

The *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the Argyll Bird Club (<http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>)

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# The Eider



A Redwing at Lochgilphead this autumn ©Jim Dickson

To receive the electronic version of *The Eider* in colour, ABC members should send their e-mail address to Dorothy Hogbin (contact details on back page). Past issues (since June 2002) can be downloaded from the club's website.

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**Editorial**

It was good to see so many of you at the autumn meeting in the Cairnbaan Hotel, for a full and interesting programme of talks. For those of you who were unable to attend the meeting, abstracts of the presentations are given on pages 20-25 of this issue.

Looking back at my editorial this time last year makes me realise just how much has been achieved during the year. First, Peter and Dorothy Hogbin very smoothly assumed the roles of treasurer and membership secretary from Bob and Sue Furness. Second, the *Argyll Bird Report* has moved to an electronic format, thanks to some hard work by Jim Dickson. This major change both saves the club money and results in a much earlier publication. We can also incorporate colour photos within the text rather than in the middle of the report as in the past. Third, we now have a FaceBook page that is growing in popularity, so saving time in continuously updating the recent bird sightings on the website.

This issue of the newsletter includes reports of three field trips during the last quarter. Unfortunately, very few people attended two of these outings, which is a shame because some interesting places were visited and some good birds seen. During the next quarter we have five outings, details of which appear on the next page. So, please try and join all, or at least some, of these.

Finally, on behalf of the club, we wish you all a very happy Christmas and great birding in 2020. Thank you so much for continuing to support the Argyll Bird Club.



**Acknowledgements**

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Annette Anderton, Anne Archer, Malcolm Chattwood, Nick Curtis, Jim Dickson, Ian Fisher, Peter & Dorothy Hogbin (photocopying & dispatching the newsletter), Ian Hopkins, David Jardine, Rob Lightfoot, Eddie Maguire, Alistair McGregor, Peter Nash, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Nigel Scriven, Margaret Staley (for black & white illustrations) and John Williams.

**Front cover photo**

Do you have a photo that would be suitable for the front cover of the March 2020 Eider? If so, please send an unedited jpeg image to the Editor before 20 February for consideration. Photos should have been taken in Argyll during November 2019 to February 2020. Thank you.

## Club News

### FIELD TRIPS 2019-2020

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. Please wear suitable footwear and bring waterproof clothing if rain is forecast. There will be a safety briefing at the start of each trip.

**Saturday 30 November. Loch Gilp and Add Estuary.** Led by Jim Dickson (phone 01546 603967. e-mail [meg@jdickson5.plus.com](mailto:meg@jdickson5.plus.com)). Meet at 10.00hrs in Lochgilphead at the Corran Car Park, opposite the caravan park, on the A83, close to the roundabout (A83/A816) at the western end of the town. Please bring your own lunch. The trip will include several short walks (each 300m maximum) on level ground.

**Saturday 25 January. Danna (and Keills).** Led by David Jardine (phone 01546 510200. e-mail [dcjardine@btinternet.com](mailto:dcjardine@btinternet.com)). Rendezvous at 10.00hrs at Tayvallich Village Hall (grid ref NR741870). Please bring a packed lunch. Warm clothing and strong waterproof footwear are advised. This trip will involve walking around

5km on farm tracks, rough ground and the shore.

**Saturday 22 February. Bute.** Led by Ian Hopkins (e-mail [hopkins0079@btinternet.com](mailto:hopkins0079@btinternet.com) mobile phone 07702 123170). Meet Steve Petty at the Colintrave Ferry at 10.00hrs. We aim to share cars to take the minimum number over on the 10.30hrs ferry. Ian will meet us off the ferry on Bute. Please bring a packed lunch. The trip will include several short walks (each 300m maximum) on level ground.

**Saturday 28 March. Sound of Gigha.** Led by Malcolm Chattwood (phone 01546 603389. e-mail [malcolmchattwood@gmail.com](mailto:malcolmchattwood@gmail.com)). Meet at Ronachan Point Car Park on the A83 (grid ref. NR741548) at 10.00hrs. We will catch the ferry to Gigha if the weather is suitable. Lunches will be available at the hotel on the island. The trip will include several short walks (each 300m maximum) on level ground, but a longer walk to Achamore Gardens on Gigha is possible.

**Saturday & Sunday 2-3 May to Mull and Iona is being considered for a small group.** They would catch the early Saturday ferry from Oban, explore the Ross of Mull and then to Iona,

### Programme for the ABC's 2020 Spring Meeting Saturday 14 March at the Burgh Hall, Dunoon

| Time      | Session   |
|-----------|---|
| 0930      | Doors open, coffee and tea  |
| 0950-1000 | Welcome and introduction— <i>Nigel Scriven</i> , Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club                             |
| 1000-1030 | Recent reports, news from the committee & BTO update— <i>Nigel Scriven</i> , Chairman of the Argyll Bird Club |
| 1030-1100 | Beavers & biodiversity— <i>Pete Creech</i>  |
| 1100-1130 | Coffee/tea  |
| 1130-1200 | RSPB conservation in Argyll— <i>Andy Robinson/Ally Lemon</i>  |
| 1200-1245 | A snapshot of wildlife in Madagascar— <i>Roger Broad</i>  |
| 1245-1400 | Lunch (available in the Burgh Hall or in nearby cafes)  |
| 1400-1430 | Where have Arctic Skuas gone? <i>Ben Davill</i> , BTO   |
| 1430-1500 | To be announced   |
| 1500-1530 | Tea/coffee  |
| 1530-1610 | Georgia on my mind— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>  |
| 1610-1630 | Raffle and closing remarks  |

staying overnight at the bunkhouse, and catching the last ferry back to Oban on Sunday. If you are interested in attending this outing please let David Jardine (e-mail [dcjardine@btinternet.com](mailto:dcjardine@btinternet.com) phone 01546 510200) know by 20 December to allow him to assess numbers and to make the required bookings.

## INDOOR MEETINGS 2020

**Spring meeting. Saturday 14 March.** This will be held at the Burgh Hall, Dunoon ([www.dunoonburghhall.org.uk/](http://www.dunoonburghhall.org.uk/)) (see map below). There is a free car park near the hall, with access from Hanover Street (see map). The programme is given on the previous page. The café in the Burgh Hall has limited seating, but offers fresh coffee, a choice of teas, cakes, home-made soup and sandwiches, plus vegetarian, gluten and dairy free options. There are a number of other cafés and bars within easy walking distance of the Burgh Hall.

**Autumn meeting and AGM. Saturday 7 November.** To be held at the Cairnbaan Hotel ([www.cairnbaan.com](http://www.cairnbaan.com)), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). Lunches will be available in the hotel. The programme will be given in a later edition of the *Eider*.

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

## ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 30 (2018)

The latest report is now available (cover photo on next page). It has been produced as a PDF (same as the e-Eider) by Jim Dickson (compiler and editor). The e-ABR can be downloaded from the club's website (under the tab 'Recent Reports 2019')

## ABC FACEBOOK PAGE

The club is now on Facebook, which is open to anyone with a Facebook account.

## ABC INFORMATION LEAFLET

A new information leaflet has been produced. If you know of any suitable locations where these can be displayed, please contact our treasurer, Peter Hogbin (contact details on back page).

## FUNDING FOR BIRD CONSERVATION PROJECTS IN ARGYLL

The ABC is willing to fund or part fund worthwhile bird conservation projects in Argyll. For example, help was given towards the costs of field work for the last year of the Seabird Monitoring Programme (seabird counts 2015-2019). Applications for funding should be submitted to the Secretary (contact details on the back page).



