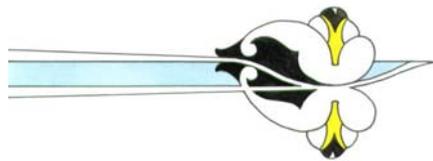


The Eider



The Eider is the Quarterly Newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club (<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>)
Scottish Charity Number SC 008782

September 2005

Jim Duncan took this superb photo of a female wheatear on Mull this spring



Editor

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Inside this issue

Editorial	2
Autumn & Spring Meetings	2
Field trips and events	2-3
Oystercatcher clutch size	3
Albino Stonechat	3
Birds of Argyll book	3-5
Papers for the AGM Financial report Minutes of the last AGM AGM agenda	6-7
Autumn meeting programme	8
Sanda field trip report	8-9
Eider survey	10-12
Diver rafts	12-13
The Hedge Sparrow's tale	13
Islay memories	13-14
New shearwater colonies?	14-15
Corncrake chorus	15
Recent reports	16-18
Mink on Gigha	18-19
Recent publications	19
2005 Tawny Owl survey	19
ABC car sticker	20

To receive the electronic version of *The Eider* in colour, members should send their e-mail address to the Editor (contact details above). Past issues (since June 2002) can be downloaded from the club's website.

Folk that spend too much time working with computers always dread their hard disc failing. Well, it happened to me in June, and it's taken me a while to get my system up and running again, due in part to taking a long holiday in July/August. So, if anyone has sent me an e-mail and not had a reply, please contact me again, and this time I will get back to you! This problem has also meant that the website has not been updated for a considerable time, but that too should be rectified soon.

You can see on page 8 that Bob Furness has once again put together an interesting variety of talks for the autumn meeting at the Cairnbaan Hotel. We hope that as many members as possible will be there, not only for the talks, but also for the

AGM, as this is your chance to influence how the club is run. The papers for the AGM can be found on pages 6-7. Currently, the club is experiencing a steady growth in membership, and it is important to try and maintain this impetus – so your views are important!

I hope you have had a good summer. As you can see from this issue, the fortunes of Argyll's birds have been variable. Record numbers of Corncrakes on island strongholds (page 15) is rewarding after so much conservation effort over recent years, and begs the question 'when will birds start to colonise the mainland'? Seabirds have had a mixed season, with another breeding failure for many species in the Northern Isle and north-eastern Scotland. Nearer

home, mink continue to spread to new islands and have a detrimental effect on breeding seabirds (pages 18-19).

This has again been a bumper issue with some excellent articles and photographs. So come on, why not write an article for December *Eider*?? I would be happy to help any potential first-time author/s, if they feel they need it. For contributions to this issue I would like to thank: Richard Allan, John Anderson, Roger Broad, Tom Callan, Clive Craik, Paul Daw, Jim Duncan (for some outstanding photos), Bob Furness, David Jardine, David Merrie, Linda Petty (proof reading), Tristan ap Rheinallt, Nigel Scriven, Margaret Staley, Michael Thomas, Chris Waltho and David Wood.

Forthcoming events & field trips

Atlantic Oakwoods Symposium—second announcements

A Symposium on Atlantic Oakwoods will be held in the Corran Halls, Oban on the 14-16 September 2005. There will be two days of talks and discussion followed by a field excursion to Glen Nant and Bonawe.

The aims of the meeting are (1) to bring together research scientists, land managers, conservationists and all who share an interest in these woods; (2) to provide a forum in which to present current knowledge on the ecological diversity and past management of the woods; and (3) to identify needs for conservation and further research. The proceedings of the symposium will be published in a Symposium Special Issue of the *Botanical Journal of Scotland*.

The programme comprises 8 sessions, each with two or three speakers. These are:- Definition and Distribution; Genetic History; Cultural History; Present Structure and Composition (diversity and plant species groups - 3 sessions); Faunal Relationships; Conservation and Management Policy. There will also be a poster session. The Symposium is being organised by the

Botanical Society of Scotland and sponsored by the Forestry Commission, Forest Research, the Scottish Forestry Trust and the British Ecological Society. A limited number of bursaries are available for students.

Booking forms and further information can be obtained from Shiela Wilson, Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh, Drummond Street, Edinburgh EH8 9XP, or from:

E-mail: shiela.wilson@ed.ac.uk

Website:

<http://www.geos.ed.ac.uk/abs/bss/>

Second-hand natural history book sale

This year's eagerly awaited second-hand book sale at the RSPB's Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve will be from 17th to 25th September 2005. If you have some books you would like to get off your shelves or you would like to acquire some more (including bargains, rare books, etc) then this event is for you!

Anything about natural history (books, magazines, journals, pamphlets, videos, DVDs/CD ROMs - even maps) qualify for

the sale. You can donate books to be sold on the RSPB's behalf, or we can also sell books on your behalf, keeping a mere 10% ourselves to cover administration costs.

For rare/scarcie books, we intend selling by auction (mainly to stop commercial booksellers coming in and buying them straight off). If you send us any rare/scarcie books, we will need a reserve price. If you are interested in a list of the rare/scarcie items, please ask us to send you one. NO BOOKS WILL BE SOLD before the first day of the sale.

Wheelchair access:

Our visitor centre, toilets, nature trails and viewing hides are accessible to wheelchair users.

Travel information

By train. Lochwinnoch railway station is immediately opposite the reserve.

By bus. There are bus services to Lochwinnoch village, which is nearby.

By car. The reserve is located 18 miles south-west of Glasgow, beside the A760 Largs road, which is off the A737 Irvine road (easily reached from the M8 at junction 28A). Car parking facilities are available.

Please do consider travelling by public transport. For further information, please telephone Traveline Scotland on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.travelinescotland.com Books need to be with us ASAP and no

Autumn Meeting 2005

On Saturday 5th November at the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead.

The programme is on page 8



Spring Meeting 2006

On Saturday 11th March at the Royal Marine Hotel, Hunter's Quay, Dunoon.

The programme will appear in the December *Eider*



later than end of August. For further details, please contact Joan Shaw.
E-mail: joan.shaw@rspb.org.uk
Reserve tel: 01505 842663

Seabird trip to Islay—17th September

I will be leading a field trip on the Islay Ferry on Saturday 17th September to see migrating seabirds. Almost anything can turn up at this time of year including shearwaters (Manx and possibly Sooty or even Great/Cory's), petrels, skuas, and other more common seabirds including auks, gulls, sea ducks etc. I will as usual do my best to help with identification, so this should be a good opportunity to brush up on your seabird ID skills before the winter sets in.

What we will see depends to some extent on the weather—and the birds of course. Last time we ran this trip, in 2001, we had a beautiful day but nothing really out of the ordinary in the way of birds! Still it was a very enjoyable trip and a chance to appreciate the scenery and chat to friends.

This is a non-landing day return trip from Kennacraig to Port Askaig and back and we will leave on the 13:00hrs ferry. We need to be aboard by 12:50 so I suggest we meet at the Kennacraig ferry terminal at 12:20 to allow plenty of time to buy tickets etc.

The ferry arrives back at Kennacraig at 17:35hrs and has full café, bar and restaurant facilities, so that you can buy food and drink on board if you wish.

If you would like to join us on this cruise please contact me before 20:00hrs on Friday 16th September.

Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

Visit to Beinn an Tuirc Wind Farm—24th September

Arrangements have been made for Argyll Bird Club members to visit Scottish Power's Beinn an Tuirc Wind Farm, Kintyre on Saturday 24th September. Details were given in the June *Eider* (page 16).

If you want to join this trip, please let me

have your name and telephone number before 8th September, so that I can let Scottish Power know how many to expect. The phone number is in case the trip has to be cancelled at short notice, due for instance to a severe weather forecast.

Editor

Crinan & Danna field trip—13th November

I am organising an all day meeting to the Crinan/Danna area on Sunday 13th November. Please meet in the Cairnbaan Hotel's car park at 09:30hrs and bring waterproofs, wellies and lunch pack.

We'll look for geese, other winter wild-fowl and migrants in the Crinan Moss and Loch Crinan area before moving south to Tayvallich and Loch Sween, Linne Mhurich, Ulva Pool and on to Danna Isle.

We should see up to four species of geese, **Whooper Swans**, sea and freshwater ducks, divers, and many types of passerines and some birds of prey on the rough farmland. Some walking will be involved. Please phone beforehand if you intend to come.

David Merrie

Tel: 01250 884273

Western Isles cruise in 2006

Chris Jackson, who owns and skippers a 70 foot motor yacht that sails out of Oban has offered to organise a charter for around 12 club members next year (see details in the June *Eider*, page 16).

So far, only one person has contacted me about the trip. If you are interested, please let me know at or before the autumn meeting. Chris will be talking at the meeting, so there will be a chance to discuss the trip with him on the day if there is enough interest from members.

Editor



Oystercatcher with large clutch

Tom Callan took this photograph of an Oystercatcher's nest with five eggs at Otter Ferry in June 2005. Clutches of this size are unusual and may be the result of more than one female laying in the same nest. If you look closely at the photo, there appears to be two main egg patterns in the clutch, and as individual females lay eggs of a similar colour and size, this clutch may well be the work of two females.

Editor



Albino Stonechat

This photo of an albino male Stonechat was taken by David Jardine on Colonsay. It was first seen by Mike Peacock in autumn 2004, and in May 2005 Alastair Young and David Jardine found it paired with a normal-coloured female at Baleromin Dhu with a recently fledged brood, none of which had any white plumage.

Editor



Update about the *Birds of Argyll*

We have been working hard on the text of the *Birds of Argyll*. A full set of first draft species accounts is nearing completion and we have made progress on the introductory chapters, graphical content, page layout and

likely publishing routes. The page layout shown on the next two pages for the **Sand Martin** is likely to be very close to the final appearance for the book; further sample pages will be available at our indoor meeting on 5 November. We seek additional club members to join our small project

team to assist with various tasks leading to publication in 2006. If you have some time, and would like to help, please contact me in the first instance.

David Wood

Tel: 01546 830272

E-mail: puffinus@stormie.idps.co.uk



SAND MARTIN

Riparia riparia

Summer visitor and passage migrant. Uncommon and localised breeding species.

Although widely distributed in Scotland, Sand Martin numbers are restricted by the availability of suitable nesting sites¹. The river bank and sand and gravel pit sites they often favour are impermanent by their very nature and birds may have to relocate from year to year. Also many smaller colonies are at remote or seldom visited sites. This makes it difficult to accurately assess population trends.

The evidence available from the older sources implies that overall distribution in Argyll has changed relatively little over the last 200 years apart from gaps in occupation of some of the islands. In the latter part of the 19th century Gray says they were widely distributed in single pairs or large colonies in almost every parish on the mainland and extended to all the remoter islands². The Old Statistical Account in 1794 mentions 'mouse coloured swallows' as inhabiting the sand banks of Tiree³. They continued to breed there until at least 1886⁵ but eventually the wind eroded away the nest site and by the end of the 19th they were apparently only rare visitors to the island⁴. Harvie-Brown & Buckley quote Graham as saying that the

species occurred on Iona & Mull but note that it was not recorded as occurring on Jura at this time⁴.

