

Tony & Garry at Inch Levels reserve



Pump House parking area, Inch Levels



Day 6 Saturday 20 May 2017

Drive to Ballycastle Harbour for the ferry to Rathlin Island; then Bertie's 'Puffin Bus' to RSPB's West Light Seabird Centre. Later in the day - The Dark Hedges

Today was our best day weather-wise - sunshine and 18 degrees. We had an earlier breakfast today for an 08.10 hrs departure, then a direct route to Ballycastle Harbour, arriving at 09.20. We had ample time to collect our booked group tickets for the 10.00 hrs crossing. The new vessel was not yet available, so we made the crossing on the ex-CalMac ferry, MV "Canna". A rather stiff breeze resulted in a lively crossing, arriving at the Church Bay landing place on Rathlin Island for 10.45. On the way over we saw plenty of shelduck, gannet, shag, cormorant and oystercatcher. Numerous black guillemots were noted flying and on the water. Razorbill and common guillemot were seen, the latter in mainly small rafts bobbing on the waves. On arrival, we immediately found our 'Puffin bus' and owner/driver Bertie. There was a slight problem, as the earlier sailing aboard the fast ferry had been cancelled due to engine trouble. Another group had booked Bertie and they should have arrived earlier. However, we agreed to let them travel first and we would either bird around the harbour or enjoy a relaxing coffee at the nearby Water Shed Café. As agreed, Bertie was with us again for 11.30 and we were soon travelling out to the West light seabird centre. Bertie's bus was old, a Mercedes-Benz 'sprinter' of at least 1990 vintage - so well over 25 years old in any case. "I hope your brakes work well" quipped one of our group as we negotiated the narrow, twisty and steep strip of tarmac which took us to the west end of the island. "Brakes...what brakes?" said Bertie. "What do you think the holes in the floor are for?" One thing certain, John Cairns would not have wished an exchange of vehicles! We arrived safely at the RSPB seabird centre for 12 noon and stayed there until 13.30. We were soon walking down to the lighthouse and the impressive bird cliffs. The seabird stacks were full to overflowing. This is Northern Ireland's biggest and most spectacular seabird colony with the many auks jostling for space as they congregate in their thousands to breed from late April through July. Puffin numbers were disappointingly low, but common guillemots were everywhere, as well as razorbills, kittiwakes, black-headed, common, herring, and both lesser and great black-backed gulls too. Numerous common terns were also seen, and we had views of five buzzards and one peregrine falcon. Fulmars were well represented and two pairs of great skua were seen in the nearby fields. We also found the 'upside'down' lighthouse most interesting with many displays about lighthouse keepers and their families.. Strange to think how close we are to Scotland at this point. Rathlin is just 19 miles south of Islay and 15 miles west of the Mull of Kintyre.



Photos: Clockwise from top from left: MV "Canna" at Ballycastle; On board the ferry; Bertie; Bertie's bus; Church Bay, Rathlin

As arranged, Bertie collected us from West Light at 13.30 and we were back at Church Bay for 14.00 hrs. A few of our group visited the island museum, others walked and scanned the area for birds, and I think most of us managed a little lunch somewhere. The open prawn sandwiches at McCuaig's bar and kitchen were a perfect choice, light and delicious. We took the same ferry back to Ballycastle at 15.30, arriving back at 16.15. It was then off once again, but calling to see the famous 'Dark Hedges', just one of the locations where "Game of Thrones" was filmed. We were back at the hotel for 18.50 after a truly wonderful day. Drinks at 19.30 and dinner at 20.15. Saturday night and the dining room and bar were both full to capacity. Tonight we had ham hock terrine as a starter and Atlantic tuna steaks in a salsa verde to follow. Later we were able to add a few new sightings to our bird list.



