

December 2008
Number 87

The Eider



It has been a good autumn for Waxwings in Argyll ©Jim Duncan

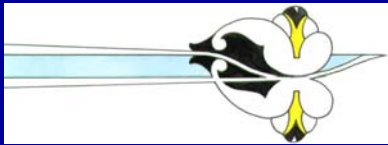
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Past issues (since June 2002) can be downloaded from the club's website.

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Inside this issue

Editorial	2
2009 Bute field trip	2
2009 Sound of Gigha field trip	2-3
ABC Indoor meetings	3
Scottish Beaver Trial	4-6
Award for Eddie Maguire	6
Butterflies in Kintyre	7
Birdwatching on Islay	8-10
Colour-ringed Brent Goose	11
Tiree—rare bird hotspot	12-13
Birding in the Sound of Gigha	14
Rose-coloured Starling	15
The ideal Christmas present	15
Bird atlas update	16
Corn Crakes & White-tailed Eagles in 2008	17-18
Recent reports	18-25
About the ABC	

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue.

John Armitage, John Bowler, David Byford, Tony Church, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Jim Duncan, Iain Erskine, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), Ian Hopkins, Simon Jones, Eddie Maguire, Angus Martin, Katie Pendreigh, Malcolm Ogilvie, Linda Petty (proof reading), Carl Reaves, Andy Robinson, Alan Spellman, Margaret Staley, Bob Swann, Ian Teesdale & Becky Williamson.



Editorial



In contrast to the last *Eider*, I've been inundated with excellent articles to make this a bumper issue – 26 sides in all! My sincere thanks go to all the authors. So please, just keep the contributions rolling in! No one has offered to take over editing and producing the *Eider*, so I've agreed to carry on until the March issue.

As you can see, this issue covers a diversity of wildlife subjects, including birds! Simon Jones has followed up his talk at the spring meeting with an account of the Beaver re-establishment trial in Knapdale Forest (pages 4-6). Subsequently, you may have seen in the newspapers that four families (17 individuals) of Beavers arrived on 20 November at Heathrow from Norway for a six-month quarantine period before being released in Argyll in spring 2009. A Beaver Trial Officer is in the process of being recruited for this project. It's taken far too long for this project to get off the ground. It's going to be exciting to see how Beavers adapt to and modify habitats in the trial area.

Butterflies had a dreadful summer to cope with, so it's gratifying to read Ian Teesdale's account from Kintyre (page 7). Large numbers of two scarce species (Green Hairstreak and Dark Green Fritillary) were found at a couple of locations early in the year. It's hard to remember that April and May produced some excellent weather, allowing many of the early-flying butterflies to do well. Anyway, I hope this article inspires others to look more closely at butterflies, particularly those folks who are out atasing, as relatively little is known about the distribution of butterflies over large areas of Argyll.

Bob Swann gave an update of progress with the Bird Atlas in Argyll at the autumn meeting. On page 16, Bob has produced maps of Argyll to show where the gaps in coverage are. Hopefully, this will encourage those members who have yet to commit themselves, to take part in this important national survey.

Finally, on behalf of the club, I would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas and New Year.

Isle of Bute field trip—Saturday 7 March 2009

Meet at Colintrave at 09.45hrs to catch the 10.00hrs ferry to Rhubodach. I can hire a 16-seater mini-bus for around £45 plus fuel, to save car/ferry costs of £10.05 (R) + £1.85 (R) for each driver/passenger. However, bring your own transport if preferred. The plan is to drive round the island checking lochs, shores and fields for waders, wildfowl etc. No long walks are planned! There is a good chance of seeing **Greylags, Greenland Whitefronts, Wigeon, Goldeneyes, Tufted Ducks, Great Crested Grebes** etc. We usually have lunch at Kingarth Hotel, but bring your own if preferred.

Let me know A.S.A.P., and by 18.00hrs on Friday 6 March at the latest. If the forecast is really bad we may be able to postpone till the following Saturday.

Ian Hopkins

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Sound of Gigha field trip—Saturday 4 April 2009

I will again lead the annual field trip to the Sound of Gigha. For less experienced birders, some guidance on identification will also be provided. Meet at the car park at Ronachan Point just off the A83 (grid reference NR741548) at 10.00hrs.

From here we will call in at the coast near the West Coast Salmon site and then on to Tayinloan to check the fields there. We will then take the ferry to Gigha, mainly to look for birds in the Sound and break for lunch. Snacks can be ordered at the hotel on the island. After returning from Gigha, if the weather and tide conditions permit, we will walk along the shore to look for waders and migrants. If time, the weather and stamina allow we might re-check some of the morning's sites before the end of the day.

This trip depends very much on reasonable weather. In the past we have been extraordinarily lucky with the weather. Will it continue?! So, will those who intend to come please contact me, by phone or e-mail, at the latest on the evening before (Friday 3rd April), so that I can confirm that the trip will go ahead and to give me some idea of how many people to expect. If the weather forecast is really atrocious

it may be possible to postpone until the following Saturday.

Spring birding in the Sound of Gigha can be a rewarding experience. This trip will be a repeat of similar field trips in spring, accounts of which appeared in the *Eider*. Some of the highlights from previous visits have included all three species of diver, **Slavonian Grebes** (some in full summer plumage), **Common Scoters**, **Long-tailed Ducks** and **Greenland White-fronted Geese**. There is always the possibility of finding the elusive **Velvet Scoter**. This year we will be a little earlier in the spring than on some recent visits, which should be better for divers and Slavonian Grebes.

Paul Daw

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ABC indoor meetings 2009

Spring Meeting 2009

Friday 24-Sunday 26th April

A weekend meeting on Islay, based at the Islay Natural History Centre, Port Charlotte (INHC).

<http://www.islaywildlife.freereserve.co.uk/>

Some information about this meeting has been given in previous issues of the *Eider*. Participants should arrive on Islay on Friday.

There will be bird watching sessions on Saturday and Sunday mornings (to whet your appetite, see Malcolm Ogilvie's article about Islay on pages 8-10), with an indoor meeting on Saturday afternoon in the INHC. The programme for the latter is given opposite.

Around 50 members have shown an interest in this venture, and some plan to make the trip into a longer holiday. A list of accommodation around Port Charlotte (Hotels, Bed and Breakfast, Youth Hostel etc.) is available from me.

Arrangements have been made for a group meal at the Port Charlotte Hotel on the Saturday night, but you need to book your place with me—so far 42 people have booked, and there are just four seats left!

If you would like to go on this trip, but have not yet registered an interest with me, please do so as soon as possible, so that you can be kept up to date with developments, including car sharing, ferry times and field trips.

Steve Petty (contact details—top of page 2)

Spring Meeting on Islay Programme for the indoor session on Sat 25th April 2009

Time	Topic
13.10-13.20	Introduction <i>Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club</i>
13.20-1330	Introduction to the Islay Natural History Trust <i>Malcolm Ogilvie</i>
1330-1345	Recent bird sightings <i>Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder</i>
1345-1430	Islay wildlife <i>George Jackson</i>
14.30-15.15	RSPB reserves on Islay <i>James Howe</i>
15.15-1600	Tea/coffee
1600-1645	<i>The social life of the Chough</i> <i>Eric Bignal and Maria Bogdonova</i>
1645-1730	Geese on Islay <i>Malcolm Ogilvie</i>

Autumn Meeting 2009

Saturday 7th November

Cairnbaan Hotel near Lochgilphead

<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>

We hope to have the programme finalised in time for the March *Eider* in 2009.

Dammed if you do, dammed if you don't (sorry!)

It is finally time. At long last the European Beaver (Castor fiber) is set to return to the wild in the UK. After more than ten years of heated debate and procrastination by hundreds of folk and many, many organisations, the current Scottish Government has taken the bold step of allowing a trial reintroduction of the Beaver to our shores. The trial will be carried out by the partnership of Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) who have been granted a license to do so by the government.

Let us not underestimate the potential importance of this decision to the UK countryside and the conservation movement. If the trial is successful and the government subsequently decides to allow a wider reintroduction programme in Scotland, and perhaps south of the border, then given time we will see these animals spread along our lochs, rivers and burns and bring with them a rejuvenation of our decimated natural wetlands and wet woodlands on a truly landscape scale.

This may sound sensationalist, but this engaging tubby rodent really has the potential to transform and enrich our countryside for generations to come.

So why exactly is the Beaver such an important species?

Beavers are what are known as a 'keystone species', i.e. species that have a marked affect on the natural functioning of an ecosystem and are thus capable of significantly modifying habitats. If these species are removed this can result in marked changes to the overall ecosystem, often with a reduction in biodiversity. Other native keystone species would formally have included Lynx and Wolf.

Scientific research from overseas has shown how the presence of Beavers on rivers and lochs, either through reintroduction by man or through natural colonisation, leads to a net increase in biodiversity. This is because they naturally alter their environment through foraging and damming behaviour and create mosaics of varying wetland habitats such as ponds, coppiced woodland and scrub, flooded water meadows, swampland, fens and so on. These natural wetland patchworks are some of our rarest habitats in the UK. Ironically, this is partly due to the past extinction of the Beaver. They are also home to a

Beaver basics



Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

- Beavers are large rodents, with adults measuring over a metre in length and weighing around 20kg.
- They live in tight knit family groups with an adult pair and 2-3 young.
- They are mostly nocturnal, but during summer months are active in late daylight.
- Beavers are active throughout the year and do not hibernate.
- They spend all of their time either in or very close to freshwater.
- They only eat plant material (shoots, leaves, twigs and bark) and do not eat fish.
- They fell broadleaved trees close to the water's edge in order to feed on bark, leaves and twigs and may use the timber to build lodges and dams. These trees then re-grow new shoots.
- They prefer aspen, willow and birch and do not like coniferous trees.
- They live in waterside burrows or lodges which have a submerged entrance, and are built up with branches and mud.
- They prefer to live on the banks of existing lochs or slow flowing rivers, but will build dams on burns to create their own lochans if necessary. They tend not to like faster flowing rivers or canal systems.

vast array of native wildlife, including dragonflies, fish, waterbirds and pond plants.

Beavers can bring other benefits too. Evidence from other countries indicates the presence of beaver dams on river systems can lead to improvements in water quality and flow regulation as they retain freshwater in periods of drought, and regulate flooding by releasing water gradually rather than it being released rapidly through the whole river system. Dams can also improve water quality by trapping silt and catching acidic and nutrient-rich run off from agricultural and forestry areas. At a local level the Beaver can also provide good opportunities to develop eco-tourism to the benefit of rural economies and the public's interest has grown markedly since the animal has made appearances on the recent BBC's Autumn Watch series.

The Beaver is also important because, along with its more contentious cousin the Wolf, it has become something of a symbol for modern conservation thinking. Conservation organisations, including SWT look more and more at the 'landscape scale approach' in the battle to maintain and enhance our native wildlife. In SWT's recent 'Natural Connections' vision we recognise the importance of properly functioning ecosystems as being the only really effective way of conserving our wildlife habitats and species in the face of modern agricultural intensification, growing development pressure and the threats of climate change. Not only is the Beaver a missing natural link in the restoration of our degraded functioning wetland ecosystems, but it also gnaws away at us from afar as a guilty reminder to our collective moral conscience that we drove it to extinction and yet have it within our power to bring it back.

