



North Ayrshire Local Group

# Newsletter

Edition 104  
Spring 2005

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[www.narspb.org.uk](http://www.narspb.org.uk)

Cover photo: Male Smew at Lochwinnoch, Vall Firminger



## Steaming for Seabirds

Following the success of last summer's Centenary Cruise, we are organising another cruise this coming July. It may be difficult to make it better, but it's certainly bigger!

Our vessel for the day will be the former Glasgow sludge boat, **the SS Shieldhall**, which now runs pleasure cruises on the Solent at Southampton, and is the UK's largest fully preserved steamship of her kind. This summer marks the Golden Jubilee of the Shieldhall's launch on the Clyde and to mark the occasion she will be returning to the Clyde for two weeks in July.

We have managed to secure **Saturday 16th July** for our cruise charter and it promises to make history.

Departing Greenock's Customhouse Quay at 1000 we will cruise down to the former MOD Pier at Fairlie arriving at about 1200. This will be the first bit of history-making in the day as the Shieldhall has never

called at Fairlie on her time on the Clyde. Departing Fairlie at 1230 we will take a leisurely cruise over to Tarbert at Loch Fyne arriving around 1530 for her next history-making call - again another Shieldhall first. The low tide prevents us arriving in Tarbert any earlier.

Following a brief stop we will pick up some passengers at Tarbert and cruise for about an hour up Loch Fyne. Passengers who have not booked the Loch Fyne cruise option will have approximately 1.5 hours ashore. We aim to depart Tarbert at around 1700 arriving back at Fairlie about 1900 and back at Greenock for about 2100.

Shieldhall will have caterers on board to provide meals if required and there is a bar

selling teas, coffees and alcohol. We will have a small Scottish Folk Ensemble to entertain us on board, along with the usual commentaries and talks. Guided tours of the Bridge and Engine Room will also be available.

We can only have 150 people on board on any given leg of the cruise. **Tickets for the Loch Fyne cruise option are extremely limited. Please check the website, which is being updated almost daily, before booking, for the latest ticket availability.** The Fairlie - Tarbert option is probably what we have most tickets available for at the time of writing. A poster and booking form with full costs and times appear on pages 12 and 14 of this Newsletter.

Welcome to the Spring 2005 Newsletter of the North Ayrshire RSPB Local Group. Time, as ever, has literally flown in by since the last Newsletter appeared last September, but what a lot we've achieved, and what a lot we've got coming up in the next few months.

You should all have heard or read about the Shieldhall cruise on the front page. Please support it and make it another sell-out. 1/3 of the tickets have already been sold and that's within a few weeks of them going on sale. Book now to avoid disappointment.

The remaining trips for this season are listed opposite. Vall has been busy organising mid-week walks which have proven to be very popular. In addition she has also been gathering the details for our next weekend trip, which will be to Morecambe Bay and Leighton Moss Reserve at the end of October. Please see the separate article on p8.

The last few weeks have seen the Group volunteers attend several important events. Firstly the RSPB's Volunteer's Conference at Battleby was up to it's usual standards. We heard talks on Capercaillie, Marketing within the RSPB, Ailsa Craig, and the Aren't Birds Brilliant schemes in South and West Scotland. Workshops included the hot topic of Windfarm proposals, community talks and an outdoor 'nature walk'. We also 'officially' handed over our cheque for £1500, raised by last year's Centenary Cruise, to Alan Lauder, Reserves Manager for South & West Scotland.

The other highly successful event was a Wildlife Tourism Course held at Brodick Castle and organised by SNH and attended by myself. The aim was to pass on information to hoteliers and guest house owners as to how they can best promote wildlife on Arran to their guests. I gave a short talk on the work we do on the Arran ferry, whilst others gave talks on Arran Wildlife and the new Countryside Access code. Did you know that Arran has fossilised dinosaur footprints? One of the results of the day has been the setting up of an Arran wildlife website using one of the standard Yahoo Groups. It's address is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/arranwildlife>. Essentially if you visit Arran then please post any of your sightings on to the Group. If you come across a rare or sensitive species please contact the Ranger Service in the first instance who will advise on whether the information should be made public. The site also contains links to some Arran accommodation providers and there is a calendar of events, at present listing events organised by the Ranger Service at Brodick Country Park.

Duncan's remarks cover some more ventures that the group is involved in. On a practical level, we are re-introducing our local reps in each of the main North Ayrshire Towns in order to deliver Newsletters, Syllabusses and to collect subscriptions. The level of non-payment of subscriptions by post is of concern to the committee and this will hopefully address the situation.



will hopefully address the situation.

**Stuart McMahon**  
Editor

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Ardrossan

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Photo:  
*Black throated diver - RSPB*



## Forthcoming Events

**Black**=Indoor meeting  
(Ardrossan Civic Centre at 7.30pm)  
**Blue**=Outdoor Trip

**Friday 22nd April**  
AGM followed by Vanessa Collingridge - Antarctica and the Effects of Climate Change

**Sunday 24th April**  
Airds Moss and Knockshinnoch Lagoons, New Cumnock

**Monday 2nd May**  
Brisbane Glen / Clyde Muirshiel Park.  
Meet at 10.30am at Largs Yacht Haven.

**Saturday 14th May**  
Wood of Cree RSPB Reserve,  
Newton Stewart

**Saturday 16th July**  
Steaming for Seabirds Cruise  
Greenock - Fairlie - Tarbert

**Sat 18th June - Sat 27 Aug**  
Calmac - Showing People Seabirds  
9.45am - 5.30pm

**Friday 16th September**  
Opening meeting - Duncan Watt  
followed by Wildlife Film

**Sunday 17th September**  
Muirshiel Country Park,  
Lochwinnoch

**Fri 21st - Sun 23rd October**  
Winter Weekend Trip to Morecambe Bay an Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve. See separate article or contact Vall Firminger for more details. Early booking essential.

## Group Website

The Group's website contains information about our meetings and events, including up to date Cruise Information and next season's syllabus. Please give us a visit at: [www.narspb.org.uk](http://www.narspb.org.uk)

# Chairman's Report

(to save him saying anything else for the AGM!!!)



