

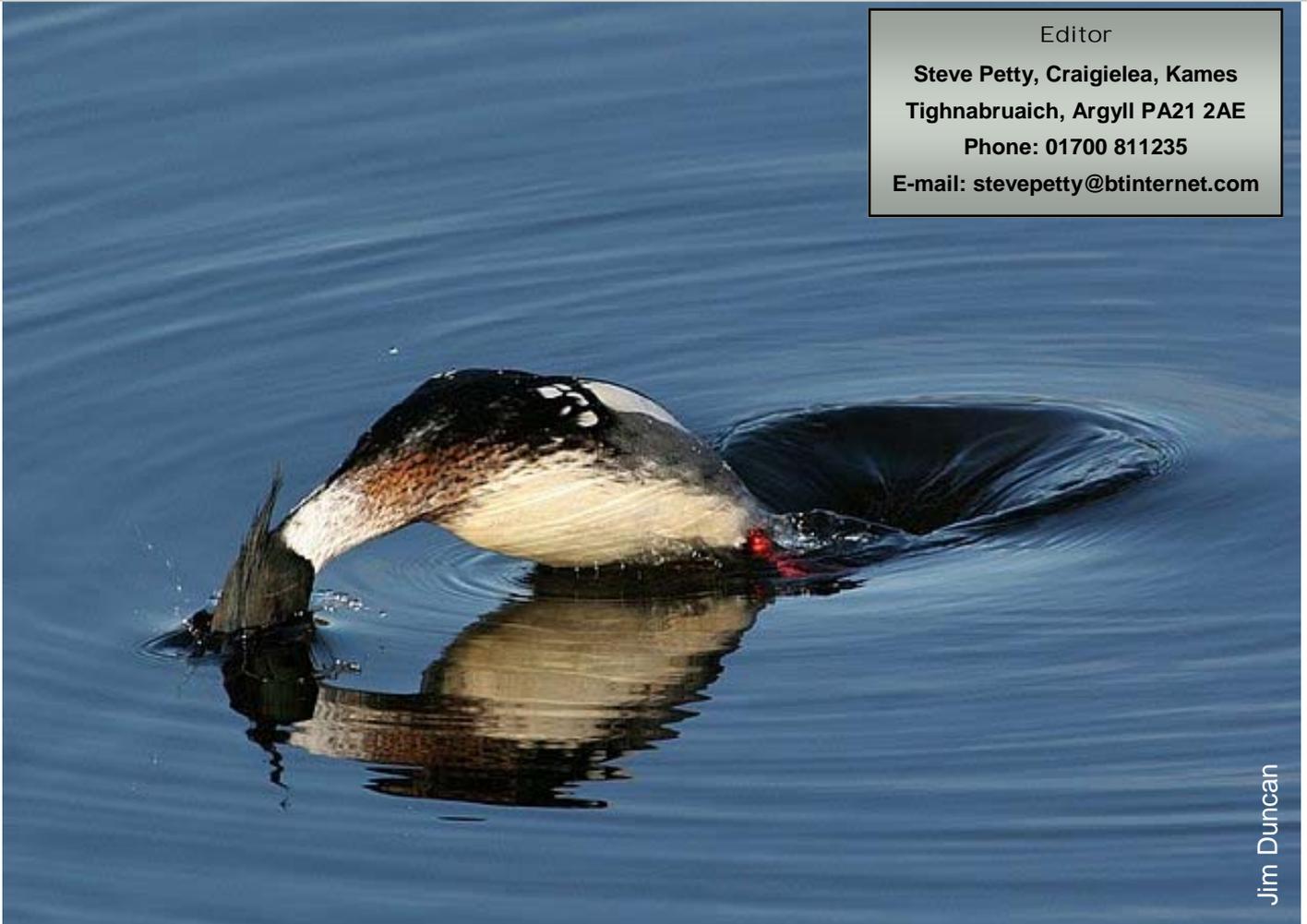
The Eider

June 2006

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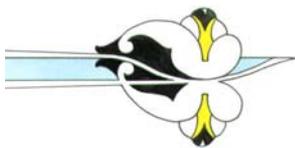
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Jim Duncan

This superb photograph of a Red-breasted Merganser about to dive was taken by Jim Duncan. It highlights the skill and split second timing required to capture something other than the classic 'text-book pose'.



Information about the ABC meetings in Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007 can be found on the back page

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

Editorial

What a different spring to last year! Apart from being late, the superb spell of weather in late April early May did much to lift both human and avian spirits. Another bonus, which many birds will benefit from later in the year, has been the prolific flowering of many tree species. I hope you noticed! This is in contrast to the dearth of tree seed food for birds last winter.

Early on, profuse catkin crops on Birch, Hazel and Alder should result in plenty of Birch seed for species such as Lesser Redpolls and Siskins in July and August, and Alder seed for the same species during autumn and winter. Hazel nuts are utilised by a number of birds that are able to open their hard shells, including Great Spotted Woodpecker and Great Tit. By late April-early May, Ash trees were in full

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bloom. This species tends to produce good seed crops every two years. During autumn and winter, Bullfinches are notable consumers of ash-keys. In Argyll, Oak trees produce bumper acorn crops infrequently, so it will be interesting to see if the copious flowering in mid-May (see photo) is reflected in the size of the acorn crop. If so, many species will benefit later in the year, such as Jay, Wood Pigeon and Pheasant. Holly has flowered well too, and at the time of writing, Rowans appear to have far more flower buds than last year, which hopefully will lead to a good berry crop in early autumn.

By mid-May you might have thought (or hoped!) some mysterious disease was attacking Sitka Spruce, as their crowns turned brown, particularly along forest edges with a southerly aspect. In fact, this was due to vast numbers of male flowers. If you had walked along forest tracks at this time, you might have noticed a yellow film over many puddles, formed by pollen! Female flowers are sited higher in the tree than male flowers, in the top few whorls, and are much less conspicuous at this time, but gradually become far more noticeable as the fertilised flowers grow. Cones develop rapidly and will reach full size by July. Heavy cone crops occur every 2-5 years, and while this year's crop will not be amongst the heaviest, it will be substantially more than we've experienced for a few years.

A number of other coniferous species have also flowered well, including Larch, whose cones are one of the first to mature. So, expect to see Common Crossbills moving into our forests during June/July, when they will start by eating Larch seeds and then move onto Sitka Spruce during autumn and winter. The crossbill is one of the few birds capable of breeding in the autumn. In northern Britain, such events are linked to large cone crops on Sitka Spruce. So, watch out for singing males, and later on fledged broods!

Finally, our local Blackthorn patch produced the best crop of flowers in over ten years. So, here's hoping the autumn brings a glut of sloes—a bonus for those who love their fruity gin!!

Many thanks to Dawn Balmer, Tom Callan, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Jim Duncan, Sharon MacKinnon, Eddie Maguire, David Merrie, Linda Petty (proof reading), Morag Rea, Margaret Stalley, Ian Teesdale, Michael Thomas and Mel Tonkins for their contributions to this issue.



Oak in bloom
 (Photo: Steve Petty)

Birds of Argyll—photographs wanted

Substantial progress has been made with the book over the last six months. First drafts of all the species accounts have now been written and these are in the process of being edited. We are hoping to publish the book early next year. It will contain around 400 pages and include colour photographs.

We are keen to include as many colour photos as possible. Initially, photographers who have kindly provided photographs for the *Eider* have been contacted, but there must be many others with suitable photographs. So, if you have any, or know of someone who does, please contact me as soon as possible, as we hope to make the

final selection during the summer.

Digital images should be of the highest quality and should not have been edited, resampled or compressed. The preferred image format is RAW or TIF, but other formats are acceptable. Ideally they should have been taken in Argyll, but elsewhere in Scotland might be acceptable, depending on the photograph. They need not be close-ups of individual birds. Images of mixed species groups in typical Argyll habitats are welcome. We are keen to include photos showing birds in identifiable Argyll settings; for example auks nesting on Harp Rock on Lunga (Treshnish); wintering geese or waders

with a backdrop of crofts on Tiree or wintering gulls in Oban harbour. The club will acknowledge contributing photographers either in the introduction to the book or alongside each photo. Photographs submitted for consideration should not have been published or have been submitted for publishing elsewhere.

Understandably, photographers tend to take photos of scarce or rare birds. What we are lacking most are interesting, good quality photographs of some of our commonest birds.

Editor

BirdTrack update

After some initial reservations about BirdTrack, arising from poor communications by the BTO with local birders, I am now happy to recommend the system to club members for compiling their bird records. However, you need a computer and internet connection.

The facility enabling recorders to extract local data is now working well and I am downloading Argyll records from BirdTrack at regular intervals. This requires a certain amount of editing to make it compatible with our own database, but provided that you use the 1km location level (we do not recommend 10km square loca-

tions as these are too vague to be really useful), the information is quite usable. The BTO have also provided a local validation facility that enables me to identify local rarities when submitted.

Initially BirdTrack had a problem with coping with records 'at sea', so that birds seen from ferries could not be accommodated. However, since I alerted Dawn Balmer to this problem, the BTO have been working on a solution, which should be available shortly.

If you are already using the Argyll Bird Club's standard (Excel) computer record format, by all means continue with this.

The same applies to all of you who send in records by phone, e-mail or on paper.

Please do not feel excluded if you do not have access to a computer! I will make use of the BirdTrack data when compiling Recent Reports for the Eider and for the Argyll Bird Report.

The following article explains the BirdTrack concept in more detail. If you have any questions about how the system works in relation to Argyll, please contact me. For further information on BirdTrack, see the website (details below).

