

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

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# The Eider



A juvenile Siskin on a Scots Pine branch. Siskins breed earlier in years when there are abundant cones on spruce trees ©Jim Dickson

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**Editorial**

Can we now see the light at the end of the tunnel? Let's hope so! After a year without field trips we are slowly trying get back to something like normal. On pages 3-4 details of field tips for the next four months are given. We hope these will run without too many additional safeguards, but please note **Government advice might mean that the number of people are limited for field trips. So, it is essential that you contact the leader of a trip beforehand to make sure a place is available.**

We are hoping that our autumn meeting on 6 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel will be possible too. A programme for that event will appear in the next Ei-

der. If we do have to cancel it, an online (Zoom) meeting will replace it. However, we all appreciate that an actual meeting has many advantages, so we will try our best to ensure that this takes place.

Due to the success of this last winter/spring Zoom meetings we are planning to run a further series of online meeting over next winter/spring. If you would like to give a talk or know of someone who would, please contact David Jardine. Summaries of this year's online meetings are given on pages 4-8 and 13-15.

It's been a very slow start to the year, with below average rainfall and temperatures. I cannot recall another year when we have had so many frosts in April. Our flowering rhododendrons and magnolias have been devastated by these events. I suspect that many birds that depend on insects for food have had a pretty tough time too. However, not all birds have suffered.

Bullfinches have been very busy in our garden. They can be quite secretive for most of the year, but this spring they have been very obvious. We first noticed our local pair feeding on a nearby cherry tree, and our neighbours remarked how pretty they were. Indeed they were, but they were so precise. They methodically worked along each branch removing and eating the every flower bud, until there were none left. Their secateur-like beaks were remarkably efficient at snipping off buds. After that, we thought we'd seen the last of them for a while. However, they thought differently! They next turned their attention to our plum tree that was full of flower buds, and within two days they had removed every single bud! Not satisfied with that devastation, they then eyed up our apple trees, and inflicted upon them the same fate that had befallen our plum tree. Oh what pretty little birds indeed! So, why such damage after none in previous years?

Bullfinches are known to cause extensive damage in orchards, particularly in the south of England, but not every year. Ian Newton studied the problem in the 1960s and after some detailed research he showed that damage to fruit trees did not occur at the same level every year (references below).

Bullfinches fed on a variety of seeds during winter including nettle, dock and bramble,

**Acknowledgements**

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Alun ap Rhisiart, Anne Archer, John Anderson, Annette Anderton, Neil Brown, Malcolm Chattwood, Jim Dickson, Ian Fisher, Gordon Holm, Peter & Dorothy Hogbin (photocopying & dispatching the newsletter), David Jardine, Eddie Maguire, Chris McInerny, Alistair McGregor, Ewan Miles, Linda Petty (proof reading),



Heather and birch seeds. These were often depleted by early spring, so Bullfinches switched to feed on Ash seed that had persisted through the winter and beyond. Ash generally produced seeds every two years, and the damage to fruit trees coincided with years when no ash seed was available. These findings seem to explain why our fruit trees suffered so much this spring, as there was no seed on any of our neighbouring Ash trees. Let's hope the Ash produce a bumper seed crop this year!

This is quite a small issue of the *Eider*. I was hoping that the lockdown would have given many of you time to write something. But, apparently not! So, please do try to let me have something for the next issue—thank you.

#### References

Newton, I. (1964). Bud-eating by Bullfinches in relation to the natural food supply. *Journal of applied Ecology* 1: 265-279.

Newton, I. (1972). *Finches*. London, Collins.

A male Bullfinch enjoying the flower buds from our neighbour's cherry tree ©Steve Petty



## Club News

### FIELD TRIPS 2021

As covid-19 restrictions ease, we are hoping to resume field trips. **Government advice might mean that numbers are limited for field trips. So, it is essential that you contact the leader of a trip beforehand to make sure a place is available.**

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 risk assessment and safety briefing at the start of each field trip.

**Saturday 29 May. Benmore Gardens and surrounding area (Cowal).** Led by Nigel Scriven (e-mail [chairman@argyllbirdclub.org](mailto:chairman@argyllbirdclub.org) phone 01505 706652). Meet 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 £7.50 for adults and £6.75 for concessions. The trip will include walks of 2-3km on paths, both inside and outside the gardens. There may also be a chance to visit a hide overlooking Holy Loch.

**Saturday 26 June. Kerrera.** Led by David Jardine (e-mail [dcjardine@btinternet.com](mailto:dcjardine@btinternet.com) phone 01546 510200). This will involve a walk round the northern end of the island, including some walking off track. Rendezvous will be at the Gallanach Ferry Terminal (map. ref. NM834283) and times will

be confirmed to those who 'book' with David. Please wear strong footwear for a 7km walk on uneven ground and bring your own lunch.

**Sunday 31 July. Add Estuary.** Led by Jim Dickson (e-mail [argyllbirder@outlook.com](mailto:argyllbirder@outlook.com) phone 01546 603967). Meet at the car park by the Island Add Bridge, Bellanoch at 10.00hrs. Walk on level ground to Crinan and back via bird hide, a total of 7km. The aim would be to find the first returning waders of the autumn as well as noting any young birds of various species on the estuary, and any passerines that we come across.

**Saturday 28 August. Isle of Gigha.** Led by David Jardine (details above) who will confirm rendezvous details to those wishing to take part, taking the ferry on foot over to Gigha. Lunches may be available at the hotel on the island. The trip will involve 4-5km walking on tracks and roads.

