

The Eider



The Eider is the Quarterly Newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club: Scottish Charity Number SC008782

Editorial

During my first year as editor, I have been impressed and delighted by the material that members have provided for *The Eider*, which has gradually grown in size. In trying to provide a more attractive outlet for member's articles, a number of changes are planned over the next few issues.

Various ways of adding colour to the newsletter have been evaluated. Unfortunately, printing or photocopying coloured pages is both time-consuming and expensive. One alternative is to produce an electronic version each quarter, in addition to the black and white version for mailing. The electronic version would be available to ABC members with access to an online computer. It would be sent to them as a pdf (portable document format) file attached to an e-mail - pdf files can be read by both PCs and Macs, providing they have Acrobat Reader installed. This software can be downloaded free of charge. Members can then save the newsletter on their computer and print a copy if required.

Developing an electronic version has a number of advantages to members and the club. First, it would be available to members before the mailed version. It would be forwarded on the day it is sent to Bob Furness for photocopying and dispatch by post. Second, the quality would gradually improve with the addition of colour. Third, it is hoped that members who opt for the electronic version will decide they can do without the mailed version, so saving the club postage and production/dispatch costs. Members who decide they are interested in the electronic version, would be given a three-issue trial, starting with the September issue, when they would receive both versions, after which they would be asked to decide which version they want.

If you are interested in receiving the electronic version for this trial period (September, December and March issues), please let me have your e-mail address as soon as possible. This will enable me to send you the electronic version of this issue, so you can see the improvement over the mailed version and to ensure that you can access the pdf file.

For the electronic version to be a success, I need a steady supply of coloured material. Digital cameras seem to be all the rage, so I am hoping "suitably equipped" members will be willing to send me the occasional digital photo (jpeg files are preferred). Subjects could include holidays, landscapes, plants, birds and action shots of field trips etc. They could also be used to illustrate an article for *The Eider*.

Members without their own computer, who would like to see the electronic version, might be able to persuade family or friends to download and print a copy of the coloured-version for them. The electronic version will be posted on the club's website (see back page for address) about two weeks after the mailed version is posted.

As spring is such a wonderful time of the year in Argyll, I was expecting very little for this issue, so I am extremely grateful to the following for their contributions: BTO Staff, Paul Daw, Shelley Fouracres, Bob Furness, David Merrie, George Newall, Margaret Staley and Michael Thomas.

Autumn Meeting

To be held in the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead on Saturday 8th November

The programme will appear in the September *Eider*

Eiders and Mink on the Burnt Islands

The Burnt Islands lie in the Kyles of Bute, between the north tip of Bute and Colintrave on the Argyll mainland. In recent years these islands have been visited each May by Clive Craik and assistants in order to carry out a survey of breeding seabirds and to look for signs of mink killing birds that nest on the islands. A few years ago David Anderson started ringing eider ducks incubating on nests on these islands, and I have carried this on. Because eiders are long-lived

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Editor

Steve Petty, Craigielea, Kames

Tighnabruaich, Argyll PA21 2AE

Phone 01700 811235

E-mail: StevePetty@compuserve.com

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as adults but the ducklings have a low survival to maturity, eider populations are especially vulnerable to factors that increase the death rate of adults. But eider females return each year to nest in exactly the same spot. So it is relatively easy to measure their survival rate by a statistical analysis of recaptures of birds in a series of years. We are collecting data each year on the female eiders of the Burnt Islands to do just this

In 2000, we were able to make a crude calculation of the size of this population by mark-recapture analysis. Clive Craik marked clutches of eggs and counted these. A few days later we visited and ringed females. By counting the proportion of marked and unmarked nests and knowing the numbers Clive marked and how many nests we checked we could estimate that there were around 450 to 600 eider nests. This made the Burnt Islands

Bob Furness's article is continued on page 8

Migration Watch

The BTO/BirdWatch Ireland Migration Watch website is up and running again and we hope that we can improve on our success of last year, broaden our geographical coverage and encourage recorders to submit records throughout the whole spring.

The website (see box) has a new look to it this spring; we have added new features to the results pages and have included a stop/start button to the animated maps so that you can view each week at your leisure. We have incorporated comments made by recorders last season and have improved the layout of many of the pages, so hopefully the whole website is much easier to use.

Migration Watch Website

<http://www.bto.org/migwatch>

Migration Watch has started a bit earlier this year so that we can record some of the very early migrants that turn up at the end of February, but also encourage recorders to send in their sightings of winter visitors and wintering warblers, so that we get a better idea of their locations before they start migrating.

If you require any further information about Migration Watch please email dawn.balmer@bto.org or if you have any good ideas or contacts we can use to promote Migration Watch then we would like to hear from you.

Dawn Balmer (BTO, Migration Watch Organiser)

Spring Meeting

Mike Gear opened the conference with a fascinating account of a recent trip to Costa Rica, where his group saw 420 species of birds. This was an amazing total, although Mike admitted that his personal tally accounted ONLY for 360 species! Much of the country's species richness can be attributed to the vast array of habitats, ranging from cloud forest in the mountainous central spine to coastal mangroves. Mike's talk was complemented by his first Powerpoint presentation (excellent!), which showed some of the habitats encountered, exotic birds seen and sounds experienced during the trip. After this, I am sure many in the audience were contemplating a trip of their own to this wildlife paradise. Further de-

tails about Mike's trip can be found in the September 2002 issue of *The Eider*.

Alan Spellman rounded off the morning session with an absorbing account of Mull's natural history, which hopefully will have encouraged additional members to book up for the field trip to Mull during 6-8th June that Rhona Campbell is organising (see the March 2003 issue of *The Eider*). This was also Alan's first Powerpoint presentation – well done! The talk highlighted the existence of a website devoted to birds on Mull (see box)

Mull Birds Website

<http://www.mullbirds.com>

After lunch, Andy Wilson from the BTO's Scottish office, ably presented information about the *Migration Atlas* and The BTO's *Migration Watch* website. The *Migration Atlas* was published in December and must rate as one of the outstanding achievements of the BTO. It uses ring recovery data to provide a comprehensive account of the movement patterns of individual species, with each account being written by an acknowledged expert. Details about this essential book for bird-watchers can be found in the last issue of *The Eider* (editorial). One of the main aims of the *Migration Watch* website is to



provide a database on the timing of arriving and departing migrants in different parts of the UK. Individual observers are encouraged to register at the website and to input their own records of arrival and departure dates (see this page for more details and the web address). Overall, this was an excellent presentation and we hope other BTO Scotland staff can be encouraged to talk at future meetings.

