

**Machrihanish Seabird Observatory
SW Kintyre – Argyll PA28 6PZ**

Established 11th September 1993

2017 Report

Compiled by: *Eddie Maguire* (warden)



Leach's Petrel >S during a NW gale event 28th October

Contents

MSBO Report 2017...Page 2.

Northern Gannets crossing overland in south Kintyre, Argyll 2017...Page 46.

Sooty Tern off MSBO 2nd June 2017...A new species for Argyll....Page 51.

UK Twite Study Project at MSBO 2010 - 2017...Page 53.

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Report 2017

Introduction

This report is an update on projects and monitoring work undertaken during the season and documents the birds and other wildlife recorded at the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) during the year.

Systematic daily seawatching from March to November ultimately produced observations of rare and scarce / unusual species and excellent totals of numerous regular passage visitors.

The MSBO was manned daily 1st March – 10th November with casual observations later. The **2017 Report** portrays the year with a monthly summary of the main ornithological events accompanied by a selection of 50+ photographs.

Visit our website at machrihanishbirdobservatory.org.uk

Vagrant seabird at MSBO

The most extraordinary event of the year involved a fly-by **Sooty Tern** (Tropical waters) on 2nd June; this is **a new species for Argyll**, the third Scottish occurrence and the first appearance of this vagrant in UK / Irish waters for 12 years - see **page 51**.

Monitoring overland crossings of Northern Gannets in S Kintyre

Surveillance of **Gannets** at Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) from March to October by Charlie Robertson (MSBO assistant warden) produced remarkable evidence of unprecedented numbers of adults crossing 8km overland on foraging trips to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) and beyond - see monthly reports and **page 53**.

March Report

Summary of the month

The first migrant of the year was a male **Northern Wheatear** on 15th followed by a **Manx Shearwater** and an **Osprey** on 16th, 2 **White Wagtail** on 23rd with 5 on 27th, and 2 **Sandwich Tern** + 2 **Sand Martin** on 29th.

An adult **White-tailed Eagle** soaring over the point on 11th was being chased by Herring Gulls and was seen by many of the staff at Stirling University Marine Research Laboratory (Simon Barnett *et al*). Three **Iceland Gulls** were in the area; an adult >S, very close to MSBO on 21st, a 2CY was regular by Machrihanish Holiday Park and a 2CY was resting on a pontoon by Campbeltown Harbour on 13th.

Five adult **Whooper Swans** by Drumlemble on 14th - 30th were joined by a **Black Swan** 29th-30th and a **Pink-footed Goose** was nearby on 30th.

Counts of **Common Shelduck** rose from 8 on 6th to 24 by 25th. From 9th, a pair regularly visited a traditional nest site (rock crevice) ca. 40m from MSBO. Three **Eurasian Teal** (2 males and a female) appeared on 12th then two **Eurasian Wigeon** (a male and female) on 10th. Max count of **Common Goldeneye** was 11 on 5th. A male **Common Scoter** >S on 16th, 2 males followed on 24th and male and a female >S on 29th. The max count of **Common Eider** was 61 on 5th. A few immatures **Red-throated Diver** (1-3) were regular in the bay and an adult >N on 16th. Max counts of **Great Northern Diver** were 10 on 8th, 14 on 12th and 20+ on 24th. None were seen in flight.



Male Eurasian Teal 12th March

Overland crossings (8km) of adults from Campbeltown Loch (Clyde) > Machrihanish (Atlantic). Single adults on 17th and 21st (Charlie Robertson / Eddie Maguire). As usual, **Gannets** were scarce during early March off MSBO. Table 1 shows the number of hours of seawatching and cumulative total of adults passing >S during each weekly period of the month. Numbers peaked during the third week but tailed off during a period of high pressure from 25th.

Table 1.

Dates	1 st – 7 th	8 th – 14 th	15 th – 21 st	22 nd – 28 th	Totals
No. hours	40	38	44	41	163
No. birds	26	45	231	120	422

The top count was 70 / 5hrs on 20th.

A female **Hen Harrier** was hunting over Lossit Park on 9th, single **Sparrowhawks** were seen on 5th, 16th, 19th and 25th, adult **Peregrine Falcons** were over the point and adjacent uplands on 3rd, 4th, 9th and 21st and a **Common Kestrel** was hunting around Machrihanish Holiday Park on 19th (Martin Conway).

A flock of 18 migrant **Oystercatcher** >S on 9th and there was a flock of 130 **Golden Plover** at Strath Farm (the Laggan). **Purple Sandpipers** were regular in small numbers; max count was 7 on 6th.

A flock of 57 **Sanderling** passed >S on 14th and 29 were at Machrihanish Bay on 25th.

A small movement of **Black-legged Kittiwake** occurred on 20th with 240 passing >S / 5hrs. Only 17 2CY birds were noted.

here was a light passage of **Lesser Black-backed Gull** >N most days: max counts were 22 on 11th and 63 >N / 5hrs on 23rd. An adult **Iceland Gull** passed >S very close to MSBO on 21st, a 2CY was regular by the Machrihanish Holiday Park and a sleepy-looking 2CY was resting on a pontoon by Campbeltown Harbour on 13th. This bird was reported regularly by many local folk during the month.

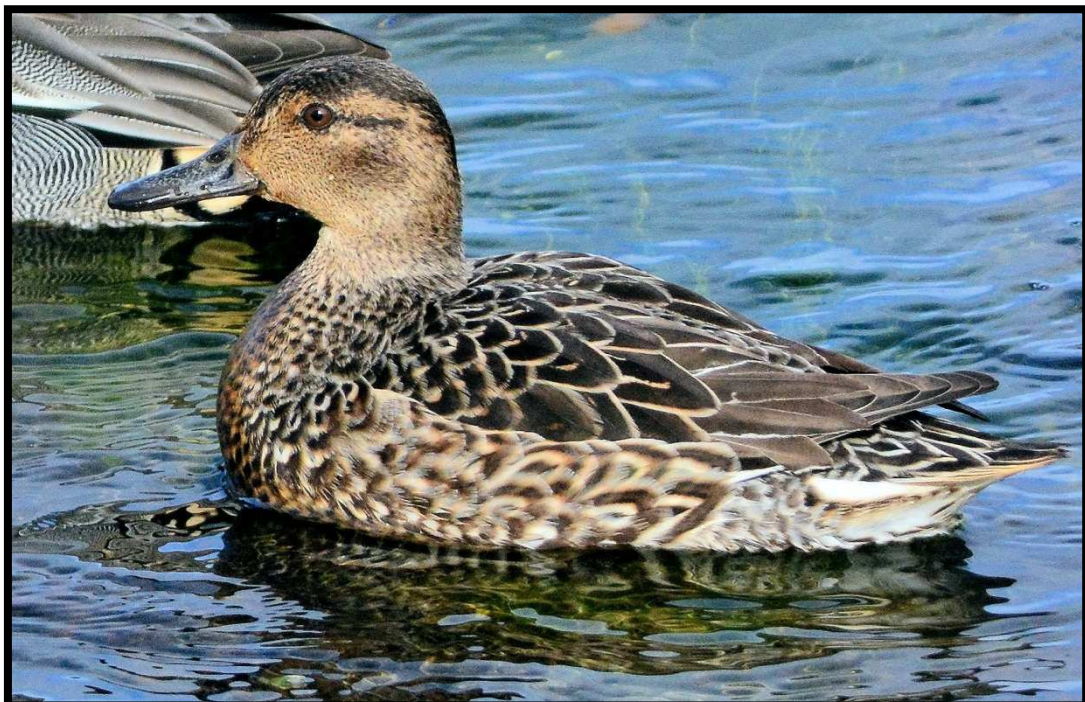
Kilkivan Quarry at Machrihanish holds the largest **Western Jackdaw** colony in Argyll. There was a remarkable flying display of 500+ over the quarry on 15th.

An estimated 2,000 **Common Starling** were roaming around the Laggan throughout the month.

Feeding station counts of **Twite** included 5 on 9th - 11th, 2 on 12th – 23rd, 7 on 24th and 15 on 25th.

At Campbeltown, 12 **Yellowhammer** were visiting a ground feeding station at 98 Davaar Avenue all month (Esther / Graham Thompson *pers. comm.*) and at Southend 8-10 birds were also visiting a garden all month (Roy / Suzie Bennet *pers. comm.*).).

This is a well above average showing for this declining farmland species.



Female Eurasian Teal 12th March

April Report

Summary of the month

The Argyll Bird Club organised a census of all Rookeries in Argyll this spring. The last complete county census took place in **1975** when **3,217** nests were found in **78** rookeries. While the population in Scotland has subsequently declined, localised increases have occurred in parts of Argyll, so it is important to check what is happening to the whole population (David Jardine pers. comm.).

Eddie Maguire and Rab Morton completed the census for south Kintyre during 14th – 18th April (before leaf-burst). The total number of active rookeries located was **26** with a total of **1,471** nests. **Table 3** and **figure 1** provide a summary of the data and both reveal the changing fortunes of this farmland specialist at all Kintyre rookeries since April 1989.

Table 2.

Year	No. Rookeries	No. nests
Kintyre 1989	24	1,397
Kintyre 1996	41	2,514
S Kintyre 2017	26	1,471

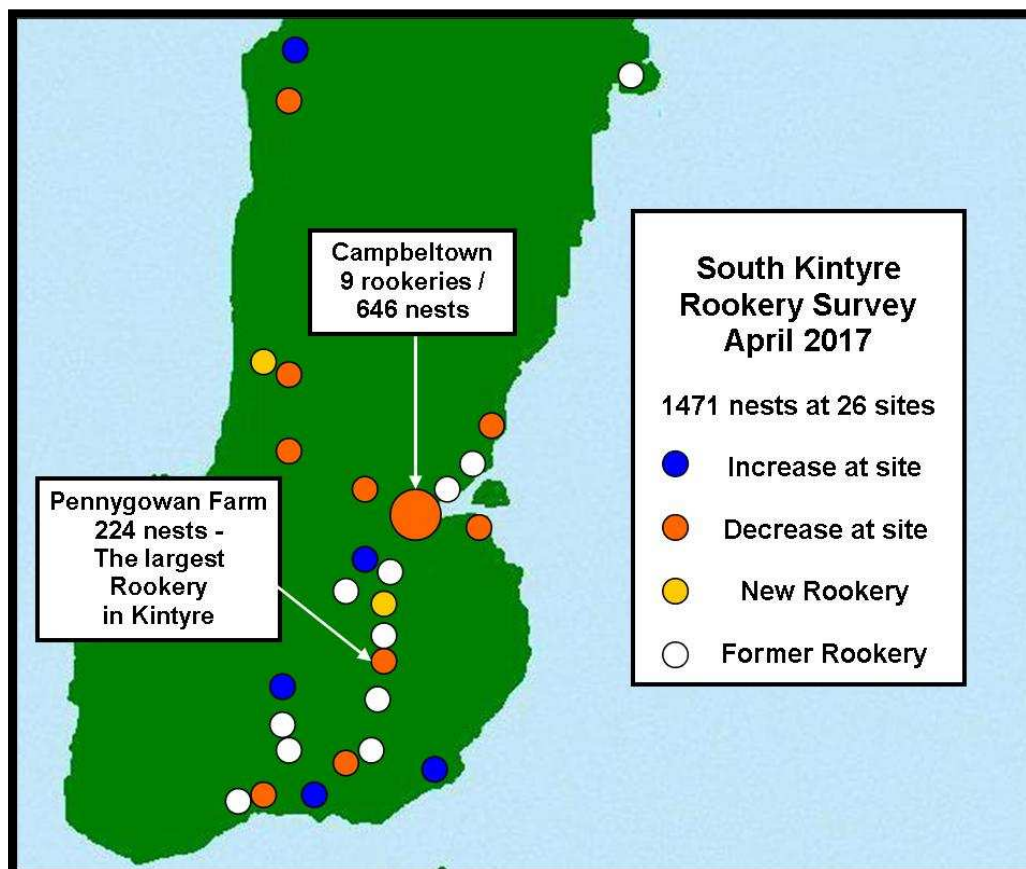


Figure 1. Locations of all known rookeries in south Kintyre from 1989 with an indication of current status.

Spring is often quiet over the sea but birding during April was still intermittingly rewarding. Excitement this month was centred on the discovery of not one, but two **Rock Pipits** showing strong plumage features of the Scandinavian race *littoralis* in transition to summer plumage. The birds were photographed on 2nd and 8th.

These records were accepted by Argyll Bird Records Committee and become the 4th and 5th occurrences of this race for the county.

The second accepted county record was one photographed at MSBO on 18th May 2014.



Rock Pipit (Scandinavian race *littoralis*) MSBO 8th April

A remarkable concentration of **Moorhen** occurred at Westport Marsh on 4th. Nine birds were assembled on a grassy area at the west corner of the marsh and many were displaying – the scene was reminiscent of a Black Grouse lek!

