

June 2008

Number 85

# The Eider

Bird Club members on a recent trip to  
Colonsay (Kiloran Bay) ©David Palmar



## Three successful field trips

**Spring migrants**  
**Recent reports for February-April**  
**Icelandic connections**

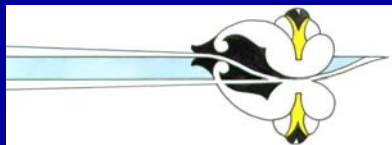
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## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following for their help and contributions to this issue.

Rob Baker, Mick Brennan, Kenny Brack, John Bowler, Malcolm & Sue Chattwood, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Jim Duncan, Bob Furness (photocopying & dispatch), Stuart Gibson, Philip Kirkham, Andrew Kyle, Eddie Maguire, Malcolm Ogilvie, Andrew Mortley, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Andy Robinson, Patricia Russell, Ian Teasdale, Michael Thomas and Sid Wright.

## Editorial

On the 1st September I will be retiring from managing the club's website and producing and editing the *Eider*. Thus, the September issue will be the last one I produce. After developing the *Eider* over the last six and a half years it's time for someone else to inject some new ideas. I have thoroughly enjoyed working on the newsletter. And, in particular, I have valued the regular contacts with our increasing pool of contributors, both those who write the varied and interesting articles and those who take the splendid array of colour photos that adorn each issue—thank you all for your help over the years—your contributions make the *Eider* the success it is today! At present, each issue of the *e-Eider* goes out to around 120 e-mail addresses, and I'm sure it's forwarded to many others! In contrast, I feel I have not given enough time to the website, as there are still some sections that have to be completed.

The club is now looking for someone to take over from me. So, if you are interested in taking on the *Eider* or the website, please contact the club's secretary (Katie Pendreigh, contact details on the back page). While I have managed both positions, there is no reason why just one person should be involved in the future. In fact, with the increasing size of the *Eider* it would be sensible to split responsibilities. So, don't hesitate to contact me if you are interested, but would like to find out more about each job before committing yourself.

## Wildlife Crime Officers in Argyll

*Whether it's the digging up of wild plants or the poisoning of birds of prey, the result is damage to the beauty and variety of our countryside, as well as endangering our natural resources. Everyone is affected by crimes against wildlife.*

Strathclyde Police has specialist Wildlife Crime Officers who have the expertise to investigate this type of incident. They are spread throughout the region covering both rural and urban areas and carry out their wildlife crime investigation role in addition to other duties.

In Argyll there are three Wildlife Crime Officers, myself Kenny Brack, based at Tarbert Police Office, Stevie McAleer, based at Appin Police Office and Laura Robertson, based at Campbeltown Police Office.

In addition, there is a full time Wildlife Crime Officer Coordinator Joe Connelly based at Strathclyde Police headquarters who oversees the WCO's and liaises with other agencies on wildlife crime matters.

Crimes against wildlife include: the taking of birds eggs; illegal shooting, trapping, snaring or poisoning of wildlife; disturbance of protected species not only nesting birds but badgers

and bats and aquatic animals such as dolphins; destruction of breeding sites, notably those of freshwater pearl mussel or protected areas for geese and the theft of native oysters.

The illegal trade in species such as parrots, birds of prey, rare plants and tortoises and the effect that pollution and litter has on the environment that wildlife live in are also part of our remit. As has been previously reported in this newsletter, the reckless and needless act of discarding fishing gear can have a fatal effect on wildlife.

As with any crime, the community can assist the police by reporting suspicious incidents, dead birds or animals or unusual activity that they witness or hear about.

If you do come across a dead bird of prey please be careful as it may have been poisoned, and the poisons that are used are very dangerous. So, please do not touch it, but take note of it's exact location, if you have a camera or mobile phone with a camera, take photographs of the scene and report it to the police.

If you are in any doubt, please report the incident to the police anyway, as

evidence of a wildlife crime is not always obvious.

Wildlife Crime Officers work closely with other agencies as part of the Partnership For Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW). These agencies include the Scottish Government, H.M Customs and Excise, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish SPCA, SEPA and the RSPB and in particular the local community such as on the Island of Mull where the eagle watch, which protects the white tailed sea eagle, involves local people in the organisation and coordination of an operation which has been a great success in recent years.

My colleagues and I are always available to provide advice and assistance and can be contacted at the following telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

**Kenny Brack**, Tarbert Police Office

Tel: 01880820280

E-mail: [Kenny.Brack@strathclyde.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Kenny.Brack@strathclyde.pnn.police.uk)

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**Kenny Brack**

## Caption competition

The winner caption, for the photo below by Philip Kirkham repeated from the March Eider, was submitted by George Newall of Dunoon with the caption:

*Hey pal; it's the ashes you're supposed to rise from, not the water!*

George wins a bottle of red wine for his effort!

I've not received a suitable photo for a competition in this issue of the newsletter.

**Editor**



## New book

Thomas, M. (2007). *Ornithological Tales: An Introduction to the Birds on the Isle of Bute*. Buteshire Natural History Society, Rothesay. ISBN 0-905812-15-8. Softback, 100 pages. Price £5.00 plus £1.50 for postage and package. Obtainable from Buteshire Natural History Museum, 7 Stuart Street, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0EP (Tel. 01700 505067).

This is not a comprehensive book on the birds of Bute, but a delightful series of essays on some of the most characteristic birds of the island. Some accounts (tales) have appeared in past issues of the Eider and most have already been published in a series of four booklets from the Buteshire Natural History Museum, which are now brought together in one publication. Most the 'tales' are about the most obvious birds to be found on Bute. For instance, there are only 10 passerine accounts compared with 28 non-passerine accounts. The book is illustrated with a series of photographs and paintings; it includes a map showing the best birding places and provides a checklist of the island's birds and their status.

**Editor**

## ORNITHOLOGICAL TALES

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BIRDS ON THE ISLE OF BUTE

By

MICHAEL THOMAS OBE



## Gift Aid

In the March *Eider* (page 2), Bob Furness was encouraging members to fill in a Gift Aid Declaration form so that the club can claim a tax refund for each subscription. The refund amounts to 28p in every pound, and if you've been a member for a long time, Bob can claim the refund for the last six years and for all subscriptions in the future. This amounts to quite a bit of extra money for the club. So please take the time to fill out the form and send it to Bob. Copies of the form can be downloaded from the membership section of the club's website. Alternatively, Bob would be very happy to post a form to you (contact details on back page).

**Editor**

## Correction

In the March *Eider* (page 4), I incorrectly described a new film by Gordon Yates on 'The Wildlife Gems of Islay' as a video. In fact, it is a DVD with some fantastic wildlife footage.

Copies cost £15 plus £1 for postage and can be obtained direct from Gordon at 3 Saxonholme Road, Castleton, Rochdale, Lancashire OL11 2YA. Please make cheques payable to Gordon Yates.

Sorry Gordon!

**Editor**

## ABC indoor meetings 2008-2009

### Autumn Meeting 2008

**Saturday 8th November**

Cainbaan Hotel near Lochgiphead

<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>

The programme will be in the September 2008 *Eider*. Also, it will be on the club's website before then.

### Spring Meeting 2009

**Friday 24-Sunday 26th April**

Weekend meeting on Islay, based at the Islay Natural History Centre, Port Charlotte

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

In spring 2009 we are departing from our normal meeting format. We are planning a weekend meeting on Islay, which will combine an indoor session with talks (Saturday afternoon, programme opposite) and birding excursions (Saturday and Sunday mornings). The meeting will be based in the Islay Natural History Centre, Port Charlotte. A list of accommodation around Port Charlotte (Hotels, Bed and Breakfast and Youth Hostel) is available from Malcolm Ogilvie ([malcolm@ogilvie.org](mailto:malcolm@ogilvie.org)) or from the editor. The Youth Hostel is situated in the same building as the Islay

Natural History Centre. We hope to take a minimum of cars from the mainland, by car sharing and possibly hiring a minibus on Islay to transport participants to and from ferries and for the bird watching trips. The best ferries to catch for the meeting leave Kennacraig at 18.00hrs on 24th April and return from Islay (Port Askaig) at 15.30hrs on 26th April.

A number of people have already shown an interest in this venture after notices in the last two issues of the *Eider*, and some plan to make the trip into a longer holiday. So, please register your interest with Steve Petty (contact details at the top of page 2) as soon as possible, so that you can be kept up to date with developments. More details about the trip will appear in the September *Eider*, including an article by Malcolm Ogilvie about the wildlife we are likely to see over the weekend.

#### Spring Meeting on Islay Programme for the indoor session on Sat 25th April 2009

Time	Topic
13.10-13.20	Introduction <i>Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club</i>
13.20-1330	Introduction to the Islay Natural History Trust <i>Malcolm Ogilvie</i>
1330-1345	Recent bird sightings <i>Paul Daw, Argyll Bird Recorder</i>
1345-1430	Islay wildlife <i>George Jackson</i>
15.15-1600	Tea/coffee
1600-1645	<i>Choughs</i> <i>Eric Bignal or colleague</i>
1645-1730	Geese on Islay <i>Malcolm Ogilvie</i>

## Field trip to the Isle of Bute—Saturday 29 March

Undaunted by a foul weather forecast, eleven club members made the ferry crossing from Colintraive to Bute. We settled gratefully into the warmth of the school mini-bus that Ian Hopkins had organised. On the way to the kennels to leave Katie's dogs for the day we stopped at Port Bannatyne and identified **Black-backed**, **Lesser Black-backed**, **Herring** and **Common Gull**, **Shag**, **Hoodie**, a **Mute Swan**, **Shelduck**, **Mallard**, **Curlew**, **Oystercatcher**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Eider** and **Jackdaw**.

We continued round the island visiting the varied habitats. On the road above Inchmarnock we added **Teal**, a **Black-bird**, **Starling**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Chaffinch**, **Skylark**, **Pied Wagtail**, **Tufted Duck**, **Goldeneye**, and a **Linnet** flock to our list. At Greenan Loch we found **Wigeon**, **Lapwing**, **Rook**,

**Sparrowhawk**, male **Pochard**, and we think two female **Scaup**. At Loch Fad the promised weather arrived and we dashed to the hide in heavy rain where we saw **Coot** and a **Song Thrush**. Then in a field we found **Pink-footed**, **Barnacle** and **Greylag** Geese. We later added a **Greenfinch** to the list.

We had an excellent pub lunch at the Kingarth Hotel. We sat round a large table eating and drinking whilst drying out and de-misting our scopes and binoculars. Once back in the mini-bus with the rain still lashing down, we agreed to end a most enjoyable day of bird watching and Ian drove us back to the ferry for 15.30hrs.

