

28th January 2022

Bang!

"Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! We gotta stand tall, ya know?"

Gore Vidal, The United States of Amnesia (documentary film)

I'm not a birdwatcher, though given the diversity of birdlife on Islay, I might give serious consideration to taking it up as a hobby while I'm here. Hen harriers, oystercatchers, guillemots, gannets, lapwings, plovers are all to be seen – if you know where to find them, and you know which is which. And I'm told I should look out for the occasional Golden Eagle too.

The birds that are most obvious here are wild geese. According to the RSPB, in winter Islay hosts 70 per cent of the world's Greenland barnacle geese and 40 per cent of the Greenland white-fronted goose population – 37,000 and 13,000 respectively. The Loch Gruinart area – a Nature Reserve where I had this week's long walk – is one of the main barnacle goose roost sites and some of the most important feeding areas.

The geese mostly roost on farmland, and the farmers don't like it. On my walk, I kept hearing what I thought were shot-gun discharges. No shooting would be allowed in a Nature Reserve, so I figured the sound was travelling across the loch from Ardnave Point on the other side. But a local man put me right. The bangs were from "gas guns", set up in fields and timed to go off randomly to scare the geese away. "Bang!" And the geese rise up and fly off. Where do they go? To the next field! Another bang? And they're back to the field they've just left! How many bangs and how many geese, I have no idea – my walk wasn't *that* long.

Moving from a settled place to a new setting can be disturbing. "Bang!", and you have to uproot. My mind went to hosts of refugees who have to do just that. The bangs for them are the bombs and gunfire of the conflict that surrounds them, the economic hardship they have to endure, the devastation of family life, the loss of loved ones, the fear and terror they have to live with day by day. "Bang!", they flee. "Bang!", their lives are disrupted. "Bang!", they are displaced refugees.

My hopes and prayers today are that when they are settled in a new field, wherever that is, there won't be another "Bang!" that displaces them. Let's shut off *our* gas guns, whatever these might be, and do our best to ensure flocks of displaced refugees have a settled future.

A prayer for today

Lord, help me to welcome new people to my field, and not chase them away. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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