David Wood rounded off the meeting with a mouth-watering account of Orkney; its birds and many of the factors that influence bird numbers. Many thanks David for organising such an enjoyable

conference, and thanks also to so many members who turned up to an indoor meeting when the weather outside was excellent!

Editor

Migration Watch April Update

This was recently sent to ringers, but I'm sure it will be of interest to ABC members—Editor

If you're heading out ringing this weekend, why not take the time to note down some numbers for any migrants you see and submit a species list to Migration Watch? Ringers are in an ideal position to record such skulking species as **Garden** and **Grasshopper Warbler** and know whether those two **Redstarts** on your patch were the same bird or not. This sort of information is very useful as it can complement field sightings by other birders. To spur you on, check out how the Bird Observatories are doing this spring at <http://www.bto.org/migwatch/text/info/observatories.htm>

With the migration season now well under way, now is a good time to look at some of the April highlights from Migration Watch.

Despite Britain and Ireland being bathed in sunshine, the start of April saw continued poor weather over southern Europe, which held up the bulk of our returning migrants. However, there were two very early **Spotted Flycatcher** on 29 and 30 March, but the next arrival was not seen until 12 April. Early **Nightingales** were also seen at several sites after the first in Cambridgeshire on 27 March, with the main arrival also being slightly early. The most exceptional arrival was a **Honey Buzzard** in Flintshire on 8 April!

Other firsts in April were a **Wood Sandpiper** in West Sussex on the 18th, a **Turtle Dove** on the 5th in neighbouring East Sussex and a **Hobby** on the same day in Kent. The main **Hobby** arrival was not seen until much later in the month, being later than last year. This was closely followed the arrival en masse of one of their main prey species, the **Swift**, a few days earlier. This rapid arrival was due to strong southerly winds after a depression tracked over Spain in the third week of April, pushing the poor weather eastwards and creating ideal conditions for migration. Also

Arrival of Swallows at:

<http://blx1.bto.org/smw-dailyresults/results/anim-322-03.html>

Black Tern observations at:

<http://blx1.bto.org/smw-dailyresults/results/s258-20-03.html>

Number of observations by week of Redwing at:

<http://blx1.bto.org/smw-dailyresults/results/s377-20-03.html>

caught up in this airflow were at least 10 **Alpine Swifts** (as far north as Scarborough) and possibly

a record spring number of 25 **Red-rumped Swallow** sightings, including four together at Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire). Swallows also arrived in good numbers, which was encouraging after a slow start to their season, and are now back to a level similar to that in 2002.

One of the most impressive arrivals of April was the large numbers of **terns** and **Little Gulls** that appeared at many sites mid-month. **Common Terns** arrived slightly earlier than last year, with **Arctic Terns** coming a week early and **Black Terns** a whole month early! Arriving in Kent from the 8th, **Black Terns** had reached East Yorkshire by the 15th and Merseyside two days later. **Little Gull** numbers away from traditional sites included up to 66 in London, 64 in Suffolk, 163 in Brighton and 43 in Cambridgeshire, all in the period 16th-26th April.

Despite all of this summery weather, many winter migrants are still in the country. **Fieldfare** and **Redwing** are being reported from far more sites than at this time in 2002, and the sight of up to 50 Waxwing in York until the 16th must have been a surprise for a few observers!

To check how the migration season is going, check the links in the box above to some recent events. So, why not give Migration Watch a go? A great way to make you field-work more valuable!

Mark Grantham, on behalf of the Migration Watch Team

The Swift's Tale

There is a Swift over my head. It is the end of August, so the Swift cannot be alive - Swifts leave the Isle of Bute in mid-August. Had I been writing this a month ago, the Swifts overhead would have been a party of screaming adults. Their offspring, raised in the roof spaces of houses on Crichton Road, will have left on their own to begin their migration south. Where are they now? Probably already south of the Mediterranean.

Above my head is a mobile, a beautiful life-size carving of a Swift given me by a Swedish friend. It keeps me company all-year round. The Swift is one of my favourite birds, quintessentially the herald of summer and the sentinel of summer's end. When it leaves about 16th August, I find it hard to bear, for it is season's end.....

The Swift [*Apus apus* from the Greek *apous*, no feet] spends most of its life on the wing. Other than during its relatively brief breeding season, it is thought to remain on the wing all day and all night for very long periods. It eats, sleeps and copulates on the wing. It is known to winter south of the African equator, but its winter roosts have never been discovered - in contrast to Swallows and Martins, which use reed beds in which to roost during their South African winter.

Visual evidence suggests that Swifts spend much of the winter in the air, coming to ground to roost probably only in bad weather.

The Swift is master of its aerial environment, and because it rarely lands on terra firma, its feet are very small and used to push off from its nest and occasionally to fight. If it lands on the ground, it has the greatest difficulty getting back into the air. Its name in heraldry is Martlet [French: *Martlet noir*], the mark of the fourth son, because he lacks land on which to set his feet. The Swift however, rarely needs land.

I record my first Swifts on the Isle of Bute around 10 May. I usually hear them before I see them, their screaming calls issuing forth from the sky above.

As one of my references states, "the extreme mobility of Swifts has hindered study of their social and display behaviour" [*A Dictionary of Birds*, 1985, p. 573]. They nest under the eaves of my neighbours' houses, but I never see them at the nest. David Lack studied them in the spires of Oxford colleges [*Swifts in a Tower*, 1956] and my Polish friend Jerzy Desselberger gained unique knowledge of fledgling Swifts because of his reputation as the Bird Doctor of Warsaw. Recently hatched Swifts often fall out of their nests, and Desselberger received them from anxious pickers-up of babies. For five years, he tried to

simulate their food - a porridge of insects provided by their parents. Eventually he succeeded and raised fledglings to flying stage in his Warsaw apartment. Some of his knowledge is recorded in Volume 5 of the *Birds of the Western Palearctic* [BWP].

Young Swifts are known to have the ability to close down, i.e. to become cold, clammy and semi-torpid, and able to survive for up to two weeks without food should the weather turn adverse and their food supply become scarce. Adults can starve harmlessly for three to four days. Given the nature of our Bute summers, this must be a life-saving capability!

