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“THE OYSTERCATCHER”

The Isle of Mull Bird Club Newsletter

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AVIEMORE ADVENTURERS

Based upon an original idea by Mike Wagemakers, we decided to put together a self catering Winter trip to the Lodges at Badaguish. Caerlaverock had been visited twice so it was time for a change. The Lodges were built only four years ago, in a "log cabin" style, but with all modern conveniences including gas fired under floor heating; a very welcome feature when it's sub zero outside! It was an early start on Monday 1st February 2010 when we met up by the ferry terminal at Fishnish. After re-packing a few cases and noting the variety of species at the feeders by the café we drove onboard for the 09.00 crossing to Lochaline on the Morvern Peninsula. The road was good [Highland Council] with only a few patches of ice remaining and we made Ardgour just in time for the crossing to Corran. How do they pack so many vehicles on that small ferry? North now on the infamous A82 to Fort William for a fill up with [relatively] cheap fuel. Some additional provisions were purchased at Morrison's before heading off to Spean Bridge. Turning right onto the A86 now, we started looking for a likely spot for mid-morning coffee! Ruth took the lead as she and Stuart knew of a place just along the road past Roy Bridge. It was a steep, snow covered side road to a car park, by a Church?, with a wonderful view. Well it would have been a wonderful view but by now it was snowing hard [sort of semi-blizzard] and our coffee break was spent inside the vehicles. Back on the road again and eventually the snow stopped and we were treated to a veritable wonderland of scenic views. We passed by Loch Laggan and the castle made famous by the TV series "Monarch of the Glen" before reaching Newtonmore. There were a good variety of bird species along the roads and fields including most of the Corvids, a good male Goosander, a Great Spotted Woodpecker, a Golden Eagle and a Jay. In Kingussie, we turned off the main road and onto the B970 heading for Coylumbridge, but stopped within a mile or so of the town to investigate the R.S.P.B. reserve at Insh Marshes. The ground was still snow covered and there were few species about but Buzzard and Whooper Swan were added to our list. After a picnic lunch we moved on along the B970 again and stopped short of Coylumbridge for a side trip to Loch an Eilean on the Rothiemurchus Estate. The Loch was frozen over [as virtually all the fresh water Lochs were] but in the car park, amongst a flock of Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch and Robin at the feeders, we found one Crested Tit. This was good news. On our first day we had found one of our target species, a speciality of the old Caledonian pine forest in the region. It was already starting to get dark by the time we arrived at the Badaguish Lodges. The man in charge of accommodation at the Lodges, Bob, gave us the low down on the various features including the heating system. Diana had prepared ahead for most of the main evening meals and so our vehicle was packed to the roof. But immediately everyone took part in unloading all the vehicles, no one sat around doing nothing, and so in short measure we were preparing the first evening meal. Selwyn decided that after all that work we all needed a refreshing "cuppa" so he simply got on with it and made a pot or two for the rest of us! It cannot be stressed too strongly what a cohesive group we had. Because of a mix up over dates Mike Wagemakers was unable to join our group for the full three days. However, he decided to travel independently and to camp near to Badaguish. We had learnt of this decision on the Sunday and so it was not a complete surprise to have Mike knocking at our door on that first evening! He joined us for a nightcap before returning to his tent. We decided to swop our itinerary around and travel up to the north east coast the following day. After another bitterly cold night the Tuesday morning started off with a clear sky and sunshine. Mike joined us for breakfast and we set off through Aviemore heading for Grantown-on-Spey. Here we turned north on the A939 and within a couple of miles we spotted, on the vast snow covered moorland, several small flocks of Red Grouse. As we got nearer to the coast the amount of snow about diminished rapidly. Our first stop was at Findhorn Bay; a lunch break and excellent birding from a hide! The tide was well out but was rising. We scanned the area and found large numbers of Shelduck, Teal, Red Knot, Redshank and Dunlin. Other species included Oystercatcher, Goldeneye, Bar-tailed Godwit and Black-headed Gull. As the tide came in the Red Knot were forming into ever larger groups along the beach, and being relentlessly moved on towards us before eventually taking off in spectacular formation to their roosting area.

