

December 2007
Number 83

The Eider

©Eddie Maguire



A male Twite at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in October—see story on page 14-15

Angling and bird deaths

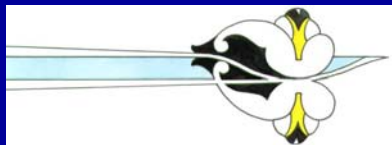
Bird Atlas update
Colour-ringed Twite
Recent report for August-October

Editor

Steve Petty: Craigielea, Kames,
Tighnabruaich, Argyll PA21 2AE

Phone: 01700 811235

E-mail: stevepetty@btinternet.com



Inside this issue

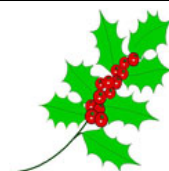
Editorial	2
ABC Field trips for 2008	3
ABC Indoor meetings	3-4
Spring meeting programme	4
Argyll Bird Report update	4
Raffle prizes wanted	4
New Bird Atlas update	5
Recent reports	6-13
Add Estuary field trip report	13
Colour-ringed Twite	14-15
Eider study	15-16
Lost & found	16
The autumn on Tiree	17-18
Angling and bird deaths	18-20
Review: Birds of Coll & Tiree	20-21
Seil Natural History Group	21
Machrihanish SBO report	22-25
About the ABC	26

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue: Bill Allan, John Armitage, John Bowler, Clive Craik, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Bob Furness (photocopying & dispatch), Ian Hopkins, David Jardine, Jacqui Kaye, Andrew Kyle, Les MacKay, Eddie Maguire, Katie Pen-dreigh, Linda Petty (proof reading), Margaret Staley, David Stroud, Richard Wesley and David Wood.



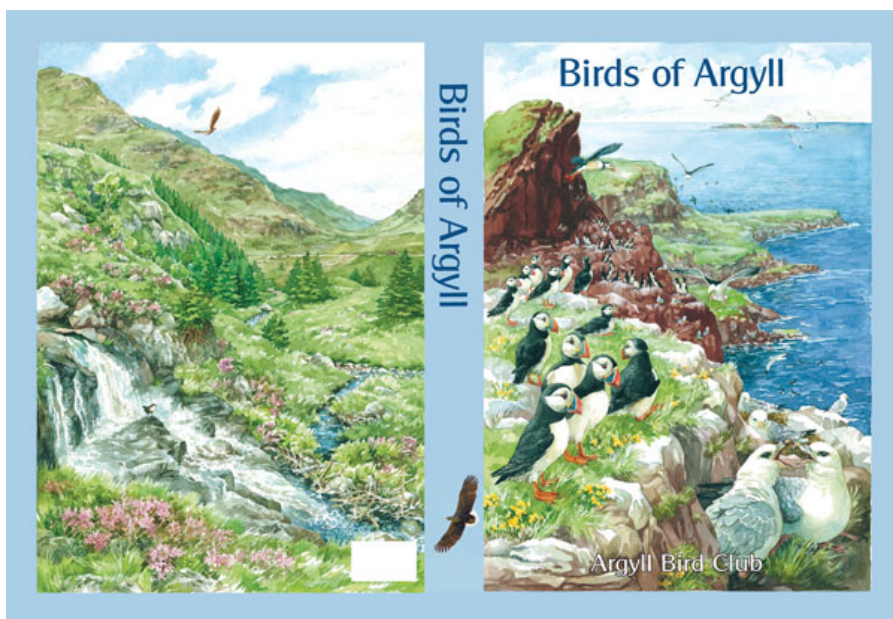
Editorial



Fieldwork for the New Bird Atlas is now underway. So, I hope you are ALL involved! Remember that ALL your casual bird sightings are important, and these can easily be submitted as Roving Records. If you want to become more involved, why not take on Timed Tetrad Visits? Bob Swann, the Scottish Organiser, wrote an article about the Atlas in the last newsletter (*Eider* 82:4-5) and Jacqui Kaye gave a talk about the project at the autumn meeting at Cairbaan. I'm sure Jacqui's presentation enthused many in the audience. It also generated a useful discussion. This in itself raised a number of queries that Jacqui couldn't answer on the day, but she promised to provide the answers. True to her word, these now appear on page 5. At the bottom of Jacqui's article are contact details of the Atlas Organisers in Argyll. You can submit your atlas records via the internet (www.birdatlas.net) or through your Regional Organiser. This is an ambitious and crucially important project for understanding the distribution, abundance and changing status of birds in Britain and Ireland—and it needs every one of you to help!

By the time you read this, the *Birds of Argyll* (front and back cover below) will be on its way from the printers. We are expecting delivery on 10 December. To avoid any hold-ups with the Xmas mail we will be arranging hand deliveries to many mainland locations in Argyll during mid December. The remaining orders will go by post, and these should arrive before the holiday. I hope you like the book. I would be surprised if it doesn't surpass all your expectations. In my view, it is a truly magnificent achievement for the club, relying heavily on the vast number of bird records contributed by many of you over many years. So far, just over a third of the print run of 1,200 copies has been sold or otherwise committed (libraries, review copies etc), which leaves around 700 unsold. Therefore, if you are aware of any retail outlets that would be willing to sell the book, please contact Bob Furness (contact details on back page).

Finally, have a wonderful Christmas and New Year—what a great opportunity to do some atlassing!!



Front and back covers of the *Birds of Argyll* showing Margaret Staley's evocative watercolours of the Treshnish Isles and Butterbridge. The page proofs of the book were on display at the autumn meeting at Cairbaan.

Field trips for 2008

Bute—Saturday 29 March 2008

Meet at Colintraive at 09.45hrs to catch the 10.00hrs ferry to Rhubodach. A mini-bus can be hired for around £20 plus fuel, to save car costs of £9.85 + £1.75 for each driver/passenger (return prices). The plan is to drive round the island checking lochs, shores and fields for waders, wildfowl etc. There will be no long walks! And, there is a good chance of seeing Greylags, Greenland Whitefronts, Wigeon, Goldeneyes, Tufted Ducks, Great Crested Grebes etc. We usually have lunch at Kingarth Hotel, but please bring your own if preferred.

If you would like to join the trip, please let me know as soon as possible (18.00hrs on Friday 28 March at the latest). If the forecast is really bad we could postpone until the following Saturday.

Ian Hopkins

Tel: 01700 504042

Mobile: 0770 2123170

E-mail: ian@hopkins0079.freemove.co.uk

Sound of Gigha—Saturday 19 April 2008

Paul Daw has been running this popular field trip for a number of years. For less experienced birders, some guidance on identification will also be provided. Meet at the car park at Ronachan Point just off the A83 (grid reference NR741548) at 10.00hrs. From here we will call in at the coast near the West Coat Salmon site and then onto Tayinloan to check the fields there. 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. After returning from Gigha, if the weather and tide conditions permit, we will walk along the shore to look for waders and migrants. If time, the weather and stamina allow we might re-check some of the morning's sites before the end of the day.

This trip depends very much on reasonable weather. In the past we have been extraordinarily lucky with the weather – will it continue?! So, will those who intend to come please contact me, by phone or e-mail, at the latest on the evening before (Fri day 18th April), so that I can confirm that the trip will go ahead and to give me some idea of how many people to expect. If the weather forecast is really atrocious it may be possible to postpone until the following Saturday.

Spring birding in the Sound of Gigha can be a rewarding experience. This trip will be a repeat of similar field trips in spring, accounts of which appeared in the newsletter (for the report of the spring 2007 trip see *Eider* 81:5). Some of the highlights from previous visits have included all three species of diver, Slavonian Grebes (some in full summer plumage), Common Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks and Greenland White-fronted Geese. There is always the possibility of finding the elusive Velvet Scoter. Once again we will be a little later in the spring than on some previous visits so there should be some early spring migrants.

Page 3

Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

Colonsay – weekend 16-18 May 2008

David Jardine has booked the Bunkhouse on Colonsay to provide accommodation for this trip. The group will leave Oban on the 17.00hrs Ferry arriving at Colonsay at c.19.30hrs where they will be met by David. On Saturday and Sunday visits will be made to a variety of sites on Colonsay viewing seabirds and looking for Colonsay specialities such as Corn Crakes and Chough. The group will return on the Sunday evening ferry arriving back in Oban around 22.30hrs.

Numbers on this trip will be limited to around 15; to reserve your place please contact:

David Jardine

Tel: 01463 731330

E-mail: dcjardine@freeuk.com

Northern Spain – week 11-17 June 2008

Unfortunately, this trip has been cancelled due to a lack of suitable air flights to Northern Spain in June.

ABC indoor meetings 2008-2009

Spring Meeting 2008

Saturday 8th March at The Argyll Hotel, Inveraray, (<http://www.the-argyll-hotel.co.uk/>). The programme is on page 4

Autumn Meeting 2008

Saturday 8th November at the Cairnbaan Hotel near Lochgiphead (<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>). The programme will be in the March 2008 *Eider*.

Spring Meeting 2009

Friday 24-Sunday 26th April, weekend meeting on Islay. The club has many members on the larger Argyll islands, but it is often difficult for these folks to attend one-day meetings on the mainland. Thus, in spring 2009 we are departing from our normal meeting format and are planning a weekend meeting on Islay, which combines indoor sessions and birding excursions (see table on next page).

The meeting will be based in Port Charlotte where we hope to hold the indoor sessions in the Islay Natural History Centre:

<http://www.islaywildlife.freemove.co.uk/>

A list of accommodation will be provided for around Port Charlotte (Hotels, Bed and Breakfast and Youth Hostel) for those interested. The Youth Hostel is situated in the same building as the Islay Natural History Centre.

Possible itinerary for the Argyll Bird Club's Spring Meeting on Islay—24-26 April 2009

Day	Time	Activity
Fri 24 Apr	1800	Calmac Ferry leaves Kennacraig. Arrives Port Askaig at 2005 then depart to accommodation (arrange your own evening meal)
Sat 25 Apr	0800	Breakfast
	0900-1200	Birdwatching (meet at the Islay Natural History Centre at 0900)
	1200-1315	Lunch
	1315-1800	Talks in the Islay Natural History Centre
	1930	Dinner (possibly in the Port Charlotte Hotel)
Sun 26 Apr	0800	Breakfast (take packed lunch)
	0900-1430	Birdwatching (meet at the Islay Natural History Centre at 0900)
	1430-1530	Pack-up and depart for ferry
	1530	Calmac Ferry leaves Port Askaig. Arrives Kennacraig at 1735

It is hoped we can take a minimum of cars from the mainland, by car sharing and possibly hiring a minibus on Islay to ferry participants to and from ferries and for the bird watching trips.

The success of such a venture will depend on how many members from the mainland are willing to travel to Islay for the weekend. The meeting is likely to be cancelled if there is not enough interest.

So, could you please register your interest with Steve Petty (contact details at the top of page 2) before the end of December, this year. Thank you.



Argyll Bird Report

The next report (ABR 20) will cover the years 2004-2005 and is currently in preparation. A good few of the species accounts are already written, but we have to revise the species headings to agree with the forthcoming *Birds of Argyll*. Most of the relevant record data has been processed on to the PC database thanks to the sterling efforts of Morag Rea, Tom Callan and Mary Gregory.

Now that the work for the book is finally complete we can concentrate our efforts on getting the bird report out. The current aim is to complete the text by the end of the year and get the report published early in the New Year. Then we can start on the 2006 report!

Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder

Raffle prizes

There will be a raffle at the Spring meeting. If anyone would like to donate a prize, please bring it along to the meeting and see our chairman, Nigel Scriven. Thank you

Programme for the ABC's Spring Meeting Saturday 8th March 2008 The Argyll Hotel, Inveraray

Time	Session
0930	Doors open, coffee and tea
0950-1000	Welcome and introduction— <i>Nigel Scriven</i> (Chairman)
1000-1015	Recent bird sightings— <i>Paul Daw</i> (Argyll Bird Recorder)
1015-1045	Birds' nest in museums: why?— <i>Mike Hansell</i>
1045-1115	Coffee/tea
1115-1215	Butterflies in South west Scotland— <i>Richard Sutcliffe</i>
1215-1245	Auction of bird books
1245-1345	Lunch (available in the hotel)
1345-1415	Ailsa Craig, Gannets and other seabirds on the Clyde— <i>David Palmar</i>
1415-1500	Return of the Beaver?— <i>Simon Jones</i>
1500-1530	Tea/coffee
1530-1615	Winter birding in Japan— <i>Brian Little</i>
1615-16.30	Raffle & end of meeting

Your Bird Atlas queries answered

Following on from my talk at the club's autumn meeting at Cairnbaan and the questions I received. I now have some information to update members. I'd just like to emphasise that the Atlas has been designed to be simple and fun to take part in, as well as yielding important information about our birds. Please don't be put off by some of the finer details of the survey, which may not affect all atlasers.

Question: Are bird records from local recorders acceptable as Roving Records, as a vast amount of records have been collected in this way?

Answer: The BTO can indeed accept such records from bird clubs. We have already had some internal discussions at the BTO about the best way forward. We will contact all bird clubs and local recorders to ask if they are willing to contribute records. At least in the short term we will be able to accept Excel spreadsheets in a form that will be specified in advance, probably once a year. Importing and validating data are not easy. The only way we can do this is by specifying the column headings and giving strict guidelines for the content of columns. The information we need is pretty straightforward, such as date, species, place, grid reference and observer name. The only field not routinely collected by most bird clubs would be breeding evidence category.

[Note from Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder. I have now heard from Dawn Balmer the Atlas Co-ordinator at BTO that they will be contacting Recorders soon regarding the method of transfer of 1-km square records from bird club databases. This is excellent news. The benefit for Argyll bird record contributors is that those of you who send me winter records (November-February) for our database will not need to submit records again as Bird Atlas 'Roving Records'. Breeding records will require us to amend our record template slightly. I will let you know as soon as this issue has been resolved.]

Question: Are repeat sightings of species of any use?

