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The Eider

Whimbrel ©Eddie Maguire



The Birds of Scotland: review

Bird Atlas update

Recent reports for November-January

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Report—part 2

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Editorial

For me, spring is the most exciting time of the year. It not only heralds the start of another breeding season but provides the spectacle of vast movements of birds on widely different scales—local, continental and intercontinental—sometimes at a magnitude too immense for us to fully grasp. Migration provides birds with the means to exploit rich food resources in separate locations on earth at different times of the year. Yet, it is often not just a simple movement from one area to another and back again, as it often involves stops of varying lengths to feed en route.

Extraordinary long distance migratory movements sometimes occur, particularly when birds have little opportunity to refuel. Modern technology keeps proving evidence of some amazing feats of endurance, and one of the most astonishing of recent years, at least in my mind, has been the travels of female Bar-tailed Godwit 'E7'.

Godwits were tagged with satellite radio transmitters as part of a larger Pacific Shorebird Migration Program, a joint initiative between the US Geological Survey and PRBO Conservation Science. Some godwits that breed in Alaska migrate to spend the winter in New Zealand and this project hoped to uncover their route. Birds were radio tagged on their wintering ground in New Zealand in February 2007. 'E7' left North Island, New Zealand in March to complete the first astonishing, non-stop leg of her journey to Yalu Jiang, China. A distance of 6,300 miles in about eight days! She settled here for about five weeks, for a well-earned rest, before heading for her breeding area in western Alaska.

After the breeding season, researchers were expecting 'E7' to follow a similar route back to New Zealand. On 29 August she flew back across Alaska, but instead of heading for China, she flew southwards, almost down the centre of the Pacific Ocean, just to the west of Hawaiian Islands, to arrive back in New Zealand eight days later, after a non-stop flight of 7200 miles! In total, this bird clocked up 18,000 miles in her epic journey from and back to New Zealand.

If you have internet access, it is well worth looking on the USGS website at the maps of the flight paths taken by these radio-tagged godwits:

http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg_updates.html

Gift aid your bird club subscription

Because the Argyll Bird Club is registered as a Charity, with the remit of encouraging interest in birds, the Inland Revenue provides the club with the opportunity to claim a tax refund for each bird club member who pays UK Income Tax. If you are a tax payer and you fill in a Gift Aid Declaration form and return it to me, I can claim 28 pence for every pound you pay this year in bird club subscription, as the Inland Revenue classifies our annual subscription as a gift to the club. Not only that, but I can claim retrospectively for up to six previous years of subscription if you have been a member for that long. And I can continue to claim this each year in future. This represents a significant extra source of funds for the club, and all you need to do is to fill out a few details and post the form to me. Then I'll reclaim the tax from the Inland Revenue. This Gift Aid arrangement will remain in effect only as long as you wish, and you continue to pay a subscription, and you continue to pay tax. The form is included with this issue of the *Eider*. Please take the few minutes required to fill it out and post it to me (my full address is on the form), or bring it to me at the Spring indoor meeting on 8th March. Thanks.

Bob Furness

ABC field trips in 2008

See the December 2007 *Eider* for more information about all of these trips.

Bute—Saturday 29 March 2008

Meet at Colintrave at 09.45hrs to catch the 10.00hrs ferry to Rhubodach. A mini-bus can be hired for around £20 plus fuel, to save car costs of £9.85 + £1.75 for each driver/passenger (return prices). The plan is to drive round the island checking lochs, shores and fields for waders, wildfowl etc. There will be no long walks! If you would like to join the trip, please let me know as soon as possible (18.00hrs on Friday 28 March at the latest). If the forecast is really bad we could postpone until the following Saturday.

Ian Hopkins

Tel: 01700 504042

Mobile: 0770 2123170

E-mail: ian@hopkins0079.freeseve.co.uk

Sound of Gigha—Saturday 19 April 2008

This popular field trip has been running for a number of years. For less experienced birders, some guidance on identification will also be provided. Meet at the car park at Ronachan Point just off the A83 (grid reference NR741548) at 10.00hrs. From here we first visit the coast near the West Coat Salmon site and then onto Tayinloan to check the fields. We will then take the ferry to Gigha, mainly to look for birds in the Sound and break for lunch. Snacks can be ordered at the hotel on the island.

This trip depends very much on reasonable weather. In the past we have been extraordinarily lucky with the weather—will it continue? If you intend to come, please contact me by phone or e-mail, at the latest on the evening before (Friday 18th April), so that I can confirm that the trip will go ahead and to give me some idea of how many people to expect. If the weather forecast is really atrocious it may be possible to postpone until the following Saturday.

Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

Colonsay weekend—16-18 May 2008

There are still places available on this trip. David Jardine has booked the Bunkhouse on Colonsay to provide accommodation. The group will leave Oban on the 17.00hrs ferry arriving at Colonsay at c.19.30hrs where they will be met by David. On Saturday and Sunday, visits will be made to a variety of sites on Colonsay viewing seabirds and looking for Colonsay specialities such as Corn Crakes and Chough. The group will return on the

Sunday evening ferry arriving back in Oban around 22.30hrs.

Numbers on this trip will be limited to around 15. To reserve your place please contact:

David Jardine

Tel: 01463 731330

E-mail: dcjardine@freeuk.com

ABC indoor meetings 2008-2009

Spring Meeting 2008

Saturday 8th March

The Argyll Hotel, Inveraray

<http://www.the-argyll-hotel.co.uk/>

The programme is on page 23

Autumn Meeting 2008

Saturday 8th November

Cainbaan Hotel near Lochgiphead

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

The programme will be in the June 2008 *Eider*.

Spring Meeting 2009

Friday 24-Sunday 26th April

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

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

In spring 2009 we are departing from our normal meeting format and are planning a weekend meeting on Islay. This will combine an indoor session with talks (Saturday afternoon) and birding excursions (Saturday and Sunday mornings). The meeting will be based in the Islay Natural History Centre, Port Charlotte. A list of accommodation around Port Charlotte (Hotels, Bed and Breakfast and Youth Hostel) will be available towards the middle of this year. The Youth Hostel is situated in the same building as the Islay Natural History Centre. We hope to take a minimum of cars from the mainland, by car sharing and possibly hiring a minibus on Islay to ferry participants to and from ferries and for the bird watching trips. A number of people have already shown an interest in this venture after the article in the December *Eider*, and some plan to make the trip into a longer holiday. So, please register your interest with Steve Petty (contact details at the top of page 2) as soon as possible. You will then be kept up to date with developments, including receiving a copy of the accommodation broadsheet when this becomes available.

Birds of Argyll—prices

Very good news: Sales of *Birds of Argyll* have been exceeding our best expectations. Not only have we sold many copies through the pre-publication offer, but also we are getting good sales through bookshops at a variety of sites, mainly within Argyll. To our surprise, the printer gave us a lower price for the job than he had originally quoted, and for the revised price we were able to get a couple of hundred copies more than we had originally intended. So we have paid less for the book and have received more from sales than we thought we would get. In addition, several club members have helped to distribute copies ordered pre-publication by people living within or close to Argyll, saving us an enormous amount on postage. We should particularly thank Katie Pendreigh, Steve Petty, Clive Craik, Paul Daw and David Wood for delivering so many copies in their local areas.

So the committee recently decided on a revision to our pricing arrangement. We will continue indefinitely to offer copies of the book to members at a price of £25 if you arrange to collect. Contact Bob Furness to arrange the most convenient collection option (we have boxes of copies at various sites including Lochgilphead, Cowal, Oban, Glasgow, Tarbet). If you request a copy to be sent by post (contact Bob Furness) we can do so for an extra £10 to addresses in the UK, so £35 in total for club members. Prices for nonmembers are: £45, including post, to addresses within the UK; £55 if posted to addresses in Europe; £65 to USA; £75 to addresses elsewhere in the world. We have had sales to addresses as far away as Denmark, Canada and the USA. We were relieved to get the pre-publication orders out in time for Christmas. But for those who did not give copies at Christmas, it might still make an excellent 2008 birthday present for someone!

Bob Furness

A new Islay DVD

The Wildlife Gems of Islay



Filmed and Produced by Gordon Yates

Gordon Yates has produced this excellent DVD of wildlife on Islay after filming on the island over the last two years.

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

Caption competition

It's a while since we've had a caption competition, due to a lack of photos being submitted.

Philip Kirkham has sent in this photo of a Cormorant 'saluting' an Eider.

Please send your caption to the Editor (address at the top of page 2) by the end of April. There's a bottle of wine for the best entry.

If you would like to send in a 'caption competition photo' for the next *Eider*, please ensure it reaches the editor before 25 May.



©Philip Kirkham

Volunteer lek surveyors sought

©Lauri Sippu



The Argyll Black Grouse Recovery Project would be keen to hear from volunteers who are willing to help with 2008 lek survey. There are several known 'lek' areas dotted around Argyll, which we aim to visit twice a year, to gauge the local population. A lek is an area where males display as part of their courtship ritual. It is a wonderful and very special sight. However, the birds do not like to make this too easy

for us, as they tend to be active at first light and often in remote locations.

So if you think you fancy this challenge, get in touch and we can send you further information. The lek survey itself will involve two site visits. The first must take place between the 21st March and 18th April, with the second following on the 19th April and 15th May. We also recommend that you check the site before the actual day, to save you scrambling around in the dark. A reasonable level of fitness is required, you must be over the age of 18 and have suitable outdoor clothing.

For more information please contact:

Marina Smith

Tel: 01546 602518

Or preferably by email:

marina.smith@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

**Black Grouse
Recovery Project**

Argyll & Bute



Review: The Birds of Scotland

Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerney, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. (2007). **The Birds of Scotland**. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.

Two volumes (pp 844 and 788). ISBN Vol 1 978-0-9512139-2-6, Vol 2 978-0-9512139-3-3. Price £75 plus £10 postage and package in the UK (Tel. Scottish Ornithologists' Club 01875 871330).

This is a landmark publication. It will serve as a work of reference for many years to come, and it will certainly be on the bookshelves of anyone with a serious interest in Scottish birds. It was a huge undertaking and the result is a great achievement.



©SOC

The Birds of Scotland (BoS) and Birds of Argyll (BoA) ran in close parallel throughout their periods of gestation. Each book was independently conceived in 2001 and each was published late in 2007. David Jardine, on the editorial team of BoS and one of the main contributors to BoA, was privileged to have a foot in each camp, and several other contributors to BoA also wrote species accounts or provided photographs for BoS. I suspect that all of us on the editorial team of BoA at one time or another felt the bigger project breathing down our necks, probably more so than vice versa. And BoS is, of course, much bigger in every way.

To begin at the most basic. Both are A4 size, but BoS is a boxed set (a nice, sturdy

green box) of two volumes that together weigh 7.2 kg (about the same as a Whooper Swan). BoA is a single volume weighing 2.0 kg (Cormorant). The two volumes of BoS together have 1664 pages (including 30 introductory pages) and respective thicknesses of 56 and 51 mm (in the box, it will occupy 117 mm or 4.6 inches of your bookshelf space), while BoA is 424 pages and 31 mm. BoS covers 509 species while BoA covers 328 (both totals excluding escapes and introductions). Each is very well illustrated with colour photographs, maps and diagrams. BoS had nine editors and 157 contributing authors, while BoA had six and 14. BoS contains 905 photographs by 213 photographers, while BoA....but that's enough of comparisons!