Paul Daw – Argyll Bird Recorder

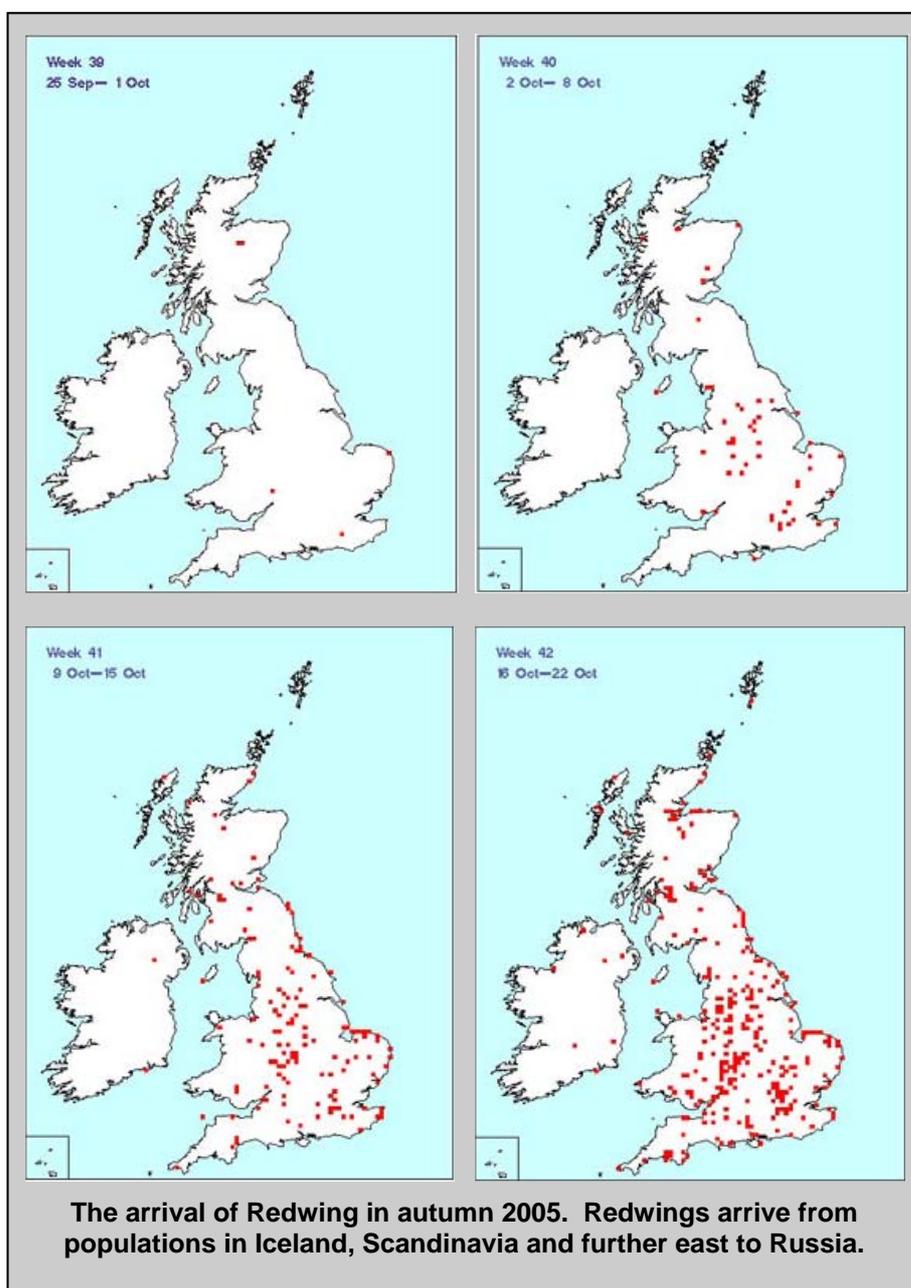
BirdTrack—making more use of your birdwatching records

What is BirdTrack?

The BirdTrack project, organised by BTO on behalf of BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland, tracks the arrival of migrants through its specially designed website (see **Redwing** maps opposite). However, BirdTrack is not just interested in your first sighting of a **Redwing**, **Pink-footed Goose**, **Swallow** or **Cuckoo**, but wants to monitor the mass arrival of these species and others. By recording lists of species you see and hear on a regular basis we can also gather important information on departure dates. Birdwatchers are very good at recording arrival dates, but when do you know you've seen your last **Cuckoo**?

BirdTrack isn't just about migrants. We can also monitor seasonal movements, such as the autumn and spring movements of **Siskins** or perhaps a cold weather movement of **Lapwings** or **Starlings** (if we get a cold winter!). We can also use records of scarce species such as **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** to help build up a picture of distribution on an annual basis. Given that national bird atlases are compiled every twenty years or so, BirdTrack could help fill gaps in species monitoring. Just think how the distribution of the **Buzzard** and **Little Egret** has changed since the last Breeding Atlas in 1991, when there were just three records of **Little Egret**! Using records from BirdTrack, we can follow these changes in much more detail.

One of the most exciting aspects of taking part in BirdTrack is entering your records of migrants, and looking at your dot on the map and seeing how it fits in with movements at the national scale. BirdTrack is updated every night so you will be able to see your sighting on the map the next day. Graphs and tables are produced at the



regional and national scale, whilst all maps are the national scale only. Using BirdTrack also means that your records are stored in a safe place and you can easily download your records into Excel for your personal use.

What records do we want?

Anyone can take part in BirdTrack, whether you go birdwatching to your local park, nature reserve, coast or just your garden. What we really want are lists of all the species you see and hear whilst out birdwatching at a site. These ‘complete lists’ are really the basis of BirdTrack. From these we can plot the pattern and timing of arrival and compare with previous years. The real benefit of using ‘complete lists’ is that it overcomes variation in recording effort—so listing can be scientific! (see box below). Incomplete lists and casual records can also be en-

tered. Wherever possible, we are keen to receive counts of birds, rather than simple presence (a tick). Estimates of flocks can be entered using circa or plus. You can also enter your historical records and we already have a number of people who have submitted their records from the late 1960s and 1970s! Think about choosing a site you have visited regularly over the years and enter the records from there.

Edit, search and download your records

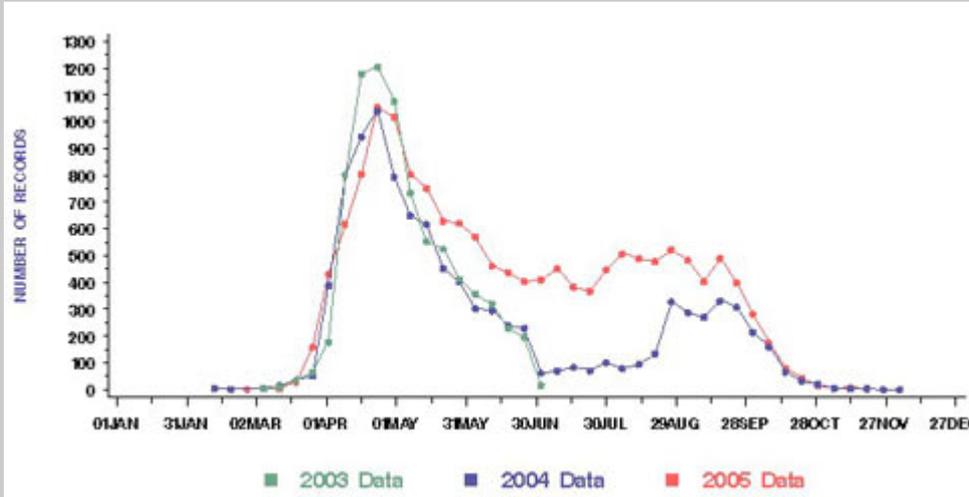
Since BirdTrack was launched in August 2004 at the Bird Fair, we have added an editing facility, which allows you to edit your own records. The *search and download facility* allows you to search your own records and to view the results online in the form of a table or a graph (where applicable). You can also download your records to Excel or a comma separated values (csv) file for your

own use. Some birdwatchers now enter their records into BirdTrack first and then download the records and load into other systems such as Mapmate, Excel for their own purposes.

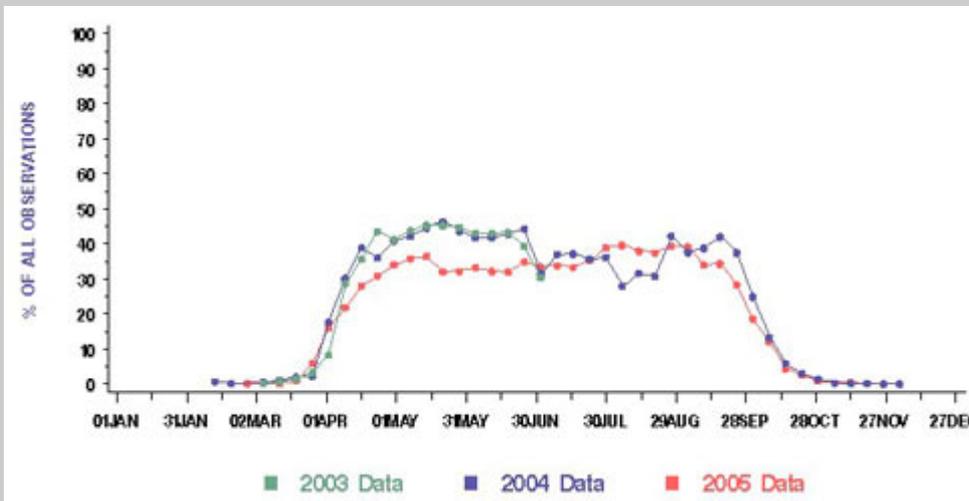
Contribute to national and local bird recording

By entering your records into BirdTrack you are contributing to national and local bird recording at the same time. Your records are automatically used in the nightly updates of BirdTrack and they can also be downloaded by your bird club (only if you have given us permission to do so). One or two nominated bird club officials (usually the recorder and data manager) can be set up with special access to BirdTrack so they can download records relevant to their recording area at whatever frequency they want. They will receive all the information they need,

Why use complete lists?



This graph shows the number of records for Swallow. Look how records increase rapidly in the spring (arrival), but then numbers tail off. This is because bird-watchers are keen to record the first, but become less enthusiastic about recording Swallows during the breeding season. It's not an accurate picture of what Swallows do!



This graph shows the proportion of lists submitted that recorded a Swallow. We see the arrival in the spring. Swallows remain here all summer and then depart in the autumn. By recording complete lists throughout the season we can build up an accurate picture of Swallows and compare timings and reporting rate between years. We see that in 2005 Swallows were later arriving and also that the proportion of lists with Swallows was also lower than in 2003 and 2004.

together with the name and contact details of the observer.

