

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

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Number 145



The Eider



An adult and recently fledged Spotted Flycatchers on Kerrera on 6 August ©Ann McGregor

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Editorial

Our next indoor meeting is on 4 November at the Cairnbaan Hotel. This will include the AGM when you will have a chance express any views that you have on how the club is run and ideas on where we should be going in the future (see pages 17-18 in the June 2023 *Eider*). The programme for the meeting has not yet been completed, but a provisional programme is given on page 19. Once the programme is finalised, it will be posted on the club's website. As it stands there seems to be a distinct gull/seabird theme. Jim Dickson's talk on identifying gulls will be welcomed by many who find this group of birds difficult, particularly their varied sub-adult plumages.

One topic that comes up repeatedly is how to encourage more young people to become involved in the club and wildlife in general. This is difficult in this day and age because of safeguarding issues and other distractions (electronic gadgets etc.) However, we would encourage adults with their own children or grandchildren, to bring the kids along on field trips. You might just get them hooked! One bonus that the club offers to young people under 25 is free membership of the club (see the back page for details), this includes the annual *Argyll Bird Report* and the *Eider*. If you know of anyone who is interested in this offer, please contact our Membership Secretary (contact details on the back page)—thank you.

We have four field trips planned up to the end of November (details on the next page). These are all to interesting locations, which have been visited in the past and provided good birding opportunities. So, do try to join us on one or more of these. The accounts of trips earlier this year, to Toward/Loch Striven in Cowal and the island of Kerrera, show just how interesting the club's field trips can be and, of course, you get the chance to chat to like-minded folk.

The deadline for contributions to the December *Eider* is 20 November, so please consider sending me something. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Alun ap Rhisiart, Malcolm Chattwood, Peter & Dorothy Hogbin (photocopying & dispatching the newsletter), David Jardine, Ann McGregor, Alistair McGregor, Mike Mullis, Linda Petty (proof reading), Nigel Scriven, Frauke Thornton, the late Margaret Staley.



Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2023

Attendance on field trips is limited to a maximum of 15 members. 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.

Friday 1 September to Sunday 3 September 2023. Trip to Iona. Bookings for this trip are now closed. A small number of members have booked and accommodation has been arranged. Other members who wish to join the group are still welcome but are requested to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements. If you are hoping to join the group please let David Jardine (dcjardine@btinternet.com) know.

Saturday 30 September 2023. Ardentiny. Alistair McGregor will lead a walking trip around Ardentiny, which will include woodlands and Loch Long shore. The walk will be on paths and forest roads and will be c.4-5km. Meet in the car park alongside the old church in Ardentiny at 10.00hrs. Please bring your own packed lunch. Please contact Alistair (e-mail alistairmcgregor16@outlook.com, mobile phone 07754524240) if you wish to go on this trip.

Saturday 28 October 2023. Gigha. David Jardine will lead a walking trip to Gigha which will involve a c.5km walk along roads and tracks. Rendezvous at the Gigha Ferry terminal at Tayinloan at 09.45hrs. Please let David (dcjardine@btinternet.com) know if you would like to attend.

Saturday 25 November 2023. Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary. 10.00 hrs start at NR852857 Please meet Jim Dickson at the Ardrishaig Car Park (first car park with toilets coming from Lochgilphead direction). A short walk from there to look over Loch Fyne. A drive to the Islandadd Bridge at the Add Estuary and a short walk to the bird hide. A drive round Crinan Ferry Car Park for lunch then drive round Barsloisnoch area to the Tile Walk Car Park at NR825958 to look for woodland birds then head back to a final look at Loch Gilp and finish trip. Please contact Jim if you would like to go on this trip (phone 01546 603967, e-mail Argyllbirder@outlook.com).

INDOOR MEETINGS 2023-24

Autumn Meeting 2023. Saturday 4 November. The meeting (including the AGM) will be held at the Cairnbaan Hotel (www.cairnbaan.com), near Lochgilphead (phone 01546 603668). Lunches will be available in the hotel. A provisional program is given on page 19. The AGM will be held after the lunch break. The minutes of the last AGM are given on pages 4-6.

Spring Meeting 2024. Saturday 9 March. The meeting will be held at St Munn's Church Hall, Dunoon. Details will appear in the December *Eider*.

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

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 35 (2023)

Work has already commenced on the next bird report (ABR 35), please can you assist its production by submitting your bird records (through the club spreadsheet, Birdtrack or Ebird) as soon as you can, as this allows its prompt preparation. There is no need to wait until the end of the year to provide details of the birds you saw during spring and summer!

A PDF of ABR 34 (photo below) was sent to members by email on 21 March 2023. If you did not receive your copy, please contact our Membership Secretary (contact details on back page). Copies of previous reports can be downloaded from the club's website.

Argyll Bird Report 2022



published by the
Argyll Bird Club

GIFT AID ON YOUR SUBSCRIPTION

The club changed its charitable status to being a SCIO last year. Although this has very little impact on the way the club operates, HMRC regard the SCIO as a new organisation and for the club to claim Gift Aid on subscriptions, the club has to be registered again with the Revenue. For those members who have indicated in the past that Gift Aid should be claimed on their subscription, we need to confirm they are still happy with this, and that we have their current address. There could also be other members who could also tick the box to say that the club can claim Gift Aid on their subscription. To get the records up to date and to reapply to HMRC for Gift Aid, the Treasurer will be emailing/writing to all members about Gift Aid in September. It does have a considerable benefit to the club's finances as a further 25% of your membership subscription can be claimed back from HMRC, which gives more 'bangs for your buck' as they say Stateside. If you can respond positively when asked, it will be a valuable contribution to what we do as a club.

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.

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).

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A PRINTED COPY OF THE ARGYLL BIRD REPORT?

As a result of discussions with some members about how much use they make of the digital bird report, the Chairman and Treasurer are privately investigating the feasibility of producing an A5 printed version of the recent bird report (*ABR* 34). Due to recent developments in printing it has become more economic to print small print runs of books and booklets, and it looks likely that printing of between 20 and say 50 copies in multiples of 10 might give a cost around £10 per copy depending on quantity. It would be full colour throughout, and comparable print size and readability to the previous A5 reports, although not on such high quality paper. If you are genuinely interested in purchasing a copy please contact Nigel or Peter so they have a firm idea of how many to purchase. If this can be done before the end of September, copies could be available for the autumn meeting and AGM.

