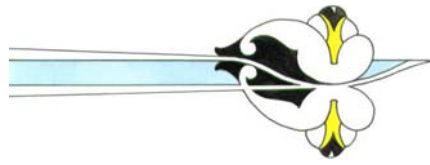




# The Eider



*The Eider* is the Quarterly Newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club (<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>)  
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Photo: Jim Duncan



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### Spring Meeting 2006

On Saturday 11th March at the  
Royal Marine Hotel, Hunter's Quay,  
Dunoon.

The programme is on page 3

### Autumn Meeting 2006

On Saturday 4th November at the  
Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead.

It is hoped to have the programme in  
the June *Eider*

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

*The club's Autumn Meeting at the Cairn-baan Hotel was particularly well attended, with at least 77 people present. It must have been the lousy weather outside that, for once, encouraged some of the most ardent birders indoors!*

Bob Furness had once again arranged a varied and interesting programme that ranged from outdoor access (Gavin Smith) and wildlife crime in Scotland (Joe Connelly) to the birding delights of Coll (Simon Wellock) and Costa Rica (Nigel Scriven). The meeting concluded with some excellent photographs from sea trips in the Hebrides (Chris Jackson). Thanks are due to all involved; Bob, speakers and the hotel for catering so well.

The meeting was also the venue for the club's AGM. John Anderson (assisted by his wife Helen) stepped down as Secre-

tary. A sad loss to the club as both had contributed so much over the years. At times in the past we've had great difficulty finding a secretary, so it was with great relief that Katie Pendreigh agreed (without too much arm twisting!) to take over the reins—thanks Katie. David Merrie resigned from the committee, but promised to continue organising field trips! The vacant committee posts were filled by Ian Hopkins (Bute) and Danielle Clark-De Bisschop (Colintraive). A full list of club officials for 2005/6 is provided on the back page.

The articles by Mike Gregory and Iain Logan on pages 17-18 both suggest that the Argyll Bird Club (committee and members) should be more prepared to comment on controversial developments that might affect bird populations, in this

case about windfarms. But, it could equally well apply to fish farm applications, new forestry schemes etc. What are your views? I would be willing to print some letters on the subject in the March issue.

For contributions to this issue, I would like to thank Clive Craik, Paul Daw, Jim Duncan, Bob Furness, Mike Gregory, Iain Logan, Eddie Maguire, David Merrie, Linda Petty (proof reading), Tristan ap Rheinallt, Nigel Scriven, Margaret Staley, Michael Thomas, Simon Wellock, David Wood and Gordon Yates.

*Finally, have a very happy Christmas and New Year—with some good birding too! And, with all that spare time during the holiday, why not write an article for the March Eider?*

## Forthcoming field trips in 2006

## Sound of Gigha—5th April

Some recent field trips have not been very well attended, so as an experiment, next year's Sound of Gigha outing will take place on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2006. As before, some guidance on identification will be provided for less experienced birders. Meet at the car park at Ronachan Point just off the A83 (grid reference NR741548) at 10am. From here we will call in at the coast near the West Coast Salmon site and then onto Tayinloan. We will then take the ferry to Gigha, mainly to look for birds in the Sound, and break for lunch. Snacks can be ordered at the hotel on the island. Arrangements for the rest of the day are flexible. We can spend more time on Gigha before returning to the mainland, if the weather is suitable and the majority wish to do so. Or, we may return to the mainland and if weather and tide conditions permit, walk along the shore towards Rhunahaorine Point to look for waders. Alternatively, we can recheck some of the morning's sites.

This trip depends very much on reasonably good weather. Will those who intend to come please contact me, by phone or e-mail, at the very latest on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, to give me some idea of how many people to expect and leave your phone number. If the weather forecast is really atrocious it may be possible to postpone until the following week.

Spring birding in the Sound of Gigha can be a rewarding experience. This trip will be a repeat of a similar successful visits in spring 2004 and 2005. An account of the latter appeared in the June 2005 *Eider*

(page 4). Some of the highlights from previous visits have included **three species of diver**, **Slavonian Grebes** (some in full summer plumage), **Common Scoters**, **Long-tailed Ducks** and **Greenland White-fronted Geese**. We will also be looking out for early migrants.

**Paul Daw**

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: [monedula@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

## Coll—13-14th May

It is hoped to arrange a field trip to Coll over the weekend 13-14 May. Please contact me if you are interested.

**Simon Wellock**

Tel: 01879 230301

E-mail: [simon.wellock@rspb.org.uk](mailto:simon.wellock@rspb.org.uk)

Warden RSPB Coll Reserve, Totronald, Isle Of Coll, Argyll PA78 6TB

## Garvellochs—late May

It is hoped to arrange a two night/three day camping trip to the Garvellochs about the end of May. Please contact me if you are interested.

**David Merrie**

Tel: 01250 884273

E-mail: [david@merrie1035.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:david@merrie1035.fsnet.co.uk)

Craigie House, Craigie, Clunie, Blairgowrie PH10 6RG

## Sanda—17-18th June

I am organising another trip to Sanda Island in 2006, during the weekend of the 17-18 June. A full report of the 2005 trip can be found in the September 2005 *Eider*, pages 8-9. Since then, the boat has been fitted with a brand new engine, which is running well, and so we shouldn't experience another breakdown! There are various options available for the weekend. A day trip on the Saturday and Sunday will cost £20 for the boat. We hope to depart at about 9am from Campbeltown and return at about 5pm. For those wishing to stay overnight, there are two rooms available in the Farmhouse for B&B at £30 per person per night. Alternatively, there are 10 spaces in the Bunkhouse at £10 per person per night. All the above prices are for 2005 and may be subject to a small increase in 2006. The boat can take 12 people, so places are limited and subject to confirmation and the weather. For more information or to book a place contact:

**Nigel Scriven**

Tel: 01369 840606 or 01505 843679

E-mail: [nigel.scriven@renfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.scriven@renfrewshire.gov.uk)





## Corncrake success

Photo: Gordon Yates



In the last issue of the *Eider* (page 15), Roger Broad highlighted the success of Corncrakes in Argyll this year, with some superb photos by Jim Duncan. Subsequently, I received this excellent photo of a Corncrake taken by Gordon Yates. Gordon says 'I took the photos in a crofter's garden on Islay this year – while it's the best shot I've taken of a Corncrake, there is also a story that goes with it. It was taken in May when the males had just commenced calling. In July, I received a phone call from the lady who owns the croft to tell me that when she was washing up, in front of the kitchen window she saw 11 young Corncrakes walk across the lawn! As you know it is not often you can prove Corncrake breeding, but obviously this male pulled it off'.

### Editor

### Purchase of optical and photographic equipment

With the cost of high quality optical and photographic equipment being so expensive, I propose that the club might negotiate a "club discount" with a suitable supplier. The discount would be negotiated with a supplier, who could accept both telephone and internet orders. Ideally, such a supplier should have shops in Glasgow, Edinburgh and possibly Oban, where members could test any equipment before purchase. I would be willing to research and negotiate the discount opportunities available to the club if the feedback from members was positive, so please get it touch if you are interested.

Iain Logan

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Tel: 01583 441352

## Programme for the ABC's Spring Meeting—Saturday 11th March 2006 Royal Marine Hotel, Hunter's Quay, Dunoon

<b>0930</b>	Doors open, coffee and tea
<b>1000-1010</b>	<b>Welcome and introduction</b> — <i>David Wood</i>
<b>1010-1020</b>	<b>Recent bird sightings</b> — <i>Paul Daw, Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club</i>
<b>1020-1050</b>	<b>The Birds of Scotland: a new book</b> — <i>Ron Forrester, SOC</i>
<b>1050-1120</b>	Coffee/tea
<b>1120-1200</b>	<b>A wild goose chase to Iceland</b> — <i>Alan Lauder, RSPB</i>
<b>1200-1230</b>	<b>Stranded off Sanda!</b> — <i>David Palmar</i>
<b>1230-1400</b>	Lunch (available in the hotel)
<b>1400-1445</b>	<b>Galapagos</b> — <i>Bob Furness, University of Glasgow</i>
<b>1445-1515</b>	<b>Conserving Argyll's natural and cultural heritage</b> — <i>Marina Smith, Forestry Commission</i>
<b>1515-1545</b>	Coffee/tea
<b>1545-1630</b>	<b>Wrangle Island: gem of the arctic</b> — <i>Brian Little, Northumbrian Ringing Group</i>
<b>1630-1645</b>	Raffle and end of meeting

## Unusual nest sites of Sparrowhawks and Tawny Owls on Islay

*It is a sad fact that most researchers coming to Islay have concentrated on its 'glory birds'- geese, Hen Harriers and Chough, with Peregrines being included in the most recent survey. Little or no research has ever been undertaken on its population of Sparrowhawks and Tawny Owls and in particular their choice of nest sites, which may be unique to the Hebrides.*

I have been visiting Islay annually since 1976. However, after discovering a high density of Hen Harriers in the 1980's, when 50 pairs bred annually, I have concentrated my research on other raptors, in particular the Sparrowhawk and Tawny Owl.

In 30 years I have visited virtually every

scrub-filled gully on the island and have found Sparrowhawk nests in the most unusual places. For example, on the ground in ferns at the base of a rowan tree, and in a gorse bush one metre above the ground! Photos of both nests appear in Ian Newton's monograph on the Sparrowhawk (illustrations 18 lower and 21 lower, in Newton 1986). Whilst searching these valley woods, I sometimes made use of my Labrador to sniff out any breeding Woodcock. It was whilst employing my dog that Tawny Owls have been flushed from ground nests containing eggs. These were mainly at the base of mature trees. None of these woodlands had trees with holes that were large enough for Tawny Owls to breed in.

One particular Tawny Owl nest, under the trunk of a fallen tree, has been in constant use for nine years and has only failed once when the young were probably predated before I arrived, as there was evidence of hatched eggs in the scrape. Of course, I should point out that there are no foxes on Islay, which is a bonus, but there are plenty of Stoats and Mink, and on one occasion a hunting Barn Owl showed some interest in the young Tawny Owl when it was not being brooded by the female!

The oak woods where these Tawny Owls breed have significant numbers of breeding passerines and in years of poor vole/mice numbers, birds have provided more than half of the owls' prey, but to



### Ground-nesting Tawny Owls on Islay



Three photos taken at the same nest site on Islay over two years by the author:

Top left—the female with a Field Vole in 2005

Top right—the male with an Islay (Common) Shrew in 2005

Bottom left—the chick with a Swallow in 2004



never more than two chicks each year. Several years ago, when checking a nest site in the early morning, there was a Willow Warbler, a seven day old Lapwing chick and the remains of an adult Lapwing still in the nest! Last year a Swallow was presented to a single young at midnight (see box).

This year only one young was raised despite a good supply of small mammals.

The photographs in the box show a female with a Field Vole in her bill and a male presenting an Islay Shrew (a race of the Common Shrew) to the chicks. The facial disk of both male and female are quite different, with the male having rich brown markings and the female being more grey/brown. These differences are apparent in photographs and have allowed me to identify the owls as the same pair that I first photographed nine years ago.

Whilst the nest sites of Islay's Sparrowhawks may change with the advent of forestry, let us hope that the delights of finding a ground-nesting Tawny Owl will remain for those who are prepared to search woodlands in the future.

### Gordon Yates

#### References

Newton, I. 1986. *The Sparrowhawk*. Berkhamsted: T. & A.D. Poyser.

