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Scotland's Bird Club Ayrshire Branch

We are always on the look-out for more articles, cartoons and photographs to include in the future editions of [Stonechat](#). Please think about contributing and send any work for publication to me: Tony Scott / Editor, at 4 Hilltop Place, AYR KA7 3PB - or e-mail me at: da.scott@tiscali.co.uk

Sightings to: Ayrshire Bird Recorder Fraser Simpson.
E-mail: recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk
For all local birding info: please go to www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk Thanks go to Kevin Waite for his excellent work in keeping this superb website on the go.

February 2013



Photo: Angus Hogg

Hello everyone, nice to know the days are getting longer once again and we're heading for spring. RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch just happened and that usually starts us off on another new birding year which I hope will be a good one for all our European species which are on the red and amber lists; we also hope that you personally have a great birding year! Our Ayrshire branch of the SOC have many good things planned, just take a look inside Stonechat to find out about the talks and field trips and other outings and holidays we have in store....and we are already working out new ideas for speakers and new places to visit in our 2013 - 2014 season. We hope as many of you as possible will support our stonechat survey (have a look at the article from Angus) and we can still take another one or two people on our September trip to Spain for the raptor migration (04 to 12 September - cost £1400 including all flights, coach travel & half board at luxury hotels). Good birding.

Tony Scott [newsletter editor](#)

Ayrshire SOC Stonechat Survey 2103



This year sees the Ayrshire coastline being scoured by SOC and RSPB observers, in search of breeding stonechats. The successive winters of 2010 and 2011 witnessed a dramatic decline in Ayrshire's stonechat numbers due to prolonged periods of severe weather. It's not entirely clear what proportion of the breeding population actually migrates out of the country in winter, but the collapse in the breeding population following these two winters was very marked.

This was not unexpected, since the same thing has occurred on previous occasions, most notably following the winter of 1981. Similar declines were reported from other parts of Scotland, and the recovery on the east side of the country was, perhaps, slower than through here in the west. However, the recovery process in Ayrshire, although under way during 2012, has been a bit patchy, especially along our coastline. Surprisingly, many inland locations saw stonechat pairs holding territory and rearing young, maybe indicating a greater degree of migration in these areas than was traditionally associated with this bird.

During 2013 the Ayrshire branch of the SOC has organised a survey of breeding stonechats along the entire coastline, in an attempt to discover just how many territories have been re-occupied. The coast has been "sectioned" into easily walked areas, and observers are asked to check these at least twice during the breeding season. The best time to establish whether or not a pair (or singing male) is present can be as early as April, since most birds will be fairly obvious (and noisy!) then. If possible, a follow-up visit a week later can confirm the species' presence, but this is not essential. A second visit during June will reveal whether or not the birds have remained on territory and may even provide a breeding result, possibly with a brood present in the area.

It's as simple as that! The only other details (which will be clearly outlined on the survey form) which would be important to note include the following: - OS six-figure grid reference for the location; brief description of habitat; a comment on site occupancy / breeding result. So far, many observers have signed up and coverage of the whole coastline appears possible. Don't worry if you wander into someone else's stretch or want to record a territory outwith your area - the greater the coverage, the better the accuracy of the survey. The forms will be available from late February and I can promise that they will be simple and straightforward to complete - no need to note down whether "your" stonechats had one or three broods (although that would be good if you can!!). You can either collect the forms at our SOC and Central Ayrshire RSPB local group meetings, or by contacting me online for a down-loadable one at dcgos@globalnet.co.uk

The survey will be of value in indicating both the rate at which our coastal population is recovering, and may even offer a contrast with the inland population. Hopefully, an article describing the results will appear in Scottish Birds shortly afterwards. In the meantime, many thanks to all who have volunteered to help - let's hope that our spring and summer weather is a wee bit better than last year!

Angus Hogg [Chairman](#)
SOC Ayrshire branch



Look what's about in Fullarton Woods!

