

March 2012
Number 99

The Eider



Kumlien's Gull. Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll. A bird new to Argyll. This bird was part of a large influx of white-winged gulls in early January 2012, which included a number of these gulls. photos ©Jim Dickson

Birding in Alaska

Field Trip Reports

Recent Reports

RSPB Volunteer and Farmer Alliance Project

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

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

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What is the mystery bird? See the back page for the answer.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all the contributors. Some articles have been held over to the next edition.

Katie Berry, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Mike Harrison, Andy Howard, Katie Pendreigh, Nigel Scriven. Articles held over: Eddie Maguire, Roger Thwaites

Editorial

Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society and a leading geneticist recently gave the Richard Dimbleby lecture. In his lecture he extolled the benefits of science to the health and economic well-being of a nation, giving examples of major contributions such as the discovery of electricity, the more controversial use of genetic engineering in food production, to the discovery of medicines. Interestingly, Sir Paul Nurse pointed to the fact that his own interest in scientific discovery would never have developed without the enthusiastic support of his school science teacher. This got me thinking— who are the people who have most influenced me and what has been the outcome? - an unfinished work in every sense of the word! Well, what about you? For one thing, your membership of the Argyll Bird Club shapes the club and really does make a difference!!

Would you like to make the most of your bird ID skills and take part in one of the UK's most important conservation projects?

RSPB's Volunteer & Farmer Alliance Project (V&FA) is a UK wide project which offers farmers and crofters free farmland bird surveys. Since it first started more than 10 years ago, over 5000 farms have been surveyed across the UK. Over 600 farms have been surveyed in Scotland, and we look to survey approximately 120 farms in Scotland each year.

We have only been able to offer and carry out these surveys due to the invaluable contribution of more than 2000 volunteers across the UK and over 200 in Scotland, but as demand for surveys grows we require more volunteers! Volunteers are matched to a farm within 20 miles and they undertake an initial visit to meet the farmer and go over any health and safety issues. They then visit the farm to carry out three or four early morning surveys between April and July. The area surveyed is usually a maximum of 80 hectares and visits take between 3 or 4 hours. Please note that not all volunteers are asked to carry out surveys every year, as there may not be a farm within the 20 mile radius.

What skills do you need?

- The ability to recognise a variety of common birds and those associated with farming.
- You need to be reasonably fit as each survey may take a few hours.
- You need to be able to get to the site. Sometimes we are able to match volunteers with more experienced surveyors or other volunteers who have transport, but this may not always be the case.
- We provide volunteers with a manual of the surveying method, etc and if we have many new volunteers in a particular area we offer training events at the beginning of the year as well as one to one support.

Volunteer observations allow project staff to construct a picture of the birds of conservation concern on the farm. The farmer receives an A3, laminated colour map with these findings, a report, full species list and the latest advisory information on how to help farmland birds. Volunteers also receive a copy of the farm map and a report.

For more information and/or to become a volunteer please visit our website:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/vandfa/index.aspx>

Alternatively, please contact your local V&FA Project Officer:

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Skylark by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Field Trips

Saturday 31 March 2012: Sound of Gigha Field Trip

The annual field trip to the Sound of Gigha will be on Saturday 31st March 2012. We'll be meeting as usual at the car park at Ronachan Point just off the A83 (grid reference NR741548) at 10.00am. From here we'll call in at the coast near the West Coast Salmon site and then onto Tayinloan to check the fields there. We'll take the 12:00 ferry to Gigha, mainly to look for birds in the Sound and break for lunch. Snacks can be ordered at the hotel on the island. After returning from Gigha, if the weather and tide conditions permit, we'll walk along the shore to look for waders and migrants. Spring birding in the Sound of Gigha can be a rewarding experience. This trip will be a repeat of similar field trips in spring, accounts of which have appeared in the Eider. Paul Daw (Tel 01546 886260. E-mail monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

SUNDAY 29 April 2012: Benmore Botanic Gardens

Benmore Botanic Gardens is an interesting birdwatching venue, with a range of woodland birds in particular, which in the past has included Green woodpecker (though after two very cold winters these may or may not still be resident). Many of the plants are also at their best in spring. Leader Nigel Scriven (Tel 01369 840606. E-mail njscriven@googlemail.com)

Saturday 26 May 2012: Taynish NNR

Taynish has excellent populations of woodland birds and has been the subject of a long running breeding birds survey. Leader Tom Callan (Tel 0777 173 2496. E-mail callansatcorra@aol.com)

SUNDAY 24 June 2012: Skipness

Meet at Skipness Castle Car Par for circular walk along Campbell's Glen, and down to the Coastal Path. The Fish Cabin will be open for snack lunch etc or bring sandwiches and please use footwear suitable for mud and puddles etc! led by Katie Pendreigh (Tel 01583 441359. E-mail katiependreigh@aol.com)

ABC indoor meeting March 2012

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

Saturday 17 March 2012
The Corran Halls, Oban, Argyll

Birds & Other Wildlife of the West Coast

Hosted by BTO Scotland, the SOC and Argyll Bird Club



Field Trip Reports



It's all smiles at the end of a good days birding

photo M Williamson

Ormsary Estate and Loch Caolisport 28th January 2012

Fourteen ABC members met at the Ormsary hall car park to brush off the winter cobwebs and enjoy a good days birding. The weather was overcast but relatively mild and calm which ensured the birds would not be hiding away as they so often do on windy days. Around the farm buildings and adjacent fields there was quite a lot of bird activity with many birds in song. In addition, members of the group noted a fine Red deer stag on the hillside above the sawmill. A small group of Canada Geese flying over the "Big House" commenced proceedings and were quickly followed by Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Blackbird, Chaffinch and House Sparrow. A couple of Song Thrushes were hiding in some scrub by the farm. The field by the farm proved to be quite lively with good numbers of smaller birds such as Chaffinch, Reed Bunting, Twite and a lone Skylark foraging in the grass. A Pied and Grey Wagtail were noted around the field boundary.. A small flock of Siskin and a

Mistle Thrush flew over as the group walked down to the shore. The bay to the east of the fish farm often proves to be very good for viewing wintering Black Throated divers and certainly this was the case on our last visit here. However, we could only find Red Throated and Great Northern Diver, single Slavonian Grebe, Cormorant and Shag. A small group of Grey Heron were spied roosting at the eastern end of the bay. A very elusive Rock Pipit was noted along the strandline. Fly- by's included Herring Gull, Great Black Backed Gull, Black Headed Gull, Common Gull, Eider, Goldeneye, Woodpigeon, Hooded Crow and Greylag Geese. The peanut feeders in the garden behind us produced Chaffinch, House Sparrow and Robin.

