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“THE OYSTERCATCHER”

The Isle of Mull Bird Club Newsletter

www.mullbirdclub.org.uk

JUNE 2009

*NEW CHAIRMAN FOR
ISLE OF MULL BIRD CLUB.....
ANDY OLDACRE*

As a boy in the West Midlands I was interested in steam engines, of course; then I had a vague idea about being an engineer of some sort. I actually started an apprenticeship in engineering but then fell under the spell of photography! I had been in Hagley Camera Club for a while when a fellow apprentice and photographic club member brought in a prospectus for the Birmingham School of Photography. I went for an interview at the school; situated in Dorrington Road in the leafy suburb of Great Barr, and was accepted. The Head of School seemed particularly impressed that I already knew the difference between 'depth of field' and 'depth of focus'. In the end my fellow apprentice carried on in engineering and I went to study professional photography for three years. With five years in engineering under my belt I was certainly the oldest in class, as all my fellow students at Dorrington Road were straight from school. After a short spell working for a distinctly non-professional outfit in Birmingham city centre I formed a new company with fellow photographer Paul Smart. He and I developed the business for twenty years. From humble beginnings at the back of a barber's shop in Kingswinford we progressed to a 2400 sq. ft. purpose built studio in Brierley Hill. We pretty well cornered the local market for furniture photography and went on to room sets for some of the biggest carpet manufacturers in Kidderminster. Along the way we did a huge amount of photographic and design work for the Cadbury-Schweppes Group and we made and laminated tens of thousands of colour prints for all types of sales and marketing promotions. The financial meltdown of the early 1990's, when several of our largest accounts went 'belly up', finally put an end to us and I moved on.



Now at a much lower level of activity I set up a graphic design unit with yet another fellow member of the same photographic club we had both joined back in the 1960's. From this I expanded side-ways into the creation of user-friendly websites and am still doing so today. What about the birdwatching I hear you ask. There's a photographic connection here too. Another member of Hagley Camera Club suggested an outing to Glen Coe. Off we went, in the middle of the night from the West Midlands, to take some sunrise pictures in Glen Coe! In those days there was no bridge at Ballachulish and we had to drive around the whole of the Loch Leven shore-line to arrive at Onich, just south of the Corran Ferry. Here we found a beautifully calm, misty scene with a lone yacht anchored off-shore. A superb picture opportunity. Trotting along the beach was this strange bird. Mainly black and white with a long orange-red bill. I wondered what that exotic species could be. On returning to the West Midlands I asked my best friend if he could help

identify it. Doug had taken up birdwatching some months earlier so he knew infinitely more than I did. The bird in question was, of course, an Oystercatcher. The circle begins to close. Through birding I met Diana, on a birdwatching holiday to Tanzania, and after many visits to Mull and joining the Mull Bird Club, we finally moved to the island in November 2005.

And all this because of photography and that Oystercatcher.

How apt is the club's logo!

Andy Oldacre
Chairman

Your New Committee

Vice Chairman	Diana Oldacre
Treasurer	Peter Hall
Secretary	Pam Brown

Committee Members:

Janet Hall
Monica Frith
Sue Hall
Debbie Thorne

Tea Rota

Everybody wants to take a turn at being tea monitor, but feel they do not know what it entails. Bring along the tea basket (check if there is plenty of tea, coffee and sugar) if you have been given it at the last meeting along with a bottle of milk.

1. Set out crockery and plates of biscuits, there is no need to bake unless you want to.
2. Switch on half filled urn, (someone who's done it before will show you how it works)
3. Put 4 teabags in each tea pot.
4. Put a spoon of coffee in several cups.
5. Ask the speaker for a 5 minute warning.
6. Boil kettles for coffee.
7. Make tea.
8. Put milk out.
9. Open shutter.

10. SMILE

See it's painless and much appreciated. After everyone has had tea/coffee, wash up and tidy kitchen. .

Any expenses incurred by the tea monitors will be reimbursed by the club.