The ABC's 37th/1st AGM held on Saturday 5th Nov 2022 at the Cairnbaan Hotel

1. Sederunt

Bill Alexander, Malcolm Chattwood, Graham Clark, Lindsay Ferguson, Liz Ferguson, Ronald Forrester, Arthur French, Bob Furness, Jane Gibson, Iain Gibson, Lynsey Gibson, Neil Hammatt, Tony Hammock, Martin Hay, Frances Hay, Peter Hogbin, Dorothy Hogbin, Ian Hopkins, David Jardine, Janet Jardine, Mary John, Andrew John, Rob Lightfoot, Alistair McGregor, Dougie Menzies, Robert (Rab) Morton, Mike Murray, George Newall, Janet Palmar, David Palmar, Steve Petty, Morag Rea, Alun ap Rhisiart, Patricia Russell, Nigel Scriven, John Sedgwick, David Stroud, Frauke Thornton, Rachel Tierney, Niall Tierney, Jack Waldie (41)

2. Apologies

Dorothy Dahl, Jim Dickson, Robin Harvey, Gordon Holm, Muriel Lindsay, Hugh Raven, John Roberts, Karren & Darren Thomas, Jo Gilpin, Kirstie & Calum Ross, Caroline Clark, Jean Maskell, Susan Knox, David Harris, Rachel Harris, Callum Satchel, Gill Gartland (18)

3. Minutes of the 36th AGM 6th November 2021

Previously published in the *Eider*. Proposed as a true record by Lindsey Gibson, seconded by Neil Hammett.

4. Matters arising, not included below

None.

5. Chairman's Report

I am pleased to report that this year has returned to relative normality, after the previous disruptive pattern of 2020 and 2021. The period covered by this report stems from last year's November AGM to this November. In terms of bird club business and governance, the spring meeting included an EGM where the original bird club charity was formally wound up, followed by the inaugural meeting of the Argyll Bird Club SCIO (Scottish Charity Incorporated Organisation). The new charity number and new bank account were already set up for that, so if you are paying next year's subscription into the old bank account, you will need to speak to Peter, because it won't go anywhere. Essentially, it is the same bird club, but it is now a SCIO rather than just a charity.

Last year's indoor conference meeting on 6th November in the Cairnbaan Hotel was a welcome return to meeting in person. Although attendance was below normal, this was understandable and it was great to meet up with those people who did come. Subjects covered were: The Wildlife Interests of a Young Person, the remarkable Lily, by Alistair McGregor; the Sea Wilding Project at Loch Craignish, by Eric Holden; the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory, by Jo Goudy and David Millwood; Buzzards and Eagles on Colonsay, and the state of our Nuthatch survey, by David Jardine; Birding in Shetland, by Neil Hammatt; and the Sights, Sounds, and Seabirds of Sanda, by Nigel Scriven.

The Spring Conference on the 5th March was also held here, sticking to a reliable venue and format. Subjects were: Birds and Dogs, by Nigel Scriven; Taynish Nature Reserve and its Birds, by Heather Watkins; Water Voles and their Reintroduction, by Pete Creech; Foula, Bird Island, by David Palmar; and White-Tailed Eagles, by Justin Grant. Thanks to all our speakers over that year.

A full programme of outdoor meetings was successfully resumed, which included: Benmore Gardens and Holy Loch on 27th November, led by Steve Petty; Clachan, Kintyre on 29th January, led by David Jardine; the Holy Loch hides on 25th February, led by Alistair McGregor; the Sound of Gigha on the 26th March led by Malcolm Chatwood; Lismore on the 30th April, led by David Jardine; Taynish NNR on 28th May, led by Jim Dickson; and the Islay ferry and Jura, led by David Jardine. Unfortunately, the trip to Sanda on 20th June had to be called off due to bad weather. Hopefully, we will go there this year. We will try to build in a fallback day as well.

The bird recording team ably led by Jim Dickson continues to receive more than 30,000 individual records from more than 450 contributors for processing and entry into the database. Most records come through the club's own recording system, but increasingly through the BTO BirdTrack system. Aside from requests for data extracts from commercial organisations and academy researchers, the main vehicle for publishing this data is the *Argyll Bird Report*. This is compiled by the Bird Recorder, Jim Dickson, and published digitally with volume 33 of the report covering 2021 published in April 2022, and electronically distributed to members. The club thanks all involved in ornithological recording in Argyll, including the Argyll Bird Records Committee, recorder Jim Dickson and his team, and Morag Rea who spends countless hours preparing records for entry into the database. They don't always come in the format they need to be. I notice that Jim is still signalling his intention to step down as Bird Recorder after 10 years in the post, during which time he has fulfilled his duties above and beyond what might be expected. His contribution has been massive, and the club owes him huge thanks for all his work. It will not be easy to fill the post; finding a replacement remains a challenge. If you know anybody, let us know.

Fieldwork and conservation activities this year also included financial support to Machrihanish Seabird Observatory. We pay the ground rent for the observatory directly to the estate. It is an important source of information on migrant birds along the Ar-

gyll coast. That is one of the reasons why we are keen to keep supporting it. The club is also supportive of similarly minded organisations, especially The Scottish Ornithologists Club and The British Trust for Ornithology. This includes the promotion of new volunteer field surveys and help with delivering training courses in the area.

Steve Petty very dependably edited four editions of the *Eider* newsletter, distributed in December, March, June, and September, always on time and packed with news. Thanks to Steve on behalf of all the members.

The club's website continues to be a valuable portal to club information and resources, which are growing year-on-year. The Facebook group has proved to be a useful platform in communicating with a wider group in public and those members that use social media. With over 1400 members of the Facebook group, it has given a wider reach than just our membership, despite a few instances of inappropriate postings, it has not posed any major problems but mainly benefits, connecting members and non-members, and has led to recruiting some new members as well.

I would like to thank all the committee for their contributions over the past year: Alun for his very prompt minutes, Peter for his canny management of our finances, Dorothy for her attention to detail on membership matters, Malcolm for his technical support, and David for his support pulling in speakers for our indoor meetings and numerous other contributions.

