

June 2018
Number 124

The Eider



Whimbrel at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 22 April 2018 ©Eddie Maguire

Birding in Estonia, pages 20-24

Recent bird sightings, pages 25-29

Cowal birding journal, pages 11-13

Editor: Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinn, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR

Phone 01369 810024—E-mail stevepetty@btinternet.com

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Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2018

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.

Sunday 27 May. West Cowal. Led by Neil Hammatt (e-mail neilhammatt@googlemail.com mobile phone 07581 448861). Meet at 10.00hrs at the Inver Cottage car park (NS007949) just off the B8000 to explore the west side of Cowal including Otter Ferry, Kilbride Farm and Kilbride Bay. Food, drinks and toilets are available at these destinations including a pop-up cafe at Kilbride Farm. The outing will include numerous short walks of less than 1km on gentle gradients.

Saturday 28 July. 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 are available at the cafe. Please let Steve know by 23 July if you would like lunch, so a table can be booked. Members of the Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh are admitted free. Entrance fees for non-members are £6.50 for adults and £5.50 for concessions.

Saturday 25 August. Inver, Jura. This 'exploratory' outing will be led by David Jardine (e-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com phone 01546 510200; please contact David if you intend to go on this trip.) Meet at the Kennacraig Ferry terminal at 09.15hrs, returning to Kennacraig at 22.10hrs. It will involve a walk on tracks and the shore of around 10km. Please bring a packed lunch; an evening meal will be had in the Port Askaig Hotel.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2018-2019

Autumn Meeting and AGM 2018. Saturday 3 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel (<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). The programme

Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—John Bowler, Roger Broad, Jim Dickson, Ian Fisher, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), Neil Hammatt, Steve hiscock, David Jardine, Eddie Maguire, Alistair McGregor, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Tom Prescott, Peter Roberts, Nigel Scriven and Margaret Staley

will be included in the September *Eider*. Lunches will be available in the hotel.

Spring Meeting 2019 (Scottish Bird-watchers Conference). **Saturday 16 March 2019 in the Corran Halls, Oban.** This will be a joint conference with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Argyll Bird Club.

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

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 28 (2016)

All members should have received their copy of ABR 28. If you haven't, please contact Bob Furness (contact details on the back page).

We are still looking for folk to help on the editorial side of future reports, including writing/collating species accounts and proof reading.

THE ARGYLL BIRD CLUB'S WEBSITE—HELP NEEDED

To keep the website updated takes a lot of effort. We urgently need more help with the 'recent reports' section, to cover periods when the usual compilers are on holiday etc. So, if you have any previous experience with maintaining websites or would like to learn how to, why not give us a hand. Without more help, the almost daily updates to 'recent reports' will become less frequent. If you are interested, please contact any club official to learn more about what is involved.

Don't forget to 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.

TREASURER AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY REQUIRED

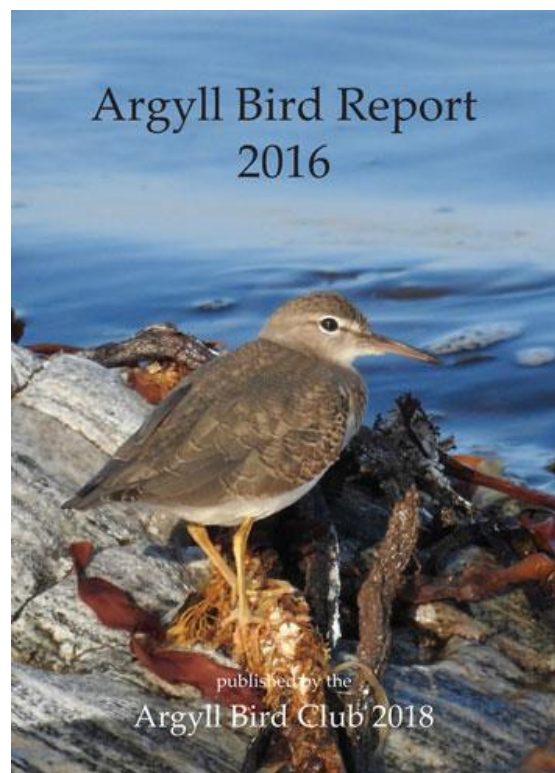
After many years of efficiently managing the club's accounts and membership data, Bob and Sue Furness are stepping down at the next AGM. So, we need someone to take over from this November. If you are interested, please contact Bob who will be more than willing to explain what the jobs involve. There are many advantages in just one person or a couple taking on both posts.

COLL BIRD FESTIVAL 18-20 MAY 2018

It's still not too late to consider going to this festival. Did you know that the best place to see the Corncrake, along with a host of other fantastic and often rare wildlife, is the Isle of Coll? And, the best time of year is late April to mid-May which is why we host Coll Bird Festival at this time of year.

Over the course of a three-day weekend, Coll Bird Festival (in partnership with the local RSPB reserve) offers a variety of guided walks, boat trips, and talks. The ever popular Puffin trips to Lunga are back and new, for 2018, is a boat trip to Tiree, a hunt for Sand Lizards and/or Short-necked Oil Beetles, and an opportunity to listen to the enchanting night-time song of Coll at our dusk-watch. We also host a ceilidh and organise a beach clean with BBQ to finish off the weekend. Visitors can book a package deal or pick and choose individual events. For more information go to:

<http://collbunkhouse.com/coll-bird-festival-2018/>



Argyll Bird Report 28 (2016). Additional copies can be purchased from Bob Furness (contact details on the back page). The cost is £12 including P&P. Cheques should be made payable to the Argyll Bird Club.

ABC field trip to Appin—24 February 2018

A bright, cold morning saw five members gather in Appin, North Argyll, less than 7km from the northern boundary of the Argyll recording area.

The first stop was at a small car park near the bird hide on the south shore of Loch Laich, from where we had good views across the loch. The neap tide was well in, but advancing only slowly towards us. Redshank, Greenshank and Curlew were feeding along the margin while some Mallard were further along the shore. Wigeon, Red-breasted Merganser and Goldeneye were further out on the water. Two Greylag Geese flew across the loch and several groups of Canada Geese could be seen in the surrounding fields. Herring and Black-headed Gulls were bathing and preening in the freshwater discharging from the river. A group of Curlews roosting on a sandbank beside the river were accompanied by three smaller, greyer waders which eventually revealed their godwit beaks but steadfastly declined to reveal their bar-tailed or black-tailed wings. As we walked along the path to the Jubilee Bridge, Coal Tit and Dunnock could be heard in the nearby garden and two Hoodies flew across ahead of us. A Meadow Pipit perched on the bridge handrail as we crossed and a Grey Heron flew in to land in the tall grass close to the river. Reaching the footpath along the old railway track we saw more Canada Geese and a Mistle Thrush in the fields on the other side. A walk along the footpath to the jetty at Castle Stalker revealed several woodland species, especially near a house with bird feeders, and a Yellowhammer. As we returned along the path a Dipper flew up the burn from under the bridge beneath our feet.

After warming up with a bowl of soup in front of a blazing stove in the Ferry Bar at Port Appin the second part of the trip started with a scan of the waters and reefs between the mainland and Lismore. Alas, not much was to be seen in the strong south easterly breeze. A low rock had a good complement of Shags interspersed with a few Cormorants while a male Eider and its parasitic Great Black-backed Gull could be seen towards the Lismore shore. A Tystie whirred in from the north and began fishing.

The path around the quartzite outcrop of Clach Thoull was unusually quiet once we were away from the Robins and Coal Tits in the gardens of Port Appin. We saw and heard nothing until we were well up into Airds Bay. A drake Goldeneye was eye-catching in the sunshine, as was an adult White-tailed Eagle which cruised over us. A Wren was busy in the dry mounds of last year's bracken and a Blue Tit was scolding something, perhaps us, in the woods. A Shelduck was in the corner of the bay and a few waders included a Curlew, a Greenshank and two Oystercatchers, which were joined by a Redshank as we watched a flock of Meadow Pipits picking over the old seaweed on the beach. We returned through the village, checking the gardens for birds as much as our watering eyes allowed, but we still had not seen a House Sparrow by the time we reached the car park. No matter—it had been a good day with some good birds.

Species List. Greylag Goose, Greater Canada Goose, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Common Eider, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Great Cormorant, European Shag, Grey Heron, White-tailed Eagle, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Curlew, Godwit sp., Greenshank, Common Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Auk sp., Collared Dove, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Wren, White-throated Dipper, Blackbird, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Common Chaffinch, European Goldfinch, Eurasian Siskin, Yellowhammer. Total: 41 Species

Mike Harrison



ABC field trip to the Sound of Gigha—24 March 2018



North of Tayinloan, Kintyre ©Jim Dickson

A heavy early morning mist soon gave way to bright sunshine producing ideal conditions for birdwatching. So, it was shame that only three members turned up at the Ronachan Car Park. Maybe this was a day when folk were turning thoughts to gardening rather than birding hence the poor turnout? Like myself, Malcolm Chattwood and Mike Harrison decided to remain on the mainland of Kintyre and not head over to Gigha.

