

No. 103
Feb. 2013

The Eider



The Eider no. 103 – February 2013

Contents

Editorial p.2

Forthcoming Field Trips p. 2

Notice – Scottish Bird Fair p. 3

Field Trip Report – Bute p.3

Winter Thrush Survey Update p. 6

Not the ABC Field Trip p. 7

National Patchwork Challenge p.7

Common Redstart Status p. 13

Appeal for Colour-ringed Gull Records p. 16

2013 Woodcock Survey p. 16

Obituary – Geoffrey Matthews p. 17

Cover photo – Glaucous Gull, Ormsary, by Errol Crutchfield.

Editorial

This issue will be my last as editor. Steve Petty will be taking over from me, and so any future articles should be sent to him, at stevepetty@btinternet.com.

Thanks to all those who helped with my editing of the previous issues.

Stuart Crutchfield

Forthcoming ABC Field Trips

Saturday 6 April 2013 Sound of Gigha

Contact person Paul Daw: monedula@globalnet.co.uk or 01546 886260

Saturday 20 April 2013 Appin (John Muir Day)

Contact person Nigel Scriven: njscriven@gmail.com or 01505 706652

Saturday 25 May 2013 Clachan (West Loch Tarbert)

Contact person Katie Pendreigh: katiependreigh@aol.com or 01583 441359

Saturday 22 June 2013 Sanda (from Campbeltown harbour)

Contact person Nigel Scriven: njscriven@gmail.com or 01505 706652

Saturday 27 July 2013 Loch Gilp, Crinan and Add Estuary

Contact person Tom Callan: callansatcorra@aol.com or 01700 821212

Scottish Bird Fair - 11 & 12 May

After the successful first Scottish Birdfair last year, it is to be repeated in May. Once again it is at Hopetoun House, near Edinburgh. The full programme of events includes world-class speakers, bird ringing demonstrations, and workshops on Photography, foraging, bushcraft, arts and crafts, cookery and more. State of the art optics and wildlife art are amongst the range of exhibitors on display.

As usual, they will be looking for volunteer helpers to help the event run smoothly, getting you privileged access. For more details, go to www.scottishbirdfair.org.uk

Argyll Bird Club – Field Trip Report

Bute – 24th February 2013

On a bright clear morning 15 ABC members met Ian Hopkins, Doug Menzies and Ann Foster of the Bute Bird Club at the Rhubodach ferry slip for a trip round the island's birding hot-spots. Once settled in the school bus we made away along the shore to Kames Bay noting Goldeneye, Mergansers and Little Grebe off-shore and some thrushes (Mistle Thrush and Fieldfare) which had arrived with the recent settled weather in the adjoining fields.

After a short stop at Kames Bay where Ringed Plover and Turnstone were added to the list we moved on to Ettrick Bay on the west coast. The fine sunny weather had brought out the dog-walkers and a high tide meant that sightings were restricted, but in the quieter corner of the bay Shelduck and Wigeon were seen along with a small group of waders, including 2 Dunlin, and 6 Bar-tailed Godwits were scoped well along the beach. We relocated to the south side of the bay

and managed to pick out a Red-throated Diver on the glassy sea.

Our next stop was at St Ninian's Bay where there was a Reed Bunting perched on the dyke and Skylarks started to sing in the sunshine. Off-shore a mystery grebe created a good debate, Tom Callan called it as Red-necked, but others erred towards a moulting Slavonian on the basis that 'common things are common and rare things are rare'. However, the length of the bill and general structure of the silhouette against the light did suggest Red-necked..... A short drive round to the east side of the bay quickly established that Tom had made a 'good shout' as the yellow base was clearly visible in the better light confirming it as only the third record of Red-necked Grebe on Bute.



Red-necked Grebe, St Ninian's Bay, 24 February 2013 (Photo: David Palmar)

A search of the fields to the south failed to find any White-fronted Geese amongst the large numbers of Greylags in the fields, so we headed on to overlook Scalpsie Bay; where 2 Great Northern Diver and Kestrel were seen as the lunch order was phoned in to the Kingarth Hotel, our next stop. But even here the day's bird list didn't stop rising with Collared Dove spied out the window as we tucked into some warm fare.

