committee: Richard Allan (Oban), Tom Callan (Otter
Ferry), Malcolm Chattwood (Lochgilphead), Paul Daw
(Minard), Andy Robinson (Partick), David Warden
(Kilfinan) and Mark Williamson (Kilberry).

Editor of the Argyll Bird Report: Tom Callan, Corra, Otter
Ferry, Tighnabraich, Argyll PA21 2DH (*phone* 01700
821212)

Editor of the Eider: Mark Williamson, Port Ban, Kilberry,
Argyll PA29 6YD (*phone* 01880 770 162)

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

Webmaster: Danielle Clark
phone 01700 841284

e-mail dany@condorjourneys-adventures.com

Argyll Bird Recorder

Paul Daw, Tigh-na-Tulloch, Tullochgorm, Minard, Argyll
PA32 8YQ

phone 01546 886260

e-mail monedula@globalnet.co.uk

BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

Argyll South, Bute & Gigha: Richard Allan
phone 01852 300 359

e-mail r.allan13@btinternet.com

Argyll North—Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern: Arthur Brown
phone 01688400415

e-mail pamartbrown@btinternet.com

Rod Little

phone 01688400315

e-mail rlett6@aol.com

Islay, Jura & Colonsay: John Armitage
phone 01496 860396

e-mail jsa@ornquest.plus.com

From front page: Mystery bird is a Goldcrest



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 digital photographs (jpeg files preferred) of birds and their habitats to the editor. Digital photographs of Schedule 1 species taken at or near the nest will not be accepted for publication unless the photographer was covered by an appropriate SNH licence.

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

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

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

More about the Argyll Bird Club

The club was established in 1985. 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 annual *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).