

The Eider is the quarterly newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club published in mid March, June, September and December

Scottish Charity Number SC008782

The Eider



Editorial

At long last I'm beginning to feel comfortable with the new software that I've been battling with for this and the last issue! So, I hope you are enjoying the new style. But, if your are not, or can suggest any way that it can be improved, please let me know.

Margaret Staley's super drawings have greatly enhanced the appearance of this issue. Now this is a cue to all you budding artists—I would greatly welcome a steady supply of drawings that will reproduce well in black and white.

I would also like to prompt some of you to put pen to paper for articles for the spring issue. While this is a fairly hefty issue, most of it is due to Paul Daw's supreme effort—thanks Paul! In addition to Margaret and Paul I would also like to thank the following for their contributions: Helen & John Anderson, David Merrie, Jane Mitchell and Michael Thomas

All that remains is to wish you all a very happy Christmas and a fantastic Hogmanay.

Steve Petty

Spring Meeting

To be held in the Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory, near Oban on Saturday 29 March

A full programme will appear in the next issue of the Eider (March)

Autumn meeting

The meeting was very well attended and the talks were full of interest.

Sandra Maclean, Project Officer, gave a presentation on black grouse, whose numbers are in decline. The critical factor seems to be the survival rate of chicks. She recommended sensitive management of heather, tree-planting, drainage and fencing.

Roger Broad (RSPB) gave some results from the Peregrine and Chough surveys. 2002 has been a poor year for peregrine nesting, especially inland. His good news was that choughs numbers are up on Colonsay and corncrakes have doubled since 1992 in places where the habitat is managed.

Martin Gaywood from SNH gave a most interesting account of the proposal to reintroduce beavers to Knapdale. The impetus came from an EC Article 22, and Britain is at the end of a long list of countries that have considered the reintroduction of the beaver. The main objections to the proposal have been from people worried about a detrimental effect on the migration of salmon and the possibility that they may harbour *Giardia*, but generally, conservation bodies expect that it should have a beneficial effect on the wetland habitat and on wildlife as a whole. There would be a full-time Project Officer for the duration of the project, and they were confident that in the event of the trial's being deemed unsuccessful it would be possible to remove the beavers at the end of the trial. At the AGM, the members voted *nem. con.* to request the

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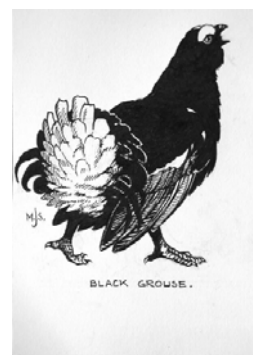
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Review

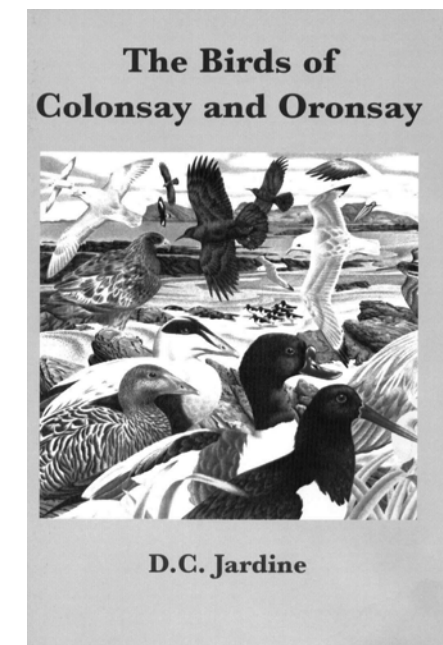
The Birds of Colonsay and Oronsay: David Jardine (2002).

48 pages, 1 map, 7 colour photographs, black and white drawings, and figures. Published privately. ISBN 1-899863-32-X. Soft-back. Price £5.99 including postage from House of Lochar, Isle of Colonsay, Argyll PA61 7YR.

Phone/fax 01951 200232.

E-mail—lochar@colonsay.org.uk

This guide provides new information on the birds of these two enchanting islands, and does so in quite a different way to a booklet of the same title produced in 1985 (by D.C. Jardine, J. Clarke & P.M. Clarke). Unlike the original publication, it does not include a detailed species list, although a checklist is provided at the back. Instead, each section is devoted to a specific topic, which together provides the



visitor with a good overview of the islands, their birds and how recent changes have influenced bird numbers.

The first two chapters are devoted to how and where to see birds, with suggested hotspots. This information is just what a birdwatcher wants on his/her first visit. To make the most of the suggested walks, a booklet on *Exploring Colonsay* (No.

11 in the West Highland Series) is also needed. Next are six sections on specific bird topics - herons, geese, eider ducks, birds of prey, farming & birds and seabirds. Together these chapters cover most of the islands' birds, with detailed information on some of the specialities.

The careful use of black and white drawings, colour photographs, graphs and text boxes greatly enhances this publication. Julia Page's colour painting on the front cover is superb. One minor criticism is that a more detailed map would have helped the reader locate many of the place names mentioned in the text.

Overall, this is an excellent booklet, not only for providing birdwatchers with the right sort of information, but for discussing and documenting some of the landuse changes that have recently influenced the distribution and abundance of birds of Colonsay and Oronsay - well done David!

Steve Petty

Recent papers from journals

This section aims to provide readers with information on papers that have recently appeared in journals. The criteria for selection is that papers must have links to birds in Scotland. The selection is biased towards what I read, so I would welcome information on other papers outwith my field, for inclusion in future abstracts. Feedback on this section would be helpful— Steve Petty.

Amar, A. & Redpath, S. M. 2002. Determining the cause of the hen harrier decline on the Orkney Islands: an experimental test of two hypotheses. *Animal Conservation*, **5**, 21-28.

Brown, A. W. & Brown, L. M. 2002. Prefledging survival of mute swans *Cygnus olor* cygnets in the Lothians, UK. *Bird Study*, **49**, 97-104.

Clode, D. & Macdonald, D. W. 2002. Invasive predators and the conservation of island birds: the case of American mink *Mustela vison* and terns *Sterna* spp. in the Western Isles, Scotland. *Bird Study*, **49**, 118-123.

Cook, A. S., Grant, M. C., McKay, C. R. & Peacock, M. A. 2001. Status, distribution and breeding success of the red-billed chough in Scotland in 1998. *Scottish Birds*, **22**, 82-91.

Evans, R. J. 2001. Cliff nesting seabirds in east Caithness in 1980-1993. *Scottish Birds*, **22**, 73-81.

Gibson, I. 2002. Manx shearwaters in the Firth of Clyde. *Scottish Bird News*, **September**, 8.

Gilbert, G. 2002. The status and habitat of spotted crake *Porzana porzana* in Britain in 1999. *Bird Study*, **49**, 79-86.

Haysom, S. L. 2001. Aspects of the ecology of black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) in plantation forests in Scotland. pp. 150. Stirling: University of Stirling. PhD Thesis.

Horne, G. & Fielding, A. H. 2002. Recovery of the peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus* in Cumbria, UK, 1966-99. *Bird Study*, **49**, 229-236.

Jardine, D. C. 2001. Feeding rates of Scottish crossbills on Sitka spruce. *Scottish Birds*, **22**, 108-109.