Day 7 Sunday 21 May 2017

The Irish Republic - Lough Mourne; Barnesmore Gap; Lough Eske; Donegal for lunch at the 'Olde Castle Bar;' Killybegs Harbour; Mountcharles Pier; and tea at Kee's Hotel, Ballybofey

After breakfast, John introduced us to Derek Hannan, our driver for the day (It was John's rest day). Derek was in Ireland for another Dodd's tour, but was free to take over the wheel of our coach for the day. We left Derry at 09.00 and drove over the border once again from Lifford to Ballybofey for our first stop at Lough Mourne. It really was far too windy for any significant birdlife on or around the water, but we did see one common sandpiper at least. On through the impressive Barnesmore Gap to Drumminin before joining the narrow and twisty road which leads around picturesque Loch Eske, nestling at the foot of the Blue Stack Mountains. Idyllic and peaceful, but difficult to find a parking spot with clear views across the water. However, we did find two parking areas where we could have short walks. There were quite a few warblers around and apart from enjoying the melodious songs and calls, we had some nice sightings. These included willow warbler, chiffchaff, blackcap, mistle thrush, song thrush, blackbird, spotted flycatcher as well as wood pigeon, collared dove, cuckoo, great spotted woodpecker, meadow pipit, rock pipit, pied wagtail, chaffinch, goldfinch, coal, blue and great tits, long-tailed tit, treecreeper and wren. By 12.30 we were parked at Donegal Harbour and walked to our lunch spot for the day - 'The Olde Castle Bar and Red Hugh Restaurant.' A delightful place, full of character and good food. Lots of fish and seafood dishes available and a choice of real ales. Leaving Donegal at 14.30, we drove out to Killybegs harbour, a place Garry suggested we look at, as well as Mountcharles pier. We visited both. The sun shone at Killybegs, but the rain came on later. However, we did see cormorant, oystercatcher, ringed plover, lapwing, black guillemot, kittiwake and a selection of the usual gulls, nothing out of the ordinary, and over the day, we had three buzzards and one kestrel. As the rain had set in, Derek suggested tea, coffee and scones at an hotel he knew in Ballybofey. It was a lovely, family run place with its own 'palm court.' Kee's Hotel was good idea for a wet afternoon. We were back at our hotel for 18.30 and dinner was at 20.00 hrs tonight. In complete contrast to yesterday, we almost had the place to ourselves. The main dish tonight was roast turkey in a red onion gravy.

Two views of beautiful Lough Eske



Donegal Harbour



Derek and John at the Olde Castle Bar



in Donegal



Killybegs Harbour

Day 8 Monday 22 May 2017

A morning in the City of Derry; Walk the Walls and cross the Peace Bridge. Belfast for the afternoon ferry to Cairnryan and dinner at Craignelder Hotel in Stranraer

Our last day in Ireland and we leave our hotel at 08.45 in order to find a space in the small city centre coach park in Derry. So from 09.15 until 12.45 we had time to visit the historic sights in the city, or go birding or walking along the banks of the River Foyle. Gerda and I decided to walk the entire circle of the walls and visit St. Columb's cathedral on the way. Becoming European City of Culture has helped to elevate Derry into a must-see centre of culture and the arts. The walls of the city were constructed between 1613 and 1618 to protect the English and Scots settlers in the new town that was established as part of the Plantation of Ulster. Derry has the most complete circuit of historic walls of any town or city in Ireland. Standing up to eight metres high, measuring 1.3 km around, and enclosing an area of roughly 13 hectares. The walls are now 400 years old and are both a legacy of the history of the city and very much part of its thriving life today. Modern Derry has given its public and visitors the Peace Bridge, the Millennium Forum shopping centre and most importantly, the hope of peace between communities as depicted in the 'Hands Across the Divide' statue at the entrance to the city.

We left at the appointed time of 12.45 in order to get us to the Stena Line ferry terminal in Belfast for the 15.30 sailing. It had been a wet start to the morning and gradually dried up to become a mild and hazily sunny day, making the crossing to Cairnryan most attractive. Tonight we were dining at the Craignelder Hotel in Stranraer, a great recommendation from Jean and Geoff. We had a very warm welcome and the food choices were excellent and well cooked. Here from 18.15, we left for Ayr at 20.20 and said our goodbyes to Jean and Geoff as they headed off in a taxi to nearby Leswalt. The rest of us enjoyed the journey north along the coast and arrived at Dodds coach depot in Ayr for 21.50, after a most pleasant and convivial holiday. Gerda and I also appreciated all the good wishes for our Golden Wedding - making the whole stay into a very special occasion. We look forward to organising another birding trip for 2018.

