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# "THE OYSTERCATCHER"

*The newsletter of the isle of mull bird club*

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

September 2006

*AREN'T OUR EAGLES WONDERFUL ????*



Photo by Iain Erskine ©



This year's Tags  
Photo by Iain Erskine ©

## A BIG THANK YOU

**O**n behalf of Strathclyde Police, myself and Constable Finlay Christine I would once again like to take this opportunity to thank each and every person who assisted with this years Mull Eagle Watch. Once again everyone's efforts have ensured the successful hatching of white tailed sea eagle chicks. For everyone's' information, this years tags are yellow. I look forward to your continued support in the future.

Sergeant Iain Erskine



Iain Erskine ©

## £MILLION EAGLES TAKE FLIGHT IN ANNIVERSARY YEAR

*First Minister finds his first eagle experience  
'fantastic'*



Photograph taken by Iain Erskine: Pictured are:- BACK ROW from left to right - Iain Erskine, Ross Lilley (SNH), Elaine Jamieson (FCS), Strathclyde Police Officer, Roger Johns FRONT ROW, from left to right: Dave Sexton (RSPB Scotland), Jack McConnell MSP, Joyce Henderson (Sea Eagle Ranger)

The sea eagles of Mull - Scotland's wildlife stars - have once again dazzled thousands of visitors to the famous Hebridean island this breeding season, including Scotland's First Minister Jack McConnell, before finally fledging the nest last week. On a visit to the sea eagle viewing hide with his family in June, Mr McConnell described the eagles – his first ever seen in Scotland— as *'fantastic'* and *'a real asset to Mull'* after a recent report by the RSPB revealed that the birds contribute up to £1.7m annually to the island's economy. After hitting the limelight in television, award winning films and now DVD's, the sea eagles of Loch Frisa were never far from the camera lens again this year, with a string of high-profile visitors heading to the joint RSPB Scotland/Forestry Commission Scotland hide on Mull. With un-seasonal summer storms leading to the dramatic rescue of two other young sea eagles on the island, staff and volunteers were relieved to see 'Oatie' and 'Haggis' weather the storm, along with parents 'Skye' and 'Frisa' atop their 30 foot home on the banks of the loch. After the huge success of BBC *Springwatch* in 2005, and the release of Gordon Buchanan's film *Eagle Island* on DVD, visitor trips were boosted by over a third this year with more people than ever catching a glimpse of Scotland's largest bird of prey. Along with regular TV visitors Kate Humble and Simon King, broadcaster John Craven also made a visit to the hide in June, and enjoyed his first views of a sea eagle as part of the current UK series of *Countryfile*. Journalists from Europe have also visited the hide in 2006, showing that the appeal of the eagles has now stretched well beyond the UK. The project, which brings together island volunteers, the police, Mull and Iona Community Trust and funding support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (via the Nadair Trust) is now in its 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary year since the first young sea eagle chick fledged in the wild in 1985, after the Scottish Natural Heritage supported reintroduction began just a few years before. Elaine Jamieson from Forestry Commission Scotland said:

*"There's always excitement and relief from everyone at the Loch Frisa hide when the young*

*eagles fledge successfully, and it's superb to see so many pairs of sea eagles now making a home in Forestry Commission Scotland woodlands. The hard work of the volunteers, local community and the police in keeping eagles safe on Mull is invaluable, and the benefits these eagles now bring to the island is a testament to the hard work of everyone involved"*

As the young eagles will now venture further away from the nest site, the viewing hide welcomed its last visitors on Sunday 16 July, although those visiting Mull may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of 'Oatie' and 'Haggis' which can be identified by their 'O' and 'H' labelled wing tags. Sea eagle viewing at Loch Frisa is a partnership between Forestry Commission Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Mull & Iona Community Trust, with funding support from the Heritage Lottery Fund via the Nadair Trust. The *Mull Eagle Watch* programme led by Strathclyde Police and local volunteers monitors eagle nesting sites in the vulnerable early part of the breeding season, 24 hours a day 7 days a week, to minimise any disturbance to the nests of Scotland's rarest bird of prey.

