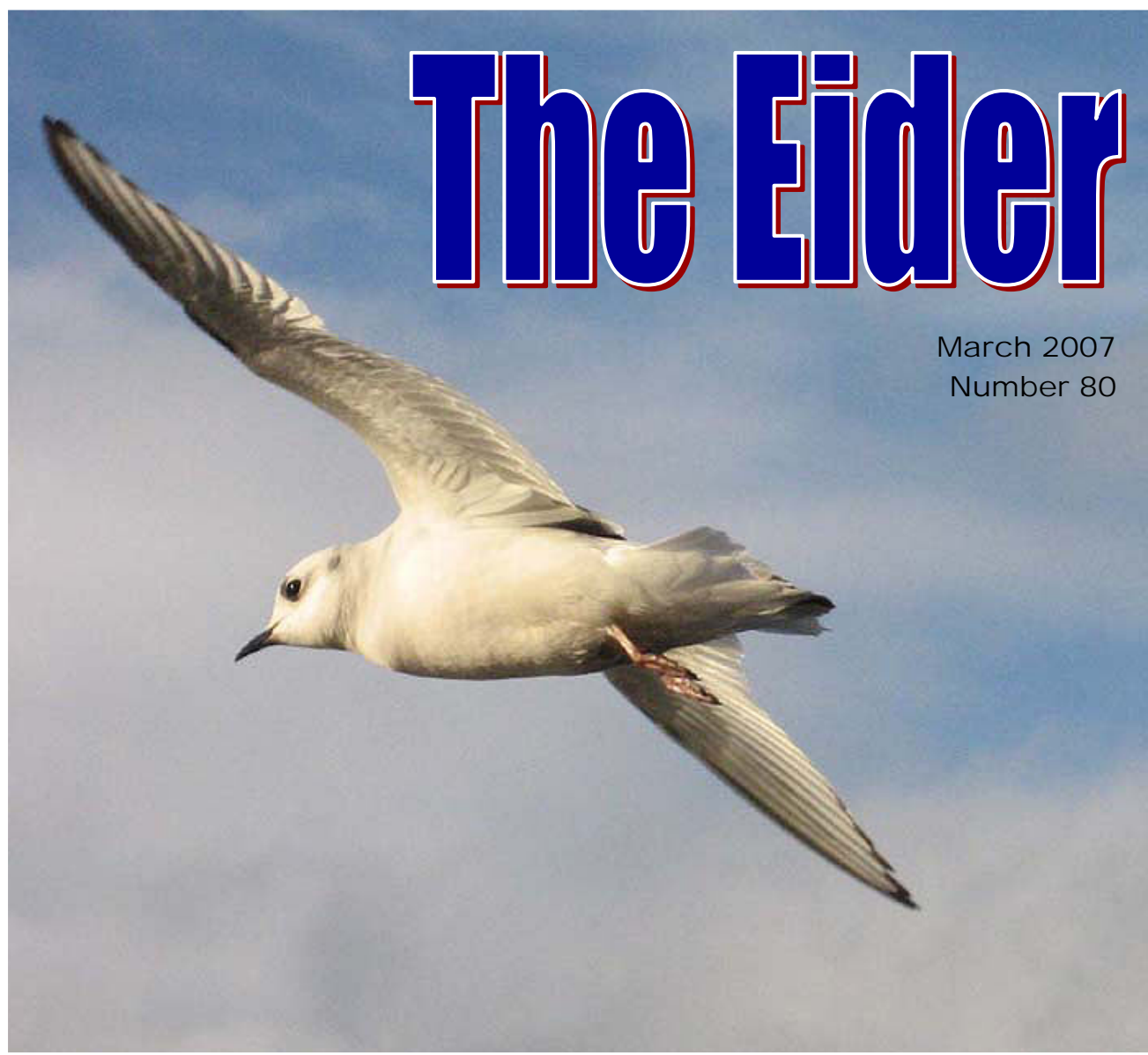


# The Eider

March 2007  
Number 80



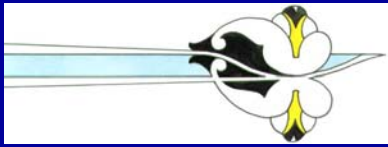
## Loch Caolisport Ross's Gull

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory—2006  
A fantastic autumn on Tiree  
Recent reports: November-January

Ross's Gull (Jim Dickson)

**Editor**

Steve Petty: Craigielea, Kames,  
Tighnabruaich, Argyll PA21 2AE  
Phone: 01700 811235  
E-mail: [stevepetty@btinternet.com](mailto:stevepetty@btinternet.com)



Inside this issue

Editorial	2
Field trips	2-3
Spring meeting programme	3
Machrihanish report 2006	4-6
Caption competition	6
Ross's Gull—Loch Caolisport	7
Missing Choughs	8
Longevity in seabirds	8
Recent Reports	9-13
Colour-ringed Med Gull on	13
Autumn 2006 on Tiree	14
Wetlands Bird Survey	15
Seal killing an Eider	15
Raven survey in Kintyre	16-17
Recent publications	17-19
Red Kite persecution	19

Many thanks

To the following for their contributions to this issue: John Bowler, Clive Craik, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Jim Duncan, Bob Furness, John Halliday, Ian Hopkins, David Jardine, Philip Kirkham, Eddie Maguire, Linda Petty (proof reading), Morag Rea, Margaret Staley, Blair Urquhart and David Wood.

**Birds of Argyll**

In the last issue of the *Eider*, it was mentioned that an order form would be included with this issue for the *Birds of Argyll*. Due to a slight delay, this will now be included with the June issue.

**Raffle Prizes**

If anyone would like to donate a raffle prize, can you please bring it along to the Spring Meeting, and see Nigel Scriven on the day. Thank you!

ABC indoor meetings in 2007

Spring Meeting

**Saturday 10th March at the Royal Marine Hotel, Hunter Quay, Dunoon. The programme is on page 3**

Autumn Meeting

**Saturday 10th November at the Cainbaan Hotel, near Lochgiphead**

**We hope to have the programme in the June *Eider***

Editorial

Articles in this issue highlight what a fantastic place Argyll is for watching birds, as if you didn't already know! They also help to emphasise the incredible mobility of birds. For example, it was an unbelievable autumn for scarce migrants on Tiree, as shown by John Bowler's article (page 15), with many vagrants appearing from North America and eastern Europe. Eddie Maguire's piece (pages 4-6) demonstrates what a range of species can be found by consistently watching a suitable coastal location, such as at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in Kintyre. In addition, Paul Daw's regular 'recent reports' round up always contains interesting records of both common and scarce species (pages 9-13). To top it all, a first-winter Ross's Gull was found by Jim Dickson in Loch Caolisport in December (page 7). This dainty gull charmed many happy birders with fantastic close-up views over many weeks. It breeds in such evocative areas as north-eastern Siberia and there are small, fragile populations in the Canadian arctic and Greenland. Now we have spring to look forward to, and the return of migrants from far distant lands. During the middle weekend in February my wife and I spent a long weekend with friends in Malaga, southern Spain. Here we saw migration in progress. Very large flocks of Lesser Black-backed Gulls headed north each morning, on their return journey to breeding areas in Britain and elsewhere in northern Europe, and many Swallows were moving in the same direction, while the local House Martins had just arrived and were already visiting last years nests. What a wonderful time of the year we have in front of us!

Field trips—2007 and beyond

**Bute - Saturday 17 March 2007**

For details, please see the December *Eider* (page 17).

Contact: Ian Hopkins

Tel: 01700 504042

Mobile: 07702 123170

E-mail:

[ian@hopkins0079.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:ian@hopkins0079.freereserve.co.uk)

**Sound of Gigha – Saturday 14 April 2007**

For details, please see the December *Eider* (page 17).

Contact: Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: [monedula@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

**Taynish National Nature Reserve – Saturday 12 May 2007**

Leader: John Halliday. Meet in the car park at the south end of Tayvallich village (map ref NR739868) at 10.00hrs. We will try to share cars down to the Taynish car park - the track is a bit rough and there are only a few passing places. Then folk have some options. John will lead a walk around the full four mile path loop. There are also shorter walks to the hilltop (126m, steep in places, but great views) or down to the coast (short and very easy going). More information is available about Taynish

at:

<http://www.snh.org.uk/nnr-scotland/reserve.asp?NNRid=41>

This is a fantastic site and John is looking forward to talking about reserve management as well as the birding of course! There is no need to contact John ahead of the trip. If the weather is dreadful, there are some big sheds at Taynish for shelter where we could have a discussion about the reserve. People should bring water-proofs and sensible footwear (short lengths of the path are a bit muddy). For lunch, people can either bring their own packed lunch, or we could go to the Tayvallich Inn, which does great food.

Directions from Lochgilhead: A816 North to Cairnbaan two miles, cross the canal bridge, follow the canal along the B841 to Bellanoch three miles, fork left at Bellanoch on B8025 signposted Tayvallich, keep on that road till you reach Tayvallich c.six miles.

**Mull, weekend of 15-17 June 2007**

For details, please see the December *Eider* (page 17).

**This trip has been cancelled due to a lack of interest.**

**Ailsa Craig – Sunday 24 June 2007**

This trip will depart from Girvan Harbour at 10.00hrs and return there for 1600hrs, and will include a boat trip around the island and three hours on-shore to explore. The maximum number of people the boat can take is 12, at a cost of £20 per person. We should have close views of Gannets on the nest, as well as views of Puffins, Kittiwakes, Shags, gull colonies, Common Guillemots, Razorbills, Black Guillemots, Fulmars, and possibly Slow Worms, and be able to see the lighthouse and partly cut curling stones. Anyone wishing to book a



place on this trip should send a cheque made payable to Argyll Bird Club to Bob Furness (see below) together with a contact phone number. The first 12 names with cheques will be allocated places.

Google gives Tarbet (Loch Lomond) to Girvan as 86 miles, 2.5 hours drive, and of course longer from much of Argyll, so getting to Girvan for 10.00hrs will mean a fairly early start, but on a summer Sunday morning that should be fairly easy driving.

Contact: Bob Furness

Tel: 01301 702603

E-mail: [r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk)

Address: The Cnoc, Tarbet, Loch Lomond, G83 7DG

**Spain - spring 2008**

For details, please see the December *Eider* (page 17-20).

Contact: Steve Petty before the spring meeting on 10 March, where a decision will be made about which part of Spain to visit.

E-mail: [stevepetty@btinternet.com](mailto:stevepetty@btinternet.com)

Tel: 01700 811235

Programme for the ABC's Spring Meeting  
Saturday 10th March 2007  
Royal Marine Hotel, Hunter's Quay, Dunoon

Time	Session
0930	Doors open, coffee and tea
0950-1000	Welcome and introduction— <i>Nigel Scriven</i> (Chairman)
1000-1015	Recent bird sightings— <i>Paul Daw</i> (Argyll Bird Recorder)
1015-1100	Puffins' progress— <i>Bernie Zonfrillo</i>
1100-1120	Coffee/tea
1120-1210	Bean Geese in Scotland— <i>John Simpson</i>
1210-1255	White Wagtails: an update— <i>Iain Livingston</i>
1255-1400	Lunch (available in the hotel)
1400-1430	Birds of Scotland 3: an update— <i>Ron Forrester</i>
1430-1515	Birding in Lesbos— <i>Jimmy Maxwell</i>
1515-1545	Coffee/tea and raffle
1545-1600	Biodiversity in Glasgow project— <i>Jacqui Kaye</i>
1600-1645	The Scottish Outliers: beyond the Hebrides— <i>Brian Little</i>

*The Seabird Observatory was manned daily from May to November. Throughout the season, 2,700 visitors enjoyed grand views of our local **Grey** and **Common Seals**, breeding shorebirds, and of course, loads of fly-by seabirds (not to mention our wonderful scenery). Frequent digital wildlife slide shows proved very popular with visitors and a regular **Otter** and the occasional pod of **Bottlenose Dolphins** were a real treat for many.*

The Trust Committee recently reviewed the seasonal operation and creative functions of the Seabird Observatory and identified a number of potential improvements, including extending the observatory, as soon as finances permit. Our main objectives are to: (i) collect and archive records of seabirds and other species at Machrihanish (ii) publish annual/biannual reports (iii) encourage bird-watchers, local folk, tourists and schools to visit and become involved at the observatory (iv), continue, through digiscoping, our wildlife photography project by accumulating images of local/migratory birds and other wildlife.

