

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory



Grey Phalarope: a fly-by off MSBO during a NW gale event 19th November



Leach's Petrel over a provocative sea during a WNW force 7 gale event 22nd October

2015 Report



Ruffs 8th September (See Birds at Strath Farm 2015 on page 38)

Contents...

• Summary of the Year....	4
• Twite Movements at MSBO 2010-2015 - An Update....	29
• Westerly overland passage of Northern Gannets in S Argyll....	33
• Birds at Strath Farm - The Laggan - South Kintyre 2015....	38



Oystercatchers by MSBO 13th June

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO)
SW Kintyre - Argyll
Established September 1993

2015 Report

Compiled by **Eddie Maguire** (Warden)

Unless stated photographs in this report are by the warden

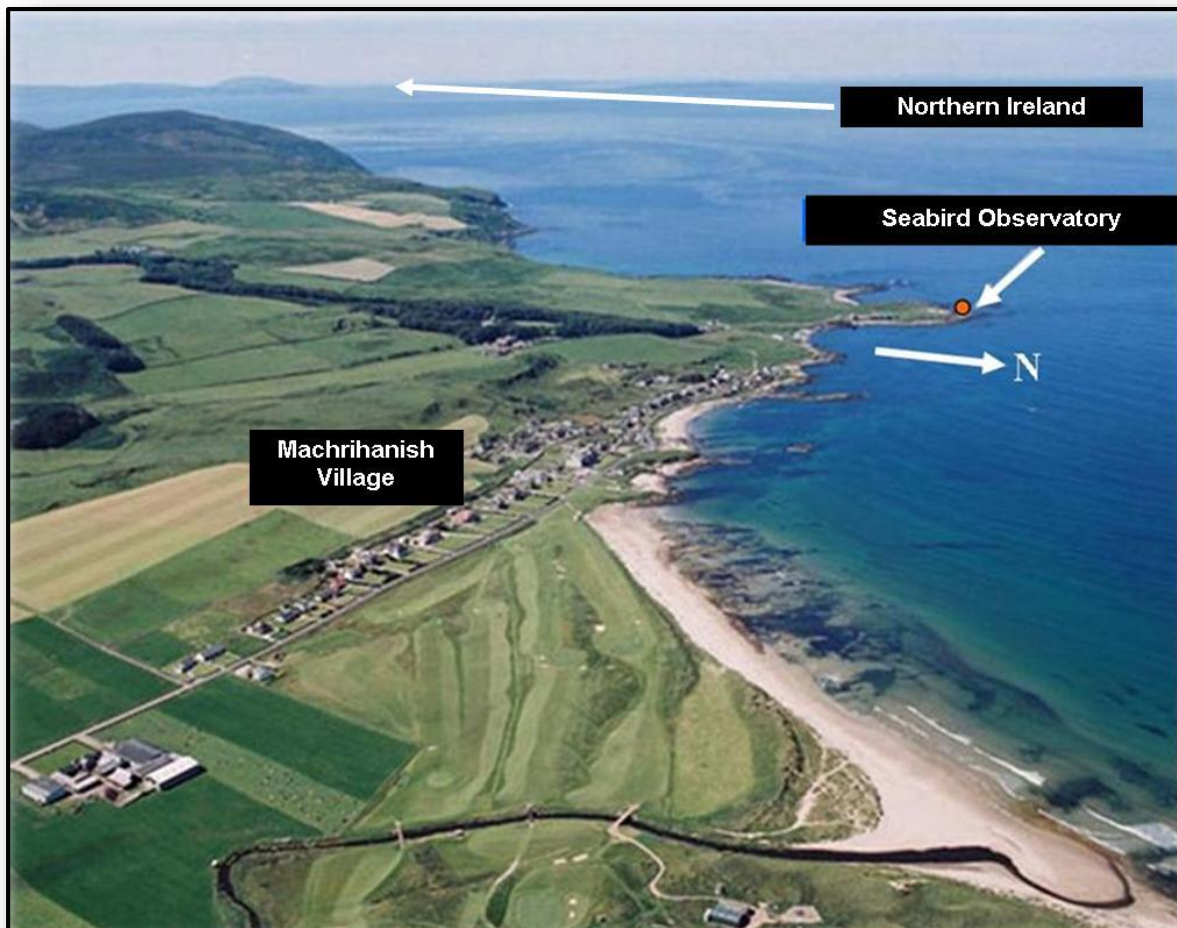


Photo – Stuart Andrew (Kintyre Photography-Campbeltown)



The Machrihanish Seabird Observatory

Summary of the Year...

The MSBO was manned intermittently during January / February then daily 1st March – 22nd November. The **2015 Report** portrays the year with a monthly summary of ornithological events accompanied by a selection of some **60** photographs.

March

A drake **Common Scoter** >S on 7th and a drake **Pintail** was photographed on 10th. A welcome – if slight – increase in local numbers of **Common Eider** was apparent with a peak of **78** birds on 16th. This species has declined locally. Since the MSBO was established (1993 – with data from 1989) the spring pre-breeding club usually held 200+ birds annually: however, during spring 2014 <**50** birds were present (a decrease of around **75%**).

Small numbers of **Red-throated Diver** were regular all month (mainly immature). Max count was 7 on 11th. Breeding plumaged adults >S on 19th and 30th.

Single (s) immature **Black-throated Divers** were present on 10th and 17th and **Great Northern Divers** peaked at 14 on 16th. The first sign that breeding plumage was appearing on some birds was noted on 11th (white spots appearing on mantle) and a bird with a partial 'necklace' was seen on 27th.

Five **Lapwings** rested on the Point on 10th.



Lapwing by MSBO 10th

Purple Sandpipers (max 9 on 10th) and **Ruddy Turnstones** (max 12 on 14th) were regular on the point.

The first **Greenshank** of the year appeared on 17th followed by the first **Whimbrel** on 19th. A flock of 8 **Sanderling** >N on 22nd.

On 31st, during a westerly gale event, a total of 440 **Black-legged Kittiwakes** >S / 6hrs. All were aged revealing that 280 / 440 (64%) were first-winter.

Two **Iceland Gulls** were logged: a first-winter >S on 8th and a second-winter was photographed on 9th. During a WNW near gale event on 28th a total of 665 auks >S / 5hrs. Photographic samples (n= 271) of many small 'trains' revealed that the majority (87%) were **Razorbills** and 233 / 236 of these were in breeding plumage. All 35 **Guillemots** found in the samples were in breeding plumage and 2 of these (6%) were bridled variants.

On 31st, in a westerly gale event f6 with regular vicious squalls and increasing wind speeds (f9-10) a total of 347 auks >S / 6hrs. Photographic samples revealed (again) that the vast majority (97%) were **Razorbills** and all were in full breeding plumage. Only 12 **Guillemots** were noted and 10/12 were in full breeding plumage.

The first **Northern Wheatears** (3) of the year appeared on 25th.



Iceland Gull (second-winter) by MSBO 9th

April

Three **Pintails** >N on 21st (a scarce spring passage visitor). An adult **Great Northern Diver** >N on 8th (first bird seen in flight this year). Max counts on sea later were 26 on 18th and 29 on 22nd.

Wader numbers picked up with 50 **Sanderlings** present 6th-11th and the first **Dunlins** (3) seen here this year arrived on 16th. Seven >N on 24th.

Whimbrels put in a decent showing with 2 on 11th, one on 18th, 10 on 19th, 3 on 21st, 7 on 23rd, 15 on 24th, 40 on 25th and 30 >S on 29th. The first **Common Sandpiper** of the year arrived on 27th and **Purple Sandpiper** were again present all month with a max count of 11 on 23rd.

At least 5 **Great Skuas** were seen from a Campbeltown fishing boat c. 10 miles NW of MSBO on 23rd-24th (Raymond Morrison). The first **Arctic Skuas** of the year were 2 dark adults >S on 27th. A first-winter **Mediterranean Gull** >S on 1st and a second-winter **Glaucous Gull** >S high over the shoreline on 23rd (both first MSBO records this year).



First-winter Mediterranean Gull >S off MSBO 1st

The first **Sandwich Terns** of the year (2) arrived on 9th followed by one on 11th, 2 on 12th and 6 >N on 13th. Present daily thereafter with max counts 11 on 19th and 14 on 23rd (initial appearance later by a week or so this year).

A total of **1320** Razorbills >S / 6hrs on 7th. All were in breeding plumage and the largest train held over 100 birds.

These were clean flocks of Razorbills: no **Guillemots** were noted and none found in any of numerous trains that were photographed (this movement likely involved the breeding population from RSPB Rathlin Island 18 miles WSW of MSBO).

A **Puffin** came ashore on 15th and was returned to the sea. It was found again next day on the shore: unfortunately, it succumbed.

The first **White Wagtails** of the year (2) rested on the point briefly on 2nd before flying off to the N. Three were present on 6th then 5 on 9th. Daily from 16th (5) with peaks of 15 on 22nd, c. 28 on 25th and 37+ on 28th.

At Tayinloan on 28th, 59 birds were present (Angus McNab).

Of interest – Tayinloan is where I revealed that significant passage of **White Wagtail** was occurring on the W coast of Kintyre in the early 70's.

A total of 31 **Goldfinches** trapped at our feeding station during the month included 16 new birds + 15 retraps from previous years.

A nice male **Linnet** appeared at the feeding station on 9th.

May

The first **Shelduck** brood (b/2) appeared on 24th and the first **Common Eider** brood (b/1) appeared on 21st followed by a b/2 on 30th. Two **Gadwall** >N on 5th – most unusual here in May. **Red-throated Divers** were regular in small numbers (1-3) with singles >S on 9 dates 9th – 31st.

The best count of **Great Northern Divers** was 14 breeding-plumaged birds in Machrihanish Bay on 19th. An immature >S on 23rd followed by single adults in breeding plumage on 29th and 31st.



