Thirty-one birds in one day’s ‘holiday’

BY SARAH HARRIS

It has been a fantastic result for Skye and Raasay so far in terms of coverage for the Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS), with hopefully further data on its way. The UK is internationally important for its numbers of wintering waterbirds, and many of these are monitored annually by the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts. However, the WeBS counts are mostly made on estuaries and inland waterbodies, therefore leaving the majority of the coastline uncounted. The 2015/16 Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) focuses coverage on these important and under-recorded habitats.

It is known that important populations of several species such as Purple Sandpipers and Turnstone occur around our shores outside of estuaries, and consequently are not monitored annually. Following the original Winter Shorebird Count carried out in 1985 and NEWS counts in 1997/98 and 2006/07, the third repeat of NEWS was carried out this winter.

Eighty-three sectors have been submitted for Skye and Raasay, with a further 25 allocated and, hopefully, awaiting data inputting. Of those submitted and allocated, 82% are priority sectors. This total is even more impressive given the weather experienced on Skye and Raasay throughout the survey period.

If we receive data from the remaining 25 sectors, we will have covered 39.4% of the coastline of Skye and Raasay. That is almost 40%, which is outstanding when you consider the inaccessibility of much of coastline of Skye and Raasay and the weather this winter.

Eighty-six bird species and five mammal species, including Bottle-nosed Dolphin and Otters, were recorded during surveys. The most numerous bird being Herring Gull and most numerous wader being Oystercatcher, through to the rarer Black-throated Diver and Little Auks on the other end of the spectrum.

On Raasay, NEWS (or the Winter Shorebird Count as it was then known) has been carried out once before, in 1985. Back then, Purple Sandpipers and Eider Duck were among the species recorded; eight species were recorded along the shoreline between Point of Eyre and Brochel [Curlew, Grey Heron, Oystercatcher, Purple Sandpiper, Turnstone, Eider Duck, Redshank and Ringed Plover]. (continued on Page 2)
Sadly, there was no coverage on Raasay during the surveys which followed, in 1997/98 and 2006/07.

Fast forward to the 2015/16 NEWS and we have more data from Raasay! An expedition team of five (including myself) from Hertfordshire travelled over to the island on the 21st January 2016. Before reaching Raasay two Little Auks were spotted from the ferry and kick-started the excitement for the day - despite the wind and rain. It is amazing how wildlife watchers are so easily distracted from stinging winds and driving rain when something unusual is spotted! The Little Auk is a small seabird which breeds on islands in the high Arctic. The winter of 2015/16 saw large numbers of these tiny seabirds (the size of a Starling) reaching the UK coastline; storms in late autumn can drive large numbers of Little Auks our way.

On reaching the island, the team surveyed most of the coastline between Oskaig to North Fearns - around the south end of the island, not up and over the north - we're not that good! Being from Hertfordshire, many of the species encountered were of great excitement to us, and what a beautiful island! During the surveys, we counted 31 bird species, two mammals and covered six sectors. Not bad for a day's 'holiday'!

An Otter put on a fantastic show for two of the team, one of whom had not seen an Otter close-up before and, of course, Common Seals were dotted along the coastline too. Two Golden Eagles spent quite a while circling above us at one point, again, the best views some of the team had ever had. Other highlights include Great Northern Divers, a Black-throated Diver, Snipe, Black Guillemot, Goosander, Black-headed Gull, Black Guillemot, Meadow Pipit, Robin, Snipe, Black-throated Diver, Common Seal, Otter].

At the moment, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) are awaiting the last few submissions and will then start checking the data ready for analysis to be carried out later in the year.

NEWS is funded by Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage and the WeBS Partnership.

See Page 19 for a BTO course.
Ever-changing views from Raasay, submitted by Ann and Sandy Macleod
There’s something irresistible about Raasay

CALUM GILLIES interviews Dr Brooke Magnanti about her latest novel, The Turning Tide

In many ways, the wealth of Raasay is reflected in the litany of books about the island - be it the landscapes, wildlife, geology, history or people and culture found here. However the island is less so represented in fiction, aside from a few fleeting references here and there.

Raasay has a long history of appearing in literature - mainly, however, non-fiction. One such notable appearance is from author Allan Maclean. In his Book Master of Morgana, we are led to a dramatic climax in which the titular ship Morgana sinks in the waters of the north of Raasay.

Now however Raasay can add another mark to its tally of stories set here, as a new book opens with a grisly discovery in a similar spot to where the Morgana went down. American-born writer and scientist Dr Brooke Magnanti is well-known for her famous Belle de Jour blog, with her writings later being adapted into the hit TV series Secret Diary of a Call Girl. She has recently released her debut thriller The Turning Tide, which begins with the discovery of a body in the waters of north Raasay.

Last week, Dr Magnanti kindly gave some of her time to answer a few questions about her new book and her decision to set parts of it on Raasay...

Your book The Turning Tide opens with the discovery of a body in the north of Raasay - what gave you the idea to set part of your story here, as opposed to any other Scottish island?

A few years ago my husband and I took a kayak trip to Raasay. It didn't go well - not because of any dead bodies, but because we were underprepared for the sea conditions on our return voyage and had let the radio batteries run down. It became clear just how easy it would be for us to have run into real trouble without any way of contacting help. When I was looking for a location as a setting to discover a body, that trip and that location immediately came to mind.

Did you know much about the island before you used it as a setting?

I've visited a couple of times, but my experience of it is limited exclusively to bothies and kayaking. I really should come back sometime for a proper holiday and check out the rest of it!

What is it, in your opinion, about the Highlands and Islands that appeals to readers?

Britain is a very small place (I'm from the US, so what's considered long-distance really is a different scale to here). But what's appealing is the sense that you wouldn't have to go far to encounter a completely different way of life, even if that only means going to a different loch or a different island. I find it interesting, for example, to hear ITV are currently filming a survival documentary on a beach in Kentra where many people in my village go for Sunday walks! It seems a world away to people in London and the south.