The Birds of Scotland opens with a series of chapters on various aspects of Scottish ornithology, written by acknowledged experts in the different fields. These chapters are all extremely interesting. Their titles are worth listing here, to give an idea of the scope and flavour of this part of the book:

- Scotland's avifauna (Ron Forrester)
- Scotland's geography & habitats (Stuart Benn & Andy Douse)
- The fossil record of birds in Scotland (Andrew Kitchen)
- The early history of Scotland's birds (W.R.P. Bourne)
- Changes in Scotland's avifauna (Ray Murray)
- Weather and bird migration in Scotland (Norman Elkins)
- Bird movements (Ray Murray)
- Bird recording, survey & research (Ian Bainbridge)
- Bird conservation in Scotland (Paul Walton & Stuart Housden)
- Pioneers in Scottish ornithology (Bob McGowan & David Clugston)
- Early history of bird photography in Scotland (T. Norman Tait)

There are many hours of fascinating reading in the 114 pages of these eleven chapters alone, before we even reach the 509 species accounts that form the core of the book. These comprise 190 breeding species, 30 wintering species, 42 passage migrants and about 250 vagrants. Of the vagrants, 170 had been recorded on twenty occasions or less and 50 of these only once. (I may not be alone in having to admit that I had not heard of one or two of these!)

The 157 authors have been brought under control by good editing. Each account of the commoner species is divided into sections on "World Range and Taxonomy", "Habitat", "Scottish Range, Distribution and Status", "Breeding Cycle", "Population", "Trends", "Threats", and "Gaps in Current Knowledge". The rarer species have the first two of these sections followed by a final section "Scottish Records and Comment". Within this standard format, a huge quantity of facts and figures has been assembled and condensed into a massive work of reference. While its size and weight make it unsuitable for carrying around in suitcase

or rucksack (or car?), the 905 colour photographs, and numerous maps and charts, also make it a very acceptable bedside or coffee-table book for the discerning reader.

The naming system is that of the BOU (another difference from BoA). Thus we have Mew Gull for Common Gull, Tundra Swan for Bewick's Swan, Little Plover for Little Ringed Plover, Rock Pigeon for Rock Dove, and so on. However, alternative English names, sometimes more than one, are given at the start of each species account, so any initial confusion is quickly allayed.

The cut-off date for records in the species accounts was the end of 2004 but Appendix 3 gives records of rarer species for 2005 and 2006. There are several other Appendices, all at the end of Vol. 2. Appendix 6, compiled by our own Tristan ap Rheinalt, lists the Gaelic names of the most important 260 bird species on the Scottish List. Appendix 1 gives a full account of each of the 13 Category D species (those thought not to occur in a natural state; this includes species such as Greater Flamingo and Booted Eagle), many of them with good colour pictures. Appendix 2 lists the names about 100 Category E species (Escapes & Introductions; this includes species such as Black Swan and Eagle Owl). An important section of the book is Appendix 4, which is an attempt to give Scottish population estimates of all breeding and wintering species. Some of these are admittedly provisional and this is clearly stated.

Appendix 5 gives the scientific names of animals and plants. The purpose of a list like this is to give scientific equivalents of English names that have been used in the text. Thus, on p 1610 under Insects, some of the orders are correctly translated as Latin equivalents (for example, beetles as Coleoptera, flies as Diptera and earwigs as Dermaptera). But, inconsistently in the same list, families are also translated as orders—for example, crane-flies as Diptera, horse-flies as Diptera, whirligig beetles as Coleoptera and aphids as Hemiptera. Correct translations would have been Tipulidae, Tabanidae, Gyrinidae and Aphididae respectively. The names of the orders could then have been given after these family names, if this was felt necessary.

Appendix 5 also, incidentally, contains the only incorrect spelling that I came across in the entire book (all 1663 pages and, by my reckoning, some 800,000 words). On page 1610 (right-hand column) "Colembola" should surely be "Collembola".

But those are extremely minor and pedantic points! There are very few serious criticisms to be made of this lavish and well-produced book. As I read through it, only two things annoyed me, slightly but repeatedly.

Firstly, it would have been nice to have had the species name given unobtrusively at the top of each page. Often I found I didn't know which species I was reading about and had to find out from figure legends (thankfully, the species name is always given under each figure or diagram). However, on pages where there are no figure legends, you must either search the text, or turn back a page or two to the start of the species account (as for example on p 1412 for Twite, p 1396 for Greenfinch and p 986 for Sand Mar-

tin, to give just a few cases from Vol 2). If giving the species at the top of each page would have been too demanding of space, it could have gone at the bottom (alongside or, perhaps, instead of the words “The Birds of Scotland” that appear at the foot of every left-hand page—unnecessarily, I thought).

Secondly, I found the following usage annoying (these are two examples chosen at random): “House Martin is a common breeding summer visitor...” (p 994) or “Mandarin is an attractive alien duck...” (p 182). Surely it is more usual, and it sounds better, to say either “The House Martin is...” or “House Martins are...”.

There are superb colour photographs, large and small, throughout the book. My favourite is the entrancing overhead shot of a drumming snipe, its outer tail feathers fully projected and the patterns on its wing and tail shown in exquisite detail. (p 1613). Not all the photographs come up to this ultra-high standard. The badly out-of-focus photograph of a Tree Swallow on p 987 is almost a case of “spot the bird”, but no doubt it was the only picture taken of this major rarity!

Clive Craik

Bird deaths due to discarded fishing tackle in Northumberland

Reading Clive Craik’s interesting article in the last issue of the Eider (83: 18-20), reminded me of data I have collected over a number of years on bird deaths on the Northumberland coast.

Between December 1991 and November 2002 I was involved in monitoring bird deaths along 3.2km of sandy beach to try and establish how many birds were being killed by a windfarm at Blyth, Northumberland. The beach was searched once a week to locate dead birds, which had been washed up along the high tide line. A post mortem was carried out on each individual to determine the cause of death and to identify those which had collided with either the rotor blades or the towers.

A total of 3750 corpses was found, comprising 96 differ-

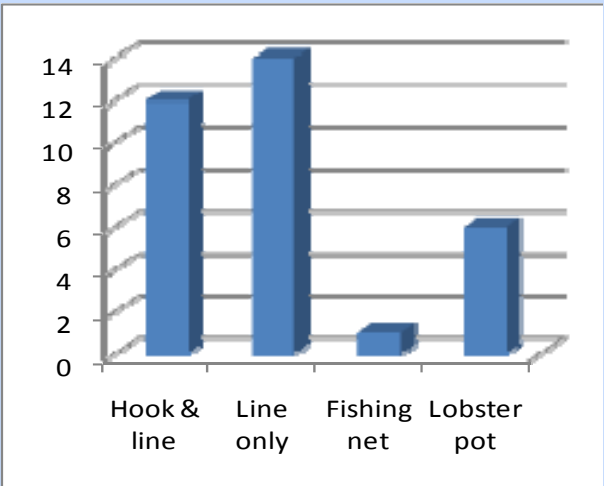
ent species. Of these, 33 individuals had died after becoming entangled in fishing-related equipment (box below). Eiders, Cormorants and gulls were the most frequent casualties. Details provided with each corpse highlight the gruelling death experienced by many—“swallowed one hook with a second hook embedded in right thigh with two foot of line attached”, “swallowed a baited hook and line that were attached to a cork”, “fish hook in throat causing huge swelling”, “fish hook buried in left wing and trailing fishing line”—and lots of similar descriptions!

During this period, there were 114 proven windfarm collisions. Most of these were large gulls

Brian Little

Bird deaths due to discarded fishing gear at Blyth Northumberland

The table (right) lists the numbers and species involved and the chart (below) indicates the cause of death



| Species | Number |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Herring Gull | 6 |
| Starling | 6 |
| Eider | 5 |
| Cormorant | 4 |
| Common Guillemot | 3 |
| Great Black-backed Gull | 3 |
| Little Grebe | 1 |
| Redshank | 1 |
| Purple Sandpiper | 1 |
| Kittiwake | 1 |
| Gannet | 1 |
| Black-headed Gull | 1 |

Recent bird reports from Paul Daw: November 2007—January 2008

This report is mostly made up of a selection from sightings already published on the website. See Latest Reports numbers 60-66 on the website for further records and for more details of those listed below. Records included are not necessarily of 'rarities' but may also relate to birds in unusual places or behaving in untypical ways. I also include records from areas that are not normally well covered. In particular I would welcome more reports from Islay, Kintyre, Mull and North Argyll. You can send them in by e-mail, post or telephone.

Spring migrants 2008. By the time you are reading this, it will only be a couple of weeks until the first summer visitors arrive—our earliest recent Northern Wheatear was on 9th March. There have already been several very early records on BirdTrack of migrants further south. Please try to make of note of the first dates on which you see (or in the case of Cuckoos, hear) each species and let me have them so that we have a full picture for the next *Eider*. Many thanks.

2007 Bird Records. It is still not too late to let me have any unreported sightings for 2007. If at all possible these should be in the club Excel record format. Alternatively, I have a Word table format for those without Excel on their PCs. For odd records, just the species name, date, location (including a grid reference if possible) and number of birds will be fine—and your name of course!

Observers. Full names are given in brackets except for BA = Bill Allan, JB = John Bowler, TC = Tom Callan, PD = Paul Daw, JD = Jim Dickson, EJM = Eddie Maguire and SG = Stuart Gibson.

Wildfowl (and Gamebirds)

A juvenile **Whooper Swan** with a darvic ring was seen at Fidden, Mull on 3rd Nov. When the number was submitted to WWT they reported that it was one of a family that had stopped off at Loch Doon before arriving at Caerlaverock. The staff at Caerlaverock were delighted to hear about the bird as it was the missing cygnet from a family ('Doon' and family) being monitored for their 'Super Whooper project' (<http://www.wwt.org.uk/superwhooper>). Thanks to Bryan Rains for this story.

Other **Whooper Swan** sightings included seven on Loch Baile Mhic Chailein, North Argyll also on 3rd Nov (BA), 108 at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 4th Nov (JB), 13 at Loch Beg, Mull on 5th Nov (Bryan Rains), 11 at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 7th Nov, 11 at Ulva Lagoons, Loch Sween on 14th Nov, 34 at the top of Loch Indaal, not flustered by jets flying over, on 20th Nov (Ian Brooke), a family (two adults, two juveniles) on the Powder Dams near Millhouse, Cowal on 3rd Dec (Daphne Campbell), 156 on the whole of Tiree (including 39 cygnets) on 11th Dec, five (two adult, three juveniles) at Kettlehole, near Ford, Mid-Argyll on 8th Jan (Karl Pipes), three on Loch Leathan, just beyond Kilmichael Glassary, Mid-Argyll on 11th Jan (Sue Furness) and six on Loch Ederline (near Ford) on 26th Jan (BA).

Recent Report Updates

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

<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

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

Stop Press

While walking along the shore near Ardnoe Point, near Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 3rd February, Hazel Whiston and her family saw a large white owl, first perched in a tree and then flying. It was almost totally white and they concluded it could only be a male **Snowy Owl**. A description has been supplied and if accepted this will be the first Snowy Owl on the mainland of Argyll since 1891! It was last seen flying south and so far it has not been picked up by anyone else. But we live in hope!