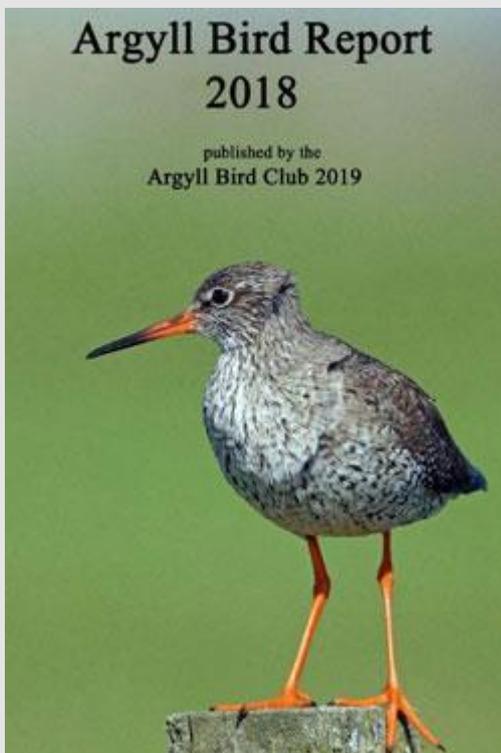
## Financial report

As mentioned in the last copy of the *Eider*, the accounting period this year was extended to 30 September in order to bring the financial accounts into line with the subscription year. That did not significantly alter the figures, but just made it easier to report accurately to the committee about how membership renewals were progressing during the course of the year

It meant that the cost of two *Argyll Bird Reports* appeared in the accounts (see table opposite). You will notice that there has been a considerable saving in producing a pdf rather than a printed version of the report. The change to an electronic report meant that subscriptions can be kept at the same low level for a number of years.

The committee will continue to investigate opportunities for supporting good birding sites in Argyll. Our ambition for the club is to one day own its own reserve.

**Peter Hogbin (Treasurer)**



| Income and Expenditure<br>for the period to 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2019 |                          |                 |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|
| 2017/2018   | INCOME                   | 2018/2019       |
| 2601.23   | Subscriptions            | 2564.23         |
| 749.00  | Sales                    | 887.50          |
| 405.00  | Raffles & donations      | 1112.00         |
| 112.00  | Data fees                | 140.00          |
|   | HMRC Gift Aid            | 415.23          |
|   | Bank interest            | 0.00            |
| 3867.23   | <b>Total Income</b>      | <b>5118.96</b>  |
|   | <b>EXPENDITURE</b>       |                 |
| 1568.00   | Bird report 2017         | 1886.30         |
|   | Bird report 2018         | 600.00          |
| 398.80  | Newsletter               | 491.05          |
|   | Leaflets                 | 79.20           |
| 548.62  | Postage                  | 294.15          |
| 880.10  | Public meetings          | 310.00          |
| 113.00  | Insurance                | 113.00          |
|   | Licences/website         | 0.00            |
|   | Committee expenses       | 445.39          |
| 1100.00   | Grants & Donations       | 2330.00         |
| 39.98   | Club equipment           | 0.00            |
| 4648.50   | <b>Total Expenditure</b> | <b>6549.09</b>  |
| -781.27   | <b>SURPLUS/DEFICIT</b>   | <b>-1430.13</b> |

### Balance sheet as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019

| 2017/2018 | CURRENT ASSETS                               | 2018/2019       |
|-----------|--|-----------------|
|           | Cash on hand                                 | 0.00            |
| 11303.36  | Current Account                              | 1873.23         |
|           | HTB 90 day Business account                  | 8000.00         |
|           | Debtors                                      | 0.00            |
|           | <b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>                   |                 |
| 0.00      | Creditors                                    | 0.00            |
| 11303.36  | <b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>                      | <b>9873.23</b>  |
|           | <b>REPRESENTED BY</b>                        |                 |
| 12084.63  | Working Capital at 15th April 2018           | 11303.36        |
| -781.27   | Surplus/Deficit for year 2018-2019           | <b>-1430.13</b> |
| 11303.36  | <b>TOTAL FUNDS as at 30th September 2019</b> | <b>9873.23</b>  |

Download your copy of the latest *Argyll Bird Report* at:

<http://argyllbirdclub.org/publications/the-argyll-bird-report/>

## The role of your local bird recorder

### Some questions answered

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) acts as the coordinating body for ornithological recording in Scotland. Through the branches, it appoints most of the Local Bird Recorders and publishes a number of Local Bird Reports. In addition, the SOC produces the Online Scottish Bird Report (see page 8).

### What is a Local Bird Recorder (LBR)?

The LBR (or SOC or county bird recorder or simply bird recorder) is typically a volunteer who is responsible for collating individual records of birds that birdwatchers send in for a particular area. The LBR enters the records into some form of database (e.g. BirdTrack), answers queries, and acts as the point of contact between observers and the various rarities committees. The records also form part of a wider, national picture.

The SOC is a core partner in the BTO's BirdTrack record gathering scheme, which acts as a repository for millions of records each year. Once entered, individuals can analyse their own sightings and view them within the wider UK and European context. The total number of entered records for a particular area can be downloaded and analysed or turned into graphs and maps for use in publications, such as the local bird report, by the LBR or report compiler.

### Who co-ordinates bird recording in Scotland?

Most of the LBR Network in Scotland is co-ordinated by the SOC, often in close co-operation with the local branch. Exceptions are: Shetland where recording is co-ordinated by the Shetland Bird Club, Argyll (Argyll Bird Club) and Fife (Fife Bird Club), and two of Scotland's bird observatories (Fair Isle and the Isle of May).

### What happens to the records, and what are they used for?

The LBR's database is clearly a valuable archive of local bird information and has numerous uses. Foremost, the database is the main source of information for the published local bird reports. In the past, these may have been manuscripts that are held in the Waterston Library, but now there is an almost complete network of published local bird reports in Scotland. These reports are further distilled to form the Online Scottish Bird Report.

### History of bird recording in Scotland

The LBRs' Network was established by the SOC in 1968 to support the newly published *Scottish Bird Report*. Before that, significant Scottish records were collated nationally and published in the *Scottish Naturalist* (1871-1957) and then *Scottish Birds* (1958-1967). Scotland's bird observatories also have a long history of bird recording, and local bird clubs also published rec-

ords, but such clubs were scarce. Before 1968, the records were grouped and published according to Scotland's 'faunal regions' (essentially drainage basins) rather than the Vice-County system that was (and still is) used to map the distribution of other animals, invertebrates and plants.

### What areas do the Local Bird Recorders cover?

The various bird recording areas have evolved over the years, but since 1968 they have been based on administrative boundaries that ideally should be those shown on current Ordnance Survey maps. The old counties formed the basis of the recording areas until 1985, when the SOC adopted the revised Region and District boundaries, but many of these have evolved further. Although these boundaries have not always remained unchanged, for consistency, they have been retained as the key to the current Recording Area boundaries.

### Who can send in records?

The Local Bird Recorders welcome records from all birdwatchers, whether they are amateur or professional, beginners or experienced, local or visitor. Don't be put off, all records are potentially valuable.

### What sort of records should be sent in?

Local Bird Recorders are interested in receiving many categories of bird sightings within their areas. For example:

- data on breeding birds, such as territory counts, Common Bird Census data, counts of seabird colonies and indications of breeding success
- regular counts throughout the year from your local patch, e.g. monthly peak wildfowl and wader counts
- early and late summer and winter migrants
- counts of seabird passage (preferably over timed periods and including commoner species)
- all records relating to influxes (e.g. Waxwing, Crossbill, Quail, Little Auk etc.)
- all records of uncommon birds and rarities.

In addition to the basic data, it is often of great interest to include general comments relating to some of the records (e.g. that was a record count, the best/poorest year for a particular species).

