

March 2010
Number 92

The Eider



A great comparison shot of Ring- Billed Gull and Common Gull. Oban Harbour, 18th January 2010.

Photo©Jim Duncan

Bird Atlas Update

Indoor Meetings

Kintyre Moths

RSPB volunteering



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

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Great Grey Shrike photo@Jim Dickson

Acknowledgements

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Editorial

This year, Argyll Bird Club celebrates its 25th year. If you were there at the beginning, we would like to hear from you– anecdotes, photographs, favourite birding moments, your views on the changing environment and so on....

As part of the celebrations we are hoping to hold a photographic competition. Some of the details are still to be decided– but it is likely that photographs will be submitted to the Club and voted on via the website. Photographs must be taken in Argyll. The two entry categories are for Juniors and over 18's. Last date for entries will be 31st August 2010. More details will be presented at the March indoor meeting, via email and in the June edition of the Eider. So for now, start taking those photographs. See www.argyllbirdclub.org for further information.

On a completely different tack, Scottish Natural Heritage have been asked by the Scottish government to produce a policy document on Golden Eagle Special Protection Areas (SPA's). The consultation process ends 7th April 2010. Nigel Scriven has agreed to present ABC's response to the consultation document and would welcome any input from ABC members. To view the document, visit the SNH website, www.snh.org.uk/strategy/GE_consult01.asp and send your comments to Nigel at njscriven@googlemail.com

Announcements

The Isle of Mull Bird Club presents an evening with:

Roy Dennis

9th April 2010, 19.30

Craignure Village Hall, Mull



£3 entry to non Isle of Mull Bird Club members

Roy will be signing copies of his latest book "A life of Ospreys".

Journals – free to a good home!

The following journals are surplus to my requirements.

Animal Behaviour 1998 (vol **56**) to 2004 (vol **68**)

Journal of Applied Ecology 1981 (vol **18**) to 2003 (vol **40**)

Journal of Animal Ecology 1981 (vol **50**) to 2008 (vol **77**)

Please contact me if you are interested in giving them a home. I could bring them to the ABC's spring meeting.

Steve Petty

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ABC indoor meetings 2010

Argyll Bird Club Indoor Meeting. Community Centre, Easdale, Seil Saturday 6th March 2010

0930	Doors open; coffee and tea
0950-1000	Welcome & introduction Nigel Scriven (Chairman, ABC)
1000-1030	Recent bird sightings Paul Daw (ABC)
1030-1115	What are the beavers up to in Argyll? Jenny Holden, Scottish Wildlife Trust
1115-1145	Coffee/tea
1145-1215	Snowy owls, skuas and storm-petrels on St Kilda Will Miles, University of Glasgow
1215-1245	Eagles and other predators at an Alaskan seabird colony Alex Robbins, SNH Area Officer for Coll, Tiree & Mull
1245-1400	Lunch (available at the venue, with caterer arranged by the Bird Club)
1400-1430	Identification of warblers in Argyll Paul Daw (ABC)
1430-1500	Tracking bird migrations in a changing environment Bob Furness (ABC)
1500-1600	Tea/coffee and raffle
1600	End of meeting



Location: Seil Island Community Hall (Map shows Hall as Easdale Island Folk Museum). Take the A816 south from Oban or north from Lochgilphead. At Kilninver take B844 to Easdale. Follow this road which passes a converted tin church on the left at the summit of the road, then descend to the shore. Continue on past the Primary School, An Cala garden and the Hall is clearly visible on the left hand side of the road.

Catering: Coffee, tea and biscuits will be available on arrival and at breaks during the morning and afternoon sessions. Luncheon of soup and sandwiches will be provided in the Hall at a cost of £5.75 per person. There will be no bar service in the Hall but there is a well appointed Bar within easy walking distance (100 yards or thereabout).

Autumn Indoor Meeting: Saturday 6th November 2010. Cairnbaan Hotel

Field Trips 2010

- March:** **Sound of Gigha**, Saturday 27th March. Led by Paul Daw.
- April:** **Sandbank/Holy Loch** to use the newly- built bird hide, Sunday 25th April. Details Nigel Scriven.
- June:** **Field Trip to Jura**. We are planning a weekend field trip to Jura for the weekend Friday 25 to Sunday 27 June. There is relatively little accommodation on Jura, but the Jura Hotel has rooms available that weekend. An easier option that might be more attractive is to stay on Islay and go onto Jura for the day. There is good accommodation available on Islay (including the Youth Hostel, and several hotels; the Bridgend Hotel might be one of the most suitably located for this trip) and there is a very regular ferry crossing from Islay to Jura which would allow for some birding on Islay as well. Alternatively, it may be possible for some folk to travel direct to Jura from Crinan, landing towards the north end of Jura at Inverlussa. One of the aims of this trip is to look for nesting Arctic Skuas. The last observation of those birds was of a few pairs holding territories near to Ardlussa/Inverlussa and northwards along the northeast of Jura in Glen Lealt. The field trip will be coordinated by Bob Furness so if you are keen to come along on this weekend (for part or all of the time- and you are of course welcome to add further days yourself if you wish) please contact Bob at r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk or 01301 702603 to register your interest and for updates on the plans as they develop.

Further details about these field trips will be emailed to members nearer the time of each trip.

Field Trip Reports



Field trip: Ormsary Estate and fish farm 30/1/2010.

Overnight patchy snowfall and an early shoot at Ormsary did nothing to deter members on what turned out to be a good day for birding. Fine, calm weather enabled the group to amble through the estate from the community centre almost to where Ormsary water joins Allt Doire Duibhe before returning to the community centre for a welcome lunch- break and thaw out!! At the start of the walk, Chaffinch, House Sparrow, Blackbird and Buzzard were quickly seen by the farm buildings. A Song Thrush struggled to be heard as we



View towards Jura from the fish farm

passed by the sawmill buildings (much enjoyable chatter broke out along the walk). I made a comment about the general scarcity of Wood Pigeons in this part of Knapdale and as often happens in these cases, small groups of up to six birds were seen on numerous occasions flying over the plantation opposite- encouraged no doubt by the shoot taking place below them. Further up the hill above the sawmill , Crossbill were heard, a group of 10- 15 Siskin were seen flying over and a Pheasant did what it does best! gave half of us heart- failure as it exploded from its

hiding place. A Reed Bunting proved difficult to see in Willow scrub. Hooded Crow were much easier to see flying around the hillsides. Close to the end of the hill walk, Pied Wagtail and Fieldfare were seen. A distant, circling raptor produced the inevitable excitement... however, it was too far away to identify with certainty. The walk ended with a stop at Ormsary water. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was observed flying over the silver birch trees by the river. As we rested by the river discussing Dipper and Kingfisher sightings, two large raptors circled effortlessly above us. Most of us responded with incredulity- these Buzzards look a bit big?! Over the next ten minutes or so, we were treated to great views of Golden Eagles circling above us. On the way back down, Raven, Cormorant, Cross-bill and Woodcock were seen. Up to five Buzzards were observed circling one of the hilltops. Back at the community centre, Robin, Dunnock and Blue Tit were added to the list. A short lunch-break in the warmth of the community centre allowed us to regain our strength and regroup for an afternoon of sea-watching along the southern coastline of Loch Caolisport.

