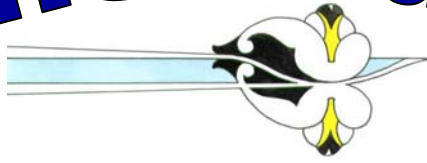




The Eider



The Eider is the Quarterly Newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club (<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>)
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Waxwings—one of the highlights of the autumn! Currently underway, is one of the largest invasions for many years of this superb bird from the northern forests/taiga. Large numbers have been reported

throughout Scotland, with many flocks in Argyll (see page 11). And, they may be well around for a bit longer, due to the heavy crop of berries on many trees and shrubs. **All sightings please to Paul Daw** (all photos are by Jim Duncan).

Spring Meeting 2005

On Saturday 12th March at the Argyll Hotel, Inveraray. The programme will be in the March Eider

Autumn Meeting 2005

On Saturday 5th November at the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead

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

Editorial

It was great to see so many of you at the Autumn Meeting at the Cairnbaan Hotel. No only do our indoor meetings provide an entertaining variety of talks, but they are also a great social event! And, on this occasion, with the chance of seeing **Waxwings** nearby! I was fortunate enough to see a flock of around 65 birds feeding on *Sorbus* spp. berries in the grounds of Inveraray Primary School on the day after the meeting; my first in Argyll! You will be pleased to see on the front cover that dates and venues for the two meetings in 2005 have now been booked by Bob Furness, who has organised yet another interesting assortment of talks for the spring meeting.

As always, the success of each issue of the *Eider* depends entirely on your contributions. During the year I have been overwhelmed with the amount and variety of material sent to me – thank you so much! The main development has been the use of an increasing number of digital photos in each issue. It's hard to imagine that the first colour photo appeared just over a year ago, in the September 2003 issue. I now have many to choose from for each issue, thanks to the advent of digital cameras and digiscoping (see Jim Dickson's excellent article on pages 8-9), and some very enthusiastic photographers!

For help and contributions to this issue, I would like to thank Tristan ap Rheinallt, Clive Craik, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Jim Duncan, Bob Furness, Mike Gear, Mary Gregory, Ian Hopkins, James How, Iain Livingstone, David Merrie, Dave Okill, Katie Pendreigh, Linda Petty (proof reading), Nigel Scriven, Michael Thomas, Chris Waltho and David Wood.

Finally, I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year. 2005 looks like being a memorable year. Not only is it the club's 20th anniversary, but the new book on the *Birds of Argyll* will have been completed and hopefully published before the end of the year. Enjoy your birding over the holiday, and please take up David Merrie's challenge (pages 3-5)!

Have you lost your glasses?

A pair of slim-line reading glasses and case, were left at the Cairnbaan Hotel after the autumn meeting. If they are yours, please contact:

John Anderson, Secretary of the Argyll Bird Club

Tel: 01631 710630

Forthcoming field trips

Argaty Red Kites

There will be a visit to the **Red Kite** feeding station at Argaty Farm, near Doune, on Sunday 16 January 2005. I hope that we can arrange some sharing of cars for this trip. So, if you are interested in offering car seats or in travelling with others, please let me know and I'll see if we can make arrangements to share travel. We will meet at Argaty Farm at 13.30hrs on Sunday 15 January. It is important to be on time there as there is only a single viewing each day. You can stay to watch the kites for as short a period as you wish or up to about 2 hours in the hide at maximum. The car park at the farm is within about 50 yards of the hide, but there are possibilities for birdwatching in the area before or after seeing the kites if you wish.



Red Kites (painting by Mike Gear)

There will be a fee of £3 per person to be paid at Argaty, for access to the hide. You can see details of Argaty on the internet at:

<http://www.argatyredkites.co.uk>

If you would like to join this trip it is essential to book places as we are limited to a maximum of 15 people, because I have booked that number of places in the hide, so please book with me.

Bob Furness

Tel: 01301 702603

E-mail: r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk

Sound of Gigha

I will lead a field trip to the Sound of Gigha on Saturday 2nd April 2005. Meet at the car park at Ronachan Point just off the A83 (grid reference NR741548) at 10.30am. This trip depends very much on suitable weather. Will those who intend to come please contact me, by phone or e-mail, at the latest on the evening before (Fri 1st April), so that I can confirm that the trip will go ahead and to give me some idea of how many people to expect. If the weather forecast is really atrocious it may be possible to postpone until the following Saturday. Additional information about this trip can be found in the December Eider (page 17)

Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

Island of Bute

On Saturday 5th March, I will take folks around the 'hot spots' on Bute. Those coming from outwith Bute should meet at Colintraive for the 09.00hrs ferry, and cross to Bute where I will meet them. There should be a good selection of wintering birds, and many geese. If you are interested, please phone before the 4th March to let me know that you will be coming.

Ian Hopkins

Tel: 01700 504042

Editorship of the Argyll Bird Report

As I have now been Editor for over ten years, it may be time for someone else to take over. This preliminary request is just to see if there is anyone out there who thinks they would like to do this work, which occupies only a few weeks each year. Some editorial or writing experience would be desirable. I emphasise that I will certainly not be resigning immediately and am happy to continue until a suitable volunteer comes forward. Any change would, of course, require the approval of the committee.

Clive Craik

Grendon, Barcaldine, Oban, Argyll
PA37 1EC

Tel: 01631 720 327

Birds of Argyll—appeal for information

Work on the species accounts for the forthcoming book on the *Birds of Argyll* has revealed several gaps in our knowledge of the current status of birds in the county.

In particular, there have been very few records at all from **Jura** during the past ten years. If anyone has any records relating to Jura that have not been submitted in the past, even simple lists of birds with dates seen, please pass them onto me as soon as possible.

Similarly, if you have any recent notes on local **Sand Martin** colonies, especially counts of nest holes, which you have not previously submitted, please let me have them. **Common Swifts** are relatively scarce as breeding birds in Argyll and do not necessarily breed every year in localities where they occur. Again, if you have any recent records of apparently resident **Swifts** please let me know.

Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

Mute Swans in Oban Bay

Alison and Donnie McKenzie have been feeding the swans in Oban Bay every day for many years but are no longer able to do so. Thanks to their enormous efforts over the years, a large winter flock of **Mute Swans** has built up there accompanied by the occasional **Bewick Swan**. The food (mainly grain) is paid for the local SWT branch. I understand that daily feeding is required, so volunteers must live locally. If anyone is interested in taking over, please ring me in the first instance (phone with answering service).

Clive Craik

Grendon, Barcaldine, Oban, Argyll PA37 1EC

Tel: 01631 720 327

New bird hide at Benderloch, near Oban

A new hide is being built overlooking some lovely estuarine saltmarsh beside Kintaline Mill Farm, near Benderloch. The owners of the farm, Tim and Jill Bowis, are keen that birdwatchers should be aware of it and contribute to records of species seen there. The main claim to fame of the site is a wintering flock of 40 to 75 **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, but many other

species are seen or expected there. The hide will give an outlook over the tidal sands as well as the adjoining farmland where breeding birds are likely to be seen.

There have been very few records from the site and much remains to be found out about this diverse area of salt marsh and farmland, not just ornithologically but in all branches of natural history.

The farm has parking as well as toilet, tea and coffee making facilities. There will be a computer and book available to record observations and comments on the site, as well as reference books.

Visitors are asked to contact Jill Bowis in the first place for information about parking and visiting etc:

Phone: 01631 720223

E-mail: birds@kintaline.co.uk

Web: www.kintaline.co.uk/ansailean.html

Colour-ringed Eiders

The *Clyde Ringing Group* has started colour-ringing female Eiders. Each bird has a metal BTO ring on the right leg. Above this, on the same leg, is a white darvic ring, which is used as the scheme marker. All Clyde colour-ringed birds will show white on the right leg. On the left leg is a bigger colour ring, which varies between nesting colonies. This year; 28 birds were marked with light green on Lady Isle, 3 with yellow on Little Cumbrae, 13 with white from the Eileans in Millport Bay, and 50 with orange from Faslane.

Please reports all sightings of colour-rings to me.

Chris Waltho

73 Stewart Street, Carluke, Lanarkshire ML8 5BY.

Tel: 01555 750719

E-mail: clydeeider@aol.com

Atlantic Oakwoods Symposium

A symposium on *Atlantic Oakwoods* will be held in the Corran Halls, Oban on the 14–16 September 2005. It is being organised by the Botanical Society of Scotland and sponsored by the Forestry Commission, Forest Research and the British Ecological Society. There will be two days of talks and discussion followed by a field excursion to study some of the local examples of these woods.

