

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

March 2020
Number 131



The Eider

Great Spotted Woodpecker
Cairnbaan, 3 January 2019
©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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Acknowledgements

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Editorial

Nigel, our chairman, has put together a very interesting programme for the club's Spring Meeting in Dunoon. The programme and details of the venue are given on the next two pages. It's our first meeting in the Burgh Hall, so please let any committee member know what you think of the Burgh Hall as a venue for future meetings.

There were two very successful field trips in the last quarter. For once the weather was kind to us, and both trips attracted over ten participants. The birds were good too (pages 13-16)! Unfortunately, the trip to Bute in February had to be cancelled due to bad weather.

Four field trips are planned for the forthcoming quarter. Although places on the Mull trip were quickly filled, outings to Gigha (March), Benmore Gardens (May) and a return seabird trip to Islay (June) offer some excellent spring birding opportunities. So, please try to make the effort to join one or more of these.

It's certainly been a wet, windy winter. So, I'm hoping this inclement weather has given some of you time to think about writing an article for the June newsletter. There are getting fewer and fewer pages in the newsletter these days. So, I would really welcome your contributions. Note that the deadline for articles for the June Eider **must be with be before the 10 May**. Usually it's the 20th of the month prior to publication.



©Margaret Staley

Front cover photo

Do you have a photo that would be suitable for the front cover of the June 2020 Eider? If so, please send an unedited jpeg image to the Editor before 10 May for consideration. Photos should have been taken in Argyll during March to June 2020. Thank you.

Club News

FIELD TRIPS 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 28 March. Sound of Gigha. Led by Malcolm Chattwood (phone 01546 603389. e-mail 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. Led by David Jardine (e-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com phone 01546 510200). This trip is now fully booked.

Saturday 30 May. Benmore Gardens and surrounding area (Cowal). Led by Nigel Scriven (mobile phone 07901 636353 e-mail njscriven@gmail.com). Meet Nigel in the Benmore Gardens Car Park (grid ref. NS142866) at 10.00hrs. Please bring your own lunch. Members of the Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh are admitted free. Entrance fees for non-members are £7.00 for adults and £6.00 for concessions. The trip will include a walk of 2-3km on paths.

Sunday 28 June. Seabirds from the Islay Ferry. Led by David Jardine (phone 01546 510200. e-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com). Meet David at the Kennacraig Ferry Terminal at 09.30hrs. The ferry departs to Islay at 10.00hrs, arriving at Port Ellen at 12.10hrs. The return ferry leaves Port Ellen at 12.45hrs and arrives back at Kennacraig at 14.55hrs.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2020

Spring Meeting. Saturday 14 March. This will be held upstairs at the Burgh Hall, Dunoon (www.dunoonburghhall.org.uk/) (programme below).

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 the Arctic Skuas gone? <i>Ben Darvill</i> , BTO
1430-1500	An Australian avian odyssey— <i>Neil Hammatt</i>
1500-1530	Tea/coffee
1530-1610	Georgia on my mind— <i>Nigel Scriven</i>
1610-1630	Raffle and closing remarks

Non-members are welcome (entrance fee £5)

There is a lift and wheelchair access to the meeting room. A free car park is available near the hall, with access from Hanover Street (see map below). Additional free parking is available along the seafront. 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-free and dairy-free meals. If you want to have lunch here, please book a table when you arrive or no later than the morning coffee/tea break. 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), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). Lunches will be available in the hotel. The programme will be given in the September edition of the *Eider*.

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

ABC INFORMATION LEAFLET

A new information leaflet has been produced (photo opposite). This includes a membership application form. 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