On our most recent SOC/RSPB field trip on the 19th of January, we met at the car park in Fullarton Woods. This is a regular patch for Norman Lawrie, who let us into one of his little secrets. A tawny owl - resident in the area for around three years, has been watched by Norman for all of this time. Thanks for sharing this knowledge with us Norman - we'll pay the little fellow a visit from time to time! We also enjoyed a flock of long-tailed tits and a large flocks of pink-foot and greylag geese in the fields near Loans.

North Ayrshire Patch Work



The twice-annual visits to the higher farmland do enjoy the visible migration of meadow pipits in flitting crowds, and to look for early wheatears, more sedately hopping towards the moorland above, changed into commitment to a new "local patch".

What happened was a change to the landscape. Wind-power turbines were to be installed on the high moor. A stony road was laid straight up the hill to facilitate the heavy construction traffic. Part of this road, a touch more than a kilometre in length, lies adjacent to a burn right along the migration meadows which follow the valley of the burn. Better still, grants were given to plant up the area with all the right indigenous trees and shrubs.

The place was developing into a rich habitat with plenty of potential for birds and other wildlife, so Liz and I decided to adopt it as a 'patch'. An hour was spent with the farmer, who was enthusiastic about our approach. When you adopt a place like this, it is a leap of faith - an adventure. However, we had a hunch that there would be some worth in this patch. The burn is a tributary of the Garnock River, so might hold birds dispersing from the valley populations - dipper for example; and in the spring, migrant warblers. In winter, the northern thrushes, and who knows what else?

Writing this in December 2012, we can report that after just over eight months observing, we have recorded 45 species from 202 visits onto the BTO's BirdTrack site. Apart from the developing grant-aided habitat, the attractions of this particular patch for us is that it is just five kilometres from home and the stony road is easy walking or slow driving, with minimal traffic.

Like garden watching, a patch can go very quiet for no apparent reason, but perseverance and patience usually pay off, as I'm sure every patch worker has discovered; because when activity happens, it is the behaviour patterns observed that deepens our understanding of why we watch nature, and how to watch birds.

Duncan Watt

What your e-mailing style says about you

The following extract of an item published in Alumni, the magazine for graduates and friends of the University of Glasgow may chime with you.

Researchers at Glasgow have been examining the idiosyncratic patterns of behaviour in e-mail users and have found that they match with typical bird-like behaviours. They identified 15 bird-like characteristics of e-mail users including:

Compulsive woodpecker:

Can't resist reading e-mail at any time of the day and night.

Hibernating poorwill:

Reads e-mail only occasionally, so they can't be relied upon.

Back-covering emu:

Sends e-mails in order to be able to prove, at a later date, that the information was passed on.

Echoing mynah:

Acknowledges all e-mails. For example, engages in exchanges something like: 'thanks' then 'my pleasure', then 'thanks again'.

Night owl:

The midnight e-mailer who fails to understand that others do wish to have 'time out'.

There was one type of bird associated with perfect e-mail manners: the robin. These people are admired for not allowing e-mail to dominate their lives and making time to speak to people in person whenever they can.

Dr Karen Renaud, Senior Lecturer in Computing Science at Glasgow, who worked with Judith Ramsay of the University of the West of Scotland, says 'It is likely most people will be able to identify some of their e-mail correspondents with these behaviours and perhaps even recognise their own e-mail style. What the research really highlights is that e-mail is a great source of stress for many people. Too often, e-mail is used instead of a more suitable means of communication like actually talking to someone. People need to think before they send e-mails: is this the best way of communicating? Even if it is, still think before you click!'

The full report of the research has been published in Interfaces, the quarterly magazine of the British Computer Society.

Henry Martin



Letter from America

Heidi Scott writes from Northampton MA.

