

Vagrant gull lands in Oban



Pictures by Jim Dickson

A trio of rare gulls from the New World have paid a flying visit to Oban this winter, creating great excitement among local birdwatchers.

Three separate Ring-billed Gulls, an adult and two third calendar year immatures, have taken up temporary residence on Oban's George Street foreshore area, with one long-staying individual having remained since it was spotted in September 2005.

This bird, now in its second winter plumage, is most likely to be the same individual that first appeared in Oban a year ago in April, during a renowned period of Spring migration for this species of gull.

This bird has spent fully seven months in the area, and is the longest-staying Ring-billed Gull to have been recorded in Argyll.

During the initial few weeks of its stay during last Autumn, this trans-Atlantic vagrant was somewhat aloof and content to linger throughout the day on the George Street foreshore, remaining to roost there with

returning Common Gulls in the evening.

Since then, however, this individual has become somewhat enigmatic in its use of the foreshore area, preferring to feed elsewhere, while returning to the harbour area to roost later in the day.

These feeding forays have taken this bird to Cockleshell Bay, some two miles north of Oban, near Ganavan, and to Dunstaffnage Bay almost 3.5 miles east of the town, where it consorts with the local Common Gulls.

Ring-billed Gulls are medium-sized, being obviously smaller than the

Herring Gulls that predominate around Oban harbour, yet usually larger than the Common Gulls that they often associate with.

It is, however, as its name suggests, its beak that often makes them stand out.

An adult Ring-billed Gull has a thick, greenish-yellow coloured beak, with a well-defined, black sub-terminal band or 'ring'.

While maturing, younger individuals tend to have a peach-pink tone to their bill

In mid-January, an adult bird joined the second-winter immature among the ranks of the Common Gulls assembled at the

