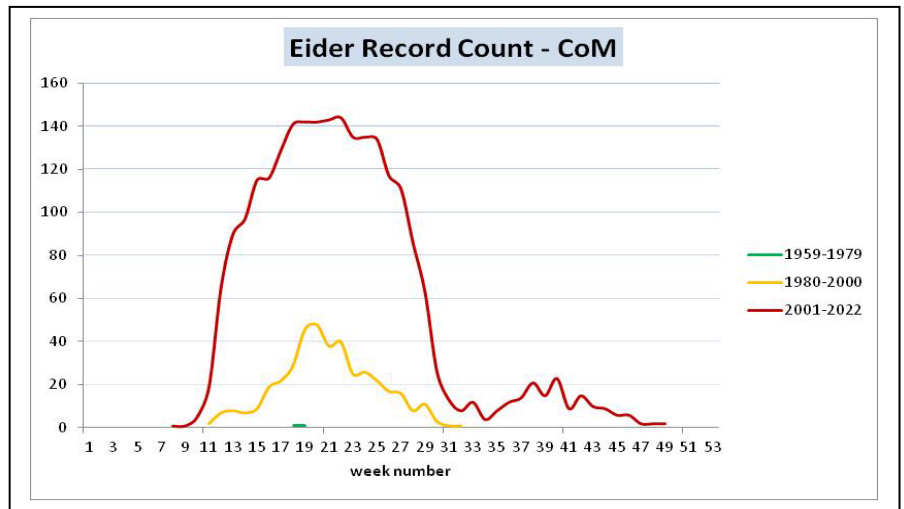


Common Name:	Eider
Scientific Name:	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>
Manx Name:	Laagh Loghlinagh
BoCC IoM 21 classification:	RED
IUCN 3.1 classification:	Near Threatened
MBRC:	A
Legal classification:	

Resident breeder and occasional passage migrant.

Prior to the 1990s, the distinctive Common Eider was a rare visitor to the Calf of Man. However, since first breeding on the island in 1992, their numbers have increased steadily, reflecting a broader southerly expansion across Britain (Balmer et al, 2013). Currently, the Calf of Man hosts around 100 breeding pairs.



The earliest records of Common Eiders on the Calf date back to May 2 and 7, 1963, when four individuals were observed. Over the next 27 years, there were only nine additional records, including a single bird on August 28, 1966, two on November 13, 1975, five on September 16, 1980, and sightings of one or two birds on six other dates in September and October.

The situation began to change in 1991 with sightings of two birds in late May and singles in June and July. By late April 1992, a pair of Eiders was present off Cow Harbour, and successful breeding was documented later that year. The female and three large young were observed in the Gibdale area until July 12, 1992 (McCanch, 1992).

The distribution of Common Eiders in the British Isles has exhibited a gradual southerly expansion since the 1988–91 BTO Atlas. By the time of the 2007–11 BTO Atlas, Eiders had also begun to colonize Anglesey. The Isle of Man's Eider population had increased to fewer than 50 pairs by 2007, as noted in the Manx Bird Atlas, with 12 pairs recorded on the Calf of Man. Although the precise origin of these colonizing birds is unclear, their migration likely stemmed from population increases in south-west Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Walney Island in Cumbria.



Since the first confirmed breeding on the Calf in 1992, Eiders have bred annually on the island. Their success has been aided by the eradication of Brown Rats and the absence of other ground predators. Nest monitoring initiated in 2017 for the BTO nest record scheme

indicates that the breeding population may have exceeded 70 pairs from 2018 to 2021. By 2022, 89 active nests were found, suggesting that the population has likely surpassed 100 pairs (Sapsford, 2022).

Grzeskowiak (2023) found that Bracken was the most favoured nesting habitat for Eiders, with 47% of nests located in this vegetation type. Additionally, 18% of nests were in a mix of Heather and Bracken, while 27% were exclusively in Heather. Eiders tend to nest in social groups, and mapping of colonies on the Calf shows significant groupings along the north coast from Kione Beg to Cow Harbour, the lower slopes below Jane’s House to The Cletts, the east coast between Kione ny Halby and South Harbour, and in the south-west at Rarick and Caigher Dub.

The southern sites are adjacent to large gull colonies, which pose a direct predation threat to Eiders. Despite this risk, the benefits of nesting in these areas must outweigh the threats, suggesting that there are advantages to such proximity that make it a worthwhile location for breeding.

Accumulative monthly total of records (1959 – 2022):

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2	2	226	585	823	646	293	38	74	58	22	1

With the colonisation of the Calf as a breeding site, the Common Eider now occurs year-round on the island. However, the majority of sightings occur from mid-March to the end of July (weeks 11–30). Eiders begin to arrive in the first half of March, with numbers increasing rapidly through April and May.

From 1963 to 2022, a total of 2,770 records were made. Of these, sightings of 1 to 10 birds were the most common, comprising 60% of all records. Records of 11 to 50 birds made up 35%, while counts of 51 to 120 birds accounted for 5%.

Counts of up to 100 birds are typical in most years, with notable peaks of 109 on April 28, 2011, and 110 on May 13, 2018. Males, which do not participate in incubation or care of the young, begin to disperse soon after females start incubating. Consequently, counts from June onwards generally include only females and their young. Small groups of young Eiders, known as “creches,” are sometimes seen but rarely remain along the Calf coastline for long, likely due to predation risks from the large number of gulls present. Observations of family groups crossing the Sound towards the main Isle of Man suggest they may join other Eiders along the Manx coastline.

Sightings after mid-July are relatively rare. However, since 2020, small numbers of Eiders have been occasionally spotted between August and November, mostly consisting of a few remaining females and their young. Autumn seawatching has occasionally recorded small flocks, with notable counts of 10 on October 7, 2014, and 12 on November 3, 2019.

A total of 147 Eider have been ringed on the Calf between 1997 – 2022, with three subsequent reports:

	Isle of Man	Northern Ireland	Grand Total
Eider			
Recoveries (yellow)	2	1	3
Controls (red)	0	0	0

A female Eider ringed in May 2010 was subsequently found at Mew Island, Co. Down, approximately 86 kilometers away, nearly five years later. This finding suggests that Mew Island could have served as a wintering area for this bird. Another female, ringed on the Calf, was sighted at Peel Bay, 18 kilometers away, two years and five days later. Additionally, a third female was discovered dead at Langness, just 13 kilometers from the Calf, five years, four months, and 25 days after being ringed. These observations provide valuable insights into the movement and possible wintering sites of Eiders from the Calf.



References:

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