Swifts took to nesting on buildings [castles, churches etc.] during the Middle Ages. As tall building proliferated during the 19th century and forests were decimated, the Swift has become associated with the urban landscapes of western Europe. Before then, they would use tree holes, crags, sea cliffs and caves. In some parts of its range, they still use tree holes. The species is not hard to see on the Isle of Bute, but I suspect, as did McWilliam [*The Birds of the Isle of Bute*], that Craigmore is a stronghold. Screaming family parties are part of the music of July. In late evening quite large groups will fly by until one notices that they are spiralling upwards, to spend the night on the wing.

They depart with precision - around 16th August every year they go. What triggers their departure? Swallows and Martins stay for another month, probably feeding on much the same insectivorous food. [BWP, Vol 5, p. 661] recorded a study that estimated 300 insects per ball of food were delivered to the nest, with each nest receiving 3000 visits per twenty-four hours. When the bugs are biting in your back yard, think how much worse it would be without Swifts! I suspect that by mid-August one or more of their menu items becomes scarce, so triggering their departure. They are also probably able to anticipate the arrival of cold fronts.

Craigmore birds go on or about 16th August. I then see a few more birds, but I believe these to be migrants from further north. By the 20th, I know that I must wait until early May before my Swifts will be back and my spirits will revive. Meanwhile, my mobile keeps me hopeful.

Michael Thomas

Editor's note: This is one of ten essays now published as *Ornithological Tales: Including a Checklist of the Birds of Bute, Book I*, published by the Buteshire Natural History Museum, and available for £3 from the Bute Museum, Stuart St., Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 OEP.

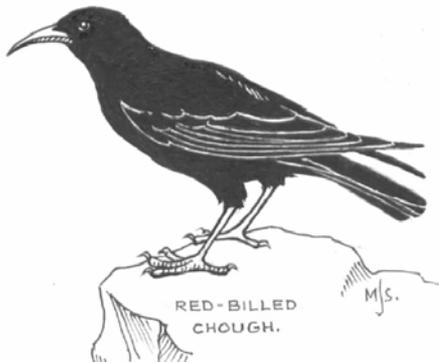
Those were the days—40 years ago

This is the third article in the series and describes how we tracked down the **Choughs** that then bred on the Mull of Kintyre.

8-9th June 1963

On arrival at Southend we paid a visit to old Mr Greenlees, the retired postman, who Charlie Palmar had told me about. He had been to the Mull last year and had seen **Golden Eagles** and three **Choughs**. Much heartened by this we went along the lighthouse road, stopping at the park at the crest of the hill and walking south from there. We saw our first **Choughs** here, just three of them flying far below us.

We saw a **Kestrel** here, and then spotted an **eagle's** eyrie on a second tier cliff right



over the sea. Although it was about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile from us, with telescopes we could make out a 4-5 week old chick. A few minutes later we had a wonderful view of, first one, then both parents swooping and soaring around the rock. We decided to approach the eyrie on our return, and went on along the upper cliffs. We saw a couple more **Choughs** and found another old

eyrie by the old fort, still in very good condition and repair as though it had been used recently.

The sea was covered in a low haze all day, and only inshore movement could be watched. However, we saw plenty of auks, **Black Guillemots** from the lower cliffs and **Guillemots** and **Razorbills** from the main cliffs. There were, of course, hundreds of **Fulmars**, and a procession of **Gannets** to and fro. At one spot we saw a single **Kittiwake**. We managed to get above the occupied eyrie and peer over the edge direct into the nest twelve feet below. There was very little food in the nest - just the leg of a **Brown Hare** sticking out from under the eaglet.

A bit further along we met a **Chough** who was taking a very proprietorial interest in a crack. It was the only one we saw which looked definitely as though it was breeding. Altogether we saw six birds at once from this point and had seen two earlier, so that we can safely say that there is a minimum, of eight birds here. We also saw quite a number of **Twites**. Their heavy streaking and yellow bills were very noticeable. The calls consisted a single strong nasal 'tweet' and a softer double, but still nasal, 'chee chee'. We had a glance up coast from the side of Cnoc Moy as far as Rubha Duin Bhan, but the coastline was rounded and uninteresting. We moved round to Ballygroggan, near Machrihanish for the night. Below the camp were **Shelducks**, **Oystercatchers**, **Ringed Plovers**, and all around were **Fulmars** which croaked through the night.

We walked south from Ballygroggan along the cliff and coast to Rubha Duin Bhan. It was extremely hot and a little

hazy. We bathed frequently. The first line of cliffs was Sron Garbh, where I surprised a **Buzzard** dozing on a rock. He flew off and was joined by another. We did not find the eyrie. The next line of cliffs was quite spectacular and produced a pair of **Kestrels** which announced themselves with persistent chatter. At the seaward projection of these cliffs, called Uamh Ropa, there were a few smallish seabird colonies. **Razorbills**, **Guillemots**, **Fulmars** and **Herring Gulls**. A few **Tysties** were flying and sitting on the water.

On the broken cliffs around the corrie to the south of Uamh Ropa I found a yellowish leguminous plant that I had never seen before. I collected a specimen. On my return I looked it up in CTW and decided it was *Oxytropis campestris*, which was supposed to occur only in Glen Clova, and Loch Loch, and was extremely rare. However I showed it to Molly Palmar on Monday and she contacted a learned botanical friend who said my identification was almost certainly correct, and that the spot was known to Glasgow botanists, but in order to check that the plant was not an aberrant form of *O. halleri* some people were counting chromosomes. Apparently they have not come to any definite conclusion yet. It seemed that the spot had only been discovered a few years ago.

The next and last line of cliffs was very spectacular, a fittingly produced a screaming **Peregrine**. She appeared from a cleft in the cliffs, but from nowhere could one see in and the site was inaccessible. As we drove away from Ballygroggan there were more **Twites** a few feet away in a roadside field.

David Merrie

Recent Reports (February – April 2003)

So far it appears that despite the unusually good weather in March and April migrant birds did not all turn up early. In fact, birds like **Swallows** were rather later than usual. John Halliday tells me that at the crucial period the weather in the Mediterranean and North Africa was not good and this may have had something to do with it (see page 2).

As last year, I have produced a table (see next page) of first records for the arrival of spring migrants, so that you can see at a glance the earliest records submitted so far. I have given, where available, the first dates for each of the recording areas. If any of you have further information please

let me know. It is good to have an overall picture of the main arrival periods for each species as well as unusually early individuals. I apologise for anything of note that has been omitted.

