

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

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# The Eider



Gannets by Margaret Staley

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<b>Editorial</b>	<b>Pages 2-3</b>	<p>Since the last issue of the <i>Eider</i>, three members, who each made a huge contribution to both the club and birding in Argyll, have sadly passed away. Obituaries for Ian Brooke (Islay) and Eddie Maguire (Machrihanish Seabird Observatory) appear later in this issue.</p> <p>More recently, Margaret Staley passed away on 3 August. We owe a great deal to Margaret, not only did she design the club logo, but she contributed some superb painting and drawing for the <i>Birds of Argyll</i>, published in 2007, including the front and back covers for the book. She produced numerous other bird and wildlife paintings, one of which adorns the front cover of this issue, and many others, some of which have been used in the <i>Eider</i> over the years, including this issue. Margaret and her husband Peter were part of a small group of founder members of the ABC in 1985, and Peter served for many years as the club's Treasurer. Our condolences go out to Peter and their respective families.</p> <p>On a brighter note, it has been encouraging to see field trips re-instated after such a long pause due to Covid-19 restrictions. Outings to the Benmore area, Kerrera and the Add estuary all benefitted from the unusually good weather over spring and summer. Details of three more field trips for this autumn are included on the next page. We hope you can make some of these.</p> <p>We are also hoping to run the indoor meeting, incorporating the AGM, at the Cainbaan Hotel on 6 November (details on the next page). After missing out on an autumn meeting last year, it will be good to meet and chat to fellow members again.</p> <p>More recently, more sad news. Alan Spellman a stalwart of bird recording on Mull, passed away on 19 August. Alan made a tremendous contribution to the Mull 'bird scene'. He was a great character and diligently posted folks' sightings over many years, as well as producing the <i>Mull Bird Report</i>.</p>
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### Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Annette Anderton, Margaret Brooke, Malcolm Chattwood, Jim Dickson, Stuart Gibson, Jo Goudie, Peter & Dorothy Hogbin (photocopying & dispatching the newsletter), David Jardine, Alistair McGregor, Rab Morton, Linda Petty (proof reading), Peter Roberts, Nigel Scriven and Margaret Staley,

## Club News

### FIELD TRIPS

The number of people on field trips will be limited. So, it is essential that you contact the leader of a trip beforehand to make sure a place is available and to receive rendezvous details.

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 25 September.** Toward and south Loch Striven. Led by Alistair McGregor (e-mail [alistairmcgregor16@outlook.com](mailto:alistairmcgregor16@outlook.com) mobile phone 07754524240 ). Please contact Alistair for rendezvous details. There will be three short walks of about 1km each on a mix of shore and track, suitable footwear is advised. Please bring your own packed lunch.

**Saturday 30 October. Lismore.** Led by David Jardine (phone 01546 510200. E-mail [dcjardine@btinternet.com](mailto:dcjardine@btinternet.com)) who will confirm rendezvous details to those wishing to take part. Please bring your own lunch. This trip will include walks of around 7km on roads, tracks and paths with mostly gentle gradients.

**Saturday 27 November. Benmore Gardens and Holy Loch.** Led by Steve Petty (phone 01369 810024. E-mail [stevepetty@btinternet.com](mailto:stevepetty@btinternet.com)). Would those wishing to take part please contact Steve before 25 November for rendezvous details. The trip will include a walk of 2-3km in Benmore Gardens and a visit to the Holy Loch Hide.

### INDOOR MEETINGS 2021

**Saturday 6 November, Autumn meeting and AGM.** 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. We are planning to go ahead with the autumn meeting, providing the present Covid-19 restrictions do not change. **However, we are probably going to be restricted to 50 participants, including club officials. So, we need you to e-mail our Membership Secretary if you would like to attend, stating how many places are required, and if you require lunch.** Dorothy will then confirm to you by email if a place is available. Please see the club website for updates.

The programme will include a talk by David Jardine on interactions between Buzzards and eagles on Colonsay and some results from the ABC Nuthatch survey. Alistair McGregor will talk about encouraging children to look at wildlife and Nigel Scriven will talk on the seabirds of Sanda. A full pro-

gramme will be posted on the club's website.

Papers for the AGM will be e-mailed out to members prior to the meeting.

### ZOOM MEETINGS—AUTUMN 2021 PROGRAMME

We hope to hold more online meetings over the coming autumn-spring period. Information about the first meeting is given below. Details of subsequent meetings will appear in the December *Eider*. If you would like to give a talk at a future zoom meeting, please contact David Jardine. Please see the club's website and Facebook page for updates.

**Thursday 7 October** (talks start at 19.30hrs, but you can access the weblink from 19.15hrs).

**Talk 1.** David Wood will talk about Raptor migration monitoring at Sarimazi, Turkey, for the Egyptian Vulture New Life Project.

**Talk 2.** John Bowler will talk about Birds of Tiree.

If the Indoor Meeting on 6 November is cancelled due to Covid-19 restriction, we will endeavour to run a zoom meeting in December to include some of the talks planned for Cairnbaan

We have chosen weekday evenings for Zoom meetings to avoid disrupting weekends. Meetings will comprise 1-3 talks, each of approximately 15-20 minutes duration. Details (including a weblink) will be sent to members by email just before each meeting.

For general guidance on how to join a Zoom meeting see:

<https://www.the-soc.org.uk/files/docs/SOCZoomGuideforMembers.pdf>

### 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. 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.

### MACHRIHANISH SEABIRD OBSERVATORY MONTHLY REPORTS

Following the untimely death of Eddie Maguire (see pages 7-8), his colleagues at MSBO are hoping to keep the observatory running, but it may not be open all the time. So, if you are planning a visit please contact Jo Goudie ([jomitzi@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jomitzi@yahoo.co.uk)) to check if the observatory will be open. Monthly MSBO reports (PDF format) can still be downloaded at:

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



### **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.

### **FUNDING FOR BIRD CONSERVATION PROJECTS IN ARGYLL**

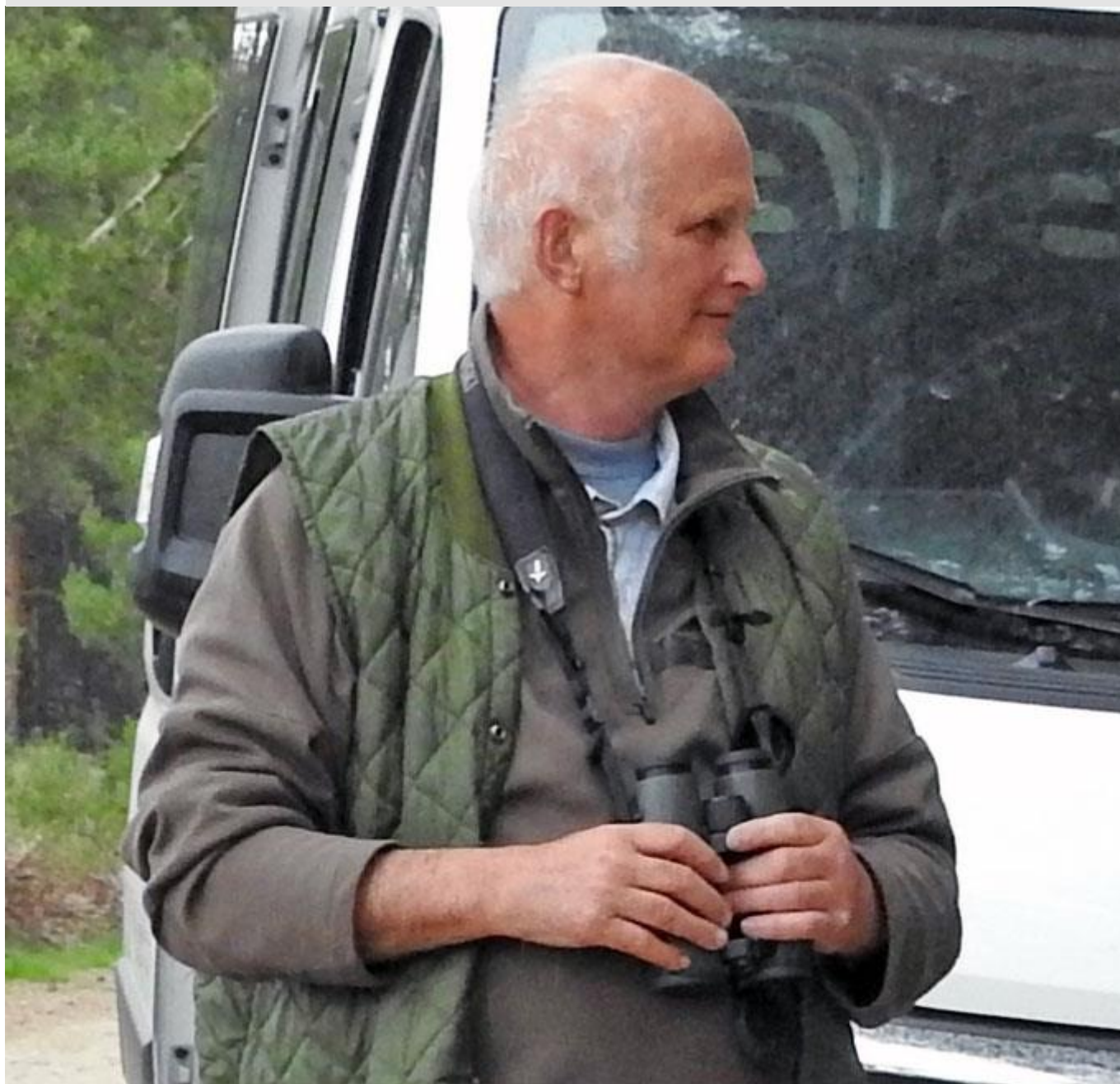
The ABC is willing to fund or part fund worthwhile bird conservation projects in Argyll. For example, help was given towards the costs of field work for the recent Seabird Monitoring Programme (seabird counts 2015-2019). The club has also helped to fund the provision of nest boxes for Grey Wagtails and Dippers in Kintyre (see article in the June 2021 *Eider*, page 12). More recently, the club has bought ten Swift nest boxes (photos on this page, but also see pages 9-10). Seven of these are already in place. Applications for project funding should be submitted to the secretary (contact details on the back page).

Two of the ABC Swift nest boxes in place under the eaves ©David Jardine



## Ian Kellie Brooke

11th April 1949—10th June 2021



Ian Brooke photographed in the Sierra de Gredos, on a trip to Spain in 2015 ©Margaret Brooke

Ian Brooke was one of the stalwarts of the birding community on Islay and it was a huge loss when he suddenly and unexpectedly passed away at his home on 10 June 2021.

Ian gained a BSc in Agriculture from Aberdeen University and spent much of his early life involved in various aspects of farming in his home area of the Borders in southern Scotland. He first visited Islay on a family holiday in 1989. Both he and his wife Margaret fell in love with the island and moved here ten years later, buying the Old Manse and a set of holiday cottages at Kilchoman. They quickly fitted into island life

and became active and appreciated members of various organisations promoting Islay as a tourist destination. But the move to Islay allowed Ian's already keen interest in the outdoors, wildlife and especially birds, to flourish. Above all, Ian was a practical man who got involved and got things done. He became a trustee of the Islay Natural History Trust and an active volunteer at the local RSPB reserve. He helped produce the *Islay Walks* booklet and developed the associated, very successful "Walk Islay" week offering guided hikes to out of the way locations of special interest across the island.