Scanning through telescopes from Ronachan was made easy in the very good light although ideally the sea surface could have been calmer to help us pick out distant species. A small number of Great Northern Divers were relatively close in giving good views. However, none were in breeding plumage. The rocks just offshore held 13 Common Seals with some folk stopping off to view them and enquire about our bird sightings. Several Shags, two Ringed Plovers and four Purple Sandpipers were on nearby rocks. The latter group took off and landed just in front of us. Needless to say a great photo opportunity was missed having left my camera in the car. Further out were around 15 Common Scoter, mostly all males, many Eider, two Black-throated and two Red-throated Diver, two Slavonian Grebe and passing Shelduck.

Our next two stops enabled viewing of the sound to the north of Rhunahaorine Point. Here we got closer views of more Slavonian Grebes (photo below), most in transition into breeding plumage, with one was in full breeding plumage. More Great Northern Divers and Common Scoters were seen along with small numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers, the usual gull species, Hoodies, Rooks, Jackdaws and Rock Doves. We then headed south, passing good numbers of White-fronted Geese, en-route to Tayinloan jetty just in case any other folk had arrived late. But there was no one, so we decided to have lunch at Big Jessies café at the pier.

Now suitably refreshed our quiet paced birding suddenly seemed to go up a gear or two, adding new species for the day list every minute or two—with a close in Razorbill, three distant Long-tailed Ducks, Cormorants, Black-headed Gulls, Sparrowhawk and no sooner than us saying this area is often good for an early Sandwich Tern we scoped one sitting on rocks just



Slavonian Grebes ©Jim Dickson

south of the pier! A walk along the beach towards Lochan Luing (Point Sands caravan-park) was very rewarding with several Ringed Plovers, two Bar-tailed Godwits, a smart male Northern Wheatear, a pair of Stonechat, several Meadow Pipits and Sky Larks with at least three males in display song flight. Just inland from the beach is some excellent marshy land and flooded fields from which several Common Snipe took flight along with Grey Herons. Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Reed Bunting were added and a flock of 47 Curlews landed at the back of the marsh. Further inland a flock of 50+ Wood Pigeons kept circling the area and over the distant hills up to six Buzzards and two Ravens were noted.

At Lochan Luing at least 18 Teal were present as well as a pair of Mute Swans, several Mallard and a Grey Heron. A short walk inland was made to try and gain a few woodland species, noting that we still hadn't seen a Blackbird or Dunnock. Here we added Coal Tit and Long-tailed Tit, Mistle Thrush, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kestrel, Grey Wagtail and a flock of 40+ migrant Meadow Pipits. With a reasonably good total of species seen we headed back towards Tayinloan along the beach and in



Red-breasted Merganser © Jim Dickson

the process disturbed a Little Egret that took flight giving us nice views. It dropped down ahead of us out of sight but was then seen a few minutes later flying back around us and towards Lochan Luing. With the trip now coming to an end we did get to add Blackbird onto our list with one in full song in Tayinloan village. Our combined species total for the day coming to a healthy 66 species.

Jim Dickson



Grey Heron at Lochan Luing ©Jim Dickson

ABC field trip to Luing—21 April 2018



A group photo at Gorstan, Luing
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Eleven members met on the Island of Seil on a beautiful sunny morning, where they 'consolidated' the number of vehicles to be taken over to Luing. The day had a feel of 'spring' and the first migrants were recorded before getting on the ferry. A Grasshopper Warbler was reeling at Balachuan, while Chiffchaffs and Blackcap were singing in Clachan Seil and a Sand Martin flew over the slipway at Cuan.

After crossing at Cuan, where a Black Guillemot was seen flying through the sound, the party made their way down to Kilchatan, where the local Rooks were busy at their nests, Skylarks were singing and a single Lapwing was noted on the grassland. There was no sign of the Barnacle Geese which usually winter in this area. Presumably they had departed for their breeding grounds. At the next stop in the Gorstan/Black Mill Bay area a migrating group of around 45 Pink-footed Geese were heard, and then seen, as they headed north-west to Iceland.

A Great Northern Diver was feeding offshore, Gannets and Kittiwakes were passing in the Sound of Luing, and around the gardens in this area at least four Yellowhammers (photo opposite) and a Reed Bunting were found. The former were a welcome sighting of this scarce species in Argyll. Other Yellowhammers were later seen at

Toberonochy and Achafolla.

The next stop was at Toberonochy where the party walked south along the coast to an 'estuarine' area, which David Jardine hoped would have some interesting birds—sadly not on this bright sunny day, but there were a few Shelduck (photos next page). Fortunately, it was a case of the journey being better than the arrival. Seen by some were two Whimbrel (photo next page) resting on the shore at the south end of the village and three Twite flying over. On the return journey a Common Sandpiper was found, and excellent



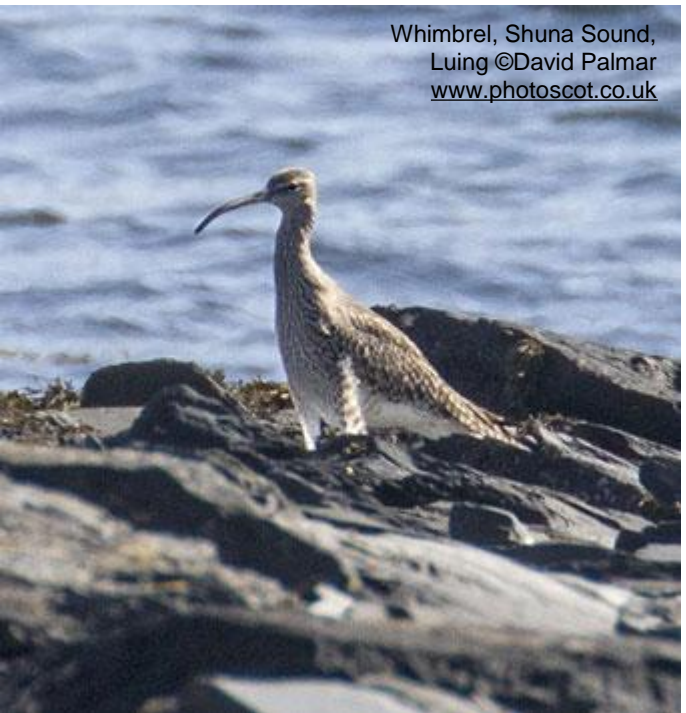
Yellowhammer, Luing
©David Palmar
www.photoscot.co.uk

views were had of a bright 'Greenland' Wheatear, allowing the difference in size and brightness to be compared with another Wheatear. A Swallow was flying over the village in the sunshine.

Lunch was beckoning, which was enjoyed at the excellent Atlantic Islands Centre in Cullipool before a short walk to the old slate quarry to the north. An incubating Buzzard was found here, but there was no sign of the local Ravens. A search for Water Rail in a marsh near Bardrishaig proved unsuccessful, but the fifth warbler of the day, a Sedge Warbler, was found skulking in the scrub.

On the return to the ferry good views were gained of a Peregrine and later a Kestrel at Cuan. A good end to good day, on which the arrival of migrants were good harbingers of the summer ahead.

Species List. Pink-footed Goose, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Shelduck, Mallard, Eider, Pheasant, Great Northern Diver, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Buzzard, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Black Guillemot, Common Gull, Kittiwake, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Rock Dove, Kestrel, Peregrine, Rook, Hooded Crow, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, Swallow, Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Starling,



Whimbrel, Shuna Sound,
Luing ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Wren, Stonechat, Wheatear, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Linnet, Twite, Redpoll, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting (56 species)

Additional species seen on Seil. Mute Swan, Teal, Tufted Duck, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Sand Martin, Grasshopper Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff (10 species)

A total of 66 species

David Jardine



Shelduck, Luing ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

BTO news update 2018

Owl Appeal and Surveys

A national funding appeal has been launched to help improve our understanding of their population trends.

<https://www.bto.org/support-us/appeals/bto-owl-appeal>

As apex predators, owls sit at the top of food chains, making them excellent indicators of the health of our countryside. We need to know more about how they use different habitats and how they interact with other species. These are the five species of interest:

Short-eared Owl—range contraction and decline in abundance

Long-eared Owl—poorly monitored

Tawny Owl—stable range, but population declining

Barn Owl & Little Owl—not specifically surveyed since 1990s

The action plan is:

Tawny Owl

Garden BirdWatch Calling Survey—autumn 2018 repeat of previous survey (2005/6).

Structured Survey, following methods of 1989 & 2005 using pre-selected 2x2km squares for 2-4 visits in autumn 2018. Volunteers required.

Barn Owl, Little Owl & Tawny Owl

Develop new and support existing networks to collect better data on clutch size, brood size, laying date and adult survival, working with ringers and nest recorders.