MY PATCH

## BIRDS IN MY GARDEN

By John Preston



In my previous life in "Cake Town" (i.e., Pontefract, West Yorkshire), the highlight of my week was my daily visitation of a handful of House Sparrows to the bird feeders in my garden, along with an occasional Blue Tit, Great Tit and a couple of Blackbirds. When I left the grime and congestion of Pontefract, little did I realise what amazing vistas awaited me in my new garden on the Isle of Mull. Up to date, I have counted 30 different species of birds, as well as mink, toads,

frogs, slow worms and voles along with a suspected mole-cricket. Apart from the day to day visits from the resident birds, e.g., Blue Tits, Great Tits, Coal Tits, Chaffinches, House Sparrows, Robins, Dunnocks and the occasional Wren, which attack the peanuts in my bird feeders or pick up food from the ground, I also pick up the occasional visitor - the Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Siskin who tend to come in the spring along with the Yellowhammers. The latter visit daily throughout the breeding season in numbers of 14-16. However, last year as I was re-seeding my front lawn, I was amazed to see 30+ Yellowhammers busily eating all the newly sown seed. It cost me dearly to provide sufficient seed for the birds in addition to the seed needed for my new lawn. Last year I had several sunflowers growing in the garden and the Coal Tits would disappear from view inside the flower head, searching for seeds, and then reappear several minutes later, their bellies full. The visitors to my front garden include Blackbirds, Starlings and Swallows. Although the latter don't land on my garden, they skim the lawn and rockery regularly from Easter onwards until they congregate together upon the telegraph wires until it is time to migrate. The Blackbirds regularly dig up worms from the lawn and last year one female Blackbird managed to pick up several snails from my pond, eat the snails and leave the shells. Fortunately she didn't teach her offspring to do the same. I also see 2 Pied Wagtails from time to time and the occasional Grey Wagtail on my front lawn. Both the Songthrush and the Mistlethrush also chase after the worms. During the breeding season last year we were fortunate in having a visit from a family of Great-Spotted Woodpeckers - a male, female and two juveniles. They stayed with us feeding on peanuts from our feeders for 2/3 months. This year we have seen a male and female but so far no young. We did have a brief glimpse last year of two Green Woodpeckers on the roof of my shed. A friend who happens to be in charge of the nesting programme at Lea Gardens, Derbyshire, drew my attention to them. The Collared Doves and Woodpigeons take over the bird table at times intent on eating all the wild bird food while the Common and Herring Gulls eat all the bread and scraps placed outside, quite often trying to fly off with a complete fat ball before the Hooded Crow scavenges the remains. Our two most rare birds which made an appearance only once, were a Brambling, which arrived along with the Chaffinches on the seed tray and a

Common Sandpiper. They both appeared very briefly in the back garden. We have occasional visits from both the male and female Pheasants and often see a Common Buzzard sitting on one of the garden posts. Another occasional visitor is a pair of Bullfinches, although we have not seen them yet this year. A most frequent visitor is the Sparrowhawk who tends to hide amongst the greenery, waiting for a small, unsuspecting bird. Fortunately his success rate is quite low. Last year he flew down to attack his prey and flew into my kitchen window, leaving the imprint of his outstretched wings. As I quickly sped outside there was a dazed Sparrowhawk waddling around the back garden. I took several photographs of him as he jumped onto a large rock where he stayed for about 10-15 minutes. In the end I had to chase him away as the small garden birds were beginning to return. On top of all this, I sit with a cup of coffee in one hand and a chocolate biscuit in the other looking through my lounge window and quite often I see numerous red deer and sometimes a White-tailed Sea Eagle (or 2) on the hill opposite - how lucky am I.....???

