

extra female as the "Auntie." Only the very occasional drake was seen near the families.

It was surprising to find the speed at which the families swam. On one particularly choppy day at Stravanan the counters, walking along the shore, could hardly keep up with the ducklings. Eiders spend a lot of their time out of the water on the rocks and sea weed. Their feeding places can be recognised by the debris of whelks, crabs, mussels and sea urchins.

Roger Ratcliffe, Junior Naturalist, undertook part of the 1969 count for me. I am grateful to members of the B.N.H.S. who helped me with various counts, Mrs. MacLagan, Mrs. Buchanan and Miss Brownlee.

RECENT NOTES ON THE BREEDING BIRDS OF SOME SMALL BUTESHIRE ISLANDS

By J. A. GIBSON

For the past fifteen years I have continued regular visits to the small islands of Buteshire, and these notes concern Pladda, Holy Island and Inchmarnock. Each of these islands has had previously published accounts of its birds, and the purpose of these additional notes is to bring our knowledge of the breeding birds up to date.

PLADDA

For previous accounts of the birds see *Glasgow Bird Bulletin*, 3: 55-56 (1954) and *Transactions of the Buteshire Natural History Society*, 14: 87-117 (1955).

SHAG *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

A pair nested in 1961, and one or two pairs have nested from time to time since then.

EIDER *Somateria mollissima*

Has increased steadily; up to ten pairs now nest.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

A pair nested in 1960.

GULLS and TERNS

The recent striking decreases in the gull and tern populations are almost certainly due to human interference. Within recent years picnic trips to Pladda have become very popular, and are now actually advertised in Kildonan general store. Some collecting of eggs does take place, but the main factor is probably the incessant disturbance of the nesting area.

GREATER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

Two pairs have nested since 1966.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*

First nested in 1964, and half-a-dozen pairs by 1966 and 1967. No sign of nesting since.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

Slowly colonised Pladda, and fifteen pairs by 1966. Now down to two-three nests.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

Started nesting in 1962, and had reached twenty pairs by 1966 and 1967. Only two-three pairs in 1968 and 1969.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

Began to nest for the first time in 1964, and rocketed to nearly

200 pairs by 1966. Then well down in 1967, and only two nests in 1968 and four nests in 1969 on the whole island. This is a bit of a mystery. The black-headed gull has always been an uncommon breeding species around Arran, and at the present time I know of nowhere in the Arran group of islands where this gull nests in any numbers.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*

No nesting record since 1954.

COMMON and ARCTIC TERN *Sterna hirundo* and *macrura*

Had increased to a mixed colony of about three hundred pairs in 1966, but a steady decrease since then. Only seventy-five pairs in 1969, and of these nearly sixty pairs were arctic.

ROSEATE TERN *Sterna dougallii*

Adults seen most years since 1960, and at least six in 1965, but breeding not proved. Seven nests in 1966 and three in 1967. None seen since; possibly owing to swamping by black-headed gull.

BLACK GUILLEMOT *Uria grylle*

A steady increase. At least six pairs now nesting, and may well be more. On one occasion in 1966 Ronald MacDonald saw over thirty birds on the sea around Pladda.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

A pair nested on the sheds near the pier in 1967 and 1968.

CROW *Corvus corone*

A pair of apparently pure-bred hoodies nested on the west cliffs in 1967.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

Colonised Pladda about 1959, and now nests widely along the cliffs.

HOLY ISLAND

For previous accounts of the birds see *Glasgow Bird Bulletin*, 3: 38-41 (1954) and *Transactions of the Buteshire Natural History Society*, 14: 87-117 (1955).

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

One pair of cormorants nested in 1968; they were not present in 1969.

SHAG *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

First known to nest in 1949, and about half-a-dozen pairs now nest fairly regularly, amongst the boulders and fallen rocks on the east side.

HERON *Ardea cinerea*

One pair nested in thick thorn scrub on the west side of the island in 1965. Remains of this nest could still be seen in 1968.

EIDER *Somateria mollissima*

A great increase, and many pairs nest all round the shore.