Answer: If there is any increased evidence involving breeding you should submit repeat sightings of the same species with the correct code. For example, if you first saw a Robin singing (S) and later saw a Robin with a faecal sac (FF), the higher evidence of breeding should be recorded.

In each 10-km square we are trying to build up a complete list of all species found there during the four years of the Atlas in winter and summer. So, once a Robin has been recorded as a Roving Record in a particular 10-km square in winter there is no need to record it again, but it will

need to be re-recorded in summer.

Please note that timed visits to tetrads only require four visits; one early and one late visit in each season, after which there is no need to do any more timed visits in that tetrad for the remainder of the Atlas. There are plenty of other tetrads which need to be covered!

Question: I was asked after my talk about covering tetrads with the central point under water.

Answer: It has recently been clarified that although these tetrads are low priority, they can still be covered for timed tetrad visits.

Richard Allan, Atlas RO for Argyll South, Bute & Gigha, asked me to clarify that ideally winter counts should not be made in the first or last hours of daylight due to birds roosting and giving misleading information. However, we appreciate that hours of daylight, especially in Scotland, are short and we therefore leave it to observers to make the best use of their time.

If there are any more queries about Atlas fieldwork methods do feel free to contact the Argyll Regional Organisers below in the first instance.

Argyll South, Bute & Gigha

Richard Allan

Tel: 01852 300359

E-mail: richardallan@compuserve.com

Mull & Morvern

Shaun McCullagh

Tel: 01688 400 388

E-mail: shaun@lizbluehouse.freemove.co.uk

Coll & Tiree

John Bowler

Tel: 01879 220 748

E-mail: john.bowler@rspb.org.uk

If still in doubt, Scottish Atlas Organiser, Bob Swann will be happy to help. Bob is contactable at:

E-mail: bob.swann@bto.org

Tel: 07919 378876

Jacqui Kaye, Promotions Officer, BTO Scotland

[Editor's note: An article by Bob Swann about the New Bird Atlas appeared on pages 4-5 in the September 2007 issue of the *Eider*]

Bird Atlas 2007-11

Mapping Britain and Ireland's birds



This report is a selection from sightings already published on the website—see Latest Reports numbers 54-60 for further records and for more details of those below. Records included are not necessarily of ‘rarities’ but may also relate to birds in unusual places or behaving in untypical ways. I also include records from areas that are not normally well covered. In particular, I would welcome more reports from Cowal, Kintyre and North Argyll. You can send them by e-mail, post or telephone.

Autumn produced the usual crop of rare and unusual birds including a juvenile/first-winter drake **Lesser Scaup** in Oban on 21st Oct, several **Balearic Shearwaters** at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, at least five **Great Shearwaters** on Tiree, a **Little Egret** at Machrihanish Water, Kintyre on 1st Oct, a possible **Great White Egret** at Loch Cre-ran, near Oban on 22 Sep, a **Red Kite** flying past the Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse on 6th Oct, a possible **Pallid Harrier** on Jura, a **Hobby** near Tayinloan, Kintyre on 11th Sep and a juvenile/first-winter **Hobby** at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 8th Oct, up to eight **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** on Tiree on 19th Sep, an adult **American Golden Plover** at Sandaig, Tiree on 5th Oct, a juvenile **Barred Warbler** at Balephuill, Tiree on 30th Sep, four **Lesser Whitethroats** on Coll/Tiree, four(!) **Yellow-browed Warblers** on Tiree in Oct, a juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** at Vaul, Tiree on 17th Sep, a juvenile **Common Rosefinch** at Hynish, Tiree on 7th Sep and a **Little Bunting** at Milton, Tiree on 23rd Oct. Scarce waders on Tiree included **Wood Sandpiper** and **Spotted Redshank**. Several people remarked on the number of raptors, especially groups of different species, seen during September, almost as though some kind of passage was in progress.

Observers. Full names are given in brackets except BA=Bill Allan, JB=John Bowler, TC=Tom Callan, PD=Paul Daw, JD=Jim Dickson, EJM=Eddie Maguire and SG=Stuart Gibson.

Wildfowl (and Gamebirds)

A pair of **Mute Swans** with four juveniles were at Ard Doran, Loch Feochan and five adults were with two juveniles at Ballachuan Loch, Seil on 5th Oct (BA). Number of **Mute Swans** on the Ulva Lagoons, Loch Sween peaked at 32 on 7th Oct (PD/TC). Returning **Whooper Swans** included 11 (with a family of five cygnets) on Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 4th Oct and a distant check of Loch a' Phuill late

Recent Report Updates

The latest bird sightings in Argyll are available on the Argyll Bird Club website at:

<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

On the home page ‘click here for latest bird reports’ takes you to straight to the most recent update. This page is updated every 10-14 days

afternoon on 7th Oct found 45 **Whooper Swans** with at least eight **Greenland White-fronts** (JB). Twelve **Whooper Swans** were heading south over Ballachuan Reserve, Seil Island on 10th Oct and a flock of 17 flew south at 15.00hrs over Balvicar, Seil Island on 14th Oct (Richard Wesley). At Ulva Lagoons, Loch Sween 20 **Whooper** and 20 **Mute Swans** (no juveniles) were present, also on 7th Oct (Anne-Lise Dickie/BA). A visit to Danna/Ulva Lagoons, Loch Sween on 20th Oct found 24 **Whooper Swans** (including just two juveniles), 20 **Mute Swans** (including five juveniles), 320 **Barnacle Geese**, 30 **Greylag Geese** and four **Greenland White-fronted Geese** (BA). At Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 25th Oct, 144 **Whooper Swans** had just 12 cygnets with them. The lack of juveniles among **Whooper Swans** this autumn had been remarked on by several observers—presumably the result of a poor breeding season.

There were no widespread reports of **Pink-footed Goose** passage during Sep but two were at Loch an Eilein, Tiree and a flock of 15 were flying south over Balevullin on 17th Sep (JB). On that same evening geese (thought to be Pink-footed) were heard passing south through Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll at around 20.30hrs in still and bright conditions with a following northerly wind (Simon Lawrence). At least 105 **Greylag Geese** were roosting at the head of Loch Feochan on the afternoon of 9th Aug (PD) and 158 were near Bonawe, Loch Etive, North Argyll on 27th Sep (SG/BA). The first arrivals of **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were eight near Loch Gorm, Islay on 27th Sep, with 20 **Barnacle Geese** (Ian Brooke) and a flock of c.40 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** flying east over The Laggan, near Campbeltown on 28th Sep (EJM). A single **Snow Goose** seen with 35 **Greylag Geese** at Balvicar, Seil, Mid Argyll on 25th Sep was quite probably the returning bird from last year (Richard Wesley).

A total of 147 **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** were at RSPB's Loch Gruinart Reserve on 24th Sep (James How per Ian Brooke), seven were at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 30th Sep (EJM) and six were at Fidden, Mull on 4th Oct (Bryan Rains). Gatherings of **Greater Canada Geese** in Aug included 87 on the River Add at Dunamuck on 4th Aug (Malcolm Chattwood), 37 the mouth of the Kilail Burn, Otter Ferry on 13th (TC). Large numbers of geese were on the move on 7th Oct, including 400+ **Barnacle Geese** and 50 or more **Greenland White-fronted Geese** on Coll (Ben Jones, RSPB Coll), a skein of 26 **Pink-footed Geese** flying

Stop Press

Although we have had nothing like the huge numbers of **Little Auks** seen on the east coast recently, there have been several reports from Tiree, Machrihanish Seabird Observatory and elsewhere.

A very late (or wintering?) **Common Sandpiper** was found at Kilmun (Holy Loch), Cowal on 10th November. A wintering bird was found at the same place on 31st December 2001.

south over Dunollie Castle, Oban at 12.30hrs (SG). On Tiree, **Pink-footed Geese** were moving south-east early in the morning—some 150 in flocks of 30. **Barnacle Geese** were heading south from late morning to mid-afternoon—some 400 in groups of 20-30 and a few **Greenland White-fronts** were heading south-east later on—some 24 in small groups. Meanwhile on Islay, large numbers of **Barnacle Geese** were arriving at Loch Gruinart. At 11.00hrs there were c.10,865 (with a lot more later). There was also a **Green-winged Teal** on the floods (James How). Approximately 600 **Barnacle Geese** were seen heading south-west out to sea (to Ireland?) at Fidden, Mull on 9th Oct and nine **Whooper Swans** were at Beach, Ross of Mull (Bryan Rains). On 16th Oct, flocks of 50 **Pink-footed Geese** and 150 **Barnacle Geese** were all flying south-west out to sea at Fidden, Mull and three **Eurasian Teal** were there too. At Uisken, 30 **Pink-footed Geese** and 50 **Barnacle Geese** were flying south-west and six **Whooper Swans** were flying west at 20.30hrs at Loch Beg (Bryan Rains).

Eurasian Wigeon started to arrive in late Aug and nine were at Loch Gilp and 20 in the Add Estuary on 26th. Numbers at the Add Estuary had increased to 57 by 30th Aug, when they were accompanied by six **Goosanders**. By 16th Oct numbers of **Eurasian Wigeon** in the Add Estuary had reached 345 (JD). Seven **Gadwall** were with **Whooper Swans** on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 14th Sep (JB). Among wildfowl seen in the Oban area on 24th Oct were two **Long-tailed Ducks** (adult female and immature) in Dunstaffnage Bay (photo opposite), five **Pochards** (including four males) and 29 **Tufted Ducks** (including 26 males—a good count for the mainland) on Loch Nell and, most surprisingly, two female-type **Greater Scaup** (with a female Tufted Duck) on Lochan Dubh, Pennyfuir, near Oban (SG/JD). Two drake **Greater Scaup** flying past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 6th Aug were the first the autumn (EJM). Stuart Gibson had an encounter with what appeared to be a juvenile/first-winter drake **Lesser Scaup** at the North Pier, Oban at 18.00hrs on the evening of 21st Oct. A description has been supplied for consideration by BBRC (SG).

Ten **Common Scoters** were seen in the Sound of Gigha from 'West Coast Salmon' on 14th Oct (Malcolm Chattwood). Four **Common Scoters** were at Tayinloan on 28th Oct, a minimum 400 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were just north of there and six **Common Scoters** were at 'West Coast Salmon' with around ten **Red-breasted Mergansers** (BA). Two early female **Common Goldeneyes** were seen at the head of Loch Riddon, Cowal at high tide on 30th Sep (Rosemary Kennedy). Counts of moulting flocks of **Red-breasted Mergansers** included 115 in Loch Caolisport on 16th Aug (JD) and 72 at the top of Loch Riddon, Cowal on 20th Aug (Graham Clark). Six **Goosanders** were in the Add Estuary on 30th Aug (JD) and a female **Goosander** with six almost fully-grown young seen on the River Cur at the head of Loch Eck, Cowal on 4th Sep (Peter Woods).

A juvenile male **Black Grouse** was seen in flight near Loch Nant, Mid-Argyll on 29th Aug (PD). At least seven **Red Grouse** were seen (groups of three and four) at a site near

Barguilean, Glen Lonan on 13th Oct. An unusual number here—perhaps they have had a good breeding season (PD)? At least 19 **Red-legged Partridges** were counted in late October on the road between Ardnacloch and North Ardnacloch Farms, Appin, North Argyll. They derive from birds reared as a release programme some years ago by a local enthusiast and appear to have been very successful (Mary Gregory). Two spectacular male **Reeve's Pheasants** were seen on the road at Castle Lachlan, Loch Fyne on 7th Oct (TC) and one was seen on the road alongside Loch Striven, Cowal on 12th Oct (Les Mackay).

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

Twelve **Red-throated Divers**, all in breeding plumage, were calling and flying around in Ardmucknish Bay on 17th Aug and a **Slavonian Grebe** there was moulting into winter plumage (SG). A total of 36 adult **Black-throated Divers** were seen in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on the afternoon of 11th Sep (JD/BA). On 1st Oct, three **Red-throated Divers** were on Loch Scridain, Mull (Bryan Rains), a **Red-throated**



Above: Long-tailed Duck at Dunstaffnage on 24 October. ©Jim Dickson

Below: Juvenile Sabine's Gull at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 24 September. ©Eddie Maguire



The Eider

Diver still in breeding plumage and three **Slavonian Grebes** (two adults in winter plumage and one possible juvenile) were in Ardmucknish Bay, North Argyll (SG) and a single **Slavonian Grebe** was on the sea off Sandaig, Tiree (JB).

Totals of 29 **Little Grebes**, three **Great Cormorants**, 20 **Grey Herons** and a **Red-throated Diver** in winter plumage were seen during the WeBS count at Loch Sween on 7th Oct (PD/TC). Three **Red-throated Divers**, 17 **Great Northern Divers** and 265 **Northern Gannets** were seen during a sea-watch from Aird, Tiree on 17th Oct (JB), and three **Red-throated Divers**, a **Black-throated Diver** and six **Great Northern Divers** were on Loch Scridain, Mull on 25th Oct (Bryan Rains). Four **Slavonian Grebes** and a **Red-throated Diver** were on Loch na Keal, Mull on 30th Oct and two **Little Grebes** were on the Mishnish Lochs (BA).

At least 340 **Manx Shearwaters** were seen in small groups from the Kennacraig/Islay Ferry on 3rd Aug (Malcolm Chattwood) and the first **Balearic Shearwater** of the autumn was seen at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 5th Aug, flying south with Manx Shearwaters (EJM). No less than three **Balearic Shearwaters** were seen at Machrihanish on 18th Aug flying south and a single was seen the following day (19th Aug).