All owls

Establish new connections between volunteers and local community groups responsible for sites with breeding owls. Involving ringers, nest recorders and local communities

Short-eared Owl

Build on pilot research in Scotland to better understand home range, habitat use and year-round movements. Involves BTO staff and interested volunteers.

Long-eared Owl

Testing field methods for survey, and promoting more detailed studies involving volunteers.

Breeding Bird Survey in Argyll Mainland (Bute & Gigha)

The current situation is that there are 41 squares in total, of which 19 are allocated and 22 unallocated, so there are opportunities for volunteers if the available squares are not too far away.

Upland Rover squares are a new addition to the scheme, trialled last year, and now being promoted, where volunteers take on a single visit BBS survey to remote upland locations between April and the end of June. Recognising that a one-off visit is better than no visit at all, it will help improve coverage of more remote upland areas. Available squares can be found on an interactive map on the BBS part of the BTO website. It is especially appropriate for experienced surveyors on holiday in these areas.

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/taking-part/upland-rovers>

Heronries Census—90th Anniversary

2018 marks 90yrs of the BTO's longest running field survey. Trailblazing citizen science. This year an attempt is being made for full coverage:

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/heronries-census>

Coverage in Argyll has always been patchy, and under-recorded, so if you know of any heronries, and can count the nests, please do so. The web site above also has a link to a vacant sites map, and a video on how to register for the census and enter data online. You can always contact your local organizer (BTO rep) for advice.

WeBS

The Wetland Bird Survey involves monthly counts of wetland birds on coastal and inland sites. With Argyll's enormous length of coastline and lochs, there are always opportunities to fill the gaps in coverage. Counts are monthly with priority given to the most important sites on certain dates in the winter period, although counts throughout the year are welcomed. If you are interested in taking on a patch, either on your own or in partnership with others, contact your local organiser, or the WeBS office at the BTO: webs@bto.org

Seabirds Count

This is the 4th national survey of all our breeding seabirds, and is organised by JNCC. It began in some areas in 2015, but this year has been extended to cover all areas, to be completed in 2019. Much has changed since the last survey (Seabird 2000), and help will be needed to achieve the best coverage. If you wish to contribute, especially if you know any new sites, please contact the Argyll Local Organiser, Nigel Scriven.

Nigel Scriven

Cold weather mortality of Herons during winter 2017/2018

Each year I count the number of nests at a sample of sites in Argyll for the BTO Heronry Survey. 2018 is the 90th anniversary of this, the longest running bird survey in the world (see details on page 9). Nationally, an extra effort is being made to count a greater sample of sites this year. At all sites I have visited in 2018, the number of occupied nests has declined from the counts made in 2017. At some sites the number of nests is the lowest count I have recorded.

Since 1994, 334 Heron chicks have been ringed on the islands of Colonsay and Oronsay as part of an ongoing study of the population of 15-20 pairs which breed there. During this period there have been nine recoveries from these ringed birds including birds found on Colonsay, and at Loch Lomond, Islay, Ireland (3) and even Norway. Therefore it came as a complete surprise to recently receive four additional Heron recoveries in the course of 48hrs. These had all been found long-dead on the shores of Oronsay and Colonsay in late April. They were birds which had been ringed there in 2013, 2014 and 2016 (2).

Conversations with local residents indicate that during the period when most of Scotland was suffering from the 'beast from the east' (late February and early March), the

shores around Colonsay and Oronsay were covered with ice, a very rare event. Most of Colonsay's Herons feed in the inter-tidal area and this severe weather event, which prevented them from feeding, probably led to an increase in mortality. The national Heronry Survey has shown similar population declines associated with severe winters in the past and historically populations have subsequently recovered over a period of years.

Please send any details of nest counts at heronries in Argyll to Nigel Scriven or the BTO. If you find a dead heron this spring, please check it for rings.

David Jardine



Heron chicks, Garvard, Colonsay, June 2017
©David Jardine

Cowal birding journal 2015-2018



A diverse range of habitats.
Stillaig, near Portavadie,
Cowal, with Arran in the
background.

March 2015

It is time to leave Oxfordshire for a quieter life, somewhere with lots of space. But where can I afford a large garden with good birding and excellent scenery near the sea? Argyll has an excellent bird club and regularly updated website, but relatively few birders venture there.

September 2015

I have fallen in love with an overgrown garden in west Wales, near Cardigan, surrounded by oak woodland. To own some woodland has always been a dream having been a tree breeder for many years. And, there it is all on a plate—1.6ha of land in a deep wooded valley, 20km from the sea at Cardigan, with 0.3ha of landscaped but, massively overgrown garden, and a run-down, unloved house.

December 2015

Things are even better now that my valuer has told me to offer £50,000 less for the house in Wales!! Amazingly, it was accepted by a desperate seller, leaving me £50k to spend on a real treat for a devotee of the Highlands. The cheapest habitable Scottish cottage is in Clachaig on the Cowal peninsula in Argyll for less than £45k. This hadn't been lived in for 30yrs.

March 2016

I bought my house on Cowal and another dream has come true—a bolt hole among the magnificent scenery of western Scotland.

April 2016

I have already had a lot of bird surprises in Cowal. In Oxfordshire, where I lived previously, it was not normal to have Grasshopper Warbler, Stonechat and Whinchat (photo below) in the garden, but in Clachaig it is. In the south, I was used to catching up with them on migration. And, adding to that Tree Pipit (photo next page), Willow Warbler, Garden Warbler and Whitethroat in Clachaig, I am thinking differently about Argyll.



Whinchat ©Neil Hammatt

May 2016

I have had to return to Wales, where in the valley the full dawn chorus echoed deafeningly each morning. The estate agent's literature hadn't listed other residents as Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Redstart and Wood Warbler. I suddenly realise that amber and red-listed birds I could only see on nature reserves in southern England, are still widespread in Wales and Scotland. Whinchat is common in the uplands of mid-Wales and Pied Flycatchers and Wood Warblers are regular in Welsh woodlands more generally.

December 2016

I have now seen 108 species in Cowal including breeding Osprey and Golden Eagle. And I know from Arthur French that I missed quite a few, such as Merlin and Short-eared Owl. I now realise that Cowal is a hidden gem. It would be an important nature reserve in England, but in Argyll car-loads of birders drive through Cowal on their way to Islay and Mull, oblivious to the ornithological gems in this part of the mainland.

January 2017

This year I will focus on getting to know Cowal better, especially its birds, and record these on BTO Birdtrack. Cowal is all the land south of the A83 where it leaves Loch Long and then joins Loch Fyne. There is minimal farmland, much of it now abandoned, but extensive conifer plantations in the rocky uplands and long stretches of oak woodland along its shores. It was a surprise to see a Waxwing in Ardentinny.

21 May 2017

I have increased my Cowal list to 120 regulars. I have missed at least ten, some of which I consider curiosities such as Rose-coloured Starling, while some could become regulars such as Great White and Little Egret. I'd say 130 species is pretty amazing for a peninsula of maybe 770km² and its surrounding sea lochs.

31 May 2017

What amazes me is that many woodland species, highlighted by the BTO in its 2016 summary of the Breeding Bird Survey, are abundant in Cowal's temperate broadleaved woodlands. These include abundant Wood Warblers and Redstarts. In Cowal's wet grazing such as in Glen Lean and Glendaruel, Grasshopper and Willow Warblers sing in large numbers, unheard by any birder from the south, and Whinchats and Sedge Warblers are regulars too.

1 June 2017

In May, one bird occupied days of my birding time without success. Another spring migrant, it was a real challenge because it was no longer known in any of its previous haunts. Nor was it singing in other areas of Cowal where nest boxes were now exclusively occupied by tits. But I wasn't ready to give up, and acting on little bits of intelligence gleaned here and there, and a niggles in the back of my mind on my last day on Cowal, I decided to ask at the forestry office at Glenbranter. I had been on various trails there several times, but the reason I didn't spot a Pied Flycatcher was because they nested in a bat box by the office!!! There was me checking all the beautiful bluebell-filled oak woods, but the birds hadn't read the text books! I know I should expect the unexpected with wildlife, but as far as I know these were the only Pied Flycatchers to breed in Cowal in 2017. Plans are afoot to increase the numbers of nest boxes there in winter 2018. Another fantastic feature of Argyll is its many Rhododendron gardens, including Ardkinglas by the head of Loch Fyne. In early



May, I decided to treat a friend to a day there as she needed time out of a hectic life. The sun shone and the gardens were full of colour. While listening to Wood Warblers, two nut-hatches appeared, an adult being chased by a begging youngster. On subsequent visits to Ardkinglas, Nuthatch has been a regular sight, supporting the view that this species is spreading further through Argyll. I subsequently heard of another unsuccessful Nuthatch nest in the post-box in Strathlachlan in 2017.

8 June 2017

When I was a child in Buckinghamshire, Spotted Flycatchers nested in a climbing rose on the front of our garage, but today they are rare in the southeast, a sad and familiar story for so many species. So, now I have returned to Cowal, this migrant is my target. During a brief six days on Cowal I have found two, both at Old Castle Lachlan, one in the graveyard and one by the castle ruin. To my relief both were feeding young .

