



Editor and Webmaster

Isle of Mull Bird Club, Newsletter & Website

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“The Oystercatcher”

Field Trip to Lochdon and Loch Spelve Tuesday 4th June 2019

A select group of 4 members and 2 visitors set off from Craignure, first stop being the road to Gorsten. There was very little on the mud, it being low tide, but we found a black-headed among the gulls, and the Canada geese had young goslings. Most notable was the singing of both dunnock and wren. Oystercatcher, curlew, Mallard and RB Merganser were busy at the water's edge.

Moving on to overlook the marsh past Hazelbank we could hear great spotted woodpecker and had a brief view of a spotted flycatcher on the edge of the woods behind us, while several red deer grazed on the hill with distant views of white tailed eagle above. Again dunnock and wren were singing, but most time was spent being entertained by a two buzzards. They flew in one after another to land on a hillock, the first carrying quite large prey. We would have been confident this was a rabbit if they were not so scarce at present because of disease. For a considerable time we watched as they squabbled over and then, alternately, devoured the prey before flying off back over the conifers behind us. As they disappeared a male hen harrier flew along the road edge giving us a very close view.

Further along towards the deserted farmhouse bird activity was made up of starlings, swallows and meadow pipits, while seals basked in the sun on the rocks of Loch Spelve. A smart male reed bunting showed in the bracken.



Golden Eagle (Aquila Chrysaetos) © Jennifer Jackson

We lunched by the deserted cottage at Torness, enjoying the view but not the midges, and seeing very little bird life. At three lochs meadow pipits were active but it was very busy so we soon moved on further down Glen More to watch the golden eagles. Good views were had of both adults, skimming the ridge and flying in and out of the nest site on the cliff. Well worth the journey down the Glen.

Jennifer Jackson (Bird Club Member)

Field Trip to Loch Ba Tuesday 18th June 2019

I'm writing this report well after the event! I seem to recall that the day was quite good, despite heavy rain in the preceding days. Certainly the various burns we passed were very full. A good number of members and visitors joined this first Summer visit to Loch Ba. Previously we'd only been there in Autumn or Winter; and today we expected to see numbers of breeding species.

As usual we had permission from the estate to drive as far as the bridge before walking. The amount of water in the burns slowed our progress and in the end we had to cut short the main walk - it was simply impossible to safely cross one of the burns in the re-generated woodland area.

Near the bridge there were lots of Sand Martin and Skylark, around the woodland there were small flocks of Redpoll. Across the loch we found the local pair of WTSE, and on the loch there Goosander.

I'll tell the rest of the story in pictures:



Chaffinch & Skylark pix © A M Oldacre



Sand Martin & Goosander pix © Nancy Somerville



We saw the following species:

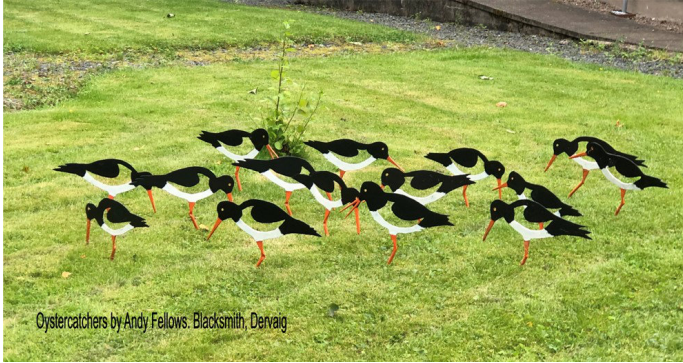
Cormorant
Grey Heron
Greylag Goose
Mallard
Goosander
WTSE
Oystercatcher
Lapwing
Ringed Plover
Curlew
Common Sandpiper
Common Snipe
Common Gull
Cuckoo
Skylark
Sand Martin
Barn Swallow
Grey Wagtail
Pied Wagtail
Meadow Pipit
Robin
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Willow Warbler
Blue Tit
Chaffinch
Redpoll
Hooded Crow

Andrew M. Oldacre (Chairman)

Oystercatchers in Dervaig A Report from Alan Spellman

Andy Fellows is our local blacksmith and artist in metal. I thought that I would like to share with you just some of his work.

All his work is hand forged and personal.



Barn Owl Project Mull Bird Club involvement

Barn Owls are in serious decline. On Mull this is due in part, at least to the deforestation currently being carried out across the island which is creating a loss of habitat and suitable nesting sites. The Forestry Commission are clearing the forests as they mature and are not replacing the barn owl plastic barrels as trees are being felled.

This deforestation will also have a devastating effect on long eared owls. This secretive owl spends most of its life deep in the forest where it nests and feeds. This is one of the reasons that we get so few sightings reported.

However there is also a good side to some deforestation in that it will create habitat in the medium term for short eared owls, hen harriers, tree pipits and even possibly nightjar. Some old farm buildings which have always been natural nesting sites are being renovated and again reducing available nesting sites.



We, your committee, believe that your bird club can do something to help barn owls on our island and to this end plan to install some new barn owl boxes at established sites. We will also encourage estate owners to repair and replace barn owl boxes wherever we can.

However this is a bird club project and we would like club members to be involved. We will need to monitor and record our activity to establish its success, and need members to help in this respect. If you feel that you could monitor a nest box please get in touch.

