

THE CORNCRAKE

The Isle of Colonsay's Online community newsletter

Get in touch if you have news or comment

Colonsaycorncrake@gmail.com

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Freight crisis – meetings held to try and find a solution

Urgent meetings have been held over the past month to seek a solution to the island freight crisis which is putting a huge strain on Colonsay businesses and households.

A Calmac crackdown on illegal overloading of vans has resulted in charges being hiked by as much as 50% as carriers are forced to put several legal vans on the boat as opposed to one overloaded vehicle.

Island bodies and businesses have come together to try and find ways of easing this burden which is threatening the viability of some Colonsay businesses and putting a strain on household finances.

An urgent meeting of the Argyll Ferries User Group has demanded action from Scottish Government Transport Minister Keith Brown.

The group says ways must be found of cutting the charges to carry small commercial vehicles on Calmac Ferries. In their submission to the minister the FUG highlighted the plight of the Colonsay Hotel. The user group tells the minister the hotel freight bill leap from an average of £492.19 a month to a staggering £953.84 for July.

FUG convener Councillor Duncan MacIntyre told the Minister: "The hotel highlighted that margins are already exceptionally tight and to try and recover this increased operating cost is impossible..... as customers simply do not understand the need to pay a premium for food on the island." Elsewhere one household got a £30 freight bill for carrying £22 worth of hen food and a domestic smoke detector cost £22 to get from Oban.

Community councillor Margaret Keirnan has been investigating the charges on behalf of the CCC and uncovered some anomalies that she has brought to the attention of Transport Scotland – the body that oversees public transport.

Margaret said: "I have asked TS to explain to me how it is that a commercial vehicle travelling the 27 nautical miles to Colonsay is charged £157.58 but the same van travelling 80 nautical miles from Oban to Barra is charged less - £156.84."

The Corncrake will follow developments in the coming weeks.

Colonsay land sale D day nears

Volunteer directors of Colonsay's community development company are waiting to hear if their funding bid to buy land for affordable housing from the island laird has been successful.

The CCDC has applied to the Scottish Land Fund for cash to buy land for four affordable houses based on the district valuer's price of £130,000 for the 12 acre site – a decision is expected soon.

Directors and Highland and Island Enterprise executives met the laird, Alex Howard, recently but it's understood he believes the land to be worth much more.

A source with knowledge of the process said: "We hope to hear from the land fund in the next few weeks.

"If the bid is successful it will be based on the £130,000 valuation which is the maximum the community will get from the land fund

"So there are three courses of action open: Alex accepts the DV's valuation; the directors try to reach agreement on price with him and raise the extra money elsewhere; or they walk away from the purchase altogether.

“This has been going on for about 10 years and if a deal can’t be done the community needs to look elsewhere for land to build affordable housing. “

In a statement for the April 1 issue of The Corncrake issued by the estate it was claimed: “Island housing needs should be a long-term project. Alex has been working with the Colonsay Development Company for two years with a view to selling a parcel of land of around 12 acres which could accommodate up to 50 houses or other buildings. Funding for a feasibility study has been obtained and a number of consultants have visited the island. It is now hoped that the HIE Land Fund will support this potentially transforming project.”

The source said if the land fund bid is successful the ball will be very much in Alex’s court.

Scotland Decides – historic vote just days away

In 18 days’ time Scotland will be a sovereign nation – for 15 hours - as the people decide the constitutional future of the nation. The battle between Yes and No has been going on for the best part of three years – here two of our elected representatives make a final pitch for your support.

From the Yes Camp: MSP Michael Russell, SNP government minister, and from the Better Together side Alan Reid, our Lib Dem Westminster MP.



For the Yes Camp Michael Russell writes:

“In April 2013 the Colonsay Corncrake was one of the first of Argyll’s local newsletters to host an independence referendum debate. Jamie McGrigor and I had a very civilised discussion and answered questions for a couple of hours and then repaired with some of the audience to the hotel for a drink where further debate took place.

“I have taken part in dozens more referendum events since then some of which have been far less even tempered. And with a couple of weeks still to go I remain on the campaign trail with village hall meetings in Luig, Campbeltown, Colintrave, Oban, Dunoon, Islay, Mull, Bute and a host of other places to complete before polling day.

“The key issues of the campaign have varied over the weeks and months but in those closing days one issue predominates - public

Michael Russell MSP

services. Specifically people want to know what a YES or NO vote would do for the NHS which is being rapidly privatised south of the border and which would inevitably find itself under more and more financial pressure in Scotland if we cannot make our own monetary decisions.