3 November 2017

My Cowal list is now 124 having found Tufted Duck in Loch Askog and Knot at Otter Ferry.

18 November 2017

I'm looking forward to 2018. In winter I will continue my search for Great-crested Grebe on Loch Long. In spring I will be torn between my 65 flowering Rhododendrons in Wales and the birds of Cowal. I plan to concentrate on birding later in spring, with new birds in mind. Were I to extend Cowal a bit to incorporate the Arrochar Alps, then Ptarmigan and Ring Ouzel may be possible. Reports in 2017 of roding Woodcock in Glendaruel and of Nightjar on the golf course in Innellan mean I will also try and stay awake and find them myself. Or maybe I will just wild camp as is the custom in Scotland and wait for them to wake me!

To be continued...

Dr Neil Hammatt



Broadleaved woodland in Cowal look fantastic at this time of year, with extensive carpets of Bluebells, other woodland plants and a wide range of songbirds ©Steve Petty

Abstracts of talks given at the Spring Meeting of the ABC on 3 March 2018



© Steve Pettty

Introduction

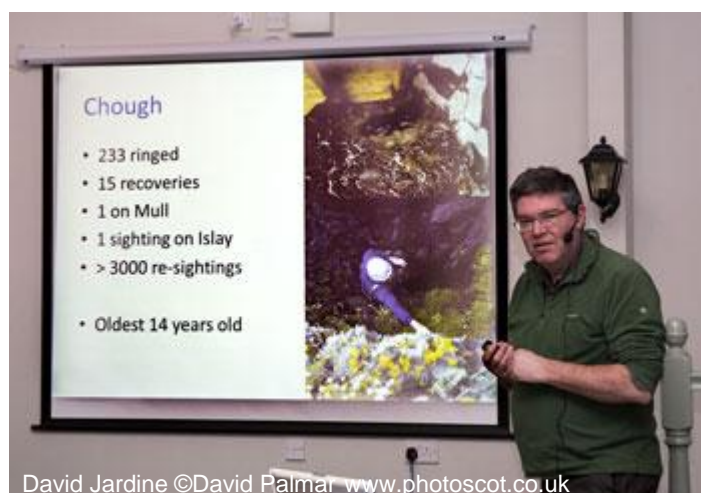
Club chairman, Nigel Scriven, welcomed just over 30 members and guests to the spring meeting at the Inveraray Inn on Saturday 3 March. Considering the severe weather conditions during the few days prior to the meeting, we were most grateful to those folk who made the effort to attend. The 'beast from the east' meant that a two speakers travelling from the east were unable attend due to atrocious snow conditions. At short notice, David Jardine efficiently re-organised the programme. Jim Dickson, the Argyll Bird Recorder, opened the meeting with an excellent set of photographs of both common and uncommon birds seen in Argyll since the autumn meeting. Jim then went on to show us some super photos from a trip to Lesvos last year (see Eider September 2017, pages 15-19).

Three crows sat upon a wa'—David Jardine (*summary by David Jardine*)

As a stand in for a speaker who had not been able to come as a result of the weather, David Jardine gave a talk on a comparative study of crows on Colonsay which he originally gave at the Scottish Ringers' Conference. Chough, the first

crow (the rarest of them a'), is well known as a result of colour-ringing studies on Colonsay and Islay. The survival of first-year birds is a key factor in the population dynamics of this species. This has been poor on Colonsay in recent years and consequently the size of the non-breeding flock has diminished significantly (and was zero in 2010). This reduction in recruits to the breeding population has resulted in a decline to fewer than ten pairs on Colonsay and Oronsay. The reasons for the poor first-year survival appear to be linked to food supply, as supplementary feeding on Islay has led to improved survival. On Colonsay, factors affecting poor survival are habitat problems (caused by less grazing), a reduced genetic base, weather impacts on soil invertebrates, veterinary practices and parasites.

The next crow, the biggest of them a' (Raven, photo





Raven on Colonsay ©Ian Fisher

next page) has seen a fluctuating population on the island over the last 30yrs. Unlike Chough, which are sedentary, young Ravens appear to leave the island, where there is not a non-breeding flock for much of the year, only breeding pairs. Licences to control the population in 1995 led to a halving of the breeding population which then took 10yrs to recover. With the change from headage payments for agri-

culture to area payments, there has been a significant decline in the number of sheep on the islands (which led to some of the Chough feeding areas becoming overgrown). Initially, because of a reduction in husbandry effort, this led to an increase in the number of Raven, but in recent years there has been a gradual decline in the population.

The last crow is the least known of them all. While the population demography of Chough is well known and is now being explored for Raven, very little is known about this for Hooded Crows. David has been studying their nesting success for a number of years and described their nesting habits, some of which are on low rocks just above the coastal high water mark or in gorse bushes. One adult found on Colonsay in 2017 was 10yrs old, but until now ring recoveries have been insufficient to look at dispersal and first-year survival. Colour ringing started in 2017 and initial results from this are encouraging, and may help unlock the population biology of this much disliked species.

Butterflies and moths of Argyll— Tom Prescott, Senior Conservation Officer, Butterfly Conservation (summary by Steve Petty)

It probably came as a surprise to some folk to learn that Argyll has an amazing number of rare moths and butterflies. A total of 27 species of butterflies have been recorded in Argyll, and from these Tom picked three of the scarcest to describe in detail—Marsh Fritillary (photo next page), Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Chequered Skipper (photo opposite). The latter species became extinct in England in 1976. It was discovered in Scotland in 1939. Its present range is centered either side of Loch Etive, Argyll and appears to be stable. Recently, a modelling study was undertaken to try and highlight its potential range in western Scotland. Follow-up surveys found the species present in new areas selected by the model, most of them in Argyll. It is still possible that Chequered Skippers will be found elsewhere in Argyll. They require damp, sunny glades with Purple Moor-grass, the caterpillar's only food plant, where Bog Myrtle and birch scrub are often pre-



Tom Prescott ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



Chequered Skipper ©Tom Prescott/Butterfly Conservation



sent. The range of Marsh Fritillary has declined dramatically elsewhere in the UK, but new colonies are still being found in Argyll. Damp grassland with abundant Devil's-bit Scabious, the larval food plant, is the main habitat. Colonies can be small so it is important to preserve or create linkage between suitable sites. Tom has spent much time with the farming community to identify such areas and to use various agricultural schemes to aid their conservation. The females lay eggs in large batches and the hatching larvae are gregarious and live initially inside a protective web, which they spin. These webs become obvious by the end of August, and this is a good time to search suitable habitats for their presence. Populations of Marsh Fritillary are prone to large annual fluctuations due to a wasp which lays its eggs in the larvae, and can destroy all the larvae in a web. A number of nationally rare, day-flying moths also occur in Argyll, and Butterfly Conservation has been actively improving habitats for these species. The scarcest of these is the New Forest Burnet, a Red Data Book species. It was first recorded in the New Forest, but the English population became extinct around 1927. Remarkably, a small colony was discovered in western Scotland in 1963. By the 1980s only a handful of individuals remained, due largely to overgrazing. The larval food plants (Meadow Vetchling and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil) only flowered on some of the steeper ledges, inaccessible to sheep. Grazing is now restricted on the site allowing herb-rich areas to flourish and numbers of this burnet moth have increased dramatically, to over 12,000 at one point. Tom rounded off his talk by discussing various ways of catching moths, including the

use of moth traps, searching for moths at night with a torch, and applying sweet substances to fence posts to attract moths. This was a great talk, full of enthusiasm, which I'm sure will encourage club members to look more closely at these fascinating invertebrates. We already have number of confirmed moth addicts in the club!

Argentina: land of contrasts—Steve Petty (*summary Steve Petty*)

An invitation to attend a wedding in Buenos Aires came totally out of the blue, but providing an opportunity for Steve and Linda to visit part of South America they had never considered before. Argentina is an enormous country stretching from sub-tropical rainforests in the north to glacial landscapes in the south, and from the Andes in the west to the rich Atlantic seaboard to the east. Discounting five days in Buenos Aires for the wedding, how could you best spend the remaining nine days? In the end, they opted for three nights at each of three locations. After a number of flights (Glasgow to Heathrow, Heathrow to Buenos Aires and finally Buenos Aires to Posadas) during a very long, tiring day, they reached the first destination—the Iberá Wetlands in north-eastern Argentina. After the Pantanal in Brazil, this is the second-largest wetland in the world. They stayed at an estancia that lay between the Río Parana and the wetlands. It was the middle of September and the start of spring in this sub-tropical environment. The flowers in the gardens around the estancia attracted many fabulous butterflies and birds. They soon spotted the first hummingbird, a Gilded Sapphire, nectaring on hibiscus flowers. A pair of Southern Lapwings was displaying just in front of their lodge, and willing to attack any human daring to venture onto 'their' lawn. It was always exciting and challenging to be in an area where every bird you see is a new species for your list. One of the most abundant and noisiest species around was the Monk Parakeet. These were busily building massive stick nests in some of the taller trees and palms. Overhead, Turkey Vultures were more abundant than Black Vultures. Numerous species of woodpeckers were seen and two pairs of Ringed Kingfishers (photo next page) were having a prolonged territorial dispute. After a very restful night and a good



Upper photo. Ringed Kingfisher in the Ibéra Wetlands

Middle photo: Part of Iguazú Falls in northeastern Argentina

Lower photo: Monkey Puzzle growing in mixed forest in the Andes in northern Patagonia.

