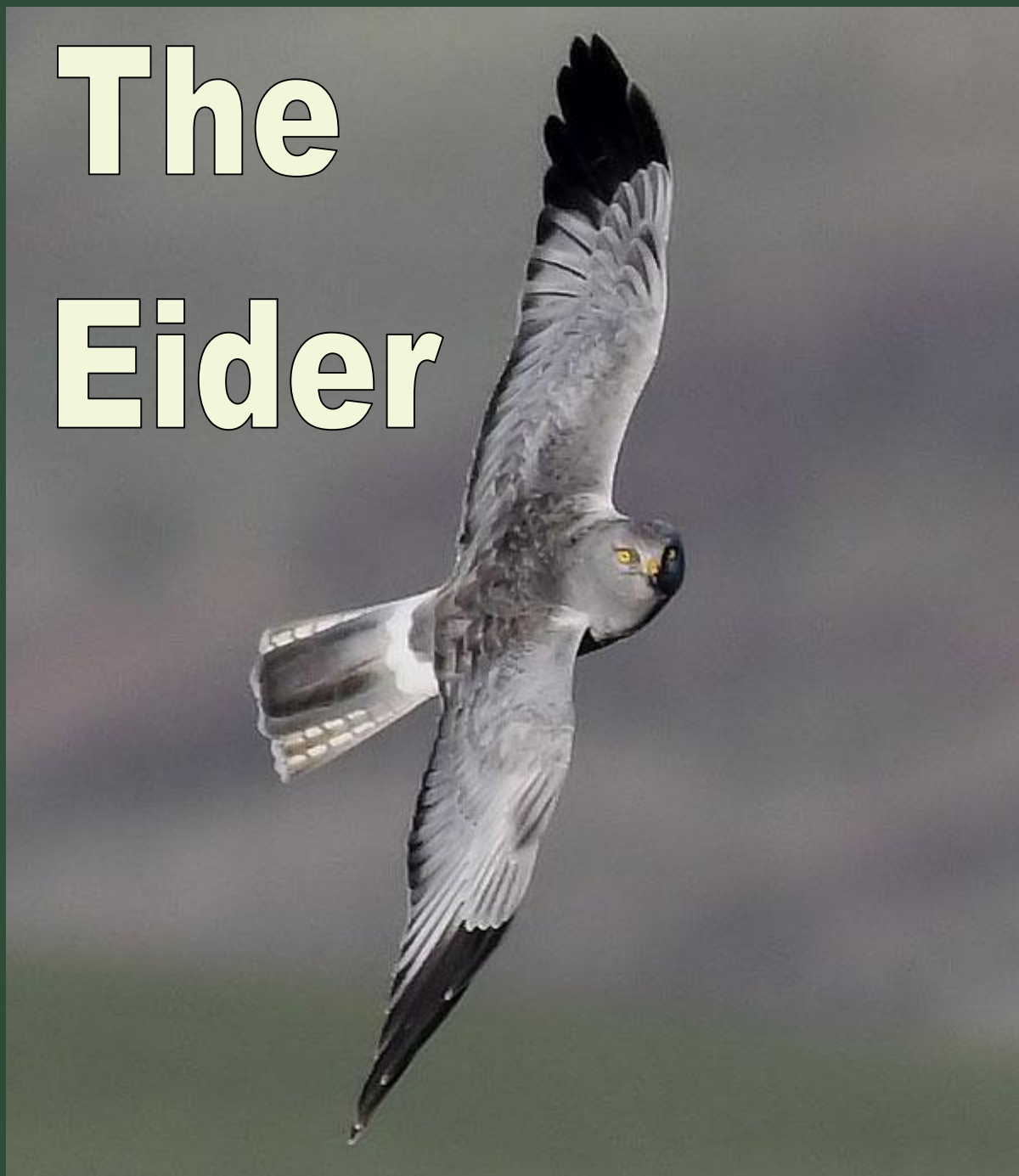


March 2018  
Number 123

# The Eider



Male Hen Harrier at Bleachfield, The Laggan, Kintyre on 8 January ©Eddie Maguire

Overland crossing by Gannets, pages 11-13

Recent bird sightings, pages 18-21

Photographing Hen Harriers, page 10

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

Phone 01369 810024—E-mail [stevepetty@btinternet.com](mailto:stevepetty@btinternet.com)

### Inside this issue

<b>Club news</b>	<b>Pages 3-5</b>
<b>ABC field trip report: Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary</b> <i>Malcolm Chattwood</i>	<b>Pages 6-7</b>
<b>ABC field trip report: Ormsary</b> <i>Malcolm Chattwood</i>	<b>Pages 7-8</b>
<b>Colour ringing Hooded Crows: request for sightings</b> <i>David Jardine</i>	<b>Page 9</b>
<b>Photographing Hen Harriers</b> <i>Eddie Maguire</i>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>Overland crossing by Gannets</b> <i>Eddie Maguire</i>	<b>Pages 11-13</b>
<b>Unusual tick on Chough chick</b> <i>David Jardine</i>	<b>Pages 13-14</b>
<b>BTO news update</b> <i>Nigel Scriven</i>	<b>Pages 14-15</b>
<b>Gull study: help needed</b> <i>Andrew Tongue</i>	<b>Pages 15</b>
<b>Colour ringing Twite: an update</b> <i>Eddie Maguire &amp; Rab Morton</i>	<b>Pages 16-17</b>
<b>Recent bird sightings</b> <i>Jim Dickson</i>	<b>Pages 18-21</b>
<b>A week in Castilla y Leon, northern Spain</b> <i>Steve &amp; Linda Petty</i>	<b>Pages 22-25</b>
<b>Information about the ABC</b>	<b>Back page</b>

### Editorial

David Jardine has put together an interesting programme for the club's spring meeting in Inveraray. We hope that many of you will be able to attend. In addition, details of the next four field trips are also given on the next page. Three of these are to locations that have been visited in the past by the club. The new addition is to the west side of Cowal, which in May should prove to be productive for both spring migrants in the extensive Atlantic oakwoods in this area, and for coastal species too.

After being kept indoors by some pretty foul weather over winter I was hoping I would be inundated with articles for this issue of the *Eider*, but alas no!! I even had to put pen to paper with my wife to write an article about one of our trips last year, to ensure this edition wasn't too small. So, please try to send me something for the June issue. Please note that the deadline for submissions to this issue is 5 May, much earlier than usual. As a result the June *Eider* should be with you around mid-May.

Just as I was finishing the *Eider*, Jim Dickson posted a note on the Argyll Bird Club website to say that the Sooty Tern seen by Eddie Maguire on 2 June 2017 at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory has been accepted by the British Birds Rarity Committee, making it one more species for the Argyll list, which now stands at 355 species—congratulations to Eddie!

### Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—John Bowler, Malcolm Chattwood, Jim Dickson, Ian Fisher, Bob Furness (including photocopying & dispatch), Neil Hammatt, Mike Harrison, David Jardine, James Lehmann, Eddie Maguire, Alistair McGregor, John Nadin, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Nigel Scriven, Margaret Staley and Andrew Tongue



## 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.

**Saturday 24 February. Loch Laich and Port Appin.** Led by Mike Harrison (phone 01631 710656, [e-mail jmharrison@jee.org](mailto:jmharrison@jee.org)). Meet at the Appin Village Hall car park on the A828 (grid ref. NM938459) at 10.00hrs. Please bring your own lunch. This trip will include walks of 3km and 2km on roads, tracks and paths with mostly gentle gradients.

**Saturday 24 March. Sound of Gigha.** Led by Jim Dickson (phone 01546 603967, [e-mail meg@jdickson5.plus.com](mailto:meg@jdickson5.plus.com)). Meet at Ronachan

Point Car Park on the A83 (grid ref. NR741548) at 10.00hrs. Lunches will be available at the hotel on Gigha. The trip will include walks of 2-3km on roads and tracks with gentle gradients.