On previous trips, the area has refused to produce any white-winged gulls, but hopes of sightings were high as we set off to the western side of the fish farm. To be honest, Tom Callan and I had already seen an adult Iceland Gull on the way round to Ormsary earlier in the morning and Tom had also seen two Glaucous Gulls at the river mouth- which I missed in my haste to be on time to meet the group (I was still late!!). We were not to be disappointed. In fact, once we had seen an

adult Iceland Gull the topic of conversation changed to the number of yearly cycles Iceland Gulls go through to attain adulthood. This was because we quickly encountered first, second and third winter birds in with the other gulls. Observing white-winged gulls in flight is always a delight and the birds we were watching proved to be very active, flying around the bay and onto one of the small skerries at the entrance to the bay. Other birds of note were six Common Scoters in the bay with Eider and Goldeneye. Normally, the scoters tend to be well out on the sea loch and can be quite difficult to locate. The Goldeneye numbers seemed to be well down (the next day I counted 105 birds). Shelduck were noted- it is about this time that numbers seem to build up here- along with Mallard. There was a scattering of wading birds in the bay including; Redshank, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, lone Curlew and 50+ Turnstone. Jackdaw were spotted near the boathouse by the fish farm. The morning walk finished with a stroll up to the mouth of Ormsary water. Dunnock, Treecreeper, Buzzard, Coal Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker were all observed on the way. At the mouth of Ormsary water, a Pheasant was flushed from cover and a Raven flew over to our right. A quick scan of the sea added Black Guillemot to the list. A brief look at the Ellary skyline opposite produced three Buzzards and a male Hen Harrier. Three of the Iceland Gulls joined other gulls at the mouth of the river and another adult Iceland Gull was added to the list when the bird seen earlier by Tom and I was scoped as it foraged around the same field about a mile and a half away. A second winter Glaucous Gull put in a brief fly-by appearance. At this point we all returned to the Ormsary estate car park for lunch. After lunch we drove to Achahoish where we saw Goosander, Red- breasted Merganser and at least 10 Black Throated Divers. A walk over the hill to view the head of Loch Caolisport proved to be very

disappointing- especially as it started to rain. A couple of Mute Swans, Redshank and good numbers of Curlew were observed at the head of the loch- however, all of these birds had to be scoped because of the distance involved. I was treated to a masterclass in spruce and pine identification by Tom (I can now just about identify Lodgepole Pine and Western Hemlock Spruce and have ceased to name all spruces as pine trees). Crossbill, Goldcrest, Meadow Pipit and Starling were all heard, but generally the woods were very quiet- much more in keeping with mid-winter. So, a slight anti-climax to the day..... However, most of the group would agree that over all, the day had been a success with good numbers of birds observed and many an interesting conversation had by all.

A total of 59 species were seen during the day, the most glaring omissions being , Guillemot, Razorbill, Goldfinch, Fieldfare, Redwing and Wren- which just goes to show that nothing can ever be taken for granted with birds.

Mark Williamson



One of the Iceland Gulls at Ormsary © M Williamson

Appin, 25 February 2012

"So it's all downhill from here" was Malcolm's comment as the second species of the day went into the notebook. The first, a Raven, had been noted only a minute or two earlier and the last two members to arrive were barely out of their car as the White-tailed Eagle glided high overhead. Sadly, only six members were present to see the eagle – not surprising given the weather forecast – but the rain had cleared just before the meeting time and we could now see Lismore and the Morvern hills.

Leaving one car at the Castle Stalker View café we drove along the Port Appin road and parked in the lay-by near the hide on the south shore of Loch Laich. The spring tide was ebbing rapidly and half the bay was already exposed. Curlew and Oystercatcher were feeding on the mud, though not in any great numbers, and Goldeneye, Wigeon and Red-breasted Merganser could be seen on the water. A Grey Heron flapped slowly away. We waited in and around the hide while a light shower passed and struggled, like last year, to identify a single distant wader which was different from the rest. Eventually, by elimination of other species, we decided that it was probably a Knot. There were plenty of gulls about as we walked along the shore towards the Jubilee Bridge; Common and

Herring Gulls were most numerous but there were also a few Great Black-backed Gulls further out in the bay and one or two Black-headed Gulls as well. A pair of Mallard swam away at our approach and Robin and Chaffinch could be heard singing in the bushes near a cottage. From the bridge we could see some Canada Geese grazing a field near the main road. A single Shelduck was spotted before we crossed the bridge and made our way onto the old railway/new cycleway. A couple of Wrens were having a territorial singing match in the woodland by the track. The peanut baskets at the cottages by the old station were deserted but the local House Sparrows put in an appearance for us and a number of Chaffinches were moving through the bushes. A Shag was diving close to the seaward side of Castle Stalker's rock while about 15 Mergansers fed closer to the shore before us. The Wigeon flock, about 40 strong, flew in after being driven from the shallow water by a loose dog. We retraced our steps along the track and found our first Blackbird of the day, immediately followed by the second, and heard a Great Tit singing in the woods. Another shower arrived as we regained the south side of the loch and we returned to the cars in the rain. As the dog had now chased all the birds from the bay and the rain looked likely to continue for some time we had no alternative but to retire to the café for lunch.

Lismore and Morvern reappeared and disappeared again several times as lunch turned into a tutorial on the use in the field of hand-held digital devices for bird

identification. Suitably impressed, and with the weather much improved, we set off for Port Appin and the second part of the trip. Blue Tit and Collared Dove were soon added to the list as we walked through the village towards the pier. Some Eider were feeding offshore, as were two grebes which were less readily identified. The further one was probably a Dabchick; the nearer one might have been a Slavonian Grebe, but might have been another Dabchick. The first Redshanks of the day were spotted on the mudflats along with some more Curlew and Oystercatcher. Some Cormorants were lined up on a skerry towards Lismore, their white thigh patches marking them out clearly from the smaller Shags. We walked down the path towards Clach Thoull and spent some time scanning the Lyn of Lorn. A flash of white in the approaching shower could have been a distant Gannet but the bird did not come our way. Returning to the village we surveyed the scene from the end of the pier, adding a Tystie to the list, before heading back to the cars. Having scanned the bushes unsuccessfully for several minutes for a single singing Greenfinch we rounded a corner and found a flock of 14 in a treetop. A fitting finale for the day.

Last year we followed the morning's White-tailed Eagle with two more in the afternoon; this year we were not so lucky. In that sense it was "all downhill from here" but an interesting day nonetheless.

Mike Harrison



Just what is that bird? The ABC group enjoy the challenge of identifying a distant bird....photo © M Harrison

Holiday Reports

BIRDING in HOMER, ALASKA, MAY 2011



Homer Spit and Kachemak Bay

Photo: Jim Dickson

After a few years of thinking about 'doing' a birding trip to Alaska, May 2011 was going to be our time to go, having been put off previously by anticipated high costs and the sheer vastness of the state! Both these obstacles were resolved in no small part due to my cousin Vicki who has settled just outside the picturesque town of Homer on the Kachemak Bay in south-east Alaska. In the past few years she has been increasingly involved in the local birding scene which is internationally recognised as one of the best areas for wader migration, in particular for Western Sandpipers, and has drawn my attention to the sheer wealth of birding on offer in this relatively small area. An ideal birding trip on offer, meeting up again with my cousin and her husband Tom and the hope of seeing many species of birds that are high on my 'wanted' list....species such as Tufted Puffin, Harlequin Duck, Wandering Tattler, Surfbird and Varied Thrush to name a few- an opportunity too good to miss.....

