

NEWSLETTER 25 - APRIL 1999

ADDITIONAL MEETING ON FRIDAY 14th MAY

Roger Cottis will give an illustrated talk on "Wildlife Recording in Skye and Lochalsh" with particular emphasis on mammal recording for the Highland Biological Recording Group's Mammal Atlas. The meeting will be held at Kirkton Church Hall and will commence at 8.00pm. It is hoped to follow this up with a field meeting when Roger will give us practical advice on what to look out for in the field. With a bit of luck Roger may have some slides developed by 14th May of a Fur Seal seen recently on Skye - far from its home in the high Arctic!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held on 23rd April at Plockton Village Hall. The existing Committee was re-elected as follows:-

Chairman	John Holt	Committee Members	Jean Camilli
Vice-Chairman	Pat Mucklow		Tim Godfrey
Secretary	Brian Neath		Iain Matheson
Treasurer	Andree Bishop		

In view of the substantial increase in our bank balance it was decided to reduce the subscription for family membership to £15.

The formal business was followed as usual by a most enjoyable social evening. Andree provided another amazing feast and she, John Holt and Tim Godfrey worked very hard in setting up the hall. Many thanks to them and to all the willing volunteers who helped with the washing-up and clearing away at the end of the evening.

BOAT TRIP FOR 1999

The annual boat trip this year will be to Loch Scavaig and Loch Coruisk.

The arrangements will be the same as last year with the "Western Isles" leaving Armadale at 10.00am and returning between 5.00pm and 6.00pm. In the event of poor weather the contingency plan is to sail across to Loch Hourn and Loch Nevis and land at Inverie. Please sign and return the enclosed form if you intend to go on the trip.

1996 HIGHLAND BIRD REPORT

Apologies to anyone who bought a copy of this publication following my recommendation in the January Newsletter. I hadn't seen the 1996 report at the time but was familiar with previous issues. Unfortunately the Lochalsh records were somehow omitted so there is little of local interest in the report. Colin Crooke was extremely apologetic and could not understand what had happened as he remembered highlighting records for inclusion. He will now incorporate our 1996 records in the 1997 report.

WINTER 1998/99 - WILDLIFE REPORTS

The big disappointment during this period was the absence of our usual wintering flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese. A group of 11 was seen in Loch Kishorn on 14th November by a passing wildfowl enthusiast but for the first time since 1990 I failed to locate any in the Plockton area. Despite their best endeavours Josephine and Roy Dean were unable to find the Kishorn birds again. If anyone else happened to come across the White-fronts I would be delighted to hear about them. The Greylag Geese flocks were more scattered than usual so it was difficult to estimate the total population. Individual flock sizes were generally smaller than during the two previous seasons but a flock of 76 at Dubh-aird on 11th January was the largest flock I have recorded in the Plockton

area.

Two families of Whooper Swans were present on Loch Shiel during November but they did not appear to be on the best of terms and tended to keep well away from each other. The larger family which included 4 juvenile birds eventually took sole possession and remained through until March. Perhaps the parents were the 2 adults which had spent the previous two winters on the loch and had bred successfully at last in 1998, probably in Iceland.

Little Auks were present in the area again during January and February. Roger Cottis saw a flock of about 15 do a U-turn in Kyle Akin rather than fly over or under the Skye Bridge on 19th January. Two days later large numbers of Guillemots were flying north through Kyle Rhea, splashing down in the water and being carried back by the current. 30 Little Auks were counted amongst the estimated 120 Guillemots in a period of 90 minutes. Little Auks were also seen off Dubh-aird on 11th January and 11th February and a single bird was in Loch Duich on 8th February.

Rock Doves were scarcer than usual. The post-breeding flock which usually appears in the Eilean Tioram/ Ardelve area and which peaked at 70 in 1996 and 60 in 1997 did not materialise in 1998. I saw only 4 or 5 there during November.

Blackcaps were not so widely reported in Lochalsh as in recent winters. We had a single male in our garden on Carr Brae on 18th November and 1 or 2 visited gardens in Kyle during January and February. Outwith Lochalsh Blackcaps were feeding at bird tables in Kyleakin, Leacanashie and Lochcarron. The male which visited Josephine and Roy Dean's bird table in Lochcarron stayed well into March.

Birds which were more numerous and widespread than usual included Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Stonechat and Redpoll. 1 or 2 Pied Wagtails winter most years in Kyle but are rarely found elsewhere. This winter they were also seen at Ardelve, Carr Brae, Glenelg and Plockton. 2 birds even braved out the whole winter in the exposed conditions around Carr Brae View Point. A flock of 60 to 90 Redpolls remained on Carr Brae where less than 10 or even none at all is more the norm. Even larger numbers were seen in the vicinity of Duirinish Lodge where there were about 170 on 11th December and at least 500 on 3rd March - a remarkable flock!

Snow Buntings are birds of the high tops but move down to lower levels during harsh weather. It seems strange that in our area you are most likely to see Snow Buntings from the car! This winter they were recorded in this manner near Cluanie, on Mam Ratagan and north of Kishorn.

Goldfinches are uncommon birds in the area at all seasons but their increasing tendency to feed in gardens may eventually result in an expanding population as has already happened with Siskins. 2 were feeding on peanuts in our garden for the first time in March and I heard of others feeding on bird tables or peanut holders in Dornie and Allt nan Sugh. Further records of this behaviour would be welcomed.

Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555341)