Several years ago, some brave individuals within Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) decided to do something about this missing link. Despite having their proposal to run a trial in Knapdale in 2002 turned down by the last administration, SNH persevered and early this year the Government, through SNH, signalled its intent to reintroduce the Beaver in the 2007 Species Action Framework. This document provides a strategic approach to species management in Scotland and the European Beaver appeared amongst 32 species requiring targeted management and action. This action although admirable is far from unprecedented, as the UK is one of the last countries in Europe to reintroduce the Beaver, with 26 states already way ahead of us in their reintroduction programmes.

Beaver impacts

So what would we expect to see in a wild Beaver landscape? How would it differ from now? The answer is that this depends on the terrain and vegetation types. Beavers prefer sizeable areas of still water surrounded by broad-leaved woodland and when colonising sites, such as large lochs or meandering rivers, their presence and impact may not be very obvious at all, with only scattered felled trees dotting the banks and a few well worn tracks to and from the water. If such sites are not available, Beavers

will attempt to create their own water body and build a dam across a burn, using felled timber in order to back up water and create a 'safe' environment. Such beaver lochans are obvious and tend to be about 1.5ha in size, with dams averaging 15m in length and 1m high. However, Beavers still require plentiful broadleaf tree cover very close by and will not set up in areas that are solely within coniferous woodland. In hilly areas, like Knapdale Forest, these lochans are longer and thinner as they sit in steeper sided valley bottoms, whereas on floodplains beaver lochans can cover larger areas due to the flatter terrain.

With such engineering behaviour it is inevitable that Beaver and man can occasionally come into conflict and across Europe there are several examples where the presence of European Beavers in a modern landscape creates issues at a local level, mostly for landowners with forestry or agricultural interests. Beavers can block drainage culverts, fell orchard trees or feed on crops such as maize that are very close to the water's edge. Authorities and landowners in these countries deal with the problems in a variety of ways, but what we must accept if we are to have wild Beaver populations in Scotland in the future, is that we will have some local problems and these will need to be managed if man and Beaver are to co-exist again. The evidence from comparable countries in Europe is that these problems tend to be on a small, local scale and there are many proven methods to deter Beavers using fences and pipes to protect particularly vulnerable sites. However, in the absence of natural predators, there may be times when the culling of particular problem Beavers is the only solution and we cannot ignore this uncomfortable fact.

What is happening at Knapdale?

Late in 2007 a local consultation on the proposal to release Beavers in Knapdale showed an overwhelming level of support for the trial from the people of Mid Argyll. Following an application from SWT and RZSS the Scottish Government granted a licence, in May 2008 to carry out a five-year trial reintroduction in the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) owned Knapdale Forest in Mid Argyll. Independently monitored by SNH and working alongside FCS, the trial will provide a scientific study of Beavers and their impact on the natural environment and local economy of the area. This autumn approximately 20 Beavers from a healthy wild population in Telemark, southern Norway will be captured by scientists working in partnership with RZSS and SWT and put into six month quarantine, where the animals will be monitored to ensure they are healthy and free of disease before release. In the spring of 2009 the first wild Beavers in the UK for nearly 400 years will be released in family groups, at separate locations within an unfenced, 15 km² area of Knapdale Forest. Although there will no doubt be significant public interest in these animals, it is planned that the Beavers will need some quiet time to settle into their new homes before visitor facilities are developed for the public to see the site. After five years of intensive radio-tracking, tagging, vegetation monitoring and sampling by scientists, the Scottish Government will then decide the long-term

future of the European Beaver in Scotland. Will it be further trials in other parts of Scotland? Will it be a full reintroduction programme at other sites, or will it be au revoir to the Beaver once more? Only time will tell.

One thing is for sure, the Beaver issue will not go away, whatever the Scottish Government decides. Beavers, such as those filmed for Autumn Watch, are already found at several sites, both public and private across the UK, from Inverness to Kent, but these are all captive animals within enclosures. However, there are a growing number of people and organisations that wish to see wild Beavers back in England and Wales, as well as Scotland and I believe that the question is not if, but when this will happen.

Supporting the trial

The Scottish Beaver Trial Partners are very grateful to the Argyll Bird Club for the support it has shown for the trial—both politically and financially. But, what part could you play in the story of the Beaver? Well, if you live within the Mid Argyll area, in time there will be opportunities to become involved as volunteer 'Beaver Wardens', working with the Knapdale Beaver Field Officer, scientists and landowners to monitor and track the animals and their impact. However, perhaps the biggest contribution that the public could make to this project is to support it financially. Despite generous backing from the Mammals Trust UK we still need to raise significant funds for this nationally important project, to ensure it has all the resources it requires to be a success.

Simon Jones, Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager

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Area (44km²) in Knapdale where Beavers will be released in spring 2009



RAFOS award for Machrihanish Warden



Eddie Maguire, warden at the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, was recently awarded the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS) plaque. The award was presented to Eddie by the society for his hospitality, generosity and quality humour during a recent RAFOS expedition to the Mull of Kintyre.

The society was surveying tetrads at the Mull of Kintyre for the New Atlas project by the British Trust for Ornithology. While in Kintyre, the RAFOS atlas team visited the observatory daily and enjoyed remarkable views of summering Arctic Skuas including a pale morph and many dark morphs.

The plaque was presented to Eddie by Bill Andrew, Campbeltown Royal Air Force Association Branch Chairman.

Some Kintyre butterflies in 2008

If our experience in High Askomil and further afield is anything to go by, this has been a disappointing year for butterflies in Kintyre. Yet paradoxically we have had two or three encounters with particular species that have been altogether exceptional.

The first was in early May, when I heard that Mike Read, a self-employed forester, was seeing **Green Hairstreaks** *Callophrys rubi* in a forest ride near Tangy Loch. I duly visited the site and saw several of the butterflies, the first time in my life that I have seen more than a single specimen. I went along with a friend on the following day and saw many more, perhaps between 20 and 30. Agnes and Allister Stewart returned to the site a day or two later and encountered them in similar or possibly greater numbers, spread over most of the circular ride that surrounds Skeroblin Hill, just south of Tangy Loch. These little butterflies are entrancing creatures to watch, and are among the most beautiful of all our Lepidoptera; but because they are incessantly on the move they are almost impossible to count with any degree of accuracy. To the best of my knowledge, however, this is the first time that more than ones or twos have been recorded in Kintyre, and all of us who saw these insects are grateful to Mr Read for giving us the chance to have this unusual experience.

The next event of this sort involved our South Kintyre Botany Group, who were on a field meeting in mid-June to explore the sandy waste ground west and north of the McFadyen sand-quarry that lies at the end of the road past Clochkeil Farm. Our route took us at one point into the dunes at the back of Machrihanish Bay, where there were several large patches of Sea Radish in full flower. And over the largest of these patches was a horde of **Dark Green Fritillaries** *Argynnis aglaja*, too many and too active to count, but certainly dozens and possibly several score. This too was for me, and I daresay for the other members of the group, a memorable and moving experience and one I shall long remember.

Finally, on 17 July I was on my own walking along the road into Ballochroy Glen, at a point about half a kilometre from the A83 where there is commercial forestry on either side of the road, when my eye was caught by a dark-coloured butterfly with speckled whitish marks on the upper side of the wings. It was motionless on a leaf, wings outspread, and I watched it for perhaps a couple of minutes until it flew off and was lost to sight. It could only have been a **Speckled Wood** *Pararge aegeria*, a species we were familiar with in Somerset but which I have not seen in the peninsula before. However, they have been recorded from the area immediately south of West Loch Tarbert, as Futter *et al.* (2006) indicate. Ann Baird, whose abilities



Above: Dark Green Fritillary near Clochkeil Farm, Kintyre on 16 June 2008 ©David Byford

Below: Speckled Wood ©Steve Petty

as an all-round naturalist have been demonstrated to many in Kintyre on earlier occasions, told us several years ago that she had encountered Speckled Woods on the shore path that skirts the woodland south of Dun Skeig, near the village of Clachan. Futter *et al.* (2006) believe this species may be spreading, possibly as a result of global warming, so perhaps my sighting in Ballochroy presages further reports of it in more southerly locations in Kintyre in future years.

Ian Teesdale

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[**Editor's note**—this article first appeared in *The Kintyre Magazine* No. 64, Autumn 2008 (per Angus Martin)].

Islay: a birdwatcher's paradise

Islay is often called the island of geese, which is understandable as about 45,000 Barnacle and 7,000 Greenland White-fronted Geese winter here—the largest concentrations of both species anywhere in Britain. But there is much, much, more to Islay as a place to watch birds as I hope to show.

Geese

The geese arrive from their arctic breeding grounds in early October staying to early April. Initially, the Barnacles concentrate around their two main roosts, the heads of Lochs Gruinart and Indaal, but gradually they disperse to almost every corner of the island's farmland. The Whitefronts on the other hand spread themselves out straight away. Ringing has shown that there are at least 40 separate groups of birds, each with their preferred feeding and roosting areas.

Birdwatchers scanning the goose flocks are frequently rewarded by sightings of Lesser Canada Geese (up to half a dozen annually of a variety of sizes and colours), the occasional Snow Goose, and small numbers of Light-bellied Brent, Pinkfeet and Greylags. In the last ten years, a resident breeding population of Greylags has built up. A Red-breasted Goose was present a few winters ago and a Bar-headed Goose in winters 2007-8 and 2008-9.

The huge numbers of wintering geese have a considerable impact on farmland pastures, and the Scottish Government compensates the 100–120 farmers and crofters for their considerable loss of income through a management scheme administered by Scottish Natural Heritage which pays out in excess of £600,000 per winter.

Choughs

Islay is home to around 70 pairs of Choughs, 80% of the Scottish and nearly 20% of the British populations. These splendidly aerobatic birds used to breed exclusively in coastal caves, but since the 1960s, pairs have begun nesting in old buildings with about one-third of the pairs now doing so. Sometimes, Choughs and Barn Owls breed in the same building; there are about 25 pairs of Barn Owls on the island. After breeding, the Chough families head for the sand dunes at Machir Bay on the west coast and the Ardnave Peninsula in the north, where they probe in the short turf for leatherjackets or excavate cowpats to find the grubs inside. Large numbers of cattle are kept year-round on the dunes especially for the benefit of the Choughs under management agreements with SNH.

Corn Crakes

As elsewhere in the Corn Crane's Hebridean range, numbers on Islay declined rapidly through the 1980s and 1990s, from about 25–30 calling males in the mid-1980s to just 4 in 1996. Since then, thanks to the willing participation of farmers and crofters in an SNH management scheme, and more importantly, the careful management of their reserves by the RSPB, numbers have climbed spectacularly to over 80 calling birds in summer 2008.

