

The Birds of Canna – A guide and checklist to the birds of Canna.

Check list and text below taken from National Trust for Scotland publication *The Birds of Canna – A guide and checklist to the birds of Canna*.

The National Trust for Scotland gratefully acknowledges the work of Bob Swann and his assistance in the preparation of the publication.

The first recorded visit of an ornithologist to Canna was in 1881 by J A Harvie-Brown. He was to be followed by many others, most of whom kept list of the birds they had seen on their visits.

The first published list of the island's birds appeared in the 1939 Jan/Feb edition of *The Scottish Naturalist*. Written by Robert Carrick and George Waterstone and entitled *The Birds of Canna*, it was based on their own records plus those of some recent expeditions from Glasgow University. It also relied heavily on records from the Thoms, the then owners of Canna, and from other island visitors.

In 1967 this paper was updated by Evans and Flower's *The Birds of the Small Isles*, which appeared in *Scottish Birds Vol 4* and updated all records to 1966.

In 1983 Bob Swann was asked to prepare a bird list as an appendix for the first edition of John Lorne Campbell's book *Canna, The Story of a Hebridean Island*, published in 1984.

He had started to visit Canna in 1971 as part of a seabird study which has continued up to the present day and has generated a great wealth of information on the island's birds.

His 1983 list updated all the previous lists and made use of all the available records plus those of the islanders, particularly Dr and Mrs Campbell and the Mackinnon family, all of whom have taken a great interest in the island's bird life. Many visitors to the island also supplied additional records.

The information here and the checklist have been collated from Bob Swann's update to the 1983 list, incorporating all records up to August 2010.

Changes continue to occur on the island which affects its varied bird life. The 1983 list made mention of how the development of the plantations had greatly increased the number and varieties of birds on the island. As these plantations are thinned and mature they become attractive to an even wider range of species.

This has led to recent breeding of redpoll, siskin, treecreeper, great tit, coal tit and long-eared owl on the island. Some plantations have, however, been damaged by wind-blow and salt spray and attention to these is required.

There have been several agricultural changes on the islands. There are few hay parks on Canna and they are subject to heavier grazing pressure. Currently no cereal crops are grown, and on Sanday no crops are grown at all. This has affected some species, particularly corncrakes which have undergone a major decline since 1982. The lack of cereals may also explain the loss of tree sparrow as a breeding species.

Factors beyond the island can also have an effect. For instance, virtually all the seabird species witnessed an increase in numbers peaking in the early 1980s and 1990s. Many species then suffered

from poor breeding success and numbers started to decrease. This appears to have been related to a reduction in food availability possibly caused by climate change in the surrounding seas.

The late 1990s, however, saw a welcome recovery in breeding numbers for most seabird species. One exception was the Manx Shearwater, which has shown a dramatic decline and became extinct in its main colony. This was attributed to rat predation which has also begun to affect other seabird species.

As a result a successful rat eradication programme took place in the winter of 2005/06, following which Shearwaters have returned to breed. Continued vigilance is needed to prevent a reintroduction of rats.

By keeping regular counts of the birds on and around islands such as Canna the National Trust for Scotland and other conservation bodies are able to monitor changes in the bird population. These fluctuations may be for a variety of reasons such as climate change, or over fishing of the birds' food stocks. Two species whose numbers have fluctuated dramatically in recent years are kittiwakes and puffins.

PUFFIN - Currently there are two large colonies on the island. The best place to see them is at dusk on Dun Mor where over 1000 were counted up to the 1990s. The other colony is at Geugasgor. Smaller colonies are found at Ant-Each and on Sanday at Tallabric and by the lighthouse.

KITTIWAKE - Records have shown that number have fluctuated from 520 pairs in the 1960s to around 700 pairs in 1993, reaching a peak of 1340 pairs in 2004. Since then, as a result of poor feeding, numbers have declined with only 960 pairs in 2010.