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## Scotland's Bird Club Ayrshire Branch

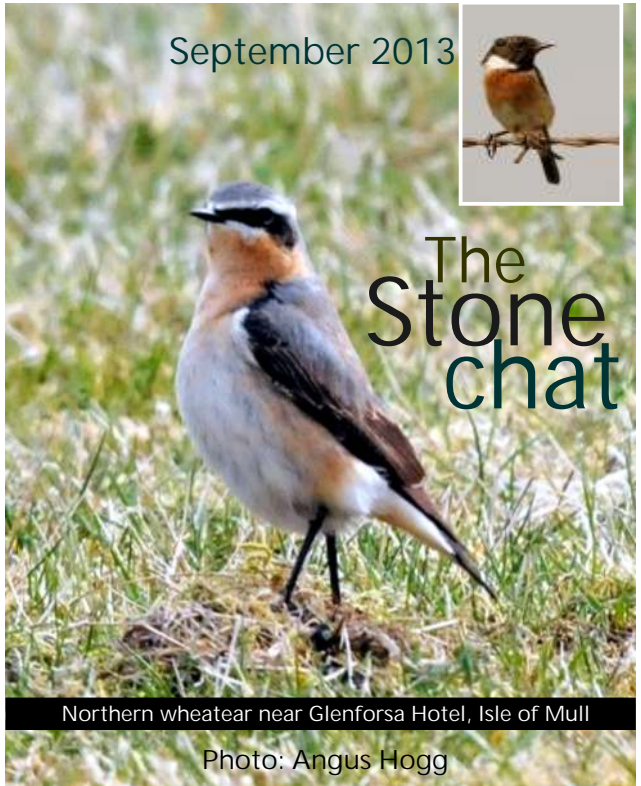
We are always on the look-out for more articles, cartoons and photographs to include in the future editions of [Stonechat](#). Please think about contributing and send any work for publication to me: Tony Scott / Editor, at 4 Hilltop Place, AYR KA7 3PB - or e-mail me at: [da.scott@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:da.scott@tiscali.co.uk)

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

September 2013



# The Stone chat



Northern wheatear near Glenforsa Hotel, Isle of Mull

Photo: Angus Hogg

Hello everyone. Preparing the layout and articles for the autumn issue of [Stonechat](#) is totally different than for the early spring edition. At that time of the year when the anticipation of migrating and then breeding birds is high, and the prospect of longer days and sunny weather in store seems just then to be the very peak, the best time of the year. However, the warm, golden colours of the impending autumn leads one to more feelings of fulfilment, with the return of waders, geese and the continued enjoyment of the remaining summer migrants. Having (hopefully) enjoyed a great spring and summer, the anticipation of the future seasons has as many high points and attractions. We are also entering the time of club meetings and getting together to hear some great talks, and also to get out into the countryside, not only on our own, but on the monthly field trips organised for all of our members. We also have planned a trip to North Yorkshire and its many reserves for the end of May. Look inside this edition for all the info and a host of great articles.

Tony Scott [newsletter editor](#)

## Garden bird-listing by Angus Hogg



A take-over - juvenile swallows in the garage

Yes, birding in your garden (if you have one) can be great fun, and will, inevitably, lead to a desire among a few of us to keep a "garden list." But, what should be on this list? What criteria would you employ to include a bird on your garden list?

Well, I'm not too fussy, and will happily record anything which occupies airspace above my garden, or can be heard (and positively identified) from it. This allows you to get out there at night and listen for migrating redwings or green sandpipers (and, no doubt, raise a few eyebrows among neighbours at the same time!). You have to be scrupulous, mind you, and the report of a species which you haven't personally seen, but has been observed by, say, your wife (Ed: careful now!), has to be fully described before acceptance on to such a prestigious list!

So, let's see; what have I seen over the 30 years in my current abode, and how have things changed? Well, the first thing to say is that the garden itself has changed dramatically during my time, with trees and shrubs replacing open areas of grass used for football and swings. Gone are the attempts at large-scale fruit and vegetable growing: a currently much more modest effort has allowed even more trees and bushes to take over. In short, we now have a much more bird-friendly garden - long grass and lots of cover where previously it was wide open spaces and kids running around.

