

The *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club (<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>)

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The Eider



Black-winged Stilt at Helylipol, Tiree on 17 April. This is a new species record for Argyll ©Jim Dickson

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Editorial

The spring conference in Oban was a great success (see pages 4-13). In fact, it was the largest ever joint spring conference of the SOC and BTO, with 240 delegates registered. The proceedings of the raffle, which normally go to the bird club/SOC branch organising the meeting, raised a staggering £1,000. Prior to the meeting the committee of the Argyll Bird Club had agreed that any money raised should be donated to the Fair Isle Bird Observatory following the disastrous fire just before the conference.

Quite a few folk must have left the meeting prior to the raffle, resulting in a number of prizes being unclaimed. If you have any of the following tickets, you have won one of the raffle prizes and should contact

Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Anne Archer, John Bowler, BTO, Malcolm Chattwood, Alan Davis, Jim Dickson, Lizzy Grieve, Peter & Dorothy Hogbin (for photocopying & dispatching the newsletter), David Jardine, Eddie Maguire, Alistair McGregor, Sally Nicholson, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), RSPB, Nigel Scriven, Margaret Staley.

our Treasurer (contact details on the back page) to make your claim.

White ticket (pink edge) number 117

Green ticket number 87

Green ticket number 95

Green ticket number 5

Blue ticket number 878

On the Sunday, following the conference, a number of field trips had been arranged. Fortunately, the weather had improved considerably after a wet Saturday. I went on the trip to Mull, which turned out to be a very memorable day out. Personally, I've never seen so many eagles in a single day. The windy, but sunny conditions were ideal in encouraging both species into the air. We even had a Golden Eagle displaying spectacularly for us, and we saw two occupied White-tailed Eagle nests. We had joined the monthly meeting of the Mull Bird Club, and without their knowledge we would certainly have seen far fewer eagles. So, thanks very much guys for showing us such sights and for transporting us around the island.

Around Ardentinny, Sitka Spruce have a massive amount of male flowers, making the upper tree crowns look brownish, as though they are inflicted with some dreadful disease. This bodes well for later in the year as there should be a excellent cone crop. So, keep your eyes (and ears) open for Crossbills. We are already seeing small flocks of up to ten birds in the forest at the back of the house. They will start feeding on the new green cones from late summer through to next spring. In really good cone years, Crossbills will occasionally start breeding in the autumn, with breeding peaking in early spring. Other species that feed on conifer seed will benefit too. These include Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Goldfinch, Coal Tit and Great-spotted Woodpecker. The exceptionally hot and dry summer last year was probably the trigger for trees to produce so much flower this year, and it's not only Sitka Spruce, many other trees are producing too, for example Beech, Oak, Sycamore and numerous other conifer species. A bonanza for all later in the year!

Can I remind readers that contributions for the next newsletter should be with me before **20 August**. Thank you!

Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2019

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. Please wear suitable footwear and bring waterproof clothing if rain is forecast.

Saturday 25 May. Taynish NNR, Ulva Lagoon & Loch na Cille. Led by Jim Dickson (mobile phone 07985726209 e-mail argyllbird-er@outlook.com). Meet Jim in Tayvallich at the car park (by tennis court beyond the shop/café) at 10:00hrs. The Taynish section involves an 8km (5 mile) walk on relatively level ground. Some folk may prefer to meet at the Taynish carpark beyond (just south of Lochan Taynish) after 10.30hrs to reduce walking distance. Walk at Keills/Keillmore will be approximately 1km. Please bring your own lunch.

Saturday 1 June. Boat trip to count seabirds. Led by David Jardine (phone 01546 510200. e-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com). This will be restricted to 11 members (excluding David). The main purpose of this outing will be to carry out boat-based seabird counts around north-west Jura, Scarba and the Garvellachs for the National Seabird Survey. The boat will depart from Crinan. All participants will be asked to assist by counting particular species, and to contribute £25 each for the day. The boat hire will be part subsidised by the club. Please contact David quickly if you are interested in joining this excursion.

Saturday 27 July. Toward and south Loch Striven. Led by Alistair McGregor (mobile phone 07754524240 e-mail alistairmcgregor@outlook.com). Meet Alistair at Toward Primary School Car Park (NS 1260 6755) at 10.00hrs. From Dunoon follow A815 through Innellan. The school car park is approximately 4km past Innellan. There will be three short walks of about 1km each on a mix of shore and track, suitable footwear is advised. Please bring your own packed lunch.

Saturday 31 August. Campbeltown/ Machrihanish Seabird Observatory. Led by Malcolm Chattwood (phone 01546 603389. e-mail malcolmchattwood@gmail.com). Meet Malcolm in Campbeltown, at the Information Centre, which is at the top of the pier, at 11.00hrs. Car parking is on the pier or along towards the ferry terminal. After visiting good birding spots around the town, the group will head for Machrihanish Bird Observatory to be shown around by Eddie Maguire. One aim of the trip is to witness Gannets on their overland journey (see March 2019 *Eider*, pages 16-17). The trip will involve several short walks, each less than 500m. Please bring your own lunch.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2019-2020

Autumn Meeting and AGM, Saturday 2 November 2019. To be held at the Cairnbaan Hotel (www.cairnbaan.com), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). Lunches will be available in the hotel. The programme will be in the September issue of the *Eider*.