Madders, M. & Walker, D. 2002. Golden eagles in a multiple land-use environment: a case study in conflict management. *Journal of Raptor Research*, **36**, 55-61.

Marquiss, M. & Rae, R. 2002. Ecological differentiation in relation to bill size amongst sympatric, genetically undifferentiated crossbills *Loxia* spp. *Ibis*, **144**, 494-508.

McGhie, H. 2001. Diet of barn owls in East Ross and East Ness. *Scottish Birds*, **22**, 92-103.

McGrady, M., Grant, J. R., Bainbridge, I. P. & McLeod, D. R. A. 2002. A model of golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) ranging behaviour. *Journal of Raptor Research*, **36**.

McLeod, D. R. A., Whitfield, D. P. & McGrady, M. J. 2002. Improving prediction of golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) ranging in western Scotland using GIS and terrain modelling. *Journal of Raptor Research*, **36**, 70-77.

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Recent reports from Paul Daw: August–October 2002

Since the last issue of the Eider we have had news of 3 more **Rosy Starlings** in Argyll; two different adults on Lismore, on 28th August and 1st September respectively, and a juvenile on Islay on 21st October. This brings the Argyll total for 2002 to at least 9 individuals. So far I have still not had any written or photographic confirmation of the birds at Bowmore, Islay 21st June, Iona, Mull (various locations) 15th - 20th July or Gigha 16th - 18th July. If any of you can provide such confirmation please contact me as soon as possible.

In some ways the most unexpected visitor during the period was a **Crested Tit** that appeared in a garden at Tobermory, Mull. First reported on 19th October in the garden of Celia MacIntyre it was seen on the following day by 'our man on Mull' Alan Spellman. This is only the second time the species has been reliably recorded in Argyll (the first was near Loch Tulla, N Argyll in 1991) and the location was so unexpected that it is fortunate that the bird was photographed while at a peanut feeder. For those with internet access, the photograph can be seen at the excellent website <http://www.mullbirds.com>.

Another great rarity, a **Black-eared Wheatear**, was reported at Machrihanish SBO on 5th/6th October. A description has been provided and if accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee this would be only the 15th record for Scotland as well as the first for Argyll.

However what must be the rarest sighting of all was the **Common Eider** of the N. America race *dresseri* found among a flock of 'British' Common Ei-

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There have been two reports of **Mandarin Ducks** on Loch Awe within a couple of days of each other: 2 males and a female were near Innis Chonain at the north end of the Loch on 13th Nov and a pair were photographed at An Lodan at the far south end of the Loch on 15th Nov. Although it is known that Mandarins have been kept in a wild fowl collection near the Loch it will be interesting to see if these are signs of the establishment of a new feral population in addition to the well established flock on Lock Eck.

A flock of 15 or so **Snow Buntings** were flushed from the marsh beside the Add Estuary on 16th Nov, the first report of the species at this location for many years

ders in Campbeltown Loch on 18th October. Again a description has been supplied which, if accepted, would constitute the first record of the race for Britain and, as far as we are aware, for the Western Palearctic.

The other remarkable record of the period concerned 3 juv. (**Pied**) **Avocets** seen flying past Machrihanish SBO 3rd Sep. This is only the fourth time that Avocets have been reported in Argyll and the first for 16 years.

Other highlights are listed below with many thanks to those who send in records regularly.

Divers to Wildfowl

Post breeding gatherings of divers included 19 **Red-throated Divers** in Crossapol Bay, Coll on 16th Sep and 45 **Black-throated** and 48 **Great Northern Divers** in the Sound of Gigha on 30th Oct. There were two reports from Mull of the scarce Red-necked Grebe, one in Bloody Bay on 18th Sep and one close inshore at Grasspoint on 7th Oct and Slavonian Grebes were gathering at the usual sites with 9 at Loch na Keal, Mull on 21st Sep, 16 at Blackrock (Loch Indaal) Islay and an amazing 51 counted in the Sound of Gigha in flat calm conditions on 30th Oct. This last must be a record count for a single site in Argyll.

Our first **Cory's Shearwater** since

1997 made an appearance at Frenchman's Rocks, Islay on 29th Aug and exceptional numbers of Sooty Shearwaters were reported from various sites including 180 from the Islay ferry on 10th Sep, 15 offshore from N Colonsay on 13th Sep and a record count of 379 flying S in 5 hours at Frenchman's Rocks on 29th Aug. The only records of **Balearic Shearwaters** so far have been a single at Frenchman's Rocks on 11th Aug and 4 from the Islay ferry on 10th Sep.

The fairly numerous but normally seldom seen **European Storm-Petrel** showed well for once, with 47 off Gunna Sound Coll/Tiree on 14th Aug, 5 flying S at Frenchman's Rocks on 29th Aug and 2 or more from the Islay ferry on 10th Sep. During the latter ferry journey one of only 2 **Leach's Storm-petrels** reported was spotted, the other being off NE Colonsay on 13th Aug.

The main arrival of **Whooper Swans** occurred in mid-Oct and by 22nd a record gathering of 307 birds was present at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree. On 4th Oct 2 **Bean Geese** were spotted from Craignish Point, flying over the Sound of Jura. The species is very scarce in Argyll and if accepted this will be our first record for ten years. The main arrival of **Greenland White-fronted Geese**

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was also in mid-Oct. During the early hours of 17th Oct birds could be heard flying over Minard, Mid-Argyll calling and during the morning skein after skein (600 or more birds) flew SW high over Loch Fyne, still calling. On the same day 129 were counted flying over Tiree, in 4 flocks. Many **Barnacle Geese** arrived at the same time with 100 at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 15th Oct, over 100 on Tiree on



17th Oct and 600 in the Ruaig area of Tiree on 22nd. Good numbers of **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** during Sep including 70 at Loch Gruinart on 3rd and 3 were seen in Loch Gilp (where the species is seldom recorded) on 2nd Oct. An unusual goose found with **Greylag Geese** at Loch Gruinart on 1st Sep showed characters of both **Lesser Snow Goose** and **Ross's Goose** and was apparently a hybrid. The species are known to hybridise in the wild in North America. Most of our Canada Geese are 'home grown' and no less than 107 were counted in the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 3rd Aug, confirming the continued increase of the species in Argyll. The **Red-breasted Goose** that appeared on Islay at the end of Oct was considered to be probably the same returning bird as that seen there last winter. Simi-

larly 'old faithful' our drake **American Wigeon** appeared in Loch Crinan on 26th Oct for the fourth winter running.

A flock of 6 **Gadwall** was an unexpected sighting from the ferry between Coll and Tiree on 19th Oct as was the **Green-winged Teal** spotted in the Add Estuary from the hide near the Crinan Canal on 26th Oct. Sometimes scanning carefully through a flock of commoner birds can bring rewards as was the case when an immature **Garganey** was found in a large flock of **Eurasian Teal** at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 29th Aug. An even more spectacular example was when an unusual looking **Common Eider** was found among a flock at the mouth of the Campbeltown Loch on 18th Oct. The shape of the shield above the bill appears to fit the North American race *dresseri*, which has never been recorded on this side of the Atlantic. A detailed description has been provided but such an unusual record would benefit greatly from additional photographic evidence. The Sound of Gigha is a good location for finding some of our scarcer ducks and this autumn has been no exception. On 7th Oct, 165 **Black (Common) Scoter** were counted there and on 30th Oct 11 **Long-tailed Ducks** and 8 **Velvet Scoter** were present. The earliest date so far for returning **Common Goldeneye** is 9th Oct, when a female was on Loch a' Phuill.