At 96 species, the list for 11 Kirkmichael Road, Crosshill has attained a degree of respectability, but it could always be better! Why, for instance, have I not seen or heard wigeon, when a nearby farm held more than 60 birds a few winters ago?

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And what about that white stork about half a mile up the road - could it not have had the common decency to fly over the garden? But then, there was the instance when, at 03.00 hrs one summer's morning, when I awoke my less than delighted wife to let her hear a quail which had landed in a garden across the road from us. Or the occasion when I was nearly bowled over by a hobby as it shot across the garden pursued by a gang of hirundines.

Once you've eliminated oddities like Bewick's swan, woodcock and dipper, there's always the welcome appearance of commoner species with the changing of the seasons: a February morning resonating to a song thrush's return, a great spotted woodpecker or a brambling suddenly turning up on feeders; a group of brilliant yellowhammers on the snow-covered grass or a migrating male hen harrier heading south. There's always something going on in, or over, the garden.



I'm fortunate to live in the country - the summer air is often disturbed by the sounds of a family group of young peregrines learning the skills they'll need for the future, or the querulous croak of a young raven as it tries to figure out just why this daft guy is standing in his garden trying to imitate it. Summertime swifts screaming around the village, being dive-bombed by our breeding swallows which have taken temporary possession of the garage; the late night surprise as a barn owl ghosts past in the gloaming - gardens were just made for birding!

So, what was number 96? The 11th of June 2013: I was about to splash some water on my face at around 07.30 hrs, and was thinking about the day's (birding) priorities, when a song I knew well came echoing across the garden and into the bathroom. "Pleased to meet you" it sang and, in an instant, all was panic. With all thoughts of washing suspended for the day, it was a case of grab some clothes (and the camera) and head for the garden. Mary was still heading downstairs as I was happily watching

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a young common rosefinch throwing back its head and belting out its song. Another “star” for the garden list, which now poses the problem of trying to sensibly work out what number 97 is going to be. You just don’t have a clue what’s going to be next up, but isn’t that what makes garden birding such fun?

Angus Hogg 22 June 2013

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## Emperor penguins keeping warm in the Antarctic

Henry Martin found this following curiosity when reading the magazine ‘Avenue’ from his Alma Mater - the University of Glasgow



Research on Emperor penguins conducted using thermal imaging technology has shown that they retain body heat in temperatures which can be as low as -40 degrees Celcius not only because of their thick plumage and layers of fat but because the surface of their feathers is colder than the surrounding air by some four degrees Celcius. The only parts of the penguins warmer than the surrounding air were their eyes, beaks and feet. Indeed, only the eyes were above freezing! It would appear that this cold coat of their outer surface must gain some heat from the very cold but relatively ‘warm’ surrounding air. It is believed that this regained heat is unlikely to reach their skin, but it could help to reduce heat loss from the body through thermal radiation.

The research was conducted by University of Glasgow and Université de Strasbourg. Dr. Dominic McCafferty of Glasgow, who has spoken in the past to SOC Ayrshire about owl insulation, comments: “We didn’t think a warm-blooded animal could ever have an outer surface temperature that was colder than its surroundings. Antarctic penguins’ plumage is so well insulated - the insulation equivalent of us wearing two ski suits - that heat will be transferred very slowly to the skin surface. In this way the penguin will remain warm on the inside but the outer surface of its plumage will be extremely cold.”

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## The giant moa by Keith Martin

An extract from his book “New Zealand in Fifty Birds”



I suspect that I should disbelieve the giant moa. It seems an easier choice to struggle to imagine such enormous birds striding through the New Zealand bush. Consider the sheer improbability of a procession of lofty giant moa carefully treading a woodland path, stooping to peck at the flotsam of the forest floor.

But I really can imagine giant moa. New Zealand's spacious landscape badly misses a native animal of this size. I feel the giant moa's absence keenly as we walk through silent forests. I imagine their shadows on the boulder-strewn paths that meander to the mouths of South Island's magnificent glaciers. On empty plains, beneath massive skies, there are spaces enough for hundreds of giant moa. Could they really be out there, beyond that distant lonely tree, on the farthest skyline?

