

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory 2018 Report



Compiled by Eddie Maguire

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory
SW Kintyre Argyll PA28 6PZ
Founded 11th September 1993

2018 Report

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 seawatching from 1st March to 10th November ultimately produced observations of rare, scarce / unusual species and many outstanding totals of numerous regular passage visitors.

The MSBO was manned daily 1st March – 10th November with casual observations later. The report portrays the year with a monthly summary of all main ornithological events accompanied by a selection of **125 photographs** (for a full account see Systematic Lists in 2018 Monthly Reports on MSBO website).



The Seabird Observatory is located just west of Machrihanish village in SW Kintyre

Cover photographs – 1CY **Mediterranean Gull** and **Purple Sandpiper**

Monitoring overland crossings of Northern Gannets in S Kintyre

Surveillance of **Gannets** over Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) from March to October 2018 by Charlie Robertson (MSBO assistant warden) produced additional remarkable evidence of adults routinely crossing 8km overland on foraging trips to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) and beyond - see **Northern Gannets crossing overland in S Kintyre 2018** on page 71 of this Report.

Note – TL = The Laggan

March 2018

Adult **Whooper Swan** were at Kilkivan Farm TL on 19th (3) and Bleachfield Farm TL on 23rd - 25th (4) and a single there on 28th.

At Strath Farm TL **Greenland White-fronted Geese** peaked at 600+ on 8th.



Greenland White-fronted Goose (adult) TL 8th March

On 7th, a single **Pink-footed Goose** was in with 344 **Greylag Geese** at Strath TL. Flocks of **Common Shelduck** at MSBO included 16 on 5th, 30 on 13th with an increase to 34 on 19th. Ten were at Strath Farm TL on 12th.

A male **American Wigeon** was photographed in the company of 85 **Eurasian Wigeon** at Strath Farm TL south flood pool on 7th (Eddie Maguire). Not found on later dates.

The 4rd Kintyre record.



American Wigeon (male centre) Strath Farm TL 7th March



Great Northern Diver in transition to breeding plumage 25th March

Two **Northern Shoveler** were on Kilmichael Farm floods (by Campbeltown) on 9th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*) and single adult **Northern Gannet** crossed 8km **overland** from Campbeltown Loch (Clyde) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) on 12th and 21st. Max. counts of **Common Eider** at MSBO was 77 on 6th and **107** on 19th. The latter count is the highest spring count here for six years but still down by around **50%**. Counts of **Great Northern Diver** included 9 on 5th, 14 on 11th and 24 on 18th. Many were showing signs of attaining breeding plumage and their far-carrying, haunting calls, were heard more frequently from mid month. The following four photographs (taken on 28th) show a harassed **Red-breasted Merganser** about to lose its fish catch to a very determined **Great Black-backed Gull**.







There was a favourable conclusion for a beleaguered **Eurasian Woodcock** that was found indoors at the Morton's family home at Dalsmerran, Glenbreackerie (Nr Southend).

"On Sunday, March 18th my family became aware that our Jack Russell was investigating something on an internal window sill outside the larder.

It turned out to be a live Woodcock, a relatively common bird in the area (especially during winter 2017/2018).

I managed to catch hold of it, assuming that it would have to be despatched humanely, but the bird seemed entirely unharmed.

After about ten minutes, mostly spent examining the bird for puncture injuries or breaks, we went outside.

The bird immediately flew off strongly to a wet area above the house where woodcock have occasionally been seen "roding" in low light.

My family's assumption - in default of any other explanation - is that one of the cats brought the bird inside" (Brian Morton pers. comm.).

Note - many birds (and small mammals) caught by cats often escape later, unscathed, if they 'play dead' at point of capture (Eddie Maguire).



Woodcock at Dalsmerran prior to release 18th March (Photo / Brian Morton)

A **Little Egret** was seen near Tayinloan on 24th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

On 7th, 3 **Golden Eagle** were soaring over an area south of Loch Lussa; However, they were mainly silhouetted and plumage detail (therefore ages) could not be established (Campbell Fox *pers. comm.*).

There has been several sightings of **Golden Eagle** in this area in the recent past; could the area around Lussa Loch possibly be part of a new home range?

Hen Harrier were showing well with males by MSBO on 5th, Westport Marsh on 7th, Machrihanish Dunes Golf Course on 12th (Gus McConnachie *pers. comm.*) and Loch Lussa on 24th (Dee Brodie *et al / pers. comm.*). Female types were seen at East Chiscan TL on 9th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*) and Bleachfield TL on 12th (photographed). See Supplementary Reports ***Hen Harriers at Bleachfield*** on page 74.

A **Merlin** was at Bleachfield TL on 11th.

Twenty **Ruddy Turnstone** were at Campbeltown on 24th (Rab Morton *pers. comm.*) whilst at MSBO regular small numbers of **Purple Sandpiper** were present all month; max count was 9 on 19th.

Common Ringed Plover males were singing/displaying from 5th then 10 >N with a few **Dunlins** on 15th.

At Kilmichael Farm floods (by Campbeltown) on 9th there was 25 **Northern Lapwing** and 208 **Golden Plover**; also, a **Common Greenshank** was at Kennacraig (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).



Hen Harrier at Bleachfield 12th March

A **Black-tailed Godwit**, still in winter plumage, was at Kilmichael Farm floods (by Campbeltown) on 9th and two **Bar-tailed Godwit** were at Sound of Gigha on 24th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

A **Great Skua** >N on 24th - the first this year and a loose flock of 140 adult **Black-legged Kittiwake** >S on 23rd.

The first few adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** of the spring were by Drumlemble School on 7th. At MSBO a total of 61 >N / 4hrs after rain stopped late morning on 15th. An adult **Iceland Gull** found at Campbeltown Harbour on 27th January was seen on 10 dates during February and was present on 5 dates 4th - 16th March.

Two **Sandwich Tern** at Campbeltown Loch on 29th were the first in Kintyre this year (Rab Morton *pers. comm.*).

A total of **820 Razorbill** >S / 4hrs on 21st (drizzle / poor visibility). Many 'trains', up to 40 birds strong, were photographed and these revealed that the vast majority were in full breeding plumage (likely from RSPB Rathlin). 560 >S / 3hrs on 25th (NW f4).

The first migrant to appear at MSBO this spring was a male **White Wagtail** on 22nd. Later, there was one on 26th and 2 on 28th.

A male **Backcap** was at a Carradale garden feeding station early month (Margo Kennedy *pers. comm.*) and at a Southend garden feeding station **Yellowhammer** peaked at 7 on 24th (Roy / Susie Bennet *pers. comm.*).

April 2018



On the doorstep! Great Skua 26th April

A single **Pink-footed Goose** was at Strath TL on 18th - 19th. **Common Shelduck** counts included 18 on 4th, 8 in-off-sea on 14th, 12 >N on 14th and 9 >N on 15th. Strath TL had 10 on 14th - 20th and 12 during 22nd - 26th.

At Westport Marsh there was 63 **Eurasian Teal** and 22 **Eurasian Wigeon** on 27th, 3 **Northern Shoveler**, including a male, on 3rd, a male and female **Gadwall** on 29th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*) and a **Northern Shoveler** was by MSBO on 16th.

A flock of 10 **Common Scoter** >S on 29th.

There was another highly pleasing count of **97 Common Eider** on 4th. Hopefully a good breeding season ahead too.

Two **Velvet Scoter** were seen at Sound of Gigha on 8th (David Jardine / Argyll Bird Club website).

Monitoring westerly overland passage of adults **Northern Gannet** is an ongoing MSBO Project. During April, Charlie Robertson reported a total of **45** adults crossing 8 km to the west over Kintyre from Campbeltown Loch (Clyde) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) on 19 / 30 days of observation.

The total crossing overland during March / April was **51**.



Adult Northern Gannet MSBO 26th April

A **Great Crested Grebe** was at the Sound of Gigha on 8th (David Jardine / Argyll Bird Club website) and a **Black-throated Diver** was at Southend on 10th – 11th.

Counts of **Great Northern Diver** off MSBO reached 27 on 4th including a group of 12 with several almost in full breeding plumage.

Three **Manx Shearwater** >S on 11th - the first seen this spring.

A **Little Egret** was at Kennacraig on 18th (Argyll Bird Club website).

A male **Hen Harrier** was over the golf course at Carradale on 4th (Alistair Paterson / Argyll Bird Club website), a female type was at Ormsary, Glenbreakerie; on 10th (Brian Morton *pers. comm.*) and males were at Bleachfield TL on 14th (David Haggarty *pers. comm.*) and Polliwilline (near Southend) on 21st (Brian Morton *pers. comm.*).

A **Sparrowhawk** was displaying over Lossit Estate on 19th and a **Merlin** was at Dalnaspidal, Tanga on 9th (Brian Morton *pers. comm.*). Three pairs of **Lapwing** were displaying at Westport Marsh on 27th.

A flock of 40 **Common Ringed Plover** rested by MSBO on 6th and a local pair had a full clutch on 20th.

Purple Sandpiper were very regular with a max of 10 on 13th and two **Common Greenshank** >N on 6th.

A **Bar-tailed Godwit** appeared on 9th then a **Black-tailed Godwit** on 19th.

The first **Whimbrel** of the year arrived on 6th. Passage later included one on 17th, 5 on 18th, 8 on 19th, 2 on 20th, 3 on 21st, 5 on 22nd, 2 on 23rd, 10 on 25th, 2 on 26th, **22** on 27th, 11 on 28th, **25** on 29th and one on 30th.



Whimbrel 20th April

A 3CY **Iceland Gull** >S offshore on 18th, a **Great Skua** >S on 26th and at Campbeltown Loch there was 3 **Sandwich Tern** on 2nd (Rab Morton *pers. comm.*) then a superb total of **48** there on 29th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

Small numbers of **Sandwich Tern** were present at MSBO almost daily with a peak of 11 on 19th.

The first **Common Cuckoo** was heard on Ben Ghuillion, Campbeltown on 10th (Alec Wilson *pers. comm.*) then at Grogport (N of Carradale) on 13th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*) and at Campbeltown again on 17th (Rob Blackstock *pers. comm.*).

Three **Barn Swallow** on 7th were the first at MSBO this year. Passage N later included one on 8th, 5 on 9th, 8 on 11th, one on 12th, none 13th then daily in small numbers from 16th.



Sandwich Tern off MSBO

The first record of **Sand Martin** was one on 14th at Machrihanish Bay.