**Saturday 21 April. Luing.** Led by David Jardine (e-mail [dcjardine@btinternet.com](mailto:dcjardine@btinternet.com) phone 01546 510200). Meet at Kilbrandon Church, Isle of Seil (grid ref. NM757155) at 09.40hrs. A visit will be made to the Atlantic Islands Centre at Cullipool for lunch. The trip will include walks of 2-3km on gentle gradients.

**Sunday 27 May. West Cowal.** Led by Neil Hammatt (e-mail [neilhammatt@googlemail.com](mailto: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

### Programme for the ABC's 2018 Spring Meeting Saturday 3 March at the Inveraray Inn, Inveraray

Time	Session
<b>0930</b>	<b>Doors open, coffee and tea</b>
0950-1000	Welcome and introduction— <i>Nigel Scriven</i> , Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club
1000-1030	Recent bird sightings and photographs— <i>Jim Dickson</i> , Argyll Bird Recorder
1030-1100	Butterflies and moths of Argyll— <i>Tom Prescott</i> , Butterfly Conservation
<b>1100-1130</b>	<b>Coffee/tea</b>
1130-1210	Where can seabird tracking take marine conservation?— <i>Peadar O'Connell</i> , Marine Policy Officer, RSPB Scotland
1210-1240	Birds, ticks and diseases— <i>Rachel Steenson</i>
<b>1240-1400</b>	<b>Lunch (available in the hotel, if required)</b>
1400-1445	Argentina, land of contrasts— <i>Steve Petty</i>
1445-1500	Surveying Woodcocks— <i>David Jardine</i>
1500-1530	<b>Tea/coffee</b>
1530-1600	BTO updates— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
1600-1615	<b>Raffle and closing remarks</b>

#### 4 - Eider March 2018 (no. 123)

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.

#### INDOOR MEETINGS 2018-2019

##### Spring Meeting 2018. Saturday 3

March at the Inveraray Inn

([www.inveraray-inn.co.uk](http://www.inveraray-inn.co.uk)). The programme is given on the previous page. Lunches will be available in the hotel.

##### Autumn Meeting and AGM 2018. Sat-

urday 3 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel (<http://www.cairnbaan.com/>), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). The programme 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.

#### NEW REGULATIONS ABOUT CONTACTING ABC MEMBERS

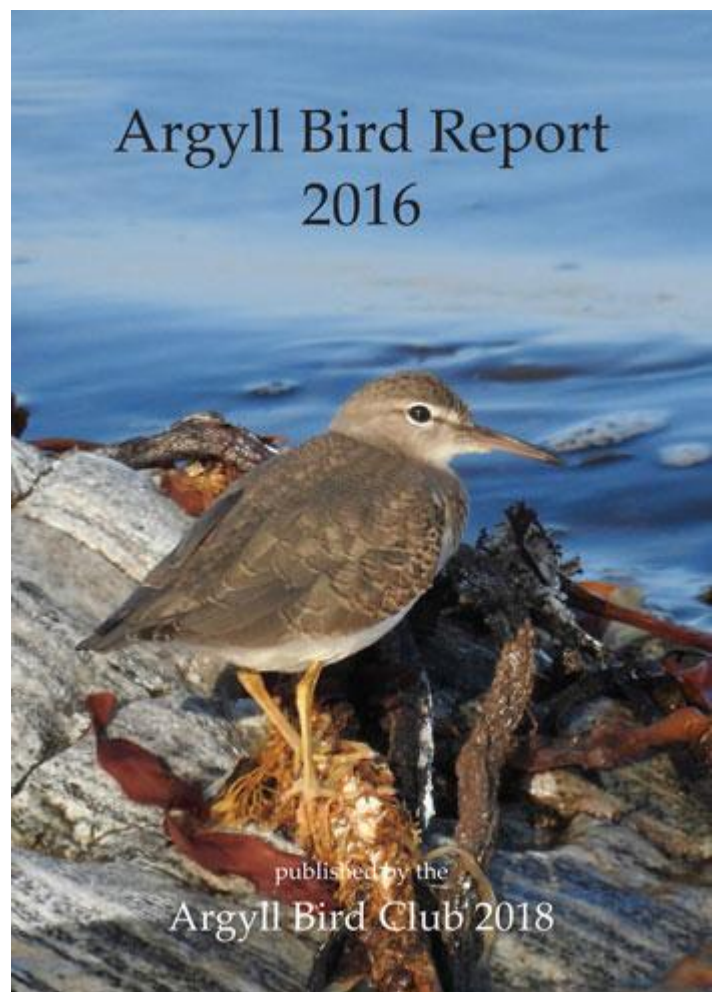
There will be a change to regulations regarding organisations contacting members, which means we have to ask members to request from us if they want to receive emails about club activities. In future we will only be able to send emails to those who have made such a request. We will not be able to send emails to members who have not done so (except for club management purposes, such as circulating copies of the *Eider* and sending reminders or correspondence about subscriptions). So, if you wish to receive emails from us about field trips and other such club activities, you need let us know. Many members opted into this after Bob Furness sent an email around notifying members of this forthcoming change.

But if you did not get round to doing so, or if you are not yet on the club's email ad-

dress list, or if you have recently joined and have not yet been asked to opt in for email notifications, you need to email Bob to request that your address is added to the list for messages if you do wish to receive those. If you do not want such emails, then you don't need to take any action. But if you'd like your email address added to the list for club emails and did not reply previously about this, then please send an email requesting this to [bob.furness@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:bob.furness@glasgow.ac.uk)

#### ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 28 (2016)

The 2016 report is nearing completion and will be with the printers soon (see below). We expect the report will be back in time for the spring meeting in Inveraray. Members will be able to collect their copy at the meeting, and non-members will be able to purchase copies too. Copies will be posted out to members who cannot get to the meeting. We are still looking for folks to help on the editorial side of future reports,



*Argyll Bird Report 28* (2016) is with the printers. Club members will receive a free copy. 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.



including writing/collating species accounts and proof reading.

## EDITOR OF THE ARGYLL BIRD REPORT

Jim Dickson is stepping down as editor of the bird report after ABR 28 is published (see previous section). We urgently need a replacement editor. If anyone is interested please contact Jim.

## 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](http://www.argyllbirdclub.org)) to find out about up-to-date arrangements for meetings, recent sightings of birds, including photographs, and lots more.

## COLL BIRD FESTIVAL 18-20 MAY 2018

Is the Corncrake your nemesis? Has your best sighting just been a fleeting glance and you didn't get that photo? 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 3-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 (photo below) 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/>



Puffin photographed on Lunga in the Treshnish Isles. Boat trips to this destination offer fantastic, close-up experiences with a range of seabird species ©Steve Petty



ABC members at Moine Mhor National Nature Reserve ©Jim Dickson

A healthy turn-out of 14 members and guests assembled at The Corran Car Park in Lochgilphead in anticipation of a good day's birding and cautious optimism that the forecasted deterioration in the weather would not come too soon! A stroll along the front green produced the expected common species with the addition of Goosander and distant pair of Shelduck. It was just about low tide, and it was anticipated that our return later in the day would produce better views of the waders and ducks which were discernible at the tide line.

Our first stop on our short tour of Mid-Argyll was the car park in Ardrishaig where the highlight was mammalian and not avian. An Otter was sighted about 50m offshore but then came ashore to devour a large fish in full view close to the car park. A better view in such a public place would be difficult to imagine. In the hope of seeing the odd diver the party travelled the short distance over the canal bridge to a point just beyond the church with open views down Loch Gilp and across to Duncuan Island and the dump. It wasn't long before a Black-throated Diver (photo opposite) was spotted fairly close inshore whilst a Great Northern was further out near a navigation buoy. This encouraged some questions about the identification of divers in winter plumage and Jim Dickson was

able to give an impromptu tutorial, which will hopefully make the separation of the three main species much easier in future for us less experienced birders. Common and Black Guillemot were spotted over towards Duncuan Island and beyond a Buzzard could be seen perched on some equipment at the dump. In addition to a single Rock Pipit, a Grey Wagtail flew past our group. Looking down Loch Gilp a party of Eider was visible and two more Black-throated Divers, but no Red-throated on this occasion. Jim lived up to his reputation as a gull specialist with the eyesight of a peregrine as he identified three loafing Kittiwakes a good way down the loch. A Magpie had been reported in Ardrishaig on a couple of



Black-throated Diver, near Ardrishaig on 26 November ©Jim Dickson



occasions recently, but despite regular scanning away from the shore and maintaining a keen ear for its chattering call we drew a blank.

