

The Corncrake May 2015

Greetings – and an apology. This issue is sadly very late and very restricted in its coverage, since the temporary editor was away for most of April having a super time with the younger generations in Hong Kong and has been overwhelmed with all the activities of Springtime In Colonsay ever since.



THE GENERAL ELECTION:

Queen Elizabeth I kindly remarked “We have quite forgot the fart” to put at ease the courtier returning from some years in the wilderness. Let us hope that the electorate can say as much, concerning the Moat, the Duck House, the Cash for Questions, the Iraq War, Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Banking Crisis. After all, they all of them mean well and in every case could claim our mandate! A big turnout will show that we have quite forgot.

THE FERRY DEBACLE

As readers will be aware, there was considerable surprise and disappointment when the Good Friday ferry turned back, hugging the Mull shore in a northwesterly blow and encountering Force 9 conditions. It would have been less surprising if the Hebridean Princess was not known to be making a good passage from Colonsay to Oban at the same time, pushing against the wind, but rather closer to the Garvellochs and encountering Force 7 conditions, which were also being observed in Colonsay. Soon afterwards, various unexplained problems arose, leading to an extremely sketchy and erratic ferry service for the rest of the month.

As can be imagined, Colonsay Community Council and many individuals became increasingly concerned, and the situation was not helped by a resolute refusal from CalMac management to make any meaningful communication. Eventually the issue reached the public press, whereupon CalMac management bruted the usual platitudes about weather, mechanical problems, need to make balanced decisions etc. They totally failed to address the nub of the situation – the role of management.

Everybody living in Colonsay lives in the real world – things go wrong! Machinery breaks, the weather gets rough, people fail to turn up for work, decisions made in good faith might be questionable in hindsight – this is the reality of life and Colonsay folk do not pretend to live in some special Shangri-la. On the other hand, this extended month-long disruption created a real crisis for Colonsay, yet senior management in CalMac seemed to have lost the plot. Instead of implementing simple crisis-management procedures, they were desperately hoping that everything would blow over and meantime issuing press statements covering a range of glittering awards. The awards were

doubtless well-earned, but Colonsay needed (and deserved) a sensible and measured communication from senior management, explain what exactly was going wrong, what plans were afoot to correct it, and what was the timescale before the implantation of Plan B if correction was not possible.

It is time that CalMac caught up with management practice elsewhere. When things go wrong, face up the situation, admit the facts and say what steps are being taken. It is very strange to think that people who have evidently read the text-books have missed this crucial rule for the 21st century. The other rule – when things go wrong, it is not good practice to try to blame the consumer!

THE AIR SERVICE

Residents were shocked to discover that our air-service is about to be suspended sine diem. It will be remembered that Argyll & Bute overcame enormous odds to establish CAA approved aerodromes at Colonsay and Coll, apparently in the face of outrageous and unjustifiable sniping from private vested interests elsewhere. The then obtained EU funding to support a scheduled air-service, a major benefit of which being to permit High School students to get home for the weekends. The original carrier unfortunately was unable to maintain the service, whereupon the current operator took over. Throughout the existence of the service, Argyll & Bute and the flight operator have been magnificent – the service has been very reliable and although slightly more expensive than had been hoped it has been well-patronised. During the recent ferry debacle, for example, the air service did permit numerous individuals to fulfil hospital appointments which are very difficult to reschedule. Perhaps we have been too quiet in our praise, but even persons who were originally unhappy at the idea of an air service have been won over – it has now become a vital part of our infrastructure.

As far as is known, the contract is up for renewal and there is a funding gap between the amount that A&B feels justified in paying and the amount that the existing operator would wish to charge. One cannot comment on that situation, but one can imagine that both parties are fully committed to trying to resolve it. There are many comparable routes and one imagines that both parties are studying the underlying costs; it might be that a third-party could help in the negotiations and it is possible that an entirely new arrangement is required. One could imagine CMAL/CalMac being a possible operator, or a private company such as SERCO, or perhaps some existing airline might find a use for such an operation as part of a bigger plan. In the meantime, our highly-trained fire-crew is to be stood down, involving a financial hit to the personnel involved, and the rest of us are left more vulnerable than ever to forces beyond our control.

MacPHEE-BAGGING



On Monday 4th, there was a great turnout for a tour of all of Colonsay's 300ft peaks (the MacPhees), a 20 mile sponsored circuit in aid of Educational Travel for students at the primary school. The pupils themselves were out in force – and did extremely well, completing all three of the initial peaks. Rosie was the first to reach the summit of Carnan Eoin, possibly because she followed the path whilst Felix decided it would be more exciting and difficult to struggle through the heather; he made amazing progress and would happily have kept going if he had not been withdrawn after the third. Ella was like a gazelle and would certainly have been game for the first 7 peaks; Ella seems to be tempted by free-running and at one point was discovered climbing the vertical face of a rockwall. Meanwhile Eve claimed the title of bravest person – on the slopes of A' Bheinn Bheag there is one of MacPhee's hiding places and as soon as it was pointed out, Eve boldly explored it on behalf of us all. After the first 7 summits, numbers were reduced but the circuit was completed in full by Caitlin Collins, Derek Emslie, Kevin Byrne and Lola. Sponsorship forms raised £264.00 and there were further sums raised by JustGiving and also through forms promoted by the pupils themselves – if all goes well, it is hoped that maybe £400 will be raised.

