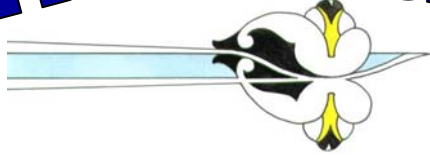


The Eider



The Eider is the Quarterly Newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club: Scottish Charity Number SC 008782

Editorial

The birding must be good - as this is the smallest issue of *The Eider* for quite a while. So, I'm hoping there will be some good stories for the September issue! Some digital photos would help too. I'm sure you will all agree that the photos have greatly added to the attractiveness of the newsletter. Just look at Mary Gregory's sparrowhawk photograph on page 6 to see what can be achieved with a digital camera!

I spent the first half of May in Poland visiting Bialowieza Forest, a large temperate forest on the Belarus border renowned for its large size and the pristine condition of some parts, and the Biebrza valley with its extensive marshlands. The birds (and mammals) were excellent, but the weather was awful—cold, windy and very wet. So, it was great to get back to the warmth and sunshine in Argyll, midges included! Although we saw many unusual and interesting birds, the highlight of the trip for me was the high density of breeding **Hawfinches** around some of the villages in Bialowieza. One morning, before breakfast, we located 5-6 pairs along a 400m track, including finding two nests!

Some of you may have tried to access the club's new website and failed. It's not your fault! The website was finished in mid April, but there have been complications with the service provider. So, I apologise to all of who have tried to log onto the site. It is now accessible, so please try again at:

<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

There are still many sections of the website to complete and some of the current text needs revising. This is going to be an ongoing project, and I have volunteered to update and improve the site over the next year, or until most of the sections have been completed. This is already providing a steep learning curve for me. However, if anyone is out there with experience in managing websites – the club needs you!

I would appreciate any feedback about the site—design, contents etc. Websites are very flexible, so its easy to update existing

sections and add new sections. While the committee can rally round to help, we are also dependent on members' ideas and input. So, don't be afraid to make suggestions.

Finally, I would like extend the club's appreciation to Bill Staley for the excellent job that he has done as Membership Secretary. Bill has recently decided to step down. Fortunately, Sue Furness has agreed to take over the job - thanks Sue!

For help and contributions to this issue, I would like to thank Paul Daw, Bob Furness, Mike Gear, Mary Gregory, David Merrie, Linda Petty (proof reading), Alan Spellman, Margaret Staley and Michael Thomas.

Autumn Meeting

To be held at the **Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead on Saturday 6th November 2004**

The programme is on page 5

Mull of Kintyre Field Trip—6th June

Contact **David Merrie (01250 884273)** if you are interested in this trip (see details in the **March Eider**)

Spring meeting account

The Spring Meeting was held at the Royal Marine Hotel, Hunters Quay, Dunoon on Saturday 27th March. With around 70 folks present, it was a very well attended gathering with quite a few new faces. Thanks are due o Bob Furness for arranging such an interesting and varied programme and to the hotel staff for helping to make the day such a success.

Duncan Orr-Ewing (RSPB) got the meet-

June 2004

Editor

Steve Petty, Craigielea, Kames

Tighnabruaich, Argyll PA21 2AE

Phone: 01700 811235

E-mail: stevepetty@compuserve.com

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ing off to a great start with a fascinating account of the **Red Kite** re-establishment programme. Almost the entire world population of **Red Kites** breed in Europe. In countries with the largest populations (Germany and Spain) numbers are declining. In Britain, **Red Kites** have declined from being abundant in medieval times to near extinction, when the remnant population in Wales was reduced to about 10

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



Red Kite at nest with chicks (photo—RSPB Images)

pairs in the 1930s and 1940s. Most of these declines were linked to persecution (shooting, trapping, poisoning etc). Thus, there were valid reasons why kites should be re-established in areas they once inhabited, including Scotland and England.

Duncan's talk concentrated on the three re-establishment programmes in Scotland, but mentioned similar projects in England. The first release site was on the Black Isle, where around 20 birds per year were imported from Sweden. In total, 90 birds were released over a 5-year period. This population has increased to 35 pairs producing 70-80 young. The second release site was in Central Scotland, using birds from the old East Germany. This started in 1996 and the first breeding was recorded in 1998. By 2002, the population had grown to 18 pairs that produced 34 young. The most recent site is in Dumfries and Galloway, where a further 15-20 birds will be released later this year. Here, the first successful breeding attempt was recorded last year. The project has been highly successful, but worryingly, persecution is the main factor reducing population growth in all three areas. It has been possible to show that illegal poisoning is by far the most important cause of mortality, as many of the birds had been either radio-tagged or wing-tagged. Thus, the current Scottish population of around 55 pairs, should have been much higher!

Bernie Zonfrillo's (Glasgow University) talk on wildlife conservation on Aisla Craig provided an absorbing account highlighting the benefits of eradicating rats. The first rats were recorded on the island in 1889, during the construction of the lighthouse. Subsequently, most ground- and tunnel-nesting birds disappeared, due to predation of chicks by an ever increas-

ing rat population, which was supported by a super abundance of food. For example, around 600-800 **Gannets** per annum die naturally on the island. The predation problem was highlighted by Bernie's own research on **Fulmars**, where many otherwise healthy chicks were killed by rats.

After careful consideration, it was decided to attempt an island-wide rat eradication programme with warfarin; a rodenticide that degrades quickly in the environment. Five tonnes of warfarin were airlifted onto the island by a Royal Navy helicopter from HMS Gannet. Warfarin was distributed by hand throughout the island in rock crevices, under boulders and in specially designed bait boxes; all in sites that only rats could reach. The effectiveness of the operation was measured with chewsticks – similar to lollipop sticks coated with margarine - which the rats relished! If rats were present they gnawed the sticks. The operation was dramatically successful! Prior to the deployment of warfarin, 100% of the chewsticks were gnawed. In contrast, three weeks after deployment, 100% of the sticks showed no sign of rat activity. Subsequently, the recovery of the island's wildlife has been impressive.

Interestingly, not only birds responded. Masses of flowers carpeted the island, including some rare species, such as **Tree Mallow** that had almost disappeared. Rats not only ate their seeds, but the plant too! **Pygmy Shrew** and **Slowworm** numbers increased dramatically. Bernie showed a slide with a writhing mass of **Slowworms** under a sheet of corrugated tin – the largest number ever recorded in one place in Scotland! The first birds to recolonise the island were all tunnel-nesters, such as **Black Guillemot**, **Shelduck** and **Wheat-ear**. This was followed by **Shags** and

Razorbills establishing colonies along boulder beaches. Ten years after the rats had been eradicated, **Puffins** reappeared. A few birds were seen in 2001, but in 2002 two pairs bred – the first in almost 100 years. With the RSPB recently taking over the management of Aisla Craig, let's hope this success story continues.

The final talk before lunch was about owls in Argyll by Cristina McAvoy (SNH). She first described some of the characteristics that enable owls to catch prey, such as acute hearing, excellent eyesight and modification to the feathers that enable silent flight. Four species of owl breed in Argyll. From the commonest to the scarcest these are; **Tawny Owl**, **Barn Owl**, **Short-eared Owl** and **Long-eared Owl**. **Long-eared owls** can be particularly elusive. It was highlighted that we know little about the distribution and abundance of these species throughout Argyll, although some detailed studies have been undertaken on **Barn Owl** and **Tawny Owl**. All four species are dependent on rodent populations for successful breeding. The **Field Vole** is a particularly important prey species that inhabits rough grasslands. So, how such habitats are managed in the future will influence owl populations. The **Barn Owl** is perhaps the only species where a lack of nest sites limits the population size. They need large cavities in which to nest, because they can rear large broods and have a nestling period that is twice the length of the other owl species (two months instead of one month). Buildings and cavities in crags provide the most important nest sites in Argyll. However, breeding numbers can be increased by the use of suitable nest boxes, both in buildings that lack suitable sites and along forest edges with suitable foraging habitat nearby. This was Cristina's first attempt at public speaking. Nevertheless, she produced an impressive 15 minute Power-Point presentation to everyone's enjoyment – congratulation Cristina!

