

March 2017

Number 119

The Eider



Purple Sandpiper at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 16 November ©Iomhar McMillan

Recent bird sightings, pages 13-17

Argyll Bird Club Rookery Survey, pages 19-20

Watching Otters in Argyll, pages 9-10

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Editorial

It's already beginning to feel as though spring is not too far away. The hours of daylight are increasing daily, and with it an increase in the dawn chorus. Song Thrushes, which largely disappear around us over winter, are back and loudly laying claim to territories, as are the resident Great Spotted Woodpeckers with their drumming. Spring is my favourite time of year, as summer migrants start to trickle back from sunnier climes. Soon we'll be hearing our first Chiffchaffs and seeing our first Sand Martins and Swallows as they arrive back from Africa.

While the recovery of ringed birds has provided a vast amount of knowledge of where our summer visitors spend the winter, it has limitations, particularly when birds die in areas where the chance of finding rings are slight. New methods of tracking migrants overcome these problems, and in addition are providing new information on routes to and from winter quarters. This means that we are no longer dependent solely on recoveries of ringed birds. An excellent example is provided by recent work on Nightjars (Evens *et al.* 2017). Using a combination of geolocators and GPS tags (minute devices that record geographical locations), researchers investigated the migration routes and wintering areas of eleven adult Nightjars. It was discovered that the main wintering areas were in the savannah and dry forest to the south of the central African rain forest. Satellite-tagged Cuckoos have also been shown to winter in the same area. Such studies, which identify previously unknown wintering areas, highlight habitats where conservation effort may need to be directed in future.

The deadline for article for the June *Eider* is 5 May, which is two weeks earlier than normal. This is because I'll be away from home later on in May. It means you will receive the June *Eider* a little earlier than usual—around the middle of May. My editorial in the last issue, asking for contributions for the newsletter, resulted in a couple of articles in this issue (on

Inside this issue

Editorial	Page 2
Club news	Pages 3-5
ABC field trip to Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary	Page 6-7
ABC field trip Ormsary	Pages 7-9
Watching Otters in Argyll	Pages 9-10
Goldfinch movements	Pages 11-12
Recent bird sightings	Pages 13-17
BTO surveys	Pages 18
ABC Rookeries Survey	Pages 19-20
Information about the ABC	Page 21

Otters and Goldfinches), but I need more! So, with spring approaching, please try to put pen to paper before 5 May—thank you.

Reference

R. Evens., *et al.* (2017 in press). Migratory pathways, stopover zones and wintering destinations of western European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus*. *Ibis* (DOI: 10.1111/ibi.12469)



Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Anne Archer, John Bowler, Malcolm Chattwood, Jim Dickson, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), Toby Green, Mike Harrison, David Jardine, Eddie Maguire, Iomhar McMillan, Katie Pendreigh, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Nigel Scriven and Margaret Staley

Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2017

If there is a chance that adverse weather might lead to the cancellation of a field trip, please check the club's website or contact the organiser the night before or prior to setting off.

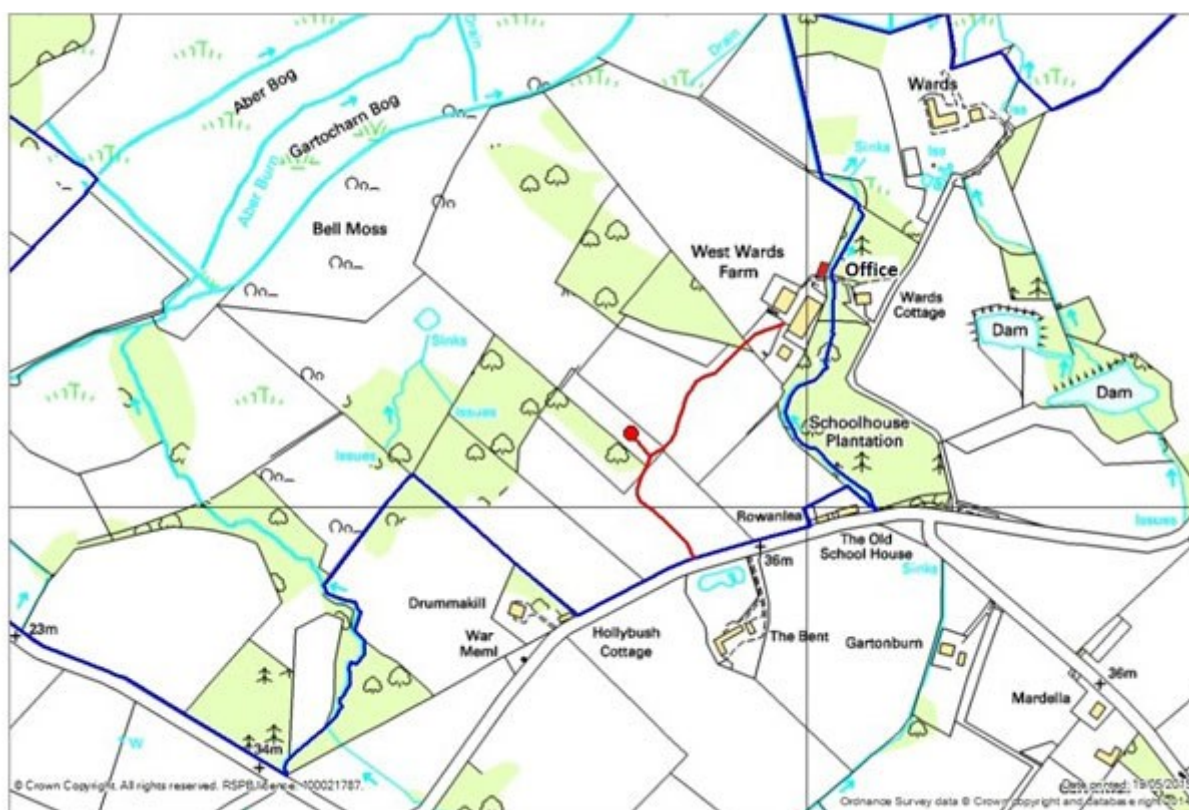
Saturday 25 February. Walk to Port Ramsay, Lismore. Led by David Jardine (Phone 01546 510200. E-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com). Meet at the Appin Hall car park (grid ref. NM938459) on the A828 at 0930hrs. Please bring a packed lunch, and let David know if you hope to attend.

Saturday 25 March. Sound of Gigha. Led by Mike Harrison (E-mail jmharrison@iee.org. Phone:

01631 710656). Meet at Ronachan Point Car Park on the A83 (grid ref. NR741548) at 10.00hrs. Lunches will be available at the hotel on Gigha.

Saturday 29 April. Benmore Gardens and surrounding area (Cowal). Led by Steve Petty (E-mail stevepetty@btinternet.com. Phone 01369 810024). Meet in the Benmore Gardens car park (grid ref. NS142866) at 10.00hrs. Lunches will be available at the cafe. Please let Steve know by 24 April if you would like lunch, so a table can be booked.

Saturday 10 June. Loch Lomond RSPB Reserve. Led by Anne Archer (Phone 01700 811611. E-mail archerspringbank@btinternet.com). Meet



The map above shows the location of the access road and car park at the RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve.

