

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

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The Eider



A super photograph of a Greenshank at the mouth of Campbeltown Loch on
22 September ©Errol Crutchfield

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Editorial

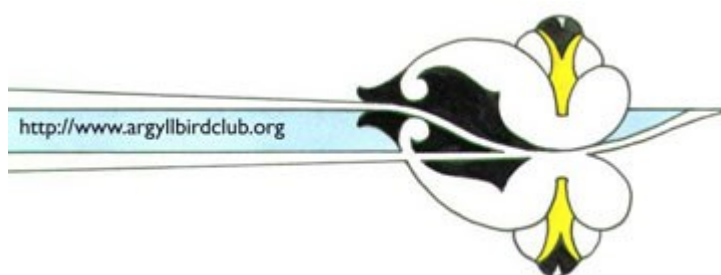
What an excellent autumn meeting at the Cairnbaan Hotel—great talks, excellent food and good company. We're now looking forward to seeing you at the spring meeting on Saturday 4 March, again at the Cairnbaan Hotel. But, before that you have three excellent field trips to look forward to. The details of these are on the next page.

I'm writing this editorial from our casa in northern Spain. We usually come here in September/October, but this year we had too many other commitments, so we decided to travel here soon after the autumn meeting. Prior to our arrival it had been one of the driest summer/autumns on record, but we must have brought some Scottish weather with us, as we've had rain most days and even snow on the hills around as I write. However, we've had some sunny spells and it's amazing how wildlife reacts, just like ourselves. One afternoon we saw nine species of butterfly—not bad for the end of November. Cleopatra, a large yellow butterfly like a Brimstone but with orange patches on the upper wing, were particularly evident. Black Redstarts were busy flycatching around the patio, and the male was in full song. They usually nest under the front porch, and they have often fledged their first brood by the time we arrive for our spring/summer visit in late May.

On behalf of the club, we wish you all a very happy Christmas and New Year. Thank you for continuing to support the Argyll Bird Club.

Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Alun ap Rhisiart, John Boyd, Frank Cavanagh, Malcolm Chattwood, Jim Dickson, Jo Gilpin, Dave Harris, Neil Hammatt, Ian Hopkins, Peter & Dorothy Hogbin (photocopying & dispatching the newsletter), David Jardine, Peter Knight, Rose Maciewicz, Andrew McFarlane, Alistair McGregor, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Nigel Scriven and the late Margaret Staley.



Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2022-2023

The number of people on field trips is limited to a maximum of 20. Therefore, it is essential that you contact the leader of a trip beforehand to make sure a place is available, and to receive up-to-date 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. Trip leaders will keep a record of folk attending each trip.

Saturday 3 December. Loch Laich. Led by David Jardine (dcjardine@btinternet.com). Please let David know if you would like to attend to check that places are available. There will be a walk along the cycleway from Appin Village Hall Car Park (NM 938460) and return, totalling 5km (3 miles), rendezvous at 10.00hrs.

Saturday 28 January. Loch Gilp and Add Estuary. Led by Jim Dickson (phone 01546 603967, e-mail Argyllbirder@outlook.com). Please let Jim know if you would like to attend to check that places are available. Meet at 10.00hrs in Lochgilphead at the Corran Car Park, opposite the caravan park, on the A83, close to the roundabout (A83/A816) at the western end of the town. Please bring your own lunch. The trip will include several short walks (each 300m maximum) on level ground.

Saturday 25 February. Sound of Gigha and Skipness. Led by David Jardine (dcjardine@btinternet.com). Please let David know if you would like to attend to check that places are available. Meet at Ronachan Point Car Park on the A83 (grid ref. NR741548) at 10.00hrs.

Saturday 25 March. Bute. Led by Ian Hopkins (e-mail hopkins0079@btinternet.com mobile phone 07702 123170) and possibly Ron Forrester and Dougie Menzies. Please let Ian know by 10 March if you aim to go on this trip, to check that places are available. Meet Steve Petty at the Colintrave Ferry at 10.00hrs. We aim to share cars to take the minimum number over on the 10.30hrs ferry. Ian will meet us off the ferry on Bute. Please bring a packed lunch. The trip will include several short walks (each 300m maximum) on level ground.

DECEMBER 2022 ZOOM MEETING

Thursday 8 December (19.30hrs). An 'online' evening with wildlife photographer, John Aitchison. Details about the Zoom connection

will be sent out to members closer to the event.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2023

Spring Meeting. Saturday 4 March. The meeting will be held at the Cairnbaan Hotel (www.cairnbaan.com), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). Lunches will be available in the hotel. The programme for the meeting will be sent by e-mail to club members just prior to the meeting.

Autumn Meeting. Saturday 4 November. The meeting will be held at the Cairnbaan Hotel (www.cairnbaan.com), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). Lunches will be available in the hotel. The programme for the meeting will be sent by e-mail to club members just prior to the meeting.

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

NEW EDITOR FOR THE ARGYLL BIRD REPORT

Jim Dickson is in the process of handing over the editorship of the bird report into the very capable hands of David Jardine. Jim has done a tremendous job as editor over many years, and hopefully he will now have more time for birding! We wish David well in his new role. The club is hoping to publish the next *Argyll Bird Report* (number 34 for 2022) in spring 2023.

ARGYLL BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE (ABRC)

If you have good bird identification skills, the ABRC are keen to add a new member to their team. This is a voluntary role and would be suitable for an experienced birdwatcher, but equally, may suit a less experienced but enthusiastic/improving individual who is looking to learn more and develop record assessment skills. Ideally you should have an interest in and be familiar with scarce and rare birds and reasonably confident in your abilities to identify most species that turn up in Argyll. Having previously found rare birds and being familiar with submitting descriptions would be helpful but not essential. Batches of around ten records with descriptions are posted on Dropbox, usually four to six times per year, then judged by members of the committee who vote to 'accept' or 'not-accept' each record based on the facts presented. As such you should be able to use word docs, access a link to Dropbox and be mindful of working in a confidential way. If you think this might be something you would like to consider then please drop me a line and I can discuss any questions you have further and show you examples of our work.

Jim Dickson Argyllbirder@outlook.com

DO YOU REGULARLY LOOK AT ARGYLL BIRD AND WILDLIFE FACEBOOK GROUPS?

The Argyll Bird Recorders (Jim Dickson & Malcolm Chattwood) are looking for someone who is a Face-

book (FB) user with perhaps a bit of spare time to regularly look through various bird and nature FB groups covering the Argyll area for relevant bird records. This task would involve recording noted bird sighting onto the bird club recording spreadsheet, for which guidance will be given if you are not familiar with using this. Not all records noted on Facebook need to be recorded (e.g. common garden birds unless a notable count etc.) but ideally notable sightings where a location and count are given. For any questionable records then Jim and Malcolm can give guidance. If you think this might be something you would like to consider then please drop me a line and I can discuss any questions you have further and show you examples of our work.

Jim Dickson Argyllbirder@outlook.com

ARGYLL BIRD RECORDER

We are still looking for someone to fill the above post. Further details of the post were given in the December *Eider* 2021 (pages 3-4). Please contact Jim Dickson if the post appeals to you.

CHANGING THE WAY TO PAY YOUR SUBSCRIPTION (IMPORTANT, PLEASE READ THIS)

Due to changes in the legal status of the club (to an SCIO) old Standing Orders will no longer transfer members' subscriptions into the new club account, so you will need to set up a new Direct Debit to pay your annual subscription.

I have recently contacted you about how to set up a new Direct Debit. Many of our members who have already set it up say that it is very easy to do. However, there are still quite a few members who have not yet set up a new Direct Debit, so if you haven't please consider doing so soon. Of course, it will still be possible to pay by a new standing order or by bank transfer (to our new bank account), or by cheque (made out to the 'Argyll Bird Club') or even cash if you prefer! If you have any questions about the changes, do get in touch. Peter Hogbin, Treasurer

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, all of which have now been given a home. We can

have more boxes made if anyone has a site in mind. If you know of a suitable building, please contact David Jardine (contact details on back page). Applications for funding other projects should be submitted to the secretary (contact details on the back page).

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 33 (2021)

ABC members can download the latest report from:

<https://argyllbirdclub.org/annual-bird-report-download/>

The report can only be accessed by members of the ABC by using a password that has been sent to each member by e-mail. If you are not a member of the club, please consider joining (details on back page).

MACHRIHANISH SEA BIRD OBSERVATORY

Many members will have visited Machrihanish Seabird Observatory where Eddie McGuire was maintaining the building and monitoring the birds passing through the area over many years. With Eddie's passing, the work at the observatory has been taken on by Jo Goudie and David Millward. David and Jo are looking for others to become involved. They need volunteers to help with recording the different birds that visit the site and also help is needed for the maintenance of the property. They are wanting to form a small committee so that MSBO can become a charity, which would then be able to apply for grants to support the work. If you are interested to help in any way at the observatory, Jo would love to hear from you. Her contact details are: mobile 07919 660292, email jomitzi@yahoo.co.uk

COLOUR-RINGED BIRDS

Nowadays there are many colour-ringed birds in the countryside, particularly amongst waterfowl and waders. Please report any that you see, noting which leg the ring is on, its colour and any numbers/letters that you can read. Try to photograph the bird if possible. Every record provides valuable data on movements and survival (see pages 15-21). Please send your records to David Jardine who will forward the information to the relevant organisation, and keep to you informed of any results. Thank you.



Newly-arrived
Barnacle Geese
on Tiree ©Jim
Dickson

ABC field trip to Jura on 20 August



The Paps of Jura as seen from the Islay Ferry ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

A day-long trip to Jura and Islay without seeing an eagle might be thought by some to have been a poor day—read on to find out why this one wasn't.

"Mull of Kintyre to Ardnamuchan Point: Force 5-7 southerly veering south-westerly and dropping to 3-5, showers, visibility good dropping to moderate in showers". So announced the early morning Shipping Forecast—it looked like being a breezy crossing, but fortunately it wasn't too rough!

The sail down West Loch Tarbert was smooth, but unlike in winter, it was relatively quiet for birds. Two lingering summer visitors, a fishing party of five Sandwich Terns and a hovering Osprey at the mouth of the loch were the highlights, along with a small party of Eiders on the rocks by Eilean Traighe (the only ones seen during the day).

Initially the sea was relatively quiet other than a good number of 'white horses', and a single Great Northern Diver seen from the stern of the boat. But after passing Gigha the number of seabirds increased, initially with feeding Gannets and Guillemots with their dependent chicks, which could be heard calling to their fathers (who carry out parental care once the chicks have left the breeding cliffs). Very suddenly it became busy with more Kittiwakes and Manx Shearwaters visible in all directions—over a 1000 of the latter were seen during the crossing. All eyes were soon on a 'hurry' (a concentrated feeding party of seabirds fly) reasonably close to the boat and some members were fortunate to see the Minke Whale when it surfaced, and Neil and Frank were lucky enough to pick out a brown coloured shearwater (with dirty 'armpits'), which contrasted with the 'black and white' Manx Shearwater—it was a Balearic Shearwater!

The shearwater-fest continued with Manxies flying close-by under the bow of the fer-

ry. It was not long until a larger shearwater appeared with longer wings and completely black/brown plumage, apart from silvery underwings (photo below). This was the first of at least three Sooty Shearwaters seen during an exciting hour of seabird watching. Two Fulmars and a single Arctic Tern looked very dainty amongst the Kittiwakes. Shortly afterwards, Neil spotted another Balearic Shearwater amongst the Manxies.

Things quietened down as the ferry entered the Sound of Islay, although a steady stream of Gannets was seen passing through all day—a very encouraging sight given the fears about the impact of Avian Flu earlier in the summer.

