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Wood Sandpiper, Finnmark,
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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was formed in 1936 to encourage all aspects of ornithology in Scotland. It has local branches which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, each with its own programme of field meetings and winter lectures. The George Waterston Library at the Club's headquarters is the most comprehensive ornithological library in Scotland and is available for reference seven days a week. A selection of Scottish local bird reports is held at headquarters and may be purchased by mail order. The Donald Watson Gallery holds exhibitions of artwork for sale. Check out our website for more information about the SOC: www.the-soc.org.uk

Scottish Birds, the official publication of the SOC, comprises four sections: original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, short notes on bird observations, topical articles and Club-related news (*Scottish Bird News*) and reports of rare and scarce bird sightings and birding sites (*Birding in Scotland*).

Four issues of *Scottish Birds* are published each year, in March, June, September and December. The SOC also publishes an annual *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme* Report, which is produced on behalf of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group with grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage. It is sent to all members.

Copies of these reports may be purchased by non-members on application to the SOC. Membership details as well as news and information can be found on the Club's website www.the-soc.org.uk.

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From the President

In recent years it has become the custom for a 'President's letter' to be provided along with newsworthy items from Waterston House on a separate sheet of paper that was inserted with the SOC mailings of *Scottish Bird News* (and *Scottish Birds*). These were helpful letters which let members know of some of the key activities and successes of the Club and allowed a personal message to be provided regularly.

These letters have documented some significant developments such as the launch of *The Birds of Scotland*, the Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland Project and the Atlas. It is perhaps regrettable that some of this information is not recorded in other Club publications and as it has been provided on a photocopied sheet it has perhaps been more ephemeral than other Club documents. With the recent changes in the production and publishing of *Scottish Birds* it is an appropriate time to consider the future of the 'President's letter'. One aspect which has to be considered is the costs associated with the introduction of additional documents within the mailing; the current system requires the SOC to pay for the carriage of the publication from the printer to Waterston House as well as the postage out to members. This issue has been mailed direct from the printers on a trial basis, thus saving the carriage cost.

This does not mean that the information on the news sheet and in the letter will not be provided to members. What is proposed is that important notices will be included in the journal and that the information which is more ephemeral is provided through other (including electronic) media. I hope that members will agree that expenditure is better spent on providing pages in the Club's journal than spent on carriage and photocopying. Consideration will also be given as to the best method of distributing the local bird newsletters in future.

Scottish Birds continues to evolve following its changes during the summer and I wish to record my thanks to all members of the editorial team who have put in a power of work to deliver the new-look journal. We have been receiving a lot of good and helpful feed-back on how it is progressing and any further ideas of what you, the members, would like to see in the journal will be most welcome.

It is also appropriate at this juncture for me to record my thanks to Chris Waltho, the outgoing President, for all the hard work he has put in during his presidency to take forward the Club, bird-watching and Ornithology in Scotland. Thanks Chris, you've done a great job; the Club is now in a stronger position than it has been for many years.

David C. Jardine, President

Changes in the numbers of breeding waders on wetlands and farmland in Badenoch & Strathspey between 2000 and 2005

C. MITCHELL, L. STREET, P. MOORE & T. PRESCOTT

Approximately 9,000 hectares of farmland and wetlands along c.130 km of strath in Badenoch & Strathspey was surveyed during April to June in 2000 and 2005. Forty-six sites were covered by a team of c. 50 surveyors. The five commonest species encountered were Lapwing, Curlew, Snipe, Redshank, and Oystercatcher. The total number of pairs of these five species recorded in 2005 was 2,429, representing a 28% decline since 2000 (3,381 pairs). Of the 46 sites, 12 (26%) showed an increase in numbers compared with 2000, and 34 (74%) showed a decrease. Individual species showed different trends. Overall, Oystercatchers increased by 9% compared with 2000. However, during the same period, the numbers of Redshank declined by 25%, Curlew by 28%, Snipe by 30%, and Lapwing by 43%. Weather conditions were broadly similar during the two survey years and the same survey techniques were used during the two surveys. Two sites that were surveyed in other years suggest that the decline may have started prior to 2000. Declines in numbers suggest either a decline in the population at large (the causes of which are unknown) or local habitat deterioration. Such declines merit further, and prompt, investigation.

Introduction

Recent surveys in the UK have indicated considerable declines in numbers of some breeding waders giving cause for concern over wader populations on farmland. For example, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* numbers declined by 49% between 1987 and 1998 across England and Wales (Wilson *et al.* 2001). Between 1982 and 2002, there were significant declines of 38% for Lapwing, 61% for Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, 40% for Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and 27% for Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* in over 1,000 wet grassland sites in lowland England and Wales (Wilson *et al.* 2005).

In Scotland, a repeat survey of farmed land comprising c. 400 1-km squares was undertaken between 1997 and 2000 (O'Brien *et al.* 2002). Although the study showed an 8% decline in Lapwing numbers, there was no significant overall changes in wader numbers between 1992 and 1993 and between 1997 and 2000. However, the study concluded that the ability to detect significant trends was poor due to a combination of the short time period between the surveys, and considerable variation in wader trends both between sites and between regions. The authors, quoting Wilson & Browne (1999), concluded that '... Scotland does not appear to have suffered from the widespread loss of breeding waders on lowland farms that has been encountered in England and Wales ...'

The BTO/NCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) monitors all bird species recorded on a random sample of sites in the UK on an annual basis since 1994 (e.g. Risely *et al.* 2009). The population changes recorded between 1995 and 2007, based on BBS squares in Scotland, showed a 24%

decline in Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, 33% decline in Lapwings, 51% decline in Curlew, and a 48% increase in Snipe.

Anecdotal and survey data from a small number of sites regularly monitored in Badenoch & Strathspey (see Results) suggested that the number of breeding waders was declining locally. With a backdrop of reported declines in the number of breeding waders in England and Wales, a suggestion of a decline in one of two surveys in Scotland, and local evidence of a decline, a repeat survey of all sites monitored in Badenoch & Strathspey in 2000 was carried out in spring 2005.

Methods

Forty-six sites, covering approximately 9,000 ha were checked for breeding waders in 2000 and 2005 (Figure 1). Forty-five sites were in the River Spey strath, or adjacent tributaries, from Spey Dam (NN5793) to Cromdale (NJ0731). Most of the sites were active farms, which included areas of habitat suitable for breeding waders, and several wetland areas in the Strath. The sites included Insh Marshes (NH8002), a c. 750 ha floodplain poor fen which regularly supports over 500 pairs of common breeding waders. One site, at Dalnaspidal (NN6473), was to the south of Badenoch near Drumochter Pass.

Three visits were made to each site: visit one during the period 18 April to 8 May, visit two during the period 9 May to 29 May, and visit three during the period 30 May to 19 June. The survey period started either at, or within one hour of dawn, or during the last three hours of daylight (dusk). Survey methods followed Gilbert *et al.* (1998), with the number of pairs for each species

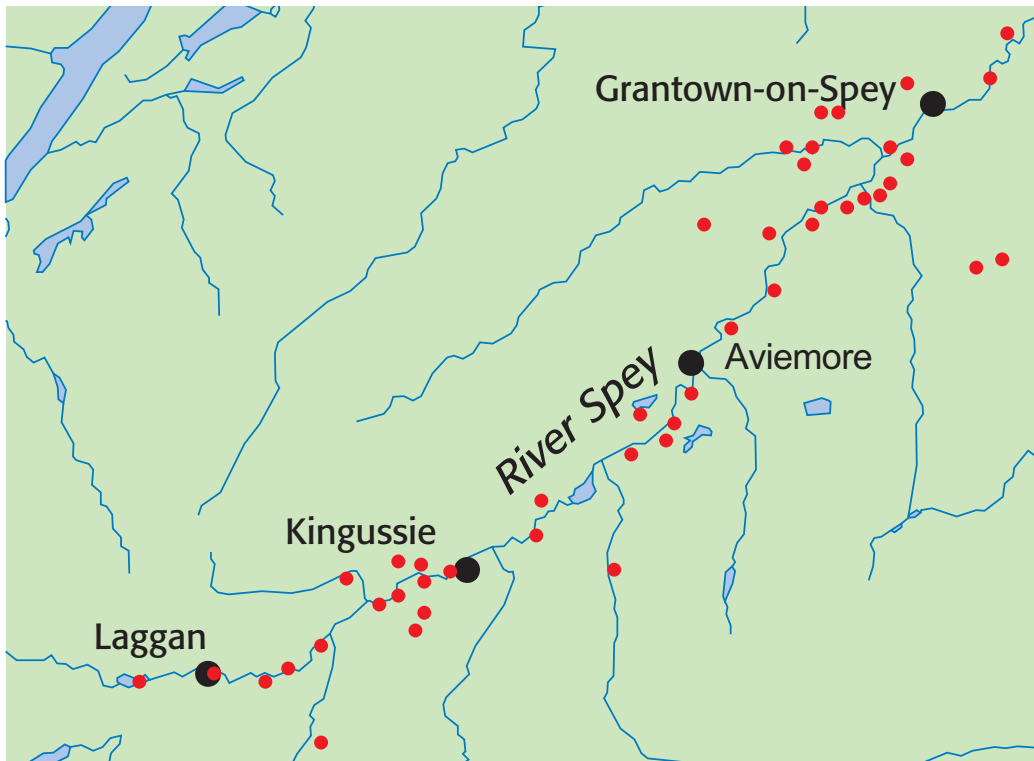


Figure 1. The location of the 45 wetland and farmland sites (●) in Badenoch & Strathspey where breeding waders surveys were undertaken in 2000 and 2005. One site, at Dalnaspidal (NN6473), was to the south of Badenoch and is not shown.

determined as: the peak number of pairs of Oystercatchers recorded over the three visits; the peak number of Lapwings recorded on the site divided by two; the peak number of Snipe heard drumming or chipping was multiplied by 1.68; the mean number of individual Curlew counted over the three visits using the formula $(0.71 \times \text{mean count}) + 0.1$; the mean number of individual Redshank counted over the three visits.

Field access was on foot. Surveys were not carried out during wet or windy weather because waders, in common, perhaps, with field survey workers, do not then perform very well. For this reason, the 'best weather days' in any week were chosen for field survey work. The same survey methods were used in both years. Simple weather records (daily temperatures and rainfall) were recorded at a meteorological station at Insh (NH8202) and weather conditions were broadly similar during the two survey periods (2000 and 2005, Table 1).

Table 1. Comparisons of weather data for the two survey periods, 2000 and 2005 (63 days). Records taken from RSPB Insh Marshes meteorological data recordings.

	18 April to 19 June 2000	18 April to 19 June 2005
No. of days with rainfall	35	34
Average rainfall (mm)	2.26	1.9
Average temperature (°C)	15	13.5
Maximum/minimum temperature (°C)	27/-3	25/-5
Frost days with temp 0°C or below	10	5

Results

The total number of pairs of waders of the five commonest species, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew and Redshank, was 2,429 pairs in 2005, representing a 28% decline since 2000 (3,381 pairs). Individual species showed different trends. Overall, the number of pairs of Oystercatcher increased by 9% compared with 2000. However, during the same period the numbers of Redshank declined by 19%, Curlew by 28% displaying Snipe declined by 30%, and Lapwing by 43%. The total number of pairs of waders recorded in 2000 and 2005, percentage change in individual species, and percentage change in total number of pairs of waders between the two survey years are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The total number of pairs of waders recorded in Badenoch & Strathspey in 2000 and 2005.

	Total no. of pairs in 2000	Total no. of pairs in 2005	% change 2000–2005	No. of sites showing increase, or no change (%)	No. of sites showing decrease (%)
Oystercatcher	523	571	+9%	25 (54%)	21 (46%)
Lapwing	1328	761	-43%	11 (24%)	35 (76%)
Snipe	773	542	-30%	17 (37%)	29 (63%)
Curlew	460	332	-28%	17 (37%)	29 (63%)
Redshank	297	223	-25%	14 (30%)	32 (70%)
Total	3381	2429	-28%	12 (26%)	34 (74%)

Of the 46 sites, 12 (26%) showed an increase compared with 2000, and 34 (74%) showed a decrease (Figure 2). The sites which showed an increase were similar in average size to those that showed a decrease (c. 180 ha, $f_{45}=0.17$, $p=0.68$), and held, on average a similar numbers of bird (c. 54 pairs, $f_{45}=0.25$, $p=0.62$). However, five out of the 12 sites showing an increase, held less than 20 pairs of waders in 2005. Note that despite the number of Oystercatchers increasing by 9%, they declined on 46% of sites. For the other four species, the proportion of sites showing a decrease in numbers was, broadly, relative to the decline in numbers of each species across the Strath. The sites with the highest density of breeding waders recorded in 2005 are shown in Table 3.