“I am certain we need independence to be able to defend our NHS and run health and education as we wish. The core powers are devolved but the purse strings are still controlled by London. As long as that is true we will always be at the mercy of Westminster priorities that presently include flogging off our health services to Tory donors.

“That is totally unacceptable,. We need a better way forward, which Independence provides.

“At virtually every meeting in the last two years I have quoted the second American President John Adams , who in 1776 wrote that he and his fellow countrymen and women, in seeking Independence from Britain were engaged in the task of *“building government anew from the foundations and building it as we choose”*.

“That is a wonderful and exciting thought for our generation too, and for those who come after us. We are uniquely privileged in being able to choose that path - a path that allows us to have a vision of what type of nation we wish to live in, and then work to make that nation a reality.

“I want a country without weapons of mass destruction. A country that is not the fourth most unequal in the developed world. A country where we get the government we vote for.

“The Scottish islands need more powers too. The Scottish Government has already distributed information to every household on the islands that outlines how independence can help. I was very surprised to discover in recent days that the UK Government offering in response makes no mention of the Argyll islands at all, and confines any new advantages to Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. I and my Scottish Cabinet colleagues have made certain that every island - including all the Argyll islands - will benefit from the changes that come about after independence.

“Scotland will soon make its choice. Colonsay has heard the arguments but of course I would be happy to respond to any final questions from any of my constituents, by email or phone but in summary I think that Colonsay, like every part of Argyll & Scotland, can only benefit if it says YES.”



For The No Camp – Alan Reid MP tells The Corncrake:

“When Scotland votes in the referendum, we will face a historic choice which will shape our country and our families’ futures for generations to come.

“Of course Scotland could become an independent country, there’s no doubt about that, but I believe that we will prosper much more if we maintain the ties that we have built up as part of the United Kingdom.

“For over three hundred years, we have achieved so much as part of the United Kingdom.

“Together we built a free and democratic society - a welfare state – a National Health Service.

“We have family, friendship and business links with the rest of the United Kingdom.

“Scotland is a proud nation within a larger state which creates opportunities for our people.

“We're positive about all the identities that we share - Scottish, British, European, citizens of the world.

“I want Scotland to continue to look outwards – to continue play our part in bringing benefits to the wider world.

“We can do that best as part of a strong United Kingdom.

“When our two largest banks crashed five years ago, the size and strength of the UK meant we were able to bail them out and Scottish taxpayers only carried a small part of that cost.

“Even the Yes campaigners recognize that the pound is a strong currency and want to go on using it after Independence. However, that would mean waking out of the UK and then handing all the powers to run our economy to the country we’ve just left. Better to stay in the UK and keep the pound.

“Islands like Colonsay benefit greatly from Royal Mail’s very reliable, go anywhere for the same price postal service throughout the UK.

“When we go abroad we can rely on the strength of a British passport.

“It would be a mistake to see this Referendum as a choice between independence and no change.

“The Referendum is a choice between independence and a Scottish Parliament with far more powers within the United Kingdom.

“The 2012 Scotland Act, already passed at Westminster, will deliver more powers to the Scottish Parliament over the next few years.

“The Liberal Democrats led the way by asking Sir Menzies Campbell to set up a commission to come forward with plans for more powers for the Scottish Parliament.

“His report which recommended extensive new powers for the Parliament is already party policy and all three UK parties have met and signed up to new powers for the Scottish Parliament.

“So, irrespective of the outcome of next year’s UK General Election, far more powers for the Scottish Parliament are guaranteed.

“We can have the best of both worlds – a strong Scottish Parliament to decide our own internal affairs and still be part of a strong UK to look after foreign affairs and defence.

“We will overcome the challenges of the future much more effectively if we continue in partnership with our neighbours and friends throughout the UK.

“Vote to stay in the UK on 18 September.

The Corncrake hopes to bring you the result of the referendum in our October 1 issue.

Emotional return to Tiree for Colonsay Resident

Colonsay resident Sheena Pelling has just returned from a poignant visit to Tiree to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the death of her first husband in one of Scotland’s least known aviation disasters.

Just weeks after their island wartime wedding Sheena’s husband Roy “Steve” Stevenson died, aged just 20, along with 15 other RAF personnel when two planes from the Tiree based 518 Squadron collided head on at 300 feet in thick cloud.