After disembarking in Port Askaig the 16-strong party were soon aboard the MV Eilean Dhiura and soon across to Feolin on Jura, where a picnic lunch was taken in sunshine on the shore (photo on next page). Just as they were finishing lunch a Peregrine drifted over to the north.



Sooty Shearwater (left) and Manx Shearwater (right) seen from the ferry ©Frank Cavanagh



Upper photo. Lunch at Feolin, Jura ©David Jardine

Lower photo. A late Whinchat at Feolin, Jura ©David Jardine

A late Whinchat (photo above) was a surprise find on the track up to Inver, but like the last visit to Jura in 2018, it was insects which provided interest along the track. A total of eight different species of butterflies were seen during the day with good views of



The elusive Grayling butterfly
©David Palmer www.photoscot.co.uk

many Small Coppers and the 'houdini' Graylings which seemed to disappear on landing (photo at bottom of page). The sunshine also meant that there were dragonflies to be seen with many Highland Darters basking on the track and rising from our feet along with several Golden-ringed Dragonflies and Common Hawkers being seen and photographed.

Alongside the pair of Mute Swans at Whitefarland Bay, there was a pair of Canada Geese, showing the continuing expansion of this invasive, introduced species. The swans were without cygnets. It would have been interesting to see if, like on the previous visit, they had any young of the 'polish morph', but such an observation will have to wait for another year.

More shelter was found in the native woodland at Coille na h-Uanaire, and within habitat numerous passerines were found, including Coal and Blue Tit and Willow Warbler. Calum found a Grey Wagtail by the burn and Patrick and Frank were fortunate to get a brief view of a young Cuckoo.

A walk to within viewing distance of Loch a' Chnoic Bhric followed by a check with the 'scope found little to see on the water, thus saving around 2km of walking out and back to the shore. However, this 'tea-stop' afforded good views of a hunting Hen Harrier, thought to be a juvenile female on account of its large size and dark brown colouration, along with a Kestrel and some late Sand Martins.

A breather on the return journey at Whitefarland Bay allowed the group to see the egg-case of the critically endangered Flapper Skate, which young Frank found on the shore. This fish, previously known as the Common Skate, can grow to 3m in length and live to the age of 50-100 years, is known to breed in Scottish waters with most egg-cases found in Orkney, but some also in Argyll. Quite a find! However, given the tidal flows in the Sound of Islay it is difficult to be certain where breeding occurred.

The party caught the late afternoon ferry back to Port Askaig, just as it clouded over followed by a short shower. Some retired to the hotel for tea while others, on a short walk up the hill, added Bullfinch, Blackcap, Mistle Thrush and the first House Sparrow of the day to the trip list. A great meal was enjoyed by all in the hotel and afterwards as the sunshine returned a couple of migrating groups of waders were seen flying south through the sound—18 Redshanks in the first and 36 Black-tailed Godwits and one Redshank in the next group.

The sun was beginning to dip as everyone boarded the MV Finlaggan for the return crossing. All eyes were open for a White-tailed Eagle on the shore in the evening light, but it was not to be, even if David J did try to turn the rear-end of a distant Red deer

into one, before seeing it walk away! The wind had dropped and there were far fewer sea-birds around than in the morning, but Patrick managed to pick out, and show other folks two Arctic Skuas flying back up the sound, and in the last of the fading light the keen young eyes of Frank Cavanagh picked out a Storm Petrel.

What do you think?—the lack of eagles didn't spoil a great day.

Species list (68 species). Species in italics were seen on/around Jura. *Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Eider, Cuckoo, Rock Dove, Collared Dove, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern, Arctic Skua, Guillemot, Razorbill, Great Northern Diver, Storm Petrel, Fulmar, Sooty Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, Manx Shearwater, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Heron, Osprey, Hen Harrier, Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine, Hooded Crow, Raven, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Wren, Treecreeper, Starling, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Whinchat, Stonechat, Wheatear, House Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Redpoll, Goldfinch, Siskin.*

David Jardine



Club members on the way to Inver, Jura
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

ABC field trip to Campbeltown and MSBO on 24 September



Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) ©Malcolm Chattwood

On the day of a field trip, when the first glance out of the window provides a view of thick mist, immediate thoughts turn to what plan B may be. However, the forecast for 24 September was a good one, and so it proved to be, as with much relief the mist cleared by the time I reached Lochgilphead for a rendezvous with Rob Lightfoot, who had kindly volunteered to drive. The views to the west as we headed down the Kintyre Peninsula were magnificent and landscape features in Antrim and on Rathlin (Northern Ire-

land) were clearly visible.

Unlike our last trip here in 2019 my joining instructions were obviously adequate as 16 of us assembled at the end of the old pier in Campbeltown. It was also great to welcome some new faces to hopefully enjoy a day's birding. As leader of the trip there's always a bit of pressure to live up to the expectation of being an "experienced birder" which I'm not, but I was very fortunate to be in the company of Rob Lightfoot, Neil Hammatt and Rab Morton, with the latter also having

intimate knowledge of the local area and its birds.

We strolled out to the end of the Old Pier where a panoramic view opens out over the harbour area and Campbeltown Bay. Eiders, Gannets, Herring Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls were seen as expected whilst a couple of Mute Swans were easily visible on the northern shore. It was particularly pleasing to see Black Guillemots in their white winter plumage (photo opposite) as it was a good opportunity for those amongst us who weren't too familiar with the species. Despite most attention being focussed on the water, the skies were in Rob's sights as he spotted a large soaring raptor to the south towards Beinn Ghuilean, seemingly being harassed by something much smaller. They were high but were readily seen through binoculars against the cloud. Rob managed to train the telescope in their direction and identified the pair as a Golden Eagle and Kestrel. This unexpected sighting kept us all occupied for the next few minutes as the eagle soared high above us heading north towards Peninver—follow that!

After all the initial excitement we headed off in cars around the south side of the bay to stop at the tidal pool known as Stinky Hole where fortuitously it was high tide and likely to be the haunt of roosting waders. We weren't disappointed as 70 or so Curlews were resting there, a few Oystercatchers and a pair of Greenshanks (photo opposite) were readily visible at the water's edge. To their right, attention was drawn to the orange legs of a couple of Redshanks but careful scrutiny through telescopes revealed that 20 of the nearby pebbles were in fact sleeping redshanks with orange bills and legs well tucked away in a wonderful display of avian camouflage. Teal and Mallard were prospecting around the edges whilst a flock of around 10 Red-breasted Mergansers flew across to Davaar Island and settled on the sea. The peaceful scene was momentarily disturbed as a young Peregrine flew over the top of us, across the pool and out into the bay. As ever with the Peregrine, it all happened so quickly that not everyone was able to pick the bird out against the background, but the alarm calls of the other birds certainly confirmed its presence. One benefit of this brief incursion was a flock of around eight Dunlin which now revealed themselves, previously having been out of sight over the top of the pebble bank.

Leaving Stinky Hole, we continued



Upper photo. Black Guillemot in winter plumage, Campbeltown Harbour ©John Boyd

Lower photo. Two Greenshanks at Stinky Hole ©John Boyd

round to Kildalloig with a view over the more open Firth of Clyde. Rock Pipits, Pied Wagtails and a Robin were flitting about amongst the seaweed on the shore. A calling Buzzard appeared over the trees behind that drew the attention of a Woodpigeon and either Swallows or House Martins—impossible to say at that distance. Out at sea, little was to be seen other than the odd Gannet, Shag or Cormorant. A trio of Red-throated Divers bobbed about on the lumpy sea and fortunately stayed on the surface for everyone to pick them out.

Leaving Kildalloig we stopped briefly at a layby opposite Davaar where good numbers of Shags were resting close to the shore before heading across the peninsula to Machrihanish. Previous visits to the area at high tide had produced up to a dozen Grey Herons on a small part of shoreline close to the NATO oil terminal, but today they were absent, one of their number probably being the one we saw perched on a buoy in the harbour at the start of the trip.

Neil Hammatt had headed straight to Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (MSBO) where he'd been fortunate to find Pip who had opened up for him. He was able to report that he hadn't seen much but there was little concern as it was lunchtime and members selected their preferred spots in the sun to eat their lunch! A fresh WNW wind

would be preferred to bring birds close to the shore and the day's northerly didn't produce anything of note with the exception of a single Kittiwake. The group strolled back round the track towards the salt pans where I'd seen a Merlin the previous week, but we weren't able to repeat my previous good fortune. However, good sightings of a female Wheatear (photo opposite) provided a fitting end to a day's birding which didn't record a large number of species but certainly one or two memorable ones.

Thanks are due to all associated with MSBO for accommodating us on the day, to Rab, Neil and Rob for giving me support, Dave and John for providing photographs and to all the members who shared it with us.

Species list. Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Mallard, Teal, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Woodpigeon, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Redshank, Greenshank, Kittiwake, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Common Guillemot, Black Guillemot, Red-throated Diver, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow,



Wheatear ©John Boyd

Hooded Crow, Raven, Swallow, Starling, Blackbird, Robin, Wheatear, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Linnet

Malcolm Chattwood



A Cormorant, Greater Black-backed Gull, Herring Gulls and Eiders along the shore ©Dave Harris

ABC field trip to Toward and south Loch Striven, Cowal on 22 October



Photo ©Alistair McGregor

The weather forecast for the day wasn't good, suggesting prolonged showers but becoming drier in the afternoon. However, upon arrival at Toward at about 09.35hrs it was dry and mild with a temperature of about 12 degrees. By 10.00hrs, 15 people had arrived so I gave a safety briefing and explained what the plan for the day was.

From the car park at Toward Primary School we spotted Cormorant, Shag, Curlew, Oyster catcher, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and a very distant Black Guillemot. This is when the panic set in as in past trips to this area we would have seen almost 20 species by now. The weather was mild and the sea was calm and almost at high tide. I hoped these factors were the reason for the lack of species.

We started off along the road, then onto a small path that led to the beach and a small bay. Passing houses on our left gave us views of House Sparrow and Chaffinch on some bird feeders in a garden. Heading down the path to the beach there was a ditch full of rushes where we found Goldfinch, Starling, Greenfinch, Robin, Stonechat (photo, next page) and Lesser Redpoll to name a few. I began to feel my spirits lifting as the total was now well into the twenties.

A large group of Snipe provided us with good views as they shot past like darts, closely followed by, but much higher and a tad of slower, Whooper Swans—six in total. As our attention was now focused on the sky, we spotted Fieldfare, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Rook and Hybrid Crows

Things were now looking better and the weath-

er was still dry, albeit with darker clouds looming near by. Along the foreshore we found Mallard, Wigeon, Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser. One of the group (Neil Hammett) spotted a single Skylark flying overhead, which in turn drew our attention once again skyward and we saw a large group of little brown jobs (LBJs). They comprised mostly Chaffinches and Greenfinches, but a Linnet was spotted as they came to rest in a nearby bush.

Some of the more able in the group walked back to the car park area to get better views along the shore, while I took the rest back the way we had come. We had nice views of Goldfinches feeding on weed seeds and more Snipe flying about the wet grassland adjacent to the main road.

The rest of the group arrived with some excitement as they had spotted a pair of Yellowhammers. In my eight years of bird watching in this area, I have only seen one, seven years ago!

We had a quick catch up and moved on to our next location at Arydne. We parked at the Arydne shore car park and walked along the track adjacent to the shore. This gave good views out across to the island of Bute. Numerous Eiders were seen on the sea, and good numbers of Mallard, Wigeon, Teal, Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander were observed.

Numerous Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Redshank and Dunlin were amongst a large group of mixed gulls roosting on a gravel bar. Geese were heard across the field but were too far away to identify.