John Preston  
Luem Cottage  
Lochdon.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SPOTTER



"In memory of Toto"  
Produced by kind permission of Simon King©  
[www.simonkingwildlife.com](http://www.simonkingwildlife.com)

**D**ave Sexton our resident RSPB Officer and Bird Club member was due to take a month-long sabbatical. Where would he like to go? Would it be a beach holiday, *NOT QUITE*, would he like to soak up the sun, *GETTING WARMER*, or would he like to go on an adventure of a lifetime and join the BBC's Big Cat Diary team in the Masai Mara spotting Leopards, Cheetahs and Lions, *HOT, HOT, HOT*. He had worked with the BBC's wildlife team before when they came to Mull to film sea eagles and working alongside Mull wildlife cameraman Gordon Buchanan, so when it came to this sabbatical Dave asked if there was anything he could do to become involved with at the BBC's famous wildlife documentary unit and found himself on a plane, bound for Kenya working alongside Simon King. The BBC set up a huge tented camp alongside the Mara River in the Masai Mara. They had three teams, a Leopard team, a Lion team and a Cheetah team. Dave worked as a spotter, mainly for the Leopard team. "we would try and locate the animals in the field and by using this technique it saved time and money for the camera crews" said Dave. The film was sent back to the camp every day and edited there and then. There were a team of 60 people and as a spotter he left the camp every morning at 4.30 am and

returned after dark. He said that he did not see the inside of the tent in daylight for more than three times in the month that he was there. When he returned he said that the whole experience was "blissful"

Editor..... "thank you David for sharing your experience with us, and a special thank you to Simon for allowing us to use the picture of Toto who I am sure I along with others fell in love with....."

## WHO SAYS THEY ARE ELUSIVE?????

Just a small note.....whilst holidaying on Mull Lesley and Jim Curwen, bird club members, were travelling along one of Mull's



Highways and spotted this little bird so took a photo from the car window.....just out for an afternoon stroll.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

As a new club member, I was delighted to receive my first copy of The Oystercatcher. I see that the first Corncrake is reported to be on 29 April. My wife and I visited Iona on 28 April and heard one corncrake calling from the iris beds at about midday in the area between the Abbey and the village. I had not realised how fortunate we had been. We enjoyed our 2 weeks on Mull despite the unseasonal cold weather and are looking forward to a return visit in the future. I was interested to read Edwin's article about his visit as we had spoken together only a couple of days before he flew up to Glasgow. How a couple of weeks makes all the difference to migration etc, plus having a

local expert to accompany him.  
Best wishes  
David Turner

Thanks Jan for the e-mailed OYSTERCATCHER, that was two good things to come out of Mull yesterday, the other being the long awaited web cam from Frisa on the internet, we watch this day after day to keep us up to date with a little of what is going on when we are not there. Roll on the 1st of July when we take our next trip up there. Tell Pete that the subs will be posted very soon. Thanks again. Best wishes

Sandra and Les Garnett

## ATTENTION BIRD CLUB MEMBERS

Just to let you know that our new web site is up and running. Please visit this and let me know what you think. A big thank you to Andy Oldacre, our web master for setting this up. Please feel free to email Andy, his email address is on the front of the newsletter.  
[www.mullbirdclub.org.uk](http://www.mullbirdclub.org.uk)

Editor



"Got to get this finished before me beard grows"

## PROFILE

Secretary  
**SHAUN MCCULLOCH**

*Why an interest in Birds?*

At the age of 8 I was confined to bed with rheumatic fever for 3 months. The little sod had to be kept quiet somehow, so I was given a superb set of leather bound bird books written in about 1855 by Rev FO Morris with brilliant coloured engravings. Result - hooked for life.

*Who do you admire in the Bird World?*

The Late Chris Meade of the BTO. I attended several of his courses and heard him speak often.

*What do you like about birding?*

Always expect the unexpected.

*What do you dislike?*

We feed them all the year round, provide them with habitat nesting sites and boxes and how do they repay us - they steal all the soft fruit if I don't get there first.

*Why Mull?*

We spent a week's holiday here in 2000 and by the end of the week we were house hunting!!

*Favourite Reserve?*

Difficult one this, but Ouse Washes in Cambs/ Norfolk has to be high on the list in winter and perhaps Minsmere in summer.

