

The Eider



The Eider is the Quarterly Newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club: Scottish Charity Number SC008782

Editorial

In the last issue, Bob Furness vividly portrayed the impact of mink predation on the largest known breeding colony of Eiders in Argyll.

In this issue (see below), Clive Craik provides an overview of the impact of mink predation on the breeding bird communities of Argyll's offshore islands, many of which hold nationally important populations of seabirds.

Clearly, mink are a threat to Argyll's biodiversity in that many of these islands have already, or will in the near future, lose all their breeding seabirds. However, not all is lost, as Clive has ably demonstrated how seabird populations can be restored.

Surely, we would all like to see our offshore islands brimming with breeding seabirds once again. But, now the thorny question—how to finance the conservation action that is necessary? Isn't this just the type of project that conservation bodies, such as SNH, should be involved with and funding? Clive has clearly shown what can be achieved with just a few dedicated people. Imagine how much more could be accomplished with official support! Without such financial backing, Argyll's breathtaking coastline is fast becoming a sterile environment for breeding seabirds—do we really want this proc-

ess to continue?

The response to my last editorial (June 2003), about proposed changes to *The Eider*, has been encouraging. A number of members have asked to take part in the three-issue trial (September 2003 to March 2004), when they will receive both the mailed and electronic versions of the newsletter. Some have already decided that they want the electronic version only! If you would like to receive this version, let me have your e-mail address and it will be sent to you as a pdf file (for details see the editorial in the June issue). This is the first issue to include colour photographs in the electronic version.

The programme for the autumn meeting is included in this issue, together with papers for the AGM. Remember that the AGM is your chance to influence what the club does and how it is run, so please try to attend.

Once again, I am very grateful to club members who have contributed to this issue including John Anderson, Danielle Clark-De Bisschop, Clive Craik, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Bob Furness, Mike Gregory, David Merrie, Nigel Scriven, Margaret Staley, Michael Thomas and David Wood.

After a wonderful spring and summer, many of you must have material that could make interesting reading in the next issue—so, I look forward to hearing from you!

The Burnt Islands and Beyond

In the last issue of *The Eider*, Bob Furness graphically described his May 2003 discovery of mink predation at Argyll's largest Eider colony, on the Burnt Islands. It may be worth broadening the picture by pointing out how widespread this problem is. This summer I visited over 100 similar seabird breeding sites in Argyll and neighbouring Lochaber, almost all on small islands like the Burnt Islands and with similar mixed colonies of gulls, wildfowl, waders and, at some, Common and Arctic terns. Although a few of these colonies are small with only a handful of pairs of all species combined, most of the sites hold 20-200 breeding pairs, while some are as large as

or larger than the Burnt Islands and hold many hundreds of pairs. I visited every island at least twice, some of them many times, and counted all the breeding species, measured their breeding success as far as possible, and recorded the presence or absence of mink predation. Many important colonies that were once severely affected by mink are now protected by mink removal as part of the mink-seabird programme (which I organise and carry out every year with several friends and helpers) and these are mentioned separately below.

Altogether, 23 colonies were definitely affected by mink in 2003, and mink were strongly suspected at another twelve. Almost all of these 35 colonies produced no

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Autumn Meeting

To be held in the Cairnbaan
Hotel, near Lochgilphead on
Saturday 8th November
Programme on page 10

Spring Meeting

To be in the Royal Marine
Hotel, Hunter's Quay, Dunoon
on Saturday 27th March 2004

young; at the largest some young flew but productivity was reduced, sometimes almost to nothing. Twenty-eight colonies were unaffected by mink, and another 29 were successfully protected by mink removal; these all fledged good numbers of young. Since the 29 protected sites had been affected by mink in the past and would be affected again if protection were to cease, this means that $23 + 12 + 29 = 64$ of the 92 colonies (70%) were or would have been affected by mink, while only 28 (30%) were naturally mink-free. Two of these last were roofs of industrial buildings to which **Common Gulls** have recently moved (in response to mink?), but otherwise most are unlikely to remain mink-free in future years; it seems that mink have just not reached them yet (e.g. Liath Eilean and Glas Eilean in L Fyne, and Eilean Balngowan in L Linnhe).

What will happen to the mink-affected colonies, and what would happen if mink-control were to cease at the protected colonies? We can answer this by looking back ten to twenty years. At that time another 53 colonies in this area were suffering badly from mink each year, producing no or almost no young after year just like those above. What happened to them? The answer is stark and tragic. They are all, every one, extinct.

Some of these now-empty sites held large and important breeding colonies, like the **tern** islets of L Sunart, the gulls and **Black Guillemots** of the Creag islands off Lismore, the **Shags**, **Black Guillemots** and **gulls** of the Coinean group (Rabbit Island) in the Sound of Jura, and, perhaps most sadly of all, the beautiful **tern-** and **oystercatcher-**studded island jewels in Loch nan Ceall, off Arisaig. No-one did anything – perhaps the local people hardly noticed or cared – at a time when action could have been taken.

The lesson for the future is clear. It is not

too late. Some of the 23 colonies affected in 2003 are nationally important seabird sites, indeed one of them, the McCormaig Islands, is burdened with initials such as SSSI. Do these mean anything?

On Eilean Mor, one of the two main McCormaig Islands, not a single seabird fledged this year, for the first time on record, while breeding success of **gulls** on the other island, Corr Eilean, was reduced and **Black Guillemot** adults there were being killed and cached by mink. On 14 June it was obvious that all the **gulls** on E Mor had already failed. Their empty nests gave no clue to the cause, but a search of nearby rock caverns and holes revealed many intact eggs and empty shells, some with mink canine marks. Alarming, on the same day there were 320 pairs of **Common** and **Arctic Terns** (a large colony by Argyll standards) with nests and eggs on a skerry a mere 500m from the depredated gull colony, an easy swim for a mink. (Terns breed a month or so later than gulls.) Immediate action was needed. I placed a firewall of four traps along the affected shore of Eilean Mor and caught a male and a female mink. The **terns** on the skerry went on to raise well over a hundred young, although later breeders there may have been affected by more mink in late summer.

I had to take similar immediate action at two other tern sites in late May, when it was obvious that **gulls** had failed because of mink and that the **terns** would be next to lose their eggs or young. Mink were caught at both sites, many of the **gulls** re-laid, and both **terns** and **gulls** went on to breed very successfully. At both sites, the last **Common Tern** young flew at the end of August (a sure sign of colony success in **Common Terns**!) If mink had been present during laying, the adult terns would have deserted almost at once and not laid again this year.

Three approaches to mink control for seabird conservation are possible. One can

keep an eye on how breeding is progressing at each site in May-June, using the **gulls** as sacrificial indicators for prompt “firewall” action to protect more valuable species such as **terns** (as above). Alternatively, mink can be removed from near affected colonies, either throughout the year or early in the spring; the former works well, the latter works in most cases. As an unpaid amateur, I organise and carry out such methods to the best of my ability, and offer many thanks to all those who help. SNH generously fund mink control near one or two SSSIs. However, the 15hp outboard that is my lifeline gets heavier each year!

In his article in the previous *Eider*, Bob Furness makes a plea for the main conservation bodies to act at the Burnt Islands before it is too late. I endorse this and suggest that such organisations should be more widely involved in this work. I may be too closely involved to make rational judgements, but I do not see how these continuing losses of seabird colonies and breeding numbers can be regarded as anything but a catastrophe, one that has gone almost wholly unrecognised by officialdom. As detailed above, 53/145 (37%) of all the seabird colonies that once existed in the sealochs and firths of mainland Argyll and Lochaber have already been lost because of mink, while 70% of those remaining are now affected and will be lost if no action is taken. If the cause had been something televisually dramatic such as oil spills, official action would have been prompt. But on mink and seabirds there seems to be no well-defined policy, no overall strategy, no individual responsible for immediate action such as was necessary on the McCormaig Islands and elsewhere in 2003. As Bob implies, we need more hands-on involvement and *action* by those whose job it is to make sure our wildlife is handed on to the next generation.