Bear in mind that over the years the most useful records have been those that allow comparison between years and document the importance of local bird populations, which can potentially be used to reveal population changes.

It is very important to send records to the LBR even if they have previously been phoned in to information services such as Rare Bird Alert, BirdGuides or Birdline Scotland. This confirms the record submission, attributes it to a definite source and provides a point of contact should it be required.

#### **When should the records be sent in?**

In order that the annual analysis of records can take place promptly, all records should be submitted by the end of January of the following year. Some recorders also welcome periodic submission of records during the year itself in order to spread the task of data entry.

#### **What format should the submission take?**

Each LBR will have a preferred format for standard record submissions, so it is always best to check with them (e.g. in the latest Local Bird Report). The most common approach is to sort the records by species, but it may be agreeable to list them by date and locality. All LBRs accept records in digital formats, particularly via BirdTrack or as Excel files. It is worth contacting the respective LBR to find out the preferred form for record submission.

#### **Which species require supporting descriptions?**

For most of us, the sight of an unusual or rare species is the spice of birdwatching, and there is nothing more exciting than discovering a rarity oneself. But in order to give an accurate account of the year's sightings in Local Bird Reports, all records of unusual species should be supported by written details of circumstances and observations sufficient to prove identification. All records published must stand the scrutiny not only of readers today but also of those who may refer to these reports in the future. With these aims, Scotland now has a three-tier system of adjudication on records—the 'British Birds' Rarities Committee (BBRC) being responsible for British rarities, the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) for Scottish rare birds and local records committees (LRC) for lesser rarities and local rarities. Details of the species that each local records committee considers are listed in the respective local bird reports and the local recording pages on the SOC website for each region. A suggested format for a rarities submission is also available on the SOC website—click the 'bird recording' option on the website home page.

#### **Where should I send records of rarities?**

The preferred route for submitting descriptions of rarities is to send them to the LBR who will then forward them to the relevant Records Committee (BBRC, SBRC or Local RC). Subsequent decisions are then returned along the same route.

#### **Where should I send records of rare breeding species, including the less common raptors?**

In the past there was potential for records of rare breeding birds to be lost, as the records were often retained by the individual observers. Since its establishment in 1973, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) has become the recognised repository for all such records. The records are kept in confidence, but can be accessed by the sponsoring organisations (RSPB, BTO etc.) for official use. Similarly, records of the less common raptors are now kept centrally in the archives of the local Raptor Study Groups and breeding records are lodged with the national Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme.

The important issue is that these records are held securely somewhere and that they keep their necessary confidentiality, but they are nevertheless made available for appropriate conservation use by relevant individuals and organisations. Records can be submitted direct to the body concerned, or channelled via the LBR, if preferred. It should be noted that in the cases mentioned above, only summary data is normally fed back to the Local Bird Recorder.

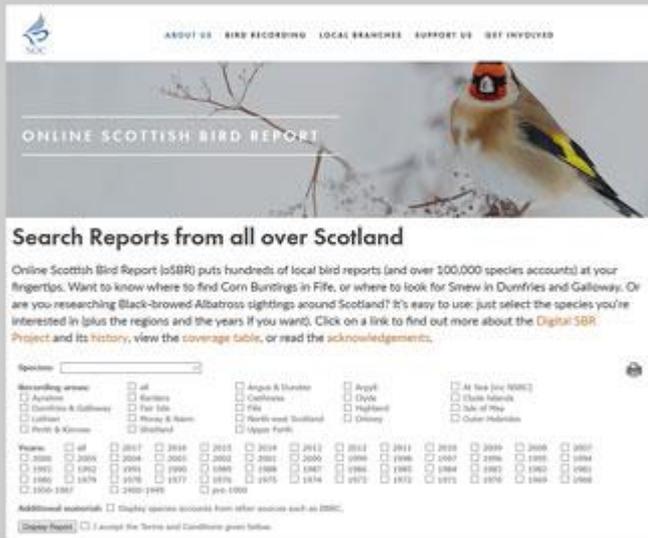
#### **Should results of other surveys (e.g. WeBS, BTO or RSPB) be sent to the Recorder?**

Local surveys are often organised by the LBR or local SOC Branch, and hopefully the results will be deposited with the Recorder. However, the only routine feedback from national surveys is likely to be in the final published summary, unless there is a local arrangement with the organiser (e.g. the BTO Regional Representative, or local WeBS organiser). You may decide therefore to send a digital copy of your own results of such surveys to the Local Recorder, and the LBR can amalgamate these, potentially for separate inclusion in the local report, and also submit a copy for the SOC archive. The LBR is also able to make a specific data request should they want information from schemes such as WeBS or BBS for use in their annual report.

**For more information or any queries about bird recording in Argyll please contact Jim Dickson (Argyll Bird Recorder) or Malcolm Chattwood (Assistant Recorder) whose contact details can be found on the ABC website and at the end of this Eider.**



# Online Scottish Bird Report (oSBR)



Species descriptions from past editions of many Scottish local bird reports can be viewed via the SOC's oSBR.

This facility is free and simple to use. Find it in the 'Bird Recording' menu at [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk), choose a species, and select the year(s) and region(s) you are interested in.

New features include the ability to extend a search to all species (in a year/area) and to produce a pdf file of the search results.

## Enhancements to oSBR

Several major enhancements were made to oSBR in August 2019.

You now have the ability to extend a search to all species in a specified year/area. To enable this, 'all species' has been added to the drop-down list of species along with pre-existing 'all areas' and 'all years'—but they can't be used together! If all species is selected, then only a single area/year is possible. This enables you to replicate a local bird report for a specific year.

If you choose a species in the drop-down menu, linked subspecies and unattributed records will also be displayed e.g. if 'Mute Swan' is selected 'swan sp.' will also be displayed.

Cross-border records. A BBRC record attributed to two adjoining areas will now display if either area is selected.

You can now print or produce a pdf of the output of your search. Clicking the 'print' icon (top right) will open your computer's print menu. Here, depending on your setup, you should be able to choose to save to a pdf or use your printer.

### Addition of North Sea Bird Club data.

Thanks to input from NSBC Recorder, Andy Thorpe, annual species summaries since the 1990s, plus the 10th and 25th anniversary summaries (as 'other sources', see below) are now available.

The ability to add sources of information other than local bird reports has also been expanded. The BBRC archives are one such database, but

now local avifaunas and other species summaries can also be selected. 'Other sources' that have been uploaded to date include 'The Birds of the Lothians' (1986) and Eagle Clarke's 'Studies in Bird Migration' Fair Isle summaries published in 1912.

Thanks go to Stephen Hunter for implementing these exciting enhancements.

### ..and a note from David Jardine

Have you ever wondered about the occurrence of a particular species of bird in Argyll? Have they occurred here before? How many? Where and When? This information is contained in past copies of the *Argyll Bird Report*, which have now been collated into the 'Online Scottish Bird Report'. This allows you to search all the reports from Argyll back to 1980 by species. The database also includes details from the published *Scottish Bird Reports*, other local bird reports and other sources. This mine of information, which has been pulled together by the Scottish Ornithologists Club is available at <https://www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/online-scottish-bird-report>. It is very easy to use and you'll be surprised what you can learn from it; give it a wee try by answering these:

- Does Ring Ouzel occur every year in Argyll?
- In what year was the Northern Parula found on Tiree?
- When was Corn Bunting last seen in Argyll?
- Explore the rise in the number of Little Egrets in the county.