### ONLINE AND INDOOR MEETINGS 2021

**Zoom meetings.** The club held further online meetings in February, March and April. All were well attended. Summaries of talks from these meetings are given on pages 4-8 and 13-15. Another Zoom meeting was planned on 20 May. A summary of talks from this meeting will appear in the September issue of the *Eider*. We are hoping to hold more online meetings over the next winter/spring period.

**Saturday 6 November, Autumn meeting and AGM.** We are still hoping that this meeting will go ahead, but it will be dependent on government ad-

vice. The meeting will 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 the September 2021 *Eider*. Please see the club website for updates.

### ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 32 (2020)

Jim Dickson (compiler and editor) has completed the latest ABR in record time. It is full of interesting records and superb colour photos (see front cover photo opposite). Well done Jim. If you don't have a copy already, one can be downloaded (PDF format) from the club's website (under the 'Publications' tab). Previous years' reports, in PDF format, can be downloaded from the same place.

### 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 recent Seabird Monitoring Programme (seabird counts 2015-2019). The club has also helped to fund the provision of nest boxes for Grey Wagtails and Dippers in Kintyre (see page 12). More recently, the club has bought ten Swift nest boxes. Seven of these are already in place. Applications for project funding should be submitted to the secretary (contact details on the back page).

### ABC COMMITTEE VACANCY

We are looking for two people to join the club's committee. If you are interested, please contact our secretary to find out more about the post.

## Argyll Bird Report 2020



*published by the*  
Argyll Bird Club 2021

### MACHRIHANISH SEABIRD OBSERVATORY MONTHLY REPORTS

The observatory's monthly reports are packed full of superb photos taken by Eddie Maguire and colleagues at MSBO. You can download PDFs of reports at:

<http://www.machrihanishbirdobservatory.org.uk/reports.htm>

### Abstracts from ABC Zoom meeting on 18 February

The meeting on Thursday 18 February was the best attended meeting so far, with 49 locations logging on. Summaries of the three talks are given below

**The mountain grouse of Mull**—Ewan Miles, Nature Scotland and BTO Representative for Mull (summary Alistair McGregor)

Ewan Miles is a very knowledgeable, passionate and committed naturalist living and working on the Island of Mull. He works for Nature Scotland and is also a regional representative for the BTO. He has run *Nature Scotland—Mull Wildlife Experience* tours for the last five years along with his father John Miles who was also an RSPB warden and is an author of numerous books.

Ewan's talk was about his experience with the elusive Ptarmigan, and his endless search for them on Mull. Ewan explained a bit about Ptarmi-

gan biology and the habitat they live in. They are a mottled-brown grouse, but moult these summer feathers to become almost white in the winter months (photos on next page). They blend in well with the rocky terrain and with the snow-covered mountain tops in winter. They are seldom found below 700m altitude. Ptarmigan live within rocky outcrops found on the higher reaches of Scotland's mountains. Their diet is similar to that of Red Grouse and comprises largely shoots of ericaceous plants, while insects are important food for young chicks. The name Ptarmigan derives from the Scottish Gaelic word *tarmachan* with a *p* added by association with the Greek *pteron* meaning wing. There are possibly 10,000 breeding pairs within Scotland.

Ptarmigan are able to survive a wind-chill factor as low as -45 degrees centigrade due to the dense plumage that extends to their legs and



feet. Long toe nails enable them to dig snow holes for survival in the worst weather, and to dig for food below the snow. Mull's climate is described as oceanic with low cloud and rain or snow falling in every month of the year, which makes it difficult to find the Ptarmigan.

In 2011, Ewan looked on Jura for Ptarmigan and found their remains, possibly an eagle kill, and their droppings. The weather then was very wet and windy, which wasn't ideal conditions to find this very well camouflaged, elusive bird. He found more of their droppings in other suitable habitats comprising Crowberry, Bilberry and Heather, usually on a south facing slope with scree and rocks.

In the winter of 2019 he saw reports of Ptarmigan on Mull on BirdTrack. So, on Christmas Day when the weather was ideal, no wind or rain, he set off in search of them. After trekking a number of miles, he started to find fresh droppings. Further on he heard birds calling and he finally caught up with them. The slides Ewan showed were fantastic, illustrating just how well camouflaged the birds are.

During summer 2020, Ewan was surveying Golden Plover when he flushed a pair of Ptarmigan on the south end of Mull. More photos showed how well the birds are camouflaged in the rocky montane terrain. Ewan explained that the existence of Ptarmigan in Scotland is threatened and one possible reason is likely to be global warming, leading to milder winters and wetter summers. Other factors could include predation of adults and chicks, and new fencing, which the birds can collide with as they fly from one area to another. Ewan's website is:

<https://www.naturescotland.com/>

My first experience with Ptarmigan was in 1982, on Ben More in Cowal, I was out with the local deer stalker and came across five birds, and further on a single dotterel. Luckily, I was with an experienced hill guide, otherwise I would have just thought they were 'funny' Red Grouse. I have seen neither in Cowal since.

**What can be achieved in one week every year**—Robin Ward, Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group (summary David Jardine)

The Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group (TIARG) first visited these isles to the west of Mull fifty years ago to count the breeding seabirds for the first national seabird census (Operation Seafarer). The group has returned every



Ptarmigan on Mull in summer (above) and winter plumage (below). Both photos ©Ewan Miles

year since (except 2020) to carry out annual monitoring of the seabird populations on the islands. This is usually a sample of the key areas using standardised protocols, but a complete count of all the islands has now been completed for the fourth time for the current 'Seabirds Count' census.

