

## News from the Loch Edge - Issue 1 - March 2011

**News from the Loch Edge** is the first of a series of regular articles about the Loch Stiapabhat Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in Ness.



View across the Loch

The loch covers 2.5ha and is rich in nutrients owing to underlying sand & runoff from crofts. Due to its marsh, machair & birdlife, it has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and in July 2005 the loch and the surrounding machair was declared a Local Nature Reserve by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – a first for the Outer Hebrides.

Loch Stiapabhat is the largest eutrophic (nutrient rich) loch in Lewis and is situated on the main flyway from and to the Arctic. It therefore, attracts a great variety of migrant and vagrant bird species. It is the first fresh water found by birds migrating from Iceland and Greenland in autumn, for washing, drinking & feeding, and the last for those returning in spring. None of our lochs has had a wider range of rarities recorded or possesses such a diversity of common water birds that can be so easily observed. Some of the rarities observed in recent years have included Little Egret and Killdeer (a plover normally found in the US).

### What can you see on the Reserve in Spring?

During migration in spring, Greylag and other geese, Whooper Swans and a large variety of ducks use the loch as a staging point and many will have spent the winter on the Loch

rather than heading further south. These include Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Goldeneye and Tufted Duck. Occasional Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Garganey and Pintail also occur. Mute swans were once an occasional visitor but over recent years have become resident and have nested on the loch which is unusual in the islands. Towards the end of April the first croak of the Corncrake is usually heard as they return from Africa and the LNR and surrounding crofts are recognised as a key site for Corncrake and a number of males can be heard calling throughout the summer months.



Pair of wigeon – a species commonly seen on the Loch  
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Do you have stories or photos of the loch in years gone by? We would welcome any that you have so that these can be shared with readers in subsequent articles. What would you like to see on your Nature Reserve? Please let us know.



Pupils from Sgoil Lionel on the LNR

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