

Clyde Bird News

Newsletter of the Clyde Branch of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club

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Winter Meetings Programme 2001/02

Following the 2001 AGM in April, the Branch found itself in the unfortunate position of having no venue and no speakers arranged for this winter's meetings.

Possibly for the first time in the history of the Clyde SOC, we had no Chairman or Secretary. We are grateful to Liz Parsons, who has continued to deal with SOC HQ in Edinburgh on an ad hoc basis, but other matters relating to the running of the Branch have been unattended since the spring.

As the result of a meeting on 3rd December, we now have the foundation of a new committee to be proposed at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 7th January.

The nominations are: George White (Chair), Iain Gibson (Vice-chair), Alan Wood (Secretary), Iain Livingstone (Meetings Secretary), and ordinary members Chris Waltho, Simon Zisman/Sue Agnew (RSPB rep), and Willie Thom. Frances Gatens continues as Treasurer.

The speakers for the evening will be Frances Gatens with "A Toddle Around Texas", and a video of Arizona Birds from George White.

The February-April meetings will take place on the dates shown in the SOC meetings programme, but in **Kelvingrove Museum**, not the University.



Grasshopper Warbler George T White

Newsletter

This is the first of what is hoped to become a biannual Clyde Branch newsletter. It has been felt for some time that the committee carried out a lot of work behind the scenes, of which most members were unaware, and this is one area where we hope to keep members more informed.

The newsletter should also help to keep everyone in touch with what is happening both in the bird world and in the world of conservation.

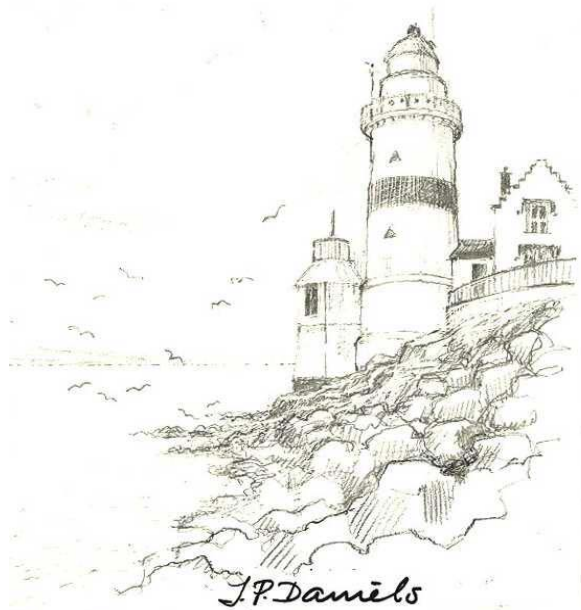
In future editions we hope to have regular features which will include Club news and Recent Bird Sightings. Contributions will be gratefully received by the editor.

Grapevine

Jim and Val Wilson operate the Clyde SOC Grapevine, which allows members to receive daily bird sightings information either by e-mail or by telephone. If you would like to participate, contact Jim and Val on 0141-639 2516 or jim.val@btinternet.com

STOP PRESS An Extraordinary General Meeting, followed by a speaker, will take place at Kelvingrove Museum & Art Galleries at 7.30pm on Monday 7th January. Please bring your SOC meetings programme for entry to the museum (at back door).

Manx Shearwaters in the Firth of Clyde



The year 2001 will go down as one of the most memorable years of summer seawatching at Cloch Point, mainly due to spectacular numbers of Manx Shearwaters. Virtually unknown in the inner Firth of Clyde until 1988, large numbers of manxies started to appear in 1989, with a maximum count of 254 north and 434 south past Cloch Point within 1½ hours on 24 August.

It was John Spooner who first alerted Chris Waltho and me to the appearance of these birds. John had been working with the MoD Police, and for over twenty years had a launch patrol area which encompassed the inner firth as far out as Bute and Arran. During all those years he saw only a handful of Manxies.

Since 1990, the trend has been for ever increasing numbers of shearwaters coming into the Firth of Clyde, which is also reflected in reports from North Ayrshire in the Ayrshire Bird Report.

Numbers are variable and rather unpredictable from one year to the next. For example, in 1999 Frances Gatens and I recorded 2,826 bird-days, then in the following year a massive total of 14,545 bird-days, mainly during July and August. This year has been even more impressive, with a total number of Manx Shearwater sightings in excess of 35,000 bird-days, a record total.

Between 1988 and 1993 manxies appeared each year, mainly between mid July and early September. The regular movement involved them moving north past Cloch Point, heading up the estuary as far as Loch Long and Greenock, then turning around and heading back south again. During these years no shearwater was seen landing on the water or feeding.

In 1994 their behaviour changed quite dramatically. There were still the usual movements past the point, but increasingly flocks began to land on the water, sometimes actively fishing in the company of Gannets. On 30 July that year I had one of my first really memorable days watching the shearwaters. Not only were there lots of Gannets diving, and good numbers of Harbour Porpoises offshore, but also a Basking Shark, only the second record for Renfrewshire.

That evening was calm and warm. Manxies were around in their hundreds, by that time most moving out of the estuary. I counted 2,005 passing south within the course of an hour. By the end of the hour, a large raft of about 1,400 had settled on the water only two hundred metres offshore. With all this activity taking place, it was hard to believe I was in Renfrewshire, not the Western or Northern Isles.

This year (2001) has produced many spectacular days at Cloch Point. Up to 3,000 shearwaters were recorded on several occasions. Observers visiting for the first time were surprised at how close in the birds could be viewed. It is not unusual to see small groups as close as 50 metres, and for flocks of several hundred to land on the sea only 100-200 metres offshore. Even with binoculars, several observers commented that they were experiencing their closest ever views of Manx Shearwater.