A male **Northern Wheatear** on 7th was the first at MSBO this year. A female appeared on 9th. There was regular small numbers from 12th and a male was trapped/ringed on 14th.

A male 'Greenland' **Wheatear** was briefly by MSBO on 18th then 2 males (one photographed) on 25th and another 28th - 29th. A striking 'Greenland' male was photographed at Strath TL on 20th.

Passage of **White Wagtail** >N occurred on 19 dates with a peak of **32** on 19th. Inland, at Strath floods TL there was 6 on 20th, 3 on 25th, 7 on 27th and 2 on 28th – 29th.

There was a good presence of **Eurasian Magpie** with singles at Stewarton village TL on 1st (Davie Reid *pers. comm.*), Campbeltown at many locations around the town 3rd - 14th (Bob Middleton / Douglas Campbell / George Shields / Gerald Boylan *pers. comm.*). One was at Carradale on 24th March and was joined by another on 4th (Alistair

Paterson / Argyll Bird Club website). The Magpie is mainly a scarce spring passage visitor that recently attempted to breed in Campbeltown.

A likely source of these migrants is Co Antrim to the west (the nearest large breeding population). Neville McKee (Copeland Bird Observatory / N Ireland) has reported many migrant Magpies leaving the island over many years, and heading out over the North Channel for Dumfries and Galloway. However, there is a far shorter sea crossing to the Scottish mainland from around the Ballycastle area at the NE point of N Ireland to the Mull of Kintyre (12 miles) and birds seen in spring here, over many years (including at Mull of Kintyre), are considered to have originated from Co Antrim (Eddie Maguire – a personal belief based on many records over the past 45 years).

See [www. Magpies in Argyll](#) (by Paul Daw).

A **Cirl Bunting** was seen at Port Righ, Carradale; this was a cautious identification by a competent birdwatcher of a male at garden feeders on 11th (Alistair Patterson / Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*). A search of the area 12th – 13th proved negative.

'A pretty rare find in Scotland and a first for Argyll if record is accepted by Scottish Birds Records Committee' (Jim Dickson, Argyll Recorder *pers. comm.*).

Yellowhammer were reported from three widely separated localities and all at garden feeding stations. Campbeltown; 4 including a male at Davaar Avenue on 10th (Graham / Esther Thompson *pers. comm.*). Southend; 8 on 3rd. One was found dead below window on 9th (Roy / Susie Bennet *pers. comm.*). Carradale; 2 regular at Port Righ (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).



Male Northern Wheatear 20th April / compare with male 'Greenland' race below



Male Northern Wheatear; '*Greenland*' race Strath TL 20th April

May 2018



Whimbrel on passage 25th May

There was a good May showing of **Whooper Swan** with 2 at Drumlemble TL 1st – 5th and one at Strath TL 1st – 5th. Unusually, there were two late records at MSBO - an adult arrived offshore mid-morning on 28th and then 2 adults >N on 29th.

The first brood of **Common Shelduck** was b/10 on 30th and **Common Eider** produced a b/1 on 23rd then a b/2 appeared on 30th.

Monitoring westerly overland passage of adults **Northern Gannet** - an ongoing MSBO Project...

During May, Charlie Robertson (MSBO assistant warden) reported a total of 78 adults crossing west over Kintyre on 24 / 31 days of observation.

During March – May, 129 adults crossed the peninsula on 45 / 92 days of observation. A male **Hen Harrier** was near the north end of Gigha on 4th (Alistair Anderson *pers. comm.*) and a male was seen at Torrisdale Castle Estate on 13th.

A pair of **Merlin** appeared to be holding territory at Ballygrogan, just south of MSBO; both were seen hunting migrants offshore on several dates 10th – 22nd (has bred successfully in this upland habitat in the past).

Wader passage included peaks of 60 **Dunlin** on 22nd, 40 **Sanderling** on 30th and 22 **Ruddy Turnstone** on 20th. A **Bar-tailed Godwit** arrived on 19th. **Whimbrel** passage numbers peaked early in the month with 30+ on 4th and 43 >N on 5th. Small numbers appeared on 12 dates later to 30th (1).



Sanderlings in various stages of transition / on passage 30th May



Ruddy Turnstone in breeding plumage 20th May



Whimbrel 25th May

A 2CY **Mediterranean Gull** was photographed on 22nd.



2CY Mediterranean Gull MSBO 22nd May

Sandwich Tern were present almost daily with a peak of 16 on 5th.



Sandwich Tern 10th May

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Four **Common Swift** arrived over Campbeltown on 8th. These were the first arrivals in Argyll (Jim Dickson / Argyll Recorder *pers. comm.*).

White Wagtail was rather scarce this month with none 1st – 9th and later there was only a total of 8 birds on 4 dates. What happened to the May passage? Although apparently a poor showing the overall numbers seen this spring were still close to the total numbers seen during April / May for most years 2014 – 2018.

Table1.

Cumulative daily totals of **White Wagtails** on passage at MSBO during April / May 2014 – 2018.

Year	April	May	Totals
2014	91+ on 24 dates	32+ on 24 dates	123
2015	90+ on 28 dates	44 on 14 dates	134
2016	64+ on 20 dates	45+ on 19 dates	109
2017	133 on 21 dates	102 on 14 dates	235
2018	121 on 21 dates	8 on 4 dates	129



White Wagtail 20th May

The **Eurasian Magpie** was regular by Stronvar Bowling Club, Campbeltown all month (Bob Middleton *et al pers. comm.*).



Common Linnet MSBO 6th May

June 2018



Sub-adult Northern Gannet foraging off MSBO 16th June

Common Shelduck broods just hatched included b/6 on 5th, b/3 on 7th, b/7 on 13th and a b/1 + a b/3 on 15th. Note; the b/10 that hatched on 30th May did very well indeed; the brood was seen many times up to 26th June and all had managed to survive.

Table 2.

Common Shelduck productivity at Machrihanish during May / June **2016 – 2018**.

Year	No. broods	No. ducklings	Mean brood size
2018	6	30	6
2017	8	55	6.7
2016	6	37	6.1

The topmost duckling productivity at Machrihanish occurred in **2010** when **75** (9 broods) hatched during April /June. On 9th June that year, a pair in charge of a remarkable assembly of 19 tiny ducklings (just hatched) appeared (apparently several females often dump eggs in a single nest). Excluding the crèche pair the average brood size in **2010** was **7** (8 broods / 56 ducklings).

Broods of **Common Eider** just hatched included b/5 on 2nd, b/2 on 7th, b/6 on 10th, b/4 on 13th and b/3 on 26th.

On 15th, 7 females with a creche of 10 very small ducklings appeared by MSBO. The largest ducklings (4) were probaby the b/4 from 13th so are omitted from the table below. When the broods split up the smaller ducklings looked good for b/3s; these were added to the no. of broods in the table below.

Table 3.

Common Eider productivity at Machrihanish during May / June **2016 – 2018**.

Year	No. broods	No. ducklings	Mean brood size
2018	8	25	3.1
2017	6	23	3.5
2016	10	35	3.5



Common Eider MSBO 20th June

Two eclipse male **Gadwall** arrived on 29th and were still present on 30th – a rare mainland summer occurrence.



Gadwall: eclipse male 29th June

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Flocks of **Common Scoter** >S included ca. 30 males on 6th, 7 males on 16th and 9 (5 males) on 23rd. A female was resting in Machrihanish Bay on 29th.

Passage total at MSBO during the month was 46 birds >S on 3 dates.

This species is a regular June passage visitor in variable numbers and flocks usually consist mainly of males.

A total of 51 were at Sound of Gigha on 26th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).



Common Scoters on passage 23rd June

A flock of 14 **Red-breasted Merganser** >S on 14th and a total of **290** counted at Sound of Gigha on 26th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

Great Northern Diver in non-breeding plumage included singles on 6th and 15th. On 25th, 3 appeared offshore; two were in partial breeding plumage.

At Campbeltown Loch, a lingering adult (in breeding plumage), was present to at least 9th (Brian Morton *pers. comm.*).

During June, a total of **336** adult **Northern Gannet** crossed west over Kintyre on **28 / 30** days of observation.

From March to June the total number of **Northern Gannet** crossing west over Kintyre was **465** adults on **73 / 122** days of observation

A flock of 43 **Dunlin** arrived on 9th and a flock 14 on 12th; the birds in both flocks were all in breeding plumage, had long bills / bright rufous upperparts which, along with the late passage dates, suggested northern breeders, perhaps nominate *alpina*?



. Adult Northern Gannet foraging off MSBO 16th June



Dunlin 12th June

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Two pairs of **Oystercatcher** bred by MSBO (one failed at egg stage). First eggs hatched 6th June and two chicks were ringed on 13th.

Three **Ruddy Turnstone** arrived on 15th – a scarce mid-summer occurrence, then a **Red Knot** in non-breeding plumage rested for a few hrs on 19th – a most unusual mid-summer occurrence.



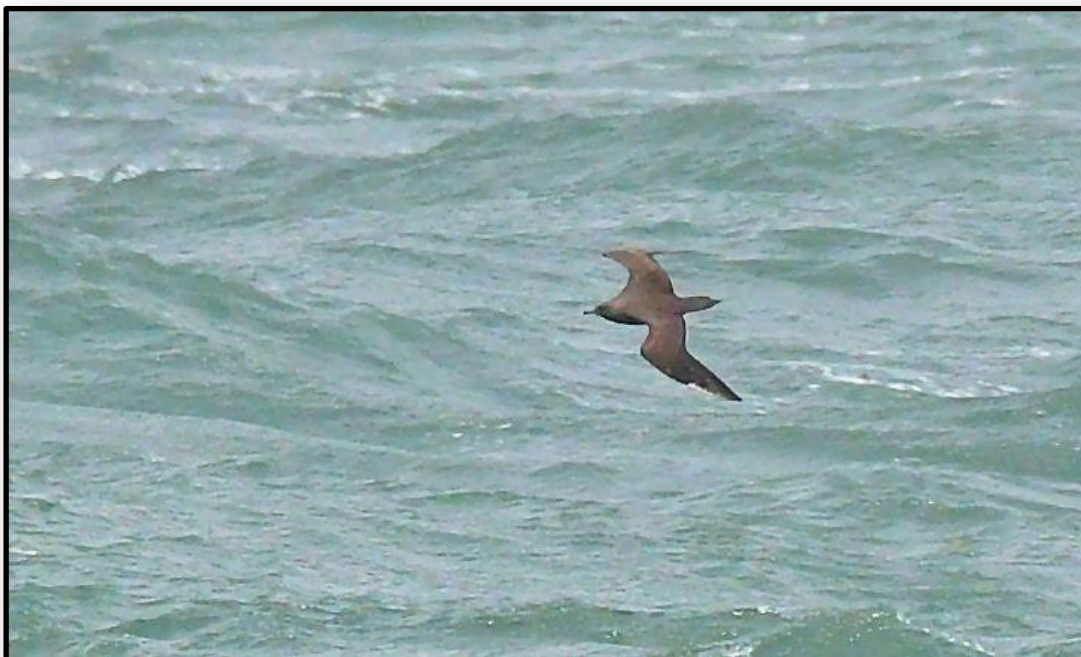
Red Knot (non-breeding plumage) 19th June