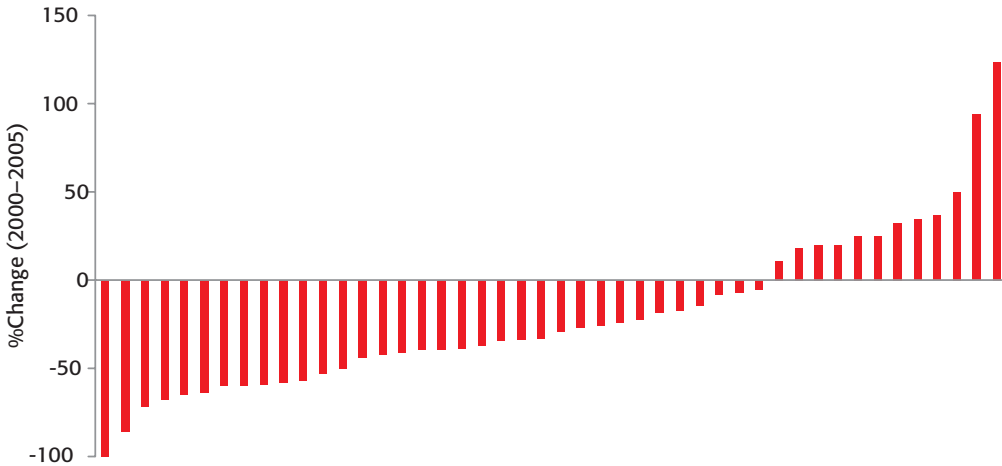


Figure 2. The percentage change in the number of breeding waders recorded on 46 sites in Badenoch & Strathspey between 2000 and 2005. Note: 0% = no change.

Table 3. The sites/farms with the highest density of breeding farmland waders in 2005 compared with 2000.

Site/Farm	Size (ha)	Density of breeding waders in 2000 (pairs/ha)	Density of breeding waders in 2005 (pairs/ha)
1. Balliefurth Farm	85	1.22	1.67
2. Highland Wildlife Park	47	1.04	0.85
3. Insh Marshes	757	1.07	0.83
4. Boat of Garten	152	0.74	0.68
5. Dale of Newtonmore	85	0.68	0.64
6. Duthil/Ballinluggan	97	2.12	0.59
7. Cromdale	117	0.82	0.50
8. Laggan Marsh *	18	1.05	0.44
9. Uvie Lochans *	19	0.63	0.42
10. Strone	127	0.44	0.41

*Note that two of the sites are relatively small and hold few waders: Laggan Marsh and Uvie Lochans holding only eight pairs of breeding waders each.

A small number of sites have been surveyed in years other than 2000 and 2005. These allowed for longer term trends to be examined. Cluny Marsh (NN6594) comprises wetland and mixed grassland agricultural land alongside the River Spey between Newtonmore and Laggan. It is grazed by sheep and cattle, although cattle numbers declined up to the mid-2000s. There has been a steady decline in the number of breeding pairs of waders from 109 pairs in 1992 to 23 pairs in 2005. The largest losses were Lapwing, down from 59 pairs in 2000, Snipe, down from 19 pairs in 2003, and Redshank, down from 22 pairs in 1992 (Figure 3).

Dellmore of Kingussie (NN7599) comprises pasture, scrub, small areas of marsh/fen and river shingles along the northern bank of the River Spey between Newtonmore and Kingussie. Part of the area is grazed by cattle and sheep and also used for hay and silage making and there is a small area of cereal cultivation. Some of the land (towards Kingussie) is no longer being used for agriculture, although much of it was formerly grazed. There has been a modest increase in the number of breeding pairs of waders since 2000 (from 55 pairs to 61 pairs between 2000 and 2005) due to an increase in Oystercatchers and Lapwings, although Snipe have virtually abandoned the site. However, the number of pairs recorded in 2005 is lower than in the mid-1990s, when 82 pairs of Lapwing were recorded (Figure 4).

Balliefurth (NJ0123) is a mixed farm with permanent pasture, some of it herb-rich, marshy grassland and rough grazing, some barley and an area of planted seeds. Beef cattle and sheep are grazed and the re-seeded pastures are cut twice for silage. An RSPB management agreement covers part of the site. In contrast to the first two examples above, the number of breeding pairs of waders has increased since 1999, particularly Redshank and Lapwings (Figure 5), probably as a result of sympathetic and targeted management and the willingness of the landowner to implement management recommendations.

Few sites within Badenoch & Strathspey have been monitored adequately enough to investigate long-term trends at the farm/site level. However, from two of the three examples given above it is probable that, at some sites, the decline in numbers of breeding waders started before 2000.

Discussion

The main changes in agriculture that have affected breeding waders in Europe are thought to be a change to intensively managed grasslands, a loss of mixed farming systems, increased use of pesticides, changes in cropping, changes in livestock systems, field drainage and increases in the number of predators (see Baines 1988, Green & Robins 1993, Wilson *et al.* 2004, 2005). Agricultural intensification has affected breeding waders through the loss of quantity and quality of nesting habitat and a decline in abundance and availability of food (e.g. Beintema *et al.* 1991). In Scotland, the greatest densities of breeding waders have been found on poorly drained rough grazings (Galbraith *et al.* 1984), while in the Cairngorm Straths, highest wader densities were associated with rushy pastures, rough grazings and old grassland (Picozzi *et al.* 1996).

Ten areas in Scotland were designated as Environmentally Sensitive areas (ESA) by the Scottish Office during the mid-1990s. The scheme has potential benefit for breeding waders (Swash 1997). Under the scheme, farmers within the boundaries of an ESA have the option of registering for payments which help compensate for loss of revenue which may

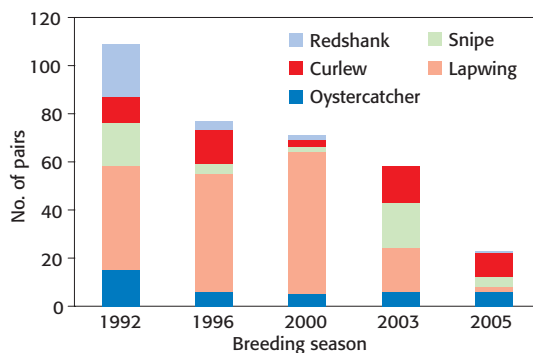


Figure 3. Changes in the number of common breeding waders at Cluny Marsh, Badenoch, 1992–2005.

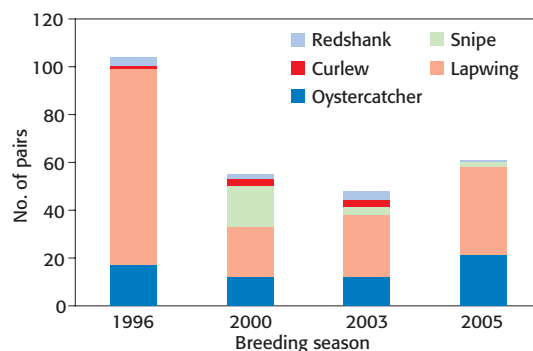


Figure 4. Changes in the number of common breeding waders at Dellmore of Kingussie, Badenoch, 1996–2005.

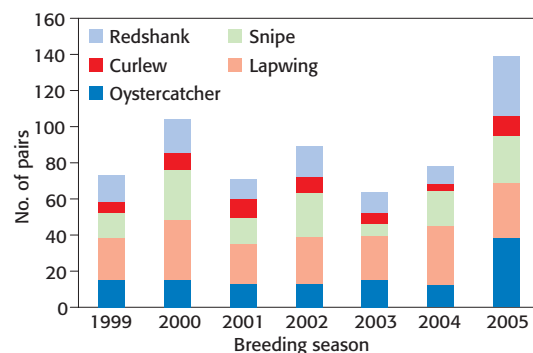


Figure 5. Changes in the number of common breeding waders at Balliefurth Farm, Strathspey, 1999–2005.

result from less intensive practices. Options available in the Cairngorm Straths ESA appeared to either maintain or create suitable habitat to benefit breeding waders (Picozzi *et al.* 1996). More recently, agri-environment schemes, such as the Countryside Premium Scheme, Rural Stewardship Scheme and the current Rural Development Contracts, Rural Priorities Scheme, have included wader friendly prescriptions. Some of the farms within the 2005 survey area have included areas for wader friendly management, targeted at reducing incidents of trampling during the nesting season. While these may have resulted in short term benefits for breeding waders, through improved nesting success, there is concern that the medium term impacts of extended periods with little or no grazing, and farmers' response to these restrictions, have had a deleterious effect on both sward and soil structure and, ultimately on breeding wader populations.

Some of the farms (26% of those surveyed) within Badenoch & Strathspey have shown an increase in wader numbers between 2000 and 2005. This may be due to positive and/or sympathetic management for breeding waders (e.g. Balliefurth Farm, see above). Alternatively, changes in agriculture within the Strath, may have concentrated more birds into the few remaining suitable places where they may be exposed to higher predation risks.

During a study of 630 Lapwing nests monitored at eight sites near Newtonmore, Badenoch between 1996 and 1998, mean clutch size (3.6 eggs) and mean brood size at a hatching (3.0 chicks) remained constant and nest survival from laying to hatching was around 60% (range 32–75%) (French *et al.* 2000). Daily failure rates differed depending on habitat. Nest failures were attributed to agricultural operations (10%), trampling (7%), predation (13%), other (9%) and unknown (61%). Overall, chick mortality was high and the survival rates, allowing for replacement clutches, would, at most, have equated to between 0.38 and 0.77 chicks per breeding pair. On the RSPB Insh Marshes reserve, 132 Lapwing nests were monitored at a site with at least 35 breeding females between 2000 and 2002 (Dickens 2002, Fredricks 2002). The mean clutch size (3.4 eggs) and mean brood size (3.0 young) were similar to those recorded at Newtonmore (French *et al.* 2000). Nest survival varied between 80% in 2000 and 41.5% in 2002. Of the failed nests, 44% were predated, 16% trampled, 5% deserted, 5% flooded and 30% from unknown causes. Productivity was estimated at 0.59 chicks per female (range between 0.42 and 0.83), although monitoring chick survival without being able to individually recognise the chicks proved to be difficult in the study area. Both studies suggest that productivity in the area was at or below levels required for the Lapwing population to remain stable (0.83–0.97 chicks/pair, Peach *et al.* 1994; 0.56 chicks/pair Catchpole *et al.* 1999).

The key drivers contributing to a decrease (and on a small number of sites, an increase) in breeding wader populations in Badenoch & Strathspey are poorly known and equally merits attention. A third survey, planned for 2010, may help to identify some of these causes. In addition to monitoring trends in wader numbers, this survey should aim to identify those areas that are within agri-environment schemes with wader friendly prescriptions and ascertain whether wader populations trends are favourable in these schemes.

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Numbers and distribution of breeding Wood Sandpipers in Scotland - results of the 2007 national survey

B. KALEJTA-SUMMERS & K. CHISHOLM

The number of Wood Sandpipers has declined in many European countries in recent years or it has become locally extinct. Britain is at the most westerly part of its range, with all the birds nesting in Scotland. A survey of 57 old sites and nine additional random sites took place in Scotland between May and July 2007. Wood Sandpipers occupied 20 sites, including four new sites. Breeding was confirmed at four sites, five were probable breeding sites and 11 were possible. Taking into consideration only the confirmed and probable breeding records, a minimum of 16 pairs bred. However, if the further 10 possible breeding pairs are included, the population size was 26 pairs.

Wood Sandpipers have been recorded at 65 sites during the breeding season since the first breeding record in Scotland in 1959. A review of the sites indicated that 12 had unlikely breeding habitat and the records in the past were probably of non-breeding birds. In addition, there were six sites where habitat changes, both natural and man made, took place and birds no longer bred. There were also 27 sites, where no visible changes have taken place and there was no apparent reason why birds no longer bred.



Plate 169 (left). A Wood Sandpiper on its breeding grounds in Scotland, June 2006 © Bozena Kalejta-Summers.
Plate 170 (right). Wood Sandpipers in Scotland prefer areas with access to bare wet ground, which they use for feeding. This picture was taken in June 2007 at the site in Ross & Cromarty, where birds have been breeding for over 20 years © Bozena Kalejta-Summers.

Introduction

The Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* breeds from the north-west coast of Norway through Russia to eastern Siberia (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1986, Tucker & Heath 1994). It is a migratory species, wintering throughout Africa, from the Mediterranean region to the southern tip of Africa, and from southern China through south-east Asia to Australia (Ferguson-Lees 1971, Cramp & Simmons 1983).

The total European breeding population is estimated to be 1.2 million pairs, with Fennoscandia and the European part of Russia containing up to a quarter of the global breeding population (Tucker & Heath 1994). Although numbers in Fennoscandia are now considered to be stable, a considerable decline took place in Finland and Sweden during the 19th century. Other European breeding populations, in Denmark, Lithuania, Ukraine and Latvia have also declined. In Germany, Poland and Iceland it no longer breeds. The main reason for the decline in the European breeding population is habitat change, predominantly through the drainage and destruction of bogs, and possibly climate change (Glutz van Blotzheim *et al.* 1977, Boström 1978). Although it is still reasonably common elsewhere, its gradual decline in western Europe is of concern.

Britain is at the western limit of the range. Here, Wood Sandpipers were recorded nesting successfully for the first time in Northumberland in 1853 (Hancock 1874). Although, several possible breeding records existed, the first confirmed breeding in Scotland did not occur until 1959. Today, Scotland is the only part of Britain where Wood Sandpipers breed (Chisholm 2007, B. Kalejta-Summers & K. Chisholm in Forrester *et al.* 2007). There has been a steady increase in number of sites and number of breeding pairs in recent years (Chisholm 2007). However, because the status in Scotland is based mainly on casual records and varying degrees of monitoring, it is unknown whether any change is real or reflects a greater effort by observers. There is, therefore, a need for a better understanding of its distribution and abundance.