A seawatch off Aird, Tiree on 6th Aug produced a single **Sooty Shearwater** and **Storm Petrel** as well as 29 **Manx Shearwaters** and 124 **Northern Gannets** (all heading west). The following day 5,740 **Manx Shearwaters** were counted in one and a half hours (JB) and four **Sooty Shearwaters** were seen there on 15th Aug. Six **Sooty Shearwaters** and five **Storm Petrels** were seen during a one and a half hour seawatch off Aird on 25th Aug (JB, Keith Gillon). Another **Balearic Shearwater** was flying south past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory with c.1,000 **Manx Shearwaters** (in one hour) on 30th Aug and the first **Sooty Shearwaters** (two single birds) appeared. The following day (31st) a total of 17 **Leach's Storm-petrels** flew south past the Observatory in about two hours (EJM). Seawatches off Aird, Tiree in mid Sep found five **Great Shearwaters** (a single at 08.10hrs and a group of four at 08.25hrs), 20 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 1,100 **Manx Shearwaters**, and a **Leach's Storm-petrel** on 10th, and two **Great Shearwaters** with 18 **Sooty Shearwaters** on 14th (JB). A flock of 200 **Shags** flew south down the Sound of Iona, Mull on 30th Aug with many more on the water. Probably well in excess of 300 in the Sound altogether (TC).

A **Little Egret** was seen at Machrihanish Water, Kintyre on 1st Oct (EJM). A report of a possible **Great White Egret** seen at Loch Creran, near Oban on Saturday 22nd Sep by a Mr Marcus was received via the RSPB. Around ten Great White Egrets have been reported in Britain during late Sep/early Oct and if confirmed this would be our first autumn record. Six previous records in Argyll were all in late spring. Good counts of **Grey Herons** included a total of 18 roosting at high tide at the NATO refueling jetty, Campbeltown Loch on 27th Sep (Neil Brown) and 21 at Ballachuan Loch, near Balvicar on 5th Oct (BA).

Raptors, rails etc.

A **Red Kite** flying slowly south past the Mull of Kintyre

Lighthouse on 6th Oct was the only one reported this autumn. It had purple wing tags but was just too far out to read the white letters/numbers (Rod Angus per EJM). There were widespread reports of **Hen Harriers** throughout the period including males and females/ring-tails regularly in the Add Estuary/Moine Mhor area of Mid-Argyll. Ring-tails were seen at Otter Ferry, on Tiree, at Ardbrecknish, Loch Awe, at Balvicar, Seil and in Glen Lonan. Males were seen at Glen Seilisdair (Mull), Tullochgorm (Minard) and High Ranachan, on the Gobagrennan road, near Campbeltown. A male and a ring-tailed were hunting together near the B8001 road between Kennacraig and Claonaig, Kintyre.

There was a claim of a **Pallid Harrier** hunting along the north-west side of Loch Tarbert, Jura (NR591833) on 1st Oct (BirdGuides). No further details are available and a detailed description would be needed for this potential first record for Argyll. However an unusually plumaged Hen Harrier was reported at Loch Gruinart, Islay the following day and a similar bird was seen later on the Western Isles.

Excellent photos were obtained of a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** in a Dunoon garden with the Wood Pigeon it had caught (photo on next page). It was very bold and even when the observer went out into the garden it did not fly off, merely stared him out (Lesley Mackay)!

Three **Golden Eagles** were displaying high over the uplands to the south of Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 20th Aug (EJM). A **Golden Eagle**, four **Buzzards**, and a **Common Kestrel** were all in the air at the same time (together with five **Ravens**) at Scammadale near Oban on 30th Sep. The Buzzards minded their own business, but the Ravens and the Kestrel gave the eagle a hard time, putting on a spectacular show (Laurence Langan). A pair of **Golden Eagles** was watched for about 20mins over Moine Mhor at around mid-day on 22nd Oct (photo on next page of one of the eagles being mobbed by two ravens). An adult and a 'near' adult bird were circling around and grappling a couple of times over Barsloisnoch and both then sat together on a hill at Barr Mor (JD). An adult pair of **Golden Eagles** was seen on the Dervaig to Achleck road, Mull and an untagged pair of adult **White-tailed Eagles** was at Gruline on 30th Oct (TC).

Later **Osprey** sightings included one seen from the ferry flying north over West Loch Tarbert on 3rd Aug (Malcolm Chattwood), one in the Add Estuary on 15th Aug (JD), two flying north along the coast at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 21st Aug (EJM), two in the Add Estuary on 27th Aug (BA), two at Loch Gruinart, Islay and one flying south over the Lossit uplands near Machrihanish on 28th Aug (EJM).

The usual crop of autumn immigrant **Common Kestrels** were reported, including three flying south at some height into a south-west force 5-6 wind over Otter Ferry on 24th Sep (TC). **Merlins** were seen on Tiree (up to three), Moine Mhor, High Ranachan, near Campbeltown and around Arinagour (Coll). **Peregrine Falcons** were reported, from Otter Ferry, Tullochgorm (Minard), RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay and



Left: Female Sparrowhawk with Wood Pigeon prey in a Dunoon garden on 4 October. ©Les Mackay



Right: Golden Eagle being mobbed by two Ravens above Moine Mhor on 22 October. ©Jim Dickson

Loch Bhasapol, Tìree. Two juveniles were seen from the Add hide on the Crinan Canal, Mid-Argyll on 13th Sep (Kevin Francis). Not just one **Hobby**, but two were reported this autumn. One was seen briefly at close range on the afternoon of 11th Sep near Tayinloan, Kintyre. Probably a juvenile though best left as an un-aged bird; even an adult was not fully ruled out (JD/BA) and a juvenile/first-winter at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 8th Oct (EJM).

Three **Water Rails** were calling in the Balephuill/Carnan Mor area of Tìree on 30th Sep (JB). **Corn Crakes** were reported throughout September on Tìree and a late bird was present at Barrapol on 2nd Oct (JB). A juvenile **Moorhen** on Loch Pottie (Poit na h-I), Mull on 19th Sep was unusual (per Alan Spellman) and a single **Coot** at Loch Bhasapol on 17th Sep was the first of autumn on Tìree (JB).

Waders

Newly arrived waders at Otter Ferry on 4th Aug included c.50 **Ringed Plovers**, c.40 **Eurasian Curlews**, a single **Common Sandpiper** and c.40 **Turnstones** (TC). An early adult **Little Stint** was at Loch a' Phuill on 7th Aug, with 35 **Dunlins**, 60 **Ringed Plovers** and 60 **Golden Plovers**. Counts of 190 **Sanderlings** and 120 **Dunlins** were made the same day at Gott Bay (JB). A single **Ruff** was among only a handful of waders at Loch a' Phuill, Tìree on 11th Aug (JB). Four **Greenshanks** were at Ulva Lagoons, Loch Sween on 16th Aug and six juvenile **Red Knots** were with six **Redshanks** in Loch Caolisport (JD). The first **Whimbrel** of autumn at the Add Estuary was on 17th Aug with five **Red Knots** and one **Dunlin** and Loch Gilp had 11 **Red Knots**, nine **Redshanks** and two **Ringed Plovers** (JD). Also on 17th Aug, a total of 75 **Ringed Plovers** (including a late brood of two), 22 **Turnstones** (including several juveniles), four **Sanderlings** and eight **Dunlins** were on Ledaig beach, North Argyll (SG). Meanwhile on Tìree, a late afternoon check of Loch a' Phuill in the drizzle revealed 65 **Northern Lapwings**, 13 **Red Knots**, 15 **Black-tailed Godwits** (including a leg-flagged bird), two **Bar-tailed Godwits**, one **Greenshank** and 35 **Curlews** (JB).

Three **Whimbrel** were at Islandadd Bridge, Moine Mhor on 19th Aug, and a **Greenshank** was put up by a juvenile **Peregrine**, which then had another unsuccessful low level attack at it further out in the estuary. Fourteen juvenile **Red Knots** and a single **Bar-tailed Godwit** were also present (BA). At Ledaig Point, North Argyll on 20th Aug there were 93 **Oystercatchers**, 95 **Ringed Plovers**, eight **Red Knots**, eight juvenile **Dunlin** and just ten **Turnstones** (SG). A single **Black-tailed Godwit** in slightly faded breeding plumage and 12 **Red Knot** were seen there later (BA).

A **Wood Sandpiper** (always scarce in Argyll), nine **Ruffs** and five **Greenshanks** were at Loch a' Phuill, Tìree on 20th Aug (Nick Addey per JB). Totals of eight **Ruffs** and 19 **Black-tailed Godwits** and a single **Red Knot** were at Loch a' Phuill, Tìree on 22nd Aug (JB). A small group of 30 non-breeding plumage **Black-tailed Godwits** were briefly on Loch Gilp during misty conditions along the north-west seaboard on 23rd Aug (Simon Lawrence), and two **Black-tailed Godwits** at Balliemore, Otter Ferry, Cowal on 24th Aug were the first TC had seen there. Eight **Black-tailed Godwits** and 12 **Red Knots** were seen at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 27th Aug (Ian Brooke).

Six **Ruffs** were at Kilmoluaig, Tìree on 3rd Sep as well as 27 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Loch a' Phuill, and 13 **Red Knots**, 390 **Sanderlings** and 12 **Bar-tailed Godwits** in Gott Bay (JB). A single **Ruff** and 350 **Golden Plovers** were at Sandaig the same day (JD). On 4th Sep a total of 92 **Oystercatchers** were roosting at Ledaig Point, North Argyll, together with 130 **Ringed Plovers**, seven juvenile **Red Knots**, a single juvenile **Sanderling**, five juvenile **Dunlins**, a single **Black-tailed Godwit**, two **Common Redshanks** and 50 **Turnstones** (SG).

A juvenile **Spotted Redshank** was found by JD at Loch a' Phuill on 6th Sep. It was seen there later with 55 **Black-tailed Godwits** including a leg-flagged juvenile bird (JD/JB). Spotted Redshank is a very scarce bird on Tìree—this was the first JB had seen in six years on the island! A group of three juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were newly arrived at Loch a' Phuill on the afternoon of 9th Sep. They were seen well in flight and on land—fairly briefly in the open and for longer in long grass before disappearing into

The Eider

the machair. Four were there the following afternoon (JB).

Waders along the Loch Fyne shore in the Otter Ferry area on 9th Sep included totals of 61 **Ringed Plovers**, two **Red Knots**, one **Dunlin**, eight **Common Redshanks** and 116 **Turnstones** (TC). A single **Grey Phalarope** was seen off Aird, Tiree on the morning of 10th Sep as well as 17 **Golden Plovers** and four **Red Knots**. Late in the afternoon 105 **Black-tailed Godwits**, two **Red Knots**, six **Ruffs** and 28 **Common Redshanks** were with the **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** at Loch a' Phuill (JB). By 19th Sep unprecedented numbers of **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** (eight) were on Tiree. Six juveniles were together at Loch a' Phuill during 17.00hrs-18.00 hrs (JB) and two juveniles were at Balevullin at 17.30hrs (BA). At least 630 **Oystercatchers** together with 74 **Curlews** were roosting at Stinky Hole, Campbelltown Loch at lunch time on 28th Sep (PD).

A juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** on The Strand, Colonsay on 29th Sep was with six juvenile **Red Knots** (JD). A juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** was at Gott Bay, Tiree on 1st Oct together with 340 **Ringed Plovers**, 30 **Dunlin**, 220 **Sanderlings** and 16 **Bar-tailed Godwits**. A flock of 1,550 **Golden Plovers** was at Greenhill with 620 more at Sandaig and 26 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Loch a' Phuill (JB), and Ledaig Point, North Argyll had 95 **Ringed Plovers**, six **Red Knots**, a juvenile **Sanderling**, 23 **Eurasian Curlews** and 36 **Turnstones** (SG).

An adult **American Golden Plover** found at Sandaig, Tiree on 5th Oct (found by Jerry Wilson, RSPB) was showing well in the afternoon. It was still there the following day. Two juvenile **Little Stints** were at Loch a' Phuill together with 60 **Ringed Plovers**, six **Sanderlings**, six **Dunlins** and ten **Black-tailed Godwits** (JB). Two juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** were at Gott Bay, Tiree on the afternoon of 19th Oct and two **Ruffs** were newly arrived at Loch Riaghain on 23rd Oct (JB). A single **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** on the machair west of Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 7th Oct was presumably one of the eight birds seen earlier in the month, although it was possibly a new bird (JB)?

Four **Greenshanks** and 130 **Golden Plovers** were at Loch Beg, Mull on 11th Oct (Bryan Rains). A **Marsh Sandpiper** was reported at Kilfinichen Bay, Loch Scridain, Mull on 12th Oct. If supported by a good description and accepted this record would be a 'first' for Argyll (Bill Honeywell per JD). Three **Grey Phalaropes** were found during a seawatch at Aird, Tiree on the morning of 16th Oct. All three independently stopped to feed on the sea just off the point (JB). Three more, including two juveniles on the sea just off the point, were there the following day (17th), when two also flew south past Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (EJM). Some years ago Grey Phalaropes were recorded less than annually in Argyll. In the past four or five years numbers reported have increased markedly, although this may be due in part to increased levels of sea-watching.

A leg-flagged **Sanderling** seen at Hough Bay, Tiree on 29 May 2007 had been ringed near the village of Iwik on the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania (19.52.64 N, 16.18.18 W) in Nov-Dec 2005.

Skuas, gulls, terns and auks

Pomarine Skuas were seen off Tiree on several dates in early Sep including three on 10th (JB, JD, BA, Anne-Lise Dickie). Late **Arctic Skuas** were seen from the ferry off Scarinish, Tiree (Jerry Wilson) on 6th Oct and during a seawatch at Aird, Tiree on 17th Oct (JB). Four **Great Skuas** were displaying over Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree on 1st Aug. Hundreds of **Kittiwakes** were still present, but there had been a total breeding failure with not a single chick to be seen (JB). Unusual numbers of **Great Skuas** were recorded during the autumn including 20 during Aug at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (EJM), 15 off Aird, Tiree on 10th Sep (JB) and 10 in an hour off Aird, Tiree on 16th Sep (BA, Anne-Lise Dickie). A seawatch off Aird, Tiree on 14th Sep produced three **Pomarine Skuas** (including two adults with 'spoons'), six **Arctic Skuas**, one **Long-tailed Skua**, 31 **Great Skuas**, two juvenile **Sabine's Gulls** (feeding very close in with an **Arctic Tern** and staying in the bay for c.25mins), 51 **Kittiwakes** (including 21 juveniles), five **Arctic Terns**, 16 auks (mostly **Razorbills**) and a single **Puffin** (JB).

