



Isle of Rum Community Trust Ranger Service Newsletter Wildlife Roundup - 2009

The season went well in its first year of operation and helped to improve the 'visitor experience' on the island. Many benefited in one form or another and I received favourable feedback from numerous people of all ages who appreciated that there was now a friendly face on the island that was on-hand to answer questions and others valued that there was now something laid on once they got here. Two hundred and fifty people took advantage of the advertised programme of events this season and takings from all events amounted to £938.00. Visitor numbers peaked in July through to Sept, with fewer visitors present in August presumably due to wet weather. However it must be noted that a far greater number actually received support offered by the service, as this figure was calculated from paying customers only.

The start of the season was spent writing a programme of events and then trying to figure out how best to execute it. With all promotional material finally designed and up around the village and on the website, I was now ready for the summer onslaught! As expected, a greater interest for the new service was detected in the longer staying public who had discovered what the service had to offer once on the island and who had the additional time to commit. Interest in the evening lectures were very encouraging, but numbers attending could increase if the loch had proper mooring facilities for visiting yachts.

Interest for events from day visitors were limited in comparison and this difference may be a direct result of inadequate mainland advertising, no obvious orientation point or general disembarkation confusion (or probably a combination of all three factors). As there is no dedicated orientation point at the pier at present I attempted to address some of these operational difficulties and had a uniform designed with identification badges, and hoped it would do the trick. However, this had limited success and I suspected that many thought I was some random guy, and possibly as a result, many seemed reluctant to engage in conversation. So if you do see a random uniformed guy waiting at the pier next year, please come and talk to me!

These initial problems could be rectified in subsequent seasons if there were a dedicated and obvious information point within the forthcoming waiting room (or elsewhere at the pier). Hopefully this building would be situated at the top of the car park and sited away from loading vehicles and noise. I am currently investigating the possibilities of some sort of ranger kiosk at the pier. This would be invaluable to the service and could be easily incorporated into any future waiting room design. The kiosk would be beneficial in a number of ways as people would identify it with a professional ranger service and would be more likely to seek information on arrival. In addition, it could safely store walking leaflets for distribution on arrival and would provide some shelter from the worst of the elements.

Improved events promotion on the mainland would also increase numbers for the Wednesday 'Discover Rum' guided walk. At present only a small A5 summarised ranger events programme flyer is posted around the Small Isles, Arisaig and Mallaig (B&Bs, Information areas), with



nothing in the major towns such as Fort William. This issue will hopefully be addressed as Caledonian MacBrayne is very interested in combining this walk within their programme of packaged tours from Fort William for the 2010 season. In combining our efforts with CalMac, we'll gain free advertising in the Tourshop in Fort William and other promotional material. Furthermore, the Information Centre in Mallaig will be operational next year and have already agreed to promote our programme.

Many thanks to Ronnie Dyer and Angus MacLean of Arisaig Marine for their agreement to offer a joint seabird/cetacean cruise with ourselves and many visitors took the opportunity to get to grips with some of the extraordinary marine wildlife that inhabit the waters between Soay and Rum. It was agreed that an additional tour catering specifically for longer stayers would be useful, as it's hard to observe species like the Manx Shearwater on the island during the day. With the promotion of this species in subsequent seasons a high priority, I left the island and headed for Aviemore at the beginning of August to take part in Mountain Leader Training at Glen Moore Lodge. This week long course was pretty intense and is only an initial part of training and an assessment will be required before the full qualification is granted. It is hoped that once I'm qualified, the Ranger Service will be able offer visitors guided trips to the nearest shearwater colony on Hallival, probably once a month (to limit disturbance) during the dark of the moon. In this way, more people will experience the strange cries and immense activity of the colony at night and learn about the species ecology first hand.

