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"THE OYSTERCATCHER"

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A TRIP TO TIREE

By Alan Spellman with contributions from Arthur Brown!!!!

We caught the last ferry from Mull to stay overnight in Oban, had a supper of fish and chips and on the return to our accommodation for the night we checked the foreshore and found the Ring billed Gull and an adult Glaucous Gull within a few feet of one another. It was cold and dark and a time of the day I did not know even existed. At five thirty in the morning we were eating a breakfast of bacon and eggs at the Harbour View. We then tramped across to the ferry, all lit up and ready to sail, that's the ferry all lit up! (not me) as I sleep walked behind Arthur and dragged my suit case behind me. Tickets at the ready we boarded the "Lord of the isles", bound for Coll and on to Tiree. The boat sailed at 06.45 hours and we moved up the Sound of Mull just as the morning sky was beginning to lighten.

As we passed the northern tip of Mull the sky had brightened to a clear sky and prospects of sun shine. Looking across to Ardmore we spied a pair of Sea Eagles, one sitting on a favourite rock and another high in the sky. There were very few sea birds about at this time of the morning which made me think "how sensible they were to be still in bed at this time of the day" We enjoyed a three hour sail to Coll, up on the bridge, then to Starboard and again to Port, peering through our binoculars looking for Divers....Sea Gulls....Gannets.....Anything.? Looking Aft and at the Bow end. There was little activity, a few Auks and Gulls and as we neared Coll, Eider and Shag. From Coll it was another 45 minutes to Tiree where we disembarked and picked up our hire car. My driver Arthur (whom I had brought along to help with the baggage and to drive the vehicle), grated in to first gear and we moved off to find our accommodation. Now, who would think that it was even possible to get lost on the single tracks of a small island like Tiree. Well let me report that it is possible, I know because we did it. Anyway we arrive at our accommodation and dropped of our bags, had a coffee and set off on our first exploration of the island of Tiree. We stayed at "Fawltly Towers Tiree" where Arthur had a shower which started out icy cold then almost instantly went scalding hot and later turned brown and finally clogged up the nozzle so no water came out at all. We had all the facilities for making a nice hot drink, except for the kettle and my wash hand basin had a big crack in it. My bed collapsed as I tried to step over it.....but apart from all that it was fine.

Tiree has some exquisite beaches on its Atlantic coast, secluded coves and turquoise seas. The heavy Atlantic swell makes it home to the surfing fanatics and competitions are held here each year. We were surprised how flat the island is, except for the one high hill which houses early warning R.A.D.A.R station. There are no trees on the island, the strong westerly winds prevent any small shrubs or trees for getting a foothold. Whilst sea watching at Hough Bay, Arthur picked out a beautiful Long tailed Duck and there were Divers and Eiders out in the sea. I spied a Purple Sandpiper in the same area. We checked the inland freshwater lochs to find Pochard and lesser Scaup and a Coot (all rare birds on Mull), Whooper Swan and Tufted Ducks plus, on the shore were Redshank, Ringed Plover and Lapwing. In another Bay there were hundreds of Sanderling feeding frantically as they ran forwards and back with each wave and there were Dunlin, Oystercatchers, Turnstone and Ringed Plover feeding on the beach. We followed a small flock of Twite which were busy feeding in the seaweeds at the high tide mark.

With no trees on the island, imagine our surprise when we saw a Buzzard hunting over the marshes. We had fantastic views of a female Merlin, flying and resting on a post. There were two Glaucous Gulls and thousands of Starlings. Flocks of Geese in their hundreds were mainly Greylags

three Hares doing what Hares do in the spring if you know what I mean!

The weather was kind to us and we stayed on Tiree for a couple of days and had 63 species of birds. The four hour return journey produced a few auks and Sea Eagles at the north end of Mull, but nothing else of note.

All in all we enjoyed our trip to Tiree, we laughed a lot, enjoyed our food and drank a little too much.....note for diary....."must do it again, but take Sat-Nav next time.

PROFILE
Stuart Gibson
Bird Club Member



Purple Sandpiper

Sanderling



Long Tailed Duck

Turnstone



Why an interest in birds ?

