



giving
nature
a home

Newsletter
of the
Central Ayrshire
Local Group

37th year
Summer 2013



Dawn chorus bird walks in Belleisle Park, May 2013.



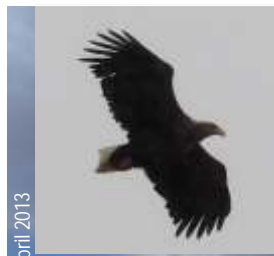
Our stand at the national Science & Engineering Week event at Rozelle House this spring.



Showing people seabirds. On board PS Waverley Cruise around Ailsa Craig on 22 July 2013.



Anne Dick & Anne Thomson in charge of our sales stand at the Low Green in June 2013.



TheGannet

Raptor watch in Glen More, on a club trip to the Isle of Mull - 29 April 2013



For all local birding details - log on to: www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk

Leader's Lines

Hi folks!

Once again we are approaching our winter programme. As we look back at our summer, it appeared at first, that it would not materialise. However, it may have been late coming, but we certainly got some nice, warm sunshine eventually. Your committee have been out and about broadcasting the new RSPB message of 'giving nature a home'. Starting with our spring bird walks at Rozelle, and for the very first time in Belleisle Park, Ayr. All of our walks were well attended. We also had a presence at the National Science and Engineering week event in Rozelle, offering information on bird ringing, what to feed and how to attract garden birds. We also attended 'Celebrate Ayrshire' in Culzean Country Park, as well as the Armed Forces Day event at Ayr's Low Green (and the weather was much calmer than in 2012). Our stall was well supported and we managed to raise over £150.00 for RSPB funds.

As you know, and can see from the new logo and strapline at the top of the page, the RSPB house style has been completely re-designed. Over the coming months, we will be seeing far more of the new style and will be using it ourselves for all future publications. PS Waverley welcomed us aboard once again for their series of cruises around Ailsa Craig out of Ayr South Harbour during July and August. We made a good start and our commentary and information stand has been well received by all those we have spoken to.

Our new season heralds a most varied programme of speakers for our evening meetings, as well as our monthly field trips - again jointly with SOC Ayrshire. I would encourage you all to tell your friends what we have in store and invite them to join us. As in past years we are arranging a full day coach trip in November and a long weekend away, to North Yorkshire in May 2014, and details are available inside and also at all our meetings.

Once again may I thank all of you, our members, for your support - and I look forward to welcoming many new members this coming season.

Best wishes,

Ronnie Coombes, Group Leader.

RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group & SOC Ayrshire's long weekend 27 - 30 April 2013 Trip Report by Tony Scott

Saturday 27 April From Ayr to Oban and the Isle of Mull Photos: Angus Hogg / Gerda & Tony Scott