On 6<sup>th</sup> October, the Seabird Observatory featured on Radio Scotland's 'Out and About' programme hosted by Mark Steven. Mark was particularly enthralled with the whole concept of digiscoping and really enthusiastic when viewing and talking about the local wildlife. We also enlightened listeners on how certain weather conditions can effect the movements of seabirds and why the topography of the area is often a very important factor in bringing many species really close to this promontory.

Details of spring sightings (to 21 May) appeared in the June 2006 issue of the *Eider*. These notes cover the period late spring/summer through to early winter and include highlights at the Observatory, along with significant records at The Laggan and a few other locations in south Kintyre.

### Late spring/summer

Single adult **Pomarine Skuas** were heading S on 21<sup>st</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May and after a great late spring passage of **Arctic Skuas**, a dark-phase adult stayed off-passage during 24<sup>th</sup> May-1<sup>st</sup> June (see photo in September 2006 *Eider*, page 7).

During June, there were 35 **Sanderling** on 9<sup>th</sup>, a single **Ruddy Turnstone** (see photo opposite) throughout the month, six **Common Crossbill** at Lossit Estate on 12<sup>th</sup> and a **Corn Crane** calling at Brunerican, Southend on 15<sup>th</sup>. The first **Storm Petrel** and an immature **Great Northern Diver** were offshore on 20<sup>th</sup>, and on 24<sup>th</sup>, eight **Puffins** flew S/6hrs among 1,300 auk *sp.*

Some scarce/unexpected species and other events were a feature of June. A **Yellow Wagtail** was calling as it flew north on 4<sup>th</sup> and a female **Goldeneye** was off-passage during 7-8<sup>th</sup>. A surprising movement of **Leach's Petrel** occurred on 22<sup>nd</sup> in a WNW force 5-6 wind with poor visibility and light rain, not the exact catalyst for the appearance of this species at Machrihanish, when a total of 11 flew south between 0830 and 0940hrs. Suddenly, **Storm Petrels** took over the scene and in 6hrs from around 1000hrs, 200 birds had passed to the south. Many loose groups of 3-8 birds were moving slowly, feeding as they went. Other species overtaking the petrels during this rousing 6hrs seawatch included five **Red-throated Divers**, 80 **Fulmars**, 800 **Manx Shearwaters** and a drake **Tufted duck**. The only other interesting seabird movement of the month came on 30<sup>th</sup>, when 1,200 **Manx Shearwaters** and 1,700 **Black-legged Kittiwakes** flew S/7hrs.

Breeding success for both **Common Eiders** and **Common Shelducks** was exceptional, with record numbers of ducklings. A count between the Observatory and the village (1km) on 16 June produced 57 and 37 respectively. Six pairs of **Shelducks** bred this year, many more than usual, and one pair produced a brood of 12! The first **Eider** duckling appeared on 23 May and the latest was a single, which had just hatched on 1<sup>st</sup> July.

Ruddy Turnstone (Eddie Maguire)



Early July was outstanding for seabirds foraging around the point and in Machrihanish Bay (and well to the north), but not as spectacular as the unprecedented numbers encountered during summer 2005. The best day this year was on 2<sup>nd</sup> July when during 7hrs of observation the following were estimated flying south, well offshore and out of the bay—5,500+ auks *sp.*, 1,800 **Manx Shearwaters**, 600+ **Northern Gannets** (see photo below) and 2,500 **Black-legged Kittiwakes**. Regular identification samples from the auk 'trains' revealed that, unlike 2005, the vast majority (77%) were **Razorbill**. **Puffin** peaked on 5<sup>th</sup> with 30 flying S/6hrs as did **Storm Petrels** when 22 flew south. In addition, a first-summer **Little Gull** (the second this year) was a good find on 1<sup>st</sup>, dip-feeding below **Kittiwakes**.

After a long absence as a breeding species on Kintyre, **Little Terns** returned in spectacular fashion. At the historical site, Ruhnahorine Point, Blair Urqhart (SNH: Kintyre Officer) and I (under license) monitored activity at the colony for several hours on 13<sup>th</sup> July. We counted a minimum 28 adults, and two fledged and seven unfledged chicks. This eventful visit brought back memories from 32 years ago, when I camped out at 'Point Sands' every weekend throughout the breeding season. As honorary warden for SWT, I was enthusiastic about controlling increasing human disturbance to not only **Little Terns**, but also a sizeable **Arctic Tern** colony.

Northern Gannet (Eddie Maguire)



## Summer/autumn

During July, a second-summer type **Arctic Tern** appeared on 3<sup>rd</sup>, then a third-summer type **Pomarine Skua** went south on 12<sup>th</sup>, followed by the first **Arctic Skua** of the autumn period on 21<sup>st</sup>. The first **Red Knot** (see photo opposite) also appeared on 21<sup>st</sup> along with **Sanderling** (18) and **Common Redshank** (40). A single **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Common Greenshank** (peak 3 on 26<sup>th</sup>) and 140 **Dunlins** were off-passage on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Two, now predictable events in July, showed just how consistent some species are at arriving in this area. The first juvenile **Sandwich Terns** (3) were offshore on 19<sup>th</sup> (usually always arrive just before 20<sup>th</sup>) and the only two **Little Terns** of the autumn (an adult and a juvenile) were in Machrihanish Bay on 29<sup>th</sup> (usually always appear as fly-by's heading south during the last 10 days of July).

With persistent E/SE winds, the autumn was generally abysmal for seabird movements. Very few **Manx Shearwaters**, skuas and petrels were seen. Only 22 **Arctic Skuas** were logged flying south on 12 day during 21<sup>st</sup> July (1)–28<sup>th</sup> Sept (2), with a peak of only six on 1<sup>st</sup> Aug. **Great Skuas** too were well down on previous years, with only 11 birds going south on 10 dates during 1<sup>st</sup> Aug (2)–7<sup>th</sup> Oct (1).

Serious seawatching interest was rekindled in August when a very probable **Macaronesian Shearwater** flew south on 5<sup>th</sup>, but it was too distant to obtain a reliable description. **Arctic Tern** numbers were very low, with a peak of only nine on 12<sup>th</sup> (including two juveniles and another second-summer type), and on 29<sup>th</sup> only a single **Common Tern** juvenile put in an appearance. The second **Yellow Wagtail** of the year flew north on 7<sup>th</sup>. **Whimbrels** were scarce, with only one on 7<sup>th</sup>, eight on 12<sup>th</sup> and two on 23<sup>rd</sup>, and **Bar-tailed Godwits** peaked at only five on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Noisy groups of **Common Swifts** were a daily feature over Campbelltown during summer with an impressive single flock of 52 spiralling high over the town centre on 6<sup>th</sup> August. The last one was seen at dawn on 12<sup>th</sup>.

The first juvenile **Kittiwake** on 12<sup>th</sup> August was around ten days later than normal. Several **Merlins** (see photo opposite), **Sparrowhawks**, **Peregrines** and **Hen Harriers** were very active around the Observatory and at The Laggan from 20<sup>th</sup>. **Sandwich Terns** were regular all summer and later there was a flock of 27 (including eight juveniles) on 23<sup>rd</sup>. A **Red-necked Phalarope** foraging well offshore on 29<sup>th</sup> was confidently identified by its very distinctive in-flight (zig-zag) feeding behaviour, but, was just too far away for a detailed plumage description to be taken.

September was quite eventful too. On 1<sup>st</sup>, a **Ruff** and a **Grey Phalarope** flew south and a **Great Crested Grebe** was found foraging in the bay. **White Wagtails** were thin on the ground with a maximum of only six on 6<sup>th</sup>. A **Northern Pintail** flew south on 9<sup>th</sup>, a juvenile **Hobby** gave excellent views around Machrihanish village on three dates during 13–18<sup>th</sup>, then on 11<sup>th</sup> a colour-ringed **Twite** ringed at Bank's Marsh, the Ribble in spring 2005 was photographed just outside the Observatory. Eight highly vocal **Siskins** flew high to the south on 12<sup>th</sup> and a big charm of 45 **Goldfinches** was a pleasing sight around the village on 15<sup>th</sup>.

The first **Brent Goose** flew south on 18<sup>th</sup> September in the near company of seven **Common Scoters**. Later the same day, a **Little Stint** was found at The Battery pool by the first tee on the golf course, three passed south at the Observatory on 21<sup>st</sup>, seven were in the bay on 28<sup>th</sup> with the last two on 2<sup>nd</sup> October (see photos on ABC website). A total of 19 **Greater Scaup** flew south on 19<sup>th</sup> and next day, 16 **Storm Petrels** flew S/2hrs in the afternoon and 250 **Ringed Plovers** (moult flock) and 100 **Sanderlings** were loafing in the bay.

On 24<sup>th</sup> September, Hugh Nicol had a fortunate encounter with a **Eurasian Dotterel** on Remuil Hill (304m asl) 3km south of Cnoc Moy. The first in-flight drake **Eider** noted after the moult period were singles on 27<sup>th</sup> August followed by one on 1<sup>st</sup> September. At the Laggan, the first **White-fronted Geese** (23) arrived back on



Red Knot (Eddie Maguire)

30<sup>th</sup> September.

Apart from mainly S/SE winds and rain, October was fairly interesting too. On 1<sup>st</sup>, Kenny Maben (postman) reported a gathering of 18 **Common Buzzards** in one field near Caliburn Quarry (Loch Lussa road). On the shore, our third **Little Gull** record of the year came on 1<sup>st</sup> when two first-winter birds were found at a gull roost by Machrihanish Water mouth. A juvenile **Arctic Tern** was also seen there. **Twites** peaked at only 80 on 1<sup>st</sup>, a **Long-tailed Duck** going south on 4<sup>th</sup> took a shortcut across the point and on 7<sup>th</sup> during a 5hr seawatch, 18 **Red-throated Divers**, seven **Gadwalls** and 33 **Greater Scaup** flew south.

The only **Grey Plover** of the year was one in the bay on 9<sup>th</sup> October, whilst the longest staying **Ruff** ever recorded here arrived at Westparkfergus, The Laggan, on 8<sup>th</sup> and stayed for at least 50 days, being last seen on 28<sup>th</sup> November and always in the company of **Lapwings**. The first **Purple Sandpipers** (3) appeared on 14<sup>th</sup>, a **Blackcap** was skulking in a decaying nettle bed by the Observatory on 16<sup>th</sup> and the last **Northern Wheatear** of the year was seen at Westparkfergus on 18<sup>th</sup>.

The first returning adult **Great Northern Diver** was in the bay on 18<sup>th</sup> October with nine **Northern Pintails** and 64 **Greater Scaup**. Beside Machrihanish Water mouth, a juvenile **Great Cormorant** sporting a tall green colour-ring with white letters CBB was photographed. This bird, still present on 27<sup>th</sup>, had been ringed on Puffin Island, North Wales. On 19<sup>th</sup>, a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** showing characteristics of the darker backed subspecies *L. f. intermedius* was photographed at Machrihanish Bay. The latest sighting of a **Sandwich Tern** was a first-winter bird going south on 26<sup>th</sup>, on which date a drake **Northern Shoveler** arrived and stayed off-passage by the Observatory until 1<sup>st</sup> No-

Merlin (Eddie Maguire)



## The Eider

ember. Around 2000 **Herring Gulls** and 550 **Common Gulls** were foraging in The Laggan throughout the month.

**Pink-footed Geese** occur at The Laggan, mostly in small numbers, especially during the late autumn period, and occasionally one or two stay for the winter. However, it was to prove a remarkable autumn/early winter for this species. Sixty arrived in off the sea on 19<sup>th</sup> and surprisingly, had increased to 160 the following day. Numbers then remained stable until 1<sup>st</sup> November when 170 were present, although there was a further increase to 182 by 3<sup>rd</sup> before an exceptional flock of 252 were meticulously counted on 16<sup>th</sup>. Persistent east winds obviously forced these birds west of the main migration route from Iceland. When I left Kintyre for the West Midlands at the end of November, the 'pinks' looked well settled in for the winter. The largest pack of **Whooper Swan** reported was 60 flying south over Stewarton on 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

### Early winter

During November, the weather pattern established earlier dominated. Very late **Common Sandpipers** were surprise finds on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> (our latest ever) and on 6<sup>th</sup> a total of 47 **Purple Sandpiper** flew south with a further 34 going south on 11<sup>th</sup>. Also on this date, a **Leach's Petrel** and a **Grey Phalarope** were battling south close to the shore. White-winged gulls were really scarce this year, so a first-winter **Iceland Gull** by the Observatory during 13–14<sup>th</sup> was a very welcome sight. A **Black-throated Diver** flew south on 13<sup>th</sup> then another first-winter **Little Gull** was found on 21<sup>st</sup> travelling south among **Kittiwake** (as usual).