Patricia Russell

## Field trip to the Sound of Gigha—Saturday 19 April

*Once again we were blessed with fine weather for the annual ABC field trip to the Sound of Gigha, although there was a brisk, cold breeze from the ENE. Happily we had a record turn out for this trip, with 25 people arriving at the car park at Ronachan, including some new club members and guests.*

As usual several newly arrived **Willow Warblers** were singing in the trees opposite the car park together with **Robins** and **Wrens**. At least six **Great Northern Divers** were found, although most were well out at sea. Two **Sandwich Terns** flew past off-shore—the first of the year for many of us. **Rock Pipits** were hopping about on the shore and some were singing. On the rocks were several **Shags** and one or two **Great Cormorants** with at least seven **Red-breasted Mergansers** and a pair of **Common Shelducks** nearby. Unusually, no Common Eiders were seen here. Close to the shore, gulls included **Common**, **Herring**, and **Great Black-backed**. A pair of **Ringed Plovers** was flying back and forth along the shore and the odd **Oystercatcher** was about. Single **Gannets** flew past out at sea and one or two **Sand Martins** flew past the car park.

The weather conditions at the site at 'West Coast Salmon' were not ideal, with a stiff breeze still blowing, and this may have influenced the number of birds seen. We only had frustratingly brief views of the one or two **Slavonian Grebes**, in breeding plumage. There were small groups of **Common Scoters** sitting on the sea just off-shore, which gave reasonably good views—probably 15 or more in all. No **Velvet Scoters** were spotted this year although the choppy conditions could have hidden any that were very far out. We did pick up a couple of pairs of **Long-tailed Ducks** that obligingly stayed around long enough for everyone to get a good look at them. **Common Eiders** did make an appearance here and a group of three **Common Goldeneyes** were also seen. Two **Ringed Plovers**, a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and a couple of **Razorbills** flew past and a **Pied Wagtail** was in the dunes. We had to drag ourselves

away to be in time for the 12.00hrs ferry to Gigha.

As we waited to board the ferry a **Common Raven** flew over and a single **Barn Swallow** and two more **Sandwich Terns** were seen by some. It was quite choppy on the journey across to the island, but we managed to see a few **Black Guillemots** and **Common Guillemots**, and the odd **Razorbill**. At least a dozen or more **Common Scoters** were also spotted before we reached the island, and as the ferry came in to the slipway on Gigha, a **Great Northern Diver** was seen close to the shore.

The usual passerines were seen and heard as we walked to the hotel, including **Meadow Pipit**, **Wren**, **Dunnock**, **Robin**, **Blue Tit**, **Song Thrush**, **Blackbird**, **House Sparrow**, **Common Starling**, **Goldfinch** and **Greenfinch**. As the wind made it rather cold for sitting outside we were grateful that the Gigha Hotel made their lounge available for us to eat our lunch. From inside the glorious spring sunshine was very enjoyable! In view of the strength of the wind we decided to return to the mainland straight after lunch.

As we left Gigha, three **Sandwich Terns** were fishing close to the shore and on the return journey we saw more **Great Northern Divers** and **Black Guillemots** close to the ferry.

Another single **Swallow** flew past as we walked from the ferry towards Katie Pendreigh's house, and we spotted what appeared to be a flock of **Whimbrels** in the fields. As we approached closer it became clear that there was indeed a flock of a dozen or so **Whimbrels**, which were standing conveniently close to a couple of **Eurasian Curlews**. This was an excellent opportunity to sort out the distinguishing features of two species which are not always as easy to separate as some field guides make out. The size difference is only striking when the species are next to each other. A couple of **Oystercatchers** nearby were also a useful size comparison being a similar height to the **Whimbrels** although rather stockier. The pale central crown stripe of the **Whimbrel** is only clearly visible if the bird is facing you, but the shorter and differently shaped bill is more of a help. Many field guides highlight the call as an

easy ID feature but none of the Whimbrel we saw made a sound! There were at least two flocks of a dozen or so birds and obligingly, they kept returning so that we could have another look at them. By the end of the afternoon we could all identify a Whimbrel instantly – well, more or less!

Katie then led us on an enjoyable walk along the shore and inland past a damp area with rushes and reeds. The sun was still shining, **Sky Larks** sang overhead and we had good views of two wagtails on the beach. We all eventually agreed they were **White Wagtails** rather than Pied. Iain Livingstone would have been proud of us! A pair of **Common Shelduck** flew past and landed on the beach and, in a field next to the shore, at least five **Northern Wheatears** also allowed excellent views; none showed features of the Greenland race. A male **Common Stonechat** was seen nearby.

Two **Common Snipe** were flushed from the damp field and two **Northern Lapwings** were near a flooded area, in what looked to be good breeding habitat. **Reed Bunting**, **Common Pheasant** and **Collared Dove** helped to make up our species list as we walked via the main road for a welcome cup of tea with biscuits at Katie's house. As we enjoyed the refreshments we could actually watch the Whimbrel again from the living room window and were entertained by 'Fred', Katie's tame Rook who joined up for tea, eating biscuits on the garden wall. So despite the stiff easterly breeze we had an enjoyable day with the birds (58 species plus White Wagtail) and good conversation.

As always, many thanks are due to Katie for kindly providing the refreshments for such a large group.

Paul Daw

### Field trip to Colonsay—weekend 16-18 May



The party arriving in Colonsay (above) and one of the islands charismatic species, the Chough (below) ©David Palmar



*Friday 16 May in Oban was a dull evening, but it was fortunately dry. Boarding the Calmac ferry "Lord of the Isles", 13 of us (and a fiddle orchestra) sailed out at 17.00hrs through the Sound of Kerrera, noticing **Eiders**, **Black Guillemots**, **Cor-morants** and **Shags** on the rocks. Past the Garvellachs, there was a **Golden Eagle** flying above the most northerly of the islands to the tune of the Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre from the forward lounge! Out in the open sea, there was a **Great Northern Diver**, a few **Manx Shearwaters**, **Guillemots**, **Razorbills** and **Puffins**, and the odd **Gannet** diving as we approached Colonsay, where the sun came out, and remained out for the evening.*

David Jardine was there to meet us with the island minibus. He drove us to Loch Fada, where we were treated to a **Cuckoo**, a male **Hen Harrier** flying past, and a **Heron** nesting in a low willow tree. After depositing our baggage in the bunkhouse, we walked along the road through the woods and fields to Kiloran Bay in the north, hearing the elusive **Grasshopper Warbler** and **Corn Crake**, and spotting **Chough**, a **Raven** and **Feral Goats**. On the way back, some **Woodcock** flew past as it grew dark.

On Saturday 17 May, a visit to Oronsay was planned, to coincide with low tide. On the way, we saw **Sedge Warbler**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Dunnock**, **Chiffchaff**, **Willow Warbler**, **Lapwing** and many other common species. Parking the minibus at the south end of Colonsay, we walked out on to the Strand, a kilometre-wide sound which separates the main island from Oronsay. Stopping briefly to wait for the tide to go out, we then proceeded across the wet sand, and were met by Mike, the RSPB warden for Oronsay. Mike took us on a walk, stopping to explain about Hebridean Sheep grazing the *Molinia* short enough for waders to nest in, and Luing Cattle helping to keep the machair grass in a suitable condition for **Choughs**. He showed us a cow-pat which **Choughs** had investigated, to see if there were crane-fly larvae in it yet.

Amongst ornithological highlights of Oronsay were **Twite**, **Lapwing**, **Rock Dove**, **Reed Bunting**, **Sky Lark**, **Redshank**,

and above all, **Corncrake**, which after skulking loudly in the nettles for a while, eventually decided to come out and give us a good show, which the local paparazzi duly recorded (see opposite).

After a brief visit to the Priory, Mike gave us a lift back across the Strand in his Land Rover, which was ideal, as it saved us another three mile walk, and the prospect of being cut off by the tide! After a visit to Scalasaig, we went on to the west coast, beside Colonsay "Airport".

**Shelduck** and **Oyster Catcher** foraged in the sandy bay below the main (only!) runway. **Great Northern Diver**, **Eiders** and seals were seen in the bay. After a compulsory stop at the island bookshop to buy David Jardine's book on the birds of Colonsay (only kidding!), we recorded **Turtle Dove**, **Tree Creeper**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Cuckoo**, and **Canada** and **Greylag Geese**, both with goslings.

We repaired to the Colonsay Hotel for dinner, after which we visited the village hall for a concert by the Oban and Lorne Fiddlers, conducted by Daphne Campbell, and a wonderful series of jokes by the compere, Peter Macleod, for example:

*"What is the difference between a Colonsay farmer and a seagull?*

*Only one of them can put a deposit on a new tractor."*

Sunday 18th dawned a glorious sunny day. We started with a short minibus ride then a walk to Uragaig cliffs, where we had the most wonderful views of an **Otter**, seen from above for about 20 minutes, swimming across the sea, climbing out on to several rocky stacks and foraging in rock pools. There were few seabirds in comparison to normal, mostly **Kittiwakes**, and some **Fulmars** gliding about, but most of the usual **Guillemots** and **Razorbills** had not appeared. We did, however, have distant views of skuas, both **Arctic** and **Great**, and we also saw a **Cuckoo** up close, and **Lesser Redpoll** and a **Sedge Warbler** appeared in the bushes.

After a paddle in Kiloran Bay and a packed lunch in the sand dunes, complete with **Common Gulls**, **Arctic Terns** and **Linnets**, we set out north past **Ravens**, **Choughs** and **Jackdaws** flying about, towards Balnahard, to see if we could find a **Golden Eagle**, which we duly did—being mobbed by a **Raven**, and we found its eyrie on the cliffs.

Then it was back in the minibus to the bunkhouse for a cup of tea, collecting our luggage and leaving it at the Ferry terminal before heading to the Pantry for our evening meal, prepared very quickly, with good portions and much cheaper than in the hotel! The ferry duly arrived on time, and then it was off into the sunset, with magnificent views of **Manx Shearwaters** and **Razorbills**, the sunlit hills of Jura, Scarba and the Garvellachs, a glorious sunset over Mull, then back to Oban, with McCaig's Tower lit up, and the Mull ferry making an impressive night picture. We arrived at 22.30hrs, then after retrieving the car, it was back to our various establishments—in our case we got to bed in Glasgow by 01.30hrs the next morning, ready for going back to work for a rest a few hours later!

All participants had a wonderful time, and would like to



The party approaching Uragaig Cliffs (above) and a lucky photo (eventually!) of a Corn Crake (below)  
©David Palmar

join with me in thanking the club for making the excursion possible, and in particular in thanking David Jardine for sharing his expertise, his minibus driving, and for organising the accommodation and all the food for breakfast and packed lunches - I think he will still be eating the leftovers as you read this!

**David Palmar** (website <http://www.photoscot.co.uk>)

## Arrival of spring migrants, departure of winter visitors and some passage migrants in 2008

*Once again, this report has only been possible thanks to the efforts of those who took the trouble to send in records. We have had an even better response than last year to the request for arrival dates of spring migrants in Argyll, and as a result we have quite a detailed picture of what happened this year. Many thanks for all your records and to Eddie Maguire for many reports from Kintyre. A table of departure dates is included at the end of this report. If you have any observations that would add to this picture, it is not too late to send them in.*

### Departure of winter visitors

There was a noticeable movement of **Whooper Swans** on 11<sup>th</sup> April when flocks were seen on Islay and in Mid-Argyll and seven late birds still lingered on Tiree on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. A significant proportion of wintering **Barnacle** and **White-fronted Geese** also left Islay overnight on 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> April (John Armitage) and all the wintering geese at The Laggan, Kintyre left on 15<sup>th</sup> April.