Argyll Bird Club



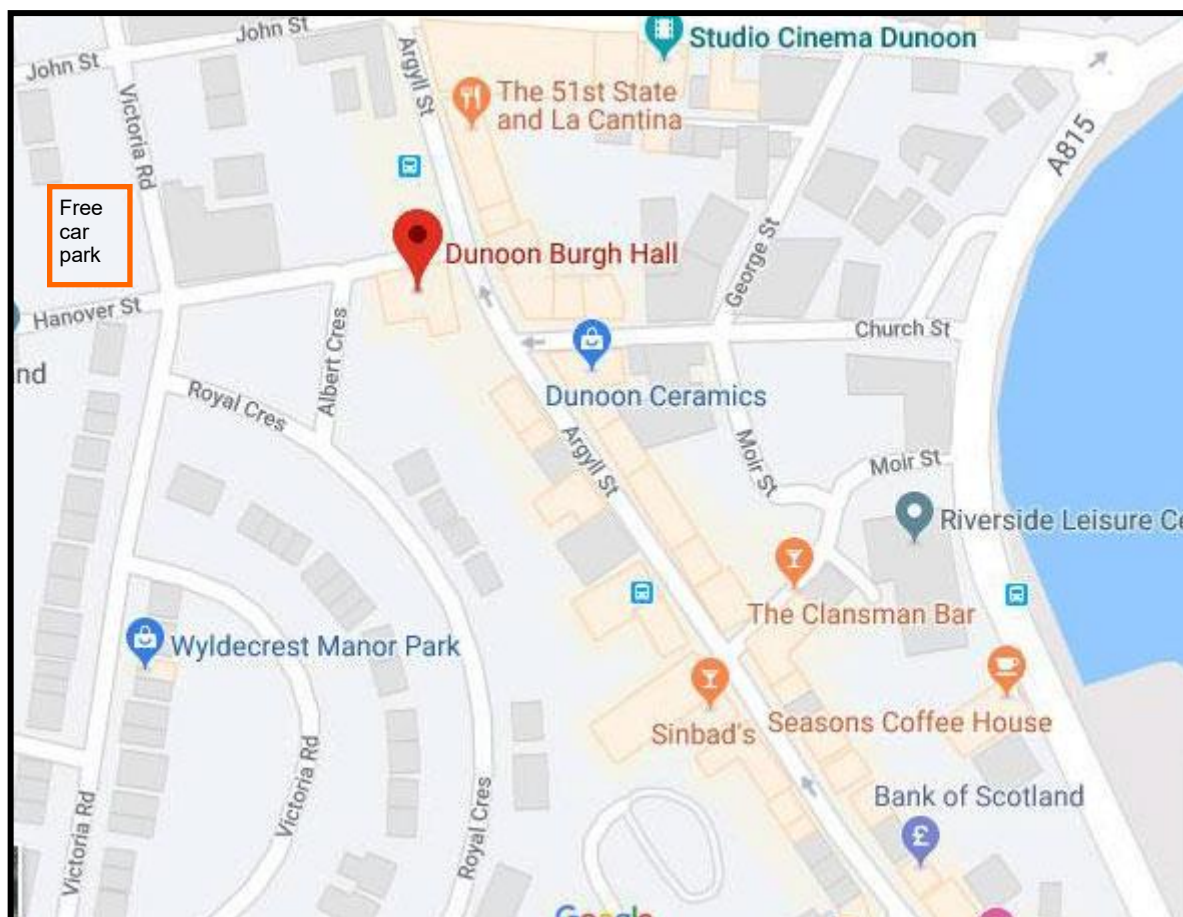
For anyone interested in wild birds

- Meet like-minded people
- Explore Argyll
- Learn from the experts
- All levels of experience welcome



Argyll Bird Club offers

- Field trips
- Indoor meetings
- Quarterly newsletters
- Annual bird reports
- Access to database of Argyll birds



bird conservation projects in Argyll. For example, help was given towards the costs of field work for the recent Seabird Monitoring Programme (seabird counts 2015-2019). More recently the club has helped to fund the provision of nest boxes for Grey Wagtails and Dippers in Kintyre (photo opposite). Applications for funding should be submitted to the Secretary (contact details on the back page).

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 30 (2018)

The latest report is now available. 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 'Publication' tab)

ABC FACEBOOK PAGE

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

MACHRIHANISH SEABIRD OBSERVATORY (MSBO) ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019

Eddie Maguire has produced his annual report for MSBO (photo opposite). It's packed full of excellent photos and bird records. You can download a PDF copy from the ABC website ('Publication' tab). Reports for previous years are also available as PDFs under the same tab.

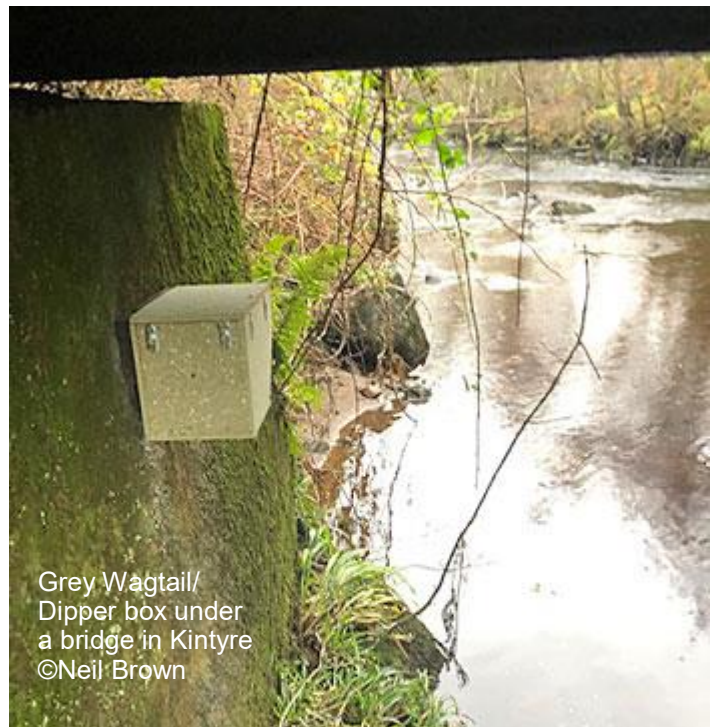
SPEAKERS AT MEETINGS

While it is nice to hear about an ornithological topic in depth, the committee feel that we need to balance this with shorter presentations of perhaps 10-15mins. Hopefully, this will include some new speakers from the club, covering experiences that will be of interest to others. Please contact the committee if you have any suggestions.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

As part of the review of where the Argyll Bird Club might be in ten years' time, recent discussions have included the pros and cons of changing the club from being an unincorporated charity registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, to become a SCIO, i.e. a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (also registered with OSCR). For more information on OSCR look at www.oscr.org.uk

The key points are that the aims and objectives would remain the same, but there would be additional liability protection for those on the committee, compared to the present. It would enable the club to hold assets and enter contracts in a way that we can't at the moment. There is a bit more to it than this, but it will require some change to the constitution to enable the current assets (money)



Grey Wagtail/
Dipper box under
a bridge in Kintyre
©Neil Brown



to be transferred to the new SCIO. The new SCIO would have a new constitution as well.

