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THE BIRDS OF INCHMARNOCK, A CLYDE ISLAND.

By JOHN MORELL M'WILLIAM.

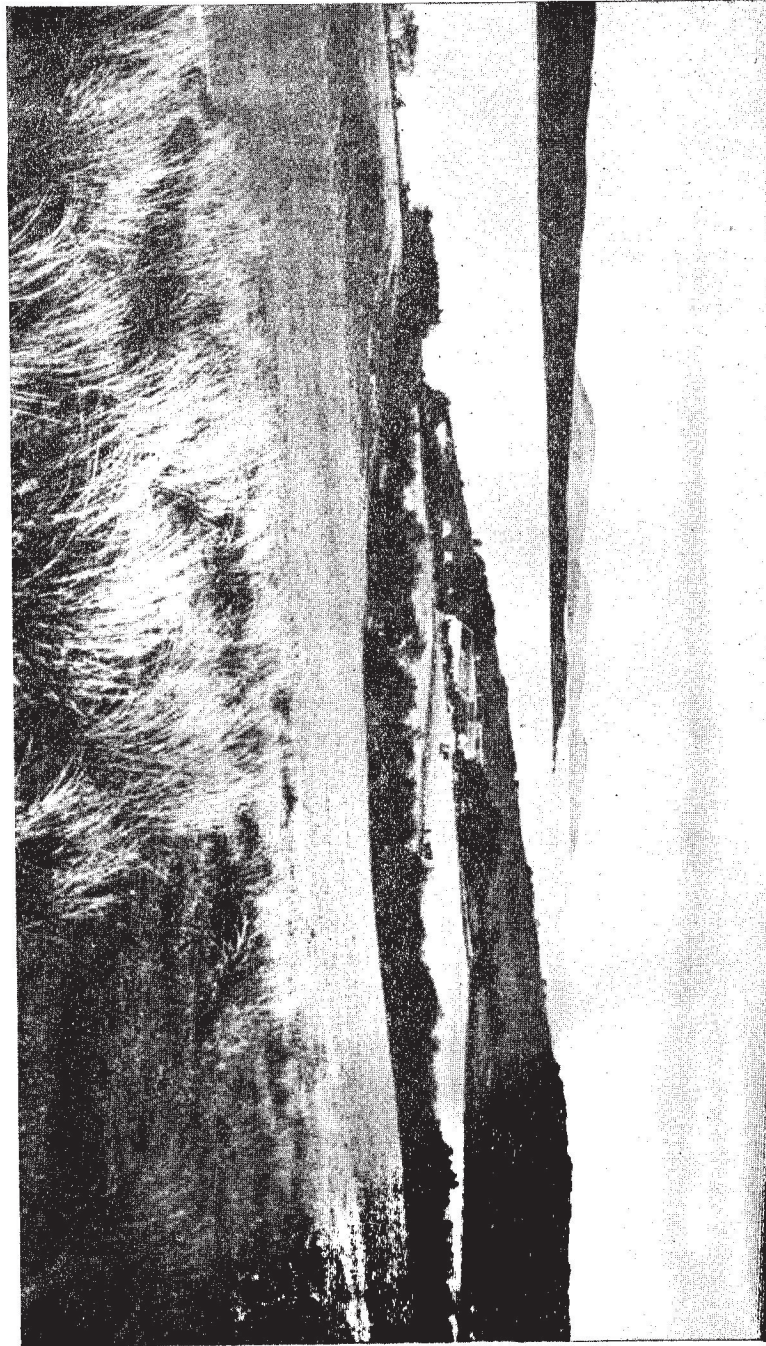
[Read 7th December, 1937.]

No separate paper has hitherto been published on the birds of Inchmarnock. Many references to it are made in my two books, *The Birds of the Island of Bute*, and *The Birds of the Firth of Clyde*, but no attempt has yet been made to compile anything in the nature of a complete list for the island.

I have known Inchmarnock for over twenty years. When I lived in Bute I paid in all five visits to the island. These were all in the summer, and were only for a few hours on each occasion. My first visit was with Mr L. P. W. Renouf, on 5th June, 1916. I was on the island again on 15th June, 1916. I was there again with the Buteshire Natural History Society on 26th May, 1923. I visited the island on 27th May, 1924, and on 18th May, 1925. For twelve years after that I was never on Inchmarnock, till in June, 1937, I at last paid a reasonably long visit. My wife and I stayed from 2nd June till 9th June at North Park Farm, with Mr Miller. We explored the island very thoroughly, walking at different times the whole way round the shore, and crossing the island at many points. We spent a good many hours in the gullery, and carefully noted the birds in both woods. The result is that my list of the summer birds must be practically complete. In fact, my 1937 list is much the same as the list made on my first visit in 1916. Certainly, if any other species are to be found, they must be scarce, and cannot affect the conclusions in this paper.

