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# “THE OYSTERCATCHER”

*The Isle of Mull Bird Club Newsletter*

[www.mullbirdclub.org.uk](http://www.mullbirdclub.org.uk)

**SEPTEMBER**

## BIRD BOXES

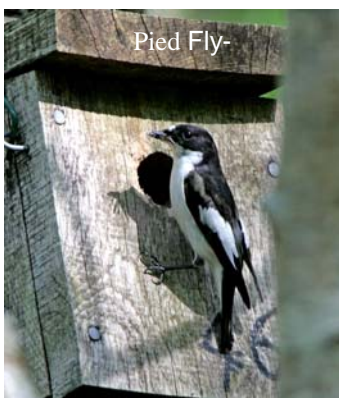
**P**ermission was obtained from the Killiechronan estate to place some nest boxes into their oak woodland which runs along the side of Loch na Keal to the west of the camp site and below the Sea Eagle site. Our Bird Club Committee then agreed to fund the cost of the materials and the Lochdon Bird Box Company was created, under the management of your President, with Foreman Owen Tyson and skilled worker John Preston. In just a few days 21 nest boxes were produced to a very high standard. The boxes are suitable for Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and Pied Flycatcher. With the help of Peter Hall these boxes have now been placed in the oak woods at Killiechronan, close to the road side so that they can be observed easily by club members and bring pleasure to all.

Pied Flycatcher status is that of a 'very scarce summer visitor' and they have been recorded on Mull, first in May 2002 in Ardura oak woods and again in September 2005, and at different locations in August 2008 and September 2009. We have excellent habitat, which is most suitable for them, (they like oak woodlands close to water) and I am hopeful that our nest box project will encourage them to stay and breed successfully on Mull.

You will be aware of the boxes placed in the Ardura wood a few years ago and whilst, so far they have not been used by Pied Flycatchers the boxes have been regularly used by Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and Great tits.

I take this opportunity to thank the Killiechronan estate for allowing the club to place these boxes.

*Alan Spellman President*



## BEE-EATERS ON MULL

**A**pril is always an exciting month for birdwatchers on Mull. It's the time of the year when our migrants arrive to spend the summer months here. By the end of the month I had Swallows already building their nest in the garage, as they have done so for many years. The Corncrakes arrive on Iona, early this year, on 9th April and immediately started calling. Grasshopper Warblers arrived on 26<sup>th</sup> and with their own very specific and continuous call were heard in Dervaig reed beds. The next day was followed by the arrival of Sedge Warblers making their presence known with their particular brand of 'singing'. And by the end of the month, most of the summer visitors had arrived.

With all this movement of birds going on, there is always the chance of something special arriving; and so it was as we were visited by a pair of **Bee Eaters** which turned up at Calgary On 24<sup>th</sup> April and stayed until 28<sup>th</sup>. Bee Eaters normally live in the Mediterranean area and are found in Southern Spain, Portugal, Italy and France. We had a pair of birds at Glen Gorm Castle in June 1998 and there have also been reports of single birds at Loch Buie in May 2003 and Killiechronan Camp site in 2007. Andrew Mortley was able to take this picture of the birds which caused quite an attraction for visitors and locals alike. The Calgary Farmhouse did a roaring trade in coffees as visitors searched for the birds.



Picture: Andrew

On the last day of the month a female **Hawfinch** was feeding at a garden feeder at Treshnish House garden and this is only the second record of Hawfinch for Mull. The first recorded Hawfinch being last year at Calgary on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2009 in Andrew Mortleys garden.

Although this is a 'resident' bird of the UK, it is a bird that is not often seen, the least disturbance will see them off and away. The Hawfinch is the largest of our finches with a strong heavy beak which it uses for cracking open nuts and seeds

Anand Prasad was able to capture these images of this rare visitor to Mull.

Alan Spellman

Picture:  
Anand Prasad



## A WINTER WEEK IN NORFOLK

**W**e went to Norfolk for our annual winter break, spending 3 days and staying at Heacham B&B one of our regular haunts. As usual our 2 collies came with us to enjoy plenty of walks. We started our trip at Lynford Arboretum and were quickly rewarded with 9 Hawfinch and 15 Common Crossbill. Our next venue was Wolverton where for many years we have seen Golden Pheasant, however on this occasion we drew a blank! With evening arriving we went to Heacham,s Fox public house for a pint and an excellent meal, then back to base a cup of tea, feed the dogs, log call then after a tiring day off to bed.