A brief stop was made at Islandadd Bridge where numbers of distant Teal and Wigeon could be seen. Single Little Grebe and Goldeneye were feeding just upstream of the bridge in a favoured spot. The Moine Mhor was scanned for a hunting Hen Harrier, but all was quiet, so we headed off across the moss to the Tileworks Car Park for lunch and an impromptu group photograph (photo previous page). A stroll up past Poltalloch East Lodge and the Long Walk in search of woodland species added Goldcrest, Mistle Thrush, Blue Tit and Coal Tit to the list. A distant call of a Great Spotted Woodpecker was so brief that there wasn't the confidence to include it in the day's tally.

We then headed towards Crinan Ferry via Barsloisnoch in the hope of spotting the declining flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese, but were to be disappointed, but not surprised. Great Tit was added to the list and a Raven was heard at Crinan Ferry but the fading light prompted the decision to head back towards Lochgilphead. Another foray along the front green provided better views of Curlews that

had been distant specks in the morning, and nearby Bar-tailed Godwits allowed a good comparison to be made of relative size and feeding behaviour. Despite Jim's efforts to spot anything unusual amongst flock of 300+ Black-headed Gulls the poor light won the day leaving Dunlin and Ringed Plover to finish off the day's list with a total of 51 species.

### Malcolm Chattwood

**Species List:** Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Greater Canada Goose, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Common Eider, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Great Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Guillemot, Black Guillemot, Collared Dove, Western Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Common Raven, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Wren, Common Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Rock Pipit, House Sparrow.

### ABC field trip to Ormsary —4 February 2018



ABC members enjoying the sunshine and view out to Jura ©Jim Dickson

Purely based on the weather, the move of the first field trip of 2018 from the last Saturday in January to the first Sunday in February proved to be a smart one, but would a good crop

of bird sightings follow? In glorious calm and sunny weather seven members assembled at Ormsary Estate Office to meet up with Errol Crutchfield, our guide for the day. Three mem-

bers had made an early start from East Kilbride to be with us. They had to negotiate the potholed assault course that is the A83 en route, so there was a little pressure to produce sightings that would make their trip worthwhile!

As fellow members were greeted and footwear changed a Great Spotted Woodpecker could be heard drumming in the woods to the east. The area round the buildings was populated with a good mix of garden birds including Robins, Blue, Great and Coal Tits along with Chaffinches and House Sparrows taking advantage of feeding opportunities provided by the presence of cattle wintering in nearby sheds. As the party headed off down the drive towards the shore the adjacent burn was scanned for a Dipper or wagtail, but the only sighting was of a Mistle Thrush foraging in the field beyond.

Our arrival at the shore prompted the setting-up of telescopes to check what the calm conditions of Loch Caolisport might offer. We weren't to be disappointed, with Ringed Plovers and Oystercatchers seen feeding on the shore. The shout of "Peregrine" drew attention to the sight of a bird with prey in its talons jinking away at low level over the loch. All three species of diver were visible at a distance, with a raft of 21 Black-throated being the most notable. Whilst scanning the opposite shore the movement of a juvenile White-tailed Eagle alighting on a rock attracted Jim Dickson's attention and we were all able to view it through a 'scope. It is debatable whether it would have been spotted had it not been for its short flight. Eider, Common Scoter, Razorbill and Black Guillemot were also worthy of note on the loch. Jim was perhaps hoping for a find like the 2007 Ross's Gull, but had to make do with a lone Kittiwake on this occasion, a bird I'm sure the rest of us would have missed. On the landward side a Buzzard was seen settling in trees and a flock of Greylag Geese was feeding in a field close by.

Heading off down the road towards the fish farm the party strung out and a Tree Creeper, Reed Bunting and Goldcrest were missed by some, but Greenfinch, Blackbird and Song Thrush were seen by most of the party. As expected there were good numbers of gulls around the fish farm outfall including Great

Black-Backed, Black Headed, Common and Herring, whilst duck species included Eider, Mallard, Teal, Goldeneye and Shelduck. A single Redshank was the only wader in evidence. The rocks at the edge of the bay held a number of roosting Eider, whilst Cormorants and Shags in breeding plumage appeared to be enjoying the sunshine and taking the opportunity to condition their plumage. A Carrion-like Hybrid Crow was one of a pair which flew past and a Grey Wagtail and Rock Pipit were foraging for insects amongst the seaweed on the shore.

Our lunch in the sun outside the estate office could almost be described as a picnic and we then headed off up the hill spotting a pair of Jackdaws in a distant tree, their posture trying to fool us into thinking they were starlings. Casting our eyes over the open expanse of moorland we were hoping to see the odd raptor known to frequent the area. A pair of Ravens was the best we could manage, but the party was still in good spirits as we descended down the glen back towards the shore and re-traced our steps along the road. At the fish farm outfall the roosting Redshank had wakened and was now feeding and the wader count increased with the addition of a single Curlew.

On our field trips I always try to select a "sighting of the day" which is the one that provided most pleasure rather than simply one of the Argyll specialities, which might be a must-see for visitors, but which we might be lucky enough to see at any time. The distant views of White-tailed Eagle, Peregrine and Divers were all thus discounted. In the end the excellent view of six Shelduck in breeding plumage looking vibrant in the wonderful light came out as number 1 from the 55 Species seen.

### Malcolm Chattwood

**Birds list (Mike Harrison and Malcolm Chattwood):** Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Teal, Mallard, Eider, Common Scoter, Goldeneye, Pheasant, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Cormorant, Shag, White-tailed Eagle, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Redshank, Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Woodpigeon, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay, Jackdaw, Hy-



brid Crow, Hooded Crow, Raven, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Treecreeper, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle

Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Reed Bunting.



Finding out more about hoodies—love them or hate them—we don't know a lot about the movements of Hooded Crows and even less about their population demography. In order to find out a bit more David Jardine has been colour-ringing nestlings on Colonsay and would be interested in any sightings. Previous work with BTO metal rings has shown that birds do disperse from the island. A nestling ringed on Colonsay in May 2013, was found at Bunnahabhain, Islay the following February. Last summer another hoodie, ringed as a nestling on Colonsay on 22 May 2007, was caught in a crow trap on 25 May 2017 on the island. The current longevity record for a Hooded Crow is of a bird shot at Lockerbie, Dumfries & Galloway. This bird had been ringed in Opland, Norway six years, four months and three day previously. David

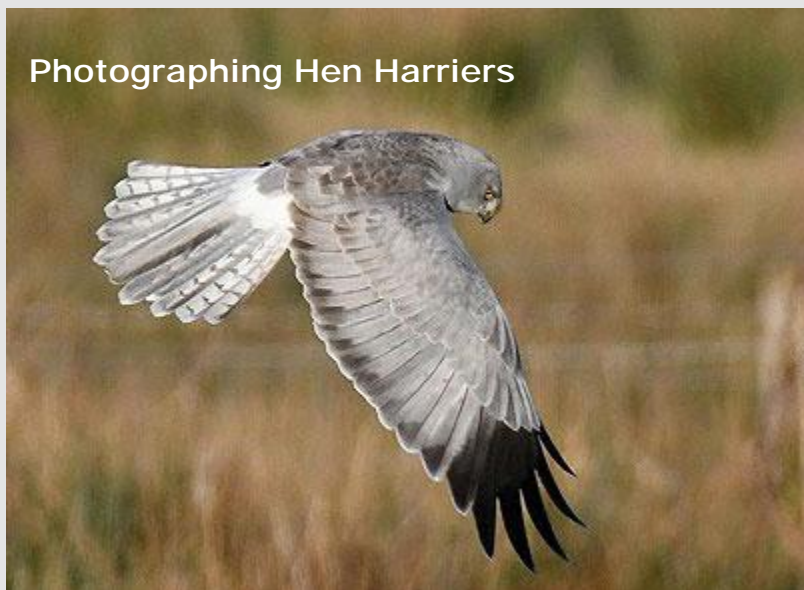
would be delighted to hear of sightings of any Hooded Crows with yellow colour rings.