There was still plenty of action going on at The Laggan. **Sky Larks** were plentiful, with an estimated 900 in a potato field at Westparkfergus on 3<sup>rd</sup> November. Several times we watched a **Merlin** going nearly vertical after a lark. One chase, at great height, was relentless and eventually the raptor and prey appeared as a single speck against a blue sky; breathtaking stuff!

A routine foray through these farmlands on 11<sup>th</sup> November revealed 1,260 **White-fronted Geese**, 160 **Greylags**, three 'real' **Barnacles** and 66 'hybrid blacks' (**Canada x Barnacle Geese**). Two **Brent Geese** were also present. **Whooper Swan** numbers peaked at only 19 this month and two adults sporting yellow colour-rings were photographed. 73P arrived at Westparkfergus about 10<sup>th</sup> November and was still present on 28<sup>th</sup>, and B67 found on 15<sup>th</sup> was last seen on 22<sup>nd</sup> (photo below) (ringing details pending for both). In addition, on 13<sup>th</sup>, a dull orange neck-collar (3PX) on a **White-front** was eventually read.

There were some notable wader counts too. **Golden Plover** numbers increased dramatically throughout the month, and by 27<sup>th</sup> November an amazing flock of 1,200+ were present along with 1,000+ **Lapwing**. An inland **Red Knot** (rare here in winter) was also seen with 12 **Dunlin** (photo opposite). There was an influx/passage of **Stonechat** being present here and by the Observatory all month.



Given the prevailing weather conditions this autumn, there were no records of **Sooty** and **Balearic Shearwaters** or **Sabine's Gull** and, it was yet another blank year for **Mediterranean Gull** (maybe next season!).

John McGlynn (Director at the Observatory) visited regularly during December and reported a first-winter **Little Gull** on 5<sup>th</sup>; this brings the year total to a pleasing five records involving six birds (an adult in spring, a first-summer in July and four first-winter birds later). John also logged a **Leach's Petrel** on 12<sup>th</sup> December.

### Eddie Maguire, Warden

Seabird Observatory Tel: 07919 660 292 or 07833 133 947

E-mail: [machrihanishbirds@btinternet.com](mailto:machrihanishbirds@btinternet.com)



### Caption competition

There were three caption suggestions for Philip Kirkham's photograph (below) of Eiders in the December *Eider*. These were put to the vote at the last committee meeting. The winner was Michael Thomas, with the caption under the photo.

Well done Michael - you've won a bottle of wine!

Any suitable 'caption' photos for future issue of the *Eider* would be most welcome.

### Editor



Oops!! Too late—she's pregnant already!!!!

## The Loch Caolisport Ross's Gull

*Most birders have a notion of finding their own dream bird, but the reasons for seeing such a species will differ. It could be a bird we have been drawn to in field guides, and for some reason have always wondered what it would look like in the flesh. For others, it is the rare opportunity to see a far travelled vagrant.*

Having been lucky enough to find many good species over the last 37 years, for me it is a combination of several factors – but importantly being able to recall such events quite vividly and being able to share the thrill of the sighting with other folks. One highlight that stands out was identifying Britain's first and, so far, only Snowy Egret from North America, on Seil Island in 2001. The bird was first found by locals and, although initially misidentified, it led to the biggest 'twitch' ever seen in Argyll, with over 2,000 people coming to see it.

To find my own Ross's Gull would fall into this dream bird category; a species along with Ivory Gull, which are often referred to as the Holy Grail of birding finds in Britain. This probably has something to do with their once extreme rarity, beauty and often mythical appearance. Having seen an Ivory Gull many years ago, soon after I made a trip to the north of Scotland to see a Ross's. However that was unsuccessful, and with such trips now a thing of my youthful past, my only hope of seeing one was to find one locally!

A severe storm hit the west of Britain on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2006, with torrential rain, lightning and violent winds. However, this was not enough to deter myself and another 'all weather' birder, Bill Allan, from venturing north from Oban along Loch Etive and finding a nice Mediterranean Gull, a new species for North Argyll. Later that afternoon as we headed back home I found a Leach's Petrel at the head of Loch Melfort that was bravely fighting its way against the strong wind, and at times being blown across the road. This was a wonderful sight, but I had concerns for its ability to survive the onslaught!

I had a feeling that this storm had possibly whipped up and displaced other species. So, on the 14<sup>th</sup> December I set off to Inverneil in the hope of seeing more Mediterranean Gulls – a species that is becoming much more frequent in Argyll, and as Eddie McGuire has said, 'it probably will not be long before they breed here, having done so recently in Northern Ireland'. With no 'Meds' around, I headed towards Loch Caolisport, having seen them there in the past.

Past Ormsary, at Eilean Traighe, I was barely out of the car when about 200m away I noticed a small gull which was obviously not a



Ross's Gull at Loch Caolisport (Jim Dickson)

A few satisfied customers! (Jim Dickson)



Black-headed! Thinking it was possibly a first-winter Little Gull; I quickly set up the scope, and as is often the case struggled to relocate it. What I did see, were frustrating glimpses as it briefly flew above the horizon of a gully, which mostly concealed it. After a couple of quick views, I was amazed to see that although obviously in first-winter plumage, it did not have the dark-capped appearance of Little Gull. From this point I knew I was looking at a species I have always wanted to see!

The next step was to get closer for a better look and to 'collect evidence' in the form of photographs. With the wind still very strong, poor light and rain, a still distant photograph was out of the question. There was no way of taking a flight shot. I knew that a 'white blur' would not go down well with the rarities committee! The only solution was to use my camcorder and try to get closer.

The next two hours were just pure magic. My first Ross's Gull was not in the least bit shy, and indeed appeared to be putting on quite a performance, flying back and forward within a few feet of me. At one point it flew straight at me, as if very curious and with a tern-like call. It was my first Ross's.....was I its first human! The scene was complete – a great species with lots of character in beautiful surroundings, and importantly, film in the bag. It was time to leave it and put 'word out' to Paul Daw and Angus Murray at Birdline Scotland.

Over the next month of the bird's stay I revisited the site about eight times and in the process met many of the 200 or so bird-watchers who came from far and wide to see it – a good contingent from the Argyll Bird Club, as well as keen twitchers from Germany, Spain and Switzerland! The bird performed excellently over this period and was well photographed by many.

In Argyll, 2006 will go down as a remarkable year for Ross's Gull, with another two earlier records. These were brief sightings of an adult bird from Tiree in August and the same or another adult from Islay in October! A sighting from Mull in October 2004 was unfortunately found 'not-proven' by the British Rarities Committee, although it did put on a good show for the three finders. The only other Argyll record was a bird seen from Islay in 1976.

What I have learnt over the years from rare bird sightings, is that no matter how happy you are with your discovery at the time, the challenge is convincing others, who did not have the good fortune to be there, of its identification! It is therefore crucial to take good field notes at the time, to add to a full description written up soon afterwards, and take photographs or video footage to make the record complete. Now, be prepared to find your own dream species!

**Jim Dickson**

Missing Choughs

Have you seen any colour-ringed Choughs? As part of a long-running study on Colonsay, over 52 birds have been colour-ringed since spring 2004 (photo opposite). Since the autumn of the year in which they were ringed, only five have subsequently been seen on Colonsay or Oronsay. As Choughs are monitored regularly on Islay, they are unlikely to be there. While all these young birds may have died, there are areas on Jura, and even on Mull, where Chough have been seen in the past. Could it be some of our colour-ringed birds have moved there?

If you see Choughs away from Islay or Colonsay, can you please check them for colour-rings, and let either Mike Peacock or me know the colour ring combination and the location. Thank you.

**David Jardine, 49 Bellfield Road, North Kessock, IV1 3XX**

E-mail: [dcjardine@freeuk.com](mailto:dcjardine@freeuk.com)



Longevity in seabirds



Clive Craik’s long-term studies of seabirds on the Argyll Islands has involved monitoring numbers and breeding performance, and also ringing very many chicks.

As with all such studies, it is only after many years of dedicated work that ringing recoveries start to give an indication of the potential age of a few of the oldest individuals. The table below provides fascinating information on some recent recoveries of six seabird species, with ages ranging from 16-25 years.

The photograph opposite shows the 20-year old Common Gull in the table with a fishing hook lodged in its throat. Unfortunately, discarded fishing line and hooks are too often the cause of death in seabirds.

Species	Date ringed	Date recovered	Age when recovered
Herring Gull	Ringed as chick on Eilean Dubh (Lynn of Lorn) 24 June 1986	Killed by car on Ballachulish Bridge on 25 August 2004	18 years
Great Black-backed Gull	Ringed as chick on Eilean Gainimh, Lismore, 10 June 1987	Found dead at South Shian, Loch Creran, 31 July 2003	16 years
Common Gull	Ringed as chick at Kilmaronag, Loch Etive, 16 June 1986	Found killed and eaten by Peregrine at same site 20 May 2003	17 years
Common Gull	Ringed as chick at Kilmaronag, Loch Etive, 26 June 1985	Found dead there, entangled in fishing line with hook down throat, 10 July 2005	20 years
Common Tern	Ringed as breeding adult on Reisa mhic Phaidean, Sound of Jura, 14 July 1990	Found killed and eaten by otter on E nan Gabhar, Loch Teacuis, 23 June 2006	At least three years old when ringed, so 19+ years old at its death.
Arctic Tern	Ringed as chick on Abbot Isles, Loch Etive, 14 July 1982	Found dead intact on Eilean Coltair, Loch Melfort, 7 August 2006	24 years
Common Guillemot	Ringed as chick on Treshnish Isles, 4 July 1980	Found dead Ardmucknish Bay, near Oban, 18 July 2005	25 years



## Recent bird reports from Paul Daw: November 2006—January 2007

*This report is a selection from the sightings already published on the club's website. Records included are not necessarily of 'rarities', but may also be of birds in unusual places or behaving in untypical ways. I have also included records from areas that are not normally well covered. In particular I would welcome more reports from Cowal, Kintyre and North Argyll. You can send them in by e-mail, post or telephone.*

Despite the generally wet and windy weather this winter it has proved to be quite an exiting time for scarce birds in Argyll, especially for gull watchers! There were also signs of a 'wreck' of **Leach's Petrels**, and unusual numbers of **Common Kingfishers** were reported.

**Spring migrants.** By the time you are reading this, it will only be a couple of weeks until the first summer visitors arrive—our earliest recent **Northern Wheatear** was on 9th March. Please try to make of note of the first dates on which you see (or in the case of Cuckoos, hear) each species and let me have them, so that I can produce a summary for the June *Eider*. Many thanks.

**Observers full names appear in brackets except for:** SW = Simon Wellock, JB = John Bowler, TC = Tom Callan, PD = Paul Daw, JD = Jim Dickson, JH = John Halliday, BA = Bill Allan

### Wildfowl (and Gamebirds)

On 21st Nov, 29 **Pink-footed Geese** were counted around West Tiree and 204 **Whooper Swans** were found on the whole of Tiree (JB). A flock of 18 **Whooper Swans** (all adults) flew SW over Dunollie Castle (nr Oban) at 10.30hrs on 22nd Nov. They flew towards Mull at first, but then headed south in the direction of Islay (Stuart Gibson). A total of 585 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were on The Laggan, Machrihanish on 5th Jan, mostly around the Strath. In the same general area were 72 **Greylag Geese**, 53 **Barnacle Geese** and a single **Whooper Swan**. One hundred and forty three **Eurasian Wigeon** were in a flooded field near Chiscan Farm near Campbeltown (Neil Brown). A total of 540 **Barnacle Geese** were counted at the Isle of Danna (Loch Sween) on 9th Jan and at least 220 **Goldeneyes** were at the fish farm at Ormsary with a further 18 at Loch Craiglin (Loch Sween) (JD/BA). A high total count of 3,386 **Barnacle Geese** was made on Tiree on 17th Jan together with 830 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** (JB). A flock of 300 **Greylag Geese** were at Killiechronan (Mull) on the morning of 6th Nov (Alan Spellman). A white-morph **Snow Goose** (photo opposite) with **Greylag** and **Canada Geese** at Head of Loch Craignish near the Ardfern turn-off on 19th Jan was seen subsequently both there and on Seil Island (BA).

