

OBAN AND LORN'S Socio

STEP outside after dark on an overcast October evening and the chances are that the night air will be punctuated with the thin and plaintive 'tseep' contact calls of Redwings migrating overhead.

Although a small number of these handsome, little thrushes nest annually in northern Scotland, they are best known as winter visitors to Britain, from their breeding grounds in Iceland and Scandinavia.

Redwings begin to arrive in the Argyll countryside in late September, but it is not until October when the main influx of these rusty-flanked foragers will descend, almost overnight, to gorge ravenously on Argyll's larder of hawthorn and rowan berries.

Depending on the weather in other parts of Europe, as many as one million Redwings will choose to spend the Winter months in Britain. Thousands of these long-distance, little avian travellers (Redwings are the smallest true thrush found in this country) may be found feeding in the local countryside in autumn, but the majority appear on passage, preferring to rest and feed, before moving on to wintering pastures elsewhere, perhaps in Ireland.

Redwings are nomadic travellers. Birds that visit the

Oban area during any one autumn, may turn up, in subsequent years, in such diverse countries as Georgia, Iran, Italy and Greece. The stamps on a Redwing's passport would make for interesting reading, as the longest-lived individual reached the ripe old age of 18 years!

The bulk of Redwings encountered originate from Scandinavia and belong to the nominate race, 'iliacus'.

However, slightly larger, darker, and more strongly marked birds may appear on some of the Argyll islands, including Mull, particularly in early Spring.

These individuals belong to the sub-species, 'coburni', that breed in the Faroes and Iceland, small numbers of which pass through the Hebrides during their spring migration (April) and are worth looking out for at this time, when