Whilst at Crinan on 6th Feb, looking for the Snowy Owl, Jim Dickson saw a sandpiper on the shore. It was at some distance and could not be seen clearly, but seemed to show some characteristics of **Spotted Sandpiper**. In the following days Jim got closer views and some good photos of the bird (below). He concluded it was most likely a **Common Sandpiper** (still quite a find here in winter) although some experts who have seen the photos still think it could be a Spotted Sandpiper. They are not easy to tell apart in winter plumage!

An unusual gull has been attracting attention in Oban. It has many of the features of a **Caspian Gull**. This gull has only recently been recognised as a species in its own right and was formerly considered a race of the Yellow-legged Gull. They are not easy to distinguish with certainty and the jury is still out at the moment. If accepted it will be a new species for Argyll (SG/JD).



The goose count on Tiree during 14th–15th Jan found three **Pink-footed Geese**, 730 **Greenland White-fronts**, 3,376 **Greylags**, a single **Canada Goose**, 3,439 **Barnacle Geese** and two **Pale-bellied Brent Geese**, as well as 134 **Whooper Swans** (JB). A count of 140 **Greylag Geese** was made at Moine Mhor on 15th Jan (BA).

Away from the well known sites in Islay, Tiree, Kintyre and Loch Sween, **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were reported from Loch Pottie, Mull (22 on 3rd Nov, Bryan Rains), An Sailean, Benderloch, North Argyll (16 flying over on 13th Nov, SG), on the fields near Inverfolla, Appin, North Argyll (80 on 25th Nov, Mary Gregory), Fidden, Mull (46 on 9th Dec, Bryan Rains) and Ardnacloch, Appin, North (94 on 11th Dec, BA).

A group of 46 **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** were near Bruichladdich, Islay on 20th Nov (Ian Brooke). The white-morph **Snow Goose** was with 46 **Greylag Geese** in roadside fields at the Craobh Haven turn-off (off Oban-Lochgilphead road A816—NM 807086) all day on 11th Jan (BA).

Three female **Mandarin Ducks** were seen along the River Cur, at the head of Loch Eck, on 17th Dec (Peter Woods). A drake **Gadwall** was at Bunessan, Mull on 3rd Nov (Bryan Rains). Numbers of **Tufted Ducks** on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree peaked at 110 on 4th Nov (JB). Much smaller numbers (usually two to four) were seen at other sites, including Loch Pottie, Mull, Loch Melldalloch, Cowal and Loch Leathan, Mid-Argyll. A male **Common Pochard** on Harrison's Loch, Mull on 2nd Nov was the first to be reported on the island for several years (Ron Cook).

The gathering of **Common Goldeneyes** in Loch Fyne at the mouth of Leacann Water, Furnace, Mid-Argyll totalled at least 264 on the morning of 16th Dec—a new record count for a single site in Argyll (PD). The flock near the fish-farm at Ormsary, Knapdale numbered 116 on the same day (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie). The flock off Furnace were counted again by Bob and Euan Furness, in calm conditions on 30th Dec. A total of 263 was pleasingly close to the 16th Dec count. Euan is determined to find at least 265 on his next visit! A group of nine **Common Scoters** at Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 10th December was an unusual record for this area (PD/TC).

Twenty-five **Long-tailed Ducks** were at Hough Bay, Tiree on 21st Jan (JB). Most other reports have been of one or two birds, at sites in Mid-Argyll, Mull and North Argyll (BA/Bryan Rains *et al.*). A juvenile/first-winter female **Surf Scoter**, first seen feeding in the surf at Hough Bay, Tiree on 6th Jan, has been seen there throughout Jan (see photo on next page), usually in the company of **Long-tailed Ducks** (JB).

Two male **Black Grouse** first seen by the roadside near Inverfolla, Appin, North Argyll by Mary Gregory on 18th Nov, have since been seen on several subsequent occasions sometimes with females (see photo on next page). **Black Grouse** are seldom reported from North Argyll.

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

A seawatch from Aird, Tiree in a NW6 wind on 5th Nov produced two **Red-throated Divers**, 23 **Great Northern Divers**, nine **Fulmars** and 29 **Northern Gannets**—all heading west (JB). Twenty-three **Leach's Storm-petrels** were seen flying south during an 8hr sea-watch at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in a NW gale with very frequent squalls on 8th Nov (EJM).

On 14th Nov, two **Red-throated Divers** in winter plumage, four **Great Northern Divers** and three **Grey Herons** were found in the Loch na Cille area of Loch Sween during a WeBS count (PD). Meanwhile, on the same day, Loch Caolisport had six **Red-throated Divers**, four **Black-throated Divers** and nine **Great Northern Divers**, and another **Great Northern Diver** was off Craignish Point, Mid-Argyll (BA). A visit to Kilfinan Bay, Cowal on 15th Nov found two **Red-throated Divers**, at least six **Great Northern Divers** and a **Slavonian Grebe** in winter plumage (TC/PD). A **Red-throated Diver**, a **Black-throated Diver**, five **Great Northern Divers** and two **Little Grebes** were on Loch Scridain, Mull on 10th Dec (Bryan Rains).

A single **Slavonian Grebe** with **Common Eiders** and two **Little Grebes** on 18th Dec was an unusual record for Campbeltown Loch (PD). A close group of 16 **Black-throated Divers** was off Skipness, Kintyre on 7th Jan (JD). This is a favoured location for this species although such large numbers have usually been reported later in the year (e.g. 21 on 8th May 1998). A WeBS count at Kilfinan Bay, Cowal found 11 **Black-throated Divers** and eight **Shags** on 12th Jan (TC). Eight **Red-throated Divers**, and four **Slavonian Grebes** were in Ardmucknish Bay, North Argyll on 16th Jan (BA).

At 11.40hrs on 31st Jan, three **Manx Shearwaters** passed through mid channel of the Clyde Estuary. They were viewed from the ferry to Hunters Quay, and headed off up Loch Long (Tom Cameron). **Manx Shearwaters** are seen only rarely anywhere in Scotland between December and February (according to *The Birds of Scotland*) and are especially unusual on the west coast. Over the past 10 years there have been only three mid-winter records in Argyll—two in December and one February, but none in January. Could the weather conditions at the time have been responsible (PD)?

Raptors, rails etc.

A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was reported at the Oa, Islay during 12th–18th November. If a description is supplied and accepted this would be the first in Argyll since 1997 and the first on Islay since 1988 (Gus Keys per JD).

A **Red Kite** seen on the outskirts of Dalmally, Mid-Argyll on 2nd Jan was a very unusual winter record for Argyll (Harry Kent). A **White-tailed Eagle** with a white wing tag with the letter 'E' was seen near Portnahaven, Islay on 25th Nov (George Newall).

Hen Harriers, both single birds and pairs, have been widely reported during the winter—perhaps more frequently than usual. A minimum of six (five ring-tails, one male) came into the Moine Mhor roost at dusk on 1st Jan (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie).

Common Kestrels have also been widely and frequently



Top left: A female Merlin at Balephetrish, Tiree in January ©John Bowler

Bottom left: A first-winter female Surf Scoter at Haugh Bay, Tiree in January ©John Bowler

Top Right: Two male Black Grouse perched in a tree near Appin on 29 January ©Andy Robinson

Bottom Right: A Redshank at Otter Ferry that was determined to stare out the photographer ©Tom Callan



reported. At least five were seen during a day trip to Mull on 13th Nov (BA). On 19th Nov, a **Peregrine Falcon** was seen making a pass at gulls near the shore in West Bay, Dunoon (Peter Woods) and an immature **Golden Eagle** was being mobbed by three **Buzzards** at Inveryne Farm, near Kilfinan, Cowal (David Warden per TC). Another **Golden Eagle** was being mobbed by two **Common Buzzards** at Ardencaple, Seil, Mid-Argyll on 30th Dec (Richard Wesley).

The **Common Coot** is something of a misnomer in Argyll. They seem to be occurring in smaller and smaller numbers. Only a single bird has been seen for most of the winter at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree, where there is usually a small flock (JB). The only other record has been of a first-winter bird on Loch Luachrach, Oban on 22nd Nov (BA). On the other hand, **Moorhens** seem to have been reported slightly more frequently of late. Four, including two large juveniles, were on Lerags pond, near Oban on 1st Nov (BA) and two were on the lochan near Ostel Bay, Cowal on 25th Nov (Steve Petty/Alex Millon).

Waders

A late flock of 30 **Sanderlings** was in Machrihanish Bay on 2nd Nov (EJM). On 9th Nov at least 650 **European Golden Plovers** arrived at The Laggan, near Campbeltown (EJM) and a high tide roost at Stinky Hole, Campbeltown Loch

held 58 **Eurasian Curlews**, 345 **Oystercatchers** and three **Common Redshanks** (PD). On the same day, four **Purple Sandpipers** were in West Bay, Dunoon (George Newall) and a leg-flagged Sanderling seen at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree had been ringed in May 2007 at Sandgerdi, Iceland (JB).

A flock of at least 72 **Northern Lapwings** was seen in fields near Barsloisnoch Farm, Moine Mhor on 24th Dec (PD), and 25 were at the mouth of the burn in Camas Bruaich Ruaidhe, Loch Etive, near Dunstaffnage on 6th Jan (Mike Harrison).

A very late, or wintering, **Common Sandpiper** was found at Kilmun, Holy Loch, Cowal during the WeBS count on 10th Nov. A wintering bird was found at the same place on 31st December 2001. Other birds found included 379 **Oystercatchers**, 17 **Ringed Plovers**, 23 **Eurasian Curlews**, 26 **Common Redshanks** and 20 **Turnstones**. Because of strong winds at the time of the count many of the Curlews would have dispersed to the surrounding fields (George Newall).

Fifteen **Common Snipe** and three **Common Redshanks** were found at An Sailean, Benderloch, North Argyll on 13th Nov (SG). An all island count of waders on Tiree the same

day found 4,325 **European Golden Plovers** and 2,250 **Northern Lapwings** (JB).

Four **Woodcocks** at Ceann a' Mhara, Tiree on 14th Nov was a high count for this location (JB) and one was flushed at crossroad in the middle of Moine Mhor at dusk that same day (BA). In general **Woodcocks** seem to have been even more numerous and more widely distributed than usual this winter.

In the Kilbride Bay (Ostel Bay), Cowal area on 25th Nov, 15-20+ **Common Snipe** were flushed in small groups from an area of wet coastal moorland, while seven **Dunlin**, 25 **Ringed Plovers**, and 12 **Curlews** were counted along the coast (Steve Petty/Alex Millon). Single **Grey Plover** and **Bar-tailed Godwit** were at Tayinloan, Kintyre on 15th Jan together with an unusually large (for here) flock of about 120 mixed small waders—c.85 **Ringed Plovers**, ten **Dunlin** and 25 **Turnstones** (Katie Pendreigh).

