

The Eider is the quarterly newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club published in mid March, June, September and December

Scottish Charity Number SC008782

The Eider



Editorial

December saw the publication of the most important bird book for many years. *The Migration Atlas* brings together and summarises data collected by ringers since the start of the national ringing scheme in Britain and Ireland in 1909. *It is a monumental tome that should be in the library of anyone with an interest in birds.* The maps and text provides details about the movement patterns of individual species, with each account being written by an acknowledged expert. It is a book that is hard to put down, but also one that will provide an invaluable reference source for many years to come. The British Trust for Ornithology are to be congratulated on having the drive and foresight to have embarked on such an enormous task, and to have produced such an attractive and readable book. It is also a fitting tribute to amateur bird ringers who have devoted innumerable man years to provide the raw data for this fantastic achievement. Do not be put off by the price—its worth every penny—and more!!

The migration atlas: movements of the birds of Britain and Ireland: Chris Wernham, Mike Toms, John Marchant, Jacque Clark, Gavin Siriwardena & Stephen Baillie (2002). T. & A.D. Poyser, London. 884 pages. Hardback £65.00. ISBN 0-7136-6514-9

Finally, I would like to thank the following for their contributions to this bumper issue: John Anderson, Rhona Campbell, Clive Craik, Paul Daw, David Jardine, Iain Livingstone, Sandra Maclean, David Merrie, Jane Mitchell, Tristan ap Rheinallt, Margaret Staley,

From the Chairman

I was delighted to be elected as the Chairman of your Club at our AGM last Autumn. I first got involved soon after coming to Argyll in 1997, and was struck straight away by the great commitment of the membership and committee. This was amply demonstrated by one of my early field trips, a rough boat trip followed by a thoroughly sodden day out on Sanda Island - but despite the rain, everyone's enthusiasm won through and we had an excellent day.

That trip was organised by Nigel

Spring Meeting

To be held in the Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory near Oban on Saturday 29th March
Programme on page 13

Autumn Meeting

To be held in the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead on Saturday 8th November

Scriven. Nigel has organised many trips and indoor meetings, and chaired our committee meetings, with enormous skill and dedication. Truly a hard act to follow. Many thanks Nigel - and don't go anywhere, I need you there as Vice Chairman!

The Club was set up in 1985 to 'promote interest in, and conservation of, the birds of Argyll and their habitats'. Those aims are still relevant, and the Club will continue to fulfill them through a full program of indoor meet-

March 2003

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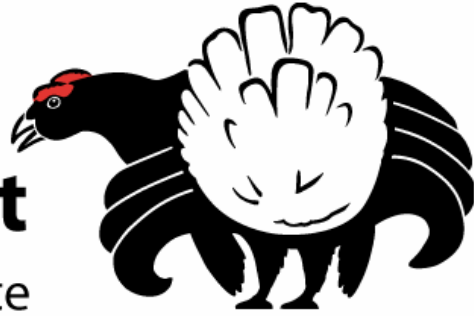
Inside this issue:

Black Grouse Project	2
Kintyre Field Trip Report	
Sanda Island—2002	3
The Eider	4
40-Years Ago	4-5
Beavers	6-7
Use for Dead Birds	8
Recent Reports	9-11
Bird's of Argyll—Book	12
Spring Meeting Programme	13
Field Trips Argyll Bird Report	14
Ascension Frigatebird February Committee Meeting	15
BTO Surveys in 2003	16

ings and field trips, and publication of *The Eider* - now bigger and better than ever, thanks to Steve Petty - and the *Argyll Bird Report*. Everything changes, of course. First, the Club has matured and now finds itself well up to the challenge of a landmark publication, *Birds of Argyll*, which I hope will come to be seen as the definitive
(continued on page 9)

Black Grouse Recovery Project

Argyll & Bute



Would you like to watch black cocks lekking this spring and help reverse their decline in Argyll?

Volunteers are being sought to take on surveying of known lek sites in Argyll in April and May 2003. Two early morning visits in good weather should suffice for each lek site. Volunteers will be paired with lek sites as near to their home as possible. Many are located on for-

est roads where access will be by vehicle. By the end of spring 2003 we aim to have surveyed all of Argyll. This will enable us to identify black grouse hotspots where habitat management will be targeted. If you would like to help contact the Project Officer Sandra Maclean on 01546 850355 or

sandra.maclean@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Kintyre excursion on the 12th January What we saw and what we missed!

The great plan for this excursion was laid out in the last issue of *The Eider*. Unfortunately the weatherman had not read the script, and decided not to cooperate. Fortunately, for me anyway, we arrived in Kintyre two days earlier to stay with our old friend at Balure. In the late afternoon we went out to Rhunahaorine Point. The sun gilded the dappled sea, a myriad of seabirds silhouetted against the western sky. To our left parties of **Eider** were crooning. In front, groups of **Common Scoter** bobbing and piping and to our right, brilliantly lit by the low sun, **Long-tailed Ducks** were squabbling and hooting like miniature klaxon horns. At least 9 of these super birds. The hard frost of the last week had sent a **Snipe**, a **Woodcock** and a **Stonechat** to the long grass by the sea's edge. The next day I had a good trip down to Campbeltown and Tangy, seeing a lot of geese and thrushes. In the afternoon we saw 5 thrush species in Ballochroy Glen.

However, come the day, low clouds, driving rain and poor visibility greeted the dawn. Knowing the way with the weather in Kintyre, I did not call the expedition off, expecting that it might well improve later. Only three folk met me in Tarbert at the appointed hour of 1015; local girl Barbara and the two stalwarts from Bute, Ian and Billy. We

waited another quarter of an hour just in case, and time enough to pick up **Redshank**, **Curlew**, **Eider**, **Herring Gull**, **Cormorant**, **Oystercatcher** and a lone **Dabchick**, and to don our waterproofs.

We tried 'phoning the Andersons, who should have been on the ferry from Gigha, on Barbara's mobile but failed to make contact. So, a change of plan was needed. Instead of a march to the top of windswept Dun Skeig, we opted for a low level walk from Clachan to Dunskeig Bay. By now the rain had eased. We found **Song Thrushes** and **Jackdaws** common, had a nice party of 10 **Long-tailed Tits**, checked off **Blackbird**, **Chaffinch**, **Dunnock**, **Great** and **Blue Tits** and **Collared Dove**. Two **Ravens** played around the summit of Dun Skeig and 2 **Buzzards** lower down. In the fields we saw lone **Snipe**, **Fieldfare** and **Skylark**. In the bay were a few **Shags** and single **Common Scoter** and **Teal**. Fifty-five **Greylags** fed in a field below the main road across the valley.

By now well behind schedule, we sped on to Ballochroy, stopping at the bridge. No **Dipper**, but offshore a **Tystie** and our first **Great Northern Diver**. We had had an invitation to call in at Balure, and took this opportunity to have our lunch in comfort watching the frenzied activity at the amply stocked bird-table. **Green-**

finch, **Coal tit**, **House Sparrow**, **Robin** and **Pheasant** were added to the tally. At the bottom of the drive we stopped to watch a flock of c. 200 **Greenland Whitefronts** with 5 **Barnacle Geese** amongst them. Then it was off to Rhunahaorine Point to leave a car, and then to Tayinloan Pier to leave the other car and start our walk along the shore back to the Point. This was the most productive part of the day. The rain had stopped; the wind eased somewhat, though the sea was rough and the light bad. Between the Pier and the caravan park we had c.200 **Greylags**, 230 **Greenland Whitefronts**, 8 **Teal**, 125 **Wigeon**, a few **Pied Wagtails**, one **Stonechat** and 7 **Redshanks**. But the piece-de-resistance was 2 **Grey Plover**, very scarce on this coastline. **Twite**, normally in good numbers were down to 3. **Starling**, **Rook**, **Rock Pipit**, **Heron**, **Shelduck**, **Black-headed**, **Common**, and **Great Black-backed Gulls** were noted.