Raptors to Gamebirds

It has been a good autumn in Argyll for **Red Kites**. A juvenile with wing tags at Loch a' Phuill on 1st Aug was identified as a female ringed on the Black Isle, Highland. The birds seen on Mull, at Acharonich on 12th Sep and at Calgary on 10th Oct, were quite possibly from the same source and probably on their way to wintering quarters in Ireland. An immature **White-tailed Eagle** again appeared on Tiree, this time at Gott Bay on 11th Sep and a male **Eurasian Marsh Harrier** was seen at Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll on 6th Aug. An

Osprey in Loch Gilp on 20th Aug was being mobbed by gulls and one was at Loch Gruinart on the same day. A late individual was flying S at Pennygael, Mull on 3rd Oct.

A group of 6 **Willow Ptarmigan (Red Grouse)** seen at Broadhills on 13th Aug constitute the first record for this species on Coll for many years as do the 5 **Grey Partridges** at Cliad on 25th Sep. Both presumably derive from released birds. A late **Corn Crake** was flushed from the edge of saltmarsh at Bridgend on 29th Sep. Late breeding may also be the explanation for a pr of adult **Common Moorhens** with 3 juvs at Breachacha, Coll on 16th Sep and a pr of **Common Coots** with a well grown juv on Mill Loch, Gigha on 17th Oct.

Waders

The most remarkable wader record of the period concerned 3 juv. (**Pied**) **Avocets** seen flying past Machrihanish SBO 3rd Sep, our first record of this species since one was seen at Southend, Kintyre in May 1986. Migrating **Ringed Plovers** included 400 at Loch Gruinart on 19th Aug and 109 at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 26th Sep while an estimated 1,500 **European Golden Plovers** were at Bridgend, Loch Indaal, Islay on 30th Oct. A flock of 350 **Northern Lapwings** at Kenovay, Tiree on 26th Aug included a leucistic bird with sandy brown upper wing coverts, mantle and crown that had the observers pulse racing for a few moments! An unusual number of **Red Knot** appeared at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll this autumn including 61 on 30th Aug. However, the last individual, on 12th Oct, will not be returning as it was taken and eaten by a **Peregrine Falcon**! A single **Little Stint** was seen with Dunlin at Ruaig, Tiree on 13th Oct, and two **Curlew Sandpipers** were in the Add Estuary on 31st Jul with 6 juvs at Carnain, Loch Indaal, Islay on 10th Sep. Large numbers of **Dunlin** were passing through Argyll in late Jul early Aug. A flock of 181, mostly adult birds, in the Add Estuary on 31st Jul was the

largest number seen there in recent years and on 19th Aug an estimated 1,500 were present at Loch Gruinart. Several **Ruff** were recorded in the latter half of Aug and early Sep including one or two birds on Islay, Tiree, Colonsay and in Cowal, and no less than 8 at Loch a' Phuill on 29th Aug. Apart from 101 in a single day at Machrihanish SBO in early Sep, 24 at Loch a' Phuill on 26th Aug and 14 at Ballard, Coll on 17th Aug most reports of **Black-tailed Godwits** were in single figures. Similarly, although **Whimbrel** were widely reported, from Coll to Sanda,



the only flocks in double figures were 11 at The Reef, Tiree on 26th Aug and 45 at Lochdon, Mull on 20th Aug. A gathering of 58 **Common Redshank** in the Add Estuary on 30th Aug was exceptional for this location and 7 **Common Green-shank** at Loch a' Phuill on 26th Aug was the highest number reported so far. On 8th August one of our members came across an unusual wader at Kildonald Bay, Kintyre. Similar to a Common Redshank but with bright yellow legs it was clearly one of the **Yellowlegs** species. Frustratingly it was not possible to obtain a detailed description in the time available and it may not be possible to determine whether it was **Greater** or **Lesser Yellowlegs**. Among other scarce wader species seen were two **Green Sandpipers** (at Bridgend, Islay on 8th Aug and Port na Luing, Coll on 9th Aug), a **Wood Sandpi-**

per at Balevullin, Tiree on 18th Sep, and a **Grey Phalarope** offshore at Manna, Tiree on 9th Oct. **Common Sandpipers** usually occur only in small groups so 17 together at Sandaig, Tiree on 4th Aug was unusual. A late migrant of this species was seen on Sanda 15th Sep.

Skuas to Woodpeckers

Early indications are that the skuas showed well this autumn. Five **Pomarine Skuas** were seen from the Islay Ferry in Sep, 3 adults on 10th and 2 immatures on 19th. From late Aug to mid Oct **Arctic Skuas** were reported from Islay and Tiree and no less than 10 flew past Frenchman's Rocks on 5th Oct. **Great Skuas** were also seen on several dates from Islay and Tiree and 2 were sighted from Keillmore, Mid-Argyll flying N over the Sound of Jura on 9th Aug. The only scarce species of gull reported at this time were a 1st winter **Ring-billed Gull** from the Islay Ferry on 3rd Oct, an adult **Yellow-legged Gull** at Craigens, Islay on 1st Sep and an adult **Glaucous Gull** in Campbeltown Loch, Kintyre on 16th Aug. Late **Sandwich Terns** were seen at Toward Point, Cowal on 7th Oct at Vaul, Tiree on 12th Oct, 8 **Common Terns** were feeding in Loch Gilp on 13th Aug and 2 late **Arctic Terns** flew south off Frenchman's Rocks on 5th Oct.

Stock Pigeons (Stock Doves) are scarce any where in Argyll but the bird seen on Islay 26th Oct was the first record for the island since 1979. The last **Common Cuckoo** reported to date was a juv. at Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 31st Jul and there have been no reports of **Common Swifts** since early Aug when one was seen at Port Charlotte Islay on 1st.

Passerines

There have been widespread reports of local **Barn Swallows** staying late and birds were still present at Kinloch, Mull on 13th Oct, Minard on 16th Oct and Tayinloan, Kintyre on 17th Oct. I have a note of one on 29th Oct, reported at the Bird Club

autumn meeting but I failed to record the location. Please let me know if this was your record. The latest date for **House Martin** so far is 7th Oct, at Tayinloan.

A heavy passage of pipits and wagtails was noted in the first 2 or 3 weeks of Sep, among which were an estimated 2,000 **Meadow Pipits** passing through Sanda Island on 17th Sep, 250 **Pied Wagtails** at Machrihanish (together with 25 **White Wagtails**) and 120 Pied Wagtails at Dunaverty Bay, Kintyre (with 20 White Wagtails) on 9th and an amazing 80 **White Wagtails** on Sanda on 18th Sep.