Great Northern Diver (first-winter) >S off MSBO 23rd

A total of 80 **Manx Shearwaters** >S / 1hr on 22nd: this light movement, the best so far this year, occurred during a period of poor visibility.

An **Osprey** was seen >S at The Inneans (a few miles S of MSBO) on 9th (Kenny Graham pers. comm.).

A male **Merlin** was seen on 6 dates to 23rd by MSBO, over adjacent uplands and hunting offshore.

A flock of 11 **Sanderlings** were in the bay on 23rd increasing to 20 on 28th - 30th (many still in non-breeding plumage). A flock of 50 >S on 31st.



Sanderling by MSBO 30th

Ten **Dunlins** >N on 2nd, 25 >S on 19th, 5 >S on 28th and 8 were present on 30th. Passage peaks of **Whimbrel** included 33 >N on 7th and 22 >N on 13th. A few were present daily to 15th. Later there were singles on 19th and 22nd.



Whimbrel by MSBO 13th

The only obvious movement of **Common Sandpiper** noted was 8 >N in heavy rain on 5th.



Common Sandpiper singing by MSBO 5th



Arctic Skua (dark adult) off MSBO 16th

There were three records of **Purple Sandpipers** with 6 on 2nd, 4 on 10th and 2 on 25th. **Ruddy Turnstone** numbers were fairly high at the beginning of the month with

a flock of 30 on 5th. This peak fell to 4 birds by 21st - 25th then 2 on 30th. A pale adult **Pomarine Skua** >S on 29th (north-west wind was especially strong during occasional squalls) - the first record this year. Four dark adults and a pale adult **Arctic Skua** >S / 3hrs on 8th, two dark adults were present all day on 16th and a single dark adult was ranging around Machrihanish Bay all day 20th. A leucistic adult-type **Herring Gull** with a dark tail band was photographed on 10th. A total of 80 **Great Black-backed Gulls** including 32 adults >N / 3hrs on 8th. Immatures (all age categories) accounted for 60% of the passage. A total of **127** including 46 adults >N / 15hrs on 3 dates 14th - 16th. Immatures accounted for 64% of the passage. A colour ringed first-winter **Black-legged Kittiwake** was photographed on 24th. A total of 170 >S / 7hrs on 29th (the majority were first-winter).



Black-legged Kittiwake: a colour-ringed / much-worn first-summer bird 24th

Reasonable numbers of **Sandwich Terns** were a feature of the month with 12 on 3rd and total of 18 >N on 5th. A loose flock of 27 rested by Machrihanish village on 8th. Seen daily thereafter with best count 35 on 17th. A total of 10 **Arctic Terns** arrived on 5th. This species was present at Big Scone island colony from 12th with max of 17 on 14th. **Common Terns** were scarce: 3 arrived on 10th. Present Big Scone island colony from 12th with max 7 on 14th. A total of 400 **Razorbills** / **Common Guillemots** >S / 7hrs on 29th (the majority were **Guillemots**) and 2 **Puffins** >S on 22nd during a period of poor visibility. Five **Rock Doves** were by MSBO on 21st. Obvious coastal passage of **Barn Swallow** occurred on 8th with 160 >N / 3hrs and many others in off sea. Northward passage of small numbers continued to 21st. A flock of c. 60 **Sand Martins** was foraging over the shore by MSBO on 29th. A Greenland type male **Northern Wheatear** was foraging / ranging over the point on 11th and 13th. **White Wagtails** were present daily to 17th with max count 20 on 4th. Later there were singles on 19th and 27th. Finally, a male **Lesser Redpoll** paid a brief visit to MSBO feeding station on 27th.

June

Common Eiders breeding success at all time low...

Last year MSBO reported that the population of **Common Eiders** had declined locally. Since the MSBO was established (1993 – with some data 1989 - 1992) the spring 'club' held 200+ birds annually: however, during spring 2014 < 50 birds were present (a decrease of around 75%) and in May – June last year (2014) the lowest ever number of ducklings (25) was logged: mean brood size of 8 ducks = 3.1.

The population of Eiders in Clyde waters is known to be in serious decline (Chris Waltho pers. comm.).

Low breeding success of Eiders at Machrihanish 2015...

So far, this spring / early summer, records have revealed the lowest duckling productivity ever by MSBO. The only data logged was just three broods – a B/1, B/2 and a B/5. Was this year's very cold (and wet) late spring a possible contribution for this seasons alarming low breeding success or simply more evidence of the recent decline?

A look at MSBO Eider duckling productivity between MSBO and Machrihanish village during **2012 -2013** reveals the following...

2012: June - total of 42 ducklings.

2013: June - total of 62 ducklings.

However, the best ever year for duckling productivity was **2010** when **94** ducklings were counted during June / July with an average brood size of 3.7. **Shelduck** broods included a b/10 on 10th and a b/8 just hatched appeared on 13th.

Six **Storm Petrels** >S / 7hrs on 6th (all in 1.5hrs in the afternoon). The first birds seen off MSBO this year and typically during a period of onshore wind / poor visibility (Eddie Maguire / Martin Conway).



Storm Petrel >S c. 250m off MSBO 6th

A drake **Tufted Duck** >S on 2nd – a very scarce passage visitor - and 2 drake **Common Scoters** >S on 24th followed by 6 drakes>S on 30th. A single adult **Great**

Northern Diver in breeding plumage was present daily from 2nd and was joined by a first-summer on 16th. A **Black-throated Diver** (non-breeding plumage) appeared briefly on 7th.

A total of 280 **Manx Shearwaters** >S / 7hrs on 6th (strong westerly wind / poor visibility).

An **Osprey** >N high over MSBO on 7th. Two **Kestrels** were at the Galdings cliffs 500m S of MSBO on 14th.

Small numbers of waders were in evidence including **Sanderlings** on four dates 2nd (one) – 18th (max 22 on 2nd).

Dunlins were regular 10th – 16th, the first returning **Redshanks** (18) >S on 30th, single **Whimbrels** on 11th and 17th and a superb showing of **Ruddy Turnstones** with one >S on 2nd, 3 all day on 6th, a summering immature bird almost daily 9th - 26th and an adult female regular 18th-21st. Finally, 3 >S on 30th.



Ruddy Turnstone: a summering immature by MSBO 19th

A strong westerly wind with accompanying poor visibility and continuous rain at times on 17th brought in 3 **Great Skuas** - all >S.

An unusual species here in summer.

A dark adult **Arctic Skua** was present all day on 2nd and possibly the same bird appeared again on 6th targeting mainly **Sandwich Terns** (20+)



Arctic Skua (dark adult) pursuing a Sandwich Tern 2nd

An adult **Mediterranean Gull** >S on 30th. The first MSBO June record.



A striking adult Mediterranean Gull – a fly-by on 30th

Sandwich Terns were present all month: max daily count was 20+ on 2nd.

A count on 13th revealed 26 **Arctic Terns** off Big Scone island colony although a few (likely many more) were still present on the island incubating / brooding. A first-summer >N on 26th.

Common Terns were scarce this year: none seen at the Big Scone Island Arctic Tern colony on 13th. A total of 740 **Common Guillemot** >S / 7hrs on 6th (only 37 **Razorbill** were logged).

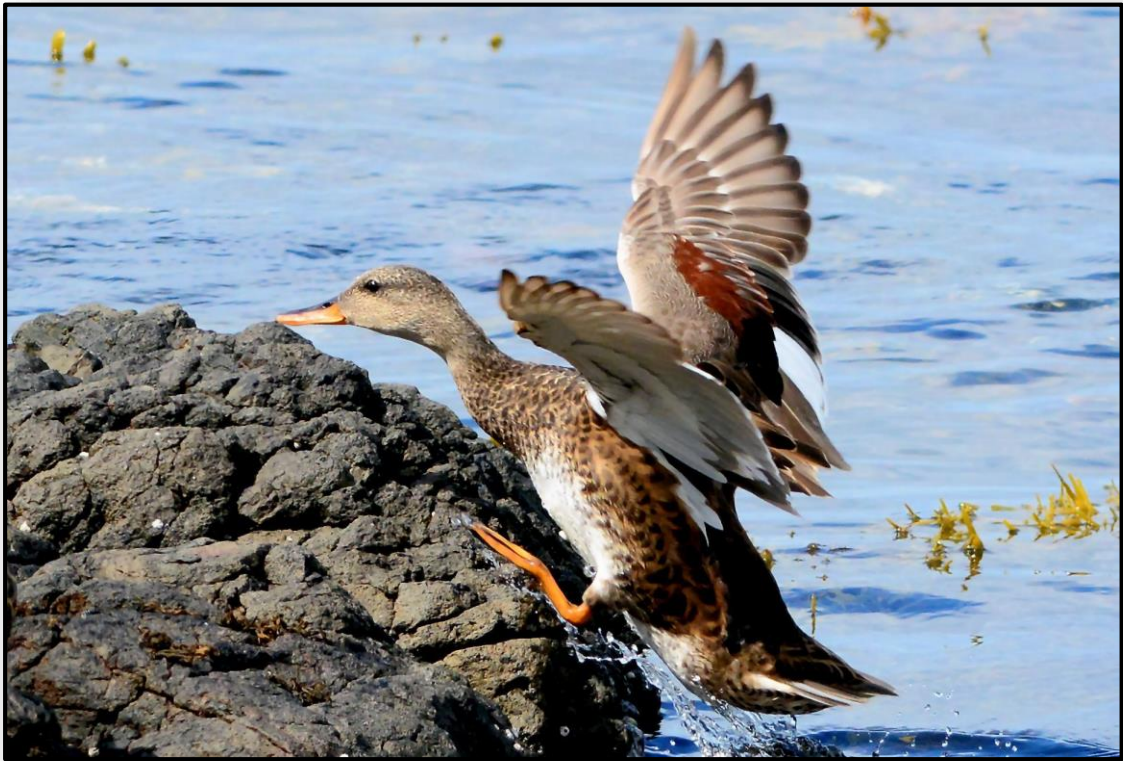
The first **Guillemot** noted carrying a small food item this year >S on 15th then many were seen doing this on later dates (doubtless indicates mid June as start of hatching period at one or more colonies S of MSBO). A **Swift** came in off sea on 30th.