On Lochan Luing, where supplementary feed is provided, there was a large flock of **Mallard**, one **Moorhen**, 10 **Whooper Swans** and two **Mute Swans**. **Turnstones** flitted along in front of us and later

on were joined by **Ringed Plover**. Not until we were beyond the Point did we see any **Dunlin**. By then **Turnstone** numbers had built up to about 30, but only very small numbers of the other two. The sea conditions and light were really too bad to make out more than a lone **Goldeneye** off the point. The **Snipe** from two days ago was still there, and so, probably were all the seabirds, sheltering unseen on the Gigha side.

However, we had made something of the day, and had seen 56 species. We later heard from John and Helen that they had met up with Katie and Lilly at Tayinloan, and had had some good goose-watching and a comfy lunch indoors. I hope everyone enjoyed the day, and maybe we'll have better luck next time.

David Merrie

**Sanda Island Bird
Observatory Trust
Autumn 2002 Update**

We were granted Scottish Charity status (number SC03994) in May following the appointment of the Trust's Committee. Our membership to date stands at 54 Full members and one Friend Of. A total of twelve people visited the Observatory over the year, six of which were new to the Island.

The accommodation in the Lighthouse Keeper's Cottages is good, fresh running water and electric light thanks to the efforts of Dick Gannon and Rab Morton. Not to mention the roasting hot coal and wood fire. All comments from the visitors were positive and interest in the project is growing. An application for Lottery funding is underway as are the negotiations with the Gannons for rental of the building in 2003.

Daily census, nest recording and ringing continued throughout the year with several new species recorded and a record number ringed (see table). Despite wet and windy weather limiting the five-day June trip for seabirds, to a mere thirty hours, we still managed to ring over 1,500 auks and 300 others. A hectic 18 hours on Sheep Island and Glunimore, four hours in preparation and cleaning up and the other eight squandered on eating and sleeping!! A more settled week followed so the second team managed a

The table opposite lists the birds ringed on Sanda in 2002

*New species for the Island
 **Total includes 7 Greenland Wheatears.

Species	Full grown	Pull	Total
Fulmar	1	47	48
Manx shearwater	42	55	97
Storm petrel	359	0	359
Cormorant	0	8	8
Shag	7	449	456
Greylag goose*	1	2	3
Eider	6	0	6
Sparrowhawk	3	0	3
Buzzard	0	1	1
Merlin*	1	0	1
Oystercatcher	1	12	13
Ringed plover	0	11	11
Curlew	1	0	1
Common gull	0	95	95
Lbb gull	0	23	23
Herring gull	0	48	48
Gbb gull	0	39	39
Guillemot	124	1437	1561
Razorbill	76	324	400
Black guillemot	0	3	3
Puffin	2	1	3
Rock dove	1	0	1
Swallow	3	0	3
Meadow pipit	674	6	680
Rock pipit	52	7	59
Grey wagtail*	5	0	5
Pied wagtail	5	0	5
White wagtail	9	0	9
Wren	90	0	90
Dunnock	25	0	25
Robin	149	4	153
Whinchat	9	0	9
Stonechat	38	1	39
Wheatear**	33	0	33
Blackbird	1	0	1
Song thrush	20	4	24
Grasshopper warbler	1	0	1
Sedge warbler	20	0	20
Whitethroat	47	0	47
Garden warbler	1	0	1
Blackcap	2	0	2
Chiffchaff	3	0	3
Willow warbler	253	3	256
Goldcrest	102	0	102
Coal tit	1	0	1
Blue tit*	14	0	14
Great tit	3	0	3
Starling	1	0	1
Chaffinch	5	0	5
Goldfinch	1	0	1
Siskin	9	0	9
Linnets	62	4	68
Twite	23	0	23
Lesser redpoll	10	1	11
Bullfinch*	1	0	1
Reed bunting	22	0	22
TOTAL	2319	2585	4904

The Eider

busy but more relaxed couple of visits to Glunimore to do another 500 **Guillemots**.

My week's visit in September could not have been more different weather wise, but was still hectic for birds. Four of us visited the Island from 14th September to witness the autumn passage. We arrived in clear sunny skies with a moderate wind; it was to be the last wind for the week. What followed were six perfectly calm, ideal netting mornings, with thousands of passerines passing south daily. The initial birds at first light were typically **White Wagtails** and **Chaffinches**, often settling onto the Lighthouse Tower, closely followed by the heaviest **Meadow Pipit** passage I have ever witnessed. Throughout the day groups of pipits passed over, the best day was Tuesday 17th with 4-5,000 counted.

As the day went on we recorded **Sky-larks**, **Siskin**, **Lesser Redpoll**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Swallows** as well as occasional waders. The last of the warblers and Wheatears, including **Greenland Wheatear**. As the week progressed the first tits appeared, with **Blue**, **Great** and **Coal** all present. Raptors were well represented with **Kestrel** (5), **Sparrowhawk** (4), **Peregrine** (3), **Merlin** (1) and **Hen Harrier** (1) present on the island but sadly neither of the two **Golden Eagles** from the previous week were recorded. We never had much time for sea watching, but the flat calm sea did offer good views of Auks and Shearwaters from the Observatory door.

Ringling was steady, and due to the calm weather, we were able to try new sites for nets and at times run three **Meadow Pipit** lures. Regular netting sites in the plantations were operated daily from first light until 3pm on most days, breakfast was at 1pm and was run in shifts depending upon bird numbers. The afternoon and evening was spent recovering from the morning and organising for roost catches of **White Wagtails** at the pier and waders on the Reine.

Daily ringling totals varied from 63 to 205 birds with 942 of 31 species ringed during the week. This included the Island's first **Merlin**, **Bullfinch**, **Blue Tits** and **Grey Wagtails** as well as another eight **White Wagtails** and the only **Coal Tit** and **Garden Warbler** for the year. This was, without a doubt the best week I have had on the Island - and was a great way to end the year.

So, 2002 has been an excellent year and a

great way to start the Observatory project. I would urge all of you to continue to support this work. Please renew your subscriptions and if possible visit the Island next year, you won't regret it.

Iain Livingstone

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The Eider's Tale

A field at the edge of the sea covered with little waving red flags! That was my introduction to the Eider Duck. It was on a visit to Iceland in the 1960s. There the farmers cultivate eider down, and those flags were nest markers, where each nest was regularly visited by the farmer to collect small quantities of down, quickly replaced by the sitting Eider duck. Each nest would yield about 17 grams of the finest insulation per season.

The Eider Duck is THE shorebird of Bute. My American friends would say nonsense because for them a shorebird is a wader like the Curlew or the Redshank. However, the Eider on Bute is indeed the bird of the shores of the Clyde, Rothesay Bay and the Kyles of Bute. Perhaps the Eider should be the brand symbol of the island. It is the logo of the Argyll Bird Club. The Eider Duck is the bird that every visitor to Bute should see - it is the bird that I see every day of the year.

The male Eider [*Somateria mollissima*, from the Greek *soma*, meaning body, and *mollissima*, Latin, meaning softest] is, for much of the year unmistakable. It is larger than a Mallard, heavily built, with a large wedge-shaped bill, white body, black belly, sides, rear, and thigh patch, black wing tips [primaries] and a beautiful green nape patch. The nape patch is an extraordinary green. The top of the male's bill is also green. The breast is often suffused with pink. The female is brown, functionally coloured so that when sitting on the nest she is inconspicuous. She always nests close to the water, characteristically sitting so tight that you can often touch the bird. She is totally dedicated [the male takes no part in incubation], rarely leaving the nest during the later stages of incubation [25-28 days]. The male may stand by, guarding the nest during the early stages of incubation, but soon loses interest and goes off to join an all male club off-

shore. Typical!

In adult plumage, the male Eider is difficult to overlook, but the male has a dramatic moult cycle. At the end of the breeding season, which is about the end of June, the males 'disappear', in that they lose all their white feathers and become superficially as inconspicuous as females. The males tend to flock together, having left the females to get on with the house-keeping. The male moult continues until October; then and only then do they become conspicuous again.

