

Machrihanish SeaBird Observatory Report 2019



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**Machrihanish SeaBird Observatory
SW Kintyre Argyll PA28 6PZ**

**Founded 11th September 1993
2019 Report**



Enduring first-rate vantage point

The Seabird Observatory is located just west of Machrihanish Village in SW Kintyre
Photo / **Stuart Andrew** (Kintyre Photography)

Cover photographs – adult **Kumlien's Gull** and male **Velvet Scoters**.
Unless stated, photographs in this report were taken by **Eddie Maguire**.

Contents...

Introduction	Page 3
Highlights of 2019	Page 4
Northern Gannet Overland Project	Page 59
Otters at MSBO	Page 64
Acknowledgements	Page 67

Introduction...

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

This year a slightly different format is being employed for the report; there are no complete monthly reports. This summary is confined to presenting all outstanding ornithological events that occurred during each of the months under review and is accompanied by around **90** photographs.

For inclusive monthly reports see Systematic Lists in *2019 Monthly Reports* on MSBO website - machrihanishbirdobservatory.org.uk

All MSBO records are stored monthly on the **Argyll Bird Club** database.

Scarce / rare visitors 2019...

Systematic seawatching from 1st March to November ultimately produced some sightings of rare, scarce / unusual species and many truly outstanding totals of the visible migration of numerous shorebird species along with other interesting visitors.

Spring...

The weather patterns that normally provide a decent window for quality seawatching by conveying large numbers of seabirds, including scarce / rare species, within sight of the shore were few and far between this year. Exceptions in spring included a single **Leach's Petrel** on 12th March, a fly-by adult **Kumlien's Gull** >S on 20th March (the 4th MSBO record) and a summer-plumaged **Grey Phalarope** that was found on 26th May deftly nipping in and out of the troughs, in a WNW gale event as it fled south – the **first spring record** of this species at MSBO and only the second April / May record for Argyll.

Autumn...

In general, autumn 2019 was depressing for land-based seawatchers with rather low numbers of **Great** and **Arctic Skuas**, minimal numbers of **Manx Shearwaters** and **Black-legged Kittiwakes** and also a dearth of the large auks.

The second record of **Leach's Petrel** this year involved a single >S at 11:30hrs on 4th September during a NW f6-7 gale event.

Another NW gale event / squalls on 11th November failed to produce any movements of common seabirds; for example, there were no **Black-legged Kittiwakes** and no large auks. Nevertheless, the 5hr seawatch did produce several quality moments with the sudden appearance of 2 **Little Auks** >S at 11:10hrs followed by the second **Grey Phalarope** of the year >S at 11:26hrs. Both these species appeared after a particularly vicious squall.

Hopefully a much better showing of scarce / rare seabirds and other species in 2020.

MSBO Monthly Highlights 2019

March...

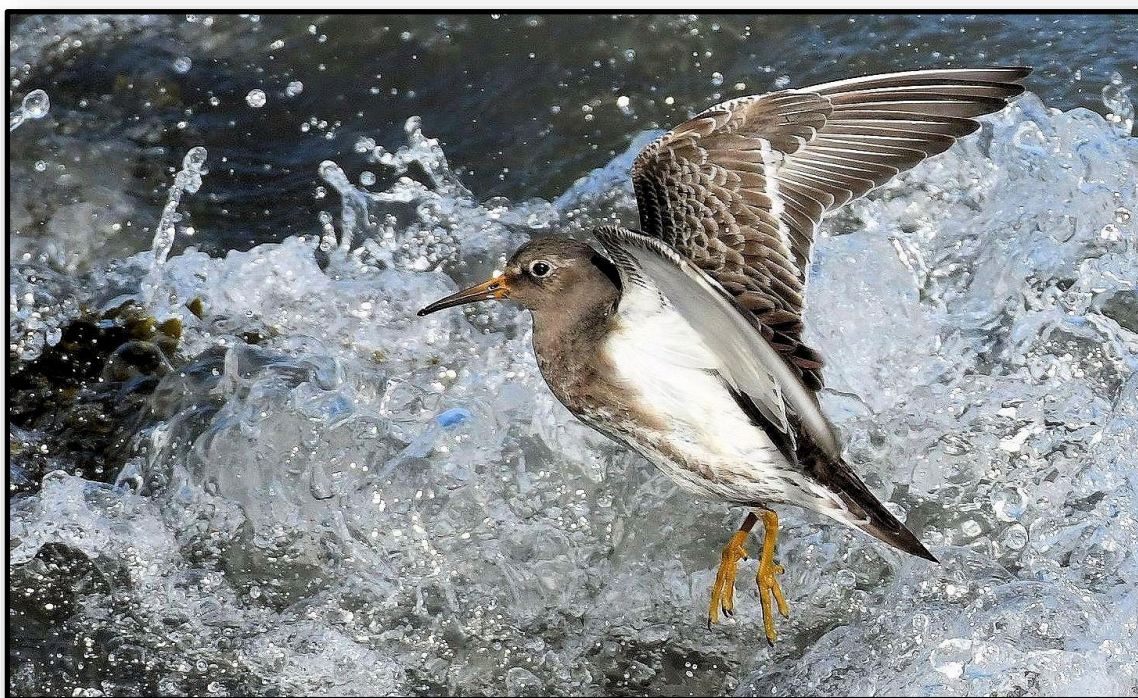
Seawatching this month was pretty much just that, with no real movements of anything, although there was a very rare monthly appearance of **Leach's Petrel** on 12th during a gale event (*Storm Gareth*).

A remarkable fly-by on 20th was a fly-by adult **Kumlien's Gull** that >S at 13:35hrs (photographed).

This is a subspecies of **Iceland Gull** from the Arctic region of NE Canada and was the 4th MSBO record.



Kumlien's Gull - a fly-by adult >S at 13:35hrs / 20th March
The 4th MSBO record



Purple Sandpiper - dodging the waves at MSBO 14th March
This photo was designated *notable* in '*Photo of the Week*' 13th-19th March at ...
www.birdguides.com



Black-legged Kittiwake - battling a gale event off MSBO 15th March



Twite - Colour ringed male 'H52' at MSBO 1st March

The ringed male **Twite** was photographed at MSBO feeding station on 1st and was present on territory / singing continually all month. This individual was ringed at MSBO on 30th April 2018. (Clyde Ringing Group / UK Twite Study Project).

The alpha/numeric code **H52** on the green colour ring (see photo) confirms the BTO metal ring number as **L974705**.

April...

Migrant arrival dates...

First arrival dates for migrants included **Northern Wheatear** (2nd), **Manx Shearwater** (6th), **Common Greenshank** (6th), **Barn Swallow** (6th), **Sand Martin** (7th), **House Martin** (9th), **Great Skua** (14th), **Common Sandpiper** (16th), **Common Cuckoo** (16th), **Brent Goose** (18th), **Sedge Warbler** (22nd), **Arctic Tern** (30th) and **Blackcap** (30th).

Rarities reported in S Kintyre Included a **Little Egret** (2nd) at Peninver, a male **Black Redstart** (17th) on the outskirts of Campbeltown, a **Eurasian Magpie** (11th) in Campbeltown and a female **Hawfinch** (19th) photographed on a garden feeder in Bellochantuy.



Pale-breasted Brent Goose – migrant at MSBO 19th April

A pair of **Northern Shoveler** loafing by MSBO on 12th were then present intermittently to the morning of 19th when they finally disappeared >S.

An occasional spring / autumn passage visitor to MSBO / has bred at Westport Marsh (now drained) in recent years.