This is the highest number of this species seen at a single location by Eddie Maguire in 45 years of birding in Kintyre.

The first **Whimbrel** arrived on 12th (3) followed by a decent northerly passage / presence on 12 dates later with one on 13th, 5 on 15th, 8 on 16th, at least 20 on 19th, 7 on 20th, 12 on 21st, 6 on 24th, 11 on 25th, one 26th – 29th and 6 on 30th.

Sandwich Tern were regularly on show with an almost daily presence; best counts were 9 on 15th, 11 on 16th, 14 on 20th, 10 on 21st, 16 on 26th, 8 on 27th – 28th and 10 on 30th.

A **Stock Dove** was seen well at Killellan Park, south Kintyre on 14th (Eddie Maguire / Rab Morton). This is a very rare bird here now.

A boat trip around Sanda Island on 2nd to survey the number of **Black Guillemots** found a total of **181** birds (Rab Morton pers. comm.).

A well-travelled MSBO colour ringed **Twite** has, so far, clocked up **1,788km** on journeys from Machrihanish to NE Wales and back!

Around 70 **Goldfinch** were trapped / ringed this month and a **French** ringed bird was controlled (details pending).

There was, as usual, a fine passage of **White Wagtail** on 25 dates with an impressive presence of at least **50** birds on 22nd.



White Wagtail 4th April

Surveillance of **Northern Gannet** crossing 8km overland from Campbeltown Loch (Clyde) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) continued; a total of **23** adults crossed on 12 dates during April including 5 on 3rd.

Table 3. Date, number of birds crossing overland and wind direction.

Date	No. Adults	Wind direction
1 st	1	E
3 rd	5	S
5 th	2	NW
7 th	1	NW
9 th	1	W
11 th	3	W
12 th	1	NW
13 th	3	NW
14 th	3	NW
27 th	1	NW
28 th	1	W
29 th	1	S
Total	23	

A total of **25** adults crossed overland on **14** dates during March (2) and April (23).

May Report

Summary of the Month



Little Egret - a breeding-plumaged adult 22nd May

Argyll Bird Club Rookery Census 2017 – The Complete Kintyre Data

Argyll Bird Club rookery census data for N Kintyre has been received (David Jardine *pers. comm.*).

All known rookeries (4) were active and a new one was located resulting in 5 rookeries with a total of **200** nests.

The number of active rookeries located in Kintyre during spring 2017 now stands at **31** and these contained a total of **1,671** nests.

Northern Gannet crossing Kintyre

From March this year, surveillance was resumed at Campbeltown Loch (Clyde waters) and MSBO (Atlantic) to determine the numbers of **Northern Gannet** crossing 8km overland as the month's progress.

With the breeding season now well underway at the Ailsa Craig colony, overland transit by adults flying west to gain access to foraging grounds off the west coast of Kintyre increased significantly from a meagre 25 birds during March – April to an impressive total of **129** birds on **22** days this month with peaks of **18** on 12th and **21** (record day total) passing west on 16th.

Table 4. Date / number of adults crossing / wind direction and observers.

May	Number of Adults	Wind direction / strength	Observers
2 nd	4	NE 3 - 4	CR/EM/RM/IM/DR/DG
3 rd	6	NE 3 - 4	CR/EM
6 th	2	NE 3 - 4	CR/EM
8 th	5	NE 2 - 3	CR/EM
9 th	1	SW 2	EM
10 th	9	Variable 1	CR/EM/RM
11 th	8	NE 3	CR/EM
12 th	18	NE 2 - 3	CR/EM
13 th	6	SW 2 - 4	CR/EM
14 th	2	SW 2 - 3	CR/EM
16 th	21	SW 2 - 3	CR/EM
17 th	7	S 3	CR/EM
18 th	1	W 2 - 3	CR/EM
19 th	6	Variable 1	CR/EM
20 th	1	SW - 2	CR/EM
21 st	6	S - 5	CR/EM
26 th	4	Variable 1 - 3	CR/EM
27 th	4	Variable 1 - 2	CR/EM
28 th	1	NW 2	CR/EM
29 th	1	ENE 2 - 3	CR/EM
30 th	14	WNW 4	CR/EM
31 st	2	E 3	CR/EM
22 days	129 birds		

Summary...

2017. From March to May a total of **154** adult **Northern Gannet** crossed overland on **52 / 86** days of surveillance.

Gannets cross west over Kintyre at varying heights.

Charlie Robertson, eloquent as ever, recently described one that was so high over Campbeltown that it was...*'Likely conversing with angels'*.

Another classic description re high fliers is...*'Virtually in the gods'*.

However, his latest and now certainly principal quote on high fliers concerned two birds that left together for the west on 31st May...*'They were more likely en-route for the Sea of Tranquillity than the Atlantic.'*

Charlie and MSBO wardens have noted that they also fly west, low over the town, often just over roof top height, to take advantage of this now well-defined 8km shortcut to foraging grounds in the Atlantic.



Adult Northern Gannet 25th May

Migrants at MSBO during May...

An adult **Little Egret** in breeding plumage arrived in-off-sea on 22nd; it came from the direction of Islay / Jura and pitched down briefly right in front of MSBO.

It appears likely that this is the individual that was at Loch Gruinart, Islay the previous evening (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

There was an excellent showing of some regular migrants this month.

There were peaks of 42 **Whimbrel** on 2nd, 120 **Sanderling** and 36 **White Wagtail** on 13th and 66 **Sandwich Tern** on 14th.

A 2CY **Iceland Gull** was present most days 16th – 31st.

A pair of **Garganey** on a small pool at Strath Farm (The Laggan) on 25th was a first-rate find (Malcolm Blanchflower).

A male **Yellow Wagtail** was identified by an experienced observer near MSBO on 16th (Bob Relph). *The record was accepted by Argyll Bird Records Committee.*

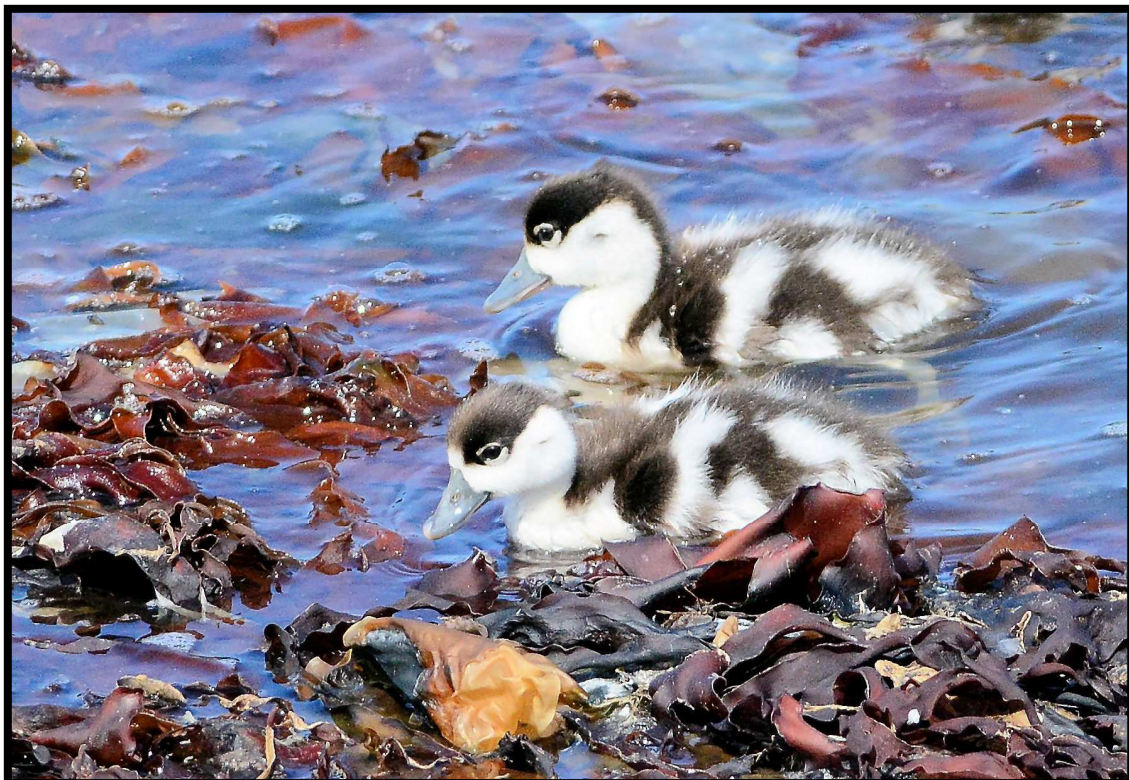
Also, it was motivating to have photographic records of an early **Storm Petrel** on 16th and late records of **Common Goldeneye** on 21st along with **Red Knot** and **Black-tailed Godwit** on 27th.

At least 6 pairs of **Common Shelduck** are in the area and females were noted hanging around rabbit burrows and also a rock pile by MSBO on 9th and 14th.

Five broods totalling 26 ducklings have appeared so far; the first was b/9 on 22nd followed by b/3 on 25th, b/5 on 27th, b/6 on 28th and another b/3 on 30th. Mean brood size = 5.2 (In May 2016 there was 5 broods / 33 ducklings – mean brood size = 6.6).



Adult Little Egret 22nd May



'Shelducklings' 26th May

A female **Common Eider** appeared with a b/5 on 18th then another with a b/3 on 27th. The first brood of **Ringed Plover** hatched on 15th and a nest with eggs was located on 19th.

There was small numbers of **Ruddy Turnstone** around on 17 dates with a peak count of 27 on 25th.

A flock of 70 **Sanderling** arrived on 9th and rested on the shore for most of the day. Flocks on the shore ranged from 10 to 120 (13th) on 17 dates later.



A Sanderling in transition to breeding plumage 27th May

Flocks of **Dunlin** including 14 on 1st were the first seen here this year. Numbers ranging from 1 to 65 (13th) were present on 21 dates later.

The first **Red Knot** recorded at MSBO this year was 3, still in winter plumage, on 13th. Nine passed >N on 19th and a bird in non-breeding plumage was present all day on 27th.

Whimbrel appeared on 19 dates with a peak count of 42 on 2nd.

The only record of **Black-tailed Godwit** was a single late bird on 27th.

Another 2CY **Iceland Gull** was in the Machrihanish area from 16th – 31st and was photographed at MSBO on 19th, 22nd and 31st.

A loose flock of 38 **Sandwich Tern** rested on the shore on 2nd. This species was present on 25 dates with a peak of 22 on the shore on 21st. However, a notable passage occurred during the afternoon of 14th when a total of 66 >N / 2hrs during / after light showers.

There was a late arrival of **Arctic Tern** this year with first bird on 8th. At least 12 were ashore at Big Scone Island colony 23rd – 31st.

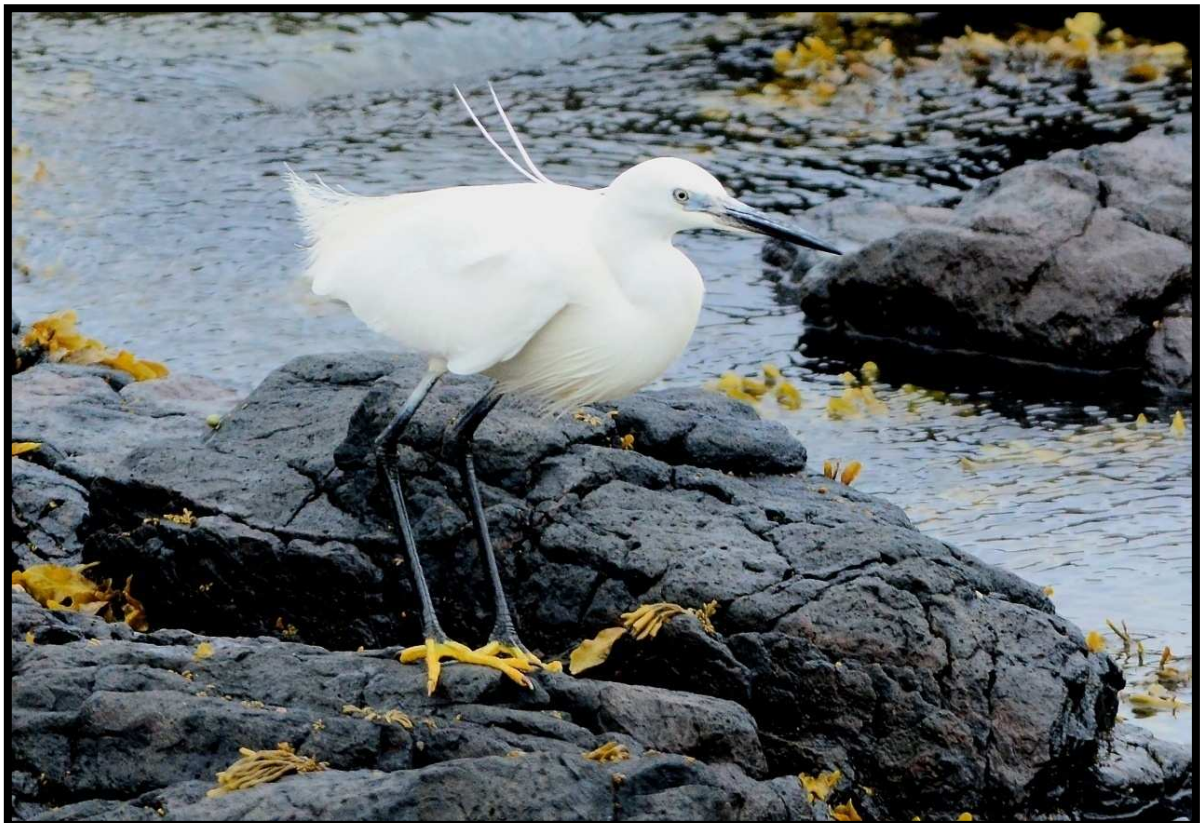
Ringed Birds...