There were a few more spring records of **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** than usual, but no **Fieldfares** were reported after 11 in Kilmichael Glen on 6<sup>th</sup> April and the last **Redwings** were on 11<sup>th</sup> April, when 40 were seen on Tiree. A **Lapland Bunting** was photographed near Salen, Mull on 13<sup>th</sup> April (photo opposite), but there were no late records of Bramblings or Snow Buntings.

A **Waxwing** was seen in a garden at Eredine on 17<sup>th</sup> April, a very late date for Argyll, although curiously, one was seen in Lochgilphead on exactly the same date in 2002.

### Spring arrival pattern

The pattern of arrivals showed quite a mixed picture this year. Some migrants that are usually among the earliest arrivals were somewhat later than in recent years. **Northern Wheatears** did not appear until 25<sup>th</sup> March, and apart from a scattering of records on 31<sup>st</sup> March, most first sightings were in early to mid-April. A very spring-like day on 31<sup>st</sup> March produced a small flurry of migrants. The first **Sand Martins** and **Common Chiffchaffs** were noted and although this is quite typical for Sand Martins, Chiffchaffs usually appear earlier in March.

**Ospreys** on 1<sup>st</sup> April were a little later than usual, but two records of **Barn Swallows** on the same day were not unusual for first arrivals. However, the main arrival of **Swallows**, from about 19<sup>th</sup> April in most places, was a little later than normal. As is often the case, a lone **House Martin** appeared as early as 4<sup>th</sup> April, though most seemed a little later than usual and more than one observer has reported that their local House Martins have not arrived yet!

There were several quite early records of **Common Cuckoos**, following one on 9<sup>th</sup> April on Colonsay, although most places had them around the usual time from 18<sup>th</sup> April onwards. A **Willow Warbler** on 9<sup>th</sup> April was rather early. There appears to have been quite a movement of migrants from 9<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> April as several places had their first **Sand Martins**, **Northern Wheatears**, **Willow Warblers** and **Chiff-**



**Above:** A Lapland Bunting at Salen, Mull on 13 April  
© Mick Brennan

**Below:** A cock Whinchat ©Andy Robinson

**chaffs** during these few days. Apart from one reported on Mull on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, **Common Sandpipers** arrived at about the usual time. The first **Corn Crakes** on Coll and Tiree (13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> April respectively) were also on fairly typical dates as was the first **Tree Pipit** on 14<sup>th</sup> April and the first **Common Tern** on 16<sup>th</sup> April.

Because of their over-wintering habits, first dates for **Blackcaps** are always difficult to detect, but birds reported on 6<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> April were probably new arrivals. A **Ring Ouzel** singing near the Rest and be Thankful on 22<sup>nd</sup> April could have been a local breeding bird or a passage migrant.

The first **Grasshopper Warblers** on 23<sup>rd</sup> April were a little later than usual, but by 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> April they were reeling all over the place. Many **Sedge Warblers** seem to have arrived on 28<sup>th</sup> April too (also slightly later than usual) as there were widely scattered records on that date. Similarly the first **Common Whitethroat** was recorded on 28<sup>th</sup> April, but most seem to have arrived on 30<sup>th</sup> April when there were records from various parts of the county. The first **Common Redstart** on Mull was on the fairly typical date of 26<sup>th</sup> April, but the first **Wood Warbler**, on 28<sup>th</sup> April, was on the late side.

Two **Common Swifts** seen between Lochgilphead and Bridgend on 1<sup>st</sup> May were the earliest for ten years. There have only been three previous April records. However, a first **Whinchat** on 29<sup>th</sup> April was a few days later than usual and the **Garden Warbler** on 3<sup>rd</sup> May was also a little late. Always among the last to arrive, **Spotted Flycatchers** on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> May were a little early.

The only **Pied Flycatcher** reported so far was a probable migrant at Killellan Lodge, Kintyre on 10<sup>th</sup> May. They are now very scarce in Argyll and any records at all would be

most welcome.

### Passing spring migrants

A drake **Garganey** on Tiree on 23<sup>rd</sup> April and a pair of **Dotterel** near the Rest and be Thankful on 11<sup>th</sup> May were almost certainly just passing migrants. It is a good spring for passage **Whimbrels**, with a steady flow of records from all over Argyll from 16<sup>th</sup> April onwards, and birds still passing through.

The usual spring **Turtle Dove** appeared on Tiree on 7<sup>th</sup> May. Also on Tiree, and more remarkably, was a female/immature **Golden Oriole** on 6<sup>th</sup> May. Last, but certainly not least, a **Great Reed Warbler** was reported singing in a garden on Seil Island on 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> May. A description has been supplied and, if accepted by BBRC, this will be a new species for the Argyll list.

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### Departure and arrival dates of migrants—spring 2008

Species	Date	Number	Location	Observer
Whooper Swan	11 April	7	Portnahaven, Islay	John Armitage
	11 April	25	Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll	Jim Dickson
	24 April	5	The Reef, Tiree	John Bowle
	2 May	7	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	John Bowler
Garganey	23 April	drake	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	John Bowler
Long-tailed Duck	19 April	4	West Coast Salmon, Kintyre	ABC Field Trip
Osprey	1 April	2	Loch Ederline, Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan & Karl Pipes
	14 April	1	Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll	Robert Donaldson
	15 April	1	Loch Tulla, North Argyll	Nigel Suess
	25 April	1	Balephuill, Tiree	John Bowler
Corn Crake	13 April	1 calling	Uig, Coll	Simon Wellock
	15 April	1 calling	Balephuill, Tiree	John Bowler
	26 April	2 calling	Colonsay	Jim Dickson
Dotterel	11 May	pair	Beinn an Lochain, Cowal	per Russ Liddell
Jack Snipe	9 April	1	Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree	John Bowler
Black-tailed Godwit	17 April	7	Loch Bhasapol, Tiree	John Bowler
	1 May	2	Westport Marsh, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
Whimbrel	6 April	1	Machrihanish, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	16 April	7	Tayinloan, Kintyre	Katie Pendreigh
	19 April	24+	Tayinloan, Kintyre	ABC Field Trip
	21 April	1	Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll	Kevin Frances
	22 April	6	Loch Gruinart, Islay	John Armitage
	24 April	10	The Reef, Tiree	John Bowler
	27 April	14	Loch na Cille, L. Sween, Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan
	28 April	24	Fidden, Mull	Bryan Rains
Common Sandpiper	2 April	1	Lochdon, Mull	per Alan Spellman
	11 April	1	East Loch Fada, Colonsay	Alan Davis
	11 April	1	Machrihanish, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	15 April	1	Loch Scridain, Mull	Bryan Rains

Species	Date	Number	Location	Observer
Common Sandpiper	16 April	3	Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll	Jim Dickson
	16 April	1	Stremnishmore, Islay	Andy Schofield
	17 April	1	Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll	Iain Gibson
	20 April	1	Connel, Mid-Argyll	Mike Harrison
	20 April	1	Kilail, Otter Ferry, Cowal	Tom Callan
	22 April	1	Clachan Sound, Seil, Mid-Argyll	Bob Grove
	24 April	1	Tarbert, Kintyre	Steve Petty
	28 April	1	Minard, Mid-Argyll	Paul Daw
	8 May	1	Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree	John Bowler
Arctic Skua	15 April	3	Machrihanish, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	28 April	1	Roadside Lochs, Coll	Simon Wellock
	28 April	1	Rhinns of Islay	John Armitage
Lesser Black-b. Gull	3 March	1	Oban, Mid-Argyll	Stuart Gibson
	4 March	2	Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll	Jim Dickson
	6 March	1	The Laggan, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	7 March	3	Loch an Eilean, Tiree	John Bowler
Sandwich Tern	23 March	1	Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	8 April	3	Tayinloan, Kintyre	Katie Pendreigh
	10 April	2	Port Ellen, Islay	per Andy Schofield
	19 April	5	Rhunahaorine Point, Kintyre	Bill Allan
	19 April	3	Gigha, Kintyre	ABC Field Trip
Common Tern	16 April	1	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	John Bowler
Arctic Tern	17 April	3	Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	28 April	4	Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree	John Bowler
Little Tern	15 April	1	Gott Bay, Tiree	John Bowler
	1 May	2	Tayinloan, Kintyre	Katie Pendreigh
Turtle Dove	7 May	1	Scarinish, Tiree	John Bowler
Cuckoo	9 April	1 seen	Scalasaig, Colonsay	Alan Davis
	12 April	1 calling	Colintraive, Cowal	Danielle & Gr.Clark
	14 April	1 seen	nr Grasspoint, Mull	Alan Spellman
	15 April	1 calling	Bridge of Orchy, North Argyll	Nigel Suess
	18 April	1 seen	The Oa, Islay	Malcolm Chattwood
	18 April	1 calling	Glen Euchar (nr. Oban), Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan
	23 April	1 calling	Tullochgorm (Minard,) Mid-Argyll	Paul Daw
	23 April	1 seen	Balvicar, Seil Is., Mid-Argyll	Richard Wesley
	23 April	1 calling	Connel, Mid-Argyll	Mike Harrison
	24 April	1 calling	Loch Tulla, North Argyll	Bob Grove
	25 April	1 calling	Appin, North Argyll	Mary Gregory
	27 April	1 calling	Kames, Cowal	Steve Petty
	5 May	1 calling	Cornaigbeg, Tiree	John Bowler
Common Swift	1 May	2	nr Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	Sue Chattwood
	3 May	1	Balephetrish, Tiree	John Bowler
	4 May	1	Bridgend, Mid-Argyll	Malcolm Chattwood
	4 May	2	Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan
	9 May	3	Oban, Mid-Argyll	Anne-Lisa Dickie
Sand Martin	28 March	4	Lussa Loch, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	31 March	12	Glen Feochan House, Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan
	6 April	65	Loch Ederline, Mid-Argyll-with others at nearby lochs.	Jim Dickson
	10 April	1	Braevallich, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll	Karl Pipes
	10 April	4	Loch Feochan, Mid-Argyll	Richard Wesley
	10 April	17	Ormidale, Cowal	David Warden
	13 April	first 2	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	John Bowler
	18 April	first	Connel, Mid-Argyll	Mike Harrison
	19 April	20	Millhouse, Cowal	Tom Callan