Clive Craik

Mull field trip: 6-8th June 2003

On Friday 6 June we headed to Oban, blessed with bright blue skies and agreeable temperatures, to join the long-awaited field trip to Mull that has been organised by Rhona Campbell. Being a bit late, we made a mad dash to Oban via Inveraray for the 16.00 hrs Cal Mac ferry to Craignure. Happily we made it to the ferry in time and once aboard we relaxed and enjoyed the views and a light meal en route to the beautiful Isle of Mull.

From Craignure, we headed towards Dervaig via Tobermory where we bought some food for the next day. We watched a

Short-eared Owl hunting for his dinner along Loch Carnain an Amais while driving to the Bellacroy Hotel in Dervaig. Here we met the rest of the members to discuss options and trips available, while enjoying a meal and some drinks. Due to the large turnout we had to split into two groups for the next day's exploration of Mull. Rhona explained the main differences between the two trips and before bedtime managed to divide us in one group joining Pam & Arthur and another group joining David Woodhouse.

Next morning after breakfast, we drove to the Dervaig village hall to meet Pam &

Arthur, our guides for the day. We zig-zagged along the Tobermory road north to Loch an Torr where we watched two **Greylag Geese** with their two young peacefully navigate the lake while listening to the fine vocal display from a **Common Whitethroat** on the power line just above us. From here, we eagerly branched off the main road and joined the Forestry Commission road on the north side of Loch Frisa, which lead to the **White-tailed Eagle** hide. Here we patiently waited for the forestry warden to arrive and open the hide. Once inside, we admired the excellent display of information

on **White-tailed Eagles** and the nest-camera that was showing live pictures of two eaglets of approximately 7-weeks old, which occasionally sat up and flapping their wings. An adult was sitting in a pine tree across the loch, opposite the nest site, and we watched this superb bird through the telescopes. From here we headed back to the single-track road and towards Cali-

seen hunting over the marsh, but much closer this time. Full of sightings of the day, we arrived back in Dervaig. Before heading to the pub for our joint meal, we went for a short walk to admire the superb sunset accompanied by the local legions of midges. We ended the evening in the pub, enjoying our meal, swapping bird sightings and pints followed by the musi-

for our trip to the Treshnish Isles and Staffa. Along the shores of Ulva, we headed for the open water and the Isle of Lunga, the largest of the Treshnish Isles, while looking for porpoises (we saw none) and watching the numerous flocks of **Guillemots** and **Puffins** flying just above the calm sea. We landed on Lunga, with the help of a specially constructed pontoon, and walked up the path to the sea stack of Dun Cruit with its stunning views of bird city on the rocky ledges; inhabited by countless **Common Guillemots**, **Razorbills**, **Puffins**, **Shags** and **Kittiwakes**. The air was filled with a never-ending swirl of seabirds and occasionally we sighted an **Arctic** and **Great Skua** while listening to the cacophony of seabird calls from the stack. Certainly this was the highlight of the trip, nature in the raw, at its best! Nobody could get enough of the clown-like **Puffins** sitting within the pink flowers at the entrance of their burrows, the beautiful silky dark-green **Shags** on their nests, the black and white beautifully patterned **Razorbills** staring out to sea and the musical concert featuring **Common Guillemots** and **Kittiwakes** on the stack. Wishing we could stay on Lunga, we headed back to the Hoy Lass for our journey to Staffa. On Staffa, we explored Fingal's Cave and walked to the cairn to enjoy the beautiful views over Mull, Iona and the Treshnish Isles before heading back to Ulva Ferry for farewells and our return journey home on the last ferry back to Oban.



Puffin, Shag and Razorbill photographed on the visit to Mull (Lunga) (photo - Danielle Clark-De Bisschop)

ach point. The weather was excellent, and Ardnamurachan lighthouse and the islands of Eigg and Rum were clearly visible against a blue sky. At Calgary, with its beautiful sandy bay, we went for a small walk toward the stone pier where we watched an otter eating the meal he just caught by the stone steps of the old pier. At a secluded stop in the Treshnish point area, we enjoyed the sun and views while eating our sandwiches. Back on the road, we caught a brief glimpse of a **Yellow-hammer** near the north shore of Loch Tuath looking over to Ulva. Some of us desperately needed a toilet stop, so we headed for Ulva Ferry. Alas, the toilets were not working, but we were lucky to see a family of **Lapwing** fledglings crossing the road in front. From Ulva Ferry we headed onto the north shore of Loch na Keal, which provided stunning views to the ridges and top of Ben More and on to Gruline, with a short stop to view some **Fallow Deer** and a look over the old stone bridge for **Dippers**. A short drive brought us on the south side of Loch na Keal to study the strange and unique lava rock formations, only seen at this spot, before driving through Salen and back onto the Glen Aros road where we had our first distant view of a male **Hen Harrier**. While passing an old ruined village near Dervaig, another male **Hen Harrier** was

cal feast from Rhona and Catrina before going to bed.

On Sunday, we headed to Ulva Ferry to board the Hoy Lass, run by Tarus Mara,

Danielle Clark-De Bisschop

Species seen by the two groups on the Mull field trip

Group 1:

Little Grebe, Max Shearwater, Gannet, Cormorant, Heron, Mallard, Teal, Tufted Duck, Eider, Red breasted Merganser, Shelduck, Greylag Goose, Mute Swan, Golden Eagle, Buzzard, White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Peregrine, Merlin, Kestrel, Moorhen, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Redshank, Greater Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Arctic Tern, Rock Dove, Woodpigeon, Cuckoo, Short-eared Owl, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Sand Martin, Raven, Hooded Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Wren, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Wheatear, Stonechat

Mammals: Red Deer, Fallow Deer, Otter, Common Seal

Group 2:

Short-eared owl, male & female Hen Harrier, White-tailed Eagle, Redstart, Wood Warbler, Willow Warbler, Golden Eagle, Kestrel, Raven, Stonechat, Buzzard, Eider, Tern (species not specified), Gannet, Swallow, Skylark, Lapwing, Meadow Pipit, Wheatear, Pied Wagtail, Cormorant, Snipe, Heron, Siskin, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Lesser Redpoll, Gulls (species not specified)

Mammals: Red deer, otter, seal (species not specified)

Common sightings (Lunga):

Arctic Skua, Great Skua, Fulmar, Shag, Kittiwake, Razorbill, Common Guillemot, Black Guillemot, Puffin

Mammals: Rabbit, Grey Seal, Common Seal

Birdwatching in Lesvos, Greece

I would recommend Lesvos as a holiday destination where you can enjoy good quality birding in pleasant surroundings. Having now made three spring and one autumn visit, this is an island that draws you back, each time revealing a bit more of its special nature. Situated just 5-8 miles off the Turkish coast, the island is about 40 by 25 miles, which I liken to the area of Islay and Mull joined together; an ample size for holiday exploration. The western side has bare rocky uplands contrasting with the mainly pine and oak woods in the east. In between are vast areas of olive groves. Low lying coastal and arable areas surround what is now the recognised birding centre of Skalla Kalloni, with nearby saltpans and wetlands.

Lesvos has been a popular birding destination for almost ten years, particularly at the end of April and early May, which coincides with spring migration. A number of birding tour companies visit the island at this time, quickly filling up a large portion of available hotel rooms. Package tours (plus car hire) can be arranged for less than a third of their price, but need to be booked about a year ahead to secure accommodation. Visits earlier in April are becoming more popular, when passage numbers can be even more dramatic, however this is for the independent traveller, usually via Athens.