Day 2 arrived with a keen easterly wind and after a full breakfast we lumbered out to walk it off and went to Holkham to be greeted by 4 Barn Owls 15 Shorelarks a Snow Bunting, White fronted, Egyptian, Brent, and Pink footed geese, a few Avocets and a Peregrine, we then moved onto Wells Next The Sea where we located 4 Scaup on the boating lake plus another 2 Barn Owls. The easterly wind calmed down and even the sun came out, other species seen were Grey and Red Legged Partridge , a rewarding day then back to the pub for food ---and a drink (despite this we don,t drink a lot) Day 3 took us to Titchwell with as usual a great variety of birds including a Water Pipit ,4 Water Rail, Marsh Harrier, Bittern, Mealy Redpoll and a blanket of snow. On the sea were a few rafts of Common Scoter, a Long Tailed Duck several Mergansers and Goldeneye, after a car park lunch it was time to make our way home, our species list totalled 102. Despite the very harsh winter there were plenty of birds, most encouraging was our count of 14 Barn Owls. P S for the fourth winter running we have a Barn Owl opposite our house. We now look forward to Mull when we arrive on the island for a week probably for our 15th occasion

*Norman + Gill Greatholder, Creswell, Stafford*

## A TRIP TO INCH KENNETH IN MAY WITH MULL MAGIC

**I** had had an Australian girl (Kate) staying with me for 4 weeks and this being her last day we chose to take 2 of the last 4 tickets with Martin Keivers of Mull Charters on the first ever chartered trip out to Inch Kenneth. The day dawned bright, clear and calm (an essential for a trip in a small boat) and 12 of us, (including the crew, being Martin's wife and family) boarded his launch at Ulva Ferry leaving at 11am. The water, being almost calm, made for a lovely trip out round the East end of Ulva out to Inch Kenneth with fabulous views out to the Treshnish Isles and beyond and little movement on the water apart from Razorbills and Shearwaters. Landing on Inch Kenneth was amusing as we had to be unloaded and ferried across to the island in the dinghy in twos. Kate and I were first and stepped ashore on the white sands North of the pier, which unfortunately we were unable to use being private. The beach was littered with lovely shells and flints of all colours and

above us skylarks sang a song of welcome. We were unable to visit the house as there was a house party in residence, but we were able to cross the field in front of the house, stopping to take some great photos. Through a gate, at the top of the field, we shortly arrived at the beautiful chapel which was in an amazing state of preservation, housing some beautiful grave stones with the inscriptions still intact after the passing of many years of storms beating upon them.

Kate and I chose to walk to the very Western point of the Island enjoying the bird song and wild flowers along the way. We chose a lovely sheltered sandy bay facing the Treshnish Isles and the geology in the bay was amazing – flints and shells of all colours imbedded in the rock strata overhanging the bay. After lunch we only just had time to retrace our steps to the beach and await the dingy to take us back to the launch and join the rest of the party for our gentle trip back to Ulva Ferry. A wonderful day out and a big thank you to Ruth Fleming

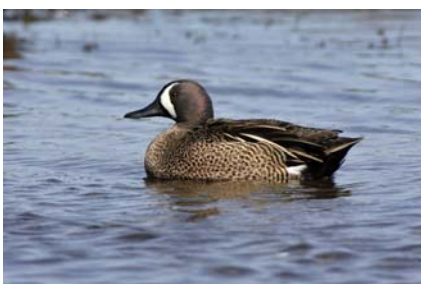
Maureen Hilder



Photographs taken by Ruth Fleming, Mull

## ANOTHER FIRST FOR MULL

**A** Blue Winged Teal was spotted on the Island at Killichronan by Bruce Hyde. It was here from 30th April until 1 May. This is another first for Mull.



## PHOTO CAPTION COMPETITION



Think up a suitable caption to go with the photo.

