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"THE OYSTERCATCHER"

The Isle of Mull Bird Club Newsletter

www.mullbirdclub.org.uk

January 2007

THAT LONG BILLED MURRELET

By Edwin Shackleton



In early November, news of a Long Billed Murrelet at Dawlish crashed into the bird news sources. I checked in my "Birds of North America" and found no reference at all but that the Marbled Murrelet had a "long slender bill". The temptation to visit the area proved overwhelming and on Sunday 12th November, I had a clear run down the M5 into Dawlish town. This is some 95 miles north of Bristol and parked at the railway station. I luckily got the last vacant space. Under the railway bridge and on to the promenade, there were dozens of telescope bearers on their way home. Yes they had seen Murrelet but it had gone way out to sea and it would be best to go to Dawlish Warren, some 1 1/2 miles away. A long trek along the promenade adjacent to the railway and literally hundreds of frustrated birders gazed out to sea with "have you seen it yet?" remarks. Eventually a call

came, "it's flying" and I caught a binocular view as it passed a small boat and landed, but distant. Gradually the Murrelet drifted towards the famous Langstone Rock and came into good binocular sight. It was said that some 2000 birders had been there and many had travelled overnight from Tyneside, Nottingham, Kent even a reported Belgian! The bird, just 8 inches long (half the length of a Guillemot) was extremely active, spending 5 to 10 seconds on the surface and about double the time below water. I did see it with a sand eel. Experts said that the Long billed Murrelet was a recent offshoot of the Marbled Murrelet and that it was an inhabitant of the NW Pacific. Pangs of hunger attracted me back to Dawlish and then I strolled back under the railway line to the narrow stone jetty. A largish gathering of people were obvious in nearby Coryton Bay with telescopes. It had flown right across the bay. So I quickly made tracks in that direction and people were saying that it was only 20 feet out. Not paying attention to the array of people, it gave brilliant sightings and after one particular dive it came right out of the water. I counted 120 telescopes in that bay, just a fraction of the group at Langstone Rock.

In the past I have seen the Belted Kingfisher in Cornwall, the Wall-creeper at Cheddar both in the 1970's but the Murrelet has to take top marks as it was the only reported live sighting in Europe.

*Edwin Shackleton
Bristol Member*

THE NEWSLETTER

Just to remind you all that this is the last newsletter that will be sent in hard copy format. All newsletters from now on will either be in PDF format and sent to members or if you have access to the internet, it can be downloaded from the website. ONLY If you do not have a computer or do not have access to the internet and you require a hard copy, please let me know by 28th February 2007. Please ring me!!

Can I also ask that if you do change your email address, please let me know.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks for September e mail bulletin its always good to read of Mull, as I said in my phone call to yourself , in may 06 - we arrived on mull May 27th- we stayed at Glenhouses Dervaig having missed our spot at Gorten -- however we have booked early for next year back at Gorten.
our Dervaig holiday proved to be the last for one of our collies she passed away in June sadly----
-- she was a Mull stalwart
regards Norman + Gill. Stafford



Nuthatch on Feeder

Courtesy Steve Kirk

FIRST MEETING OF THE WINTER SEASON OCTOBER MEETING

The Isle of Mull Bird Club held its first meeting of the autumn on Friday 20th October. The meeting started with a presentation by the club president, Alan Spellman to Len and Pam White, of a picture of a black throated diver. Len, who was secretary from the inception of the club, was thanked for his hard work and for his calming influence and Pam was thanked for running the monthly raffle in particular her creative industry buying the prizes and also for making sure we were all fed with tea and biscuits at the meetings. Where Len was the swan providing a calm cooling influence for the club Pam was the feet splashing like mad beneath the surface making sure everything ran smoothly.

The talk at the meeting, given by Sue Dewar, of 'Wings over Mull' was on organic farming and its effect on wildlife. This was very interesting and some of the data produced gave us all a lot of food for thought. Following the usual get together tea and biscuits we had an informal chat about wildlife seen during the summer, by members in their gardens. This prompted some lively, and at times very humorous, discussion, which was enjoyed by all. The meeting finished at 9.30pm giving members with a long journey time to get home.