Hedge Accentors (Dunnocks) do not often feature in these pieces but a count of 34 birds at the north end of Gigha on 17th Oct together with apparently migrant birds on Tiree at this time seems to confirm my suspicions that there is a significant degree of immigration of this species in autumn. Similarly 100 **European Robins** counted on Sanda on 14th Sep and 60 in the Port Wemyss area of Tiree on 20th Oct must also have involved migrants. A late **Whinchat** was spotted at Vaul, Tiree on 10th Oct and an influx of **Common Stonechats** took place on Tiree in late Sep including 8 at Heylipol on 23rd. As well as the rare **Black-eared Wheatear** noted above there were several reports of migrant '**Greenland**' race **Wheatears** including 8 on Sanda on 14th Sep. Mull seems to be a good place for finding migrant **Ring Ouzels** and this year was no exception with a male bird found feeding on rowan berries at Lochbuie on 24th Sep. Early **Fieldfares** were at Minard on 25th Sep and **Redwings** at Balephuill, Tiree

on 14th Sep. The main arrival of winter thrushes took place in mid-Oct with 100s of **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** at Craignure, Mull on 18th, 145 **Redwings** on Tiree

on 14th and 300 in the Port We-myss area of Islay on 22nd Oct. **Fieldfares** seems to have been less in evidence on the Islay and Tiree at this time.

Two migrant **Garden Warblers** were pausing on Tiree on 12th and 13th Sep and in the latter half of Oct at least 15 **Blackcaps** were found on the island. The last reports of **Common Chiffchaffs** were at Ardcastle Wood, Mid-Argyll on 12th Sep and at Loch Ballygrant, Islay on 23rd Sep and a late **Willow Warbler** was at The Manse, Tiree on 14th Oct. As mentioned above a **Crested Tit** graced a garden in Tobermory from 19th Oct and was still around as I write this (mid-Nov). On Tiree a flock of 4 **Blue Tits** at Ruaig on 13th Oct was almost as surprising, given the location.

A **Eurasian Jay** reported at the north end of Jura at the end of Oct was well outwith the normal range of this species. At Kintra, Islay on 28th Oct a **Eurasian Jackdaw** was seen that showed the characters (which include paler grey on the head and a narrow whitish collar or crescent at the base of the nape) of the race *monedula* of north and east Europe. As mentioned above, two different adult **Rosy Starlings** (one with creamy buff plumage and one distinctly pink) were seen on Lismore on 28th August and 1st September respectively and a juvenile bird at Kintra, Islay on 21st October may have been the same individual as that reported at the end of Aug in Bowmore.

There have been more reports of **Bramblings** than usual raising hopes that this may turn out to be a better winter for this species in Argyll than we have had in recent years. A first winter male was feeding on peanuts in my

garden at Tullochgorm, Minard on 13th Oct and a male bird was at Alan Spellman's bird table at Lochdon, Mull from 22nd - 28th Oct. There were also several birds on Tiree from 14th - 19th Oct including 3 at Hynish on 15th. Nine **Common Crossbills** were an unexpected sight in a garden at Vaul, Tiree on 16th Sep and they soon flew off high to the south. It seems to have been a good autumn for **Twite** and good sized flocks reported from the islands included: 80 on Sanda on 19th Sep, 160 at Balemartine on 29th Sep, 200 at Totonald, Coll on 27th Sep and 250 at Portnahaven, Islay on 22nd Oct. By contrast there seem to have been only small numbers of **Lesser Redpolls** about including 20+ at Lochgair, Mid-Argyll on 12th Sep and 30+ at Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll on 13th Oct. However a small flock at Loch Gorm, Islay on 28th Sep included one individual that was identified as a moulting juv. **Mealy (Common) Redpoll**. September produced two reports of **Lapland Longspur (Lapland Bunting)** involving one bird at Ardskenish Point, Colonsay two at Ardnave, Islay on 28th Sep. The first **Snow Bunting** was a female at Greenhill, Tiree on 27th Oct.

Paul Daw (contact details on back cover)

Stop Stop Press!

Leach's Petrel, Little Auk and Turtle Dove were reported from Machrihanish in Oct/early Nov. There have been two recent reports of Kingfishers, one seen on several occasions in Holy Loch during Oct and Nov and, even more unusually, one on Loch Ba, Mull during Nov.

Autumn meeting

(continued from page 1)

Scottish Executive to decide soon whether the trial should go ahead.

Jimmy Maxwell described the willow tits he observes in Lanarkshire. They come below great and blue tits in the pecking order, and often lose their painstakingly excavated nest holes to these. His presentation included his song of the Willow Tit, for which he accompanied himself on the guitar.

Stuart Bearhop described how blackcaps that spend the summer in S Germany have been found wintering in England. His mention of the experimental work done on wild birds in Radolfzell, Germany, was informative. It is now possible to use isotopes to tell from a feather where a bird was feeding at the time when the feather grew.

Bob Furness told us that bonxies, fulmars and kittiwakes are now declining in Shetland. Numbers of kittiwakes are holding up elsewhere on the North Sea coast of Britain. He is using satellite transmitters to track bonxies in the winter.

At the AGM Nigel Scriven stepped down as Chairman, but was elected as Vice-Chairman, while David Wood was elected as Chairman. Thanks were expressed to Nigel, to Pam Staley who is retiring from the post of Membership Secretary, and to Bob Furness for organising a really excellent Meeting.

Jane Mitchell, 6/11/02

AGM minutes

The minutes of the Annual General meeting, which was held during the autumn meeting at the Cairnbaan Hotel, can be viewed on the Argyll Bird Club's website (for address—see box on last page)

What to do when you see a rare bird

Nowadays there are many different categories of bird watcher (some of them are amusingly described in Bill Odie's Little Black Bird Book). However, although we are by no means all 'twitchers' there can be few of us who do not experience a surge of excitement when we come across a bird that we know is something out of the ordinary. Such birds mostly appear unexpectedly and frequently do not stay around for long. Less experienced birders will often find that when they get back to the car (or home) to check up in their favourite field guide some crucial piece of information (e.g. colour of rump) is missing. This means, firstly, that you will be frustratingly uncertain about what exactly you saw and secondly that you will not have enough information to compile a precise description to submit. The tips that follow are intended to help you deal with such encounters successfully.

Rule 1. Make notes. Memory is fallible. There are so many plumage details with many birds that it is just not possible for most of us to retain them all in our mind until we get to a reference book. Then there is the 'it's in the book so I must have seen it' syndrome. It is quite amazing how easy it is to convince oneself that one did see an aspect of plumage that is critical to identifying a particular (rare) species. If possible, you should draw a rough sketch indicating any key features seen. My own artwork is a disaster but I still try to illustrate the most important things I have seen when I come across a bird I cannot identify straight away. If you see something really rare the various committees that consider such claims will often

expect to see a copy of any field notes you have taken at the time of the sighting. If you have the right equipment with you try to take a photograph.