After lunch, Neil Forbes gave a thought-provoking talk. Although advertised as being about **Merlins** at risk, it was far more wide-ranging. Neil is a well known vet with a vast knowledge of diseases in birds of prey. His grandfather was the first person to breed **Merlins** in captivity, and Neil later became involved in describing a new and fatal disease in captive bred **Merlins**, called fatty liver syndrome. This was caused by *Caryospora*, a protozoal coccidial parasite, which has subsequently been found in 14 species of raptor. *Caryospora* can complete its full life cycle in its raptor or rodent host. In Britain, *Caryospora* is unknown in potential wild rodent prey of raptors. Around 17% of captive bred Merlins tested positive to *Caryospora*, but out of 72 wild-bred birds

none were positive. In captivity, the parasite is shed by adults in their faeces, particularly just prior to breeding, and is then easily transmitted to other birds in the same aviary. Once a falconry establishment is infected with *Caryospora*, it is probably unrealistic to expect to eradicate it. Therefore, much effort has been put into developing a live vaccine, with some success. The final part of the talk discussed the likelihood of infecting wild raptors with diseases common to captive raptors. Neil emphasised the great care that is necessary to avoid this potential problem when captive bred birds are used to re-establish populations in the wild.

Next, Sarah Davis (Glasgow University) described some of her work with **Arctic Skuas** on Foula. Here the population has been in decline since 1975 and mirrors the situation elsewhere in Scotland, including Argyll. Around 100 pairs breed on Foula, of which around 80% are colour ringed. **Arctic Skuas** obtain most of their food by kleptoparasitism; the chasing of smaller seabirds, such as terns, until they give up the food they are carrying (mainly sand eels). Sarah has investigated if food shortage is the problem, by looking at its effect on adult survival and breeding success. She used two groups of birds, those pairs where she provided food supplements

(hens' eggs and cat food) at the nest and other pairs used as an unfed control group. Supplemental fed birds produced significantly more young and adults had both higher survival and return rates than control pairs. These results indicated that the skuas' decrease on Foula was food related leading to fewer chicks being produced and lower adult survival and return rates.

Nigel Scriven (Vice-Chairman) concluded the meeting with account of Alexander Wilson (1766-1813); a Paisley born-naturalist. He was the son of a poor distiller. As a young man he tried his hand at writing and politics, the latter leading to a short term in prison, due to his scathing satire about a local capitalist. Dissatisfied with his life in Scotland, he emigrated to America, arriving in Delaware in 1794. He became a peddler and his trips into the country gave him the opportunity to observe wildlife. In 1802, he met a naturalist called William Bartram who encouraged him to study birds. The end result was a nine volume set on *American Ornithology*, embellished with many outstanding hand-coloured lithographs (see example), published during 1808-1814. Numerous birds were named after him. He drowned while pursuing a bird at the age of 47!



One plate from Alexander Wilson's *American Ornithology*

Editor

Notes from the last committee meeting

Eleven members of the committee met at 7.30pm at the George Hotel in Inveraray on the 23rd March. Under matters arising from the previous meeting, it was agreed that the ABC would set aside as earmarked a sum of £1000 to aid mink control, to assist a joint SNH/ RSPB project.

National Bird Club Forum: Mike Gear and Paul Daw (representing the committee) had attended the first ever get-together of around 46 bird clubs from around the UK, with over 80 participants. They reported that the forum, jointly organized by the West Midland Bird Club and the BTO was practical, constructive and dealt with several topics of importance to the club. Topics discussed included membership (services to new members, survey of membership and promotion and recruitment) and research (County Bird Recorders, internet-based bird recording, surveys and atlases, electronic data management and training needs). It was emphasized how important it was to welcome new members, both at indoor meetings and at field trips. Mike Gear agreed to do this, with help from others on the committee. The Membership Secretary is to provide names of the new

members and committee members will have name badges at future meetings. Several delegates emphasized the importance of Public Liability Insurance for field trips. The committee accepted that this was an urgent issue for the club, to be resolved as soon as some idea of costs was available. The BTO reported that with the proposed expansion of their internet-based recording (Migration Watch, Garden Bird Watch and in the future Bird Track) they were keen to help clubs with computer planning and to organize joint pilot studies to facilitate data exchange.

Future Indoor Meetings: The autumn meeting is to be held on 6th November at the Cairnbaan Hotel. Topics suggested for talks included wild-life crime, wind-farm impact, bird rarities on Barra, digiscoping and talks and workshop on bird data-base management. Details will appear once the programme is finalised.

Birds of Argyll Book: The species accounts were progressing, but many are still to be completed. David Wood has resigned as BTO regional representative for South Argyll to give more time to the book. It was agreed to seek further funding to help with the costs, particularly printing and distribution, from 'Awards

for All for Scotland'.

BTO Representative for South Argyll: Following David Wood's resignation a new rep. is needed—anyone willing to help?

Web-site: Steve Petty said that he hoped to have the site running in late April. Frequent updating is obviously important and Steve has requested feedback and suggestions from members. It is hoped that the site will be a good promotional activity for the club (particularly when seeking funding) and a likely source of new members, as is the new ABC Leaflet, which the committee would be grateful for members help in distributing across Argyll.

Field Trips: The following trips were discussed and further details can be found elsewhere in this issue of the *Eider*; Gigha, Largybaan SWT reserve, Tiree and Foula.

Finally, the committee always welcomes comments or suggestions from members. The next meetings are on the 24th August and the 26th October.

Mike Gear

Sound of Gigha field trip report

The day of the Argyll Bird Club's field trip to the Sound of Gigha on the 3rd April started unpromisingly, with frequent heavy showers. Despite the weather 15 optimistic members and friends turned up at the car park at Ronachan equipped with a variety of optical aids. Fortunately, by the time people started arriving the rain was beginning to ease off.

Close to the shore there were the usual species of gull, **Shags** and **Eiders**. Further out, with the aid of telescopes, we soon picked out several divers: **Great Northern** and **Black-throated** reasonably close in and **Red-throated** further out. Also, fairly well out were at least eight **Slavonian Grebes**, some of which were in almost full breeding plumage. One of the grebes was obviously not a **Slavonian** however. It had mostly black and white plumage but with dusky cheeks and a white breast contrasting strongly with a darker looking lower neck. Frustratingly, because of the considerable distance and the fact that it was constantly bobbing up and down on the waves, we were unable to see enough detail to make a definite identification. However the bird certainly showed some of the characteristics of winter plumage **Black-necked Grebe**—'another one that got away'. Small groups of **Common Scoters** were also present well offshore, but sadly no sign of **Velvet Scoters**. Close at hand a group of three **Ringed Plovers** flew by and a **Common Redshank** landed on the shore near us.

As the rain was continuing to hold off we moved down to the shore access next to the West Coast Salmon fish farm. Two **Sandwich Terns** flew past just as we arrived – the first of the year for most of us. We also had good, reasonably close, views of a **Great Northern Diver** in winter plumage and a beautiful **Black-throated Diver** almost in complete breeding plumage. While we were there **Common Shelducks** and **Red-breasted Merganser** flew past close to land. We soon had to drag ourselves away, as the ferry to Gigha was due to leave.

Arriving in good time we were delighted to hear **Skylarks** singing as we waited to board the ferry. On the journey across to the island we saw **Common Guillemot**, **Black Guillemot**, **Razorbill** and another **Great Northern Diver**, all close to the ferry. By good luck we arrived at the Gigha Hotel just as the heavens opened. We were served excellent refreshments (the fish soup was especially commended) and by the time we had finished chatting



Club members who braved the rain had a rewarding trip on 3rd April to the Sound of Gigha (photo—Mary Gregory)

and eating the weather had miraculously cleared, and it was time to catch the ferry back.