When the eggs hatch, many young broods gather in 'crèches'. Apparently, many females, having spent long periods incubating, go off to feed up again, leaving their offspring in the care of 'aunties'. Crèches of up to a hundred young have been seen, although I have never counted more than fifteen.

During April and May, look out for courtship behaviour, which recurs in October and November. Bill tossing [head thrown back, bill held vertically] and neck stretching [head thrust forward, bill held down] may be observed. The Eider's call note is also distinctive, cooing of a quality that comes over the noise of waves and surf. When bill tossing and neck stretching occur, listen for the ah-hOOO sound. One of the bird's local Scottish names in 'coo-doo's'. [My wife calls it the Frankie Howard bird!]

The eider feeds chiefly on mussels, but also on gastropods and crustaceans. It is widely distributed around the Arctic Circle and numbers in Scotland are increasing. We are fortunate to have this beautiful bird in relative abundance along our western coast. The Eider population around Bute is relatively sedentary, although in winter, birds come from the Argyll coast and islands to overwinter on the Clyde.

Never take this bird for granted. Look again at the gorgeous plumage of the male.

Michael Thomas, 1 September 2002

Those were the days—40 years ago

This is the second article in the series and relates to the first time I explored the area of hill lochs between Loch Awe and Loch Fyne. The area was richer then than now; for instance **Common Gulls** are

now in very small numbers. Many visits over succeeding years made me realise its value for breeding divers, but also that their breeding success was very low. This led to contacts with landowners and the start of my project for providing floating nest rafts for both **Black-** and **Red-Throated Divers**, which commenced in 1976 and continues to this day. I always need volunteers to help with monitoring and maintenance work, so anyone who is interested should contact me by phone or email before the beginning of May. Below, I follow the 1963 entry with the record of the installation of the first raft in 1976, in the same small bay where we saw the diver come ashore in 1963. This raft was accepted in 1964 and has been in almost continuous use since.

The Lochs between Furnace and Loch Awe - 2 June 1963

The sun shone brilliantly all day, but a fresh SE breeze kept us at a fairly comfortable temperature. We started at 09.45 from a wood a mile and a half NNW of Furnace, visiting first Loch Leacann. We saw nothing here except **Common Sandpipers** and **Common Gulls**. As we rounded the hill below Loch Garbh, I espied an **Golden Eagle** above the northern end of the range to our west, a mile and a quarter away. We soon saw another. With much tumbling and wheeling they played on the wind, slowly drifting north. Eventually they were lost behind the northern shoulder of the range. We crossed the valley and examined all the small cliffs of this hill, but found no eyrie. However, the range was full of outcrops and we were full of hope. Continuing SW along the edge of the range we came to the Dubh Loch, where we found a crow's nest in a small birch tree. Loch a'Chaorruin next door produced a pair of **Sandpipers** and a pair of **Teal**.

We then took the foot/Land Rover path to Loch Gainemeach. From the hill above the loch we watched a pair of **Black-throated Divers** swimming and diving. They did not seem to have a nest. Then suddenly one bird, presumably the female, hauled herself up onto the beach at the small

point in the NE end of the loch. With two enormous humps she landed herself about 5-6 feet from the water, then turned round and slid back into the water. We supposed she was still prospecting.

From here we went along the west side of Loch nan Ceard-Beag. A **Common Gull** was sitting on a nest on the top of a small pile of stones near the edge. Following the stream we arrived a quarter of the way along the west side of Loch Fincham. The two islands were alive with **Common Gulls** and fringed with a bright yellow border of Kingcups. Shortly we became aware of a **Black-throated Diver** on the other side, and then another on our side which surfaced almost thirty yards from us. Neither seemed anxious to get to a nest, and we also suspected that these two had not started nesting.

The other islanded lochs, Dubh Loch and Loch an Eilean, produced more **Common Gulls**. We headed back into the crags by Cruach Mhic Fhionnlaidh to search for eyries. However after circling many rocks and seeing an **Eagle** flash past almost at ground level we still could not find the eyrie. In compensation we did see a male **Hen Harrier** in the hollow by Loch nan Losgainn, with the breeze behind it, streak swirling and swooping, side-slipping and soaring west to where the hills fall towards Loch Awe. On the north end of this range we again saw an **Eagle** rising on the wind. If they have no eyrie here, then they must be attracted by the abundance of rabbits in the valley around Loch Sitheanach. There were burrows everywhere.

28 February 1976

David and Andrew came with me to Ford in Mr Kilpatrick's truck that he had kindly loaned me to help with the transport of prefabricated rafts from Dollar to Loch Awe. We transferred these to Eddie's Land Rover, and a coil of netting trailing behind. What a fine sight we looked going up the hill with the two rafts tied onto the roof. During the afternoon one island was half completed.

29 February 1976

After a belated breakfast we eventually persuaded Eddie to get going and at

10.30 he took us up the hill road again. By the time we arrived the weather had deteriorated to driving rain and work was difficult. However we completed the first island and moored it. It was 3pm by the time we parked the boat.

We were then treated to a spectacular territorial display by a cock **Golden Eagle** along the edge of Sith Mor. He flew strongly into the wind, towering up with powerful strokes and projecting himself up so that the final upward sweep was made with closed wings, as with a dive. As he reached the top of the throw he twisted backwards and streaked downwards. This was repeated several times. He then turned and came over us. Once more he went along the hill, came back, and then glided away towards Loch Fincham. After lunch we had just time to drag the material and raft for the second island to Little Tinker Loch, but not to do any building. There were 4 **Goldeneye** on the loch. Nearby a **Red Grouse** and a **Stonechat**. Work will have to be completed next week

6 March 1976

The first day of the SOC excursion I diverted members to launching the second diver island. 6 people came up to help. The wind turned very cold and we were all perished by the time the island was successfully launched and anchored. The others then went straight home, but Roger and I went up over Sith Mor, round the south side of the Sandy Loch, and down past Glasvaar. Disappointingly we saw no birds of prey. There was a **Stonechat** near the Sandy Loch, and two **Whooper Swans** swimming near my first island. On the moors we met a few **Red Grouse**, **Meadow Pipits** and **Sky-larks**. At 850-900 feet we found frog's spawn in a puddle on the road, it had been frozen earlier in the day. At the far end of Sandy Loch was a flock of 12 **Pochard**. When we reached the fields below Glasvaar it was dark. **Snipe** and **Lapwing** were still displaying and calling

David Merrie



Beaver away for nothing?

The proposal to re-establish beavers in Argyll was discussed at the AGM. Subsequently, our secretary wrote to the Scottish Executive (SE) expressing the club's support for the project. This letter is printed below, and on the next page the response from the SE. Also, at the bottom of this page is a press release issued by the SE in December, which many of you will probably have seen. Personally, I find it

frustrating that the SE have failed to give this project the green light after such a careful evaluation. In fact, many of the additional details they now are asking for were covered in the original application. Let us hope that sense will prevail, and Scotland will eventually follow many other European countries in successfully re-establishing this important riparian species.

Editor

Mr Ross Finnie, MSP

Minister for Environment and Rural Development

The Scottish Executive

Pentland House

47 Robbs Loan

Edinburgh

EH14 1TY

18 November 2002

Dear Minister

Trial Reintroduction of the European Beaver to Knapdale, Argyll

On behalf of the Argyll Bird Club, I write to ask you to approve as quickly as possible the Scottish Natural Heritage proposals to reintroduce the European beaver to Argyll on a trial basis.

Such a trial would enable the impact on the environment to be monitored prior to any further decision as to whether or not a more widespread reintroduction would be considered beneficial.

Reintroductions have been successfully carried out in much of mainland Europe.