In the scrub at the base of Mount Cook, we come much closer. Here, we just miss some giant moa. Growing in plenty along the trail are feisty native buckthorns known as matagouri. In a land now free of large grazing animals, matagouri have evolved fierce defensive weaponry of vicious spikes. Why? Why else but to defend against a grazing animal of immense power and persistence. Matagouri now thrive in the absence of giant moa.

Of course we can still see giant moa. The Auckland Museum has a particularly good one, towering tall above passers-by. The taxidermist decorated it with emu feathers, since moa feathers are now in short supply. The Christchurch Museum boasts several giant moa, stalking through a painted landscape panorama, unaware of the dangers posed by the occupants of wooden huts, within which moa hunters prepare their spears.

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The small museum at Karori Sanctuary has an engaging audio-visual display in which giant moa come to life. Just as they do in our living room, where Kyla and Finlay stride the carpet pretending to be giant moa, necks craned, kicking their moa feet , and making noises that I doubt real moa would. But who am I to say?

Some say there were eleven moa species. There was a giant, a crested, a heavy-footed, even a stout-legged. Other experts disagree. They'll never know, we'll never know, perhaps it doesn't matter. What is less disputed is that moa are no more, and that's a crying shame. Giant moa remind us of the obvious observation that nothing is forever. Yet it's a lesson that we so easily forget. We recognise our world changes, but rarely appreciate in time the consequential dispossession. We are losing species all over this fragile planet. There are some species we'll never know. Did we speak out? Do we regret?

Christchurch is a gentle city. I enjoy the colonial architecture, the stonework of the Christchurch Arts Centre and the classical "wild west" frontages of many of the city centre streets. There are structures aged over one hundred years, not long by great moa standards. But, like great moa, many of these heritage buildings are now extinct. From afar we shake with disbelief as the news pictures filter through the wiring of the internet. Parts of a city we briefly called our home have been reduced to rubble. Extinction is not always so unexpectedly and potentially unavoidable.

I suppose they will rebuild Christchurch city centre. Perhaps it will be almost restored. But don't believe the sci-fi movies or the fantasists of generic science. We'll never again see a giant moa stride through the forests of New Zealand. That's something we would all do well to regularly recall.



Christchurch Museum



# Letter from America

Heidi Scott writes from Northampton MA.

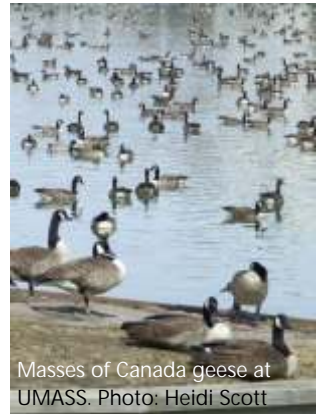
## Springtime bird sightings in western Massachusetts



Canada geese



Eastern bluebird



Masses of Canada geese at UMASS. Photo: Heidi Scott



White-fronted goose



Cedar waxwings on the UMASS campus, Amherst. Photo: Tony Scott

Springtime 2013 in our corner of western Massachusetts brought an interesting range of sightings around the UMASS campus in Amherst and in the general area. This article from the 'Weekend Gazette' also describes the species noted in Northampton, Hadley and Florence.

"The Audubon Society has reported a variety of recent bird sightings in western Mass. (03.30.13). Very large numbers of Canada geese, common mergansers and ring-necked ducks are now being found in the region. Other early spring arrivals are still very scarce, with only robins and eastern bluebirds in good numbers. Seen in smaller numbers were wood ducks, hooded mergansers, great blue herons, ospreys, peregrine falcons, killdeer, woodcocks, kingfishers, hermit thrushes, chipping sparrows and fox sparrows."

"A white-fronted goose has been seen with huge flocks of Canada geese on the South Maple Street fields in Hadley and at the campus pond at the University of Massachusetts (UMASS) in Amherst."

"Eight American wigeons, a northern shoveler and two blue-winged teal were reported in Longmeadow. A green-winged teal and a northern pintail were seen in Hadley, and a gadwall and an American wigeon were in Northampton. A northern goshawk was found in Florence and three lesser scaups were seen in Southwick. Eight black vultures were reported in Sheffield and a flock of 60 Bohemian waxwings and 100 cedar waxwings was found in Williamstown."

