

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

September 2024
Number 149



Registered
SCIO
SC050823

The Eider



A brood of Wrens, Carradale 17 July 2024 ©Alasdair Paterson

First pelagic birding trip in Argyll

Technology to help locate Nightjars in Argyll

Fancy taking on a BBS square?

Pages 15-17

Pages 10-11

Pages 13-14

Contents	Page
Editorial	2
Club news	3-4
Report of an ABC field trip to Taynish NNR on 25 May <i>Jim Dickson</i>	4-5
Report of an ABC field trip to Toward and south Loch Striven on 29 June <i>Alistair McGregor</i>	6-7
Book review—ID Handbook of European Birds I <i>Jim Dickson</i>	7-8
BTO update—August 2024 <i>Nigel Scriven</i>	8-9
Thoughts from the Chairman <i>Nigel Scriven</i>	9-10
Using technology to find Nightjars <i>Jim Dickson & David Jardine</i>	10-11
Some clearwing moths in Argyll <i>David Jardine</i>	11-12
A BBS square in Argyll—up for grabs! <i>David Palmar</i>	13-14
A pelagic birding trip in Argyll <i>Jim Dickson, Stuart Gibson & David Jardine</i>	15-17
Programme for the autumn meeting in Inveraray—2 November	17
Information about the Argyll Bird Club	18

Editorial

Not so long ago I had very little for this issue of the *Eider*. So I was very pleased when I had offers of a number of interesting articles. Three of these demonstrate just how new techniques and technology are changing the way we detect and record wildlife.

Passive sound recorders are now being used to see if we have breeding Nightjars in Argyll (pages 10-11). This is a species that is difficult to detect, as it starts calling around nightfall, just when the midges are most active. Plus, there is a vast amount of potentially suitable habitat in Argyll, namely clear-felled areas within forests—so where do you start looking? This new technique has detected Nightjars elsewhere in Scotland, so we are very much looking forward to hearing the results of this year's trial.

Switching to moths, David Jardine has shown how using artificially-produced pheromones can detect the presence of some hard-to-detect clearwing species (pages 11-12). Pheromones are complex species-specific compounds produced mainly by female moths to attract males.

The last article in this issue (pages 15-17) describes how the use of 'chum' can be used to attract some of our rarer seabirds. While this technique has been used with great success elsewhere in the UK, this was the first trial in Argyll. Hopefully, weather conditions will allow for similar pelagic trips this autumn, with the chance of sighting some of the rarer petrels and larger shearwaters.

In addition to these projects, members are increasingly using the Merlin app on their mobile phones to identify bird species by their calls (see Jim Dickson's comments of page 4). For folk who have difficulty recognising the different sounds that birds make, this is a great learning tool.

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

Acknowledgements

Very many thanks to the following for their contributions to this issue—Malcolm Chattwood, Jim Dickson, Peter & Dorothy Hogbin (photocopying & dispatching the newsletter), David Jardine, Stuart Gibson, Alistair McGregor, Greg Nicholson, David Palmar, Linda Petty (proof reading), Alistair Patterson, Sea Life Mull, Nigel ScFlight Identification of European Passerines and the late Margaret Staley.



Club News

FIELD TRIPS 2024

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. For most trips you will need to bring a packed lunch and a drink.

There will be a risk assessment and safety briefing at the start of each field trip. Trip leaders will keep a record of folk attending each trip.

Saturday 31 August. Outing to Lismore. In a change to our normal visit to the northern end of Lismore, this walking outing (of 5-6km on paths, tracks and roads) will take the 11.00hrs ferry from Oban, returning on the afternoon ferry. Outdoor footwear and clothing required. Please let David Jardine (dcjardine@btinternet.com) know if you wish to attend, so that he can advise you about fuller details.

28/29 September. BTO Gull Survey. In a change of format for club outings, members are invited to join leaders in different parts of Argyll to help contribute to a national survey on gulls. Leaders will help you learn more about gull identification in Cowal, Mid-Argyll and Kintyre. If you are interested in taking part please contact Nigel Scriven (Kintyre: njscriven@gmail.com), David Jardine (Mid-Argyll: dcjardine@btinternet.com) or Alistair McGregor (Cowal: alistairmcgregor16@outlook.com)

Saturday 19 October. An outing to Bute led by Alistair McGregor (mobile phone, 07754 524240. E-mail, alistairmcgregor16@outlook.com). Please let Alistair know if you would like to go on this trip, to check that places are available. Meet Alistair at the Colintraive Ferry at 10.00hrs. We aim to share cars to take the minimum number over on the 10.30hrs ferry. Ian Hopkins will meet the group on the Bute side of the ferry. The trip will include several short walks on level ground.

Saturday 30 November. Danna (and Keills). Led by David Jardine (email dcjardine@btinternet.com). Rendezvous at 10.00hrs at Tayvallich Village Hall (grid ref NR741870). Please bring a packed lunch. Warm clothing and strong waterproof footwear are advised. This trip will involve walking around 5km on farm tracks, rough ground and the

shore. Please let David Jardine know if you hope to attend this outing so that he can provide last minute information as necessary.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2024-2025

Autumn Meeting & AGM 2024. Saturday 2 November. The meeting will be held at the Inveraray Inn, Inveraray (phone 01499 302466). The programme is on page 17. If you are going to the meeting, please book your place so that we know how many teas/coffees we need to cater for. Also a soup and sandwich lunch will be available at the meeting, which must be booked in advance (£12 payable on the day). Book your lunch with the membership secretary (contact details on back page). Thank you.

Spring Meeting 2025. Saturday 8 March. The meeting will be held at St Mun's Church Hall, Du-noon, where the highly successful 2024 spring meeting was held. The programme will appear in the December *Eider*.