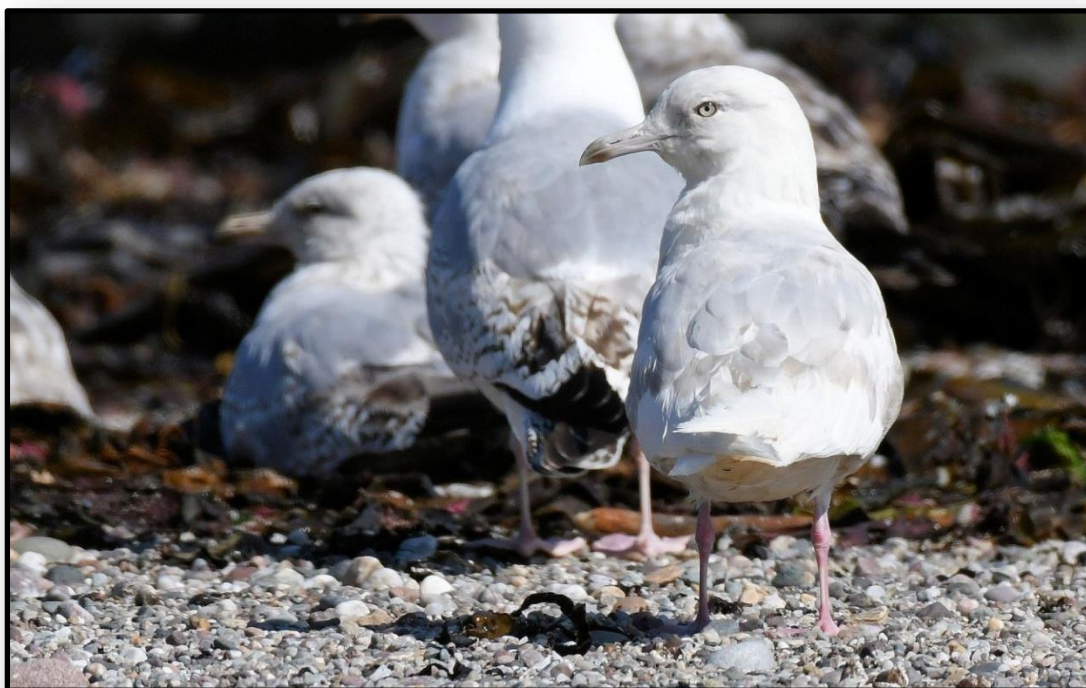
Sanderlings 10th June

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Sixty **Sanderling** were resting on 4th, 10 >S on 8th, 7 rested on 10th and 8 >S on 14th. A **Common Sandpiper** with b/3 appeared on 20th and a **Whimbrel** was present daily 1st – 5th. One that arrived on 29th was a scarce summer occurrence. Single dark phase adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 11th and 14th - a rather scarce June visitor.



Arctic Skua 14th June



2CY Iceland Gull 20th June – another rare mid-summer occurrence

An immaculate breeding plumaged adult **Mediterranean Gull** on 1st was flying south so close to MSBO (on the doorstep) that any notion of obtaining a photo was futile.

A 2CY **Iceland Gull** arrived on 15th and was present to 22nd

Another rare mid-summer occurrence of this northern species following summering immatures at MSBO and TL last year.

Sandwich Tern were present daily in small numbers; max counts 9 on 7th, 10 on 14th and 11 on 22nd. At Southend, there was 12 on 10th (Dee Brodie *pers. comm.*).

Eight pairs of **Arctic Tern** nested on Big Scone Island off the village. Small chicks were seen being fed on 22nd.

A pair of **Rock Pipit** were feeding 4 fledglings on 26th.

Four **Northern Wheatear** chicks fledged on 1st.

At MSBO, **Pied Wagtail** nested between the open (hooked-up) wooden hatch and the roof of the viewing platform. The clutch (5) hatched on 19th (photos below).

This is likely the second brood of a pair that bred successfully close by in late April / May.

A flock of up to 80 juvenile **Starling** foraged on the shore all month

A pair of **Common Linnet** were feeding 3 fledglings on 2nd. A male was present 6th – 8th with 2 there on 10th.



Northern Wheatear (fledgling) MSBO 15th June



Pied Wagtail nest at MSBO with one week old b/5 on 26th June

July 2018



Common Sandpiper MSBO 18th July
An unprecedented record one-day-total occurred on this date

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At Muasdale, a group of 14 adult **Mute Swan** on 22nd was a high count for S Kintyre (Owen / Karen Traynor *pers. comm.*).

The brood of 10 **Common Shelduck** that hatched on 30th May all survived and all had their first flight on 11th July - 43 days after hatching. A well grown b/4 was at Strath, TL on 5th (Marjorie Fraser *pers. comm.*).

The two eclipse male **Gadwall** that arrived late June had a stopover to at least 2nd – a rare summer occurrence.

The eclipse / flightless period for male **Common Eider** is now well underway and last one seen in flight occurred on 2nd. The moult in females is similar to the males but occurs around a month later. Six females were still flying on 28th and 14 >S on 29th. At least 3 females had started wing moult by 30th (no primaries).

A male and a female **Common Scoter** rested in Machrihanish Bay on 7th and a flock of 18 (majority males) >S on 9th.

During July, a total of **121 Northern Gannet** adults crossed west over Kintyre from Campbeltown Loch for the Atlantic on **20 / 31** days of observation.

From March to July a total of **586** adult **Northern Gannet** crossed west over Kintyre on **92 / 153** days of observation

Interestingly, a high total of **336** crossed during June; then, surprisingly, during the prolonged period of grand weather that followed during this month, far fewer birds were visiting Campbeltown Loch and a rather meagre total of only **121** crossed on 20 / 31 days of observation. The largest flock seen crossing overland was 15 at 12:55 on 29th.



Adult Northern Gannet MSBO 26th July

Single adult **Red-throated Diver** >S on 24th and 29th and single **Great Northern Diver** in non-breeding plumage >S on 4th and 7th then 3 on 9th.

A brown-type **Hen Harrier** was over Cnoc Garbh, nr Keil Point, Southend on 8th Dave Albiston *pers. comm.*) an adult male was seen well hunting over the ditchline / surrounding habitats between Kilwhipnach and Homeston farms at 21:30hrs on 18th (Brian / Sarah Morton *pers. comm.*) and probably the same male was close by at Killellan on 27th (Robert Shaw *pers. comm.*).

Singles **Sparrowhawk** were noted on 8 dates 16th - 30th.

An adult **Peregrine Falcon** was resting on the east spire of Lorne and Lowland Church, Campbeltown on the evenings of 2nd, 6th, 7th and 17th. An adult was at Machrihanish Holiday Park on 18th (Stuart Ryan *pers. comm.*).

There was a light passage of **Eurasian Oystercatcher** early in the month with an increase from 11th when 90 >S followed by 40 on 13th, 28 on 16th, 60 on 18th, 30 on 20th, 22 on 21st, 140 on 24th, 35 on 25th and 44 on 30th.

Summary of July passage; a total of 489 >S on 9 dates from 11th.

A count of **Ringed Plover** from MSBO to Machrihanish Bay on 17th revealed flocks totalling 100+ on the shore. Flocks >S included 37 on 11th, 20 >S on 24th, 9 >S on 25th, 17 >S on 26th and 55 >S on 30th.

Summary of July passage; a total of 138 >S on 5 dates.

Three **Whimbrel** >S on 7th and a single (?) was present on 5 dates 11th - 22nd.



Whimbrel MSBO 11th July

There was a light passage of **Eurasian Curlew** from 2nd with small flocks of migrants >S over the sea on most dates; flock sizes increased as the month progressed and included 26 on 11th, 41 on 13th, 35 on 17th, 19 on 22nd and 9 on 29th.

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An adult **Ruddy Turnstone** arrived on 16th then 3 adults were present all day on 23rd. Southerly movements of migrant adult **Red Knot** included 2 on 18th, 5 on 22nd, 3 on 26th and singles on 29th - 30th.

Southerly passage of **Sanderling** included an adult on 3rd, 12 adults on 18th, ca. 50 on 23rd, **145** on 24th (7 flocks / largest 60), ca. 70 on 26th, 90 on 28th, 22 on 29th and **168** on 30th (6 flocks / largest ca. 85).

*Summary of July passage; a total of **557** >S on 7 dates.*

Note – during **July 2017** a total of only **140** >S on 5 dates although the passage total for **July 2016** was much better with **400** birds >S on 5 dates 21st-28th.

Southerly passage totals of **Dunlin** included one adult on 2nd, two adults on 13th, 10 on 15th (included the first juvenile), 3 adults on 16th, 40 adults on 17th, 25 on 18th, 12 on 20th, 70 on 24th, 130 on 26th, 60 on 28th, one on 29th and 95 on 30th.

*Summary of July passage; a total of **449** >S on 12 dates.*

Note – during **July 2017** a total of **619** >S on 16 dates.



Sanderlings and Dunlins on passage MSBO 28th July

Southerly passage of **Common Sandpiper** was superb with 6 on 3rd, 11 on 6th, 8 on 9th, 5 on 10th, 4 on 11th, 3 on 14th and one on 15th (rain). On 18th, an extraordinary / relentless passage occurred in fine weather from early morning until 14:00hrs when a total of **110+** >S / 7hrs. There were many singles and small casual associations of 2 – 5 passing south whilst five larger groups totalled **44** birds in loose flights of 7, 9, 12 and a surprising disorderly / noisy swarm of **16** at 12:40hrs (Warden along with Stuart Ryan).

The following day only 2 >S then none 20th – 22nd, 3 on 23rd, none 24th – 26th, 5 on 27th, 14 on 28th, 12 on 29th, none 30th and 8 on 31st.