Following discussion at its recent AGM at Cairnbaan, Knapdale, the Argyll Bird Club members voted on this issue: 56 voted in favour, none against and four abstained, some due to having a vested interest. This overwhelming vote in favour of the re-introduction trial reached the same view as the earlier public consultation exercise and we would urge you to delay no further in approving the Scottish Natural Heritage proposals and bring the benefits of this scheme to Knapdale and Argyll.

Yours sincerely

John Anderson

No go ahead for beavers in Scotland

Further information is required before the Executive can agree to proposals to re-introduce the European Beaver to Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been told.

In a letter to SNH chairman John Markland, which outlined the process under which Ministers have considered the application, Deputy Environment Minister Allan Wilson highlighted aspects of the proposed SNH pilot project that required further consideration.

These include the financing and management of the trial, the potential risks to agricultural, forestry and salmon interests as well as a thorough assessment of any public health risks.

Mr Wilson said:

"I appreciate that a great deal of effort has been put into developing this proposal, and recognise that SNH have attempted to address the wide range of complex legal, ecological and economic issues required in such an application.

"However, I am currently unable to grant approval for a licence under Section 16 (4) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on the basis of the information as presented.

"It would be helpful to know more about the experiences of other countries where European Beaver have been introduced, including any longer term impacts."

Press Release issued by the Scottish Executive on 20/12/02



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE Environment Group

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Our ref: 2002/00339430R

20 December 2002

Mr John Anderson
Argyll Bird Club
Ard Beag, Connel
Oban
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Mr Anderson

Thank you for your letter of 18 November to Ross Finnie MSP, Minister for Environment and Rural Development about the proposed trial re-introduction of the European Beaver to Knapdale, Argyll which has been passed to me for reply.

As you will be aware, Scottish Natural Heritage submitted an application in January 2002 to the Scottish Executive for a license to import and release, following a period of quarantine, four beaver families in Forest Enterprise land at Knapdale, Argyll.

The Scottish Executive is obliged to consider the application to trial the re-introduction of beavers to Scotland at the specified site in Knapdale, submitted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence under the 1981 Act for any person to release or allow to escape into the wild, any species of a kind which is not ordinarily resident or not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state. The Act allows exceptions to this provision under the terms of a licence issued by the appropriate authority; in this instance the Scottish Ministers. In considering the application, Ministers must also have regard to UK obligations under the Habitats Directive which obliges Member States to study, the desirability of re-introducing species, that are native to their territory where this might contribute to their conservation.

I note the interest that Argyll Bird Club Members have expressed in the proposed trial to re-introduce Scottish Beavers to Scotland. However, the case made by Scottish Natural Heritage is based upon some 5 years of research which is indicative of the complex range of issues considered by Ministers. These include legal, ecological and economic issues which command detailed consideration in advance of a final decision being formed on the application. I have attached a press release issued today by the Scottish Executive for your information.

I hope that this has proved helpful.

Yours sincerely

ANGELA McTEIR



The Environment Group is part of the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department

Bird corpses, bits of birds and ornithological research

Corpses of birds, and bits of birds, have a usefulness that is often insufficiently appreciated by those who find them. Specimens that survive can continue to provide new information for tens, or hundreds, of years (e.g. *British Birds* 93: 61-73, 2001).

Although the finders of some rarities are keen to retain them in their possession, the plumage may fade very quickly (due to light exposure) lessening their scientific value. Such specimens are also prone to damage or total destruction by insect pests such as moths or beetles, or they may rot away as the fat in the skin decomposes. In any case, personally held specimens are not accessible to other researchers. Characteristically, few such specimens survive longer than a couple of decades and ultimately they are lost to science. During the most recent review of Grey-cheeked Thrushes *Catharus minimus* in the British Isles, it was discovered that only 4 of the 9 dead birds were traceable (*British Birds* 89: 1-9, 1996).

Fresh corpses should preferably be passed to a museum where the specimen will be preserved. Research use is likely to go beyond identification. Depending on circumstances, other material may also be preserved, e.g. whole or part carcass, tissue or blood sam-

ples, external and internal parasites, stomach contents and skeleton. It is usually possible to salvage parts with valid research potential even if the specimen is fragmentary – perhaps only a wing or a few feathers - or is partially decayed. In some cases, single feathers may be significant.

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) strongly encourages finders of rare bird corpses, and also of birds in less well-known plumages or with plumage aberrations, to deposit them with a collection where they will be preserved and made available for research. Skin collections at national museums are generally recognised as the most suitable depositories for rarities. In the UK these are at Tring, Herts (The Natural History Museum), Edinburgh (National Museums of Scotland), Liverpool (National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside), Cardiff (National Museums & Galleries of Wales) and Belfast (Ulster Museum). Contact details are given below. Some museums, both national and local, are also keen to receive good specimens of commoner birds, but this should always be checked with them before supplying specimens.

The relevant museum should be contacted for specific instructions and advice for the transmission of specimens. For interim storage, fresh corpses should

be wrapped in absorbent paper (e.g. kitchen roll), labelled with date and locality of collection (and fresh weight if possible), packed in a polythene bag and frozen. Some institutions will reimburse postal charges.

If you have a specimen at the moment and no longer need it, please consider passing it on to a museum now. Alternatively, if there is a chance that someone else may have to deal with it in due course, please add a large label to it now, with full data (if it doesn't have it already) and the following text:

DO NOT DESTROY

This is an important specimen.

Please contact [address/details of museum].

Ringers handling rare birds are encouraged to preserve feathers that may come loose (making sure they DO come from the bird concerned – not just stray debris from the bottom of the bird bag!). Feathers are best placed in a small envelope and labelled with the ringing details, and then passed to one of the museums in the box below.

Bob McGowan (Tel 0131 247 4262: E-mail b.mcgowan@nms.ac.uk)

Steve Dudley (Tel 01 733 844 820: E-mail: steve.dudley@bou.org.uk)

Press Release—On behalf of the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee

The Natural History Museum: Bird Group, Akeman Street, Tring, Hertfordshire, HP23 6AP: Tel: 020 7942 6158: E-mail bird-enquiries@nhm.ac.uk

National Museums of Scotland: Department of Geology & Zoology, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF: Tel 0131 247 4262 (Bird Section), 0131 247 4231 (Taxidermy): E-mail b.mcgowan@nms.ac.uk

National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside: William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN: Tel 0151 207 0001: E-mail clem.fisher@nmgm.org

National Museum & Gallery Cardiff: Peter Howlett, Dept. of BioSyB, Cathys Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NP: Tel 029 2057 3233: E-mail peter.howlett@nmgw.ac.uk

Ulster Museum: Botanic Garden, Belfast, BT9 5AB: Tel 028 903 8300: E-mail angela.ross@um.nics.gov.uk



GOOSANDER.

(continued from front page)

statement of the status of Argyll's birds at the start of the new millennium. Second, the annual *Report* has established an enviable reputation for thoroughness, reliability and quality of presentation - a testament to the enormous efforts of Paul Daw, and before him Tristan, ably assisted in the editing phase by Clive Craik. The number of records being submitted is now so great that we need to think hard about new ways to help Paul upgrade the process of data collation and presentation. Third, new opportunities for field trips have been developed by members like Rhona Campbell and Helen Anderson. Many of you will recall her account of the Rum expedition. I'm sure that we can look forward to many more exciting and innovative field trips in the months ahead.

For those of you who don't know me... for my sins I work for Scottish Natural Heritage as advisory officer in Argyll and Stirling. Prior to that I was area officer for mid Argyll... delving even further back, in the mid 90s I worked on important bird sites in Orkney and Shetland, and before that, spent three fun years chasing seals and dolphins round the Moray Firth as a research assistant with Aberdeen University. I like playing the flute, photography, sailing, hillwalking and of course, birding. For the British Trust for Ornithology, I'm Regional Representative for mainland Argyll. My wife Louise heads up the music department at Lochgilphead High School. If you ask nicely, we'll come and play flute and clarsach at your wedding!

Please remember, this is *your* Club. You have an excellent and dedicated Committee, but we can't act in a vacuum; we rely on your feedback. Enclosed with this mailing you will find a questionnaire. Please do give this a few minutes of your time, and help us to make the Club even better than it is today.