The aims of the meeting are (1) to bring together research scientists, land managers, conservationists and all who share an

interest in these woods; (2) to provide a forum in which to present current knowledge on the ecological diversity and past management of the woods; and (3) to identify needs for conservation and further research. The proceedings of the symposium will be published in a Symposium Special Issue of the *Botanical Journal of Scotland*.

The programme comprises 8 sessions, each with two or three speakers. These are:- Definition and Distribution; Genetic History; Cultural History; Present Structure and Composition (diversity and plant species groups - 3 sessions); Faunal Relationships; Conservation and Management Policy. There will also be a poster session. A limited number of bursaries will be provided for students.

Booking forms and further information will be available from 28th February 2005, and can be obtained from:

Shiela Wilson, Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh, Druinmond Street, Edinburgh EH8 9XP, or from the website.

E-mail: shiela.wilson@ed.ac.uk

Website:

<http://www.geos.ed.ac.uk/abs/bss/>



Oakwoods in Argyll are an important habitat for birds (photo Steve Petty)

New Year's Day Challenge

It's become a bit of a ritual with me; to get out on New Year's day when there's precious few folk about, and spend all of the daylight in the field to see how many species of bird I can find. Of course, like any ritual there are certain rules to be followed. The first and foremost is that one must use one's own motive power. Usually this means walking. I have cycled a few times, but it is not easy to quickly swing one's bins to the eyes and grip the handlebars at the same time, so cycling trips, though they might take one further a field, have not produced a longer species list. Secondly, one must start and finish at the same place, and that

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usually means where one has spent New Year's Eve. Thirdly, the outing should take place on the actual New Year's Day. I have broken this rule in special circumstances, but this is not to be encouraged, and if done must be as close as possible to New Year's Day. Regrettably, I missed several years when we took our children skiing, and in more recent years, when we have been abroad. However I have managed 31 appearances in the last 45 years, with a total species tally of over 120.

Way back, in the dim and distant, on two hill walks in the western highlands (birds were not the main aim of these trips), I only managed 2 species each time; in 1963 on Beinn Tee I had **Snow Bunting** and **Raven**; the next year on Beinn Dearg it was **Ptarmigan** and **Golden Eagle**.

Obviously if you want a good list you have to keep to the lowlands and include as wide a variety of habitats as possible; farmland, woodland, moorland and both fresh and salt water. So it not surprising

that my three walks from Oyne in the middle of Aberdeenshire should have produced 30 to 48 species. In 1983 I walked 21 miles from dawn to after dusk for only 39 species.

When we lived in Dollar, Clackmannanshire, I could walk from Dollar past Gartmorn dam to the River Forth near Alloa. A good mix of habitats. This produced 65 species.

More recently, from my present home in central Perthshire, from which I can easily reach lowland lochs, rich farmland and woodland and the River Tay, I have averaged 55 species over 3 years, all within the same 10km OS square. Not so lucky on 1 Jan 2004, when I spent the morning clearing snow before I could venture down to Clunie Loch. Even so that produced 40 species.

However, my best years have been in Kintyre, walking out from Balure House, over the heather hills behind and over farmland and wooded valleys to Tayinloan and then back along the shore from Tayinloan past Rhunahaorine Point, sometimes as far as Ballochroy Bay, before heading back home in the gathering dusk waiting for that **Tawny Owl** to call.

The sad thing about these walks is that, over the years, the lists have been getting shorter and shorter. For the 3 years 1971 to 1973 I averaged 69 species; from 1976 to 1978 66 species, and from 1993 to 1999 just 54.

What has changed? The sea is much the same; the garden birds are still there. But very seldom nowadays do you see a field of corn stubble or of turnips. Flocks of **Lapwings** 1000 strong are no more, though up to 20 may be seen. The farmland no longer has throngs of small birds.

The best year was 1973, with 73. A major highlight was finding five species of geese in the one field, **Whitefronts** and **Greylags** of course, but also **Barnacles**, a **Brent** and a **Pinkfooted Goose**.

The total over all 9 years from Balure is 92 species, so this must be a target. I shall, god willing, be out again this coming New Year, whether in Perthshire or Argyll I cannot say, and of course hoping for good weather. Not like the time my daughter joined me in Kintyre, and we were sheltering from the westerly gale in a crude stable on Tayinloan's shore, sharing it with a horse that trampled on my water-bottle. Or days when I gave up at 3 o'clock because not only was I soaked to the skin, but worse, my binoculars were unusable.

Well, here's the challenge.

I challenge any of you, strictly abiding by the aforesaid rules of the game, to better my own list (this should not really be difficult), and I will give a prize of a free copy of the forthcoming (I hope) book *The Birds of Argyll* to the person submitting

Table. New Year's Day birds at Balure, with number of times out of 9 that they were seen

Red-throated Diver (4)	Merlin (2)	Pied Wagtail (9)
Black-throated Diver (1)	Peregrine (1)	Dipper (4)
Great Northern Diver (7)	Red Grouse (3)	Wren (8)
Slavonian Grebe (7)	Black Grouse (3)	Duncock (9)
Cormorant (6)	Pheasant (9)	Robin (9)
Shag (9)	Moorhen (2)	Stonechat (6)
Grey Heron (7)	Coot(2)	Blackbird (9)
Mute Swan (6)	Oystercatcher (9)	Fieldfare (6)
Whooper Swan (3)	Ringed Plover (8)	Song Thrush (8)
Pink-footed Goose (1)	Lapwing (8)	Redwing (7)
White-fronted Goose (9)	Dunlin (8)	Mistle Thrush (7)
Greylag (9)	Snipe (9)	Goldcrest (5)
Barnacle Goose (4)	Woodcock (1)	Long-tailed Tit (2)
Brent Goose (2)	Bar-tailed Godwit (3)	Coal Tit (7)
Shelduck (8)	Curlew (9)	Blue Tit (9)
Wigeon (9)	Redshank (9)	Great Tit (9)
Teal (8)	Turnstone (9)	Treecreeper (2)
Mallard (9)	Black-headed Gull (9)	Jackdaw (8)
Pochard (1)	Common Gull (9)	Rook (9)
Tufted Duck (1)	Herring Gull (9)	Hooded Crow (9)
Greater Scaup (1)	Great Black-backed Gull (9)	Starling (9)
Eider (9)	Razorbill (2)	House Sparrow(6)
Long-tailed Duck (2)	Black Guillemot (5)	Chaffinch (9)
Common Scoter (9)	Rock Dove (6)	Greenfinch (6)
Velvet Scoter (7)	Woodpigeon (9)	Linnet (4)
Goldeneye (9)	Collared Dove (4)	Twite (5)
Red-breasted Merganser (9)	Tawny Owl (2)	Redpoll (2)
Hen Harrier (3)	Skylark (6)	Snow Bunting (3)
Sparrowhawk (4)	Meadow Pipit (7)	Yellowhammer (1)
Buzzard (9)	Rock Pipit (9)	Reed Bunting (6)
Kestrel (6)	Grey Wagtail (3)	

the best list, which must be accompanied by a route description.

And I will leave it to Steve Petty to augment that challenge by stipulating that the winner writes up his or her outing for *The Eider*.

David Merrie

Phone: 01250 884273

E-mail: david@merrie1035.fsnet.co.uk

Autumn Meeting 2004

The Cairnbaan Hotel provided the venue for another highly successful autumn meeting, with around 60 people in attendance, including quite a few new faces. Bob Furness is to be congratulated on organising such a varied and interesting programme.

Paul Daw opened the conference with an update of recent bird sightings, including news about the current **Waxwing** invasion (see front page and page 11). Very large numbers are being reported in Scotland, with many in Argyll, including a flock in Lochgilphead during the conference!

David Wood gave the first talk of the morning session on *Argyll's biodiversity, past, present and future*. This replaced a programmed talk on *capercaillie conservation*, which I hope can be included in a future meeting. David's talk was wide ranging, but mainly looked at biodiversity at three levels; the species level, below species level (sub-species, genetic diversity etc) and above species level (communities, habitats, ecosystems etc). Global estimates of the number of species range from 2 million to 100 million, with hotspots of species diversity being mainly in tropical forest. On a world scale, Scotland holds only a small fragment of the global species pool. Nevertheless, some of the species and habitats that occur in Scotland are of both national and European importance. Within Scotland, numerous areas of species richness are located in Argyll, particularly in coastal areas that include habitats such as machair. The final part of the talk considered man's influence on biodiversity and the impact of climate change on shaping our present day habitats and communities. With current predictions of climate warming it's sometimes hard to grasp the fact that global climates have always been and always will be dynamic; with or without man's influence!