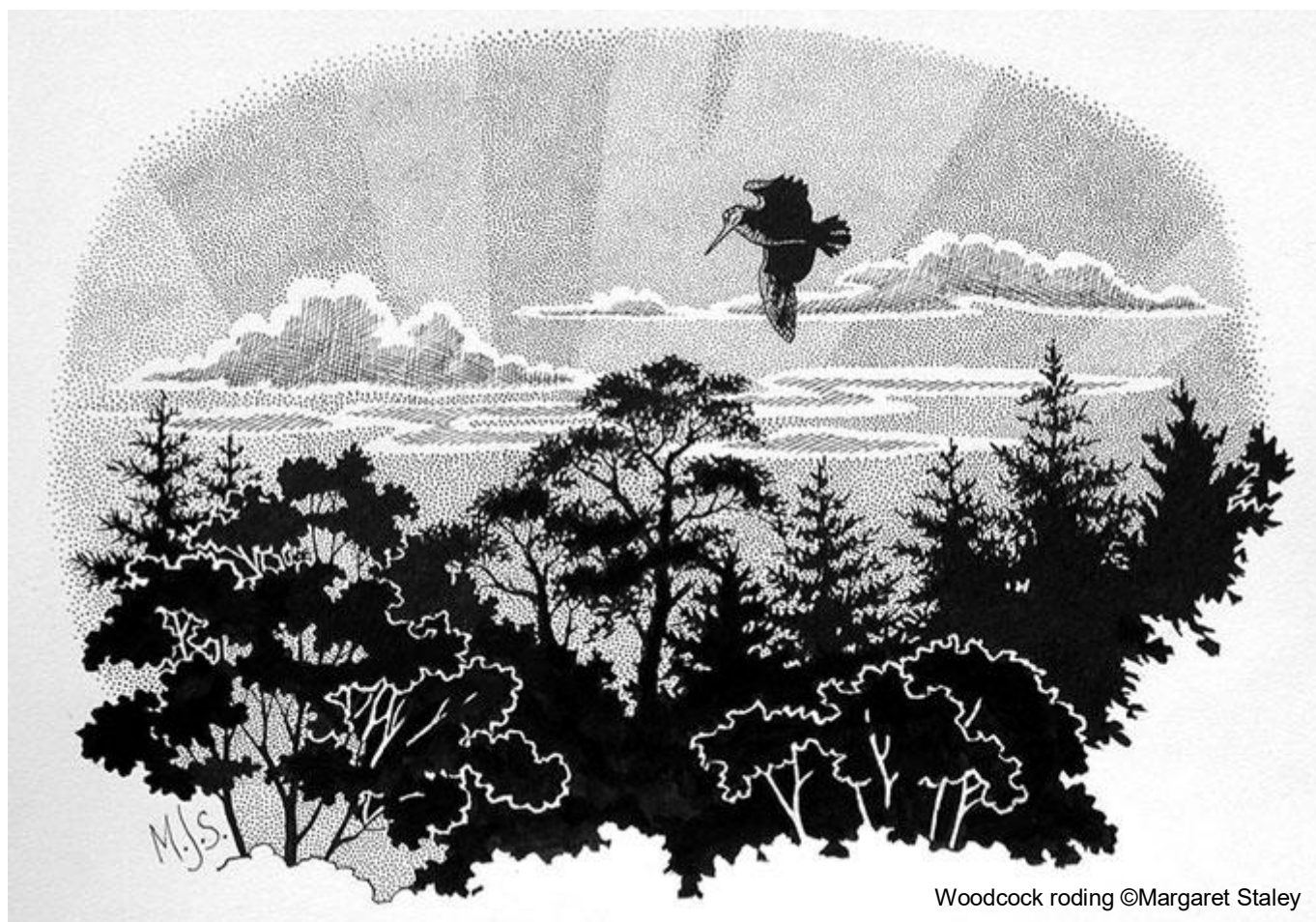
Keen to promote Islay further, Ian began sending regular birding notes to *Birdwatching Magazine*. In 2007 he quietly got on with setting up the Islay Bird Blog, posting chatty, daily accounts of the birdlife on Islay and beyond—something many of us on Islay had talked about, but never got around to doing. He also instigated the "Islay Bird Nerds" informal meetings once a month, open to anyone interested whether resident or visiting, to get together, meet new faces and catch up on bird news. "The Blog" has become a greatly appreciated and valued focus for any birdwatchers interested in Islay and from the accumulated records Ian was able to contribute each month to the Argyll Bird Club database. Not one to rest on his laurels, he dreamed up the great idea of Islay having a presence at the annual British Bird Fair to further make birders aware of the island's great potential. Quietly canny, he realised that whisky was the other element that made Islay special, so he convinced the distilleries to donate dozens of bottles of whiskey that he and his other dedicated volunteers could give out as free drams at the bird fair. Understandably, the Islay stand was a huge attraction and success over many years of his hard work and organisation and was awarded "Best Small Tourism Stand".

Retirement for Ian and Margaret meant a short

move to Shepherd's Cottage at Kilchoman. Although out of the way at the end of a dead-end road, his friendly, unassuming and easy-going manner, and the wonderful welcome (complete with coffee, tea, biscuits and cake) any visiting birdwatcher would receive from Ian and Margaret, turned this into something of a social hub for all visiting birdwatchers to drop in for a blether. Ian and Margaret's retirement home further illustrated Ian's passion for putting ideas into action. He planted hundreds of trees, created flower and wild bird food meadows, ponds, built a birdwatching hide and an elaborate shed to encourage Choughs to breed. Installation of CCTV cameras gave him and his many visitor hours of interest watching the daily comings and goings of his garden's wildlife. Right up until his last days he was excited to share video footage of his nesting Barn Owls.

The wonderful mix of quiet self-effacement and calm good humour combined with deftly putting ideas and words into productive action will be sorely missed by all his friends on Islay and beyond. Our thoughts and condolences go out to Margaret, his wife of 44 years and to his son Andrew at this time of loss.

**Peter Roberts**



Woodcock roding ©Margaret Staley

## Eddie Maguire (1946—2021)



Eddie Maguire photographed at Machrihanish Seabird Observatory ©Rab Morton

The death of Eddie Maguire is a big loss to Argyll birding as he was one of its main characters and one of the pioneers of modern-day Argyll 'birding' with meticulously detailed observations on visible migration, breaking new ground on observing seabird passage in the west of Scotland.

Eddie was born in Glasgow in 1946 and had a difficult childhood. He was cruelly separated from his sibling when he was put into the care of the state in his youth. However, at this time his love of birds developed; he rejected sport (football in particular), which was forced on many youths at that time and instead was given the opportunity to learn about birds by one of his carers.

Little else is known about his early life as Eddie preferred to talk about birds. His love for these led to him getting a job in Perth Museum as a general assistant around the late 1960s/early 1970s where he was involved in the local birding scene. Notably, along with Bob McMillan he found a hybridising Slavonian and Black-necked Grebe on a local loch.

In the early 1970s he moved to Campbeltown (the home of his then wife Patsy McCallum) and found work in the Machrihanish Air Base as a

lorry driver with the air support team of the RAF. He never moved away from the area, which he loved, and soon became the leading ornithologist in Kintyre. Occasionally he would migrate south to the English Midlands for the music scene during winter. He was accomplished on the twelve-string guitar and also played the mouth-organ. His musical tastes were REM and U2, combined with a love for traditional folk music. His home venue was the Kilbrannan Inn in Campbeltown, which allowed him to combine his music, socialising with the local community and birding.

While at times difficult to work with, his good humour and enthusiasm for birds was infectious and he worked closely with others, notably Rod Angus, John McGlynn, Iomhar McMillan and Rab Morton. He also helped inspire young ornithologists, such as Neil Brown, to find out more about Kintyre's birds. Over the half century he lived there he wrote up many of his studies, including three editions of *The Birds of Kintyre*, along with notes on the breeding performance of Common Buzzards, the passage skuas and Balearic Shearwaters, identification of Grey and Red-necked Phalaropes, overland passage of Gannets, movements of Twite, and most recently on the



movement of Magpies.

In the late 1970s along with Rab Morton and others he pioneered the use of tape lures to catch Storm Petrels on Sanda. Until the advent of mist nets, only a few hundred were ringed each year in the UK, following which 2-3 thousand were ringed each year. The discovery that Storm Petrels could be attracted ashore to be captured using tape lures led regularly to over 10,000 being ringed each year. By the end of 2019 over half a million have been ringed, leading to a realisation that many of these roaming birds are non-breeders.

He helped construct and operate a heligoland trap at the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse in the late 1970s to ring migrants. Later, following research to find the best location, he established Machrihanish Seabird Observatory at Uisead Point in September 1993, which along with the hides at Fife Ness and at North Ronaldsay, is one of the best places for sea-watching in Scotland.

Tristan ap Rheinallt got to know Eddie in the early 1990s when he began monitoring the movements of seabirds past Frenchman's Rocks (Islay). It wasn't long before he discovered that the many hours he was investing in seawatching paled into insignificance compared to the effort Eddie was putting in at Machrihanish.

Eddie was something of a lone wolf and did not suffer fools gladly, so Tristan had to convince Eddie that he was serious about birds before he in turn would take him seriously, which was achieved. There ensued a lengthy period during which they regularly exchanged information about their sightings and thereby Tristan developed a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the movements and behaviour of seabirds that fascinated them both. Later, after Eddie had managed to organise the construction of the observatory at Machrihanish he would be happily cooking his breakfast while keeping an eye on the sea as Tristan huddled in the shelter

of a rock and struggled to keep his optics free of salt spray. During this period, Eddie paid several visits to Islay with a group of musician friends, and they enjoyed some wonderful nights out in the Port Charlotte Hotel.

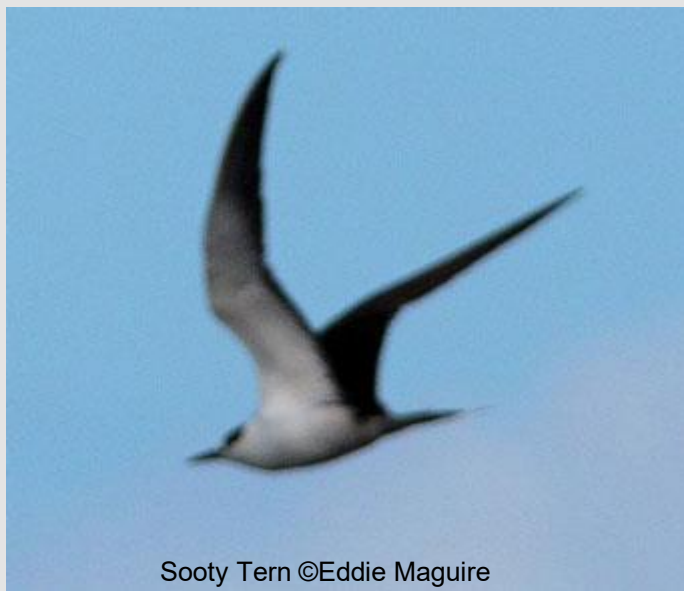
Many people were welcomed warmly at the seabird observatory by Eddie as he manned it most mornings (often all day if there was a good passage) from March to November, providing not only valuable information on the passage of seabirds, but spring and autumn movement of waders on the Mull of Kintyre. Sightings were diligently written up and published in annual reports which contain examples of his excellent photographic skills (he was an early adopter of digiscoping). These are available online at:

[Machrihanish seabird & Wildlife Observatory \(machrihanishbirdobservatory.org.uk\)](http://machrihanishseabirdandwildlifeobservatory.org.uk).