Northern Shoveler - (male) 12th April

Northerly passage of **Whimbrel** was modest with 12 >N on 16th - the second record this year. One on 17th, **18** on 18th (flocks 11 and 5 + 2 singles), 8 on 19th, 2 on 20th, 2 on 22nd, none on 23rd / 24th, 6 on 25th, 2 on 26th, 5 on 27th, 7 on 29th and **18** on 30th (flocks 11 and 7)

*Summary of April passage at MSBO; a total of **81** >N on 11 dates.*



Whimbrel - A migrant arriving at MSBO 22nd April

A **Great Skua** was successfully 'procuring' food from **Great Black-backed Gulls** and a **Northern Gannet** that were attending a lobster fishing boat on 14th - the first record this year.

Visible migration of **White Wagtail** was excellent; all movements were in a northerly direction with two on 5th, one on 6th, 2 on 9th, singles on 10th - 11th, 3 on 13th, one on 14th, 3 on 16th, 10 on 17th, 20+ on 18th (high pressure), 25+ on 19th, 14 on 20th.

There was a superb passage on 21st: birds were arriving from the south all morning in calm / sunny conditions with some resting / foraging briefly on the point before flying out to the N over the sea although many were going straight through. The visible migration total for this species on 21st was **112** >N / 5hrs from 09:00hrs.

Later there was a protracted northward daily turnover with birds arriving intermittently on the point then leaving soon after for the N as described above; 33 on 22nd, 7 on 23rd, **67** / 6hrs on 24th, **80** / 6hrs on 25th, 28 on 26th, 17 on 27th, 29 on 28th, 22 on 29th and 12 on 30th.

*Summary of the visible migration during April at MSBO; a total of **490** >N on 22 / 30 dates. Peaks = **112** / 5hrs on 21st and **80** / 6hrs on 25th.*



White Wagtail - >N 26th April

Greenland Wheatear

A beautiful male was photographed on 28th. This sub-species is a spring / autumn passage visitor usually in very small numbers. Probably under-recorded.



A leggy / bold-looking male **Greenland Wheatear** 28th April
Note that the bird is watching a fly just in front / above of its head!

May...

Early May was dominated by cold northerly winds then high pressure arrived mid-month creating a rather hazy seascape; the north wind persisted and conditions resulted in a dearth of birds over the sea for most of the month. However, a WNW force 5 - 6 on 26th provided a decent window for quality seawatching when it delivered a breeding-plumaged **Grey Phalarope** and the first **Arctic Skua** of the year within sight of the shore.

Gannets crossing overland in S Kintyre...

Surveillance of Northern Gannets crossing 8km overland to the west from Campbeltown Harbour to Machrihanish Bay was maintained.. This unique **MSBO Project** continued through to mid-October (see **Summary of MSBO Northern Gannet Overland Project 2017 – 2019** on page 59 of this report).



Northern Gannets – adults >S off MSBO 26th May
En-route for colony – note full crops and stomachs

A **Common Crane** was photographed near East Backs cottage on the Moss Rd (by Campbeltown Airport) on 4th (Jim Dickson / Argyll Recorder *pers. comm.*).

The first two Argyll records of this species were in Kintyre. One was at West Loch Tarbert during 10th – 28th May 1966 and the other, or same, was at Rosehill Farm, Glenbarr from 19th December 1966 to 19th March 1967 (**Birds of Argyll** / ap Rheinallt et al 2007).

The **Grey Phalarope** in breeding plumage was seen some 300m offshore at 14:20hrs on 26th in a WNW force 5 - 6 / squalls; however, it was staying mainly in the

deep troughs and, when relocated several times over the crests, the jizz (slow rolling flight) and breeding plumage were seen well; hence other name **Red Phalarope**.

The first ever spring record at MSBO and only the second spring occurrence (April / May) for Argyll (Jim Dickson / Argyll SOC Recorder pers. comm.).

Ruddy Turnstones were scarce with only singles on 3 dates 2nd - 24th.



Ruddy Turnstone – in breeding plumage MSBO 19th May



Whimbrel - MSBO 2nd May

Whimbrel passage continued with peaks of 23 on 1st followed by a flock of **44** on 7th. A **Ruff** was photographed on 15th. This species is an irregular spring passage visitor more frequently seen during autumn and usually in small numbers.



Ruff - MSBO 15th May

A pale phase adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 26th (WNW f5-6); the first logged at MSBO this year. A dark phase adult >N on 30th.



Arctic Skua – adult >S MSBO 26th May

A loose flock of 38 **Sandwich Tern** was ashore at Machrihanish village on 1st. present daily all month with peak later of 14 on 6th.



Sandwich Tern - MSBO 12th May / note ring on right leg



White Wagtail - MSBO 6th May

Northerly passage of **White Wagtail** continued with 18 on 1st. Peak count later was **40** on 7th. Following a most impressive visible migration during April (**490** >N on 22 / 30 dates) numbers on passage this month fell dramatically to only **111** >N on 16 / 31 dates.



Eurasian Oystercatcher – this clutch was 8m from MSBO window / 30th May

June...

Common Shelduck broods included a b/3 just hatched on 1st followed by b/6 on 16th.

Table 1.

Shelduck productivity at Machrihanish during May / June **2016 – 2019**.

Year	No. broods	No. ducklings	Mean brood size
2019	3	19	6.3
2018	6	30	6
2017	8	55	6.7
2016	6	37	6.1



Common Shelduck – female MSBO 26th June



Velvet Scoters – some of a scattered flock (all males) >S / 2nd June



Velvet Scoter – female >S off MSBO 2nd June

An exceptional flock of **21 Velvet Scoter** >S off MSBO at 11:25hrs on 2nd June. The birds were well-scattered, small loose groups at varying distances from the shore (200m+); the total comprised **16** males / 5 females.

This is largest number seen in Argyll since the 1970's (Eddie Maguire *pers. obs.* / **Birds of Argyll**; ap Rheinallt *et al* 2007).

The first broods of **Common Eider** just hatched included b/4 & b/3 on 2nd. This was followed by b/1 and b/5 on 6th, b/4 on 14th and b/1 on 26th.

Table 2

Common Eider productivity at Machrihanish during May / June **2016 – 2019**.

Year	No. broods	No. ducklings	Mean brood size
2019	6	18	3
2018	8	25	3.1
2017	6	23	3.8
2016	10	35	3.5

Two **Ruddy Turnstone** arrived on 17th and two fresh-plumaged **Whimbrel** were on the shore on 23rd - 28th.

Both species are scarce but not surprising mid-summer occurrences.

A late migrant **White Wagtail** was seen on 1st.



Ruddy Turnstone – adult MSBO 17th June / rare in summer

A male **Black-headed Bunting** (vagrant) was described well / no photo on Gigha (at Gighalum on the south end of the island) on 8th (Keith Helm *per* Jim Dickson / County Recorder).

July...

Four males **Common Scoter** >S on 12th, a flock of 10 (including 3 females) flew into Machrihanish Bay from the west on 16th and 22 (majority males) >S on 26th.

Last adult male **Common Eider** seen in flight prior to wing moult / eclipse period was on 3rd (last flying male during 2018 was on 2nd July).
Breeding; a late b/2 just hatched appeared on 6th.

Table 3.

Common Eider productivity update at Machrihanish during May / July **2016 – 2019**.

Year	No. broods	No. ducklings	Mean brood size
2019	7	20	2.8
2018	8	25	3.1
2017	6	23	3.8
2016	10	35	3.5



Common Scoters – flock arriving Machrihanish Bay 16th

Off MSBO > Machrihanish Bay 500+ **Manx Shearwater** were foraging with Gannets on 5th.

Horizon movement: **1,200** >S / 2hrs on 11th and 300 >S / 2hrs on 22nd.