One of my favourite Argyll birds is the **Red-throated Diver**, so I had looked forward to Dave Okill's talk on *Shetland's rain geese* with great anticipation – and I wasn't disappointed! The **Red-throated Diver** is the most adaptive of all diver species; being found breeding in a wider



Red-throated Diver (photo Dave Okill)

range of habitats and latitude than any other. Our population in Argyll is the most southerly within its European range, apart from a few pairs in Ireland. Divers breed around the 'soft' edge of lochans and on islands; never more than a few metres from water. Some of the highest breeding densities occur in Shetland, where Dave has been studying them for around 30 years. Here, one of the main developments has been the ability to catch (and ring) birds on their breeding pools with long nets. During 1909-1976, only 162 had been ringed in the UK, but by 2004 this total had jumped to 3409, which had produced 241 recoveries! This has greatly advanced our knowledge of movements, site and mate fidelity, age of first breeding (5-6 years of age) and longevity (oldest 22 years and 10 months). The number of pairs in Dave's study increased until the 1980s and subsequently declined, with 2004 being the poorest year for breeding success since 1979. The decline appears to be related to the decline of sandeels, the main food that adults feed to their chicks. Breeding success on small pools is twice that of larger lochans. This is attributed to smaller pools having a more constant water level, little disturbance, less wave action and less interference from other **Red-throated Divers**. There is a high degree of site fidelity amongst established breeders, and the few movements recorded have always been to adjacent pools. Likewise, juveniles return to breed very close to where they were reared, distance being only 2.17 km for males and 37.8 km for females. This agrees with many other bird species where natal dispersal distances are greater for females than males (in contrast to most mammals,

which show the reverse trend). The greatest mortality factor appears to be from birds getting caught in nets (68% of ringing recoveries), but some birds are shot and others hit overhead wires. Dave finished off the talk with some example of where rafts had been used to improve breeding success, mainly on lochans with both fluctuating water levels and shoreline disturbance. A super talk and some great slides!

The last talk before lunch was on *birds and garden feeders: monitoring and conservation* by John Calladine. The BTO started the Garden BirdWatch Survey in 1970/71. It is a year-round project that gathers information on how different species of birds use gardens and how this use changes over time. Some 16,500 participants currently take part by sending in simple weekly records. Most are submitted on line and results can be viewed and downloaded from the BTO's website. Although the south and east of England have the most recorders, there are still more than 1,000 gardens in the survey in Scotland, which means that even in remote areas the coverage is fairly good. Thus, on the website you can get regional summaries (see examples of a table and figures in the box on the next page). Argyll and Bute falls within the south Scotland area, but some summaries are available for Argyll and Bute alone. Gardens act as a refuge for large numbers of birds, not just in winter, but throughout the year. They are particularly important during periods when natural foods become scarce. Analyses are currently underway to see if and how gardens can help farmland birds, particularly those species that are declining nationally, such as **Yellowhammer**, **Reed Bunting** and **Tree Sparrow**. Anyone can contribute to the Garden BirdWatch survey by enrolling on the BTO's website (see box for address).

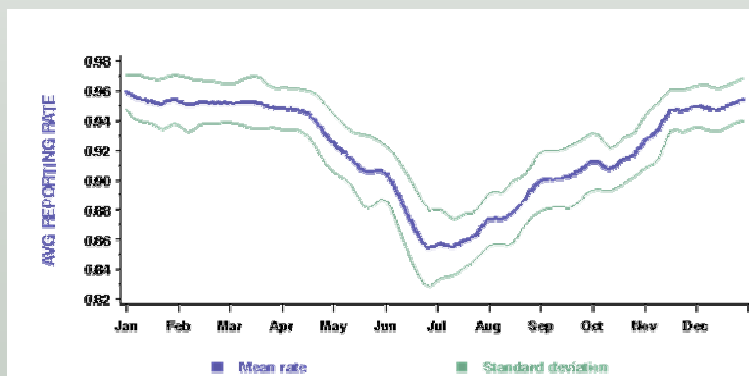
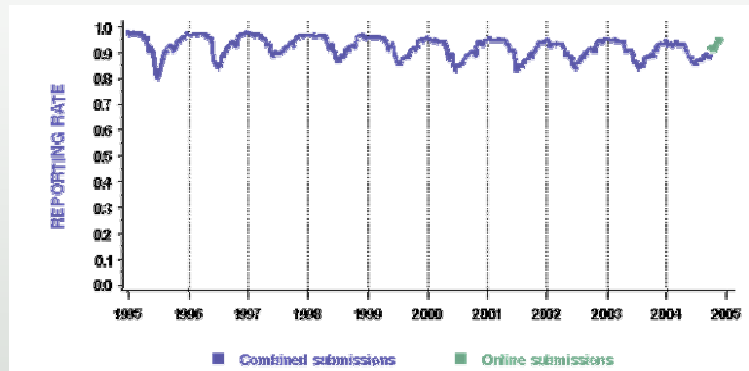
The AGM was held after lunch. This was followed by a talk on *wind farm and birds* by Simon Lawrence, including the use of baseline surveys, examples from some studies, post-construction results, offshore wind farms and the future. Simon has been involved in assessing the impact on birds of the Tangy Wind Farm, near Campbeltown. Monitoring studies before and after the installation of the turbines indicated that breeding waders had not been affected, with little change in numbers of **Curlew** and **Snipe**. **White-fronted Geese** were another possible hazard in the area, but the wind farm was sited away from flight lines between roosts and feeding areas. At Tangy, much work has been done on improving moorland habitats surrounding the wind farm for the benefit of **Red Grouse**, and possibly **Golden Eagles**. Simon explained some of the problems that can be encountered during

Examples of information available from the BTO's Garden BirdWatch Survey website

Position	Species	Reporting Rate
1	Chaffinch	97.7
2	Blue Tit	96.3
3	Blackbird	95.3
4	Robin	92.5
5	Great Tit	89.2
6	Greenfinch	84.7
7	Coal Tit	81.8
8	House Sparrow	81.2
9	Dunnock	76.7
10	Collared Dove	66.3
11	Song Thrush	50.6
12	Siskin	46.4
13	Wren	38.1
14	Carrion Crow	36.5
15	Starling	32.1
16	Goldfinch	25.1
17	Sparrowhawk	20.3
18	Jackdaw	19.6
19	Pied Wagtail	15.8
20	Woodpigeon	14.1

The graphs are two examples of the information that can be down loaded from the BTO's website (<http://www.bto.org>). The top graph shows weekly reporting rates for Blue Tit from 1995 until 2004 and the bottom graph shows the average monthly reporting rate for Blue Tit using data from all gardens in the survey.

The table shows the 20 most commonly reported birds from gardens in Argyll & Bute between 29th September 2002 and 21st September 2003. Each species is ranked in order by the number of gardens.



monitoring. One of the most difficult aspects is to gain a better understanding of bird movements near to turbines in misty/foggy weather, when the risk of bird collisions is expected to be higher than in clear conditions. Novel techniques were being employed to investigate this aspect, including the use of radar to track bird activity. Overall, the risk of bird collisions appeared to be low.

The final talk of the day was a fascinating account of *tracking seabird migration* by Bob Furness. The decline of sandeel populations was now affecting a number of seabirds, particularly in the northern North Sea, where the 2004

breeding season was one of the worst on record. **Bonxies** (**Great Skuas**) have successfully adapted to this food shortage by switching to fish discarded from trawlers and more recently to greater predation on



Great Skua (photo Bob Furness)

seabirds. **Kittiwakes** appear to be particularly badly affected, with poor breeding success due both to a lack of sandeels and increased predation from **Bonxies** which lowers survival rates. As a result, numbers in some breeding colonies are now declining.

What **Bonxies** eat and where they go to outside the breeding season was until recently poorly known. Ringing recoveries indicated that most adults spend the winter in the Bay of Biscay, around the Iberian Peninsular and into the western Mediterranean. Breeding adults have been caught and colour-ringed on Foula over many years, and this show that adults exhibit a high degree of nest site fidelity. Recently

some of these birds have been fitted with satellite transmitters and data loggers. The latter records the latitude and longitude at predetermined intervals during the winter, and are removed from the birds when they are caught during the following breeding season. Surprisingly, over half the tagged birds spent some of the winter off the West African coast. So, why are there no ringing recoveries from the same area? One possibility is that good feeding conditions might lead to few birds dying. One adult even moved from West Africa in the autumn to near Greenland in March before returning to breed in Scotland! One interesting question for the future is what will happen to **Bonxies** as the volume of fish discards reduces due to improved fishing techniques and reduced quotas – further increases in predation on seabirds? This was an absorbing talk demonstrating how new technology can increase our understanding of seabird movements.