Captions are to be returned to Pam Brown by the 1<sup>st</sup> December by email at [pamartbrown@btinternet.com](mailto:pamartbrown@btinternet.com) or by post to Mrs Pam Brown, Ardrioch Farm, Dervaig, Isle of Mull PA75 6QR. The competition is open to all fully paid-up members of the Bird Club. The winner will be announced at the Bird Club Christmas Party on Friday 10th December and a prize will be given to the winner. Go on - get your thinking caps on!

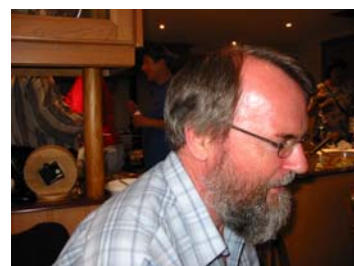
## BIRD CLUB BBQ

**W**ell, it was that time of year again and we all descended on Pam and Arthur for another BBQ, we thought this time we could have the BBQ outside in the sunshine, how wrong we were, it rained, yet again. All of the members who turned up with food enjoyed the evening and again the Chefs Pam Brown and Peter Hall did us proud.



A Hot Chef

Chairman in pensive mood



## SEA EAGLE NEWS

**A**s we headed towards fledging time, it was beginning to look like a good season for the white-tailed eagles on Mull overall. It gives me great pleasure to let you know now that not only has it been a very good year for the eagles on Mull with 10 young sea eagles fledged, it has also been the best season so far all down the west coast of Scotland. An announcement is due to be made shortly about the overall numbers so I won't pre-empt these but suffice to say it looks like we may have finally reached some important milestones. Mull's golden eagles have also had a very good year and are more than holding their own.

**Grasspoint:** this single chick fledged on schedule and has since been seen flying strongly in the general area and near Duart. So the old-timers have done it again!

**Loch Frisa:** Following their failure this year, Frisa & Skye have still be wowing the crowds at the Eagle Hide this summer and are now to be seen regularly back in their favourite haunts.

**Golf course:** this star pair fledged two chicks for the second year running under Mary's watchful eye and they are now exploring further afield to Morvern. They were seen recently – adults and 2 chicks – circling low over the ferry as it arrived at Craignure giving quite an impressive welcome for some lucky people on their holidays.

Mull Eagle Watch has reached the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year of the satellite tagging project to study juvenile sea eagle dispersal from their natal sites. This year we tagged two more chicks with the help of FCS climbers, SNH funding, Justin Grant and Roy Dennis and they can now be tracked on [www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/mulleagles](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/mulleagles). We have a female called Shelly and a male called Midge and they too are beginning to venture away from their nest sites. There's been no more contact with the 2009 chicks Oran and Venus unfortunately but the original two, Mara and Breagha from Loch Frisa in 2008, are still out there and transmitting.

All in all, a very busy season with much to celebrate for Mull Eagle Watch and all of you who have helped in one way or another to help make it the overall success it's been.

Best wishes  
Dave

*Stop press...some of you may have heard that one of our Mull white-tailed eagle chicks from this year has recently been rescued on Mull having sustained a wing injury. Hopefully there will be some news on its progress and chances of recovery at next week's party.*

David Sexton  
Mull Officer  
RSPB Scotland



## A BOAT TRIP ON THE LADY JANE

**A**s I sit writing this in 2010 I realise just how little I knew this time last year. The idea of running a charter boat had always been at the back of my mind but several things had always put me off. I have always been a keen fisherman but knew that there were never going to be enough people to make sea angling alone a viable proposition from Ulva Ferry. It was a chance conversation with Dave Sexton while I collected my youngest son from school which got me thinking. People rightly regard Mull as the best place in the UK to see eagles. What if we could take them to see eagles by boat?

The pair at Killechronan seemed as settled as any birds can and had raised several broods in their now familiar site. I knew from experience how inquisitive these birds were especially where fish were concerned. What if we could run sea angling trips, keep a few fish back and then run trips to the general area of the nest site and perhaps entice the birds to come close enough to take offered fish? It seems ludicrous now looking back, but this was the vague idea which started a chain of events the like of which I have never before experienced. The first thing we needed was a boat suitable for both purposes. And we found one straight away. Lady Jayne had recently been running between Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Mull, but a change of circumstances and some unfortunate happenings for the owner meant she was being offered for sale. After doing some homework we found that Lochins were highly regarded by people who knew the West Coast waters, and that the RNLI had even used the hull to make its Brede class of life boat. Better still the price had been reduced and she was seriously for sale. To cut a long story short we took ownership of Lady Jayne in late January 2009.

