

# The thriving birds of Arran

**First atlas produced by army of volunteers**

The most comprehensive guide to the bird population on Arran has been produced for the first time.

The Arran Bird Atlas 2007-2012 records every bird sighted on the island over the five year period.

And it includes 28 UK red listed birds. These are birds which are globally threatened and have seen a severe decline in population and range over the past 25 years.

Worryingly these include some previously common birds such as the house sparrow and the starling as well as species like the hen harrier, lapwing and song thrush.

The book, which has been meticulously prepared by Dr Jim Cassels, maps the breeding and wintering birds of Arran.

And he is positive about the bird population on the island and said: 'Even birds which are not doing well in the UK generally are doing OK on Arran.'

Bird atlases provide a fascinating periodic insight into the status of all of the bird species of an area. For the casual birdwatcher, they provide indications of what can be seen where. For the scientist, they provide a means of understanding the factors limiting bird distribution. And for the conservationist, they provide indications of changes in distribu-



Arran's first bird recorder Maggie Dunn beside her telescope with a copy of the Arran Bird Atlas. 20\_b13bird01

tion that might be indicative of wider issues.

Under the direction of Dr Cassels, the bird recorder for the Arran Natural History Society, over 30 volunteers conducted fieldwork over five years covering the whole of the island. In addition almost 700 people contributed bird sightings during these five breeding seasons and five winters.

The data collected contains over 36,000 records on 177 species. It is an outstanding effort by residents and visitors, who share a passion for the birds of Arran. Adding to this community effort, at the publication stage over 30 photographers agreed to the use of their images. The work involved in this project was



Greylag geese in flight at sunset. b13bird02NO

recognised nationally when the Marsh Local Ornithology Award was presented to the Arran Natural History Society in October 2013 by the Marsh Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology. The key features of the resulting full-colour publication are that in 168 pages are more than 400 maps and over 200 photographs of the 177 birds.

With the support of funds from the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and the Arran Trust, the Arran Natural History Society has kept the cost to an affordable £8.00. The publication gives an insight into the distribution of Arran's birds and provides a source of information for future land management. It is a must for all with an interest in Arran.

The book is dedicated to the large number of enthusiastic and skilled people who made it possible but in particular to Maggie H Dunn, who was a founder member of the Arran Natural History Society which was formed in 1977 and as its first bird recorder produced the annual bird report until 1991.

In his dedication to Maggie, a retired primary school teacher who is now 90, Dr Cassels says: 'Both as a teacher and as a member of the society, Maggie was and is an inspiration. Through her, many developed and shared her passion for the birds of Arran. Her enthusiasm for Arran and its birds continues.'

The book has already been

raised at the Scottish Parliament in a motion by Arran MSP Kenneth Gibson which has received wide cross-party support.

Bob Swann the Scottish organiser of the national bird atlas for the same period said: 'Arran is popularly described as Scotland in miniature. A local atlas can reveal differences in bird communities with the rest of Scotland. For example island bird communities, being isolated, can be more vulnerable to change than mainland communities, but for some species they can also act as a refuges.'

'Examples highlighted by the atlas work include species as diverse as mute swan and hen harrier which show increases since the original 1968-72 bird



atlas, whilst others such as moorhen and yellowhammer have declined.

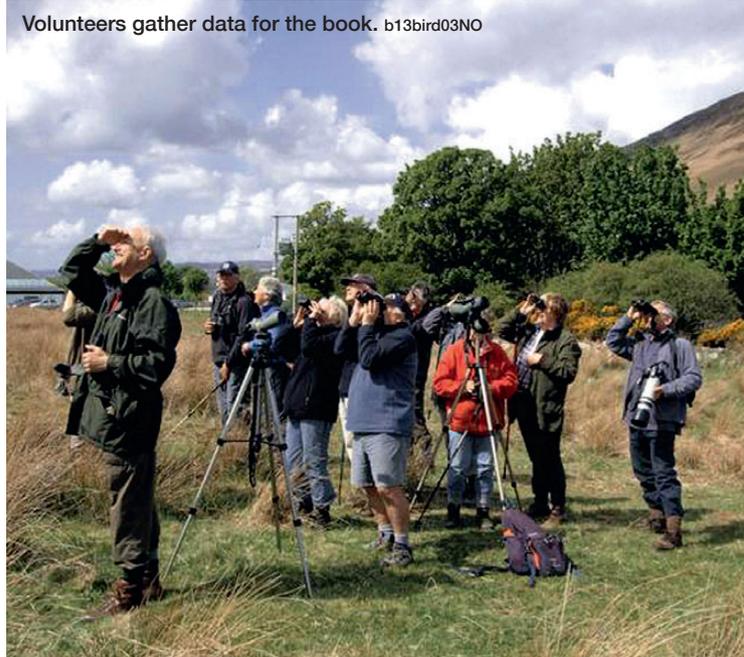
'The bird watching community on Arran is to be congratulated in undertaking this project and seeing it through to completion. Gathering atlas data is not easy. It requires dedicated volunteers to get out and cover the ground, as well as a good local organisation to ensure full coverage and that the results are properly validated, collated and presented.

'The atlas has produced a detailed baseline where birds were distributed on Arran in the early 21st century. It will be fascinating to repeat this project again in the future to see how successful we have been in conserving the island's birds during a time of great change.'

And what of the future Dr Casells says: 'Hopefully the publication will stimulate all people with an interest in birds to find our more and record and share their information, so improving our collective understanding of the birds of Arran.

'In Scotland, habitat change is thought to be the main cause of bird species decline. It is hoped that this publication will be used as a conservation tool that will assist with future land management planning on Arran.

The publication is available from shops and other outlets throughout the island or can be ordered



Volunteers gather data for the book. b13bird03NO

directly from Alan and Jill Hollick of High Kildonan  
[alanandjillhollick@gmail.com](mailto:alanandjillhollick@gmail.com)



Starlings which are doing well on Arran. b13bird04NO