One of the looming clouds decided to deposit its



content on us for about twenty minutes, giving us a chance for a bite to eat in our vehicles, and for me to up date my species list for the day. We were now on 48.

As we drove towards low Loch Striven we stopped to look at the geese that we had heard earlier, and we managed to pick out four Pink-footed Geese amongst the Greylags and Canada geese (photo below).

A short distance round to Knockdow estate and we saw Moorhen, which is a common sight at this location, but not elsewhere in Argyll.

The weather improved, drying up nicely as we stopped on the shore side of Loch Striven and observed a large flotilla of Eiders, which numbered over 500. Some of the young males were still in eclipse plumage and further out in the loch were some Common Guillemots.

The last short walk of the day at Inverchaolion Church gave us a few more species, including Raven, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Pheasant and Collared Dove. The keen hearing of Neil and Rob Lightfoot picked out a



Left photo. Stonechat ©Andrew McFarlane

Right photo. The group at Toward ©Andrew McFarlane

Goldcrest in a stand of Scots Pine and rhododendrons, but unfortunately it wasn't seen.

As we were heading back to the parking area at the church I heard and saw a Jay. It was acting in a distressed manner and disappeared into the undergrowth, still calling loudly. I then spotted the cause of the Jay's distress—a Peregrine. We couldn't have wished for a better bird to finish the day on.

Many thanks to everyone who turned out on the day, and special thanks to Neil Hammett and Rob Lightfoot for helping with spotting and identification.

Species total (59). Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Cormorant, Shag, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Mallard, Wigeon, Teal, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander, Pheasant, Moorhen, Oystercatcher, Buzzard, Peregrine, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin, Redshank, Curlew, Snipe, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Guillemot, Black Guillemot, Feral Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Robin, Dunnock, Stonechat, Mistle Thrush, Redwing, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Hooded Crow, Rook, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Siskin, Greenfinch, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll,

Alistair McGregor



Three Greylags and a Pink-footed Goose ©Alistair McGregor

Holy Loch Nature Reserve Part 1. Biodiversity Census



A flower-rich part of the reserve ©Neil Hammatt

The Holy Loch Nature Reserve, on Cowal, comprises a range of different habitats including broadleaved woodland, salt-marsh, freshwater pools, gravelly beaches and banks, tidal creeks, sea-bed, bog and reed-bed. The most significant feature of the reserve is its unmanaged state. Unusually, the whole reserve is not grazed by livestock, only by native species. As a result, this site provides an opportunity to study ecology in a range of habitats unaffected by human economic or leisure activity.

In previous summers I had explored the whole reserve, not just the area between the gate and bird hide. It blew my mind—where from the hide one sees a mostly grassy salt-marsh, up close one sees a mosaic of grassy areas and both dry and wet wild flower meadows and pools. The gravel banks had probably the most diverse community of wild flowers I've seen anywhere, presumably from seed that floated in off the sea. This area of the reserve simply hums with insects on a sunny day.

At a chance meeting with club member Jean Maskell, the now chairperson of the Trust that leases the land from Argyll and Bute Council, on a bird club outing in late 2021, we hatched a plan to raise the profile of the reserve. Thus, the Sandbank Community Development Trust is currently working on improving the reserve visitor infrastructure, while I am tackling recording what lives on the reserve having only recorded birds previously. Also, I

asked myself a simple question—what is there for birds to eat on the reserve?

Naively, in February I predicted that the reserve would have around 110 flowering plants. To date, I have named 217!! But, that does include a few in the council and Scottish Water compounds, both of which are surrounded by the reserve.

One challenge for anyone attempting such a task is species identification. Resources are patchy and each group of organisms has different ways for recording finds. Superimposed upon this is a county-based system. Quite simply, there is no single standard method for inputting data, although Scottish government policy is to have just one by 2025.



Small Tortoiseshell ©Jo Gilpin

In the meantime, my aim is to get as many of my finds onto the National Biodiversity Network Atlas because the biodiversity crisis cannot be tackled effectively without knowing what lives where. I use the iRecord app, where many finds are reviewed by experts, thereby adding another element of confidence. But many records are not reviewed because there are too few experts. Wasps are a good example. With around 9000 UK species, the recording task is monumental. There are also 5500 species of fly, many requiring microscopic examination to determine the species! But in an ecosystem, every species counts. As a beginner I try my best with all of the resources available, and on iRecord, many of my finds have been confirmed by the available experts. Fortunately, through various phone apps such as Obsidentify, artificial intelligence is being applied to improve initial identification, and over time, with a growing database to feed off, such apps should learn more species detail and become more accurate. I like to have at least two sources of evidence for my identifications. I am a retired (now unpaid) scientist with typical scepticism—I will not record evidence I am not convinced by.

Ultimately, the strategic aim is to have all of the species that live on the reserve listed on the reserve website, and also on the searchable iRecord database and NBN atlas, all being available to a global audience of amateurs and professionals.

To date, I have identified over 750 distinct organisms on the reserve and its environs, most of which I have photographed. Amazingly, several of these do not appear on the biodiversity atlas for Argyll, and could be new species for the county, but this could also be because historical paper-based records have not yet been uploaded onto a digital database. The 750 include 65 fungi (numbers growing), 33 hoverflies, 60 other flies, 8 bees, 96 moths, 102 birds and 12 mammals including myself! I am just starting to add algae, mosses, liverworts and lichens.

In 2023, I will continue this work, concentrating on what lives in the various water bodies, leaf litter, tree bark and mosses, and also down low in the wild flower meadows and in its soils. Inevitably, I will be working on much smaller species, which will be trickier to detect and work with. But I like a challenge, and nets, magnifying glasses, pit traps, microscopes and macro lenses are being acquired as I write.

Neil Hammatt



Upper photo. Kingfisher. A bird that is regularly seen on the reserve ©Andrew McFarlane

Lower photo. Amethyst Deceiver one of the many fungi recorded ©Neil Hammatt





BTO update November 2022



Woodcock Survey

- This is now annual. Now a Red-listed breeder. April recce visit to locate counting point.
- Three visits between 1 May and 30 June, minimum one week apart.
- Counts start 15 mins before sunset and last for 75 mins.
- 1500 survey squares 1km (805 high priority, 775 low priority).
- Additional squares possible on request to organiser david.norfolk@bto.org

More information at:

www.bto.org/our-science/projects/woodcock-survey

Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP)

- Previously run by Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. Now hosted and organised through the BTO.
- 2 or 3 monthly visits in winter on set weekends.
- Able to identify and age migratory geese and swans, and count them accurately.
- Contact gsmp@bto.org

More information at:

www.bto.org/our-science/projects/goose-and-swan-monitoring-programme

BTO Training courses

- Some are on-line.
- Some are field-based.
- Some are free.
- Some have modest costs.

More information at:

www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/training-courses

BTO Annual Conference—online only

Monday 28 Nov 1900 - 2030. **Harnessing the Power of Citizen Science**

Tuesday 29 Nov 1900 - 2030. **Latest BTO Research**

Wednesday 30 Nov 1400 - 1530. **Monitoring Updates (Woodcock, Seabirds, Geese and Swans)**

Thursday 1 Dec 1400 - 1530. **Tracking Studies**

Friday 2 Dec 1900 - 2030. Witherby Lecture given by Peter Marra. **Studying birds in the context of the full annual cycle**

BTO Heronries Census

BTO's longest running survey (95 years in 2023). Now includes Little Egret.

More information at

www.bto.org/our-science/projects/heronries-census

Nigel Scriven



Grey Heron ©Steve Petty

K'not all known – Why do Red Knot occur in western Scotland?

The Red Knot (hereafter Knot) is an infrequent visitor to western Scotland. From the 2018-2021 Argyll Bird Report records there are three main periods of observations (Figure 1).

1. in autumn mainly juveniles plus visual migration observations of Knot heading south along the coast.
2. in winter very small numbers observed across the region.
3. in spring small numbers being observed late April/early May and some also in late May.

The subspecies involved, *Calidris canutus islandica*, breeds in north and east Greenland and the high arctic of Canada, and winters mainly on North Sea estuaries with smaller numbers in the Irish Sea and the coast of France. The main autumn moulting sites are on the east coast of England (The Wash and Humber) and Liverpool Bay, and also the Dutch Wadden Sea. They are not known to moult in Scotland. After the moult, there is a dispersal that dramatically increases numbers in the Irish Sea as well as along the broader North Sea coast of the UK from the Moray Firth to the Thames Estuary. Many wintering sites are vacated in March and large numbers build up in the German Wadden Sea as well as in the autumn moult sites. Then in early May there is a departure of adults to staging grounds in western Iceland and arctic Norway, from which the birds leave for the breeding grounds by the start of June.

Given this annual migratory cycle, the questions are: why do Knot bother to stop at all in western Scotland and when they do, where do they come from and where are they going?

Using tracking methods for Knot ecology

One way to try to answer these questions is by using 'mark and recapture' methods. Originally this was through metal ringing but more recently this has moved towards the use of plastic colour markers with and without alphanumeric codes, and finally to the use of digital tracking devices such as geolocators, GPS or satellite tags. Each of these methods has its pros and cons. Metal ringing has a long history and allows comprehensive comparative data over decades, but it is limited to sites where ringing is done or to chance recovery of a ringed corpse. Colour marking is more costly than adding just a metal ring and requires additional handling techniques, but many birds can still be marked. Furthermore 'recapture' via sighting is much more likely than recapture or recovery and for migratory species such as waders the bird can be tracked throughout the year so that individual histories build up over years. The use of tracking devices has the advantage of yielding high density data and sensational visual results, but usually only low numbers of birds are marked due to high costs, making extrapolation to the whole population uncertain. Also tracking data are usually collected over a short time-period due to for instance the limited life of the battery and the attachment method of the tag, which is usually gluing to feathers that later moult.

For *islandica* Knot, colour marking has been ongoing for almost 25 years with a marking program in the Dutch Wadden Sea since 1998 during the autumn moulting period as well as in late winter. Since 2005, Knot have also been marked on their staging grounds in May in north Norway, and since 2011 in Iceland too. However, until recent-

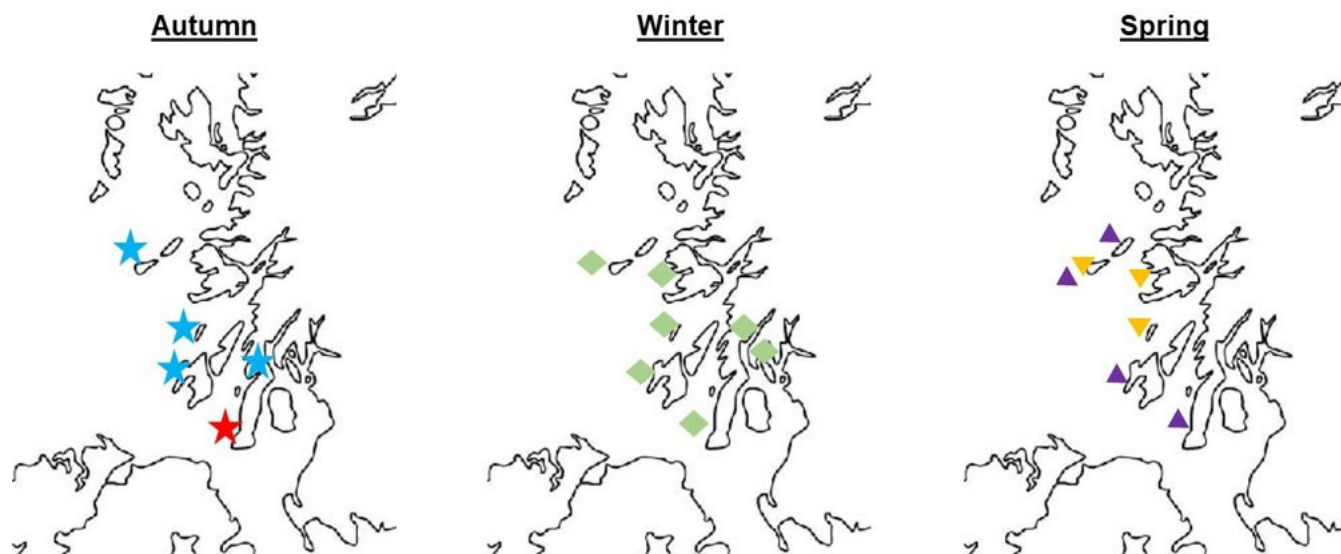


Figure 1. Observation sites of Knot in the Argyll and Bute area in Autumn, Winter, and Spring. Mainly juveniles in August to early September (blue star). Visible migration in southerly direction in August to early September (red star). Small numbers reported in mid-winter (green diamond), late April /early May (yellow triangle) and late May (purple triangle).