Freshwater wetlands

Islay is very well supplied with water, with about 230 freshwater lochs, ranging from small pools on the peat to the very large Loch Gorm, nearly two kilometres across. The majority of lochs are in the uplands where the acid rocks contain few nutrients and so there's little food for



Barnacle Geese at Bridgend, Loch Indaal © Malcolm Ogilvie

Some Islay gems



Upper: Barnacle Geese—about 45,000 winter on Islay
©Malcolm Ogilvie

Middle: Corn Crane—the number of calling birds has increased from just four in 1996 to 80 in 2008 ©Tony Church

Lower: A family party of Choughs—80% of the Scottish population breed on Islay ©Carl Reavey

birds. A few pairs of Red-throated Divers can be found by the determined walker, the only other regular species being Common Sandpiper, Mallard and Teal. Some of the lowland lochs, on the other hand, are more fertile, including Lochs Ballygrant, Allan, Skerrols and Ardnave. These all support breeding pairs of Mute Swans, Little Grebes, Mallard, Teal and Tufted Duck, while in the winter they are also home to Goldeneye, Pochard, Wigeon and the

occasional Coot. A few pairs of Dippers nest along the two rivers, the Sorn and the Laggan, and small Sand Martin colonies can be found along the banks of the latter as well as in the steep sides of sand dunes.

The richest freshwater wetland on the island is entirely artificial! On the RSPB's Loch Gruinart Reserve, earth bunds were built around three low-lying fields, which were then flooded. The water levels in each are lowered in spring to provide suitable nesting conditions for Redshank and Snipe. They are then raised in the autumn attracting flocks of 3,000 or more Teal and several hundred Wigeon. The floods also attract a great variety of resident and migrant species, including many rarities. A hide overlooking the floods is a favourite birdwatching haunt of locals and visitors alike, which is not surprising as there can't be many wetlands of similar size that have held Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs in successive years!

The farmland adjacent to the flooded fields is also carefully managed for birds, grazing geese in winter and breeding waders in summer. Water levels here are also controlled so that there are optimum conditions in spring for breeding Lapwings. Well over 200 pairs nest on the Reserve and, with the 100+ pairs of Redshank and 60–70 pairs of Snipe, this makes the Reserve one of the more important Scottish sites for these species.

Coasts and sea lochs

The seas around Islay are quite rich in fish but while there are some fine cliffs, rising to about 200m, they provide relatively few horizontal ledges that birds such as Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Fulmars need for nesting and there are only a few thousand pairs all told, mainly on the west coast of the Rhinns and on The Oa. Some of Islay's Golden Eagles and Peregrines also nest on the sea cliffs, while Rock Doves, still relatively untainted by domestic pigeon blood, breed in many of the caves.

The few sheltered bays hold small numbers of divers in winter, as well as Goldeneyes and the occasional Long-tailed Duck, but the main marine bird interest is in the two large and shallow sea-lochs, Gruinart and Indaal, which both support large numbers of birds.

Loch Indaal holds breeding Arctic Terns, with the occasional Little Tern, numerous pairs of Ringed Plovers, a late-summer moulting flock of more than 100 Red-breasted Mergansers at Blackrock, families of Shelducks in the muddy pool at Carnain, followed by Teal and Pintail in autumn and winter, as well as flocks of Dunlin, Knot, Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher and Curlew. The inner part of the loch holds a wintering flock of Scaup (up to 1,000, occasionally 1,500).



Loch Gruinart and hills from Ardnave—the coastal grasslands are a favourite foraging area for Choughs ©Malcolm Ogilvie

Here, too, can be found 20–30 Slavonian Grebes, all three divers, Whooper Swans, Wigeon, Common Scoter, Goldeneye and Long-tailed Ducks, while along the shore are Purple Sandpipers, Turnstones, and a regular wintering flock of up to 40 Light-bellied Brent Geese.

Loch Gruinart, as it nearly dries out at low tide, doesn't hold many divers or ducks, but considerable numbers of waders can be found on the mudflats at its head. Dunlin regularly exceed four figures, and the occasional Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint are seen more or less annually. Searching through the wader flocks here has, over the years, produced several rarities, especially from America, including White-rumped, Baird's and Semipalmated Sandpipers.

Hills and woods

Hills and moorland occupy the greater part of the island, with the lowland blanket bog alive in summer with Meadow Pipits and Sky Larks, Teal nesting on the small pools and Common and Black-headed Gulls on the hummocks surrounding them.

The hills are not very high (up to 450m) but have breeding Golden Plover, while in the early 1990s there were a few pairs of Ring Ouzels, though there is some doubt whether they are still present.

The final habitat of importance is woodland. There are three types here. Remnants of native oak woodland, which once covered most of the low ground, are now reduced to small isolated patches. These were fenced a few years ago to stop them disappearing altogether under the pressure of grazing stock and deer.

Extensive areas of broad-leaved woodland were planted in the second half of the 19th century around the big

houses and they now host small numbers of Blackcaps and Garden Warblers, as well as the usual tits and other small woodland birds, plus many Woodcock, both breeding and wintering.

Finally, there are conifer plantations, the oldest, now largely felled, over 40 years old, but the majority planted in the 1980s. Apart from encouraging an increase in the numbers of Siskins and Redpolls, as well as the occasional breeding by Crossbill, the plantations, when young, offered excellent breeding habitat for Hen Harriers and Short-eared Owls. There is still a healthy population of Hen Harriers on the island as there is no persecution.

Conclusions

Conservation designations are in place to safeguard both birds and habitats, as well as Common Seals and Marsh Fritillaries and some of the island's very varied geology. The RSPB have three reserves on the island and their management of them has resulted in, among other things, the amazing rise in the numbers of Corn Crakes, the continued well-being of the Chough, the very important numbers of breeding waders, not to mention the contented feeding by thousands of geese on their land.

Given all the above, it is perhaps not surprising that Islay is one of the 'must visit' locations in Britain for birdwatchers. For those who enjoy 'listing', there are well over 100 species of birds on the island every day of the year (about 105 species breed), rising to 130 or more in the spring and autumn when winter and summer visitors overlap and migrants are passing through.

It is truly much more than just an island of geese.

Malcolm Ogilvie

BURB the Canadian 'supergoose'

On a recent trip to Islay I found two Pale-bellied Brent Geese out on the mudflats of Loch Gruinart. Nothing really exceptional in this, although seeing a Brent Goose in August is quite early. However, on closer inspection I could see that one bird had a colour ring on each leg.

Walking slowly towards the geese on the mudflats both birds were reasonably approachable and allowed me to get within 40m before they began to move slightly. With a bit of patience I was able to obtain some digiscope images clearly showing the lettering on the plastic colour rings: Left leg, blue ring marked U and right leg, red ring marked B or 'BURB' as this individual is referred to by the Irish Brent Goose Research Group. Feedback from Graham McElwaine, the resightings co-ordinator of the research group, informed me that 'BURB' was ringed as a juvenile on Bathurst Island, Canada (De La Beche Bay to be exact) on 8th August 2007 and that it had been resighted in Dundrum Bay, Northern Ireland between 30th October and 1st January 2008.

Migrating from Arctic Canada to Islay and on to Northern Ireland is quite a journey. Actually it is the longest migration of any goose species, with a round trip of nearly 9,000km each year. This compares with 6,000km for a Greenland White-fronted Goose and 5,000km for a Greenland Barnacle Goose. This fantastic migration has been tracked and described as part of a joint venture between the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and BBC Radio 4's World on the Move, Great Animal Migration series and has given the Canadian Pale-bellied Brent the title of 'Supergoose'! The migrations of three each of Brent, White-fronted and Barnacle Geese can be compared at:

www.wwt.org.uk/text/264/light_bellied_brent.html



'BURB' photographed in Loch Gruinart, Islay on 31 August 2008 ©Jim Dickson

www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/worldonthemove/species/brent-geese/

As part of this study, several geese have been fitted with satellite transmitters to allow flying speed, elevation of flight and estimate of virtual fat reserves to be investigated. After a 20hr flight from their wintering grounds in Northern Ireland birds arrive in Iceland where they 'fatten up' by as much as 40% before attempting the most remarkable part of their journey. They fly to the eastern coast of Greenland and then make a two day non-stop flight over the Greenland ice cap which in places is 2.7km or a mile and a half high and takes an incredible feat of strength and stamina, though not all birds are successful. No one has knowingly witnessed this migration over the ice cap and prior to using these satellite transmitters it was thought that the geese followed the coast of Greenland.

The bird's destinations are boggy tundra where they may have two months of good weather in which to raise their broods after eggs are laid in mid-June. 'BURB' having hatched out in summer 2007 would have travelled back this summer close to where it was raised, but as an immature bird, it would not have bred on its first return to the arctic.

Heading south again, birds do occasionally turn up on our Argyll shores and the earliest recorded returning bird was one at Machrihanish on 19th August 2001. Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland is the wintering stronghold for this race of Brent Geese with 85% of world total or nearly 30,000 birds counted in October. Some dispersal to other parts of Ireland occurs at the turn of the year when the main food source (eel grass) becomes depleted. In Argyll, at Loch Indaal, large numbers have been recorded over-wintering in the past, but there was a dramatic decrease after the 1930s. This coincided with a marked decrease in Brent numbers, which may have been due to a mould that wiped out much of the eel grass in western Europe in the 1930s, as well as hunting pressure.

The Canadian Brent, although greatly recovering from a population low in the 1970s, is still considered 'threatened' and the bird has an International Single Species Action Plan to help it recover. It remains to be seen whether or not these geese will regularly winter again in Argyll in any significant numbers. However, it is likely that with careful observation you will be able to see passage birds that have travelled from arctic Canada.

Jim Dickson

[Thanks for information to: John Armitage, Graham McElwaine, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, BBC Radio 4 website/supergoose, Birds of Scotland 3]

A week on Tiree: Argyll's rare bird hotspot

Tiree's reputation as a destination to find scarce and rare birds has been increasing over the last few years. This has been mostly due to some great finds by John Bowler, the resident RSPB Conservation Officer, as well as visiting birdwatchers like Keith Gillon and others who have great skill and ability to consistently find and identify these exciting birds.

The fact that Tiree is a remote island with very little tree or scrub cover for migrants and its location within Argyll tends to make finding small migrants much easier than on the mainland and it is also a prime location for migrating waders. To put this into context, this year alone has seen six new species added to the Tiree list, three of which were new to Argyll!

With John being off the island for the whole of September and October this autumn, Bill Allan and I decided to spend a week (4th-11th October) on the island so that there was some observer coverage for what might turn up. The excitement started slightly earlier than anticipated as a **Gull-billed Tern** was found on 30th September! Fortunately I was able to go over and witness this new record for Argyll, only 11th for Scotland, before it departed on 3rd October.

I travelled back over with Bill on Saturday 4th October and we were quickly rewarded by finding a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** in the short grass at Vaul Golf Course. This is a North American wader that has been recorded annually on Tiree in recent years, with as many as eight being seen together last year!

Showing well at Gott Bay were four **Pale-bellied Brent Geese**, these birds were also noted by Tom Callan who was enjoying a more relaxing holiday with his wife and friends, unlike myself and Bill who were less able to relax due to the frequency of rare bird finds that were to unfold!