After lunch as we walked down to the Quien Loch hide around 25 Song Thrushes, also part of the spring arrival, moved out of the kale crop into the hedge ahead of us. On the loch was a pair of Great-Crested Grebe, Coot, Tufted Duck and more Goldeneye. The beautiful late afternoon light on the Teal and Wigeon allowed us to enjoy the brightness of their plumage.

Nigel Scriven claimed it was the magic hour of evening light as we arrived at Greenan Loch, where a small group of Whooper Swan and a female Goosander were of interest amongst the waterfowl. And so on to the Kirk Dam where amongst large numbers of duck there were more

Whooper Swans and a few Moorhens, and a Great Spotted Woodpecker flew into an adjoining tree. Ian's i-phone caused some confusion, both to members and the local Water Rail, which promptly called in response; regrettably they stayed well hidden in the reeds.



Members returning from the Kirk Dam hide (Photo – David Jardine)

A quick comfort break was taken at Rothesay Pier where around 25 Pied Wagtails gathered in a pre-roost, before Ian took us all back in time for the 17.30 hrs ferry. While the weather played its part, Ian's local knowledge meant that a great day's birding was had, with a total of 66 species noted.

David Jardine

Winter Thrush Survey Progress

As I write this (30 Jan 2013), I have checked on the number of squares surveyed, and who has been doing them. Despite my notes in the Eider, and my appeal at the Bird Club meeting, uptake so far has been miserly, to put it frankly.

I don't know why this should be, although it's not difficult to speculate. Are potential surveyors having a rest after 4 winters of Atlas fieldwork? Are surveyors put off by the instruction sheet? Are they put off by submitting the routes and results on-line? Are they put off by the misunderstanding that only core squares can be surveyed? Or is it something else?

The Main Argyll BTO area also includes Bute, Arran, Gigha, Lismore, Scarba, Kerrera & Seil. In Main Argyll area there are 20 Core Squares. The purpose of the core squares is to prioritise that

these randomly selected squares are all surveyed in the core period of 27 Dec to 10 January.

Of these 20 squares, 1 square (NM7014) is a tiny skerry between Easedale and the Garvellachs, which is completely pointless. One square is on Arran and has been adopted by Jim Cassells. Of the remaining 18, 5 are in remote or mountainous areas, and so have considerable access challenges. Despite this David Jardine managed to survey the square on Lunga Island next to Scarba (NM7008) during the core period.

Of the remaining 13 squares, I am doing one at Corlarach near Innellan, so that leaves 12 up for grabs. Of these, 4 are near habitation, and not difficult to get to, and the remaining 8 are accessible although not quite so handy to get to, and near to where I know birders live.

However, **YOU CAN TAKE PART WITHOUT DOING A CORE SQUARE**, and in fact **YOU CAN EVEN DO IT ON YOUR LOCAL PATCH**. I'm beginning to think "Not a lot of people know that!"

If you have a local patch with a regular circuit of about 1 to 2 miles, taking an hour or so to amble round while you're out birding, it will qualify. It doesn't have to be all within a 1 km square. It can wander in and out of a block of 9 squares (3 by 3), but be centred on the square you use to identify it. You don't even have to see any thrushes! Negative results do count. They may not be so interesting, but you might see something else that is. I didn't see any when I did my core square, but I did when I did my self-selected square near Benmore Gardens.

Anyway it's a great excuse to get out more, and to contribute data from your local patch. If you're not sure about the methodology, I suggest you download the instructions (www.bto.org) and try it out without registering on the website. That may give you the confidence to try it again, to register the square and then submit the results after you have done it. There are now some BTO video tutorials on Utube to help you with the online entering of data. You can access them from the WTS survey pages on the BTO website.

You can do it as often or as little as you like, although it is preferred that it be roughly monthly if that is feasible. If you are going to an area that you can only visit once, that is not a problem either. Any data will be making a contribution. The data processing will be computerised, and can handle large datasets, so volume of data is less of a problem than lack of data.

There are 5 people so far that have done self selected squares. Thanks to them, and well done.

The survey runs to the middle of April. Happy birding!

Nigel Scriven, WTS Organiser.

Not the Argyll Bird Club Field Trip 2/12/12

In early July my wife & I made a decision to pay a visit to Tyneside where we still hold fond but hazy memories of student days there in the late 1970s. It had been seven years since we'd last visited & a pre-Christmas break sounded like a good idea. At the time the hotel was booked it was anticipated that the Bird Club field trip would be on the last Saturday of November & arrangements were made to head south and east over the first weekend in December. What I hadn't bargained on was the date of the Bird Club field trip being put back a week so that consecutive weekends wouldn't be taken up by Bird Club activities - the 17th November being the indoor meeting & AGM. This was particularly annoying as I'd been looking forward to a trip

round my own area under the expert guidance of Jim Dickson & for one reason or another I'd missed two previous opportunities.

