



a million  
voices for  
nature

Newsletter  
of the  
Central Ayrshire  
Local Group

36th year  
Summer 2012



At the heronry, Culzean - Spring 2012



Nuthatch at a feeder at RSPB Ken Dee Marshes  
reserve - on a local group field trip



Some of local group members depart Seahouses  
Harbour on 24th June 2012 for Staple Island



Part of our 26-strong group wave to the 'other half'  
as they leave Amble Harbour for Coquet Island

Photo: John Rogers  
Off Coquet Island on a club trip - 23 June 2012

# The Gannet



For all local birding details - log on to: [www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk](http://www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk)

## Leader's Lines

Hi folks!

Where has the summer gone? I seem to say this every year, but this time around we could probably add "what summer?" That said, I do hope you all have had some nice summer holidays and pleasant birding experiences. It's always good to enjoy a change of scenery. Nan and I had a lovely break in the Highlands, with no midges and only one day of rain, so no complaints there! The highlights included sightings of two Slavonian grebes in summer plumage and great views of ospreys.

We "Stepped up for Nature" during the summer months (as we are all encouraged to do by RSPB Scotland), having had our annual public bird walks at Rozelle Park in Ayr. This year we were even more successful than usual with a record 39 people joining us for the two walks. We had a display at the "Churches give to Grow" day at Newton-Wallacetown Church in Ayr. We also were present at this year's "Celebrate Ayrshire" event, complete with our own gazebo and display stands. This took place at the NTS Culzean Country Park in June. We attended the "Armed forces day" at Ayr's Low Green on a very blustery and cold July day. The PS "Waverley" trips are going well, despite the poor weather. On the 23rd of July we saw around 200 puffins on the water and flying around Ailsa Craig, and the gannetry appears to be going from strength to strength with new areas of the island being colonised. It was also good to see so many young common guillemots amongst the hundreds we saw in rafts on the calm waters of the Firth of Clyde. I would like to say a big thank you to all who took part and are taking part in these events. I would also like to say a big thank you to Waverley Steam Navigation, who continue to welcome us aboard to help inform all passengers about the RSPB reserve of Ailsa Craig and its bird life.

I look forward to welcoming everyone back for our new session, we have a nice mix of interesting talks and outings which our deputy leader Anne Dick, our outdoor leader Jim Thomson and coach trip organiser Tony Scott, have put together for our enjoyment. Thanks go to all our other committee members for their dedicated work, and to you all for supporting us. Our first evening meeting takes place on Monday 17th September when David Grant tells us about the gulls of Lady Isle. A full diary of our indoor meetings and field trips is included in this newsletter. We look forward to meeting with you all.

Best wishes,

**Ronnie Coombes, Group Leader.**

# The Isle of May

Words and  
pictures  
by Ian Thomson



Weekend break with friends, we travel  
to the place I spent my youth.

Beaches: sand and rock and gravel,  
villages with pan tile roofs.

Arrive in Anstruther - it's raining,  
waves are breaking on sea wall,  
same all over, no complaining.

Scottish summer? Dodging squalls!

Saturday we walk the coast path,  
in the rain to Elie Bay.

Cheering up the Sunday forecast,  
dull but dry for Isle of May!

Tied up, by the lifeboat station,  
"May Princess" was boarding, full.  
Luckily, four cancellations,  
weather now calm, dry and cool.

As we near this birders' Eden  
puffins number more and more.

Watch them bob up with their sand eels,  
heading for May Island shore.



Gannet squadrons wheeling, diving,  
each dive worth Olympic gold.

Fat grey seals bask on the tide line  
with that blubber, never cold.

"May Princess" ties up on island,  
we disembark to see the birds.

Survive attacks by Arctic terns  
noise too intense for words.

Cacophony of seabirds' screaming,  
kittiwakes with endless cries.

Puffins seem to be unheeding  
of the chaos in the skies.

All too soon it's time to leave  
nesting birds in wild terrain.

Eider duck and Manx shearwater,  
next year we'll be back again.



