

South Arran Marine Protected Area

What about the birds?

Introduction

This is a response to Marine Scotland's consultation on the Government's proposed network of 33 Scottish Marine Protected Areas. This includes four MPAs in the Clyde with one of these being the proposed South Arran MPA.

In general the proposed MPA network represents an exciting opportunity for Scotland and our coastal communities. The proposal is embraced wholeheartedly.

The Arran MPA is an opportunity to bring real environmental, social and economic benefits by protecting and helping to restore fragile marine habitats in our waters. Fish spawning and nursery grounds as well as intricate maerl beds will receive long overdue protection from bottom trawling and dredging if the proposal is properly implemented.

What about the birds?

When I read the government proposals, I found this quote coming into my mind "*When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.*" It is from John Muir the Scottish born explorer and father of conservation writing in one of his books *My first Summer in the Sierras* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911. Over one hundred years ago, he had a very clear idea about the interconnectedness of life on the planet.

In the South Arran MPA there is no mention of birds. There is no mention of those species that depend totally or largely on the sea like Gannet, Eider, Black Guillemot, Arctic Tern. There is no mention of those species that are totally or largely dependent on the shore and intertidal zones like Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover. To me that is a serious omission.

Birds to use the jargon of the consultation should be recognised as "marine priority features". Bird distributions can be monitored and the information collected could be used to indicate the health of the marine environment.

Arran Natural History Society, the Monitoring of Birds and the South Arran MPA

The ANHS does have a base of information on the birds in the proposed South Arran MPA.

The ANHS produces each year an annual bird report (REF1).

More specifically and contributing to these reports are the monthly British Trust for Ornithology Wetland Bird Surveys which are carried out in designated areas throughout the UK on a specified Sunday each month. There are eight shores on Arran walked by members of ANHS, four in the Arran MPA namely Lamlash, Whiting Bay, Kildonan and Blackwaterfoot.(Appendix 1). Attached are a couple of screen prints to give you an insight into the data that has been collected by ANHS people.(Appendix 2) As you can see from the first slide this data goes back over forty years and as you can see from the second slide it can be interrogated in some detail.

In addition, the ANHS supported the latest national atlas, Bird Atlas 2007–2011. This is a partnership between the British Trust for Ornithology, BirdWatch Ireland and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club covering both breeding and wintering birds (REF2)

Alongside the fieldwork for the national atlas, the Arran Natural History organised additional fieldwork with the aim of producing a detailed local atlas of distribution and abundance for all bird species. To gather enough data to do this, every area in Arran has been surveyed. In all there are around one hundred and forty tetrads (2x2 kmsq) surveyed across Arran. Each tetrad has been surveyed twice during winter and twice during the breeding season, using the same methodology as used for the National Atlas.

The annual bird reports, the WeBS survey and the local atlas work means that the ANHS has collected a lot of data over the last five years 2008-2012. Focusing on the twenty five tetrads, which cover the coastal area of the South Arran MPA from Clauchlands Point in the east to Drumadoon Point in the west including Holy Isle and Pladda, the number of bird sightings recorded was almost 11,000 on over 170 species of birds.

Of those species, 81 are either totally or largely dependent on the sea or the intertidal zones. A summary of the data of these species is shown in (Appendix 3). For each species the number of years that it was recorded is shown maximum five, the number of tetrads in which it was seen maximum twenty five and the largest group seen is shown.

As well as these species, there are species that move to the coast in winter from our rivers and burns like Dipper seen in five years in twelve tetrads, Kingfisher seen in four years in two tetrads and Grey Wagtail seen in five years in thirteen tetrads.

In addition there are large number of species while not totally dependent on the marine environment at migration times move through the coastal areas where there is ready access to food like kelp flies. Again selecting three examples which appear every year, White Wagtail was recorded in 12 tetrads largest group 96, Linnet in 15 tetrads largest group 300 and Swallow in 21 tetrads largest group 150. With the migrants come birds of prey. For example Merlin was recorded in 12 tetrads and Peregrine in 18.

