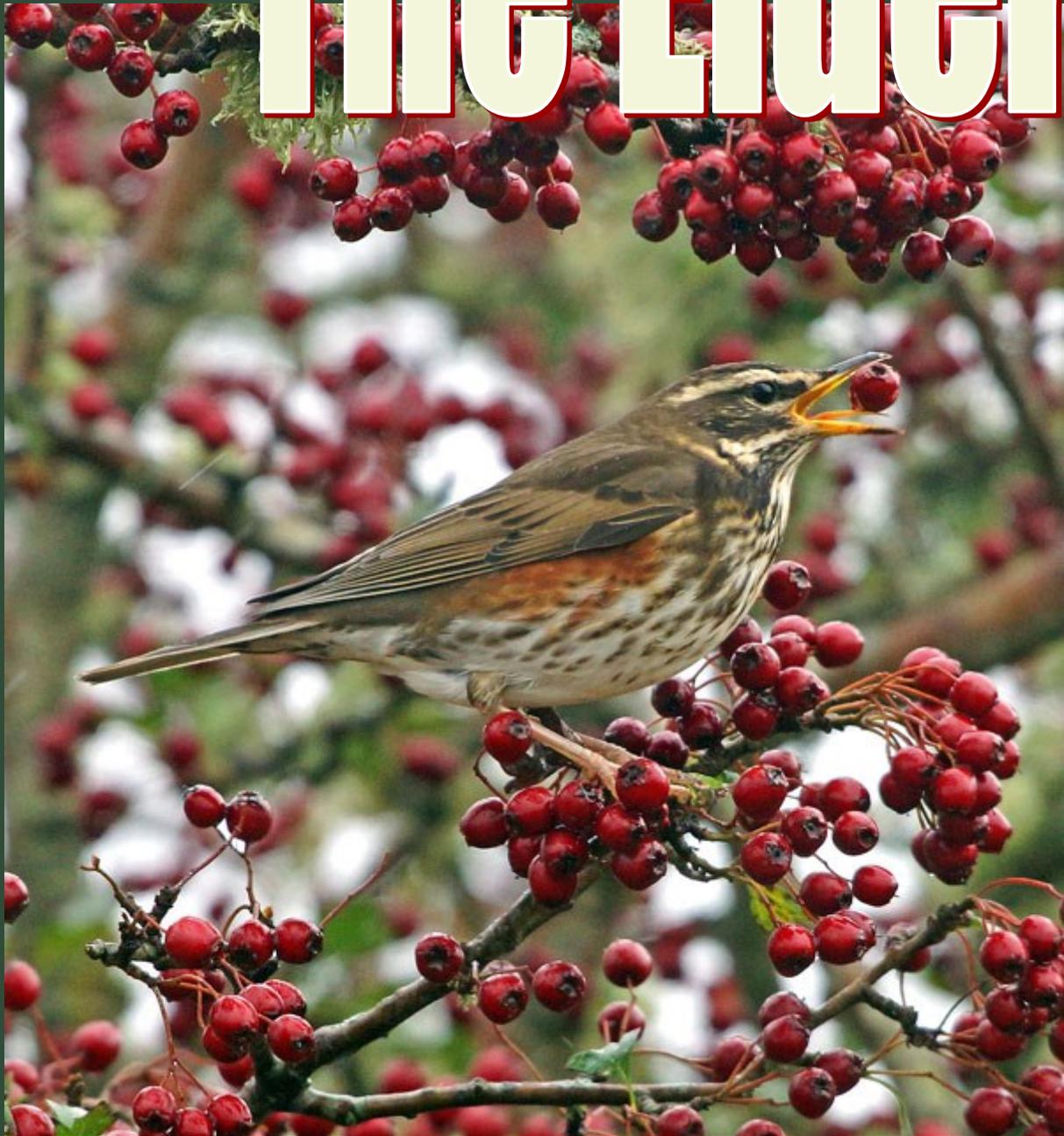


**December 2017**

**Number 122**

# The Eider



Redwing feeding on Hawthorn berries, Moine Mhor on 21 October ©Jim Dickson©

**Barn Owls in Kintyre, pages 17-19**

**Nuthatches at Barcaldine, pages 24-27**

**Recent bird sightings, pages 12-16**

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### Club News

#### FIELD TRIPS 2017-2018

If there is a chance that adverse weather might lead to the cancellation of a field trip, please check the club's website or contact the organiser the night before or prior to setting off.

**Sunday 26 November 2017. Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary.** Led by Jim Dickson (phone 01546 603967. e-mail [meg@jdickson5.plus.com](mailto:meg@jdickson5.plus.com)). Meet at 10.00hrs in Lochgilphead at the Corran car park, opposite the caravan park, on the A83, close to the roundabout (A83/A816) at the western end of the town. Please bring your own lunch. The trip will include several short walks (each 300m maximum) on level ground.

**Sunday 4 February 2018. Ormsary.** Led by Errol Crutchfield (e-mail [mreinsmithy@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mreinsmithy@hotmail.co.uk), phone 01880 770267). Meet at the Ormsary Estate Office car park (gid ref. NR741724) at 10.00hrs. Please bring your own lunch. The trip will include a walk of about 5km on level ground.

**Saturday 24 February. 2018. Loch Laich and Port Appin.** Led by Mike Harrison (phone 01631 710656, e-mail [jmharrison@jee.org](mailto:jmharrison@jee.org)). Meet at the Appin Village Hall car park on the A828 (grid ref. NM938459) at 10.00hrs. Please bring your own lunch. This trip will include walks of 3km and 2km on roads, tracks and paths with mostly gentle gradients.

#### INDOOR MEETINGS 2018-2019

**Spring Meeting 2018.** Saturday 3 March at the Inveraray Inn ([www.inveraray-inn.co.uk](http://www.inveraray-inn.co.uk)). The programme is given on the next page. Lunches will be available in the hotel.

**Autumn Meeting and AGM 2018.** In November (date not yet fixed) at the Cairnbaan Hotel (<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). The programme and date will be in a later issue of the *Eider*. Lunches will be available in the hotel.

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**Spring Meeting 2019 (Scottish Bird-watchers Conference).** Saturday 16 March 2019 in the Corran Halls, Oban. This will be a joint conference with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Argyll Bird Club.

**Raffle Prizes.** Donations of raffle prizes for indoor meetings are always welcome.

#### PREPARATION OF ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 28 (2016)

Work on ABR 28 is well underway. Jim Dickson is looking for good quality photos of birds taken in Argyll in 2016 for the report. Please contact Jim if you have any that may be suitable for consideration. We are also looking for folks to help on the editorial

#### Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Martin Armstrong, Jessica Baines, Neil Brown, John Bowler, Malcolm Chattwood, Clive Craik, Jim Dickson, Ian Fisher, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), Sue Furness, Mike Harrison, David Jardine, Eddie Maguire, Alistair McGregor, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Will Smith, Morgan Vaughan and Mark Woomb

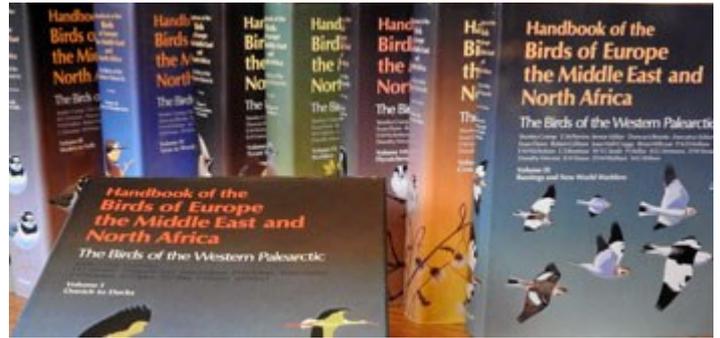
side (writing/collating species accounts, proof reading etc.). We hope ABR 28 will be available at the spring meeting in 2018.

### EDITOR OF THE ARGYLL BIRD REPORT

Jim Dickson is stepping down as editor of the bird report after the next issue is published (see last section). We urgently need a replacement editor. If anyone is interested please contact Jim. By applying now you would have the opportunity to shadow Jim during the preparation of the latest report.

### THE ARGYLL BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE HELP NEEDED

To keep the website updated takes a lot of effort. We urgently need more help with the 'recent reports' section, to cover periods when the usual compilers are on holiday etc. So, if you have any previous experience with maintaining websites or would like to learn how to, why not give us a hand. Without more help, the almost daily updates to 'recent reports' will become less frequent. If you are interested,



please contact any club official to learn more about what is involved.

Don't forget to visit our website ([www.argyllbirdclub.org](http://www.argyllbirdclub.org)) to find out about up-to-date arrangements for meetings, recent sightings of birds, including photographs, and lots more.

### A COMPLETE SET OF BIRDS OF THE WESTERN PALEARCTIC (HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA) - OFFERS PLEASE!