Given the popularity of stories such as those by Peter May (The Lewis Trilogy) and Ann Cleves (the Shetland series), do you think the Scottish Isles could become a focus for crime drama much like ‘Nordic Noir’ did in Scandinavia?

Absolutely. It would probably take someone with a local background though, someone who was well-rooted in the history and the way communities here interact. I've only lived in Lochaber for six years, so my point of view is very much as an outsider looking in.

This book is a movement away from the work that you’re known for, is this genre one you now want to concentrate on?

Oh, for sure. Most of my previous works were memoir, I couldn't keep writing the Belle books too...
much longer after I retired from sex work. Also, I was a forensic scientist almost ten times as long as I was a call girl; it would be silly to let that experience go to waste. Everything’s material to a writer.

**Do you envisage more murders around Raasay in the future?**

Most likely yes. Though right now I'm focusing on manuscripts with plots set in Fort William, and Breakish on Skye. But Raasay will almost certainly creep into my work again. There is something about the unique geography and the geological landscape that is irresistible.

**Excerpt from The Turning Tide:**

Of all the things that Daniel Wallace had hoped to do on holiday, finding a dead body was not one of them.

The kayak trip from Skye to Raasay was perfect. It was his girlfriend’s first visit to Scotland and he wanted to make it a weekend she would never forget. Daniel had planned this leg of the trip carefully: a journey starting on Skye, going up the long east coast of the island of Raasay. Winter weather in the Highlands was tough to predict but although the water was cold, there was little wind and the only snow was on the mountaintops. They would paddle past the steep cliffs and fossil beaches with views over to the mainland and lunch on the cobble beach below castle ruins he knew well, then continue on to a romantic night at a bothy inaccessible to walkers and unlikely to be occupied at this time of year.

Maya teased him for being such a list maker, but as the day went on he was pleased at having planned it so well. There was a slight chop on the water as they left Skye and late winter light on the wavelets sparkled like sequins. It changed to perfect glass as they rounded the tip of Raasay and turned north. There was a superpod of dolphins spanning the sound between the island and Applecross on the mainland, hundreds of them leaping and squealing for the sheer fun of jumping around. He could tell Maya was nervous about the large mammals at first. She clutched the shaft of her paddle tightly, but was soon laughing with the joy of it all.

They landed on the northern tip of the island. Maya pulled her kayak above the tide line onto the shingle beach while Daniel hung back. ‘Something wrong?’ she asked.

‘I think there’s something caught in my rudder,’ Daniel said, ‘bit of seaweed, maybe. You go on ahead and find the bothy, I’ll catch up.’

The Turning Tide is available from all good booksellers.

**Your Island, Your Cash, Your Choice**

**BY DELLA CHESHIRE**

Do you need £100 to £1,500 to put an idea into action? The Highland Council is offering grants to local community, voluntary or non-profit organisations, or informal groups.

All activities proposed have to happen on Skye or Raasay and benefit local people.

To apply, complete the online form and return it before 4pm on Friday April 29.

If your idea fits, the community will vote for the best ideas at an event on Saturday May 28 between 11am and 3pm.

RDT Development Officer Lloyd Gudgeon said: "If anyone has an idea they would be welcome to discuss it with me or RDT if they wished."

“That way we might help avoid six applications going in for roughly the same project from six different groups. "I'll be happy to help anyone or any group with writing the application, or we can do it on behalf of the community if that's what people want.”

For further information or assistance, contact Annie Davidson on 07795 825573 or annie.davidson@highlifehighland.com or Skye & Lochalsh CVO on 01478 612921 or info@slcvo.org.uk.

The application form is available from www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/15892/application_form

To receive PDFs of *Am Bratach Ratharsair*, for free, email Lloyd Gudgeon (lloydraasay@gmail.com)
Raasay Community Council (Comhairle Choimhearsnachd Ratharsair)
The inaugural meeting of the new Raasay Community Council was held on Thursday March 17th under the chairmanship of Willie MacKinnon, Ward Manager, Highland Council.

The Office Bearers were elected as follows:

Chairperson      Anne Gillies
Secretary        Jill Westgarth
Treasurer        Elizabeth Simpson

After this meeting, a short business meeting to deal with urgent items was held, at which Elizabeth Simpson was elected Minutes Secretary. Minutes of both these meetings will be posted on the Community Council notice board in due course.

The remaining members of the Community Council are John William (Bradan) Gillies; Tekela Koek; and Darryl Simpson. We are sorry that Katherine Gillies has had to step down for personal reasons.

We are aiming to hold regular monthly meetings, which will be open to the community to attend (and, with the permission of the Chair, to ask questions and/or make comments).

Notices and agendas for our meetings will be posted in advance on the Community Council notice board and you will be very welcome to come along.

A’ Bheil Fios agaibh? BY REBECCA MACKAY
Do you know that lightly-pigmented cattle can become photosensitive after eating tormentil? In other words, they can suffer from _losgadh na grèine_, sunburn! Tormentil, a yellow, four-petalled plant, grows from May till September in damp, acidic soils.

Grassland Management

A one-day course for crofters

Tuesday 10th May, Portree, Isle of Skye

We will be looking at soil management: structure, drainage, nutrients, pH and biology. We will also look at sustainable weed control.

Speakers will include independent consultant, Ian Cairns.

The day will include a visit to a croft, followed by a BYO soils workshop and a Q&A session.

Free of charge to land managers £40.00 plus VAT to others

Booking is required, so lunch & packs can be provided

For more information or to book contact David on 0131 666 2474 or dmchicensoilassociation.org

Horticulture

A one-day course for crofters & other small producers

Glendale, Isle of Skye, Wednesday 11th May

This is a practical one-day event looking at soils, fertilisers and rotations for horticultural crops in Skye and Lochalsh.