*Summary of July passage; a total of **191** >S on 14 dates including an amazing record one-day-total of **110+** on 18th. The monthly passage total is also a record.*

Note - In **July 2017** the passage total for **Common Sandpiper** was **160** >S on 16 dates. Also, in **July 2016** the passage total was **140+** on 11 dates.



Common Sandpiper MSBO 18th July

The first migrant **Common Greenshank** arrived on 11th. Singles >S on 14th, 17th then two on 20th. One was at at Campbeltown Loch on 25th (Margaret Adamson pers. comm.).

Southerly passage totals of **Common Redshank** included 6 on 2nd, two flocks totalling ca. 90 on 13th, 30 on 14th, 16 on 15th, 10 on 21st and 75 (flock) on 22nd.

*Summary of July passage; a total of **227** >S on 6 dates.*

Two dark adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 5th and one >S on 11th.

The first two juvenile **Black-headed Gull** appeared on the shore on 3rd – a few days earlier than usual. Present daily later with 11 juveniles >S on 8th and 29 >S on 27th (the latter in loose groups over 20mins).

The first 3 juvenile **Common Gull** appeared by the shore on 12th. Two adult **Little Tern** rested by the **Arctic Tern** colony on 2nd. Adult **Sandwich Tern** were present frequently in small numbers; max counts included 7 on 9th and 12 on 15th. An adult, present 21st – 25th had a recently fledged juvenile in tow. None logged 26th – 28th then 4 juveniles on 29th.



Redshanks on passage MSBO 13th July

A visit to the **Arctic Tern** colony at Big Scone Island, Machrihanish by a licenced ringer on 3rd resulted in 3 different aged chicks being ringed. In addition, a nest contained 2 eggs and a day old chick was found dead. Six recently fledged juveniles were by the colony on 13th then 10 juveniles were there on 18th. Still 3 juvs on 25th and an adult and a juvenile on 29th. Two x 2CY were by the colony on 10th followed by one 11th – 12th. The colony was deserted 30th.

Two **Common Wood Pigeon** were at Strath TL on 29th. A scarce bird locally that was fairly common at TL in the 1960s - 1970s when root crops and grain spillage attracted good numbers (Rod Angus / Eddie Maguire).

Dairy farms at The Laggan now rely largely on growing grass for silage.

Max counts of **Common Swift** over Campbeltown was 20 over Burnside Square on 21st and 16 over Saddell St on 23rd (Charlie Robertson *pers. comm.*).

A **Eurasian Magpie** was regular around Ralston Road, Campbeltown early in the month and nearby at Meadows Avenue on 22nd (Alistair Anderson *et al pers. comm.*). Flocks of juvenile **Common Starling** were regular on the shore; counts included 90 on 12th and 200+ on 19th. A murmuration at West Machrihanish Farm just before dusk on 18th contained at least **1,500** birds. An adult Peregrine and a Sparrowhawk were both in attendance (Stuart Ryan *pers. comm.*).

August 2018

Special thanks to the following who gave permission for their photographs to be used to enhance the August Report; **Andy Pollard** / Cuckoo at the Mull of Kintyre and **Jo Goudie** / Bar-tailed Godwit at the MSBO.

There were numerous significant visible migration counts (many from photographs) of fly-by waders, records of other species along with sightings from around Kintyre by an increasing number of contributors.



Eurasian Sparrowhawk - MSBO 31st August

The only records of **Common Shelduck** (all 1CY) was 5 on 16th and 2 on 27th - 29th. Flocks of **Common Scoter** >S included 8 dark-bellied adult females on 14th and 30, majority males, on 20th.

In SE Kintyre, 8 **European Storm-Petrel** were tape-lured / trapped by Corphin Bridge between 02:00 - 03:30hrs on 4th and included a control (Rab Morton / Nigel Scriven *pers. comm.*).

There was a light southerly passage of adult **Red-throated Diver** with 2 on 14th, one on 18th, 7 / 2hrs on 20th, 4 on 21st, 3 on 24th and singles on 27th and 30th.

A male **Hen Harrier** was at Homeston on 4th (Andy Pollard *pers. comm.*) then 2 brown-types were there on 25th (Brian Morton *et al*). A brown-type was at Machrihanish Holiday Park on 24th (David Millward *pers. comm.*).

Single **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** occurred on 8 dates 14th – 31st and one was at Campbeltown Loch; on 25th (Rab Morton *pers. comm.*).

At Campbeltown; an adult **Peregrine Falcon** was on the east spire of the Lorne and Lowland Church, Longrow on 2nd and 16th then photographed leaving there on 17th (Eddie Maguire). Seen there again on 19th (Brian Morton *pers. comm.*) and 30th. Adult(s) seen frequently from MSBO although no juveniles yet.

A (not so) **Common Kestrel** was at Mull of Kintyre; one on 2nd (Andy Pollard *pers. comm.*).



Peregrine – Adult at Lorne & Lowland Church / Campbeltown 17th August
Photo taken from Burnside in low light / drizzle (a heavily cropped/noisy image)
A nest-box here may prove appealing to this species

Southerly passage totals of **Eurasian Oystercatcher** included 27 on 2nd, 154 on 3rd (14 flocks / largest 25), 118 on 4th, 62 on 5th, 84 on 8th, 70 on 9th, 93 on 10th, 22 on 12th, 60 on 13th, 21 on 14th, 50 on 15th, 38 on 18th, 71 on 19th, 39 on 20th, 27 on 23rd and 16 on 24th.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **972** >S on **16** dates.*

A flock of **180 Golden Plover** came in-off-sea on 17th.

Southerly passage of totals **Common Ringed Plover** included 33 on 2nd, 16 on 4th, 20 on 11th, 12 on 14th, 26 on 17th.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **107** >S on **5** dates.*

On Gigha, there was 140 at Ardminish Bay on 5th (David Jardine *per* Argyll Bird Club Website).

Passage totals of **Whimbrel** included one on 1st and singles on 4th, 9th and 14th, 2 (singles) on 15th, flock **14** and a single bird on 16th, 3 on 17th, one on 22nd, 2 on 24th and singles on 25th, 28th and 30th.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **30** >S on **12** dates.*

Eurasian Curlew southerly passage totals were 2 on 1st, 22 on 2nd, 8 on 3rd, 9 on 4th, 7 on 8th, 3 on 10th, 12 on 15th, 5 on 21st, 7 on 22nd, 9 on 23rd, 28 on 24th, 20 on 27th, 6 on 28th, 12 on 29th and 30 on 31st.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **179** >S on **15** dates.*



Whimbrel – a fresh 1CY MSBO 4th August

A flock of 6 **Bar-tailed Godwit** foraged on the shore on 16th; all >S later. One >N on 18th, 3 >S on 19th and one on 20th.

Southerly passage totals of **Black-tailed Godwit** included flock 18 on 2nd, flock 39 on 4th, 8 on 8th, 7 on 18th, **144** on 19th (largest flock 60), 30 on 20th and 9 on 21st.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **255** >S on 7 dates – a well above average showing.*

Machrihanish Links; 4 foraging on 4th, one there on 26th and 2 on 27th.

Southerly passage totals of **Ruddy Turnstone** was rather poor with 6 on 1st, 17 on 2nd, 26 on 6th, 3 on 7th, one on 9th, 5 on 10th, 8 on 16th, 3 on 17th and singles on 18th and 24th.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **71** >S on 10 dates.*

Campbeltown Loch; max count was 30 on 25th (Rab Morton pers. comm.).

Southerly passage totals of **Red Knot** was also dismal with only 9 on 2nd, 12 on 4th, one on 7th, 6 on 8th, one on 13th and 2 on 23rd.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **31** >S on 6 dates.*

A **Ruff** at Machrihanish Links on 12th was first recorded locally this year; it >S later. A 1CY male was photographed by MSBO on 16th. This bird was sexed on size when compared to nearby Common Redshank.

A **Ruddy Turnstone** >S on 28th.



Bar-tailed Godwit – 1CY by MSBO 16th August - Photo / Jo Goudie



Black-tailed Godwit – adult Machrihanish Links 4th August



Ruff - 1CY male by MSBO 16th August

Southerly passage totals of **Sanderling** was excellent with **270** on 2nd (11 flocks / largest ca. 90), 115 on 4th, 6 on 5th, 30 on 6th, 18 on 7th, 48 on 8th, 11 on 12th, 6 on 18th, 40 on 21st, 18 on 23rd, 60 on 27th and 36 on 29th.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **688** >S on 12 dates.*



Sanderlings and a Dunlin - on passage MSBO 27th August

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory 2018 Report

Passage totals of **Dunlin** was stirring with **170** on 2nd (8 flocks / largest ca. 90 / see photo below), 43 on 3rd, 52 on 4th, one on 5th, 47 on 6th, 8 on 7th, 40 on 8th, 12 on 9th, 28 on 10th, 70 on 11th, **220** on 12th (6 flocks / largest 140+), 80 on 13th, 26 on 14th, 12 on 15th, 146 on 16th (4 flocks / largest ca. 70), ca. 90 on 17th (2 flocks / largest 70), 33 on 18th, one on 27th.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **1062** >S on 18 dates.*

A flock of 70 was present at Ardminish Bay, Gigha on 5th (David Jardine / Argyl Bird Club Website).



Dunlins - ca. 90 birds on passage MSBO 2nd August

After last months record day / monthly totals, passage of **Common Sandpiper** tailed off drastically with 5 on 1st, 7 on 2nd, 6 on 4th, one on 5th, 2 on 6th, 2 on 7th, one on 8th, 2 on 10th, 5 on 16th and singles on 21st and 27th.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of only **33** >S on 11 dates.*

Two **Common Greenshank** >S on 6th, one >S on 8th, at least 3 present on 11th then singles >S on 24th and 31st.

Passage totals of **Common Redshank** included 65 on 2nd, 97 on 4th, 40 on 7th, 33 on 9th, 10 on 11th, one on 12th, 39 on 16th, 12 on 23rd, 22 on 29th and 55 on 31st.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **374** >S on 10 dates.*

Two adult **Sandwich Tern** were present on 3rd - 4th, one adult on 6th, 2 adults and a 1CY on 10th, an adult on 16th, 3 adults >S on 19th, 2 adults and 2 1CY >S on 20th and 2 adults >S on 26th.



Greenshank – this one paused briefly at MSBO before >S on 31st August

A 1CY **Mediterranean Gull** was photographed on 19th, then on 20th, a 1CY – judged to be a different individual - was photographed >S over the point.

These are the 3rd and 4th MSBO records this year following an immaculate adult in summer plumage in June and a 2CY in May.