All images ©Steve Petty

breakfast their guide took them into the wetlands on the estancia's boat. Soon after leaving the boat shed they spotted the first Yacare Caiman. This was followed by sightings of 15-20 different individuals, all basking in the warmth of the early-spring sun. The largest grew to about 3m in length. On the return boat it was cloudier, and all the caiman had disappeared. Coming round a corner in the reedbeds they almost ran into a Capybara, only a few metres from the boat. It was a massive male who seemed totally unconcerned about their presence. It was a great area for ducks, geese, herons, egrets and numerous passerine species. They even came across a couple of parties of Greater Rhea. The second destination was Iguazú Falls and National Park (photo opposite). This is the largest waterfall system in the world (2.7km in length), and the river forms the boundary between Argentina and Brazil. The falls are surrounded by sub-tropical rain forest, part of the Atlantic Forest Ecoregion. They spent one day exploring the Argentinean side and the following day in Brazil. Altogether very spectacular, but far too many people with the birds difficult to see in the dense forest, but they did see clouds of spectacular butterflies, and were astounded at the ingenuity of gangs of Coati robbing folks of their food! Fortunately their guide had warned them not to take anything edible. The third destination was to the Andes in northern Patagonia. This involved a couple of flights—from Posadas back to Buenos Aires and then from Buenos Aires to San Carlos de Bariloche. From here they went by car to San Martín de los Andes, close to the border with Chile, all part of the Valdivian Temperate Rainforest Ecoregion. In the lower areas, numerous *Notofagus*



sp. (southern beeches) form the bulk of the forest, while conifers became more prolific higher up. One reason for coming here was to try and find areas where Monkey Puzzle (*Araucaria arucana*) was growing naturally. It is an important tree for native people of the area, who value its very large, edible seeds. A visit to Lanin National Park, north of San Martín, provided some spectacular scenery around the volcano, after which the park was named (Volcan Lanin 3776m). They first spotted isolated *Araucaria* trees along the shore of Lago (lake) Huechulafquen, within the national park. As they progressed along the lago, more *Araucaria* was found as the forest became more widespread (photo on previous page). On the grassy areas alongside the lago were flocks of Ashy-headed Geese (photo above), a very attractive goose. These had recently returned from the pampas areas, where they winter, to breed in the forests adjacent to the lago. Soon though, it was time to return to Buenos Aires for the wedding—and that's another story!

Surveying Woodcocks—David Jardine (summary David Jardine)

In this short talk, on what is possibly the commonest wader in Argyll during winter, David Jardine described how the Argyll breeding population was augmented by large numbers of migrants from Fennoscandia from late October until spring. These shelter in woodland during the day but come to feed in fields after dark and are often seen in car headlights feeding on road verges, which sometimes leads to casualties. David had found one such casualty on his way to

the spring meeting and had brought it to allow members to see its plumage at close quarters, and in particular the tips of the underside of its tail feathers which are a 'fluorescent' white—a feature which is believed to be used in its display. Despite the recent frosty weather, when probing waders such as Woodcock can suffer, the weight of the Minard casualty (which was kindly weighed by Bob Furness after the meeting) was 323g, above the average weight for this species.

Recent Atlas results suggest that the breeding range of the Woodcock is contracting in Argyll. The reasons for this are unknown. Woodcock display at dusk and members are encouraged to submit all records of roding birds, to help establish whether the range contraction is real, or whether it is a result of reduced reporting. There is a national Woodcock Survey (<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey>) to which David contributes with sites in Knapdale Forest and on Colonsay. This 75mins survey at dusk can turn up other interesting sightings including owls and members were asked to consider taking part in this survey. On David's plots, the number of roding birds on Colonsay was higher than in Knapdale. Why this difference exists, and why the population on the mainland has contracted (they are still reported regularly on Mull) is uncertain. It may be habitat change or may be linked to increasing numbers of ground predators (eg foxes).

BTO surveys and updates—Nigel Scriven

See page 9-10

Conclusion

After drawing the raffle and thanking donors for the prizes, the speakers for their excellent talks and David Jardine for arranging the programme, Nigel Scriven closed the meeting with an invitation to the autumn meeting at the Cairnbaan Hotel on 3 November 2018.

Nigel Scriven

Miscellaneous

Is your coffee bird-friendly?

Coffee is produced from the roasted seeds of the *Coffea* plant, which is native to tropical Africa, where it grows in the under story of rain forests. It has subsequently been planted in many equatorial regions, including in Asia and America. Today Brazil is one of the largest producers of coffee. To meet the demand for coffee, new high-yielding varieties have been developed that grow in full sun. This has led to the clearance of vast areas of rain forest, where these sun-tolerant varieties require a lot of water and other inputs, such as fertilisers and pesticides. However, these high-input methods of producing coffee are largely unsustainable and have a detrimental effect on the environment.

This has led to a resurgence of growing coffee under the shade of rain-forest trees. Research has shown there is a link between the structural diversity of coffee plantations and the number of bird species it supports (and other wildlife too). The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre (SMBC) has undertaken work on the importance of shade-grown coffee for bird populations. In one study, 184 bird species (including 46 migratory species) were recorded in shade-grown coffee farms compared to as few as 6-12 species in unshaded monocultures.

If you want to buy shade-grown coffee then look for brands that use the SMBC certification system. 'Bird & Wild' (photo below) is just one of the firms marketing such products. Bird & Wild also donate 6% of sales to the RSPB.



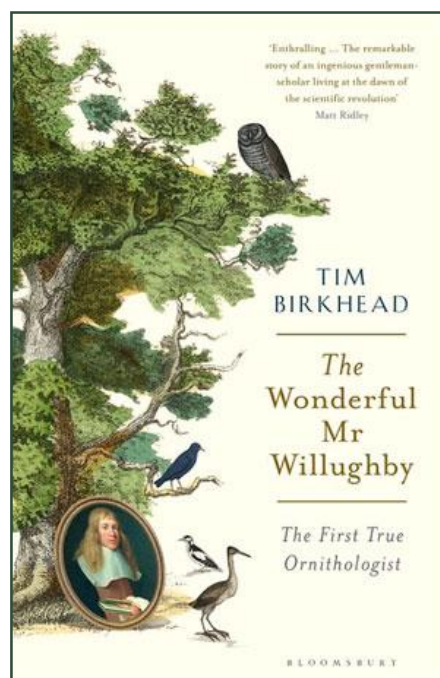
You may be tempted by this

Francis Willughby lived and thrived in the midst of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Along with his Cambridge tutor John Ray, Willughby was determined to overhaul the whole of natural history and impose order on its complexity. Yet before Willughby and Ray could complete their monumental encyclopaedia of birds, *Ornithology*, Willughby died. In the centuries since, Ray's reputation has grown, obscuring that of his collaborator. Now, for the first time, Willughby's own story and genius are given the attention they deserve.

In his short life, Willughby (an original member the Royal Society) finessed the differentiation of birds though identification of their distinguishing features and asked questions that were centuries ahead of their time. His discoveries and his approach to natural history continue to be relevant, and revelatory today.

With a fellow expert's understanding and passion, Tim Birkhead celebrates how Willughby's endeavours set a standard for the way birds and natural history should be studied. Rich with glorious detail, *The Wonderful Mr Willughby* is a fascinating insight into a thrilling period of scientific history and a lively biography of a man who lived at its heart.

Author: Tim Birkhead. Publisher: Bloomsbury. Hardback. ISBN: 9781408878484. Price: £25



Birding in Estonia, 1-7 April 2018



A cold scene at Matsula Bay ©Jim Dickson

This trip was organised by Jim Dickson and was open to all ABC members. Willing participants were Bob Davison and four ex-Fair Isle Bird Observatory staff Roger Broad, Peter Roberts, Mike Peacock and Jim.

Sunday 1st April. Glasgow to Tallinn and Saaremaa Island. On our arrival in Tallinn, it was evident our luggage had not been so lucky! We were

promised our bags would arrive on the same flight tomorrow and then brought to us at Saaremaa Island. Luckily, we all had some warm clothing, but no tripods for our scopes! All very annoying!

After taking charge of the rental minibus, the journey to the Saaremaa ferry at Virtsu was easy, along lovely smooth, fairly traffic-free roads. The predicted large amounts of snow and ice were not evident, though it was on the cold side. We saw some birds on our way including Common Cranes (photo opposite).