If you are coming from Drymen along the A811, heading for Balloch and Gartocharn, you will pass the Old Schoolhouse B&B on the right hand side. The entrance to RSPB Loch Lomond is the next right hand turn, there is no signage but the entrance to the site has a low stone wall. If you pass a property called Drummakill, then you have gone too far.

If you are coming from Balloch heading along the A811 to Drymen, you will need to drive through Gartocharn. As you leave the village there will be several bends after which you need to look out for the War Memorial and a property called Drummakill, which will be on your left-hand side. The entrance to RSPB Loch Lomond is the next turning on the left, there is no signage but the entrance to the site has a low stone wall. If you pass the Old Schoolhouse B&B, you've gone too far.

Follow the access track down the hill, the visitor car park is on the left hand side. Please note, unfortunately our post-code doesn't work for sat nav.

at the visitor hub/car park at the reserve (map and details of how to get there are on the previous page). Please let Anne know if you want to take part in this trip by 31 May as numbers need to be confirmed with the RSPB. There will be a charge of £5 per person. An RSPB staff member will show us around. Participants should be aware that there are no paths leading from the visitor hub, so most of the walk will be through farm fields (which may contain cattle) and other habitats such as woodland, fen and wildflower meadows. Wellies may be required, depending on weather conditions leading up to the visit. Paula Baker gave a talk about the reserve at one of our autumn meetings, an account of which appeared in the December 2015 Eider, pages 29-28.

Sunday 25 June. Skipness (Kintyre). Led by Katie Pendreigh (E-mail katiependreigh@aol.com. Phone: 01583 441359. Meet in the car park beside the entrance gate to Skipness Castle at 10.00hrs. The Sea Food Cabin will be open for lunch.

Saturday 29 July. Clachan (Kintyre). Led by Malcolm Chattwood (Phone: 01546 603389. E-mail malcolmchattwood@gmail.com). Meet at the Clachan Village Hall car park (map ref. NR766562) at 10.00hrs.

Saturday 26 August. Colonsay. Led by David Jardine (E-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com. Phone 01546 510200). A full-day visit with transport provided. Further details will appear in a later issue of the *Eider*.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2017-18

Spring Meeting 2017. Saturday 4 March at the Royal Marine Hotel (<http://www.royalmarinehotel.co.uk>), Dunoon (phone: 01369 705810). A one-course lunch will be available in the hotel for £8.95 per person. The menu is given on the next page. Please make a selection and give in your order when you arrive at the meeting to collect your name badge—thank you. Tea/coffee will be available free-of-charge for

Programme for the ABC's Spring Meeting

Saturday 4 March at the Royal Marine Hotel, Hunter Quay, Dunoon

Time	Session
0930	Doors open, coffee and tea
0950-1000	Welcome and introduction— <i>Mike Harrison</i> , Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club
1000-1030	Recent bird sightings and photographs— <i>Jim Dickson</i> , Argyll Bird Recorder
1030-1100	Argyll Bird Club Rookery Survey— <i>David Jardine</i>
1100-1130	Coffee/tea
1130-1200	Wildlife crime— <i>Donald MacKay</i> , Police Scotland
1200-1220	BTO survey updates— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
1220-1400	Lunch (available in the hotel if required)
1400-1430	Technology, tags and tracks— <i>Ben Darvil</i> , BTO Scotland
1430-1500	Listing beyond birding— <i>Ron Forrester</i>
1500-1530	Tea/coffee
1530-1600	Some conservation issues— <i>David Palmar</i>
1600-1610	Sawing off the branch?—10 slides in 10 minutes— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
1610-1630	Raffle and closing remarks

Lunch menu for the Spring Meeting

- ◆ Fish & Chips (with side salad)
- ◆ Chilli Baked Potato (with side salad)
- ◆ Arrabiatta Pasta
- ◆ Ham Salad (with side salad and boiled potatoes)
- ◆ Pan Fried Chicken (with vegetables, boiled potatoes and rich jus)

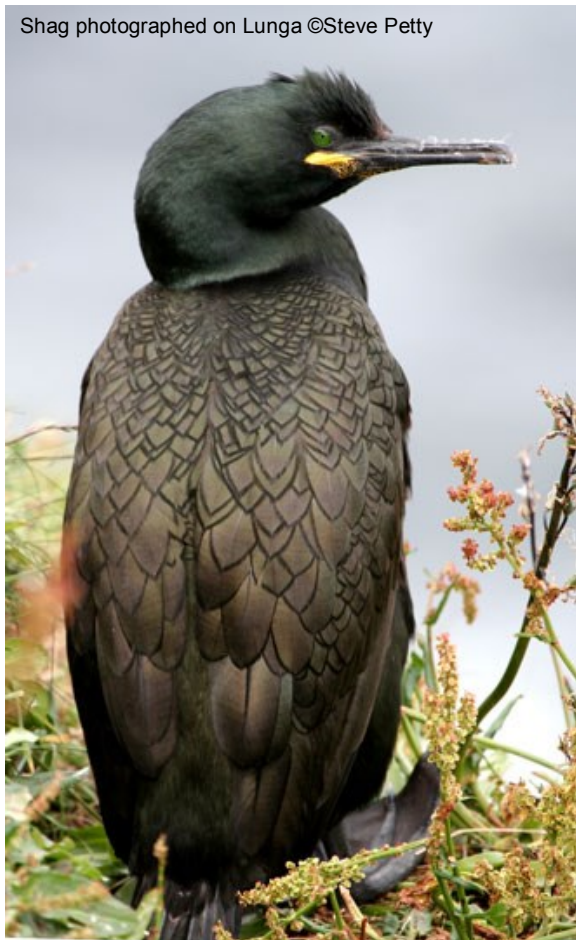
members on arrival, mid-morning and in the afternoon. See the programme on the next page.

Autumn Meeting and AGM 2017. Saturday 4 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel (<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>), near Lochgilphead (phone: 01546 603668). The programme will appear in the June *Eider*.

Spring Meeting 2018. Saturday 3 March at the Inveraray Inn (www.inveraray-inn.co.uk). A date for your diary! More details to follow in a later issue of the *Eider*.

Raffle Prizes. Donations of raffle prizes for indoor meetings are always welcome.

Shag photographed on Lunga ©Steve Petty



ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 27 (2015)

The report is being formatted and will soon be at the printers. Copies should be available for members at the Spring Meeting.

THE ARGYLL BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE

Do visit our website (www.argyllbirdclub.org) to find out about up-to-date arrangements for meetings, recent sightings of birds, including photographs, and lots more.

To keep the website updated takes a lot of effort. We urgently need more help, to cover periods when the usual compilers are on holiday etc. So, if you have any previous experience with maintaining websites, why not give us a hand. If you are interested please contact any club officials to learn more about what is involved.

BTO TRAINING COURSE IN ARGYLL

On Saturday 8th April the BTO is running a course entitled 'skills and techniques for BTO bird surveys'. It is based at the Living Stones, Kilmartin. The turning to the centre, on the A816, is on the opposite side of the road to the museum. The course may well be useful for improving your skills or confidence ahead of the breeding season? Please come along to the course if you can, to refresh your skills, to learn more about how you can help, and also to help the BTO understand the area and its challenges better. It will be a very enjoyable day! The BTO is hoping for a good turnout, so they've subsidised the cost down to a nominal £5 for the day (to help cover refreshment costs). You can find out more about the course at <https://www.bto.org/news-events/events/2017-04/skills-and-techniques-bto-bird-surveys>. If you would like further information or wish to register please contact Anne Cotton at BTO Scotland (E-mail anne.cotton@bto.org. Phone 01786 466560).