We set off in early May to coincide with the Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival which is based in Homer for four days when wader passage is greatest. Travelling from a connection in Frankfurt we found the cheapest and also the only non-stop flight to Anchorage with Condor Airways. The flight took just under 10 hours and gave us spectacular views of the Greenland Ice Cap, Arctic Canada, the north coast of Alaska over Barrow and down over Mount McKinley and into Anchorage.



Pine Grosbeak

Photo: Jim Dickson

From Anchorage we travelled by hire car to Potter Marsh on the outskirts of the city, a relatively small (by Alaskan standards) area of saltwater marsh which has an excellent reputation for breeding and passage birds. Here we got our first taste of the local avifauna with a good selection of waders and ducks which included many species we are familiar with in the UK such as Mallard, Gadwall, Pintail, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander and Arctic Tern. In amongst these were birds I was keen to study more....Canvasback, Green-winged Teal, Barrow's Goldeneye, Trumpeter Swan, Mew Gull and Sandhill Crane. A nice start to our trip, although other than some Common Redpolls and Pine Siskin there were very few other passerines around, as it was still perhaps a bit early in the spring or was it late winter? We then headed another 40 miles or so for our first overnight stop in the heavily wooded ski-resort town of Girdwood. From this base we made a couple of walks into the woods, hoping that the local bears were still in hibernation. Several Moose wandering around the town made us very cautious when driving- roads signs gave tallies of the number of Moose fatalities in the past year on each stretch of highway! Red-breasted Nuthatches appeared to be quite common and every 100 metres or so we could hear repeated buzzy-whistle calls coming from the tops of the tall pine trees.....eventually we were able to see a couple of birds and make out the wonderful pattern of Varied Thrush! From Girdwood we visited the Alaska Wildlife Refuge where a number of injured birds and animals were being rehabilitated. This gave us close views of Bald Eagles, Coyotes, Wolf , Brown and Black Bear, Bison, Caribou and Moose.

*Surfbird**Photo: Jim Dickson*

Heading south to our eventual destination of Homer we made stops at the Kenai River Estuary and Anchor Point. The Kenai River supports some 10-20 million returning adult Salmon each spring and is one of the most important fishing rivers in the state. The estuary also supports thousands of migrating wildfowl and waders. We missed the huge flocks of Snow Geese that pass through here but in our very brief spell in this area did see good numbers of Sandhill Crane, 15 Bald Eagles our first dowitchers and yellowlegs of the trip. Several duck species were observed along with our first Glaucous-winged Gulls mixed in with thousands of American Herring Gulls- a species subject to a culling program due to the effect they are having on other species. Heading further south we had a brief sighting of Pine Grosbeak as it flew over the car and a better view of a Goshawk, several of which were seen on the trip. Anchor Point looks out across the Cook Inlet to three active volcanos in the Alaska Range and is the furthest west you can drive on the American road network. From here we found a good vantage point to seawatch and in wet and windy conditions were seeing birds everywhere. Several Bald Eagles were patrolling the beach or just sitting about with North-west Crows. On the sea were a scattering of Harlequin Duck, flocks of White-winged and Surf Scoter, several Red-necked Grebes, Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots and Pelagic Cormorants. Passing further out at sea -more like a typical seawatch-were waves of Kittiwake, several White-billed and Great Northern Diver, and a single distant Sooty Shearwater, or was it a Short-tailed as both are possible?



Bald Eagle

Photo: Jim Dickson

About an hour later we arrived in Homer which has a population of about 6000 people and is set in the most stunning surroundings. Driving towards the town you look down on a very picturesque scene with a four mile stony spit sheltering the fishing harbour as it points out into the Katchemak Bay. In addition, the bay is surrounded by high mountains and glaciers. The town is full of excellent restaurants and coffee shops conveniently placed next to the many equally excellent birding areas! The town hosts the annual Katchemak Bay Shorebird Festival for a few days in early May to coincide with the arrival of thousands of Western Sandpipers and a total of 25 species of wader. The festival attracts good numbers of birders from the States and abroad and puts on talks, workshops, field trips and pelagics for the event. Over the next 10 days the spit and surrounding areas were to be the main focus of our birding activity- a truly fantastic area to bird if you love watching waders, wildfowl, gulls and seabirds!

We stayed with my cousin who lives about an hour's drive east out of town, in a fairly remote area surrounded by three very small Russian villages set up in the last 20 years or so by settlers who follow the Russian Orthodox faith- descendants from original Russian settlers into Alaska in the early 1900's. They still speak Russian but the children now learn English at school and they wear traditional clothes. Our first morning walk to explore our new surroundings was taken with Tom and his hand gun! Several Black Bears had been seen recently and the gun was

taken as a precaution. There are also grizzlies on higher ground and the news that a female jogger had been killed by a grizzly elsewhere in Alaska made us slightly apprehensive. As it turned out however, we only had one Black Bear sighting on the whole trip....a female with cub at a distance of about 200 metres, although close enough to get a few photos!



Wandering Tattler

Photo: Jim Dickson

Each morning I would check out the bird table and feeder to see what was about. Regulars were Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Grosbeak, Slate-coloured Junco, Hairy Woodpecker, Pine Siskin, Song Sparrow and Black-capped Chickadee. Short walks would produce Grey and Steller's Jay, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Varied Thrush, American Robin, Boreal Chickadee, Northern Shrike, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Fox Sparrow. New summer visitors including Violet-Green and Tree Swallow, Golden-crowned, White-crowned, Lincoln's and Savannah Sparrows and Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, started to make an appearance in the coming days. One of the most amazing sights was the almost daily appearance of an immature Goshawk that kept trying to get one of Vicki's hens before they could scramble into the hen house. This bird would appear and hover just like a harrier until Vicki ran outside to 'shoo' it away, ruining my photo opportunity! Our daily routine was then to travel into Homer and check out Mud Bay, Beluga Lake and Beluga Slough before going down onto the spit to see what new birds had arrived. At this time of year the migration was in full swing and each day brought a new

batch of birds. The lake just outside the town had good numbers of both Greater and Lesser Scaup and was an excellent place to study the differences between the two species. Along with the groups of American Wigeon were a few much rarer Eurasian Wigeon! Canvasbacks, Ring-necked Duck, Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Bufflehead and Barrows Goldeneye made up the rest of the duck group along with several pairs of nesting Red-necked Grebe. The odd rarity like Cliff Swallow appeared in with the now common Tree and Violet Greens. A short walk away was the small estuary at Beluga Slough which produced displaying Lesser Sandhill Crane, both Yellowlegs species, Wilson's Snipe, the odd Caspian Tern, flocks of Buff-bellied Pipits, Greater White-fronted Geese and a backdrop of passerines such as Golden Crowned Kinglet, Boreal Chickadee and Yellow-rumped Warbler. From the Slough, Katchemak Bay was only a stones throw away and viewing from here out to sea we could see large flocks of Black, White-winged and Surf Scoter, Common Eider, Harlequins, Red-necked Grebe, Common and White-billed Diver and watch migrating waders fly in from the sea in flocks of between 10-50 and land in the slough just behind. Such flocks were arriving every few minutes and consisted of 'peeps' - Semi-palmated, Western and Least Sandpipers. Moving down onto the spit.. at its base is Mud Bay, a huge expanse of tidal mud that attracts thousands of these 'peeps'. Western and Semi-palmated Sandpipers would form huge separate flocks on the mud which was like watching opposing armies assembling on the battlefield... quite a sight!