Although never a twitcher, Eddie was always keen to find his own birds and remained faithful to Kintyre where over the years he found no fewer than nine 'firsts' for Argyll (Egyptian Goose, Black-browed Albatross, Temminck's Stint, Pectoral Sandpiper, Mediterranean Gull, Sooty Tern, Whiskered Tern, Red-footed Falcon and Greenish Warbler). His other impressive finds included; Bewick's Swan, King Eider, White-billed Diver, Cory's, Great and Balearic Shearwater, Pallid Harrier, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Sabine's Gull, Ross's Gull, Roseate Tern and Common Rosefinch.

Eddie was buried at Patchan Cemetery overlooking the sea, which he had watched over from MBSO for over a quarter of a century on a lovely warm July afternoon—warm enough for a Sooty Tern to drift by! He is survived by John, his son, and Brian, his brother, to whom sympathies are extended. He will be greatly missed.

*Prepared by members of the Argyll birding community.*



Sooty Tern ©Eddie Maguire

This is by no means the best photo Eddie ever took! However, this is more of a testament to his second to none ability to be quick off the draw—a split second decision to take a burst of shots when presented with a species he knew instantly would require at least a photo record as it whizzed past.

Probably nine out of ten birders would never even have managed an attempt at such a shot.





As I have previously reported in the *Eider*, we have been lucky to have two pairs of breeding Swifts and one pair of non-breeding Swifts nesting in our house over the past few years.

Last year the Argyll Bird Club (ABC) kindly offered to supply us with another two boxes, which we put up earlier this year.

When the breeding Swifts returned at the beginning of May both pairs returned to their usual sites, one pair in one of our home-made boxes and the other in a hole under the eaves. But, while we were waiting for the non-breeders to arrive in July, a pair of House Sparrows, who had mastered the art of flying vertically up through the box entrance, built their nest in the box used by the non-breeder Swifts for the last two years.

As Swifts are extremely site faithful we hoped that our non-breeders would not be put off by the resident House Sparrows, but we were also concerned that the returning Swifts might evict the House Sparrows and their nestlings. However, our fears were not realised and we were delighted to find that the returning non-breeders opted for the easier option of using one of the boxes supplied by the ABC, which was very close to the box they had previously used (Photo 1).

The breeding Swifts in our home-made box successfully raised two chicks (Photo 2) and following a day of vigorous press-ups and wing exercises (Photo 3) both chicks fledged on the evening of the 6 August. We are hoping that our non-breeders will return for their fourth year in 2022, and will successfully breed in the ABC box.



Sadly, it is estimated that the UK Swift population has fallen from 133,600 pairs in 1994 to 52,000 pairs in 2019, a loss of 81,600 pairs (61.1%) in 25 years. And

since 2009 the average fall per year has been 5% (Swift Conservation 2021). Key reasons for this are the loss of nesting sites in renovated buildings, the absence of suitable sites in modern buildings and dwindling insect numbers due to the widespread use of insecticides. But there is some hope as in its publication *Designing for Biodiversity* The Royal Institute for British Architects (Gunnell et al. 2013) recommends the inclusion of one new nest place for every housing unit.

We can all help by putting up nest boxes in suitable locations. And I am delighted to be able to report that this year we have regularly had at least eleven Swifts circling over our house and on one occasion we were able to count 15, more than in any year since I started recording numbers in 2017.

I would like to thank the ABC for providing a nest site for one pair of our Swifts this year and hope that the second ABC box will possibly be used by a returning pair of yearlings in 2022.

And finally—the House Sparrows have successfully raised two broods in the Swift box that they took over earlier this year.

**Annette Anderton**

#### References

Gunnell, K., Murphy, B. & Williams, C. (2013) *Designing for biodiversity. A technical guide for new and existing buildings* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). RIBA Publishing.

Swift Conservation (2021) But sadly the Swift population decline continues unabated. <https://swift-conservation.org>

### Birds and Birdwatching at NTS Crarae Gardens, near Minard, Loch Fyne



The entrance to the gardens ©Jim Dickson

Recently I was contacted by Victoria Winters, secretary of the "Friends of Crarae Gardens" asking if the Argyll Bird Club would be interested in helping Robert Carroll, the Head Gardener at Crarae. Robert is looking for inspiration on how to improve the bird hide, interpretation and the bird (or red squirrel) watching opportunities in the gardens.

As it had been several years since my last visit to the gardens, this seemed like a perfect excuse to return and try and offer any useful advice. For anyone not familiar with the gardens, they are about 16km south of Inveraray, just off the A83. They are owned by the National Trust for Scotland. The gardens were created in 1912 by Lady Grace Campbell, the aunt of intrepid plant hunter Reginald Farrer, who sourced trees and shrubs from China, Nepal and Tibet. This 50 ha

(126 acre) site is described on the NTS website as "An exotic splash of wilderness is a Himalayan-style glen, set in the gentle hills of Argyll. The sparkling waters of the Crarae Burn form the centrepiece for a woody paradise of rocky gorges, wooden bridges and thickets of maple, birch and evergreen trees and scrubs, blending with sprays of flowers". The Friends of Crarae website adds:

*The gardens are developed on either side of the valley of the Crarae Burn. The surrounding landscape is mainly rough hill land and forestry. The soils are a thin layer of gravelly acid loam over impermeable grey glacial clay with pockets of localised mineralised peat which provides the conditions for growing the range of plants found here. The average annual rainfall is over 75". There are long views from the gardens across Loch Fyne to Castle Lachlan and the Strathlachlan Forest and,*



*behind the garden, Beinn Ghlas is a prominent feature. Outward views are a critical feature of the garden.*

I met up with Victoria and Robert and we had a look at the hide, about a five-minute walk from the reception and tearoom building where we discussed a few ideas. It turned out that the hide was in better condition than I had envisaged, having been placed in a small woodland clearing in an off-track area of the gardens about five years ago by the previous head gardener. Whether the hide would be suitable to view more species of birds than could be seen elsewhere in the gardens was perhaps debatable unless a new feeding station was created. However, this may present logistical difficulties in maintaining it away from the reception area. Some ideas were explored that may be put to the "Friends of Crarae" members who may wish to be more involved with using the hide. As the hide was slightly off the main track it might not be very suitable for the general public. Moving the hide elsewhere was thought to be impractical.

There is a small bird-feeding station at the reception building. However, the position was probably too close to the rear door and toilet facilities, and prone to frequent human disturbance. Moving this slightly further away, to a more open public-seated area would likely be more suitable, where resting or snacking visitors could watch the birds and squirrels. Robert was also keen to explore setting up a bug hotel.

We discussed ways of improving information and interpretation of the birdlife in the gardens. Certainly, some suitable posters would help highlight the known bird species. Robert and Victoria already knew many of the species seen in recent

years, but they were keen to gain a better understanding of which birds can be seen over the year and those that actually breed there. My suggestion was to offer a full breeding bird survey of the gardens next spring, and to record species present in each season. Many of the likely species can of course be guessed at, but it would be good to confirm their presence. Nuthatches have recently been seen, but the overall numbers of each species present are not known. Victoria said both species of eagle had been seen overhead, and Dipper and Grey Wagtail have been seen at the mouth of the Crarae Burn.

The use of a whiteboard or similar, listing seasonal species to inform visitors, was thought to be useful. Adding some bird photographs to the excellent "Friends of Crarae Garden" website would be helpful too:

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

This features trees and flowers that are in their prime each month. I am happy to meet with ABC members who may wish to try and make a photographic record of species in the gardens over the year, aiming for a visit per season and hope to arrange a visit this autumn.

Finally, to help with the recording of bird species and of course other wildlife, members of the Argyll Bird Club are warmly encouraged to visit and record their sightings. It is hoped that future ABC field trips can be arranged, which would be a highly suitable test of woodland birding. If any ABC member wishes to get involved, please let me know or contact Victoria Winters direct at [contact@friendsofcrarae.com](mailto:contact@friendsofcrarae.com)

**Jim Dickson,** [Argyllbirder@outlook.com](mailto:Argyllbirder@outlook.com)



**Left photo.** An example of one of the information boards

**Right photo.** The existing bird hide

Both photos ©Jim Dickson



Many months ago I was asked by Nigel to do a 15mins talk on "encouraging youngsters to watch wildlife " Well the scope of this is massive, till you try putting it into words! I managed 10mins with some questions at the last Cairnbaan indoor meeting. I enjoy a challenge or two and decided to broaden my scope, and learn as I go.

### Part 1

I am employed by the charity "HELP" Argyll & Bute, which was set up to help youths between the ages of 16 and 25. It aims to help them secure tenancies, budget their income, help with CV writing and finding work etc.

I am a supervisor of the community task force, which is similar to old YOP and YTS programs. We employ youths in the above age group to develop skills they didn't know they had. Some of the tasks are gardening and garden equipment maintenance, repairing public benches and shelters, clearing footpaths and many more land-based and indoor projects.

The world has progressed so far since my days growing up in Glen Massan in Cowal, our mobile phone was in a big red box in the middle of the glen! We only had three TV channels if the weather was good, nowadays the kids all have mobile phones that can access hundreds of different sites, including numerous TV channels.

I was fortunate growing up surrounded by so much diverse habitat filled with wonderful wildlife. The toys I played with most were an old pair of binoculars and a Kodak 135 camera.

My interest in wildlife grew and grew, and I was de-

## Encouraging young people to take an interest in wildlife

scribed as boring by some school pals, because that is all I wanted to talk about.

Over the years I have learnt many skills. Unfortunately, one of them wasn't dealing with kids. I was in for a rude awakening!

In the course of our daily work we encounter all forms of wildlife. I always point these out to the boys, some will show interest, but others would rather use their mobile phones. However, I have often used this as a talking point, asking the lad engrossed with his phone to google the animal or insect, just in case I'd got it wrong. They by nature would love to prove me wrong, so will happily look it up, but of course they have to read out their findings to the other boys, this also helps to build their confidence in speaking to groups of people.

During the time of the Australian bush fires the team of boys I was working with didn't show much interest, as it was on the other side of our planet. I was imparting some of my knowledge about Australian wildlife to them, but having very little impact till I told them some facts about Koalas. The males having a forked penis with two heads and the females having two vaginas and two uteri. After this the boys wanted to know everything about the wildlife affected by the fires. This topic then led onto talking about the subsequent regeneration of the eucalyptus forests and the return of the native wildlife.

I still haven't worked out if their interest came from the reproductive oddities of Koalas, or that most of the animals appeared to be misfits compared to what is found in the British Isles. Nevertheless, it had the desired affect and sparked an interest, and many questions.