Sadly, like so many young boys, growing up in the early 1970's, I cultivated my interest by collecting birds' eggs. When not away 'nesting' with other like-minded kids, I would be out getting dirty playing football. I was never happier than when 'shinning' up trees (I can still see and smell the spruce resin that stuck to my hair and clothes !) or kicking a football/tennis ball against a wall. Having seen the better of my ways regarding egg collecting (at a young age, I have to say !), I had hoped to develop my footie skills. However, realising that I wasn't ever going to pull on the dark blue of Scotland and run out at Hampden Park in front of 100,000 cheering fans, I started to go bird-watching on a Saturday morning with a friend, instead ! (I did play in the same team, however, as someone who went on to score many times for his country at football, as well as someone who became a famous film and television actor. I obviously couldn't play the game or even pretend that I could !). I remember pestering my Mum and Dad for a pair of binoculars, which I eventually received one Christmas morning : a heavy, second-hand pair of ex-Navy 7 x 50's. Oh, the birds that I saw with them (Sadly, very few conformed with anything I could find in my field guide !).

Who do you most admire in the bird world ?

I vividly recall buying a copy of Desmond Nethersole-Thompson's wonderful book, 'Highland Birds', from the former tourist board premises in Oban, way back in the early 1970's. Not long after having been mesmerised by the brilliant footballing Brazilians at the Mexico World Cup of 1970, here I was absolutely entranced by the images of watching birds in the Highlands that were being projected upon my mind by this great book. I started corresponding with Mr. Nethersole-Thompson at this time, first by writing to the book's publishers, who passed my letter on to the author and former headmaster. Back came a reply and a signed copy of a 'Highland Birds' map (a sort of 'Where to Watch Birds in the Highlands' , 1970's-style). Incredible ! Here was a

wee boy, taking his first steps as a fledgling birdwatcher, receiving advice and encouragement from a 'grand old man of Scottish ornithology'! Our correspondence lasted for many years. I can still see his highly distinctive handwriting on the Basildon Bond notepaper and will never forget the kindness and generosity that Mr. Nethersole-Thompson showed to me. My regret is that I never ever got the chance to meet Desmond, although he invited me to drop in anytime to his home in Sutherland. Being a youngster, and living several hundred miles distant in East Kilbride, meant that was never likely to happen. When I left High school in 1979, I was at a crossroad in my young life : should I go to college or try to secure my first job and first pay packet ? Mr. Nethersole-Thompson encouraged me to attend a Zoology degree course at Paisley College of Technology, for which he was going to stand as my referee, no less. Back then, nobody in my family had ever gone on to tertiary education, so I was afraid of what college/university life was all about, and I decided not to take Mr. Nethersole-Thompson up on his extremely kind offer. It was the first of many decisions in my life when I've turned 'left', instead of heading 'right' !

Anyone else ... ?

Back in the halcyon days of the 1970's, I tried not to miss the television travels of the writer/naturalist, Tom Weir. His 'Weir's Way' programme was a huge favourite of mine, particularly those programmes that highlighted birds and the bird-places that he visited.

Before 'Weir's Way' was networked in its own right, Tom's travels were showcased in five-minute 'tasters' on STV's early evening news magazine, 'Scotland Today'. Tom (with his red nose and his bobble hat !) received iconic status as a result of these programmes, which are still repeated in the wee small hours for the benefit of all us ageing insomniacs ! Tom lived on the south-side of Loch Lomond, and one of my uncles worked on an estate, near the Endrick Mouth, which Tom used to visit regularly. On the few occasions that I stayed with my aunt and uncle in their gatehouse home, I got the chance, not only to meet Tom, but to go bird-watching with him. I don't remember any of the birds that we shared on these walks, but it was just such a thrill to be in the company of Scotland's first 'celebrity' bird-watcher ! Recalling those occasions from my early teenage years, I was greatly sad-

dened when Tom passed away last year.

What do you like so much about birdwatching ?

Without question, it is the blessed self-forgetfulness that being a birdwatcher affords you. No matter what woes betide me, when focused on birdwatching, and surrounded by like-minded people, wonderful birds and awe-inspiring scenery, I am often able to simply escape my troubles, albeit temporarily. Birds, and birdwatching, have this amazing therapeutic power to allow you to do just that !