Spring Meeting, March 2020. We hope to hold this meeting in Dunoon. The venue and date will be given in the September *Eider*.

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

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 29 (2017)

All members should have received the latest bird report. If not, please contact the treasurer. Additional copies are available from the treasurer for £10 + £2 p&p (contact details on back page).

ABC FACEBOOK PAGE

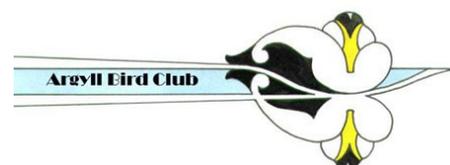
The club now has a Facebook page. Anyone on Facebook can send a request to Nigel Scriven (contact details on back page) to join. If you are not on Facebook, you will need to set up a Facebook account first

CHANGE OF POSTAL ADDRESS/ E-MAIL ADDRESS

Please note that if you change your postal address or e-mail address, to let us know so we do not lose contact with you. In the event of you no longer wishing to remain a member, you should cancel your standing order at your bank as standing orders paid after the membership ceases are treated as donations. Dorothy Hogbin, Membership Secretary tel: 01499 500665 email: membership@argyllbirdclub.org

FUNDING FOR BIRD CONSERVATION PROJECTS IN ARGYLL

The ABC is willing to fund or part-fund worthwhile bird conservation projects in Argyll. For example, this could include helping with the costs of field work for the last year of the Seabird Monitoring Programme (seabird counts 2015-2019). Applications for funding should be submitted to the Secretary (contact details on the back page).





Abstracts of talks from the Spring Meeting of the ABC/SOC/BTO on 16 March 2019

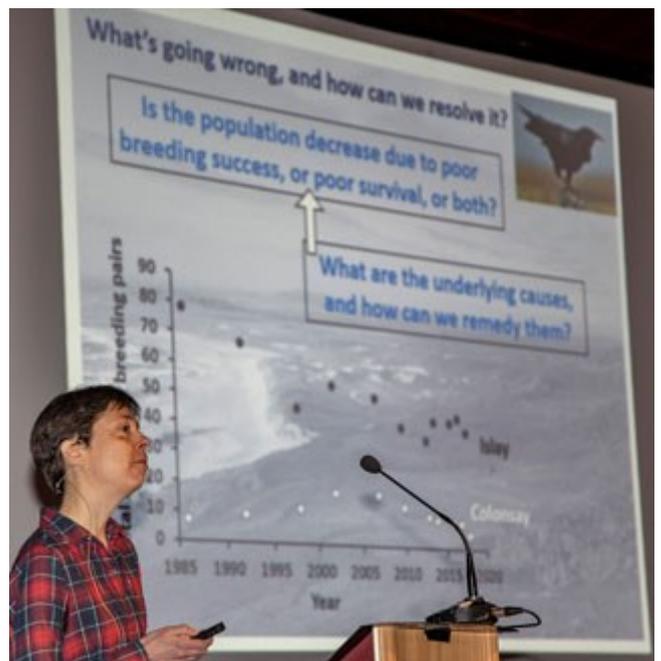
Introduction

Ian Bainbrige, president of the SOC, was programmed to give the opening address, but due to ill health he was unable to attend, and so it fell on David Jardine's capable shoulders to open the conference at the Corran Halls in Oban. This was the largest ever joint spring conference, with 240 folk registered. It was seven years since the ABC had last hosted a similar conference at the same venue. The meeting included an indoor session on the Saturday with a varied array of presentations (abstracts below). Fortunately the weather was pretty foul outside, so folk didn't feel they were missing many birding opportunities. Nevertheless, a flock of around a dozen Tysties were conveniently parked on the sea just in front of Corran Halls! The weathermen had forecast better conditions for Sunday's outings to various locations within easy reach of Oban (see pages 10-13).

It's tough for Choughs: Ecology, genetics and conservation of Red-billed Chough in Scotland. Jane Reid, University of Aberdeen (summary by Malcolm Chattwood)

In the first presentation of the day Professor Jane Reid introduced an issue very close to home in Argyll when she considered the future of Chough populations on Islay and Colonsay with

45 and six breeding pairs respectively. A long-term study of Choughs had been ongoing in Islay since 1983, which involved colour-ringing birds that had allowed over 130,000 re-sightings since the study started. The repeat sightings allowed the determination of breeding success and surviv-



Jane Reid ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

al rates of both adults and sub-adults. It was this latter category which was of particular concern as the survival rate for chicks was only 0.2 in their first year, which threatened the long-term future of the colony. The main causes of this high mortality were found to be shortage of food within the critical July to October period and also a lack of genetic diversity due to the relatively small population. Minimal intervention in the form of supplementary feeding has been adopted when necessary during the critical period and was deemed to have been successful. Modelling studies had been undertaken to determine the impact of different intervention strategies to stave off extinction of the population, which was predicted within 25 years. The parameters modelled included translocation of birds from elsewhere to both increase numbers and genetic diversity, and the provision of supplementary food during the late summer. The conclusion reached was that both translocation and supplementary feeding would both be required to sustain the Islay population and possibly to achieve a slight increase over a long period. The success of both interventions of course would be dependent on the maintenance of suitable habitat. As part of the research effort Professor Reid asked conference delegates if they would complete a short questionnaire designed to gauge views on support for the future conservation of this scarce local species that is struggling to survive on two of Argyll's islands.