The squadron was based on Tiree from where they flew long and dangerous missions far out into the Atlantic carrying out meteorological observations to allow weather forecasters to help plan crucial allied missions across Europe.

In all 48 members of 518 squadron were killed in crashes as they flew arduous 12 sorties far out into the Atlantic.

Their Halifax Bombers had been stripped of all unnecessary equipment to increase their range with extra fuel tanks.

They flew at a fixed altitude sending back coded readings every half hour to allow accurate forecasts to be produced for military commanders fighting across Europe where weather patterns are often dictated from far out in the ocean.

Sheena was serving on Tiree as a WAAF and met and fell in love with Roy and married on the island – the girl from Helensburgh and man from Nottingham thrown together in a strange far off place by the coincidences of war.

Just weeks after the June wedding, on August 16 1944, Roy's plane and another Halifax collided at 300 feet killing all 16 on board the two aircraft and sending flaming wreckage down onto the airfield narrowly missing the NAAFI hut.



The beautifully tended War Graves of the crash victims

The funerals of those killed was held a short time later on a day of driving rain with the coffins carried on a low loader and the accompanying mourners struggling to keep their footing on the mud soaked road.

One crewman from another of the Halifax's was flying out as the funeral was taking place. He said they dipped their wing as they flew over the burial ground as a mark of respect – he recalled: "I was still crying when we landed in Liverpool".

The importance of the work carried out by 518 squadron is well recorded in WW2 histories – not least providing Churchill with accurate forecasts leading him to order the postponement of the D Day landings by 24 hours to benefit from a weather window forecast with the Tiree airmen's vital information.



*Roy Stevenson served as a meteorological observer
on this converted Halifax Bomber*

The death toll of the crews of 518 squadron speaks for itself – the tales of the airmen have been recorded in various places and gathered together in a recently published book.

The crews talk of flying for hours at a time in appalling weather conditions just 1,000 feet above the Atlantic. One crewman described the seas he saw on one mission as being alike a giant pot of fast boiling jam with waves 100 feet tall heading in no particular direction and the nose cone of their aircraft coming back caked in salt. The storms were not confined to winter – in June, just two months before the fatal crash, crews endured a fearful battering in a full Atlantic storm on their flights but recorded the information that led to the switch of the D Day date and perhaps changed the course of history.

The story may have ended with the crash – however Sheena discovered she was pregnant and gave birth to a boy, called Roy in memory of his father, and settled in Nottingham after the war to help look after him with her late husband's family.

Young Roy pre deceased Sheena but left her four grandchildren. Sheena married again and had three further children, giving a total of 4 children, 11 grandchildren, 13 great grand children, and seven great-great grandchildren.

Speaking to the Corncrake after her return Sheena said she had found the trip exhausting but was very glad to have gone with the support of her sons Iain and Phillip.

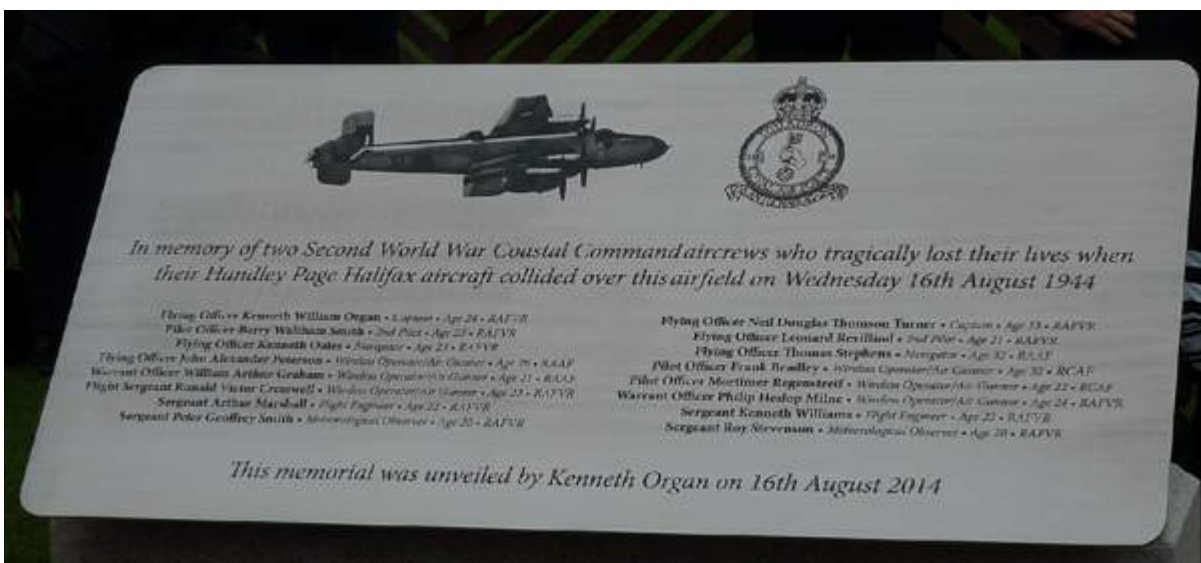
“I attended the ceremony exactly 70 years to the minute after the crash and went to the ceilidh in the evening.