The following day the Bird Club field trip continued the theme by visiting Ardalanish Organic Farm and Isle of Mull Weavers, home of Minty and Aeneas MacKay. Aeneas gave us a very enlightened talk on organic farming, the running of the weaving looms and where he hoped organics can go in the future to help crafting and rural communities. On being questioned on the effects of wildlife on Ardalanish, he replied that nature and farming should go hand in hand, that this year he had seen 6 corn buntings on the farm, which given the current decline in the numbers of this species is a credit to Minty and Aeneas and their methods.

After coffee we went for a walk around the farm seeing golden eagle at close quarters and then making a precarious climb down to Ardalanish beach. A special mention must be made to Janet Ackroyd for her fortitude and good humour on this part of the walk. This may have had a lot to do with the fact that she was attracting men to help like 'moths to a candle'! The afternoon saw us visit Fidden Farm to see the geese and Whooper swans.

To end a beautiful day we went to Ardachy House for delicious afternoon tea and cakes provided by Cathy and Maggie. Their hospitality was first class and we were able to relax before the journey home, discussing all we had seen and agreeing that the club had started the season in fine style seeing 46 bird species in the day.

UPDATE ON SEA EAGLES

People often ask how Itchy & Scratchy (Red I & S), the stars of BBC's Springwatch 2005, are faring. In case you wanted it for website news etc...

Scratchy (Loch Frisa, Springwatch 2005) was seen on Wednesday 10 January at Loch na Keal as was Oatie (Loch Frisa 2006). Other 2006 Mull chicks: yellow P on the Mull of Kintyre, yellow G still on Mull, yellow N in Strathspey. No records for a while of Itchy (Red I) & Haggis (Yellow H).

cheers for now
Dave Sexton

RED KITE PROGRAMME IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

Report sent in by New Bird Club Member Steve Kirk

Introduction.

Red Kites are large birds with a distinctive forked tail. They have a wing-span of around 150 centimetres (5 feet) and a length of around 60 cms (2 feet), yet they weigh little more than a kilogram (2.20lbs)! They are listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which gives them special protection, not least during their breeding season when they are protected against intentional or reckless disturbance of their nests and young. Detailed information about Red Kites can be found in 'The Red Kite' by Ian Carter, Arlequin Press 2001, ISBN 1 900159 61 9.

Red Kites became extinct in England and Scotland around 150 to 200 years ago. The Yorkshire Red Kite Project is one of seven which aim to see Red Kites re-established in suitable habitat in England and Scotland and linking up with the resurgent Welsh kite population which just managed to avoid extinction. The Yorkshire Project, the fifth in this sequence, began in 1999. A total of 69 birds, all sourced from the very successful initial English release area in The Chilterns, were released in Yorkshire up to 2003. This figure was supplemented by an untagged bird of unknown origin which arrived in late 1999 – she obviously liked what she saw as she stayed and played a significant role in establishing a Yorkshire breeding population. Up to and including the 2005 breeding season, no fewer than 165 young had been raised in Yorkshire. Details are given below of what happened in 2006.

Monitoring.

Activity in 2006 has again concentrated on monitoring the expanding population and liaising with an increasing number of landowners, gamekeepers and farmers, onto whose ground the birds have spread. The co-operation and assistance of all involved is very much appreciated.

All of the young kites released in Yorkshire were fitted with wing-tags and radio-transmitters. Tags and transmitters have also been fitted to young birds fledged in the wild. This is likely to continue until it is clear that the population has become firmly established in the county. The proportion of untagged birds in the population is increasing and we look forward to the day when tagging will no longer be necessary.

Wing-tags fitted to Yorkshire kites in 2006 were:

Left wing – Orange (the Yorkshire area identifier)

Right-wing – Green (the year identifier – it will be Black in 2007)

Year identifier tags fitted in previous years were Black (1999), Pink (2000), Blue (2001), White (2002), Red (2003), Yellow (2004), Orange (2005).