The cruise we took to the Isle of Arran and up the Kyles earned great profit indeed! We officially presented the cheque for £1500 to the RSPB Sea Eagle Project at the Battleby RSPB conference, pictured below.

Our Group contribution to the RSPB Centenary in Scotland celebrations grew out of the memory of our historic hire of the Waverley in 1986 and the success of our Calmac Arran Ferry venture. All praise to Stuart McMahon's initiative and his knowledge of Clyde shipping!

Pursuant to the success of the venture, we were considering hiring a boat in 2005: perhaps the QE2 for a weekend trip round the Western Isles? While I had my head in the clouds and my feet in the upper air, Stuart kept his firmly in the water, while not actually walking on it: "The SS Shieldhall is coming to Glasgow in July".

This Clyde-built steamship is historically important as a survivor of the craftsmanship of that bygone age of steam supremacy whose engineering made Glasgow famous. Your committee readily agreed to once again lead the North Ayrshire Group into the by now well-charted waters of enterprise!

Vall Firminger's innovative weekday birdwalks have been a great success, details from Vall, or from our wonderful website.

At a recent committee it was decided to set up a Conservation Survey Group: Vall Firminger and Marco McGinty plus Frances Gatten will undertake bird survey on behalf of the group at Clydeport Hunterston and Loch Thom where a wind farm proposal has been notified to us. Any members willing to join in such important work please contact me, this is a function which the group is now strong enough to engage in again. Information on BTO beached-bird surveys and Webs-counts is available from the BTO website [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

## Clydeport Liaison.

During this session, we initiated talks with the site executive of Clydeport at Hunterston Mr John McGuigan to improve the facilities at Dorothy's Lagoon for birds and birdwatchers. Our proposals were met with such enthusiasm that John Montgomery and I looked down from the "Control Tower" with

relish at this opportunity for our group to once again bring our special interest to bear upon this prime location created by Dorothy Morris 25 years ago. The hide has now been moved forward, weather-proof treated and hundreds of bulbs planted. Plans are afoot to create a blind to avoid disturbance to the birds.

Hazel Montgomery, our youngest member, raised over £80 in sponsorship to participate in the Ayrshire SOC winter bird race. Hazel has decided to direct these funds to the RSPB Leighton Moss Bittern project. Let's hope that we hear that unforgettable bird's "Upwhoomp" call during our October visit.

This session of meetings and field trips has been most successful with excellent speakers and excellent attendances, the astonishing RSPB film, "The Eagle Odyssey" was shown at our first meeting to an enraptured audience! Our Christmas Party was a great success, with members' slides and those of our guests from West Kilbride Camera Club. The traditional New Year birding at Saltcoats Harbour was dry but the windiest and most freezing yet! Ah, but Edna's home and a choice of three home-made soups warmed us up again. Thanks to Edna and the Soup dragons! Special thanks to press officer Jim McDill for assiduous reports in local papers.

## Local Reps:

The need for local RSPB group representatives is still important. Although we post the newsletters we do need the personal link within local communities. A name and friendly face that folk can contact on behalf of birds. You may not realise that although over 60 people are present at our meetings, we have another 60 who can't attend, but who enjoy membership and welcome our group newsletter.

We therefore need reps, preferably in each town and village in our area, to give up a little time to deliver odd items and help collecting subscriptions from a few of our members who prefer not to send by post to the treasurer. This only needs a bit of 'local knowledge' and a smile. Offers please to John and Wendy Tedd: 01294 823434 or email [wendy.tedd@virgin.net](mailto:wendy.tedd@virgin.net)

Thanks to the Committee whose forbearance during some quite long meetings is much appreciated, especially to all at 1 Owen Kelly Place for hosting these marathons more often than usual this session.

The continuing development of the group is entirely due to the Committee's patience and well-focused effort.



# Vall's Midweek Walks

Vall Firminger, North Ayrshire RSPB Local Group



Right: Auchendarvie Ponds, Stevenston  
Below (clockwise I-r) Tree Sparrow – Springside Disused Railway Path;  
Fullarton Woods, Troon; Birding at Seamill; Grey Wagtail at Seamill  
Photos: Vall Firminger

A casual conversation can sometimes lead us to take action on something we had been tossing about in our minds for a while. Such was the case that brought about the start of the midweek walks for our Group last year. This conversation seemed to reinforce the feelings that I had that "yes, I would like to go walking and birdwatching here and there but not by myself – too isolated and I would feel uneasy."

Other committee members were approached for their input to get a feel if there was enough interest. The idea met with positive vibes. This was then put to the committee and approved. A list of walks was then compiled and first walk commenced in October 2004.

Any expectations? Not really. To quote from Simon Barnes' book "How to be a Bad Birdwatcher" - "as with everything to do with wildlife, you should set out

with high hopes and low expectations. You should be ready to be sidetracked, and, above all, to revel in what you see rather than what you want to see."

That probably sums up what these walks have really brought to those of us who have been able to take part. Just the pleasure of birdwatching in the quiet enjoyment of the absolutely ordinary. Sometimes it is 'just a common bird' but a rare moment – never disappointing.

Two unexpected pleasures for me have been the special privilege of showing someone a bird they've never seen before and revel with them in that moment; and secondly, helping to improve the ability of an individual to identify birds and increase their enjoyment of what they are seeing. Enthusiasm can be infectious and we have lots of that!

To conclude, I go back to Simon Barnes' book mentioned above (he expresses my own feelings so well when it comes to birds) and I quote: "Birdwatching isn't something you do; it is something you are. Birds are life-enhancing; they bring joy when you see them, it is a constant joy to share your life with them; and to share that joy with fellow-humans. Let's revel in the ordinary: local places, everyday birds, a walk in the park, the dog-walk in the woods, an evening stroll. The birds will be there. They need these places almost as much as we do. Birds indicate life in its richness and its diversity and without them we would have a deeply impoverished planet. It is a real pleasure to show people birds, a real pleasure to share birds."