The morning dawned bright and sunny, if just a touch chilly. 18 of our group of 21 met at Dodds coach depot in Ayr for an 08.00 hrs departure. Our 22-seat Toyota coach was soon underway with John Cairns, our long-time driver and virtually one of the group (he always brings binoculars) at the wheel. Robin and Ingrid were collected in Kilmarnock and we were off in the direction of the Erskine Bridge and on along the Bonnie Bonnie Banks where our first comfort stop was at Luss. A little more cloud had gathered over the hills, but Ben Lomond still managed to look like a majestic plum pudding with a scattering of caster sugar on top. On reaching Crianlarich, a four car Class 156 DMU was sitting in the station with what, I imagine, would be a service ready to split in two parts - one for Fort William and Mallaig and the other two cars for Oban - also our ferry crossing point to Mull. Passing a sign for 'heated wigwams' (we truly would hope they were for the sake of the occupants) we climbed northwards to Tyndrum, where hunger and thirst would be catered for at the 'Green Welly Stop'. Fortified with bacon rolls, freshly baked scones and steaming cups of coffee, we were on our way once again along the A85 through Dalmally (a pair of goosander on the River Orchy), passing the beautiful shores of Loch Awe, the narrow and gloomy Pass of Brander and then on to Taynuilt where the road meets Loch Etive. Today with an ebb tide, the Falls of Lora at Connel were truly impressive. It was now just a hop, skip and a jump into Oban which we reached just after midday. John stopped close to the centre of town where we alighted, and he went on to fill up with fuel, all meeting in the CalMac ferry terminal at 13.30. In the meantime, the bay was scanned for birds, while others enjoyed some fresh seafood from one of the stalls, or maybe a pint of Caledonian Best Ale in "Auly's Bar." Tickets were obtained and handed out before boarding MV "Isle of Mull" for the 14.00 hrs crossing to Craignure. The sun was still shining as we enjoyed views of McCaig's Tower and Dunollie Castle on the Oban side, and the Isles of Kerrera and Lismore as we threaded our watery way between the Firth of Lorne, the Lynn of Lorne and Loch Etive, before Duart point hove into view where we could disembark on the Isle of Mull. We arrived in the grounds of the Glenforsa Hotel to meet our hosts Allison and Brendan Walsh, who would be caring for us for the next three days. After being personally shown to our rooms, some of us met in reception for a walk across the airfield (yes, the hotel has its own airfield. Even more amazing, on the guest registration form there is a section for 'car registration number/aircraft registration!'). The shore footpath along the Sound of Mull lies beyond the airfield. From here - apart from the many playful rabbits - the short grass was full of meadow pipits (200+), white and pied wagtails and quite a few northern wheatears. Three great northern divers were visible on the water, along with cormorants, shags, oystercatchers, shelduck, common eider, red-breasted merganser and goosander. A grey heron, a pair of wigeon and a number of mallard were at the mouth of the Forsa. Curlew and common redshank flew by with their unmistakable and evocative calls. Raptors seen today were buzzards, sparrowhawk and two adult white-tailed eagles in late afternoon (Angus and Mary saw these in Glen Forsa). It was soon time for a pre-dinner drink, and as one would expect, the bar has a good selection of ales from the Mull Brewery. Two to be sampled were the Golden Galleon blonde at 4.1% and the Terror of Tobermory at 4.6%. A surprise for all was a sighting of tawny owl from the bar! Dinner was called punctually at 19.15 hrs and the menu included an excellent locally caught and smoked mackerel, served as a delicious pate with a garlic mayo accompaniment. The soup was a creamy carrot and coriander and mains included a meltingly tender venison tagine with a vegetable-studded couscous and a lively sauce which undoubtedly contained rose harissa. Fish was locally caught salmon and the desserts - lemon tart with mixed berries and a ripe Dunsyre blue cheese with red onion marmalade. A fine bottle of Argentinian Malbec went very well with the venison and the cheese. Coffee and more was served in the upstairs lounge with views across the darkening Sound of Mull. An ideal place to call our bird list sightings for the day. Ah, perfection!



Great northern diver, off Glenforsa



Northern wheatear



MV 'Clansman' in the Sound of Mull

Sunday 28 April. A drive around north Mull to Calgary and Tobermory.

After a great breakfast with porridge, free-range eggs from the hotel's own hens, Stornoway black pudding and more - it was time to collect our packed lunches and leave for a day on a very different kind of 'North circular road!' Our first stop was at Salen - looking out across the bay for otters, but the tide was wrong. Lots of siskin, chaffinches and goldfinches on the nearby garden feeders, and some ducks and waders out on the rocks. We took the B8073 west to Loch na Keal, where we pulled off the road near the Killiechronan caravan and campsite. Great views of a white-tailed eagle's nest from here, which was highlighted when eventually the sun came out to make us all feel a bit warmer (but not *too* warm!) On the water - great northern divers, common sandpipers and more. After 30 minutes or so we moved on along the north shore of the loch, passing Eorsa island and the road to Ulva ferry. We were in the midst of a short but gusty rainstorm as we drove past Laggan Bay. The cry went out - "eagle!" Above us a barn-door of a bird, a white-tailed eagle was struggling against the elements. John managed to find a place to stop and photographs were taken despite the rain. A bonus of a kestrel and sparrowhawk nearby was also appreciated.

The sun came and went as John struggled with the coach along the narrow and tortuous but scenic road to Calgary Bay. We could stop here for a while - (and there was even a flower-bedecked public toilet) - to admire the views across the vast beach of white sand. More divers here (we saw 12 great northern today) and eiders. The road, although still narrow, was better from here to Dervaig and Tobermory, and we pulled in at a viewpoint near the standing stones above Dervaig for our packed lunches. Next on the list were the Mishnish Lochs - but all were relatively empty. Not surprising as the WNW winds were blowing at 23 mph.

Down in Tobermory, a music festival appeared to be in full swing and we had an hour to take the obligatory photographs of the colourful houses around the picturesque harbourside. Moving on the short distance from Tobermory to the tranquil Aros Estate and park just a couple of kilometres away, we took time to walk around the loch with its beautiful woodlands full of mossy banks and lichens. The song of woodland birds were music to our ears and it was with great pleasure that we enjoyed this idyllic setting before another (unsuccessful) attempt for otters at Salen Bay.