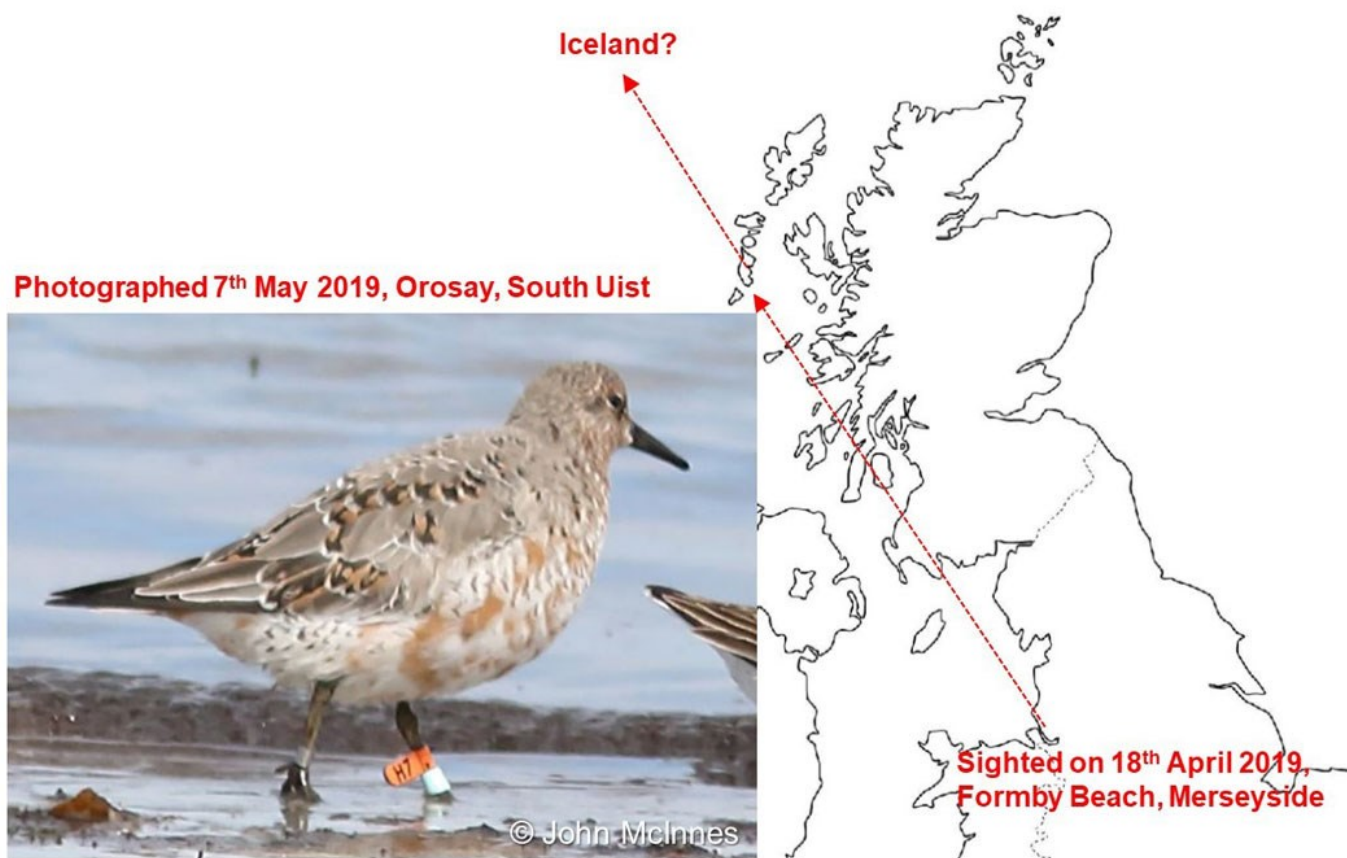


Figure 2. Northward movement of Knot OfP H7 from Formby Beach, Merseyside to Orosay, South Uist in late April/early May 2019.

ly, colour marking of Knot had not been done in the UK.

The UK orange-flag Knot project

In northwest England, Knot are present in all seasons and winter numbers were known to be of international significance. However, Knot numbers in the area declined significantly during the 1980s, have not recovered and appear to be in continual decline, for unknown reasons. Using colour ring readings in 2016 and 2017 we found that in contrast to winter, there were very few colour-marked Knot in the Liverpool Bay area in autumn and late spring despite there being thousands of Knot present. This suggested that these Knot were using migratory pathways where no colour marking was taking place and indicated that more than one population was using the area.

Armed with this information, the coded orange-flag Knot project began in September 2017 with the aim to provide a greater understanding of the ecology of Knot that use Liverpool Bay. This hoped to investigate their survival, productivity, migratory patterns, and behaviour, and more recently about the impact environmental changes may have on these. Since then, several other ringing teams have joined the orange-flag project, including in N Ireland, W Wales and NE Scotland. Colour marking in Scotland started in September 2019 by the Grampian Ringing Group on the

Ythan estuary and over the last couple of years has expanded to include the Highland Ringing Group in the Inverness area and the Orkney Ringing Group on Sanday. At the time of writing, 2,092 Knot have been fitted with orange flags, and so far we have had almost 12,000 complete sightings. The Scottish teams have flagged 342 Knot. It is early days, but to date there have been 332 sightings of these Scottish-ringed Knot.

The placement of the flag is itself a bit of an experiment. The upper leg of Knot is quite short and often obscured by belly feathers especially in cold weather. Therefore, to improve flag visibility at all seasons, we attach it to the lower leg. However, abrasion of the flag by mud and sand could be a problem, so this was reduced by interposing a colour ring between the foot and the flag, so keeping the flag off the ground. Even so a proportion of the flags have developed wear over time, though most still appear fine after five years. We have taken the opportunity to use the colour of this support ring, together with flagging on the left or right leg to identify the region in the UK where the Knot was flagged. Knot ringed in Scotland have a bright yellow support ring, those from Ireland an orange one and W Wales pale blue on the right leg. Liverpool Bay rings are mainly green, but can be pale blue, on the left leg. So even if you can't read the code on the flag, you (and we!) can learn something from noting those features of a colour-marked bird.

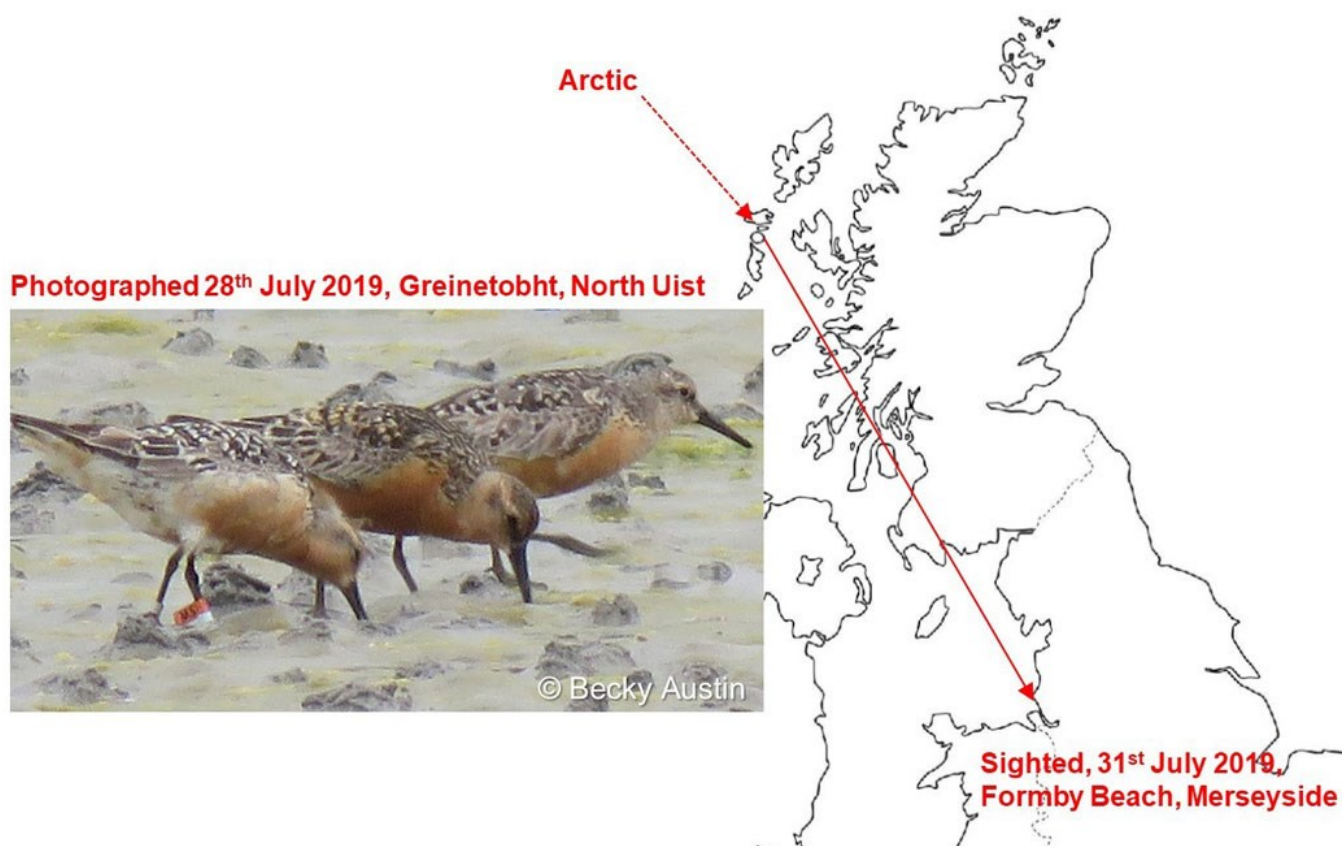


Figure 3. Southward movement of Knot OfP M5 from Greinetobht, North Uist on 28 July 2019 to Formby Beach,

What do immature Knot do?

Knot that hatched the previous year do not go north in May. Instead, these second-calendar-year (2CY) Knot, which stay in grey, non-breeding plumage, spend the breeding season in the UK and the Netherlands, principally in the Wash, Liverpool Bay and the Wadden Sea. Although they represent the future of the subspecies, these young Knot have been little studied in the past, so we don't know how best to ensure that they survive to breeding age. Our first cannon-net catch in September 2017 comprised about equal numbers of 2CY and adult Knot, and since then we have made two further catches of 2CY Knot, in July 2020 and late May 2021. The other ringing groups have also managed to flag good numbers of young Knot. Currently these young birds make up 41% of all orange-flagged Knot, and resightings of these birds are set to transform our knowledge of the movements of this age group.