# Ayrshire Bird Race 2005

Whooper Swans  
Photo: rspb-images.com

Hazel Montgomerie (age 14)

On the morning of Saturday, 8 January 2005, Duncan and Liz Watt came to our house to pick us up to go on a sponsored bird race.

Our first stop was along the shore road, in a flooded lay-by where we saw redshanks and cormorants out to sea. But as we looked inland, the field had greylag geese and curlews in it.

Next stop was beside the golf course along Portencross Road, where we saw a crow harassing a buzzard who was devouring a kill. The buzzard defended itself, first by mantling its prey and when the crow refused to give up, the buzzard lifted its tail and defecated on the annoying crow!! Along the road, we stopped at a ploughed field where we sat for quarter of an hour to identify the twite, meadow pipits and stonechats. Further down, we also saw a pair of peacocks and a grey wagtail but we didn't count the peacocks in the final total!

Along the back road to Hunterston, mum spotted a group of whooper swans in a

field with a hoodie/carrion crow hybrid. Fairlie bay had red-breasted mergansers and redshanks. Up near Fairlie Station we found a great tit and a lovely bullfinch which talked back to Duncan.

At Hunterston we saw about 5 little grebes, a couple of Canada geese, 4 gadwall, goldeneyes, greenshanks and herons. One unseasonal Manx shearwater flew past the jetty near the power station.

It was very windy and we started to get hungry so we headed back home, but not before we made one more stop at Saltcoats harbour area. We stopped at the harbour only to see a kittiwake!! But afterwards we went down Seaview Road to beside the railway where we saw turnstones, one shag and a few purple sandpipers. We then went to our house and had hot soup!!

After warming up, we travelled to Auchendarvie pond where we saw scaup, tufted ducks, moorhens and coots. Next we stopped at Irvine Magnum pond and saw two pochards. Our next delight was



at Stevenston Point, where Duncan pointed out a gull. But not just any gull. A Glaucous gull!! We left before the wind blew the car over the edge!! At Garnock Floods, I finally managed to see teal. It was starting to get dark when we arrived at Barassie, but we still saw lapwings and a group of dunlin flying across the beach near the car.

It was night-time when we arrived at Don Smith's farm near Minishant, where we revealed our grand total of 63 birds. We couldn't beat Angus Hogg's total of 90-plus, but we weren't the least, either!

Grand total of £82.45 was raised which I have sent to Leighton Moss to go towards bittern habitats.

# New Year Birdwatch 2005

2 hardy birders at  
Saltcoats Harbour  
Photo: Stuart McMahon

Susan Montgomerie (age ??)

A dozen or so hardy – or crazy – Group members met at Saltcoats harbour with the strong wind ruffling our scarves. John was reluctant to put up our new telescope in case it got wet, but he took the chance and we were rewarded with good views of turnstones turning seaweed. Oyster-catchers and redshanks sheltered among the rocks, with a great black backed gull and some herring gulls trying to pinch food from other birds. Cormorants, eiders and red-breasted mergansers could be seen out on the rough sea. A dunlin and a purple sandpiper obligingly stood side by side to show us the differences between each other. A kittiwake was seen flying in the sea spray while a rock pipit got blown along the top of the sea wall.

A pied wagtail accompanied us along the path as we headed towards the harbour. As we walked to the turret at the end of

the harbour, the wind blew so fiercely, I was worried that someone would be blown off their feet. Thankfully, we all survived, though not much birdwatching was done!

We headed for Auchendarvie pond where a group of mute swans sheltered from the breeze while some goldeneyes and little grebes dived up and down. We looked closely at a group of about 35 ducks and found they were tufties mixed with scaup, plus the unusual sight of a tufted duck-scaup hybrid bird. The differences were very subtle, but once pointed out could be seen clearly. Also on the pond were some coots and mallards, while round the pond stood curlews, black-headed gulls and common gulls. At this point, a heavy shower came on and we scuttled back to the cars, dedicated birders that we are!!



After a short stop at the boating pond along Winton Circus we decided to call it a day and headed for Edna's house where, very soon, three steaming pots of soup were being ladled out and washed down with hot mulled wine. Some people had also brought along cake and goodies to be shared by all and we all enjoyed our lunch while doing a bit of last minute birdwatching out of Edna's kitchen window. Altogether 29 species were seen and a big thanks goes to Edna for providing refuge on such a stormy day and everyone who provided food for the first trip of the New Year.

# John and Wendy's Tour of Australia – Part 2

All photos - John & Wendy Tedd



John and Wendy Tedd, West Kilbride  
john.tedd@virgin.net

**In the last Newsletter, John and Wendy Tedd started their expedition to Australia. Here is the concluding part of their adventure:**

We spent the next week touring the Kimberley going from Broome to Kununarra on a camping safari. It's a very remote area. By the end of the trip we had the other Australians on the trip pointing out birds to us. We didn't see many new birds, although we had an excellent of a spinifex pigeon, and a fleeting glimpse of a Gouldian finch. The latter was a real find, we were very lucky to see it.

In Kununarra we had a boat tour on Lake Argyle, a very large dam. No birds, but a good view of rock wallabies, golden orb weaver spiders with their huge webs suspended between trees, and a crocodile. We held fish food over the side of the boat. The archer fish shot jets of water at the food to knock it into the water. A bread roll thrown into the water disappeared in seconds, eaten

voraciously by the cat fish. We returned to Kununarra via the Ord River, and had our first sighting of a jacana, whose other name is a Jesus bird as it appears to walk on water.

Whilst waiting for the bus to Darwin John acquired another bit of wildlife, a large praying mantis which sat on his rucksack. Half an hour later we crossed the border into the Northern Territory, with the result that sunrise at 6.30 a.m. – luxury. The first birding place we visited in NT was Fogg Dam. This was a marvellous place for easily viewing water birds, including some excellent views of royal spoonbills in breeding plumage. The next morning we had a boat trip on Yellow Water in Kakadu National Park. After we had booked for the 9 a.m. trip we met several people who said the 6.45 a.m. trip was the best for bird watching.