The first specific mention of nesting on Islay was in 1913 (when there were 3 known sites) and they were reported as possibly breeding on Jura in 19395. Baxter and Rintoul found Sand Martins on Mull in 1948 but not on Iona.

The Atlas of 1968-72 showed few differences from the pattern evinced by the historical record. Apart from Cowal, where there were confirmed breeding records from most of the 10 km squares, distribution on the mainland was patchy with significant gaps in south Kintyre and Knapdale. Breeding was also confirmed for much of western Mull, parts of Islay and for two 10km squares on Jura. There were no records at all for Colonsay, Coll, Tiree or any of the smaller islands⁶.

In common with much of the rest of Britain, a noticeable contraction of range in Argyll was evident from the 1988-91 Atlas. To some extent this was a result of the dramatic nationwide

crash in numbers in 1983, although there had been some evidence of a partial recovery since 1985. On the mainland losses occurred in north Kintyre, around Loch Awe and Loch Fyne and in North Argyll. There were also fewer confirmed breeding records for Islay and Mull and none at all for Jura. In all there were breeding records for only 24% of the Argyll 10km squares. The abundance map showed 'hot-spots' of moderately high density around Campbeltown, Lochgilphead and Dalmally⁷.

Since the last Atlas there have been regular records of active breeding colonies in Cowal, Islay, Kintyre, Mid-Argyll, Mull and N Argyll. The largest known colony, at North Ledaig sandpit near Benderloch, had increased from 170 occupied nest holes in 1996 to 340 apparently active nest holes (from a total of 392) by 1999. Since then numbers have fallen again, to less than 200 active nest holes.

Larger colonies recently counted elsewhere include:

Kilmichael Glen woodyard, Mid-Argyll: peaked at 110 active holes in 1998 but declined to only 30 in 2002.

Barcaldine gravel quarry, N Argyll: 107 burrows in 2001.

River Breackerie, Amod, Kintyre: 56 freshly dug holes in July 2001 and at least 23 active nests.

Gorten, Mull: 45 active nest holes in June 2002.

Ballure, Kintyre: 100 nest holes in groups of 40 and 60 in coastal sandbank - only 10 - 20 occupied in 2000.

Kilchiaran, Islay: 25 occupied holes in 1996, 19 in 2002.

Kilmartin Quarry: 100 occupied holes in 1996, no recent counts.

Stronchullin, Cowal: at least 29 occupied holes (from a total of around 150) in 1999.

Since 1997 colonies of less than 20 occupied nest holes have been reported at the following sites:

Cowal - Bealachandrain Farm, Blairmore, Gairletter, Little Eachaig River and River Massan.

Islay - Ardnave, Coull Farm, Laggan Bridge, Machrie River, Saligo, Tormisdale.

Kintyre - Carskey Bay, Drumgarve (Glen Lussa) and Strone Glen.

Mid-Argyll - Ashfield, Kerrara Drove Road (Oban), Leac a' Chaoruinn (Eredine), Lusragan Burn at Ardchonnell, River Add at Moine Mhor, and Tervine (Loch Awe).

Mull - Calgary, Loch Ba head, Loch Frisa, Scoor beach, Tenga/Crannich (2 small colonies), Torosay sand pit

North Argyll - River Dearg at Barcaldine⁹.

Breeding was suspected at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree in 2002 and confirmed in 2003, the first breeding record for Tiree in over 100 years. By June 2004 there were at least 9 nest holes at this site.

This is one of the first spring migrants to arrive and in most years birds are present by the first week in April. March arrivals are not unusual and the earliest date recorded was 16th March at Loch Skerrols, Islay in 1993. Most have departed by the end of September but there are occasional stragglers during October and one very late bird was at Ardilistry Bay, Islay on 4th November 2001⁹.

Although large gatherings of Sand Martins can occur in spring and autumn there have been no reports of flocks of more than 100 or so in Argyll in recent years⁹.

Ringling recoveries indicate that many of our breeding birds appear to take the same route through southern England on migration. Nine birds have either been ringed at breeding sites in Argyll and recovered at Icklesham, East Sussex in autumn or ringed there (in autumn) and subsequently recovered in Argyll. The direction they take subsequently is suggested by six birds recorded passing through Belgium and central France and one ringed in Argyll and recovered in Malta. That some at least some winter in West Africa is demonstrated by the 3 juveniles ringed at the North Connel colony (in 1989/90) and all subsequently recovered at the Parc National du Djoudj, Fleuve, Senegal.

Paul Daw

Argyll Bird Club—Treasurer's Report for the Financial Year 2004-2005

The Argyll Bird Club had a surplus of £5664.10 in financial year 2004-05 (see accounts opposite). This was mainly due to the club receiving substantial grant income (£4367) that will be used in the production of the '*Birds of Argyll*' book, and to the fact that we did not produce an *Argyll Bird Report* during this year. Our assets at the end of the year stood at £12,033.75, which represents by far the highest level in the club's history.

Income from subscriptions increased due in part to a welcome increase in membership. Income from sales, bank interest, advertising in the *Eider* and from raffles at indoor meetings were all at a higher level than usual, giving a larger total income than previously, even before inclusion of the grants.

Expenditure in 2004-05 for copying the *Eider* includes both the issues produced in 2003-04 and in 2004-05, and represents considerably less than the cost that would be incurred if copying was done commercially. Postage costs in 2003-04 were exceptionally low compared with previous years and the sum in 2004-05 represents some postage costs from the previous year as well as all postage in 2004-05, plus a bulk purchase of stamps now being used in 2005-06. The longer term trend in postage expenditure is fairly flat, as the increases in membership numbers and size of the *Eider* (sometimes pushing it into a higher postage category), are balanced by a slowly increasing number of members taking the electronic *Eider* and the fact that we have not had an *Argyll Bird Report* to post out. Expenditure on public meetings continues to rise slightly as it has over the last few years. Most of this can be attributed to room hire and refreshment costs, which have tended to increase faster than most other prices. In 2004-05 we had a large number of promotional leaflets printed, and this one-off cost should hopefully be worthwhile in terms of recruitment of new members. Equipment/software purchases in 2004-05 saw us buy software for development of our web page. This purchase was fully funded by a grant from Scottish Natural Heritage and the Local Biodiversity Partnership. For the first time the club paid for Insurance to cover risks of field outings. We also subscribed to the local tourist board, mainly to assist with the distribution of membership promotion leaflets. One subscription payment, which for technical reasons was entered twice in our 'Income' column, was returned to the member.

Given the healthy state of the club's finances we are well placed to pay for the costs of printing the '*Birds of Argyll*' book, which we hope will appear in the 2005-06 accounts.

Bob Furness, 4 June 2005

20th Year Accounts for the Argyll Bird Club 16 April 2004—15 April 2005		
	2004/2005	2003/2004
Income		
Subscription	2920.17	2053.82
Sales	170.16	77.50
Bank Interest	104.70	63.66
Fees and advertising	70.00	0.00
Other (raffles, donations, etc)	398.00	100.00
Grants	4367.00	0.00
Total	8030.03	2294.98
Expenditure		
Bird Report	0.00	1545.00
Newsletter photocopying	240.00	0.00
Postage	392.76	80.00
Bird Recorder expenses	73.11	295.50
Public meetings	631.25	584.15
Publicity leaflets	506.78	0.00
Equipment/software purchases	349.88	0.00
Insurance	150.00	0.00
Tourist Board membership	12.15	0.00
Returned subscriptions	10.00	58.00
Total	2365.93	2562.65
Surplus/Deficit for year	5664.10	-267.67
Brought forward	6369.65	6637.32
Assets at end of year	12033.75	6369.65

Minute of 19th Annual General Meeting of the Argyll Bird Club
held on Saturday, 6 November 2004

Present; David Wood (Chairman), Nigel Scriven (Vice-Chairman), John Anderson (Secretary), Bob Furness (Treasurer) and 47 members.

1. Apologies: Linda Byron, Shirley Callan, Valerie Malcolm, Bill Staley, Ian Teasdale

2. Minute of AGM, 8 November 2003: Proposed by Vi Tulloch, seconded by Clive Craik, approved by Members and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters arising: None.

4. Chairman's Report: David Wood thanked members for attending the AGM in such a large number. He reported that this had been a really busy year. He

thanked Committee Members for their excellent support and significant and valuable contributions to the Club's development and well-being. He thanked John Anderson for producing the Club's wonderful leaflet and for his sterling work as Secretary, Helen Anderson for taking the minutes, Bob Furness as Treasurer and for organising the last two successful meetings, Steve Petty and his daughter Kate for the very professional website and Argyll and Bute Local Biodiversity Partnership and Scottish Natural Heritage for the software to run the site, Paul Daw, the Argyll Bird Recorder, for his work on recording all the sightings and the time he spent on this, and Tom Callan, Mary Gregory, Jane

Mitchell and Morag Rae who had assisted with data input, Paul Daw and Clive Craik for an excellent 2001 *Argyll Bird Report* which had been published and then distributed by Bob Furness. The next *Argyll Bird Report* should be published next year and would be a combination of the years 2002 and 2003. He invited members to volunteer with the data inputting to help progress the 2004 Report which was now a simple task and Paul had prepared explanatory notes. Members were also invited to record their sightings electronically and Paul was also willing to explain this simple system. He reported that Bill

Staley was standing down as Membership Secretary and thanked him for all the hard and meticulous work he had done. Mike Gear was thanked for his fund raising endeavours and for arranging public indemnity insurance for the Club to cover field trips etc, and for attending the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) meetings along with Paul Daw. The year's field trips had been very successful, thanks being extended to David Merrie (Largybaann and Scarba), Paul Daw (Sound of Gigha) and Sue and Bob Furness for manning the hide at the Dalriada Festival which had been very worthwhile, particularly in the recruitment of new members. He reported that Tristan ap Rheinallt, Paul Daw and himself, with other authors, were working on the species accounts for the *Birds of Argyll* book, planned to be published in the autumn of 2005 – a very big undertaking. He thanked them, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Argyll & Bute Local Biodiversity Action Partnership for their financial contribution to this and Margaret Staley for her superb drawings and the new logo. He thanked Richard Allan for taking on the role of BTO representative, co-ordinating our local contribution to the BTO surveys. Regarding the introduction of the European Beaver into Knapdale, SNH continued base line monitoring of the proposed beaver sites, the project was still under discussion, and further ABC input would be made when the time was right. On the control of mink, SNH was willing to support local people financially to purchase mink traps, fuel etc. It was hoped there would be increased up-take in 2005. He was still hoping that finance would be found for a dedicated officer to work with local communities. He thanked Steve Petty for his work as Editor of the Eider, which was an excellent publication.