This broad brush look at the data for the South Arran MPA with over 170 species of which 81 are totally or largely dependent on the sea clearly indicates that the proposed MPA is an important area for birds. This is true of the breeding season, migration times and during the winter.

The broad brush look may however hide underlying concerns, namely what is happening to seabird populations. For example there has been a more focused look at Eiders not just round Arran but in the whole Clyde estuary. The annual survey work of Chris Waltho shows a 67% decline in Eider population between 1997 and 2012.(REF 3)

Seabirds and Scotland

Scotland holds internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds and supports the majority of the UK's breeding seabirds. Many breed in large colonies. It is recognised that seabirds are useful and important indicators for assessing the state of the marine environment. They rely on the sea but breed on the land and are therefore relatively easy to monitor regularly at their breeding colonies. There is none or very little monitoring of seabirds in their feeding areas.

Currently there is legislation in place that protects birds including seabirds at their breeding colonies but there is no legislation currently protecting areas where seabirds feed. This should be a feature of all the proposed Scottish MPA.

Seabirds and South Arran MPA

As stated earlier, the proposed MPA is an important area for birds. This is true of the breeding season, migration times and during the winter.

In the South Arran MPA there are small breeding colonies of seabirds on for example Holy Isle and Pladda. In addition the South Arran MPA is an important feeding area for seabirds including the internationally important seabird colony on Ailsa Craig.

Conclusion

Birds should be included in the systematic monitoring of the South Arran MPA. The absence of birds as marine priority features in the present proposal is in my opinion a serious omission.

The systematic monitoring of a select group of seabirds in the South Arran MPA would provide important indicators for assessing the state not only of the birds but of the marine environment.

The birds selected for monitoring is a matter for discussion but I would suggest that it should include Black Guillemot, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser and Oystercatcher, all species which are relatively easily recognised and which between them feed on a range of marine foodstuffs.

Whatever the selected species, the ANHS members with their collective experience of regular recording are in an ideal position to carry out this monitoring.

Jim Cassels
Bird Recorder
Arran Natural History Society
August 2013

References

1. Cassels, J. (ed) 2008 The Arran Bird Report 2008. Arran Natural History Society
Cassels, J. (ed) 2009 The Arran Bird Report 2009. Arran Natural History Society
Cassels, J. (ed) 2010 The Arran Bird Report 2010. Arran Natural History Society
Cassels, J. (ed) 2011 The Arran Bird Report 2011. Arran Natural History Society
2. BirdAtlas home | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas>

Bird Atlas 2007-2011 http://www.arranbirding.co.uk/bird_atlas_2007-2011.html
3. Clyde_eider_news_no_11_aug_2012.pdf
http://www.arranbirding.co.uk/files/clyde_eider_news_no_11_aug_2012.pdf

Appendix 1

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is the monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK, which aims to provide the principal data for the conservation of their populations and wetland habitats. The UK is of outstanding international importance for waterbirds. Lying on some of the major flyways for Arctic-nesting species, large numbers of waterbirds are attracted, especially during winter, by the relatively mild climate and extensive areas of wetland, notably estuaries. The UK thus has both moral and legal obligations to conserve both these waterbirds and the wetlands upon which they depend. The UK has ratified the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) of the 'Bonn' Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. AEWA entered into force in 1999. It is a specific Agreement requiring nations to take coordinated measures to conserve migratory waterbirds given their particular vulnerability due to their migration over long distances and their dependence on networks that are decreasing in extent and becoming degraded through non-sustainable human activities. Article three of the Agreement requires, among other things, that sites and habitats for migratory waterbirds are identified, protected and managed appropriately, that parties initiate or support research into the ecology of these species, and exchange information and results. Explicit in this Agreement is that adequate monitoring programmes are set in place to fulfil these objectives and the Action Plan to the Agreement specifically requires that nations endeavour to monitor waterbird populations.