“It was a very moving day and has brought a sense of closure for me all these years later.”

The plaque for the brave airman was arranged by Ken Organ from Sheffield whose 24 year old father was the pilot of one of the planes. Ken coordinated the memorial effort and tracked down relatives of many of those killed along with Tiree doctor John Holliday and war historian Mike Hughes.



*Sheena examines the new commemorative plaque along with
Group Captain Bob Kemp RAF (Rtd)*



The newly unveiled memorial plaque

Families from Australia and Czechoslovakia, as well as across the UK were represented.

More details of the vital work of 518 Squadron and Tiree's wartime history can be found in Tiree – War among the Barley and the Brine, by Mike Hughes and John Holliday, published by the Island's Book Trust – copies are available through the Colonsay Bookshop.

Litter clean up completed:

The remarkable clean up of Colonsay's lengthy coastline has been completed for a second year in a row.

By mid august a small but determined band of volunteers led by Kevin Byrne declared the coastline – 50 miles in total – all to have been cleared of rubbish.

The clean up covers the island's best loved beaches, but also miles of rugged coast that sees volunteers scrambling into steep gullies to retrieve the discarded debris - often wedged into tight crevices.

Kevin said: "We are attempting to remove all flotsam and jetsam at least once per year for proper disposal, in the interests of amenity but more particularly in the interests of wildlife and the environment. The project is run under the auspices of Colonsay Community Council and has received every encouragement from Argyll & Bute Council.



In 2013 over 1350 bags of rubbish were collected, with much the same amount in non-bagged materials (fishboxes, nets, floats, wheels etc.), whereas in 2014 the

total was just under 250 bags (plus equal amount unbagged). Progress has also been made upon about 24 sites presenting special difficulty – these range from old fishing nets embedded in sand through to old engine parts or giant mooring ropes. It is hoped that all of these problem items will have been cleared by the autumn of 2016, but in some cases there may be a special

call for extra volunteers or specialised skills and equipment. Kevin has provided a powerful quad bike to assist with the actual uplifting of collected rubbish, and Seamus very generously provided an excellent trailer to complete the task.



Feeling tired – imagine hauling these off the shore

The work is supplemented by removal of all litter beside lochs, paths, tracks and the roadside; very little litter is to be found and the pupils at Kilchattan monitor the situation carefully – if anything is spotted, they stop the bus and the driver picks it up. This has been part of their activities that led to the school gaining a special environmental award.



By sea and by land the rubbish is gathered in

The overall project has been supported by the GRAB Trust, which awarded some £800 towards costs, and also by a private Trust, which contributed a further £500. Kevin said: "Such support is more than encouraging, and enables us to entertain more ambitious ideas in the field of environmental and recycling activities. We have to thank Jane Rose and Paul Cooke for attracting the attention of those charitable trusts and must also thank all who assisted in the actual work. Christa, Derek and Jane gave sterling support in all weathers, Maghnus skilfully picked up the "dumps" of collected rubbish along the east coast, David has undertaken to remove a large collection from Port na Cuilce and Alex has agreed to remove the VERY large dump from Poll Bán (at Balnahard Point) which will involve a big boat and lots of helpers. Thanks also to the Furze family from Hong Kong, and to Colin Flower and John MacLean, all of whom made major contributions. Very special thanks must go, once again, to George and Danny who have acted for Argyll & Bute Council in loading and removing such great heaps of awkward detritus, well above and beyond the call of duty. "

In 2014, leaflets were produced and distributed by Gavin, Sarah and David, so as to make all visitors aware of what we are trying to achieve; it seems that many of our visitors are now actively assisting the local effort by collecting any rubbish they notice – one or two have gone further and actually "adopted" stretches of coastline as their personal or family project. We hope to start again in April 2015, and this time will begin at the Strand road-end and work clockwise along the Garvard and Ardskenish coasts. Help in the early part of the year is especially useful as we need to clear each section as quickly as possible so as to minimise disturbance to nesting birds.