Rule 2. Rule out common species. The first thing to do when you see a bird you cannot at first identify is to make quite sure it is not one of the commoner species. This may sound obvious but it is surprising just how variable some common species can be. Anyone who has looked closely at the Chaffinches that appear on the bird table, for example, will have noticed the variation both in breast colour and the extent of white in the wings and tail (among other things). This is just for birds in supposedly the same plumage phase (e.g. male, breeding). When looking at small waders I always try to eliminate Dunlin first. They are very variable in size, length of bill and plumage details. Seasonal variations and different moult conditions add another dimension. And of course differing light conditions can make an enormous difference to the appearance of a bird. Northern Wheatears are also very variable and have given rise to claims of species such as Great Grey Shrike! The species that gives me the most headaches is the Northern Goshawk. We have claims of this species every year but it is very rare in Argyll and only the most detailed description would be accepted. Unfortunately it is often seen only briefly. Having ruled out the common species think of those that are slightly less common but with which you are not very familiar. Among the waders, Ruff is a common confusion species. There is such variation in size and plumage between the sexes and from spring to autumn, not to mention the legs, which can be almost any colour you please apart from bright red! Now you have ruled out anything common go on to:

Rule 3. Be detailed. Do not assume that because you are dealing, for example, with a large and distinctive bird that it is unmistakable. In

most cases there is a possible confusion species (sometimes several). Black Kite (for example) is a classic problem species. In the latest round up of rare birds in Great Britain the secretary of BBRC points out that approximately 70% of Black Kite records are not accepted, often due to incomplete descriptions.

So, try to organise your description in a logical sequence. Start your description with an introduction outlining the circumstances of the observation, and write a short summary of the bird's appearance. Factors such as distance from the bird, details of optical equipment used, weather conditions etc. should be entered in the relevant box on the form (see below). Light is also important - dull light can be a problem but very bright conditions are often even worse. Size and shape are usually crucial. The former can often be deceptive e.g. at a distance or in misty conditions. Where possible size should be compared with a nearby well-known species. Terms such as dumpy, large-headed, attenuated etc. can be helpful where appropriate. Then describe the plumage, from head to tail, concentrating on any significant distinguishing features (see box on next page).

Also describe the habitat and mention any calls or other sounds made by the bird: the latter can be diagnostic. Do not forget to describe the bird's behaviour including feeding methods, style of flight, movements on the ground (or water), attitude (e.g. upright or horizontal stance).

Usually you will not be lucky enough to have covered everything listed above but the more items you have included the more likely that your record is accepted. Sometimes you will have to accept that the bird you have seen cannot be identified with certainty, and will just go down as 'one that got away'.

Rule 4 Be prompt. Write all this down as soon as possible after seeing the bird and preferably before

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looking at the books! Details fade in the memory.

Rule 5 *Try to get confirmation.* If you see something really unusual try to get someone else to look at the bird to give a 'second opinion'. Two pairs (or more) of eyes are almost invariably better than one. If you contact the recorder he may be able to suggest someone in your area who would come and have a look at your bird or may be able to come himself. **Photographs or camcorder footage are invaluable evidence.** In a very few cases (e.g. Iberian Chiffchaff) a sound recording is almost essential.

Details of rarities should be sent in as soon as possible after the sighting, preferably on the standard recording form (available from Recorder). For Argyll there are three levels of rarity *viz.* (1) birds that are not nationally rare but are scarce in an Argyll context, descriptions of these will be

judged locally by the Argyll Bird Records Committee; (2) birds that are not exceptionally rare in the UK as a whole but are scarce in Scotland, these are considered by the *Scottish Birds* Records Committee (SBRC) and (3) birds that are rare in the UK, which are judged by the *British Birds* Rarities Committee (BBRC). The observer is always informed personally as to the decision made. A list of birds that come into categories (1) and (2) are listed in the introduction to the *Argyll Bird Report* each year. Any rare bird that does not appear on this list will probably be a BBRC rarity and in any case will need a description. **No record of any of these species and races will be published unless adequate supporting details (including a description) are provided and are accepted by the appropriate records committee.** In addition, brief details may be requested for occurrences of scarce species not on the list where the circumstances appear to warrant this.

Confidentiality. With certain rare species you may have concerns about having details of their occurrence/breeding published and the information leading to some form of persecution of the birds. However it is nearly always in the best long-term interests of the birds for there to be some permanent record of their presence/breeding. If you are concerned about the safety of the birds please include a note with your record and only the most general comment will be made in the *Argyll Bird Report* or, if you wish, the record will not be published at all. No details will be released to other organisations without your express permission.

The decision. Lastly try not to be too disappointed if your description is turned down. The decision does not mean that you are a bad or unreliable bird watcher or even that the bird in question was definitely not what you claimed it was. Simply that the committee in question does not feel that there is sufficient evidence to be 100% sure that it was.

Key points to record

- ⇒ size, colour and shape of bill
- ⇒ colour of eyes and presence or absence of eye ring and supercilium (stripe above eye)
- ⇒ colour of cap, nape and throat
- ⇒ colour of breast and belly and presence, or otherwise of streaking/barring. It is sometimes important to say whether there is a sharp demarcation between breast and belly or whether a breast band is present.
- ⇒ colour of back and wings. For some species (especially some small passerines) detailed descriptions of each area of wing feathering (i.e. primaries, secondaries, scapulars, greater, median and lesser wing coverts etc.) is essential. It may even be necessary to go into details of individual feathers (e.g. whether they have paler tips). Number and colour of wing bars is often crucial.
- ⇒ rump colour is often a key feature and remember to note how far up the back it goes.
- ⇒ shape and colour of tail - again individual feathers may be important (especially outer tail feathers).
- ⇒ lastly length and colour of legs and feet can be a crucial distinguishing feature (the Snowy Egret was a good example of this).

Species for which descriptions are required. The box on the next page details rare species whose occurrence in Argyll needs to be fully documented. It is made up of the Argyll Bird Records Committee (ABRC) list of Argyll rarities (in lower case) and the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) list of Scottish rarities (in capitals - **NB** this includes the species shown in both upper *and* lower case in the SBRC official list), but excludes the large number of U.K rarities assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Asterisked species have occurred in Argyll. **No record of any of the species and plumage phases listed below will be published unless adequate supporting details (including a description) are available and verified by the appropriate committee.** In addition, brief details may be requested for occurrences of scarce species not on the list where circumstances appear to warrant this.

Paul Daw

Species for which descriptions are required

Black-necked Grebe*	WOOD LARK (WOODLARK)
CORY'S SHEARWATER*	Horned Lark (Shore Lark)*
GREAT SHEARWATER *	RICHARD'S PIPIT*
BALEARIC SHEARWATER*#	TAWNY PIPIT
Great Bittern (Bittern)*	WATER PIPIT
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON (NIGHT HERON)*	COMMON NIGHTINGALE (NIGHTINGALE)*
LITTLE EGRET*	Bluethroat*
PURPLE HERON	CETTI'S WARBLER
WHITE STORK*	AQUATIC WARBLER
Eurasian Spoonbill (Spoonbill)*	MARSH WARBLER
Bean Goose*	Eurasian Reed Warbler (Reed Warbler)*
European White-fronted Goose (race <i>albifrons</i>)*	ICTERINE WARBLER*
AMERICAN WIGEON*	MELODIOUS WARBLER
GREEN-WINGED TEAL*	DARTFORD WARBLER
Red-crested Pochard*	BARRED WARBLER*
RING-NECKED DUCK*	Lesser Whitethroat*
SURF SCOTER (except adult males) *	PALLAS'S LEAF WARBLER (PALLAS'S WARBLER)
Smew*	Yellow-browed Warbler*
Ruddy Duck*	FIRECREST*
EUROPEAN HONEY-BUZZARD (HONEY BUZZARD)*	RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER*
MONTAGU'S HARRIER	Bearded Tit
Goshawk*	Marsh Tit
ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD*	Willow Tit*
EURASIAN HOBBY (HOBBY)*	Crested Tit*
COMMON CRANE (CRANE)*	Wood Nuthatch (Nuthatch)*
Avocet*	Red-backed Shrike*
STONE-CURLEW*	WOODCHAT SHRIKE*
LITTLE PLOVER (LITTLE RINGED PLOVER)*	ROSY STARLING (ROSE-COLOURED STARLING)*
KENTISH PLOVER	EUROPEAN SERIN (SERIN)
Temminck's Stint*	Mealy Redpoll (formerly race of Redpoll)*
PECTORAL SANDPIPER*	Scottish Crossbill
BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER*	COMMON ROSEFINCH (SCARLET ROSEFINCH)*
Red-necked Phalarope* (away from traditional breeding areas)	Hawfinch*
Long-tailed Skua (except adult)*	CIRL BUNTING*
Mediterranean Gull*	ORTOLAN BUNTING
SABINE'S GULL*	LITTLE BUNTING*
RING-BILLED GULL*	
HERRING GULL (yellow legged races <i>michahellis</i> and <i>cachinans</i>)*	
Roseate Tern*	
Black Tern*	
Little Owl	
EUROPEAN BEE-EATER (BEE-EATER)*	
Eurasian Wryneck (Wryneck)*	
LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER	
GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK (SHORT-TOED LARK)	