When it came to our bird list though, we had done very well with highlights including (naturally) white-tailed eagle and the other raptors, lots of greylag and the handsome (if intrusive) Canada geese, ringed plover, lapwing, 15 black-headed gulls (which are not supposed to be on the Mull list!!), common, herring, both lesser and great black-backed gulls, razorbill, black guillemot, great spotted woodpecker (at Salen), skylark, sand martin, barn swallow, two rock pipits at Calgary (and more meadow pipits), pied and white wagtails, wren, dunnock, robin, 12 or more wheatears, song and mistle thrushes, blackcap and willow warbler (Aros Park), three long-tailed tits, and blue, coal and great tits (plenty around Glenforsa Hotel), as well as tree creeper and three bullfinches. We had Slavonian grebe at Loch na Keal and teal were showing too. So, back at the lovely Glenforsa for drinks and dinner at 19.00 hrs.

Tonight - a truly delicious menu. with salmon and crayfish mousse, Paupiette of lemon sole, and for me, the best of all.....Pork belly stuffed with Stornoway black pudding and spring onions, with delightfully crisp roast potatoes and a buttery carrot mash. Maple and pecan steamed pudding seemed a great idea at the time of ordering and was excellent.....but after the main dish (I was beaten!). But Drew and his team had worked wonders in the kitchen. And so - to the coffee, shortbread and a Tobermory malt. Is life always this good? It can be.....



Jim, Mary & our coach at Salen



Loch na Keal

Monday 29 April 2013 A day on the sacred island of Iona

A brighter day today - but still a high wind. Plenty of birdsong around the hotel and the group started to hover around the breakfast room at 07.30 already! Happy and content with what we had eaten, we were off before 09.00 hrs. As we left the hotel - a white-tailed eagle shot over the coach and out to the Sound of Mull, a great start to the day! Craignure was almost deserted at this time and we sped on passing Loch Don and close to Loch Spelve - where another raptor was sighted - so a quick stop was made to identify a short-eared owl patrolling the hillside close to the ground. I think we all managed some reasonably good shots of this bird. Then on to the head of Glen More where we parked up for half-an-hour in the anticipation of more raptors. It was not to be, for despite the sunshine, the wind was blowing more strongly than yesterday and birds of prey were keeping their heads down. Lower down Glen More we did see two hen harriers hunting - obviously a pair, and a most opportune sighting. We moved on to pass Loch Scridain, Pennyghael and Bunessan, arriving at Fionnphort for 11.15 and in plenty of time for the 11.45 ferry over to the island of Iona. The wind was fairly whistling through the Sound of Iona and the ferry was rolling more than some of us were happy with. Gannets accompanied us, flying directly overhead and keeping speed with the vessel. Black guillemots, common guillemots and razorbill were on the water and kittiwakes were calling their name all around us. The sparkling azure sea and the brilliant white sands welcomed us to Iona, where we set about our task of finding the elusive corncrakes. In time they were not so elusive, and in the field near the fire station (and from Deone's house and garden) - they were starting to call and became louder and more numerous as time went on. Lunch beckoned us into the Martyr's Bay Restaurant where we enjoyed the views of sea, sand and mountain together with a light snack. In the afternoon everyone went their separate ways, some visiting the Abbey and Heritage Centre, some walking to the south end of the island, some on a photographic mission, and all looking for corncrakes! Gerda and I walked along the shore past the Abbey and then to the north end of the island where the full force of the gales were blowing! Great views were had across to Staffa and Fingal's Cave with the saturated colours of the sea and sky creating a dramatic watercolour effect. The Treshnish Isles out to the west were also beckoning for a visit, but to do this one must stay a couple of nights at least on Iona itself. We heard lots of corncrakes and got a great view of one close to the Abbey. Another surprise was a field with over 80 golden plover in summer plumage - a real treat. We returned for the 16.15hrs ferry back to Mull and stopped en-route to see two golden eagles in Glen More. A second stop at the head of the glen revealed another short-eared owl doing a spot of low-level hunting. John received a telephone call from a colleague bringing a Dodds tour over to Mull for four nights. His passengers were being put on to a delayed ferry (the service had been suspended for a few hours due to high winds) to Craignure, but both he and his coach were not on board. John got us back to the hotel for 18.30 and he rushed back to Craignure in time to get the almost stranded passengers to the Isle of Mull Hotel & Spa at Craignure. Their luggage and their coach and driver would arrive a couple of hours later! John returned by 19.30 in time for another delicious dinner at the Glenforsa Hotel.