Putting the disappointment of missing Jim's trip aside I was hoping that we might manage an opportunity to revisit some old haunts that weren't necessarily pubs. My first pair of binoculars (Zeiss Jenoptem 8*30) were bought in Newcastle and that's where my interest in birdwatching really started. I have no notes of those early days but it's nearly always the case that some memories stand out - my first sighting of a redwing, the shock of a grey partridge making a noisy and hasty departure from almost under my feet. The latter were common in the arable fields around where I lived in the area near the airport but development has since been extensive and I wonder how many there are now? At this time I was familiar with common garden birds but the redwing was identified with the help of my only reference - The Observers Book of British Birds. Am I the only Bird Club member who started out using this book as a guide? Fortunately it wasn't long before I received a Collins field guide as a present and there was no looking back.

Newcastle's city centre birdwatching speciality – 250+ pairs of Kittiwakes – had long since departed by December but we decided to see if we could work a bit of birding into our weekend itinerary. My last year on Tyneside was spent out at the coast at Whitley Bay which was bounded by farmland to the north and with good numbers of waders on the shore in winter. In addition to the usual redshank, dunlin, turnstone, curlew, ringed plovers & oystercatchers, sanderling were always plentiful & purple sandpipers were fairly common in the area up near St Mary's Island with its tidal causeway and attractive lighthouse. Short eared owls were regular visitors to the nearby farmland in winter and another still-vivid memory is of a close encounter with one whilst out on my bike. I'd stopped for a rest to check over the nearby fields & just as I was setting my binoculars a short eared owl floated up to within 10 feet of where I was standing, gave me a long, piercing & slightly intimidating look & floated away on its hunt for food. All without a sound – magical. What chance of a similar encounter thirty-odd years on?

We headed out on the Metro train to the coast on a sunny but freezing day in the hope of at least seeing local birds that are not regular in Argyll. Following a reviving cup of tea and sausage bap at the reassuringly unchanged & traditional Rendezvous Café on the promenade we headed off up to St Mary's Island. It was a beautiful day & the doggie walkers were out in their dozens; my optimism for seeing a good collection of waders faded rapidly. However, as we reached the end of the beach there were good numbers of sanderling scurrying along the shoreline along with the other more common waders but no sign of purple sandpipers which I was particularly keen to see. I paid particular attention to a mixed flock of gulls offshore. If there was a Mediterranean gull amongst them it would be something to note because it was almost inevitable that Jim would find one for his trip around Loch Gilp. A few rock pipits were flitting about in seaweed close to the sea wall & then something just makes you freeze & take a proper look. I'm certainly glad I did stop to check as there amongst the pipits was a female black redstart – highlight of the day & certainly never recorded by me in that area before.

It was low tide so we strolled across the causeway to the lighthouse but other than the odd shag and cormorant there was little to see, other than the fine view. Walking back along the sea wall we could see lots of redshank and turnstones amongst the rocks below and then a solitary purple sandpiper was spotted – excellent. We headed off to the bus stop past the pitch and putt course which was providing good foraging ground for curlew, oystercatcher and redshank and a single bar tailed godwit which was a bit unexpected on the area of grass. There was no sign of a short eared owl but it was certainly an interesting visit 30 years on; the black redstart was without doubt an unexpected species and some compensation for missing Jim's local trip.

Returning to Argyll I checked the Argyll Bird Club's website & there was a report of the Sunday trip including a Mediterranean Gull. Well done, Jim. I would imagine there were one or two well pleased with that sighting and the others on what appeared to have been a good trip. I also had a look at the Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club website and was interested to see a report from the same area that we'd walked including the single godwit, purple sandpiper and black redstart. The report suggested I hadn't missed anything which was reassuring. I was also interested to read about the number of birding spots and variety of species that are local to North Tyneside. Whilst north Northumberland and the Farne Islands are well known birding spots, anyone wishing to mix a bit of birding in with a break in a fine city then Newcastle and North Tyneside comes recommended.

Malcolm Chattwood

National PatchWork Challenge- Some Argyll Birdwatchers Take Part!