Putting auks on the map: A multi-colony tracking study of wintering ranges. Lila Buckingham, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (summary by Anne Archer)

Lila's talk certainly did what it said on the tin. Plenty of maps with plenty of tracking lines and circles indicating ranges. It really emphasised the changes since electronic tracking devices have become small and powerful enough to be attached to birds that tell us exactly where they are. Of course, there are snags. They don't function if there are long periods of darkness, which happen during long Scottish nights, but can also be because the tag is on a foot that is snuggled up under a roosting bird, or if a Puffin is down a burrow.

This was not the only talk of the day which enlightened us with its ability to tell us so much that was not known before, but also reminded us of the worrying decline in numbers of many birds. It's hoped that these electronic tools may be able to give a clearer picture of where the problems lie. Where birds keep to a local 'patch' it can be assumed that the problem will be found there, but those which travel long distances outside their area and/or migrate are a trickier problem. Lila first listed possible problems en route for migratory birds in general—collisions, navigation errors, bad weather, available stopovers and increasing distances as the



Lila Buckingham
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Sahara gets bigger—and secondly the threats on arrival for the winter—hunting, land use, development, pollution, climate change etc. This was not new news, but put together it made you wonder how any of them return at all. One interesting non-Auk example that she gave us was of the Eurasian Cuckoo migration route. Our Scottish Cuckoos go east and down through eastern Europe, while English ones go down a westerly route. The Scottish ones are doing better, but no one yet knows why.

But back to auks. They have not escaped the 70% decline in seabirds since 1950. The reasons for this decline will be some or all of: marine pollution, climate change, over-fishing, deliberate hunting, fisheries bycatch and offshore development. Lila pointed out that while auks from the Scottish west coast migrate south down the west, as would be expected (they're not cuckoo), those on the east go down the North Sea, also as expected, but through an area where there are concerningly large developments of offshore wind farms.

The use of the tags has also provided lots of new information on the behaviour of auks in summer. So far research has been limited to bird breeding on Canna, Foula and Fair Isle. Guillemots nesting on Canna, fish in an area around Canna, while those on Foula and Fair Isle range much further afield. There is little overlap between these groups. However, Razorbills range much further and there is a high degree of overlap.

Lila concluded by mentioning future research possibilities. There will be new research areas, such as the Shiant, Treshnish and Colonsay. It is now possible to tag birds so that information can be gained about diving and feeding behaviour. Feath-

er samples can show what birds have eaten and where they caught it. Knowing the sex of a tagged bird can help with the understanding of behavioural differences of males and females, e.g., the role of the male Guillemot and Razorbill in feeding the semi-fledged young at sea. So much still to know and seemingly so little time.

The population status and conservation needs of Corncrake in Scotland. Bridget England, RSPB Scotland (summary by Steve Petty)

Corncrakes were once widespread in the United Kingdom, breeding largely in hayfields. Their decline was brought about by a change in farming practices. In particular, the switch from hay to silage with its earlier cutting dates, resulting in the loss of corncrake nests, recently fledged chicks and possibly adults too. The strongholds of Corncrakes are now in the western Isles of Scotland, where they are largely confined to fertile grassland. Here the population is recovering following research by the RSPB and other organisations, and the implementation of suitable large-scale management schemes. These include; increasing and improving the area of early cover (e.g. iris beds), which are essential for birds when they first return in early spring; delaying the cutting of silage or hay until after 31 July, so the birds can breed successfully; and using corncrake-friendly mowing techniques to reduce chick mortality. The latter includes mowing field from the centre outwards so that chick are given the opportunity to escape. Since 1992, conservation measures to benefit corncrakes have been implemented on a large scale, principally through agri-environment schemes, during which time the corncrake population has partially recovered. Bridget highlighted numerous management practices for maintaining the fertility of grasslands that were beneficial to Corncrakes, such as the use of seaweed and dung from cattle. The raising of public awareness was mentioned too, including a recent scheme called 'I slept with corncrakes', which encourages tourist to use B&B accommodation in locations with calling Corncrakes. A very wide ranging and interesting talk.



Bridget England
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Paul Haworth—a lifetime of raptor research. Alan Fielding, Independent Conservation Data Analyst (summary by Nigel Scriven)

Close colleague and friend, Alan Fielding, gave a worthy appreciation of the contribution to bird conservation, made by Paul over several decades. After a geology degree, and a landscape ecology masters, his PhD study was on upland birds in the south Pennines, going on to become established as a freelance ecologist specializing in birds of prey. His field skills were difficult to match, with an ability to find much higher densities of raptor territories than were thought at the time. His home on Mull was the setting for many late night sessions working and discussing raptor research. This focused primarily on eagles, harriers and merlin, not just on Mull, but across the highlands and islands of Scotland, and also in Ireland. He was the driving force behind the Highland Renewable charity that established the Tiberagan re-wilding project on the Ross of Mull, which will be a lasting legacy. He contributed significantly to the Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier conservation frameworks for government agencies. His recent work was on the tracking of range use by raptors and their clustered disappearances around grouse moors. His humour, friendship and encouragement will be missed by his many friends, colleagues and fellow naturalists.