5. Secretary's Report: It was reported that the Committee had met four times since the last AGM and John continued to enjoy working with a very active and good Committee. He had produced the new Argyll Bird Club promotional leaflet with helpful suggestions from Committee Members, copies having been distributed to all members. Additional copies were available. The ABC had become a 'friend' of the local tourist board and copies of the leaflet should be on display in all Tourist Information Centres in Argyll and Bute. He asked all members to check their local Information Centre and, if any were out of the leaflet, to ask the Centre to obtain more copies from the Oban office, which is co-ordinating the distribution. He thanked everyone who had helped him with his work.

Treasurer's Report: Bob Furness reported that the Statement of Accounts for the year 16 April 2003 to 15 April 2004 had been published in the Eider. The ABC

had a deficit of £267.67 in the financial year 2003-04, slightly less than last year. Our assets at the end of the year stood at £6369.65, only slightly below the highest level in the Club's history. This represented our bank balance only, and excluded from consideration any non-cash assets such as unsold copies of *Argyll Bird Reports* and sales items. However, the cash value of this stock was small. Income from bank interest had fallen with declining interest rates and income from *Argyll Bird Report* sales was down due to the difficulty in selling copies of a report published rather long after the year it represented. As a result of the drop in *Argyll Bird Report* sales and the increase in *Report* printing costs, the Club may wish to consider in future whether publication of a rather late *Bird Report* in a printed form is the best way to spend a significant part of the Club's money. For example, an alternative could be to post the *Bird Report* as a pdf file on the Club's web page. The higher than normal Bird Recorder's expenses was due to a decision by the Committee to send two members to a two-day National Bird Clubs Forum in England organised by the BTO, in addition to normal annual expenses. Although no *Birds of Argyll* book costs fell within the 2003-04 financial year, we are likely to see a substantial part of our bank balance required at least initially to fund the production of the this book. In the longer term, sales of the book may recover part of that expenditure. In view of the healthy state of the Club's bank balance, he would not recommend any increase to the current subscription rate. The Statement of Accounts was approved, proposed by David Merrie and seconded by Kate Pendreigh.

7. Membership Report: In the absence of Bill Staley, there was no formal membership report. However, Bob Furness reported that Bill Staley had advised him sometime ago that he wished to stand down at this meeting and the membership

data base had been handed over to Sue Furness who was willing to undertake these duties. Since then, about 15-20 people had joined as a result of the new promotional leaflet. The Chairman called for nominations for the post of Membership Secretary and Sue Furness was appointed, proposed by David Merrie and seconded by Nigel Scriven.

8. Proposed Field Trips:

5 March: Isle of Bute, organiser Ian Hopkins

2 April: Sound of Gigha, organiser Paul Daw

Sometime between April and September: Day trip to Colonsay from Kennacraig, organiser Paul Daw

May/June: Orkney or Handa, organiser Bob Furness

Sanda Island, organiser Nigel Scriven. Perhaps flexible 1 or 2 days

Jura – proposed as little bird information available. Organiser – to be found.

9. Election of Office Bearers and Committee Members: The following existing Office Bearers and Committee Members were re-elected, proposed by Norman Rae, seconded by Clive Craik. Chairman - David Wood; Vice-Chairman - Nigel Scriven; Secretary - John Anderson; Treasurer - Bob Furness; Members - Roger Broad, Tom Callan, Paul Daw (Argyll Bird Recorder), Mike Gear, David Merrie, Katie Pendreigh, Steve Petty (Editor of the Eider). Richard Allan was proposed by David Merrie, seconded by Nigel Scriven and elected.

There being no other competent business, the Chairman was heartily thanked for all his hard work and the development of the Club and its publications.

The meeting ended at 1435.

Helen and John Anderson, 7 November 2004

Agenda for the 20th Annual General Meeting of the Argyll Bird Club

The AGM will be held at 13.40 hrs on the 5th November 2005 at the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead (see Autumn Meeting programme on page 8)

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2004 Annual General Meeting
3. Matters arising not covered in following items
4. Chairman's Report
5. Secretary's Report
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Membership Secretary's Report
8. Future field trips
9. Election of Office Bearers and Committee Members. A maximum of 12 can be elected - nominations invited (current officials are listed on the back page)
10. AOCB (please notify the Chairman before the meeting)

John Anderson, Secretary, 11th June 2005

Programme for the Autumn Meeting on Saturday 5th November 2005
Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead

09.30	Doors open, coffee and tea
09.55-10.00	Welcome and introduction — <i>David Wood</i>
10.00-10.10	Recent bird sightings — <i>Paul Daw</i>
10.10-10.30	Scottish outdoors access: recent changes in the law — <i>Gavin Smith</i>
10.30-11.00	To moult or not to moult: a Tawny Owl's dilemma — <i>Steve Petty</i>
11.00--11.20	Coffee/tea
11.20-12.00	Wildlife crime — <i>Joe Connelly</i>
12.00-12.40	Costa Rica: breakfast of biodiversity — <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
12.40-13.40	Lunch (available in the hotel)
13.40-14.10	Annual General Meeting
14.10-14.50	How birds build nests — <i>Mike Hansell</i>
14.50-15.10	Coffee/tea
15.10-15.50	Wildlife on Coll — <i>Simon Wellock</i>
15.50-16.20	Visiting St Kilda and other Western Isles — <i>Chris Jackson</i>
16.20-16.30	Raffle and end of meeting

Sanda weekend 18-19 June

It was flat calm and cloudy as I sped down the west coast of Kintyre to Campbeltown, arriving ahead of time as the road was so quiet. At the back of nine o'clock, six of us assembled to board the *Seren Lass*, the Sanda boat. The skipper, Peter, has been working on the Sanda run for the past three summers. As skipper of a Norfolk fishing boat he is an extremely competent navigator. His experience extends beyond British waters to several years in the Caribbean, and to racing yachts as well as powerboats.

David and Janet Palmar had come down the night before from Glasgow, Tom Callan arrived just before me from Otter Ferry, and Lily Cregeen and Ellen Oliver from close to Campbeltown. Douglas and Val Barker were to come over on the Sunday for the day. We were also met by Rab Morton, warden of the Observatory, who was making his way back across to the island.

The early rain that I had driven through on the way had dried up, but as we motored down Campbeltown Loch the cloud was low on the hill, and we emerged into a dense fog. We could just see the shore, but it was hard to judge the distance through

the fog. The benefits of radar, GPS and chart plotters were very real in these conditions. There was also quite a stiff breeze, about force four, with a moderately bumpy sea. It was not the best of conditions for birding.

A minor incident occurred when a warning buzzer went off warning of a drop in oil pressure. We stopped and investigated. An oil leak was swiftly tracked to a loose nut, following a recent oil change. Quickly sorted, we continued on our way, arriving at around 11 o'clock.

We were welcomed ashore by Dick Gannon and ushered into the Byron Darn-ton bar for a bowl of soup and home baked bread. The forecast was for the weather to brighten, so we didn't feel a great sense of urgency to get going straight away. The four of us that were staying over dumped our bags in the accommodation, the old schoolhouse, and we all assembled in the front garden of the farmhouse.

Rab had been monitoring the waders on the beach, and had found several pairs of **Ringed Plovers** and **Oystercatchers** with nests. The challenge was to spot the nests

from the markers by the road. Some still had eggs and some had hatched. They were well concealed by their camouflage.

Just before cutting off the road to go down to the boathouse, a pile of feathers revealed the recent presence of a **Sparrowhawk**. The boathouse is the home of the observatory and recent modifications have created a public exhibition area, separated off from the main room. A new door on the south side is now the entrance, and the sliding door entrance on the shore side is now a picture window. The display panels for the public exhibition are still being created, so there were only freshly painted blank walls. Inside the main room a **Wheatear** had found its way in, and was fluttering in the window. Rab caught it and it was duly ringed and measured, then taken outside for photographs. Within a few minutes of its capture it was free again to forage along the shore and to build up its energy reserves prior to heading south for the winter.

By this time the weather had turned drier and brighter. From the boatshed we worked eastwards along the shore to the

Herring Gull colony, where some eggs were still hatching, and larger chicks were hiding in the rocks and the oldest on the sea. The going got quite tough further round on the south east side, so we made our way up the grassy slopes to bypass the difficulties, and traversed to the viewpoint above the auk colony. This gave us a bird's eye view of a large number of **Razorbills**, and a few **Guillemots**, **Puffins** and **Shags**. There are **Fulmars** nesting all the way up the cliff, and they glided past at eye level. We sat enjoying our lunch and watching the squadrons of **Gannets** on their flight path to and from Ailsa Craig at cruising altitude.

Walking up from our lunch spot we kept high, seeing **Meadow Pipits**, **Wheatears** and hearing a **Skylark**. Cutting down to the Lighthouse, we marvelled at the extraordinary shape of Elephant Rock, next to the unusual lighthouse designed by Stevenson, with its double flight of spiral stairs to the top of Prince Edward's Rock. The slopes round about it are the home of **Manx Shearwaters**, and the rocks above the beach below is the home of **Storm Petrels**. A night visit would be required to see both of these. In case conditions might be right later on, we set up a couple of mist nets, and then furled them tightly. The 1946 wreck of the Byron Darnton can be seen here at low water.

Coming back down the one road on the island we could see and hear the clamorous **Common Gull** colony just to the west. Entering the top of the glen, the view down towards the boathouse stretched across the fenced pasture, grazed short by the island's sheep. Various corners of this valley have been fenced off and planted with native deciduous trees. The scrub that has developed harbours **Whitthroats** and **Sedge Warblers**. The height of some of the trees has now reached 8 to 10 feet and is able to provide enough shelter for some mist nets.

The damp rushy ground in the middle of the glen holds **Reed Buntings**, and the bracken and gorse on the surrounding slopes have **Stonechats** and **Linnets**. Walking down the road, the fence is an attractive perch for many birds, especially young **Wheatears** and another Sanda speciality; **Twite**.

Back down at the pub refreshment was available and we could wave off Ellen and Lily on their journey back home. The four of us that were staying settled in to the Old Schoolhouse, and changed into clean clothes prior to our evening meal in one of the remotest pubs in Scotland. The remoteness doesn't seem to be a deterrent to the clients though, as several yachts were anchored in the bay, and RIBs parked at the pier. The bar was positively busy. The menu is not extensive, but relatively reasonable, tasty and filling, which is remark-

able from such a tiny kitchen. The kitchen extension is the next phase of development, and is already underway. The bar was well stocked with three real ales, and the usual keg beers. The appeal of walking back up to the lighthouse for Stormies and Manxies diminished with the realisation that it was not going to get dark enough until extremely late. We did walk along the shore towards the boatshed and Rab was able to find a **Manx Shearwater** by its burrow for us to see.