On the return journey we saw yet more **Great Northern Divers** and had good views of **Common Scoters**, again close to the ferry. As we landed back at Tayinloan dark clouds were threatening and we just had time to count the **Greenland White-fronted Geese** (320) and see that one had a neck collar before the rain began again.

At this point Katie Pendreigh, who fortunately lives close by, very kindly saved the day by inviting all of us in for tea/coffee and biscuits. While we sat out the shower we were treated to very close up views of **Goldfinches** and **Reed Buntings** in Katie's garden and just as we were about to leave a female **Sparrowhawk** landed on the ground no more than three feet from the window. Some said these were the best views of birds we had had all day!

In view of the uncertain weather we decided to abandon the walk along the shore and instead returned to the West Coast Salmon site. This turned out to be a good decision because a **Long-tailed Duck** was sighted as soon as we arrived. Soon after this a procession of **Slavonian Grebes** in full breeding plumage sailed past us, so close in that the wonderful head plumes could be clearly seen through binoculars. Next, two adult male **Long-tailed Ducks** swam southwards, also fairly close in-shore and both in almost complete breed-

ing plumage. One was preening vigorously and waving it's long tail in the air as if to prove it's identity beyond all doubt. A group of **Common Scoters** also came close enough for us to see the small yellow patches on the bill quite clearly. A **Gannet** sailing by offshore and a female **Common Goldeneye** brought our species total to 48. We could undoubtedly have recorded more species if we had torn our eyes away from the sea for long enough to note a few more land birds.

The whole experience was undoubtedly enhanced by the kindness of members with telescopes who made them available to those without. So, despite the uncertain weather, it was altogether quite a memorable day for those who came. One member said he had seen more new species during the field trip than he could remember in any other day!

Paul Daw



Weekend on Scarba

Arrangements have been made for a boat to take up to 12 people to Scarba on the evening of Friday 23 July returning on Sunday evening 25 July. There are still some vacancies on this trip. Would anyone who is interested please contact me (details below).

The trip will involve camping and exploring this little frequented, rugged Inner Hebridean island, which is about 3 miles across and rises to nearly 1500ft in the middle. It lies just north of the famous Corryvreckan whirlpool and the Island of Jura. The cost of the boat return trip is fixed at £50, to be shared by all equally. So, if

we fill it to its capacity of 12 the cost will be less than a fiver each. It should not be less than c£8 on current level of interest.

Please let me know if you have camping equipment, or at least a sleeping bag. There will be some spare equipment/tent space for those without, but I will need to know in advance so as to provide accordingly. All participants are to bring their own food for the 3 days.

Roll up, roll up for Scarba!!

David Merrie

Phone: 01250 884273

E-mail:

david@merrie1035.fsnet.co.uk

Photo quiz answer

A correct answer to the quiz that appeared on page 10 of the *March Eider* was provided by a person at the spring meeting. The seeds were from a **Monkey-Puzzle** *Araucaria araucana*. The bird that had opened the seeds was a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. The seeds were collected in Benmore Gardens, Cowal in autumn 2002, when the *Araucaria's* produced very many large green globular cones, which are up to 15cm in diameter. These take two years to mature, after which they break up while still on the tree, but in this case the woodpeckers gave them a helping hand!

Editor

Autumn Meeting Programme

Saturday 6th November 2004

Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead

09.00	Doors open, coffee and tea
10.00-10.05	Welcome & introduction—David Wood (Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club)
10.05-10.15	Round up of recent bird sightings—Paul Daw (Argyll Bird Recorder)
10.15-10.45	Capercaillie conservation—Helen Doherty (SNH)
10.45-11.20	Shetland's rain geese—Dave Okill (Shetland Bird Club & BTO Rep. for Shetland)
11.20-11.50	Coffee
11.50-12.20	The use of feeders by garden birds—Dan Chamberlain (BTO Scotland)
12.20-12.30	The Argyll Bird Club's website—Steve Petty (Editor of <i>The Eider</i>)
12.30-13.40	Lunch (available in the hotel lounge)
13.40-14.20	Annual General Meeting
14.20-14.50	Wind farms and birds—Simon Lawrence (Lawrence Environmental Consultants)
14.50-15.20	Tracking seabird migration—Bob Furness (University of Glasgow)
15.20-15.30	Argaty Red Kites
15.30-16.00	Raffle, tea and coffee



This superb photograph of an adult male **Sparrowhawk** was taken in March by Mary Gregory from inside her house, though a glass window! Mary remarked....“as so often happens with bird pictures, it was pure luck. I had been trying to get a picture of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** on my bird feeder; by the time I got my camera it had gone, of course! But, then this **Sparrowhawk** swept by and sat outside my bedroom window demolishing a **Great Tit**”.

New seabird book

Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland: Results of the Seabird 2000 Census (1998-2002). Edited by P. Ian Mitchell, Stephen F. Newton, Norman Ratcliffe and Timothy E. Dunn (2004). T & A D Poyser, (an imprint of A & C Black Publishers Ltd.), London. ISBN 0-7136-6901-2. 511 pages, including numerous dramatic full colour photographs. Price £35 RRP, listed at £31.50 from www.acblack.com

The Seabird Group and partners achieved a noteworthy first in 1970 with the census of breeding seabirds on virtually the entire coastline of Britain and Ireland. ‘Operation Seafarer’ was then repeated 15 years later but with more complete coverage and improved methodology, and including inland breeding seabirds that were often overlooked by the first survey. Dramatic changes in numbers of some seabirds were shown, but populations of some species such as **Storm Petrels** remained uncertain due to their nocturnal burrow-nesting habit. Another 15 years on, ‘Seabird 2000’ was carried out, and the results from this new survey are presented in a very impressive book following the traditions of the Poyser series.

Over 1000 people contributed counts, and the book provides detailed analysis of the data in 25 species chapters each written by experts on the particular species, plus review chapters outlining the likely causes of changes and the international signifi-

cance of our seabird populations. Species accounts follow a consistent format: a brief introduction, census methods, current status and trends, causes of change, and international context. The book has

from 1985 to 2000, together with tables listing breeding numbers by areas and in relation to global numbers.

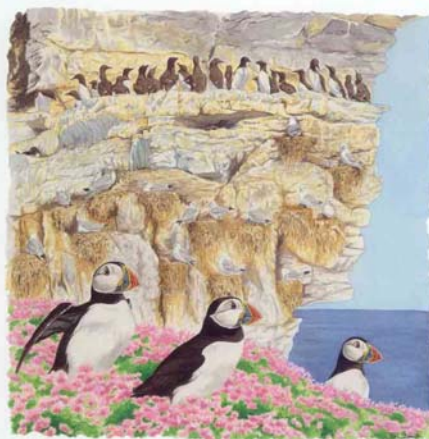
It is an important reference book that many ornithologists will use regularly. But it is also a book that should be of interest to the general bird-watcher, especially since it is now evident from Seabird 2000 that many of our seabird populations are now in decline, dramatically reversing the upward trend that had been evident in previous decades. Who would have imagined, for example, that there would be less **Fulmars** in 2000 than in 1985! Is the current decline due to global climate change? Or overfishing? Or long-line bycatch of fulmars (which is a much greater problem than generally appreciated)?

This book provides the latest, and highly authoritative, views on why our seabird populations are increasing, or in most cases decreasing. It highlights a range of environmental problems, from the widely appreciated (but rather minor problem) of oil pollution to the serious (but often overlooked) problem of mink predation, to the new threats of collision with marine wind farm turbines. I strongly recommend this book, especially

since it is unlikely to be superseded for at least another 15 years!