A group of eight **Bar-tailed Godwits** were at the head of Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 7th Jan and up to 48 **Dunlin** were in Loch Gilp on 13th Jan—a good count for here (JD). WeBS counts on 12th Jan produced seven **Oystercatchers**, 25 **Northern Lapwings**, seven **Eurasian Curlews** and three **Common Redshanks** at Kilfinan Bay, Cowal (TC), while 579 **Oystercatchers**, 18 **Ringed Plovers**, three **Northern Lapwings**, 56 **Eurasian Curlews**, 14 **Common Redshanks** and 22 **Turnstones** were at Holy Loch (George Newall) and 55 **Oystercatchers**, 16 **Common Snipe** (probably brought in by the hard weather), 34 **Eurasian Curlews**, and five **Common Redshanks** were at Loch Etive (Mike Harrison).

During the goose count on Tiree during 14th–15th Jan, 4,405 **Northern Lapwings** and 4,180 **Golden Plovers** were counted on the island. Numbers of both species were up on earlier counts, possibly due to cold weather influxes (JB)?

A single **Greenshank** was with 11 **Common Redshanks** at Kennacraig, Kintyre on 4th Nov (BA) and five **Greenshanks** were at Grasspoint, Mull (Bryan Rains). Up to five **Greenshanks** have been seen at both Loch Scridain and Loch Beg, Mull through the winter (BA/Bryan Rains) and two were seen in Balvicar Bay, Seil, Mid-Argyll on 27th Jan (Richard Wesley).

A **Grey Phalarope** seen from the Islay-Kennacraig ferry on 18th Nov (Angus Keys per Ian Brooke) was the only record for this period. In all, at least 120 **Turnstones** were at the fish farm and the spit at Otter Ferry, Cowal on 19th Dec (TC).

Skuas, gulls, terns and auks

A juvenile **Arctic Tern** at Traigh Bhi on 4th Nov was the latest ever on Tiree, and equalled the latest date for Argyll as a whole (at Ardnave, Islay in 1999).

A seawatch from Aird, Tiree on 7th Nov found 160 auks, most of which were **Razorbills**, 138 **Kittiwakes** and a single **Little Auk** (JB), and three **Pomarine Skuas** (all juveniles at 10.39hrs). Six **Little Auks** were among birds seen flying south during a 6hr sea watch at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in a NW gale (force 6-7) with frequent squalls

(EJM) on the same day. The following day at Machrihanish (8th Nov) a juvenile **Sabine's Gull** and a **Little Auk** were seen during a NW gale (force 7-8) with very frequent squalls, including one vicious hailstorm (EJM), and a seawatch from Aird, Tiree found two **Pomarine Skuas** (one adult, one juvenile), 79 **Kittiwakes** and 27 auks (mostly **Razorbills**) (JB).

The adult **Ring-billed Gull** was at roost with 24 **Common Gulls** on George Street foreshore, Oban on 11th Nov (photo on next page). The first time it had been sighted for a while (SG). An adult **Mediterranean Gull** was with c.1,050 Black-headed Gulls at Loch Gilp on 22nd Nov (JD) and was seen there subsequently (photo on next page).

A first-winter **Iceland Gull** was at Sandaig, Tiree on 13th Nov—the first of the winter (JB). A first-winter **Glaucous Gull** was photographed on a fishing boat just south of Torsa Island, near Seil on 23rd Nov (Billy MacInnes per Richard Wesley). Another first-winter bird was at Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 5th Jan (JB).

First-winter **Iceland Gulls** were seen on the shore near the Glenbarr cemetery, Kintyre (NR6635) on 13th Jan (Katie Pendreigh), at the gull preening station opposite Oban R.C. Cathedral on 17th Jan (BA), at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 19th Jan (JB), Tarbert Harbour, Kintyre on 20th Jan (BA—photo on next page), at Fionnphort, Mull on 27th Jan (Bryan Rains) and at the fish farm at the north end of Loch Awe on 29th Jan (Andy Robinson).

A single **Puffin** in winter plumage was seen flying over Kilbrannan Sound off Carradale, Kintyre on the morning of 18th Dec (PD). A single **Little Auk** seen during a seawatch on 7th Dec off Aird, Tiree was the last record of winter (JB). They have been relatively scarce in Argyll, in contrast to the huge numbers seen off the east coast.

Doves, owls, woodpeckers etc.

November was a good month for pigeons in Argyll. A spectacular roost of at least 312 **Wood Pigeons** was observed in woods at Mheall Cottage near Barsloisnoch, Moine Mhor on 6th Nov. This was an unusual number for Mid-Argyll (JD). The following day (7th Nov), at the same roost, a minimum of 570 were seen in flight, in several different groups, from 14.30hrs onwards (JD/BA). Flocks of up to 300 birds were seen elsewhere in Mid and North Argyll in the following days.

A flock of 558 **Rock Doves** on stubbles at Balephuill, Tiree on 11th Nov was by far the largest flock John Bowler had ever seen on the island (JB).

Barn Owls were reported from near the Killail Burn, Otter Ferry at 22.00hrs on 11th Nov (TC), approximately 1 mile down the Bonawe road, North Connel, North Argyll on 3rd Dec (it seemed quite unconcerned by torchlight) (Debra Brennan per Robin Harvey), three at Loch Beg, Mull on 20th Dec (Bryan Rains), near Otter Ferry on 12th Jan (David Warden) and at Keppochan, Loch Awe, with another at Bal-limeanoch on 22nd Jan (Karl Pipes).

A **Short-eared Owl** at Cornaigbeg, Tiree on 1st Jan was one of very few reported so far this winter. One seen at Balephetrish, Tiree on 15th Jan may have been the same bird (JB).

A medley of winter gulls



Top left: An adult Ring-billed Gull on the George Street foreshore, Oban. This was probably the same bird that has returned to the area for its fourth winter. During the day it often feeds with Common Gulls in Dunstaffnage Bay and returns to the Oban foreshore/harbour to roost ©Stuart Gibson

Top right: A first-winter Iceland Gull in Tarbert Harbour, Kintyre in January ©Jim Dickson

Bottom Right: An adult Mediterranean Gull was present during Dec-Jan in Lochgilphead ©Jim Dickson



A record has been received since the last Recent Reports of a **Common Kingfisher** being watched on 14th Sep in the Kyles of Bute near Tighnabruaich for about 10 minutes until it flew out of sight westwards (Daphne Campbell). This is the first recent report of a Kingfisher in this area. A single Kingfisher was seen at Taynuilt, Mid-Argyll on the edge of a lagoon between the road and the shore on 3rd Dec (Carl Farmer per Richard Wesley). On 9th Dec, not just one, but two were seen during a WeBS count on Loch Etive—one at Kilmaronag and the other at Kelly's Pier, Taynuilt (Mike Harrison). One of these birds was photographed at Taynuilt, Mid-Argyll on 22nd Dec. It was taking a species of goby, in just a few cm of water at low tide (R. Shucksmith per Robin Harvey). During a WeBS count on 12th Jan the observers were lucky enough to see a bird fishing successfully from a perch at Airds Bay, Loch Etive. It sat around long enough for some pictures to be taken (Mike Harrison) and was presumably the same individual as above. This bird is becoming something of a 'star'. One was seen again at Taynuilt on 22nd Jan (JD/BA).

Passerines

A single very late adult **Barn Swallow** was at Killiechronan, Mull on 13th Nov (BA). The last report was of one seen flying across the road at Bunessan, Mull on 25th Nov (Shaun McCullagh).

An unusual number of **Dippers** have been reported this

winter. Several have been seen in the course of Timed Tetrad Visits for the Bird Atlas when areas not often visited by birders have been covered. This more systematic coverage seems to show that Dippers may be more widespread (at least in winter) in Argyll than we often think.

Flocks of 15 **Meadow Pipits** at Milton, Tiree and 35 at Kirkapoll on 12th Nov were unusual given the date, as only a handful winter on Tiree (JB). Nineteen seen during a Timed Tetrad Visit for the Bird Atlas on 11th Dec at Lochan Chuilceachan near Otter Ferry were unexpected at an altitude of 360m in winter (TC). Good numbers of **Meadow Pipits** (32) and **Pied Wagtails** (26) were found near Drimvore, Moine Mhor on 31st Dec. Most of the **Pied Wagtails** were adult males (JD).

Good numbers of **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** were still passing through during November and early December, including 120 **Redwings** at Ardness, Mull on 3rd Nov (Bryan Rains), 100 **Redwings** at Balephuill, Tiree on 4th Nov (JB), 250+ **Redwings** and 400+ **Fieldfares** at Achahoish, Loch Caolisport on 6th Nov (JD), 100+ **Fieldfares** at Tullochgorm (Minard), Mid-Argyll on 11th Nov, c.1000 **Redwings** about on Tiree on 13th Nov, 52 **Fieldfares** at Ballygrant, Islay feeding on hawthorn berries on 22nd Nov (per Ian Brooke), 20 **Fieldfares** on the fields near Kilbride farm, Cowal on 25th

Nov (Steve Petty, Alex Millon) and around 300 **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** in a mixed flock on the field in Strath Eachaig, just south of Benmore Gardens, Cowal on 2nd Dec –of which about 75% were **Fieldfares** (Steve Petty).

More unusually they were still being reported, in smaller numbers, through Dec and into Jan e.g. 30 **Redwings** were at Ruaig, Tiree and three **Fieldfares** and 20 **Redwings** were at Cornaigbeg on 18th Dec, a mixed flock of 20 or so thrushes at Loch Melldalloch, Cowal on 20th Dec included a few **Redwings** and **Fieldfares** as well as **Song Thrushes** and **Mistle Thrushes** (TC), ten **Redwings** were seen at Bal-lachuan Loch, Seil, Mid-Argyll on 21st Dec (Richard Wesley), about 50 **Redwings** were at Slockavullin, Mid-Argyll on 31st Dec, and 30 or more **Redwings** were with 40+ **Common Starlings** seen near Drimvore, Moine Mhor on 31st Jan (PD).

Blackcaps on the other hand have been conspicuous by their absence. Apart from a series of records of one or two birds on Tiree during 2nd–18th Nov, no **Blackcaps** have been reported in Argyll this winter, except for one in Oban on 4th Feb. A very late Common Chiffchaff (*abietinus*-type) was in the garden at Balephuill, Tiree on 7th Dec and a *tristis*-type Common Chiffchaff was at Cornaigbeg, Tiree on 10th Dec, but typically it didn't call (JB).

A **Firecrest** was reported on 6th Jan at the same location near Dalmally, Mid-Argyll (Laganbuidhe Farm) where one was first seen in 1999 (Alan Gray). A flock of 18 **Long-tailed Tits** were found in conifer forestry near Tullochgorm, Minard on 11th Nov (PD), a flock of at least 14 were in a garden at Glenbranter, Cowal on 16th Nov (Peter Woods) and another flock of 14 were in the garden at Campbell Crescent, Oban on 14th Dec (SG).

The ever increasing local flock of **Western Jackdaws** at Otter Ferry had reached at least 250 on 14th Nov (TC). Three **Magpies** were seen together in Bishop's Glen, Dunoon on 19th Nov (Peter Woods). More unusual were single Magpies at Tighnabruaich, Cowal on 26th Nov (David and Eva Shrewsbury per Steve Petty) and on the west shore of Loch na Cille, near Tayvallich on 2nd Dec (Morag Rea).