Photographs taken by Steve Kirk

I would like to thank Steve for sending in these pictures the above is an extract from their Newsletter, If members wish to see the full report on the Red Kites which Steve sent to me, please drop me an email and I will forward you the whole Newsletter. *Editor*

MY PATCH

Arthur Brown



Croig

Calgary Bay - Cailiach Point - Croig

Calgary Bay a white sandy beach set within volcanic rock with a Machair foreshore and large deciduous woodland, how many habitats is that in one area. On the beach in early morning waders can be found, usually Oystercatchers, Curlew, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Turnstone, but I have also seen Knot and Little Stint here as well. All 3 Divers can be seen in the bay in the winter with Red Throated all year, along with the ubiquitous Shags and in the summer Auks and Terns add to the fun. Common Gulls are present all year and it is good for Lesser Black Backed Gulls in summer. In spring look out for incoming migrants in the woodland as they join the Blue, Great and Coal Tits on their breeding sites in the woodland, Goldcrests and Tree Creepers are also seen here. Take the walk to the coast past the pier and you could see members of the finch family, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Linnet and if you are lucky maybe a Twite. On the volcanic hills surrounding the bay Peregrine Falcons have been seen, Hen Harrier nest locally as do a pair of Golden Eagles and the Loch Frisa White Tailed Sea Eagles are regularly seen flying over looking for a meal. In the summer Calgary is one of the best places on Mull to get a close look at Basking Sharks, particularly if you happen to be swimming in the shallow water. Bottle Nosed Dolphins appear occasionally and Minke Whales have also been seen at Calgary.

Cailiach Point, beautiful and remote, the most westerly point on Mull, arguably also the

windiest part of Mull, but I think it is a special place. Sea watching can be very rewarding here, Gannets plunge diving, Manx Shearwater in their hundreds, look out for a Cory's or a Sooty Shearwater I have not seen any yet but others have. All the Auks are here, as well as the seemingly fragile Kittiwakes along with breeding majestic Fulmars, it can be a fantastic place for sea bird lovers. As well as sea birds Oystercatchers breed here, so do Kestrel and Buzzard and it is a good area for Merlin because lots of Wheatear, Skylarks, Meadow Pipit and Rock Pipit breed here. Rock Doves and Raven breed on the cliffs joining the Hooded Crows giving acrobatic flying displays. Otter and Atlantic Grey Seals are to be found in the bays the seals give you the impression they are watching you as much as you are watching them, they are so curious. The other delight of Cailiach is its beauty and solitude, looking out to the small isles Eigg, Rhum, Muck and Canna with the Cuillins of Skye in the background you could imagine yourself completely alone in the world, it is magical.

Croig a lovely bay and harbour a very good place to see Otter up close if you are lucky, there are seals here as well and again it is pretty it is well worth a visit. Park on the side ¼ of a mile down the Croig road and walk looking for small birds in the trees and thrushes on the fields. When you reach the harbour look out for waders in the mud and as the bay widens Stonechats can be found, they are joined by their relatives the Whinchat in the summer. Keep walking and you will come upon 3 or 4 little beaches, these are delightful and quite remote and just the place to relax on a summer evening after a nice day birding. All in all this is a great area to live in and with the Dervaig reed bed just round the corner what more could a bird watcher ask.

PROFILE

Mike Wagemakers

Why an interest in Birds?

It's hard to say why, from a young boy I have always had an interest albeit in an unstructured way. I didn't even own a pair of binoculars. I was fortunate as a 14 year old to go on a school's expedition to Iceland and I had the responsibility of recording birdlife seen. However, it is really only in the last 15 years or so that I have really taken a

more specific interest but even then why they have grabbed my imagination I can't place my finger on. I have a more than general love of the countryside but birds are really the only things that I seem to be adept at recognising and remembering. Plants I can't remember to save my life.

Who do you admire in the Bird World?

For me Bill Oddie is a favourite. It has always been a surprise that someone I new as a comedian as in the background spent all his free time rushing, sorry ambling, around the countryside. I enjoy his humour, and his infectious nature had done much to legitimise bird watching in the eyes of the general public.