### Part 2

Part of my job with the boys is to help schools with maintenance of school gardens and play areas. At Kirn Primary School I became aware of the school's wildlife program, which is part of their curriculum, so I offered my assistance.

My team has helped to make paths and dug over some rough ground where wildflowers will be planted, and built a rockery. While doing this I got to know some of the teachers and found them to be very keen to



teach the children about nature.

The kids in primary five and six had an in-class competition to design bird tables, and I picked the best two to build for their garden.

Then lockdown happened!! During this period I was furloughed, but continued to help in the Kirn Primary School garden, and I kept in contact with the school about the bird tables. This progressed into me cutting the wood ready for the kids to put them together, then to erect them in the school grounds.

Some of the kids' designs were magical, such as a landing strip with flashing lights shaped like flowers to attract insets so the birds could eat them. Another was shaped like a giant acorn that the seed could be poured into, and there were many more wondrous and imaginative ideas.

I picked the two that were most suitable to be flat packed and easily assembled by the children. In addition, I'd pre-cut the wood for two bird boxes that were to be made.

Still on furlough and the kids back in class, I revisited the school representing Argyll Bird Club.

On the first day we made the boxes and I found the children to be both interested and quite knowledgeable about birds in the local area.

On day two we erected the tables and I was also asked to give a short talk on birds. I spoke about birds' beaks. I had printed out some small booklets of pictures of birds with a number of different beak types.

I explained the reason for the different beaks, and by the end of the session the children were able to say what birds with a particular beak



Erecting one of the bird tables ©Alistair McGregor

were likely to be eating, from seed and insect eaters to the large carnivorous raptors.

This gave them some ideas of what to put on the bird tables and the birds they might attract with some carefully planned feeding.

Hopefully I might be asked back in the near future.

**Alistair McGregor**

## A songbird survey of Aros Park, Mull, 19/04/20—19/06/20



The old walled garden, a great place to see Bullfinches, Song Thrushes and Spotted Flycatchers  
©Stuart Gibson

Aros Park is a wonderful amenity on the doorstep of Tobermory, the principal town on the Isle of Mull. It comprises a delightful mixture of indigenous broad-leaved trees and non-native conifers. The former estate woodland provides sanctuary for a wide range of resident songbirds, as well as a suite of migratory species.

Counting singing and/or calling birds that are assumed to be holding territory was the primary methodology used in this survey, which was undertaken on 20 early morning visits during 19 April—19th June 2020 (during first lockdown). Other non-songbirds of interest were frequently encountered, and these records and any significant extra-limital observations have also been included.

Existing woodland trails in the park were divided into seven transects (of unequal length, between 0.3km and 2.4km), totalling 10.5 km. While carrying out this study, I walked in excess of 366,000 steps, which approximately equates to 180 miles. So, it is fair to say that counting songbirds during lockdown was of great benefit to both my physical and mental well-being!



I chose seven transects (T) that follow existing woodland paths, some of which are used more than others. Suffice to say, at 06.00hrs during lockdown, I rarely met a fellow human being, except for one or two usual suspects and their dogs!

**Goosander** (*Mergus merganser*)

A female was present on Lochan a' Ghurrabain at the centre of Aros Park on 26/05/20.

**Red-throated Diver** (*Gavia stellata*)

Two noisy birds were both heard and seen from T6 on 25/05/20.

**Little Grebe** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

A single bird was seen at Lochan a' Ghurrabain on 15/05/20.

**Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

One was at Lochan a' Ghurrabain on 26/05/20.

**Buzzard** (*Buteo buteo*)

In a woodland setting in spring, it can be surprisingly difficult to detect this large bird of prey. Like other raptors, it can be secretive once they settle down to incubation duties, thus reducing the opportunity to observe them. One to two pairs likely bred in Aros Park.

**Lapwing** (*Vanellus vanellus*)

One was at Apper Mor (T4) on 15/05/20.

**Woodcock** (*Scolopax rusticola*)

One flushed from deciduous woodland on T1 on 25/05/20. Roding birds are occasionally report-

ed from this location.

**Wood Pigeon** (*Columba palumbus*)

Birds were recorded in five of the seven transects (discretion is required as several transects overlap.). A minimum of four singing males were found, suggesting that a small population of these birds breed in the area. Finding these singing birds was a pleasant surprise as, until recently, this species was unusual in North Mull.

**Collared Dove** (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Recorded in only two of the seven transects, both in areas where there is human habitation. Three singing males present around Ledaig Car Park, Tobermory (2) and at the Gatehouse at the (road) entrance to Aros Park.

**Cuckoo** (*Cuculus canorus*)

Recorded in six of the seven transects, but such can be the distance covered by males that the possibility exists that the same individual may be responsible for all sightings: probably 1-2 calling males.

**Tawny Owl** (*Strix aluco*)

One was heard during daytime in Aros Park on 02/05/20.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos major*)

Recorded (sight records, as well as 'drumming' birds) in six of the seven transects, but discretion suggests that as few as three territorial pairs may be present. A path-side nest was locat-



The man-made lochan adds to the overall biodiversity of Aros Park ©Stuart Gibson



ed, where fledged young were seen on 24/05/20.

**Skylark** (*Alauda arvensis*)

One seen on 28/05/20 was thought to be extra-limital to the study, and was probably breeding on adjacent moorland.

**Sand Martin** (*Riparia riparia*)

It was not known if they breed in the general park area, but they are known to do so elsewhere in Tobermory, where at least one was seen over the Tobermory roundabout on 20/04/20.

**Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica*)

Unknown if breeding occurred in the general park area, although up to eight birds were regularly noted coming to feed above a clear felled area in T4: eight on 24/05/20. Elsewhere, one over Tobermory roundabout on 20/04/20.

**House Martin** (*Delichon urbica*)

It was unknown if breeding occurred in the general park area, although two birds were seen feeding over a clear felled area in T4 on 10/05/20 and 25/05/20.

**Tree Pipit** (*Anthus trivialis*)

A passage bird was heard on 19/04/20. Recorded from two transects and from an area out with the survey area: two to three singing/displaying males present. Elsewhere, one to two pairs bred at Baliscate.

**Meadow Pipit** (*Anthus pratensis*)

No singing or displaying birds noted. However, up to five birds were present on a clear felled area in T4 between 23/04/20 and 15/05/20. A single pair bred at nearby Baliscate.

**Grey Wagtail** (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Present in three transects where suitable breeding habitat was available. Recorded feeding in area of clear-fell in T4 between 06/05/20–25/05/20, where fledged young (family party) noted on 28/05/20. At least one pair was thought to have bred.

**Pied Wagtail** (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Present in two out of seven transects, where feeding birds were present in clear felled area in T4 between 06/05/20–25/05/20). A fledged young was noted on 28/05/20. One pair was thought to have bred.

**Wren** (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

A total of 73–85 singing males were recorded in all seven transects. T4 (clear-fell) held the densest concentration with up to 23 males. As is the case with many of the songbirds present on this survey, these figures may be prone to underestimation and should be regarded as a minimum number.

**Dunnock** (*Prunella modularis*)

13–16 singing males/pairs present. Birds recorded in all seven transects. Elsewhere, two pairs were recorded at Baliscate.

**Robin** (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Recorded in all seven transects, with notable concentrations in T1 (Tobermory coastal path) (10) and along the main driveway into Aros Park (T3–15). A minimum of 54 territories were established during the survey.

**Wheatear** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

One in suitable breeding habitat on 20/05/20 was the only one recorded during the two months that the survey took place. Elsewhere, two were at Baliscate on 02/05/20, but not thereafter.

**Blackbird** (*Turdus merula*)

A minimum of 36 singing males/territories were established during this study, with breeding pairs present in all seven transects.

**Song Thrush** (*Turdus philomelos*)

An estimated 16–18 singing males/pairs were present throughout.

**Mistle Thrush** (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Recorded in five out of seven transects surveyed, but it was thought that only two pairs were present.

**Sedge Warbler** (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

A singing male in young conifers in T4 only remained in the area for a day (04/05/20) and did not breed.

**Whitethroat** (*Sylvia communis*)

Birds present in suitable breeding habitat in T5 (one on 31/05/20) and T6 (two on 28/05/20) may have involved the same birds. Elsewhere, extra-limital singing males were at the entrance to Tobermory road sign on 10/05/20 and at Baliscate throughout spring, where it is thought that one pair bred.

**Blackcap** (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Excellent habitat exists throughout the Aros Park area for this species, so it was no surprise that the survey returned evidence of a strong population. A total of 24–29 singing males were recorded, with birds present in all seven transects. A male mimicking the song of a Garden Warbler was heard in T3. An extra-limital male seen and heard in the vicinity of the author's flat in Tobermory. It was heard (until 07/06/20) to imitate the songs of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and/or Wryneck and use this both as an accompaniment to (or as a replacement of) its normal song. It appears that this is something that has rarely been recorded in Britain.

**Wood Warbler** (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

For the first time in recent memory, no Wood Warblers returned to breed in Aros Park (2–3 singing males are usually present in T1 and T3).

**Chiffchaff** (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Recorded in four of the seven transects surveyed, but probably only involved three individual birds, two of which were thought to be mi-

grants. A single male in T3 was thought to be highly mobile and may be indicative of this bird searching for a mate. One pair probably bred. A male in part-song in T4 on 28/04/20 was thought to have been a migrant and wasn't seen or heard subsequently. A particularly grey and dull individual seen at close quarters on 30/04/20 showed characteristics of the Scandinavian race *abietinus*—a good record for the Isle of Mull.

**Willow Warbler** (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

A minimum of 38–40 singing males were present throughout the area, with notable concentrations in T4 where there was a clear-fell (12) and in T6 where the habitat was dominated by birch scrub (11). Elsewhere, three pairs bred at Baliscate.

**Goldcrest** (*Regulus regulus*)

Aros Park represents excellent habitat for this species, owing to the extensive planting in recent decades of Sitka Spruce, and to the historical use of non-native conifers. Nonetheless, it is thought that the numbers found were an underestimate of the true density. Recorded in all seven transects, with a minimum of 34 singing males heard. An extra-limital male was in song at Baliscate on 15/05/20.

**Spotted Flycatcher** (*Muscicapa striata*)

Recorded in five transects. Between 8–10 sing-

ing birds represented a pleasing return for a bird that has have suffered locally in recent times. First recorded on 13/05/20.

**Pied Flycatcher** (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

While waiting and listening in an area that normally held a singing male Wood Warbler, I was treated to a 'one day only' cameo from a cock Pied Flycatcher: singing male, Aros Park, on 16/04/20.

**Long-tailed Tit** (*Aegithalus caudatus*)

This is a tricky species to census, as it is an early breeder and the male has no distinctive song. Despite an abundance of potential breeding habitat, this species is easily overlooked. It was recorded in all but one of the seven transects (that was probably an oversight!), a minimum of seven pairs were established, with fledged juveniles seen in T5 on 19/06/20. Elsewhere, two pairs bred successfully at Baliscate.