*Which was your favourite foreign holiday?*

We've had so many, but Kenya has to be high on the list

*How do you see the future?*

Dealing with global warming, destruction of habitat, protecting endangered species. Increasing public awareness.

### *What do you see in the future for the Bird Club?*

We have a sound base to work from, an increasing membership and we have to deliver what the members want - Interesting winter meetings, regular field trips and hopefully encourage members to take part in surveys (RSPB/BTO). These can range from garden to the great outdoors depending on experience, expertise, fitness, time etc.

## CHAIRMAN'S VIEW

Arthur Brown

**T**hese are exciting times at the Bird Club as we move into the new season. The web site [www.mullbirdclub.org.uk](http://www.mullbirdclub.org.uk) is now up and running on its own site, and a big thank you must go to Andy Oldacre for this. I would also like to thank Alan Spellman for having a section dedicated to The Bird club on his site "mullbirds" in the past. (Don't forget to put the website into your favourites)

At the last committee meeting we have decided to try and do a survey of Garden Birds on Mull and will need your help so look on the web site and at meetings for more information on this. We hope that this will promote everyone's interest on the birds in their garden as well as what is happening elsewhere on Mull - birds need to be enjoyed, not just fed.

We are asking for opinions on how you receive the Oystercatcher, the hard copy "newsletter" that is sent out to members is now costing a lot of money to produce, so we propose to put future copies onto the web site so that you can download it. We do not however want anyone to miss out on their newsletter so if you DO NOT have a computer and still wish to have the newsletter in hard copy form, please let Jan Hall know on 01680 812440 and this will still be sent out to you.

We are arranging Field Trips each month, after all bird clubs are about birding. The first one is to the Ross of Mull and to Ardanalish Farm by kind permission of Aeneas and Minty MacKay. It is important that all those who would like to attend the trips inform the leader of their intention to come as we usually have an early evening supper in the vicinity and

catering numbers are required. The committee have some new initiatives for the coming season but YOUR input is vital to us, so if there is something you would like us to do on your behalf, please contact any committee member and we will see if we can accommodate you.

Until the next edition, keep looking, listening and enjoy your birds.

Arthur Brown - Chairman

## PROGRAMME OF EVENTS INDOOR MEETINGS

20TH OCTOBER 2006

Sue Dewar  
Organic Farming as opposed to ordinary farming and its effect on Wildlife

17th NOVEMBER 2006

Andy & Diana Oldacre  
Birding Trips

15TH DECEMBER 2006

Stuart Gibson  
Northern Hemisphere Birds  
Iceland Birds

19TH JANUARY 2007  
THE COMMITTEE

"How to be a bad birdwatcher and other humorous events"

16TH FEBRUARY 2007  
TBA

16TH MARCH 2007

Whale and Dolphin Trust

20th APRIL 2007

A.G.M  
Janet and Peter Hall  
Birds of Costa Rica

All the above meetings will take place at Craignure Village Hall at 7.30 prompt unless

otherwise advised. PLEASE WATCH FOR POSTERS.

## PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FIELD TRIPS

21st OCTOBER 2006

Ardalanish—visit to a Weaving Mill  
Meet at Bunessan Car Park @ 10.30am  
Organiser—Mike Wagemakers  
016881 700375

18th NOVEMBER 2006

Croggan, Lochbuie. Eat at Craignure Inn  
Meet at Craignure Hall @ 10.00am  
Organiser—Andy Oldacre  
01680 812105

9th DECEMBER 2006

Craig  
Meet at Ardrioch Farm Dervaig @ 10.00am  
Organiser - Arthur Brown  
01688 400415

1st JANUARY 2007

Bird Race  
Details will be on the website shortly

## A NOTE FROM THE TREASURER

A number of members have not yet paid their subscription for the current year which was actually due on the 1st April 2006. It remains unchanged at £5 per person per annum and not wishing to be a nag if you have not yet paid would you kindly do so as soon as possible. Thank you.

Peter T Hall ACIB - Treasurer