Knot visit western Scotland en route between breeding and non-breeding sites

So, what have we learned about the orange-flag Knot that frequent western Scotland? Here are some examples:

We have observed that in late April and early May Knot depart from Liverpool Bay on a north-westerly bearing that would take them directly to Iceland. This bearing would take them over the western isles of Scotland. While it is clear from the lack of large flocks of Knot in Scotland that the majority of Knot undertake

this journey in one flight of 1,800km, some Knot do make a stopover. For instance, orange flag over pale blue ring (OfP) H7, which was observed up to 18 April 2019 on Formby Beach, was then photographed 7 May 2019 on South Uist. This was an adult Knot in its fourth calendar year, so should have been going north to breed. Since ringing in September 2017, it had been sighted in autumn, winter and spring in Liverpool Bay, but since this photograph it has not been seen again. Perhaps it gave up the flight north due to ill health, and succumbed (figure 2).

Most adult Knot leave the breeding grounds before their young, with females leaving before the males, as the latter undertake the main parenting role. A group of adult Knot photographed on North Uist on 28 July 2019 included OfP M5. Three days later M5 was sighted back in Liverpool Bay where it regularly moulted. This indicates that the group were making a brief stopover in western Scotland. They may well have flown direct from the breeding grounds, as numbers of adult Knot in Iceland in autumn are much lower than in spring (figure 3).

Knot OfY UXV was photographed among a party of about 40 Knot, mainly juveniles, on Islay on 5 September 2022 (figure 4). It had been flagged as an adult on Inverness Firth only in December 2021, so not surprisingly had no previous sightings. Knot do not start their autumn moult until they reach an established moulting site, and indeed this bird shows worn plumage with no new non-breeding feathers. Despite the late date, this suggests that the bird had only recently ar-

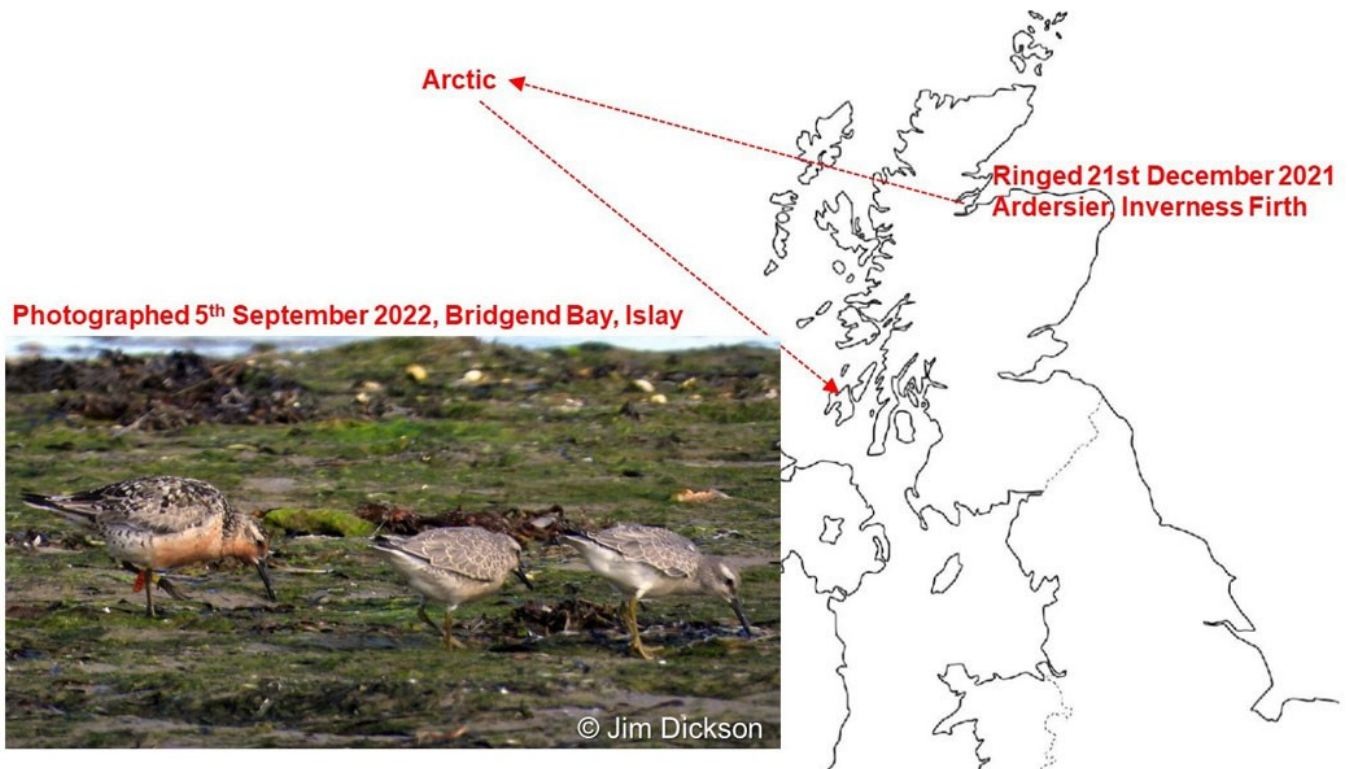


Figure 4. An adult Knot OfY UXV with two skinny juveniles at Bridgend Bay, Islay on 5th September 2022.

rived, and would not stay long. Perhaps it had paused to refuel in Iceland, as it looks plumper than the two skinny juveniles. Repeat visits to a site that has a colour-marked bird can be valuable in showing how long the birds stay. Even without colour marks, the distinct plumage patterns of individual Knot can be recognised among photographs taken across a series of

visits, and thus reveal the extent of turnover within a flock.

Some Knot fly north for the winter—or stay in Scotland in spring

Our recent catches of the flock of 2CY Knot that summers in Liverpool Bay has shown an unexpected connection with Scotland, including the

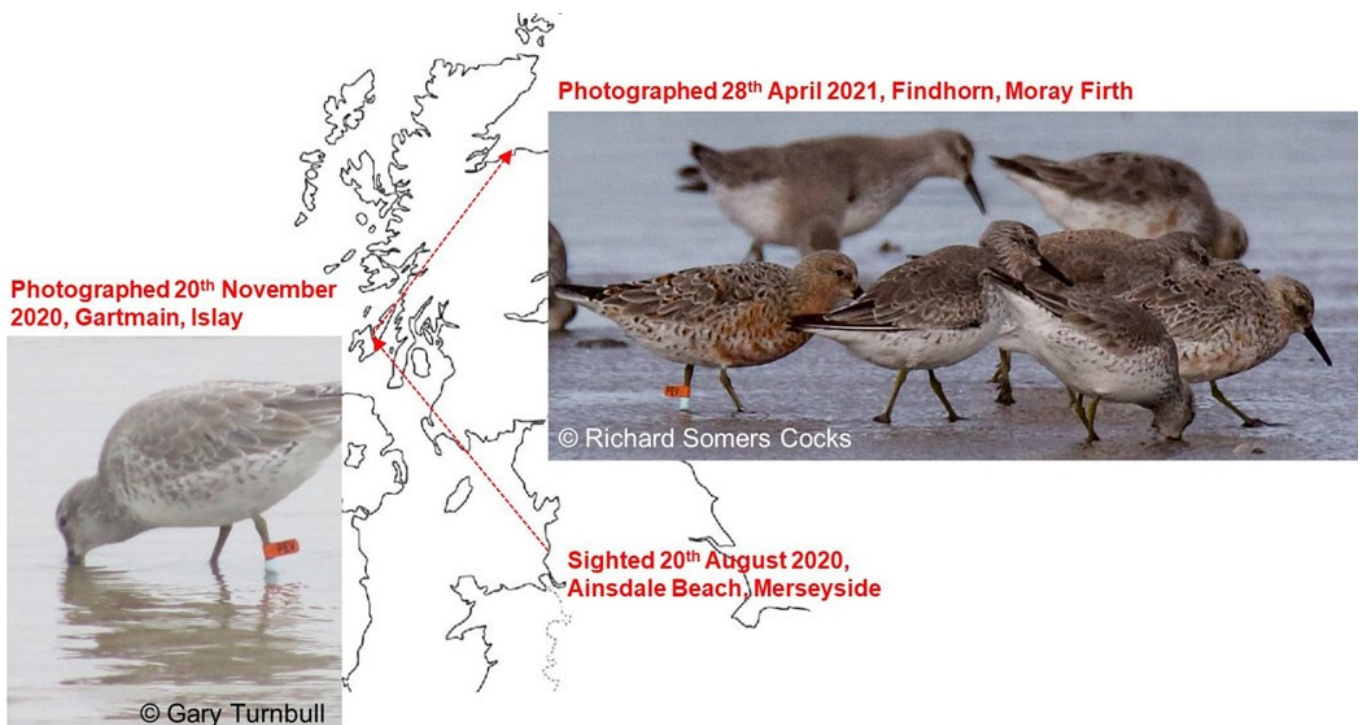


Figure 5: The travels of the young Knot OfP PEV

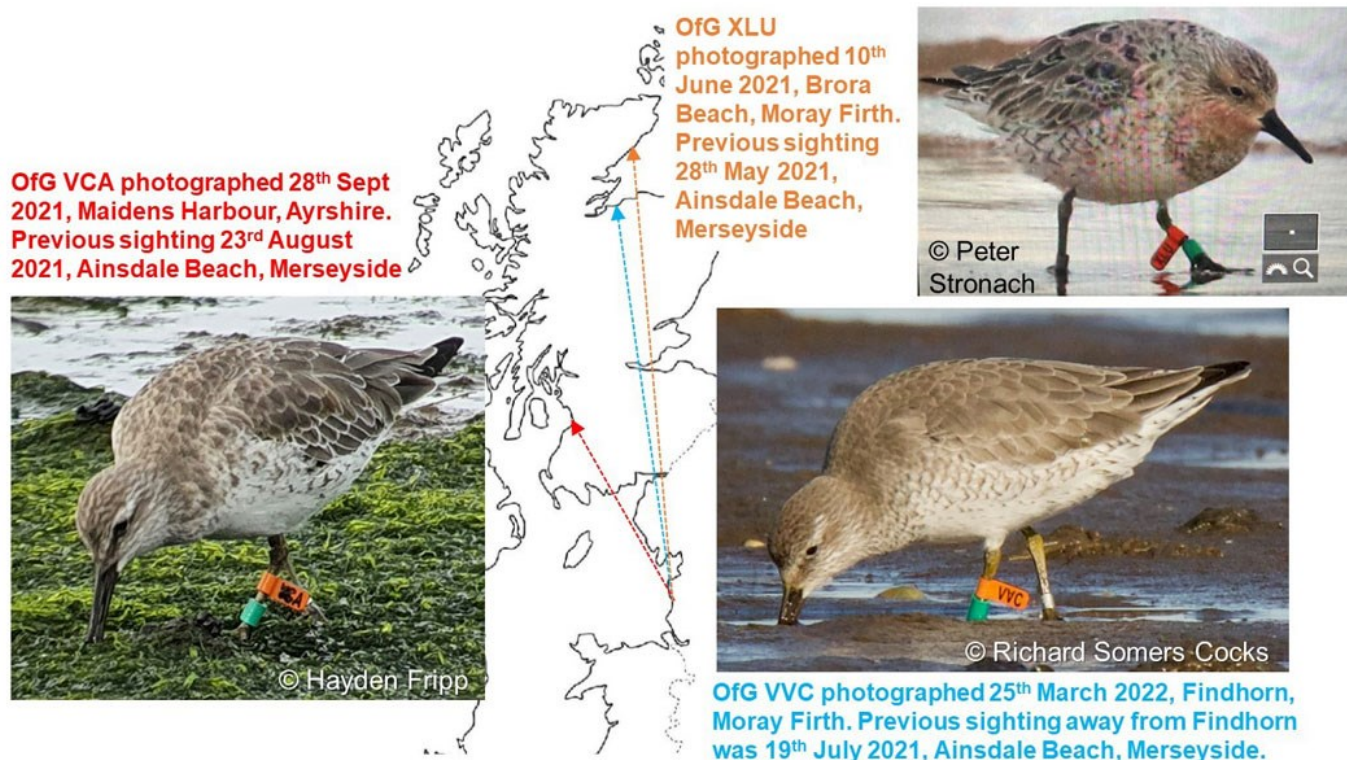


Figure 6: Three orange-flagged Knot that have moved to Scotland after ringing in Liverpool Bay in May.

west coast. Sightings during the summer following ringing showed that most birds stayed in the area while undertaking a complete moult into second winter plumage, but then most of them left the area. OfP PEV ringed in July 2020 and sighted there through August, was sighted at Gartmain, Islay in late November and then was seen, moulting into breeding plumage for the first time, at Findhorn Bay, Moray at the end of April 2021 (figure 5). Perhaps it had moved up the Great Glen to join the Knot flock that winters near Inverness.