As it happens, we were lucky. The day was overcast (more rain in the dry season). Because of this the birds were still active, so we had good

views of them, and the usual obligatory crocodile. We stayed at Katherine, and drove to Mataranka, where we got a lovely view of about 12 apostle birds bathing in a water fountain. We found out they are called apostle birds as they go round in groups of about 12. It was also a spot for hundreds of little red flying foxes (bats), John was fascinated, I wasn't too impressed as they were restless, flying overhead, generous with their droppings and smelly.

The last place we visited in NT was Litchfield National Park. We didn't see many birds, instead the main wildlife interest was termite mounds, in particular the mounds made by cathedral termites were enormous, and the ones made by magnetic termites make mounds aligned roughly north-south.

Our next major stop was Cairns, Queensland. We hired a motor caravan and drove to Kingfisher Birdwatchers Lodge in the Tablelands. The lodge

has both campsites and units. It is in a garden setting which is excellent for birds. We were greeted by the owner Ron, who made us most welcome, telling us to pick our campsite, then help ourselves to coffee on the veranda. The veranda was a lovely spot where everyone staying at the lodge congregated to compare bird watching notes, watch the birds at the feeding area, and drink wine. All the birds were identified for us by David, a birder who spent as much time as possible at the lodge, because he enjoyed it so much. The next morning at 7a.m. David led a walk round the lodge grounds and surrounding area. It was very productive for birds, although we ended up quite wet. The problem with camping was that it rained for the first 4 days. We were told very precisely where we could see fig parrots. We followed the instructions exactly and found the correct tree, but the only birds we could see were silver eyes. On returning to the lodge we were told that the parrots were there but we hadn't looked hard enough. On



Parrakeets

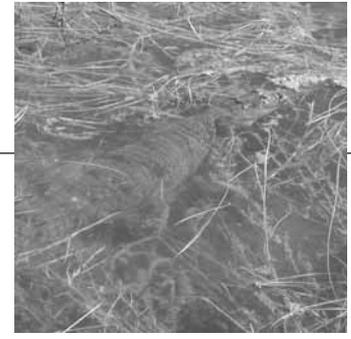


Termite Mound



Kingfisher

# John and Wendy's Tour of Australia – Part 2 continued



our next visit to the tree, we looked very carefully, and eventually saw them. They were small, bright green, just feeding silently off the figs without moving. It was no wonder we hadn't seen them.

The next day we were up at 4.30 a.m. and did a long, dark, very wet drive to the Daintree River in time for a 6.30 a.m. bird watching trip with Chris Dahlburg. He was excellent, and managed to point out many birds including 4 species of kingfisher. It was a memorable trip only spoilt by the fact that it was an open boat and it never stopped raining. Afterwards we dried off whilst eating breakfast in a small café and had a lovely view of figbirds and yellow bellied sunbirds feeding on the nearby trees.

Driving south through the Tablelands we stopped for half an hour at Lake Mitchell. To our delight the sun came out and, from a single spot we saw 19 species of birds.

We discovered a good birding spot near Atherton, Hastie's Swamp. As we approached we had a lovely view of a flock of chestnut fronted mannikin feeding in a puddle of water. The swamp was full of water birds, mainly plumed whistling ducks, which were restless and noisy. The hide was a "Rolls Royce" version with 2 storeys, and even a toilet!

Driving along we passed a sight seeing place called the Crater. I didn't know anything about it, but we decided to have a quick look. There was a nice walk by some waterfalls, but the treat came on the way back as, just on the other side of the fence, there was a cassowary. It was an impressive sight, and we lucky to see it. Immediately after we read the notice telling us how vicious these birds can be.

Before leaving the Cairns area we visited the Rainforest Habitat at Port Douglas. As the birds were in captivity it gave us a good opportunity to study them. We were pleasantly

surprised to discover that many of the birds that were there we had already seen in the wild.

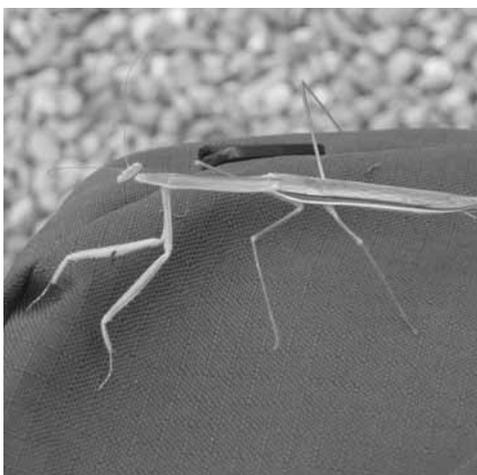
The last area we visited in Australia was South Queensland and North New South Wales. We visited O'Reilly's Guesthouse in Lamington National Park. It was a long, twisty ride there up to quite a high altitude. It was much colder. All activities are include in the price, and these include early morning bird watching, walks, 4-wheel drive trips and talks. We saw lots of wild life including possums, pademelons (a wallaby) and glowworms. We also saw 2 interesting birds. The first was the satin bowerbird and its decorated bower. This bird likes to use blue items to decorate its bower. These include bottle tops, string, pens, pegs, straws and feathers. Luckily for the bower birds there were a lot of crimson rosellas in the area, and these birds have lovely red and blue feathers. The second bird was the Alberts Lyrebird.

This bird has an amazing sound repertoire, and mimics many of the sounds it hears. We spent a long time listening to one, but only got a fleeting glimpse of it. Then, a few days later, driving down a country road one strolled across the road in front of us. That was a treat.

We visited Byrons Bay in NSW, which is the most easterly mainland point of Australia. We didn't see many birds but had excellent views of about 40 dolphins and 2 humpbacked whales all migrating north.

The last place of interest for wildlife we visited was Bunya Mountains. Here there were lots of colourful crimson rosellas, king parrots and red browed finches, together with wallabies all over the place.

The 9 weeks we spent in Australia were very enjoyable. We saw lots of wildlife, and we were very pleased to end up with a bird count of 230 Australian birds.



*Praying mantis*



*Egret*



## Arent Birds Brilliant Events

The following is a list of the proposed sites for showing people some of Scotland's Amazing Wildlife this summer. Please check with the locations prior to visiting that the projects are running.