What do you dislike ?

Birdwatching, sadly, attracts an 'undesirable element', too !

People have the great ability to bring life to others, and, conversely, to take life away from where vitality once lived. Braggers and individuals with an inflated ego have soured my pleasure of birdwatching all-too-often in the past, which is one reason why I do not belong to any club, other than the Isle of Mull Bird Club. We all like to feel important in our lives, but when someone's self-importance starts to make you feel uncomfortable, it's time to switch channels !

Why Mull ?

Although I reside 'over the water' in Oban, I've always believed Mull to be the perfect choice as the 'Outdoor Capital of Scotland', if not Britain. To me, it has just about everything to offer the home-based naturalist : magnificent scenery, moulded by an impressive geological history; and a wonderful wealth of wildlife-rich habitats, which support a species-rich diversity of plant, animal and bird that is the envy of many places. (All that, and I never mentioned White-tailed Sea Eagles or Corncrakes once. It must be good !).

What's your favourite Nature Reserve ?

Baron's Haugh; a small, RSPB reserve in Motherwell, situated between the bustling A74 artery to the south and Fir Park, home to Motherwell Football Club in the Scottish Premier League. You can sit in the Marsh Hide on quiet Saturday afternoon's and listen to the sound of the fans cheering when the goals go in ! I had the pleasure of working there in the early 1990's, as an Information Warden, and it was the best job that I'm ever likely to have (Our very own David Sexton was one of my bosses at this time !) The reserve is a flooded meadow and for-

mer mine, surrounded on one side by the River Clyde. It possesses a variety of habitats that are contained within a relatively small area. It is a stronghold in Scotland for breeding Gadwall, with Lesser Whitethroat, Little Ringed Plover, Nuthatch and Willow Tit all nesting nearby. In Autumn, a surprisingly varied selection of passage waders occur, including Green and Wood Sandpipers; Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Little Stint and Spotted Redshank (although not at the same time !) In Winter, a herd of Whooper Swans fly in from Iceland, to accompany large flocks of Wigeon and Teal, as well as assorted other dabbling and diving ducks. Baron's Haugh is a real gem in RSPB Scotland's crown. The potential for environmental education on this reserve is second-to-none, situated as it is on the edge of the Greater Glasgow conurbation. The RSPB has only recently decided to recognise properly this marvellous reserve's potential, albeit 25-30 years after it was first brought to their attention. It is, without doubt, the best little nature reserve in the country ! (I hope that nobody detects any hint of bias on my part ?).

What's your favourite bird ?

As a youngster (with those heavy 7x50's), I had a 'Top Ten' bird list, which would change each week, depending on the birds that I saw on a Saturday morning. I vividly recall Lapwing, Curlew, Dipper and Grey Wagtail topping my favorites chart in the seventies, and Golden Plover went straight in 'with a bullet' when I came across a flock of them one November morning ! Later, in 1986, I was introduced to my first Jack Snipe, and a 'love affair' was born. I became obsessed with this cryptic little Winter visitor, and I spent much of my bird watching time, donned in welly boots, searching local marshes for this bird. Many birdwatchers' have yet to see their first Jack Snipe, yet I 'walked up' some 600 in five years, and had recorded over 1,000 individuals by the time I re-located to Oban in 2001. One Autumn morning, in the early 1990's, I recall 'walking-up' no fewer than 25 of these diminutive 'Half-Snipe' from sedge marsh on Blantyre Muir. This, I believe, was the largest gathering of this species to have been recorded anywhere in Scotland, at the time. One of the last things I did before leaving East Kilbride was to visit my local Jack Snipe haunts. Sad, or what ??? Coincidentally, I haven't 'set foot' on a Jack Snipe since my move North, although they must be out there, somewhere !

How do you see the future ?

Rather bleakly, I'm afraid. But, in an effort to accentuate positives, I'll say no more, and let my silence be eloquent !

What is the future for the Bird Club ?

Very cheerful, I think ! It is extremely difficult trying to cater for the needs of everyone within a club, yet the new 'regime' appear to be making a very good fist of it. For a while, I feared for the future of the club, but such thoughts have been well-and-truly dispelled. Birdwatching is all about ... well, watching birds, so I appreciate the emphasis that now exists regarding field trips.