The beach to the north of the old burial ground provided the start to the afternoon birding. As expected, good numbers of Great Northern, Black throated and Red Throated divers were seen, along with an elusive Slavonian Grebe, Shag and Eider. The surrounding woodland and scrub produced Starling, Treecreeper, House Sparrow, Goldfinch and Chaffinch. One of the crows on the beach appeared to be a Carrion Crow- however, we lost our nerve and decided "hybrid crow" was enough of an identification. From the beach, a large group of gulls was observed spiralling high into the air beyond the fish farm. The gulls observed later at the fish farm were well down on the

Day List for Ormsary and Loch Caolisport

Greylag Goose	Great Spotted Woodpecker
Mallard	Meadow Pipit
Common Eider	Rock Pipit
Common Scoter	Pied Wagtail
Common Goldeneye	Wren
Common Pheasant	Dunnock
Red Throated Diver	Robin
Black Throated Diver	Blackbird
Great Northern Diver	Fieldfare
Slavonian Grebe	Song Thrush
Great Cormorant	Mistle Thrush
Shag	Blue Tit
Common Buzzard	Great Tit
Golden Eagle	Eurasian Treecreeper
Oystercatcher	Hybrid Crow
Ringed Plover	Hooded Crow
Northern Lapwing	Common Raven
Woodcock	Common Starling
Eurasian Curlew	House Sparrow
Redshank	Common Chaffinch
Turnstone	Greenfinch
Black headed Gull	Goldfinch
Common Gull	Siskin
Herring Gull	Common Crossbill
Great Black Backed Gull	Reed Bunting
Razorbill	
Black Guillemot	
Woodpigeon	



A typical scene by Ormsary fish farm



Golden Eagles. Ormsary Estate

usual numbers. After the beach, we walked along the road to view the bay to the south of the fish farm, viewing and photographing an obliging Mistle Thrush on the way. The bay consistently holds good numbers of gulls and ducks and 86+ Goldeneye produced one of the highest counts of this species so far this winter. A supporting cast was provided by Redshank, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover,

Turnstone, a lone Curlew and four species of gulls. Other birds in this area included Meadow and Rock Pipit. Distant views were



Goldeneye at Ormsary

obtained of Greylag Geese, Black, Red throated and Great Northern Divers. The field trip finished at the mouth of Ormsary water. Here, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, single Common Scoter and a Lapwing completed the additions to the field list. Unusually, certainties such as Grey Heron, Coal Tit and Kittiwake were not observed on the day. However, The combination of good weather, beautiful scenery and good "crack" ensured a good day was had by all. I would like to thank Ormsary Estates for giving us permission to walk through the estate, and for the use of the community centre during the lunch break.

Mark Williamson

(photos@editor)

Field Trip to the Add Estuary and Moine Mhor 26th February 2010

Despite the rather cold north-easterly breeze a good turn out of 15 enthusiastic birdwatchers met at the Islandadd Bridge near Bellanoch. From this excellent, if rather cold, vantage point several species were quickly notched up and Mark kindly agreed to keep the list updated for the day. As usual the Add Estuary is quite a good place to see wading birds and wildfowl and although, not the greater range of species you would find during migration, there were plenty of Wigeon and Teal on show with smaller numbers of Goldeneye, Merganser, Mute Swan, Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Little Grebe. A long-staying resident male Tufted Duck was found by Tom further along the Crinan Canal later on.

As parts of the canal are currently closed for repair we were unable to walk along to the bird hide but instead did some car sharing and headed towards Crinan Wood. On the way we briefly scanned the lawns at Bellanoch for the resident Moorhen but unfortunately, this now rare Argyll species, remained hidden!

The next part of the trip involved a walk around the outer border of Crinan Wood, taking us along the open section of the canal path to Crinan and inland back around to the cars. This gave us a chance to see some duck species more closely and also see Cormorant, Shag, Shelduck, Red-throated Diver, Eider, Buzzard and several woodland species. It was noted that the number of Wrens appear to be well down and that no Stonechats have been seen this winter, prompting fears of a population crash during the hard weather.

A rather excited Danielle made the most spectacular find of the day.....a Macaw (Scarlet?) perched outside a house in Crinan. Sadly, we could not tick this one! Slightly less brightly coloured, the sharp-eyed Mark spotted a handsome male Bullfinch flying across the road.



Part of the ABC group enjoying the sunshine at Crinan



Hen Harrier by Barsloisnoch. photo©Jim Dickson

Barsloisnoch Farm took us round the fields of Poltalloch estate heading into the bracing wind- but gave us the chance to add Greenland White-fronted Goose, Lapwing, Jackdaw, Mistle Thrush, Carrion Crow, Grey Wagtail, Reed Bunting and Starling.

We then headed into the shelter of Poltalloch Woods and caught up with Siskin and checked out flying Woodpigeon to see if any Stock Dove had returned to their Argyll stronghold.

Heading back to the cars, Tom found an emaciated immature male Kestrel at the side of the road though fortunately, there was still a live bird seen nearby as well as a briefly glimpsed Sparrowhawk. Finally, before the end of the trip we managed to locate a Redwing and a Fieldfare which have been quite scarce in these parts recently.

Altogether it had been a very successful day in good-spirited company. At this time of year birdlife in the area tends to be much scarcer, so we were all surprised when the daily total of birds seen amounted to 57 species- thanks to so many keen birdwatchers!

Jim Dickson.



One of the elusive Moorhens photographed later by Jim Dickson. photo©Jim Dickson

Before getting back to the cars we made a brief visit to the garden area of Mike and Daphne Murray who are keen birdwatchers and custodians of Crinan Wood. At this superb spot Mike told us we had just missed a Woodcock by a minute, though we did see some Treecreepers and added Coal Tit. Mike also told us about a Tawny Owl nest which had been predated by a Pine Martin and kindly supplied Danielle with video footage - to see if it could be digitised and displayed on our website.

We then headed back to the Islandadd bridge for a brief rest and lunch before the afternoon section of our walk. Driving towards Barsloisnoch we all managed to get very good views of a ring-tail Hen Harrier that quartered the fields just in front of us putting up several Curlew in the process. Our next walk from



Scarlet Elf Cup (apparently edible when cooked). Poltalloch

Bird List:

Mute Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Common Eider, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Pheasant, Red-throated Diver, Little Grebe, Great Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Hen Harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Oystercatcher, Northern Lapwing, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Rock pipit, Grey Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Eurasian Treecreeper, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Common Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting.

Notes

Golden Moments At The Oa

Wednesday 4th November 2009.... One of those days which will live long in the memory. On a birding holiday on Islay, the Wardens (David, Kim & youngest daughter Sophie) decided to check out the Oa, more in hope than in expectation.

After some foul weather the conditions improved and by the time we reached the RSPB car park (late morning) the sun was shining with a light onshore breeze. Heading left out of the car park we followed the track about 200 yards to a point giving elevated views of the coastal cliffs and crags.

Sophie was the first to spot movement and the call of "eagle!" went up. Sure enough a juvenile Golden Eagle showing the characteristic white on the wings and tail was soaring over the crags below us. Then, an adult bird was spotted, followed by another; both soaring above the juvenile. The juvenile took to the air again soaring up on the thermals to land on the highest cliff close to a sheep, which paid it no attention.

To our astonishment a fourth eagle, an adult, flew into view, moving across our view to the moorland behind the crags. Four eagles in view at the same time..... we couldn't believe our luck!!!

The two adults- surely the parents of the juvenile- continued soaring over the crags, watched by their offspring from the cliff top. Suddenly, the soaring adults furled their wings and plummeted downwards as if on a hunt. Lower down on a crag, two Buzzards were forced to take evasive action to avoid the diving eagles. This appeared to confirm that the adults were indeed the parents of the juvenile, but were they acting in defence of their offspring (as it was clearly big enough to look after itself) or was it a lesson on how to treat those annoying Buzzards; or perhaps a statement that the Buzzards would not be tolerated on their territory?

Enter the Ravens, a pair of which harassed one of the adults. The juvenile took to the air again and the adults soared up to join it high above the cliffs, drifting away along the coast in the direction of Port Ellen.

And what of the fourth Eagle we had seen so briefly earlier? We scanned the crags and hillocks of the hinterland and eventually picked it up on the lee of a crag preening itself and watching us watching it!!

Altogether an unforgettable 45 minutes and just about as good as it gets. To satisfy my curiosity and to exchange info on the sightings I later rang Andy Schofield, the RSPB warden for the Oa, who confirmed that it was indeed the resident family we had been watching. This pair have evolved a method of hunting Greenland White-fronted Geese and this may be one of the reasons the juvenile was still with its parents so late in the season, as of course the Geese don't show up until October.

The fourth Eagle was probably one of the other local pairs. Apparently, the resident pair have a certain degree of tolerance of other Eagles they recognize, but drive away any they do not!