A two-year study was undertaken between 2006 and 2007 to examine the distribution, abundance and habitat selection of Wood Sandpipers in Scotland. In this paper, we present the results of the survey across Scotland and discuss the changes and suitability of the habitat at the past breeding sites. The results of the study of habitat requirements will be published elsewhere.

Methods

The national survey in 2007

Historical records of all breeding sites of Wood Sandpipers in Scotland were obtained from Chisholm (2007) and updated from recent records. Four of these sites were not included in the survey because grid references were either unclear or the habitat unsuitable. Altogether, 66 sites were selected for the national survey. Those included 57 sites where birds have been recorded since 1959 and an additional nine random sites, to account for the possibility of finding unknown sites. The random sites were selected 1–3 km from known sites, where it was thought that habitat was suitable.

Surveyors were asked to visit each site three times. It was the choice of the surveyor when to conduct the survey, as long as the first two visits were at least four days apart between 6 and 20 May, and the third visit was between 6 and 24 June 2007. Forty-seven surveyors took part. Each surveyor was provided with instructions, map and background information on the behaviour of the birds. The boundary of each site comprised a circle with a 500-m radius, centred on the previous record. However, if suitable breeding habitat occurred outside the circle, surveyors were asked to check outside the designated site. It was expected that at least three hours would be spent at the site, and that routes would be walked across the site to within 200 m of every point of the site.

Surveyors were equipped with tape lures to broadcast Wood Sandpiper calls to stimulate them to respond. They played the tapes/CD every 300 m for 1–2 minutes, while walking across the site.



Plates 171–172. This is a relatively new breeding site for Wood Sandpipers in Badenoch & Strathspey, where at least three pairs have been breeding since 1989. Birds here occupy small islands in the loch and often feed alongside margins (May 2006). Later in the season (June 2007), the islands become densely fringed by the Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* and Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, where the birds feed and guard their chicks © Bozena Kalejta-Summers.

Changes in status of breeding sites

To determine if changes in habitat, land management or other factors had taken place that might have affected the occupancy by Wood Sandpipers, details about the sites were obtained by talking to individuals who made the past records and to site managers. In some cases, archive documents were studied.

Four categories were used to describe the breeding status of the sites (modified from Hagemeyer & Blair 1997)

1. **Confirmed breeding site** - a site where breeding was confirmed by the presence of a nest, eggs, egg shells or chicks. Also, if agitated behaviour of an adult took place, indicating the presence of chicks, on more than one occasion within one breeding season.
2. **Probable breeding site** - a site where presence of a singing adult, courtship or display flight took place on more than one occasion during one breeding season. Also, if alarm calls from an adult occurred only once.
3. **Possible breeding site** - a site where an adult was recorded in suitable breeding habitat, or singing/displaying birds were recorded only once.

Results

The national survey in 2007

Observer effort varied between sites. The average time spent by observers at the 57 known sites was 7 hours and 2 minutes for all visits combined (range: 50 minutes to 18 hours and 15 minutes). Less time was spent surveying the additional nine sites. The average time spent at each site was 2 hours and 43 minutes (range: 40 minutes to 4 hours and 45 minutes). At seven sites, further surveys were abandoned after the first visit and only two visits were paid to 10 sites. In some cases, surveys were not continued after the first visit, when it was noted that the habitat was unsuitable for breeding Wood Sandpipers. In other cases, observers were unable to pay all three visits.

Wood Sandpipers were recorded at 17 of 66 sites surveyed, including a new site which was one of the nine additional random sites (site 17 in Table 1). There were also another three new sites (sites 18–20 in Table 1), which were not part of the national survey, where birds were recorded incidentally.

Of 20 sites occupied in 2007, four sites were confirmed, five were probable and 11 possible (Table 1). Taking into consideration only the confirmed and probable breeding records, a minimum of 16 pairs bred at nine sites in 2007, with one site holding seven pairs. However, if a further 10 possible pairs are included at an additional 10 sites (records at sites 10 and 11 are considered to be of the same pair) (Table 1), the population size was 26 pairs.

Changes in the status of breeding sites

Between 1959 and 2006, there have been 61 breeding sites of Wood Sandpipers, including four sites that were excluded from the survey in 2007 (see methods). In 2007, four new sites were found (sites 17–20 in Table 1), making a total of 65 sites where Wood Sandpipers have been recorded. The majority of the sites were located in the Highlands, mainly in Sutherland and Caithness. Of the 65 sites, 13 sites were confirmed breeding sites, 12 were probable breeding sites and 40 were possible (Table 2). Thirty of those sites are designated as SPAs (Special Protection Areas), SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) or SACs (Special Areas of Conservation). However, only three of the designated sites list Wood Sandpiper as a qualifying feature.

Of the 65 sites where Wood Sandpipers were recorded between 1959 and 2007, 18 were considered no longer suitable for the breeding birds (Table 3). Twelve of those sites had records of single birds in unlikely breeding habitat, so they were possibly non-breeders. At three sites, natural changes in the vegetation over time have made the sites unsuitable for breeding. However, there were also three sites where habitat changes were caused by man, making them unsuitable. For instance, a single bird was seen at a site in North-east Scotland in 1977, but despite several visits in the following years, no other records were made (G. Rebecca, pers. comm.). This could be due to the fact that this site underwent several changes over the years. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, it was drained, ploughed and seeded with grass. At present, it also serves as a helicopter landing base, causing considerable disturbance (G. Rebecca, pers. comm.).

Table 1. List of the sites and details of Wood Sandpiper records during the national survey in 2007. Details of records prior to the current survey and the breeding status code for each site are also given. †A pair at site 10 is thought to be the same as at site 11. CNF - confirmed breeding, PRB - probable breeding and PSS - possible breeding (see methods).

Site no.	Years in which birds were recorded prior to survey in 2007	Number of pairs	Breeding status in 2007	Records of birds during the survey in 2007
1	1987, 2002	1	PSS	Single bird calling
2	1982, 1988, 1992–94, 1996, 2004	1	PSS	Single bird displaying
3	1973, 1975, 1977	1	PSS	Brief burst of song by a single bird
4	1988–89	1	PSS	Brief burst of song by a single bird
5	1962–63	1	PSS	Single bird heard singing
6	1977–79, 1981–82, 1984, 1987–88, 1994–95, 1998, 2002–06	1	CNF	A pair alarming on all three visits
7	2004	1	PSS	Single bird flushed
8	2006	1	CNF	Two alarming adults and a chick
9	2003	1	PRB	A pair alarming
10	2004	1†	PSS	Single bird singing and displaying
11	2004	1†	PRB	A pair alarming
12	2004	1	PSS	Single bird heard singing
13	1972, 1978–80, 1982–84, 1987–88, 1992–2006	7	CNF	Alarming birds indicating seven pairs; one chick and four fledglings seen
14	2001–02	1	PRB	Two birds alarming and singing
15	1998–2006	2	CNF	Alarming adults indicating two pairs
16	2005–06	1	PRB	Two birds displaying on all three visits
17	no previous records	1	PSS	Single bird flushed
18	no previous records	1	PSS	Single bird displaying
19	no previous records	1	PSS	Single bird displaying
20	no previous records	1	PRB	Single bird alarming
		Total: 26		

Table 2. Regional summary of 65 breeding sites of Wood Sandpipers in Scotland between 1959 and 2007 with the number of designated sites and breeding status. The list includes four sites excluded from the 2007 survey and four new sites (see methods).

SOC recording area	Total number of sites	Number of designated sites	Possible breeding	Breeding status	
				Probable breeding	Confirmed breeding
Outer Hebrides	5	1	2	3	0
Caithness	9	6	5	1	3
Sutherland	22	14	17	3	2
Ross & Cromarty	4	1	1	2	1
Inverness District	6	1	4	1	1
Badenoch & Strathspey	7	2	2	1	4
Moray & Nairn	1	1	1	0	0
North-east Scotland	5	2	5	0	0
Perth & Kinross	1	1	0	1	0
Lochaber	5	1	3	0	2
Total	65	30	40	12	13

Similarly, human induced changes at the Insh Marshes in Badenoch & Strathspey, are believed to have affected the breeding birds. Wood Sandpipers bred here since at least 1968. Nests were found in some years between 1974 and 1984, with birds breeding possibly until 1996. In the early 1970s, Wood Sandpipers nested on moorland south of the RSPB reserve and outside the SSSI/SPA boundaries. Parts of this area were burnt, cleared or ploughed, and boggy areas drained prior to planting with Scots Pines *Pinus sylvestris* and Lodgepole Pines *Pinus contorta* by the Forestry Commission in 1977 (D.C. Jardine, pers. comm.). Despite the changes, birds continued to breed here for the next few years. However, presumably when the conifers grew and the habitat became unsuitable (Insh Marshes, RSPB annual reports), Wood Sandpipers ceased breeding. The peak number of nests occurred the year after the moor was burnt prior to tree planting, with five nests being located and up to 15 pairs estimated. In the mid-1990s, 2.6 ha and 5.4 ha of the forest was felled by the Forestry Commission in attempt to create suitable breeding habitat for Wood Sandpipers (D.C. Jardine, pers. comm.). However, so far, no birds have been recorded in these areas.

Forty seven sites were considered to have a suitable breeding habitat for Wood Sandpipers (for details see Kalejta-Summers 2007), but only 20 of these sites had birds in 2007 (Tables 1&t 3).

Table 3. Regional distribution and status of 65 breeding sites of Wood Sandpipers between 1959 and 2007. The list includes four sites excluded from the survey and four new sites found in 2007.

	Sites with unlikely breeding habitat and no birds recorded in 2007			Sites with likely breeding habitat	
	Sites with a single record of possibly a non-breeding bird	Sites where habitat changed naturally	Sites where habitat changed due to man	Sites with no records in 2007	Sites where birds were recorded during the survey in 2007
Outer Hebrides	1	0	0	3	1
Caithness	3	0	0	2	4
Sutherland	2	2	0	10	8
Ross & Cromarty	2	0	0	0	2
Inverness District	1	0	0	3	2
Badenoch & Strathspey	1	0	1	3	2
Moray & Nairn	0	0	1	0	0
North-east Scotland	1	1	1	2	0
Perth & Kinross	0	0	0	1	0
Lochaber	1	0	0	3	1
Total	12	3	3	27	20



Plate 173. Wood Sandpipers were recorded at 22 sites in Sutherland since the first record in 1959. At this site, photographed in June 2007, birds used to breed in the open habitat of mire and wet heath, intersected by pools, boggy channels or firm heathery ground © Bozena Kalejta-Summers.



Plate 174. A breeding site for Wood Sandpipers in Ross & Cromarty, June 2007. Birds have been breeding here since 1972. The range of habitats here includes open water, swamp, grassland and fen communities © Bozena Kalejta-Summers.

Discussion

The national survey in 2007 revealed that the breeding population of Wood Sandpipers in Scotland was 26 pairs, with birds present at 20 sites (Table 1). However, one has to be cautious when interpreting the presence of birds as a possible breeding record, because migration to and from the breeding grounds further north coincides with the breeding season in Scotland. Spring passage of Wood Sandpipers in Scotland occurs between late April and mid-June and autumn passage occurs between late July and late September (Kalejta-Summers & Chisholm in Forrester *et al.* 2007). On the other hand, the 26 pairs might also be an underestimate. Firstly, not all sites had three visits, as recommended. Observer effort at each visit varied, and the full three hours surveying were not spent at all sites. Wood Sandpipers are secretive birds and, although lures were played to stimulate a response, a short visit may not be sufficient to detect them. On a few occasions, the presence of birds was not detected during the first two visits but alarming adults were present on the third visit. However, this could be due to the birds nesting elsewhere and coming to the site only with their brood. Wood Sandpipers can lead their brood up to 100 m within 24 hours (Ferguson-Lees 1971). At one of the sites in Scotland, a brood moved 200 m to the edge of a loch within three days of hatching (Kalejta-Summers 2007). Birds also tend to be less active at low temperatures or when there is strong wind or heavy rain (Kalejta-Summers 2002, 2007). Because all surveyors, except one, were volunteers, the majority of surveys were conducted over the weekends and, consequently, poor weather conditions were sometimes difficult to avoid. The presence of Wood Sandpipers at four new sites also indicates that there could be more unknown sites in Scotland.

The survey showed that 18 of all 65 known sites may now be unsuitable as breeding sites (Table 3). Of those, 12 were probably never potential breeding sites and the records of Wood Sandpipers in the past were actually of non-breeding birds. It is also possible that birds recorded in unlikely breeding habitat were actually feeding birds that bred elsewhere. Wood Sandpipers can travel considerable distances from their breeding sites in search for food (pers. obs.). Habitat changes, both natural and man-made, were implicated in the disappearance of breeding birds at 6 sites. There were also 27 sites where no visible changes took place and there was no obvious reason why birds no longer bred. However, factors other than change in habitat could also make the site unsuitable and cause the birds to abandon it; for instance, predation or human disturbance. Fishermen, hill walkers and birdwatchers were frequently observed at or close to breeding sites. Forty-six percent of the breeding sites are protected through designation (Table 2) and the management plans for those sites should promote responsible access to them. At one of the sites, where birds bred successfully for a number of years, sport shooting was conducted during the breeding season (Kalejta-Summers 2007). Informing the owners and managers of the sensitivity of the sites may encourage them to undertake sympathetic management.