Marsh Sandpiper (Photo—Jim Dickson)

A hire car is recommended so that all the diverse habitat types can be covered. However, much can be seen (for the more energetic) using a bicycle within a few miles of Skalla Kalloni. From this location a typical day starts with an exploration of the wetland pools near the hotel. This is an easily worked and extremely well watched area, which acts as a magnet for various herons, marsh terns, ducks and warblers. Glossy Ibis, Spotted Crake, Little Crake and Marsh Sandpiper are regular visitors. Highlights this spring included a



Black-headed Bunting (Photo—Jim Dickson)

Great Snipe and River and Savi's Warblers. This area also provides good photographic opportunities with many birders trying their hand at digiscoping, with results being compared in the bars and restaurants later. A short drive from here takes you to the East River and the saltpans beyond, prime areas for gulls, terns, waders and numerous small migrants. The flat fields around here are good for all the harriers, Red-footed Falcon, pratincoles, Black-headed Bunting, larks, pipits and wagtails. The saltpans are popular and provide good views of Greater Flamingos, Avocets and many small waders. These often attract Peregrine, Lanner and the occasional Eleanora's Falcon. Special birds this year included a Dalmation Pelican and Lesser Sandplover, with both Caspian and Greater Sandplover in recent years.

The abundant olive groves are good for passage warblers as well as Middle-Spotted Woodpecker, Hoopoe, Turtle Dove and Masked Shrike. Upland pine and oak habitats produce the much sought after Krupper's Nuthatch as well as Sombre Tit and Short-toed Treecreeper, plus localised Olive Tree Warbler, Hawfinch, Nuthatch and Bonelli's Warbler. The sparsely vegetated west side of the island is home to the Cinereous and Cretzmar's Bunting, Ruppell's Warbler, Bonelli's and Short-toed Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Rock Nuthatch, Rock Sparrow, Blue Rock Thrush and Isabelline Wheatear. Excellent falls of small migrants are often found at the lofty Ipsilou Monastery where bushes can be graced with Collared, Semi-collared and Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Black-cap etc. From early May, numbers of

migrants have peaked, but Black-headed Bunting start to pop up almost everywhere. The last migrant to appear, often in good numbers, is the Rosy Starling though the fast moving flocks are tricky to photograph.

Most trips to Lesvos give you the chance to meet many other birders and to share information on sightings, locations etc and engage in friendly rivalry. Generally about 150-170 species can be seen in a fortnight. This year, a group of young Dutch birders managed 190, which takes some beating - well maybe next year!

Jim Dickson

If you would like further information on visiting Lesvos please contact me, Jim Dickson (Phone: 01546 603 967; E-mail: Jamesmilne.dickson@btopenworld.com).

Further reading: *Birding on the Greek Island of Lesvos*, by Richard Brooks and published by Brookside Publishing.

Holy Loch Hide Field Trip

Argyll Bird Club members are welcome to join a Cowal Natural History Society field trip to the Holy Loch hide on the 15th November at 11am. Park at Kilmun Church car park, walk west along the shore road and the hide is the only building on the shore side, opposite Craigend House.

Nigel Scriven



The Great Crested Grebe's Tale

Question: What is the connection between the **Great Crested Grebe** and an organisation to which many of the readers of this booklet will belong? Read on to find the answer.

During fifty years of watching birds, I have seen a number of species, which may be labelled 'exotic' – **Roseate Spoonbills** in the Florida Keys and Everglades, **Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters** in Sri Lanka, **Painted Snipe** at Mai Po in Hong Kong, and **Great Bustards** in Austria. However, the **Great Crested Grebe** still holds the first place in my list of 'exotics', and you can see it on the Isle of Bute.

After my first introduction to the chemistry of bird watching in the late 40s, I started to explore my local patch, which was south Birmingham. One day I reached out into Warwickshire, and explored the Earlswood Lakes, feeder reservoirs for the Grand Union canal system. They became a favourite haunt, being only about seven miles from my home - an easy cycle ride. It was there that I became familiar with the hundred commonest birds on my list, there that I observed diurnal migration - very early morning movements of **Meadow Pipits** and **Skylarks** in the autumn. It was there that I identified a **Water Pipit** and had the record published in *British Birds*. Most importantly, it was there that I discovered and identified the **Great Crested Grebe**.

It was probably in the late spring of 1947. Armed with a pair of war surplus binoculars and the *Observer's Book of Birds*, I was walking along a reservoir path, with dense willow scrub between the open water and me. I caught a glimpse of a bird that looked truly extraordinary - it had a long, white-sided neck with a reddish fringe on top! Excited examination of my book soon revealed it to be a **Great Crested Grebe** (happily the Grebes are listed near the beginning in any field guide - just below the Divers). I could not believe that such an exotic looking bird lived on my local reservoir.

On Bute, I see it regularly on at least two lochs - Ascog and Greenan. The **Great Crested Grebe** [*Podiceps cristatus* - Latin for crested] was unrecorded as a breeding species in Scotland before 1877. Though a rather shy bird, it appears to have established itself south of the Great Glen and is by no means an uncommon bird in the Lowlands, wherever relatively shallow lakes are to be found. Its nest, like those of its relatives the Divers, is always at the water's edge: its feet are good for swimming but fairly useless for walking, hence nesting close to the water's edge gives it an escape advantage in case of danger.

The nest is, however, very vulnerable to flooding and to disturbance, usually unintended, by anglers.

Many mainland breeders move to the open sea after the breeding season and large flocks are recorded in winter in the Firth of Forth. However, it is possible to see Grebes in most months of the year on Bute. In winter, the bird loses its exotic fringe, but early in the New Year, the bird comes back into breeding plumage. It's the time to start looking out for this splendid bird.

About the size of a very slim **Mallard**, it has a low-slung body, a long white-sided neck, a carmine bill, and an unmistakable head plume, the impression being of a bird wearing a rather splendid neck ruff. The black crown extends to a double crest at the rear, the 'tippets' being erected during its courtship display. Every birder should witness this courtship. It was the subject of a landmark study by the great Julian Huxley, published in 1914. *The Courtship Habits of the Great Crested Grebe* is an essay that I wish I had written! It describes in detail all the elements and functions of the ritual. The core element is head shaking, leading to both birds - male and female - rising up out of the water, necks extended upwards, breasts touching, each bird offering its mate weed [nesting material], whilst both are treading water furiously, in order to stay erect. Until you have observed it, you have missed one of the great sights of bird watching. The grebe is also one of those species that regularly carry their young on their backs, another charming aspect of the bird's behaviour.

The persecution of the **Great Crested Grebe** led directly to the foundation of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds – the RSPB. In the late 19th Century, milliners used the head feathers for hat decoration and this feather trade was the first target of the RSPB.

Huxley's essay is regarded as the foundation stone of the science of ethology, the study of behaviour. In the introduction to his essay, Huxley writes:

This paper will, I hope, help to show what wealth of interesting things still lies in and about the breeding places of familiar birds. A good glass [binoculars], a notebook, some patience, and a spare fortnight in the spring - with these I not only managed to discover many unknown facts about the Crested Grebe, but also had one of the pleasantest of holidays. Go thou and do likewise.

Michael Thomas

Nest trapping and radio tagging Golden Eagles in Argyll

Between 1991 and 1996, the RSPB and the Forestry Commission jointly undertook a project to attach radio transmitters to adult Golden Eagles in order to determine their ranging behaviour, with particular emphasis on the effects of afforestation. The results have been useful in conservation planning especially when dealing with proposals for further forest plantings and wind farms in upland areas.

Because of the difficulty of catching adult eagles it became necessary to trap birds at their nests, and some people may remember that Justin Grant gave a talk to the club about this in 1994 and this was written up by Bob Clarke in a subsequent edition of the Eider. Although the technique of trapping adult birds whilst they are incubating eggs or brooding young is fairly common, it is somewhat controversial, and the effect of this as well as the use of radio transmitters in the case of eagles was uncertain.

Since 1964 Sandy Gordon and I have been monitoring the population of golden eagles in the southern part of mainland Argyll and this provided an opportunity to check if nest trapping and radio tagging had any adverse effect on the subsequent breeding performance of these birds. A paper describing our findings was published in *Ibis* No. 145 in January 2003. Nowadays most scientific journals require papers to contain a rigorous statistical analysis of the available data and we had to enlist the help of our friend Robert Moss to provide this. Most bird watchers including us find statistics completely incomprehensible but the intention is to ensure that any conclusions are sound and are not due to chance or other factors.