Tufted Puffin

PHOTO: Jim Dickson

*Gray Jay**Photo: Jim Dickson*

Other waders included Grey, American and Pacific Golden Plovers, both dowitcher species, Hudsonian and Marbled Godwits, Dunlin, Red Knot, Sanderling, Hudsonian Whimbrel and Ruddy Turnstone. Also on the mud were flocks of Black Brants (American Brent Goose) and just off shore large flocks of American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal and Greater Scaup. Further along the spit, the habitat became rockier. Here, there were flocks of Surfbirds, groups of Wandering Tattlers and a few Black Turnstone, but unfortunately no Rock Sandpiper. At the end of the spit are a collection of restaurants and gift shops and a small marina/fishing boat harbour with 'take away' - Halibut and Chips being the regular 'fish supper'. This is also the ferry stop to Kodiak Island and the outer Aleutian Islands. Seawatching from the end of the spit is a paradise for gull watchers and seabird fanatics. With telescope set up and a beer in hand, looking out from the outdoor bar of the Land's End resort, you can only marvel at the flocks of auks going back and forward along with hundreds of Mew Gull, thousands of Kittiwakes and a few Bonaparte's Gulls. It is a challenge trying to pick out the various ages of Glaucous and Glaucous-winged Gulls. Further out there are up to 10,000 Common Guillemots with the occasional Tufted Puffin, Kittlitz's



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Photo: Jim Dickson

and Marbled Murrelet, Fork-tailed Petrel and several species of diver including Pacific Diver. This is one of the best sites in Alaska for rare gulls with previous records of Ross's and Thayer's Gull. However, I did manage to find an Iceland Gull which is apparently quite a rarity here. We made a pelagic trip out into Kachemak Bay to visit various remote beaches and rock stacks where there were thousands of breeding Common Guillemots. Thick-billed or Brunnich's have been recorded in the past but proved too difficult to find as did Horned Puffin, but we did see quite a few Tufted Puffin as well as Double-crested, Pelagic and Red-faced Cormorants. In the quieter coves we found Black Oystercatchers and got up close and personal with good numbers of Sea Otters. In the open bay waters there were now thousands of Red-necked Phalaropes on the surface- just precisely how many was difficult to estimate. Common Eider, all three scoter species and divers were observed flying more or less overhead along with groups of Long-tailed and Harlequin Duck.

As well as our daily trips to the 'spit' we made several inland excursions checking out river valleys, lakes, forest and above the tree line. Species like Swainson's Thrush were just starting to arrive towards the end of our stay and we may have missed one or two late arriving species, but did manage to see things like Spruce Grouse, Rough-legged Buzzard and White-winged Crossbill as well as a single Porcupine. Some species, I'm afraid, will have to be saved for our next visit and hopefully we can then catch up with Black Dipper, Hawk and Great Grey Owl, Steller's Eider, Aleutian Tern, Horned Puffin and Grey-crowned Rosy Finch.

For a short stay or limited budget trip to Alaska, I can thoroughly recommend basing yourself in the Homer area particularly during the middle of May.

Jim Dickson

Recent Reports

November 2011 to January 2012

Paul Daw

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The latest news on bird
sightings in Argyll is
available on the Argyll
Bird Club website at
www.argyllbirdclub.org

NB. Computer 'crash'. In late December 2011 my PC experienced a major 'crash' (an appropriate word!). The hard drive had failed and despite the fact that the PC was equipped with a 'mirror' disk which should have preserved a copy of all the files, everything on the computer was lost. Danielle thinks this may have been caused by a virus which managed to slip through the virus protection software. Fortunately I've always operated on the 'belt and braces' principle where computers are concerned and had also backed up the many important files, e.g. the ABC bird record database, on flash drives. Nevertheless, a great deal of information relating to the period since I started using the new PC in April 2010 and up to December 2011 has been lost.

Would anyone who sent me bird records in the latter part of 2011 please send me copies if at all possible.

And focussing on finally (!) getting the Argyll Bird Report vol. 22 to the printers has meant that I haven't been able to check through all the incoming e-mails for the period thoroughly. Please bear all this in mind when reading this report, which will certainly be incomplete.

Paul Daw.



European White-fronted Geese, Barslinoch ©Jim Dickson

WILDFOWL (and GAMEBIRDS):

Mute Swan. A total of 30 were found during the Loch Sween WeBS count on 20 November (Paul Daw), 42 were on Loch Skerrols, Islay on 1 December (Bob Davidson) and 29 were on floods at The Reef, Tiree on 16 Dec (John Bowler).

Whooper Swan. The WeBS count on Tiree found 188 (including 155 at Loch a' Phuill) on 21 November (John Bowler). On 5 November, 24 flew in from the north and landed at sea at Caliach, Mull and slowly came towards Port na Caillich (Anand Prasad). A total of 21 flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 12 November (Eddie Maguire). Nine flew S over Ardfern, Mid-Argyll on 22 November (Julia Randall), 25 were Loch Nigheadaireachd, Islay on 16 November (per Malcolm Ogilvie) 30 were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 30 November (per I. & M. Brooke) and 36 were found during the Loch Sween WeBS count on 20 November (Paul Daw). An all island count on Tiree on 12 – 15 December found 68 birds, including just 4 cygnets and 90 counted on 16-17 January still included only 5 cygnets (John Bowler).

Black Swan. The adult bird remained with Whooper Swans at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree throughout November and early December (John Bowler).

Bean Goose. Three (Tundra) Bean Geese (*Anser fabalis rossicus*) were found near Loch Nell S of Oban on 24 November (Bill Allan). Only the second record of this race in Argyll. They were accompanied by European White-fronted Geese (see below). A single of the same race with Greylags at Gott, Tiree on 16 January was not seen subsequently (John Bowler).



Tundra Bean Geese, Kilmoe ©Jim Dickson

Pink-footed Goose. Two were in Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 12 November (John Halliday).

European White-fronted Goose. A flock of 11 were seen with the Bean Geese at Loch Nell on 24 November (Bill Allan/Simon Pinder/Jim Dickson). They were all present until at least 26 November. The last wild flock in Argyll of this race was way back in 1972 and before that 1962! This record ties in with both these species/races turning up in other parts of Scotland and the UK in unusual numbers. On 5 February a flock of 15 birds of this race were found at Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor (Jim Dickson). This is the first known record for this area.