Bob Furness (Argyll Bird Cub) ringed a **Goldfinch** at Cnoc, Loch Lomond (Argyll and Bute) on 17th April 2017 and this individual was controlled at MSBO on 1st May - a movement of **109km SW** in **14** days!

A ringed **Oystercatcher** appeared just outside MSBO on 11th May. The local breeding pair took exception to the presence of this intruder on their territory and as they '*pleaded*' with it to move on the ring was photographed at many different angles many times; when pieced together the ring number = **FH45411**.

The bird was ringed on **16th October 2011** at Penmon Quarry, Beaumaris, Isle of Anglesey, UK.

Duration: 2034 days. Distance: 260 km. Direction: 335 deg (NNW).



Adult Little Egret 22nd May

June Report

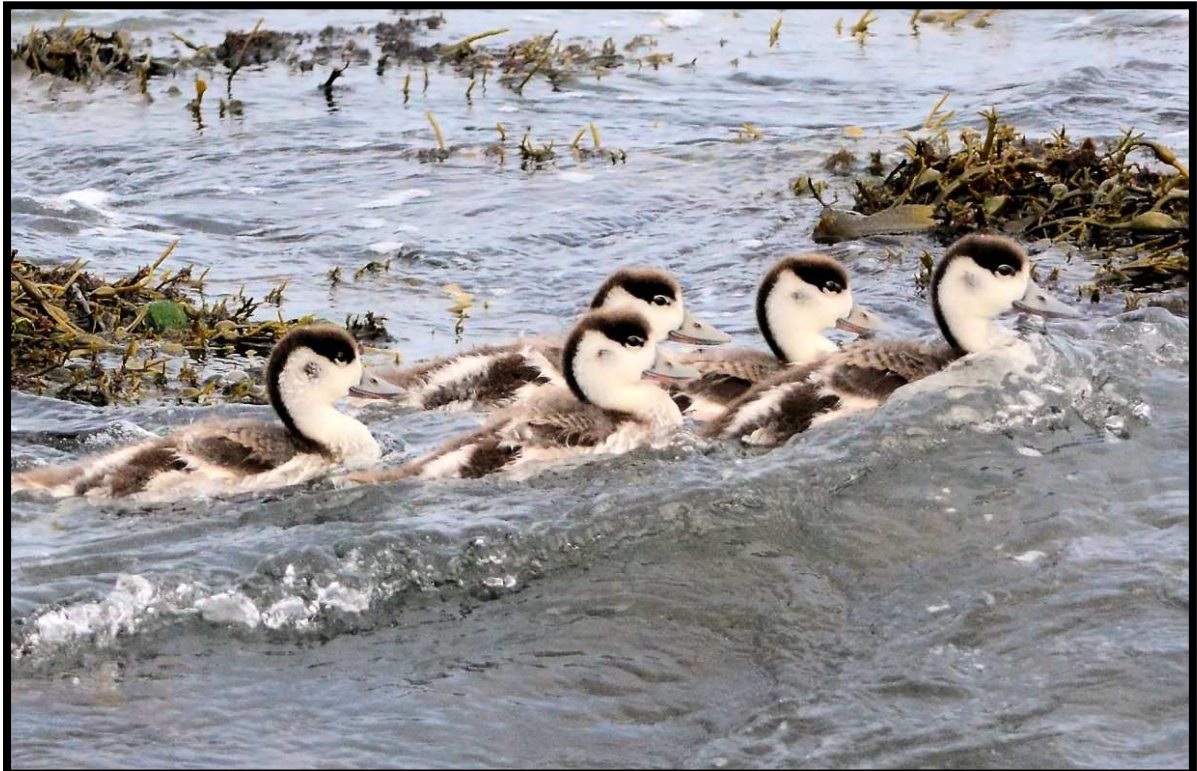
Summary of the month

Bird of the year was a fly-by **Sooty Tern** (Tropics) photographed at 11:04hrs on 2nd June. This is a new species for Argyll and the third Scottish record (for a full account of the occurrence of this vagrant **see page 51**).

Common Shelduck broods along with dates of hatching included b/9 on 4th, b/12 on 5th and b/8 on 13th.

May / June productivity was 8 broods / 55 ducklings and mean brood size was 6.8.

2016. *Statistics for May / June show 6 broods with a total of 37 ducklings; mean brood size was 6.1.*



'Shelducklings' 23rd June

Common Eider broods / dates of hatching follow; b/5 on 4th, b/2 on 10th, b/4 on 21st and another b/4 on 23rd.

May / June productivity was 6 broods / 23 ducklings and mean brood size was 3.8.

2016. *Statistics for May / June was much better with 10 broods / 35 ducklings; mean brood size was 3.5.*

A flock of 19 **Common Scoter** passed >S on 13th and 5 males rested on the sea on 16th.

Starting in March this year, surveillance of **Northern Gannet** was resumed at Campbeltown Loch (Clyde waters) and MSBO (Atlantic) to determine the numbers of **Northern Gannets** crossing 8km overland as the month's progress.

During June **126** adults crossed over on **24 / 30 days** of surveillance.

The largest gathering off MSBO this year was ca. 200 foraging around the point on 11th. On 12th, a total of 570 passed >S / 8hrs in a WNW force 5.

Table 5. Date / number of adults crossing / wind direction and observers.

June	Number of Adults	Wind direction & strength	Observers
2 nd	2	W 1 - 2	CR/EM
3 rd	2	W 2 - 3	CR
5 th	2	W 2	CR
6 th	4	NW 5	CR/EM
7 th	1	W 2 - 3	CR/EM
8 th	2	SW 3	CR
9 th	1	W 2	CR
10 th	4	S4	CR/EM
11 th	11	SW 4 - 5	CR
12 th	6	WNW 5	CR/EM
13 th	7	S 2	CR/EM
14 th	1	S 5	CR
15 th	4	SW 2	CR/EM/IM/DR/DG
16 th	1	SW 1 - 2	CR
17 th	6	SW 2 - 3	CR/EM
18 th	4	Variable 1 - 2	CR
19 th	1	Variable 1 - 2	CR/EM
20 th	1	N 2	CR/EM
21 st	2	E 3	CR
22 nd	24	W 2 - 3	CR/EM
23 rd	21	WNW 4	CR/EM
24 th	9	WNW 4 - 5	CR/EM
25 th	6	WNW 4	CR/EM
30 th	4	N3	CR
24 days	126 adults		

Summary...

From March to June 2017 a total of **282** adult Northern Gannets crossed overland on **76 / 116** days of surveillance.

MSBO voluntary assistant Charlie Robertson was the key man at Campbeltown and witnessed an unprecedented record flock of **10** adults '*confidently vanishing high to the west*' on 23rd June.

Four **European Storm-Petrels** were well offshore on 6th foraging in a relatively small area along with some 2CY Black-legged Kittiwakes. Two passed >S at 07:42hrs on 12th.

Twelve **Sanderlings** were present on 1st then 50+ on 2nd - 3rd, 42 on 4th, 11 on 5th and 22 on 6th. Small numbers of **Dunlin** appeared early in the month with 3 on 1st, 7 on 3rd and one on 4th.

A single **Whimbrel** was seen on 22nd and 25th.

The 2CY **Iceland Gull** that arrived on 16th May was present daily 1st – 30th. **Sandwich Tern** showed up daily in small numbers; max counts were 10 on 19th, and 8 on 23rd.

An adult **Little Tern** on 22nd was by the **Arctic Tern** colony (a rare June record at MSBO).

A total of 940 **Razorbill / Common Guillemot** passed >S / 8hrs on 12th. The vast majority were Guillemots. The first **Guillemot** seen carrying a food item this year passed >S on 18th then many were seen doing this daily (indicates mid June as start of hatching period at colonies south of MSBO).

The first bird seen carrying food south in 2016 was on 17th June and in 2015 it was 15th June.

A **Humming-bird Hawk Moth** was a brief but welcome visitor to the MSBO garden on 26th.



Sandwich Terns 19th June



Adult Arctic Tern en-route for Big Scone Island colony 11th June



Northern Wheatear (fledgling) 12th June

July Report

Surveillance of **Northern Gannet** continued at Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) to establish the numbers of adult Gannets flying 8km over Kintyre to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic).

Table 6. Date / number of adults crossing overland and wind direction.

July	Number of Adults	Wind direction & strength
1 st	8	SW 2 - 3
2 nd	2	SW 2
3 rd	7	SSW 2
4 th	10	ESE 3 – calm pm
5 th	5	Variable 1 - 2
6 th	7	Variable 1
7 th	17	SW 2
8 th	3	SW 1
9 th	3	WSW 2 - 3
10 th	10	WNW 2 - 3
11 th	3	SW 2
12 th	11	WNW 1 - 2
13 th	6	W 2
14 th	8	NW 3 – 4 / SE 2
15 th	13	WSW 4 - 5
16 th	14	NW 5
17 th	10	W 2 - 3
18 th	5	ENE 4
19 th	8	ENE 4 / NW 4
20 th	19	WNW 1 – calm
21 st	0	Rain / poor vis.
22 nd	1	E 5 - 6
23 rd	13	Variable 1 - calm
24 th	8	W 4- 5
25 th	15	W 2
26 th	6	S 4 / W 4
27 th	2	WSW 3
28 th	5	SW 2 - 4
29 th	31	SW 3
30 th	6	SW 3
31 st	14	SW 3 - 4
Total =	274 birds	

Gannets on foraging trips to the Atlantic from Campbeltown Loch usually travel singly over the low-lying (The Laggan) and narrowest (8km waist) section of Kintyre. MSBO Assistant Warden Charlie Robertson reported a record flock of 12 adults flying exceptionally high to the west over Campbeltown on 29th on the same day we had a record one-day total of **31** birds.

Several smaller flocks crossing on other dates included 6 on 4th, 5 on 7th and 6 on 20th.

The July total of **274** birds is also the highest number seen crossing during any month since this project was initiated in August 2016.

The latest birds noted crossing to the west during late evening was 3 shortly after 22:00hrs on 10th (CR / EM).

Summary of the Month

Red-throated Divers were regular in the bay on many dates; max was 5 on 13th. The first sign of passage was 2 >S on 28th.

A total of 31 **European Storm-Petrels** passed >S / 1hr during a brief period of poor visibility / light rain pm on 6th. Seven passed >S / 2hrs during period of poor visibility / light rain am on 9th.

Three **Peregrines** on 26th included an adult with 2 juveniles. A **Sparrowhawk** was present on 3 dates 25th – 30th.

A flock of **170** migrant **Oystercatchers** grounded by continuous rain on 21st likely included Icelandic birds. A total of **354** passed >S / 3hrs after rain stopped around 10:00hrs on 26th (the largest flock was ca. 150). Flocks totalling 88 >S am on 28th and 64 >S on 29th.

A well-known pair of **Ringed Plover** (female ringed) appeared with a second brood (b/3) on 27th.



Second brood; Ringed Plover chick 27th July

Six **Sanderling** >S on 9th were the first returning birds. Southerly passage totals later included ca. 40 on 15th, 9 on 20th, 26 on 26th and ca. 60 on 30th.

A total of **619 Dunlin** passed >S on 16 dates with a peak count of **110** on 26th.

A single **Ruddy Turnstone** on 9th was likely a summering bird.

A total of 55 (2 flocks / 38 and 17) >S on 28th, a flock of 22 >S on 29th and 12 were present on 30th.

The first 3 adult **Red Knot** passed >S on 8th and single adults >S on 26th and 30th.

There was a good passage of **Common Redshank**; a total of **375** passed >S on 10 dates and the peak count was **138** >S / 3hrs after rain stopped at 10:00hrs on 26th.

