

Waders in Argyll in stitches



In May and early June, dunlin move through quickly on their way to more northerly breeding locations, elsewhere in Scotland, Iceland and Greenland. At this time, birds are resplendent in their breeding plum-

age: chestnut and black-spangled upperparts, with a streaked breast and black belly patch.

In autumn, the early returning birds (usually females) in late July and August hold on to a vestige of these beautiful markings, but many local flocks will comprise of mainly juvenile birds later in August and throughout September, when birds start to adorn the grey upperpart markings of winter.

Lorn birdwatcher, Stuart Gibson, said: 'Dunlin are remarkable, long-distance migrants with a somewhat manic approach to life.

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Three races of dunlin occur in Argyll and the islands throughout the year. Most of the birds encountered belong to the sub-species, 'schinzii', which breeds in Scotland, Iceland and southern Scandinavia.

Northern Scandinavian and Russian birds belong to the nominate, 'alpina', race, which have brighter breeding plumage and longer, curved beaks. Birds of the Greenland race, 'arctica', may also occur during migration and it is interesting trying to assign a race to parties of dunlin that you manage to get close views of. 'Arctica' birds are duller-plumed, lacking the chestnut upperpart colour of other races, and are shorter-billed.

It is possible to watch birds of this race, in mixed flocks with other dunlin, as they stitch-feed (like a sewing machine) along island shorelines in the area in late May, and their occurrence at this time may be anticipated by local birdwatchers.