### White-tailed Eagles on the Isle of Mull

A truly unique opportunity to experience Britain's largest bird of prey the white-tailed eagle, at its huge nest. Visitors also have the chance to see a host of other wildlife around the Isle of Mull including Golden eagles and otters.

**When** From easter till the end of July  
**Where** TBC  
**Contact** Oban Tourist Information 01680 812377  
Forestry Commission Scotland 01631 566155  
RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

### Muirshiel Hen Harriers

A chance to see the rare and beautiful hen harrier on live close-up camera systems throughout the nesting season. Visitors also have a chance to take a guided walk to see hen harriers and other wildlife on the nearby moorland.

**When** May to July  
**Where** Clyde Muirshiel Country Park Visitor Centre  
**Contact** Visitor Centre 01505 842803  
RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

### Osprey viewing at Aberfoyle

See nesting ospreys and other birds on live close-up cameras against the stunning backdrop of the Trossachs, with a wealth of other Scottish woodland wildlife along the nearby trails.

**When** April - August  
**Where** David Marshall Lodge Visitor Centre, Aberfoyle  
**Contact** Visitor Centre 01877 382258  
RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

### Tweed Valley Ospreys

See and hear live nesting ospreys on CCTV cameras at these two sites in the heart of the Scottish borders, with lots of friendly volunteers on-hand to describe the daily action.

**When** April - August  
**Where** Glentress Visitor Centre 01750 721120  
Kailzie Gardens Visitor Centre 01721 720007  
RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

### Argaty Red Kites

Experience one of our rarest and most acrobatic birds of prey the Red Kite at Argaty Red Kites, with buzzards and a huge variety of farmland birds spending the summer on this wildlife-friendly farm – with guided walks to tell you all you need to know.

**When** All year round (for opening hours contact Argaty Red Kites as walks and viewing times are limited by farm operations)  
**Where** Argaty, near Doune just north of Stirling on the A9.  
**Contact** Argaty Red Kites 01786 472211  
RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

### The Galloway Kite Trail

There is no better backdrop than 'Burn's Country' in Dumfries to see South Scotland's only Red Kites, along the Galloway Kite Trail near Castle Douglas. A viewing hide allows visitors to get breathtaking views of the birds as they swoop down for the daily feed.

**When** Feeding Station (Bellymack Hill Farm)  
8am – 4pm summer, 10am – 4pm winter  
**Where** The trail follows the A713 and A762 around Loch Ken (follow the Trail signs).  
**Contact** Dumfries & Galloway tourist board 01387 253862  
RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

### Golden eagles on Mull

Loch na Kiel on the Isle of Mull is perhaps the finest location in Europe to see eagles, and at this new viewing project on the shores of the Loch visitors can view the iconic golden eagle throughout the summer on a cliff top eerie.

**When** TBC  
**Where** TBC (likely to be on Loch na Kiel).  
**Contact** RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

### Seabirds on the Clyde

A chance to see seabirds and gannets from Calmac's Ardrossan - Brodick Ferry or from the PS Waverley sailing around Ailsa Craig.

**When** Late June to August  
**Where** Calmac Ardrossan to Brodick Ferry on Saturdays  
PS Waverley on Monday sailings from Ayr  
**Contact** RSPB Scotland 0141 331 0993

## Weekend Trip to Morecambe Bay and Leighton Moss

As mentioned earlier the group is holding a late autumn weekend trip down to Morecambe and the Leighton Moss RSPB reserve from Friday 21st October to Sunday 23rd October. Our accommodation will be at the Eidsforth Hotel on Morecambe's seafront. The hotel cost will be £65 including a meal on the Saturday night. Transport costs and arrangements are still to be confirmed as there is a problem with the hire of the Council minibuses.

Highlights will include seeing the huge flocks of waders at roost on Morecambe Bay around Hest Bank, and of course the visit to Leighton Moss. The reserve is good at any time of the year but in the autumn it has a huge potential for drawing in the odd rarity or two, not to mention the frequent sightings of Bitterns, Bearded Tits and Marsh Harriers.

Numbers are limited so bookings, along with deposits are required as soon as possible.



## Open Day for Inversnaid

One of RSPB Scotland's little-known and hidden reserves – Inversnaid on the shores of Loch Lomond in the National Park, will be welcoming visitors to its spectacular moorland and warbler-filled woodlands during a family open day Saturday 14 May. With grand old oak trees nestling on the shores of the loch and moorland rising into the Trossachs playing host to everything from Golden Eagles to Black Grouse, this RSPB reserve is hardly known to many, but under an hour from Stirling. This varied nature reserve is packed with both cultural and natural history – for all the family to enjoy. Whether you prefer a short woodland stroll or a more involved moorland trek, an abundance of birds, mammals and flowers await visitors of all ages. The open day will give visitors the chance to take a guided walk through either the woodlands or the moorland above Inversnaid and for younger explorers, there will be an opportunity to discover the mini-beats lurking above, below and in the streams meandering through the woods.

For those with a real passion for Scotland's iconic birds and a good alarm clock, Duncan Cameron – Reserve Warden will be offering a unique chance to witness displaying or 'lekking' Black Grouse at a location near the reserve meeting at 4:00am, the best time to see these birds at their most exciting. For more information contact RSPB Scotland on 0141 331 0993.

## Capercaillie on Loch Lomond

The world's biggest grouse is teetering on the edge of extinction in the National Park. Left in only one area, this bird has the unenviable title of Loch Lomond's most threatened species.

As a result, capercaillie conservation has become a top priority. Deer fencing in capercaillie areas has either been removed or is marked and a ban means that the species can no longer be shot.

A new threat however, has recently been confirmed. Research has shown capercaillie are avoiding woodland areas adjacent to tracks and paths that people use. In the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, this presents a great threat as it reduces the already small patches of suitable woodland these birds can use. The only area where capercaillie still breed is on Loch Lomond's islands. These small and fragile habitats contain around 30 birds, although reports suggest their numbers have declined.

