

## The Isle of Colonsay's online community newsletter

Issue 266, February 2014.

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# COMMUNITY HOTEL PURCHASE FALLS THROUGH.

The Colonsay community has been preparing a bid to buy the hotel in Scalasaig for several months. David Johnston, the Chair of the steering committee dealing with this, explains the outcome:

*“The District Valuer came over recently and his detailed report valued the hotel business as it stands at £420,000 as opposed to Alex and Jane Howard’s asking price of £545,000. The steering committee unanimously took the view that to attempt to raise money in excess of the valuation would not be the right course of action and the Howards on their part saw no room to lower their asking price. We offered them the opportunity to discuss matters if they wished, on the basis that we would not go above valuation, but they felt there was no point.*

*The valuation cost £2,100 of which the Colonsay Community Development Company contributed £840 and the rest was met by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The CCDC element of this cost was recouped by the proceeds of the Hogmanay Ceilidh, which also donated £300 to Mary’s Meals. I would like to put on record my gratitude to the members of the steering committee who contributed much to the process, the directors of the development company for their support, and to Alex and Jane Howard for their engagement in the process.*

*We have left it that our steering committee has gone into sleep mode and will awaken if Alex and Jane come back to us on the terms we have outlined. The valuation lasts only for six months after which a new one would need to be obtained.*

*Two subsequent courses of action have been suggested: going down the community right to buy route or attempting to have planning conditions imposed on the hotel that could prevent it being turned into private accommodation.*

*The right to buy is not relevant in this case. To obtain this right is a lengthy process requiring the consent of Scottish Government ministers and has the effect only of giving the community an exclusive right to negotiate a potential purchase once the asset goes on the market. There has to be agreement between vendor and purchaser for the sale to go through and no sale can be forced. After we obtained the valuation, the Howards offered us an exclusive six-month period of negotiation if we wished to try and raise sufficient to interest them in selling. As that was not on our agenda we declined. I hope people understand why the right to buy route is not relevant. Please feel free to contact me if you have a different view or require further explanation.*

*On the potential conversion of the hotel to private accommodation, it is clear there is nothing that can be done in advance to ensure the hotel stays as a hotel. However in response to an enquiry from ourselves, Council Planning Officer Peter Bain, made the planning policy clear:*

*“I can confirm that policy LP COM 2 in the Argyll and Bute Local Plan 2009 sets a presumption against the loss of key rural services (including hotels with public bars) unless a similar facility is*

*available in the same community or close proximity OR all reasonable steps have been taken over a minimum period of 12 months to market the property as a going concern.”*

*Finally, I believe it is very unlikely that the Howards would seek to sell the hotel as anything other than a hotel. However if they tried to, it would be up to the community to make their opinions heard and mount a campaign to stop it, if that was the view of the community.”*

## BURNS’ NIGHT 2014

This year’s event was, by all accounts a great success. Mr Ross Moodie is the man who makes it all happen every year: Well Done and Thanks, Ross!

This year’s host with the most was Mr Gavin Clark, Chairman of CCDC, Proprietor of The Colonsay Pantry and all-round good guy. MC Gav cut an impressive figure in his full Highland regalia (this is, after all, the man with the two-pint hip-flask).



Gavin Clark



The Top Table

Gavin was joined at the top table by fellow A-list celebrities Mrs Diane Clark and wife-and-husband team, Michelle MacDonald and Matthew Cameron. Later, Cammy was to have them rolling in the aisles with his Address to the Lassies, neatly incorporating an uncannily accurate impersonation of “Big” Trev Patrick. Keir also impressed all present with his rendition of Tam O’ Shanter, Michelle triumphantly overcame her nerves to Reply on behalf of the Lassies and there were many other unforgettable contributions from, er, several other memorable performers....



Donald MacAllister accordions the haggis in.



Angus McPhee displays the product of Ross' labours in the kitchen

*The Cornflake would like to thank Katherine Edds for sharing her atmospheric photos.*

## **A TRIBUTE TO MRS FLORA MacNEILL**

Many thanks to Mrs Sheena Pelling for sharing with us the following tribute, written by a dear friend of hers named Doreen:

### **FLORA 1918-2013**

The flickering candle has faded out  
And the peat fire is but a glow  
Her sparkling eyes have closed in rest  
And her smile said, "I have to go".

She lived her life, she laughed and cried  
And faced each day with cheer  
She shared her love and wisdom  
And drew the lonely near.

Remember her when you see the flowers  
Whose names she knew so well  
The pride she had in her island home  
And the tales she loved to tell.

She's happy now, her race is run  
She's earned her peace and rest  
While Andrew plays a Welcome  
To the kindest and the best.

# NATURE UPDATE



## RSPB wildlife notes December and January

During these often cold and wet months, we have been lucky to get great views of some of our most charismatic predators. A resident **peregrine falcon** and three golden eagles (two adults and a juvenile) have been seen swooping over Beinn Oronsay. Later on in this month, Morgan one of our long term volunteers, had a juvenile **golden eagle** gliding low to the ground just 35 meters away from him. Just yesterday, Mike and Val saw two adults in flight and one even had a rat in its talons!

These spectacular birds are quite scarce in the UK with only 440 pairs of eagles found in Scotland, while none are now in England. There are attempts to make the golden eagle the national bird of Scotland and it has already been voted Scotland's favourite wild animal by members of the public.