Looking back at black bears

No need to worry about bears awakening from their winter sleep this year, as temperatures are down to minus 20 centigrade. Today, the 23rd of January 2013, it is minus 17 during the day and with the wind, it feels more like minus 22! Last year was a different story, and here's one I've chosen from Karen Brown - a resident of Northampton as well. It was written late last winter.

Bears stuffing themselves near Massachusetts homes

The mild New England winter means that more bears are up and about, looking for food - and not just in the woods. They're also exploring urban backyards and residential streets. The small town of Northampton, Mass., has more than its fair share of furry visitors. A call on a neighbourhood e-mail list for tales of recent bear encounters netted about a dozen responses an hour. Almost everyone, it seems, has a bear story.

"I was working by the side of our driveway in the middle of the day, and a huge - must've been a male - literally walked by within a metre or so of me" one neighbor says."And I screamed at Joan, 'There's a bear!' really loud, but of course she couldn't hear me because she's, you know, bopping away under the headphones," recounts another. How did Northampton get to this point? It's a college town full of restaurants, clothing stores and art galleries. Not exactly wilderness. But it's flanked by rural, wooded and swampy areas that black bears love - and they don't have to go far for easy meals. They eat from the dumpsters, the bird feeders and the compost bins.



"And the mother bear lifted this up and swung the door open, and knocked the trash can over. And I mean, we see them in the yard all the time," a resident explains. Over the past three decades, wildlife trackers have counted more and more bears in Northampton. Jane Fleischman, who lives near a meadow, says it's not unusual for her to look up from cooking dinner and see a mama bear and her cubs lumbering down the cul-de-sac. "When the bears are sighted in our neighborhood, you can literally track them on the internet," Fleischman says. "People will post a photo, and then ten minutes later they'll say, 'Oh, it's in my driveway,' 'Oh, it's in my backyard,' and you can literally follow them around. And so in some ways, I think there's a great fascination for them."

People don't seem to be scared. There are reports of bears breaking into cars or popping out kitchen screens, but no attacks on humans. Northampton writer Elissa Alford even tried to talk to a bear on her patio. "I really just wanted to make eye contact," Alford says. "I wanted to have that moment when we were together and seeing each other. That contact with the wild."

But does it have to be quite so close? "We love bears. We love wildlife. What we don't love is having them trample through our property on a daily basis," says resident Janel Jorda. Jorda sees a darker side to the Northampton ursine story. Bears have destroyed her wooden trash enclosure and crushed her landscape lighting. Last month, a mother bear ripped down her chain link fence as Jorda gaped from the other side of a glass door. "When the baby tried to follow the mother in, the baby got stuck," Jorda says. "The baby was huge, and got stuck inside the fence, and that's when I was like, 'Oh man, I'd better call the police.' Because I was alone with a huge mother and two babies." Jorda doesn't blame the bears - she blames a neighbor who's apparently feeding them.

Wildlife officials are pushing for a city law to make feeding bears illegal, so they'd have little reason to leave their natural habitat. The problem is, mother bears have already taught their cubs that chomping on discarded pizza crusts is a lot easier than picking berries in the woods. For the next generation of bears, this may actually be their natural habitat.

[Karen Brown](#) Daily Hampshire Gazette



The Tui by Keith M Martin



With apologies to Lynley Dodd, author of much loved stories for children such as the Hairy Maclary series, and to the Whangarie Museum and Heritage Park in New Zealand. This is an extract on the tui from Keith's draft book on his search for New Zealand endemics. To learn about these birds, visit www.nzbirds.com

Perched on a branch at the back of a cage
Was a dark purple bird with flashes of sage
He chortled and snorkled and clackered and creaked
And puffed the white feathers that covered his neck
So they brought in a snack, all fruity and gooey
For Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



Woof-woof had been rescued from having a spat
With an overly quarrelsome neighbourhood cat
A ranger was called after quite a palaver
To fetch the hurt bird from a Pohutukawa
His left wing was broken, his dark eyes all dewy
Poor Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui

And so it began, Woof-woof's great adventure
At the Native Bird Rescue Centre
Despite care and attention, as the days slowly went by
It became clear that Woof-woof would no longer fly
So although he was healthy and fed every day
Woof-woof the Tui was full of dismay
Poor Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



Morepork the Owl who could only growl
From the cage next to Woof-woof would give him a scowl
He'd once swallowed a weta that stuck in his throat
And now was unable to strike up a note
So he danced on his perch, which the tourists adored
As they filed past his cage and almost ignored
Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



Old Swamp the Pukeko was spotted and speckled
 He'd stepped in some paint and now looked quite art deco
 Like a long-legged rainbow he was strikingly smart
 A clambering, screeching, bird work of art
 They'd once entered him in a local craft show
 He came second, behind a green glass Kakapo
 So much brighter than Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 and Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



Spiral the Blue Duck whose starboard leg stuck
 After tangling an eel and some dreadful bad luck
 Had lived at the centre for almost five years
 And could hop round her pond, to visitors' cheers
 The kids really loved her, a fact that she knew
 As they waited to see her in a long queue
 Past Old Swamp the Pukeko all spotted and speckled
 Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 And Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



Piwi the Kiwi had been seen on TV
 One night when he'd followed some lights bright and cheery
 And just as a worm had crawled out of a ditch
 He'd heard someone shout "Get that bird off the pitch!"
 They'd picked up a strange feathered brown rugby ball
 And now he was famous, adored by them all
 More than Spiral the Blue Duck whose starboard leg stuck
 Old Swamp the Pukeko all spotted and speckled
 Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 And Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



Macca the Kaka who performed the haka
 Was a parrot you'd never suggest was a slacker
 His routine astonished the visiting hordes
 Who gasped in amazement at this ferocious bird
 They placed precious coins in a box by the fence
 Which paid for the bird food and most of the rent
 To keep Piwi the Kiwi as seen on TV
 Spiral the Blue Duck whose starboard leg stuck
 Old Swamp the Pukeko all spotted and speckled
 Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 And Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



But slowly the money began to run out
 So the bird centre sent out a new talent scout
 When they came back empty handed, things really looked bad
 And everyone said it was terribly sad
 But what could you do? It was just a small zoo
 Tough times for the people were tough for birds too
 Like Macca the Kaka who performed the haka
 Piwi the Kiwi as seen on TV
 Spiral the Blue Duck whose starboard leg stuck
 Old Swamp the Pukeko all spotted and speckled
 Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 And Wof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui

Now Woof-woof felt sad like a talentless waster
 'til a stoat broke into the Native Bird Centre
 It snazzled a Fantail and a Barbary dove
 When Woof-woof heard a scratch up above
 He might well have skedaddled and crouched in a hunch
 But Woof-woof the Tui could see the next munch
 Was either Macca the Kaka who performed the haka
 Or Piwi the Kiwi as seen on TV
 Or Spiral the Blue Duck whose starboard leg stuck
 Or Old Swamp the Pukeko all spotted and speckled
 Or Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 Or Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui

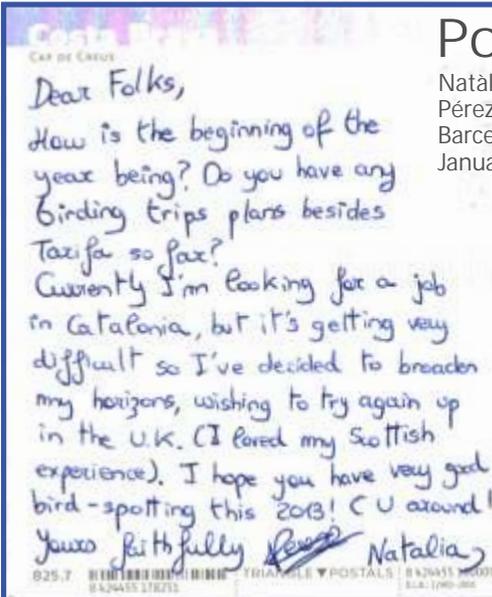
So Woof-woof pumped up and fluffed his white wattle
 He grizzled and grazzled like cork drawn from a bottle
 He freckled and cackled and shrickled and croaked
 And then something amazing emerged from his throat
 "Crek - it's a stoat!" was the sound of the noise
 The ranger came running and looked for the boy
 Who'd saved Macca the Kaka who performed the haka
 And Piwi the Kiwi as seen on TV
 And Spiral the Blue Duck whose starboard leg stuck
 And Old Swamp the Pukeko all spotted and speckled
 And Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 And Woof-woof the Tui from Whangaranui