Editor

Garden birds!!!

Normally at this time of year if I am woken up in that peaceful pre-dawn time it is by the patter of tiny feet - mice! However, this morning I was rudely awakened by a loud shrieking and piping sound. Clearly, something worthy of getting out of bed to explore was happening outside my house. On peering out from my bedroom window I met the ruby red eyed glare of an **Oystercatcher**, standing on the old wooden tension post of my garden fence, while stationed on the opposite side of the road was her mate. They were back!

The contemplated nest site was a deep cup formed by the rotting hollowed out centre at the top of the large fence post. Clearly it had sunk a little since last year and to brood eggs the birds would be nearly bent in half. They both seemed to try it for size and then abandon the idea, flying off down to the shore to join their kind for refreshments and a high-speed survey of the surrounding fields and coast. Throughout the next few days peace reigned, apart from the usual dawn and dusk patrols complete with full sound accompaniment, and I assumed that another nest site had been chosen.

Not so, however! On 19th May, in the early hours of the morning, my prying eyes found OC to be settling in comfortably, on the top of the post. When she was off the nest I looked in to discover one egg positioned on a bed of wood chippings, which had been chiselled from the sides of the cup to enlarge it. Egg number two followed within 24 hours and incubation commenced.



Oystercatcher on it's nest in Katie's garden (photo Duncan MacDougal)

This proved to be an emotionally charged period for one and all. Neighbour's children scurried past on the road in fear that the woman from the house would come out and glare at them (or worse) should they linger. The trouble was, that although the brooding bird sat tight as cars, lorries and buses swept past only four feet away and even cyclists were tolerated, passers-by on foot were not. Every time someone walked down the road to catch the ferry, on reaching a certain point the brooding bird gave a loud shriek, rose from the nest and pinked dramatically, flew to the opposite side of the road. This prompted those who would otherwise have passed by without noticing to "have a quick peek in" and even feel the eggs!

Over a period of time I was able to exit my front door, open the nearby gates and drive my car out under the ever-watchful staring ruby eye, without the nest being vacated, although I needed no front door bell to alert me to any visitors. Early a.m. Mr. & Mrs. OC could be observed from my kitchen window prodding the lawn for slugs, which were cleaned of slime (thrush fashion) and eaten with relish. In the evenings, the nest was left unattended for a worrying length of time while they joined their friends on the shore, but I came to realise that this break was after the time when the crows had gone to roost.

By Friday 18th June it was time for the eggs to be hatching, so I climbed on to the adjacent gate to examine the nest and found my stare to be returned by one from a bright, beady brown eye set in a bed of grey fluff, and the other egg was cracking open. Beating a hasty retreat I guarded the nest against intruders for the remainder of the afternoon – together with the parent birds!

On the morning of Sunday 20th June, with garden birds fed and watered, and OC peacefully surveying the surroundings from her elevated vantage point, I settled

down to enjoy sausage, bacon and tomatoes while sitting in the sun by the kitchen door. I was roused to attention by a kafuffle at the post and was just in time to see one chick float/tumble down to the ground – thankfully on the field side of the fence. Now I wondered how would they cope with one up and one down? I kept well out of the way and went back to my congealing breakfast, thankfully the road was quiet. Subdued pink, pink noises ensued as one parent followed the chick into the field; the other settled down to brood chick two in the nest—well I suppose they knew best! A sip of coffee later and a further volley of shrieks summonsed me to view chick two tumble to the ground, thankfully again on the safe side of the fence. I could relax now, re heat my coffee and enjoy the knowledge that I had successfully sent my family on their way.

But no—soon I was alerted to a further commotion, this time with both Mr. & Mrs. OC swooping up and down the road and making a fine fuss. Both chicks had strayed onto the road and would undoubtedly be run over once the approaching ferry had disgorged its load of cars. The parents' loud protests just had to be ignored as I picked up the grey, downy youngsters almost invisible on the grey road and thrust them through the fence. You can't climb a gate carrying a chick in each hand whilst being screamed at and threatened by red/black arrows overhead!! Following this, OC sat on the chicks as I took up a position as lollipop lady until the cars passed. At last I could relax and enjoy my breakfast while the OC family could be seen making their way to the middle of the field then settling down for a doze in the sun.

Katie Pendreigh (9th May, 2004)

The Collared Dove's Tale

Doves and pigeons are easily seen on the Isle of Bute. **Feral Pigeons** are always present around the harbour, **Wood Pigeons** are easily seen in or near woodland, **Stock Dove** flocks occasionally show up on grassland fields. But, this tale is about the **Collared Dove**, now a common resident around Rothesay and the other townships, a species that had never been recorded in Britain before 1952. In that year a bird was recorded in Lincolnshire. In 1955 a pair bred in Norfolk—at the time a very closely guarded secret!!! In the following half century the British population increased to an estimated half a million birds.

The species originated in northern India. The population was static until about 1900 when the expansion began, moving



Collared Dove (photo Mary Gregory)

through the Balkans in a northwesterly direction at about 1,000 miles every 20 years. It arrived in Bute in the mid-sixties, and the first breeding record was in 1968. In 2001, I saw the species in Hilton Head,

South Carolina. The American population originated from a flock of Dutch birds introduced into the Bahamas in 1947. Some birds later reached Florida, and its northwesterly march began again!!

The **Collared Dove** is a pale pinkish grey, with a long square ended, partially white tail. It has a narrow black half collar, quite prominent in the field. Outside the breeding season it tends to be gregarious. It has a song, a persistent musical 'ku-koooo-ku', which is most frequently heard in early morning and evening. It also uses a buzzy flight call, uttered as it alights on your television aerial!

It is mainly a grain feeder, but it also takes berries and insects. Its initial expansion was associated with poultry runs. More recently, the spread of bird feeders in

suburban gardens has undoubtedly aided survival and the growth of populations. It is suburban rather than urban - the latter the preserve of the **Feral Pigeon**. It shares a similar niche with the **House Sparrow**, although nest sites are different. But, in contrast to the **Collared Dove**, **House Sparrow** populations are declining nationally—why the difference?

No one knows what caused its astonishing expansion. Perhaps a genetic mutation allowed it to survive in climates cooler than in its traditional Indian home. Perhaps, it is a bell-weather of global warming. It even reached Iceland in 1971! It is a prolific breeder, raising several broods in a season; weather and food supply permitting.

Michael Thomas

Is digiscoping for you?

Have you ever considered bird photography using a digital camera and telescope combined (digiscoping)? In this short article I hope to encourage and make the subject more appealing to *Argyll Bird Club* members who may have considered 'going digital'.

I am by no means an expert on digiscoping, but over the last four years have greatly enjoyed experimenting and learning with both a camcorder-telescope and a digital still camera-telescope combination. Like other 'digiscopers' I have found that this is not as difficult as first envisaged and the end result photographs can be very rewarding. Investing in these 'tools' has completely rejuvenated my interest in birdwatching; one of the best things to happen in my 35 years of birding, this despite many years of trying conventional photography using an SLR camera, a 500mm lens and lots of wasted film!

The main difference, which cannot be over emphasised, is the vast increase in power of magnification using this technique. A very useable magnification with digiscoping can be 60x, and often 100x or more using a camcorder. This contrasts with 8 or 10x with conventional photography. Prior to using this technique, 35mm cameras were not that user friendly for bird photography as good field craft or use of hides were needed to get close enough to the bird to produce something worthwhile. Point and shoot digiscoping is only slightly more complicated than watching a bird through your telescope and then placing your camera over the eyepiece and capturing the image.

Getting Started

A good quality telescope is key to producing a good image, the larger the objective

lens for light gathering the better, though digital cameras are great at producing acceptable results in poor light conditions. The power of the eyepiece is better kept at the lower end of those available, with 20x being adequate. This coupled with a digital camera with a 3x optical zoom lens will give 60x magnification. It's best to have this zoom on your camera to avoid the problem of 'vignetting' (dark circle round edge of image). Getting full frame shots of small birds now becomes achievable!