Two members have kindly donated a full set of nine volumes (photo above) to the club. This is a monumen-

Programme for the ABC's Autumn Meeting	
Saturday 3 March at the Inveraray Inn, Inveraray	
Time	Session
0930	Doors open, coffee and tea
0950-1000	Welcome and introduction— <i>Nigel Scriven</i> , Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club
1000-1030	Recent bird sightings and photographs— <i>Jim Dickson</i> , Argyll Bird Recorder
1030-1100	Butterflies and moths of Argyll— <i>Tom Prescott</i>
1100-1130	Coffee/tea
1130-1210	Where can seabird tracking take marine conservation— <i>Peadar O'Connell</i> , Marine Policy Officer, RSPB Scotland
1210-1240	To be confirmed
1240-1400	Lunch (available in the hotel, if required)
1400-1445	Argentina, land of contrasts— <i>Steve Petty</i>
1445-1500	Surveying Woodcocks— <i>David Jardine</i>
1500-1530	Tea/coffee
1530-1600	BTO updates— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
1600-1620	Raffle and closing remarks

tal work, published by Oxford University Press, the last volume appearing in 1994. They are in good condition. We are offering these for sale to the highest bidder. We will not be able to post these to the successful bidder, due to their weight, but they can be collected at the spring meeting or from any club official. Please send your bids (by post or e-mail) to Bob Furness (contact details on back page).

## **VOLUNTEERING TO TAKE PART IN SEABIRDS AT SEA SURVEYS FROM CALMAC FERRIES**

The club has received the following from Mark Lewis of JNCC

A collaborative project involving Calmac, SNH, JNCC, BTO, RSPB and Marine Scotland is aiming to use volunteers to collect ESAS (European Seabirds at Sea) standard seabird and cetacean data from Calmac Ferries in western Scotland. The surveys are likely to start in 2019, but there will be a survey pilot in 2018, possibly starting in January or February. We're looking for people to volunteer to take part in this survey pilot, and hope that they could continue to volunteer for the monitoring scheme when it commences in 2019.

We're looking for two types of volunteer at this stage:

### **Volunteer mentors**

Mentors will lead surveys alongside a volunteer surveyor, who they will mentor on the survey methods, bird identification, and at the same time, manage the data collection. If you have good bird ID skills, and/or some experience in offshore bird survey, we invite you to volunteer for this role.

You will need:

- ◆ To be able to take approximately 5 days out of the office, over two periods, not including any travel time you might need.

- ◆ Availability for 3 days in January/February, and 2 days in March to take part in the pilot
- ◆ To be able to get to western Scotland for training and to meet ferries (most likely Kennacraig for the Islay ferry for the pilot).

You will receive free JNCC ESAS training (this usually costs a lot of money!). All food and accommodation costs will be covered, and ferry costs will be covered by Calmac. It is possible that contributions towards travel costs can also be made.

### **Volunteer surveyors**

We are looking for anyone keen on taking part in these surveys or the pilot to volunteer for the surveyor role, regardless of survey experience or competence in bird identification.

If you'd like to volunteer for this, you will need:

- ◆ To be able to take 2 days out of the office, most likely in March, as well as any additional travel time you may need.
- ◆ To be able to get to western Scotland for training and to meet ferries (most likely Kennacraig for the Islay ferry for the pilot).

All food and accommodation costs will be covered, and ferry costs will be covered by Calmac. It is possible that contributions towards travel costs can also be made.

If you are interested in taking part, or have any questions, please email Mark Lewis ([Mark.Lewis@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:Mark.Lewis@jncc.gov.uk)). Include details of which role you'd like to take on, and if you're keen on being a mentor, any details of any previous offshore or seabird surveys that you might have.

Thanks, and looking forward to hearing from you!

**Editor's Note:** The club's committee has agreed to make available a small amount of funding towards travel costs of volunteers which may not be completely covered by the SNH/JNCC funding.

## **Editorial**

Many changes are taking place in the club. The AGM saw Mike Harrison retiring as chairman and Nigel Scriven taking over the reins (not for the first time!). I'm sure all members would like to

thank Mike for steering the club so ably over the last few years. David Jardine kindly agreed to become Vice Chairman, which left one vacancy on the committee that was filled by Neil Ham-

matt, a very keen birder who spends his time between Wales and Argyll.

Jim Dickson has been closely involved in many aspects of the club (committee member, Argyll Bird Report editor, Argyll Bird Recorder, Argyll Bird Records Committee secretary, and the club's website) for a number of years, which has involved a tremendous amount of work. To try and get his life back onto an even keel, Jim has decided to retire as the editor of the bird report. Thus, we are now looking for someone to replace Jim. So, please contact Jim, or any other club official, if you are interested. By applying now you would be able to shadow Jim during the preparation of the latest bird report.

For too long the club has depended on a few members to keep it running. So, we really do need other members to help out. In particular, with field trips and the club's website

(see Club News). Each year we keep recycling previous field trip. It would be so nice if we could organise trips to new locations. As we all know, there are so many opportunities in Argyll. So, how about volunteering to lead a trip to your favourite patch?

The *Eider* goes from strength to strength, and I'd like to thank all those who have contributed to its continuing success in 2017. Please keep the articles coming! One new feature I'd like to include in future issues is the Young Naturalist's Corner (see page 11). If you have children or grandchildren, try to encourage them to send me a few sentences about some of their experiences of the natural world, with a photo or two. It can be about any plant or animal, not just birds.

The officials of the club wish you all a very merry Christmas and we hope the New Year provides you with some great birding opportunities. Thank you for continuing to support the Argyll Bird Club.

## ABC field trip to Colonsay and Oronsay on 26 August



A group of ten (members and one non-member) met at Kennacraig before boarding the 'Heb Isles' for the long day trip to Colonsay and Oronsay. There were a few Oystercatchers and Curlews roosting on the shore by the ferry terminal, but no sign of the long-staying Little Egret, which had gone AWOL that morning. Some mizzly showers meant that viewing from the deck was limited as we sailed down West Loch Tarbert, but a pair of Red-throated Divers was found at Ardpatrick, and a large group of Harbour Seals and a few Eider were on the rocks at Eilean Traighe at the mouth of the loch.

Low wind and a fairly benign state of the sea meant that relatively few seabirds were seen once out of the loch, although a raft of around 70 Manx Shearwaters were near Gigha and a larger number of Kittiwakes were in the Sound of Jura where there was also a constant stream of adult Gannets returning to Ailsa Craig.

After a short stop at Port Askaig, sailing up the Sound of Islay and across to Colonsay produced more Kittiwakes and Gannets, but few other seabirds amongst the wonderful coastal scenery of the west coast of Jura.



**Photo above.** Larva of Fox Moth ©Steve Petty

**Photo below.** Irish Lady's Tresses ©David Jardine



Abundant wild flowers (Corn Marigold, Cornflower, Redleg and Red Poppy) in the fields of Bere Barley ©Steve Petty

Arriving at Scalasaig shortly after lunch the group was met by the island minibus and promptly taken down to the Strand. An added bonus on this leg of the journey was the sighting of a large raptor with a pale tail, which caused some debate, but it was concluded it was the local adult female Golden Eagle that has a distinctive tail pattern. The tide at the Strand was favourable and after changing to waterproof footwear we crossed to Oronsay on the falling tide, seeing small groups of Ringed Plover with some Dunlin and Sanderling.

A surprise sighting on arriving at the northern shore of Oronsay was a young Cuckoo, a very late date for this species. However, once ashore it became apparent why this bird was favouring this area as the group quickly found two large hairy caterpillars, a favourite food of Cuckoos. These were identified as the larvae of the Fox Moth (photo left) and Knot Grass.

By now the sun was out and the walk over to Oronsay House was pleasant with a few Common Blue butterflies being sighted. A female Sparrowhawk was seen hunting a flock of c.100 Linnets and being mobbed by a large group of over 50 Swallows as we approached the farm.

A short stop was taken at the Augustian Priory where there was a large group of Rock Doves, including darker and duskier youngsters. Here the group met up with Morgan Vaughan, the RSPB Reserve Warden on Oronsay, who was able to spend some time with the group explaining how the island was being farmed for Corncrakes and Chough. He took them through the fields showing them the Bere Barley (with Cornflower and Corn Marigold, photo below), grown to provide winter fodder for the Luings Cattle, but also providing weedy stubble for finches and larks. At present his main worry before harvest was the Greylag and Canada Geese, which were now starting to eat the grain. The next field had a greater floral interest as one flowering shoot of the rare orchid Irish Lady's Tresses *Sprianthes romanzoffiana* (photo left) was found.

From the arable fields a short detour was taken down to Seal Cottage where Red-Merganser was added to the day's list, but time and tide were waiting for no-one and it was soon time to be heading back

Chough on Colonsay ©Ian Fisher



over to the Strand to Colonsay. While re-crossing the Strand a Kestrel was seen flying from the Hangman's Rock area over to Oronsay and the cries of young Buzzards, begging for food from their parents, were heard.

On arriving back on Colonsay the party was met by the minibus. There was just time for a short tour of the island. Chough were found at the golf course at Machrins, where a pair was feeding below the road, allowing everyone to see the red bill and legs of this rare crow, around ten pairs of which are found on Colonsay (photo above). Another pair was seen in the distance near Dun Ghallain and the near pair flew up onto the hill where they joined their two young which were loafing there.