## BTO update December 2019

The **Upland Rovers** scheme encourages one-off visits to a selection of rarely-visited BBS squares. This allows priceless data to be collected, which we would not otherwise receive. If you're planning a highland trip in the spring, and can squeeze in an upland BBS square, you can choose one at <https://app.bto.org/bbs/public/upland-rovers.jsp>

There were two **BTO training days** recently run in Argyll by Ben Darvill of BTO Scotland for identification of wetland birds, and to encourage participation in the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). They took place on 13 October and 11 November at Ardrishaig and at Craignure respectively. Both had 17 participants and were very well received. They drew participants from outside Argyll, and resulted in many folk signing for WeBS sites. Argyll doesn't have that many counters compared to the number of sites, so there are still many more sites available. If you wish to find a site near you, go to <https://app.bto.org/websonline/sites/vacant/vacant-sites.jsp>

An **International Swan Count** will take place on 11th and 12th January coinciding with the

WeBS count days. Even if you're not a WeBS counter you can contribute by counting any Bewick's or Whooper Swans and reporting them online at <https://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/recording> or by completing a form from here <https://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Swan-2020-form-v2.pdf>

All WeBS data will contribute, but there is some additional information being sought so you can add more value to your counts if you submit extra data using the recording form. Counts are sought from any non-WeBS sites where the swans occur, so non-WeBS counters can contribute as well.

The annual **National Nestbox Week** takes place again during 14–21 February. For more information on nestboxes go to <https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/nnbw>

2020 is mopping up year for counting seabirds for the **Seabirds Count Census**. If you have data to contribute or you can visit colonies, please contact Nigel Scriven at [njscriven@gmail.com](mailto:njscriven@gmail.com)

**Nigel Scriven**



The new app for your mobile phone gives details of nearly 400 of Scotland's top birdwatching spots. New sites will continue to be added and existing ones updated as far as possible (for more details see the September 2019 *Eider*, page 12). You can download the app at [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk)

Jim Dickson (Argyll Bird Recorder, contact details on last page) coordinated 48 of the best birdwatching sites in Argyll this spring for use in the app and is now looking to add many more sites. This will rely on help from Argyll Bird Club members who have good local knowledge of sites they know well. Please have a look at the sites already added for Argyll and let Jim know if you would like to help to add new sites.

## Mike Peacock 1953-2019



Mike Peacock ringing Choughs on Oronsay, February 2007 ©David Jardine

Mike Peacock died on Islay in early September following a brave fight against cancer. He will be greatly missed. Mike grew up in Nottingham and started birding in his teens, ringing with the South-West Notts Ringing Group and becoming involved with the Wash Wader Group in the 1970s. An early visit to Cape Clear Island in Ireland gave him the 'island bug' which developed further when he took up posts at Bardsey Bird Observatory (1975, 1976, Assistant Warden during 1978 and 1979) and Fair Isle Bird Observatory (Assistant Warden 1977)

He returned to Nottingham and received a horticultural training, which he used to good effect later in life winning prizes for his veg-

etables at the Islay Show or Colonsay 'Root & Grain'.

However, the island bug began to bite again and in 1984 he moved north with his partner, Val, soon to become his wife, as she took up a nursing post on Fetlar in Shetland. After a few years working hard as a fencing contractor with the island crofters during the winter and on bird surveys during the summer, he became the RSPB warden on the island. Here he was involved in helping the last of Fetlar's Snowy Owls and habitat improvements which reversed the declining population trend of Britain's remaining Red-necked Phalaropes. It was here that he and Val found Britain's first ever Chestnut-sided

Warbler.

His hard work and enthusiasm was soon recognised within RSPB, and Shetland's loss was Argyll's gain when he and Val moved to Islay in 1988, where Mike took over responsibility at the Gruinart Reserve. This led to a series of changes at Gruinart, first, with RSPB taking the farming back 'in hand' and then moving the focus of the reserve from a single species (Barnacle Goose) to providing wider conservation benefit. He drove forward the development of the Floods at Gruinart, which provided optimum habitat for many waders, principally Lapwing and Redshank. Elsewhere on the reserve 'corners' were made for Corncrakes. Through his encouragement further acquisitions were made on Islay by RSPB to help Chough and other species. As a ringer he also monitored the populations of Barn Owls and Hen Harriers on Islay with Malcolm Ogilvie for the Argyll Raptor Study Group.

In 2000, Mike and Val moved from Islay to Oronsay, vicariously swapping roles with James and Sally How to allow them to raise their daughter on a larger island. Here, and on the adjoining island of Colonsay, Mike's efforts on Corncrake conservation saw the population rise from 32 calling males in 2000 to 86 in 2014. This effort and his work for Chough was recognised when he was Highly Commended in the Species Champion section

of the Nature of Scotland Awards (NoSA) in 2015, when he and Val also received the NoSA Lifetime Achievement Award for their work and attention to ecological detail to support a wide range of species (including Irish Ladies Tresses and mining bees) on the spectacular edge of their range in the United Kingdom.

In addition to his contribution to habitat management, an enduring legacy of Mike's work was his nurturing and coaching younger generations of conservation managers. Those involved under his wing in the last three decades are now making a difference throughout the country (Strathbeg, Galloway, Strontian, Dorset to mention a few) and worldwide (Antarctica, Denmark....).

Mike's life was celebrated by his family and his many friends at an event at Gruinart in mid-September, but the birds weren't missing. A White-tailed Eagle (another species he had been involved in monitoring in recent years) flew past the graveyard at the end of the service. The best wishes and sympathies of the Argyll Bird Club are extended to Mike's wife, Val, and his sister and brother, Tina and Peter, and their families.

**David Jardine (with help from Peter Roberts)**



Barnacle Geese on Islay, 8 November 2019 ©Jim Dickson

## ABC field trip to Kintyre and Machrihanish Seabird Observatory on 31 August



Red Knot, 68 flew south on 31 August ©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. It is generally the case that Kintyre fares rather better than Mid-Argyll. Therefore, it was 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. Once south of Clachan the weather did clear, with the view across to Islay only occasionally obscured by showers. The trip was billed as an opportunity to see Gannets taking the overland shortcut from their Ailsa Craig nesting colony in the Firth of Clyde to their feeding grounds to the west of the Kintyre peninsula. Eddie Maguire, the Warden at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) has been counting birds and documenting this unusual activity, which has been regularly reported in the *Eider* and *Argyll Bird Report 28*. Eddie's work relies on a "spotter" at the

eastern side of the peninsula at Campbeltown Loch, where Charlie Robertson fulfils this role. Charlie passes reports of overflying birds to MSBO by phone. This prompts Eddie to take a break from sea-watching to look out for birds arriving from the east, about nine minutes later. Charlie is in the fortunate position of being able to see the departing Gannets from his front window and so benefits from the comforts and facilities that his home provides—a distinct and welcome advantage during the recent bad weather.

On the day of the field trip Charlie kindly abandoned his normal viewing point to meet up at the Old Quay. He explained how he used his experience in watching the Gannets to decide "will they/won't they" make the overland crossing. The meeting point for the trip had been published as the Information Centre at the pier but unfortunately the centre had been a victim of recent cuts, and was now a teashop. That wasn't much help to Alun and Helen who,



Black-tailed Godwits at The Lagan on 31 August ©Eddie Maguire

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 met up with them around lunchtime. Back at the Old Quay, Charlie and I were able to shelter from the occasional heavy shower and watch a single bird and a pair fighting their way into the westerly force 5/6 wind as they headed off over the town and out towards their fishing grounds beyond Machrihanish. The high tide was covering the shore along the Esplanade and the foraging areas for Turnstones and Curlew, but the odd 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 Cormorants and a flock of feeding Gannets were visible offshore, with a couple of Manx Shearwaters alternatively flashing black and white as they skimmed 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 and House Sparrow were heard rather than seen although a 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. Four Mallard were the only ducks in evidence. A siege of 13 Grey Herons appeared almost like additional sentries close to the gate of the NATO oil depot at Glenramskill. In truth they were simply sheltering until they, like the Curlews, could take advantage of the forthcoming low tide.