Digital cameras have evolved greatly, with image quality increasing and costs falling. At present a suitable camera can be purchased for £200-£450. Images are

viewed on the camera's LCD screen and can be instantly reviewed or deleted. Being digital these cameras have no film but a memory card that slots in and can store up to hundreds of images depending on its capacity. The cost of memory cards has dropped greatly, and a good one should last for years—so no film to buy any more and you can snap away as often as possible without feeling you are wasting film. The more shots you take the more likely you will get a good result!

Other essential equipment would be a tripod and an adaptor (about £40) to link the camera to your telescope. Good results can be obtained without an adaptor when the camera is just held against the tele-



Ringed Plovers at Crinan (photo Jim Dickson)

scope eyepiece, though this technique used for quick opportunistic shots takes a little practice, and an adaptor is strongly recommended. A cable release can be used with some makes of digital camera; however vibration is less of a issue than with conventional cameras.

Digital Images

Images taken with a digital camera are stored on the memory card (type depends on make of camera). The quality of the image obtained can be controlled by the quality setting on the camera. Higher quality (resolution) takes up more memory space on the card. The maximum image quality for a camera is expressed in pixels (length x height), a pixel being an individual spot of colour on the image. For example, an image taken at 2000 x 1500 would multiply to give an image containing 3,000,000 pixels (3 mega pixels or 3 mp). This value determines the image size that can be printed out. For a top quality print, printing at 300 dots per inch, would give a print in the above example 2000 divided by 300 for length and 1500 divided by 300 for height which is roughly 6.6 by 5 inches. For a reduced quality of print, say 200 dots per inch then a larger print of 10 x 7.5 inches (roughly A4) can be obtained.

For viewing on a computer screen or for sending as e-mails, 75 dots per inch will give a good quality image. So if you want to take digital photos and produce A4 results then a 3mp camera would be a good starting point. Higher image cameras with 6mp or more are becoming widespread and this upward trend should continue. I'm told that for a digital camera to have the resolving power of the human eye it would need 20mp!

Having your own photo-quality printer is not essential as many retail outlets will produce prints from your memory card or compact disc. If you purchase your own printer, more models nowadays can print directly from the memory card without the need to use a computer—good for those with an aversion to such things! If however you have a PC, image software is usually provided with the camera and transferring images is easy, where they can be adjusted for sharpness, colour, size, cropped etc. It is now common practice to share your better bird photos and especially any rarities by using e-mail or more widely by posting (attaching to e-mail) them onto a website such as the new *Argyll Bird Club* website, where club members are encouraged to share images of Argyll birds. Hopefully your favourite bird photos can feature there also.

The key to achieving a good shot is not being afraid to try things out. The worst thing that can happen is that you get a bad shot; the good ones are often unexpected. Also being fully prepared when in the field is vital as you never know when that



Garden shot of a Yellowhammer (photo Jim Dickson)

once in a lifetime rarity is going to appear! Not a rarity but a good record for my garden is the shot of a **Yellowhammer** taken while writing this article on a dull day through a wet window! On more than one occasion I have missed a good shot through poor preparation; forgotten to take a memory card, not charged the camera battery, having a tripod leg screw come loose at the wrong moment! One strives to improve!

Jim Dickson

The plover's page

In the last issue of the *Eider*, Michael Thomas in his article entitled *The Dunlin's Tale* provided a Gaelic name for the Dunlin – “gille-feedag”. Keen-eyed readers may have noticed that a different name, *graillig*, features in the *Argyll Bird Report*. There is nothing unusual about this. Gaelic bird names – unlike English or even Welsh ones – have never been “rationalised” at a national level, and there is no such thing as a list of standard names. Instead, different names are (or were) used for the same species in different areas, and arbitrary choices are often made when lists are compiled.

Graillig and other similar Gaelic names such as *grailleag* and *sgraillig* for the Dunlin seem likely to be onomatopoeic in origin, the last of them being perhaps derived from an onomatopoeic intermediary in the form of the verb *sgràill* or *sgrail* (to scold harshly). These names represent an accurate rendering of the Dunlin's grating call. What, then, are we

to make of the assertion in *The Dunlin's Tale* that “gille-feedag” can be rendered into English as the “boy or attendant who whistles”? Although this is the translation given in Robin Hull's book on Scottish birds, it seems highly unlikely that anyone would describe the Dunlin's call as a whistle.

The answer to the puzzle lies in Michael Thomas's statement that the species is called the plover's page in the west of Scotland. The usual Gaelic name for the Golden Plover is *feadag*, a word also used for a flute or whistle. The reference to the plover's call is obvious. Thus the Dunlin is *gille-feadaig*, plover's gillie, presumably so named because the two species share the same breeding habitat, as stated in *The Dunlin's Tale*.

Note the spelling of this name. In Gaelic, vowels are divided into two classes: broad (*a, o, u*) and slender (*e, i*). With very few exceptions, vowels preceding and following a consonant or consonant group must be of the same class. Thus *feadaig* (broad vowel before and after the *d*) is a permissible spelling, but *feedag* (slender vowel before and broad vowel after the *d*) is not. In addition, long vowels are represented in Gaelic by an accent, not by doubling.

Note also that an *i* has crept into *feadag* when it appears in *gille-feadaig*. The reason for this is that *feadag* is in the genitive case here, i.e. gillie of a plover. Where possible, singular Gaelic nouns are slenderised (i.e. a slender vowel is introduced into the last syllable) to form the genitive. Strictly speaking, since *feadag* is a feminine noun, it should also gain an *e* at the end in the genitive case (*feadaige*), but this is not usually heard in speech and sometimes disappears in writing too. The extra syllable is retained in *gille-nacubhaige*, the Cuckoo's gillie (formed from *cubhag*, Cuckoo), which also features the definite article. What is *gille-nacubhaige*? Clue: one of its local English names is Cuckoo's mate.

But to return to the Dunlin, another Gaelic name for this familiar species is *pollaran*, or its close equivalent *pollairean*. To understand the derivation, it helps to know that *poll* can be a pit, a hole, a mire, or even mud. Robert Gray, in *The Birds of the West of Scotland* (1871), translated the name (spelt by him as *pollaireun*) as “bird of the mud pits”, claiming that this “expresses in a single word its habits better than any English or Scottish synonym.”

Tristan ap Rheinallt



Dunlin and Curlew Sandpiper on the Add Estuary (photo Jim Dickson)

Recent bird reports from Paul Daw: August—October 2004

The star bird of the period was a **Ross's Gull** seen by several lucky observers at Fidden, Mull on 6th Oct. We also had a good showing of vagrant transatlantic waders including one or possibly two **American Golden Plovers**, 3 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, a **Baird's Sandpiper** and a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**. Other scarce migrant waders have been seen in unusual numbers including **Green Sandpipers** and **Grey Phalaropes**. It has also been an amazing autumn for seabird migration with record numbers of, among other species, **Storm** and **Leach's Petrels** and **Sabine's Gulls**.

A **Barred Warbler** on Coll will, if confirmed, be our first record since 1992 and a **Yellow-browed Warbler**, also on Coll, will be only our 6th record. A **Red-backed Shrike** in Sep is apparently the first record for Colonsay and the **Arctic Redpoll** on Tiree will, if accepted, be just the second record for Argyll. Otherwise the main event during the last few weeks has been the major influx of **Waxwings**. They have appeared all over Argyll and the size of flocks involved has been unprecedented for this area. I would be grateful if anyone, who saw any and has not yet reported them, would let me have details so that we can get a full picture of this notable event. Don't assume someone has already reported them!

Stop Press

A juvenile female **Northern Goshawk** was reported at Loch Avich on 23rd Oct. A description has been provided and we shall wait with bated breath to see if this will be the first record to be accepted since 1993!

Divers to Wildfowl

A count of 164 **Red-throated Divers** flying S at Frenchman's Rocks on 12th Sep was a record for this site and 36 **Black-throated Divers** were counted between Rhunahaorine Point and West Loch Tarbert on 11th Sep. A most unusual sighting for Argyll was 3 **Great Crested Grebes** in the Sound of Gigha also on 11th Sep. It was another poor autumn for **Sooty Shearwaters** with maxima of only 15 off Frenchman's Rocks, Islay on 27th Aug and 28 off Hynish on 3rd Sep. **Balearic Shearwaters** were seen on Tiree off Gott Bay on 10th Aug, off Hynish on 12th Sep, off Balevullin on 20th Sep and off Aird (2) on 6th Oct and seen from Clabhach flying N on 20th Sep is the first record for Coll. Large numbers of **European Storm Petrels** were reported including a record 165 off Hynish on 12th Sep, 120 from the Cal-



Whooper Swans near Oban (photo Jim Duncan)

Mac pier on Coll (also on 12th Sep and another record count) and 142 at Frenchman's Rocks on 29th Aug. An exceptional number of **Leach's Storm-Petrels** have been seen this autumn including 143 at Frenchman's Rocks (a record count) on 21st Sep, 44 off Aird, Tiree on 22nd Sep (also a record) and 18 from the Coll-Tiree ferry on 28th Sep. A **dark rumped Petrel** seen from the Coll-Tiree ferry on 28th Sep could possibly have been a very rare **Swinhoe's** but was not seen well enough to obtain the sort of detailed description necessary to clinch identification.