Brian Rains had come to this area a couple of weeks previously and reported a King Eider at Burghead. The wind had increased by the time we arrived there and the tide was at its peak. Along the foreshore, on a rocky breakwater, a group of Red Knot, Turnstone and Redshank were roosting. Tucked in amongst them were a couple of Purple Sandpiper. We walked around the harbour and found Long-tailed Duck bobbing up and down in the surf between dives. We then drove around the town to the other side of the head to look for the elusive King Eider. The sky was getting cloudy and grey by now but as we pulled up a shaft of sunlight illuminated a small group of Common Eider. We scanned the sea to no avail and were about to depart when someone shouted, I've got it! Visible some 50 yards or more off shore was the King Eider. It gradually got further away as we watched it in the waves, first visible, then hidden. The wind had picked up even further as we finally lost sight of the bird. More Red Grouse on our return journey. The moorland north of Grantown-on-Spey was particularly good for this species and we had roadside encounters several times. We had a last coffee break at one lay by and were treated to the unmistakable sound of Red Grouse "get back, get back, get back" as they wandered off into the distance.

Mike joined us for an evening meal and decided that a mattress on the floor of the living room was preferable to a campsite tent in sub zero temperatures outside! He was off early the following morning for his hospital appointment in Glasgow that same day. After breakfast we drove up to the Cairngorm Ski Centre to look for Snow Bunting. The road was generally clear with a little ice and slush here and there. As we approached Loch Morlich the sun was back-lighting the mist hanging over the still frozen water. A photo opportunity not to be missed. As the road approached the ski centre it became clear that we would not have the car park to ourselves! Hundreds had turned up to enjoy the skiing and we felt oddly out of place with only our binoculars! However there were also about two dozen little birds flying about coming readily to food. I think we all managed to get some sort of photo of a Snow Bunting. Just down the road from the ski centre we stopped off at Glenmore Shop. This place was known to be good for Red Squirrel and it did not disappoint. There was just a chance of Pine Marten too but that was always a long shot during daylight hours. Later, at Loch Garten, we walked through the woods to the R.S.P.B. Osprey Centre hoping to see more Crested Tit. We watched the feeders for a while before deciding to cut our losses and return to Loch an Eilean once more. Once again we took advantage of free parking [no one in attendance at the hut] but found no Crested Tit at the feeders. Most of the party took a walk up to the Loch whilst a few remained to get pictures of the Chaffinch, Great Tit and Blue Tit at the feeders. After a while just a single Crested Tit put in an appearance long enough for a picture or two. It vanished for a while and then returned just as the walking party got back from the Loch. Light levels were now pretty poor so we decided that as the temperature was dropping too we'd head back to the warmth of Badaguish Lodges! After another excellent evening meal we decided to take advantage of the games room on the site. Here we played table tennis [after a fashion!] and Pool. Thursday dawned, another bright day, and after breakfast we packed the vehicles again for the journey home. Our judicious use of fuel meant that we got some of our deposit back and we left the Lodges at Badaguish contented. Well almost! Capercaillie was never going to be easy and so it proved but we did think that Ptarmigan was a possibility. So we took the long route home via the Lecht Ski Centre on the other side of Cairngorm. Here, we thought, was our best chance for that species. We arrived at the ski centre near midday having passed through roads surrounded by huge amounts of snow. In places the snow was two metres above the road and it was like driving through a tunnel without a roof! More close encounters with Red Grouse en-route despite trying to turn some of them into Black Grouse. At Lecht there were more Snow Buntings to delight us amongst the thronging crowds of ski folk! We had seen a sign, way back in Milton, that the road beyond the ski centre was closed. It was indeed but the activity of snowploughs led us to believe that it would open soon. Thankfully [or otherwise] it did. The area just beyond the ski centre was favourite for Ptarmigan. A long line of traffic that had been stranded just beyond our view descended to the ski centre and then we set off. More Red Grouse to be seen but no Ptarmigan. If the altitude was good for Red Grouse maybe it was too low for Ptarmigan? I guess so because none were seen. Maybe over the next hill? And so we went on hopefully to lunchtime, finding a suitable spot to overlook a mountainside. By the time we arrived in Pitlochry in the late afternoon it was clear that even the last ferry from Lochaline to Fishnish was going to go before we got there. We made the decision to extend our trip to another night and stayed at a small hotel in Fort William.

It was an excellent four days overall with more than sixty species seen, some in spectacular ways. We will definitely do this again, perhaps excluding the enforced stay in Fort William!

Species highlights:

Crested Tit, Snow Bunting, Red Grouse, Red Knot, Purple Sandpiper and King Eider.

A total of nearly seventy species seen over the four days.