A large Chaffinch flock at Slockavullin (minimum of 350) on 16th Dec, included at least 20 **Bramblings**, though there could have been many more (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie). This is the largest number of Bramblings seen together on the mainland since 1997 (PD)! Fifteen **Bramblings** were still there on 31st Dec, six were by the roadside, just south of Tayvallich Village, Mid-Argyll on 1st Jan (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie) and a female was seen in a holly bush opposite the Co-Op in Dunoon on 21st Jan (George Newall).

A flock of 40 **Goldfinches** were feeding along the Crinan Canal bank near Crinan on 19th Nov (Malcolm Chattwood). A flock of 60 **Siskins** were near Loch Ederline, Ford, Mid-Argyll on 4th Nov (BA), a flock of 35 were feeding on alder seed in Kames on 24th Nov (Steve Petty), 52 were counted with a few **Chaffinches** at Keills (Loch na Cille) on 1st Jan (BA/Anne-Lise Dickie) and c.50 **Siskins** were seen at Finchairn, Loch Awe on 21st Jan (Karl Pipes). An impressive 48

Siskins were at a feeding station at Acha, Balvicar, Seil on 28th Jan (Pat Blunsden)

Twite numbers at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory had increased to at least 150 by 4th Nov (EJM).

Exceptional numbers of **Common Crossbills** have been reported this winter. We presume they are this species of crossbill as they are currently the only one on the Argyll list! Many have been found during Timed Tetrad Visits for the Winter Atlas including 16, at least one of which had the distinctive orange plumage of some variant males, near Tullochgorm, Minard on 11th Nov (PD). At least 13 were recorded in ones and twos during TTVs for the Winter Atlas in the Otter Ferry area, together with nine **Bullfinches**, on 22nd Nov (TC). Two different flocks of 10 and 14 **Crossbills** were flying over one after the other at Loch Glashan, Mid-Argyll on 3rd Dec (Paul Daw). At least 15 birds were in the Otter Ferry area on 29th Dec, including four perched on standing dead spruce in clear-fell area c.50 m from standing mature spruce (TC) and 11 were seen at Loch Bealach Ghearran, near Minard, Mid-Argyll (Paul Daw).

A flock of 12 **Common Crossbills** flew low over the houses at Kames, Cowal on 24th Nov, with one male singing in flight (Steve Petty), 12 were reported at Loch Beg, Mull on 29th Dec (Bryan Rains), c.12 were reported in the woods just past the railway bridge near Taynuilt, Achnacloich on 2nd Jan (Bob Grove), two were calling loudly near Ach-nabreck, Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll on 16th Jan (JD) and five were at Ardchonnell (Loch Awe) on 26th Jan (Karl Pipes). Three **Mealy Redpolls** were found at Balephuill, Tiree on 3rd Nov (JB).

On 18th Nov, a **Lapland Bunting** was reported on the Oa, Islay (Angus Keys per Ian Brooke) and five **Snow Buntings** were at Ardnave (James How). A group of six **Snow Buntings** were seen near the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 19th Dec (John McGlynn per EJM) and five were seen just north of Ferry farm, Tayinloan on 22nd Jan (Katie Pendreigh).

A minimum of five male **Yellowhammers** were with a flock of c.70 Chaffinches feeding at a garden at the end of Lerags road, near Oban on 22nd Nov. Twelve **Yellowhammers** were at Inverfolla, Appin on 21st Jan (BA) and numbers at Acha, Balvicar, Seil during January peaked at seven on 23rd (Pat Blunsden).

Other sightings

There has been a recent report of a **Grey Squirrel** found dead on the road near Oban. So far Argyll has been more or less free of this problem species. If anyone has seen them in Oban or elsewhere in Argyll please contact the Scottish Squirrel Co-ordinator Mel Tonkin at:

mtonkin@swt.org.uk

Mel is also keen to hear about all **Red Squirrel** records in Argyll (Paul Daw).

Paul Daw

Tel: 01546 886260

E-mail: monedula@globalnet.co.uk

The atlas project has got off to a great start in Scotland. As we complete the fieldwork for the first year of the winter atlas we have had records reported online from over 3000 tetrads where Timed Tetrad Visits have been undertaken. Of these almost 60% received an early and a late visit. In addition vast numbers of Roving Records have been received helping to create complete species lists for each 10-km square.

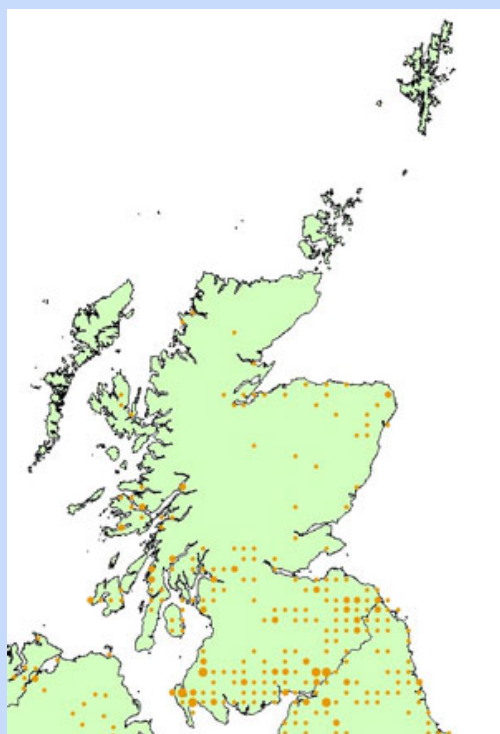
Argyll is obviously going to be one of the more difficult parts of Scotland to cover. It is a huge area with 142 10-km squares, many in remote areas with difficult access. In addition there is often a lack of local birdwatchers to help out with the project. In order to achieve full coverage of the area we are going to require help from virtually every single Argyll Bird Club member, either by conducting timed tetrad visits and/or submitting roving records.

Around 800 tetrads will need to be surveyed in Argyll. So far we have received records from 155 (map on next page). This is a minimum figure as it only includes those submitted online by mid February. We know some observers are waiting till the end of the survey period before they send in their data either online or on paper forms. The dreadful weather in January has also had a big impact. Of the 155 tetrads surveyed, 50% had received the necessary second visit. This means these tetrads will need to be completed in January or February 2009.

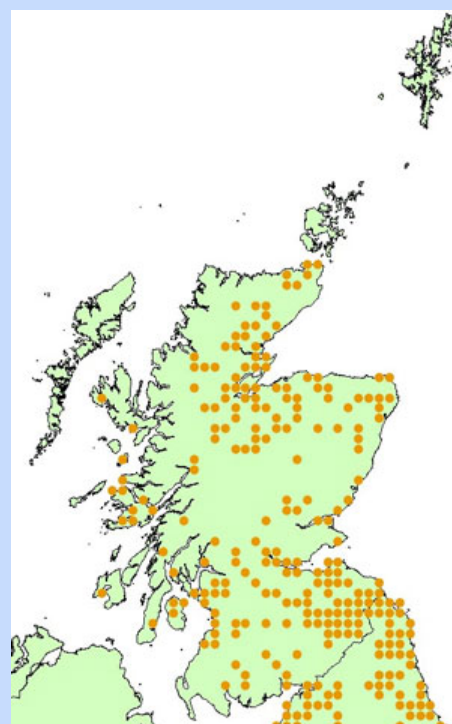
Already we are seeing some fascinating results coming in to the project. It has been a fantastic year for Woodcock with birds being recorded in big numbers all across Scotland. This bird is perhaps our commonest wintering wader. The huge cone crop in the forestry plantations, particularly on spruce trees has resulted in large numbers of Crossbills and Siskins being recorded. The recent run of very mild winters has benefited a range of species. Stonechats are being widely recorded across Scotland, even in upland, inland areas. Kingfishers are being reported further north and Barn Owls have shown a dramatic spread in the north and west (box below).

During April–July the record gathering process will restart for the breeding season atlas work. Each 10-km square will need a complete list of all species for the dot distribution maps and at least 8 tetrads will need to be covered for Timed Tetrad Visits in order to allow us to calculate relative abundance. At least the days will be longer and the weather, hopefully, better to allow us to get out there and get the survey work done. As with the winter work, the tetrads will require two visits: an early (April or May) and a late (June or July) one. We recommend that if your early visit is in April, your late one should be in June. If your early visit was in May, then either a late June or July would be OK. The main thing is that one of the visits coincides with the bulk of the summer visitors being present, and

Apparent changes in the distribution of Barn Owls



The left-hand map is from the Winter Atlas (1981/84) and the right-hand map shows Barn owl distribution as recorded in winter 2007/08 for the Bird Atlas.



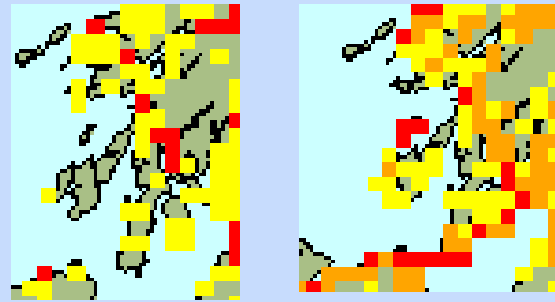
hopefully, obvious in your tetrad.

An extra feature of the breeding season work is gathering information on breeding evidence. Each species should be coded according to whether it is possibly, probably or definitely breeding in the 10-km square. These codes are found on all instruction forms or on a coding card available from your local organiser or the BTO.

For most species it should be easy to record the lowest level: possibly breeding. This would be either a bird present in suitable habitat (**H**) or a singing bird (**S**). With closer observation sightings can be boosted to the next level: probably breeding. This would include a pair in breeding habitat (**P**), territorial behaviour (**T**) such as three redstarts singing against each other in a wood, agitated behaviour (**A**) such as the mournful piping call of a Golden Plover as you cross a moor, or a Stonechat "tsak-tsakking" at you from some scrub. These birds will almost certainly be breeding with a nest or chicks nearby. Obviously we are keen that as many species as possible are reported at the highest breeding level category: confirmed breeding. Here a nest with eggs (**NE**) or young (**NY**) is definite proof. Although this is easy to get for some species like Rook, for the bulk of species it's a lot trickier and rather time consuming. However, there are many ways of proving breeding, without finding a nest. Birds carrying food or faecal sacs (**FF**) can be very obvious. Whilst recently fledged, dependent young (**FL**) can be very noisy, as they continually call for food.

There are two other useful codes covering non-breeding birds. The first is **M** to be used for a bird still obviously on migration, such as Sanderlings passing up the west coast in May. **U** can be used for summering, non-breeding birds such as immature Bar-tailed Godwits on the coast, injured Whooper Swans that have not made it back north or flocks of geese or winter thrushes that are still present till mid May before heading back to their northern breeding grounds.

Atlasing is very rewarding and good fun. Every bird you see counts. It is a good test of your ornithological skills as you try to build up complete species lists for your 10-km squares. On the other hand you do not have to be an ex-



Current reported winter coverage (left map) and the breeding season allocation (right map) of 10-km squares in Argyll for the Bird Atlas

pert to participate. As long as you have positively identified a bird the record can be submitted and will put a dot on the final distribution map. It is also easy to do. The website www.birdatlas.net is very user friendly, and with the new server, it is now working well. Data input is quick and easy. Just login and then use the buttons to request a tetrad for surveying, or to submit your Roving Records or TTV counts. If you are not connected to the internet do not worry as we can supply you with paper forms, just contact Bob Swann on 07919 378876. On the website you can use the latest results section to check out coverage, look at the sample species maps and don't forget to click on Bird of the Day.