Once again Tiree has come up with the star attractions for the period. On 18th April a visiting birder reported a **Little Egret** at Sorobaidh Bay. After some searching it was relocated at Loch Bhirceapol on 21st April and remained there until at least the end of April. It was an adult bird in full breeding plumage and provided the first record of the species for Tiree. Also on the 21st April, John Bowler noticed an unusual duck with a flock of

Tufted Ducks on Loch Bhasapol. Careful examination revealed that it was a **Ferruginous Duck**. A very rare species in Scotland, with only a dozen or so records and, if confirmed, it will be yet another Argyll first for Tiree (see stop press box for more exciting records from Tiree).

If there are any 2002 Argyll bird records still out there that have not been submitted please let me have them as soon as possible. It helps enormously if you follow the guidance on submitting records that has appeared in the Eider & the Argyll Bird Report Vol. 17 2000 - briefly; species, no. of individuals, exact location and date.

Table showing the first dates for spring migrants, last dates for winter migrants and dates for some passage migrants, Argyll 2003

Species	Locality	Date
Osprey	Aros, Mull	5 th April
Corn Crake	Cornaig, Coll	15 th April
Corn Crake	Fidden, Mull	17 th April
Corn Crake	Portnahaven, Islay	17 th April
Corn Crake	Heylipol, Tiree	18 th April
Common Sandpiper	Penmore, Mull	30 th March
Common Sandpiper	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	16 th April
Sandwich Tern	Clachan Seil, Mid-Argyll	26 th March
Sandwich Tern	Tayinloan, Mid-Argyll	28 th March
Sandwich Tern	Balevullin, Tiree	16 th April
Arctic Tern	Port na Luing, Coll	18 th April
Little Tern	Crossapol Bay, Tiree	9 th April
Little Tern	Loch Indaal, Islay	23 rd April
Little Tern	Crossapol Bay, Coll	24 th April
Cuckoo	Kilmartin, Mid-Argyll	14 th April
Cuckoo	Garvachy, Mid-Argyll	16 th April
Cuckoo	Loch Gruinart, Islay	20 th April
Cuckoo	The Lodge, Coll	23 rd April
Sand Martin	Garmony Point, Mull	19 th March
Sand Martin	Glen Bellart, Mull	27 th March
Sand Martin	Loch Finlaggan, Islay	1 st April
Swallow	Tayinloan, Mid-Argyll	28 th March
Swallow	Loch na Keal, Mull	2 nd April
Swallow	Heylipol, Tiree	15 th April
Swallow	Garvachy, Mid-Argyll	16 th April
Swallow	Kilmartin, Mid-Argyll	16 th April
Swallow	The Lodge, Coll	16 th April
House Martin	Bruichladdich, Islay	24 th March
House Martin	Tottronald, Coll	23 rd April
Tree Pipit	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	15 th April
Tree Pipit	Minard, Mid-Argyll	17 th April
White Wagtail	Vaul, Tiree	29 th March
White Wagtail	Hynish, Tiree, 12 in loose group	30 th March
White Wagtail	Loch Gruinart, Islay	2 nd April
White Wagtail	Hogh Bay, Coll	23 rd April
Black Redstart	Lagavulin, Islay	30 th March
Common Redstart	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	23 rd April
Common Redstart	Invercreran, North Argyll	23 rd April
Common Redstart	Colonsay (1 st in many yrs)	27 th Apr
Common Redstart	Coll (1 st for Coll!)	6 th May
Whinchat 22 nd	Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll	22 nd April (early date)
Whinchat	Dervaig, Mull	24 th April
Northern Wheatear	West coast, Jura (2 males)	14 ^h March
Northern Wheatear	West coast, Jura (female)	15 ^h March
Northern Wheatear	Penmore, Mull	15 th March
Northern Wheatear	Ben Feall, Coll	17 th March
Northern Wheatear	Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree	26 th March
Ring Ouzel	Balevullin, Tiree (2 nd for Tiree)	7 th April
Ring Ouzel	Kiloran Bay Colonsay	19 th April
Ring Ouzel	Hyne, Coll (1 st for Coll)	24 th April
Redwing	Tottronald, Coll	6 th April
Redwing	Loch Bhasapol, Tiree	6 th April
Grasshopper Warbler	Dunadd, Mid-Argyll	17 th April
Grasshopper Warbler	Portnahaven, Islay	18 th April
Grasshopper Warbler	Dervaig, Mull	20 th April
Grasshopper Warbler	Colonsay Ho., Colonsay	21 st April
Grasshopper Warbler	Ardencaple, Seil Is., Mid-Argyll (2)	21 st April
Sedge Warbler	Auchnasaul, Mid-Argyll	1 st April
Sedge Warbler	Loch Gruinart, Islay	20 th April
Sedge Warbler	East Loch Fada, Colonsay	21 st April
Sedge Warbler	Fernoch (Lochgilphead), Mid-Argyll	23 rd April
Common Whitethroat	Balinoe, Tiree (early date)	14 th April
Common Whitethroat	Ardencaple, Mid-Argyll	21 st April
Common Whitethroat	Fishnish, Mull	24 th April

(cont. on next page)

OTHER RECORDS

Divers to Herons

Twelve **Great Northern Divers** were in Loch na Keal, Mull on 10th Feb, 21 were counted in Gott Bay, Tiree on 21st April and 12 were around the harbour at Scala-saig on 29th April. Eleven **Slavonian Grebes** were counted at the head of Loch na Keal, Mull on 10th February. The **Little Egret** (see above) was still on Tiree on 30th April.

Wildfowl

On Tiree the total of 95 **Whooper Swans** on 7th Feb was well down on the January count. One **Whooper Swan** among the flock of 50 on Loch Bhasapol on 4th April was ringed and had spent the earlier part of the winter in Northern Ireland. On the 23rd March, 23 migrant **Whooper Swans** were at Loch Indaal and on 5th April a flock of 37 flew north over Loch Gilp. A blue-phase **Snow Goose** was seen with **Greenland White-fronted Geese** at Laphroaig, Islay 23rd February. An unusual sight in Loch Gilp was a flock of 30 **Brent Geese** on 26th April with 12 still present on 28th, and up to 18 were at Loch Indaal in early February. An **American Wigeon** sighted at the head of Loch Feochan on 16th March may have been our regular visitor to the Loch Crinan area. Also unusual were two **Northern Shovelers** at Pennyghael on 8th April the first recorded on the island since 1995. A **Green-winged Teal** was still present at Gruinart on 31st March, and a flock of 5 **Goosanders** at Ardnahoe on 11th March was unusual for Islay. There have been more **Common Pochards** reported than in most winters including, in February, 6 on Loch nan Druimnean, Mid-Argyll on 1st, 34 on Loch Ballygrant, Islay on 17th and 15 near Kilchurn Castle, Loch Awe on 20th. The **Ferruginous Duck** stayed at Loch Bhasapol until at least 29th April. There were relatively few **Long-tailed Ducks** reported, but 12 were in Feall Bay, Coll on 5th February and 4, including a male in breeding plumage, in Balepethrish Bay, Tiree on 2nd April. Just after the period under review, 2 immature **Long-tailed Ducks** in Loch Gilp, near Ardrishaig, on 24th May caused some consternation. This species has the most varied plumage of any duck and can be very difficult to identify. A large congregation of **Common Goldeneyes** in Loch Fyne, near Furnace, peaked at 90 on 12th Feb.