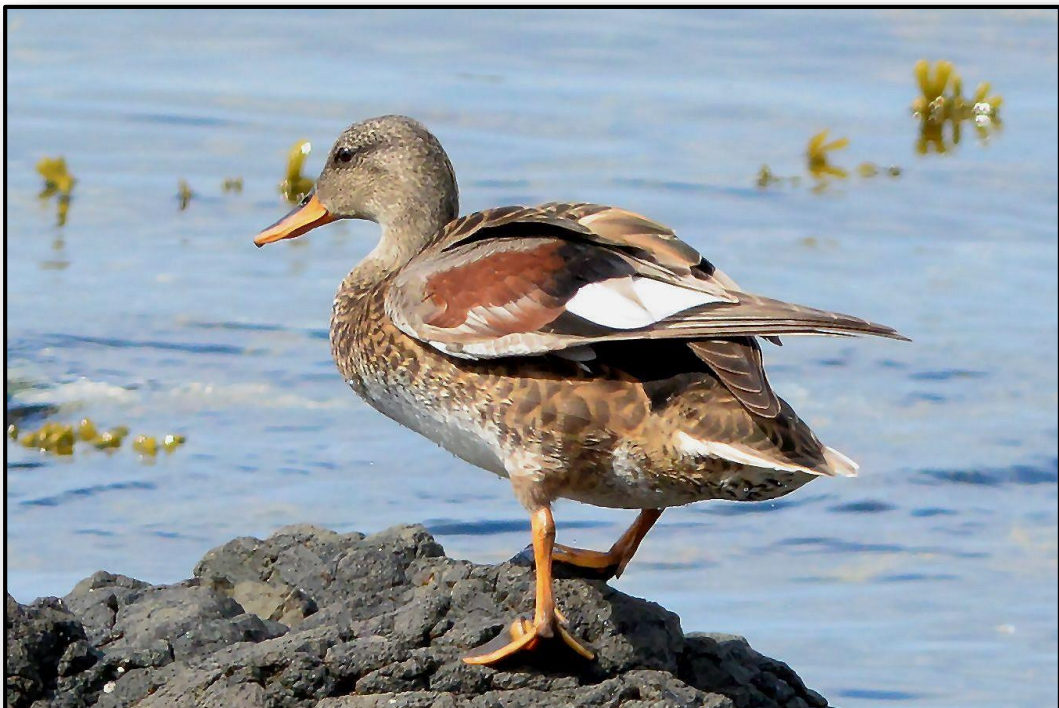
Oystercatchers - chick attempting to swallow a limpet provided by adult (note both chicks are ringed)

July

A female **Mallard** appeared by MSBO with a late (newly hatched) b/2 on 5th. Two **Gadwall**, an eclipse drake accompanied by a fresh-looking female-type, appeared briefly on 4th.



A close encounter with a Gadwall (eclipse drake) 4th



The Gadwall drake 4th

A flock 12 **Common Scoter** (all adult drakes) >S on 5th and a flock 5 >S on 11th (including 3 adult drakes). An eclipse drake **Tufted Duck** rested briefly by the point on 5th then >S.



Tufted Duck (eclipse drake) 5th

A total of 570 **Manx Shearwaters** >S / 2hrs on 13th (light rain / poor visibility). One >S on 17th then a loose group of 90 >S on 21st. A total of 14 **Storm Petrels** >S / 2hrs on 13th (light rain / poor visibility). Eight adult **Red-throated Divers** >S on 23rd including a loose group of 5.

A **Sparrowhawk** was hunting along the shore on 23rd and a **Kestrel** >N – well offshore – on 28th.

The first flock of **Oystercatchers** (14) >S on 9th. Southerly movements later included a total of 40 on 17th, five flocks totalling 92 birds on 21st, 30 am on 27th, three flocks totalling 80 am on 28th and a flock 60 on 30th. Two **Lapwings** >S over MSBO on 12th and a total of 22 **Ringed Plovers** >S am on 17th.

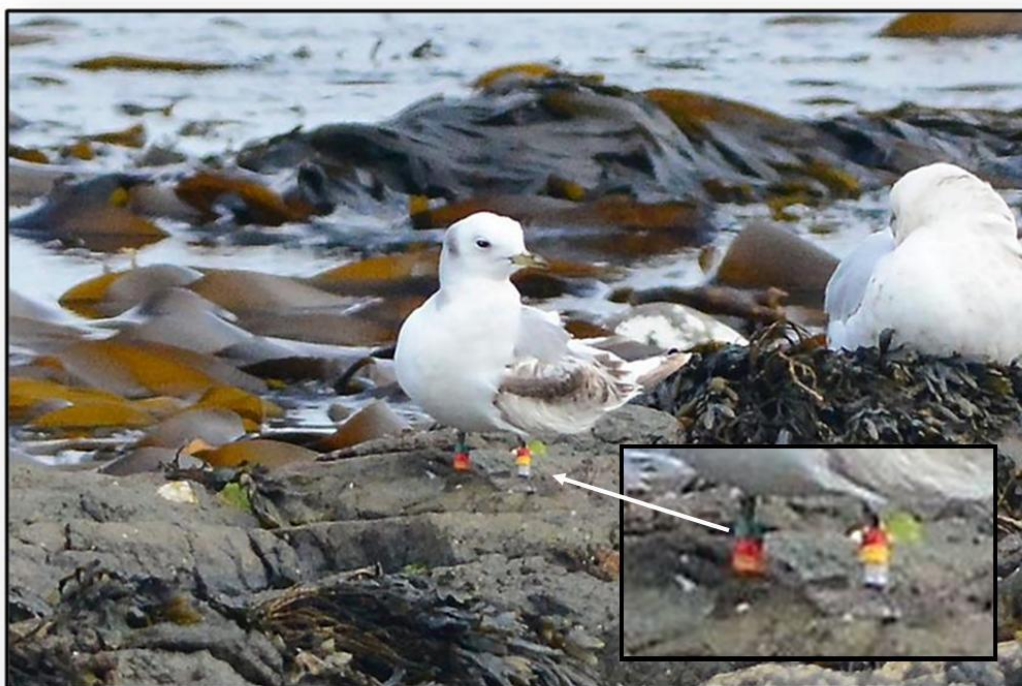
The first juvenile **Sanderling** >S on 16th. Southerly movements later were 3 juveniles on 17th, an adult and 2 juveniles on 20th, two flocks totalling 26 and including at least 3 adults am on 21st, a flock of 42 on 27th and a total of 60 am on 28th. The first returning **Dunlins** (c. 20) >S on 5th. Southerly movements later included twelve on 8th, 7 on 9th, 80 am on 17th, 61 on 20th, 30 on 21st, 52 on 26th, 95 including flock c. 60 on 27th and **160** including flock 100+ on 28th.

The first **Red Knot** recorded at MSBO this year >S on 13th. Flocks >S later included 28 adults on 17th, 2 on 23rd, flock 23 on 27th and total of 14 on 28th.

Light passage of **Common Sandpiper** >S commenced on 5th with a total of 6 singles >S / 5hrs. Later passage S included total of 11 / 5hrs on 11th, 5 / 6hrs on 12th and 7 / 3hrs am on 17th. Scarcer from 20th with only ones and twos >S on 5 dates to 28th.



A very young Common Sandpiper 6th



Colour ringed Black-legged Kittiwake MSBO 24th May

A colour ringed first-summer **Black-legged Kittiwake** that was photographed by MSBO on 24th May 2015 was found dead on the beach close by on 19th July.

This bird was ringed in France (probably at a colony in Brittany). Full metal ring details were...

Mus. Paris FX24192

Of interest, there are two previous confirmed summer records of French colour ringed **Kittiwakes** at MSBO involving 4 first-summer birds including 3 together on one date and all were ringed at colonies in Brittany.

A **Greenshank** was present most of the day on 20th and a single >S on 26th.

Small numbers of **Redshanks** were on passage from 2nd. Forty >S on 28th. A flock of 11 **Black-tailed Godwits** >N off MSBO on 27th and single **Whimbrels** >S on 12th and 30th. Two **Common Snipe** came in off sea on 26th and a first-summer **Ruddy Turnstone** was on the point on 3rd. A single adult >S on 16th, 2 adults >S on 18th, 5 adults >S on 21st and 4 adults were on the shore on 23rd. A **Great Skua** >S on 8th.

The first juvenile **Black-headed Gull** appeared on 4th and the first juvenile **Common Gulls** (5) appeared on 8th.

Sandwich Terns were seen daily in small numbers - max only 5 on 13th. An adult with a single juvenile in tow was seen regularly 18th – 24th.

A first-summer **Arctic Tern** >S on 6th. At Machrihanish village, the Big Scone island colony was deserted on 13th. An adult >S on 19th.

Two **Swifts** came in off the sea on 4th.

August

This summer there has been a very conspicuous change in the local status of **European Shags**. There was no large post-breeding influx of juvenile **Shags** to SW Kintyre this year. Only very small numbers have been seen, although normally, **100's** would appear in late July-early August. The warden on Sanda (off SE Kintyre) has reported that the **Shag** colony on the SE side of the island was totally deserted this year: he attributes this to an incursion of **American Mink**. Breeding numbers on Sanda peaked at c. **800** pairs during 2005-2006 but the colony had plummeted to 354 pairs by 2010 (Rab Morton pers. comm.) Ringing of nestling **Shags** on Sanda over many years has revealed that a high percentage of juveniles disperse north from the island and many have been recovered on both E and W coasts of Kintyre. Over the years, the most impressive post-breeding assembly of mainly juvs off MSBO was **500** on 15th-19th July 2007.