In the same edition, David Spector (A Gazette contributing writer and former board president of the Hitchcock Center for Environment) writes about his

## First wood duck of the year

"In the late winter or early spring I usually see my first wood duck of the year. Many people consider the many-colored subtly patterned wood duck to be one of the most beautiful ducks, and it is kept in parks around the world as a sort of aquatic peacock. Native to wooded North American swamps, this bird nests in cavities in trees, and, although it eats a wide variety of foods, its predilection for eating acorns has given it one of its folk names, "acorn duck." I often see my first wood duck of the year on my commute as I drive through Longmeadow on Interstate 91. Even at high speeds (both mine and the bird's) a glimpse of its long, rectangular tail is often evidence enough for me to identify the bird in flight. The wood duck's tail, relatively long for a duck, is a convenient field mark for human observers, and that tail is marked as a key to identification in field guides. More importantly, the tail is an adaptation for flight in a forest. A duck that navigates at high speed among crowded trees and lands at nest holes needs a more precise steering mechanism than does a more typical duck whose flight is largely over open water and whose ground nest can be reached by waddling ashore. The wood duck's tail gives it a good rudder for precision maneuvers through the woods."

"This unconventional duck nests in cavities - holes produced by fungal rot of trees where branches break off, old nests of large woodpeckers and, in recent decades, artificial nest boxes. Natural nests average about 15 feet (five metres) above the ground. The only improvement that the wood duck makes to the nest is adding down plucked by the female from her own breast. The female lays about 11 eggs per nest. About a day after hatching, the young respond to the female's "kuk, kuk, kuk, kuk" and jump from the nest to the ground, where they follow her, sometimes a mile

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or more, to appropriate wet habitat rich in the insect food they need for growth. It takes about two months to reach adult size and the flight needed for southbound migration in the fall. Driving on a highway between Springfield and Hartford is hardly a wilderness experience, but my sightings of these small ducks here is a result of a century of efforts no less important and interesting than those that have returned condors to the Grand Canyon or wolves to Yellowstone. The wood duck is now common across a large part of the lower 48 states and parts of southern Canada, but a century ago there was concern that the species might be on its way to extinction. Draining of wetlands and especially unregulated over-hunting had brought the population of this species quite low"

"Bird protection legislation and careful regulation of hunting have enabled wood duck numbers to rebound over the past century. Also important has been the preservation of wild or semi-wild land, such as the Fannie Stebbins Wildlife Refuge abutting the highway where I see these wood ducks. Habitat conservation comes about because people have learned to value land and its natural inhabitants, and protected land, in turn, provides opportunities for environmental education. The Stebbins Refuge was purchased by the Allen Bird Club in 1952, with funds raised from private donations, and named for the woman who, as supervisor of elementary school science for the Springfield public schools and a founder of the bird club, had contributed much to increasing knowledge of nature in our region. This refuge protects several habitats, including flood plain forest, which is important not only for wood ducks, but for many species of plants and animals."

"There are many ways to participate in the preservation of species like the wood duck while honoring the educational legacy of Fannie Stebbins, the foresight of those who bought and protected the refuge named for her, and the generations of wildlife biologists who worked to maintain and increase the wood duck population. It is also important to get out and enjoy and learn about wood ducks and the rest of our plants and animals, especially if you can share that experience with a young person. After all, conservation efforts like the one which saved the wood duck can continue only if there is a new generation to take up the challenge." (ED: a sentiment we can all wholeheartedly share).

American wood duck in all its glory!

Wood duck on a small reserve in Northampton MA.



## Since when did a love of nature make one bourgeois?

George Monbiot



George Monbiot says his heart is broken by the destruction of the planet. For this he has been called many things, even a fascist. He says it is a price worth paying. From [The Guardian](#) 09 July 2013

Two months ago, American canvas weevil was found in the archives of the National Gallery. After ravaging the Metropolitan and Guggenheim collections in the US, it is now working its way through the gallery's storage rooms. Hundreds of old Masters have been destroyed. The curators fear that much of the collection will go the same way. The media has greeted this devastation with near-silence. A front-page article in the Guardian's review section dismissed expressions of love for the paintings as "bourgeois escapism". Those seeking to arrest the spread of canvas weevil were compared to "anti-immigration demagogues (who) claim that foreigners will destroy a unique and distinctive British culture". Inconceivable? You would hope so - and this story is, happily, fictitious. But the responses I've mentioned are real, when you swap art for nature.