Arrival at MSBO and hearing of the rendezvous travails of Alun and 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 Gannets and Kittiwakes were the odd Sandwich Tern, Bonxie and Red-throated Diver to add a touch of variety and interest. The first Wigeon of the season included a single male accompanying five females. They flew past the hide heading south, but returned a few minutes later to the shelter provided in the bay. A phone call from Charlie Robertson in Campbeltown resulted in the comfort of the hide being temporarily abandoned to scan the area towards the airfield to try and spot the incoming Gannet. This sounds easier than it actually was because of the necessity to scan a wide area of Machrihanish Bay. A Gannet that suddenly appears in view may have come either from the seaward side or overland. This is when experience comes to the fore and a good view will may reveal an empty crop, showing the bird is



the one reported by Charlie nine or so minutes previously. After scanning the area for a couple of minutes, a single adult Gannet made its way laboriously towards the hide, building anticipation that an empty crop would reveal it was the subject of Charlie's message a few minutes earlier. The bird passed close by the hide and headed out to sea in an effort to fill its visibly empty crop, before returning to Ailsa Craig later on the long way round via the Mull of Kintyre. The photo on the previous page shows an adult with a full crop.

As thoughts were turning to call it a day, a single Bar-tailed Godwit flew low past the hide to increase the wader count beyond the Curlew, Sanderling, Knot and Turnstone seen earlier. Thankfully the challenging weather hadn't deterred a few Gannets from making their five 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.

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

**Common Shelduck**, three juvs present. **Eurasian Wigeon**, five including an adult male. **Red-throated Diver**, five flying (>) S. **Northern Gannet**, the total crossing Kintyre in a NW force 5-6 on 31st was 20 between 10.40–18.50hrs, making a total for the month of 624. **Manx Shearwater**, 140 >S in 2hrs am. **Peregrine Falcon**, an adult. Eurasian Oystercatcher, 40 >S. **Dunlin**, 28 >S. **Sanderling**, 40 >S. **Red Knot**, 58 >S (five flocks, largest 23). **Common Redshank**, 19 >S. **Ruddy Turnstone**, 33 >S. **Bar-tailed Godwit**, one >S. **Whimbrel**, three >S. **Great Skua**, two >S. **Arctic Skua**, two pale and one dark phase >S. **Black-legged Kittiwake**, a total of 60 >S in 6hrs. **Sandwich Tern**, two (ad and 1CY).

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

**Malcolm Chattwood**

### ABC field trip to Benmore Gardens on 28 September



An enormous Western Hemlock in Benmore Gardens ©Steve Petty

Early on the weather looked promising, so I headed out to the meeting point at Benmore Gardens Car Park. On arrival I spotted pair of Dipper close to the road bridge. As I walked closer to the river a single male Goosander flew down stream past me. Then, just out the corner of my eye a slight movement drew my attention to a single Treecreeper working its way up the trunk of a nearby conifer.

Also, in the car park were numerous finches including a pair of Greenfinch, which were feeding close to a large group of Chaffinch, who were being periodically chased by a Robin.

Two people, Alun ap Rhisiart and Anne Wood arrived by ten o'clock for the field trip. So, we decided first to go for a coffee, where we had a short safety briefing for the walk. By 10.30hrs no other folk had arrived, so we continued into the

gardens.

As we walked to the bird hide, close to the entrance, we saw Red Squirrels running about. From the hide we saw, Coal, Blue and Great Tit on the bird feeders, and a Nuthatch put in a brief appearance. We then walked through the formal gardens. I explained the changes I have seen over the years. There is no longer the wonderful flower beds that were once maintained by the staff, and many of the dwarf conifers have been removed over the years due to infection by a species of *Phytophthora*, a fungal-type pathogen. Blackbird, Song Thrush and a couple of Mistle Thrushes made themselves known, and a large flock of Siskin was feeding in nearby conifers. Then, a Great Spotted Woodpecker landed in the tree and the Siskins scattered in all directions.

We headed to the upper view point, accompanied by a Robin. Numerous chaffinches were feeding on the pathways along with Wood Pigeons. Groups of siskin occasionally flew past.

These were undoubtedly attracted to the gardens by the abundance of cones. Conifer seed is an important food source for this species. Walking from the view point a pair of raven were first heard then seen as we headed down the hill and through the recently-established Chilean area of the gardens. A Wren popped out long enough for a quick picture, closely followed by a single Goldcrest.

Heading back to the car park, we made a final visit to the squirrel hide. A Nuthatch, then a Great Spotted Woodpecker came in for a quick feed along with the usual tits and finches.

We had seen 21 species throughout the walk, albeit a low species count, but the quality was good, and Argyll Bird Club gained a new member as Anne decided to join on the day.

**Alistair McGregor**



**Top left photo.** Female Great Spotted Woodpecker

**Bottom left photo.** Wren

**Top right photo.** Nuthatch

All images ©Alistair McGregor, and all photographed on the day of the outing

## ABC field trip to Lismore and Loch Laich on 26 October



Lunchtime at Port Ramsay, Lismore ©David Jardine

A group of 13 members and friends met at Appin Hall Car Park for the outing to Lismore and Loch Laich, despite the 'iffy' weather forecast. With dark clouds, sunshine and frequent rainbows the group were very lucky to experience only a few short showers in the fresh westerly wind.

Before leaving the car-park, a flock of Fieldfares, with a few Redwing (which could be picked out amongst their larger cousins by their shorter tails and dark underwings) flew over. This was to be a recurring theme of the day, with flocks be-

ing seen on a regular basis. Over a thousand thrushes were seen on the outing, around Rowans and Hawthorn berries, and flying over. Other species heard at the car park, which weren't seen later included Collared Dove and Treecreeper.

After the safety briefing and reducing the number of vehicles, the group moved off and stopped at the Jubilee Bridge by Loch Laich. The tide was very low and the light made it difficult picking out birds on the exposed shore,



Enjoying a view of an Otter, east Lismore ©David Jardine

but a few Wigeon and Canada Geese were seen and a Grey Wagtail with its higher pitched call (than Pied Wagtail) flew by. A young Peregrine shot across the bay, eluding some of the group, but shortly afterwards it reappeared above the hillside opposite where it sported with three Buzzards, and this time was seen by all.

After catching the foot ferry over to Lismore the party walked down the east coast, enjoying views of a (increasingly rare) Greenfinch drinking at a puddle on the road. This was one of a group of four that had been feeding on the fruits of *Rosa rugosa* in a garden at Rubha Mor.

Further down the road the party enjoyed good views of an Otter, possibly a male, feeding at the water's edge. At one point it came ashore with a spiny fish, thought to have been a Sea Scorpion, before swimming off south. While watching this, the raucous calls of a Jay were heard from the adjacent woodland, followed by calls of a Buzzard. However, controversy was introduced as leader David Jardine questioned whether these should be included in the list as neither bird had been seen and whether the possibility of a Starling imitating these species had been ruled out! A Buzzard was seen shortly afterwards and Starlings were also seen at Port Ramsay.

Moving out of the sheltered east coast, the group walked briskly round to Port Ramsay adding Meadow Pipit to the day's list and then found three Reed Buntings and a Stonechat as they approached the village. The tide was rising allowing views of 21 Red-breasted Mergansers feeding along the shore, while 12 Teal slept nearby. There were a few Curlews and Oystercatchers and two Redshank on the exposed mud, but the five Ringed Plovers were extremely difficult to pick out after they flew in and landed. The light and views to snow-clad mountains were exceptional making the walk worthwhile.