## The Curlew's tale

The Curlew's name is onomatopoeic—its name sounds like its call. Various described as haunting, a lament, desolate and an appalling cry; but its call is distinctive and evocative. For me the call is glorious and resonant of wild places, high moors and wilder shores. My generation grew up with the BBC Radio programme *The Naturalist*, chaired by James Fisher and Peter Scott; my on-air tutors in natural history. It was Ludwig Koch's recording of the Curlew's call that opened and closed the programme.

Robert Burns also felt for the bird (lang-leggity beasties):

*I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the Curlew  
on a summer noon....without feeling an elevation of  
the soul like the enthusiasm of devotional poetry.*

from a lullaby sung to a child.

*Numenius arquata* (arquata is the Latin meaning bow like, as in violin bow), the Common Curlew is present all year on the Isle of Bute. It nests both near the shore and on highest ground on the island. In summer it can always be heard on the moor and around Glenkaabae in the Glenmore valley. Outside the breeding season,

flocks of Curlew can be encountered around the shore—at the north end of Kilchattan Bay, along the Mount Stewart shore, at St. Ninian's Bay (500 on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2000), Scalpsie Bay (800 on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2000) and Ettrick Bay. I often see 50 or more birds in a flock feeding on the fields around Loch Ascog in late winter. Solitary birds can usually be found on any foreshore. There are probably around 2000 birds on Bute during the winter months. The Clyde estuary is a nationally important wintering area.

McWilliam (*The Birds of the Isle of Bute*, 1927) notes significant movements of Curlew over Bute during July and August, with birds moving from NE to SW and often quite high; a phenomenon worth looking out for.

### Michael Thomas

[Editor's note: this account is taken from *Ornithological Tales Book IV*, which Michael has written about the birds of Bute. Together with *Ornithological Tales Book I - III*, all are available from the Bute Museum, Stuart Street, Rothesay, Bute PA20 0EP and cost £4.50 each, including P&P. Cheques should be made payable to 'Bute Museum'.]



Photo: Jim Duncan

## Where Blackcaps that winter in Argyll come from—and why the habit is increasing

*Blackcaps are being seen increasingly frequently in Argyll in early winter. You may be lucky enough to see one on your bird table! These are not British Blackcaps that have decided against migrating to warmer winter quarters. Ringing has shown that the Blackcaps wintering in Britain and Ireland come from central Europe. Birds that breed there mostly go to Spain and North Africa for the winter, but an increasing proportion travel west to winter in the western British Isles.*

A major step forward in understanding bird migration was made by Professor Peter Berthold and his research team in Germany, when they performed genetic experiments with captive birds. By crossing Blackcaps from northern Europe, which migrate a long way, with birds from southern Europe, which migrate very little, they demonstrated that hybrid offspring migrate a distance half as far as the sum of their parental habits. The distance that birds migrate is controlled by the genes they inherit; so is their preferred migratory direction. But, this discovery creates a dilemma. If a new mutation confers an advantage by taking a bird to a new and better wintering area, then this advantage may quickly be lost if it mates with a bird with differing genes. For example, for Blackcaps breeding in central Europe, it may be good to winter in Spain or in Argyll, but a hybrid would probably drown in the Bay of Biscay!

A team from Glasgow University (Stuart Bearhop, Steve Votier, Bob Furness, Susan Waldron and Jason Newton) joined with the German researchers to investigate this evolutionary conundrum. The rain in Spain is different from rain in Britain. In Spain the water molecules contain more heavy hydrogen (deuterium) than British rain. This is a purely natural physical process, but the difference becomes incorporated into the birds' tissues. By catching Blackcaps in spring, on their breeding territories in central Europe, the winter quarters of each bird can be identified from the deuterium isotopic signal in a tiny sample of the bird's toe-nail grown during winter. The research, published in *Science* (21 October 2005, full reference below), showed that central European Blackcaps wintering in Britain mostly paired with others also from Britain. This 'assortative mating' means that the migratory preference can evolve rapidly within a population because nonsense hybrid combinations are avoided. This mechanism may lead to rapid evolutionary change in



Photo: Jim Duncan

animal migration patterns, something of topical interest given concerns about global climate change.

Back in central Europe, Blackcaps that had wintered in Britain had higher breeding success than those that wintered in Iberia, despite the warmer conditions in Iberia, so this new habit should increase. Maybe your bird table is responsible for this, as there is some evidence that food supply is the cause! Also, it may possibly provide a mechanism for the formation of new species, based on differing migration routes.

**Bob Furness**

#### Reference

Bearhop, S., Fiedler, W., Furness, R.W., Votier, S.C., Waldron, S., Newton, J., Bowen, G.J., Berthold, P. & Farnsworth, K. 2005. Assortative mating as a mechanism for rapid evolution of a migratory divide. *Science*, **310**, 502-504.

## Superswans

***This article is dedicated to the memory of Doug Trigg, who died in April.***

*Above Dunstaffnage Bay on 19 October, I was looking down on some distant Mute Swans when I saw something so unusual for Argyll that it took me a second or two to realise what it was. Some specks on the horizon grew bigger and closer as eight huge birds, flashing eight sets of smart brown-and-white plumage, flew in to join the swans. They looked like a flock of some fantastic, exotic species...*

All year round there are flocks of Mute Swans at traditional gathering places along the coast, for example at Loch Etive, Loch Craignish, and Fort William. Perhaps surprisingly, many adult swans are at these sites through spring and summer when we might expect them to be breeding. Even more surprisingly, national surveys of the species over the years have repeatedly found that, each spring, more

swans are found as non-breeders in such flocks than are recorded on territories as pairs attempting to breed.

Of the minority that do nest, many succeed in hatching their eggs, but most of the young disappear while they are still small. By autumn, not many pairs have surviving young and large broods at this time of year are not common. Four, five or six fully-grown young in a brood are, I believe, unusual enough in Argyll to be worth recording.

Most swan pairs that I monitor had failed in 2005, so I was pleased that day when I found a pair with just one large cygnet. The trio had appeared in the bay very recently. None of the immediate locals had bred successfully except one pair with a lone cygnet at Ganavan, a couple of km down the coast, so I guessed these might have come from there. To confirm this, I tried to get close to see if either adult had

one of Doug Trigg's numbered leg-rings, as I knew that the Ganavan cob was F16. However, they swam away before I could see their legs. I gave up and continued up onto some higher ground.

*It was then that the flock of eight monstrous birds flew in, such a sheer volume of feathers that for a moment I didn't see a ninth bird flying with them, a single adult Mute Swan. Then I realised. This was a female with (yes) her brood of eight airborne youngsters.*

After swimming round the yachts at the marina, unsuccessfully looking for yacht's people to feed them, all nine flew off again towards Oban, probably hoping for food in the bay. But, not before I had run down and read the adult's ring number.

She was a female with ring F11, one of many numbered rings applied to Mute Swans in Argyll over the last fifteen years



by Doug and Elaine Trigg. Enquiries revealed that she had been ringed as a cygnet at Dunbeg in December 1999 and had bred this year at Angus's Garden at Barguilean, near Taynuilt. For several years there had been a nonflying "rescued" male there. In January this year F11 had flown in with another male, no doubt looking for territory. The resident drove the incoming male away and then bred with F11. The resulting brood of eight was so unusual that they were pictured in *The Oban Times* on 2 June (see opposite). Now F11 had flown with her brood, leaving the disabled male parent behind (thanks to Sean Honeyman for this information.).

Normally both parents would fly with the young and stay with them for the winter, so F11 may now be finding life difficult for two reasons. Finding food for eight fully-grown young will be difficult enough. But without a male, they may all be driven off by other swans from areas with good natural food.

*So, if you see F11 and her eight hungry young this winter, please try to feed them (bread or grain would be fine; a cheap Tesco loaf would do wonders). Also, a photograph of the family would be good for the record. And, of course, a count – to see if all eight survive the winter.*

They may turn up anywhere, as adults with flying young can move fair distances at this time of year. In 1998, a pair I had recorded in May nesting on an island off Fort William flew into Dunstaffnage Bay on 31 October with four young. They were driven off by the resident male, who had young of his own. This was a distance of about 50 km and, again, it was only because of Doug's colour rings that I could identify them (see *Argyll Bird Report* (1999) 15: 27).

*I like to think that Doug himself, with all his experience of swans, would have been pleased to see F11 and her octuplets. Doug's colour rings live on, and they are still proving invaluable in identifying individual swans like these. So – many thanks again, Doug!*

**To keep Doug Trigg's good work going, I would be very pleased to keep records of all sightings of colour-ringed swans, past and future (including F11 and family if you see them). Please let me know the ring number on the plastic (usually red) leg ring, together with date, place and any other information, such as how many adults and young were present.**

**Clive Craik**

E-mail: [jcac@sams.ac.uk](mailto:jcac@sams.ac.uk)

Tel: 01631 720327.



'Superswans' (Photo: Oban Times)

## Islay memories 2 : Bitten by the seawatching bug

*Even before I moved into my new house on Islay in the spring of 1993, I was aware that I would be living within a stone's throw of Frenchman's Rocks, a well-known seawatching site discovered by Keith Verrall in the 1970s. Indeed, I had spent some considerable time reading and re-reading his paper in *Scottish Birds* (Vol. 12, No. 1). It wasn't just his sightings of rarities such as Cory's and Little Shearwaters, Surf Scoter and Ross's Gull that intrigued me, but also the sheer number of birds he recorded. Kittiwake movement, for example, had exceeded 10,000 birds per hour on one occasion—to me at the time, an unimaginable figure.*

In 1993 I had done relatively little seawatching apart from irregular visits to well-known Cornish sites such as Porthgwarra and Pendeen. However, three autumns spent on Arran provided

occasional opportunities to see large concentrations of seabirds in the Kilbrannan Sound. Indeed, I had managed to see Storm Petrel, Leach's Petrel, Little Auk and even Black Tern (the first Arran record) from my living room. If this was possible from a straight stretch of coastline on Arran, a mere glance at the map was enough to reveal the promise of the west coast of Islay.

My first visit to Frenchman's Rocks was on 3rd May 1993. Having spent so much time there since, I find it difficult to remember how I felt. However, my notes record how impressed I was with the quality of the early-morning light at this west-facing site, and how difficult I found it to track birds passing by at close range while also keeping an eye on what was going on further out. Both these impressions have stood the test of time. In the right conditions, Frenchman's Rocks offers superb views of a wide variety of seabirds, but the action

can sometimes be so hectic that it becomes overwhelming.

On that first day, a Puffin was the most exciting bird I saw. Over the weeks that followed, I began to get an idea of how the wind and the weather influenced the movements of the most common seabirds, namely Fulmar, Gannet, Manx Shearwater, Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill. As summer turned into autumn, I also realised that small numbers of waders as well as seabirds could be seen migrating south past the headland. Lacking a fluid head on my tripod, I found their identification challenging on occasion.

August became more exciting as a few Sooty Shearwaters accompanied the growing number of migrating Manx Shearwaters. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, I recorded two Balearic Shearwaters (known then as Mediterranean Shearwaters, before the two races *mauretanicus* and *yelkouan*

were split). At the time, there was only one accepted record of this species from Islay; indeed, it was still quite a rarity in Scotland. Over the next few years I was to become very familiar with its appearance, seeing no fewer than 50 individuals during 1993-6, all but one of them in autumn. A similar increase in records was observed by Eddie Maguire at Uisead Point (Machrihanish) from 1992 onwards, with the result that Argyll became *the* region in Scotland for this species. More recently, however, numbers at Frenchman's Rocks and elsewhere in Argyll have declined; today, more Balearic Shearwaters seem to be seen on the east coast of Scotland than in the west.