OfG VCA, ringed in late May 2021 at Southport and seen near there until late August, turned up at Maidens, Ayrshire in late September. Two other Knot from that catch have also been found in Scotland. OfG VVC remained until late July, and was then found at Findhorn Bay in late March 2022, so may have taken the same route as OfP PEV. OfG XLU aged as adult, didn't stay to moult—it was at Brora, Sutherland on 10 June and still in partial breeding plumage (figure 6). It could well have been a two-year-old bird not yet mature enough to head to the Arctic, but with some urge to move northwards in summer. It is relevant that a flock of Knot including many 2CY birds has been seen on Sanday, Orkney in May in recent years, feeding on invertebrates in the banks of rotting seaweed. These have included birds colour-marked in both Merseyside and the Moray Firth. They disappear by the end of the month, but not to Iceland, as 2CY Knot are rarely seen there. How widespread is this phenomenon around Scottish coasts?

Field identification of immature Knot

We have mentioned 2CY Knot many times, but how would you identify a 2CY Knot in the field? It is relatively easy to identify that a Knot is juvenile in August and September as the upperpart feathering has a scaly pattern that is produced by the dark subterminal line around the tip of each feather (figure 7). This patterning includes the upper wing covert feathers. Adult Knot arrive back from the Arctic in red breeding plumage, and the boldly marked upperparts are replaced with uniform grey feathering, quite distinct from juveniles, during a complete moult that starts shortly after arrival at a traditional moulting site.

During the autumn, juveniles replace their body feathers with plain grey ones like adults, but the wing coverts remain largely unmoulted, and stay unmoulted until the following summer. Thus, if the wing coverts are not obscured by overlying mantle or flank feathers, 2CY Knot show a patterned panel on the side of the body. Moreover, as with most birds, the juvenile feathers are of poorer quality than first-winter body feathers—they bleach to a buff brown instead of grey and they wear away. Therefore, from November to June this panel of wing coverts forms a buff, worn feature that contrasts with the rest of the plumage and allows 2CYs to be identified. From April onwards, adults moult into red breeding plumage, whereas the 2CYs stay grey, with at most a scattering of orange-tinged feathers. Thus, Knot flocks seen recently in Orkney and Moray in late May have shown a mixture of orange and grey birds, with most grey birds having the worn covert panel that shows they are 2CY.



7th November 2021



15th November 2020



20th May 2022

Figure 7: Identifying young Knot in the field. **Upper left**, a Knot that has replaced body feathers with plain grey, except for the retained, patterned wing coverts (arrowed). **Upper right**, compare the buffy wing coverts (arrowed) of the young bird on right with the non-contrasting coverts of the adult on left. **Lower panel**, a summering 2CY flock at Liverpool Bay. Note the lack of breeding plumage in all but one bird, and the pale, worn panel of wing coverts visible on many birds (examples arrowed). OfY-UHL (centre), ringed Inverness Firth, December 2021, summered Liverpool Bay in 2022. All photographs © Howard Stockdale.

From June onwards, 2CY Knot start their full moult, with the new feathers being indistinguishable from adult winter plumage. By September, 2CY Knot are therefore indistinguishable from adults in non-breeding plumage.

A few adult Knot don't fly to the arctic in summer

Something that we have learned from colour

marking is that a small percentage of summering Knot are adults that for whatever reason have not gone north and have not moulted into breeding plumage. These grey birds would have been passed off as 2CY if we didn't know their history from the colour marks they carry. But knowing that, close inspection shows that such birds do not have the buff, worn wing panel of a true 2CY. A series of photographs of any Knot seen from

mid-May to mid-July in Scotland will thus be useful for identifying the ages of the birds involved.

Can you find a North American Knot?

Something that birders in western Scotland are well placed to discover are vagrant Knot of the North American subspecies *C. c. rufa*. This is the subspecies made famous by its dependence on the eggs of horseshoe crabs at its spring staging sites in Delaware Bay. A high percentage of the adult birds carry coded flags, mostly lime coloured, fitted above the knee. In recent years, two of these flagged birds have been read in Iceland in May. Juveniles, which are most likely to be vagrants, will be less likely to have been flagged, so pose a big challenge, but a juvenile seen in Brittany in 2021 had been colour-marked on the St Lawrence river, Canada on its way south. The UK is thus overdue its first record. There are suggestions that *rufa* juvenile plumage differs from the subspecies using the East Atlantic flyway, so we recommend taking (and archiving!) photographs of any juvenile Knot you find, in case reliable criteria are established in future.

Keep an eye out for Knot

One of the great virtues of colour-marking projects is that anyone can contribute to building life histories by recording and reporting any sightings they make. The huge advances in

digital bird photography and super-zoom bridge cameras mean that it is often easier to get a reading from photographs than from trying to decipher combinations of colours and/or characters in the field, especially in windy weather. It adds an extra dimension to a bird photograph to be able to tell a tale about the bird's life history. Even at bird reserves one shouldn't assume that the colour-ringed bird in front of you will already have been reported by the staff or other birders. In any case, multiple reports of the same bird help to establish how long it stayed at the site, so all reports add value.

There are quite a few colour-marking schemes for Knot, and a lot of effort is currently being put into building up a stock of colour-marked birds. So this is a great time to check the legs of any Knot you see. To help you sort out which scheme your bird belongs to, we have produced a 'Photoguide to Red Knot colour-ring schemes', which includes where to report it. You can find the Photoguide via the Red Knot entries on cr-birding e.g.

<https://cr-birding.org/node/5697>

and at the International Wader Study Group website at:

<https://www.waderstudygroup.org/projects/colour-marking/observers/>

Finally, thanks to folks who have provided photos for this article.

Rose Maciewicz and Peter Knight



An adult Knot OfY UXV at Bridgend Bay, Islay on 5th September 2022 ©Jim Dickson



**Abstracts of talks from the autumn meeting of the Argyll Bird Club
Saturday 5 November 2022, at the Cairnbaan Hotel**

Introduction

The drive to Cairnbaan was a pretty wet experience for most folk, and for once it was good to be heading for an indoor meeting. Considering the weather, it was not so surprising to find that it was one of the better attended meetings, with just short of 50 members turning out. Nigel, our chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief introduction to the day's events.

Cats and birds by Nigel Scriven (summary Nigel Scriven)

Following on from the March talk on "Dogs and Birds", the obvious next step was to look at cats and birds, although the nature of the subject is quite different. Highlighting that there are eleven million domestic cats in Britain, and that one in four households have at least one cat, set the scene. There followed an examination of the problems that this might cause to birds, and some possible solutions.

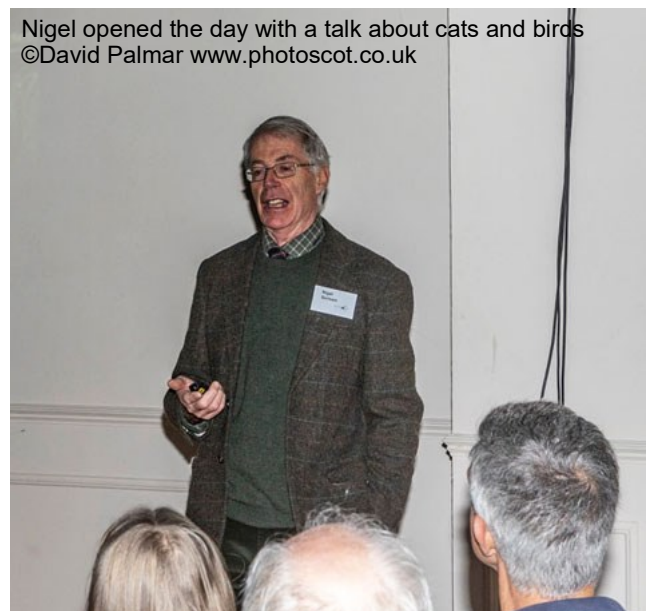
The most extreme cases of the impact of cats on wildlife are found on islands. These include the case of the Stephens Island Wren, in New Zealand, which became extinct in three years following the introduction of one pregnant cat. Other impacts include hybridisation and disease. The latter can pose a hazard to human and animal health.

In terms of predation impact on wildlife, domestic cats were found to take mostly small mammals (69%), with birds making up 24% of

prey items, in a study of 986 cats using 618 household questionnaires. In another study of urban cats, with 229 cats/km² the predation rate was 21 prey/cat/annum, with predation highest in spring and summer. These rates were found to create a dispersal sink for juveniles from nearby source areas.

Looking at the big picture in Britain, despite the large numbers of birds killed by cats, there is little scientific evidence to link cat predation to a decline in any bird population. The evidence available is that the most frequently caught

Nigel opened the day with a talk about cats and birds
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



birds are all common species that have relatively big populations, and that cats tend to take the weak and sick, which are likely to die anyway. Thus, cat predation will be compensatory rather than additive. In contrast, those birds experiencing the most serious declines rarely encounter cats, and are usually affected by other environmental factors. Nevertheless, on small islands cats can cause local declines. One example is the recent loss of Manx Shearwaters from Foula and Fetlar where strong evidence suggested that cats were responsible.

In addition, the impacts of cats can be sub-lethal, but still causing declines. An experiment with model cats near active Blackbird nests reduced parental provisioning by one third, leading to significantly reduced nestling growth rates. Moreover, the parental nest defence behaviour alerts other predators, possibly leading to an increase in corvid nest predation. Other sub-lethal effects include reducing access to high quality foraging and nesting areas.

Another piece of research found that cats' hunting behaviour was reduced if the cat has a high meat-content diet, and if the owner spends 5-10 minutes daily playing with their pet. Bells, sonic devices and bright collar covers can also reduce cats' hunting success.

For the average birder with a garden (and possibly even a cat) cat eradication is not feasible. Domestic cats are protected by law, and it is an offence to trap, injure or kill them. However, there are steps that can be taken to make gardens, or parts of gardens, more cat-hostile and bird-friendly. Garden and bird-feeder layout, types of plants and anti-predator devices can all play their part. Finding the best combination of measures will present a challenge to get the best outcome.

Bird flu, net zero and seabirds by Bob Furness (summary by Malcolm Chattwood)

Given the subject of his talk, Bob began by making a welcome promise not to show lots of pictures of dead seabirds, but equally welcome he provided a concise description of the origins and spread of the H5N1 strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Endemic in Asian poultry since 1996, the disease has spread throughout the northern and southern hemispheres, mostly in poultry farms but assisted by migrating wild birds. In Europe, rates tend to disappear in spring only to reappear in autumn, linked to the arrival of migratory waterfowl. Outbreaks in 2021 and 2022 have been newsworthy and have prompted the culling of three million birds in the UK in 2022 and 45 million in the EU.