The factors that determine the bird population of an area are very varied. Geographical position, food supply, shelter in winter and summer, the presence or absence of other species, suitable breeding ground, are all of the greatest importance. These do not account for everything, as there must always be an element of chance, but the environment is usually decisive. The Island of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, has in most parts an exceedingly small number and variety of land birds. One may go for miles and hardly see a bird, except round the crofts; but a generation ago the ground round Stornoway Castle was planted with trees, and this now possesses a fairly full bird population, including a large rookery. In these woods one could hardly realise that one was in the Outer Hebrides. It is only occasionally that the results are seen in so simple a form, but the surroundings do to a great extent in all cases determine the nature of the avifauna.

Inchmarnock is situated in the Firth of Clyde a mile distant from Bute, and four miles from Arran. It is approximately two miles long, and a quarter to three-quarters of a mile in width, lying roughly north and south. The ground rises fairly regularly from the shore to the central ridge, which lies above the hundred foot line for more than a mile. The highest point, towards the north end, is about a hundred and seventy feet above the sea level. There is a point near the south end marked one hundred and sixty-five feet on the Ordnance Survey map, but the other is slightly higher. Practically the whole shore of the island is rocky. There is one sandy bay at the south end, but there are no mud flats. On the east shore the ground rises gradually, without any cliffs whatever. At the north and west and south there are broken cliffs about thirty feet high about a hundred yards from the shore, with in many places large boulders, with bracken amongst them, between shore and cliff. There are three or four small caves at



MIDPARK, INCHMARNOCK; SOUTH END OF BUTE IN THE DISTANCE.

Photo: J. M. McWilliam, June, 1937.

the south end and one at the north end. Inchmarnock has two farms, and on the eastern slope there is a good deal of cultivated ground. There is practically nothing of the nature of a valley on the island, and from its regular outlines practically every point is in sight of the sea. In earlier times the island was probably covered by natural wood, but now it is mainly under grass and heather. There is a small area of short heather above the cliffs at the north end, and some longer heather towards the south. There are two natural woods. On the east, near North Park Farm, there is a wood of hazel and rowan about half a mile long by a hundred yards wide, the trees reaching a height of about twelve feet. At the south end is a rather larger wood, mainly of birch, but with rowan, hazel, and oak as well, of no great height. There are some old thorn trees on the island, but no close thorn hedges. There are some patches of brambles. There are no pines, no laurels, no thick hedges of any kind, no masses of ivy. The result is that except in the clefts of the rocks there is little shelter for birds in the winter. The island is practically entirely exposed to winds from the sea. This paper is an attempt to set out the results of this environment on the avifauna.