Enjoy your Club and your bird-watching!

David Wood, February 2003

Recent Reports (Nov 2002 – Jan 2003) from Paul Daw (Tel: 01546 886260 e-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk)

The highlight of recent months, as far as rare birds are concerned, was the arrival of a **Forster's Tern** in Oban Harbour. Even more extraordinary at this time of the year, was that when found on 9th January, it was accompanied by a **Sandwich Tern**. Fortunately, the **Forster's Tern** stayed in the area until at least 11th Jan and several of our members were fortunate enough to see it. Naturally a great many photographs were taken and we hope that one of them will appear in the appropriate annual report. This is a first for Argyll and only the third record for Scotland so far accepted. It is still subject to acceptance by BBRC but with the wealth of documentary evidence available this should not be a problem.

Many thanks to everyone who has already sent in their 2002 Argyll bird lists. There must be quite a few of you out there with records still to submit though. I would be grateful if those of you who still have material could send it in as soon as possible. It helps enormously if you follow, the guidance on submitting records that appeared in previous issues of *The Eider*. A standard recording form is enclosed with this mailing. It is very helpful if you either fill it in by hand or use the same layout for computerised records. Although the Grid Reference is optional it helps a great deal if this is included. The process of putting records onto the computer is very time consuming, so submitting records on a standardised form helps enormously. My view is that your records are valuable, and if you take the trouble to send them in it is up to the club to make a permanent record of them. They are in any case the essential raw material for the production of the annual Systematic List.

This brings me to the question of the *Argyll Bird Report*. The 2001 report is again well behind schedule and we are already well into 2003. This has been partly due to problems with my ageing computer, which has slowed down the input of records. This has now been resolved thanks to our Chairman obtaining a grant for the provision of a new PC for this work (and for the Birds of Argyll book). I am very grateful for his efforts in this respect. However, the core problem is that the 'job' of recorder now involves

too much work for one volunteer. My earlier pleas for assistance resulted in the offer of help in processing records onto the computer from one of our members; Mary Gregory. She had just got into the swing of this when her husband, sadly, became seriously ill. For obvious reasons she has felt unable to continue with her assistance, but I am most grateful for the help she did provide.

The situation now is, that unless some further assistance is available, the reports will simply fall further and further behind. There are two possible areas where others could help.

1. For anyone with an interest in rare birds, the work involved with circulating rare bird reports to the appropriate committees and reporting back to the observers could easily be undertaken by another individual. It is not necessary to have an extensive knowledge of rare birds - I certainly haven't!
2. Processing records onto the computer. To do this you would need to have a PC with Word 97 or later. I devised a sort of 'training package' for Mary Gregory to explain the process of computerising records and this would of course be available to anyone who volunteered. The best option would be to have at least two or three people involved. The more volunteers the less work for each of them!

I have already had one potential volunteer but if there is anyone else who thinks they might be able to help please 'phone me to talk it over.

Divers to Herons

As usual at this time **Red-throated**, **Black-throated** and **Great Northern Divers** were all widely distributed off the islands and coasts of Argyll. Unusually though, apart from 10 **Great Northern Divers** in Crossapol & Fell Bays, Coll on 5th January, no counts in double figures were reported. The only really large count of

Slavonian Grebes was 31 in Loch Indaal, Islay on 27th December but there were 12 near the head of Loch na Keal, Mull on 16th December and , unusually, one at Loch a' Chumhainn, Dervaig, Mull on 4th January. Very few **Great Crested Grebes** appear in Argyll and an individual at Loch Indaal on 27th December was the only one reported so far this winter. There were some very large gatherings of **European Shags** on Tiree, with 90 at Traigh Thodhrasdail on 8th December, 375 in Sorobaidh Bay on 17th and no less than 520 off Urvaig on 18th December. Although much smaller numbers of **Great Cormorants** were recorded there, several groups of 5 or 6 birds in January were unusual for Tiree.

Wildfowl

Counts of **Mute Swans** in Oban Harbour have again been lower than usual (ca 35 birds) - could there be any connection with their recently formed habit of walking across the main street in search of food!? Numbers on Tiree were much as usual with a WeBS count of 40 birds on the freshwater lochs on 8th December. After a peak in November when 47 were on the Ulva Lagoons (Loch Sween) Mid-Argyll on 19th and a total of 265 on Tiree on 12th - 13th, **Whooper Swan** numbers fell gradually. Then, smaller groups were reported like the 12 at the north end of Loch Awe on 18th December and 10 on Lochan Luing, Kintyre seen by the Bird Club outing on 12th January.

On Tiree the goose count on 13th & 16th January produced a new record total for **Barnacle Geese** with 2,786 birds in all and the total of 3,516 **Greylag Geese** on 9th & 11th December was only a few short of the Dec 2001 record. A total of 800 **Barnacle Geese** at Totronald on 25th December was also a good count for Coll and the **Snow Goose** flock numbered 30 at Port na Luing on 13th January. The **Red-breasted Goose** was again present on Islay throughout the period as was our faithful **American Wigeon** in Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll (intermittently) and a **Green-winged Teal** was also present at Loch Gruinart for most of the time.

Other significant counts of wildfowl included 530 **Eurasian Wigeon** on

Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 8th November, 448 **Eurasian Teal** on Tiree on 8th December, 320 **Mallard** in Loch Caolisport on 31st December, a remarkable 69 **Northern Pintail** on Loch Indaal on 5th November, 168 **Tufted Ducks** on Tiree on 8th January (86 on Loch a' Phuill), 137 **Common Goldeneye** on Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 31st December and 82 **Common Goldeneye** at Furnace, (Loch Fyne) on 2nd January. Among the scarcer wildfowl species 21 **Common Pochards** were found on Tiree (an unusually high number) on 8th January and 12 were at Loch nan Druimnean on 28th December. Records of **Long-tailed Duck** included 6 in Loch Indaal on 27th December, 5 off Traigh Bhagh, Tiree on 10th January, 5 at Crossapol Bay, Coll on 5th January, 5 at Feall Bay, Coll on 17th January, one on Loch Feochan, Mid-Argyll on 28th December and a long staying bird on the inland lochan in Aros Park, Mull from mid-November to mid-January. A female **Velvet Scoter** was on Loch Indaal on 9th November.

Raptors to Gamebirds

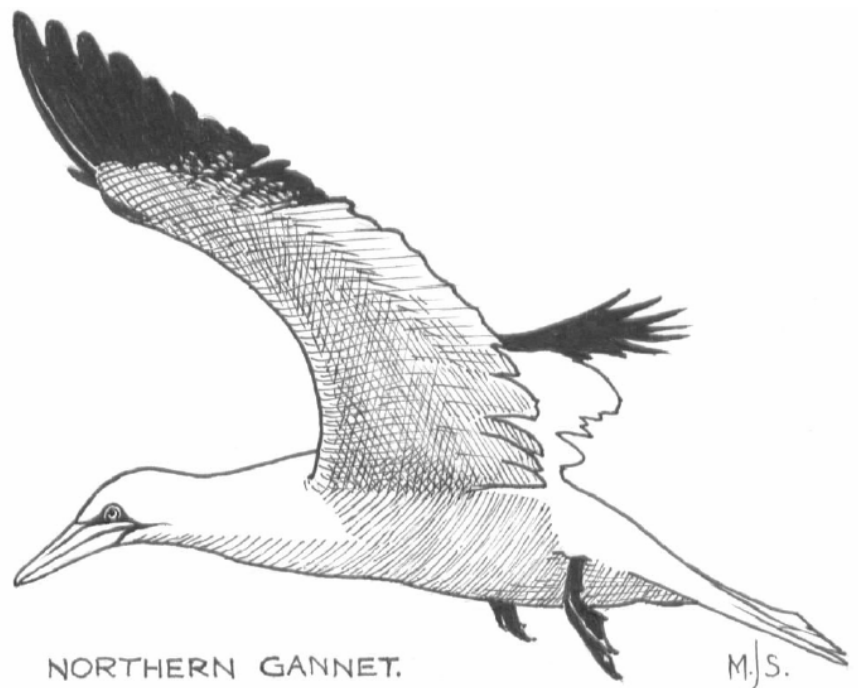
A juvenile **White-tailed Eagle** on the shores of Loch na Cille (Loch Sween) on 15th December had a blue wing tag bearing a letter 'L' and was one of the previous season's young from Mull. On 21st December a **Red Kite** flew across the road at Cuin (nr Dervaig) Mull and settled on a telegraph pole. Local residents had apparently seen it during the previous weeks. There were three independ-

ent reports of a probable **Northern Goshawk** around Loch Fyne during January although, as usual, none gave rise to a detailed description. An **Osprey** seen and photographed over Loch Feochan, Mid-Argyll on 11th December was the latest ever recorded in Argyll.