After lunch the leader led the group round toward Fennachrochan to view the bay from a different angle in the hope of finding a Little Egret, which had been reported in the area recently. A few of the party lingered, watching the shore.

The advanced party returned to find that shortly after they had moved off the egret had walked out into full view for those who had remained. Meanwhile it had disappeared around a rock and remained elusive! Fortunately, it was relocated and everybody enjoyed good views of it from the village before a shower came in.

The walk back to the ferry was easier with the wind at our backs and a male Kestrel was seen by a few. While waiting for the ferry three winter-plumaged Black Guillemots were picked out around the pier and two more Otters (thought to be a mother and a cub) were picked out on the offshore islands after they disturbed the roosting Shags and Cormorants. Many of the party also enjoyed the cake that was found in the community telephone kiosk (honesty box)!

To finish, the group stopped briefly at Loch Laich on the way back from the ferry. The tide was now very high with all the waders concentrated on a disappearing islet. Three Greenshank and eight Bar-tailed Godwits were picked out under a superb rainbow finish (see below). It rained much of the journey home.....'we sneaked that one in!'

**Species List.** Greylag, Canada Goose, Wigeon\*, Teal, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Great Northern Diver, Cormorant, Shag, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine\*, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Dunlin\*, Bar-tailed Godwit\*, Curlew, Redshank, Greenshank\*, Black-headed Gull\*, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Rock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove\*, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Grey Wagtail\*, Pied Wagtail\*, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit\*, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Treecreeper\*, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook\*, Hooded Crow, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting (61 species, \*not recorded on Lismore).

**David Jardine**



A rainbow to finish the day ©Nigel Scriven

## A week in Kintyre

4-11 November 2019



A view across the causeway (Dhorlin) to Davaar Island ©Peter Nash

In November last year we visited Kintyre, mainly to discover an area of Scotland we had never been to before, and 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 best sites for watching birds, but also with the knowledge that there are huge areas of the peninsula which are not well watched, especially in November. Whilst it was a little late in the season, the chance of finding something more interesting was another compelling reason for our visit.

We stayed on the Saddell Estate, and our arrival in the early evening of the 4th was met by a kronking Common Raven and a very vocal Tawny Owl calling from the trees above our cottage (Saddell Lodge). The first morning dawned clear, dry and bright, so we decided to explore one of the many forestry roads. We drove up from the west side near Gigha over the hills to Carradale. On our way we drove along Glen Barr, noting a number of woodland species as well as Common Raven and Common Buzzard. There was nothing more exotic, despite the farmer at Arnicle Farm assuring us of the region's pedigree for harriers and eagles! Only a few minutes later we saw a ringtail Hen Harrier along the forestry track! During the remainder of our day we saw more Ravens, Buzzards, a large flock of Redwings, and Fieldfares, with a couple of Mistle Thrushes and several Bullfinches.

Returning to Saddell, we enjoyed an afternoon's walk along the shore bay, where we saw Grey Wagtail, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Curlew and Common Redshank, with more of the usual woodland species on our way back, just as the light was fading. Again, our "local" Tawny Owl was very vocal as we cooked our dinner of lamb curry.

Wednesday dawned wet, so we spent the day in Campbeltown touring the distilleries. A very pleasant "task", and we hardly noticed the rain! Both tasting sessions were excellent. A number of samples were purchased for further testing over the forthcoming days, back at the lodge, and, of course, at home! The local bus was used to transport us safely to and from Saddell. Bird-

watching was not entirely abandoned as we noted seven 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.

On Thursday, we were presented with a dry but cold day. However, the weather became more unpleasant as the day wore on. So, we decided to look for geese. We headed out to Drumlemble and the various tracks around the Laggan where we were not 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 eight Whooper Swans. We also watched a Merlin chasing its prey within a large group of Common Starlings. A European Stonechat was also seen, and Common Buzzards and corvids were almost everywhere. We then took a drive to Southend via the coast road stopping at the Dhorlin (see photo above). But, after a quick walk we soon beat a hasty retreat to our car, as the cold north-easterly wind was now accompanied by stinging rain. However, we did see Dunlin, Common Redshank, Little Grebe (two), 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. There we were pleased to see both Red-throated and Great Northern Diver amongst the sea ducks, Cormorants and gulls.

After a brief stop for cake in Muneroy tea rooms, we continued and stopped at the Machrihanish Bird Observatory (MSBO). We had collected a key for the observatory from Eddie Maguire on our way to Saddell on Monday. The sea was quiet, reflecting the unhelpful north-easterly wind. We spent an hour there before the cold and fading light saw us retreat back to our accommodation to eat and light the fire. Later on we sampled some Campbeltown products to raise our spirits!

We awoke to a cloudless, windless, clear day on

Friday (8th), which quickly turned into bright sunshine and felt warm in the still atmosphere. Determined to make the most of the weather, we drove to Loch Lussa (photo below) and walked the forestry road in stunning "christmas-card" conditions. Alas, we did not see an eagle, nor even a Hen Harrier (which we had noted here last year). However, 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 produced a good number of Common Snipe. The 20 we recorded was probably less than half the number present. 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 ten Canada Geese we had seen at the far end of the loch flew 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 plan was derailed when we saw an unidentified auk from our car. The Dhorlin, a natural shingle causeway to Davaar Island, was slowly being revealed by the retreating tide. We took advantage of this and spent almost 3hrs 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, three Dunlin, one Bar-Tailed Godwit, one Red Knot, one Shelduck and eight Turnstone as well as an astonishing (to us inland birders) 294 Oystercatchers! In total, some 28 species were recorded. Oh, and the unknown auk turned out to be a Little Auk, which stayed around the entire duration of the afternoon, on one occasion dodging a couple of minesweepers that had come into the bay to refuel!

One good day deserves, in our case, an awfully wet one! And, we spent Saturday (9th) ensconced in MBSO for four and a half hours. Here we could at least keep warm and drink tea, but saw few birds given the wind direction. Our best sightings were of a single Black-throated Diver and a Pur-

ple Sandpiper, the latter dodging the waves on the rocks outside the observatory, which threatened to wipe out the brave little wader at each surge.

On our final day (Sunday 10th), we were once again blessed with another crystal clear and still day. So, we 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 just north of the fish farm where the sound narrows. Our tally of birds was good. We saw 100 Red-breasted Mergansers, 20 Great Northern Divers, at least one Black-throated Diver, 41 Common Scoter, two Velvet Scoters, three Long-tailed Duck, seven Ringed Plover, 31 Curlew and at least 250 White-fronted Geese. The latter two species being seen in a wet field alongside the road down to the caravan park. Inevitably, our best bird was set to be seen right at the end of our holiday. Walking back up the track to our car, just north of the fish farm, we spotted two birds feeding on the track in front of us. Having spent two weeks in early October on St Agnes in Scilly, birding every day, we somehow managing to miss this species. We were delighted when we realised we were looking at a couple of Snow Buntings. Not the rarest of birds, but always nice to see.

Before driving home we headed back to MSBO to return the key. We found Eddie and Dee and caught up with our last observations. Eddie dryly noted that tomorrow would likely be a good sea-watching day, being squally with 50-60mph gusts. Just our luck!

It was a 475 mile drive home after our week in Kintyre, which produced a tidy list of 84 species and some pleasant weather, excellent company, beautiful scenery and generous hospitality.

No doubt we will return!

