

The Eider is the  
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of the Argyll Bird Club

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# The Eider

June 2002



## Editorial

Nigel has found it increasingly difficult to find time to edit *The Eider*. I have agreed to take over the reins temporarily, until another suitable candidate makes him or herself known. We are all greatly indebted to Nigel for the effort and time that he has devoted to the editorial role over last few years.

I want *The Eider* to be the tool by which members can influence the future direction of the Argyll Bird Club, and make it a worthwhile publication for all who read it.

Thus, I am encouraging

you all to make *The Eider* the voice of the club. While I am happy to collate and edit members' contributions, its success will depend all of you.

After this issue I will try my best to get the Eider published as near to the 15th day of the following months:

- September
- December
- March
- June

To give me sufficient time to produce issues on

these dates, the deadline for articles, letters, notices etc for inclusion in *The Eider* will be the 1st day of each publication month. Needless to say, contributions before these cutoff dates would be very much appreciated.

Ideally, contributions should be sent to me by e-mail as file attachments (Microsoft Word or rich text format files). However, do not let this put you off, as I am willing to have contributions typed - all you have to do is write one!

Steve Petty

### Editor

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## Spring Meeting

A successful meeting was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> April at the Royal Marine Hotel, Hunters Quay, Dunoon.

John Mitchell opened the meeting with a super account of Loch Lomond's natural history, interspersed with numerous interesting bird observations. John's recent book also provided a topic of conversation (Mitchell, J. 2001. *Loch Lomondside: gateway to the Western Highlands of Scotland*. London: Harper Collins - available in softback and hardback versions).

This was followed by a fascinating talk by Roy

Dennis about ospreys, including an account of their recent breeding success in England and results tracking birds to their winter quarters in Africa with satellite radio tags. Just before lunch, Tristan ap Rheinallt kindly stood in for Paul Daw to give an update of recent bird sightings.

Brian Little opened the afternoon session with a stunning account of a trip to Antarctica. Chris Waltho followed with an update of his work on eiders in the Clyde estuary. This included a fascinating account of their

colonisation of the area. It's hard to imagine that eiders have not always been part of the birdlife of the area.

Tristan gave the final talk; an update about the Birds of Argyll, which he is editing. This is an enormous task, but progress is encouraging. The book will provide a much-needed update of the history of birds in Argyll. The last account was published in 1892 by . Harvie-Brown, J. A. & Buckley, T. E. (*A vertebrate fauna of Argyll and the Inner Hebrides*. Edinburgh: David Douglas).

## Diary Date

The autumn meeting will take place in the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead on Saturday 2 November

A full programme will appear in the next Eider (September)

## Help for black grouse

### Black grouse Officer

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Sandra Maclean was appointed Black Grouse Officer for Argyll and Bute this April in a project funded by RSPB, Scottish Power, SNH, and the Forestry Commission.

The initial task of the project was to establish the Black Grouse population size and distribution south of the Crinan Canal. Countless early mornings by Sandra, Forest Enterprise Rangers and other insomniacs gave a total of around (a few more records still to be handed in) sixty five

lekking males from 35leks. This gives an unhealthy average of just under two birds per lek, but more positively there seems a good distribution over the area.

If you know of a Black Grouse lek, or have made spring /summer sightings of these birds please contact me (see box for details).

Historical records are also wanted to give a clearer picture of the decline in Argyll. Next springs survey work will begin in April

and it is hoped a volunteer group will be trained up to assist with this. If you are interested in getting involved and fancy a good view of one of the most bizarre British bird spectacles to be had, then get in touch. Sandra's work is now focussed on drawing up management plans for key Black Grouse sites and securing funding to get this management underway. Black Grouse workshops will also be held for farmers and foresters to advise on management and funding opportunities.

## Something more exotic!

Mike Gear visited northern and western Costa Rica during 2-17 March 2002. The close proximity of many wonderful birds and animals had to be top of the list for most in the group. Here are a few highlights from Mike:

- A male resplendent quetzal posing only a few feet from us while its mate called gently close by.
- A fight of roseate spoonbills dropping into a pool to roost.
- The first pairs of scarlet macaws high above us as they flew over the rainforest calling loudly.
- Black skimmers sitting on a mud bank waiting for the tide to drop.