Work in progress

BirdTrack is very much 'work in progress' with many exciting additions planned for the next year or so. We have set up a BirdTrack Working Group, comprised of a small number of bird recorders and data managers, who have been able to advise us on many issues relating to bird recording. We thank them for their help so far. For more information, see

www.bto.org/birdtrack/bird_recording/btwg_home.htm.

How to take part

To take part in BirdTrack, visit www.birdtrack.net and register as a recorder. We ask you to register so we can store your records securely and because we may need to contact you in the future. Once you have your user name and password, you can login to enter sightings. You will arrive at 'Data Home' and from there you can create sites, enter lists, view and edit records etc. We prefer if sites can be registered at the 1km level which gives more detailed information to BirdTrack and the bird recorder, but large sites can be registered at the 10km level (not rec-

ommended for Argyll - Paul Daw). For these large sites, we suggest you make a note of six-figure grid references of particularly interesting species you see and record this information in the comments box against the species. It is important that you keep your email address updated and you can do this in 'my details and settings'. If you have any queries or comments, please contact birdtrack@bto.org. For technical issues we have a Web Support Team who will be able to help you (web.support@bto.org).

Dawn Balmer, BirdTrack Organiser

Machrihanish Seabird and Wildlife Observatory Spring News 2006 (March to 24th-May)

During March–April, the Machrihanish Seabird and Wildlife Observatory was manned intermittently while the warden carried out a population study of Common Raven in Kintyre for Scottish Natural Heritage. Some preliminary results of the study are included below. Daily observations began in earnest on 1st May.

Some migrant arrival dates during March–April 2006

March: the first **Northern Wheatear** arrived on 16th followed by a **White Wagtail** next day (peak only 20+ on 30th April).

Migrants at Balnamoil, Mull of Kintyre on 28th March included 10+ **Northern Wheatears**, four **Chiffchaffs** and at least two **Ring Ouzels**.

April: a **Barn Swallow** flew around the Observatory on 4th (peak 20 >S on 15th), two **Sandwich Terns** arrived back, slightly later than usual, on 8th (peaks so far were seven on 19th and 12 flying S on 6th May). A male **Whinchat** stopped briefly on 10th, then the first **Common**

Cuckoo was heard near Whitehouse on 17th followed by one at Machrihanish Golf Course on 21st.

Whimbrels (see photo below) were present almost daily from 20th (3). The best flock noted was 60 flying N on 27th, when a **Common Sandpiper** also flew N. The first song of this latter species was not heard at the Observatory until 7th May.

Seawatching and other records

Although seawatching was mainly unproductive, with no skuas until 19th May, no white-winged gulls and only light movements of **Manx Shearwaters**, a few scarce species and other interesting events did much to relieve the tedium. The highlight of the spring for me was a surprising late passage of **Arctic Skuas** on 19th May with a record spring total of 25 drifting N in 6 hrs in a westerly force 5 with poor visibility. The birds were all adult and most passed through during the morning, travelling mainly singly. The total included 16 dark morphs and nine pale morphs. The following day, nine birds

flew S in a NW force 4-5 (seven were dark morphs). On the evening of 21st, a single pale morph was harassing **Sandwich Terns** in Machrihanish Bay.

An adult **Pomarine Skua** startled delighted observers on 24th May when it suddenly appeared just outside the window of the Observatory. It was moving very slowly, almost motionless at times, into a westerly force 5/6. An intermediate phase **Northern Fulmar** flew S on 19th May.

Two scarce species put in an appearance. A neat adult summer-plumaged **Little Gull** was trailing behind a pack of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** that were moving S on 17th April and a very nervous female **Black Redstart** was found close to the Observatory on 24th April (in the Marine Research Laboratory complex).

Single immature **Black-throated Divers** flew S on 3rd May and N on 19th May, while the wintering **Great Northern Divers**, mostly in summer plumage, started 'yelping' from mid-April, although none were noted flying until 28th April. Superb displays were heard, and much appreciated, from a pack of 26 birds on 3rd May.

Whooper Swans were moving north to breeding grounds in Iceland throughout late March/April with a peaks of 38 on 30th March and 18 on 2nd April. A single pale-breasted **Brent Goose** flew N on 11th May. **Common Shelducks** peaked at 18 on 19th March and an early brood of seven ducklings appeared by the Observatory on 7th May followed by a brood of 12 on 20th May. The **Common Eider** 'club' by the Observatory proved a constant source of amusement for many visitors, with the highest count being 180 birds on 23rd April. On this date the flock comprised 112 adult drakes, 22 immature drakes and 46 females. The first brood (only one duckling) appeared on 23rd May (first brood has been as late as 29th–30th May in recent years). The only **Common Scoters** seen were eight birds flying S on



A Whimbrel at Machrihanish (Photo: Eddie Maguire)



Laughing Gull, Campbeltown, 2nd April (Photo: Eddie Maguire)

4th May. An **Osprey** was reported at West Loch Tarbert on 21st May. On 18th April 60 **Eurasian Golden Plovers** were panicking high over Machrihanish, although the only raptor noted in the area was a male **Hen Harrier** low over the golf course.

Wintering **Purple Sandpipers** were a daily feature, with a peak of 16 on 30th March along with small numbers of **Ruddy Turnstones**. **Turnstones** reached a peak of only 10 in March, then 18 flew N on 17th April. Forty-five **Sanderlings** flew N on 26th April followed by a further 30 on 29th April, then a splendid flock of 115 birds on 4th May.

On 16th April, 60 **Eurasian Curlews** flew N and a pack of about 50 **Whimbrels** were feeding/resting on grassland by the ferry terminal at Tayinloan on 5th May. A tight flock of 12 **Black-tailed Godwits** flew E over The Laggan on 16th April and single winter-plumaged **Bar-tailed Godwit** flew S on 26th and 29th April.

The North American **Laughing Gull** (see photo above) was last seen on the evening of 15th April (almost in full breeding plumage) standing patiently beside the fish and chip van by the Kinloch Green,

Campbeltown!

Unusually, **Little Terns** appeared before both **Arctic** (2nd May) and **Common Terns** (3rd May), with three **Little Terns** on 30th April and two on 4th May, then two were seen by the ferry terminal at Tayinloan on 5th May.

A single, slightly early, **Common Swift** flew S over the sea into a SE gale on 3rd May. This species usually arrives over Campbeltown around 10th May. However, this year three arrived during fine weather on 6th, and 14 were over the town on 8th May.

An assembly of around 55 **Rock Pipits** on 100m of seaweed at Machrihanish on 12th February was noteworthy, as was a flock of 60 **Fieldfares** flying N over Lossit Estate on 24th March.

An enterprising pair of **Rooks** nested successfully on a chimney pot at the corner of Cross Steet/Main Street (by the old town hall) in the centre of Campbeltown and were still feeding young on 7th May.

Two **Bohemian Waxwings** turned up at Feorlan near the Mull of Kintyre on 7th April. Only one was present on 8th. It settled and was feeding regularly at a bird

A Bohemian Waxwing had an extended stay during April at a garden in Feorlan, near the Mull of Kintyre (Photo: Eddie Maguire)



table (see image below) until it vanished overnight on 16th/17th April. It was reported to have eaten a whole apple just before departure!

A very interesting record was of three male **Blackcaps** on territory and in full song at Achamore Gardens, Gigha on 5th May. Small numbers of **Eurasian Siskins** were calling high over the Observatory as they moved north during late March/April with the largest flock of 10 on 28th April. Two **Snow Buntings** flew S on 24th March.

On 9th February, 20+ **Common Bullfinches** were in the small plantation at top of Borgadeltmore Glen (Mull of Kintyre), 10 of which flew low to the NW over open moorland towards The Gap. At about the same time a **Merlin** (on territory?) was chasing a **Sky Lark** high over the glen. This record demonstrates just how early some species return to upland habitats.

Twites have been rather scarce with only a small wintering flock (20) near Westport. One pair has been very regular around the observatory. A surprising find was a female type **Reed Bunting** at 240m elevation, just below The Gap, Mull of Kintyre on 4th February.

Two scarce crows put in an appearance. A **Eurasian Jay** was screeching at a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** near Dalsmerran on 5th February and a **Black-billed Magpie** was at Drumlembie on 20th March. What was probably the same bird was regularly visiting a garden at Machrihanish during 16th April–10th May. Some **Carrion Crows** were noted moving S during April with two on 17th, nine on 28th and four on 29th, whilst a communal roost of 140 **Hooded Crows** was found in a Sitka Spruce plantation at Skeroblin Loch on 28th April.

A recent population study of **Common Ravens** in Kintyre has revealed a minimum 42 active nest sites and three communal roost sites with a minimum population surplus of around 300 immature birds. The Ronachan roost held in excess of 130 birds during March, the highest count at Skeroblin Loch roost was 59 in early April and the Glen Kerran roost held a max of 82 in early May.

There are certainly more than 42 breeding pairs of **Common Ravens** in Kintyre and the true figure could well be around, or even in excess of, 65-70 breeding pairs. Assuming a latter figure is correct, the post-breeding population on Kintyre could be around 650 birds (300 non-breeding birds and 70 pairs, each producing an estimated 3 fledglings).

The Seabird Observatory is open daily to October.

Eddie Maguire

Tel. 07919 660 292

Recent bird reports from Paul Daw: February—April 2006

The latest news on bird sightings in Argyll is available on the Argyll Bird Club website (www.argyllbirdclub.org). On the home page 'click here for latest bird reports' takes you to straight to the most recent update.

The outstanding records of the period were the **Tree Sparrows** on Coll and Tiree, our first for ten years!

Recent Rarity News. The record of an **Arctic Redpoll** seen on 23rd October 2004 on Tiree (John Bowler) has been accepted by BBRC. This is only the second ever for Argyll.

Recent Reports (February-April 2006)

This account excludes first dates for summer visitors and last dates for winter visitors, which are shown in the following article.

Observers full names are in brackets except for SW = Simon Wellock, JB = John Bowler, TC = Tom Callan, PD = Paul Daw, JD = Jim Dickson, JH = John Halliday, BA = Bill Allan

Divers to Herons (incl. sea ducks, skuas, terns and auks seen during sea-watches)

All-island surveys on Tiree 5th–10th February found a minimum of 19 **Great Northern Divers** around the coasts but by 21st April there was a total of 22 in Hynish Bay alone (JB).