6. Secretary's Report

In clubs with a separation between Honorary Secretary and Membership secretary, I get the easy part. I have two main functions: acting as a human spam filter on external email communications, forwarding to the appropriate person where necessary, and writing up the minutes of committee meetings. I try to get the minutes of meetings sent out within one hour of the meeting finishing so that any actions are carried out.

7. Treasurer's Report

We have had the complication of two organisations being joined together, the club and the new SCIO. So we have two columns, totalling up to the combined accounts. If you look at the right-hand column, you will see that income and expenditure is pretty much the same year-on-year. The reason for setting up

the SCIO was so that the club could actually own assets, because it becomes a legal entity. Membership subscriptions stayed about the same, but we had a lot of data fees this year; Jim has been very active in selling data to companies. All monies were transferred from the old bird club account to the new SCIO account. With a reduction of costs from printing the bird report, funds are accruing.

This could be used for setting up a bird reserve. Some people have not yet changed their payment to the new account.

One of the big donations was to the Tayvallich Wildlife Club, a club for school children, for a trip to the Treshnish Isles. This is the sort of thing we would be interested in continuing. We are looking for projects that are worthy of support. When a new breeding birds atlas comes out, probably at the end of this decade, incorporating BTO maps, the BTO may help us with this, but we would need money in reserve.

8. Membership Secretary's Report

Last year we had an increase of members of over 30 people. A reminder that if there is a change of address, change of email, or a family member passes away, could the Membership Secretary be informed?

9. Future Field Trips

The committee is open for suggestions from members for field trips. In the early days of the club we didn't have field trips, and it was quite a struggle to get them going. Once we had got them going, it became baked into our DNA, so during COVID we were looking for ways to keep them going. At the moment, we are doing one a month, but if there is demand there is no reason we couldn't have more than that.

10. Election of Officers and Committee Members

The Chair was vacated while the secretary called for nominations for Chairman. Nigel Scriven was proposed by Alun ap Rhisiart, seconded by Rob

Lightfoot, elected nem con. The Chair resumed his position and the election of the remaining committee inducted.

Vice-Chairman: David Jardine, proposed Nigel Scriven, seconded Dorothy Hogbin, elected nem con

Secretary: Alun ap Rhisiart, proposed David Jardine, seconded Rob Lightfoot, elected nem con

Treasurer: Peter Hogbin, proposed Lynsey Gibson, seconded Malcolm Chattwood, elected nem con

Membership Secretary: Dorothy Hogbin, proposed Lynsey Gibson, seconded Alistair McGregor, elected nem con

Committee: Steve Petty, Alistair McGregor, Gordon Holm, Malcolm Chattwood, Lynsey Gibson, Andy Robinson. Proposed en bloc by Nigel Scriven, seconded Ron Forrester, elected nem con

New committee member Frauke Thornton nominated Nigel Scriven, seconded Lynsey Gibson.

11. AOCB

Neil: Are we going to continue having a meeting on the Cowal? Nigel: the intention to rotate spring meetings is still there, but unfortunately not the next one, as we have already booked it

Is there going to be another joint meeting with the SOC/BTO? Nigel: the last one was in 2019. We haven't been approached by SOC/BTO yet, it rotates around different bird clubs, and there was a two-year delay around COVID lockdowns.



Wheatear ©Margaret Staley

ABC field trip to Toward and south Loch Striven Sound on 27 May 2023



The party looking across to the Island of Bute ©Frauke Thornton

Due to work commitments and other inconveniences, I don't get out birding as much as I would like, but the opportunity to lead a field trip is always a good incentive for a recce or two. So, on the two weekends leading up to the field trip, I took my father for a look at potential sites. The first Sunday wasn't bad, with a little fine rain and broken cloud. We spotted over 30 species including a Kestrel and White tailed Eagle. The next Sunday was a beautiful day. I had just downloaded the merlin app. and was keen to try it out before the field trip. We had travelled round the coast to lower Loch Striven. We spotted all the usual birds in the places I expected to see them. We then decided to stop and try out the app. First on the list was Willow Warbler, which was easy spotted, next was Blackcap singing from the centre of a willow bush, then Garden Warbler. This one took me a bit of time to find, but after walking up and down the road side I did manage to spot it.

I had left the app. running on the roof of the car when I was stalking the Garden Warbler. I had a quick look and it said Cuckoo. I hadn't heard it so I was thinking the app. was not that great! I jumped into the car and drove a short way round a corner and spotted, you can guess, a Cuckoo sitting on the power cable line. This made my father's day and he was now ready to head home. I was feeling lucky, as we'd picked up 45 species. I was now looking forward to the field trip and was expecting the tally to be over 50 species.

The weather report for the area was good

with a slight chance of showers, then drying out during the afternoon. I arrived to dry weather at Toward at about 09.35hrs. Everyone had arrived by 10.00hrs when 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, Oystercatcher, Great Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull. House Martins were flying back and forward to their nests under the eaves of the school. Some were still nest building (photo below).

Leaving the car park and walking along the main roadside with houses on the right of us and over the other side of the road was a field with rough grasses and rushes. A single lapwing was spotted here, which at times gave chase to a marauding Carrion Crow, suggesting that it might have a nest



A House Martin building its nest under the school roof ©Alistair McGregor

nearby. House Sparrows were seen coming and going from the field back to the houses, and Goldfinch were seen in the patchy hedgerow.

We then headed off along the road to a small path that leads to the beach and small inlet. Passing some houses on our way provided more House Sparrows and Chaffinches on bird feeders in a garden. Heading down the path to the beach there was a ditch full of rushes and many birds—Goldfinch, Starling, Greenfinch, Robin and Stonechat to name a few.

Someone spotted a pair of Shelduck having a disagreement with a pair of crows that were on the lookout for a quick meal. We watched as the drake took flight chasing the crows away. Then, eight small ducklings appeared and were promptly rounded up by mum and taken away to safety. Dad arrived back and continued to guard his family (photos below).

We then headed back along the shore for our cars. We had a quick chat and moved on to our next location at Arydne. We parked at the 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 out on the sea, along with Mallard, Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander.