THE DIRECTION PLATE



Readers may have seen a notice, still online together with a picture : MISSING: This important and valuable bronze direction plate disappeared from Beinn a' Gudairean between September 8th and Christmas 2011; if you can help trace it, please get in touch. The police investigation remains open, Case Ref: LB01220612 and they will welcome information.... A reward of £1,000 can be paid to whoever can find it and get it safely returned... no questions asked.



Picture courtesy Ruari Cummins

Incredibly, after hours of fruitless searching over the years, the plate was discovered yesterday, barely 6ft from the heavily-used main path from the Old Road to the trig-point. It was a bit bent and badly weathered but intact. Steps will now be taken for its restoration and subsequent very secure re-instatement. Happily the finder has waived the reward!

COLONSAY FESTIVAL OF SPRING

What a triumph! It is still in full flow and perhaps we could ask for a report afterwards? Events to date have been heavily subscribed, comments and feedback are wonderful. Casual observation saw a queue of cars from Kiloran farmhouse to the Old Hall, suggesting that William Joll had a good turnout for bread-making; on the night of May 4th, so many people turned up for the talk by Tannis on McNeill history that the room was completely filled and some of us will await a future presentation; David had an enthusiastic turnout for his farmwalk in challenging conditions, as did David Jardine for his Oransay walk. Eight people came to look at the archaeology of Garvard, there were two enthusiastic bands of people on the drystone dyking practical course, and a full house for the lecture. Enough burbling – go to <http://www.colonsayevents.co.uk/> and you can download details for each of the three weeks involved.

COLONSAY BOOK FESTIVAL

Your correspondent attended this year's festival – no longer being precluded by actually being employed elsewhere – and enjoyed it immensely, has already booked for next year! Details of 2016 events will be found at <http://www.colonsaybookfestival.org.uk/festival/>

Unfortunately there is no time to do justice to the event in this mini-edition of The Corncrake, and I do apologise. Basically the format consisted of one-hour slots in which each author gave a presentation (riveting in every case) followed by Q&A. These slots were interspersed by 30 minute breaks to take tea or soup, baking, filled rolls etc. (delicious, and organised by Hannah and her team), or indeed to purchase copies of the books, get them signed by the author etc.. Your correspondent found this to be an excellent format.

William Letford, the poet, gave an extraordinarily polished and gripping presentation – he was a true highlight, not to be missed, and he was amongst strong competition. Aline Templeton described her work, centred upon crime and detection set in Dumfriess & Galloway, and the ways in which she achieves verisimilitude; an interesting contrast with Sarah Maitland, who lives in that area and who treasures the benefits of solitude, unfazed by any fictional crimewave. Sarah read from Mosswhitch, having described the background to a series of stories, all based upon the specific knowledge and background that had been vouchsafed to her by specialists in various arcane and academic fields. James Buchan gave an account of an extraordinary Scottish financial genius, and it was fascinating to see the breadth and depth of his knowledge of such varied interests (his study of Iran was on sale in the hall and caught my own attention). Proceedings finished with a presentation by Mary Contini, again of particular interest to yours truly, as it outlined the history Valvona and Crolla within the context of the emigrant phenomenon (obviously enough, Italian in this case) – Mary was assisted by Pru Irvine in the role of agent provocateur and they made a great double act.

Many congratulations to the splendid Book Festival committee and especial thanks to Dilly Emslie for her amazing organisational skills in the middle of a wonderful distraction – having just become a newly-fledged and full accredited grandmother. Well done and all best wishes from us all.

HAZEL ROSE

Hazel is one of 3 finalist for "Graduates In The Spotlight" competition! This is through Nude Jewellery which is a gallery in Mayfair London. If she wins she gets the opportunity to show her jewellery in the gallery and get lots of publicity. Winning relies upon getting the most votes so if anyone would like to do this follow this link or go to the Nude Jewellery website and go onto the blog. It requires logging in first using either a facebook account or email. Once this is done then return to the blog page and a drop down box opens under 'vote for your graduate in the spotlight'.