Red-throated Divers were widely reported in March. Records included 12 in Port Ellen Bay, Islay all in breeding plumage on 19th (Andy Schofield), singles in winter plumage in Oban Bay (Stuart Gibson) and off Otter Ferry (TC) on 22nd and two in breeding plumage off Traigh Bhagh, Tiree on 27th (JB).

Great Crested Grebes are always scarce in Argyll and one on Loch Kinnabus, Islay on 28th March was even more unusual, being an inland water. It was still there on 31st March (Andy Schofield).

Good numbers of divers seen from the Islay ferry north of Gigha on 29th March included 70-80 **Great Northern Divers**, 25 or more **Black-throated** and 30-40 **Red-throated Divers** and four **Slavonian Grebes** that were almost in full breeding plumage (Andy Schofield).

At least 12 **Great Northern Divers**, two or more **Black-throated Divers** and one **Red-throated Diver** were seen in the Sound of Gigha during an ABC field trip on 1st April. Most were juveniles or adults still largely in winter plumage. However, all but one of the 12 or more **Slavonian**

Stop Press

There has been an extraordinary flurry of records of Marsh Harrier—normally a very scarce migrant in Argyll. These include a female at Dunamuck farm (Moine Mhor) heading towards Cairnbaan on 6th May (JH), an immature female flying over Salen Pier, Mull on the morning of 7th May (Ross Facer per AS), another sub-adult female flying south over Tortonald at around 21.00hrs on the evening of 8th May (SW), a female at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on the evening of 9th May (JB) and a sub-adult female at Loch Gruinart, Islay also on 9th May (James How). These sightings are quite unprecedented, even if (as seems likely) two or more records involve the same individual.

A juvenile Rose-coloured Starling was seen in the garden of the Columba Hotel, Iona on 14th May. It was attacked and caught by a cat, but was rescued by conveniently placed birdwatchers and released at a safer location (Anne Stevens).

Grebes seen were in breeding plumage (PD *et al.*).

A half hour seawatch at Hynish, Tiree at lunchtime on 22nd April produced six **Great Northern Divers**, three **Manx Shearwaters**, 76 **Gannets**, 280 **Fulmars** and 20 **Kittiwakes** (JB).

Wildfowl

All-island surveys on Tiree 5th–10th February found totals of 138 **Shelducks**, 478 **Teal**, 269 **Mallards**, 145 **Eiders** and 52 **Red-breasted Mergansers** around the coast (JB).

The first **Whooper Swans** were on the move on 15th March with two heading north over Tiree towards Rhum, while on the following day a flock of 40 headed north over the island, towards Skye (JB). Other reports of migrant **Whooper Swans** included approx. 25 flying north over Coll on 16th March with 11 more over Tortonald the following day (SW), 35 at Kinnabus Loch, 22 around Ardbeg on

20th March, 18 flying N over Loch Gruinart on 19th (Andy Schofield), 55 at Loch Bhasapol, 20 at Loch an Eilein, 35 at Loch a' Phuill on Tiree 22nd March (all had left by the end of the day) (JB) and 17 heading NW over Cairnbaan on the morning of 23rd March. (JD). Tiree experienced a big passage of **Whooper Swans** during 29th March with at least 251 counted passing through (JB).

A single white-phase **Snow Goose** seen with **Greylag** and **Canada Geese** at the head of Loch Craignish on 21st Feb was still present on 23rd February (BA/JD). An adult white-phase **Snow Goose** seen heading north over Coll with ca 160 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** on 3rd April was not thought to be one of the local feral flock (SW).

A **Gadwall** reported at Bunessan, Mull on 16th March is the first recorded there since 1984 (per Alan Spellman). At least 145 **Common Goldeneyes** were present on Loch Fyne off Furnace on 12th February (PD), 152 were in Loch Caolisport 24th Feb and 52 were found in the whole of Loch Gilp on 2nd March (JD). Although numbers seem to be falling elsewhere in Scotland we are finding more each winter in Argyll.

Five **Long-tailed Ducks** and 32 **Common Scoters** were counted off Rhunahaorine Point on 18th February (BA). The majority of the 35 or more **Common Scoters** seen in the Sound of Gigha during the ABC field trip on 1st April were drakes. A large proportion of 25 or more **Long-tailed Ducks** were also drakes, many almost in complete breeding plumage. A flock of approx. 350 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** remained in the fields at Tayinloan (PD *et al.*).

The long staying female **Redhead** was last seen on Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 22nd March (JB). On 11th April at Loch Leathan, **Tufted Duck** numbers had reached 15 (8 male, 7 female) and as well as 13 **Goldeneyes** there were 4 immature **Whooper Swans** present. On the same day, 11 **Whooper Swans** and 22



Great Northern Diver in late April, Colonsay (Photo: Jim Dickson)

Greenland White-fronted Geese were seen in Loch Crinan (JD).

Raptors to Gamebirds

There have been several reports during the latter half of April of an intermediate phase **Gyr Falcon** at various places on Islay. Will anyone who can provide a description please contact JD (j.dickson@tiscali.co.uk). A **Honey-buzzard** was reported flying in off the sea at Port Ellen, Islay on 28th April, followed by an escort of angry **Common Gulls** (Andy Schofield).

On 17th March, JH had a frustratingly brief sighting (from the kitchen window!) of what could have been an immature **White-tailed Eagle** flying over. Amazingly, early the following morning it was seen again, not far away, sitting on the Crannog on Loch Leathan (north of Lochgilphead) and definitely identified as an immature **White-tailed Eagle** with red tags on both wings. So technically John now has White-tailed Eagle on his garden bird list – not bad (JH).

Immature **White-tailed Eagles** were also reported from Arileod, Coll on 18th March (SW), from Laphroaig, Islay on 19th and 20th March (Andy Schofield). Another individual was seen near Kilmelford on 23rd March (BA). A **White-tailed Eagle** at Otter Ferry on 8th April was seen by several observers taking and killing a female **Eider**. It lost the prey after being mobbed by several gulls. It then circled inland while being mobbed by two **Buzzards** (per TC). A green-tagged immature **White-tailed Eagle** was seen flying over Ballyhogh, Coll on 26th April (SW).

A mature male **Northern Goshawk** was seen well in north Knapdale by Peter Kirk, an experienced falconer, on 20th March, not far from where a similar bird was reported in January. A detailed description has been provided (Peter Kirk).

Jane Mitchell flushed a male **Hen Harrier** from the roadside near Kames, Cowal on 31st March and she noticed that it had dropped a prey item in the middle of the road. Although the head was missing she thought it was probably a **Common Snipe**, but phoned Steve Petty (who lives nearby). He was able to confirm the ID and reported that the snipe was still warm—quite a good catch for a harrier!

The following report was received from Morag Rea of a remarkable observation on 6th April. A cock **Pheasant**, which regularly feeds in a local garden, was seen shaking its head with something string-like caught in its beak. It proved to be a wriggling **Adder** (probably not long out of hibernation), which the **Pheasant** eventually killed. Morag said she thought Adders can be a threat to nestlings, but didn't realise that Pheasants would attack them (see article and photo on page 16).



Second-winter Ringed-billed Gull, 5th March, Oban (Photo: Jim Dickson)

A stunning male **Ptarmigan** in winter plumage just below the summit of Cruachan on 1st March was well worth the climb! (Lawrence Langan).

Waders

A colour ringed **Purple Sandpiper** at Scarinish Pier, Tiree 9th–18th February had been ringed as a female at Gardskagi, SW Iceland on 8th May 2005 (JB).

All-island surveys on Tiree 5th–10th February found totals of 889 **Oystercatchers**, 648 **Ringed Plovers**, 1,027 **Golden Plovers**, 26 **Grey Plovers**, 607 **Lapwings**, 468 **Sanderlings**, 368 **Purple Sandpipers**, 270 **Dunlin**, 175 **Common Snipe**, 46 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, 493 **Curlews**, 483 **Common Redshank** and 1,191 **Turnstones** around the coasts. These were high counts for most species, but **Sanderling** and **Dunlin** were down on previous years (JB).

A pair of **Ringed Plovers** in Ardmish Bay, Gigha had a nest with 3 eggs on 21st April (Blair Urquhart).

At Otter Ferry a flock of 96 **Dunlin** on 10th March was an exceptional number for this site (TC). A flock of about 100 **Golden Plovers** on fields of short grass by New Danna House (Loch Sween) on 24th March was also unusual for this location (John Aitcheson).

An estimated 6,600 **European Golden Plovers** were at The Reef, Tiree on 20th April. On 25th April a single **Red Knot**, in partial breeding plumage, among a flock of approx. 3,200 **Golden Plovers** at The Reef, Tiree was a surprise and 188 **Black-tailed Godwits** had arrived at Loch a' Phuill (JB).

A total of 14 **Bar-tailed Godwits** were on the mud at Loch Gilp on 14th February (TC) and seven **Purple Sandpipers** were seen at Rhunahaorine Point on 18th February (BA). February 12th was a good day for **Ruddy Turnstones** on the mainland. A total of 54 were counted at Otter Ferry,

Cowal (TC) and 43 on George Street foreshore in Oban was Stuart Gibson's highest ever count at this location.

Skuas (see also under Divers to Wildfowl) to Woodpeckers

The Oban second-winter **Ring-billed Gull** was seen regularly on the foreshore in the harbour, often opposite Woolworth's in late afternoon (Stuart Gibson/BA/PD et al.). It has also been seen at Corran Esplanade, Cockleshell Bay (2 miles N of Oban on Ganavan Road) and Dunstaffnage Bay and has been present in the area since 12th September 2005 (Stuart Gibson). Amazingly, another **Ring-billed Gull** (again a second-winter bird) was found in Oban on 1st March, once more on the George Street foreshore. It was distinctly smaller than the other (second-winter) individual which was standing conveniently nearby for comparison (Stuart Gibson). Finally, a detailed description has been provided of a first-winter **Ring-billed Gull** seen by a visitor at the Mishnish Lochs, Mull on the evening of 20th April (David Hatfield per Stuart Gibson). Including the adult bird seen in Oban in January and another adult found at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 2nd and 3rd February (JB/Roger Broad) there have been at least five individual **Ring-billed Gulls** in Argyll this winter.