The next stop was at Kiloran Bay (photo below),

where some small black crows were feeding in the dunes—they turned out not to be further Chough, but a small group of Jackdaw. The still conditions meant that stop was curtailed by the midges, but this allowed another stop overlooking Loch Fada, where Little Grebe and Mallard were added to the island list, before returning to the pier in time for the approaching ferry.

Supper was had on the ferry and a few hardy folk remained on deck until Port Askaig, but the crossing was quiet for birds and the 'hoped for' Storm Petrel was not seen before the light faded. Thanks to Calmac skipper Roddy MacLeod whose excellent seamanship led to the ferry arriving back at Kennacraig 20mins ahead of schedule. Thus, the late finish was not quite as late as it might have been.

**Species list**—Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Diver, Manx Shearwater, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Sanderling, Dunlin, Redshank, Snipe, Black Guillemot, Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Rock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Cuckoo, Kestrel, Chough, Jackdaw, Hooded Crow, Raven, Skylark, Swallow, Whitethroat, Wren, Starling, Robin, Stonechat, Wheatear, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Linnets, Twite, Goldfinch, Reed Bunting (total 58)

**David Jardine**



Kiloran Bay ©Steve Petty

## ABC field trip to Tiree—16-19 September



Balephuill, Tiree with Mull and the Dutchman's Cap (Treshnish Isles) in the background ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

**Saturday.** It was just getting light when the group of 12 members met on the pier in Oban for the 07.15hrs ferry. Once aboard some folk opted for a short rest prior to tucking into a Calmac breakfast.

Once through the Sound of Mull and past Ardmore Point, more of the party ventured on deck, with the first Bonxie being seen near Tobermory, along with a few Manx Shearwaters. With the strong wind a few folk stayed on deck, taking shelter where they could. On the north side of the ferry, three members were lucky enough to see an adult Long-tailed Skua flying east between Coll and Ardnamurchan Point. Most managed to see some of the 3-4 Bonxies around the ferry as we approached Coll. Two Minke Whales were also seen on this crossing. A few more species were added to the list while at Arinagour Pier, Coll (Curlew, Redshank, Buzzard) and David and Janet Palmar boarded the ferry to join the group.

Unfortunately the weather broke as the party arrived on Tiree with a front of heavy rain moving through. So, after getting provisions at the shop the party split with half going for shelter in the hide at Loch Bhasapol and the other half going to Loch a' Phuill. The heavy rain seemed to have brought a fall of Snipe, with many being seen on the road verges while going to the hides. A flock of 50 was seen at Loch Bhasapol. After an hour or so the parties agreed to 'swap' locations. Those at Loch a' Phuill were enjoying watching a Hen Harrier, some Shovelers and six Whooper Swans, when they got a call from those in the north who had located a Buff-

breasted Sandpiper in the large flock of Golden Plover and Lapwing at Loch Bhasapol. Unfortunately the flock had flown before they arrived and it was not relocated during the rest of the visit.

With continuing poor weather the party again split to go to their respective accommodation at the Cottage (Hynish) and the Mill House Bunkhouse at Corraig, before gathering together for a meal at Gott Bay.

**Sunday.** The rain of the previous afternoon had slipped away overnight and a beautiful morning dawned, with only a light wind. Those who were up before the sun at Corraig enjoyed a dawn chorus of at least four Water Rails calling from their winter territories.

After meeting up the group searched for migrants in bushes at Hynish and then at Balephuill where a few Goldcrests, a single Willow Warbler and a Blackcap were seen. Another check of Loch a' Phuill failed to find any new birds. However, a walk across the machair to Ceann a' Mhara in warm sunshine found the bumblebees buzzing, and David Palmar expertly found a Moss Carder and later a Common Carder amongst the late clover (photos on page 10). A Peregrine (photo on next page) was watched sparring with a Buzzard by the shore.

A short stop in Scarinish found two Bar-tailed Godwits feeding near the shore. During the short 'toilet stop' another Minke Whale and dolphins were watched offshore in a glassy sunlit sea—not many public WCs can add this to their tripadvisor comments! The party then



Lapwing (above) and Peregrine (below), both photographed during the visit ©David Palmar  
[www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)

moved to Gott Bay where good views were gained of the waders as the tide rose, including the first two Dunlin of the trip.

News had come in from John Bowler that there was a Lesser Whitethroat at the Manse. A few managed to get some glimpses of this skulking individual, along with better views of another Willow Warbler. That evening an excellent meal was enjoyed at the Cobbled Cow at Tiree Mart.

**Monday.** Again dawned fair and warm. Some early risers watched a group of around 800 Starling leaving their roost in the reedbed at Loch Bhasapol in a golden light. Others found a Greenfinch and a 'large' Redpoll in Balemartine en route to the rendezvous in Hynish, where the group were under surveillance from the local Ravens.

The first stop was at Vault where the party split up to explore the beaches and surrounding vegetation. At least ten

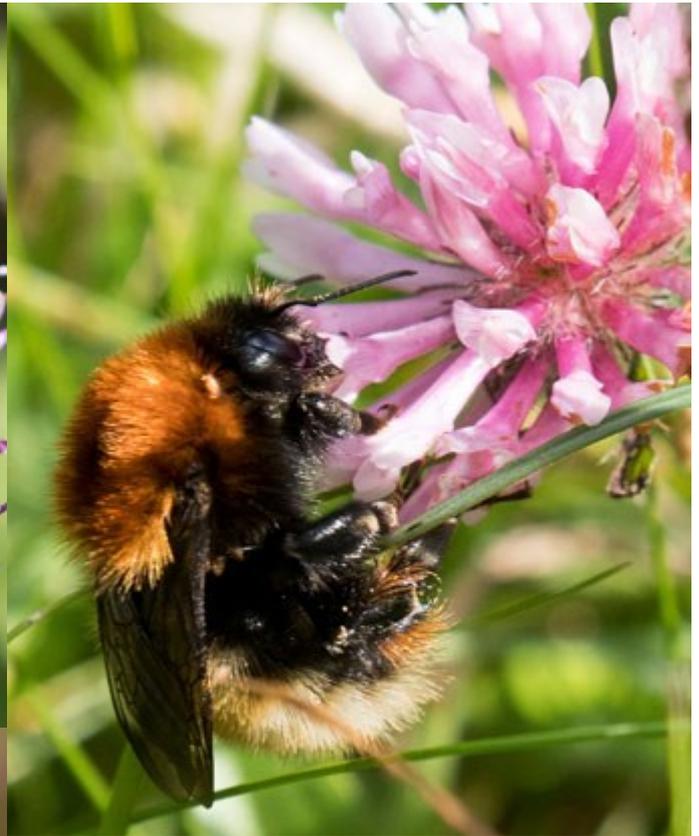
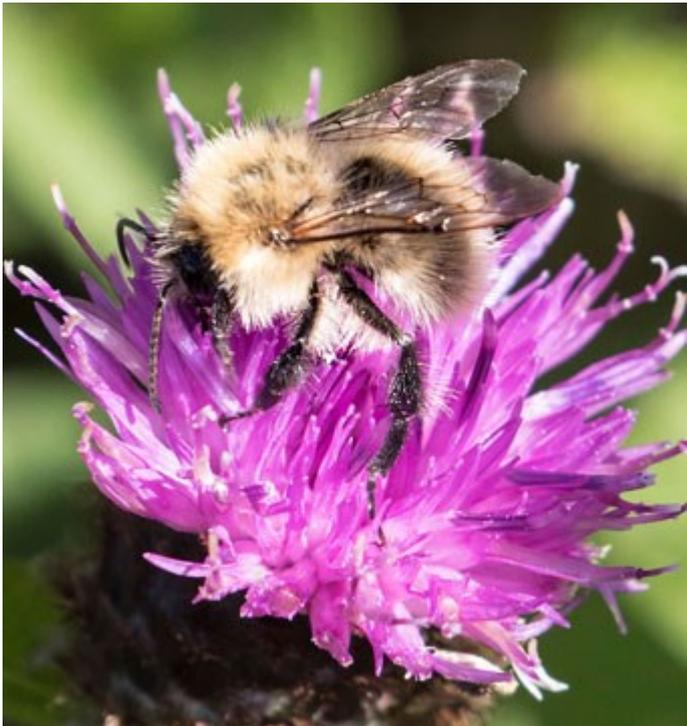
Red-throated Divers were offshore in the mirror-calm waters and some observers found a Black-throated Diver. Sanderling and Ringed Plover (photo next page) were on the shore as well as large groups of Golden Plovers and Lapwing, and even a few Turnstones in the fields and on the golf course (where some saw a couple of Black-tailed Godwits later in the day). A search for Basking Shark in the Gunna Sound proved unsuccessful, but another Peregrine was watched and Red-breasted Merganser were found offshore.

While returning west (for a DIY evening meal) a first-calendar-year Grey Plover was found in the corner of Gott Bay. A few enjoyed the roosting waders in the evening sun at Balephetrish Bay and found Oyster Plants at Ard Mor, and another Ruff in the fields nearby.