Watching birds, to me, isn't simply about putting names to what appears in your binoculars or telescope. I'm very pro-education and information regarding birds, and the Bird Club is a great vehicle for doing just that. When I look at a bird, the same questions immediately pop up in my mind : the 'What's, the Where's, the Why's, the How's ...' all relating to that bird's life, it's biology and ecology. If I don't know an answer, I'll eagerly set about finding one ! As birdwatchers (I dislike the term 'birder'), we all like to know what we are looking at, but chasing up and down the length and breadth of the country in search of rarities has never held any real appeal for me. For a start, I can't drive, so twitching was always going to be that much more difficult for me to take part in ! Trying to appreciate and understand birds and the role that they play in life's 'bigger picture' is something far more enjoyable (not to mention meaningful !). The Bird Club has a very positive role to play in allowing members to appreciate and explore their shared love for birds, whether that be over a cup of tea and a chat, an evening's slide presentation, or while scanning wildfowl and waders on a chilly January morning at Loch Beg. The appreciation, understanding and subsequent knowledge gained can forge a lifetime's friendship (with both birds and people) ! There are so many gaps in our knowledge of Mull's birds, and active members of a thriving Bird Club have the opportunity to help fill some of those gaps. There continues to be more questions than answers regarding the true status and distribution of many of the island's birds. The finding of some of these answers would greatly increase the awareness and enjoyment that the island's birdlife already provides for Bird Club members. Independent of Bird Club 'jollies', members are to be encouraged to get out birdwatching all over the island, whenever they can, and to record and report back what

they see to the club, for the benefit of others.

Stuart Gibson

A JOLLY JAUNT

An outing of the bird club on a lovely winter's day
17th February 2007

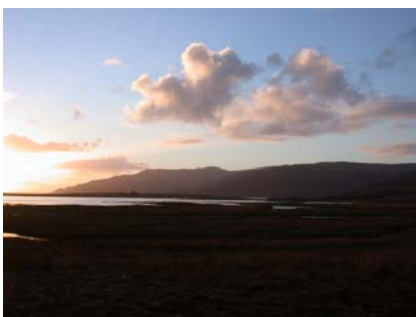


The early morning rain cleared away nicely giving us a beautiful sunny day for the Bird Club outing. We met at Killichronin Campsite at 10am. The telescopes were already out and pointing at wildlife with a purpose when we arrived. We were a bit flustered, thinking we'd be a bit late, having met a cow jam and a few nonchalant sheep along the road, but luckily a few others had a loose interpretation of time as well. Everyone got off to a marvellous start with cracking views of the Sea Eagles. Flying and perching and generally being very obliging. A few other species got onto the list as well, Kestrel, Buzzard, Goldeneye and Wigeon being the most notable. Then we were off! The first stop was the bridge at Knock. No Dipper to be found but superb views of Golden Eagle and a few small birds such as Robin and Coal Tit. Twenty five people on the bridge at once was an exercise in road safety. It's amazing just how busy a spot can be as soon as you stop to look around. Regular shouts of 'car!' were heard and mostly the traffic passed easily. Everyone squished up against the stonework, toes tucked in. Only one near drowning as a car got far too close to one side. A nimble manoeuvre involving scrambling on to the parapet, swinging both legs up and hanging on for dear life averted a soaking. There was much laughter and applause for the acrobatics! When we'd caused enough