.....oh.....and our final total of bird species was 116 for the week.

St. Columbs Cathedral



The Walls of Derry



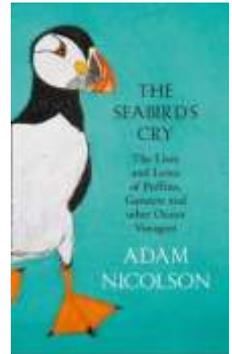
The Peace Bridge



Precious seabirds are falling off a cliff

Adam Nicolson

Adam Nicolson is the author of The Seabird's Cry, published by HarperCollins in June this year. This article appeared in The Guardian on 26.05.2017



Puffins are among species decimated by fishing and warming seas - just as science unlocks their secrets

About 70,000 tonnes of seabird are now afloat or on the wing off the shores of the British Isles. This biomass - roughly the same as Salisbury Cathedral - is made up entirely thinking, fishing, hunting, flirting, fighting, flying, diving and feathered beauty: eight million breeders, several million more adolescents and, by the end of the summer, armies of chicks. Perhaps 15 million creatures in all: here for sex, and the raising of the next generation.

Every coastal culture on Earth has evolved a double attitude to seabirds - using and loving them, nurturing and killing them, experimenting with them and selling them, looking at them with awe and making toys, hats and dinner out of them. They were never merely walking or flying larders but, as the archaeologists Marcus Brittain and Nick Overton have called them, "participants in life". Stillborn children were buried on the wings of whooper swans in Mesolithic Denmark. At Isbister in Orkney, more than 600 sea eagle bones were mixed in with human remains in a bronze age tomb. In Shetland shepherds used to feed titbits to the bonxies - great skuas - that protected their lambs from sea eagles and ravens. Even now, Hebridean fishermen keep seagulls as pets in their gardens.

For generations, their mystery and power has been their ability to come and go beyond any horizon: wandering albatrosses sail five million miles in a lifetime's voyaging around the Southern Ocean; each puffin holds within its mind a map of the North Atlantic, tracking across it to the same unmarked parts year after year; shearwaters smell their way around their 20,000-mile migrations from northern nest sites to southern fishing grounds in a two-hemisphere life of unbroken summer. But just as science is coming to understand the seabirds, we are destroying them. By one measure, in the past 60 years they have declined by two thirds, from about 1.5 billion to something like 500 million. The extension of the graph into the future reaches zero in about 2060. That won't happen. But a disaster is unfolding, and it is one we have brought on ourselves: through overfishing; the massive accidental catching of birds in fishing gear; their deliberate destruction; introducing rats, cats, dogs, pigs, goats, rabbits and cattle to the breeding places of birds that are defenceless because they did not evolve with the introduced species (many Pacific birds

“Plastic floating in the ocean comes to smell like food, so 90% of seabirds have plastic in their stomachs”

literally cannot smell a rat); pollution by oil, metals, plastics and other toxins; the recently discovered fact that plastic floating in the ocean, comes to smell like food, so 90% of all seabirds are now found to have plastic in their stomachs; the destruction of nesting sites by human developments; and the multiple effects of climate change and the acidification of the sea.

The details are horrible. Fulmars and other species are being caught in Spanish longliners; they are drowning in gill nets, which hang in the sea and are designed to trap fish by the gills but are just as effective at catching birds; and they are being killed under the heavy cables behind trawlers, where they gather to feed on offal. In European seas, fulmar numbers have declined by 40% over the past 30 years.

