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The Eider



A family party of Crossbills feeding on the seeds in Sitka Spruce cones at Port Righ, Carradale on 2 April. The photo shows three recently-fledged juveniles with a female (second bird from bottom) ©Alasdair Paterson

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Editorial

At long last Spring is here. It's seemed a long time coming. Many resident birds have now fledged their first broods and most of our summer visitors are back in force. The super cover photo shows a family of Common Crossbill photographed on 2 April on Kintyre. The chicks would have fledged about a week prior to this as their beaks are just starting to cross. Their beaks are uncrossed at fledging. This means that the female would have started laying eggs around 15 February, making it one of the earliest passerines to start breeding. In fact, when conifer seed is very abundant this species can breed throughout the autumn/winter.

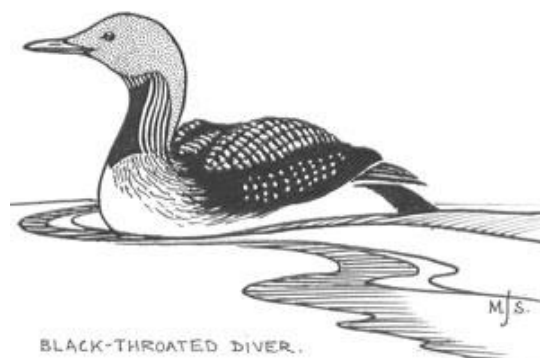
There are three great field trips planned over the next few months, with details of each on the next page.

The trip to Taynish in May will be great for seeing and hearing our newly arrived summer visitors, such as Redstart, Tree Pipit, Spotted Flycatcher and maybe even Pied Flycatcher. The warblers should be back in force too, and with Jim leading the trip, it will provide a good opportunity for you to hear and learn the songs of Willow Warbler, Wood Warbler, Garden Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap and Chiffchaff.

Nigel's seabird bonanza to Sanda in June is likely to be very popular, so do contact him quickly to reserve a place as there are only 12 available.

In August, David has put together a very interesting trip to Islay to observe seabirds during the ferry crossing to and from the island. This trip also includes an excursion over to Jura, an island from where we get few bird records. It will be a long, but very interesting day, with a meal at the Port Askaig Hotel to look forward to.

We've also fixed the dates for the next two indoor meetings on 5 November and 4 March 2023, so please put these into your diary.



BLACK-THROATED DIVER.

Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2022

The number of people on field trips is limited to a maximum of 20. So, 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.

Saturday 28 May. Taynish NNR, Ulva Lagoon & Loch na Cille. Led by Jim Dickson (e-mail argyllbirder@outlook.com, mobile phone 07985726209). Meet Jim beyond Tayvallich at the Taynish Car Park (just south of Lochan Taynish) at 10.00hrs. The Taynish section involves a 5km walk on relatively level ground. The walk at Keills/Keillmore will be approximately 1km. Please bring your own lunch

Saturday 25 June. Sanda Island. Led by Nigel Scriven (mobile phone 07901 636353, e-mail njscriven@gmail.com). The boat is booked (Mull of Kintyre Sea Adventures) for the day. The maximum party size is 12, and the cost is approximately £70 per head if the trip is fully booked. Meet in Campbeltown Harbour at 09.30hrs, the crossing takes 30mins. Please contact Nigel as soon as possible for more details, and to book a place.

There is no field trip in July

Saturday 20 August. Seabirds from the Islay Ferry and a foray onto Jura. Led by David Jardine (phone 01546 510200. E-mail dcjardine@btinternet.com). Meet David at the Kennacraig Ferry Terminal at 09.00hrs, for departure on the 09.45hrs ferry to Port Askaig as foot passengers. Disembark at Port Askaig and take the ferry to Jura for a picnic lunch on the island, then walk from Feolin to Inver (and return), a distance of 5-6km on tracks. Please take stout footwear and outdoor clothing. Return from Jura on the ferry to Port Askaig where we will have an evening meal in the Port Askaig Hotel. Return to Kennacraig on the 20.15hrs ferry, arriving at 22.10hrs. Return ferry fares are £14.50 to Islay and £2.00 to Jura. Please contact David if you wish to join this trip

INDOOR MEETINGS 2022-2023

Saturday 5 November 2022. Autumn Meeting and AGM. 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 pro-

gramme will be included in the September issue of the *Eider*.