It is also fascinating to watch the shearwaters' feeding behaviour. Large flocks tend to split up and forage over the sea, then, usually attracted by diving Gannets, or a group of their own kind, they converge on a shoal of fish. The shearwaters engage in a frenzied feeding activity, flying around in tight circles before making shallow dives into the water.

If you haven't been to Cloch Point to see this amazing spectacle, give it a try next year. The shearwaters can be present any time from late June to early September, but from late July to the end of August is the best period.

Iain Gibson

Biodiversity News

Most local authorities in the Clyde Area are taking the lead in developing Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP's) in association with Scottish Natural Heritage, voluntary conservation bodies and other partners. This is an exciting development in local nature conservation, and below we detail some of the recent and ongoing initiatives.

City of Glasgow

The City of Glasgow Local Biodiversity Action Plan was launched on Monday 10th September 2001 at the City Chambers. The Tranche I Habitat Action Plans (11) and Species Action Plans (9) include Reed Bunting as one of three 'champion' species. The biodiversity steering group (the City Council and partner organisations such as SNH, RSPB and SOC) is now undertaking the next stage in the development of the plan, targeting key tasks and projects to be carried out over the next year to achieve the actions in the plans. Tranche II habitat and species action plans, currently being written, will include the priority bird species of conservation concern found in Glasgow, including Tree Sparrow.



Reed Bunting

If SOC members would like to contribute to the Biodiversity Action Plan process in Glasgow (eg by writing plans or carrying out Reed Bunting surveys), please contact the Biodiversity Officer on 0141 287 5665 or e:mail carol.maclean@land.glasgow.gov.uk.

Renfrewshire

Three local authorities are involved in the 'Renfrewshire' LBAP - East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. The appointment of a Biodiversity Officer is imminent (and may well have taken place by the time you read this).



Hen Harrier Alison Beck

The Steering Group has chosen a number of key species to promote for priority action within the first phase of the LBAP, including the following chosen by the Birds Subgroup: Hen Harrier, Black Guillemot, Lesser Whitethroat and breeding waders.

For information about the Renfrewshire LBAP contact Jenny Gough at Renfrewshire Council Dept of Planning & Transport on 0141-842 5270 (e:mail jenny.gough@renfrewshire.gov.uk)

North Lanarkshire has produced an ambitious Biodiversity Action Plan which includes proposed actions for a wide range of habitats and species. Plans have been prepared for Bean Goose, Barn Owl, Swift and Willow Tit, as well as a joint plan for Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. Clyde SOC member Jimmy Maxwell, whose work on the Willow Tit is well known, has produced a Species Action Plan which seeks to consolidate the status of Willow Tits in their strongholds, and hopefully expand their range through provision of nest boxes and other means.

For information about the North Lanarkshire LBAP contact Brian Thomson at North Lanarkshire Council Community Services on 01236 780636 (e:mail thomsonb@northlan.gov.uk).



Lapwing

Tommy Daniels

Bean Geese in the Clyde area - an update

Regular monitoring of the flock started in December 1989 and has continued intensively to the present day. The flock size has risen considerably from the 1989/90 figure of 112, to the present total of 192 birds.

This is very unusual in European population trends. Most flocks are either decreasing or have disappeared from traditional haunts, leaving only the strongholds in southern Scandinavia. In comparison to the other British population in the Yare valley, the Slammanan flock, as it has become known, arrives much earlier around late September and leaves later in mid to late February. This ostensibly means that for much of the winter season our birds are the only Bean Geese in Britain and some of the earliest arriving winter visitors in the country. This year the first 20 birds arrived on 24 September at Easter Fannyside Loch.

Most birdwatchers will know this site but probably don't know that it has been specifically bought as a reserve for Bean Geese and is managed by RSPB. Much of the study concentrates on site usage by the birds as they face ever growing pressures.

The impact of forestry and farming on what is undoubtedly the most defensive and wary of our goose species is becoming a big concern. The birds exploit marginal grazing ground and require sites that offer little or no disturbance, which means that we have to control access to the birds whenever possible.

With liaison from farmers to birdwatchers, all sectors must be catered for but it must be highlighted that birders on a day out come low in the list of priorities. But we help whenever we can. The reduction in the number of fields used by the birds has been decreasing. Sites like Carron Valley Reservoir and Loch Ellrig have all but been abandoned for varying reasons, leaving just a few core areas.

To help fight for conservation initiatives a Bean Goose Action Group has been established. The membership includes all the main conservation bodies, local councils and other interested parties. This move has ensured that detrimental impacts on the flock can be minimised and that we all work towards agreed aims to protect this nationally

important flock. It is also hoped to have watching points at varying sites on the plateau to allow greater controlled access, and information boards sited to keep birders up to date.

The flock is favouring two main areas at the moment. The first is Beam Farm in Falkirk district. To view this site go to Newcraig Cottage at NS849756 and park on the hard standing near the gate leading north over the moor. Walk for half a mile or so to the turning circle which overlooks the field. A good view will be anything under 300 metres but the birds are usually further away. Please do not leave the path. The birds are not like other geese which will fly off to an adjacent field; these birds will get up and go to the other end of their range some 5-10 km away.

The other current site is Blackhill in North Lanarkshire, which can only be viewed by looking south from Fannyside Mill Farm at NS809734, some 1½ kilometres away. I trust the difficulty in studying these birds is apparent and the fact that the sanctity of a few core and very important sites is always maintained.

Over the years the study has developed into a working partnership between myself and Angus Maciver, and is now partially funded by the Bean Goose Action Group. A web site giving an insight into the flock can be found on the SOC's links page and would appear to be well received. Should you want to know more or want to get involved then please contact us; you will be made most welcome.

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