David Jardine [dcjardine@btinternet.com](mailto:dcjardine@btinternet.com)





## Photographing Hen Harriers



These three photos of a male Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* (opposite) were all taken at Bleachfield, By Stewarton, The Laggan (c.5km west of Campbeltown) on 8 January.

Both males and female-types were occasionally seen over the large area of *Juncus* at Bleachfield Farm during November 2017 through to January 2018.

The harrier stake-out on Monday 8 January was glorious with 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 (Ken Bruce followed by Jeremy Vine) while waiting for a harrier to appear. By the time 'Steve Wright in the Afternoon' finally reached my ears at 14.00hrs I was toying with the idea of moving on. The stake-out was bordering on monotonous, especially listening to Jeremy Vine (big zzzzs), but as you will appreciate, it was soon well worth a 4hr wait! At 15.10hrs, the harrier 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, it was at times as close as c.40m and performed superbly. My new camera (Nikon D500 with Nikkor 150-500mm lens) was activated intermittently at 10 shots per second.

Cars make grand hides!

Eddie Maguire

## Northern Gannets crossing overland in south Kintyre, Argyll March—October 2017



### Introduction

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

### Methods

From 1st March to 20th October 2017 Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) Assistant Warden Charlie Robertson (CR) spent time each morning watching the movements of Gannets from his home overlooking Campbeltown Loch, and he spent many hours in the afternoon and evening at Campbeltown Harbour (Fig 1). He logged the times of all crossings and would alert MSBO wardens by mobile phone when birds were flying west over the town allowing scores of these to be timed arriving over Machrihanish Bay. His efforts involved an average of 26 days

of observation each month.

### Results and Discussion

During this period CR obtained additional evidence involving unprecedented numbers of adult Gannets crossing 8km to the west over the narrowest part of the Kintyre peninsula. A total of 1,461 crossed overland on 148 out of 207 days of prolonged observation. Most of these, 1,173 birds, crossed during July–September and were thought to be breeding adults on forag-



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



ing expeditions to the Atlantic from the Ailsa Craig colony in the Firth of Clyde, some 33km south-east of Campbeltown Loch Harbour.

Table 1 shows a substantial increase in the number of Gannets crossing over Kintyre in August (408) and September (491). This is presumably related to breeding adults from Ailsa Craig having to increase their foraging in the Atlantic to meet the increasing food demands of large chicks (Bob Furness *pers. comm.*). The seasonal pattern appears to validate this theory. The peak period for overland crossings was not just a result of more observer effort during the latter stages of the breeding season, as the number of observation days each month showed little variation (average 26).

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

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

The rapid increase in numbers of adults crossing Kintyre during August–September may also involve birds from other colonies that have been foraging in the Clyde; perhaps from the east coast or even Scar Rocks (Solway). Some adults could have already fledged young elsewhere, and be starting their migration"

On overland foraging trips to the Atlantic from Campbeltown Loch, adult Gannets usually depart high over the town singly or in small groups of two to six, and occasionally flocks of up to ten.

The maximum number seen crossing together was a flock of 16 in September 2017. Adults often fly low over the town, many just over the rooftops (Maguire *et al.* 2017).

Head winds appear to have little influence on numbers that embark on this overland shortcut to the Atlantic. MSBO weather data for the period revealed that 1,068 of 1,461 birds crossed overland when the wind was from a westerly direction (i.e. SSW > NNW). From 1 June to 30 September the wind was from a westerly direction on 73 out of 109 days of surveillance.

Neither did wind strength discourage crossing. For example, 50 birds flew west on 19th August in a WNW wind force 6. We watched many birds during late evening struggling to fly to the Atlantic from the harbour and were amazed at their resolve as they headed into wind, barely making headway as they ranged high over the town for several minutes before eventually departing to the west.

The record one-day total of birds crossing overland was 67 flying west on 7 September 2017 in a NW force 5 wind with squalls. However, birds crossed overland whatever the wind direction. For example, 18 on 12 May 2017 in a NE f2-3 and 40 on 2nd September 2017 in a SE f4.

At Campbeltown, no birds were seen starting the overland crossing during early morning, although small numbers crossed during late morning. The main period of overland activity was consistently late afternoon and evening. The latest birds were seen crossing was during the late evening, including three shortly after 22.00hrs on 10 July. All birds making the crossing in the evening appeared to roost on the sea. After foraging successfully the following morning they head for Ailsa later that day. Normally this will allow the mate guarding a chick to depart on a foraging trip and, although entirely speculative, may partly explain why overland crossings to the west occur mainly in the late afternoon and evening.

Table 1. Monthly totals of adult Northern Gannets flying 8km overland on foraging trips from Campbeltown Harbour (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic) and number of days of observation during March–October 2017.

2017	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
<b>Monthly totals</b>	2	23	131	126	274	408	491	6
<b>Cumulative totals</b>	2	25	156	282	556	964	1455	1461
<b>No. of days of observations</b>	27	29	22	24	31	24	30	20

The following are estimates of distances and flight times of Gannets around Kintyre. Gannets do not glide over Kintyre, they employ continuous deep wingbeats on level flight. When leaving Campbeltown for the west they are always flapping until out of sight, and when located over the sand dunes at Machrihanish they are still flapping continuously. The distance covered over land was 8km. They covered this distance in a fairly constant 9mins from Campbeltown Harbour to the dunes at Machrihanish, giving a flight speed of around 56kph. Mike Taylor (Sea-tours, Campbeltown) with Eddie Maguire and Iomhar McMillan timed adult Gannets returning east through the Sound of Sanda for Ailsa Craig from Mike's fast RIB. On two occasions flight speed was logged at 33knots. This equates to 59kph, and was thus comparable to the flight speed of Gannets crossing over Kintyre (56kph).

On their return trip from the Atlantic to Ailsa Gannets are known to converge at the Mull of Kintyre then orientate east for Clyde Estuary. Gannets have never been recorded returning overland from Machrihanish to Campbeltown.

Breeding adults travelling south off Machrihanish en-route for Ailsa after foraging successfully in the Atlantic and sea lochs in Argyll (ap Rheinallt et al, 2007) were visibly bloated with fish prey (extended rear ends, see header photo on page 11) and probably near their top weight. Constrained by this additional weight, they appear to rely on dynamic soaring over the waves for their return journey by sea. The distance to the Ailsa colony from Machrihanish via the Mull of Kintyre is ap-

proximately 60km, and with a flight speed of 59 kph, this would involve a one hour flight.

Adult Gannets flying over Campbeltown to the Atlantic looked streamlined and are probably near their minimum weight, which must be an advantage when employing powered flight over land. If the overland route from Campbeltown Harbour to the Atlantic was not employed, the marine route to Machrihanish via the Mull of Kintyre would be c.55km and take around 54mins. In contrast, the 8km overland route to the Atlantic from Campbeltown Harbour takes a mere 9mins, so proving a significant time saving.

## References

Ap Rheinallt, T., Craik, J.C.A., Daw, P., Furness, R.W., Petty, S.J. & Wood, D., (eds.) 2007. *Birds of Argyll*. Argyll Bird Club, Lochgilphead.

Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerny, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. (eds). 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.

Maguire, E. 2015. Westerly overland passage of Northern Gannets in south Argyll 2007-2015. *Eider* 114: 12-14.