David Warden

Golden Eagle. The Oa. December 2009 ©editor



Golden Eagle. The Oa. December 2009 ©editor



Some Kintyre Moths

It's clear from Daphne Campbell's account in the December 09 issue of the Eider that ABC members are prepared to interest themselves in more aspects of the countryside than just the birds- indeed previous issues have borne similar witness to the breadth of our members' interests. As someone whose knowledge of British birds is patchy, I personally welcome the evidence that as an organisation we are prepared to take a broad view of what our local countryside has to offer. To put it at its lowest, an outing in the course of which the birds are disobligingly absent may well be savoured through the finding of some special plant, or moth, or dragonfly or other creature one might not normally see. I particularly remember one such outing with David Merrie, some 5 or 6 years ago- to the Largybaan cliffs in south Kintyre to see Golden Eagles that nest in the area.



Magpie ©courtesy Ian Kimber



Silver Y ©courtesy Perry Hampson



Humming Bird Hawk Moth
©courtesy Stephen Foster



Elephant Hawk Moth ©Ian Kimber

Instead of eagles however, we found Kintyre's greatest claim to botanical fame, the cliff colony of *Oxytropis campestris* (yellow oxytropis). To this day that is the only occasion I have ever seen the colony in flower and I treasure both the memory and the photograph taken at the time by David Merrie. With thoughts such as this in mind it occurred to me that a short article on some of the day-flying moths we have seen and identified might be of interest to readers of the Eider. I am not seriously into moths and to me the majority of Scotland's 1300 or more species are a closed book. However, a few of the larger, commoner day-fliers are identifiable, even to someone like myself. As a gardener, I should perhaps begin with the Magpie, the larvae of which has regularly defoliated our four gooseberry bushes. Both the larvae and the imago are similarly coloured with bold black and orange dots on a white background. In recent years this insect has been abundant on moorland hereabouts, so its activities in the garden are not surprising.

Another species plentiful in late summer is an immigrant species- the Silver Y. It does produce a second brood in the UK, although I am not aware of ever having seen the larva. This small buff brown moth gains it's name from the small white mark on the forewing. The wings move very rapidly, with an almost buzzing action as the moth moves from flower to flower.

The only other moths associated with our garden are two of the Hawk moths- Humming Bird and Elephant Hawk Moth. The Humming bird Hawk moth is one of my favourite insects. It too is an immigrant but may be seen from spring to autumn. It has a short, fat, furry body, dark forewings and orange- brown hind wings which are difficult to see as true to its name it beats rapidly in flight. If one passes close, as happened to me, you can hear the buzz of the beating wings. When sipping nectar from a flower, it does not land on the plant, but hovers at the mouth of the flower and extends its tongue inside. We have seen these delightful creatures once or twice a year in most years since moving to the area in 2000. 2009 however, was a blank year. The Elephant Hawk- moth gets its name from the larva which is supposed to look like an elephants trunk. On one occasion a fully grown caterpillar was found in the garden and photographed by my wife. But wild-life photography is not as easy as it looks and all the pictures were abysmal.

Three other members of this intriguing and dramatic group of moths have been found in Campbeltown and the surrounding area. Poplar Hawk moth, Convolvulus Hawk moth and Death's Head Hawk moth, the scientific name of which comes from Acheron- one of the five rivers of the underworld and Atropes- the third of the three fates who cut the thread of life at the moment of death. My neighbour photographed one which had been resting on her front door. The local postman brought me the fresh corpse (which I still have) of a Convolvulus Hawk moth, which had been given to him by someone in the town to identify. The Poplar Hawk moth was found by a startled shopkeeper one morning, on the door of her shop when she came to open up. I was summoned to identify it.

The remaining five names on my list all belong to species you are more likely to encounter in the open countryside. Two of them are characteristic of the dunelands between Machrihanish and Westport. They are the Six- spot Burnet and the Cinnabar moth. The latter is familiar in its larval stage and is found on ragwort. The Burnet with its blackish forewings marked with red spots is familiar to most people. The chrysalis, a papery, boat-shaped cocoon can usually be found attached to a grass stem, in late spring or early summer.

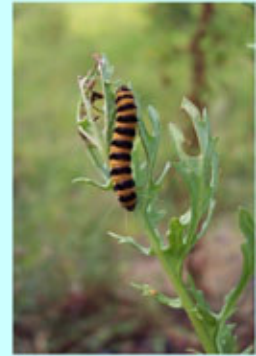
All of the remaining three species, the Drinker, the Northern Oak Eggar are all characteristic of open moorland. As far as I can remember, I have never seen the Drinker as an adult moth; but in the damp, marshy areas it prefers, it's larva is not uncommon. The Oak Eggar however, I have seen on the wing. It was during the course of a walk along the path from Tarbert to Skipness, in steady rain. As we crossed the highest part of the route we saw a number of large, dark insects cavorting around, which I at first assumed were butterflies. But, I knew enough about the Scottish butterfly population to realize that none of them matched what we were seeing. I later realised they must have been Oak Eggars; and I have since come across both larvae and imagos in similar situations in Kintyre and on Arran.

My last species- the Emperor, is in some ways the most spectacular of all the Scottish moths. It is large and generally brown in colour, but with a startlingly realistic eye depicted on each forewing. We have seen both the imago and larva on Kintyre moorland and on one occasion observed a newly hatched female resting for many minutes in a forest edge near Tangy loch.

It will be apparent from the foregoing that I am no expert on the Scottish moths- no mention, for example of two species mentioned in Daphne Campbell's account of last years field trip to Skipness- Fox moth and Angle Shades. They may well be more common than those I have mentioned. The main hope is that the gaps in my own knowledge may stimulate other members to add to or correct what I have written.

A final word about field guides. I have found the David Carter large-format book Butterflies and Moths in Britain Pan Books, 1982, an invaluable aid to identification. I have used Bernard Skinner's Moths of the British Isles 1998, in order to update some of the nomenclature used in Carter's book.

Ian Teesdale.



Cinnabar ©NEN Gallery



Burnet Moth ©NEN gallery



Oak Eggar ©courtesy Roy Leverton



Emperor ©courtesy David Painter

Surveys and Reports

RSPB Volunteer & Farmer Alliance

The Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (V&FA) has now seen over 500 Scottish farms receive free farmland bird surveys. Most farmers receive follow-up advice and 97% of farmers surveyed felt the project was worthwhile. With funding secured for the next 3 years we are looking to expand in more remote areas, and possibly cover some upland farms as well.

Currently we have only a few volunteers in Argyll, but we could do with more as we hope to attract more farmers in the region through attending agricultural shows later on in the year. Full training is provided and expenses are paid. It can be thought of as 'stand-by' volunteering - as we typically only match volunteers if farms request surveys within 20 miles of where they live. So in some years there might not be any survey work. If you are matched to a farm, the surveys involve 3 morning visits between April and July and typically take around 3-4 hours each.

Results from surveys are put into BirdTrack and the Bird Conservation Targeting Project. Farmers and volunteers each receive a report and hopefully direct benefit to farmland bird conservation results.

For further information or discuss please contact Dan Brown on 0141 331 0993; email dan.brown@rspb.org.uk.

Volunteers sought for Black Grouse lek surveys

Alison Phillip, the newly appointed Black Grouse Project Officer is looking for volunteers to monitor/find Black Grouse leks. Leks are sites where males display, allowing them to show off and impress the grey hens visiting the lek. The distribution of leks within Argyll is not fully known / up to date, so more volunteers are needed. It is a wonderful and very special experience to witness lekking Black Grouse. The birds don't make life easy, as they lek in the early mornings, often in remote locations. A reasonable level of fitness is required; you must be over the age of 18 and have suitable outdoor clothing. You can help in two ways:

- i) **Survey a known lek site** – Ideally, volunteers are matched to under-recorded sites close to home and according to capabilities. The lek survey involves at least two site visits, one between the 21st March - 18th April, and a second between 19th April - 15th May. It is also recommended that a site visit be made before the actual recording day, to check directions and find a suitable vantage point.
- ii) **Assist in co-ordinated counts** – This approach is used to introduce new volunteers to survey methods at sites where estimating numbers has been difficult in the past. This will be preceded by a 'Black Grouse Survey Evening' in Lochgilphead on 10th March 2010 which will outline ecology and survey methods.

Alison is keen to hear from potential volunteers willing to help. Results from surveys will allow us to target positive habitat management for Black Grouse in the most beneficial places. Contact **Alison Phillip** Tel: 0141 331 0993 or email: alison.phillip@rspb.org.uk

**Black Grouse
Recovery Project**
Argyll and Stirling



Bird Atlas 2007-11. The third summer.