Snow Bunting

Just a few photographs that from the many that were taken

Knot



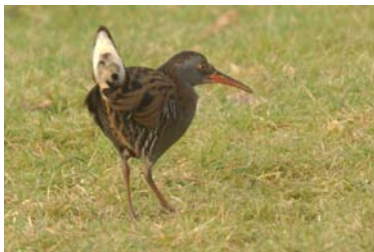
King Eider



A VERY SPECIAL VISITOR

The very cold weather of January and early February was very hard for the birds and I am sure that all of you watched the birds at your feeders eating every scrap of food that you put out. All the regular birds turned up every day and some not so regular. I had a Great Spotted Woodpecker which turned up over two days to feed on peanuts whilst trying desperately to hang on to the feeder. I had Greenfinches feeding on seeds and the males looked splendid and so colourful when the sun shone on them. There were Blackbirds and Song Thrushes feeding from the ground and Dunnock, Robin and Chaffinches. Starlings swooped down in their dozens, looking fantastic in their iridescent plumage and promptly 'cleared the table' I was also so very lucky to have a **Water Rail** visit my garden over four days. I only caught a brief sighting of the bird on the first day and so this prompted me to put up my hide in the garden. The following day (to the great amusement of Judith) I spent a couple of hours in the hide and managed to get some photographs with the bird as close as 3 metres. I have never been so close to a Water Rail and was able to see the fine detail of plumage. The Water Rail (*rallus aquaticus*) is a rarely seen bird on Mull, it is a very small (L 22cm) and secretive little bird, more often heard than seen. It lives and breeds deep in reed beds like the one at Dervaig. Only a few birds are reported each year and I am sure that it is under recorded because of its secretive nature. Debbie Thorne was also lucky enough to have a Water Rail in her garden at about the same time. (Feb 2010). The bitter freezing weather makes the ground so hard that they can not feed in their normal habitat and so this drives them into local gardens for food.

Alan Spellman



Two of these birds were, without doubt, different birds, being seen within minutes of each other, each flying from different places in the reeds to different destinations. The third may have been the second bird seen, although it must have moved a long, long way to rise out of the reeds where it did – anyway three sightings. Just to ice the cake, a Smew redhead on the water in front of the hide.

February 26th. Friday

After my experiences on the 24th I thought I would push my luck just a bit more so, before going to work, I spent an hour or so at Strumpshaw; my luck was in again and I saw yet another Bittern! There were two others in the Fen Hide, one was local, the other from Yorkshire on a week's birding trip and we locals had been giving him some instructions on how to get to where-ever. After we had filled in the visitor, I began to concentrate and to look for the Water Rail which had been spotted a little earlier but which I hadn't seen. I didn't find the Rail but I did spot a Bittern standing by the edge of the reeds just across the water, and in full view; I drew the others' attention to it. It then flew leisurely in a wide curve from the Fen Hide area round towards the main broad. With the bird I had seen over-flying the reed beds, and me, at Titchwell on January 13th this made five sightings in 2 months - can't be bad!

March 19th Friday.

Both Debbie and I had the day off and after a bit of a chat it was suggested we visit Suffolk, or Minsmere to be specific. It was a lovely day and so we walked on Westleton Heath first before going to the reserve. Once on the reserve we made our way to Bittern Hide and were told that, only minutes before, a bittern had been prowling about the edges of the reed bed directly in front and in full view. Debbie sat down but before I could take a seat, I saw a bittern flop into the reeds. I saw none of the bird's flight, just the bird as it dropped in, and I was the only one to see it. It remained visible plenty long enough for me to get my glasses on it; standing with its head tipped back, a typical bittern stance. It then moved slowly off and vanished into cover. With two birds in the immediate vicinity the eight or nine people in the hide were now razor sharp. It wasn't long before the bird we had missed earlier put in an appearance and was spotted immediately. It walked slowly across a 10 metre gap between the reed-beds and on reaching the other side, began to stalk the margins, occasionally picking up bits and pieces to eat. This was Debbie's first bittern and she couldn't have had better views. Whilst this was going on another bird appeared, skimming over the reeds. My neighbour said 'There's a harrier' but I corrected him – it was yet another bittern! Finally, a fourth bird was seen (on reflection, this may have been the first one I saw leaving the reeds having walked through the reed bed). Once again Debbie saw this and was able to track it for some distance before it dropped out of sight. From never having seen a bittern Debbie saw two, both really well, especially the stalking bird which must have been showing for 15 minutes, and all within 30 – 40 minutes!



Photograph by
Bill Knight

A TRIP TO STUMPSHAW FEN BY ROD HORNE

February 24th. Wednesday

Being at a loose end, I went to Strumpshaw Fen in the hope of seeing one of the Bitterns being reported from there – four in a day on one occasion. I had no intention of staying long, or working hard for them so when I ended up seeing three from the Fen Hide I was quite pleased to say the least!

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It's been a while. The season was just starting when I last wrote and now it's ending. And what a season!