Raptors to Gamebirds

There were two reports of **Red Kite**, one near Dervaig, Mull on 21st February and another near the Rare Breeds Farm at Oban in mid April. A **White-tailed Eagle** seen near Portnahaven, Islay on 20th February was considered to be about 3 years

Species	Locality	Date
Garden Warbler	Lochawe, Mid-Argyll	19 th April
Garden Warbler	Fearnoch, Mid-Argyll (3)	12 th May
Blackcap	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	15 th April
Blackcap	Auchnasaul, Mid-Argyll	20 th April
Blackcap	Loch Gruinart, Islay	20 th April
Blackcap	Uig, Coll	21 st April
Blackcap	Colonsay House, Colonsay	21 st April
Blackcap	Grasspoint, Mull	22 nd April
Wood Warbler	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	23 rd April
Wood Warbler	Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll (4+)	28 th April
Common Chiffchaff	Craighouse, Jura	23 rd March
Common Chiffchaff	Connel, Mid-Argyll	28 th March
Common Chiffchaff	Kildalton, Islay	29 th March
Common Chiffchaff	Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	4 th April
Willow Warbler	Gruline, Mull	3 rd Apr
Willow Warbler	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	6 th April
Willow Warbler	Totronald, Coll	10 th April
Willow Warbler	Heylipol, Tiree	15 th April
Willow Warbler	Minard, Mid-Argyll	17 th April
Spotted Flycatcher	Fernoch (Lochgilphead) Mid-Argyll	9 th May
Pied Flycatcher	?	?
Snow Bunting	Ben Feall, Coll	6 th April

old. Away from breeding areas, **Ospreys** have been reported in the Aros area of Mull on 23rd April, at Loch Leathan, Mid-Argyll on 26th April and at Loch Scamadale on 1st May. During March and April ten or more **Merlins** were reported from Coll, Colonsay, Islay, Mull, the mainland and Tiree. **Water Rails** were widely recorded during the period, from Coll, Colonsay, Cowal, Kintyre and Tiree where one was (again) killed by a cat. They seem particularly prone to cats.

Waders

Sanderling numbers on Tiree peaked at 175 in Balephetrish Bay on 5th February and a single **Little Stint** at Loch Don, Mull on 23rd April was an unusual spring record for this species. The only **Purple Sandpiper** flocks in double figures were on Tiree where 16 were at Traigh Hough on 12th April. A **Jack Snipe** was flushed from rough grass at Machir Bay, Islay on 21st February. Early visits (in March/April) to sites covered by the Woodland Bird Survey in Argyll confirmed how widespread **Eurasian Woodcock** are in this area, at least in winter. They were found in all but 4 of the 16 sites visited and sometimes 2 or 3 birds were flushed. The first **Black-tailed Godwits** reported were 2 at Bridgend, Loch Indaal on 30th March, followed by 7 at Loch an Eilean, Tiree on 31st March while 12 there on 11th April included a colour ringed bird from The Wash. The first passage **Whimbrel** reported was at Bridgend, Loch Indaal on 30th March. Later on **Whimbrel** were reported in smaller numbers than usual and included 2 at Crosapol Bay, Coll on 24th April, 10 at Kilnave, Islay on 27th April and 10 at Hey-

lipol, Tiree on 28th April. A wintering **Common Greenshank** was at Linne Mhuirich (Loch Sween) on 16th February and one was at Loch Don, Mull on



OSPREY.

23rd April. A very early **Common Sandpiper** was reported from Penmore, Mull on 30th March and one at Taynish NNR on 16th April was the earliest ever recorded on the reserve. A **Grey Phalarope** was swimming close inshore at Bruichladdich, Islay on 9th March

Skuas to Woodpeckers

First arrivals of the various tern species are listed in the Table. Three **Little Auks** were feeding in Balephetrish Bay,

Tiree on 5th February. An adult **Iceland Gull** reported from Bunnahabhain Bay Islay on 1st April was the only record of the species so far submitted for this winter as was a 2nd winter **Glaucous Gull** at the head of Loch Feochan, Mid-Argyll on 29th March. On 13th March, an adult **Little Gull** was found at Loch Gruinart, Islay. An unexpected find during the Woodland Bird Survey was a **Long-eared Owl** flushed from a broadleaved wood on the north west shore of Loch Awe on 27th March. On 26th April some visiting birders from the south who were familiar with the song reported hearing a **European Nightjar** chirring near Dalmally, Mid-Argyll. A **Common Kingfisher** was seen flying over the Holy Loch on 22nd February.

Passerines

Early **Sand Martins** were reported from Mull on 19th and 27th March and 2 early **Barn Swallows** were at Tayinloan on 28th March, but the main arrival of these species seemed, if anything, later than usual and in many places **Barn Swallows** did not appear until near the end of April. **White Wagtails** on passage were reported from Tiree on 29th and 30th March and 12 were in a loose group at Caolas Tiree on 18th April while Coll had 2 at Hogh Bay on 23rd April. A **Black Redstart** was found at Lagavulin, Islay on 30th March; the second record of this scarce species this year. A **Common Redstart** seen on Colonsay on 27th April was the first record there for many years and one on Coll on 6th May was apparently the first record ever for the island. **Ring Ouzels** are generally scarce in Argyll on passage, but this spring we had male birds on Tiree (only their 2nd record), Colonsay and Coll (another first for the island) – see the table for details. Very few **Fieldfares** were reported later in the winter, but **Redwings** were quite numerous in late Mar and early April including 60 at Kilnave, Islay on 28th March, 30 or more at Coull Farm Islay on 29th March, 32 at Balevullin Tiree on 2nd April and 7 on 6th April at Totronald, Coll. Several observers have commented on how numerous **Common Grasshopper Warblers** have been this spring with 2 or 3 birds singing quite close together in some places. **Garden Warblers** have also been more numerous than usual or perhaps they have been overlooked in the past. One Woodland Bird Survey site near Connel had 3 singing birds in early May. A very early **Common Chiffchaff** was singing near Craighouse, Jura on 23rd March and by the end of the month birds had also been reported from Mid-Argyll and Islay. **Goldcrests** from the west coast of Jura on 15th March and from Tiree in late March/early April were presumably passage migrants. Although a