A drake **American Wigeon** was new in at Loch Bhasapol on 18th Jan, it was found by John Bowler whilst reading Whooper rings at lunch-time. A drake **Green-winged Teal** had been seen at Loch Gruinart in the couple of days prior to this (Andy Schofield). A male **Pintail** in flooded fields near top of Loch Nell (NE end) nr

### Stop Press

An immature drake **American Wigeon** was found on 6th Feb in Kildalloig Bay, Kintyre, just outside the mouth of Campbeltown Loch (south bank). Amazingly, it was at about the same place where Eddie Maguire found the second American Wigeon for Argyll in the early 90's. A crane species (almost certainly **Common Crane**) was seen flying south near Bridgend (near Lochgilphead), Mid-Argyll on the morning of 23rd February. It was seen from a moving car, so identity could not be more precise (Jim Dickson). Jim is hoping to find it again.

### Recent Report Updates

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

<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 7-10 days

Torinturk Farm (nr Oban) on 3rd Dec was an unusual visitor. It was accompanied by 55 **Wigeon**, four **Tufted Ducks**, a **Pochard** and a single **Goosander** (JD).

Huge floods on The Reef, Tiree held a bumper 425 **Teal** and six **Pintail** on 5th Dec (JB). A total of 89 **Tufted Ducks** and a single **Pochard** were found at Loch a' Phuill on 3rd Nov (JB). Seven **Pochards** (including six males) at Loch nan Druimnean (nr Kilmelford) was a good number for the mainland and a 'Scaup faced' female **Tufted Duck** was also present there (BA). By 26th Nov there were eight **Pochards** at Loch nan Druimnean (five male/three female) (JD). A drake **Ring-necked Duck** was new in at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on the afternoon of 6th Dec. It spent much of its time asleep and had disappeared by the following day (JB). Again on Tiree, two drake **Ring-necked Ducks** were together (mostly asleep) at Loch Riaghain on 5th Jan, as well as 27 **Shovelers** and eight **Pintails** (JB). A drake **Ring-necked Duck** on Loch Ballyhaugh, Coll was first seen on the afternoon of 19th Jan, showing well with 21 **Tufted Ducks**. It was seen for several days afterwards (SW). A total of 19 **Tufted Ducks** at Dubh Loch nr Inveraray on 26th Jan was a good count for this location (JD).

A **Lesser Scaup** first seen at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree in poor conditions on 12th Nov showed well again at lunch-time on 13th. It appeared to be a first-winter male and finally revealed its upperwing pattern (bright white bar across secondaries contrasting with darker grey bases to primaries), so John Bowler was confident of its identification. Also present were five **Pochards**, three **Gadwall** and c.30 **Common Goldeneyes**. One **Goldeneye** showed an almost entirely pale fleshy-pink bill, a feature that was very striking in the field (JB).

A count of **Eiders** from Toward Point (Cowal) to the head of the Holy Loch on 2nd Nov found 594 birds, of which c.65% were males, and 17 **Goldeneyes** were counted in the East Bay at Dunoon (TC). On 17th Dec, a total of 15 **Long-tailed Ducks** were in Hough Bay, Tiree plus a drake **Goldeneye** (rare on the sea here) (JB). Two male **Velvet Scoters** were found in choppy conditions in the Sound of Gigha on 6th Dec and c.800 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were with a hybrid flock of 67 **Canada/**



Snow Goose at Ardfern (Jim Dickson)

## The Eider

**Barnacle** geese at Drumlemble (near Machrihanish), Kintyre (JD/BA). At least 123 **Common Goldeneyes** were counted off Furnace (Loch Fyne) on the morning of 19th Nov (PD) and at least 200 **Goldeneyes** were at Ormsary fish farm, Knapdale on 19th Dec (TC). By 4th Jan **Goldeneyes** off Furnace, Loch Fyne numbered 154 (JD/BA). A fine drake Goosander in eclipse plumage at An Fhaodhail on the morning of 1st Nov was the first on Tiree since 1992! (JB). The WeBS counts at Tiree's four main freshwater lochs on 22nd Jan came up with some high island counts including, ten **Pintail**, 33 **Shovelers**, 132 **Tufted Ducks**, 45 **Goldeneyes**, three **Pochards**, 102 **Whooper Swans** and 30 **Mute Swans** (JB).

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

Eight **Great Northern Divers** and a single **Gannet** were in the Inverneill area (Loch Fyne) and four more **Great Northern Divers** were at Skipness on 9th Nov. Also, at least one **Slavonian Grebe** and six **Great Northern Divers** in choppy conditions in the Sound of Gigha (JD/BA).

A very unusual diver was photographed on the morning of 19th Nov at Inverneill showing a noticeably up-slanting bill but with all other features in keeping with **Great Northern Diver** (JD). There are records of hybrid White-billed/Great Northern Divers ..? However, on 19th Dec it was re-found in Tarbet Harbour and Jim Dickson was able to get a really good view of the bill. He became pretty confident that the bill was actually deformed, twisted upwards and also a bit to the side. One side of the bill is dark grey and the other side is light grey appearing more like White-billed from that side! (JD).

On 17th Dec the WeBS count in Loch Sween found a total of two **Red-throated Divers**, a **Great Northern Diver**, 19 **Little Grebes** and a **Slavonian Grebe** (PD/TC) and on Loch Scridain, Mull there were three juv **Black-throated Divers**, four **Great Northern Divers**, three **Slavonian Grebes** and two **Little Grebes** (per Alan Spellman). A **Slavonian Grebe** was at Loch Bhasapol on 17th Nov—they are less than annual on Tiree (JB). A single **Slavonian Grebe** seen quite close in at Killail, Otter Ferry on 25th Nov was also unusual, but even more exciting was a somewhat larger grebe further out with a longer and more dagger like bill than the Slavonian and with a yellow base. It was seen again on 27th Nov and 8th Dec and confirmed as a **Red-necked Grebe** (TC). A group of nine **Little Grebes** were seen swimming in 'line astern' at Linne Mhuirich during Loch Sween WeBS count on 29th Jan (PD) and six **Little Grebes** were counted on Campbeltown Loch on 30th Jan (Neil Brown).

A **Leach's Petrel** was seen at close quarters from the Tarbert-Loch Fyne ferry on 4th Dec at 12.10hrs. This is in keeping with the many seen throughout Britain during the previous couple of days (Stuart Craig per Jim and Val Wilson). Another **Leach's Petrel** was picked up in a car park in Oban on the same day. The finder, Rob Blackwell, managed to get some food into it but it was dead the following morning (per JD). A third **Leach's Petrel** was seen close inshore at Loch Melfort, Kilmelford on a wet and windy morning on 12th Dec (JD). The unusual sight of a **Fulmar** on the beach and then swimming about near the shoreline in Oban Bay on the morning of 10th Jan was reported by two separate observers (Laurence Langan/Alex Nicol). Perhaps it was driven in by the recent gales?

A count of 17 **Grey Herons** in Loch Gilp on 4th Nov was the most Jim Dickson had seen there. Yet another indication of high numbers around during autumn—presumably following a good breeding season? A **Grey Heron** with a broken leg was visiting a garden at Muasdale, Kintyre in early January and feeding on frogs from the garden pond. It could fly, taking off without too much difficulty, but disappeared after a few days and may not have survived (Janette Fiander).

### Raptors, rails etc.

A **White-tailed Eagle** of unknown age was seen on 9th Nov at

Merlin on Tiree (John Bowler)



Arduaine, Mid-Argyll (per JD) and a male **Hen Harrier** was seen chasing a **Common Buzzard** in Glen Lonan, Mid-Argyll (PD). A pair of **Hen Harriers** were seen hunting regularly south of Slockavullin in the second week of January (Brian John).

**Kestrels** have been widely reported during the period including birds at Vault (Tiree), a pair interacting at Glenramskill (Campbeltown Loch), singles at Dunaverty Bay (Kintyre) and in Glen Lonan, a female hovering at Loch Nell, a pair of interacting just north of Clachan (Glendaruel) Cowal and one near the Rare Breeds Farm, Oban. On 23rd Jan, three different **Kestrels** were noted in the Seil Island/Loch Seil area, with three more on Luing (male and two females), a female at Loch Nell, nr Oban later in the day (BA/JD) and one was hunting at Otter Ferry, Cowal on 24th Jan (TC). **Kestrels** are rarely this numerous in summer on mainland Argyll!

On 18th Nov, a **Peregrine Falcon** was seen to rise from its rocky perch at the Lismore lighthouse. It flew low, just above the water's surface, before trying to snatch an isolated **Guillemot**. The auk saw it coming at the last minute and dived in the nick of time, securing its survival on this occasion (Stuart Gibson). Two juvenile **Peregrines** were at Loch na Cille, Mid-Argyll (on the Danna side) on 22nd Jan. They were making repeated osprey-style passes at something in the shallows, and then sat on the seaweed for a while (Morag Rea). Two **Merlins** at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 7th Dec included a rather bedraggled female (photo above) (JB) and a female was near West Parkfergus, Machrihanish on 5th Jan (Neil Brown).

### Waders

On 4th Jan, 343 **Oystercatchers**, 112 **Curlews** and 12 **Common Redshanks** were counted at Stinky Hole, Campbeltown Loch (Neil Brown). An impressive count of 601 **Oystercatchers** was made around Otter Ferry on 8th Dec and 41 **Turnstones** were at the fish farm nearby (TC) on 16th January. However, the total of 720 **Oystercatchers** found from Otter Ferry spit southwards during NEWS count was the highest ever count recorded here (TC).

On 9th Nov, a wader roost opposite West Coast Motors at Ardrishaig held 20 **Ringed Plovers**, 23 **Dunlin** and 17 **Turn-**

stones, and 102 **Northern Lapwings** were counted in a field north of Tayinloan (JD/BA). A count of 47 **Ringed Plovers** was made at Dunaverty Bay (near Southend) Kintyre on 6th Dec (JD/BA). A flock of approx. 1,000 **Northern Lapwings** was in fields west of West Parkfergus (The Laggan) Kintyre on 31st Oct (Ian Teesdale) and of 486 **Lapwings** were counted near Westport, Kintyre on 16th Dec (Neil Brown).

The WeBS count on Tiree on 18th Dec found a single **Grey Plover** at Balephetrish Bay and 16 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, with 1,200 **Golden Plovers** at Gott Bay (JB). An all-island count on Tiree during 16th-17th Jan found 3,166 **Lapwings** and 3,640 **Golden Plovers** (JB).

Two **Red Knots** at Killail (Otter Ferry) on 27th Nov were unusual visitors there, along with a single **Dunlin** (TC). Twelve **Purple Sandpipers** were at Ormsary, Knapdale on 14th Dec (JD). Two **Ruffs** at Loch a' Phuill on 7th Dec were the latest ever recorded on the island. They were with 33 **Redshanks** (JB). On 23rd January, thirty **Lapwings** were found on Luing (nr Oban) with 14 **Ringed Plovers** at Blackmill Bay (BA/JD). A check of Hough Bay/Rubha Chraiginis, Tiree in the sun at lunch-time on 23rd Jan found 75 **Purple Sandpipers**, a very good count for Argyll (JB). Ten **Common Snipe** were flushed at An Sailean, Benderloch on 18th Jan (BA). A single **Woodcock** flushed from the roadside at Bealachandrain (nr Otter Ferry) on 16th Nov was the first in the area this winter (TC). A single **Ruff** and 22 **Black-tailed Godwits** were still at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 3rd Nov and 900 **Golden Plovers** were counted at Kenovay (Tiree) (JB).

A single late **Whimbrel** was with **Curlews** and c.100 **Turnstones** at the Otter Ferry spit, Cowal on the morning of 10th Nov (TC). A total of 83 **Common Redshanks** in Loch Gilp early on 4th Nov was a good count for the area, but by 9th Nov numbers there had increased to 94 (PD/ JD/BA). A single **Greenshank** seen at Linne Mhuirich on 29th Jan during the Loch Sween WeBS count was one of few reported this winter (PD).

A first-winter **Grey Phalarope** was at Hough Bay, Tiree on the afternoon of 17th Dec, feeding both on the sea and later amongst cows on Rubha Chraiginis (JB). A sandpiper seen briefly at Dunstaffnage Bay on 24th Nov by Stuart Gibson was seen again through the 'scope on 26th Nov by JD when its identity was confirmed as a first-winter **Common Sandpiper**. Another **Common Sandpiper** was at Loch Melfort, Kilmelford in the late morning on 15th Dec (BA). Wintering birds have appeared almost annually in Argyll in recent years.