Over 100 **Whooper Swans** have been reported at the Ulva Lagoons, Mid-Argyll in Oct, more than is usual here and a steady passage of these birds was noted through Tiree throughout Oct. The resident flock of 29 **Snow Geese** on Coll had 12 fledged young with them in August and a flock of 160 **Canada Geese** at Loch Crinan on 12th Aug was one of the largest ever seen in Argyll. Exceptionally high numbers of **Brent Geese** were seen on Islay this autumn including a record including 970 at Loch Gruinart on 19th Sep and a record 1,247 at Frenchman's Rocks on 21st Sep. Strangely this was not repeated on Tiree where there were less than usual at this time. Our faithful **American Wigeon** returned once more (at least we assume it is the same returning bird) to Loch Crinan and was seen on 25th Sep and 16th Oct. This is sixth winter running that it has appeared. Two **Gadwall** were on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 1st Aug and a flock of 7 were seen flying S at Frenchman's Rocks on 6th Oct.

Raptors to Gamebirds

An untagged 1st winter **White-tailed Eagle** flew in off the sea at Hogh Bay, Coll on 11th Oct and was seen again on 12th Oct. Katie Pendreigh had a close encounter with a male **Hen Harrier** during Oct. The bird must have seen a Chaffinch collide with the window of her house at Tayinloan and fall to the ground stunned. It flew straight into her garden, pounced on the bird, and proceeded to eat it only a few

feet from her window. Bad news for the Chaffinch, but an amazing sight for Katie! There have been 3 reports of **Goshawks** at different locations on Mull, but no further details are available. An **Osprey** spent most of the morning of 17th Aug around Lochdon, Mull. A **Hobby** seen nr Uig on 17th Aug was presumably the same individual as that reported elsewhere on Coll in late Jul. One was also reported over Tobermory, Mull on 2nd Aug but no details have been received so far. A **Corn Crake** at Kilmoluaig, Tiree was still with 4 mid-sized young on 24th Sep and this was also the last date that Corn Crakes were seen on the RSPB Reserve on Coll.

Waders

Heavy passage of **Ringed Plovers** on Tiree included 180 at Gott Bay on 16th. One **American Golden Plover** is pretty remarkable, but we had two sightings this Sep, an adult just starting to moult out of summer plumage at Sandaig, Tiree on 13th and one in similar plumage at Ballard, Coll on 20th that could just possibly have been the same individual. Some 3-4,000 **European Golden Plovers** were around on Tiree in Oct. An adult **Grey Plover** in the Add Estuary on 26th Aug was still in breeding plumage and this was an unusual location for the 7 **Sanderling** seen there on 13th Aug. A beautiful summer plumaged **Red Knot** at Gott Bay on 10th Aug was one of an unusual number of this species seen this autumn including 176 at the head of Loch Indaal on 13th Aug, 79 mostly still in breeding plumage in the Add Estuary also on 13th Aug and 20 at Otter Ferry on 22nd Aug.

Juv **Little Stints** were seen on Tiree on 19th Aug and 5th Sep and at Machrihanish on 17th Sep, 3 adults were at Crossapol, Coll on 24th Aug and Islay had 3 in Aug and two in Sep. A summer plumaged **Curlew Sandpiper** at Sorobaidh Bay on 9th was one of 3 on Tiree during Aug and 2 juvs were at Loch Gruinart on 10th Sep. Two more juv **Curlew Sandpipers** were on Tiree in Sep, one was at Crossapol, Coll on 29th Aug and another 2 juvs were seen at Loch na Cille, Mid-Argyll on 9th Sep. A juv **Baird's Sandpiper** seen on the shore nr Breachacha Castle on 21st/22nd Sep was the first record for Coll of this transatlantic vagrant. A most interesting group of waders at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 15th/16th Sep included juvenile **Pectoral** and **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** as well as 7 **Ruffs**. Six **Ruffs** were on the floods at Loch Gruinart from 1st – 5th Oct.

An influx of **Common Snipe** on Tiree in Sep included one flock of 90 birds at Midleton on 14th. On 16th Aug a total of 169 **Black-tailed Godwits** were found on

Tiree a record autumn count for the island and a very late and very tame **Whimbrel** was on the road at Crossapol Farm on 20th Oct. Some years no **Green Sandpipers** at all are recorded in Argyll so to have 5 at various locations on Islay in Aug and 9 on Tiree in Jul/Aug was quite exceptional. As if this were not enough, these were followed by 4 more on Islay in Sep. A scarce **Wood Sandpiper** was in the Add Estuary on 12th Aug. At least 75 **Ruddy Turnstones** were around Otter Ferry on 24th Sep. To round of an amazing autumn for waders in Argyll, exceptional numbers of Grey Phalaropes were recorded during Sep, including two on Tiree, two on Coll and no less than 7 at Frenchman's Rocks and 3 at Ardnave on Islay. Two Phalaropes seen off Jura on 22nd Sep had very fine looking bills and could have been **Red-necked**.

Skuas to Woodpeckers

A good passage of skuas this autumn included several **Pomerine Skuas** and large numbers of **Great Skuas** seen from ferries and on Islay, Coll and Tiree from late August to early Oct as well as 12 **Arctic Skuas** flying past Frenchman's Rocks on 29th Aug. More unusually there was a juv **Long-tailed Skua** at Frenchman's Rocks on 6th Oct, another off the pier on Coll on 1st Sep and no less than 3 juvs on Tiree also on 6th Oct.

A first winter **Little Gull** was off Aird, Tiree on 22nd Sep, an adult was in Loch Crinan on 5th Aug and a 1st winter bird was seen there on 22nd Sep. Juveniles were also seen at Ardnave on 19th Aug and at Frenchman's Rocks on 27th Aug. A 3rd summer **Glaucous Gull** in the Add Estuary on 18th Aug was an unusual visitor at an unusual date. A splendid adult **Sabine's Gull** flew west off Aird on 21st Sep and 2 juvs were seen at the same location on 7th Oct but quite exceptional numbers were seen on Islay, with 17 recorded from 30th Aug to 23rd Sep. Coll which had previously had no confirmed records at all produced no less 6 adults and 3 juvs from 1st – 21st Sep. The **Ross's Gull** seen at Fidden on 6th Oct will, if confirmed, be only the second Argyll record of this rare visitor from the Arctic. The first was on Islay in 1976.

A juv **Common Tern** at Loch an Eilein on 14th Oct was by far the latest ever re-

cord for Tiree and late **Arctic Terns** on Islay included 76 at Frenchman's Rocks on 21st Sep and 23 there on 6th Oct. Following a spate of records from 1998 – 2001 we have had two years without a **Black Tern** so it is good to hear that we had two this autumn one seen at Loch Craignish, Mid-Argyll on 12th Sep and a juv at Loch a' Phuill on 15th/16th. Following gales in mid-Sep a number of exhausted or dead **Common Guillemots** were found in places well away from the sea including at the north end of Loch Awe, on the road near Glendaruel and in a field at Achmagoul (nr Inveraray).

Three juvenile **Common Cuckoos** were seen on Tiree during the first half of Aug. A **Barn Owl** at Heylipol on 30th Oct was just the 3rd record for Tiree and a **Long-eared Owl** at Balinoe on 29th Oct was only the second.

The remarkable influx of **Common Swifts** on 11th/12th Aug included at least 160 over Loch Gruinart, 41 over Moine Mhor, 19 over Breachacha, Coll and what John Bowler describes as a seething wall of at least 380 over Balephuill and Loch a' Phuill, all on 12th. John considers that at least 520 were present on Tiree on that day. There were also reports of smaller numbers on Mull including 15 at Penny-gown on 11th Aug. A late report was received of a **Common Kingfisher** flying under the Add Bridge in Kilmichael Glen on 27th Jul, an unusual date for Argyll. Single **Kingfishers** were also seen in Loch Gilp on 4th Sep, flying past the southern tip of Lismore Island on 9th Sep and on the beach at Stronachullin, Loch Fyne on 26th Sep.