Greenland White-fronted Goose. Approx. 300 were by Drumlemble School, The Laggan, Kintyre on 8 November. There was no obvious increase later and very few at the usual haunts this autumn (Eddie Maguire). The WeBS count at Loch Creran on 25 November found 69 birds including two with neck collars (T1C and P5C) that have been recorded here in past winters (Robin Harvey). The all-island goose count on Tiree 16 – 17 November found a total of just 571 birds, including 67 (13.2%) goslings from 506 birds aged and 883 were counted at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 15 November (James How). Numbers at counts on Tiree in December and January were also lower than usual. The SNH goose count on Islay on 16 December recorded 4,670 birds (per I. & M. Brooke).

Greylag Goose. The WeBS count at Loch Craignish & Loch Beg on 20 November found 77 birds (Julia Randall) and at least 100 were at Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 1 December (Tom Callan). The all-island goose count on Tiree 16 – 17 November found a total of 2,259 birds (John Bowler) and the SNH goose count on Islay on 16 December recorded 587 birds (per I. & M. Brooke).

Bar-headed Goose. One was seen at Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor on 12 January (Jim Dickson).

Greater Canada Goose. The WeBS count at Loch Craignish & Loch Beg on 20 November found 34 birds (Julia Randall) and 98 were counted at Ulva Lagoons, Loch Sween on 15 Jan (Paul Daw).

Lesser Canada Goose? A party of 3 presumably vagrant birds were with the Barnacle Geese at Balephetrish/Kenovay, Tiree in mid-January. They included 2 medium-sized birds and a classic Richardson's (*hutchinsii*) Goose (John Bowler). Up to four were reported on Islay during the

period.

Snow Goose. The adult blue-phase bird was found again at various locations on Tiree from 1 – 17 November and again in December and January (John Bowler)

Barnacle Goose. A goose count at Loch Gruinart on 15 November found 21,713 birds (James How) and the all-island goose count on Tiree 16 – 17 November found a total of 2,706 birds. By mid-January the count on Tiree had reached 4,352 birds (John Bowler). The SNH goose count on Islay on 16 December recorded 42,595 birds (per I. & M. Brooke). Elsewhere, 126 were counted at Danna Island, Loch Sween on 15 January (Paul Daw) and 13 were at Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor on 18 January (Jim Dickson).

Dark-bellied Brent Goose. Two dark-bellied (*B. b. bernicla*) adults flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 21 November – the first record for the observatory (Eddie Maguire).

Pale-bellied Brent Goose. A total of 23 flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 3 November (Eddie Maguire) and two were in Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 12 November (John Halliday) and 60 were at Blackrock, Islay on 8 January (per Bob Davidson).

Common Shelduck. On 9 November, 25 were found at Loch Indaal, Islay (Bob Davidson), six were at Loch na Cille, Loch Sween on 15 December (Paul Daw), four were at Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 1 January (Jim Dickson) and six were at Ruaig, Tiree on 16 January (John Bowler). A total of 223 were counted on Loch Gruinart, Islay on 24 January (per Crystal Maw).

Eurasian Wigeon. A count at Loch Gruinart floods on 18 November found 177 birds (James How), 72 were in Ardlamont Bay, Cowal on 15 Dec (Tom Callan), 260 were counted between Bowmore and Gartbreck, Loch Indaal on 15 January (Bob Davidson), 199 were found during the Tiree WeBS Count on 17 January (John Bowler) and 135 during the WeBS Count at Loch Etive, Mid-Argyll on 16 January (Mike Harrison).

Gadwall. Five were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree from 19 – 21 November (John Bowler) and 12 were at Loch Gruinart floods on 18 November (James How) and a male was with Mallards at Connel on 22 December (Mike Harrison).

Eurasian Teal. A total of 64 flying S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 12 November was the peak count for the month (Eddie Maguire) and 135 were in the Add Estuary on 12 November (John Halliday). The WeBS Count on Tiree on 20 December found 186 birds (John Bowler) and 1,116 were counted on Loch Gruinart Floods, Islay on 20 December (per James How).

Pintail. A count at Loch Gruinart floods on 13 January found 64 birds (James How) and one was in Holy Loch, Cowal during the WeBS count on 16 November (George Newall).

Shoveler. Four female-types were by Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 2 November (Eddie Maguire) and a count at Loch Gruinart floods on 18 November found 64 birds (James How). On 20 December a total of 22 were found on Tiree (John Bowler).

Common Pochard. Three drakes were found at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 18 and 21 November and on 2 December (John Bowler), 3 were at Loch Skerrols, Islay on 13

November (James How) and a drake was on Loch Nell nr Oban on 20 November (Jim Dickson).

Tufted Duck. The WeBS counts on Tiree found 65 at Loch a' Phuill on 21 November and 92 on 20 December (John Bowler). A flock of 17 were on Lochan Dubh nr. Oban on 20 December (Jim Dickson).

Greater Scaup. Approx. 140 were at Blackrock, Loch Indaal, Islay on 5 November (Bob Davidson) and 170 were reported at Bowmore on 15 January (per David Wood).

Long-tailed Duck. Two flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (unusually in the company of Teal) on 12 November (Eddie Maguire), 8 were at Bowmore, Loch Indaal on 30 December, a male was at West Coast Salmon, Kintyre on 14 January (Tom Callan) and there were 15 in Hough Bay, Tiree on 13 January (John Bowler).

Common Scoter. An outstanding passage occurred at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 11/13 November. A total of 88 flew S in 2hrs in early morning including two sizeable flocks of 36 and 22. Then 36 were counted flying S in 4hrs on 12th then on 13th a further southerly passage occurred with a total of 61 in 3hrs. The total number of birds 11-13 November was 185 and strangely only one of them was an adult drake (Eddie Maguire). Nine were off Laine Sgeir, Calgary, Mull on 20 November, and were present in the area until the end of the month (Anand Prasad) and four juvenile/female birds were in Gunna Sound, Coll/Tiree on 17 November (John Bowler).

Common Goldeneye. The WeBS count on Tiree found a total of 24 birds on 21 November (John Bowler). A total of 120 were counted on Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 1 January (Jim Dickson). However the large flock that has been present at the mouth of Leacann Water, Furnace, Loch Fyne in recent years seems to have completely disappeared. If anyone has seen any there this winter please let me know.

Red-Breasted Merganser. A total of 18 in the Otter Ferry area on 10 December were virtually all in pairs (Tom Callan) and 30 were counted between Bowmore and Gartbreck, Loch Indaal on 15 January (Bob Davidson).

Goosander. A fine drake at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 18 November was only the second record for the island in 11 years (John Bowler). Five were in the Add Estuary on 9 November (Jim Dickson).

Red-legged Partridge. Six were seen at the head of Loch Striven, Cowal on 21 December (Tom Callan).

SEABIRDS – divers, grebes, shearwaters, herons etc (and other seawatch species):

Red-throated Diver. Eight flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 12 November (Eddie Maguire). Six were off Traigh Bhi, Tiree on 6 November (John Bowler).

Black-throated Diver. One was photographed at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 12 November (Eddie Maguire).