In the wild bird population, Bob drew a timeline of affected sections ranging from high goose mortality in winter 2020/21 to auks and Kittiwakes in July 2022, but also including other species in large numbers such as Great Skua (Bonxie), Gannet and Sandwich Tern. Bonxies have been subject to a great deal of research by Bob and his colleagues over the years and it is thought that scavenging of infected carcasses



Bob Furness ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

followed by communal bathing in freshwater pools has been responsible for the high mortality found in the species. Foula hosts the largest Bonxie population in the world and in summer 2022 a survey by Kees Camphuysen and Sheila Gear found 1500 dead adults on the island. Shockingly, this equates to approximately half the Foula population of Bonxies. Bob visited in October 2022 and sampled ground underneath bonxie carcasses only to discover that the virus was now absent. It was assumed that rainfall had washed virus traces away. An examination of Bonxie colony size over the last 20 years has shown that small colonies have grown whilst larger ones have stayed the same or declined, probably as a result of dwindling food supply. It is likely that this trend will continue and ironically it is the larger colonies which are given protection under the Birds Directive whilst the smaller ones receive no protection. This highlights the fact that the Directive is not very helpful in protecting those seabirds which forage miles from their nesting site. Despite the bad news associated with species like the Bonxie and Gannet, it is good news that Arctic Skuas have had their best



Colour-ringed Great Skua ©Bob Furness

breeding season for 25 years with no bird flu reported. Likewise Red-Throated Divers occupying lochs frequented by infected Bonxies remained unaffected. Guillemots in Shetland were unaffected by HPAI but those breeding on Canna were severely impacted, so it remains that there is much research work to be done to fully understand this terrible disease.

Offshore wind farms present two main risks to seabird populations. Collision risk affects those birds flying high like Gannets, Kittiwakes and gulls, whilst divers and auks are at risk of displacement. Currently, the majority of offshore wind turbines are sited off the east coast in the southern part of the UK where there are relatively fewer seabird populations. However, it is very likely that a great deal of future development will be in the seas around Scotland with larger seabird populations. Coupled with the recent impacts of bird flu it is now of greater concern how the development of offshore wind will affect seabird populations including those species which haven't previously been affected, like Manx Shearwaters. To mitigate impacts on those affected populations like Sandwich Terns it is suggested that the creation of compensation habitat may be appropriate to attract birds and maintain breeding numbers. Ideally this should be as close to existing colonies as possible, but that may not always be the case and Bob suggested that there may be opportunities for suitable habitat to be created in western Scotland, including Argyll. This approach could open up a new chapter in seabird conservation and may present an opportunity for Argyll Bird Club to become involved.

Bob wrapped up an excellent, informative and thought-provoking talk with an update on the UK and Scottish governments' position in relation to the publication of their long-promised seabird conservation strategies; disappointingly they have not yet materialised. This unfortunate absence leaves the offshore wind industry, who are trying to minimise the impact of their developments, without a clue as to the governments' favoured approach and is to the detriment of already struggling seabird populations.

Ecological surveying and protecting biodiversity by Simon Lawrence (summary Alun ap Risiart)

The talk focused in particular on wind farm projects, and how to evaluate their impact on the environment. Initially, baselines need to be established that incorporate all the key features. This is complicated because the key features are changing all the time, with or without wind farms. So, wind farm areas need to be matched with control areas and environmental changes monitored in both areas over 5-10 years, or even longer.

A typical survey looks at the key species, and attempts to determine what the ecological impact of the development may be. One example was of one of the first wind farms in Argyll, and its impact on Golden Plovers. The baseline data went back to 1991, when the position of plover nests was plotted on a map. A species protection plan was de-



Simon Lawrence
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vised, part of which stated that workers should not approach closer than 200m to a nest. This entailed trying to ensure that nests didn't end up near arterial lines used in the construction phase. Dissuasion methods were used to encourage the plovers to nest away from these access routes, this included using flags and ticker tape, as well as plastic crow decoys, netting screens, and walking dogs through critical areas prior to the nesting season, to make the access routes undesirable for nesting, but not to move them off the site completely. This was all experimental. At this time, it was not well understood what methods would work.

There were numerous problems. Wind farms are built in areas with a lot of wind, which means the ticker tape would last just days, or the screen fencing would blow down. At one time White-tailed Eagles appeared, attracted by the groups of plastic crows! In disturbing the ground for the construction, the moorland vegetation grew back slowly making it more attractive for nesting plov-



Dogs and plastic crows have been used in Simon' work ©Simon Lawrence

ers. This resulted in construction work being halted until the eggs hatched and the chicks had moved offsite.

In mitigation areas away from the wind farm, the heather was trimmed to a few centimetres to make it more attractive for nesting plovers. Unfortunately, the number of plovers declined over the study period in both the control area and in the construction site.

Teal, Red Grouse and Black Grouse also nested near the construction site, and continued to do so for 10-15 years afterwards. Red-throated Divers nested in lochs nearby, so bird strike surveys were undertaken under power lines. This involved searching the ground for any corpses, as well as controlling for scavenging rates by laying dead quail and seeing how long they remained. No definite bird strikes above Meadow Pipit size were recorded. Rafts were built for the divers in several lochs. These were used as nest sites in some years and not in others.

A large number of wind farms have now been built that incorporate mitigation strategies, including survey work, to help bird populations. However, there is no UK-wide strategy for evaluating the impact of onshore renewables on bird populations, and if mitigation schemes work.

Catching, tagging and tracking Goosanders by Anthony Wetherhill (summary David Jardine)

This talk was based on work currently being developed by BTO Scotland and BTO Wales because of the concern about the conservation status of the Atlantic Salmon, the population of which has declined by 40% over the last 40 years. While fisheries scientists acknowledge the key issue is 'at sea' survival with low return rates of Salmon, there is still a perception amongst the angling community that fish predators are a problem, particularly as the population of Goosanders has increased by 149% over the last 40 years.

One part of the project was a full census of sawbills on the ten most important Salmon rivers in Wales, but Anthony was describing his pilot work to catch and track Goosanders in Scotland. During this work, based on the River Tweed and its tributaries (and also the River Devon, Clackmannanshire) he worked with some water bailiffs who have licences to scare through shooting birds on the principal smolt sites. The angling community see this as a licence to cull rather than to scare, but the shot birds had allowed an investigation of the diet of Goosanders in these areas, which is not entirely young Salmon, but also includes many Minnows and Sticklebacks.

Previous ringing studies had found out quite a bit about the movement of Goosanders, but modern technology using GPS trackers could allow more detailed investigation of feeding habitats by recording the position of a bird

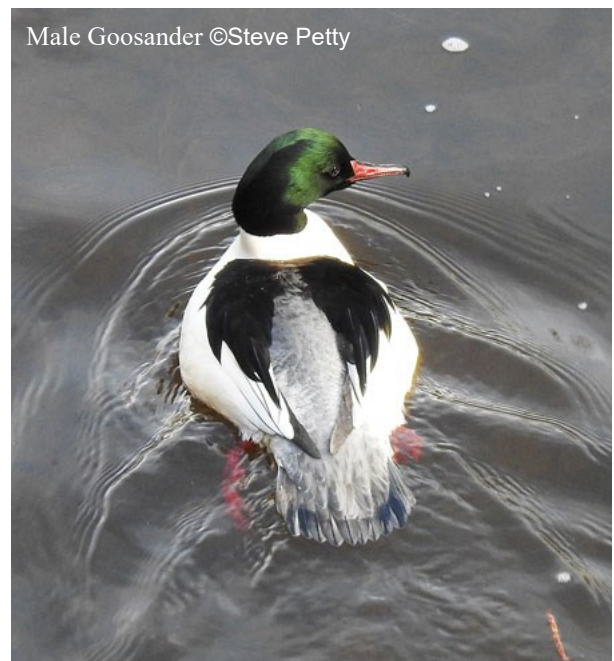
Anthony Wetherhill
©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



every 15 minutes. This might sound straightforward, but Anthony has faced, and overcome, some major issues. The normal method of attaching trackers to birds is by using harnesses, but with diving ducks this has been shown in the USA to cause unacceptable levels of mortality. Thus, Anthony developed a new technique where the tag was stuck to the bird for short periods using glue. In the first year of the project the tags remained attached for around a week, and the following year with a refined technique for around a month. One of his tagged birds was unfortunately shot under licence, but this allowed him to confirm that his techniques for attaching the tag were not causing harm to the bird.

His other problem was how to catch the birds! Goosanders can weigh over 1kg, and when flying at speed, they flew straight through Anthony's mist-net on his first catching attempt.

Male Goosander ©Steve Petty



However, he soon strengthened his nets and learnt to place them under a bridge, which concentrates the flight path of the bird—success!

His preliminary findings are now being written up, but the kernel density mapping will allow the river habitats to be identified and behaviour patterns to be observed. One of the male birds, was tracked to Norway; reconfirming work done in the 1970s and 1980s by Bob Furness and the Northumbrian Ringing Group. However, the tag showed an appreciable slowing down on its migration route as it approached the Norwegian coast. Was it getting tired, or did the wind direction change? He also found appreciable differences between the movements of birds on the Tweed, which were relatively restricted, and those on the Devon, which ranged across much larger areas in central Scotland.

In finishing this interesting talk Anthony made a request for information from anybody ringing Goosanders, or those who regularly saw Red-breasted Mergansers flying under bridges, for their assistance in developing this important work further.

Greenland Whitefronts—still struggling to cope with diverse conservation threats both in Argyll and globally by David Stroud (summary Nigel Scriven)

The Greenland subspecies of White-fronted Goose has a Scottish-wintering population and an Irish-wintering population. Both populations have separate breeding grounds on the west coast of Greenland, and exhibit leap-frog migration, via Iceland. The bulk of the Scottish population winters on Islay (about half), and the remainder elsewhere in Argyll, making the coun-

ty very important for this species.