The data collected are used to assess the size of waterbird populations, determine trends in numbers and distribution, and assess the importance of individual sites for waterbirds, in line with the requirements of international conservation Conventions and Directives. Continuing a tradition [begun in 1947](#), around 3,000 volunteer counters participate in synchronised monthly counts at wetlands of all habitat types, mainly during the winter period.

WeBS is a [partnership](#) between the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (the latter on behalf of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage) in association with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

On Arran eight lengths of coastline are monitored each month by members of the ANHS.

Four of these are within the proposed MPA namely Lamlash Bay, Whiting Bay, Kildonan and Blackwaterfoot.

Appendix 3

	Summary of Data 2008-2012			
	South Arran Marine Protection Area			
	Number of Years		Number of Tetrads	
	Total 5		Total 25	Largest Group
Species				
Arctic Skua	2		3	1
Arctic Tern	5		9	30
Bar tailed godwit	5		6	4
Barnacle goose	3		2	34
Black Guillemot	5		11	60
Black necked grebe	1		1	1
Black-headed Gull	5		14	29
Black-tailed Godwit	2		3	1
Black-throated Diver	5		10	12
Brent goose	3		2	2
Canada goose	5		14	22
Common Gull	5		20	500
Common Sandpiper	5		12	8
Common Scoter	1		1	7
Common Tern	2		2	1
Cormorant	5		17	20
Cory's Shearwater	1		1	1
Curlew	5		20	400
Dunlin	5		11	23
Eider	5		21	113
Fulmar	5		14	60
Gannet	5		22	300
Glaucous gull	1		1	1
Golden plover	5		7	250
Goldeneye	5		12	12
Goosander	5		9	4
Great Black-backed Gull	5		20	50
Great crested grebe	4		4	1
Great northern diver	5		15	30

(continued)

	Summary of Data 2008-2012				
	South Arran Marine Protection Area				
	Number of Years		Number of Tetrads		Largest Group
	Total 5		Total 25		
Great skua	4		3		1
Greenshank	5		8		10
Grey heron	5		20		14
Grey plover	4		4		2
Greylag Geese	5		13		400
Guillemot	5		10		3000
Herring gull	5		20		900
Iceland gull	2		5		2
Jack snipe	3		5		10
Kittiwake	5		5		2500
Knot	5		5		14
Lapwing	5		15		80
Lesser Black-backed Gull	5		18		400
Little grebe	5		8		2
Long-tailed Skua	1		1		2
Mallard	5		20		64
Mandarin Duck	1		2		1
Manx shearwater	5		11		1000
Mute Swan	5		14		20
Osprey	3		3		1
Oystercatcher	5		20		100
Pink footed goose	4		4		35
Pintail	3		4		2
Pochard	1		1		1
Pomarine skua	1		1		2
Puffin	4		5		2
Purple sandpiper	5		8		19
Razorbill	5		8		100
Red necked grebe	2		1		1
Red-breasted Merganser	5		19		21
Red-throated Diver	5		15		8
Redshank	5		15		36
Ringed Plover	5		17		88
Rock pipit	5		17		40
Sanderling	5		6		18
Sandwich tern	5		10		6
Scaup	2		2		1

(continued)

	Summary of Data 2008-2012			
	South Arran Marine Protection Area			
	Number of Years		Number of Tetrads	Largest Group
	Total 5		Total 25	
Shag	5		20	150
Shelduck	5		15	23
Shoveler	1		1	2
Slavonian grebe	3		2	1
Snipe	5		11	10
Sooty shearwater	1		1	1
Storm petrel	1		1	2
Teal	5		8	120
Tufted duck	2		3	2
Turnstone	5		14	80
Whimbrel	5		12	39
White tailed eagle	3		10	1
Whooper swan	5		15	100
Wigeon	5		13	40
Wood Sandpiper	1		1	1