Further **Sabine's Gulls** were seen at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 24th Sep (two juveniles) (EJM), Arinagour, Coll on 16th Oct (Alan Lauder), off Aird, Tiree on 17th October (JB) and at Claggain Bay, Islay on 25th Oct (per JD). A nice adult **Mediterranean Gull** was on the mud in Loch Gilp on the evening of 17th Sep, and was seen there again on 22nd Sep (JD). Another adult was found on 26th Sep, this time at Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll (15.10hrs-16.00hrs). This was a different bird from the one at Loch Gilp—smaller and less black on head (JD). A juvenile **Little Gull** was just off the point at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 20th Aug. Later it was found off-passage, dip-feeding, in Machrihanish Bay (EJM). A second juvenile flew south past the Observatory on 30th Aug (EJM). Another, or the same returning, **Ring-billed Gull** was seen on the George Street, Oban foreshore at 20.45hrs on the evening of 23rd Aug. (SG).

A juvenile **Black Tern** was reported at Ulva Ferry, Mull on 14th Sep (Andrew Gouldstone per Dave Sexton). Five **Little Terns** were at Gott Bay, Tiree on 7th Aug and 12 **Little Terns** were still at Miodar (JB). Two late **Common Terns** were seen at Uisken, Mull on 3rd Oct (Bryan Rains) and a juvenile **Arctic Tern** at Traigh Bhagh on 30th Oct was, at the time, the latest ever recorded on Tiree, although an even later bird appeared here on 4th Nov (JB). Six **Sandwich Terns** off the spit at Otter Ferry, Cowal on 11th Sep were the last of the autumn and two **Common Guillemot** corpses were brought in by the high tide there (TC).

Doves, owls, woodpeckers etc.

Barn Owls were reported at the RSPB's Loch Gruinart Reserve on 21st Aug (James How), at Moine Mhor on 29th Aug (Malcolm Chattwood) and at Ballimeanoch, south Lochaweside on 24th Oct (Karl Pipes). The only **Short-eared Owl** reported during this period was at Cornaig, Tiree on 1st Aug (JB).

It seems to have been a good year for **Common Swifts** in Argyll. Impressive early evening gatherings over Burnside



Many records of Fieldfares and Goldfinches were submitted this autumn. These two photos were both taken by Eddie Maguire. The Fieldfare at The Lagan and the Goldfinch at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, both in Kintyre.

Square, Campbeltown during the first half of the month included 80+ on 1st Aug falling to around 30 on 16th Aug (EJM). Birds were also reported from Lochgilphead, Bridgend (near Lochgilphead), Kilmelford (Mid-Argyll) and Oban at this time (Anne-Lise Dickie/SG/ Malcolm Chattwood). The last were seen in Campbeltown on the evening of 21st Aug.

The first **Common Kingfisher** of the autumn was at the mouth of the river Awe, Taynuilt (Mid-Argyll) on the morning of 11th Aug. On 8th Sep, and again on 24th Sep, there were two at the same site (Laurence Langan). Three Common Kingfishers were reported on Mull in early Sep - at Lochdon, Aros Park and north of Salen (per Alan Spellman), and one watched in the Kyles of Bute near Tighnabruaich, Cowal for about 10mins on 14th Sep, was the first record from this area in recent years (Daphne Campbell).

A flock of 49 **Wood Pigeons** were at Tayinloan, Kintyre on 11th Sep and small groups of up to 20 were widespread in the area (JD, BA). A flock of 60 **Rock Doves** were at Killechronan, Mull on 30th Oct, together with two feral birds (BA).

Passerines

At least 20 **Sand Martins** were still active around nest burrows at Loch Melldalloch, Cowal on 20th Aug. Juveniles were visible in their burrows and one was visited every 3-4mins over a 20min period (TC). At least ten late nests were still active at Ledaig Sand Quarry on 31st Aug (SG, BA). The last **Sand Martin** reported was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 14th Sep (JB). Big numbers of **Barn Swallows** around on Tiree on 27th Aug, included a loose feeding group of 180 in the Gott area. A minimum of 400 in the east half of island was presumed to include migrants, although this has been a bumper breeding year for them on the island (JB). Up to 90 **Barn Swallows** and ten **House Martins** were at Kilmelford, Mid-Argyll the same day (BA). A flock of c.60 **Barn Swallows** was feeding above High As-

komil, Campbeltown on 3rd Oct (Neil Brown). On 30th Oct, three late birds circled over a house near Southend, Kintyre for about ten minutes before they disappeared (Margaret Bakes), and an adult was sitting on telephone wires at Salen, Mull (BA). Numbers of **House Martins** in Glen Euchar, near Oban had built up over the previous week until there were over 200 around the house on 21st Aug. They were nearly all gone the following day (BA). A total of 75 were on the roof of the Mid-Argyll Hospital in Lochgilphead early on the morning of 22nd Aug (JD). The last were two birds seen in absolutely foul weather, rain and wind, at Eredine, Loch Awe on 27th Oct (Karl Pipes).

Six adult **White Wagtails** plus eight probable immatures and 15 **Pied Wagtails** were found at Ulva Lagoons, Danna area of Loch Sween on 12th Aug (JD). A **Dipper** was seen on 4th Sep on the stream running into the River Cur at the head of Loch Eck, Cowal (Peter Woods) and one was seen in Conieglen Water, near Southend, Kintyre on 27th Oct (Margaret Bakes). **Northern Wheatears** were still trickling through during Oct, and the last two '**Greenland**' **Wheatears** were at Balemartine/Sorobaidh, Tiree on 25th Oct (JB).

Large numbers of **Blackbirds** appeared in late Oct, including a total of 22 around chalets at Largiemore, near Otter Ferry, on freshly mown grass on 27th Oct (TC). **Redwings** appeared in numbers in late Sep and c.100 were present around a garden at Glenbranter, Cowal on 30th Sep (Peter Woods). Flocks were seen regularly over the following weeks, but compared to **Fieldfare** numbers, were relatively small. Larger flocks included 60 around Eredine village, Loch Awe on 12th Oct (Karl Pipes), 150 at Otter Ferry on 20th Oct (TC), a minimum of 660 near Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor on 22nd Oct (JD) and about 100 at Balephuill, Tiree on 30th Oct (JB). Surprisingly, the first **Fieldfare** was a single bird in the Balephuill/Carnan Mor area of Tiree on 30th Sep (JB). On the following day (1st Oct) six were at Loch Beg, Mull (Bryan Rains) and two small flocks of 20 (40 in all) were seen flying in off the sea at Moy Castle, Lochbuie, Mull. They flew straight into Hawthorn bushes close to the

The Eider

shoreline to feed where there were also **Starlings**, **Song Thrushes** and **Blackbirds** (Shaun McCullagh). Only small numbers of **Fieldfares** were reported, including two on Colonsay on 2nd Oct (JD). A large movement on 12th Oct, included a minimum of 106 at Cairnbaan together with a few other thrush species (Anne-Lise Dickie). Larger numbers did not appear until 17th Oct, when 350 were at Drum Cottage, near Otter Ferry (TC). In the following few days hundreds were seen at various locations in Mid-Argyll and Mull (especially on 20th Oct), but other areas reported relatively few. A total of 122 **Mistle Thrushes** were counted on overhead wires together with 11 **Starlings** at Auchoirk Farm, near Millhouse, Cowal and at least 45 **Mistle Thrushes** were feeding on Rowan, south of Auchnaha (near Otter Ferry) on 14th Aug (TC). A large post-breeding flock of c.60 **Mistle Thrushes** was seen at North Connel in 'late Aug' (Graham Brennan per SG) and at least 30 were present around a garden at Glenbranter, Cowal on 27th Sep (Peter Woods).

A juvenile **Grasshopper Warbler** at The Manse, Scarinish, Tiree on 28th Aug and one at Balephuill on 31st were probably locally bred as both sites had reeling birds until the start of the month. They were the last seen in Argyll this autumn (JB). A late **Sedge Warbler** was at Stinky Hole, Campbeltown Loch on 27th Sep (Neil Brown). The last **Garden Warbler** was in the Balephuill/Carnan Mor area of Tiree on 30th Sep, with a male Blackcap (JB). **Blackcaps** were seen frequently on Tiree during late Sep and through Oct (JB) and a male was in the garden at Lagganmore, near Oban on 19th Oct (BA). A juvenile **Barred Warbler** was in a garden at Balephuill, Tiree on 30th Sep (JB). There are only six previous Argyll records, including two very old ones. A **Lesser Whitethroat** found at Hynish, Tiree on 23rd Aug was reportedly present until 25th Aug (Nick Addey). A second one was seen and photographed at Baugh, Tiree on 1st Oct (JB) and yet another was at Arinagour, Coll on 11th Oct (BA/JD). A fourth **Lesser Whitethroat** was a new arrival in the garden at Balephuill on 13th Oct (JB). An unusual number considering there are only 20 previous Argyll records.

A **Yellow-browed Warbler** was newly arrived at Balephuill, Tiree on the morning of 2nd Oct. It was present again the following day. Another at Balephuill, Tiree on 11th Oct was presumably a new bird and yet another was newly arrived at Balephuill at lunch time 15th October. This was a nice bright bird, unlike the 11th Oct bird. A fourth was at the same site on 27th Oct (JB). A remarkable run of records considering there are only six previous records for Argyll.

A juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** was picked up on a mowing survey, at Vaul, Tiree on the morning of 17th Sep (JB). It was last seen again, briefly, on 22nd Sep (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie). A single **Magpie** was an unusual visitor at the Isle of Danna causeway, Loch Sween on 29th Sep (BA). Approximately 350 **Common Starlings** were on cut fields at Cornaig, Tiree on 15th Aug (JB) and a flock of c.385 were gorging on Rowan berries at Ulva Lagoons, Loch Sween on 16th Aug (JD).

A single **Brambling** was seen at Kildalloig, near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 13th Oct (EJM) and a male was at Bale-

phuill, Tiree on 30th Oct (JB). Flocks of **Goldfinches** included 22 feeding on roadside seed-heads at Druim Farm, near Otter Ferry on 17th Sep where at least 50% were juveniles (TC), 30–40 along the River Cur at the head of Loch Eck, Cowal on 23rd Sep (Peter Woods), 35 at Balvicar, Seil, Mid Argyll on 25th Sep (Richard Wesley), c.90 at Upper Ballywilline Farm, Gobagrennan road near Campbeltown on 30th Sep, with a further five flocks of 10-20 birds nearby (Neil Brown) and c.15 feeding on Field Scabious seed-heads at the top of Eredine Village, Loch Awe on 15th Oct (Karl Pipes).

A ringing report has been received for a **Siskin** found dead in a garden in Appin on 25th June this year. It turned out to be a second-year female ringed at Stocksfield, Northumberland on 9th April 2006. Most Siskins found with rings recently in Argyll have been ringed in north-west England (Jane Williams). An unprecedented number appeared on Tiree, where they are normally very scarce visitors, in Oct and nearly 50 were counted on 21st Oct. The birds were feeding mostly on Knapweed and Thistle seeds (JB). A flock of 50-60 **Siskins** were feeding on alder catkins near Southend, Kintyre on 25th Oct (Margaret Bakes).

Flocks of **Twite** reported at this time included 11 at Cruachan Reservoir dam, North Argyll on 8th Aug (James Towill), 40 in the Ledaig Point area on 20th Aug (SG), 120 on the Balephuill, Tiree machair (together with 80 **Linnets**) on 22nd Aug (JB), 38 in the Add Estuary on 30th Aug (JD), 20 feeding just above high water mark at Balvicar, Seil, Mid-Argyll on 31st Aug (Richard Wesley), a large flock of 170 in the Ledaig Point/Connel Airfield area on 31st Aug (SG/BA), at least 50 at Keillmore, Loch Sween on 30th Sep (TC), 60 at Fidden, Mull on 4th Oct (Bryan Rains) and, on Tiree, 250 at The Reef (with 70 **Linnets**) and 150 at Balephetrish on 13th Oct.

Lesser Redpolls reported on Tiree included seven in the Balephuill/Carnan Mor area of Tiree on 30th Sep. Six **Common Redpolls** showing Greenland/Iceland characteristics were also present (JB). Despite a good cone crop in many places, **Common Crossbills** have been fairly few and far between. A group of six (males and females) were seen feeding at the top of conifers in forestry near Arinarach Hill, south Kintyre on 6th Oct (Margaret Bakes), six flew north over Lochdon, Mull toward Gortan/Duart on 21st Oct (SG), two were on the golf course at Kames, Cowal on 22nd Oct (Steve Petty) and four flew south over Torinturk Farm (Loch Nell) near Oban on 24th Oct (SG/JD).

A juvenile **Common Rosefinch** at Hynish, Tiree on 7th Sep was JD's second good find on Tiree that week. It was not seen subsequently. A flock of at least ten **Bullfinches** in Ardcastle Wood, near Loch Gair, Mid-Argyll on 13th Sep included several juveniles (PD), and at least five at Kilninner, near Oban on 30th Sep included three very bright males (BA).

A **Lapland Bunting** was heard calling as it flew over Balephetrish, Tiree on 13th Oct, one was seen at The Reef, Tiree (JB) on 19th and another at Fidden, Mull on 22nd Oct was only the third ever record for Mull (Bryan Rains). An

early **Snow Bunting** was at The Strand Colonsay on 27th Sep (JD) and two were at Balephetrish Hill, Tiree on 23rd Oct. An exceptionally large flock of c.70 **Yellowhammers** was reported at Lerags, Oban on 14th Sep (John McAvoy). This is the largest reported gathering of Yellowhammers in Argyll for over 20 years (PD). A small flock of ten at Balvicar, Seil on 29th Sep was more typical (Richard Wesley). A **Little Bunting** was found on the morning of 23rd Oct at Milton, east Tiree. Initially it was feeding along a track, but later feeding on grain put out for sparrows (JB). There is only one previous record in Argyll—a first-winter bird found dead at Skerryvore Lighthouse on or around 27 Sep 1985.