**Tuesday.** A morning trip to Balephuill allowed more of the group to connect with another Ruff in the field, along with Golden Plover. A search of Loch a' Phuill saw eleven Shoveler arriving during our short stop. However, Dougie made the star find at Balephuill, completing the hat-trick of interesting bumblebees on the trip—a rare Great Yellow Bumblebee (photo on next page).

Another Ruff was found at Balephetrish Bay, allowing everybody a view. On the afternoon walk out to the interesting Ringing Stone on the north coast of the island more Wigeon and Whimbrel were found. Two Black-tailed Godwits were seen during a short stop at Gott Bay, before heading for the ferry, and a juvenile Lesser Black-backed Gull was added to the list. It was getting gloomy and damp as the party boarded the ferry, with little being seen as the light faded other than a single Storm Petrel and a few Common Dolphins off Coll.

**Species List.** Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, Greylag, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Scaup, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Pheasant,



A trio of bumblebees—Common Carder (top left), Moss Carder (top right) and Great Yellow (bottom left) all images ©David Palmar [www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)

Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel\*, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, White-tailed Eagle\*, Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine, Water Rail, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Sanderling, Dunlin, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Ruff, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone, Long-tailed

Skua\*, Great Skua\*, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Rock Dove, Collared Dove, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Wheatear, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Hooded Crow, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Greenfinch, Linnet, Twite, Redpoll sp., Reed Bunting (\*only seen from ferry) (total 84 species)

**David Jardine**



Ringed Plovers, Balphetrish Bay, Tiree ©David Palmar [www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)

## ABC field trip to the Sound of Gigha on 28 October

Wind west veering north west, force five to seven was the forecast for Saturday but at least, we thought, the TV forecast had shown that Kintyre and Gigha were to remain dry until late afternoon. We drove south from Oban through grey curtains of rain expecting at any minute to break through into the better weather but all we found was cloud-shrouded hills and more rain. Past Ardrishaig, but no sight of Cowal. It was certainly getting brighter the further south we went, but that, we decided eventually, was because the sun had only just risen. Up into the cloud again between Whitehouse and Clachan, then down to Ronachan. There were no members' cars waiting for us in the layby, just a planing machine from the resurfacing work up the road. We looked across towards Gigha and could just

make out the profile of the island where the heaving grey sea met the slightly lighter grey sky. No birds were to be seen amongst the surging white horses. Another member arrived and we surveyed the grey scene together. A Buzzard appeared over the woods across the road, harried by a couple of Hooded Crows. A Chaffinch alighted on a bush before flying off. A few Herring Gulls cruised past, seemingly not at all bothered by the strength of the wind, and a Shag perched on a rock. A Robin was heard ticking in the undergrowth. And that was that. With no more members, no more birds, and no real prospect of better weather, we set off for home.

**Mike Harrison**

## Young Naturalists Corner

### Editor's note

I recently received this e-mail from Jessica Baines (10 years old) about her exciting experience. It would be great if we could encourage more of our children or grandchildren to contribute to this section in the future. A few sentences and a photograph or two about anything they have observed in the natural world. It doesn't have to be about birds. I look forward to hearing from you.

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I remember my dad told me that he was in the garden cutting the grass, when he saw what looked like a bird of prey fly past him at high speed chasing a bird. He went to investigate and saw the bird of prey had downed a bird in our back garden. Upon investigation, he saw the bird of prey feeding on a pigeon, which unfortunately appeared to be dead. The bird of prey then flew off without finishing its meal. He came inside and told me what had happened. I ran outside and had a look, and knew straight away that it was a Wood Pigeon that had been killed. My Dad and I then hid in the garage and waited and hoped for the bird of prey to come back, and



Sparrowhawk and prey ©Jessica Baines

sure enough it did. It started to rip out the bird's intestines with its hooked beak and claws, and at one point, the male Sparrowhawk tried to fly off with it! I was absolutely fascinated watching this, and the Sparrowhawk was so absorbed in eating its prey, it allowed me to get very close to take a photo (above). After some time observing, he finished his meal and left, leaving nothing but a pile of feathers...

**Jessica Baines**

## Recent bird sightings August to October 2017



Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, 26 October, ©Eddie Maguire

Presented here are records of rare and unusual species, as well as counts and movements of more common species recorded in Argyll during the period. I wish to thank everyone who sent in records and apologise for any errors or omissions. Ideally records should be submitted using the Argyll Bird Recording System or by using the BTO BirdTrack System. For information about either scheme please email:

[abcrecorder@outlook.com](mailto:abcrecorder@outlook.com)

A more detailed and up-to-date account of recent sightings, including a list of spring migrant arrival dates, is available on the Argyll Bird Club website.

**Note:** Machrihanish SBO = Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, Kintyre

### Swans, ducks, geese & game-birds

**EUROPEAN WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE.** An adult was with Greylags at Ruaig, Tiree on 28 Aug (John Bowler).

**CAKCLING and LESSER CANADA GOOSE.** A Cackling (*hutchinsii* type) was at Gruinart, Islay on 20 Oct and three 'small' Canada Geese were around Bridgend, Islay on 23 Oct. Two Todd's

(Lesser Canada) types were noted at Gruinart on 26 Oct.

**PALE-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE.** First autumn records were of—one at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 4 Sep and two at Loch Gruinart and at Port Charlotte, Islay on 9 Sep, thereafter good passage was noted during Sep and Oct.

**MANDARIN DUCK.** Two were near Ford, Mid-Argyll on 14 Oct and five were on Loch Eck, Cowal on 30 Oct.

**AMERICAN WIGEON.** A juvenile/first winter was at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll from 24 Sep (Jim Dickson et al).

**POCHARD.** A female was at Loch Skerrols, Islay on 23 Oct.

**RING-NECKED DUCK.** A first-winter male was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree during 28 Sep to 6 Oct (John Bowler *et al.*).

**GREATER SCAUP.** The first record of the autumn was of two at Loch Indaal, Islay on 12 Sep with numbers peaking there at 50 on 22 Oct.

**VELVET SCOTER.** Only one report of a bird off Port Charlotte, Islay on 27 Oct.

**PTARMIGAN.** One was at the summit of Beinn Ime, Cowal on 25 Oct.

## Seabirds (divers, grebes, shearwaters, petrels and also egrets & herons)

**SOOTY SHEARWATER.** Three were seen off Hynish, Tiree on 16 Aug, two were off The Oa, Islay on 31 Aug, one was at Kilbrannan Sound, off Campbeltown, Kintyre on 3 Sep and one was off Ardnamurchan, Mull on 27 Oct.

**BALEARIC SHEARWATER.** One was off Hynish, Tiree on 16 Aug with another there on 22 Sep and one was seen off Machrihanish SBO on 6 Sep.

**LEACH'S PETREL.** On Tiree, one was off Aird on 9 Sep, another was there on 14 Sep, four were off Hynish on 22 Sep, two off Aird on 2 Oct with singles there on 3 and 4 Oct. At Machrihanish SBO one flew past on 11 Sep, 12 on 2 Oct and 52 on 28 Oct. One was seen off Caliach Point, Mull on 3 Oct. One was off Sanaigmore, Islay on 27 Oct.



**Upper photo.** Little Egret, Loch Gilp on 19 October ©Jim Dickson

**Lower photo.** Marsh Harrier, Add Estuary on 18 August ©Jim Dickson

**LITTLE EGRET.** One was at the Holy Loch, Cowal on 1-3 Aug (from 29 Jul). Two were at Kennacraig, Kintyre on 1 Aug, then one was there intermittently from 4 Aug through to Nov. One was at the head of Loch Long, Cowal on 4-5 Aug. One was at the head of Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 17-22 Oct (photo opposite). One was at Fishnish, Mull on 22 Oct and into Nov. One was seen again at Loch Craignish, Mid-Argyll on 26 Oct. One was at Milton, Tiree on 31 Oct and into Nov. Perhaps up to four birds were involved in these records.

**SLAVONIAN GREBE.** First returning birds were seen at Loch Indaal, Islay, with two there on 9 Sep. Higher counts included five at Loch na Keal, Mull on 19 Sep and 17 at Loch Indaal, Islay on 17 Oct.

**PIED-BILLED GREBE.** The long staying male at Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll was seen occasionally during this period.

## Raptors to rails

**RED KITE.** One was at Gribun Rocks, Mull on 19 Sep (Pete Hall *et al.*) and another on Seil Island, Mid-Argyll on 11 Oct (Wendy Raine).

**MARSH HARRIER.** A juvenile male was at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 12 Aug and was seen there again on 17-18 Aug (Dave Pearson/Jim Dickson *et al.*) (photo opposite).

**COOT.** One was at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 30 Sep and one was at Loch Nell, Mid-Argyll on 25 Oct.

## Waders

**AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER.** A juvenile was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 28 Sep (John Bowler).