There was strong passage of **Common Sandpiper** from 2nd with a total of **160** passing >S on 16 dates and a peak count of 19 / 6hrs on 24th.

Single **Whimbrel** passed >S on 15th and 20th, two were resting on 25th then 5 >S on 26th, one on 28th and 3 on 29th.

Two **Common Greenshank** came in off the sea on 4th and flew east into Machrihanish Bay (the first MSBO record this year). One was resting on the shore on 5th and singles >S on 18th and 22nd.

A flock of 7 **Black-tailed Godwit** passed >S on 11th.



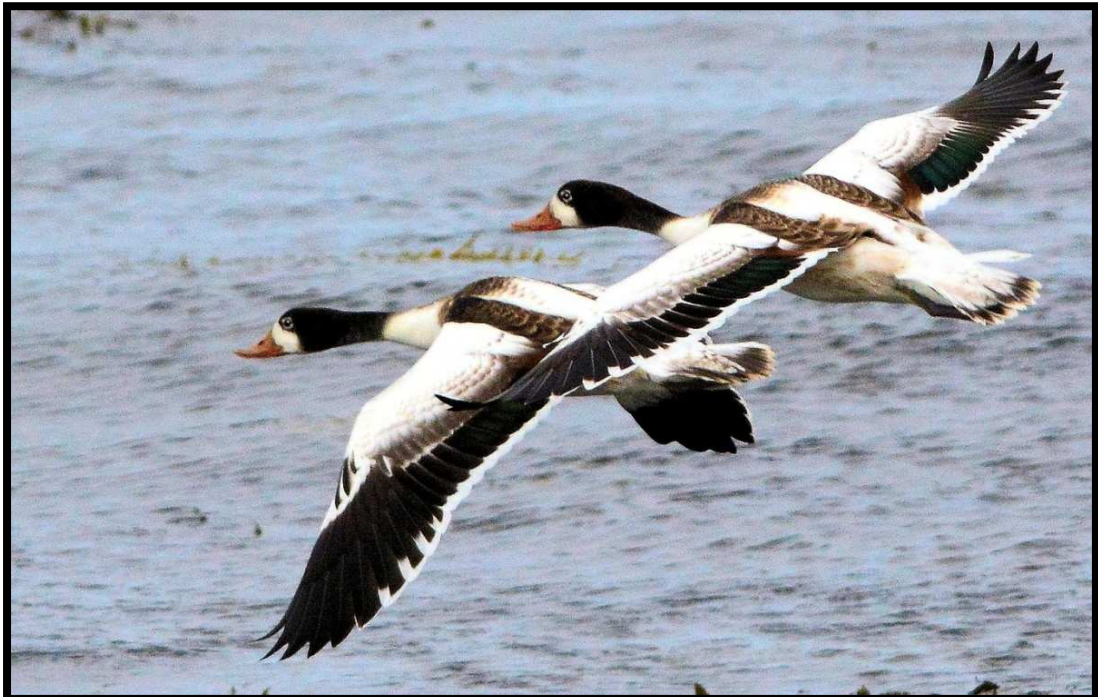
Whimbrel 26th July

The bleached / worn 2CY (first-summer) **Iceland Gull** that arrived on 16th May was present daily 1st – 31st. This individual has now spent 77 days at Machrihanish.

Three adult **Little Terns** were off-passage on 18th.

A total of 41 **Sandwich Tern** passed >N / 3hrs on 5th. An adult with the first juvenile of the year in tow flew in from the west on 6th (likely a rapid post-breeding dispersal from a colony in nearby N Ireland). Two juveniles were present on 11th then singles were seen resting on the shore 14th - 16th. Two adults on 20th, one on 24th, 2 on 27th, 3 including a juvenile >S on 28th and adult and a juvenile were present 30th – 31st.

Three **Arctic Tern** chicks were ringed on 5th at the Big Scone Island colony (Rab Morton). A 2CY was present by the colony 17th – 18th.



Juvenile Common Shelducks 26th July



A dry Otter on 20th July revealing its true colours

August Report

Summary of the Month

Surveillance continued at Campbeltown Harbour (Charlie Robertson) to establish the numbers of adult **Northern Gannets** flying 8km W over Kintyre for the Atlantic.

Table 7. Date / number of adults crossing overland and wind direction. N/Obs = No Observations. 0 = No Gannets crossed the peninsula during an observation period.

August	Number of Adults	Wind direction & strength
1 st	3	W 2 - 3
2 nd	2	E 3 - 4
3 rd	3	W 2 - 3
4 th	4	NW 4 -5
5 th	2	NW 2 - 3
6 th	N/Obs	-
7 th	N/Obs	-
8 th	N/Obs	-
9 th	N/Obs	-
10 th	5	WSW 3
11 th	N/Obs	-
12 th	N/Obs	-
13 th	N/Obs	-
14 th	3	SW 3 - 4
15 th	1	SE 5
16 th	4	SW 4
17 th	4	SW 5
18 th	23	SW 4
19 th	50	WNW 5 - 6
20 th	4	E 1 - 2
21 st	0	E 3
22 nd	21	E 3
23 rd	5	SW 2
24 th	15	S 3
25 th	31	SW 2 - 3
26 th	26	SW 1 - 2
27 th	17	W 1 - 2
28 th	33	WNW 4
29 th	49	WNW 3
30 th	65	WNW 2 - 3
31 st	38	WNW 2 - 3
24 dates	408	

August was a record-breaking month for **Northern Gannet** crossing Kintyre; just over **400** birds crossed over and around half of these (197) crossed on only 5 dates when the wind direction was WNW (force 2 - 6).

The largest flocks seen crossing this month included 10 on 19th and 10 on 30th. Also, the record one-day total of birds crossing was well crushed when a remarkable total of **65** crossed between 14:22 – 20:22hrs on 30th.

On this date Charlie noted... *'The Gannets were queuing up to get over Campbeltown from the harbour in a WNW f6 and with continuous deep-wingbeats they all fled to the west.'*

Table 8.

Monthly totals of adult **Northern Gannet** flying 8km overland on foraging trips from Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish (Atlantic) during March – August.

2017	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Monthly totals	2	23	131	126	274	408
Grand total	2	25	156	282	556	964

There was a light southerly passage of **Red-throated Diver** with one on 4th, 14 / 5hrs on 14th, 2 on 18th, 6 on 19th and 2 on 26th. Fewer **Manx Shearwater** were noted on passage with just 280 >S / 6hrs on 4th and 740 >S / 6hrs on 19th.

Female/immature-type **Hen Harriers** were seen at Cour, NE Kintyre on 2nd (Leslie / Andy Griffiths *pers. comm.*) and near MSBO on 25th. Males were also seen at Bleachfield on 21st (Alistair Mitchell *pers. comm.*) and Bellochantuy on 27th (Yvette / Idris Blume *pers. comm.*). Juvenile **Peregrine Falcons** appeared on 4th and 20th and an adult was at Strath Farm (The Laggan) on 20th.

Sparrowhawks were hunting along the shore on 10th, 15th and daily 28th – 31st.



Sparrowhawk 29th August

On 1st, regular flocks of **Oystercatcher** >S totalled **530** / 6hrs (largest flock **270**). Passage total for the month was **1,142** >S on 7 dates with another high count of **190** >S / 6hrs on 4th.

Flocks of **Ringed Plover** >S included 12 on 7th, 8 on 13th, 12 on 14th, 10 on 18th and 30 on 25th. Four flocks of **Sanderling** totalling 44 >S on 2nd. Passage total for the month was **233** >S on 7 dates and peak count was 70+ >S on 25th.

A total of 70 **Dunlin** >S on 1st. Passage total for the month was **323** >S on 7 dates and peak count was three flocks totalling 80 >S on 14th. Ten **Ruddy Turnstone** >S on 7th with 18 >S on 25th and 4 were regular 29th – 31st.

Two **Red Knot** >S on 4th, one >S on 26th and 4 >S on 29th. One was inland at Strath Farm pool (The Laggan) on 20th. The southerly passage total of **Common Redshank** was **402** >S on 7 dates and the peak count was five flocks totalling **136** birds on 4th (largest flock ca. 70). A **Common Greenshank** >S on 3rd and, as usual, **Common Sandpiper** were rather scarce (main passage occurs in July) with only 7 >S on 3rd, 4 >S on 7th, one >S on 11th then none 12th – 31st. **Ruff** were inland at Strath Farm (The Laggan) on 20th (1) and 22nd (4). Flocks of **Whimbrel** >S included 8 on 1st, 2 on 4th, 3 on 7th and singles on 15th, 18th, 23rd and 31st. At Campbeltown on 26th, a flock of 10 >W high over the town (Rab Morton *pers. com.*).



Ruff at Strath Farm pool 22nd August

Seawatching was rather poor but picked up in part during periods of strong westerly winds with single **Great Skuas** >S on 18th and 19th, a pale morph adult **Pomarine Skua** >S on 19th and a dark adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 30th.

The first juvenile **Black-legged Kittiwake** of the year >S on 14th; southerly movements of this age category later included 6 on 18th and 20 on 19th.

The 2CY **Iceland Gull** was present to 3rd. This bird arrived at Machrihanish on 16th May and stayed for 80 days.

An adult and a juvenile **Sandwich Tern** were foraging offshore on 1st. Ten that were present on 3rd included 4 juveniles. Two adults with 2 juveniles were present on 10th, an adult and a juvenile on 12th-13th, none were seen 14th – 28th then an adult arrived on 29th.

Flocks of **Black-tailed Godwit** >S included 5 on 13th, one on 18th, a flock of 7 on 19th, a flock of 18 on 24th, 4 on 25th and one was off-passage on 26th.

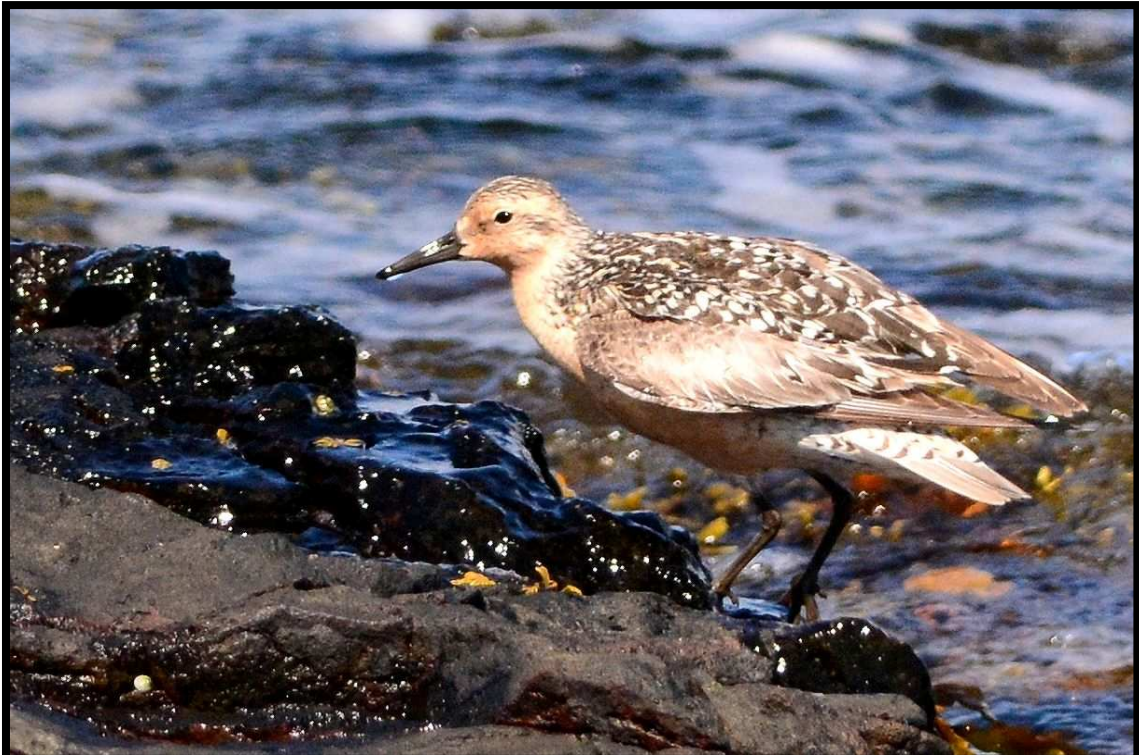
At Strath Farm pool there was one on 13th, 15 on 14th, 14 on 20th, **41** on 22nd and one on 26th.