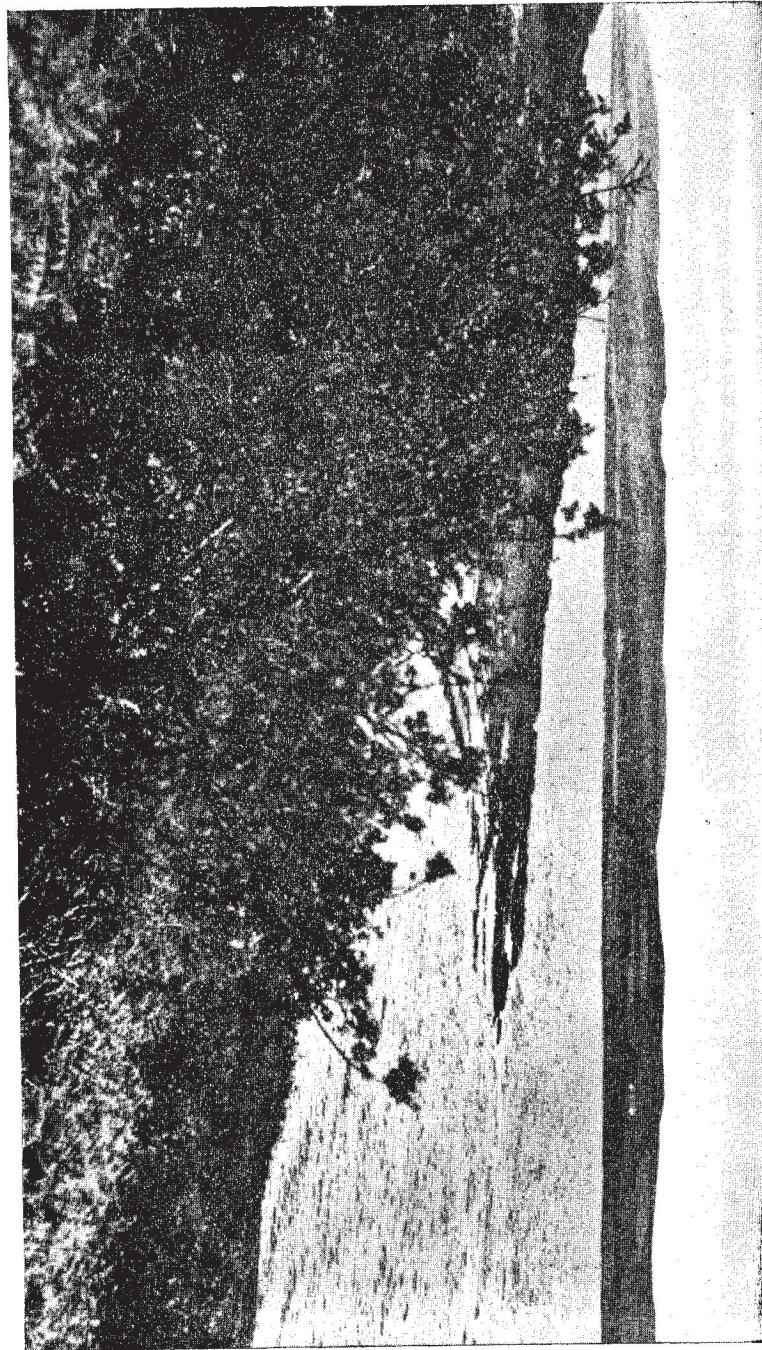
By far the most important thing on the island from an ornithological point of view is the great gullery towards the south end. Fortunately, we know the history of this quite accurately. Certainly from 1900, and probably long before that, some Common Gulls nested here. At the time of my first visit in 1916 there were about a hundred pairs of Common Gull, and about fifteen pairs each of Herring-Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull. I was told at that time that the large Gulls had only recently begun to nest. In 1923 there were at least a hundred pairs of these two large Gulls nesting together. In 1924 there were about two hundred pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gull and about fifty pairs of Herring-Gull.



THE WEST SHORE; ARRAN IN THE DISTANCE.

Photo: J. M. McWilliam, June, 1937.

In 1937 there were perhaps five hundred to seven hundred pairs of Herring-Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull in tolerably equal numbers. At one time I counted about three hundred of these large Gulls in sight, in one fairly small section. These very rough figures show in twenty-one years an increase of nests of Herring-Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull from thirty to seven hundred or possibly even more. The gullery stretches for at least half a mile at the south-west of the island. The nests are all near the sea, both above and below the little cliffs. The Gulls are definitely social in their habits. The colony has extended gradually, without any haphazard nesting through the island or along the shore. Both species nest over the whole area of the gullery, so they have no antagonism to one another, but there are often little groups of one species, and the nesting is not entirely indiscriminate. I saw few sucked eggs or ruined nests, and noticed no quarrelling between the two species. It is, of course, doubtful whether the Gulls nesting at present are all the descendants of the original thirty pairs. There has been a great increase recently of Gulls in many parts of Britain, and Gulls are frequently driven from one place to another. However, I made a very rough estimate of the natural rate of increase of Gulls under favourable conditions, and asked a friend of mathematical tastes how this might work out in twenty years, and his figures suggest that the present large gullery may actually have increased in itself without outside assistance. A fact worthy of note is that, except where these Gulls are actually nesting, other birds, such as Waders, are quite common, so it seems possible to have a large gullery without greatly affecting the other birds on the island. If these Gulls are allowed to increase without much human interference, it is a natural subject for speculation to what extent this colony may grow. There is a very large possible nesting area, and the food supply must be practically unlimited. On some islands off the coast of South America sea birds are



STUNTED OAK AND BRACKEN AT SOUTH END; BUTE IN THE DISTANCE.