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

TREASURER AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Our treasurer (Peter Hogbin) and membership secretary (Dorothy Hogbin) are retiring at the AGM, and will be replaced by David Harris (treasurer) and Rachel Harris (membership secretary). The club thanks Peter and Dorothy for their considerable contributions over many years.

SECRETARY

Our secretary, Alun ap Rhisiart, has indicated that he wishes to resign at the 2024 AGM. The club thanks Alun for his significant contribution over the past few years. If anyone is interested in taking over this post please contact Alun or any other club official.

EDITOR OF THE EIDER

After producing the *Eider* for many years, Steve Petty has decided that it's time for someone else to take over the reins. If this post interests you please contact Steve (for more information about the job) or any club official.

FUNDING FOR BIRD CONSERVATION PROJECTS IN ARGYLL

The ABC is willing to fund or part-fund worthwhile bird conservation projects in Argyll. For example, the club 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).

This year, the club has bought some owl nest boxes to be monitored by Rob Lightfoot. These have now been installed.

More recently the club has part-funded the purchase of Static Audio Recorders to monitor the

presence (or not) of Nightjars in Argyll (see pages 10-11).

Applications to funding other projects should be submitted to the secretary (contact details on the back page).

ARGYLL BIRD REPORT 35 (2023)

The latest *Argyll Bird Report* was published in

the spring as a PDF file. ABC members were informed about how to download their copies. Congratulations to Jim Dickson, David Jardine and Malcolm Chattwood for producing such a superb report. It gets bigger and better every year!

Records are now coming in, and are being collated for the next *ABR* (36, 2024). Please ensure that you submit your 2024 bird records as soon as possible. Thank you.

ABC field trip to Taynish NNR on Saturday 25 May 2024

An anticipated turnout of seven bird club members for a walk around the lovely woodlands of Taynish NNR, south of Tayvallich, bode well for good birdwatching in this type of habitat. Unfortunately, for various reasons, four folk needed to pull out of the trip at the last minute leaving just three of us. In addition, my own mobility problem necessitated a shorter route on level ground down to the tip of the reserve and back again, and no onward journey to the Ulva Lagoon and Danna.

A small chance of rain was forecast for the day, but it stayed dry. However, the day remained overcast and chilly. These dull conditions may have gone some way to explain why so few birds were in song, giving the impression many birds were absent. Yet, Heather Watkin the NatureScot manager of the reserve had informed me that Wood Warblers and Redstarts, species that many folk look forward to seeing at Taynish, were around in good numbers earlier in the week. We suspected that a much earlier start to catch the dawn chorus and better weather conditions would have made a big dif-

ference.

We slowly made our way south through the reserve and did hear brief snatches of Wood Warbler song, largely drowned out by the loud tones of Blackcap, for which Argyll must have impressive breeding numbers! Bridget Baker spotted a male Reed Bunting and Bill Alexander (photo below) tried hard to get photos of it. We then heard a Garden Warbler giving bursts of good song—or was it? The usual Garden Warbler versus Blackcap debate ensued with us discussing how to tell them apart without a visual of this particularly skulking bird. The Merlin bird app was 'put to use' and 'suggested' Garden Warbler! We noted 'suggested' as that's what Merlin does—make suggestions albeit usually pretty accurate and this was 'confirmed' when we got a visual—phew! Woodpigeon, Goldcrest, Cuckoo and Great Spotted Woodpecker were then added. We had poor views of a distant Tree Pipit—one of only three on the day. We mentioned Redstart being possible in this area of suitable oak woodland, and no sooner said, one appeared before quickly disappearing again. A couple of Bull-



Bill Alexander and Bridget Baker
at Taynish ©Jim Dickson

finch flew up from the side of the track then gave lovely views.

From higher ground near Taynish House looking across towards Loch Sween we noticed two Gannets in flight, which looked out of place as they appeared above the distant trees, but were of course over water that was hidden by the hill in front. Herring and Lesser Black Backed Gulls were added to our list and the regular species such as Blue, Great and Coal Tit, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Goldfinch and Wren helped to boost the tally. In total we heard three different Chiffchaffs in song, but only got good views of one.

We made it down to the more open area at the south end of the reserve overlooking the water towards Ulva and New Danna. Always a good place to sit and have lunch. From there we noted Canada Geese, Red-breasted Mergansers, a Cormorants, a pair of Oystercatchers, a Common Sandpiper, three Grey Herons and two Common Terns flying close in past the point. The gorse and grassland behind us was quite productive with several Linnets and Whitethroats (photos opposite) in song, together with Skylarks and Meadow Pipits.

With only three of us on this outing, and our very leisurely pace, it was very conducive for having a good chat. On our walk back to the car park not only did we discuss how to put the world to rights, but covered various aspects of nature conservation, nature helping folk with their wellbeing, bird migration, and in particular, how to encourage young folk to engage more with nature—all interspersed with pauses to check out anything that moved. So, what turned out to be very much a plan 'B' for the day became a highly enjoyable revised plan 'A' day.

Species list: Canada Goose, Cuckoo, Wood Pigeon, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper, Common Gull, Great Black Backed Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Common Gull, Common Tern, Gannet, Cormorant, Heron, Hooded Crow,



Linnet (above) and Common Whitethroat (below), both seen in the more open areas at Taynish ©Jim Dickson

Carrion Crow, Raven, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Skylark, Swallow, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Wood Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Goldcrest, Wren, Song Thrush, Robin, Common Redstart, Meadow Pipit, Tree Pipit, Reed Bunting, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Redpoll, Linnet, Goldfinch, Siskin (total of 43 species)

Jim Dickson



Rock Pipit ©Margaret Staley

ABC field trip to Toward & south Loch Striven on Saturday 29 June 2024

In the weeks leading up to the field trip I had my usual Sunday afternoon sorties to see what was about. We had some dry weather, but a couple of damp days that helped with the insect life, although the day-time temperatures were only into the teens and night-time temperatures were down as low as three degrees.