I've already talked about the [delicious] outing to Aros Park for the fungi season so I'll not mention it again. A week or so later we had the "Fledging Party" at the Loch Frisa hide. I recall a male Hen Harrier was the main centre of attraction, even followed on screen courtesy of some nifty camera work. And lots of food! Aren't these events wonderful? In October Iain Erskine showed us the results of a wildlife safari to Tanzania, hand around A4 sized colour prints of the animals and birds he encountered. Nearer to home we ventured over to the Morvern Peninsular again, more successfully than the previous "only just made it back" trip of two years earlier.

In November Dave Sexton reviewed the "Highs and Lows of Springwatch and Autumnwatch" with some short films. We are lucky here to have such a wildlife spectacular on our doorstep. Later in the month, on a very wet day, we decided to go "off island" for some fish & chips. Strange you may ask, for indeed the trip was advertised on our website [you do look at the website dear reader?] as a day out for fish & chips at The Real Food Café in Tyndrum. Of course that was the main reason for going but we thought as we were on the mainland in a suitable area we'd visit the Argaty Centre to see the odd Red Kite or three. It rained all the way from Mull to Argaty and all the way back again but for the hour or so when the Centre staff put out some meat and the Kites were in action it was blue sky and sunshine!



We decided to have Christmas early this year. On previous occasions the "Christmas Party" had been held on the following January. A curious state of affairs but based upon the anniversary of the starting of the Bird Club. However, this year, because of the schedule of one of our

speakers, we departed from tradition and held it in December. Now I'm the first to admit that it finished much later than planned. And for that I apologise, especially to those folk who made the journey to Craignure from the further reaches of our island such as Fionnphort, Tobermory and Dervaig. Having said that we had a very full programme that evening. The photographic competition was so well supported that three sections had to be created where I was only expecting one. As a seasoned professional in the photographic industry I also have to say that I was very pleasantly surprised by the quality of the entries. The numbers were such that voting took a while over the three sections but eventually we had our three winners. The "Landscape" section was won by Ruth Fleming, the "Birds" section was won by Andrew Kirkham. He won the "Other Wildlife" section too! After the viewing there was musical entertainment. We started off with "the twelve days of Christmas" beautifully choreographed by Ted and Norma Dowling. Then Hannah Thorne played her penny whistle before Mike and Belinda Hale gave us some Christmas songs, with Mike on his guitar. Later in the month our field trip began at the Killiechranan campsite and meandered along the shores of Loch an Keal before we retired to the welcoming bar of the

Kinloch Hotel. Thanks to Arthur Brown for leading the trip and to Charles Pease for putting on a wonderful afternoon tea.

The Winter had already set in as one of the coldest on record and in January the number of volunteers for the BIG BIRD COUNT were limited. However those that braved the weather and conditions were rewarded with a total count of 81 species. Lower than in some years but I guess the wildlife was in short supply too! The highlight of the month was our indoor meeting on the 13th when David Lindo came to the Club. Well known as the "Urban Birder" David revealed the wealth of species to be found even in London, where he's based. Thanks to Debby Thorne for contacting David in the first place and getting him to travel to Mull; eventually! In February Phillip Price fully engaged his audience with his enthusiasm for photographing wildlife. Phillip runs a commercial outfit called "Loch Visions" and takes paying guests on photographic safaris [including to Mull]. Our field trip in February was to the Ross of Mull. We visited a number of places including Ardanish Bay and Fidden before being offered the most sumptuous afternoon tea at the Caol-ithe Guesthouse in Fionnphort run by Carol Marshall and Mike Wagemakers. Delicious!

In March we travelled [metaphorically speaking] to the Treshnish Islands with Erika Hearn and literally with Debby Thorne to Loch Frisa. After views of White-tailed Sea Eagle there we managed to see a "changeover" at the nest near to Killiechranan before again meandered along the shores of Loch na Keal. At the appointed time we made the short journey back into Salen for an afternoon tea at the Salen Hotel. Homemade cakes and biscuits went down wonderfully with lashings of tea!

With two meetings in April to look forward to and the BIG BIRD COUNT during "Wild Isles Week" I'll leave you until next time. Keep looking at the Club's website for all the details.

Andrew Oldacre
Chairman.

ORTOLAN BUNTING



This is a very rare bird for the UK and even so on Mull, we reported on this in the last "Oystercatcher" and the following two photographs were taken by Sandra Price and

Alison Ingle at Craignure Camp Site, who actually spotted the bird.