Some coastal wader counts on Tiree on 5th Jan included, 22 **Purple Sandpipers**, 178 **Sanderling**, 130 **Ringed Plovers** and 35 **Turnstones** at Balephetrish Bay and 226 **Sanderlings**, 245 **Dunlin**, 150 **Ringed Plovers**, 70 **Turnstones**, 11 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, 1,130 **Golden Plovers** and 600 **Lapwings** at Gott Bay (JB).

### Skuas, gulls, terns and auks

This has been a remarkable period for scarce and rare gull species in Argyll.

Two **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Loch Gilp on 19th Nov, an adult (presumed same as 18th Nov) and a second-winter, together with 570 **Black-headed Gulls**, and totals of 1,900 **Razorbills** and 350 **Kittiwakes** were flying south off Inverneill in one hour during the afternoon with only small numbers of **Common Guillemots** (JD). In Loch Gilp at 3.30hrs on 19th Dec, Bill Allan found an adult **Little Gull** and five minutes later Jim Dickson found an adult **Mediterranean Gull** (JD/BA). On 21st Dec, during poor light in the afternoon two **Mediterranean Gulls** were found at Loch Gilp, an adult (same as above) and a new second-winter bird (JD/BA). As Jim says, it may not be long till **Mediterranean Gulls** breed in Argyll, if they haven't done so already! Breeding has already taken place in Northern Ireland. An adult **Little Gull** at the fish cages 2kms south of Inverneill and on the

shore there on 31st Dec nicely rounded off what has been a remarkable year for scarce and exotic gull species in Argyll (JD). An immature **Little Gull** was by the pier at Otter Ferry on the morning of 2nd Jan (Shirley O'Brian per TC). Close up views of an adult **Ring-billed Gull** were obtained on 16th Nov, near Woolworths in Oban - the usual spot (BA). It was seen in the vicinity regularly thereafter. At the head of Loch Fyne (opposite the Oyster Bar) another leucistic **Common Gull** was found on 4th Jan! Unlike the Tiree bird, which was a first-winter bird, this individual was an adult (JD/BA).

A first-winter **Iceland Gull** was at Loch Gilp on the afternoon of 13th Nov. The bird showed some features of **Kumlien's Gull**, not enough for a certain 'classic', but an interesting bird anyway (nearly all dark bill; dark spots on closed primaries; darkish tail contrasting with rump; venetian blind effect on flight feathers though not as marked as would be expected on two outermost) (JD). A second-winter **Iceland Gull** was at Arinagour, Coll on 23rd Nov (SW) and a first-winter **Iceland Gull** was in fields at the north end of Loch Nell, nr Oban (BA). On 20th Dec a first-winter **Iceland gull** was seen on the water between the piers in Campbeltown Loch (Neil Brown) and on 30th Dec two first-winter **Iceland Gulls** (photo of one below) were showing well near the piers (JD/Neil Brown). A second-winter **Iceland Gull** was amongst a flock of **Common Gulls** on the Laggan, Kintyre, just past Stewarton at 12.30hrs on 13th Jan (Neil Brown). An adult **Iceland Gull** seen in Oban Bay on 31st Jan was an absolutely stunning bird in immaculate plumage (Laurence Langan).

A first-winter **Glaucous Gull** was at Gott Bay on 5th Dec feeding on a dead **White-sided Dolphin**. The latter was the first John had seen on Tiree. He also found a dead **Little Auk** there (JB). A third-winter **Glaucous Gull** was seen feeding on a dead (white) seal at Loch Beg, Mull, just above the Kinloch Hotel, at high watermark near the road on 14th Dec (per Alan Spellman) and a second-winter **Glaucous Gull** was seen at the salmon nets south of Inverneill (nr Ardrishaig) on 15th Dec, which was then relocated at the next salmon nets further south (BA). A very confident, first-winter **Glaucous Gull** at Tarbert Harbour on 7th Jan came to feed on bread so that Laurence Langan was able to photograph it. A check of Hough Bay/Rubha Chraiginis, Tiree in the sun at lunch-time on 23rd Jan revealed no less than seven **Glaucous Gulls** (three adults/four first-winter) and a single first-winter **Iceland Gull**. A further first-winter **Iceland Gull** was still at Balephetrish (JB). JB thinks the number of **Glaucous Gulls** on Tiree at the time was in double figures (10-11 birds); unprecedented numbers for there (and probably for anywhere else in Argyll—PD).

In the late morning of 14th Dec, Jim Dickson found a first-winter **Ross's Gull** at the mouth of Loch Caolisport near Ormsary, Knapdale (NR 734 721 Eilean Traighe). It was dip feeding with a few **Black-headed Gulls**, not at all bothered by his presence and flew



First-winter Iceland Gull. One of two in Campbeltown on 30th December (Jim Dickson)



Little Auk on Tiree on 22 November (John Bowler)

within a few feet at times. Amazingly this was the third **Ross's Gull** found in Argyll this year (after only one previous appearance ever). See full report on page 7.

Very good numbers of auks were on the move (both **Common Guillemots** and **Razorbills**) in the Inverneill area (Loch Fyne) on 9th Nov. Flocks of up to 50 in steady streams were mainly going south, which were difficult to count, but certainly amounted to a few hundred of each in c.30mins. There were also a few **Kittiwakes** (JD/BA). A small black and white bird brought in by the cat belonging to a local vet on Mull on 22nd Nov turned out to be a **Little Auk**. As it was unharmed it was released back into the sea to live another day (per Alan Spellman see [www.mullbirds.com/G46.html](http://www.mullbirds.com/G46.html) for images). Another **Little Auk** found in a garden at Milton, Tiree on the same day was later released to the sea (photo above) (JB). Two **Little Auks** were in Loch Fyne on 19th Dec (JD/BA) and another one was seen from Tarbert-Portavadie Ferry at 10.00hrs on the same day, about half a mile from Tarbert (TC).

**Doves, owls, woodpeckers etc.**

A flock of 53 **Woodpigeons** at Otter Ferry, Cowal on 29th Jan were making the most of Pheasant feeding stations (TC).

A **Short-eared Owl** hunting at The Reef (Tiree) on 1st Nov caught and ate a Curlew (JB). Another was watched on 29th Jan hunting on the hills above Peninver, near Campbeltown. NR745248. David Lord says they used to be very common, but with the expansion of the forestry they disappeared, and it was the first he had seen there for 20 years. Strangely, another **Short-eared Owl** turned up at Loch Gruinart on the following day, 30th Jan. They are not often seen there at this time of year (Andy Schofield). Three **Long-eared Owls** were seen on the Aros Moss (near Machrihanish), Kintyre on the morning of 12th Dec—two roosting together and a third some 50m away (Neil Brown). Good views were had of a **Long-eared Owl** at Barrananaoil, Mid-Argyll (between Ardferr and Craobh Haven) on 31st Dec (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie).

After a good autumn for the species, **Kingfishers** continued to be frequently reported from Loch Gilp. Records included birds on 4th, 5th, 9th (2 birds) and 13th Nov (JD/BA/Anne-Lise Dickie) and again on 16th Nov (Delys Marks) and 17th Dec. There were also reports from along the Crinan Canal between Cairnbaan and Crinan on 12th Nov (Peter Kirk), around the River Ba and Killechranon on Mull on 22nd Nov (per Alan Spellman), at Loch Scotnish (near Tayvallich) Mid-Argyll during the Loch Sween WeBS count (PD/TC) on 17th Dec and along the River Fyne, Mid-Argyll on 4th Jan (JD/BA).

**Passerines**

A flock of winter thrushes at Druim Cottage (nr Otter Ferry) on 3rd Nov included c.200 **Redwings** and a few **Fieldfares** (TC). A flock of 16 **Fieldfares** were feeding in a Siberian crab apple tree at Tullochgorm (Minard) first thing on 11th Nov (PD) and a flock of 80+ were at Lochgilphead Meadows on 13th Nov (JD). On 16th

Nov, a flock of 30+ **Fieldfares** were seen at Leanach (nr Strachur), Cowal and a flock of 250 or more mixed **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** (c.60% **Fieldfare**/40% **Redwing**) were on Hawthorn in fields north of Clachan, Glendaruel, Cowal (TC). Around 40 **Fieldfares** were at Ardmarnock road end, near Millhouse, Cowal on 12th Dec and a mixed flock of 10 **Fieldfares** and 45 **Redwings** were seen at Kilfinan, Cowal on 23rd Jan (TC).

Late records of **Common Chiffchaffs** are often attributed to the Scandinavian or Siberian races, although these are usually difficult to identify with certainty in the field. Between 5th Nov and 9th Nov there was a spate of such records on Coll and Tiree. Scandinavian, *abietinus*-type were reported on Tiree on 5th, 6th and 9th Nov and Siberian *tristis*-type were reported on Coll on 5th Nov and on 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Nov on Tiree. On 9th Nov, in sunny conditions, one *tristis* **Chiffchaff**, calling for once, an *abietinus*-type **Chiffchaff**, a *collybita* (the 'local' race) **Chiffchaff** and a **Blackcap** were together in a garden at Cornaigbeg, Tiree—making for some nice comparisons (JB). Several **Blackcaps** were also found on Tiree at this time and three **Blackcaps** (two male/one female) were visiting a garden in Lochdon, Mull in late Nov (per Alan Spellman). There were still two **Chiffchaffs** at Cornaigbeg, Tiree on 17th Nov (one *abietinus*-type and the other a *collybita*), a *tristis*-type was calling and flycatching around a farm-yard at Whitehouse, Tiree on 22nd Nov (JB) and a **Blackcap** and *collybita* **Chiffchaff** were in the small copse at Grishipol, Coll on 23rd Nov (SW). A *tristis* **Chiffchaff** was showing well in the sun (yes, there were a few sunny days this winter!) on 16th Jan at Vaul, Tiree—feeding on the ground with 12 **Reed Buntings** (JB).

A **Blackcap** (sex unspecified), was eating an apple core, in garden at North Connel on 19th Nov (G. Brennan per Stuart Gibson) and a lovely male **Blackcap** gave very good views in the open at a bird-table in Oban on 9th Dec. It was feeding on a suspended fat ball (Stuart Gibson). More December records included a single male in a garden at High Askomil, Campbeltown on 20th December, which had also been present on 17th Dec (Ian Teasdale). Up to three have been present at Waterside Cottage, Southend, Kintyre in late November/early December (Margaret Bakes per Ian Teasdale). A male and three females were seen at Peninver, Kintyre between 1st and 3rd December. Sadly two were killed by a cat! (Steve Walker). A female **Blackcap** (photo below) was present in a Tayvallich garden from 24th Dec, feeding on the fat block—and several locals have mentioned seeing a male around the village over Christmas (Morag Rea). A female in a garden at Muasdale, Kintyre on 9th Jan had been busy feeding on an apple left out for blackbirds and a 'charm' of at least ten **Goldfinches** has been visiting the same garden (Janette Fiander). A pair of **Blackcaps** were in a Tobermory, Mull garden on 16th Jan. Alan Spellman says they seem to have had many more reported on Mull this winter than in previous years.

A party of at least 14 **Long-tailed Tits** were moving slowly



Female Blackcap at a bird feeder in Tayvallich in late December (Morag Rea)

through mixed Oak and Birch just north of Goirtein Point (Loch Fyne), Cowal on the afternoon of 28th Nov (TC). Another flock of 16 flew over Campbeltown on 12th Dec (Neil Brown).

Two **Magpies** were seen in a garden in Lochgilhead on 21st Dec (per David Rutherford) and one seen south of Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll on 11th Jan had been present in the area since before Christmas (Brian John).

A flock of at least 700 **Common Starlings** were feeding in a field at West Darlochan, the Laggan (Kintyre) on 1st Nov (PD). **Reed Buntings** at Loch Melldalloch, Cowal numbered 17 (including nine in one small bush) on 16th Nov and a minimum of 150 **Starlings** were at Drum Cottage (nr Kilfinan) Cowal.

Approximately 400 **Chaffinches** were in stubble at Moine Mhor on 27th Nov, making it difficult to check if any Bramblings were present (BA). Two **Bramblings** in Arinagour, Coll on the morning of 28th Nov were the first reported so far this winter (SW). A single **Brambling** was seen in local garden at Dervaig, Mull on 14th Dec (per Alan Spellman). A **Brambling** seen at Grainel, Loch Gruinart on 18th Jan was one of very few reported this winter (Andy Schofield).