In the morning it was calm and foggy. We breakfasted in the bar and then went down on the shore to wait for the Seren Lass to arrive with Douglas and Val Barker. While doing so we watched the behaviour of a pair of **Ringed Plovers** on the beach next to the pier. Their eggs had hatched and there were three chicks to be caught and ringed. That done we went up to the hen house to see if the **Swallow** brood was ready for ringing, and they were duly adorned with unique serial numbers.

With our own numbers back up to seven, we were off along the beach again, and located the **Oystercatcher** chick belonging to the noisy parents. It was very well camouflaged, and had been ringed already. From here our track followed the pattern of the day before, along the shore and up over by the freshwater loch to look down on the auks and round to the lighthouse. David spent ages there photographing **Black Guillemots**, as they were particularly approachable. If you sit still, they come and perch on rocks near to you.

By mid afternoon we were sat outside the Byron Darnton pub, avoiding dehydration, to be disturbed by a small helicopter landing in the field next to the house. The bar was already busy, but people had flown from Cumbernauld for a drink here. The time duly came to board the boat for home, and David Palmar returned from his photographic exertions in time, and we made our farewells.

I would like to say that we had an uneventful journey back to Campbeltown, but that was not the case! It was a beautiful calm and sunny afternoon. Just north of Sheep Island an engine warning light and buzzer warned of a loss of cooling water pressure, and the engine was shut down. Initial thoughts were seaweed

blocking the seawater intake filter, sucked in while coming alongside the end of the pier at low tide. This was cleaned out, and reassembled but still no cooling water. Checked the water pump impeller and put in a new one, which was easier said than done! It was just as well it was so calm and the flood tide was carrying us in the right direction. There were great views of **Puffins** and **Porpoises** while we were waiting. Impeller installed, but we still had no water pressure. By radio we had alerted the island of our situation, and two of the yachts anchored in Sanda Bay were from Campbeltown, and were making their way towards us. In time they reached us, and one passed us a tow line, so we did not need the Campbeltown lifeboat on this occasion! It was a slower journey home than planned, but we were on dry land for 9pm, a bit later than anticipated. Had it not happened, we would not have seen the **Minke Whale** while under tow – a memorable end to an otherwise great weekend!

Many thanks are due to the yachts that saw us back safely, and also, to Peter the boatman who managed the situation so well. To Dick, Steve and Sue who accommodated us so well on the island and to Rab for sharing his enthusiasm for Sanda's bird life with us. And, thanks to those members who came along and made it so worthwhile.

Post script: the engine damage has proved more serious than initially thought, and requires a new engine. It is still possible and easy to get to Sanda, as there are RIBs in Campbeltown that can be chartered and get there very quickly. The seabird ringing courses in the last week in June and first week in July went ahead despite the demise of the Seren Las. Anyone wishing to visit Sanda should look up the Sanda website for information and contacts at:

www.sanda-island.co.uk

Day Tel: 01586 554 667

I also recommend the bird observatory website:

www.sibo.abelgratis.co.uk

Mobile phone: 07979 013 954

Nigel Scriven



Argyll Bird Club members on Sanda with the Warden (Photo: Nigel Scriven)

A survey of Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* moult flocks in south and west Scotland, Northern Ireland and northwest England in 2004

Introduction

As part of the on-going monitoring of Common Eider populations in the Firth of Clyde (Waltho 2001, 2002, 2003), several attempts have been made to count moult flocks in recent years. Between 2001 and 2003, all 13 flocks were counted at least once, but not all flocks were counted in any one year. Totals were; 13007 at 10 sites in 2001 (Waltho 2001), 9354 at 8 sites in 2002 (Waltho 2002) and 12195 at 10 sites in 2003 (Waltho 2003). There is evidence that the traditional moult sites along the Ayrshire coast have declined dramatically over the last decade, but without evidence of mass mortality, it is considered that these birds may have moved elsewhere to moult.

The Loch Ryan moult flock has been long known (Dickson 1986) and there were several counts of another moult flock in west Galloway, north of Portpatrick (*Dumfries & Galloway Bird Reports*). The origin of Eiders moulting in Galloway is unknown, and the subject of some speculation. In other parts of the survey area little is known about the location or size of moult flocks, with the exception of Morecambe Bay.

This survey was undertaken to establish the location and size of moult flocks throughout the Firth of Clyde, west Argyll and islands, west Galloway, Northern Ireland and northwest England and to provide a baseline for future monitoring.

2004 survey

In 2004, a concerted effort was made to undertake a complete count of all 13 Clyde sites, co-ordinated by Chris Waltho. In addition, an attempt was made to count all likely moult flocks in west Argyll, southern Inner Hebrides, west Galloway, Northern Ireland and Morecambe Bay. These were co-ordinated as follows: Coll (Simon Wellock), Tiree (John Bowler), Mull (Dave Sexton and Alan Spellman), Islay (Malcolm Ogilvie), West Argyll (Clive Craik), West Galloway (Chris Waltho), Northern Ireland (Neville McKee and James Robinson) and

Morecambe Bay (John Thompson)

All counts were undertaken during the period 17 July—22 August, when the majority of birds were flightless, and so incapable of significant movements. Coverage varied among areas (Table 1). Whenever possible, counters were asked to separate moulting males, essentially black eclipse plumage, from the brown plumaged females and juveniles.

Results

A total of 25,529 birds were counted at 33 moulting sites (Table 2 and Figure 1), of these 13,569 (53.1%) were located at 13 sites in the Firth of Clyde.

Ten flocks had in excess of 800 birds with total count of 20,114 birds or 78.8% of the overall count (Figure 1 and bold numbers in the 'count' column of Table 2). These 10 sites surpassed the 750 criteria for national (Britain) importance. In addition, Belfast Lough (692) surpassed the 50 criteria for all Ireland importance.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to all the counters who took part, namely John Bowler, Tom Callan, Tom Cameron, Clive Craik, George Henderson, Antony McGeehan, Neville McKee, Malcolm Ogilvie, James Robinson, Dave Sexton, Alan Spellman, John Thompson, Simon Wellock

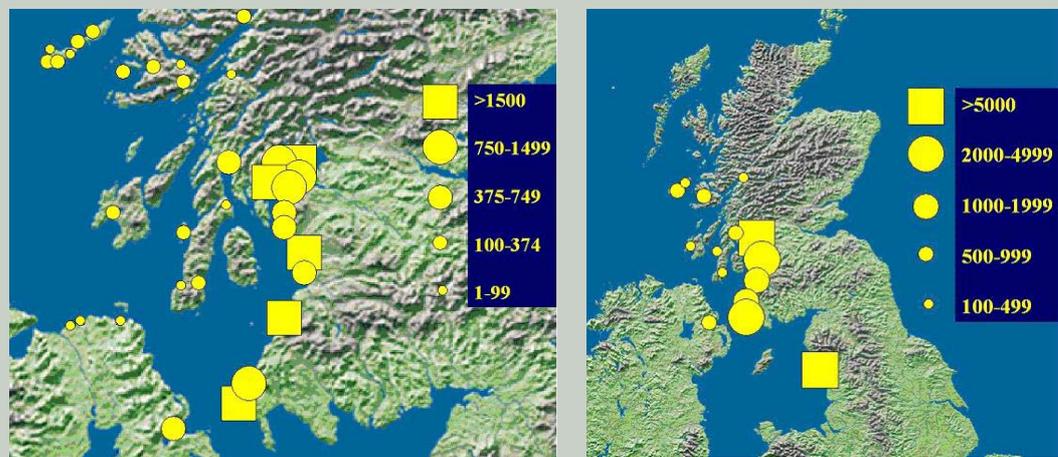


Figure 1. Moulting sites of Common Eiders in western Scotland and Northern Ireland (left-hand figure) and sites with over 100 moulting birds in the whole survey area (right-hand figure)

Table 1. Survey effort for locating moult flocks of Common Eider

Location	Coverage	Comments
Firth of Clyde	Good	All sites counted
Coll	Good	All coasts and Gunna covered
Tiree	Good	All coastline counted
Mull	Good	Likely most sizeable flocks were found
Colonsay/Oronsay	No count	
Jura	No count	
Islay	Limited	Only Loch Indaal counted
West Argyll	Limited	No coverage between Kilberry and Oban
West Galloway	Good	2 counts north of Portpatrick
Northern Ireland	Good	Most likely sites counted from Belfast to mouth of Lough Foyle
Morecambe Bay	Good	Flocks around Walney and Foulney counted four times

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Table 2. The location of moulting flocks of Common Eider in western Scotland, Northern Ireland and northwest England

<i>Place name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Observer</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Gareloch	Firth of Clyde	22-Aug	Chris Waltho	2,230	51% male (n=1730)
Lower Loch Long	Firth of Clyde	21-Aug	Chris Waltho	914	72.5% male (n=864)
Hunters Quay-Toward Pt	Firth of Clyde	21-Aug	Chris Waltho	2,225	
Hunterston-Fairlie	Firth of Clyde	11-Aug	Chris Waltho	497	
Ardrossan-Seamill	Firth of Clyde	11-Aug	Chris Waltho	450	
Irvine Bay	Firth of Clyde	07-Aug	Chris Waltho	1,547	
Ayr Bay	Firth of Clyde	07-Aug	Chris Waltho	718	
Turnberry-Girvan	Firth of Clyde	31-Jul	Chris Waltho	1,500	
Loch Ryan	Firth of Clyde	31-Jul	Chris Waltho	1,150	90% male
Gourock-Wemyss Bay	Firth of Clyde	11-Aug	Chris Waltho	845	
Clyde Estuary	Firth of Clyde	11-Aug	Chris Waltho	803	
Otter Ferry	Firth of Clyde	14-Aug	Tom Callan	590	
Campbeltown Loch	Firth of Clyde	mid July	Chris Waltho	100	
Killantringan Bay	West Galloway	10-Aug	Tom Cameron	3,600	mostly males
Sound of Gigha	Gigha	mid July	Chris Waltho	420	
Traigh Hough, Tiree	Tiree	08-Aug	John Bowler	92	60.8% m (56m 36f/juv)
West Hynish, Tiree	Tiree	09-Aug	John Bowler	179	?
Gott Bay, Tiree	Tiree	10-Aug	John Bowler	87	100% male
Traigh Bhagh, Tiree	Tiree	16-Aug	John Bowler	187	?
Coll	Coll	9 Aug	Simon Wellock	235	c40% male
Gunna	Coll	9 Aug	Simon Wellock	141	
Loch Indaal	Islay	early Aug	Malcolm Ogilvie	150	
Sallachain	Loch Linne	30-Jul	Clive Craik	147	
Scallastle Bay	Mull	12-Aug	Clive Craik	25	
Loch na Keal	Mull	late July	per Alan Spellman	150	
Loch Spelvie	Mull	late July	per Alan Spellman	100	
Staffa	Mull	late July	per Alan Spellman	300	
Ardachy	Loch Etive	01-Jul	Clive Craik	77	
Belfast Lough N	Northern Ireland	10-Aug	per Neville McKee	692	92.3% m (638 m & 54 f/juv)
Ballycastle-Fair Head	Northern Ireland	mid Aug	per Neville McKee	26	50% male

The Eider

Place name	Location	Date	Observer	Count	Notes
Port Ballantrae	Northern Ireland	mid Aug	per Neville McKee	18	44.4% male
Port Stewart-Portrush	Northern Ireland	mid Aug	per Neville McKee	34	52.9% male
Walney Island/Foulney Island	Morecambe Bay	1-8 Aug	John Thompson	5,300	88.7% m (max 4700 m & 600 f)
TOTAL				25,529	

Rafting in the hills

During the weekend of the 21/22 May 2005 I made the first of my three annual pilgrimages to an area east of Loch Awe, on the Ederline private estate and the Forestry Commission's Eredine Forest. It was on two lochs on the Ederline estate in 1976 that I got permission to put out one raft for a pair of **Red-throated Divers** and another raft for a pair of **Black-throated Divers**. Both pairs used to nest within a short distance of a well-used hill track, an old drove road. The lochs had no islands, so the divers had to nest on the shore, and in years prior to 1976 they had suffered disturbance or predation to such an extent that they hardly ever fledged young. The estate kindly provided a Landrover for transporting the raft bases up the hill track and boats for use on the lochs, although in one case we had to drag a boat up a 50ft high slope from a larger nearby loch.