Species	Date	Number	Location	Observer
Swallow	1 April	20+	Kilchurn Castle, L. Awe, Mid-Argyll	Allan Gray
	1 April	1	Seil Island, Mid-Argyll	John Sedgwick
	3 April	1	Southend, Kintyre	per Eddie Maguire
	6 April	1	Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll	Jim Dickson
	6 April	1	Bridgend, Mid-Argyll	Malcolm Chattwood
	8 April	1	first on Mull	per Alan Spellman
	9 April	1	Appin, North Argyll	Mary Gregory
	11 April	1	Dunstaffnage, Mid-Argyll	per Robin Harvey
	11 April	1	Muasdale, Kintyre	per Katie Pendreigh
	14 April	1	Tayinloan, Kintyre	Katie Pendreigh
	16 April	6	Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree	John Bowler
	16 April	1	Loch Gruinart, Islay	Andy Schofield
	19 April	1	Fidden, Mull	Bryan Rains
	20 April	1	Finchairn, Loch. Awe, Mid-Argyll	Karl Pipes
	20 April	1	Connel, Mid-Argyll	Mike Harrison
	21 April	2	Millhouse, Cowal	Tom Callan
	23 April	2	Tullochgorm (Minard), Mid-Argyll	Paul Daw
	23 April	1	Kames, Cowal	Steve Petty
House Martin	4 April	1	Kilbride Bay, Cowal	Daphne Campbell
	11 April	25+	Blarghour Farm (Loch Awe), Mid-Argyll (mixed flock with Swallows)	Delys Marks
	16 April	1	Aros, Islay	Andy Schofield
	24 April	2	Loch Beg, Mull	Bryan Rains
	24 April	2	Bridgend, Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	Malcolm Chattwood
	4 May	2	Otter Ferry, Cowal	Tom Callan
	4 May	20	Add Estuary, Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan
Tree Pipit	14 April	1 singing	Tullochgorm (Minard,) Mid-Argyll	Paul Daw
	23 April	2 singing	Eas Mor, Torosay, Mull	Bryan Rains
	26 April	singing	Appin, North Argyll	Mary Gregory
	29 April	singing	Lussa Loch. Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
White Wagtail	27 March	3	Traigh nan Gilean, Tiree	John Bowler
	29 March	2	Barr Beith. L. Awe, Mid-Argyll	Karl Pipes
	7 April	3	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	John Bowler
	8 April	1	Machrihanish, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	16 April	10	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	John Bowler
	16 April	1	Fidden, Mull	Bryan Rains
	27 April	16 in flock	Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree	John Bowler
Waxwing	17 April	1	Eredine, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll	Karl Pipes
Common Redstart	26 April	male	Torosay, Mull	Bryan Rains
	6 May	1 singing	Crinan, Mid-Argyll	Paul Daw
Whinchat	29 April	singing	Lussa Loch, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	1 May	female	Scammadale, Mid-Argyll	George Newall
	2 May	male	Glen Euchar (nr. Oban), Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan
	5 May	pair	Kilmartin Glen, Mid-Argyll	Karl Pipes
	6 May	male	Otter Ferry, Cowal	Tom Callan
Northern Wheatear	25 March	1	Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
	25 March	3 singles	Tiree-Happy Valley, Hynish, Baugh	per John Bowler
	31 March	2	Craignish Point, Mid-Argyll	Malcolm Chattwood
	31 March	2 (pr)	Loch Scammadale, Mid-Argyll	Bill Allan
	31 March	3	Gleann Seilisdeir, Mull	Ron Youngman
	2 April	1 (f)	Ulva Lagoons, L. Sween, Mid-Argyll	Jim Dickson
	3 April	1	Tayinloan, Kintyre	Katie Pendreigh
	3 April	1	Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll	Roger Broad
	4 April	1	Balvicar, Seil Is., Mid-Argyll	Richard Wesley
	7 April	2	Gribun, Mull	Bryan Rains
	9 April	2	Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree	John Bowler
	10 April	1	Tayinloan, Kintyre	Katie Pendreigh
	11 April	3	Portnahaven, Islay	John Armitage
	11 April	1	Lochgoilhead, Cowal	James Towill
	17 April	25	Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree	John Bowler

Species	Date	Number	Location	Observer
'Greenland' Wheatear	23 April	2	Sorisdale, Coll	Simon Wellock
	5 May	2	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	John Bowler
Ring Ouzel	2 April 22 April	1 1 singing	near Campbeltown, Kintyre Rest and be Thankful, Cowal	per Eddie Maguire John Bowler
Fieldfare	5 April 6 April	40 11	Crossapol, Tiree Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll	John Bowler Jim Dickson
Redwing	23 March 8 April 8 April 9 April 11 April	100+ 15 c.10 c.50 40	Loch Tralaig, Mid-Argyll Barsloisnoch, Mid-Argyll Portnahaven, Islay Balephuill, Tiree Balephuill, Tiree	John McAvoy Jim Dickson John Armitage John Bowler John Bowler
Grasshopper Warbler	23 April 23 April 26 April 27 April 27 April 27 April 28 April 28 April 29 April 29 April 30 April 30 April 30 April 7 May	1 reeling 1 reeling 1 heard 1 reeling 1 reeling 1 reeling 'several' 1 reeling 'several' 1 reeling 1 reeling 2 reeling 1 reeling 1 reeling	Balvicar, Seil Is., Mid-Argyll Connel, Mid-Argyll Duart Castle, Mull Tullochgorm (Minard,) Mid-Argyll Appin, North Argyll Colonsay Rhinn of Islay Dunadd, Mid-Argyll Ardconnel (nr Oban), Mid-Argyll Lussa Loch, Kintyre Acha, Coll nr Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll Kames, Cowal Carnan Mor, Tiree	Richard Wesley Mike Harrison Bryan Rains Paul Daw Mary Gregory Jim Dickson John Armitage Malcolm Chattwood Bob Grove Eddie Maguire Simon Wellock Brian John Steve Petty John Bowler
Sedge Warbler	26 April 28 April 28 April 28 April 28 April 30 April 6 May	1 singing 1 singing 1 singing 1 or more 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing	Colonsay Minard, Mid-Argyll Loch Bhasapol, Tiree Rhinn of Islay Glenadale, Kintyre Acha, Coll Craignish Point, Mid-Argyll	Jim Dickson Paul Daw John Bowler John Armitage per Eddie Maguire Simon Wellock Mike Deakin
Common Whitethroat	28 April 30 April 30 April 30 April 30 April 8 May	present 1 singing 1 singing pair singing 1 male	Tomain nan Eun, Coll Loch Gair, Mid-Argyll nr Kilfinan, Cowal nr Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll Aros Moss, Kintyre Carnan Mor, Tiree	Simon Wellock Paul Daw Tom Callan Brian John Eddie Maguire John Bowler
Garden Warbler	3 May	1 singing	Tullochgorm, Minard, Mid-Argyll	Paul Daw
Blackcap	6 April 18 April 22 April 23 April 26 April 28 April 2 May 5 May	1 singing female female male female 1 singing 2 (pair) 1 singing	Torrisdale Castle, Kintyre Eas Mor, Torosay, Mull Balvicar, Seil Is., Mid-Argyll Totronald, Coll Balephuill, Tiree Minard, Mid-Argyll Otter Ferry, Cowal Falls of Cruachan, North Argyll	per Eddie Maguire Bryan Rains Richard Wesley Ben Jones John Bowler Paul Daw Tom Callan Malcolm Chattwood
Wood Warbler	28 April 7 May	2 singing 2 singing	Minard, Mid-Argyll Crinan, Mid-Argyll	Paul Daw Paul Daw
Common Chiffchaff	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2 <sup>nd</sup> April 6 <sup>th</sup> April 8 <sup>th</sup> April 9 <sup>th</sup> April 9 <sup>th</sup> April 9 <sup>th</sup> April 10 <sup>th</sup> April	1 singing 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing	Dunoon, Cowal Achnabreck, Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll Saddell House, Kintyre Lochdon, Mull Lochgair, Mid-Argyll Balephuill, Tiree Kilmory, Mid-Argyll Tayinloan, Kintyre	George Newall Jim Dickson per Eddie Maguire Bryan Rains Paul Daw John Bowler Malcolm Chattwood Katie Pendreigh

Species	Date	Number	Location	Observer
Common Chiffchaff	12 April 14 April 16 April 19 April 20 April	1 singing 1 singing 4 singing 1 singing 1 singing	Oban Seil, Mid-Argyll Tighnabruaich, Cowal TTV nr. Minard, Mid-Argyll Appin, North Argyll Connel, Mid-Argyll	Richard Wesley Daphne Campbell Paul Daw Mary Gregory Mike Harrison
Willow Warbler	8 April 9 April 11 April 11 April 12 April 12 April 13 April 13 April 14 April 16 April 16 April 19 April 20 April	1 singing 1 singing 2 singing 4 singing 2+ widespread 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing 9 singing 1 singing 1 singing 1 singing	first on Mull first on Islay Barnluasgan, Mid-Argyll Lochgoilhead, Cowal Clachan Sound, Seil, Mid-Argyll Kilfinan, Cowal Camuslaich, Seil, Mid-Argyll Benderloch, North Argyll Connel, Mid-Argyll TTV nr. Minard, Mid-Argyll Uisken, Mull Appin, North Argyll Balephuill, Tiree	per Alan Spellman per Andy Schofield Jim Dickson James Towill Bob Grove Tom Callan Richard Wesley Robin Harvey Mike Harrison Paul Daw Bryan Rains Mary Gregory John Bowler
Spotted Flycatcher	7 May 8 May 11 May 11 May	1 seen 1 seen 1 seen 1 seen	Eredine, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll Carnan Mor, Tiree Minard Castle, Mid-Argyll Ulva Lagoons, L. Sween, Mid-Argyll	Karl Pipes John Bowler Karl Pipes Anne-Lisa Dickie
Pied Flycatcher	10 May	male	Killellan Lodge, S. Kintyre	Eddie Maguire
Golden Oriole	6 May	fem/imm	Carnan Mor, Tiree	John Bowler
Lapland Bunting	13 April	1	near Salen, Mull	Sylvia & Mick Brennan

## Recent bird reports from Paul Daw: February-April 2008

**New Species for Argyll.** The description of the **Whiskered Tern** seen by Eddie Maguire at Machrihanish SBO on 9 July 2007 has been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee. This is a new species for Argyll and takes our total to 329.

The description of a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** seen by John Bowler at Balephuill, Tiree on 8 September 2006 has been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee. The two Bonelli's Warblers (Western and Eastern—*Phylloscopus bonelli* and *P. orientalis*) were originally treated as a single species. The singing male at Easter Ellister, Islay on 21 to 22 May 1976 could not be assigned with confidence to one or the other of this species pair, so the Tiree bird is technically a 'first' for Argyll. However, the species total for Argyll remains at 329.

**February to April 2008 highlights.** These are included below. Additional information during this period can be found in 'Latest Reports 66–72' on the club's website (see box opposite). Information about migrants during this period appear in a separate article on pages 8-13.

**Observers.** Full names in brackets except: SW=Simon Wellock, JB=John Bowler, TC=Tom Callan, PD=Paul Daw, JD=Jim Dickson, BA=Bill Allan.