What do you like about birding?

Being out in the countryside has always been an important part of my life. Professionally as an outdoor pursuits specialist, my climbing, canoeing, sailing and walking has taken me to very varied and often wild habitats but always there has been the wide variety of bird life to accompany me. Being able to pass on what little knowledge to others that I have been out with has been a bonus.

What do you dislike?

Not being able to get out more, work has always been very demanding on my time and having the time to myself for enjoying my bird watching has often been a frustration.

Why Mull?

Mull particularly was an accident but love the west coast of Scotland and now that I am here it is wonderful to be in a place that has great scenery, still wild unfrequented places and of course great speciality species.

Favourite Reserve?

Particularly enjoy North Norfolk and the Solway Firth with Titchwell in Norfolk and Caerlaverock in Dumfries are very much favourites, although being more tuned in to the WWT enjoy all wetland reserves.

Which was your favourite foreign holiday?

Not being great foreign travellers not an easy question. Have enjoyed Majorca with its wide varieties of species but Britain has much to offer and I think often hard to beat.

Favourite Bird?

Wildfowl have always been a favourite, whether that is because of my love of the water I don't know, but migration is a fascination, how do they do it? And seeing the skeins of geese, spring and autumn, are still for me the hairs on the back of neck, spine tingling emotions. Favourite bird The Barnacle Goose. So if we move to Islay or Dumfries don't be surprised.

How do you see the future?

Sadly the future for wildlife generally does seem bleak if the media is anything to go by. We certainly are going to see some species disappear but others will take their place. We certainly as a race need to give more time to minimise our effect on the planet but there is also a part of me that says – these sorts of issues have gone on for millennia and who knows what exciting species, with evolution, will appear in the future.

Finally, what do you see in the future for the Bird Club?

I think the bird club has a variety of functions. It must continue as a forum for like-minded people to share their knowledge and interest. It is also important for its social value. However, there are wider implications and I hope that in our small way, together with other bird groups, we will be able to contribute to the knowledge base of bird life and so to assist in seeking solutions to solve the problems that birds face. For me always a disappointment is the lack of interest from younger people and I hope that we can do something about that. How we compete with computers, ipods and Wii's I don't know. It is sad I think that even in a place like Mull youngsters don't seem to have the interest in the outdoors and what it has to offer as perhaps youngsters 50 years ago might have had.

Mike Wagemakers

SCOTLAND'S sea eagle population has

Celebrity summer ends with 'A list' visitors

Courtesy of RSPB Scotland

November 2006

received a record boost for a second year running after 29 young eagles fledged from nests in 2006.

The Isle of Mull took the spoils again this year, with 10 young fledgling eagles taking flight from the popular west-coast tourist destination, now famed for its huge feathered residents. Skye's sea eagles also put on a good performance, with one pair hatching three chicks – an exceptionally rare event which has been recorded just twice in the past 30 years. Although the third Skye chick sadly died after unseasonably bad weather, the remaining chicks fledged fit and healthy with their parents often seen catching fish close to

