

WINTERING SHORE BIRDS OF BUTE

P. and B. Crichton

In the autumn of 1984, as members of the British Trust for Ornithology, we were invited to co-ordinate a numerical survey of the wintering shore birds of Bute as part of an overall survey of the British Isles. As members of the Buteshire Natural History Society, we were fortunate to call upon, not only other B.T.O. members, but the enthusiasm and expertise of other members of the B.N.H.S.

We were asked, in the first place to report upon the following species:—

	Numbers recorded
Oystercatcher	1078
Lapwing	67
Ringed Plover	88
Grey Plover	3
Golden Plover	25
Turnstone	112
Curlew	2026
Bar-Tailed Godwit	—
Redshank	87
Knot	—
Dunlin	99
Sanderling	—
Purple Sandpiper	17
Eider	623
Heron	45

A nearly total survey was carried out on the week-end of 15th/16th December, and on selected coasts, in late December and in mid January. The later surveys did not demonstrate any significant differences in the observers' reports. Certainly, there were increases in one section or another, but they were more often than not compensated by decreases in an adjacent area. Generally, the weather was cold and dry, with easterly winds.

Additional Species reported:

Diver (Unspec.)	2
Cormorant	41
Shag	8
Shelduck	3
Wigeon	488
Teal	47

Mallard	338
Pintail	1
Tufted Duck	7
Scaup	6
Goldeneye	8
Red Breasted Merganser	87
Greenshank	1
Snip	7
Seals	3
Unspec. Sea Ducks	33
Total	<u>5350</u>

This total over a week-end is remarkable. Areas considered by ornithologists as good wintering habitat, including certain areas of the English east coast, were found to be cold and devoid of birds. Without more research, your reporters would find it difficult to make definitive conclusions. However, certain observations should be made.

Divers are observed from time to time, but are often too far away to be identified as Red-throated or Black. Both could well be off our coasts.

In the older books it was said about *Phalacrocorax* that if you had seen a Cormorant it was a Shag. Now, one could often say the opposite.

The incidence of Shelduck is certainly under-reported, but for no known reason.

Large quantities of "dabbling duck" were observed in the sea, but one wonders whether, in certain conditions, the numbers might not have been much larger. Tufted Duck and Scaup are not frequently observed, and the Greenshank was a good sighting – they are seen from time to time but not every year; Greenshank are more likely to be seen when migrating.

Bar-tailed Godwit are frequent visitors to Kilchattan Bay, but were not reported. So be it. This is a factual observation. By contrast, however, there were reports of Purple Sandpiper, which are not unknown, but not frequently seen. They are well known in the Outer Hebrides, but we are fortunate enough to have a member who knew them there and so could be certain of the identification.

The survey has reinforced the great importance of Bute for certain species such as Curlew – or Whaup – the Oystercatcher and one might also add the Eider.

The importance of the amateur in this survey cannot be exaggerated, nor can the grateful thanks of the B.T.O. be stressed too often.

GIANT PUFF BALLS (*LANGERMANNIA GIGANTEA*) IN BUTE

Dorothy N. Marshall

Giant Puff Balls appeared in August, 1982, in a grass field to the south of the steading of Upper Ardroscaidale Farm NS 59/039642. They were growing among the partially exposed roots of a tree. There were about ten Puff Balls some oval and evenly shaped. The largest was about 13" high. The next year they appeared again growing – as is their habit – on the fringe of and beyond the area of the 1982 crop. Some were large, one 4' in circumference but flattish in shape. Some did not develop more than an inch in diameter. In 1984 they were there again, 15' from the centre of the 1982 crop. They were first seen by me on August 13, when the largest was a perfect sphere 5" diameter, three days later it had grown to 7" and others were appearing. By September 6th, they were practically over, shrinking and becoming discoloured. There had been fifteen with only one really large one.

In 1983, they appeared in a grass field on Cranslagvourity Farm just under a mile away from Ardroscaidale NS 048658 and were there again the following year. I did not see them myself, but Mrs MacMillan, the farmer's wife, described them as a group of four or five, big but not as big as a football. She had never seen them before. The Kennedys have farmed at Ardroscaidale for many years and have never seen them before. Mrs Sheila Stewart, who was brought up on the farm does not remember seeing them. I have never heard of them on Bute before. A crop of Giant Puff Balls, so round and white and so big is a sight to be remarked upon and remembered. At a certain size they can resemble a skull. No wonder that the French name is Tête de Morte.

While rare in the South West of Scotland, they can be found in the East and are common in South and East England.

Mr Kennedy re-seeded the grass field in 1982 with seed from Masters of King's Lynn where these great fungi are common. I wondered if the spores could have come to Bute among the seed. It has been estimated that a ripe Giant Puff Ball could have seven million million spores.

I took my problem to Dr. Silverside of Paisley College of Technology. He was inclined to think that the mycelium, the "invisible" part of the fungus, could have persisted for generations underground. The exceptionally favourable conditions for fungal growth in 1982, a wet Autumn following a hot Summer, brought them to fruit in such a spectacular fashion. Small button like fruits may have been produced from time to time and gone unnoticed.