Mention of Machrihanish leads me to acknowledge my debt to Eddie Maguire. Having begun an intensive programme of seawatching at Uisead Point in 1989, Eddie had already amassed a great deal of experience by the time I first came into contact with him. Although I was never able to match him in terms of single-minded dedication over the years that followed, I greatly appreciated the fact that there was always someone with whom I could compare and discuss observations. In fact, Eddie's inexhaustible enthusiasm was a constant source of inspiration.

Otherwise, seawatching was on the whole a lonely pursuit during those early years. On rare occasions, I might be joined by a visiting birder or two, but otherwise I would not see a living soul all morning. In many ways, this enhanced the experience. It also allowed me to concentrate my whole attention on the birds—the importance of this being brought home to me on one best-forgotten occasion, when as I was answering a visitor's questions about what I was doing and why, a Little Shearwater flew past at close range. The experience was over in less than a minute, and I had very little to show for it other than a collection of mental impressions. Knowing what a hard line the rarities committee takes with Little Shearwater records, I knew that there was no point in submitting this one.

This, of course, is one of the major disadvantages of seawatching on one's own. When a rare or unusual bird shows up, it is normally in sight for just a short time, and it can be particularly difficult for a lone observer to gather many details about its appearance. Should a crucial identification feature be missed, for whatever reason, no one else is around to make good the omission. When it comes to writing up the record, the details can seem so sparse that there is a strong temptation to embellish them, with results that may be less than convincing. In short, it's a minefield. Fortunately (I suppose), the Little Shearwater was the only major rarity I saw while seawatching at Frenchman's Rocks, and by quietly forgetting the sighting I was able to avoid the stigma that tends to accom-



The author seawatching at Frenchman's Rocks (Photo: Clive McKay)

pany single-observer records of major rarities these days. Nevertheless, I was still kept fairly busy writing descriptions of species such as Cory's Shearwater, Long-tailed Skua, Sabine's Gull and Black Tern, as well as (in the early days) the above-mentioned Balearic Shearwater.

Rarities were just the icing on the cake, of course. As I soon discovered, seabirds of various species could be seen passing Frenchman's Rocks in good numbers almost year-round, and even midwinter had its attractions with occasional sightings of skuas and Little Auks. Setting aside the odd surprise such as Great Crested Grebe and Velvet Scoter, spring was characterised mainly by the arrival of migrants such as Manx Shearwater, Arctic Skua and Arctic Tern, coupled with a gradual increase in the numbers of several common seabirds. Generally speaking, this increase continued through the summer, with movements of several species peaking in August or early September, though auks became scarce at this time. From about mid-July onwards, the variety of migrating birds increased, with the greatest range of species occurring between late August and late September.

I soon realised that weather was a critical factor. There was nothing new about this discovery, of course: Verrall & Bourne in their 1982 paper had discussed the influence of weather conditions at this site in some detail. To summarise, Frenchman's Rocks is a classic west-facing seawatching location where the best conditions occur in the wake of a fast-moving Atlantic depression that passes somewhere between the north of Scotland and Iceland. Passage of a front over Islay is marked by a switch in the wind direction, often from SW to W, with constant rain giving way to showers and sunny periods. This is when seabirds start to pass through in big numbers. Generally speaking, the stronger the wind and the more frequent and heavy the showers,

the better the chance of seeing "real" seabirds such as Leach's Petrel, Grey Phalarope and Sabine's Gull. This is of course a generalisation, and as such it doesn't always hold true. I have arrived at the site on several occasions in apparently perfect conditions to see very little, while on the other hand some of the most impressive shearwater movements have occurred in near-calm weather. Nevertheless, the most exciting seawatches have almost always accompanied W or WNW gales, with reduced visibility and heavy, squally showers.

Next to season and weather conditions, time of day is the most important factor influencing numbers of birds. Unless the wind veers round during the day, movement almost always peaks early in the morning. On a good day, birds often pile through from first light, though equally it may take them a little while to get going. Shearwater movement in particular tends to be rather slow for the first couple of hours. Unless the wind is very strong, the action can be all over by 10 or 11 a.m., although there tends to be a secondary increase in activity towards the end of the day. In my experience, however, this never matches the intensity of the early-morning movement, and poor light can also be a problem.

Unfortunately, this attempt at an objective analysis conveys nothing of the excitement of a really good seawatch, when thousands of birds stream southwards hour after hour, providing the fortunate observer with an unforgettable experience. In the next issue of the *Eider*, I shall attempt to restore the balance by describing the events of 21<sup>st</sup> September 2004, when a westerly gale resulted in a hectic day for Clive McKay and me.

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## Recent bird reports from Paul Daw: August—October 2005

**Bird sightings in Argyll**

*The latest bird news is now available on the Argyll Bird Club's website (front page). On the home page, see 'click here for latest bird reports'.*

**Where do our Siskins go in the winter?**

A report just received from the BTO concerned a ringed Siskin found sick in a garden at Glenbranter, Cowal on 26<sup>th</sup> May and later released. The ring number revealed that it had been ringed as an adult on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2004 at Meols on the Wirral (Merseyside), a distance of 329km (204 miles). This is the third Siskin (that I know of) in recent years to be found in spring/summer in Argyll that had been ringed in Lancashire/Merseyside in winter. This would seem to show that some at least of our breeding Siskins spend Christmas in the Liverpool area, which makes one wonder if some of the Siskins seen here in the winter come from further north?

**Major Pink-footed Goose movement**

On the afternoon and evening of 15<sup>th</sup> Sep there were several reports of skeins of geese seen/heard flying between south and east high over Mid-Argyll and Cowal. These included, birds over Oban (where a single bird was found on the foreshore the following day), Minard, Lochgilphead, a flock of 90-100 from Dunoon over the Firth of Clyde and flocks of c.70, 45 and 60+ over Tighnabruaich. Flocks were also seen on the same day from just N of Carsaig (nr Tayvallich) flying SE from Jura then turning south. Based on calls and the date, the consensus is that they were probably all Pink-footed. On the afternoon of 15<sup>th</sup> skeins totalling some 200 birds came in off the Minch at Balevullin and flew south over Tiree. At about 16.30hrs, 3 skeins of geese, each numbering about 100-150 birds, were seen heading south-east over Glen More, Mull, several flocks were moving east over Calgary/Dervaig, Mull from Coll and a party were heard calling as they flew south over Oban at 22:20hrs. In all this passage apparently continued from about mid-day to late evening and must have involved numbers running into the thousands. (Pam & Arthur Brown, PD, Stuart Gibson, Sandra Hacker (per JB) Simon Lawrence, George Newall, Alex Nicol, Steve Petty). Any other records of this influx will still be very welcome.

**Observers**

Full names in brackets except: SW = Simon Wellock, JB = John Bowler, TC = Tom Callan, PD = Paul Daw, JD = Jim Dickson, JH = John Halliday

**Divers to Herons (including other birds seen during sea-watches)**

For a species that is normally only recorded in small numbers in Argyll, 178 **Storm Petrels** counted heading SW off Hynish, Tiree in one hour on 17<sup>th</sup> August (a record for the island) was remarkable. There was further excellent sea-watching on Tiree just a week later when a **Cory's Shearwater**, 16 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 3 **Pomarine Skuas** and 7 **Bonxies** were recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> August (JB). On 22<sup>nd</sup> August, a **Great Shearwater** and two **Cory's Shearwaters** were seen from the ferry near Coll (SW). A **Balearic Shearwater** was seen heading west off Hynish, Tiree with **Manx Shearwaters** on 31<sup>st</sup> August (JB). Single **Leach's Petrels** appeared at Arinagour pier, Coll on 30<sup>th</sup> August (SW) and off Balevullin, Tiree on 29<sup>th</sup> August (JB).

Sightings from Coll pier on 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep included 26 **Red-throated Divers**, 2 **Leach's Petrels**, 7 **European Storm Petrels**, 6 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 2 **Arctic Skuas**, a juv **Pomarine Skua** and 14 **Great Skuas** (SW). On the same day Tiree had, a **Sooty Shearwater**, 14 **Black Guillemots** and 2 imm. **Pomarine Skuas** in the morning, and in the evening 27

**Great Skuas**, an adult **Arctic Skua** and 3 **Arctic Terns** (JB). A sea-watch from the pier on Coll on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> Sep produced 6 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 2 **Manx Shearwaters**, juv. **Pomarine Skua**, 2 **Arctic Skuas** and 2 **Great Skuas** (JD/SW).

Morning and evening watches on Tiree on 28<sup>th</sup> Sep, in high winds, produced totals of 16 **Leach's Petrels**, 7 **Storm Petrels**, 13 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 1 imm. **Pomarine Skua**, 2 **Arctic Skuas**, 20 **Great Skuas** as well as nearly 3,000 auks (nearly all **Razorbills**) and over 1,000 **Gannets**. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, a record (for Tiree) 57 **Great Skuas** were heading west off the Aird, Tiree along with 62 **Manx Shearwaters**, 6 **Leach's Petrels**, 3 **Arctic Skuas**, 3 imm. **Pomarine Skuas**, 8 **Arctic Terns**, 7 **Black Guillemot** and over a thousand each of **Gannets**, **Kittiwakes** and auks (again mainly **Razorbills**). (JB).

At about the same time, off Ballyhaugh, Coll, 8 **Red-throated** and 13 **Great Northern Divers**, 4 **Leach's Petrels**, 8 **Storm Petrels**, 27 **Manx Shearwaters**, 29 **Great Skuas**, 5 **Arctic Skuas**, 2 juv. **Pomarine Skuas** and 6 **Arctic Terns** were accompanied by 11 **Long-tailed Ducks** and hundreds of auks (once again mainly **Razorbills**) (SW).

The above are just a selection of the sea-watch results from Coll and Tiree which have been outstanding this autumn. Further details are available in the 'latest reports section of the club's website (address on front page).

A **Great Shearwater** flying alongside the ferry from Barra for 3 mins, about 30 mins north of Tiree on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct, was probably just about within the Argyll recording area and an early **Little Auk** just south of Tiree definitely was (JB).

**Wildfowl**

The arrival of **Whooper Swans** included single birds at Loch Craiglin (Loch Sween) on 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep (PD/TC) and on Coll on 25<sup>th</sup> Sep (SW), 19 at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 25<sup>th</sup> Sep (Clive McKay). Tiree had 28 at Loch a' Phuill also on 25<sup>th</sup>, increasing to 40 by the following day (JB).

The WeBS count of Loch Sween on 15<sup>th</sup> Oct. found a total of 18 **Little Grebes** and 28 **Mute Swans** and 65 **Whooper Swans** (incl. 5 cygnets) at the Ulva Lagoons, together with 129 **Wigeon** and a pair of **Tufted Ducks** (unusual at this site) (PD/TC). By the following day (16<sup>th</sup> Oct) **Whooper Swan** numbers there had increased to at least 75 (Bill Allan/Anne-Lise Dickie).

A flock of 13 **Whooper Swans** (incl 3 juvs.) flew across Loch Fyne from Port Ann towards Otter Ferry on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct be-

**Stop Press**

There has been quite an influx of rare gulls. A **Laughing Gull** and a **Ring-billed Gull** were seen by Tom Lowe at Machir Bay, Islay on 8th November. The Laughing Gull was seen again nearby at Loch Gorm on 16th and the same, or another (both were adults), at Port Ellen on the same day (per Malcolm Ogilvie). An adult **Mediterranean Gull** found and photographed at lunch-time at the head of Loch Gilp on 14<sup>th</sup> Nov, during very wet weather, is the first record of the species for this area (Jim Dickson).