They are predicted to crash by the same percentage again in the next 50. It is the same story for the world's 11 million puffins. They will be 80% down by the second half of this century, and a rare sight anywhere south of the northernmost islands in Scotland. The tufted and horned puffins, of which there are about five million in the Pacific, are also declining. Their cousins, the guillemots and razorbills, are suffering too, with sharp losses in Iceland, one of the headquarters of auk life, with big colonies losing almost half of their birds. There are now some 20 million kittiwakes strung around the northern hemisphere, but in places the population has halved.

What is to be done? All that can be done. We must not preside over the ending of these marvels. Most of the practicalities are obvious: there needs to be a much wider understanding of the state of the world's seabirds; their breeding places need to be protected; much tighter controls must be imposed on all kinds of fishing vessels so that fewer birds are killed at sea; and because of the death rate of adult birds in winter has more influence on seabird populations than any other single factor, their winter feeding grounds need to be understood, mapped and protected - particularly the great oceanic upswellings off the continents.

Finally, and most intractably, the rate at which we are changing the atmosphere and the ocean, both its temperature and its acidity, needs to be brought under control. Donald Trump's relighting of the fires under global warming is to be accompanied by the cutting of funds to the US nature agencies. In the UK, groundbreaking censuses of seabirds were made in 1970, 1985 and 2000. There should have been one in 2015, but shamefully it was thought unnecessary and never carried out. The destruction will romp into the future. And unless we change our minds, it will also happen in the dark.

Suddenly, this summer.....



Eleanora Forrester writes from her diary of birding memories

29 July 2017

Keeking out from my dining room window to look at my feeding station, I was expecting to see the usual frenetic, crammed feeding station with masses of families of garden birds and my woodpeckers. My garden was totally devoid of the sound or sightings of birds. Whatever can the matter be? Suddenly, the curtains of butterfly bushes were parted. Out appeared a beautiful fox from below the feeding area.

Out I went and chased it away. Not that I was worried for the birds, of course. Strangely for a birder, I possess a cat. I was begged and begged to take from the local rescue centre and I gave in, as the poor wee thing can't even climb so she is not a problem for my birds. And, she is not allowed beside the feeding station for the sake of ground feeders. She is not capable of escaping foxes and just screams for help if she is out there when they appear. My cat is named Melaniitta because she is black and velvet, so named after the scoter family. This is to give her the connection to birds! Plus I have informed her she is a bird watcher and not a bird catcher! Therefore, when I sit watching the birds from my window, she sits with me and watches too!

17 June 2017

During my WeBs count at Troon beach, I noticed masses of posters warning dog owners that palm oil had been washed up along the coast and if dogs digested it they would need to be immediately taken to a vet. I was puzzled that it would be a problem but then that set my mind thinking how varied nature's diet is among our wild creatures.

Years ago, in South America, I managed to persuade my husband Bruce to navigate me to the oilbirds. I can drive but my navigational skills are zero. (He wasn't too keen as it was an involved journey just for one tick!) I wanted to see the oilbirds because strangely they live and nest in caves and hunt in the dark like bats. Well worth the journey, it was a wonderful spectacle as we watched the soaring mass late in the evening from the huge cave. At the time, I presumed they were eating beasties, but have since discovered they are vegetarian and pluck the oily fruits from the palm trees. They were named oilbirds because the Indians of Venezuela used the palm oil from the fat fledglings for their cooking. What a fascinating world we have.

On the food theme, my pair of woodpeckers are incessantly stuffing their beaks with nuts and then they fly off with a whole nut each time into my nearby trees. The leaves are so dense, I can't see where they must be feeding the offspring but I shall look forward to seeing the adolescents. The blue tits are faring well and the young just sit by the feeders, flutter their wings, and are being well fed.