Alan Fielding
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Tracking Short-eared Owls and other attempts to understand them. John Calladine, BTO Scotland (summary by Steve Petty)

The breeding bird atlases have indicated that Short-eared Owls (SEO) have declined more than any other raptor in Britain over recent years, with a 48% reduction in range and 37% reduction

in abundance. They breed mainly in the uplands where their distribution is positively linked to Red Grouse and vole abundance.

The management of heather moorland for Red Grouse includes the control of predators such as Red Fox, Stoat, Mink and crows, which are known to predate ground-nesting SEOs, thus this aspect is beneficial. Grouse moors often include grassy areas, and these provide ideal habitat for field voles. Some of John's work has shown that SEOs concentrate their foraging on such areas, highlighting their importance. However, the value of grassy areas is often neglected, with management attempting to increase the area of heather for grouse to the detriment of owls.

The crucial role that field voles play in the distribution of SEOs is highlighted by the absence of SEOs from part of Britain and Ireland where field voles are absent, such as in Ireland and on some Hebridean islands. Conifer forests provide ideal vole habitat for up to 10-15 years after planting due to the extent of grass amongst the trees, but this is shaded out once the tree canopy closes. Suitable vole habitat is again provided once the tree crop is harvested, until canopy closure once more occurs. However, the size of clear cut areas may be crucial for SEOs, as they appear reluctant to colonise small clear cuts.

To get a better understanding of SEO foraging, John has been fitting SEOs with radio tags. This has brought to light some interesting aspects of their ecology. It has shown that they forage mainly at night, whereas visual observations have in the past suggested that most foraging is by day. Night-time ranges were substantially larger than day-time ranges. Also, owls tended to forage at higher elevations at night, but it was not sure why. Radio tagging owls has shown the nomadic nature of this species, with owls making substantial movements between successive breeding at-

tempts in the same year, both within Scotland and even to England and Norway. Hopefully, radio tagging in the future will provide more information on home range usage, sequential breeding attempts, predation risks and the importance of vole abundance - all crucial data that are needed to try and reverse the decline of this enigmatic upland species.

What can be achieved in one week every year? Robin Ward, Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group



Robin Ward ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Robin wrote an article about the work of the Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group for the September 2017 *Eider*, pages 27-29

Sea Eagles and livestock: Resolving the conflict. Ross Lilley, Scottish Natural Heritage (summary Steve Petty)

The predation of lambs by White-tailed Eagles is the problem, and any attempt to resolve this must include both sheep farmers and those interested in the future of White-tailed Eagles. Ross used a quote that encapsulates the problem,

"situations that occur when two or more parties with strongly-held opinions clash over conservation objectives and when one party is perceived to assert its interests at the expense of the other (Redpath et al. 2013)".

Thus, any resolution depends on all stakeholders having an equal say in agreeing a White-tailed Eagle Action Plan. The population of White-tailed Eagles is still increasing and in 2015 numbered about 115 pairs, mainly centred on the west coast, but with some pairs now established in eastern Scotland following a re-establishment project there. The Scottish population is now dominated by wild-bred birds, in contrast to earlier on when many of the breeding pairs consisted of birds that had been released. Unfortunately, the time when eagle chicks reach their peak food demand coincides with the period when lambs are being born -



John Calladine
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



Ross Lilley
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

thus lies the heart of the problem. Past research has shown that while eagles will take dead lambs, they will also kill lambs, and such predation can have a financial cost to sheep farmers. There are also increasing reports of adult sheep being attacked in September/October. A number of adaptive management methods have been trialled in an attempt to reduce the level of predation, these have included the provision of carrion, and the removal of nests during the winter, when these are too close to lambing fields. Ross concluded by saying that hill livestock farming and White-tailed Eagles are a unique part of Scotland, and showed a slide of the following statement from the parties involved,

"together, we are committed to developing the right conditions for the sustainable co-existence between sea eagles and sheep farming in ways which benefit the biodiversity, economic and social interests of Scotland. We will take this work forward through the Sea Eagle Stakeholder Groups".

Wildlife filming on the west coast and the Hebrides. John Aitchison, Wildlife Cameraman (summary by Steve Petty)

John has been involved in filming wildlife documentaries all over the globe. So, we were extremely lucky that he hadn't been called away at the last minute by the BBC to film in some exotic location. John's home is in Argyll and his presentation included numerous video clips of some of his more notable wildlife encounters on the west coast. His first clip included some fantastic shots of a nesting pair of Short-eared Owls on Moine Mhor National Nature Reserve, near Lochgilphead. John showed how a severe storm in May prevented the parents being able to feed their chicks. This was a nice complement to John Caladine's Short-eared Owl talk earlier in the day.