Maguire, E., MacMillan, I., Morton, R. and Robertson, C. 2017. Overland passage of Northern Gannets in south Argyll 2016. *Argyll Bird Report*. 27: 136-140

Eddie Maguire

[msbowarden@gmail.com](mailto:msbowarden@gmail.com)

## An unusual tick on a Chough chick



Tick on Chough chick ©Ian Fisher

When one of the Chough chicks was being colour-ringed in May 2017 (under a Schedule 1 licence) a large tick was found below its lower mandible (photo opposite). Fortunately a tick-removal card was being carried and it was possible to carefully remove the tick without injuring the chick. With the help of Rachel Steenson (who is working on ticks on birds at Glasgow University and is giving a talk on her work at the Spring 2018 meeting) it was possible to get the tick identified through the UK Government's Tick Surveillance team (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tick-surveillance-scheme>).

They have identified it as *Ixodes caledonicus*, this was

the first time they have received a tick of this species. It is also known as the Northern Bird Tick (<http://www.bristoluniversitytickid.uk/page/1xodes+caledonicus/35/#.WntHHbx18dU>). It appears to be a relatively poorly recorded, or reported species, with only 29 records of it in the National Biodiversity Network Atlas

(<https://species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000730326>). These records were mainly from the northern isles, central Scotland and the North Sea coast. While there was one record from North Uist, this was the first record from Argyll and given this distribution is likely to be the first from a Chough.

David Jardine

## BTO news update 2018

### BTO Owl Appeal and Owl Surveys 2018

The BTO are planning survey work for later this year and beyond, to identify the causes of declines in five species of owl. However it can-

not all go ahead without further funding, and so an appeal has been launched:

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

While the details are to be announced, the surveys planned are given in the table below.

Species	Details
<b>Tawny Owl</b>	1. Garden BirdWatch Calling Survey—autumn 2018. A repeat of previous survey (2005/6). 2. Structured Survey, following methods of 1989 & 2005. Pre-selected 2x2km squares for 2-4 visits in autumn 2018.
<b>Barn Owl, Little Owl &amp; Tawny Owl</b>	Develop new networks & support existing to collect better data on clutch size, brood size, laying date & adult survival, working with ringers & nest recorders
<b>All owls</b>	Establish new connections between volunteers and local community groups responsible for sites with breeding owls. Involving ringers, nest recorders & local communities
<b>Short-eared Owls</b>	Build on pilot research in Scotland to better understand home range, habitat use and year-round movements. Involves BTO staff and interested volunteers.
<b>Long-eared Owls</b>	Testing field methods for surveys, and promoting more detailed studies involving volunteers.

### BTO Training courses in Scotland in 2018

Sharpen your skills ahead of the breeding season, plus meet like-minded supporters and enjoy a bit of birding. Full details at [https://www.bto.org/national-offices/scotland/news-events/events?dm\\_i=1L9X,5G9VT,FYVKR3,L48WM,1](https://www.bto.org/national-offices/scotland/news-events/events?dm_i=1L9X,5G9VT,FYVKR3,L48WM,1)

**Subsidised training\* (£5).** One-day courses covering '*Upland Breeding Bird Survey skills and techniques*'. Improved coverage of remote/upland areas is a high priority, but it is hard to find volunteers who are willing/able to visit these areas. These courses are offered at a subsidised rate to maximise attendance and hence participa-

tion.

- RSPB Loch Leven, Kinross—Saturday 24 March
- Muirshiel Country Park—Saturday 24 March
- Arrochar, Argyll—Sunday 22 April
- Grantown-on-Spey—Sunday 29 April
- Cannich (Glen Affric)—Sunday 6 May
- Fort William—Tuesday 15 May

**Standard-rate training (£60).** One-day courses covering '*Bird identification by sight and sound*':

- RSPB Lochwinnoch—Saturday 3 March
- Lochore Meadows, Fife—Thursday 22 March



- Kinnoull Hill, Perth—Thursday 19 April
- SWT Falls of Clyde, New Lanark—Thursday 3 May
- Scottish Dolphin Centre, Fochabers—Thursday 10 May
- Aberfoyle Forest Lodge—Thursday 17 May
- Bennachie Visitor Centre, Inverurie—Thursday 24 May

### Seabird monitoring programme. Seabird counts 2015-2019.

The main aims are:

1. To undertake a complete census of all species of seabirds breeding in Britain and Ireland
2. To determine whether population trends recorded at local levels by the Seabird Monitoring Programme are representative of national trends.
3. To identify long-term (last 4-5yrs) national trends by comparison with previous three censuses.



4. To determine the level of change recorded since Seabird 2000, a period when populations of some seabirds are predicted to have undergone dramatic change. More details at:

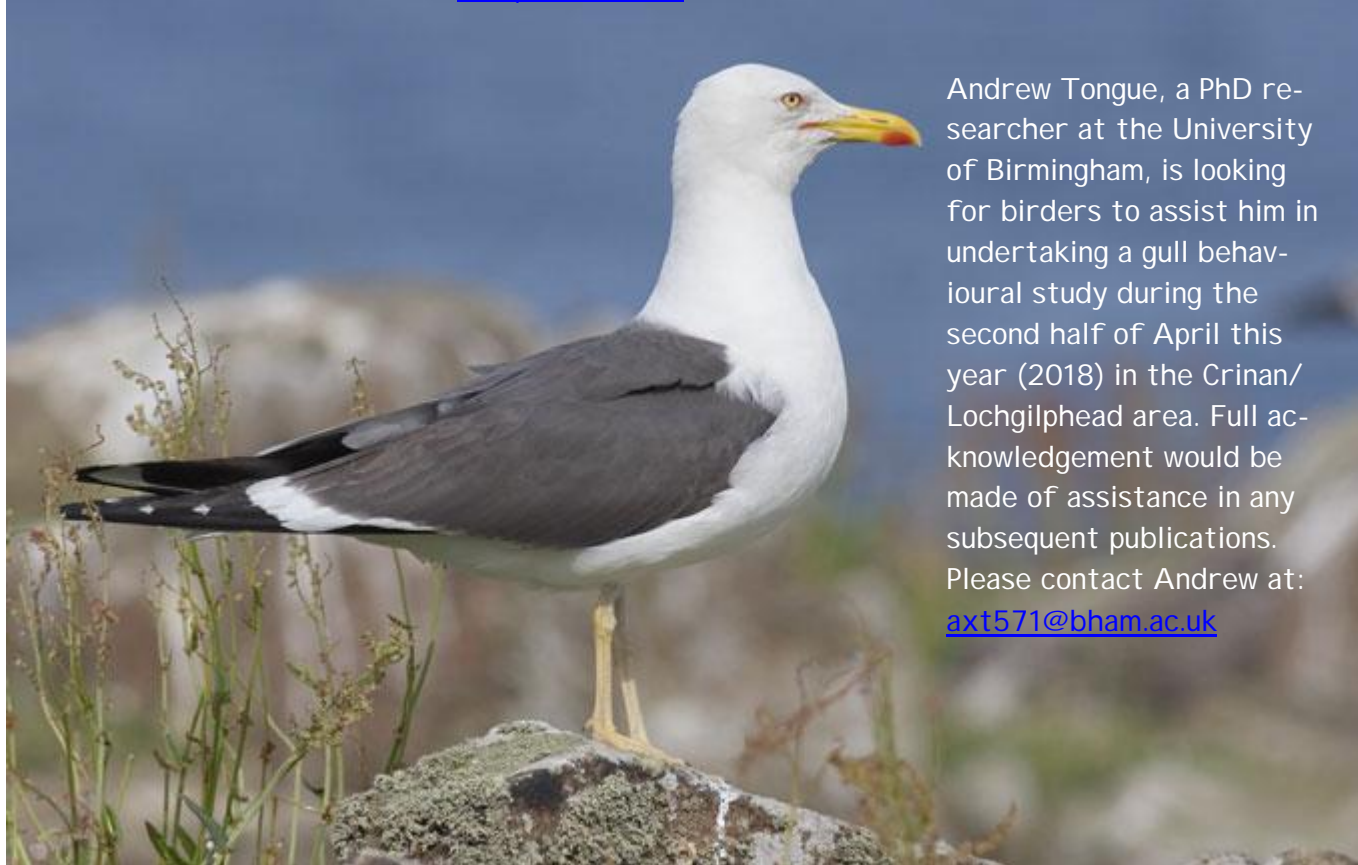
<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7413>

There is a spreadsheet for all of Argyll noting all breeding sites previously recorded. If you wish to help by surveying or by contributing data you hold already, please contact the Argyll organiser, Nigel Scriven (contact details on back page).