**Blue Tit** (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

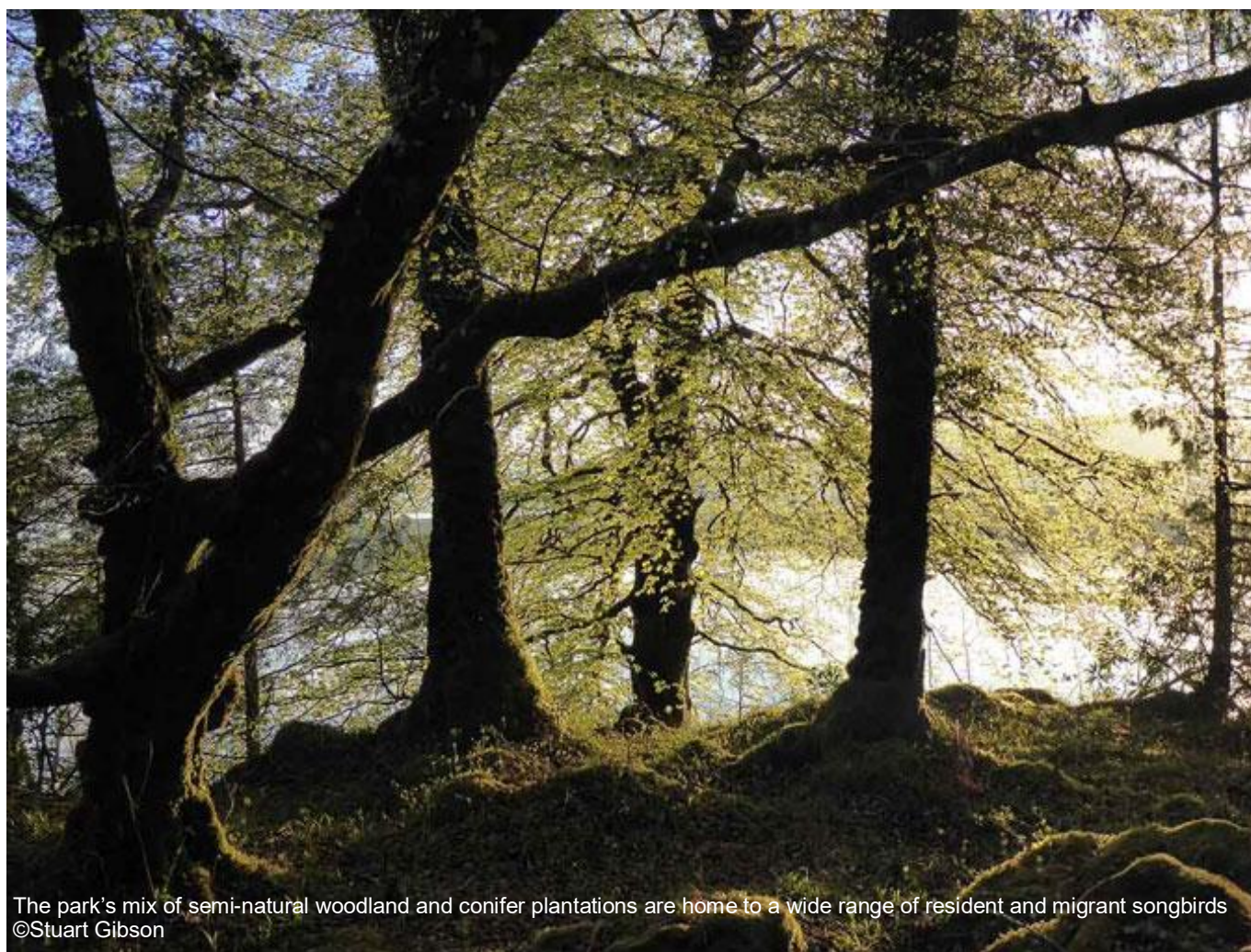
Although seen in all seven transects, this is another species that has probably been underestimated: 39 singing males/territories found.

**Great Tit** (*Parus major*)

Recorded in all seven transects: 25 singing males/territories found.

**Coal Tit** (*Periparus ater*)

Considering the wealth of suitable breeding hab-



The park's mix of semi-natural woodland and conifer plantations are home to a wide range of resident and migrant songbirds  
©Stuart Gibson



itat, particularly in those transects dominated by Sitka Spruce and other conifers, it is possible that this total may also be an underestimate: 25 singing males/territories.

**Nuthatch** (*Sitta europaea*)

With an individual coming to feeders at the Mull Theatre in T5 during the winter months, it was hoped that a pair may have settled to breed in the area. However, no evidence of this species' presence was found in 20 visits to the location in spring.

**Treecreeper** (*Certhia familiaris*)

Another species that can be difficult to detect if not singing or calling. Therefore, as Aros Park is a veritable paradise for this species, the following total is likely to be a gross underestimate: nine singing males/territories.

**Jay** (*Garrulus glandarius*)

A bird that appears to have increased in number and range in north Mull during the past decade. However, due to its secretive nature during the breeding season, it was a species that was likely to be overlooked (and, so it proved!). It was recorded in only two of the seven transects in the park: a minimum of two pairs found.

**Hooded Crow** (*Corvus cornix*)

Recorded in five out of seven transects: 4–6 pairs present.

**Raven** (*Corvus corax*)

It was unclear if breeding took place in the park or nearby: one pair was suggested by sightings in two of the seven transects.

**Starling** (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Only seen on a single occasion in one transect (T3 at Gatehouse, where it conceivably could have bred.). Elsewhere, a small colony exists (no estimate of numbers) at Baliscate.

**House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*)

Recorded in only two transects. Six singing males held territories in the Ledaig Car Park at the start of T1 and birds were seen around the Gatehouse in T 3. Elsewhere, a further six singing males/territories were recorded at Baliscate.

**Chaffinch** (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Recorded in all seven transects: 56–60 singing males/territories.

**Greenfinch** (*Carduelis chloris*)

Two singing males/territories at nearby Baliscate.

**Goldfinch** (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Recorded in six of the seven transects: nine singing birds/pairs.

**Siskin** (*Carduelis spinus*)

Complicated, as birds frequently overflowed transects: 4–12 pairs present during breeding season.

**Linnet** (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Extra-limital to study, a single pair bred successfully at nearby Baliscate.

**Lesser Redpoll** (*Carduelis cabaret*)

Like Siskin, trying to evaluate numbers for this species was complicated by the tendency for song flights to extend over more than one adjoining transect: 4–9 displaying males were present.

**Crossbill** (*Loxia curvirostra*)

No singing males were heard during the course of this survey and all records refer to individual birds or small groups in spring. The presence of birds at this time has been taken as indicative of birds having possibly bred: one on 19/04/20; four on 27/04/20, which may have been a family party; two + two on 30/04/20; one + one on 15/05/20; one on 20/05/20; and eight on 31/05/20, which may have been one or two families.

**Bullfinch** (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Another species that is tricky to survey, due to the male having a rarely heard song (of sorts!). Nonetheless, this species was found in five of the seven transects, although the total of only eight pairs may well be an underestimate.

**Reed Bunting** (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

A singing male was present in suitable breeding habitat at Lochan a' Ghurraibain on 03/05/20. It remained there for just this single day and was not re-found subsequently.

**Stuart Gibson, February 2021**

A particularly high density of Blackcaps breed in Aros Park ©Stuart Gibson





## The Great Spotted Woodpecker on Islay and Jura



Loch Skerrols woodlands, where Great Spotted Woodpeckers now breed ©Peter Roberts

### Historical records

Thom (1986) gives a useful overview of the breeding status of the Great Spotted Woodpecker in Scotland up until the early 1980s, including Islay and Jura:

*The Great Spotted Woodpecker has undergone remarkable changes in status over the last 200 years. From being widespread in the 18th century, it decreased as forests were cleared until by the middle of the 19th century it was possibly extinct. By the late 1800s it had recolonised much of lowland Scotland, and during the first half of this century it spread north to Sutherland and west to Ardnamurchan and Mull. Though the population has fluctuated since then, the only real change in distribution has been on the islands. Skye and Jura have been colonised since 1953 (exact dates unknown) and small numbers now breed there (Reed et al. 1983). Single birds have been seen several times in summer on Islay and Rhum, but there has not yet been any evidence of breeding. Nesting has occurred on Arran but has not been recorded since 1972, although birds are still occasionally seen, while on Bute there has been a marked decrease since the mid-1940s.*

ap Rheinallt et al. (2007) confirmed and updated the assessment of Thom (1986) to the early 2000s, and adds more specific details for Argyll:

*The first recorded breeding in Argyll was at St. Catharines, Cowal in 1919.....by 1936 they were reported breeding at several sites in Knapdale. This range ex-*

*pansion continued steadily so that by 1946 they were present at Aros House and Gruline on Mull.*

Forrester et al. 2007 provide some historical records for Scotland, but little information for Islay apart from one brief mention:

*In the decade to 2002 potentially breeding birds were recorded in south Kintyre, and singles in several years were also on Islay..*

UK-wide national bird atlases add further insights specifically for Islay and Jura.

Sharrock (1976) for the period 1968-72 showed a confirmed breeding record for Jura, but no breeding records for Islay.

Lack (1986) for the three winters of 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84 showed no records of wintering for Islay or Jura.

Gibbons, Reid & Chapman (1993) for the period 1988-1991 showed no confirmed or possible breeding records on Islay or Jura.

Balmer et al. (2013) showed no breeding records for Islay, but possible breeding in two areas on Jura during the four years 2008-2011. It also indicates the species present in winter on both islands.

### Historical records from local publications

More detailed accounts of the species on Islay



can be found in the several booklets published about the birds of Islay, plus the Argyll Bird Club's (ABC) annual *Argyll Bird Report* (ABR), and the data bases of the ABC and The Islay Natural History Trust (INHT) the latter maintained by Malcolm Ogilvie. Records for Jura are scant, probably incomplete and are dealt with separately later.

Elliott (1989) covers the period up to 1987 or 1988 and states:

*Ten birds have been recorded on Islay in eight years from 1954-1985; these sightings are dated from April to November. The first record was of a shot bird at Ardmore in 1887; in April 1959 one was in a wood at Ardbeg and later near Loch Lossit; a bird was at Kilchoman, Bruichladdich and Portnahaven from 22nd-24th October 1962; another was north of Craighens on 21st and apparently Erisaid on 22nd November 1979 (both localities have small woods next to Gruinart Flats); one was photographed at Machrie in the autumn of 1972; and in April 1982 an adult stayed from at least 12th to 18th in Kildalton Woods. The most recent record is of one at Port Askaig on 10th April 1985.*

This is somewhat confusing as only six birds are mentioned for six years during 1959-1985. The INHT database has additional sightings of single birds at Kildalton in April 1963 and at Ballygrant in July 1979 (the first summer record) accounting for eight birds in seven years during the same period.

However, Elliot comments somewhat presciently:

*All the major mixed woodlands and some copses have been visited; perhaps one day this species will breed on Islay.*

Ogilvie (2003) updates sightings to 2001 in the following account of the species:

*One shot in 1887. About 13 records from 1954-2001, four in April, one in July, eight in Oct-Nov, most often in Ballygrant and Bridgend Woods, with some staying for several days or weeks with feeding excavations noted in rotten trees and also in poles carrying electricity cables.*

In this period there was a ten-year gap (1987-1996) with no sightings of the species on Islay.