Bob Furness

SEABIRD POPULATIONS OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

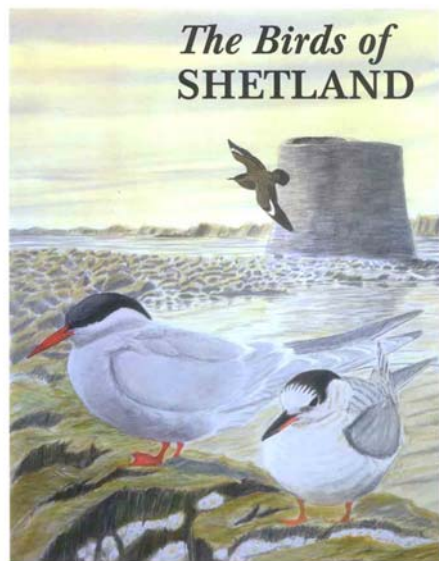


P. IAN MITCHELL, STEPHEN F. NEWTON, NORMAN RATCLIFFE & TIMOTHY E. DUNN

numerous colour photographs, and excellent maps showing breeding distributions and abundance, and changes in numbers

New book on Shetland's birds

The Birds of Shetland. Edited by Mike Pennington, Kevin Orborn, Paul Harvey, Roger Riddington, Dave Okill, Pete Ellis and Martin Heubeck (2004). Christopher Helm (an imprint of A & C Black Publishers Ltd.), London. ISBN 0-7136-6038-4. 576 pages plus 40 further pages of colour photographs. £40.



Mike Pennington, Kevin Osborn, Paul Harvey, Roger Riddington, Dave Okill, Pete Ellis and Martin Heubeck

Shetland is famous for its globally significant populations of breeding seabirds and its remarkable list of rare migrants. This book presents a detailed review of the status of all 430 bird species recorded in the archipelago. It also presents some very brief introductory chapters on the islands' climate, vegetation, ecology and history of land use, and a rather longer (33 page) chapter 'The Birdwatchers' on the history of ornithology, birding and bird conservation. This I found fascinating, and it is beautifully illustrated with black and white photos of historical interest. I particularly liked the photos of Ken Williamson's 1954 portable Heligoland trap, and a fresh-faced Roger Broad on arrival in Fair Isle in 1971! The 40 pages of colour photographs are grouped together and present a few views of Shetland, several photos of the typical breeding birds, and lots of photos of rare species in Shetland. Many of the species accounts are nicely illustrated by small drawings, monochrome photos, or graphs showing seasonal occurrence of records for the less common migrants.

The main part of the book is the species accounts, and with so many species most

get only a page or two. Not much more is provided for the important breeding species (**Kittiwake** three pages, **Puffin** two and a half, **Tystie** three pages). Even the **Wren**, with two endemic subspecies in the archipelago, gets less than two pages. So the amount that can be said about breeding or common birds is rather limited compared to the often very detailed information known about their Shetland populations and biology. But I think the editors and authors have got the balance just about right. Indeed, the structure and style may well serve as a template for future avifaunas of Scottish regions.

The effort required to prepare a book of this sort is enormous, and the Shetland Bird Club and Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, as well as the individual editors and authors are to be congratulated in their outstanding achievement.

Bob Furness

The Fruin Hills—40 years ago

Now that Helensburgh is considered to be part of Argyll, I thought I would tell you of a spring walk in the Fruin Hills on the 10th March 1963.

In light rain and under a sky heavy with rain, I set off from the house (Cardross) at 9 am. The walk over to the first road was pleasant enough, skirting the heather moor all the way round. Hares skittered everywhere and a few **Red Grouse** flew over the heather. As I approached the road, a small flock of about 50 **Greylag Geese** flew into a field a mile or so down the glen, toward Bannachra. I crossed the road and headed for a bridge on a private track crossing the Fruin water. Just above the bridge a flock of **Woodpigeons** rose from a stubble field. Amongst them was one **Blackcock**, which separated and went over the road onto the moor. The next bit of field was full of hen **Pheasants**. This was obviously a shooting estate, for the woods were lined with tickets on sticks and inside feeding bins spilling corn on the ground.

I crossed the north road by Ballymenoch and started up the side of Craperoch. Here I began to feel a little damp, but I decided that it was as much sweat as rain! At about 1600 feet I saw my first **Snow Bunting**, a female, hopping about on a surviving snow drift. At about 1900 feet the rain had turned fully to snow and it was sticking wetly everywhere. I saw another party of 6 **Snow Buntings** near Balenock. The mist was quite thick here and I overdid the

left turn for Beinn Tarsuinn and found myself back on the Craperoch ridge—most embarrassing! However, I was rewarded by a flock of over 60 tinkling **Snow Buntings**, with some **Skylarks** chirruping richly. I managed to reach Beinn Tarsuinn, beneath which I had my lunch, but lost my way again and had to sink below the clouds before I could correct my bearing for Beinn Chaorach. It was very bleak and snowy here, and I was sure there would be some **Ptarmigan**, but no, so I slid down to the bealach and climbed the steep eastern slope of Beinn a'Mhanaich. I arrived on the northern side, where I had seen **Ptarmigan** last spring. After walking round the summit twice, albeit unintentionally, and sinking down on what I thought was the eastern face, but was actually the north face, I found a set of tracks leading up some snow for a hundred yards or more, which was either **Red Grouse** or **Ptarmigan**. The likelihood of them being from the former was far less than from the latter, so I presumed that somewhere on that hill **Ptarmigan** were back again. Coming down from the hill, just above the reservoir, I flushed a **Woodcock** from the wet grass, a most untypical situation.

I crossed the Fruin Water below Strone Farm and went up the hill over to Shandon. This area is surrounded with notices proclaiming a WD training area. First, I found a golf ball, then about half a dozen rotting sheep followed by an array of grouse butts. It seemed quite a jolly training area. From Shandon I walked over to Rhu, where I joined the road as it was too dark to see anything on the hill, and went into Helensburgh to catch the train back to Cardross. With the walk back from the station I had covered 25 miles on foot.

David Merrie

The Shelduck

*If you are on the west side of Bute, on Kames Bay or in the Kyles of Bute, and you see a bird that superficially looks gooselike, clearly bigger than your average **Mallard**, showing a black head, white body, dark wings, a chestnut belt across its breast, then you are looking at a **Shelduck**. In all likelihood you will see a pair, and if one is showing a bright red knob on its bright red bill, you have a male. **Shelduck** are relatively common breeders on the island, always close to the shore.*

The Orkney name for the species is 'Links Goose'. It is primarily a shore line feeder and likes rabbit burrows, where they exist, for its nest. Its search for holes and cavities sometimes take them inland. When I

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lived in Silverdale, on Morecambe Bay, a quarry a mile from the shore was a favoured site. The **Shelduck** ducklings had to be led down to the shore by their parents, probably at night so as to avoid predators. I rarely observed this happening, but from time to time villagers would bring me lone birds which they had found. I immediately released them in my garden, which was a few hundred yards from the sea, but hidden from the sea by hedgerows and undulations. The duckling, placed on my lawn, always made a bee-line for the shore, sometimes struggling to find a way through a hawthorn hedgerow. Never once did a bird turn inland! Could they smell the sea, or hear the breaking surf?

The name **Shelduck** has nothing to do with shells. Sheld means 'variegated' or 'pied'. The principal diet of the bird is molluscs, crustaceans and insects. A high proportion of its food intake is the gastropod snail *Hydrobia vulvae*.

One of the most interesting features of the species is its moult migration. Large numbers of adults leave Britain after the breeding season and fly to the German Waddenzee (Helgoland Bight) area, where their annual moult takes place. All ducks and geese undertake a rapid annual moult where the wing feathers are moulted si-



multaneously. Being unable to fly during this period makes them vulnerable to predators. One hundred thousand **Shelduck** converge on the Waddenzee, a large estuary that provides safety in numbers. Many British birds fly direct to the site, in one day. I have seen them leave

Morecambe Bay in numbers in June/July, bound for Humberside and then Germany. The young of the year are left in creches, gatherings of large numbers of young in the breeding area, with a few foster parents left in charge who will moult locally. In recent years, a moulting flock of about 3-4,000 birds has been gathering in Bridgewater Bay (Somerset), which is thought to consist mainly of Irish breeders. Another small flock of mainly immature birds seems to favour the Firth of Forth—ringing records suggest these are Scottish birds—non German speakers I presume! The Waddenzee flock disperses in October, to return directly or indirectly to their breeding grounds.