The Treshnish Islands, especially Lunga, receive many visitors to see the seabirds, and in particular Puffins. However, during 2020 there were very few visits because of the Coronavirus outbreak and TIARG are looking forward to see if there are any discernible changes in 2021 following a year with very limited human disturbance. It may be that the visitors provide some of the seabirds with protection from predators. At a seabird colony in Sweden where human disturbance was much lower in 2020 (for the same reason), the researchers found that there had been increased predation of Puffins and Guillemots by White-



A Puffin (upper) and a pair of Razorbills (lower) on Lunga on the Treshnish Islands. Both species have been studied for many years by TIARG ©Steve Petty

tailed Eagles. However, they also reported reduced egg-loss to gulls and crows, which in part was a consequence of the presence of eagles.

The national survey work by TIARG also includes assessments of the populations of Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels. These species usually only visit their nests under the cover of darkness (to avoid predation). Normal counting methods are therefore not possible, so a 'play-back' survey is carried out. This involves assessing the number of nesting burrows on the islands and playing the call of these species at the entrances to the burrows and listening for the birds to call back to confirm they are occupied. Not all birds call back, so further calibration is required to allow a population estimate to be calculated. An estimate of 1992 apparently occupied Manx Shearwater nests were found in the recent survey; an increase of 55% over the total found in the Seabird 2000 survey. During 2018/19 TIARG estimated that there were 10,261 breeding pairs of Storm Petrel, a 104% increase on the 1996 population

estimate.

In addition to the population assessments, TIARG ring a lot of seabirds, which has contributed important information on the biology of these species that spend most of their time at sea. A recent geolocator study conducted by Lila Buckingham has tracked the winter 'at sea' distribution of Guillemots and Razorbills providing valuable data for making decisions on offshore renewable projects. Other capture-recapture studies on Storm Petrels and Shags has provided important information on the longevity of these species, which is required for environmental assessment of such proposals and the long-term conservation of seabirds.

TIARG team members (usually around 8 in number) work incredibly hard during their week-long stay on the island with a programme of work from morning to dawn. Even the Corncrakes, which have recently colonised Lunga following the removal of sheep, don't keep them awake when they crawl into their tents after their all-night Storm Petrel ringing sessions. Over the years they have seen 85 different species on the islands, but more importantly the contribution of their week-long work of systematically recording the seabirds provides a very valuable scientific understanding of one of Argyll's largest seabird colonies. Further information on the work of TIARG is available at:

<https://www.naturescotland.com/>

#### **Moth trapping in Argyll and northern Spain—Steve Petty, Argyll Bird Club (summary Steve Petty)**

Steve has been moth trapping in Argyll (Ardentinny) and northern Spain (Picos de Europa, Cantabria) for ten years. No licenses are required to catch and record moths and butterflies in Scotland, but they are in Spain, which tends to limit the recording of Lepidoptera there. Using one light trap in each location, a total of 345 species of macro moths were recorded at Ardentinnny, and 825 species in Linares. This reflects the overall greater biological diversity in northern Spain.

The main methods of catching moths were described. These included various types of light traps, catching moths with a net, often at dusk, and sugaring. The latter method involved painting a sweet solution on fence posts or tree trunks.

Nowadays, there are excellent field guides available for identifying both macro and micro moths. Digital cameras with a macro function have revolutionized moth identification, making the collections of specimens redundant, except in rare cases where genital examination is necessary to





**Left photo.** Female Buff Footman *Eilema depressa*, a species that has only recently colonised Scotland and, even more recently, Argyll.

**Right photo.** Gold Moth *Axia margarita*, a new species recorded in north-western Spain

confirm identification. In addition, there are various online forums where photographs of moths can be posted for experts to identify. The ScottishMoths group is an excellent example (<https://groups.io/g/scottishmoths>) where most photos of moths are quickly identified, often within hours of being posted. Other invertebrate species are also caught in moth traps,

and the talk illustrated some examples of these.

Steve showed that changing status of individual moth species can be highlighted by using just one moth trap over a number of years (left photo to above). In addition, moth trapping in northern Spain has discovered numerous species that had not previously been recorded in that part of the peninsular (right photo above).

### Abstract from ABC Zoom meeting on 5 March

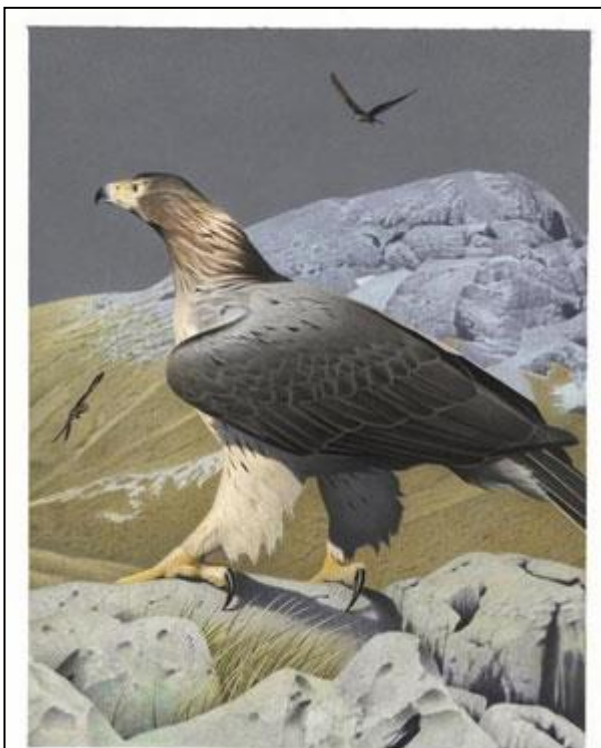
A talk on New Zealand birds was followed by the AGM (which should have taken place at the autumn 2020 meeting, but was cancelled due to covid-19). Around 30 locations logged onto the meeting.

