

**March 2014**  
**Number 107**

# The Eider



Drake Wigeon at Loch Gilp on 18 November 2013 ©Jim Dickson

**Recent bird sightings, pages 16-20**

**Constant effort ringing, pages 11-13**

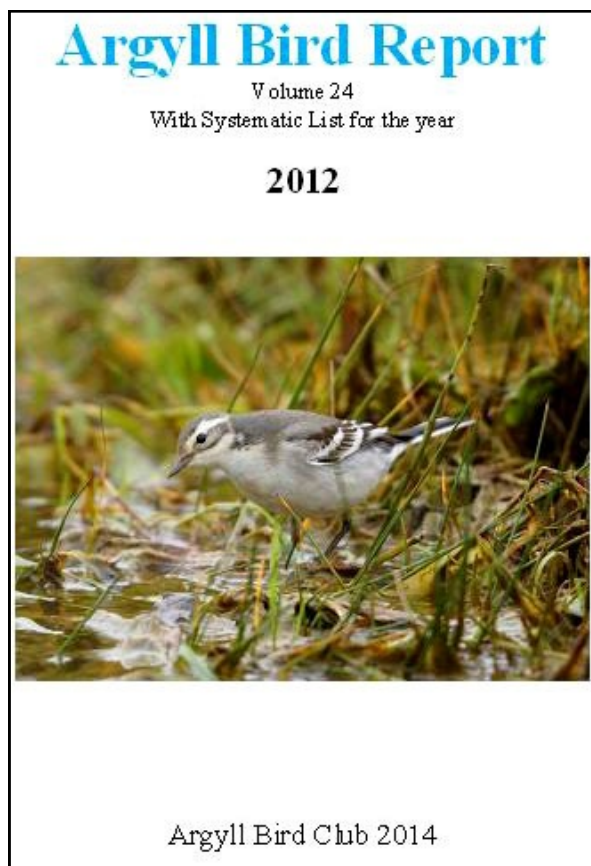
**Twite ringing in Argyll, pages 21-23**

**Editor: Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR**

**Phone 01369 810024—E-mail [stevepetty@btinternet.com](mailto:stevepetty@btinternet.com)**

### Argyll Bird Report Volume 24 for 2012

The latest bird report is now with the printers and we hope it will be back in time for distribution at the ABC spring meeting at Arrochar on Saturday 8th March. Should it be ready in time, then club members will get a chance to collect their copy, and for those not attending, copies will subsequently be posted to them. Members will also get a chance to obtain extra copies at a discounted price of £5.00 if bought in person, or £6 inclusive of postage to a UK address, which may be useful to give to family, friends or colleagues and at the same time help the club to finance future reports. Extra copies can also be purchased from Bob Furness (Treasurer) by sending a cheque payable to Argyll Bird Club to Bob Furness, The Choc, Tarbet, Arrochar, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG. **Jim Dickson**



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### Editorial

Many congratulations to Jim Dickson and his team for the speedy production of the latest *Argyll Bird Report* for 2012. We are now back to annual reports after a series of two-year reports, following delays incurred during the preparations of the *Birds of Argyll*. The team is already working on the next ABR and considering ways of raising money, via sponsorships and adverts, so the quality of the report can be increased, which will hopefully result in increased sales. If you have any suggestions about raising money, please send these to our secretary (Katie Pendreigh—contact details on the back page).

### Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—John Bowler, Neil Brown, Graham Clark, Malcolm Chattwood, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), British Trust for Ornithology, Mike Harrison, Eddie Maguire, David Palmar, Katie Pendreigh, Linda Petty (proof reading), RSPB Loch Lomond and Nigel Scriven



## Club News

### Field trips

**Saturday 29 March 2014. Sound of Gigha.** Led by Paul Daw (contact details: phone 01546 886260: [e-mail monedula@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:e-mail monedula@globalnet.co.uk)). Meet as usual at the car park at Ronachan Point just off the A83 (grid reference NR741548) at 10.00hrs. As part of the itinerary is taking the ferry to Gigha, this trip depends very much on reasonable weather. So will those who intend to come please contact me, by phone or e-mail, at the latest by Thu 27 Mar, so that I can let people know if by any chance we need to postpone.

**Sunday 27 April 2014. Machrihanish Seabird Observatory.** Led by Nigel Scriven (contact details: phone 01505 706652, 01369 840606, 07901 636353: e-mail [njscriven@gmail.com](mailto:njscriven@gmail.com)). Meet at the observatory at 10.00hrs.

**Saturday 31 May 2014. River Add Estuary and Taynish.** Led by Jim Dickson (contact details: phone 01546 603967: e-mail

[meg@jdickskon5.plus.com](mailto:meg@jdickskon5.plus.com)). Meet Jim at Islandadd Bridge, Ballanoch at 10.00hrs.

**Sunday 29 June. Skipness.** Led by Katie Pendreigh (contact detail: phone 01583 441359: e-mail [katiependreigh@aol.com](mailto:katiependreigh@aol.com)). Meet Katie at the entrance to car park beside the main entrance to the castle grounds at 10.00hrs.

If possible, please check the club's website before setting off for any field trip, particularly when bad weather is forecast.

### Indoor meetings

**Spring meeting 2014.** On Saturday 8 March 2014 at the Three Villages Hall, Arrochar. The programme is given below, which has changed slightly since the last *Eider*. Information about the venue is available at:

<http://www.threevillages.org.uk/>

This is an excellent hall for our talks and has plenty of space for tables, posters etc. We have

| Programme for the ABC's Spring Meeting                |   |
|---|---|
| Saturday 8 March at the Three Villages Hall, Arrochar |   |
| Time  | Session   |
| 0930  | Doors open, coffee and tea  |
| 0950-1000   | Welcome and introduction— <i>Mike Harrison</i> , Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club                             |
| 1000-1030   | Recent bird sightings and photographs— <i>Jim Dickson</i> , Argyll Bird Recorder                              |
| 1030-1100   | Tracking Basking Sharks in Argyll— <i>Ruth Abernethy</i> , University of Glasgow                              |
| 1100-1130   | Coffee/tea  |
| 1130-1200   | RSPB's seabird tracking and research (STAR) in Argyll— <i>Tessa Cole</i> , RSPB                               |
| 1200-1230   | Thermography: from counting birds to assessing their moods— <i>Dominic McCafferty</i> , University of Glasgow |
| 1230-1400   | Lunch (provided in the hall—soup & sandwiches for £5.50)  |
| 1400-1430   | Argyll Bird Club's trip to Tiree— <i>David Palmar</i> , <a href="http://photoscot.co.uk">photoscot.co.uk</a>  |
| 1430-1500   | Ringing Jack Snipe and gulls in the Clyde area— <i>Iain Livingstone</i> , Clyde Ringing Group                 |
| 1500-1530   | Tea/coffee  |
| 1530-1600   | Catching and tracking Cuckoos: are Scottish Cuckoos different— <i>John Calladine</i> , BTO Scotland           |
| 1600-1620   | Wind, wave and tidal power: threats to birds in Argyll— <i>Bob Furness</i> , MacArthur Green                  |
| 16.20-1630  | Raffle and close  |

also booked a separate room within the hall (adjacent to the main hall) for lunch. A soup and sandwich lunch will be available for £5.50 per person. Teas and coffees will be provided free as usual. The meeting is free for club members and £5 for non-members (collected at the door). There is a car park beside the hall, and in the event of us filling that car park, there is plenty of extra car parking space in front of the hotel next door. Peregrines and Golden Eagles nest just a few minutes flying time from the hall, and there are usually seabirds to be seen on Loch Long in front of the hall, so it is worth bringing binoculars.

**Autumn meeting 2014.** On Saturday 22 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead (**note change of date**). The programme will appear in a later issue of the *Eider*.

**Raffle prizes.** These are always welcome at indoor meetings.

### ABC Website

We are now updating the 'recent sightings' page on the club's website at regular intervals; daily if there are enough sightings to report. Although we have a core of regular contributors it would be good to hear more from the membership at large. We are not just interested in rare birds! Given

the recent mild (if wet and windy!) weather it's not too early to be thinking about early migrants. Mistle Thrushes are already in song but how about reporting the first Song Thrushes, Robins etc. you hear. To save Jim time I'm carrying out much of the updating of this page, so it helps if you copy me in to any reports you send to him and/or Malcolm Chattwood: We look forward to hearing from you. **Paul Daw** (phone 01546 886260; e-mail [monedula@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:monedula@globalnet.co.uk))

### BTO Regional Representative for Argyll mainland, Bute & Gigha

After being without a rep. for too long, Nigel Scriven has kindly agreed to take on this role.