If you are on the shore in spring or early summer, listen for the call of the **Shelduck**, usually described as 'squeaky whistling'. It has a nasal component, and the sound travels surprisingly far. It also has a guttural and repeated 'ack..ack..ack'. The painting of a trio of **Shelduck** which illustrates this article, is by the distinguished wildlife artist, Keith Shackleton.

Michael Thomas

(Editor's note: this account is taken from *Ornithological Tales Book III*, which Michael is preparing about Bute's birds)

Black Grouse on Mull

It's amazing what you come across on wet days! On one such day last summer we visited Torosay Castle during an otherwise perfect spell of weather on Mull. In one of the rooms the estate's game books were on display, which for a while provided me with some interesting browsing. The use of game records to provide an index of gamebird population fluctuations is affected by many biases. The most obvious one is that shooting effort is unlikely to be constant among years, due to many factors. Nevertheless, such records can often be illuminating!

In recent years, **Black Grouse** have been rarely recorded on Mull. The Argyll Bird Club started collecting systematic bird records in 1980. Since then, only three records have appeared in *Argyll Bird Reports* (Table); the last one in 1993. From the lack of recent records, one might conclude that **Black Grouse** have been extinct on Mull for a number of years.

So, do the club's records genuinely reflect the status of **Black Grouse** on the island? It appears they do. Roger Broad who has undertaken fieldwork on Mull for about 25 years, has never seen **Black Grouse** on the island. Neither have any been reported over the same period during extensive annual surveys for **Golden Eagles**,

White-tailed Eagles and occasional surveys for other species. Mike Madders believes the last place they bred on Mull was in the pre-thicket plantations at Crannich, west of Salen, probably in the 1980s, in habitat that is now largely unsuitable.

Conifer forests provide ideal habitat for **Black Grouse** for 10 and 15 years after planting, until the tree canopy starts to close and shade out the ground vegetation upon which **Black Grouse** are dependent (for food, cover and nest sites). On the

Table. Records of **Black Grouse** on Mull during 1980-2001
(source *Argyll Bird Reports*)

Date	Number & sex	Location
15 April 1984	One female	Garmony
25 April 1990	Two males	Reudle
17 May 1993	One (no sex given)	Glen Aros (Crannich)

The three records during 1984-93 (Table) may well be of birds that had dispersed from nearby mainland sites. **Black Grouse** are easily capable of crossing the Sound of Mull. For instance, Harvey Brown (1892) documents 'the not infrequent crossing of the even greater distance between Mull and Ardnamurchan'. The dearth of records over the last 10-years coincides with a decline of numerous mainland **Black Grouse** populations, many of which have been linked to a loss of large areas of suitable conifer forest habitat and the overgrazing of hill ground.

mainland, **Black Grouse** populations increased dramatically after the Second World War as vast areas of conifer forest were established on heavily-grazed moorland, particularly during the period 1950-1980. **Black Grouse** were then so abundant that they were considered at times to be forest pests, as they ate the tops out of newly planted trees! Although the habitats so created were ephemeral, there is no indication that the formation of similar habitats on Mull led to an increase in **Black Grouse** numbers, apart from the Crannich example above. This indicates numbers were at a very low point well

before the main afforestation phase.

The game book records from Torosay paint quite a different story just over 100 years ago (Figure). From 1899/1900 until the First World War (1916/17) the number of **Black Grouse** shot annually reached double figures in every year apart from two. The highest bags were in 1900/01 and 1912/13 when 101 and 71 birds respectively were shot. These figures indicate that they must then have been quite abundant on Mull. In contrast, after the First World War the maximum shot in any one year was seven birds, while in many years none at all were shot. The game book shows that the last bird was shot in 1949/50. **Red grouse** bags show a similar trend, with many more being shot before than after the war (Figure). Rintoul & Baxter (1927) reported similar declines of

discussions that Mike Madders had with various elderly folks on the island, it seems that **Black Grouse** were in the past associated with areas where cereal crops were grown in small areas of low-lying crofted ground (Lochdon, Dervaig, Salen, perhaps Pennyghael and other pockets of the Ross of Mull). People remember them feeding for gleanings in harvested fields and even coming into the stack yards. Of course this is unlikely to be the whole story, simply a reflection of where people saw them. **Black Grouse** require extensive mosaic habitats containing much ericaceous vegetation, unimproved grasslands, wet areas and scattered broadleaved woodland. In particular, stands of heather and blaeberry need to be substantially taller than for **Red Grouse**. That is why young forests are such an attraction! Thus,

and Mull, 1852-1870. Edinburgh: David Douglas.

Harvie-Brown, J. A. & Buckley, T. E. 1892. *A vertebrate fauna of Argyll and the Inner Hebrides*. Edinburgh: David Douglas.

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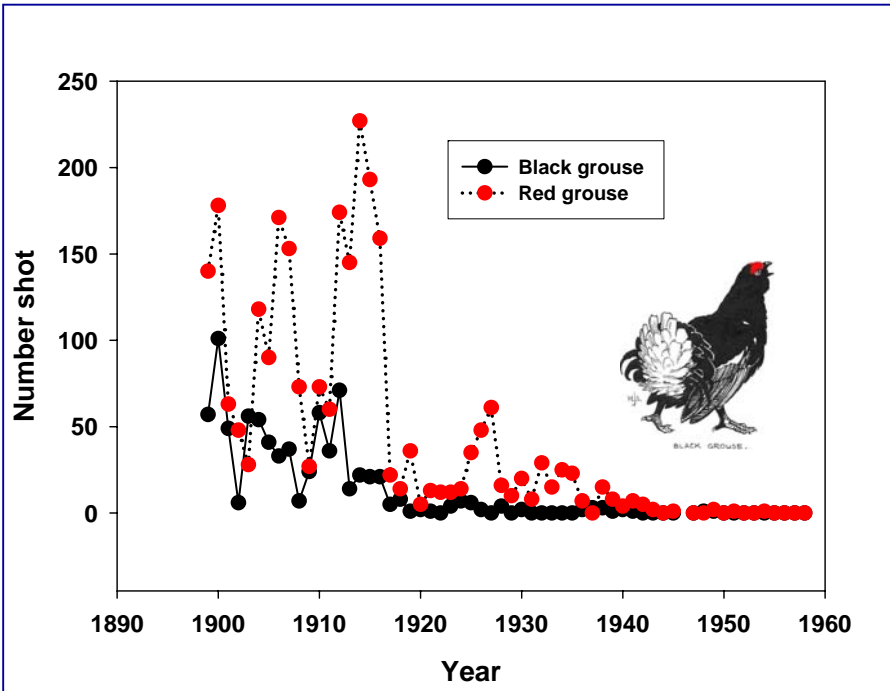
Leucistic Willow Warbler

This leucistic **Willow Warbler** has returned to the same territory where it bred successfully last year. With such bright and unusual plumage, it is amazing that it has not fallen prey to a **Sparrowhawk** or **Buzzard**, or another species of raptor on its autumn and spring migration route. This pale bird is the female, which has already mated with a normal **Willow Warbler** and is busy nest building.



Leucistic Willow Warbler photographed on Mull by Alan Spellman on 8th May 2004

Figure. Numbers of **Black Grouse** and **Red Grouse** recorded as shot during 1899-1959 from the Torosay Castle game book



Black Grouse in Scotland from around the time of the First World War.

For **Black Grouse** to have been so abundant on Mull towards the end of the 19th century, suggests strongly that habitats must have been very different to those available today. In fact, Graham (1890) states that that in southwest Mull, **Black Grouse** outnumbered **Red Grouse** by 10 to 1. This was during the period 1852-1870, indicating that the peak numbers recorded in the Torosay game books were only the tail end of a period of even greater abundance!

So, why are **Black Grouse** now 'extinct' on Mull? One aspect may be linked to changes in agricultural practices. From

a widespread decline in the quality of ground vegetation could have played a major part in the decline of this charismatic species. This could have resulted from the detrimental effects of heavy grazing as densities of **Sheep** and **Red Deer** increased during the early part of the 20th century. Subsequently, the decline of many mainland populations reduced the chance of enough surplus birds dispersing onto Mull to re-establishing a breeding population.