Among the very few reports of 'white-winged' gulls this winter were two first-winter **Glaucous Gulls**. One was seen and photographed by a fisherman at Scoul Eilean (Loch Melfort) on 23rd February (Billy McInnes per Richard Wesley) and the other was at Port Ban, Sandaig (Tiree's first record of the winter) on 25th February (JB).

A **Little Gull** was reported of at Loch Beg, Mull on 17th March (per Alan Spellman).

A group of 18 **Puffins** was seen from the ferry between Coll and Tiree on 7th March (JB) and a total of 33 **Black Guil-**



A Tree Sparrow photographed at Moss, Tiree on 22nd April by Sharon MacKinnon. The first record in Argyll since 1996.

Iemots were counted in Oban Bay on 22nd March (Gordon Scott per Stuart Gibson).

A **Green Woodpecker** was calling at Benmore Gardens, Dunoon on 31st March (Steve Petty). They must surely be breeding in this area, but firm evidence is elusive.

The **Kingfisher** first seen at Lochdon, Mull on 3rd December 2005 was noted there again on 4th February (Alan Spellman). Another **Kingfisher** was seen at the head of Loch Sween on 19th February (Lawrence Langan). There have been an unusual number of sightings of **Kingfishers** in Argyll this winter, although these may have involved only a few individuals.

Passerines

A male **Blue-headed Wagtail** on the RSPB reserve near Port-na-Luing on 16th April is the first record of any race of Yellow Wagtail on Coll (SW).

Approx. 18 **Song Thrushes** in a field in Glendaruel, Cowal on 23rd February were part of an obvious movement taking place at that time (TC). A male **Black Redstart** at the RSPB reserve on Coll on 1st April was only the second record for the island.

Two male **Blackcaps** seen in garden at High Askomil, Campbeltown on 1st February were both present daily until 4th February when female also present (3 birds in all!) (Ian Teesdale, see article on page 16).

The **Firecrest** first reported at Laganbuidhe Farm, Dalmally, North Argyll on 22nd December was seen again at close quarters on 12th February. A **Goldcrest** seen shortly afterwards provided a striking contrast (Alan Gray).

A **Nuthatch** was first seen feeding on peanuts by a neighbour of Peter Woods in Glenbranter on 20th April and was seen in the same place by Peter on 22nd April. **Nuthatches** are still very rare birds in Argyll, but curiously enough one was seen

in Glenbranter in 1999, also in April.

Two **Magpies** flew out of a copse in Glen Fyne (near head of Loch Fyne) to feed in open field with sheep on 4th February (Dave & Pat Batty). JD had an exciting find at Cairnbaan when a **Magpie** was seen around the gardens in his street on 25th March. Yet another extralimital **Magpie** in March—as happened last year!

A pair of **Common Crossbills** was flushed from the road across Moine Mhor, between the conifers, on 25th February. The male resplendent in salmon pink (PD).

A bright yellow bird that has been visiting a garden at Connel during March appears to be a male **Greenfinch** with totally yellow plumage (Jeanne Adcroft per Clive Craik). A similar bird was reported in the same area last November (Anna Nicholson).

A flock of **Reed Buntings** in a garden and surrounding Blackthorn scrub in Oban had reached 14 birds by 17.00hrs on 4th March (Stuart Gibson) and at least four **Bramblings** were found in a flock of about 450 **Chaffinches** near the Temple Wood Circle at Kilmartin on the same day. They were still present on 24th March when they had been joined by two Linnets (BA). This seems to be a traditional haunt for **Bramblings** and quite large flocks have been found there in the past (e.g. 100+ in Dec 1995).

Good views were had of a **Tree Sparrow** at Totronald, Coll on the morning of 27th March. This was the first on Coll since about 1937 and the first anywhere in Argyll since 1996 (when one was reported on Iona in June). It was seen again briefly in the evening (SW). Another, or just possibly the same bird turned up at Balephuill, Tiree on the evening of 21st April. It was present in a garden at Moss the following day where some excellent photos were taken (per JB) (see photos above).

Other sightings

A **Long-eared Bat** was seen flying in the afternoon at Tainish NNR on 24th April and on the same day 15 or so **Peacock Butterflies** were found in 3-4 hours (Anne-Lise Dickie/ BA).

A **Basking Shark** and two **Minke Whales** were seen off Gunna Sound, Tiree on 29th April (JB).

If you go down to the woods today... the world of the early morning bird surveyor can be full of surprises. Driving along the main A83 towards Inveraray the other morning (at about 04.40hrs) I picked up three creatures in the headlights. Standing at the side of the road were three largish grey/brown animals about 60cm (2 ft) tall. They stood quite still and looked for the entire world as if they were waiting for a bus! As I passed them it became quite clear that they were **Wallabies**.

Of course I had heard about the feral population around Loch Lomond, but never of any in Argyll. Later in the day I e-mailed David Wood at SNH to see if anyone there knew of them. A quick reply from Cristina McAvoy reassured me that I had not been imagining them, and before long I had the full story from her father John McAvoy of the SSPCA. I am indebted to him for the following information.

Apparently there is a long history, going back to the 1990s, of Wallaby sightings in this area. The suspicion is that they escaped or were released from the former Argyll Wildlife Park near Inveraray. The three I saw are well known locally, and food is provided by staff from the local stables to help through the winter. At least one is a female, so there is the possibility of a feral population becoming established. Unless of course, as John says, they are all females! From what I can gather, Wallabies are thought to have relatively little impact on native species, unlike some other alien species (e.g. **American Mink**) that are now well established.

As well as the population around Loch Lomond there is a colony in Bedfordshire and a long standing feral population in Derbyshire. I am not certain of the species involved in Argyll, but the others are **Red-necked Wallabies** *Macropus rufogriseus*. They are most active at dawn and dusk, so if you are driving through the area at this time, watch out for them!

Paul Daw

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Arrival of spring migrants, departure of winter visitors and some passage migrants in 2006

I would like to thank those of you who have taken the trouble to send in reports of migrants (see table below). The encouraging response to my appeal for records at the autumn ABC meeting in Dunoon means that we have a quite detailed picture of what has been happening this spring. So, I have taken the opportunity to compare this spring with the previous five years (2001-2005 inclusive). Almost every year we hear comments about extraordinarily early or late arrivals of migrants, but these often relate to odd individuals. The significant factor is when the main arrival of any particular species occurs and the following comments are about this.

There have been some unusual features this spring. We had our earliest **Osprey** for several years and the main arrival of **Swifts**, on 4th May, was a week or ten days earlier than usual. However, some species are amazingly consistent. For example, the main body of **Cuckoos** arrived to within a day either side of 23rd April every year!

The arrival dates for **Corn Crakes**, **Common Sandpipers**, **Common**, **Arctic** and **Little Terns**, were about average although the first **Sandwich Terns** were slightly later than usual.

Although there were fewer really early March records for hirundines, the main arrival dates, early-April for **Sand Martins** and mid-April for **Swallows** and third week of April for **House Martins** were about average. The same was true for **Northern Wheatears** with none of the usual mid March records. Arrival dates of **Tree Pipits** were also about average.

Grasshopper Warbler arrival dates were very typical with the bulk of birds arriving in the last week of April. **Sedge Warblers** were possibly a day or two later than usual although the first week in May is about right for them. Early May is also typical



Common Sandpiper
(Photo: Jim Duncan)

for the main arrival of **Common White-throats** and they too arrived pretty much on time. **Blackcap** records are difficult to interpret because of the presence of winter visitors, but there were indications that at places like Taynish NNR, the arrival of breeding birds was a few days later than usual.

Two species did arrive later than normal; **Willow Warblers** and **Common Chiffchaffs**. The first **Chiffchaffs** are usually heard in the third or fourth week in March and they are widespread by the first week of April. This year there were no March records at all and they were not generally reported until the second or third week in April. Similarly, **Willow Warblers** are normally first heard singing in the first week of April and are widely distributed by mid-April. None were heard this year until mid-April and there seems to have been a mass arrival on 20th/21st April,

about a week later than normal.

For some species, such as **Common Redstart** and **Garden Warbler**, there are too few records to give a clear picture, but it appears that they arrived in early May as usual. There were also relatively few records of **Wood Warblers**, but again they seem to have arrived in late April/early May as usual. The end of the first week in May is also fairly typical for first arrivals of **Spotted Flycatchers**.

There can be local variations of course. The first **Swallow**, a single, was not seen at Kames, Cowal this year until 27th April.

So thanks once again to all those who have sent in records of migrants this spring. And, it is not too late for those who didn't – the more records we have the clearer the picture.

Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder

Arrival and departure dates of migrants - Argyll 2006				
Species	Location	No.	Date	Observer
Whooper Swan	L. Leathan, nr Lochgilphead	5	23 rd April	John Halliday
Whooper Swan	Loch Eck, Cowal	4	23 rd April	Frances Lynn
Whooper Swan	Loch Poit na h-I, Mull	2	24 th April	Richard Wesley
Garganey	Canal Loch, Coll	1	5 th May	Simon Wellock
Garganey	Loch Gruinart, Islay	7	10 th May	James How
Honey-buzzard	Port Ellen, Islay	1	28 th April	per Andy Schofield
Osprey	Arinagour, Coll	1	23 rd March	Simon Wellock
Osprey	Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll	1	27 th March	Bill Allan