I had noted a decline in the number of young birds I would normally see at this time of year in this area. However, I wasn't disheartened as I was picking up 35-40 species on each outing, including a White-tailed Eagle that put in a surprise appearance on the weekend prior to the field trip.

As always, I arrived early at the car park at Toward Primary School. I was watching House Martin (photo opposite) coming and going to their nests under the eaves of the school as club members started to appear.

When everyone had arrived I gave a safety briefing and explained the plan for the day. From the car park we spotted Cormorant, Shag, a single Curlew and a fly past by a small group of Oystercatchers. Great Black-backed Gulls were perched on nearby rocky outcrops.

House Martins were continually flying back and forth to the school as we headed along the roadside to a path that led onto the beach. House Sparrows (photo opposite) were flying across the road to the houses with feeders in their gardens. A couple of Dunnocks were spotted under the feeders, picking up the bits that the other birds had dropped.

Going down the path to the beach I noted a lack of small birds, but could hear Goldfinches in the dense cover. A robin made a brief appearance before scuttling off into cover. This is when I spotted the culprit for the lack of small birds showing themselves, a large hen Sparrowhawk was systematically working her way along the hedge and rough ground towards our location. This most definitely had an impact on the birds we were seeing, or more to the point, not seeing!

On returning to our vehicles we spotted Collared Dove sitting on the roof of one of the houses, and we saw a Raven flying over a distant farm.

We decided to walk through the woods in the grounds of Toward Castle. There is an old pond there where we hoped to see more hirundines.

Walking along the footpath we were constantly hearing birds singing, but unable to see them due to the dense cover. The spe-



A House Martin collecting nest material (above) and a male House Sparrow (below). Both species were plentiful around Toward School ©Alistair McGregor

cies included, Chiffchaff, Wren, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Blackcap. Near the old pond house, Sand Martins and a few Swallows were darting about feeding on flying insects.

Neil Hammatt was with us and provided information on the plant and insect life found along edge of the path. He pointed out Red-tailed Bumblebee, a Speckled Wood butterfly (photo on next page) and various other beasties.

We headed back to the cars, and near the parking spot, there was a Common Sandpiper calling. They are always a delight to see, bobbing about and flying rapidly from rock to rock.

We then drove to Toward Sailing Club and parked at the end of the track that leads down to the entrance of the fish farm compound. After the last two walks everyone was ready for lunch. Here we spotted Black-headed, Common and Herring Gull. The Eiders were all



Speckled Wood butterfly ©Alistair McGregor

well out at sea with a few Mallard dotted about .

We all left the car park in convoy heading for low Loch Striven, about 2km further on. We soon came across a line of cars. I went down to a chap that had a high viz vest on and asked what was going on, he informed me that the road was closed till 18.00hrs because of a cycling event. Disgruntled at this, I left and headed back to the team and explained that the road was shut, so it was decided to have a walk up to the Chinese Ponds near Ardyne Farm.

On the way to the ponds we just saw one bird in the wood, a Chaffinch, but again Neil was in his element talking about plants and insects. His commentary was invaluable and kept everyone interested on the way to the ponds.

At the ponds it was very still, but a Chiffchaff was heard and seen. Apart from that the walk was very unremarkable!

When we returned to the vehicles we decided to call it a day. I would like to thank everyone that turned up, and give special thanks to Neil Hammatt for keeping everyone going with his knowledge of plants and insects.

Species list. Shelduck, Mallard, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Heron, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Cormorant, Shag, Sparrowhawk, Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Raven, Swallow, House Martin, Sand Martin, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Black-cap, , Wren, Blackbird (heard but not seen), Song Thrush, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Goldfinch, Linnet, House Sparrow (37 species in total).

Alistair McGregor

Book Review

ID Handbook of European Birds by Nils van Duivendijk and Marc Gyt. Publisher: Princeton University Press, 2024. ISBN: 9780691253572. 1056 pages, 5500 colour photos. RRP £90, current discount through Birdguides £60

Described as a ground-breaking, two-volume, illustrated reference book covering all of Europe's birds, these volumes—long awaited and eagerly anticipated—have now been published in English (originally in Dutch) and arrived on my doorstep just two days ago. Not often do new bird identification bird books come along attempting to equal or surpass the widely recognised birders favourite—the *Collins Bird Guide* by Lars Svensson *et al.*, now in its third edition. These new volumes use high resolution photos throughout and are expected to become a standard reference to Europe's birds. Taxonomy follows a modified version of the IOC World Bird List, prioritising ease of identification over taxonomic considerations. Nomenclature follows the IOC but defers to British names wherever there are differences with American ones. Volume 1—Non-Passerines and Volume 2—Passerines cover 733 species known to occur in Europe, featuring more than 5,500 colour photos, detailed species accounts describing key identification features, moult, age, and gender beautifully laid out in an easy to use clear format.