The same storm had an impact on a wide range of species. Many of the Atlantic oakwoods in the area had their leaves browned by the low temperature and gales. This resulted in fewer caterpillars for insectivorous birds. However, a pair of Redstarts that John had been filming at Tainish Natural Nature Reserve did manage to fledge their chicks. The nest was in a hole in an Alder alongside a track and John was able to film the birds from the comfort of his vehicle. One of John's most intriguing video clips was of a pair of nesting Red-throated Divers repelling an unwanted visitor. A Black-throated Diver had landed on the lochan, a short distance from the Red-throated Diver's nest and was repeatedly attacked by the off duty Red-throated Diver. Eventually the larger Black-throated Diver was driven away and peace returned to the lochan. Two chicks eventually hatched at this nest and John showed footage of them learning to fly. The lochan was only just long enough for them to practice their take off—with a lot of foot paddling and numerous faulty attempts in the process! Other video clips included some superb shots of Great Skuas closely chasing Puffins and Gannets in the hope of making them drop the food they were bringing back for their chicks, and some shots of the machair in the Western Isles in spring with a blaze of colour and a white ferret causing panic amongst breeding waders. The final treat included some underwater shots in a Marine Protection Area in the Firth of Lorne taken by a friend of John, showing the amazing reef systems and pointing out the fragile nature of such ecosystems.

Conclusion

The final act was the draw the raffle, which was undertaken by Ben Darvill (BTO). There were some superb prizes donated by individuals and organisations, including a number of books signed by their authors, gin and whisky from local distilleries, ferry vouchers and a superb original painting (not a print as announced at the meeting)



John Aitchison & Chris Wernham
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



A view of the audience in the Corran Halls
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by Margaret Staley. The proceeds of the raffle usually go to the local bird club, in this case the Argyll Bird Club. However, a few days before the conference we had the disastrous news about the fire that had devastated Fair Isle Bird Observatory. So, the ABC decided that the proceeds from the raffle should be donated to the observatory. This amounted to an amazing total of £1000. Thanks to all of you who bought more raffle tickets than usual for this very worthy cause. Jane Read gave a short graphic account of the fire and hopes for the future restoration of the observatory.

Overall, the conference was a great success. The speakers performed magnificently and kept to time, the lunch was excellent and ran remarkably smoothly considering the number of people catered for, and the organisation of the conference (BTO, SOC and ABC) was spot on. Finally, Chris Wernham, head of the BTO Scotland, thanked everyone for attending the conference, all those involved in organising the event and the staff at the Corran Halls. A large number of delegates stayed in Oban overnight in readiness for the field trips on the following day (some accounts follow).



Numerous Tysties put in an appearance in front of the Corran Halls just as delegates were arriving ©Steve Petty

Field trips on 17 March following the joint ABC/SOC/BTO meeting in Oban

Six field trips had been arranged for the day following the joint ABC/SOC/BTO meeting. These were to Mull, North Connel/ Ledaig Point & Ardmucknish Bay, Seil & Luing, Loch Laich, Lismore and Kerrera. Accounts of four of these are given below.

Mull

This field trip was one of six organised to provide those attending the Scottish Bird-watchers' Conference in Oban on the previous day with the opportunity to see some of the different habitats and, hopefully birds, that the west coast has to offer. Four of the six trips included crossings to islands with the trip to Mull offering the longest crossing and arguably the best chance of seeing interesting birds. In the event there wasn't much to see as the MV Isle of Mull pulled out of Oban Harbour, apart from a number of Tysties.

The weather on the previous day had been dreich, and whilst showers were forecast for the early part of our trip, the fresh north westerly ensured that they didn't linger. Arriving at Craignure, our party of 18 strolled down to the village hall to rendezvous with our hosts for the day. The Mull Bird Club were holding their monthly field trip and had kindly invited our merry band to join them. By this time our numbers had swelled to 20. The Palmars arrived in their campervan and were intending to stay on the island for a day or two longer. With numbers larger than the usual monthly trip, Jacqui Murphy marshalled us into two main parties with one heading south into Glen More and the other heading north to reach Loch na Keal.

Our party, in a convoy of minibus and cars, headed south towards Lochdon, but took the minor road towards Duart Castle where we were able to park, set up 'scopes and look towards a clump of trees where the bulky nest of a White-tailed Eagle was clearly visible. Closer inspection with a 'scope revealed the head of an adult sitting on the nest, and probably incubating eggs. A flock of Lapwings and Starlings were foraging in an adjacent field.

We headed back and turned left, passing through Lochdon and towards Glen More where our first roadside stop brought views of a soaring White-tailed Eagle, Buzzard and a two female Hen Harrier quartering the nearby rough pasture. As we went deeper into Glen More the likelihood of seeing Golden Eagles increased and we weren't disappointed. The first sighting was probably the day's most difficult—a

single bird hunched up on a crag was expertly picked out despite being well camouflaged against the dark rock. Lunch was taken whilst watching the eagles quartering nearby ridges. The highlight was a magnificent sky-diving display by the female. Stuart Gibson took the opportunity to provide us with details about eagle biology and behaviour, so that we weren't just impressed by the sight of the birds, but much better informed. A Kestrel put in a brief appearance across the valley making our raptor tally five species, or six if you include Raven as an honorary raptor.