There are still lots of 10-km squares in Argyll requiring coverage. The map above shows the squares with tetrads allocated for breeding season work. Red squares have full coverage, yellow squares partial coverage and white no coverage. We have four seasons to turn Argyll red. Remember each tetrad only needs one set of summer visits and one set of winter visits. They do not need to be redone in a subsequent year. Once completed you could help out by choosing further tetrads in the same or neighbouring squares in subsequent years. If you think you can assist please contact one of your local organisers or the Scottish organiser (table below).

Bob Swann, Scottish Atlas Organiser

| Argyll organisers for the Bird Atlas | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---|
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Making the most of your birdwatching records

Spring is the most magical time of a birdwatcher's year, as we listen out for the first burst of song from migrants arriving back. As we have discovered over the last few years, spring migration is very much determined by weather patterns, with poor conditions in Spain and Portugal severely delaying flights from the Mediterranean and bad weather in North Africa killing many birds on their way north.

If you would like to know how this spring is progressing and which species are back then you can visit the **BirdTrack** website at www.birdtrack.net and select the species and county you want to look at. For example, from March onwards you can watch animated maps showing Chiffchaff arriving as the weeks progress. Better still, you could contribute your own observations to **BirdTrack** and help us to study the marvel of migration.

One of the most exciting aspects of taking part in **BirdTrack** is entering your records and looking at your dots on the map and seeing how they fit in with movements at the national scale. **BirdTrack** is updated every night, so you will be able to see your sightings on the map the next day.

BirdTrack is basically a free online logbook that allows you to do all sorts of fancy stuff with your sightings at the click of a button. Once you've registered you can start by setting up your bird watching sites. Then, just plug in your records (See box opposite)

At the click of a button with **BirdTrack** you can:

- Create your year list or total list of all the species you've ever entered
- Compare all of the species you've seen at all of your sites (or selected sites) or view a graph of the species richness of each of your sites
- View your observations at each site by date
- Produce a map of all the locations where you have recorded a selected species
- For a selected species, view a graph of number of individuals seen through time (useful for seeing annual peaks etc.)
- Produce a table of first arrival dates for migrants, and how this compares to others in your region
- Ask specific questions by selecting a species, location and time period.
- Download your records to an Excel spreadsheet to play with them however you wish!
- Contribute to Bird Atlas 2007-11. Records from **BirdTrack** automatically feed into the Atlas as Roving Records, which help us create the distribution maps.

As well as being a safe way of storing your records, another benefit to **BirdTrack** is that when you register you will receive a monthly email summarising the bird highlights of the previous month and whetting your appetite for the coming month.

What records do we want?

Anyone can take part in **BirdTrack**, whether you go birdwatching at your local nature reserve or park, spend a day on the coast or just record what comes to your garden. Although you can enter casual records, what we really want are lists of **all** the species you see and hear. These 'complete lists' are the core of **BirdTrack**; because they give information on the birds that you don't see, as well as the ones that you do. From these, we can plot the pattern and timing of arrival and departure of migrants, and compare this with previous years. (See "Why complete lists?"). Wherever possible, we are keen to receive counts of birds, rather than simple presence (a tick), and estimates of flocks can be entered using circa or plus. You can also enter your historical records: we already have a number of people who have submitted their records back to the mid 1950s!

Learning more about our birds

Taking part in **BirdTrack** is more than just a handy way to store and play around with your bird records. What you see and hear when you're out can help us find out more about birds in Britain and Ireland. **BirdTrack** was developed through a partnership between BTO, RSPB and Bird-Watch Ireland to use birdwatchers' records to support species and site conservation at local, national and international scales.

Understanding migration patterns

The power of the Internet makes it possible to produce up-to-date daily results. **BirdTrack** is an all-year round recording package. As well as studying spring and autumn migration we can also look at other movements and distributions, associated with cold weather and the search for food.

In the migration seasons, we are interested in not just when the first birds arrive or the last ones depart but we also want to know when the bulk of the population has arrived or departed (whether it is summer or winter visitors). We can generate some fascinating information on passage migrants, particularly inland wader movements.

We can also investigate how birds filter through the country; do they head up the centre of the country or do they disperse west or east in spring time?

Tracking the conservation status of scarce species

An important aspect of **BirdTrack** is to provide supplementary information on some of the scarcer species in Britain and Ireland.

There is a range of species for which birdwatchers can

How to take part

To take part in **BirdTrack**, visit www.birdtrack.net and register as a recorder. We ask you to register as this stores your records securely and because we may need to contact you in the future. Once you have your username and password, you can 'Login to enter sightings'. You will arrive at 'Data Home' and from there you can create sites, enter lists, view and edit records etc. We prefer if sites can be registered at the 1km level (which gives more detailed information to **BirdTrack** and the bird recorder), but sites can also be registered at the tetrad or 10km level. If you have any queries, please contact bird-track@bto.org. For technical issues we have a Web Support Team who will be happy to help you (web.support@bto.org).

easily and usefully contribute information. We hope to build up an annual picture of their distribution in Britain and Ireland. For species such as Hawfinch and Woodcock we would like to receive records from throughout the year, but for others we are more interested in records from the breeding season, for example Pochard and Dunlin.

One of the key outputs of **BirdTrack** is to provide data that feed into the Bird Conservation Targeting Project. This joint project is aimed at farmland and woodland species of conservation concern, pulling together as much information as possible for birds like Corn Bunting, Snipe, Tree Pipit and Grasshopper Warbler. Targeting maps will then allow Government subsidy payments to be distributed in a much more focused way. The project is now in its second year in England, and hopefully will be launched in Scotland in 2008, so your records will be more important than ever in the coming years.

BirdTrack or Bird Atlas?

There's no need to choose which project to get involved in as all records entered into **BirdTrack** during the Atlas fieldwork periods (November to February and April to July) will automatically feed into the project. If you're making complete lists of your sightings then please put them into the **BirdTrack** online system so that we can use your data both for **BirdTrack** and the Atlas.

Contribute to national and local bird recording

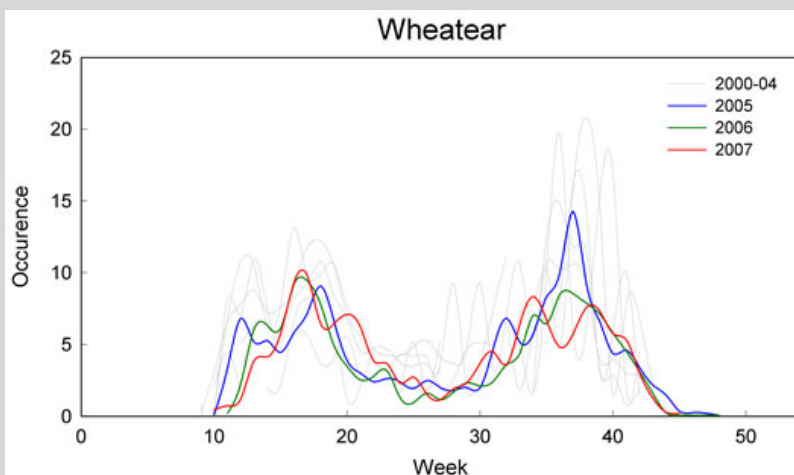
BirdTrack is a really efficient way to make more of your birdwatching and to save you time. Not only are you building up your own personal bird recording log and contributing to our national knowledge of bird distributions and movements, you are sending in your local bird records at the same time, as long as you tick the box which gives permission for your records to be sent to your local Bird Club. Then nominated Bird Club officials (usually the recorder and data manager) can be set up with special access to **BirdTrack** so they can download the records relevant to their recording area at whatever frequency they want. They will then receive all the information they need, together with the names and contact details of observers.

With all these benefits, you really should give **BirdTrack** a try. At its most simple, **BirdTrack** is a safe place to store your records. It is also a great way to make sure that your sightings contribute to our understanding of birds, and ultimately to their conservation.

BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net) is a joint project between BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland.

Jacqui Kaye and Mark Grantham

Why complete lists?



This graph shows the proportion of lists submitted to BirdTrack that included a Wheatear. We see the first arrival of 'our' birds, followed by a later arrival of 'Greenland' Wheatears en route to Greenland and Arctic Canada (around weeks 15-18). By recording complete lists throughout the year we can build up an accurate picture of Wheatear movements and compare timings and reporting rates between years. We see that the Wheatear arrival has actually got later in recent years, with the 2007 arrival around 12 days later than two years previously.

The first part of this article appeared in the December issue of the Eider (83:22-25).

August (continued)

There were no significant movements of waders this month. The only **Black-tailed Godwits** seen were singles on 17th and 26th. An adult **Bar-tailed Godwit** in breeding plumage flew south on 3rd and single fresh-looking juveniles followed on 17th and 28th (see photo opposite). Single **Greenshanks** flew south on 5th, 19th, 21st and 25th. **Whimbrels** were rather scarce with only one on 8th, two on 12th, 'calls' on 14th, one on 15th, 'calls' on 18th and one on 26th (see front cover).

Dunlin passage was abysmal. The peak this month was only 70 on 25th. **Turnstones** were regular in small numbers as were **Red Knots** (max. 15 flying south on 27th) and **Sanderlings** (max. counts 63 on 18th and 18 flying south on 26th). **Curlews** too were passing south regularly but the peak count was only 41 (three flocks) on 22nd.

A total of 20 **Great Skuas** (many more than usual) flew south on 11 dates with singles on five dates and two on 13th, 16th, 17th, 18th, four on 25th and three on 30th. The record on 13th included one that was slope soaring over the adjacent uplands, some 600m inland! After some exceptional appearances during July, **Arctic Skuas** were back to a usual light autumn southerly passage with a total of only ten on seven dates, including three on 19th.

August produced the second and third records of **Little Gull** this year. A juvenile was just off the point on 20th and was relocated off-passage a few hours later, dip feeding, over 'the bound' in Machrihanish Bay. The earliest juvenile seen here was on 18th August 2004. Another juvenile flew south on 30th in a force 7 NW wind. Packs of juvenile **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** flying south included 18 on 8th and 22 on 14th. There was a light southerly movement of **Kittiwakes** (120) on 6th then the first juvenile of the year flew south on 8th (12th August last year). Only 22 more juveniles were logged by the month's end with a max. of four on 27th.

Throughout the month **Sandwich Terns** were seen daily, although counts were rather low for most of the month. Six flew south on 5th and five (including two juveniles) followed on 6th, then 26 (including juveniles) flew south in a NW gale on 31st. Only 14 **Common Terns** made the log sheets with nine flying south (including one juvenile) on 6th, single adults flying south on 11th, 18th, and 22nd and two adults on 26th. There was decent showing of **Arctic Tern** (total of 53) with three (including one juvenile) on 6th, then 22 adults flew south on 8th. Later, southerly movements of juveniles included one on 10th, three on 11th, seven on 17th and one on 20th, an adult and a juvenile



Bar-tailed Godwit (upper) and Otter. The latter is regular visitor at the observatory ©Eddie Maguire

flew south on 26th, two adults followed on 30th and finally four adults and seven juveniles went south on 31st.