chaos and it was time to move on, 'Gypsy Rose' Arthur announced that there was a pair of White-tailed Eagles just around the corner and close to the shore. It was an amazingly correct premonition. I didn't even see the crystal ball, what skill! He does need to leave the gold hoop earrings to Pam though! Another pair of eagles were spotted as well, and all four of them engaged in a bit of a flurry, talon tickling and swooping about until they were happy with the seating arrangements. We all enjoyed a hot drink and a scan about. A Slavonian Grebe was diving offshore and was quite hard to pick up. Two Golden Eagles were up at the back – definitely a good day for them. A little further round the Loch we pulled in by the pontoon and ruined the peace of a couple standing in quiet contemplation. It's not every day you get invaded by twenty five bird watchers and a dog! Sadly, we had just missed two otters out on the rocks and no amount of hopeful scanning was going to make them reappear. The next stop was close to the sheep farm. By this time it was drizzling a little bit but rain never stops play. At first it looked like quite a blank area but gradually the shouts went up – Great Northern Diver! Ringed Plover! The divers were difficult to get the scopes on. The coloured buoys were used as focal points but you had to be looking at the right buoys to start with. People shouted out positions using the clock face – eleven o'clock, three o'clock! Good job no one tried 17.25. Moving on, we stopped opposite Inch Kenneth in a beautiful sunny and sheltered spot and had lunch. The scopes were out in force. Hopefully there was no one staying on the island as it would have looked like the paparazzi were staking the place out! Between mouthfuls of sandwich and gulps of tea Black Guillemots in summer plumage were seen, a Red Throated Diver and a lone Eider Duck. There was a shout for Peregrine but it turned out to be a Hooded Crow. Strange the way the light can affect the jizz of a bird or dazzle the eye of the watcher! Over the hills behind us there was an amazing display by four Ravens who were formation flying in pairs. They could have put the Red Arrows to shame with their precision. Breathtaking stuff. In Glen Seilister there wasn't much to be seen except some precision driving involving oncoming traffic with little or no patience. Once through the Glen we paused to watch a family of Otters. Mum and two cubs were in view for about fifteen minutes. Behind us in the trees were a female Bullfinch and a Goldfinch on the fence. See how handy it is

having eyes in the back of your head? It always pays to have a good scan about. Along Loch Scridain there were Razorbills and Great Northern Divers. The line of floats in the water was put to good use – seventh float from the left and up! You have to use whatever is at hand. When I first started serious bird watching I was frustrated by the cry ‘it’s in the tree’, the binoculars would swivel round and soft whispers of ‘ahhh’ could be heard. How do they do that? We were standing in a wood – which tree? So, floats, clocks – it all helps! The convoy tried to have a look over Loch Beg but suddenly the sky darkened and it started hail stoning. The devoted still managed to spot a Little Grebe before it was pummelled into the water. By this time the end was in sight. Pennyghael yielded Golden Plover, Turnstone and Lapwing. Pennyghael Stores looked like it was having a clearance sale with all the cars parked outside the Kinloch Hotel. Into the pub and the welcome hospitality of Charles and his tea pot. The grand finale was the Heron in the garden who happily posed for photographs, hopefully thinking that someone might have Heron food about their person. The refreshments were much appreciated and we sat about and discussed the day. Tony gave a fantastic speech of thanks and managed to remember the names of the bridesmaids and the mother-in-law! We ended up with 54 species on our list, eagles were into double figures, seven otters, red and fallow deer were seen as well as the seals. It was a marvellous day out. Full of birds, eagles in particular, laughter and the making of good friends!

Joy Hardy



A Lovely end to a perfect day

“ONE TO WATCH”