OTHER FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Coll Bird Festival 12-14 May. Coll has a rich and fascinating birdlife that attracts visitors all year round. The festival will look at some of the key species of breeding and passage birds with guided walks and family activities from Friday to Sunday. Boat trips to neighbouring Lunga offer an opportunity to spot a wide variety of wildlife and plant life (photo opposite). More information can be found at www.visitcoll.co.uk/event/coll-bird-festival-2017.

ABC field trip to Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary on 26 November 2016



Club members looking over the Add Estuary ©Jim Dickson

The forecast of morning fog fortunately failed to materialise and we were lucky to avoid any rain or excessive windy conditions, although it was fairly cold. The Corran car park at the head of Loch Gilp was quickly full of bird club members' cars and 12 folks from Cowal, Kintyre and Mid-Argyll assembled prior to a short walk along the front green of Lochgilphead.

The tide was rising and almost high which meant a collection of Oystercatchers were already roosting just across the mouth of the Cuilarstich Burn and a good number of Wigeon were on the water with other wildfowl comprising several Mute Swans, a female Goldeneye, several Mallards and a smart pair of Goosander that appeared on the river beside the car park. Other wader species were in short supply with only a single Redshank flying in briefly to join the Oystercatchers. However our plan was to look at the loch more closely later in the day when the tide would be out.

Mike Harrison kept a note of the birds seen for the day and regulars such as House Sparrow, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Starling, Jackdaw and Robin were quickly notched up. Returning back to our cars a Kingfisher appeared about 50m away, so we steadily walked closer and fortunately it remained perched in a tree allowing us to get prolonged views to everyone's satisfaction. We then sorted out some car sharing before heading off the short distance to Ardrishaig and then a bit further south in Ardrishaig to give a different views of Loch Gilp and across Loch Fyne. Roosting Ringed Plovers and Dunlin were noted en routes plus a single Grey Heron.

Our first stop quickly produced a single Little Grebe just offshore, several Shags on top of buoys, some Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers, Black Guillemots and then distant Goldeneyes. Two female/immature Long-tailed Ducks were seen through our telescopes, but maybe a bit distant for some folk not familiar with this species. A Great Cormorant flew past and Tom Callan pointed out to others how the flight style differs from Shag, which was helpful. The next stop was to give us a chance of seeing some divers and after a bit of searching some distant Red-throated and Great Northern Divers were found. A female/immature Common Scoter was a good find for this location and further out groups of large auks could be seen, most of which were Razorbills. Just as we were about to get back into our cars Malcolm Chattwood spotted a Song Thrush-sized bird in a tall tree while he was looking towards Ardrishaig, but it was in silhouette. As we got our binoculars onto it, the bird conveniently turned its head revealing the distinctive crest of a Waxwing! Unfortunately it flew off within seconds and not everyone got to see it.

We set off for the Islandadd Bridge at the Add Estuary noting Mistle Thrush on the way. At the estuary we had a good scan around for Hen Harrier but none appeared. Stonechat, Rock and Meadow Pipits put in a brief appearance before we walked along towards the new bird hide area from where we saw many Teal, Wigeon, four male Goosanders another Little Grebe, a Buzzard, Hooded and Carrion Crow, Curlew, Oystercatcher a Ringed Plover and a late adult Lesser Black



Drake Eider ©Jim Dickson

backed Gull. After a short drive across the Moine Mhor moss, noting a Kestrel on the way, we got out of the cars for a short walk in search of Barnacle Geese to an area of Barsloisnoch Farm where 82 birds had been with Canada geese the previous day. Unfortunately the Barnacles had moved on, but the Canada Geese were seen and also four Lapwings. A Song Thrush was watched feeding on the road and a Goldcrest was in a small tree just ahead of us. Some distant Woodpigeons were noted as well as a Mistle Thrush.

Time for lunch so we headed round to Duntrune Gardens, which although a very pleasant area produced very few new birds. Later on some of the members headed home while the remainder headed back to Lochgilphead for another look at the loch now the tide was out. This time there was a lot more to see with many waders in the distance and about 20 Bar-tailed Godwits being picked out from the much larger Curlews. A Pied Wagtail was on the front green and then a Grey

Wagtail appeared at the river's edge, then a Greenfinch nearby. Suddenly a load of gulls took to the air in pursuit of another bird and through binoculars a nice big Peregrine was seen flying across the loch carrying a wader, which looked like a Redshank. It made a nice spectacle to end the trip. We heard later that Mike spotted three male Black Grouse in bushes as he headed north across the Moine Mhor—perhaps the sighting of the day!

Species List

Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Common Scoter, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Red-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Great Cormorant, European Shag, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Peregrine, Common Kestrel, Common Kingfisher, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Carrion Crow, Northern Raven, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Bohemian Waxwing, Wren, Common Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Robin, European Stonechat, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch.(63 species).

Jim Dickson

ABC field trip to Ormsary on 29 January 2017

After a spell of overnight rain we were fortunate to have a dry sunny day, which made for very good birdwatching conditions. The area to be covered included part of the Ormsary Estate with varied habitats of woodland, moor and river as well as the EileanTraighe Bay at the mouth of Loch Caolisport and sea area looking over towards Islay and Jura.

Although the official start of the trip was to commence at 10.00hrs, four of the six participants stopped off a bit earlier by the eastern shore of Loch Caolisport for a quick look and were rewarded with the unusually high count of

six winter-plumaged Slavonian Grebes, all in a tight feeding group. These, along with drumming Great Spotted Woodpeckers, some Curlews, a flock of Greylag Geese, Bullfinches and two Pied Wagtails were unfortunately not seen again later during the 'official' trip tally!

Outside the Ormsary Estate Office, we were met by Errol Crutchfield who was standing in for his son Stuart, who was unable to lead the trip due to another engagement. Errol then kindly took on the role of guide and escorted us around the estate. Mike Harrison was scribe for the day and kept a close eye on the bird tally starting

Great views of Jura were had during the visit ©Jim Dickson



with Great, Blue and Coal Tit around the estate buildings plus Robin, Woodpigeon, Wren and Blackbird as we walked down to view Loch Caolisport.

Viewing conditions were very good for picking out divers on the loch and we soon had our 'eye in' for the many Red-throated and Great Northern to be seen, and soon after a tight flock of 14 winter-plumaged Black-throated Diver with another three single birds a bit further away. A few single Shags were flying up the loch as well as the odd Hooded Crow and further out on the loch was a Black Guillemot already in summer plumage. Looking over to the hills on the far shore of the loch we could see a couple of distant displaying Common Buzzards, a Raven, a group of Red Deer with good antlers and later on an adult Peregrine perched high on a rock. On the nearby beach a tightly-packed group of ten Ringed Plovers was spotted. We then walked round to Eilean Traighe, past the fish farm, seeing big flocks of Chaffinches, Starlings and the odd Dunnock on the way. Looking into the bay, south of the fish farm, there was a large collection of birds to scan. The usual four species of gulls were soon joined by the rarer Iceland Gull (photo opposite), a sole pale juvenile bird perched on the rocks at the mouth of the bay. Ducks included Mallard, Goldeney, Eider, Teal, Shelduck and a single female Pintail doing its best trying to escape our detection by hiding among the female Mallards. On the tideline

there were several Rock Pipits with a few Meadow Pipits mixed in. A couple of Grey Wagtails flew by and a single Greenfinch was noted in with the Chaffinch flock. In a large group of feeding Hooded Crows on the shore we noted a single Carrion and two very Carrion-like hybrids. However, more unusual was a group of 14 Red Knot that flew in and landed at the water's edge.