## Join us for a Mull eagle watch

**Saturday 27 to Tuesday 30 April 2013**

RSPB Central Ayrshire and SOC Ayrshire are joining forces once again on a three-night Mull long weekend in April 2013. It is our intention to travel by small luxury coach from Dodds of Troon, crossing over to the Isle of Mull from Oban to Craignure. We intend to visit the top birding spots on the island and the actual itinerary will depend very much on where we stay. **This can only be decided once we have enough of our members interested in joining the trip. More details and joining forms will be available at the first two meetings of RSPB in Ayr and SOC in Monkton.**

**To give us maximum time on Mull and Iona, we will attempt to take the midday ferry on the 27th and return mid afternoon to Oban and back to Ayrshire on the 30th of April. Needless to say, our top birds will be white-tailed eagle, golden eagle and hen harrier, but there are many more interesting species to find on both of the islands we will be visiting.**

As a taster - here are just some of the places we intend to visit. **GLEN MORE** - Excellent for observing upland species such as hen harrier and short-eared owl, buzzard, golden eagle, white-tailed eagle, kestrel and raven. In the valley floor and lower hillsides we may look for curlew, cuckoo, whinchat, stonechat and wheatear. Glen More is 16km from Craignure.

**MISHNISH LOCHS** - on the B8073 towards Dervaig. The lochs are stocked with brown trout and attract little grebe, grey heron, red-throated diver, and occasionally goosander. Hen harrier, buzzard, golden eagle and short-eared owl may also be around. About 5km from Tobermory. **LOCHDON** - has residents which include grey heron, mute swan, eider, red-breasted merganser, hen harrier, buzzard and redshank. 5km south of Craignure. Passage waders include grey plover, knot, sanderling, both bar and black-tailed godwits, and whimbrel. In recent years, pectoral sandpiper, ruff, spotted redshank and green sandpiper have been recorded. **LOCH NA KEAL** is 4.8km from Salen on the B8035. This is a large sea loch with varied coastline and several islets and skerries. Shag, eider, oystercatcher, red-breasted merganser, curlew and redshank can be seen all year. Slavonian grebe numbers often peak in April. **FIONNPHORT & IONA.** Fionnphort is at the end of the A849 and 64km from Craignure. The ferry crosses from here to the sacred isle of Iona (1.6km). Fidden is another 1.6km to the south and has a diverse mix of intertidal habitat, coastal farmland and lowland moor and is good for waders and passerines. Just to the east of Fionnphort is Loch Phoit, where little grebe are present all year.

**THE ISLE OF IONA** has low-lying rocky moorland, fertile hay meadows, sandy bays and exposed sea cliffs. Fulmar, shag and kittiwake breed to the south west. Rock dove and jackdaw elsewhere. Linnet, twite and yellowhammer are common all year. Iona is the most likely place to hear corncrake - the fields around the abbey and village being best. **LOCH SCRIDAIN** is 33km from Craignure on the A849. Best known for great northern divers - but all three are present (in



White-tailed eagle by Chris Gomersall (RSPB)

winter). Individuals can also be seen in summer. This is also a very good spot to see otters.

**BIRD CALENDAR. Species which can be seen all year on Mull include:** red-throated diver, fulmar, red-breasted merganser, hen harrier, sparrowhawk, buzzard, golden eagle, white-tailed eagle, kestrel, merlin, peregrine, red grouse, ptarmigan, ringed plover, snipe, woodcock, redshank, greenshank, common gull, common guillemot, razorbill, black guillemot, rock dove, tawny owl, short-eared owl, great spotted woodpecker, rock pipit, grey wagtail, dipper, stonechat, raven, siskin, twite, redpoll, crossbill, yellowhammer. **April into May:** great northern diver, goldeneye. **Breeding birds include** Manx shearwater, golden plover, common sandpiper, kittiwake, common and Arctic terns, cuckoo, sand martin, tree pipit, redstart, whinchat, wheatear, ring ouzel, sedge warbler, tree pipit, common redstart, whinchat, wheatear, common whitethroat and wood warbler. **Spring passage birds include** pink-footed goose, golden plover, sanderling, occasional spotted redshank, black-tailed godwit, whimbrel, kittiwake and (in April) white wagtail.

**We will be basing our initial price on bed and breakfast in good en-suite accommodation in ideally three-star hotels.** On Mull, there is very little choice in anything of a lower category, unless one looks for guest houses (which would be unlikely to have enough accommodation for our group). **We will base the costing on a maximum of 17 participants. Initial enquiries suggest the total cost of all coach travel from and back to Ayr, three nights bed and breakfast in en-suite accommodation and ferry crossings would be about £295 per person.** If we can also get a good deal to include dinner on each of the three evenings we would accept it, but inevitably this would increase the cost somewhat. Cost all comes down to supply and demand in the Highlands and Islands, and the demand is getting greater at all times of the year now.