Speakers are Audrey Litterick (Audrey Litterick Consulting) and Donald Munro (Dalnight), authors of Horticulture: A Handbook for Crofters

The day will include outdoor practical sessions on soil physical assessment, crop choice & crop rotations for polytunnels, and selection and placement of windbreaks and shelter.

Free of charge to crofters & smallholders £40.00 plus VAT to others

Booking is required, so lunch & packs can be provided

For more information or to book please contact David on 0131 666 2474 or dmchicensoilassociation.org
Lesser Celandine

In the second of a series of articles on Raasay’s flora, botanist STEPHEN BUNGARD takes a closer look at Lesser Celandine

Lesser celandine flowers are opening and can be found in damp ground anywhere away from the most acidic soils e.g. roadsides and streamsides. In shade it can form a continuous carpet.

The name celandine comes from a Greek word for the swallow and in this part of the world the flower arrives at a similar time to the bird.

The plant lies dormant for about six months of the year, new leaves appearing in late winter. Flowering is at its peak in April and May; by July the foliage has usually died back. Over 80% of records in the local area are from April to June. I have recorded it in ninety 1 km squares on Raasay out of the total of 100 (whole or partial).

It is a member of the buttercup family and until recently it was included in the genus Ranunculus with other buttercups. Several subspecies are described, but as far as is known all Raasay plants are Ficaria verna subsp. fertilis. A second subspecies with bulbils in the leaf axils occurs in a few locations on Skye in, or close to, big house or hotel gardens so it might be worth another check for this in Raasay House grounds.

The glossy yellow flowers grow on single stems and have eight to twelve petals in a star shape. The heart-shaped leaves are also shiny, and are dark green, sometimes mottled with white. The flowers are important to early season insects when there is not much nectar available.

At least one, perhaps three, fly larvae burrow through the leaves making “mines” and three fungi, (Celandine Clustercup Rust, Bitter Chocolate Rust and a smut with no common name Urocystis ficariae) specifically infect this plant.

Like other buttercups it contains a toxin that can cause blisters externally if damaged leaves are handled. If eaten untreated it can cause a variety of unpleasant symptoms from nausea to paralysis but drying or heating inactivates the toxin. The old name of pilewort tells you what herbalists used it for.

Stephen is Vice-county Recorder for the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland for Skye, Raasay and the Small Isles. His website, including Flora of Raasay, can be found at tinyurl.com/Raasayflora OR bit.ly/Raasay, and his botanical blog can be found at skyeraasayplants.wordpress.com.
Raasay Healthcare Matters

Raasay Healthcare Matters was set up to fill the gap between Community Councils and keep alive the issue of NHS Highland’s withdrawal of out-of-hours nursing cover. Several members of RHM are now Community Councillors and so, at its inaugural meeting on 17th March, Raasay Community Council agreed to take over this work and that RHM should no longer exist. We are grateful to all those who helped over the last few months by attending meetings and giving invaluable input.

Thank you also to all who filled in the questionnaire. Over 30 were returned and we hope to carry out further analysis on the results before passing the information on to NHS Highland. There have been a surprising number of incidents reported and several have occurred since the closing date. Anyone who missed the deadline is welcome to fill in a form, return it to the box in the shop or pass it on to any Community Councillor.

We continue to press for the restoration of nursing cover. The gradual erosion of daytime cover is of great concern as is the failure to provide even minimal out-of-hours cover since the start of the year. We have written on several occasions to NHS Highland requesting a meeting – so far without success. However, attendance at the NHS Highland Open Day on Friday 18th March gave an opportunity to meet Councillor John Gordon who agreed to speak with NHS Highland on our behalf. Also, Dave Thompson MSP answered our request for a meeting very promptly and visited Raasay along with Councillor Ian Renwick and Kate Forbes on Saturday 19th March. Dave and Ian both agreed to support our cause and Dave has already written to Garry Coutts, Chairman of NHS Highland, pleading our case, as well as issuing a press release calling for reinstatement of nursing cover on Raasay.

The next meeting to discuss these matters is to be held at 8pm on Tuesday 29th March in the Community Centre. Everyone is welcome to attend.
Is it time to hold NHS Highland to account?

BY DELLA CHESHIRE

It is now three months since NHS Highland (NHSH) failed to recruit a nurse to Raasay following the advertisement of fixed-term posts. In that time out-of-hours provision has been virtually non-existent (and cover is “pragmatically unlikely – see Page 2), two working days have seen no nurse at all, no further meeting has taken place between NHSH and community representatives, and the posts have not been re-advertised.

Tracy Ligema, NHSH’s area manager for north and west, said: “The needs of patients on Raasay are constantly assessed and at present, the caseload is small.”

Is the lack of a nurse out-of-hours affecting the number of evacuations?

According to NHSH, there have already been six incidents of people requiring emergency transfer from Raasay this year.

Ms Ligema said: “We would point out that NHS Highland is responsible for primary and community services, which we are delivering to the best of our ability, and not emergency response, which is the remit of the Scottish Ambulance Service.”

However NHSH does have an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) on Emergency Transfers, which aims “to provide a clinically safe, effective and efficient transfer service for emergencies off the Island of Raasay”. Dated 2011, it states that a review should take place every six months, and currently contains inaccuracies about the population size, the presence of a community nurse and the availability of the ferry for emergency transfers.

When questioned about the last time the document was reviewed, Ms Ligema said it is “operationally reviewed” whenever it is used, and is currently being updated by NHSH and the Scottish Ambulance Service.

Anne Gillies, chairperson of Raasay Community Council (RCC), said: “Back in November 2015 we understood that NHS Highland would “red-flag” calls to NHS24 from Raasay so that call handlers would realise that our island location meant that a different approach was necessary.