During frosty weather in January a **Water Rail** was reported from a garden at Aros, Mull.. A **Common Moorhen** was among the birds seen at Lochan Luing by members of the club who braved the weather on 12th January. Numbers of **Common Coot** present on Loch Nell, Mid-Argyll had increased to 6 on 28th December. After reaching a peak of 9 at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 8th December all Coots there had disappeared on 8th January, following the early January freeze-up.

Waders

Numbers of at least some wintering waders on Tiree were somewhat down on previous years with peaks of only 550 **Golden Plovers** at Heylipol on 29th November and 480 **Northern Lapwings** on stubble at Kilmoluaig on 16th January. Numbers of **Lapwings** elsewhere were also modest with 180 at Breachacha Bay, Coll on 21st December, 137 at Gallanach, Coll on 13th January and 30+ at Penmore, Mull in January. Loch na Cille, Mid-Argyll which usually has a small flock produced only a single bird all winter during WeBS counts.



NORTHERN GANNET.

Other noteworthy wader counts included 260 **Sanderling** at Traigh Hough, Tiree on 2nd November, 120 **Ringed Plovers** at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 7th December, 600 or more **Dunlin** at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 24th January, 48 **Common Redshank** in Loch Caolisport on 9th December and 252 **Bar-tailed Godwits** at Loch Gruinart on 16th December. The best count for **Eurasian Curlew** was just 65 at Loch Caolisport on 9th December, for **Purple Sandpiper** 22 at Traigh na Gilean, Tiree on 1st January and **Ruddy Turnstone** 40 at Ardalanish Bay, Mull on 16th January and 45 at Balephetrish Bay on 7th December. Winter **Common Greenshank** were recorded from 3 sites on Mull and from Loch Sween and Loch Caolisport. The 1st January was an unusual date for 2 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Loch Gruinart. The only report of **Jack Snipe** so far was a single at the Reef, Tiree on 13th November and a **Grey Phalarope** gave superb views at Bowmore, Islay on 7th November following strong NW winds. **Eurasian Woodcock** have been widely reported this winter including two birds, at Crinan, Mid-Argyll and Dervaig, Mull feeding in gardens during hard weather in January. The bird at Crinan left a noticeable pattern of holes in the soil where it had been probing. For the third year running we have had a winter record of **Common Sandpiper**. One was at Loch Feochan on 10th December.

Skuas to Woodpeckers

Apart from the well watched **Forster's Tern** and **Sandwich Tern** at Oban, referred to above, it has generally been a fairly thin time for most seabirds. The only 'white-winged' gull reported so far was a 1st winter **Iceland Gull** at Dunstaffnage, Mid-Argyll on 29th December but a remarkable count of 720 **Great Black-backed Gulls** was made in Loch Gilp on 30th December. Most were in the area around the Lingeron tip.

However it has been a good winter for **Little Auks** so far. Tiree in particular has had several birds. One picked up alive on Balephetrish Dunes on 22nd November was warmed up in a box overnight and released in good shape the next morning. A less fortunate bird

was found dead at Balephuill on 24th November. A single bird was seen feeding close inshore at Balephetrish Bay on 11th January and another was with other auks between Coll and Mull on 28th December. In Mid-Argyll, one was near the mouth of Loch Craignish on 25th December and 2 were off Reisa mhic Phaidean in the Sound of Gigha on 4th January.

Sadly the **Barn Owl** that had been seen several times in the past months on Coll was found with a damaged wing and had to be put down. There have been the usual sprinkling of **Common Kingfishers** reports this autumn/winter with single birds in the Ardkinglass area of Loch Fyne on 19th September and 30th November, at Holy Loch on 26th October (and more recently on 22nd Feb) and at Gruline, Mull on 22nd January. An unusually large flock of 137 **Rock Pigeons** (Rock Doves) was found at Roundhouse, Coll on 21st December.

Passerines

We have been getting used to late **Barn Swallows** (Swallows) in recent years, but even so, events on Tiree were quite exceptional. In November a group of three birds, presumably from a late brood, were found roosting in an old bus that was heated for use as a greenhouse. They emerged on warm days to feed on insects around the croft buildings and were still there until at least 17th December (thanks to John Bowler for this fascinating story).

Although reasonable numbers arrived on the east coast, few **Bohemian Waxwings** penetrated to Argyll this winter. Four were reported near Oban in December, two were in a garden at Innellan (nr Dunoon) on 24th January and, remarkably, one was seen at Totronald, Coll on 5th January. Winter thrushes were reported in fairly modest numbers with 16 **Fieldfares** at Tigh an lochan, Coll on 11th November, 75 around Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll on 8th December and 100 approx. on Craignure Golf Course, Mull on 10th January. **Redwings** were seen in slightly larger numbers with 120 at Heylipol, Mull on 2nd November and 200 around Slockavullin on 8th December.

Several **Blackcaps** have been reported visiting gardens including one at Tobermory, Mull on 8th December, a male in

Kilmichael Glen, Mid-Argyll on 27th December, a female at Kilmelford, Mid-Argyll on 30th December and female and male birds in Dunoon during January/February. On Mull a remarkably late **Willow Warbler** was reported at Calgary on 5th December and the **Crested Tit** at Tobermory was last seen on 9th November. **Blue Tits** and **Great Tits** are rare visitors to Coll and Tiree, but Coll had 2 or 3 **Blue Tits** at two locations in November and one in December and a **Great Tit** at Arinagour on 5th November.

Rooks are similarly only winter visitors to these islands so several flocks of up to 36 birds on Coll in December were noteworthy as were 11 at Crossapol, Tiree on 4th November. Also outwith their normal range were **Black-billed Magpies** (Magpies) at Lochawe village, Mid-Argyll on 15th December and at Ardbeg/Port Ellen, Islay on 4th November. The juvenile **Rosy Starling** was still present on Islay until at least mid-November.

A male **Brambling** feeding in a garden at Lochdon, Mull from 2nd - 4th November was the only one reported since the small influx in October. **Snow Buntings** have been quite well represented in recent reports received, including 19 at Beinn an Dothaidh, North Argyll, 4 at Beinn Dorain, North Argyll, 1 at Ben Lui, Mid-Argyll and 5 along the ridge to the N of Loch Sween all on 17th November (from different observers!). One was also seen in Glenn Bellart, Mull on 4th December, while Tiree had single males in November & December, a family party of 6 on 8th December, 4 at Sorobaidh Bay on 20th December and 3 at Sorobaidh on 31st January and Coll had 6 at Friesland on 7th November. **Yellowhammers** are normally recorded in fairly small numbers in Argyll, so 15 in a garden at Dervaig, Mull on 3rd January and about 20 in a garden at Penmore, Mull also in January were certainly unusual. **Corn Buntings** are very rare now in Argyll so to have a bird on Oronsay from 5th - 9th January and another at Smaull, Islay in January was most unexpected.