Manx Shearwater - >S off MSBO 22nd July

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Off MSBO - Machrihanish Bay; 200+ **Northern Gannets** were foraging inshore 1st – 4th with 300+ there on 5th and 500+ on 10th. On 18th, **1,170** >S / 5hrs (W wind f3-4 / birds on narrow front inshore passage). On 22nd, **1080** >S / 5hrs.



Northern Gannets – adults >S MSBO / 22nd July



Northern Gannet – adult >S MSBO / 22nd July

Dunlin passage commenced from 21st (8) followed by 18 >S on 22nd, 73 >S on 24th, **150+** >S on 25th, 12 >S on 26th, **185** >S on 27th, 16 >S on 28th, 30 >S on 29th and 2 on 31st.

*Summary of July passage; a total of **498** >S on 9 dates from 21st.*



Sanderling – off-passage briefly at MSBO / 24th July
*Summary of July passage; a total of **496** >S on 7 dates from 21st.*



Common Sandpiper – on passage / 25th July
*Summary of July passage; a total of **78** >S on 17 dates from 2nd.*

The first returning adult **Red Knot** - still in breeding plumage - arrived with Common Redshanks on 19th and a flock of 7 adults >S on 27th.



Red Knot – MSBO 19th July

Common Redshank; summary of July passage; a total of **263** >S on 11 dates with peak of **90** on 24th.

A **Great Skua** was photographed >S at 13:22hrs on 2nd.



Great Skua – >S off MSBO 13:22hrs / 2nd July

A dark adult **Arctic Skua** >S on 26th. A first-summer (2CY) **Mediterranean Gull** arrived at MSBO from the north with Common Gulls on 9th and settled briefly on the point. This individual was re-located by Machrihanish village on 12th - 13th. A juvenile >S at 12:30hrs on 27th during a period of poor visibility.

These are the first MSBO records this year.



Mediterranean Gull – first-summer (2CY) MSBO 11:03hrs / 9th July



Mediterranean Gull – record shots of the juvenile >S
12:30hrs / 27th July

A migrant **Willow Warbler** appeared in MSBO garden on 27th (possibly came in-off-sea / visibility down to 1km).



Willow Warbler – MSBO 27th July

A few more July photos



Great Skua – >S off MSBO 13:22hrs / 2nd July



Small Tortoiseshell
On Spear Thistle MSBO / 16th July

August...



Ruddy Turnstone – a 1CY on passage / resting by MSBO 28th August

The first 1CY **Northern Gannet** of the year was photographed >S on 18th.
'When Gannets nest early, the first young fledge during the first week in August'
(Bernie Zonfrillo pers. comm.).



Northern Gannet – 1CY off MSBO 18th August

Summary of August passage of **Eurasian Oystercatcher** at MSBO; a total of **1,007**
>S on 16 dates with peak of **316** on 8th.



Eurasian Oystercatchers – 7 Adults + a 1CY on passage MSBO 5th August

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Summary of August passage of **Red Knot** at MSBO; a total of **557** >S on 17 dates from 4th. the highest day totals >S included 73 on 13th, 90 on 26th and **147** / 6hrs on 30th (light rain / poor vis). 12 were inland at Strath Farm floods (Laggan) on 31st.



Red Knot – on passage off MSBO 15th August



Red Knot – on passage MSBO 26th August

Note - The heavy August **Red Knot** passage (557 >S on 17 dates from 4th) was outstanding; it was also the second highest monthly total recorded at MSBO.

The record - an amazing one-day Argyll record total of **741** – occurred on 29th August 1993 (Eddie Maguire / Rod Angus / Brian Withers et al / pers. obs.).

Reference - **Birds of Argyll**; ap Rheinallt et al 2007.

Summary of August passage of **Ruddy Turnstone** at MSBO; a total of **176** >S on 13 dates and peak was **46** on 31st.

Summary of August passage of **Dunlin** at MSBO; a total of **578** >S on 10 dates with peak 118 on 4th.

50 were inland at Strath Farm floods (Laggan) on 31st.

A **Purple Sandpiper** arrived on the point with Red Knot on 28th then >S.

This is an unusual early autumn appearance; occasionally a few return mid-late September but more often than not, birds on passage do not appear until October.



Purple Sandpiper – an early autumn occurrence / 28th August

A flock of 5 **Ruff** >S on 22nd and one spent most of the day on the shore on 23rd then >S early morning on 24th.



Ruff – by MSBO 23rd August

A **Bar-tailed Godwit** rested on the shore then >S on 19th and singles >S on 27th and 31st.

Summary of August passage totals of **Sanderling** at MSBO; a total of **504** >S on 9 dates with peak of **165** on 4th.

Summary of August passage of **Common Redshank** at MSBO; a total of **301** >S on 12 dates and peak was **77** on 8th.

Single **Common Greenshanks** >S on 5th, 9th and 29th.

A total of 15 **Whimbrel** >S on 8 dates 15th - 31st including 4 on 25th.

Visible migration of waders off MSBO July – August 2019...

During July – August a total of **5,430** fly-by waders that included 14 species >S at MSBO.

Table 4.

Monthly totals of waders on passage >S at MSBO July / August 2019.

Species	July	August	2019 Monthly Totals
Eurasian Oystercatcher	628	1,007	1,635
Common Ringed Plover	115	123	238
Whimbrel	-	15	15
Bar-tailed Godwit	-	3	3
Black-tailed Godwit	10	16	26
Ruddy Turnstone	28	176	204
Red Knot	8	557	565
Ruff	-	6	6
Sanderling	496	504	1,000
Dunlin	498	578	1,076
Common Sandpiper	78	16	94
Purple Sandpiper	-	1	1
Common Greenshank	-	3	3
Common Redshank	263	301	564
Grand Totals	2,124	3,306	5,430

A **Great Skua** >S on 16th, 2 >S on 28th and 2 >S on 31st.

Early August passage of **Arctic Skua** started well with 5 dark phase (4 adults + a juv) >S / 2hrs on 7th (wind WNW force 3 / occ. light showers). Pale morph adults >S on 16th and 18th. A total off **7** >S on 28th in a NW f5; the total included 4 adult + a 1CY dark phase and 2 adult pale phase. On 31st, 3 adults (2 pale and a dark phase) >S.



Arctic Skua – a dark phase adult >S off MSBO 7th August

A 1CY **Mediterranean Gull** >S was photographed at 14:21hrs on 15th. Another 1CY was present briefly during a heavy shower then >S on 18th.



Mediterranean Gull – a 1CY on passage MSBO 15th August



Sandwich Tern – a 1CY MSBO 16th August

Sandwich Tern were present on 17 dates 1st – 31st with the largest gathering 9 including a 1cy on 4th. 3 1cy were present on 17th.

A few more August Photos...



Painted Ladies – MSBO garden 6th August



Eurasian Curlew – a fresh-plumaged 1CY MSBO 19th August



Mediterranean Gull – a 1CY on passage MSBO 15th August
Note clean underwing

September...



Eurasian Curlew – incoming at MSBO 27th September

A noisy flock of c.40 **Pink-footed Geese** >S high over MSBO at 12:51hrs on 12th.
The first **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** - a total of 9 adults - >S off MSBO on 4th.



Brent Geese – adults on passage off MSBO 4th September

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Two fem/imm **Northern Pintail** were in with Mallards 11th - 12th. A fem/imm was present 25th - 29th.



Northern Pintail – fem / imm off-passage MSBO 11th September

Pale-bellied juvenile **Common Scoter** >S on 14th (1) and 15th (2).