Of interest; elsewhere in Argyll, 2 (both 1CY) were at Loch Crinan, Mid Argyll on 23rd August (Jim Dickson pers. comm.). This indicates a very recent small influx into the county



Mediterranean Gull – 1CY >S off MSBO 20th August

The first 1CY **Black-legged Kittiwake** >S on 4th (bang on time).



Black-legged Kittiwake – 1CY off MSBO 22nd August

A 1CY **Common Cuckoo** was photographed at Mull of Kintyre on 2nd (Andy Pollard *pers. comm.*).



Cuckoo – a 1CY Mull of Kintyre 2nd August (Photo / Andy Pollard)

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The first returning **White Wagtail** appeared on 8th. An adult and a 1CY were present all day on 21st. Three >S on 23rd then **34+** >S on 27th - these birds arrived from the north over ca 4hrs as singles or in small groups 2 – 6 and rested briefly before moving on south. There was a similar pattern of movement to the south in the following counts; 12 on 28th, 18 on 29th, 7 on 30th and 22 on 31st.

*Summary of August passage at MSBO; a total of **96** >S on 6 dates.*



American Mink MSBO 19th August

September 2018



Northern Gannet – a fly-by adult ‘on the doostep’ MSBO 12th September

Arran Natural History Society and **Argyll Bird Club** visited MSBO during the month; see notes by **Jim Cassels** and **Eddie Maguire** at end of the August report.

The first **Whooper Swan** (7) of the autumn were at Stewarton TL on 29th (Argyll Bird Club Outing). A flock ca. 80 **Pink-footed Goose** >S on 19th and at TL 17 >E at Strath on 22nd and 12 were at Bleachfield on 23rd.

A flock of 12 **Greater Scaup** >S on 15th and 2 >S on 24th. *The first MSBO records this year.* The first **Common Eider** male seen in flight after the flightless moult period was on 8th then 4 on 9th.

2017; *the first male(s) seen in flight occurred on 6th - 8th September.*

A fem/ imm-type **Long-tailed Duck** was at Campbeltown Loch on 29th (Argyll Bird Club Outing). This is the first local record this autumn.

A male **Common Scoter** >S on 9th, 2 males >S on 14th and a tight group of 7 >S on 15th appeared to be all males. Two (male and female) >S on 29th.

Southerly passage totals adult **Red-throated Diver** included one on 1st, 5 on 7th, 14 on 10th, 6 on 12th, 3 on 13th, **33** adults / 6hrs on 14th (largest loose group was 6). More adults followed with 8 on 15th, 14 on 16th, 3 on 17th, none 18th – 20th, 17 / 6hrs on 21st including the first juvenile, a juvenile on 23rd, none 24th - 26th, 12 adults on 27th, 6 adults on 29th and 3 adults on 30th.

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*Summary of September passage at MSBO; a total of **125** >S on 12 dates.*

This September exodus south through Argyll has been well-documented at MSBO and Frenchman's Rocks, Islay in the past.

The first **Great Northern Diver** of the autumn, an immature (2CY), >S on 30th.



Red-throated Divers on passage off MSBO 21st September / 1CY (left) & adult



Northern Gannet – 1CY on passage off MSBO 29th September

The first real movement of **Manx Shearwater** this year was only ca. 400 >S / 3hrs during a WSW gale event on 19th.

Another poor September showing.

The first **Leach's Petrel** seen this year appeared well offshore >S on 12th in a WNW f5 with light squalls (Eddie Maguire / Charlie Robertson). A total of **21** >S / 3hrs from 09:25 on 16th in a WSW f5 - 6 / squalls (Eddie Maguire / Paul Evans).

The first juvenile **Northern Gannet** appeared >S on 12th in a WNW f5 followed by one on 14th, 3 on 19th, 2 on 26th, 2 on 27th, 9 on 29th and 2 on 30th.

Summary; a total of 20 juveniles >S on 7 dates from 12th.

See also **Northern Gannets Crossing Kintyre** at the end of this report.

Two brown-type **Hen Harrier** were at Homeston on 1st (Brian Morton *pers. comm.*).

Single **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** were noted on 4th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 16th and 20th.

At Campbeltown, an adult **Peregrine Falcon** was loafing on the Lorne and Lowland church early morning on 5th and 6th. On 13th, 20th and 24th, probably the same bird was on the east spire at dusk (19:54, 20:10 and 20:02 hrs) and perhaps went to roost on the broad ledge below. Southerly passage totals of **Eurasian Oystercatcher** were much lower than August with 20 on 5th, 16 on 12th and 10 on 16th. Three **Golden Plover** >S on 12th and two >S on 30th. Eight **Common Ringed Plover** >S on 12th and 7 >S on 30th. Only 2 **Whimbrel** were logged, on 5th and 14th. Southerly passage totals of **Eurasian Curlew** were lower too with only 11 on 1st, 6 on 4th, 14 on 5th, 5 on 8th, 2 on 10th, 9 on 12th.

Summary of September passage at MSBO; a total of 47 >S on 6 dates.



Curlew – MSBO 28th September



Black-tailed Godwits & a Red Knot – on passage MSBO 12th September



Migrant Red Knot – on passage MSBO 11th September

Passage totals of **Red Knot** included 2 on 10th, 5 on 11th, 9 on 12th, one on 13th, flock 16 on 14th, flock 9 on 18th and one on 21st.

*Summary of September passage at MSBO; a total of **43** >S on 7 dates.*

A **Bar-tailed Godwit** >S on 3rd and two small flocks of **Black-tailed Godwit** appeared >S; 12 on 12th and 8 on 14th.

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Passage totals of **Ruddy Turnstone** were low with two on 3rd, one was off-passage briefly then >S on 7th, 18 on 11th, 8 on 12th, one on 15th, 7 on 16th, 2 on 18th and one on 22nd.

*Summary of September passage at MSBO; a total of **40** >S on 8 dates.*

Sanderling passage totals were 14 on 12th, 12 on 14th, 9 on 15th, 42 on 16th, 15 on 18th and 25 on 19th.

*Summary of September passage at MSBO; a total of **117** >S on 6 dates.*



Sanderlings – on passage MSBO 12th September



Common Redshanks – on passage MSBO 6th September

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Southerly passage totals of **Dunlin** fell away this month too with only 3 on 11th, 30 on 12th, 17 on 16th and one on 27th.

The first **Purple Sandpiper** of the autumn were 3 >S on 20th and 7 >S on 29th whilst a single **Common Sandpiper** >S on 11th was the sole record.

Single **Common Greenshank** >S on 2nd and 9th and 3 were at Kennacraig; on 8th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

There was a reasonable showing of **Common Redshank** with southerly passage totals of 6 on 1st, 18 on 2nd, 9 on 4th, two flocks totalling 51 on 6th, 6 on 11th, 10 on 12th, 4 on 13th, 14 on 14th, 11 on 16th and 6 on 20th.

Summary of September passage at MSBO; a total of 135 >S on 10 dates.

Autumn passage of waders at MSBO 2018...

From July to September 2018, a total **6,810** waders of 16 species were logged on migration at MSBO.

Table 4. Cumulative monthly totals of fly-by waders on passage south at MSBO.

Species	July	Aug	Sept	Species totals
Eurasian Oystercatcher	489	972	46	1,507
Golden Plover	-	180	5	185
Common Ringed Plover	138	197	15	350
Whimbrel	3	30	2	35
Eurasian Curlew	124	179	47	350
Bar-tailed Godwit	4	11	1	16
Black-tailed Godwit	0	255	20	275
Ruddy Turnstone	4	71	40	115
Red Knot	12	31	43	86
Ruff	0	2	0	2
Sanderling	557	688	117	1,362
Dunlin	449	1,062	51	1,562
Purple Sandpiper	0	0	10	10
Common Sandpiper	191	33	1	225
Common Greenshank	5	7	2	14
Common Redshank	227	374	135	736
Grand totals	2,199	4,092	519	6,810

October 2018



Eurasian Curlew foraging by MSBO 1st October



Adult Whooper Swan at The Laggan 21st October

Seven adult **Whooper Swan** >S on 4th, 20 adults >S on 18th and 5 adults in-off-sea on 2nd. At TL, 8 >SW over Drumlemble on 4th (Elizabeth McTaggart *pers. comm.*), 10 adults were at Bleachfield 8th – 9th, ca. 12 including 2 x 1CY at Killypole Loch on 17th (Elizabeth McTaggart *pers. comm.*). Two >W then >S over Kilkivan Quarry on 20th (Elizabeth McTaggart *pers. comm.*), an adult was at Strath on 21st and 14 at Drumlemble on 22nd with 9 still there including a 1CY on 24th - 28th then 6 including 2 x 1CY on 29th - 31st. At

At Campbeltown, 15 >E on 12th and 20+ >W on 20th (Charlie Robertson *pers. comm.*), 9 adults >W on 25th (Martin Coffield *pers. comm.*), 6 adults >E over Campbeltown on 27th and 4 adults east there on 28th (Charlie Robertson *pers. comm.*).

Ca. 800 **Greater White-fronted Geese** (Greenland race) arrived at Strath on 27th; numbers then swelled to **1,400** there on 28th then there was a count of **1,150** at Drumlemble on 30th and 600 at Tayinloan on 30th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

Five **Greylag Geese** at Strath on 24th included one with an orange neck-collar; this bird was ringed in Ireland (**Irish Greylag Goose Study Group** - full details pending). *These birds were almost certainly on passage from Iceland to Ireland* (photo below). 210 arrived at Strath on 27th.