Most keen birdwatchers have a favourite patch in which to engage in their hobby. With frequent visits and local knowledge of habitats and birds to be found in each season a 'patchworker' is often the local expert for their particular area, able to see and record birds that are often missed by the more casual observer. Over time the number of species seen builds up and there is great anticipation awaiting the arrival of summer or even winter visitors and also what the spring and autumn migrations will produce.

To enhance the enjoyment of working your own patch and even add a little bit of competitive edge 2013 has seen the start of the Patchwork Challenge across Great Britain and Ireland. Very simply each patchworker records the species found in their defined patch which is mapped out and restricted to a maximum of 3 km square of any shape. Birds must be seen while the observer is in the patch, hence birds far out to sea or over distant fields or hills can be added. Each species is given a score and is weighted by the level of scarcity between 1 and 5 as taken from the Birdguides scarce/rarity gradings. Obviously some areas of the country will be more species rich than others therefore to overcome this comparative scores for each patch are calculated based on species and scores for a patch over the last two years. This may all sound a bit overly complicated but is actually quite straightforward once you get started...honest! For more details and explanation please look up patchworkchallenge.blogspot.co.uk

So far around 230 birdwatchers have 'signed up' to the challenge with 42 in Scotland and seven in Argyll: John Bowler (Balephuill, Tiree); Stuart Crutchfield (Ormsary, Mid-Argyll); Jim Dickson (Crinan Canal Corridor, Mid-Argyll); Simon Pinder (Taynuilt); Anand Prasad (Treshnish, Mull); Bryan Rains (Pennyghael, Mull) and Alan Reid (Innellan, Cowal). So far Islay is not represented but it is not too late if anyone else wants to join in. The table below shows the scores for all Scottish coastal patches up to the end of January. Scores will obviously change as the year progresses....

Table showing Scottish 'mini-league' for coastal patches (taken from Patchwork blog)

Coastal Scotland					
Position	Name	Patch	Species	Points	%
1	John Bowler	Balephuill, Isle of Tiree	77	99	39.1304
2	Paul H	Quoyangry	71	97	42.1739
3	Tristan	Stornoway	75	96	N/A
4	Chris H	Burntisland	80	95	66.9014
5	Jim Dickson	Crinan Canal Corridor	74	87	42.8571
6	Barrie H	Burray	62	80	N/A
7	Ian T	Askernish	53	74	52.8571
8	YvonneB	Askernish	57	71	52.5925
9	Alastair F	Old Nisthouse	60	69	47.9166
10	Gary Bell	Sumburgh	51	67	27.4590
11	Stuart Crutchfield	Ormsary	57	67	N/A
12	Bryan Rains	Pennyghael, Mull	54	66	47.1428
13	Mark Hammonds	Findon	58	65	N/A
14	Mark Lewis	Girdle ness	52	64	37.982
15	Phil C	The Gramps	54	62	N/A
16	Ali Shuttleworth	Inverkeithing	55	59	35.9756
17	A.Whitehouse	Girdle Ness and Torry	48	57	33.8278
18	Alastair F	Birsay	35	46	N/A
19	Jack McArdle	Linlithgow	42	44	N/A
20	Dave W	Burray	37	43	N/A
21	Alan Reid	Innellan	0	0	N/A
22	Anand Prasad	Treshnish, Mull	0	0	
23	Douglas Moore	Prestwick	0	0	N/A
24	John Harrison	Aberlady	0	0	
25	Mark Newell	Isle of May	0	0	N/A
26	Rob Fray	Virkie/Toab/Exnaboe	0	0	
27	Andy Webb	Old Portlethen	0	0	

Hopefully all the Argyll 'patchworkers' will get a chance to introduce and describe their patch.....habitats, the birds and what their patch means to them. Included here are accounts of the Balephuill patch on Tiree and the Crinan Canal Corridor in Mid-Argyll. Later in the year we hope to give progress reports.