On the gravel bar, Ringed Plovers were running about and a Common Sandpiper was feeding in a muddy wet area. Swallows, House and Sand Martins were all zooming about catching flying insects. At the Ardyne Burn we saw Grey Wagtails feeding on the abundant invertebrates, and Whitethroats were skulking in some of the gorse bushes. We all headed back to the vehicles for a quick lunch break.

After a short drive to Knockdow Estate we saw a Moorhen, which is a common sight at this location, but it is not a numerous species in Argyll. As we drove on we spotted a Grey Heron on the loch side and a Black Guillemot just out from the shore. Siskins were feeding in the Common Alders. We stopped at the area where I had heard and seen the Blackcap and Garden Warbler on my previous visit. I wasn't disappointed as we soon located Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Wren and Blackbird. The last short walk of the day, at Inverchaolian Church, gave us Raven, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Pheasant and Song Thrush.

I wasn't disappointed that we'd failed to see any eagles or Kestrels on the day. That's the great thing about birding, you have to be out and about to spot them, and you're not going to see them all in the one day. Many thanks to everyone that turned out on the day, and to Steve Petty for helping out.

Species list (total 54) Canada Goose, Shelduck, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Wood Pigeon, Black Guillemot, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Heron, Moorhen, Buzzard, Cuckoo, Pheasant, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Hooded Crow, Raven, Swallow, House Martin, Sand Martin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Stonechat, Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, House Sparrow

Alistair McGregor



A Shelduck chasing away a marauding Carrion Crow (left ©Frauke Thornton) and a parent leading the ducklings safely to the sea (right ©Alistair Mc Gregor)

ABC field trip to Kerrera on 24 June 2023



ABC members with Highland Cattle near Rubh Ard an Duine on Kerrera ©David Jardine

A group of eleven members and one guest met at the Kerrera Ferry to cross over to the island. They were well wrapped up in waterproof jackets and leggings in sharp contrast to the outing two years previously, which had enjoyed warm sunshine. After crossing to the island a short safety briefing was provided and the group set off in the opposite direction to the last trip by walking along the recently surfaced new road to the north end of the island.

The dull, dank weather meant that bird finding was slow as birds kept dry, but waterbirds such as Black Guillemot, Shag and Red-breasted Merganser had less concern and were added to the outing list as the group walked up the east side of the island. A slight wind gave hope that the weather might shift and a Buzzard soared over Ellery Hill to dry out.

As we approached Ardantrive the sun broke through and birds started to appear everywhere with a mixed group of finches feeding in the hayfield providing some challenges as people looked at different birds—Goldfinch, Linnet and Twite were all present. There was a group of hirundines feeding in the lee of the hill; mainly Sand Martins, but there were also a few Swallows and House Martins. Frank's young eyes picked out a Swift as it moved south, with many people getting on to it; a great sighting as there were only a few previous records on the island.

The overnight rain was clearly a joy to the local Snipe following the prolonged hot dry period in June, as one was heard and seen drumming over the reedbed and marsh at the northern end of the island to which the group was heading. But, not before a short snack break where the group enjoyed the sun and were able to peel off their waterproofs. The local Starlings were also clearly enjoying the sun. A group of 30

were watched in the top of an Elder bush where they appeared to be basking rather than feeding.

Moving round to the reedbed some members spied the welcome sign of a juvenile Greenfinch, before various singing warblers allowed good comparisons with Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and at least five Sedge Warblers being found, but not the hoped for Reed Warbler (a species whose range is extending significantly in Scotland and may one summer be found in Argyll). In the reedbed we listened to the to the close-range 'growling' of a Water Rail as it responded to playback. This was possibly the star bird of the day. It remained well hidden in dense reeds with only a couple of the group gaining a glimpse of it.

A pair of Poplar Hawkmoths (photo below) were found in grass next to a willow bush (one of the food-plants of their caterpillars) in the reedbed, and a few butterflies (Meadow Brown, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral) started to appear as the day warmed. All members of the group (whose



Frank Cavanagh with Poplar Hawkmoths ©David Jardine

age range spanned 70 years) successfully negotiated the style, fence and ditch at the end of the reedbed, allowing everyone to move round to the shore for lunch. A group of kayakers kindly provided a distraction for some Highland cows (who were intent on feeding on plants on the shore) while sandwiches were enjoyed. Offshore there were a few Arctic Terns on Sgeir Dhonn which were joined by a Cormorant drying its wings.

Walking along the north shore of the island after lunch several Fragrant Orchids were found, and good views were had of a newly fledged Wheatear (photo opposite). Offshore, near Rubha Redegich, an otter dived for its lunch.

After the flat terrain around the shore, the group climbed up the steep path to the bealach (on the way back to the ferry) where five species of bees were found feeding on a small bramble patch amongst the bracken, including a Tree Bumblebee (a species relatively recently arrived in Argyll). A 'backward glance' on the way up the hill also allowed some to enjoy the sight of a pair of Kestrels sporting with a female Hen Harrier.

Despite the poor weather at the start, Kerrera, like two years ago, had brought out the sunshine and there was no more fitting way to finish the trip, thanks to Mike Murray's generosity, than with ice creams at the farm shop.

Species list, those not recorded on Kerrera itself in italics (57 species):



Juvenile Wheatear ©David Jardine

Pheasant, Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Mallard, *Eider*, Red-breasted Merganser, Swift, Rock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Water Rail, Oystercatcher, Snipe, Common Sandpiper, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Arctic Tern, Black Guillemot, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Heron, Hen Harrier, Buzzard, Kestrel, Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Great Tit, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Stonechat, Wheatear, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Twite, Linnet, (Lesser) Redpoll, Goldfinch and Reed Bunting.