**New Zealand's birds-extinctions and salvation**—Peter Robert (summary by Alun ap Rhisiart)

New Zealand ranges from subtropical to temperate and almost sub-Antarctic latitudes. It is a very diverse and interesting archipelago, with fewer people than Scotland, but a bit larger than the UK, but it is an environmental mess. The nearest landmass, Australia, is 1,600km miaway. It broke away from Gondwanaland about 170 Ma ago.

New Zealand was the last major landmass on the planet to be colonised by Man. The Maoris only arrived there 8-900yrs ago, and the first white settlers around 400yrs ago. The settlers started to arrive in the very late 1700s, but it didn't

really get going until the 1800s. Before man arrived the flora and fauna evolved in total isolation, and with few predators and no land mammals. Many of the birds became flightless, and all of them were sadly naïve. The Polynesians brought with them dogs, rats, and pigs. These formed feral populations and problems quickly developed. They encountered a thickly-forested paradise with abundant, easy prey, including the huge flightless moas. Up until then the only threat the moas had faced was the magnificent Haast's Eagle, possibly the largest eagle ever to have existed (illustration on next page). In spite of their size, the moas proved very easy to kill, with 6,000 moa skeletons in one Maori midden alone. Within a couple of hundred years, all nine species of moa were extinct, along with Haast's Eagle. Unfortunately, the Polynesians killed off more than the moas: of 58 bird species that became extinct in New Zealand since Man arrived, 26 of them were gone before Europeans arrived. Of these, 19 were flightless, and three



The magnificent, extinct Haast's Eagle that used to hunt moas. It was probably the largest eagle ever to have lived ©Paul Martinson

were duck species verging on being flightless. Others included the Adzebill, Forbes' Harrier, the North Island Goose, Scarlett's Duck, and some of the flightless rails. A very good book on the subject is *Extinct Birds of New Zealand* by Alan Tennyson and Paul Martinson (front cover opposite).

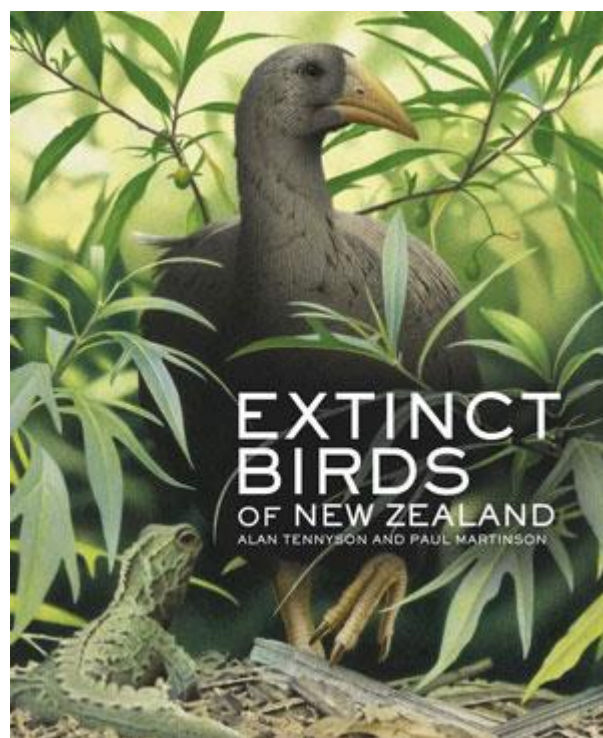
Small woodland birds went extinct as well, falling victim to the Maori's introduced pigs, dogs, and rats. These included the Long-billed Wren and Stout-legged Wren—both being flightless. Some, such as the New Zealand Raven, could fly, but had few defence mechanisms against mammals.

Then European settlers came along. They also found birds that were defenceless, and even today people can walk up to flightless Wekas, which haven't learned to run away. There were advertisements offering free passage to suitable people to help colonise the islands. Life would have been tough, but the carnage continued, both from hunting for sport and the pot. Much of the hunting to extinction of large, edible species on the North and South Islands had happened earlier due to the Maoris, but now much of the hunting to extinction by European settlers happened on the offshore islands. For example, the Chatham Islands and

Norfolk Island where birds such as Auckland Merganser, and Norfolk Island pigeon soon went extinct.

Europeans were impatient to turn pristine forest into workable farmland. They just burned it, even though the timber today would be priceless. Deforestation was swift and was replaced by open farmland, and this caused a rapid contraction of the ranges of native birds to remote areas and steep hillsides. The homesick settlers subsequently imported and released an estimated 133 species of European birds, of which about 40 still survive, thriving in the vacuum created by open farmlands. Introduced mammals such as Red Deer, Rabbits, Feral Goats, and Wild Boar are now a scourge across much of New Zealand. Some species of wallabies were imported from Australia, and being endangered there are now being reintroduced back to Australia. Possums, rats, cats, and dogs were introduced also.

New Zealand has many offshore islands, where native species were more likely to survive. It is here that conservationists have concentrated their efforts. As a result, New Zealand has become a world leader in the preservation of island species and the removal of pest species.

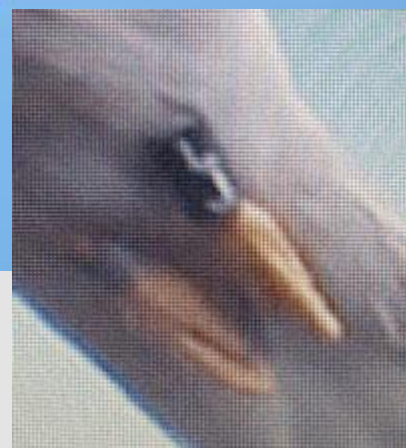


This excellent book recounts the destruction of native birds in New Zealand by Man.