Prior to these works Nils van Duivendijk was known for his *Advanced Bird ID Guide* for the Western Palearctic published in 2010 which was not illustrated but detailed text that became a 'go to reference' when checking bird ID covering over 1,300 species and sub-species, and no doubt particularly valuable to rare bird committees and serious birders across Europe. Perhaps a drawback to that great work is that it wasn't illustrated. The new handbook addresses this and some, with carefully chosen photographs with pointers to relevant clinching ID features. Recent advances in bird species and sub-species ID from papers in the likes of *Dutch Birding* and *British Birds* are used. However, as always it is an evolving situation and no doubt will require a few adjustments in any future editions. Unlike the great bird painting artwork of the *Collins Bird Guide*, in any field guides using photos it is often the case that birds don't always appear in one classic illustrated pose or coloured plumage, but are usually a bit more confusing—as in real life. In these volumes the authors generously don't restrict each species to just one or two illustrative photos, but for species that pose more difficult ID challenges they give as many photos as they feel necessary to get any necessary ID features across e.g. *flava* wagtails take up 14 pages.

What is fascinating about these volumes, hav-

ing just had time to only flick through large sections of them, is the amount of new, hitherto unknown ID features, that for me at least, keep jumping out. Many features are subtle and perhaps will only be of most value to birders with an interest in difficult groups of species and some of the moult and age class information will be of value perhaps to ringers. I particularly enjoyed the sections on similar species groups such as in Volume 1 (wildfowl, raptors, waders, gulls & terns) and in Volume 2 (pipits, warblers, finches & buntings) with large amounts of new ID detail not seen in other guides. The gulls section alone is more than a match for the excellent gull ID reference work—*Gulls of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East* by Adriaens *et al.* Bird-watchers who are less experienced or are more locally based rather than Euro travellers may find the detailed information just too much. However, delving into these volumes may just

open up, for an aspiring birder, the world of cutting-edge bird ID and help progression to the 'next level'. For less demanding birdwatchers who prefer a photo ID guide, the Wild Guides series on Britain's Birds and also Europe's Birds will no doubt be more than adequate as is the Wild Guide's *Flight Identification of European Passerines*, all of which are excellent value. Perhaps too early for me to make any criticism of these new works, but maybe more of a wish list for the future for a third volume to be added that expands the European species area covered to include the Western Palearctic as in his original non-illustrated Advanced ID Guide. Also, as we are used to in other field guides, the inclusion of distribution maps even at a very basic level would be a great addition rather than a cursory single line note. However, the clear aims of these volumes are all about detailing solid ID features and so far at least they hit that mark.

Jim Dickson



BTO update—August 2024

Bird Atlas 2027-31

Preparations are underway for the next BTO Bird Atlas, 20 years on from the last one 2007-11.

Winter Gull Survey (WinGS)

[www.bto.org/our-science/projects/winter-gull-](http://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/winter-gull-survey)

[survey](#)

August marks the beginning of the supplementary period of WinGS where repeat counts of sites can be submitted. For gull enthusiasts, now is the time to start capturing the arrival of migrants from the continent.

The key count date for the Autumn WinGS survey period is September 29. As with last January's surveys, there is a week's leeway before and after, where counters can submit within the "key" period. There are plenty of sites available across Argyll. Head to the WinGS website to browse sites for the Autumn period. The vacant sites map is here: <https://app.bto.org/wings/public/vacant.jsp>

Woodcock Survey

Indications are that the 2024 monitoring survey will be by far the biggest since the annual monitoring began (300 + squares). BTO typically aim for around 150-200 squares each year, so an increase by more than a third is encouraging and suggests that quite a number of people enjoyed the national survey enough to carry on covering their squares!

BTO Training Courses www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/training-courses Booking online only

Online FREE courses (1hr 45m):

Counting birds and the Wetland Bird Survey (Tues 24 Sep, 7pm)

Counting birds and the Wetland Bird Survey (Wed 24

Sep, 10am)

Counting birds and the Wetland Bird Survey (Wed 24 Sep, 7pm)

[Online ID skills courses \(1hr 45m + supported self-study £24\).](#)

Improve your identification of winter wild-fowl and other waterbirds in these two-part online courses

Waterbird ID (2 sessions, Tuesdays 7pm)
10th & 17th Sep 2024

Waterbird ID (2 sessions, Wednesdays 10am) 11th & 18th Sep 2024

Waterbird ID (2 sessions, Wednesdays 7pm) 11th & 18th Sep 2024

[Wetland Bird Practice Session – Loch Laich, Appin \(Loch Linnhe\)](#)

Join BTO Scotland for a practice session on wader and waterbird ID, learning key features and transferable skills. Sun 6 Oct 10.00-13.00hrs Cost £10.

Nigel Scriven

Chairman's chat—some thoughts

Next year marks 40 years of the Argyll Bird Club

Little did I imagine that I would be writing this when I attended the inaugural spring meeting in the Inveraray Church Hall all that time ago. Credit must go firstly to Colin Galbraith who had the vision to establish a club, following on from his editing and production of the very first *Argyll Bird Report* in 1983. Credit must also go to the very many individuals who have over the years have contributed to the continued running of the club and supporting its activities. A list would be too long to mention here, but I will just mention Steve Petty, who was also at that inaugural meeting. He has been on the committee since day 1, with a brief sabbatical during 2009-2012. He has edited the *Eider* since June 2002, apart from during 2009-2012, until the present day. He now feels it is finally time to step down as editor after serving us so well for so many years, and we owe him many thanks.

Landmarks like this tend to stimulate reflection, as do other internal and external events. It can be a time to look back, to look round and to look forward. These are timely processes, and can help inform where the club is now, what it is for, what it does well, what it could do better and what it might do in the future. In the short term, how should we recognise the 40th anniversary of the club? Suggestions please.

A conservation plan

This has been a topic of discussion both at committee meetings and at our conference meetings. This is not our sole purpose, but is consistent with our constitution which primarily is "To promote interest in, and conservation of, the birds of Argyll and their habi-

tats."