If any local person is keen to help with the special "problem" ploys, please get in touch with Kevin Byrne on 01951 200320.

Colonsay gears up for the Music Festival

Excitement is building as Colonsay's Music Festival nears.

Tickets are still available for the whole festival – and as usual there will be a limited number of tickets available on the door for all concerts. Curtain up Thursday September 11.

The festival comes hard on the heels of a summer of music which has delighted locals and visitors alike.

Island impresario Donald "Pedie" MacNeill: "The final "Scalasaig Session" of the season took place on Wednesday with an album promoting concert by young traditional band Canach. Canach feature Colonsay's own CaitlinMcNeill along with Robbie Greig on fiddle and Alana MacInnes on whistles and pipes. Their excellent four track CD, simply called Canach is available by contacting canachmusic@gmail.com.

News for The Corncrake – Colonsaycorncrake@gmail.com



Canach – Alana McInnes, Caitlin McNeill and Robbie Greig.

The previous week had Keir Johnston and friends, with Keir as usual delighting his audience with a well chosen Americana set. Half time was enriched by some fine home baking by Grace, particularly the chocolate brownies.

Marc Duff, whistle player extraordinaire managed to make two trips to Colonsay once to play with Mull singer-songwriter Ian Thompson and once as part of the Alastair MacCulloch trio. Both concerts were very well received by locals and visitors alike.

While I was on a holiday enjoying the commonwealth games there were concerts by Corran Raa and the next week by Mary-Ann Kennedy and friends. The latter sounds to have been, possibly the highlight of the summer and the after gig party probably the runner up. This concert was part of a tour Mary-Ann was doing promoting her project Aiseag and was facilitated by Colonsay's Local Development Officers.

It seems a long time ago then that the season was kicked off by the Machrins McNeills who treated us to an excellent selection of songs, some tunes by Caitlin and Liam, and some very tasty cakes by Christine.

All in all a great summer of music.

Ice bucket challenge “problems” makes Colonsay news round the world.

Colonsay made headlines round the world last week after it was reported in the Sun newspaper that the island water plant had shut down because of so many people doing the ice bucket challenge.

The claims saw the island featured in stories in Australia, Hong Kong, across the USA and even in Russia.

The original story quoted brewery director David Johnston. He told the Corncrake: “It is marvellous that such a daft story has been a vehicle to promote the island worldwide – for free.”

Sports News:

Commonwealth Games celebrated on Colonsay

Funding from the Commonwealth games outreach programme allowed the island LDO's to stage a sports day and commonwealth ceilidh for locals and visitors free of any charge.

The first great success of the event was the decision taken at 1pm on a cold wet Saturday afternoon to put the games back by 24 hours – when they were met with sunshine and warmth.

Shots were putted, discs thrown, hills raced and tennis tabled. The big crunch event of the day was the tug of war when an island team took on the rest of the world and won.

(Editors note, in all sporting events on Colonsay when a local team takes on TROTW Colonsay is recorded as winning – no matter what the result).

Contact The Corncrake:

Colonsaycorncrake@gmail.com



Some of the sporting and ceilidh scenes, montages above and below courtesy of Grace MacPhee.



Ceilidh scenes – a commonwealth theme was the order of the evening

The fun of the games was surpassed in the evening by a Commonwealth themed Ceilidh with a huge spread of delicious foods from the commonwealth conjured up by Sarah Moss. Dancing was to the tunes of Liam McNeill and his band.

GOLF

Colonsay exile returns to win the open

On Saturday, 16th August, Magnus Byrne, now living and working on a bigger island (Eileann Hong Kong), won the Isle of Colonsay Golf Open, writes our golf correspondent Scott Weatherstone. He emerged from a field of 23 finely-honed athletes to record a net score of 70, no mean achievement, given the challenging meteorological circumstances. Neil Hutton came an extremely close second, with Donald MacAllister Snr narrowly taking third place from Ian Forest.

The best scratch score of the day, 80, was recorded by Walter Ashcroft, who we have recently welcomed as a new member of the club. The Locals Shield was won by Donald, with Trevor Patrick taking the Nearest The Pin prize.

There was a very enjoyable evening prize-giving ceremony in the hotel, with an excellent hot buffet prepared by Dave Kinnear and colleagues. During the ceremony, we honoured the earlier achievements of Liam McNeill, who won both the Winter League and the Machrie Trophy. We also bade farewell to Liam; he's giving up his greenkeeping job to sail to Uist to study music.

