



Editor and Webmaster

Isle of Mull Bird Club, Newsletter & Website

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“The Oystercatcher”

Dawn Chorus Walk Tuesday 7th May - early!

I have always thought 4am to still be night, but as we assembled in Aros Park in darkness there was clearly a pale glow in the east. Stuart materialised from the trees and announced he had already seen a woodcock – a crepuscular bird i.e. active in the twilight of dawn and dusk. An eerie croaking from the heronry was the only sound, but strictly not part of the dawn chorus!

We stood straining our ears and the first sounds were the soft call of a tawny owl, still a noise of the night. But soon a robin began a trill, prompting a second robin to strike up keen to announce its presence and protect its territory. Next was a blackbird with a sequence of phrases and then the strident song thrush - more easily identified - with its short clear phrases each repeated 2 or 3 times. The song thrush typically delivers its song from the topmost point of a tree, but we were only able to locate this one later when fully light.

The majority of singing birds are male, establishing and maintaining a territory, attracting and keeping a mate. However I learned that female robins do sing in January and February. Singing in the early morning enables the song to be heard more clearly against other (human made) noise later in the day and it may be that as many song birds are insectivorous and insects do not

appear until the day warms up, it makes sense for them to sing early and feed later. However the main reason for singing at the break of day is that this is when females are most receptive to males and so this is the time males need to display their prowess.

Coming late in life to bird song I have not found it easy to learn to identify birds by their song, but there is great pleasure in trying. However as we listened more species joined in, creating a wonderful concert, but some observed it would help if, once identified, a species could be switched off to then allow one to focus on the rest! Tree creeper, chaffinch and wren joined in while we stood in the clearing of the car park. Then moving in amongst the trees we heard goldcrest, blackcap and goldfinch. Three of the tit family could be heard - great tit, blue tit and coal tit. We learned that the great tit's familiar “teacher-teacher” may have as many variations as 70 around the UK, while each individual will have about 6 or 8 variations of its own depending on its age. It will use these in different parts of its territory and it has been found that a male great tits' attractiveness to females increases with the number of variations in its song. It also uses this to give the impression to less experienced males that there is lots of competition around – so no point hanging around here!

This first week in May there is lots of new growth of vegetation and Stuart drew our attention to the

way ferns have fronds that are rolled up with their tip in the centre and then unroll themselves as they come out – known as circinate vernation.

We walked up beside the river to the main track but had to leave the water to be able to hear more song. The first migrant heard was a wood warbler which demonstrated both variations of its song – the pew, pew, pew and then the rapid trill. It was good to hear them together. As we returned to the car park via the main track we heard dunnoek, bullfinch, and willow warbler nearby then a cuckoo in the distance. A greenfinch ‘wheezed’ from the trees and a pair of mistle thrushes were hunting on the grass but we had missed their song.

The full chorus had lasted about an hour after which there was still plenty of song, but not the full-on combination of several individuals of many species all competing for attention. It was agreed the early start was well worth it and many thanks are due to Stuart Gibson for leading us and sharing his huge knowledge.

Felicity Pollard (Club Secretary)

Saturday 22nd April 2017 Field Trip to the Morvern Peninsular

We were lucky with the weather on our first Spring visit to the Morvern Peninsular. And it was our first ride on the electric hybrid ferry, the ‘Lochinvar’; eerily quiet for a ferry! As usual we chose to walk along the old route from Lochaline to the head of the loch; and as usual Mike Wagemakers made the journey on his own, driving the Lochaline Community Bus - thanks again Mike!

Spring - the birds were singing - and it took some of us a while to get our ears adjusted! Past the mining facilities with their associated noises we found Goldcrest (a pair displaying to each other) and lots of Blackcap. The loch had RB Merganser, Goosander and Black-throated Diver. Our first Common Sandpiper was on the shoreline whilst the wooded hillside ‘trilled’ to the sound of Wren, Robin and Song Thrush.

We met Mike again, near the end of the loch, and drove the short distance to the bridge, not far from the boathouse. Eventually Dipper was seen from the bridge and another Song Thrush kept singing from the highest tree around whilst we added Meadow Pipit, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Swallow to our list.