Weather systems the previous week had been more conducive to scarce passerines turning up from the east with two **Yellow-browed Warblers**, a **Lesser Whitethroat** and a **Garden Warbler** being seen. By now it appeared that most of these birds had moved on. However, single **Whinchat**, **Wheatear**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Willow Warbler** were still to be seen. A **Water Rail** flushed from some nettles was seen well at close range at Hynish. Visible goose migration was underway with **Pink-feet** passing over the island in groups of 30 to 50 birds during the morning.

The following day, Sunday 5th October, brought a change, with more pleasant weather and the day got off to a slow but steady start with small numbers of **Goldcrests** and **Robins** in many of the island gardens. A lone adult **White-fronted Goose** was watched flying in off the sea at West Hynish, while Loch a' Phuill held 35 **Whooper Swans**, a single **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Swallows** were still around in small numbers. The **Buff-breasted Sandpi-**

per was relocated near Ruaig and allowed us a much closer approach as it mixed in with **Golden Plovers**. At the other end of the island near Middleton we found another American wader, this time a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at a pool edge with some **Snipe** and we got great views at close range. This autumn has seen exceptional numbers of this species in Scotland with groups of up to seven birds being seen at some locations.

Monday 6th October was very difficult for birdwatching due to the heavy rain and strong wind and very few new birds were seen other than a **Barnacle Geese** and two **Goldfinch** at Balemartine. A 'greyish' **Golden Plover** was seen briefly through binoculars near Balevullin, but it flew just as it was about to be 'scoped'! However, its identity was revealed later.....

The following day's weather conditions were much more pleasant to start with, but deteriorated as the day progressed. In the morning on Loch a' Phuill there were 12 **Tufted Ducks**, a **Greater Scaup**, **Goldeneye** and a **Gadwall**. A group of four **Golden Plovers** were watched at close range on the machair to the west of the loch and one of the birds was clearly smaller and slimmer. This was quickly identified as a juvenile **American Golden Plover** and allowed us to study it and take photographs for nearly an hour. Amazingly, just a couple of hours later we discovered a second much greyer **American Golden Plover**, also a juvenile, at Balevullin. This was presumably the same individual we had seen briefly at this location the previous day. Other birds around the island included a **Merlin**, a **Peregrine**, small numbers of **Whooper Swans** and a good count of 425 **Skylarks** at Crossapol Farm. Our first **Redwing** of the autumn was seen feeding quietly on its own in a garden near Crossapol.

Weather on Wednesday 8th October was to be the most pleasant of the week, very sunny and quite warm. Loch a' Phuill we had an **Otter** showing well, feeding on what appeared to be an eel. A few scattered **Willow Warblers** and **Chiffchaff** were found as we checked various gardens around the island. Good numbers of **Blackbirds** were seen, and like Tom Callan, we noted that most were first-winter males. The find of the day, to this point at least, was yet another **Pectoral Sandpiper**. Located at Loch an Eilein in the company of a **Redshank** this was clearly a different individual from the Middleton bird with no split white supercillium.

Rare bird finds took a significant turn for the better just after mid-day with the discovery of a juvenile **Pacific Golden Plover** in the **Golden Plover** flock at Barrapol. This bird stood out, appearing very small, probably not much larger than a **Dotterel**, with a pale yellow wash to the underparts and supercillium unlike an **American Golden** and showed long tertials relative to the primary tips. Just under two hours later the Balevullin **American Golden**

Some of the exciting birds on Tiree in October



Top left: Gull-billed Tern on 2 October. The first record for Argyll.

Top right: Red-eyed Vireo on 9 October. Another first for Tiree and only the second record for Argyll (the first was on Coll in October 1992).

Bottom left: Buff-breasted Sandpiper on 5 October. In recent years this North American wader has been recorded annually on Tiree.

All photos ©Jim Dickson

Plover was refound and this time we got to within 30m, allowing us some reasonable photos.

On this great day for birdwatching good birds kept coming with **Peregrine**, **Merlin** and **Sparrowhawk** all showing well, **Barnacle Geese** flying overhead, three late **Arctic Terns** at Vaul Bay and the unusual find nearby of a **Coal Tit**. Rather than calling it a day we decided to take one last look at Loch a' Phuill. This was a great decision, as in addition to seeing a pair of **Shoveler**, there was a lone **Great Crested Grebe**. We knew that any large grebe on Tiree is unusual but we were astonished to learn that this was the first record for Tiree in 56 years! What a great day.

We felt that the week so far had been tremendous and could not possibly get any better, or could it? Thursday 9th October was to be one of those special days. The first half of the day's birdwatching was done in very difficult conditions with the severe overnight south-west gale continuing. **Hen Harrier** and **Sparrowhawk** were seen, three **Knots** at Gott Bay were new and two **Coots** at Loch Bhasapoll being a good addition to our growing list of birds. Just after three o'clock we were to make a great chance sighting of the first North American passerine record for Tiree. In the force eight gale and heavy rain we did what any normal birdwatcher would do when faced

with the possible sighting of a Chaffinch fly over the car when driving at 30 mph. No we did not drive on, but stopped to look for it! This potential Chaffinch was never refound but incredibly in a garden next to where we stopped was a rather wet **Red-eyed Vireo** trying to feed and keep low out of the wind. We were grateful to Elspeth MacKinnon for letting us view the bird in her garden, all of us getting soaked in the process. Taking photographs of the bird was not at all easy, having to wrap a towel around the camera to keep it dry. This was only the eighth record for Scotland and we could only imagine the endurance this bird had undergone flying across the Atlantic.

On Friday 10th October there were a few bits and pieces around including **Willow Warblers**, **Goldcrests** and the Vaul **Spotted Flycatcher** was still present. To keep the sightings of American birds going on a daily basis we were treated to excellent views of the 'greayer' **American Golden Plover** at Sandaig. This was a great sight as the bird stood head on looking towards us and was joined by around 700 **Golden Plovers** all within 50m.

On our last day, Saturday 11th October, we only had time to refind the **Spotted Flycatcher** at Vaul and another **Coal Tit** at Gott before having to catch the ferry back to Oban. What a fantastic week of birdwatching!

Jim Dickson

A memorable day in the Sound of Gigha: 2 November 2008

With Derrick Goode, I checked out this renowned waterfowl haven on an incredibly calm and sunny November day. We were greeted by rousing yells of Great Northern Divers. Conditions for viewing and counting the various species were optimum; the sound was like a mirror. From Rhunahaorine Point north to Ronachan Point we had a fairly high (non-record-breaking) count of Great Northern Divers and logged an astonishing record-breaking number of Slavonian Grebes.

Great Northern Divers were scattered all over, but the large gatherings were off Corriechrevie (300-500m offshore—see map opposite). Groups of 49, 52 and 66 were noted and many were still sporting much breeding plumage. The final total was 217 (the record count for the Sound of Gigha is 268 on 25 October 1991 (personal observation). A single pack of 19 **Black-throated Divers** seen well off Ballochroy (between Corriechrevie and Achnafad) were all in non-breeding plumage.

Slavonian Grebes were all over the sound! One's and two's and many small groups of 3-5 were seen although two loose gatherings of 14 and 18 birds were noted. Fifty-seven were counted between the Caravan Park and Ballochroy and the remainder were off, and north of, Corriechrevie. Only one bird was south of the Rhunahaorine Point and only three were noted north of Ronachan Point. The final total was 89, which was a record for this site and also Argyll (and in all probability Scotland too!). It now appears that occasionally there could well be over 100 Slavonian Grebes wintering in, and north of, the Sound of Gigha.

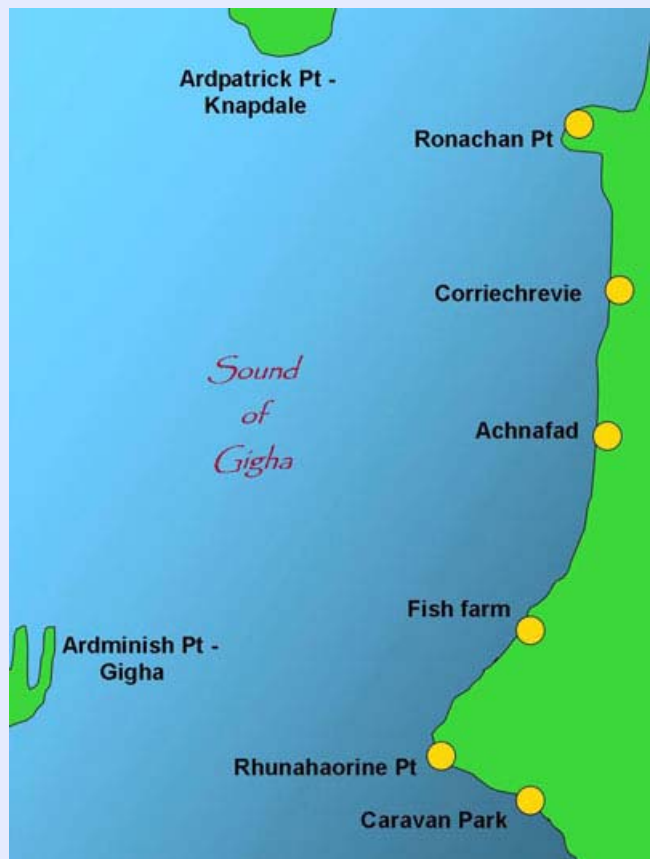
Velvet Scoters can almost be guaranteed here, often in summer too! The total was seven, including four drakes, and predictably (personal observations since 1974) all were seen 300-400m offshore from the fish farm. This is the only mainland Argyll site where this species occurs regularly although it is a rare autumn passage visitor at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (personal observations).

Common Scoters are a speciality here too, although only 70 birds were found, with the largest group being 22.

Two highly mobile **Long-tailed Ducks**, including a stunning drake, favoured the sea area between the fish farm and Rhunahaorine Point.

Other species (counts) included **Red-throated Diver** (11), **Common Eider** (159), **Goldeneye** (20), **Red-breasted Merganser** (57) and **Tystie** (73).

Eddie Maguire



Above: Map showing the main viewpoints (yellow circles)

Below: Great Northern Diver and Slavonian Grebe, both photographed on 2 November.

All images ©Eddie Maguire



A Rose-coloured Starling visits Mull

A rare visitor to Mull in July and August was a Rose-coloured Starling. This is a most attractive member of the Starling family whose European members include our Common Starling and the Spotless Starling. The latter species is found in Spain and North Africa. The nearest breeding populations of Rose-coloured Starling to the UK are in south-eastern Europe, but their main breeding range extends further east into central Asia. They winter chiefly in India. Like our own Common Starling they are highly gregarious and live in large groups, which nest in crevices in rocks, buildings and trees.

The bird is a similar size to our Common Starling, but the adult has pink legs and a slightly curved pinkish bill. Its plumage is unmistakable with typical glossy-black head, wings and tail and a beautiful pink breast and back (see photo). Its pattern of marking is similar to small brightly-coloured Hooded Crow.

This is an irruptive species and in some years large numbers visit Western Europe, particularly during late spring and summer, as occurred this year when many were recorded in the UK. Occasionally a few birds turn up in Argyll and our bird flew those extra few miles to arrive on Mull. As far as I am aware this was only the second record for mainland Mull, the first being at Fidden on 13 June 1984 (Argyll Bird Report 3). In addition, there have been at least three records from Iona; in 1932, 2002 and 2006.