### Argyll Bird Report 24

It is hoped to have this latest report ready for distribution at the spring meeting.

### ABC Anniversary Event

The club is 30yrs old next year and the committee are considering ways of celebrating this event, such as a dinner and/or ceilidh, a weekend outing to an island e.g. Islay or a bird race. If you have any suggestions, please send these to our secretary, Katie Pendreigh (contact details on back page).

## BTO Heronries census 2014

The BTO Heronries Census began in 1928 as a one-off investigation for the journal *British Birds* but has matured into an annual survey still ongoing more than 80 years later. Its Grey Heron data represent the longest-running monitoring data set for any breeding bird in the world. The simple aim of the Heronries Census is to collect counts of 'apparently occupied nests' of herons, egrets and other colonial waterbirds from as many heronries as possible in the United Kingdom each year.

Many heronries hold a dozen or more nesting pairs, even a hundred or more, and occupy traditional, well-known sites that are active for many decades. Smaller and shorter-lived heronries (more typical in Argyll) must also be included in the counts, however, to ensure that the data represent the whole population. Even single nests of any of the normally colonial heron or egret species are relevant to the Heronries Census, even if only occupied for one season.

Changes in the numbers of nests over time are a clear measure of population trends. The more heronries that can be counted each year, the more certain we can be of population trends at national, regional and local scales. Counts are made by BTO volunteers and collated at BTO HQ in Thetford.

### Taking part

Heronries Census nest counts are made by BTO volunteers, including birdwatchers, reserve wardens, landowners and foresters. Help from people with special access to private or remote heronries is especially welcome. Nests in deciduous trees are best counted before leaf-burst in spring.

Coverage is coordinated through a network of regional organisers who match heronries to counters and try to avoid double counting. The first step in contributing to the Heronries Census is to contact your BTO Regional Representative

([njscriven@gmail.com](mailto:njscriven@gmail.com)) to ask whether there are known sites that need counters. If you know of a heronry, you could ask whether it already has a counter. There is a list of heronries that have been counted historically, with the oldest in Argyll from 1927.

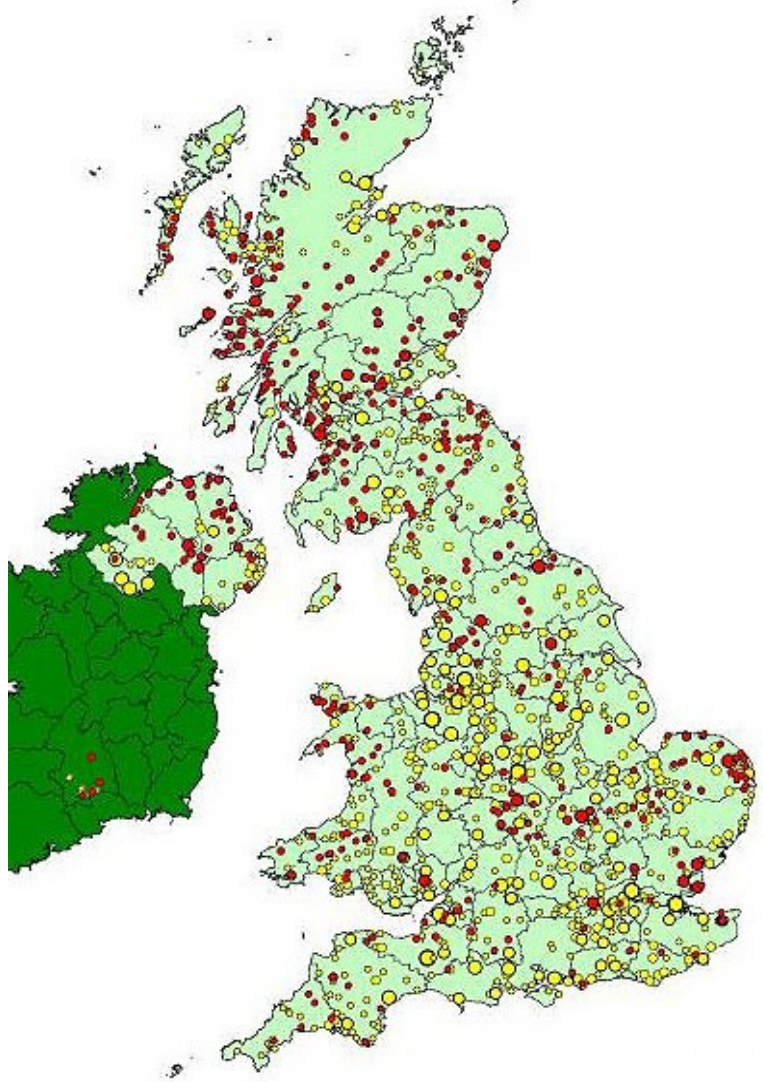
Making a count of 'apparently occupied nests' at a heronry is often very straightforward but is tricky when the nests are obscured by foliage. No specialised ornithological knowledge or experience is required. Clues such as droppings or hatched eggshells under nests can help observers decide whether a nest is in use. Access is needed under the nests or to nearby vantage points from which the heronry can be viewed. In many cases this may require landowners' permission.

Even if no nest count can be made, a report indicating whether or not the heronry is in use, and if so by which species, is valuable for monitoring. Online data entry is not yet available for this scheme. Counts are submitted mostly on A6-sized cards, which are distributed by the survey's regional organisers and available by post from BTO HQ in Thetford, but can be accepted in any format.

Around two-thirds of all heronries in England, Wales and the Isle of Man are currently counted each year. **Historically rather few counts have been made of heronries in Scotland and Northern Ireland**, but support for the Heronries Census there has been growing fast in recent years. The number of active heronries counted in the UK is now well over 500 each year.

### Survey Health & safety

Heronries Census participants are asked to bear in mind that counting heronries can often bring risks to personal safety, and are reminded to minimise risk and take all proper precautions. The BTO's health and safety information, available on the BTO website, should be studied before any fieldwork is started.



Heronries in 2003, scaled by number of apparently occupied nests of Grey Heron: yellow=counted, red=imputed from other years' data.



Grey Heron ©Steve Petty



## BTO Peregrine survey 2014

**Who can take part?** This survey is suited to experienced volunteers with good knowledge of their local area. We will be working closely with Raptor Study Groups and individual Peregrine specialists.

Depending on the coverage and distribution of random squares (see below) in your area, as well as on your own experience and preferences, you may be asked to take on the surveys in one of these squares, or to look for Peregrines in other areas. Casual recorders are encouraged to contribute by submitting records observed from March to July 2014, together with evidence of breeding, to BirdTrack.

**When to take part?** Between March and mid July 2014.

**How to take part?** Organisation of the Peregrine survey at the local level will vary from region to region. Some regions will be organised by a member of a Raptor Study Group whilst others will be organised by the BTO Regional Representative, or a combination of the two. The list of local organisers will be available on the BTO website as soon as possible.

If you are interested in taking part and are not a member of an organised raptor monitoring group, please contact Anne Cotton at BTO Scotland ([anne.cotton@bto.org](mailto:anne.cotton@bto.org), 01786 466560) in the first instance. **Please note, you need a licence from SNH to visit occupied Peregrine sites.**

Why are running a Peregrine survey? The Bird Atlas results suggest a number of areas, mainly in the uplands, from which breeding Peregrines declined in recent years in terms of range or abundance. These include substantial parts of the central, north and west Scottish highlands, south-west Scotland and parts of Cumbria, Wales and areas across Ireland.

It is a key requirement of conservation agencies to have up-to-date Peregrine population estimates for each of the four countries of the UK (including the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands), and changes at this scale since the last survey.

The majority of sites are known and will be revisited as part of this survey. However, we are also including a sampling approach, in order to

**Take part in the Peregrine survey to record the number of breeding birds, and to estimate the number of occupied territories**



improve comparisons between areas (and, in the future between years) where there are differences in monitoring efforts.

We would also like to generate some within-country regional estimates, and numbers on sites designated (SPAs and SSSIs) for Peregrines (this will be dependent on securing additional funding).

### **For survey square surveyors**

You will be allocated a randomly selected 5km by 5km square across the Peregrine's UK range.

You will need to download or obtain a copy of the Peregrine survey form (BTO website or local organiser).

We will ask you to search each square for suitable habitat (e.g. cliffs, crags, quarries, pylons, industrial buildings, cathedrals, bridges) and to look for the presence of Peregrines.