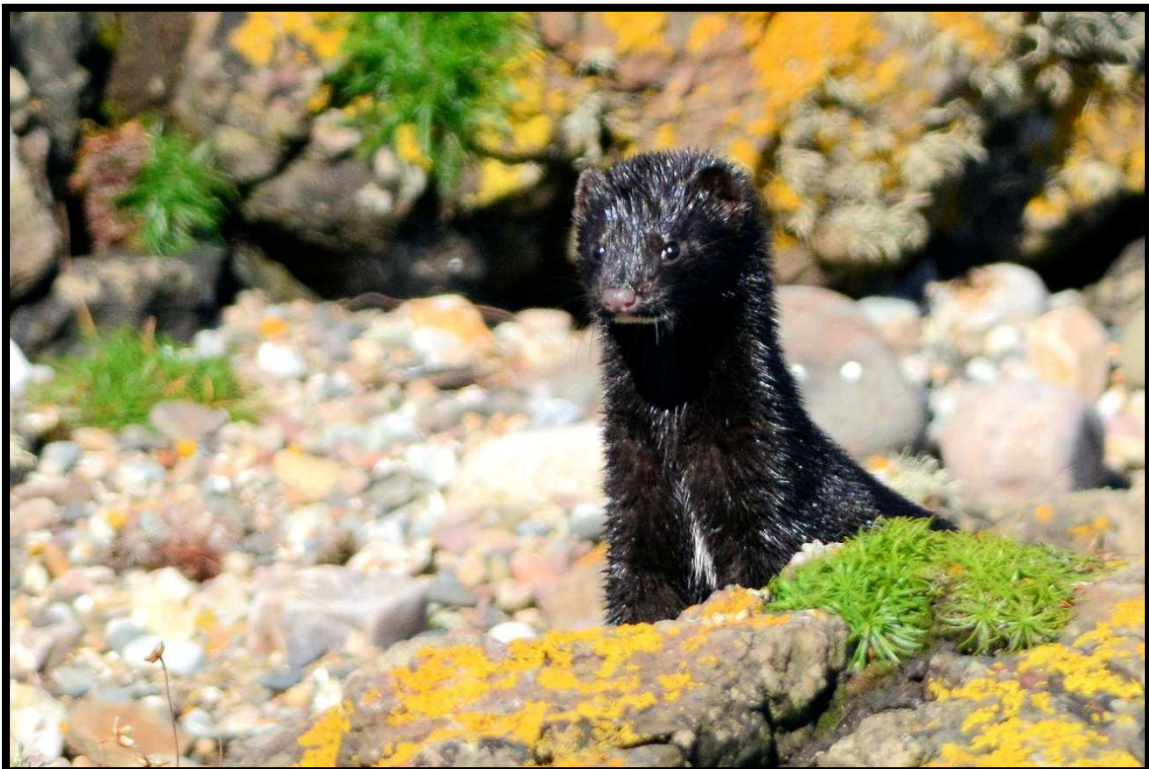
Black-tailed Godwits Strath Farm 14th August



Black-tailed Godwits 25th August



Red Knot 4th August



American Mink 12th August

September Report

Summary of the Month

September produced some notable species over the sea including a **Leach's Petrel**, a juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** and a juvenile **Sabine's Gull**.

A noisy flock of ca. 120 **Pink-footed Goose** came in off sea on 15th and continued >E over Machrihanish Links and a flock of ca. 200 >E over Campbeltown on 16th (Rab Morton *pers comm.*). At Strath Farm (The Laggan) 5 Hybrid **Canada x Barnacle Geese** were regular all month.

The following all >S; **Brent Goose** (pale-bellied) 4 on 8th, 2 >S on 11th and two flocks totalling 77 >S on 30th, a male **Eurasian Wigeon** on 17th, 2 **Northern Pintail** on 2nd, a flock of 8 **Gadwall** on 12th and 3 **Greater Scaup** on 13th.

Southerly movements of **Common Scoter** included 5 on 6th, 2 on 8th, 5 on 11th and 2 on 27th. The first male **Common Eider** seen in flight after flightless moult period (June – August) was seen on 6th.

Southerly passage of **Red-throated Diver** was respectable with a total of **84** >S on 11 dates and the peak count of **28** >S / 7hrs occurred in a NW f5 / squalls on 8th.

An immature **Great Northern Diver** >S on 20th. Southerly movements of **Manx Shearwater** included 110 / 2.5hrs am on 5th, ca. 600 / 4hrs on 6th, a total of 920 / 7hrs in a NW f5 / squalls on 8th and ca. 600 / 12hrs on 11th. Another poor autumn passage. A **Balearic Shearwater** >S on 6th was the first record off MSBO for several years and this has been attributed to a massive decline in **Manx Shearwater** foraging behaviour off MSBO during recent late summers and also dwindling numbers of this species on autumn passage through the area.

A **Leach's Petrel** >S on 11th was the first showing off MSBO this year (Eddie Maguire / Jarred Hadfield).



Leach's Petrel >S 11th September

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Report 2017

On 2nd, the number of adult **Northern Gannet** that crossed Kintyre this year exceeded **1,000** birds. Also, monthly and one-day record totals were truly smashed; the September total of birds crossing was an astonishing **491** and the monthly record one-day total was surpassed when **67** crossed on 7th; this total included a flock of **16** >W in almost V formation.

Table 9 includes the date / number of adults crossing overland / wind direction and period of crossings.

Sept	Number of Adults Crossing	Wind direction & strength	Times first / last birds crossed overland
1 st	33	WNW 2	10:45 – 20:10hrs
2 nd	40	SE 4	12:25 – 20:05hrs
3 rd	25	ESE3 / poor visibility	11:02 – 19:23hrs
4 th	12	SW 2 – 3 / poor visibility	13:20 – 19:39hrs
5 th	25	NW 4	12:02 – 19:35hrs
6 th	20	WNW 4 - 5	14:25 – 19:47hrs
7 th	67	W 3 – 4	11:35 – 19:08hrs
8 th	13	NW 5 / squalls	16:10 – 18:08hrs
9 th	18	NNW 3	12:56 – 18 50hrs
10 th	25	W 5	13:01 – 18:50hrs
11 th	1	NW 5	12:23hrs
12 th	5	WNW 3	12:53 – 14:07hrs
13 th	12	NW 4	11:30 – 18:20hrs
14 th	7	N 4	16:47 – 19:00hrs
15 th	32	N 4	11:55 – 18:24hrs
16 th	24	N 2	11:43 – 19:20hrs
17 th	10	Variable 1	13:59 – 19:10hrs
18 th	10	NW 1 - 2	11:51 – 16:35hrs
19 th	33	SW - 2	12:10 – 19:02hrs
20 th	13	NW 3 / poor visibility	11:25 – 16:10hrs
21 st	24	NW 2	12:31 – 17:51hrs
22 nd	1	S 5 / poor visibility am	14:15hrs
23 rd	2	SSE 5	18:08 – 18:17hrs
24 th	7	Variable 1	16:15 – 17:06hrs
25 th	1	Variable 1 / poor visibility	16:25hrs
26 th	5	S 4 - 5	12:21 – 16:21hrs
27 th	0	S 5 / poor vis. / cont. rain	–
28 th	4	S 4	11:43 – 12:45hrs
29 th	15	SSW 4	11:13 – 17:00hrs
30 th	7	SSW 3 - 4	11:58 – 18:18hrs
	491		

Table 10. Monthly totals of adult **Northern Gannet** flying 8km overland on foraging trips from Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) during March – September.

2017	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
Monthly totals	2	23	131	126	274	408	491
Cumulative	2	25	156	282	556	964	1,455

The best southerly movement of **Northern Gannet** off MSBO this month was **733** / 5hrs on 5th. The first 2 **Juveniles** >S on 11th followed by 3 on 12th and one on 19th.



Adult Northern Gannets 12th September

A fem/imm **Hen Harrier** came in off sea on 2nd and continued >E over Machrihanish Links for The Laggan. Fem/imms were at Homeston (Southend Rd) on 17th (Brian Morton *pers. comm.*) and Strath Farm (The Laggan) on 19th.

Sparrowhawk were logged on 8th, 12th, 17th, 21st and 28th.

An immature **Peregrine Falcon** appeared on 13th and an adult on 24th.

Southerly passage of **Ringed Plover** occurred with 12 on 4th, 20 on 7th, flock 45 on 17th and a total of 70 on 25th.

A **Grey Plover** >S on 6th and a flock of 140 **Golden Plover** >S on 15th.

Southerly passage of **Sanderling** included 4 on 8th, 20 on 10th, 6 on 11th, 60 on 12th, 10 on 13th, 40 on 25th, ca. 30 on 28th and 50+ on 30th.

Two **Curlew Sandpiper** >S on 17th and there was a light southerly passage of **Dunlin** with 18 on 7th, 30 on 8th, 40 on 10th, 30 on 17th, 6 on 19th and 18 on 23rd.

Southerly passage of **Ruddy Turnstone** was light too with only 2 on 4th, 6 on 8th and 36 on 29th. At Campbeltown New Quay there was 20 on 2nd, 22 on 18th and ca. 70 on 24th (Rab Morton *pers. comm.*).

Red Knot >S included 2 on 6th, 10 on 7th and 15 on 10th and the first **Purple Sandpiper** of the autumn (2) arrived on 29th.



Red Knot 6th September

A **Common Sandpiper** >S on 26th was the only record this month.

Bar-tailed Godwit remained scarce with only one >S on 6th and 8 >S on 12th.

Whimbrel are usually scarce autumn passage visitor and this status bode well with only singles >S on 3rd and 8th, 2 on 12th and 2 on 24th.

Two **Great Skua** >S on 6th (WNW f4-5) and a total of 5 singles >S on 8th (NW f5 / squalls). Others >S included 2 on 10th, 4 on 11th and one on 13th.

Two pale adult **Pomarine Skua** >S on 8th and one juvenile >S on 11th as did 2 juvenile **Arctic Skua**.

A juvenile * **Long-tailed Skua** – a very scarce mainly autumn passage visitor - was photographed >S on 11th (Eddie Maguire / Jarred Hadfield).

* This record was accepted by **Argyll Bird Records Committee**.

A juvenile **Sabine's Gull** (High Arctic Canada) was photographed >S at 15:11hrs on 8th in a NW f5 / squalls.



A rare fly-by - Sabine's Gull (juvenile) >S off MSBO 15:11hrs on 8th September

A total of 780 **Black-legged Kittiwake** >S / 5hrs in a WNW f5-6 on 6th. Ageing samples of many small flocks (38) revealed that the majority (78%) were juveniles. A total of **1,200** >S / 7hrs in a WNW f5 / squalls on 8th. Interestingly, ageing samples (44) totalling 310 birds revealed that only 97/310 were juveniles (around 30%). A total of ca. 700 >S / 12hrs on 11th.

The 2CY **Iceland Gull** that has been in the area since 16th May reappeared by MSBO on 12th (see May – August Reports) and was regular 19th - 29th. Another 2CY appeared on 25th and both were photographed in the same field by MSBO.

An adult and juvenile **Sandwich Tern** appeared on 3rd and 5 >S on 11th. There was a single adult **Arctic Tern** on 3rd and 8th then 12 >S (mainly juveniles) on 11th.

Six **White Wagtail** were present on 2nd then there was 4 on 4th, 7 on 8th and 2 on 16th. Eight arrived on the point together on 17th. Mainly ones and twos daily later with max counts of 5 on 22nd and 7 on 30th. A few **Northern Wheatear** appeared this month including 2 on 20th and singles daily 22nd – 30th. A flock of ca. 50 **Goldfinch** was reported at Machrihanish village on 21st (Pip Ashley *pers. comm.*). **Twite** were very scarce early month with only 4 seen by 6th. 20 >S on 21st then 25 at MSBO feeding station on 30th.

October Report

Summary of the Month

Two adults **Whooper Swan** came in off sea on 3rd, 7 >S on 17th and a flock of 17 >S on 20th. At Strath Farm (The Laggan) there was an adult on 3rd with **80** there on 19th

- 20th then **170** 21st - 22nd and 130 on 25th. Next day (26th) the number of birds rose to **211** but dropped to 105 on 27th – 31st.

A flock of 22 **Brent Geese** (pale-bellied) >S on 2nd, one adult >S on 5th, 3 >S on 16th, 2 >S on 17th, 4 were on the shore 19th – 22nd then 6 on 25th. Ten >S on 26th while 4 remained on the shore.



Pale-bellied Brent Geese on passage 26th October

A **Barnacle Goose** >S on 3rd was the first appearance this autumn. Flock 8 >S on 5th, 3 >N on 20th and 2 >S on 22nd. At Strath Farm a flock of 20 **Pink-footed Geese** >E on 19th.

Several flocks of **Eurasian Wigeon** totalling 18 >S on 22nd and 5 >S on 29th. At Strath Farm: 110 on flood 23rd with 127 there on 26th.

Four **Northern Pintail** >S on 2nd, 3 >S on 14th and one was at Strath Farm (The Laggan) on 10th. Seven **Gadwall** >S on 17th, a **Shoveler** was at Strath Farm 23rd - 26th and 10 **Greater Scaup** >S on 2nd.

A fem/imm type **Long-tailed Duck** >S on 17th, an adult male was in with the **Common Eiders** on 27th and a first-winter was photographed at Kennacraig on 22nd (Jim Dickson *pers comm.*).