Balephuill, Tìree 'Patch' by John Bowler



At a maximum of 12 miles long and 3 to 4 miles wide, Tìree is a good size for keeping a local list. Not too big to cover (although it can sometimes feel that way at migration times) and big enough to sustain bird-interest year round. Indeed for nearly 12 years this has been my local patch and in that time I've seen around 255 species there. I therefore found it hard to delineate my 3km patch for the challenge. What to include? Well my local gardens at Balephuill were a no-brainer, the best cover for miles, sheltered from SW storms by the highest peak on the island (Ben Hynish), provide a constant turnover of passerine migrants in spring and autumn, all easily watched from my upstairs office window, where I spend a lot of my time (working obviously!). Equally, the nearby willow scrub and hawthorns at Carnan Mor have had a long history of pulling in migrants, plus harbour a broad selection of breeding birds such as Wren, Willow Warbler, Stonechat and Lesser Redpoll that are otherwise very scarce on the island, whilst the roadside willows and elders at Main Road Farm have had their moments too (mostly involving Yellow-browed Warblers), so both areas had to go in.

Loch a' Phuill, a shallow, weedy loch lying at the western edge of Balephuill township, is the largest water-body on the island and is home to a rich array of wintering and breeding waterfowl. Its south-westerly position and muddy shores act as a magnet for migrating waterbirds including annual Nearctic ducks and waders, as well as passing terns and gulls (plus an Ascension Island Frigatebird in July 1953!), so it had to be included too. This didn't leave much room for a coastal section but I managed to stretch the boundary to include the adjacent beach at Traigh Bhi. Not a major birding hotspot, but the bay should allow me to add in the commoner seabirds, seaducks and divers, although I may struggle to observe passage shearwaters and skuas from its rather sheltered confines – we shall see! A short stretch of rocky shore should add Rock Pipit and Purple Sandpiper and that's about it. The resulting odd-shaped polygon includes tracts of crofting country that I usually pass by on my way to more favoured sites, so I will need to work on these more closely. The reedy ditches and meadows are home to Corncrakes, Water Rails and breeding waders, and could easily harbour lurking migrants, whilst the roadside wires held a Lesser Grey Shrike in August 2009, perhaps hinting at the potential of these areas.

The island never sees large falls of drift migrants but small numbers occur when conditions are right (usually easterly breezes with light rain over night). 2012 was a good year on Tìree with 4 new species added to the island list: Subalpine Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Citrine Wagtail and Buff-bellied Pipit – with the first three species all turning up in the Balephuill patch. These

additions bring the T'ree list very close to a total of 300 species. I didn't keep a full list of the new Balephuill patch last year (and didn't focus my efforts there) but it tallied an unofficial total of around 153 species within its boundaries including such scarcities as Marsh Warbler, Barred Warbler, Common Rosefinch, Golden Oriole, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Ring-necked Duck and Green-winged Teal, giving a score of about 253 for 2012. The patch has seen one or two "mega-rarities" in recent years including Northern Parula in 2010 and Brown Shrike in 2011, but none in 2012, so here's hoping 2013 can top this.... By late January 2013, I had seen 74 species on the patch scoring 94 points with top birds being an adult Iceland Gull and a Jackdaw (latter less than annual on T'ree!).



The Crinan Canal is a well know man made geographic feature of the Mid-Argyll landscape running nine miles between Ardrishaig on Loch Gilp to the east and Crinan on Loch Crinan in the west. Completed in 1801 the canal provides a navigable route between Loch Fyne and the Sound of Jura. Living roughly halfway along the canal at Cairnbaan I tend to split my local birding time between Loch Gilp on the one side and the Add Estuary on the other side and now know the area well since moving there in 1998.

My initial challenge was how to incorporate both these good birding areas into one patch bearing in mind that the patch should be limited to 3 square kms! To do this I have kept entirely within the rules (honest!) and made my patch follow the road from the south side of Ardrishaig where seawatching can be carried out looking far across Loch Fyne. From there the road is followed to Crinan with off shoots into Cairnbaan village where garden birding can be included and also a loop around to Loch Crinan across the Moine Mhor. The downside to a patch shaped like an anorexic two-headed snake is that all my birding has to be done from the road however as Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary are usually best observed from various road stop off points this should not limit the number of species seen too much (hopefully!).

One thing about living and birding on mainland Argyll is that you quickly realise that the Inner

Hebrides tend to get the lion's share of species recorded in the region and also see much more passage numbers of both waders and unusual passerines. What I have found over the last decade or so in Mid-Argyll is that the range of species is not too far behind the likes of Islay or Tiree however numbers of each species are much less with things like waders occurring as a tiny fraction of say Loch Gruinart. In order to see a good range of species a significant amount of effort is involved and use of local knowledge combined with tuning into what various wind directions and sea conditions may produce off each side of the peninsula.