David Jardine started the ball rolling with an appeal for suggestions, which he duly collated. These suggestions all need to be evaluated and prioritised in the context of our current and potential resources. The suggestions were categorised into large, medium and local projects largely based on habitats, or on prioritising species. A SWOT analysis of the club might provide a useful context to assess these suggestions. We need to match aspirations with a realistic appraisal of what the club can achieve. More about this in due course.

In the meantime, it is fair to say that apart from our financial resources, the main asset the club possesses are its members and the executive committee that manages its activities. One of the strengths of the committee has been its stability, largely as a result of the commitment of the individuals on it, and we have been very fortunate that we have been well served by them. However, change occurs, it is inevitable and can be necessary for all sorts of reasons.

One change in the pipeline is that of the post of Treasurer and Membership Secretary. For perfectly valid reasons Peter and Dorothy Hogbin have decided they need to stand down. They have served us extremely well since they took on their roles in 2018, and have set a high bar for their successors. However, the good news is that club members David and Rachel Harris have agreed to

take over, and we hope they will be duly elected at the AGM.

However, that is not the only change in the pipeline, as Alun ap Rhisiart intends to stand down as secretary at the AGM, along with Steve Petty as newsletter editor. Both of these roles are key positions in the running of the club's activities, so we would welcome any interest in helping the club to fill these posts. Please contact any committee member if you feel that you could help, just as soon as you can.

Other news from the committee

We have been exploring the purchase and deployment of "smart" mink traps with a view to supporting other interested groups in the control and potential eradication of mink from critical areas of Argyll to benefit birds and other wildlife. More about this at the Autumn Meeting.

The *Birds of Islay and Jura*, written by club member Peter Roberts, is nearing publication. The club will be giving financial support to its

publication. It will be in the format of the *Birds of Colonsay and Oronsay*.

We have been discussing the possible revision of the "*Birds of Argyll*" book, which was published in 2008. As the BTO bird distribution atlas is to have a repeat survey from 2028-31, it would seem timely to plan for this using the Argyll data from the new atlas, to add distribution maps to the county avifauna. The atlas fieldwork will be a major undertaking, especially where birders are thin on the ground and the area is large and in places remote. It will need planning and collaboration with many observers. The committee are looking at using our field meeting programme to encourage and promote recording methodologies. We need to recruit a new generation of birders as the 2008-11 generation may not be as capable or even available as they were 20 years ago. While it is still a long way off, there will also be a need to recruit writers for the species accounts for the Argyll book.

Nigel Scriven

Using technology to find Nightjars in Argyll



A view from Song Meter Micro site at Brenfield Forest ©Jim Dickson

Historically, the crepuscular Nightjar was once widespread in Argyll, but the population declined to only Cowal and Kintyre. By early this century it was considered to be extinct as a breeding bird in Argyll (*Birds of Argyll*). Occasional birds, thought to be passage migrants, occur every few years.

In addition to the well-known population, which has persisted in the forests of Dumfries and Galloway, of around 40-50 churring males, breeding birds have been found in the Border Forests in recent years. Pioneering work in north-east Scotland using passive sound recorders has found a small population including two successful breeding pairs in 2024. This year fledged young were also found in Moray & Nairn, along with birds reported in Strathspey and in Angus.

All of these birds are in upland forests and with over 100,000ha of this habitat in Argyll it is possible that there might be birds breeding here—but where do you start?

And, what about the midges? Fortunately advances in technology have allowed us to use static audio recorders to make recordings at potentially suitable sites to see if Nightjars might be using them. In mid-May we took delivery of three Wildlife Acoustics Song Meter Micro 2 units kindly funded by the Argyll Bird Club and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club Research Fund.



Song Meter Micro 2 deployed in a forest restock at Dalbuie Forest, Kintyre, May 2024 ©David Jardine



Exterior and interior views of Song Meter Micro 2 ©Jim Dickson

This summer was about getting to know how the units worked and how to successfully deploy them. We still have a bit to go to improve their programming, to just record at the critical time of day. So far we have deployed them at eleven sites and have now over 1500 sound files to analyse. Fortunately this does not involve hours of listening to the recordings as

several packages using artificial intelligence are now available, which will identify the calls present in the sound files. This is a task for the wet winter nights. We'll report back once we've made progress and hopefully we'll be able to let you know if we have found any sites with Nightjars, which we can follow up in 2025.

Jim Dickson & David Jardine

Lunar Hornet Moth and Large Red-belted Clearwing in Argyll

While this summer may not be remembered for its fine weather, we have had a few warm sunny days when I have taken time to look for some of our strangest moths. Clearwing moths are wasp mimics and are found on warm sunny days. Little is known about their distribution in Scotland, but in recent years advances have been made using pheromones, which attract males if set in the right habitat and in the correct conditions.

The recently published *The Larger Moths of Scotland* by Roy Leverton and Mark Cubbitt notes that the Lunar Hornet Moth *Sesia bembeciformis*, which resembles a hornet or wood-wasp, is the most widespread of this group in Scotland. While it is described as 'widespread but local' there are relatively few records from Argyll. Prior to the turn of the century it had only been recorded in one 10 km-square (on Islay). Between 2000 and 2015 it was found in two

further 10 km-squares (near Inveraray) and another five squares since then.

Armed with a pheromone (kindly given to me by Ann McGregor, but available from lepidoptera suppliers) I decided to see if I could find some. On 6 July I left a trap on the east shore of Loch Awe in an area of damp birch and willow while I went on another errand. I am sure you can imagine my excitement when on my return I found five moths in the trap and another outside it. I tried in a few other locations over that weekend without success, but on the Monday I attended an event at the Beaver Centre in Knapdale Forest and decided to leave a trap out there for the morning (again in an area of birch and willow). Hey presto! At lunchtime there were another five moths in the trap and another outside it—the first record for VC101.