**Common Kingfishers** were reported along the Crinan Canal and in the Holy Loch during early Nov. All records of this scarce visitor to Argyll are welcomed.

Two **Waxwings** have been around the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve on Islay over the last week or so, first seen around 14th and still present on 18<sup>th</sup> Nov (Malcolm Ogilvie).

November records received for **Wheatear** and **Barn Swallow** will be dealt with in the next issue of the *Eider*.

fore circling up the loch and eventually flying off southward (TC). Forty **Whooper Swans** counted on Ballachuan Loch, Seil Island on 28<sup>th</sup> Oct, included 11 cygnets (Richard Allan). Flocks and small groups of **Whooper Swans** have been noted more widely than usual thus autumn.

The first **Barnacle Geese** on Tiree were 27 at Hynish on 24<sup>th</sup> Sep, with 94 in three flocks on the following day and 66 at Miodar on 26<sup>th</sup> Sep accompanied by 22 **Pink-footed Geese** (JB). At Loch Gruinart no less than 2,703 **Barnacles** were counted on 25<sup>th</sup> Sep, as well as an impressive 987 **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** (Clive McKay). The first **White-fronted Goose** arrived at Loch Gruinart early on 24<sup>th</sup> Sep with two more later in the day (Clive McKay). A group of 5 adult **Bar-headed Geese** were reported at the head of Loch Feochan on several dates during August. This species has been reported in this area in the past and it will be interesting to see if a feral population becomes established, as has happened in parts of England (Bill Allan, JD *et al.*).

Two male **Mandarin Ducks** in eclipse were reported at Loch Leathan (nr Kil-michael, Mid-Argyll) on 12<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> Sep (John Halliday) and a pair have been seen at Loch Angus nr Taynuilt for the past two or three weeks (Laurie Langan). Possibly, the population from Loch Awe is spreading, although the picture may be complicated by further escapes/ releases.

### Raptors to Gamebirds

On Coll, an adult **White-tailed Eagle** was seen near Kilbride on 6<sup>th</sup> and at Ballard on 11<sup>th</sup> Aug. An immature female **Marsh Harrier** flew south past Totronald on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug (SW). An adult **White-tailed Eagle** was seen heading north at Baugh, Tiree on 9<sup>th</sup> Sep, and a **Peregrine** was photographed sitting in the middle of a flock of 800 Greylag Geese at Loch an Eilein on 10<sup>th</sup> Sep (JB). A juvenile **Hobby** was seen hunting over trees at the entrance to Carse House, Knapdale in the late afternoon of

14<sup>th</sup> Sep (Mark Williamson). **Ospreys** were on the move during August, with no less than three at the head of Loch Feochan, Mid-Argyll on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> August and one at Ardmaddy Bay on 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug. (Bill Allan). Two or three **Peregrines** were hunting for auks (plenty to choose from!) off Aird, Tiree on the evening of 28<sup>th</sup> Sep (JB) and a juv. flew rather indolently over the shoreline at Loch na Cille (Loch Sween) on 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep (Bill Allan). Oct. 6<sup>th</sup> was a good day for migrating raptors. A male **Marsh Harrier** was spotted moving southwards near the Rare Breeds Park, Oban (John McAvoy) and a **Red Kite** was seen in flight, pursued by passerines, at Letterwalton (north of Benderloch) (Clive Craik).

Strange companions were a **Water Rail** and a **Corncrake** seen together at Balemartine, Tiree on 10<sup>th</sup> Sep (JB). At least 4 **Common Moorhens** were present in the gravel pit at Benderloch, North Argyll on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct (Robin Harvey).

### Waders

A juvenile **American Golden Plover** seen and photographed at Loch Beg, Mull during 3-6 September was the first ever record for the island and one of only a handful for Argyll (Bryan Rains per Alan Spellman). The run of transatlantic waders continued. On the evening of 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep a **Baird's Sandpiper** (one of two in Scotland in September) was found at Loch Gruinart, Islay (Clive McKay). A **Lesser Yellowlegs** (one of three in Scotland in Sep) was reported on The Strand, Colonsay on 26<sup>th</sup> September and an **American Golden Plover** (one of 8 in Scotland in Sep) was on the landing strip Oronsay on the same day (Andy Schofield per Angus Murray, who supplied the info. on Scottish numbers). Two summer plumage **Grey Plovers** were in the Add Estuary on 15<sup>th</sup> August (Jim Dickson). Eleven **Red Knot** at the same location on 14<sup>th</sup> August were all in winter plumage (Anne-Lise Dickie), but 6 on 18<sup>th</sup> August included two still in breeding plumage.

At Crossapol beach, Coll on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> September 280 **Sanderling** were accompanied by 150 **Ringed Plover** a Knot and 40 **Dunlin** (SW). A nice mixed flock of waders at Loch na Cill (Loch Sween) on 9<sup>th</sup> Sep included 35 **Ringed Plovers**, 5 juv. **Curlew Sandpipers**, a juv. **Purple Sandpiper**, 115 **Dunlin**, a **Bar-tailed Godwit**, a **Common Greenshank** and a **Turnstone**. There was also a female/imm. **Pintail**. The following day the **Curlew Sandpipers** were still there and a drake **Greater Scaup** was present on 'The Puddle' (Ulva Lagoons) (JD). Meanwhile, on the same day (9<sup>th</sup> Sep), Tiree produced an island minimum total of 2,487 **Lapwings** and 1,256 **Golden Plovers** with a **Ruff** and 36 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Scarinish and 2 **Ruffs** and 31 **Black-tailed Godwits** (all juvs.) at Loch a' Phuill. And at Gott Bay, totals of 253 **Sanderling** and 105 **Ringed Plovers** were counted (JB). No less than three **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were present at the west end of Tiree during 3-5 September, and a juvenile seen at the Reef on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept could have been yet another! (JB). A flock of 5 were seen on Lewis at about this time. A very confiding juv. male **Ruff** and a **Curlew Sandpiper** (probably juv.) were on the beach at Machrihanish on 4<sup>th</sup> Sep (Bill Allan).

A dramatic fall of **Common Snipe** occurred on Coll and Tiree during drizzly weather conditions on 10-11 Oct. On Coll, 410 were counted on the RSPB reserve with 5 **Jack Snipe**, 29 **Curlews** and 37 **Golden Plovers**; 170 **Snipe**, with 400 **Lapwings** and 37 **Ringed Plovers** in flooded fields at Ballard and 95 **Snipe** with 870 **Golden Plovers** near Arileod. There were reports of yet more Snipe elsewhere on the island. Meanwhile Tiree had flocks of 290 **Snipe** or more at the Reef, 165 at Balevullin and 260 on floods at Middleton as well as flocks of up to 130 birds flying over low heading SW. At least 1,430 birds seen around the island although John Bowler thinks there were probably nearer 2-3,000 altogether! The bulk of the **Snipe** apparently left both islands at first light the following morning (11<sup>th</sup> Oct) although there were still flocks of 30 or more birds in places.

Twelve **Ruffs** were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 18<sup>th</sup> Aug (JB), but one at Lachlan Bay, Loch Fyne on 15<sup>th</sup> August was an unusual record for this site (Peter Woods), as was a **Whimbrel** on the spit at Otter Ferry, Cowal on 24<sup>th</sup> August (TC). On Mull, **Whimbrel** numbers at Lochdon reached 55 on 5<sup>th</sup> September while 44 Ruddy Turnstones were there on 4<sup>th</sup>. (Alan Spellman).

On the shore near Kirm, Dunoon a very pale (leucistic) **Common Redshank** has been seen recently in the company of normally plumaged birds. A leucistic individual (possibly the same bird) has been regularly reported (at least once as a Spot-



Peregrine photographed in front of the Machrihanish Bird Observatory by Eddie Maguire



ted Redshank!) in winter in exactly the same locality since at least 1999 (Frances Lynn). On the evening of 17<sup>th</sup> Sep a **Lesser Yellowlegs** was still roosting with Redshanks at Loch Gruinart (Clive McKay). Very few **Green Sandpipers** are recorded in Argyll in any one year, so one in the River Eachaig estuary at the top of the Holy Loch on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. was a good find (Ralph Clough).

A **Grey Phalarope** was seen from the ferry to Coll on 22<sup>nd</sup> August (SW) and a juvenile was feeding in the lee of Hynish pier, Tiree following a westerly gale on 24<sup>th</sup> August (JB). A storm blown **Grey Phalarope** was found at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree late in the afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> Oct (JB).

A **Red-necked Phalarope** seen at a pool at Bruichladdich, Islay on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct was photographed and identified as a 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird. Only the second record for Islay of this species (a very scarce passage migrant in Argyll), the last being in 1974 (Malcolm Ogilvie).

### **Skuas (see also under Divers to Wildfowl) to Woodpeckers**

An adult **Pomerine Skua** with full 'spoons' was off Arinagour pier, Coll on 30<sup>th</sup> August (SW) and two dark morph **Arctic Skuas** were seen in Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 11<sup>th</sup> August (Anne-Lise Dickie). An adult **Great Skua** was seen close to the Islay ferry in the Sound of Islay on 17<sup>th</sup> Sep (PD/TC).

On the foreshore at Oban, a 2<sup>nd</sup> winter **Ring-billed Gull** was giving excellent close up views on 16<sup>th</sup> Sep (Stuart Gibson). A group of 6 **Sandwich Terns** feeding at the head of Loch Gilp on 10<sup>th</sup> September included an adult bird still bringing fish to juvs., who seemed reluctant to dive for fish themselves (JD). Singles were at Skipness on 12<sup>th</sup> Sep (PD) and at Mannal, Tiree on 13<sup>th</sup> (JB).

A juv. **Sabine's Gull** was associating with a juv. **Little Gull** among a group of Kittiwakes at Gott Bay, Tiree on 30<sup>th</sup> August (JB). A **Little Auk** was seen well from the ferry south of Port Askaig, Islay on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct (Bill Allan/Anne-Lise Dickie).

A **Short-eared Owl** was hunting over Moine Mhor on the evening of 22<sup>nd</sup> August (JD). A **Kingfisher** was seen at the mouth of Glenlussa Water (nr. Peninver), Kintyre between 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Sep. (Steve Walker).

### **Passerines**

Two adult **Barn Swallows** still feeding 4 juvs at Tayinloan on 15<sup>th</sup> Oct. (Katie Pendreigh) and two late adult **Swallows** were reported at Ballochgair, Kintyre on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct. (Lily Cregeen). Late **House Martins** were found at Tayinloan on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct. (Katie Pendreigh) and at Kilchoman, Islay on 27<sup>th</sup> Oct. (Bill Allan/Anne-Lise Dickie).



White Wagtail  
(Photo: Eddie Maguire)

At least 20 **White Wagtails** were on Sanda on 8<sup>th</sup> September, but otherwise things were fairly quiet there (JD). A **Richard's Pipit** found at Loch Gruinart on 25<sup>th</sup> Sep is only the third record for Argyll (Clive McKay). The previous two were also on Islay, as long ago as 1971 and 1973. About time another one turned up!

There were two reports of **Dippers** on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct, with two in Glenlussa Water (nr. Peninver) Kintyre (Steve Walker) and one in the River Euchar at the Younger Botanic Gardens, Cowal (Peter Woods). On 25<sup>th</sup> Oct, a single **Waxwing** was at Crossapol, Tiree, as well as five presumed **Mealy Redpolls** at Balephuill with 2 **Goldcrests** and 2 **Dunnocks**.