Photo: J. M. McWilliam, June, 1937.



BAY AT SOUTH END; ARRAN IN THE DISTANCE.



CLIFF AT SOUTH-WEST.

Photos : J. M. McWilliam, June, 1937.

farmed for their guano. If Inchmarnock were a rainless island, these Gulls would represent a potential gold mine. It is difficult to suggest almost any natural limits to their possible increase. On the other hand the Common Gull has decreased considerably in twenty years, and has entirely forsaken the main gullery. It still nests at the north end, but only perhaps twenty pairs. It greatly resents the presence of the larger Gulls, attacking them when they come near, and as there are colonies in Bute, the Common Gulls have probably gone there for the sake of peace. In 1918 a pair of Great Black-Backed Gulls nested on the island, and in 1921 three pairs. In 1924 and in 1925 I saw single nests. In 1937 there was still only one nest, as far as possible from the main gullery. It is remarkable that this Gull should not have steadily increased in numbers, as it has done elsewhere. The reason may be that it resents the presence of human beings. The only places where I have seen large colonies are remote from human beings, such as North Rona. Still, one would like to have figures of the number of young reared each year. It is hard to see why the rate of increase should be less than for other large Gulls. Great Black-backed Gulls have increased in parts of Scotland in recent years, but at nothing like the rate noted here for the other species.

The Black-headed Gull, though it visits the shores of Inchmarnock, has never yet begun to nest. The colony at the Plan, in Bute, which was founded in 1922, increased to about three hundred pairs, but in 1936 they deserted this place, apparently of their own will. Some years earlier, in a note in "The Scottish Naturalist," I had prophesied that this place would some day be forsaken, as the island where they bred was gradually joining up with the mainland.

The Arctic Tern nests, fifteen pairs in 1937, on a stretch of shingle on the west shore of Inchmarnock. I examined these carefully. In 1924 I have a note of a



NEST OF HERRING GULL; ARRAN IN THE DISTANCE.

Photo: J. M. McWilliam, June, 1937.

nest of Tern (species doubtful) at this place. The Arctic Tern may be increasing as a breeding species on the Clyde. Till a few years ago it had not been proved to nest on the Clyde, and we now know that it nests on the Burnt Islands in the Kyles of Bute, and on the west shore of Bute, and on Inchmarnock. It is not very difficult to distinguish it from the Common Tern, but it may have been overlooked. It will be interesting to see how the Inchmarnock colony fares.

For several of the wading birds, conditions on Inchmarnock seem perfect. Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank, and Green Plover breed abundantly. On the other hand, there are a very few pairs, only three or four, of Ringed Plover, the Common Sandpiper is not numerous, the Snipe is obviously very scarce, and there seem to be only a few pairs of Woodcock. One evening in 1937 we had Woodcock, Curlew, Green Plover, Oystercatcher, and Redshank flying over us at the same time. In winter, the Woodcock is abundant, as is seen from the game list. I saw and heard a Whimbrel in 1937. The birds occurring off shore will naturally be the same for Inchmarnock as for Bute.

The Cuckoo visits Inchmarnock. I noticed it in my list for 1924. In 1937 a Cuckoo sang on the island twice for stretches of an hour or so, but there was no sign of the presence of a female. It is worth noting that when on the island we could distinctly hear Cuckoos calling on Bute, at a distance of certainly a mile, and probably a mile and a quarter. There must be few birds whose note carries so far. This may be related to its polygamous habits.

Probably the most interesting thing on Inchmarnock is the presence or absence of certain species of small birds. The Skylark is, as one would expect, abundant. The Meadow Pipit is not numerous, though widely distributed. The Chaffinch is much the most



numerous Finch. The Lesser Redpoll is relatively common. There are no Greenfinches, though I noted it in 1916. There are a very few pairs of Linnets. The Twite, which I noted in 1923, was absent in 1937. The Yellowhammer, which I noted in 1916, was also absent in 1937. The Rock-Pipit is not numerous. The Hedge-Sparrow is very scarce. The Starling is common, nesting invariably in clefts of the rocks. The Blackbird is very common, the Song-Thrush very much rarer. The Robin is found in woods and even on the edge of the cliffs entirely away from the houses. A few pairs of Swallows and a few pairs of House-Sparrows nest round the farms. The Common Wren is much scarcer than it might well be. There are no Stonechats or Whinchats, no Tits of any kind apparent, no Mistle-Thrushes, no Bullfinches. Warblers are scarce. There are no Corncrakes. It is quite obvious that this uneven distribution of species is due to the absence of shelter, though the effect of food supply is apparent too. The ratio of the different species is entirely different from what we find in the gardens or plantations in Bute, or even amongst the whins on the hillsides, or in the rushy marshes. Apart from a few puzzling cases, we have the natural result of an island with little shelter, especially in the winter. If shrubberies and gardens were planted, twenty years would probably bring the avifauna of Inchmarnock into line with that of Bute. At the same time, a list such as this may be interesting at a future date in showing changes that may occur without any great apparent change in the environment.