- A lek of collared manakins doing their incredible wing-cracking, electric display flights around us
- An Agami heron secretly fishing in the gloom under dense foliage above a stream.
- Several Tamandua anteaters snuffling up their food.
- Or a spider monkey demonstrating the use of a prehensile tail in modern gymnastics.

For others it was a slightly bigger picture:

- All six species of toucans seen during the trip.

- Mixed flocks of American wood warblers.
- Brightly-coloured tanagers flitting around fruiting trees or feeding stations.
- The challenge of identifying 33 species of hummingbirds or 46 species of tyrant flycatchers
- Huge kettles of hawks and vultures migrating to their breeding grounds in North America.

And, for everyone the thrill of being in true rainforest, with water dripping from the vast trees after a shower, was almost indescribable.

*Note: extracts from Mike's diary of the trip will appear in the next Eider*

## Argyll Bird Report

Argyll Bird Report vol. 16 [with Systematic List of records for year 2000] has been severely delayed but it is now expected in mid-June. Corrected proofs were sent to the printers at the start of May. I apologise to members for its late appearance. In the Editorial of the volume that is about to appear, I give fuller details of why it is so

late, so I won't repeat them here. One of the main reasons was the lateness with which some bird records for 2000 were sent to Paul Daw (County Recorder). In that Editorial I also make suggestions for overcoming this problem, mainly a request that all 2001 records should be sent to Paul "by midsummer 2002". When I wrote

this, we expected the Bird Report in May, but further delays at the printers (beyond our control) perhaps make this unrealistic now. Please, therefore, make sure that all 2001 records reach Paul as soon as possible – and certainly by the end of July!

*Clive Craik*

| <i>Species</i>      | <i>Locality</i>                 | <i>Date</i>            |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Corn Crake          | Friesland, Coll                 | 18 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Corn Crake          | Tiree Airport                   | 22 <sup>nd</sup> April |
| Corn Crake          | Iona, Mull                      | 28 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Common Sandpiper    | Lochdon, Mull                   | 29 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Common Sandpiper    | Hynish, Tiree                   | 20 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Common Tern         | Hynish Bay, Tiree               | 25 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Common Tern         | Sound of Mull                   | 5 <sup>th</sup> May    |
| Arctic Tern         | Mull                            | 9 <sup>th</sup> May    |
| Little Tern         | The Reef, Tiree                 | 19 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Little Tern         | Crossapol Bay, Coll             | 30 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Cuckoo              | Ledmore, Mull                   | 7 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| Cuckoo              | Strone & Tayvallich, Mid-Argyll | 19 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Swift               | Gigha, Kintyre                  | 15 <sup>th</sup> May   |
| Swift               | Craignure, Mull                 | 19 <sup>th</sup> May   |
| Sand Martin         | Ardyne Point, nr. Dunoon        | 26 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Sand Martin         | Gorten, Mull                    | 29 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Sand Martin         | Gruinart, Islay                 | 1 <sup>st</sup> April  |
| Swallow             | Balephetrish, Tiree             | 27 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Swallow             | Baugh, Tiree                    | 28 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Swallow             | Lochdon, Mull                   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> April  |
| Swallow             | Loch Gorm, Islay                | 3 <sup>rd</sup> April  |
| Swallow             | Appin, North Argyll             | 8 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| House Martin        | Kilchurn Castle (L. Awe)        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> April  |
| House Martin        | Kilninver, Mid-Argyll           | 6 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| House Martin        | Killiechronan, Mull             | 22 <sup>nd</sup> April |
| Tree pipit          | Lochdon, Mull                   | 19 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Tree Pipit          | Keils, Mid-Argyll               | 24 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Wheatear            | Kilchoman, Islay                | 16 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Wheatear            | Gribun, Mull                    | 17 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Wheatear            | Tiree (50+)                     | 1 <sup>st</sup> April  |
| Whinchat            | Croig, Mull                     | 4 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| Common Redstart     | Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll         | 9 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| Common Redstart     | Mull                            | 11 <sup>th</sup> May   |
| Fieldfare           | Kilberry, Mid-Argyll            | 29 <sup>th</sup> Mar   |
| Redwing             | Loch Buie, Mull                 | 9 <sup>th</sup> May    |
| Grasshopper Warbler | Appin, North Argyll             | 26 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Grasshopper Warbler | Dervaig, Mull                   | 28 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Sedge Warbler       | Loch Bhasapol, Tiree            | 30 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Sedge Warbler       | Glen Forsa & Lochdon, Mull      | 4 <sup>th</sup> May    |
| Common Whitethroat  | Ford, Mid-Argyll                | 6 <sup>th</sup> May    |
| Common Whitethroat  | Fishnish, Mull                  | 6 <sup>th</sup> May    |
| Garden Warbler      | Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll           | 27 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Blackcap            | Kilmory, Mid-Argyll             | 10 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Blackcap            | Mull                            | 6 <sup>th</sup> May    |
| Wood Warbler        | Loch Ba, Mull                   | 30 <sup>th</sup> April |
| Common Chiffchaff   | Kilmory, Lochgilphead, M/A      | 27 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Common Chiffchaff   | Grasspoint, Mull                | 30 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Common Chiffchaff   | Kiloran, Colonsay               | 30 <sup>th</sup> March |
| Willow Warbler      | Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll         | 4 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| Willow Warbler      | Gruinart, Islay                 | 6 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| Willow Warbler      | Craignish, Mid-Argyll           | 6 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| Willow Warbler      | Lochdon, Mull                   | 9 <sup>th</sup> April  |
| Spotted Flycatcher  | Torloisk House, Mull            | 13 <sup>th</sup> May   |
| Pied Flycatcher     | Ardura, Mull                    | 25 <sup>th</sup> May   |
| Snow Bunting        | Gribun, Mull                    | 15 <sup>th</sup> March |