Thankyou,
Susan Hall

Firsts for Mull

We have had some interesting firsts for the island in the last few years. One of the joys of watching birds is that you never know just what might turn up. A little knowledge and a regular check of the weather forecasts can guide you as to what to expect. Bitter cold weather in the north will bring down Waxwing, Snow Bunting and Brambling in the winter, as they have to find food and escape from the worst of the cold. Strong easterly winds from Europe, especially in spring, can force small birds from their normal migration path and drop them into the UK where they will stay for a few days to rest and feed before continuing their migration. It gives us the chance to see birds that we don't normally see.

The regular hurricanes of the Americas can whisk birds across the Atlantic Ocean in a matter of days. The Western Isles, being the first stretch of land for thousands of miles receive good numbers of North American birds blown far across the sea. Occasionally, when Snow Geese are migrating from Greenland to Ireland in autumn, strong westerly winds have forced them onto Mull, and a flock, forty strong rested up at Killiechronan for a few days in 2003. Very few of the smaller birds that get blown across will ever return, the prevailing westerly winds being just too strong. Changing weather patterns from the south, be they high pressure or strong winds, will enable birds to move further north than they normally would, and for a brief period, a new bird to the UK turns up in a local's garden and the twitchers scramble to see it, many travelling hundreds of miles only to be disappointed as the bird has moved on.

Then there is the effect that global warming is having on our birds, as they struggle to adapt to changes in their habitats and food supplies, they are being forced to move either north or south away from their normal breeding areas, or naturally expand their area of breeding like Little Egrets in the south, now breeding there when only a few years ago they stayed in Europe. Or the Common Crane which has now taken up residence in Norfolk and is breeding there.

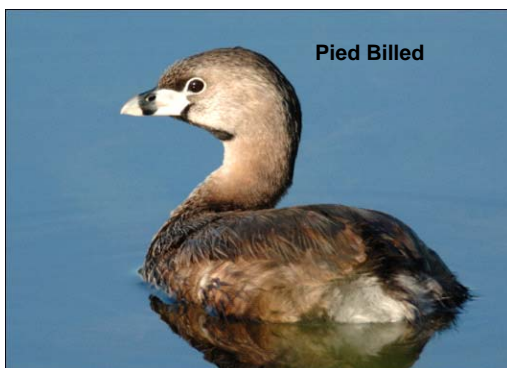
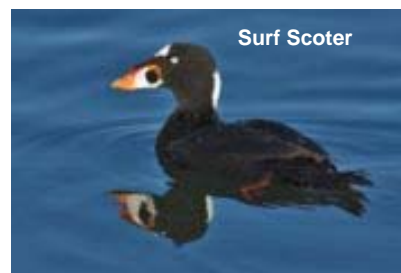
Over the last few years we have had some 'firsts for Mull' visit our island.

In June & July 1998 a **Pied billed Grebe**, a very rare visitor from North America was found at the Mishnish Lochs and stayed around for three months. On 30th July 2008 a **Rose coloured Starling** was found in Dervaig by Pam & Arthur Brown and later, in August, seen in a Bunes-san garden, seen & photographed by Diana & Andy Oldacre and myself. This very colourful starling was thousands of miles from where it should have been. It normally lives in northern Asia and lives in large communities, being very gregarious and noisy like other Starlings.

Also in 10th April 2008 we had our first ever Nuthatch, found and photographed at Calgary by Andrew Mortley and seen again June in Pete & Jan Hall's garden at Craignure and by Phil McDermott at Lochdon A