Nigel Scriven

## Help needed with gull study

Lesser Black-backed Gull ©David Palmer [www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)



Andrew Tongue, a PhD researcher at the University of Birmingham, is looking for birders to assist him in undertaking a gull behavioural study during the second half of April this year (2018) in the Crinan/Lochgilphead area. Full acknowledgement would be made of assistance in any subsequent publications. Please contact Andrew at: [axt571@bham.ac.uk](mailto:axt571@bham.ac.uk)

## Machrihanish Seabird Observatory

### UK Twite Study Project 2010—2017: An Update

Colour-ringed Twite.  
MSBO green 22E on 4  
October 2017, with  
additional colour rings  
added in Flintshire (see  
text below)  
©Eddie Maguire



### Introduction

In July 2010 Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) joined the UK Twite Study Project. During 2010—2017 just over 1,500 Twite were colour ringed at MSBO, an average of 188 birds per year (see Maguire, 2014).

The greatest movement was of a bird to Essex, but most movements were to and from western Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England. Birds were also seen on the east coasts of Scotland and England, in Wales and the Republic of Ireland (Table 1). In total 82 birds ringed at MSBO have been sighted, photographed or trapped elsewhere in the UK and Republic of Ireland, and 20 birds ringed in other parts of the UK and Republic

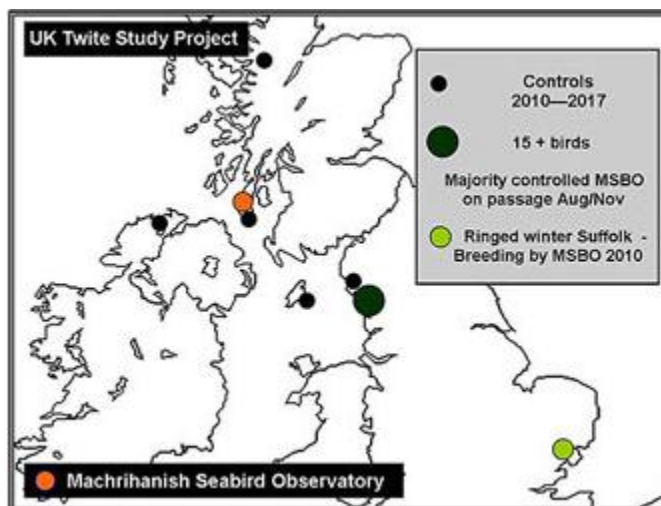
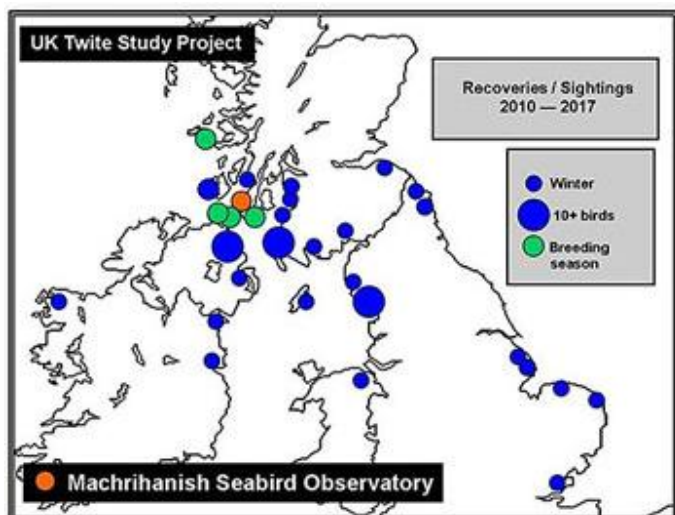
of Ireland have been sighted, photographed or trapped at MSBO. The maps below highlight the distribution of UK/Republic of Ireland movements of Twite to and from MSBO.

### Ringling 2017

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

### Sightings of MSBO colour ringed Twite

Confirmed breeding of MSBO colour-ringed birds is at present confined to a pair with fledglings at Mull of Kintyre, and more reliably, adults with



Map 1 (left). Recoveries/sightings of Twite colour ringed at MSBO. Map 2 (right). Twite ringed elsewhere and controlled or photographed at MSBO

Table 1. Locations of Twite recoveries and controls from MSBO during 2010-2017

Location	Ringed at MSBO and seen/ caught elsewhere	Ringed elsewhere, photo- graphed/caught at MSBO	Total
<b>SCOTLAND</b>			
Argyll	8	1	9
Ayrshire	4	0	4
Dumfries and Galloway	16	0	16
East Lothian	1	0	1
Highland	0	1	1
<b>ENGLAND</b>			
Northumberland	3	0	3
Cumbria	5	2	7
Lancashire	14	12	26
Lincolnshire	2	0	2
Isle of Man	6	2	8
Suffolk	0	1	1
Norfolk	2	0	2
Essex	1	0	1
<b>WALES</b>			
Flintshire	2	0	2
<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b>			
Co. Antrim	12	0	12
Co. Down	4	0	4
<b>REPUBLIC OF IRELAND</b>			
Co. Donegal	0	1	1
Co. Mayo	1	0	1
Co. Louth	1		1
Co. Wexford	1	0	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>103</b>

fledglings are seen every year at MSBO feeding station. In addition, singles have been sighted during the breeding season on Tiree (Argyll) and Rathlin Island (Co Antrim). The most recent island connection was of one trapped at Mull of Oa, Islay during late autumn 2017 (Jamie Dunning *pers. comm.*). Other recent sightings include singles at Stevenson, Ayrshire and in Northumberland and Lincolnshire. We are awaiting details of these.

A 2014 MSBO colour-ringed bird is performing

well on trips to NE Wales and back, and has accumulated a very interesting history (see header photo):

BTO ring = L586170 + green colour ring 22E.

- Ringed MSBO on 10 October 2014.
- Controlled at Connah's Quay, Flintshire, NE Wales on 14 and 25 March 2015. Additional rings were added to this bird when it was controlled in Wales as the number on the MSBO green colour ring had faded/see photo above.



- Retrapped at MSBO on 14 October 2015.
- Controlled at Connah's Quay on 12 February and 11 March 2016.
- Retrapped at MSBO on 28 September 2016.
- Controlled at Connah's Quay on 20 January and 15 February 2017.
- Retrapped at MSBO on 7 April 2017 and again on passage from breeding grounds on three dates during 4–10 October (on its way to Flintshire again?).
- Controlled at Connah's Quay on 1 February

2018.

Connah's Quay is 298km SSE of MSBO. So far, the seven single journeys completed by this individual amounts to at least 2,086km.

### References

Maguire, E. (2014). Ringing Twite at machrihanish Seabird Observatory. *Eider* 107:21-23.

Eddie Maguire

[msbowarden@gmail.com](mailto:msbowarden@gmail.com)

Rab Morton

[sanda.bo@btinternet.com](mailto:sanda.bo@btinternet.com)

## Recent bird sightings

November 2017  
to January 2018

Merlin at Bleachfield, The Laggan,  
Kintyre on 18 January ©Eddie  
Maguire



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](mailto:abcrecorder@outlook.com)

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

**Note:** Machrihanish SBO = Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, Kintyre

### Swans, ducks, geese & game-birds

**WHOOOPER SWAN.** A good count of 217 at the Laggan, Kintyre on 12 Nov.

**TODD'S CANADA GOOSE.** One, possibly two were on I slay between 10 Nov and late Jan.

**ACKLING GOOSE.** On I slay, two were at Rockside and then Loch Indaal from 15 Nov with another at Kinnabus from 19 Nov (photo next page).