Paul Daw

“Birds of Argyll” Project—Progress Update

Members who attended the 2002 spring meeting in Dunoon will perhaps recall that I rounded off the day's proceedings with a brief account of the club's book project. The same project has been the subject of several short articles and appeals for information in the last few issues of the *Eider*. As it is now almost exactly two years since the inaugural meeting of the publications group, this seems an appropriate time to provide a progress update.

To recap on information given previously, our aim is to produce a book that summarises the current and past status of every bird species recorded in Argyll. This has not been attempted since Harvie-Brown and Buckley's 1892 publication, *A Vertebrate Fauna of Argyll and the Inner Hebrides*, which did not focus exclusively on birds. More recently, various books have dealt with restricted geographical areas, but none has covered anything approaching the whole of Argyll. We felt that the time was now ripe for a local avifauna, which – among other things – would condense and analyse information published in the club's bird report over more than two decades.

Following the February 2001 meeting, the publications group spent the first few months planning the scope, format and content of the book in detail, and preparing a small number of specimen species accounts to serve as a basis for discussion. Following on from this, we identified potential authors for the species accounts and invited them to participate in the project. A total of 11 species authors are currently involved, with the number of species per author varying from 1 to 158. Since early 2002, work on the species accounts has been progressing steadily and I now have in my possession draft accounts for 53 per cent of the 325 species currently on the Argyll list. Others are being worked on at the moment. This represents a substantial effort on the part of the authors – all of whom are volunteers – but a lot of work remains to be done. In an attempt to complete the job as quickly as possible, we are currently

attempting to recruit additional authors.

In parallel with work on the species accounts, we have been engaged in various other activities. Following a fairly lengthy negotiation process, the BTO has supplied us with a complete listing of ringing recoveries relevant to our area. These data will make an important contribution to many species accounts, with the BTO's recently published migration atlas helping to put the information in context. At the same time, Philip Snow and Margaret Staley have already provided us with some superb artwork for inclusion in the text, and we hope to receive additional illustrations over the coming months. We have also been evaluating the various options for publication and weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of publishing the book ourselves as opposed to finding a commercial publisher willing to take it on. This has involved looking at relevant software packages as well as producing initial estimates for printing costs, potential sales and other variables.

We recently received some very good news in the form of an offer of a grant from Scottish Natural Heritage towards publication of the book. About £2,000 of the £6,367 awarded has gone towards initial costs, notably the purchase of a computer and appropriate software for Paul Daw, one of our key species authors, and the purchase of data from the BTO. The remainder is earmarked for use later in the project,

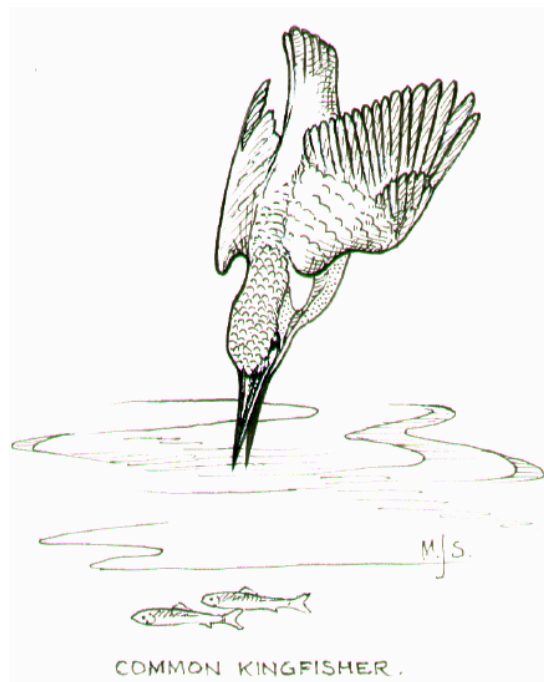
when the club will incur larger costs associated with printing. Grant applications to other funding bodies are currently being prepared.

I would like to finish with an appeal for assistance. If any club member has an interest in the project but is not yet involved in any way, it is not too late to join the team. A variety of tasks remain to be done, some in the immediate future and others at a later stage. Some of these tasks demand a reasonable knowledge of Argyll's birds; others do not. If you would like to help, please contact me (details below).

Also, if you have any interesting bird records from past years hidden in the pages of your notebooks, please send them to me or to Paul Daw if you have not already done so. It doesn't matter how old they are. In the case of scarce species such as Kingfisher, Stock Dove or Tree Sparrow, for example, any unpublished sighting would be of interest even if it dates back several decades. For more details about the kind of information that might be required, see my articles in the July 2001 and September 2002 issues of the *Eider*. If you aren't sure whether the information you have is worth communicating, please send it anyway.

Tristan ap Rheinallt

Lenimore, Gruinart, Isle of Islay PA44 7PP
E-mail: calidris@cix.co.uk



ARGYLL BIRD CLUB
SPRING MEETING - SATURDAY 29TH MARCH 2003
DUNSTAFFNAGE MARINE LABORATORY, BY OBAN



09.30 - 10.20	Doors open, coffee & tea	
10.20 - 10.40	Welcome and introduction, and round up of recent bird sightings <i>David Wood</i> <i>Paul Daw</i>	20 mins
10.40 - 11.20	Birds of Costa Rica <i>Mike Gear</i>	40 mins
11.20 - 11.30	Update on proposed field trips, possible training opportunities offered by the Club <i>David Wood</i>	10 mins
11.30 - 11.50	Coffee	20 mins
11.50 - 12.30	A Taste of Mull <i>Alan Spellman</i>	40 mins
12.30 - 14.30	Lunch	2 hours
14.30 - 15.10	The BTO's new Migration Atlas, and Migration Watch <i>Andy Wilson, BTO Scotland</i>	40 mins
15:10 - 15:50	Birds of Orkney <i>David Wood</i>	40 mins
15.50 - 16.20	Raffle, tea and coffee	30 mins
16.20	Depart	

Progress of Argyll Bird Report Vol. 18 (2002)

Unfortunately, this year there is a severe delay in production of the *Argyll Bird Report*. The basic problem is exactly as described in the Editorial of vol. 17. All is ready to roll but the Systematic List for year 2001 has not been completed. It is so late this year that editing, proof-correcting and dealing with the printers will almost certainly extend into the summer. I will not be able to deal with it then because of fieldwork commitments. So there seems little chance that the Report will appear before the autumn (unless someone else wants to do the editing etc in the summer!)

As editor, I am only too aware that the club deserves better than this. Bird records lose their immediacy and interest as they recede into the past. Who should bear the blame?

Paul Daw, County Recorder, has written each Systematic List single-handedly every year since 1997. Every one is a

huge undertaking and recently Paul has repeatedly asked for help with processing the records and other aspects of the work. Although some members have very kindly helped him out, their contributions have not been enough to overcome the difficulty. Paul is the one person who is not to blame for this situation. His warnings and requests for help could not have been clearer (see, for example, last year's editorial). The blame lies squarely with all those members of the club (including myself) who have not responded to his cries for help.

So if we feel that the present situation is unacceptable (and it most certainly is) – the remedy lies in our own hands! This is a major difficulty that we, as a club, will have to overcome.

Clive Craik (Editor, *Argyll Bird Report*)

Field Trips in 2003

Colonsay

The response to the suggestion made at the November meeting of a weekend trip to Colonsay during 13-15 September has been well received. Indeed so well received that it is currently fully booked, but I am still interested in receiving expressions of interest just in case some have to change their plans. A slight change to the arrangements is likely as there is an indication that the time of Calmac will be later, with the return to Oban not until around 2200hrs. This may mean some late journeys home—but it will allow another two hours on Colonsay!

Bookings are now being made and I will keep in touch with those who have expressed interest by letter, phone or email. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me by:

Phone: 01463 731330 or
E-mail: dcjardine@freeuk.com
David Jardine

Mull

I am planning a field trip to Mull during 6-8th June, to include:

- ⇒ Visiting the white-tailed eagle hide at Aros, with the chance of seeing chicks.
- ⇒ A trip to the Treshnish Isles with Turus Mara to see breeding puffins and auks.
- ⇒ A trip with a local wildlife tour operator.
- ⇒ Doing your own thing!
- ⇒ For birders spouses/partners who are not so smitten with birds there are other opportunities, such as Mull Little Theatre, Tobermory (pubs, chocolates, shops), Torosay and Duart Castles, Eas Fors Waterfalls, Calgary Bay etc.