On 1st April the third summer of fieldwork for the 2007-11 Bird Atlas will commence. At the half way stage 48% of the minimum number of required tetrads in Argyll had been covered for breeding season timed tetrad visits (TTVs) and hundreds of *Roving Records* had been received. This is an excellent achievement and the challenge now is to complete the gaps in TTV coverage and boost species lists in every square.

Timed Tetrad Visits

There is still much to do throughout Argyll to achieve full coverage. The biggest gaps are in the north of the mainland, Cowal, south Mull, Coll, Islay and Jura. So how can you help? If you have been allocated tetrads for breeding season visits please make an effort to cover these this summer. If you think you are unlikely to cover them please inform your local atlas organiser so that the tetrads can be reallocated. If you would like to take on more tetrads visit www.birdatlas.net and click on the **request a tetrad** button. For each 10km square this will inform you of which tetrads require further coverage. The priority is to have at least eight tetrads covered in each 10km square, so look for squares with fewer than eight and target these. In some of the remoter areas it may be possible to survey a tetrad with a single two hour visit (with separate tally lists kept for both hours) as long as the visit takes place during late May or June. If you are considering this option, please inform your local organiser.

Roving Records and breeding evidence codes.

We are also very keen to gather *Roving Records* in order to boost species lists in all the Argyll squares. All Argyll Bird Club members can assist with this. **Figure 1** shows where most help is required. This map looks at the number of species recorded in each 10km square so far and compares it with the number recorded in that square in the last breeding atlas. Squares where more than 50% of species are 'missing' (red and black dots) are very under recorded and need more effort. Even those squares coloured yellow and brown (10 – 49% missing) also require a bit more effort to boost species lists.

The **Any Square Summary** button on the website allows you to print out species lists for any 10-km square in Argyll. This can be used to work out what species are missing from the square. Consider adopting a few

of your local squares and see if you can help boost their species tally.

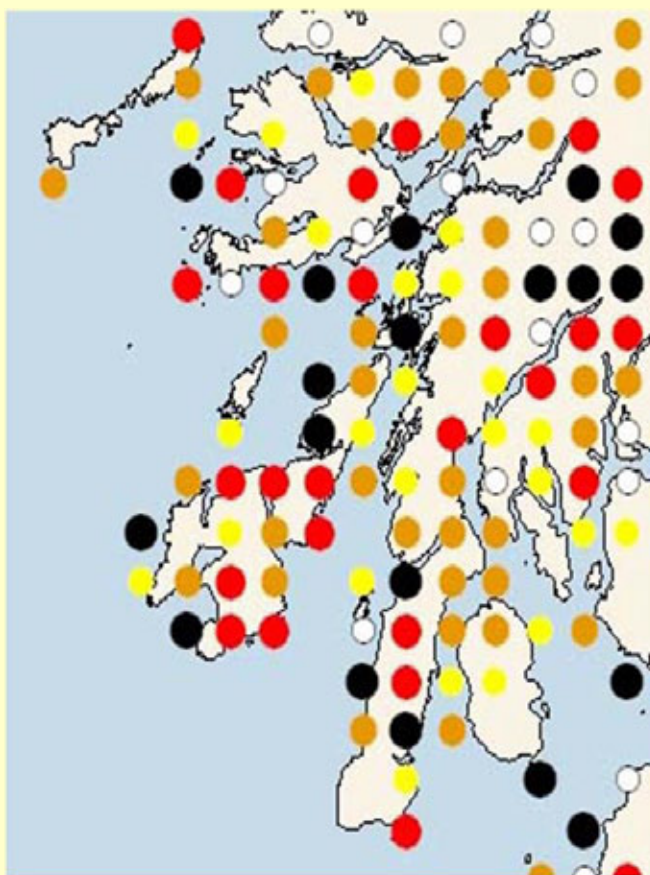


Fig 1. Species coverage during the current survey

A major aim of the atlas project is to map the current breeding range of all species. To achieve this, all summer atlas or Bird Track records can be greatly enhanced by adding breeding evidence codes. For most species possible breeding evidence codes like **H** (= in breeding habitat, such as a Dipper on a river) or **S** (= singing bird) can usually be added. The use of codes such as **P** (= pair in suitable habitat), **T** (= several singing territorial birds), **B** (= bird carrying nest material) or **A** (= agitated, alarm calling bird) can boost the record up to the probable breeding category. Confirmed breeding codes include **NE** or **NY** (= nest with eggs or young) and **ON** (= bird going on or into a nest site), but also useful ones like **DD** (= distraction display), **FF** (= bird carrying food or faecal sac) or **FL** (= recently fledged dependent young). These latter codes mean that you can confirm breeding without necessarily finding a nest. Please try and add codes at as high a level as applicable. As the breeding season

progresses it should be possible to add more probable and confirmed codes on later visits to squares for *TTVs* or *Roving Records*. There are a few tricky species with regard to these codes. Herons, gulls and terns away from known colonies should probably be coded as **U** (= summering). An examination of the species lists via the **Any Square Summary** button will show which species still require evidence of probable or confirmed breeding. You may think your local square has been completed, but in fact there could still be much more work to do in order to gather breeding evidence.

Figure2 shows the current breeding season distribution of Oystercatcher in Argyll. The large red dots indicate confirmed breeding, medium ones probable breeding and small ones possible breeding. Even with a common bird such as this there are a lot of gaps and a lot of records do not confirm breeding. Although finding a nest or a chick can be tricky, the adults very agitated manner near a nest or chicks can be used to confirm breeding (**DD**).

The Argyll Bird Club has been a strong supporter of this important conservation project. Please consider helping either by taking on some tetrads or providing Roving Records with breeding evidence codes. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

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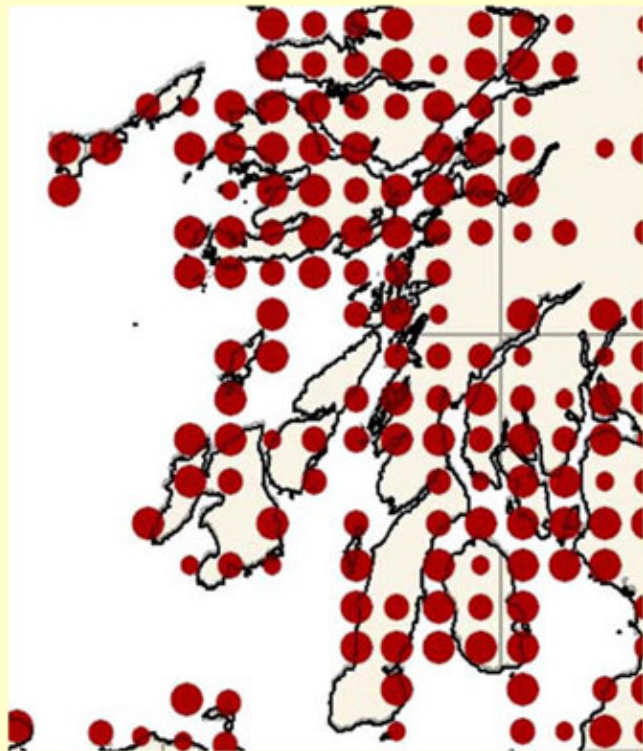


Fig2. Breeding distribution of Oystercatcher in Argyll

Bob Swann
bob.swann@bto.org
Scottish organiser Bird Atlas
2007-11.



Bird Atlas 2007-11. Winter tetrad progress

The table below summarises the number of 10-km squares in the region and how they have been allocated to observers in each season.

Level of allocation	Number of 10-km squares
Less than minimum tetrad allocation* ¹	5
Minimum tetrad allocation achieved	74
Additional 10-kms with low-priority tetrads* ² : none allocated	4
Additional 10-kms with low-priority tetrads: some allocated	0

*¹ Minimum allocation means 8 or more priority tetrads, or all of them if fewer than 8 available

*² Low-priority = tetrads whose centre is not on land

The **Winter Atlas tetrads survey** is progressing satisfactorily with only 11% left for winter 2010/11. This is achievable if those willing to take on a few of the remainder which, admittedly, are in remote areas contact me for further information.