**MANDARIN.** High counts included four at Ha-



**Upper photo.** Cackling Goose (bottom right) with Barnacle Geese on Islay on 30 November ©John Nadin.

**Middle photo.** Great-crested Grebe at Blairmore, Loch Long on 12 December ©Alistair McGregor

**Lower photo.** Glossy Ibis on Tiree on 30 January ©John Bowler

zelbank, Cowal on 19 Nov and five at Braevallich, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll on 27 Jan.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL.** A drake was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree

between 10 Dec and 1 Jan. A drake was at Gruinart, Islay on 7 Nov and (the same?) there on 2 Jan (descriptions required please).

**POCHARD.** A male and female were at Finchairn, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll on 16 Dec.

**RING-NECKED DUCK.** A first-winter male was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 1-5 Nov.

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

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

**LEACH'S PETREL.** Two flew W off Aird, Tiree on 16 Nov and one was inland past Braevallich, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll on 16 Nov.

**GREAT WHITE EGRET.** One was at Loch Cuin, Mull on 4 Nov and is a first record for the island.

**LITTLE EGRET.** One was at Milton, Tiree on 2 Nov. Two were at Carnain, Islay from 7 Nov and later at Foreland on 21 Nov. In Kintyre one was at Kennacraig and West Loch Tarbert intermittently in Nov and one was in the Tayinloan area at the end of Jan. On Mull, one was at Garmony and Fishnish early to mid-Nov. In Cowal one was at the Holy Loch in mid-Nov and one (same?) at Arrochar on 13 Dec. In North Argyll one was at Loch Creran on 10 Dec and one (same?) at Ard-mucknish Bay, Benderloch on 26 Dec.

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE.** One was found dead at Carnain, Islay on 9 Dec and one was off Blairmore, Loch Long, Cowal on 12 Dec (photo opposite).

**RED-NECKED GREBE.** One was off Pennyghael, Loch na Keal, Mull from 10 Jan with possibly the same bird reported at Loch Spelve on 31 Jan.

**PIED-BILLED GREBE.** The long-staying adult male was reported at Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll on 2 Nov and 5 Dec.



**GLOSSY IBIS.** On Mull, one was at Ardnacross Farm on 21 Dec to 4 Jan and presumably the same at Tobermory briefly on 6 Jan. Five were together on the Ross of Mull (Fidden/Iona) on 25 Dec to 6 Jan. One was seen in flight towards Loch Kinnabus, Islay on 6 Jan. One was on Tiree from 24 Dec until end of Jan (photo previous page).

## Waders

**RUFF.** Two were at Gruinart, Islay from early Nov to late Jan.

**JACK SNIPE.** Five were flushed from a marsh at Caliach Farm, Mull on 2 Nov. Singles were on Tiree during Dec, early Jan and total of three at the end of Jan. One was at Carnain, Islay on 18 Jan. One was in Scammadale Glen, Mid-Argyll on 21 Jan.

**WHIMBREL.** One was at Salen, Mull on 1 and 12 Jan and one was at Gartbreck, Islay on 26 Jan.

## Skuas, gulls, terns & auks

**GREAT SKUA.** One flew W off Aird on 7 Dec and one was at Gott Bay, Tiree on 29 Jan. One flew S at Machrihanish SBO, Kintyre on 9 Nov. One was off Caliach Point, Mull on 10 Nov. One was at Loch Crinan, Mid-Argyll on 10 Dec. One inland flew past Braevallich, Loch Awe, Mid-Argyll on 27 Jan.

**POMARINE SKUA.** One flew W off Aird, Tiree

on 16 Nov.

**LITTLE GULL.** An adult was seen in the Sound of Islay on 1 and 12 Nov, an adult was at the head of Loch Gilp, Mid-Argyll on 23 Dec and an adult was at Loch na Keal, Mull on 10 Jan.

**MEDITERRANEAN GULL.** An adult was at the head of Loch Gilp on 23 Dec and another adult was at Ormsary fish farm, Mid-Argyll on 25 Dec.

**RING-BILLED GULL.** A first-winter bird was on Tiree from 26 Jan (photo below).

**ICELAND GULL.** On Tiree a juvenile was at West Hynish on 14 Nov then up to 10, mostly juveniles, were noted there during Jan. On Islay at least six juveniles were noted during Jan. In Kintyre, two 2CY birds (MSBO and Laggan) were present Nov to Dec, a juvenile was at Campbeltown Harbour in Dec and an adult was there in late Jan (photo below). On Mull one was at Treshnish Farm on 11 Jan.

**GLAUCOUS GULL.** On Tiree up to 20 were noted during Jan, including at least 14 juveniles. On Islay at least eight were noted in Jan including four near Bowmore on 26 Jan. On Mull a juvenile was at Knock on 6 and 12 Jan and another at Loch na Keal on 10 Jan. In Mid-Argyll a juvenile was inland at Poltalloch on 26 Jan and one was at Braevallich, Loch Awe on 30 Jan. In Cowal a juvenile was at Otter Ferry on 28 Jan.



First-winter Ring-billed Gull (left) on Tiree on 26 January ©John Bowler. Adult Iceland Gull (right) at Campbeltown Harbour on 27 January ©Eddie Maguire





Hawfinch on Tiree  
on 15 November  
©John Bowler

**PUFFIN.** An early bird was off Glengorm Bay, Mull on 25 Jan.

**LITTLE AUK.** Six flew past Aird, Tiree on 16 Nov and one was off Ardnave Point, I slay on 3 Jan.

### Passerines (larks to buntings)

**MAGPIE.** One was at Tarbert, Jura on 19 Nov. One was in the Ardrishaig/Lochgilphead area in late Nov to late Dec and one (the same?) was at Ulva/Keills on 6 Jan.

**HOUSE MARTIN.** A late report of one at Dalavich, Mid-Argyll on 3 Nov.

**SWALLOW.** One was at Kilnaughton Bay, I slay on 5 Nov and a last report of one at Bellochantuy, Kintyre on 8 Nov.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT.** One, probably of the

Siberian race *blythi*, was in a garden at Glenegdale, I slay from 5 Nov until at least 14 Dec.

**NUTHATCH.** A good number of reports received. Please send in your sightings to enable a more complete picture of current range expansion.

**WAXWING.** One was at Kinnabus, I slay on 6 Jan.

**COMMON REDSTART.** A late bird (latest ever in Argyll?) was in Campbeltown, Kintyre on 6 Nov.

**HAWFINCH.** Four birds in total (2 males and 2 females) at Balephuill, Tiree between 3 and 25 Nov (photo above). One was reported from Dalavich (per BirdGuides), Mid-Argyll on 3 Nov (further details required please).

**SNOW BUNTING.** Good numbers were on Tiree in late Nov with 26 at Traigh Bhagh and 15 at Gott Bay. Small groups of up to seven were on I slay in Jan. Eight were at the Meall Mor wind farm, Mid-Argyll on 1 Dec.

**LAPLAND BUNTING.** One was at The Reef, Tiree on 1 Nov.

**Jim Dickson**

Argyll Bird Recorder

### Stop Press

**RING-NECKED DUCK.** A drake was seen on the Gruinart floods, I slay on 10 Feb.

**LITTLE AUK.** Three flew past Hynish, Tiree on 14 Feb.



Purple Sandpipers at Loch Craginish, Mid-Argyll on 20 January ©James Lehmann



## A week in Castilla y Leon, northern Spain



Peña Amaya in the mid-distance with semi-natural vegetation in the foothills and an intricate mosaic of arable fields in the foreground ©Steve Petty

During our annual spring/summer migration to Cantabria in northern Spain we try to visit an area of the country we are unfamiliar with. Last year, with friends, we rented a casa for a week in the north of Castilla y Leon. This area lies just south of the main Cantabrian Mountain chain, which runs along the north of Spain, just inland from the Bay of Biscay. We had little prior information about wildlife in this area,

which often makes it all the more interesting!