Three **Common Scoter** >S on 4th and 2 singles >S on 22nd. Southerly passage of **Red-throated Diver** included 2 on 1st, **26** / 8hrs on 2nd (NW gale event), 7 on 3rd, 9 on 5th, one on 10th, 5 on 14th, **17** / 5hrs on 15th, 9 / 7hrs on 17th, 3 on 18th, 4 on 22nd and singles on 23rd and 30th.

Summary of October passage; a total of **85** >S on 11 dates.

Summary of September / October passage; a total of **169** >S on 22 dates.

Southerly passage of **Great Northern Diver** included one on 15th, 21 / 7hrs on 17th, one on 19th, 11 / 5hrs on 22nd, 2 on 26th and one on 31st.

A grand total of **65 Leach's Petrel** >S on 3 dates and all occurred during WNW gale events. Twelve on 2nd (Eddie Maguire / Iomhar McMillan / Martin Conway), one on 17th (Eddie Maguire / Iomhar McMillan) followed by a major occurrence of **52** / 5hrs on 28th (Eddie Maguire).



An adult male Long-tailed Duck 27th October

Northern Gannet crossing Kintyre.

Table 11. Date / number of adults crossing overland / wind direction and period of crossings.

Oct 2017	Number of adults crossing	Wind direction & strength	Times first / last birds crossed overland
1 st	3	SSW 5 - 6	15:07 – 15:12
7 th	1	WNW 2 - 3	13:30
10 th	2	SW > W 3 - 4	13:51
	6		

The total number of adult Gannets crossing overland this year was **1,461**. Most of these, a whopping **1,173** birds, crossed during July-September. However, the increasing numbers that crossed overland in August (**408**) and September (**491**) indicates urgency by adults from the Ailsa Craig colony to gain access to foraging

grounds rapidly as this period coincides with the final stages of the breeding season when chick food demands reach their peak.

Table 12. Monthly totals of adult **Northern Gannets** flying 8km overland on foraging trips from Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) during March – October 2017.

2017	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct
Monthly totals	2	23	131	126	274	408	491	6
Cumulative	2	25	156	282	556	964	1,455	1,461

Juvenile **Northern Gannet** >S off MSBO during October included **17** / 8hrs on 2nd (NW gale event), 3 on 10th, 2 on 11th, one on 13th, one on 14th, 4 on 17th and one on 29th.

Summary of September / October passage; a total of 35 juveniles >S on 10 dates.

Table 13. Autumn totals of juvenile **Northern Gannets** off MSBO 2010-2017

Year	Totals
2010	18
2011	48
2012	7
2013	14
2014	14
2015	9
2016	46
2017	35

Male **Hen Harriers** were at Westport on 10th (Malcolm Cook *pers. comm.*) and at Drumore (just N of Campbeltown) on 21st (Davie Robertson *pers. comm.*).

A **Sparrowhawk** was pursuing Twite on 1st and one was present on 29th.

Two **Kestrels** >S together - high over the sea on 9th - was the first MSBO record this year. Three singles were spotted on the A83 on 22nd at Putechan, Muasdale and Ballure (Jim Dickson *pers comm.*).

A **Merlin** appeared on 3 dates 23rd – 31st, an adult **Peregrine Falcon** passed >S on 1st and one was over Lossit Estate uplands on 27th.

Southerly movements of **Ringed Plover** included 40 on 1st, 8 on 9th, 10 on 15th and 35 on 17th. Thirty were on the shore on 26th.

Two **Grey Plover** >S on 17th.

A flock of **800 Northern Lapwing** arrived at Strath Farm on 25th and were still present on 26th. The flock was down to 300 on 27th and they were still present on 29th.

Flocks of **Sanderling** >S included 50+ on 2nd, 24 on 9th, flocks totalling **170** on 17th (NW gale event) and one on 22nd. 20 were present 27th – 29th.

A **Red Knot** >S on 2nd and one rested briefly on 10th.

A flock of 10 **Ruddy Turnstone** >S on 2nd. At Campbeltown New Quay sea wall the maximum count was 94 on 8th (Rab Morton *pers. comm.*).

Small flocks of **Purple Sandpiper** >S included 6 on 2nd and 10 on 20th. Two were on the shore 22nd - 27th.

Six **Bar-tailed Godwit** >S on 2nd. There was a good showing of **Grey Phalaropes** with 2 >S on 2nd (NW gale event; Eddie Maguire / Iomhar McMillan / Martin Conway) and one >S on 5th (NW gale event; Eddie Maguire).



Red Knot 10th October



Purple Sandpiper 22nd October

Gale events from the WNW on 5 dates produced inshore movements of 8 **Great Skua** >S on 2nd, 6 >S on 17th, a juvenile **Pomarine Skua** >S on 3rd, 3 juveniles >S on 17th then a sub-adult was photographed >S on 28th and a pale adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 3rd followed by 2 juveniles on 17th.



Great Skua >S during a NW gale event 2nd October



Sub-adult Pomarine Skua >S during a NW gale event 28th October

Small flocks of **Black-legged Kittiwake** totalling 240 >S on 17th (NW gale event), 300 >S / 5hrs on 22nd and 420 >S / 5hrs on 28th.

The regular 2CY **Iceland Gull** was present again on 11th and 28th. At Strath Farm (The Laggan) the 2CY that was present last month was photographed on 20th. A juvenile was at Campbeltown on 24th.

A 2CY **Glaucous Gull** >S on 17th (NW gale event) was the first record this autumn. An adult and a juvenile **Sandwich Tern** >S on 1st and 2 adults >S on 20th. Two juvenile **Arctic Tern** >S on 2nd, 7 >S on 17th and a juvenile was foraging offshore on 25th.

A **Northern Wheatear** appeared on 5th.



Northern Wheatear 5th October

At Strath Farm: **Redwing** numbers rose from 140 on 19th to ca. **900** on 25th - 26th. It was a similar story with **Fieldfare**; 250 were at The Strath on 19th increasing to ca. **600** there on 25th - 26th.

The only local report of **Bohemian Waxwing** was a flock of ca. 40 at Woodbank (Southend Rd) on 21st (Alastair Anderson et al / *pers. comm.*).

A migrant **Common Chiffchaff** was at MSBO on 30th.

Two **Brambling** were spotted (in with Chaffinches) at Homeston (Southend Road) on 8th (Brian Morton *pers. com.*).

UK Twite Study Project. Ringing; 29 trapped on 5th included 24 new birds colour ringed and 5 retraps

A 2014 MSBO colour ringed bird is performing well on trips to NE Wales and back to MSBO and has accumulated a very interesting history of doing so....

BTO ring = L586170 + green colour ring 22E.

Ringed MSBO on 10th October 2014.

Controlled at Connah's Quay, Flintshire, NE Wales on 14th and 25th March 2015. Additional rings were added to this bird when it was controlled in Wales / see photo below.

Retrapped at MSBO on 14th October 2015.

Controlled at Connah's Quay on 12th February and 11th March 2016.

Retrapped at MSBO on 28th September 2016.

Controlled at Connah's Quay on 20th January and 15th February 2017.

Retrapped at MSBO on 7th April 2017.

And – would you believe it...

Retrapped at MSBO again on passage south from breeding grounds on 3 dates 4th – 10th October 2017 (on its way to Wales again?).

Connah's Quay (Flintshire) is **298km** SSE of MSBO. So far, the six single journeys completed by this individual amounts to **1,788km**.

A Twite colour-ringed at MSBO recently has been reported in Northumberland – details pending.

November Report

Summary of the Month



2CY Iceland Gull at The Laggan 16th November

Daily observations ceased at the Observatory on 10th although many casual observations there later and at The Laggan, and elsewhere, produced some very interesting records for this early winter period.

Late migrants included a **Common Redstart** at Campbeltown on 6th and a **Barn Swallow** at Bellochantuy on 8th.

Whooper Swans flew in-off-sea on 2nd (3) and 10th (7). At Strath Farm (The Laggan) numbers were high with 106 on 2nd, 122 on 6th - 7th, 162 on 8th with an increase to **217** on 12th - 15th. Numbers tailed off then but there was still 100+ present 16th – 26th and then only 12 by 30th.

Normally the **Whoopers** would move on to the south fairly quickly but they were feasting on barley in two very large fields that became flooded earlier in the season and could not be harvested.

At Strath Farm on 19th, **1,955** geese were present in two fields including 1,040 **Greenland White-fronted**, 690 **Greylag**, 214 **Canada** and 11 **Pinkfeet**.

One of the **Greylags** was wearing an orange neck-collar marked **B|PJ**; the bird was collared / ringed at Threecastles, Poulaphouca (Co. Wicklow, Ireland) in December 2015.

There was a good showing of **Pink-footed Goose** over the autumn with 7 on 3rd, 2 on 12th, **11** on 19th and 5 on 26th; they appear set to winter

Common Shelduck were also at Strath Farm with 2 on 17th - 19th and 8 on 25th.



Adult Whooper Swans at Strath Farm (The Laggan) 11th November



Neck-collared Greylag at Strath Farm, The Laggan 19th November

Other species at the Strath included a **Northern Pintail** and 142 **Eurasian Wigeon** on 24th and 6 **Eurasian Teal** on 24th. Although regular inland on freshwater lochs and reservoirs, 3 juvenile **Great Cormorants** loafing by a flood pool on grassland on 23rd and 26th was most unusual.

A fem/imm **Hen Harrier** was at Carrine, Glen Breackarie, nr Southend on 24th (Brian and John Morton *pers. comm.*) and an adult male was photographed at Aros Moss by Campbeltown Airport on 29th.



Hen Harrier Aros Moss 29th November

Other raptors in the area included **Eurasian Sparrowhawks** at MSBO on 3rd, Strath Farm on 12th and Aros Moss on 29th, a **Merlin** at Strath farm on 10th and a **Common Kestrel** >N over Stewarton on 11th. Waders noted inland included 40 **Northern Lapwing** at Westport Marsh on 5th and **800 Golden Plover** at Strath Farm on 12th. There was still some southerly passage of waders at MSBO with 30 **Ringed Plover** on 2nd - 3rd and 50+ on 7th, 40 **Golden Plover** on 3rd, a total of 186 **Sanderling** with a peak count of 70 on 7th and a **Red Knot** on 9th.

Purple Sandpiper passage >S was very obvious early in the month with 8 on 1st, five flocks totalling 42 on 5th, 3 on 6th and 10 >S on 8th. Early November passage has been noted at MSBO for many years and it is now known (from geo tags) that this November passage involves birds from Canada (Scandinavian birds apparently go through earlier / David Jardine *pers. comm.*).

A single **Great Skua** >S on 9th and the regular 2CY **Iceland Gull** was present on 2nd, 9th, 12th and 24th. At The Laggan farmlands: the other 2CY was regular at Strath Farm floods 2nd – 28th.

A late adult **Barn Swallow** was at Bellochantuy on 8th November (Davie Robertson *pers. comm.*). At Strath Farm there was 40 **Redwing** on 12th and 80+ **Sky Lark** on 16th. At Campbeltown a late migrant fem/imm **Common Redstart** was foraging in a tree at Benmore, Saddell Street, on 6th (Derrick Goode *pers. comm.*). **Birds of Argyll** states... "*Most seem to have left by the end of August, although there are a few October records, and the latest...was at Barr Glen, Kintyre on 1st November 1980*" (ap Rheinallt *et al* 2007). There was a flock of 13 **Reed Bunting** at Campbeltown Airport on 29th and **Yellowhammer** arrived at usual, but widely separated wintering sites, simultaneously on 5th when 4 were in a garden at Campbeltown (Esther / Graham Thompson *pers. comm.*) and one in garden at Southend (Roy / Susie Bennett *pers comm.*).



Purple Sandpiper 5th November

December Report



Great Northern Diver 5th December

Summary of the Month

Note; although MSBO is closed for the winter period this report includes casual observations from there.

TL = The Laggan

The only **Whooper Swans** seen were 3 adults at West Parkfergus TL on 8th and 5 adults at Strath Farm on 31st. **Greylags** included 300+ at West Parkfergus on 16th and 360 at Kilkivan Farm (Machrihanish) on 18th. At West Parkfergus the maximum counts of other grey geese was 435 **White-fronts** on 4th and 8 **Pink-feet** on 18th. A flock of 190 **Canada Geese** appeared at Kilmichael Farm, by Campbeltown; on 15th.



Whooper Swans at The Laggan 8th December

At MSBO a female-type **Northern Pintail** was in with Mallards on 3rd and a fem/imm **Long-tailed Duck** was present 3rd - 18th in with flock of Common Goldeneye. Ten **Great Northern Divers** were in Machrihanish Bay on 5th. A 1CY **Northern Gannet** was foraging successfully in a WNW f6-7 on 30th – most unusual to see this age category in winter (should be off W Africa).