**CURLEW SANDPIPER.** A juvenile was at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 31 Aug. A juvenile was at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 5-7 Sep and 2 juveniles were at Gott Bay, Tiree on 6 Sep. A juvenile was at Toberonochy, Luining, Mid-Argyll on 9 Sep. Two flew past Machrihanish SBO on 17 Sep. Two were at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 29 Sep.



Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Tiree on 11 September ©John Bowler

**LITTLE STINT.** On Tiree, single juveniles were at Gott Bay on 7 Sep, at Vaul Bay on 11 Sep and another at Balephetrish Bay on 6 Oct.

**PURPLE SANDPIPER.** The first back were three at the Crazy Golf, Dunoon, Cowal on 3 Oct.

**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER.** On Tiree a juvenile was at Greenhill on 6 Sep, also two juveniles at Loch a' Phuill on 11 Sep (photo above) and a report of one at Kilmoluaig on 16 Sep.

**PECTORAL SANDPIPER.** One was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 20 Aug.

**RUFF.** It was a good autumn passage, with peak numbers including 22 at Baugh, Tiree on 28 Sep, with around 40 birds across the island at this time. Twenty were at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 28 Sep and 26 there on 4 Oct.

**JACK SNIPE.** Singles were at Baugh, Tiree on 5 Oct, the Reef, Tiree on 17 Oct, at Ardtalla, Islay on 22 Oct and on Isle of Luing, Mid-Argyll on 28 Oct.



Sabine's Gull, Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, Kintyre on 8 September ©Eddie Maguire

**WHIMBREL.** A peak count of 60 coming in off the sea, at The Green, Tiree on 1 Sep.

**GREEN SANDPIPER.** A juvenile was at Ri Cruin, Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll on 26 Aug (Jim Dickson).

**WOOD SANDPIPER.** One was at Pennyghael, Mull on 5 Aug (Rob Strong). A juvenile was at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 28 Aug (Tony Davison). One was at Arinagour, Coll on 2 Sep (David Andrews).

**GREY PHALAROPE.** On Tiree, singles flew past Aird on 11 Sep, Hynish on 23 Sep and Aird on 2 Oct (John Bowler). Two flew past Machrihanish SBO on 2 Oct and another was seen off there on 5 Oct (Eddie Maguire).

### Skuas, gulls, terns & auks

**POMARINE SKUA.** An adult passed Machrihanish SBO on 19 Aug, with two adults on 8 Sep, a juvenile on 11 Sep, a juvenile on 3 Oct, three juveniles on 17 Oct and a sub-adult on 28 Oct. Singles were seen off Aird, Tiree on 2nd, 4th, 5th and 17 Oct and off Hynish, Tiree on 14 Oct. One was off Portnahaven, Islay on 25 Oct.

**LONG-TAILED SKUA.** An adult was at sea between Mull and Coll on 16 Sep (ABC field trip). A juvenile was photographed at Machrihanish SBO on 11 Sep (Eddie Maguire/Jarred Hadfield). A juvenile was reported at sea off NW Mull on 28 Aug (Ewan Miles). A juvenile was off Aird, Tiree on 17 Oct (John Bowler).

**SABINE'S GULL.** A juvenile was photographed off Machrihanish SBO on 8 Sep (Eddie Maguire) (photo opposite). Singles were off Tiree at Aird on 14 Sep and Hynish on 23 Sep, and three juveniles were off Aird on 17 Oct (John Bowler).

**LITTLE GULL.** A sub-adult was at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 6 Aug. A juvenile was at Claddach, Islay on 22 Oct then again at Saligo, Islay to 24 Oct.

**ICELAND GULL.** A long-staying 2CY bird at Machrihanish SBO from May was present until the end of Oct. Another 2CY bird was at the Machrihanish SBO on 25 Sep and at Strath Farm, The Laggan, Kintyre on 20 Oct, and a juvenile was at Campbeltown Loch, Kintyre on 24 Oct.

**GLAUCOUS GULL.** A 2CY bird was at Machrihanish SBO on 17 Oct.

### **Doves, cuckoos, owls, swifts, kingfisher & woodpeckers**

**TURTLE DOVE.** One was at Treshnish Farm, NW Mull on 15 Sep (Anand Prasad).

**COMMON SWIFT.** There was a peak count of a flock of 28 birds at Campbeltown, Kintyre on 8 Aug with the last report there of four on 20 Aug. Up to 18 were over Oban, Mid-Argyll in Aug. A late bird was at the Reef, Tiree on 25 Aug.

**KINGFISHER.** One was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 2 Sep. One was seen from the bird hide on the Holy Loch, Cowal on 9 Sep with one or two birds there frequently until Oct (photo below). One was at Strone Point near Inveraray, Mid-Argyll on 9 Sep. One was at Dervaig, Loch Cuin, Mull on 24 Sep. One was at the Ormsary fish farm, Mid-Argyll on 28 Sep. One was at Bruichladdich, Islay on 15 Oct. One was at Ardanstur, Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll on 23 Oct. One was at Ardrishaig, Mid-Argyll on 29 Oct.

**WRYNECK.** One was seen and photographed at Balymeanoch Farm, Gribun, Mull on 21 Sep (Mark Appleton, Kerry Tiller *et al.*).

### **Passerines (larks to buntings)**

**JAY.** A high count of 14 was made at the Maltlands, Inveraray, Mid-Argyll on 29 Sep.

**HOUSE MARTIN.** A late bird was at Cairnbaan, where it was last seen on 23 Oct.

**SWALLOW.** Two late birds were at Islay House

Square, Bridgend, Islay on 26 Oct.

**CHIFFCHAFF.** A 'Siberian race' bird was at Balephuill, Tiree on 27 Oct, with two more there on 29 Oct. One was at Machrihanish SBO on 30 Oct.

**YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER.** One was at Balephuill, Tiree on 22-23 Sep then at Carnan-Mor on 24 Sep (John Bowler). Another was at The Glebe, Scarinish, Tiree on 2-5 Oct (Jim Dickson). One was at Balnamoil, Mull of Kintyre on 18 Oct (Chris Brown per Bird-Track).

**LESSER WHITETHROAT.** One was at the Manse, Scarinish, Tiree on 17-18 Sep with another there on 25 Sep (John Bowler). One was at Kenovay, Tiree on 6 Oct (Jim Dickson).

**NUTHATCH.** One was at feeders in Benmore Gardens, Cowal on 8 Sep. One was at Bonawe, North Argyll on 17 Sep. One was at Lunga, Craobh Haven, Mid-Argyll on 28 Oct and reported as visiting there occasionally since June.

**WAXWING.** A flock of around 40 was at Woodbank Road, north of Southend, Kintyre on 21 Oct (Alastair Anderson per Eddie Maguire).

**GOLDEN ORIOLE.** An immature male/female was in gardens at Vault, Tiree on 2-4 Sep, but was very elusive (Keith Gillon).

**FIELDFARE.** The first report of the autumn was of 15 at Derryguais, Mull on 30 Sep, thereafter flocks of 20-100 birds throughout Argyll, with 'hundreds' noted at The Oa, Islay on 24 Oct.

**REDWING.** Larger flocks this autumn included 1,000 at Killiechronan, Mull on 22 Oct and 3,000 at The Oa, Islay on 24 Oct.

**RING OUZEL.** A good run of single birds noted on Islay at Bruichladdich on 22 Oct, Carnain on 23 Oct, The Oa on 24 Oct, Lagstoban on 24 Oct and Kilchoman on 28 Oct. One was at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 29 Oct.

**RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER.** An immature was at Balephuill, Tiree on 10-12 Sep (John Bowler) (photo on next page).

**PIED FLYCATCHER.** An immature was at Balephuill, Tiree on 9 Sep and another was there on 20-22 Sep.

**BRAMBLING.** A better showing this autumn





**Left photo.** Red-breasted Flycatcher, Tiree on 11 September ©John Bowler

**Right photo.** Snow Bunting, Oronsay on 15 October ©Morgan Vaughan



with widespread singles. However, four were seen at Kinnabus, Islay on 23 Oct and six at Octofad, Islay on 31 Oct.

**COMMON REDPOLL.** A peak count of 12+ birds at Balephuill, Tiree on 16 Oct (John Bowler).

**HAWFINCH.** One female/immature was reported from a garden at Octofad, Islay on 27 Oct (Irene & Tony Miller), a female was at Balephuill, Tiree on 3 Nov and a male was in the same garden there on 5 Nov (John Bowler). Large numbers are being reported from southern England, with a few finding their way further north.

**SNOW BUNTING.** Several reports of low numbers, mainly on Islay and Tiree. However, there was a peak count of seven birds at Ardnave, Islay on 30 Oct.

**LAPLAND BUNTING.** On Tiree, singles were at Gott Bay on 4-6 Sep, at Greenhill on 6 Sep, at the Reef on 19 Sep, at Carnan Mor on 24 Sep, at Barrapol on 6 Oct and at Balephuill on 20 Oct. On Islay, one was at Blackpark on 18 Oct and one at Machir Bay on 23 Oct.

**Jim Dickson, Argyll Bird Recorder**

## STOP PRESS

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL.** One was reported from Loch Gruinart, Islay on 7 Nov.