The first juvenile **Black Guillemots** (two) appeared on 7th. In recent years, this species appears to have suffered a serious decline off Machrihanish. For years, especially during late summer/early autumn, we could easily count/estimate 100+ birds in Machrihanish Bay with one sweep of a telescope. But, not now! Counts this month confirmed that the presence of this species in the bay and off the observatory was down by around 80+%. What's the cause of such a large decline?

An impressive sight during the first three weeks of the month was the regular early evening (seemingly synchronised) convergence of **Common Swifts** over Burnside Square, Campbeltown.

The birds would arrive overhead from around 18.30-18.40hrs, initially at great height and from all directions, with loud 'cheery screams' (Derrick Goode). Soon they lost height and circled wildly around the square, low over the roofs and around the Lowland Church steeple. Counts included 80+ on 1st, 70+ on 8th, 40ish on 12th, 25 on 14th, 38 on 15th and around 30 on 16th. The last 20 or so were over the square at 21.15hrs on 21st. A few days later, when the realisation kicked in that 'our' Swifts had obviously departed south for the winter, Derrick Goode announced, with his usual poetic skill, that the Burnside Square was 'wide-skied and swiftless'.

Small numbers of **White Wagtails** were regular. Then a good passage occurred in a force 7 NW wind on 30th (am) when 44 were logged going south in 4hrs. All birds were flying low over the point, below the observatory, and most stopped briefly before pushing on south.

Starling numbers increased dramatically on 20th to 800. They appeared to be all juveniles and were regularly on rotting seaweed probing for kelp-fly larva. What happened to our expected post-breeding **Twite** flocks? None arrived by the observatory this month—an unprecedented event since serious recording began here 19 years ago (August 1989). Usually, over 100 birds would be off-passage at this time of year!

On 20th, local lobster fishermen Campbell Keyte and Jackie Dickinson had an encounter with an ocean **Sunfish**. It was lying on the surface of the sea ('sunbathing') just north of Machrihanish Bay. Campbell noted that the fish was 'as big as a lorry tyre' and had 'a very beautiful eye' (oh I say!).

Our resident dog **Otter** was seen quite often and digiscoped too (see photo on previous page). A visitor who obviously had very little knowledge of wildlife inquired—'what time do the **Otters** come out'? **Grey** and **Common Seals** were normally on view around the point. Visiting teenagers often come out with some really funny comments about them. The top recent remark was priceless—'hey mister, what time do you feed the seals?'

September

Renowned as the month for seawatching off the SW west coast of Argyll when hordes of **Manx Shearwaters**, **Kittiwakes**, **Razorbills**, **Guillemots** etc can be seen piling south past the observatory. However, on most days this month, seabird movement was non-existent with most species failing to turn up in any numbers, or not at all!

The highest one-day passage of **Manx Shearwater** was only 600 flying south in 7hrs on 14th (very few appeared after this date and no rafts were seen). It was a similar story with **Black-legged Kittiwake**; the best one-day southerly passage total was only 378 (including 40 juveniles), also on 14th. Auk movement was limited to <50 per day (from 12th) with very few on the wing on most days, and oddly, only five **Fulmars** were logged all month!

The routine passage of **Red-throated Diver** was not inspiring either. A total of only 87 flew south on 19 dates with peaks of 17 in 7hrs on 14th and 22 in 8hrs on 24th. An

adult (reported as an Oystercatcher with broken legs!) was found on the shore and brought to the observatory. The rescuer did not realise that this species legs are pretty useless on land and that they are actually incapable of walking! Was this one perhaps left high and dry on the shore by an outgoing tide? Anyway, the summer-plumaged beauty appeared to be in perfect health and was promptly photographed (see photo in part 1) then placed in a most appropriate environment—the sea!

Storm Petrels were rather scarce with many fewer than in previous months scurrying skilfully through the wave troughs. Only 42 were logged on four dates including 18 flying south in 1hr on 8th.

Skuas too were particularly thin over the sea. A meagre total of six **Great Skuas**, including five flying south in 7 hrs on 14th and only 11 **Arctic Skuas** seen on nine dates, with a peak of just three on 15th (see outstanding late summer presence of this species at Machrihanish in July). A single adult **Pomarine Skua** on 24th was the sole record of this species (a predictable scarce autumn occurrence).

Foul weather finally arrived on 24th and forced a few exciting seabirds within sight of the shore including two juvenile **Sabine's Gulls** diverted from their mid-Atlantic migration route by the strong NW wind. The seawatch on 24th started with a WSW wind force 4-5 accompanied by frequent squalls. This appeared to be the order of the day but, just after midday, the wind suddenly switched to the NW and increased to force 6-7. 'Bright n' breezy' conditions brought in a few birds but it was vicious squalls that did the chief business! At 15.00hrs, after an acceptable 8+ hrs seawatch with 22 **Red-throated Divers**, single **Leach's Petrel**, **Arctic Skua** (juvenile) and **Pomarine Skua** (adult) all flying south, Eddie Maguire & John McGlynn headed for the nearby sheltered bay by the Marine Research Laboratory compound. Hundreds of gulls (mainly **Common Gulls**) were the main species on view.

At 15.20hrs a juvenile **Sabine's Gull** was found hugging the sea quite near the shore (by the old lifeboat station). Soon, another Sabine's came into sight. We now had two off-passage juvenile **Sabine's Gulls** on our patch—superb! Both birds made regular short dip-feeding flights that, irritatingly, attracted persistent, aggressive pursuits by adult Common Gulls (wearisome behaviour for us that, undeniably, provoked many unprintable hollers from Eddie Maguire, especially when the digiscoping gear was ready for action).

All plumage characteristics, soft parts and flight jizz were seen well—and at very close range (10-12m). Obviously it was important for us to obtain a photographic record of this rare off-passage occurrence for our observatory's gallery of digital images, but the awful weather conditions (especially the strong wind) thwarted all early attempts. However, we did manage to get some 'asylum' from the wind, not to mention the 'crazy' antics of Common Gulls, and adequately digiscoped one of these high-arctic gems (see photo, *Eider* 83:7).

The very few digital images we did manage to get showed the distinctive plumage features, and of course, the characteristic, almost tern-like structure, of a very confiding

juvenile Sabine's Gull. By 16.40hrs both birds had flown south past the observatory.

Other major sightings during the month included seven **Sooty Shearwaters** flying south in 7hrs on 1st, two **Balearic Shearwaters** on 14th (singles going south at 10.50hrs and 12.20hrs) and an adult taiga **Bean Goose** on 16th. The latter was an astonishing find, sitting casually on the sea during a violent squall. Eventually it flew south with a small pack of Brent Geese. This is an exceptionally rare wanderer to the west coast and a detailed description of the occurrence has been forwarded to the relevant Rarities Committee.

As with the above, many other species managed just a single entry in the observatory logbook. These included two female-type **Teal** and a lone **Lapwing** flying south on 11th, two off-passage **Black-throated Divers**, a foraging **Common Sandpiper** and three **Grey Plovers** on 13th, ten southbound **Golden Plovers** on 14th, three **Goosanders** on 16th and three **Little Stints** at Machrihanish Water mouth on 25th. A nervous flock of five off-passage female-type **Gadwall** appeared on 26th and a sleek-looking female-type **Pintail** was consorting with the local Mallards on 29th.

As usual, **Brent Geese** were the earliest geese to appear with eight on 14th, 19 on 16th and seven on 30th (all flying south). The first **Greenland White-fronted Geese** (c.40) flew E over The Laggan on 28th. The first **Wigeon** (three) appeared from 25th, although only a handful of **Common Scoter** (six) turned up on five dates, including two on 15th and Scaup (a total of 42 birds) were logged on only five dates with an unexceptional pack of 27 flying south on 14th.

All the usual raptors were showing well. **Buzzard** and **Kestrel** were evident daily and **Sparrowhawk**, **Peregrine** and **Merlin** were all seen frequently. **Hen Harriers** (adult males and ringtails) were seen in The Laggan, and on fine days, **Golden Eagles** (one's and two's) were floating high over the Lossit uplands.

Many visiting birdwatchers commented on the lack of waders and the general consensus was that, compared with most Septembers in the past, they were indeed in rather short supply. Species seen daily included **Ringed Plover** (max. 45 on 16th), **Redshank** (max. 30 on 4th) and **Dunlin** (max. 60 on 2nd). Small numbers of **Red Knots** were seen flying south on 11 dates to 20th with highest counts of only nine on 6th and six on 18th. **Sanderling** numbers were a bit better with birds present almost daily to 20th and peak flock was 40 flying south on 5th. The status of **Bar-tailed Godwit** certainly remained unchanged with, as usual, only a handful of birds (three) on two dates (two on 11th). The **Whimbrel** is often quite a scarce September migrant, so it was pleasing to have a few showing well around the observatory on six dates to 15th including three on 10th. A slight southerly passage of **Curlew** was apparent on seven dates to 19th with a peak of 46 on 11th. **Ruddy Turnstones** appeared on only seven dates with a peak of 25 flying south on 15th.

The **Common Gull** roost by Machrihanish Water mouth

held 470 on 7th and this increased to 700+ on 19th. But, still no **Mediterranean Gull** - so far!.

Sandwich Terns were present on 17 dates, but numbers were generally low with a peak of only 11 birds on 10th. A good total of 115 **Arctic Terns** was logged on 20 dates including 64 (22 juveniles) struggling south (NW gale) during a 7hr seawatch on 14th. In contrast, **Common Terns** were decidedly scarce with only singles on 4th (adult) and 22nd (juvenile).

The **Puffin** is normally very scarce at this time of year, so, 'thin-billed' singles just offshore on 1st and 7th were welcome additions to this month's total. As reported earlier, numbers of **Tystie** have suffered a serious decline off Machrihanish over the past 2-4 years (possibly longer). The mainland breeding population from Machrihanish to Southend was estimated at around 100 breeding pairs in the early 1990's and from observations later it appeared that the inshore waters around SW Kintyre, at least north to Machrihanish Bay, was the main foraging area for the 'Mull of Kintyre' breeding population with 100+ birds often present offshore. Regular observations of other seabird species (1989-2007) suggest that the recent local decline of the Tystie is probably not related to any major change in the availability of food—especially sand eels. The highest count in the bay this month was only 13 on 6th and no major weather-related movements have been noted here for many years. Perhaps the cause of this local decline is Mink related? Evidence exists that could support this theory. A sizeable **Herring Gull** colony, just north of Largiebaan, known locally for 60+ years by local folk as 'the gulls den' has been abandoned for at least four years. In addition, the modest **Fulmar** colony on the fairly accessible slopes of The Galdrons in the Bay of Storms has been waning for 4-5 years and none have been 'sitting on' over the past two breeding seasons.

The vast, remote area of 'the Mull' between Machrihanish and Southend (30km of shoreline) has obvious potential to sustain Mink. Many visitors to the Mull of Kintyre light-house holiday cottages have reported seeing Mink in this area and, after many years of sustained effort, one regular Mink trapper at Carskies, Southend, is still catching small numbers of this 'wee terrorist'.