Spotted Flycatcher was reported near Lochgilphead in early May. So far, there have been no records of Pied Flycatchers and none have yet been recorded during the Woodland Bird Survey. One notable record unaccountably missed from the last *Recent Reports* was a **Great Grey Shrike** seen in the Glenbarr area of Kintyre on 10th January. These are now very scarce birds in Argyll and the last confirmed record was near Loch Awe in 1996. An unusually marked ?male **House Sparrow** seen in a garden at Airds Bay, Loch Etive during March had a pure white chin, nape and under-parts as well as a white 'right shoulder' and back. Until closely examined such birds can easily raise hopes that a real rarity has been found. Single **Common Crossbills** have been reported from Colonsay, on 20th April, and at Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll on 26th April. A flock of 12 **Snow Buntings** were seen at Ais-an t-Sidhean (nr. Bridge of Orchy) on 16th February and a single late bird was at Ben Feall, Coll on 6th April. It is good to report that **Yellowhammers** have been seen in some gardens in good numbers during the winter including Ardrishaig, Mid-Argyll, Lossit Farm, Islay and at Dervaig and Penmore, Mull where 15 or more have been present at times.

Paul Daw (contact details on last page)

Stop Press (May)

Tiree does it again! A dark phase male **Eleonora's Falcon** at Ceann a' Mhara on 2nd May will almost certainly turn out to be the most unexpected bird of the year. If accepted it will be only the second record for Scotland and, of course, another first for Argyll. There have also been, as yet unconfirmed, reports of **Cory's Shearwater**, **Bee-eater** and **Woodlark** on Mull and two separate records of **Pomarine Skuas** around the coasts of Mull; all in early May. Our annual **Hoopoe** report comes this time from Claonaig, Kintyre (the Arran ferry terminal) where a visitor reported one on 1st May. On Islay, a **Lesser Yellowlegs** was found at Lock Gruinart on 25th May; in almost exactly the same spot as the **Greater Yellowlegs** last year. A superb male **King Eider** was found by Chris Waltho amongst 350 male **Common Eiders** at Toward Village, Cowal on the 27th May. To round off the month, a singing **Golden Oriole** was found at Taynish NNR on 31st May.

The Cuckoo Season*

by *Shelley Fouracres*

I

Clear and sunny May Day,
clear full moon at night,
Bumble-bees and butterflies in accelerating flight
seek out spring-rich nectar
for breeding days to come.

Cuckoo....Cuckoo....

Deceiving time is here.
Cuckoo....it echoes off the hill
and Pipits distracted by His call
move off to seek the stranger....Cuckoo.
Now down She swoops and lays her egg;
Cuckoo Cuckoo the deed is done

II

Early and hot, changing tune in June.
Blue Tits fledged and young ones piping.
Yellow Flags, midges biting.
Daisies and Floxgloves,
Ash leaves and Lime.
This is picnic time.

Later and colder, changing tune in June,
thunder rattling the slated roof.
The Mhór now softened as mists are rising;
White Owl and Nightjar,
Pipistrelle and Moth;
pale moon peeping over the hill at dusk.

III

And in July away They'll fly....
when hair-soft barley green
turns to brittle gold.
And stiffly stand the thistles,
rich purple slipping into thistledown.

Oh Cuckoo, your legacy is now so huge,
replete with hairy caterpillars.
Your surrogates' tireless job complete
once more they lightly dance.

IV

Tired green and golden grain,
season of change on change.
Hot and dry the Barley stands
'till circling "jaws" attack and excited Swallows "hoover" up the insect swarm.
When early mists evaporate, the damper grass now
sprouts with Penny-buns and fairy-rings.

In August go he must....
Although such plenty is around,
the shortening days signal the change.
Here danger lurks - a sudden frost-
and then would end the feast.

So to the tropics he'll fly,
The Meadow Pipits' changeling.
Farewell you harbinger of Spring,
farewell the Cuckoo season.

*with reference to the old rhyme:
"In April the Cuckoo shows his bill
In May he sings all day
In June he alters his tune
In July away he'll fly
In August go he must".
(Brewer's Dictionary of Phrases and Fables)

Continued from page 1

by far the most important site for breeding eiders in Argyll, and one of the two largest colonies in the west of Scotland (the other main site being Horse Island off Ardrissan where numbers are apparently similar to the total on the Burnt Islands). A similar mark-recapture analysis in 2001 gave a

“This made the Burnt Islands by far the most important site for breeding eiders in Argyll”

similar total, while we were also able to do some calculations based on the numbers of retraps and unringed birds we caught, which also suggest somewhere around 500-600 breeding female eiders on the Burnt Islands.

You might wonder why this indirect approach. Surely it is easier just to count the birds without even disturbing them? Not so on the Burnt Islands. Nesting gulls use most of the grassy periphery of the islands, but most of the ‘interior’ is a thicket of woodland and scrub and it is there that the eiders prefer to nest, well away from risks of egg predation by gulls. Eiders mainly nest underneath a thick cover of brambles, under the canopy of conifers and rhododendrons, and in bracken. Seeing the incubating birds is extremely difficult. Only in areas of bracken is it really possible to be confident that most nests can be seen, as the bracken is still young in May while the ducks are incubating.

We recorded measurements, weights, and clutch sizes of the birds to compare with data from other studies. Our birds seem to be maintaining good body weights and producing good clutch sizes, so there is no suggestion of any severe shortage of food, at least in the period before laying. Indeed, we found two females that were breeding despite having only one eye, and even more surprisingly, one female incubating a clutch despite having only one wing. We suspect that she lost one wing as a result of entanglement in anti-predator netting at some aquaculture establishment, as the wing had been cleanly cut and the wound had healed over. Obviously she could not fly, but apparently that had not stopped her from feeding and even getting into breeding condition. These injured birds still surviving also suggest that there has not been strong selection weeding out less fit individuals, and maybe life has been fairly easy for Burnt Island eiders in the last few years.