A flock of 13 **Siskins** at The Lodge, Arinagour on the morning on 2nd Nov was unprecedented for Coll. They were with at least six Greenland-type **Common Redpolls**, a dozen or so **Goldcrests** and 160 **Blackbirds** (SW). A flock of 30 **Twite** were with 30 **Rock Pipits** and 18 **Pied Wagtails** at Dunaverty Bay (near Southend) Kintyre on 6th Dec (JD/BA). On 3rd Dec a flock of 30 **Siskins** were at Glenfeochan (S of Kilmore), nr Oban (JD), and on 17th Dec a flock of 60+ **Siskins** were seen feeding in alders at Loch

Craiglin (nr Achnamara), Mid-Argyll (PD/TC). On 27th Dec, a flock of at least 100 **Siskins** were on Alder Cones at Bealachandrain Farm, Glendaruel, Cowal (TC).

A male **Common Crossbill**, with a lovely deep red body colour, was seen on the trees above the lodge gate at Strachur House, Cowal on 18th Dec (Rosemary Kennedy) and a flock of nine heard calling and then seen in Loch Nant, Mid-Argyll on 26th Dec included males, females and juveniles (Laurence Langan).

A group of eight **Bullfinches** in Glen Lonan, Mid-Argyll on 22nd Nov were mostly males (PD). A total of 24 **Yellowhammers** in a cover crop on the Ardtalla estate, Islay on 18th Jan was a good record for the island as were five **Bullfinches** in Port Ellen. (Andy Schofield). A **Snow Bunting** at Loch a' Phuill on 16th Nov was the first of winter on Tiree (JB). Another single was found at Balephetrish Hill, Tiree on 18th Dec (JB). There were 20 **Reed Buntings** at Loch Melldalloch, Cowal on 15th Dec and by 23rd Jan the flock had reached 36, when it included males well on the way to full breeding plumage (TC).

### Other sightings

A very late **Red Admiral** butterfly was seen at The Airport (Tiree) on 8th Nov (JB/Andy Robinson). A **Weasel** in the garden at Otter Ferry on 14th Jan streaked past some Chaffinches on the ground—they completely ignored it! (TC).

### Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: [monedula@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

## Colour-ringed Mediterranean Gull on Bute—19 September 2006

For those of you who don't know me, I am a retired farmer from Lancashire who moved to Bute in January 2006 to TRY to make a living from wildlife photography. I have my own web site at [www.birdphotographs.co.uk](http://www.birdphotographs.co.uk) and I am also a moderator on the United Kingdom Nature Photographers website.

Lancashire is home to a breeding colony of Mediterranean Gulls at Stocks Reservoir, and as I am also a fly fisherman, I would regularly see the birds on their

protected island.

As you will all be aware, Bute has a healthy population of various gull species both around the shores and also feeding on the well manured grassland of the island. I am lucky to have the time (and inclination!) to use my binoculars to scan these various flocks for any unusual visitors. However, the strange thing about this sighting is that I was actually sitting in camouflage gear on the shore at Port Bannatyne trying to photograph Sandwich Terns when I noticed the gull with the ring on its leg (photo below). Obviously, this made for a closer examination, and I was pleasantly surprised to identify it as a Mediterranean Gull.

Later that day, having processed the image on my computer, I was also able to read the leg ring number, and a subsequent follow up revealed that the bird had been rung at Stocks reservoir earlier that year (photo below, left shows it being ringed as a chick). It looks as though I am not the only Lancastrian who realises what a great place Bute is!

### Philip Kirkham



Colour-ringed Mediterranean Gull on Bute (Philip Kirkham)

*Memories of autumn 2006 on Tiree will long stay in my mind, not only for the very rare birds that graced the island, but also for the sheer number and variety of scarcer migrants that occurred. Quite simply it was the best autumn for migrant birds in my six years on Tiree and indeed was better than all of the previous five autumns put together! Why the autumn was so good is not clear. It definitely helped having a few more birders coming out to check the island, including ace bird-finder Keith Gillon, but it also felt that there were simply more birds around to find. I certainly put no more effort into looking for birds than in previous autumns and yet simply bumped into good birds in places where I had seen none before.*

The autumn started early in style with an adult **Ross's Gull** lingering off the point at Aird on 9th August during an after-work sea-watch in a stiff north-westerly. I was hoping for a Sooty Shearwater or two when this delightful dainty gull came into view. Was it the same as the bird seen later in the autumn off Ardnave Point on Islay by James How? Sea-watching was actually rather poor this autumn, as there were few early Atlantic storms and instead there was a prevalence of light easterly breezes, which might account for the unusual number of smaller drift migrants that occurred. August scored with an immature **Barred Warbler** at the Scarinish Manse (28th) and rather more unexpectedly a splendid **Booted Warbler** at Balephetrish (31st) found by Keith. A real red-letter day for rare waders was on 29th August. A stunning adult **American Golden Plover** in full summer plumage appeared on my mowing survey at Greenhill, whilst at the same time, Keith was watching a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at Loch a' Phuill and later went on to find a first-summer **Pacific Golden Plover** in a huge group of Golden Plovers at Balevullin – what a day! A juvenile **Dotterel** at Greenhill on 26th completed the wader set for the month.

The American and Pacific Golden Plovers stayed into early September, as did the Booted Warbler and these were quickly followed by a gleaming **Western Bonelli's Warbler** in the bushes at Carnan Mor (8th)—again a complete surprise find, when all I had been hoping for was a migrant Spotted Flycatcher! September took on more of an American turn, when westerlies mid-month brought two to three juvenile **Pectoral Sandpipers** to Loch a' Phuill, where they mixed in with groups of up to 20 Ruff and 158 Black-tailed Godwits. Bizarrely, as in 2004, the arrival of the Pec Sands coincided with the arrival of a juvenile **Black Tern** at the site, which if I had been on the ball, I could have photographed hovering over one of the preening Pecs! Only one Curlew Sandpiper put in an appearance—at Cornaig on 1st, but there were three Little Stints, whilst other scarce visitors included a mobile Marsh Harrier, plus a handful of Grey Phalaropes and Leach's Petrels offshore. Again however, it was the land birds that dominated, with good numbers of Garden Warblers logged, a late Spotted Flycatcher at Balephuil (23rd), a skulking Grasshopper Warbler at Heylipol (24th), an early Lapland Bunting at The Reef (28th) and at least two Turtle Doves in September with another in October.

After the early rush, October could have disappointed but this was not to be. A juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** in a garden at Milton (2nd) was the first ever recorded for the island, whilst the following day a juvenile **Barred Warbler** and a **Lesser White-throat** performed a bizarre double-act along a fence-line at Balephuil. There was another Lapland Bunting at Heylipol (22nd), a long-staying Turtle Dove at Scarinish plus a late sighting of the wandering female Marsh Harrier (10th). Scarcer migrants included hauls of 31 Blackcaps, 21 Goldcrests, seven Chiffchaffs and over 60 Greenland Wheatears, whilst there was an influx of some 2,000 Redwings on 20th. Six Grey Phalaropes included two storm-driven birds at Loch a' Phuill, whilst a window of clear weather on 19th saw thousands of Barnacle Geese stream-



Two autumn migrants on Tiree. Barred Warbler above and Greenland Wheatear below ( John Bowler)



ing across the Minch from Barra, cutting low across the island and then heading down towards Islay.

November continued in a similar vein with a further influx of seven Blackcaps and 11 Chiffchaffs early in the month including at least three classic *tristis* individuals. However, rare ducks were the highlight of the month with a moulting drake **Goosander** at An Fhaodhail (1st), the first for Tiree since 1992, and then a **Lesser Scaup** at Loch a' Phuill (12th-16th), the first for Tiree if confirmed. In the mild conditions, up to 27 Black-tailed Godwits stayed late at Loch a' Phuill until 8th November, whilst three Ruff stayed there until at least 7th December. More typical late-autumn fare included the odd Rook, Jack Snipe, Short-eared Owl, Scaup, Slavonian Grebe and Woodcock. Winter was not without its surprises however, with a drake **Ring-necked Duck** at Loch Bhasapol on 6th December and then two drakes together at Loch Riaghain in the New Year. A very late first-winter Grey Phalarope at Hough Bay on 17th December was no doubt driven in by the Atlantic storms, but who knows where the drake **American Wigeon** came from that appeared on Loch Bhasapol on 18th January only to disappear again the next day. It really seemed that autumn 2006 didn't want to end at all. Will autumn 2007 be as eventful on Tiree? Somehow, I doubt it, but we will have to wait and see! Tiree boasts a wide range of accommodation and transport options to suit all tastes (see [www.isleoftiree.com](http://www.isleoftiree.com)), so why not give it a try next autumn?

**John Bowler, RSPB Officer for Tiree**

## The Wetlands Bird Survey (WeBS counts)

*As long ago as 1969, I took part in the very first of what were then called 'The Birds of Estuaries Enquiry' surveys. The stretch covered was Sunk Island, on the north bank of the River Humber in Yorkshire. It was a wonderful training ground for wader identification and numbers of species like Knot and Dunlin often ran into four figures. One never knew what to expect – I'll never forget the sight of two Flamingos flying down the estuary one dull December day or the gatherings of Short-eared Owls hunting over the saltings.*

Now known as the 'Wetlands Bird Survey' this is probably the longest running regular bird survey in Britain. Each month during the winter an army of, mainly amateur, bird watchers visit the WeBS count units in over 1,130 10km squares throughout Great Britain. They count the numbers of wetland birds, i.e. divers, grebes, herons, swans, geese, ducks, rails, waders and Kingfisher (counts of gulls and terns are optional) present in estuaries, sea lochs and at many inland waters. From this is compiled an annual report (sent free to all participants) that monitors the fortunes of these birds. This data is invaluable and is used by government agencies and in connection with planning proposals for developing such areas.

As you will have seen we also use these data when compiling our own Annual Bird Report. At present counts in Argyll are carried out regularly on Islay, at Lochs Gruinart and Indaal, at The Strand, Colonsay at the four main freshwater lochs on Tiree, at Loch Sween, Loch Crinan

and Loch Etive. Until recently counts were also carried out regularly on Holy Loch and Loch Gilp.

We are currently looking for new WeBS counters on mainland Argyll, especially on Holy Loch and Loch Gilp which both hold significant numbers of wildfowl and waders, not to mention large numbers of gulls. Other potentially worthwhile sites include Loch Feochan, Loch Craignish, the Sound of Gigha, Campbeltown Loch, Loch Caolisport, and West Loch Tarbert, but other suggestions would be considered.

This kind of bird watching can be very rewarding. Over a period you get to see all sorts of interesting patterns of bird distribution. For example, there has been a single Grey Plover in Loch na Cille (part of Loch Sween) almost every winter since I started covering this area for WeBS. Why only one? Is it the same returning bird? And by watching an area regularly, you are more likely to turn up something unusual – like the Red-necked Grebe that was present for three successive months one winter at Achnamara.

All that is required is a visit once a month during September to March. Will anyone who thinks they might be interested or would like to know more details please contact me

**Paul Daw**

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: [monedula@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

## Seal killing a drake Eider

I have recently found several **Eider** carcasses on the shoreline near to my cottage on Bute, and I have also received reports of a seal attacking the seabirds near here.

On 25th February 2007 I was fortunate to witness a **Grey Seal** devouring an **Eider** drake that it had caught. The photographs here were taken from quite a distance away, but are still good enough to see what had happened.

I wonder if this is the result of very few fish being left in these waters due to gross overfishing?

**Philip Kirkham**

(These interesting observations and photos came from Philip's website at: [www.birdphotographs.co.uk](http://www.birdphotographs.co.uk)—Editor)



*In 2006, Scottish Natural Heritage funded a survey to estimate the population size and distribution of Ravens in part of the Kintyre peninsula (Urquhart & Maguire 2006). A total of 47 occupied nest sites were located. In addition, three communal roosts held around 200-300 non-breeding birds. Thus, the total population in Kintyre probably exceeded 400 birds, bearing in mind that only part of the peninsula was surveyed.*

Raven numbers appear to be increasing throughout the whole of Argyll, and particularly around coastal areas (Haworth in press). Therefore, most of the population estimates from 10-20 years ago may well be lower than the present population size.