### Wildfowl (and Gamebirds)

Many **Whooper Swans** were on the move in mid-Mar in-

### Recent Report Updates

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

<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

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

cluding a flock of 49 that flew north over Lochgilhead at 19.40hrs on 18th Mar towards the Crinan Estuary (Christine Lawrence), where they were seen later by Louise Wood. Even larger numbers passing through Argyll on 27th Mar. These included small groups flying over Tiree all day plus 42 which came in off the sea from the south at 12.30hrs and landed at Loch an Eilein for a few hours before moving on. The latter included the neck-collared bird 2J53 which was last seen on Tiree in October 2001 (JB)! A **Black Swan** was an unexpected visitor to Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 16th Apr (JB—see page 19).

A flock of 216 **Barnacle Geese** was counted on Inch Kenneth, Mull on 31st Mar (Ron Youngman). A pair of **Gadwall** and 41 **Whooper Swans** were newly arrived at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 7th Apr (JB). A pair of **Gadwall** was present at Westport Marsh near Campbeltown on 30th Apr (Eddie Maguire).

The first-winter female **Surf Scoter** was still at Hough Bay, Tiree on 1st Feb (photo in the March *Eider*, page10), with eight **Long-tailed Ducks** and a male Goldeneye (latter rare on the sea here).

On 4th Feb, a female **Black Grouse** was with two males just starting to take on breeding plumage at Inverfolla, Appin, North Argyll and a male **Reeve's Pheasant** was photographed at Castle Lachlan, Loch Fyne, Cowal (TC). Another super male was seen at Ardtaraig, Cowal on 7th Mar and a very dark-green cock pheasant crossed in front of the car at the head of loch Scriven—very similar to a **Green Pheasant** (Steve Petty)!

Lekking **Black Grouse** included one or more at a site near Tullochgorm, Minard on 27th Apr (PD), a pair seen mating at a site near Strachur, Cowal on 28th Apr (TC) and a male and a female at a lekking site near Connel, Mid-Argyll early on 29th Apr (Bob Grove).

A group of six **Ptarmigan**, including two beautiful winter plumage males, were found at 800m on Beinn Odhar, North Argyll (NN338338) just within the Argyll recording area boundary on 15th Feb (Sid Wright; photo opposite). Two **Ptarmigan** in winter plumage were seen on Binnein an Fhithleir (above Glen Kinglas), Cowal on 4th Mar (John Fleming per Peter Woods). A **Red Grouse** and two **Ptarmigan** were seen on Beinn Bhreac near Barcaldine, North Argyll on 16th Mar (Debi Brennan per Robin Harvey).

A shore-based survey of seaducks, divers and grebes in upper Loch Fyne (Furnace—Largiemore south to Kilfinan Bay—Inverneil) on 17th Mar found 269 **Common Eiders**, 79 **Common Goldeneyes** and 43 **Red-breasted Mergansers** (PD). On 16th Feb there was a total of 26 **Long-tailed Ducks** at Hough Bay, Tiree (JB).

A **Swan Goose** was an unexpected sight on 18th Feb at Lochan na Beithe (NM9135) North Argyll. Presumably this was an escape from the nearby wildfowl collection at Benderloch (Mike Harrison). An adult drake **King Eider** was seen at the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory at 11.00hrs on 28th Feb. It remained until at least 5th Mar (John McGlynn & Eddie Maguire). This location seems to be becoming a 'hotspot' for this species.

### **Seabirds – divers, grebes, shearwaters, herons etc (and other seawatch species)**

The 5th February was a good day for divers in Argyll. A **Red-throated Diver** and a **Slavonian Grebe** (unusual here) were off Otter Ferry, Cowal (TC). At Dunaverty Bay in south Kintyre a minimum of 12 **Red-throated Divers** and three **Great Northern Divers** were present and four **Red-throated Divers** and six **Great Northern Divers** were off Machrihanish. A minimum of 12 **Black-throated Divers** and 45 **Great Northern Divers**, but only two **Slavonian Grebes** were in the Sound of Gigha (JD) and 14 **Great Northern Divers** were on Loch Scridain, Mull (Bryan Rains).

A count of the area of Loch na Keal between Eorsa and the loch head in ideal calm conditions on 18th Feb found 27 **Great Northern Divers**, nine **Red-throated Divers** and 40 **Slavonian Grebes**. On the same day 17 **Great Northern Divers**, four **Red-throated Divers** and a single **Slavonian**



**Top:** A neck-collared Greenland White-fronted Goose in the Tayinloan area, Kintyre ©Andy Robinson)

**Bottom:** A male Ptarmigan on Beinn Odhar, North Argyll on 15 February ©Sid Wright

**Grebe** were found on Loch Scridain between Eilean an Fheoir and Loch Beg (Dave Shackleton). This is the highest ever count of Slavonian Grebes on Loch na Keal known to me (PD). And, on the same day, 31 **Red-throated Divers**, 68 **Great Northern Divers** and 23 **Slavonian Grebes** were counted between Black Rock and Port Charlotte, Loch Indaal, Islay (Angus Hogg).

A shore-based survey of seaducks, divers and grebes along the east coast of Kintyre (Skipness—Campbeltown Loch) on 24th Mar found a **Red-throated Diver**, a **Black-throated Diver** and three **Great Northern Divers** in the Skipness/

Claonaig area and four **Red-throated Divers** together in Campbeltown Loch. Three of the latter were still completely in winter plumage while one was in full breeding plumage (PD).

A total of 33 **Great Northern Divers** were counted on Loch Scridain, Mull on 30th Mar (Bryan Rains). They were counted in the evening when the birds gather to roost on the open water and 28 **Great Northern Divers** were off Traigh Bhagh, Tiree on 11th Apr (JB).

Three early **Manx Shearwaters** were seen from Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 12th Mar (Eddie Maguire). On the ferry back to Oban from Colonsay on the evening of 18th Apr a group of six **Manx Shearwaters** was flying north, at about 20.45hrs when, out of nowhere, a **Peregrine** took one of the birds. Fortunately for the shearwater, the Peregrine lost its grip and its intended supper fell into the water, whilst the Peregrine raced off towards the mainland (Alan Davis).

A total of 48 **Manx Shearwaters** were seen off the east coast of Colonsay on 25th Apr (JD) and a sea watch at south-west Islay mid-morning on 28th Apr found 18 **Red-throated Divers** flying north and a passage of 115 **Manx Shearwaters** going south (John S. Armitage).

### Raptors, rails etc.

Two male **Hen Harriers** were performing display flights near Loch Melldalloch, Cowal on 3rd Feb (TC) and two **White-tailed Eagles** and two **Golden Eagles** were reported around Port Appin in early February (Mary Gregory).

A second or third calendar year **White-tailed Eagle** flew over Arileod, Ballard and Lonban, Coll on 14th Feb, but no wing tags were seen (SW). An adult **White-tailed Eagle** flew past "chased" by a Herring Gull at Port Appin, North Argyll on 16th Feb (John Carson) and an immature **White-tailed Eagle** was seen flying from Craobh Haven Mid-Argyll towards Luing via Arduaine Point and Degnish on 21st Mar (John McAvoy). Two **White-tailed Eagles** were reported at Loch Scammadale, near Oban on 5th Apr, at least one of which was an adult bird (Bob Grove). Two **White-tailed Eagles** reported at Musdale, near Oban on 13th Apr were possibly the same birds (per Richard Wesley).

Four **Hen Harriers**, a male and three females, were seen at Ardchrishnish, near Bunessan, Mull on 4th Apr (Bryan Rains). A **Red Kite** was reported near Loch Gorm, Islay on 17th Apr (Andy Schofield) and presumably the same bird was at Loch Gruinart on 22nd Apr (John Armitage). A **Red Kite**, with jesses, was reported on Jura on 30th Apr. Could this be the same bird as the one at Loch Gruinart on 22nd April (John Armitage)? Another **Red Kite** was reported over Tomain nan Eun, Coll on 28th Apr (SW).

A juvenile **Northern Goshawk** was reported near Coullabus, Islay on 21st Mar. A description is being supplied and, if accepted, it will be the first confirmed record on Islay for many years (Jeremy Hastings per Malcolm Ogilvie). Three **Common Kestrels** were seen in the area around Otter Ferry on 4th Mar (TC).

A **Common Coot** reported at Gallanach Pond on 28th Apr was apparently the first record for the island since 1955 (Rob Wainwright).

### Waders

Whilst at Crinan looking for the Snowy Owl on 6th Feb, Jim Dickson saw a sandpiper on the shore. It was at some distance and could not be seen clearly but seemed to show some characteristics of **Spotted Sandpiper**. In the following days Jim got closer views and some good photographs of this bird (see March *Eider*, page 8). He concluded it was probably a **Common Sandpiper** (still quite a find here in winter) although some experts who have seen the photos still think it could be a Spotted Sandpiper. They are not easy to tell apart in winter plumage! A **Common Sandpiper** flushed from the shore at Otter Ferry on 5th Mar was probably an over wintering bird or, just possibly, a very early migrant (TC).

A total of c.3,700 **Golden Plovers** were at The Reef, Tiree on 9th Apr and a **Jack Snipe** was at Ceann a' Mhara (JB). Small waders on the shore at Tayinloan, Kintyre on 7th Feb included 52 **Ringed Plovers**, 24 **Dunlin**, 20 **Sanderlings** and 28 **Turnstones** (Katie Pendreigh). A **Woodcock** was seen at dusk the same day, at Kilninver, near Oban (BA).

A flock of 33 **Sanderlings** at Machrihanish Bay on 28th Feb was unusual for this scarce winter visitor to Kintyre. Peak counts for other waders at Machrihanish included 12 **Purple Sandpipers** on 12th Apr, 45 **Whimbrels** on 27th Apr and 14 **Turnstones** on 28th Apr (Eddie Maguire). A flock of at least 30 **Purple Sandpipers** were on the shore at Dunoon, in the West Bay on 11th Feb—a good count for Argyll (Peter Woods).

On 23rd Apr a total of 51 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Gruinart floods, Islay (James How), waders at Loch a' Phuill included 232 **Ringed Plovers**, 16 **Black-tailed Godwits**, three **Whimbrels**, and 45 **Common Redshanks**. Also 10 **Whimbrels** and c.5,500 **European Golden Plovers** were at The Reef, as were the first **Lapwing** chicks of the spring (JB).

A big influx of waders into Tiree on 25th Apr included some 1,200 **Ringed Plovers** noted at four sites, including two Icelandic colour-ringed birds, a **Greenshank** at Balephet-rish Bay, around 850 **Sanderlings** at three beaches including a flock of 685 at Gott Bay; where there were also 245 **Dunlin** and a **Whimbrel** (JB).

### Skuas (see also 'Seabirds'), gulls, terns and auks

A **Great Skua** was seen on 1st Apr at Machrihanish (Eddie Maguire) and one was off the east coast of Colonsay on 25th Apr (JD).

