



NEWSLETTER 78 – NOVEMBER 2012

WAXWINGS

There can be little doubt as to what the event of November 2012 has been. Every two or three years there seems to be a “Waxwing year” but the influx of these birds into Skye and Lochalsh from the 2nd of November onwards has been unprecedented. Flocks of 200 to 500 have been widely reported and peaked with a staggering 1000 plus in Kyle on the 12th. I was fortunate to witness this concentration in Kyle which occurred in a relatively small area centred on Stoney Road. Large restless flocks were swirling around and settling briefly on overhead wires, trees and bushes with the odd bird even perching on roof tops. Groups would settle briefly in berry-bearing trees and shrubs before flying off again for short flights. It was during a relatively settled spell that I was able to make a reasonable assessment of the numbers involved. In Lochalsh the Waxwings have mainly been seen between Kyle and Plockton with relatively few sightings from Balmacara eastwards. However a few were seen at Ardelve and Sallachy.

On Skye flocks of between 160 and 300 have been widely reported from Kyleakin and Isleornsay and as far north as Dunvegan.

With Redwings and Fieldfares arriving several weeks later than usual it has meant that the thrushes have been present at the same time as Waxwings. In most years the thrushes have eaten all the rowan berries before the Waxwings arrive and the Waxwings then feed mainly on hawthorn berries. However this year, despite the thousands of birds present, there are still at the time of writing some rowan trees with plenty of berries remaining.



Photos of Waxwings by John Leiper

OTHER WILDLIFE REPORTS

The hoped for late emergence of Peacock butterflies never happened. I saw one at Conchra on 22nd September and John Rooney saw one in Kyle the following day. If anyone knows of any further sightings I would be pleased to receive details. It will be interesting to see whether the Peacock can recover from this decline next year. I eventually caught up with a Red Admiral at Ardelve on 8th October but that was my only 2012 sighting. The last Speckled Wood was seen on Carr Brae on 2nd September and there was an exceptionally late report of two Scotch Argus in the Kinloch/Leiter Fura area on Skye on 14th October (Hugh and Margaret Scott). My latest date for Scotch Argus in Lochalsh was on 26th September 2011.

The flight period given for Scotch Argus in the “Atlas of Butterflies in Highland and Moray” is given as late July to early September so the 14th October date is quite extraordinary.



Scotch Argus



Angle Shades

By contrast there were very good numbers of moths during October. I recorded 19 species of macro-moth attracted to my Robinson trap during the month with high counts of Red-green Carpet (32), Feathered Thorn (22) and Yellow-line Quaker (15). On 10th October there was a record count for Wester Ross of 39 Angle Shades. The previous highest count was nine – also in my garden on Carr Brae on 14th October 2005. The Angle Shades can turn up at almost any time of the year.

The attractive Goldeneye duck has decreased in recent years. It used to be seen in small numbers around the coast between Kyle and Plockton and also at the heads of Loch Duich and Loch Long as well as on Loch Shiel. The freshwater Loch Achaidh na h-Inich has always been the best site for Goldeneye and fortunately it is still a regular winter visitor there. Jan Storie found the first three back there on 19th November. Details of any Goldeneye sightings would be appreciated. Jan has also seen a Greenshank and Turnstones on the shore at Plockton during November.

My last Swallow of the year was at Nostie on 26th September when there was also a Dipper along the burn. A late Blackcap was still making alarm calls on Carr Brae on 5th September. A single Whooper Swan was in Loch Long on 8th October and was quite close to the Mute Swan which was present at Bundalloch during September and October. On 26th October there were three different groups of Whooper Swan in the Inverinate/Shiel Bridge area – a pair with two juveniles on Loch nan Corr, 5 adults and one juvenile on the Croe Saltings and a similar group on Loch Shiel. A Great Northern Diver off the Drumbuie coast on 22nd October was still in its splendid breeding plumage and two days later there was a single Pink-footed Goose amongst a flock of 80 Greylag Geese near Morvich. It was good to see 9 Yellowhammers at Ardelve on 25th November where they were probably coming in to roost. And it was interesting to hear that Reg Brown had seen a Nuthatch at Sallachy on 16th November. Could this be the same bird that spent 13 weeks on Carr Brae at the end of 2011? This was only the sixth record of Nuthatch in Highland Region.

THE CROWLIN ISLANDS

Following the report of the Highland Biological Recording Group's visits to the Crowlins in the last newsletter Bill Ramsay has been researching the human history of the islands. It appears that as late as the 1841 census there were 35 people living on the islands, including 18 under the age of sixteen years. However by 1881 the census showed that only one family with six children remained. By 1891 there was just one family of seven and one servant but with no children under sixteen remaining. One family remained in the 1901 census but by 1931 the islands were free from human occupation.

In the early years of the 19th century the kelp found around the coast was a valuable commodity and in 1824 the tenants were paid for 9 tons 6cwts of kelp and in 1827 received £25 – 11s for 8 and half tons. Small oats and potatoes were grown and goats, small Highland cattle and some sheep were kept. Fish were plentiful so the inhabitants would have had a reasonably varied diet. Despite the harsh conditions Isabella MacLennan lived to the age of 85 (died in 1871) and Duncan MacLean lived to be 80 (died in 1894).

It is hoped to include Bill's full summary of life on the Crowlins on the Field Club's website in due course.