

COUNT OF EIDER DUCK FAMILIES ROUND THE
SHORES OF BUTE

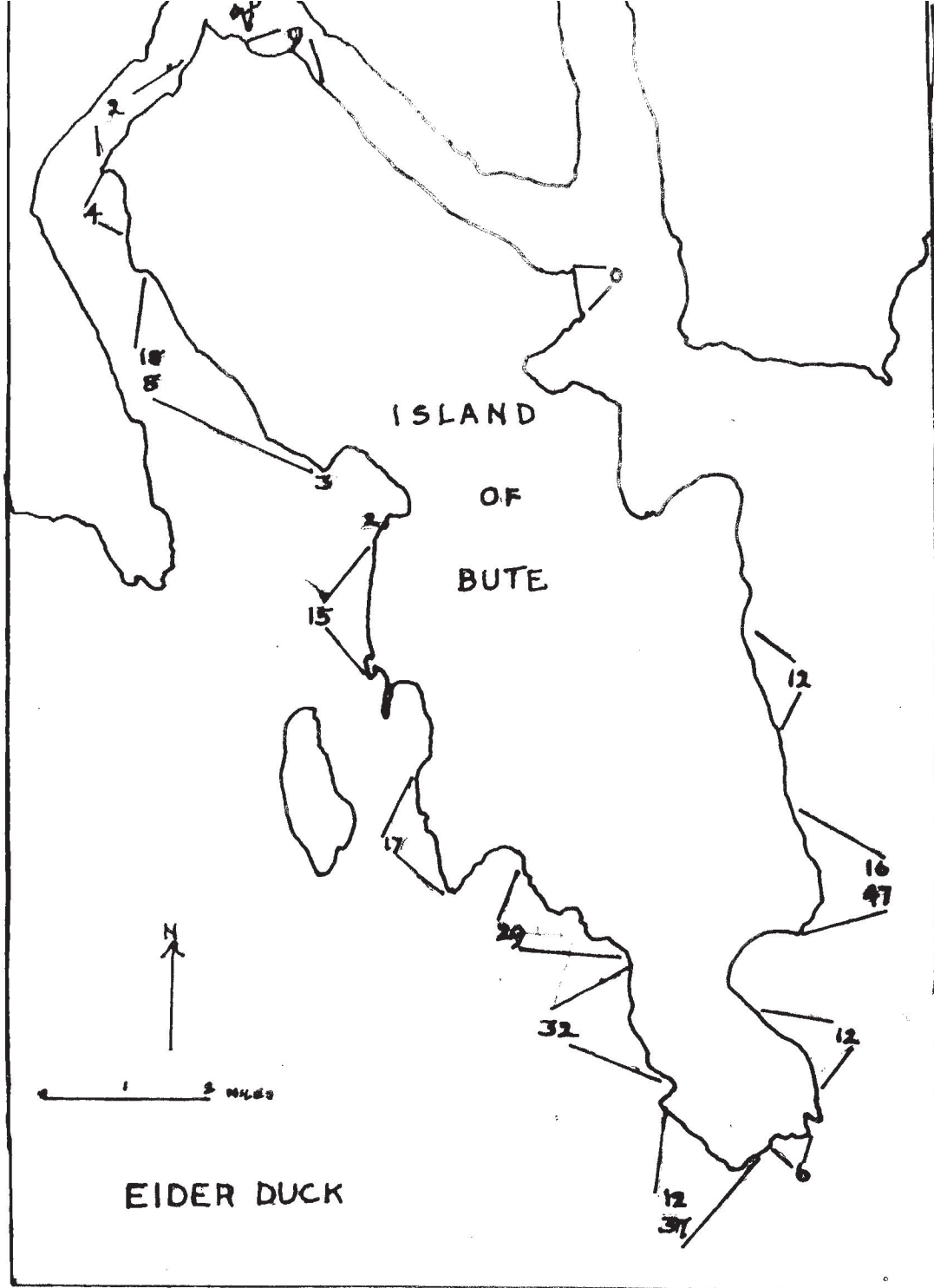
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The recent population explosion of the Eider Duck is one of the ornithological phenomenon of the Clyde area. In his "Birds of Bute" J. M. McWilliam reports that Gray wrote of the Eider in Arran in 1872 "Rare, occasionally finds its way into the Kilbrannan Sound." He further writes, as though it was something of note, that he saw a flock of 7 males, 4 females and 4 young off the Sgatt Island, Loch Fyne, in 1925.

During June and early July, 1968 and 1969, I walked along the foreshores of a great part of Bute counting the Eider Duck families. The chart gives the result of this count which should be taken as an indication rather than a firm census of the Eider population. The family is used as the unit. Ducklings are very vulnerable, a family of 5 being reduced to 2 in very few days. There were few families of well grown ducklings with more than two young. Where two figures are given the upper one is for 1969 and the lower 1968. The other figures represent an average of the two counts. In 1968 there were about three times as many seen at Bruchag and Garroch Head as in 1969; but twice as many were counted in '69 north of Ettrick Bay to Kilmichael. In 1968 over 40 nests were found on the Burnt Islands yet only 9 families were seen between Rhubodach and Balnakeilly in June '69.

Wind and weather may account for some of the differences but there did seem to be slightly fewer duck in 1969 than in the previous year.

The Eider Duck congregate with their families in groups, this is especially so off the Bruchag shore. The counter has to watch while the ducks separate with their ducklings following them before an estimate of the families can be made. Many of the families have two adult ducks with them. M.F.M.M. of the Glasgow Herald refers to this



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