Passerines

My latest date for **Barn Swallow** so far is 18th October for one at Kilmory, Mid-Argyll – can anyone better this? A **White-throated Dipper** seen at Tainish on 22nd October was the first record for the Reserve.

Two **Bohemian Waxwings** at Port Askaig, Islay on 21st Oct were the first (so far reported) indication of a major influx to Argyll. They were followed by 7 at the Lodge, Coll (only the second record for the island!) on 23rd Oct with 32 at Craigdarroch garden, Coll on 26th. By early November they were widespread and reports were coming in of quite unprecedented flocks of up to 100 birds from many parts of Argyll. A full account will appear in the next Eider, so keep those records coming in!

An immature male **Ring Ouzel** at Totronald, Coll on 21st Oct was only the 3rd record for the island. A few immigrant thrushes were seen in mid-Sep but the main arrival was in mid-Oct when exceptional large numbers were widely reported

including 4 – 500 **Fieldfare/Redwing** in Glendaruel and 3,000+ **Redwings** on Tiree both on 18th Oct. An estimated 2,500 were on Coll on 22nd Oct. Over 2,000 **Fieldfares** were near Totronald, Coll on 27th Oct. 24 **Mistle Thrushes** were seen at Meldalloch, Cowal on 13th Oct, but there have otherwise been few reports of large flocks this autumn.

A juv **Barred Warbler** seen at The Lodge, Coll on 8th Sep will, if confirmed, be our first record since one in 1992 which was, curiously, also on Coll. Amazingly a second juv was found at The Lodge on 28th/29th Oct. **Lesser White-throats** are among our scarcer migrants, but there were two on Tiree this autumn, one at Cornaigmore on 28th Sep another at Scarinish on 23rd Oct and one on Islay, at Ardnave, on 1st Sep. **Blackcaps** arriving in late Oct are presumed to be winter visitors from central Europe and at least 10 were reported on Tiree and 8 on Coll at this time, one on a garden at Minard and a pair at Kilmory, Mid-Argyll on 1st Nov. There were more migrant **Common Chiffchaffs** on Islay and Tiree than usual this autumn and late 'abietinus' (northern race) types were reported on Coll and Tiree in Oct. A first winter **Yellow-browed Warbler** at The Lodge, Coll on 15th-18th Oct is potentially the first record for the island and only the 6th for Argyll. **Goldcrest** numbers at The Lodge, Coll reached 80 on 30th Oct.

A first winter **Red-backed Shrike** nr Kiloran from 27th-29th Sep obligingly posed for photographs and is apparently the first record for Colonsay (photo below). **Jays** have been reported from Glen Masson, Cowal on 6th Sep, Arichamish (Loch Awe) on 24th Oct.



Juvenile Red-backed Shrike on Colonsay (photo Jim Dickson)

Among **Brambling** reports, the largest group so far has been 26 at Martin's Wood, Coll on 24th Oct. A flock of 750 **Twite** seen at Totronald Coll on 6th Sep was the largest of many post breeding flocks seen around this time. A splendid white male **Arctic Redpoll** of the race 'exilipes' was seen well at Scarinish Tiree on 23rd Oct. A lone **Common Crossbill** in a garden at Heylipol, Tiree on 11th Sep



Juvenile Little Gull (photo Jim Dickson)

was an unusual sight. **Lapland Buntings (Lapland Longspurs)** were reported from Kilnave, Islay on 5th Oct, The Reef Tiree on 14th Oct and at Totronald, Coll (2) on 18th Oct. Good numbers of **Snow Buntings** have been reported including several individual sightings on Tiree in late Sep and 21 there on 10th Oct, as well as 14 nr Totronald on 27th Oct Kintyre.

Paul Daw

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Records of non-native birds in the UK

A joint appeal from the *British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee* (BOURC) and *Rare Birds Breeding Panel* (RBBP). Since 1996, the RBBP has monitored the establishment and spread of many non-native species breeding within the UK and produces an annual report (published in *British Birds*) detailing, county by county, the numbers and breeding status of these species. The BOURC is responsible for the maintenance of the British List and the categorisation of species on the List. The two bodies work together in relation to introduced species.

In the current context, the two relevant British List categories are defined as follows:

Category C. Species that although introduced now derive from the resulting self-sustaining populations.

Category E. Species that have been recorded as introductions, human assisted transportees or escapees from captivity and whose breeding populations, if any, are thought not to be self-sustaining.

Species on Category C form part of the official British List, those on Category E do not (unless they are species on Categories A, B or C of the List).

The BOURC uses the information gathered by RBBP to decide whether a species may be eligible for elevation from Category E to Category C and makes recommendations to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) accordingly. In this way, changes to our national avifauna can be tracked, status changes recorded, official lists updated and information gathered that helps us better understand the effects of humans on bird populations.

It has become apparent that the data submitted on non-native species, on which the RBBP bases its annual report, are far from comprehensive and that the overall picture of the status of many species is thus incomplete. There are several reasons for

this. Some observers may be unaware of the need to record introduced species. Others may show a marked disinterest in submitting such records to their county recorders and that, in turn, makes it impossible for the recorders to provide RBBP with the information required.

BOURC, RBBP and JNCC believe that it is very important to maintain an up-to-date and comprehensive view of the status of introduced non-natives species. Also, one of the key recommendations of Defra's recent Non-native Species Working Group's review of policy (www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/resprog/findings/non-native/report.pdf) was to "Establish adequate monitoring and surveillance for non-native species in Great Britain."

We therefore appeal to all observers to submit records of non-native species seen in the wild to their county recorders. In this context, we would ask for records of all species on Category C (except Red-legged Partridge and Common Pheasant) and Category E, but not those with the joint categorisation AC (see BOU Website for full British List).

For any non-natives falling into those categories, it would be very helpful to submit full details, including (where known) locality, date, numbers, age/sex and especially breeding activity/status. Only in this way will we be able to monitor the status of these species to the ultimate benefit of our native avifauna.

For further information, you can contact:

Eric Meek, Chairman, BOURC

Tel: 01 856 850 176

E-mail: eric.meek@bou.org.uk

Malcolm Ogilvie, Secretary, RBBP

Tel: 01 496 850 218

E-mail: rbbp@indaal.demon.co.uk

Steve Dudley, BOU Administrator

Tel: 01 733 844 820

Email: steve.dudley@bou.org.uk

Note: A full list of category E species is available from Paul Daw (editor)

Sanda Island Bird Observatory Trust

Ringling

The Seabird Ringing Courses took place again in the last week of June and the first week of July. A total of ten delegates attended, eight of which were new to the island. The **Razorbills** had good numbers of well grown young and just over 500 were ringed, but unfortunately the **Guillemots** were late and had mainly eggs and newly hatched young when we got to Glunimore on the 25th. However, there were far more **Puffins** on top of the island

than ever before and several young were ringable. Unfortunately the weather deteriorated mid week and stayed wet and windy throughout the second week preventing any return visits to Sheep Island or Glunimore, resulting in virtually no **Guillemots** ringed this year.

July and August saw a marked passage of **Willow Warblers** and **Robins**. The **Twite** flock migrated early, but three adult birds with colour rings were seen prior to leaving; details to follow in time.

Visitors

In addition to the Courses there were five other visitors, a group of four ringers in August for the **Manx Shearwaters** and **Storm Petrels**, and a student collecting ticks from Glunimore again.

Report 2003

Unfortunately the body that had agreed to fund the report have pulled out, as the data had already been collected, but Rab has managed to secure alternative funding and the report will be sent to 2003 members soon.

AGM

The SIBOT AGM was held at on 20th November at the Duke of Gordon Hotel Kingussie (during the Scottish Ringers Conference).

(i) The equal opportunities policy was accepted onto the constitution.

(ii) Iain Livingstone stood down as Secretary and Treasurer, the new Treasurer will be Nigel Scriven, taking over in January 2005. The new Secretary will be John Walner taking over immediately.

(iii) The finances for 2003 were presented and show a balance of £3110.45 at the end of the year. The membership is falling so the only income that assures a continued presence on the island is from the Ringing Courses held in June and July. The current membership were asked to try to recruit new members and wherever possible should visit the island to show their support for this project.