very rare **Ortolan Bunting** was found at Craignure camp site 9th May 2009. This is a first record for Mull and for Argyll. Ortolan Buntings don't normally visit the UK. They stay in Europe and Scandinavia. They migrate to tropical Africa and are a very scarce migrant to the UK. At Loch Beg, Pennyghael an **American Golden Plover**, which breeds on the tundra of Alaska and Canada was feeding with a flock of European Golden Plover in September 2005 and recorded by Bryan Rains. That most colourful of birds, the **Bee Eater**, has made several visits to our island, to Glengorm in June 1998 and to Loch Buie and Killiechronan in May and September 2003. This is a bird many of you will have seen whilst visiting Spain and other Mediterranean countries. A male **Surf Scoter** from North America spent several days in Craignure Bay in May 1999 and there has also been a female Surf Scoter in Laggan Bay. Once a more common bird, the **Red backed Shrike**, has suffered from destruction of its habitat, and is now a rare visitor from the eastern Mediterranean. One was at Pennyghael in June 1998 and a second bird was found along the Grasspoint road in May 2007. The **Ring billed Gull** at Oban Harbour has been returning for several years now. It really belongs in North America and seems to like to spend its winters here. In a Tobermory garden a **Crested tit** turned up and stayed for a few weeks in October- November 2002. This was a first for Mull. Crested Tits are normally sedentary birds, not moving far from their territories and the nearest birds are north of Fort William and in Speyside. Pam & Arthur Brown & I became very excited when we watched a **Ross's Gull** for forty minutes in October 2004 at Fidden. This small and dainty gull nests on arctic tundra in Greenland and Canada and spends most of the year in arctic & sub arctic waters close to pack ice. It's a very rare bird in Europe and here it was on Mull. Watching this little bird, so far away from its normal territory made our day. More recently the **Nightjar** is now a rarities species and for the last three years we have had these amazing night flying birds regularly visit Mull. There are records from over 20 years ago but in 2006 birds were seen on 2 nights in late May at Balmeanach camp site, and at Scoor, and Quinish in June. In 2007 and again in 2008 birds returned and were heard and seen. As I write this (in mid May) we are awaiting the arrival of the Nightjar which usually makes an appearance at the end of May. This seems to be another effect of climate changes which is encouraging the birds to move north, and to our benefit. To hear Nightjar on a still summer night and perhaps be fortunate enough to see them displaying is a sight every one should have the chance to experience.

Alan Spellman





Wagtail, Great Tit, Common Gull, Starling, curlew, Great Northern Diver, Cormorant, Pheasant, Mallard, Raven, Grey Heron, Blue Tit, Wheatear, Skylark, Goldcrest, Greylag goose, Redshank, Blackcap, Treecreeper, Goldfinch, Siskin, Woodpigeon, Lesser black backed Gull, coal Tit. *List (compiled by Peter Hall.)*

Monica Frith

One to Watch

The Red-breasted Merganser is a real character among the clan of diving ducks, and has a distinct north and west maritime distribution in the British Isles. A significant number of the 2,300 pairs that breed around the British coast do so in Western Scotland and the N. W. Highlands, where it is a feature of many sea lochs and sheltered bays. Although comparatively few reside in Scotland, the Red-breasted Merganser is a hugely successful species in the Northern Hemisphere. It enjoys a complete circumpolar distribution, with birds breeding from Alaska and Canada, east to Siberia and the Bering Straits. Unlike other ducks, including its closest relation, the Goosander, the Red-breasted Merganser does not have a dependence on trees for nesting purposes, so has been able to colonise open ground that is unsuitable for other species. Red-breasted Mergansers are often confused with their larger congener, the Goosander. Although the general rule that the Red-breasted Merganser is the coastal equivalent of the freshwater-loving Goosander normally applies, there are exceptions to this 'rule'. Red-breasted Mergansers nest predominantly around the coast, but some pairs breed far inland on freshwater lochs. Goosanders breed along tree-fringed rivers, but may be seen outwith the breeding season on some sea lochs. The attractively-plumaged drakes are not so readily mistaken as the 'red-headed' females. The shape of the duck's head can give you an important clue as to the bird's identity. The smaller-headed Red-breasted Merganser has a very distinctive 'punk hairstyle' (very late 1970's !), with two peaks of spiky 'hair', at the rear of the crown and on it's nape. The 'hair' of the female Goosander lacks this spiky feathering, hanging at the back of the neck 'in a bob'. Game fish, such as Salmon and Trout, are important prey items in the diet of Red-breasted Mergansers. Because of their depredations on fish, Red-breasted Mergansers have come into conflict with fishermen and have been both legally and illegally persecuted as a result. Red-breasted Mergansers possess long, thin and highly-serrated bills, armed with teeth-like protrusions, superbly adapted for gripping slippery prey like fish. Although they dive for fish, Red-breasted Mergansers spend much of the time above the surface with only their head submersed. This 'snorkeling' behaviour allows them to search for likely prey, and is akin to a Kestrel hovering above ground on the lookout for small mammals. Once identified, Red-breasted Mergansers dive in pursuit of their next meal in a somewhat unique way for ducks, as they use both their wings and feet for underwater propulsion. It could be said that they are, indeed, 'flying underwater'. Much of their diet consists of small fish, which are eaten underwater, with only larger items