You will be encouraged to make three visits to the square between March and mid-July. The main aim of the first and second visit is to locate Peregrines in the square and establish their breeding status. On your third visit look for evidence of breeding success.

More details can be found at [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/peregrine-survey](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/peregrine-survey)

## Report of the ABC field trip on 30 November 2013 to Tayinloan



Part of the group birding ©David Palmar (photoscot.co.uk)

Strong gale force wind and heavy horizontal rain swept the shore clear of birds on the day before our outing and it seemed the shore and fields at Tayinloan had been deserted by birds. However, when (eventually) the morning of 30th dawned the wind and rain had both calmed and left me with a nice clean car and evidence of wild life returning!

Nine of us met at the car park and set off northwards along the shore, although David Palmer turned back to take some "must have" photographs of the Long-tailed Ducks that seemed quite close to the pier. Greylag Geese and good numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese were grazing on the surrounding fields, but in spite of careful searching, none were found to have neck collars. All eyes were also looking out for the two Snow Geese that had been in the area off and on for several days previously, and we nearly missed a Peregrine that flew in from over the sea and headed inland before disappearing from view.

Proceeding further north with sightings of a Great Northern Diver and two Red-throated Divers we watched five Bar-tailed Godwits feeding at the edge of the sea in the company of Curlew, Teal, Wigeon and Shelduck. As thoughts were by now veering towards a hot drink and perhaps something to eat we retraced our steps and visited the Ferry Farm Cafe for a welcome lunch break. Once all appetites had been satisfied, it was agreed we should proceed south along the shore, crossing the Tayinloan Burn by means of the slightly shaky wooden bridge frequented by Grey Wagtails in days gone by. As the afternoon light began to grow dull, and with a list of fifty-one species, we all agreed that it was time to make our way home.

### Species List

Greenland White-fronted Goose, Greylag Goose, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck,



Greenland White-fronted Geese at Tayinloan©David Palmar

Red-breasted Merganser, Common Pheasant, Red-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Great Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Slavonian Grebe, Hen Harrier, Common Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, Oystercatcher, Common Snipe, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Rock Dove, Collared Dove, Western

Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, Wren, Common Starling, Blackbird, Redwing, Robin, Common Stonechat, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Rock Pipit, Common Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Twite.

**Katie Pendreigh**

## Report of the ABC field trip on 25 January 2014 to Ormsary



Oystercatchers ©David Palmar (photoscot.co.uk)

In ignorance of, or in spite of, the cancellation on the previous evening of this field trip, six members met at Ormsary on Saturday 25 January. The hail, rain, lightning and thunder experienced on the way supported the decision to cancel and set the tone for the morning's weather, although it was not actually raining at 10 o'clock.

After piling on the waterproofs we walked down to the shore noting the Pheasants in the field as we passed. Two Ravens flew out of the woods and disappeared downwind. We were rewarded by the sight of an Otter diving off the mouth of the burn but there did not appear to be many birds about. However, there were one or two gulls working the strong winds and a couple of Shags were diving in the bay. A distant diver was seen between waves but not identified. The rain arrived, in large drops. House Sparrow and Blue Tit were found in the hedge at the cottage; a Pied Wagtail and a few Dunlin were on the beach. A line of Oystercatchers (photo above) flew low across the bay to join their fellows on a rocky islet. We set off down the road towards the fish farm before deciding, belatedly, that it might be better to shelter for a while. Shelter was some distance away, past the warm, dry byre in which were noted several of the sub-species 'Sensible Sparrow'. Fortunately, the rain stopped before we reached the cars.

We had just set off again for the fish farm when a large raptor was spotted approaching along the coast from the south-west. The bird turned out to be a juvenile White-tailed Eagle which continued along the coast towards the north-east. The tide was well up the sandy bay beyond the fish farm so the usual complement of waders was not there but there was a large raft of Goldeneye, half a dozen Shelduck and a few Mallard. The next shower arrived while we were chatting to a local keeper and we decided to call it a day.

It was not yet 12 o'clock when we got back to the cars, very wet but under the brightest sky of the morning. A Great Tit and a Coal Tit were seen near the estate office to complete what is not a bad list for a cancelled field trip.

### Species List

Common Shelduck, Mallard, Common Eider, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Pheasant, Diver sp., Great Cormorant, European Shag, Grey Heron, White-tailed Eagle, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blackbird, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Common Chaffinch

Otter

**Mike Harrison**



## BTO Bird Atlas—What now?

After the cessation of enjoyable fieldwork, followed by many months of eager anticipation, many of you will have had a chance to dip in to your new *Bird Atlas*. You can get lost for hours, looking at all the places and species you know well, to see whether they got it right. But what has it achieved?

Inevitably it is probably too soon to assess the full picture. We can say that it is the most up to date and complete picture of nearly all the species that regularly occur in the British Isles, achieving a greater coverage than any of the preceding atlases. The range shifts identified are complementary to the population trend information from annual population monitoring.

Together this information is significant in several ways:

**1 to identify species that trigger red or amber listing because of contractions in range at the UK or European level**

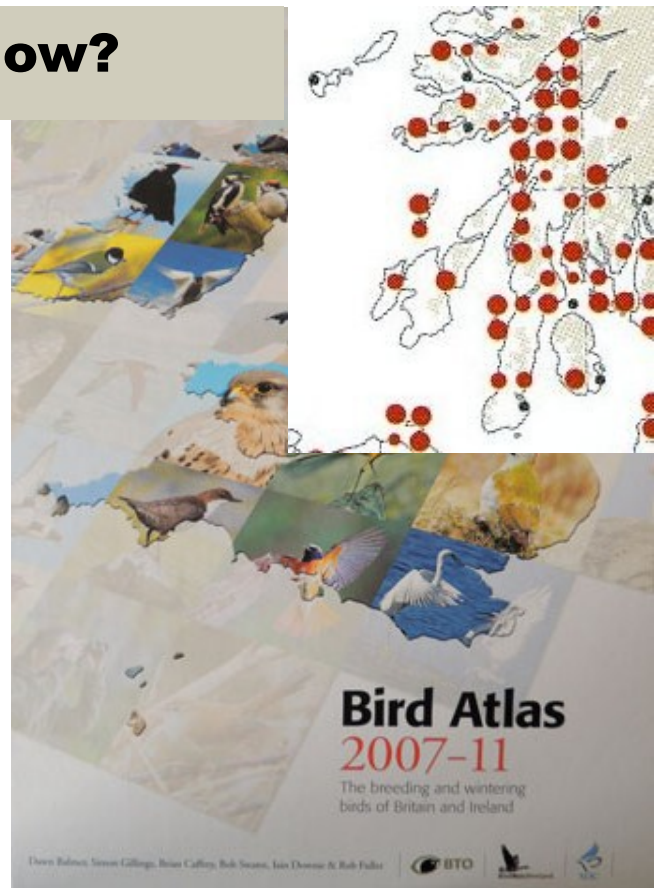
**2 to comply with new EU requirements relating to the Birds Directive, to provide information on distribution and trends**

**3 to help assess overall population size by combining occupancy information with more localised estimates of densities.**

For example, reductions in range greater than 50% trigger red-listing in the UK's Birds of Conservation Concern assessments. The occurrence of a species at a small number of sites can trigger amber listing, as it indicates vulnerability. The maps can show the important areas within a species range, aiding the future designation of protected areas. It can also be used to focus conservation effort, such as regional targeting strategies within agri-environment schemes for farmland birds.

The research potential in the data in the atlas is massive. What factors are leading to the big picture changes in distributions? Land-use, climate changes, protected areas, re-introductions, non-native species? Since birds are one of the best monitored taxonomic groups, broader questions on biodiversity can be explored.

Closer to home, how are the species faring in Argyll? The Atlas will tell us a lot more than we could tell just from our annual bird reports, especially if we look back at the previous atlases. However, the



sharp-eyed amongst you will also have spotted gaps, where you know the species occurs, but doesn't appear on the maps. Now, that is where the importance of county recording can fill these gaps, so that together, they achieve the best picture of distribution. Also the atlas can, for some species, go out of date scarily quickly.

So, here's a bit of a challenge! Name the species whose distribution map appears at top of this page (answer at bottom of page)? Of course if you haven't bought your copy of the atlas, then you can't even trawl through the pages and match it up with the right answer. In which case I suggest you order one immediately!