Our conclusion was that either nest trapping or carrying backpack radio transmitters did have a subsequent adverse effect on the breeding performance of eagles and we suggested that research workers should take this into account when planning future similar projects. My personal view is that too many birds and mammals are being fitted with devices of one sort or another and that it would not matter too much if some aspects of their behaviour remained a mystery.

Mike Gregory

Those were the days—40 years ago

I went to Mull during Easter 1964. I took the bus from Craignure to Fionnphort intending to walk from there along the Ross of Mull to Bunessan and thence across the island to Salen. However, on arrival at Fionnphort I found my rucksack was missing, so put up for a couple of nights with a Miss Isemonger, who originally hailed from a village near my parents' home in Gloucestershire. She came from a big old country house that was reputed to have a secret passage connecting with another house nearby. She said she believed this to be true, but had never searched for it. On the Saturday she loaned me a very old pair of 12x40 binoculars to explore the Ross of Mull, which seemed to have a very healthy population of **Golden Eagles**. When I returned I found my rucksack safely delivered.

On Sunday morning she gave me a lift on her way to church at Gruline. On the way we saw **Mistle Thrushes**, 2 **Yellowhammers**, and by Balevulin a **Great Grey Shrike**. With a long tail, black with a white border; very prominent white bars on the secondaries, about 9 inches long, it flew from the roadside with undulating flight uphill to a large rock. In Loch Scridain I only managed to see 3 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, but the water was a little rough. In Loch na Keal we saw 2 **Great Northern Divers**.

Miss Isemonger dropped me at the bottom of the Gleann na Beinne Fada, up which I walked to the bealach, seeing **hoodies**, **pipits** and **hares**. From the bealach and the lower slopes of Beinn Fada I scanned for **eagles**. I thought I saw an eyrie at the bottom of the first line of cliffs on Creag Mhic Fhionnlaidh. The nest I had seen was about 1000ft or maybe a bit higher, right at the foot of the cliffs where there was a deep undercut. One could walk right into it along the contour. It had not been repaired this year and looked as though it had not been used for a year or two. There was an old **eagle** feather and old bones of a hare.

On the next line of rocks I found another eyrie. This was further up the cliff. I could not climb into it, but by some rather hazardous clambering approached to within about ten yards at the same level. It was in better order than the last nest, but had not been repaired this year; it may have been used last year or the year before.

However, on the third line of cliffs I surprised an **eagle** that floated out from half way up the rocks. I was now too tired to drag my rucksack up the cliff. Maybe just as well, as in places the climbing was trickier than before. At last I arrived immediately above the eyrie and could look down into it from about two yards away. It

contained two eggs, and was fairly small and compact - probably about 4 feet by 3 feet. I left as quickly as possible and found the remains of an old path leading down from the pass at the end of the cliffs. I turned to look back and saw the **eagle** hanging over the top of A'Chioch. She banked and, closing her wings so that she

but it would appear that this nest is presently tenanted. I photographed it. The height of the nest was about 30ft from the ground.

The woods of Doire Darach are far more plentiful and thicker than the map indicates and because of this I missed the second nest by aiming too high and then not being able to see through the trees. I had not enough energy left to climb down and back again!

However, I found the nest in the Garbh Coire Wood. The wood dies out long before this point is reached, and only a few scattered trees remain in places. The nest is, in fact, below the intersection of the two burns, not above it, and is invisible from further down stream. It is in a short dead, not very substantial, oak, on the steep slope of the ravine. The nest is less than ten feet from the ground. Though still fairly deep, it was not in good repair, and seemed not to have been visited for some time.

I walked on up past Loch nam Daimh to the watershed. The other side has suffered a recent invasion by forestry, the far side of Allt na Searmain and Beinn Bhuidhe having been ploughed up, fenced round and planted with seedling larches and pines. I could see no sign of a nest anywhere in the wood, and was able to see all trees reasonably well. Therefore, it is probable that 1954 was the last time that **eagles** nested there. Further down the burn I was sure I heard a **Willow Warbler**. I waited but no more song was forthcoming. Two **Short-eared Owls** aerobated over the wood.

I put in at the Salen Hotel for the night, where the reception was reluctant, the room moderate, but the much needed meal was excellent and rapidly served. The hot water was just warm enough to take a bath without adding cold, but not warm enough to allow one to soak. Their scales were accurate, 10st 4 lb in my birthday suit, the same as Miss Isemonger's scales!

David Merrie



looked like an ancient crossbow, swept down into the glen, turned and soon lost herself against the brown rocks on her way back to the nest.

I shambled down the path, which had become a shallow stony watercourse covered over by beguiling grass. I turned both ankles before finding somewhat better walking on the lower slopes above Loch Ba.

Here I saw a few more birds. **Curlews** called from below. A **Buzzard** flew out from the Clachaig Wood, and soared and wheeled as it crossed the loch. A few **Meadow Pipits** also, and of course **hoodies**. Three **mergansers** on the loch.

Golden Eagles were supposed to have some tree nests here. I found the first nest near the spot on my map. It was compact and well down from the top of the tree in the main fork of a sturdy oak tree. It was decorated with fresh holly leaves around the top, buzzard fashion. I saw no **eagle**,

Recent Reports (May – July 2003)

In contrast to 2002, signs so far indicate that 2003 has generally been an excellent breeding season for Argyll's birds, especially for some of the rarer species. For example, our **Black-throated Divers** reared 5 young birds, including 2 sets of twins; the best result since 1996. **Corn Crake** numbers reached their highest levels for many years on some islands, including a remarkable 22 calling birds on Iona. At a more mundane level, my own impression is that many common birds have successfully fledged second and third broods. That is if the number of young **Greenfinches** in my garden still begging for food from parents is anything to go by and the fact that only three weeks ago I saw an adult **Winter Wren** hotly pursued by a brood of at least 7 recently fledged young. I would be very interested to hear from any members who have similar evidence from their own gardens, or who have breeding information, even for commoner species.

Highlights of the period under review include a **Yellow-billed Diver** off Mull on 15th May, a **Little Egret** at Kennacraig on 1st Jun, a **Green-winged Teal** on Tiree on 26th – 29th May, a male **King Eider** in the Toward/Innellan area, Cowal from 27th May, a **Eurasian Hobby** over Totronald Coll on 16th Jun, an **Eleonora's Falcon** on Tiree on 2nd May, a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Loch Gruinart 25th – 27th May, a **Wood Nuthatch** at Ardkinglas, Mid-Argyll on 24th Jun, a **Golden Oriole** at Tainish NNR on 31st May and a **Rose-coloured Starling** at Portnahaven on 16th-17th July. Many of these records are subject to confirmation when descriptions are received.

Divers to Wildfowl

There have been reports of a **Yellow-billed Diver**, off Mull on 15th May and in Gott Bay Tiree on 26th May. In the first case, only a brief view was obtained and a similarly brief description supplied and no description at all has been supplied for the Tiree bird. So, if anyone has any further information please let me know. On 20th June, 4 **European Storm Petrels** flew S past Frenchman's Rocks, Islay and 6 more appeared on 24th while 2 were off Gunna Sound, Coll on 14th Jun. A large Shearwater flying S at Frenchman's Rocks on 24th July was almost certainly a **Great Shearwater** but was, frustratingly, just too distant to be 100% certain. The **Little Egret** on Tiree was still present until 2nd May, but another (or just possibly the same?) individual turned up at Kennacraig, Kintyre on 1st Jun, the first mainland record since 1998. On Tiree a pr of **Gadwall** were at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree

on 26th May and a pr of **Garganey** were on a pool at Moss on 27th May, but neither were seen subsequently. A male **Green-winged Teal** present on the island from 26th May – 4th Jun was seen at 3 different locations. The **King Eider** nr Toward, Cowal first noted on 27th May, was still present on 21st June, by which time it was going into moult.