**Peter Nash (Sandy, Bedfordshire) & Nick Curtis (Tamworth, Staffordshire)**



The north end of Loch Lussa ©Peter Nash



The Cairnbaan Hotel. The usual venue for the autumn meeting ©Steve Petty

## Introduction

Nigel Scriven (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the autumn meeting of the club. He then gave a brief account of some notable birds seen in Argyll since the spring meeting. These included a female Snowy Owl on Coll in April, a possible Barolo (Little) Shearwater off Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in September, a Baird's Sandpiper on Tiree and Pectoral Sandpipers on Mull and Islay. It had also been a good autumn for Yellow-browed Warblers, with a number of birds on Tiree, and some even reported on mainland Argyll. During the last week of October large flocks of Redwing and Fieldfare had arrived. Nigel also gave a brief account of the work undertaken by the club's committee.

## Living with swifts—Annette Anderton (summary by Malcolm Chattwood)

I'm probably not the only Argyll Bird Club member who watches a drama on television and subconsciously listens to birdsong in the background. When the birdsong or species don't tie in with the season or geography it can lead to a futile remonstrance, which goes unheeded by either the television or my wife! The sound of screaming Swifts around the spires of Oxford, whilst the sleuthing heroes of Colin Dexter's Morse series trawl the colleges for the perpetrator of a gruesome murder, is a case in mind. However, filming always does seem to be set in summer, so Swifts

are more probable than possible.

One of the many facts we learnt from Annette's talk was that the tower of the Oxford Museum of Natural History is home to a colony of nesting Swifts that has been studied since 1947. So, the persistent sound of screaming Swifts on the Morse/Lewis/Endeavour soundtrack is perhaps not surprising. The Oxford study has provided valuable information on the nesting habits and behaviour of this fascinating bird. Annette described how the Swift had been considered by natural historians from the first accurate illustration in 1676, through to the latest attempts to track their migration routes using of tiny geolocators attached to their backs. She then went on to illustrate aspects of their UK and world distribution, migration



Annette Anderton ©David Palmar [www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)

A nest camera photo of two Swifts in one of Annette's boxes ©Annette Anderton



routes, breeding cycle and feeding habits, so providing an insight into the Swifts' unusual life.

On a more modest scale, and less than 5km from our meeting venue, Annette and Roger Anderton have been encouraging Swifts to share their home. Their efforts to accommodate Swifts included the move from a proprietary design of nest box to a refined home constructed box, with the main aim of dissuading Starlings from settling in to breed prior to the Swifts return from Africa in May. In 2018 cameras were installed in two boxes, but unfortunately the birds didn't take up the offer. 2019 proved to be more successful and from mid-July onwards two 'nestlings' were filmed inside one of the boxes with the birds exhibiting similar behaviour to those observed in the Oxford study. However, a combination of appearance and behaviour suggested the two birds being filmed were neither adults nor nestlings, but more likely to be non-breeding sub-adults. Observed behaviour from the cameras inside the boxes and outside in the garden included birds banging on the box, the purpose being unclear, but possibly to deter predators from approaching. The sub-adults were also seen to be sleeping in the box and sheltering from rain. This was a departure from the popular belief that Swifts spend all their time on the wing when not incubating eggs or feeding young.

Annette's talk gave the audience a fascinating insight into the work and commitment involved in providing a home for one of our favourite summer visitors, which is sadly quite scarce over much of Argyll. The use of miniature cameras allowed us to see the behaviour of birds in the box, raising the possibility of them returning next year to perhaps lay eggs and raise their own young. It's an exciting prospect and hopefully one that can be reported at a future club meeting.

**Editor's note:** The Argyll Bird Club intends to undertake a survey of breeding Swifts in Argyll in 2020/ More information about this will be given in the March *Eider*.

**Let's go snorkelling—David Jardine**  
(summary David Jardine)



David Jardine ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Great Northern Divers are often seen snorkelling—swimming along with their heads underwater looking for prey. David's talk was about a new project on their feeding habits. A recent proposal to increase the size of the fish-farm in the proposed Special Protection Area in the Sound of Gigha had intrigued him. The diet of Great Northern Divers is not particularly well known and is based either on some old studies or small sample sizes from casualties from oil spill incidents.

The use of a computer search engine had found almost a hundred photographs of Great Northern Divers with prey in their bills. Around 20% of these were from freshwater sites with the remainder from marine environments. Prey items could be identified in many of these photographs (see below). Most were benthic (bottom dwelling) species, suggesting that Great Northern Divers fed largely along the seabed.

David had started to observe the feeding habits of divers and was noting the proportion of dives when visible prey was brought to the surface. On many dives no prey was visible, leaving open the question of whether photographs and observations recorded all prey items. His preliminary observations found that divers brought prey to the surface on 10-15% of dives, but a larger sample was required to check for seasonal and site differ-



Great Northern Diver with langoustine, Colonsay ©Ian Fisher

ences.

Over half of his observations were of crabs being eaten, along with fish (over 12% of which were flat fish). Other prey items included Nephrops (langoustine), a razor clam, a whelk and other unidentified items.

When considering the possible effects of aquaculture on Great Northern Divers, the area of impact of the fish farm on the divers' food sources needs to be better understood. Similarly, David asked whether other fishing activities, such as dredging for scallops or trawling, might have a bigger area impact within the pSPA. These activities might even provide positive benefits for Great Northern Divers if they increased the abundance of some key food items, such as crabs.

This new study will aim to obtain more feeding observations, quantify the relative importance in terms of the mass of the different prey (correcting for any not brought to the surface), and investigate the ecology of the diver's main prey.

David is keen to receive any photographs of Great Northern Divers with prey in their bills (and also of divers in wing moult), and to receive prompt notification of any dead birds, which might allow stomach contents to be determined.

### **Special investigations—James Leonard** (summary by Alistair McGregor)

James Leonard has been a keen birder and nature lover all his life. He has been employed by the Scottish SPCA for the last five years, and works within the Special Investigations Unit (SIU)

Prior to this he worked for nine years with the RSPB's investigations team where he gained knowledge on how to detect and investigate raptor persecution and bird crime.

James explained that the SSPCA have powers under the Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) 2006. This allows them to seize animals that have been injured or are ill without a

warrant.

SIU mission statement is to Investigate, Prevent, Detect and Disrupt, and they deal mostly with serious and organised animal cruelty in Scotland. They work along with other agencies (police, SCDA, local authorities and port authorities) to secure convictions for crimes that have been committed against animals.

James explained some of the tools they have for this task. The SIU have the use of police the national computer data base (PNC), so each member of the unit must do rigorous training and comply with all regulations in the use of this tool.

James explained the cruelty involved in dog fighting and badger baiting and showed some graphic images of dogs that had been seized on raids. He mentioned a couple of cases that had resulted in custodial sentences and life-time bans from keeping dogs. However, these people often move areas and continue such criminal activities elsewhere.

James spoke of the puppy trade and the cruelty involved, which often results in high mortality. Some of the pictures depicted pups and dogs in squalid conditions during transportation in crates stacked on top of each other, and without food or water.

He gave a brief talk on snares and traps, showing pictures of the illegal use of both. These included Fenn traps set in the open or on poles for birds of prey, and snares set on fences where trapped animals can be horrifically injured. He mentioned the legislation surrounding the legal use of traps. All traps should be under cover and with restricted entrance to stop non-target species entering. Snares should be free running and placed in an area where any animal is caught does not injure itself. Snares are free running so that non-target species can be released unharmed.