The truth is that we will continue to realise the value of the new atlas for some years to come, as more of the research it spawns is published. I can predict that one of the priorities for focus will be a reassessment of the Birds of Conservation Concern, which no doubt will reveal winners and losers. Quite how much we should get worked up about the losers rather depends on the species, and what can be done about addressing the decline. I imagine some of these will be unstoppable, and the resources needed just can't be assembled to bring about a favourable change.

**Nigel Scriven**

## Report of the ABC field trip on 22 February 2014 to Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary



Drake Goosander photographed from the Corran car park, Lochgilphead ©Jim Dickson

An unusually sunny morning greeted folks who turned up at Corran car park in Lochgilphead for this trip. Ten participants in total, one of whom (Richard Green) was new to such outings and was given a warm welcome from all. The forecast was for heavy rain by early afternoon. Therefore, it was decided to concentrate our efforts around Loch Gilp, then onto the Add Estuary but probably not adding on the extension to Keills and Ulva.

Once we were all suitably kitted out we set off on foot along the front green of Lochgilphead to look down the loch. A nice Grey Wagtail appeared and was watched feeding on a small gravel island in the river. A Common Buzzard was overhead and various gull species were notched up, and scribbled into Malcolm Chattwood's notebook; our recorder for the day. Quickly, Wigeon, Mallard, Mute Swan, Oystercatcher, Grey Heron, Redshank and Curlew were added. A good find here was a single Red Knot—or rather a wintering 'grey' Knot! Through our telescopes we could just make out a group of Bar-tailed Godwit on the tideline about a mile away, as the tide was very low! A male Goldeneye was then added, and as the wind chill was getting more severe we decided to move back to our cars and try our luck on the south side of Ardrishaig looking out into Loch Fyne. The light here was in our faces, but we had good view of a pair of Black-throated Divers which were moulting into summer plumage. Fur-

ther out into the loch there was little sign of any Kittiwake or auk movements that are often seen from here. However, a single Red-throated Diver was seen briefly as were a few Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers and Tysties. A single Goldeneye was spotted just off the harbour wall and a Razorbill was feeding 30m in front of us. A scan over to the Lingerton Landfill revealed the usual group of hovering gulls and several Ravens, but sadly no Glaucous Gulls on this occasion.

Our next stop was at the Islandadd Bridge to have a look over the Add Estuary. From here a few more species were quickly notched up. A pair of Mute Swan flew overhead (photo on next page), a couple of Little Grebe was seen up river, a couple of Rock Pipit was flitting about and Morag Rea picked out a distant Stonechat. Downstream there was a sizeable flock of around 150 Wigeon and mixed in with them were smaller numbers of Teal. A party of Greylag Geese were 'hiding' in the long grass and three Sky Larks flew over that group. Meadow Pipits were seen distantly, and scanning the Add produced an adult Lesser Black Backed Gull—our first 'summer' visitor!

We moved round and across Moine Mhor and spotted Canada and Greenland White-fronted Geese with flocks of Hooded Crows and Jackdaws. Good numbers of Common Gulls were in the fields. However, we did not get much time to stop





Mute Swans, Islandadd Bridge ©Jim Dickson

and scan as our convoy of four vehicles was blocking the way for farm traffic, therefore after a word in our ear we moved on swiftly, well almost!

At Crinan Ferry we had a different angle to view the Add basin and one, then two, then a total of six Lap-

wings was seen—a species that has been very scarce here this winter. A small party of Red-shank was also seen and some tits and finches, including a wheezy Greenfinch were noted.

We moved round to Crinan Wood and got yet another angle on the Add basin before ending the trip round at Crinan. From this location we had good, but distant views of Great Northern Divers and closer views of Red-throated Divers. Some of the group headed for home and the rest of us headed back to the Corran car park to collect cars. The tide was now high and a nice surprise there was a drake Goosander (photo at start of article). In total 56 species were seen which was not too bad for four hours bird watching on a quiet winter's day.

**Jim Dickson**

## An introduction to 'constant effort ringing' on Aros Moss, Kintyre



Looking west onto Aros Moss ©Neil Brown

**Aros Moss, once known as Laggan Moor, is an area of peat bog lying to the South of Campbeltown and adjacent to Campbeltown airport. It is a flat area of mostly improved grassland supporting several dairy farms and bordered by sheep grazing.**

The Moss itself is a mere shadow of its former glory when it was an important part of the Duke of Argyll's grouse moors. It was also for hunting ducks, geese and other wildfowl. It was managed as a grouse moor as late as 1911 and was described by Doctor J.H. Balfour in 1844 as "*the flat strath, which extends from Machrihanish Bay to Campbeltown, this is a hilly, moorish district which has not*

*yet been brought into cultivation*" also local author and gamekeeper Dugald McIntyre writes of "*grouse in their thousands on the Laggan Moor in Kintyre*".

An important area of semi-natural vegetation of some 50ha, it comprises mainly peat bog interspersed with willow thicket and beds of Reed Mace or Bullrush. The ground-covering sphagnum and Common Haircap moss create a spongy walk underfoot and the water table is high for most of the year, despite a central ditch that is well maintained by the landowner.

This encourages plant life typical of this habitat, including scented Bog Myrtle (apparently a midge repellent), while white fluffy Common Cotton-grass can be seen swaying amongst clumps of rank Heather in spring. Many other colours are provided

by Water Forget-Me-Not, Cuckoo Flower (Lady's Smock), bright yellow Bog Asphodel, Common Spotted and Northern Marsh Orchids amongst many others. These in turn encourage 19 species of butterfly, including the recently added Speckled Wood that appeared for the first time in 2012 and Marsh Fritillary in 2013.

Several species of dragonfly and damselfly are regularly recorded as well as Great Diving Beetles and the noxious, but colourfully marked, Sexton Beetle. Common Frog and Common Toad breed in good numbers and along with Common lizards provide a good food source for the increasing population of Adders.

In winter this site can seem almost devoid of life but a walk through can flush good numbers of roosting Woodcock and Snipe, and although not often seen, Water Rails can often be heard squealing from the undergrowth. Long Eared Owls regularly spend the winter here, with a maximum of 11 individuals recorded in 2009. Breeding had been suspected for a number of years and has recently been confirmed. Historically this was also the site of a Hen Harrier roost although in recent years numbers have been very low, but it is still a bird seen frequently during the winter.

There is a small but significant Yellowhammer roost often with Reed Buntings. Both birds are in serious decline in the area and although Reed Buntings stay to breed, Yellowhammers have mostly disappeared by April. As the year advances many resident breeders become more vocal and obvious as they stake out their territorial claims, birds such as Blackbird, Song Thrush, Dunnock and Wren are often well advanced with nest building or even egg laying by the time the first migrants arrive. Although not considered long distance migrants, Goldfinch and Redpoll are also returning at this time and recent recoveries of birds ringed on the Aros Moss indicate that some of these finches are spending the winter in Belgium.

By the end of April Aros Moss appears quite a different place with bird song appearing to come from every bush, particularly at dawn. Sedge Warblers (photo on the next page) are the most obvious, with the weaker but maybe more melodic song of the Willow Warbler in the background. Good numbers of Grasshopper Warblers can also be heard by those with good ears; their reeling appearing to fade in and out as they turn their heads in the dense vegetation. Blackcaps are also heard at this time and within a couple of weeks Common Whitethroats will add their voice to the throng. Although not as common as in the past, it is still possible to hear (and see) the Common Snipe spectacular 'drumming' display high above the moss. It was in the midst of this rich and vibrant habitat that I decided to launch a new and exciting bird ringing study.

In 1997 I acquired my 'C' class ringing permit that allowed me to carry out bird ringing activities unaccompanied and I was very keen to strike out and establish a significant study of my own. I had already been ringing at Aros Moss for a couple of years before and I was aware of its potential as a study site. I had also been reading results from Constant Effort Sites (CES) from

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) publications. The CES scheme offered the exciting opportunity to be involved in an important, national and professional survey at an amateur level, and 1997 became the launch year for the Aros Moss CES.

The CES is a long running survey run by the BTO that uses bird ringing as a tool for monitoring various aspects of bird population within the UK. The scheme uses standard visits and methods within- and between-years aimed at 25 species of breeding songbirds—Song Thrush, Willow Tit and Linnet (all Red listed), and Willow warbler, Common Whitethroat, Dunnock, Bullfinch and Reed Bunting (all Amber listed), and the remaining species are Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Cetti's Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Treecreeper, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch. This list can occasionally change dependant on the sample sizes caught for individual species, and of course, not all of these species have been recorded at Aros Moss.