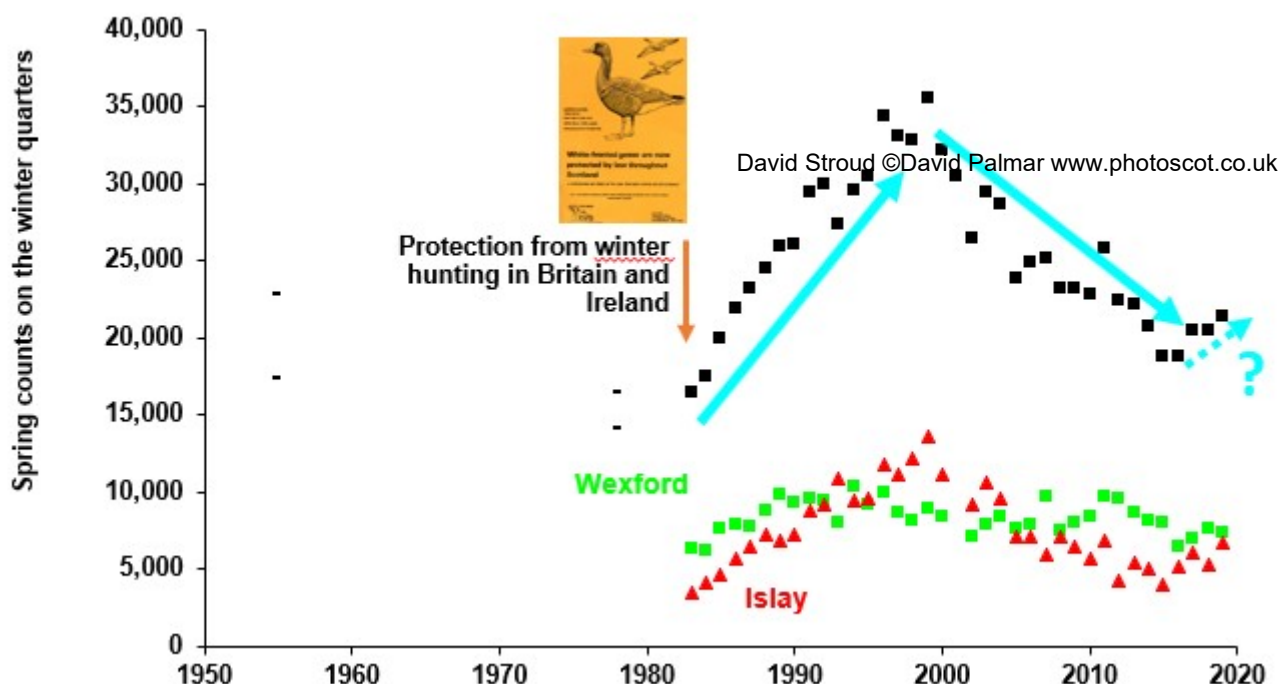
David's interest in these geese was sparked by a paper by Rutledge and Ogilvie (1979, *Irish Birds* vol 1: 292-363) reviewing their status as one of the rarest goose subspecies in the world with a world population of 15,000. Setting up the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study Group followed in 1978, with David Stroud and Tony Fox making an expedition to Greenland to study them on their breeding grounds in 1979.

Organised monitoring led to better understanding of numbers and productivity over the last 40 years. In 1983 they were given protection from hunting in Scotland and Ireland, and the population grew steadily to peak at 35,600 in 1999 (figure below).

However, this was followed by a steady decline to just under 20,000 by 2015 (figure below) From counts of young in the winter flocks, it is apparent that productivity has been declining, while adult mortality has been stable. Looking at the breeding grounds records show higher snowfall in late winter, and the former breeding grounds are snow covered later into the spring, making it difficult for the birds to commence breeding on their return. This is linked to climate change and to the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation, which appears to control the trends in weather systems.

In Argyll the gross distribution of birds has not changed much in 40 years, with most birds found on Islay where numbers have been stable despite changes in the overall population. Even on Islay the distribution is a complex of small traditional flocks. Numbers in the small

Greenland Whitefront global population size



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



flocks elsewhere in Argyll fluctuate, not in any particular pattern, which is probably linked to local factors. Local extinctions and colonisations have occurred, highlighting the importance of small flocks.

Conservation needs to focus on reducing adult mortality and enhancing the condition of sites where there are ongoing declines, especially on designated sites. Therefore, counting and reading colour-rings is critical, so please keep it up.

Moths in Argyll by David Hill (summary Steve Petty)

David is the County Moth Recorder for vice-counties (VC) 98 (mainland Argyll) and 100 (Kintyre). David submits all the moth recorders' data into the National Moth Recording Scheme. Many of these records come from people using moth traps. There are more moth recorders in VC98 compared to VC100. In his

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



Transparent Burnet Moth ©David Hill

talk, David concentrated on a few individual species. There are some nationally scarce moths in Argyll and he went into details about two of these, both being day-flying moths. The Transparent Burnet is restricted to around 60 sites in north Argyll (photo above). Its larvae feed on Thyme on steep south-facing slopes with base-rich soils. It's possible that this species could be found in more sites in Argyll. In contrast the Forester Moth, which is a lovely emerald-green colour, is found in damp grassland where its larvae feed on Common and Sheep's Sorrel. White-spotted Sable is a rare, attractive micro moth that has been found in Glasdrum National Nature Reserve, and could be found in other sites in Argyll.

Many moth species are in decline nationally and this is reflected in Argyll. Generally, woodland species have fared better than grassland and moorland species. These declines are the result of numerous environmental factors, with global warming being one of the most important. David gave examples of a few such moths, which included widespread species such as True Lover's Knot and Antler Moth (photo on next page), both are moorland species with their larvae feeding on heaths and grasses. Red Carpet, a moorland species with the larvae feeding on Lady's Mantle, is also in decline. There is also concern for the scarce Barred Tooth-striped, moth whose larvae feed on Ash trees due to Ash Die-back Disease, which is spreading rapidly in Argyll.

In contrast, a number of species have increased over recent years. One of the best examples is Buff Footman (photo on next page) that was recorded in Scotland for the first time in 2006. It is now widespread in Argyll. Its larvae feed



Upper photo. Antler Moth (female on the left, male on the right) a species that is declining nationally ©Steve Petty

Lower photo. Buff Footman, a species that has increased dramatically since the first record in Scotland in 2006 ©Steve Petty

Raptors in Cowal—what's happening by Arthur French (summary Alistair McGregor)

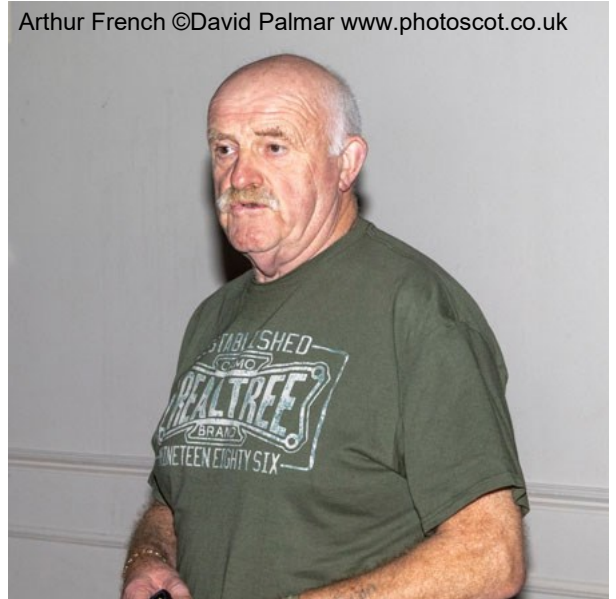
I have known Arthur (AKA Frenchy) for eight years and before that I had heard his name mentioned at various raptor/birding events that I had attended. He was always something of a mystery to me till I moved back to the Dunoon area. I had spoken to him on numerous occasions regarding sightings of raptors in Cowal. On this particular evening he asked if I would like to go to an Osprey nest to see the chicks being ringed, I of course jumped at the chance and the rest is history. Anyway, as Arthur had been asked to speak at this meeting, I knew that I would need to help him with his PowerPoint presentation. Arthur's describes his IT skills as "I'm a dinosaur"!

Arthur, who is now retired, was a postman in the rural area of Colintriave and Glendaruel for over 40 years. In his early years one of the shepherds told him about Golden Eagles up in the hills, and Arthur being young and fit wanted to see these magnificent birds. On visiting the area, he sat for hours and saw nothing. So, he decided to head back to his car, but when he stood up from his viewpoint, an eagle swooped past him. Arthur was filled with awe and wonder at seeing this majestic bird so close that he was immediately hooked. Soon afterwards he started ringing raptors in Cowal with Dave Anderson and others. Arthur gave a long list of the people that have helped him over the years. Cowal is a peninsular on the west coast of Argyll with Loch Long on the east and Loch Fyne on the west. It has a wide variety of habitats from open hill through to forest of both coniferous and deciduous trees, and coastal areas. Numerous species of raptor can be found here. Peregrine falcon numbers show little change from year to year. Nest sites range from abandoned quarries to mountainous crags. Kestrel numbers have fallen dramatically in Cowal over the last ten years, and Arthur says that he is lucky if he now finds two nests a year. Sparrowhawk appear to be reasonably abundant, but their forest nest sites are difficult to locate. They are regularly seen throughout the area, and particularly at garden bird feeders. Buzzards appear to have declined a little, but they are still widespread. Some of their nests are used over many years and can become enormous structures. The breeding success of

on algae and lichens on trees. This food source has most likely increased due to improvements in air quality. A number of other footman species, with similar larvae-feeding habits, are also increasing in range. A species that may well be found in Argyll in the near future is Blair's Shoulder Knot whose larvae feed on numerous species of cypress. Improved detection techniques may lead to a better understanding of the distribution of some species. One family of moths called the clearwings, which at first glance don't look like moths, are fast-flying and very difficult to find. Female moths release chemicals called pheromones, which they use to attract males. Pheromones differ for each species of moth, but now artificial pheromones are being produced for individual species, and these are increasing our knowledge about the distributions of numerous species, including clearwing. This was an excellent talk, which I'm sure will encourage more of our members to look more closely at moths.

Tawny and Barn Owls fluctuate from year to year depending on the abundance of Field Voles. Arthur said that some Barn Owls still had eggs in late September. Hopefully, vole numbers will hold up to give these late chicks a chance. Both these species of owl are widespread in Cowal, unlike Long Eared Owl with only a few sightings in the last decade and one road casualty. Hen Harrier numbers fluctuate from year to year possibly due to the availability of food and weather conditions. They are mainly seen hunting over moorland. Merlins breed in Cowal in small numbers, but their nesting areas are difficult to locate. It's been a couple of years since Arthur last found a nesting pair. However, Merlins are regularly seen throughout the year in Cowal. Ospreys arrived in Cowal approximately ten years ago. Currently, 4-5 nest sites are monitored annually. Birds are regularly seen fishing on most of the lochs in Cowal. There are four breeding pairs of Golden Eagles in Cowal. Considering their size, their nest sites can be surprisingly difficult to locate. White-tailed Eagles are the newest arrivals in Cowal, with three nest sites so far, and possibly one other. Similar to Golden Eagles their nests can be very difficult to find in large tracts of forest. Cowal's raven population has grown over the last 30 years and large counts of juvenile birds have been made near Sandbank, this is probably due to a nearby refuse dump. Arthur's wish list for the future is to find breeding Goshawk and Honey Buzzard, or even for these species to become regular visitors. Arthur's talk was full of laughs,

Arthur French ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk



while at the same time demonstrating his wealth of knowledge on raptors.

Summary

Thanks are due to Nigel Scriven and David Jardine for putting together a really excellent program, and to the speakers for performing so well. Also, thanks are due to all of our members who attended the meeting. The Cairnbaan proved to be as good a venue as usual and everyone enjoyed their lunches, with the opportunity to chat to friends. Roll on the spring meeting!



A packed house at the Cairnbaan Hotel ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Contributions for the March *Eider* should be sent to the editor before the 20 February 2023

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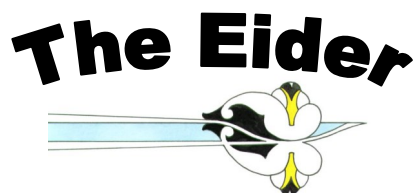
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The *Eider* is the quarterly newsletter of the **Argyll Bird Club**. The editor welcomes articles about birds, wildlife conservation and ecology in Argyll, including articles of a wider natural history interest, notices of forthcoming events, book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

Suitable illustrations greatly enhance the attractiveness of the *Eider*, and artists and photographers are encouraged to submit artwork and unedited digital photographs (jpeg files only) of birds and their habitats to the editor. **Please do not embed digital images in word files.** Digital photographs of Schedule 1 species taken at or near the nest will not be accepted for publication unless the photographer was covered by an appropriate SNH licence.

The *Eider* is published during the first week of March, June, September and December. Articles for each issue must be with the editor **before** the 20th day of the month prior to publication. However, it greatly helps if material can be submitted well before these deadline dates. Contributions are accepted in the order they are received, which may result in some late submissions being held over until the next issue. 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 currently has 313 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, standing order or direct debit. 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).