Eleanora



Birds and landscapes of the Dorset coast

Leader: Jim Thomson
Organisers: Tony
& Gerda Scott

Monday
28 May
to Wednesday
06 June
2018

Join us for nine nights as we tour the most interesting birding sites and places of natural beauty along the beautiful Dorset Coast. We will travel by coach from Ayr and stay overnight at a three star hotel en route to Dorset and again on the return, calling at reserves on the way south and north. We will be staying for seven nights at a three or four star hotel in Dorset - all on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis. We will be planning to spend time at the extensive RSPB Arne Reserve, part of a number of exciting protected areas around Poole Harbour and the Isle of Purbeck. Tidal mudflats and saltings surround the harbour with the richest areas in the west and south. The open, dry heaths of the Isle of Purbeck are mainly heather and gorse with some bracken. Spring and autumn bring a great variety of waders to the harbour and coastal bushes attract wryneck, Icterine, melodious and yellow-browed warblers. In summer, little egret, common and sandwich terns nest on Brownsea Island. Dartford warblers are on the heath, as well as nightjar at dusk. Areas of woodland hold sparrowhawk, green and great spotted woodpeckers and marsh tit. Red kites, peregrines and hen harriers are also about.

We will also visit Studland Heath Reserve; RSPB Radipole Lake and Lodmore; Chessil Beach and the Jurassic Coast; Portland Bill and the cliffs around Durlston Head where a variety of auks breed, including puffins and razorbills. We will also take the time to travel to Corfe Castle and a ride on the Swanage steam railway. We would appreciate early booking if possible, as hotels can be booked up quite early for this time of year. We expect the cost to be in the region of £1100.00 for the ten days/nine nights trip - inclusive of all travel and hotel accommodation. Full details available in the autumn.



Scotland's Bird Club

The SOC



We hope to stay at Best Western Hotels throughout our stay. We are currently looking at the BW Plus Lancashire Manor Hotel near Wigan (3*); The BW Hotel Rembrandt in Weymouth (3*) or the BW Hotel Royale at East Cliff, Bournemouth; On the way north, possibly the BW Tillington Hall hotel, Stafford (3*). As usual, Dodds of Troon will be providing a coach and driver, either John or Derek. If you would like to join this tour, please request an itinerary from Tony & Gerda Scott, 4 Hilltop Place, Ayr KA7 3PB or please telephone us on 01292 281 085 or e-mail Tony Scott on: da.scott@tiscali.co.uk

Committee

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Please note: talks subject to alteration

Indoor Meetings 2017

Monday 18 September
BIRDING IN INDIA AND SRI LANKA
A talk with superb images by **LIZ LEYDEN**
Membership registration precedes the talk.

Monday 16 October
'COMPLETING THE JIGSAW' AT RSPB MERSEHEAD
An illustrated talk by **COLIN BARTHOLOMEW**

Monday 20 November
BIRDS, BUDDHISM AND BLUE WHALES
An illustrated talk by **ANDREW SHAND**

Monday 18 December
**OVERVIEW OF RSPB IN S&W SCOTLAND - OUR PLANS
FOR THE FUTURE** An illustrated talk by **DAVE BEAUMONT**

Indoor Meetings 2018

Monday 15 January **BUTTERFLIES OF SOUTH WEST
SCOTLAND.** An illustrated talk by **PAUL TARLING**

Monday 19 February
BIRDS OF DORSET An illustrated talk by **JIM COYLE**

Monday 19 March **SWIFTS & HOUSE SPARROWS -**
An illustrated talk by **TOBY WILSON**

Monday 16 April
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by **AYRSHIRE
ROUND-UP** - the year's highlights told by **JIM THOMSON**



WINTER SWANS & WADERS At RSPB Leighton Moss and WWT Martin Mere

Saturday/ Sunday 18/19 November 2017
by **COACH** from **AYR**
Leader: **Jim Thomson**

A joint SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group WEEKEND TRIP. **Leaving Dodds coach depot, East Road, AYR at 07.30 hrs on 18 November.** We will be driving to RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS Reserve for lunch and an afternoon of birding. **We will stay overnight on a Dinner, Bed and Breakfast basis at a 3* hotel near Southport.** Next day we will visit WWT MARTIN MERE to spend time from 09.30 to 15.00 hrs. **Returning to AYR for around 22.00 hrs and stopping en- route for dinner in Carlisle.** Registration will be from September onwards or register earlier by e-mailing Tony Scott on : da.scott@tiscali.co.uk or telephone 01292 281 085. **The cost should be in the region of £145.00 per person.** This trip will operate with numbers of 15 to 20 people.