Upper left and right. Lunar Hornet Moth and pheromone trap with moths, East Loch Awe, 6 July 2024



Lower left. Large Red-belted Clearwing, Barnluasgan, 1 June 2024.

All images ©David Jardine

Meanwhile, Neil Hammatt had trapped some at the Holy Loch Nature Reserve in Cowal. Spurred on with these successes I found one in willow at Loch Ceann a' Choin, near Ford, and decided to try to find out how much further south they occurred. Knowing that Aros Moss, near Machrihanish Airport, had a number of large willows, a pheromone trap was put out the following Saturday, and yes, five were caught there too. Lunar Hornet Moths were found in two further 10 km-squares subsequently. The pheromone seemed to be successful when placed near large Goat Willows *Salix caprea* in bright sunshine, usually in the morning. Despite the few previous records in Argyll, Levington & Cubbitt's assessment that it was 'widespread but local', appears correct for the whole of Argyll. It is

hoped that this account might encourage others to fill the gaps further.

The project to find Lunar Hornet Moths had been inspired by success earlier in the summer during the Butterfly Conservation Scotland (BCS) project to look for some of the other clearwings. The target species were Welsh Clearwing *Synanthedon scoliaeformis* (which I failed to find, but has been found recently on Mull) and Large Red-belted Clearwing *Synanthedon culciformis* (LRB)

At the beginning of June, on the day after the LRB pheromone arrived in the post, I put out a trap on the Moine Mhor in the early afternoon of a hot sunny day in an area where rhododendron and a few birch trees had been cleared. Returning an hour later there was one in the trap! As the weather was still good the trap was taken down to Barnluasgan in Knapdale Forest and left for an hour—there was one inside on our return from a short walk! Our current understanding is that the LRB is a much rarer moth, only having been found in three locations in Argyll, all since 2016. Two sites are in east Mull and the other was at Slockavulin, close to the Moine Mhor site. However, this again may be a case of us just learning how to find it. Good luck if you decide to have a look next year!

David Jardine

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)—an opportunity in Argyll



View in 2021 from BBS square NN0707 towards Loch Fyne and Inveraray. The replanted trees are a bit bigger now ©David Palmer www.photoscot.co.uk

For several years my wife, Janet and I have done the BBS in a square near Inveraray (NN0707).

This has been an enjoyable and rewarding survey, during which it was exciting to identify my first Tree Pipit.

We have completed our two visits for 2024, but now as we get older and are involved in other things, it's time for us to call a halt on this square, and to offer it to someone else. By the time you read this, it should be marked as available on the BTO's BBS website.

I would be happy to chat and give further details to anybody who wants to take it over in 2025. In the meantime here is an outline of what the square is like. Hopefully you might want to take it on!

Permission

Permission (a licence to enter the forest) is obtained from the Forestry and Land Scotland Lochgilphead Office.

They are cooperative and helpful. They like to know the date of the survey two weeks in advance, as the area is also used by Argyll Estates, whom F&LS should inform of a surveyor's presence.

I give them for each visit a planned date and a backup date of the next day in case there's a postponement due to inclement weather.

The beginning of May is suitable for the first

visit and the beginning of June for the second visit. I confirm the date of the survey once I see the weather forecast—about 5 days in advance.

They issue a licence, a map of the route into the forest, and a location where we can park our vehicle (on the transect, so no having to walk in)!

Access

Going south from Inveraray, turn off the A83 at the minor road towards Achnagoul. The gate into the forest has always been left unlocked.

There are about 3.5km of gravel roads, driveable with care in a normal car. You need to drive and park where they say, and they will issue maps which form part of the licence to enter the forest.

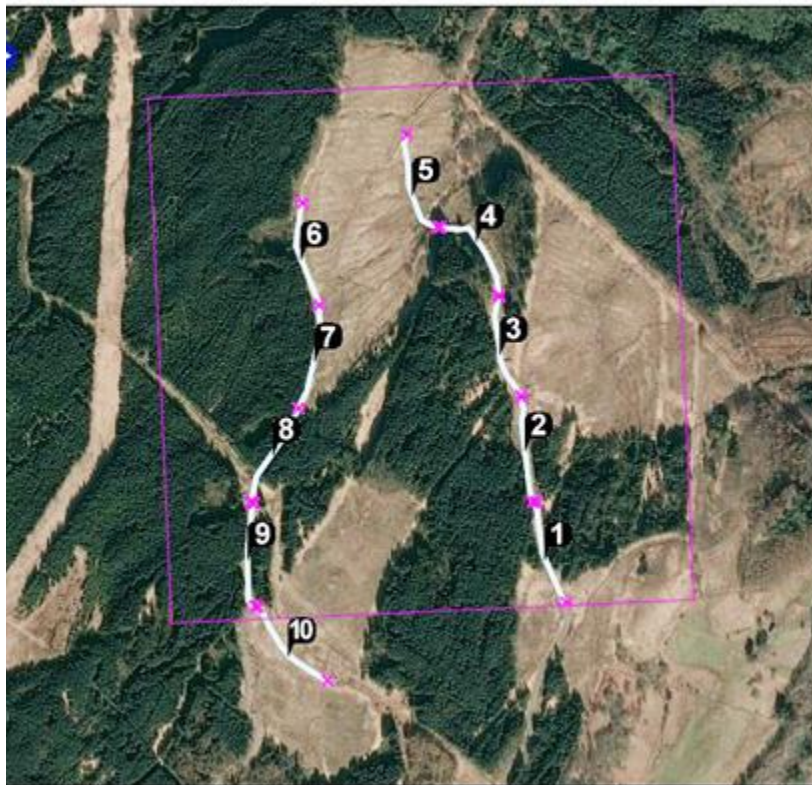
Fitness and safety

A normal degree of fitness is required, but there's no real issue with the terrain to prevent anyone from taking this on.