The **Tystie's** favourite breeding site at the base of a cliff—often in a boulder field—makes the sitting bird and any egg/chick incredibly vulnerable to a foraging Mink and supports the idea of a Mink-related decline. Conjecture maybe, but for whatever reason, the diminished numbers of Tysties off Machrihanish is now actually staggering (<80+ %; unpublished data from Maguire *et al.*, 1989-2006).

Around 40 Mink were trapped at the observatory during April–October 2004-2006. This is an ongoing project—see remarkable breeding success of vulnerable ground-nesting species such as Eider and Shelduck at Machrihanish during 2006-2007 on our website news/reviews. In addition, and probably linked to reduced Mink activity, the Rabbit popu-



Upper left. Raven—a regular visitor to the observatory looking for scraps

Upper right. Female-type Common Scoter

Lower left: Redwing at The Lagan. Redwings were far less numerous than Fieldfares in autumn 2007

All photos ©Eddie Maguire

lation around Machrihanish Village/Lossit Estate during 2006/2007 reached pest proportions.

There was a reasonable showing of **White Wagtail** on 22 dates (>10 on seven dates) with two distinct peaks; 42 flew south low over the point in 2hrs (just after dawn) on 2nd and 30 were off-passage on 17th. Only one was present on 29th. **Grey Wagtail** is an under-rated migrant with a distinctive flight call. This species was noted on 13 dates with birds often flying high to the south especially on 1st (five) and 16th (three). Light southerly movements of **Meadow Pipits** were noted on many dates, but peak passage occurred with a NNE wind force 3-4 (bright n' breezy) on 26th when 250+ birds were logged in a 3hr period flying N over the point, and onward, out over the sea.

Single **Wheatears**, looking very like the Greenland race, were on the shore on 19th, 22nd and 25th. The first **Robin** (singing) arrived on the point on 13th followed by the first **Stonechat** on 17th. **Fieldfare** (40) and **Redwing** (18) literally fell out of the sky on 25th but this was the sole September record. On 28th, a **Crossbill** was calling in the garden at the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse (Rod Angus). A few small flocks of migrant **Siskins**, including 16 on 4th and 20 on 27th, were noted flying high to the south. Several flocks of migrant **Twite** did finally appear, although none lingered. Flock sizes passing the observatory were the lowest recorded, with only 40 on 6th, two on

11th, four on 13th, two on 24th, 14 on 26th and 34 on 28th. On 30th, a very restless 30 birds were in the vicinity of the point all day.

October

The first week or so was dominated by winds from a SE direction, creating favourable conditions for the arrival of scarcer species with a more southerly distribution. A **Little Egret** that arrived at Machrihanish on 1st October was the first of what was to become a mini influx of this species into Scotland (Angus Murray, Birdline Scotland pers. comm.).

On 8th, the wind direction was ESE force 2 with patchy cloud and this brought yet another scarce migrant to the area—a juvenile **Hobby**. This wee falcon came in off the sea from the west, circled the Marine Research Laboratory, and then flew off to the NNE over Machrihanish Bay.

While **Red-throated Divers** were present daily in small numbers with a peak of six on 27th only four **Black-throated Divers** put in an appearance on 18th-20th. Around six **Great Northern Divers** were regular on the sea for most of the month while the only sign of any passage occurred on 16th when



Heron about to pounce ©Eddie Maguire

12 were heading S in a westerly force 6.

Seabirds were in rather short supply with no records of **Manx Shearwater** or skuas, and no movements of **Kittiwakes** and auks.

Migrant **Whooper Swans** were seen on nine dates from 8th. The largest herd was 40 flying W over The Laggan on 27th. On 30th, a low-flying herd of 23 was tailed by car from Machrihanish Water to the Observatory. Their flight speed was clocked at a steady 21–22mph.

Brent Geese were seen on only two dates with one on 17th and three on 24th. It was obviously too much to expect another decent influx of **Pink-footed Geese** (see last autumn's record numbers). A single bird arrived on 18th and was joined by another on 30th—a very typical autumn occurrence.

The main arrival of grey geese was much later than usual. Only 300 **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were present on 18th, but had increased to 680 by 30th. **Greylags** too were slow to appear, with only 44 on 21st and 120 on 30th.

Very few passage waterfowl put in an appearance. A drake **Wigeon** lingered during 1st–4th, a female **Pintail** flew south on 2nd, a drake **Tufted Duck** flew south on 8th and a female **Teal** was present on 25th. **Goosanders** are an occasional visitor to this area, especially in autumn. A female was at Machrihanish Water during 10th–11th and a drake flew S on 29th. The first **Goldeneye** flew S on 20th, then one was in the bay on 27th.

Raptors, including **Hen Harriers**, **Peregrines** and **Merlins**, were seen regularly from the observatory and also at The Laggan.

Lapwings were scarce with only a single record of 20 at

Westparkfergus on 20th and **Ringed Plover** peaked at only 40 on 2nd. Two juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** were at Machrihanish Water mouth on 2nd, a **Little Stint** was there daily during 2nd–5th and the first **Purple Sandpipers** (seven flying S) appeared on 14th although they remained scarce for the remainder of the month with only two on 28th and four on 29th. **Red Knots** were also scarce with only one on 1st, three on 16th and two on 28th. **Sanderlings** were logged on only eight dates, with a peak count of 30 on 28th. The only **Common Sandpiper** seen this month was a late single flying S on 28th. On 17th, a NW wind (force 5–6) brought two **Grey Phalaropes** briefly into Machrihanish Bay, then both flew S past the observatory.

Juvenile **Arctic Terns** were at Machrihanish Water mouth on 6th (two), 7th (one) and 19th (one). Offshore, **Black Guillemot** remained very scarce and the highest count was only nine on 18th.

On 7th, six **Swallows** were feeding around the observatory and eight **Siskins** flew south on 8th. A **Wheatear** was at Machrihanish Water on 15th. From 14th, **Redwings** were common, but **Fieldfares** were truly abundant, especially on 23rd at Westparkfergus, and by the Conie Glen Water, Southend when an estimated 2,000 **Fieldfares** were present on Hawthorn and stubble. The Hawthorn bushes in The Laggan were stripped of berries in just a few days!

Sky Lark numbers soared to a peak of 1,000+ at Westparkfergus on 18th although far fewer were there by the end of the month. In Campbeltown, a **Bohemian Waxwing** was devouring apples at Auchinshea, Kintyre Gardens on 31st and was still present next day. Two **Ravens** were seen heading NW out to sea on 17th and were still purposely holding this course after several miles until out of sight.

Twite have been daily by the observatory all month and peaked at 140 on 2nd. A feeding station (niger seed) was initiated and many could be viewed down to three metres from observatory, including four colour-ringed migrants (see separate article, *Eider* 83:14-15).

The largest charm of **Goldfinches** was only ten on 11th; very poor compared with much larger numbers seen in most recent years. From 20th, 120+ **Chaffinches** were on stubble at Westparkfergus. A female-type **Snow Bunting** was foraging on the cross Kintyre forestry road (Killeen to Brackley) just W of Ducheran Hill on 12th—this is the third sighting of a single here in recent years and almost at the same place! On 13th, a single **Brambling** was on the shore with Chaffinches at Kildalloig.

A few interesting records from Rod Angus (Director of the Scottish Owl Centre) who has been carrying out occasional visible migration studies by the Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse included 40 **Siskins** flying south on 5th, a **Red Kite** flying slowly S on 6th, which was wearing purple wing-tags bearing a white letter or number—just too far off to read (what a superb record!) and a **Lapland Bunting** flying south on 26th. Rod is obviously accruing much useful information on bird movements (especially passerines) at this well-established rarity hotspot. The one million candlepower light is undoubtedly a magnet for spring/autumn nocturnal migrants seeking a dawn landfall.

A **Pipistrelle Bat** was active over Burnside Square, Campbeltown at 18.15hrs on 26th October.

Early November

On 2nd there was a late flock of 30 **Sanderlings** at Machrihanish Bay. **Twite** numbers had increased to 150+ on 4th.

And, at long last seawatching produced some exciting birds! On 7th, a NW gale (force 6-7) with frequent squalls, a watch by the warden for 6hrs produced (all flying south) 11 **Whooper Swans** (adults), 30 **Purple Sandpipers** (largest flock 12), six **Little Auks** (all during 10.20-11.36hrs), three **Pomarine Skuas** (all juveniles at 10.39hrs). This was surpassed on 8th during a NW gale continued/increased to force 7-8 with very frequent squalls, including one vicious hailstorm! This 8hr watch from 07.00hrs by Eddie Maguire, John McGlynn and Iomhar McMillan was particularly exciting with several **Leach's Petrels** appearing really close to the observatory (10m) and a **Sabine's Gull** at 15m! Again all birds were flying south and included 23 **Leach's Petrels** (all during 09.50-13.40hrs), a **Sabine's Gull** (juvenile at 10.09hrs), a **Little Auk** (at 10.20hrs) and two **Long-tailed Ducks** (both arrived in the early afternoon).


On 9th, a **Black-throated Diver** flew south and 650+ **Golden Plover** arrived at The Laggan. Only 35 **Twite** were feeding at the niger seed on this date. A **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was detected (calls only) at Dalintober, Campbeltown on 12th and two **Yellowhammers** (with **Chaffinches**) were at Westparkfergus, The Laggan. A visit to the observatory for a few hours on 13th produced a single **Little Auk** flying south and ten **Purple Sandpipers** on the rocks.

December

John McGlynn had six **Snow Buntings** feeding around the observatory on 19th.

Eddie Maguire (warden)

Observatory website: www.machrihanishbirds.org.uk

| <div>Programme</div> <div>ABC's Spring Meeting</div> <div>Saturday 8th March 2008</div> <div>The Argyll Hotel Inveraray</div>  | Time | Session |
|---|------------|---|
| | 0930 | Doors open, coffee and tea |
| | 0950-1000 | Welcome and introduction— <i>Nigel Scriven</i> (Chairman) |
| | 1000-1015 | Recent bird sightings— <i>Paul Daw</i> (Argyll Bird Recorder) |
| | 1015-1045 | Birds' nests in museums: why?— <i>Mike Hansell</i> |
| | 1045-1115 | Coffee/tea |
| | 1115-1215 | Butterflies in South west Scotland— <i>Richard Sutcliffe</i> |
| | 1215-1245 | Auction of bird books |
| | 1245-1345 | Lunch (available in the hotel) |
| | 1345-1415 | Ailsa Craig, Gannets and other seabirds on the Clyde— <i>David Palmer</i> |
| | 1415-1500 | Return of the Beaver?— <i>Simon Jones</i> |
| | 1500-1530 | Tea/coffee |
| | 1530-1615 | Winter birding in Japan— <i>Brian Little</i> |
| | 1615-16.30 | Raffle & end of meeting |

Articles for the June issue of the Eider should with the Editor before 25th May 2008

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

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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, press releases and letters. Whenever possible, contributions should be submitted to the editor as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word or rtf format. But, this should not deter potential contributors, as hand-written scripts are also acceptable. If in doubt about whether an article is suitable, please contact the editor for advice.

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

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

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

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

The Argyll Bird Club

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

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

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Ordinary | £10 |
| Junior (under 17) | £3 |
| Family | £15 |
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Subscriptions are due on 1st January and can be paid by cheque or standing order. New members joining after 1st October are covered until the end of the following year. Further information can be obtained from the Membership Secretary (see the box opposite).