Enough has been lamented by MSBO this season about the **Common Eider** population crash followed by a truly insignificant breeding attempt around Machrihanish. Now adult birds are extremely scarce off MSBO / Machrihanish Bay with a top count this month of only **12** birds including 3 eclipse drakes.

Off MSBO, the horizon was mainly birdless. However, many days of inshore wader passage and several light inshore movements of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** kept interest afloat.

A flock of 29 **Mallards** were present on 3rd, increasing to 37 on 13th. Three drake **Common Scoters** >S on 27th (the only record this month).

Peak counts of **Common Eiders** this month included 9 (2 eclipse drakes) on 6th and 5 (2 eclipse drakes) on 23rd followed by 12 (3 eclipse drakes) on 31st.

Southerly passage movements of **Red-throated Diver** included: one on 1st. One on 6th. One on 23rd. Five on 27th included 2 >S and 3 >S on 30th.

Small numbers of **Oystercatchers** on passage most dates: the best movements >S included **330** / 4hrs on 13th (this passage involved 12 flocks / largest 80+). A total of 140 >S on 26th. A flock of 10 **Lapwings** >S on 18th.

Southerly passage of **Ringed Plovers** included: 30 on 1st, 45 on 3rd, 60 on 4th, 38 on 7th and 80 on 9th. Only small numbers were seen on passage later.

Southerly passage movements of **Red Knots** included: two >S on 4th, 12 on 7th, 12 on 9th, 3 on 12th, 6 on 14th, 18 on 15th, one on 17th, 4 on 18th, flock c. 40 on 19th, one on 23rd - 24th, 3 on 25th, 40 on 26th, one on 27th, 40 on 28th and 80 on 29th.

Summary total of **Red Knot** logged >S at MSBO during August = **283**. Southerly passage movements of **Dunlins** included: 12 on 1st, flock 20+ on 2nd, two flocks totalling 38 on 3rd, many flocks totalling **140** am on 4th, 40 on 5th, 10 on 7th, many flocks totalling c. **180** on 9th, 40 on 12th, 70 on 13th, 30 on 27th, 80 on 28th, 60 on 29th and 10 on 31st. Summary total of Dunlin logged >S at MSBO during August = **730**.

Southerly passage movements of **Sanderling** included: 18 on 3rd, 25 on 4th, one on 8th, 16 on 9th, 12 on 21st, 20 on 27th and 22 on 29th - a poor August showing.

Three **Common Sandpipers** >S together on 2nd. a total of 8 on the shore and 5 >S on 3rd. Ones and twos daily to 8th. 5 on 9th. 12 singles >S on 12th. 10 >N on 13th. 12 >S on 15th including 4 together. 6 on 17th. 4 on 18th. Singles >S 19th and 21st. 2 on 22nd. 5 on 23rd. Total of 22 >S on 24th including a flock of 5. Total of 8 on the shore on 25th. 4 on 27th. 6 on 28th. 3 on 29th. one on 31^s (total of 60+ >S during August).

A **Green Sandpiper** (calling) >S 30m above MSBO at c. 10:00hrs on 25th (Eddie Maguire / Iomhar McMillan) – a scarce, mainly autumn passage visitor.

A **Greenshank** >S on 26th and southerly passage movements of **Redshank** included 30 on 9th, 10 on 17th, flock 70 on 19th, 20 on 27th, 35 on 28th and 45 on 29th. The only record of **Black-tailed Godwit** was a single bird on 27th.



Red Knots on passage MSBO 29th



Red Knot off-passage 29th



Black-tailed Godwit: MSBO 27th

Four **Bar-tailed Godwits** >S on 28th. A flock of 5 **Ruddy Turnstones** >S on 4th with further southerly movements of 8 on 7th, 2 on 9th, one >S on 19th, one on 24th, 6 on 27th and 12 on 29th. A pale adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 9th and 2 dark adults + a pale adult >S on 10th. The first juv **Black-legged Kittiwake** of the year >S on 15th. A total of 464 >S / 5hrs on 16th. Of these, 328 (70%) were juvs. A further 11 birds (not included in the analysis) were first-summer plumaged. Another light southerly movement on 27th revealed that only 56 / 216 (26%) were juvs. No first-summer birds were noted.



The striking plumage of a juv Black-legged Kittiwake >S off MSBO 16th

A total of 24 **Sandwich Terns** including 7 juvs were logged during the month. Peak period was 27th – 29th with 5 birds off passage including a juv.

A **Wood Pigeon** flew in off the sea on 16th – a rare sighting at MSBO.

The first juvenile **White Wagtails** (4) arrived on 13th. Total of 8 were on the shore on 27th. Small numbers noted regularly later. A flock of 400+ **Starling** were around the point all month

Arrivals of **Twite** at MSBO feeding station included 6 on 19th, 14 on 20th, 19 on 21st, 25 on 24th, 38 + on 28th. A total of 41 were trapped and ringed.

Resightings at MSBO

L586106: (juv). Colour ring = **green**: code = **17D**.

Ringed MSBO 29th September 2014.

Reappeared 1st / 2nd August 2015.

September

For seawatchers, autumn, and especially September, is usually the most dynamic period of the year when onshore weather can displace large numbers of seabirds

inshore: however, with winds persistently from the N and E most of the month this was the most disappointing September ever experienced at MSBO - That's life! Thirty **Mallards** on 6th and 42 on 20th. A **Teal** was by MSBO on 10th. An adult drake **Wigeon** appeared on 9th and a female-type on 18th - 19th and again 29th - 30th. Seven drake **Common Scoters** were in Machrihanish Bay on 2nd. Numbers of **Common Eiders** are now building up in Machrihanish Bay: during the last week of the month there was an obvious increase of adult males. A total of 36 by MSBO on 30th included 14 adult drakes. The first drakes (2) in flight after the flightless moult period occurred on 9th. A single **Red-throated Diver** >S on 17th and 5 >S / 1hr on 23rd. A poor showing. A **Great Northern Diver** in breeding plumage was offshore on 15th. Another very disappointing autumn with no movements of **Manx Shearwaters**. **Gannets crossing Kintyre...**on 1st September an adult was noted c. 1km inland >W over Lossit Estate. We suspected that it had crossed over the low lying Laggan from Clyde Waters (Campbeltown Loch) 8 km to the E. Another systematic watch was initiated by MSBO observers over the estate/village and the bay N to Westport c. 6km to the N. This stirring watch was much different from many, many others undertaken over the past few years: unusually on this date there was no Gannet foraging activity off MSBO and none were present in the E inner bay area. The watch, from 14:14 - 15:15hrs produced a most unexpected result. A further 8 birds in passage mode arrived from the E. In all, a total of 9 adults >W / 1hr including 3 together. These high-flyer's materialised from The Laggan and surely had crossed from Campbeltown Loch to arrive at Machrihanish (Eddie Maguire / Rab Morton). The first **juvenile** >E into Machrihanish Bay on 24th. The 6th was a particularly good day for large raptors over Ballygroggan uplands S of MSBO. Three **Golden Eagles** and many **Buzzards** were very active for a period of about 1.5hrs. A male **Hen Harrier** was over Lossit Estate on 13th, a **Kestrel** was seen on 15th and a **Merlin** appeared on 29th.



Merlin 29th

October

Another exceptionally poor month for seabird movements off Machrihanish. The only suitable weather window for expectancy occurred on 22nd and this produced an exciting total of **29 Leach's Petrels** inshore in a WNW gale event.

French connection at MSBO...

A **Black-legged Kittiwake** photographed at MSBO on 24th May 2015 was found dead close by on 19th July. Metal ring details were as follows...

Mus. Paris FX24192 (see MSBO May and July Reports)

The bird was ringed on 10th July 2014 at Pointe du Raz, Plogoff, Finistere (Brittany) **824** km south of MSBO (per BTO). This is the **5th** French colour ringed **Kittiwake** to be found in Argyll waters in summer: all were ringed in Brittany, all were first-summer and, remarkably, all occurred at MSBO.

Seven adult **Whooper Swans** came in off the sea on 17th and a flock of 22 **Greylag Geese** came in off sea on 14th. Two juvs **Brent Geese** were present daily 16th – 21st with 3 on 22nd. Also, 9 >S on 22nd, one was on the shore on 24th, and 2 >S on 26th.

A drake **Shoveler** was off MSBO on 27th and a **Wigeon** was present daily 1st - 8th. A drake >S on 24th and 8 >S on 29th. Two female-type **Pintails** >S on 31st.