Because of the frequency of records in Argyll, the SBRC has delegated decision making on this species to the Recorder. Normally a description will not now be required although the ABRC reserve the right to request one if the circumstances seem to require it.

In addition to the above, all records of sub-species recorded in Scotland on twenty or fewer occasions, will be examined by either BBRC or SBRC. All 'new' pre-1950 records of species appearing on the BBRC List, require to be accepted by SBRC.

Committee meeting on 19 November, 2002 - a personal view

There was only one member missing from this meeting, which was David Wood's first as Chairman. Most of the business was routine – planning of future general meetings and outings. The Spring meeting will be on 29 March, 2003, in Dunstaffnage by Oban. Put this date in your diary now. Details will follow in a later issue.

We hope to discover what you the members want from your Club from your responses to David's questionnaire, which will be included in the Spring issue. We would also like to try to foster an interest in birds among young people, but we deferred consideration of this to our next meeting on 25 February. If you have ideas about this please pass them on to a Committee member.

Paul Daw gave information on his workload as Argyll Bird Recorder. The Club will help with the upgrading of his computer now, and will consider other assistance at its next meeting.

Jane Mitchell, 20/11/02

Field Trips in 2003

Kintyre

Weather permitting, a visit to the best birding spots between Tarbert and Campbelltown on Sunday 12 January 2003. Intending participants should contact the leader, David Merrie (phone 01250 884273; e-mail david@merrie1035.fsnet.co.uk) by 10 January at the latest. Please leave a contact telephone number to be used in case of cancellation or change.

Meeting place: Tarbert harbour frontage, immediately after turning off the main road. The excursion will leave the harbour at 10.15 am. Cars will be pooled where possible for company and economy. Exact itinerary will depend on the local conditions and recent sightings, but will include some or all of the following:

- ◆ East Loch Tarbert (harbour). Check for interesting sea-gulls.
- ◆ West Loch Tarbert. Various access points, such as the Golf Course at West Tarbert, Kennacraig, Corran to Dunskeig farm, or ascent of Dunskeig for waders, geese, seaducks, divers, seals, birds of prey and farmland passerines.
- ◆ Seal view point at Ronachan. For seals and waders.
- ◆ Ballochroy Bridge and possibly Ballochroy Glen. Good location for dipper, migrant thrushes in glen and seabirds dependent on wind and sea conditions.
- ◆ Fish farm. For interesting gulls.
- ◆ Tayinloan shore to Rhuna-

haorine Point. Shore walk of either 1/2 or 3 miles with fields and marsh on the landward side. This is usually a very rich section and should produce at least 40 species.

- ◆ A'Chleit. A sandy beach where there should be a few Sanderling.
- ◆ Machrihanish Moss. Geese, ducks, birds of prey and small birds.
- ◆ Uisead. Location of Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, a look-out for seabirds and waders.
- ◆ To finish, a visit to Campbelltown Loch for gulls and waterbirds, and possibly some welcome refreshment before the return to Tarbert.

If the conditions are good we will aim for a tally of 80 species or more. Keep your fingers crossed.

David Merrie

St Kilda

The decision to go to St Kilda will be taken at very short notice (a few days) when a calm anticyclone is forecast over north-western Scotland. This is because St Kilda has no good anchorage and is approx 50 miles from Loch Maddy, North Uist across an exposed bit of water. Indeed, Village Bay, the main anchorage, is treacherous and so a visit is only recommended in settled weather. Even in calm conditions the swell in Village Bay can be considerable (sick making!) and the landing can be difficult, ie you can hurt yourself. At sea and on St Kilda any medical emergency (or any other kind of emergency) may not receive an immediate response. In other words, we are on our own!

It is proposed that John and Helen Anderson would co-ordinate this trip in the *Sea Otter* (skipper/owner Chris Ireland). This vessel operates out of Dunstaffnage Marina. The *Sea Otter* would have to be avail-

able, but Chris is also keen to go to St Kilda in calm weather. However, if you were thinking of going on this trip you would have to satisfy yourself that you are happy with *Sea Otter* and Chris. Helen and John Anderson are acting as co-ordinators only and would not be responsible for any incident of any kind during the trip. *Sea Otter* can only take six people and it is envisaged that the cruise would take six days at approx £60 per day (including food). Even if the trip goes ahead, there is always the possibility that St Kilda would not be reached, but other interesting places may be visited. However, no promises can be made. *Sea Otter's* website is:

<http://www.sea-otter.co.uk>

Please let Helen and John Anderson know if you are interested.

Tel: 01631 710630. E-mail: helen@highlandimage.co.uk

Colonsay

If the review of David Jardine's book on Colonsay and Oronsay (page 2) has whetted your appetite to visit these enchanting islands, then make sure you read the next *Eider*. David is planning a trip to Colonsay in September and he will be providing full details in the spring issue.

Steve Petty



Those were the days—forty years

I have been birdwatching in Argyll for over forty years, before blanket forestry, fish farms, mink, and before the *Argyll Bird Club* itself, of which I was a very early member. Nowadays scores of Argyll birdwatchers capture observations of almost all and any rarity that come within county bounds, but in the early sixties there was only a handful of us. Some birds have come, but many have gone. I'll let you make your own judgements. I thought it might be of interest to you if I retold some of my diary entries from *circa* forty years ago; so this (editor willing) is the start of a series of birdwatching excursions from the days when, except for the twice annual goose bash and an obsession with Golden Eagles, one just went out and watched birds: no BTO surveys, no Raptor Study Groups, no Licences to Disturb! So first of all I'll take you on a goose count. Then, it was done both in November and March. I'll run them together.