Field Trip April 09

I Don't believe it !!! there is a field trip today and the sun is shining—wow!!, well almost - it was when I left Tobermory, but by the time I got to the meeting place at Duart Castle car park, it was cloudy with a cool breeze. A small party of 10 set off to meander down the road to see what we could find. Willow Warblers were in full voice and swallows were flitting about the wire - summer must have arrived. There were plenty of birds around including Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Thrush etc., with a parachuting Pipit to add to the enjoyment. In the water we saw Oystercatcher, Curlew, Shellduck to name but a few. From Duart we drove down to Torosay, by this time the sun had broken through the cloud and we sat out in the open air to have our lunch. We got rather too comfy and almost forgot we were on a "bird walk". This time we walked through the woodland where we were lucky enough to see and hear blackcaps and a treecreeper to add to our list of woodland birds. We ambled along enjoying the sights and sounds of a beautiful spring day with fantastic views over the Sound of Mull to the distant hills which were hazy in the heat. We returned to Torosay via the hedgehog walk, with time to spare for a little more sunbathing, ice-cream eating or wandering around the Castle Gardens, before moving into the Craignure Inn for tea and cakes. A thoroughly enjoyable day when we saw the following 44 species: Swallow, Meadow Pipit, Hooded Crow, Shellduck, Oystercatcher, Herring gull, Willow Warbler, Linnet, Song thrush, Wren, Razorbill, Great black backed gull, Robin, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Redpoll, Eider, Lapwing, Buzzard, Pied

being brought to the surface to subdue. Most fish are caught in relatively shallow water (< 5 metres) and although birds can be underwater for up to two minutes, the duration of most dives is around 30 seconds. Red-breasted Mergansers are accomplished solo feeders, but they will also hunt in pairs or small groups, in order to drive a shoal of small fish into the shallows where they are easier to catch. Red-breasted Mergansers breed throughout the coastline of Mull, and may also be seen on some freshwater lochs, e.g. Loch Ba. The Isle of Mull Bird Club would like to hear of any pairs of this attractive 'sea duck' seen on local freshwater lochs during the breeding season. In late Winter and early Spring watch for displaying males in breeding areas : birds will posture by jerking their heads and necks into a forward-pointing 'salute', as well as appearing to bow or 'curtsey', by elevating their rear ends, while depressing the front of their bodies. At such times, the drake's shaggy crest is either raised or lowered as part of the display ritual. Nests are difficult to locate and breeding is best confirmed by watching for the presence of ducklings once the eggs hatch. Merganser chicks are taken to water almost immediately after they have hatched and dried in the nest. Once there, they may be joined by other families and creched in the same manner as the Eider. There is a record of one female baby-sitting no fewer than 51 chicks, the probable result of around six or seven nests ! The survival chances of young mergansers is very poor, with most falling prey to local gulls, otters and, where young are escorted on to freshwater, pike, whenever this aquatic predator is present. Moulting migrations of Red-breasted Mergansers occur in the sea lochs of Western Scotland, when males temporarily assume the same 'red-headed' appearance of females. A late Summer flock of moulting birds previously gathered in Scallastle Bay, in the Sound of Mull, but it is not known if this is still the case. A visit to this area in July - August by local bird-watchers would be helpful in ascertaining the post-breeding status of this sawbill on the island. Likewise, the possibility exists that other moulting groups of 'Snorky' and his friends may be going undetected elsewhere on the island at this time.