Steve Petty (with thanks to Roger Broad and Mike Madders for their observations)

References

Graham, H. D. 1890. *The birds of Iona*

Leucism results from a partial loss of pigment. In contrast, albinism is caused by a total loss of pigment, leading to complete white plumage with pale pink eyes, bill and feet. Leucism is rare amongst wild birds and involves variable amounts of white, whitish or pale plumage. Examples, such as this **Willow Warbler** with pale plumage and white wings and tail, are near the end of the scale, although sometimes pure white birds occur with normal coloured eyes, bill and feet (the extreme end of the leucistic scale). The apparently more rounded head, paler legs and beak and larger size of this bird are perhaps a 'trick' of the pale plumage colour and 'fluffed-up' posture?

Alan Spellman

Recent bird reports from Paul Daw—February to April 2004

I have again produced a table (opposite) of early records received for the arrival of spring migrants so that you can see at a glance the earliest dates submitted so far. I have given, where available, the first dates for each of the recording areas. If any of you have further information please let me know. It is good to have an overall picture of the main arrival periods for each species as well as unusually early individuals. I have also included some late records for winter visitors and a few migrants. Once again, apologies for anything of note that I have omitted.

Highlights of the period under review include a drake **Ring-necked Duck** at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 20th-21st Apr, a **Northern Goshawk** on Coll on 28th Feb, a **Black Kite** at Loch Scridain Mull on 20th Apr, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 29th Apr and **Ring-billed Gulls** on Islay and Tiree. But, in some ways the outstanding bird of the period was a male **Great Spotted Woodpecker** near Ballard, Coll on 24th February; the first known record for either Coll or Tiree.

If there are any 2003 Argyll bird records still out there that have not been submitted please let me have them as soon as possible. It helps enormously if you follow the guidance on submitting records that has appeared in the *Eider* and the *Argyll Bird Report* previously—briefly; species, no. of individuals, specific place (with 4 figure grid ref. if possible) and date.

Below is a roundup of notable sightings not included in the table.

Divers to Herons

A total of 14 **Great Northern Divers** were at the head of Loch Scridain, Mull on 15th Feb, 20 were in Breachacha Bay, Coll on 17th Mar and 29 were at Crossapol Bay, Coll on 16th Apr. Sixteen **Black-throated Divers** were counted in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 16th Apr. No less than **49 Slavonian Grebes** were counted on Loch na Keal, Mull between Eorsa and Gruline on 14th February and 22 were counted in the Sound of Gigha on 16th Apr. A flock of 14 **Little Grebes** on Loch Sween on 20th Feb was an unusual sight.

Wildfowl

A **Mute Swan** seen on Colonsay in late March/early April was a rare visitor to the island. A flock of 135 **Whooper Swans** flew N down Loch Gruinart, Islay on 27th Mar, 65 were at Loch Cliad, Coll on 27th Mar, 46 flew N at Dervaig, Mull on 28th Mar and 45 were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree also on 28th. Unusual numbers of **Whooper Swans** were seen on passage over Mid-Argyll in late Mar/early Apr. One hundred and nine were on Loch Gilp on 27th Mar, 36 flew N there on 28th, with 27 there on 29th Mar, 23 flew over my house in Minard also on 29th and another 13 flew N over Loch Gilp on 30th Mar. A further 34 were on Loch Fyne off Crarae on 11th Apr. An adult **Black Swan** flying north with a group of Whooper Swans at Kilmoluaig, Tiree on 9th Mar must have been a strange sight. The 5

Table. Early dates for spring migrants, late dates for winter migrants and some passage migrants—Argyll 2004

Species	Location	Date
Osprey	Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll	24 th March
Osprey	Calgary, Mull	11 th April
Corn Crane	Breachacha, Coll	18 th April
Corn Crane	Iona, Mull	25 th April
Common Sandpiper (2)	Loch Beg, Mull	17 th March
Common Sandpiper	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	16 th April
Common Sandpiper	Peninver, Kintyre	24 th April
Sandwich Tern (5)	Crossapol Bay, Coll	28 th March
Sandwich Tern (1)	Traigh Bhagh, Tiree	21 st April
Sandwich Tern (4)	Peninver, Kintyre	24 th April
Common Tern	Gott Bay, Tiree	25 th April
Arctic Tern (5)	Gott Bay, Tiree	25 th April
Little Tern (9)	The Reef, Tiree	16 th April
Little Tern	Port na Luing, Coll	26 th April
Cuckoo	Loch Uisg, Mull	16 th April
Cuckoo	Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll	18 th April
Cuckoo	Ardfenaig, Mull	25 th April
Sand Martin	Loch Scammadale, Mid-Argyll	19 th March
Sand Martin	Colonsay	31 st March
Sand Martin	Gortan, Mull	1 st April
Swallow	Aros Castle, Mull	20 th March
Swallow	Appin, N Argyll	7 th April
Swallow	Tayinloan, Kintyre	7 th April
Swallow	Baugh, Tiree	12 th April
Swallow	Kilberry, Mid-Argyll	16 th April
House Martin	Kilchurn Castle (Loch Awe)	2 nd April
House Martin	Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll	17 th April
House Martin	Loch a' Phuill, Tiree	23 rd April
Tree Pipit	Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll	15 th April
Tree Pipit	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	16 th April
White Wagtail (2)	Crossapol Bay, Coll	22 nd March
White Wagtail	Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	26 th March
White Wagtail (12)	Machair Mhor, Coll	23 rd April
White Wagtail (4)	Uisken, Mull	28 th April
Common Redstart (male)	Lochdon, Mull	24 th March
Northern Wheatear (2)	Otter Ferry, Cowal	18 th March
Northern Wheatear	Baugh, Tiree	19 th March
Northern Wheatear (2)	Penmore, Mull	20 th March
Northern Wheatear	Crossapol Bay, Coll	22 nd March
Northern Wheatear	Traigh na Cille, Mull	25 th March
Northern Wheatear	Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll	27 th March
Fieldfare (6)	Minen, Kintyre	7 th March
Fieldfare (1)	Gott, Tiree	29 th March
Fieldfare (80)	Acha, Coll	12 th April
Redwing (53)	Colonsay House, Colonsay	12 th April
Redwing (60+)	Dervaig, Mull	15 th April
Redwing (210)	Arnabost, Coll	14 th April
Redwing (1)	Balephuill, Tiree	25 th April
Grasshopper Warbler	Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll	18 th April
Grasshopper Warbler	Appin, N Argyll	22 nd April
Grasshopper Warbler	Southend, Kintyre	25 th April
Grasshopper Warbler	Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll	28 th April
Sedge Warbler	Baugh, Tiree	25 th April
Sedge Warbler	Aros Moss, Kintyre	26 th April
Sedge Warbler	Fernoch, Mid-Argyll	1 st May

Species	Location	Date
Common Whitethroat Common Whitethroat	Barnluasgan, Mid-Argyll Garmony Point, Mull	27 th April 27 th April
Garden Warbler Garden Warbler Garden Warbler	Loch Frisa, Mull Cairmbaan, Mid-Argyll Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll	4 th April 19 th April 27 th April
Blackcap (2) Blackcap Blackcap Blackcap Blackcap	Colonsay House, Colonsay Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll Minard, Mid-Argyll The Lodge, Coll Appin, N Argyll Balephuill, Tiree	14 th April 16 th April 18 th April 21 st April 22 nd April 25 th April
Wood Warbler	Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll	27 th April
Common Chiffchaff (3) Common Chiffchaff Common Chiffchaff Common Chiffchaff Common Chiffchaff	The Lodge, Coll Colonsay House, Colonsay Loch Spelve, Mull Heylipol & Balephuill, Tiree Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll	7 th April 9 th April 11 th April 11 th April 13 th April
Willow Warbler Willow Warbler Willow Warbler Willow Warbler Willow Warbler (2) Willow Warbler	Lochaline, Mull Taynish NNR, Mid-Argyll Cairmbaan, Mid-Argyll Baugh, Tiree Arinagour, Coll Appin, N Argyll	18 th March 7 th April 15 th April 16 th April 16 th April 22 nd April
Snow Bunting (14)	Port na Luing, Coll	28 th March

NB no reports have been received so far of **Whinchats** in April or any reports at all of **Spotted Flycatchers**. Have you seen these birds!?