### Records from 2000 onwards

From 2002 onwards, there are the following records gathered from ABC and INHT databases and ABRs:

**2002.** One record: at Kildalton on 20 October. The ABR mentions that this was the third year running for the species at this location, but there is no reference in the databases of birds at Kildalton in the two previous years.

**2003.** No records.

**2004.** One record: Bridgend Woods on 27 October.

**2005, 2006, 2007.** No records

**2008.** Two records: One at Kilchoman on 24 November and possibly the same bird on 13 December.

**2009.** Three records: possibly the same bird as in 2008, overwintering and seen at Kilchoman on

8 February, with the presumed same bird seen again on 3 March, and at a garden feeder there on 28 March.

**2010.** One record at Bridgend Woods on 20 May.

**2011.** No records. (the ABR notes: "A bird at Kilchoman Islay was recorded drumming on 8 Feb and was seen for the first time on a garden feeder at the site on 28 March". This is presumably an error referring to the identical note in the 2009 annual report?).

**2012.** Two records: Singles at Port Askaig on 15 February and Ballygrant on 24 June—only the second summer record.

**2013.** Five records: One on a feeder at Foreland near Bruichladdich on 3 March. Another at Loch Allan near Port Askaig on two dates in April and presumably the same bird/birds there on 16 May, with three in the same area on 6 July—the first suggestion of birds breeding on Islay.

**2014.** Six records: Singles at Ballygrant on 26 February and 29 October with another, presumed different bird near Port Askaig on 19 and 23 March and 19 May. A third bird was at a new location (Lagavulin) on 7 April.

**2015.** Sixteen records: Sightings of single birds on six dates in Bridgend Woods throughout March into early April and again in June and October. Others were near Loch Allan on 31 March and 24 May. Loch Skerrols produced further multiple records on 9 and 24 April, 8 May, 7 August and 19 November. Two birds were seen at Ballygrant on 22 November and there was a record on 19 March from a new location in forestry plantation near Bunnahabhain. At the opposite end of the island, there was a singleton at Kildalton on 14 June. This series of records suggests resident birds in at least three different locations in wooded areas between Bridgend and Port Askaig.

**2016.** Fourteen records: Singles were seen at four new locations: at Tallant, near Laggan Bridge on 11 February; near Ardbeg on 20 March; at Mulindry on 23 February and in woodland in the Loch Gruinart area on four dates between 24 October and 11 December with a count of three birds on one date. There were seven further sightings between 20 March and 10 July at Loch Skerrols, Kildalton, Bridgend Woods and Ballygrant that indicate resident birds and possible breeding at these four locations.

**2017.** 20+ records: Sightings of 1-3 birds from March through to November. Most records were from the wooded, possible breeding locations of Loch Skerrols, Ballygrant, Loch Allan, Bridgend Woods and Kildalton—all in spring and summer. Additional breeding season sightings were at Finlaggan and in woodland along the edge of Loch Fada on the Mulindry Road. There were also several records out of the breeding season of presumed wandering resident birds (or possibly migrants)—on feeders at Loch Gruinart RSPB, and working along fence posts at Octofad and Corsapol.

**2018.** 12 records: Single birds following a similar pattern of occurrence to those of 2017, with likely breeding sites of Loch Allan, Loch Skerrols, Ballygrant, Bridgend Woods, and Kildalton continuing to produce records throughout the year, with a new breeding season record in forestry at Laggan Bridge and winter records from Bruichladdich, Bowmore and Foreland Estate.

**2019.** 13+ records: For the first time on Islay, there was positive proof of nesting with active nests and young seen in June at three sites—Loch Skerrols, Kildalton and Bridgend Woods. Birds were also recorded at Foreland, Loch Allan and Ardbeg, both in and out of the breeding season, and birds regularly attended feeders at the Woollen Mill in Bridgend Woods, suggesting breeding at perhaps six sites.

**2020.** 17 records: Noted in most months, all from eight suspected or previously proven nesting locations—Loch Skerrols, Kildalton, Bridgend Woods, Foreland, Loch Allan, Ardbeg, Laphroaig and Laggan Bridge. Only one sighting away from these locations at Loch Gruinart RSPB in November. Although there was no confirmed breeding in 2020, personal observations and those of others strongly suggest breeding took place, with resident birds on territory and juveniles seen at feeders in two locations in late summer.

**2021.** Multiple records. After appealing to locals to send in sightings, it is evident that Great Spotted Woodpeckers were being seen on an almost daily basis in specific locations, strongly indicating territories at Dunlossit/Loch Allan, Bridgend Woods, Loch Skerrols, Foreland, Laggan Bridge/Avonvogie, Laphroaig, and Kildalton/Ardbeg, with other sightings at Loch Gruinart. Several of these sites have confirmed or probable breeding status with juveniles seen and, at two sites confirmed breeding with nest sites and chicks located. Records from several of these sites indicate or confirm that they hold more than one territory.

### Summary for Islay

From the first definite record of a bird shot in 1887, to the sporadic occurrences with long gaps, of wandering Argyll mainland and possibly continental migrant birds (almost all out of the breeding season) from the 1980s right up to the early 2000s, Great Spotted Woodpeckers have clearly now established themselves as a regular breeding bird on Islay. Breeding may have first occurred from 2013 and certainly since 2019. The present situation suggests a continued increase in the numbers of resident pairs in the woodlands of Islay and I estimate that there



Great Spotted  
Woodpecker at a  
bird feeder on Islay  
©Mary-Anne Featherstone



are currently 9-12 pairs now breeding at 5-7 locations right across the island. All but one of the sites now colonised are predominantly deciduous woodland, some with a scattering of exotic conifers. There are also extensive areas of non-native coniferous plantation forestry of varying ages across Islay. Only one of these (at Laggan Bridge) is so far recorded as being a likely breeding site, though a few other records come from coniferous plantations at Finlaggan and towards Bunnahabhain. This may be an indication of the species preferences for deciduous woodland as nesting habitat, or simply that few people on Islay venture into dense coniferous plantations, so additional territories go unrecorded.

## Jura records

The statement in Thom (1986): "Skye and Jura have been colonised since 1953 (exact dates unknown) and small numbers now breed there (Reed et al. 1983)," is ambiguous and unclear whether "small numbers now breed there" refers to Skye or Jura, or both. The reference to Reed et al. (1983) simply refers to the first BTO breeding bird atlas spanning the period 1968-72, which confirms breeding on Jura, but again does not indicate in how many years of that five year period. So, whether the Great Spotted Woodpecker has bred just twice on Jura between 1953 and 1982, or regularly throughout is unknown. ap Rheinallt et al. (2007), taking records up to 2002, makes no further mention of the species on Jura.

Gibbon et al. (1993) shows no breeding records for those five years of the atlas, while Balmer et al. (2013) shows two possible breeding locations for Jura and a winter presence. *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland*, covering the three winters of 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84 gives no records for Jura.

Records from the ABC and INHT databases, and ABR are scant:

**1982.** One Kinuachdrachd on 4 September.

**1985.** One Inverlussa in early June.

**1987.** One Ardfin on 21 January.

**2012.** One "North Jura" 23 October.

**2013.** A nest with young near Ardlussa on 17 June was the first breeding record for possibly 30 years. There was another sighting of a single bird near Loch Tarbert on 21 September.

**2015.** One 8 July (no specific location).

**2016.** One near Craighouse on 17 March.

**2018.** One near Craighouse on 24 October.

**2021.** Anecdotal reports of birds "seen regularly" on Jura during the year with reference made to eight different locations.

## Summary for Jura

Jura has had confirmed breeding of Great Spotted Woodpeckers on at least two occasions, dec-

ades before they colonised Islay. But whether they have ever bred regularly, or how many there are is not known. The data are very patchy and sparse, due mainly to a lack of visiting and resident birdwatchers. However, the comments for 2021 suggest that the species may be more widespread than official records indicate, and possibly an established breeding species.

## Status on some other Argyll islands

Although a long-established resident breeding bird on Mull, the species remains a very scarce visitor to the comparatively treeless islands of Colonsay, Coll and Tiree.

## Footnote

Formerly a scarce visitor to Ireland, breeding was confirmed just a few years ahead of Islay. Niall Keogh reports:

*Great Spotted Woodpeckers are now very well established (since 2005/2007) and widespread, but nowhere near at the same density as some parts of Britain. Records into Donegal, Galway and Kerry now. Probably more sites in the (underwatched) midlands.*

A similar pattern is evident on the Isle Of Man: once very scarce, records increased in the 1990s, with suspected breeding in 2005 and confirmed breeding in three locations by 2010.

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**Peter Roberts**

## Abstracts of talks from the online Zoom meeting on 20 May

There was just one online meeting organised for the spring, as field trips were planned to resume in May. Around 25 members logged into this meeting. Our thanks go to David Jardine for organising the two talks.

### **Redheads with eye shadow.** **Chris Waltho** (summary by Steve Petty)

The first part of the talk compared the ecology and plumage differences between the two common 'sawbills' found in Scotland. The name 'sawbill' is most appropriate as the bills of both Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser have fine, inward-pointing serrations to enable them to grasp and hold fish, the main prey of both species. The Goosander is the larger species and occurs mainly on fresh water lochs and rivers, at least during the breeding season. They nest in tree holes, rock cavities in crags and even in burrows. Outside the breeding season they occur on both freshwater and coastal locations. In contrast, the Red-breasted Merganser is largely confined to saltwater habitats, where they nest amongst shoreline vegetation. After the breeding season, both species can form large flocks comprising juveniles and moulting adults. Around 1000 birds can be found in the Clyde area at this time.

Chris then went on to describe plumage transition throughout the year in Red-breasted Mergansers, particularly in males. The males start to moult out of their breeding plumage during April-May, with the head moulting first. The body feathers continue to moult, and by August the wing coverts are moulted too. September sees the wing feathers moulting, but the new ones take time to grow, so they are flightless for part of this period. In total, they are flightless for about 30 days, and it takes around 40-43 days for the flight feathers to fully grown. Females moult slightly later than males. By the end of September males and females look similar, but the males have more white on the wing. October sees the males



Red-breasted Mergansers. A female above with the normal white eye ring, and a female(?) below with a dark shadow around the eye

beginning to moult out of their eclipse plumage. The green head reappears in November, with the males continuing to moult into breeding plumage, which is complete by mid-winter.

Coming back to the title of the talk, some female-looking birds, by the end of January, have a dark shadow around the eye. Chris was speculating that these might be first-year males. Hopefully, he will be able to determine just what sex these birds are in the future. Altogether, this was a fascinating talk.

### **Let's count some more seabirds and BTO update.** **Nigel Scriven** (summary Nigel Scriven)



## ABC field trip to the Benmore area on 29 May 2021



The four members attending the first ABC field trip since the lockdown ©Nigel Scriven

The anticipated seven members resolved to a stalwart four that met in the car park at Benmore Botanic Garden at 10.00hrs on a fine spring morning. Disappointingly, delay problems with the bus from Dunoon and the ferry from Tarbert to Portavadie conspired to prevent three members from linking up, despite the walk not leaving the car park until after 10.20hrs. The fabulous four were Alistair McGregor, George Newell, Caroline Clark, and leader Nigel Scriven. While we were waiting for the late arrivals, Alistair impressed us by hand feeding a Robin in the car park.