Raptors to Gamebirds

Three **Ospreys** were seen at Loch Feochan, Mid-Argyll on 8th July and up to 2 were regularly seen fishing in the Add Estuary in late July. One flew over Loch Don, Mull on 6th June and one was seen fishing at Loch Frisa, Mull also in June. Few records of **Merlins** have been received recently, so sightings on Tiree on 1st and 2nd May and 16th Jun, at Ballard, Coll on 9th May, near Lochbuie and near Mishnish Lochs on Mull both on 6th June and at Totamore dunes, Coll on 9th July are worth recording. The dark-phase **Eleonora's Falcon** seen at close range at Ceannt a' Mhara Tiree on 2nd May gave rise to several reports of unusual dark falcons elsewhere but none were confirmed. Possibly a case of wishful thinking? Not quite as rare, but still very un-

among several record counts for recent years was 184 calling males revealed by a survey on Tiree in Jun.

Waders

An adult **Little Stint** seen at Vault Bay, Tiree on 12th May was in full summer plumage. A late **Grey Plover** was at Arileod, Coll on 8th May. Four **Red Knot** seen in the Add Estuary on 21st Jul were still in summer plumage. A single adult **Little Stint** in breeding plumage was at Vault Bay Tiree on 12th May and another was at Loch Gruinart on 29th May. Up to 3 **Ruffs** were reported from Tiree 26th – 29th May. At least 4 **Eurasian Woodcock** were roding at Ballygrant, Islay on 30th May. The peak count for **Black-tailed Godwits** on Tiree was 13 at Heylipol on 8th May and for **Whimbrel** was 19 at Loch an Eilein on 2nd May. On Islay **Black-tailed Godwits** peaked at 42 at Loch Gruinart on 10th July and **Whimbrel** numbers on Coll peaked at 25 at Crossapol on 20th May. A striking **Bar-tailed Godwit** in full breeding plumage was seen on Mull on 30th Jun. 50 **Eurasian Curlews** were still at Soay island, Coll on 1st July and no less than 12 **Common Green-shanks** were already passing through on



Black-tailed Godwits on the Add Estuary (photo—Jim Dickson)

usual for Argyll was the **Eurasian Hobby** that flew over Totronald Coll on 16th June. An adult **Saker** falcon circling over The Reef, Tiree on 30th Jul and distinctly worried the remaining **Arctic Terns**. It had conspicuous black jesses and was obviously an escapee. A **Spotted Crake** was heard calling on Coll several times in late May. As noted above, **Corn Crakes** seem to have had a very good year in Argyll and

25th July when they were seen at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree.

Skuas to Woodpeckers

The first **Arctic Skuas** seen on Coll were on 10th May and a dark phase bird was sighted off Croig, Mull on 28th May. An excellent spring passage of rarer skuas was reported, with no less than 14 **Pomer-**

ine Skuas noted from the ferry from Oban to Tiree on various dates 14th – 24th May, as well as one chasing a **Great Cormorant** at Loch Beg, Mull on 17th May and 4 **Long-tailed Skuas** between Coll and Tiree on 24th May. **Great Skuas** were noted off Baugh, Tiree on 24th May in Gunna Sound on 15th Jun and (3) flying S at Frenchman's Rocks on 20th Jul. There are also early reports that the breeding population on the Treshnish Isles has increased this year. A first summer **Little Gull** called briefly at Loch Bhasapol at noon on 28th May. The first **Arctic Tern** was back on Tiree on 2nd May with **Little Terns** first seen there on 1st May and were noted at 2 locations on Coll in mid-May. There is also a possibility that **Sandwich Terns** bred on Tiree this year. There have been a good number of **Short-eared Owl** reports from Mull, including birds at Loch Assapol on 24th May and 25th Jun, at Dervaig on 5th Jun, at Garmony on 13th Jun as well as birds at 2 locations on Coll in May. Our annual migrant **Turtle Dove** turned up at Cornaig, Tiree on 30th May. A late adult **Common Cuckoo** was being mobbed by Meadow Pipits at Kenovay, Tiree on 15th Jul and a juvenile was at Moine Mhor on 22nd July. Away from their usual breeding places, **Common Swifts** were on Tiree on 25th and 26th May, at Lochbuie, Mull on 26th May and on Coll on 1st and 26th July

Passerines

Sand Martins were confirmed breeding on Tiree in Jun for the first time in recent years. A female **Common Redstart** seen on Coll on 6th May was the first record ever for the island. **Common Grasshopper Warblers** were heard at 3 locations on Tiree in Jun (none recorded in 2001 or 2002) and 4 locations on Coll in May, while dozens of **Sedge Warblers** were heard singing on Tiree by mid-May. At least one pr of **Willow Warblers** bred in the Moss area of Tiree, and unusual record for the island. A **Common Chiffchaff** singing at The Lodge Coll was also unusual and birds were also heard at 3 locations on Tiree in May. On Mull an almost entirely white-plumaged **Willow Warbler** was raising a family in Jun near Grasspoint. A **Wood Nuthatch** reported in a garden at Ardkinglas, Mid-Argyll on 24th June will be only our 4th record ever, if confirmed. A **Rose-coloured Starling** was reported at Portnahaven, Islay on 16th-17th Jul. A lone **Black-billed Magpie** was seen in a garden at Ganavan (Oban) on 24th April. A flock of 100 **Common Linnets** was noted at Arileod Meadows, Coll on 24th July. **Common Crossbill** sightings included 2 at Lettermore Plantation, Mull on 10th May, one at Knock, Mull on 24th June, a flock of 15 near Auchindrain, Mid-Argyll on 2nd July and 3

feeding on cones in a lucky members garden at on 8th July,

Non-birds.

On a boat trip from Coll to Gunna Island (to survey for breeding birds – terns present but no Corn Crakes heard) on 1st July, Sarah Money (RSPB warden, Coll) saw no less than 3 basking sharks.

Paul Daw

Colour-ringed Twites – Request for information

Twite have started to increase as a wintering bird in Lancashire and we were fortunate enough to ring 200 at Heysham Harbour, on the sand mound by the harbour entrance, during the 2002/3 winter. At the time, we had no idea where they were breeding, but recent events have been informative. So far, we have had two records from Sanda (an island off the bottom of the Mull of Kintyre), one from Eigg and another from Staffa - all during the 2003 breeding season. Tony Soper found the Staffa bird! A feature of the 2002/3 winter was that there were far more Twite in coastal north Lancashire than is usual, so it is possible that some Lancashire-ringed birds may occur on passage or even in subsequently winter, in Northern Ireland for example. One of the Sanda birds was trapped, so there may be several colour-ringed birds in breeding areas to look out for. The legs are not always easy to see, but if you see a bird with a metal ring, please try to view the other leg and record the colour ring combination. Many thanks.

Pete Marsh (North Lancashire Ringing Group)

E-mail address: Pbmars@btopenworld.com

Recent Papers from Journals

This section aims to provide readers with information on papers that have appeared in journals since the last list in the June 2003 newsletter. The criteria for selection is that papers must have links to birds in Scotland. The selection is biased towards what I read, so I would welcome information about other papers outwith my field, for inclusion in

future lists - **Editor**

Amphlett, A. 2003. Contexts, developing ideas and emerging issues in the conservation management of the RSPB Abernethy forest reserve. *Botanical Journal of Scotland*, **55**, 135-148.

Arthur, D. S. C. & White, S. A. 2003. Growth rates of ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus* nestlings. *Ringing & Migration*, **21**, 169-173.

Bowler, J. 2003. Family cohesion in greylag goose *Anser anser* broods following catching and ringing. *Ringing & Migration*, **21**, 181-182.

Buchanan, G. M., Pearce-Higgins, J. W., Wotton, S. R., Grant, M. C. & Whitfield, D. P. 2003. Correlates of the change in Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* abundance in Scotland from 1988-91 to 1999. *Bird Study*, **50**, 97-105.

Cosgrove, P. 2003. Mandarin ducks in northern Scotland and the potential consequences for breeding goldeneye. *Scottish Birds*, **24**, 1-10.

Finney, S. K., Harris, M. P., Keller, L. F., Elston, D. A., Monaghan, P. & Wanless, S. 2003. Reducing the density of breeding gulls influences the pattern of recruitment of immature Atlantic puffins *Fratercula arctica* to a breeding colony. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, **40**, 545-552.