Common Scoters - >S 15th September

The second **Leach's Petrel** record of the year involved a single >S at 11:30hrs on 4th during a NW f6-7 gale event.

This was a new species for Dee Brodie and he contentedly spent around 5 mins soaking up the jizz of this individual as it made slow measured progress south / effortlessly hugging every contour of a lumpy sea.

800+ **Manx Shearwater** were rafting / foraging offshore on 2nd; all >S later. A total of around **1000+** >S / 7hrs during a NW gale event on 4th.



Manx Shearwater - >S off MSBO 2nd September

Six **Sooty Shearwater** were foraging well offshore with a large group of Manxies on 2nd. All >S later. Summary of September passage of **Red-throated Diver** off MSBO; a total of **120** >S on 18 dates and the top day total was **18** on 12th. A ringtail **Hen Harrier** was at sea >S ca. 1km off MSBO on 18th.

Three **Grey Plover**, the first this autumn, >S well offshore on 27th.

Summary of September passage of **Red Knot** at MSBO; a total of **104** >S on 9 dates with top day count of **27** on 11th. 4 were inland at Strath Farm floods (Laggan) on 1st - 2nd. Outstanding numbers of **Red Knot** were logged at MSBO this autumn (and in Argyll / Jim Dickson *pers. comm.* / County Recorder) – see **Table** below.

Summary of September passage of **Black-tailed Godwit** at MSBO; a total of **105** >S on 7 dates 4th – 25th with peak of **48** on 6th. 12 inland by Strath Farm floods (Laggan) on 1st.

Two **Bar-tailed Godwit** >S on 13th and 4 >S on 20th and a single **Ruff** >S on 12th.

Southerly passage totals; 28 on 4th, 7 on 7th, 13 on 10th, 18 on 11th, 8 on 12th, 6 >S on 14th and 26 on 18th.

Summary of September passage **Dunlin** at MSBO; a total of **106** >S on 7 dates.

Summary of September passage of **Sanderling** at MSBO; a total of **118** >S on 6 dates 4th – 21st including flock **40** on 16th. A **Common Greenshank** >S on 6th.

A **Whimbrel** >S on 2nd, 6 >S on 4th, singles >S on 5th and 7th and 2 >S on 23rd.

A **Grey Phalarope** >S at 09:40hrs during NW f6–7 gale event on 4th. This bird was 'on the doorstep' ca 12 – 15m from MSBO window; great views for a couple of seconds but too close / no opportunity for photos (warden & Dee Brodie).



Black-tailed Godwits – resting by MSBO then >S 8th September



Red Knot – off-passage briefly 21st September
Photo / **Cathy Cochrane**

Visible migration of waders off MSBO July to September 2019...

From July to September a total of **6102** fly-by waders that included **16 species** were logged >S at MSBO.

Table 5. Monthly totals of fly-by waders at MSBO during autumn 2019.

Species	July	Aug	Sept	Autumn 2019 Fly-by totals
Eurasian Oystercatcher	628	1,007	76	1,711
Grey Plover	-	-	3	3
Common Ringed Plover	115	123	33	271
Whimbrel	-	15	11	26
Bar-tailed Godwit	-	3	6	9
Black-tailed Godwit	10	16	105	131
Ruddy Turnstone	28	176	74	278
Red Knot	8	557	104	669
Ruff	-	6	1	7
Sanderling	496	504	118	1,118
Dunlin	498	578	106	1,182
Common Sandpiper	78	16	0	94
Purple Sandpiper	-	1	-	1
Common Greenshank	-	3	1	4
Common Redshank	263	301	53	617
Grey Phalarope			1	1
Monthly Totals	2,124	3,306	672	6,102

Three **Great Skua** (singles) >S on 2nd and one >S on 4th.

Three adult **Arctic Skuas** - 2 pale and a dark phase - >S on 2nd. Two pale phase adults, a dark adult and a 1cy >S on 4th.



Great Skua - >S off MSBO on 4th September



Arctic Skua – a pale phase adult >S off MSBO 4th September

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Horizon estimate; 800+ **Black-legged Kittiwake** >S on 2nd. A total of 380 >S / 7hrs on 4th (94/200 birds aged revealed 47% were 1cy).



Black-legged Kittiwake – 1cy >S off MSBO 27th September

A 2cy **Mediterranean Gull** was photographed >S at 12:26hrs on 25th.
The fifth record this year following a 2cy and a 1cy in July then 2 1cy in August.



Mediterranean Gull – 2cy >S off MSBO 25th September

Summary of September passage of **White Wagtail** at MSBO; a *total of 188* logged on 19 dates with peak **40+** on 20th. Four on 1st, 2 on 2nd, 6 on 5th, 3 on 6th. 9 on 7th, 6 on 8th, 3 on 10th, 2 on 11th, 9 on 13th, 2 on 14th, 4 on 17th then on 20th, **40+** arrived on the point from the west in small groups (2 – 6) over a 4hr period in the morning. The wind was from the east (f3) and all the birds continued >E into Machrihanish Bay. Passage continued with 20+ on 23rd, 14 on 24th, 6 on 25th, 17 on 26th, 10 on 27th, 23 on 28th and 8 on 29th.



White Wagtail – MSBO 27th September

A few more September photos...



Northern Wheatear – MSBO 27th September



Grey Wagtail – MSBO 10th September



Northern Wheatear – fly-catching at MSBO 10th September



White-tailed Eagle – adult at Grogport 19th September photo / **Tony Allman**



Northern Wheatear – MSBO 10th September

October...



Pink-footed Goose – Strath floods (Laggan) 4th October

A male **Greater Scaup** >S on 3rd and a male **Common Scoter** >S on 5th followed by 6 >S on 14th.

Two fem/imm **Velvet Scoters** >S on 11th.



Velvet Scoters – fem/imms >S 11th October
A scarce passage visitor at MSBO

A fem/imm **Long-tailed Duck** arrived after a heavy shower on 13th and was seen frequently to 18th.

A 1cy **Northern Gannet** >S on 8th, followed by 5 singles on 9th, one on 10th and 2 on 11th. A total of **12** 1cy were logged >S at MSBO in recent months with one in August, 2 in September and 9 in October.



Northern Gannet – 1cy (same individual below)



Northern Gannet – 1cy MSBO 12th October

Little Egret

One was photographed >S at MSBO on 5th.
The 3rd MSBO record.



Little Egret - >S at MSBO 5th October

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A **Purple Sandpiper** appeared on 18th / flew around the point a couple of times then >S – a more typical passage date following a very early single bird that was seen briefly / photographed 51 days earlier (28th August). Later, 11 >S on 27th.

Two **Sanderling** >S on 7th, 4 >S on 8th, 12 >S on 9th and 8 >S on 11th.

A single **Red Knot** >S on 1st. A late fly-by after a superb autumn passage (see Table below).



Red Knot - >S on 1st October

A **Common Snipe** in-off-sea then >S on 1st was first at MSBO this year.



Common Snipe – MSBO 1st October

Visible migration of waders at MSBO autumn 2019...

From July to October a total of **6165** fly-by waders that included **17** species were logged >S at MSBO.

Table 6. Monthly totals of fly-by waders >S at MSBO during autumn 2019.

Species	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Autumn 2019 Fly-by totals
Eurasian Oystercatcher	628	1,007	76		1,711
Grey Plover	-	-	3		3
Common Ringed Plover	115	123	33	14	285
Whimbrel	-	15	11		26
Bar-tailed Godwit	-	3	6		9
Black-tailed Godwit	10	16	105		131
Ruddy Turnstone	28	176	74		278
Red Knot	8	557	104	1	670
Ruff	-	6	1		7
Sanderling	496	504	118	26	1,144
Dunlin	498	578	106	9	1,191
Common Sandpiper	78	16	0		94
Purple Sandpiper	-	1	-	12	13
Common Greenshank	-	3	1		4
Common Redshank	263	301	53		617
Grey Phalarope	-	-	1		1
Common Snipe	-	-	-	1	1
Monthly Totals	2,124	3,306	672	63	6,165

Pomarine Skua

A 1cy >S at 11:10hrs on 24th (WNW f4-5 / squalls). The first this autumn.