After lunch we started to retrace our path stopping at points on the road that could accommodate our small convoy. A view over Three Lochs was unproductive whilst a little further on near Ishriff Farm a Golden Eagle was soaring in the distance and a Coal Tit braved the fresh breeze to fly from one bank of trees to another. In the sheltered hollow near Ardura, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Chaffinch were feeding, whilst a pair of Curlews were keeping a couple of Canada Geese company in an adjacent field. A trio of peacocks in a garden warranted comment about



Upper photo. Four White-tailed Eagles on a skerry

Lower Photo. Ben More and Loch Scridain, Mull

Both photos ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

whether they should be formally recorded. Winding down through bare oakwoods our thoughts turned to the visitors that might populate such fine habitats a little later in the year. We soon reached Loch Spelve where Wigeon, Mallard and Little Grebe were spotted nearby, whilst another pair of White-tailed Eagles effortlessly soared across our field of view, visible for some minutes.

Time was marching on and Jacqui thought a trip to a small parking area adjacent to the golf course, just beyond Craignure, would provide a suitable end to our day. Her judgement proved to be spot on. We had excellent views of a pair of White-tailed Eagles leaving their nest, in trees alongside the golf course, and heading off towards the hills. In the field adjacent to the road Oystercatchers, Curlew, Greylag and Canada Geese were feeding but they were not disturbed by the eagles departing in the opposite direction. Looking out over Scalcastle Bay, Herring, Common and Great Black-backed Gulls were roosting whilst Wigeon, Teal, Redshank and Turnstone were identified at a distance. On a rock further out into the Sound of Mull an Otter was picked out and easily visible though telescopes.

Returning to Craignure the two groups reconvened and exchanged notes on the day's sightings. The above notes were based on the southern party's trip, whilst the northern party also had excellent views of White-tailed Eagles at Loch na Keal, and also sightings of Great Northern Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Bar-tailed Godwit and Green-shank amongst others. Perhaps the most unexpected sighting of the day was a Barn Owl perched in a tree in Glen Bellart. Everyone was very appreciative and grateful for the time and hospitality extended by Mull Bird Club. Thanks in particular to our guides for the day, Jacqui and Mike Murphy and Arthur Brown. They operate wildlife tours under 'Enjoy Mull' and 'Discover Mull Wildlife Tours' respectively and the evidence of their detailed knowledge and expertise gained during their "day jobs" was visible right there in the lenses of our binoculars and telescopes. Many of us had never seen so many eagles (of both species) in one day. Just fantastic!!! **Malcolm Chattwood**

Seil & Luing

A small group met at Ellenabeich on Seil before looking at a few sites on their way to Cuan Ferry, to catch the first ferry to Luing. Before moving off, a group of 20 Jackdaws was watched playing in the (cold) wind in the cliffs above the car-park and a Kittiwake flew through Easdale Sound. A

Black Guillemot flying through Cuan Sound was a welcome sight for many of the group, along with a Hooded Crow, both of which are familiar birds to Argyll Bird Club members, but not regularly seen on the east coast of Scotland.

Three cars went over on the ferry, along with three foot passengers who were met by Richard Wesley, now resident on Luing, who took them in his car. Two cars went to Toberonochy and the other two to Blackmill Bay because parking is restricted on Luing. At the latter a distant White-tailed Eagle was watched over Lunga, drifting towards Scarba, where it was seen taking 'avoiding action' from a Golden Eagle. Nearby at Ardlarach a (migrant?) Grey Wagtail showed well close to the road and shortly afterwards a Sparrowhawk flipped past.

Despite the cold wind the sunshine brought out a Skylark whose brave song was a welcome harbinger of spring. Over at Toberonochy, Canada Geese and Greylag were visible but only distant views were had of the wintering Barnacle Geese. Both groups made their way round to Cullipool where a distant Red-throated Diver was seen in the Sound of Luing on way to a very welcome and warming lunch at the Atlantic Islands Centre, with its stunning views to the sunlit, snow-covered hills on Mull. After lunch, steps were retraced to Cuan, with a few Eiders seen off Torsa along with many Shags roosting on Fraoch Eilean, then back to Easdale in time to let the group make their long journeys home after an excellent conference weekend.

Species List (both islands): Mute Swan, Greylag, Canada Goose, Barnacle Goose, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Eider, Red-Breasted Merganser, Red-throated Diver, Cormorant, Shag, Heron, White-tailed Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Turnstone, Black Guillemot, Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Rock Dove, Collared Dove, Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Raven, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch (49 species). **David Jardine**



View towards Scarba ©David Jardine

Loch Laich

While some delegates to the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference in Oban chose to visit Mull, Lismore, Kerrera, Seil or Ledaig Point, Isobel from Alloa, Jeff from Perth and Tony from Fort William joined Mike Harrison on a trip to Loch Laich, Appin. On a dry, cold and reasonably sunny morning we mustered in Appin before taking one car along to the small car park on the south shore of the loch at the end of the path to the Jubilee Bridge. It was barely an hour after low water when we arrived there and most of the water and, more importantly, the birds were a long way away. However, telescopes soon revealed a few Curlew, several Oystercatcher and seven Redshank in the small channel between the car park and the Ardtur peninsula. A small flock of Canada Geese was grazing the field above the beach and two Shelduck were on the shore near the end of the peninsula. A 'scattering' of Wigeon on the open water towards Castle Stalker turned out to be 35 strong. A Greenshank and two more Redshank flew in from around the corner to our left. Numerous gulls were bathing in the main river channel; Herring, Common, a few Black-headed and two Great Black-backed. No specials were noted despite careful study.