*Extinct Birds of New Zealand*, by Alan Tennyson and illustrated by Paul Martinson. Published by Te Papa Press (2006). ISBN 978-0-909010-218



## Recent recoveries of birds ringed or found in Argyll Part 2



The male Hen Harrier (above) was photographed (under a schedule 1 licence) at a breeding site on Colonsay. It was later identified from its colour ring. The right photo provides an enlargement of the tail area of the above photo. See ringing details below ©Ian Fisher

Following on from the March *Eider* (number 135, pages 18-19), which concentrated on seabirds, this article provides details of the more interesting recoveries of other species in 2019. Full details for the whole of Britain can be found in Robinson *et al.* (2020) where it is possible to filter for different years, species and specifically for Argyll.

### Waterbirds

#### Barnacle Goose

291066—adult ringed at Grunart Farm, Islay, on 10 November 2001, shot at Landbrot, Vester-Skaftafellssysla, Iceland on 10 October 2019 (NNW, 1090 km, 17 years 11 months).

#### Greenland White-fronted Goose

1331814—first-year female ringed and fitted with a neck-collar at Mains of Duchrae, Dumfries & Galloway on 1 April 2009, which was seen at Gruinart Flats, Islay on 8 November 2019 (WNW, 171 km, 10 years 7 months 7 days).

#### Mute Swan

W05900—adult female colour-ringed at Ashton, Gourrock on 27 January 2002, resighted at Gairletter, Blairmore on 10 April 2019 (NNW, 8 km, 17 years 2 months 14 days).

### Grey Heron

1503641—nestling ringed at Garvard, Colonsay on 10 June 2013, found long dead on Colonsay on 24 July 2019 (3 km, 6 years 1 month 14 days).

### Raptors and Owls

#### Osprey

1408004—nestling colour-ringed at a confidential site in Angus on 28 June 2007, which was found breeding on Loch Awe in 2013 and 2014, was found predated on 6 May 2019 (WSW, 118 km, 11 years 10 months 8 days).

1700001—nestling colour-ringed in Cowal on 10 July 2018 resighted at Kartong, The Gambia on 31 October 2018 and also 9 January 2019 (SSW, 4,874 km, 5 months 30 days).

#### Hen Harrier

EY18439—nestling male colour-ringed at a confidential site on Colonsay on 14 June 2016, photographed (under licence) at a breeding site on Colonsay on 14 June 2019 (2 km, 3 years) (photo above).

#### Peregrine

GJ51464—nestling female fitted with a tran-

sponder tag in Cowal on 15 June 2008, found nesting at a confidential site near Roslin, Midlothian in 2016, 2017, 2018 and on 30 May 2019 (E, 130 km, 10 years 11 months 15 days).

### Barn Owl

GV59663—nestling ringed in west Kintyre on 6 May 2017, found dead (hit by car) in Llanddowror, Carmarthenshire on 17 April 2019 (S, 442 km, 1 year 11 months 11 days)

GR88578—nestling female ringed at the Luib Hotel, Stirlingshire on 5 June 2017, found long dead at Balnahard, Colonsay on 7 July 2019 (WSW, 112 km, 2 years, 1 month 2 days).

### Waders

**Oystercatcher**—four recoveries linking birds summering in Argyll, but wintering further south.

FJ06103—adult colour-ringed at The Gann, Pembrokeshire on 14 March 2016, seen at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree in 2017 and 18 February 2019 (N, 540 km, 2 years 11 months 4 days).

FH678600—adult colour-ringed Bangor Harbour, Gwynedd on 19 January 2014, seen on Tiree in 2017 and 2018, then at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 4 April 2019 and 24 July 2019 (NNW, 403 km, 5 years 6 months 5 days).

FH44197—nestling ringed at Lagganbeg, Kiln-inver on 8 June 2016, recaptured by a ringer at Beaumaris, Isle of Anglesey on 16 November 2019. (SSE, 353 km, 3 years 5 months 8 days).

FH45411—adult colour-ringed Beaumaris, Isle of Anglesey on 16 October 2011, recaptured at Llanfairfechan, Conwy on 19 October 2013, resighted at Machrihanish, Kintyre in 2017 and on 7 May 2019 (NNW, 260 km, 7 years 6 months 21 days).

### Curlew

SFH/CT150714—first-year bird colour-ringed at Kainuu, Finland on 3 July 2011, resighted at Lochdon, Mull on 27 October 2019 (W, 2003 km, 8 years 3 months 24 days).

### Passerines

#### Chough

ES06993—nestling female colour-ringed at Balnahard, Colonsay on 16 May 2002, resighted Oronsay on 7 November 2019 (SSW, 13 km, 17 years 5 months 22 days).

#### Blue Tit

AHD3229—nestling ringed at Rowney Wood, Essex on 21 May 2018, caught by ringer near Campbeltown on 31 March 2019 (NW, 549 km, 10 months 10 days).

#### Sand Martin

DKC 9AH8224—Adult ringed at Thisted, Denmark on 4 June 2015, recaptured by a ringer at Langa Quarry, Campbeltown on 7 July 2019 (W, 907 km, 4 years 1 month 3 days).

### Swallow

Z445477—first-year bird ringed at Newshot Island, Dunbartonshire on 7 August 2017 found freshly dead in building at Benmore, Dunoon on 29 May 2019 (WNW, 37 km, 1 year 9 months 2 days).