The rafts were very successful. The pair of **Red-throated Divers** produced an average of one chick a year over many years. The Black-throated Diver pair also took straightaway to their raft, but were not consistently successful. I wrote a short note for *British Birds* on the success in 1978 (Merrie 1979) and was afterwards contacted by folk from all over the world, who saw opportunities for rafts with similar or different species. The North American Loon Fund had had a similar scheme, using a raft of a different design for **Great Northern Divers**, and I corresponded with them for several years. Nearer to home, a keen young birdwatcher from Bute, by the name of Ian Hopkins, took the design and installed a raft in a loch in Bute. Over the years, this has been regularly used by **Red-throated Divers**. British Petroleum kindly sponsored more rafts in 1979 and 1980, so that I then had a fleet of eight! In due course the RSPB took up

the idea and started to make rafts for **Black-throated Divers** (Hancock 2000). They now have 65 sites across Scotland where rafts are or have been installed. They have modified the design and now have to adhere to health and safety issues that would have been unimaginable in the gung-ho early days. Over the last five years, Forest Enterprise at Lochgilhead has been putting out rafts of a very economical and successful design in lochs and lochans on Forestry Commission ground. The number grows yearly and now stands at over twenty.

Where rafts have been provided the results have been rewarding (Merrie 1995), with the production of young in both species improving to a level that should sustain the future population. Of course, the rafts and associated waters need to be monitored during the breeding season for the presence of birds returning from their winter break, to check that laying has taken place and whether young hatch and fledge. This involves at least three visits each season to each raft site, when checks for fishing or loafing divers on nearby waters are also made.

During the rest of the year work can be done to repair damaged or worn rafts, or to make new ones. Forest Enterprise have this year employed a Conservation Officer, Marina Smith, and deployed two rangers (Jock Hunter and Bob Blackwell) purely on conservation work. Jock and Bob have been responsible for making and monitoring all or most of the rafts on Forestry Commission waters. Jock has the use of an Argo, eight-wheeled go-anywhere vehicle, which can carry a raft base, a boat, anchors and tools (spades, ropes etc), so that raft installation is a much less physical task than when we started, when we had to man-handle raft bases (2x3m) up to 2 miles across rough country.

The raft base is constructed from two layers of plastic or plastic-coated fence netting and plastic drums. The raft is built on site with turfs cut at the lochside and secured below a third layer of fence netting. It is then towed out by a boat, assisted by ropes handled by helpers on the shore. Anchors of concrete or netting bags filled with stones are dropped off at appropriate spots.

The first **Red-throated Diver** raft installed in 1976 lasted till last year,

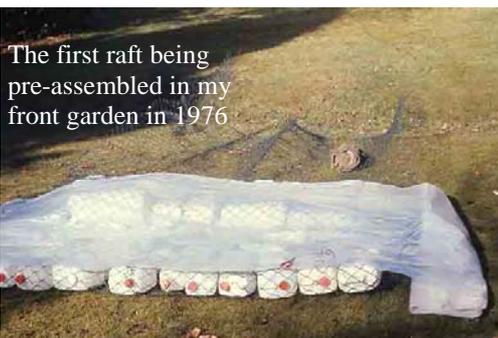
but age and last winter's gales finally did for it. This May we found it scattered over the moor to the north of the lochan. I hope to be able to rebuild it before the winter comes. I too am feeling the effect of passing years! So, after spending the last thirty years monitoring a small population of divers (by now my rounds cover 14 rafts, mostly on Forestry Commission ground), I am now looking for a few interested people to take over this task during the next 2-3 years. Forest Enterprise plan to cover all rafts on their ground, but it would be a good opportunity for community involvement if some Argyll Bird Club members could get involved in their work, and I am trying to encourage this. Then there are the four rafts on private ground, with the potential for a few more. These are easily covered in a day's walk. I was lucky to have Marina Smith with me on 21 May and to be able to show her seven raft sites at Eredine, and on the 22 May I was ac-



A new mini-raft for divers on Loch Leachd (photo: David Merrie)

companied by Dave and Pat Batty from Kilmichael.

I would very much like to hear from other people who might be interested in getting involved in raft monitoring, and would be happy to take them out on one of my rounds next year. These are likely to be during early-mid May, around mid-summer and early August 2006. Anyone interested must be able to walk for 5-6 hours over rough ground. I will introduce them to the estates concerned. Those interested in continuing alone in the future will have to obtain SNH Schedule 1 licences. There are other things to be seen in the hills too, and the views can be superb. So, these days out can be very rewarding. For instance, in May 2005 we found a pair of **Whooper Swans** (did they stay to breed?)



The first raft being pre-assembled in my front garden in 1976

and a rare dragonfly. So, roll up, roll up, I'd love to hear from you.

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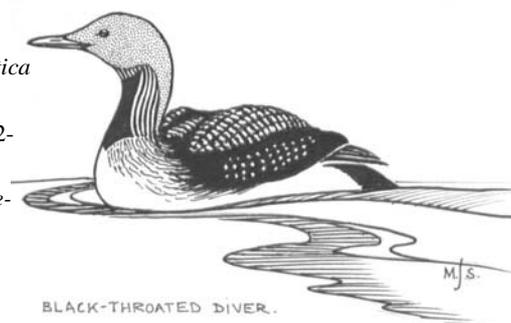
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BLACK-THROATED DIVER.

The Hedge Sparrow's tale

The **Hedge Sparrow** or Dunnock is found in most gardens on Bute. Somewhat mouse-like, it rarely lands on my bird tables, preferring to feed on the ground before retreating under shrubs. In parts of Scotland it is known as 'Creepie'. It is not a sparrow but an accentor, largely insectivorous, hence its needle like bill, quite unlike the sparrow's seed eating instrument. Its plumage can be described as grey and tweedy *Prunellus modularis* is its scientific name. Prunelle means sloe or sloe-coloured; modularis, director of music, referring to its high pitched song. **Dunnock** derives from dun (coloured), beautifully described by John Clare, the great birdwatching poet:

The tame Hedge Sparrow in its russet dress

is half a Robin for its gentle ways.

Hedge Sparrows are greatly favoured by the **Cuckoo**, and it has a reputation for being easily fooled, so tolerant are they of the intruder in the nest. However, do not underestimate the gentle **Dunnock**. Recent research has revealed that their sex lives are very complicated!

It was once believed that the **Dunnock** was monogamous, but now it seems that polyandrous trios are the norm, namely one female and two males. Males have been observed (I saw it myself this spring) to peck at the cloacae of the female before mating, relieving the cloacae of any semen



Photo: Jim Duncan

already deposited by another male, thereby maximising the spread of its own progeny! The female wants to ensure a good supply of food for her offspring, so she uses two food finders, but, there are also polygynous trios - a male and two or even three females.

After the breeding season, the complicated pair bonds are broken, and birds remain solitary and territorial until the following breeding season, when the careful observer will see the fluttering wing display of the male trying to attract a female - or is it the female trying to seduce a male?!

British Dunnocks are non-migratory, unlike their continental cousins, which are far more migratory and occasionally reach the east coast of Scotland.

Michael Thomas

[Editor's note: this account is taken from *Ornithological Tales Book IV*, which Michael has written about the birds of Bute. *Ornithological Tales Book I-III* are available from the Bute Museum, Stuart Street, Rothsay, Bute PA20 0EP and cost £4.50 each, including P&P. Cheques should be made payable to 'Bute Museum'.]

Islay memories

As I write this I am sitting at my window looking out over a small freshwater loch that is home to a few Mallards and Tufted Ducks. A flock of Rock Doves is foraging in the field outside, with a few Greylags in the distance and a Buzzard circling overhead. It could be Islay - but it isn't. After spending ten of the last twelve years on the island, I have moved north to a new home on the Isle of Lewis. It's a tremendously exciting place for birdwatching, but even so I feel frequent pangs of long-

ing for my old home on the west side of Loch Gruinart. I feel that I shall never get to know a place and its birds so well again.

By way of consolation, I have of course accumulated many happy memories - together with a large number of field notebooks. I would like to share a few of these memories, and it seems logical to start with what I regard as my most exciting birding experience on the island. This was my encounter with an Ivory Gull.

I have a strong interest in gulls, and for

many years Ivory Gull had vied with Ross's Gull for top spot on my "gulls I would most like to see" list. I had wasted a fair amount of time and money trying without success to see the latter, but the only occasion I had even come close to seeing an Ivory Gull was in Canada in 1983. One morning a birdwatching friend had arrived breathless at my door to announce that there were "*trois Mouettes blanches à Pointe-au-Père*." Sadly, the said *Mouettes blanches* had departed by the time I reached the quay where they'd been sighted, and they did not reappear.