A male **Ring Ouzel** with Greenfinches and Chaffinches at Totronald and a **Spotted Flycatcher** and another **Ring Ouzel** at Acha, Coll on 21<sup>st</sup> Oct (SW). A male **Ring Ouzel** at Hynish, Tiree on 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct (JB). An unusual number of **Ring Ouzels** have been reported on Coll and Tiree this autumn, but few elsewhere—perhaps they are overlooked?

The first sign of winter? A flock of at least 9 **Fieldfares** feeding on Rowan berries in a garden in Oban on 31<sup>st</sup> August during low cloud and drizzle was the earliest autumn record of the species in Argyll since 1986 (Ted Potter). The first **Redwing** on Tiree was a single bird at Balephuill on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct with 12 new in at Heylipol on 12<sup>th</sup> Oct (JB). On 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, 45 **Redwing** feeding on Rowan berries in Glen Euchar (nr. Oban) with 20 **Blackbirds** (mostly juv. males), which soon flew off southwards. (Bill Allan/Anne-Lise Dickie). Some 1,000 **Redwings** around Tiree and 50 **Song Thrushes** at the west end of the island on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct, as well as groups of up to 6 **Blackbirds**, but only

about 10 **Fieldfares** (JB). Two parties of **Fieldfares** totalling 90 birds and one flock of 40 **Redwings** over Otter Ferry were all flying south on the morning of 29<sup>th</sup> Oct (TC). Records indicate that **Redwings** have been both widespread and in larger numbers than normal this autumn as have immigrant **Blackbirds**, whereas **Fieldfares** have been far fewer. A single male **Northern Wheatear** was seen near the shore at Otter Ferry on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct (TC).

The Craigdarroch/Coll Hotel gardens area produced a juv. **Barred Warbler** (very rare in Argyll) and a **Garden Warbler** on 25<sup>th</sup> Sep. Large numbers (50+) of **Robins** also appeared on the island that day as well as 16 **Snow Buntings** together with 200+ **Twite** at the car park at Totronald. (JD/SW). A freshly dead **Garden Warbler** was found in the garden at Tullochgorm (Minard) on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. (Paul Daw). A **Common Chiffchaff** was at Totronald, Coll on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct. with another at Uig on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct. and an early **Redwing** was near Ballard on 5<sup>th</sup> Oct (SW).

**Blackcap** records during Oct included a male at The Lodge, Arinagour, Coll on 7<sup>th</sup> Oct (SW), a female in a garden at Peninver, Kintyre on 8<sup>th</sup> (Steve Walker), 2 at Balephuill, Tiree on 10<sup>th</sup> (JB), a female in a garden at Tullochgorm (Minard) on 19<sup>th</sup> (PD), two in a shoreside garden at Kilmun on 21<sup>st</sup> Oct, Cowal feeding in the shrubbery (Alex Nicol), four on Tiree at two different locations (JB) and 4 on Coll (SW). One was still at the Airport Camp, Tiree on 28<sup>th</sup> Oct.

A **Yellow-browed Warbler** found in a small patch of trees at Arinagour, Coll was still there on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct. Always a rare bird in Argyll, but there has been a 'deluge' of **Yellow-browed Warblers** on the east coast according to BirdGuides, so perhaps not unexpected. Also on Coll that day

were 8 **Chiffchaffs**, 150 **Blackbirds** (mainly males), approx. 1,550 **Redwings** and 100+ **Robins** (SW).

A first year **Pied Flycatcher** was seen catching flies among rowan trees at the top of Glen More, Mull on 6<sup>th</sup> Sep (Chris & Tony Johnson). A mixed flock of tits at Otter Ferry, Cowal on 12<sup>th</sup> Sep included no less than 22 **Long-tailed Tits** (TC).

A group of 6 **Jays** at the entrance to Glen Euchar (nr. Kilninver, Oban) on 21<sup>st</sup> Sep was unusual, as was a **Magpie** flying past Loch Fyne Oyster Bar on 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep (Anne-Lise Dickie/Bill Allan).

A male **Brambling** was among the Chaf-

finches in a garden at Otter Ferry on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct and a female was there on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct (TC). Eight **Bramblings** were near the doctor's surgery at Arleod, Coll on 27<sup>th</sup> Oct (SW), a single was at Cairnbaan on 28<sup>th</sup> Oct and **Bramblings** have also been reported in the Campbeltown area (JD). A freshly fledged brood of three **Twite** were seen at Beinn Hough, Tiree on the late date of 22<sup>nd</sup> August (JB) and a flock of at least 100 **Twite** were in Gleann Seilisdeir, Mull on 4<sup>th</sup> September. A flock of over 100 **Twite** were in the car park at Machrihanish on 24<sup>th</sup> Sep (Steve Petty/ TC). A group of redpolls at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct included 8 **Lesser** and 2-3 '**Icelandic**' **Common Redpolls** (Clive

McKay). A **Hawfinch** found in a garden in Oban on 28<sup>th</sup> Oct was still present the following day and was photographed (Fiona Donn/Stuart Gibson).

Two **Lapland Buntings** were found at Ardnave, Islay on 27<sup>th</sup> Sep as well as one **Willow Warbler** sheltering in the bracken from the strong westerly wind (Clive McKay). Another **Lapland Bunting** was found in wet machair on Coll on 29<sup>th</sup> Oct (SW).

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## What's in a name? - British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee recent decisions

*The taxonomists strike again! Just when you think you know which species of bird you are looking at, the 'splitters' come up with two (or more) species for the price of one.*

The latest 'taxonomic recommendations for British birds' were published recently in the *Ibis*. What follows is a summary of the decisions that affect Argyll (the full text can be found as a PDF file at:

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1474-919X.2005.00483.x>

or, for anyone without internet access, I can send a hard copy.

The main decisions that affect us are:

**1. Canada Goose.** The 11 races of Canada Goose currently recognised are now to be treated as two separate species:

Greater Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* (will include the races *canadensis*, *fulva*, *interior*, *maxima*, *moiffitti*, *occidentalis* and *parvipes*)

Lesser Canada Goose *Branta hutchinsii* (will include the races *hutchinsii*, *leucopareia*, *minima* and *taverneri*)

At present, only Greater Canada Goose is on the British List (as Category C).

This presents us in Argyll (among others) with something of a problem. For some time now, many birders visiting the area (and Islay in particular) have been confidently identifying single Canada Geese (or sometimes pairs) seen in winter associating with Barnacle Geese and (more rarely) Greenland White-fronted Geese as being members of specific races, on the assumption that they are genuine wild vagrants from North America. Four or more different races have been identified in this way and at least two of these (*hutchinsii* and *minima*) are now treated as Lesser Canada Goose.

Malcolm Ogilvie (a leading authority on wildfowl) believes that because of problems of variability and intergrading be-

tween races it is not feasible to identify any small or medium sized Canada Geese to race. The only advice he would give to birders is that the largest birds, like the ones breeding in Argyll, are Greater Canada Geese. The really dinky ones that we get here, which are no larger than and sometimes smaller than, Barnacle Geese, can legitimately be called Lesser Canada Geese. The intermediate sized birds, around Whitefront size, which again we get in Argyll with both Barnacles and Whitefronts, cannot be determined to species, let alone race.

As Malcolm acknowledges, there are some birders who would not agree with his assessment of this problem, but for my money the above is good advice for the great majority of us.

**2. Common Scoter.** What were formerly considered to be the two races *Melanitta nigra nigra* and *M. n. americana* have also now been split into two species:

Common Scoter *M. nigra*

Black Scoter *M. americana*

Both species are on the British List (Category A), but there are no authenticated records of Black Scoter in Argyll. Adult male Black Scoters (from North America) are readily distinguished by much more extensive yellow on the bill, including the swollen knob at the base of the bill. So, here is one to watch out for! Females and juveniles are probably not normally distinguishable in the field, although they have a more swollen base to the bill than Common Scoter. The two species also have differently shaped nostrils although for practical purposes this probably doesn't help much!

**3. Velvet Scoter.** This has also been split into two species:

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*.

However, as the latter occurs in east Asia and is not on the British list, this will not be of immediate concern to us.

**4. Small shearwaters.** Three species breeding in the tropical and sub tropical Atlantic Ocean, which included Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*, have been ascribed to two species:

Macaronesian Shearwater *Puffinus baroli*  
Audubon's Shearwater *P. lherminieri*

The name Macaronesian Shearwater replaces Little Shearwater. This species is on the Argyll List although all past records of the species are currently under review by the British Birds Rarities Committee.

**5. Herring Gull.** Three of the former subspecies are now to be treated as separate species:

Yellow-legged Gull *L. michahellisi*

Armenian Gull *L. armenicus*

Herring Gull *L. argentatus*

Yellow-legged Gull has been treated as a separate species by many authorities for some time and records for Argyll have been accepted by the Scottish Birds Records Committee. There are currently no British records of Armenian Gull.

The status of the so called Caspian (or Steppe) Gull *Larus a. cachinnans* is still under review.

**6. Terns.** The taxonomic relationships of the terns have been reviewed and as a result both the sequence in which the species will be listed in future and some of the scientific names have been changed.

The species on the Argyll list will now appear as:

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*



Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*  
 Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*  
 Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*  
 Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

**7. Swallows.** The taxonomic relationships of the swallow family (Hirundinidae) have been reviewed and as a result both the sequence in which the species will be listed in future and some of the scientific names have been changed.

The species on the Argyll list will now appear as:

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*  
 Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*  
 Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

A record of a Red-rumped Swallow on Coll (potentially a 'first' for Argyll) is currently in circulation with the British Birds Rarities Committee.

**8. Tits.** The taxonomic relationships of the tit family (Paridae) have been reviewed and as a result both the sequence in which the species will be listed in future and some of the scientific names have been changed.

The species on the Argyll list will now appear as:

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*  
 Great Tit *Parus major*

Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

N.B. Long-tailed Tit, which of course belongs in a family of its own (Aegithalidae), is not affected by these changes and will still be listed before the true tits (Paridae).

Many thanks to Malcolm Ogilvie for his advice regarding identification of Canada Geese and for sight of his paper on the subject recently submitted to *Birding World* for publication.

**Paul Daw**

## The British List

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee maintains 'The British List', the official list of birds recorded in Britain. The latest published version is the 6th edition 1992, but an up-to-date list can be found on the BOU website at:

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

The Committee's remit includes the assessment of new species to be admitted to the British List and the category assignment of each species.

The definition of categories is reviewed from time to time and what follows is a summary of what I think are the essential points from the latest review as far as they affect Argyll. The full text of this review can be found as a PDF file at:

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1474-919X.2005.00470.x>

or, I can send a hard copy to anyone who does not have internet access.

These changes are significant to birders in that they reflect the current state of knowledge as to how many of the birds that we see, actually come to be here.

The revised categories (with notes as to how they relate to the Argyll List are:

**Category A.** Species that have been recorded in an apparently natural state at least once since 1st Jan 1950. The great majority of species recorded in Argyll naturally fall into this category.

**Category B.** Species that were recorded in an apparently natural state at least once between 1st January 1800 and 31st December 1949, but have not been recorded subsequently.

The only species recorded in Argyll that falls into this category is White-faced Petrel, although there are seven species (Red-crested Pochard, Wilson's Petrel, American Bittern, Sora, Little Crane, Great Snipe and Pallas's Sandgrouse) that have been recorded in Britain since 1st

Jan. 1950, but only prior to that date in Argyll.

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

This category has been subdivided as follows:

C1. Naturalised introduced species. Species that have occurred only as a result of introduction e.g. Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*.