Finney, S. K. & Jardine, D. C. 2003. The distribution and status of the red-billed chough in Scotland in 2002. *Scottish Birds*, **24**, 11-17.

Hancock, M. H. & Wilson, J. D. 2003. Winter habitat associations of seed-eating passerines on Scottish farmland. *Bird Study*, **50**, 116-130.

McGowan, R. Y., Clugston, D. L. & Forrester, R. W. 2003. Scotland's endemic subspecies. *Scottish Birds*, **24**, 18-35.

McKay, C. 2003. Late summer wader migration at Loch Gruinart, Islay. *Scottish Bird News*, **68**, 10-11.

Milwright, R. D. P. 2003. Migration routes, breeding areas and between-winter recurrence of nominate redwings *Turdus iliacus iliacus* revealed by recoveries of winter ringed birds. *Ringing & Migration*, **21**, 183-192.

Parkin, D. T., Collinson, M., Helbig, A. J., Knox, A. G. & Sangster, G. 2003. The taxonomic status of carrion and hooded crows. *British Birds*, **96**, 274-290.

Petty, S. J., Anderson, D. I. K., Davison, M., Little, B., Sherratt, T. N., Thomas, C. J. & Lambin, X. 2003. The decline of common kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* in a forested area of northern England: the role of predation by northern goshawks *Accipiter gentilis*. *Ibis*, **145**, 472-483.

Phillips, R. A., Cope, D. R., Rees, E. C. & O'Connell, M. J. 2003. Site fidelity and

range size of wintering barnacle geese *Branta leucopsis*. *Bird Study*, **50**, 161-169.

Reid, J. M., Bignal, E. M., Bignal, S., McCracken, D. I. & Monaghan, P. 2003. Age-specific reproductive performance in red-billed choughs *Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax*: patterns and processes in a natural population. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, **72**, 765-776.

Robertson, D. 2003. Eurasian reed warblers in Scotland: a review of probable breeding records. *Scottish Birds*, **24**, 36-39.

Sim, I. M. W. & Rebecca, G. 2003. Catching methods and biometrics of breeding ring ouzels *Turdus torquatus torquatus* in northeast Scotland. *Ringing & Migration*, **21**, 163-168.

Summers, R. W. & Pierny, S. B. 2003. The Scottish crossbill - what we know and what we don't. *British Birds*, **96**, 100-111.

Whitfield, D. P., McLeod, D. R. A., Watson, J., Fielding, A. H. & Haworth, P. F. 2003. The association of grouse moor in Scotland with the illegal use of poisons to control predators. *Biological Conservation*, **114**, 157-163.

Dawn Chorus Inveraray 10th May 2003

Six am in May is not exactly dawn, but early enough to enjoy the seasonal joy of birdsong. Inveraray Castle has a good range of habitats around it, making it an attractive centre for general birding. It was a grey morning, with dampness in the air and a slight threat of drizzle. However the hormonal drive of birds to reproduce takes a lot to dampen its intensity at this peak time. The disappointment for me was that no-one came to join me. However, I wasn't going to drive home just because I was alone. Having prized myself out of bed, and driven up Loch Eck and round Loch Fyne, I wanted to get some return for my efforts.

Just in case someone might arrive late, I hung around the car park for the first fifteen minutes, and picked up quite a few birds without taking a step. **Pied wagtail**, **Greenfinch**, **Willow Warbler**, **Wren**, **Blackbird**, **Chaffinch**, **Robin**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Great and Blue Tit** soon got me to double figures. Moving slowly along the track northwards to the bridge over the Aray, **Song Thrush** and **Wood Warbler** brought up the dozen. Bridges are always useful vantage points, but it was the proximity of the conifers nearby that held a **Goldcrest**. The insects in and over the water attract many species, so

Swallows and **Common Sandpiper** were no surprise.

Wandering northwards through the woods a **Treecreeper** proclaimed its territory, and emerging onto the long straight track to Carloanan **Common Gulls** foraged in the fields. From the trees and bushes across the river, in the direction of Maltland a **Garden Warbler** sang its scratchy song, while a **Dipper** shot past flying downstream. As I closed in on the bridge near the doocot **Meadow Pipits** flitted overhead, and perched on overhead cables. A **Grey Heron** cronked as it flapped heavily up from the bank. It had been some time since I had last been this way, so I was wary picking my way through the farm buildings with dogs barking. This didn't scare off the **Starlings** or a nearby **Blackcap**. Through the gate and up the hill track to Tom Breac, I was glad when the barking subsided, and could then clearly hear the song of the **Tree Pipit**, delivered from its rising song flight, and then parachuting glide back to the electricity wires.

On approaching the conifer forest the calling of **Coal Tits** heralded the change of habitat, confirmed by the clattering scream of a **Jay**. Nearing the top of Dun na Cuaiche, a **Buzzard** was soaring over the forest, and a **Redstart** sang among the beeches beyond the spruce trees. The top of the hill is one of the best views in the county and can often be enhanced by a **Kestrel** or **Raven**, but not on this occasion. Descending by the path that traverses the foot of the steep south facing cliffs, I picked up **Bullfinch** and **Chiffchaff**, with **Oystercatchers** a short distance away on the beach. Thinking I could add to my total, I dawdled back across the bridge to the car park, but could only find **Siskin** and **Goldfinch**.

That made 35 species for three of hours of a very pleasant spring morning, and was definitely worth getting up for!

Nigel Scriven

From the Chairman

We had a well attended committee meeting on Tuesday 2 September, and it turned into quite a 'meaty' session after our summer break. Sadly, Jane Mitchell resigned from the committee due to other commitments. Thank you Jane, for your contribution. Jane will continue to have an extremely valuable role in helping to prepare the *Argyll Bird Report* for publication.

The Club has various options at present to link up with various Scottish and UK-wide initiatives. We discussed the developing role of the Scottish Ornithologists'

Club and its desire for more joint working relationships with individual bird clubs. Similarly, the British Trust for Ornithology is looking to develop its Bird Clubs' Partnership. The committee is open to various possibilities, but would not wish to change our core activities. Any partnership arrangements with other organisations would have to deliver real benefits to our membership. We will, of course, consult and inform you as things move on.

The Committee agreed that Paul Daw and Mike Gear should attend the inaugural meeting of the National Bird Club Forum, co-hosted by the BTO and West Midland Bird Club, in February 2004. The one-day meeting will be held in deepest Blightly (Sutton Coldfield) and will look at a range of issues affecting all bird clubs, including promotions, bird recording, publications and surveys.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an account of Club's recent trip to Mull - my thanks to Rhona Campbell for this excellent and well-attended trip. Rhona, where will you take the Club next?

I am very grateful to everyone who returned the questionnaire included with *The Eider* in March. Curiously, members living the furthest distance from Argyll were the most likely to respond! Every return was valuable. You all seem broadly happy with our indoor meetings. I am relieved by this, because they do take significant effort to organise. Several of you thought we could broaden our activities to do more for younger members or to provide training. I very much wish to set such activities in place, however, as ever it is a matter of time. Practically all of your committee have full time day jobs and it can be frustrating for us not to have time to pursue all opportunities that present themselves. The committee is open to new ideas and ways of taking the Club forward; please feel free to contact any of us with your suggestions. If you would like to get more involved and have a little time to spare, so much the better!

I am painfully aware that the *Argyll Bird Report*, volume 18 is still not published. I am making efforts to get this to press as soon as possible. The Committee has put in place several mechanisms to help get subsequent volumes out on a shorter timescale. Our other publication project, *Birds of Argyll*, now has over half of its species accounts drafted, thanks to our team of authors and especially to Tristan ap Rheinallt. We are looking at publication towards the end of 2004 and think you will be delighted with this landmark publication.

Enjoy your birdwatching, and I hope to see you on a field trip or at one of our indoor meetings soon.