The Eider

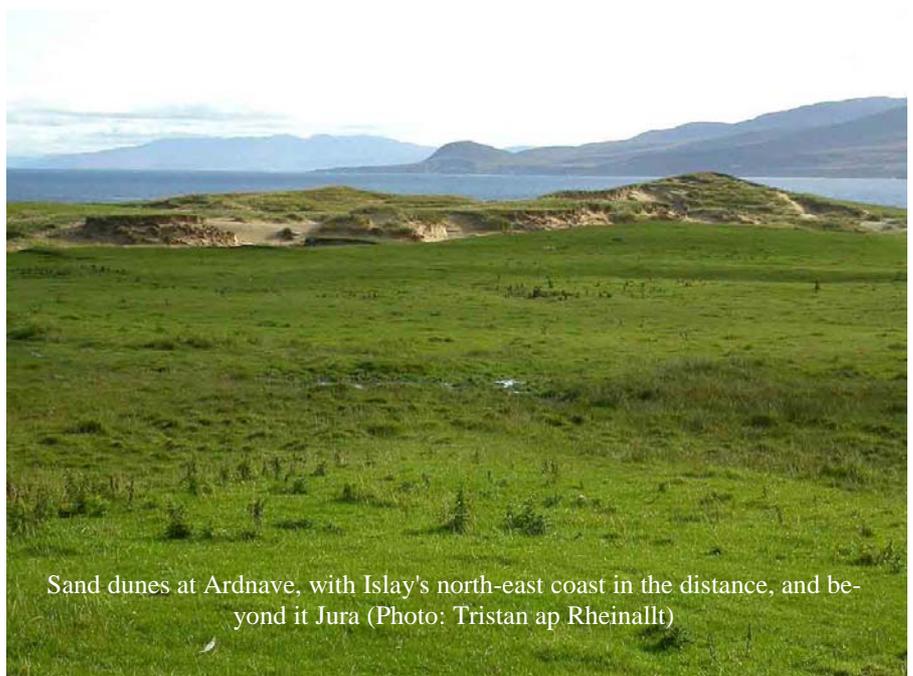
I seem to recall that this incident took place in the month of January. Seventeen years later, on January 24th 2000 to be precise, I received an interesting phone call from Clive McKay at the Loch Gruinart RSPB office. I confess that I was initially sceptical when he reported that two RSPB volunteers claimed to have seen an Ivory Gull on the beach at Ardnave the previous afternoon. It wouldn't be the first time that people had been fooled by a white or nearly white Common Gull or Kittiwake. It didn't help either that I'd been down at Ardnave that afternoon myself, just a few hundred metres away from the place where the bird was allegedly sighted, but nothing even remotely resembling an Ivory Gull had passed my way.

Nevertheless, as Clive relayed the details to me, I became intrigued. The bird had not been an all-white adult, as I'd assumed it would be, but a spotted first-winter. Thus misidentification seemed less likely. Still, it was rather odd that the finders hadn't told anyone else about it for almost twenty-four hours, and it was clear that no one from the RSPB was sufficiently inspired by their report to go out and look for the bird. I decided to carry on with my work.

I should point out that I'm the kind of person who finds it difficult to resist going to check things out. This trait has led me to waste a lot of time over the years, but every so often I've struck lucky. This time, the thought of coming face-to-face with a bird that I regarded as almost mythical continued to niggle away at me until, finally, I abandoned the computer in frustration and went to collect my binoculars and telescope.

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon, the kind of winter's afternoon when avian activity dips nearly to nothing. It was also unusually calm. In fact, the stillness was almost eerie. As I walked out through the dunes in the direction of Ardnave Point, I felt that a less promising scenario for finding a rarity could hardly be imagined. The only birds to be seen were a few Common Gulls flying lethargically along the shoreline. With not even a breath of wind in the air, their wing beats were slow and ponderous, making them seem much larger than they really were.

After about an hour I had lost what little hope I ever had of locating my quarry. But just as I was deciding to return to the car, a solitary gull appeared out of the blue and flew past me at eye-level, just a few metres away. It looked like nothing I'd ever seen before. I barely had time to register its appearance before it flew over a sand dune and disappeared from sight, leaving me desperately trying to fix the few definite features I'd noticed in my mind. But there was no room for doubt about the identification.



Sand dunes at Ardnave, with Islay's north-east coast in the distance, and beyond it Jura (Photo: Tristan ap Rheinallt)

I immediately clambered to the top of a dune and called the RSPB office to say I had found the Ivory Gull. Then I jogged off towards the south, convinced that it would have joined the Common Gulls on the beach. It wasn't there. I scrambled up to various vantage points and scanned my surroundings, but to no avail. I was now becoming very worried, imagining a scenario where I would have to try to compile a submission for the rarities committee, based on a fleeting view that lasted only a few seconds. I would struggle to put together a description that didn't apply equally well to a Dalmatian.

The arrival of several people from the RSPB lifted my spirits a little. We assembled on the shore and tried to figure out where the bird might have gone. Then Clive McKay spotted a distant gull out on a sandbank in the estuary. Telescopes were trained and smiles broke out. I breathed a sigh of relief.

The Ivory Gull was so far away that views through the haze were less than satisfactory. Nevertheless, the strange pigeon-chested shape, the short black legs and the spotted plumage were apparent, as was the

untidy grey smudge at the base of a dull yellow bill. Less than ten minutes later, the bird took off and flew out into the bay before circling round and heading westwards, passing almost over our heads before disappearing inland. At this point George Jackson managed to get a couple of shots of it in flight with this camera, though when developed they showed little more than a white speck.

Unfortunately, although the gull didn't look as though it was going very far, it was never seen again. I searched in vain for it during the rest of the afternoon, and again with others the following day. Interestingly, a first-winter Ivory Gull was seen on the Isle of Lewis from 9th to 18th January, and it seems highly likely that it and the Ardnave individual was Argyll's second Ivory Gull in recent years, and there are in addition a small number of sightings from the 19th century. It was also the 13th gull species I'd seen on Islay – but in this case 13 was most definitely a lucky number!

Tristan ap Rheinallt

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Manx Shearwaters breeding on the Garvellachs?

When the *Seabird 2000* book was published, it came as a surprise that the only Manx Shearwaters found in Argyll were on Sanda and the Treshnish Isles. David Jardine decided to take this up with Ian Mitchell of JNCC who had organised the survey, as David had seen dusk-time rafts off the Garvellachs each year since 1982 during May-July. In the 1980s numbers ranged between 500 and 2000, in the 1990s between 200 and 1950, while there had only been between 370 and 600 birds during the first few years of this century. Members of the Argyll Bird Club had also

found remains of predated Manx Shearwaters when they visited the islands in June 1991. Members of the Clyde Ringing Group had also heard Manx Shearwaters ashore at the Garvellachs in the 1980s, so the evidence of an undocumented colony seemed strong.

Following discussion with Ian Mitchell an expedition to search for Manx Shearwaters was organised locally by Stephen Austin, SNH and involved several members of the Argyll Bird Club. They visited

and camped on the two main islands on 6-8th June 2005.

The group split up, some going to Eileach an Naoimh, others to Garbh Eileach. Over the first 24 hours no birds were found ashore either during daytime searches, in response to taped calls or by listening in suitable areas after dark. However, at dusk approximately 350 Manx Shearwaters were seen in two separate, distant rafts to the north east of Garbh Eileach. On the following day, a few short burrows were located on Garbh Eileach, but none showed any signs of recent usage and these may even have been dug by rabbits that were noted during the 1991 visit but

were apparently absent during this visit. The evening of the 7th June was murky and the Garbh Eileach team split up with Roger Broad heading to the north of the island and Matt Parsons and Stephen to the south. Around 2330 hrs, from near the top of the north cliffs, Roger was amazed to hear a distant and intermittent Corncrake calling. Closing the distance on the corncrake took Roger to the northeast end of the island from where the corncrake could be heard calling from across the water on Dun Chonnuill. In the half hour after midnight, as the corncrake continued calling persistently, Manx Shearwaters could be heard calling over Dun Chonnuill

with 3-4 calling simultaneously at times.

Remarkably, when Roger contacted Matt and Stephen by phone, he found that they too were listening to Manx Shearwaters calling over the small island to the south - A ' Chuli. This year's expedition has certainly strengthened the case for the discovery of one/two new breeding colonies of Manx Shearwater in Argyll; the challenge now remains to find and count the actual nests and confirm breeding.

Roger Broad & David Jardine

Corncrake chorus



These superb photos of Corncrakes were taken on Iona this spring by Jim Duncan



The results of a suite of positive conservation measures on the Argyll Islands, begun mainly since the early 1990s, have shown a spectacular reversal in the decline of Corncrake numbers. Comprehensive surveys, carried out largely by RSPB and Scottish Natural Heritage staff, have found successive record figures in each of the last four summers. While final survey totals have yet to be confirmed for 2005, the numbers heard calling in the island strongholds this summer have been unprecedented in recent years—Coll 155, Tiree 310, Mull and Iona 32+, Colonsay and Oronsay 44 and Islay 50. In total, about 600 Corncrakes have been reported in Argyll this year, of which only two reports have so far been received from the mainland.

Where Corncrakes were most concentrated, in areas of Tiree and Coll, the nocturnal chorus was remarkable with more than 10-15 individuals audible from some places. The camouflaging growth of vegetation in the early spring was slow to get underway in many areas, and combined with exceptional numbers of corncrakes returning to their strongholds in April-May, many observers were treated to the bonus of clear, uninterrupted views of Corncrakes as they moved along the fringes of patches of early cover. Particularly good viewing opportunities were to be had from the roadside, without causing disturbance, at RSPB reserves on Coll and Oronsay and from the roadside on Iona. **Roger Broad**

This year's breeding season. Anecdotal evidence so far indicates that this has been a mixed breeding season. Some wading birds were apparently washed out earlier in the year and there are indications that many terns had a very poor season. On the other hand, our garden birds seem to have had a very successful season. In particular, there have been reports of large flocks of **Greenfinches** including many juveniles. If our garden is anything to go by, there have been also many successful late broods of tits and **Chaffinches**.

Swallows. I would be interested to hear your comments on **Swallow** numbers in your area this year. Our local farmer tells me that his barns which normally hold at least 14 or 15 nests had only 4 this year. I have heard similar reports from elsewhere in Mid-Argyll and Cowal. Has this been your experience too?

Hobbies. There have been several reports and rumours of reports of **Hobbies** in the Mid-Argyll area this summer. If anyone has any firm information, especially detailed descriptions of birds seen and in what circumstances, please let myself and Jim Dickson know. Details of location will be treated in absolute confidence if requested.

Recent Reports. Observers full names in brackets except: SW = Simon Wellock, JB = John Bowler, TC = Tom Callan, PD = Paul Daw, JD = Jim Dickson, JH = John Halliday.

Divers to Wildfowl

An unexpected pair of **Black-throated Divers** were on Loch Restil (near The Rest and be Thankful) on 11th May and just as unexpected were two Whooper Swans there on 21st May. There have also been one or sometimes two **Red-throated Divers** at the same Loch between mid May and the end of June (Bob Furness) and one was seen there on 6th July (James Towill). A **Black-throated Diver** on Loch na Keal, Mull on 21st July was in non-breeding plumage (Nick Pomiankowski).