One of the principal tasks for the ranger service this winter is the production of new interpretative material for the Visitor Centre as the posters on display at present are lacking in content and colour faded. Further efforts will be concentrated on funding applications for two prioritised ranger projects, i.e., a dragonfly and dipping platform and nest cameras either for Manx Shearwaters and/or a grey herons. Another priority is the possible eradication of rhododendron from within the village with possible funding coming from the Scottish Rural Development Programme or Leader depending on cost, and this I am currently investigating. Other schemes such as new signage for the North Side Trail, path repairs and walking leaflets have been put on hold for the time being to avoid unnecessary duplication as a Visitor Management Plan is currently in preparation by SNH. Other projects for subsequent seasons include a wildlife garden, a child friendly secret wildlife camp and an interactive Rum map for the website.

Monthly wildlife summary

Some fantastic wildlife was encountered on the island and surrounding waters this year with many interesting migrants turning up throughout the season. Golden eagles had a very productive season with two out of our three pairs successfully rearing twins. Manx shearwater breeding success was also reasonable this year, with productivity calculated at 0.7 chicks per pair. Many thanks to everyone who found shearwater fledglings in the village and brought them into be ringed and released.

April

The start of the summer season saw a few overwintering great northern divers still residing in Loch Scresort on the 26th March and early summer migrants such as *wheatear* and *greenshank*



putting in an appearance on this day also. However, it wasn't until the 10th April that the first *swallow* was observed, followed a few days later with the first *willow warbler* on 12th. *Red throated divers* were also beginning to be seen more regularly in Loch Scresort around this time, and some were even observed displaying on the water. Winter migrants were still evident with 12 *redwing* around the castle grounds on the 12th. Most trees were coming into leaf mid month and many of the early vascular plants were now in flower around the village, these included *dog violet*, *lesser celandine* and *primrose*. The first *cuckoo* was heard calling on the 13th in the bluebell wood and otter hide sites. *Golden eagles* were very obvious in the skies over Kinloch and elsewhere on the island, with an adult seen carrying nesting material above the crossroads on the 16th. The end of the month produced more notable migrants including a lone *brent goose* at Kilmory on the 21st and a singing male *ring ouzel* on the upper reaches of Glen Dibidil on the 25th. The departing days of April were notable for some observers thanks to an obliging *otter* that was seen at length outside the school on the afternoon of the 27th, and 12 *bottle nosed dolphins* were encountered from the MV Loch Nevis by four lucky individuals on their way to the island.

May

Things should have started to heat up in May, but the weather deteriorated, with heavy rain and strong winds being the norm. However, this weather did blow in some interesting migrants with the first displaying *common sandpipers* sighted on the loch shore and a 'ringtail' *hen harrier* was observed flying over Loch Scresort much to the disapproval of the shrieking oystercatchers on the 3rd. A single *house martin* also put in appearance on this day and joined the growing numbers of swallows that were frequenting the mouth of Kinloch Burn. This bird was recorded daily until the 25th May, when it was joined by another individual.

9 *brent geese* were unexpected on Loch Scresort on the morning of the 4th and had obviously stopped off for a rest on their way north to their breeding grounds. The next day they had moved on, but other notable birds were still moving through including a *grasshopper warbler*, *whitethroat* and a sub-adult *sea eagle* on the 5th. Most impressive however was an adult *great northern diver* in full breeding plumage seen close to the ferry terminal. The wind was particularly strong on the 7th and had caused a lone *gannet* to be forced into the loch and was glimpsed flying above the garden of Ivy Cottage at the head of the loch for short period! The wind had abated next day and the grating song of a *sedge warbler* was much easier to detect near the yurt, where it seemed to have set up territory on the 8th. On the 10th, another (or same) adult summer *great northern diver* was discovered in the shallows at Samhnan Insir and a single *sand martin* was noted presumably prospecting for a nest site there in the sand banks.