An adult **Sandwich Tern** with a 1cy in tow >S on 7th.



Sandwich Tern – a 1cy >S 7th October



Great Cormorant – 1cy >S off MSBO 8th October

November...



Dunlin - At Campbeltown / on sea wall by the New Quay / 18th November

Daily observations ceased at MSBO in late October although an onshore November gale on 11th coupled with casual observations at the Laggan and interesting reports from local folk and visiting birders helped to shape a respectable November Report.

A **Jack Snipe** was seen well at Machrihanish Airbase, **Common Kingfishers** were a delight for local fishermen at Carradale, Loch Lussa and Machrihanish, a couple of **Snow Buntings** were videoed by the shore north of Tayinloan and there was small flocks of **Bohemian Waxwings** by Carradale and near Southend.

At MSBO the NW gale event / squalls on 11th failed to produce any movements of common seabirds; for example, there were no large auks and no **Black-legged Kittiwakes**. However, the 5hr seawatch did produce several quality moments with the sudden appearance of 2 **Little Auks** >S at 11:10hrs followed by a **Grey Phalarope** >S at 11:26hrs. Sure these were exhilarating species to log but, apart from 40 **Eurasian Wigeon** >S followed by 2 **Great Northern** and a single **Red-throated Diver**.

This seawatch was, for the most part, mainly birdless and a long 5hr sojourn for two chilled observers.

**Argyll Bird Club Field Trip to Campbeltown / MSBO
31st August 2019**

By: Malcolm Chattwood

Photos: Eddie Maguire

The weather on Friday 30th August was consistently foul with persistent rain and strong westerly winds. Saturday 31st dawned in much the same way although it was an improving forecast and it is generally the case that Kintyre fares rather better in the weather stakes than at home in Mid-Argyll. It was therefore not surprising that I'd received only one contact to say that Alun and Helen were proposing to make their long journey for the field trip. Leaving home in very poor conditions wasn't sufficient to dim my optimism that the forecasters would be right and once south of Clachan the weather did clear albeit the view across to Islay was occasionally obscured by showers. The trip was billed as an opportunity to see adult **Northern Gannets** from the nearby Ailsa Craig colony taking the routine overland shortcut from the Clyde at Campbeltown Loch to Machrihanish Bay to gain access to feeding grounds in the Atlantic. Eddie Maguire, the Warden at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) has been monitoring the birds and documenting this most unusual activity which has been regularly reported in the Eider and Club's Annual Bird Report ABR28.

Eddie's work relies on a "spotter" at the eastern side of the peninsula at Campbeltown Loch; Charlie Robertson is the MSBO "Northern Gannet Project Coordinator" and fulfils this role by reporting all adults flying west over Campbeltown to MSBO by phone. This prompts Eddie to take a break from sea-watching to look for the birds arriving from the east; it takes a Gannet ca. 9 minutes to cross 5 miles over this low-lying area of the peninsula. Charlie is in the fortunate position of being able to watch for adult Gannets departing overland to the west from his front window and so benefits from the comforts and facilities his home provides – a distinct and welcome advantage during recent inclement weather.

On the day of the field trip Charlie kindly abandoned his normal viewing point to meet up at the Old Quay and provide the benefit of his experience in watching the Gannets flying into Campbeltown Loch from the Clyde and provide an expert analysis of their "will they/won't they?" behaviour. The meeting point for the trip had been published as the Tourist Information Centre at the pier but unfortunately the centre had been a victim of recent cuts by *Visit Scotland* but had very recently reopened as a teashop. That wasn't much help to Alun and Helen who, being unfamiliar with the area, arrived at the other pier which serves the Calmac ferry no doubt wondering where the Information Centre was and noting a distinct lack of folk wearing binoculars. Fortunately they found their way to MSBO where I was able to meet up with them around lunchtime.

Back at the Old Quay Charlie and I were able to shelter from the occasional heavy shower and we watched a single bird, then two together, fighting their way into the

westerly force 5/6 wind as they headed west over the town and overland towards their fishing grounds off Machrihanish and beyond.

The high tide was covering the shore along the Esplanade and the foraging areas for **Ruddy Turnstones** and **Eurasian Curlew** but the odd **Common Eider** and **Black Guillemot** could be seen along with around 14 Shags trying their luck in the more sheltered waters. **Herring** and **Great Black-backed Gulls** were roosting on the North Shore pier.

As Charlie retreated to his front room "bird hide" I took the opportunity to head round the south side of Campbeltown Loch towards the Fanks which overlooks the Firth of Clyde. Above the white horses, passing **Great Cormorants** and a flock of feeding **Northern Gannets** were visible offshore with a couple of **Manx Shearwaters** amongst them alternatively flashing black and white as they wheeled just above the waves. On the shore, **Rock Pipits** flitted about in search of food in contrast to the **Curlew** sedately probing amongst the seaweed covered rocks. In the hedges and fields behind the shore **House Martins** and **Barn Swallows** swooped whilst the wind dictated that the **Robin**, **Chaffinch**, **House Sparrows** were heard rather than seen although a **Northern Wheatear** was struggling to stand its ground on a nearby cottage roof. Heading back along the road a **Common Sandpiper** jinked along in front of the car for about 50m before peeling off to land on the shore. At the tidal pool known as Stinky Hole, 20 or so **Curlew** were keeping their heads down until the tide ebbed far enough to uncover their feeding grounds whilst 4 **Mallard** were the only ducks in evidence. A siege of 13 **Grey Herons** appeared almost like additional sentries at their communal high tide roost close to the gate of the NATO oil depot at Glenramskill but in truth they were simply sheltering until they, like the **Curlews**, could take advantage of the forthcoming low tide rock pools.

Arrival at MSBO and hearing of the rendezvous travails of Alun & Helen prompted a mental note to double check arrangements for future trips and to include a grid reference, even in urban areas where landmarks would be expected to be permanent!

Eddie had been keeping watch since early morning and considered that the weather conditions were pretty good with a fresh westerly wind and the odd squall helping to push birds on passage towards the shore and within range of his binoculars and long camera lens. Amongst the feeding **Northern Gannets**, **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were around in good numbers with the odd **Sandwich Tern**, **Bonxie** and **Red-throated Diver** to add a touch of variety and further interest. The first **Eurasian Wigeon** of the season appeared with a single male accompanying five females. They flew past the hide heading south but returned a few minutes later to take advantage of the shelter provided in Mill Bay just round the corner from MSBO to the east.

A phone call from Charlie Robertson in Campbeltown prompted the comfort of the hide to be temporarily abandoned for a few minutes to scan the area over towards the airfield to try and spot the incoming adult **Northern Gannet**. This sounds easier than it actually is because of the necessity to scan a wide area over the water of Machrihanish Bay and over the golf course and Laggan farmlands as any adult

Gannet suddenly appearing in view may have come either from the north into Machrihanish Bay or, as expected, overland via the Laggan from Campbeltown Loch. This is when experience comes to the fore and a good view will reveal an empty crop and stomach showing that the bird is the one reported by Charlie nine minutes previously. After scanning the likely area for a couple of minutes a single adult **Gannet** made its way towards MSBO, building anticipation that an empty crop and stomach would reveal it as the subject of Charlie's message 9 minutes earlier. It certainly was; the bird passed close by the hide and headed out to sea in an effort to fill its visibly empty crop and stomach, returning to the Ailsa colony later on the long way round via the Mull of Kintyre.