Saturday 4 March 2023. Spring Meeting.

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 will be included in the December issue of the *Eider*.

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

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 33 (2021)

Once again, an incredible record of birds in Argyll in 2021 has been put together by Jim Dickson. A fantastic photo of a Cuckoo appears on the front cover (see photo below) As part of the ABC's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint, the report is available only as a PDF file. Members can download it 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).



CHANGING THE WAY TO PAY YOUR SUBSCRIPTION

The Argyll Bird Club was first registered with OSCR as an unincorporated association. One of the effects of this was that the club was unable to enter into any contract as it was not a legal entity. This meant it was unable to own any assets—these could only be held by the officers of the club on behalf of the club. It was decided to change the legal status of the club into a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, or SCIO for short. This has now been done. However, one result of this changeover is that the club had to open a new bank account and transfer all of the funds it held into the new account.

A consequence of this is that all of the Standing Orders members had given to their own bank will no longer transfer the subscription into the new club account. This means that I will be contacting every member in June to give the options now available for paying the sub. Technology, including the way we use banking services, has gone through a revolution. We are now able to offer you a simple link to set up a direct debit which will be easiest, and our preferred option, for the club to collect subs in future. Of course, it will still be possible to pay by standing order, by bank transfer, by cheque or even cash!

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).

MACHRIHANISH SEABIRD OBSERVATORY

If you are planning a visit to the observatory please contact Jo Goudie (jomitzi@yahoo.co.uk) to check if it will be open. MSBO reports (PDF format) can still be downloaded at:

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

ABC COMMITTEE VACANCY

We are looking for one person to join the club's committee. If you are interested, please contact our secretary (contact details on back page) to find out more about the post. As our committee meetings are now via zoom, it would be great to get some volunteers from the Argyll islands.

ARGYLL BIRD RECORDER AND EDITOR OF THE ARGYLL BIRD REPORT

We are still looking for one or two people to fill the above posts. Full details of both were given in the December *Eider* (pages 3-4). Please contact Jim Dickson if either post appeals to you.

Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Argyll Bird Club Saturday 5th March 2022, Cairnbaan Hotel

1. Introduction by Chairman. We are winding up the Argyll Bird Club in order to create a SCIO. Basically it is the same thing, but as a charity this gives more protection to committee members. The members of the committee are trustees of the club, and held liable for any liabilities. As a SCIO, committee members are not liable. The proposal has been around for some time, but was delayed by COVID, as we did not want to do it via Zoom. This EGM is to be followed by an inaugural meeting of the SCIO.

2. Sederunt. Pete Creech*, Justin Grant*, David Palmar*, Heather Watkins*, Nigel Scriven*, Bill Alexander, Alun ap Rhisiart, Malcolm Chatwood, Janet Palmar, Jim Dickson, Douglas Fontaine, Lynsey Gibson, Neil Hammatt, Peter Hogbin, Dorothy Hogbin, Ian Hopkins, David Jardine, Rob Lightfoot, Alistair McGregor, George Newall, Steve Petty, Morag Rea, Norman Rea, Olly Hemmings, Patrick Bird. (* = speaker)

3. Apologies. Ann Archer, Caroline Clark, Ronald Forrester, Joanna Gilpin, Muriel Lindsey, Frances Lynn, Linda Petty, Darren & Karen Reader, Jackie Scott-Mandeville, Dougie Menzies, Gordon Holm, Mary & Andrew John, Heather Cameron, Andrew McFarlane.

4. Minutes of 36th AGM 6th November 2021. They were published in the March 2022 *Eider* (pages 5-6). Nigel Scriven proposed taken as read. Seconded by Norman Rea. No matters arising from the minutes.

5. Proposal. That the Argyll Bird Club be dissolved today and the assets and memberships be transferred to Argyll Bird Club SCIO. Argyll Bird Club SCIO already exists as an entity. No suggestions for amendments. Proposed by Nigel Scriven, seconded by Rob Lightfoot. Carried *nem con*.