We headed back to the estate office car park to have lunch before heading inland up the hill, seeing a group of Long-tailed Tits on the way. This gave us views of the open moor to the east, mainly in the hope of spotting one or more of the Golden Eagles that Errol had been seeing there recently. Unfortunately despite our best efforts there was not much to be seen other than distant Ravens. We then headed back round to-



An Iceland Gull amongst Herring Gulls ©Jim Dickson

wards the coast via a nice wooded river (Ormsary Water) where we added Goldcrest, Sparrowhawk and Mistle Thrush (plus a Red Squirrel) and then a sub-adult Golden Eagle that Mike spotted circling just above the tree line—phew! Back at the coast we got better views of the Iceland Gull as the tide was well in, and a single Redshank plus a couple of Turnstones. It was an excellent day out with a good range of species seen.

Birds seen (53 species from Mike Harrison). Greater Canada Goose, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Common Eider, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Pheasant, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver,

Great Cormorant, European Shag, Grey Heron, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Ringed Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Common Redshank, Black Guillemot, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Iceland Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Woodpigeon, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Jay, Carrion Crow, Hooded Crow, Northern Raven, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Common Chaffinch, European Greenfinch.

Mammals seen. Red Squirrel, Red Deer.

Jim Dickson



Along inland rivers, Otters tend to be somewhat secretive and often nocturnal, which makes them difficult to see. Some have territories that extend from the sea, inland along rivers, and into freshwater lochs.

However, Argyllshire is one of the best places in Scotland to see otters. They are easiest to see on the shores of sea lochs, where they have territories that extend along 2-3km of coast. There is much such habitat in Argyllshire with its highly indented sea lochs. Here, they can be found hunting amongst the seaweed for crabs and fish. A good place to look is near where a river or stream comes into the sea, as otters periodically need to wash the salt out of their fur. An otter holt can often be found there too.

The weather and the tides affect your chances of seeing an otter. If the sea is calm you are more likely to see the ripples as they swim along,

whereas when it is rougher they are much more difficult to spot. Similarly if the tide is coming in, your chances are better as they often hunt in areas newly covered by the sea. But they can be seen at any state of the tide.

Much like stalking a diving bird, if you spot an otter, wait for it to dive, then creep down on to the beach and secrete yourself behind a rock while the otter is under water. If you are lucky it might catch something and swim in towards the shore and you will get a good view.

Although we have fitted in otter watching amongst birdwatching, and have not looked for otters a lot, we have seen them several times in Argyllshire. The following sites are offered as suggestions where you might reasonably, with persistence, expect to see one or more, although sometimes you can expect to be disappointed!

Starting with the easy sites, along Loch



Caolisport near Ormsary, a minor road runs parallel to the shore so provides a place which is easy and safe to search from a car. You can stop at several places and use your binoculars in much the same manner as you might search for birds.

There are a number of rocks here where otters haul out when they have captured a fish or crab, which is too large for them to deal with in the sea. You can see the evidence of broken shells and crab claws on the large rocks. Otters will often swim along parallel to the shore so you can predict to an extent where they might pop up next.

On Mull, the beach north-west of the head of Loch na Keal is a well-known otter-watching spot easily accessible from the road. Similarly north of Salen on the shores of the Sound of Mull can be productive without too much of a detour off the road. It is also possible to stop

safely on the road round the south of Loch Scridain.

We even saw one from the esplanade in the middle of Oban on the weekend of the joint Scottish Birdwatchers Conference in the Corran Halls.

Among sites which are more difficult to access is Ballachuan Hazel Wood SWT Reserve. If you make your way through the wood and down to Seil Sound and sit down for a while you may see them swimming about in the sheltered waters of the sound.

Coll near Arinagour is also supposed to be good although we have looked a couple of times and not seen any there.

These are just a few suggestions. Anywhere with seaweed on a sheltered sea loch has the potential to be productive. Good luck otter hunting!





Movements of Goldfinches in Argyll 2009-2016

Goldfinch at Machrihanish SBO ©Eddie Maguire

Introduction

Prior to 2007 there was no information on movements of Goldfinches in Argyll (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2007). The recent wealth of BTO notifications on the movements of Goldfinches to and from Argyll is intriguing. Just two ringing sites in the county are responsible for the majority of these records.

Have changes in the behaviour of Goldfinches, in particular their use of garden and woodland feeding stations, made them more readily available for BTO ringers to catch?

Main ringing sites in Argyll

At the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) feeding and trapping station only nyjer seed is used as bait. There are only two recoveries from several hundred birds ringed since 2010, but eleven birds ringed elsewhere in the UK have been caught (controlled) there.

At the Kilmartin (Mid-Argyll) feeding and trapping station, peanuts and occasionally nyjer are used as the bait. There has been only one recovery, and four birds ringed elsewhere in the UK have been controlled there (D. C. Jardine *pers. comm.*).

The only other British-ringed bird involving Argyll was a Goldfinch ringed in Hertfordshire and

Locations of ringed Goldfinches moving to and from Argyll

Location	Recoveries of birds ringed in Argyll	Controls of birds ringed elsewhere in the UK
Scotland		
Strathclyde	0	2
Dumfries & Galloway	0	1
England		
Lancashire	0	2
South Yorkshire	0	1
Cheshire	0	1
Lincolnshire	1	1
Nottinghamshire	1	0
Shropshire	1	2
Suffolk	0	2
Herefordshire	0	1
Wales		
Gwynedd	0	1
Northern Ireland		
Co. Antrim	0	2
TOTAL	3	16

found dead on Jura.

There were two reports of ringed birds involving other countries—a French-ringed bird found dead at Kilberry (Mid-Argyll) and a Campbeltown-ringed bird controlled in Belgium. All together there are 21 records of Goldfinch movements to and from Argyll (Table, previous page)).