Other sightings

Two **Basking Sharks** were breaching offshore at Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree on 1st Aug (JB) and nine were counted from

the ferry off Coll on 9th Sep (JD). Many small groups of **Harbour Porpoises** seen from Otter Ferry in Loch Fyne (TC) and at least three were also off Furnace (Loch Fyne) on 5th Aug (PD). At least ten **Harbour Porpoises** seen in Argyll waters from the Uist ferry on 18th Aug included a school of at least six off Craignure (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie).

An **Otter** with two cubs was seen from the Port Charlotte to Portnahaven road on Islay on 14th Aug (Michal Sur).

A **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** was seen on the north Rinn of Islay on 25th Aug (Ian Brooke). Two late **Red Admiral** butterflies were seen at Torinturk Farm, Loch Nell, near Oban on 23rd Oct (SG/BA).

Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

Field trip to Loch Crinan and the Add Estuary—Sunday 23 september

Our outing to the Add Estuary started bright and early with Tom Callan having already notched up a quick 20 species before the arrival of myself and shortly afterwards, Robin Harvey, David Wood, Bill Allan and Ginny Hind. This helped to set out the tone for the next four hours with the six participants eager to find all the species on show in this beautiful estuarine setting. And, despite a poor forecast, we were in the main fortunate with the weather.

The other aim of the trip was to serve as an introduction to digiscoping, though it was apparent that most of the participants were already familiar with this now popular technique of bird photography. The use of both a digital still camera and a camcorder with a telescope were demonstrated, with the latter put to good use on Peregrine early on! This adult bird flew past us at Islandadd Bridge and landed in a large oak tree at Bellanoch, quickly being relocated by David Wood. Using the scope and camcorder combination a much higher magnification can be achieved and some shots were obtained at 120x—not great clarity, but a good record shot!

On the Add River, a Tufted Duck was spotted amongst some Red-breasted Mergansers, the Tufted being an unusual record for this area until David announced that this was probably the same individual that had joined his domestic flock of ducks at Bellanoch Basin over the last year or so!

A short walk along the canal past the bird hide gave us a good vantage point over the estuary with good views of the Wigeon and Teal flocks. On the Add, numbers of Wigeon can build up to several hundred later in the autumn with Teal not far behind. Several small parties of Goldfinch, Linnet and Greenfinch were evident as well as good numbers of Stonechats. However, attempts to photograph any of these were made difficult by the fairly strong wind shaking the cameras.

We then headed round towards Loch Crinan and were all fully prepared to walk out to the distant tide edge. However, as we arrived at the loch the wind had picked up, so we decided to change our tactics—'extreme birding' was called for—using our combined skills to scan for distant specs and turn them into meaningful species! These skills were put to good use and some 500m away six Knot and a Bar-tailed Godwit could be made out, as well as a couple of Common Terns over the loch. At this point Bill Allan and I spotted a very distant drake Greater Scaup on the sea which then flew across to the Add Estuary. We were able to relocate it a bit closer later on.

On our way to Crinan Ferry we spotted a couple of birds in the sky causing quite a commotion. At first they were thought to be two Sparrowhawks having a go at each other. However, on closer inspection one turned out to be a female Sparrowhawk chasing and attacking a Kestrel! The Sparrowhawk was quite persistent and kept at it for a few minutes. Altogether it proved to be a very good day for raptor sightings. A male and two 'ring-tail' Hen Harriers were seen quartering parts of the moss, and we all had great views of a female Merlin that flew low across the road in front of us.

A total of sixty species was felt to be very good for this short trip and we also managed some reasonable digiscoped photographs for our efforts.

Jim Dickson



Colour-ringed Twite at Machrihanish

During August–October, Twite are renowned locally by birders as the speciality passerine of Machrihanish Seabird & Wildlife Observatory. At this time, post-breeding flocks normally arrive from the north/north-west. However, the transitory flocks were somewhat delayed this autumn—a most unusual event since serious recording began almost 20 years ago (August 1989). There were virtually none in August, when usually 100+ would be off-passage!

So, where were they? Were they delayed on their southward trek in favour of an abundant food source somewhere to the north? For instance, during August, Paul Daw (Argyll Bird Recorder) reported 170 birds in the Ledaig Point/Connel Airfield area.

Finally, several flocks appeared in September, although

none lingered. Also, the size of flocks passing south at the Observatory this month were rather modest with only 40 on 6th, two on 11th, four on 13th, two on 24th, 14 on 26th and 34 on 28th. On 30th, a very restless 30 birds were bounding around the point all day. Then, on 1st October, an acceptable assemblage of 70 birds was present. This was followed next day by the long-awaited influx and a reasonable October peak of 140 (phew!).

A feeding station was promptly initiated and this attracted the entire flock. Birds were present daily throughout the month and most could be viewed down to a few metres from the Observatory. Twite find niger seed irresistible! Around 110 were still present at the end of October.

Colour-ringed migrants were found immediately, and by 17th October, four had been digiscoped (see box below).



Further details about the colour-ringed Twite

Bird 1. The right and (eventually) the left leg of this twitchy female were digiscoped when it appeared very briefly (for an hour or so) by the Observatory on 17th October. Ring number T934802. It was ringed as an adult female on 16th January 2007 at Sheskinmore Nature Reserve, near Ardara, County Donegal. It was retrapped there on 12th March 2007. This represents a movement of approximately 186km NNE (69 degrees).

Bird 2 (upper photo ©Eddie Maguire). This male was present daily by the observatory during 7th–23rd October. It was ringed at Light Hazzles Reservoir, near Whiteholme, Lancashire in January 2006 and was last seen there on 22nd February 2006. A movement of 308km. Additional information is pending.

Bird 3 (lower photo ©Eddie Maguire). This female was seen daily by the observatory during 2nd–8th October. It had been ringed on the Ribble Estuary, Lancashire in January 2007. Additional information is pending.

Bird 4. This bird was present for a few hours on 2nd October. It was ringed at Heysham, Lancashire in January 2005. Additional information is pending.

Three had been ringed in previous winters in north-west England. However, a really challenging and very brief passage visitor was a restless female that had been colour-ringed in west County Donegal during the early part of this year.

Being able to identify these birds highlighted the indisputable value of colour ringing to the ornithologist. The use of light plastic colour rings has revolutionised our ability to identify individual birds in the field. It also provided a classic example of the indispensable role of digiscoping to the modern birder!

There was actually a negative aspect to this remarkable Twite yarn. The October bill for niger seed was £60!

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to Pete Marsh and David Sowter (BTO Twite Coordinators) for their prompt replies to my e-mails with details of the birds from north-west England. Thanks also to Derek McLoughlan (Sligo University) for the comprehensive details of a challenging Eire bird (and all the others) that 'brightened up' my patch in October 2007.

Eddie Maguire, Warden, Machrihanish Seabird & Wildlife Observatory

A study of Eiders on the Isle of Cumbrae

The Isle of Cumbrae is a wonderful bird haven; the garden birds are a joy to watch (from the tiny wren to the majestic goldfinch) and the diversity of waders and seabirds is quite a sight. So when tasked to undertake an MSc dissertation there, I knew where my eyes were looking. Developing the project from scratch I picked my favourite seabird and decided upon studying its feeding and diving behaviour. Throughout this six month study I would spend many a morning sitting upon a beach at 5:30am watching charismatic Eiders dive and forage through their daily routine, and learn much about their ecology. It was a journey of science and discovery in the traditional fashion, braving the Scottish summer whilst watching birds in their natural habitat; uninhibited and undisturbed.

Taking my four study areas—Ballochmartin Bay in the east, Eerie Port and Skate Point in the west and Portachur Point on the southern tip of the island—I set up a schedule for watching duck behaviour during four periods of the day and at two tidal states. Early morning was from dawn until 9am, morning 9–12, afternoon 12–5, and evening 5–dusk. Tidal states were high and low. Every six minutes within a 30min study period, a visual count was made of ducks present in the site, plus a note of how many were feeding, cleaning and sitting on the water or ashore. These 30min periods were undertaken and replicated at each time of day and each tidal state, at each site, until a reasonable amount of data had been collected for statistical analysis. The results I shall cover in a while, but for now let us reflect on the observations.

When the weather was nice, the study periods were a joy. Sitting silently on a beach with a pair of binoculars, simply counting ducks and noting their behaviour is not exactly backbreaking. My only complaint being the necessary early waking time. And even when the weather wasn't quite so welcoming (this is Scotland, after all), hunching up inside waterproofs and fleeces isn't exactly my idea of torture. On more than one occasion, I found myself forgiving the early rises, as I sat on the beach at Portachur Point and witnessed the sun rise. Not so much the sun itself, but the way the mist would burn away across the Clyde, revealing Goatfell on Arran in all its sun-kissed glory. The ducks were reduced to a bonus sighting as I watched the Gannets

sweep up from the Ailsa Craig into the Kyles of Bute and the Fairlie Channel, heading for their feeding grounds. Once I even managed to persuade (coerce) my friend Michael into accompanying me on one such early start—and even he, a landlubber through and through—could appreciate the beauty of the occasion. I learnt a lesson—never ask Michael to count Eiders diving. I left him for ten minutes and he came up with an A4 page of detailed notes, just what I needed—of two Shags he had spotted. "Aren't they ducks?", he asks, innocently.

Eiders feed on mussels *Mytilus edulis*. They target primarily the juvenile mussels of around 10–20mm in length called spat, though occasionally they pick off larger adult mussels. A typical dive will involve the characteristic splash as the duck unceremoniously submerges, unlike the more fluidic dive of the Cormorant. Then the duck folds its wings and descends to the sea bed using only its webbed feet. It removes its prey from the substrate and then, passively, returns to the surface. I proposed that it may be possible to exploit this passive return on mussel farms, where Eiders are a growing problem. The spat is the critical stage of mussel growth and Eiders have been known to devastate whole seasons' worth of cultivated mussels, even bringing about the economical collapse of the farm itself (Ross & Furness 2000). It may be possible to construct a wide baffle (of several metres diameter) that would be suspended underwater by a foot or so, and from the centre of which the spats would be suspended. This way the ducks would have to dive down, dive under the baffle and travel horizontally for several metres before getting to the mussels. Returning to the surface after feeding would be a difficult process, involving horizontal swimming before ascent. This was one of the suggestions made in the 'future work' section of my dissertation.

A further observation was made during the course of the study regarding the shore activity of Eiders. When they are not feeding, the ducks tend to gather in groups on the shore to sleep and preen. They tend to do this when the mussel beds are exposed at low tide. One question is why don't they feed on mussels out of the water? I searched, but could find no answer in the literature, so I opened the question to my imagination. The ducks are visibly uncomfortable out of water, possibly because their feet are webbed, and much of the beach around the mussel beds is

Eider study on the Isle of Cumbrae



Photos ©Andrew Kyle



The author (left) and two of his study subjects (above)

coated with razor sharp barnacles. They are not quite as maladapted for terrestrial life as grebes and divers, whose legs are so far back that standing upright is almost impossible. It is possible the ducks are unable to remove the mussels from the substrate using their neck muscles alone as mussel byssus threads are “stronger than human muscle tendons” (Smeathers & Vincent 1979). Instead, the ducks rely upon their positive buoyancy in the water to pull the spat from the rocks. It may be possible to test this theory using Newton balances and duck models—more future work suggested in my dissertation!

Thinking laterally about the behaviour of the ducks was an ideal way to spend the free time during the observation periods. I tried listening to music, but I’ve always considered the lapping of waves to be more therapeutic—unless it’s the new Status Quo album, but by the time it was released in September I had completed the data collection!

The statistics obtained from the study (approximately two months’ worth of data) and the accompanying analysis showed a few significant differences between the four sites with regards to duck abundance and activity, but nothing out of the ordinary. Importantly, there was no significant variation in numbers of ducks at individual sites. But, there were significant differences in duck numbers among sites.

Fewer ducks were seen feeding at Skate Point than the other sites. Skate Point, incidentally, showed a higher average number of ducks ashore than the other sites. It is possible that Skate Point is utilised less as a feeding area and more as a loafing site where the ducks flock ashore during the night or during their ‘recovery period’ after a feeding bout. As mussels are composed of shell matter, which is difficult to breakdown, birds need to undergo periods of recovery, to overcome the “digestive bottleneck” effect (Ross, B.P., pers. com.). So, to do this they appear to group together in large offshore rafts or come ashore.

When I began the study in May 2007 I was unaware of recent numbers of Eiders in the Clyde area. I found some

literature on their numbers from 2004 and initially was expecting to see in the region of 600 ducks a day while circumnavigating the island. I could quite easily say I was not seeing anywhere near that number. Further delving into the internet, I then discovered Eiders are currently experiencing a decline of unknown cause. The most recent numbers for Cumbrae were almost half what they were in 2004. My single regret is that I didn’t tie the study into researching this decline, for perhaps the data I was collecting would have contributed to understanding the cause of this phenomenon.

Nevertheless, I consider my summer of duck studies to be a summer well spent; after all, its not often one gets to sit on a beach and watch ducks as part of work. Okay, so we didn’t have the best summer weather wise; but it was great weather for ducks!

Andrew Kyle

References

- Ross, B.P. & Furness, R.W. 2000. *Minimising the impact of Eiders on mussel farms*. University of Glasgow, Glasgow.
- Smeathers, J.E. & Vincent, J.F.V. 1979. Mechanical properties of mussel byssus threads. *Journal of Molluscan Studies* 45:219-230.

Lost & found

A pair of reading glasses in a silver cigar-shaped case was left at the Cairnbaan Hotel after the autumn meeting.

Please contact David Wood (01546 830272) if these belong to you.