C2. Naturalised established species. Species with established populations resulting from introduction by man, but which also occur in an apparently natural state e.g. Greylag Goose *Anser anser*.

C3. Naturalised re-established species. Species with populations successfully re-established by man in areas of former occurrence e.g. Red Kite *Milvus milvus*.

C4. Naturalised feral species. Domesticated species with populations established in the wild e.g. Rock Pigeon (Dove)/Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*.

C5 Vagrant naturalised Species. Species from established naturalised populations abroad (e.g. possibly some Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea* occurring in Britain. There are currently no species in category C5.

C6 Former naturalised species (a new sub-category added in 2005). Species formerly placed in C1 whose naturalised population is either no longer self-sustaining or are considered extinct, e.g. Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae*.

There are less than 20 Argyll species that include Category C in their designated status although some may have a combined status e.g. Gadwall AC2 where birds were released or escaped in the past but also occur in a natural state. See below for further details.

**Category D.** Species that would otherwise appear in Category A except that there is

reasonable doubt that they have ever occurred in a natural state. Species placed in Category D form no part of the British List, and are not included in the species totals.

The only Argyll species in this category are Ruddy Shelduck and Red-headed Bunting although there are records, not identified as to species, of Flamingo and Pelican.

**Category E.** Species that have been recorded as introductions, human-assisted transportees, or escapes from captivity, and whose breeding populations (if any) are thought not to be self-sustaining. Species that have bred in the wild are designated as E\*. Category E species form no part of the British List, and are not included in the species totals (unless already included within Categories A, B or C).

A dozen or so species have been recorded in Argyll, which fall into this category, although it appears that reporting of such species has been very patchy in the past.

### Introduced species with self-sustaining populations (Category C)

The BOURC has also been reviewing the official status categories and particularly the status of various species that were originally introduced to Britain by man. These fall into two groups: Category C and Category E – see above.

The main changes that affect us in Argyll are:

**Mute Swan:** now Category AC2. This reflects the current view that Mute Swans never occurred here in a truly domesticated state although there was a form of 'owner ship' where some wild birds were marked.

**Greylag Goose:** now Category AC2C4E\*. This reflects the complicated status of this species in Britain where in addition to the naturally occurring wild breeding population in western Scotland, a widespread breeding population occurs elsewhere in

Britain largely derived from the release of birds reared from eggs taken from the wild Scottish population and individuals from a domestic source.

**Snow Goose:** now Category AC2E\*. The C2 category is assigned on the basis that the birds on Coll (which originally derive from full winged birds from a waterfowl collection in north west Mull) are now a self-sustaining breeding population.

**Greater Canada Goose:** now Category C2E\* (formerly ACE\*). This is because no vagrant Canada Geese have ever been accepted to subspecific level, so there are currently no accepted records of either species (Greater or Lesser Canada Goose) in Category A. A review of this situation is in progress.

**Barnacle Goose:** now Category AC2E\*. This is on the basis that there are now widespread naturalised and self-sustaining populations in Britain.

**Muscovy Duck:** Category E\*. A fascinating review of the status of the species includes an account of the expanding population in and around Ely in Cambridgeshire that has reached such proportions that it is being 'culled' by the local District Council. BOU are keen to encourage submission of all records of this species.

**Wood Duck:** retain Category E\*. There is still considered to be insufficient evidence to support any natural vagrancy.

**Mandarin Duck:** now Category C1E\*. On the basis that there are a number of localized, established, breeding populations which derive from escaped and/or introduced birds.

**Gadwall:** now Category AC2. Although part of the British breeding population from naturalised birds established in the 1800s the evidence is that the current breeding population is expanding due to natural growth and immigration from the continent.

**Mallard:** now Category AC2C4E\*. On the basis that some of the hundreds of thousands of captive-reared Mallard released for sporting purposes over the last 50 years or so are considered to be of a domestic source.

**Red-crested Pochard:** now Category AC2E\*. This is on the basis that there are now several naturalised and self-sustaining populations in Britain.

**Ruddy Duck:** now Category C1E\*. On the basis that there are widespread, established, breeding populations which derive solely from birds of captive origin.

**Black Grouse:** Retain as Category AE. Although birds have been released in an attempt to re-establish the species in areas of former occurrence, none has so far

succeeded and there is no evidence that the current population derives from captive stock.

**Capercaillie:** now Category BC3. The current Scottish population derives solely from birds released in the 19th century.

**Red-legged Partridge:** now Category C1E\*. There is an established, widespread, breeding population which derives solely from birds of captive origin and up to a million birds are still released annually in Britain. Smaller numbers are released in Argyll and it seems unlikely that the population here is self-sustaining. The species should probably fall into Category E\* in Argyll.

**Grey Partridge:** now Category AC2E. Grey Partridges populations in Britain are made up of both naturally occurring birds and those deriving from introductions. Birds are released locally in Argyll, but it seems most unlikely that the population here is self-sustaining. The species should probably fall into Category E\* in Argyll.

**Common Pheasant:** now Category C1E\*. There is an established, widespread, breeding population which derives solely from birds of captive origin and approx. 15-20 million birds are still released annually in Britain. Large numbers are released annually on some estates in Argyll and the population here may or may not be self-sustaining.

**Golden Pheasant:** now Category C1E\*. The established, localized, breeding populations derive solely from birds of captive origin. For some years there was a small population on Mull that was apparently not self-sustaining. There have been no reliable recent reports and the species should probably fall into Category E\* in Argyll.

**Red Kite:** now Category AC3. Red Kites have been successfully re-established in various localities in England and Scotland. Although wild vagrants have occurred in the past in Argyll, the majority of recent records will involve birds from the re-established populations in Highland and Central Scotland.

**White-tailed Eagle:** now Category AC3E. This species has been successfully re-established into Western Scotland. A resident breeder in Argyll a hundred years or so ago the re-established population of White-tailed Eagles includes an increasing number of pairs in Argyll.

**Northern Goshawk:** now Category AC3E\*. Extinct as a British breeding species around 1890, the current re-

established population derives from escaped and intentionally released falconers' birds originating from continental Europe. There is no evidence to support natural recolonisation. Only occurs as a very scarce visitor to Argyll.

**Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** now Category AC4E\*. Following a long history of domestication of Rock Doves for a variety of reasons, Feral Pigeons have established themselves across the whole of Britain. It is unclear whether there are any remaining truly wild Rock Doves. Although the birds breeding on some of the islands in Argyll are probably near to 'pure' Rock Doves, it is doubtful that there are any 100% genetically pure birds remaining.

**Barn Owl:** retain on Categories A and E\*. Recent studies have showed that captive bred Barn Owl have a low survival rate when released into the wild and that it was very unlikely the release of captive-bred Barn Owls was boosting the wild population at all. Release of captive birds is now controlled under the provisions of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981). Argyll has a relatively small, but apparently flourishing breeding population of Barn Owls, assisted in some areas by the provision of artificial nest sites.

### Other species

The following non-native species all bred in Britain in 2001 and/or 2002 and have occurred in Argyll.

**Bar-headed Goose:** Category E\*

**Emperor Goose:** Category E\*

**Eagle Owl:** Category E\*

The BOURC consider that their populations here should be monitored.

The following species which are on the British List but have no naturally occurring breeding populations were nevertheless all found breeding in Britain in 2001 and/or 2002. These species require further monitoring.

**Pink-footed Goose:** Category AE\*

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** Category AE\*

**Ruddy Shelduck:** Category BDE\*

Once again the BOU encourages all observers to submit records of all bird species (to the local recorder), including the recording and monitoring of all naturalised species (particularly breeding records and interactions with native species) and, just as importantly, increased reporting of all escaped species seen in the wild in Britain, including escaped species found breeding in Britain and in particular those with increasing breeding numbers which may be future considerations for Category C status.

**Paul Daw**



## Field trip reports

Seabird trip to Islay  
17th September

The weather forecast was not encouraging and some members cancelled at the last moment, so that just two people arrived at the terminal for the outing. The ferry was very full but the only people out on deck were the dedicated smokers and us bird watchers! Although there was steady light rain, the visibility was reasonable, and as we sailed up West Loch Tarbert we saw a pair of **Mute Swans** with two well grown cygnets and a handful of **Black Guillemots**, including at least one juvenile, as well as the usual gulls, **Eiders** and **Shags**.

There was quite a swell as we sailed out into the Sound of Jura, but as far as birds were concerned; the journey across to Islay was relatively quiet, with just a few gulls and a steady stream of **Gannets** and **Fulmars**. However, as we passed Brosdale Island, at the southern end of Jura, we had excellent close views of a **Great Skua** with prominent white wing flashes (so probably an adult bird). While moored at Port Askaig a very vocal group of **Jack-daws** tumbled around the cliff face and several juvenile **Swallows** were noted as well as two or three **Grey Herons**.

Sailing back down the Sound of Islay, the odd **Manx Shearwater** accompanied us and when we reached the Sound of Jura a few auks at last appeared. These included a group of a dozen or so **Razorbills** flying in strict line astern but only a few **Common Guillemots**. Out in the Sound a few **Great Black-backed Gulls** and **Kittiwakes** were joined by frequent **Fulmars** and **Gannets** but little else of interest. As we sailed back down West Loch Tarbert we saw the usual gathering of **Shags** and seals at the mouth of the loch and shortly afterwards a diver in the distance, which we were fairly sure was **Red-throated**. Despite the fact that we saw relatively few birds (and even fewer birders!) the conversation was excellent and I was amazed at how quickly the afternoon passed, so that before we knew it we were back at Kenacraig.

Paul Daw

Windfarm visit  
24th September

On the 24<sup>th</sup> September members of the ABC visited Beinn an Tuirc windfarm in Kintyre. This was one of the best attended field trips for years, with 22 folks turning up. We met at 11:00hrs on the side of the A83 and then proceeded in convoy along 7-8 miles of Forestry Commission road to



Part of the group at Beinn an Tuirc  
(Photo: Bob Furness)

the windfarm site. It was a different world up there, with a brisk, cool wind, in contrast to the pleasant temperature lower down. Those who had thought to bring gloves and woolly hats must have been very pleased with themselves! The operation of the windfarm, with its 46 turbines, was then explained by Ewan Anderson, the windfarm manager, which including a look inside one of the units.

Dave Walker then explained some of the mitigation work that has been undertaken to compensate the local pair of **Golden Eagles** for loss of foraging habitat due to the windfarm. Observational work has shown that most moorland bird species have been unaffected by the windfarm, and we had some examples of **Hooded Crows** and **Kestrels** flying and foraging amongst the turbines. In contrast, the resident pair of eagles stopped using the windfarm area once the towers had been installed (Walker *et al.* 2005), even though **Red Grouse**, one of their main prey species, breeds within the windfarm site. A thoroughly chilled party descended back to the main road for a final question/answer session before thanking Ewan, Dave and Brian Burrows (Conservation Ranger) for a most interesting morning.

Thanks also to Saya Sheridan for helping to arrange the visit and for providing written information on the day.

Afterwards, those who remained split into two groups. A small contingent proceeded to Machrihannish Seabird & Wildlife Observatory where Eddie Maguire, the warden, explained his work and showed some of his really excellent digiscoped photos taken from the observatory (see photos on pages 10-11), which overlooks Uisaed Point. Unfortunately, there was little seabird movement, apart from flocks of **Razorbills**. Large flocks (up to 70) of **Razorbills** had been observed earlier in the day moving in Loch Fyne from the Portavadie to Tarbet ferry. It was a delight to see a flock of over 100 **Twite** in the car park as we left the observatory. On the retreat from Kintyre, a stop in a car park near West Cost Salmon, overlooking the Sound of Gigha, added a few more birds including 2 **Slavonian Grebes**, 8 **Common Scoter** and a tight 'flock' of 11-12 divers quite a way out, some of which were **Black-throated**. In addition, Paul Daw had 17 **Golden Plovers** flying south along the shore at A' Chleit (south of Tay-inloan).