On 5th Feb, single first-winter **Iceland Gulls** were at Dunaverty Bay, south Kintyre, Low Cattadale and Machrihanish. At least 1,000 **Common Gulls** were at The Laggan near Campbeltown (JD) and a first-winter **Glaucous Gull** was seen in Oban Bay (Stuart Gibson). There were widespread reports of **Iceland Gulls** throughout the period and it seems to have been another good winter for this species in Argyll.

The Oban adult **Ring-billed Gull** was with **Common Gulls** at



**Top:** Bar-tailed godwits at Loch Gilp on 20 February ©Jim Dickson

**Middle:** Ospreys at Loch Awe on 21 April ©Rob Baker

**Bottom:** First-winter Glaucous Gull, Oban Harbour on 15 February ©Stuart Gibson

Dunstaffnage Bay on the afternoon of 6th Feb (Stuart Gibson/BA).

First-winter **Glaucous Gulls** were at Heanish and Gott Bay, Tiree on 10th Mar (JB). John suspects there may have been up to four **Glaucous Gulls** on the island at the time as other first-winter birds were reported (per BA) at Balephetrish Bay on 3rd March and Loch Bhasapol on 8th March (JB).

A movement of auks noted from Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 1st Apr totalled at least 600 birds flying south, of which around 88% were **Razorbills** (Eddie Maguire). A survey of **Black Guillemots** at dawn on 9th Apr, at Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree, found 30 birds—up on last year's total (JB).

### Doves, owls, woodpeckers etc.

A pair of **Stock Doves** visited the garden at Tayness, Kilmartin, Mid-Argyll on 9th Apr, where they had been seen last summer (Brian John).

A male **Short-eared Owl** was giving the wing clapping display to a female at Carsaig, Mull on 24th Apr (Bryan Rains).

While walking along the shore near Ardnòe Point (near Crinan), Mid-Argyll on 3rd Feb, Hazel Whiston and her family saw a huge white owl, first perched in a tree and then flying. It was almost totally white and they concluded it could only be a male **Snowy Owl**. A description is now circulating BBRC and if accepted this would be the first Snowy Owl on the mainland of Argyll since 1891! It was last seen flying south, and was not seen again.

**Common Kingfishers** were reported on the River Awe near Taynult on 2nd Feb (Robin Harvey) and flying along the shore of Loch Fyne at Ardmarnock, Cowal on 10th Feb (Chris Thody). The latter was a very unusual location for this species.

A **Wryneck** was reported at Sorisdale, Coll at lunchtime on 23rd Apr (SW).

### Passerines

Migrant **Sky Larks** on 28th Feb included a flock of 55 at Fidden, Mull (Bryan Rains) and flocks of 20–30 in Otter Ferry area (TC).

A male **Black Redstart** was found near the pier at Scarinish, Tiree on 2nd Feb by a visiting RSPB group from Worcestershire. It was still present there on 4th Feb—the first mid-winter record for the island (per JB).

A **Eurasian Nuthatch** seen and photographed in a garden at Calgary, Mull on 10th April was the first record in Argyll away from the mainland and only the sixth for the county (Andrew Mortley—see photo opposite). Nuthatches have been spreading northwards in Scotland for some years and we may expect more Argyll records in the near future.

A male **Blackcap** was seen at a feeding station at Millstone Wholefoods shop, High Street, Oban, which backs on to Tesco's car park in early Feb (Ray and Linda Grant per Stuart Gibson) and another male was seen visiting a bird table

at Kilkerran, Campbeltown during Feb. Relatively few Blackcaps were reported this winter.

Reports of wandering **Magpies** during the period included one in Campbeltown from 31st Mar (Ian McKerrall *et al.*), one in a garden at Peninver, Kintyre (NR758243) on 5th Apr (John Craig per David Lord), one at Otter Ferry on 9th Apr (TC), one at Glenreaddell, Kintyre on 10th April (Eddie Maguire), two at Kilbride Croft, Seil, Mid-Argyll on 12th Apr (Richard Wesley) and one at Drumlemble, Kintyre on 24th April (Archie Greenlees). **Magpies** were also reported in Cowal, near Colintrave and in Glendaruel during early Apr (Arthur French per George Newall) and in Kintyre near Lussa Loch and at Carradale in mid-Apr. Early spring has become a traditional time for wandering Magpies to be reported in Argyll away from the core breeding area around Dunoon, but there have been more than usual this year. According to 'the books', they are very sedentary and there seems to be no mention anywhere of birds wandering in early spring. So this behaviour is something of a mystery.

A male **Brambling** was feeding on seed in a garden at Bridgend, Mid-Argyll on 9th Feb with other finches (Malcolm Chattwood) and another (or the same) male was seen at Slockavullin (Brian John). Three **Bramblings** (two males and a female) were seen in a garden at Drimfern, Glen Aray, Mid-Argyll on 9th Mar (Judith Witts).

A **Bullfinch** newly arrived at Carnan Mor on 19th Apr and another reported from Mannal were only the second and third ever spring records for Tiree. At least ten **White Wag-**

**tails** were along the coast east of Balephetrish the same day (JB).

A group of 14 **Common Crossbills** were seen at Loch Beg, Mull on 5th Feb (Bryan Rains). Following the large influx during the winter, a female **Common Crossbill** was seen feeding 3-4 young in the forest near Blarghour Farm, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll on 6th Apr (Delys Marks). A total of 32 **Snow Buntings** were at cattle feeding stances near Ballyhaugh, Coll on 29th Feb (SW).

### Other sightings

A dead **Cuvier's Beaked Whale** was found and photographed at Miodar/Salum Tiree on 9th Feb and two more of this species reported from Islay in the previous two weeks. A 5m **Pilot Whale** was found newly stranded at Crossapol Bay on 12th Feb—although it had been dead a long while (JB).

A **Pine Martin** ran through the garden at Otter Ferry on 14th Mar, followed less than a minute later, by a second individual (TC).

Early butterfly sightings included an optimistic **Small Tortoiseshell** at Balemartine, Tiree on 4th Apr (JB), another early **Small Tortoiseshell** at Balvicar, Seil, Mid-Argyll on 5th Apr (Richard Wesley) and a lone **Green-veined White** flying in the garden at Tullochgorm, Minard on 20th Apr, despite the stiff easterly breeze (PD).

### Paul Daw

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**Left:** A Bullfinch at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 19 April. This species is very rare on Tiree ©John Bowler



**Right:** Nuthatch at Calgary, Mull on 10 April, which was the first record for an Argyll island ©Andrew Mortley

## Siskins in a Campbeltown garden

Our newspaper, *The Independent* is notorious, indeed sometimes hilariously inaccurate in its reporting of ornithological matters. On one notable occasion some years ago it was expressing outrage, reasonably enough, about the annual slaughter of spring migrants crossing the Mediterranean should they be incautious enough to touch down in Crete. To illustrate the point there were coloured photographs of four species of which nature-lovers in the United Kingdom might expect to see fewer numbers than had set out on their journey. Two of the photographs were captioned as robin and sea-eagle. But they were, all too evidently, of American Robin *Turdus migratorius* and the famous Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*.

But, there was a brief report in the same paper the other day that was certainly accurate and interested us because it chimed perfectly with our Garden BirdWatch experience. It was to the effect that continental Siskins were invading British gardens because of poor cone crops in their own country.

We began recording here for Garden BirdWatch towards the end of 2002, and have had Siskins in the garden on one or two days each year from 2003 onwards—on three days in April that year, on two days in 2004, on one day in late March and one in late May in 2005, and on two days in April 2006. Last year there was a small increase in frequency—we saw them on four days in February and once in early March. To my recollection it was mostly single birds that came to the feeding station, and just occasionally a pair.

They are delightful little birds and we are always pleased to see them, but also somewhat surprised since there is no coniferous woodland nearer to us than a mile distant across the loch on the flanks of Ben Gullion. Nevertheless, a pair of Siskins duly appeared here in mid-January this year (therefore, several weeks earlier than usual) and was very soon joined by others. We never managed to get an accurate count of how many were present once numbers built up, but for



A male Siskin on a bird feeder ©Jim Duncan

much of the time we could certainly see seven or eight on the various feeders, with more flitting about. They were present in those sorts of numbers until 16th March; and we have seen none since.

Our feeding station until this year had consisted of a seed feeder containing mixed seed, a fat cake with insects, a fat ball hanging in a net, and one (latterly two) peanut feeders. Soon after the Siskins arrived this year we put up in addition a Niger seed feeder. But, we were intrigued to see that Siskins took from all these sources, even occasionally the fat cake. They seemed to spend as much time at the peanuts as at the Niger seed, which we had supposed would be their preferred diet.

Reading the ABC's new book, *Birds of Argyll* (and what a pleasure to be able to do so!) it is clear that groups of Siskins using peanut feeders in gardens in spring is entirely characteristic behaviour for this species, and one could deduce from our experience this year that the cone crops were also poor, which, combined with the continental invasion already mentioned, accounts for the unusual numbers seen in our garden this year. However, this is not entirely true as spruce cone crops have been good over winter. However, prolonged spells of wet and damp weather have prevented Siskins from feeding on this preferred food. Conifer cones only open in dry weather, when Siskins are able to extract seeds from between the cone scales with their long, pointed beak. But, whatever the reason, the result has been a very happy birdwatching experience for us during this seemingly interminable winter!

**Ian Teasdale**

## Icelandic connections to Argyll

Lying on the western edge of Scotland, Argyll is an excellent county in which to observe the annual spring migration of birds moving north towards their breeding and staging grounds in Iceland. Such passage is particularly pronounced on the Argyll Islands, with obvious influxes and movements of passerines such as White Wagtail and Redwing, waders such as Whimbrel, Golden Plover and Black-tailed Godwit, and wildfowl including Whooper Swan and Greenland Barnacle Goose. For many species however, the situation is confused because Argyll also receives spring migrants which are heading NE towards Fennoscandinavian and Russian breeding grounds, whilst of course others may end up breeding locally or a little further north in the Outer Hebrides. Some of the races, such as those of Icelandic and Scandinavian Redwings, are reasonably distinct in the field allowing their origins to be determined, but others are not. Thus, for example when watching a mixed flock of Sanderling, Dunlin and Ringed Plover on a Hebridean beach in late April, it is very difficult to ascertain where each individual bird is going to end up spending the summer. For four birds observed on Tiree this spring however, their northward journeys were plotted very precisely, thanks to individually identifiable markers—colour rings in three cases and the overall colour of a bird in the other!

First up was a leg-flagged and colour-ringed Sanderling “G3YWGR” which wintered at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree between 9 November 2007 and 26 April 2008. This bird had been ringed at Sandgerdi, south-west Iceland on 27 May 2007 and re-appeared at Sandgerdi on 8 May 2008. For this bird, Iceland appears to be a regular spring staging area before heading north-west to its’ breeding grounds in north-east Greenland.