I am happy to act as a field trip facilitator rather than an organiser! The idea (for those who missed the Islay, Coll and Rhum trips) is that we meet up with ABC members from Mull and liaise with other local experts to make the most of the trip. It would be good if we could meet in the local pub/hotel in the evening to swap notes. During Saturday and Sunday there will be optional excursions (see above). We can obtain reductions if we have large enough groups. All trips come highly recommended by various ABC members.

You will need to organise and pay for your own accommodation. In order that we can keep together as a group, accommodation should be based in Dervaig. Options here include camping, bunkhouse, B&B and country house hotel. Be warned that accommodation will book up quickly in June.

Various minibuses are available from the local wildlife tour companies. There are

also local buses, postbuses and taxi companies. However, if you plan to bring your car, please let me know. If you are interested in this trip, please complete the form enclosed this issue of *The Eider* and send it to:

Rhona Campbell
27 Balliemore
Kilmichael Glassary
Argyll PA31 8QD

Tel: 01546 603768. Mobile: 0790 1616952. E-mail: rhonacampbell@aol.com

Dawn Chorus

Nigel Scriven is leading a dawn chorus on Saturday the 10th May. The field trip starts at 0600 hrs in Inveraray Castle Car Park. If you are interested, please contact Nigel on one of the following numbers:

Evening
01369 840606 or 01505 843679

Daytime
0141 8403800

Editor

**Press release from the British Ornithologists' Union Records
Committee and British Birds Rarities Committee**
Ascension Frigatebird
Tiree, Inner Hebrides, Scotland. 9 July 1953

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) has added **Ascension Frigatebird** *Fregata aquila* to Category A of the British List following the reidentification of a bird found moribund on the island of Tiree, Inner Hebrides, Argyllshire, Scotland on 9 July 1953 (sight record, specimen) and originally identified as **Magnificent Frigatebird** *Fregata magnificens*. With no other records, **Magnificent Frigatebird** is therefore removed from the British List. The bird, an immature female, was found exhausted on 9 July 1953 and died later the same day. The body was taken to the National Museum of Scotland where it remained for nearly fifty years, its identity as **Magnificent Frigatebird** unquestioned.

The record was recently reviewed by the British Birds Rarities Committee

(BBRC) following a decision by the Association of European Rarities Committees (AERC) to bring European rarities committees into line with a standard date of 1950 for Category A records. Prior to this, the accepted date for Category A in Britain was 1958, the date when BBRC was formed. During the circulation, BBRC members Brian Small and Grahame Walbridge suspected a misidentification and undertook detailed research to confirm the identity as **Ascension Frigatebird**. Identification of immature frigatebirds is not straightforward and this research broke new ground.

At the same time that **Magnificent Frigatebird** is removed from the British List, it is added to the Isle of Man List following the discovery of an exhausted bird at Scarlett Point, Castletown, on 22 December 1998. The bird, an adult female was taken into care, where it died 10 months later (October 1999). The

detailed description plus photographs left no doubt that the bird was correctly identified, though unfortunately the corpse was not retained. Thankfully the original observers of the Tiree frigatebird sent the body to a museum otherwise **Ascension Frigatebird** would have been denied its rightful place on the British List. There will be a full paper appearing in *British Birds* outlining this remarkable event.

These changes mean that the British List remains on 565 species (Category A = 542; Category B = 14; Category C = 9).

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Committee Meeting on 25 February, 2003 - a Personal View

The meeting was again very well attended. The main feature was a presentation by Mark Holling, the vice-president of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, on what the SOC does. His purpose was to explore the possibility of links with our club. The SOC has about 2300 members nationally but only about 30 in Argyll. It has local branches in some other areas. It employs two staff members and publishes a scientific journal (*Scottish Birds*) as well as a quarterly magazine (*Scottish Bird News*). It also holds the most comprehensive library of Scottish ornithology and supports the local Bird Recorders.

There was further discussion on how to get bird record data entered. We heard that some Recorders are able to receive much of their data in spreadsheet form.

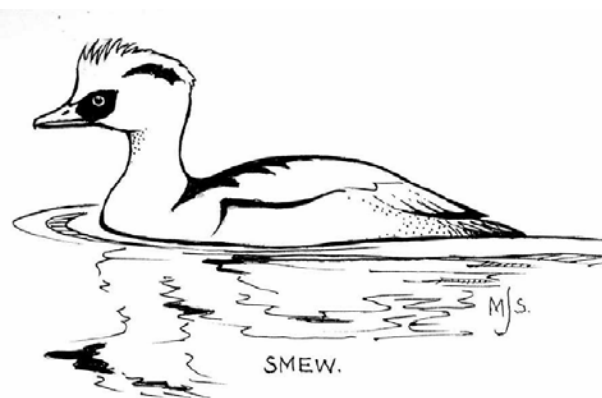
The question of training for interested members cropped up again. Some branches of the SOC and the British Trust for Ornithology may offer this as day or weekend outings. Two useful web addresses, which give information about these societies, are well worth a look. They are:

<http://www.bto.org>

<http://www.the-soc.fsnet.co.uk/soc-home.htm>

Work on *The Birds of Argyll* is proceeding well (page 12) and the programme for our Spring Meeting on 29th March can be found on page 13.

Jane Mitchell



Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should be sent to the Editor before 1st June 2003

BTO Surveys in 2003

The British Trust for Ornithology has again set up a variety of surveys this spring and summer. The **Breeding Birds Survey** continues; there are survey areas available across Argyll for this important national survey. To mark its 75th year, the organisers of the **Heronries Census** are aiming for a full census of UK heronries. Just a note on activity at your local heronry would be most valuable to this survey. Lastly, a national **Survey for Breeding Woodcock** has been set up in partnership with the Game Conservancy Trust. Surveys are based on 1km squares. Please contact David Wood (home phone 01546 830272) to find out more about any of these surveys.

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club

Chairman: David Wood, Drover's House, Bellanoch, Lochgilphead PA31 8SN

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

Secretary: John Anderson, Ard Beag, Connel, Oban PA37 1PT

Treasurer: Bob Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Loch Lomond G83 7DG

Membership Secretary: Bill Staley, 16 Glengilp, Ardrishaig PA30 8HT

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

Committee: Roger Broad (Killearn), Tom Callan (Otter Ferry), Paul Daw (Minard), Michael Gear (Appin), David Merrie (Blairgowrie), Jane Mitchell (Tighnabruaich), Katie Penderigh (Tayinloan)

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

Argyll Bird Club Website (under development):

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/Acad/IBLS/DEEB/rwf/abc/>

The Eider



The Eider is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The club was established in 1985. Its main purpose is to play an active role in the promotion and conservation of birds in Argyll. It is recognised by the Inland Revenues as a charity.

The club holds 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 or Inveraray. 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. The 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. Those joining after 1st October are covered until the end of the following year. Further information can be obtained from the Membership Secretary and additional or past copies of the *Argyll Bird Report* can be obtained from Bob Furness (see box on this page).

The Editor (contact details on front page) welcomes articles for inclusion in *The Eider*. Most of each issue is devoted to articles about some aspect of ornithology, wildlife conservation or general ecology in Argyll, but some articles of a wider natural history interest and notices of forthcoming events are also published. If possible, these should be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word2000, or previous versions of Word. However, 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.

Artists are encouraged to submit black and white drawings, sketches etc. of birds and habitats for possible inclusion in *The Eider*. Some digital images are also suitable for publication

The four issues of *The Eider* are published annually around the 15th day of March, June, September and December. For articles to be included, they must be with the editor before the 1st day of each publication month.