6. The meeting was closed, to be followed imme-

diately by the inaugural meeting of the ABC SCIO.

INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE ARGYLL BIRD CLUB SCIO—SATURDAY 5TH MARCH 2022 AT THE CAIRNBAAN HOTEL.

1. Introduction by Chairman. SCIO was set up more than a year ago; Peter Hogbin and Nigel set up new bank account last year.

2. Proposal. that the Argyll Bird Club SCIO adopt the new constitution as circulated. It is close to the previous constitution, with no major changes. Proposed by Nigel Scriven, seconded by Malcolm Chatwood. No amendments. Carried *nem con*.

3. Proposal. That the officers and committee

members of Argyll Bird Club, elected to serve up to its dissolution today, should now be elected as the officers and committee of Argyll Bird Club SCIO. Proposed by Nigel Scriven, seconded by Lynsey Gibson. Carried *nem con*.

4. Proposal. That the Argyll Bird Club SCIO be renamed Argyll Bird Club. Proposed by Nigel Scriven, seconded by David Jardine. Carried *nem con*.

5. Payment of subscriptions. Peter Hogbin informed the meeting that the bank said the treasurer must write to everybody to obtain a new standing order, as the bank details have now changed.

6. The meeting was closed after thanking those present

Possible ABC trip to the Canary Islands, late February/early March 2023



Canary Pine forests on Tenerife. Mount Teide, the highest mountain in Spain (3718m asl), is in the background

Jim Dickson has suggested a club trip next winter to look for some of the islands' endemic species such as Laurel Pigeon, Canary Islands Chiffchaff, at least one species of Blue Chaffinch, and other dry habitat species, particularly Houbara Bustard (photo opposite) and Cream-coloured Courser. At that time of year, many of the endemic island plants are also coming into flower. Jet2 flies from Glasgow more or less daily, car hire is quick and simple, and all types of accommodation plentiful. The trip would take in at least Tenerife and Fuerteventura. In order to gauge interest, please email me.

Neil Hammatt

neilhammatt@gmail.com.



Houbara Bustard ©Neil Hammatt

ABC field trip to Gigha on 26 March



The ABC party enjoying the glorious weather on Gigha ©Lynsey Gibson

As the date of a bird club field trip approaches, I find myself paying a bit more attention to the weather forecast. On this occasion, as I was leading the trip and a ferry was involved, the forecast for Sound of Gigha on Tuesday was not what I was hoping for—mist and fog for the whole day.

My thoughts turned to the development of a Plan B, which I hoped would not disappoint the members too much, some of whom I knew would be travelling some distance. In the event the weather was glorious with blue skies, warm sun and, importantly, low winds with consequent smooth sea conditions.

Three members unfortunately had to cancel due to work commitments or illness but a good complement of eleven, included two welcome newcomers to our trips, assembled at the Ronachan Point car park. Telescopes to the fore, a good field of view and excellent visibility allowed a huge area to be scanned including nearby offshore rocks which revealed a couple of Purple Sandpipers as well as a few resting Common Seals. In addition to the commoner gull species, good numbers of the area's winter specialities were spotted—Slavonian Grebe, Common Scoter and Great Northern and Black-throated Divers. Although primarily a site to look seaward, nearby trees and the shoreline provided a number of passerine species for the day's list including Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Grey Wagtail, Rock pipit and Skylark. Before we headed off, a distant Razorbill and Black Guillemot were added.

En route to our next site at "West Coast Salmon" Greenland White-fronted, Greylag Geese and Buzzard were identified by keen-eyed observers in the passenger seats. Upon arrival a Chiffchaff was drawing attention to its arrival from more southern climes, prompting discussion as to what

other summer migrants we would hope to see or hear during the day. A stealthy approach to the shoreline allowed good views of a small group of Slavonian Grebes swimming close to the shore (photo below). A pair of Mute Swans glided away to the south and David's persistent work with the telescope revealed a Velvet Scoter amongst Common Scoters some way out. The diver complement rose to three with a Red-throated visible. It was pleasing to have some good views of two males of one of the hoped-for species—Long-tailed Duck.

