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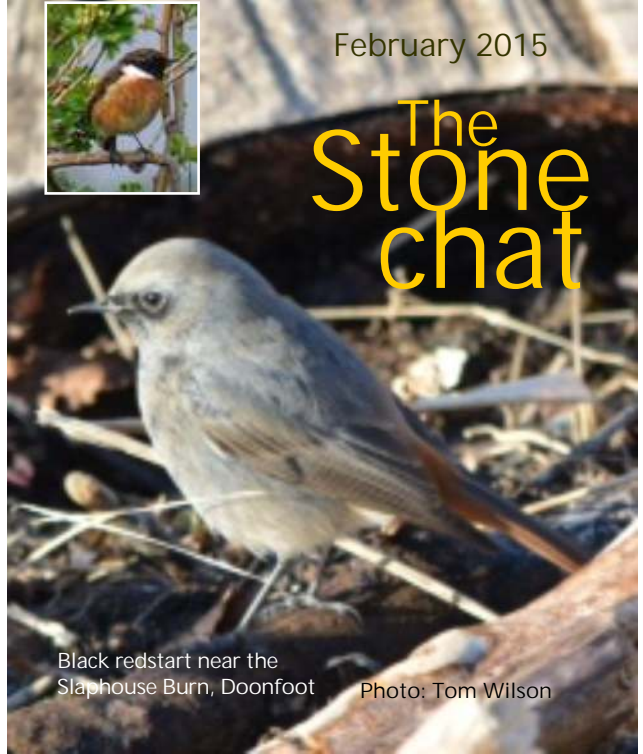
Scotland's Bird Club Ayrshire Branch

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 2015

The Stone chat



Black redstart near the
Slaphouse Burn, Doonfoot

Photo: Tom Wilson

[Hello and welcome to our new edition of Stonechat.](#) We have a great selection of articles for you in this issue. I would like to thank all our contributors, and especially for the help given by Jane Cleaver at Waterstone House. She has provided us with a couple of articles including one from SOC President, Chris McInerney on the Isle of Coll Bird Festival. Angus Hogg has written about the American golden plover at Maidens; Roger Hissett has made us aware of the scheme to protect the 'Goose Fields' of Loans; and Susan Porteous has sent in a poem by the late Janet Wiltshire. The SOC/RSPB joint trip to Islay in November is reported on, and we have news of the Ayrshire Birders eleven-day trip to experience the Crane Migration in Eastern Germany from the 2nd to 12th of October this year. The festive season seems to be a fading memory now, but we do hope you all enjoyed the Christmas and New Year holidays and wish you all the very best of good health and good birding in 2015. Why not join us for our field trips or the crane migration experience? You would be most welcome!
Tony Scott [newsletter editor](#)

The Coll Bird Festival

Chris McInerny



Arinagour Bay and ferry, Coll

All photographs by Chris McInerny

Jane Cleaver (SOC Development Officer), John Bowler (RSPB Officer) and myself were fortunate to be invited by George McConnachie of Development Coll to represent the SOC at the first Coll Bird Festival in April 2014. This short article describes our visit to this beautiful hebridean island and our experience of the weekend. We hope it will encourage readers to consider going to the next Coll Bird Festival, which is taking place 24-26 April 2015.

Both Jane and myself took the ferry from Oban the week before the festival started; me having caught the train from Glasgow, and Jane coming by car, with a boot-full of SOC resources. The ferry passes through a spectacular sound between the north of Mull and the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, taking three hours to get to Coll. John, as the resident RSPB warden on Tiree, had a much shorter trip!

We stayed in an excellent B&B, Tigh na Mara, the first house after the ferry pier in Arinagour, the main village on the island. Others stayed at the Coll Hotel, or the newly built Coll Bunkhouse; there are many other options for accommodation, including camping.

Boat to Lunga



Puffin on Lunga





Crossapol Beach

For two days before the Bird Festival I travelled around by bicycle, hired on the island, seeing the RSPB reserve at Totronald (where the corncrakes had just arrived), otters in Arinagour bay, and the magnificent white beaches at Crossapol. The island is spectacularly beautiful.

The Bird Festival was much fun. I hosted four boat trips to the nearby island of Lunga, one of the Treshnish Islands. The weather was perfect and all the visitors enjoyed seeing the seabird colonies, with puffins and shags just a few feet away. Other organized tours on Coll included walks at Totronald to see corncrakes run by the RSPB, and birdwalks by James Bray of BTO Scotland. On the Saturday evening there was a series of talks at An-Cridhe (meaning 'the heart'), the new community centre on Coll, including the birds of Scotland by myself, the birds of Tiree by John and recording birds by James.

The Coll Bird Festival was a great success, enjoyed by all. So good indeed, that we will be going back again this year to repeat the event on the 24-26 April. I strongly encourage anyone interested who enjoys Scottish countryside and wildlife to attend. I look forward to seeing you there, I hope on the boat trip to Lunga!