As thoughts were turning to call it a day a single **Bar-tailed Godwit** flew low past the hide increasing the wader species seen beyond the **Curlew**, **Sanderling**, **Red Knot** and **Ruddy Turnstone** noted earlier. Thankfully the challenging weather hadn't deterred a few **Gannets** from making their 5 mile overland passage tracked and recorded at each end by the commitment and dedication of Charlie and Eddie. Thanks are due to both Charlie and Eddie for their time and hospitality - it's a remarkable story and it was fascinating and very pleasing to be invited to share it.



Ruddy Turnstone – on passage / resting at MSBO



Red Knot - on passage at MSBO

The list of species below was kindly provided by Eddie from the MSBO log on 31st August:

Common Shelduck - 3 juvs still present.

Eurasian Wigeon - 5 including an adult male.

Red-throated Diver – 5 >S.

Northern Gannet -The total crossing Kintyre on 31st in a NW f5-6 = **20** between 10:40 – 18:50hrs and the total crossing overland during = a *whopping* **624**.

Manx Shearwater- 140 >S / 2hrs am.

Peregrine Falcon – an adult.

Eurasian Oystercatcher – 40 >S.

Dunlin – 28 >S.

Sanderling – 40 >S.

Red Knot – 58 >S (5 flocks / largest 23).

Common Redshank - 19 >S.

Ruddy Turnstone - 33 >S.

Bar-tailed Godwit – one >S

Whimbrel – 3 >S.

Great Skua – 2 >S.

Arctic Skua – 2 pale adults and a dark phase adult >S.

Black-legged Kittiwake – a total of 60 >S / 6hrs.

Sandwich Tern – 2 (ad and 1cy).

Other species present included **Great Black-backed**, **Herring**, **Lesser Black-backed**, **Common** and **Black-headed Gulls**, **Curlew**, **Starling**, **Rock Pipit** and **Pied Wagtail**

A Week in Kintyre...

4th – 11th November 2019

*By: **Peter Nash** (Sandy / Bedfordshire) & **Nick Curtis** (Tamworth / Staffordshire)*

Introduction...

In November last year, we visited Kintyre, mainly to discover an area of Scotland we had never been to before, but with the added attraction of the distilleries in Campbeltown.

We had such a good time, so decided to revisit this year, not only armed with a little more knowledge of the area and its' premier sites for watching birds, but also in the knowledge there are huge areas of the peninsula which are not well-watched...especially in November. Whilst a little late in the season, the chance of finding something more interesting was another compelling reason to visit.

We stayed on the Saddell Estate and our arrival in the early evening of Monday 4th was met by a kronking Common Raven and a very vocal Tawny Owl calling from the trees above our cottage (Saddell Lodge).

Buzzards and Bullfinches (Tuesday 5th)...

The first morning dawned clear, dry and bright, so we decided to explore one of the many forestry roads and drove up from the west side near Gigha over the hills to Carradale. On our way there we drove along Glen Barr, noting a number of woodland species as well as **Common Raven** and **Common Buzzard**, although nothing more exotic, despite the farmer at Arnicle Farm assuring us of the region's pedigree for harriers and eagles!

It was therefore only a few minutes before we then saw a ringtail **Hen Harrier** along the forestry track, although the remainder of our day was limited to more Ravens, Buzzards and a large flock of **Redwings**, **Fieldfares** together with a couple of **Mistle Thrush** and several **Eurasian Bullfinches**.

Returning to Saddell, we enjoyed an afternoon walk along the shores of the bay, where we saw **Grey Wagtail**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Eurasian Curlew** and **Common Redshank** with more of the usual woodland species on our way back to the property as dusk fell.

Again, our "local" **Tawny Owl** was very vocal as we cooked our lamb curry dinner.



Common Buzzard – MSBO 10th November: Photo / **Eddie Maguire**

Whisky Galore (Wednesday 6th)...

Dawned wet and we spent a planned day in Campbeltown touring the distilleries, a very pleasant “task” and we hardly noticed the rain. Both tasting sessions were excellent, varied and more samples were purchased over the forthcoming days for further testing, back at the Lodge, and, of course, at home! The number 300/445 bus was used to transport us safely to and from Saddell. Birdwatching was not entirely abandoned as we noted 7 **Black Guillemots**, a couple of **Red-breasted Mergansers** and a **Slavonian Grebe** in Campbeltown Bay, during our walk between Springbank and Glen Scotia distilleries, albeit in heavy rain.

The Laggan and Southend (Thursday 7th)...

We were presented with a dry but cold day, although the weather became more unpleasant as the day wore on. We decided to look for Geese and headed out to Drumble and the various tracks around the Laggan where we were not to be disappointed. **White-fronted** and **Pink-feet** were noted in some numbers, with 260 of the former and 75 of the latter in one large field accompanied by 8 **Whooper Swans**. In the area we also watched a **Merlin** chasing its’ prey within a large group of **Common Starlings** with **European Stonechat** also seen and **Common Buzzards** and corvids almost everywhere. We then took a drive to Southend via the coast road stopping at the Dhorlin, although we beat a hasty retreat to our car after a quick walk, as the cold north-easterly wind was now accompanied by stinging rain. We did, however, see **Dunlin**, **Common Redshank**, **Little Grebe** (2), **Red-breasted**

Merganser as well as 30 **Ruddy Turnstone** amongst the numerous gulls and **Eurasian Oystercatchers**. Driving quickly on, we passed through a feeding group of some 500 **Common Starling** and 250 **Fieldfare** on roadside bushes on our way to view the sea at Dunaverty Rock, where we were pleased to see both **Red-throated** and **Great Northern Divers** amongst the sea duck, cormorants and gulls. After a brief (!) stop for cake in Muneroy team rooms, we continued on and dropped in at the Machrihanish Bird Observatory, where we had collected a key from Eddie Maguire on our way to Saddell on Monday. The sea was quiet, reflecting the unhelpful north-easterly wind direction, but we spent an hour there, before the cold and fading light saw us retreat back to our accommodation to eat and light the fire....perhaps sampling some Campbeltown products later in the evening to raise our spirits!

Loch Lussa and Campbeltown Loch (Friday 8th)



Loch Lussa: looking south from Colluska Water; Photo / **Peter Nash**

We awoke to a cloudless, windless, clear day which quickly turned into bright sunshine and felt warm in the still atmosphere. Determined to make the most of the weather, we drove to Lussa Loch and walked the forestry road, in stunning “scenery-cut-from-a-Christmas-card” conditions.

Alas, we did not see an eagle, nor even a **Hen Harrier** (which we had noted last year), but the loch soon provided us with good numbers of **Mallard**, **Eurasian Teal** and **Eurasian Wigeon**, as well as **Common Ravens** and **Common Kestrels** overhead. At the far end of the loch, a swampy area also produced a good number of **Common Snipe**, the 20 I recorded probably actually double that in reality and maybe more. Walking back, we thought we heard a **Common Crossbill**, but could not locate the bird, despite a thorough search. As we returned to our car, the 10

Canada Geese we had seen at the far end of the loch flew up past us, to be joined by over 500 **Greylag Geese**. A huge commotion ensued, although we did not see any other species of geese within this group.