At the more absurd end of the scale, Mr Gavin Clark, Proprietor of the Colonsay Pantry, beat off stiff competition from Mr Keir Johnston, Manager of Colonsay General Store, to record the highest score of the day, a quite extraordinary 147 shots, for which he was "rewarded" with a bottle of port.

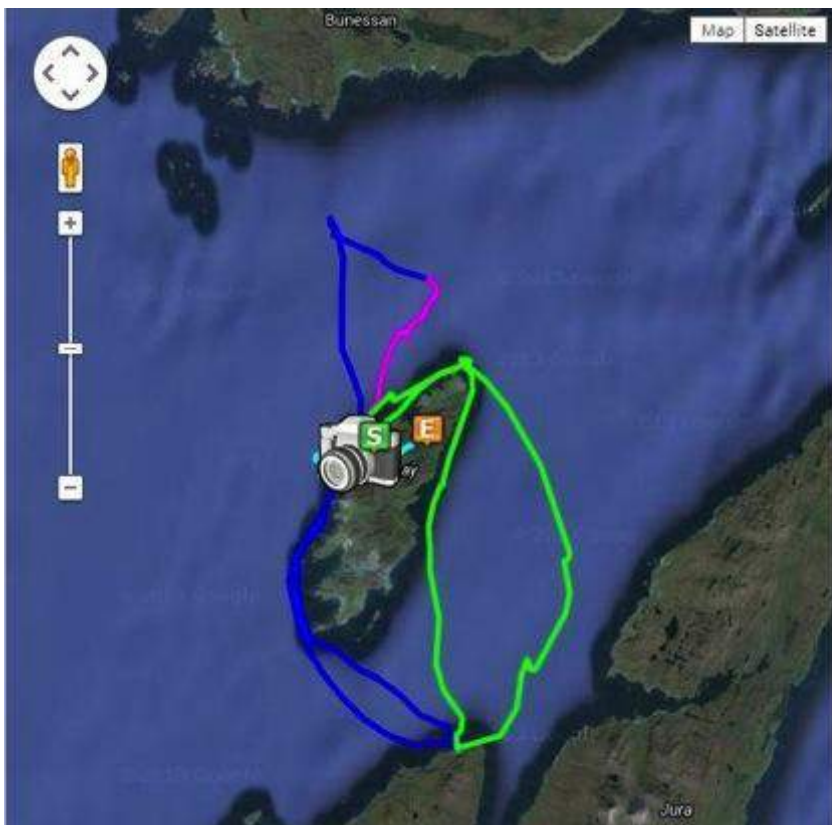


On a topical note, here's a photo of the Open in 1981. You may recognise the gentleman on the left. Then he was an assistant economist with the RBS – now First Minister, Alex Salmond suggested an Open competition; the players said "Yes", and here we are, 33 years later, with the competition still thriving.

Seabird Tracking – article held over from last month – but still fascinating.

It's coming to the end of the Seabird Tracking and Research (STaR) field season on Colonsay for 2014. After a very slow start to the season we began catching in June and then it was rather non-stop until last week! We've recovered 40 GPS tags this year from Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes. Unfortunately we couldn't work with Shags this year as they were badly affected by the stormy winter meaning that a lot of them weren't in good enough condition to breed. The species that we did study were foraging in similar areas to normal such as near the Corryvreckan and the Great Race, although the Torren Rocks off the south west tip of Mull seemed to be more popular than in previous years.

One guillemot travelled down to an area off Islay to feed, choosing to go one direction round the island on the first trip and then to spice it up a bit by going the opposite direction on its second trip! We're starting to understand a lot of the mysteries about where seabirds go to feed at sea and why but sometimes I do just wish I could get inside one of their heads to really understand their decision making and how they learn about these feeding "hotspots" in the first place!



Most of the birds feed within sight of Colonsay which is brilliant as it means enough food is available near to their breeding grounds for them to feed their young. Fair Isle has infamously had guillemots travelling down to the coast off Dundee to get food for their young in previous years, unsurprisingly leading to very low productivity of the colony due to the energy expended on obtaining just one fish. Happily I can report that our team on Fair Isle has this year seen lots

of birds feeding relatively close by off Orkney and therefore also seen an increase in chicks actually surviving to fledging.