### **Birds in Japan—Rob Lightfoot** (summary by Anne Archer)

Although Rob's talk introduced us to a variety of birds seen on his trip, the overarching memory is of cranes. A subtitle for his talk might have been "conserving cranes", as it is only thanks to feeding programmes that several species have been brought back from the brink. Without this intervention his trip and talk would have been rather shorter. He and Audrey first encountered them in the north, on Hokkaido, at a sanctuary where Red-crowned Cranes have been saved by a rice-feeding programme and numbers are now up to 2,000. A combination of clear blue skies, snow and Rob's new camera with adjustable lens gave us some terrific shots of the mating dances. Also spotted there was a single Common Crane, very uncommon there. Less than 24hrs later and early on a very cold morning they (Rob and Audrey) were in position on a bridge to watch a fly-past of all 2,000 cranes from their roost to the feeding site. Video clips and still shots gave a



James Leonard  
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



**Upper left photo.** Rob Lightfoot. ©David Palmar  
www.photoscot.co.uk

**Upper right photo.** Red-crowned (Japanese) Cranes displaying ©Rob Lightfoot

**Bottom right photo.** Steller's Sea Eagle ©Rob Lightfoot



good insight into the amazing sights and sounds, but it was clearly a 'you needed to be there' moment that they will never forget.

Sticking to cranes, rather than the Lightfoot itinerary, we jump to southern Honshu, where rice has again brought cranes back from the brink, with a sanctuary of thousands of Hooded Cranes and some White-naped Cranes, so densely packed that Rob's concern was the possibility of disease. Also taking advantage of the rice were five Sandhill Cranes, very rare vagrants that ought to have been in Siberia or the US.

If all this seems like too easy bird-watching, we also had a description of floodlit armchair viewing of an owl. But not just any owl. This was a Blackiston's Fish Owl, rare anywhere but now very rare indeed in Japan. It's the biggest owl in the world, with a wingspan of 1.9m and needs very big holes in very big old trees, which are also becoming rare. So the answer is very big nest boxes and this has resulted in a small increase in the population. They are usually very shy, but this one was not and supper went cold.

The trip's excellent guide clearly knew where to look and also took them to see Whooper Swans

and a Steller's Sea Eagle in Hokkaido, which is also big with a wing span of 2.3m and a world population down to a few thousand. It knew when to arrive for its daily meal of frozen fish (frozen fish float) in the same way as our smaller White-tailed Eagles.

But there was the excitement of chance encounters too, the most memorable being a Ural Owl, which even three dedicated global twitchers in the group had not seen before. The Sino-Japanese Realm is next to the Palearctic Realm between roughly the same latitudes and therefore has an interesting mixture of truly separate species and subspecies. They saw a Siberian Thrush, a Brown-headed Thrush, Oriental Turtle Doves, slightly different Greater Black-backed Gulls, Harlequin Ducks, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Great Tits (a separate species), Willow Tits, very dark Jays, Red-flanked Blue-tails, Black-faced Spoonbills, Green Pheasants, and many more.

Rob ended his talk by describing a week of Japanese-flavoured skiing. You'll have to ask someone else about the downhill videos. I couldn't look! Thank you, Rob.



**Upper left photo.** Ian Hopkins. ©David Palmer www.photoscot.co.uk

**Upper right photo.** Osprey on Bute with a pike, a favourite food ©John Williams

**Bottom right photo.** A favourite fishing spot on Bute ©Ian Hopkins



## The story of Ospreys on Bute—Ian Hopkins (summary by Steve Petty)

The first part of Ian's talk comprised an interesting historical account of Ospreys on Bute. The first known record for the island was as far back as 1944, when one bird was seen around Loch Fad from June to August. Then followed a large gap without any further sightings, until the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s when there were numerous records, mostly of single birds around the Loch Fad area. From the turn of the century there were records in most years, with a further increase in sightings from 2009.

In 2010, regular sighting throughout the breeding season indicated that a pair was present. However, it was not until after the breeding season that a nest was eventually found, but it was unclear if breeding had been successful. This nest was badly damaged during the following winter. So, a decision was made to fell the nest tree and build an artificial nest in a nearby Scots Pine. Success followed, with a pair settling to breed on their new nest in 2011. Two chicks successfully fledged, which were ringed by Ian on 20 June.

Subsequently, Ospreys have nested on Bute every year since 2011. Between 2012 and 2018 a pair reared chicks every year except in 2013 and 2018. In 2019, two pairs were present and reared one chick each. The nests were only 1.5km apart. During the period 2011-2019, 13 chicks have fledged successfully (10 ringed). One male has nested in six years and is now eleven years old. Some of the breeding adults on Bute had been colour ringed as chicks, and has been possible to read the ring numbers by telescope and digital camera. One bird came from a nest in Thurso, one from Loch Lomond and two from Loch Awe. This was an inspiring talk about a species which is slowly expanding its range in Argyll and Bute.

## Engaging young people in birds and nature—Alistair Mc Gregor (summary by Nigel Scriven)

Alistair McGregor's short talk, given without the aid of a projector, was a brief outline of some of the work he has been doing with young people. He has been trying to encourage greater interest in the natural world, but engaging

their attention is not necessarily pushing at an open door, and had it's various challenges in the circumstances he was working. It has been a learning curve for both him and the students, but has had it's rewards.

### BTO update—Nigel Scriven

See page 9 for details

### Conclusion

After drawing the raffle and thanking donors for the prizes and the speakers for their excellent talks, the chairman closed the meeting with an invitation to the spring meeting in Dunoon on 14 March 2020.



Alistair McGregor. ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



Some of the audience at the autumn meeting of the Argyll Bird Club ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



Articles for the March *Eider* should with the editor before the 20th February 2020

### Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2019/2020)

**Chairman:** Nigel Scriven, 14 Taylor Avenue, Kilbarchan, Johnstone PA10 2LS. *Phone* 01505 706652 *email* [chairman@argyllbirdclub.org](mailto:chairman@argyllbirdclub.org)

**Vice Chairman:** David Jardine, The Old Schoolhouse, 26 Kilmartin, Lochgilphead, Argyll. *Phone* 01546 510200

**Secretary:** Anne Archer, Sealladh Breagha, Gallanach Road, Oban, Argyll PA34 4PD. *Phone* 01631 566276 *e-mail* [secretary@argyllbirdclub.org](mailto:secretary@argyllbirdclub.org)

**Treasurer:** Peter Hogbin, South Craleckan, Furnace, Inveraray, Argyll PA32 8XN. *Phone* 01499 500665 *e-mail* [treasurer@argyllbirdclub.org](mailto:treasurer@argyllbirdclub.org)

**Membership Secretary:** Dorothy Hogbin, South Craleckan, Furnace, Inveraray, Argyll PA32 8XN. *Phone* 01499 500665 *e-mail* [membership@argyllbirdclub.org](mailto:membership@argyllbirdclub.org)

**Committee:** Alun ap Rhisiart (Clynder), Malcolm Chattwood (Lochgilphead), Neil Hammatt (Clachaig), Gordon Holm (Strone), Alistair McGregor (Dunoon), Steve Petty (Ardentinny), and Andy Robinson (Stirling).

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

**Editor of the Eider:** Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR. *Phone* 01369 810024 *email* [stevepetty@btinternet.com](mailto:stevepetty@btinternet.com)

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

### Argyll Bird Records Committee

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

### Argyll Bird Recorder

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

*phone* 01546 603967

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

### Assistant Bird Recorder

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

*phone* 01546 603389

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

### BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

**Argyll Mainland, Bute & Gigha:** Nigel Scriven

*phone* 01505 706652 *mobile* 07901 636353

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

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

*e-mail* [emb.gww@gmail.com](mailto:emb.gww@gmail.com)

**Islay, Jura & Colonsay:** David Wood

*phone* 01496 300118

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

**WeBs Count Organiser, Mainland Argyll & Mull:** Nigel Scriven, 14 Taylor Avenue, Kilbarchan, Johnstone PA10 2LS (phone numbers & e-mail above)



**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 only) 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 indoor 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  |
| Age 25 and under | free |
| 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).