THE URBAN BIRDER ON MULL

By Debby Thorne

During January, David Lindo (aka The Urban Birder) presenter on The One Show, Springwatch and writer for Birds, BBC Wildlife and Birdwatching magazine visited Mull with photographer Russell Spencer. David was here to write an article for the spring edition of Birds magazine on the wildlife of Mull and also to talk at one of our Bird Club Meetings on Urban Birding. David and Russell were here for nearly a week when the Island had just experienced the worst snow and ice for years! They had been on the Island for 30 minutes when a juvenile white tailed eagle flew in front of them – Dave Sexton and I had to convince them it wasn't a remote controlled bird! David's talk at the Bird Club was a huge success – he spoke about his special birding patch – The Scrubs – which many of you may be familiar with as a prison! But for David it's his piece of birding paradise. He is passionate about trying to get people in towns and cities to just stop and look around them and see what's right under their noses – a whole host of birdlife! His talk was accompanied by some stunning photography provided by Russell and had we were all enthralled. Whilst on Mull, David saw his first Scottish Golden Eagles – not just one but two playing tag in Glen More. Despite the weather, they managed to see a whole host of birds including Jack Snipe, woodcock and a merlin! The one bird that eluded us were snow buntings – there were reports of them in Glen More but every time we drove through, of course, they had vanished! A great time was had by all, and I'm sure it won't be long before they are back!

David's Website: <http://www.theurbanbirder.com/home/>
Russell Spencer flickr site: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/remove-before-flight/>



David Lindo, Russell Spencer and Dave Sexton watching Eagles in Glen More

David Lindo and members of the Bird club at Fidden (from left to right) Andy Oldacre, David Lindo, Peter Hall & Mike Wagemakers)



"SPA"RING PARTNERS

Love is definitely in the air on Mull, these two "lovers" were spotted not too many miles away from where I am sitting typing this and we have them monitored daily, let us hope that they have a shed load of little ones. Thanks to Bob and Linda Boswick for the photographs.



"Lady in Waiting"



"Good Grubs"

TWO DAYS OF EAGLE WATCHING

On a calm dry morning, the area around the caravan is alive with the sounds of approaching Spring. A mixed flock of Siskin and Redpoll move noisily from tree to tree in search of food. Coal, Blue and Great Tits are singing everywhere and now and again a Wren or Dunnock pops up and bursts into song. A Great Spotted Woodpecker drums on one of the remaining tall deciduous trees amongst the plantation pines. Down by the road a Reed Bunting flits from bush to tree and back again and in the rank grass beyond the stone wall male Stonechat try to out-sing each other. Through the valley Red Deer graze and gradually move up the slope whilst a Hen Harrier glides in moth like flaps looking for the telltale movement of its prey in the vegetation below. I sat wondering why I'd want to be anywhere else.

Tuesday 30th March 2010

I arrived at the gate by the caravan just after 08.00 this morning and was immediately aware of a WTSE in the sky to the left of the nest. It drifted over the nest and past before banking around towards the nest. It was at this point I realised there was now a second WTSE appearing to have come from the nest or nearby [although I did not at any time see a perched bird anywhere] and join the bird already circling. They did not interact but simply drifted off in the direction of Loch Spelve. No activity on the nest then or later. One bird was bigger than the other suggesting male and female. I drove up the Grasspoint road worrying that there was some sort of disturbance but found nothing. I returned to base and watched until 10.00 but no sign of a bird either in the sky or at the nest. I later got a report that all was well at the nest. I confirmed the presence of Jay in the area on sound, and saw one bird cross the valley from behind the caravan to the fenced-in wooded area across the other side. I got a good flight view and its spread wings as it landed.

Wednesday 31st March 2010

At about 08.30 I noticed three large birds circling around over the hillside. Not a one hundred percent sure at first but then it became clear that I was watching three young Golden Eagles. One of our Lochdon WTSE's ap-

peared and the comparison was clear. There was no interaction and our bird flew off towards Loch Spelve. It later re-appeared and there was some interaction for a while [flying upside down and presenting talons to the GE] before disappearing in the direction of Loch Spelve once more. I watched the three young GE for a while, they gradually moved towards Loch Don over the Grass-point road and were continually interacting with each other with no one bird dominant. A variety of other species were taking flight at the mass approach of large predators and at one point at least two of them were dive-bombing a Grey Heron! It flew off eventually and there was interaction mid-air before the GE continued their play. Later, once the skies had been clear for a while, I noticed that the three had now become six and were just to the right of the nest tree. Our WTSE returned and there was more interaction for a while before the WTSE landed on the nest structure and then dropped into the nest. The other, "sitting" bird did not appear or I simply missed it going. The six GE continued to circle around, at one point forming a vertical column. Gradually they disappeared from view.