Species	Location	No.	Date	Observer
Spotted Crake	Uig, Coll	1	26 th April	Simon Wellock
Corn Crake	Crossapol, Tiree - presumably an over wintering bird!	1	1 st March	John Bowler
Corn Crake	RSPB Reserve, Coll	1	19 th April	Simon Wellock
Corn Crake	Balephuill, Tiree	1	22 nd April	per John Bowler
Corn Crake	Oronsay, Colonsay	1	24 th April	Mike Peacock
Corn Crake	Tiree	6	28 th April	John Bowler
Corn Crake	Loch Gruinart, Islay	1	28 th April	Andy Schofield
Dotterel	The Reef, Tiree	pair	28 th April	John Bowler
Black-tailed Godwit	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	2	18 th April	John Bowler
Common Sandpiper	Lochdon, Mull	1	14 th April	Alan Spellman
Common Sandpiper	Rhugarbh Croft, Appin, North Argyll	1	15 th April	Mary Gregory
Common Sandpiper	Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll	1	17 th April	Bill Allan
Common Sandpiper	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	1	18 th April	John Halliday
Common Sandpiper	Loch Fada & New Loch, Colonsay	4	18 th April	Alan Davis
Common Sandpiper	Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll	2	20 th April	Jim Dickson
Common Sandpiper	Widespread reports	6+	21 st /22 nd April	Richard Wesley <i>et al.</i>
Sandwich Tern	Ronachan Point, Kintyre	2	1 st April	ABC Field Trip
Sandwich Tern	Tayinloan, Kintyre	3	1 st April	ABC Field Trip
Sandwich Tern	Innellan, Dunoon, Cowal	1	15 th April	George Newall
Sandwich Tern	Tighnabrauaich, Cowal	3	23 rd April	Lawrence Langan
Common Tern	Colonsay	2	26 th April	Jim Dickson
Common Tern	Loch Feochan, nr Oban	4	5 th May	Bill Allan
Arctic Tern	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	1	25 th April	John Bowler
Little Tern	Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree	3	19 th Apr	John Bowler
Turtle Dove	Totronald, Coll	2	4 th May	Simon Wellock
Cuckoo	Burgh, Mull	1	14 th April	Martin Keivers
Cuckoo	RSPB Reserve, Coll	2+	19 th April	Simon Wellock
Cuckoo	nr Otter Ferry, Cowal	1	19 th April	Tom Callan
Cuckoo	Glenbranter, Cowal	1	20 th April	Peter Woods
Cuckoo	Kilmichael Glen, nr Lochgilphead	1	21 st April	John Halliday
Cuckoo	Widespread reports	7+	23 rd April	Steve Petty <i>et al.</i>
Common Swift	Oban, Mid-Argyll	2	3 rd May	Mary Gregory
Common Swift	Oban, Mid-Argyll	8	4 th May	Bill Allan
Common Swift	Loch Nell, nr. Oban	1	4 th May	Jim Dickson
Common Swift	Connel, Mid-Argyll	2	4 th May	Mike Harrison
Common Swift	Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	1+	5 th May	John Halliday
Common Swift	Heylipol, Tiree	1	6 th May	John Bowler
Sand Martin	Loch Indaal, Islay	1	30 th Mar	Jeremy Hastings
Sand Martin	Port Ellen, Islay	1	31 st March	Andy Schofield

Species	Location	No.	Date	Observer
Sand Martin	Ronachan, Kintyre	1	1 st April	ABC Field Trip
Sand Martin	Lochdon, Mull	2	1 st April	Susan Bird
Sand Martin	Kilmartin, nr. Lochgilphead	10	2 nd April	Jim Dickson
Sand Martin	Ledaig sandpit, North Argyll	2	2 nd April	Mike Harrison
Sand Martin	Luachrach Loch, Oban	17	7 th April	Bill Allan
Sand Martin	Loch Ederline, Mid-Argyll	50+	11 th April	Jim Dickson
Swallow	Aros, Mull	1	27 th March	per Alan Spellman
Swallow	Loch Indaal, Islay	1	30 th Mar	Jeremy Hastings
Swallow	Tarbert, Kintyre	1	1 st April	Mike Harrison
Swallow	Luachrach Loch, Oban	4	7 th April	Bill Allan
Swallow	Keills, Loch Sween	1	8 th April	Tom Callan
Swallow	Ledaig, North Argyll	1	10 th April	Mary Gregory
Swallow	Colonsay	1	10 th April	David Jardine
Swallow	Taynuilt, Mid-Argyll	1	14 th April	Lawrence Langan
Swallow	nr Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	1	14 th April	Paul Daw
Swallow	Dunoon, Cowal	1	15 th April	George Newall
Swallow	Otter Ferry, Cowal	1	16 th April	Tom Callan
Swallow	Balvicar, Seil, Mid-Argyll	1	16 th April	Richard Allan
Swallow	Appin, North Argyll	3	17 th April	Mary Gregory
Swallow	Kilmichael Glen, nr Lochgilphead	1	17 th April	Blair Urquhart
Swallow	Widespread reports	6+	19 th April	Katie Pendreigh <i>et al.</i>
House Martin	Kames, Cowal	4	20 th April	Steve Petty
House Martin	Kilmichael Glen, nr Lochgilphead	1	21 st April	Blair Urquhart
House Martin	Oban Hospital	3+	4 th May	J. Dickson/S. Gibson
Tree Pipit	Kames, Cowal	1	16 th April	Steve Petty
Tree Pipit	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	1	18 th April	John Halliday
Tree Pipit	Minard, Mid-Argyll	1	18 th April	Paul Daw
Blue-headed Wagtail	Port-na-Luing, Coll	1	16 th April	Simon Wellock
White Wagtail	Totronald, Coll	1	17 th March	Simon Wellock
White Wagtail	Ulva (L. Sween), Mid-Argyll	1	19 th March	Jim Dickson
White Wagtail	Balephetrish Bay, Tiree	1	18 th April	John Bowler
White Wagtail	Kiloran Bay, Colonsay	6	21 st April	Alan Davis
Black Redstart	RSPB Reserve, Coll	male	1 st April	Simon Wellock
Common Redstart	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	1	23 rd April	Bill Allan
Common Redstart	Loch Nell, nr Oban	1	4 th May	J. Dickson/S. Gibson
Common Redstart	Carnan Mor, Tiree	1	9 th May	John Bowler
Whinchat	L. Leathan, nr Lochgilphead	2	25 th April	John Halliday
Whinchat	Islay	1	25 th April	Andy Schofield
Whinchat	Balvicar, Seil, Mid-Argyll	1	28 th April	Richard Wesley

Species	Location	No.	Date	Observer
Whinchat	Kilninver, nr Oban	1	1 st May	Bill Allan
Whinchat	nr Ardpatrik, Knapdale	1	3 rd May	Bill Allan
Northern Wheatear	Loch na Keal, Mull	1	26 th March	Susan Bird
Northern Wheatear	Tayinloan, Kintyre	1	27 th March	Katie Pendreigh
Northern Wheatear	Heanish, Tiree	1	28 th March	John Bowler
Northern Wheatear	Loch Indaal, Islay	1	30 th Mar	Jeremy Hastings
Northern Wheatear	Gribun, Mull	3	30 th Mar	Susan Bird
Northern Wheatear	Scammadale, Mid-Argyll	1	31 st March	Bill Allan
Northern Wheatear	RSPB Reserve, Coll	3	1 st April	Simon Wellock
Northern Wheatear	Musdale (nr Oban), Mid-Argyll	1	2 nd April	Cristina McAvoy
Northern Wheatear	Bellanoch, Mid-Argyll	1	2 nd April	Blair Urquhart
Northern Wheatear	Loch Sween, Mid-Argyll	2	5 th April	Jim Dickson
Northern Wheatear	Machrins, Colonsay	pair	10 th April	Alan Davis
Northern Wheatear	Appin, North Argyll	1	11 th April	Mary Gregory
'Greenland' Wheatear	Scarinish, Tiree	1	30 th April	John Bowler
Ring Ouzel	Glenastle, Islay	male	31 st March	Andy Schofield
Fieldfare	Heanish, Tiree	2	28 th March	John Bowler
Fieldfare	Kilmichael Glen, nr Lochgilphead	18	11 th April	Jim Dickson
Fieldfare	Otter Ferry, Cowal	5	16 th April	Tom Callan
Redwing	Colonsay	3	23 rd April	Jim Dickson
Redwing	Heylipol, Tiree	1	3 rd May	John Bowler
Grasshopper Warbler	Kilmichael Glen, nr Lochgilphead	1	18 th April	Blair Urquhart
Grasshopper Warbler	Kames, Cowal	1	21 st April	Steve Petty
Grasshopper Warbler	Fernoch, nr Lochgilphead	1	21 st April	John Halliday
Grasshopper Warbler	Dunbeg, nr Oban	1	24 th April	Mr Dempster
Grasshopper Warbler	Crinan Canal, nr Lochgilphead	1	25 th April	David Wood
Grasshopper Warbler	Upper Fernoch, nr Tayvallich	1	25 th April	Blair Urquhart
Grasshopper Warbler	Glencruitten, Oban	1	26 th April	Stuart Gibson
Grasshopper Warbler	Widespread reports	10+	27 th /28 th April	Cristina McAvoy <i>et al.</i>
Sedge Warbler	Lochdon, Mull	1	21 st April	Stuart Gibson
Sedge Warbler	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	1	24 th April	John Halliday
Sedge Warbler	Loch Bhasapol, Tiree	2	28 th April	John Halliday
Sedge Warbler	Balvicar, Seil, Mid-Argyll	1	30 th April	Richard Wesley
Sedge Warbler	Widespread reports	20+	7 th /8 th May	Bill Allan <i>et al.</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	Ardfern, Mid-Argyll	1	7 th May	Delys Marks
Lesser Whitethroat	Ardfern, Mid-Argyll	1	7 th May	Bill Allan
Common Whitethroat	Glencruitten, Oban	1	28 th April	Stuart Gibson
Common Whitethroat	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	1	3 rd May	John Halliday
Common Whitethroat	nr Otter Ferry, Cowal	pair	5 th May	Tom Callan