As a committee we would like to hear any views that the membership have on this, and the March meeting in Dunoon would be a good opportunity.

Birds on Tiree in 2019



Gull-billed Tern at Loch a' Phuill on 17 May ©John Bowler

The Isle of Tiree enjoyed a bumper year in 2019 with a record 191 species of bird observed, including six new species for the island, plus a generally successful breeding season for its nationally important breeding birds.

The year got off to a great start with several wintering North American birds remaining from 2018, including three Ring-necked Ducks (an adult pair and an immature drake) which commuted between Loch a' Phuill and Loch Bhasapol until 2nd May, a second-winter Ring-billed Gull at Sandaig (photo below), a drake Green-winged Teal at Loch a' Phuill and a Todd's Canada Goose in with the Barnacle Geese at Caoles. Other scarce species in January included a drake Pochard at Loch a' Phuill (2nd), three Little Auks off Aird (8th) and



Ring-billed Gull at Sandaig on 02 February
©John Bowler

occasional visits by White-tailed Eagles. A lack of strong northerly winds meant that there was no repeat of the large influx of white-winged gulls seen in January-February 2018, and instead there were just single records of juvenile Glaucous Gull (photo below) and Iceland Gull in these months.

February brought the first spring migrants in the shape of Pied Wagtails, Black-headed Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, plus our earliest ever Goldcrest at Balephuill (22nd) and a rare spring Brambling there (16th). March brought up to three more wandering White-tailed Eagles, heavy northerly Whooper Swan passage and the first of the Wheatears (31st). The traditional spring build-up of Golden Plovers on The Reef peaked at 4,350 on 18th April but strong SE winds for much of April and May prevented a build-up of other passage waders and spring peaks of 165 Black-tailed Godwits on 20th April and 340 Sanderling on 19th May were modest by recent standards.

The first Corncrakes arrived on 20th April, with



Glaucous Gull at Crossapol on 11 February ©John Bowler

most regular spring migrants back by the month-end. April also brought several avian surprises to the island. Most excitingly, a Black-winged Stilt on a pool near Heylipol Church (16th-18th) (photo opposite) was the first for Argyll, whilst a Greater Yellowlegs at Loch a' Phuill (28th) and a Mandarin duck at Cornaigmore (20th) (photo opposite) were both first records for Tiree. April also brought scarcities including a Great Tit at Balephuill (4th), a very early Redstart at Balevullin (11th), an Osprey at Loch a' Phuill (19th) and a Whinchat at Balephuill (20th).

May was no less exciting with a wandering Gull-billed Tern (17th-27th) (header photo) just the third record for Argyll, a female Red-backed Shrike at Balephuill (21st), four Dotterel and a Little Egret at the Reef (8th), a Wood Warbler at Balephuill (5th), a male Black Redstart at Balemartine (12th), a drake Garganey at Kilmoluaig (16th) and a stunning UK-race male Yellow Wagtail at Loch a' Phuill (8th-10th). Late migrants in June included a Hobby at Milton (6th), a Turtle Dove at Heylipol (8th-10th), a Bullfinch at Scarinish (3rd), a Quail at Crossapol (18th) and a Golden Eagle at Baugh (4th).

Night-time surveys in June found an island total of 300 calling male Corncrakes, a little down on the 322 recorded in 2018. Numbers of Corncrakes remain high thanks to all the excellent management work put in by the island's crofters and farmers, although the declining trend in recent years remains worrying. Take up of agri-environment schemes remains high on the island, with further farm plans submitted by SAC for future funding with input from RSPB, which should hopefully help Corncrake numbers increase again.

The breeding waders on Tiree had a good year with record numbers of both Snipe and Oystercatcher at one long-studied site. Most species appeared to have good breeding success, although some early Lapwing clutches were lost during cold weather in May and many pairs re-laid to have late broods in June.

Tiree's seabirds mostly had another good breeding year. Up on the cliffs at Ceann a' Mhara, some 324 pairs of Kittiwake fledged 480 young, 2,487 Guillemots produced some 415 chicks and 81 pairs of Shag fledged 160 young. 333 pairs of Arctic Terns in scattered colonies around the island fledged over 150 young, 30 pairs of Little Terns fledged 21 young and two pairs of Common Terns bred successfully for the second year in a row. In general, most other birds also had a good breeding season on the island in the settled dry conditions with particularly high numbers of fledged Swallows, Wheatears and Stonechats about in late



Upper photo. Black-winged Stilt at Heylipol Church on 16 April ©John Bowler

Lower photo. Female Mandarin at Cornaigmore on 20 April ©John Bowler

summer. Of our scarcer breeders, a record four pairs of House Martin nested at three sites, Common Sandpipers held territory at six sites and up to three pairs of Whitethroats attempted to nest, with at least one pair fledging young.

July produced a few more highlights as waders began heading south once more including a Green Sandpiper at Loch a' Phuill (28th) followed by two Wood Sandpipers and a Spotted Redshank in central Tiree (30th). There was also a scattering of Swifts, which are increasingly rare here plus a very early migrant Goldcrest at Gott (28th). August was even more exciting when a female

Two-barred Crossbill appeared briefly at Balephuill (10th), which will be the first record for Argyll if confirmed, whilst the only Common Crossbill of the year was nearby at Carnan Mor (24th). In a good autumn for Greenland Wheatears over 100 were recorded in the last three days of August alone.