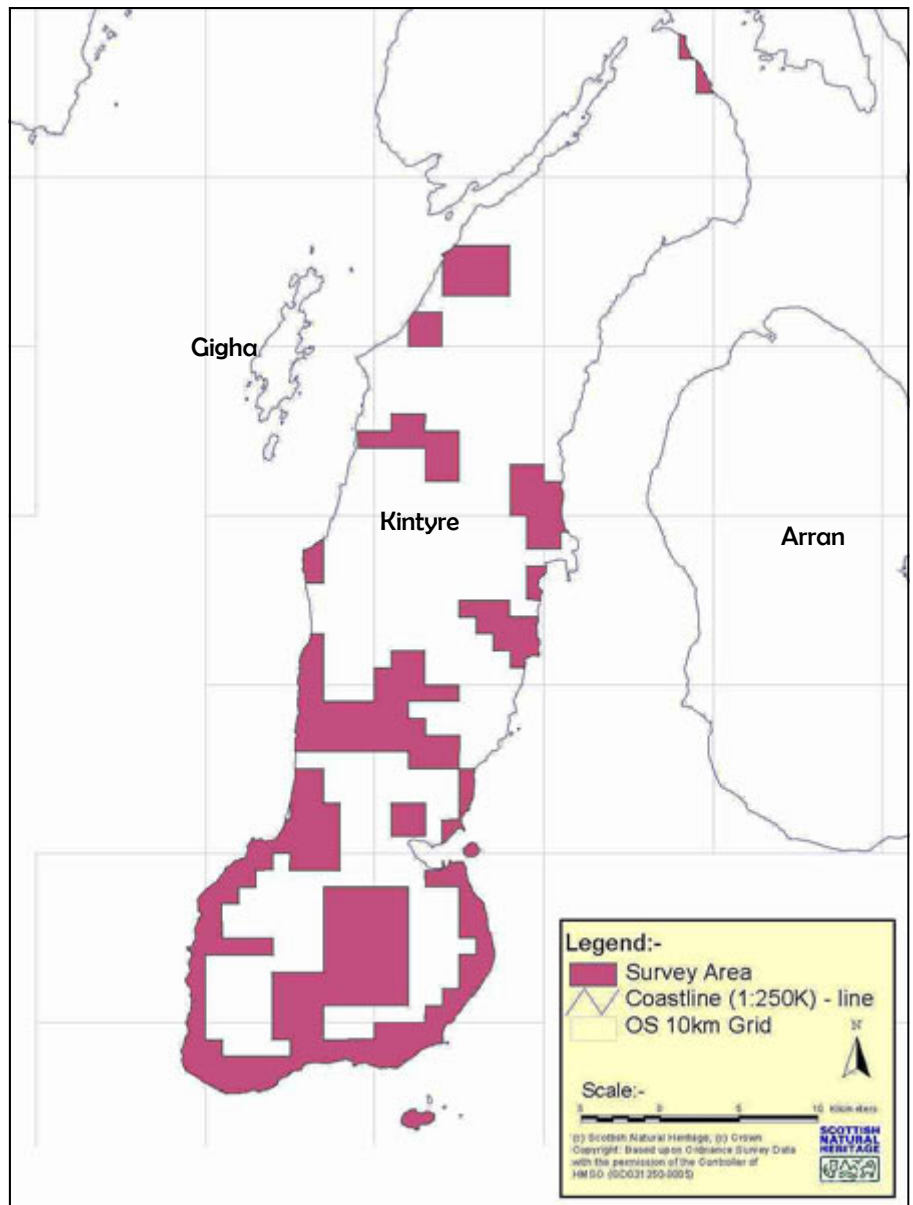
So, why have Raven numbers increased? The answer is not clear, but what is apparent is that survival rates have increased considerably over the last twenty years. In the late 1980s early/1990s Chris Thomas undertook some detailed survey work on Ravens in Mid-Argyll for his PhD (Thomas 1993). He discovered there was an apparent dearth of recruits, and gaps in the distribution of Ravens appeared to be due to a shortage of birds rather than a lack of suitable habitat.

Subsequently, the number of non-breeding birds has increased and numerous communal roosts have appeared throughout Argyll. Some of the largest roosts hold well over 100 birds. Sometimes roosts are located near landfill sites, but not always. They can also be surprisingly difficult to locate, as many are in conifer forests and birds do not enter the roosting area until it is almost dark. Thus, there are likely to be more communal roosts than those we know about.

Nowadays, there is probably no lack of recruits to replace territorial ravens that die or to establish new territories in previously unoccupied, but suitable habitat. It is intriguing why the situation has changed so dramatically in the space of about 20 years. One factor that could account for such a widespread phenomenon is a reduction in the illegal use of poisons. These were used widely by shepherds and gamekeepers to kill foxes, crows, ravens and raptors. National campaigns against poisoning during 1980-1990 (together with many prosecutions)



A Raven at Machrihanish BO (Eddie Maguire) (above) and map of the area surveyed for Ravens in Kintyre in 2006 (below).





The breeding density of Ravens in four areas of Argyll. Slightly different methods were used to define study areas and estimate density

Area	Density (pairs km <sup>-2</sup> )	Source
Mull	0.06	Harworth 1989
Islay	0.04	Madders 1997
Mid-Argyll	0.04	Thomas 1993
Kintyre	0.06-0.19	Urquhart & Maguire 2006

appear to have substantially reduced the illegal use of these substances. In the past, non-breeding Ravens that foraged over very large areas would have been highly susceptible to poison-laced carcasses.

With the recovery of the Raven population it is important to get a better estimate of the present situation. This was one of the reasons why SNH funded a survey in Kintyre in 2006 (Urquhart & Maguire 2006). Eddie Maguire undertook most of the field-work, amounting to ten days each month during February to April (30 days in total). Within the pink areas on the map, all known territories were checked for occupancy, and the remaining area was searched for previously unknown territories. The pink areas were selected because they contained most of the known territories in Kintyre. It is anticipated there will be far fewer birds in the remaining area. In addition, vantage points were used to count birds going into communal roosts.

In total, 47 occupied territories were located in the areas surveyed (Map). Fifteen of these were previously unknown and were assumed to have been occupied fairly recently. The distribution of territories was largely along the coast, 31 (66%) being located on sea cliffs, with the greatest density around the Mull of Kintyre. In the inland territories, five pairs nested in trees, two on man-made structures and the rest on crags. When ravens nest in trees they can be quite secretive and difficult to find, particularly in conifers. Thus, in areas without suitable crag sites, conifers can provide nesting opportunities in areas that would otherwise be unsuitable.

The densities found in Kintyre were higher than previous estimates from three other parts of Argyll (Table). However, population density in these

latter areas will almost certainly have increased since the time the work was undertaken.

Three communal roosts were found. All were in woodland. These were at Ronachan (mean of 84 birds), Skeroblin (59 birds) and Glen Kerran (mean of 77 birds), a total of around 220 birds. In addition, flocks of non-breeding birds were observed in numerous other locations, but it is not clear if these are separate to the birds using communal roosts.

This year, additional work is already underway to estimate the breeding population for the entire Kintyre peninsula, and to obtain information on breeding success. Future work could look at the relationship between territorial pairs and the non-breeding sector of the population, but this would depend on having a reasonable sample of birds that could be identified at a distance, using such techniques as wing-tagging or colour ringing.

### Blair Urquhart, Eddie Maguire & Steve Petty

#### References

- Haworth, P. F. 1999. *Population ecology of the Raven on Mull*. SNH Report No. HT/97/98/91.
- Haworth, P. F. in press. Raven *Corvus corax*. In: *Birds of Argyll* (Ed. by ap Rheinallt, T., Craik, J. C. A., Daw, P. C., Furness, R. W., Petty, S. J. & Wood, D.). Lochgilphead: Argyll Bird Club.
- Madders, M. 1997. *A population and behavioural study of Ravens on Islay (Argyll & Bute)*. A report to SOAEFD and SNH. Project No. MMA/001/96.
- Thomas, C. J. 1993. *Modelling the distribution and breeding performance of the Raven Corvus corax in relation to habitat: an application using satellite remote sensing and geographical information systems*. University of Glasgow, PhD Thesis.
- Urquhart, G. B. & Maguire, E. 2006. *A population study of ravens in Kintyre*. Lochgilphead: Scottish Natural Heritage (unpublished report).

## Recent publications

This section provides readers with information about publications (papers in journals, reports, books etc) that have appeared since the last list was published in the June 2006 Eider. The criteria for selection is that a publication must have a link to birds in Scotland. The selection is biased towards what I read, so I would welcome information about other publications for inclusion in future lists.

#### Editor

- Bain, C. 2006. Climate change and bird conservation. *Scottish Bird News*, **80**, 15-17.
- Beale, C. M., Burfield, I. J., Sim, I. M. W., Rebecca, G. W., Pearce-Higgins, J. W. & Grant, M. C. 2006. Climate change may account for the decline in British ring ouzels *Turdus torquatus*. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **75**, 826-835.
- Blackburn, J. & Grantham, M. 2006. Rings, radar, flags and tags. *BTO News*, **265**, 17.
- Booth, C. J. & Adam, R. G. 2006. Predation of European storm petrels by great black-backed gulls on the island of Aukerry, Orkney. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 43-45.
- Booth, C. J. & Ellis, P. M. 2006. Common eiders and common guillemots taken by killer whales. *British Birds*, **99**, 533.
- Bourke, B. P. & Dawson, D. A. 2006. Fifteen microsatellite loci characterized in the golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* (Accipitridae, Aves). *Molecular Ecology Notes*, **6**, 1047-1050.
- Brown, A. & Grice, P. 2005. *Birds of England*. London: T. & A.D. Poyser.
- Buchanan, G. M., Grant, M. C., Sanderson, R. A. & Pearce-Higgins, J. W. 2006. The contribution of invertebrate taxa to moorland bird diets and the potential implications of land-use management. *Ibis*, **148**, 615-628.
- Chisholm, K. 2007. History of the wood sandpiper as a breeding bird in Britain. *British Birds*, **100**, 112-121.
- Clark, H. & Sellers, R. M. 2006. Some early records of northern gannet movements in the coastal waters of Caithness. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 40-43.
- Collinson, M. 2006. Splitting headaches: recent taxonomical changes affecting the British and Western Palearctic lists. *British Birds*, **99**, 306-323.
- Conway, G., Wotton, S., Henderson, I., Langston, R., Drewitt, A. & Currie, F. 2007. Status and distribution of European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus* in the UK in 2004. *Bird Study*, **54**, 98-111.
- Dott, H. E. M. 2006. House sparrows nesting in sites other than buildings in Scot-