tourist boats around the island – to the delight of tourists and wildlife-watchers. Such breeding success is pinned on the hard work of volunteers and communities across the country, especially in the well-known breeding areas of Mull and the Isle of Skye, which are home to almost two thirds of the Scottish sea eagle population of 33 breeding pairs. The dedicated local teams work closely with the police, to ensure that all eagle nests are given the best chance of success, not least at Forestry Commission Scotland's (FCS) Loch Frisa site where RSPB Scotland works with the 'Commission to show an active nest to visitors each year. A similar project using live CCTV cameras at the Aros Centre on Skye, attracted over 8,500 visitors in 2006, taking the total number of people who have seen sea eagles in Scotland through the RSPB's Aren't Birds Brilliant! project to 13,000 this year. The 2006 Mull fledglings, named 'Haggis' and 'Oatie' by local schoolchildren, were popular with visitors of all ages including veteran broadcaster John Craven, who saw his first sea eagle. More recently Oscar nominated actor Tom Conti visited the island's sea eagles as part of a new BBC television series *Saving Planet Earth* due for broadcast next year. Skye's eagle pair are also set to feature in the BBC's new *Nature's Calendar* series in the coming months. The continuing popularity of the Loch Frisa site has ensured that the economic boost to the Isle of Mull looks set to continue, with visitors to Argyll and the isles encouraged to report any sightings of 'wing-tagged' sea eagles, allowing RSPB staff to monitor their progress once they have left the relative safety of the home territory. After 2005's BBC *Springwatch* broadcast and progress reports in this year's series, the enthusiasm for wildlife watching shows no sign of slowing down as the RSPB's Mull Officer David Sexton confirms: "Over 5,500 people enjoyed watching Skye, Frisa, Haggis and Oatie at Loch Frisa this year and booking enquiries for next year are already coming in. The local Tourist Information Centres also recorded their busiest season yet for visitors coming to see wildlife. The challenge now is to ensure that the sea eagles and other wildlife are not adversely affected by all this additional, but welcome interest in our incredible natural world. The aim must be for wildlife to thrive and for people to be enthused and satisfied by their experience. It's important too that they realise that

the biodiversity is so rich here largely thanks to the way the land and seas are managed and the people that do it. Long may it remain so" Mull Eagle Watch involves a host of partners ranging from Strathclyde police, local residents, farms and estates, through to Mull-based businesses like Crerar Hotels, Scottish Sea Farms and Marine Harvest. These and other community groups such as the Mull & Iona Community Trust and national bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage are all working together to protect sea eagles, whilst allowing the public to enjoy the spectacle of seeing them in their natural environment. The Mull Eagle Watch team is grateful for the kind support from Heritage Lottery Fund via the Nadir Trust.

CHAIRMAN'S VIEW

As 2006 comes to an end may I thank all the members for their support in my 1st year as chairman of the Bird Club. I hope that this support will continue in 2007 and that some of you will come up with ideas to move the club forward. I would like to thank the committee for all their hard work keeping me on the straight and narrow, also to Alan Spellman & Len White for all their help: all of you who know me realise that I need it more than most. After being chairman now for 8 months I realise what a great debt of gratitude we all owe Alan and Len, not forgetting Pete who is still on the committee, without their drive and commitment I doubt if we would even have a bird club today, let alone one that boasts over 120 members. We now have a committee of 8 members all of who contribute and help with the running of the club as do the members, more letters, contributions to the Oystercatcher, and garden sightings please. In the early years there was only a committee of three and they did a fantastic job, it would be remiss of me not to show the clubs appreciation in my New Year column and to state that as long as I am in the chair any input that either Alan or Len wish to make on how the club is run will be more than welcome, After the December meeting some people, inspired by Stuart Gibson's excellent talk and slides of North West Scotland, The Faeroe and

Iceland suggested maybe a field trip to Iceland: who knows, maybe in the future? Stuart is another member and excellent birder whose contributions and suggestions for the club are more than welcome and I can honestly say we are lucky to have a birder with such a wealth of knowledge in the bird club. Finally the unsung hero's awards go to Jan Hall for continuing to produce the Oystercatcher magazine for us all to enjoy. To Susan Hall for organising the tea rota so efficiently that we never go hungry or thirsty at club meetings. Pam White for her thoughtful gifts for draw prizes, she has been doing this since the clubs inception and deserves all our thanks. Finally to Pam, my Pam what can I say she is my diary, my inspiration, and secretary and when she pushes me out the door makes sure that I have every thing that I need. To all of you on behalf of the club a very big thanks you. You know the saying behind every man there is a good woman, well, I have four. One of our new initiatives to be undertaken by the club is joining The British Trust for Ornithology (B.T.O.) The B.T.O. does lots of research into how our birds are fairing in the world and with their world shrinking I think it is important for members to send in sightings, in particularly winter warblers you see anywhere, Blackcaps, Gold crests and if you are really lucky a Firecrest. I would like to wish all our members a very Happy New Year, enjoy your birding and I hope to see a lot of you at the Bird Race on 6th Jan, 10am prompt; another new idea which I hope will be well supported. Please check web site for start points for the day.