Earlier this year, the former energy minister John Hayes described concerns about the rainforests of Malaysia and Indonesia - which, with their tigers, orangutans and thousands of unique species, are being destroyed to grow biofuels - as "bourgeois views". (Coming from a Tory MP, this was magnificent.) In the Guardian Review on Saturday, Steven Poole took up the call (Comfort of the wild, 6 July). Echoing Mao's denunciations of pre-revolutionary Chinese culture, he castigated those of us who write about our love of nature as bourgeois and snobbish, and suggested that our concerns about the spread of exotic invasive animals and plants are a form of crypto-fascism - "the green version of the English Defence League". Exotic invasive species are a straightforward ecological problem, wearily familiar to anyone trying to protect biodiversity. Some introduced creatures - such as brown hare, little owl, field poppy, corncockle and pheasant's eye in Britain - do no harm to their new homes, and are cherished and defended by nature lovers. Others, such as cane toads, mink, rats, rhododendron, kudzu vine or tree-killing fungi, can quickly simplify a complex ecosystem, wiping out many of its endemic animals and plants. They have characteristics (for example, being omnivorous, light-excluding, toxic or inedible to any native carnivore or herbivore) that allows them to tear an ecosystem to shreds. These aren't cultural constructions. They are biological facts.

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Comparing those who describe this process to racists is the intellectual equivalent of stating that evolution through natural selection is a coded attack on the welfare state, or that the first law of thermodynamics was hatched by green campaigners intent on conserving energy. It is to see the words but not to understand the science they describe. This fallacy - mistaking scientific findings for cultural concepts - was deliciously ripped apart by Alan Sokal's satirical paper *Transgressing the Boundaries: towards a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity*.

I see a love for the diversity and richness of nature as an aesthetic and cultural impulse identical to the love of art. It is a form of culture as refined and intense as any other, yet those who profess it tend to be regarded as nerds, not connoisseurs (that's true snobbery for you). Poole and people like him position themselves among the philistines - those who see no value in the wonders which others are enchanted.

Consider the issue of dry rot in historic buildings. It's a major problem. Anyone who dismissed the concern of conservators as a form of neo-fascism would be considered insane. Dry rot is an exotic invasive species, a fungus that, until we introduced it in shipments of timber, lived quietly on pine and yew trees in the Himalayas. Unchecked, it could destroy much of our cultural heritage. What's the difference?

Why is this Red Guard philistinism directed at those whose hearts are broken by the heedless destruction of the natural world, by people who wouldn't dream of trivialising the heedless destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, or the demolition last month of a 4,000-year-old pyramid at El Paraiso in Peru?

I think there may be three reasons. The first is ignorance. A complete absence of cultural understanding would be career death in the media. A complete absence of scientific understanding is no impediment at all, as almost all media outlets are run and dominated by humanities graduates. I think, among some commentators, there's also a sense that concern for the living planet is a check on human progress, an affront to the view of humanity as *deus invictus*, the weightless god, floating above the grubby realities of life on earth,

But most importantly, perhaps, is an unconscious absorption of the demands of money. Unlike most art, the wonders of nature often stand in the way of attempts to extract resources or to build airports or shopping centres. Corporate attacks on people who love and seek to defend the natural world have seeped into every pore. Cultural hegemonic, the developers' view finds expression in the most unlikely places.

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So those of us whose love of the natural world is a source of constant joy and constant despair, who wish to immerse ourselves in nature as others immerse themselves in art, who try to defend the marvels that enthrall us, find ourselves labelled - from the Mail to the Guardian - as romantics, escapists and fascists. That, I suppose, is the price of confronting the power of money. Twitter: @georgemonbiot

[George Joshua Richard Monbiot](#) (born 27 January 1963) is an English writer, known for his environmental and political activism. He lives in Machynlleth, Wales, writes a weekly column for [The Guardian](#), and is the author of a number of books including *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain* (2000) and *Bring on the Apocalypse: Six Arguments for Global Justice* (2008).