BY STUART GIBSON

The Woodcock is unusual on many counts, no less than it is truly a woodland wader, spending much of its life in dense cover, under the canopy of areas of moist woodland. Woodcock are the loners of the Mull bird world, preferring their own company, in comparison to the gregarious nature of their close relation, the Common Snipe, that can be found in large wisps outside the breeding season. Woodcock feed on worms, snails and insects, which they locate with their long bills. Much of this diet is found on the woodland floor, although regular visits to open fields are made in search of worms. During bouts of cold, frosty weather, probing can be very difficult. At such times, the Woodcock’s diet may be modified to include seeds and berries, as well as any invertebrates found by turning over animal droppings and leaf litter. The upper mandible of a Woodcock’s long bill is very flexible, allowing prey to be grasped at the tip, without opening the bill completely. This tip is pitted with tiny holes, which contain extra-sensitive touch receptor cells, which aid the Woodcock’s search for food when probing in soft ground. As a solitary feeder with crepuscular habits, Woodcock are vulnerable to surprise attacks by predators, both on the ground and from above. When probing for food in poor light, Woodcock use their large eyes, which allow for better night vision. These eyes are situated on the side of the head, in such a way as to provide binocular vision backwards as well as forwards when the bird is feeding head down. Ground predators, including foxes, weasels, stoats and rats, are the potential enemy of the Woodcock. To combat this threat, the Woodcock’s obvious defence lies with its blotchy, cryptically-camouflaged plumage. When faced with a roaming predator, the Woodcock will rely on this camouflage, and will ‘freeze’ until the threat passes. Outside the breeding season, Woodcock are only disturbed when humans approach too close for their comfort. Even then, the flushed bird has an advantage over any potential predator, as the sound made as the Woodcock rises causes an initial fright to the predator, allowing the bird to fly away to safety. During the breeding season, adult Woodcock have been known to carry their chicks to safety when faced with danger. This it does by holding the chick between its thighs or in its beak. The former is a feat that has been granted almost mythical significance over the years, but has now been established as fact. The Woodcock’s breeding season commences in late March, when the male’s strange territorial advertisement flight, known as ‘roding’ can be seen and heard over its woodland habitat. With a slow, owl-like wing action and accompanying squeak-and-croak call, male Woodcock perform their display flight in a wide circle, low over the tree-tops. This is a bird watching curio that takes place on Mull every Spring (April-June), but appears to be rarely recorded. Woodcock frequent large tracts of both deciduous and mixed woodland, and have developed a liking for young forestry plantations, making Mull seemingly ideal for this strange, yet fascinating woodland wader. The Isle of Mull Bird Club would like to know the whereabouts of any ‘roding’ birds seen on the island, in order to better understand the status and distribution of the Woodcock on Mull. A visit to any apparently suitable woodland on the island at dusk in Spring may reward the local birdwatcher’s patience with views of a ‘roding’ bird. Likewise, a drive along some of the quiet roads on the island at dusk on an Autumn or Winter’s evening may reveal a number of Woodcock by the roadside, as they prepare to head out to feed, after a day concealed in thick cover. Large numbers of immigrant Woodcock arrive in Western Britain in Autumn from the Continent. Many of these birds may find their way to Mull to supplement existing numbers of this quite mesmerizing, yet often over-looked ‘frog-owl’.

Stuart Gibson

MY PATCH

By Joy Hardy



My patch stretches from the Kinloch Crossroads to the bridge at Pennyghael. The habitat is varied, with shoreline, loch, surrounding hills and woodland areas. Right outside the shop I have the tidal area that runs into Loch Beg with the back drop of Ben More. Almost every day I can see Golden Eagles and White-tailed Eagles from the doorstep. One day there were four White-tails dotted about the immediate shore. The usual suspects are always in attendance, Lapwings, Oystercatchers, Redshank, Greenshank, Goldeneye, Gulls – Common, Black-headed, Great Black-backed and Glaucous for a while. The delightful Little Grebe puts in an appearance occasionally. I'm trying to familiarise myself with all the rocks and seaweed lumps. Just now and again one of them turns out to be a seal. Next to the Kinloch Hotel there is a Heronry. At the moment there are five nests. The building materials have literally been flown in over my head. Further developments are awaited with baited breath. I've never seen a real live Heron chick before and can imagine that only its mother would love it. Having only lived here for a short while there is a lot to learn. Things I took for granted in England are sometimes considered to be rare on the Island and vice versa of course. Birds such as Chaffinch and Goldfinch are stunning to watch as they are so much brighter and cleaner than I am used to. A female Mallard looks stunningly orange in the late afternoon sun. This could all be the new glasses but I hope not! Further along in Loch Scridain Great Northern Divers abound. There were about thirty of them the other evening, swimming in a long line. Otters can be seen here too and usually Golden and White tailed Ea-

gles soaring way above in the up draughts. Buzzards are everywhere, sitting about on telegraph poles to fool the unsuspecting tourist. Out on the Aird a Hen Harrier is regularly seen. It flew straight overhead which was amazing because I've never seen one from underneath before. It is a fantastic place to live. The privilege of having all this as a front garden so to speak. The fantastic views of Ben More in all the different weather conditions. Bright rainbows that light up a dreich afternoon. Watching the rain squalls coming up the loch. The irresistible urge to be outside with bins and telescope 'just in case'. Soon there will be the wild flowers and the trees will be green. I'm looking forward to watching how it all develops over the coming year.

DID YOU KNOW???