So, we have clearly established that the

Burnt Islands are an extremely important nesting site for west of Scotland eiders. We have also been increasing the numbers of ringed eiders in the west of Scotland. Indeed, we are in ‘competition’ with ringers working on Horse Island; our ringing total is still just a bit ahead of theirs (I’m just saying this to encourage them to try harder next season!). Together with some ringing at Faslane and other sites, some 600 eiders have been ringed in the west of Scotland in the last few years. So if you see a dead eider on a beach it is well worth checking in case it has a ring (virtually all ringing has been of females so drakes will be unlikely to have a ring). So far, we have only two recoveries of birds ringed at the Burnt Islands away from the colony; one was at Rothesay about 6 months after ringing, and the other, ringed in May 1999, was drowned in mussel farm netting in Loch Striven in January 2001. So the very limited evidence so far is consistent with the expectation that they do not move great distances.

In 2000 and 2001, Clive Craik found no evidence of mink killing birds on the Burnt Islands, but in 2002 Clive saw evidence that there was some mink activity there, and we found several common gull corpses that had been ‘cached’ by mink. One or two eider clutches had also been eaten, but the vast majority were not affected. In 2003, we found that mink activity on the largest of the Burnt Islands (where most of the eiders nest) was very obvious. The whole island was affected, but almost all eiders at the southern end of the island had been attacked. We located at the very minimum 17 dead eiders (16 females and one male). Almost all showed signs of having been killed by mink, though one or two may have died of other causes. Many of these carcasses had been dragged to a cache site where they were quite well hidden, so we may well have missed quite a number of corpses that were too well hidden for us to notice them. That would not be difficult on such a densely vegetated island. Three of the females were birds that we had ringed in previous years. We also saw about a dozen nests where mink had eaten eggs, and a number of eggs were hidden in the caches where the adults had been placed. Many eiders were still sitting tightly on their clutches, and so this predation may not affect the overall chick production much, but the mortality of perhaps 5% of the females from this colony in 2002 would roughly double the normal natural mortality rate of adult eiders. This is almost certainly not sustainable. And of course the impact of mink may increase further in future years now that they are clearly established on the Burnt Islands. Perhaps a conservation body might feel

that there is an urgent need to control mink predation at this important eider colony; if not, the future for eiders at this site looks bleak.

“Perhaps a conservation body might feel that there is an urgent need to control mink predation at this important eider colony”

Last summer, Chris Waltho tested out a temporary marking scheme using a short (about 1 inch long) length of plastic tape gummed to the feathers on the back of female eiders’ necks. This mark was quite easy to see on females and allowed Chris to locate dispersing females and broods to see where birds from Horse Island moved after the ducklings hatched. This marking scheme is registered with the BTO. So this May we put a short bit of yellow tape onto the feathers on the back of the neck of 79 females at nests on the Burnt Islands. These birds are likely to disperse around Bute, maybe into Loch Striven, and the Firth of Clyde (perhaps Dunoon, Holy Loch and south to Arran). The tape is not likely to stick onto the feathers for long. At best, some may remain with tape until July when they moult the neck feathers, but most will probably detach sooner. But

“If you see a female eider with a yellow neck tag please let me know”

if you see female eiders over the next few weeks please do look out for any with a yellow mark on the back of the neck. These marks are very obvious, so I hope we may get some sightings of the birds to find out how the postbreeding movement patterns vary between birds from different colonies. If you see a female eider with a yellow neck tag please let me know – I can be contacted by email (r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk) or by phone (01301 702603) where there is an answering machine even if I’m not in. The information I’d like is the date and location where the bird was seen and whether she had ducklings with her. Many thanks.

Bob Furness (*Cnoc, Tarbet, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG*)

Recent Papers from Journals

This section aims to provide readers with information on papers that have appeared in journals since the last list in the December 2002 newsletter. The criteria for selection is that papers must have links to birds in Scotland. The selection is biased towards what I read, so I would welcome information on other papers outwith my field, for inclusion in future lists - *Editor*

Amar, A., Redpath, S. & Thirgood, S. 2003. Evidence for food limitation in the declining hen harrier population on the Orkney Islands, Scotland. *Biological Conservation*, **111**, 377-384.

Andrews, I. J. & Naylor, K. A. 2002. Records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions. *Scottish Birds*, **23**, 61-116.

Baines, D. & Andrew, M. 2003. Marking of deer fences to reduce frequency of collisions by woodland grouse. *Biological Conservation*, **110**, 169-176.

Brooke, M. de L., Douse, A., Haysom, S. & Nicholson, A. 2002. The Atlantic puffin population of the Shiant Islands, 2000. *Scottish Birds*, **23**, 22-26.

Calladine, J., Baines, D. & Warren, P. 2002. Effects of reduced grazing on population and breeding success of black grouse in northern England. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, **39**, 772-780.

Clark, J. A., Balmer, D. E., Adams, S. Y., Grantham, M. J., Blackburn, J. R., Robinson, R. A., Wernham, C. V., Griffin, B. M. & Milne, L. J. 2002. Bird ringing in Britain and Ireland in 2001. *Ringing & Migration*, **21**, 80-143.

Daunt, F., Monaghan, P., Wanless, S. & Harris, M. P. 2003. Sexual ornament size and breeding performance in female and male European shags *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*. *Ibis*, **145**, 54-60.

Fraser, P. A. & Rogers, M. J. 2002. Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2000. *British Birds*, **95**, 606-630.

Gregory, M. J. P., Gordon, A. G. & Moss, R. 2003. Impact of nest-trapping and radio-tagging on breeding golden eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* in Argyll, Scotland. *Ibis*, **145**, 113-119.

Harris, M. P., Rothery, P. & Wanless, S. 2003. Increase in frequency of the bridled morph of the Common Guillemot *Uria*

aalge on the Isle of May, 1946-2000: a return to former levels? *Ibis*, **145**, 22-29.

Hewson, R. 2002. Scavenging by birds upon salmon carcasses during the spawning season. *Scottish Birds*, **23**, 27-31.

Holt, S. & Whitfield, D. P. 2003. Timing of nest departure by broods of Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*. *Bird Study*, **50**, 88-90.

Innsley, H., Hounsom, M., Meyhew, P. & Chisolm, K. 2002. A preliminary comparison of population estimation by tape response and mark/recapture methods for storm petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* in two contrasting Scottish colonies. *Ringing & Migration*, **21**, 75-79.