Systematic monitoring of the small population of Wood Sandpipers in Scotland should be conducted on a regular basis. Some of the sites are within the boundaries of RSPB reserves and regular surveying is already part of the duties at those sites.

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Plate 175. *Twite* winter habitat: overwintering cattle on dune edge, Sandhead, Luce Bay, Dumfries & Galloway, December 2008 © R. Mearns

Wintering Twite in Dumfries & Galloway

R. MEARNS

Records of wintering Twite in Dumfries & Galloway over the past 50 years show that birds consistently occur on low-altitude coastal farmland near Stranraer, and on saltmarshes at Wigtown Bay and the inner Solway. Although numbers have declined historically there was no convincing evidence of any further decrease in the past 10 years. Flock sizes were mostly of 10–100 birds with occasional larger flocks up to 300, and more rarely up to 600. Few birds now occur more than 5 km from the coast. During winter 2008/09 more Twite were present on low altitude coastal farmland in west Galloway than on saltmarsh on the inner Solway. The maximum number of Twite present in the region in any winter month probably did not exceed 1,000, though additional undetected birds could perhaps bring numbers up to about 1,500 birds in some years. This could be as much as 10% of the mid-winter Scottish population.

Introduction

The Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* (of the endemic race *pipilans*) is one of the few British breeding land birds whose population is of international importance and is included in the Red List Species of High Conservation Concern (Gregory *et al.* 2002). It is a Local Priority Species in Dumfries & Galloway (Norman 2009). The species has experienced historical UK population declines since the 1800s (Holloway 1996) and the prime conservation requirement is to provide protection to the main breeding and wintering areas. The current breeding status of Twite in the region is very low with just a few pairs remaining in Wigtownshire on the west coast of the Rhins and parts of the Machars (Forrester *et al.* 2007). In early autumn and winter there is an influx of additional Twite, some of which may progress further southwards.

A review of winter habitats of Twite in Scotland was conducted by Clark & Sellers (1998a) who listed the habitats in Dumfries & Galloway where birds were found in varying degrees of abundance as weedy turnip fields, stubbles (other than rape), pasture, other farmland, dunes, beaches & strand line, salt marsh, and around cattle feed troughs and silage rings. This paper gives more detail about the distribution and habitats of Twite in this region, derived from a study of wintering Twite carried out in winter 2008/09 (Mearns 2009).

Methods

Literature search

The Dumfries & Galloway Environmental Resources Centre (DGERC) holds an extensive but incomplete set of wintering Twite data for the region, so additional records were sought elsewhere. The most obvious source was the *Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report* (1985 to the present), as well as some earlier versions of county reports dating to the 1960s and 1970s (Watson & Young 1967, 1968, 1970, Watson 1975, Wright 1979–81). All references to birds in the index to the *Transactions and Proceedings of the Dumfries-shire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* (1862–2008) were checked, as were unpublished notes and typescripts of J.G. Gordon (early 20th century) and A.D. Watson (late 20th century), and unpublished reports commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage. Local naturalists were contacted for unpublished records.

Fieldwork in winter 2008/09

The coast of Dumfries & Galloway was arbitrarily divided into 11 sections of unequal length, partly based on previous knowledge of Twite distribution in winter, with a 12th section for inland records. Twite records were then plotted on Excel spreadsheets for each section, for each calendar year for the months January–March and October–December. It was then possible to determine which sections of coast had the most Twite records, and which particular areas within each section had the most regular and most numerous reports of large Twite flocks. Thirteen sites were chosen for fieldwork, limited in size by the area of coverage possible in one day of fieldwork by one to two observers. Some sites were chosen because they were thought most likely to have wintering Twite, while others were checked because they had occasionally had large flocks. Each site was visited three times during the course of the winter, once each month in December, January and February. Sites were well covered on foot with the exception of some saltmarsh at Caerlaverock NNR to prevent disturbance to geese. All areas were scanned with binoculars and a telescope and any passerine flocks were watched closely to determine species composition as well as feeding and flocking behaviour. Searches were also made for dye-marked or colour-ringed birds. Whenever possible, flock counts were checked by photographing the birds in flight.

In addition, casual records of Twite were solicited from reserve staff at Wigtown Bay LNR, RSPB Mersehead, SNH Caerlaverock, WWT Caerlaverock and from local birdwatchers. An appeal was also made by the RSPB for those taking part in their Beached Bird Survey on 21–22 February 2009 to record any Twite seen.

Results

Literature search

Although the first reports of Twite in Dumfries & Galloway date back to the 1830s, it is an 1884 publication by Maxwell that best summarises the early status of this species with the statement that it 'occurs in great flocks in winter, and a few remain to breed with us.' Twite were more numerous, not only along the coast but in inland areas too. Lockerbie, Canonbie, Langholm, Upper Nithsdale, Moffat, and Eskdalemuir are mentioned as places where Twite arrived in the autumn (Gladstone 1910). Most reports were of a general nature, lacking information about flock size and location. It was not until the late 1950s that local birdwatchers began to note flocks with details of numbers, location and exact date, and it was not until the late 1960s that such records began to appear in the annual bird reports for Dumfriesshire (firstly for 1965) and Galloway (firstly for 1975). In the local bird reports covering the whole of Dumfries & Galloway (1985–2008) Twite records are becoming more numerous, reflecting an increase in the overall numbers of observers and the number of bird records submitted rather than any sudden increase in the number of over-wintering Twite as there are now multiple records for the same flocks. Significant additional records were found in two studies. Quinn *et al.* (1993) surveyed the inner Solway merse for all species of wintering birds in 1991/92 and 1992/93, and during the course of

fieldwork some large Twite flocks were recorded. Whyte (2001) made the only attempt to identify the birds' feeding preferences and micro-habitat usage within extensive areas of merse. Records held at the DGERC are mapped in Figure 1.

Winter habitats were rarely specified in the literature but included the following: 'wild stubble lands' (Jardine 1839, quoted in Gladstone 1910); 'fairly well dispersed throughout the arable districts of the county [of Dumfriesshire], and are even met with on the lower moors until the weather becomes too severe' (Gladstone 1910); and 'coastal fields and along the tide-wrack and to a lesser extent inland [in Wigtownshire]' (Dickson 1992). Comments sent to local bird recorders include general observations such as 'on barley stubble', 'in stubble field with other finches', 'in scrubby field', 'in dunes and near shoreline', 'merse', 'merse and riverbank', 'strandline', 'on debris washed up by floodwater'. Two reports stood out for their detail: 'habitat of moderately grazed improved neutral pasture with some agricultural weeds and a little poached/bare ground' and 'in a very heavily poached (75% bare) field which had been improved pasture until over-wintering cattle had had a few months to get at it' (D. Hawker via DGERC). Surprisingly, there appears to be no mention of saltmarsh as a winter habitat for Twite until 1957 (I.F. Stewart *in litt.* 1957). Inland birds (more than 5 km from the coast) were mostly on farmland. Habitat details for some of these recent inland records were obtained: Torthorwald: a flock of 300 birds in a turnip field (D. Skilling pers. comm.); Kirkton: small numbers, in two winters, in a field within a conservation scheme containing barley stubble, un-harvested barley and a high proportion of arable weeds, including an abundance of Fat-hen *Chenopodium album*, with other finches present (R. & B. Mearns pers. obs.); Lochfoot: moderately grazed improved neutral pasture with some agricultural weeds such as thistles *Carduus*, Stinging Nettles *Urtica dioica* and Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*, and a little poached/bare ground and, in a different year, feeding on bare ground in pasture (D. Hawker via DGERC).

Although it would be easy to overlook Twite in the uplands (above 300 m) it seems unlikely that they occur there in winter with any regularity. The only two records from high ground were from two observers, each with several decades of winter visits to the hills, who had each only ever seen Twite on one occasion: four flocks on the same day in the hills south of Loch Trool where Twite were 'flushed from blanket bog ... I am pretty sure birds were taking heather seed' (G. Shaw pers. comm.); and one small flock feeding in upland grassland, with sedges *Carex* and wood-rush *Luzula*, on Benbrack, Carsphairn, where sheep had been removed following commercial afforestation at lower altitude (R. Mearns pers. obs.).

Specific food items have rarely been noted, partly because Twite feed on small seeds, often taken from the ground that could have come from any nearby plants. Food plants that are mentioned include Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* (Jardine 1839, quoted in Gladstone 1910), Self-heal *Prunella vulgaris* (Brown 1887), and Common Glasswort *Salicornia europaea* (I.F. Stewart *in litt.* 1957).

The only detailed local commentary concerning Twite food is restricted to saltmarsh plants (Whyte 2001). In this study Twite were recorded only on merse areas that were lightly grazed or not grazed at all and were associated with three main habitat types: pioneer saltmarsh communities of glasswort; lower saltmarsh communities (with salt-marsh grass *Puccinellia maritima* and a range of other low-marsh species); strandline communities with couch-grass *Elymus* or stranded vegetation. Away from the strandline, Twite were always associated with habitats with a relatively high density of seed heads of glasswort, Sea Aster *Aster tripolium*, Sea Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritimum*, Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima* or sea-lavenders *Limonium* (or a combination of these with seed heads of arrowgrass and plantain always present). It was noted that all of these species, with the exception of glasswort, can be suppressed by grazing. All sites used by Twite had glasswort except for one site that had the smallest number of birds overall. No Twite were seen on upper saltmarsh communities dominated by Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* or

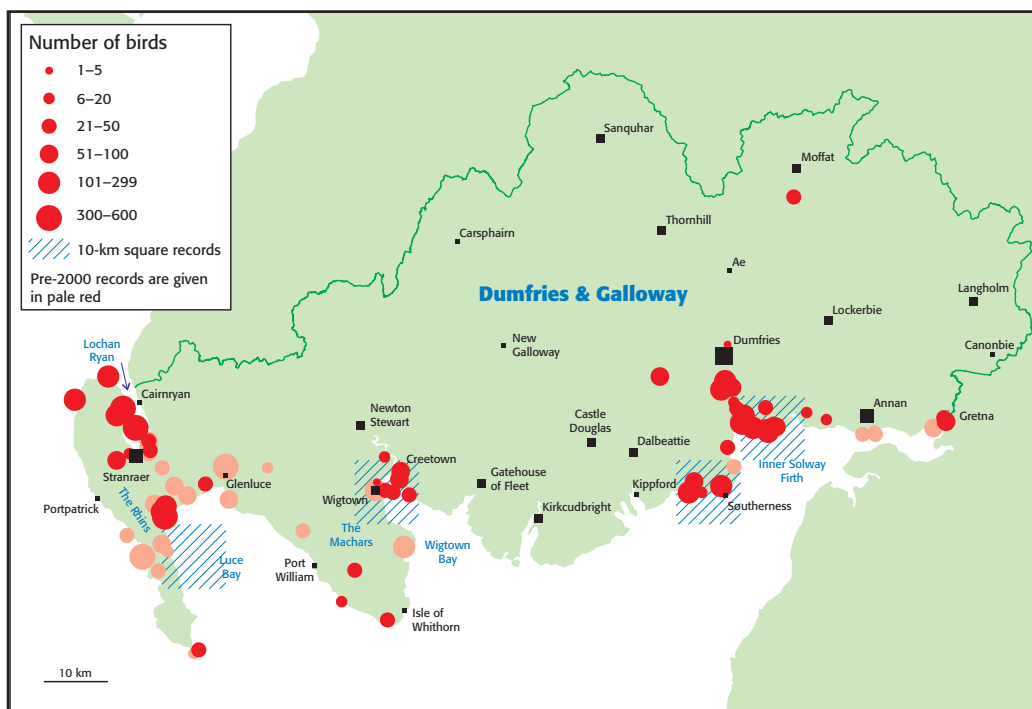


Figure 1. Distribution of Twite in Dumfries & Galloway during the mid-winter period November to February (all records held by DGERC up to February 2009 including fieldwork in 2008/09).

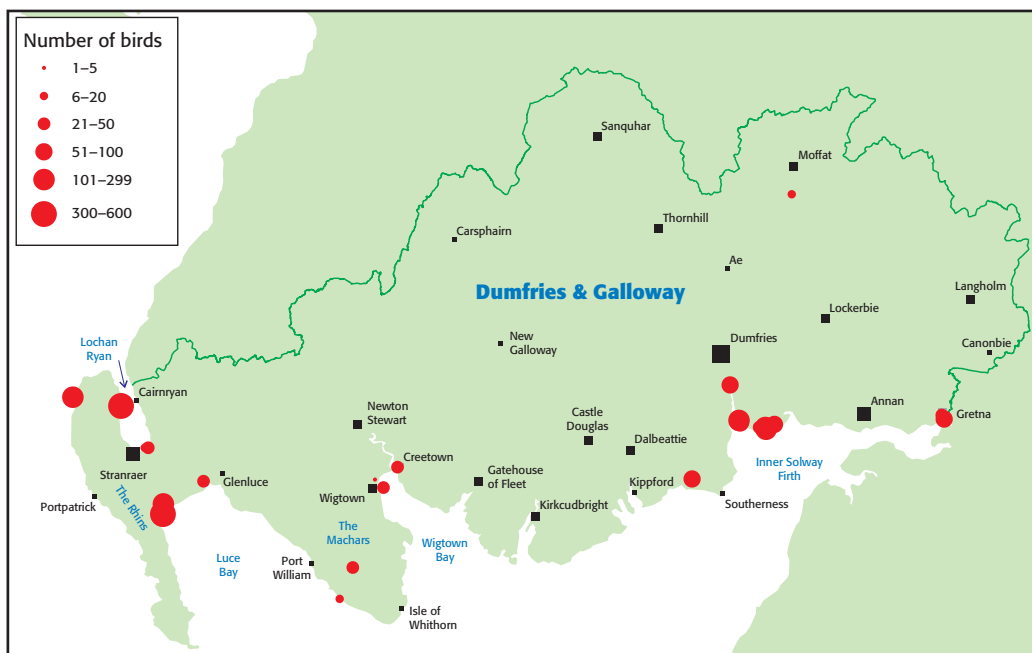


Figure 2. Distribution of Twite in Dumfries & Galloway during the mid-winter period November 2008 to February 2009 only.

those with a relatively low density of saltmarsh plant seed heads. Whyte reported that Sea Purslane *Atriplex portulacoides* played a role in twite feeding at the one site at which he considered it abundant (Southwick). Sea Purslane is also abundant at the Piltanton Estuary near Stranraer but Whyte did not visit that site and though Twite occur there occasionally there are no known observations of Twite feeding habits on that saltmarsh.