Priority	No. of tetrads	No. needed for minimum coverage (min-8-rule)	Total no. TTVs (2 visits)	Total no. TTVs (only 1 visit)	No. using min-8-rule (1+ visits)	% of target (1+ visits)
High (tetrads on land)	1359	572	404	160	510	89%
Low (coastal tetrads)	318	.	33	16	.	

So far, *Timed Tetrad Visits* have been made in **613** tetrads in winter (**437** receiving both early and late visits).

Richard Allan.

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Recent Reports

November 2009
To
January 2010

Paul Daw

Tel. 01546 886260

e-mail:

monedula@globalnet.co.uk

The latest news on bird sightings in Argyll is available on the Argyll Bird Club website at www.argyllbirdclub.org See 'Click here for latest bird reports' on the home page.

This report is a selection from the sightings to be published on the club website (see Latest Reports 90 - 92 for full details of sightings during this period).

Despite the very cold spell of weather there has been plenty to interest Argyll birders.



Great Grey Shrike. Slockavullin. photo@Jim Dickson

RARE AND UNUSUAL SPECIES: An adult male **Great Grey Shrike** was found by Brian John near Slockavullin at 12.25 pm on 07 December and remained there for several days (see below for details) (Brian John/Jim Dickson). **Gyr Falcon** and **Long-billed Dowitcher** were both reported on Islay in January.

GARDEN BIRDS. Jays have been more widely reported this winter than usual and have even appeared in several gardens, presumably driven by the hard weather. For similar reasons there have been several reports of **Woodcocks** and even the odd **Water Rail** coming into ABC members gardens. On the other hand there were, perhaps not surprisingly, fewer records than usual of wintering **Blackcaps**.



Bittern. Croabh Haven. Dec 2009.

©John Anderson

LATE MIGRANTS. The latest **Swallow** records received so far included one at Nerabus, Islay 8 November (Stuart Graham) and an immature at Baileouchdarach, Lismore on 22 November (David Jardine). Also a **Sand Martin** flying along King Street (Portnahaven), Islay on 5 November (Stuart Graham) was the latest ever Argyll record – by one day! Let me know a.s.a.p. if you have any later sightings.

STOP PRESS. A **Red-necked Grebe** has been showing well in Loch Gilp during early March.

Mainland WeBS counts for January 2010.

We now have a growing team of club members who check various stretches of water each month from September to March for the BTO Wetlands Bird Survey. We are always keen to cover other lochs etc (e.g. Loch Caolisport, Loch Gilp and many sites on Mull) so please contact Paul Daw if you are interested.

Birds recorded during WeBS counts on mainland Argyll included:

Holy Loch, Cowal.

Wildfowl: 19 **Eurasian Wigeon**, 24 **Eurasian Teal**, 75 **Mallards**, 102 **Common Eiders**, 15 **Common Goldeneyes**, and 3 **Red-breasted Mergansers**.

Divers, grebes, herons etc: one **Red-throated Diver**, 11 **Little Grebes**, 3 **Shags** and one **Grey Heron**.

Waders: 430 **Oystercatchers**, 20 **Ringed Plovers**, 2 **Red Knots**, one **Common Snipe**, 18 **Eurasian Curlews**, 20 **Common Redshanks** and 22 **Turnstones**.

(George Newall).

Kilfinan Bay, Cowal.

Wildfowl: 38 **Greylag Geese**, 11 **Canada Geese**, 2 **Eurasian Teal**, 11 **Mallards**, 22 **Common Eiders**, 3 **Common Goldeneyes** and 5 **Red-breasted Mergansers**.

Divers, grebes, herons etc: one **Great Northern Diver**, one **Great Cormorant**, 7 **Shags** and one **Grey Heron**.

Waders: 21 **Oystercatchers**, 4 **Eurasian Curlews** and one **Common Redshank**.

Other species: Dipper.

(Tom Callan).

Ruel Estuary and Loch Riddon, Cowal.

Wildfowl: 36 **Greylag Geese**, one **Common Shelduck**, 23 **Eurasian Wigeon**, 17 **Mallards** and 5 **Common Goldeneyes**.

Divers, grebes, herons etc: 2 **Little Grebes**, 2 **Shags** and 5 **Grey Herons**.

Waders: 112 **Oystercatchers** and 22 **Eurasian Curlews**.

(Daphne Campbell).

Loch Etive, North Argyll.

Wildfowl: 27 **Mute Swans**, one **Pink-footed Goose**, 65 **Greylag Geese**, 133 **Eurasian Wigeon**, 42 **Eurasian Teal**, 239 **Mallards**, 23 **Common Eiders**, 21 **Common Goldeneyes**, 8 **Red-breasted Mergansers** and one **Goosander**.

Divers, grebes, herons etc: 21 **Little Grebes**, 10 **Great Cormorants**, 23 **Shags** and 35 **Grey Herons**.

Waders: 33 **Oystercatchers**, 8 **Ringed Plovers**, 17 **Eurasian Curlews**, 3 **Common Redshanks** and 2 **Turnstones**.

Other species: two **Eurasian Sparrowhawks** and 7 **Common Buzzards**.

(Mike Harrison).

Loch Sween, Mid-Argyll.

Wildfowl: 16 **Mute Swans**, 26 **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, 5 **Greylag Geese**, 4 **Common Shelducks**, 43 **Eurasian Wigeon**, 49 **Eurasian Teal**, 38 **Mallards**, 22 **Common Goldeneyes**, 20 **Red-breasted Mergansers** and 3 **Goosanders**.

Divers, grebes, herons etc: 6 **Little Grebes**, 2 **Shags** and 7 **Grey Herons**.

Waders: 23 **Oystercatchers**, 16 **Ringed Plovers**, 4 **Dunlin**, a **Common Snipe**, 21 **Eurasian Curlews** and 2 **Common Redshanks**.

Other species: male and female **Hen Harriers**.

(Paul Daw).

Sound of Gigha, Kintyre:

Wildfowl: 30 **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, 4 **Common Shelducks**, 16 **Mallards**, 92 **Common Eiders**, 30 **Long-tailed Ducks** (an impressive count), 29 **Common Scoters**, 2 **Common Goldeneyes**, 16 **Red-breasted Mergansers** and 3 **Goosanders**.

Divers, grebes, herons etc: 11 **Red-throated Diver**, 19 **Great Northern Divers**, 35 unidentified divers, 16 **Slavonian Grebes**, 35 **Shags** and one **Grey Heron**.

Waders: **Oystercatchers** (no count), 26 **Ringed Plovers**, 10 **Northern Lapwings**, 2 **Sanderlings**, 39 **Dunlin**, one **Common Snipe**, 8 **Eurasian Curlews**, 5 **Common Redshanks** and 2 **Turnstones**.

Other species: 10 **Meadow Pipits**, 21 **Rock Pipits** and 7 **Pied Wagtails**.

(Katie Pendreigh).

Wildfowl (and Game-birds):

Whooper Swan with histories:

1) A radio tagged Whooper Swan (NA3) was tracked leaving Iceland at 15:00 on 3 November 2009, flying past the Shiantis at 07:00 on the morning of 4 November, Barra at 09:00, Tiree at 10:00 and arriving on Islay at 12:00. Not bad going! (per Clive McKay)

2) 11 November. A darvic ringed **Whooper Swan** (DK4) was on stubble at Strath Farm (The Laggan) Kintyre along with 4 other adults on 11 November 2009 (Eddie Maguire). Originally ringed as a cygnet on Iceland in August 2007 it had been seen subsequently at Welney, Norfolk (Oct 2007) and Loch Eye, Ross-shire.

During a Bird Atlas visit to Lismore 21-22 November, a total of 191 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were seen at the south end of the island and a single **Barnacle Goose** was with 12 **Canada Geese** at Port Ramsay (David Jardine). A **European White-fronted Goose** at Balinoe on 15 December was paired with a Greylag Goose. John Bowler presumes this bird has been on Tiree since April 2009.

A single, rather lost looking, immature **Pale-bellied Brent Goose**

was at the head of Loch Gilp on the afternoon of 28 December (Jim Dickson/Brian John). The all-island goose count on Tiree (18-19 Jan) produced 139 **Whooper Swans**, 787 **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, 3,532 **Barnacle Geese** and 3 **Pink-footed Geese** at Cornaigmore, with 1 at Heylipol (John Bowler).