It's best to do this with two people for safety, as you probably won't see anybody else. There is a good mobile signal on Vodafone and on EE.

Because of small boggy bits, we normally wear wellies, but walking boots should be okay unless it has been pouring.

It's good practice to let F&LS know when we're out of the forest again.



The Google satellite view (left) shows the canopy forest and the clearfelled areas with the two transects and sections.

The bird photo is a Tree Pipit taken in the BBS square ©David Palmar
www.photoscot.co.uk

Transect details

Most of the transect sections have on one side clearfells with replanted Sitka Spruce less than 5m high and on the other side thick tall coniferous forest. It is therefore possible, indeed necessary, to survey the forest mainly by listening for bird sounds.

Familiarity with a few common bird songs and ability to hear high-pitched sounds such as Goldcrests and Grasshopper Warblers is needed.

If you're in doubt with any of these, a free app called Merlin is very handy for confirming what species you think you heard, but it shouldn't be relied on or used excessively.

The 25m band usually coincides roughly with where the forest begins on either side, parallel to the road. Distance bands from the transect beyond this are therefore an estimate.

The first five transect sections are along a mostly flat or gently sloping forestry road.

To get to the second transect there is a moderately sloping path up the hill, which you follow to the top of the clearfelled area.

Sections 6 and 7 are along the forest edge. There is an ill-defined path.

Section 8 is through the wood, going into the forest to avoid a boggy section. There are very few birds.

Section 9 and 10 are again on forestry roads.

Typical birds are common woodland species such as tits, warblers, Chaffinches, Robins and a Cuckoo, so nothing so unusual that you can't learn their songs easily. Occasionally we have seen a Crossbill and more commonly a Tree Pipit.

We have always done the whole survey between 07.50hrs and 10.30hrs, when it was dry, or at worst, light drizzle for part of the time.

A Google map with satellite view and the transect sections already marked can be used to locate where you are, in preference to the OS map, on which the forest extent is out-of-date because of felling.

In order to communicate with Forest and Land Scotland, it's probably best to avoid days immediately after holiday weekends for the survey in case you need to postpone the survey date.

Can you afford to ignore this unique and fun opportunity?

David Palmar, Conservation photographer

dpalmar2000@yahoo.co.uk

www.photoscot.co.uk

The first Pelagic birding trip in Argyll



The new double-hulled Sea Life Mull boat Rathlin Express, provided a stable base with good observation points for a trip to the west of Coll and Tiree ©Sealife Mull

Following on from the talk on pelagic seabirds in Argyll at the ABC meeting in November 2023, which highlighted a number of the scarce and rare seabirds which are known to occur in Argyll, SeaLife Mull advertised two trips in late summer 2024 leaving from Tobermory. Thanks to Stuart Gibson a vessel was found that would allow observers to visit areas thought to be good for these species rather than having to rely on short passing views from Calmac Ferries or from headlands in poor weather.

Elsewhere in Britain, pelagic trips regularly use 'chum' to attract seabirds, particularly the Procelariidae or 'tubenoses'. The deployment of chum was a 'first' in Argyll waters. Chum is a

smelly mix of fish waste, preferably from oily fish, to which is added ground up pop-corn which helps it float. Tube-nosed seabirds have a great sense of smell and the oily fish attract them.

Two types of chum were prepared. 'Hard' chum consisting of large chunks of fish that were towed (in an onion bag) from the back of the boat when moving between sites, and 'soft' chum, a much oilier concoction with the pop-corn was released from onion bags while moving at a slow speed in suitable areas.

Saturday 20 July dawned wet, but this did not dampen the enthusiasm of the group of birders

Preparing the chum (hard chum on the left and soft chum on the right)—just as well you cannot smell it! ©David Jardine





A Fulmar and Great Skua feeding frenzy (above ©Jim Dickson) and a Storm Petrel (below ©Greg Nicholson)

and whale-watchers who assembled in Tobermory for the ten-hour day at sea. After embarkation a few Harbour Porpoise were seen as we left Tobermory Bay. Nearby, a White-tailed Eagle with a single chick was seen by the shore before we sped west through the showers and beyond Coll to Hawes Bank, at the edge of the deeper water in the Minch.

On passage, a group of Common Dolphins joined the boat for a short while, and as we navigated into the deeper water west of Coll, several Minke Whales were seen. It was drier now and increasing numbers of Manx Shearwaters were in feeding rafts of up to a hundred birds, along with plenty of auks, including some good views of Puffins.

Once at Hawes Bank the engine was cut and the onion bag with soft chum was put over the stern, and remarkably, within minutes Storm Petrels started to appear attracted by the film of fishy oil on the sea surface. These provided remarkably prolonged views, sometimes down to a range of 20m. These were amongst the best views of this species for many on board, as most encounters with Storm Petrels are seen at long distance as they pass headlands, or short views from moving ferries. Up to 20 were in view at a time, with an estimated total of 100 seen. Despite careful scrutiny, all were European Storm Pet-



rels, with no hint of any Wilson's Storm Petrels amongst them, but it was a great outcome for the first pelagic to get such good views.

A surprise 'at sea' sighting was of a Swift, and as the boat moved west, some migrant waders were seen moving south past Coll—c.35 Black-tailed Godwit, 10 Bar-tailed Godwit and eight Knot. As the boat increased speed a switch was made to 'hard' chum, which left a trail of small pieces of fish behind the boat, attracting (again at close range) up to 40

Fulmars, and as we approached Gunna Sound, a feeding flock of up to 35 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. This feeding activity soon drew in some Bonxies (Great Skuas) with up to five present at any time, but probably involved around a dozen birds through the day. It was great to see these, as this seabird has been most affected by Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza ('Bird Flu'), with breeding numbers reported to be down by 70-80% at the main colonies. They were joined briefly by a dark-phase Arctic Skua before the Rathlin Express headed through Gunna Sound and made for Lunga on the Treshnish Isles.