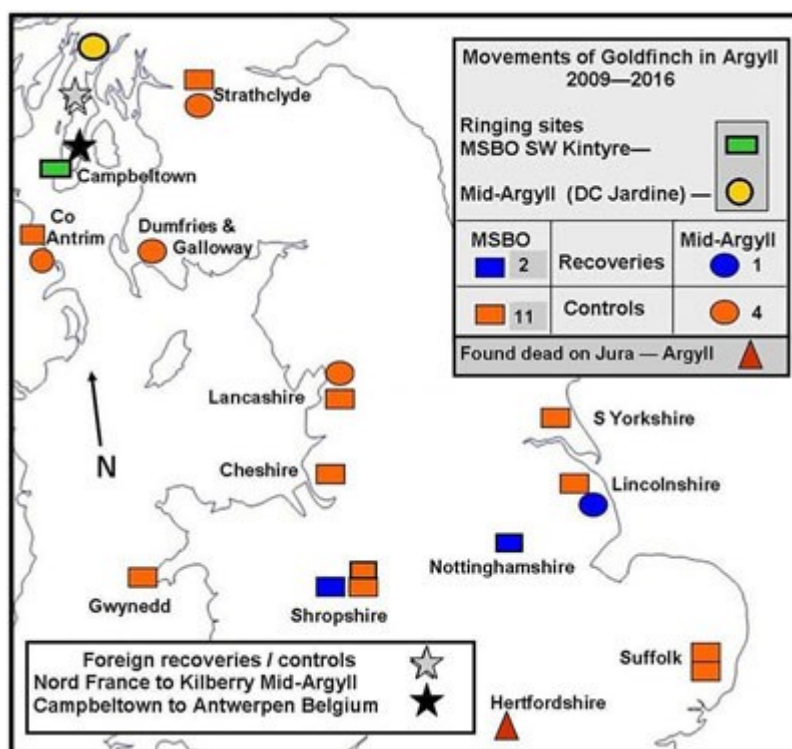
The map opposite shows all movements of ringed Goldfinches >20km from the ringing sites at MSBO (2) and Mid-Argyll (1), all UK controls (16) and foreign notifications (2). Note the SSE origin of the majority of controls

Discussion

Changes in the behaviour of Goldfinches, in particular their increasing use of garden bird feeders, may explain the current wealth of information accumulated in Argyll by a few BTO ringers. This must have greatly enhanced opportunities for all BTO ringers to catch Goldfinches in greater numbers at garden and woodland feeding stations.

Furthermore, the increase in the UK Goldfinch population has been dramatic—it increased by about 80% between 2002 and 2012, and has been increasingly spotted in gardens. While at the same time, many of our familiar songbird species are in decline. Trends in common breeding birds in the UK (Breeding Bird Survey) showed a 111% increase for Goldfinches during 1995-2013 (Hayhow, 2015).

It follows that the sudden wealth of recoveries/controls in Argyll may be as much a consequence of the population increase as it was to a change in feeding habits, although that undoubtedly has aided capture (D. C. Jardine *pers. comm.*).



References

- Ap Rheinallt, T., *et al.* (eds.) (2007). *Birds of Argyll*. Argyll Bird Club, Lochgilphead.
- Hayhow, D.B., *et al.* (2015). The state of the UK's birds 2015. RSPB, BTO, WWT, JNCC, NE, NIEA, NRW and SNH, Sandy, Bedfordshire.

Eddie Maguire



Recent bird sightings November 2016 to January 2017



Little Egret, Machir Bay, Islay, 20 November 2016 ©Toby Green

Presented here are records of rare and unusual species, as well as counts and movements of more common species recorded in Argyll during the period. I wish to thank to everyone who sent in records and apologise for any errors or omissions. Ideally records should be submitted using the Argyll Bird Recording System or by using the BTO BirdTrack System. For information about either scheme please email:

abcrecorder@outlook.com

A more detailed and up-to-date account of recent sightings, including a list of spring migrant arrival dates, is available on the Argyll Bird Club website.

Note: Machrihanish SBO = Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, Kintyre. BBRC = British Birds Records Committee. ABRC = Argyll Birds Records Committee.

Swans, ducks, geese & gamebirds

ACKLING GOOSE. On Islay, one was at Gruinart on 11 Jan (James How) and one, perhaps the same bird, was seen in fields near Ballygrant on 31 Jan (Dan Brown).

GADWALL. Away from Islay and Tiree; two males were at Westport Marsh, Kintyre on 20 Jan and two males were at Knock, Mull during Nov-Dec.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL. On Tiree, single males

were at Clachan on 15 Nov and presumably the same bird was at Loch Bhasapol on 2 Dec, 14 Jan and 17 Jan, with a second male at Loch a' Phuill on 17 Jan (John Bowler). A male was at RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay from 16 Dec and throughout Jan (Michal Sur, Dave Maynard *et al.*).

PINTAIL. A peak count of 61 birds was made at RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay on 15 Dec. Rare on the mainland, a male and female were noted at Balloch Farm (The Laggan), Kintyre on 20 Jan, and a female was at Eilean Traighe, Ormsary, Mid-Argyll from 14 Jan.

SHOVELER. A peak count of 30 birds were at RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay on 25 Dec. Rare on the mainland, where the only records came from Kintyre, with one at Machrihanish SBO, on 24 Nov, two at Kilmichael (by Campbeltown) on 14 Nov, a male at Balloch Farm (The Laggan) during Jan, and a male at Westport Marsh on 29 Jan.

POCHARD. Two drakes were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 5 Nov. On Islay, one was at Ardnave Loch on 26 Nov and two were at Loch Skerrols on 1 Jan.

RING-NECKED DUCK. A first-winter male was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 5 Nov (John Bowler).

GREATER SCAUP. A peak count of 73 birds was made off Blackrocks, Loch Indaal, Islay on 28 Jan.

LONG-TAILED DUCK. Peak counts of 15 birds at Loch Indaal, Islay on 4 Nov, followed by ten in the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 27 Dec. Smaller numbers were noted on Coll, Tiree and in Mid-Argyll.

COMMON SCOTER. The highest count was of 142 in Loch Indaal, Islay on 14 Dec.

Seabirds (divers, grebes, shearwaters, petrels, also egrets & herons)

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER. A high count of 326 birds, in ideal conditions, in the Sound of Gigha on 31 Jan.

SOOTY SHEARWATER. One headed SW off Hynish, Tiree on 8 Nov.

LITTLE EGRET. One flew over Machir Bay, Islay on 20 Nov and one was at West Loch Tarbert, Kintyre on 26 Nov—both being found by Toby Green. One was at Loch Laich, North Argyll from 12 Jan (John Landale), and one was seen at Tayinloan, Kintyre on 31 Jan (Graeme Garner).

SLAVONIAN GREBE. A peak of 33 birds was at Loch Indaal, Islay on 2 Nov. Twelve were noted at Loch na Keal, Mull on 19 Nov, 14 were at the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 27 Dec and 18 were there on 5 Jan. Six were at Loch Caolisport, Mid-Argyll on 29 Jan.

Raptors to rails

RED KITE. One was seen at The Oa, Islay on 21 Nov.

GYRFALCON. A 'grey plumaged' bird was reported from Rockside, Islay on 22 Dec (George E Jackson *et al.*) and a 'white-phase' bird was reported from Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 4 Jan (Rebecca Boyd). Both records have been submitted to the BBRC.

COOT. A first-winter bird was at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree from 5 to 19 Dec at least, and on Islay singles were at Carnain on 12 Jan and at Loch Ballygrant on 29 Jan.

Waders

GREY PLOVER. One at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 19 Dec was most unusual, being away from the coast. There was a peak of eleven birds on Islay at Gartbreck on 14 Jan.

WHIMBREL. One, with Curlews, was at Inverlussa, north Jura on 31 Jan.

PURPLE SANDPIPER. Highest mainland count was at Dunoon Crazy Golf, Cowal with 28 on 2 Jan.

WOODCOCK. High counts on Islay included 40 at An Curran (Port Ellen) on 28 Jan and 100 at Carn Mor, Laphroaig on 28 Jan.