Lingering wasn't an option as we had a ferry to catch, so Tayinloan was set in our sights with Neil having the good fortune to spot a Lapwing as we headed south. The ferry was still mid-channel offering further opportunities to scan the flat water and shoreline where c.30 Sanderling could be identified feeding towards Rhunahaorine Point. Song Thrush, Stonechat Starling, Siskin and



Slavonian Grebes. One in winter plumage (left) and the other in breeding plumage (right) ©Jim Dickson



Great Northern Divers were abundant in the Sound of Gigha
©Jim Dickson

Greenfinch were identified as bags and optics were sorted prior to boarding the ferry.

It would be easy for me to say that I missed most of the ferry crossing as I was tied up with the purser as she tried to coax the credit card terminal to accept payment for our fares. However, whilst that was partially true, I confess that the opportunity to catch up and have a blether with an old friend proved a major distraction. Nevertheless, I was reassured that there were 20 other eyes peering through quality optics so that not a sighting would be missed.

Our picnic lunch (photo below) was taken on the beach near the ferry prior to heading across the field towards the hotel, with me feeling the need to

mumble an apology to a horse whose slumber we had disturbed. Work is in hand on Gigha to improve the surface of some of the footpaths, which we were able to take advantage of as we headed south out of the village past the fire station. The nearby wood was traversed by a track—that was boggy in places but has benefited from the construction of a path to create a dry surface through towards Achamore Gardens and the Village Hall. It was certainly preferable to following the road and provided good views of a single Long-tailed Tit and a pair of Treecreepers. Heading back towards the eastern shore at Gallochoille there was much to attract those of our party whose interests spread beyond birds into wider flora and fauna. The warm sunny weather had prompted Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies to take to the air and a number of species of bee were busy doing their work whilst the weather conditions allowed. Arrival at the jetty at Gallochoille allowed us to take a rest on the warm rocks and look across the bay with visibility now affected by heat haze. It was possible to make out Shelduck, Redshank and Curlew whilst offshore Jim spotted a distant Gannet—the only one of the day. All too soon it was time to stroll back to the ferry with Neil identifying a Reed Bunting in a field adjacent to the path as a late addition to the list.

On our field trips I always try to select a "Sighting of the Day", which is the one that has

Lunch on the rocks! ©Lynsey Gibson



Long-tailed Ducks in flight, taken by the youngest member of the group ©Frank Cavanagh



provided most pleasure rather than simply one of the Argyll specialities which might be a must-see for visitors but we might be lucky enough to see at any time. Good views of Long-tailed Ducks were prime avian contenders but I think that the sight of a willow tree covered in bees hard at work with their attendant loud hum took the prize. My attention was drawn to it by Frank who was a new member of our group (and the youngest by some decades) who was taking a keen interest in an attractive Red-tailed Bumblebee amongst its White-tailed cousins. He confidently identified and pointed the different species of bee and how heartening it was to learn something new from one so knowledgeable yet so young.

Species list (total 72). Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Mute Swan, Shelduck, Mallard, Eider, Velvet Scoter, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser, Pheasant, Rock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Slavonian Grebe, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper, Redshank, Kittiwake, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Razorbill, Guillemot, Black Guillemot, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Buzzard, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Hooded Crow, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Wren, Treecreeper, Starling, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Stonechat, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Goldfinch, Siskin, Reed Bunting.

Malcolm Chattwood



It was around here somewhere! ©Lynsey Gibson



Long-tailed Ducks in flight ©John Spiers

ABC field trip to Lismore on 30 April

With a poor forecast at the end of a three-week warm and dry spell it was perhaps not surprising that there were some call-offs for this outing. However, four hardy members, including newcomer Graeme Nelson, gathered early in Appin with the hope of beating the worst of the weather on their trip to Lismore.

The outing started well with Rob picking out two White-tailed Eagles soaring over the ridge near the car park. Cuckoos and several Willow Warblers were singing as we organised ourselves to move down to the restricted parking in Port Appin. A quick stop at Loch Laich at the Jubilee Bridge added some gulls to the growing trip list, but the wintering ducks, waders and egret had all departed for summer quarters.