The other group visited the Owl Centre in Campbeltown. After a interesting, informative but chilly wind farm visit, a reviving hot cup of tea at the centre had great appeal. The centre provided excellent views of the owl species native to Britain - how much easier to see them in the wild when you know exactly what you are looking for! Orientated around the conservation, breeding and release of endangered owl species, there are within the collection, owls from many parts of the world in enclosures designed to mimic their natural habitat. A highlight for many was the display of **Little Owl**, **Great Grey Owl** and **Barn Owl** free flying—as in falconry.



Machrihannish Bird Observatory  
(Photo: Steve Petty)

Even Katie Pendreigh's daughter, who was giving up some precious shopping time with boyfriend to humour her mother, confessed to thoroughly enjoying the visit.

**Steve Petty** (with thanks to Katie Pendreigh and Paul Daw for additional information)

### Reference

Walker, D., McGrady, M., McCluskie, A., Madders, M., McLeod, D.R.A. (2005) Resident golden eagle ranging behaviour before and after construction of a wind-farm in Argyll. *Scottish Birds*, **25**, 24-40.

### Cairnbaan to Danna 13th November

We caught a truly beautiful winter's day for this excursion, booked in advance of course, but you can never be sure of the delivery of these things nowadays!

Katie and I arrived at Cairnbaan on time at 9.30am to find only two folk, Peter and Dorothy, waiting for us. Here we picked up several common garden birds - **Dun-nock**, **Herring Gull**, **Rook**, **Great** and **Blue Tits**, **Blackbird**, **Chaffinch**, **Buzzard**, **Hooded Crow** and **Robin**. By the time we'd counted these, Kev and Mary turned up, carrying apologies from others; apparently it was also a WeBs count day, as well as Armistice Day. Never mind; we set off a little late to Dunadd, and climbed this ancient hill, with its superb view over Moine Mhor and the Crinan fields. Three-four **Wrens** and three **Meadow Pipits** greeted us on the ascent. We set up telescopes on the summit and found dabbling ducks in a bend of the River Add; 40 **Teal**, 40 **Mallard** and 2 **Wigeon**, and in a

nearby field were a pair of **Whooper Swan** with a youngster. Further afield were scattered parties of **Grey-lag Geese** totalling 19 and 4 **Canada Geese**.

Down below Rhona was pacing up and down with Sam the dog. They joined us for half a day, so that made a total party of seven birdwatchers and three dogs!

We did a quick circuit on the fields by Slockavuillin and Barsloisnach, (what lovely sounding names). I'd been here last week, and seen a crowd of geese, but today we only found 6 **Canada Geese** and 30 **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, and a **Buzzard** and **Kestrel** on electricity poles.

The bridge at Islandadd is closed till the end of January 2006, so we had to go back to Cairnbaan on our way to Bellanoch. We stopped here and walked along the canal to the site of the British Waterways bird watching hide, with its excellent view over the estuary. However, on a fine day like this, there was a better view from the canal bank with 130 **Teal**, 25 **Wigeon** and 4 **Mallard** lazing on the banks of saltmarsh islands and across the bay, **Curlew**, **Redshank** and **Oystercatcher** probing the mud. There was a smaller, paler bird among the **Curlew**, but it remained steadfastly asleep, bill along its back, and unidentified; probably a godwit or maybe a **Greenshank**. The expected tally of gulls included **Great Black-backed**, **Herring**, **Black-headed** and **Mew**.

By now we were a bit behind my schedule, but had to pause in Tayvallich for the unprovisioned amongst us to stock up with a bit of lunch! But, we did manage to pick up a **House Sparrow** as we waited!

Then, on down past Linne Mhurich to the Ulva pools, by which time the day had

clouded over and the light was flat. It was hard at first to make out the white swans on the calm water. However, with telescopes all had a good view of 30 **Whooper Swans** and 15 **Mute Swans**, together with 20 **Wigeon** and 30 **Teal**. A fine cock **Kestrel** landed on a pole by the road.

On the approach to Danna we met Paul and Tom, who had been doing the WeBs count for this area. They had seen **Green-shank** and **Grey Plover**, which we had missed in haste to get to Danna before the light faded.

We arrived at the Danna gate by 2pm, and walked out along the farm road. Last week there had been several parties of geese near the road, north of New Danna, but today just two groups of 10 and 14 **Grey-lags**. Near the farm we found three **Pied Wagtails** and beyond it a mixed flock of about 50 **Redwings**, 20 **Fieldfares** and several parties of **Starlings**.

Low down on the west shore opposite Liath Eilean were 20 **Greenland Whitefronts**. A group of 10 **Shags** clustered at the north end of the island, and later we saw about 30 on Sgeir Dhonncha to the south.

A **Great Northern Diver**, still in full summer dress, fished between the island and the shore and entertained us with its lovely willowing call. We had hoped to find **Barnacle Geese** near Mid Danna, but last week's flock had moved. Instead we found two parties of 24 and 14 to the southeast of Danna na Cloiche, before turning our attention to the shore birds at the south end—more **Mallard**, **Wigeon**, **Teal**, **Curlew**, **Redshank**, and **Oystercatcher**.

Standing on the top of the raised beach, we could see as far as Ireland, and there was a marvelous vista of the Kintyre coast right down to the Mull of Kintyre, round past the close islands of Eilean Mor and Corr Eilean, across to Islay and the long sinuous back of Jura. Behind us the hills mounted steadily to the snow-dusted twin tops of Cruachan. As Peter rightly said, it was worth it just for the view!

As we turned to go back a pair of **Shelduck** flew past and shortly after we caught a glimpse of a hunting ring-tailed **Hen Harrier**. And then, as we came opposite New Danna, we saw on the eastern fields opposite the Loch Sween Caravan Park, the flock of **Barnacle Geese** we'd been looking for; some 250 with the 20 **Whitefronts** nearby.

We had seen 45 species and some crackling views in good light, so we didn't mind the wee smirr of rain that misted the wind-screen as we drove home.

**David Merrie**



David Merrie and companions  
(Photo: David Merrie)



## Mink control in coastal Argyll—the continuing story

*Some Club members will know that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has recently been involved in some limited research to gain a better understanding of the threats to wildlife posed by North American Mink in coastal Argyll. Specifically, two separate studies were commissioned in early 2005. The reports have now been finalised and you might be interested in summary of the results.*

The first study was carried out by Paul Daw and aimed to identify key areas at risk of Mink predation. Concentrating on the coast, we looked at the distribution and size of seabird and Eider colonies, including those covered by statutory designations (SSSI and SPA). Paul obtained the *Seabird 2000* data set from staff of the Seabirds and Cetaceans Team in Aberdeen, and presented it in a more easily digestible format. Clive Craik also shared the results of his hugely valuable work. We classified the larger colonies by their vulnerability, based on existing records of Mink predation, existing programs of Mink control and separation distances of islands from coastlines where Mink are known to be present. This study identified

18 high-priority colonies being predated, but with no program of Mink control; several of these have been selected for Mink control to start in 2006. Mink are already controlled at 24 sites, and the status of Mink needs to be examined at a further 58 sites.

The second study, carried out by Kenny Auld of the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, was a community consultation exercise. We wanted to find out who was carrying out Mink control in Argyll, where and why they were doing so, how successful they had been and what factors might discourage people from getting more involved in voluntary Mink control. Kenny interviewed 69 individuals and

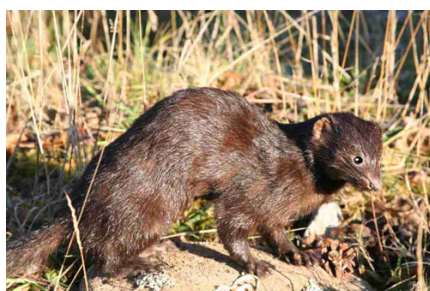


Photo: David Wood

organisations right across coastal Argyll. More contacts were identified than he was able to cover during his contract! Many more people are carrying out Mink control than had currently been thought; but for many of these trappers, there is a need for some guidance, co-ordination and other support. The study identified a 'hotspot' of community interest in Mink control on Mull and Iona. This, together with the significant natural heritage interests vulnerable to Mink on and around these islands, has allowed SNH to allocate limited additional funds to pilot studies and control work in this area in 2006.

Wherever you are in Argyll, if you wish to carry out Mink control for wildlife conservation, SNH can advise you, and may be able to provide additional help (for example, by providing a trap on long term loan). You will need to agree to check traps daily, and to kill any Mink caught by legal methods (either using a firearm, or a high powered air weapon). These are legal requirements. Contact your local SNH office.

**David Wood**

## Members Views

### Help required for the protection of Argyll's birds

I am calling on the individual members and the committee of *Argyll Bird Club* to support two major proposals which will help protect the birds and wildlife of Argyll and Bute.

*The first involves major national policy change*

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been asked to give advice, including recommending areas for inclusion, to the Scottish Executive regarding the proposal to create Coastal and Marine National Parks. Any areas which receive this categorisation will receive the additional protection which that status affords. I propose that the *Argyll Bird Club* writes to SNH giving reasons why the west coast of Argyll should be included within this proposed new category of National Park.

*The second involves changes to the Argyll & Bute Finalised Draft Local Plan (windfarm section)*

Although the consultation period has ended (which enabled interested parties to lodge their representations regarding the Argyll & Bute Finalised Draft Local Plan as it relates to windfarm development) it is still possible to influence the outcome of the Public Inquiry by supporting the at-

tempts of ArgyllWindFarms.com (AWF) to ensure that only appropriately sited windfarms receive planning consent. AWF is Argyll & Bute's windfarm watchdog. AWF supports the revised windfarm development policy and map, as it believes they afford considerably more protection to the wildlife and landscape of Argyll and Bute than the previous draft. AWF will be making a presentation to the Public Inquiry, which will include an ornithological section. It would be grateful for contributions to this from individual members and the committee of Argyll Bird Club.

*Further information/contact*

A & B Finalised Draft Local Plan (windfarm section)

[http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/localplans/written\\_statement.pdf](http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/localplans/written_statement.pdf) (see LP REN 1 & 2)

ArgyllWindFarms.com

Write to: The Secretary, AWF, PO box 2, Tarbert, Argyll, PA29 6YU.

Website: [www.argyllwindfarms.com](http://www.argyllwindfarms.com)

SNH: Coastal and Marine National Parks

<http://www.snh.org.uk/strategy/CMNP/sr-adnp01.asp>

**Iain Logan**

Member of Argyll Bird Club & Director of ArgyllWindFarms.com Limited

### Stacain windfarm—threat to Golden Eagles

Unless you are in the habit of keeping a close watch on the advertisements for planning applications in the *Oban Times*, you may not have noticed that a windfarm is proposed at Stacain. It would not be surprising if you did not know where Stacain is. This seems to be part of the strategy of windfarm developers. They choose the name of some insignificant geographical feature so as not to draw attention to what is being proposed.

Stacain is actually in Glen Shira, which is northeast of Inveraray, and the proposed wind farm happens to be almost in the middle of the most productive Golden Eagle territory in Argyll. In fact it is one of the best eagle territories in the whole of Scotland. These birds often rear two chicks and on one notable occasion in 1973 they reared three.

