

Firth of Clyde Eider News

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Introduction

The 2002 breeding season has been a difficult one for fieldwork. The seemingly endless procession of depressions, with their wind and rain, prevented or curtailed a number of census/ringing visits to the smaller islands. The sea conditions also prevented a complete count of the moult flocks, especially in the outer firth. That said, breeding productivity in the Gare Loch was similar to 2001. The weather appears to have been harsher for eider watchers.

This year's September count will take place from 7-15th to co-incide with the national WEBS count on the 8th. This is at least a week earlier than recent years, but I hope that the dates are still convenient with regular counters.

2002 breeding season

Colony Nest counts & change from 2001

Site	nests 2002	nests 2001	change	% change	notes	
Horse Island	542	503	39	7.8		RSPB
Faslane	69	90	-21	-23.3	many early and low lying nests washed out in late May	CMW/J Simpson
Minard Islets	41	no count			39% decline since 2000 attributed to mink predation	C Craik
Burnt Islands - largest island	461	572	-111	-19.4	based on Bob Furness counts of clutches marked by Clive Craik, but overall estimates of island group c600 nests is similar to 2001	Bob Furness/C Craik
Sanda	40	no count				Rab Morton
Total	1153					

Clutch size data

Site	sample size	largest clutch	mean clutch size	2001
Horse Island	280	8	4.07	3.97
Faslane	61	6	3.89	3.84
Minard Islets	37	7	4.86	
Total	378			

Mean clutch size at Horse Island and Faslane is higher than 2001

First broods reported 2002

On 12 May on Eilean Aoghainn (Minard Islands) eggs in one clutch were chipping and hatching was expected within 24 hours.

16th May - Horse Island (RSPB)

Reports from other sites would be welcome

Brood counts

site	date	no brood/ creches	no ducklings	attendant females	other females
Troon	20/06/02	6	17	10	19
Bogside	20/06/02	6	17	13	10
Ardrossan	20/06/02	4	7	8	45
Seamill-Portencross	20/06/02	14	34	45	38
Fairlie	20/06/02	4	18	6	8
Fairlie-Largs	06/07/02	8	30	19	75
Great Cumbrae	03/07/02	23	47	53	171
Rhu-Rosneath	14/07/02	25	65	37	232
Rosneath-Kilcreggan	14/07/02	5	16	6	100
Kilcreggan-Couport	14/07/02	4	9	8	70
Total		99	260	205	768

Breeding production

By mid July most of ducklings still alive should have escaped the highly vulnerable gull predation risk of their first two weeks, and most are expected to fledge. This can be used as a measure of duckling production. The data from Rhu-Couport is compared to 2001. There was a 25% increase in broods and ducklings, but with the same number of attendant females (11% of all females). This was achieved by almost three times as many broods being tended by a single female. However, this does not necessarily mean that single female broods are more successful than multi-female broods/creches.

Rhu-Couport	2001	2002	change	% change
date	15/07/01	14/07/02		
no brood/creches	27	34	7.00	25.93
no ducklings	72	90	18.00	25.00
attendant females	50	51	1.00	2.00
other females	406	402	-4.00	-0.99
all females	456	453	-3.00	-0.66
% attendant females	11.0	11.3	0.29	2.68
ducklings/all females	0.16	0.20	0.04	25.83
mean brood/creche size	2.67	2.65	-0.02	-0.74
attendant female per duckling	0.69	0.57	-0.13	-18.40
mean attendant females per brood	1.85	1.50	-0.35	-19.00
no single female broods	8	23	15.00	187.50
% broods/creches with single female	29.6	67.6	38.02	128.31