On the 11th a *peregrine* was spotted briefly over moorland directly above Caves Bay and a male and female *bullfinch* were observed in the village. By mid month the weather was brighter, although still chilly in the north easterly breeze. Many plant species were now in flower including *wood sorrel*, *herb-robert*, *marsh lousewort*, *Dove's foot Crane's-bill* together with the usual *sundew*, *butterwort* and *heath spotted orchid*. Moth trapping on the 12th produced single *pine beauty*, *yellow barred brindle*, *peppered moth*, *engrailed* and 4 *spruce carpets*. Other notable insects from around this time included *speckled wood*, *orange tip* and *large white butterflies* on the North Side Trail. At least 5 *grasshopper warblers* were singing in the village by mid month with most reeling anywhere between Tattie House and Primrose Gully. The 13th saw 2 *sand martins* pass high over the village and the adult summer *great*



northern diver arrived back in Loch Scresort for a couple of days. A **whimbrel** was also detected by shearwater researchers as it flew north, high over Hallival. A singing male **wood warbler** was discovered on the morning of the 14th in woodland close to the Japanese Bridge, and 2 **swifts** were observed leisurely feeding in the skies over the village in the afternoon.

On the 16th, a **basking shark** and 12 **bottle nosed dolphins** were reported from Dibidil and another male **ring ouzel** was discovered in Atlantic Corrie on the 17th. Another **swift** was seen on the 21st, but didn't hang around for long. The 24th witnessed a single **spotted flycatcher** at Rock Cottage and a male **hen harrier** was seen flying west over the walled garden. **Four-spotted chasers** were very evident around the village and elsewhere on the island by the end of the month.

June

As the midge season kicked off in full force there were still some welcome insects on the island. A very successful moth trapping session on the night of the 1st produced 5 **clouded border**, 3 **swallow prominent**, 4 **buff tips**, 18 **peacocks**, 3 **spruce carpets**, 6 **scalloped hazels**, 4 **pale prominent**, with single **buff and white ermine**, **herald**, **clouded-bordered brindle**, **spectacle**, **poplar hawk moth**, **brimstone**, **green silver-lines**, **bordered white**, **marbled coronet** and **barred umber**. The barred umber being a new record for the island. Dragonflies were very evident at the beginning of the month with **large red**, **common blue** and **blue-tailed damselflies**, **common hawker**, **golden ringed** and **four spotted chasers** observed in good numbers around the Glen Shellesder bog pools on the 6th.

A single **grasshopper warbler** was heard reeling close to the shearwater hut and a single **green hair streak** butterfly was observed on the North Side Nature Trail on the 8th. The 9th witnessed three displaying **red throated divers** in Loch Scresort for most of the morning, and a **saxon** was recorded in the moth trap. Although this species had been recorded on Rum in the mid 1930's by the infamous Professor Heslop Harrison, it is still regarded as a new record as it wasn't officially included on the Rum insect list because Harrison was notorious for making up biological records.

Activity in the surrounding waters was a particular highlight mid month, with 100+ **common dolphins** seen between Arisaig and Eigg on the 10th, a **basking shark** at Dibidil on the 11th, and 12 **common dolphins** were recorded off the east coast of Rum on the 13th together with 2 **minke whales**. Many ground nesting bird species were observed with young at this time. At least four pairs of **common sandpipers** resided around the shores of Loch Scresort with many of their young being at the mercy of wandering dogs. **Red grouse** and **greenshank** were observed with young in the interior also, plus one **arctic** and two **common tern** pairs with young on the Kilmory Bay Islet. **Bonxies** were also on eggs near Samhnan Insir. On the 23rd a male and female **ring ouzel** were seen between Bloodstone and Harris suggesting a possible breeding attempt. The month came to an end with reports of a **humpback whale** off Canna on the 30th.

July



The month started well with a massive **crossbill** invasion involving some 80+ individuals in the village. Many had been displaced from Scandinavia due to a pine crop failure, so had headed west across the North Sea in search of food. By mid month at least 20 could still be observed in the tree tops anywhere between the White House and otter hide. Small groups were also recorded on Canna and Eigg from around the same period. A lone **barn owl** was another unexpected highlight on the 16th and was observed quartering the fields around the castle at dusk and a male **hen harrier** was observed in the village the same day. **Bog and frog orchids** were noted at Kilmory at the end of the month.