The ferry was modern and hassle free, and the ease with which it broke through the thin sea-ice was impressive. Calmac could learn a thing or two! We arrived at Loona Manor Lodge, at the far end of the island in time for Mike and Jim to see a Eurasian Pygmy Owl before supper. We looked over our notes and maps and made outline plans for tomorrow before an early night.

Monday 2nd April. Saaremaa Island. We awoke to a winter wonderland, with 15cm or more of fresh snow and more falling from a leaden sky. After a good breakfast we decided to try for the Steller's Eiders we'd

Common Crane ©Jim Dickson





come to see. Very soon our van was getting stuck, so we decided it was safer to return to the lodge—a major disappointment! Cups of tea and a chat with the lady of the house made us none the wiser as to whether we were being sensible or not! So we stayed put, and read books into the early afternoon of a sadly wasted and precious day.

Mike and Roger, suffering from cabin fever, wandered out in the afternoon and came back saying the roads looked better. We managed to drive the minibus out of the snow-packed car park and to the nearby village of Kihelkonna where we got a coffee and a very weird doughnut, and then set off towards Undva Point. This is the peninsula noted for Steller's Eider. But, the side roads were still difficult to negotiate, so instead we tried our luck along the coast at Veere. The forest fringing the road obscured the sea view, plus the snowy verges made it tricky to stop. Eventually we found suitable places to stop and scan the sea and harbour in the hope of "the bird" showing up. It didn't, and the viewing conditions were poor. Long-tailed Ducks (photo above) were abundant offshore, along with Goosander and the odd Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Mallard and Tufted Duck. We did try the Undva road again, which was fine for about 4km, but got too dodgy, so we played safe and headed homewards. Along the way we checked the forest for Tengmalm's Owl and were delighted to find a flock of the white-headed, northern race of Long-tailed Tit accompanied by single Blue and Willow Tit. Reaching the hotel we heard the Eurasian Pygmy Owl again but couldn't see it. After another very good evening meal we popped outside to try and call in the Pygmy Owl, but to no avail. Just then a taxi appeared complete with our five suitcases—a great relief!

Tuesday 3rd April. Saaremaa Island to Parnu. We awoke to a brilliantly blue sky with

snow lying "deep and crisp and even". After breakfast we made a contingency plan with our hostess to return and stay an extra night if we didn't find Steller's Eider.

After starting off cautiously, we found some roads were driveable with care. However, we thought the small roads around Undva might still be tricky, so we headed for Saaremaa Harbour, where the eiders are often seen. From there we scanned out to sea and across a sheltered bay. Many gorgeous Long-tailed Ducks were noted, some very close inshore. A Coot was an unexpected find sitting on the sea, while various other duck species were evident in small numbers. Much further away were the sought after Steller's Eiders, about 150 of them seemingly roosting on the sea and fairly inactive. The sun wasn't in a great position and combined with distance the views were rather disappointing. Their features were barely discernible in such gloriously sunny conditions. After waiting for an hour or so for the views to improve, which they didn't, we called it quits and headed off the island to our next destination.

The drive to the ferry terminal was straightforward, with the major roads now snow free. We found a pleasant cafe for lunch before taking the ferry back to the mainland. This ferry was equally as impressive as the outbound journey and once ashore we headed to the south of Matsalu Bay (see header photo), to do some birding from one of the watch towers. With the bay mostly frozen over, the wildfowl were concentrated in small areas of open water, in good light. Masses of Whooper Swans dominated the scene along with Mute Swans and the very dapper *sinensis* race of Great Cormorant. Also in good numbers were European White-fronted Geese and an array of ducks. Most common were Common Goldeneye, but with them were a dozen Smew—both males and females. Also, eight huge White-tailed Eagles sat out on the ice.

After this we headed towards the Parnu area, with a stop at an area where woodpeckers of many species are supposedly abundant. We only had 20mins,

but did rustle up a couple of Great Spotted and a bonus Eurasian Nuthatch. Then it was time to head further on, skirting the large town of Parnu itself and by pure chance coming across a small Italian restaurant that did a quick meal for us. Afterwards we headed to our next accommodation near Tori. This turned out a pleasant surprise, as it was in the middle of nowhere and close to Soomaa National Park (photo at end of article). It was a spacious guesthouse/hunting lodge, which we had all to ourselves.

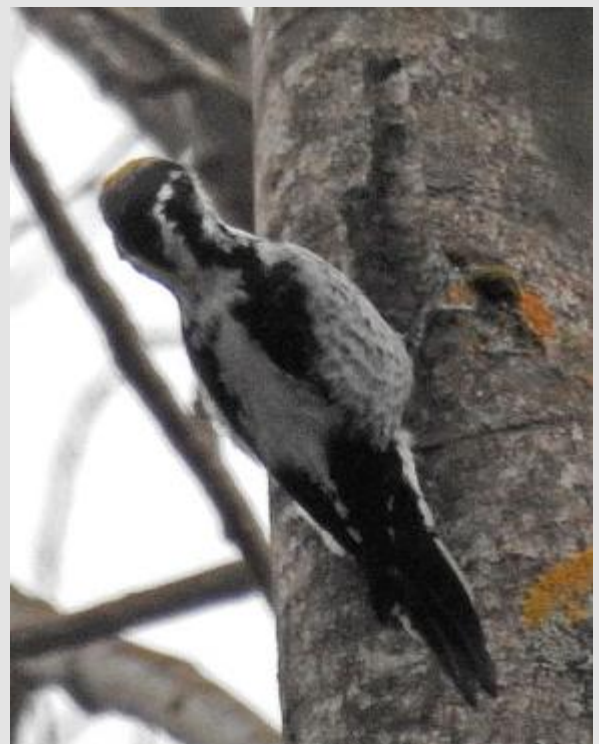
Once settled, we ventured out at dusk along the road to the National Park to look for Ural Owl. Our second try with the taped call produced a response from a near-by bird. Sadly it was tricky to locate, but Jim somehow managed it using his camera as a night-vision viewer. A very shadowy, ghostly shape of the large owl was seen by some of us flying away, not to be lured back again.

Wednesday 4th April. Soomaa National Park. We left the lodge around 06.00hrs in cloudy, but dry conditions and we were soon in Soomaa N.P. Here we stopped at likely spots for grouse and woodpeckers. It was slightly warmer and the ice and snow were thawing, but the birds were still scarce. Between playing taped calls of various woodpeckers, Roger spotted a Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker (photo opposite). We had some prolonged views of it drumming away on various bits of dead timber, making a variety of drumming noises.

After a decent breakfast at the lodge, and with improving weather conditions, we decided to spend much of the day around the Soomaa N. P. We drove back to the same area we'd visited before breakfast, and walked along a snow track through mixed forest to a viewing platform looking out over a bog and rough fields. This was probably the most productive part of the day. Jim found a Eurasian Pygmy Owl, which we all managed see and hear briefly. The owl's call brought out numerous mobbing passerines, including several Willow Tits. We also saw our first Crested Tit and Goldcrest. Further on, we heard, and then called in, a pair of Grey-headed Woodpeckers. There were several Great Spotted Woodpeckers, making it difficult to locate rarer species, such as White-backed Woodpecker. On the walk back to the vehicle, a Black Woodpecker (photos opposite) was heard and

brought closer to the group with taped calls—the fourth woodpecker of the morning.

Hazel Grouse, Nutcracker and White-backed Woodpecker still eluded us, so with time running out we had to decide where to go next. We opted to go to nearby Viljanda for fuel and lunch. Along the way we



Black Woodpecker (upper) and Three-toed Woodpecker (lower) Both images ©Jim Dickson

encountered one of the more spectacular sights of the day—a huge flock of 500+ Mealy Redpolls (photo opposite). These little gems were feeding dangerously close to the road edge, possibly eating grit. The birds were in varied plumages and their agitated activity and tightly-packed flock was a pleasure to see. After lunch we continued back into Soomaa N. P. via a more southerly route. By now the thaw was in full swing, turning the icy roads into mud and slush, which covered the minibus with a thick layer of grime. Back at the lodge we admired the Yellowhammers, Tree Sparrows and a Brambling or two. We then retired to the dry and warmth of the house for supper.

Thursday 5th April. Soomaa N. P. to Dirhami via Matsalu Bay. We had another early morning session watching from the observation tower previously visited. It was dry and still thawing, but misty at times. Green Sandpipers were a new species, small flocks of thrushes, especially Fieldfares were much in evidence and there was a fairly regular passage of geese overhead. Most of these were European White-fronted Geese, but with them, and in separate groups, were Bean Geese—probably the smaller Tundra species.