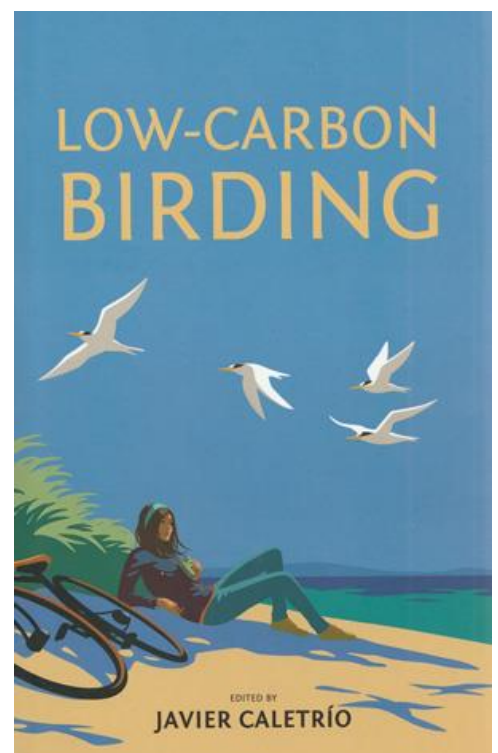
David Jardine

Book review

***Low Carbon Birding*, by Javier Caletrío 2022 Pelagic Publishing
Hardback, ISBN 9781784273446, £16.95.**

What is it? Why do it? How do you do it? Who does do it? These are all answered in this book. Above all, it is very readable. I hope that is a good enough recommendation, but you will want to know more. Javier Caletrío is probably not an author many of you will have heard of. A background in economics and sociology might suggest he's not qualified in this field, but wait. He researches in the interface of travel, inequality and ecological transitions, for the institute Mobile Lives Forum. Based in England for 22 years, he returns to Valencia every year to visit family and his former birding patch in Albufera.

Caletrío sets the scene for the rest of the book in his first two chapters: "Are we addicted to High-Carbon Ornithology?" and then "Questions of Travel, Climate and Responsibility." We are all familiar with the argument that high-carbon lifestyles, dependent on frequent flying and long-distance driving, contribute disproportionately to climate change. That the birding world media should consider this high-carbon birdwatching as normal and acceptable is sending out a clear message to the rest of society that is incompatible with the urgency of the climate crisis.



In accepting the realities of this crisis, then how do we transition to low-carbon birding, as we surely need to do? The remaining 29 chapters are written by 28 authors, many of whom are well known in ornithology from academics and authors to hard-core birders, from the relatively young through the age groups to the very experienced die-hards. Each has their own story and perspective on how to engage with low carbon birding, and the joys and rewards of birding more locally without diminution of their satisfaction in the process of such a simple activity as watching birds. If you have any doubts about

how your own contribution to reducing emissions might make little difference, then doubt no more. There are many choices available to achieving this transition and you will be one of many, not the exception, in making the perceived sacrifice of birding nearer home instead of travelling the globe. The chapter authors provide illustrations of how they have done this themselves and how much this has benefitted them. These examples are very varied, so I can only recommend that you read them for yourself. You will see things differently once you have.

Nigel Scriven

Early movements of young Hen Harriers from Argyll islands

In late December 2022, news came through of a colour-ringed Hen Harrier which had been photographed at the Wexford Slobbs in Eire; it had been ringed on Colonsay earlier in the year. This sighting and earlier ring recovery from Cumbria indicates that Hen Harrier chicks disperse from their breeding grounds to winter throughout the British Isles.

Small satellite tags have proved extremely successful in tracking the movements of young Hen Harriers as they disperse from the breeding grounds, allowing their position to be tracked on a daily basis. This has proved very helpful in under-

standing the scale of illegal killing, which amounts to up to three-quarters of the annual mortality of this protected species (Ewing *et al.*, 2023). This study tracked 148 individuals between 2014 and 2021 and found that many disappeared or were found dead on areas managed for grouse shooting. The birds tracked in this study were from throughout Britain, but relatively few were young birds from Hen Harrier strongholds on Orkney and the Argyll islands. Only three from Mull were included.

To help rectify this low level of sampling, and to understand whether survival rates were higher in