Counts around the Tiree lochs on 6 January, produced high totals of: 145 **Whooper Swans**, 12 **Pintails** and 160 **Tufted Ducks** (John Bowler) and a total of 440 **Barnacle Geese** were found, just south of Toberonochy, on Luing, Mid-Argyll on 8 January (Anya Lamont per Richard Wesley).

Wildfowl at Ormsary (Knapdale) Mid-Argyll at midday on 18 January included 12 **Common Shelducks**, 30 **Mallards**, ca 70 **Common Eiders** and 70 **Common Goldeneyes** (Jim Dickson).

A male and female **Mandarin Duck** were on the river at Benmore Botanic Garden on 23 December and 20 or more **Common Goldeneyes** and 2 **Goosanders** were on Holy Loch (John Bowler).

A flock of at least 120 **Eurasian Wigeon** were at the head of Loch Gilp on 17 December (Karl Pipes).

A total of 32 **Tufted Ducks** on Loch Seil (Mid-Argyll) on the evening of

21 January was a very good count for the mainland (Bill Allan).

Five **Pochards**, all male, on Loch Crinan on 28 November were unusual for (Karl Pipes) what seems to be a declining species in Argyll at present. John Bowler reports "**Pochard** numbers have also crashed (on Tiree) in the last few winters with very few/no wintering birds - last winter saw 4 in Nov 2008 and 1 in Feb 2009. There have been none at all so far this winter, and I think it's a very similar situation on Uist. There are lots on Orkney however, this winter - so not quite sure what is going on". However, a flock of 9 **Pochards** on Loch Awe, off Lochawe Village, were a nice surprise during winter atlas survey work on 15 December (Roger Broad) and two drake **Pochards** were on Loch nan Druimnean (nr Kilmelford) on 29 January 2010 (Bill Allan).

On the 21 October a male **Long-tailed Duck** was seen very close to Calgary beach, Mull at 3.30pm - an unusual bird for this location (Anand Prasad). The WeBS count on Tiree on 23 November produced: a female **Surf Scoter** at Hough Bay, very likely to be the same bird returning for its 3rd winter, with 3 **Long-tailed Ducks** and just 52 **Tufted Ducks** on Loch a' Phuill (John Bowler).

The winter flock of **Common Goldeneyes** at the at mouth of Leacann Water (Furnace) Loch Fyne) numbered 88 on 8 December (Paul Daw) and on 23 January 2010, a total of 158 **Common Goldeneyes** were counted at the head of Loch Caolisport and at Ormsary (Jim Dickson).

Five **Goosanders** were at the mouth of Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 4 December (Tom Callan).

A total of 6 **Black Grouse** were seen at Inveroran (Loch Tulla) North Argyll on 4 December. Two



Richardson's Canada Goose, Balephetrish, Tiree. photo©John Bowler



Little Egret. Loch Gruinart, Islay. photo©Jim Duncan

flying over the moor in the afternoon and 4 going to roost later (Graham & Danielle Clark). And five **Black Grouse** were seen near Loch Nant, Mid-Argyll on 9 January (Roger Broad).

At least 3 **Indian Peafowl** were seen at Corra (Ardlamont) Cowal on 31 January 2010 (Tom Callan).

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

A total of 42 **Great Northern Divers** were counted off Ardpatrik Point, West Loch Tarbert on 8 November (Alastair Reid), and 18 **Great Northern Divers** were at Hough Bay, Tiree on 3 January (John Bowler).

A **Little Egret** was in the Add Estuary again on 3 November. On the following morning it was just opposite the bird hide. It is quite an unusual bird in that it shows extensive yellow/green on the legs and has a bit of yellow in front of the eye (Jim Dickson). A **Little Egret** at the Ulva Lagoons, Loch

Sween on 11 November (Karl Pipes) was initially thought to have been the same bird (Karl Pipes) – but on 13 November two **Little Egrets** were standing proudly together on the spit in the middle of the Add Estuary at Islanddadd Bridge. One was again near the Islanddadd Bridge, Bellanoch on 18 November (Mrs. M McLellan per Lynsey Gibson).

A **Little Egret** was showing well in Loch Gilp at lunch-time on 10 December and was still present later

in the afternoon. It had much darker legs than the long stayer at the Add Estuary in November (Jim Dickson/Paul Daw/Mike Gregory). A **Little Egret** at the head of Loch Gilp in the late morning of 24 December was a different individual, as this one had extensive yellow legs (Jim Dickson). The question now is – were there two or three (or even more) Little Egrets in the area at the time? (Jim Dickson). A **Little Egret** was reported again at Loch Gruinart, Islay in early January (John Armitage).

A **Bittern** was reported near Craobh Haven at 12.10pm on 8 December by John & Helen Anderson. Amazingly, it was standing right beside the main A816 road (NR 803 086): they noticed it as they drove past but could hardly believe their eyes. They drove back and managed to snatch a quick photo on their mobile phone (John & Helen Anderson). Jim Dickson was alerted and after a quick dash up there managed to locate it at 12.55 pm before it walked slowly off and could not be found again. He had time to make sure it was **Eurasian Bittern** rather than an American Bittern! It was seen again by Bill Allan early on the following morning (9



Bittern. Craobh Haven. photo©Jim Dickson

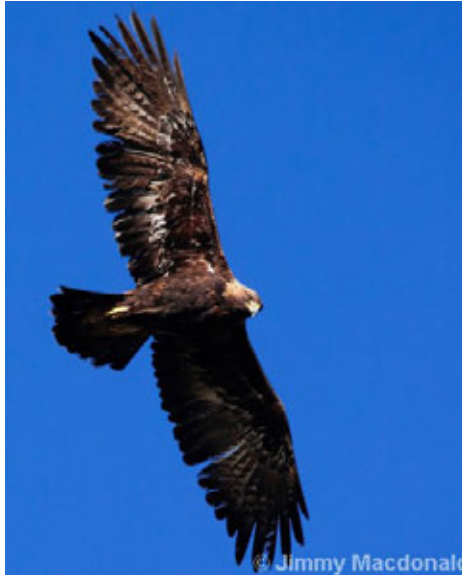
Dec) but not subsequently. The last confirmed record in Argyll was a dead bird found near Appin in 1999, and this was one of only eight since the first record on Islay in 1864.

Some records take longer to percolate through than others. In mid-January a lady who lives near the Craobh Haven turn off phoned to ask if it was at all possible she had seen a Bittern there in mid-December. She seemed quite pleased when I told her it was...

The sad ending to the Bittern saga came on 9 February 2010 when Wendy Bramley phoned to say she and her husband had found the Bittern in exactly the same place near Craobh Haven and that, not surprisingly given the hard weather since December, it was in a bad way. So much so, they were able to pick it up and take it home. Despite doing their best to feed it the bird died on 11 February.

Raptors, rails etc.:

Two **Golden Eagles**, a **White-tailed Eagle** and a **Hen Harrier** were all seen in the Treshnish area of Mull on 2 January (Anand Prasad). Four **Golden Eagles** in the sky together is quite a sight. On 4 November, three adults and a juvenile were seen together at Upper Killeyan, Islay (David Warden). During the Argyll Bird Club field trip to Ormsary (Knapdale) on 30 January (described elsewhere on the website and in the March 2010 *Eider*) the highlight was magnificent views of two **Golden Eagles** soaring over the forest in bright sunshine and on 31 January 2010 two **Golden Eagles** harried by 4 crows flew over Tom Callan's house at Otter Ferry. Only Tom's second sighting there in 30 years! **Common Kestrel** records during December include a female at Bal-



Golden Eagle. West Kintyre.
photo© Jimmy MacDonald

limeanoch (Loch Awe) on 7 December (Karl Pipes) and males at Lindsaig, Cowal on 11 December and Leanach, Cowal on 19 December (Tom Callan). A **Kestrel** was at Ardencaple "lagoons", Seil on 31 January and 2 more were at Loch Nell (Bill Allan).

Three **Merlins** were seen between Loch Bhasapol and Hough, Tiree on 14 January and a **Merlin** was seen to catch and kill a Snipe at Barrapol, Tiree on 19 January (John Bowler).