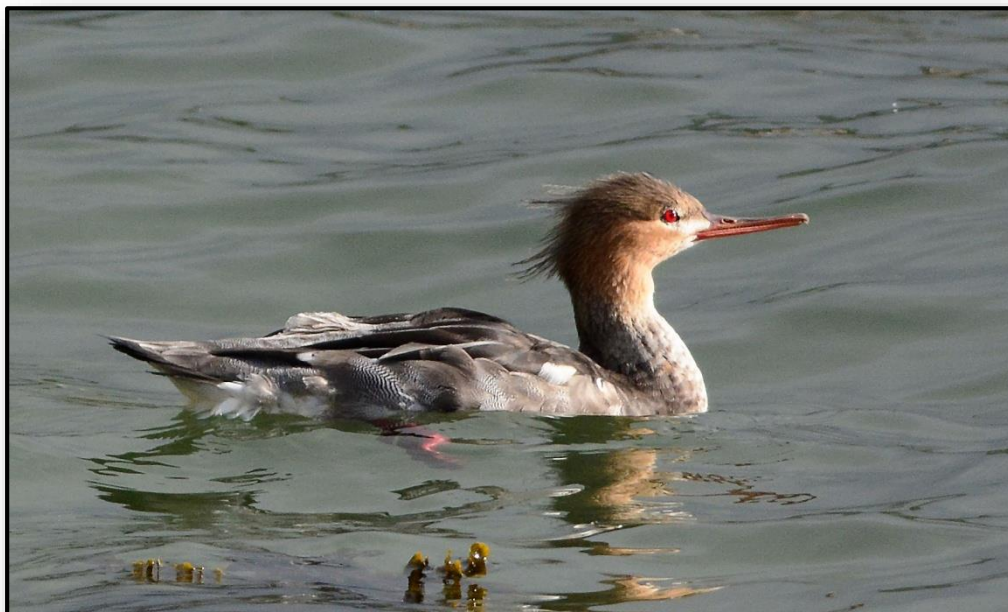


Wigeon 8th

Five **Red-breasted Merganser** >S on 5th and 3 were by MSBO on 6th. One >S on 31st. A **Goosander** >S on 26th, two **Red-throated Divers** >S on 1st, another 5 >S on 3rd followed by singles on 19th and 27th. Four **Black-throated Divers** were offshore 17th - 19th. An adult **Great Northern Diver** >S on 2nd, 6 adults >S / 4hrs on 21st, 3 >S on 22nd and 10 were present on 28th. A total of 21 >S / 5hrs on 29th.

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Report 2015

A juv **Northern Gannet** >S on 21st. A total of 220 >S / 7hrs on 22nd included a juv. Another juv >S on 29th. Including one in September, a total of only 4 juvs have occurred this autumn.



Red-breasted Merganser 6th



Northern Gannet 22nd

On 22nd an exciting total of **29 Leach's Petrels** >S / 7hrs (NW f7 gale event) (Eddie Maguire / Rab Morton). First appearance at MSBO this year.



Leach's Petrel 22nd



Kingfisher: absolutely out of habitat / the first MSBO record

Merlins were hunting along the shore on 13th and 22nd and 60 **Ringed Plovers** were by Machrihanish village on 18th. A single **Red Knot**, the only record this month, was seen on 22nd, 2 **Dunlins** were by the village on 18th, two flocks of **Sanderlings**

totalling 116 were present on 18th and the first returning **Purple Sandpiper** >S on 21st.

Three **Great Skuas** >S during a WNW gale event on 22nd and a dark adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 26th.

A grand total of **2814 Black-legged Kittiwake** >S / 7hrs during a WNW gale event on 22nd. Regular ageing samples indicated that around 44% were juvs.

A **Common Kingfisher**, calling very loudly, appeared briefly at 14:00hrs on 7th - a most unexpected addition to the MSBO list of species although they have occurred on Machrihanish Water a few km to the E.

MSBO / Clyde Ringing Group UK Twite Study Project.

The October colour ringing total was only 16 birds: total trapped / ringed during August - October = **110**. Fifty arrived at the feeding station on 30th

. November

A **Twite** colour ringed this autumn at MSBO was photographed on 29th October at Newbigging-by-the-Sea, Northumberland – our second notification from this NE county and both birds were on the North Sea coast.

Since the colour ringing programme began at MSBO, we have experienced the lowest ringing total this autumn by around 50-60%. Could their breeding success have been affected by the very cold / wet spring?

It's too early to speculate, but the general consensus from some members of the **UK Twite Study Project** indicates low numbers of this species.

The westerly gale event on 13th displaced very few seabirds within sight of the shore. A **Great Skua** was the bird of the day.



Great Skua 13th

A **Grey Phalarope** was bird of the day during a WNW gale event on 19th (first MSBO record for two years). Then on 20th, the wind switched to almost NNW bringing in 5 **Long-tailed Duck** (singles - 2 were adult males), 3 **Leach's Petrel** (singles) and 2 juv **Pomarine Skuas** (singles).



Grey Phalarope: fly-by off MSBO 19th

A flock of 6 **Whooper Swans** including 2 juvs >S on 6th. A single juv >S on 16th. Four **Pink-footed Geese** >S on 2nd and 24 pale **Brent Geese** arrived from the W on 5th. Further small flocks of pale birds included 5 >S on 17th and 4 >S on 18th. A single >S on 19th.

Six **Pintail** >S on 11th, 5 **Long-tailed Ducks** (singles) >S on 20th included 3 adult males and a redhead **Goosander** >S on 17th.

Southerly movements of **Red-throated Divers** included 3 on 6th, 2 on 9th, 3 on 13th, 4 on 17th and 2 on 19th. A single **Black-throated Diver** >S on 5th. Southerly movements of **Great Northern Divers** were 8 on 3rd, 5 on 5th, 6 on 13th and 8 >S on 19th. A loose group of 12 were offshore on 4th.

Single juv **Northern Gannets** >S on 5th, 11th, 13th, 17th and 28th (this brings the total number of juvs >S this autumn to a meagre 9). Three **Leach's Petrels** (singles) >S during a WNW gale event on 20th (the second occurrence this year).

A single **Red Knot** >S on 13th, two flocks of **Sanderlings** totalling 18 >S on 9th with a further flock of 35 >S on 16th and a **Black-tailed Godwit** >S on 28th.

Single **Purple Sandpiper** >S on 6th and 9th and 2 were on the rocks on 22nd.

The only **Grey Phalarope** of the year, a fly-by in a gale, was photographed >S on 19th and another **Great Skua** >S on 29th.

A pleasant surprise on 28th was a first-winter **Kumlien's Iceland Gull** >S. The bird was photographed in extremely poor light conditions (the third MSBO record).



A fly-by Kumlien's Gull (first-winter) 28th

Forty **Black-legged Kittiwakes** >S / 7hrs on 9th, 50>S / 6hrs on 13th and a total of 370 >S (only 20% juv) on 19th.

MSBO / Clyde Ringing Group UK Twite Study Project.

November colour ringing total = 21: total trapped / ringed during August – November = **131**.

Acknowledgements

Argyll Bird Club for generous financial assistance towards the **UK Twite Study Project** at MSBO: this covered all costs (colour rings / nyjer seed) necessary for the continued success of the project during autumn 2015.

Rab Morton (warden of Sanda Island BO) for all his prompt appearances to ring Twite at MSBO. Without Rab we would almost certainly have been unable to continue with the **UK Twite Study Project**.

Stirling University for many years of grateful sponsorship.

David Millward (professional photographer) for many years of friendship, sound technical / legal advice and infinite patience with all DSLR problems / settings and purchasing.

Jo Goudie (artist) for MSBO website and for updating the site swiftly each month.

Pip / Carol Ashley & Martin / Leticia Conway for their exceptional friendship and unremitting support for MSBO.

The Observatory will reopen to the public on 1st March 2016

UK Twite Study Project An Update

This valuable colour-ringing programme continued.
Cumulative ringing totals August / October 2015= **130**
Total ringed to date = **1,500**

Twite Movements at MSBO Autumn 2010 - January 2016

Introduction

In July 2010 Machrihanish Seabird Observatory joined the **UK Twite Study Project**. During autumns 2010 - 2015, a total of **1,500** Twite were colour ringed at MSBO, an average of 250 birds per year. The greatest movement was of a bird to Essex, but most movements were to and from western parts of Scotland and northern England. In total 76 birds ringed at MSBO have been sighted, photographed or caught elsewhere in the UK and Republic of Ireland, and 20 birds ringed in other part of the UK and Republic of Ireland have been sighted, photographed or caught at MSBO.

Recent recoveries / sightings of MSBO colour ringed Twite

- 1) Colour ringed at MSBO autumn 2014
Colour sequence noted at St John's Point, County Down on 15th March (George Gordon / Tim Murphy pers. comm.).
- 2) Colour ringed at MSBO autumn 2013
Colour sequence noted at Island Magee, just north of the entrance to Belfast Loch, County Antrim on 22nd March (George Gordon / Cameron Moore pers. comm.).
- 3) **L586011**. Ringed MSBO 10th September 2014.
Retrapped MSBO 8th October 2014
Caught at Connah's Quay, Deeside, Flintshire, N Wales 14th March 2015
Controlled by ringers (Spence and Brenchley).
Duration: 185 days. Distance: **298 km**. Direction: 145deg (SE).
- 4) **L586123**. Colour ringed MSBO 29th September 2014.

Photographed at Happisburgh, NE Norfolk 9th April 2015 (per Jamie Dunning).

These are the first MSBO ringed Twite confirmed from both Wales (2) and Norfolk.



This male Twite was colour ringed at MSBO during autumn 2015 and reappeared spring 2016

- 5) **L586107**: colour ring = green: code= **13D**. Ringed MSBO 29th September 2014.

Photographed on 8th March 2015 at Gyles Quay, Co. Louth, Ireland (David Knight pers. comm.).

The third MSBO colour ringed bird reported from the Republic.

- 6) Colour ringed MSBO autumn 2015.

Photographed on 29th October at Newbigging-by-the-Sea, Northumberland. Our second notification from this NE English County and both birds were on the North Sea coast.

- 7) Colour ringed MSBO autumn 2015 (August-November).

Photographed on 14th December at Blakeney, N Norfolk, 2015 (Kieran Nixon pers. comm.).

This is the second MSBO Twite photographed in N Norfolk (both coastal sightings).

- 8) Colour ringed MSBO autumn 2015 (August-November).

Seen by Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire 16th January 2016 (per Jamie Dunning). This is our first Twite notification to this county. This bird was also by the coast.

Twite movements at MSBO

The maps that accompany this paper present the distribution of UK / Republic of Ireland movements of Twite to and from MSBO.

The maps do not, however, indicate the remarkable numbers of birds involved.

The data in the table below reveals these totals and includes 1) all MSBO colour-ringed birds that were seen / photographed / controlled elsewhere in the UK / Republic of Ireland and 2) all birds seen / photographed or controlled at MSBO.