Highlight sightings over the last few years have been almost entirely at the Add Estuary or Loch Gilp ends of the patch although Crinan Wood has a good range of warblers and woodland species. The Moine Mhor can attract a good variety of raptors as well as things like Short-eared Owl, Cuckoo, Whinchat, Skylark and some goose species unlikely elsewhere in the patch. My garden at Cairnbaan now has a list surpassing 90 species although many species are 'flyovers' a Dipper sitting on top of the garden wall was a bit unexpected.

Loch Gilp has now produced a fair proportion of all Argyll Mediterranean Gull records with other good gulls including Ring-billed, Kumlien's, Iceland, Glaucous and Little. On the loch, Smew, Red-necked and Slavonian Grebe, Brent Goose, Greater Scaup, Pintail, Long-tailed Duck have been seen and Little Auk, Bonxie, Velvet Scoter and Manx Shearwater further out into Loch Fyne. On the mud and around the edges there have been Snowy and Little Egret, Kingfisher, Grey Phalarope and Pectoral Sandpiper. At the Add Estuary/Loch Crinan end, American Golden Plover, Baird's Sandpiper, Little Stint, Wood Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, American Wigeon, White-tailed Eagle, Little Egret, Shoveler, Kumlien's Gull, Little and Mediterranean Gull are some of the highlights that come to mind. Other birdwatchers have also recorded things such as Green-winged Teal, Marsh Harrier, Rudy Duck and Long-billed Dowitcher in the past so the potential for more species in the future is definitely there. Last year an adult Bonaparte's Gull put in an appearance for over a week in early August and was only the third record for Argyll and helped the patch list toward an end of year total of 150 species and 203 points. In total it is likely that the patch as outlined has achieved somewhere around 185 recorded species. By mid-February I have now seen 84 species on the patch scoring 106 points with best species so far being Velvet Scoter, Slavonian Grebe, White-tailed and Golden Eagles, Kingfisher, Little Auk and Black-throated Diver.

The goal for this year would be to try and reach last year's total with maybe a few surprises on the way. Some species may prove tricky to find e.g. Purple Sandpiper, Ruff, Stock Dove, Magpie, Bonxie.....however to boost the points score rare species are needed and these are always far from predictable! Ultimately the most important thing is all about the birds and hopefully the weather and hence breeding success is much better than last year.....

The Former Status of Common REDSTART IN KINTYRE - 1974-1984 (unpublished data) and 2008.

During the 1970's - 80's the status of the **Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* in Kintyre was designated by a small group of Campbeltown birders as 'a *widespread but often localised breeding summer visitor*' (Eddie Maguire, Rod Angus and the late John McGlynn; unpublished data: see accompanying map showing all locations of singing males 1974-1984 and 2008).

Prior to the publication of *Birds of Argyll*, the County Recorder indicated to Eddie Maguire (via e-mail) that there would, in due course, be discussions with Campbeltown birders re the status of passerines in Kintyre.

Disappointingly, our unpublished data was *never* requested by the County Recorder, or any of the other five editors of *Birds of Argyll*, although, many of the species accounts in that major publication includes a large amount of unpublished information from many contributors.

Consequently, the editor of **Redstart** in *Birds in Argyll* reckoned, much to our lament, that the species former summer breeding distribution in Argyll was insignificant south of Tarbert.

This hypothesis infers that its former status (in Kintyre) was comparable to that in nearby Northern Ireland, where the species is a rare and irregular breeding summer visitor and scarce passage migrant.

Not so; for many years, Campbeltown based birders were involved in ringing studies / woodland surveys, and a comprehensive survey of the distribution and breeding success of **Common Buzzard** (1979-80). We located many **Redstart** territories in Kintyre.

We also acquired an intimate knowledge of the principal broad-leaved woodland habitats (especially the policies) on this peninsula, accrued much valuable unpublished data on woodland bird communities and were adept at id of passerine melodies / calls, including the **Redstarts** rather simple, down-to-earth delivery, and, importantly, the species primary habitat preferences.

In short, we had an exclusive grasp of this species former summer breeding distribution in Kintyre. Indeed, our collective data reveals that singing males occupied favoured sites, and song posts, persistently, year after year.