“The mishandling of a 999 call earlier this month showed clearly that this has not been done.”

Why have requests for a meeting gone unanswered?

Raasay Healthcare Matters (RHM; now incorporated into RCC) requested a further meeting with NHSH on January 27, and have repeated that request several times.

When asked why a further meeting had not been arranged, Ms Ligema said: “It has been important for NHSH to take stock on what the service needs/requirements are for the community.”

She said NHSH are exploring services for Raasay including ongoing community nursing and an alternative way of delivering primary care out-of-hours, possibly using rural support workers.

Ms Ligema continued: “We would like to work closely with the community to build a resilient and sustainable model of care for the future.”

In the meantime, Independent councillor John Gordon has promised his support, and Dave Thompson SNP MSP, SNP councillor Ian Renwick and SNP candidate Kate Forbes have managed to meet with RHM this year.

Mrs Gillies said: “The last meeting with NHS Highland took place on 17th November 2015.

“This is not my idea of working closely with the community.”

Would the advertisement of a permanent post have made a difference?

NHSH PIN (Partnership Information Network) Policy on fixed-term contracts states they are “committed to using permanent contracts of employment as the norm, with fixed-term contracts only being used where necessary and appropriate”. The document includes a Needs Assessment Checklist to determine which contract is appropriate, with factors such as geography, impact on service of failure to recruit and clinical risk scored as High, Medium or Low. The completed checklist for Raasay has been requested.

Ms Ligema said the Raasay posts were fixed-term “on the basis that there is Highland wide redesign of out-of-hours services along with the national out-of-hours review so we know that there will be change ahead in out-of-hours provision”.

However NHSH has advertised a permanent post for a community nurse on the Isle of Colonsay, an island with a smaller population and a resident GP, twice in recent months.

Ms Ligema said about the Colonsay post: “It is not the easiest of posts to fill, but over the last four years we have managed to fill the post and that is why it is out to advert permanently again.

“If we can’t recruit to the post, then discussions with the local community will need to take place to look at an alternative model.”

Mrs Gillies said: “NHS Highland’s plan all along for Raasay - and for other remote and rural areas - is to replace lone skilled medical staff with teams of amateurs.

“It will save them money but at a huge cost to these communities.

“A permanent post would have been advertised as often as was required if NHSH actually wanted to recruit a nurse for Raasay, instead of trying to prove that it is impossible to do so.”
Raasay War Memorial – From a distance

BY SALLY WALKINSHAW

Among the names on the Raasay War Memorial is that of Private Alex Graham from Rona. He is showing as serving with the 1st Australians. Although geography is not one of my strongest subjects I believe the distance from Rona to Australia is approximately 9,456 miles (thank you internet!).

I do not know the connection between Private Graham, Rona and the 1st Australian Division but he would certainly have covered a lot of ground during World War One.

The Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was formed at the outbreak of the war and sailed in early November 1914 bound for England. However the AIF initially ended up in Egypt.

In 1915, after being involved defending against an attack by the Turks on the Suez Canal, they became most famous for their part in the fighting that took place to the west of the Dardanelles Straits, better known as Gallipoli. Here they combined forces with the New Zealand Army as the ANZACS (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). The 1st Australian Division left Gallipoli in late 1915 and headed for France. If Gallipoli had been a dreadful loss of life, the Western Front was to become a terrible sacrifice.

The AIF had been joined by large numbers of fresh reinforcements and expanded. From March 1916 the first of the divisions from Egypt began arriving in France and after initially being near the Belgian border they move to front line trenches near Armentieres.

The British Army had moved to the Somme about 100km to the south and the main offensive commenced on 1st July 1916. Over the next few weeks the Australians became involved. The British attacks had brought the front line close to the village of Pozieres and on the 23rd July the 1st Australian Division made an assault. The village was eventually taken but only after hard and intense fighting. The capture of Pozieres had cost the 1st Division 5,000 men in five days.

The 1st Division was replaced by the 2nd who suffered yet more casualties, overall almost 7,000 in twelve days. The 4th Division were next to take part pushing towards Mouquet Farm and then Thiepval.

Over a period of 42 days the Australians made 19 attacks, 16 of them at night. As a consequence the casualties finally totalled 23,000 men of whom 6,800 were killed. Five Victoria Crosses were won.

Finally in early September the Australian Divisions were taken out of the main battle and sent to Flanders to recover.

In 1917 the 1st Division were again in the thick of the fighting. They pursued the enemy forces as they retreated to fortifications in the Hindenburg Line and towards Bapaume (back towards the Somme).

In April they were then in support during the 1st Battle of Bullecourt, part of the Arras Offensive. Enemy forces attacked four Australian battalions but were unable to break the Australian line. In this action the 1st Division suffered 1,010 casualties.

In May the 2nd Battle of Bullecourt commenced with the 1st Division in reserve, but it joined the fighting on the second day. The fighting ceased
after seventeen days and the 1st Division withdrew having suffered 2,341 casualties.

In September the 1st Division joined the Third Battle of Ypres with the Battle of Menin Road along with ten other divisions. The 1st Division lost 2,754 men.

In October they advanced for the Battle of Broodseinde which saw the end of the 1st Divisions involvement in Ypres. The casualties were 2,448 men killed or wounded.

1918 saw the 1st Division still at Messines in Belgium when the Germans launched another offensive on the Somme.

The 1st and 2nd Divisions began moving to the Somme but on reaching Amiens the 1st Division had to turn back to relieve the British Divisions at Hazebrouck. In August the 1st Division returned to Amiens and then on south of the River Somme. They took many prisoners and also captured a German 15in Naval Gun.

In September only 2,854 men were available out of the normal strength of over 12,000 men but they took part in an assault on the Hindenburg Line capturing a large section.