Susan's Garden

I have been on site for 6 months and since Christmas have put out the odd morsel for the birds and lately seeds and nuts. The workmen have thrown half eaten butties and until this week I had not seen any birds eating. (I have a feeling Philo is guilty) I have seed that has grown with the sunshine and rain. I put out some cake and hey presto a chaffinch. I hope this is the start of some good bird visits.

Susan Hall

**NOTE TO ALL MEMBERS:
IF YOU CHANGE YOUR EMAIL
ADDRESS, POSTAL ADDRESS,
PHONE NUMBER. PLEASE
LET ME KNOW AS SOON AS
POSSIBLE YOUR HELP
WOULD BE
APPRECIATED**

Editor

A day out for a paddle

Well, when I say paddle I mean a steamer. My husband and I decided to take a trip on the Waverley which was coming to Tobermory on June 1st for a trip out to Tiree. We duly boarded this wonderful vessel at 12.00pm on Monday, the boat was practically full and for the first half an hour or so we sat on the boat and people watched, mmmmmmm. The Captain was very forthcoming and told us where we were and what we could see either on the port or starboard, (I can never work out which) so if we could not see it on one side we rushed over to the other. Peter had obviously taken binoculars and I my camera. We went down into the excellent restaurant to eat lunch and then back up to the topside of the boat, when the captain announced that if we looked to one side of the boat which was lucky as that was the side we were on, we could see basking sharks and a minkie whale. Then a few more miles on he announced another set of basking sharks, and yet another set. We arrived at Tiree and several people got off and we stayed on board to have an hours cruise up the Gunna sound, and luckily we did as we saw more basking sharks. They seemed to be all over the place. We met a couple in the coffee shop who said they had counted them so what we actually saw was 43 basking sharks and 1 minkie whale. Not a bad day then for wildlife. The conditions were very good, it was quite a hot day and the sea was flat calm, like a millpond. We arrived back at about 5.50 in the evening to Tobermory and both said what a wonderful day we had had.

Sorry no pictures of basking sharks. They were too quick for us.

Janet and Peter Hall

ISLE OF MULL BIRD CLUB

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE Y/E 31ST MARCH 2009

INCOME

Membership	750.00
Admission	150.00
Raffle	221.50
Stickers	6.00
Bank Interest Received	9.61
Sale of Keyrings	4.00
Donations	80.00
Caerlaverock Trip	<u>280.00</u>
 Total Income	 <u>1501.11</u>

EXPENDITURE

Hall Rent	155.00
Heating	18.00
Printing, Postage, Stationery	271.52
Speakers' Expenses	6.49
Gifts for Speakers & outgoing	
Committee members	61.97
Caerlaverock Trip	336.00
Computer Repair	30.00
January Party Expenses	44.27
Donation: British Humanities Aid	100.00
Extension Cable	13.49
Web Space & Webmaster	54.10
Flowers	<u>34.79</u>
 Total Expenditure	 <u>1125.63</u>

Surplus of income over expenditure 375.48

Balances B/F 01.04.08

Bank Account	1163.76
Cash in Hand	<u>52.02</u>
 Total	 1215.78
Add excess of income over expenditure	375.48
Grand Total	<u>1591.26</u>

Represented by balances 31.03.09

Bank Account	1554.26
Cash in Hand	<u>37.00</u>
 Grand Total	 <u>1591.26</u>

Peter T Hall ACIB
11.04.09/ PTH/jth/accs8

Audited and certified correct from the books and papers produced
Michael E Jordan, Tobermory
Auditor

A note from your Treas-

Alongside are this year's accounts. Due to technical problems at the AGM, this will be the first time most of you will have seen them. If anyone has any queries, please let me know.

Can I just mention that if you have not yet paid your subs - still only £5 per year - they are now overdue.

Thank you

Peter T Hall ACIB
Treasurer