Fieldwork during winter 2008/09

The early parts of December and January were characterised by calm, cold weather, with many sunny days, so most fieldwork was carried out in optimum conditions. Much of the UK experienced heavy snowfalls during February but snowfall on the low ground in Dumfries & Galloway was slight and lasted only a few days; once again there were many calm sunny days with excellent visibility. Results from fieldwork at selected sites were pooled with sightings from other observers (Figure 2). The RSPB Beached Bird Survey did not directly provide any extra information on Twite, though one pair of observers took the opportunity to report a hitherto unrecorded inland flock.

Winter 2008/09 was a relatively good year for Twite in west Wigtownshire with high flock counts at several locations, notably at the Wig (maximum count 600), Dally Bay (200) and Sandhead (389) - believed to involve at least some of the same birds. In east Wigtownshire small numbers were present at Wigtown Bay (maximum 90). On the north inner Solway, there were flocks at only four locations (maximum counts of 60 at Mersehead, 97 near the River Nith at Kelton, 200 at Caerlaverock and 60 at the Sark River mouth near Gretna).

The majority of Twite were on farmland in weedy fields, often where docks *Rumex* were abundant, and often where cattle or sheep were being fed over the course of the winter such as the Wig at Loch Ryan, Dally Bay and Sandhead. Further east most Twite were on saltmarsh.

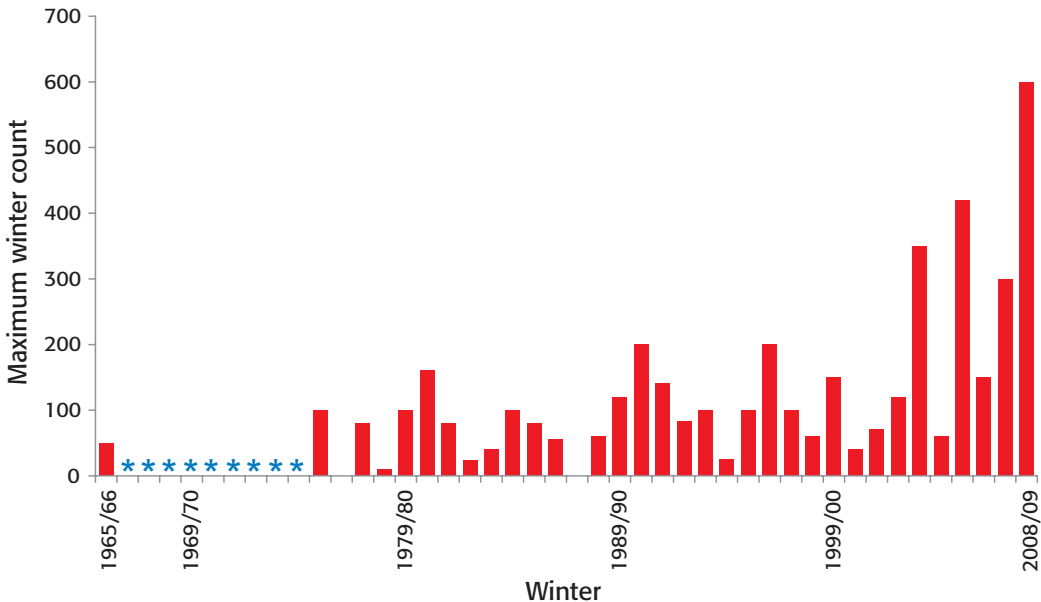


Figure 3. Winter maxima of Twite at Loch Ryan, Dumfries & Galloway, 1965/66 to 2008/09. * = no known data

Occurrence at particular sites

An apparent increase in Twite numbers on farmland and shoreline at Loch Ryan (Figure 3) may be a result of better coverage but considering the relatively stable numbers until 2003/04 it seems likely that this is a genuine increase in the number of Twite visiting in winter. Conversely, at Wigtown Bay the records seem rather irregular suggesting that Twite do not occur every year and that there has been a significant decline (Figure 4).

On the north inner Solway most Twite records have been from the Nith Estuary, especially Caerlaverock NNR. Examining all records for this area showed no particular trends but it was noticeable that within this area Quinn (1983) found high numbers of Twite in Carse Bay (maximum 387) and that Whyte (2001) found record numbers for Kirkconnell Merse (maximum 270). Both these places are visited infrequently by casual birdwatchers, but the possibility that significant numbers of Twite are being missed at these two locations year after year was slight as counts at the two sites were only high when counts elsewhere in the estuary were low. There were no Twite sightings at Carse Bay or Kirkconnell Merse during fieldwork in winter 2008/09, so it appears that Twite only use these saltmarshes in some winters.

In 1993 Mersehead Farm was purchased by the RSPB and since then it has gradually become one of the more regular sites for Twite in the region, with birds reported in almost every month between October and March from 1999 to the present. This almost certainly reflects a real increase in Twite numbers due to land management changes, in particular the provision of wild bird cover. Most counts of Twite on the reserve do not exceed 150 but in 2001 there were 447 in weedy turnips in March and 310 in April, after a period of snow (D. Fairlamb pers. comm.).

Inland Twite records (more than 5 km from the coast) are surprisingly scarce. Although most large finch flocks in inland Wigtownshire in 1970s and 1980s contained a few Twite (P.N. Collin pers. comm.), the recent local bird reports suggest that few now winter inland (less than 15 records since 1980).

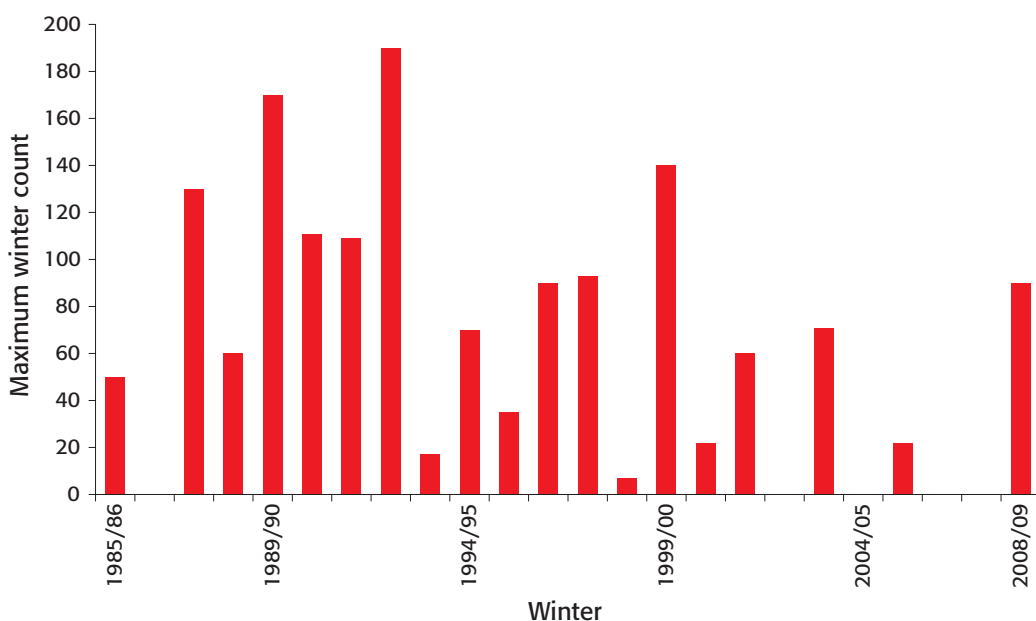


Figure 4. Winter maxima of Twite at Wigtown Bay, Dumfries & Galloway, 1985/86 to 2008/09

Discussion

Numbers, origins and movements

As expected, Twite distribution patterns deduced from the literature search for Dumfries & Galloway were broadly similar to those presented for the area within general Scottish summaries (R. Lambert in Lack 1986, Thom 1986, N. Wilkinson in Forrester *et al.* 2007). Fieldwork in winter 2008/09 was carried out in a year with relatively high numbers of birds present in both the west and east of the region. The origins of local Twite are unknown as only six individuals have ever been ringed locally and there are no ringing recoveries or controls for the region (North Solway Ringing Group data, G. Sheppard pers. comm.). Nor have there been any local sightings of Twite from north-west England or north-east Scotland where birds have been colour-ringed in recent years, including winter 2008/09. However, six birds colour-ringed on the north-west England wintering grounds were re-sighted during the breeding season on Sanda (Mull of Kintyre), Oronsay, Staffa and Eigg (Inner Hebrides), Bornish (South Uist), with an additional record in the Highlands east of Fort William (Raine *et al.* 2006), so it seems likely that wintering Twite in Dumfries & Galloway are also from these western parts of Scotland.

A study of colour-ringed Twite wintering in Norfolk showed that although individual birds made many movements in search of suitable feeding areas they remained on the same general part of the coast. They made movements of up to 25 km during the winter, regularly moving 10 km, sometimes daily (A. Brown & P.W. Atkinson in Wernham *et al.* 2002). If birds wintering in Dumfries & Galloway behave in a similar manner, they could easily move between Loch Ryan and Sandhead, from one side of Wigtown Bay to the other, from Carse Bay to Caerlaverock, and to and fro across the inner Solway at its narrower parts. Twite seen in the vicinity of Browhouses, Redkirk Point and Gretna may be derived from Cumbria's Rockcliffe Marsh but there was no suggestion that Twite regularly moved across the wider parts of the inner Solway, from say Caerlaverock to Moricambe Bay.

Twite flocks were seen to be repeatedly harassed by raptors during the winter on both farmland and saltmarshes. Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* and Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* were all seen to cause concern to Twite flocks, and may harry them day after day causing the flocks to split and disperse to other areas.

Population and trends

From the data collated from the literature it is obvious that the number and distribution of Twite varies from year to year, often considerably, with 'good' years and 'poor' years. The winter of 2008/09 was a winter for high numbers of Twite in west Wigtownshire and the north inner Solway, and this was also the case in parts of north-west England where there was a significant influx of mainly juvenile birds during late October to mid-November 2008. This variation makes it difficult to assess long term trends in Twite numbers but it does appear that numbers are increasing in west Wigtownshire, perhaps because these birds are derived from breeding areas where numbers are stable or increasing, though local food abundance is probably of greatest importance in determining abundance in any one area. An apparent slight decline at Wigtown Bay may simply be the result of a reduction in fieldwork as few observers walk onto the merse to search for birds, not even for the monthly Wetland Bird Survey - counting is mostly done at a distance by telescope from vantage points so as not to move the wildfowl and shorebirds around the bay (P.N. Collin pers. comm.).

The maximum numbers recorded in the region during mid-winter is not more than 1,000. Additional undetected birds could perhaps bring the overall numbers up to about 1,500 birds. N. Wilkinson (in Forrester *et al.* 2007) estimated that the mid-winter population for the whole of Scotland to be about 14,000 to 35,000 birds, so the Dumfries & Galloway proportion would be 7% to 2.8% (or, for the upper limit of 1,500 birds 10.7% to 4.3%).

Habitats and food preferences

Although the results were broadly comparable to the summary contained in Clark & Sellers (1998a) more detail was obtained on habitat preferences in a local context. The present study was intended to build on the work of Whyte (2001) though it is clear that Whyte's statement that 'overall, a regional picture emerges of a population which is mostly coastal, largely centred on or around saltmarsh' is true only for the east of the region. More than half the wintering Twite in Dumfries & Galloway occurred on low-altitude farmland in west Wigtownshire on stubble fields, kale and turnip fields, and degraded sand dunes where cattle were being fed. Most of the remainder of Twite recorded in winter 2008/09 were found on saltmarsh, the highest numbers at Caerlaverock NNR and Wigtown Bay LNR (cf Clark & Sellers 1998a where saltmarsh is erroneously indicated as widespread for Rhins of Galloway). Few birds were seen on the strandline, a habitat that is often considered typical for Twite, particularly during periods of hard frost and snow (Clark & Sellers 1998b), though such conditions rarely last for long at low altitudes in the south-west and may account for its relatively infrequent use locally. Maize fields, a recent addition to the local agricultural scene over the past 20 years or so, have never been mentioned as Twite feeding sites. This is not surprising as they are generally of poor value for wintering passerines as the dense stands of maize plants prevent other plants from flowering and setting seed. Rape is rarely planted and currently of little importance to Twite in the south-west.