Species	Location	No.	Date	Observer
Common Whitethroat	Cairnbaan, nr Lochgilphead	1	6 th May	Jim Dickson
Common Whitethroat	Appin, North Argyll	1	6 th May	Mary Gregory
Common Whitethroat	Ardfern, Mid-Argyll	4	7 th May	Bill Allan
Garden Warbler	Appin, North Argyll	1	23 rd April	Roger Broad
Garden Warbler	Minard, Mid-Argyll	1	8 th May	Paul Daw
Garden Warbler	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	1	10 th May	John Halliday
Blackcap	Taynuilt, Mid-Argyll	1	28 th March	Lawrence Langan
Blackcap	Glencruitten Road, Oban	1	21 st April	Stuart Gibson
Blackcap	Connel, Mid-Argyll	1	23 rd April	Mike Harrison
Blackcap	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	2	23 rd April	Anne-Lise Dickie
Blackcap	Kames, Cowal	1	24 th April	Steve Petty
Wood Warbler	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	1	26 th April	John Halliday
Wood Warbler	Kilmichael Glen, nr Lochgilphead	1	4 th May	Blair Urquhart
Wood Warbler	Glen Nant, Mid-Argyll	2	8 th May	Lawrence Langan
Common Chiffchaff	The Lodge, Coll	2	1 st April	Simon Wellock
Common Chiffchaff	Polvinister, Oban, Mid-Argyll	1	9 th April	Stuart Gibson
Common Chiffchaff	Tayinloan, Kintyre	1	13 th April	Alan Spellman
Common Chiffchaff	Colonsay	1+	16 th April	Alan Davis
Common Chiffchaff	Otter Ferry, Cowal	2	18 th April	Tom Callan
Common Chiffchaff	Connel, Mid-Argyll	1	19 th April	Mike Harrison
Common Chiffchaff	nr Port Appin, North Argyll	1	19 th April	Mike Gear
Common Chiffchaff	Balephuill, Tiree	3	21 st April	John Bowler
Common Chiffchaff	Tighnabruaich, Cowal	1	24 th April	Steve Petty
Willow Warbler	Coll	3	14 th April	Simon Wellock
Willow Warbler	Kames, Cowal	4	16 th April	Steve Petty
Willow Warbler	Crarae Gardens, Mid-Argyll	1	16 th April	Paul Daw
Willow Warbler	Colonsay	1+	16 th April	Alan Davis
Willow Warbler	Balvicar, Seil, Mid-Argyll	1	17 th April	Richard Allan
Willow Warbler	Fernoch, nr Lochgilphead	1	17 th April	John Halliday
Willow Warbler	Gallanach Road, Oban	2	17 th April	Derek Pretswell
Willow Warbler	Otter Ferry, Cowal	1	18 th April	Tom Callan
Willow Warbler	Connel, Mid-Argyll	2+	19 th April	Mike Harrison
Willow Warbler	Crinan, Mid-Argyll	3	20 th April	Jim Dickson
Willow Warbler	Kames, Cowal	13+	21 st April	Steve Petty
Willow Warbler	Ardpatrick, West Loch Tarbert	8+	21 st April	Paul Daw
Willow Warbler	Balephuill, Tiree	12+	21 st April	John Bowler
Spotted Flycatcher	Iona	2	6 th May	Ross Facer
Spotted Flycatcher	Ardfern, Mid-Argyll	1	7 th May	Bill Allan
Spotted Flycatcher	Carnan Mor, Tiree	1	9 th May	John Bowler

Species	Location	No.	Date	Observer
Spotted Flycatcher	Taynish NNR ,Mid-Argyll	1	9 th May	John Halliday
Pied Flycatcher	<u>No records yet</u>			
Brambling	Upper Killeyan, Islay	1	20 th March	Andy Schofield
Brambling	Kilmartin, Mid-Argyll	5	24 th March	Bill Allan
Snow Bunting	Upper Killeyan, Islay	23	20 th March	Andy Schofield
Snow Bunting	The Lodge, Coll	6	23 rd March	Simon Wellock

Report of a field trip to the Sound of Gigha on Saturday 1st April 2006

Despite a poor forecast the weather was dry as we gathered at Ronachan car park, if rather cool and with enough wind to make the sea slightly choppy. Fortunately as the day went on we continued to avoid the showers, the wind dropped and it warmed up nicely. Twelve members turned up for the start of the day and two more joined us later on.

We soon picked up at least four winter plumaged **Great Northern Divers** and one **Black-throated Diver** in the middle distance and at least four **Slavonian Grebes** in breeding plumage as well as at least 20 **Common Eiders** and two or more pairs of **Red-breasted Mergansers**. A pair of **Mute Swans** joined us close to the shore together with a pair of **Common Shelducks**. Meanwhile waders along the shore included four **Dunlin**, two **Common Redshanks**, **Oystercatchers** and two **Turnstones**. We also had **Rock Pipits**, **Shags** and the usual selection of **Herring**, **Common**, **Black-headed** and **Great Black-backed Gulls**.

After the very late arrival of most migrants this spring we were all delighted to see what was, for most of us, the first **Sand Martin** of the year as well as two **Sandwich Terns** (strangely) flying south.

We then moved on further down the peninsula to the West Coast Salmon site. A smart male **Grey Wagtail** and another lone **Sand Martin** were there to greet us. It was more sheltered here and the sea calmer and, as usual, the birds were closer to the shore. Two groups of **Slavonian Grebes**, all but one in breeding plumage gave us excellent views as well as winter plumage **Great Northern Divers**, another **Black-throated Diver** and a single **Razorbill**. A beautiful male **Long-tailed Duck** all in almost complete breeding plumage delighted everyone by swimming past at close quarters. Even those of us who have seen them never tire of seeing these lovely birds. Groups of **Common Scoters** totalling at least 16 birds appeared in small groups. A few were showing the distinctive female plumage but most were males and some of them had such prominent yellow on the bills that they looked

almost like **Velvet Scoters**. Sadly there was no sign of the white eye or wing patches though. A **Raven** 'cronked' overhead and small numbers of **Pied Wagtails** flew along the beach.

We tore ourselves away and headed south again to catch the 12.00hrs ferry to Gigha. On the way we saw groups **Greylag Geese** in the fields and **Rooks** were busy at their nests. A moderate sized flock of 350 or so **Greenland White-fronted Geese** feeding in the fields as we approached the ferry terminal, a small flock of **Common Starlings** were swirling around the farm, a **Buzzard** circled overhead and a group of eight **Eurasian Wigeon** were seen in the bay north of the jetty.

We have almost come to expect close up views of Katie's 'tame' **Great Northern Diver** as the ferry leaves and sure enough there he (or she) was just off the jetty—still largely in winter plumage as were most of the divers we saw. More **Great Northern**s were sighted during the crossing as well as the odd **Long-tailed Duck**, a few **Shags** and one or two **Black Guillemots** (fewer than usual).

The weather was still improving as we arrived on Gigha, **Meadow Pipits** gave their parachute display flights and **Dun-nocks** were singing in the sunshine. We enjoyed our soup and sandwiches at the Gigha Hotel and then sat outside for a while enjoying the warm sun. As we walked back to the ferry a male **Reed Bunting** was spotted with a group of **Greenfinches** in the top of a tree.

The return ferry trip produced more **Great Northern Divers** and a couple of **Black Guillemots**. On the whole though, the auks were conspicuous by their absence. We didn't see a single **Common Guillemot** all day—very unusual for the area at this time of year.

As the weather was still fair we walked along the shore towards Rhunahaorine Point. A flock of about 50 **Curlews** were flushed from one of the fields and a single **Common Snipe** from near the sea. Five or six **Common Redshanks** flew up at intervals along the shore and in one marshy field at least five pairs of **Lapwings** were

swooping and calling in display flights. We agreed it was quite a treat to see these once common birds at close quarters again. In the Sound of Gigha we had good views of a winter plumaged **Red-throated Diver** to complete our trio of divers. Farther out there were groups of **Common Scoters** totalling 15 or more birds and at least 25 **Long-tailed Ducks**. The long tails of the drakes, held up well above the water, could be picked up even at a considerable distance. Nearer the shore we found small groups of **Wigeon** and **Teal** and at least three pairs of **Common Shelducks**. Just to prove that spring was really on the way John Halliday found a single **Small Tortoiseshell** butterfly.

As the weather at last started to look more threatening we headed back and as we approached the jetty three more **Sandwich Terns** flew over. Just to round the day off nicely Mike Harrison noticed that two of a group of four largish waders flying over southwards were not **Curlews** but had long straight bills and white wings bars and were in fact **Black-tailed Godwits**!

Katie Pendreigh kindly provided us with her very welcome biscuits and hot drinks just as the first shower of the day started and we enjoyed a good chatter until it was time to go home. We listed 57 species, but as usual here it was quality rather than quantity that made it a rewarding day. The missing species of the day was **Wheatear** but Katie told us she had seen her first one at Tayinloan on 27th March.

Paul Daw



More on wintering Blackcaps

Blackcaps have been in the news lately. Coinciding with the article on Blackcap migration by Bob Furness in December 2005 *Eider* (page 6) was one by Mike Toms, organiser of the BTO's Garden Birdwatch, in the GBW magazine *Bird Table* for winter 2005, entitled 'Focus on the Blackcap'. GBW members will be aware that the winter issue of *Bird Table* contained information about a BTO survey of wintering warblers being carried out over this last winter by Greg Conway.

We have had Blackcaps in our garden in Campbeltown for two of the three winters since we began feeding and recording garden birds in 2003. For some reason we saw none during the 2004/05 winter. We hoped to have them back again last winter and so offered to take part in Greg's survey. As a follow up (albeit at a far lower level of scientific expertise!) to what Bob Furness wrote, I thought our results might be of interest to readers of the *Eider*.

Our first sighting of the winter was of a male on 16th January. One or more males were seen every day thereafter without a break (except for three days in mid-March when we were away) until 31st March when we saw our last bird. The first female appeared on 31st January. Over the ensuing 17 days there were two more visits by a female, but from 8th February onwards until the final sighting on 31st March, females were seen (usually only one, but two together on a couple of occa-

sions) almost as often as males. We assume that all our Blackcaps have now returned to their continental breeding ground.

I should explain at this point that we have three bird-feeders hanging by our kitchen window, one each for mixed bird seed, peanuts and fatcake with insects. The fatcake feeder incorporates a cage designed to exclude starlings and large birds. Blue Tits and Robins use this feeder regularly, and Chaffinches occasionally; but the Blackcaps used it almost exclusively. We only saw Blackcaps take seed from the seed-feeder on 2-3 occasions. Getting into the cage is a knack the birds have to learn, and once in there are various postures a bird can adopt while pecking at the cake. Individual Blackcaps would develop and habitually use a characteristic pattern of behaviour inside the cage, to the extent that we became reasonably sure we could tell one bird from another, simply by their way of getting to the cake. We spent many hours watching them!

So, how many Blackcaps altogether used our feeding station during the two and a half months? We do not of course know. However, what we do know is that the maximum number we saw on any one day was at least three – either two males and a female or two females and a male. It was not unusual to see two individuals together in the cage – two males, two females or one of each. Therefore, the minimum total

of visiting Blackcaps was four. But on the evidence of posture and behaviour inside the cage we are reasonably sure that the actual total over the whole period must be higher; at least five, probably six or even more.