Autumn 2007 on Tiree

After the feast of scarce and rare birds on Tiree in autumn 2006 (*Eider* 80:14), it seemed unlikely that autumn 2007 would be as eventful on the island. It certainly felt that way in August, as the month failed to produce any real surprises in contrast to late August 2006, which saw the arrival to the island of several very rare birds such as Pacific Golden Plover, American Golden Plover and Booted Warbler. Scarcer migrants in August 2007 included a Wood Sandpiper at Loch a' Phuill (20th), an early Lesser Whitethroat at Hynish (23rd-25th) and a couple of Grey Wagtails in the last week. Coverage of the island was good, with several visiting birders out scouring the island for migrants most weeks, but clearly, weather patterns were not conducive to producing rare migrants.

September soon changed all that! First up was a splendid juvenile **Spotted Redshank** at Loch a' Phuill (6th) found by Jim Dickson, who then went on to find a juvenile **Scarlet Rosefinch** at Hynish the next day. An extended run of westerlies brought a trio of juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** to the Loch a' Phuill machair on 9th, with a record flock of four there the next day. It appeared that these had moved on, but on 19th, there was a total of six birds together at Loch a' Phuill, whilst two more were watched by Bill Allan and Anne-Lise Dickie at the same time at Balevullin—a total of eight birds on the island, the largest group yet recorded in Scotland! The westerlies also brought some good seabird passage off the north coast of the island with five **Great Shearwaters** and a Grey Phalarope on 10th, and two Great Shearwaters, two Sabine's Gulls and a Long-tailed Skua on 14th, along with good numbers of Sooty Shearwaters, Leach's Petrels and Pomarine Skuas. A fine juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** at Vaul (17th-22nd) managed to arrive despite the lack of easterly winds and may have been the same bird that was seen a few days earlier further north on the island of Barra. The winds finally switched to the east at the end of the month and there was a rush of migrant passerines on 28th. At Balephuill, these included the first 14 Redwings, six NW-type Common Redpolls, two Garden Warblers, a Blackcap and a Willow Warbler, as well as an early Fieldfare at Carnan Mor (30th) and best of all, a **Barred Warbler** at Balephuill (30th).

October continued where September left off with a ridge of high pressure permitting the arrival of easterly migrants including a Lesser Whitethroat at Baugh and a Dunnock at Balephuill (both on 1st). One bird I have always hoped to see on Tiree is a Yellow-browed Warbler. These boldly marked migrants turn up regularly on Barra and the Uists in the autumn, so why not on Tiree as well? A penetrating "tsee-oo-eet!" call from our neighbour's willows at Balephuill on the morning of 2nd October pronounced the arrival of my first **Yellow-browed Warbler** on Tiree. This gem of a bird remained for two days and most surprisingly was followed by a highly vocal but duller bird at the same location on 11th, another very bright individual there on 14th-15th and a fourth bird briefly on 27th. A little like waiting



'Greenland' Wheatear (above) at The Reef on 7th October and American Golden Plover (below) at Sandaig on 5th-6th October.
photos ©John Bowler



for buses, I had seen none on Tiree in seven years and then four turned up almost at once! These birds were not alone, as the variable winds also brought in yet another Lesser Whitethroat, the third of the autumn, this time to Balephuill on 12th, as well as another Garden Warbler (2nd), a steady stream of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs including the first *tristis*-type bird at Balephuill from 22nd, plus three more Grey Wagtails and four Dunnocks. The best bird however, was a **Little Bunting** at Milton (23rd), which fed on grain put out for House Sparrows by an island resident – this was just the second record of this rare migrant for Argyll. The bird seemed to be accustomed to feeding on the grain and perhaps had been present for a while, al-

The Eider

though sadly it was gone the next day. Up to seven NW-type Common Redpolls hung around the Balephuill area until 20th and these were joined by up to seven Lesser Redpolls (1st-12th) and then followed on 22nd by up to three Mealy-type Common Redpolls, which remained for the rest of the month, providing some nice comparisons of this tricky group. Also at Balephuill, a female Brambling put in a rare appearance on 27th and was followed by a smart male bird there on 30th-31st. Even more unusual for Tíree, was the arrival of two Siskins at Balephuill (13th). These were the first I have seen perched on the island (as opposed to calling in flight as they pass overhead) and proved to be the harbinger of a large influx of these tiny finches, apparently from Scandinavia, which affected all of the Western Isles and even spread to Iceland later in the month. On Tíree, groups of up to 20 Siskins were scattered across the machairs and in-bye land feeding on the seed-heads of thistles and knapweed. Birds were seen daily until the end of the month and this unprecedented influx must have involved in excess of 100 birds. Waders were not to be outdone however, as visiting RSPB Scientist Jeremy Wilson found a smart adult **American Golden Plover** at Sandaig (5th-6th) in amongst a large flock of European Golden Plovers—the third adult to grace Tíree in the last four autumns. A late **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was a surprise find on the machair near Loch a' Phuill on 7th—either one of the eight birds that had remained from September or a new arrival. Up to two Curlew Sandpipers frequented Gott Bay for much of the month, whilst two juvenile Little Stints graced Loch a' Phuill (6th-10th) and were joined on occasion by a late Ruff, with two more Ruffs seen at Loch

Riaghain and Ruaig (23rd-24th). The seas were relatively calm in October, given the absence of westerly gales, although strong north-west winds on 16th and 17th brought another Sabine's Gull close inshore off Aird (17th) as well as six Grey Phalaropes, a Pomarine Skua (17th) and a good passage of Great Northern Divers.

Early November was also dominated by strong westerly-based winds, although the hoped-for American passerine did not materialise this autumn—one day! Instead, and despite the winds, small numbers of continental migrants continued to appear with odd influxes of Chiffchaffs until 11th and Blackcaps until 18th. Three Mealy Redpolls hung on at Balephuill until 3rd and small groups of Siskins remained in the first week of the month, with the last one noted on 19th. Arctic Terns continued to be seen in the generally mild conditions, and a juvenile at Traigh Bhi (4th) was the latest ever recorded here. Strong north-west winds in the first week brought two Little Auks off Aird (5th and 7th) together with a very late Great Skua (5th) and two Pomarine Skuas (8th) plus a further passage of Great Northern Divers. Early November also saw a small influx of Woodcocks, as well as up to five Scaup, an adult Glaucous x Herring Gull hybrid at Balemartine (4th) and the first Iceland Gull at Sandaig (13th)—sure signs that winter was on its way.

All told, Tíree enjoyed another exciting and unpredictable autumn passage in 2007 and we can but wait and see what future autumns will hold in store.

John Bowler

A new angle on angling

In June 1985 I ringed a three-week-old Common Gull chick at a colony in Loch Etive. Just over twenty years later I found it freshly dead at the same colony, entangled in fishing line and with a hook down its throat. Its chicks probably also died as a consequence. This article is dedicated to its memory and to the thousands of other birds of many species that suffer slow, painful deaths caused by anglers.

You don't often see the fisherlouts, but you can usually tell where they've been. Their haunts are littered with packaging from fishing weights, line, hooks and bait, as well as empty cigarette packs, beer cans and picnic meals. Perhaps they can't read the message on each pack about disposal of litter (although, somehow, I can't imagine them taking their litter home). But I really cannot forgive them for the way they discard their baited hooks.

If a farmer, vet or scientist were to inflict such lingering torture and death on birds and mammals in his care, he would go to jail. But we allow fisherfolk (what a charming, homely name for dispensers of pain and death) to do it as much as they please. They go home scot-free, ignorant and uncaring. The birds fly off with a hook through the bill or down the throat and with fishing line trailing behind them, sometimes many metres. This soon becomes entangled

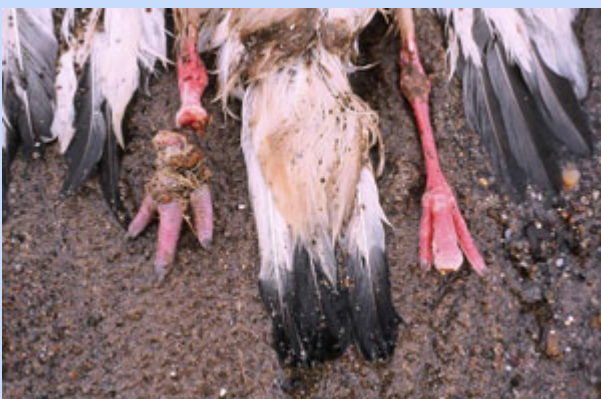
somewhere.

Think about a bird with a hook down its throat or through its bill (as sensitive as our lips) on a line entangled in the vegetation. Every gust of wind, every slight pull as it tries to free itself, drives the hook in or tightens the line around its body and limbs, increasing the pain. This goes on for several days until it dies.

Often, I find them at breeding colonies where they have died surrounded by other birds, perhaps their own mate and young. The corpses are then eaten and more birds become entangled. Some hooks are triple, with three barbed hooks on a single shaft. At one gull colony I found three birds all dead together on one of these, one on each hook. The second and third birds must have tried to eat the first.

Yes, you will say—but the fisherlouts are the lunatic fringe. Surely most fishermen (and anglers are almost always men—women have more sense) are responsible and caring people.

In summer 2006 I saw a middle-aged man, a respectable holidaymaker, take a fishing rod from his car near the Dunstaffnage Arms at Connel, near Oban. He cast his line from



Some examples of the suffering and death caused by discarded fishing gear



Photo 1 (upper left). An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull found alive but immobilised by one hook down its throat attached to another hook through the webbing of its foot. Saulmore shore, Dunstaffnage, Oban. It died from the stress involved in hook removal.

Photo 2 (upper right). An adult Herring Gull carrying lead weight of 0.14 kg. It must have had great difficulty and pain trying to fly with this dangling from a hook through its nostril. Found dead at the Abbot Isles colony, Loch Etive.

Photo 3 (lower left). An Oystercatcher found dead with fishing line wound tightly around its almost severed leg. Spurn Head, Yorks.

All photos ©Clive Craik

the rocky shore. It was high tide. Within a minute his hook was firmly snagged in the seaweed. He pulled harder and harder, trying to free it. The line broke. He attached a new hook and bait. It happened again. Not learning from experience, he did it again. And once more. Eventually he walked disconsolately back to his car and packed his fishing gear away, muttering to his wife who had been standing nearby. They drove off, leaving four baited hooks waiting to be exposed at low tide a few hours later.

You often see people fishing from that lay-by. Do they all repeat this remarkable performance? Two days later, a few hundred metres along the shore, I found a dying Lesser Black-backed Gull with a hook down its throat, its head immobilised by the line leading to another hook through the web of its foot, hopelessly entangled in line around its wings and legs (Photo 1). It was impossible to save it. Of course, I can't prove that the man I saw was the cause of its death—there are just too many fishermen doing the same thing!

If the birds are alive, I try to remove the hook and, if they can fly, I release them. Ten or fifteen years ago you could do this easily by cutting the barbed tip off with a small pair of metal cutters, provided that the hook was not too far

down the throat. But nowadays hooks are made of much stronger metal and I find it impossible to cut them. The bird is usually doomed. That's progress!

I find about ten such birds a year, meaning that many thousands must die in this way in the British Isles alone. As long as hook and line are used to catch fish, large numbers of birds will continue to die slowly and painfully (Photos 1 & 2). Sometimes, fishing line alone is enough to kill (Photo 3), sometimes just small fragments of fishing net.

Perhaps it's time to take a fresh look at the whole "sport" of angling. We should think how our grandchildren will view the things we do, just as we now look back with incredulity at bear-baiting, cock-fighting and fox-hunting (not to mention keel-hauling and the burning of witches). How, after all, can you justify putting a sharp hook into a highly-evolved, sentient vertebrate animal with brain and nervous system that are simpler but not basically different from those of a human? All just as a hobby, a pastime, something we do for pleasure! The mouth and lips of a fish are as sensitive and as nerve-rich as our own, although some fishermen may insist that fishes "feel no pain". Anglers sometimes remove the hook from their catch and put the fish back in the water. It may then die from shock or injury, as visits to popular angling spots sometimes reveal.

The Eider

What is the point of this cruel and destructive hobby? Can we expect that angling will, sooner or later, go the way of fox-hunting? Only then will the unimaginable suffering that anglers cause, proved by these pictures, become a thing of the past.

Clive Craik

[On first reading Clive's article, my first reaction was to ask him to tone it down a bit, as it does express a strong personal view, which will upset many anglers. But, I decided against it. Fishing debris does result in significant bird mortality, and also considerably more suffering than most

other causes of death. I suspect Clive has more experience than anyone else in Scotland of the harm done by discarded fishing gear. And, it's not just seabirds that suffer! I've had three adult Tawny Owls that died lingering deaths after being caught up on fishing hooks and line, probably the result of bathing at the edge of streams, which they frequently do in hot weather. One of these events also resulted in a brood of young owls starving to death. And of course, the casualties we find are just the tip of the iceberg! So, do consider what Clive has said. I'd be happy to print any of your views on this subject in the next issue of the *Eider*. Editor]

Review: Birds of Tiree and Coll

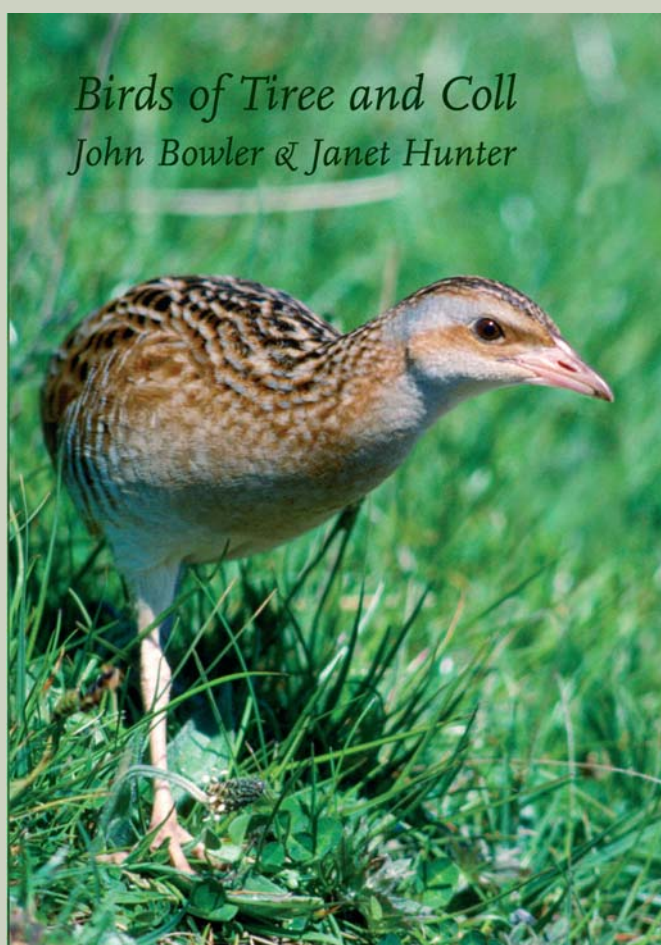
For their size, the islands of Tiree and Coll have a wide diversity of natural habitats which, coupled with an intimate mix of traditional and generally low-intensity land-uses together with relative geographic isolation, results in a fascinatingly complex avifauna. Indeed, a considerable extent of both islands is subject to a number of national and international protected area designations in recognition of their importance for bird conservation.