1CY Northern Gannet 30th December

Male **Hen Harriers** were at Campbeltown Airport on 11th and 19th, a female-type was at Bleachfield, TL on 26th and an adult male was at Strath Farm on 31st. Two 1CY **Golden Eagles** were soaring over the rise between Auchalochy and Campbeltown Loch on 15th (Campbell Fox *pers. comm.*). Two were seen close to this location during late summer. The only other raptor of interest was **Merlin** with singles at Strath farm on 9th and Campbeltown Airport on 11th. There was a flock of 500+ **Northern Lapwing** at Westport Marsh on 19th and 228 **Golden Plover** at Campbeltown Airport on 11th. At Machrihanish Bay **Sanderlings** numbered 26 on 11th and a flock of 40 >S on 31st. A total of 212 **Black-legged Kittiwakes** >S / 6hrs on 30th – 31st. The regular Strath Farm TL 2CY **Iceland Gull** was also at Campbeltown Airport on 10th, a fresh 1CY was new in at Campbeltown harbour; on 18th and was seen again on 21st (Charlie Robertson *pers. comm.*). A 2CY was by MSBO on 30th - 31st. Six **European Stonechats** were at Campbeltown Airport on 11th and a flock 700+ **Common Starling** was at Strath Farm TL on 21st.



Fem/imm Hen Harrier at Bleachfield 26th December



2CY Iceland Gull Campbeltown Airport 10th December



1CY Iceland Gull Campbeltown harbour 18th December



European Stonechat Campbeltown Airport 11th December

The **MSBO UK Study Project**; recent movements of our colour ringed birds include one trapped at Mull of Oa, Islay (Jamie Dunning *pers. comm.*), one seen at Stevenston, Ayrshire (Tom Byars *pers. comm.*), one photographed in Co Antrim (Jamie Dunning *pers. comm.*) and singles have been spotted in Northumberland and Lincolnshire. Full details of all these movements are pending.

A single **Yellowhammer** was visiting a garden feeding station at Southend village all month (Roy / Susie Bennet *pers. comm.*).

Northern Gannets crossing overland in South Kintyre, Argyll March – October 2017

A Machrihanish Seabird Observatory Project

Eddie Maguire and Charlie Robertson

Introduction

Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* have been noted crossing overland to the west in south Kintyre, Argyll from Campbeltown Loch since 2007 (Maguire 2015). Surveillance during August to October 2016 revealed that a total of 286 adult Gannets crossed overland to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) on 53 dates of observation (Maguire *et al*, 2017).

Methods

During 2017 Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) Assistant Warden Charlie Robertson (CR) devoted most of his time each morning watching the movements of Gannets from his home overlooking Campbeltown Loch and spent many hours in the afternoon and evening at Campbeltown harbour.

He logged the times of all crossings and would alert MSBO wardens by mobile phone when birds were flying west over the town allowing scores of these to be timed arriving over Machrihanish Bay. His efforts involved an average of 26 days of observation each month.

Results

From 1st March to 20th October 2017, surveillance was continued at Campbeltown. During this period CR obtained remarkable additional evidence involving *unprecedented* numbers of adult Gannets crossing 8km to the west over the narrowest part of the Kintyre peninsula.

A total of 1,461 crossed overland on 148 / 207 days of prolonged observation. Most of these, 1,173 birds, crossed during July-September and were thought to be breeding adults on foraging expeditions to the Atlantic from the Ailsa Craig colony in the Firth of Clyde some 33 km (21 miles) south-east of Campbeltown Loch harbour. Table 1. Monthly totals of adult Northern Gannets flying 8km overland on foraging trips from Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) and number of days of observation during March – October 2017.

2017	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Monthly Totals	2	23	131	126	274	408	491	6
Cumulative Totals	2	25	156	282	556	964	1,455	1,461
No. days of Observation	27	29	22	24	31	24	30	20

Table 1 shows a substantial increase in the numbers of Gannets that crossed over Kintyre in August (408) and September (491); presumably this indicates urgency by breeding adults from the Ailsa Craig colony to gain access to foraging grounds in the Atlantic as this period coincides with the final stages of the breeding season when increasing food demands of large chicks reach their peak (Bob Furness *pers. comm.*). The seasonal pattern in the table appears to validate this theory by establishing that the peak period for the overland crossings was not just a result of more effort during the latter stages of the breeding season (fledging period) as the number of days of observation each month averaged 26.

Most Gannet chicks fledge mid to late September (Forrester et al 2007). Bernie Zonfrillo (*pers. comm.*) provided the following summation on the fledging period at the Ailsa Craig colony and also comments on the possibility that passage birds may also be involved in the south Kintyre overland crossings especially during August and September

“The first chicks fledge on 1st August with a peak in mid September and some young are still around on Ailsa from early November. Gannets take 90-93 days from hatching to fledging on Ailsa Craig. Young cease accepting food from the adult about 10 days before fledging. But some young will accept a meal on the day they fledge. The fledglings weight around 3.2 kg.

The rapid increase in numbers of adults crossing Kintyre during August - September may also represent birds from other colonies – perhaps from the east coast or maybe even Scar Rocks (Solway) that have been foraging in the Clyde, therefore not necessarily all Ailsa birds. Some adults could have already fledged young elsewhere, and be starting their migration”

Discussion

On overland foraging trips to the Atlantic from Campbeltown Loch adult Gannets usually depart high over the town singly or in small groups of 2 – 6 with very occasionally, flocks of up to 10 birds. The maximum number seen crossing together was a flock of 16 in September 2017. Adults also often fly low over the town, many just over rooftop height (Maguire et al, 2017).

Wind direction appears to have little influence on the numbers that embark on this apparently unique overland shortcut to the Atlantic. MSBO weather data for the period revealed that 1,068 / 1,461 birds crossed overland when the wind included west in direction (i.e. SSW > NNW). From 1st June to 30th September the wind direction prevailed from a westerly direction on 73 / 109 days of surveillance.

Wind strength does not discourage crossings either; another high total of 50 birds >W on 19th August in a WNW f6. We watched many of these birds during late evening struggling to get W from the harbour and were amazed at their resolve; always head to wind, and barely making headway, they ranged all over the sky high above the town for several minutes before eventually departing to the west.

The record one-day total of birds crossing overland was 67 >W on 7th September 2017 in a NW f5 with squalls. However, birds will cross overland whatever the wind direction; for example; 18 on 12th May 2017 in a NE f2-3 and 40 on 2nd September 2017 in a SE f4.

At Campbeltown, no birds have been seen crossing overland to the west during the early morning period although small numbers have crossed during late morning. The main period of overland activity was consistently late afternoon and evening. The latest birds noted crossing to the west during late evening was 3 shortly after 22:00hrs on 10th July. All birds crossing to the west in the evening apparently roost on the sea and after foraging successfully the following morning will be en-route for the Ailsa Craig colony sometime that day. When they return to the colony after an overnight stop on the sea many will arrive later in the day. Normally this will sanction a mate that has been on nonflexible nest duty guarding a chick to depart on a foraging trip and, although entirely speculative, may partly explain why overland crossings to the west at Campbeltown occur mainly in the late afternoon and evening.

The following data are approximates of direct distance and flight times of Gannets around Kintyre.

Gannets do not glide over Kintyre; they employ continuous deep wingbeats to cross on level flight. When leaving Campbeltown for the west they are watched, always flapping, until out of sight and when located over the sand dunes at Machrihanish from MSBO they are still employing continuous wingbeats. The distance covered over land is 8 km (5 miles) and as timing them crossing at MSBO was a constant 9 mins from Campbeltown harbour to the sand dunes at Machrihanish this gives a flight speed of around 56 kph (35 mph). Also, Mike Taylor (Sea-tours, Campbeltown) along with Eddie Maguire and Iomhar McMillan timed adult Gannets returning east through the Sound of Sanda for Ailsa Craig from Mike's fast RIB. On two occasions flight speed was logged at 33 knots; this equates to 59 kph (37 mph) and is comparable to the flight speed of Gannets crossing over Kintyre (56 kph / 35 mph).

On returning from the Atlantic to Ailsa from the north and north-west Gannets are known to converge at the Mull of Kintyre then orientate east for Clyde waters.

If adults employed an overland return from Machrihanish to Campbeltown to gain access to Clyde waters and the Ailsa colony, the distance would be around 41 kilometres (26 miles) and would take about 46 minutes flight time. However, this overland route appears to be entirely one-way. Gannets have never been recorded returning overland from Machrihanish to Campbeltown Loch. So, after foraging in the Atlantic they obviously take a marine route back to the colony.

Breeding adults travelling south off Machrihanish en-route for Ailsa after foraging successfully in the Atlantic and sea lochs in Argyll (ap Rheinallt *et al*, 2007) are not streamlined, but visibly bloated with fish prey (extended rear ends) and are most likely at their top weight. Constrained by this additional weight they must therefore rely, essentially, on dynamic soaring (wave power) to assist them on a marine route return journey. The distance to the Ailsa colony from Machrihanish via the Mull of

Kintyre is approximately 60 km (37 miles) and with a flight speed of 59 kph (37 mph) this would involve a one hour flight.

Adult Gannets flying to the west over Campbeltown on a foraging expedition to the Atlantic look streamlined and are evidently at minimal weight which must obviously be a huge advantage when over land.

If the overland route from Campbeltown harbour to the Atlantic was not employed by Gannets then the direct marine route to Machrihanish from there would be around 55 km (34 miles). This time-consuming marine route from the harbour to Machrihanish Bay would take around 54 minutes flight time. To get there from the harbour, the birds would have to travel south through Clyde waters, then west through the Sound of Sanda and finally north around the Mull of Kintyre.

In contrast, the highly significant time-saving 8 km overland route to the Atlantic from Campbeltown harbour is a mere 9 minute flight to the west.

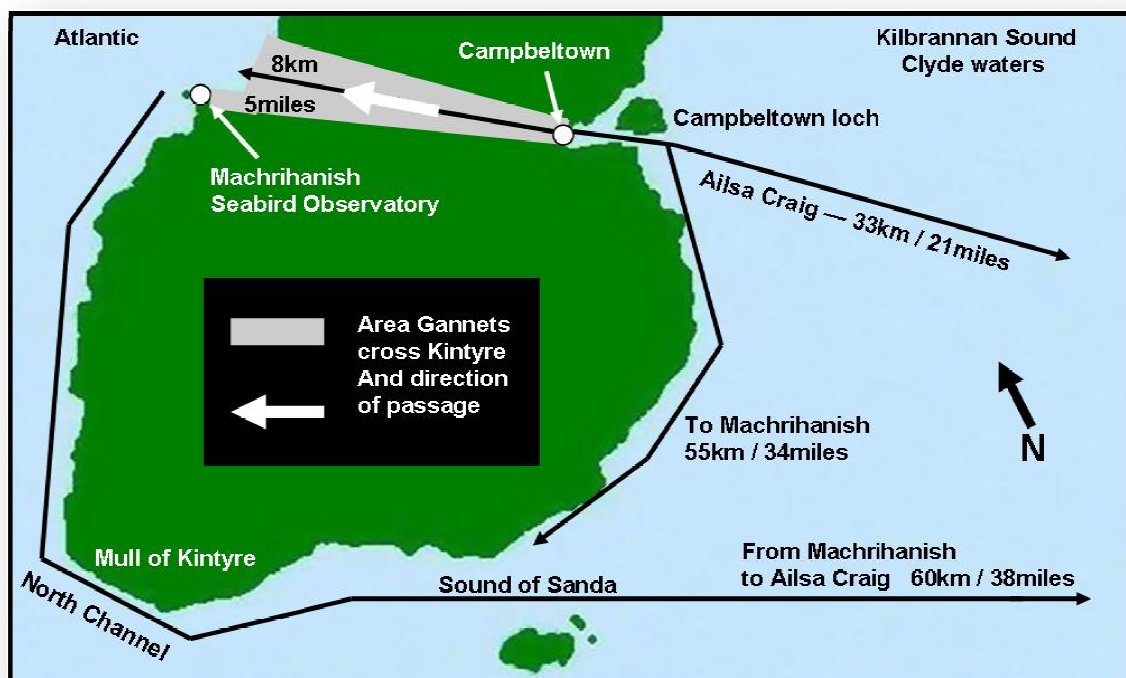


Figure 1.

Map of South Kintyre, Argyll showing the westerly overland route (8 km / 9 minute flight) taken by adult Northern Gannets from Campbeltown Loch harbour (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic). Direct marine routes with approximate distance from Campbeltown Loch and Machrihanish to Ailsa Craig are also shown.



Northern Gannet >S off MSBO: note distended rear end. This adult is en-route to a colony
© Eddie Maguire

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Sooty Tern in South Kintyre on 2nd June 2017
A new species for Argyll

Eddie Maguire

No one could have foreseen that the rarest seabird to visit the SW coast of Kintyre would do so on a relatively calm sunny day, but...that's exactly what happened! At 11:00hrs on 2nd June entries in the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) logsheet revealed little movement over the sea.