JACK SNIFE. One was at Balephuill, Tiree on 28 Jan. On Is-



Upper photo: Adult Glaucous Gull, Loch Gilp, 19 January ©Jim Dickson

Lower photo: Juvenile Glaucous Gull, Machrihanish SBO, 20 January ©Eddie Maguire

lay, singles were at Avinlussa on 2 Nov, Ardnave on 26 Nov and The Oa on 23 Jan.

GREENSHANK. Higher counts included five at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 1 Nov and six at Loch Cuin, Mull on 26 Jan.

GREY PHALAROPE. One was seen and photographed at Ardtalla, Islay on 25 Dec.

Skuas, gulls, terns & auks

POMARINE SKUA. A juvenile headed SW off Hynish, Tiree on 8 Nov.

LITTLE GULL. An adult was at the head of Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 28 Dec and 10 Jan, then three adults together there on 13 Jan.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL. Four first-winter birds were at Campbeltown Harbour, Kintyre on 31 Nov. Early records of single adults were at Ballinaby, Islay on 12 Jan and at Sandaig, Tiree on 20 Jan.

ICELAND GULL. On Tiree, the long staying 2CY (second-calendar-year bird) remained into Jan. In Kintyre, two birds (a juvenile and a second-winter) were at Campbeltown Loch on 16 Jan. On Mull, up to two juveniles were at Loch na Keal from 27 Dec into Jan and a juvenile was at Loch Scridain on 13 Jan. In Mid-Argyll a juvenile and a 2CY/3CY bird was at Ormsary from mid-Jan. In North Argyll a juvenile was at Loch Laich on 17 Jan. On Islay, single juveniles were at Gartmain on 8 Nov and at Gruinart on 29 Nov.

GLAUCOUS GULL (photo on previous page). On Tiree, single juveniles were recorded with totals of one in Nov, two or possibly three in Dec, and five or possibly six in Jan. In Kintyre a juvenile was at Campbeltown Loch on 16 and 20 Jan and a juvenile was at Bellochantuy during 14-31 Jan. On Islay, one or possibly two birds were at the head of Loch Indaal from 30 Dec into Jan. On Coll, a juvenile was at Cliad Bay on 1 Jan. On Mull, a juvenile was at Loch Scridain on 11 Jan. In Mid-Argyll, an adult was at Loch Gilp from 19 Jan and a juvenile was on the

Great Grey Shrike, Moine Mhor, 17 December ©Jim Dickson



front green there on 27 Jan, and a 'possible Glaucous' was at the head of Loch Fyne on 25 Nov.

PUFFIN. On Tiree, an early bird was in Gunna Sound on 23 Jan and one flew SW off Hynish on 26 Jan.

LITTLE AUK. Two flew SW off Hynish, Tiree on 25 Jan, and one was picked up dead at Dunstaffnage, Mid-Argyll on 16 Jan.

Doves, cuckoos, owls, swift, kingfisher & woodpeckers

WOODPIGEON. A large flock, for Mid-Argyll, of 155 birds was observed moving SE over Cairnbaan on 11 Nov.

KINGFISHER. In Mid-Argyll, single birds were noted at Furnace on 21 Nov, a female at Loch Gilp from late Nov into Jan, and at Lusragan Burn, Connel on 6 Dec. One was at Dervaig, Mull on 14 Jan, and one was at Ardkinglass shore, Cowal on 21 Jan.

Passerines (larks to buntings)

GREAT GREY SHRIKE. One was at the Moine Mhor, Mid-Argyll on 16-17 Dec (Mike Hoit *et al.*).

CARRION CROW. One at Kilkenneth, Tiree on 14 Dec was the first there for several years.

SKY LARK. A count of 300+ birds at West Parkfergus, the Laggan, Kintyre on 12 Nov was the largest concentration seen in that area for many years.

BARN SWALLOW. One was at Tayinloan, Kintyre on 9 Nov and one was at Loch Beg, Mull on 12 Nov. A



Upper photo: Isabelline Wheatear, Islay, 1 December 2016 ©Jim Dickson

Lower photo: 'Siberian' Chiffchaff, Balephuil, Tiree, 8 December 2016 ©John Bowler

'hirundine' seen at close range in Dunoon on 5 Nov showed features that were a good fit for a North American Cliff Swallow, but unfortunately this report could not be confirmed despite a later search.

LONG-TAILED TIT. At least two birds photographed (in a flock of 10) at Loch Beg, Mull on 7 Nov were identified as 'northern' race (Bryan Rains *et al.*). This is the first for Argyll, and appears also to be the first record for the west of Scotland. This report has been submitted to the BBRC.

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER. A late bird remained at Balephuil, Tiree during 1-7 Nov (John Bowler).

CHIFFCHAFF. Singles were at Balephuil, Tiree in Nov, with a 'Siberian race' bird there on 3-9 Dec (photo above). One was in

the woods at RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay on 25 Nov.

BLACKCAP. Single males and females were at Balephuil, Tiree during Nov. A male was in Cairnbaan on 4 Nov, a male was at Corra Farm, Cowal on 18 Nov, one was at Octomore, Islay on 18 Nov. A male was seen at Salen, Mull on 10-11 Dec and a male was in a garden at Scammadale, Mid-Argyll on 22-25 Dec.

WAXWING. One was at Caol Ila, Islay on 2 Nov. In Mid-Argyll, six were at Connel on 5 Nov rising to 28 there on 10 Nov, up to 30 were in Lochgilphead on 24-25 Nov, with possibly the same flock again in Ardrishaig on 30 Dec, and in Minard on 21 Jan. On Tiree, one was at Balephuil on 2 and 11 Nov. Ten were at Craignure, Mull on 30 Nov. One was at Barcaldine North Argyll on 1 Jan, and 10-14 birds were at Benmore Gardens, Cowal on 4 Dec.

NUTHATCH. One was at Balindore, Mid-Argyll throughout Nov and Dec, with one nearby at Dalmally Bridge, Mid-Argyll on 2 to 3 Jan. Three were at Ardkinglass Woodlands, Cowal on 21 Jan.

ISABELLINE WHEATEAR (photo opposite). One frequented Machir Bay, Islay from 27 Nov to at least 3 Dec, and was probably present from 23 Nov, when a Northern Wheatear had been reported there. (Mike Peacock, Gary Turnbull *et al.*). If accepted by the BBRC, this will become a new species for Argyll, and the first ever for the west of Scotland.

BRAMBLING. Only small numbers were recorded. On Islay, one was at Gruinart Farm on 1 Nov and one was at Octomore on 2 Nov. On Mull, one was at Salen on 5 Nov and one was at Glengorm on 1 Jan. One was in Connel, Mid-Argyll on 8 Nov, one was at Bishop's Glen, Dunoon on 12 Jan, two were at Stonefield,

Kintyre on 12 Jan and one was in Ardrishaig, Mid-Argyll on 28 Jan.

HAWFINCH. One was seen in Oban, Mid-Argyll briefly at feeders on one day only in early Nov (Eileen Ballantyne & Pete Willis) and has been accepted by the ABRC.

BULLFINCH. A flock of 13 birds was seen in Glendaruel, Cowal on 11 Dec.

LINNET. One at Traigh Bhagh, Tiree on 22 Jan was the just the second January record for Tiree in 100 years!

TWITE. A very high count of 948 birds was made at Kinnabus, The Oa, Islay on 10 Nov.

LESSER REDPOLL. A flock of 50 birds was at Rhudle Mill, near Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll on 4 Nov.