The bridge over the River Eachaig gave us a good vantage point for collecting the first few species for the day's list, which soon attained double figures: Wren, Chaffinch, Robin, Carrion Crow, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Goosander, Siskin, Great Tit, Woodpigeon and Grey Wagtail. We followed the west bank of the river downstream, noting that the Botanic Garden had uprooted the best Brambling spot in the area to plant it up with some exotic trees. After Magpie, came Willow Warbler, Pied Wagtail, Swallow, Spotted Flycatcher and then (for me) the star bird of the day, a Garden Warbler, in an Ash tree on the opposite bank of the river. A family group of four noisy Mistle Thrushes were unsuccessfully hiding in the grass in the adjacent field as we continued toward the Uig Hall Weir. Blue Tit and Bullfinch were tracked down in the field hedge, and Crossbill flew overhead. As we ap-

proached the conifers next to the ford where Alistair used to cycle through the river as a boy, Coal Tit called its presence, and a Song Thrush sang out its proclamation of territory.

We carried on south to Deer Park and a distant Cuckoo took the total to 25. We followed the looping path through the trees on the south side of the River Massan opposite the Deer Park houses to the call of the Cuckoo, song of the Dunnock, and mew of a Buzzard. Back on the Massan Bridge we crossed to the Eachaig Bridge and south along the east bank of the Eachaig, putting up a Common Sandpiper from the river bank. Further along Chiffchaff song preceded the appearance of a Dipper, which should have been evident at the Benmore Bridge. Mallard flew up from the water nearby, and then a Blackbird heralded the flight song of the Tree Pipit from a relict tree isolated in the clear fell before us.

Heading back north to the bridge at Uig then over the road to Eckford, we heard a Pheasant. During our way back to the Black Gates Car Park we added Goldfinch, Jay, Goldcrest, Treecreeper and Lesser Black-backed Gull making a list of 39. While not the greatest of lists, what was really great was getting out birding with friends again, after a long time of abstinence. Thanks go to both those that made it, and to those that tried, but couldn't join us.

**Nigel Scriven**



## ABC field trip to Kerrera on 26 June 2021



Members at mining bee colony © David Jardine

A perennial debate in Scottish football is whether to change the season to play the majority of fixtures during the summer months and have a winter closedown. Until Covid-19 the Argyll Bird Club, like football, has kept its field outings to a winter season with little if any discussion as to moving to fixtures during the summer....

The last trip to Kerrera was held on a showery day in October 2016, when we walked the circuit round the southern end of the island. On this current trip, the small group of members walked round the shorter northern circuit. One of the first birds seen on arrival was a Tree Pipit high on a dead limb of an Ash tree (stricken by Ash dieback) and the list grew

quickly as we passed the gardens near the pier.

Like the last trip, our route started up the steep hill up to Balliemore Farm. This time the excuse for a 'breather' was a small mining bee colony (photo above) in the bank by the track near the Community Centre, which was previously the school on the island and before that the chapel. One Ashy Mining Bee was seen emerging from its nest hole to see if the sun was coming out (photo bottom left).

A Blackcap was singing by the farm and a Pheasant was heard calling nearby. Crossing the beallach we had wonderful views across to Mull and Lismore. A pair of Kestrels living up to their old name 'wind-hover' were hunting for prey by Barr nan Cadhag (translated Peak of the Jackdaw?). It was good to see this small falcon, which is becoming increasingly rare in Argyll. A recent study has suggested a link to the use of second-generation rodenticides.

Down by the shore a Heron was feeding amongst the oyster beds, along with a Red-breasted Merganser, while over on Eilean an Uan there was a large flock of Canada Geese. Lunch was taken in the sunshine by the shore, during which a distant Otter was seen by Rubha Redegich, close to a large number of Common Seals on the islands.

Walking along the shore, Common Blue and Small Heath butterflies were spotted in the sunshine and the air was rich with the



Ashy Mining Bee ©David Jardine



scent of coastal flowers. During the trip five species of orchids were found—Heath Spotted, Common Spotted, Northern Marsh, Greater Butterfly and the aptly named Fragrant.

As we approached the offshore fish farm a Black Guillemot (on a sortie from Oban Bay?) and a group of Eiders were spotted. Leaving the track, a detour was made round onto the path through the reedbed on the old filtration beds. A hunting female Hen Harrier was spotted by Neil, which gave us good views, and left us wondering where she had come from, and if her nesting attempt had failed.

The reedbed added a few more species to the 'island list' with singing Sedge Warblers, several Reed Buntings and eventually two Water Rails, which responded loudly to a playback call. The dense vegetation obscured any view, but it was good to know they were present.

There were several finch families feeding in the weeds around the edge of the reedbed—mainly Lesser Redpolls and Twite. Swallows, House Martins and a few Sand Martins were feeding on in-

sects attracted by the animals at Ardentrive Farm. The farm shop there provided the opportunity for ice-creams before the walk back down the east coast to the ferry. What's not to like about mid-summer outings!

**Species list:** Greylag, Canada Goose, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Pheasant, Cormorant, Shag, Heron, Hen Harrier, Buzzard, Kestrel, Water Rail, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Rock Dove, Woodpigeon, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Wheatear, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Twite, Lesser Redpoll, Reed Bunting (57 species).

**David Jardine**

## **ABC field trip to the Add Estuary (Bellanoch to Crinan) on 31 July 2021**



Some of the group  
©Jim Dickson

The Islandadd Bridge at Bellanoch was the rendezvous point for this 'post lockdown' meeting that saw 14 club members re-unite in the field. We were met with some light drizzle and light cool winds rather than the anticipated dry forecast. However, the weather gradually brightened, and became warm sunshine by the end of the day.

From the bridge area we quickly totted up several species including a very distant Osprey, Lesser Redpolls flying overhead, also Stonechats and Meadow Pipits on nearby fences and

various gulls, Greylag and Canada Geese by the river as well as Common Sandpiper and distant Oystercatchers, Curlew and family groups of Shelduck. Cooing under the bridge were the now resident flock of around 30 or so Feral Pigeons that moved there a couple of years ago, with most looking like smart Rock Dove types.

We set off on foot westwards along the Crinan Canal towards Crinan. Our first scanning point across the estuary was by the bird hide. The tide was high and most birds were on the islands in the grass or in the water and included Grey





Moorhen ©Jim Dickson

Heron, better views of young Shelducks, a family group of young Red-breasted Mergansers, a Cormorant and a distant flock of gulls that were still on some mud not yet covered by the rising tide. Fortunately, Stephen Bowie had brought his top-of-the-range telescope allowing a closer look at these gulls, which essentially all looked the same through binoculars! Going through the flock and checking each bird eventually revealed the first Mediterranean Gull of the autumn—a nice adult still retaining a jet black hood. Unfortunately, it spent most of the time hidden behind a Common Gull, and only gave the odd glimpse of its pure white wing tips and the top of its black head and blood red bill.

At this time of year very few birds are in song other than the occasional blast from a Wren or the buzzing calls of several flying Lesser Redpolls. However, contact calls of Spotted Flycatchers revealed their presence in what appears to have been a good season for them. A Treecreeper was added, followed by a few more passerines such as Robin, Willow Warbler, Song Thrush, Blackbird and Coal Tit. Neil Hammatt then loudly declared 'Crossbill', which was heard flying over, and alt-



Recently-fledged Wren ©Jim Dickson



Osprey ©Jim Dickson

hough most folk heard it, trying to see it was more difficult against the forest background.

We took a detour across the Crinan swing bridge and past "Fraser's Wagon" area by the canal where we notched up a family of Moorhens—a surprisingly scarce bird in Argyll (photo above). Then some of us headed up towards Crinan Wood via Kilmahumaig while Mary John, Pat Russell and Neil Hammatt made a short detour up into Crinan Wood to a known site to see a patch of Bird's-nest Orchids, before catching up with the group. We watched the antics of a very recently fledged family group of Wrens (photo below) with a parent apparently trying hard to keep them all in check with constant calls back and forward. Our only Woodpigeon was spotted by John McInally before we headed past the garden area of Mike and Daphne Murray, which cuts in to Crinan Wood, and more Moorhens were noted. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was heard, then a red-headed juvenile was spotted at some feeders, which also attracted Blue and Great Tits, before the star bird in the form of a Nuthatch was spotted. Along the path ahead we encountered a lot of finch activity, with a small flock of juvenile Sis-



Lesser Redpoll ©Jim Dickson



kins with some Chaffinches and Lesser Redpolls mixed in. By now the sun was out and the added warmth encouraged the appearance of some butterflies with Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Scotch Argus and Speckled Wood noted albeit in small numbers.

We arrived at the west entrance to the Crinan Canal that made an ideal lunch stop, and some of us made use of the Crinan Coffee Shop before re-engaging with some birding by scanning out over the Sound of Jura. A few House Martins and House Sparrows were added to our growing list and John McNally spotted an adult Peregrine Falcon. Out on Loch Crinan both Shags and Cormorants were present along with a single Black Guillemot. There were also groups of Eiders and some Red-breasted Mergansers.

Heading back along the canal to our starting point we saw more Spotted Flycatchers up close, and good views of Lesser Redpolls. Andrew John heard the distinctive sound of an Osprey 'cry' and his sharp eyesight picked it out high up in the distance. Slowly it circled round and came closer, almost overhead and was joined by another, so we assumed they were an adult and a fledged youngster. Once back at the Islandadd

Bridge we had a few final scans around and Stephen Bowie spotted a single Lapwing up-river hiding in the grass. Unfortunately, regular birds in recent days at this spot were not noted such as Rock Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat and Skylark, which was a pity as that would have made 60 species. Nevertheless, 56 species for a gentle stroll along the canal wasn't too bad.

**Species list:** Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Heron, Shag, Cormorant, Osprey, Buzzard, Moorhen, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot, Feral Pigeon, Woodpigeon, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Peregrine, Carrion Crow, Hooded Crow, Raven, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Willow Warbler, Wren, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Spotted Flycatcher, Stonechat, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Goldfinch, Siskin, Common Crossbill. (56 species).