Note that the control totals from Co Donegal, Lancashire and Isle of Man include colour-ringed individuals (c. 12) that were photographed at MSBO.

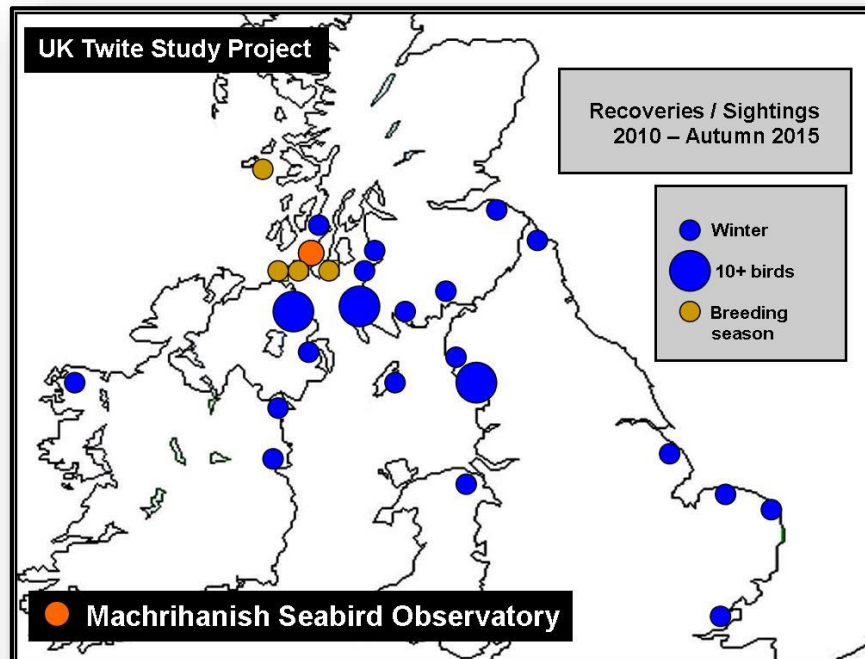
Table....

Locations of all MSBO recoveries / controls

Locations	Ringed MSBO Seen / controlled	Photographed / controlled at MSBO
Scotland...		
Argyll	6	1
Highland		1
Ayrshire	2	
Dumfries and Galloway	16	
East Lothian	1	
England...		
Northumberland	2	
Cumbria	5	2
Lancashire	14	12
Lincolnshire	1	
Norfolk	2	
Suffolk		1
Essex	1	
Isle of Man	6	2
Wales		
Flintshire	2	
Northern Ireland...		
Co Antrim	11	
Co Down	4	
Republic of Ireland...		
Co Donegal		1
Co Mayo	1	
Co Wexford	1	
Co Louth	1	
Totals	76	20

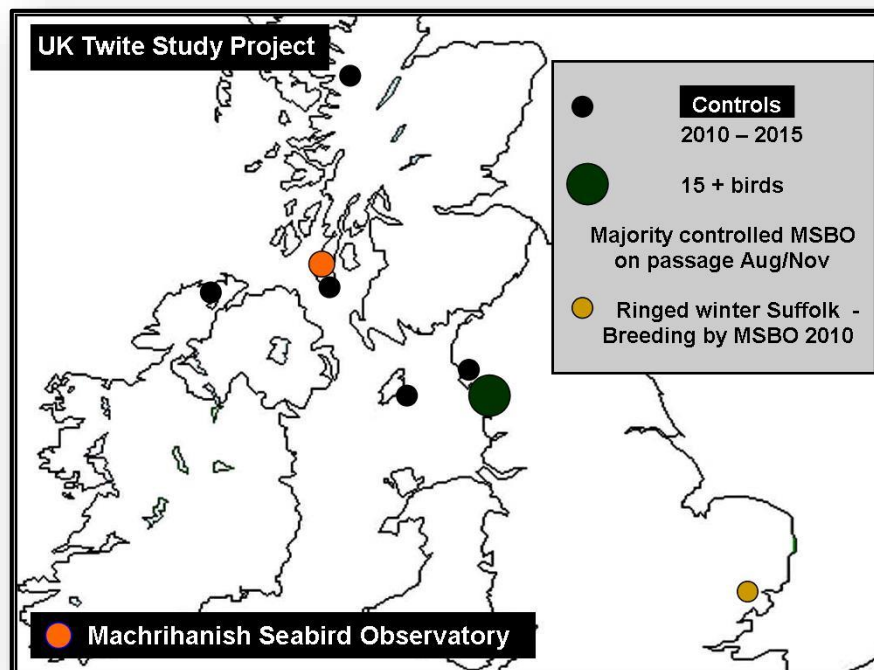
The following maps highlight the movements of Twite to / from MSBO.

Map 1.



Recoveries (sightings / controls) of birds colour ringed at MSBO

Map 2.



Birds Controlled at MSBO

Confirmed breeding of MSBO colour-ringed birds is at present confined to Mull of Kintyre, and more reliably, around Machrihanish. In addition, singles have been sighted during the breeding season on Tiree (Argyll) and Rathlin Island (Co Antrim).

For additional information see *Twite Ringing in Kintyre* (Maguire 2014). Argyll Bird Club quarterly newsletter *The Eider* (Editor Steve Petty), March 2014; Number 107.

Westerly overland passage of Northern Gannets in S Argyll 2007-2014

(An edited account of this paper was published in Argyll Bird Club quarterly newsletter *The Eider* (Editor Steve Petty), December 2015; Number 114).

*It is always intriguing to find a Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* flying over land especially as their principal habitat, away from a colony, is so very strictly, the marine environment.*

However, casual observation by many observers in SE Kintyre, Argyll have revealed that adult Gannets periodically fly high over Campbeltown and disappear rapidly overland, out of sight, to the west. This seasonal behaviour was initially thought to be a random crossing from Clyde Waters to Atlantic foraging grounds, but recently it became evident that one way westerly movements by Gannets could also be motivated by a very obvious visual stimulus. Indeed, as observations accumulated, it became apparent that here was a unique opportunity to investigate and perhaps validate what would obviously be a rare phenomenon - adult Gannets crossing overland from Clyde Waters in SE Kintyre to gain access to foraging grounds in the Atlantic.



Northern Gannets (adults): photo Eddie Maguire

Introduction

Casual observations of westerly movements of Gannets over Campbeltown, was first detected in summer 2007 (Saunders Girvan pers. comm.), and has been noted every year up to 2014.

All sightings occurred between May and August and always during the early evening period. Most records involved single birds, but several occurrences involving a maximum of two birds were noted on occasions (Maguire 2007 - 2014).

As records accumulated, a tangible explanation for what appeared to be overland crossings to the west by Gannets in S Kintyre eventually came to light. In early summer 2012, two large cranes were installed at Campbeltown Harbour. One was a massive 54m high jib: the other was a bit shorter. Piling and dredging operations commenced to develop the quay and seabed to accommodate much larger industrial shipping. Remarkably, the presence of the tall jibs at the harbour was the catalyst that shed light on a single credible explanation why adult Gannets would challenge an 8km overland crossing from Campbeltown to, apparently, the Atlantic.

Notes from Machrihanish

At Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO), it was soon noted that, looking E across The Laggan (the narrowest and lowest part of Kintyre), that both jibs at Campbeltown harbour could be seen against the backdrop of Davaar Island 11km to the east, and on calm days, the distinctive double thump from the taller jib (piling) could be heard at MSBO some 8km W of Campbeltown harbour

Throughout late spring and summer, Gannets are regularly foraging off MSBO and to the NE in Machrihanish Bay. A few birds are always patrolling in the area and within minutes of one, or several, locating a major food source, many others appear from all directions. Within 10-15mins, sometimes as many as 100-500 can arrive, obviously attracted to the vicinity by the rapidly growing multitude and plunge-diving frenzy of birds high over a major food source.

The largest gatherings occurred between May – August and predominantly when the wind was onshore.

Notes from Campbeltown

At Campbeltown, Gannets can often be present in good numbers and foraging height is often >100m above the loch. Given that observers at MSBO could see both jibs at the New Quay, it soon became evident that Gannets foraging at jib height (54m), or higher, in the loch must have quickly become aware of the tumult of plunge-diving birds off Machrihanish and commenced flying west, high above the town, then high over The Laggan, to finally arrive off the west coast.

A search of MSBO logsheets validated this theory; the dates of all presumed overland crossings from Clyde to Atlantic during June-August 2012 occurred during periods of peaks in Gannet foraging activity off Machrihanish.

Indeed, all Gannets noted >W over Campbeltown were adults, all were >100m above the town and all logged during periods of westerly winds. Also, the flight bearing (270deg) over the town was steadfast, close to, over Lorne and Lowland Church spire, Longrow, and their flight progress was always unwavering, accompanied by uninterrupted steady wingbeats that imparted a very noticeable impression of urgency.

Although the overland crossings were recorded only in the evening, it seems likely that this remarkable behaviour could occur at any time of day. Also, there is a single

record of a bird returning shortly after flying W over the town: a heavy shower arrived soon after this!

Data from casual observations at Campbeltown

It is reasonable to assume that Gannets circling at a great height are employing several tactics that obviously includes looking for prey below. In addition, their altitude will involve surveillance of the horizon in search of any foraging behaviour by other Gannets. Is this the visual stimulus that apparently compels birds to embark on an 8km overland trek from Campbeltown Loch to Machrihanish? This last statement is borne out by personal observations of mass arrivals of birds over 5 – 10 minutes when a major source of primary prey species is located by a small number of birds off MSBO and in Machrihanish Bay.

During 2007 – 2014, casual observations show that a total of 38 adult Gannets flew W out of sight over Campbeltown on 30 dates. All sightings occurred between May and August.