The national goose counts Nov/Mar 1963/4

November 9, 1963

In response to a card from Hugh Boyd in his incredibly small tidy handwriting, I volunteered to do the goose count for the Wildfowl Trust in Kintyre. We drove out from Cardross, arriving mid-morning at Tangy Loch by Machrihanish. The weather, which was foul by Loch Long, gradually improved until it turned into a dry clear day with thin cloud. On Loch Lussa we saw a few Mallard, but on Tangy Loch, a small loch in a hollow with only one good field beside it, we saw an enormous flock of geese in that field and a fine collection of duck. After a while the geese flew on to the water. We counted 220 Greylags, 350 Greenland Whitefronts,

70 Mallard, 32 Pochard, 4 Wigeon, 2 Tufted, 1 Goldeneye and 3 GBB Gulls. While we were watching a harsh calling came from the other side as a Peregrine flew low across the hill and settled on a small knoll. On a nearby small loch were several Common Gulls, 3 redhead Goldeneye and 1 Teal.

After a fruitless search round Machrihanish flats for more geese, we went off to Rhunahaorine Point. We walked as usual along the north shore, totting up the grebes, divers etc., in total 25 Slavonian Grebes, 9 Great Northern Divers at least, 1 Black-throated Diver, 1 Red-throated Diver. We saw c.40 Velvet and c.20 Common Scoter; also c.20 Mallard, 9+ Merganser, 3 Black Guillemots and 2 Kittiwakes flew past. By the barn half way along we climbed from the beach to the top of the gravel plateau. In a short while up sprang some Whitefronts, and later many more from further over the moor. They gathered in a great gaggle and settled at the point. We counted almost exactly 300. There were the usual Turnstones on the north shore. We met a small bunting in a hollow, which gave us a lot of bother. It was very retiring and the light was poor. It had an orangey head and nape and orangey patches on each breast. The back was brown and streaked. Its face was pale, as also the underparts. When it flew we could see that it had a white wing bar (c. ¼ in wide) along the base of the secondaries and single white outer tail feather. This was of course a first winter male Snow Bunting. Throughout the course of the day we saw 5 Buzzards, 9 Kestrels and 2 Whoopers flew north to south in mid-afternoon.

March 15, 1964

There were 3 of us in Sandy's car, and I had the back seat. The drive to Machrihanish was notable for the numbers of Buzzards and Kestrels. At first Kestrels were slow in

picking up, but Buzzards ran a close battle with the number of times I hit my head on the roof in the back seat of the Rover. Eventually Kestrels had one or two scoring sprees, but Buzzards played solidly and won the day 13 to Kestrels 10, and hits 10. On the way we heard a Tawny Owl by Cairndow and saw some Eiders between Loch Gilp and Tarbert. Here we also saw a Black-throated Diver flying. At first it headed up the loch but then turned and began to catch up the car, which was doing 50 mph.

Past the gravel quarry, almost opposite Rhunahaorine Point was a field of Whitefronts. Earlier we had seen 5, here there were 280. This almost equals the total of 300 we put up on Nov 9. Past Rhunahaorine where the road rises slightly we saw 37 Greylag in a field. Mike spotted a Pale-breasted Brent amongst them. We then drove on to Tangy Loch, which was almost empty except for the flock of 30 Pochard, which we saw before, 6 Mallard, 3 Tufted and 1 Goldeneye. However, the moors produced a Grouse or two and a thin-looking Short-eared Owl. We went back down the bumpy road past fields with Redwings and Fieldfares, to Campbelltown, where the harbour held only 3 Eider and 4 gulls. Along the road to Machrihanish, looking north, we saw geese in two places in the centre of the plain. After some experimenting we found a farm road, which took us very near the largest flock, just north of Lochsanish. The field dipped slightly and some geese must have been hidden. We counted 163 Greylags, 220 Whitefronts and 1 Pinkfoot consorting with a party of 11 Whitefronts. Taking the road across the centre of the plain we got a clear view of the other goose party. These

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were just north of the Machrihanish Water by Aros and numbered 41 Greylag. We also saw a Raven on the Moss. The pools in the centre of the Moss, by the rubbish tip, contained a Wigeon, a Shoveller, 4 Mallard and a Moorhen.

We returned to Rhunahaorine for lunch, driving out along the road to Lochan Luing and walking along the south-west shore to the point. We saw Goldeneye, Teal and Coot on the Lochan, and Ringed Plover and Dunlin on the beach. The sea was calm on the south side and rough on the north, with the easterly wind. Very little could be seen from the point, so we walked to the start of the high gravel bank for lunch. From here we saw a GN Diver, 2 Slav Grebes, and a Rock Pipit or two. However, we had to move on, so back to the car and next stop Corran at the south-west end of West Loch Tarbert. We popped over the cabbage field and

there, just across the hollowed fields was a flock of geese. They looked dark, clustered tightly in a brownish corner of a sloping field, but turned out to be 95 Greylags and in their midst a lone Barnacle, thus giving us 5 goose species in a day.

Now off around Loch Tarbert to Loch Stornaway, but no geese. We pressed on to Kilberry Castle. The ground rises beside the road and then dips away to the sea. We breasted the rise and saw two parties of geese way below. Both seemed to be about 14, but the one on our left grew as we progressed and shifted our point of view, 24, 34, 91. It was evident that dead ground hid several birds, and a purposeful stalk brought us to an outcrop of rocks having a clear view of the field. This time we counted 103; the other party remained at 14, making a total of 116 for this area. Here we experienced the difficulty that the strong wind lifted the wings of several birds making them appear double. Two or three counts were necessary

to remove possibility of error.

We pushed on past Achahoish to Inverneil where we saw a Blackcock in a tree, and on up to Crinan, arriving just after 5 o'clock and drove along the south road beside the canal. In the first possible field past Barnakill there were 165 Greylag. Over the canal bridge to the north and there was a male Stonechat on the fence. The fields by Barsloisnoch contained 75 Greylags. This ended our goose count for the day. There was a close correlation with the totals from November and a December trip to Crinan. Greylags 692 in March and c. 704 in Nov/Dec; Whitefronts 505 in March and c. 550 in Nov. We ended the day at Lochgilphead to count the Shelduck (55) and to find a Bar-tailed Godwit, bringing our day's total to 73 species.

David Merrie

Recent papers from journals

(continued from page 2)

Proctor, R. & Summers, R. W. 2002. Nesting habitat, clutch size and nest failure of capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* in Scotland. *Bird Study*, **49**, 190-192.

Ratcliffe, N., Catry, P., Hamer, K. C., Klomp, N. I. & Furness, R. W. 2002. The effect of age and year on the survival of breeding adult great skuas *Catharacta skua* in Shetland. *Ibis*, **144**, 384-392.

Redpath, S., Amar, A., Madders, M., Leckie, F. & Thirgood, S. 2002. Hen harrier foraging success in relation to land use in Scotland. *Animal Conservation*, **5**, 113-118.

Redpath, S. M., Arroyo, B. E., Etheridge, B., Leckie, F., Bouwman, K. & Thirgood, S. J. 2002. Temperature and hen harrier productivity: from local mechanisms to geographical patterns. *Ecography*, **25**, 533-540.

Summers, R. W. 2002. Cone sizes of Scots pines *Pinus sylvestris* in the Highlands of Scotland-implications for pine-eating crossbills *Loxia* spp. in winter. *Forest Ecology and Management*, **164**, 303-305.

Summers, R. W. 2002. Parrot crossbills breeding in Abernethy, Highland. *British Birds*, **95**, 4-11.