Mike Toms in his article in *Bird Table* alludes to reports from GBW members that Blackcaps can be aggressive in defending a food source. Also, he describes them as more catholic than other warblers in their choice of what to eat – “feeding in the winter on fat, bread, fruit and even meat on occasions”. Our Blackcaps often shared the fatcake feeder with Robins or tits, as well as other Blackcaps, and we never witnessed aggression on their part. We often placed bread scraps or fruit on the ground, but our Blackcaps were not interested. However, at times we were surprised by the amount of fat a particular bird would eat, and wonder if this was an individual building up energy reserves for his or her forthcoming return to mainland Europe.

I do not know how much, if anything, these observations add to the sum total of published information about *Sylvia atricapilla*. But watching these birds so often, from so near at hand and over such a relatively long period, was a deeply satisfying and worthwhile experience. Our meal-times now seem strangely empty!

Ian Teesdale

The Pheasant and the Adder

On the edge of our village, a cock Pheasant has his patch. There is the typical Argyll mix of small birch and a steep bank of heather and rough grass. The Pheasant comes regularly to several gardens to feed on bird seed left out for him.

In early April, the young twins from one house were outside on the bank playing, when they saw “their” Pheasant with something tangled round his head. Their parents investigated and found that the Pheasant had an Adder in his beak. The snake was very much alive and wriggling. The Pheasant thrashed and shook the Adder until it was dead and then simply abandoned it on the grass.

I photographed the snake a couple of days later (on 9th April). It looked undamaged (see photo) apart from a few missing scales on a patch near the head (see photo) and a second small patch lower down the body.

Adders apparently hibernate until late March and then feed on invertebrates, lizards and occasionally nestlings. Perhaps the Pheasant saw the snake as a threat to itself or to its next brood.

Birds Britannica makes no mention of such behaviour in Pheasants. In fact, its contributors suggest Pheasants lead pretty boring lives. They quote a nice passage from *British Birds* where Prof. Meiklejohn describes a Pheasant knocked off balance by a wave and adds “this is probably the only known case of a Pheasant doing something interesting.”



Morag Rea

Maybe Argyll birds are just tougher and braver than the rest!

Morag Rea, Tayvallich

An unsung hero of Scottish Ornithology

“Between them the two men produced ornithological works that were to lay the foundation of the subject in their respective countries” (Ralph 1999).

The two men were John James Audubon and William MacGillivray. Curiously both men were born out of wedlock. MacGillivray's father was a student at King's College, Aberdeen, whose subsequent career in the army is surrounded by mystery. William, unlike Audubon, received an excellent education at King's College, in medicine and latterly in zoology. It was this scientific training that led to his friendship with Audubon, whom he met in Edinburgh in 1830. This meeting led to Audubon's invitation to MacGillivray to transcribe his (Audubon's) notes into what became the five volume work *Ornitho-*

logical Biography (published by Adam Black, Edinburgh, 1831-39) sent to all subscribers to the *Birds of America*. This work remains a vivid account of the birds of America, far better known than its American predecessor, also written by a Scot, Alexander Wilson's *The American Ornithology* (9 volumes, 1804-1814).

MacGillivray was a fine artist in watercolours, and many of his works are held in the Natural History Museum, London. He should be known as Britain's Audubon! He wrote a five volume work *A History of British Birds*, published in London, 1837-1852, which is graced by handsome head engravings, but not alas by any full portraits, as no London publisher would agree to the costs involved.

After an itinerant career, MacGillivray

ended up as Regius Professor of Natural History at Marischal College, Aberdeen. Here he radically changed the way students were taught and nurtured their enthusiasm in natural history with his own passion for the subject. Although greatly respected by his students, his uncompromising personality won him few friends elsewhere.

Even though Audubon's star continues to burn brightly, I wonder how many ABC members know about the life and works of William MacGillivray?

Michael Thomas

Reference

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Scottish squirrel survey

Why the survey?

The Red Squirrel is the only squirrel native to the British Isles. However, most people in the UK are more familiar with its close relative, the Grey Squirrel, which was introduced here from North America in the late 19th century, and now outnumbered red squirrels by about twenty to one. Grey Squirrels have become the dominant species at the expense of Red Squirrels, and since their arrival have displaced reds by dominating most of the foods shared by both species. One estimate put the UK's Red Squirrel population at about 160,000, and three quarters of those are to be found in Scotland.

But, even in Scotland the Red Squirrel is not safe. The Grey Squirrel has completely displaced it throughout much of lowland Scotland, the Borders are struggling to keep a few selected forest areas grey-free and conservationists in Dumfries and Galloway have been working for some years to try to prevent Grey Squirrels from coming in from Ayrshire, Cumbria and South Lanarkshire. Elsewhere they continue to spread out from the Clyde Valley, Angus, south Perthshire and Aberdeen to threaten our squirrel in what we believe to be its heartlands in the Highlands, north Perthshire, Grampian and Argyll.

If we want to protect our red squirrels, we need to know

- Where they still occurs in healthy numbers
- Which forests sustain the best and most secure populations, the so-called

“Priority Woodlands”.

- Where Grey Squirrels are expanding their current range, and especially..
- Where Grey Squirrels are moving into areas that currently support healthy red squirrel populations.

If we know this, we can try to prevent further expansion of the Grey Squirrel's range. If all else fails, we can manage the best Red Squirrel forests to favour reds over greys, and put in place other measures to keep Grey Squirrels out of these “Priority Woodlands”.

What are the aims of the survey?

The Scottish Squirrel Survey aims to set up a sustainable system of survey and monitoring of Red and Grey squirrels throughout Scotland by using Local Squirrel Group volunteers to undertake systematic surveys.

There are ten Local Squirrel Groups currently, covering most (but not all) of Scotland. Details of your Local Squirrel Group can be obtained through the Scottish Squirrel Survey Co-ordinator.

What does the survey involve?

The survey will employ two main methods of collecting squirrel distribution data.

Standardised walked transect counts. It takes a little effort to set up land-owner permissions and to select transect routes, but the actual count involves walking silently through woodland in the early mornings in good weather, recording any squirrels seen (and enjoying the other wildlife).

Squirrel hair-collection techniques. Where

visibility in dense forest is severely restricted and we can't use transect counts, we will detect Red and Grey Squirrel presence by putting out baited boxes or tubes with a hair-collecting device. The hair can be examined later to distinguish between species.

The surveys will focus on 157 potential Priority Woodlands throughout Scotland to try to get some measurement of the abundance of Red Squirrels in what we hope are the best forests for this species. Although these contain suitable habitat for Red Squirrels, we currently have few records of squirrels in most of these sites.

We will also focus on areas where Grey Squirrels are abundant, but close to healthy red squirrels populations. We need this information to find the places where Grey Squirrels populations are expanding to be able to predict the future threats to Red Squirrels in order to protect them.

How you can help?

You can get involved in standard surveys by contacting your Local Squirrel Group or the Scottish Squirrel Survey Co-ordinator. They can provide all you need, including training and survey sites where



Red Squirrel
(Photo: Steve Downer)

The Eider

we most need records.

You can send in records of your sightings of Red and Grey Squirrels. Most of our current squirrel records come from the edges of forests near roads and houses. You can collect more valuable information if you can send in sightings from the parts of forests that previous surveyors have not reached. To find out where these are, you can log on to:

www.searchnbn.net

search for "Red Squirrel" (or "Grey Squirrel"), choose "Interactive map" for the species, zoom in to your chosen forest (you can zoom in to the level of a 1:50,000 OS map) and see which km squares are lacking records—and off you go! Try to get records for as many empty squares as you can.

As a courtesy, please remember to ask permission on privately owned land, and know the Countryside Access Code beforehand.

Health & safety tip: Let someone know where you intend to go and when to expect you back. Take a mobile phone or an alarm whistle for emergencies.

Contact Details

Mel Tonkin

Scottish Squirrel Survey, c/o Scottish Wildlife Trust, Cramond House, Cramond Glebe Road, Edinburgh EH4 6NS

E-mail: mtonkin@swt.org.uk



Recent sightings of Grey Squirrels on Bute give cause for concern. It is only a short distance across the Kyles of Bute to Cowal, an area that holds a thriving population of Red Squirrels (Photo: Jim Duncan).

Recent publications

This section provides readers with information about publications (papers in journals, reports, books etc) that have appeared since the last list was published in the September 2005 *Eider*. The criteria for selection is that a publication must have a link to birds in Scotland. The selection is biased towards what I read, so I would welcome information about other publications for inclusion in future lists. **Editor**

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Request for help

Does anyone have a complete set of the *Eider*—from the first issue? I would like to include an 'issue number' on the front page of future editions, but need to know how many have been published. If you have such a set, please contact me.

Editor

Sanda Weekend

If you intend to go to Sanda during 17-18 June (see March *Eider* 2005, page 3), please contact Nigel Scriven as soon as possible using one of the following phone numbers:

0141 840 3800 work

01505 843 679 home2

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Editor

Why not advertise in the *Eider*? Rates are: £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.

Telescope for sale

Top of the range, Opticron HR80 45R ED telescope with a 40872 HDF T lens giving 30xWW. Also included is an Opticron 'stay on case'. Everything is less than two years old. The asking price is £425.00 with free delivery to anywhere on mainland Argyll.

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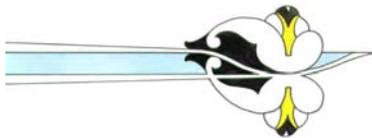
Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should with the Editor before the 25th August 2006 (see the box opposite for more information)

ABC Autumn Meeting 2006

Saturday 4th November

Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead

The programme will be in the September Eider
(and on the club's website before then)



ABC Spring Meeting 2007

Saturday 10th March

Argyll Hotel, Inveraray

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

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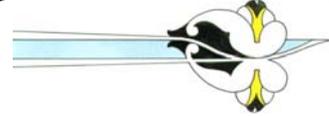
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Argyll Bird Club Website: <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

The Eider



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

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

The *Eider* is published during the first week in March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor before the 25th day of the month prior to publication. However, it greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline dates. Contributions are accepted in the order they are received, which may result in some late submissions being held over until the next issue.

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

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More about the Argyll Bird Club

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

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

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

Subscriptions are due on 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).