With frequent spells of westerly winds and good coverage by visiting birders including Keith Gillon and Jim Dickson, it was no surprise that autumn 2019 produced more records of American waders on the island. First up in September was a juvenile Baird's Sandpiper at Vaul and Gott (3rd-7th), followed by a juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper at Loch a' Phuill (15th) and an adult American Golden Plover at Baugh (26th). These were followed in October by two juvenile American Golden Plovers in West Tiree (12-15th) and better still, a juvenile Long-billed Dowitcher (photo opposite), a long-awaited first for the island, at Sandaig (5th), which remained until 8th November. The pair of Ring-necked Ducks returned to Loch Bhasapol from 8th October and the Todd's Canada Goose (photo opposite) returned to winter with the Barnacle Geese in NE Tiree from 14th October.

Drift migrants from the continent arrived during spells of easterlies under high pressure and included at least nine different Yellow-browed Warblers between 25th September and 18th October, a Reed Warbler and a Common Redstart at Balephuill on 19th September, plus Pied Flycatchers there on 16th and 30th September, whilst a Wood Warbler at Balephuill on 18th-20th September constituted the latest ever Argyll record to date. October brought more good birds in the shape of a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Balephuill (14th), two more Pied Flycatchers, three Ring Ouzels, eleven Snow Buntings, two Siberian Chiffchaffs, our latest ever Cuckoo near Loch Stannail (17th) and a juvenile female Ring-necked Duck at Loch a' Phuill (25th-28th). However, ten Long-tailed Tits at Balephuill from 29th, were arguably the birds of the month, as this common mainland species was last seen on Tiree in 2013!

Sea-watching in periods of onshore gales produced a Grey Phalarope, six Sooty Shearwaters, six Leach's Petrels, five Storm Petrels and seven Pomarine Skuas in amongst large movements of auks, Kittiwakes and Gannets. There was a record passage of Pink-footed Geese involving some 3,500 birds passing through between 29th September and 2nd October with groups of up to 160 feeding on the island and at least 25 birds remaining into December. Passage of Greenland geese and Whooper Swans from the northwest was intermittent



Upper photo. Long-billed Dowitcher at Sandaig on 05 November

Lower photo. Todd's Canada Goose with Barnacle Geese at Kenovay on 04 November

Both images ©John Bowler

throughout October with heaviest passage on 12th-13th October. The goose count in December found high totals of 5,648 Barnacle Geese and 750 Greenland White-fronts, with both species benefitting from a more successful breeding season in 2019 than in 2018. There were also 2,253 Greylags, 135 Whooper swans, 2,895 Golden Plovers and 4,200 lapwings wintering around the island. Up to four different Glaucous Gulls appeared in December, whilst three Long-tailed Ducks regularly commuted between Traigh Bhi and Loch a' Phuill. A Siberian Chiffchaff at Balephuill on 22nd December was the latest yet for the island and rounded the year off nicely. Who knows what 2020 will bring!

John Bowler, RSPB Scotland

john.bowler@rspb.org.uk

Swifts by Annette Anderton



©Annette Anderton

*Sharp crescents of jet
Flecked with amber
Scythe through the gold summer skies,
Spectral arrows released
From their quiver,
Wraiths that forever must fly.
Evening now darkens
To pewter,
A vortex of voices now cry,
A spiral curves
Upward still upward,
Screams spin as they shiver and die.
Wings lit with silver
Now shimmer as
Tips touch the curve of the moon,
Glide through soft clouds
Lost in slumber,
Then descend with the rays of the sun.*

Mystery photo

©Steve Petty



This photo was taken in northern Spain in early June. What species is it? All will be revealed in the June *Eider*.

There's a bottle of wine for the first correct answer, to be collected at the spring meeting in Dunoon.

Answers to the Editor please.

To fly or not to fly?



Visitor money is allowing further expansion of private nature reserves such as this at Curicancha cloud forest, Monteverde in the ecotourism capital of the planet, Costa Rica ©Neil Hammatt

This is a question vexing many birders who travel the planet to enjoy their hobby—including myself. I have visited some inspirational places in a range of countries that give me hope that if only humans can prevent global overheating, the wildlife we love so much, can endure.

Firstly, it's worth considering the fact that flying contributes a mere 2% of global emissions of CO₂. Given that methane is around 30 times more potent than carbon dioxide, flying contributes far less than 2% to global warming. So, there are much bigger targets for emission reductions, including cement (8%) and shipping (including cruise ships), which receive much less scrutiny.

Personally, I fly in winter to escape the darkness, my restless leg syndrome, and low moods aggravated by reduced levels of sunlight. I also travel to enjoy the world's wildlife and to support ecotourism. The simple fact is—the arrival of tourists at a particular rural destination creates a lot of excitement in the local population, as well as generating a lot of employment. An example of this is what Ashanti Tours is achieving with White-necked Rockfowl conservation in Ghana. In the west of the country a small patch of forest, on a rocky hilltop, stands out as not having been completely cleared for its timber. It's here that a new school is being built from donations given to the local chief by visitors who were taken into the forest to watch the critically endangered White-necked Rockfowl coming in to roost in a cave. Education is the route out of poverty in a developing world, as educated people tend to have fewer babies. This

project links children's education to conservation of the forest and people turning up to see the rockfowl. No rockfowl, no school, simple!