As we walked along the path to the bridge a Robin could be heard in the bushes by the road. A scan of the saltmarsh upstream of the bridge revealed the white head and neck of a Little Egret lurking in one of the ditches through the marsh. Unfortunately, it moved further along the ditch and was lost from sight without us having had a good view of it.

The cycle path along the old railway line was soon reached and we scanned the fields beyond for the thrushes and geese, which are often there, but we found none. Woodland species were more forthcoming with Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch and Wren in the trees and bushes along the track. The tide had by now advanced into the loch and a gap in the bushes allowed a close sweep of the water's edge where a Bar-tailed Godwit was spotted feeding near some Curlew and Wigeon. Song Thrush and Blackbird were both present in the trees at the old Appin Station site and a Dunnock was skulking in the undergrowth as we reached the Castle Stalker slip and boathouse.

A Shag was getting a rough ride on a mooring buoy just off the slip and eventually fell off into the choppy water. A group of four Red-breasted Mergansers was feeding beyond the castle and two Little Grebes were diving in the sheltered water close to the castle rock. A male Goldeneye and three females were the last record before we retraced our steps towards the bridge.

A group of three Yellowhammers flew into a tree by the station as we returned, a welcome record these days. After that, the only new species for the day was a Pied Wagtail which flew over our heads as we made our leisurely way back along the track. On reaching the Jubilee Bridge we were pleased to find that the Little Egret had emerged from its ditch into the main river channel and good views were had by all. A fitting end to a relatively short trip and an enjoyable introduction to birding in Argyll for our visitors from outwith the area.

Species list. Greater Canada Goose, Common Shelduck,



Upper photo. Birdwatching near Castle Stalker boat-house

Lower Photo. Castle Stalker, with the snowy hills of Mull in the background!

Both photos ©Mike Harrison

Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, European Shag, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Common Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Hooded Crow, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Wren, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, Pied Wagtail, Common Chaffinch, Yellowhammer (30 Species). **Mike Harrison**

Kerrera

Eleven hardy souls joined me at the Kerrera Ferry at Gallanach for the 10.30hrs boat. After an early shower, it was bright and sunny with some dark clouds threatening more rain at times. While waiting for the boat, the first bird of the day was a Raven, followed by Robin in song. Although it was early in the year, it was a popular time to cross, and it took two trips before we were all together on the other side. We took the clockwise route, following the coast road to the Horse Shoe Bays, branching off before Upper Gylen Farm, to Gylen Park. Most of the usual shorebirds were seen, along with the usual common passerines, but nothing to get excited about. The choice of route gave the sudden, and spectacular approach to the 16th century tower of the MacDougalls' Gylen Castle from the southeast, perched on its rocky promontory, and ruined in the 17th century (photo opposite). The wind was fresh from the northwest, and pretty chilly, so a sheltered spot was found nearby, on the sunny side, to set up the picnic and identify the various islands and landmarks across a grey and sparkly sea. Unfortunately the tea barn at Lower Gylen was not yet open, so we were spared the anguish of which cake to choose! Some of the party were anxious to get back for a specific ferry, so from here round the group strung out, heading round the west side, past Barnabuck, then back over the middle to Ballimore and the ferry. While it was a glorious day, and a great walk, the birding was not the most memorable. My list stumbled up to 24, well short of expectations, and bird of the day was a Goosander in the sound to the north of the ferry on the way back. No raptors were seen, which was, in its way, remarkable for a pretty unremarkable day birdwise. However, the scenery was splendid, and the walk was good exercise, and so still an enjoyable day. I don't know why I carried my telescope and tripod all the way round. Seemed like a good idea at the time! **Nigel Scriven**



Upper photo. Waiting for the ferry

Lower Photo. The ruins of Gylen Castle

Both photos ©Nigel Scriven



Hooded Crow. A common bird seen on all the field trips
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

A Golden Eagle death on Seil

In early April, Scottish Natural Heritage were contacted by a farmer on the island of Seil to say that he had found a dead Golden Eagle next to a half-eaten newly born lamb. The farmer also reported that when he was out earlier, helping to lamb the ewe, there were two Golden Eagles and a White-tailed Eagle hanging around.

The eagle corpse, which was ringed, was collected for a post mortem, which was conducted promptly by STUC. The bird was an adult female (ringed in 2010) and its oviduct was stated as being prominent, so it is likely to be from a nearby territory, although attempts to find which territory has been affected have proved inconclusive to date. Its injuries were consistent with it being struck by another eagle. Its crop was full of fresh meat (from the lamb). It is presumed that the dead eagle had been struck on the ground. The lamb, a twin, was alive earlier in the morning and was thought to have been killed by one of the eagles.

This story has featured in the press and has been used to 'spin' against White-tailed Eagles. There still remains no firm evidence that White-tailed Eagles are impacting on the Golden Eagle

population. The most recent Golden Eagle survey in 2015 found the Golden Eagle population in Scotland had increased by 15% (to 508 territorial pairs) since the previous survey in 2003. This increase occurred during a period when the White-tailed Eagle population was also increasing.