While waiting at the pier at Port Appin a beautiful summer-plumaged Great Northern Diver was seen flying south down the Firth, clearly not wishing to migrate through the Great Glen on its journey north to Iceland or Greenland. Several more 'GNDs' were seen during the visit, three off the pier at Point and another four at Port Ramsay, some of which still had to complete their moult. The short crossing was made on the old foot-ferry 'The Lismore' (photo at top of page) which is shortly to be replaced by the new larger 'Lady of Lismore' which was moored off-shore.

The gardens on the road south from the pier, with their feeders, led to further species being found, including a pair of Greenfinches and several House Sparrows.

A repeated whistle on the shore gave the first indication that the Whimbrel, which had been reported on the club facebook page the previous day by Teenie Wilson, was still present. Very well camouflaged in the seaweed on the rocky and muddy shore, eventually five birds were seen and allowed good views of the 'Beltane bird' (the old Scottish name of this diminutive Curlew which appears on passage at the beginning of May). The shorter, all dark, bill and the crown stripes which, along with the seven-whistling call, distinguish this species from the larger Curlew were seen well.

On the road round from Stronacroibh to Port Ramsay two Wheatears, one female, the other a male, sat side by side on the fence, thus allowing us to compare their different plumages. The male flickered his



The ferry to Lismore ©David Jardine

wings in display, but the female was not impressed and flew off! Shortly afterwards a comparison with another member of the chat family was possible as a male Stonechat, which was carrying food for its young, sat up in the top of a bush.

On this section of the walk the expected rain changed from being very light to being more persistent—while uncomfortable for the members, it was clearly welcomed by some birds such as the Snipe which started calling. The re-wetting of the marshes where they feed following a long dry spell was clearly to their benefit.



Whimbrel ©David Jardine

The tide was falling at Port Ramsay/Fennacrochan, but in contrast to the October trip the 'estuary' had few birds. One Shelduck, three Mallards, a single Ringed Plover and a few Oystercatcher were feeding, unlike in autumn and winter when there was a good range of ducks and waders. Nor were either of the two Little Egrets present; confirming that this remains a wintering species in the area, coming north to the warm Atlantic coast to avoid the colder winters of southern England and the near continent.

After sheltering to take lunch, like a female Kestrel on a nearby crag, the group decided to turn their backs on the weather and head home before the heavy rain arrived, as it duly did once they were in the shelter at the pier on Lismore for the journey home.

Species list (total 54, *species only seen on the mainland) Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Cuckoo*, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove*, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Snipe, Common Sandpiper*, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Black Guillemot, Great Northern Diver, Cormorant, Shag, Heron, White-tailed Eagle*, Buzzard, Kestrel, Jackdaw*, Rook, Hooded Crow, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Skylark, Swallow, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff*, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Stonechat, Wheatear, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Siskin*, Reed Bunting.

David Jardine

ABC field trip to the Holy Loch Hides (Cowal) on 26February



Some of the party at the Broxwood Hide ©Steve Petty

Whilst travelling to the meeting point at Broxwood Car Park at the head of the Holy Loch, the weather looked like it was improving. I wasn't wrong, just the timing of the improvement was off by a couple of hours!

By 10.00hrs, approximately 16 people had arrived and the weather was a heavy drizzle and visibility was poor, but manageable.

I gave a short safety briefing and discussed the plan for the day. We all had a slow meander into the Broxwood Hide spotting some of the smaller birds as we walked in, which included Siskin and Long-tailed Tit.

At the hide we spotted numerous gulls, luckily Jim Dickson had come over for the field trip and easily identified them. He gave us some tips of whether they were first-, second- or third-winter birds. We also had good views of flocks of Wigeon and Teal that were fairly close to the hide.

Like all events that I have been to since the easing of Covid restrictions, the morning was full of people that hadn't seen each other for months. This certainly added to the enjoyment of the whole day. Personally I hadn't seen many of the attendees since before the pandemic and it was great to have a catch up and share birding stories.



A Little Egret conveniently settled just in front of the hide at Broxwood ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

One of the highlights at the Broxwood Hide was the appearance of a Little Egret. Then David Gilmour appeared with an injured Kittiwake that he had found on the roadside near the Western Ferries Terminal. Unfortunately this bird died later.