After breakfast we set off northwards to our first stop at the reedbeds and fields along the coast north of Pärnu at Audru, noted for huge numbers of geese. Again, White-fronted dominated, but there were plenty of Tundra Bean Geese and a few Barnacles. Here we saw our first European Marsh Harrier. Continuing northwards we started working our way around potential vantage points along the eastern and northern sides of the extensive Matsalu Bay. There are numerous watch towers positioned along the marshy, boggy edge of this shallow sea inlet. At Kloostri, despite the thaw, much of the bay was still frozen with small breaks in the ice where wildfowl congregated. We worked our way around to the northern



Part of a large flock of Mealy Redpolls (upper) and a Grey Partridge (lower). Both images ©Jim Dickson

side of the Bay to the well known Haeske Tower, which provided a lot of the same species, plus a few common waders such as Redshank, Curlew, Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover, plus a Siskin or two in the nearby vegetation.

After a quick lunch we set off north again towards Vonnu where we hoped to find White-backed Woodpecker. Along the way, in partly sunny conditions, we found our first Great Grey Shrike by the roadside. Once at Vonnu we wandered along a road in a damp forest of birch and alder with plenty of dead trees. We played calls and stayed here for well over an hour, but had no luck. A Great Spotted Woodpecker had our hopes raised briefly, but it was a very frustrating "no show" for the rarer species. We did find plenty of Eurasian Nuthatches and called in a lovely Marsh Tit.

The habitat changed a bit as we travelled through coniferous forest on sandier soils, but still typically very flat. Arriving at Dirhami we found our modern hotel, checked in,

showered and got ready for an early supper in a nearby fish restaurant. The meal was good. They specialised in local fish—especially Baltic Herring. While we were eating, a Northern Wheatear was spotted on the seawall outside.

Friday 6th April. Dirhami, Leisidoo, Nova and back to Tallinn. We drove off on a circuit through bog, open farmland, and mixed forests where Capercaillie, Black Grouse and Hazel Hen lurked, but found none! We knew it was easiest to find these in the early morning by driving slowly along forest tracks, but which tracks? There were many to choose from, but many looked impassable with ice and mud. Thus, a frustrating three hours was spent driving around, eventually picking tracks that opened out into unsuitable habitat and at times deteriorated into trails that a two-wheel drive mini-bus shouldn't be driving along!

We had a late breakfast back at the hotel, then packed our bags. As we were at the famous Dirhami and Spithami migration watchpoints along the coast, we drove to Spithami to see what might be moving. Luckily we found an unlocked, fully glazed bird watching hide, providing shelter from a cold wind. We revelled in the sight of hundreds of gorgeous Long-tailed Ducks, along with smaller numbers of Common Scoter, Common Eider and various other wild-fowl species out at sea. A Rough-legged Buzzard was watched slowly flapping towards land in the head wind and closer to shore a Common Tern was seen along with a group of Snow Buntings.

By early afternoon we decided to set off for a final try back at Vonnu for White-backed Woodpecker. We arrived in intermittent snow flurries and valiantly tried again, but just as yesterday, we found only Great Spotted Woodpeckers. We soon gave up and headed to Tallinn. We made one further stop at a convenient roadside halt overlooking a field with a great selection of Eurasian White-fronted and Tundra Bean Geese, Whooper Swans and our first Bewick's Swans. After a quick halt for coffee we arrived at our hotel, and after a good meal we counted up the number of species seen, which totalled 100, a little more than any of us had expected, so a pleasant surprise.

Saturday 7th April. To Glasgow and home. A final early morning start just before a very short walk to the airport to check-in for our flight to Amsterdam. After checking in, we had a quick breakfast. Jim had been checking over his photos of the trip and announced that we had in fact seen two more species than we realised! Careful scrutiny of his photos showed that amongst the Tundra Bean Geese at Audru on 5th April were 1-2 Taiga Bean Geese. One stood next to a Tundra and was clearly different in size, structure and bill colouration. He also showed us photos of the huge redpoll flock we'd admired on the 4th April, where in their perched midst were clear candidates for 2-3 Arctic Redpolls. Thus, our final tally was a respectable 102 species for the six days birding.

Peter Roberts and Jim Dickson



Part of Soomaa National Park ©Jim Dickson)

Recent bird sightings

February to
April 2018



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 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: MSBO = Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, Kintyre

Swans, ducks, geese & game-birds

ACKLING GOOSE. One was on Islay during Feb. One was at Ruaig, Tiree on 5 Apr (John Bowler)

AMERICAN WIGEON. A male was found at Strath, The Lagan, Kintyre on 7 Mar (Eddie Maguire).

GREEN-WINGED TEAL. A male was again at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 4 Feb and then, perhaps the same, at An Fhaodhail on 19 Feb (John

Bowler). A male was seen infrequently at Gruinart, Islay during this period (James How *et al.*). Two males were reported from Oronsay, Colonsay on 28 Apr (David Jardine *et al.*).

SHOVELER. Up to 16 were on Tiree during Feb and 26 in Mar. In Kintyre, a pair were on floods at Kilmichael Farm on 9 Mar. A male was at Bunnellan, Mull on 18 Apr.

GARGANEY. A pair were at Heylipol, Tiree during 26-28 Apr (John Bowler, photo below).

POCHARD. A male was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 4 Feb.

RING-NECKED DUCK. A male was reported from the Gruinart floods, Islay on 10 Feb (Bob Davison *et al.*).



Male Garganey, Heylipol, Tiree on 26 April ©John Bowler

GREATER SCAUP. On Islay, up to 25 were at Loch Indaal in Feb.

LONG-TAILED DUCK. On Islay, up to eight were at Loch Indaal in Feb. In Kintyre, three were at the Sound of Gigha on 24 Mar. On Tiree, three were at Hough Bay on 2 Feb and one was off Traigh Bhi on 4 Feb.

VELVET SCOTER. Two were at the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 8 Apr.

PTARMIGAN. Only one report of three birds on Ben More, Mull on 25 Feb.

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

MANX SHEARWATER. First report was of 10+ off Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 22 Mar.

LITTLE EGRET. In Kintyre, one was north of Tayinloan on 24 Mar. In Mid-Argyll, one was noted briefly at the Add Estuary on 9 Apr. In North Argyll, one or possibly two birds frequented Loch Creran and Loch Laich during this period.

GLOSSY IBIS. The single on Tiree from end Dec 2017 was seen again intermittently during this period (photo opposite).

PIED-BILLED GREBE. The regular male at Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll was noted again from 24 Mar (David Jardine).

SLAVONIAN GREBE. On Islay, up to 20 were at Loch Indaal in Feb. On Mull, ten were at Loch na Keal on 25 Feb. In Mid-Argyll, six were on Loch Caolisport on 4 Feb. In Kintyre, eight were at the Sound of Gigha on 24 Mar. A single was still present at the Sound of Gigha, Kintyre on 29 Apr.

RED-NECKED GREBE. One, from January, remained on Loch Scridain, Mull during this period (Bryan Rains *et al.*, photo opposite).

Raptors to rails

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE. An adult was at Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 27 Apr.

OSPREY. The first report was of one at Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 3 Apr.

RED KITE. On Mull, one was at Loch Spelve on 29 Mar and one was at Tiroran on 28 Apr. One was seen over Oakfield, Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll on 16 Apr.

MARSH HARRIER. A 'probable' was seen at Dubh Loch (near the airport), Islay on 30 Mar.

CORNCRAKE. The first report was of one at Roundhouse, Coll on 20 Apr.

Waders

PECTORAL SANDPIPER. One was seen and photographed at RSPB Gruinart Reserve, Islay on 27 Mar (Tim Wallis).

COMMON SANDPIPER. First reports were of singles



Upper photo. Glossy Ibis, Tiree on 3 February
©Roger Broad

Lower photo. Red-necked Grebe, Loch Scridain,
Mull on 15 March ©Steve Hiscock

from two sites on Mull on 12 Apr.

RUFF. Up to three were at Gruinart, Islay during Feb-Mar.

JACK SNIBE. Singles were at Sunipol, Mull on 23 Feb, at The Reef, Tiree on 28 Feb and at Machir Bay, Islay on 4 Mar.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT. Early birds included, a winter-plumaged bird with Golden Plovers in fields at Kilmichael Farm, Kintyre on 9 Mar, one at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 18-20 Mar with another or the same at Loch Bhasapol on 29 Mar and one at RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay on 23 Mar. Photo below.

WHIMBREL. An early bird was at Baugh, Tiree on 26 Mar. The highest counts noted were 17 at Gartbreck, Islay on 17 Apr, and 25 at MSBO, Kintyre on 29 Apr.

GREENSHANK. Higher numbers included ten or more around the coast of Mull during this period, and four or more were on Islay. Photo below.

Skuas, gulls, terns & auks

LITTLE GULL. An adult was at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 17 Feb, one was at Loch na Keal, Mull on 23 Feb and an adult was off Dunoon, Cowal on 22 Mar.

RING-BILLED GULL. The 2CY (first-winter) on Tiree from 26th Jan remained there until 20 Feb (John Bowler *et al.*).

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL. An adult

off Hynish, Tiree on 14 Feb was our first report.