John Bowler and Janet Hunter, who have lived on Tiree since 2001, have produced a long-needed review of the birds of the islands, packing an extraordinary wealth of information into a beautifully produced softback book. The quality of publication is superb, with pages attractively laid out. The very considerable care and attention to detail of the design team is apparent throughout. Two sections of colour photographs illustrate not only some several rarities seen on the islands in recent years, but also a range of the typical species and their habitats.

Whilst the bulk of the book consists of species accounts, a series of short introductory chapters introduce the islands, their geography and habitats, a fascinating summary of local folklore related to birds, a seasonal guide to the islands birds, as well as a short guide to key locations (with maps) and vantage points for birdwatching. A final section briefly and very selectively lists some of the non-avian fauna of the islands, as well as a combined check-list and index.

John Busby has provided many striking black and white line drawings which illustrate the species accounts, with typically one or two per page. These really bring the book alive with birds shown in a wide range of behaviours and against typical backgrounds.

The species accounts are full and descriptive, gathering together a wealth of recent and



Book details

John Bowler & Janet Hunter (2007). *The Birds of Tiree and Coll*. Published by Paircwood Publishing. ISBN: 1-905601-01-8. Softback, 208 pages, 16 colour plates, five black and white photographs, seven maps and numerous line drawings by John Busby. £9.00 (postage and packing £2.50). To order a copy please send a cheque for £11.50 payable to "Tiree & Coll birdbook" to Janet Hunter, Pairc na Coille, Balephuill, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, PA77 6UE. For any other queries contact Janet Hunter at janetmhunter@clara.co.uk.

unpublished observations, including much input from many RSPB staff and other professional fieldworkers, who have either visited or have been resident on the islands in recent decades. The species accounts summarise seasonal abundance as well as reviewing historic status. My personal preference would have been rather more to state original sources for many of the historic observations (although there is a full reference list at the back of the book). Likewise, as the authors seek suggestions for future editions in their introduction, I felt that a historical overview of ornithology on the islands would be very useful, to give a context to better understand many of the species accounts. Such a review need not be extensive, but it would provide a means of better understanding the relevant literature and its limitations (especially changing bird-watching 'effort' over the last century).

My one grumble is with a small number of stylised graphs showing population trends of a few species over time. The axes of these graphs are labelled just at their beginning and end (e.g. 1930s—2000s) leaving the reader to guess

(or refer repeatedly to the text to work out the dates of the population assessments. With properly labelled axes so easy to produce, it is hard to understand why proper labelling was not adopted. But this is a minor quibble!

The species accounts are eminently browsable and bring together very many stories that relate to changing land-use on the islands. It has been a massive task to bring all this information together, but—again for a future edition—it would be fascinating to try and synthesise a review of these changes and how they have been influenced by past and current land-uses. Perhaps, this could be another project, which might include other Hebridean islands? Certainly for Coll and Tiree, the data are now assembled to make it possible.

I would highly recommend this book to all those with any interest in these islands. It is a production of the highest quality and is an absolute delight to read. John and Janet are to be heartily congratulated on their massive undertaking.

David A. Stroud

Seil Natural History Group[(SNHG)

The SNHG held its inaugural meeting on Wednesday 14th November 2007 and was well attended. The group aims to study, conserve and promote awareness of natural history on the Isle of Seil and surrounding area.

We are organising field trips on the Isle of Seil and to nearby locations (see website), inviting local and national speakers on all aspects of natural history and are co-operating with conservation organisations to preserve and maintain Seil's biodiversity. We believe that by understanding the local ecology we will promote awareness and help protect the wonderful natural world we have on our doorstep.

Indoor meetings are held in Seil Island Hall, Elle-nabeich between 19.30hrs and 21.30hrs. The next meetings are Wednesday 12th December 2007, Wednesday 9th January 2008, and on the second Tuesday in every month thereafter (see table opposite).

Field trips will all start at 09.30hrs on Saturdays and will normally run for half a day (see website). The first four field trips are all on Seil with a common meeting place at Balvicar Stores. I am happy to provide further information about these. Otherwise, please see the SNHG website below for more up-to-date information.

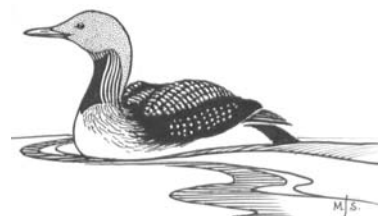
Monthly meetings of the SNHG 2007-2008

Date	Speaker	Topic
Wed 12 Dec		A journey to the Treshnish Isles
Wed 9 Jan	Marina Colthart	Biodiversity
Tues 12 Feb	Jacqui Kaye	BTO Bird Atlas
Tues 11 Mar	John Simpson	The Bean Goose
Tues 8 Apr	Billy MacInnes	Life at sea
Tues 13 May	Peter Hardy	Digital photography
Tues 10 Jun	Simon Jones	Beaver reintroduction
Tues 8 Jul	John Howe	Antarctic expedition
Tues 12 Aug	David Palmar	Sanda Island
Tues 9 Sep	Brian & Sandy Coppins	Lichens
Tues 14 Oct	David Ainsley	Sealife adventures
Tues 11 Nov	Pat Batty	Dragonflies

Richard Wesley

E-mail: richardwesley@btintetnet.com

SNHG website: <http://seilnature.spaces.live.com/>



The observatory was open daily from Easter to mid November. Yet again, visitor numbers increased to just over 3,000. The main attractions for most folks are Otters, Grey and Common Seals, and above all, Bottle-nosed Dolphins. Regular shows from our fast growing digital image collection and digiscoping demonstrations proved very popular to visitors, including school children. A wildlife presenter for Swedish Radio recorded a programme about the observatory in June. Our most distinguished 'tourist' this year was the well-respected and first-rate ornithologist, and ever jovial, Brian Little MBE (see photo opposite).

At times, the birds were first-rate too! Resolute daily observations produced many records of scarce species, such as Balearic Shearwaters (8), several movements of Leach's Petrels, Bean Goose, American Wigeon, King Eider, Little Egret, Hobby, Grey Phalaropes (2), Pomarine Skuas (4), Roseate Terns (3), Whiskered Tern, Little Ringed Plover, Sabine's Gulls (3) Little Gulls (3) and Little Auks (8). This selection shows the value of working an elite local patch. Many of the above species are rare in Argyll, and some records 'subject to acceptance'. Where relevant, all descriptions have been submitted.

Without doubt, the recurrence of many scarce birds in the vicinity of this low-lying promontory is chiefly linked to the advantageous topography to the north (a long, 17km south-leading coastline), weather conditions and relentless observations!

The following notes cover the period spring to mid November 2007 (plus a second instalment to appear in the march *Eider*) and include all highlights at the observatory along with significant records from The Laggan and a few other locations in south Kintyre. A full account of the year's events and many photos will soon be available on the observatory website:

www.machrihanishbirds.org.uk

February

On 6th, a first-winter drake **American Wigeon** was found at the mouth of Campbeltown Loch (south bank) in Kildalloig Bay (see photo, *Eider* 81:16). It remained faithful to the area, along with c.100 **Eurasian Wigeon** to 15th March. Amazingly, this individual was at the same place where the author had identified the second accepted Argyll record way back in February 1992! An **Iceland Gull** (first-winter) was at Machrihanish village on 9th (see photo opposite).

March

Iceland Gulls were very confiding at Campbeltown Harbour with up to four birds (all first-winter) on 9th. Also present was a first-winter **Glaucous Gull**. **Purple Sandpipers** were regular, but peaked at only 16 on 6th. An early **Sandwich Tern**, and apparently the first



Top: From left to right—Eddie Maguire, Warden of Machrihanish, Steve Petty and Brian Little MBE. Bottom: First-winter Iceland Gull, Campbeltown, February 2007. Both photos ©Eddie Maguire



migrant to arrive in Argyll this year, flew south past the observatory at 10.45hrs on 15th. The first reasonable seawatch of the year (6hrs) was on 18th (08.00-14.00hrs). The wind was north-west force 8-10 accompanied by frequent hail squalls, but 'bright n' breezy' later. A total of seven **Leach's Petrels** (first this year) flew south along with two **Iceland Gulls** (both first-winter), a **Little Gull** (first-winter and the first this year) and 46 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (all adults). The first **Northern Wheatear**, a male, on 24th, was quite a bit later than in previous years. **White Wagtails** were dragging their heels a bit—the first three birds were not recorded until 31st.

April

On 1st, an **Osprey** flew north over Saddell, then the first **Sand Martin** arrived at Langa Quarry on 2nd. The first **Swallow** was at the same quarry on 6th. Divers were still mainly in transition plumage with only a few **Red-throated** in full breeding plumage. The first **Arctic Skuas** were two dark-morph adults flying south on 9th. Single migrant **Merlins** were seen going north over the

sea on 10th and 19th and the first Whimbrels (three) appeared on 17th. Later arrivals included Common Sandpipers (three) on 23rd and an Arctic Tern on 26th. White Wagtails were a daily feature at the observatory throughout the month and peaked at 25 (off-passage) on 24th.

May

Iceland Gulls still lingered at Campbeltown Harbour, with a single on 1st and two on 8th (first-winter/summer birds). At the observatory, **Great Northern Divers** peaked at 22 on 1st-2nd. Warm hazy weather prevailed during 2nd-4th grounding many **Whimbrels** around the observatory, and there was also a good strong offshore passage to the north. About 300 birds were logged over this period with a peak of 160+ on 3rd. On the same day a migrant **Corn Crake** was flushed at Westparkfergus, The Laggan. At Machrihanish, **Sandwich Terns** (five regularly) along with **White Wagtails** (peak of 30+ on 4th) were the daily specialities.

The first **Swifts** were screaming over Campbeltown on 7th with 15 on 13th. An early brood of nine **Shelduck**, just hatched, were at the 'Stinky Hole', Campbeltown Loch, on 10th. On 11th, an adult **Roseate Tern** was heard calling and located just off the observatory with a loose group of foraging **Sandwich** (six) **Arctic** (20) and **Common Terns** (two). All birds drifted slowly to the south. The **Roseate Tern** is one of the scarcest seabirds in the UK and a rarity in Argyll. During early May the fine weather allowed migrant **White Wagtails** to move north rapidly (en-route for Iceland). Unusually, none were seen after 12th when three were present. A striking vagrant was a surprisingly late adult drake **King Eider** that flew in from the west at 17.00hrs on 12th with a small group of **Common Eiders** (see photo on front page of *Eider* 81). They all touched down at the Marine Research Laboratory outflow adjacent to the observatory, where the Arctic beauty was promptly digiscoped over 150 times! What a stunner! A single dark-morph **Arctic Skua** flew south on 13th. On 16th, 22 **Common Scoter** flew south and a pair of **Shelduck** appeared with one duckling (just hatched) then another pair was seen with a day old brood of three on 18th. The first **Eider** duckling appeared on 20th. A total of nine **Arctic Skuas** (all dark-morph adults) flew south on 25th in a north-west force 5 wind (bright n' breezy) and eight **Sandwich Terns** along with four **Whimbrels** were present. On 30th, ten **Sandwich Terns** were on the shore, a **Whimbrel** flew north and a redpoll (first this year) was calling over the point. A **Whimbrel**, two **Dunlins** and three **Sanderlings** were present on 31st and four **Twite** were by the observatory.

A further 17 new **Raven** nest sites were located this spring bringing the total of known breeding pairs in Kintyre to 64. Illegal human meddling was evident at one site where five very young chicks were found dead below a unique, but very accessible nest built on an observation tower at Campbeltown Airport (Defence Estates). This species is a valued, daily visitor to the observatory and several birds are now enthusiastically accepting food scraps—much to the consternation of the local Herring Gulls!

June

The adult drake **King Eider** that arrived at the Observatory on 12th May (for a couple of hours) has been quite mobile on the west coast of Kintyre. After this initial, brief appearance, it was found at Rhunahaorine Point (Tayinloan) on 24th May, then surprisingly, it reappeared at the observatory/Machrihanish Bay for a six-day stay during 7th-12th June. During its stopover this stunning duck was never seen to dive for food but preferred to up-end in shallow water. Its main food appeared to be *Zostera* (eel-grass). It was seen well and photographed by many people including Mike Taylor, Gary Sutherland, Kath Wilson and Bill Allan. This reappearance constitutes the fifth observatory occurrence. To cut an interesting long story short, it was back at Rhunahaorine Point on 6th July! (Tom Charman, SNH Kintyre Officer).