The visits, 12 in a season, are carried out between the months of



A typical habitat on Aros moss ©Neil Brown



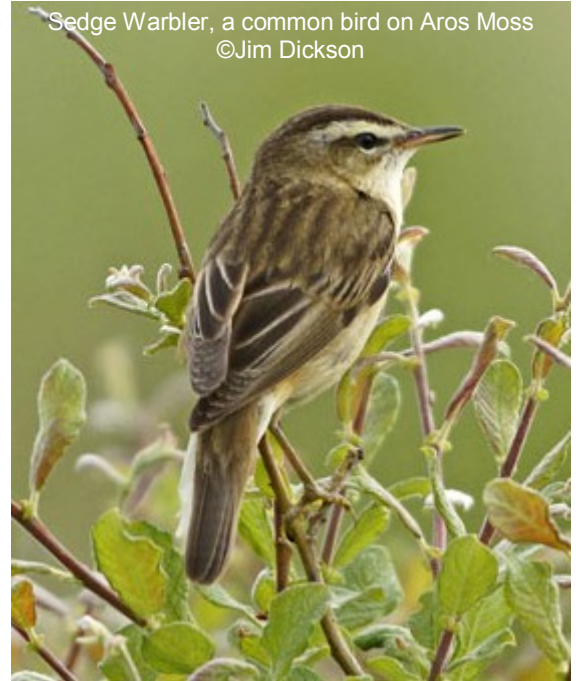
May and August and the same mist net positions and mist net lengths are used each year. The CES has been running since 1983 and there are currently over 120 sites throughout Britain and Ireland. Each visit lasts for around about 6hrs and would typically begin at dawn. There is some flexibility within the scheme for extra visits and nets but the priority is the 12 main visits using the standard nets agreed for each individual site.

On Aros Moss I have seven individual nets giving a total net length of 110m set in such a way as to cover the varieties of habitats within the site and on what I consider the main 'flyways'. My visits usually commence at 05.00hrs though this time advances slightly during the season as day lengths shorten. The main aims of the CES are to monitor the abundance of the various bird species by the numbers caught, breeding success or productivity by recording the ratio of adult to juvenile birds and survival rates through the number of birds returning to the respective sites year on year.

The BTO uses the annual results of this scheme to complement other surveys such as Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) and the Nest Record Scheme (NRS) amongst others to assess between-year changes in bird populations. Results from the CES highlight the poor productivity recorded for many of the UK's breeding birds in 2012 and 2013 due to extreme weather conditions. For many returning migrants in 2012 the heavy and prolonged rain may have been the cause of low breeding success, possibly resulting from the difficulty birds experienced in locating insects required to feed chicks, and perhaps because many ground and open-cup nesting birds had their eggs chilled or nests flooded.

This was certainly the case with many birds on the Aros Moss in 2012, in particular with Sedge Warblers that had the lowest capture rate of juveniles I have ever recorded. It has also been suggested that the high rainfall could have additionally affected the survival rates of young that did manage to fledge, due to feathers becoming waterlogged and difficulty in finding food. The spring of 2013 again brought many weather-related challenges for migrant birds. The poor breeding success of the previous year meant fewer birds arriving at their wintering grounds and returning to breed the following spring. Surviving migrants returned to the coolest spring since 1963, and coupled with strong winds mortality was high, which resulted in many summer visitors having their lowest populations on the CES site since the scheme began in 1983.

On a more positive note the CES results, combined with nest records indicate a more successful breeding season in 2013 for many of these birds, no doubt helped by the



Sedge Warbler, a common bird on Aros Moss  
©Jim Dickson

warm and dry late spring and summer allowing large clutch sizes, high fledging rates, and possibly more broods being raised per pair. Early on, many resident species had reduced numbers and delayed breeding for 2-3 weeks beyond the average laying times due to the cold spring. My observations show some tits abandoned breeding altogether, with many nest boxes unoccupied or with incomplete nests.

Many papers are regularly produced using information from the huge data sets arising from over 30 years of CES ringing, and CES-type schemes have been developed all over Europe and in other parts of the world, with the potential to produce an international review on the status of our birdlife.

Ringing has been carried out at Aros Moss for 16 years and in that time it has produced some exciting captures such as a Red backed Shrike and a Reed Warbler as well as annual near misses with Merlins. However, it is the privilege and excitement of contributing to an important, if not the most important tool for monitoring the change within the United Kingdom's bird populations that keeps me returning each year to ring at this particular site and I hope to share the results specific to the Aros Moss in future articles.

**Neil Brown**



RSPB Loch Lomond is one of the best places for wildlife in Scotland. Located on the southeast shores of Loch Lomond, the site has a remarkable mix of habitats: not just woodland and grassland, but rich floodplains, and swampy mires and fens, all of which provide food and shelter for a massive range of creatures.

The Greenland White-fronted Geese that come here in the winter make up an internationally important population. Each year some 200 of these migrants join 2400 Pink-footed and 200 Greylag Geese, spending the winter on the bonnie shores of Loch Lomond. The River Lampreys that skulk amidst the mud at the bottom of the River Endrick display a unique behaviour, migrating to the freshwaters of the loch, rather than to the sea like other lampreys. There are rare insects here too, like the Ox-bow Diving Beetle, and even a plant that is only found here in the whole of the UK, the Scottish Dock.

The site forms part of the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve (NNR) and was acquired by the RSPB in April 2012, with financial support from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park (LLTNP) and the National Heritage Memorial Fund. This 563-acre site, previously part of the Wards Estate, is now managed by the RSPB, SNH and the LLTNP in a unique tripartite agreement



The RSPB has an ambitious vision for the site and aims to make it a flagship site for nature conservation and wildlife tourism. The team has been working hard to achieve this, with the help of volunteers, partners and colleagues. There is a long history of land management here, much of which helped to form the unique habitats found today. Over time, the RSPB wants to recreate some of those conditions and use historical practices to make this place the best it can be for wildlife and people. Over the course of 2013, the grasslands were cut and then grazed, to improve their condition for wildlife. The results are already visible, with gaggles of geese returning to the High Wards fields after 11yrs.

Hard work and expert knowledge helped monitor important wildlife and even uncovered new species for the



©RSPB Loch Lomond





site. Highlights included 5000 Common/Heath Spotted Orchids, the Horsetail Sloth Weevil (second Scottish record of this beetle in 100yrs) and the Dung Cannon Fungi, also known as the fastest organism in the world (due to an explosive ejection of spores).

Over time, the RSPB plans to improve access and facilities for visitors. However, it is already possible to enjoy the amazing

sights RSPB Loch Lomond has to offer. Visitors can walk down to the Shore Wood via the Aber Path, which begins at the Kilmaronock Millennium Hall in Gartocharn.

This walk is most enjoyable in spring, when the woodland is full of Bluebells, and in the summer when migrant birds start to return, filling the air with song. The path leads to the Net Bay viewpoint where you can see Ospreys in summer and flocks of geese in the winter. The breathtaking view over the loch, islands and hills is of course a year-round spectacle. Outdoor enthusiasts of all ages can also join the RSPB team for activities and events including dawn chorus, guided walks and more.

If you would like to find out more about the site, or if you would like to share your thoughts about the RSPB's plans for the site please email [loch.lomond@rspb.org.uk](mailto:loch.lomond@rspb.org.uk)



## Recent sightings November 2013 to January 2014

by Jim Dickson, Argyll Bird Recorder

Presented here are a selection of rare and unusual species as well as counts and movements of more common species recorded in Argyll during this period. Many thanks to everyone who has sent in records and in particular for the comprehensive reports from Islay (Ian Brooke), Tiree (John Bowler), Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (Eddie Maguire) and Mull (Alan Spellman). Also, many thanks to Morag Rea and Tom Callan for inputting vast amounts of information onto the Argyll Bird Database and Malcolm Chattwood for managing the database. Paul Daw continues to assist with the club website which gives sightings in a chronological order. Monthly WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey) counts can also be viewed on the club website.

(Note: Machrihanish Seabird Observatory = Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre. ABRC = Argyll Bird Records Committee and BBRC = British Birds Rarities Committee).

### Swans, ducks, geese and gamebirds

WHOOPEE SWAN. All-island counts on Tiree on 9 December found 112 (including 14 cygnets).

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE. Singles on Tiree at Hey-

lipol and at Cornaigmore on 19 November, two at Ruaig on 6 December and one at Balinoe on 1 January. Thirty flew past Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 3 November.