The smallest bird in the world is the male **Bee Hummingbird**, (*Mellisuga helenae*) It is also the smallest known warm blooded vertebrate, and its native habitat is Cuba where it is found in dense forest and woodland edges. The Bee Humming bird weighs in at 1.8grams, (a one penny piece weighs 4 grams) and is 63 mm in length, (less than one inch). It builds a nest of spiders' webs and lichen which has a diameter of only 3 cm, (1.25 inches) It feeds on insects and nectar and is more often mistaken for a bee than a bird. Incredibly its wings beat at 200 times a second and it has to eat half its total body mass and drink eight times its total body mass each day.

Alan Spellman



SPRING FLOWERS

By Norma Dowling

At this time of year my ears and eyes are alert for Willow Warbler and Wheatear. In the garden bats have been chasing each other round at dusk, Peacock butterflies are coming out of hibernation too, as are the White-tailed Bumble Bee queens. There was Frogspawn in the roadside ditch at Pennyghael on 25th March. But it is the early wild flowers that let me know winter has passed. Perhaps because winter this year has been especially grey, wet and windy I have really welcomed the wild flowers. It was February 21st that I first saw the buds of Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*). These were poking through the mud in a large patch by the first little bridge beyond the camp site at Loch na Keal. It is commonly found in damp places and its large pinky flowers can be seen before the leaves show much growth. Later the leaves take over and can be up to 90 cms across - our largest-leaved plant. No wonder it was used to wrap butter before paper was cheaply available. Other names for it are Wild Rhubarb and Umbrella plant. Colt's-foot (*Tussilago farfara*) was the next flower I noted, in early March. This, like the Butterbur, is in the Daisy family and has flowers before the leaves. It is able to flower early as it has thick underground stems that store food. I have seen its cheerful yellow/orange, typical daisy flowers near Highland Supplies, just outside Tobermory and also, this year, on a bank up a track just off the Glen Aros road. The warm spell in late March has brought a splash of yellow to our roadsides with Common Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), another Daisy family member; Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) with its delicious coconut scent; Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) and Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*). Primrose flowers come in two forms; 'pin-eyed' and 'thrum-eyed' and they grow on separate plants. You may need to put on your glasses to see the difference! In the centre of a 'pin-eyed' you will see the green knob of the stigma but the stamens are hidden below in the calyx tube, while in the 'thrum-eyed' you will see a star shape made up of five stamens and the stigma is hidden. This arrangement enables cross pollination by long-tongued insects, such as bees and moths. Amazingly even

the pollen grains are different to aid the process. Trees are awakening too. Larch, introduced in 1600s, our only deciduous conifer, is now greening up and so is Hawthorn, while the Blackthorn is flowering along the road at Salen Bay. Goat Willow has its 'pussy palm' and in the garden the male Yew flowers are producing pollen. You can see flowers on the Wych Elm at Torosay Gardens. Our first Spring on Mull was taken up with boxes; the second with kitchen walls, or rather lack of them; this year I am trying to get out locally to get to know my patch and what grows there! Will I see Lords-and-ladies? Leaves of Ramsons or Wild Garlic; Dog's Mercury; and Yellow Iris are just a few signs of pleasures in store and I can almost smell the bluebells! So when you are out bird watching why not rest your eyes occasionally and look down by your feet or along the ditches and banks. Get in close and take a good look - flowers don't fly away just as you focus on them.



A QUICK RULE OF THUMB

If you see a flock of crows in a field they're rooks; and if you see one rook on its own it's a crow. Anything else is sparrers!

CHAIRMAN'S VIEW

Birding should be fun, and in the bird club I think we are getting the balance right, between learning, enjoyment and sharing. As long as we have such knowledgeable members like Stuart Gibson, Sue Dewar, Alan Spellman and Len White willing to pass on their birding tips we cannot help but grow as a club. With this new found ability we as a club now share our birding experiences regularly at club meetings in a very informal and lively debate. I personally enjoy this part of the meetings as we generally have a good laugh as well as learning more about the birds we have here on Mull.