The best of what was really a mind-numbing morning included 50+ **Sanderlings**, a loose group of 25 2CY **Black-legged Kittiwakes** passing south, the very regular and bleached-looking 2CY **Iceland Gull** and intermittent fly-by **Sandwich** and **Arctic Terns**.

At 11:04hrs a small to medium-sized black and white seabird appeared ca. 150m to the north. It was some 20m or so above the sea and approaching the point ca. 100m from the Observatory.

From its very direct flight jizz, my initial impression was that it was a pale morph skua but when I looked at it more closely it was obviously a black and white tern that, suspiciously, had an alarming, for me, 'non-European' look about it.

This was an extremely neat looking bird with very dark/black upperparts including a complete black cap engulfing the eye, clean-white forehead with narrow black loreal stripes extending from the black cap to the gape, clean-white underparts, a longish thin tail and a very precise undeviating flight with steady wingbeats (very skua-like).

I grabbed the camera and rattled off a dozen or so shots.

As the tern vanished to the south I looked at the images on the camera screen and was stunned when I realised, incredibly, that I had photographed a fly-by vagrant **Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscata*.



Sooty Tern >S off MSBO at 11:04hrs on 2nd June 2017

Since 1993 we have found some notable birds at MSBO including **Black-browed Albatross**, **Pallid Harrier**, **Ross's Gull** and **Whiskered Tern** to name a few; however, this mega beauty from Tropical oceans will take some thrashing!

Jim Dickson (Argyll SOC Recorder) was quickly informed and described the appearance of this species in Argyll as...

"Quite an astonishing record for the west of Scotland and an excellent UK record".

If accepted by BBRC this will be a new species for Argyll, only the third Scottish occurrence and the first sighting of the species in Britain / Ireland for 12 years.

The 2nd June will long be ranked as one of the most exciting days I have experienced at MSBO when an adult **Sooty Tern**, a species that breeds in the Tropics, and a 2CY **Iceland Gull** that will eventually breed in the Arctic regions of Canada or Greenland (but not in Iceland as its name suggests) were both on my patch at the same time.



Sooty Tern >S off MSBO at 11:04hrs on 2nd June 2017

Birdguides Review of the Week 31st May – 6th June provided information on other possible sightings of this individual prior to its very brief appearance off MSBO...

*"There were some exciting discoveries —and none more so than the **Sooty Tern** that flew past Uisaed Point, Argyll, on 2nd".*

This Sooty is presumably the bird seen in France in early May, which was widely speculated to be the bird also seen (in chronological order) off Cape Verde, Lanzarote and mainland Portugal in March and April.

If it is the same individual, and of course there'll be no way of proving it is, it's a casual 4,600 km (in a straight line) between Raso and Uisaed Point. Quite impressive" (Josh Jones).

Sooty Tern records in Britain and Ireland

Scotland's first was found dead at Myatt Hill, near Denny, Forth in late May 1939, and is now at the National Museums of Scotland. The only other record was a one-day bird on 14th July 1989, on the Isle of May, Fife.

The most recently accepted British record was an adult bird found at Rhosneigr, Anglesey, on 5th July 2005. This bird was refound at a number of different sites over that summer, on The Skerries (Anglesey) as well as off Skerries (Co.Dublin) on the opposite side of the Irish Sea.

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory UK Twite Study Project 2010 – 2017

An Update

Eddie Maguire and Rab Morton

Introduction...

In July 2010 **Machrihanish Seabird Observatory** joined the **UK Twite Study Project**.

During 2010 - 2017, a total of just over **1,500** Twite were colour ringed at MSBO, an average of 188 birds per year.

The greatest movement was of a bird to Essex, and although most movements were to and from western parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England, birds were also seen on the east coasts of Scotland and England, in Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

In total 83 birds ringed at MSBO have been sighted, photographed or trapped elsewhere in the UK and Republic of Ireland, and 20 birds ringed in other parts of the UK and Republic of Ireland have been sighted, photographed or trapped at MSBO.

The maps that accompany this paper highlight the distribution of UK / Republic of Ireland movements of Twite to and from MSBO.

Table 1. Locations of all MSBO recoveries and controls

Locations	Ringed MSBO controlled elsewhere	Controlled at MSBO	Totals
Scotland			
Argyll	8	1	9
Highland	-	1	1
Ayrshire	4	-	4
Dumfries & Galloway	16	-	16
East Lothian	1	-	1
England			
Northumberland	3	-	3
Cumbria	5	2	7
Lancashire	14	12	26
Lincolnshire	2	-	2
Norfolk	2	-	2
Suffolk	-	1	1
Essex	1	-	1
Isle of Man	6	2	8
Wales			
Flintshire	2	-	2
Northern Ireland			
Co Antrim	12	-	12
Co Down	4	-	4
Republic of Ireland			
Co Donegal	-	1	1
Co Mayo	1	-	1
Co Wexford	1	-	1
Co Louth	1	-	1
Totals	83	20	103

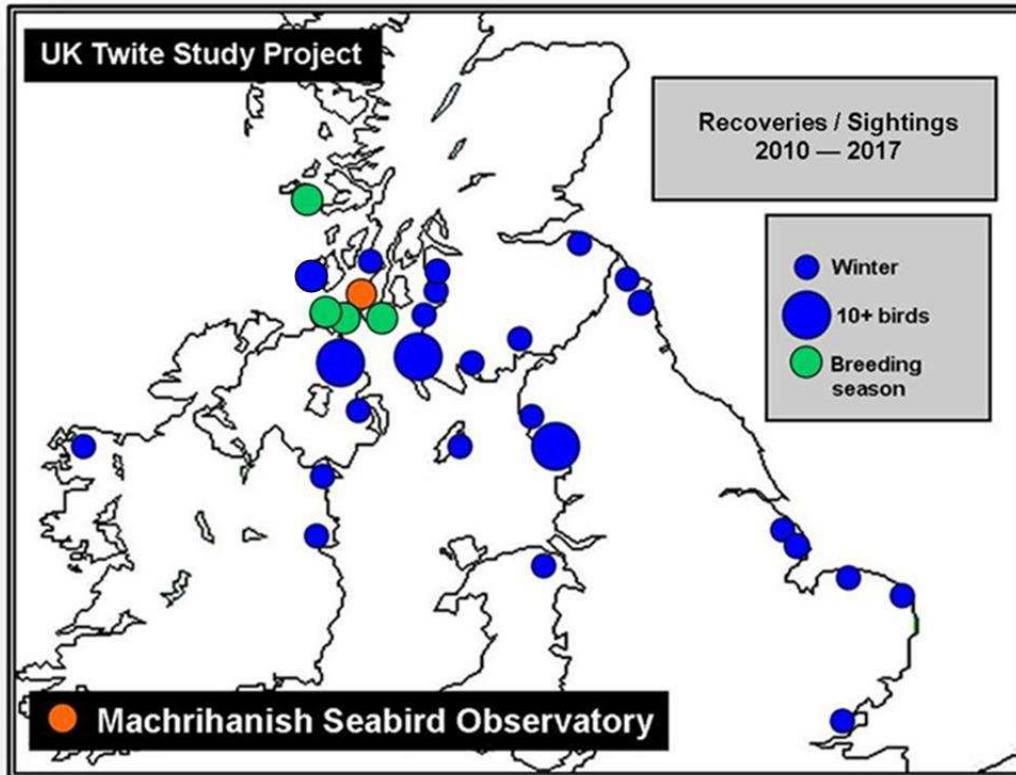


Figure 1. Recoveries / sightings of Twite colour ringed at MSBO

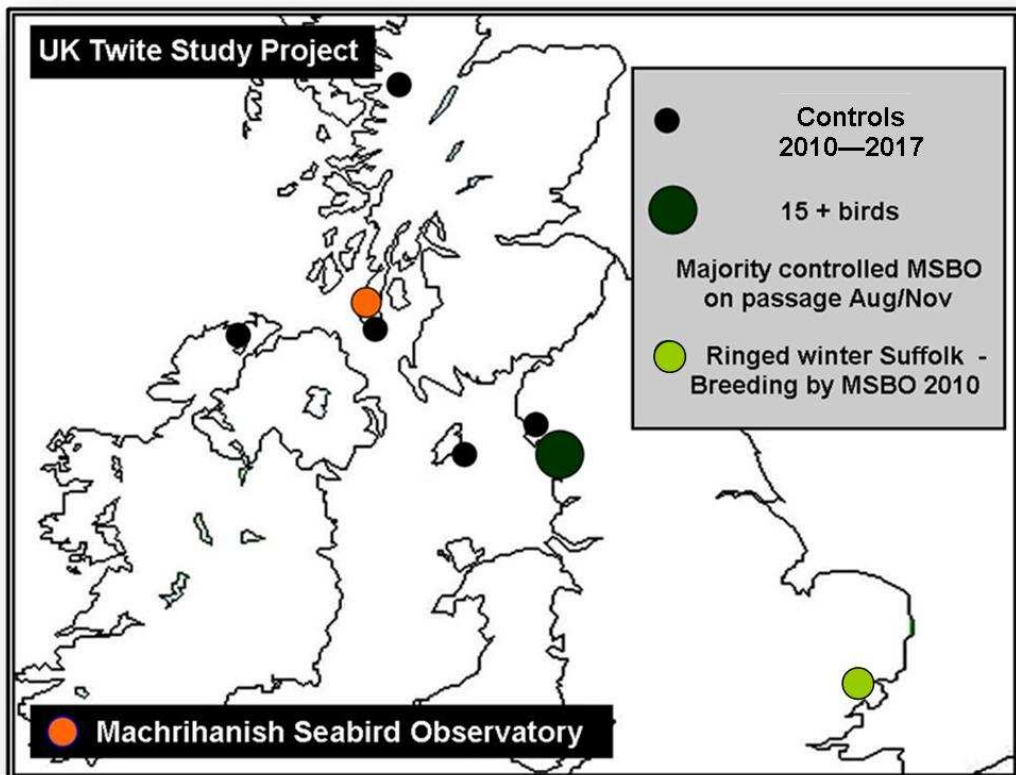


Figure 2. Twite ringed elsewhere and controlled or photographed at MSBO

Sightings of MSBO colour ringed Twite...

Confirmed breeding of MSBO colour-ringed birds is at present confined to a pair with fledglings at Mull of Kintyre, and more reliably, adults with fledglings are seen every year at MSBO feeding station. In addition, singles have been sighted during the breeding season on Tiree (Argyll) and Rathlin Island (Co Antrim). The most recent island connection was one trapped at Mull of Oa, Islay during late autumn 2017 (Jamie Dunning pers. comm.). Other recent movements of MSBO colour ringed birds include one seen at Stevenston, Ayrshire (Tom Byars *pers. comm.*), one photographed in Co Antrim (Jamie Dunning pers comm.) and singles have been spotted in Northumberland and Lincolnshire.

Details are pending on all these birds.

Ringling 2017...

It was a most disappointing autumn; no real passage occurred at MSBO and only 29 birds were trapped including 24 new birds colour ringed and 5 retraps.

However, a 2014 MSBO colour ringed bird is performing well on trips to NE Wales and back and has accumulated a very interesting history of doing so....

BTO ring = L586170 + green colour ring 22E.

Ringed MSBO on 10th October 2014.

Controlled at Connah's Quay, Flintshire, NE Wales on 14th and 25th March 2015. Additional rings were added to this bird when it was controlled in Wales as the number on the MSBO green colour ring had faded / see photo below.

Retrapped at MSBO on 14th October 2015.

Controlled at Connah's Quay on 12th February and 11th March 2016.

Retrapped at MSBO on 28th September 2016.

Controlled at Connah's Quay on 20th January and 15th February 2017.

Retrapped at MSBO on 7th April 2017 and again on passage from breeding grounds on 3 dates 4th – 10th October (on its way to Flintshire again?).

Connah's Quay is **298km** SSE of MSBO. So far, the six single journeys completed by this individual amounts to **1,788km**.

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See *Twite Ringing in Kintyre* (Maguire 2014). *Argyll Bird Club* quarterly newsletter The Eider, March 2014; Number 107.

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David Millward (professional photographer) for many years of friendship, sound technical advice and infinite patience with all DSLR problems.

Jo Goudie (artist) for updating MSBO website each month.

Iomhar McMillan (assistant warden) for keeping the MSBO in top-class working order.

Charlie Robertson (assistant warden) for his significant commitment to the **Northern Gannet Project** at Campbeltown Harbour.

And to definitive friends of MSBO; **Pip / Carol Ashley** and **Martin / Leticia Conway**.



Leach's Petrel >S off MSBO 17th October

The Machrihanish Seabird Observatory will reopen from 1st March 2018