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE. The International Goose Counts on Islay found 5,888 in mid-November, 5,869 in mid-December and 5,329 in mid-January. There was a count of 86 at Loch Sween (Ulva Lagoons), Mid-Argyll on 23 January.

LESSER CANADA GOOSE. At least two birds were on Islay. Two seen at Bridgend on 24 and 25 November have been submitted to the BBRC (Colin Bradshaw).

BARNACLE GOOSE. The International Goose Counts on Islay found 46,931 in mid-November, 36,244 in mid-December and 41,951 in mid-January.

PALE-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE. Peak count was of 82 birds between Blackrocks and Gortain, Islay on 11 January.

SNOW GEES. Two birds (a white and an intermediate morph) remained in the Tayinloan, Kintyre area from October and throughout the win-



ter (still present end February).

**SHELDUCK.** The first returning bird was noted at Salum, Tiree on 26 November. Counts at Gruinart, Islay found 100 on 6 December and 222 on 20 January.

**MANDARIN.** A high count of 19 (11 males and 8 females) at Loch Eck, Cowal on 1 November. Four were at the Ford Lochs, Mid-Argyll on 23 January.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL.** A drake was reported from the Gruinart hides, Islay on 3 November (a description is required for this sighting). A drake (possibly a returning bird from last winter) was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 27 November and again on 29-31 December and on 14 and 20 January.

**PINTAIL.** Counts on Islay gave 57 at Bun an Uillt on 6 November and 86 at Gruinart on 13 December.

**SHOVELER.** Peak counts on Tiree during WeBS were 14 on 16 December and 24 on 20 January. At Bun an Uillt, Islay the peak count was 40 on 6 November.

**POCHARD.** Two males and a female arrived at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 15 November. A male was on Colonsay on 27 December and was re-found on 2 December—the first record there since February 1997.

**GREATER SCAUP.** Peak count at Loch Indaal, Islay was 158 on 4 November.

**LONG-TAILED DUCK.** Peak count on Tiree was of 18 at Hough Bay on 30 December. Fifteen plus were seen in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 28 November and on Islay, 13 were at Loch Indaal on 4 November.

**COMMON SCOTER.** Fifty plus were seen in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 28 November.

**VELVET SCOTER.** Eight were in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 6 December. Four were reported off Milton, Tiree on 1 January.

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

**BLACK-THROATED DIVER.** The highest count reported was of 16 at Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 6 December.

**GREAT NORTHERN DIVER.** High counts

were 28 off Oronsay on 22 November, 70+ in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 28 November and 118 there on 6 December. Eleven were at Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 6 December and 15 were off Milton, Tiree on 1 January.

**MANX SHEARWATER.** Late singles were seen flying past Aird, Tiree on 20 and 29 November. A dead ringed bird found at Vault Bay, Tiree on 18 August had been ringed on Skomer Island in 1983, making it at least 31 years old!

**LEACH'S PETREL.** One was seen off Hynish, Tiree on 14 December.

**GLOSSY IBIS.** A rather confiding bird was seen briefly at Kirkapol, Tiree on 13 January (photo below). This is the first on Tiree since 1958 (John Bowler). Also there were reports of a bird on Colonsay from the end of December until February, however there have been no supporting details as yet.

**LITTLE EGRET.** One was on the burn running down to Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 15 November (Tom Callan).

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE.** Outwith the Clyde Estuary: one was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree from 25 November to 4 December. This was John Bowler's first in his 12 years on the island!

**SLAVONIAN GREBE.** Twenty-three at Loch Indaal, Islay on 4 November with 13 seen there on 20 November and three at Ardmucknish Bay, North Argyll on 4 November. Nineteen were seen in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 6 December.



Glossy Ibis, Kirkapol, Tiree on 13 January ©John Bowler

## Raptors to rails

**RED KITE.** A single was seen in Glen Orchy, North Argyll on 4 November.

**WHITE-TAILED EAGLE.** Sightings outwith usual areas: two (adult and first-winter) were on Colonsay on 27 November, an immature bird was at West Hynish, Tiree on 6 November, a first-winter bird (photo opposite) was at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 9 December and an adult was there on the 28 December, and an adult was seen near Lington Landfill, Mid-Argyll on 7 January.

**GOLDEN EAGLE.** One over the centre of Campbeltown, Kintyre on 31 January.

**MARSH HARRIER.** A male was seen near Port Charlotte, Islay on 29 December.

**HEN HARRIER.** A very pale, almost white male was seen at Westport March, Kintyre on 22 January had the observers thinking of a Pallid Harrier?

**WATER RAIL.** One bird visited a house in Ardfern, Mid-Argyll on Christmas Eve—it was found standing on a hall coat hook!

**COOT.** One at Loch Skerrols, Islay on 4 November. Singles at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 28 December and 20 January.

**COMMON CRANE.** Two were seen flying and circling off shore from Minard Castle, Loch Fyne on 30 November and then flew across the loch and over Castle Lachlan, Cowal (Graham Clark, photo below).

## Waders

**GOLDEN PLOVER.** High counts were noted on Tiree, with an all-island total of 2,115 birds on 16-17 December, 850 were seen near Campbeltown



Common Crane, Loch Fyne, 30 November ©Graham Clark

First-winter White-tailed Eagle, Add Estuary, 9 December  
©Jim Dickson



Airport, Kintyre on 12 November and 1,600 were at Gruinart, Islay on 8 November.

**GREY PLOVER.** Six were at Gruinart, Islay on 9 November and singles at Oronsay on 1 December and at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on the 5 December.

**LAPWING.** Peak numbers on Tiree were 3,490 during an all-island count on 13-14 January and 430 were at Gruinart, Islay on 9 December.

**PURPLE SANDPIPER.** High counts included 75 at Rubha Chraiginish and 60 at Balepheterish Bay, Tiree on 4 and 20 December respectively. A total of 58 flew past Machrihanish SBO on 10 November. A record count of 66 was made at Seal Island, Oronsay on 1 December and numbers at Dunoon 'Crazy Golf', Cowal peaked at 20 on 20 January.

**RUFF.** One was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 4 November with two there on 5-11 November, and a single bird there on 10 January was first ever on Tiree for that month of year.

**JACK SNIPER.** One was at Ruaig, Tiree on 6 December.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT.** Late birds: one at Gruinart, Islay on 6 November and one at The Reef, Tiree on 11 November.

**COMMON SANDPIPER.** A wintering bird seen at Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre from at least 9 December and seen several times up to 29 January.

**GREENSHANK.** A few widespread singles noted with a maximum of three birds noted at Gruinart, Islay on 9 November and 31 December and four there on 12 January.

**TURNSTONE.** Outwith counts on the islands, at



least 64 were counted near Dunoon 'Crazy Golf, Cowal on 20 January.

GREY PHALAROPE. One at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 11 November was being harassed by Hooded Crows.

### Skuas, gulls, terns and auks

POMARINE SKUA. An immature bird was seen off Aird, Tiree on 14 November, an immature bird flew past Machrihanish SBO on 5 December and an unusual winter record was of an immature bird off Ardrishaig, Mid-Argyll in mist on 3 January.

GREAT SKUA. Three late birds were off Aird, Tiree on 14 November.

KITTIWAKE. Peak movement noted was of 2,700 past Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 5 December.

BONAPARTE'S GULL. A first-winter bird turned up briefly at the head of Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll after a severe storm on 5 January (Jim Dickson).

LITTLE GULL. A first-winter bird was at the head of Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 9 November and an adult there on 5-6 January.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL. A number of birds were seen at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll: an adult on 9 November and 15 December (David Jardine), an adult and first-winter on 11 December (Jim Dickson). A first-winter was at the Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll on 26 November (Jim Dickson).

ICELAND GULL. A poor showing so far this winter with singles noted at Gribun, Mull on 16 December, one at Loch na Keal, Mull on 14-16 January and singles on Islay on 10-13 and 26 January.

KUMLIEN'S GULL. One was seen and photographed at Machrihanish SBO on 26-27 January. (Eddie Maguire, Kevin Hamilton *et al.*) (photo at the start of this article). A high proportion of Iceland Gulls in the UK this winter have been of this arctic Canada race.

GLAUCOUS GULL. An adult was at Kilfinichen Bay, Mull on 6 December. A juvenile frequented Bruichladdich, Islay from 29 December to 17 January and a second-winter bird at Uiskentuie, Islay on 2-3 January.