If you go down to Pigs Paradise in the next week you should manage to catch a glimpse of the last “jumplings”. That’s the collective term for razorbill and guillemot chicks that are about 15 days old and unable to fly when they make their leap in to the sea for the first time. It’s incredible to think that these tiny cute bundles of fluff will not come back to land to breed until they’re four years old. What a shock the wide expanse of sea must be after being crammed like sardines on to the cliff ledges with their noisy parents! The guillemot chicks are especially good at being heard so if you hear a loud “whinnet” sound from the sea, keep your eyes open for the chick which will be swimming alongside its dad who teaches it what to do for the first few months of its life.

Anyway it’s not just goodbye from the seabird chicks it’s also goodbye from Ruth and goodbye from me. I’d just like to say what a privilege it has been to live on Colonsay for the past four summers and to get to know so many lovely people. Thank you for embracing us into the community here. I will sorely miss it and I’m sure you’ll see me soon on my holidays!

Best wishes,

Tessa

(Tessa.cole@rspb.org.uk)

RSPB wildlife notes August

On Oronsay we have begun surveys of **marsh fritillary** butterfly larval webs. So far we are seeing a further expansion of their range. They can now be found all over Oronsay. A second survey of **Irish ladies tresses** showed 196 flowering spikes!

This year pair of **gadwall** successfully fledged eight young and we had 5 pairs of **shoveler** on the reserve. Breeding wader surveys showed 60 pairs of **lapwing** with 48 chicks seen, and 19 pairs of **redshank** with 29 chicks seen. There were 80 **Arctic tern** nests this year and we saw 31 fledged juvenile birds. There were also three pairs of **little terns** on territory.



Arctic Tern nest with chicks
© Isobel Baker

As some of you may have noticed already, it has been a great year for **corncrake**. This year there were 20 males on Oronsay and 67 on Colonsay! This is the highest ever total of 87 for the two islands.

Winter flocks of **twite** and **linnet** can be seen around the reserve, particularly in the arable and silage fields. We also had a nice flock of 13 **greenfinches** in the same area.

I was lucky to have a rare view of a **short eared owl** flying out of our arable barley crop, perhaps after mice. Mike saw a migrating **ruff** on the pools

This is a great time of year to see birds of prey, as the newly fledged juveniles as well as adults are out hunting independently. On Oronsay we are regularly seeing young hen harriers flying over our in-by fields as well as peregrines and sparrowhawks.

We have continued moth trapping and in one of our latest sessions we found a new species for Oronsay; a **Hedge rustic** moth.



Hedge Rustic © David Mason

The solitary mining bee *Colletes succintus* has been seen in good numbers in the dune systems on Oronsay. They will be enjoying the great heather season we are having.



With the stronger winds we have been experiencing in the last few weeks, lots of **by-the-wind-sailors** have washed up on the beaches. These are Cnidaria - (along with jellyfish) and each individual is in fact a hydroid colony. These beautiful and fascinating creatures float on the surface of the sea using a sail-like protrusion to drift with the wind. While floating, they dangle their tentacles beneath the surface to catch passing plankton. Look for bright blue objects along the western shore front.

Dave Mason has returned for three months of volunteering on Oronsay. Morgan Vaughan (last winters volunteer) has returned to volunteer after his very successful season working on Chesil Beach with little terns.

Lastly, this will be the last corncrake article I write, as I will be leaving these beautiful islands for newer pastures. It has been an extraordinary pleasure knowing the islands and being part of its special community and these four years have been an amazing adventure I shall never forget. I hope very much to stay in touch with you all and hope to meet you again somewhere, sometime in the future

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

Raphaëlle, Assistant warden Oronsay Reserve

raphaëlle.flint@rspb.org.uk

RSPB office – 01951 200 367

First Person

Each Month the Corncrake asks a person with Colonsay connections to tell us a little about themselves and their relationship to the island. This month it is the turn of the Director of the Colonsay Book Festival Dilly Emslie:



How long have you lived on Colonsay?

We moved into our house in Glassard – built by a great Colonsay team – in 2006, and for the last five years we have spent half the year here, from April to September.

What brought you here in the first place/lifelong residents could answer Why have you stayed here/come back?

I first came with Derek for our honeymoon, 40 years ago; we had intended to go to Cyprus, but two weeks before the wedding, the Turks invaded! So instead we spent 10 days in the hotel, which was then run by Angus and Peggy Clark. In around 1984 we started coming for family summer holidays; we meant to do all the Scottish islands, but we loved this place so much that we forgot about the rest and holidayed here at least once or twice a year since then, before building our house.