Bean Geese near Port Ellen, Islay were still present on 15th Feb, a single **Bean Goose** was present on Oronsay during late Mar/early Apr and even more surprisingly 6 (taiga) **Bean Geese** were on Coll on 27th Mar. This is normally a very scarce species indeed in Argyll. A flock of 31 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were seen at the SW end of Lismore on 13th Feb. A heavy passage of **Brent Geese** on Tiree included flocks of 220 and 55 heading northeast along the coast at Baugh on 25th Apr. A **'Richardson's Canada Goose** (race hutchinsii) with Greenland White-fronted Geese on Coll 18th-24th Feb was thought likely to be a genuine trans-atlantic vagrant. A first winter male American Wigeon was present at Ardnave Loch, Islay from at least 13th Feb to 3rd Mar. A pair of **Northern Shoveler** at Fidden on 13th Apr were unusual visitors to Mull. A fine drake **Ring-necked Duck** was found among **Tufted Ducks** at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 20th Apr and remained until the following day. **Common Pochards** are not so common in Argyll, so 48 on Ballygrant Loch, Islay on 19th Feb was exceptional, 29 on Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 23rd Feb was a good count, even 7 on Loch na Druimnean, Mid-Argyll on 26th Feb is noteworthy and one at Canal Loch, Coll was only the third record for the island. Up to 47 **Long-tailed Ducks** were in Feall Bay, Coll in Feb. At least 30 **Long-tailed Ducks** were counted in the Sound of Gigha on 7th Apr and 65 **Black Scoters** in the Sound of Gigha on 16th Apr was also a good count. The large congregation of **Common Goldeneyes** in Loch Fyne, near Furnace, peaked at 111 on 11th Feb and 58 were counted in Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 15th Feb.

Raptors to Gamebirds

A **Black Kite** was reported over the north side of Loch Scridain, Mull on 20th Apr and **Red Kites** were reported over Coll on 13th Mar and over Kilmelford, Mid-Argyll on 14th Apr. A 2nd year **White-tailed Eagle** flew over Port na Luing, Coll on 17th Mar before heading back towards Mull. The adult female **Eurasian Marsh Harrier** seen near Totronald, Coll on 20th Apr was only the third record for the island. A huge female **Northern Goshawk** was seen being mobbed by a Raven (which looked smaller in comparison!) over Arinagour, Coll on 28th Feb. Two **Common Coots** on Ballygrant Loch, Islay on 19th Feb were unusual visitors.

Waders

The peak count of **Ringed Plovers** on Tiree during the period was 270 on the machair at Ruaig on 26th Apr while the maximum **Sanderling** count was 210 at Balephetrish Bay on 23rd Feb. At least 5,150 **Golden Plover** were present in the west of Tiree on

19th April. However the highest count of **Purple Sandpipers** on Tiree was only 8 at Sorobaidh Bay on 22nd Feb. A pair of **Dotterel** found on The Reef, Tiree on 16th Apr were still there on 19th; the female was in full breeding plumage. A provisional count of 337 nesting pairs of **Northern Lapwings** was made at The Reef, Tiree in late Apr. A total of 112 **Dunlin** in Loch Caolisport on 15th Feb was an exceptional count for this location while 209 were at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 6th Feb. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was found on Loch Gruinart floods on 29th Apr. Three **Eurasian Woodcocks** were roding around Colonsay House gardens, Colonsay on 9th Apr. A heavy passage of **Black-tailed Godwits** on Tiree in Apr included a high count of 75 at Loch an Eilein on 18th Apr. **Whimbrel** on Tiree peaked at 20 (at Heylipol) on 26th Apr and were reported from Coll from 15th Apr. Later on 2 were at Peninver, Kintyre on 24th April. Two wintering **Common Greenshank** were at Der-vaig, Mull on 17th Jan, 4 were at Langamull, Mull on 15th Feb and one was at Linne Mhuirich (Loch Sween), Mid-Argyll on 29th Feb. Always a very scarce passage migrant in Argyll, a **Wood Sandpiper** was on the Loch Gruinart floods on 26th Apr. A total of 105 **Ruddy Turnstones** were in Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 23rd Feb, at Crossapol Bay, Coll on 24th April, 10 at Heylipol, Tiree on 28th April and 10 at Kilnave, Islay on 27th April.

Skuas to Woodpeckers

A very early **Pomerine Skua** was at Claggain Bay, Islay on 12th Feb and one was at Arinagour, Coll on 13th Mar, as were 2 **Great Skuas**. A single **Great Skua** was off Gunna Sound, Tiree on 16th Mar. An adult **Ring-billed Gull** was at Machir Bay, Islay on 21st Feb. A first winter **Little Gull** was reported off Dunollie Castle, Oban on 16th Mar and even more surprisingly, 2 **Ring-billed Gulls** were present together at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 19th Mar. An early returning **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at Balemartine, Tiree on 18th Feb. A good number of **Ice-land Gulls** were reported with an adult at Bunahabhain, Islay on 19th Feb, a first winter bird in Loch Melfort, Mid-Argyll on 21st Feb, an adult in Oban Harbour (together with a 2nd winter **Glaucous Gull**) on 20th Mar and a 2nd winter bird following a fishing boat on Loch na Keal on 20th Apr. An adult **Glaucous Gull** was near Kilbride, Coll on 20th Mar, another was along the Arileod Straights, Coll on 23rd Apr, a 1st winter bird was in the Hynish area of Tiree during Mar and a 2nd winter bird was at Glenforsa, Mull on 15th Apr. A single **Little Auk** was off Arinagour, Coll on 13th Mar and 4 were seen from the ferry in the Sound of Mull on 20th Mar. A late report of was received of a wrecked **Little Auk** found in a garden at Caolas, Tiree on 15th Jan that later flew off strongly out into Gunna Sound. A total of 5 **Short-eared Owls** were seen at 3 different locations in north Kintyre on the evening of 17th Mar, perhaps indicating what an under-recorded species this is in Argyll. A **Common Kingfisher** was seen at Kennacraig, Kintyre in early Feb and the bird that frequented the Lochgilphead area during the winter was seen again on 22nd Feb.

Passerines

White **Wagtail** passage on Tiree continued throughout Apr with a maximum count of 8 at Sorobaidh Bay on 30th. A female **Ring Ouzel** near Kilbride, Coll on 12th Apr was only the second record for the island. As was the case last year, several observers have commented on how numerous **Common Grasshopper Warblers** have been this spring (see records above). An influx of **Goldcrests** on Tiree during Apr included 6 at Balephuill on 4th. A single **Blue Tit** in a garden at Sandaig, Tiree in Feb had, unusually, been present all winter and a single, obviously lost, **Coal Tit** was feeding on open turf west of Balevullin, Tiree on 31st Mar. A **Black-billed Magpie** was seen, outwith its normal range, nr Inveraray on 15th Apr. A flock of 10 **Chaffinches** were fly-catching in a garden at Vaul, Tiree on 21st Feb. There was a marked influx of **European Goldfinches** on Tiree in Apr including 3 at Vaul on 12th. A pair of **Common Linnets** at Moss and a flock of 15 at Heylipol were the first on Tiree since Nov 2003. A flock of 310 **Twite** were at Port na Luing, Coll on 22nd Mar and 55 were at Balephuill, Tiree on 1st Apr. Single male **Bramblings** were reported from gardens just outside Lochgilphead on 5th Mar and at Dervaig, Mull on 15th Mar. A flock of 30+ **Reed Buntings** at Port-na-Luing, Coll were presumably migrants. Six **Snow Buntings** were in Glen More, Mull on 26th Feb, an immature male was at Heylipol, Tiree on 27th Mar and 4 were at Port Luing, Coll on 22nd Mar with 14 there on 28th Mar.