Throughout the world, poor rural communities have no choice but to exploit their environment if there are no alternative sources of income. In Ghana, the vast Upper Guinea tropical rainforest has largely been cleared and replaced by inefficient agriculture, while in the north, dry sub-Sahel forest is being converted to charcoal. The degraded, thin soils and lack of rain result in the land being unsuitable for any significant economic activity afterwards. While many birds **can**



Income from the new aerial walkway at Kakum National Park, Ghana supplies much-needed funds for the conservation of Upper Guinea forest species, such as this White-necked Rockfowl ©Neil Hammatt

adapt to such degraded habitats, species relying on primary rainforest or dry forest **cannot** adjust to life in these man-altered habitats and thus face extinction. Against this background of growing environmental degradation in Ghana, the Ashanti rockfowl project has made the village one of the wealthiest in rural Ghana.

Throughout the developing world there are lots of individual champions of conservation. Assigning an economic value to local wildlife massively boosts their efforts. In Colombia, the local indigenous population of Camarones, on the Caribbean coast, has a lot to lose if their lands are replaced by upmarket tourist hotels. The whole village economy relies on visitors turning up and being guided around their bird-rich dry forest, and then eating and drinking in their restaurant. The chief is the bird guide and has the biggest house in the village. Through ecotourism, the village has control over its destiny.

The road to Montezuma in the Colombian Andes is being reinforced to ensure birders can get to the recently refurbished Montezuma Lodge run by owner Leopoldina. She is a self-appointed custodian of the adjacent Tatama National Park, ensuring the edges of this cloud forest are not indiscriminately felled. Leopoldina's six year-old son (photo opposite) goes out birding when he's not at school. One day he will become another custodian of the cloud forest.

Fortunately in Colombia, the indigenous people have rights over their land in the constitution, and large land areas are designated National Parks. But environmental degradation is still a threat in this country, slowly recovering from a long civil war and suffering from poor accessibility to remote areas. Empowering local communities economically via ecotourism gives a great incentive to conserve local wildlife, by not damaging pristine habitats.

The Colombian Government also understands the economic importance of its wild areas. It now has an official training course to address the shortage of bird guides. After its recovery from the civil war, there is a huge interest from international birders to visit Colombia, which boasts 1950 bird species.

Costa Rica is in a class of its own in respect to environmentalism, way ahead of the rest of the world in every respect, putting the UK to shame. Everyone in the country will know people reliant on a steady arrival of high-spending international visitors intent on enjoying the country's lush lowland rainforests, mon-



Upper photo. Leopoldina is training her son, aged six, as a bird guide in Tatama National Park, Colombia

Lower photo. Fees to visit feeding stations in Cuba for endangered Bee Hummingbirds, one of the world's smallest birds, provide essential funds to buy sugar in one of the world's poorest countries, and provide a big incentive for locals to feed them.

Both images ©Neil Hammatt

tane cloud forests, and 850 bird species. Fifty percent of the country is protected land, both public and private, and is an outstanding example of the importance of the ecotourist pound. Admission fees at the volunteer-led, private Curi Cancha reserve in Monteverde, have allowed it to expand its protected area into a large tract of contiguous cloud forest. Imagine what would happen to Costa Rica's forests if the tourist tap was switched off overnight and the locals became reliant on forest products.

Lastly, the story of the Interamericana Highway (Route One) and the Harpy Eagle in the Darien Rainforest. You

can drive Route One unbroken from British Columbia to Eastern Panama. You can also drive unbroken from the south of Chile to the north-west of Colombia, but no further. You have to fly between Colombia and Panama because there's one big obstacle—the Darien Rainforest. It is still occupied by indigenous peoples such as the Embera and, of course, a whole host of amazing flora and fauna. This is the realm of the Harpy Eagle, the world's most powerful raptor, capable of picking monkeys and sloths from the rainforest canopy. The Embera people have constitutional rights over their lands, and encourage tourists to pay big bucks to stay, and to be transported down their waterways to see a Harpy Eagle nest, and a vast array of other wildlife. Thus, highlighting the long-term economic value of large intact forests. Hopefully, it should ensure that Route One is never joined up and the Darien stays a remote, wild place. Ironically, this area is also protected from human encroachment by the security situation, where illicit drugs cross the border and people are reluctant to move in!

However, such good intent still requires birds to fly, and to emit carbon dioxide. Most reputable tour companies make an environmental charge to clients. In South Africa, for example, Rockjumper Tours use this money to support research into Flufftail (a small bird related to the rails) biology and conservation. On top of that, you can voluntarily offset emissions. I support, financially, the UK-based World Land Trust which has several rainforest recovery plans in Belize and Mexico involving replanting trees to form wildlife corridors. My only question is how the amount paid is calculated. Do the trees absorb enough carbon dioxide to offset my emissions?

I have concluded that targeting my tourist pound towards ecotourism, in countries harbouring significant biodiversity, outweighs the effects of my carbon emissions. I am passionate that species do not become extinct, as a result of desperation among the rural poor.

Neil Hammatt

Attempted capture of Teal by female Hen Harrier

One afternoon between Christmas and New Year I visited Ardnave Loch, Islay. When I arrived there was a female Hen Harrier flying low over the water. After a few minutes it picked up a male Teal by the head (upper photo opposite) and carried it around 20m towards the shore before dropping it. The Teal did not appear to be dead.