The environmental statement which accompanied the planning application included a highly theoretical calculation which predicted that one eagle might be killed every year by the wind turbines, but concluded that the overall effect of the windfarm on bird species would be low or negligible. No mention was made of the two wind farms that have already been constructed within Golden Eagle territories in Argyll. At Beinn an Tuirc in spite

of a fortune having been spent on so-called mitigation measures, eagle breeding success since construction of the wind farm has been zero. And at Beinn Ghlas not only has breeding success been zero but the territory now appears to be abandoned.

Both SNH and the RSPB have objected to this planning application, and over 200 private individuals from all over Britain have made written objections, with many of them expressing concern about the likely adverse effect on the Shira eagles. Argyll and Bute Council is likely to be making a decision on this planning application early in 2006. One thing that influences Members in making their decision is the number of objections which have been

received, especially if these are from Argyll residents. So, if you have not yet made an objection to this proposed wind-farm, I would urge you to do so now. All documents and plans together with responses from formal consultations and individual objections are available for public inspection, but this involves a visit to the planning department offices in Albany Street in Oban. There is no need for a lengthy letter. The important thing is to say that you are objecting because of the likely adverse impact on the Golden Eagles and make sure that your letter is signed. Separate letters from other adult members of the household, especially if they are Argyll residents would be very useful.

The environmental statement is a massive document, but I would be happy to e-mail a copy of my own letter of objection, and also a copy of the very detailed objection by SNH, to anyone who sends me their e-mail address.

As a final thought, maybe the Committee could explain why a bird club should find it necessary to make several written submissions to the Scottish Executive on the subject of a beaver reintroduction project and yet be silent on development proposals that appear to be having a serious impact on our Golden Eagles.

**Mike Gregory**

E-Mail: [mikegregory@beeb.net](mailto:mikegregory@beeb.net)

## Press releases, updates etc

### Windfarm developers must do more to help wildlife

*RSPB Scotland is calling on renewable energy companies to be more environmentally aware when planning new wind farm developments.*

While we support the principle of wind farms and other forms of renewable energy, the RSPB believes more can be done to ensure that wildlife is protected and habitats are not destroyed when the developments are being planned and constructed.

In addition to reducing the impacts of climate change and global warming, RSPB Scotland believes that renewable schemes should also include measures that attempt to improve the surrounding land to help safeguard and attract native birds, plants and animals.

With such safeguards in place, the RSPB is happy to support carefully thought out wind farm projects.

#### Sensible measures

ScottishPower's newest and largest wind farm at Black Law in Lanarkshire is host to a seminar discussing these and other renewable energy issues. Together with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), RSPB Scotland has worked with ScottishPower over the past two years to help them take action to enhance the degraded 1,440 hectare site.

Black Law wind farm site was originally moorland that had over many years been blighted by intensive industrial and commercial activities such as opencast mining and plantation forestry.

We welcome the range of measures ScottishPower are putting in place to improve the wildlife value of the site, which include:

- Felling commercial forestry to allow regeneration of blanket bog - a rare peat rich habitat of high conservation value.
- Creating a 150 ha wetland area with small ponds and marshland to attract feeding and nesting wading birds.
- Restoring a 320 metre stretch of river to its original course to attract otters and voles.
- Enhancing deciduous woodland and scrub and planting of unharvested crops to attract farmland birds which have suffered population declines across Scotland in recent years.

The RSPB objects to some wind farm applications where they are inappropriately located and pose a significant threat to birds and other wildlife, such as the proposal for the world's largest on-shore wind farm - a 234-turbine development by AMEC and British Energy on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides.

However, we fully support renewable projects that are sensibly located and where the developers take action to improve the habitat to benefit wildlife around the location site.

#### Ensuring no threat to birds and wildlife

Anne McCall, RSPB Scotland's head of planning, said, 'Wind farms are presently one of the best means of tackling the greenhouse emissions that cause the problems of global warming, and we support them for that reason. However, we must be very careful to make sure that those renewable energy developments themselves do not pose a threat to important bird and biodiversity resources that we are trying to protect.

'We are consulted on hundreds of different applications for potential wind farm developments, and we only object to about 10% of those. If they can actually be designed to benefit the environment and wildlife

too, then all the better.

'It is encouraging that other wind farm developers are now coming forward with similar habitat enhancement initiatives to Black Law in their schemes. We understand that Scottish and Southern Energy are considering such measures for their proposal at Harrow's Law near Tarbax in South Lanarkshire, similarly with AMEC's Kyle project in East Ayrshire, and Airticity's application for Clyde in north Lanarkshire.'

Simon Zisman, the central Scotland conservation officer for RSPB, said, 'Black Law has taken a badly scarred site and vastly improved it. The terrible damage done by opencast mining has been reversed. As well as improving the landscape this will benefit a range of wildlife - notably breeding waders and farmland birds.'

He added, 'It would be fantastic to see the level of commitment and resources invested in this project by ScottishPower continued throughout the rest of the industry.'

**Source: RSPB Scotland, 26th October**

### Avian influenza and bird-watchers (Updated 4th November)

*Over the last few months, many bird-watchers will have become aware of considerable media interest in the subject of avian influenza or 'bird flu', following outbreaks in central Asia, Russia and the Black Sea region of the highly pathogenic strain of the virus—H5N1—which developed within poultry.*

Representatives of BTO, WWT, RSPB and JNCC have been involved in discus-



There is a small possibility that some wild birds may be affected by the high pathogenic form of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza in the UK this autumn. If you come across a suspicious die-off of wild birds please:

**Do not touch them**

**Contact the Government Helpline immediately.**

Call 08459 335577 in England, Scotland and Wales

Call 02890 524999 in Northern Ireland

sions with the relevant government agencies, principally to advise on the latest knowledge of the origins of birds wintering in the UK, migration routes and timing, and bird distributions within the UK. Such information is derived largely from the hard work of volunteers working on schemes such as the BTO Ringing Scheme and the BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). We have also remained in close contact with international colleagues.

The overall assessment is that the chance of this strain of the virus being carried to the UK by a migrating bird is currently low (and no more likely than the chance of transmission via illegally imported poultry and their products, or the wild bird pet trade). In addition, even if H5N1 did make it to the UK, it is important to note that this is a disease of birds, primarily poultry; that there are no known cases of transmission from wild birds to humans; in south-east Asia, the virus has (infrequently) infected humans as a result of close and excessive contact with infected poultry. Thus the risk to human health from wild birds carrying H5N1 is remote.

Nevertheless, it is clearly sensible to keep the situation under review. A number of organisations are working together to deliver a national surveillance programme for wild birds on behalf of Defra. For further details see:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/index.htm>

This will include enhanced monitoring for sick or dead birds, coupled with a programme of taking faecal samples from a) apparently healthy live birds, and b) birds shot as part of legal wildfowling activities.

As part of this process, we would ask birdwatchers in the field to keep an eye out for any suspicious cases of large-scale mortality or sickness amongst wild birds. Wildfowl are potentially among the most vulnerable wild birds. Obviously, all birdwatchers encounter dead birds occasionally, almost all due to perfectly natural causes, so use your common sense. However, if you should come across an incident that seems out of the ordinary, this should be reported via the Government Helpline on 08459 335577 in England, Scotland or Wales or 02890 524999 in Northern Ireland. Calls would then be referred to the relevant veterinary authority. Specialists at the labs would then

make an assessment on what further action, if any, should be taken.

Although there have been no proven cases of humans catching the disease from wild birds, the virus is spread through nasal secretions and faeces, so please do not touch sick birds or carcasses in the event of a suspicious die-off. Note that separate guidelines have been provided to ringers and these will be made available to anyone else who regularly handles wild birds. In general, however, to guard against a wide variety of illness, including avian influenza, it is always prudent to exercise basic hygiene when coming into close contact with wild animals (e.g. washing hands with soap directly afterwards, especially before eating).

At a time when there is a lot of misinformation on this issue circulating, it is essential to keep matters in perspective and to sift fact from fiction. We reiterate that, at present, we consider the chance of wild birds bringing highly pathogenic H5N1 to the UK to be low and the potential for onwards transmission from wild birds to people to be very low. Obviously, however, we are continuing to monitor the situation and if there are any further developments we will communicate these widely, in the first instance via organisational websites.

## **BTO, WWT, RSPB, JNCC**

### **Pioneering research unlocks the mysteries of conserving a rare and beautiful bird**

*A pioneering study of Black-throated Divers has revealed the special conditions this beautiful bird needs to thrive.*

The UK population of the bird is restricted to remote lochs in north and west Scotland. Latest available figures show that it is scarce—the numbers stand at around 180 pairs and a new survey will take place next year—but it has previously been a mystery why some lochs are regularly occupied by divers, whilst others that are seemingly suitable are shunned.

The new research—based on a sample of 90 lochs in the Western Isles, Caithness, Sutherland, Strathspey and Badenoch and Wester Ross—demonstrates that fish populations are the key. Those lochs with

a good supply of small brown trout and Arctic charr (the staple diet of the adult birds) and of minnows and sticklebacks (ideal for chicks) are most likely to support successfully nesting divers.

In lochs where these fish are scarce, then the birds are either absent or rely on insects for food and fledge fewer chicks. Lochs usually lack fish either because of unsuitable water conditions or because predatory pike have been introduced and have removed many of the smaller fish that the divers rely on for food.

'It is encouraging to see from this research that the signs are good for the black-throated diver in Scotland - providing it has access to the right kind of food supply,' said Dr Digger Jackson, the research scientist who carried out the study for RSPB Scotland.

'Although many of the lochs that do not currently support breeding Black-throated Divers are clearly unsuitable there are many others, possibly up to 100 in Scotland, where the food supplies and shorelines are broadly suitable. These lochs have the potential to support new pairs of divers in the future, especially if conservation measures could improve the food supplies and nest-sites for the birds.'

Recent conservation work by RSPB Scotland, in partnership with other conservation bodies, has also shown the birds' breeding success has greatly improved following the provision of man-made floating rafts which have proved ideal for nesting. These grass-covered polystyrene and wood structures are anchored to loch beds and help to overcome the problem of fluctuating water levels which can cause the failure of the birds' nests on shore edges.

'The presence of black-throated divers is living proof of a healthy loch ecosystem,' said Dr Jeremy Wilson, Head of Research for RSPB Scotland. 'Conserving this rare and special bird hinges on management of lochs. If they contain an abundance of small fish and good nesting sites and remain free of pike, then we can look forward to a secure future for the bird and an expansion in the population over the years to come.'

**Source: RSPB Scotland, 31 October**



LITTLE GREBE.

Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should with the Editor before the 25th February 2006 (see the box opposite for more information)

Female Eider (Photo: Eddie Maguire)



### Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2005/2006)

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

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

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

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

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

**Committee:** Richard Allan (Oban), Roger Broad (Killearn), Tom Callan (Otter Ferry), Danielle Clark-De Bisschop (Colintraive), Paul Daw (Minard), Mike Gear (Appin), Ian Hopkins (Bute) and Steve Petty (Tighnabruaich)

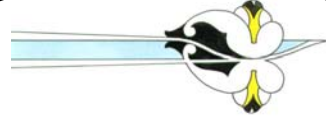
**Editor of the Argyll Bird Report:** Simon Wellock, Warden RSPB Coll Reserve, Totronald, Isle of Coll, Argyll PA78 6TB (Tel: 01879 230301)

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

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

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

## The Eider



**T**he *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 during the first week in March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor before the 25th 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 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 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 1<sup>st</sup> January and can be paid by cheque or standing order. New members joining after 1<sup>st</sup> October are covered until the end of the following year. Further information can be obtained from the Membership Secretary (see the box opposite).