Chris McInerny SOC President

Thanks go to Jane Cleaver at Waterston House for asking Chris to do a short article about the Coll Bird Festival. I'm sure it would be a great trip for any of our Ayrshire members wishing to make the journey to Oban and on to the Isle of Coll this April. It is also something our branch could consider for a weekend away at the 2016 Coll Bird Festival. **Tony Scott, Editor.**

Please keep in touch with SOC events by logging on to the SOC's Twitter and Facebook pages



www.twitter.com/Scottishbirding

www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub

For the full itinerary and booking form, please contact Tony Scott on 01292 281085 or e-mail da.scott@tiscali.co.uk

The Crane Migration

Experience a Golden October of wild nature at the heart of the Pomeranian National Park and the Müritz National Park in Germany



Leader: Angus Hogg Organisers: Tony & Gerda Scott with Gabriele Kratzsch

Friday 02 to Monday 12 October 2015

This eleven day holiday includes flights from Glasgow to Berlin and back; all coach travel in Germany; accommodation in en-suite rooms with ten breakfasts and ten dinners (One on board ship on an evening crane cruise). Cruises as follows: to the island of Hiddensee from Zingst; to the island of Vilm; evening cruise to view cranes roosting on the Bodden; a cruise on the Müritzsee, and a day on the Island of Rügen. It includes entrance to all national parks, the crane viewing hides and platforms and for local ornithologist-guides as well as the services of our own bird leader Angus Hogg. It also includes a journey on the narrow gauge steam train 'Molli', as well as a visit to the Crane centre in Gross Mohrdorf. The cost of all the above will be in the region of £1575.00 pp depending on numbers and exchange rate. Ayrshire Birders.

During the autumn migration of 2013, over 60,000 common cranes were counted in the West Pomeranian National Park. **The call of the cranes heralds a time of colour and excitement, especially during this mass migration south to Spain and North Africa. Please join us for what we believe to be one of the finest wildlife experiences we personally have ever witnessed.** From mid-September to the end of October, thousands of these elegant birds rest here and attract birders from across our continent and beyond. **Birdlife is plentiful in both the coastal areas and in the Müritz, with its lake-studded forests and meadows.** Species such as white-tailed eagle, osprey, common and rough-legged buzzards, black, green, greater, middle and lesser-spotted woodpeckers, goshawk, hen and marsh harriers, black and red kites, great bittern and a host of geese, ducks and waders add variety. On this tour, we will spend seven nights at the **4* IV Jahreszeiten Hotel (Four Seasons Hotel) at the heart of the Pomeranian Boddenland National Park in the harbour-town of ZINGST.** Plus a further three nights at the **4* Hotel Harmonie which overlooks the Müritzsee in the resort town of Waren, adjacent to the Müritz forest National Park.** Flights will be from Glasgow to Berlin and all coach travel will be provided throughout our eleven days holiday. Hotel stays will be on a half board basis.



The American golden plover (centre) among a group of European golden plovers

The Maidens American golden plover - do I *have* to write a description? Angus Hogg

When the American golden plover turned up at Maidens on 17th October, I was confronted by that thorny problem of having to write a description. There are those among us who, for good reasons or not, prefer not to bother, in the hope that:

- a) someone else will do the job (I've broken my wrist – honest!)
- b) lots of observers will see the bird (and that'll make it OK), or
- c) somebody will get a good enough photograph (and that saves *everyone* a lot of hassle)

Maybe it's down to an era in which I cut my teeth in birding, but I have always been a fan of the written word when it comes to descriptions, throwing in the odd sketch where appropriate. Nowadays, the importance of the fieldsketch has, to large extent, been negated by the advent of digital cameras (although I still think sketches are useful). Not everyone has a camera – nor can everyone turn in a Killian Mullarney masterpiece – but everyone **can** write a description of what they saw.

Leaving it to others, or going down the “mass observer” route is, of course, a matter for the individual, but I suspect that there are a few observers out there who have found a really rare bird and get more than a little irritated when the record doesn't appear in the local or national archive. And, that's partly where the problem lies. All such records of what are, after all, only a tiny minority of what's seen every year in the UK, require a description in order to be accepted as documented evidence within an area's avifauna. To effect this, you must submit to the judgement of a panel of so-called experts. Not everyone likes this idea, comments ranging from “I know fine how to identify a (*****!!) American golden plover” to “Who are this bunch of eejits anyway?” All well and good, but records (if submitted) have to be assessed somehow.

Anyway, I know that some observers balk at the notion of writing up descriptions: indeed some are not at all confident in doing it. That really shouldn't stand in the way of an honest submission though. So, what should you include? Let's take the Maidens American golden plover as an example.