It would be very helpful if all interested parties would pay a deposit of £75 as this would enable us to secure rooms in the most conveniently placed hotel. We need to do this well before the end of the year of course. We look forward to a most rewarding experience with the large raptors playing a big part in the enjoyment of all of us.

*Thanks to Mike Madders and Julia Welstead's book 'Where to watch birds in Scotland' for much of the information shown in this article.*

Tony Scott - trip organiser



The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654.



# Central Ayrshire Local Group

## Meetings, Outings & Holidays

### Season 2012-2013

Shag with young birds and razorbills and kittiwakes in the background.  
Staple Island, 24 June 2012.  
Photo by Gerda Scott

## The Gannet

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## Field Trips 2012

Saturday 29 September

### LOCHMABEN & APPLETREEGARTH

Meet at Lochmaben Main Street for 11.00 hrs. (toilets). Visit Castle Loch before moving on to Appletreegarth Reserve with its sand martin bank. Please bring a picnic lunch. Whole day trip

Saturday 27 October

### WWT CAERLAVEROCK RESERVE

Meet at the reserve car park for 11.00 hrs. All day birding trip to the reserve. Café, bookshop, picnic tables and toilets on site. Finish around 16.00 hrs.

Saturday 24 November **BY COACH**  
**EDEN ESTUARY & ST. ANDREWS**

Meet at Dodds coach depot in Ayr at 07.45. One stop en-route for coffee etc. Visit Guardbridge hide and centre, Tip Point and Balgove hide on the estuary. On to St. Andrews later. Dinner will be arranged for c.17.45. Back in Ayr for around 22hrs. Coach tickets £23, available at first meetings.

Saturday 08 December

### LOCH RYAN & WIG BAY, STRANRAER

Meet at Ballantrae seafront car park (toilets) for 10.30. On to bird Loch Ryan and Wig Bay. Please bring picnic lunch. A garden centre with café and toilets is a short drive from Wig Bay. Finish c.15h.

## 2013

Saturday 19 January

### FULLARTON WOODS, TROON, & BARASSIE

Meet at Fullarton Woods car park (toilets) at 10.15. On to Barassie shore and Troon Harbour later. A picnic lunch may be a good idea. Finish c.15 hrs.

Saturday 16 February

### DOONFOOT & GREENAN SHORE, AYR

Meet at Greenan Castle car park for 10.00 hrs. Birding the bay and adjoining scrubland. We aim to finish by 12.00 noon.

Saturday 30 March

### SOUTH AYRSHIRE COAST & PINMORE

Meet at Maidens Harbour car park for 10.30 (toilets). After birding Maidens Bay, move slowly south to Girvan, then some inland birding around Pinmore village. Please bring picnic lunch. Finish c.15.30.

Saturday 27 to Tuesday 30 April **BY COACH**  
**THE ISLES OF MULL & IONA**

Meet at Dodds coach depot in Ayr at 07.30 for a three night, four day trip to these enchanting isles at the optimum time for breeding and migrant bird activity. We will book comfortable en-suite rooms on Mull and travel will be in a small coach - max participants will be 17. Two full days on Mull and Iona, with a chance to bird some other West Highland locations. Indicative cost for coach, b&b, and ferry - around £295. Full details later.

Saturday 25 May

### LOCH DOON & NESS GLEN

Meet at the 'Round House' cafe/toilets at the dam for 10.15 hrs. Bird Ness Glen and the area along Loch Doon. Hot and cold food available at the 'Round House' or bring lunch. Finish about 16.00h.

Saturday 22 June

### BROWNSIDE BRAES, PAISLEY

looking for lesser whitethroat and more with Tom Byars around his local patch. Meet at Brownside Braes Farm car park for 11.00. Please bring a picnic lunch. Finish around 16.00 hrs.

## Indoor Meetings 2012

Monday 17 September

### LADY ISLE - ITS GULLS & DISEASES

An illustrated talk by **DAVID GRANT**  
Membership registration precedes the talk.