August

With the beginning of the month heralding the start of autumn movement it wasn't surprising that there were numerous sightings of **storm petrel**, **minke whale** and **basking shark** around the coast.

8 **black tailed godwits** put in appearance at Kilmory on the 1st and a **sunfish** was spotted in the waters between Arisaig and Eigg by Ronnie Dyer on the 7th. 7 **Storm petrels** were caught and ringed at Kilmory on the night of the 8th, and a male **hen harrier** and juvenile **shelduck** were spotted in the village on the 11th. Single **crossbills** were evident from the 12th until the end of the month and a further 5 **storm petrels** were caught and ringed at Kilmory on the 13th.

Post breeding groups of **kittiwakes** were evident in Loch Scresort and Kilmory mid month involving at least 150 individuals. A first winter **sanderling** was recorded at Kilmory on the 22nd together with a small group of **dunlin**. The 25th saw another male **hen harrier** on the North Natural Trail and a lone **whimbrel** was observed feeding at low tide on Loch Scresort on the 26th. The summer plumaged **great northern diver** was now moulting into winter plumage and put in another appearance at Samhnan Insir on the 30th. Presumably this was the same bird that had been recorded in May and had been in residence all summer. The end of the month saw **arctic skua** coming through on passage with a single bird recorded on the 27th.

September

Seabird passage was in full swing at the beginning of September so an **arctic skua** in the mouth of Loch Scresort on the 1st wasn't unexpected. 7 **storm petrels** were observed from the Loch Nevis on the 5th, together with a further 2 **arctic skuas**. Finch numbers increased within the village with 70+ **siskin** observed feeding around the plantation near Tattie House. **Harbour porpoise** were very much in evidence around our coastal waters with 10 reported from the MV Sheerwater on the 10th. A **merlin** was seen briefly up near the Shearwater Hut on Hallival on the 19th and **goldcrest** numbers seemed to increase by the end of the month with many a bush ringing to the bird's high pitched calls. 5 **brent geese** were reported from Kilmory and 3 **wigeon** and 5 **rock pipits** were seen around Loch Scresort on the 25th.

October

Otters were seen from the hide more frequently from the 5th and small parties of **crossbills** were still being regularly sighted around the village early month. 30 **lesser redpoll** were observed feeding in alders near the former site of Ferry Cottage between the 6th and 7th. An exhausted **turtle dove** was a surprise find in cover close to the mouth of Rockery Burn on the



7th (thanks to Gus Jones for the record and photo). Other scarce migrants included an adult female **red-backed shrike** in Kilmory Glen on the 8th. This sun loving bird is no longer a British breeding species due to our lack of large flying insects and cooler wetter summers (last bred in the Norfolk Brecks in 1987), but is still annually recorded in the UK on passage migration in the spring and autumn (usually on the east coast). The species has a continental distribution and should have been well on its way to Africa and not frequenting a tree plot on a remote Scottish island. The only other shrike species recorded on Rum was a lesser grey in 1971, so the Kilmory individual was a first for the island. Despite searching, the bird was not relocated in subsequent days. My apologies once again to the pupils and staff of Rum Primary School, who must have thought I had gone crazy that afternoon.

The first **redwing** arrived from the east on the 9th and a lone **Brambling** put in an appearance at Tattie House on the 12th but it wasn't until the 15th that migrant thrushes increased to any significant numbers, with at least 40 **redwing** present around the top fields. A single **chiffchaff** put in an appearance around Kinloch Burn Bridge on the 15th and was recorded daily until the 21st. The first **fieldfare** was recorded on the 16th and 9 **snow bunting** were observed on the upper reaches of Hallival on the 17th. **Crossbills** were a continuing feature of village life it seemed, with 14 flyovers on the 21st. By the end of the month there was an obvious movement of thrushes involving c.100+ **redwing**, c.50+ each of **fieldfare** and **blackbird** with most concentrating around the top fields and Tattie House. A **black-headed gull** on Loch Scresort was a welcome change from the usual herring and common gulls on the 25th and the last **crossbill** was recorded over the village on the 28th.

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