Although only casual observations, the steady increase in the total number of adult birds apparently crossing Kintyre as the months progress, substantially more so in August, perhaps indicates a greater urgency during this period by breeding adults to locate and access a major food source. Large Gannet chicks nearing the fledging period on Ailsa Craig will require much more food in August. First fledging dates on Ailsa reaches a peak mid – late September (Forrester et al 2007).

The first juvenile seen off MSBO during autumn 2015 was on 24th September.

Table

Summary of monthly distribution of adult Gannets flying west over Campbeltown during 2007 – 2014.

Year	May	June	July	August	Totals
2007				2	2
2008				2	2
2009				1	1
2010		1	4	4	9
2011			1	3	4
2012	1	5		4	10
2013			2	3	5
2014	1			4	5
Totals	2	6	7	23	38

Results at Machrihanish

The overland passage theory at Campbeltown was treated cautiously. However, the evidence was compelling: Gannets were undoubtedly departing high over the loch and flying purposely out of sight to the west over the town without changing direction. Only one was ever seen returning and this individual was obviously discouraged by an approaching squall: surely the others must have arrived over the Atlantic?

At Machrihanish, this hypothesis took several years to validate. It was extremely difficult to be absolutely sure if any Gannets were arriving from the E. The inner bay area between MSBO and the village is normally busy with foraging sea birds of many species. This was thought to mask any arrival of Gannets from the E. In addition, adults >S through Machrihanish Bay for the Craig colony often arrive in the inner bay and, to complicate the situation, they then orientate W to get around the point.

Adults with an obvious knowledge of the topography of the area regularly cross the point up to 50-60m inland: no Gannet in immature plumage (juv > sub-adult) has ever been recorded doing this.

Over many years Gannets have been observed, frequently, evidently arriving at Machrihanish from the E. All birds slope-soaring W over the adjacent uplands (500 – 1000m inland) and over Lossit Estate (> 200m inland) were considered likely to have crossed the peninsula from Campbeltown Loch (Maguire et al / unpublished data). Additional quality observations were required to corroborate this assumption, and finally, in September 2015, this objective was accomplished.

On 1st September 2015, an adult was noted c. 1km inland >W over Lossit Estate. Another systematic watch was initiated by MSBO observers over the estate/village and the bay N to Westport c. 6km to the N. This stirring watch was much different from many, many others undertaken over the past few years: unusually on this date there was no Gannet foraging activity off MSBO and none were present in the E inner bay area. The watch, from 14:14 - 15:15hrs produced a most unexpected result. A further 8 birds in passage mode arrived from the E. In all, a total of 9 adults >W / 1hr including 3 together. These high-flyer's materialised from The Laggan and surely had crossed from Campbeltown Loch to arrive at Machrihanish (Eddie Maguire / Rab Morton).

Discussion

On overland passage Forrester et al (2007) state "*Flocks may enter the inner Firths on the east coast in autumn and there is evidence that some overland passage exists between the Firths of Forth and Clyde but sightings inland are rare*" (Forrester et al 2007). These apparent crossings were published by Taylor (1977). The sightings involved first year Gannets (juveniles) from the Bass Rock possibly carrying out a short crossing over Scotland during August / September to arrive over Clyde waters, probably on the Ayrshire coast.

The species account of the Northern Gannet in the fairly recent publication **Birds of Argyll** (ap Rheinallt et al 2007) does not include any historical account of overland passage in the county by the Gannet: however, the extraordinary records (by many observers) relating to birds flying W over Campbeltown during 2007- 2014, published in MSBO monthly and annual reports (2007-2014), were not incorporated in the systematic lists of any contemporary Argyll Bird Report (Callan et al 2006 – 2013).

Adults appear to exploit the narrowest part of the Kintyre peninsula to access the Atlantic, and although the catalyst for this previously unrecorded behaviour was originally thought to be promoted by the spectacle of foraging activity by other Gannets at a major food source off Machrihanish, it now appears that it could also be employed simply as a gateway to foraging grounds in the Atlantic, possibly by many older adults with previous experience of doing so.

Regular early morning southerly flights of Gannets >S off MSBO (normally on broad front passage) eventually converge with many others by the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse then orientate E on their way to the Clyde colony. Also, birds from the Scar Rocks colony off the N shore of the outer Solway Firth (Dumfries and Galloway) are obviously involved in these movements: in recent years many birds with distended rear ends (obviously returning to a colony) have been noted on a SE bearing off the Mull of Kintyre, and, interestingly, another flight line, bearing directly south has been identified (Maguire unpublished data).

A short overland trek W to E from Machrihanish to Campbeltown via The Laggan by the Ailsa Craig breeding population would be particularly advantageous: this

'shortcut' would reduce a Gannets journey to the Clyde colony by some 32km and also slash the duration of their flight time by around 40mins. Curiously, so far, overland passage at The Laggan appears to be exclusively by adults and only from Clyde Waters to the Atlantic.

References

ap Rheinallt, T. et al (Eds) 2007. *Birds of Argyll*. Argyll Bird Club, Lochgilphead.

Callan, T. et al (Eds) *Argyll Bird Report*. Vols. 21 – 25 (2006 – 2013). Argyll Bird Club.

Forrester, R. W. et al (Eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.

Maguire, E. (Ed). Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Reports 2007 – 2014.
www.machrihanishseabirdobservatory.org.uk

Taylor. I. M. 1977. Overland passage of Gannets from the Forth. *Scottish Birds*. Vol. 9, No. 6.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thanks David Jardine for much encouragement and some interesting, lengthy suggestions on how I should consider eventually presenting the data from this hypothesis. I took three more years to think about it and went on to accumulate significantly more casual statistics that provided much more evidence of a rare undertaking by the largest indigenous seabird in the N Atlantic.

I would especially like to thank Saunders Girvan who brought these most unusual overland movements to my attention and for much detailed (unpublished) notes re Gannets flying west over Campbeltown.

Thanks also many other friends who shared much of this experience with me, several independently reporting Gannets flying west over Campbeltown. They include Dave Armour, Kenny Brown, Derrick Goode, Rab Morton, John McCallum, Iomhar McMillan, Davie Robertson and Tom White et al

Eddie Maguire

Email - msbowarden@gmail.com

Tel – 07919 660 292

**Birds at Strath Farm
The Laggan
South Kintyre–Argyll
March–November 2015**

Unless stated all Records / Photographs by Eddie Maguire

Introduction...

During early March 2015 occasional visits to flood pools on grassland at Strath Farm (by Stewarton village) The Laggan, S Kintyre, Argyll ultimately led to daily observations of birds visiting / migrating through the area.

By mid April, one of the floods, the east pool (location NR 683197), developed into a significant marsh-like habitat with a classic muddy margin: this was the catalyst that promoted daily surveillance.



During March–November a total of around **500** visits were accumulated at Strath Farm flood pools: the duration of each visit ranged from 10 – 40mins.

The data accrued along with accompanying photographs reveal what was achieved by conscientiously paying fixed casual visits both morning and late afternoon to temporary flood pools where suitable marsh conditions developed with obvious potential to attract a variety of migrant waders and other wetland species.

A breakdown of all data is presented in the **List of Selected Species** below.

Rare / Scarce Birds at The Strath...

Some scarce / rare species were observed / photographed from spring through to autumn. During May, an adult **Egyptian Goose** – a new species in Argyll and around the 10th Scottish record – and two **Red-necked Phalaropes** appeared, then in July, two **Pectoral Sandpipers** were the star birds.

These rarities have all been accepted by the relevant Scottish or Argyll Bird Club Records Committee's.



Adult Egyptian Goose / a new species in Argyll

The brace of summer-plumaged **Red-necked Phalaropes** (both males) on the east pool was an amazing record: Alas, they departed overnight. This was an unprecedented spring mainland occurrence in Kintyre and almost certainly so in Argyll.



One of two Red-necked Phalaropes on the east pool: both birds were oblivious to admiring photographers

A particularly exciting record involved **Pectoral Sandpipers** (N America): one was found in late July (only the third Kintyre record) and incredibly, it was joined by another a few days later.

In August, an elegant **Wood Sandpiper** appeared for a few hours (mainly a very scarce autumn passage visitor to Argyll), a sub-adult **Little Gull** was attracted to the pool in September (a scarce, mainly autumn marine passage visitor / rare inland) and finally a juvenile **Glaucous Gull** appeared in November. All these rare / scarce species were photographed (photos in Systematic List below).

More passage visitors...

A grand variety of species were noted / photographed including many passage visitors attracted by the muddy margin of the east pool. Interesting waders included a few **Red Knots**, loads of **Dunlins**, a brick-red adult **Curlew Sandpiper**, an adult **Greenshank** and many Icelandic **Black-tailed Godwits**.

After 41 years of birdwatching in Kintyre the biggest surprise for this observer at the east pool was witnessing the finest, most protracted passage of **Ruff** ever recorded in the area. To summarise, between 5th August – 27th September this species was recorded on 24 dates with maximum monthly counts of 12 on 5th August and 5 on 12th September.

The **Ruff** is a regular, mainly autumn, passage visitor in small numbers to S Kintyre and is recorded mainly at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory. A record flock of 18 flew south there on 14th August 2011. Unusually, a long-staying individual remained at West Parkfergus, The Laggan with a flock of **Lapwings** from 8th October to 28th November 2006: for a passage visitor this was a record 52 days stay.



Ruff wading in the east pool

The smaller, deeper, west pool attracted mainly **Mallard** and **Teal**: surprisingly, a small flock of up to 7 **Shovelers** were regular for a short period.

List of Selected Species

Unless stated records refer to the east pool.

Mute Swan

October: a juv was present daily 25th – 30th.

Whooper Swan

March: 3 adults were regular 1st - 17th.

May: an adult arrived on 9th and, surprisingly, remained daily to 29th.

October: 13 on 25th and 9 including a juv on 27th. Nine adults on 30th.