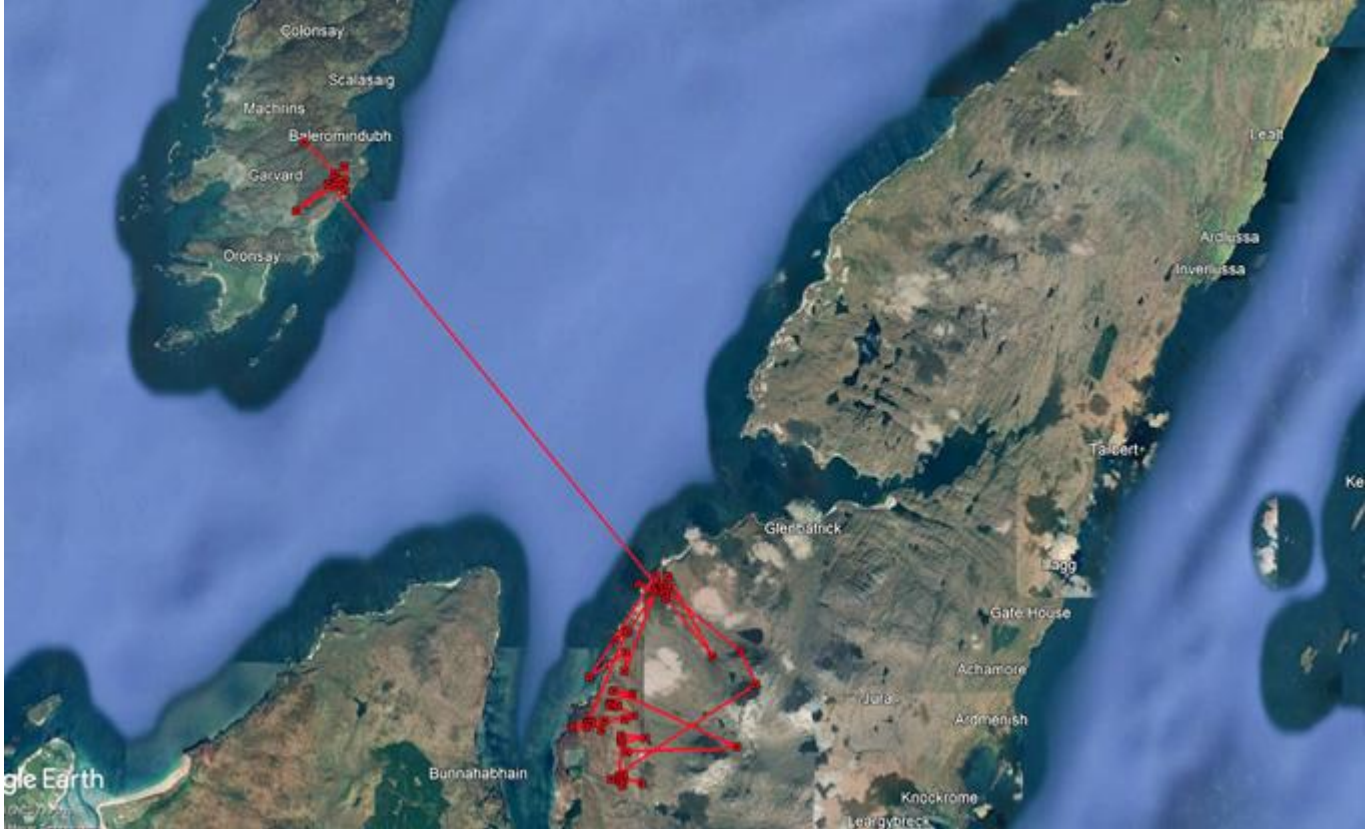


Female Hen Harrier chicks from Kerrera (Isla) and Colonsay (Victoria) after tagging (c)David Jardine

the west, an attempt is now being made to increase the number of birds being tagged in the west. During June and July 2023, RSPB staff working with members of the Argyll Raptor Study Group tagged two female harriers, each the largest youngster in their broods, on Kerre-

ra and Colonsay (figure), named Isla and Victoria respectively (photos on previous page). The tag for Isla was funded by Hen Harrier Action.

Both youngsters fledged successfully and in the initial weeks explored the islands on which they



Movements of two satellite-tagged juvenile Hen Harriers (Victoria above and Isla below)



were reared, but by late July Isla, which fledged after Victoria, had made the short crossing over to mainland Argyll, before heading quickly over towards Loch Lomond where she stayed in early August. Victoria, faced with a longer sea crossing, did not leave Colonsay until early August when she flew over to Jura.

While the tracking of young Hen Harriers often has a sad ending, it will be interesting to follow their progress in the coming months.

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David Jardine

Argyll revisited



River Creran and Beinn Sgulaird seen from Glasdrum NNR ©Mike Mullis

In May 2023, I made my first visit to Argyll since the distant memories of many hill-walking trips in 1977-1991. Back then I used to go camping and hiking in the Scottish Highlands almost annually, taking on a few Munros during each visit and also looking for wildlife. My last trip to Scotland had been in April 1991, when I added Ben Cruachan as my 120th and 'final' Munro. After that family life, work commitments, wildlife projects and holidays south from Sussex (rather than north) gradually took over. This time round, I was travelling north to visit my old friends Rob and Carole, who had moved from Sussex to the Argyll coast, near Benderloch this February. I stayed with them for a week and visited some wildlife hot-spots. Below I'll give an account of two of these day excursions

19 May—Beinn Lora and Glasdrum NNR. I was out early before my friends were up and

about. I took a short walk into Benderloch Village along the cycle path. A couple of Red-breasted Mergansers flew along the coast, plus a Hooded Crow and Oystercatchers on the beach. Then up the path on right-hand side, before the Pink Shop, heading up to Beinn Lora (308m) high above the village and looking down on my friends' house beside the coast road. I had been optimistically contemplating a single Munro this visit and Beinn Lora was the perfect warm-up. If I could make it up there, then maybe something three times the height might just be possible. Beinn Lora is an excellent birding walk if you don't mind a short steep climb up to the summit.

As I headed up the footpath, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Long-tailed Tit and Coal Tit were all heard through the lower, wooded part of the trail just above the village, then yet more

singing Willow Warblers plus Siskins, Skylarks, Stonechats, Meadow Pipits and Whitethroats in the conifer clearings higher up the main path. A distant Cuckoo was calling throughout my walk, possibly two different birds, plus a singing Garden Warbler near one of the wonderfully scenic picnic tables (photo opposite) where I also saw a pair of Bullfinch. A rattling Mistle Thrush flew over the wood down to the main road. Further up the hill, a pair of Ravens flew over and a Common Buzzard called briefly. On the final slope up to the Beinn Lora trig point, a couple of Meadow Pipits flew up and a Red Grouse was calling nearby. One of the pair of the latter flew off from close to the first summit cairn. Beinn Lora is a fantastic viewpoint for just a third of the height of a Munro—highly recommended! More of the same bird species on the way down (and especially Stonechat—photo opposite) with the added bonus of my first singing Wood Warbler (photo opposite) this visit, perched invisibly in a large tree at the top of the steep ravine near one of the picnic tables. This lovely walk also has some interesting flora, especially in the boggy area half-way up Beinn Lora, notably Bogbean, Lady's Smock and Cotton Grass. Also, Common Butterwort on the rock slopes up to the trig point.

I arrived back at my friends' place by mid-morning, just in time to accept a lift, as they were off to Ballachulish. They kindly agreed to drop me off at Glasdrum NNR, just beyond Creagan Bridge alongside the north shore of the inland stretch of Loch Creran. I had read about Glasdrum but had never been there before. Chequered Skipper was one of my target species for the day. Glasdrum is a must-visit wildlife spot. The first thing I heard in the NNR car park was, of course, a singing Willow Warbler and 50m along the track, another singing Wood Warbler. A great start to the visit.

My friends headed off to Ballahulish, leaving me to wander around Glasdrum for a few hours. I managed to get a couple of photos of Wood Warbler plus a brief audio or two. Nowadays you rarely hear them in Sussex, where they are thought to be extinct as a breeding species. I also bumped into the local Butterfly Conservation volunteer who was doing her regular butterfly transect. We had a brief chat about Pearl-bordered Fritillary at Glasdrum, a butterfly I have been involved with back in East Sussex (official re-introductions in various Sussex woods). She thought that this species was at the end of its



Upper photo. A singing Wood Warbler

Middle photo. One of several picnic benches at superb viewpoints

Lower photo. Male Stonechat

All photos ©Mike Mullis

flight period after a very early emergence in mid-late April, but confirmed that recently emerged Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were currently flying around the reserve. I spent most of the next 2-3 hours barely moving more than



Upper photo. Male Chequered Skipper on Bluebells

Lower photo. Male Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

All photos ©Mike Mullis

100-200m, photographing Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (only 3 or 4 males out so far—photo above) and the almost abundant Chequered Skipper (first time I had ever seen them in the UK—photo above). Also flying was a single Speckled Wood and a Peacock, plus brief views of Green-veined White and an Orange Tip.