After this the 1st Division was withdrawn and took no further part in the fighting having lost 677 men in their final battle.

The Australians built a memorial at Pozieres, as the Divisions sustained more casualties there than in any other battle.

I have only been able to find one Private Alex Graham through the Commonwealth War Graves website and it seems probable that this is 'our' Private Graham.

He is listed as Date of death 24/09/1915 with regiment Australian Infantry AIF 12th Bn.

He is commemorated on the Chatby Memorial in Alexandria (Egypt). The following is the description from CWGC: “The Chatby Memorial commemorates almost 1000 Commonwealth servicemen who died during the First World War and have no other grave but the sea. Many of them were lost when hospital ships or transports were sunk in the Mediterranean sailing to or from Alexandria. Others died of wounds or sickness while aboard such vessels and were buried at sea”.

Whatever his outcome, I think the distances that the 1st Australian Division covered must be some of the greatest of any of those that fought in World War One.

N.B. To clarify regarding 1st Division - A Division was approx. 18,000 men, split into three infantry brigades each comprising four battalions. Each battalion comprising eight companies! And I wonder why I have problems tracking anyone down!

I hope to be able to do a similar article about the 4th Cameron Highlanders and the Seaforth Highlanders in due course. Unfortunately these regiments were quickly incorporated into the Regiment of Scotland during WW1 so it is taking time to get an accurate account of which area and battles were relevant.

If you have any further information regarding WW1 and Raasay residents past and present, Sally would love to hear from you. Her email address is walkinshawsally@gmail.com.

To all those who owe money for logs (£60 full trailer, £40 half trailer) please can you settle up ASAP...

Put cash/cheques in an envelope with your name on and leave in the shop. Or please contact Kate on 660226... Thanks very much.
In 1991, twelve members of the Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists (A.C.F.A.) inspected Raasay as a potential area for detailed surveying of its archaeological past. That year the group stayed in Raasay House and it was to Raasay House that the remaining Raasay Volunteers returned to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the original foray. The survey itself began at Easter 1995; nine volunteers stayed in the Youth Hostel. Every year thereafter at Easter, excepting 2001, the year of the Foot and Mouth outbreak, the volunteers, now numbering over twenty, stayed at Borodale House.

Sadly, ten of the original volunteers are no longer with us, but a toast at the commemorative dinner recognised our absent friends and their contribution to the reports.

The Raasay Volunteers have donated copies of the A.C.F.A. Raasay reports to Raasay House Community Company; the reports, organised and produced by John McDonald and James Scott Wood, are in the library in the West Wing.

Anne McDonald said: ”I reckon that the average age of those attending the reunion is probably about seventy-four! We enjoyed the company of our six invited guests: Rebecca Mackay, Angus and Jane Gillies, Bradan and Katherine Gillies and Calum Don Mackay who helped smooth our path and all of whom have been generous with their knowledge of Raasay matters over the years.”

The local people invited to the meal travelled a mile or so to the venue, but one couple, Amy and Ave Gazin Schwartz, travelled all the way from Massachusetts. Amy has an anthropological interest in medieval and rural settlement of a later date in Scotland.

Frances Hood said: ”It was good to see old friends again even though some of us are hirpling! How we managed before, carrying equipment and battling the elements is a mystery and I’m afraid never to be repeated but it leaves us with many happy memories.”

The reports are a valuable asset to our community and visitors alike; those volunteers must be commended for their labour and diligence in the field and in the follow-up work done at home. Not only did they give their time to the project, but the volunteers paid their own hotel bills and travel expenses. Many thanks for all that you have done.
Update on progress at Borodale House

BY OLLI BLAIR

As we reach the end of March remedial works at Borodale House will be completed and the contractor will leave site.

The roof has been re-slated using a mix of the tiles that were already there and reclaimed Balaculish slates. New lead work and flashings have been fitted and gutters and downpipes refurbished and painted. The chimneys have been repointed and some harled areas returned to the stone.

Raised tiles have been installed on some of the slopes of the roofs to allow for roosting Pipistrelle bats and access to the main roof space for roosting Brown Long Eared bats has been maintained. There are also bat boxes in the trees around the site.

The link between Borodale House and the accommodation wing has also been demolished in order to prevent the building deteriorating.

Biebod Properties Ltd, the current owners of Borodale House, will hand the building over to R&B Distillers in due course and work is likely to start on the distillery building at some point in May.

The programme is tight and work should proceed quickly once started.

If you have any issues relating to the site please contact either the Architect, Olli Blair (07500 601940) or the site agent, Ivor Aitchison (07976 686924).

Community Arts and Crafts Project

The community arts and crafts project continues to develop. Another successful workshop was held on Saturday 19th March. We hope to have the 'island' material soon as well as the canvas sets. Then everyone will be able to see what we've done to date and plan for the next two workshops.

These will take place on Saturday 16th April and Friday 22nd April, both from 2-4pm. The first will be a sewing workshop, and the second both a sewing and a printing workshop. Look out for posters on the notice board to remind you of the dates.

Interested, but haven't come along to a workshop? Then note the dates given!
Brochs: A Scottish mystery

BY VAL COREY

The impressive dry-stone buildings known as brochs are an exclusively Scottish phenomenon occurring mainly in the north and west of the country, including the Hebrides. They were constructed around the Iron Age, c.200 BC.

Brochs are round towers of considerable height, tapering towards the top with double walls of around 3-5ft thicknesses. Raasay has its own broch, Dun Borodale (Vorodale or Voradel), located just behind the Old Free Church Manse. It can be easily seen from the road and is quite accessible, when there is no felling going on, from the path round the manse garden. Even in its now robbed and dilapidated state it is impressive. The site commands a wide view across the Sound and of the surrounding countryside making it an excellent lookout post.

