



NEWSLETTER 64 – MAY 2009

AN UNLIKELY GARDEN BIRD

From at least February into May one or two Glaucous Gulls have been visiting the garden of Sheena and Roger Knight in Dornie along with the group of Herring Gulls that are fed daily. The Glaucous Gull is an uncommon but regular winter visitor to Scotland with the majority of birds occurring in the Northern Isles and the Outer Hebrides. Smaller numbers are seen along the east and west coasts, particularly in fishing ports such as Mallaig and Portree. In Lochalsh I have found it to be less frequent than the similar but smaller Iceland Gull with only nine records between 1991 and 2001 compared with 30 records of Iceland Gull between 1990 and 2006. However since February of this year the two Glaucous Gulls have



Photo: Brian Neath



Photo: Sheena Knight

been seen frequently in the Ardelve/Dornie area, as well as in the Knights' garden, and another bird has frequented the saltings at the mouth of the River Croe. All my records have been of immature birds and this year's individuals were probably in their third year. I have never recorded this species later than March before but it looks as if one of the birds may have decided to stay throughout the summer. The nearest breeding grounds of Glaucous Gull are in Iceland but there is one record of a bird interbreeding with a Herring Gull in Shetland. This is quite likely to be the first record of the Glaucous Gull as a garden bird.

BUTTERFLIES

During an exceptionally mild period in the middle of March Peacock butterflies were widely reported throughout the Highlands. Locally Peacocks were seen at Achnandarach and on Carr Brae on 19th and 20th March. Subsequently they were widespread in the area from April until mid-May. Five years ago the Peacock was extremely scarce in the north west but in that short period it has spread from Argyll and the Moray Firth right through to the north coast of Sutherland and Caithness and is now a common sight in Lochalsh. The main flight periods are from April to early June and from August to October, after which it hibernates until the following spring. By contrast at the time of writing I have heard of no Red Admirals in our area so far this year.

Green-veined White and Orange-tip have been common and widespread from the last week in April and through May. On 28th April I found both species on the wing at Nonach before 9.00am. and on 14th May both were numerous in Glen Elchaig. The Orange-tip is still uncommon in the north of Skye but there

has been a recent report of one at Edinbane. Green Hairstreak numbers have been low again as they were in 2008. The Speckled Wood has been present on Carr Brae in modest numbers but this species is always more numerous from July to September. 23 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries on my Carr Brae transect on 13th May was my second best count of this BAP priority species after the 24 recorded on 27th May 2004.

The Small Tortoiseshell is causing concern due a rapid decline in numbers during the last two years. It is possibly being affected by a new parasite. There is a postcard survey of this species this year, similar to those for Peacock and Orange-tip in the last two years. Alternatively records can be passed on by myself (see contact details at the foot of page 2).

Butterfly Conservation reports a huge arrival of millions of Painted Lady butterflies in the UK during the last week of May so keep a look out for their arrival in our area. 1996 was the last year in which large numbers reached the north west Highlands.

BIRD ATLAS UPDATE

81 million birds of 489 species have now been recorded for the BTO's Atlas of Breeding and Wintering Birds and this is less than half way through the four year recording period. 67% of the required minimum coverage has been achieved for the winter period and 61% for the breeding season. Within the Lochalsh area Willow Warblers and Chaffinches are dominating in lowland and coastal areas while Meadow Pipits tend to be the most numerous birds in upland areas. In the hills between Carr Brae and Glen Glennan both Golden Plover and Ring Ouzel have become exceedingly scarce in recent years and none were found at sites where they were frequent a few years ago. However Greenshank seem to be doing well and possibly increasing. Single Redwings were found in two surveyed squares in the Killilan/Glen Elchaig area during May and although no proof of breeding was obtained it is tempting to believe that the birds are summering in the area rather than being late migrants.

OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS

Huge numbers of Willow Warblers arrived during fine weather from 11th to 13th April and it is difficult to imagine the vast numbers of these tiny birds that must have been migrating by night during this period. Other migrants which have arrived in good numbers include Cuckoos, Grasshopper Warblers and Blackcaps. Swallows arrived very early in Glen More and Ardelve but were reported to be late appearing at Balmacara and Inverinate.

Jessie MacGregor continues to have Bullfinches feeding in her garden in Kyle and Ishbel Cameron is still getting both Yellowhammers and Reed Buntings feeding in her garden in Drumbuie. Yellowhammers are also regular in gardens at Ardelve and Conchra but remain scarce on Skye. Any records of these three species feeding in gardens in other parts of Lochalsh would be appreciated.

The moth season like that of butterflies has been a hit and miss affair so far this year due to the erratic weather pattern. The first good moth-trapping evening was on 18th March when 152 moths of 15 species were recorded including 17 Yellow Horned and a Red Swordgrass. The 20th April produced 148 moths of 21 species including two Grey Birch and two Least Black Arches. The 17th May catch was the most interesting so far. Although only 68 moths were trapped this included 26 species. Highlights on this night were Birch Mocha, Light Knot Grass and my second record of a Herald. All these moth species can be viewed on the UKMoths website (www.ukmoths.org.uk).

NEWSLETTERS and the WEBSITE

If you would like to receive your newsletters by e-mail please let me have your e-mail address. One advantage is that any photographs will be in colour. Alternatively you can view all newsletters since August 1996 on our web-site (www.swrfc.org.uk). Please let members of the committee know of anything you would like to have added to the website. Items for consideration include checklists of birds, butterflies, moths, mammals, wildflowers etc which have been recorded in Lochalsh and a photo gallery of some of the specialities of the area.