During this period a Kestrel was seen hovering and a Buzzard was stalling in the wind trying to do the same. Then a lone GE turned up heading for the fenced woodland opposite the caravan, accompanied by a crow. The crow lost interest, but against the dark of the woodland it was clear that the GE was probably very young for it had white spots on the wing and upper and lower white bands on the tail. The other GE were showing some white on the under-wing but no or little white on their tails. Quite a session; for most of the time between 08.30 and 10.00 there was some activity in the sky.

Andrew Oldacre.

Our Trip to Mull (Part 1)

I received this article from Tony Jenkins, Bird Club Member, and I thought it was very interesting. The trip is in the form of a diary of their visit in June 1989. It is interesting to see what birds they saw then and what we have now. The September part of the article will be in the next "Oystercatcher".....Ed

TOSTARY HOUSE, KILNINIAN, JUNE 1989

Friday 9th June

We leave the Castle at 0940 hrs heading north up the M5 then M6, we meet up with Col, Glen & Pete at the Keele service exit. We continue north crossing the border at 1440hrs, on to Callander where we spot 4 roe deer in a clearing near the road, we stop near here for a snack. Our route takes us through Crianlarich on the A82 up to Rannoch Moor and down through Glen Coe, the mountains are capped with snow, the weather is overcast and dark clouds threaten. We arrive at the Corran ferry terminal at 1800hrs, C.G & P drive on to Glenelg to find Camusfura where Gavin Cambell lived. The ferry departs fairly soon (£3.00) for the 10 min crossing, we then take the A861 along Loch Linnhe stopping at several places to birdwatch, we have cormorants, eiders with ducklings, wheatears, herons, curlew, common sandpipers, r.b. mergansers, oystercatchers, pipits and terns.

Saturday 10th June

We wake around 0730hrs , walk along the beach , the weather is

fine, overcast but dry, there is no-one around to pay for last night so we leave at 0830hrs, collect groceries and fill up with petrol for the trip down to the Lochaline ferry terminal, en route along the coast there are common sands, pied wagtails, herons, buzzards and wheatears.

Cross over to Mull on the 1145hr ferry, the trip takes 15 mins, we spot around 12 terns during the trip. Land at Fishnish 1205hrs, we head towards Tobermory spotting buzzard on a telegraph pole and a kestrel hovering. Top up with fuel and collect groceries in the town also a few books from the tourist information centre, The Birds of Mull and 2 books on walks in north Mull and walks in south Mull. Continue west to Der-vaig first stopping at the Mishnish lochs where we add a little grebe to our list, then on to Torloisk and collect the key to the house from Mrs Johnson, she says that there are otters and golden eagles in the area. We spot a great northern diver in breeding plumage on loch Tuath, arrive at the house at 1500hrs, I pick out 2 more g.n. divers through the scope. Jan and Rhys wander down to the shore while I unpack, they see a merlin, I relax and read through the birds of mull and walks on mull. Colin, Glen & Pete arrive at 1830hrs, we all walk down to the shore where there are common sandpipers, oystercatchers, ringed plovers, black guillemot and a single gannet. I find a meadow pipit nest with 4 eggs near the house. After dinner we then walk back down to the shore, a grey seal makes an appearance, we return at 2230hrs.

Sunday 11th June

Waking up at 0610hrs, myself, Col & Rhys walk north-west along the cliff tops towards Treshnish, we walk as far as rubh-an-t-suibhein. We see black guillemots, great black backed gulls, ravens, cuckoos, a herring gull's nest with 2 chicks and around 30 shags, arrive back at the house at 0810hrs, breakfast and prepare for our walk to the 'fossil tree'. We all leave at 0930hrs arriving at the Tioran car park at 1100hrs, the book states it is a 7 mile walk out to the tree, we follow a good track for around 4 miles then it is more rough going along the cliff ledges and beach for the last section. We climb down to the beach by means of an old iron ladder , Glen waits here as she has the dog, it's around another ½ mile to the tree. En route we see shelduck, curlew, yellowhammer, robin, spotted flycatcher, grey wagtail, peregrine, kestrel, buzzards, mergansers, eider, mallard, 4 red deer and 3 other dead deer, (fallen from cliff ledges), willow warbler/chiff chaff, an injured meadow pipit, Colin finds a dead yellow bird on the rocks, it is a male golden oriole ! The surviving stump of the tree is not very impressive, apparently the Victorian collectors had removed most of the remaining tree and all that is left is a 6 foot stump which has been capped with concrete to prevent further damage. We take several photos then make our way back, the weather is windy with sunny intervals and some light showers, we arrive back at the house at 1900hrs. The verdict is, that it was a long hard walk especially along the cliff edges and the tree itself does not justify 14 miles but it was a really wild area and worthy of another trip in the future, at least I would go back!