We now know we have Blackcaps in most areas of the island, several species of ducks that occasionally occur and I, thanks to bird club members saw my first Waxwing on Mull. This sharing of our sightings either on our web-site or on 'mullbirds' or at meetings gives us all a chance to see birds we might otherwise miss. The fieldtrips go from strength to strength with a record number of 27 on the February trip. This proves that members enjoy the get togethers and the social side of the club, which is as it should be, if we are not in it to enjoy it why be doing it in the first place. Members of the club are doing some B.T.O. surveys this year and so we will be helping preserve these special creatures we all enjoy so much and along with the help we give to the Mull eagle watch programme I think the club and it's members can be proud of themselves. As well as birds we are hoping to carry the club into other wildlife activities such as wildflowers and fungi during the next 12 months and I hope you will all continue to support the club and enjoy the wildlife as much as you appear to have done this year. A special mention to all our members from off the Island, thank you for your support and any contributions you wish to submit to the Oystercatcher either as a short piece or a letter will be very welcome. As long as I am chairman all views will be welcomed and no member of this club will be overlooked, we should and I hope do cater to you all.

Thank you for all your support this year enjoy the wildlife particularly the birds.

Arthur Brown

BIRD CLUB - SUMMER EVENTS

8TH May	Alan Spellman 'A Taste of Mull' at Aros Hall 7.30pm tickets: £3.50 Adults £2.50 children under 14
10th May	Alan Spellman 'A Taste of Mull' at Craignure Village Hall 7.30pm Tickets £3.50 Adults. £2.50 children under 14
18th May	Evening Walk @ Lochdon with Stuart Gibson meeting at Ardochas home of Pam and Len White at 7.30pm
19th May	Dawn Chorus walk with Stuart Gibson meeting at Killichronan boathouse by the bench at <u>4.00am</u>
June/July	Evening Wildflower Walk led by Norma Dowling. Date, time and place to be arranged. Check local press and web site for details.
June/July	Social Evening to be arranged. Check local press and web site for details.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to thank everyone for their articles and pictures. The newsletter is quite a long one this time for which I am grateful. If you stories or articles are not in, I must apologise so will probably be bringing another one out sooner rather than later. PLEASE KEEP YOUR STORIES COMING.

Thank you once again and happy birding.



ISLE OF MULL BIRD CLUB
ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDING 31.03.07

<u>INCOME</u>	£	<u>EXPENDITURE</u>	
Membership	595.00	Hall Rent	112.00
Admissions	295.50	Heating	14.00
Raffle	244.00	Raffle	189.85
Stickers	13.50	Stationery, printing	
Bank Interest	7.17	postage	260.55
Wings over Mull BBQ	70.00	Speakers Exp	23.29
Donations	19.50	Donations	100.00
Book	<u>1.50</u>	<u>Equipment</u>	
		Speakers	43.18
		Radio Mike	59.99
Total Income	<u>1246.17</u>	<u>Computer Exp</u>	
		Computer repair	75.00
		Domain Name &	
		Web space	44.10
		Gift for Auditor	5.99
		BBQ	53.47
		Picture & Frame	63.00
		Buffet	49.00
		Sundries	41.00
		Total Expenditure	<u>1134.42</u>

Total Income	1246.17
Total Expenditure	<u>1134.42</u>
Excess of income	
Over expenditure	<u>111.75</u>

Balances B/F 01.04.06	
Bank	955.00
Cash in hand	<u>29.00</u>
Sub total	984.00
Add surplus	<u>111.75</u>
	<u>1095.75</u>

Represented by balances 31.03.07	
Bank	1021.37
Cash in hand	<u>74.38</u>
	<u>1095.75</u>

Peter T Hall ACIB
13.04.07
PTH/jth/accs6

Audited and Certified correct from the books and papers produced.

Michael E Jordan

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Michael E Jordan
Tobermory 16.04.07.

A WORD FROM THE TREASURER

On this page you will find the audited accounts for the year ending 31st March 2007. These are in the same format as those produced last year and you will note that we ended up in a similar position as this time last year. As a consequence your committee has decided to leave the subscription rate unchanged at £5 per member per annum. This subscription is now due for payment and a good number of you have already paid for this year, for which I thank you. For administration purposes I would be extremely grateful if your subscription is due if this could be paid sooner rather than later. It can be a costly exercise chasing subscriptions later on in the year. Thank You.

Peter T Hall ACIB
Hon Treasurer