Monday 15 October

### WILDLIFE & CULTURE OF MADAGASCAR

A talk with superb photography by **LIZ LEYDEN**

Monday 19 November

### IN SEARCH OF KESTRELS - ON

**THE SEYCHELLES, MAURITIUS & CAPE VERDE**  
A wildlife adventure, told by **GORDON RIDDLE**

Monday 17 December

### CULZEAN COUNTRY PARK & ITS WILDLIFE

**NTS's KATIE WALKER** unlocks many wildlife secrets of our nearest country park at this festive pre-Christmas meeting

## 2013

Monday 21 January

### THE GOLDEN EAGLE - & AN UPDATE ON THE BEAN GEESSE OF SLAMANNAN PLATEAU

told by **JOHN SIMPSON** of Wild Caledonia

Monday 18 February

### IMPROVEMENTS AT RSPB's VANE FARM RESERVE. A talk by **VICKI TURNBULL**

Monday 18 March

### THE WORK OF RSPB - NATIONALLY & LOCALLY

A visit by **RSPB Scotland director STUART HOUSDEN** and an insight into what's new

Monday 15 April

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by **RORY CRAWFORD** on the **UPS AND DOWNS OF SCOTTISH SEABIRDS**



with Angus Hogg and Tony + Gerda Scott  
**Contact address + info:**  
4 Hilltop Place  
AYR KA7 3PB  
Tel: 01292 281 085  
E-mail: da.scott@tiscali.co.uk

September 2013

## RAPTOR MIGRATION IN CÁDIZ PROVINCE AND THE STRAITS OF GIBRALTAR

Join **Angus Hogg** for seven full days in one of the prime birding regions of southern Spain, to observe the migration of raptors, storks and many other species as they move south across the Straits of Gibraltar into Africa. Or take time out from birding to **join Gerda and Tony Scott** as they explore the villages and towns of the Costa de la Luz, such as the haunting Moorish hill town of Vejer, the ancient Roman settlement of Baelo Claudia, the town of Tarifa and the harbour town of Cádiz, one of the oldest settlements in Spain. Apart from the spectacle of the autumn migration here, the Tarifa hinterland is rich in breeding species of rocky, wooded country. There are some very large vulture colonies, with griffon, Egyptian and a few black vultures. There have been recent records of Lammergeiers, Rüppell's vultures, long-legged buzzards and Lanner falcons, especially in the autumn. The beach area at Tarifa is a favourite for large groups of gulls, including Audouin's. Tern flocks form on the lagoon fringes and include some lesser crested terns in autumn, as well as large numbers of waders. Passerines throng the fields and pines at times of migration, so time will be at a premium to see all that is about. We hope to stay at the Meson de Sancho (3\*), a traditional style Andalusian mansion, close to Los Alcomales Nature Reserve and just inland from Tarifa. **We anticipate that the final cost will be in the region of £950 per person for all flights, coach travel, dinner, bed and breakfast for eight nights (nine days) and the services of our bird leader.** Full details available from October.

All indoor meetings take place on Monday evenings at 19.30 hrs - Hall B of Newton Wallacetown Church Halls, Main St., Ayr

The meetings are open to everyone interested in birds and wildlife. Please come along and join us.

If you enjoy our meetings and field trips - local membership costs only £6 single or £10 double. There are eight indoor meetings and nine field trips.

If you would like more information - please phone:

Ronnie Coombes  
Tel: 01292 521 522

Tony Scott (re tours)  
Tel: 01292 281 085

Ian Clark  
Tel: 01292 441 940

We will be repeating our annual bird walks in Rozelle Park and Belleisle Park, for one day only in Spring 2013. At 06.00 hrs (Rozelle) & 08.30 (Belleisle) Date to be decided

All field trips are held jointly with the Ayrshire branch of the SOC (Scottish Ornithologists' Club). The meetings are open to everyone interested in birds and wildlife. Please come along and join us on any of these outings.

We generally car share and if anyone requires a lift or is willing to share their car, please telephone any of the committee mentioned below.

Ronnie Coombes, **Group Leader.** 01292 265 891

Anne Dick, **Deputy Group Leader.** 01292 541 981

Ian Clark, **Treasurer.** Tel: 01292 441 940

Anne Thomson, **Secretary.** Tel: 01292 260 816

Jim Thomson, **Outdoor Leader.** Tel: 01292 570 351

Gerda & Tony Scott  
Tel: 01292 281 085

Kenneth Smith 01292 442 901