After a quick bite to eat, we decided to head for the hills again, although our plans were derailed as we saw an initially unidentified auk species from our car at the Dhorlin, which was starting to reveal its' causeway, and later the bay was uncovered on the Davaar Island side, given the very low tide. We took advantage and spent almost 3 hours there before the sun disappeared behind the trees and a familiar chill returned. However, our efforts were rewarded as we saw 30 **Ringed Plover**, 50 **Curlew**, 18 **Redshank**, 3 **Dunlin**, 1 **Bar-Tailed Godwit**, 1 **Red Knot**, 1 **Common Shelduck** and 8 **Ruddy Turnstone** as well as an astonishing (to us, inland birders) 294 **Eurasian Oystercatchers**!

In total, some 28 species were noted. Oh, and the unknown Auk species....turned out to be a **Little Auk**, which stayed around for the duration of the afternoon, on one occasion dodging a couple of minesweepers that had come into the Bay to refuel.



Davaar Island: Looking east with the south end of Arran in the background
Photo / **Peter Nash**

Shelter at the Bird Obs (Saturday 9th)...

One good day deserves, in our case, an awfully wet one the next and we spent this ensconced in the Bird Obs for 4 and a half-hours, where we could, at least keep warm and drink tea, if not see too many birds, given the wind direction. Our best sightings were a single **Black-Throated Diver** and a **Purple Sandpiper**, the latter dodging the waves on the rocks outside the Obs, which threatened to wipe out the brave little wader at each surge.

Sound of Gigha (Sunday 10th)...

Our final day, we were once again blessed with another crystal clear and still day, so decided to head up the western coast to view the waters around Gigha, spending

some time at the Tayinloan Ferry terminal (hardly an appropriate description), the caravan park and, finally, just north of the fish farm where the Sound narrows. Our tally of birds was good and we saw 100 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, 20 **Great Northern Divers**, at least 1 **Black-throated Diver**, 41 **Common Scoter**, 2 **Velvet Scoters**, 3 **Long-tailed Duck**, 7 **Common Ringed Plover**, 31 **Eurasian Curlew** and at least 250 **Greenland White-fronted Geese**, the latter two species being seen in wet fields alongside the road down to the caravan park. Inevitably, our best birds were set to be seen right at the end of our holiday, which, as we walked back up the track to our car at the site just north of the fish farm, fed out on the track in front of us. Having spent 2 weeks in early October on St Agnes in Scilly, birding every day, and somehow managing to miss an example of this species throughout our fortnight, I was delighted when I realised we were looking at a couple of **Snow Buntings**. Not the rarest of birds, but always nice to find and see so we were delighted.



Snow Bunting: VideoGrab / **Peter Nash**

Finally...

We headed back to the Bird Obs to return our key before our drive home on the Monday where we found Eddie and Dee Brodie and caught up quickly with our last observations. Eddie dryly noted that tomorrow would likely be a good sea-watching day, being squally with 50-60 mph gusts.

For us, though, it was a 475 mile drive home after our weeks' efforts, which produced a tidy list of **84** species and some pleasant weather, excellent company, beautiful scenery and generous hospitality.

No doubt we will return.

Summary of MSBO Northern Gannet Overland Project 2017 - 2019

By Eddie Maguire & Charlie Robertson

During March to October 2017 – 2019, a total of **4,744** adult **Northern Gannets** *Morus bassanus* crossed 8km (5 miles) to the west over Kintyre (S Argyll) from Campbeltown Loch (Clyde Waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic).

Table 1.

The numbers of adult **Gannets** that crossed west over Kintyre during the breeding seasons March to October **2017 - 2019**.

2017	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Monthly totals	2	23	131	126	274	408	491	6
Cumulative totals	2	25	156	282	556	964	1,455	1,461
No. days of Observation	27	29	22	24	31	24	30	20
2018	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Monthly totals	6	45	78	336	121	247	372	16
Cumulative totals	6	51	129	465	586	833	1,205	1,221
No. days of Observation	31	30	31	30	31	31	30	25
2019	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Monthly totals (Average per day)	0	61 -	214 (7)	181 (6)	323 (10)	624 (20)	656 (22)	3 -
Cumulative totals	0	61	275	456	779	1,403	2,059	2,062
No. days of Observation	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	18

In all years the number of adults crossing overland diminished rapidly during early October; this fits well with known facts that young Gannets on Ailsa Craig mainly

fledge mid to late September (Bernie Zonfrillo *pers. comm.*) and provides more credence to our belief that birds crossing over S Kintyre from Clyde to the Atlantic are breeding adults on foraging trips. For further information see **Factfile** below.

Timing the 8km overland flight of Gannets...

From known departure times of adult Gannets flying over Campbeltown harbour for the west their 8km overland flight time to Machrihanish Bay has been firmly established for several years.

A recent example follows; at 13:28hrs on 1st July 2019, Charlie Robertson (MSBO Northern Gannet Project Coordinator) contacted the MSBO by mobile phone to report that a squadron of 7 adults had just flown over Campbeltown Harbour and departed high over the town for the west.

At Machrihanish, the flock was located by observers on the MSBO viewing platform at 13:36hrs as they came into view over The Laggan to the east, still flying west, still overland and still high as they approached the western edge of Machrihanish Airbase. About a minute later they were over the golf course then the dune slacks, and finally over Machrihanish Bay (Eddie Maguire / Dee Brodie).

As usual, this matchless 8km overland flight time from Campbeltown Harbour had taken 9mins. Scores more were timed during July and all completed the crossing in 9mins.

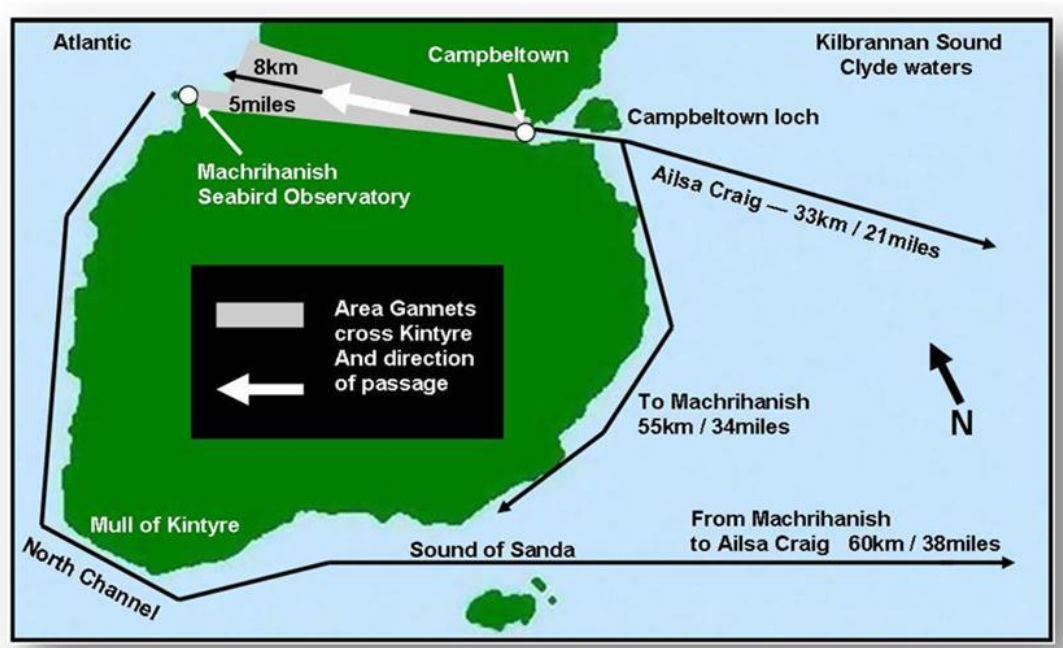


Figure 1. South Kintyre, Argyll & Bute showing the westerly overland route (8 km / 9 minute flight) taken by adult **Northern Gannets** from Campbeltown Loch (Clyde waters) to Machrihanish Bay (Atlantic). Direct marine routes with approximate distance from Campbeltown Loch to Machrihanish and to the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