## Recent Reports from Paul Daw February—April 2002

As this is the edition of the Eider in which arrival dates of spring migrants are reported I have produced a table (opposite) of first records received so that you can see at a glance the earliest dates submitted so far. I have given, where available, the first dates for each of the recording areas. If any of you have further information please let me know. It is good to have an overall picture of the main arrival periods for each species as well as unusually early individuals. Once again apologies for anything of note that has been omitted.

Rare or unusual birds during this period have included a Gyr Falcon (I hope someone sends in a description this time!), a Green-winged Teal and a Hoopoe on Islay and a King eider on Mull and in the Oban area. The Snowy Egret made surprise re-appearance in Argyll. After a spell on Arran it was reported at Lower Auchalick (S. of Otter Ferry) on 29<sup>th</sup> Mar, at the head of Loch Shira (near Inveraray) on 30<sup>th</sup> Mar, in Lachlan Bay (opposite Minard) on 1<sup>st</sup> Apr, in Loch Gair where it was seen standing opposite wooden figure of a White Stork and roosted overnight in garden of club member Alan McCulloch, on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and at Port Anne on 3<sup>rd</sup> Apr. It was back at Balvicar on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr.

If there are any 2001 Argyll bird records still out there that have not been submitted please let me have them as soon as possible. It helps enormously if you follow the guidance on submitting records that appeared in the recent issue of the Eider - briefly; species, number of individuals, specific place and date.

### Divers to Herons

19 Black-throated Divers were counted in Loch Caolisport on 27<sup>th</sup> Feb while 15 Great Northern Divers were off Pennycross, Mull on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb with 12 in Loch Scridain, Mull on 8<sup>th</sup> April. Eight Slavonian Grebe were counted at the head of Loch na Keal, Mull on 12<sup>th</sup> March.