Short-eared owl, Glen More



Song thrush, Iona



Meadow pipit, Iona



Herring gull, Iona

Isle of Iona, view from the ferry landing



Tuesday 30 April 2013 Mull Eagle Watch at Glen Seilisdier & home to Ayrshire

An absolutely beautiful morning with clear blue sky, dewy grass.....and frost! The view into the Sound of Mull was stunning, as a CalMac vessel made its way towards us and on to Oban. All too soon it was time to say goodbye to Allison, Brendan, Drew, Holly and Steven - the team who had looked after us so well at the Glenforsa Hotel. We were away by 09.00 once again and travelling the shores of Loch na Keal which was resplendent in the sunshine and its sparkling waters were still and clear. Divers and grebes were noted as we drove by, purposefully moving on for our appointment at 10.00 - a 'Date With Nature' as advertised on the RSPB and Forestry Commission websites. Our two friendly representatives of each organisation were there to greet us and to help those who wanted a lift up to the reception hide in their van. The main purpose of the visit of course, was to see the white-tailed eagles on their nest. It would not be long before the three eggs would hatch; Friday was the day in question we were told. We hope the event happened as planned. (in fact...it did!). It is always special to see something like this and we felt suitably privileged to be watching these wild creatures do the changeover on the nest. The female bird (Iona) left as the male arrived to perform his nest duties.

Lots of siskins were around this area, as well as goldfinch, greenfinch, chaffinch, blue, coal and great tits. Leaving at 12.00 noon we returned to the shores of Loch na Keal where the weather had morphed into something more usual for the area. The wind had increased somewhat and the waters were ruffled. Undaunted, we took our packed lunches out of the coach and proceeded to find suitable rocks to use as a windshield or dining table. Scattered around amongst the sheep droppings, 22 hardy souls partook of lunch in this wild place, where two golden eagles were seen high above us.

Our story of the Mull long weekend is almost at an end. We stopped once again at Salen - but still no chance of an otter sighting, so on to our ferry crossing - in bright sunshine once again - over to Oban. We ran through some heavy rain around Tyndrum, but the sun shone again as we reached Dumbarton, where dinner had been arranged at the 'Malt & Myre' Brewer's Fayre restaurant. By 19.30 we were on our way again and reached Kilmarnock by 20.50 and Ayr by 21.15 after a truly enjoyable weekend. I would like to thank John Cairns for his safe driving, as well as all at the Glenforsa Hotel for their warm hospitality. Thanks go to all of those who took part in this venture and we look forward to more exciting wildlife adventures together in the years to come. Taking part were: Jim Thomson (bird leader); Ronnie Coombes; Ian & Monica Clark; Morven Cumming & Heather Slater; Anne Dick & Charlie Conner; Jennifer Dudney & Eleanora Forrester; Fionna Ferguson; Deone Finlayson & Ingrid Swanson; Angus & Mary Hogg; Henry Martin & Robin Turner; John & Sue Rogers; Gerda & Tony Scott.



Viewing white-tailed eagles at their nest in Glen Seilisdier



Picnic lunch on the shores of Loch na Keal



John Cairns at the Glenforsa Hotel



Ian & Monica Clark



Allison Walsh, Eleanora Forrester & Jennifer Dudney

Life Force, Mull

by Mary Thomson

Fifty people on the boat to Staffa and one small child,
 a blonde haired tot, passed from hands to arms and
 a hundred avid eyes diverted from the seas to watch,
 ready to catch, prepared to steady as the waves rolled.
 A pair of oystercatchers on rocks with unfledged chicks
 which wandered from the nest on awkward feet;
 one black-backed gull, stone still, too near,
 the parents piped 'stay here', one eye each on them.
 In Aros glen a harrier, searching from a pale sky
 distressed a nesting lapwing on the grass above;
 its limpid warbling turned to splinters in the air
 while a cuckoo's hollow flute rose from the woods below.
 Strange among such beauty how each would kill or die,
 how all comes down to this: perpetuate.



Mary Thomson has been in Scotland for seven years and now lives in Glasgow. Born in Cheshire she spent her childhood on a farm and her working life as a curator and art critic in Yorkshire (as Mary Sara). Her life as a poet has flowered since she came to Scotland to marry a Scot in 2006.

Mary Thomson also designs and makes small handmade books of individual poems and has exhibited at By Leaves We Live at the Scottish Poetry Library, the Glasgow International Artists' Book Fair and at Scottish Pamphlet Poetry events at the National Library of Scotland.

Mary also exhibited her work at our own RSPB 'Art on the Wing' exhibition at the Maclaurin Gallery in Rozelle Park, Ayr during 2011.

Mary has asked us to include the following notes about her poem '**Life Force, Mull**'.

"It was written after staying on Mull and visiting Staffa in June last year. I wrote it in sonnet form, using the form to describe three distinct and indelible moments of experience and then in the last two lines expressed my personal observation about the reality of the natural and human worlds those incidents reflected".

Copies of *Comings and Goings* can be ordered for £5 from Mary Thomson. Email her for details:

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