He is the founder of *The Land is Ours*, a peaceful campaign for the right of access to the countryside and its resources in the United Kingdom.

Visit his website: <http://www.monbiot.com/>

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## Birds, steam and real ale in North Yorkshire

SOC & RSPB (Ayrshire) long-weekend.

Saturday 24 to Tuesday 27 May 2014

Staying on half-board at the Forest & Vale Hotel (Pickering) or the Bell in Driffield - both 3\* Best Western hotels (or similar). Coach travel from Ayr. Inclusive cost of coach travel and half-board - around £360.00 per person.

We intend to visit the following reserves: [RSPB Saltholme](#) - the award-winning new centre and a huge wetland with breeding colonies of common terns and lapwings. Little gull, little tern, peregrines, skylark, sand martins and wide variety of waders. Café on site. [Bempton Cliffs](#), with its wonderful views of over 200,00 seabirds including gannets, guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, fulmars etc. [Fairburn Ings](#) for kingfishers, garganey, little-ringed plovers, reed warblers, green sandpipers and a host of other species. [Blacktoft Sands](#) - where 270 species of birds have been recorded, including breeding avocets, bittern, bearded reedling, marsh harriers. The [Wykeham Forest raptor viewpoint near Pickering](#) for honey buzzards and more. Another highlight will be a trip on the [North Yorkshire Moors steam railway](#) from Pickering all the way to Whitby, for sea breezes and a boat trip. Another boat trip [will be from Bridlington to Flamborough Head](#). Real Ale (and good food) will of course feature in this as in every one of our trips, and we invite you to join us. [Look out for the full programme of details which will be available from the very first evening meetings of SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire local group.](#)

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# Are fatty foods bad for birds?

A question posed by the BTO. Article from Henry Martin



Fat-based bird foods are provided widely in UK gardens and are thought to help birds gain a calorific boost in times of need. Indeed, they attract many species, from swarms of long-tailed tits in winter to flocks of young starlings in summer. But how good are these foods for our garden guests? Three recent studies have produced mixed results. Feeding garden birds is a popular pastime - around half of people in the UK are thought to participate - and it is an industry that is worth hundreds of millions of pounds every year. As a result, working out the effects of bird feeding has attracted substantial research interest over recent years. In particular, scientists have been keen to ascertain whether bird feeding really helps birds and, if so, how?

The size of bird populations is governed by two processes: (i) the number of chicks that are reared (i.e. 'productivity'); and (ii) the survival of birds between successive breeding seasons. For birds that visit gardens, feeding could affect either of these processes. The latter, unfortunately, is particularly difficult to measure in free living birds because survival and dispersal between breeding seasons are difficult to disentangle. The former, productivity, however, is easier for researchers to get a handle on. Three recent studies have looked at the productivity of birds that were provided with fat-based food supplements:

**1: Harrison et al. (2010).** Species - blue tit and great tit. Habitat - woodland. Food provided - commercial peanut cake (50% beef suet, 50% ground-up peanuts); non-supplemented. Timing - food provided during spring and early summer (Mar - July). Effect on productivity - fed birds experienced significantly lower productivity than non-supplemented birds.

**2: Plummer et al. (2013).** Species - blue tit. Habitat - woodland. Food provided - suet; non-supplemented. Timing - food provided in late winter and early spring (Feb - April). Effect on productivity - fed birds experienced significantly higher productivity than non-supplemented birds.

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3: [Smith and Smith \(2013\)](#). Species - great spotted woodpecker. Habitat - woodland. Food provided - suet; non-supplemented. Timing - food provided in late winter and early spring (Feb - April). Effect on productivity - fed birds experienced significantly higher productivity than non-supplemented birds.