American golden plover at Maidens

The initial sighting of the bird

I first caught sight of the bird as it circled slowly, with a flock of European Golden Plovers, at Maidens on the morning of 17th October. As the flock wheeled around in bright sunlight, there was one bird which appeared slightly slimmer and longer winged compared to the others. Moreover, it looked like it had plain grey underwings, compared to the gleaming white underwings of the "Goldies". I entertained the idea at this point that this *could* be an American golden plover, but this kind of sighting would clearly be insufficient for submission as such – it could just be a "small" European golden plover, and bright sunlight does amazing things to your perception of underwing tones! After 20 frustrating minutes, the first group of 10 birds landed and I managed to get a good look at the "suspect" bird.

A few seconds later and it was airborne again, not re-appearing again that morning. However, and a lot of what follows comes down to species familiarity, the main features had been clearly seen – enough to be sure of its identification. So, what were the key features? Briefly, they included the following:-

- A slim, long-winged bird (c.f. European Golden Plover) – 3 or 4 primaries extending beyond the tail tip.
 - Largely greyish body tones, with very little of the golden/yellowish tones of EGP
 - A striking head pattern with a whitish forehead and clear whitish supercilium
 - A clearly "capped" appearance, with an almost black crown
 - A pale greyish breast band which had a fairly clean demarcation between it and a white belly

Additional features which could be added from the extensive flight views would have included a weak whitish wing bar and pale, grey axillaries.

It might have been useful to have heard it call, but there was sufficient here to scribble down a few notes (or, as I've been doing for years, put these details on to my voice recorder. This has the advantage of not having to take your eyes off the bird as you note the details).

What next?

What you decide to do about writing up a description is up to you, but simplicity can often be the key. There is no need to over-embellish the text since the main thing is to set out clearly just why you thought it **was** a certain species. After writing up your description, it's a good idea to hold on to it until you're sure the bird has gone from the area. In this case, one, fairly useful piece of additional information was obtained – the call. This usually stands out clearly from European golden plover: a short, shrill, whistled “kleeee – ih” with the second part **just** audible (Transcriptions of calls can be a nightmare for some, but still helpful if you can put them on paper).

Photographs of the bird were obtained on 1st and 3rd November – all adding to the complete picture. In addition, many observers were lucky enough to see this bird before it departed, which can be helpful for corroboration. So, whatever your attitude is to writing up descriptions, can I encourage you to give it some thought – if nothing else, it can make the local recorder's life a lot easier?!

Angus Hogg 5 Dec 2014

Protecting the Loans “goose fields”



Roger Hissett

Most *Stonechat* readers will know the fields to the SW of Loans village which attract large numbers of geese, curlews and lapwings in winter (plus the odd duck or fifty). The site seems to have been used more and more in recent years. However, we realised early last year that although much of the site is rather wet, and would appear unattractive to developers, it had no actual protection from housing developments.

We decided that there were two main possibilities for giving the site a degree of protection. Either we could get it recognised as a Local Biodiversity Site (Wildlife Site) or as an Ornithological Site (OS). The latter seemed more appropriate and did not involve new wildlife surveys. We already had some good species counts from the Ayrshire bird records.

Greylag goose numbers are often in the 100s with a peak count of 2058 in December 2009; Pinkfeet numbers had been increasing in recent years, reaching a remarkable 2400 in March 2014; and there are also records of barnacle and white-fronted geese using the site most years, with seven bean geese on one occasion. As well as geese, the site is regularly used by substantial numbers of waders, including up to 400 curlews, lapwings in the low 100s (though 600 in January 2005) and occasionally golden plover flocks. So we had good evidence for the importance of site.

So in January 2014 we contacted South Ayrshire Council to find out what the procedure is to get a new ornithological site recognised and protected under the Local Development Plan (LDP). After a brief exchange of emails it transpired that there is no formal procedure, but that an application would need to be accompanied by a GIS file defining the site boundary. Also, since all the previous OSs had been proposed by the RSPB, they would like to know that the latter supported our suggestion.

During the summer we duly sent the planners our proposal including details of the numbers and importance of the birds using the site; and the RSPB kindly provided the GIS data along with their letter of support. These things progress slowly, particularly when planning officers are busy writing a new Local Development Plan, but at the beginning of December we finally received the news that the "Loans goose fields" would be included in the list of ornithological sites in the new LDP. So now the fields between Loans village and Fullarton Wood and bounded by the A759 in the north and the B746 in the NE should be a little bit safer.

How much safer?

Well, as everyone (including Donald Trump) knows, there is no such thing as absolute protection from harmful developments. The appropriate section in the new South Ayrshire LDP states that:

"Development.....which would affect (ornithological sites) shall only be supported where the developer can show that the integrity of the site will not be put at risk."

Given the nervous nature of goose flocks in winter, I think a prospective developer would find it hard to fulfil this requirement. But let's hope that the designation will be enough, and we will now never have to go to all the bother of arguing it in a planning inquiry. Fortunately, the new plan puts the onus on the developers to convince the planning department that their proposal will NOT put the site at risk.

Roger Hissett