### Willow Warbler

KJJ847—first-year bird ringed at Glen Euchar on 12 July 2019, recaptured on the Calf of Man, Isle of Man on 12 August 2019 (S, 256 km, 1 month).

HPN349—adult female caught at Aros Moss, Campbeltown on 23 May 2015, recaptured there in 2016 and on 7 June 2019 (1 km, 4 years 15 days).

### Redwing

ISR 8117254—first-year colour-ringed at Hornafjodur, Austur-Skaftafellssysla, Iceland on 4 August 2018 resighted at West Hynish, Tiree on 7 April 2019 (SSE, 979 km, 8 months 3 days).

### Duncock

NY54988—first-year ringed Earl Strongham, Suffolk on 11 February 2017, recaptured by ringer near Campbeltown on 7 April 2019 (NW, 571 km, 2 years 8 months 1 day).

### Chaffinch

P692061—adult female ringed Drummond, Inverness on 10 January 2017, found long dead (hit glass) at Ardfarn on 2 April 2019 (SSW, 161 km, 2 years 2 months 23 days).

### Twite

S969333—first-year male ringed Clachtoll, Loch-inver on 25 November 2018, recaptured by ringer at the Oa, Islay on 3 December 2019 (SSW, 294 km, 1 year 8 days).

AXB2008—first-year male ringed Cleats Shore, Ayrshire on 18 October 2018, recaptured by ringer at the Oa, Islay on 2 December 2019 (WNW, 68



Increasing numbers of Goldfinches are being ringed at feeding stations ©Jim Dickson



km, 1 year 1 month 14 days).

### **Lesser Redpoll**

Z889471—first-year male ringed Wakefield, West Yorkshire on 23 October 2015, found freshly dead (cat) at Lunga Estate, Craginish peninsula on 1 May 2019 (NW, 388 km, 3 years 6 months 8 days).

### **Goldfinch**

S432888—second-year female ringed at Leswalt, Dumfries & Galloway on 4 May 2018, recaptured by ringer at Kilmartin on 26 December 2019 (N, 135 km. 1 year 7 months 22 days).

### **Siskin**

S515886—adult male ringed near Minehead,

Somerset on 6 March 2018, recaptured by ringer at Glen Euchar on 10 April 2019 (NNW, 584 km, 1 year 1 month 4 days).

ARF0006—first-year female ringed near Rhayader, Powys on 8 March 2019, found dead Kilmelford on 27 July 2019 (NNW, 461 km, 4 months 13 days).

### **Reference**

Robinson, R.A., Leech, D.I. & Clark, J.A. (2020) The Online Demography Report: Bird ringing and nest recording in Britain & Ireland in 2019. BTO, Thetford. (<http://www.bto.org/ringing-report>, created on 10-September-2020).

**David Jardine**

## **Harbinger of Spring**

**By Annette Anderton**



As early rays of sunshine weave  
Through glistening,  
Dew-jewelled trees,  
The woodland is embroidered  
With a tapestry of song.  
The chorus fades to patchwork,  
Two notes floating  
In the air, that  
Echo and echo,  
From glen to glen  
Over river, wood and moor.  
Cuck-oo, cuck-oo,  
Cuck-oo, cuck-oo.  
The voice of a visitor  
Often heard  
But rarely seen.  
The herald of an awakening world,  
A harbinger of spring.

## Dipper and Grey Wagtail nest boxes in Kintyre



Through casual observation over the last five years or so I had become concerned about the breeding status of Grey Wagtail (and subsequently Dipper) in Kintyre. I had noticed that several sites in the area, that had traditionally held breeding pairs, no longer seemed occupied. Beginning in 2019 I built a few open-fronted nest boxes, suitable for both species, and placed them in appropriate sites. Most were under bridges spanning some of the many small, fast-flowing rivers and burns in Kintyre, mostly in the south of the peninsular. I also requested funding from the Argyll Bird Club, and through their generous donation I was able to purchase a further 18 purpose-built Grey Wagtail nest boxes. The hope was to get a better idea of the numbers of both species breeding in South Kintyre.

Unfortunately, the restrictions of covid-19 and a leg injury in early 2020 slowed the placing of boxes, and by spring 2021 I still have four to find a site for. Discouragingly, initial observations seem to show a complete shunning of the purpose-built boxes over the few open-fronted boxes, and naturally existing nest sites. However, time and effort on this project has thus far has been very limited. My hope is that now restrictions are, thankfully, being lifted, the boxes will give us a better picture of how these wonderful riverside birds are faring in subsequent years.

**Neil Brown**

Neil fixing a nest box to a bridge, and a brood of Grey wagtails in one of the boxes (lower photo). All photos ©Neil Brown





## Abstracts from ABC Zoom meeting on 15 April

Around 28 locations logged onto this meeting comprising three talks (summaries below).

**The 2021 Nuthatch Survey**—Jim Dickson, Argyll Bird Recorder (summary Steve Petty)

The Nuthatch has been expanding its range in Continental Europe, England, and more recently in Scotland. Jim's talk was based on an article that he wrote for the last newsletter (*Eider*, March 2021, pages 8-12. The status of the Nuthatch in Argyll). This highlighted the fairly recent, rapid colonisation of Argyll, and sought to encourage ABC members to take part in the 2021 survey (*Eider*, March 2021, page 13). The survey aims to chart the distribution of Nuthatches in more detail, and to determine breeding density in suitable habitats, to enable a more realistic estimate of numbers in Argyll. Many Nuthatch records to date have been from bird feeders in gardens, but the new survey will also be looking for Nuthatches in suitable woodland away from feeding stations, using recorded calls.

