



IRCT Ranger Service News (Early summer 2011 issue)

After the long dark winter it's great to see the island burst back into life. As expected, our returning Manx shearwaters made their presence felt on the second week of April, when a few individuals crash landed around Kinloch Castle on the night of the 10th. The first of our breeding swallows returned on the 5th April and many (15 pairs or so) are now in the process of breeding. In an attempt to entice the pair displaced by the removal of our old flit boat 'Rhouma', we've installed two artificial nesting platforms in the Visitor Centre and things look favourable so far, as the pair are regularly seen flying in and out of the building.

The bulk of our returning migrants put in a first appearance during the second week of April, with blackcap, cuckoo, willow warbler and chiffchaff being recorded around Kinloch Village. A colour ringed twite, which was originally ringed last winter in Angus, was recorded at Harris on April 9th. Male grasshopper warblers seem to be 'reeling' everywhere this spring and were first recorded along the North Side Nature Trail on the 17th April (at least four individuals were also recorded along Kilmory Glen on the 3rd May). Overwintering geese were on the move north with a flock of 70+ Barnacles on the 8th April (one sickly bird remained around the east end of Kilmory beach until the 22nd April). Flocks of up to 30 brent geese were recorded on the 13th and 21st April.

Later arrivals included the first sedge warbler on the 23rd and common sandpipers and common terns on the 7th May. A lone male hen harrier was observed on the North Side Trail on the 24th April and another or perhaps same individual was seen flying east along Loch Scresort on the 6th May. Two (presumably) non-breeding great northern divers (in full summer plumage) were also visible in the mouth of Loch Scresort on the 6th May. On the other hand, red-throated divers have been noisily displaying in Loch Scresort and are evidently intent on getting the business of breeding well under way.

Other notable bird species recorded this spring include a female brambling on the 24th April. Settled conditions on May 3rd produced a lone whimbrel in Loch Scresort and a singing male wood warbler in the Harris tree plot. The latter was obviously holding territory as it was heard again at Harris on the 9th. A late Iceland Gull put in an appearance on Kilmory beach on the 7th May, whilst the bad weather on the 11th May forced a few migrants out to the west, with 2 house martins and single sand martin and swift in Kinloch.

The usual worts (ie milk, butter and louse) are currently out on show around the nature trails, together with heath-spotted and northern-marsh orchids. An early purple orchid was observed at Kilmory on the 3rd May. Otters have also been observed around Loch Scresort on several occasions this spring, with a male and cubs seen several times around the shore on the south side of Loch Scresort. Highlights on the insect front include 2 green hairstreak butterflies on the North Side Trail on the 21st April and one at Harris on the 14th May. Several spring flying moth species have also been recorded in the village and include emperors, brown silver lines, scalloped hazel and small square spot.