Red-throated Diver near Lochgilphead (Photo: Jim Duncan)



A sea-watch at Aird, Tiree on 5th May produced a single **Bonxie** (Great Skua) and an unusual spring **Leach's Petrel** as well as 93 **Arctic Terns**. On the following day there was another **Leach's Petrel** and

Bonxie as well as 86 **Arctic Terns** and at approx. 8,000 **Manx Shearwaters** (JB). For many years **Manx Shearwaters** have been suspected on breeding on the Garvelachs, but this has never been proved. A group camping there in the first week in June heard birds calling on two of the islands during one night, bringing proof of breeding that bit closer (Roger Broad; also see article on pages 14-15). A single **Manx Shearwater** was a very unusual visitor to the Add Estuary on 13th July. It appeared at the same time as unusually large flocks of **Kittiwakes**, **Common Terns** and **Razorbills** all presumably attracted by good fishing in the loch (JD). A very rare **Little Shearwater** was reported passing Machrihanish Observatory on 21st July (Eddie Maguire). We are still awaiting a decision from BBRC on the individual seen at the same location in 2000!. Three **Storm Petrels** were seen between Coll and Tiree on 15th June (JB).

It's surprising what can still be around in the sound of Gigha as late as June. Jim Dickson had a **Slavonian Grebe**, 8 **Great Northern**, 9 **Black-throated** and 6 **Red-throated Divers** there in flat calm conditions on 24th June, as well as 164 **Common Scoter** and 3 **Velvet Scoters**!

At least 3 pairs of **Gadwall** were on Tiree from 5th – 11th May and Pintail were at potential breeding sites on the island during May (JB). A drake **Garganey** was on

Stop Press

A fisherman in the Minch in mid-August, who was doing some fisheries surveys, had at least 20 **Great Shearwaters** (he didn't count them accurately as he was busy, but it was far more than he'd ever seen at one time before) around the boat down towards the Hawes Bank north of Coll and Tiree. He's going to pass on details of exactly when and where they were. They are most likely to have been in Argyll waters, but they could have been in Highland or Outer Hebrides waters, since the three boundaries meet in that area (Andrew Stevenson). At least 70 Great Shearwaters were recorded in the same area in October 1999.

Excellent seawatching from two sites on Tiree on the morning of 24th August included a **Cory's Shearwater**, 16 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 3 **Pomarine Skuas** and 7 **Bonxies**. And, record numbers of **Storm Petrels** had been seen there on 17th August, when 178 were counted flying SW off Hynish in just one hour (John Bowler).

a pool at Moss, Tiree on 4th May with a pair of Gadwalls and the first Mallard broods (JB). A drake **Green-winged Teal** found at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 6th June was at a similar location and on a similar date to individuals in 2002 and 2003 and so possibly the same returning bird (JB). Another (or the same?) drake **Green-winged Teal** was reported from Loch Eatharna, Coll on 17th June (Mark Finn). A female **Mandarin** was at An Lodan (Loch Awe) on 17th June (JD). A nest box with a clutch of **Mandarin** eggs near Strachur in June was predated by Pine Martens (Peter Woods). A pair of **Scaup** were on West Loch Fada, Colonsay on 9th June and the female was still present on 11th (David Jardine).

Raptors to Gamebirds

There was a late, but interesting report of a **Red Kite** seen near Ormsary, Kintyre on 19th February (Peter Quelch). A male **Marsh Harrier** was present at Acha, Coll on 16th May (Simon Wellock) and a female was at Loch Fada, Colonsay on 19th May (David Jardine). Also, on 19th May a **Hobby** was reported at Glenastle, Islay (Andy Schofield). An **Osprey** was fishing in Loch Frisa, Mull on 31st May (Alan Spellman) and due to their regular visits to the Add Estuary during May and June Jim Dickson has now been able to add **Osprey** to his 'seen from the garden' list at Cairnbaan. More unusual really, was a **Dipper** there on 15th June. A single **Osprey** was seen over Loch Eck on 26th July being mobbed by gulls and a **Peregrine** (Peter Woods).

A **Quail** was calling at Balephuill, Tiree on 30th May (JB) and two were calling overnight at Totronald, Coll also on 30th May (SW). Calling **Quail** were at Heylipol and Middleton, Tiree on the night of 14th June and at Balephetrish on 16th June. One was also calling at Balinoe on 5th July (JB) and on the mainland a **Quail** was calling in the fields at Dunadd, Mid-Argyll on 7th – 11th July (JH) (interestingly one was heard calling nearby in June 1999).

A **Water Rail** was heard calling at a pool near Gallanach, Oban on 6th June (Bill Allan). One of two **Spotted Crakes** heard calling on Coll during the month was still present on 22nd May (Simon Wellock). Birds were heard calling at two sites on Tiree in May and June although JB thinks these may be the individuals from Coll moving over. One of these birds was still calling on 9th July. Another bird was heard calling at Dervaig, Mull on 16th June (David Williams). We seem to have done rather well with this species while it has been reported as scarce at some of its usual strongholds in Scotland and England this year (JB).

It looks as though we are in for another record number of **Corncrakes** in Argyll this summer (Roger Broad; also see article and photos on page 15). The final count on Tiree reached 310 males in July, by far the highest count ever on the island (JB).

Moorhens (generally a scarce breeding species in Argyll) at Benderloch gravel workings had 6 well grown chicks on 30th May (Robin Harvey) and another pair, near Strathmore (Moine Mhor), had a brood of young on 8th June (JD). Two pairs at a pool near Lerags (nr Oban) both had broods of young on 14th June (Bill Allan), a pair at Auchnaha, Cowal had 2 young on 7th July (TC) and a large chick was seen at Balephuill, Tiree on 28th July (JB).

Waders

An apparently very productive **Oystercatcher** near Otter Ferry was sitting on no less than 5 eggs on 1st June. A rare event for a bird than normally lays only 3, although it is apparently not unknown for two females to lay in a single nest. (TC; also see photo on page 3). Two young **Ringed Plovers** were being guarded by their parents at Tralee shingle beach, North Argyll on 10th June (Robin Harvey). An interesting report of three **Dotterel** near the summit of Dun da Ghaoithe (nr Scallastle), Mull on 24th May were probably of migrants (Graham & Trish Cundall).

A **Little Stint** at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (along with 1,080 **Dunlin**!) on 15th May was followed by 2 at Balephetrish Bay on 16th May together with 270 **Sanderling**. Also 755 **Ringed Plovers** at Vaul/Ruaig on 16th. A **Green Sandpiper** was reported at Hynish on 17th May by a visitor and 48 **Knott** were at Gott Bay on 20th May. (JB). A **Temminck's Stint** at Port-na-Luing, Coll on 4th-6th May was a rare passage migrant for Argyll (Simon Wellock) and 2 **Little Stints** at Gott Bay, Tiree as well as 3 at Heylipol, Tiree (both records on 1st June) were unusual in spring (JB).

A **Curlew Sandpiper** feeding with *alpina* race Dunlin at The Reef, Tiree on 7th June was still in non-breeding plumage (JB). A **Broad-billed Sandpiper** found at Scarinish, Tiree (with **Dunlin** next to the pier) on the morning of 31st May by Ian Darling and Frank Hamilton was found again by JB in Gott Bay late on the afternoon of 1st June. This rare passage migrant which breeds in northern Fennoscandia has only been recorded once before in Argyll, again on Tiree, in 1994.

A single lekking **Ruff** was at a site on Tiree during May (JB) and the first migrant of autumn was at Loch a' Phuill on 25th July (JB). A large influx of **Black-tailed Godwits** occurred on Islay and Tiree on 2nd July including no less than 92 at Loch a' Phuill. A **Bar-tailed Godwit** in

Black-tailed Godwit
(Photo: Jim Dickson)



the Add Estuary on 4th June was still in non breeding plumage (JD) as were 5 at The Reef and 5 at Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 7th June (JB). Numbers of **Whimbrel** on Tiree peaked at 37 on 2nd May and 42 on 3rd May (JB) and no less than 64 were at Tayinloan on 7th May. Two late individuals were on Tiree at Rubha Chraiginis on 8th June with one at Baugh on 14th June (JB). A single bird was seen at Lachlan Bay (Loch Fyne) on 11th July (Peter Woods) and one was at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 22nd July (Clive McKay).

Two **Common Greenshank** were at Otter ferry, an unusual location for this species (TC), on 24th July, four were seen in the Add Estuary for several days between 22nd and 30th July (JD) and 7 were at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 23rd July (Clive McKay). A late report of a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Dervaig, Mull on 13th March will, if confirmed, be only our 5th record (Gordon Berry).

No less than 6 **Common Sandpipers** were in the Add Estuary on 14th June (JD) and 5 chicks were on the shore at Dunstaffnage with their parents on 3rd June (Robin Harvey). The first returning **Turnstones** at Otter Ferry were 2 on 18th July (TC).

Skuas to Woodpeckers

Two adult **Pomerine Skuas** with full 'spoons' headed NE off Hynish on 18th May (JB). Three **Arctic Skuas** and a **Great Skua** flew West past Caliach Point, Mull on 18th July (Nick Pomiankowski). An adult **Long-tailed Skua** flew up the Gruinart estuary, Islay on 21st July and 2 **Great Skuas** and an **Arctic Skua** flew past Saligo Bay, Islay on 23rd July (Clive



Adult Kittiwake
(Photo: Jim Duncan)

McKay).

Coll had both a 1st summer **Little Gull** (moving north on 5th May) and a 2nd summer Mediterranean Gull (roosting with **Common Gulls** at Hogh beach on 30th May) (SW). After the large winter influx, a few white-winged gulls hung on until May or even June. A (probably 1st summer) **Iceland Gull** was still in Oban Bay on 25th May (JD) and a 1st summer bird was at Kilmartin, Mid-Argyll on 27th May. A 2nd summer **Iceland Gull** was at Ballymeanoch (near Kilmartin, Mid-Argyll) on 4th June (JD) and a 1st summer bird was at Gott, Tiree on 13th June (Keith Gillon). A first winter **Glaucous Gull** remained at Sorobaidh Bay Tiree on 1st May (John Bowler).

An amazing influx of gulls and auks at Loch Crinan on 9th July included 2,500+ **Kittiwakes**, 1,200+ **Razor-bills/Guillemots**, large numbers of **Her- rington and Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (no juveniles) and smaller numbers of **Great Black-backed, Common and Black-headed Gulls** (JD). Jim thinks they may have been displaced from the islands by the mist prevailing at the time. A **Black Tern** was reported from Loch Eatharna, Coll on 3rd June (SW). There was an encouraging count of 54 **Black Guillemots** between Otter Ferry and the mouth of Loch Fyne on 21st May at a time when they are likely to be breeding locally (TC).

A **Woodpigeon** at Heylipol on 14th May was an unusual visitor to Tiree, where they are less than annual (John Bowler). Following the sighting of a **Turtle Dove** at Tayinloan on 16th two more were reported, both on 23rd May, one at Auchnasaal (nr Seil Island) and another at the RSPB visitor centre at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 9th July. The Islay bird may have summered as it was also seen later at Smaull (Clive McKay).



Cuckoo
(Photo: Jim Duncan)

Cuckoos are now quite scarce in parts of southern England but no less than 5 were in the air together near Otter Ferry, Cowal on 14th May. A latish bird was in the same

The Eider

area on 20th July (TC). Excellent news of Argyll **Nightjars**. Birds heard churring at 2 separate locations in the Dalmally area on the evening of 1st June should represent birds attempting to breed (L. & C. Crossan).