David Wood

Autumn Meeting Programme

Saturday 8th November

Cainbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead

09.30-10.20	Doors open, coffee and tea
10.20-10.30	Welcome & introduction— <i>David Wood (Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club)</i>
10.30-10.40	Recent sightings— <i>Paul Daw (Argyll Bird Recorder)</i>
10.40-11.15	Farming for sea eagles: benefits for farming and birds— <i>Ross Lilley (SNH)</i>
11.15-11.25	Field trips and training opportunities in the year ahead— <i>David Wood</i>
11.25-11.50	Coffee
11.50-12.30	Hebridean whales and dolphins— <i>Juliet Fenton (HWDT)</i>
12.30-13.30	Lunch (available in the hotel conservatory and bar)
13.30-14.30	Annual General Meeting
14.30-15.10	Dealing with wildlife crime— <i>PC Murray, Wildlife Liaison Officer, Strathclyde Police</i>
15.10-15.40	Tea
15.40-16.00	Alexander Wilson: Paisley born father of American Ornithology— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
16.00-16.20	Raffle
Admission to non-members £5.00 (or free if you join the club)	

Treasurer's Report for financial year 2002-2003

The accounts (page 11) show that the Argyll Bird Club had a deficit of £571.87 in financial year 2002-03. Nevertheless, our assets at the end of the year stood at £6637.32, the second highest in the history of the club. This represents our bank balance only, and excludes from consideration any non-cash assets of the club such as unsold copies of *Argyll Bird Reports* and sales items. However, the cash value of this stock is small, and to an extent hypothetical (for example, most remaining back numbers of *Argyll Bird Reports* are of a few particular issues that are now most unlikely ever to be sold). The 2001-02 figures (showing a surplus of £1499.22) are somewhat misleading, as they do not take account of the cost of the 2000 *Argyll Bird Report*, which

should have been published during 2001-02 but was delayed. The cost of that report (£1598) fell in the 2002-03 financial year. In 2001-02 the balance for the year would have been a slight deficit if the report had been produced on schedule.

The accounts show two new categories of expenditure; equipment (a PC, and a screen for use at indoor meetings), and bird book preparation costs. Income in 2002-03 was very much higher than in the previous year, due largely to a grant from SNH towards the costs of producing the *Birds of Argyll* book. This included provision for the purchase of a computer and associated software to be used by Paul Daw not only in production of the book, but also in the collating of bird records and preparation of the annual *Argyll Bird*

Report systematic list. This grant, totalling up to £6367, is being paid to the Bird Club in two parts. The first payment (£2000) was received during 2003, while the second will be paid to the club in August 2004. Payment of the 2nd part by SNH depends on us providing itemised accounts of expenditure on the production of the book. Apart from the purchase of the PC, expenditure by the club on the book production has mainly been the cost of acquiring data on Argyll bird ring recoveries from the BTO. Details are listed below.

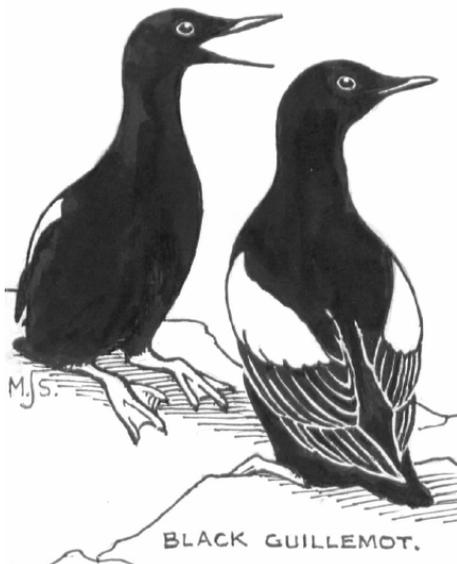
Income from bank interest has fallen with declining interest rates, and income from bird report sales was down due to the difficulty in selling copies of a report published rather long after the year it repre-

sents. As a result of the drop in bird report sales and the increase in bird report printing costs, the club may wish to consider in future whether publication of a rather late annual *Argyll Bird Report* in a printed form is the best way to spend a significant part of the club's money. For example, an alternative could be to post the *Argyll Bird Report* as a pdf file on the club's web page. This would cost the club nothing in cash terms. Income from membership subscriptions appears to have increased, but this does not reflect a substantial increase in numbers of members; the change may result from payments made just after, rather than just before the start of the new financial year (16 April). Expenditure on public meetings continued to increase as it has over the past several years. Variations in other expenditures are mostly due to costs happening to fall within one rather than another financial year, and show no clear trend.

In view of the healthy state of the club's bank balance I would not recommend any increase to the subscription rate, despite the balance of income and expenditure having moved into a deficit (as predicted). We are likely to see a substantial part of our bank balance required at least initially to fund the development of the *Birds of Argyll* book, but the funding from SNH provides a substantial part of that requirement. In the longer term, sales of the book may recover our expenditure on book production.

Accounts for the *Birds of Argyll* book in 2002-03: Income £2000 (SNH). Expenditure £235 (BTO Ringing summary data), £110.58 (Editor's expenses), £171.55 (BTO Ring recovery data), £1852.36 (Computer, peripherals and software); total Expenditure £2369.49. Balance - £369.49.

Bob Furness, 19 June 2003



Argyll Bird Club

18th Year Accounts

16 April 2002 – 15 April 2003

Income	2002/2003	2001/2002
Subscriptions	2053.48	1600.32
Bird Report Sales	223.00	403.85
Bank Interest	86.47	122.83
Sales	30.00	29.50
Other (raffles, donations, etc)	211.00	93.00
Grants	2000.00	0.00
<i>Total</i>	<i>4603.95</i>	<i>2249.50</i>
Expenditure		
Bird Report	1598.00	0.00
Newsletter production	147.90	0.00
Postage	103.00	248.35
Committee expenses	0.00	27.50
Bird Recorder expenses	69.25	133.53
Public meetings	729.55	340.90
Bird Book	517.13	0.00
Equipment purchases	2010.99	0.00
<i>Total</i>	<i>5175.82</i>	<i>750.28</i>
Surplus/Deficit for year	-571.87	1499.22
Brought forward	7209.19	5709.97
Assets at end of year	6637.32	7209.19

Signed: R.W. Furness (Hon. Treasurer)

Date: 19 June 2003

I certify that from the vouchers/cash books and other information shown to me this balance sheet is in accordance.

Signed: B. Zonfrillo

Annual General Meeting of the Argyll Bird Club

The 18th Annual General Meeting will be held at 1400 hours on Saturday 8th November 2003 in Cairnbaan Hotel near Lochgilphead.

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 2002 Annual General Meeting
2. Apologies
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman's Report
5. Secretary's Report
6. Membership Secretary's Report
7. Treasurer's Report
8. Future field trips
9. Election of Office Bearers and Committee Members (a maximum of 12 can be elected - nominations invited)
10. AOCB (please notify the Chairman before the meeting)

CURRENT OFFICIALS

<i>Chairman</i>	David Wood
<i>Vice Chairman</i>	Nigel Scriven
<i>Secretary</i>	John Anderson
<i>Treasurer</i>	Bob Furness
<i>Membership Secretary</i>	Bill Staley
<i>Committee</i>	Roger Broad, Tom Callan, Paul Daw (Argyll Bird Recorder), Mike Gear, David Merrie, Jane Mitchell (resigned 1st September 2003), Katie Pendreigh

John Anderson, Secretary (3rd September 2002)

Minutes of the 17th Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 2 November 2002

Present: Nigel Scriven (chairman) David Wood (vice chairman), John Anderson (secretary), Bob Furness (treasurer) and 56 members.

1. Apologies: Clive Craik, Arthur French, Mary and Neil Gregory, David Jardine.

2. Minute of previous AGM, 3 November 2001: This was proposed by Jane Mitchell, seconded by Eileen Graham, approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters arising: None.