- land. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 47-49.
- Dudley, S. P., Gee, M., Kehoe, C., Melling, T. M. & The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC). 2006. The British List: A checklist of birds of Britain (7th edition). *Ibis*, **148**, 526-563.
- Elkins, N. 2006. Waterfowl counts on the Tay Estuary. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 30-38.
- Etheridge, B., Holling, M., Thompson, D. B. A. & Riley, H. T. 2006. *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme Report 2004*. pp. 33. Aberlady: Scottish Ornithologists' Club.
- Etheridge, B. & Summers, R. W. 2006. Movements of British hen harriers *Circus cyaneus* outside the breeding season. *Ringling & Migration*, **23**, 6-14.
- Fischer, A. & van der Wal, R. 2007. Invasive plant suppresses charismatic seabird – the construction of attitudes towards biodiversity management options. *Biological Conservation*, **135**, 256-267.
- Fox, A. D. 2006. Calls of 'northern bullfinches'. *British Birds*, **99**, 370-371.
- Fraser, P. A., Rogers, M. J. & the Rarities Committee. 2007. Report on rare birds in Great Britain. Part 1: non-passerines. *British Birds*, **100**, 16-61.
- Fraser, P. A., Rogers, M. J. & the Rarities Committee. 2007. Report on rare birds in Great Britain. Part 2: passerines. *British Birds*, **100**, 72-104.
- Freeman, S. N., Noble, D. G., Newson, S. E. & Baillie, S. R. 2007. Modelling population changes using data from different surveys: the Common Birds Census and the Breeding Bird Survey. *Bird Study*, **54**, 61-72.
- Futter, K., Sutcliffe, R., Welham, D., Welham, A., Rostron, A. J., MacKay, J., Gregory, N., McCleary, J., Tait, T. N., Black, J. & Kirkland, P. 2006. *Butterflies of South West Scotland: an Atlas of their Distribution*. Glendaruel: Argyll Publishing.
- Gillings, S., Austin, G. E., Fuller, R. J. & Sutherland, W. J. 2006. Distribution shifts in wintering golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* in Britain. *Bird Study*, **53**, 274-284.
- Gimona, A. & Brewer, M. J. 2006. Local environmental effects and spatial effects in macroecological studies using mapped abundance classes: the case of the rook *Corvus frugilegus* in Scotland. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **75**, 1140-1146.
- Grubb, N. 2006. The nuthatch in Lothian. *Scottish Bird News*, **81**, 8-9.
- Hardy, J., Crick, H. Q. P., Wernham, C. V., Riley, H. T., Etheridge, B. & Thompson, D. B. A. 2006. *Raptors: a field guide to survey and monitoring*. Edinburgh: The Stationary Office.
- Harris, M. P., Heubeck, M., Shaw, D. N. & Okill, J. D. 2006. Dramatic changes in the return date of guillemots *Uria aalge* to colonies in Shetland, 1962-2005. *Bird Study*, **53**, 247-252.
- Haworth, P. F., Mcgrady, M. J., Whitfield, D. P., Fielding, A. H. & McLeod, D. R. A. 2006. Ranging distance of resident golden eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* in western Scotland according to season and breeding status. *Bird Study*, **53**, 265-273.
- Jackson, D. B. 2007. Factors affecting the abundance of introduced hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) to the Hebridean island of South Uist in the absence of natural predators and implications for nesting birds. *Journal of Zoology, London*, **271**, 210-217.
- Johnstone, I., Thorpe, R., Moore, A. & Finney, S. K. 2007. Breeding status of Choughs *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax* in the UK and Isle of Man in 2002. *Bird Study*, **54**, 23-34.
- Kalejta-Summers, B. 2006. Changes in numbers and distribution of waders in the Moray Firth *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 1-16.
- Kenward, R. 2006. *The goshawk*. London: T. & A.D. Poyser.
- Lewis, S., Wanless, S., Elston, D. A., Schultz, M. D., Mackley, E., du Toit, M., Underhill, J. G. & Harris, M. P. 2006. Determinants of quality in a long-lived colonial species. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **75**, 1304-1312.
- Marquiss, M. 2007. Seasonal pattern in hawk predation on Common Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: evidence of an interaction with habitat affecting food availability. *Bird Study*, **54**, 1-11.
- Mavor, R. A. 2006. Seabird numbers and breeding success in 2005. *Scottish Bird News*, **81**, 16-17.
- Mavor, R. A., Parsons, M., Heubeck, M. & Schmitt, S. 2006. *Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland, 2005*. Peterborough: Joint Nature Conservation Committee (UK Nature Conservation, No. 30).
- Minderman, J., Lind, J. & Cresswell, W. 2006. Behaviourally mediated indirect effects: interference competition increases predation mortality in foraging redshanks. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **75**, 713-723.
- Murray, S., Wanless, S. & Harris, M. P. 2006. The status of the northern gannet in Scotland in 2003-04. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 17-29.
- Nelson, J. B. 2006. Mean laying date in the northern gannet. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 50.
- Newton, I., Hobson, K. A., Fox, A. D. & Marquiss, M. 2006. An investigation into the provenance of northern bullfinches *Pyrrhula p. pyrrhula* found in winter in Scotland and Denmark. *Journal of Avian Biology*, **37**, 431-435.
- O'Brien, M., Green, R. E. & Wilson, J. 2006. Partial recovery of the population of corncrakes *Crex crex* in Britain, 1993-2004. *Bird Study*, **53**, 213-224.
- Pearce-Higgins, J. W. & Grant, M. C. 2006. Relationships between bird abundance and the composition and structure of moorland vegetation. *Bird Study*, **53**, 112-125.
- Pennington, M. G. 2006. *Sylvia* warblers taking nectar on autumn migration in Shetland. *British Birds*, **99**, 579-580.
- Prasad, A. 2006. Common starlings roosting in a cave. *British Birds*, **99**, 582.
- Pullan, D. 2006. Short-billed dowitcher in Northeast Scotland: new to Britain. *British Birds*, **99**, 354-360.
- Quinn, J. L. & Cresswell, W. 2006. Testing domains of danger in the selfish herd: sparrowhawks target widely spaced redshanks in flocks. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B*, **273**, 2521 - 2526.
- Raine, A. F., Sowter, D. J., Brown, A. F. & Sutherland, W. J. 2006. Migration patterns of two populations of twite *Carduelis flavirostris* in Britain. *Ringling & Migration*, **23**, 45-52.
- Raven, M. & Noble, D. 2006. Common bird trends 1994-2005. *BTO News*, **266**, 12-15.
- Redpath, S. M., Mougeot, F., Leckie, F. M. & Evans, S. A. 2006. The effects of autumn testosterone on survival and productivity in red grouse, *Lagopus lagopus scoticus*. *Animal Behaviour*, **71**, 1297-1305.
- Reid, J. M., Bignal, E. M., Bignal, S., McCracken, D. I. & Monaghan, P. 2006. Spatial variation in demography and population growth rate: the importance of natal location. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **75**, 1201-1211.
- Rollie, C. & Christie, G. 2006. Peregrine falcon catching and killing a bat in daylight. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 45-46.
- Sellers, R. M. 2006. Breeding population estimate for northern wheatear in Britain. *British Birds*, **99**, 533-535.
- Sellers, R. M. 2007. Common starlings roosting in sea caves. *British Birds*, **100**, 124.
- Sims, M., Wanless, S., Harris, M. P., Mitchell, P. I. & Elston, D. A. 2006. Evaluating the power of monitoring plot designs for detecting long-term trends in the numbers of common guillemots. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, **43**, 537-546.
- Stark, F. 2006. Golden eagle diet on the Isle of Lewis. *Scottish Bird News*, **80**, 18-19.
- Steele, J. 2006. From the Rarities Committee's files: do we know what British 'soft-plumaged petrels' are? *British Birds*,

99, 404-419.

Summers, R. W. 2006. Patterns of nest attendance by a pair of parrot crossbills. *British Birds*, **99**, 562-568.

Walsh, P. T., Evans, D. M., Hansell, M. & Ruxton, G. D. 2007. Factors influencing nocturnal egg-turning frequency in Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*. *Bird*

*Study*, **54**, 133-136.

Watson, A. & Marquiss, M. 2006. Cross-bill numbers in old pinewoods on upper Deeside and Speyside in 1944-75. *Scottish Birds*, **26**, 51-55.

Watson, A. & Nethersole-Thompson, D. 2006. Black grouse and western capercaillie on upper Speyside in 1934-42. *Scottish*

*Birds*, **26**, 55-59.

Wernham, C. & Humphreys, L. 2006. The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme. *BTO News*, **265**, 8-9.

White, T. A. & Searle, J. B. 2007. Factors explaining increased body size in common shrews (*Sorex araneus*) on Scottish islands. *Journal of Biogeography*, **34**, 356-363.

## Illegal persecution of Red Kites is still a massive problem

*Illegal persecution of Red Kites is still having a devastating impact on the Scottish population, according to ongoing research by RSPB Scotland scientists.*

Many land managers welcome Red Kites, but some involved with game management continue with indiscriminate and illegal abuse of agricultural pesticides by laying poison baits. Poisoning was one of the factors that led to the Red Kite becoming extinct as a breeding bird in Scotland nearly 150 years ago.

Continuous monitoring and recording of data on the birds which have been individually marked since their reintroduction in the late 1980s has allowed RSPB Scotland scientists to build up a highly accurate picture of the factors influencing the fragile population north of the border.

Preliminary analysis by RSPB Scotland researchers indicates that 38% of the 395 Scottish birds that fledged between 1999 and 2003 were poisoned, and a further 9% were either shot or otherwise killed by man. RSPB Scotland believes that these are conservative estimates, as the corpses of birds deliberately killed are more likely to be hidden or disposed of than those that have died naturally, and the remains of some recovered birds are too decomposed for a conclusive post mortem. The overall background level of illegal activity in relation to red kites may also be indicative of what is happening to other bird of prey populations.

Almost all Red Kites that successfully fledge in Scotland are fitted with wing tags that identify them as individuals. Of the 395 birds that were tagged during 1999 to 2003, only 49 were known to still be alive in December 2006. 30 were found dead and subjected to post mortem analysis, and 13 found to be illegally poisoned with a further three shot. 307 tagged birds have not been seen for three years and are therefore presumed dead. Assuming that the post mortem results are representative of these missing birds, 185 Red Kites wing tagged in North and Central Scotland are estimated to have been deliberately killed by man between 1999 and 2006 (we include birds found dead during 2004 to 2006)—an average of 23 birds per year.

The results bring into sharp focus the scale of the problem throughout Scotland, with the source of this illegal persecution remaining largely attributable to upland areas of our country where game management takes place.

Poisoned baits, using agricultural pesticides, are left out in the open countryside to kill crows, birds of prey and any other species that are judged as a threat to grouse and other game birds even though the practice has been illegal since the early 1900s. Although Red Kites are rarely the intended victims, and most shooting estates agree that Red Kites are of no threat to game birds as they are largely scavengers, illegal poisoning is still having a devastating impact on both their numbers and their ability to expand their current range. Their carrion feeding habit makes them highly likely to find any poisoned meat left lying around.

Duncan Orr Ewing, head of species and land management for RSPB Scotland, said: 'It is time for the fine rhetoric about tackling illegal poisoning to be turned into action on the ground. Every-

body seems to agree that this activity is reprehensible however cases involving the deliberate killing of some of our rarest birds of prey, like the red kite, occur year after year in Scotland. It may take a custodial sentence before people engaged with this activity begin to take the matter seriously. Unfortunately Scotland contributes some 52% of birds of prey recorded as illegally killed in the UK—a statistic which shames us all.'

Between 1996 and 2006 there have been 49 confirmed poisoning cases of Red Kites in Scotland. For all birds of prey, including Red Kite, Peregrine, White tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Raven there have been 283 confirmed cases of poisoning over the same period. It is likely, however, that these cases are just the tip of the iceberg, with far more incidents going undiscovered.

Rhona Brankin MSP, the Deputy Environment Minister, said: 'The continuing persecution of Red Kites in Scotland revealed in these figures is deplorable, irresponsible and criminal. The impact of such acts can spread way beyond the persecution of rare birds. "The misuse of pesticides does not affect birds of prey in isolation but has potentially harmful consequences for all life in the countryside, including people which is why we introduced last year stricter regulations on possession of pesticides. "The actions of a few pose a public health and safety risk to the many who use and enjoy our country. It undermines the success of our programme to reintroduce Red Kite. This will not be tolerated and those responsible will be pursued to the full extent of the law.'

**Source: RSPB Scotland, press release 3 January 2007**



Red Kite (Jim Duncan)

Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should with the Editor before the 25th May 2007 (see the box opposite for more information)

### Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2006/2007)

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

**Vice Chairman:** Tom Callan, Corra, Otter Ferry, Tighnabruaich, Argyll, PA21 2DH (phone 01700 821212)

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

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

**Membership Secretary:** Sue Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Loch Lomond G83 7DG (phone 01301 702603)

**Committee:** Richard Allan (Oban), Roger Broad (Killearn), Danielle Clark-De Bisschop (Colintraive), Paul Daw (Minard), Ian Hopkins (Bute), Steve Petty (Tighnabruaich) and David Wood (Bellanoch)

**Editor of the Argyll Bird Report:** Tom Callan (see vice-chairman above)

**Editor of the Eider:** Steve Petty (contact details on page 2)

**The club's website** <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

### Argyll Bird Recorder

Paul Daw, Tigh-na-Tulloch, Tullochgorm, Minard, Argyll PA32 8YQ (phone 01546 886260 e-mail moned-ula@globalnet.co.uk)

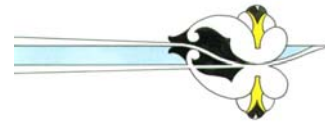
### BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

**Argyll South, Arran, Bute & Gigha:** Richard Allan (phone 01852 300 359; e-mail richardallan@compuserve.com)

**Argyll North, Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern:** Sue Dewar (phone 01680 812594; e-mail sue@wingsovermull.com)

**Islay, Jura & Colonsay:** Malcolm Ogilvie (phone 01496 850218; e-mail malcolm@ogilvie.org)

# The Eider



**T**he *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 25th 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 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 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).