

Coll Bird Festival May 13 – 15th 2016

The Coll Bird Festival provides a wonderful opportunity for anyone with an interest in wildlife generally and especially birdlife to learn more about the birds, animals, sea life and flora that thrive in this remote but stunning Hebridean island with its beautiful golden sands and turquoise seas.

Staff and volunteers from An Cridhe Community Centre will be working alongside RSPB representatives Katherine Jones, John Bowler, Ben Jones and SOC representative David Palmar to provide a varied programme of events that includes trips to the island of Lunga, guided walks, an evening of informative talks, a beach clean, barbecue and an evening of music.

Katherine Jones works for RSPB Scotland leading their work relating to people and communications in the South and West Scotland Region. She has been mad about birds since she joined the Young Ornithologists Club at the age of five, went on to do a PhD on lesser-black-backed- gulls and then went on to work for SNH, Scottish Parliament and now RSPB. Her favourite bird is the gannet.

John Bowler has been the Tiree Officer for RSPB Scotland since 2001. He has been a keen birder all his life and has also worked for other conservation organisations including the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Wildlife Trusts. He completed a PhD on Bewick swans at Bristol University and has worked extensively on bird conservation projects around the world including 3 years managing an island nature reserve in Seychelles. His favourite birds are pittas, also known as "jewel-thrushes".

Ben Jones started work with the RSPB in 2007 when he moved from the Isle of Man. For most of his career he has worked on small islands and will probably never become a mainlander again! The role of Coll Reserve Site Manager is a varied position ranging from sowing crops, mending fences, clearing drains, rush management, fund raising, guided walks and regular interaction with the reserve tenants etc. The role is a varied one that requires someone being happy be it up to their waist in mud or tapping away at a computer.

David Palmar began his interest in wildlife in the 1950s when his family travelled from Glasgow around Scotland to natural history locations. He was given a camera for Christmas at the age of 15. Partly because of the travelling, he became first a Geography teacher, then a Computing teacher in 1990. Since he retired in 2010 he has continued his love of travelling with his wife in their camper van, particularly to the Scottish islands. He is a volunteer photographer for the RSPB and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. He runs a website www.photoscot.co.uk where his photos of Scottish scenery and wildlife can be seen. As a wildlife photographer he has become interested in conservation issues in Scotland, which will form part of his illustrated talk.

An Cridhe Community Centre staff and volunteers

George McConnachie and Jane Metcalfe work at the community centre and will be available over the weekend together with other volunteers for advice and information.

Thursday May 12th and Friday May 13th

Welcome packs can be collected from An Cridhe Community Centre where staff and volunteers will be on hand to deal with any queries about the festival until 5.00pm. The community centre is located on the edge of the village of Arinagour, about one mile from the ferry terminal and is open from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm every day for the use of locals and visitors. Information will be on display at the centre re all the activities/meeting points etc. There will be a sightings board that you are welcome to add to throughout the weekend. You can come into the centre and use the facilities here at any time when the building is open. The facilities include Wi-Fi, public WCs that are open 24 hours, 7 days a week, coin operated showers and for a small donation you can make yourself a hot drink. If you can't find the information you need when no-one is available at the community centre leave a message on 01879 230217 or telephone 07502313168 and someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

Friday May 13th

Boat trips from Coll to Lunga with Coastal Connections of Oban

Lunga is the largest of the Treshnish Isles which are currently designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and are a Special Protection Area under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. Each trip allows about 2 hours exploring Lunga's amazing birdlife. Please note all trips are weather dependant. If a trip does have to be cancelled an alternative walk exploring the birdlife on Coll will be led by one of the weekend's leaders. Each trip allows for approximately 2 hours ashore and depending on the sea conditions trips take 3.5 hours in total. Transferring from the boat to the island can sometimes be tricky depending on the sea conditions. Please discuss this with one of the weekend's volunteers if you think there is likely to be any difficulty with this.

Departure times: 9:30am to 1pm; and 1pm to 4.30pm

Boat departs from: Middle pier, Arinagour. The pier is located on the left as you leave the village going towards the Calmac ferry terminal, next to the skips for glass and cardboard, an old telephone box and some public WCs. Please arrive at the pier at least 10 minutes before the boat leaves.

Led by: David Palmar SOC am
Kat Jones RSPB pm

Cost: £40.00 per person. Booking is essential as there are a maximum number of 11 places per trip.

Walks around Totronald RSPB reserve

Times: There will be two walks in the morning and two in the afternoon; times to be confirmed.

Meeting point: Totronald information Centre approximately 6.5 miles from Arinagour

Led by: Ben Jones

Cost: £5.00 per adult (RSPB members £3.00), children free

How to get there: Turn left out of the community centre and follow the road on the left past the now closed Free Church on the right; the Lodge also on your right (there is a heronry in these woods); Old Hall on the left which is now a second-hand shop and worth a visit while you are here; past Coll medical practice on the right; the twin lochs where geese can often be seen and sometimes red throated divers. There are great views of Mull and the Treshnish Isles and look out for hen harriers along the way. Keep following the road until you see the two castles over to the left and shortly after

the airport on the right. Keep straight on to the T junction. Turn right here and follow the road to the RSPB car park at the end. The information centre is on the left just before the car park.