ICELAND GULL. At least 12 birds on Tiree in Feb and smaller numbers on Islay and Mull. In Kintyre, two were at Campbeltown Harbour in Feb with the adult seen there during Mar, and singles were at Tarbert and Kennacraig. In Mid-Argyll, singles were seen briefly at Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary.

GLAUCOUS GULL. At least 15 birds on Tiree in Feb and smaller numbers reported elsewhere; mainly from Mull and Islay, with singles noted in Mid-Argyll and Cowal.

SANDWICH TERN. The first report was of one at Machir Bay, Islay on 16 Mar.

LITTLE TERN. The first report was of one at Gott Bay, Tiree on 9 Apr.

COMMON TERN. First report was of one at Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 22 Apr.

ARCTIC TERN. First report was of one at Hunter's Quay, Cowal on 14 Apr.

LITTLE AUK. Three flew southwest off Hynish, Tiree

Right photo. Greenshank, Kinacraig, Kintyre, 10 March ©Jim Dickson

Lower photo. Black-tailed Godwits, Tiree on 19 April ©John Bowler





on 14 Feb, and ten were at Loch na Keal on 23 Feb.

PUFFIN. An early bird was seen from the Tiree ferry off Bloody Bay, Mull on 2 Feb.

Doves, cuckoos, owls, swift, king-fisher & woodpeckers

CUCKOO. The first confirmed report was of one near Campbeltown, Kintyre on 10 Apr.

KINGFISHER. In Kintyre, one was at Kennacraig on 3 Feb. On I slay, one was at Loch Ballygrant on 18 Mar. In Cowal, one was at the Strathlachlan River on 10 Feb.

Passerines (larks to buntings)

JAY. The highest count was of eight in a garden at Bishop's Glen, Dunoon on 5 Mar.

FIRECREST. One was reported from Iona, Mull from 29 Mar (Robin MacCormick/Carol Dougall).

SAND MARTIN. The first report was of one at Kellen, Mull on 2 Apr.

HOUSE MARTIN. An early single was reported at Carnain, I slay on 30 Mar.

SWALLOW. The first report was of one at Sand-

bank, Cowal on 7 Apr.

WOOD WARBLER. The first report was of two in song at Dalavich, Mid-Argyll on 22 Apr.

CHIFFCHAFF. The first report was of one at Kilmory (Knapdale), Mid-Argyll on 30 Mar.

WILLOW WARBLER. An unusually early report of one in song at Minard, Mid-Argyll on 19 Mar.

LESSER WHITETHROAT. One was at Upper Killeyan, The Oa, I slay on 23 Apr (Dave Wood).

COMMON WHITETHROAT. One was heard singing at Ardtalla, I slay on 22 Apr.

BLACKCAP. Wintering birds or early migrants included one at Hunter's Quay, Cowal on 9 Feb. A male was in a garden at Carradale, Kintyre in early Mar.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER. The first report was of one near Cairnbaan, Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr.

SEDGE WARBLER. The first report was of one at Lingerton, Lochgilphead Mid-Argyll on 19 Apr.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. First report of one at St Catherines, Cowal on 30 Apr.

PIED FLYCATCHER. A male was at Scarinish, Tiree on 30 Apr.

RING OUZEL. A report of one at Port Weymss, I slay on 25 Apr, per Ian Brooke at I slay Birds.

FIELDFARE. The highest count received was of 220 in a field at Ballymeanoch north of Lochgilphead, Mid-Argyll on 5 Mar.

REDWING. Up to 450 were counted on Tiree in late Feb and a significant movement noted across Argyll on 7 Apr. On I slay, 500 were at Finlaggan on 7 Apr and 400 at Port Charlotte on 8 Apr. On Mull, 1,000 were counted at Loch Beg and Kilfinichen Bay on a 7 Apr.

BLACK REDSTART. An adult male was at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 11 Apr and a first-summer male was at Killiechronan, Mull on 19 Apr.

WHINCHAT. The first report was of one at Inverlussa, Mull on 21 Apr.

WHEATEAR. The first report was of one at



Black Redstart (left), Carnan Mor, Tiree on 11 April ©John Bowler. Brambling (right), Port Righ, Kintyre on 13 April ©Jim Dickson

Ardnave, I slay on 12 Mar.

TREE SPARROW. Five were at Caol Ila, I slay on 26 Apr and three were at Port Righ, Carradale, Kintyre on 28 Apr.

WHITE WAGTAIL. First one was at MSBO, Kintyre on 22 Mar with a maximum count there of 32 on 19 Apr.

TREE PIPIT. An early report of one at Gribun, Mull on 7 Apr.

'SCANDINAVIAN' ROCK PIPIT. Two were reported from Loch Buie, Mull on 24 Feb (Stuart Gibson).

WAXWING. One was just north of Tayvallich, Mid-Argyll on 26 Feb.

BRAMBLING. Highest count was of eight at Kilchoman, I slay on 3 Mar.

HAWFINCH. One was reported from Port Weymss, I slay on 11 Apr (David Clugston *et al.*), two were at Ardtun, Mull on 22 Apr (Jon Lloyd) and one (perhaps one of same?) was at Fionnphort, Mull on 23-24 Apr (Carol Marshall).

YELLOWHAMMER. In a Southend, Kintyre garden feeding station there was a maximum of seven there on 24 Mar. Ten were at Kildalton, I slay on 19 Feb and 12 at Ballygrant, I slay on 7 Apr.

SNOW BUNTING. On I slay, up to seven were at Carnain during Feb to Mar. In Mid-Argyll, a flock of 18 were in Knapdale Forest, south of

Cairnbaan on 13 Feb. On Mull, the highest count was of 17 at Loch Ba on 13 Feb. On Tiree, five were at Traigh Bhagh on 2 Feb, six at Sorobaidh Bay on 3 Feb, then six at Traigh Bhagh on 6-8 Feb and one at Sandaig on 20 Mar.

LAPLAND BUNTING. On Mull, two were at Glen More on 11 Apr and one was at Ardvegnish on 28 Apr. One was at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 17 Apr.

Jim Dickson

Stop Press

PECTORAL SANDPIPER. One at Ardnave Point, I slay on 4 May (James Butcher)

LITTLE EGRET. One at Loch Riddon, Cowal on 2 May (Allister Hamilton).

POMARINE SKUA. Eight adults seen off Tiree (3 at Gunna and 5 at Hynish) on 4 May (Andy Robinson/ John Bowler).

RING-NECKED DUCK. One at Loch Finlaggan, I slay on 4 May.

Articles for the September issue of the *Eider* should with the editor before the 20th August 2018

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2017/2018)

Chairman: Nigel Scriven, 14 Taylor Avenue, Kilbarchan, Johnstone PA10 2LS (*phone* 01505 706652)

Vice Chairman: David Jardine, The Old Schoolhouse, 26 Kilmartin, Lochgilphead, Argyll (*phone* 01546 510200)

Secretary: Anne Archer, 2 The Meadows, Toward, by Dunoon, Argyll PA23 7UP (*phone* 01369 870273)

Treasurer: Bob Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Arrochar, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG (*phone* 01301 702603)

Membership Secretary: Sue Furness, The Cnoc, Tarbet, Dunbartonshire G83 7DG (*phone* 01301 702603, *e-mail* sue.cnoc@gmail.com)

Committee: Malcolm Chattwood (Lochgilphead), Jim Dickson (Cairnbaan), Gordon Holm (Strone), Katie Pendreigh (Tayinloan), Steve Petty (Ardentinny), Andy Robinson (Stirling), Blair Urquhart (Kilmichael Glen)

Editor of the *Argyll Bird Report*: Jim Dickson (contact details under Argyll Bird Recorder below)

Editor of the *Eider*: Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR (*phone* 01369 810024)

ABC Website: <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

Argyll Bird Records Committee

Jim Dickson (Secretary, contact details below), John Bowler, David Jardine, Malcolm Ogilvie & Andy Robinson

Argyll Bird Recorder

Jim Dickson, 11 Pipers Road, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8UF

phone 01546 603967

e-mail meg@jdickson5.plus.com

Assistant Bird Recorder

Malcolm Chattwood, 1 The Stances, Kilmichael Glasary, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8QA

phone 01546 603389

e-mail abcrecorder@outlook.com

BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

Argyll Mainland, Bute & Gigha: Nigel Scriven

phone 01505 706652 *mobile* 07901 636353

e-mail njscriven@gmail.com

Argyll North—Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern: Ewan Miles

e-mail emb.gww@gmail.com

Islay, Jura & Colonsay: David Wood

phone 01496 300118

e-mail david.wood@rspb.org.uk



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

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and 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, September 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 necessarily 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 relatively small and widely dispersed. The club hosts two one-day meetings each year, in spring and autumn. The venue of the spring meeting is rotated between different towns, including Dunoon, Inveraray, Lochgilphead and Oban. 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 subscription entitles you to one copy of the *Argyll Bird Report*, four issues of the *Eider* and free admission to the two indoor meetings. New members are always welcome, whether you live in Argyll or not. Membership categories and rates are:

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