With all the rain we have had, the reserve looks like a wetland with pools of water found in many fields. Fortunately, some of the plants, like those in the Machair field are adapted to be temporarily submerged over winter.



Purple sandpipers

**duck**. There is a possibility that this was the same female seen a few months back so keep an eye on the sea in calm weather. Flocks of lapwing and golden plover have passed through and the barnacle geese continue to amaze us with fantastic flight formations.

Perhaps the most potentially exciting recent bird sighting was reported by Scot Weatherstone. He was very lucky to spot a **glossy ibis** on Colonsay. In the last month sightings of these beautiful birds have been reported around UK, including Tiree, but if Scot's record is accepted, this would only be the third ever record for Argyll.

This enigmatic bird, about the size of a stork, breeds in the warm areas of much of the world; Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Atlantic side of the Americas. Most European birds winter in Africa but recently, the Spanish population have taken to wintering in the UK and Ireland.

Glossy Ibis on Tiree © John Bowler





The elegantly curved bill of the ibis is used to feel and snap up any prey it finds in shallow wetland habitats or wet fields. This is done either by probing with their bill in the mud and sensing when there is prey to snap up, or by swaying their head side to side with a slightly open bill. This is done while walking forward until some juicy victim is encountered and the bill snaps shut on reflex. Animals like insects, worms, molluscs and crustaceans are a regular part of their diet, but these birds will also go for small snakes, fish, amphibians and nestling birds.

Some historical anglo-saxon references refer to glossy ibises as black curlews. Very apt since that's the first impression many have on first seeing it.

This species has been known to live for over 26 years in captivity. Though not classed as threatened by experts, some populations of these beautiful birds are declining due to loss or damage of the wetland habitats they depend on.

**If anyone else thinks they saw this bird on Colonsay, could they please contact me or call the number below. Many thanks.**

Feel free to email or call with any wildlife observations or questions,

*Raphaelle, Assistant warden Oronsay Reserve*

[raphaelle.flint@rspb.org.uk](mailto:raphaelle.flint@rspb.org.uk)

RSPB office – 01951 200 367

## COLONSAY BOOK FESTIVAL 2014

The festival is only two months away now, and excitement is rising at the prospect of such a strong line-up! Coming back to Colonsay is travel writer Patrick Richardson, who will be talking about his fascination for islands, and in particular those of the Southern Pacific. Also appearing will be novelist and poet Andrew Greig, Lesley Glaister who is the author of several novels and screenplays, Jackie Kay, another prize-winning writer whose works include poetry, novels, children's books and autobiography (*Red Dust Road*), and the mega-successful crime writers Christopher Brookmyre and Val McDermid.

There will also be a creative writing workshop on Sunday morning led by Lesley Glaister, who has taught this subject for many years, first in Sheffield and currently at the University of St Andrews.

There are still a few tickets left, at £10 each; don't delay - get yours today!

For further information, and to book your weekend passes or individual tickets, see the website:

[www.colonsaybookfestival.org.uk](http://www.colonsaybookfestival.org.uk)

We look forward to seeing you all at the end of April.

## McNEILL FAMILY HISTORY: A REQUEST FOR HELP

Mr Roy Holderness has written from New Zealand with the following enquiry:

*"I am a descendant of John McNeill, "The Auld Laird", through my grandmother, Cecil May McNeill, grand-daughter of Alexander Carstairs McNeill (1834-1909). I have been doing an*

*extensive history of the McNeills from my New Zealand perspective. I have compiled an 18 page document with as much information as I have been able to collect from this end of the world. However, I would like to have it read, corrected where necessary, added to and commented on by any of your readers who can contribute to its accuracy and content. I have also collected photos of many McNeills and their relations.*

*If this is of interest to you, or you are able to pass my material on to anyone who can help, please let me know. I note that there does not seem to be any database for the Colonsay McNeills. Such a source would have been of great assistance. I will be constructing a spreadsheet based on my material. This may also be of interest to you or others."*

If you can help Mr Holderness with this, or would like to contact him to discuss further, you can get him at: [Roy & Sandra Holderness](#)

## ISLE OF COLONSAY GOLF CLUB

.... Would like to announce that the Colonsay International All-Comers Open Golf Championship will take place in blazing sunshine on Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

The Club is also organising a trip to Islay, to play the fearsome Machrie Links. This will take place on Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> June.

Liam McNeill still tops the Winter League, with only four weeks to go:

PLAYER	POINTS
L. McNeill	22
D. Binnie	17
S. Weatherstone	14.5
D. Bell	12.5

## SEAL PUPS AT ARDSKENISH





MANY THANKS TO SUE TAYLOR FOR THIS LATEST SELECTION OF TOP PIX.

## THE CORNCRAKE

Many thanks to all the following people for their kind contributions to this edition:  
David Johnston, Mrs Sheena Pelling, Dillie Emslie, Raphaele Flint, Katherine Edds, Roy  
Holderness and Sue Taylor.

This is my last issue, folks. I'd like to express my gratitude to all who have contributed to, or read the paper.

Special thanks to Kevin Byrne.

Next month's edition will have, as Guest Editors, Hannah MacAllister and David Johnston.

I wish them the best of luck.

Please send your contributions for the February edition to:

[David@fairnielawhouse.co.uk](mailto:David@fairnielawhouse.co.uk)