Brochs have long been the subject of conjecture as to their builders and their function. The folk who built them were skilled architects and engineers. There have been several attempts in modern times at reconstructing a broch but the skills required to reproduce their unique shape without using mortar elude today’s builders.

There is a problem in building high dry-stone structures as the weight of the stones can cause the walls to fall in on themselves. The Iron Age builders overcame this by building two walls linked together by horizontal slabs. The inner wall was vertical, the outer wall sloped very gradually inwards. The horizontal slabs stabilised the structure. A staircase wound around inside the walls linking galleries and small, cell-like rooms.

It is still possible to see traces of a 3ft wide passage at the east of Dun Borodale. The passages ran round the broch and were connected by stairways. A scarcement, a ledge which could hold an upper floor, can be seen in a few places.

There were no windows in the massive walls, except for the entrance door which led through to the central courtyard which was probably partially or wholly roofed. A sensible idea given our unpredictable weather.

A large number of people and animals could be housed in the central courtyard and the whole structure would suggest a defensive sanctuary, but against whom they were defending themselves we can only guess. The brochs still retain their secrets. There is a great deal to be uncovered at Dun Borodale and it would be wonderful to see it happen.
Project Updates from RDT

The RDT AGM was held on 23rd March in front of a good turnout of Members and Associate members. A new Board was elected, including three new Directors. Your RDT Board is now made up of: Donnie Oliphant (Chair), Darryl Simpson (Vice-Chair), Kate Smith (Treasurer), Angus Gillies, Katherine Gillies, Artemis Pana and David Westgarth. There is scope to add to the Board by appointment from the Community Council and by co-option. If you are a member of RDT and would like to be considered for co-option to the Board, please get in touch with any of the Directors or with Lloyd.

Forestry
All of the compulsory felling work was completed within the deadline date. The work being done now is the additional felling that is required to make the edges of the exposed stands safe from wind blow, and to remove the over-mature trees that are due for felling anyway. The bottom road from Oscaig will be closed from mid-April during the day to allow felling and removal of the trees on the steep slope. It should stay open during the school run in the morning, but otherwise during the day please use the top road. Notices will be placed at the diversions to explain the details. Cut timber is being stock-piled at the Suisnish slipway, and this will continue throughout the spring and early summer, with timber being removed by barge from late April.

As before, please be very careful around the forest while felling is going on. Please do not use paths that have been temporarily closed, and keep children and dogs under control near machinery!

There will be a second re-stocking meeting on the evening of 27th April in the Hall. Everyone is welcome to come along and contribute to the plans for planting new trees. Copies of the first draft plans are on Page 17. If you would like to receive a copy by email, please contact Lloyd.

Hydro Scheme
Thanks to everyone who returned the questionnaire on the possible district heating scheme for Inverarish. If you have not returned yours yet, please do so as soon as you can. Don’t worry about the deadline – just fill it out and return it.

Meanwhile, we are still progressing slowly with trying to line up customers or potential customers for the electricity we will produce. As we can sell only part of what we produce to the Grid, we have to find local consumers for the rest. This involves additional expense installing wires, so we have to design the system that will give us the best return for the lowest investment.

Website
The first draft of the proposed new website has been circulated amongst the various groups taking part, and a final version will be prepared using everyone’s comments. We hope the final version will be ready for the summer.

Community Artwork
Several sessions have already put an outline design in place. The work will be a huge collage map of Raasay including weaving, tapestry, painting, woodwork, whatever you can think of to represent the history, geography, businesses, wildlife and spirit of the Island. Everyone is welcome to take part. You don’t have to come to all the sessions – just come along to one, get an idea, go home and work on it and then contribute your work, if that’s easier for you. Look out for notices giving dates for the next sessions.

Part 4, the final part of the tetralogy entitled “Gach Cùil is Cèal” is now available at £12.99 + postage from R Mackay, osgaig@lineone.net. It deals with Fearns, Eyre and the descendants of Roderick Mackay, the piper. All profit goes to Raasay Heritage Trust and its new heritage centre, a work in progress.
Option 1: Restock with native woodland

**Advantages**
- Biodiversity benefits associated with native woodland increased
- Arguably would provide a more attractive forest for recreation
- Minimal management burden (post establishment).
- Increase in coppice area which requires less specialist machinery to manage

**Disadvantages**
- Difficult to establish with browsing pressures
- Increase in establishment expenses (tree shelters etc)
- Negative visual impact from tree shelters
- More prone to Rhododendron re-colonisation
- Significant decrease in timber production

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Birch / Scots pine Mosaic: Blocky mixture of Scots pine and downy birch.

Upland birchwood: Mainly downy birch with components of hazel, rowan and sallow & grey willow

Upland oakwood: Sessile oak and downy birch with components of hazel, rowan and holly.

Riparian woodland: mixture of common alder, sallow & grey willow and aspen.

Mixed policy woodland: extension of policy woodlands, mixture of sessile oak, sycamore, wych elm and Scots pine / Norway spruce.

Mixed broadleaf coppice: sessile oak, sycamore, hazel on free-draining soils. Aspen, common alder and grey willow on wetter sites.

Native woodland could be planted at variable lower density to maximise ecological benefits or higher density for fuelwood production.
Option 2: Restock with standard

Advantages:
- Will produce a good supply of timber & deliver aesthetic improvements (open up paths, increase in broadleaf cover).
- Fast conifer growth will help to compensate for land degradation.
- Should be easier to establish due to a majority of lossable or productive species.
- Possible timber stream from sheltered (sheltered areas) if community had the capability.
- Recent broadleaf planting utilised to produce a regular supply of fuelwood.

Disadvantages:
- Community may not have the capability to process and harvest large conifer crops in the future.
- Depending on the rate of thinning, this will not produce a regular flow of timber as the forest is likely to be relatively even aged in the next rotation.
- The exposed upper margins are only suitable for Sitka spruce or pine and small monocultures are unavoidable if timber production is to be optimised.