Monday 12th June

Up early again 0630hrs, watch a buzzard hunting over the cliff ledges in front of the house as I eat breakfast, a gannet is fishing offshore. A collective decision is made to venture to Tobermory to collect groceries, having done this we walk up in to the hills above the Mishnish lochs to a point called s'airde beinn (lochans aired beinn), this is the site of an old volcano and we can see the outline of the rim. We find hare droppings and grouse pellets around the rim and there are some good views, back to the cars and looking over the lochs. Returning to the lochs , Colin spots a white bird, it is an albino sand martin amongst the other martins, also we have ravens, buzzard and willow warbler. Drive on to Caliach point which although this viewpoint is mentioned in the birds of mull book, it now appears to be private property, we ask per-

mission to walk out to the point, this is granted but no dogs are allowed so Glen stays in the car. After a cloudy drizzly start the weather has now cleared to bright skies and a fresh wind, we take the short walk across the machair to the cliff edge where we have whinchats, swallows, twite and offshore gannets, arctic skua, fulmars, gulls, guillemots, nesting shags below us, I then spot a brown shape swimming just underneath the water close to the rocky shore, it is leaving a wake, I shout 'otter', we then get 15 minutes of really good views as it feeds then grooms itself before swimming through the rocks along the shoreline.

Tuesday 13th June

The weather starts overcast and mild, walk down to the beach at 0745hrs, start sea fishing using limpet for bait and trying spinning as well with no luck, however I hit lucky because 2 otters swim close by from left to right, I keep still and watch, they are close enough not to need binoculars, they swim right across the small bay called traigh na cille, all this before 0830hrs, another good sighting occurs about an hour later when an otter swims right to left in mid channel. Birds spotted this morning include oystercatchers, ringed plovers, common sands, mergansers, rock pipit, wheatears attacking a kestrel and a buzzard.

After lunch Jan, Rhys and myself drive to Calgary and walk around the north side of the bay, we find a seal's skull to add to Rhys's collection, Jan spots a large brown rat inside a seal's carcass, we continue walking on the lower raised beach, a buzzard soars along the cliff tops whilst a grey seal is fishing in the bay, there are 4 divers out in the bay and we eventually confirm that they are red-throated in breeding plumage. Black guillemots are flying in from the sea towards the cliffs, they are probably nesting here. We arrive back at the house at 1700hrs, a pheasant is calling. After dinner we get further good views of an otter feeding in the bay below the house. Take several sunset photos.

Wednesday 14th June

A fine morning for our trip to the Treshnish Isles, the Staffa and Lunga cruise, but first Jan and I go down to the beach, the sand is volcanic granules of basalt and is dark grey. I seawatch with the scope, a grey seal spotted about 50m offshore. We set off for Ulva ferry terminal at 0955hrs and depart at 1030hrs, there are around 60 people on board, we land on Staffa at 1205hrs and walk to Fingals cave where the tide rushes in and makes the powerful sounds that inspired Mendleson. We can now concentrate on our birds as the island is alive with them, nesting shags, puffins, razorbills, guillemots, fulmars and kittewakes, I take several photos. We depart from Staffa at 1310hrs, there are several small colonies of seals then 2 arctic skuas fly over. As we wait to disembark on Lunga a gbb gull is attacking eider ducklings by dropping them into the sea then drowning them, we can do nothing, it is nature at work, we land on the island at 1405hrs and walk around taking photos of puffins, shags and guillemots, the weather is bright and sunny, we can approach the puffins to within around 5 feet so we manage some good quality photos. Rhys collects egg shells and a puffin skull.

We leave Lunga at 1600hrs and continue on around the Treshnish Isles before returning to Ulva at 1740hrs, on returning to the terminal we spot 5 seals near the entrance to the loch and a gannet flying by. We have all caught the sun today through a combination of sea spray, wind and bright sunshine, a good day out

Jan and Glen cook the evening meal, later myself and Rhys follow the moorland path to Calgary, after about 45 minutes we reach high point where we spot a buzzard hunting over a tree lined gully to our left whilst to our right we spot several red deer amongst the bracken, we count at least 7.

Thursday 15th June

I walk down to the shore then back along the clifftops, a seal swims by and cuckoos are flying low over the bracken. At 0900hrs we all set off for a trip to Carsaig, en route I spot a large bird of prey near the cliffs of the Gribun, we stop at the post office at Pennyghael for food, camera film and postcards, on turning right on the Carsaig track we spot a redstart, continue on the narrow track over the hill and drop down into Carsaig, we park and walk west along the shoreline towards the nuns cave and sapphire beds. A herd of 9 or 10 wild goats are grazing along the rough track, they appear not to take too much notice of us, we locate the nuns cave a short distance past the rock formation that looks like a sphinx's head, there are 2 dead goats inside, we can make out dates on the shallow arched roof of the cave, we look around the rocky shoreline for sapphires with no luck.