I also managed to photograph a few day-flying moths, which were good to see—Mother Shipton, Common Carpet and Brown Silver-line, plus a micro moth that evaded the camera. At the far end of the Chequered Skipper habitat (under the power lines), I heard one more singing Wood Warbler and Willow Warbler. My friends returned to the Glasdrum car-park from Ballachulish by mid-afternoon and we finally managed to circumnavigate the main nature trail together (Treecreeper and another Willow Warbler calling higher up the reserve). This was an excellent visit with superb views of both the butterflies and Wood Warbler just along the track from the car park. The other bird species of note were Curlew, Oystercatcher, Mallard and Canada Goose along

the Loch Creran shoreline.

22 May—Beinn Sgulaird). I had long been contemplating (somewhat optimistically) another Munro this visit, some 32 years after my last summit when I was a much fitter, slightly slimmer, 36 year old. This holiday, Ben More on Mull was very tempting, but it was going to be tricky to organise such a trip by bus and ferry at short notice. In short, it was a logistical non-starter without a car and overnight accommodation booked. My alternative plan for another Munro was slightly closer to Benderloch and quite doable by bus from the village. I had also photographed the mountain's various tops and starting point from Glasdrum NNR on the opposite side of Loch Creran earlier in my visit. I had checked it out on the internet too, so had a fair idea as to how much walking was involved and where to start/finish. It just had to be Beinn Sgulaird on the southern side of Loch Creran! It was not a Munro that I had done before, but it was not too daunting (in theory) at only 937m high. I had not heard much about this fine peak, but the write-ups online sounded promising and the views, weather permitting, looked amazing. I made up my mind to give it a go while the weather held out.

I was up early, and feeling remarkably healthy following a walk on Kererra the day before, and quietly slipping out before my friends had stirred. I had cut it fine for the first bus to Creagan Bridge from Benderloch Village, but just made it to the bus-stop as the 405 rolled up around 07.15hrs. No time for a brief food stop at the world famous Pink Shop, but I was already pretty well-stocked, even over-loaded with two cameras, various breakfast and lunch snacks and several bottles of water. Ten minutes later, I hopped off the bus at a very quiet Creagan Bridge on the north side of the loch. There was hardly any traffic or people around and the loch was like a millpond, with stunning scenery all around (photo on next page).

A group of 4-5 Red-breasted Merganser on the sea just north of Benderloch (visible from the bus) was a promising start to my birding/hill-walking adventure. I walked back across the bridge to access the minor road running along the south side of Loch Creran. There was a pair of Oystercatcher and a Herring Gull on the edge of the loch close to the



Loch Creran at Creagan Bridge at the start of the hike up Beinn Sgulaird (937m—the peak to the left of the highest peak on the right-hand side of the photo) ©Mike Mullis



Oystercatchers (above) and a Common Sandpiper (below) on the side of Loch Creran. Both photos ©Mike Mullis

were perched photogenically on rocks along the edge of the shore, quite close to the road (photos opposite). One of the Common Sandpipers flew up from the grassy bank right next to the road and only 5m from me. No sooner had I photographed these birds when a couple of Common Seals swam up close by to see what was going on. A seriously good start all round! After that it was a pretty uneventful, 2-3km plod along the minor road to Druimavuic on the edge of the Glen Creran estate (my recommended starting point for the Beinn Sgulaird hike), but I did see and hear a couple of fly-over Lesser Redpolls halfway along the road. After that, a couple more each of singing Willow and Wood Warblers along the way. My recommended route up Beinn Sgulaird went through a gate into the Glen Creran estate then up a steepish 4WD track, zig-zagging in places to gain height. Before I had even reached the second gate, the reeling call of a Grasshopper Warbler could be heard about 50m away in the young conifers off to the left-hand side of the track. The bird was frustratingly invisible, but I wasn't tempted to fight my way through the undergrowth to get a better view. I still had a long way to go and was trying hard to ignore too many of these tempting distractions.

After another steep uphill section of 4WD track, I found the small cairn on the edge of the track marking a path up the grassy slopes to the left.

bridge, plus a Curlew calling nearby. As soon as I reached the minor road heading inland alongside the loch, a Wood Warbler was heard singing from roadside trees on the south side of the road and a pair each of Oystercatcher and Common Sandpiper

This was my recommended route to the first of several subsidiary tops of the main Munro, the first grassy summit being at 488m. I heard a Whinchat singing just off the main track, then a couple of Wheatear in the grass tussocks just off the ridge I was following. A Meadow Pipit flew off from near the 488m cairn, after which the path dropped down to the first bealach of the climb. A short, steep ascent followed, then easier, grassy slopes heading slowly up to the next un-named top at 863m. About halfway up this section, an eerie wailing call alerted me to a pair of Golden Plover (photo opposite) walking about on the part-rocky, grassy ridge along the skyline to the left. Presumably a breeding pair? Another Wheatear was seen on rocks further up, and a Raven was heard in the distance ahead of me. Best of all, a Ptarmigan croaked somewhere from amongst rocks just beyond the 863m summit cairn of this un-named top, but I was unable to pick it out for a photo. Although not too tricky or precipitous, it is a very rocky walk/scramble down the other side of this top and up again to the next one, Meall Garbh (848m). High up on the ridge here, it was disappointingly birdless. I had been hoping for a Golden Eagle of course, but no such luck. Great views though of the final peak and main Munro, Beinn Sgulaird, plus many other hills in all directions. It looked a long way up (and down to the bealach) en route to the final summit from Meall Garbh, so I hesitated and sat on a rock for 20 minutes while I tucked into my picnic lunch. I was torn between pushing on to the main summit or calling it quits while my knees were still holding out and still capable of getting me back down to Loch Creran, given the very rocky ups and downs still needed if I were to retrace my route from the tops as recommended in the various online guides.