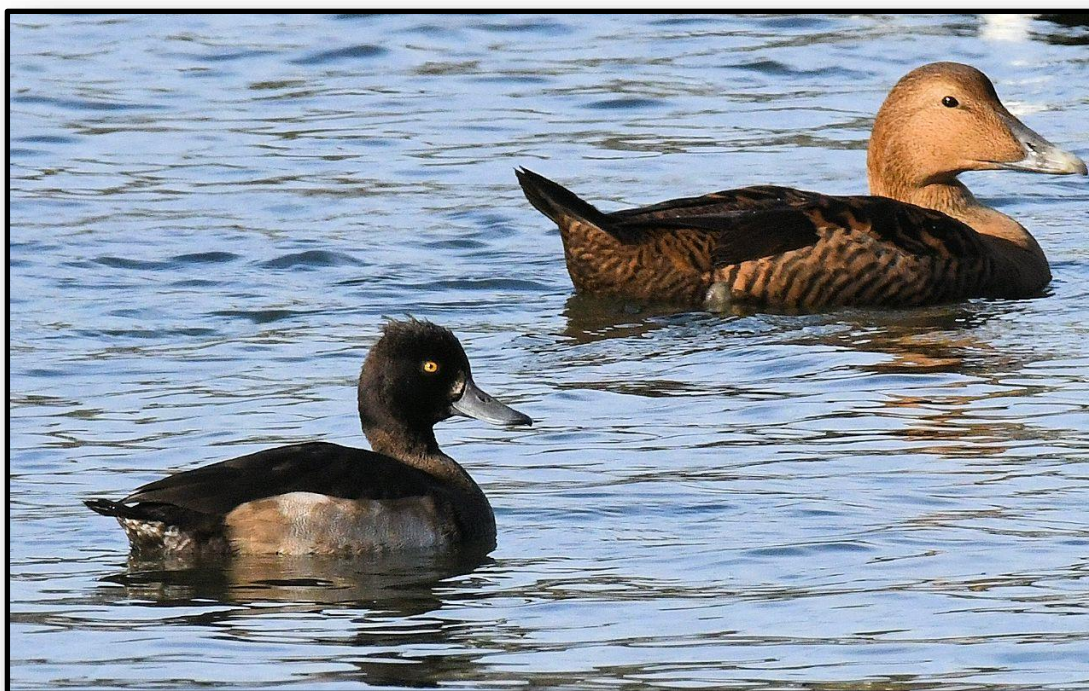
Greylags – Strath TL 15:00hrs 24th October / orange neck collar text = B|VC

Nine **Pink-footed Geese** were at Strath on 27th and the first MSBO autumn record of **Brent Goose** was 3 >S on 3rd. A 1CY was resting / foraging on 31st.

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Two **Barnacle Geese** >N on 17th and 30 >S on 23rd. 12 were at Strath on 22nd - 23rd and one at Drumlemble on 30th.

A male **Tufted Duck** was briefly at Mill Bay adjacent to MSBO on 18th.



Tufted Duck & Common Eider MSBO 18th October

At Campbeltown harbour a flock of **147 Common Eider** on 18th included 87 adult males, 8 immature males and 52 apparent females



Male & female Common Eider off MSBO 5th October

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A fem-type **Common Scoter** >S on 4th and a tight flock of ca. 25 >S on 25th.

Southerly passage of **Red-throated Diver** included one on 1st, 2 on 2nd, one on 5th, 2 adults on 10th, singles on 11th, 14th and 20th then 5 >S on 22nd. Small numbers were regular on the sea; max 5 on 10th.

A **Black-throated Diver** was on the sea on 2nd and one >N on 17th.

Southerly passage of **Great Northern Diver** (13 birds) occurred on 10 dates 1st (1) - 30th (1) with 3 on 26th.

Southerly passage of 1CY **Northern Gannet** included 2 on 2nd, one on 5th, one on 8th, 14 / 6hrs on 9th, 3 on 10th, 6 / 5hrs on 12th and one on 31st.

Summary; a total of 28 >S on 7 dates.

See **Northern Gannets Crossing Kintyre 2018** below.



Two 1CY Northern Gannet ‘treading softly’ off MSBO 9th October

There were two records of **Little Egret**; one was at Campbeltown Loch on the shore opposite Davaar Island on 10th and one was at Waterfoot, Carradale on 31st (Jim Dickson *pers comm.*).

Two adult **White-tailed Eagle** were spotted on Gigha on 3rd (Steve & Elise O’Donnel / Louise Jones *pers. comm*) and a brown type **Hen Harrier** was at Southend on 30th (Jim Dickson *pers comm.*).

Eurasian Sparrowhawk were seen from MSBO on 9th, 11th, 20th and 22nd.

At Westport Marsh on 26th there was **800+ Golden Plover** and **330 Northern Lapwing**. There was a light southerly passage of **Sanderling** with 4 on 2nd, 18 on 17th, 12 on 25th and 30 on 30th.



Sanderling on passage 25th October

A **Bar-tailed Godwit** was present on 14th - 15th. Two **Purple Sandpiper** >S on 6th, 8 >S on 14th and 2 >S on 22nd. Several 1CY **Mediterranean Gull** were photographed; one on 2nd and 8th, likely 2 individuals on 16th and another new 1CY by Machrihanish Holiday Park on 20th. Possibly one or two of these birds were present earlier in the autumn following 2 1CY in September and August; however, there may also be some passage birds involved. In addition, an immaculate summer-plumaged adult occurred in June and a 2CY in May - truly a bumper year!



1CY Mediterranean Gull off MSBO 10:44hrs 8th October



1CY Mediterranean Gull by MSBO 11:02hrs 16th October



1CY Mediterranean Gull >S off MSBO 12:12hrs 16th October



1CY Mediterranean Gull by Machrihanish Holiday Park 14:55hrs 20th October

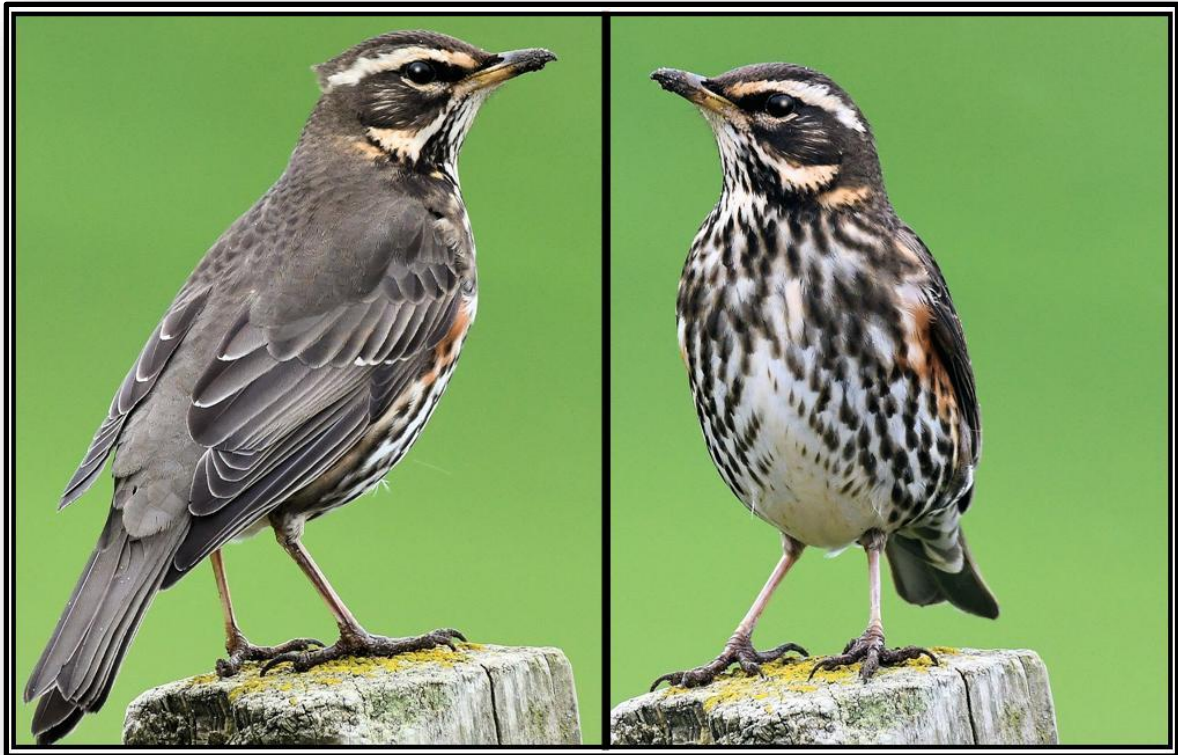
At Machrihanish Airbase on 2nd ca. **250+ Feral Pigeon** were loafing on the roof of the Gaydon Hanger. Late records of **Barn Swallow** included a loose flock of 6 >S over the sea on 12th, 2 >S on 15th and 2 >S on 19th.

There was a light passage of 40 **Meadow Pipit** >S / 2hrs on 18th.



Meadow Pipit on passage MSBO 18th October

Redwing (800+) and **Fieldfare** (300+) were in the Machrihanish area on 27th.



Redwing MSBO 31st October

Another Northern Gannet year over...

The dust has now well and truly settled on another memorable overland passage of Gannet. With the breeding season now over, daily surveillance of adults crossing 8km overland to the west from Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) during 2018 concluded on 25th October 10 days after the final bird was logged on 15th. A total of only 16 crossed over on 12 dates during October (see **Northern Gannets crossing overland in S Kintyre 2017 - 2018** on **page 71** of this report).

November

Full daily observations at MSBO concluded on 10th November although many casual visits were made to Machrihanish and surrounding area later.



Purple Sandpipers resting by MSBO 4th November

Up to 12 **Whooper Swan** at Drumlemble included 3 1CY on 7th – 13th, then 4 including 2 1CY 14th – 22nd and 4 adults were at Kilmichael floods on 12th.

At Campbeltown, 12 >W on 14th and 9 >E on 17th (Charlie Robertson *pers. comm.*).



Greenland White-fronts - 2 adults and a 1CY at Strath on 16th

On 20th, **Greenland White-fronted Goose** counts were good at TL with a total of **960** that included 560 at Strath and 400 by Drumlemble School.

By Campbeltown, 150 **Greylag Goose** were at Kilmichael Farm floods on 11th and Strath TL held 320 on 16th with 270 there on 20th and 100 on 25th.

Greylag ringing information...

Ring no. **526713**. Orange neck collar / Black text **B|VC**.

Ringed on 23/04/2016 at Strangford Loch, Co Down..

Resighted on 11/02/17 at Charlestown, Loch Neagh, Co Armagh.

Resighted/photographed on 24/10/2018 at Strath, The Laggan, Kintyre.

Note link with the following information...

An orange neck-collared **Greylag Goose** (with black text **B|PJ**) that was ringed at Threecastles, Poulaphouca, Co. Wicklow in December 2015 was resighted/photographed at Strath Farm TL, (by Stewarton) on 19th November 2017 and was seen back at Poulaphouca on 26th January 2018 (**Niamh Fitzgerald / Irish Greylag Goose Study Group pers. comm.**).

Both individuals were obviously off-passage in S Kintyre while en-route from their breeding grounds in Iceland to N Ireland

Another Irish collared bird was photographed at TL this month (details pending / see photo).



Greylags at Strath TL 25th November / Collar text = B|PD

Seven **Pink-footed Geese** were by Drumlemble School on 8th, 4 at Bleachfield on 10th and 5 at Strath 16th - 20th. Two were at Kilmichael floods by Campbeltown on 13th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).