The bird was first spotted by Pam and Arthur Brown on 30 July at Dervaig, on the roadside about half a mile from



Adult Rose-coloured Starling on Mull ©Alan Spellman

their farm. It was seen the following day in the same area by visitor Maurice Webber. A phone call from Jack Degnan at Buinessan on 7 August saying "there was a bird in a local garden, which had been there since 4 August, and was thought to be a Rose-coloured Starling" prompted me into action. This was a chance in a lifetime to see a new bird, and so together with Diana and Andy Oldacre we drove down to Buinessan and were delighted to find the bird in a small flock of Common Starlings feeding at a bird table. We spent a couple of very enjoyable hours watching the bird. It was a life tick for Pam, Arthur, Diana and Andy and for me too. So, grinning from ear to ear we returned to Lochdon!

Alan Spellman



Looking for Christmas presents?

Sales of the *Birds of Argyll* are going very well (over two-thirds sold). So, this may be your last chance to buy copies as Christmas presents for your family and friends.

ABC members can purchase copies for £25 as long as they collect their purchases from a committee member (names on back page).

Non members can purchase copies for £45 (including postage) from Bob Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Arrochar, Dumbartonshire G83 7DG. Cheques should be made payable to the Argyll Bird Club.

Bird Atlas 2007-11 in Argyll- maintaining the momentum

As most of you are well aware we are now entering the second winter of fieldwork for the Bird Atlas project. There are two ways Argyll bird club members can help. The first is by providing Roving Records which help us build up the species lists in each 10-km square. The second is by doing Timed Tetrad Visits which allow us to work out relative abundance.

If you can identify all common Argyll birds by sight and sound then helping out with TTVs is not too onerous. You choose the tetrads you wish to survey. Two visits are required in winter (one Nov/Dec and one Jan/Feb) and two in summer (one Apr/May the other Jun/Jul). Each visit is for one hour, or two hours if you wish (but keep a separate tally list for both hours). You choose a route covering the main habitats in the tetrad and count all the birds you see and hear. In some areas you can string tetrads together to cover a few in a morning's walk. **Once a tetrad has been surveyed it does not need to be resurveyed in subsequent years.**

The maps below show which tetrads have been allocated in the three Argyll regions. There are lots of gaps as we need to get at least 8 tetrads covered in each 10-km square. If you spot a gap that you could help fill please log onto the www.birdatlas.net website. Click on the **Request a Tetrad** button and choose your tetrads. It is that easy! Otherwise contact me on bob.swann@bto.org or on 01862 894329 and I'll be delighted to arrange things for you.

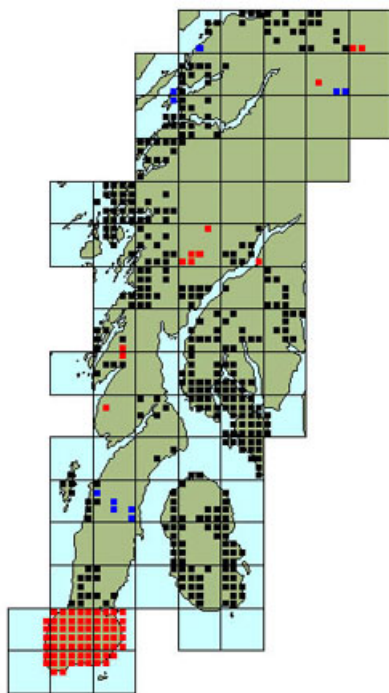
The other way to help is by submitting Roving Records. These help us get complete species lists for each 10-km square. In order to work out which squares need more records the species richness maps on the website are very useful. These show what percent of species have been recorded so far in a 10-km square based on what was present in that square in the last atlas. Squares with less than 90% of species need to be targeted by submitting roving records. All we need to know is the species, the date and the 10km square the birds were seen in. Once a species has been reported in a season (winter/summer) it does not have to be submitted again as the dot will have been generated on the map for that species for that season. Data can be very easily submitted online (click on **Submit Roving Record** button) or on paper forms, which can be obtained from me bob.swann@bto.org on request.

Shortly a new button will appear on the website called **Any Square Summary**. This will let you print out species lists for any 10km square. This will again help highlight gaps in the species lists. Roving Records need only be submitted for any extra species you see.

Please consider helping us get complete cover for Argyll for this important project. Every Argyll Bird Club member should be able to assist. Not only is atlasing good fun it makes sure your bird records will be used for important conservation work, so please get involved.

Bob Swann

Scottish organiser Bird Atlas 2007-11

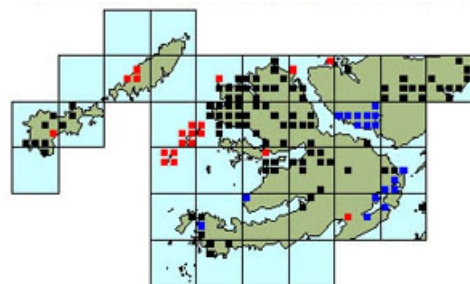
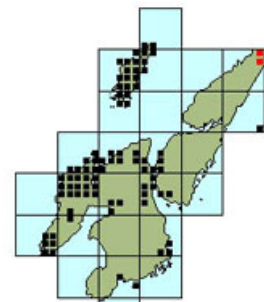


Tetrads in Argyll that have been allocated for Atlas coverage (mainland Argyll left; Islay, Jura & Colonsay top right; Mull, Tiree & Coll bottom right).

Red=Breeding season only

Blue=Winter only

Black= Both seasons





White-Tailed Eagle

This is a brief summary of the 2008 breeding season in Argyll. The majority of the 12 territorial pairs are found on Mull, with only two pairs elsewhere. Nine chicks fledged in 2008.

Chicks were not wing tagged on the west coast this year. This aspect of the project had provided much useful information on dispersal and pre-breeding movements in recent years. Instead, chicks were colour ringed when 4-6 weeks old. The 2008 rings were silver over red with a letter and a number. Sightings of young eagles, and better still of ring colour/letter combinations would be very welcome.

This year, a pilot satellite-tagging project got underway with the two chicks raised at Loch Frisa. This was funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), RSPB and Natural Research Ltd, with assistance from Roy Dennis of Highland Wildlife Foundation in this first year. It is already providing useful information on juvenile dispersal. Mara (male) has so far been to Tobermory, Calgary, Ross of Mull, Morvern and Ardnamurchan while Breagha (female) has been to mainland Argyll and back to Mull. The project was featured on 'Autumnwatch' and 'Landward'. Movements of the youngsters can be followed via the RSPB website:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/mulleagles/>

It is interesting to note that at least two birds from the 2007 reintroduction to the east coast of Scotland ap-

peared on Mull. Bird F is now back in the east and bird 7, which was on Mull, headed east again, but recently returned to Mull. We can probably expect some of this year's releases and perhaps some of the Irish-released birds to start appearing in Argyll as they wander further afield.

As the population expands, new sub-adult pairs should hopefully take up territory on mainland Argyll. To assist in monitoring this range expansion I would be pleased to receive records of any sightings.

If you are interested in seeing White-tailed eagles, a visit to the Loch Frisa hide on Mull during the breeding season can be very rewarding (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/brilliant/sites/mull/index.asp>). Thanks must go to the partners we work closely with on the 'Mull Eagle Watch' project—FCS, SNH, Strathclyde Police and the Mull & Iona Community Trust.

Corn Crane

This year, the Argyll islands Corn Crane population remained high, with a total of 733 calling males (CMs) recorded. Tiree remains the stronghold with a total of 408 CMs—a 4% increase on last year. Tiree is arguably the most important site for this species in the UK. In comparison, the whole of the Outer Hebrides held just 372 CMs.

The season started late. Northerly winds seemed to hold back a lot of birds. This cold spell meant birds lacked cover on arrival. The first bird was calling on Tiree on the 15th April, from a clump of daffodils. Soon after arrival, good weather in late April-early May was ideal for successful breeding. John Bowler took a photo (see opposite)

of a large chick on the 12 June on Tìree—working backwards this suggests that some eggs were laid on or around the 1st May.

Overall, the number of CMs was slightly down on 2007, but only by 15. This reduction was due primarily to a 34% decrease in the number of birds found on the Isle of Coll. This apparent decline was difficult to explain when most other islands showed slight increases. Maybe the cold late spring meant birds experienced a lack of early cover, or that birds wandered off the island or even suffered increased mortality during migration? However, birds returning to Tìree and other parts of Argyll would have encountered similar conditions and no decrease was apparent elsewhere. A change in observers (RSPB wardens) may account for some of the difference. But, the fact that birds were absent from large areas of Coll that were traditionally occupied, strongly suggests other factors were involved.

Iona had a most successful season, with a 66% increase since 2007 to 50 birds. On Islay, CMs increased by 18% from 2007 to 82. It's good to see the continuing steady increase here, and there is potential for larger increases in the future. Numbers of CMs remained about the same



on Colonsay and Oronsay (67 birds). However, there were few records from the mainland.

The abundance of Corn Crakes on the Argyll islands remains of vital importance for the species within the UK, with Argyll holding 63% of the Scottish population.

Next year, I would welcome any records of White-tailed Eagles and Corn Crakes, particularly from the Argyll mainland.

Andy Robinson

E-mail: andy.robinson@rspb.org.uk

Recent bird reports from Paul Daw: August-October 2008

This report is a selection from the sightings already published on the club website—see *Latest Reports Numbers 76-78* for full details of sightings during this period.

This period has been notable for the unusual number of marked wildfowl that have been recorded and photographed. Details of movements of these birds are noted below. Also, it was another good autumn for transatlantic waders on Tìree, with three **American Golden Plovers**, a **Pacific Golden Plover**, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** and at least six **Buff-breasted Sandpipers**. Not to be outdone, the Add Estuary produced a juvenile **Baird's Sandpiper**.

Common Terns. Clive Craik reports that this has been by far the worst year on record for **Common Terns** in the SAMS study area (mostly in Argyll but with some sites in Highland) with none settling to lay at the two largest colonies (Sound of Mull and Loch Melfort). So wandering adults could have appeared anywhere away from their usual haunts, possibly looking for food. However, none were seen in Loch Etive and no birds turned up in Oban Harbour as they did in 2007. But there was fair success at the tern raft at South Shian in Loch Creran, where 100 or more adults could still be seen on 7 August. Although fewer terns were breeding, when Clive's team arrived on the raft to ring the last young, a mink was found in a trap. The live mink was surrounded by inquisitive large chicks staring goggle-eyed at it! Unfortunately the mink had killed five large young, about a quarter of those present, before entering the trap. But if the trap had not been there, all chicks would have been killed and the adults would have deserted, as happened there in 2005 (when no trap was in place).

Recent Report Updates

The latest bird sightings in Argyll are available on the Argyll Bird Club website at:

<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

On the home page 'click here for latest bird reports' takes you to straight to the most recent update. This page is updated every 15-25 days

Coal Tits. Many people have remarked on the exceptional numbers in gardens in Argyll this autumn. For example, at least ten at a time have been feeding on peanuts in the garden at Tullochgorm, Minard—an unusual number for this location (Paul Daw). A total of 30 were in a garden at Campbeltown Loch in early November ("I have never seen this many in the garden before"—Dr Jim Leask). Also, at least six were at a bird table in Peninver, Kintyre in early November ("many more than usual"—Francis Hood). Bob Furness tells me that numbers were high following two years of good spruce cone crops. However, there has been a poor crop this autumn, which could well explain the unusual numbers in gardens.