The islands are understandably popular with visitors. Most people keep to the shoreline, a great help as disturbance is kept to a minimum. However of most concern are visitors and their dogs venturing into the heart of the islands. With capercaillie nesting on the ground, hens and young are very vulnerable to disturbance by people and dogs. If this spectacular species is to spread to its former haunts, nesting has to be as successful as possible, with large numbers of young to re-colonise surrounding woodlands. Park's Rangers will be asking people to keep to the shoreline and prevent dogs from venturing off the shore. For those who want to explore further, paths and guided walks are provided by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Park Authority on Inchcailloch, with a special ferry laid on to provide access to this island from the boatyard at Balmaha.

## Community Talks

The North Ayrshire Group can now offer community groups a variety of illustrated talks. Available topics are "The RSPB in Scotland", "Gardening for Wildlife", "Seabirds on the Clyde" (Stuart McMahon) and "Prehistory Now - The Runes" (Duncan Watt). Other topics may be available. If you would like a talk at your community group then please contact either Stuart McMahon on 01294 603848 or Duncan Watt on 01294 832361 for further information or to check availability.

## Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the North Ayrshire RSPB Local Group will take place on Friday 22 April in Ardrossan Civic Centre. In keeping with tradition it should last no longer than 15 minutes! Anyone wishing to raise an item of business should pass it to the group leader no later than Friday 15th April. The group is always on the lookout for new committee members to help support the existing office-bearers. Please consider lending your support.

## Local Representatives

As mentioned elsewhere, the group will be re-establishing the network of local representatives in each of the main towns in North Ayrshire in order to deliver newsletters, syllabuses and collect subscriptions. If you can donate a couple of hours of your time twice a year (in general) then please contact John Tedd on 01294 823434 who will happily add you on to his list of representatives.

## Calmac Sailings

John Tedd is also compiling the rota of volunteers to help on this summer's sailings on the Arran Ferry. If you would like to help out please contact John as soon as possible.

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8am till late, 7 days a week





## Eco Tourism

by Marco Lambertini, Programming and Network Director,  
BirdLife International

### *Can the most benign form of tourism help to protect natural areas and their fauna?*

#### From tourism to eco-tourism

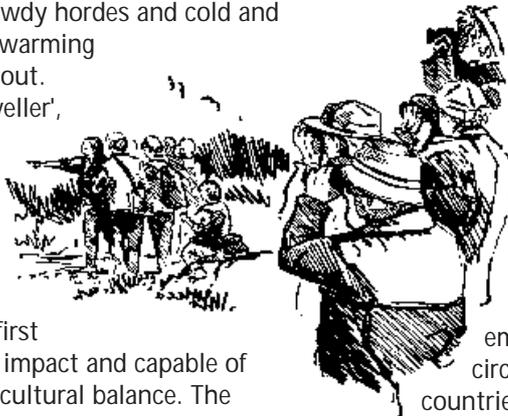
It is the most rapidly expanding industry in the world, the one the majority of us support in practice, or would like to. It moves around the planet roughly a sixth of the world's population, people in search of emotion, fun and adventure.

If I mention the word 'tourists', there immediately springs to mind a rather bleak image of rowdy hordes and cold and anonymous hotel complexes, swarming beaches and rubbish strewn about.

On the other hand, if I say 'traveller', everything changes and there's a feeling of adventure, of respect and culture. Of course, there are tourists and tourists, or better, eco-tourists. These two species are the twin souls of tourism, the first

having an enormous ecological impact and capable of destroying an area's social and cultural balance. The second tries to limit as far as possible any damage to the environment, supports local economies and brings benefits to the people as well as respecting their way of life.

Eco-tourism can be defined in several ways, but the description I prefer is the one that sees the eco-tourist as someone who goes somewhere because of its value as a place of natural beauty. Many of those in this category are also interested in wildlife: large mammals, fish and birds.



#### Some interesting statistics

There is no shortage of travellers who go looking for wildlife. The United States provides us with the most accurate figures. Every year, over 20 million people go on 'wildlife watching' trips. Of these, 85% (18 million) go birdwatching. Even more head for 'natural' destinations. Worldwide statistics are few, but the World Tourist Organisation claims that in 1994 about 530 million people arrived with tourist visas, and of these 200-300 million were eco-tourists and 100 to 200 million wildlife tourists. In the Nineties, while tourism in general increased by 4% a year, 'tourism with nature in mind' grew by more than 20%. Despite the numbers, eco-tourism is still far from reaching its full potential, as a protector of the environment.

#### A global challenge

The prospect of eco-tourism is often cited to ward off destructive development plans. However, from an economic point of view, and this is especially true in the underdeveloped world, profits are rarely reflected in direct benefits to the sites visited or to the local populace. The organisers are foreign, employ foreign staff, and most of the money involved circulates through bank accounts far away from the countries concerned, let alone the natural areas which are the objective of the trip. The biggest challenge facing eco-tourism is this: to balance global advantages with local benefits so that profits are translated into resources for the management of natural areas and into social improvement in local communities. In any case, without natural areas with their fauna and flora, the thriving industry of eco-tourism would be unable to survive. It is in the industry's own interest to protect nature as a primary product for its customers, and is key to its economic success.

## Just One Tree

- A mature tree will remove a quantity of pollutants 70 times greater than a young one, absorbing 22kg per year of carbon dioxide.
- In the course of its life a tree will clean 40 million cubic metres of air, a volume equal to that contained by 80,000 single-family homes.
- Research has shown that 91% of those interviewed perceived a degree of reduction in stress levels after having visited a garden.
- 100 million mature trees can reduce the energy used for heating and cooling houses by 30 billion kWh making savings of 2 billion Euros in energy costs.
- Increasing by 10% the tree cover in a city would save 59 – 90 Euros per year per household in energy use.
- 500,000 trees can reduce air pollution by 6,500 tons per year to a value of 4.5 Euros per tree per year.



## 600 anti collision devices

Collaboration between LIPU and Anas has resulted in the installation of 600 anti collision silhouettes on the noise dampening panels on the Cesena to Forli road. Dark adhesive cut outs with the shape of a hawk, work as 'Guardian Angels' for numerous species of birds who previously not seeing the transparent panels crashed into them with fatal results. The solution was cheap, effective and did not affect the anti noise function of the panels.