Great Northern Diver. Fourteen appeared in the bay at Machrihanish on 12 November and a total of 12 flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 26 November (Eddie Maguire). Eight were off Hough Bay, Tiree on 5 November, 29 off the beach at Killinallan, Islay on 12 November, 16 off Hynish on 11 December (John Bowler), 8 were off Bowmore on 15 January (per David Wood) and 12 off West Coast

Salmon, Kintyre on 14 January (James How).

Little Grebe. One was found on a small area of shallow floodwater at Lintmill, The Laggan near Campbeltown on 1 November (Eddie Maguire). Seven were in Holy Loch, Cowal during the WeBS count on 16 November (George Newall) and 23 were found during the Loch Sween WeBS count on 20 November (Paul Daw).

Slavonian Grebe. Five were at the head of Loch na Keal, off Killiechronan, Mull on 6 November (Anand Prasad), 4 off Otter Ferry on 31 December and 5 off West Coast Salmon on 14 January (Tom Callan).

Fulmar. At least 700 were already on nest-ledges at Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree on 15 December and approx 850 were there on 13 January (John Bowler).

Shag. The WeBS count at Loch Craignish & Loch Beg on 20 November found 29 birds (Julia Randall).



Little Egret, Mull ©Andy Howard

Cattle Egret. In an amazing re-run of what happened on Islay in October 2009 and on Mull recently both this species and Little Egret have now turned up the same time on Tiree. On 17 November John Bowler had the Cattle Egret nearly fly against his car at Whitehouse! It's been seen at various other locations on Tiree until at least 25 November and if confirmed will be a first for the island. The Little Egret is suspected of having been on the island since 5 November was confirmed at Barrapol on 10 November (John Bowler).

Little Egret. One was found and photographed at Pennyghael, Mull on 9 November (Andy Howard). And see above for Tiree record.

RAPTORS, RAILS etc.:

White-tailed Eagle. Two were seen over the Sound of Islay on 25 November (James How). An adult perched in front of the chalets at Ballimore (nr. Otter Ferry) on 21 January was later seen nearby being harried by two sub-adult Golden Eagles (Tom Callan). Two were at Port Askaig, Islay on 21 December (per I. & M. Brooke). Two adults were soaring together over North Connel at lunch-time on 3 February. They made a magnificent sight against a clear blue sky as they circled and gained height, drifting to the north towards Benderloch. They then glided off to the north west towards Lismore or Morvern. One had a yellow wing tag on the right wing, I could not see any tag on the other bird (Mike Harrison).

Golden Eagle. Five were counted over the Oa, Islay on 12

January (per Bob Davidson).

Peregrine Falcon. An adult female was seen attacking a Common Gull at Loch Charastoin, Tiree on 5 January (John Bowler).

Water Rail. Up to 4 birds were squealing from a marsh at Balephuill, Tiree throughout November and one or two were seen regularly in gardens there during December (John Bowler).

Moorhen. A group of 8 on Lochan Dubh near Oban on 20 December was an unusual number for Argyll (Jim Dickson).

Common Coot. A juvenile was at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree 18 and 21 November (John Bowler).

WADERS:

Oystercatcher. A count at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 19 November found 327 birds (per Mary McGregor and David Mason), 448 were in Holy Loch, Cowal during the WeBS count on 16 November (George Newall), 222 were at Stinky Hole, Campbeltown Loch on 12 January (Paul Daw) and a total of 441 were in 5 groups at Otter Ferry on 20 Jan (Tom Callan).

Ringed Plover. Forty were at Otter Ferry on 2 November (Tom Callan) and 325 were at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 9 January (John Bowler).

European Golden Plover. Approx 1,000 at Clochkiel Farm 1 – 19 November included several 'grey-plumaged types' which were photographed here and at Westport Marsh (Eddie Maguire). The all-island count on Tiree 16 – 17 November found a total of 4,195 birds (John Bowler) and approx. 1,100 were at Ardlarach, Islay on 16 November (Malcolm Ogilvie).

Grey Plover. Eight were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 19 November (per Mary McGregor and David Mason).

Northern Lapwing. A flock 300 were at Westport Marsh, The Laggan, Kintyre from 5– 14 November and a flock 500+ were at Lintmill, The Laggan on 15 November (Eddie Maguire). A count at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 19 November found 551 birds (per Mary McGregor and David Mason).

A total of 42 were at Carry Point, Ardlamont, Cowal on 10 November (Tom Callan) and (again) 42 were in Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 29 November (Jim Dickson). The all-island count on Tiree 12 & 15 December found a total of 2,990 birds and the mild weather was probably responsible for a count of 3,450 on 16-17 January (John Bowler). A total of 800 on Gruinart Floods, Islay on 20 December were also unusual for the time of year (per James How). A flock of 42 were at Carry Point, Ardlamont, Cowal on 10 November (Tom Callan) and 51 were at Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 17 January (Jim Dickson).

Red Knot. One at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 11 November was unusual for the time of year (Eddie Maguire), and 32 were at Gartbreck, Islay on 18 December (per Bob Davidson).

Sanderling. A flock of 90 were in Machrihanish Bay, Kintyre on 26 November (Eddie Maguire) and 64 were at Killinallan, Islay on 12 November (James How). The highest count on Tiree was 205 at Hough Bay on 5 November and different wintering leg-flagged birds had all been ringed in Iceland.

Curlew Sandpiper. A late bird was at Sandaig, Tiree 1 – 7 November (John Bowler).

Purple Sandpiper. Numbers at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory peaked at 27 on 22 November (Eddie Maguire).

Ruff. A late male was at Balephuill, Tiree on 2 November and then at Loch a' Phuill on 4th (John Bowler).

Jack Snipe. Singles were reported at The Oa Islay on 6 January (Bob Davidson) and at The Reef, Tiree on 26 January (John Bowler).

Common Snipe. Higher counts on Tiree included 50 at Barrapol on 1 November and 45 at Loch Bhasapol on 18 November (John Bowler).

Woodcock. Approx. 100 birds were flushed by Snipe shooters on Tiree on both 16 and 17 November. Unprecedented numbers for the island (John Bowler) but perhaps giving some indication of the large numbers of this species present in Argyll in winter. Eight were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 20 November (James How) and two were in Ardkinglas Woodland Garden, Loch Fyne on 13 November (Glyn Toplis).

Bar-tailed Godwit. A count at Gartbreck, Islay found 236 birds on 20 November (Bob Davidson), 524 were counted at Loch Gruinart on 20 December (per Mary McGregor and Crystal Maw) and 21 in Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 28 January was a good total for this location (Jim Dickson).

Eurasian Curlew. A flock 345 were at Westport Marsh, the Laggan, Kintyre on 5 November (Eddie Maguire), 64 were in Holy Loch, Cowal during the WeBS count on 16 November (George Newall), 100 were at Stinky Hole, Campbeltown Loch on 12 January (Paul Daw), 157 were counted at Loch Gruinart on 24 January (per Mary McGregor and Crystal Maw) and 47 were at Otter Ferry on 26 January (Tom Callan).

Greenshank. Four were found at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 12 January (per James How).