Winter Thrushes. Winter thrushes seem to have arrived slightly later than usual. Apart from a single **Redwing** on Tìree on 5 October, none were reported until seven or eight were seen with a Mistle Thrush at Loch Nell near Oban on 12 October (Bill Allan). Small groups of **Redwings** appeared in the Oban/Connel area on 15 October

when six **Fieldfares** were also at Inverfolla, Appin, North Argyll (Mike Harrison/Bob Grove). By the following day there were plenty of **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** around Connel, including a mixed flock of about 300, which comprised mostly **Fieldfares** (Mike Harrison). Many places though saw no **Redwings** or **Fieldfares** until at least 18 or 19 October, which would be at least a week later than usual. Numbers soon picked up after this and flocks of both species were widespread. As usual they were accompanied by smaller numbers of **Blackbirds**.

Waxwings. A major influx of Waxwings into Scotland took place in early November, with flocks of over 100 being seen at far west as Stornoway, Western Isles. Although three early birds appeared on 29 October (see below) the main event took place outwith the period covered by this report and records are still coming in as I write. A full account including a new record count for Argyll (!) will appear in the next *Eider*.

New species for Argyll. The record of a **Short-toed Lark** at The Reef, Tiree during 12-29 August 2008 was recently accepted by SBRC. This brings the Argyll total to 331 species, with at least four further species currently awaiting decisions by BBRC. A **Black-browed Albatross** reported at the Machrihanish SBO hide on 27 October would be a new species for the Argyll list if accepted (Eddie Maguire).

Observers. Full names are given in brackets except for BA=Bill Allan, JB=John Bowler, TC=Tom Callan, PD=Paul Daw, JD=Jim Dickson and EJM=Eddie Maguire.

Wildfowl (and Gamebirds)

Three **Ruddy Shelducks** were reported on Oronsay in August. Like most birds of this species they are presumably escapes or from one of the European feral populations. Nevertheless, it is the first Argyll record since 1997, when birds were seen on Islay and Tiree ('islaybirds.blogspot' per JD).

Six **Whooper Swans** flying south at Machrihanish SBO on 20 September, were the first of autumn (EJM). By 7 October a total of 62 Whooper Swans were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree together with a male **Gadwall**, an immature **Greater Scaup**, an immature **Goldeneye** and 17 **Tufted Ducks** (JD/BA). On 22 October an impressive total of 236 **Whooper Swans** (including 49 juveniles) arrived at The Laggan, Machrihanish, Kintyre—probably attracted by extensive flooding. The main arrival of **Greenland White-fronted Geese** also took place that day (later than usual), with at least 700 birds present (EJM). A flock of 26 **Whooper Swans** flew in off the sea at Machrihanish SBO on 4 October. Forty **Barnacle Geese** were also present there and 183 **Greater Scaup** flew south in one hour (EJM).

The WeBS count at Loch Sween on 26 October found six **Mute Swans**, 50 **Whooper Swans**, 115 **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, six **Greylag Geese** and two **Canada Geese**. One of the **Whooper Swans** was carrying a yellow darvic leg ring 4VT. It had been ringed as an adult at Svanavatn,

Skagafjörður, Iceland on 7 August 1995 and was seen in several subsequent winters in Co. Donegal and Co. Monaghan, Ireland. This was its first sighting in Scotland (PD).

A **Greenland White-fronted Goose**, with a red collar number J3H, was seen in a flock of 37 birds at Claddach, Islay on 8 October. It had been caught in west Greenland in July 2008 (John Armitage/Tony Fox). About 70 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** seen at Ardnacloch, Appin, North Argyll on 19 October were the first of winter there.

A colour-ringed **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** that arrived at Loch Gruinart Islay on 5 September had been ringed as a juvenile at De La Beche Bay, south-west Bathurst Island, Canada on 8 August 2007 and was present at Dundrum Bay, Co. Down, Northern Ireland during winter 2007-2008 (JD – see article on page 11). Another **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** with yellow plastic leg rings X and 2 photographed on 21 September at Machrihanish SBO had been marked as an adult at Skerjafjörður, Iceland on 17 May 2007 and spent the previous winter (2007/2008) at Strangford Lough and Dublin Bay (EJM/Graham McElwaine). Four **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** were at Tayinloan, Kintyre on 9 September (Katie Pendreigh), and another four were at the west end of Gott Bay, Tiree on 4 October, where 150+ **Pink-footed Geese** were seen flying south-east. A single **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** was seen with a large group of **Greylag Geese** and about 80 **Canada Geese** on grazing land on the Poltalloch Estate, Moine Mhor on 29 October (Dave Payne).

The returning white-morph **Snow Goose** was back (from Iceland?) with 20 **Greylag Geese** on 16 September, in the field just north of the Craobh Haven turnoff of the A816 Mid-Argyll (NM 8007) (BA).

Two **Goosanders** and 15 early-returning **Eurasian Wigeon** were in the Add Estuary on 20 August. By 13 September totals of 25 **Eurasian Teal**, 118 **Eurasian Wigeon** and four **Goosanders** were at the same site. A juvenile **Pochard** was an unusual visitor in Loch Crinan (JD). Five **Gadwalls** were at Kilmoluaig, Tiree on 26 August (JB) and a single **Shoveler** in Machrihanish Bay, in the company of nine **Eurasian Wigeon**, was an unusual visitor on 18 September (EJM).

A group of 38 **Pintails** flying south past Machrihanish SBO on 27 August was the largest flock ever recorded there (EJM). A flock of 46 **Red-breasted Mergansers** was at Crinan Ferry, Mid-Argyll on 10 August, of which at least 70% were young birds (Malcolm Chattwood).

Red-legged Partridges have been reported from several places recently. One feeding in a garden at Glenbranter, Cowal on 4 October was the first record for this area (Peter Woods). Two had been feeding in a garden at Ardentinnay at about the same time (Gerry McGinty per James Towill) and three were present at Ardnacloch, Appin, North Argyll on 19 October (Mary Gregory).

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

Five adult **Red-throated Divers** were seen near the Crua-



Top: Black-throated Divers in summer plumage at Skipness, Kintyre on 22 August ©Jim Dickson

Right: Juvenile Merlin at Machrihanish SBO on 8 October ©Eddie Maguire



chan Dam Visitor Centre at Loch Awe on 7 August, at the fish ring, which allows trout that can jump over ring to escape. A juvenile **Black-throated Diver** had been seen there the previous day (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie). Other reports of divers included five **Red-throated Divers** (two pairs in breeding plumage and a juvenile) off Ballimore, Otter Ferry on 19 August (TC), a **Red-throated Diver**, three **Great Northern Divers** (still in breeding plumage) and a **Slavonian Grebe** seen from 'West Coast Salmon', Kintyre on 13 September (Malcolm Chattwood), 12 **Red-throated Divers** counted at Machrihanish SBO on 26 October (EJM), eight adult **Black-throated Divers** at Skipness, Kintyre on 22 August (JD/BA—see photo above) and nine **Red-throated Divers** seen flying south during a sea-watch at Portnahaven, Islay in a south-west wind during 07.45-09.45hrs on 19 September (John Armitage).

Records of **Slavonian Grebes** included two in breeding plumage in the Sound of Gigha on 4 August (JD/BA), four in Loch Indaal, Islay on 31 August (JD) and two on Loch Etive at North Connel on 23 October (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie). During the WeBS count at Loch Etive on 19 October, 23 **Little Grebes** were recorded (Mike Harrison) and a group of six **Little Grebes** were seen together in Loch Gair on 22 September (PD). A **Great Crested Grebe**, in winter plumage, at Loch a' Phuill on 8 October was the first record for Tiree since 1952 (JD/BA)!

An adult **Black-browed Albatross** was reported flying north, 400m out from the Machrihanish SBO hide at 09.26hrs on 27 October (EJM)! If confirmed this will be a new species for the Argyll list.

The first **Balearic Shearwater** of autumn was seen at Machrihanish SBO on 1 August. Other singles were noted on 9, 12, and 25 Aug (EJM). A total of 7,740 **Manx Shearwaters** seen flying south at Machrihanish SBO in 7hrs on 6 August was the maximum day count for the month. In all, some 23,000 were recorded during August (EJM). The first **Sooty Shearwater** of the autumn appeared close inshore at Machrihanish SBO on 25 August (EJM) and a total of 63 **European Storm-petrels** flew south past Ma-

chrihanish SBO in 4hrs on 26 August (EJM).

An early morning sea-watch at Aird, Tiree on 27 August found a **Balearic Shearwater**, four **Sooty Shearwaters** as well as two **Arctic Skuas** and two **Great Skuas** (Nick Ad-dey per JB).

Leach's Storm-petrel, Sooty Shearwater & Manx Shearwater. It was a very poor September for these species at Machrihanish SBO owing to mainly off-shore winds. There were no records of Leach's or Sooty Shearwater and less than 2,000 **Manx Shearwaters** and few auks passed south. It was also a very poor year for these species in Northern Ireland with no ideal winds until the 30th September, when two Leach's Storm-petrels were at Ramore Head (George Gordon—Northern Ireland Recent Report for September 2008). A single **Balearic Shearwater** flying south at Machrihanish SBO on 29 September was the only record during the month (EJM). A single **Leach's Storm-petrel** flew south at Machrihanish SBO on 1 October when 100 **Manx Shearwaters** flew south in 4hrs, and two **Leach's Storm-petrel** flew south there on 21 October

Three **Little Egrets** were found at the head of West Loch Tarbert at mid-day on 24 August (Julie Goodlet-Rowley/David Rowley). When JD went to check the following day (25 Aug) he found no less than four at the head of West Loch Tarbert. They were always a bit distant and jumpy and had disappeared by the following day (see photo on page 7 of the September *Eider*). This equals the largest previous group in Argyll (and Scotland) of four birds at Loch Don head, Mull during Oct-Nov 1969. Could this be a portent of colonisation?!

A juvenile **Great Cormorant** photographed from the hide at Machrihanish SBO on 14 September with 'FIZ' in green on a white plastic ring had been ringed as a chick at Inverbervie, Aberdeenshire on 28 June 2008 (EJM). It would be interesting to know the route it had taken to get there!

Raptors, rails etc.

The final count of calling **Corn Crakes** at the main sites (excluding the smaller islands) in Argyll during 2008 was 733 birds. This represents a slight reduction in numbers since 2007 (748) due mainly to a significant fall in the count on Coll (from 180 in 2007 to 118 in 2008). Apart from Colonsay/Oronsay, where there was a slight fall, numbers elsewhere continued to increase (Andy Robinson RSPB—see article on pages 17-18).