### Wildfowl

On Mull 25 Whooper Swans were noted flying north at Loch Don on 5<sup>th</sup> April and a flock of 47 Greenland White-fronted Geese were counted at Fidden on 17<sup>th</sup> February with 71 at Ardtun on 14<sup>th</sup> March. The introduced resident flock of Snow Geese numbered 24 at Crossapol, Coll on 30<sup>th</sup> April. A Green-winged Teal was still present at Gruinart on 31<sup>st</sup> March. Unusually there have been two records of pairs of Gargany; at St Mary's Loch, Loch Awe on 10<sup>th</sup>

## Recent reports (continued)

and at Canal Loch on Coll on 16<sup>th</sup> May. At Loch nan Gad (nr Clachan, Kintyre) 6 Common Pochard were present on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. Ten Long-tailed Ducks in Hynish Bay, Tiree on 1<sup>st</sup> Mar included 5 displaying drakes and 8 were in the Sound of Gigha on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb together with 6 Velvet Scoters. The large congregation of Common Goldeneyes in Loch Caolisport totalled 165 on 5<sup>th</sup> Feb. A King Eider drake seen in Tobermory Bay on 27<sup>th</sup> Mar was probably the same individual as was later seen at Dunstaffnage Bay Mid-Argyll on 3<sup>rd</sup> April and subsequently in the Oban Bay area.

### Raptors to Gamebirds

An Osprey flying up Mull 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Two Merlins at An Fhaodhail, Tiree on 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar combined forces to catch a Skylark, while a third bird at Heylipol on the same day had it's prey snatched by a Peregrine! A Gyr Falcon appeared on Islay on 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb and was present until the first few days in April.

A Water Rail caught by a cat at The Glebe, Tiree on 4<sup>th</sup> Mar died subsequently. Rails and Crakes on Tiree (and possibly elsewhere) seem particularly prone to being prey to cats. Loch Nell (nr. Oban) Mid-Argyll was an unusual location for 3 Common Coots 4<sup>th</sup> Feb.

### Waders

A flock of 76 migrating European Golden Plover were at Totronald, Coll on 18<sup>th</sup> April with 350+ at Fidden, Mull on 13<sup>th</sup> April and a single Eurasian Dotterel was seen on Ben More, Mull on 29<sup>th</sup> April. 8<sup>th</sup> April was an early date for two Ruffs seen at Loch Gruinart. A flock of 130 Sanderling were counted at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 1<sup>st</sup> Mar and the wintering Black-tailed Godwit on Tiree re-appeared at Sorobaidh Bay on 3<sup>rd</sup> Mar. Passage Black-tailed Godwits were recorded at Loch na Keal, Mull (8 on 23<sup>rd</sup> April). Jack Snipe were reported from Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll on 19<sup>th</sup> March and Garvard, Colonsay on 31<sup>st</sup> Mar. The first passage Whimbrel was seen over the Reef Tiree on 18<sup>th</sup> April and at Loch na Cille, Mid-Argyll 6 were noted on 27<sup>th</sup> April.

### Skuas to Woodpeckers

Great Skuas were noted at Loch Spelve, Mull on 5<sup>th</sup> April and off Hynish Tiree on 20<sup>th</sup> April. A 1<sup>st</sup> winter Iceland Gull was at Knockvologan, Mull on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb and 2 were seen together at Gruline on the following day. Other records of this species included 3 (included an adult) at Oban on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb and single 2<sup>nd</sup> winters at Loch Gilp on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb, Fidden, Mull on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and Loch Caolisport on 29<sup>th</sup> April, a smart adult bird at Loch a' Phuill Tiree on 8<sup>th</sup> April and at least 6 individuals on Islay. A 2<sup>nd</sup> winter Glaucous Gull was found at Rhuna-haorine Point on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb and two individuals were reported on Islay during the period. Passage Sandwich Terns were reported at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 24<sup>th</sup> April in Sound of Gigha and West Loch Tarbert on 27<sup>th</sup> April. Our usual annual Hoopoe was seen this year near the River Laggan on Islay on 12<sup>th</sup> April.