A Pinkfoot in with Greylags at Strath 20th November

Five **Bean Geese** were reported by visiting birders at Kilmichael floods by Campbeltown on 11th (Peter Nash / Nick Curtis *pers. comm.*). These birds could not be found here later or on many visits around TL.

A very rare visitor.

The pale-bellied 1CY **Brent Goose** that arrived by MSBO on 31st October remained to 1st.

Returning **Common Shelduck** included one at Strath on 6th and 4 at Campbeltown Loch on 19th.

A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was present on 8th and 40 were at Campbeltown Loch on 22nd. A large flock of **312** was at Kilmichael floods on 13th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*). These birds vacated the floods on 16th – 17th as they dried out and **300+** at nearby Westport Marsh on 19th were almost certainly the Kilmichael flock.

Two males and a female **Northern Shoveler** were at Kilmichael floods on 13th ((Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*) and a male was at Westport Marsh on 19th.

There was a peak of 90 **Eurasian Teal** at Westport Marsh on 6th.

Counts of **Common Eider** at Campbeltown inner harbour included **154** on 2nd (**107** adult males, 4 imm males and 43 females) and **103** on 24th (**67** adult males, 3 imm males and 33 females).



Brent Goose – pale-bellied 1CY 1st November



Wigeon – female Campbeltown Loch 22nd November

A total of 22 **Red-throated Diver** >S on 6 dates 5th – 13th including 8 / 4hrs on 13th. At Carradale, the **Little Egret** that arrived at Waterfoot last month was still present / photographed there on 1st (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*). A **Great Egret** was seen on 23rd by Aros Farm (adjacent to Campbeltown Airport) around 08.30hrs but was flushed by a tractor and flew south towards Strath / Chiscan (The Laggan). Identification was confirmed from photographs taken by the finder (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

The first Kintyre record.

At Muasdale an immature **White-tailed Eagle** >S on 10th then was seen a short time later at Bellochantuy (Ian McCallum *pers. comm.*). Reports of **Hen Harrier** were few and involved males at Westport Marsh on 3rd and Kilmichael on 11th (Peter Nash / Nick Curtis *pers. comm.*). **Merlin** appeared at MSBO on 6th, at Kilmichael on 13th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*) and Drumlamble School on 16th and 19th.

A ringed (**FP48161**) **Eurasian Oystercatcher** was photographed at Campbeltown Loch. .



Colour ring text = P1 / winter adult Campbeltown Loch 22nd November
Ringed 17th March 2018 at Newtonmore / Highland (Bob Swann *pers. comm.*)

Northern Lapwing frequented Westport Marsh with a peak of 90 on 12th and a flock of 176 was at Kilmichael floods on 13th (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*).

A count of **112 Common Ringed Plover** at the high tide roost at Campbeltown Loch on 29th was surprisingly high and almost certainly the largest winter concentration ever recorded on the peninsula. A **Red Knot** was found among the Ringed Plovers on 28th – 29th / a rare winter occurrence.

A total of **1,100 European Golden Plover** at Westport Marsh; ca. on 12th was a good count.

At MSBO a flock of 10 **Sanderling** >S on 30th.



Sanderlings – on passage off MSBO 30th November

Three **Purple Sandpiper** arrived at MSBO on 1st then there was 6 on 4th, 3 on 6th and 11 on 13th. A flock of 18 >S on 4th. There were several high tide counts of **Ruddy Turnstone** at Campbeltown Loch with 60 on 25th and **92** on 29th and **Common Redshank** peaked at 42 there on 28th. The top count of **Eurasian Curlew** at the Campbeltown Loch roost was 77 on 25th. A colour ringed bird was photographed. An adult **Mediterranean Gull** was by Machrihanish Holiday Park on 9th (Simon Barnett / Eddie Maguire) and a 1CY was seen at Carradale Bay on 12th (Jim Dickson *pers comm.*).

These records follow 2 x 1CY in September and August, an immaculate summer-plumaged adult in June and a 2CY in May. Truly a bumper year with all age categories recorded.

At TL, **1,000+ Herring Gull** were at Strath on 19th including the regular leucistic adult. Details of the ringed 2CY photographed at Campbeltown on 20th October follows...

Ring no. **GV16537** / colour ring orange with black text = **A:E52**.

Ringed 05/07/17 as a chick on Lady Isle, near Troon, Ayrshire.

Resighted on 13/08/17 at Powburn by Prestwick Airport (Clyde Ringing Group *pers comm.*).

Details of the ringed 1CY **Great Black-backed Gull** photographed at Campbeltown on 20th October follows...

Ring no. **HT38519** / colour ring white with black text = **9K1:C**.

Ringed 14/07/18 as a chick on Horse Island, Ardrossan, Ayrshire.

This is the first sighting of this bird since ringing (Clyde ringing Group *pers comm.*).



Note - the birds legs were photographed on different dates. On 22nd and 23rd it was at the high tide roost cat-napping on the right leg.



On 24th, it finally revealed the ring colours on left leg!
The bird was ringed **FP47924** as a chick at Glen Buchat, Aberdeenshire on **10th June 2013**. This is the first sighting of this bird since ringing (Hywel Maggs / RSPB *pers. comm.*).

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During a seawatch on 30th in a WNW f5-6 with frequent squalls a total of 460 **Black-legged Kittiwake** >S / 5hrs.



Black-legged Kittiwake – 1CY on passage off MSBO 30th November

At Campbeltown, a **Eurasian Magpie** was at Stronvaar Bowling Club on 6th (Bob Middleton *pers. comm.*). *This is likely the bird that has been seen intermittently around the town since April; it was last seen/heard at Stronvaar on 18th September.*



Otter - MSBO 6th November



Rock Pipit - MSBO 4th November

December



Northern Shoveler – adult male Campbeltown Loch 9th December

Note...

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory 2018 Report

Full daily observations concluded at MSBO on 10th November although many casual visits were made to Machrihanish and surrounding area to the end of the year.

At MSBO, 3 **Whooper Swan**, including a 1CY, flew in-off-sea from the NW on 1st. At TL, there were 2 adults at Strath floods on 7th an adult there on 21st and an adult and 2 1CY near Drumlemble School on 24th.



Whooper - TL 21st December

The only counts of **Greater White-fronted Geese** (Greenland race) were **700+** at Strath floods TL on 21st and 143 at Kilmichael on 21st.

On 16th, a total of **560 Greylag Geese** at 4 sites including 260 at Strath and 190 at West Parkfergus; also on this date, 70 were at Kilmichael Farm with a further 40 at Westport Marsh.

There was a good showing of **Pink-footed Goose** with a surprise flock of **21** at Strath TL on 16th – an unusually high number for December and all birds were still present on 21st.

At MSBO, a pale-bellied adult **Brent Goose** >S on 7th - a *rare December visitor*.



Greylag – TL 8th December



Pink-footed Geese – part of flock (21) at TL 16th December



Brent Goose – pale-bellied adult >S off MSBO 7th December



Eurasian Wigeon – Campbeltown Loch 9th December



Northern Shoveler – 1CY male Campbeltown Loch 14th December



Common Scoter – Machrihanish 19th December

Winter distribution in Argyll is normally restricted to Sound of Gigha and Loch Indaal (Islay)

A pair of **Common Shelduck** was regular at Campbeltown Loch 9th – 23rd, 5 were at Strath TL on 21st and 3 at MSBO on 24th. At Campbeltown Loch; **Eurasian Wigeon** peaked at 60 on 21st and 77 were at Strath floods TL on 7th.

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Six **Northern Shoveler** were also at the Loch 19th – 21st. The 2 males that arrived on 28th November were joined by another male on 1st followed by a female on 6th, a 1CY male on 9th and then a second female arrived on 19th - an outstanding winter occurrence for mainland Argyll

A female was seen at West Tarbert, Gigha on 1st (David / Janet Jardine / ABC Website).

The number of **Eurasian Teal** at Campbeltown Loch peaked at 58 on 21st. At Machrihanish, an adult male and 2 female **Gadwall** appeared / photographed on 19th. Not seen later.

A female **Common Scoter** was in Machrihanish Bay on 19th - 20th.

Inner harbour counts of **Common Eider** at Campbeltown included **123** on 20th (85 adult males, 33 females and 5 imm males) and **166** on 23rd (114 adult males, 44 females and 8 imm males).

Seven **Great Northern Diver** were in Machrihanish Bay on 24th.



Great Northern Diver - 24th December

A **Little Egret** was the head of West Loch Tarbert on 9th and 12th (Malcolm Chattwood / Ian & Margaret Brooke / ABC website) and 5 different **Water Rail** were in marshes at Leim and Tarbert on Gigha on 1st (David / Janet Jardine / ABC website).

At Campbeltown Loch high tide roost on 9th wader counts included **149 Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **91 Common Ringed Plover**, **7 Dunlin**, **108 Ruddy Turnstone**, **12 Common Redshank** and **117 Eurasian Curlew**.

On 8th, a single **Red Knot** in with the above waders at Campbeltown was a rare winter find.

A 1CY **Iceland Gull** was at Campbeltown Harbour on 20th (Brian Morton *et al pers. comm.*).

Wood Pigeon are scarce in S Kintyre so it was pleasing to find one by the SMP Creamery in Campbeltown on 16th and another was calling at Chiscan TL on 23rd. At Carradale, a **Short Eared Owl** was at the Golf Course on 15th and on the same day finches in a garden at feeders included 70+ **Chaffinch**, 16 **Goldfinch**, 13 **Greenfinch** and a **Brambling** (Jim Dickson *pers. comm.*). At Campbeltown, 2 **Carrion Crow** were regular at the pontoons all month.

Northern Gannets crossing overland in S Kintyre 2017 - 2018

Surveillance of **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* at Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) from March to October by Charlie Robertson (MSBO assistant warden) and at MSBO produced further remarkable evidence of exceptional numbers of adults crossing 8km overland on foraging trips to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic). During 2018, daily surveillance concluded on 25th October 10 days after the last adult was logged.

Young Gannets on Ailsa Craig mainly fledge mid to late September. This coincides with the period that the overland crossings diminish rapidly and are finally abandoned, therefore fittingly establishing, that the adult Gannets crossing over Kintyre during the breeding season are almost certainly from the Ailsa colony.

From March to October 2018 a total of **1,221** adult **Gannets** crossed overland on **161 / 239** days of surveillance.

Table 5 shows the number of adult **Gannets** crossing west over Kintyre during March to October **2017** compared with the recent **2018** monthly data.