Paul Daw

Tel. 01546 886260

e-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

STOP PRESS

Another fascinating early May on Tiree. A minor fall of migrants on 2nd included among the **Grasshopper Warblers**, **Willow Warblers** and **Common Chiffchaffs**, 2 new species for the island; a singing **Reed Warbler** and, even more surprisingly a singing **Common Nightingale**! And on 11th May a **Hawfinch** appeared on the bird table in John Bowler's garden feeding on sunflower seeds. We should be so lucky! Not to be outdone Coll had a **Common Crane** on 3rd May, a **Red-rumped Swallow** (potential new species for Argyll) on 4th and 5th May, a **Yellow-legged Gull** on 14th May, a 2nd year **White-billed Dove** on 22nd May and a **Black Kite** drifting slowly over Crossapol on 23rd. There was also a report of a singing **Reed Warbler** on Mull on 17th May. Quite unprecedented number of passage skuas have been reported recently, including 125 **Pomarine Skuas** from the Oban-Mull ferry on 5th May and 19 **Pomarine**, 4 **Long-tailed**, 27 **Artic** and 11 **Great Skuas** passing Hogh Bay, Coll on the morning of 16th May. More details in the next *Eider*.



A **Hawfinch** feeding on sunflower seeds. Photographed by John Bowler on 11th May on Tiree



A **Common Crane** photographed by a lucky visitor on Coll on 3rd May (photo Alistair Brydon)

Loch Garten's Ospreys prove they're really tough

At Scotland's oldest **Osprey** nesting site, a female **Osprey** has beaten the odds and started the growing number of fans by laying three eggs - despite having to fight for her life against an intruding bird only two weeks ago.

RSPB Scotland staff checked the Loch Garten nest at Abernethy Forest Reserve in Strathspey earlier this week and have confirmed that it now contains three eggs. The nest, Scotland's best known, had been without a successful breeding pair for two years. News of the eggs couldn't come at a better time, as this is the 50th anniversary of the **Osprey's** return to Scotland.

Last month saw weeks of ferocious fighting between the resident female and an intruding female bird. Later, people watched in horror and sorrow as the resi-

dent **Osprey**, known as White EJ from her identification leg ring, removed a broken egg from the nest.

Many believed the stress would be too much and no more eggs would be laid - the nest would remain empty for another year. However, the resilient White EJ has delighted RSPB Scotland staff and fans of the Loch Garten **Ospreys** by laying a full clutch of eggs.

When **Osprey** lay eggs, they generally have three, with a one or two day interval between each one. As there are three eggs in the nest now, it could mean that the resident female laid four eggs this season - a very rare phenomenon.

The RSPB's Loch Garten Site Manager, Richard Thaxton, said, 'Only a handful of

times in the last fifty years has an **Osprey** laid a clutch of four eggs. It is almost unheard of. So to see there are still three eggs in the nest, in spite of all the suffering White EJ has been through, is a huge relief and we're all thrilled. People come from around the world to see these birds and this year has been one of the most turbulent, and anxious, yet now rewarding'.

There is, however, another possibility to explain that fourth, broken egg. During the vicious attacks of last month, the intruding female bird occasionally managed to perch herself on the nest. It is possible that this **Osprey** had been ready to lay an egg herself and used the nest for this purpose in the short time she was there.

'The attacking female may have been des-

perately seeking a nest of her own, knowing she was about to lay eggs herself. Although there can be no doubt about the rightful owner of this particular nest now. It's incredibly lucky how things worked out', Richard went on to say.

The fighting of last month could have stressed both birds to such an extent that neither would lay eggs, or it may have ended in death for one of them. To find there are now three healthy eggs still in the nest is nothing short of a miracle and is fantastic news indeed. If all continues to go well, hatching should take place towards the end of May'.

Source:RSPB Scotland Headquarters

Osprey fishing by Margaret Staley



Chaffinch still top for Scots', reveals Big Garden Birdwatch

The humble **Chaffinch** remains the most common garden bird in Scotland. The 2004 Big Garden Birdwatch saw 22,205 people in Scotland take to their gardens on 24-25 January to count the birds—a massive rise from the 17,700 in 2003.

There was only minimal change, however, in the Scottish pecking order. The placing of **Robins** fell from 8th to 9th - swapping with **Coal Tits**. **Collared Doves** fell out of the top ten to be replaced at number 10 by the **Dun-nock**.

But the biggest changes to emerge from the survey came from comparing the position of birds in UK gardens across the 25 years of the Big Garden Birdwatch. **Collared Dove** and **Wood Pigeon** are now five times more common in our gardens than in 1979.

Collared Doves, seen in 62% of gardens, have increased by 525%. **Wood Pigeons**, up by 594%, were recorded in 54% of gardens. These birds did not feature at all in 1979's top 10 birds, but now hold 7th and 9th place respectively.

The four biggest losers since the first UK Big Garden Birdwatch in 1979 have been the **Starling**, **House Sparrow**, **Song Thrush** and **Blackbird**. The **Starling** has seen its numbers

plummet from 15 per garden to an average of 4.3, a decline of 71%.

The **House Sparrow**, with an average of 4.8 per garden, has declined by 52% since 1979, when an average of 10 birds were seen. **Song Thrushes** have declined by 34% since the beginning of the survey. They dropped out of the top 10 in 1987 and are now struggling to stay within the top 20. Although **Blackbirds** are still common and were recorded in 94% of all gardens this year, numbers are down by 31%.



Across the UK, the **House Sparrow** moves into the number one spot as the most common garden bird despite its declining numbers. It takes over from the **Starling**, now in number two position, which has an even steeper rate

of decline.

This year's Big Garden Birdwatch saw 409,554 people across the UK take to their gardens - a big rise from the 314,000 in 2003. A staggering 8.6 million birds were recorded and 247,000 gardens surveyed.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary, RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch aims to find the most commonly seen garden birds. Wild birds are a fantastic indicator of the health of the countryside and the survey requires only one hour to take part, producing a snapshot of winter garden bird populations.

Jonathan Osborne, Big Garden Birdwatch co-ordinator in Scotland, says: 'It's an incredible achievement for a survey to reach its 25th anniversary. We're amazed at how the popularity of Big Garden Birdwatch has grown over the years. Over time, we have been

able to measure population changes among our familiar birds - some quite surprising. In fact, Big Garden Birdwatch was one of the first surveys to notice the decline in song thrushes.'

Source:RSPB Scotland Headquarters

Articles for the next *Eider* should with the Editor before the 31st August 2004



An abundance of conifer flowers this spring may well lead to more **Common Crossbills** later in the year and over winter, as cones mature. This photograph shows female flowers on larch in March. (Editor)

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Vice Chairman: Nigel Scriven, 2 Allt na Blathaich, Loch Eck, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8SG

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Membership Secretary: Sue Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Loch Lomond G83 7DG

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Editor of the *Argyll Bird Report*: Clive Craik, Grendon, Barcaldine, Oban, Argyll PA37 1EC

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

Argyll Bird Recorder: Paul Daw, Tigh-na-Tulloch, Tullochgorm, Minard, Argyll PA32 8YQ

Phone 01546 886260 E-mail monedula@globalnet.co.uk

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



The Eider is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book reviews and press releases. Whenever possible, contributions should be submitted to the editor as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word or rtf format. But, this should not deter potential contributors, as handwritten 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.

The Eider is published around the 15th day of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor before the 1st day of each publication month. However, it greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline dates.

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the author/s, 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.

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

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

Subscriptions are due on 1st January and can be paid by cheque or standing order. New members joining after 1st October are covered until the end of the following year. Further information can be obtained from the Membership Secretary (see box on this page). Additional or past copies of the *Argyll Bird Report* can be purchased from the Treasurer.