A full information leaflet will be available at the first and subsequent meetings of RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group and SOC Ayrshire. Please book as early as possible for best prices.

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

The Gannet

is the official newsletter of
Central Ayrshire Local
Group of RSPB Scotland.
Registered charity
no. SC037654

All indoor meetings take place on Monday evenings at 19.30 hrs - in Hall B of the Newton-Wallacetown Church, 60 Main Street, AYR. Parking available on Main Street or Garden St.

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.

We will be repeating our annual bird walks in Rozelle & Belleisle Parks in 2018. New Year walk in Rozelle at 09.00 hrs/Saturday 06 Jan. Dawn chorus walks: Rozelle 06.00 & 08.00 hrs/Sat. 05 May. In Belleisle: 08.00 hrs Sun. 06 May

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 inside, also if you require further information about any activity.

Central Ayrshire Local Group Meetings, Outings & Holidays Season 2017-2018

Field Trips 2017

Saturday 23 September

MAIDENS & GIRVAN

Meet 10.30 hrs at Maidens Harbour car park (toilets). On to GIRVAN early afternoon. Please bring a packed lunch. Finish c.16.00 hrs.

Saturday 21 October

RSPB MERSHEAD RESERVE

Meet at the reserve car park for 11.00 hrs. Please bring picnic lunch. All day trip - finish around 16.00 hrs.

Saturday/Sunday 18/19 November by **COACH from AYR**

RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS & WWT MARTIN MERE.

Meet 07.30 hrs at Dodd's coach depot, East Road, Ayr. Weekend trip with DBB in a 3* hotel near Southport. Return to AYR Sunday around 22.00hrs. Cost includes coach, Dinner, B& B - around £145.00 pp. Full details soon.

Saturday 16 December

STRANRAER, LOCH RYAN & WIG BAY

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Ballantrae (toilets). On to Stranraer and Loch Ryan. All day trip - please bring packed lunch. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

2018

Saturday 20 January

GREENAN SHORE AND DOONFOOT.

Meet at 10.00 hrs Greenan Castle car park. Trip lasts until 12.00 hrs.

Saturday 17 February

IRVINE HARBOUR & BEACH PARK

Meet at 10.30 hrs at the old Harbourmasters office, Irvine. Please bring a packed lunch - or plenty of places for lunch close by. Finish c15.00 hrs.

Saturday 24 March

DUMFRIES HOUSE ESTATE & GARDENS

Meet 10.30 hrs at Dumfries House car park (toilets). Walk and birdwatch the riverbank, woodlands and gardens. Café on site or bring a picnic lunch. All day trip until c.16.00 hrs.

Saturday 21 April

LOCH DOON & NESS GLEN WOODLAND

Meet at the Roundhouse (Loch Doon) for 10.30. Please bring picnic lunch or food and drinks available at the Roundhouse. Finish c.15.30 hrs.

Monday 28 May to Wednesday 06 June 2018

A ten-day coach holiday

BIRDS & LANDSCAPES OF THE DORSET COAST

Coach travel from Ayr. Staying at three or four-star hotels on a DBB basis. Visiting RSPB Arne reserve; Studland Heath reserve; RSPB Radipole Lake and Lodmore reserves, Weymouth; Chessil Beach and the Jurassic Coast; Portland Bill; the breeding seabird cliffs at Durlston Head; Brownsea Island and the protected areas and nature reserves around Poole Harbour and the Isle of Purbeck. We will also visit Corfe Castle and the Swanage steam railway. Price will include dinner, bed & breakfast and coach travel from Ayr. We will be staying at hotels on the way south and north, and visiting nature reserves en route. Estimated cost for a maximum of 16 participants will be around £1100.00pp for all coach travel and dinner, bed and breakfast.