The initial far-carrying, brash (Chaffinch-like) notes of a singing male **Redstart** can, in suitable weather conditions, be heard for hundreds of metres, but the short, rather pleasing jingle that immediately follows this jarring outburst can only be heard at much closer range. Song posts are, as a rule, high, often above the canopy (clandestine stuff). Both sexes do not respond favourably (if at all) to a tape lure of the species song (Maguire, unpublished data).

Although we are disheartened by the lack of communication and ultimately the omission of our important species distribution data from the Argyll publication, we do express regret; we should have had the prudence to publish, or at least forward, such a considerable volume of unpublished information (albeit, accumulated over many years). Unquestionably, this cache of data would have been a valuable contribution to the *Birds of Argyll*. However, now that our data

has appeared in The Eider, it should, eventually, find its way for inclusion in any future analysis of the species former status in Kintyre.

Incidentally, during spring / early summer 2008, John McGlynn and I carried out woodland surveys in Kintyre over a 40 day period. We visited all our **36** known **Redstart** territories and found only 3 singing males – a startling decrease of well over 90%!

Eddie Maguire and Rod Angus

C/O The Auld Shop

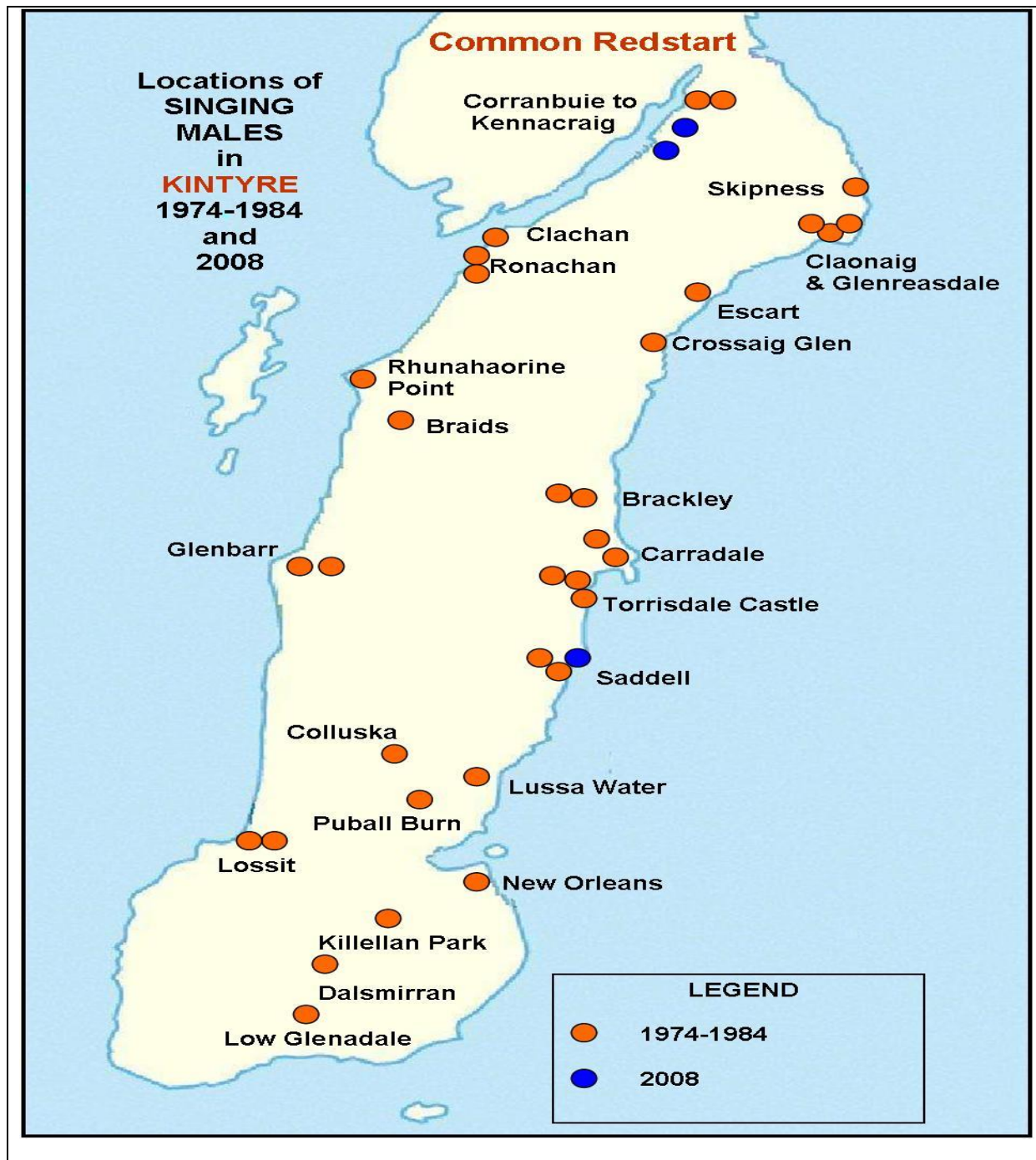
2 George Street

Killean Place

Campbeltown

Argyll PA28 6EJ

E-mail – machrihanishbirds@btinternet.com



Colour-ringed Gull Records Wanted



In the summer of 2012 the Clyde Ringing Group started a project to colour ring Herring, Lesser Black-backed, and Greater Black-backed Gulls. Birds have a BTO ring on the right leg and a tall "darvic" on the left leg: this is WHITE with RED letters/numbers (eg 1A1:C).

If you see one of these gulls, please contact **Iain Livingstone** by email iainlivcrg@gmail.com or by phone on 01698 749844, giving species, site, date and any relevant comments.

2013 BTO/GWCT Woodcock Survey

The first summer survey of Woodcock was in 2003. Initial results from the 2007-2011 Bird Atlas suggests a decrease in breeding range. This 2013 survey will be tailored to the crepuscular habits of the species, and give a more robust measure of abundance and distribution.



The survey aims to cover 1580 1-km squares which have already been randomly selected, but pinpointing woodland blocks of varying sizes. There are 805 **high priority sites** previously surveyed in 2003, and 775 **low priority sites**, which are new sites. Some sites may not hold Woodcock, but this is still valuable information. Also, if you are unable to do a high or low priority site, say if there isn't one in your area, you can choose your site to survey as an **additional site**.