A **Gyr Falcon** was reported from Portnahaven, Islay at 12.30 on 16 January (per Jim Dickson). It was reported as a white-morph bird and was seen again in the Portnahaven area on 17 January (Simon Pinder per Angus Murray).

Hard weather is often a good time for seeing the usually very elusive Water Rail and this winter has been no exception. At least two **Water Rails** were calling at Aros Moss (The Laggan) Kintyre on 18 November (Rab Morton). One was at Achnacloish Loch, Lismore on 21 November (David Jardine) and single **Water Rails** were seen in gardens at Balephuil and Mannal, Tiree on 13 December (John Bowler). **Water Rails** were show-

ing well on Tiree on 3 January, with at three or more at Balephuil, two (including 1 taken by a cat) at West Hynish and one at Mannal (John Bowler) and a **Water Rail** made a brief appearance in a garden at Lochdon, Mull on 20 January 2010. It picked up a piece of bread and scurried off (Alan Spellman).

Three adult **Moorhens** were seen together near the swing bridge over the Crinan Canal, opposite Crinan Ferry (with a male Tufted Duck) on 18 November and another Moorhen was seen on grass at Bellanoch, making four in all. Fairly unusual for what is always a scare bird in Argyll (Paul Daw).

Three **Coots** were at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 23 November - a high count here these days (John Bowler).

Waders:

A flock of 86 **Ringed Plovers** at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 3 November included a colour-ringed bird from Blairbuie in Wester Ross that also spent the 2008-09 winter at the site. And an Icelandic leg-flagged **Sanderling** was there for its third consecutive winter with 2 **Purple Sandpipers** (John Bowler).

Two **American Golden Plovers** were in a field opposite Ceabhar guest house at Sandaig, Tiree on the afternoon of 18 November (Neil Darroch per John Bowler). This rarity is becoming something of a regular on Tiree. Good numbers of waders on Tiree in December included: 2,200 **Golden Plovers** at Kirkapol/Gott Bay on 10 December, 131 **Ringed Plovers**, 85 **Sanderlings** and 193 **Dunlin** at Sorobaidh Bay on 9 Dec and 105 **Ringed Plovers** and 216 **Sanderlings** (including an Icelandic leg-flagged bird) at Balephetrish Bay on 8 Dec (John Bowler). Waders at Ormsary (Knapdale) Mid-Argyll at midday on 18 January included 40 **Ringed Plovers**, 9 **Purple Sandpipers**, 40 **Common Redshanks** and 50 **Turnstones** (Bill Allan).

An impressive count of 120 **Purple Sandpipers** was made at Hough Bay, Tiree on 30 January (John Bowler) and, on 31 January, two **Greenshanks** were with two **Common Redshanks** at Ardencaple "lagoons", Seil (Bill Allan). A flock of 34 **Northern Lapwings** were near Ardlamont Point, Cowal (Tom Callan). An impressive flock of 372 **Sanderlings** were at Gott Bay, Tiree on 5 November (John Bowler).

A total of 17 **Common Snipe** were recorded during the Loch Etive WeBS count on 22 December – an usually high number (Mike Harrison). Other indications of larger than usual numbers of **Snipe** (or at least more visible birds) included six at the Add Estuary and up to 4 at Loch Gilp (first time Jim had seen them there) on 28 December (Jim Dickson) and three on the roadside at Strathlachlan Forest, Cowal on 29 December with others seen in the open around this time (Tom Callan).

Three **Woodcock** seen at Tom-breac Plantation N of Inveraray on 13 November were among many seen during Atlas work in November. After the cold weather later however, they were conspicuous by their absence during visits in January (Paul Daw).

Two **Woodcock** were flushed on Cruachan Treshnish, Mull on 2 January: in previous years they have been common in Treshnish wood but only occasionally met with on open moorland. This cold spell has caused them to be much more common in the open and it is now impossible to go for a walk without flushing several (Anand Prasad).

The **Long-billed Dowitcher** was reported again at Loch Gruinart, Islay in early January (John Armitage).

A late **Whimbrel** was calling out on the inter-tidal area at Loch Gilp

on the morning of 9 November (Andrew Stevenson). The total of 98 **Turnstones** at Otter Ferry, Cowal (43 at Fish Farm and 55 at Killail) on 25 November was the peak count so far this winter (Tom Callan).

A late **Grey Phalarope** was seen off Aird, Tiree during a seawatch on 2 November and a **Jack Snipe** was at the Reef (John Bowler).



2nd winter Mediterranean Gull, Ardrishaig. ©Jim Dickson

Skuas (see also 'Seabirds'), gulls, terns and auks:

A nice couple of **Mediterranean Gulls** (adult and 2nd winter) were found at lunchtime on 13 January, just offshore at Ardrishaig, Mid-Argyll in with 200+ **Black-headed Gulls** (Andrew Stevenson). By 15 January there were three **Mediterranean Gulls** in the area (2 adults and a 2nd winter) and on 17 January yet another **Mediterranean Gull** was found in the bay near Craobh Haven (Bill Allan).

What we presume to be our faithful returning adult **Ring-billed Gull** was seen once more on the George Street foreshore in Oban at 15:15 on 5 December (Stuart Gibson per Alan Spellman) and was there again on 8 December (Bill Allan). It has been seen several times since.

Approx. 3,800 gulls feeding off Otter Ferry on 3 January included at least 1,000 each of **Black-headed, Common Gull and Her-**

ring Gull. Similar numbers were present there until 12 Jan and again on 29 Jan (Tom Callan). Reports of 'white-winged' gulls have been few and far between so far this winter. A **Glaucous Gull**, probably 1st winter, was seen near Islandadd Bridge, Add Estuary on 22 December (Tom Callan/Daphne Campbell) and on 16 January 2010, an adult **Iceland Gull** was at Port Askaig, Islay and an adult **Glaucous Gull** flew north past Feolin Ferry, Jura at 1.15pm (Simon Pinder per Angus Murray). Reports of **Little Auks** included one seen quite close to the shore off the mouth of the Killail Burn, Otter Ferry on 9 November (Tom Callan), one off Gunna Sound, Coll on 10 November and one seen from the ferry between Mull and Coll on 19 November (John Bowler).

Doves, owls, woodpeckers etc.:

Barn Owls were reported at the Auchinellan / Ederline, B840 roadside, Loch Awe on 29 December (S Webb., R Regan per Karl Pipes) and at Ballimore (Otter Ferry) Cowal, on 30 December (not far from where a **Tawny Owl** was seen on the 27 December) (Tom Callan). A **Long-eared Owl** flew across the Oban-Lochgilphead road after dark on 16 January, just south of the turn off for Craobh Haven (Bill Allan).

Approx. 40 **Wood Pigeons** were feeding under Beech trees at Otter Ferry Spit on 18 November (Tom Callan). Two flocks of at least 50 **Wood Pigeons** were flushed from area on 6 December, with many at Common Pheasant feeders around Otter Ferry, Cowal (Tom Callan). On the whole though, Wood Pigeons seem not to have been very numerous in Argyll this winter.

Passerines:

On 5 November a **Sand Martin** was seen flying along King Street, Portnahaven. This is the latest ever record of a Sand Martin in Argyll – by one day. The previous latest was also on Islay, at Ardilistry Bay on 4 November 2001 (Stuart Graham).

Approx. 12 "inland" **Rock Pipits** were on the machairs on Tiree (unusual) on 28 November - making the most of a mass movement of parachuting spiders (John Bowler).

Two male **Blackcaps** were at Balephuil, Tiree on 1 November (John Bowler). A **Common Chiffchaff** with a wing bar was at Crossapol, Tiree and an *abietinus* (Scandinavian) – type **Chiffchaff** and a male **Blackcap** were at Kilkenneth on 5 November (John Bowler). Other **Blackcap** records included: a female in a garden at Otter Ferry on 10 November (Tom Callan), a female at Balephuil, Tiree on 19 November (John Bowler) and a male visiting a bird table at Lochdon, Mull on 20 January (Alan Spellman).