A couple of tiny figures were making their way down from the main summit, which, quite frankly, looked miles away, so I decided to hang on a while longer and see how long it took them to reach my picnic spot on Meall Garbh. I heard their voices approaching from some way off and then in what seemed only a matter of 5-10 minutes or so, two young women (students perhaps?) in lycra leggings and short-sleeved t-shirts breezed up to my picnic spot on Meall Garbh. I felt a bit over-dressed with my fleece on over three other layers, but it was only 9-10 degrees, and I had been sitting still for quite a while whereas they had climbed briskly up from the very steep northwest side of



Upper photo. A pair of Golden Plover near the summit

Lower photo. A pair of Ravens on the summit Cairn of Beinn Sgulaird

Both photos ©Mike Mullis

Beinn Sgulaird and bombed down to Meall Garbh, so no wonder they thought it was pretty warm here. The girls reassured me that the drop down to the bealach below was only about 50-60m or so and that the climb up to the main summit would not take long. This was all I wanted to hear, so I set off down to the bealach below and plodded steadily up to the final peak of the day (937m) where I was greeted by a pair of croaking Ravens perched on the summit cairn of Beinn Sgulaird (photo above). It was a great way to celebrate my 121st Munro, only 32 years after my 120th!

I took a few photos from the summit cairn, trying to take in all the surrounding peaks and unfolding landscapes. Unfortunately the Ravens were not very obliging and had flown off just as I rolled up. The views from this Munro are superb (photo on next page), so I was very pleased that the weather had stayed fine and any small clouds were quite a way above the surrounding tops. Even better that I had decided plod to on for this peak rather than turn back from Meall Garbh. The Ben Nevis peaks, Ben Cruachan and the Taynuilt summits, Beinn a' Bheithir 'horseshoe' and various Glencoe hills were all visible plus a great seascape of islands (mainly Mull and Lismore) and mainland hills off to the west. It must



A superb seascape looking southwest from the summit of Beinn Sgulaird ©Mike Mullis

be one of the finest views of any of the Scottish peaks and well worth the early start and rocky scramble. I had already decided that my route down wasn't going to involve re-tracing my steps back over the very rocky subsidiary tops (as recommended in all the online guides). I had seen a possible descent from the bealach between Meall Garbh and Beinn Sgulaird involving steep grassy slopes to the north that descended directly down into Glen Creran, a mile or two from the eastern end of the loch. There was quite a bit of wet, slabby, steeply angled rock to avoid or negotiate but, by and large it looked feasible, despite appearing to follow a stream downhill (never a good idea in mountains).

It proved to be quite a damp descent, mostly just wet grassy slopes, so not too boggy and far better cushioning for my knees than the slabby rock and scree on the way up. I had to cross a couple of 45 degree angle rock slabs, but fortunately these were dry and I found grassy ledges to bypass the far dodgier wet slabs as I descended. After a while, I was clear of all the rock, just the stream to avoid and the steep, tussocky, rather spongy slopes to negotiate. The descent turned out to be one of the highlights of the day, just as interesting as reaching the summit on my route up.

A solitary Red Deer stag was roaring nearby and the birding interest soon resumed lower down with several more Meadow Pipits seen, one flying right out from under my feet where a nest and eggs were found. The next

surprise was a decent spread of Green-winged Orchids in flower on the steep slope—a fantastic find and quite unexpected (photo below). Plenty of other flora too—dog violet sp., Purple Saxifrage, Alpine Lady's Mantle and Common Milkwort to name some of the ones I could identify. I seemed to be descending for hours down these tussocky slopes, but relatively soon I was looking down on to one or two small lochans from above with Loch Baile Mhic Chailein directly below. I heard a Snipe drumming and as I approached the flatter, boggy terrain around the loch (photo on next page), two Common Sandpipers flew off from the southern end. They looked more like Green Sandpiper in flight but a quick check of their alarm call in my Collins app. proved to be Common Sandpiper. Another less familiar song sounded very much like Tree



Green-winged Orchids were an unexpected find ©Mike Mullis



Common Sandpipers were heard at southwestern end of Loch Baile Mhic Chailein, along with a pair of Teal, a drumming Snipe and a singing Tree Pipit ©Mike Mullis

Pipit (I only rarely see them in East Sussex). I couldn't locate the bird but tried out the Merlin app on my phone and true enough, it confirmed the call! I heard the bird singing again and yes, definitely an invisible Tree Pipit. A pair of Teal were in the stream near the loch and another pair on the far eastern side. A couple of very small day-flying moths also caught my eye; a Small Purple-barred was flying very low over the mossy tussocks plus several *Anania fuscalis*, a micro-moth that tried its best not to be photographed. I finally found my way through all the tall boggy scrub and onto a rough track heading southwest towards Loch Creran.

Rather alarmingly, the track initially ran steeply uphill, but gradually dropped down again and eventually levelled out, becoming a tarmacked private road leading out to the end of Loch Creran at Glasdrum. I heard a

couple more Wood Warblers along the way, then another singing Willow Warbler, but I failed to see a much hoped for Dipper in the shallows of the River Creran. I finally managed to rendezvous with my friends from Benderloch who kindly drove over to give me a lift 'home' around 19.30hrs, just the sound of Blackbird, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Willow Warbler and a final Wood Warbler along the minor road back to my starting point at Drumavauic by the end of Loch Creran. My Google Fit app. made it 38,626 steps, but I wouldn't read too much into these stats. I don't think they are too reliable in the hills. More importantly, 48 bird species on the day and a fabulous mountain walk to remember for a long time to come.

Mike Mullis

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Provisional program for the Autumn Meeting of the Argyll Bird Club on Saturday 4 November 2023 at the Cairnbaan Hotel, near Lochgilphead

Time	Session
09.30	Doors open, coffee and tea
10.00	Welcome and introduction, Nigel Scriven, Chairman of the ABC
	Some recent bird sightings
	Small migrant tracking, BTO
	Species on the edge, RSPB
	Pelagic seabirds in Argyll, David Jardine
12.30-14.00	Lunch break (lunch available in the hotel)
	AGM
	Identifying gulls Jim Dickson
	Winter gull survey 2024-25 and BTO update, Nigel Scriven
16.00-16.20	Raffle and closing remarks

Contributions for the December *Eider* should be sent to the editor before the 20 November 2023

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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).