They searched for the hero everywhere around
 But nobody knew where that voice could be found
 Woof-woof grackled and snarkled and then felt a twitch
 "I'm hungry!" he croaked, like a wizened old witch
 The ranger was stunned as he stared through the bars
 A chattering Tui, the Centre's new star!



The visitors poured in, the Centre was saved
 They added a shop and a brand new café
 They built a new kiwi house from an old barn
 And put up a museum and a heritage farm
 The tourists stopped by from the camper van trail
 Who'd all heard the marvellous incredible tale
 Of Macca the Kaka who performed the haka
 Piwi the Kiwi as seen on TV
 Spiral the Blue Duck whose starboard leg stuck
 Old Swamp the Pukeko all spotted and speckled
 Morepork the Owl who could only growl
 And Woof-woof from Whangaranui, the GREAT TALKING TUI.



Postcard from Natàlia

Natàlia
 Pérez-Ruiz
 Barcelona
 January 2013



Natàlia was a member of our local groups for three months last autumn

Natàlia at Out Head on our Eden Estuary trip in November last year





Feral Pigeon Project - Guide to pigeon spotting

Counting the pigeons you see in your local park or on your way to work or school is both fun and easy to do. You don't need to make a special effort, even counting the pigeons you spot whilst waiting for a bus will help us discover the secrets these amazing birds have to reveal.

How do I tell the colours apart?

Pigeons come in a variety of colours, so to make things simple, we would like you to keep an eye out for these seven different colours. Don't worry if there are any you are unsure about, these can be recorded as 'other'.

How do I send in my sightings?

Sending in sightings couldn't be easier, simply visit our website and complete the online form. Don't forget to note the date and location.

www.feralpigeonproject.com



Chequer



Blue bar



Black



Pled



Grizzle



Red



White

Results

Chequer	
Blue bar	
Pied	
Black	
Red	
White	
Grizzle	
Other	

Thank you for helping to reveal the truth behind these familiar birds.

SOC Ayrshire at the Eden Estuary

A joint field trip by coach with RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group



After torrential rain on Thursday 22 November, we were extremely fortunate to be able to enjoy a day of calm weather and sunshine on Saturday the 24th. As is now the usual practice, we left our cars in the secure car park at Dodds coach depot in Ayr and set out on our journey with John Cairns at the wheel of our usual 22-seat Toyota/Caetano coach at 08.00 hrs. A quick call in Kilmarnock to collect Ingrid and Robin and it was on to the icy wastes of The Heart of Scotland Services at Harthill. The paths from the coach park were indeed slippery, despite the sun shining brightly. Still, a hot coffee and a late breakfast kept us going until we reached our first birding stop at Guardbridge on the Eden Estuary. Having opened the lock combination for the hide, we were greeted by a quick (very quick) fly-past by a kingfisher as we entered. Everyone hoped it would return, but no. So we had to content ourselves with the wide vista of the estuary and the blue sky above. Eventually we had sightings of red-breasted merganser, little grebe, common redshank, mallard (of course), scaup, raven and a flock of lapwings. Tree sparrows were resident in the nearby bushes, as well as blue tits, great tits and chaffinches. Iain and Morag found a female long-tailed duck on the estuary shortly before departure. We were then planning to visit the Balgove hide, but a friendly fellow birder from a local group suggested it may be better to head for Out Head as the tide would be about right on arrival there.