**Jim Dickson**

## Migrants

**A short story**  
by Annette Anderton



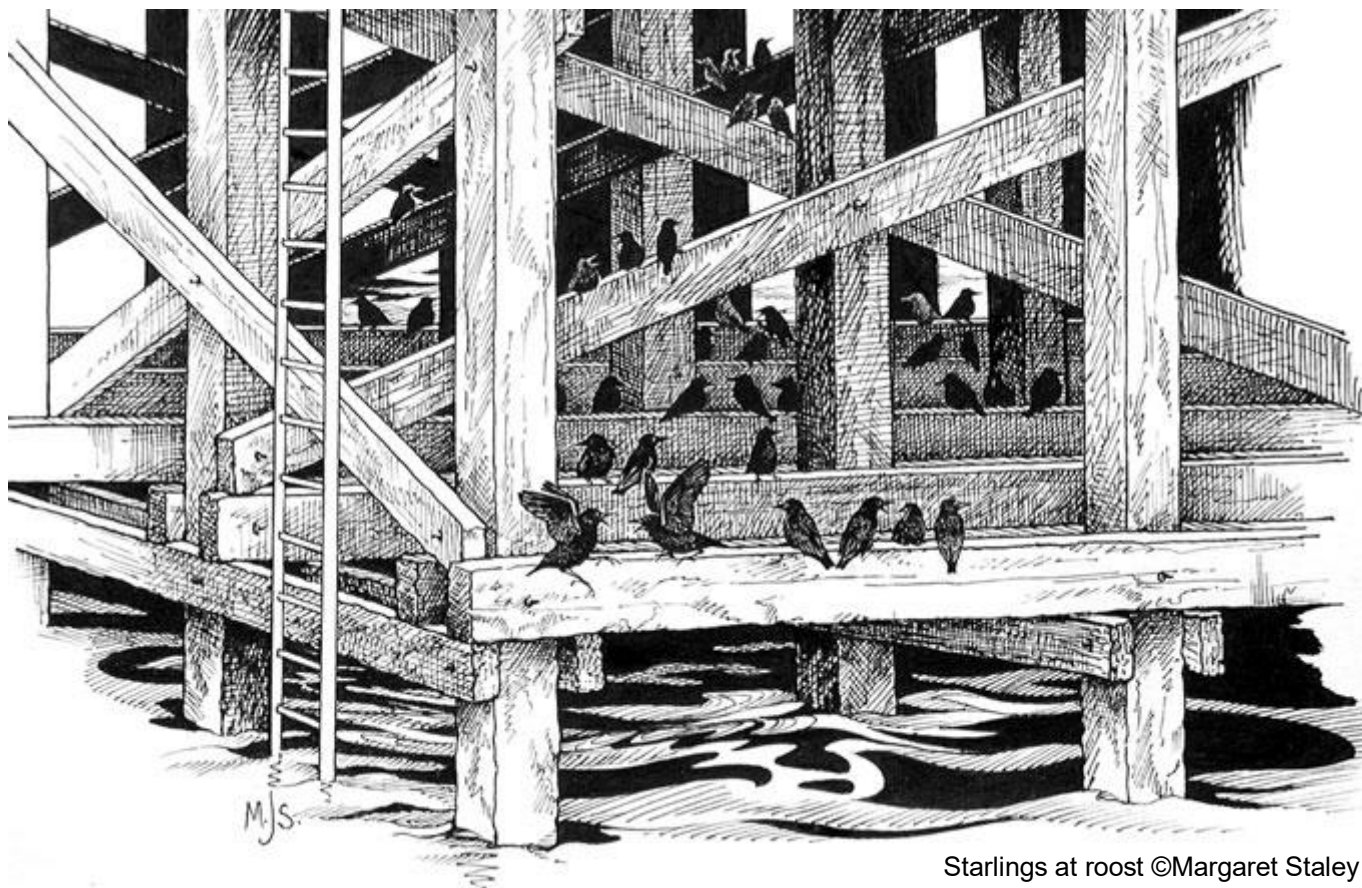
An evening in late autumn and starlings gather in increasing numbers, until thousands of them create a monochromatic kaleidoscope of patterns across the sky, as they salute the slowly setting sun.

Suddenly, chaos, the flock fragments as a Sparrowhawk swoops—a bolt from a crossbow, aimed to disrupt their harmony. No luck for the Sparrowhawk this time and a darkening globe reforms—and rolls—and swirls like a planet dislodged from its orbit. Once again, a cohesive whole, each constantly aware of its neighbour, all acting in perfect unity.

As evening shadows fall the murmuring, whirling cloud rains down on the trees and rooftops.

There, in a flurry of feathers, beaks and deafening clamour, their night-time positions are settled, each bird laying claim to its personal space. Singing, screeching, mimicking and jostling continue late into the night as sociably they reinforce the bonds of their clan.

Early winter, and new flocks of Starlings descend from the north, fleeing the bitter, icy blasts of Siberia, to spend the winter with their southern relatives. But the new-comers' strange dialects trigger territorial disputes, combatants battling for roosting sites even more forcefully than holidaymakers spoiling for a fight over deckchairs at the side of the swimming pool. Then, realising that they speak the same language and look the same, regional dif-



Starlings at roost ©Margaret Staley

ferences are forgotten and peace reigns again. Well, as far as it can, in overcrowded winter roosts where social chit-chat, banter, disgruntled murmurings and discordant singing fill the air.

All are moulting now and as adults and last year's youngsters compete for position, they sport new iridescent outfits, dull brown and black fatigues being replaced by dazzling dress uniforms. Although they are well-dressed the noisy, irreverent teenagers scream incessantly, their shrill voices more raucous and uncompromising than their parents'.

Spring arrives, farewells are said to their northern visitors, and frantic forays for nest building materials commence. Holes and boxes under eaves are furnished with a motley collection of moss, grass and leaves. Eggs are laid and new born nestlings soon wait impatiently to be fed.

"Wheee, wheee, wheee."

Dark, threatening crescents scythe through golden skies of early summer, soar up into the clouds, then suddenly descend—screaming darts hurtling past the nesting Starlings.

Panic ensues, troops are mustered and rush to defend their territory. Trembling silhouettes appear along the gutters, a row of nervous sentinels guarding the castle rampart. The evil beings with their alien language must be repelled.

The Starlings have no regard for the Swifts'

long and harrowing journey over hostile seas and lands. Destined forever to remain on the wing, death awaiting them if they fall to the ground. What evil must they have done to deserve this fate?

Bombardment after bombardment follows as Starlings dive and claw, stab and peck in frantic attempts to maim and destroy these black-eyed devils. No sympathy for the persecution the swifts have endured on their travels. No memory of their own recent acceptance of visiting Siberian relatives.

"Wheee, wheee, wheee."

Suddenly confusion and uncertainty, adult Starlings look upon their screaming children with distrust. How can this sound be coming from their ranks? Have enemy agents infiltrated? Are their traitors within?

No—they still stand in solid rank, no sign of dissent, so back to the attack. Cluster bombs of feathers, claws and beaks explode amongst the unsuspecting swifts.

No hope for compromise, no thoughts of kinship, all that matters is 'They are different'.

But the Swifts are persistent. They have not travelled thousands of miles on a fruitless mission. Time and time again they repeat their assault, no wish to harm the Starlings, just a need to secure a safe place to bring up their young.

Success at last, the first Starling brood has



fledged from one of the nest boxes and their parents are pre-occupied teaching them the basic rules of survival. A home is available with vacant possession. Speedily the Swifts move in. All they need to do is add a few personal touches—leaves, a few wisps of grass or feathers collected on the wing, to complete their nest, some even adding fresh flower petals, providing a touch of colour, a new home, new beginnings.

But the recently displaced Starlings and their progeny soon return and commandeer the gutter above the Swifts' hard-won quarters. There they practise their moves, repeated frenetic flapping of stiff swept-back wings accompanied by vocal rat-tat-tat machine gun rounds. Each time the devil birds return the dive-bombing resumes, but still to no avail and frustrated starlings make futile attempts to hover at the entrance to the Swifts' nest.

At the other end of the building the House Sparrows peer inquisitively out of their boxes, then bounce up on to the roof, and full of bravado strut around like portly moustachioed majors in the Home Guard. Safe from the front line of the action they chirrup their support to whichever side seems to be superior at the time.

Midsummer, and shrill voiced Starling nestlings peer out of a box adjacent to the Swifts' abode, waiting for their parents to re-appear. Their recently fledged siblings, freshly recruited squaddies on their first manoeuvres in their dull brown jackets, are distractedly milling about in the field below.

Up above them two tiny faces peep out of the Swifts' box, their first glimpse of this strange new world. They are hungry and have not seen their parents for days. Innocently, they marvel at the intimidating view below them. Who are all these beings? Will they feed them? Hopefully they strain to see further, too young and naïve to understand they are living under siege.

A thunderstorm is brewing and an eerie silence reigns as the Starlings and most of the other birds seek cover under the eaves or in bushes and trees. But high up in the sky above, invisible to those below, tiny gliders spiral upwards in thermals on the periphery of the storm. The adult Swifts are foraging for insects carried up by the air currents and, as the storm passes, they descend to feed their ravenous young.

But the aerial assault resumes, the returning Swifts running the gauntlet, time and time again. All ranks of Starlings join in the blockade, and emboldened sparrows chivvy them on. Now a frontal attack. Then a flanking manoeuvre. An ambush. Guerrilla tactics. But still the Swifts come, finding breach after breach, they will not be repulsed.

Above the house a new threat looms. A menacing black shadow soars, wheels and circles on a reconnaissance flight. Calls to 'take cover' echo around, but as the Starling squaddies rush round the field in a disorderly mêlée, the Buzzard strikes. One soul will fight no more.

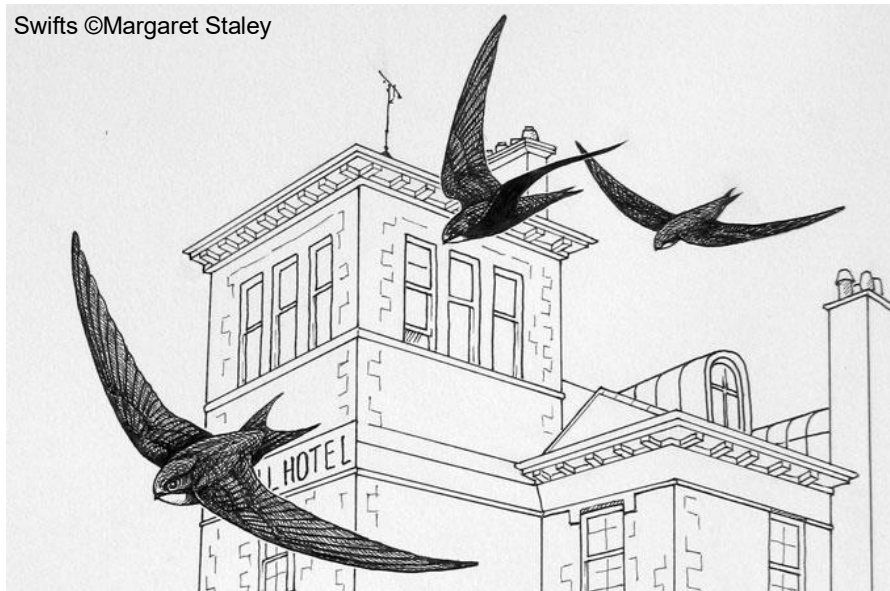
Late summer, and new recruits have joined their Starling siblings on the front line trying to repel the bands of Swifts that now perform regular fly pasts, screaming loudly to encourage the Swift nestlings to take flight.

As northerly winds start to blow, the adult Swifts start to leave and the nestlings finally dive from the only home they have known. No training for them, they must navigate their own route to warmer climes.

Believing that they have finally vanquished their opponents the Starlings revert to bickering and squabbling amongst themselves and, with the odd sharp peck, making sure that the cocky sparrows know their place.

But what of the Swifts? As they confront the perils of land and sea on their journey south, do they ever look down—and see the crowded boats below, searching for new homes and new beginnings.

Swifts ©Margaret Staley



Contributions for the December *Eider* should be sent to the editor before the 20 November 2021

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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).