An evening of talks

Time: Talks start 7.30pm

Location: An Cridhe Community Centre

Bar open: 6.30pm

Cost: £5.00 per adult, children free

Talks will be given by:

Kat Jones RSPB

“The work of the RSPB across the Argyll Islands”

John Bowler

“Birds of Coll and Tiree”

David Palmar SOC

“What in the world are we coming to? Some conservation issues for our future”

Saturday May 14th

Dawn Watch with croissants and hot drinks – led by Kat Jones

Time: Time to be confirmed

Meeting place: Totronald RSPB information Centre (see map for location).

Getting there: the same as for the Friday walks around Totronald RSPB Nature Reserve

Please let us know if you require transport

Cost: £5.00 adults (RSPB members £3.00) children free

Boat trips from Coll to Lunga

Departure times: 9.30am to 1pm and 1.30pm to 5pm

Boat departs from middle Pier as for Friday

Led by: John Bowler am

Tim Beighton pm

From Basking sharks to beetles: hunting for treasures big and tiny at RSPB Scotland's Coll reserve with Kat Jones (Family orientated event but all welcome)

Time: 10.30am

Location: Totronald RSPB reserve

Cost: £2.00 per child

Please note: The theme of this event will be focussed on engaging with youngsters and their families but all ages are welcome to come along

Evening of music and dance

Time: 7.00pm ceilidh disco; 8.00pm 'til late, traditional ceilidh dancing with local band

Bar opens: 6.30pm

Location: An Cridhe Community Centre

Cost: £10.00 per adult, children over 5 £3.00, family ticket (2 adults and 2 children) £20.00

We are hoping that a local caterer will provide food to purchase on the evening

Sunday May 15th

Boat trips from Coll to Lunga

Departure times: 9.30am to 1pm and 1.30pm to 5pm

Boat departs from middle Pier as for Friday and Saturday

Led by: David Palmar am

Tim Beighton pm

BBB - Beach clean, barbecue and bird watching at Gortan

Time: 13.00

Barbecue food: Food and barbecues provided

Cost: None

Beach clean: Bags for rubbish and gloves will be provided

Beach activity: Best bit of beach art

Location: Gortan Beach approximately 5 miles away from the village of Arinagour. Parking is limited; if anyone can offer lifts it would be helpful.

How to get there: Turn left out of the community centre on to the main road go past the Free Church then the Lodge on the right, the Old Hall on the left, as if you were going to the RSPB reserve at Totronald. Once you have passed the steep dip and rise at Acha Mill (the house on the right half way down the dip with the window sticking out towards the road) and the following bends there is a straight stretch of road followed by a smaller rise and bend to the right. A few yards on is a small house, on the right, at the crest of the next rise and standing in a garden. The gate and track leading to Gortan are opposite this house. If you can find a space park here, being careful not to obstruct the gate or the road. Another option is the airport car park further down the road which would mean a walk back to Gortan of approximately half a mile.

Running alongside the Bird Festival are two complimentary activities

"Painting and drawing birds in watercolours" - two hours of tuition with Kip Poulson. Please note you would need to bring your own watercolours.

"Getting to know your camera and photographing wildlife" - workshops led by Philip Price. Follow this link to see some of Philip's work and details about the workshops on Coll. <http://lochvisions.co.uk/>.

Tel: 01879 230000 and Speak to George or Jane for more information about either of these activities.

Weekend deals

Coll Bunkhouse accommodation: 10% discount on bookings of 3 nights. Tel: 01879 230217 for more information.

Bargain price for block booking of events

One boat trip, 2 walks, the evening talks and ceilidh event available for the price of £55.00 per person (£51.00 RSPB members) a saving of £10.00

Getting around the island: Please note there is no public transport on Coll; the island is approximately 3 miles wide and 13 long. Cycling is reasonably easy going and bikes are available to hire; local people are very good at offering lifts if you decide to walk. Transport can be arranged see the “**Tours and transport**” information below.

Walking: Though a small island and low lying Coll's remoteness means that there are few distinct pathways. Good stout waterproof footwear is recommended for any off road walking as the ground can be boggy with lots of tussocks.

Bike Hire: Bikes are available to hire at the Post office Tel: 01879 230329

Tours or transport around the island: Lighthouse Tours Tel: 01879 230479 or 07713582051
Juliet Conway Tel: 01879 230520

Getting to Coll

By Air: Flights are available from Connel airport, outside Oban to Coll airfield. Coll airfield is approximately 5.5 miles from Arinagour village.

Timetable and fare details: Visit Hebridean Airways website <http://www.hebrideanair.co.uk/flights>

By sea: Calmac run ferries from Oban to Coll and Tiree every day during May

Timetable and fare details: Visit Calmac website <https://www.calmac.co.uk/>

Coastal Connection rib from Oban

Details: Outward journey Friday May 13th leaving Oban 7.00 am arriving Coll 9.00am

Return journey Coll to Oban late Sunday afternoon, May 15th

Telephone: 01879 230000 for more information

Cost: £20.00 per person each way (£40.00 there and back)

Accommodation:

For all accommodation on Coll which ranges from Bed and breakfast to self catering visit www.visitcoll.co.uk/

If you need more information about the festival please Telephone 01879 230000 or email info@ancridhe.co.uk