Arthur Brown - Chairman

BIRD RACE

The Mull Bird Club held it's first ever 'Bird Race' on January 6th with 24 members participating in 7 teams. For anyone who doesn't know what a 'bird race' is, the 7 teams started from different parts of Mull at 10 am prompt and each team tries to see as many birds as possible before a set finishing time in our race 3 pm. All teams ended up at the Isle of Mull Hotel for tea and biscuits where there lists were checked. The event proved so popular that members want to do another one at the end of April/beginning of May, possibly in Wild isles week when some visitors could take part. In any event the

New Year 'bird race' on the first Saturday in January is going to be a regular feature of the Mull Bird Club in the future. A total of 79 species were seen on the day, not bad as weather conditions could have been better. The President, Alan Spellman, vice chairman, John Preston and Andy & Diane Oldacre were the winning team, so congratulations to them. A special mention to Ted & Norma Dowling and Clifford & Ruth Moisey who although are fairly new to bird watching took part and really enjoyed the day were arguably the most enthusiastic. A brief round up of birds seen on the day, all 3 divers, Slavonian and Little Grebes, Tufted duck, rare on Mull. Many waders were seen including the rarer Greenshank and Bar-tailed Godwits. Birds of prey were seen in abundance including a Peregrine Falcon, Hen Harriers and both eagles. Kittiwakes a very good spot and Glaucous Gulls, white winged gulls from Iceland, Razorbills, Guillemots and Black Guillemots and finally a Greater Spotted Woodpecker.

At the January club meeting the club chairman presented a wood sculpture of an Oystercatcher to the winning team which will be contested for at every bird race.

Thanks to the Isle of Mull hotel for their hospitality and also to Stewart Gibson whose devilish sense of humour provided a sting in the tail on some score cards with his wildcard which deducted 3 off any team which had seen a White-Tailed Sea Eagle.

WHITE TAILED SEA EAGLE

At the January club meeting David Sexton of the R.S.P.B. on Mull asked members to give thought to the numbers of tourists going down the Grasspoint road to look for the W.T.S.Eagles. This is a valid point as there are now several other pairs of W.T.S.E to be seen on Mull as well as the controlled site at Loch Frisa. He requested members with holiday businesses might suggest other areas of Mull where guests could go to look for W.T.S.E. and therefore take the pressure off the Grasspoint pair.

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SEA EAGLE HIDE 2007

In 2007, the sea eagle hide booking line will open at 0900 on Monday 19 March on 01688 302 038. The line will be open daily from 0900-1700. Trips to the hide will begin on Monday 2 April. This is all provisional at this stage depending on the Loch Frisa sea eagles, location of nest, egg laying etc. The hide will probably close after any chicks fledge around 15 July. This will all be confirmed nearer the time as will the meeting point for trips. Wildlife law advisory notices will be on the Loch Frisa track advising on risks of disturbance. The nest and surrounding area is kept under surveillance by Strathclyde police and local volunteers on Mull Eagle Watch. There is no vehicular access along the track from either end. Please book as far ahead of your visit to Mull as possible. During May and June most trips will be filling up fast and trying to book on the morning of the day you wish to visit is likely to be unsuccessful. We will be putting more trips on this year to try and cope with the demand. At present it is thought likely there will be trips Mon-Fri 1000, 1300 and 1600; Sat 1000 and 1300 and Sun 1200 and 1500. This is provisional at this stage and subject to change. Costs for the trips for visitors (including RSPB members) will be £4 adults and £2 children. A family ticket of 2 adults and 2 children will be £10. Island residents are free. All money raised goes back to the project and to local Mull & Iona good causes. The sea eagle viewing project on Mull is a partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Mull & Iona Community Trust, Strathclyde police, local volunteers and RSPB Scotland. It is grateful for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund via the Nadair Trust. For further information also check the RSPB's website www.rspb.org.uk and follow the links to 'Aren't Birds Brilliant!'

Copy for the next newsletter must be in by 15th April 2007 to make the 30th April deadline