In the middle of May, we headed south from the mountains of the Picos de Europa and started the climb up a windy road over the Cantabrian Mountains, heading for a pass at Piedrasluengas (1,300m altitude, photo below) and then onwards into Castilla y Leon. It had been a very warm and exceptionally dry winter, and spring was well ad-



Looking north from a pass over the Cantabrian Mountains. Note the brown (frosted) foliage on the Beech ©Steve Petty





White Stork on nest at Vañes, northern Spain, May 2017  
©Steve Petty

vanced, but this had some disadvantages. The high altitude Beech forests were well into leaf, but many trees had been recently frosted (see photo, previous page). In many European mountain ranges, conifers often predominate at high altitude, but in the Cantabrian Mountains there are no native, canopy-forming conifers, only two species of juniper. We had a coffee break at a very rustic hotel/bar near the summit, and admired the Brown Bear photos adorning the walls, all taken in the vicinity. Once over the pass, the meadows alongside the road were full of wild daffodils, and a multitude of other spring flowers.

White Storks are a rare sight north of the Cantabrian Mountains, but once south of the mountains we started to see storks in the fields, and from here on most villages had at least one nest (photo above). At Vañes, a small village alongside a large reservoir (Embalse de Requejada ) up to 20 nests can be found



The village of Amaya, Castilla y Leon ©Steve Petty

on buildings and in trees alongside the road. It's always a joy to stop here and experience their beak-clapping displays. There seemed to be fewer active nests last year, possibly due to the drought. The reservoir, which is usually brimming full at this time of the year, was substantially drawn down, with large expanses of dried mud and sand around the shore. The normally lush, marginal vegetation was absent, which may have reduced the availability of amphibians and other food for storks.

The landscape was not so rugged from here on. Extensive forests of Pyrenean Oak, interspersed with hay meadows and livestock eventually gave way to more arable agriculture as we came to the edge of the northern meseta, a vast high altitude plain. Many of the cereal crops were almost ready to be harvested. Here too the farmers had suffered due to the lack of rain, with crops only about half the normal height, and yields much reduced.

The village we were heading for was called Amaya (950m altitude) (photo below). It is situated at the base of a range of limestone hills, with Peña Amaya (1377m altitude—in comparison to Ben Nevis at 1345m) being the highest. The area around Amaya was an intricate mixture of cereal fields and rocky outcrops with semi-natural dwarf-shrub vegetation grazed by both goats and sheep (header photo). A few small, tree-lined streams flowed through the area. Amaya was a small, picturesque village, and like many in the area, had suffered from depopulation. In the 1920s the population was over 400 people, whereas today less than 50 folk remain. Consequently, many house and farm building were derelict and gardens overgrown. However, the village itself was a haven for wildlife. Nightingales sang from the bushes in just about every overgrown garden, and a few Melodious Warblers were singing too. As well a multitude of House Sparrows, we soon realised Rock Sparrows were also abundant. Swifts were continuously screaming overhead, and many other species commonly found in villages in the area were abundant here, including Barn Swallow, House Martin, Common Redstart,





**Upper photo.** Black Poplars alongside a small stream—a haven for wildlife!

**Middle photo.** Panoptes Blue (left) and Adonis Blue (right) on stones in the stream.

**Lower photo.** Corn Bunting—one of the commonest songbirds

Black Redstart, Blackcap, White Wagtail, Goldfinch and the ubiquitous Serin. At night the village came alive, not only with Nightingales singing, but also with the monotonous hooting of Scops Owl. The latter species was present at a very high density, with a male singing every 30-50m. One afternoon, sitting in the garden after a long walk earlier in the day, an adult Golden Eagle pair provided a fantastic spectacle as they soared over the garden, less than 30m above the house! This made a delightful change from the stream of Griffon Vulture passing over the house, heading for their nests on Peña Amaya. It was only May and many birds were still migrating. On most days we had flocks of Bee-eaters passing overhead. In the surrounding area we found numerous small breeding colonies, often in fairly inconspicuous banks. Near one of these colonies we found a super area for butterflies, including Chequered Blue, a new species for us.

At first glance the cereal fields surrounding Amaya look fairly uninviting for birds, but we soon realised they weren't. Corn Buntings (photo opposite) were probably the most abundant bird, with males singing just about everywhere. Tawny Pipit, Crested Lark, Stonechat, Yellow Wagtail (subspecies *iberiae*) were also abundant. On most days we had good views of male Montagu's Harrier hunting over the crops, and Quail were heard frequently. Considering the almost drought conditions, it was surprising that the small streams in the area still had running water. Most of these watercourses had Black Poplar and numerous species of willow dotted along their banks (photo above). The poplars were white with their downy seeds, which were blowing everywhere. These trees and bushes provided habit for species such as Melodious Warbler, Iberian Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Golden Oriole. Walking along a stream bank we flushed a Bonelli's Warbler from its nest (with eggs) in a grass tus-

sock on a bank. The nest was almost identical to that of a Willow Warbler. Some of the more open, damp areas along these streams were fantastic for butterflies. At one spot we found dozens of blue butterflies of at least seven species, one of which was another new for us—Panoptes Blue (photo on previous page). Other early spring butterflies were evident too, including Green Hairstreak and some of the early fritillaries such as Knapweed (photo opposite) and Glanville.

The more rugged part of the landscape, unsuitable for arable crops, provided a quite different habitat. On the more heavily grazed areas with some bare ground, Wood Larks were abundant, and we spent quite a bit of time watching their fascinating aerial song/display flights. Here too we found all three species of shrike—Southern Grey, Red-backed and Woodchat, as well as Spectacled Warbler. We watched two male Hoopoes having a protracted territorial dispute, and on most days we had Hoopoes singing in the background, as well as abundant Cuckoos. One of the highlights was locating a singing male Ortolan Bunting (photo opposite), a bird we'd so far failed to see in Spain. The southern slopes of the Cantabrian Mountains are the stronghold for this species in Iberia. Soon after locating this first bird we had another male singing against the first male. Overall, it was a pretty good habitat for buntings—five species in total (Rock, Yellow, Cirl, Corn and Ortolan). We also found some orchid species we'd never seen before, ranging from the tall Lady Orchid to the diminutive Yellow Ophrys. We also found numerous patches of wild Peony. The day-flying burnet moth *Zygaena lavandulae* (photo opposite) was also abundant; yet another new species!

The week passed remarkably quickly and before long it was time to head back north. Overall, Amaya was a pretty interesting area, and one we'd be tempted to go back to again. As it was, we felt we'd only just scratched the surface.

Steve & Linda Petty



**Upper photo.** Ortolan Bunting in one of its strongholds in Iberia

**Middle photo.** Knapweed Fritillary—a common early spring butterfly

**Lower photo.** An abundant day-flying burnet moth *Zygaena lavandulae*



Articles for the June issue of the *Eider* should  
with the editor before the  
5th May 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](mailto:sue.cnoc@gmail.com))

Committee: Malcolm Chattwood (Lochgilphead), Jim  
Dickson (Cairnbaan), Neil Hammatt, 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, Ar-  
dentinny, 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 Robin-  
son

### Argyll Bird Recorder

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

phone 01546 603967

e-mail [meg@jdickson5.plus.com](mailto:meg@jdickson5.plus.com)

### Assistant Bird Recorder

Malcolm Chattwood, 1 The Stances, Kilmichael Glas-  
sary, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8QA

phone 01546 603389

e-mail [abcrcorder@outlook.com](mailto:abcrcorder@outlook.com)

### BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

Argyll Mainland, Bute & Gigha: Nigel Scriven  
phone 01505 706652 mobile 07901 636353

e-mail [njscraven@gmail.com](mailto:njscraven@gmail.com)

Argyll North—Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern: Dawn  
Balmer

phone 01842 750050

e-mail [dawn.balmer@bto.org](mailto:dawn.balmer@bto.org)

Islay, Jura & Colonsay: David Wood

phone 01496 300118

e-mail [david.wood@rspb.org.uk](mailto:david.wood@rspb.org.uk)



**T**he *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
Corporate	£25

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