A LIST OF THE BIRDS RECORDED TO DATE FOR INCHMARNOCK.

The Raven. *Corvus corax corax* L. It is said to have bred. An old nest in a cliff at the south west of the island is said to be a Raven's.

The Hooded Crow. *Corvus cornix cornix* L. Occurs.

The Carrion-Crow. *Corvus corone corone* L. Occurs. Two or three seen in 1937.

The Rook. *Corvus frugilegus frugilegus* L. Appears doubtfully in one of my early lists.

The Jackdaw. *Coleus monedula spermologus* (Vicill.) Breeds in the cliffs.

The Starling. *Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris* L. Breeds commonly in the cliffs.

The British Twite. *Carduelis flavirostris pipilans* (Latham.) Has bred in the past but is now absent.

The Lesser Redpoll. *Carduelis linaria cabaret* (R.L.S. Mull.) Common. Frequents the birch woods.

The Linnet. *Carduelis cannabina cannabina* (L.) A very few pairs are to be seen, possibly two or three.

The Chaffinch. *Fringilla coelebs coelebs* L. Is much the commonest Finch.

The House-Sparrow. *Passer domesticus domesticus* (L.) Only a few pairs round the farms.

The Yellow Bunting. *Emberiza citrinella citrinella* L. In my list of twenty years ago, but no longer nests. The Yellow Bunting is scarcer in many places than it was formerly.

The Reed-Bunting. *Emberiza schoeniclus schoeniclus* (L.) A couple of pairs nest on the island.

The Skylark. *Alauda arvensis arvensis* L. Is one of the most numerous birds on the island.

The Meadow-Pipit. *Anthus pratensis* (L.) Fairly well distributed but not numerous.

The Rock-Pipit. *Anthus spinoletta petrosus* (Mont.) Nests in small numbers.

The Pied Wagtail. *Motacilla alba yarrellii* Gould. Two pairs nested in 1937.

The Willow-Warbler. *Phylloscopus trochilus trochilus* (L.) A few pairs nest even where there is little shelter.

The Sedge-Warbler. *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (L.) Occurs. Probably only a pair or two.

The Whitethroat. *Sylvia communis communis* Lath. One or two pairs nest.

The British Song-Thrush. *Turdus ericetorum ericetorum* Turton. Much less common than the Blackbird, but I have seen nests and young.

The Blackbird. *Turdus merula merula* L. Is very common

The British Robin. *Erithacus rubecula melophilus* Hart. Is seen round the farms and in the woods and above the cliffs.

The British Hedge-Sparrow. *Prunella modularis occidentalis* (Hart.) Occurs, but is certainly not numerous.

The Wren. *Troglodytes troglodytes troglodytes* (L.) Is much less common than might be expected.

The Swallow. *Hirundo rustica rustica* L. Two or three pairs nest at each of the two farms.

The Cuckoo. *Cuculus canorus canorus* L. Visits the island at least occasionally.

The Long-eared Owl. *Asio otus otus* (L.) A specimen taken years ago is preserved at North Park farm.

The White-breasted Barn-Owl. *Tyto alba alba* (Scop.) One taken at Inchmarnock many years ago is in the Bute Natural History Museum.

The Sheld-Duck. *Tadorna tadorna* (L.) Breeds in small numbers.

The Mallard. *Anas platyrhynca platyrhynca* L. Seen in 1937.

The Teal. *Anas crecca crecca* L. Seen breeding in 1937.

The Red-breasted Merganser. *Mergus serrator* L. A few pairs obviously nest.

The Wood-Pigeon. *Columba palumbus palumbus* L. Several seen in 1937. No doubt breeds.

The Rock-Dove. *Columba livia livia* Gm. At least twenty pairs nest in the cliffs.