### Good for some species but not others?

The provision of fat-based bird foods had contrasting effects in these studies. Worryingly, in the two tit studies the supplements resulted in lower productivity, while in the great spotted woodpecker study productivity was increased. It is possible, therefore, that the effects of fat-based food supplements on breeding productivity could be species dependent. The nutritional requirements of different species will vary as they enter the breeding season and it is conceivable that individual species might find different nutrients limiting under normal (i.e. non-supplemented) conditions. However, it is impossible to conclude from these studies that fat-based foods are 'bad' for tits and 'good' for g.s. woodpeckers. A number of other factors might explain the discrepancy in the findings. For instance, each study provided slightly different food supplements; these were available over different months of the year; and the studies themselves encompassed different years/lasted for different numbers of years. To investigate further, the same foods need to be provided to different species in the same locality and over the same period of time, with the nests of both species monitored.

### Important unknowns

There are two particular 'unknowns' that are important to consider. The first concerns matters outside of the breeding season. These three studies highlight that fat-based bird foods can affect breeding productivity - but how might survival between breeding seasons be influenced by such offerings? Unfortunately, we do not yet know. It is conceivable, for instance, that fat-based bird foods might enhance survival prospects of tits through summer, autumn and winter, despite reducing breeding productivity. Plummer et al. (2013) suggest that winter feeding might have enabled poorer quality individuals to survive into the summer breeding season and that this, in turn, might have resulted in the reduced productivity that they observed. The second major unknown is how well the findings of these studies translate into garden feeding. You'll notice that all three studies took place in woodland. This no coincidence. Almost all food supplementation studies have taken place in non-urban environments and, to the best of our knowledge, no comparable research has been conducted in gardens. Why is this? The answer is because research in gardens is logistically very difficult. Gardens are privately owned and so it would take considerable levels of public engagement and cooperation in order to conduct such work. Moreover, it is difficult to control the amount and type of foods being provided. Instead, it is easier to conduct feeding studies in non-urban environments. This, however, comes at a price when trying to interpret what the results mean for garden feeding. For instance, in broadleaved woodland - the habitat in which Harrison et al. (2010) conducted their study - caterpillars tend to be abundant, helping adult blue tits and great tits to rear more

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young than their urban-breeding cousins. By providing peanut cake in woodland it is possible that the balance of this 'optimal' breeding environment for tits might be upset in some way. In gardens, however, where caterpillars are generally scarcer, providing peanut cake might give adults a welcome boost. Indeed, it has been suggested that food supplementation has a larger positive effect on breeding success when natural conditions are otherwise poor. If garden/urban areas represent poorer breeding habitat than non-urban areas, as seems to be the case in many species, we might expect the effects of food provision to be quite different.

### [So, should we feed fatty foods to garden birds?](#)

Let us weigh up the evidence that we have. In these three studies alone, fat-based foods were found to reduce productivity in two and increase productivity in one. For a number of reasons, however, these studies are not directly comparable - slightly different foods were provided in each, the months in which these foods were available were not identical, nor were the years. Perhaps timing is everything. For instance, year-round feeding of fat-based foods might have quite different effects to its provision in specific seasons. Perhaps some fat-based products are 'better' or 'worse' than others. Only future work can help us to explore these possibilities. It is also worth remembering that each of these studies was conducted in non-urban habitats and focussed on productivity alone, without information about subsequent survival between breeding seasons being examined. On this basis, it is hard to argue that people should stop providing fat-based foods for birds in their gardens. Indeed, over the course of a year it is possible that such foods might have a positive overall effect on bird populations. However, the findings of Harrison et al. (2010) and Plummer et al. (2013) raise genuine cause for concern and should provide a focus for subsequent research. How does the provision of fat-based foods in gardens/urban areas affect productivity? Can we begin to understand how subsequent survival is influenced by these foods? How do these processes vary between species? Such questions are very difficult to answer and will require lots of public engagement, time and research funding to address. But doing so is important. Feeding wild birds is the most regular interaction that most people have with wildlife and research shows that when natural foods fail many birds turn to garden feeders for help. Feeding studies, such as the three described here, are helping to refine the questions but a shortage of garden/urban based research is leaving us notably short of answers. Only through research will we gain more confidence in recommendations about when and what to feed our garden birds.