Summers, R. W., Humphreys, E., Newell, M. & Donald, C. 2002. Nest-site selection by crossbills *Loxia* spp. in ancient native pinewoods at Abernethy Forest, Strathspey, High-

land. *Bird Study*, **49**, 258-262.

Summers, R. W., Jardine, D. C., Marquiss, M. & Rae, R. 2002. The distribution and habitats of crossbills *Loxia* spp. in Britain, with specific reference to the Scottish crossbill *Loxia scotica*. *Ibis*, **144**, 393-410.

Summers, R. W., Underhill, L. G. & Simpson, A. 2002. Habitat preferences of waders (Charadrii) on the coast of the Orkney Islands. *Bird Study*, **49**, 60-66.

Thirgood, S. J., Redpath, S. M., Campbell, S. & Smith, A. 2002. Do habitat characteristics influence predation on red grouse? *Journal of Applied Ecology*, **39**, 217-225.

Watson, J. & Whitfield, P. 2002. A conservation framework for the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in Scotland. *Journal of Raptor Research*, **36**, 41-49.

Whitfield, D. P. 2002. Status of breeding dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* in Britain in 1999. *Bird Study*, **49**, 237-249.

Wilkinson, N. I., Langston, R. H. W., Gregory, R. D., Gibbons, D. W. & Marquiss, M. 2002. Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* abundance and habitat use in Scotland, in winter 1998-99. *Bird Study*, **49**, 177-185.

Wotton, S. R., Carter, I., Cross, A. V., Etheridge, B., Snell, N., Duffy, K., Thorpe, R. & Gregory, R. D. 2002. Breeding status of the red kite *Milvus milvus* in Britain in 2000. *Bird Study*, **49**, 278-286.

Wotton, S. R., Langston, R. H. W. & Gregory, R. D. 2002. The breeding status of the ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus* in the UK in 1999. *Bird Study*, **49**, 26-34.

The pheasant's tale

The Isle of Bute is home to quite large numbers of Pheasants, so they are not hard to see. We tend to take them for granted. Perhaps we do not regard them as truly wild birds, but rather pampered by keepers who feed them regularly. However, they adorn the landscape, and they are members of a fascinating family.

My interest in the Pheasant was stimulated very recently by a book list. I had been reading Mark Cocker's *Birders, Tales of a Tribe*, which is subtitled "the story of an obsession, and the people who share it...". In an appendix, Cocker lists his 'Top Ten' available bird books. I have most of them in my library, but head of his list was William Beebe's *A Monograph of Pheasants*, a two-volume reprint of the original four-volume work, originally published by Witherby in 1926. Cocker describes the work as "a truly magnificent book". Since the reprint was by Dover Publications in New York, an e-mail to my son in New York City soon had the book on its way to Bute.

They are quite beautiful volumes, with many coloured plates by Archibald Thorburn, George Lodge, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, Charles Knight and H. Grunvold. Our local Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*, is one of the nearly one hundred species [nineteen genera], extending from the Black Sea area to China and Japan, described in the book. Most members of the family originate and live in Asia, but our bird is thought to have originated in the area of the Black Sea and the Caucasus. Colchicus is an ancient mythical kingdom between the Caspian and Black Seas.

Robin Hull in *Scottish Birds: culture and tradition* says that the Pheasant has had more influence on the landscape of Britain than any other creature except the horse! I would place *Homo sapiens* of the top of that ranking! The Romans introduced the Pheasant to England, but the Normans made major introductions into the landscape. The bird came to Scotland in the 16th Century but was probably not imported into Bute until late in the 19th Century [Thom, *Birds in Scotland*, p. 159]. Introduced for sport and food, it came to be cultivated in the environment. Thus began the wholesale destruction of its natural predators on a large scale, particularly of birds of prey, a problem that still plagues us in Scotland. Happily, the Hen Harrier is not persecuted on the Isle of Bute, but on most of the grouse moors and pheasant shoots in this country, birds of prey are not welcome.

Hull recalls a tale of a more civilised approach. "The blacksmith at Keltneyburn picked up a slightly disreputable supply of Pheasants during his regular trip up Glen Lyon to see the horses at Megernie Castle. He left grain soaked in whisky on the way up and collected the fuddled birds on the way back" [p. 154].

The pheasant family, fully described and illustrated in the splendid two-volume work, is perhaps, as a family, the most beautiful in the world of birds. The family includes the Red Jungle Fowl, the ancestor of domestic poultry, and the Peacocks. Pheasants, Peacocks and Jungle Fowl feature prominently in Chinese painting and embroidery, clearly appreciated as objects of great beauty, a thousand years before the Greeks mentioned them. Aeschylus recorded Pheasants twenty-five centuries ago around the River Phasis, which flowed through Colchicus. Phasis is the root of Phasianus, the family Pheasants.

I quote from William Beebe's Introduction: *Handicapped as Pheasants are by their long tails, decorated wings, ruffs and the most brilliantly coloured feathers, covering flesh beloved of every carnivore from man to marten, these wonderful birds have found a place for themselves on mountains, plain and island, and by the keenest exercise of the senses, have outwitted their foes and overcome physical characters which long ago would have doomed less virile groups of birds to extinction.*

The Pheasants I see on the island never have a broad white neck ring dividing the green of the upper neck from the gold and bronze of the back and breast. The Ring-necked Pheasant prevails in North America [originating in China], a separate sub-species, *Phasianus c. torquatus*. Our Bute birds have rather indistinct white neck rings, suggesting that they are from stock that is a mix of Transcaucasian and Chinese stock - racial mongrels to use a politically incorrect term!

Next time you see a cock Pheasant, recall its origins and history.

At the south end of the island, it is possible to see Red-legged Partridge, *Alectoris rufa*. I prefer, *naturellement*, its alternative name, French Partridge. Recently introduced to Bute, it is a member of the Pheasant family. Introduced into Britain from France in 1770 and into Scotland in the 1970's, it flourishes in Perthshire. It is too early to say if it will survive on Bute.

Michael Thomas, 26 June 2002.

Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should be sent to the Editor before 1st March 2003

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The Eider



The Eider is the quarterly newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club. The club was established in 1985. Its main purpose is to play an active role in the promotion and conservation of birds in Argyll. It is recognised by the Inland Revenues as a charity.

The club holds 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 or Inveraray. The club organises field trips for members and publishes the annual *Argyll Bird Report*. Your subscription entitles you to one copy of this, four issues of *The Eider* and free admission to the two annual meetings. The membership categories and rates are:

Ordinary	£10
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Subscriptions are due on 1st January and can be paid by cheque or standing order. Those joining after 1st October are covered until the end of the following year. Further information can be obtained from the Membership Secretary (see box on this page) and additional or past copies of the Argyll Bird Report can be obtained from Bob Furness (address in box opposite).

The Editor (contact details on front page) welcomes articles for inclusion in *The Eider*. Most of each issue is devoted to articles about some aspect of ornithology, wildlife conservation or general ecology in Argyll, but some articles of a wider natural history interest, letters and notices of forthcoming events are also published. If possible, these should be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word2000, or previous versions of Word. However, 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.

Artists are also encouraged to submit black and white illustration of birds and their habitats for use in *The Eider*. Some digital images are also suitable for publication

The four issues of *The Eider* are published annually around the 15th day of March, June, September and December. For articles to be included, they must be with the editor **before** the 1st day of each publication month.