4. Chairman's Report: Nigel Scriven thanked John Anderson for the efficient manner in which he had adopted the role of Secretary, assisted by Helen Anderson. He was pleased to note the large attendance and thanked members for coming. He spoke to the unfortunate late publication of the *Argyll Bird Report* and the huge task involved in producing the systematic list, perhaps more than could be reasonably expected of a voluntary bird

recorder, and thought that the time had arrived to adopt a team approach. Volume 1 of the *Birds of Argyll* book, which slanted towards a systematic list treatment, was well under way, thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work by Tristan ap Rheinallt and the sub-committee. Publishing options were still under consideration. The autumn and spring meetings at Cairnbaan and Dunoon had been very successful. The current system of committee members rotating the organisation of the programme was working well. Steve Petty had taken over editorship of *The Eider* from Nigel, which was now benefiting from a fresh perspective. Nigel announced that, after five years as Chairman, he had decided to stand down. He thanked committee members for their support and contributions during these years and other members for their help, which had made a significant difference to the well being of the Club.

5. Secretary's Report: John Anderson reported that the Secretary's job was really not difficult, was good fun

and that it was a very good committee to work with. Four meetings had been held since the last AGM. After investigation, it was concluded that the Club need not re-register under the new regulations of the Data Protection Act and this had saved the renewal fee. Steve Petty had volunteered as collector and distributor of information by e-mail, and members should contact him with any interesting news. Members wishing to be part of this e-mail network should give Steve their e-mail address. The distribution of *The Eider* by e-mail had been discussed, but no decision made. The Spring Meeting would be held in the Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory on 29 March 2003. The Committee would meet Mark Holling of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club to discuss possible closer links between the two organisations. As the Club is keen to attract new members, an information sheet and application form had been produced, copies of which are available from the Secretary. It will soon be on the ABC website. The Committee was keen to attract younger members, and members' ideas were in-

vited. The Committee was also keen to ascertain members' views on field trips – for example, do they need to be more adventurous, is guidance needed on identification or is training on surveying techniques required?

6. Membership Report: On behalf of Pam Staley, Membership Secretary, Bill Staley reported that the Club comprised 160 members whose details were incorporated in a computerised database. Membership had declined over the last four years by 7%. There were no junior members. The membership was divided into people who lived within Argyll PA postal code area and those outwith. Over one quarter of members lived outwith Argyll and this category had increased by 22% over the last four years. Pam had decided to stand down from this post, but Bill was willing to continue in her place. Pam Staley was warmly thanked for all the work she had put into the job during the last three years.

7. Treasurer's Report: Bob Furness reported that the Statement of Accounts for the year 15 April 2001 to 15 April 2002 had been distributed with *The Eider* and was also available at the meeting. He had been Treasurer for a number of years and did not find the job onerous, but was willing to stand down, particularly at a time when the balance was increasing. The Club's finances were in a healthy state, showing a balance of £7209.19. However, this was misleading as the expenditure did not include approximately £1500 for the latest *Argyll Bird Report* due to its late publication, and this might produce a slight deficit. This was part of a decreasing surplus trend, partly due to the strategy to reduce the surplus and spend more on indoor meetings, which was to the members' benefit. The publication of the *Birds of Argyll* book would consume part of the surplus. One possible publisher had requested a contribution of £6,000 and this had been rejected, as they would also take the profits. One possibility was for the club to publish the book and realise the profits. This would be a major investment in the future of the club. Various options were under consideration by the committee, including sponsorship by organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage, RSPB or a Trust such as the

Carnegie to fund the collection of data. Income and expenditure for the club over the year were fairly consistent. It was agreed that subscriptions should not be increased, as this would increase administration and possibly lose members. The Financial Report was unanimously approved, proposed by Roger Broad and seconded by Paul Daw. Bob Furness was thanked for his work during the year and for organising the very successful meeting. Bob apologised for the meeting coinciding with the SOC conference. He had taken action to avoid this, but it was outwith his control.

8. Future Field Trips: The Chairman reported proposals for trips to Mull in May/June (Organiser Rhona Campbell), St Kilda no date, but spontaneously to coincide with an anticyclone (Organisers Helen and John Anderson), Colonsay provisionally from 12-14 September (Organiser David Jardine) and Sanda Island, no date as yet (Organiser Nigel Scriven). Information about these trips was set out at the back of the hall and members were invited to express their interest. Ideas from the floor included helping David Merrie with rafts for nesting divers. Members also spoke of successful one-day trips that had been organised in the past to Gigha, Loch Awe and the Islay ferry crossing. It was agreed that good leadership was crucial to the success of these trips and all past organisers were thanked. It was noted that on 4 - 10 June the Historical and Antiquarian Society was organising a trip to Barra and these dates should be avoided.

9. Custodian of the stock of Argyll Bird Reports: Bill Staley reported that he had undertaken these duties for a number of years, which included selling copies at club meetings and to others throughout the year, and would like to pass this on. Bob Furness agreed to take over. Bill was thanked for his contribution.

10. Election of Office Bearers and Committee Members: The following were elected unanimously.

Chairman - David Wood, proposed by Committee, seconded by Josie Wall.

Vice-Chairman - Nigel Scriven, pro-

posed by Committee, seconded Margaret Staley (Nigel Scriven continued in the chair for the AGM).

Secretary - John Anderson, proposed by Mike Gear, seconded by Jane Mitchell.

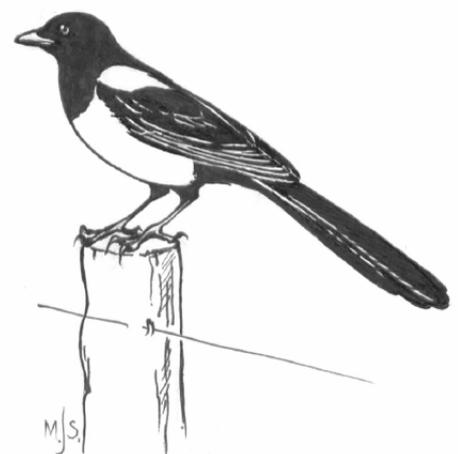
Treasurer - Bob Furness, proposed by Ian Hopkins, seconded by Peter Staley.

Committee Members - Bill Staley, Roger Broad, Jane Mitchell (proposed by Ian Hopkins, seconded by Norman Rae). Mike Gear (proposed by Jane Mitchell, seconded John Anderson), David Merrie (proposed by Mike Gear, seconded Bob Furness), Paul Daw (proposed by Bob Furness, seconded Nigel Scriven), Tom Callan (proposed by Paul Daw, seconded Jane Mitchell) and Katie Pendreigh (proposed by Nigel Scriven, seconded David Wood).

12. Any Other Competent Business: It was suggested that the ABC write to the Scottish Executive encouraging them to set up the early reintroduction of beavers in Knapdale. After discussion a vote was taken. 56 members voted in favour, none against and four abstained, some due to having a vested interest.

Nigel Scriven was warmly thanked for his period in the chair and for the friendly manner in which he had conducted his duties. The meeting closed at 14.55hrs.

John Anderson



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Articles for the next issue of *The Eider* should be with the Editor before 1st December 2003

Latest Bird Sightings

A Balearic Shearwater was seen from the Kennacraig - Islay ferry on 10th Aug

A second-year Little Gull was in in the Sound of Jura on 17th August

A Ruff seen on Coll on 1st September is apparently the first record for the island since 1905!

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Argyll Bird Club Website (under development):

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

The Eider



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

The club holds two one-day meetings each year, in spring and autumn. The venue of the spring meeting is rotated between different towns, including Dunoon, Oban and Lochgilphead. The autumn meeting/AGM is held in a convenient central location, usually near Lochgilphead or Inveraray. The club organises field trips for members. It publishes the annual *Argyll Bird Report*. Your annual subscription entitles you to one copy of this, four issues of *The Eider* and free admission to the two annual meetings. The membership categories and rates are:

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

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

The Editor (contact details on front page) welcomes articles for inclusion in *The Eider*. Most of each issue is devoted to articles about some aspect of ornithology, wildlife conservation or general ecology in Argyll, but some articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events and press releases are also published. If possible, these should be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word2000, or previous versions of Word. However, this should not deter potential contributors, as hand written scripts are also acceptable. If in doubt about whether an article is suitable, please contact the Editor for advice.

Artists are encouraged to submit illustrations of birds and habitats for inclusion in *The Eider*. Some digital images, including high-quality colour photographs (jpeg files preferred) may also be suitable for publication.

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