Turnstone. A total of 58 were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 19 November (per Mary McGregor and David Mason), 92 were in the Otter Ferry area on 12 December (Tom Callan), 73 were at Gartbreck, Islay on 18 December (Bob Davidson) and 190 were at the Ruaig machair, Tiree on 27 January (John Bowler).

Grey Phalarope. One was seen in the Sound of Islay on 25 November (per James How).



2nd winter Glaucous Gull, Ormsary Water ©Jim Dickson

SKUAS, GULLS, TERNS and AUKS (see also Seabirds)

above):

WHITE-WINGED GULL INFLUX. Following the storm on 5th January exceptional numbers of Iceland and Glaucous Gulls appeared in parts on Argyll. On the morning of 20 February a search for them from Cairnbaan to Oban carried out by Jim Dickson produced total of 9 Glaucous Gulls, 15 Iceland Gulls and 3 Kumlien's Gulls. They were found at: Loch Crinan: Adult and two first winter Glaucous and a first winter Iceland; Dunchraigaig (north of Killinochonoch): Adult Glaucous, 3 first winter and 2 second winter Iceland and a first winter and adult Kumlien's Gull; Slockavulin: second winter Iceland; Craobh Haven: first winter Glaucous and first winter Iceland; Barbreck: second winter Glaucous and 2 second winter with 4 first winter Iceland; Kames (Kilmelford): ad Kumlien's, first winter Glaucous, second winter Iceland and Oban Bay: first winter and second winter Glaucous, first winter Iceland. At least 15 different Iceland Gulls, 9 different Glaucous Gulls and a first winter Kumlien's Gull were seen on Tiree in January (John Bowler).

Jim Dickson produced the following provisional total for Argyll on 27 January "now that the Islay situation is much clearer, where min. 36 Iceland and 20 Glaucous Gulls gives us an overall Argyll total of **50 Glaucous** and **139 Iceland's** (of which 8 Kumlien's type). There are still a few areas not covered or covered well." His latest view is that "Since then there have been lots of new birds in various areas but the general picture is of a pretty massive event....though probably not unique but just well observed by a few committed birders (or birder that should be committed!).

The biggest numbers were at Barbreck/Ardfern where 14 were found by Bill Allan (13 Iceland & 1 Glaucous). Also this event has put Kumlien's on the map in Argyll with all age groups and 10+ birds reported and well photographed. Many birds are still around from original storms on 1st & 3rd Jan and it looks like a few have been predated, particularly at Barbreck...by mink/ with corpses lying about the fields."

Mainland and Mull locations include the following:

Tayinloan: 2w Glaucous

Mull: Iceland Gruline/Killiechronan: 4x2w, ad Iceland; Tobermory 3 x Iceland (unaged); Aros Bay: 1x Iceland (un-aged) 1x Glaucous (un-aged); Loch Beg: 2w Glaucous; Treshnish: 1w Iceland; Calgary: 1w Iceland; Salen Bay: 1x Iceland (un-aged) 1x Glaucous (un-aged); Caliach/ Langamull: 2w Iceland; Kilninian Beach: 1x Glaucous (un-aged); Ross of Mull/Pennyghael: 2w, ad, 1w Iceland, 1w Glaucous

North Argyll: Benderloch: Iceland 3 (1w, 2w, 3w); South Shian: ad Iceland; Dunbeg: Iceland adult, 1w Iceland 1 thayer's/kumliens Taynuilt Pier area: Ad, 3x1w, 2x2w (1 poss kumliens), 1x3w Iceland, and 1w Kumlien's, 1w Glaucous

Oban: 1w Iceland, 1w, 2w Glaucous,

Loch Feochan: 1w Iceland

Kilmelford/Kames: 2x1w, 2w Iceland, 1w Glaucous

Craobh Haven: 1w Iceland, 1w, 2w Glaucous

Ardfern: 5x1w, 2w, 3xad/3w Iceland 2w Kumlien's and 2x1w Kumlien's, 1w Glaucous

Killinochonoch: ad, 2w, 3x1w Iceland, 1w Kumlien's and ad Kumlien's 18.1

Add Estuary: Iceland 1w Glaucous 1w

Lochgilphead: 1w, ad Iceland (poss same 1w Bridgend)

Ormsary: 2 ads, 3w, 2w, 3x 1w Iceland, 1w, 2w Glaucous

Port Ban: Kilberry: 2w Iceland, 1w, 2w Glaucous

Tarbert: 1w, 2w Iceland

Cowal: Otter Ferry: ad, 2x2w Iceland, 1w, 2x2w Glaucous

Rhunahorhine Point: Iceland ad

Ronachan Point: 1w, 3x2w Iceland

Machrihanish Water: Iceland 1w

Muasdale: 1w Iceland

Stewarton: ad Iceland

Southend: Iceland 3w

Kittiwake. A total of 1,130 flew S at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in 3hrs on 1 November. Unusually, this mainly inshore passage occurred in a light S breeze (Eddie Maguire).

Arctic Tern. Two late juveniles were at Hynish, Tiree on 1 November (John Bowler).

Black Guillemot. Present daily at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, although the highest count on sea was just 7 on 4 November. Continues to be very scarce in Machrihanish Bay area and offshore (Eddie Maguire).

Little Auk. One was feeding with other auks off Arinagour, Coll on 15 November (John Bowler).

DOVES, OWLS, WOODPECKERS etc.:

Barn Owl. One was seen well at Loch an Eilein, Tiree early on the morning of 11 December (John Bowler), one was at Otter Ferry on 20 December (Tom Callan), one was over the meadows N of Lochgilphead on 20 January (Jim Dickson) and one was seen floating across the main road S of Inveraray on the way back from the ABC Committee meeting on 2 February (Katie Pendreigh/Paul Daw).

Short-eared Owl. Four or five were around Treshnish, Mull at sunset on 13 November (Anand Prasad), one was on road at Teretegan, Knapdale on 6 November (Mark Williamson) and one was at Easter Ellister, Islay on 7 January (per Jane Dawson).

Common Kingfisher. One seen at Ardkinglas, Loch Fyne on 14 November appeared there again on 12 January (Glyn Toplis). One at the jetty near Taynuilt, Mid-Argyll on 28 January has been present for much of the winter (Jill Moore per Jim Dickson).

PASSERINES:

Barn Swallow. A single very late bird came in off the sea at Machrihanish on 29 November (Eddie Maguire).

Pied Wagtail. Approx. 55 were at Ardlamont, Cowal on 15 December (Tom Callan).

Ring Ouzel. Single first winter birds were with other thrushes on Tiree, at Balephuill on 7 November and at Carnan Mor on 20 November (John Bowler).