This was like rolling a boulder over a cliff and finding you are still attached. The next problem was me! Anyone can take a boat to sea in the UK but to do it commercially you need a certificate of one sort or another. And of course the curse of the late 20th century appears, Health and Safety! Not only did I have to gain my Advanced Powerboat and commercial endorsement, I had to have everything from First Aid to Sea Survival as well. Eventually I gained the legal requirements and became master of my own vessel. By this time we had moved Lady Jayne to Balvicar where she was being professionally painted and readied for sea again as she had been lain up for several years.

Our first trip from Balvicar to Tobermory was by no means easy sailing and we arrived greyer and wiser by several degrees. Then ensued several weeks of painting, cleaning and fixing, it seemed every system needed attention. Eventually in June we managed to jump the last hurdle and gained our 5 year certificate to ply commercially, all we needed then was the paperwork to arrive. Unbelievably it took till the second week of July for it to arrive and we were then free to start taking passengers.

Our first passengers were Chris and Jenny Buckley, long time friends who insisted on being the first paying customers. On a sunny day in July we set off from Ulva pier on our new (adventure). Fish are fairly plentiful that time of year and we soon had enough for tea and try and tempt the birds. Loch Na Keal is fantastic from sea level and we all enjoyed the sail up the loch and passed Eorsa. The male was easily spotted sat on one of his favourite perches and watched us as we positioned ourselves for a trial run. After a

few attempts by us he came arrow straight from his perch like a guided missile, at the last moment he wheeled away and climbed higher, circling us, all the time, head down in that now familiar pose. He seemed to realise we were no threat and after several orbits began to come lower and lower. The final 10 feet, wings back and legs lowered are imprinted in my brain forever, I can see the colours and texture to this day and the small spray of water dripping from his feet as he grasped a fish and climbed back into the air. Success at the first attempt! I then asked my passengers to refrain from shouting and whooping with delight, only to be told that I was responsible for most of the noise! The next day was almost too surreal for words.

After a few hurried texts and phone conversations we agreed to try the same thing again, only this time with a BBC film crew aboard (no pressure there then?) With Dave along for his expert knowledge and Steve Backshall as the talent plus associated film/sound crew we managed to repeat the event no less than 3 times for the cameras. The footage is still to be shown on BBC's deadly 60 programme. We have now improved our technique and are beginning to understand how we can achieve what we set out to do more easily. Sometimes we can have both male and female visiting, one after the other and it is very rare for them not to take at least one fish per visit.

The rest of the year is much of a blur, strong winds and rain were responsible for us cancelling several trips in August and ensuring that our season was to be a short one. Whatever we did in 2009 can only be described as a practice for 2010. We are now up and running, ready for this year. We have already had a trial run and the birds remembered us, coming to the boat straight away and flying within 30 feet of us to collect a free meal. Anyone is welcome to join us. It is a photographers/birders dream come true to be at close quarters with these birds of their own free will. We are running trips daily to see the birds and whilst we can never guarantee they will come every time, experience has shown us they rarely turn down a free feed. We are also running trips to Inch Kenneth, the Wilderness and anywhere else people want to go. Private charters, fishing trips etc all catered for. Lady Jayne is also having an awning made for those trips where the weather is less than kind (like coming back from Lunga with a worsening forecast). I would like to thank everyone who has supported and helped us in our first year and would be delighted to welcome you aboard for one or more of our trips. We are always keen to help local interest groups and will try our best to accommodate any suggestions you might have.

Martin Keivers (Skip)

## CLEAN, CLEAN, CLEAN TO HALT WINTER BIRD DISEASE

**W**e're urging good hygiene around bird feeders tables and water baths to help garden birds stay healthy this winter.

Cold weather can trigger outbreaks of diseases that seriously affect garden birds so the RSPB have released advice on how to reduce the risk of infections spreading. Wild birds in gardens are susceptible to a variety of diseases, such as certain strains of salmonella in winter and trichomoniasis in late summer and autumn. As the weather gets colder, larger numbers of birds visit gardens for our food supplies and fresh, unfrozen water, making it easier for disease to spread. The diseases can spread especially quickly if droppings are allowed to mix with uneaten food. In really cold snaps birds' resistance to illness becomes even lower making them particularly vulnerable, and disease can easily kill them. We believe that taking steps to keep feeding stations clean and healthy can be very effective in protecting garden birds. It is extremely rare for any bird diseases to pass to people or to pets like cats and dogs. Nevertheless, we recommend careful hand washing after cleaning feeders and water baths. Choosing feeders and water baths that can be thoroughly cleaned in the first instance is vital.