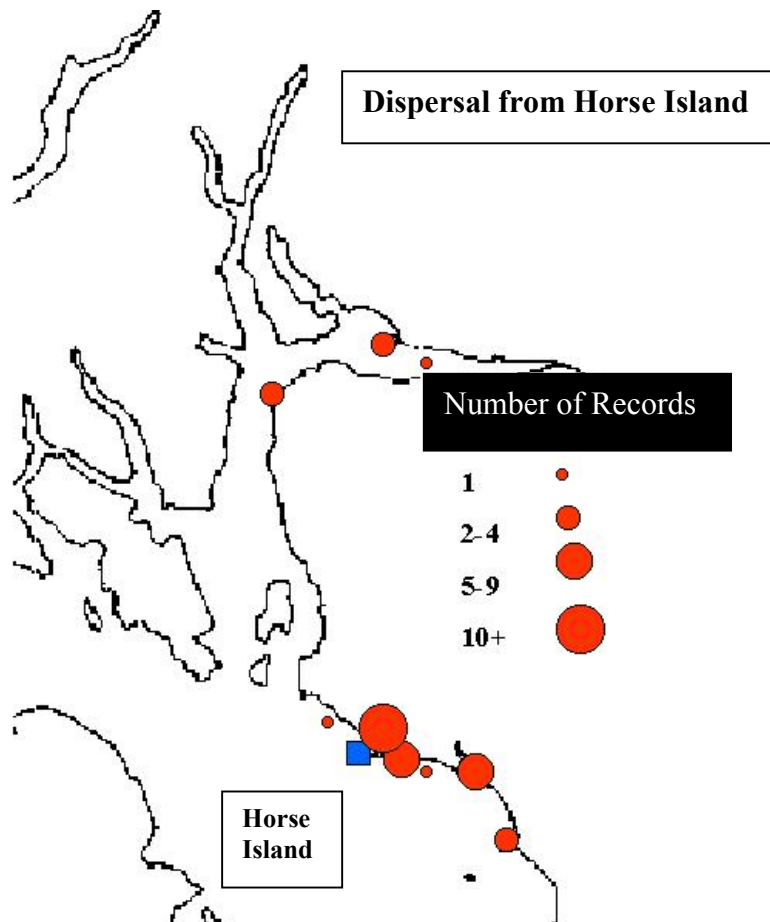
Ringling totals

Site	No. caught 2002	retrapped	ringed 2002	total ringed to date	ringers
Horse Island	96	15	81	156	I Livingstone <i>et al</i>
Faslane	35	14	21	70	I Livingstone <i>et al</i>
Sgat Mor	0	0	0	23	
Burnt Islands	56	21	35	210	R Furness
Sanda	7	1	6	11	R Morton
Minard	13	0	13	13	Clive Craik, Rob Lightfoot
Total	207	51	156	483	

Horse Island movements

On 19th May, members of the Clyde Ringing Group caught 30 nesting females and attached red nape-tags to them. The tags were attached with superglue to feathers on the bird's nape, and were designed to fall off when the birds moulted these feathers in July. Over the next 38 days, there were 29 reports of 32 tagged birds. 44% of birds were associated with ducklings and considered to be duckling rearing. All birds attending ducklings were recorded within 20 km of Horse Island. 53% of all birds were reported within 5 km of Horse Island and 84% within 20 km (see table). Most birds (81%) moved south to Ardrossan, Saltcoats, Irvine/Bogside and Troon (up to 18km). Only 19% moved north, with 5 of these representing the longest movements (35 to 50km)-but these may refer to only one or two birds

Distance from Horse Island km	with ducklings	no ducklings	Total
0-4.9	9	8	17
5.0-9.9	1		1
10.0-19.9	4	5	9
20.0-29.9			
30.0-39.0		2	2
40.0-49.0		2	2
50+		1	1
	14	18	32



Moulting Flocks

Unfortunately, poor weather during July and August prevented all the Clyde moult flocks being counted. However, seven sites counted in both years showed virtually no change (0.6% decrease from 8502 to 8454).

Moulting Flocks >750	2002		2001	
	date	observer	count	count
Gare Loch	11-Aug	CMW	1013	885
Lower Loch Long	11-Aug	CMW	688	996
Hunters Quay-Toward Pt	10-Aug	CMW	1638	1435
Irvine Bay	04-Aug	CMW	1955	2658
Ayr Bay	04-Aug	CMW	1115	851
Turnberry-Girvan			nc	1263
Loch Ryan			nc	2002
Gourock-Wemyss Bay	18-Aug	IPG	1250	753
Clyde Estuary	11-Aug	IPG	900	
Otter Ferry	27-Jul	TC	795	924
Total			9354	11767

Mink predation on Minard Islets

A census and ringing visit by Clive Craik, Rob Lightfoot and Chris Waltho took place on the 12 May. 44 eider nests were found. The population of these two islets has declined by nearly 40% since 2000. The 6 nests on the smaller island is a decline of 80% since 1995. A mink den was located, and 8 freshly killed females were found. Systematic predation of breeding females is causing a dramatic decline of one of the Clyde top eider breeding sites. The mink is also having a heavy impact on other breeding seabirds, gulls, shag and black guillemot.

Grey Seal predation

Professor Geoff Moore from the University Marine Biological Station at Millport collated data of the predation of Eider by Grey Seals around Great Cumbrae during the spring of 2001. Between early March and late April some 20 eider, predominately females, were killed. In a short paper in the *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the UK* in December 2001, he describes several instances of seals catching eider, repeatedly tossing them into the air, as a play item. He also records the seals killing and peeling back the skin in a characteristic way (see photo). Seals killing eider, although widely rumoured to occur, has rarely been witnessed.

Observers are encouraged to report other instances of seal kills or of similar corpses washed ashore.



Photo:
Geoff Moore

Ringed Eider

Readers are asked to regularly check shorelines for corpses and to inspect birds for rings. To date there have been no recoveries of the nearly 500 females recently ringed in the Firth of Clyde.

Any rings found should be reported to the **Ringling Office, British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU.**

Newsletters

The Firth of Clyde Forum has posted the last Clyde Eider News on its website www.clydeforum.org.uk. The Forum has also recently produced a newsletter called Clydebreakers. This is available on the website or directly from Stuart McQuarrie, Capian House, Marinar Court, Clydebank.



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