Blackbird. An obvious arrival was noted in Kintyre from 5 – 10 November, with many around Machrihanish village and throughout The Laggan. On 10 November, a drive around the perimeter of Campbeltown Airport revealed a total of at least 180 birds (many small flocks of 6-10 noted and a larger gathering of about 18 birds near West Parkfergus) (Eddie Maguire). Very large numbers were also reported on Tiree with some 500 birds around the island on 16-17 November (John Bowler). A similar pattern was reported in Cowal and Mid-Argyll and 20 or so were at Otter Ferry on 8 November (Tom Callan). On Islay, approx. 100 were at Gleann Mor on 9

November (Bob Davidson) and on Mull, ca300 were seen between Calgary and Ulva on 8 November (Alasdair Dawes per Anand Prasad) with hundreds reported along the Dervaig-Salen road (Dave Sexton per Anand Prasad) on 15 November. **Although there is always a notable influx of Blackbirds to Argyll at this time of year numbers do seem to have been exceptional this autumn.**

Fieldfare. On Mull, a loose mixed flock of ca200 Fieldfares and Redwings arrived at Ensay on 4 November (Anand Prasad). A large arrival was seen at The Laggan, Kintyre from 5 November, with many hundreds scattered around the periphery of Campbeltown Airport and surrounding farmlands. Around 800 were present at the airport on 9 November and what was thought to be a pre-roost assembly of this species (and Redwing) at Aros Moss just before dusk on the 10 November turned into a spectacular sight. The birds were silent, silhouetted like blankets of leaves on the tops of all the extensive (nearly bare) willow scrub on the Moss. An estimated 1,500 birds suddenly started calling and all took off simultaneously, climbing high into an almost clear but darkening sky; presumably the commencement of nocturnal migration (Eddie Maguire). About 10 were enjoying wild cherries at the top of Loch Creran during the WeBS count on 25 November (Robin Harvey) and approx. 500 were in a mixed flock with Redwings at Rockside, Islay on 26 November (Bob Davidson). The influx on Tiree in late October continued on Tiree with some 600 birds around the island on 16-17 November. There were still good numbers in December and January, including 250 around the west of the island on 15 December (John Bowler). A flock of 55 were in Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll on 6 January (Jim Dickson), 36 were near Millhouse, Cowal on 16 January (Tom Callan) and 75 were at Slockavullin on 12 February (Jim Dickson).

Redwing. An obvious arrival took place in Kintyre from 5 November with hundreds at The Laggan, but certainly not as abundant as Fieldfare this autumn (Eddie Maguire). Similar comments about the shortage of Redwings were made by observers in Cowal and Mid-Argyll. However a total of 460 were seen at Raslie Burn, Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll on 9 November (Jim Dickson). And on Tiree, some 1,200 birds were around the island on 16-17 November, still some 800 on 15 December and 140 between Balinoe and Hynish on 17 January (John Bowler). A group of 25 were near Ardlamont Point, Cowal on 15 December (Tom Callan).

Mistle Thrush. A mixed flock of thrushes at Otter Ferry on 4 November included 24 Mistle Thrushes (Tom Callan).

Blackcap. Males were reported at Inveraray on 5 November (Robin Harvey) and Ardfarn, Mid-Argyll on 27/28 November (Julia Randall). Singles were found at various locations around Tiree 1 – 21 November (John Bowler).

Common Chiffchaff. On Tiree, green-grey *abietinus*-type birds were at Balephuill on 5 -6 November and at Balephetrish Hill on 21 November (John Bowler).

Eurasian Nuthatch. Present on a daily basis during November, on nut feeder at the nursery, Ardkinglas, Loch Fyne. They disappeared for some time after the storm on 5

January but were seen again in 12 January (Glyn Toplis).

Brown Shrike. The first winter bird at Balephuill, Tiree was seen again at Balephuill 1 – 7 November and was last seen at Carnan Mor on 20 November (John Bowler).

Eurasian Jay. Seven were in trees at Otter Ferry on 5 December (Tom Callan) and 6 were at Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor on 5 January (Jim Dickson).

Red-billed Chough. Fifty were counted at Ardnave, Islay on 9 November (James How and Mary McGregor).

Western Jackdaw. One at Heylipol on 5 January was an unusual visitor to Tiree (John Bowler)

Common Starling. A flock of approx. 1,000 were at Gruinart Flats, Islay on 14 December (Bob Davidson) and at least 600 were on a field at Aros, The Laggan, Kintyre on 12 January (Paul Daw).

Tree Sparrow. Late news! We were recently informed about two birds seen and photographed in a garden at Kilbride, Seil Island, Mid-Argyll feeding on grain dropped from a bird feeder on 9 April (Richard Allan).

Common Chaffinch. A flock of 150 were near Ardlamont Point, Cowal on 15 December (Tom Callan).

Brambling. A female type/first-winter was seen (and photographed) regularly at the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory feeding station 7 – 23 November (Eddie Maguire). Two males were at Balephuill, Tiree on 4 November (John Bowler), a female was in the garden at Connel, ma' on 5 December (Mike Harrison) and one was on a garden bird feeder at Kilchoman, Islay on 18 December (per I. & M. Brooke).

Greenfinch. A flock of 16 were at Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor on 17 January (Jim Dickson).

Twite. So far this autumn 17 Machrihanish Seabird Observatory colour-ringed birds have been reported. These include sightings as far apart as Lothian, Northumberland, Essex and Co Wexford (Eddie Maguire). The largest flock on Tiree was 120 at Barrapol on 16 November (John Bowler), ca300 were at Kinnabus, Oa, Islay on 30 November (per David Wood) and five were seen in the Add Estuary on 9 November (Jim Dickson). A total of 510 were found during the farmland bird count at The Oa, Islay on 5 December (per David Wood).

Lapland Bunting. A very vocal bird was with Twite at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree and another was calling in flight south over Balephuill both on 21 November. Two were with Common Starlings at The Reef on 23 January (John Bowler).

Snow Bunting. One was seen (and photographed) regularly at the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory car park 4 – 11 November (Eddie Maguire). Four were at Gott Bay, Tiree on 1 November, one was at Loch an Eilein on 7 November (John Bowler) and two were at Machir Bay, Islay on 5 November (Bob Davidson). Three were at Hynish, Tiree on 4 January (John Bowler) and 3 were at The Oa, Islay on 9 January (per Neil Glenn).

Reed Bunting. A flock of 23 were found at Moulin, Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 17 December (per Mary McGregor).

Paul Daw: 02.03.2012

Articles for the March issue of the *Eider* should with the Editor before the 24th February 2012

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2010/2011)

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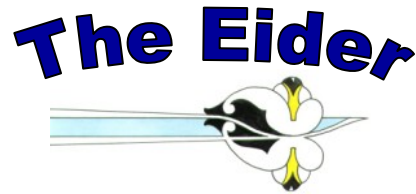
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The mystery bird is a House Sparrow



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 digital photographs (jpeg files preferred) of birds and their habitats to the editor. Digital photographs of Schedule 1 species taken at or near the nest will not be accepted for publication unless the photographer was covered by an appropriate SNH licence.

The *Eider* is published during the first week of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor before the 24th 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. 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 annual *Argyll Bird Report*. Additional or past copies can be purchased from the Treasurer. Your annual subscription entitles you to one copy of the *Argyll Bird Report*, four issues of the *Eider* and free admission to the two indoor meetings. New members are always welcome, whether you live in Argyll or not. Membership categories and rates are:

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

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