At around 12.00hrs we headed over to the Kilmun side of Holy Loch—to the new bird hide. Due to shortage of parking there, some members of the group parked at Kilmun Church and others at Kilmun Arboretum. At the arboretum we had a walk into some large conifers (*Cryptomeria japonica*) near to the car park to look at numerous active heron nests high up in the canopy. On the way back to the hide we heard a Treecreeper singing, but failed to see the bird.

There were not many more species seen here, as the numbers of birds at both hides are tide dependent, and we'd picked the wrong time to be at both. But we did manage to pick up Goosander, Mute Swan, Grey Heron and Wren.

Albeit not a great birding day as we only recorded 33 species (34 including the Kittiwake).

However, it was a good day with great company. I would like to thank David Palmer for his photographic skills, and Jim Dickson and Nigel Scriven for their help and support on the day, and all who turned up to a very well-attended meeting.

Alistair McGregor



Flock of Wigeon seen from the Broxwood Hide ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

Abstracts of talks from the Spring Meeting of the ABC on 5 March 2022



The Cairnbaan Hotel ©Steve Petty

Nigel, our chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief introduction to the day's events, including the EAGM to be held just after lunch to formally convert the club into a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation). It was great to have the opportunity to meet members again after a couple of difficult years. The Cairnbaan proved to be as good a venue as usual and everyone enjoyed their lunches, with the opportunity to chat to friends. It was glorious weather outside, with sunshine all day, which encouraged some folk to take a walk along the Crinan Canal at lunchtime. Unfortunately David Hill, from Butterfly Conservation, was unable to give his talk on 'Moths in Argyll' due to a virus, but David Palmar kindly filled the vacant slot at short notice—thanks David.

Birds and dogs by Nigel Scriven (summary Nigel Scriven)

Taynish National Nature Reserve and its birds by Heather Watkin (summary Alun ap Rhisiart)

Heather works for NatureScot at Taynish. She has been doing

the job for four years. The reserve is located 2km south of Tayvallich village. Lots of people describe it as a magical place, especially in spring, which is the best time of the year with the early flowers just starting to bloom. It was designated as National Nature Reserve in 1977, it covers 330ha, and is located on a peninsula. It is part of the Taynish and Knapdale Woods SAC, a very scenic area. It is one of the largest areas of native woodland left in Scotland. It is a European site of international significance for the oak woodland, one of the largest in Scotland; 75% of Taynish is woodland.

Taynish has a wide range of habitats apart from woodland, which include saltmarsh, bryophyte assemblage, a fern meadow, and a rocky shore. There are Otters, Marsh Fritillaries, and dragonfly and beetle assemblages, to mention just a few of the natural delights of Taynish.

There is a 400m trail taking visitors down towards the shore, and then a circular route taking you back to the main road. The site gets 10,000 visitors a year. The road and car-park was improved last year.

One thing that makes it such a special place is the mosaic of habitats, both open and closed. Management includes keeping some areas open by



The Chairman welcoming everyone to the meeting ©David Palmar
www.photoscot.co.uk

grazing. There is evidence of grazing since Neolithic times. There is a herd of 14 cattle, of three breeds, that were purchased by SNH in 2014. The extent of woodland has increased since intensive grazing in the 1700s. In summer months the cattle are grazed more along coast; in winter months they are put in the main grazing fields. We are looking to extend grazing northwards and are investigating ways of doing so without fencing, as this would be less expensive. The impact of deer and cattle grazing is monitored. This includes assessing ground disturbance and the number of regenerating seedlings/saplings. At present, impact assessments are fairly subjective, so we are looking at ways to improve the methodology.

The main use of cattle on the coastal grassland is to provide suitable habitat for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly (photo opposite). The cattle break up the bracken beds and open up some of the birch thickets allowing the food plant (Devil's-bit-Scabious) of the butterfly larvae to flourish.

The natural regeneration of oak is one of the main aims. A lot of management has been no-hands on, and is about providing the right grazing and light conditions. Oak woodland is quite hard to re-establish. Oaks are slow-growing, the soil is quite thin, and bracken and deer can create problems. Ideally we would like to see multiple age classes of trees. We are seeing regeneration, but of rowan, hazel, birch, alder and willow, not oak. At present we have 200 oak seedlings in a nursery, all grown from Taynish acorns. The hope is to transplant them into part of the woodland with minimal grazing. Volunteers are used to control bracken, some using horse-drawn implements. There are approximately 10 Roe Deer per 100ha, but there are also Red and Sika Deer.