Plate 176. Twite winter habitat: saltmarsh on Caerlaverock NNR, Dumfries & Galloway, February 2009 © R. Mearns

The practice of over-wintering cattle in the Stranraer area is widespread and thought to be linked to the milder winters there and to the drier ground conditions. It would seem to be beneficial to Twite in the wider sense that cattle are often over-wintered in the rougher, weedy fields, where poaching is of little concern to the farmer. The presence of weed seeds is of primary importance, rather than the presence of animals and animal feed. In the east of the region where Twite are more rarely found on farmland, a greater proportion of farm animals spend the winter indoors.

Almost all saltmarsh in the region lies within Sites of Special Scientific Interest and often also within an RSPB reserve or a Local or National Nature Reserve. Some areas are managed by conservation bodies for the benefit of wintering geese and breeding waders, some of which is beneficial to Twite. Farmland management is more rarely directed towards conservation but clearly the presence of weedy fields is of obvious importance. It seems ironic that the degraded sand dune areas adjacent to the border of Torrs Warren SSSI that are bereft of botanical importance because of cattle trampling are host to some of the largest flocks of Twite and other passerines in the whole region.

Further research

There are some areas in Dumfries & Galloway that Twite may be utilising year after year and not being recorded. The main priorities would be to make a more systematic and intensive survey of farmland on the Rhins, especially in the Stranraer-Sandhead-Dunragit area, to get a better idea of overall wintering numbers; and to increase coverage along the west coast of the Rhins. Attempts should also be made to examine all Twite flocks for the presence of colour-ringed birds to take advantage of the current work on wintering Twite in north-west England since it is highly likely that these birds pass through Dumfries & Galloway on their way to their breeding grounds further north in western Scotland.

Acknowledgements

This paper is a summary of part of an unpublished report to Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 327. Thanks are extended to Barry Dunne and other staff members at SNH Dumfries & Galloway, for assistance and encouragement. Chris Rollie and other RSPB staff at Crossmichael willingly supplied all their Twite records, including information from J.G. Gordon's 1930s typescript on 'The Birds of Wigtownshire' and MS notes by the late Donald Watson, and they further assisted by requesting Twite sightings during the 2009 RSPB Beached Bird Survey. Paul N. Collin (Bird Recorder for Dumfries & Galloway) kindly supplied information on Twite numbers, as did Mark Pollitt (DGERC) who also supplied the maps. Dave Fairlamb (RSPB Mersehead) and Steve Cooper (WWT Caerlaverock) searched through reserve records; and Bert Dickson trawled through his extensive field diaries between 1966 and 1997. I am grateful to the following for additional records or help in other ways: Les & Anne Dunford, Larry Griffin, Stephen Grover, Ray Hawley, Duncan Irving, Mick Marquiss, Barbara Mearns, Peter Norman, Stuart Rae, Andy Riches, Geoff Shaw, Geoff Sheppard, Derek Skilling, John Skilling and Anna White.

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Scottish Birds Records Committee criteria for identification of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

C.J. MCINERNY (on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee)

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* is an extremely rare bird in Scotland with just 34–35 individuals noted to the end of 2007, all of these adults or sub-adults, with no accepted records of either first-winter or first-summer birds (Forrester et al. 2007). Those seen in Scotland are assumed to be of the subspecies *michahellis*, although *atlantis* cannot formally be ruled out. A further large number of records have been rejected by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), usually because the descriptions did not eliminate other closely-related *Larus* species, or possible hybrids.

To help introduce transparency and consistency in the assessment of records of Yellow-legged Gull by SBRC, it was decided to draw up a list of characteristics that SBRC uses to judge records of adults and sub-adults of this species. It is hoped that these published criteria will prompt observers, when finding a putative Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, to endeavour to see and include all of these features in their description to ensure that other possibilities are eliminated.

Identification features

Yellow-legged Gull is a *Larus* species, between Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*L. argentatus argenteus* and *L. fuscus graellsii*) in size, but with a mantle/upperparts colour intermediate in shade between that of these two species, and most similar in tone to Common Gull *L. canus*, though marginally darker. In Scotland the most widespread subspecies of Herring Gull is the local resident breeding *argenteus*, which has pale grey upperparts, but the darker-coloured northern nominate subspecies *argentatus* is also observed through the autumn and winter. Yellow-legged Gull upperpart colour is very similar to *argentatus* in tone, but lacks the bluish tinge.

However, the most critical identification feature is a detailed description of the extent of black in the outer primaries of the upper wing. To see this feature can be very difficult under field conditions and requires careful prolonged views through a telescope, typically of a preening or flying bird, when the primary feathers are revealed. Digital photography can greatly assist this, and photographs should, if obtained, be included with the description. What should be noted involves the extent of black in the primaries with, for Yellow-legged Gull, much black from P10 to P6 (where P10 is the outer primary feather) and, crucially, a prominent thick sub-terminal black band in P5. The P10–P5 primary feathers should show small apical white spots, with P10 having a sub-terminal white mirror, which is sometimes present in P9, although very much smaller. This wing pattern excludes the *argentatus* subspecies of Herring Gull and Herring/Lesser Black-backed hybrids, which show either much reduced black in the outer primaries because of larger white apical spots and mirrors, grey/white tongues, and/or no black or a weak band in P5, mostly restricted to the outer web.

Other supporting features that help identify adult Yellow-legged Gull, and that should if possible be in the description, include:

1. Legs usually bright custard yellow, especially in spring/summer, but can be dull/pale yellow. However, rarely, Herring Gull can show yellow legs, so this feature *by itself* does not identify Yellow-legged Gull.
2. In winter, a clean bright white head with little or no streaking, although Yellow-legged Gull can show restricted light streaking around and behind the eye, and on the nape. Herring Gull, and particularly the subspecies *argentatus*, shows heavy, extensive, head streaking in winter. Yellow-legged Gull head profile is also more square-shaped than in Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls.
3. In late summer/autumn, the moult stage of primary feathers should, if possible, be described, as Yellow-legged Gull moults earlier than Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and consequently this can be a useful identification feature.
4. Compared with Herring Gulls of both subspecies, there is a longer primary projection, which in flight manifests as longer, narrower, wings. Birds with their wings folded such as when perched or sitting show a bulky front end and slender back end, with a scarcely noticeable tertial step, and are more similar in structure to Lesser Black-backed Gull. This is quite different from Herring Gull, particularly of the subspecies *argentatus*, which has a relatively short primary projection and a distinct tertial step.
5. In folded wings, extensive black in the primary feathers, with small apical white spots.
6. In spring/summer, a more prominent red spot on the gonyx of the bill than seen in Herring Gull. The bill often also looks larger and heavier, sometimes bulbous tipped, with a distinct gonydeal angle.
7. In flight, the underwing shows a dusky trailing bar.



Plate 177. Adult Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* Strathclyde Country Park Loch, Clyde, 17 February 2008 © Keith Hoey. This image shows a number of features used to identify this species described in this article, including the mantle tone in comparison with Lesser Black-backed and Mew Gulls (*L. fuscus graellsii* and *L. canus*), which are present alongside, the clean white square-shaped head, long primary projection, and small white apical spots on the black primary feathers. Crucially, however, this individual also showed a prominent black sub-terminal black band in P5, observed when the bird was washing and preening.

Usually, individuals are seen with other gull species, and direct comparison with these, especially *argenteus/argentatus* Herring and *graellsii* Lesser Black-backed Gulls, greatly strengthens the description. Furthermore, as many photos or videograbs should be taken and submitted as possible, as these often show features that are missed in field observation and allow jizz to be considered, and permit direct comparisons with other gull species under the same conditions if these are present.

Summary

In summary, and in order of importance, the following features should be looked for, and described in as much detail as possible in any submitted record of adult/sub-adult Yellow-legged Gull observed in Scotland:

1. Upperwing primary pattern, especially the amount of black/white in P10 and P5.
2. Mantle colour in direct comparison with other species of *Larus* gulls.
3. Bare part colouration.
4. Size/structure (jizz), emphasizing head shape and primary projection.
5. Molt details where relevant, either wing/primary moult (later summer/autumn) or amount of head streaking (winter).

As many photos or videograbs as possible should accompany the submission, along with direct comparisons with other closely related gull species.

These features can be used for birds of age second-summer/third-winter and older. Those that are second-winter and younger have not developed some of these features, especially the wing pattern, and so require a different set of criteria. Such age classes have not yet been recorded in Scotland.

We hope these notes help clarify the situation with regards to the identification of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, and the SBRC looks forward to receiving records of this species in the future.

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Short Notes

Displaying Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Tiree, Argyll in June 2004

At 16.30 hrs on 17 June 2004, whilst surveying a Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* colony on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll, I came across a small buff-coloured wader, which was feeding on short turf in amongst the Little Tern nests. I quickly identified the bird as a Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* on account of its tiny size, overall buff-coloured tones, finely-spotted breast-sides, short straight bill and orangey-yellow legs. The bird stayed at the colony for at least three days where I watched in daily and it always remained within a restricted area of c. 150 x 150 m of short grass on a gravelly base. The bird often took to flying around the perimeter of its chosen site in a curious slow flight, with the wings held high at the top of the upwards wing-beats flashing the white underwing and revealing the black crescent at the base of the primaries. The bird also raised a single wing and sometimes both wings in a similar manner from time to time, when it was on the ground. It was not clear whether this display was aimed at other species, as no other

Buff-breasted Sandpiper were present, but breeding Dunlin *Calidris alpina* and Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* were always present at the site as well as the Little Terns. The bird was last seen at 15.00 hrs on 19 June and was absent on 21 June.

Lone male Buff-breasted Sandpipers have been recorded displaying only twice before in Scotland: a bird present and displaying to Dunlin and Ringed Plover at Loch Borve, Berneray, Outer Hebrides from 23 June to 27 July 1995 and another displaying to Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* at Loch Stiapavat, Lewis on 5–6 June 1997 (Forrester *et al.* (eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. SOC, Aberlady).

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Six Buff-breasted Sandpipers together on Tiree in September 2007 - a record Scottish count

The Argyll island of Tiree has gained a reputation for producing rare birds in recent years, and, being the westernmost of the Inner Hebrides, it is not surprising that American waders regularly turn up on the island. The past five years have seen near-annual records of both American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, as well as records of Baird's Sandpiper *C. bairdii* and Semipalmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla* (Bowler, J. & Hunter, J. 2007. *Birds of Tiree and Coll*. Pairwood Publishing, Balephuill). However, in line with similar events on the Outer Hebrides, it is the occurrence of Buff-breasted Sandpipers *Tryngites subruficollis* that has become a feature of recent autumns.

The first Buff-breasted Sandpipers for Tiree were recorded in 1989 and 1996. There were

no further sightings until June 2004, when a lone adult bird spent three days displaying in and around a tern colony in the middle of the island (Bowler, J. 2009. Displaying Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Tiree, Argyll in June 2004. *Scottish Birds* 29: 223). This was quickly followed by an autumn record in 2004, since when juveniles have been recorded annually, mostly on the machairs at the west end of the island, either mixed in with European Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* or on their own, with the favoured site being Loch a' Phuill and its surrounding close-cropped machair. The earliest arrival date so far is 29 August 2006 and the latest date is 7 October 2007.

Although they can turn up as single birds, Buff-breasted Sandpipers typically migrate in small flocks and therefore have a tendency to appear in small parties, with groups of 2–4

juvenile birds not infrequently recorded in the Outer and Inner Hebrides, Orkney and perhaps more surprisingly in Lothian (Forrester *et al.* (eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. SOC, Aberlady). The Scottish record count of four was broken when five were seen at Bornish, South Uist on 1–3 September 2005 with another five in the area of Eochar and West Gerinish, South Uist on 6–27 September 2006 (*Outer Hebrides Bird Report* 2005–06). Groups are less frequent on the Scottish mainland than on the Hebridean islands, with three together in North-east Scotland in 1977 and Fife in 1996 being the largest. In England, the largest flock is 15 on St Mary's airfield (Isles of Scilly) on 8 September 1977 (*British Birds* 71: 501) and in Ireland, a flock of nine was at Tacumshin (Co. Wexford) on 3 September 1980 (*Irish Birds* 2: 102).

The first Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Tiree in autumn 2007 turned up at Loch a' Phuill on 9 September. Conditions were very overcast and a little dreich, which I have found can be good for grounding waders at the site. There were 58 Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* plus two adult Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* on the loch edge, and along the western shore of the loch, three neat and scaly juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpipers moved off the loch edge to feed in the hummocky machair. On the following afternoon, the three birds were feeding close together on short machair turf in the same area. They were joined briefly by a fourth bird that soon returned to a clump of taller grass where it had been hidden. This fourth bird, also a juvenile, appeared to be rather tired so may have been newly arrived. Despite checks on subsequent days, there were no further sightings until visiting birders Bill Allan and Anne-Lise Dickie saw three birds in the same area of machair on 16 September.

A check at 17.00 hrs on 19 September revealed a total of six juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpipers feeding together at exactly the same location as the four on the 10th - a record count not only for Tiree but also for Scotland! They moved rapidly across the machair as they fed, often with one or two birds lagging behind. A record shot of all six birds together (Plate ??) was finally achieved when the group was



Plate 178. Six juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpipers on the Loch a' Phuill machair, Tiree, 10 September 2007 © John Bowler

flushed by a passing Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and they all landed close together by the loch.

