



NEWSLETTER 80 – MAY 2013

MEETINGS

15th June 2013 Boat trip to the Isle of Canna £25 for adults, £12 for children
Meet at Armadale at 08:15
Due back at Armadale at 18:00

For booking form contact Rule Anderson 01599 511231 (randerson@nts.org.uk)

9th August 2013 Felt Road to Mongolia
Ann Ross
Kirkton Church Hall at 7:30pm

WILDLIFE REPORTS

Following the huge influx of Waxwings in the autumn a few lingered on into February. I had one feeding on cotoneaster berries in our garden on Carr Brae on 7th and 8th and perhaps the same bird fed on apples in Roger Knight's garden on the 9th. Seeing one at about 3 feet range in the garden was almost as exciting as seeing the huge flocks in Kyle during the autumn.

There were still 11 Whooper Swans on Loch Shiel on 11th February but only two by the 16th March. Large numbers of Eider off Kyle on 18th February included c.80 in Kyle Akin and another 50 or so out beyond the bridge. Along the Drumbuie coast on 10th February there were four Great Northern Divers swimming and diving unusually close to the shore allowing excellent views. By 17th April there were still five present including one bird in breeding plumage. Sea-watching from An Dubh-aird on 19th February produced a record count of 8 Slavonian Grebes as well as two Little Grebes, 13 Red-breasted Mergansers, 18 Eiders and 14 Black Guillemots. 4 Rooks near the airstrip on the same day were the first I have seen locally for some time.

Barbara MacRitchie saw a pair of Crossbills near the Murchison Monument on 20th February and Rule Anderson found a pair at Killilan on 1st March.

Jan Storie has been visiting Loch Achaidh na h-Inich on a regular basis and has shown how such frequent visits to a site can be very rewarding. She saw 16 Goldeneye there on 7th February and there was still a female present on 17th April. She also had regular sightings of species ranging from Long-tailed Tit, Treecreeper and Grey Wagtail to Cormorant and Black-throated Diver.

SPRING 2013

This spring must go down in history as one of the latest for many years. Butterflies and migrant birds have been extremely late in appearing although with the odd exception. One exception was a Cuckoo on the early date of 17th April and it was remarkable for this species to be my first summer migrant of 2013. Just to confirm that I was not imagining things the bird was seen and heard again in the same area of Carr Brae on the 19th. Three species that usually arrive before the Cuckoo are Wheatear, Swallow and Blackcap. This year Wheatear was not seen on Carr Brae until 24th April compared with the average

arrival date over the last 9 years of 9th April. The average arrival date for Swallow over the same period was 21st April but none was seen until the 30th and my first Blackcap of the year was singing at Kirkton on 30th April compared with the average arrival date for the previous 8 years of 21st April.

Rule Anderson had some reasonably early dates on the Kintail Estate. He saw 3 Wheatears and a Common Sandpiper in Gleann Lichd on 19th April, a Ring Ouzel at Allt Grannda on 21st April and a Cuckoo at Morvich on the same day. At the head of Loch Long Paul Speak had Common Sandpiper on 21st April, Wheatear on 23rd April and a pair of Greenshank on 30th April. There was also a concentration of 43 Common Gulls there on 30th April. Iain Turnbull has found good numbers of Sedge Warblers, Grasshopper Warblers, Whitethroats and Linnets on the croft land at Drumbuie and Plockton. More surprisingly he found a Black-tailed Godwit with two Whimbrel in fields at Dubh-aird.

Butterflies were inevitably late in appearing in such low temperatures. Roger Knight had a Peacock sunning itself in his Dornie garden on 1st April but it was 19th April before any more were seen. A sudden increase in temperature on 9th May encouraged five species out to feed – Green-veined White, Orange-tip, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Speckled Wood. The subsequent drop in temperature and heavy rain brought activity to an end and it will be interesting to see how the butterfly populations cope with such a cold Spring.

One mystery was a white butterfly seen by Hugh Scott on the early date of 25th February at Kyleakin. The flight period for all three “whites” usually commences in April and unlike the Peacock and Red Admiral which hibernate they overwinter in the form of a chrysalis so are not prone to emerge during an unseasonal warm spell. So unfortunately the mystery remains.

BLACKCAPS AND REDPOLLS

The Blackcap is a warbler that has long been known to visit feeding stations in gardens during the winter months. However it is unusual for such behaviour to be observed during the breeding season.

The late spring seems to have affected their behaviour, presumably due to a shortage of insects, and Blackcaps have been observed on garden feeders at a wide range of sites throughout Skye and Lochalsh during April and May. The male Blackcap shown below was photographed by Kirsty Fyfe in her garden at Portnacloich.

The Lesser Redpoll is a much more recent visitor to feeding stations. Although a common breeding bird on Carr Brae I had never seen one on garden feeders until this May. This behaviour was also widely reported on Skye during April and May and at Portnacloich. The Lesser Redpoll was photographed by Alan Horner in his Kyleakin garden. Details of any such behaviour in other parts of Lochalsh would be appreciated.



Male Blackcap (Kirsty Fyfe)



Lesser Redpoll (Alan Horner)