At Kingairloch Great Northern Diver were seen during our lunch, along with Ringed Plover, Turnstone and several dozen Sand Martin, feeding hungrily on the flies above the fresh water as it trickled into the loch. We then drove along Loch Linnhe for a while; adding Twite, Stonechat, Wheatear and Wild Goat to our growing list. At the junction with the main road we turned back towards Lochaline; with a brief wander along the side-road to the Rohoy Estate, before parking up at the ferry terminal and dashing to the café or toilet (depending on your preference at the time!) After another splendid ‘tea’ at the café we departed for Fishnish.

Andrew Oldacre (Chairman)

Species List for the day:	
Red-Throated diver	Pied Wagtail
Black-Throated Diver	Meadow Pipit
Great Northern Diver	Rock Pipit
Little Grebe	Dipper
Gannet	Wren
Cormorant	Dunnoek
Shag	Robin
Grey Heron	Stonechat
Canada Goose	Wheatear
Mallard	Blackbird
Red-Breasted Merganser	Song Thrush
Goosander	Mistle Thrush
Common Buzzard	Blackcap
Oystercatcher	Willow warbler
Ringed Plover	Goldcrest
Curlew	Coal Tit
Greenshank	Great Tit
Common Sandpiper	Blue Tit
Turnstone	Chaffinch
Common Gull	Siskin
Herring Gull	Goldfinch
Greater Black-Backed Gull	Twite
Common Guillemot	Bullfinch
Black Guillemot	House Sparrow
Woodpigeon	Hooded Crow
Collared Dove	Raven
Cuckoo	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	
Sand Martin	
Swallow	
Grey Wagtail	

Machair on Mull

An appeal from the Friends of Calgary Bay.

The Friends of Calgary Bay are dedicated to protecting this beautiful area of Mull for the enjoyment of all. We now [need your help](#) to restore the fragile, degraded machair habitat to its full glory.

Calgary Bay is home to one of Europe's rarest habitats, the unique shell-rich sandy grassland called machair. Found only on the blustery West coasts of Scotland and Ireland, machair is notable for its dazzling array of wild flowers, which in turn attracts a wealth of invertebrates and birds.

Calgary's machair is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), reflecting its national importance. In summer it should be a riot of wild flowers, bees, butterflies, beetles and birds. But it's in trouble; the 'low sward height and the inability of most machair flowers to set seed' means that the SSSI is currently in 'unfavourable declining' condition. This is the result of overgrazing.

Friends of Calgary Bay, a community group affiliated with Mull and Iona Community Trust (MICT), have been working with the local grazier, land owner and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to introduce a grazing management scheme. This is common practice in other areas and only requires the removal of sheep for the four months of the growing season.

The only practical way to achieve this is by fencing. Full public access would remain and grazing would resume from September onwards. The seaward line of fencing will be hidden in the dunes, so will not be obtrusive. We know from previous trials that this will have a dramatic and immediate effect on the diversity of fauna and flora.

National Meadows Day 2017

Wildflower walk, Saturday 1st July

On National Meadows Day we will be joining celebrations at Treshnish Farm of their Coronation Meadow.

1st July is National Meadows Day and Treshnish Farm will be celebrating in their Coronation Meadow. They have invited us to incorporate our wildflower walk into these celebrations.

The meadows at Treshnish are really important habitats for a huge number of species. One of the fields is a Coronation Meadow – part of the Coronation Meadows Project started in 2013. Although the project has finished now, we continue to look after the meadows to enhance wild flowers and support biodiversity. We will talk about that as we walk!

What will happen that day? It is great to have the support of the Mull and Iona Ranger Service for this event. Rachel, this summer's Ranger at Mull Eagle Watch at Dervaig, is going to set some moth traps overnight the night before. She is joined by Meryl, the RSPB Ranger from the Glen Seilisdair hide. At 11am the event will start off with identifying the moths Rachel has trapped. At midday we take a guided walk along from the farm to the Coronation Meadow at Haunn. With two Rangers and members of Mull Bird Club it should be a very knowledgeable walk! We will see quite a variety of flowers, including Fragrant and Greater butterfly orchids and Wood bitter vetch.

Goosander

Some local observations ...

There were up to nine Goosander at Loch Cuin in late May this year. Cheryl Callow managed to take a few pictures; one of which is reproduced here.