# Mersehead Trip

## 31 October 2004

Mersehead  
Photo: rspb-images.com



Susan Montgomerie

Two busloads of keen birdwatchers set off from North Ayrshire heading south on a crisp sunny day. First stop was the picnic site a few miles past Sanquhar where only a heron flying slowly past put in an appearance. As we neared our destination, the number of kestrels increased, till our wonderment dulled to "Oh, just another kestrel"! There were also a lot of buzzards, proving this was an area rich in small wildlife.

Arriving at the Mersehead reserve, we went into the centre to make sure that our window was still intact (in 1996 our Group gave £500 to the reserve manager Jack Fleming towards the huge panoramic window) and started looking for the birds. In the ponds were wigeon, teal, snipe and mallards, with plenty of barnacle geese plus one northern race Canada goose near the water.

As we walked past the farm buildings to the new hide, the hedges sheltered house sparrows, chaffinches, robins and dunnocks. On the overhead wires, a flock of around 50 twite flew up and

down to the stubble patch. Further down the path, a group of about 30 curlews fed in the muddy pasture. From the hide, we could see wigeons, tufted ducks, teals and goldeneyes weaving in and out of the clumps of reeds.

Walking along the paths to the next hide we saw blue tits, great tits, robins and two scolding wrens. In the line of trees leading to the second hide, blackbirds rustled among the leaves and redwings and fieldfares bounced through the treetops. Out of the comfortable hide windows, we could see shelducks, shovelers, little grebes, lots of pintails and lapwings. A male peregrine posed in the dead tree opposite us and sat so still we wondered if it was real.

Then we got a wonderful view of a male hen harrier gliding across our view, drifting over the ducks and waders, spooking some of them to flight. The grey back shone in the sunlight and we watched it until it flew out of sight.

As we walked through the strip of woodland towards the sea, a noisy great spotted woodpecker flew past us and landed in a nearby tree, giving us all the opportunity of a good view. Near the shore, we spotted a stonechat and a strange looking bird that Vall photographed – which turned out to be a decorated piece of driftwood!! Some shelduck fed along the far-out tide-line with redshank, curlew and gulls. After that we headed back to the minibuses and set off for home.

On the back roads to the RSPB Loch Ken/Dee Marshes reserve, apart from the dozens of road-running pheasants, a group of four red-legged partridges ran across the road and a small group of ten greylag geese were spotted behind the drystone wall. Further along, we saw a red kite out hunting as the light faded. As we continued home, we saw the brief fluttering shapes of bats hunting along the roads in the dusk.

Altogether, 63 species of birds were seen plus rabbits, red deer and a fox.

## Police Wildlife Crime Officers

Robin caught in an illegal trap. Photo: LIPU

Following our monthly talk in March by PC John McFarlane about the role of Police Wildlife Crime Officers it was good to read the announcement in the press on 29 March about the appointment of Scotland's first full-time wildlife crime officer, PC Jim McGovern of the Lothian and Borders force. PC McGovern has years of experience, including the recent discovery of an alligator in a bath in Edinburgh!

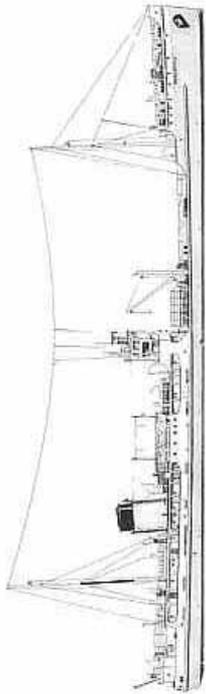
He hopes to target poaching, hunting with dogs, illegal snaring, badger crime and much more. His post will also serve as a point of contact with agencies like the RSPB and SSPCA, as well as estate and landowners across the Lothians and Scottish Borders. Let's hope that more forces follow Lothian's lead and appoint more full-time wildlife crime officers. As a reminder, if anyone sees anything suspicious or would like to report a wildlife crime then locally, PC John

McFarlane can be contacted at Irvine Police Station on **01294 404422** or alternatively the freephone Crimestoppers number can also be contacted anonymously on **0800 555 111**. Further information on wildlife crime can be found on the PAWS websites at [www.defra.gov.uk/paw/default.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/paw/default.htm) or [www.snh.org.uk/wildlifecrimeschools](http://www.snh.org.uk/wildlifecrimeschools).



**PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION AGAINST**  
**wildlife crime**





## Steaming for Seabirds Cruise on board SS Shieldhall Saturday 16th July 2005: Greenock - Fairlie - Tarbert

Meals and refreshments will be available for purchase on board the SS Shieldhall. Passengers should be at their departure point at least 15 minutes prior to sailing. Musical entertainment, guided tours and talks will be given throughout the day.

**Greenock Customhouse Quay:** see [www.narspb.org.uk](http://www.narspb.org.uk) for location maps  
Ample street parking available in and around CHQ.  
Nearest station is Greenock Central, about 10 mins walk. Good bus connections.

**Fairlie MOD Pier:** see [www.narspb.org.uk](http://www.narspb.org.uk) for location maps  
Follow signs for Fairlie Quay Marina opposite petrol station.  
Ample free parking within complex. Nearest station is Fairlie, about 20 mins walk.  
Stagecoach bus service 585 from Ayr-Greenock passes the road end.

**For enquiries please telephone 01294 603848 or email [cruise@narspb.org.uk](mailto:cruise@narspb.org.uk).**

### Approximate Times and Ticket Prices

Destination	Adult	Child (<18)
<b>Departing Greenock (Customhouse Quay)</b>		
Fairlie (one-way)	£15.00	£5.00
Tarbert (return)	£28.00	£10.00
Tarbert inc. Loch Fyne cruise (return)	£33.00	£10.00
<b>Departing Fairlie (MOD Pier)</b>		
Tarbert (return)	£25.00	£8.00
Tarbert inc. Loch Fyne cruise (return)	£30.00	£8.00
Greenock (one-way)*	£15.00	£5.00
<b>Departing Tarbert (Columba Pier)</b>		
Loch Fyne cruise	£10.00	£5.00

\*Given sufficient demand, return transport from Greenock to Largs/Fairlie may be available.