The British Oyster-catcher. *Haematopus ostralegus occidentalis* Neumann. Breeds abundantly.

The Ringed Plover. *Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula* L. Three or four pairs nest.

The Lapwing. *Vanellus vanellus* (L.) The Lapwing or Green Plover nests abundantly.

The Turnstone. *Arenaria interpres interpres* (L.) I have noted this species on the shore.

The Common Sandpiper. *Tringa hypoleucos* L. Two or three pairs nest.

The Common Redshank. *Tringa totanus totanus* (L.) Breeds abundantly.

The Curlew. *Numenius arquata arquata* (L.) Breeds in good numbers.

The Whimbrel. *Numenius phaeopus phaeopus* (L.) Seen and heard on two days in 1937.

The Common Snipe. *Capella gallinago gallinago* (L.) Is obviously a scarce nesting species. Fair numbers are shot in winter.

The Woodcock. *Scolopax rusticola rusticola* L. Only a few pairs nest. Is abundant in winter.

The Arctic Tern. *Sterna macrura* Naumann. Fifteen pairs nested in 1937. It has probably nested through previous years.

The Black-headed Gull. *Larus ridibundus ridibundus* L. Occurs round the shore but does not nest.

The Common Gull. *Larus canus canus* L. Nests in small numbers at the north end. There was a larger colony twenty years ago towards the south end.

The Herring-Gull. *Larus argentatus argentatus* Pont. Nests in large numbers.

The British Lesser Black-backed Gull. *Larus fuscus graellsii* Brehm. Nests in large numbers.

The Great Black-backed Gull. *Larus marinus* L. One pair nested in 1937. Up to three pairs have nested in former years.

The Moor-Hen. *Gallinula chloropus chloropus* (L.) One pair in 1937.

The British Black Grouse. *Lyrurus tetrrix britannicus* With. & Lonn. Occurred years ago but now extinct.

The British Red Grouse. *Lagopus scoticus scoticus* (Lath.) Perhaps two or three pairs nest each year. The game records indicate declining numbers.

The Pheasant. *Phasianus colchicus* L. Was first introduced in 1904 and several times since then.

The Partridge. *Perdix perdix perdix* (L.) Was introduced in 1920 but is extinct.

With the addition of sea and shore birds this list could be easily expanded but this would serve no purpose as the status of all such birds in the Clyde is given in *The Birds of the Firth of Clyde*.

INCHMARNOCK GAME LIST.

	Red Grouse.	Black Grouse	Pheasant.	Partridge.	Woodcock.	Snipe.	Duck.	Plover.	Pigeons.	Rabbits.
1901	—	—	—	—	17	4	—	1	—	4
1906	—	—	—	—	24	5	—	—	—	10
1907	9	—	—	—	46	13	—	—	—	27
1908	14	1	—	—	11	—	1	—	—	—
1909	1	—	—	—	31	8	—	—	—	8
1910	18	—	—	—	—	6	1	—	—	8
1911	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1912	7	—	—	—	—	6	—	—	—	—
1913	7	—	—	—	97	11	—	—	2	355
1918	8	—	—	—	25	7	—	—	1	345
1919	14	—	—	—	34	21	—	—	—	361
1920	6	—	1	—	20	11	—	7	8	228
1921	—	—	3	1	21	10	—	8	6	385
1922	—	—	—	—	15	11	—	3	—	116
1923	—	—	4	—	47	6	—	—	—	21
1924	9	—	—	—	2	3	—	—	—	24
1925	—	—	9	—	31	7	—	—	3	28
1926	—	—	12	1	11	4	—	—	—	29
1928	—	—	25	—	52	5	—	—	1	30
1929	1	—	—	—	16	5	—	—	—	45
1930	—	—	44	—	19	15	—	—	—	70
1932	—	—	19	—	35	8	—	4	1	38
1933	4	—	—	—	5	5	—	—	—	12
1934	3	—	75	—	21	15	—	—	2	60
1935	—	—	55	—	35	14	—	—	2	81

NOTE.—This game list for Inchmarnock was given to me by Mr Robert Gordon, gamekeeper in Bute. No record for the game on Inchmarnock seems to have been kept till he came. Pheasants were first introduced in 1920, and several times since then. Partridges were introduced in 1920, but were unsuccessful. Vermin is destroyed by the keepers, but no record has been kept. The island is usually shot over once or twice each season.