A phone conversation with Bill Allan immediately after my sighting remarkably revealed that he was watching two juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpipers on the machair at Balevullin and had been doing so since 17.30 hrs! So there were at least eight juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpipers on Tiree that afternoon.

Next day, the two birds were still present at Balevullin along with five at Loch a' Phuill (per Bill Allan). One was also still on the machair close to the pumping station at Loch a' Phuill on 26 September (per Graham Todd).

None were found at either site on 28 September and it was assumed that they had moved on. However, on 7 October a juvenile was found on the machair further to the west of Loch a' Phuill, close to the beach of Traigh Bhi. This was the last sighting of any of these birds and was presumably one of the eight birds from September - although it is possible that this was a ninth bird.

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Revised ms accepted September 2009

Great Black-backed Gull catching a Lump sucker

On 24 May 2009 I was walking along the top of a low cliff at Roseness, Holm, in the East Mainland of Orkney. My attention was attracted by a loud splash about 15 m out from the edge of the exposed rocks. Through binoculars I was able to see a Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* surface holding a fish. The fish was obviously heavy as the gull was only just able to keep its head clear of the water. It swam to a sloping seaweed covered rock and walked out, carrying a male Lump sucker *Cyclopterus lumpus*, about 30 cm in length. The bird had great difficulty holding the fish which twice wriggled free and was picked up again by the gull before escaping at a third attempt. No further effort was made to retrieve it. I have twice seen Great Black-backed Gulls feeding on these fish on rocky shores but had thought they might have been

scavenged after death. In *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Cramp S. & Simmons, K.E.L. 1983. Vol. 3 p. 845. Oxford University Press, Oxford) the Lump sucker is recorded as a food of the Great Black-backed Gull but without stating how they were obtained. Lump suckers do not normally swim near the surface where birds such as gulls could attack them. However the females lay their eggs in shallow water and the males stay with them until they hatch. Alwyne Wheeler in the *Key to the Fishes of Northern Europe* (1978. Frederick Warne, London, p. 227) notes that 'Males guarding egg clumps are also vulnerable to sea birds at low tide.'

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Revised ms accepted September 2009

Two Carrion Crows robbing a Eurasian Sparrowhawk of its prey

It is not unknown for smaller birds of prey to have their kills taken from them, either by members of their own species, larger predators or even non-raptors (e.g. Newton, I. 1986. *The Sparrowhawk*. Poyser, p.109). Such kleptoparasitic attacks by birds working alone are not always successful, especially when they involve non-raptors, as the account by F. Stark (2009. Hooded Crow's reaction to Sparrowhawk kill. *Scottish Birds* 29: 65) describing an attempt by a Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* to rob a Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* of its kill shows. When two birds cooperate with one another the outcome can be very different, as the following observations of two Carrion Crows *C. corone* illustrate.

The incident took place in May 2009 near Wick, Caithness, when I chanced to see an adult female Sparrowhawk take a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* on or very close to the ground in a field about 30 m in front of me. A Carrion Crow flew immediately towards the Sparrowhawk and tried to snatch the Starling. The Sparrowhawk turned to face the crow,

spread its wings and threatened the crow with its free foot. The crow seemed unprepared to press home the attack and, after a short period of posturing by the two birds, it retired to a fence post some 15 m away. Almost immediately it was joined by a second crow, presumably its mate, and together they renewed their assault on the Sparrowhawk. With one crow threatening it head-on and the other harassing it from behind, the Sparrowhawk became agitated, released the Starling, and flew off pursued by one of the crows. The Starling, which was still alive, tried to flutter away, but was quickly caught by the second crow, released and finally retaken. The crow stabbed the Starling, which was pressed against the ground, about 30 times with its bill, then proceeded to feed on the viscera. The other crow had not returned when I left about 10 minutes after the initial attack on the Starling.

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Scottish Bird News



William Neill - Hebridean Wildlife Artist

Plate 179. *The artist on the coast.*

Visitors to the recent art exhibitions at Waterston House have enjoyed the paintings of Bill Neill, who now shares with us something of the life of an artist out in the islands.

My passion for wildlife began as a small boy growing up in Cheshire when I would examine pond and plant life, insects and spiders and of course birds. Rural Cheshire in the 1950s still had a way of life that supported Yellowhammers and Lapwings, but though I spent some time listening, I never heard the illusive Corncrake. I moved to South Uist in 1980 and was immediately impressed by the open landscape dotted with lochs, enormous skies and prolific wildlife and I heard Corncrakes for the first time.

As a child I enjoyed drawing and keeping wild life notebooks which included sketches and relevant press cuttings. I still have one of those early note books which record the progress of a Moorhen's nest at the bottom of the garden and a drawing of terns (below) done on my first visit to the Bass Rock in the mid-1950s. Little did I know what would develop from my boyhood

curiosity; I now have a collection of over 150 A4 sketch books and note books on a wide range of natural history sightings and events.



Plate 180. *A child's eye view of the Bass.*

After school I trained at Leeds College of Art, and did a post graduate Art Teachers Certificate at Goldsmiths College London in 1967. I then taught in a special school before setting off overland to India, exploring the wilds of Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan on the way. Before returning home I spent three years in Australia doing a variety of jobs including being a ghost on the ghost train at the Royal Perth Show, working on a sheep station and teaching at a secondary school outside Adelaide. Australia fascinated me with its exotic plants and animals. Not just the Kangaroos and Emus, but the range of insects and the presence of a Blue-tongued Skink in the garden! I was still painting and still fascinated by wildlife, but as yet I had not put the two together.

Back in Manchester I joined the Stockport Ornithologists Club, took part in BTO census work and began to regularly enter the British Birds Bird Illustrator of the Year competition. I had always admired the work of Eric Ennion and a high point was hearing that the great man had commented favourably on one of my entries.

My parents were Scottish and my father, though he came from Ayrshire, insisted that we were descended from the Neills of Barra, so when my wife Norma was offered the job of health visitor on South Uist, we decided to give island life a try, much to the amazement of family and friends.

Initially I concentrated on drawing but, I began to consider that water colour might be a more appropriate medium to capture the transient nature of light and the 'watery' landscape of the

Uists. However oil painting had been the order of the day in the 1960s art college, so water colour painting was a new departure for me. I wanted to find my own way, so I ignored the 'How to do' guides and began with the basic ingredients, water colour paper, paint and a brush. These days I have refined these basics by having a more select range of paint and adding the essential loo roll for lightening and lifting out excess paint. The only useful guide I did find and use was Michael Wilcox's Colour Mixing System for Watercolours. This not only helped me with regard to mixing but also provided useful information on the qualities of individual colours.



Plate 181. *Black-tailed Godwits watercolour.*

What is so special about the working life of a landscape and wildlife painter living in Uist? Many people would say the light, the atmosphere, the open landscape. For me it is all these factors and more. It involves the history and culture of the islands and their remoteness. The birds I am looking at all have Gaelic names that are often lyrical and sometimes have ancient stories attached.



Plate 182. *Moorhens.*



Plate 183. *Rough sea view towards the lighthouse on Heisker.*

Recently I have spent time with other wildlife artists in different locations in Britain, which has helped me to appreciate how available and local my subject matter usually is. The beaches here are more often than not covered with Sanderlings, not sunbathers. Of course one of the attractive aspects of this is that I never go out to draw or paint a specific species because I never know what is likely to arrive or what out of the ordinary combinations of species I will see. I am reminded of Robert Gillmor telling me how he blots out the public chatter in the hide by putting his head phones on and listening to music. Not a problem I find in Uist - for a start there are no hides and my back ground 'music' is the birds, the wind, the water on rocks - or pure silence. Almost 30 years living in Uist has provided me with unique and sometimes unusual opportunities to be involved in research and natural history projects. In the early 1980s there was a young researcher working in Uist called Chris

Spray, now Professor at Dundee University. He was working on the biology of the introduced Mute Swan population and I was quickly recruited to the rather wet business of capturing and ringing swans. Since some of the nests were in the more remote parts of the island, it was a great introduction to Uist and it did lead on to an expedition to Iceland and an enduring interest in Whoopers and Mutes. I have always found monitoring raptors with the Uist Raptor Study Group, conducting breeding bird surveys, or even sitting beside a Great Yellow Bumblebee nest waiting for the returning bees, very useful exercises for finding new subject matter.

I once spent a week on Heisker or the Monach Islands a few miles off the west coast of Benbecula with Scottish Natural Heritage. We were counting, measuring and recording anything that moved - and even some things that didn't. I had brought my painting kit with me, but there was never any time as the good weather enabled us all to keep going with data collection. We were amused to find how keen the local mice were on peanut butter, and even caught two mice squeezed into one trap, each obviously desperate to get a taste of this new treat. The final morning dawned and we took down our tents and packed. Then unexpectedly the coastguard advised there wasn't enough time to get back to Benbecula before the weather would change dramatically for the worse. At last I got my opportunity to paint and enjoyed the now stormy landscape, huddled



Plate 184. *Tystie on boulder scree.*



Plate 185. Herbs with bees.

down behind sand dunes for shelter. Having begun to paint the windswept scene looking across the sea to the lighthouse (see above), I moved on to studying the Tysties that appeared on nearby bits of boulder scree.

In the first few years of living in Uist especially during the winter months, there seemed to be very few 'like minded' people around with an interest in the bird life of the islands. I remember the frustration of finding a killdeer one January and not knowing anybody who would be at all interested. That would not happen now with many more professionals and amateurs involved in natural history resident in the Uists. In those early days even the RSPB warden was a summer visitor! Another unusual recent visitor was the Nightjar that arrived in a neighbour's garden this autumn - the editors of our local natural history newsletter were soon after me for an illustration, partly because it was so well camouflaged, photographs did not provide a clear enough image.



Plate 186.
Roosting Nightjar.

At the moment I am working on an unusual project for me; an interpretative painting of Calum cille chapel in Loch Erisort, on the Isle of Lewis. I have to imagine what it would have looked like at the height of its importance in mediaeval times. I've always had an interest in history and archaeology and when Sheffield University arrived on the islands in 1988, I was interested in what they were doing and was

recruited to make interpretive drawings of the Broch at Ard Vule in South Uist, an area well known to visiting bird watchers. There was some lively discussion with the archaeo-zoologists about whether or not the Herring Gull I had included flying past the broch could really have been present in 400 BC!

I was elected as a member of the Society of Wildlife Artists in 1990. The Society has given me opportunities to exhibit at the Mall Galleries in London and to meet and work with other wildlife artists, for example in the Aig an Oir project which enabled members of the Society to work with children and local artists. The aim was to promote and raise awareness of Scotland's Atlantic Oak Woodlands. It was a very enjoyable and worthwhile experience resulting in an exhibition at the Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh and the publication of 'At the Edge'.

For some years now I have become interested in insects, and particularly bumblebees. I have been involved in the development of the biodiversity action plan for the Western Isles and monitoring the success of the Great Yellow Bumblebee. Not surprisingly bumblebees have appeared in my paintings.

I sell mainly from the informal studio gallery at home, and locals and visitors alike can buy water colour or acrylic paintings and prints or just talk about wild life. During the almost 30 years I have spent on Uist, I seem to have secured my place as the 'local artist with a curious passion for wildlife'. I do have a website www.william-neill.co.uk which I sadly neglect!

*Bill Neill, Askernish, South Uist,
Western Isles*

News and Notices

New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the Club; **Ayrshire:** Mr & Mrs G. Munro, **Central Scotland:** Mr S. Clarke, **Clyde:** Miss J.P. Cristovao, Mr & Mrs J. McLean, Mr L. Morrison, **Dumfries:** Ms G. Frame, Ms A. Muskett, Mr C. Otty, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr R. Ahmed, Mr G.M. Cook, Mr I. Fisher, Mr M. McKee, Mr H. Price, Mr A. Westwood, **Grampian:** Dr R. Ebel & Dr R. Edrada-Ebel, Mr J. Kearns, **Highland:** Mrs C. Blake, Mr S. McArdle, **Lothian:** Ms C. Beall, Mr J. Cowan, Mr J. Grzybowski, Miss E. Hall, Mr G. Jamieson, Mr J. Logan, Ms P. McKee, Ms J.R.B. Melrose, Ms K. Odling, Mrs C. Pow, Mr G. Pow, Mr J. Taylor, Ms J.R. Watt, Ms J. Wightman, **Tayside:** Mr G. Rodger.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **August: 1st** £30 Mrs A. White **2nd** £20 Mrs Caldwell **3rd** £10 Dr H. Hissett. **September: 1st** £30 Mrs J. McNeill **2nd** £20 Mrs Millar **3rd** £10 M. Nicoll. **October: 1st** £30 A.D.K. Ramsay **2nd** £20 Miss M. Speir **3rd** £10 F.D. Hamilton.

New members are always welcome. They must be over 18 and SOC members. Please contact: Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

Apologies

In the photo caption at the start of the 'SOC trip to Ailsa Craig' article on page 138 of the last *Scottish Birds*, Andy Christie, well known for his Hesselhead rescue work, was misnamed as Andy Hastie. We offer him our sincere apologies.

Also in the last issue, on page 156, the note 'A brave mother' was written by Mike Betts, not as stated.

Correction to the 2008/09 Annual Report

Please note the following correction to Scottish Bird Records Committee membership: Mark Chapman and Alan Lauder should be listed instead of Dougie Dickson and Richard Schofield who have both completed their terms on the committee.