Red Kites were reported from The Oa, Islay on the morning of 25 September (Andy Schofield per John Armitage) and at the Mull of Kintyre on 28 October (Ian Bailey per EJM). And a lucky club member looked up from pruning the currants in her garden at Drimfern near Inveraray on 20 October to see one fly over from the north, circle for quite a while, then fly off up Glen Aray (Judith Witts).

A very interesting late report was received of a **White-tailed Eagle** in south Kintyre. A wing-tagged immature bird was seen from a kayak at Borgadalemore Point, near the Mull of Kintyre on 26 July. What was possibly the same bird was seen next day by the same observers at Gleneherve, south-east Kintyre (D.E. Wilcox per EJM). The wing tag was on the upper right wing only and was either white or very pale yellow with a black letter or digit, possibly O. It was thus probably either (yellow O) hatched 2006 on Mull or (white O) hatched 2007 on Western Isles (Roger Broad). On 28 August, an adult circling around Carsaig Bay, Tayvallich, Mid-Argyll was being mobbed by gulls, but chasing them too. Good views were had, but no wing tags were seen. It was clearly a magnificent adult, but somewhat moth-eaten due to moulting of its primary feathers (Morag & Norman Rea). Another **White-tailed Eagle** flew north across Loch Etive and then headed west over North Connel on 27 October (Mike Harrison). Two **Golden Eagles** were soaring over Lossit Estate, near Machrihanish, Kintyre for over an hour on 16 September (EJM).

Two immature/female **Hen Harriers** a **Peregrine Falcon** and an **Osprey** were seen in the Add Estuary on 16 September (JD). Other late records of **Ospreys** included one flying over Furnace, Mid-Argyll on the morning of 14 September (PD) and one at Loch Gilp carrying a fish inland in direction of the Still Lochs on 19 September (JD). A **Merlin** was seen to catch a **Twite** at Machrihanish SBO on 23 September (EJM).

A **Moorhen** was on the Crinan Canal near the swing bridge opposite Crinan Ferry on 3 August (Malcolm Chattwood).

Waders

Two major falls of waders were noted during August. Just after dawn on 7 August, several thousand birds were on the beach at Machrihanish Bay, Kintyre, including a record number of **Sanderlings**. An impressive total of 760 or more were scurrying along the strand with other grounded waders, including 330 **Oystercatchers**, 210 **Ringed Plovers**, 180 **Red Knot**, 920 **Dunlin**, two **Black-**

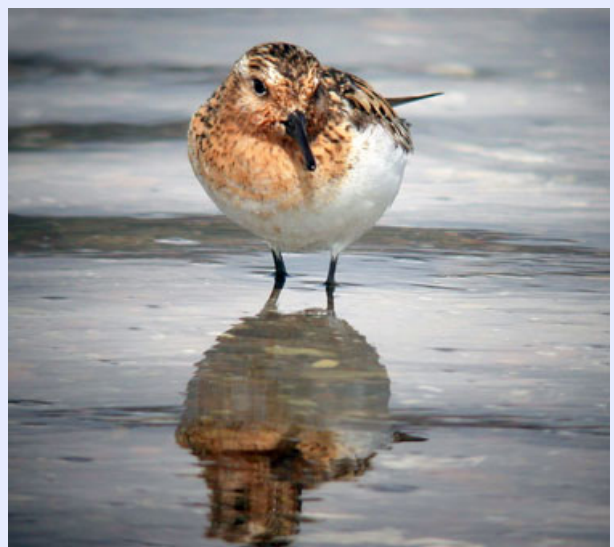
tailed Godwits, five **Whimbrel**, 60 **Common Redshanks** and 90 **Turnstones**. Later in the day, most of these flew south past the observatory (EJM). A big influx of waders around the coast of Tiree on 18 August included 800 **Sanderlings** (one leg-flagged bird), 45 **Red Knot** (one red adult), 370 **Ringed Plovers**, 200 **Dunlin** and 15 **Bar-tailed Godwits** (one red adult) at Gott Bay, and a **Greenshank** and a **Common Sandpiper** at Milton (JB). Nine migrant **Common Sandpipers** (including a group of four together) at Machrihanish SBO on the same day were the last seen during the month (EJM).

A small tight flock of 14 **Red Knot** was at Otter Ferry on the morning of 3 August (TC) and two **Red Knot** were with 70 **Sanderlings** at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree (JB). A single **Ruff** was with six juvenile **Red Knot**, 27 **Dunlin** and 94 **Common Redshanks** at Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 13 August (JD).

An **American Golden Plover** was found and photographed in a large flock of **Eurasian Golden Plovers** at Greenhill, Tiree on 5 September. It was still present the following day (Keith Gillon). A juvenile **American Golden Plover** at Balevullin, Tiree on 7 October had been glimpsed briefly the previous day and another juvenile **American Golden Plover** (brighter coloured) was at Loch a' Phuill (JD/BA). On 8 October, a juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** was at Loch an Eilein, Tiree, a juvenile **Pacific Golden Plover** was at Barrapol and the juvenile **American Golden Plover** was still at Balevullin (JD/BA). On 10 October a third juvenile **American Golden Plover** was found at Sandaig, Tiree. It was a greyer bird than those seen earlier in the week (JD/BA).

The first **Little Stint** of autumn appeared at Machrihanish SBO on 23 August and three were there on 26 August (EJM). A maximum of c.1,500 **Dunlin** was at Loch Gruinart on 31 August, with single **Whimbrel** and **Little Stint** (JD). Three **Curlew Sandpipers**, 14 **Dunlin** and three **Greenshank** were all seen in the Add Estuary on 16 September (JD). One or possibly two **Curlew Sandpipers** were at Loch Indaal, Islay on 25 September (John Armitage). The first returning flock of 17 **Purple Sandpipers** appeared at West Bay, Dunoon on 28 October with two **Turnstones** (George Newall).

A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was seen briefly at Loch a' Phuill on the morning of 26 August. It flew around with a flock of 35 **Black-tailed Godwits** but then headed off south (Nick Addey/JB). Two juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 30 August. They arrived with seven **Black-tailed Godwits** but didn't hang around long before circling the loch a few times and flying off high to the south (JB). A juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was found in a flock of 1,500 **Golden Plovers** at Greenhill, Tiree during the mowing survey on the afternoon of 1 September (JB). A juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 17 September, and a **Little Stint** and nine **Ruff** were at Barrapol (JD). Another juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was found at Vaul Golf Course, Tiree on 4 October (JD/BA) and on 5 October, a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was seen near Ruaig, a **Black-tailed Godwit** was at Loch a' Phuill and a juvenile **Pecto-**



Left top: American Golden Plover at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 7 October ©Jim Dickson

Left middle: Grey Phalarope at Machrihanish SBO on 28 October ©Eddie Maguire

Left bottom: A ringed Mediterranean Gull at Ardishaig on 22 August ©Jim Dickson

Right top: Pectoral Sandpiper at Middleton, on Tiree on 5 October ©Jim Dickson

Right bottom: Sanderling at Ledaig Point on 27 July ©Jim Dickson

ral Sandpiper was near Middleton (JD/BA).

A juvenile **Baird's Sandpiper** was an unexpected find at the Add Estuary on the afternoon of 15 September. Also present were three **Curlew Sandpipers**, eleven **Dunlin** and four **Greenshanks**. Two more **Greenshanks** were at Linne Mhuirich, Loch Sween (JD). Six **Ruff** flying past Machrihanish SBO on 6 August was a good count for this species (EJM). A big influx of **Common Snipe** was noted on Tiree on 18 September—at least 100 scattered individuals (JD).

A total of 24 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Cornaig, Tiree

on 2 August (JB) and 15 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Machrihanish SBO (EJM). Two **Greenshanks** were seen at the head of Loch Feochan, near Oban on 18 August, but they only stayed a few minutes (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie).

On 4 August a **Green Sandpiper** (a scarce migrant in Argyll) was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (JB) and four **Greenshanks** and five **Black-tailed Godwits**, including a colour-ringed bird, were at Loch an Eilein, Tiree (JD) On 20 August two **Green Sandpipers** were found at Loch Caol, Tiree (JB). A **Wood Sandpiper** flushed from Lossit Burn,

Machrihanish on 8 August flew off inland calling. This scarce passage migrant is always a good find anywhere in Argyll. Three **Greenshanks** were also seen at Machrihanish on the same day (EJM). Two **Wood Sandpipers** were at RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay on 6 September (JD).

A **Grey Phalarope** flew south close inshore at Machrihanish SBO on 17 October. Single **Grey Phalaropes** were also recorded there on 22, 24, 26 and 28 October (EJM—see photo opposite).

Skuas (see also 'Seabirds'), gulls, terns and auks

Four **Arctic Skuas** at Machrihanish SBO on 3 August were part of a total of 29 birds seen during August (EJM) and a single adult, dark morph on 21 September was the only record for the month (EJM). An adult pale-phase **Pomarine Skua** was reported off Port-na-Luing, Coll on 28 October (Simon Wellock). A **Great Skua** was seen between Lady's Rock and Duart Castle, Firth of Lorn on 23 August attacking a tern (Dr Chris Edwards) and one at Machrihanish SBO on 3 September was the only record of the month (EJM). Another flew several times around a boat off the north coast of Jura on 14 September giving excellent views (Roger Broad).

A juvenile **Little Gull** flew north-east into Machrihanish Bay on 14 August and 37 **Sandwich Terns** flew north in poor visibility due to drizzle (EJM). A juvenile **Mediterranean Gull** was at Loch Gilp at 17.00hrs on 18 August. This made a total of four in Argyll up to that time; two juveniles at Machrihanish and one adult at Inverneill (JD/EJM). Yet another new **Mediterranean Gull** (a ringed adult with clean under-wing) was seen near Ardrishaig, Loch Fyne on 22 August (JD—see photo on page 22), two were reported at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 28 August (Andy Schofield per JD) and another first-winter bird was present at Machrihanish SBO from 12 to 14 September (EJM).

A **Gull-billed Tern** was found in the Crossapol area of Tiree on 29 September by Mike McKee. It was later seen and photographed by Jim Dickson and Simon Wellock and remained in the Crossapol/Loch an Eilein area until 3 October (see photo on page 13). This will be a new species for the Argyll list if accepted by BBRC and is a considerable rarity in Scotland, with only nine previous records, usually in the period May-July (*Birds of Scotland*).

Ten **Sandwich Terns** were feeding in the ferry narrows at Colintrave, Cowal on 18 August (TC). Five were present in Loch Gair, Mid-Argyll on the morning of 20 August (PD) and two were at Skipness, Kintyre on 22 August (JD/BA). Other records included three at Otter Ferry on 8 September, two at Holy Loch, Cowal on 15 September, five at Machrihanish SBO on 21 September and two at Machrihanish on 2 October (TC/George Newall/EJM). As recently as the early 2000s, **Sandwich Terns** were still considered uncommon passage migrants in Argyll, but they seem to have become more numerous in the past few years. Two late **Arctic Terns** were at Machrihanish SBO on 9 October

(EJM). A single juvenile **Little Tern** was seen at Machrihanish SBO on 5 August (EJM).

Auks off Otter Ferry on 25 September included 32 **Common Guillemots** and 14 **Black Guillemots** between Largiemore and Liath Eilean, Loch Fyne (TC).