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

A pair apparently attempted to nest at the north in 1962, and got the length of building a fairly substantial nest, but with no ultimate success.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

One pair has nested intermittently since 1961.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

At least one pair now certainly nests most years.

GULLS

All the large gulls — greater black-backed, lesser black-backed and herring — are maintaining their populations.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

There is now a small nesting colony to the north, and a few pairs nest along the east shore.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*

One or two nests on the buildings at the north-west; apparently since 1955.

CROW *Corvus corone*

A good many pairs now nesting. Some hybrids, but most seem to be pure-bred hoodies.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

Several pairs arrived and actually attempted to nest in the west scrub in 1963. They got the length of building some nests but all were pulled out, apparently by crows, of all things. This was an extremely unusual occurrence.

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

No nesting records in the lighthouse garden 'for many years'.

INCHMARNOCK

For previous accounts of the birds see *Transactions of the Buteshire Natural History Society*, 12: 5-21 (1938), *Glasgow Bird Bulletin*, 1: 17-18 (1952), and *Glasgow Bird Bulletin*, 2: 54-57 (1953).

DABCHICK *Podiceps ruficollis*

In 1969 one pair was found nesting at the small lochan near the north.

FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*

Mr. Bogue, of North Farm, told me that a pair of fulmars nested on the south cliffs in 1965. No other record.

SHAG *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

One pair nested in 1968. In 1969 there were at least four nests along the south-west cliffs and shore, right in the thick of the gull colony.

TEAL *Anas crecca*

At least one pair was nesting near the north point in 1969.

EIDER *Somateria mollissima*

A great increase. At least thirty pairs now nesting; possibly more.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

A pair now nests most years; possibly two pairs in 1969.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

One pair still nests occasionally; at least one young bird was reared in 1968.

CORNCRAKE *Crex crex*

Heard calling most years since 1958 and presumably nesting. I did not actually hear any in 1969.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*

Usually a pair nesting near the lochan.

GREATER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

A steady increase. In 1969 I counted twenty-two pairs, nesting all round the island except the mid-east.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

The great gullery, by far the largest in the Clyde area, has continued to increase. The great colony stretches for well over half-a-mile on the south-west part of the island. Both species nest throughout the entire area of the gullery, and the nests are all fairly near the sea, both above and below the cliffs. There is also a small group near the north-west, and a few nest at the extreme south-east. It is worth while giving the known history of this gullery in detail. In 1916 the Rev. J. M. McWilliam counted fifteen pairs each of herring gull and lesser black-backed gull and was told that the large gulls 'had only recently begun to nest' on Inchmarnock. In 1924 there were some 200 pairs of lesser black-backed gulls and about 50 pairs of herring gulls; in 1937 about 300 pairs of each; in 1953 about 200 pairs of lesser black-backed gulls and 350 pairs of herring gulls; in 1958 about 400 pairs of lesser black-backed gulls and 650 pairs of herring gulls; in 1964 some 700 pairs of lesser black-backs and 850 pairs of herring gulls. In 1968 I quickly estimated the population at about 1,000 pairs of each, and in 1969, using grid counts, I reckoned there were at least 1,000 pairs of lesser black-backs and 1,250 pairs of herring gulls. Mr. Bogue, of North Farm, thought that this was considerably underestimated. There is relatively little predation on the Inchmarnock gulls, and there seems to be almost no limit to their increase. I shall continue to watch this colony with interest.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

At least one hundred pairs nesting.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

The small colony at the lochan has picked up again after some lean years; at least twenty-five pairs were nesting in 1969.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

A slow decrease since 1953. The north colony has completely gone, and in 1969 the only common terns were in a small group of about a dozen pairs on the fringe of the gull colony at the south-west point.

ARCTIC TERN *Sterna macrura*

The west colony is considerably disturbed by cattle; there were about thirty pairs in 1969, but many nests had been crushed. I could find no other arctic terns on the island in 1969.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

One pair was nesting in the south-east quarry in 1969, and Mr. Bogue told me it had nested there 'for many years'. In 1938 McWilliam noted that a barn owl 'taken at Inchmarnock many years ago is in the Bute Natural History Museum'.