References: [Harrison. T.J.E. Smith J.A. Martin G.R. Chamberlain. D.E. Bearhop. S. Robb. G.N. & Reynolds. S.J. Does food supplementation really enhance productivity in breeding birds? \*Oecologia\* 164: 311-320.](#)  
[Plummer. K.E. Bearhop. S. Leech. D.I. Chamberlain. D.E. & Blount. J.D. \(2013\) Winter food provisioning reduces future breeding performances in a wild bird. \*Scientific reports\* 3: DOI: 10.1038/srep02002](#)  
[Smith. K.W. & Smith. L. \(2013\). The effect of supplementary feeding in early spring on the breeding performance of the great spotted woodpecker. \*Denrocopos major\*. \*Bird study\* 60: 169-175](#)

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## Upcoming events

### Evening meetings

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

Contact: Angus Hogg / Chairman on 01655 740 317 or Anne Dick on 01292 541 981

[10 September 2013 Gordon Macdonald - TBA](#)

08 October 2013 Ben Darvill - Upland ecology

[12 November 2013 Toby Wilson \(RSPB\) - Futurescape North Ayrshire](#)

10 December 2013 Members Night - The Isle of Mull trip & Angus Hogg - tigers part two

[14 January 2014 Andrew Stevenson - Raptors of the Uists and Isle of Barra](#)

11 February 2013 David McCracken - Choughs

[11 March 2014 Dr. Chris Wernham - Atlas and results](#)

08 April 2013 AGM followed by Norman Lavery - New Zealand birds

### Field Trips and tours [jointly with RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group](#)

Saturday 28 September 2013 [FAIRLIE, PORTENCROSS & NORTH AYRSHIRE COAST](#)

Meet at Fairlie car park (toilets) at 10.30 hrs. Visit shore and lagoon before moving on to Portencross, Hawking Craig and the coast southwards. Please bring picnic lunch. All day.

Saturday 26 October 2013 [RSPB MERSEHEAD RESERVE](#)

Meet at the reserve car park at 11.00 hrs. All day birding trip. Information centre with hot and cold drinks and toilets on site. Please bring packed lunches. Finish ca. 16.00 hrs.

Saturday 23 November 2013 [RSPB LOCH LEVEN RESERVE & AREA BY COACH](#)

Meet at Dodds coach depot, East Road, Ayr - at 07.45 hrs. Return for 21.30 hrs. Please bring a picnic lunch. Dinner will be organised. Coach tickets cost £24.00.

Saturday 07 December 2013 [LOCH RYAN & WIG BAY, STRANRAER](#) All day trip

Meet at Ballantrae seafront car park for 10.30 (toilets). 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.

Saturday 18 January 2014 [RSPB KEN-DEE MARSHES & RED KITE CENTRE, LAURIESTON](#)

Meet at New Galloway main street (toilets) 10.30. On to Ken-Dee marshes for 11.00 and the red kite centre for 14.00 hrs. (Entry £3.50) Please bring picnic lunch. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

Saturday 15 February 2014 [DOONFOOT & GREENAN SHORE, AYR](#)

Meet Greenan Castle car park at 10.00. Birding the bay and coastal strip. Finish 12 noon.

Saturday 15 March 2014 [CASTLE KENNEDY GARDENS, STRANRAER](#)

Meet Ballantrae seafront car park for 10.30 (toilets), then to Castle Kennedy, where the rest of the day will be spent birding the lochside, park and gardens. Café and toilets. Leave c.15.30.

Saturday 26 April 2014 [DUMFRIES HOUSE PARK & GARDENS, CUMNOCK](#) Meet Dumfries

House car park at 10.30. Birding woodland and riverside paths. Café and toilets. Finish c.15.00.

Saturday 24 - Tuesday 27 May 2014 [NORTH YORKSHIRE LONG WEEKEND](#) BY COACH

Visiting Wykeham Forest raptor viewpoint; Bampton Cliffs; Flamborough Head boat trip; Hornsea Mere; Blacktoft Sands; Dearne Valley; Fairburn Ings; North Yorkshire Heritage Coast and a trip on the North Yorks Moors Railway. Staying in the Pickering area of Yorkshire at a 3\* hotel with dinner, bed and breakfast and coach travel from Ayr. Cost around £340.00.

Saturday 21 June 2014 [RSPB WOOD OF CREE RESERVE](#) All day trip. Meet 11.00 hrs at the reserve car park. Please bring picnic lunch. Nearest toilets/café at Glen Trool. Finish 16.00 hrs.