I have had a good response to my appeal for **Swift** records. They were seen regularly in Kilmichael Glen during May (Blair Urquhart), two were at Lagganmore (Glen Euchar), Mid-Argyll on 8th May (Bill Allan), two flew over Taynuilt on 29th May (PD), two were circling over Tobermory, Mull on 10th May and four were over Lochdon, Mull on 29th May. Later records of **Swifts** include two on 6th June in Dunoon (Andrew Webster), 6 over George Street, Oban on 8th June (Bill Allan), one over Heylipol, Tiree on 14th June (John Bowler), 5 over Moine Mhor on 17th June (JD), at least 7 over Taynuilt, Mid-Argyll on 20th June (Steve Petty) and 22 at The Strand, Colonsay on 19th June (David Jardine – probably a record count for Colonsay). At least three pairs were considered to be nesting at Blairmore (nr Dunoon) on 9th July (James Towill) and one was seen entering a nest site in Dunoon on 27th July (Andrew Webster).

A **Green Woodpecker** was seen and heard calling at Benmore Gardens on 5th & 8th May (Bob Furness). A probable breeding record for **Green Woodpecker** concerned two young birds reported from a garden at Lochdon, Mull on 14th June (John Preston per Alan Spellman). This would be a first breeding record for the island, although birds have been reported regularly there in small numbers during the past ten years.

Passerines

At Loch a' Phuill, Tiree, where **Sand Martins** began breeding in 2003, following over 100 years absence from the island, 26 birds were present on 26th May (John Bowler). After reports of mixed Pied/White pairs in the area in 2000 and a pair of **White Wagtails** with 3 young in July 2003, a pair of definite **White Wagtails** were seen with at least one recently fledged young at Barsloisnoch Farm near Loch Crinan on 16th & 17th June (JD). **Yellow Wagtails** are always scarce migrants in Argyll. The last on Tiree was in 1996 so the arrival of 3 or possibly 4 male **Grey-headed (Yellow) Wagtails** on the coast between Vaul and Balephetrish was remarkable (John Bowler).

A fine male **Black Redstart** was at Balephuill, Tiree all day on 24th May and a female **Common Redstart** at Kilkenneth on 25th May was only the 7th record for Tiree (JB).

Over 50 singing **Sedge Warblers** on Tiree by 13th May (John Bowler) and many **Sedge Warblers** and **Common White-throats** were in song on Gigha on 27th May (Katie Pendreigh). Strangely, **Sedge**

Warblers seem to have been scarce (or under-reported) elsewhere. A female **Common Whitethroat** was at An Airidh, Tiree on 3rd May (John Bowler) and another female was seen in garden at Tullochgorm, Minard on 4th May (PD). **Garden Warblers** apparently arrived late this year. The first singing birds reported were at Cairnbaan, Loch Barnluasgan and Bellanoch, Mid-Argyll on 19th May (JD) and at Tullochgorm (Minard) on 22nd May (PD). Another was singing nr Brackley Point, Loch Striven, Cowal on 5th June (James Towill). One **Wood Warbler** was singing in Dunstaffnage Woods (Mid-Argyll) on 3rd May (Robin Harvey).

The first **Spotted Flycatcher** was at Lussa, Kintyre on 7th May (Katie Pendreigh) and one was at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 20th May (John Bowler).

A fascinating report was received of a pair of **Golden Orioles** on 1st July at a site near Connel. This was only 1km away from the place where a male was heard singing last June. A pair bred in Fife in 1974 and it would be nice to imagine that a pair might stay to breed here one day. Following the March 'influx' further extralimital **Magpies** were seen in Kilmichael Glen on 25th May (JD), near Dervaig, Mull on 27th May (Nick Laughton) and at Cairndow (Loch Fyne) on 24th July (Peter Woods). An adult **Rosy Starling** was reported from Arinagour, Coll on 11th May (SW).



Male Greenfinch
(Photo: Steve Petty)

An amazing flock of approx. 120 finches at Killail, Otter Ferry on 28th July were mainly **Greenfinches**, but included just a few **Lesser Redpolls** (TC). An influx of **Lesser Redpolls** on Tiree in June (including 4 males and 3 females at Carnan Mor on 17th June) makes the prospect of a first breeding record for the island quite likely (John Bowler) and a group of 16 were at Killail, Otter Ferry on 18th July (TC). Two male **Lesser Redpolls** seen at Craobh Haven and Loch Craignish on 26th June were described as very red (Bill Allan).

Two broods (of 2 and 4) **Common Crossbill** fledglings were seen in Barcaldine Forest, North Argyll on 20th June. The

fledglings of both broods were at the stage where they were hanging on Sitka spruce cones, trying occasionally to feed themselves by extracting seeds (clumsily) but also being fed by the adults. The latter bit off the cones and pulled them onto a branch to extract the seeds (Steve Petty). A male **Crossbill** was seen at Baugh, Tiree on 18th July and another (or the same?) male was reported at Balephetrish on 21st July (JB).

A visitor to Argyll reported seeing a male **Common (Scarlet) Rosefinch** feeding a young bird near Ledaig, North Argyll on 30th July. If confirmed this would be a first ever breeding record for Argyll for this species. However despite searches by local bird club members it has not been seen again. A female **Yellowhammer** was an unusual visitor (feeding on black niger seed) to a garden at Glenbranter on 26th July (Peter Woods). The star bird of the period must be a male **Black-headed Bunting** seen at Kiloran Bay, Colonsay on 12th June (David Jardine). This follows a female on the island in 2001 and is only the seventh record for Argyll.

Other Records



Minke Whale in Loch Fyne
(Photo: Tom Callan)

As well as birds, **Cetaceans** have been well in evidence in Argyll. At least one and possibly 3 Minke Whales were in Otter Ferry Bay, Loch Fyne on 8th June as well as Harbour Porpoises and Bottlenosed Dolphins (TC) and an Orca was off Tiree half way out to Lunga on 5th June. There were also three Basking Sharks in Gunna Sound, Tiree/Coll on 5th June (John Bowler).

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Mink in Gigha

On 6 June 2005 I was on Craro, a small island off the west coast of Gigha, to count breeding seabirds. I was surprised to find definite evidence of mink (predated shell and seabird skeletons in deep cover/under rock overhangs, etc). Most strikingly, there had been big changes in seabird numbers.

At the time of Seabird 2000 this was, I believe, the largest **Black Guillemot** colony in Argyll with 81 adults on 24 June 1997 (Clive Craik) and 75 on 18 June 1999 (Roger Broad). This time there were only 16-20 adults, all very nervous. I found one adult skeleton under a rock and could probably have found more if I had had the energy to search under the hundreds of rocks that make (made) this such a good **Black Guillemot** site!

Shags, also exceptionally nervous, were down to 8 pairs (including three empty nests) from 86 in 1997 (Clive Craik) and 26 in 1999 (Roger Broad). **Herring Gulls** were down from 200 pairs to *ca* 90. In contrast, **Great Black-backed Gulls** and **Cormorants** had increased. Elsewhere I have also found that these two species, when present in numbers, can breed in the presence of mink, although with reduced success. Probably just a few pecks from their large and powerful bills are all that is needed to discourage a mink from going near their nests!

Finding mink on Craro was a shock. I hadn't even known that there were mink on Gigha. If anyone has any information, past or present, about mink on Gigha, please would they let me know.

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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 March 2005 *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**

Banks, A. 2005. The wetland bird survey low tide counts: 2003/04. *BTO News*, **258**, 13-15.

Brown, A. & Brown, L. M. 2005. The 2002 census of mute swans in Scotland. *Scottish Birds*, **25**, 1-16.

Buchanan, G., Pearce-Higgins, J., Grant, M., Robertson, D. & Waterhouse, T. 2005. Characterization of moorland vegetation and the prediction of bird abundance using remote sensing. *Journal of Biogeography*, **32**, 697-707.

Chamberlain, D. E., Vickery, J. A., Glue, D. E., Robinson, R. A., Conway, G. J., Woodburn, R. J. W. & Cannon, A. R. 2005. Annual and seasonal trends in the use of garden feeders by birds in winter. *Ibis*, **147**, 563-575.

Cobb, J. L. S. 2005. The biology of a

population of willow warblers in east Fife. *Scottish Birds*, **25**, 41-49.

Conway, G., Henderson, I., Wotton, S., Langston, R., Currie, F. & Drewitt, A. 2005. The 2004 national nightjar survey. *BTO News*, **259**, 8-9.

Creagan, H. P. & Osborne, P. E. 2005. Gap-crossing decisions of woodland songbirds in Scotland: an experimental approach. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, **42**, 678-687.

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2005 Tawny Owl survey

In 1989 the first and so far only survey of Tawny Owls breeding in the U.K. was set up by the BTO. The aim of the survey was to investigate factors affecting owl populations in Britain and to establish a baseline database for their future monitoring. There is now a pressing need to assess whether the abundance of the owls has changed since 1989. To this end the BTO is repeating the survey during the autumn of 2005. The periodic monitoring of Tawny Owls accumulates data useful for giving an insight into any effects of climate and land use change or pesticide misuse on their viability.

The survey entails visiting specific sites anytime from now until the 15th of October for exactly 10 minutes in the two hours after sunset and recording the number of owls hooting and calling.

To take part in this interesting and important survey, please contact me as soon as possible and I will supply all the necessary information.

Richard Allan

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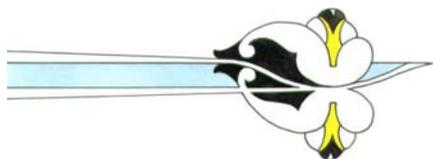
Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should with the Editor before the 25th November 2005 (see the box opposite for more information)

ABC car sticker

With the mailing of this *Eider* we have enclosed a free car sticker. The sticker is very sticky so if you put it in your car, please attach it with care. After removing the backing paper it is best to attach one edge first and then progress to the opposite end. It can be peeled off and repositioned. I know because I put it on upside down first time! **Note that the words Argyll Bird Club are on the sticker so you can see which way up it has to go!**

We have some extra stickers so those of you who have several cars or who change car every year are most welcome to request as many further stickers as you want at £2 each. Please send a cheque payable to Argyll Bird Club with your postal address details.

Bob Furness, Cnoc, Tarbet, Arrochar, Argyll & Bute G83 7DG



Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2004/2005)

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Argyll Bird Club Website: <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

The Eider



The *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book reviews and press releases. Whenever possible, contributions should be submitted to the editor as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word or rtf format. But, this should not deter potential contributors, as hand-written scripts are also acceptable. If in doubt about whether an article is suitable, please contact the editor for advice.

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and digital photographs (jpeg files preferred) of birds and their habitats to the editor. Digital photographs of Schedule 1 species taken at or near the nest will not be accepted for publication unless the photographer was covered by an appropriate SNH licence.

The *Eider* is published during the first week 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 annual 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).