The harrier then flew low in over the Teal and to my surprise landed on it. It kept its wings fully spread as it 'mantled' the Teal for around a minute (lower photo opposite). I feared that the harrier would become waterlogged and drown, however, it appeared to keep its wings out of the water most of the time. The harrier remained on the Teal for around two minutes. I presume it was trying to kill the Teal. It then took off and picked up the Teal and was blown towards the back of the loch. It dropped the Teal before reaching the shore.

It returned to lift the Teal again, but by this time other predators were moving in. Two Grey Herons flew over with their necks extended and looked as if they would try to lift the Teal. However, an adult Great Black-backed Gull then flew in and removed the corpse. The harrier circled a couple of times before departing.

A male Teal weighs around 340g and a female Hen Harrier around 508g, so lifting the Teal, which would have been wet, represents at least two thirds of the weight of the harrier. This incident shows that female Hen Harriers will tackle large prey, and not just over land. Although in this case, it failed to reap the reward of its effort.

David C Jardine



Upper photo. Female Hen Harrier carrying male Teal, Ardnave Loch, Islay, December 2019

Lower photo. Female Hen Harrier mantling male Teal, Ardnave Loch, Islay, December 2019

Both images ©David Jardine

ABC field trip to Loch Gilp & the Add Estuary on 30 November 2019



ABC members enjoying the winter sun ©Jim Dickson

Twelve well-wrapped club members met at the Corran Car Park in Lochgilphead at the start of our trip to Loch Gilp, the Add Estuary and the Moine Mhor Nature Reserve. Early morning temperatures had been down as low as -4C producing a lovely hoar frost and the low sun gave a beautiful bright light, ideal for birding.

The outing got off to a good start with around 20 species notched up in the first ten minutes or so including a trio of Goosanders sneaking off down river, then a Dipper (photo below) was heard then seen within yards of our group. A second Dipper soon appeared, and both began to chase each other back and forth, calling and causing quite a spectacle, enjoyed by us all.

Our walk along the front green in Lochgilphead produced a few waders including Redshank, Oystercatcher and Curlew. However, a group of Bar-tailed Godwits were more difficult to see further out as we looked towards the low sun. A

Grey Wagtail (photo below) was feeding by the river edge and noted to be eating tiny shrimps. A Little Egret was found about 200m away. Presumably one of the birds that has been around on and off over the last couple of months. Unexpectedly, as we started walking back to the Corran another Little Egret appeared! This just confirms that this species continues to increase around our shores particularly in winter. Trying to work out how many are currently in Argyll is very difficult as they frequently move around.

A male Sparrowhawk was seen coming from the front green side of the river, and while watching this bird in flight it flushed a Kingfisher that must have been sitting further along the bank, but fortunately didn't manage to snatch it!

After sorting out a bit of car sharing, we then headed south to Ardrishaig for a couple of stops to look out over Loch Gilp and Loch Fyne. Our first stop produced some Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers, Shags and Rock Pipit. Scans through telescopes then picked up Red-throated Diver, Black Guillemot and Goldeneye. A distant Kingfisher was seen sitting on a rock, which may or may not have been the bird seen earlier.



Dipper ©Jim Dickson



Grey Wagtail ©Jim Dickson

Looking out over Loch Fyne was unusually quiet for birds, and in particular for the three species of diver usually seen from here. In the good light two Purple Sandpipers could just be made out on Duncuan Island that sits at the entrance to Loch Gilp. Large numbers of gulls could be seen on the far shore down from Lingerton landfill dump, but they were a bit too distant to search for the likes of Iceland or Glaucous Gulls. Unexpectedly, a fox was seen trotting along the shore.

We then headed across to the Add Estuary following the line of the Crinan Canal. As soon as we arrived at the Islandadd Bridge a Little Egret was seen flying over the bridge in front of us. This was possibly our third bird of the day, but more likely to be one of the



Little Egret (above) and Peregrine (below). Both photos taken on the outing ©Jim Dickson

birds from Loch Gilp that had flown from there after the rising tide. A distant Golden Eagle was seen and photographed—a very good sighting for here. We walked to the canal bird hide to have lunch and scan over the estuary. A group of six tired looking Whooper Swans were sitting out on the mud. Teal, Wigeon, Little Grebe and Little Egret (photo opposite) were all seen well. Then an adult Peregrine whizzed past the hide. When walking back along the canal a sharp-eyed observer saw the Peregrine perched high up in a tree about 50m away. It stayed there long enough for us to get great scope views and some photos (photo opposite).

We then drove across the Moine Mhor and around to Crinan Ferry adding a few more species such as Stonechat, Greylag and Canada Geese, Buzzard, Mistle Thrush and various tit and finch species. On our drive back across the Moine Mhor towards Loch Gilp we added Snipe and Pheasant.

Overall an enjoyable day out with a reasonable list of 59 species seen, which was not too bad considering a few expected species were not seen.