On 25 April 2008, there was a large influx of Ringed Plover to Tiree and a partial survey found some 1,200 birds at just three beaches. A flock of 180 Ringed Plover at Balephetrish Bay held two different colour-ringed birds. These included male Ringed Plover “R//W-m//G” that had been ringed at Stokkseyri, south Iceland on 16 June 2005, and another male Ringed Plover “m//N-G//R” which had been ringed at Bolungarvik, west Iceland on 26 May 2007. The Icelandic ringers of these two colour-ringed birds were amazed to see pictures of them together at Balephetrish Bay, as their summering locations in Iceland are hundreds of kilometres apart. Both birds quickly moved on from Tiree, with “m//N-G//R” observed back at Bolungarvik on 2 May 2008 and “R//W-m//G” at Stokkseyri on 6 May 2008.

Finally and more prosaically a Black Swan turned up at Loch a’ Phuill, Tiree on 16 April 2008 amongst a small arrival of Whooper Swans. A handful of these escapee wildfowl now migrate annually to Iceland, where they spend the summer before returning once more in the autumn. A passing Black Swan stayed for only a few hours at Loch



Colour-ringed waders on Tiree—Ringed Plover above and Sanderling below ©John Bowler

Bhasapol, Tiree on 9 March 2004 before moving on northwards with Whooper Swans, whilst another spent the summer of 1896 (yes 1896!) at Loch a’ Phuill. The question therefore was whether the 2008 Black Swan would decide to stay or would it head north? It was last seen at Loch a’ Phuill on 29 April and amazingly what was presumably the same individual appeared at Kirkjubæjarklaustur in south Iceland the following day, establishing yet another direct bird link between Argyll and Iceland.

I would like to thank Jeroen Reneerkens, Böðvar Þórisson, Vigfús Eyjólfsson and Edward Rickson for sending through ringing and resightings information so diligently, which permitted the precise movements of these birds to be plotted.

**Dr John Bowler**

RSPB Officer for Tiree

## Winter birdwatching in Egypt

With long, dark and dreary days in winter a break away to somewhere warm and sunny can be a great tonic. However, it can be difficult to find somewhere that is good for birdwatching that does not involve a long-haul flight. Egypt may not be a destination that immediately springs to mind. But, after three visits to this fascinating country, I have found that both the birds and winter climate can both be very agreeable. For a relatively reasonable cost, Egypt with nearly 500 species recorded, can easily be visited as part of a holiday package. This advanced and politically stable Arab country is situated at the juncture of Africa and Asia and is blessed with a wide range of habitats from vast deserts, expansive wetlands along the Nile River and the extensive Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts. The fact that the country has a wealth of antiquities, probably best known for the Pharonic sites, also gives a trip here an added dimension, particularly when travelling with others who are not so keen on 'just' birdwatching.

Organised package holidays tend to visit resorts along the Red Sea, either to the Sinai Peninsula or further south on the Red Sea, as well as River Nile based holidays, though from Scotland there are only direct flights to the Sinai region. So far my own experiences have been limited to a week long river cruise from Luxor to Aswan and back, a week based in Luxor and some time spent in the Suez-Cairo area all in late winter or early spring. On the whole, I would say that we have been fortunate to have had completely hassle free trips other than being mildly pestered to look at or buy items from the ever present 'salesman' at tourist attractions and in the centre of towns, though a bit of a thick-skin does help! Away from these areas there is much less trouble though common sense should prevail and if unsure the company of a local guide or recommended taxi driver will help. The standard and quality of food both on cruise boats and in the larger hotels was very impressive and caused us no problems, but one should be cautious elsewhere to avoid 'Pharaoh's revenge'.

The week long cruise tends to be one of the most favoured trips for visiting birdwatchers and also makes for a very relaxing holiday gently scanning the banks of the Nile from a sun lounger as the land drifts by. In winter the Nile can hold significant numbers of duck with thousands of Tufted, Shoveler and smaller numbers of Pintail, Pochard, Wigeon and Teal. Prior to departure, I had seen from many reports that Ferruginous Duck appeared scarce, but was surprised to see flocks of up to 200. As well as these and many more wintering species the Nile valley also acts as a great migration corridor that channels birds to and from Europe. This is probably most noticeable with waders, where over the course of a week up to 20 different species can be seen. Those seen in large flocks are often familiar European species, although Senegal Thick-knees and Spur-winged Plover are a bit more exotic and the chance of rarer sightings like White-tailed Plover and the much sought after Painted Snipe.

A typical range of birds seen from the boat would include Pied Kingfisher which are always present, Squacco, Grey and occasional Purple Heron, Little Bittern and Striated Herons. Little and Cattle Egret are very numerous with some Great White Egrets too. Other marsh birds seen include small numbers of Egyptian Geese, flocks of Glossy Ibis, White Stork, the occasional Spoonbill and often spectacular numbers of Great Cormorants with flocks of up to 2000 flying in goose-like formations. Purple Gallinules or Swampheens can easily be seen on the river banks looking like giant Moorhens. Gull enthusiasts will easily pick out small numbers of Slender-billed Gull among the Black-headed and tern numbers can be amazing with Gull-billed, Whiskered and White-winged Back often very numerous though Black Tern are less common.

Bird of prey migration along the Nile tends to be less dramatic than along the Red Sea coast, though a good range of species can still be seen with Marsh Harrier, Black-shouldered Kite, Black Kite, Yellow-billed Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and occasionally other species such as Lanner, Egyptian Vulture, Osprey, Short-toed, Lesser Spotted, Booted and Golden Eagle seen particularly towards Aswan. Raptor migration along the Red Sea can I believe be very good in the right conditions and in the Suez region I have witnessed both Montagu's and Pallid Harrier steadily moving through in quite large numbers.

Other typical species that can be seen on a cruise week include Little Green Bee-eaters of the Egyptian race *cleopatra* and the Egyptian race (*savignii*) of Barn Swallow, which has red underparts and Egyptian race (*pygmaea*) of the Yellow Wagtail, which as the name implies, is noticeably small when seen among the numerous other flava wagtails that contain a real mixture of Russian Blue-headed types, Black-headed and a few 'others'! Laughing Dove, Hoopoe, Bulbul, Hooded Crow, Pallid Swift and Northern Wheatear can all be seen from the boat. However, to see a wider range, a bit of leg work is required ashore. Damp vegetated areas appear to be a good winter haunt for Bluethroat, with papyrus reeds holding Clamorous Reed Warblers and surrounding fields with Fan-tailed and Graceful Warblers. Depending on the month, warbler and other European-bound passerine migration can be quite good, with large numbers of Lesser Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow, Sedge, Reed, Olivaceous and Garden Warblers on view, and with a bit of work other species can be found. It can be a bit more difficult to find desert species on a cruise without a dedicated trip well away from the lush Nile valley. The 'standard' visit to the Valley of the Kings should yield Trumpeter Finch as they hang around in small flocks as well as Hooded Wheatear, Pale Crag Martin and Brown-necked Raven. Others birders have seen Desert Lark here. An 'add on' trip to Abu Simbel should yield White-crowned Black Wheatear and give a chance for sightings of Pink-

Bluethroat



Squacco Heron



Four stunning photos from Jim's trip to Egypt ©Jim Dickson

Nile valley Sunbird



Pied Kingfisher



headed Dove, African Skimmer and Goliath Heron, though to have a better chance of the last two a trip onto Lake Nasser would improve chances.

As an alternative to a cruise, this March we spent a week at the Movenpick Hotel on Crocodile Island about two miles south of Luxor after reading many positive reviews on the birdwatching there. The island which is roughly 1km long by 300m wide is connected by a bridge to the land-side. This gives the place a secure feel and is completely away from the more frenetic pace of life in Luxor where I would not recommend staying for birdwatching. Crocodile Island on the other hand has a range of habitats to attract many species that would otherwise pass by, and the island feels a bit like a bird observatory placed in the Nile. Indeed it has its own resident bird guide, Abdou Yossef, who offers daily birdwatching walks around the island and he can also arrange trips further afield. An early morning circuit of the island can be made before breakfast with each day bringing a fresh crop of birds migrating through. Again good numbers of herons and egrets can be seen and provide perfect opportunities for photography as they are fairly approachable. We had a Cattle Egret that would come up to your outside dinner table and happily be fed fish by hand. Crocodile Island is a well know location to see Painted Snipe, but they can be elusive. Other typical birds that can easily be seen include Nile Valley Sunbirds, Little Green Bee-eaters, Hoopoes, Bluethroats, Avadavats,

Laughing Doves, Pallid Swift, Isabelline Wheatear, Clamorous, Fan-tailed and Graceful Warblers to name a few. European-bound migrants are never far away and a good selection of pipits, wagtails, shrikes and warblers can be seen. As you relax on the banks of the Nile various gulls and tern fly past along with many different wader species allowing you to hone your identification skills!

In order to explore a bit further and find some desert species a 20 minute taxi ride can be made to get away from the Nile and reach the desert fringe. This proved very productive and allowed good views of Stone Curlew, Namaqua Dove, Lanner, Yellow-billed Kite, Desert Lark, Rock Thrush, Spanish Sparrow, Sardinian Warbler, Trumpeter Finch, Hooded and Isabelline Wheatears. On the outskirts of Luxor there are a series of massive reservoirs which held heaps of ducks and waders around the edges. The sight of over a thousand Shovelers in the air at once is really quite spectacular. It was possible to get close to mixed wader groups with the likes of Spotted Redshanks, and Wood, Green and Curlew Sandpipers as well as stints and stilts.

I hope that the above gives some idea about the birdwatching on offer during a short slow paced trip to Egypt in winter. For the more hardened birder, an all out birdwatching trip covering more of the country will yield a very good haul of species, especially if taken at the start or end of winter when migration is at its peak.

**Jim Dickson**

## Botanic garden trip

*Try, if you will, to imagine an interesting little story of peace, quiet, the great outdoors and the search for a red squirrel—but with a twist. In this story there is determination, tension, coincidence, surprises and a spirit guide disguised as a robin. For this is how my trip to Benmore Botanic Gardens felt. An epic dive through nature’s finest where my sole aim—to see and perhaps photograph a Red Squirrel—was to become part of a larger adventure that I had not foreseen.*

I had been aching to escape the city for some time and when I was told that a Red Squirrel was a regular sight in Benmore, I figured that it would be a nice trip. Add to this the sun, which on this particular Saturday was high in a clear blue sky. Even better, there was a cool breeze—it

was perfect walking weather.

I’ll be honest—I set out with one desire—to see a Red Squirrel. I had not considered other distractions. As far as I was concerned the camera in my hand was for one target alone – the elusive *Sciurus vulgaris*. Nothing else mattered.

The first hindrance to the singularity of my quest was that age old curse; a boy’s love of toys. In the visitor centre I was offered the use of a “radio-information gadget” that you type numbers into—numbers that were scattered throughout the gardens on little posts—and you were invited to listen to little snippets of information, be they historical, ecological or anecdotal, about the respective location. I was sold on the word ‘gadget’, and didn’t even consider how the wealth of information available may distract me from my quest. Which of course, it did. One hundred yards into the gardens and I came across my first little post and number; at the foot of a Monkey Puzzle tree. What I smiled at but thought nothing of at the time was the robin on the post which flew off as I approached. Typing in my newly discovered number I was treated to a lovely little anecdote on the origins of the term ‘Monkey Puzzle’.