**GREAT WHITE EGRET.** One was at Loch Cuin, Mull on 4 Nov.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT.** One (probable 'Siberian' race) was at Glenegedale, Islay on 5 to 11 Nov (photo below).

**HOUSE MARTIN.** A late bird was at Dalavich, Mid-Argyll on 3 Nov.

**HAWFINCH.** One was reported from Dalavich, Mid-Argyll on 3 Nov.



Lesser Whitethroat, Islay on 7 November ©Martin Armstrong



## 2017, a bumper year for Barn Owls in Kintyre

Barn Owl Neil Brown

Most folks will be aware that species, habitats and ecosystems relate with one another, giving rise to a myriad of interactions and ecological relationships involving food chains, competition, parasitism, and importantly in this article, predation! A crucial factor that governs the existence and success of Barn Owls in northern Britain is the life cycle of the Field Vole (*Microtus agrestis*), as this often makes up more than half of the owl's prey. Thus, the life cycle of the Field Vole and the Barn Owl are closely linked.

The Field Vole is the most abundant small mammal found in grassy habitats Britain. It is a small, plump creature, approximately 130mm in length (although sometimes surprisingly larger), with a short tail and ears that are partially covered by the brown-grey fur. Field Voles reach their highest density in rough un-grazed grassland, including young forestry plantations. The latter becoming less suitable as the tree canopy closes and the ground cover dies back. Field Voles will often nest in the base of grass tussocks, against rocks or logs. Territories are established around these nests, with a network of tunnels beneath the grass, and in peak years the ground can appear pock marked with a maze of holes and runways. These territories are noisily defended. A good indicator of vole presence is the loud chirruping noise from fighting males.

Field Vole density peaks every three to five years, although my own observations in Kintyre show a strong three-year cycle—a poor year, improving in the second year and reaching a peak in the third before the population crashes again. In Kintyre, 2017 was showing signs of being a peak vole year, and it was anticipated that Barn Owls would react accordingly. The last peak year was in 2014.

Signs that this was the case started to show in the summer of 2016; by this time Barn Owls were well into their breeding season and the ones that had chosen to breed had mostly laid average clutches (4-5 eggs) linked to the availability of food during the early part of 2016. On 7 July 2016, while driving home from work, I saw a single vole run across the road in front of my car, although this single observation would not stand up scientifically as the portent of a booming vole population, experience had shown me that it was time to start looking a bit closer. Sure enough, within a few days my observations confirmed that numbers were building. I began looking for and finding voles with ease. Another indicator of increasing vole numbers was the activity of Blue my Labrador, whose nose by this time was constantly stuck in the grass. However, I was often amused by the voles contempt for his inability to catch them!

These signs of vole abundance continued through



A prey 'larder' of small mammals in the bottom of a Barn Owl nest box, in Kintyre in 2017 ©Neil Brown.

2016 and into 2017. The mild winter of 2016/17 may have also contributed to a large population of voles, and certainly aided in getting their breeding season off to an early start. So 2017 arrived with the voles at the top of their cycle, with an ability to produce up to eight young per litter and sometimes as many as seven litters in a season, with the young becoming sexually mature within six weeks. Thus, it was all looking good for Barn owls.

I started to check the known Barn Owl breeding sites and nest boxes in March and already I could see the owls responding with many sites already occupied and a couple down on eggs. Many of the sites contained plenty of prey items, mostly Field Voles, which the male presents to the female as part of the courtship ritual. A plentiful food supply in spring contributes to bringing the female into breeding condition, and to the number of eggs laid and chicks reared.

Some of these prey 'larders' were truly spectacular (see

photo above). One site contained an almost 'rectangular brick' of voles. This enthusiastic male had brought in and stored 71 prey items. This stash of food also serves to feed the female during the long incubation period and also the chicks on hatching, but I have noted that much of this food is not used and often rots in the nest chamber.

As the season progressed more sites were being occupied and eggs laid. Driven by high vole numbers, the number of eggs laid by individual pairs was significantly higher in 2017 than in the previous year. Clutch size in 2016 averaging at 4.30 compared to an average of 5.88 in 2017, including seven clutches of seven eggs. However, the best example of the effect of abundant Field Voles on the Barn Owls was a comparison of breeding attempts over the last two years. For this I counted breeding attempts where eggs were laid. I recorded nine attempts in 2016 and 25 in 2017. What I also noted when ringing chicks was their apparent health. Chicks were heavier and stronger than in 2016, although these observations were subjective.

Almost all of the 2017 chicks went on to fledge successfully. In total, 110 ringed chicks fledged plus another 13 that I learned about after the event. Further breeding took place later in the season with two pairs that had failed earlier at the egg stage. One pair later fledged six chicks, but unfortunately the other failed for a second time. Excitingly, we also discovered two pairs that attempted breeding for a second time having after successfully raised healthy broods (a rare event even in a peak vole year). As I write this in November, both pairs still have large chicks in the nest. The adults are managing to feed them despite the worsening weather conditions and continue to take advantage of a vole population that even now appears to be healthy.

Without doubt 2017 was a superb year for Barn Owl productivity. In terms of numbers of chicks ringed, it is by far the best year in the last 25yrs of monitoring Barn Owls in Kintyre. However, these impressive numbers are not all down to the peak vole



A large brood of Barn Owls in a nest box in Kintyre in 2017 ©Neil Brown

year as they do not take into account an increase in effort, with more nest sites being monitored each year.

Since 2011 the work refocused on what is now the Kintyre Barn Owl Project. Rather than simply monitoring the Barn Owl productivity in Kintyre we sought to protect already established nest sites, but more importantly to identify food-rich habitats lacking nest sites. Over the last 6-7yrs appropriately placed nest boxes are creating Barn Owl territories where none

existed before. We currently have several new sites where breeding has taken place over the last 4-5yrs, hopefully leading to a long-term establishment of new sites. These good quality boxes, some built by ourselves, others donated by the Argyll Raptor Study Group, are being placed throughout Kintyre. Currently we have eleven new boxes to be placed before the 2018 season, and hopefully several more before the next peak vole year, I'm already looking forward to what 2020 brings!

**Neil Brown**

### Request for information on Rock Doves

I am an undergraduate biologist at the University of Oxford and my project is a study of the Rock Dove in Scotland. There are two main research focuses. The first is a comparison of 'pure' Rock Doves and Feral Pigeons (using biometrics, plumage descriptions, breeding behaviour and possibly genetics). The second (and potentially more challenging) involves mapping the distribution and populations of 'pure' Rock Doves in Scotland. This has never been done before and should hopefully identify if there is a conservation issue with regard to Feral Pigeon infiltration of pure flocks. As such, it would be great if you could help by sending any observations of Rock Doves to me. Please let me know for each observation:

- ◆ Date and time
- ◆ Number of birds
- ◆ Location (using a six figure grid reference if possible, if not then a reasonably detailed description so I can locate on a map)
- ◆ Plumages (i.e any non-wild types present)
- ◆ Behaviour (feeding on field, at feeding station in garden, around old farm buildings etc.)
- ◆ Photographs if possible

Please note—a 'wild type' bird is one with a white rump, two dark wing bars and no aberrant plumage features such as white flight feathers or black 'checkering' of the wing coverts (see photo).

As many such recordings as possible would

be great. Every one provides valuable data. I am interested in all records—from ringed racing pigeons and obviously feral birds near human habitation to large flocks of wild type (i.e. probably 'pure') doves in fields. The project's 'fieldwork phase' runs up to August 2018. If you are a bird ringer, or know of any ringers who would be able to catch Rock Doves, please let me know. I am looking for ringers willing to target them, or who already catch the occasional bird. If you are not a ringer but regularly get large flocks of Rock Doves at a garden feeding station for example, then it would be great to hear from you if you think it would be possible to catch birds for ringing. Any other information you might have about the status of Rock Doves on your patch would be greatly appreciated—for example if you know of breeding locations.

Please send any observations to:

[william.smith@queens.ox.ac.uk](mailto:william.smith@queens.ox.ac.uk)

Thank you for your help.

**Will Smith**



'Pure' Rock Doves on Colonsay, 26 August 2017 ©Steve Petty

## Abstracts of talks given at the Autumn Meeting of the ABC on 4 November 2017

Chairman, Mike Harrison welcoming everyone to the meeting. This was Mike's last duty as chairman, as he stepped down at the AGM to hand over the reins to Nigel Scriven. At the end of the meeting Nigel thanked Mike for all his hard work as chairman ©David Palmar [www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)



### Introduction

Club chairman Mike Harrison welcomed 43 members and guests to the autumn meeting at the Cairnbaan Hotel on Saturday 4 November. County Bird Recorder Jim Dickson presented an excellent set of photographs of birds, both common and uncommon, seen in Argyll since the spring meeting. These included a Sooty Tern photographed by Eddie Maguire at Machrihanish SBO in June. If accepted by SBRC, this will be a new species for Argyll. Three other species seen in the spring, Red-rumped Swallow, Greenish Warbler and Subalpine Warbler were only the third records for Argyll.