Species list: Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Teal, Mallard, Eider, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Pheasant, Red-throated Diver, Shag, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Oystercatcher, Purple Sandpiper, Snipe, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Kingfisher, Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Carrion Crow, Raven, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Starling, Dipper, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Stonechat, Duncock, House Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch

Jim Dickson

ABC field trip to Danna on 25 January 2020



ABC members enjoying the view ©David Jardine

Field trips at the end of January can often be at the mercy of the weather, but the portents for a good day were two Greenshank at the head of Caol Scotnish, seen by most of those on the field trip on their way to the rendezvous at Tayvallich. Another surprise was waiting in the harbour. A female Kingfisher (with a red lower mandible) had been found feeding on the low-hanging branches on the opposite side of the bay providing views for all. A great start for the day.

Signs (or was it sounds) of spring were in the air as a Great Spotted Woodpecker started drumming. This turned out to be a territorial dispute between two pairs in the trees across the bay, with four birds eventually being seen dispersing from the conflict zone. Four Little Grebes were seen fishing in the harbour and eleven Woodpi-gions flew from the beech trees above the hall, but not before a few passerines, including Bullfinch and Siskin, were added to the list in this sheltered spot. Increasing wind later in the trip meant that small birds were harder to find.

Following the safety briefing and organizing car-sharing the group moved off towards Danna, stopping briefly at the Ulva Lagoons where there were a few Shelduck and Mute Swan along with a few Greenland White-fronted Geese feeding in the marsh. An adult male Hen Harrier on the other side of the marsh was showing well. Meanwhile, on the other side of the road a Sparrowhawk, soared up before jinking into the wood. A single Whooper Swan and a Goldeneye were spotted at the south end of the lagoons from the road as the convoy moved down to Danna.

More Shelduck and a few Oystercatcher and Curlew were seen on Loch na Cille on the way down to the causeway to Danna, where the cars were parked. Sadly, nearby, there was a dead juvenile Mute Swan, a recent powerline casualty.

There were more White-fronts just on the island, along with around 30 Barnacle Geese, which along with four Canada Geese on the shore and four Greylag flying over allowed for a comparison between the different geese. Here the party were joined by Ewan, an ABC member who lives on Danna, who kindly shared local knowledge with everyone.

Little was seen in the strong wind in the walk over to Mid Danna, but it was worthwhile as there was a flock of around 540 Barnacle Geese feeding in the field, which eventually took off and moved further south allowing later views. A few Great and Blue Tits and a Chaffinch were at Ewan's feeders and a brief view was had of a wintering Stonechat near the farm.

Walking on to Danna na Cloiche a young White-tailed Eagle lifted from near the shore and gave good views (photos on the next page). Up by the ruined farm there was a small group of Starling. Shelter was taken in the lee of the farm buildings for a snack. Birding was good here. The young White-tailed Eagle came over and made a pass at the Barnacle Geese flock and another more distant bird was seen on the other side of Loch Sween. A ringtail Hen Harrier was picked out crossing Loch Sween, and then another smaller and darker ringtail, which was thought to be a 2CY male, flew by close to the farm.

After the break the group moved down to the shore. The large mass of seaweed brought ashore by storm Brendan, provided good feeding for wildfowl, with nine Shelduck, 15 Wigeon, c.50 Teal and c.25 Mallard present in the bay. However, the star of the show was a young female otter which fed in the bay no more than 30m from everyone for around 10mins. Picking

their way along the shore Rock Pipit, Pied Wagtail and Turnstone were added to the list, and a Kestrel, living up to its name of 'wind-hover' caught the updrafts in the strong wind over the raised beach.

Returning up past Loch na Cille, Great Northern Divers and Red-breasted Mergansers were seen and with the rising tide Redshank were feeding at the point. In the shelter near the cars a Dunnock was calling. All (eleven) participants agreed we had sneaked in an excellent outing to a little visited location despite the overcast conditions.

Species list (48 sp.) (* those seen on Danna): Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, White-fronted Goose*, Greylag Goose*, Canada Goose*, Barnacle Goose*, Shelduck*, Wigeon*, Teal*, Mallard*, Goldeneye*, Red-breasted Merganser*, Great Northern Diver*, Cormorant*, Shag*, Grey Heron*, Little Grebe, White-tailed Eagle*, Hen Harrier*, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard*, Oystercatcher*, Curlew*, Turnstone*, Redshank*, Common Gull*, Herring Gull*, Great Black-backed Gull*, Woodpigeon, Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kestrel*, Hooded Crow*, Raven*, Blue Tit*, Great Tit*, Coal Tit, Wren*, Starling*, Blackbird*, Robin, Stonechat*, Dunnock*, Pied Wagtail*, Rock Pipit*, Chaffinch*, Bullfinch, Siskin.

David Jardine



Upper photo. Otter

Lower photo. White-tailed Eagle

Both images ©Stephen Carter



Part of a large flock of Barnacle Geese
©Stephen Carter

Emerald and gold



Green Hairstreak at Kames, Tighnabruaich on 25 April 2019 ©StevePetty

For me, one of the joys of early spring is finding my first Green Hairstreak butterfly. It really is a gem! Startling emerald green wings amongst golden gorse blossom— what more could you ask for! The almond-scented gorse flowers of early spring only add to such an evocative experience. It's a tiny butterfly and easily missed, but once you've honed your search image, you'd be surprised just how many you can find.

It appears that most Green Hairstreaks overwinter as pupae in ants' nests, where they secrete a substance eaten by the

ants. They also produce a clicking/churring noise that attracts ants. They emerge as adults from mid-April, and this is the time to see them at their best. Pick a sunny day with little wind, but don't linger as they soon lose some of their vivid colour and the wings gradually become worn.