On 8th, a **Great Northern Diver** in breeding plumage was offshore and was seen frequently to 25th. On the same day a first-summer **Glaucous Gull** was on the rocks off Machrihanish village, at least 33 **Sanderlings** were in the bay, three **Whimbrels** flew south and another pair of **Shelduck** appeared with a brood of 12! An **Osprey** was reported fishing on the Carradale Water, at Dippen, on 12th. The peak **Eider** duckling count this year was 44 on 11th June (57 on 16th June last year) and **Shelduck** peaked at only 21 on 18th June (37 ducklings on 16th June last year).

Sandwich Terns are a summer speciality at Machrihanish, usually in small numbers, but this year, an unusual passage occurred on 13th when 26 birds were logged flying north in 4hrs and a further 33 flew north in 2hrs on 16th (in a NNE wind). Late **Sanderlings** (14) were off-passage on this date. **Dunlins** (20), **Sanderlings** (2), a **Teal** and an **Arctic Skua** were seen on 13th, and on 14th a **Red Knot** was flying north—a rare visitor in June. A small pod of **Bottlenose Dolphins** (3) were racing/leaping northwards on this date. An adult dark-morph **Arctic Skua** that was hunting offshore and resting by the observatory on 19th-20th was found dead on 21st. Second-summer (red-billed) **Arctic Terns** (one on 18th-19th and three on 22nd) and a second-summer **Common Tern** (on 22nd) put in an appearance by the tern colony at Big Scone Island, Machrihanish. About 15 pairs of **Arctic** and four pairs of **Common Terns** bred here and although up to 14 **Sandwich Terns** were summering/mating/displaying there was no evidence of breeding. Many of these birds have white foreheads and speckled black/white heads and may be second-summer immatures.

On 28th, a WSW force 4-5 wind with poor visibility and showers produced a flock of **Red-breasted Mergansers** (12) flying north plus additional records of **Arctic Skuas**. Three birds arrived, including a dark-morph adult, a pale-morph adult and a pale second-summer bird. The inshore presence of **Storm Petrels** at the observatory is very often associated with poor visibility and on this date 12 flew south in 2hrs early in the afternoon, and a further 35 flew south in 3hrs on 30th (afternoon again and in poor visibility).

The usual June southerly passage of fresh-looking juvenile **Curlews** (exodus of Scottish bred birds?) was evident from 11th (8). The largest group was 20 flying south on 28th. On

The Eider

this date a **Collared Dove** and a juvenile **Twite** were close by the observatory, and 14 **Sandwich Terns** appeared by the Common/Arctic Tern colony at Big Scone island.

A dog **Otter**, who was a specialist at catching quite large wrasse, was a frequent visitor throughout the month. During the warm, dry, sunny periods (remember!), **Painted Lady** butterflies were abundant, and proved to be the best year ever at the observatory for this species.

July

The bird of the year was a splendid adult **Whiskered Tern** that appeared briefly on 9th (for an hour or so) by the Machrihanish Common/Arctic Tern colony at Big Scone island. A detailed description of this marsh tern has already been submitted to British Birds Rarities Committee, and if accepted, will be a first for Argyll. Next day (10th), two **Roseate Terns** were found and one was photographed. The rather poor image of this species still shows clearly the distinctive black bill, very pale upperparts and a neat dark leading edge on the outer primaries. Rather short tail streamers indicated that this bird was probably still immature. This is our second recent record of this cracking, rare seabird. The July birds arrived along with a small influx of **Common** (18+), **Arctic** (45+) and **Sandwich Terns** (39+).

Another striking rarity put in an all too brief appearance at the Observatory—a **Little Ringed Plover**. This is only the second occurrence of this wader in Argyll. The first sighting involved a single bird at the Mull of Oa, Islay, way back in May 1983.

A **Corn Crane** was heard calling from 11th to at least 25th by many local folk (Brian Cook *et al.*) near 'the doctors road' at the top of The Roding, Hillside Farm, Campbeltown. It must be more than 25 years since *Crex crex* last kept the residents awake there! Apparently it could be heard from the Argyll Bowling Club/Millknowe on a calm night (Jim Lang)!

Summering **Great Northern Divers** have been rather elusive although three first-summer birds did show well in the bay on 4th and 5th. **Red-throated Divers** were seen frequently (ones and twos) and the first sign of any passage was three flying south on 27th.

To this time, there have been no outstanding movements of **Manx Shearwater**. The best daily count was only 450 flying south in 3hrs from 06.00hrs on 19th. During periods of poor visibility there were many sightings, and also a few light southerly movements of **Storm Petrels** with seven in 3hrs (pm) on 10th, seven in 1hr (pm) on 14th, ten in 1hr (am) on 26th and 14 in 8hrs on 27th.

Northern Gannets were often plunge diving around the point, and up to 150 were counted on occasions, especially when the wind was onshore. The highest southerly movement during the month was 330 in 4hrs from 06.00hrs on 26th. The vast majority of birds passing south have very noticeable 'distended rear ends' (stomachs full of fish) and are obviously adults en-route to feed hungry chicks at the Ailsa colony in the Firth of Clyde. However, most birds travelling north or arriving to forage offshore are so much slimmer looking (cigar-shaped) and very intent on looking downward (foraging mode) producing that classic con-

corde body shape. Around 90% of the birds that pass offshore are adults. Two grey juvenile **Gannets** sitting on the sea on 27th was an early surprise and one was still present next day.

There was a big influx of **Shags** around Machrihanish from 15th (500+ in the bay) then, on 19th, 450 flew north in 3hrs from 06.00hrs. These movements probably included birds from colonies on the Mull of Kintyre cliffs, the Sanda Islands off Southend (Kintyre) and Rathlin Island (Northern Ireland).

Very late broods (just hatched) of **Common Eider**, appeared on 3rd (brood of five) and 7th (brood of two). A female **Teal** flew south on 19th and a few **Common Scoters** flew south on 12th (3) and 24th (1).

Raptors included a male **Hen Harrier** on 1st and 'ringtails' on 25th and 27th, a **Red Kite** reported by a visitor (Rena Moore) near Claonaig on 19th and an early **Merlin** on 22nd. A yearling female **Sparrowhawk** was regularly ambushing young **Starlings** by the observatory and at least three juvenile **Peregrines** (seen together) hunted successfully around Machrihanish all month.

Visible migration of waders was, as usual, a feature of July; many species were recorded flying south past the observatory including **Golden Plovers** (maximum of ten on 11th), **Black-tailed Godwits** (two on 16th and 12 on 21st), **Redshanks** (maximum of 30 on 21st), **Greenshanks** (total of eight on five dates from 12th with three on 19th), **Ruddy Turnstones** (maximum of six on 19th), **Sanderlings** (maximum of 60 on 18th), a few **Red Knots** (six on 19th), a **Bar-tailed Godwit** (19th), **Whimbrels** (total of 21 on 11 dates from 12th with a maximum of six on 24th), loads of **Common Sandpipers** (including a compact flock of ten on 27th) and **Dunlins** (maximum of 50 on 17th). On 25th, a migrant **Common Sandpiper** appeared by Malcolm Cook's garden ponds at Limecraigs, Campbeltown.

Southerly movements of **Oystercatchers** (many will be migrants from Iceland) were well underway. The best early morning passage was 450 flying south in 3hrs from 06.00hrs on 19th.

July was outstanding for **Arctic Skuas** with peaks of five birds on 2nd and 7th. In all, around 30 birds (17 dark morphs and 13 pale morphs) were logged including a pair of pale adults that lingered for four days (14th–17th) and, surprisingly, were calling and displaying. Some off-passage birds were immature. Pale, second-summer types (2) were seen on 5th–6th, and then a dark second or third summer type was present during 11th–12th. Apart from obvious adults, ageing this species accurately is rather tricky! An early **Great Skua** flew south on 3rd followed by further singles on 27th, 28th and 30th.

There was an atypical influx of adult **Common Terns** (40) during June–early July and some have certainly bred rather late. In addition, around 60 were off-passage by the tern colony on 27th along with 25 **Arctic Terns**, including two first-summer birds.

More **Sandwich Terns** were present than previously re-



A Red-throated diver in full summer plumage—taking a break ashore!
©Eddie Maguire

corded during summer. A flock of 45 was roosting by Big Scone on 5th and the first juvenile on 9th was the earliest ever.

A few **Puffins** appeared as usual with singles on many dates and three flying north on 19th. An oiled bird came ashore on 8th, and sadly, died overnight. Many golfers reported **Short-eared Owls** quartering the links at Machrihanish.

Grey Wagtails have been heard flying south very high over the observatory with a max of three on 26th. On this date the first two juvenile **White Wagtails** arrived on the point. A sheep carcase near the Observatory on 30th attracted 11 **Ravens**, loads of **Hooded Crows**, a **Buzzard** and an adult **Great Black-backed Gull**. As usual, locally-bred juvenile **Starlings** gathered to feed on the shore by the observatory. These numbered about 120 on 29th and over 200 were 'balling' over Drumlemble village on same day.

August

One of the principal events this month was the arrival of the first **Balearic Shearwater** at 10.07hrs on 5th. This was followed by an unanticipated total of three birds on 18th (10.30hrs, 10.45hrs and 12.03hrs) and single birds at 08.40hrs on 19th and at 15.26hrs on 30th (Eddie Maguire & John McGlynn). All were flying south in the company of Manx Shearwaters. The RSPB has launched the first-ever survey of this species in UK waters. It is now accepted that with a global population that amounts to fewer than 2,000 pairs, this seabird is critically endangered. Experts believe that increasing numbers may be visiting British waters in late summer-early autumn, possibly as a result of climatic change. This species nests only on five islands in the western Mediterranean, including Mallorca and Ibiza, where they face threats from cats and rats, and from increasing tourist development. Since 1992 (excluding this year), there have been 62 autumn records (Aug–Nov) at the ob-

servatory involving 105 birds. So far this autumn, we have an additional four August records involving six birds—roll on September!

The first **Sooty Shearwaters** (two singles) arrived offshore on 30th, a bright and very breezy day. They were found well out to the west in a force 7 north-west wind at 12.10hrs and 12.20hrs.

Single **Red-throated Divers** were on the sea on 5th and 12th and further singles flew south on 13th and 31st. A **Great Northern Diver** (first-summer) was regular in the bay during 1st–6th.

Fulmars are usually rather scarce in August, so the meagre monthly total of only 30 with a peak of ten on 31st was not surprising. **Manx Shearwaters** finally appeared in good numbers on 6th in a north-west force 6-8 with accompanying squalls—1,800 flew south in 8hrs (no Balearic Shearwaters appeared on this date!). There were a few other notable movements including 1,000 in 1hr on 30th (and a Balearic Shearwater).

A noteworthy total of 440 **Storm Petrels** were logged flying south on nine dates during the many periods with poor visibility/rain. The best movement noted was 169 in 8hrs on 6th in a north-west wind force 5-6 with occasional light showers (visibility ranged from one to 12 miles). Another good total of 90 was logged during a 5hrs seawatch on 18th (again in poor visibility with rain). On 31st, a north-west gale with accompanying squalls and very poor visibility brought **Leach's Petrels** near to the shore, when a total of 17 passed south in about 2hrs from 13.26hrs.

On 25th at 18.30hrs, Eddie Maguire and Saunders Girvan watched two highflying adult **Northern Gannets** depart from Campbeltown Loch and fly hastily to the west over the Kinloch Green. It was a fine evening with a WSW wind force 3 and the visibility was very good. The birds soon disappeared to the west and it looked as though they purposely went on to cross The Laggan for Machrihanish Bay and the Atlantic.

Six **Common Scoters** flew south on 5th and four flew north on 31st. Two drake **Scaup** (first this autumn) flew south on 6th. The first drake **Eider** seen in flight after completion of wing moult was on 31st. The largest gathering of **Eiders** was only 43 birds on 28th including seven adult drakes in eclipse plumage.

Three **Golden Eagles** were displaying high over the uplands to the south of the observatory on 20th. Two **Ospreys** flew north, rigidly following the coastline, on 21st and then a single bird flew south over the Lossit uplands on 28th. **Hen Harriers** were noted on many dates over the uplands and **Sparrowhawks**, **Peregrines** (a local pair with three juveniles) and **Merlins** were all seen regularly hunting along the shore and over the adjacent farmlands. Locally, **Buzzard** numbers are high, and on fine days, up to 15 have been watched soaring/foraging over the estate and Ballygroggan farmlands.

Eddie Maguire, Warden

[This article will be continued in the March 2008 *Eider*]

Articles for the March issue of *The Eider* should with the Editor before the 25th February 2008
See the box opposite for more information



Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2007/2008)

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

Vice Chairman: Position vacant

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

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

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

Committee: Richard Allan (Oban), Roger Broad (Killearn), Danielle Clark-De Bisschop (Colintraive), Paul Daw (Minard), Ian Hopkins (Bute), Steve Petty (Tighnabruaich) Tom Callan (Otter Ferry) Richard Wesley (Balvicar) and David Wood (Bellanoch)

Editor of the Argyll Bird Report: Tom Callan, Corra, Otter Ferry, Tighnabruaich, Argyll PA21 2DH (phone 01700 821212)

Editor of the Eider: Steve Petty (contact details on page 2)

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

Argyll Bird Recorder

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

BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

Argyll South, Bute & Gigha: Richard Allan
phone 01852 300 359
e-mail richardallan@compuserve.com)

Argyll North – Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern: Sue Dewar
phone 01680 812594
e-mail sue.dewar@btconnect.com

Islay, Jura & Colonsay: John Armitage
phone 01496 860396
e-mail jsa@ornquest.plus.com

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

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and 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 weeks 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 human population of Argyll is relatively small and widely dispersed. The club hosts two one-day meetings each year, in spring and autumn. The venue of the spring meeting is rotated between different towns, including Dunoon, Oban and Lochgilphead. The autumn meeting/AGM is held in a convenient central location, usually near Lochgilphead. The club organises field trips for members. It publishes the annual *Argyll Bird Report*. Additional or past copies can be purchased from the Treasurer. Your annual subscription entitles you to one copy of the *Argyll Bird Report*, four issues of the *Eider* and free admission to the two indoor meetings. New members are always welcome, whether you live in Argyll or not. Membership categories and rates are:

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

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