### Searching for Bumblebees—David Palmar (summary by Steve Petty)

David took us on a trip that he and Janet made around northern Scotland in 2017 and described some of the bumblebees they encountered on various nature reserves. They started off in May at the RSPB's reserve at Balranald on the northwestern point of North Uist where the flower-rich machair was starting to bloom. However, bumblebees were not only collecting nectar from native plants, but they were also feeding on *Rhododendron* flowers. These bumblebees included Common Carder, Buff-tailed and Moss Carder. Interestingly, research in Ireland has shown that nectar from *Rhododendron ponticum* contains grayanotoxin, which is extremely poisonous to some bees, particularly

honeybees, but not to the native Buff-tailed Bumblebee. As well as the effect of *Rhododendron* nectar on honeybees, the honey they produce after feeding on this exotic plant is also toxic, in varying degrees, to humans. The next stop for the intrepid travellers was Bettyhill in Sutherland, where they visited Farr Glebe, a wildflower reserve for bumblebees, including the rare Great Yellow Bumblebee. The range of this species has severely declined, and is now found only in the Outer Hebrides, northern Caithness, Sutherland, Orkney, Coll and Tiree. While they were too early to see this species, they did see White-tailed (nectaring on Common Vetch), Common

Machair, Balranald, North Uist ©David Palmar [www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)



Carder (on Meadow Vetchling, Tufted Vetch and Greater Knapweed) and Garden Bumblebee (on Meadow Vetchling). A return trip to Balranald in July/August finally produced numerous Great Yellow Bumblebees feeding on Red Clover and Common Ragwort, plus many other species. We were shown a few photos of birds too! David ended up describing some of the bumblebees seen during the Argyll Bird Club's trip to Tiree (pages 8-10) in September, where they again found Great Yellow Bumblebee and numerous other species (Red-tailed, Moss Carder and Common Carder). Altogether this was a really excellent talk, which I'm sure will encourage many in the audience to look a little more closely at bumblebees next year. I certainly will!!

### **The Birds of Colonsay and Oronsay—David Jardine** (summary David Jardine)

This talk was based around the recently published avifauna of the islands (*The Birds of Colonsay and Oronsay* by David Jardine, Mike Peacock and Ian Fisher), a companion volume to *The Birds of Bute*. Details about purchasing the book were given in the June 2007 *Eider*, page 4. Research for the book had uncovered a fascinating history of the birds on the islands, including unpublished material from excavations of Mesolithic shell middens on Oronsay.

The first comprehensive list of the birds of the islands was published in 1935 in a book by one of the relatives of the then laird. One of the key contributors to the list was Johnny Bevan, one of Winston Churchill's chief wartime dissemblers. Interestingly, the list placed a number of records from the native islanders in square brackets [doubtful records], but recent observations of these species has indicated that all (except Shore Lark) are regular visitors to the islands.

At that time 77 species of birds were breeding on the island. This has now increased to 92, with some of the increase attributed to increases in woodland birds which have developed over the decades. For example Blue Tit was first recorded in 1932 and Great Tit was not reported until 1967. Research has shown that during the late 19th and early 20th century Colonsay was run as a sporting estate, with a number of game birds being introduced—Red



David Jardine ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

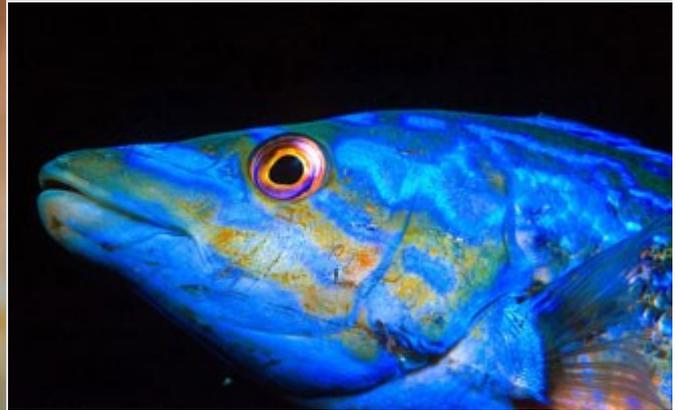
Grouse, Pheasant, Grey Partridge and Black Grouse. More recently Canada Geese were introduced to attract wild geese and have since spread to mainland Argyll. Reference to source material in old diaries and the 'game book' found that persecution of birds such as Heron, Sparrowhawk, Buzzards and gulls persisted and influenced bird populations on the islands.

Raptor studies on the islands have shown how changes in the population of Rabbits have influenced both the timing of breeding and the breeding performance of the Buzzards. Golden Eagle predation may be one factor involved in the recent decline of Buzzards.

In closing, David described recent declines in the Corncrake and Chough populations, both of which were probably a result of changing agricultural practices on the islands.

### **Underwater marine life of Loch Sunart MPA—Mark Woombs** (summary Bob Furness)

With spectacular photographs, and video, of life at the bottom of the sea, Mark introduced us to the Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Loch Sunart and the MPA extending from Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura. Loch Sunart MPA is designated to protect



Two of the amazing photos shown by Mark.

**Left photo.** Yarrell's Blenny—easily identified as the only species to have two pairs of branched tentacles above the eyes.

**Right photo.** Cuckoo Wrasse—in this species the largest female turns into a male in the absence of any males

All images ©Mark Woombs

Flame Shell beds, Northern Feather Star aggregations and Organ-pipe Worm aggregations. Flame Shell beds provide a habitat for a wide diversity of marine animals. Northern Feather Stars are usually found only in very deep water, but in Loch Sunart they occur in water only 20m deep, forming dense beds of vivid colour. Loch Sunart to Sound of Jura MPA protects the population of Common Skates. This is the largest skate in the world, and can reach a length of 2.5m and weigh over 100kg. Although Common Skates were abundant in UK waters in the past, many decades of trawl fishing have greatly reduced their numbers. There is a research programme using sea anglers to tag these skates to learn more about their numbers, movements and

growth. Mark introduced us to Moon Jellyfish, and how these develop from small polyps attached to rocks in winter to produce the free floating jellyfish we all recognise in the sea in summer, to the wide range of corals, anemones, hermit crabs, squat lobsters, swimming crabs, starfish and molluscs living in Loch Sunart and Loch Teacuis. He showed a fascinating video of swimming scallops, pointed out that the Ocean Quahogs in the west of Scotland seas can live to be 500 years old, and that a Chiton has eyes made of aragonite crystals (so has stone eyes). He told stories of being bitten by Angler Fish and the difficulty of removing the fish once it had latched onto a finger (or head), of how Conger Eels like to be tickled under their chin, but don't like being touched on the nose, of the curious (to us) habit of wrasses changing sex when appropriate, and of the conservation problem of harvesting wrasses to use as cleaner fish to remove sea lice from farmed salmon. Mark's enthusiasm for underwater life and his outstanding photography gave us a fascinating insight into an important environment that most of us know little about.

### **32nd Annual General Meeting of the Argyll Bird Club**

The annual general meeting of the club took place after lunch and was attended by 34 members. After members had voted to adopt the



Mark Woombs ©David Palmar [www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)

annual report and accounts the chairman thanked Jim Dickson for keeping the recent reports section of the club's website up to date alongside his work as recorder and editor of the bird report. The annual election of office bearers and committee members then took place. Nigel Scriven was elected chairman with David Jardine as vice-chairman. The remaining office bearers and committee members were re-elected. Bob and Sue Furness submitted 12 months notice that they would not seek re-election at the next AGM. Mike Harrison was replaced on the committee by Neil Hammatt.

### **Bird watching in Costa Rica— Sue Furness** (summary Sue Furness)

This was an opportunity to show some photos from a trip to Costa Rica in February. We went as part of an organised birdwatching tour, and I was a bit worried that I'd be out of my depth, but in fact it was a very relaxed tour that worked well for people with a range of birding expertise, largely thanks to our excellent local guide. Given that we only had two weeks, we were glad to have someone to show us the best places to go and to take care of navigating the traffic in San Jose and the narrow dirt roads in more rural areas! I don't consider myself a 'birder', but was happy to wander around taking photos, though would ideally have lingered a bit longer in some places.

The trip included stays in most of the major habitat types, from the Caribbean coast, across the central mountain range, to the hotter drier Pacific coast. Starting off in the capital San Jose, we had a day trip to the Savegre Reserve in the Talamanca Mountains, which is an area of typical cloud forest. We managed to tick off Resplendent Quetzal—probably high on the wish list for birders in Costa Rica—as well as several species of hummingbirds. Our guide had some helpful advice—if you don't know what a bird's called, just

describe it and there's a fair chance you might be right! Hence the green hummingbird with a purple patch near its ear was indeed a Green Violetear. We had our first view of a typical bird table here, laden with bananas (photo below), not a peanut in sight, but covered with birds!

We then headed over to Aninga Lodge near Tortuguero on the Caribbean coast, only accessible by boat. The low, open-sided boats provided a great way to birdwatch, with a wide variety of herons and kingfishers along the edges of the river. On a non-avian note, I was delighted to get views of both Two- and Three-toed Sloths, as well as close encounters with spectacular Green Iguanas.