SISKIN. A flock of 25 birds was at Dalvore, Mid-Argyll on 28 Nov. On Islay, 31 birds were at Foreland on 11 Dec and a high count of 102 was made at the Woollen Mill on 3 Nov.

CROSSBILL. Four were in Dunoon, Cowal on 4

Nov and seven were at Balinoe, Mid-Argyll on 10 Dec.

YELLOWHAMMER. In Kintyre, five were near Hillside Farm, Campbeltown and four were at Southend during Jan. On Mull, 12 were in a garden at Lochdon on 27 Jan.

SNOW BUNTING. On Tiree, two were at Sandaig on 2 Nov and two at Mannal on 8 Nov. On Islay, three were at Machir Bay on 22 Nov and one was at Claddach on 5 Dec. Three were in the hills east of Ormsary, Mid-Argyll on 5 Dec.

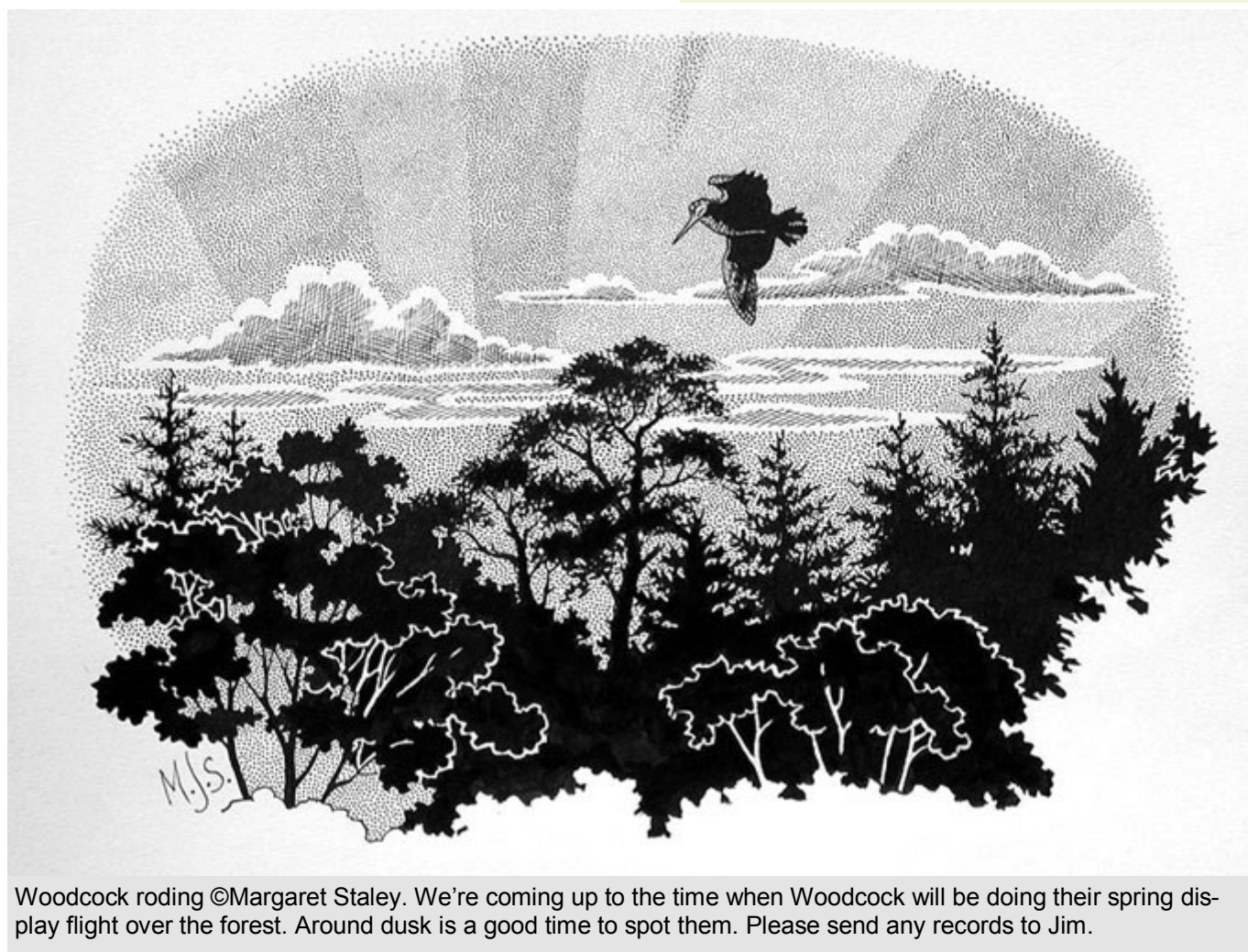
STOP PRESS

CACKLING GOOSE. A single was with Barnacle Geese again near Ballygrant, Islay from 5 Feb.

SLAVONIAN GREBE. A high count of 72 birds was made at the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 5 Feb.

KUMLIEN'S GULL. A juvenile was at Eilean Traighe, Ormsary, Mid-Argyll from 5 Feb.

STOCK DOVE. Two were at Knockdow Estate, Cowal on 9 Feb.



Woodcock roding ©Margaret Staley. We're coming up to the time when Woodcock will be doing their spring display flight over the forest. Around dusk is a good time to spot them. Please send any records to Jim.

BTO Surveys in 2017

House Martin 2017 Nest Study



The BTO would like as many people as possible to take part in this survey. It will help to improve our understanding of the causes of the decline in House Martin numbers.

2016 Argyll Results

On checking the data submitted for Argyll South, four nests were monitored by Ian McPherson at one site, given as the Green Welly Stop in Tyn-drum, but which is strictly in Stirling! For Argyll North (Mull, Coll, Tiree and Morvern), there were eight nests monitored at two sites (six nests in Morvern and two nests on Mull).

2017 Survey

For those of you that were just thinking about it last year, but somehow let the opportunity slip by, there is another chance to get some Argyll nests on the map. If you know of a site where House Martins are nesting and can answer 'Yes' to the following:

- ♦ Can nests can be viewed safely (from ground level or from a window) without causing disturbance to the birds?
- ♦ Is the site convenient for me to commit to visiting regularly for about 15mins (e.g. once a week, with an occasional break being acceptable), throughout the breeding season (i.e. until mid-September)?
- ♦ Have I obtained the site owner's permission where necessary?

What to record

Details about the building, the nests and the visits. There is also an option of additional 10-minute timed counts.

Full instructions are to be found along with the various survey forms at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey/house-martin-nest-study-2016/resources where there is also a 14mins instructional video.

You can register for the survey directly without going through the BTO Regional Rep. Please give it a go.

Heronries Census



Heronries Census

This is the BTO's longest running survey, taking place annually since 1928. Historically coverage in Scotland has always been low, but has improved in recent years, although this has not been so in Argyll, so do consider it.

Making a count of 'apparently occupied nests' at a heronry is often very straightforward but is tricky when the nests are obscured by foliage. Nests in deciduous trees are best counted before leaf-burst in spring. No specialised ornithological knowledge or experience is required. Clues such as droppings or hatched eggshells under nests can help observers decide whether a nest is in use, especially in conifers. Access is needed under the nests or to nearby vantage points from which the heronry can be viewed. In some cases this may require landowners' permission.