The Quinish estate have agreed to purchase and install three boxes on their estate and the Ben More estate have already replaced the box at the bothy, Loch Ba.

We are collecting information on current locations and if you are aware of any barn owl nest boxes or indeed wild sites, we would like that information to be included. For example, we have very little information about boxes or sites on the Ross of Mull.

If you have any information about nest sites, or indeed any other particularly interesting news of barn owls, please sent with a good description of where a site is and preferably with a map reference.



For those with suitable habitat and space to put a barn owl box, the triangular ones, shown above, cost the club £64 delivered; which we decided was less expensive than building them ourselves, even with John Preston's free labour!

Alan Spellman

Summer in Iceland *July 2019*

We first went to Iceland in February 2017; there was plenty of ice and cold; but precious few bird species to be seen. There was however a White-tailed Sea Eagle, a number of Purple Sandpiper and numerous Snow Buntings. So we decided that a visit during the Summer months was in order.

Fast forward to July 2019 and our departure from Glasgow Airport to Keflavik Airport near the capital city of Reykjavik. This was an organised photographic trip using the services of Wild Photography Holidays (with whom we went last time). We met up with the rest of the group, and our leaders, at the same hotel we'd used before; that WPH use regularly in Reykjavik. Having made our introductions we went out for an evening meal at 'Harry's Seafood and Grill Restaurant' in the centre of the city; another place we'd been to before; stunning food at incredible prices!

Our route out of Reykjavik the following day took us along the South coast, passing the town of Vik, before we reached our hotel for the night. On the way we visited several places including Skógafoss Waterfall and the glacial lake at Jökulsárlón. At the former I found a nesting Fulmar with its chick. On the black (volcanic ash) beach near Jökulsárlón we encountered Common Eider, both male and female and young, along with Snow Bunting in breeding plumage. Lesser Black-backed Gull was common here, and I managed to photograph a line of them on an iceberg.

At Heinabergslón glacial lake, early in the morning, there was a line up of several kayaks. They made a good picture with the glacial lake in the background. The place looked otherwise deserted, but then an almost familiar call took me on a rapid march of about 400 yards from the kayaks. Several Red-throated Diver were calmly 'sailing' on the lake! After a few images of them I turned to return to the kayaks; but was waylaid by a pair of Arctic Skua and then another almost familiar call - Whimbrel! Again I was able to get a few decent images. As the holiday proceeded it became obvious that Whimbrel were everywhere, in suitable habitat, not a Curlew to be seen!







On our travels I noticed, almost at the roadside, a family of Whooper Swan; two adults and four signets. Our van screeched to a halt and I was the first out of the door, rushing back to a small lake, its edges full of tall grasses. My pictures show just the heads of these fine birds as they swam backwards and forwards in front of us!

We moved on from our hotel near Jökulsárlón and turned North. There is affectively one road in Iceland, it circumnavigates the whole island - Route Number 1. At Krafla Power Station (cold water is pumped down into the earth; steam at high pressure returns and is used to generate electricity) we visited the thermal springs and found a most unusual open-air 'bathroom' ... This was also the place where we encountered our first Golden Plover.

Moving on, our next hotel (actually they were self-catering cabins) was at Mývatn. It was one of the places I was particularly looking forward to - they have Red-necked Phalarope - I'd never seen one before. Here we saw numerous Redwing (nesting and gathering food for their offspring), Redshank, Meadow Pipit, Black-tailed Godwit (in breeding plumage!) and lots of Arctic Tern. I wandered about the edge of Lake Mývatn and soon spotted my quarry - Red-necked Phalarope. I'd not realised quite how small they are. This wader swims on the surface of this shallow lake (about two feet) eating the multitude of flies that populate the area. Mývatn is Icelandic for 'lake of flies' and they were not joking! Thankfully they are more of a nuisance than anything, and do not bite. Near to Lake Mývatn is the Höfði Promontory. It was a short visit for a picnic. As

the rest of the group returned to our vehicle I became aware of the sound of young birds begging for food. The sound was coming from a thicket of trees that lined the path to the carpark. I crouched down, trying to find the source of the sound under that canopy. Suddenly I saw two, and then four, young Bohemian waxwing between the leaves; they sat side by side unaware of my presence. I took several images; I was taken by surprise by this encounter. It turns out that waxwing are uncommon in Iceland, and rare as a breeding species. I researched this on our return, another breeding pair had been seen a few miles from this spot, but nothing else for the whole of Iceland!

Our journey back to Reykjavik was across the stone desert of the interior. An inhospitable place with few birds - though I did glimpse a Merlin before we came to the desert proper. We reached the Kerlingarfjöll Mountains after three hours of stone desert! Almost at the last minute our hotel came into view, in a small valley that had been invisible until that moment. There were more thermal hot springs here to photograph, although it was a rather wet that day. We joined the 'Golden Triangle' (a set of hotspots for general tourists) at Gullfoss Waterfall and then went on to the Strokkur Geysir and Thingvellir National Park. We returned to the Klettur Hotel in Reykjavik for our final night and another fine meal at 'Harry's Seafood and Grill Restaurant'. During our eleven days we'd travelled over a thousand miles around Iceland; and seen some of its spectacular scenery and wildlife.

Andy Oldacre (Chairman)