2005

Negotiations with SNH have continued despite their withdrawal of financial support in May. The new proposal combines SNH, the WELK Trust and the Gannons, and promises £11,000 for constructing an interpretation area in the boat shed for visitors, a web page and thousands of leaflets promoting the Trust. We do not have a rental agreement with the Gannons for visitor accommodation yet, as we have been unable to find a body prepared to give us the £5,000 required. Anyone wishing to stay on the island will have to contact the secretary in the spring for an update.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support with this

venture and hope you will continue to so in the future.

Iain Livingstone (28 November 2004)

Loch Gruinart—2004

In February, with a cold wind blowing and intermittent rain, surrounded by geese pecking rapidly at the short blades of grass, I was out setting the water levels across the wet grassland. Each sluice and pipe drain was set to obtain the ideal conditions for the coming spring and the waders that would use the fields to breed on. The picture of spring and wheeling **Lapwings** kept me warm against the cold north wind.

In April, the water levels were ideal with wet ditches and dry rigs between them, giving **Lapwing**, **Redshank** and **Snipe** habitat to feed on and dry ground to nest on. Nearby the nettles and iris were tall and ready to provide cover for the **Corn-crakes** to arrive in May. The table summarises numbers of some of the more important breeding birds on the reserve.

Table. Numbers of some of the more important breeding birds at Loch Gruinart in 2004

Species	Number
Corncrakes	6 calling males
Lapwing	235 pairs
Redshank	131 pairs
Snipe	67 drumming
Curlew	21 pairs
Hen Harriers	7 nesting birds
Barn Owls	3 pairs
Shoveler	13 pairs

Looking back on the year now, again from the winter fields of geese, the reserve has had a good year with birds and butterflies all doing well.

In addition, **Marsh Fritillary** butterflies had a really good summer with lots of adult butterflies flying (135 on one walk of a 1km transect line).

At the moment, the reserve is alive with activity as **Barnacle** and **White-fronted Geese** graze the grassland. In the floods, 2500 **Teal** and 500 **Wigeon** sleep in-between bouts of frenzied feeding, and **Pintail** and **Shoveler** help swell the wild fowl community. In the hedges **Redwings**, **Fieldfares** and this year the odd **Wax-wing** busily feed on the few remaining

berries, occasionally panicked by a passing **Hen Harrier** or **Sparrowhawk**. Loch Gruinart is often at its busiest in autumn and winter.

James How

Birdwatching sites

Many of you will have seen the club's new website, recently developed by Steve Petty and his daughter Kate. It's already a great resource for members, but to develop it to its full potential, we need your help! The website contains a number of pages which we intend to fill with information about good spots for birdwatching in Argyll. We particularly want to promote sites with safe, established public access.

Please let us know about your favourite spots! To get the ball rolling, here's my own short selection:

1. Tainish Woods National Nature Reserve, by Tayvallich. With a range of new paths recently opened, this makes a great spot to catch the dawn chorus. Quite often you can get good views of **Otters** foraging along the shoreline.
2. River Add estuary. Use a telescope from Bellanoch Bridge, or view from the roadside at Crinan Ferry. Wintering and passage waders, **Osprey** and **Hen Harrier**.
3. Treshnish Isles. Pick a good calm sunny day in May or June, and be rewarded with one of the most dramatic and accessible seabird colonies in Argyll. Pick a different 'package', and extend your Treshnish trip with visits to Staffa (Fingal's Cave) and Iona. A superb day's outing.
4. Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve, Islay. Year-round interest - raptors, **Snipe**, **Lapwing** and **Redshank** in spring; geese in winter; and **Chough** always seem to be around!

Have I missed off your favourite site? Then let us know about it! A short e-mail to Steve will get things started.

David Wood

Notes from the last Committee Meeting

On the extremely wet night of 16th November 2004, seven members of the committee braved rain and flooded roads to reach the George Hotel at Inveraray to meet and discuss the business of the running of the club. Minutes of the previous Committee Meeting held on 24 August were approved as were the minutes of the AGM held on 6th November at the autumn meeting at Cairnbaan, which

will appear in the September *Eider* for members ratification at the next AGM.

Birds of Argyll Book and Argyll Bird Report

David Wood reported on progress with the *Birds of Argyll* book, which is planned to be ready for publication in autumn 2005. Paul Daw reported on the considerable progress made with the *Argyll Bird Report*. The committee agreed that the 2002/2003 reports should be combined. The data processing for the 2002 report had been finalised and that for the 2003 report was progressing well, this together with the species accounts were being worked on by Paul and would allow for publication at the beginning of 2005. As Bob Furness reported that the stock of 2001 reports was low, it was agreed to have an increased print run of 400 copies for the 2002/2003 report.

Field Trips and Insurance

In view of the proposed activities in 2005 it was generally agreed that renewal of the Public Liability Insurance was necessary. Field trips for 2005 were discussed and final arrangements for publication in the *Eider* were sought by the 30th November.

Future Club Meetings

In spite of considerable efforts made by committee members, no suitable venue in Oban had been identified and it was agreed that the Spring Meeting should be held at the Argyll Hotel, Inveraray on 12th March 2005. Names of speakers were suggested and arrangements will be consolidated to provide an interesting and varied programme that we have become used to expect. The autumn 2005 meeting at Cairnbaan will be held on Saturday 5th November, subject to Bob Furness confirming the date with the Hotel. David Wood undertook to have flyers printed for public display at suitable venues.

Bird Records

Paul Daw reported that he had agreed to trial a draft version of a computer software package promoted by the SOC to allow bird recording to be carried out on any type of computer. He also shared with the Committee his concerns regarding the BTO's new Bird Track initiative which has been devised as a follow up to their Migration Watch scheme. After discussion, it was agreed that David Wood on behalf of the club, should send a letter to the BTO in support of the role of the Local Bird Recorders and emphasise the importance of the local validation of data.

Website

Steve Petty reported that while the website is proving to be successful, the section on birdwatching locations needs to be developed, for which he plans to design a template. He also reported having received requests from commercial organisations

Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should with the Editor before the 28th February 2005

for links to the website. Members of the committee agreed that, while these should be kept to non-commercial organisations, others could be invited to buy advertising space in the *Eider* or *Argyll Bird Report*.

Committee Meetings in 2005

Meetings were arranged for Tuesday 22nd February, Tuesday 19th April, and Tuesday 23rd August. John Anderson confirmed the availability of the meeting room in the George Hotel, Inveraray.

AOB

There is a chance for SNH to run two small projects this winter, both relating to conservation-targeted mink control. The projects would (i) research the priority areas for future mink control in coastal Argyll, primarily by analysing the Seabird 2000 dataset; (ii) work with a range of local community interests to promote mink control and to better understand the strength of community support for such work. The committee gave its support to both projects and David Wood agreed to take them forward.

David Wood tabled a letter of thanks to Bill Staley for all his work as Membership Secretary. Bob Furness reported that following the introduction of the website and the club leaflet, membership has now risen by 17 to 185.

Bob Furness undertook to have a new car sticker printed for free distribution. David Wood reported that an SNH grant had been awarded to Sanda Bird Observatory Trust as well as to Machrihanish Seabird Observatory via Kintyre Bird Club.

The Committee would welcome any comments or suggestions from members and look forward to seeing you at the Spring Meeting.

Katie Pendreigh

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2004/2005)

Chairman: David Wood, Drover's House, Bellanoch, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8SN (*phone* 01546 830272)

Vice Chairman: Nigel Scriven, 2 Allt na Blathaich, Loch Eck, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8SG (*phone* 01369 840606 & 01505 843679)

Secretary: John Anderson, Ard Beag, Connel, Oban, Argyll PA37 1PT (*phone* 01631 710630)

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

Membership Secretary: Sue Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Loch Lomond G83 7DG (*phone* 01301 702603)

Committee: Richard Allan (Oban), Roger Broad (Killearn), Tom Callan (Otter Ferry), Paul Daw (Minard), Mike Gear (Appin), David Merrie (Blairgowrie), Katie Pendreigh (Tayinloan) and Steve Petty (Tighnabruaich)

Editor of the Argyll Bird Report: Clive Craik, Grendon, Barcaldine, Oban, Argyll PA37 1EC (*phone* 01631 720 327)

Editor of the Eider: Steve Petty (contact details on front page)

Argyll Bird Recorder: Paul Daw, Tigh-na-Tulloch, Tullochgorm, Minard, Argyll PA32 8YQ
(*phone* 01546 886260 *e-mail* monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

Argyll Bird Club Website: <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>



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 and press releases. 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 around the 15th day of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor before the 1st day of each publication month. However, it greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline dates.

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the author/s and not 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.

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 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 annual 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 box on this page).