## Stop Press

Greater Yellowlegs and Little Egret seen on Islay in early May, Great White Egret and Green-winged Teal on Tiree and the Snowy Egret still doing the rounds with sightings at Loch Ruel, Loch Fyne and back at Balvicar in May and early June.

### Passerines

Passage White Wagtails were at Bowmore, Islay on 27<sup>th</sup> March and Strathcoil, Mull on 7<sup>th</sup> May. Passage of Fieldfares and Redwings was noted in early Mar on Tiree and 350 Fieldfares and 400 Redwings were counted in Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll on 4<sup>th</sup> March. A male Ring Ouzel was seen at Uisken, Mull on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. A Firecrest was present near Keills, Loch Sween from at least 6<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Mar and was seen by several observers as well as being photographed. A Black-billed Magpie was reported from Pottie, Mull the second record for the island in recent months and one was at Baravullin, N Argyll on 7<sup>th</sup> April. Common Linnets were still flocking in late April when 35 were counted together at Ardpatrik (West Loch Tarbert) Mid-Argyll on 27<sup>th</sup>. There have been two reports of unusually plumaged Chaffinches in Cowal recently. Firstly a largely white bird but with mostly black wings and tail at Kilfinan during the winter and secondly an almost totally pink bird but which had dark wing feathers with pink centres. The tail was also dark with pink centres. It was seen at bird feeders at Otter Ferry (per Tom Callan). Must be something they are putting in the bird feed there?!

*Paul Daw*

## Urgent

### 2001 Bird Records

Please ensure that all your 2001 bird record reach Paul Daw before 31st July

A characteristic group of seabird species breed on islets in the sealochs and sounds of the West Highlands. It consists of cormorant, shag, black-headed gull, herring gull, great black-backed gull, lesser black-backed gull, common tern, arctic tern, black guillemot, oystercatcher, eider, red-breasted merganser and mute swan. Since 1985, many such islets within a kilometre or two of the mainland have lost all or most of their breeding seabirds. In most cases these losses have taken place after whole-colony breeding failures caused by annual mink predation of eggs and chicks. Some adult birds have moved to other islands, but overall numbers of several gull and tern species have decreased. More obviously, several entire sealochs or sounds are now empty of seabirds every summer. This is a serious loss of biodiversity. Some important tern colonies have been affected, including the largest colony of common terns in the British Isles.

Eventually it is hoped to restore breeding seabirds to sites of former colonies, but the main purpose of the mink-seabird project is to encourage normal breeding in the most important surviving colonies, so preventing them from disappearing. This is being achieved by removing mink from the immediate area of each colony early in the year, before the birds return to breed. As described in previous reports, this has been successful every year since work began in 1995. Several important tern colonies, including the largest, have been prevented from declining and disappearing after earlier attacks by mink, and most of the protected sites have now been kept free of mink for several years. Protecting islands in this way allows the full range of sealoch species to breed normally and to maintain their presence. Thus, area biodiversity is restored and maintained.

In 2001, the seventh successive year of this project, mink were removed from 27 sites in 14 sealochs and sounds. Seabirds bred normally at 25 of these sites. At the other two, gulls and terns failed to raise young because of severe predation. At one site in Loch Ailort this was definitely by mink and possibly by mink at the other site in West Loch Tarbert. Thus, the work achieved its aims at 25 of the 27 sites, but mink removal was inadequate at one or two sites. In 2001, breeding numbers of common terns at Loch Melfort were at a record level, as were number of common gulls at Kilmarnog in Loch Etive and at Loch Ailort. All three sites have now been protected from mink for several years. Comparisons of productivity (number of young raised to flying per breeding pair) between protected and unprotected colonies showed that mink removal doubled average productivity for several species.

*Clive Craik*

Note: this is the summary from a more detailed report about this important work by Clive—editor

## Subscription Reminder

Please send any outstanding subscriptions for 2002 to Pam Staley (address below)

Individual £10

Family £15

Please make cheques payable to "Argyll Bird Club"

**Please send contribution for the next Eider to the editor before 1st September**

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