4 site visits are required, an initial recce visit ideally in April at dusk to identify a good spot to observe the birds for the point count. The 3 main survey visits should be made between 1st May and 30th June, with at least a week between visits. Wet or windy weather should be avoided. The survey starts 15 minutes before sunset, and continue an hour after sunset. Each flypast and number of birds should be recorded, to the nearest minute. Woodcock calls can be found on the BTO website, along with all the instructions and field recording sheets:

www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey/resources

This survey is organised on-line and you can register to take part through the BTO website.

Obituary: Professor Geoffrey Matthews OBE

Geoffrey Matthews may not be a name known to many younger members of the Bird Club, but he was well known in the conservation world for the role he played in wildfowl and wetland conservation. In retirement he had a holiday home in Skipness, and was a member of Argyll Bird Club.

I first became aware of him when I was at university in the 1970s, and bought a booklet he wrote on bird navigation, the subject of his PhD thesis. When he was at university in Cambridge he read natural sciences but at the end of his first year in 1942 he found himself in Bomber Command, and served as a navigator on B24 Liberators in SE Asia. So after finding out how to navigate himself, when the war ended he completed his degree, and then his PhD on how birds navigate in 1950. He published the first monograph on the subject in 1955 and continued this fascination throughout his life. Also that year he was recruited to the Wildfowl Trust, founded by Peter Scott 9 years earlier, becoming director of research and conservation.

Working closely with Peter Scott, they shared a vision that the only way to save endangered waterbirds was to safeguard their wetland habitats. At that time mainstream effort had focused on saving individual species, assuming their habitats were not threatened. They instigated a programme of research, attracting scientists for all over the world. They co-ordinated systematic counts at strategic sites, and the catching and ringing of ducks, geese and swans. Revealing the extent of the birds' migration, they realised how dependent the birds were on international co-operation during their annual journeys across borders to various staging posts.

In 1956 he became the British delegate to the International Wildfowl Research Bureau, and in 1969 its Director. This is where international effort was developed, and then culminated in 1971 in Iran as the Ramsar Convention on wetlands. The 18 countries attending, including Russia and Iran, agreed to safeguard wetlands and their wildlife. Now there are 164 member states in the Convention. His expertise was also influential in working with the Nature Conservancy in the development of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

He retired from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust in 1988, continuing to write and publish. He died on 21 January 2013 aged 89. He is survived by his wife Mary and her two children, and the two children from his first marriage. His legacy lives on in the anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention on 2 February as World Wetlands Day.

Nigel Scriven