Northern Gannets – off Machrihanish September 2019

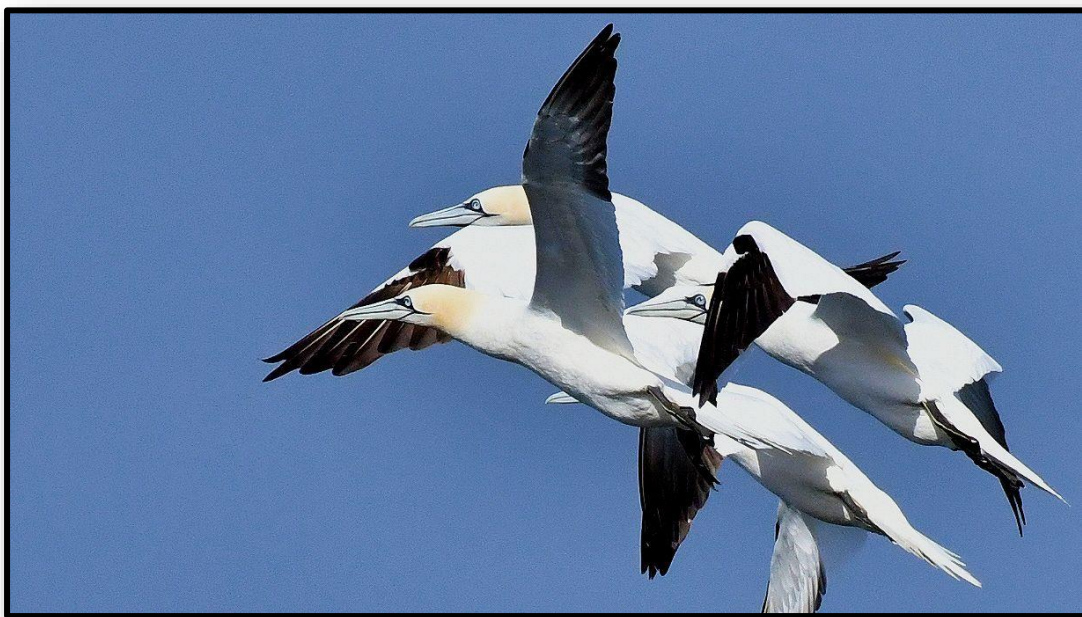
Northern Gannets crossing overland in S Kintyre Argyll

Factfile...

- South Kintyre is the only accredited location in the UK where Gannets routinely cross 5 miles (8km) overland during the breeding season, often in significant numbers, presumably to gain rapid access to foraging grounds.
- Only adults have crossed the low-lying 8km overland route from Campbeltown to Machrihanish Bay and to date, the overland passage is strictly one way – to the west (Clyde > Atlantic).
- Gannets flying to the west over Campbeltown look aerodynamic and are evidently at minimal weight which must obviously be a huge advantage when crossing west over S Kintyre.
- Gannets employ powered flight (sustained flapping) to cross the 8km at around 35 mph and the crossing of many individuals / small flocks has been timed on a regular basis at a constant 9 mins.
- After foraging successfully, Gannets are burdened significantly with fish prey, are visibly bloated and evidently at top weight; therefore, it is unlikely that they would attempt to fly overland from Atlantic to Clyde. The return journey to the Ailsa colony from Machrihanish is strictly a marine route via Mull of Kintyre relying heavily on assisted passage by alternating powered flight in concert with dynamic soaring (wave power) to accomplish this.
- There is a substantial increase in the numbers of adult Gannets that cross west over Kintyre in August and September (see data in Table 3 above);

presumably this indicates urgency by breeding adults from, almost certainly, the Ailsa Craig colony to gain rapid access to foraging grounds in the Atlantic as this period coincides with the final stages of the breeding season when increasing food demands of large chicks reach their peak.

- The record number that crossed overland to the west from Campbeltown in a single day was **79** on 5th September 2019.
- The largest flock recorded crossing to the west from Campbeltown was **16** in September 2017.
- Wind direction appears to have little / no influence on the numbers that embark on this low-lying 8km overland shortcut to the Atlantic.
- Wind strength does not dissuade crossings either; a high total of **50** birds >W on 19th August 2017 in a WNW force 6.
- As in 2017 - 2018, numbers of adults crossing overland diminished rapidly during early October in 2019. As Gannet chicks on Ailsa Craig mainly fledge mid to late September, it follows that very few adults are feeding chicks later and the overland shortcut for the Atlantic from Campbeltown is finally, totally abandoned.
- Gannets have never been recorded crossing overland to the west during the main winter period November – February.



Adult **Northern Gannets** >S over the Atlantic off MSBO
All are bloated / crops and stomachs full of fish prey



Reference...

A paper by **Eddie Maguire / Charlie Robertson** relating to studies monitoring the routine 8km / 9min overland passage of this species during 2017 entitled ***Northern Gannets crossing overland in South Kintyre, Argyll*** was published in the ***Seabird***

Group Newsletter (Number 137 / February 2018) and in Argyll Birds Club's Quarterly Newsletter **The Eider** (Number 123 / March 2018).

Notes on Otters at MSBO 1993 - 2019

Otters are seen frequently from MSBO and around the shoreline at Uisaed Point. Foraging behaviour by Otter in this area is rigorously confined to the lower shore and the marine environment and this is backed up by historical data accrued at MSBO over the last 25 years.

Sightings of Otter at Uisaed Point normally involve foraging activity in the sea by a single animal. When ashore, they are rarely more than 10m from the tideline and, more often than not, customarily appear during the flood stage of the tide.

Large prey items are always brought ashore. Small prey items are routinely eaten on the surface of the sea and are not usually readily identifiable.

There are no records of an Otter inland on Uisaed Point; usually they are within a few metres of the marine environment.

Food items recorded taken by Otters at MSBO 1993-2019

Prey species that have been identified being caught and eaten by an Otter at MSBO

- Gurnard *Eutrigla gurnardus*
- Pipefish *Syngathidae*
- Sand-eels *Ammodytidae*
- Flatfish *Pleuronectidae*
- Rockling *Crenilabrus*
- Wrasse *Crenilabrus*
- Grey Mullet *Chelon labrosus*
- Butterfish *Pholis gunnellus*
- Pipefish *Syngathidae*
- Gobies *Gobiidae*
- Conger *Conger conger*
- Shore Crab *Carcinus maenas*
- Common Lobster *Homarus vulgaris* (one record)
- Common Sea-urchin *Echinus esculentus*.

Although the Otter will obviously be influenced by what is most readily available, this historical information from MSBO reveals that the Otter is a very opportunistic hunter.

The following photos were taken at MSBO on 19th July 2019 and show a dry male Otter displaying its true colours as it heads for the sea to forage on an incoming tide.





The following photo taken on 23rd July 2019 shows an inquisitive stare from an Otter
This was in response to a whistle by the warden!



Acknowledgements...

Dee Brodie; occasional assistant at MSBO

Charlie Robertson; for his long-term devotion as coordinator to the **MSBO Northern Gannet Overland Project**. .

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

Torquil Macneal; Lossit Estate for much encouragement.

Argyll Bird Club; for continued support of MSBO.

Stirling University; for 20+ years of grateful sponsorship.

Jo Goudie; for updating MSBO website = machrihanishbirdobservatory.org.uk

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

The MSBO will be open daily from 1st March 2020



Painted Lady – MSBO 6th August