So this is what we did, and John drove the coach along the West Sands road as far as he could. From here we checked the shoreline and then made our way out to the point of Out Head. From this elevated position, we had close encounters with more long-tailed ducks - two males and one female this time; one male Slavonian grebe, a small group of common scoters, and a very close red-throated diver. There were distant views across the water, of herring, lesser black-backed and a few great black-backed gulls, as well as a fair number of eider and over 500 oystercatchers.

Amongst the scrub we picked out stonechat, reed bunting, house sparrow, common starlings and a few carrion crows. The weather was still calm, but became cooler as a veil of thin cloud obscured the winter sun, so around 14.30 we moved back to St. Andrews, where John dropped us off near the Museum of Golf. From here we could already see large rafts of scoters out in the bay - but all common unfortunately. There were more scaup around too, as well as a variety of gulls and a number of dunlin. Most of the group then walked over to the harbour, but some of us were tempted to have a walk round the streets of St. Andrews, to relive past memories maybe and - as it was getting colder - to enjoy a hot drink somewhere. St. Andrews has lots of memories for Gerda and me, as we had many visits to our daughter Heidi over a four year timespan. We remember well the fully laden car with tables, chairs and crockery for the student accommodation. We always felt that this was a wonderful place to study. After we had warmed up at Biby's Café - packed with students - we returned to the coach for the short drive to Glenrothes where tables were booked at the Bankhead Gate Brewers Fayre restaurant for a convivial end to a pleasant day. We were back in Ayr for 21.30 once again with everyone most pleased with the day. One of our group was in Scotland only for a brief period, working on a project at Auchincruive. Natàlia Pérez-Ruiz (from Barcelona) had been coming to the SOC and RSPB meetings and field trips since September, and we had the feeling that she would have loved to stay longer in Ayr. She was very happy with her day, having notched up a few 'lifers' for her Scottish bird list!

[Tony Scott](#)



The Eden Estuary and (below) tree sparrows



Images from the Eden Estuary



Upcoming events

Evening meetings

at [Monkton Community Church Hall and Pioneer Café](#) (19.00 for 19.30hrs.)

Contact: Angus Hogg (Chairman) on 01655 740 317

Or Anne Dick (Secretary) on 01292 541 981

[12 March 2013 John Threlfall - Artist in conservation](#)

09 April 2013 AGM followed by Andy Robinson - Offshore wind farms

Field Trips and tours

jointly with [RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group](#)

[Saturday 16 February 2013 Greenan Shore & Doonfoot](#) Meet 10.00 hrs at Greenan Castle car park. Trip should finish around 12 noon.

[Saturday 30 March 2013 South Ayrshire coast & Pinmore](#)

Meet at Maidens Harbour car park - 10.30 hrs. Bird from here along the coast to Girvan, then inland to Pinmore village. Please bring a picnic lunch. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

[Saturday 27 to Tuesday 30 April 2013 The Isles of Mull & Iona by coach from](#)

[Ayr](#). Three-night four-day trip. Leaves from Dodds coach depot, East Road at 07.30. [Returns on 30 April around 21.30 hrs](#). Staying at the Glenforsa Hotel, Aros (Salen), Mull. Price £345.00 including coach and ferry crossings to and from Mull and dinner bed and breakfast for three nights at the Glenfosa Hotel. [Fully Booked](#).

[Sunday 25 May 2013 Loch Doon & Ness Glen](#) Meet at the 'Round House' cafe/toilets for 10.15. Walk Ness Glen and bird the loch shores. Hot and cold food available at the 'Round House' or bring a picnic lunch. Finish around 16.00 hrs.

[Saturday 22 June 2013 Brownside Braes, Paisley](#) with Tom Byers. All-day trip.

Meet at Brownside Braes Farm car park at 11.00. Looking for lesser whitethroat and more on Tom's home patch.