Eagles killing eagles is not new and has probably been going on for millennia, indeed it may be a sign of a healthy environment. White-tailed Eagles and Golden Eagles co-exist in several parts of their world range, and there is possibly not a great deal to get excited about by this recent incident. Watching the two species interact in flight, it is clear that Golden Eagles have the upper hand, and it is quite possible that White-tailed Eagles die of injuries sustained by their attacks—but these are not reported in the local press.

David Jardine

Also see:

Jardine, D.C., Peacock, M.A., McGowan, R.Y. & Maw, C. (2011). Natural predation of Golden Eagles. *Scottish Birds* 31 (3): 226-228



Skull of young Golden Eagle killed on Oronsay, by another eagle, possibly even its own parents. The arrows indicate talon marks. November 2008. Photo: David Jardine.

BTO news update

BTO Website

You will notice a big difference if you go to the BTO website www.bto.org which had a major re-vamp on 1 May. In addition to a bright new look, there are some new additions, including case studies of BTO work that has had an impact, articles on understanding bird biology, and developing birding skills. Of the pages you thought

you were familiar with, the menu layouts have changed. This includes the BTO survey pages, which also have different data entry pages. A new area called "Community" groups together pages on the Regional Network, news, events, bird clubs and blogs. Everything is still there, but finding it should be easier.

BTO Upland Rovers

One way that Breeding Bird Survey squares in less populated areas can be covered is by visiting birders on holiday. It doesn't need to be the same person doing the same square every time, but a one-off survey can yield data that would not be obtained, and some squares can be regularly covered by different birders each time. There's plenty to choose, so if there's one near where you are intending going anyway, and fancy contributing, look at the Upland Rovers webpage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/btojnccrspb-breeding-bird-survey/taking-part/upland-rovers>

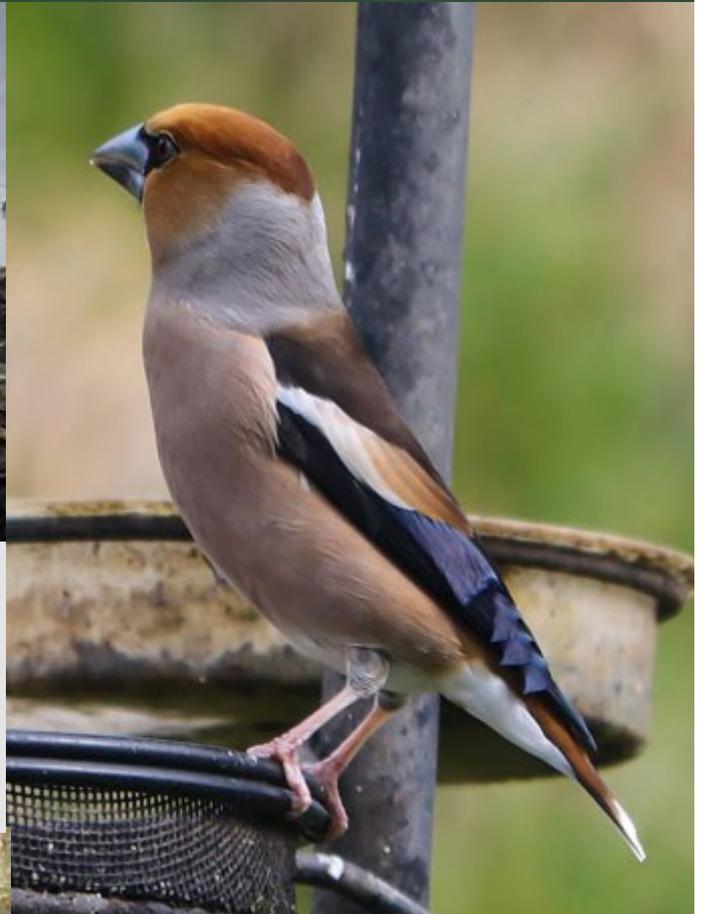
Seabird Count Survey 2019

This is the final season for data collection. If you know of any seabird sites that are no longer being used, come across apparently new sites (especially on buildings and structures), and if you are able to count at any regular sites, then please contact Nigel Scriven, organizer for Argyll. If you would like the Argyll Excel spreadsheet of previously known sites, this can be shared with you, if you contact Nigel (contact details of back page).

Some recent photos from the Argyll Bird Club website



Top left. Gargany, Craignure, Mull on 10 May ©Lizzy Grieve



Top right. Hawfinch, Ballochantuy, Kintyre on 19 April ©Sally Nicholson

Lower left. Dotterel, Colonsay on 6 May ©Alan Davis

Lower right. Kumlien's Gull, Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 20 March ©Eddie Maguire



Articles for the September *Eider* should with the editor before the 20th August 2019

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2018/2019)

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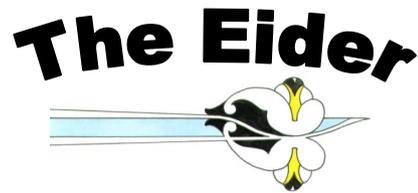
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The *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book reviews, 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 only) 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 indoor meetings each year, in spring and autumn. The venue of the spring meeting is rotated between different towns, including Dunoon, Inveraray, Lochgilphead and Oban. 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
Age 25 and under	free
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).