After two hours of meandering along the labyrinthine pathways listening to various stories and ‘info-bites’, my sense of being followed heightened somewhat. A twitter here, a cheep there. I looked several times for my pursuer, but glimpsed only a flutter of wings or a brief shadow.



**Top left:** Andrew’s guide—the Robin

**Bottom left:** One of last year’s Roe Deer kids shrouded in greenery

**Right:** Finally—a Red squirrel!

©Andrew Kyle

I was ensconced in the story of the rhododendron invasion on my funky gadget thing when the tweet reoccurred, and this time the perpetrator flew past me and swerved away to the right. I forgot about the rhoddies momentarily and my eyes followed the little bird, and fell upon a delightful pond which had escaped my notice, surrounded by eye-catching skunk cabbage. Seeing a magnificent photo opportunity, what with the striking yellow leaves, the sun and the reflection upon the pond, I got my camera out.

And then, adding to the fortune, while lying on the ground to catch the perfect angle, I spotted a Common Lizard basking in the grass. Snap goes the camera again.

Soon after, I was haunted by my ghostly follower yet again, this time diving away behind an old woodshed. I followed and curiosity took me into the shed itself, where long ago I had used the same woodshed to win a game of hide and seek against my brother. As I entered I gazed up into the rafters, enjoying the memory, and it was then that I saw that I was not alone. There was a single Pipestrelle, hanging there, all alone. Another photo!

Now nearly four hours into my walk I had all but forgotten my squirrel seeking. I had taken fifty-plus photos of various attractions and now, no matter what, would leave the gardens satisfied with the experience.

In fact, so taken by the success of the photos so far, and as the day was moving on, I decided it might be time to head home. I started downhill.

Ah—that little bird again! It shot past me and perched on a holly, tweeting its distinct little tweet. I could see now it was a Robin, and the way the light caught it as it peered down at me—it was a good chance at another photo. I unleashed my camera....

...and the wee thing moved. It flew across to another tree, slightly further downhill. I moved closer, quietly this time, so not to scare it off. Cautiously and carefully choosing my footsteps I closed the distance; raised my camera; zoomed in for the perfect shot. That's when I saw it. Hidden behind the tree but now visible through close inspection, was a Roe Deer kid. A lovely wee thing, perhaps three feet high, looking up at me, watching from its supposed hidey-hole. I took a couple of photos—how could I not? Then quickly made my escape, unwilling to disturb the dear thing further.

I handed my radio-information gadget into the visitor centre with my thanks and headed out to my car. Around my neck hung a camera with digital photos chronicling my whole trip, which had proved a most escapist venture from the city. I would be returning to the urban landscape refreshed, my batteries recharged.

As I started packing away my twitching jacket I heard that tweet again. I turned to offer my thanks to the little Robin that had been my companion and my ersatz guide, but it flew from its perch as I turned. I smiled and followed its flightpath. It alighted on a bird feeder, then continued up into the Scot's Pines. But this time my eyes did not follow; not this time.

For there, on the bird feeder, looking at me with cheeky mischievousness, was a Red Squirrel.

**Andrew Kyle**

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**Editor's note:** Benmore Garden is situated on the Cowal Peninsula and is managed by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh <http://www.rbge.org.uk/the-gardens/benmore>

## Storm-petrel delight

*Many people would view one of the main attractions of birdwatching as being the chance of seeing the unexpected, whether it be simply the species or at an unusual time. I suspect we have all thumbed through our bird guides and subconsciously produced a list of species that we would dearly love to see. It would be only natural for most of this list to be special in some way—perhaps impressive like a Golden Eagle, attractive like a Little Tern, colourful like a Bee Eater or elusive and difficult to see like a Nightjar. Many seabirds would come into this latter category and one bird that would be on many wish lists, including mine, is the Storm-petrel.*

I think the attraction is in its diminutive size and the knowledge that such a small and seemingly fragile bird spends its whole life over the open sea and only makes landfall to breed. Storm-petrels aren't accommodating like Puffins. Petrels also nest in burrows on remote islands, but they only visit at night and many will recall television pro-

grammes where the presenter spends a night on an island, such as Skokholm, armed with a tilley lamp and a healthy dose of optimism. The only certainty is that they will hear the birds yet perhaps not see one. As few of us have those opportunities or spend much time at sea then probably the only chance we would have to see a Storm-petrel is to spend a lot of time at Machrihanish Observatory at the right time of year in the right weather conditions and just hope for the best.

Sometimes though, fate conspires to produce a combination of circumstances, the outcome of which could never be realised at the time. My wife Sue and I spent a fortnight last May in Les Sables d'Olonne in the Vendee region of western France. I had gone through my usual preparation—trawl through the bird guide and make a mental list of what might be a good bet to see during our time there. We don't use our holidays as a means to go birding but many of our activities would certainly include likely venues and opportunities. The weather in May should have been warm and settled, but in 2007 May in the Vendee proved



The harbour at Les Sables d'Olonne and the fishing boat with its attendant seabirds, and one of Sue Chattwood's snapshots of a Storm-petrel, which later appeared in the *Birds of Argyll* ©Sue Chattwood

to be more like Argyll in April—frequent showers with their attendant 'fresh' breezes. On one such showery afternoon we had gone out for a stroll along the promenade without any particular aim and ended up heading out along the harbour wall to the lighthouse at the end. Whilst it was only an unplanned stroll the binoculars and bird guide were left back at our apartment. This is an error made on previous occasions followed by a promise never to allow a repetition. It usually occurs after sighting an interesting looking bird just beyond the point where the naked eye might have had a reasonable chance of identifying it.

As we walked along the wall a fishing boat was entering the harbour and it was possible to discern a good number of small birds dipping into its wake. They were too small for gulls or terns and at a fair distance the behaviour of the birds suggested swallows dipping a pond for flies. That impression only lasted for a fraction of a second and then the hours spent trawling through the bird guide creating the wish list took over. Storm-petrels! As we came closer it became clear that there were 20 or 30 zipping about the harbour entrance and feeding from the surface of the water. Then the doubts started to appear. I hadn't considered it remotely likely that we would encounter Storm-petrels on this holiday and there were vague recollections of other similar petrels on the same page of the guide. Wilson's Storm-petrel was a name that sprang to mind but no mental picture accompanied it. Was this a disaster in the making? The prospect of twenty odd petrels, never seen before, but certain identification impossible?

Fortunately Sue was rather more prepared and from her handbag our modest little compact camera appeared. Whilst I was trying to get a good view of the fast moving birds Sue was having a much more difficult job trying to catch them in the viewfinder. It is to her great credit that she managed to take any photographs at all and there

were some that enabled us to positively identify the birds as Storm-petrels, even from the small screen on the camera. Upon returning that evening armed with binoculars this time the birds were still around and I was able to confirm the previous conclusions. It was one of those bird-watching events that we all hope for and would be remembered and recounted for a long time to come. Events on our arrival back in Argyll would ensure that this would certainly be the case.

A week after our return from France the copy of the June *Eider* appeared in my inbox. The progress on the *Birds of Argyll* was reported and David Wood made an appeal for photographs of a number of evasive species including Pomarine Skua and Storm-petrel. Pomarine Skua we couldn't help with, but Storm-petrels? Surely our holiday snaps would not be of high enough quality for publication and we debated whether we should submit them to David for consideration. We were well aware of the efforts that David and his colleagues had been putting into preparing the book for publication and we concluded that any appeal for help deserved a response even if the result was polite thanks, but no thanks. When David answered by saying that he could use two of the photographs our reactions were a mixture of surprise and pleasure that we were able to play some part in such a prestigious project. When *Birds of Argyll* was published in December we realised what Sue's contribution really meant. To see the two photographs in such a fine and well received book and to see Sue credited alongside such eminent photographers as David Palmar, Philip Kirkham and all the others still causes me to smile and shake my head in disbelief that such a coincidence can have such an astonishing outcome.

**Malcolm Chattwood**

## Antarctica—random scribblings

*It is the end of the earth, but when you get there, it must be the most beautiful place on earth. Never having given the idea of going there any serious thought, when my son Huw called from Buenos Aires in November and proposed that he take me to Antarctica, what could I say? Simply an offer I could not refuse!!!*

You have to work at it! New York to Buenos Aires is a ten hour flight followed by another three hour flight from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia, the most southerly city in the world. Two days across the Drake Passage in a westerly force nine, and the same on the return!

Then, you enter an ice-, snow-, glacier- and iceberg-ridden paradise. We found three species of whale, four species of seal, and a nice list of new bird species for me—albatrosses (Wandering, Royal, Black-browed), petrels (Giant, Wilson's Storm, Blue, Cape Petrels, Sooty Shearwater and Antarctic Fulmar) and skua (Antarctic, South Polar). All were seen around the good ship Vavilov, which is registered in Kaliningrad and captained by Viktor Lysok. We also visited Gentoo (30,000 pairs), Adele and Chinstrap Penguin colonies. They still have no fear of man. For how long I wonder? And, how long will it last? At least I have seen it, and the weather was remarkably good to us. A few pictures from the thousand or so that my son and I took are reproduced here.

But, you have to have been there to understand the experience. Robert Cushman Murphy, the famous American ornithologist said, "I now belong to a higher cult of mortals, for I have seen the Albatross..."

**Michael Thomas**



Peter Kirk

Peter Kirk died on Monday 26 May after a brave fight with cancer. Pete was a dear friend who will be sorely missed by many who came in contact with him. He was a member of the club and will be known to a lot of you. Our thoughts go out to his wife Joy and the rest of his family.

Pete had many interests. He was an observant and keen naturalist while at the same time enjoying big game fishing in the tropics, deer stalking and falconry, and many other sporting pastimes. You may well recall his fascinating talk on falconry at a club meeting at Cainbaan a few years ago, and being enthralled by his female Northern Goshawk that he brought along to the meeting. Pete not only flew falcons and hawks well, but successfully bred both Merlins

and Peregrines. He was also an accomplished musician.

I first met Pete when he worked as a wildlife ranger for a private forestry group in the Borders. Later he moved to Argyll to take up a post with the Deer Commission Scotland, or Red deer Commission as it was then. After his move north, we became even closer friends and Linda and I enjoyed many happy weekends with Pete and Joy either at Lochgilphead or here at Kames.

Above all, I will remember Pete for his great enthusiasm for the countryside, its wildlife and the people who work in it—as well as his infectious smile, entrepreneurial spirit, wry sense of humour and valued friendship over many happy years.

**Editor**

**Articles for the September issue of the  
*Eider* should with the Editor before the  
25th August 2008**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Advertising rates:** £80 for a full page, £20 for a quarter page, 7p per word for smaller adverts. Payment must accompany adverts, with cheques made payable to the **Argyll Bird Club**. Contact the Editor for further information.

**More about the Argyll Bird Club**

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

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

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

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