**Top photo.** Passerini's Tanager ©Sue Furness

**Bottom photo.** Blue-crowned Motmot ©Sue Furness



Scarlet Macaw drinking from the hotel's swimming pool ©Sue Furness

We then headed inland again, with stops at rainforest lodges in Sarapiquí and Arenal and a trip to a biological research station. All the trails were easy walking, though the 'hanging bridges' over gorges in the rainforest took a bit of getting used to! Although these were a great way of getting into the canopy, the dense vegetation meant that many birds were heard but never seen. In contrast, there was some easy and very lazy birdwatching from the various hotel restaurants, with carefully positioned bird tables! Selva Verde Lodge scored particularly high on that front, with Montezuma's Oropendula, Clay-colored Thrush, a wide assortment of tanagers, as well as squirrels and coatis.

Our trip finished on the Pacific coast in Manuel Antonio National Park, with a detour for a boat trip from the aptly named 'Crocodile Bridge'. Excellent views of crocodiles on the river bank, incongruously side by side with cattle, as well as Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, and the ubiquitous herons. It was definitely the hottest part of the trip, but we had amazing views of Scarlet Macaw (albeit reintroduced to the area, photo above) and Yellow-headed Caracara, both of which made use of the hotel swimming pool for drinking. We managed to finish off the trip with a great view of a King Vulture from the hotel balcony.

Lovely country, friendly people, great weather (maybe we were lucky), and amazing birding.

### Results of the ABC's rookery survey - David Jardine (summary David Jardine)

In Spring 2017, 29 members of the Bird Club contributed to a complete survey of the 105 known Rookery sites in Argyll. Six new rookeries were found. A total of 67 occupied rookeries were found (a slight decline since the last complete survey in Argyll in 1975), in which 2519 nests were found (-20% since 1976). David described some of the changes that had occurred in different regions of Argyll. Rooks no longer breed on Jura or Mull (but do still breed on Iona). The number of Rooks has increased on Islay, but has declined elsewhere, with the largest declines being found in Cowal and Mid-Argyll. The survey also recorded the species of trees in which Rooks nested. Sycamore was by far the most commonly used tree, possibly as a result of its branching pattern and abundance in key agricultural areas, followed by Beech and Scots Pine. Full details of the survey will be published in the next *Argyll Bird Report*.

### Conclusion

After drawing the raffle and thanking donors for the prizes, the speakers for their excellent talks and Bob Furness for arranging the programme, Mike Harrison closed the meeting with an invitation to the spring meeting at Inveraray on 3 March 2018.

**Mike Harrison**

## Moving north: Nuthatches at Barcaldine



The first Nuthatch to be ringed in Argyll? Barcaldine, 18 November 2017 ©Clive Craik

Whatever groups of animals or plants interest you, the chances are that some of the species are spreading north. There are two ways of looking at this. Either it is a sad consequence of mankind's abuse of planetary resources and the environment (the all-too-familiar climate change and global warming). Or it adds an exciting new dimension to routine recording. For me, recent highlights at Barcaldine have included the following.

There was a Comma butterfly in our garden on one of the few sunny days in summer 2017, the first I've seen in Scotland (photo below) This beautiful insect will probably become more numerous in Argyll, so watch out for it and for its unmistakable caterpillar, often on nettles, which looks rather like a bird dropping (photo below).

There is also a growing list of northward-moving moths that I never caught here in the



**Left photo.** Comma butterfly at Barcaldine on 2 September 2017. **Right photo.** Larva of a Comma feeding on nettles. Both images ©Clive Craik



**Upper left photo.** A half-grown larva of Alder Moth looks like a bird dropping. ©Clive Craik

**Upper right photo.** Fully-grown Alder moth larva at Barcaldine in August 2016. ©Clive Craik

**Lower left photo.** Adult Alder Moth ©Steve Petty

1980s but now appear in increasing numbers in my moth-trap every year (Alder moth, Buff Footman, Pale Pinion and others). When half-grown, caterpillars of the Alder moth also look like a bird-dropping (photo above, photographed in Devon), but when fully-grown they are very different, a striking black-and-yellow and with clubbed black hairs (photo above). The latter larvae was found by my

wife Mary on Hazel at Barcaldine in August 2016. No-one seems sure if its astonishing colours are aposematic (warning of danger such as stings or poison, like many black-and-yellow insects) or pseudaposematic (pretence of such danger).

Among northward-moving plants, I can perhaps include two mature Hornbeam trees that I recently found on the edge of Barcaldine forest. One was cut down by the Forestry Commission a couple of years ago (did they know what they were destroying?) The Hornbeam's most unusual feature is its pagoda-like fruit and seeds (photo opposite). These tend to be hidden until the leaves fall and reveal dense sprays high up on the tree, visible only for a brief period in autumn until they too are shed.

Nuthatch tops the list of bird species that have recently arrived at Barcaldine while extending their range northwards. We first noticed one in the garden in June 2016. It was removing seeds from a feeder and taking them to a nearby post to hammer them into



Hornbeam mast, easily seen once the leaves have been shed ©Clive Craik



pieces, in the way Nuthatches do (photo above). This bird, or one like it, appeared at the feeders a few more times in 2016 but disappeared (died?) in the winter. Then in May 2017 I saw one singing territorially at the top of a tall beech on the edge of Barcaldine Forest. Through binoculars I could see its bill opening and its whole body vibrating, but (being rather deaf) I couldn't hear it. Mary could, and she described it as "like an old-fashioned machine gun". We hadn't heard the song since we moved here from the New Forest area in 1979.

Possibly that male was the father of a small family group (groups?) of Nuthatches that began to appear at our feeders in late summer 2017, sometimes three or four at a time (possibly five on one occasion). The paler juveniles were distinct from the richer-coloured adults. Now, in mid-November, they are still coming, usually singly but sometimes more. They feed on mixed seeds, fat-balls or peanuts, but seem to favour the kernels of sunflower seeds. Even though these lack shells, the Nuthatches still take them to favourite perches and hammer them to pieces. Individual Nuthatches fly off with seeds in different directions, probably

to different hammering posts.

Because of their regular habits we often thought how easy they should be to catch and ring. In autumn 2017 we frequently saw two at a time on or near the feeders, but there could be many more than this visiting the garden. Ringing is the only way to get an idea of the true numbers and, on 16 November, Rob Lightfoot and I put up mist-nets with this in mind. Although the Nuthatches didn't appear, many other birds came as usual for the large amounts of food we provide. We were able to catch and ring a Yellowhammer, two Great Spotted Woodpeckers (Mary saw one of them being driven into the net by a Sparrowhawk, which itself flew into the net but bounced out) and nine Goldfinches, as well as large numbers of tits, Robins and other garden birds. We ringed a total of 102 birds in three hours. On 18 November we tried again and managed to catch and ring one of the Nuthatches, a female (header photo, page 25). We will be trying for more in due course.

**Clive Craik**

Articles for the March issue of the *Eider* should with the editor before the 20th February 2018

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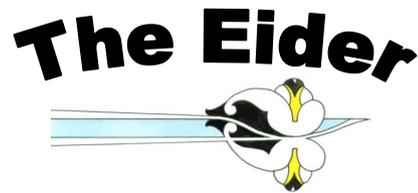
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**T**he *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book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

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and unedited digital photographs (jpeg files preferred) of birds and their habitats to the editor. Please do not embed digital images in word files. 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 of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor **before** the 20th day of the month prior to publication. However, it greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline dates. Contributions are accepted in the order they are received, which may result in some late submissions being held over until the next issue.

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the author/s and not necessarily those of the **Argyll Bird Club**.

**Advertising rates:** £80 for a full page, £20 for a quarter page, 7p per word for smaller adverts. Payment must accompany adverts, with cheques made payable to the **Argyll Bird Club**. Contact the Editor for further information.

### More about the Argyll Bird Club

The club was established in 1985 and has around 400 members. Its main role is to encourage an interest in wild birds and their habitats in Argyll; an area of outstanding natural beauty and biological diversity.

The club endeavours to provide a friendly and sociable forum for members of all ages, to meet and enjoy their common interest. This in itself provides a challenge as the human population of Argyll is relatively small and widely dispersed. The club hosts two one-day meetings each year, in spring and autumn. The venue of the spring meeting is rotated between different towns, including Dunoon, Oban and Lochgilphead. The autumn meeting/AGM is held in a convenient central location, usually near Lochgilphead. The club organises field trips for members. It publishes the *Argyll Bird Report*. Additional or past copies can be purchased from the Treasurer. Your annual subscription entitles you to one copy of the *Argyll Bird Report*, four issues of the *Eider* and free admission to the two indoor meetings. New members are always welcome, whether you live in Argyll or not. Membership categories and rates are:

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

Subscriptions are due on 1st January and can be paid by cheque or standing order. New members joining after 1st October are covered until the end of the following year. Further information can be obtained from the Membership Secretary (see the box opposite).