November: Ca. 40 >E low over the pools on 7th. Eight adults on 11th.

Barnacle Goose

November: two were by the west pool on 4th with 9 on 5th (these birds were distant / some were possibly local Canada / Barnacle Geese hybrids).



Whooper Swans on the east pool 11th November



Barnacle Geese by the west pool

Greylag Goose

May: 3 on 19th, one 22nd – 27th, three again 28th – 29th and one 30th – 31st.

June: one regular 2nd – 16th. **August:** present daily from 9th (17) – 31st (51) max 76 on 22nd. **September:** 51 on 3rd, c. **100** regular 6th – 8th then a high count of **220** (for September) was logged on 9th. None were noted at this site again until 25th (10).

Pink-footed Goose

November: Two at the east pool on 2nd then 11 there on 4th.



Pink-footed Geese (White-fronts behind) by the west pool

White-fronted Goose (Greenland race *flavirostris*)

October: flock 40 on 31st.

November: ca.600 on 2nd. 440 on 5th.

One of the White-fronts photographed at Strath on 5th was wearing a neck collar.

The complete history of this individual follows...

P1J was caught at Hvanneyri, W Iceland, autumn 2004 and was present at The Laggan, Kintyre during winters 2004/5, 2008/9, 2009/10, 2012/13 and 2014/15.

Also seen at Hvanneyri autumn 2008, 2009 and 2014.

2015 Sightings...

20th May: collar identified at Hvanneyri, W Iceland.

11th October: collar identified at Hvanneyri, W Iceland (normally this is a mean arrival date in Kintyre!). **November:** bird / collar photographed at Strath Farm, The Laggan, S Kintyre on 5th.



Neck collared J5F at Strath 8th November

Greenland White-fronted Goose (J5F)

Another neck collared **White-fronted Goose** was seen (photo above).

J5F was caught in west Greenland during July 2008 and seen again there during summers 2009 and 2010.

This individual was by Strath Farm west pool on 8th November and has been identified at The Laggan every winter 2008 / 2015.

Egyptian Goose

Vagrant

May: an adult was present / photographed on 22nd.

This record was accepted by Scottish Birds Records Committee and becomes the first Argyll record (Jim Dickson / Argyll Bird Recorder pers. comm. September 2015). An African species with sustainable feral populations in SE England and in many W European countries. There have been ca. ten Scottish records since 2008.

Shelduck

May: flock 52 on 19th. Breeding: 9 ducklings on 26th / 27th and 13 ducklings on 28th – 31st.

June: 6 ducklings (just hatched) appeared on 3rd.

November: One mid month was joined by another on 26th.

Mallard

August: peak count at the west pool was flock 40+ on 3rd.



Egyptian Goose / Whooper Swan on the east pool on 22nd May

Teal

August: max 8 on 5th.

September: present daily, max 20 on 17th.

November: 13 on 4th and 9 on 10th.

Wigeon

March: significant flocks occurred on two dates: **108** on 5th and 53 on 8th.

November: 2 on 2nd, 6 on 10th and 52 on 11th.

Pintail

March: an adult drake was present 5th - 8th.



Pintail on the east pool 7th March before the muddy margin appeared

Shoveler

July: (west pool) a small flock of female-types daily to 26th. Best counts included 7 on 3rd and 6 on 14th.

These are significant mainland Argyll occurrences.

August: (east pool) 2 on 4th. A single bird was present 5th - 7th and again 24th - 28th.

October: (east pool) 5 on 28th.

Tufted Duck

October: one appeared on 30th when the east pool had greatly increased in size / depth following very heavy rain.

Goldeneye

October / November: a female-type present 31st - 2nd. A female-type on 28th.

Hen Harrier

August: an adult male flew E over both pools on 16th.

Merlin

November: singles on 8th and 15th.

Peregrine Falcon

August: a juv on 17th was watched chasing **Ruffs** and **Black-tailed Godwits** but appeared far too inexperienced for what was obviously 'fast food'.



Peregrine stooping hard over the east pool

Lapwing

May: one on 23rd.

June: one on 14th, 8 there on 15th and one 21st - 26th.

July: 14 on 1st and a single on 19th.

September: recorded on 13 dates 11th – 29th with max of 19 on 19th.

October (west pool) 2 daily 1st – 6th.

Summary of occurrences: recorded on 29 dates 23rd May – 6th October.

Golden Plover

November: 840 on 10th.

Red Knot

July: 2 adults on 17th (a scarce species inland).

Pectoral Sandpiper (N America)

In Argyll, this species is now a regular autumn migrant with a few spring records from the islands (ap Rheinallt et al 2007).

July: one was present all day / photographed on 19th: it reappeared pm on 22nd (Eddie Maguire / Rab Morton) then, remarkably, two birds were found at the pool am on 27th (Eddie Maguire).

This species is the most frequent transatlantic vagrant to Western Europe and is regularly noted each autumn (Richards 1989).

Since the start of the 1970's it has become an annual visitor to Scotland. They are thought to originate from Alaska and Canada. Autumn movements from Canada involve routes across the western Atlantic, increasing its susceptibility to displacement by Atlantic depressions (Forrester et al 2007).

The first Argyll record was one at the 'stinky hole' Campbeltown Loch on 17th October 1978 (Eddie Maguire).



Pectoral Sandpiper: foraging belly-deep / mostly ignoring photographer on 19th July

Ruff

August: recorded on 8 dates 5th (12) – 17th (6) max 12 on 5th. **September:** recorded on 16 dates 8th (4) – 27th (1) max 5 on 12th.

Summary of autumn passage: recorded on 24 dates 5th August – 27th September, max counts 12 on 5th August and 5 on 12th September.

Curlew Sandpiper

July: a brick-red summer adult was present briefly on 17th.

Dunlin

July: recorded on 9 dates 11th – 30th max **63** on 17th. **August:** recorded on 7 dates to 15th max 50 on 15th. **September:** 2 on 24th - 25th, 3 on 26th. **October:** 7 on 2nd.

*Summary of autumn occurrences: recorded on 20 dates 11th July – 2nd October with max counts of **63** on 17th July and 50 on 15th August.*

Common Snipe

July: one on 27th.

August: 2 on 16th.

September: max 10 on 12th.



Ruff over the east pool



An unusually flamboyant Common Snipe on the east pool

Black-tailed Godwit

July: a flock of 36 adults on 17th was a grand sight. **August:** recorded on 11 dates 9th (1) - 21st (14). **September:** a single was regular 12th - 18th.

Summary of autumn passage: recorded on 19 dates 17th July – 18th September with max monthly counts of 36 on 17th July, 14 on 21st August and single bird in September.



Black-tailed Godwit over the east pool

Greenshank

June: a summer adult on 28th.

Red-necked Phalarope

A very rare, autumn passage visitor with all contemporary Kintyre records over, or on, the sea off Machrihanish Seabird Observatory

May: two summer-plumaged males were found mid-morning on 26th (Eddie Maguire) and were still present there later in the day (Jim Dickson).

This is the first spring record for Kintyre and an extremely rare Argyll mainland occurrence.

Of Interest, Northern Ireland had a summer plumaged bird at Belfast Harbour Lagoon from 29th – 31st May 2015. The last mainland record there was one at Lough Beg in May 1999 (George Gordon pers.comm.).

Wood Sandpiper

A scarce / mainly autumn passage visitor to Argyll.

August: one on 6th (Eddie Maguire / Neil Black).



Wood Sandpiper on the east pool 6th August



Wood Sandpiper over the east pool (this superb flight shot was taken by Neil Black – Arbroath birder)

Glaucous Gull

A regular winter and passage visitor usually in small numbers

November: a juvenile / first-winter on 15th.



Glaucous Gull (juvenile) east pool 15th November



Little Gull: sub-adult dip-feeding over the east pool 12th September

Little Gull

A rare spring / scarce autumn marine passage visitor at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory / Sound of Gigha. Rare inland.

September: a second-summer > third-winter (sub-adult) was photographed dip-feeding over the east pool on 12th. Eventually it departed high to the W.

Fieldfare

October: huge arrival on 29th with a total of c. **2500** in fields by the east and west pools.

November: Ca. 1000 on 1st – 2nd. Regular during the following weeks although with fewer birds around. Up to ca. 800 daily 7th – 29th.

This is the largest number seen at The Laggan by this observer: Of interest, huge numbers were also seen to the east of The Strath at High Knockrioch around this time: The farmer commented... '*certainly the most ever seen here*' (Donald Brown pers. comm.).

Redwing

October: loose flock **350+** on 28th. Large arrival on 29th with a grand total of ca. **1500** by the farm and in the fields by the east and west pools.

November: ca. 450 on 1st – 2nd. Regular during the following weeks although with fewer birds around. Ca. 300 on 7th - 29th.



Fieldfare at The Strath 16th



Redwing at The Strath 2nd November

Acknowledgements...

Many thanks to farmer **Robert Turner**, Strath Farm, for many years of friendly, unrestricted access to this rich birding area of The Laggan and **Neil Black** for permission to include his superb photograph of the **Wood Sandpiper**.

References...

ap Rheinallt, T. et al (Eds) 2007. ***Birds of Argyll***. Argyll Bird Club, Lochgilphead.

Callan, T. et al (Eds). ***Argyll Bird Report***. Vols. 21 – 25 (2006 – 2013). Argyll Bird Club.

Forrester, R. W. et al (Eds) 2007. ***The Birds of Scotland***. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.

Maguire, E. (Editor). ***Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Reports***. Records published in **Argyll Bird Reports** 1993 - 2013 and at...

www.machrihanishbirdobservatory.org.uk

Richards, A. 1989. ***The Pocket Guide to Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere***. Dragons World.

Eddie Maguire

Email - msbowarden@gmail.com

Website - www.machrihanishbirdobservatory.org.uk

Tel – 07919 660 292