Hazel's home is Colonsay, she trained at the School of Jewellery in Birmingham and has a BA Hons. in Jewellery and Silversmithing. She was awarded the Birmingham Assay office 'Most Commercial Design' in June 2014. She now has a workshop in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham. If you would like to see more of her jewellery go to her website.

http://www.nudejewellery.co.uk/blog/read_127549/graduates-in-the-spotlight-time-to-vote.html

Hazels website: <http://www.hazelrosejewellerydesigns.co.uk/>

MARINE HARVEST

We gather that there are a number of Colonsay applicants for the twelve positions on offer, and that at least one person has been for induction training – which was apparently stimulating and encouraging. The company has applied for permanent moorings and for permission to build a suitable shore-based facility. Things are looking good – this is a world-leading company with excellent credentials and a commitment to the very highest of operational standards. It is not the Colonsay way to show too much enthusiasm for new projects or facilities but, in a quiet way, enthusiasm is mounting and Marine Harvest will find that this is a great place to do business.

RSPB NATURE NOTES

April has really seen spring begin on Oronsay. We have started to see familiar migrants return and some exciting visitors passing through too.



We have had several flocks of black-tailed godwits (Icelandic race) stopping over on Oronsay on their way north the last few weeks. These magnificent waders breed in Iceland, the Faroes and Shetland. Amongst the flocks we've managed to spot two colour ringed godwits, both with interesting histories. One ringed as a chick in Iceland in 2012 has been spotted visiting Devon, Wales and Ireland in the last few years. The other godwit ringed, as an adult in Iceland has been seen in Essex and Suffolk since it was ringed in 2009. It's really fascinating to be able to build up a picture on the migration routes these birds are taking on their way to and from their breeding grounds. The godwits are coming into their bright orange breeding plumage, which is particularly vivid on the male birds.



We had an early dotterel on the 29th which was fantastic to see amongst the golden plover, which are looking very smart in their breeding plumage now. Like the barnacle geese, the golden plover will likely to head north any day now towards their breeding grounds.



The wheatear seem to be everywhere, along with plenty of white wagtails – We've had counts of up to 13 white wags at a time on Oronsay. Cuckoos are being heard on Colonsay, a sure sign spring is really underway. Sedge and willow warblers have been heard singing on Oronsay too. With many migrants arriving to breed and passing through we are also seeing the departure of our overwintering birds. The geese have been getting restless with many taking to the wing and heading for breeding grounds in Greenland.

We've had several sightings of merlin too this month. We saw a male merlin tucking into a meadow pipit while we were out early checking for new lambs and surveying for breeding waders.



We also spotted this ruff on Oronsay which took a moment to identify at a distance as it is just coming into its breeding plumage. Spring records for ruff are not overly frequent so we were very pleased to see this one.

The pools on Oronsay have provided some great views of waders and waterfowl in April. Gadwall, wigeon, teal, mallard have all been seen along with more unusual visitors, pintail and garganey which are very welcome migrants.



What to look out for in May

With migration underway, lot of birds will be returning to Colonsay and Oronsay to breed and many will also be passing through on their way to breeding grounds. Listen out for corn crakes which should be back any day. They're already calling on Islay and Tiree, so they are north and south of us already!

Please do let us know about any exciting migrants you spot!

Morgan, Assistant Warden Oronsay Reserve

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THE EASTER SHOOT

The shoot was held at Machrins on on Sunday the 5th of April:

Angs and Ella McFadyen Memorial Cup

1st- Donald MacAllister Snr

2nd- Donald MacAllister Jnr

3rd- Neill Titterton

Donald Clark Cup

1st- Donald MacAllister Snr

2nd- Donald MacAllister Jnr

3rd- Les Robinson

Morag Paris Cup

1st- Les Robinson

2nd- Bob Pocklington

3rd- Donald MacAllister Snr

Championship Cup

1st-Donald MacAllister Jnr

2nd-Donald MacAllister Snr

3rd-Les Robinson

Milligan Mug

1st- Donald MacAllister Snr

2nd- Donald MacAllister Jnr

3rd- Les Robinson

Hester MacAllister Cup (double rise)

1st- Dave Binnie

2nd- Neill Titterton

3rd- Les Robinson

Alasdair McNeill Memorial Cup (Aggrigate)

1st- Donald MacAllister Snr

2nd- Donald MacAllister Jnr

3rd- Les Robinson

Ladies

Holly Nisbet

Letters etc.

No letters received.

In Conclusion

The Corncrake is published to keep all our friends in touch with life on the island and invites contributions. Brief genealogical and related queries are also welcome from Colbhasachs overseas, as are obituaries and family traditions relating to Colonsay emigrants. The current edition was produced Kevin Byrne, as a temporary editor, and any comments will be welcomed if addressed to byrne@colonsay.org.uk As usual, it is not intended to be completely anodyne, but any errors or omissions are regretted, and anything seriously annoying will if possible be suitably modified. Please note that we are **still looking for a new editor** – any candidate should contact any member of the CCDC Board (which happens to own the publication and to be the ultimate governor).