Legend:
- Forest Road
- Forest Road Classification
- Forest Road Classes
- Forest Road Species
- Restock - Standard
- Restock - Mixed
- Restock - Conifer
- Restock - Mixed Conifer
- Restock - Trees
- Restock - High Density Coppice
- Mixed Broadleaf: species matched to site type, sessile oak, sycamore, downy birch, hazel, pear and rowan on freely drying soils aspen, common alder, eroded and grey willow along riparian zones.
- Mixed productive conifer: Norway spruce, western red cedar and Sitka spruce.
- Mixed Broadleaf / Conifer: extension of policy woodlands, mixture of sessile oak, sycamore, wych elm and Scots pine / Norway spruce.
News from Raasay Primary School

On Thursday 3rd March pupils at Raasay Primary School celebrated World Book Day. Pupils came to school dressed as either a character from a book or taking the title of their favourite book as inspiration. We had a variety of very inventive costumes and pupils had a lovely time sharing their books and stories.

Alexander Technique: We would like to thank Winnie Ireland for taking the time to come to school and share her knowledge of the Alexander technique as part of our learning about the human body and how it works. The children were interested to see how some of the techniques were similar to those that they had learned in their yoga sessions.

Basketball: Pupils in P6/7 took part in the annual inter-schools Basketball Festival which took place at Portree High School. Not only is this a chance to develop their P.E. and ball skills, but also to make friends and connections ahead of their transition to High School. The pupils all had a fantastic time and Ethan and Emily’s team were just one point off the winning score. The day was topped off with Magnum ice creams and a trip to the playground at Sligachan Hotel.

Sport Relief: It has been a busy month at Raasay Primary School but pupils wanted to make a difference to the lives of others less fortunate than themselves and organised a fun run to Raasay pier and back, followed by treats and juice. The pupils researched how the money raised would help children in Africa to be vaccinated against a deadly virus. Thank you to all who supported us – the final total raised was £140.00 which will be donated to Sport Relief.
**Story Time:** A special thank you to Val Corey who, once again, came along to school to take a lovely story time with the pupils. This was thoroughly enjoyed by all and we hope Val will be along again next term!

**Song of the Sea:** Pupils enjoyed a viewing of the animated film ‘Song of the Sea’ in the school on Tuesday 22nd March. Pupils and parents came along to enjoy the film – and also some popcorn and juice! Thank you to Katherine and the Hall Committee for organising.

**Open Day:** On the last day of term – Thursday 24th March, parents were invited to the school to see what children had been learning this term. Pupils had prepared interactive displays for their Jacobites topic using their ‘talking tins’ which play a recorded piece of information.

**Poly Tunnel:** We are delighted to announce that Raasay Primary School has been successful in securing funding from the Climate Change Fund to aid the purchase of a new poly tunnel. Congratulations and thank you to Katherine, Kate and the Parent Council for their hard work in securing the funding to ensure that we have a poly tunnel that will withstand our weather over a number of years. Thank you also to all the local organisations who kindly sent in letters of support for our bid. The Gardening Club looks forward to having plans in place to make use of our new garden facility. The link here will take you to the website where you can see all the successful bids: [http://www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org/sustainability-climate-change/climate-challenge-fund/news/116-community-led-projects-awarded-climate-action-funding/](http://www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org/sustainability-climate-change/climate-challenge-fund/news/116-community-led-projects-awarded-climate-action-funding/)

**New Staff member:** We are delighted to say that we will be welcoming a new staff member after the Easter Holidays. Mrs Katy Anne MacLeod will be joining us as Nursery Assistant and we look forward to working with her.

**Easter Assembly:** Thank you to Rev. Rosemary who came in to school to take an Easter Assembly on the last day of term. Wishing you all a very Happy Easter from us all at Raasay Primary School.

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**Course:** Skills and techniques for BTO bird surveys – Saturday April 2 10.00-5.00 (£5)

Are you keen to 'make your birdwatching count' by contributing to the British Trust for Ornithology’s monitoring schemes and surveys? Come along to brush up on your skills ahead of the breeding season and gain the confidence to take part in the Breeding Bird Survey, WeBS, BirdTrack and the forthcoming House Martin Nest Study. The day will combine indoor and outdoor sessions (weather permitting) and will have a focus on encouraging participation.

The course is suitable for 'improvers' and experienced birdwatchers who want to contribute to conservation through recording and monitoring. Please bring suitable outdoor footwear and clothing and a packed lunch. Contact Anne Cotton anne.cotton@bto.org or 01786 466 560.

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**Am Bratach Ratharsair:** Raasay’s Community Newsletter

**BY DELLA CHESHIRE**

As you might have noticed, the steering group have renamed the newsletter after voting unanimously for the title *Am Bratach Ratharsair* - Gaelic for The Raasay Banner. Thank you to those who gave us feedback.

We have already started selling paper copies of the newsletter in the shop, a month earlier than planned. This seems to have worked – copies have disappeared and there is money in the pot. Let us know when we need to restock!

Many thanks as always for all your contributions to this month’s newsletter. The deadline for the May newsletter is **Wednesday April 27**.

Please send any newsletter correspondence, including feedback, to Della Cheshire at Creachan Cottage, Isle of Raasay IV40 8NT, tel 01478 660380 / 07952 806176 or email dellatfcheshire@gmail.com.
**Raasay Community Association**

**Lunch Club**
April Lunch Club is on Wednesday 21st April. As usual regular guests need only let Ann O or Tekela know if they cannot make it, new or less regular guests please book your place. Hope to see you there.