The diversity of birds reflects the variety of habitats present in Taynish. Bird species recorded at Taynish include Wood Warbler, Redstart, Spotted flycatcher, Treecreeper, Chiffchaff, Garden Warbler, Linnet, Grasshopper Warbler, Skylark, Sedge Warbler, Wheatear, Woodcock, Little Grebe, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser, Goldeneye, Osprey, Reed Bunting and Common tern. John Halliday, the previous manager, carried out a Common Bird Census throughout Taynish during 1990-2016. The results can be found on the ABC website. A new census commenced in 2018, with a gap in 2020 due to Covid-19 in an area of approximately 1km square. This is not a standard BTO survey, but a method chosen to give more insight into the reserve. The data are sent annually to the County Bird Recorder for Argyll. There are about 10 census vis-



Upper photo. Heather Watkin ©David Palmar
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Middle photo. Taynish NNR, showing a range of habitats
©Steve Petty

Lower photo. Marsh Fritillary ©Steve Petty

its per season.

Water Voles and their reintroduction by Pete Creech (summary Alistair McGregor)

Pete has worked on numerous mammal projects since 2005 in Argyll and runs the Heart of Argyll project, and has been involved with the reintroduction of beaver to Argyll.

Pete is originally from Gloucestershire—the home of Ratty of the *Wind in the Willows*. Pete gave us a brief history of the Water Vole, and how in his home area it had lost 94% of its habitat. As the talk continued facts came thick and



Pete Creech ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

fast. I'd never heard of the two British populations before. These are genetically distinct. The black Scottish voles are the original colonist probably originating from the Iberian glacial refugia. The brown English voles appear to have colonised southern Britain from eastern Europe from the end of the last ice age while there was still a land bridge across to mainland Europe.

Water Voles, as their name suggests, are semi-aquatic rodents. They are sometimes, but incorrectly, referred to as Water Rats, though they only superficially resemble a true rat. Water Voles have rounder noses than rats, deep brown fur, chubby faces and short fuzzy ears, and unlike rats, their tails, paws and ears are covered with hair. They have between two and four litters a year with up to five young and can breed from five months old.

They are heavily preyed on by Mink, Fox, Stoat, Otter and Heron. Remains of Water Voles have even been found in eagle eyries. With the predation and loss of habitat Water Vole populations are now scarce throughout Scotland. One of the main populations is near Glasgow, with other groups scattered around the rest of Scotland including the west coast islands.

With the reintroduction of beaver in Knapdale, the habitat they create is also helping the Water Vole and Otter population with many more sightings of both species.

Pete's talk was fantastic and informative. Hopefully I can find the time to travel the short distance from Cowal to Knapdale to see the area and, hopefully, Water Voles too, along with the more widely publicised Beaver

Foula by David Palmar (summary Steve Petty)

David gave a very interesting talk about a recent trip that he and Janet had made to Foula, an island that is quite difficult to get to. It lies



David Palmar ©Steve Petty

32m west of the main Shetland archipelago. A ferry runs from Walls on Shetland and takes just over two hours to reach Foula. The ferry is for foot passengers only and is lifted out of the water on Foula to protect it against storms. A number of dwellings provide bed and breakfast accommodation on the island. Both ferry and accommodation need to be booked prior to a visit. At the house where David and Janet stayed, the owner of the accommodation had a Great Skua that regularly came to take food from his hand (photo below). The Great Skua is one of the most iconic birds of Foula and many pairs breed there. On one inland loch (Mill Loch) they counted just over 200 skuas. David provided some excellent photos of birds and flowers (Spring Squills being particularly abundant) observed during their visit, together with evocative shots of the varied Foula landscape. Many of the visitors to the island are birdwatchers. Sheep provide another important source of revenue for the islanders. The western side of the island has some rugged mountains and spectacular sea cliffs, including the second highest in the UK. One particularly impressive landscape feature is the Sneck o da Smal-lie, a massive fissure in the cliffs that leads down to the sea. The sea cliffs provide nesting opportunities for numerous seabirds, including Gannet and Puffins. In comparison, the eastern side of the island has a low-lying coastal strip. There is no mains electricity on the island, so power is mainly provided by generators, solar panels, hydro schemes and wind generators, although the fierce winds experienced on the island has led to the felling of at least one of the



Breakfast time for skuas ©David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

latter installations. It sounds like a fascinating island to visit.

