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	5350

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 Ardroscadale 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 Ardroscadale 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 Ardroscadale 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.

These Bute Puff Balls seen from the Ettrick Bay – Ballianlay Road could be mistaken for recumbent sheep. But the Bute examples are dwarfed when one reads of an American specimen with a diameter of 5' 4" and a circumference of 15', it was only 9½" high.

Ramsbottom describes the skin as being downy at first and then smooth like a white kid glove. At this stage the flesh is firm and white and edible. Unsuccessful attempts were made in Denmark to grow them commercially for food. At this stage too, it used to be used by surgeons to staunch a bleeding wound. The flesh when riper and dry smoulders when lit and can be used to smoke and quieten bees. As with the bracket fungi of the Birch tree it can be used as tinder to carry a light from one house to another or even from one village to another, or to be taken by a country worker in a tin to start his fire for his cup of tea.

There are at least 23 British species of Puff Ball. The one common on Bute is probably Vascellum pratense to be seen lying like white golf balls in the short grass of our foreshores. It makes good eating sliced and fried when the flesh is firm, but remove the skin before cooking. When ripe and the skin dries and bursts one can see it puffing out myriads of spores. I used to think that this was simply how it got its name but the etymologists derive the word puff from the Celtic word puck or the Irish Word puca or the Icelandic or Swedish word puke all denoting an elf or hobgoblin (Rolfe 1925).

I would be most grateful if anyone reading this, knowing of Giant Puff Balls growing anywhere on Bute would let me know.

I acknowledge with thanks Dr Silverside's advice and help in the preparation of this note.

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CYNOGLOSSUM OFFICINALE HOUND'S TONGUE

Dorothy N. Marshall

Hound's Tongue grows freely on the foreshore to the E of the burn which flows into Glencallum Bay (NS 112527). As this is the only known West of Scotland locality for it a fuller note than that published by Dr. J. H. Dickson in the Glasgow Naturalist Part 2 (1981) may be of interest.

As far as I know, it was first recognised by Mrs Margot Young when walking with me about 1959. Then it did not spread, as far as I can remember, more than about 10 yards. It is such an unusual plant I think it unlikely that I would have missed it if it had been growing there much earlier.

Mrs M. Munro saw one or two plants half a mile N of the bay at the Hawk's Neb (NS 114539). about 1961. The plant has not persisted there.

When Dr. W. M. Boyd saw it in 1962 at Glencallum Bay it had spread to some 30 yards. Now 1985, it grows along the foreshore for about 100 yards.

As the S end of Bute is run as a sheep farm, Dr. Boyd suggests some of its hooked seeds might have been caught in the fleece of sheep brought in from off the island some time in the late 1950s.