### RSPB RECOMMENDATIONS

- \* Smooth feeders and water baths with no corners that could trap food or dirt.
- \* Feeders with drainage holes to avoid moisture building up.
- \* Using more than one feeding site to reduce the number of birds in one place.
- \* Rotating feeders around several locations to "rest" each spot to prevent build up of infection on the ground underneath.
- \* Cleaning and disinfecting feeders and water baths regularly.
- \* Rinsing thoroughly and allowing to air dry completely - this itself will kill some diseases.
- \* Keeping the bucket and brush you clean feeders with outside and using it just for this purpose.
- \* Sweeping up droppings and spilt or old food and disposing of it carefully in an outside bin.
- \* Changing the water in baths frequently - ideally daily.
- \* Washing hands carefully afterwards.

Sick birds can be very obvious. Typical signs include lethargy and fluffed up plumage. In some diseases, there are additional symptoms like drooling saliva, regurgitating food, difficulty swallowing and laboured breathing. Some may have matted wet plumage around the face and beak or swelling on the neck. Good hygiene is important in our homes and it need be no great effort to do the same in our gardens.

Extract from RSPB site.

Diseased Greenfinch



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

**W**e had several successful Summer outings, firstly a trip to Tiree on 'The Waverley' (organised by Jan Hall) which was enjoyed by everyone who went, as was the boat trip to Muck organised by Pam Brown. Unfortunately your Chairman was unable to go on either of these trips due to prior commitments but the general 'feed back' suggests that we should organise these kind of trips again. It rained once more for the annual BBQ/AGAQ held at Pam and Arthur Brown's (Ardrioch Farm) but it was very well attended (including your Chairman!) and was an excellent evening. It was suggested we hold the next event in February or March - we may just get better weather! Thanks to Pete Hall and Pam Brown for all the cooking and to everyone else who brought a plate of food. It's been a good year for birds on Mull too! Ten new White-tailed Eagles to add to the population for starters. More sightings of Osprey around Loch Frisa and Loch Don in particular; will they ever breed here? If you've been following 'Mull Birds' (many thanks to our President - Alan Spellman for his website) you'll have noticed some exiting records from residents and visitors alike. But I'll not spoil Alan's thunder here, he'll be giving us an illustrated talk at our Christmas Party in December.

Andy Oldacre  
Chairman

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### FRIDAY 15TH OCTOBER 2010

Indoor meeting at Craignure Village Hall (CVH) at 19.30. Abbi Patterson will give an illustrated talk entitled "Nature conservation and the more hidden aspects of its management."

### SATURDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2010

Field trip to Ross of Mull including Ardanish & Fidden. Meet at Bunessan car park at 10.30. Bring a packed lunch. Leader is Mike Wagemakers. Afternoon Tea to be arranged.

### FRIDAY 19TH NOVEMBER 2010

Indoor meeting at CVH at 19.30. Finlay Christine will give us an illustrated talk about his adventures with "Tall Tales of Mull".

### SATURDAY 20TH NOVEMBER 2010

Field trip to Langamull and Calgary Bay. Meet at Ardrioch Farm, Dervaig at 10.30. Bring packed lunch. Afternoon Tea at Ardrioch Farm. Leader Arthur Brown.

### FRIDAY 10TH DECEMBER 2010

Indoor meeting at CVH at 19.30. Our Christmas Party! Please bring a plate of food. Our President Alan Spellman will give an illustrated talk on the birds seen this year including several rare species. RESULTS OF PHOTO CAPTION COMPETITION will be announced tonight.

### SATURDAY 11TH DECEMBER 2010

Field Trip to Loch na Keal. Meet at the Killichronan camp site at 10.30. Bring packed lunch. Afternoon Tea at Kinloch Hotel. Leader details to be confirmed.