Sites should best be counted in the second half of April, and if possible, an earlier and later visit, though counts in any season are helpful. Even if no nest count can be made, a report indicating whether or not the heronry is in use is valuable for monitoring.

To avoid duplication of effort, colonies are allocated to observers, so please contact your local BTO Rep. to register your interest.



Contact details for BTO Reps. are on the back page

Argyll Bird Club 2017 Rookery Survey

Rook ©Jim Dickson



During March and April the club hopes to carry out a full survey of the Rookeries in Argyll. The last complete census took place in 1975 when 3217 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.

While most Rooks are found in Kintyre and on Islay, they breed throughout Argyll and 33 new rookeries have been found since the national survey in 1975. All the known sites of Rookeries in Argyll are shown in the figure on the next page.

A standardised methodology is used to count rook nests, which allows for comparisons with past and, hopefully, future surveys. The following methodology has been adopted from that used by national surveys (in 1975, 1980 and 1986) and most local, usually county-based, surveys. The aims of the survey are to:

- ◆ Record (and map) the location of all rookeries in the survey area
- ◆ Count the number of nests in all rookeries in the survey area
- ◆ Record other pertinent data, e.g. tree species in which nests are located
- ◆ Provide an estimate of current breeding populations in the survey area

A rookery is defined as any group of nests 100m or more from the next nearest group. Whilst this is an arbitrary definition it has the advantage of being relatively easy to apply in the field and hence repeatable. In some local situations, this may require amendment. A consequence of this definition is that a single rookery may be spread out over a large area or an area with many nests could comprise a number of rookeries.

The difficulties of counting nests in rookeries are well known; the most obvious problems concern the counting of nests in conifers, the counting of multiple nests, the difficulty (in large rookeries) of arriving at a similar total each time, and the

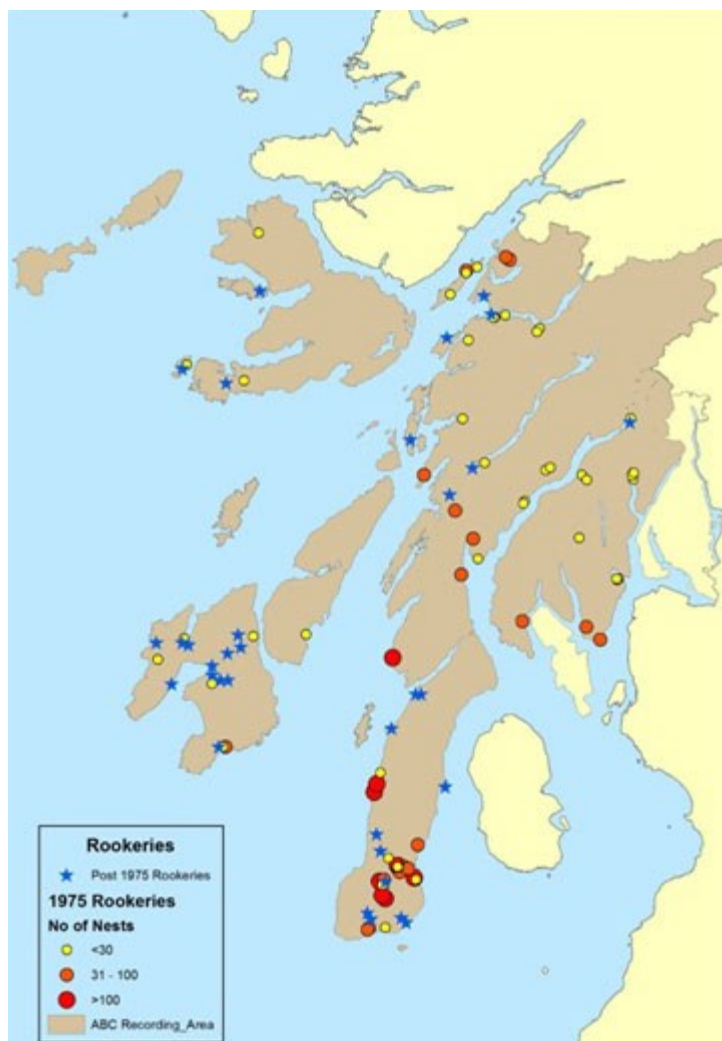


Figure. Locations of known Rookeries in Argyll.

inaccuracy that can result from counting nests from a distance.

Rookeries can, of course, be located at any time of year, but it is best to count the nests as late in the season as possible. The best period to count nests in a rookery is between 15th and 30th April as all nests should then be complete and in use, but the trees will not yet be in full leaf, thus obscuring nests. Counts made earlier in the

season will be accepted as a visit may not be possible during the best time. There is no need to differentiate between occupied and unoccupied nests as this can present difficulties and be time consuming, but should this be recorded, please include a note. Generally, a single nest in an isolated tree is likely to be that of a Carrion/Hooded Crow, but single Rook nests can occur and should be recorded as a rookery. Where it is impossible to get an accurate nest count, e.g. where nests are in conifers, please make an estimate of number of nests. Where possible, please record the tree species in which nests are built. Not all nests in a single rookery will necessarily be in the same tree species. Such data may prove useful when trying to assess the impact of various tree diseases, e.g. ash dieback fungus, on nesting Rooks.

Surveyors are asked to (1) ask the organisers for details of Rookeries which you think you may be able to count, and (2) record the following for each rookery:

- ◆ Rookery name
- ◆ The six-figure national grid reference
- ◆ Date of count and number of nests
- ◆ Number of nests in each species of tree used

Please contact the organisers on argyll-rookeries@outlook.com



Rookery at Port Charlotte Distillery, Islay ©David Jardine



Rooks ©Margaret Staley

Articles for the June issue of the *Eider* should
with the editor before the
5th May 2017

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2016/2017)

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Dickson (Cairnbaan), Gordon Holm (Strone), David
Jardine (Kilmartin), Katie Pendreigh (Tayinloan), Steve
Petty (Ardentinny), Andy Robinson (Stirling), Blair Ur-
quhart (Kilmichael Glen)

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Editor of the Eider: Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ar-
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phone 01505 706652 mobile 07901 636353

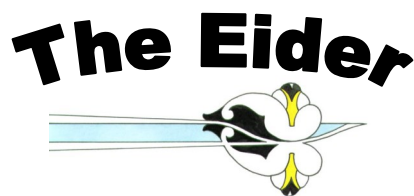
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The *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conserva-
tion and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural
history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book reviews,
press releases and letters. Whenever possible, contributions should
be submitted to the editor as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word
or rtf format. But, this should not deter potential contributors, as
hand-written scripts are also acceptable. If in doubt about whether an
article is suitable, please contact the editor for advice.

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

The *Eider* is published during the first week of March, June, Septem-
ber and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor
before the 20th day of the month prior to publication. However, it
greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline
dates. Contributions are accepted in the order they are received,
which may result in some late submissions being held over until the
next issue.

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

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

More about the Argyll Bird Club

The club was established in 1985 and has around 400 members. Its
main role is to encourage an interest in wild birds and their habitats in
Argyll; an area of outstanding natural beauty and biological diversity.

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

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

Subscriptions are due on 1st January and can be paid by cheque or
standing order. New members joining after 1st October are covered
until the end of the following year. Further information can be ob-
tained from the Membership Secretary (see the box opposite).