We return to the car and have lunch, at 1530hrs we return to the cliffs of the Gribun where we park at the col before the road descends to the coast, we can now identify several large birds of prey as golden eagles, we count 3 individuals, they appear to be performing a mating display, we also have peregrines and ravens here which give a good size comparison.

Friday 16th June

Up at 0730hrs, cloudy morning, set off for Tobermory at 0850hrs, stop briefly at the Mishnish lochs where we see 2 r.t. divers and 4 goldeneye, we collect more food and fill up with petrol then drive south to Salen then down the south shore of Loch na Keal before parking near the road bridge and taking the track up to the summit of Ben More, the cloud base is at around 2000', there are several pipits along the route, as we climb up steadily into the cloud base we pick out a small herd of red deer down in the glen to our right, there are between 10 and 14 individuals. We follow the line of cairns up to the summit shelter, a couple are making the return journey, we cannot see more than 30 metres or so but sense that the path runs close to the north face of the mountain. As we approach the summit we encounter a large flock of ravens soaring around the ridge possibly between 50-60 birds.

We reach the summit at 1315hrs and stop for a quick drink, I start to cool down quickly and have stomach cramp, we make our return journey after 5mins, Rhys is running on ahead full of energy, as we reach the point around 2000' where the cloud starts to thin we spot 2 mountain hares and then a possible ptarmigan, then another sighting of red deer down in the glen, we count 13 this time. We arrive back at the car at 1530hrs, we drive up to the pass through the cliffs of the Gribun and look out for eagles again, we are rewarded with good views once again, this time 2 birds are criss crossing the gap. On the way through the Gribun estate Jan spots 3 roe bucks alongside the road, I manage a couple of photos from the range rover. There are eiders and shags on Loch na Keal, we return to the house and viewing across to Ben More the peak is still shrouded in dense cloud.

PROFILE ON RUSSELL SPENCER

For those of you who do not know Russell Spencer, who is an honorary member, and he accompanied David Lindo when he came here to speak to the Bird Club.

How I got started?

I have always loved birds. As a kid growing up in North London birds and wildlife in general were an escape, so I developed a deep interest in behaviour through many hours of observation.

Fave birds?

Wow, so many! I love all raptors for their flying abilities, I am in awe of migrants and the distances they travel, I am amazed by hummingbirds and lyre birds, I love Gulls and the diversity and similarity in species and I would be lost without my Sparrows, Tits and finches that have always been part of my daily life.

Fave places to watch

Different species bring different delights, for instance visiting Mull for White Tails and getting to see the beautiful isle, going to Bempton Cliffs to see Gannets and leaning over the breathtaking cliffs. One recent favourite was being lucky enough to join the Tower 42 Bird Study Group (formed by David) atop the tower watching a female Peregrine hunting over the city of London – for once there were not many pigeons about!

Little bit about myself

I live in Cheshunt with my wife Yvette, we both work for Pharmaceutical companies and I run the photography in parallel, so it takes a lot of evenings and weekends up! However we both share a passion for wild life and birds in particular, we spend many hours sitting in the kitchen scanning the garden and many more walking our local patch Fishers Green, part of the Lee Valley Park.

Dreams and aspirations

I would love to combine photography, my love of nature and my business experience into a career of some sort, while living amongst it all, for instance Strumble Head in Pembrokeshire, or Scotland and it's Isles - maybe Mull..?)



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BIRD CLUB AGM

Our AGM was held on the 16th April., the committee is as follows:-

Chairman: Andy Oldacre

Vice Chairman: Diana Oldacre

Treasurer: Peter T Hall ACIB

Secretary: Pam Brown

Membership Secretary: Janet T Hall

Oystercatcher Editor: Janet T Hall

Committee Members:

Janet Hall, Bridgitt Marthaler, Belinda Hale.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Just a reminder that subscriptions for the new Birding Year starting 1st April are now due. The subscription remains unchanged at £5.00, and I know many of you have already paid. If you have not done so, would you please let me have your subscription as soon as possible. Many thanks.

Peter T Hall ACIB
Club Treasurer

AND FINALLY....

I would just like to say a big "Thank you" to all the people who have contributed to this newsletter after my plea for stories, please keep them coming no matter how small or large they are. Just send them to me anytime as if I am not able to put them in the current newsletter, I will keep them and they will go in subsequent newsletters. Once again, Thank you and Happy Birding!!!

ED