## Booking Form

Please check latest ticket availability on our website at [www.narspb.org.uk](http://www.narspb.org.uk), or by telephoning 01294 603848 or by emailing [cruise@narspb.org.uk](mailto:cruise@narspb.org.uk) prior to booking. Information on the SS Shieldhall can be found at [www.ss-shieldhall.co.uk](http://www.ss-shieldhall.co.uk).

Please indicate beside your chosen options shown below how many tickets you would like to purchase. Tickets are non-refundable. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

**Cheques should be made payable to "North Ayrshire RSPB Local Group" and sent to the Cruise Organiser, Mr Stuart McMahon, NARSPB, 93 Montfode Drive, Ardrossan, Ayrshire KA22 7PH.**

Name: .....  
Address: .....  
.....  
Postcode: ..... Contact Tel: .....

Destination	Adult	Qty	Child (<18)	Qty	TOTAL (£)
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Greenock (one-way)*	£15.00		£5.00		
<b>Departing Tarbert (Columba Pier)</b>					
Loch Fyne cruise	£10.00		£5.00		
<b>TOTAL ENCLOSED</b>					<b>£</b>

\* I would / would not be interested a bus transfer from Greenock back to Largs/Fairlie. (delete as appropriate)

# Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve News

Right: Great Spotted  
Woodpecker at Lochwinnoch  
Below: Aird Meadow  
Photos: Stuart McMahon



Ian Darroch, RSPB Lochwinnoch

## EVENTS:

Our main event in January was **Get Ready for the Big Garden Birdwatch**. We invited people to come along to the reserve to find out how they could get involved with BGW, and learn a bit about the birds that might visit their gardens, and also get tips and advice from staff and volunteers on how to attract birds, by making fat cakes, feeders etc.

On **Big Garden Birdwatch** weekend, we invited all visitors that came to the reserve, to participate in the event by counting the birds at our feeders and then entering the results online, using the computer we have in the visitor centre. Entering the results of BGW online proved to be extremely popular especially with the kids.

Our January Talk time had to be cancelled at very short notice due to Dave Grant being ill, so apologies to those who had booked – Dave has promised to do another talk at a later date.

In February our events program began with a guided walk entitled **An Introduction to birdwatching (Winter Birds)** which was well subscribed and we were able to show the people attending a good variety of wildfowl, although our now resident male smew proved elusive at times. On the trails woodland birds also showed well in the winter sunshine. In fact with quite a few song thrushes singing, there was a definite hint of spring in the air.

Talk time for the month was given by Gordon Jamieson. As well as being a regular volunteer on the reserve, Gordon has travelled the globe in search of birds, and his illustrated talk on the birds of arctic Russia was well attended.

## WILDLIFE:

In January, wintering wildfowl numbers were excellent, with good counts of tufted duck, goldeneye, pochard and mallard. The whooper swans in the area fed mostly off the reserve, but a few still turned up daily and a pair of pintail were also present, good numbers of lapwing were recorded on Aird meadow and around the Barr Loch with maximum counts still around 170.

Our now apparently resident male smew, which was first seen on the November 24th, was joined by a second male who was first spotted by a visitor on February 24th.

Two male hen harriers were seen on the reserve in February, one appeared to be a second winter bird and the other a mature adult, although they didn't appear at the same time, they were quite clearly different birds.

## HABITAT MANAGEMENT:

At the end of January, we had a contractor on site with a mini excavator to carry out some habitat management work on Aird meadow; the work was mainly to level the ground area directly in front of the visitor centre. This included removing big stones/tree stumps and other obstructions etc, in order to facilitate easier mowing,

and generally improve the view for visitors over the meadow. The work also included enlarging and deepening a pool adjacent to the visitor center, grading the banks on one side to enable better photographic opportunities from our small photographic hide, and creating a raised bank on the edge of the opposite side in order to create a sand martin bank. We also had a bank created at the opposite side of the meadow for the same purpose, so hopefully we can encourage some sand martins or perhaps even a kingfisher to use them – watch this space!

## What Else?

### WE ARE STILL OPEN!

The reserve car park is a bit of a building site at present, and some casual visitors were under the impression that the reserve was closed for construction work. This is not the case; contractors are busy putting in the new Lochwinnoch link footpath, and are using the car park as a base of operations. When they are finished, we will get it reinstated hopefully to a higher standard than it was previously.

### IN THE SHOP

We now have the new Challenger 2 feeders in stock; these feeders have been developed to allow birds to feed facing forward by using a new design of "perching ring". We also have a selection of goods and products are grown organically or manufactured from recycled materials.





# North Ayrshire RSPB Local Group

Greenock  
Fairlie  
Tarbert



## Steaming for Seabirds Cruise

on board the Clyde-built SS Shieldhall  
celebrating her Golden Jubilee



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**Saturday  
16th July 2005**

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availability:

Approximate Times	Destination	Adult	Child
<b>Dep Greenock 1000</b>	<b>Departing Greenock (Customhouse Quay)</b>		
<b>Dep Fairlie 1230</b>	Fairlie (one-way)	£15.00	£5.00
Cruise to Tarbert via North Arran & Kintyre	Tarbert (return)	£28.00	£10.00
<b>Arr Tarbert 1530</b>	Tarbert inc. Loch Fyne cruise (return)	£33.00	£10.00
<b>Dep Tarbert 1545</b>	<b>Departing Fairlie (MOD Pier)</b>		
Loch Fyne Cruise	Tarbert (return)	£25.00	£8.00
<b>Arr Tarbert 1645</b>	Tarbert inc. Loch Fyne cruise (return)	£30.00	£8.00
<b>Dep Tarbert 1700</b>	Greenock (one-way)	£15.00	£5.00
<b>Arr Fairlie 1900</b>	<b>Departing Tarbert (Columba Pier)</b>		
<b>Arr Greenock 2100</b>	Loch Fyne cruise	£10.00	£5.00

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or contact Stuart McMahon Tel: 01294 603848 Email: [cruise@narspb.org.uk](mailto:cruise@narspb.org.uk)