Colonsay is regarded by many of its residents and visitors as a very special place. What makes the island special to you?

There are so many reasons for finding Colonsay a special place: the light, the colours, the variety of the landscape, the wildlife, especially the birds and flowers, the history and archaeology, the beaches, wild walks; our friends, the bookshop and the General Store, the *craic* at the pier, the pub quiz, the ceilidhs, the community spirit, and the festivals, especially the one dear to my heart at the end of April!

Is there anything that you feel needs to be changed on the island?

Improved broadband service would be appreciated; that may be on the way!

Is there anything that you think needs special protection?

I have a particular concern for the crumbling remains of Riasg Buidhe, which I wish could be stabilised.

What is your favourite place on the island?

Of all the many possible choices, my favourite place has to be Glassard, with the stunning views over to Jura and Islay.

Share a special Colonsay memory with the Corncrake.

Again, there are so many, but family picnics at Cable Bay perhaps stand out.

If you were the absolute ruler of Colonsay what one law would you pass above all others?

I would make it compulsory for everyone to attend the Book Festival!

If you would like to be our First Person, or suggestion someone, please email Colonsaycorncrake@gmail.com

Social News



Seamus savours a pint bought by his newly 18 year sold son Liam

- will there be another one?

Letters to The Corncrake – Colonsaycorncrake@gmail.com

Dear Corncrake

Odd? Strange? That is how I feel about the absence of most mammals on Colonsay-No foxes or badgers, and no hares, no moles. But the list is long...No deer, and yet there are lots on neighbouring islands. No hedgehogs, a mercy, of course, for ground nesting birds- No pine martens (we watched these come to our bird table in the Highlands) No weasels or Stoats, no snakes-or toads or frogs.

Could we introduce Red Squirrels to the woods? So that Colonsay had one more mammal...

Jill Graham-Stewart

Colonsay

Dear Corncrake

You may have seen television coverage of the murder of defenceless Palestinian civilians currently being carried out by Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip, often referred to as the biggest open prison in the world (there is no way out by land, air or sea for residents). If, like me, you are horrified at the barbarity of this assault, at the bombing of United Nations schools, of residential areas, of at least eight hospitals and of electricity and water plants, I hope to give you some suggestions as to how you can express your revulsion.

I was lucky enough, in 2007, to visit the West Bank in Palestine, illegally occupied by Israel. I soon realised that I was looking, in my view, at the greatest injustice on the face of the Earth. I made some good friends there (the hospitality of the Palestinian people is unbelievable). I also met some brave Israeli citizens who dare to stand up against their government's brutal policies. Shortly after I returned to Scotland, the Israeli army invaded Gaza, resulting in disproportionate death-tolls to those of the current onslaught: 1,330 Palestinians were killed (79% being civilians) and 4,336 were injured (mostly civilians); 14 Israelis died (21% civilians) and 518 were injured. These horrifying experiences changed my life and I subsequently spent many years campaigning with the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

If, like me, you would like to make a stand for justice for Palestine, here are a few ideas: Contact our MP Alan Reid, the UK Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond, or send a protest letter to the Israeli Embassy.

Scott Weatherstone.

Colonsay

The Corncrake – your views please

The Corncrake now appears in a variety of formats on the Colonsay.org website. Tell us what you think – is it improved, can you find the news you want easily? What about the contents – is The Corncarke covering the stories you want to read about? The Corncrake aims to be indispensable to the wider Colonsay community – are we doing our job? Let us know

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Piershed Tales

The piershed at ferry time is the place to find out what's going on – sometimes the stories are even true!

*One of the Westside crofts has been let to a new tenant*An island based rib suffered a smashed windscreen in heavy weather one day – and flat batteries the next*Flora's house has been sold*The first of the island lambs have gone off to Dalmally auction*The laird has put another building plot up for sale near Keith*There are more mackerel than ever*Island sparkie Donald MacAllister turns thirty next week*Calmac put on an extra sailing to stop rooms and houses being double booked when a Sunday ferry was cancelled – new guests would have arrived Monday and existing ones would not have been able to leave until Tuesday*There was flash flooding at Glassard*A lightning strike set fire to an electricity pole on the Balnahard track*Publication of the CCDC and Community Council minutes on the community website seems to have stopped*William Joll is to go to Coll to examine their recycling methods which are believed to be superior to ours*Who is behind the Scottish Country Dance lessons being offered?*



Get in Touch – we want to hear your news and views

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