The males are highly territorial. They perch on bushes, such as gorse, to spot intruding males and even other insects, to which they give chase. They soon return to the vicinity of their original perch, if not to exactly the same position. Once you've located a Green Hairstreak colony, you can return year after year to the same site, with a high probability of finding these spring jewels!

Blaeberry and gorse are two of the main plants upon which adults lay their eggs in Argyll. I find the best places to see Green Hairstreaks are where both plants occur together, particularly on low-lying moorlands. During mid to late April such sites can also be very rewarding for other day-flying Lepidoptera, such as the Emperor and Common Heath moths.

Steve Petty

Waxwings



Waxwing, 26 November at Connel ©Mike Harrison

It's not been a particularly good winter for waxwings in Argyll. This bird was in our garden in Connel on a crab apple tree on 26 November. Strangely, it was all on its own and only stayed around for half an hour or so.

Mike Harrison

BTO update—February 2020

Upland bird recording and monitoring. One-day courses

Brush up on your upland bird identification skills, with a particular emphasis on songs and calls. Learn more about opportunities for participation, and practice techniques for BirdTrack and the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). Find out about the BBS 'Upland Rovers' scheme and how to get involved. The day will combine indoor and outdoor sessions (weather permitting) and will have a focus on improving confidence and skills to encourage participation.

- **Dalmellington**, Ayrshire. Sunday 8 March, available to book
- **Craignure, Mull**. Saturday 18 April
- **Kincardineshire**. Sunday 19 April
- **Blair Atholl**. Saturday 2 May
- **Near Inverness** (tbc). Sunday 3 May

For more information about these courses and to book your place, please visit the BTO website.

<https://www.bto.org/>



Upland Rovers

The Upland Rovers scheme encourages one-off visits to a careful selection of rarely-visited BBS squares, allowing priceless data to be collected, which we would otherwise not receive.

A huge thank you to everyone who took part last year. A total of 128 Upland Rovers squares were visited in 2019, up from 95 in 2018.

The refreshed sign-up map on the BTO website is now live for the 2020 season. Have a look and plan your adventures for this breeding season!

Nigel Scriven

Seabirds Count Survey 2015-2020

This is the last breeding season for collecting data on all the breeding seabirds in the UK. In the excel database for Argyll and Bute there are over 600 sites listed, and it will be a tall order to cover them all. Many have been checked already, but there are gaps. Colonies come and go, old ones no longer exist, and new sites are found. Given the geography of the county, with its long coastline, numerous islands and rocks, together with inland breeding sites, there is plenty of opportunity for any birders to contribute observations. This especially includes former sites that have been abandoned.

The gap analysis for Mull has 65 sites needing to be checked, and that for the rest of Argyll & Bute has 56 sites to be checked. Many of the sites are very small so counting should not be too onerous. Please contact David Jardine or Nigel Scriven if you would like a copy of the spreadsheets, which have grid references for all the sites.

Nigel Scriven



©Margaret Staley

Volunteer Seabirds At Sea (VSAS)

JNCC's Volunteer Seabirds At Sea project uses citizen scientists to collect European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) standard seabird and marine mammal data from ferries. Data are collected (using a bespoke app) by survey teams of two people, consisting of an experienced 'mentor' and a less experienced 'volunteer'.

ESAS is the standard ship-based bird survey method throughout Europe, and data collected as part of the VSAS scheme will contribute to the monitoring of trends in distribution, abundance and phenology of the UK's seabirds as well as being collated into the ESAS database. ESAS data have been used widely across Europe in many national and multinational monitoring schemes and the designation of marine SPAs, as well as for many smaller scale industrial or academic purposes.

Observers record observations of all birds within a 90 degree arc, covering directly forward from the observer to directly abeam, on whichever side of the vessel offers the best viewing conditions. Birds observed on the water are placed into a distance band and snapshot counts are used for those in flight. These data combine to inform density modelling that re-

turns much more accurate estimates than standard line or strip transects. JNCC offer free training in the survey methods and data recording. Courses are regularly run on CalMac ferries in western Scotland but bespoke courses can be arranged anywhere that offers suitable boat space.

The VSAS project is still relatively young but JNCC successfully ran a summer season of surveys covering three routes in western Scotland in 2019, in association with CalMac ferries and MARINELife. Reports from these surveys can be read here: <https://www.calmac.co.uk/calmac-marine-awareness-programme/marine-biodiversity-monitoring/marine-bird-surveys>

2020 will see this part of the project expanding to cover one more route (Ardrossan to Brodick on Arran) and to survey for all 12 months of the year when weather permits. Ultimately the aim is to expand to cover as many routes as possible throughout UK waters. For more info contact the coordinator: mark.lewis@jncc.gov.uk

Nigel Scriven

© Eddie Maguire



This was notable photo of the week in Birdguides (12 January). A male Hen Harrier at the Laggan, Kintyre ©Eddie Maguire. Well done Eddie!

Articles for the June *Eider* have to be sent to the editor before the 10 May 2020

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

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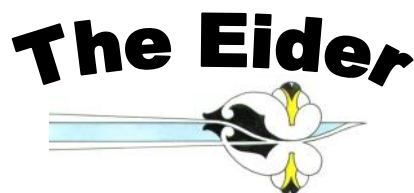
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The *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book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

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and unedited digital photographs (jpeg files 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).