Doves, owls, woodpeckers etc.

Larger than usual numbers of **Wood Pigeons** have been reported including a flock of 42 at Otter Ferry on 7 September (TC), 32 at Achnacloich (Loch Etive) Mid-Argyll on 21 October (BA), and c.100 flying up Glen Aray on 30 October (Judith Witts). A **Turtle Dove** arrived in a garden at Bunessan, Mull on the afternoon of 3 August and stayed long enough to be photographed (Pauline Reid per Alan Spellman). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at Heylipol, Tiree on 13 August (JB).

Barn Owls were reported near the fish farm at Largiemore, Otter Ferry on the evening of 27 August (TC), flying over the garden at Tullochgorm, Minard, Mid-Argyll on 28 August (PD), at Ballimore, Otter Ferry, Cowal on 1 October (David Warden), at Durran, near Eredine, Loch Awe on 7 October (Karl Pipes), at Castleton, Lochgilphead on 15 October (Joy Kirk per Steve Petty) and over Kames Golf Club, Cowal on 27 October (Daphne Campbell).

An early evening count at Burnside Square, Campbeltown on 4 August found 50 **Common Swifts**, the peak count for the month (EJM). Later reports of Swifts included four flying over Bridgend, Mid-Argyll on 9 August (Malcolm Chattwood), singles at Dalintart, Oban (Stuart Gibson) and Machrihanish (JD) on 16 August, two at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 18 August (JB) and one over Campbeltown on 21 August (Derrick Goode).

A **Common Kingfisher** was seen at Loch Gair, Mid-Argyll on 4 September (Ian Smith) and was seen subsequently by others over the following few days. Others were recorded flying over Loch Fyne at Dalchenna, near Inveraray during the FoC Eider Count on 17 September (PD), on the Lusragan Burn, Connel on 22 October (Mike Harrison) and at Ormidale at the head of Loch Riddon, Cowal on 27 October (TC).

Passerines

At least 200 **Barn Swallows** were on overhead wires at Kilfinan, Cowal on 14 September (TC). The general impression is that the departure of Swallows has occurred earlier this year, with many places noting their absence from around 17-19 September (PD). Late birds were seen near the Creggans Inn, Strachur, Cowal on 7 October (Malcolm Chattwood), two at Connel, Mid-Argyll on 15 October (Mike Harrison) and at Brecklate, Southend, Kintyre on 26 October (Donald Brown per EJM).

A **Short-toed Lark** found at midday on 12 August, on a reserve visit at The Reef, Tiree was showing well again and was photographed at 16.30hrs (JB/Duncan Orr-Ewing, RSPB—photo on next page). It was seen again intermittently until 29 August. Another new species for Argyll (see above)—Tiree does it again!

Three **Waxwings** in Connel at lunchtime on 29 October were an early foretaste of things to come. They were



Top: Rose-coloured Starling on Islay on 22 August
©Becky Williamson

Bottom: An unusual photo of a Twite perched on a branch at Machrihanish SBO ©Eddie Maguire



Top: Short-toed Lark at The Reef, Tiree in August; a new bird for the Argyll list ©John Bowler

Bottom: Juvenile Lesser Redpoll © Jim Dickson

seen eating crab apples for a few minutes before flying off. Redwings had eaten all the Rowan berries and most of the Hawthorn berries too, so that was more-or-less all there was left (Mike Harrison). A single **Waxwing** was reported at Loch Buie, Mull on 30 October (per Alan Spellman).

A female/immature **Common Redstart** was at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 24 August with 60 **Barn Swallows** (JB). A late **Whinchat** was at Balephuill, Tiree on 4 October and a **Northern Wheatear** and a **Willow Warbler** were at Vaul (JD/BA). Later reports of **Northern Wheatears** included singles on the beach at North Connel, North Argyll on 14 September (Mike Harrison) and at Furnace, Mid-Argyll on 17 September, three at Machrihanish SBO on 18 September (EJM) and one at Vaul, Tiree on 4 October (JD/BA). **Greenland Wheatears** were seen a little later, with records at South Rinns, Islay on 26 September (John Armitage) and at Machrihanish SBO on 7 and 8 October (EJM).

A single **Redwing** at Crossapol, Tiree on 5 October was the earliest reported so far (JD/BA). Seven or eight **Red-**

wings were seen with a **Mistle Thrush** at Loch Nell near Oban on 12 October (BA) and seven newly arrived **Redwings** were with six **Fieldfares** at Inverfolla, Appin, North Argyll on 15 October (Bob Grove). There were plenty of Fieldfares and Redwings around Connel, Mid-Argyll on 16 October. A mixed flock of about 300, mostly **Fieldfares** was counted (Mike Harrison). A total of 29 **Mistle Thrushes** were counted near Otter Ferry on 7 September (David Warden), a flock of 16 flew over Otter Ferry on 10 September (TC), and at least 20 were flying to and fro, with a few **Song Thrushes**, at Glenbranter, Cowal on 16 September (Peter Woods),

Three **Common Whitethroats** on 7 September were the last reported so far. They were seen at the same time on Kames Golf Course, Cowal as flocks of 60 **Goldfinches**, 40 **Lesser Redpolls** (feeding on birch seed) and 19 **Mistle Thrushes** (Steve Petty). A **Garden Warbler**, a **Lesser Whitethroat** and two **Yellow-browed Warblers** were all seen at Balemartine, Tiree in the first two days of October (Mike

McKee/JD). A **Yellow-browed Warbler** and a **Garden Warbler** were still there on 3 October (Simon Wellock). A **Yellow-browed Warbler** and a **Lesser Whitethroat** were at The Lodge, Arinagour, Coll on 5 October and 30+ **Goldcrests** and a **Chiffchaff** were at Uig (Simon Wellock).

Two lucky observers found a **Lesser Whitethroat** in their garden at Lagganmore, near Kilninver on the morning of 18 October. It showed well all day (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie). A late **Common Chiffchaff** was singing at Kames, Cowal on 26 August (Steve Petty), a juvenile **Common Chiffchaff** at Balephuill, Tiree on 27 August was the first of autumn on Tiree and one was reported at The Manse, Tiree on 30 October. A single Willow Warbler was seen at The Glebe, Tiree on 7 October.

A **Spotted Flycatcher** was still feeding fledged young near Auch, along the West Highland Way between Tyndrum and Bridge of Orchy, North Argyll, on 16 August (Stuart Milligan per James Towill). A **Pied Flycatcher** was in the garden at Balephuill, Tiree on 31 August (JB), while another **Pied Flycatcher** was seen at Barrapol, Tiree on 17 September (JD) and two **Pied Flycatchers**, a **Spotted Flycatcher** and a **Blackcap** were reported in a woodland in the south of Islay on 26 September (Andy Schofield per John Armitage). A **Spotted Flycatcher** at Vaul, Tiree was present until 11 October (JD/BA).

A flock of 17+ **Long-tailed Tits** was in the stunted conifers near Keills Chapel, Loch Sween on 23 September (Peter Woods) and at least 40 were seen by Treshnish House, Mull on 17 October (Anand Prasad). Three **Long-tailed Tits** seen briefly first thing in the garden at Balephuill, Tiree on the morning of 31 October were unusual visitors to the island (JB).

A **Eurasian Nuthatch** seen in a local garden in Craignure, Mull on 13 August was very probably the same bird that was seen at Craignure on 29 June. It might even be the same Nuthatch as that first recorded at Calgary during 10th-12th April and then again at Dervaig a few days later (per Alan Spellman).

An adult **Lesser Grey Shrike** was seen on the morning of 6 August at Balephuill, Tiree. It was very flighty and did not allow a close approach, making photography difficult. It was seen from 11.15-11.30hrs, but not subsequently, despite searches (JB). If confirmed it will be only the third record for Argyll.

A **Magpie** in a garden at Glenbranter, Cowal on 6 October, was the first one seen there (Peter Woods). Another seen at Peninver, Kintyre on 7 October stayed until 9 October (Francis Hood per EJM). At least 700 **Common Starlings** were in fields around Ruaig, Tiree on 10 October (TC). A **Rose-coloured Starling** was still feeding in a local garden with a small flock of Common Starlings at Bunesan, Mull on 8 August (see article on page 15). This bird first appeared at Dervaig on 30 July and was seen again on 31 July. It was then located at Bunesan on 4th August (per Alan Spellman).

A first-winter **Red-eyed Vireo** was found and photo-

graphed (photo on page 13) at Croch House Garden, near Caolas, Tiree on 9 October. This was the second Argyll record (the first was on Coll in October 1992). It was only the 9th Scottish record of this transatlantic vagrant (JD/BA).

There were two **Bramblings** in a garden at Drimfern near Inveraray on 30 October (Judith Witts). A flock of 65 **Goldfinches** were feeding on weed seeds along the shore near Kames, Cowal on 29 August (Steve Petty) and **Twite** numbers at Machrihanish SBO peaked at over 100 on 30 August (EJM). On 31 August, a total of 22 **Lesser Redpolls** were at Portnahaven, Islay (JD), a flock of 35 **Lesser Redpolls** was feeding on birch seed and 30 **Goldfinches** were feeding on weed seeds on Kames Golf Course. It seems to have been a very good breeding season for Goldfinches, apart from the flocks mentioned, there have also been very many family parties around Kames. (Steve Petty).

A flock of 65 **Goldfinches** was at Portnahaven, Islay on 5 September and other flocks of 30 or more were also seen (JD) and a flock of 25 **Goldfinches** at Kilfinan, Cowal included many juveniles (TC). A total of 56 **Twite** were at Ardmarnock Farm, near Millhouse and four **Bullfinches** were at Lindsaig, near Kilfinan on 17 September (TC). Four young juvenile **Lesser Redpolls** at Carnan Mor on 17 August seems to indicate a pair managed to breed successfully for only the second year on Tiree (JB). A party of six **Common Crossbills** alighted briefly in trees in a garden in Glencruitten, Oban on 27 October (Bob Grove). A **Snow Bunting** was seen on Meall Mór on 14 October (Kenny Macleod per Steve Petty).

Other sightings

At least one **Red Admiral** butterfly was in the garden at Lagganmore, near Kilninver, Mid-Argyll on 5 August. One of very few reports in a year that has for many been poor for butterflies (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie), although things did pick up briefly later in the month.

Butterflies around Kames, Cowal during August and early September. It's been a good spell for **Peacocks**, with up to a dozen feeding on Buddleia bushes, knapweed etc. I have seen only a few single **Red Admirals**, one **Small Tortoiseshell**, but no Painted Ladies. There are still some worn **Speckled Woods** around, even in gardens and along the shore, and **Green-veined Whites** are still plentiful! I saw my first ever **Large White** in Kames on 27 August and over the next few days they were seen daily, with three on one Buddleia bush on 2 September (Steve Petty).

Numbers of **Basking Sharks** at Machrihanish SBO peaked at ten on 5 August. Unusually they were regular there during the month (EJM) and up to five were seen in the week to 5 September in the Wemyss-Portnahaven area of Loch Indaal, Islay (JD).

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Articles for the March issue of the *Eider* should with the Editor before the 24th February 2009

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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 weeks in 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).