As 2024 has been a 'late' breeding season for seabirds there were still large numbers on the cliffs of Lunga—lots of Puffins and Common Guillemots, and an encouraging number of Kittiwake nests with well-grown young. The large number of seabirds attracted three further Arctic Skuas and several Bonxies. While there, Jack Waldie spotted a Peregrine going over the boat, being harassed by Arctic Terns. On the shore were Greylag Geese, a well-grown

brood of four Eiders and migrant Redshanks.

All too soon it was time to head back to Tobermory, and a fly-by Great Northern Diver in full summer plumage was a fitting end to a fulfilling (if long) day at sea. While this inaugural pelagic in Argyll may not have found some of the most 'sought-after' rare seabirds it was a great success confirming that it was possible to get to the best sea areas in a day trip from Tobermory, and that 'chum' worked its magic, bringing birds close to the boat so allowing excellent views.

Unfortunately, strong winds and a sea-swell of over 3m led to the second trip on 20 August being cancelled. An alternative shorter trip went to the area around the Cairns of Coll, but viewing conditions were difficult as birds were quickly lost in the swell—and some on board wished they had taken their Stugeron (travel sickness tablets) with them. Plans are being made for further trips in 2025.

Jim Dickson, Stuart Gibson & David Jardine

Programme for the ABC's Autumn Meeting Saturday 2 November at the Inveraray Inn, Inveraray			
Time	Session/Speaker	Subject	Time slot
0930—1000	Doors open, coffee and tea		30
1000—1010	Nigel Scriven	Welcome & Introduction	10
1010—030	Bird Club	Summer Sightings Round-up	20
1030—1100	Vince Lea, Countryside Regeneration Trust	Waterlife Recovery: a Mink-free Britain	30
1100—1130		Coffee/tea break	30
1130—1200	Catriona Laird NatureScot	Saving Scotland's Choughs	30
1200—1230	Mark Wilson BTO Scotland	The potential of PAM: Passive acoustic monitoring as a tool for monitoring birds and other taxa	30
1230—1245	Nigel Scriven	Club Conservation Plan: Where do we go from here? What are the options?	15
1245—1400		Lunch	75
1400—1430	Argyll Bird Club	AGM	30
1430—1515	Leah Kelly, RSPB	Results of the 2023 Hen Harrier Survey	45
1515—1545		Coffee/tea break	30
1545—1615	Penelope Whitehorn Highlands Rewilding	Tayvallich Estate - Rewilding in Argyll	30
1615—1630	Nigel Scriven	<i>BTO Update -WinGS</i>	15
1630—1645	Club Members	<i>Raffle and closing remarks</i>	15

Contributions for the December *Eider* should be sent to the editor before the 20 November 2024

Officials and Committee of the Argyll Bird Club (2023-2024)

Chairman: Nigel Scriven, 14 Taylor Avenue, Kilbarchan, Johnstone PA10 2LS

e-mail chairman@argyllbirdclub.org

Vice Chairman: David Jardine, Hazel Cottage, 7 Barrmor View, Kilmartin, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8UN

E-mail vicechair@argyllbirdclub.org

Secretary: Alun ap Rhisiart, Braeside, Clynder, Argyll G84 0QL

e-mail secretary@argyllbirdclub.org

Treasurer: Peter Hogbin, South Craleckan, Furnace, Inveraray, Argyll PA32 8XN

e-mail treasurer@argyllbirdclub.org

Membership Secretary: Dorothy Hogbin, South Craleckan, Furnace, Inveraray, Argyll PA32 8XN

e-mail membership@argyllbirdclub.org

ABC Committee: Malcolm Chattwood (Lochgilphead), Gordon Holm (Strone), Lynsey Gibson (Ardishaig), Alistair McGregor (Dunoon), Steve Petty (Ardentinny), Andy Robinson (Stirling), Frauke Thornton (Dunoon).

Editor of the *Argyll Bird Report*: David Jardine, Hazel Cottage, 7 Barrmor View, Kilmartin, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8UN. E-mail vicechair@argyllbirdclub.org

Editor of the *Eider*: Steve Petty, Cluaran Cottage, Ardentinny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TR

e-mail eider@argyllbirdclub.org

ABC Website: <http://www.argyllbirdclub.org>

Argyll Bird Records Committee

Jim Dickson (Secretary, contact details below), John Bowler, Theo de Clermont, David Jardine, Malcolm Ogilvie & Andy Robinson

Argyll Bird Recorder

Jim Dickson, 11 Pipers Road, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8UF.

e-mail argyllbirder@outlook.com

Assistant Bird Recorder

Malcolm Chattwood, 1 The Stances, Kilmichael Glassary, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8QA

e-mail abcrecorder@outlook.com

BTO Regional Representatives in Argyll

Argyll Mainland, Bute & Gigha: Nigel Scriven

phone 01505 706652 mobile 07901 636353

e-mail chairman@argyllbirdclub.org

Argyll North (Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern): Ewan Miles

e-mail emb.gww@gmail.com

Islay, Jura & Colonsay: David Wood. Phone 01496 300118

e-mail david.wood@rspb.org.uk

WeBs Count Organiser, Mainland Argyll & Mull

Nigel Scriven, 14 Taylor Avenue, Kilbarchan, Johnstone PA10 2LS (phone numbers and e-mail above)



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).