Glaucous Gull, Loch Bhassapol, Tiree, 17 January ©John Bowler

Three juveniles were at Rubha Chraiginis, Tiree on 4 January followed by 1-2 birds across the island (minimum of six birds: two adults and four+ juveniles). A juvenile was at the Lingerton Landfill, Mid-Argyll on 7 January and an adult was there on the 7-8 January.

TERN sp. A tern was seen flying across moorland behind the coastguard hut at Fionnphort, Mull on 26 January. The identity remains a mystery and it was not seen again. Note: up to ten Sandwich Terns have wintered in Northern Ireland (per NI birds blogspot.).

ARCTIC TERN. A late bird was seen off Port Charlotte, Islay on 8 November.

LITTLE AUK. One flew past Aird, Tiree on 5 December.

### Doves, Cuckoos, owls, Swifts, Kingfishers and woodpeckers

WOODPIGEON. Highest count noted was of 120 at Ballygrant Woods, Islay on 8 November.

KINGFISHER. Single birds (same bird?) noted at head of Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 9 and 25 November and 23 January (photo on next page).

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER. A bird seen on Lisimore on 30 December is possibly the first record for that island.



Common Guillemot, Loch Gilp, 15 January ©Jim Dickson

Kingfisher, Loch Gilp, 27 November ©Jim Dickson



### Passerines (larks to buntings)

**MAGPIE.** A single bird remained at Tobermory, Mull over-winter. Other sightings outwith Cowal: a single bird at Minard, Mid-Argyll on 10 November and 12 December.

**HOODED CROW.** A high count of 86 at Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll on 1 January.

**RAVEN.** At least 54 at the Lingerton Landfill site, Mid-Argyll on 10 January

**SKY LARK.** A flock of 125 noted at Lyrabus, Islay on 3 January.

**SWALLOW.** Latest birds noted were one over Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll on 4 November and one over Port Charlotte, Islay on 12 November.

**CHIFFCHAFF.** An *abietinus* type bird was at Baugh, Tiree on 2-4 November with another on 30 November and 4 December. The long-staying *tristis* (Siberian Chiffchaff) bird from October was seen again at Balephuill over several days in November and was last seen on 7 December.

**BLACKCAP.** A male was seen at Peninver, Kintyre for a few days at the end of January.

**FIELDFARE.** Numbers tailed off after October however 1,100 were noted in the Kilmartin Valley, Mid-Argyll on 4 November with 230 just north of Lochgilphead on 6 December and 230 (possibly same flock) nearby at Loch Leathan, Mid-Argyll on 19 December.

**REDWING.** The highest number noted was of 500 around Tiree on 18-19 November.

**WHEATEAR.** A late bird was at Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 1-2 November.

**WATER PIPIT.** One seen and photographed at West Hynish, Tiree on 19 November will be the first Argyll record if accepted by the ABRC (John Bowler).

**BRAMBLING.** Mainly singles noted across Argyll, with a peak of four birds with a flock of 50 Chaffinches at Bonawe, North Argyll on 23 November.

**GOLDFINCH.** Peak count on Tiree was 27 at Manan, Tiree on 30 November.

**SISKIN.** A high count of 55 noted at Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll on 26 November.

**TWITE.** Highest count in this period was of 400 birds at The Oa, Islay on 16 November.

**CROSSBILL.** Small numbers (single figures) were noted at several sites across Argyll.

**YELLOWHAMMER.** Highest count noted was of 14 birds at Gruinart, Islay on 26 November.

**SNOW BUNTING.** Small numbers noted on Tiree and Islay and largest flock was of 20+ at the Alt Dearg wind turbines near Ormsary, Knapdale on 8 November.

**LAPLAND BUNTING.** Two were at The Reef, Tiree on 1 November and one was there on 20 January.

**REED BUNTING.** Most noted was a group of 24 on an isolated willow bush in barren moorland at Barr Iola, Islay on 24 November.

### Stop Press

**American Herring Gull.** Two first winter birds were found in the Campbeltown area. The first was a large dark bird on 6 February (Dan Brown), which was also seen the next day (Jim Dickson). The second was a bird found at the harbour from 15 February onwards.

**Sabine's Gull.** An immature seen at Loch Scridain, Mull on 6 February (Bryan Rains)

**Yellow legged Gull.** An adult was seen near Drumlemble, Kintyre from 21 February (Jim Dickson/Eddie Maguire).

**Bean Goose.** Four 'tundra' *rossicus* birds were seen at Kilmichael near Campbeltown from 22 February.



## Ringling Twite at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory

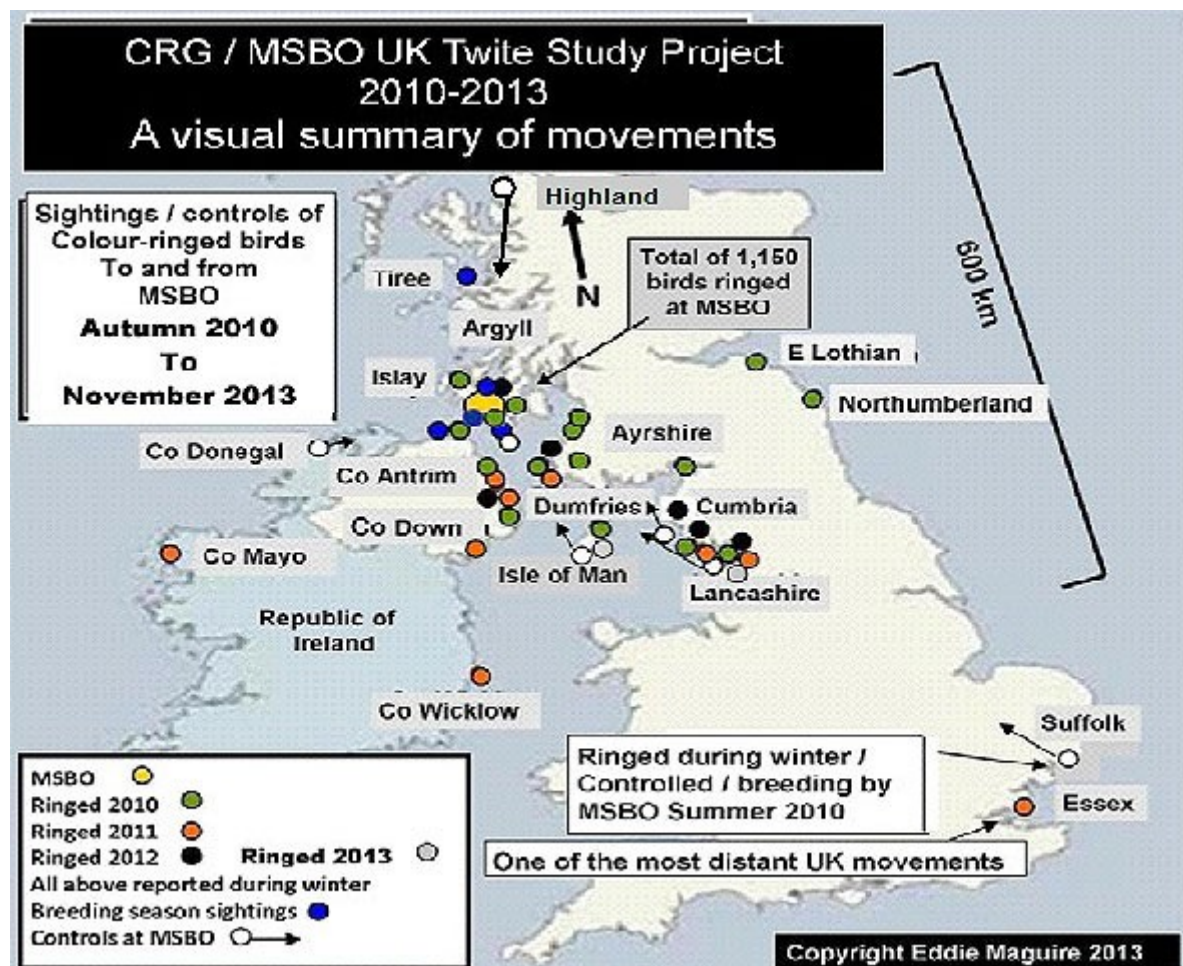
In Argyll the Twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*) is a local resident around coastal areas on the mainland and islands (*Bird of Argyll*). Historical data from the vicinity of Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) revealed a light passage of Twite in spring and a small breeding population during the summer. However, mid-August through to October is the peak time for the appearance of many passage birds from the north; presumably from numerous west coast islands and possibly mainland Argyll too. For many years flocks of up to 200 Twite have been observed in the area, and in recent years migrants have been attracted to the immediate vicinity of MSBO (just a few metres from observers) with nyjer seed.