Back where they belong: Scotland's White-tailed Eagles by Justin Grant (summary David Jardine)

It was great to hear about this conservation success story from Justin Grant, who is one of the top eagle workers in the country. He cut his teeth by tracking Golden Eagles in Argyll during the 1990s, but in addition to working as a 'call-off' contractor for NatureScot on their Sea-Eagle Management Programme, he carries out a lot of personal research on the species, particularly on their diet.

He started his talk with a brief summary of the Scottish history of this widespread species, which breeds from Greenland to China. It was exterminated from Ireland in 1898, last bred in Scotland in NW Skye in 1916, before the last bird was shot on Unst, Shetland in 1918. Following two small-scale attempts at reintroduction which failed, a larger programme using chicks from Norway was based on Rum between 1975-1985 (82 birds). But, successful breeding took a while, with the first young reared (on Mull) in 1985 and for the following ten years the population remained around ten pairs. In order to bolster the population further, birds were released in Wester Ross from 1993-1998 (58 birds) and

east Scotland in 2007-11 (86 birds). The population is now safe and increasing with currently around 150 occupied territories, including 46 in Argyll in 2021.

Justin described how they nested on both cliffs and in trees, and on one occasion in a small cave. Their nest sites are very varied, from ground nests in locations where there are no ground predators, in an old heron's nest in a small birch tree, to the tops of spruce trees which had lost their 'tops'; for such a big bird their nests can be remarkably difficult to find especially in productive forests. They usually lay 1-2 eggs and rear 1-2 young, but very occasionally three young are reared. He described how a number were found dead as railway casualties, after being attracted to deer carcasses by the line. One had swallowed fish-hooks that were found by x-ray and removed by a vet surgeon. It made a good recovery. Others suffer from electrocution or fly into power-lines and some are still shot. On another occasion a seven week-old chick was predated by a Red Fox, which was able to access a nest on a tree in a gully.

Many of the chicks are now ringed and these combined with the use of expertly hidden small trail cameras is providing new insights. For example, various birds have been seen at the same nest throughout spring and there has been changeover of birds using the same nests in different years.

White-tailed Eagles are hunters, scavengers and will also steal prey (kleptoparasitism) from other predators. Each year Justin collects a large quantity of (smelly) material from nests after the breeding season to find out about their diet. Fish remains are usually under-represented in these samples, but the bones (which are cleaned by maggots and compared with reference skeletons) show that they eat a lot of seabirds (66 Fulmar from one nest), gamebirds and lagomorphs. However, they also eat badgers and foxes, and other meso-predators such as mink. They also take domestic livestock, but it is often not clear from samples whether the eagles killed the lamb, took a moribund individual or scavenged an already dead lamb. Satellite tagging has also shown they make use of seasonal food supplies such as the Grey Seal afterbirths at colonies, such as those on the Treshnish Isles.

One needs to balance any agricultural losses against the value of the sea-eagles to tourism. A study in 2011 suggested the eagles were worth £5 million to the economy of the Island of Mull every year.... Indeed, one farmer had changed his lambing field into a camper-van site, a sure sign of increased acceptance that White-tailed Eagles are back where they belong!

Summary

It was a very successful meeting in spite of the glorious weather outside, which may have enticed some members to go birding instead. Thanks are due to Nigel Scriven and David Jardine for organising the programme and sorting out the arrangements with the hotel. Thanks too, to numerous members who donated Raffle prizes, Peter and Dorothy Hogbin for managing the door and all the attendees, and, of course the excellent speakers.



Justin with his hands full! Handle with care and never let go of the feet! ©Justin Grant

**Contributions for the September *Eider*
should be sent to the editor before the 20
August 2022**

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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).