2017	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	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
2018	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Monthly totals	6	45	78	336	121	247	372	16
Cumulative totals	6	51	129	465	586	833	1,205	1,221
No. days of Observation	31	30	31	30	31	31	30	25

Note the high total of **336** in June 2018 compared to only **126** in June 2017 and the rather low totals from July to September in 2018 (**740** birds) compared to 2017 (**1,173** birds).

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Surprisingly, during the prolonged period of grand weather in July 2018, far fewer birds were visiting Campbeltown Loch and a rather meagre total of only **121** crossed on 20 / 31 days of observation (compare with July 2017).

The combined totals crossing west over the peninsula during March - October 2017 and 2018 amounts to an extraordinary **2,682** birds.



Adult Northern Gannet off MSBO

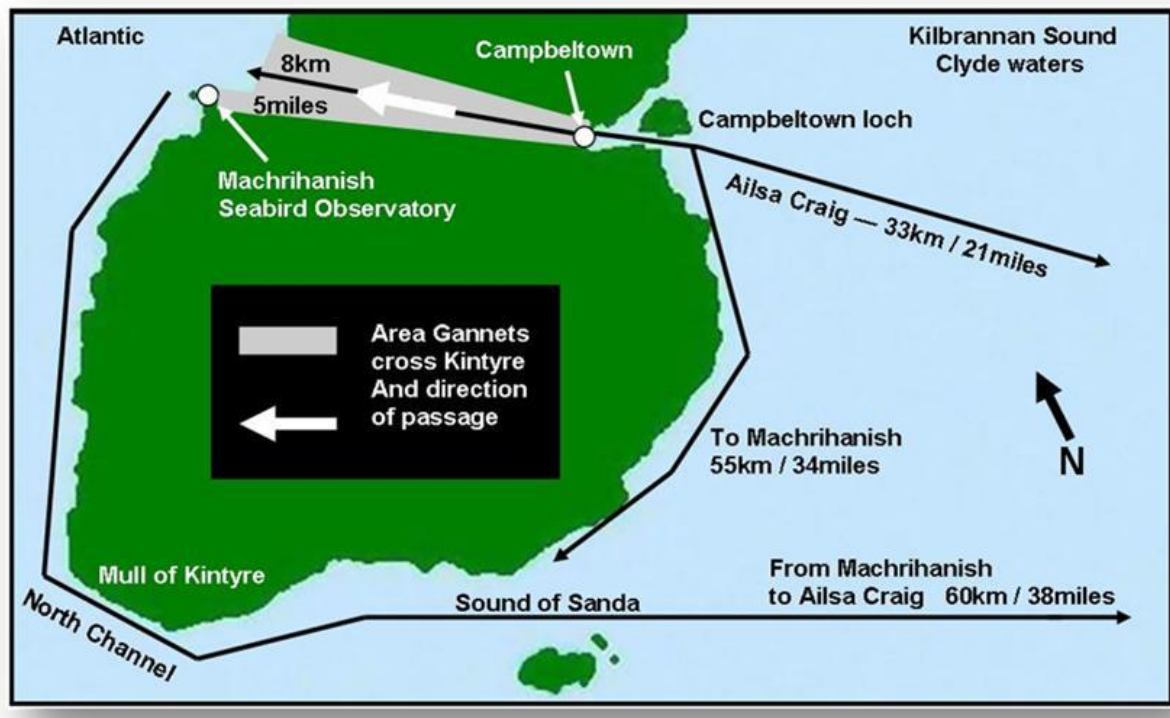


Figure 1. South Kintyre, Argyll showing the westerly overland route (8 km / 9 minute flight) taken by adult **Northern Gannets** from Campbeltown Loch (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic). Direct marine routes with approximate distance from Campbeltown Loch to Machrihanish and the Ailsa Craig colony are also shown.

Northern Gannet Factfile...

- South Kintyre is the only accredited location in the UK where Gannets routinely cross overland during the breeding season, often in significant numbers, presumably to gain rapid access to foraging grounds.
- Only adults have crossed the low-lying 8km overland route from Campbeltown to Machrihanish Bay and to date, the overland passage is strictly one way – to the west (Clyde > Atlantic).
- Gannets flying to the west over Campbeltown look aerodynamic and are evidently at minimal weight which must obviously be a huge advantage when crossing west over S Kintyre.
- Gannets employ powered flight (sustained flapping) to cross 8km overland at around 35 mph and the crossing has been timed on a regular basis at a constant 9 mins.
- After foraging successfully, Gannets are burdened significantly with fish prey, are visibly bloated and evidently at top weight; therefore, it is unlikely that they would attempt to fly overland from Atlantic to Clyde. The return journey to the Ailsa colony from Machrihanish is strictly a marine route via Mull of Kintyre relying heavily on assisted passage by alternating powered flight in concert with dynamic soaring (wave power) to accomplish this.

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- Comparable observations / behaviours to those witnessed at Campbeltown and MSBO by adult Gannets were observed on Shetland during 2018. On 1st and 7th October, Gannets were watched dispersing overland at Skaw, Unst (from the Hemaness colony). They were noted cutting the corner over land which was c40m above sea level for a distance of around 0.5km. However, birds returning to the colony were flying at sea-level around the Holm of Skaw (David Jardine *pers comm.*). Additional verification that birds starting out on foraging trips are prepared to employ marginal distance shortcuts over suitable low-lying land along with supplementary evidence that birds returning to a colony bloated with fish prey have a strict preference for a marine route.
- There is a substantial increase in the numbers of Gannets that cross west over Kintyre in August and September (see 2017 / 2018 data in Table 5 above); presumably this indicates urgency by breeding adults, from almost certainly the Ailsa colony, to gain rapid 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.
- The record number that crossed overland to the west in a single day was 67 in September 2017.
- The largest flock recorded crossing to the west was 16 in September 2017.
- Wind direction appears to have little / no influence on the numbers that embark on this low-lying overland shortcut to the Atlantic.
- Wind strength does not dissuade crossings either; a high total of 50 birds >W on 19th August 2017 in a WNW force 6.
- As in 2016 / 2017, numbers of adults crossing overland diminished rapidly during early October 2018. Gannet chicks on Ailsa Craig mainly fledge mid to late September; it follows that far fewer adults are feeding chicks later and the overland shortcut for the Atlantic is finally, totally abandoned.
- Gannets have never been recorded crossing overland to the west during the main winter period November – February.

A paper by Eddie Maguire / Charlie Robertson relating to studies monitoring the overland passage of this species during 2017 entitled '*Northern Gannets crossing overland in South Kintyre, Argyll*' was recently published in the *Seabird Group Newsletter* (Number 137 / February 2018) and in Argyll Birds Club's Newsletter *The Eider* (Number 123 / March 2018).

Machrihanish Seabird Observatory

Supplimentary Reports

January / February 2018

The Bleachfield Hen Harriers

By: Eddie Maguire



The photos of these male **Hen Harriers** *Circus cyaneus* were all taken at Bleachfield Farm, by Stewarton, The Laggan, S Kintyre on 8th January.

Both males and female-types were occasionally seen over the large area of *juncus* at the farm during November 2017 through to March 2018.

The harrier stake-out. Monday 8th January was glorious with strong sunshine all day but with a cold southerly breeze; I waited (from about 11:00hrs) in the car on the Bleachfield farm track with the sun behind me and passed the time listening to Radio 2. By 14:00hrs I was toying with the idea of moving on as the harrier stake-out was bordering monotonous, *especially* listening to *Jeremy Vine* but as you will soon appreciate, it was certainly worth a 4hr wait!

At 15:10hrs, an adult male appeared '*out of the blue*' in full foraging mode and commenced ranging low over the *juncus* field. I grabbed the camera and balanced the lens on the half-open car window and waited impatiently for the bird to arrive on the drivers side of the car; when it did, at times it was as close as ca. 40m and performed superbly.

My camera - Nikon D500 with Nikkor 200-500mm lens - was activated intermittingly at 10 shots per second.

A vehicle is a grand hide indeed!

Camera Settings = Aperture priority / F7.1 / ISO 1600 / Lens on 500mm / Auto focus / DX on 1.3 and Centre-focusing (see results / photos below).



A scarce breeding species in Kintyre



A regular passage and winter visitor to Kintyre
This photo was designated 'Notable' on www.birdguides.com



Surveillance over areas of juncus at The Laggan farmlands will produce sightings



The species is on the red list (the highest conservation priority)



Argyll holds ca. one quarter of the Scottish breeding population (per Argyll Bird Club)



They are listed as a Schedule 1 species under *The Wildlife and Countryside Act*



The most intensively persecuted UK bird of prey, especially on grouse moors (RSPB)



Prey consists mainly of small birds and mammals



The species has been harried to the edge of extinction in England (RSPB)



At MSBO, migrants are often seen well out over the Atlantic >S for Ireland, especially in autumn



Ready to pounce



Note small mammal prey in talon – probably a Short-tailed Vole

More of the Bleachfield Hen Harriers...

The following photographs were taken at Bleachfield Farm during February.

This newly discovered roost has likely been in use since the traditional roost at nearby Aros Moss was largely abandoned apparently by encroaching *salix*.

It has also likely been overlooked owing to its very surprising proximity to a main road (B843; Campbeltown to Machrihanish).

The large area of *juncus* (ca. 10 acres) where the birds roost is dissected by the track access to the farm.

The harriers (3 grey and a brown) have been noted going down to roost on both sides of the track around 100m from the B843 and were regularly photographed foraging over the *juncus* fields during the day.

Were the harriers ever disturbed? No, not at all; all photographs were taken from my parked vehicle and the *harriers* were totally unaware that they were the 'focus' of such frequent surveillance.

Acknowledgement...

I would like to thank farmer Willie McKerrall for his unstinting cooperation and particularly his infinite patience when confronted (frequently) by me parked on the single track access to the farm.

A few more Hen Harrier photos taken in February...



❖ 3rd February



❖ 12th February



❖ 15th February



❖ 15th February



❖ 20th February



❖ 20th February

Another couple of raptors at Bleachfield...



Common Buzzard 15th January



Merlin 18th January

Acknowledgements

Torquil Macneal and family of Lossit Estate for much encouragement.

Argyll Bird Club for generous financial assistance towards **MSBO**.

Stirling University for 20+ years of grateful sponsorship.

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

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

The late **Iomhar McMillan** (assistant warden) for his long friendship and for taking care of all maintenance work at MSBO.

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

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

The Machrihanish Seabird Observatory will reopen 1st March 2019