**Let's go snorkeling again; update on Great Northern Diver feeding project**—David Jardine, Argyll Bird Club (summary David Jardine)

As a follow-up to his talk in November 2019, David Jardine gave an update on his studies on the winter feeding ecology of Great Northern Divers. This project aims to discover more about the feeding habits of the most common diver species wintering in Argyll. This follows a proposal to expand fish farming in the Special Protection Area, which has been established for this species in the Sound of Gigha.

David's study, based on observations from the shore, has three parts. In the first, he observed the behaviour of divers throughout the day and at all states of the tide close to the solstice. Divers spend just over 50% of their time feeding underwater (they are well named!). They fed more around dawn, in the late morning and in the late afternoon than at other times; they also fed less at high tide than at other states of the tide (this was statistically less significant than time of day). These results were compared with findings about this species in North America (known there as Common Loon), where more birds winter further south than in Europe (thus have a longer day-length for feeding).

Feeding studies of this species are difficult as the birds ingest some of their prey underwater and the assumptions and biases were set out in this study. David noticed that divers often had a drink after swallowing a prey item which they had brought to



Nuthatches are currently being surveyed in Argyll under an ABC scheme ©Gordon Holm

the surface. Sometimes they also drank on surfacing from a dive without prey in their bill. Therefore, during watches of a single bird for 10 dives he recorded the number of dives on which they surfaced with prey and the number of dives on which they drank after a dive. Observing across different sites he found that on about half their dives, divers surfaced with prey or drank on surfacing, but the proportion of 'prey or drink' varied across sites.

More work has to be done on the food value of the prey items which were being brought to the surface, but initial findings showed differences between four different study sites. At two sites a large proportion of the surfaced prey were crabs (photo below). At the other two sites fewer crabs were eaten, with more fish being brought to the surface, particularly flatfish (Dab & Plaice). Divers also drank more often on surfacing at sites where more fish were being brought to the surface, suggesting the diet may be more fish based at these sites. The differences between sites is thought to be related to differences in the marine habitats



Two juvenile Great Northern Divers, Craobh Haven (one with a Shore Crab) ©David Jardine

present (sandy, rocky or cobble sea-floor). Juvenile divers appeared to be eating smaller crabs (measured against the diver's bill-length) than adults at one site where samples were large enough for comparison. Observations will be continued into the spring until the divers migrate north.

It is rather early to tell what impact changes in fish farming may have, but any practices which impacts on crabs or flatfish would appear to be important. However, it may be that trawl fishing, which may have a greater impact area than the fish farms may be equally important in the conservation of divers wintering in Argyll.

### Looking for Honey Buzzards in Scotland—Chris McNerny

(summary Steve Petty)

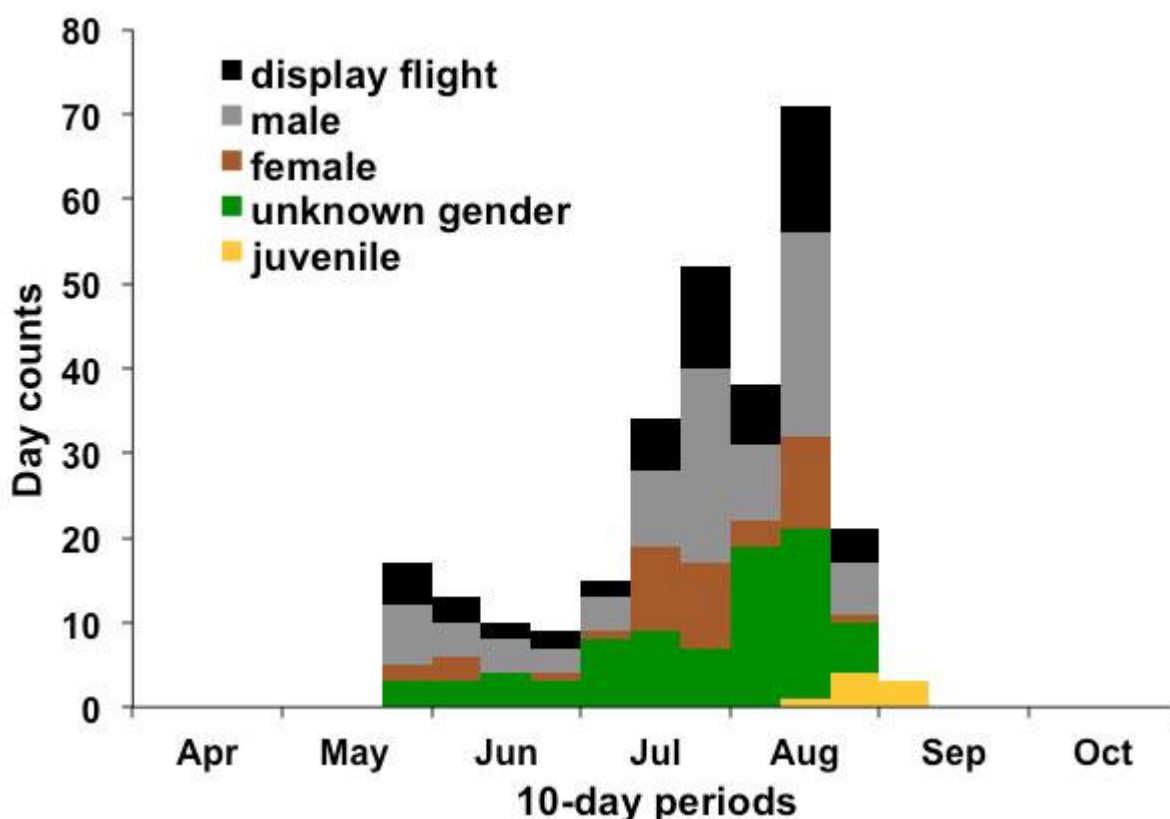
Chris gave a fascinating talk on Honey Buzzards, which included a little about the bird's biology, recent survey work that had been undertaken in central Scotland and an update of the UK status of this scarce species.