There were still hundreds of **Redwings** around on Tiree on 27 November, in flocks of up to 70 (John Bowler). A large flock of approx. 500 **Fieldfares** with approx 30 **Redwings** and 40 **Common Starlings** were at Kilfinan, Cowal on 15 January (Tom Callan) and a big closely-knit flock of up to 300 **Fieldfares** were on wires at Kilberry (Knapdale) Mid-Argyll on 18 January (Bill Allan)

A female **Black Redstart** was found during Atlas work at Tangy, Kintyre on 1 November (Alan Slater) Given the rarity of this species in Argyll there must be a strong possibility that a female **Black Redstart** seen sitting on the gate post at the entrance to Tangy

wind farm, Kintyre on 9 January (Neil Brown) was the same individual. A recently dead juvenile **Black Redstart** was found at Portnahaven, Islay on 5 November (Stuart Graham). A party of 10 **Long-tailed Tits** were at the southern corner of Asknish Bay (Craobh Haven) on 17 January (Bill Allan) and a flock of 12 **Long-tailed Tits** that had survived the cold weather were seen during an Atlas Timed Tetrad Visit at Silvercraigs (nr Lochgilphead) on 18 January (Paul Daw).

Two **Eurasian Nuthatches** were seen on a peanut feeder in a garden at Cairndow and flying between there at Ardkinglas Gardens on 9 January (Roger Broad). These birds have now been seen there regularly by several observers (e.g. on 4, 11, 18 and 23 December) and we have hopes that they might become the first breeding pair in Argyll!

An adult male **Great Grey Shrike** was found by Brian John near Slockavullin at 12.25 pm on 7 December (Brian John). It was still at Slockavullin on 14 December when Brian John, who has been lucky enough to have it in his garden, said "It is quite approachable and does not fly off easily. I have taken dozens of pictures, with the best on Saturday when we had a bit of sunshine. The reason it likes this place is probably because we have chickens- mice, and voles etc thrive on the grains left by the hens; so there is a plentiful supply of food. There are also dozens of small birds but I have not seen it showing any interest in them. When it is around, all the finches / sparrows etc make a commotion but it does not seem in the least bit bothered. It likes to perch on the tops of small trees or wires and is continually looking around." Jim Dickson managed to photograph it with a small vole/

shrew in its beak. All in all, it was a very obliging rarity (only the second **Great Grey Shrike** in Argyll since 1996). It stayed more or less in the same locality until 20 December during which time Brian kindly 'found' it again for many visiting birders.

A **Magpie** was seen at Strachur, Cowal on 11 December (Jim Dickson), a lone **Magpie** flew up from the shinty pitch into the trees at Tighnabruaich, Cowal on 15 December (Daphne Campbell). One was at Baddens Nursery, just north of Lochgilphead, on 2 January (Jim Dickson). and possibly the same bird was seen on the Meadows Road going out of Lochgilphead, between Badden Farm and Monydrain Cemetery on 18 January (Blair Urquhart).

Reports of **Jays** seem to have been more numerous than usual this winter. Three **Eurasian Jays** were seen in a garden at Hunters Quay, Dunoon on 12 November (Callum Satchel) and other records of **Jays** in gardens included: four passing through a garden at Otter Ferry on 25 November (with 2 seen frequently there) (Tom Callan), four at the waterworks in Dunoon on 3 December (Ronnie Stokes), two feeding under peanut feeders in a garden at Otter Ferry on 6 December and at least 7 other sightings were made over the following week, over a wide area of Cowal (Tom Callan) and one or two regularly in the gardens at Tullochgorm (Minard) through December and January (Paul Daw).

More of the ubiquitous **Eurasian Jays**: three were on the roadside at Ardchnell, Loch Awe on 10 December and another two flew S/W across Blarghour farm a short while later (Karl Pipes). Five in such a small distance is quite unusual. Two **Jays** were seen between Inveraray and Loch Fyne



Woodcock, Balephuil, Tiree. photo© John Bowler

Oyster Bar on 23 December with another 2 **Jays** at Loch Eck (John Bowler).

On 22 January 2010, approx. 190 **Common Starlings** entered a roost-cave at Treshnish Point, Mull from just before sunset until the sun disappeared over the horizon. They came singly (very few) and in flocks from 2 or 3 up to about 60. They did not circle around much (most groups entered the cave immediately) (Anand Prasad).

This has been the best winter for **Bramblings** in Argyll for some years. Records include: a male at Balephuil, Tiree on 1 November (John Bowler), one at a bird feeder in a garden in Campbeltown on 9 January (Janette Fiander), 16 at Arinagour, Coll on 14 November (Simon Wellock), a single male **Brambling** was with Common Chaffinches in the garden at Tullochgorm, Minard on 22 November (Paul Daw) at least one under Beech trees near the shore at Otter Ferry on 26 December (Tom Callan), one among the Chaffinches at bird feeders in a garden at West Loch Tarbert, Kintyre on 3 January (Barbara McMillan), four feeding near the shore at Otter Ferry on 4 January, at least 8 feeding in leaf litter under Beech in a field by the spit at Otter Ferry on 8 January (Tom Callan), one at a bird feeder in a garden in Campbeltown on 9 January (Janette Fiander) and one

in a garden at Salen, Mull on 20 January (per Alan Spellman).

A flock of 29 **Goldfinches** was at Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 4 December (Tom Callan) and a surprising total of 22 **Goldfinches** were noted on Tiree on 18 January (John Bowler).

Karl Pipes reported his first **Siskins** (8 in all) of the winter arriving at his garden feeders at Eredine, Loch Awe) on 16 January, and 4 **Siskins** (2 males/2 females) were at the garden feeders at Lagganmore (Glen Euchar) Mid-Argyll, on 17 January were the first there since late autumn 2009 (Bill Allan). **Siskins** were definitely back - in force. During the Loch Sween WeBS count on 17 January a flock of 60+

were counted at Loch Scotnish (nr Tayvallich), Mid-Argyll (Paul Daw). A flock of 13 **Bullfinches** was seen near Loch Arail, Knapdale, Mid-Argyll on 15 December (Paul Daw), and at least 20 **Bullfinches** were at Benmore Botanic Garden, Cowal on 23 December (John Bowler). An impressive total of 27 **Bullfinches** were feeding on deep (500mm) heather on a hill near Otter Ferry on 01 January 2010. When flushed they flew into a stand of Sitka Spruce about 50m away (Tom Callan).

A single **Lesser Redpoll** was with **Siskins** at a bird feeder in a garden at West Loch Tarbert, on 24 January (Barbara McMillan). The only one reported in a garden recently. A flock of 74 **Twite** were seen at Rubha Luidhneis, Loch Gruinart, Islay on 1 November (David Warden).

Two **Common Crossbills** near Kilmory Castle, Mid-Argyll on 29 November included a very yellowish green individual singing at the top of a conifer – presumably an unusually coloured male (Paul Daw). Two **Eurasian Jays** and 8 **Common Crossbills** were recorded during

an Atlas Tetrad survey in Glen Aray on 1 December and two more **Jays** and 18 **Common Crossbills** were in a nearby tetrad on 11 Dec and a flock of at least 26 flew over conifers behind the house at Tullochgorm, Minard (on 3 December (Paul Daw). Approx. 30 **Common Crossbills** were at St Catherines (Loch Fyne) Cowal on 9 December, with another 7 nearby at Ardkinglas, Cowal (Roger Broad).

Three **Snow Buntings** were at Kilkenneth, Tiree on 5 November (John Bowler). The first **Snow Buntings** (10) at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory flew N early on the afternoon of 11 November (Eddie Maguire).

Six **Yellowhammers** were in and around a garden nr Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll on 31 January, the first there for several weeks (Brian John).

Other sightings:

Paul Daw's neighbours at Tullochgorm (Minard) had been mystified by what had been tearing open the fat balls they put out for the birds and removing the contents. Until that is, they happened to look out of the window one night to see a **Pine Martin** scoffing away happily. He (or she, or even they!) has/have been a regular visitor throughout January and February and getting through an impressive number of fat balls... (Adam & Christine Smith).

A record 8 **Red Squirrels** were around the feeders at Otter Ferry on 8 January (Tom Callan).



Brambling. photo©Tom Callan

Articles for the June issue of the *Eider* should with the Editor before the 24th May 2010

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2009/2010)

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

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

The *Eider* is published during the first week of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor before the 24th day of the month prior to publication. However, it greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline dates. Contributions are accepted in the order they are received, which may result in some late submissions being held over until the next issue.

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

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

More about the Argyll Bird Club

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

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

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

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