Jackson, D. B. 2003. Between-lake differences in the diet and provisioning behaviour of black-throated divers *Gavia arctica* breeding in Scotland. *Ibis*, **145**, 30-44.

Jardine, D. C., How, J., Clarke, J. & Clarke, P. M. 2002. Seabirds on Colonsay and Oronsay, Inner Hebrides. *Scottish Birds*, **23**, 1-9.

Johnstone, I., Whitehead, S. & Lamacraft, D. 2002. The importance of grazed habitats for foraging choughs *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*, and its implication for agri-environmental schemes. *Aspects of Applied Biology*, **67**, 59-66.

Kershaw, M. & Cranswick, P. A. 2003. Numbers of wintering waterbirds in Great Britain, 1994/1995-1998/1999: I. Wildfowl and selected waterbirds. *Biological Conservation*, **111**, 91-104.

Madders, M. 2003. Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* foraging activity in relation to habitat and prey. *Bird Study*, **50**, 55-60.

McGhie, H. 2002. Numbers of siskins in relation to the size of the Scots pine cone crop. *Scottish Birds*, **23**, 32-35.

O'Brien, M., Tharme, A. & Jackson, D. 2002. Changes in breeding wader numbers on Scottish farmed land during the 1990s. *Scottish Birds*, **23**, 10-21.

Ogilvie, M. & Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2002. Non-native birds breeding in the United Kingdom in 2000. *British Birds*, **95**, 631-635.

Ogilvie, M. & Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2002. Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2000. *British Birds*, **95**, 542-582.

Oro, D. & Furness, R. W. 2002. Influences of food availability and predation on survival of kittiwakes. *Ecology*, **83**, 2516-2528.

Petty, S. J., Lurz, P. W. W. & Rushton, S. P. 2003. Predation of red squirrels by

northern goshawk in a conifer forest in northern England: can this limit squirrel numbers and create a conservation dilemma? *Biological Conservation*, **111**, 105-114.

Rehfishch, M. M., Austin, G. E., Armitage, M. J. S., Atkinson, P. W., Holloway, S. J., Musgrove, A. J. & Pollitt, M. S. 2003. Numbers of wintering waterbirds in Great Britain and the Isle of Man (1994/1995-1998/1999): II. Coastal waders (Charadrii). *Biological Conservation*, **112**, 329-341.

Rehfishch, M. M., Holloway, S. J. & G.E., A. 2003. Population estimates of waders on the non-estuarine coasts of the UK and the Isle of Man during the winter of 1997-98. *Bird Study*, **50**, 22-32.

Reid, J. M., Bignal, E. M., Bignal, S., McCracken, D. I. & Monaghan, P. 2003. Environmental variability, life-history covariation and cohort effects in the red-billed chough *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **72**, 36-46.

Taylor, I. 2002. Occupancy in relation to site quality in barn owls (*Tyto alba*) in south Scotland. In: *Ecology and conservation of owls* (Ed. by Newton, I., Kavanagh, R., Olsen, J. & Taylor, I.), pp. 30-41. Collingwood, Australia: CSIRO Publishing.

Thirgood, S. J., Redpath, S. M. & Graham, I. M. 2003. What determines the foraging distribution of raptors on heather moorland? *Oikos*, **100**, 15-24.

Votier, S. C., Harrop, A. H. J. & Dennt, M. 2003. A review of the status and identification of American wigeon in Britain & Ireland. *British Birds*, **96**, 2-22.

Walbridge, G., Small, B. & McGowan, R. E. 2003. From the Rarities Committee's files: Ascension frigatebird on Tiree - new to the Western Palearctic. *British Birds*, **96**, 58-73.

Wernham, C. V., Toms, M. P., Marchant, J. H., Clark, J. A., Siriwardena, G. M. & Baillie, S. R. 2002. The migration atlas: movements of the birds of Britain and Ireland. pp. 884. London: T. & A.D. Poyser.

Whitfield, D. P., Evans, R. J., Broad, R., Fielding, A. H., Haworth, P. F., Madders, M. & McLeod, D. R. A. 2002. Are reintroduced white-tailed eagles in competition with golden eagles? *Scottish Birds*, **23**, 36-45

Whitfield, D. P. 2003. Predation by Eurasian sparrowhawks produces density-dependent mortality of wintering redshanks. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **72**, 27-35.

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

Police Action

Towards the end of March, four men were seen at a nest site in Cowal, to which Peregrines had returned after an absence of several years. Ravens also use the site annually. Since it was after dark the police were called and acted immediately. A helicopter was scrambled from Glasgow to assist local police. Three men came away from the site when called to by police and a fourth emerged after being picked up in the helicopter spotlight. Two men were interviewed and warned by the police. They claimed to be climbing instructors??? Thankfully the Raven nest, which contained eggs, was untouched. Hopefully the Peregrines have not been frightened off and will nest successfully. It is very encouraging that the police acted so promptly and effectively. Hopefully they will continue to maintain a high profile to deter any further activities that could endanger bird life.

George Newall, Dunoon

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club

Chairman: David Wood, Drover's House, Bellanoch, Lochgilphead PA31 8SN

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Argyll Bird Recorder: Paul Daw, Tigh-na-Tulloch, Tullochgorm, Minard PA32 8YQ (Phone 01546 886260; e-mail monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

Argyll Bird Club Website (under development):

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/Acad/IBLS/DEEB/rwf/abc/>

The Eider



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

The club holds two one-day meetings each year, in spring and autumn. The venue of the spring meeting is rotated between different towns, including Dunoon, Oban and Lochgilphead. The autumn meeting/AGM is held in a convenient central location, usually near Lochgilphead or Inveraray. The club organises field trips for members. It publishes the annual *Argyll Bird Report*. Your annual subscription entitles you to one copy of this, four issues of *The Eider* and free admission to the two annual meetings. The membership categories and rates are:

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

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

The Editor (contact details on front page) welcomes articles for inclusion in *The Eider*. Most of each issue is devoted to articles about some aspect of ornithology, wildlife conservation or general ecology in Argyll, but some articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events and press releases are also published. If possible, these should be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word2000, or previous versions of Word. However, this should not deter potential contributors, as hand written scripts are also acceptable. If in doubt about whether an article is suitable, please contact the Editor for advice.

Artists are encouraged to submit illustrations of birds and habitats for inclusion in *The Eider*. Some digital images, including colour photographs (jpeg files preferred) are also suitable for publication.

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