**Hairdresser**
Due to hall bookings for music courses and elections Murdina will only be over in April on the 22nd.

**Bookings**
Just a reminder that the £10 monthly sports deal has now ended and that Sarah Watts has her annual Music Course on the week commencing 11th April. During that week we can't take any other bookings during the day time, however Sarah does her best to accommodate any evening bookings upstairs in the hall. Thank you to the regular groups for their understanding during this week.

**Events**

*Yurgen Puppet Theatre's The Fisherman and The Seal*
On Thursday 24th March a large audience came along to watch the production which told the story of a lonely fisherman. This was a great show and enjoyed by both adults and children alike, with a chance to "meet" the puppets and look at the props afterwards. This and the film showing of the fantastic animated film The Song of the Sea, which was shown at the school earlier in the week, were part of the Annual Animation Festival and we hope to be able to take part again next year.

*Licensed Family Dance*
The first dance of the season is on Friday 1st April and we welcome The Kyle Ceilidh Band back to Raasay for the night. Doors and bar open from 7.30pm, all welcome but please remember under 16's must be accompanied by an adult. There will be a raffle and some games for the younger guests on the night.

Whilst well-supported by guests these events can only be put on with help from volunteers to run them, so please offer a few hour’s help on the night so that we can continue to hold dances at the hall. Many thanks.

**Useful Contact Numbers**

*Business Gateway/Highland Opportunity/ Princes Scottish Youth Business Trust:*
Alistair Danter, Tigh na Sgire, Park Lane, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9EP. Tel 01478 611501, Mob 07921 758451 Email alistair.danter@highland-opportunity.com

*MP:*
Ian Blackford MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. Tel 0207 219 5292 Email ian.blackford.mp@parliament.uk

*MSP:*
Dave Thompson MSP, Thorfin House, Bridgend Business Park, Dingwall, IV15 9SL. Tel 01349 864701, www.twitter.com/@davvymsp

*Local Councillors:*
- Hamish Fraser, 8 Scullamus, Breakish, Isle of Skye, IV42 8QB. Tel 01471 822929
- John Gordon, 3 Mill Park, Staffin Road, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9EY. Tel 01478 611783
- Drew Millar, Ibrox, 6 Carndearg Place, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9PZ. Tel 01478 612895
- Ian Renwick, Lochside, Brookside, Clachamish, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9NY. Tel 01470 582386

*Ward Manager:*
Willie Mackinnon, Tigh na Sgire, Park Lane, Portree, Isle of Skye, IV51 9GP. Tel 01478 613849

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**Advertising Rates, per issue:**

- Full page: £15
- Half page: £10
- Quarter page: £6
- Eighth page/Small ad: £3
De tha Dol? Talla Ratharsair | What’s on at Raasay Community Hall

- Licensed Family Dance with the Kyle Ceilidh Band on Friday 1 April at 7.30pm.
- Community Arts and Crafts Project Workshop on Saturday 16 April 2pm-4pm and Friday 22 April 2pm-4pm.
- Forestry Restocking meeting Wednesday 27 April eve.
- Arts & Crafts – Mondays 2.00pm-4.00pm (except w/c April 11).
- Football – Tuesdays 7.00pm (w/c April 11 only if outside).
- Knitting Bee - Thursday evenings 7.30pm. All welcome.
- Lunch Club – Next lunch Wednesday April 20.
- Yoga – Tuesday mornings 9.00am-10.15am and Thursday evenings 6.30pm-7.45pm. (No yoga w/c April 11). Best to practise before you have your evening meal, or at least one hour after. All welcome, bring a mat and a blanket and wear comfortable clothing. Five sessions paid upfront £15; one-off sessions £4 per session. Please contact Tekela on 660 253 or 07810 480972 if you are interested or to book. Other times can be arranged to suit a group of 3 minimum. As usual visitors and newcomers welcome.
- Contact details for the hall bookings: Katherine on 01478 660233/358 or Ann on 01478 660388.
- If you are planning an event and would like to publicise it, please get in touch with Della as soon as possible on 01478 660380 / 07952 806176 or email dellatfcheshire@gmail.com for a mention in the newsletter.

Local Services

- RDT Surgery every Wednesday 10.00am-12.00pm or by appointment. Contact Lloyd on 01478 660358 or email lloydraasay@gmail.com
- NHS Nurse – 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday on 660204. Emergency calls to 999; minor injuries or illness to 111 (NHS 24).
- GP Surgery – Wednesday mornings by appointment through Portree Medical Practice on 01478 612013.
- Vet Surgery – Rhona Campbell, Veterinary Surgeon on 01478 611269.
- Recycle Rag Bag Raasay Primary School – Please ensure that all items are securely bagged before placing in the bin.
- Pensioner’s Bus Service – Contact Theresa or David on 660337. Next trip Thursday April 21.
- Refuse collection – alternate Wednesdays. Green Bins: April 6 & 20; Blue bins April 13 & 27.
- Mobile Library every third Wednesday – 9.55am Inverarish Terrace Phone Box, 10.30am Inverarish Terrace, 10.45am Raasay Primary School (teachers and pupils only), 11.35am Raasay House, 12.00 Raasay Ferry terminal - next due: April 6 & 27.
- Murdina Hairdresser – Alternate Thursdays on 07799315756. Next due April 21.
- The Alexander Technique – Call Winnie Ireland on 660227.
- Coal will be delivered fortnightly to Raasay. Coal lorry also delivering/selling garden coverage.
- Split fuel logs £40/£60 a load for community members from RHCC on 660226.
- Isle of Skye Fish van deliveries weekly on Friday afternoons.

Am Bratach Ratharsair advertising rates, per year:
15% discount for 12 issues paid upfront, i.e. 12 issues for the price of 10!
## What’s On Raasay – April 2016

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<td>Catholic Celebration of the Word and Communion at 37 Inverarish Terrace, Sundays 11.00am. Dave/Teresa Tel 660337.</td>
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