During autumn a more or less continuous passage of birds has been assumed at MSBO. This assessment was reinforced by the

highly variable daily counts of Twite coupled with brief sightings of different colour-ringed birds, many of which were photographed. It was soon discovered that many of these had been ringed in previous winters in north-west England (Cumbria and Lancashire). However, to our surprise a colour-ringed Twite photographed at MSBO in autumn 2008 had been ringed in County Donegal in winter 2007. These observations encouraged us to start a colour-ringing scheme of our own to get a better understanding of Twite movements in Argyll, and during late summer 2010 MSBO joined the UK Twite Study Group. Subsequently the Clyde Ringing Group has assisted with catching and ringing birds.

### Catching Twite at MSBO

The trapping method is a rather simple, near



circular pull net (2.0m x 1.5m). The back edge of the net is attached to a lead that is linked to a 1m high post. A pull line is connected to the opposite end. The net is furled neatly in a semi-circle and when the pull line is activated (from MSBO) it rises quickly and closes efficiently almost 1m over the birds (forming a tent shape) and is then lowered carefully. No pegs are used. The net is 2m deep but rises only 1m allowing the net that remains furled on the ground to act as a very capable barricade. In addition, a small drystone dyke wall was built as a shelter to aid trapping operations. The successful pull system was designed by the warden and constructed (very professionally and at low cost) by Derek Goode (MSBO occa-



sional assistant and ex Campbeltown fisherman). The largest batch caught was around 30 birds. All birds trapped were fitted with a standard BTO ring and MSBO year-specific coloured plastic rings.

| <b>Movements of colour-ringed Twite caught or photographed at MSBO 2010-2013</b> |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Location</b>  | <b>Ringed at MSBO and seen/<br/>caught elsewhere</b> | <b>Ringed elsewhere, photo-<br/>graphed/caught at MSBO</b> |
| <b>SCOTLAND</b>  |  |  |
| Argyll   | 6  | 1  |
| Ayrshire   | 2  | 0  |
| Dumfries and Galloway  | 16   | 0  |
| East Lothian   | 1  | 0  |
| Highland   | 0  | 1  |
| <b>ENGLAND</b>   |  |  |
| Northumberland   | 2  | 0  |
| Cumbria  | 5  | 2  |
| Lancashire   | 11   | 12   |
| Isle of Man  | 4  | 1  |
| Suffolk  | 0  | 1  |
| Essex  | 1  | 0  |
| <b>NORTHER IRELAND</b>   |  |  |
| Co Antrim  | 5  | 0  |
| Co Down  | 3  | 0  |
| <b>REPUBLIC OF IRELAND</b>   |  |  |
| Co Donegal   | 0  | 1  |
| Co Mayo  | 1  | 0  |
| Co Wexford   | 1  | 0  |
| <b>TOTALS</b>  | <b>58</b>  | <b>19</b>  |



## Some results

During 2010-2013, a total of 1,150 Twite were ringed at MSBO, an average of 288 birds per year. The map shows the distribution of sightings/captures of MSBO-ringed birds, and birds that have been ringed elsewhere and caught/photographed at MSBO. The greatest movement was of a bird to Essex, but most movements were to and from western parts of Scotland and northern England. In total 59 birds ringed at Machri-

hanish have been sighted or caught elsewhere in the UK and Republic of Ireland, and 19 birds ringed in other part of the UK and Ireland have been sighted or caught at Machrihanish (Table).

**Many thanks** to Derek Goode, Rod Angus, Rab Morton for their help with this project and the many folks who have reported MSBO-ringed birds elsewhere in the UK and Ireland.

**Eddie Maguire (MSBO)**

## British Puffins caught up in Biscay storms

**The sight of a Puffin might be a little harder to come by this summer due to their struggle to survive recent storms that have wracked the Bay of Biscay.**

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) have received a record number of reports of Puffins, wearing uniquely-numbered metal rings, being washed up dead on the coasts of France and Spain.

In a normal winter, the BTO would expect two or three ringed Puffins to be found in France and Spain, but during the last few weeks, over 35 have been reported. The previous highest number of ringed birds found was back in 1979 when 17 dead Puffins were reported.

It is well known that British Puffins head out into the Atlantic for the winter months, riding out the worst that the weather can throw at them. As the winter progresses, our Puffins make their way into the Bay of Biscay before heading back to their breeding colonies and the burrows that they used the previous summer. Birds found in this current wreck have come from colonies in west Wales, northern Scotland, Orkney and Shetland.

Mark Grantham, Ringing Officer at the BTO, commented, "Up until the last couple of weeks it seemed that our Puffins might have survived the worst of the winter. However, from the reports of ringed birds that are being washed-up on the Biscay beaches it would seem that the recent storms were



Puffins, Treshnish Isles ©Steve Petty

just too much for many of the birds."

He added, "It is still early days and the number of ringed birds found is likely to rise further, but we must remember that if over 35 ringed birds have been found, many un-ringed birds must have been affected too."

Bird ringing in the UK is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology and is carried out by licensed volunteers, who ring over a million birds of a wide variety of different species every year. It is the information received from these rings, when found and reported to the BTO, that enables scientists at the Trust to chart events such as this.

For more information and to report a ring number to the BTO, please visit [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

**BTO Press Release (February 2014)**

Articles for the June issue of the *Eider* should with the Editor before the 20th May 2014 (note earlier date than usual)

### Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2013/2014)

**Chairman:** Mike Harrison, 8 Ferryfield Drive, Connel, Oban PA37 1SP (phone 01631 710656)

**Vice Chairman:** Nigel Scriven, 14 Taylor Avenue, Kilbarchan, Johnstone PA10 2LS (phone 01505 706652 & 01369 840606)

**Secretary:** Katie Pendreigh, The Whins, Ferry Road, Tayinloan, Argyll PA29 6XQ (phone 01583 441359)

**Treasurer:** Bob Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Arrochar, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG (phone 01301 702603)

**Membership Secretary:** Sue Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG (phone 01301 702603, e-mail [sue.cnoc@gmail.com](mailto:sue.cnoc@gmail.com))

**Committee:** Neil Brown (Campbeltown), Malcolm Chattwood (Lochgilphead), Jim Dickson (Cairnbaan), Steve Petty (Ardentinny), Andy Robinson (Partick), Blair Urquhart (Kilmichael Glen)

**Editor of the Argyll Bird Report:** Jim Dickson (contact details under Argyll Bird Recorder below)

**Editor of the Eider:** Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR (phone 01369 810024)

**ABC Website:** <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

### Argyll Bird Records Committee

Jim Dickson (Secretary, contact details below), John Bowler, Roger Broad, David Jardine, Malcolm Ogilvie & Simon Pinder

### Argyll Bird Recorder

Jim Dickson, 11 Pipers Road, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8UF

phone 01546 603967

e-mail [meg@jdickson5.plus.com](mailto:meg@jdickson5.plus.com)

### Assistant Bird Recorder

Malcolm Chattwood, 1 The Stances, Kilmichael Glasary, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8QA

phone 01546 603389

e-mail [abcrcorder@outlook.com](mailto:abcrcorder@outlook.com)

### BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

**Argyll Mainland, Bute & Gigha:** Nigel Scriven

Phone 01505 706652 & 01369 840606

E-mail [njscriven@gmail.com](mailto:njscriven@gmail.com)

**Argyll North—Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern:** Arthur Brown

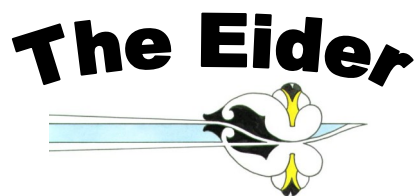
phone 01688 400515

e-mail [pamartbrown@btinternet.com](mailto:pamartbrown@btinternet.com)

**Islay, Jura & Colonsay:** John Armitage

phone 01496 860396

e-mail [jsa@ornquest.plus.com](mailto:jsa@ornquest.plus.com)



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

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and unedited digital photographs (jpeg files preferred) of birds and their habitats to the editor. Please do not embed digital images in word files. Digital photographs of Schedule 1 species taken at or near the nest will not be accepted for publication unless the photographer was covered by an appropriate SNH licence.

The *Eider* is published during the first week of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor **before** the 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 and has around 400 members. Its main role is to encourage an interest in wild birds and their habitats in Argyll; an area of outstanding natural beauty and biological diversity.

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

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

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