'Honey Buzzard' is a bit of a misnomer, because it rarely eats honey, and is not a true buzzard. It is primarily a forest raptor both in its winter quar-



**Upper photo.** Male Honey-buzzard named Shorty, August 2018, central Scotland. This individual is typical of the adult males seen in central Scotland, being a pale grey morph. © John Anderson

**Lower photo.** Histogram showing the frequency of different flight activities by Honey Buzzards during the breeding season ©Chris McNerny





ters in equatorial Africa and in its breeding range in northern Europe. It's a secretive species and can often go undetected, and as a result, numbers have probably been underestimated in the past. It also breeds later than most other raptors, only arriving back from its winter quarters in May. The UK represents the north-western limit of their breeding range.

It can be confused with Common Buzzard, but it is generally lighter-bodied, has a longer tail with distinct barring, and has longer, more flexible wings with a dark trailing edge. Honey Buzzards usually soar on flat wings, whereas Common Buzzards often soar on upturned wings. Honey Buzzards also have a unique display behaviour where they flutter and flap their wings together over their back. This can be repeated numerous times. Plumage colouration can vary greatly between individuals, just as in Common Buzzards.

Honey Buzzards excavate wasp nests to extract the comb from which they remove and eat the wasp larvae. Large pieces of wasp comb are brought back to nest by the adults, so they can feed their offspring on larvae. Soon after they arrive back from Africa, wasp nests are only just being established, and at this time they often resort to alternative food, such as frogs and small birds.

Chris showed some excellent photographs taken with trail cameras at nests. These included shots of both chicks and adults, and illustrated some nesting behaviour. Females, but not males, often returned to the nest with fresh leaf branches from both deciduous and coniferous trees. Other raptors do this too. It possibly has some sanitizing effect, by covering old/rotting prey remains and faeces that accumulate on the nest, and may also prevent feathers from becoming soiled.

Chris detailed recent survey work in east central, central, and west central Scotland. Honey Buzzards were found breeding in all three areas. Breeding was confirmed for the first time in the latter area in 2020 when two chicks were reared from one nest. Due to the large variation in plumage pattern amongst birds, individuals can now be identified from flight photos. This allows for survival and return rates to be estimated, and has highlighted that non-breeding birds are present in all three study areas. Amazingly, one chick from the successful nest in west central Scotland in 2020 was later identified on the Island of Bure from flight photographs.

One aim of Chris's talk was to highlight that the national Honey Buzzard survey was being extended into 2021, and he is looking for additional observers to undertake vantage-point counts. A very useful histogram (previous page) from the talk highlighted the best times to count soaring birds. Any ABC member who is interested in taking part should contact David Jardine. The results of the national survey up to 2020 indicated there were 50 territories in Scotland (85 volunteers taking part) and 119 territories in the whole of Britain, a substantial increase since the last survey in 2000.

## Finally

Very many thanks to David Jardine for arranging the speakers and Malcolm Chattwood for overseeing the technical aspects of all the online meetings during this past winter/early spring. Thanks too to our speakers and to those who have provided summaries of the talks. The last spring Zoom meeting was held on 20 May (2000hrs). Summaries of talks from this meeting will appear in the next *Eider*.

## BTO bird song ID

How are you at identifying songs and calls? I have just been on a BTO Zoom course and it was an ear-opener. I have 13 regular visitors to my garden and could only identify four by ear, but now I can manage them all. What really surprised me about my fellow students was that 48% self-identified as very knowledgeable about birds (unlike me!), yet they found identification by ear difficult. I had thought I had a rare problem, and it was very cheering to be surrounded by others who were also getting 'in tune' for the first time.

If you would like to join one of these courses, the best thing is to sign on to get the BTO newsletter by going to <https://www.bto.org/about-bto/national-offices/bto-scotland/our-team-scotland/bto-scotland-newsletter> so that you know when they are coming up. You need to

sign up the moment you know about them, as they are incredibly popular. You will be told the silliest ways of linking the bird to the song, but it works. Which do you think is the Mafiafinch? Which is the car with a squeaky wheel and a stone in its tread?

For me the change has been extraordinary, as if I have taken out ear plugs. After years of frustration, every walk is a delight, as I enjoy this orchestra around me playing instruments I recognise instead of it just being a pleasant, but muddled melody. When I search in vain for a bird hidden in a tree with the sun behind it, I can say, "I can't see you, but I know who you are."

**Anne Archer**

Contributions for the September *Eider* should be sent to the editor before the 20 August 2021

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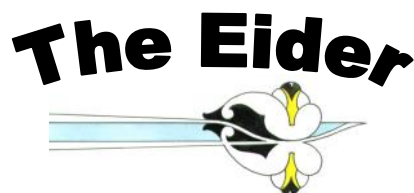
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**T**he *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book 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. Ideally, contributions should be less than 1500 words

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. Your annual subscription entitles you to one copy of the *Argyll Bird Report* (PDF file), four issues of the *Eider* (PDF files) 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

A surcharge of £5 will be added to the above rates, if printed copies of the *Eider* are requested. 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).