Lothian Bird Bulletin

We apologise to Lothian members for the absence of a *Lothian Bird Bulletin* in this quarter's mailing. The branch committee continues in its search for an editor and would be pleased to hear from anyone interested in assuming the role (with help/guidance from previous editors). It is expected that future issues of the newsletter will be in electronic format only, with hard copies available by post on request.

Thanks to outgoing local recorders

Two changes in recorder were listed in the last issue, with Mike Martin taking over from Ron Youngman in Perth & Kinross and Kevin Davis replacing Al McNee in Highland. Ron was recorder for Perthshire from 1993 to 1995, adding Kinross to his already large remit in 1996. Although small, Kinross includes Loch Leven and this added a whole new dimension to his patch. Al McNee was Highland recorder from 2000 and was responsible for producing one of Scotland's most comprehensive and well-produced bird reports. Council would like to express their thanks to these outgoing recorders on behalf of the Club and local birdwatchers. The largely under-acknowledged and totally unpaid hard work of these dedicated recorders is much appreciated.

Last chance to buy?

The SOC's definitive book on Scotland's birds, *The Birds of Scotland*, continues to sell well, to the extent that all but 300 of the 3,500 copies have been sold. Don't delay if you plan to buy a copy. If you already have it, make sure you tell others that it is soon going to be out-of-print. Copies are available at £75 from Waterston



House, Aberlady, either by collection or post (add £10 P&P). If you live abroad, it is worth mentioning that it is also available from the NHBS and Subbuteo mail order bookshops.

The Birds of Scotland Fund is sourced by profits from the sale of the book and aims to provide financial assistance to related publications and projects.

SOC/BTO Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference 2010

Saturday 20 March 2010, Culloden Academy, Culloden, Inverness. Programme and booking form are included with this mailing. See also www.the-soc.org.uk/conferences.htm

Forthcoming Art Exhibitions at Waterston House, Aberlady

- Saturday 28 November to Wednesday 3 February: 'Up River' by Darren Woodhead (Birdwatch Artist of the Year 2009). Also see the book review on page 250.
- Saturday 6 February to Wednesday 31 March: 'African Journey' by Carol Barrett.
- Saturday 3 April to Wednesday 26 May: paintings by John Threlfall.

Do you want to help the SOC?

The SOC is your Club; its success depends on the contribution from members. This short feature will, over successive issues, highlight some of the ways you can help. If you wish any further information please contact: Wendy Hicks at Waterston House.

- Gift Aid
- Remembering the SOC in your Will
- Gifting old bird books
- Attracting/inviting new members to join
- Assisting in branch activities
- Contributing articles for publication
- Getting involved in surveys: your observations are helpful in understanding changes in the birds of Scotland; take part in surveys such as the Atlas and make sure that your bird records are provided to your local recorder.

SOC e-newsletter

If you would like to receive regular Club news updates in between quarterly mailings, you can join the SOC Yahoo group by logging on to groups.yahoo.com/group/the-soc or sending your name and email address to newsletter@the-soc.org.uk.

Please send your 2009 records to the Local Recorders

An Excel spreadsheet can be downloaded from the SOC website, which provides a preferred format for your records. Check online for a new version which will be available soon.

SBRC - new member

As of 1 November 2009 Angus Murray retired from the committee and was replaced by John Sweeney.

Review of Scottish Records of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* by the Scottish Birds Records Committee

Many birders will know from personal experience that the safe identification of Yellow-legged Gull in the field is not straightforward and can be a significant challenge. That is why, in February 2008, the SBRC published a set of criteria which should be considered when identifying and describing the species. In June 2009 the SBRC similarly published criteria relevant to Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* and made some minor changes to the criteria for Yellow-legged Gull. The criteria for both species can be viewed on the SOC website (www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm), and are also published in this (and the next) issue of *Scottish Birds*.

At a recent meeting of members of the SBRC, it was decided that the Committee should undertake a review of all earlier records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland in view of possible past inconsistency in their assessment prior to the publication of the criteria referred to above.

The results of the review will be published on the SOC website in due course.

Alan Brown, Chair, SBRC

SOC Annual Conference 2009



Plate 187. *The Windlestrae Hotel.*

Once again in October, our Annual Conference took place at the Windlestrae Hotel, Kinross. This centrally located venue, very near Loch Leven and in fine birding country, drew 130 of our members who admired the beautiful garden surrounds in passing and were duly welcomed into the spacious foyer of the hotel. This area proved an excellent meeting place for small groups and informal contacts between delegates.



Plate 188. *The hotel foyer.*

As usual, the Friday evening meal was followed by the opening lecture in the comfortable auditorium lounge.

Bob McGowan - W. Eagle Clarke: the Father of Scottish Observatories

Bob opened the Conference with a chronology of those generations who have literally built the Scottish observatories we have today. The finely researched lecture presented Eagle Clarke as the father of the movement. Bob kept the audience's attention with interesting and humorous anecdotes, but the mystery remains as to the origin of William's middle name 'Eagle'.

This growing family tree of ornithologists took us progressively through many great names such as Gätke, Barrington, Stenhouse, Cordeaux, Newton and Harvie-Brown. We learned through Bob's careful investigative searching how they all pursued their own ornithological careers, inventing new field techniques and generating ideas concerning bird behaviour. But even more interesting was the way in which, through much correspondence from that time, we heard how each one interacted with his peers and contributed to the growing bank of ornithological knowledge.

It was interesting to hear how lighthouse keepers became involved in the picture. It had become obvious to the scientists of the time that here was a fantastic practical source of data gathering. Migrating birds in severe weather would be attracted to the lighthouse beam, becoming disorientated and smash themselves into the glass. Moves were made to organise the keepers to keep regular records of this, but as many were fairly inexperienced, they were usually encouraged to retrieve the bodies, or bits of bodies, in the hope of better identification.

Eagle Clarke's place in ornithological history began to emerge as his relationship with the other greats was described and we start to see their influences that shaped his growing career. His importance in the development of Fair Isle's recognition as a migration post was stressed and we heard of his pioneering thoughts on how



Plate 189. *Bob McGowan in the grounds.*

birds can be influenced by weather conditions. This was detailed, quality stuff on a great man of Scottish ornithology, and I hope that the content of Bob's research can be published or put on the SOC website for all to share.

Duncan Watt & JM

The bar was then crowded for Edmund Fellowes' customary Friday Night Quiz. Bird recognition was the first test, linked with the Atlas survey breeding codes, and then a series of teasing views of common birds' features had the audience scratching their heads. Soon it was time for the now familiar 'composites' - digitally-constructed unlikely species to say the least, each containing attributes of nine familiar birds. This was all great fun and the perfect way to loosen everyone up for a relaxing weekend. Our thanks are due to Edmund for his sense of humour and the considerable work involved.

Saturday morning, in spite of a poor forecast, proved sunny and delegates were free to enjoy the hotel grounds, marvel at the massive overflying skeins of Pink-footed Geese or perhaps visit RSPB Vane Farm, where birdy attractions mingled with Halloween activities for the kids. Some even connected with a Pied Wheatear at Fife Ness and a White-tailed Eagle as they drove back through Fife! Then back again for the afternoon's lectures ...



Plate 190. Niall Campbell.

Niall Campbell - Celebrating the Isle of May's 75 Years

The Isle of May Bird Observatory, which is the oldest in Britain, was established in 1934 by Frank Elder, W.B. Alexander, Ronald Lockley and Eric Watson (Donald's brother) with the encouragement of George Waterston and the Inverleith Field Club (later the Midlothian Ornithological Club). Waterston and others constructed the Heligoland trap and began the staffing of the observatory with volunteers, an activity that has continued most of the time since.

Long before that time, however, the 'Good Ladies' Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul had spent hundreds of days in total over the period 1907–33 studying migration on the island and had published a major paper in *Ibis* in 1918. They supplemented their own observations with records that they commissioned from the resident lighthouse keepers.

During World War II the island was occupied by Royal Navy staff and there was a major break in bird recording from 1939 to 1946. Since the war, the observatory has resumed recording coastal migration, weather-induced movements of birds and the occasional large influxes of birds such as thrushes and Goldcrests. Mist nets were introduced ending the supremacy of the Heligoland Trap and altogether some 276,000 birds of 183 species have been ringed on the island. Post-war enthusiasts of the observatory have included Joe Eggeling, Maury Meiklejohn, Bernie Zonfrillo, Margaret Thorne and artists Keith Brockie, Derek Robertson and Donald Watson.

In 1989 the light became automatic and the keepers left the island. Staff of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology now occupy the keepers' buildings. The observatory is located in the Low Light, which is set well apart from other buildings on the island. There are plans to improve the rather primitive accommodation and encourage volunteers to continue observations at the same level.

Graham Pyatt



Plate 191. Stuart Rivers before his talk.

Stuart Rivers - Rare and Scarce Migrants on the Isle of May

With its strategic position at the mouth of the Firth of Forth and proximity to Edinburgh, the Isle of May has long been a magnet for birders as well as birds. Even before the island became an observatory, 194 species had been recorded there thanks to the work of Harvie-Brown, Eagle Clarke, the Misses Baxter and Rintoul and others. These included the first British record for Pied Wheatear which was 'collected' (the shotgun was so much more convincing than binoculars in those days!) in October 1916, and four other firsts for Scotland.

Stuart left the audience in no doubt that the island has lived up to this early promise since the observatory was set up. As the only east coast observatory north of Yorkshire, the May has provided an invaluable picture of east coast migration, including many exciting rarities and some spectacular 'falls' of commoner species. With the island list now up to 278, the observatory has added three species to the British list (Isabelline Shrike, Siberian Thrush and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler) and seven Scottish firsts. As always with islands, some of its 'rarities' may come as a surprise - Magpie has only been recorded once in the observatory's history.

Whether it is the island's strategic position or the intensity of watching, the May has changed views of the frequency of several of the rarer species in the east of Scotland. Between 1990 and 2008, 71 Common Rosefinches have been

seen there, compared with a combined mainland total of eight in Fife, Lothian and Angus. However it is not just the isolated rarities that have provided memorable experiences for visitors. The spectacle of about 15,000 Goldcrests in one day in October 1982 is not something its witnesses are ever likely to forget.

Roger Hissett

At the coffee break, members took the chance to visit the various stalls around the hotel. These comprised Subbuteo and Second Nature and SOC books (with sketches and paintings by D.I.M. Wallace), Viking Optics, RSPB, SWT and the BTO. Then it was back to the auditorium ...



Plate 192. Betty Smith choosing another book.

Mike Harris - Seabirds on the Isle of May

Since the observatory was established, there have been large increases in the number of several breeding species on the Isle of May, with peak numbers of birds: Guillemot (30,000), Razorbill (4,000), Puffin (over 100,000), Fulmar (400), Kittiwake (8,000), Eider (1,200), Shag (4,000). All these species have, however, seen one or more reverses in population growth during the last 10–20 years, this being especially noticeable in Kittiwake and Shag.

Total numbers of Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull also increased sharply between 1930 and 1980 to a peak of 18,000, whereupon it was realised that they had become serious predators on other species. A cull was undertaken that reduced the population to below 2,000, a low level which has remained.



Plate 193. Mike Harris.

Arctic and Common Terns have not followed the trends of the above-named species. In the 1940s thousands of terns were reported as nesting, but since 1950 the numbers have been very low, although an increase to 2,000 birds has been observed in the last 10–15 years.

The 70 years' run of data for Shag has not only quantified the dramatic ups and downs in the population but has revealed some fascinating features of their breeding ecology. There is a huge annual variation in the laying date of the first egg of the year: the earliest was 1 March, the latest was 15 May. The causes of this variation have not yet been explained. By contrast, the breeding success (number of fledged young per nest) has not significantly changed over the 70 years.

The Puffin has been the subject of intensive study. Although its principal food, the sandeel, is currently plentiful, the size of individual fish has decreased since 1970. This has coincided with a decline in the survival of individual Puffins especially in 2006 and 2007. Research now includes the wintering behaviour of the species, which appears to show that the main British breeding populations keep to fairly distinct parts of the seas around Scotland and Norway.

Graham Pyatt

SOC AGM

The 73rd AGM of the SOC followed, starting with Matters Arising from last year's Minutes, which focused on the new sub-group formed to study and report on developing the SOC membership - ideas were requested for this.

Chris Waltho, SOC President, then gave his Annual Report, mentioning among other things membership fluctuations, bird monitoring, the Atlas survey and the healthy levels of activity at Waterston House. Frank Hamilton voiced the thought that Library matters should also be a regular feature in these reports and usage reported - this was noted.

Alan Fox in his Report as SOC Treasurer gave a brief account of our financial affairs. This covered the Reserve Fund, sales of BS3 and the resulting profit, sales at Waterston House, SNH grants and the legacies situation. He concluded that on the whole, things were 'looking good'.

In the current year, our shares were now beginning to recover and the new *Scottish Birds* was proving more expensive to produce at £3,000 per issue. There was also news of a large legacy for around £100,000 (final sum to be confirmed). Duncan Watt in the audience drew our attention to Chris Rollie's literary work concerning Robert Burns and wildlife. Alan was congratulated on his first year as Treasurer by his predecessor Dick Vernon.



Plate 194. David Jardine and Chris Waltho.

As Chris Waltho's term as SOC President was complete, the only nominee, David Jardine was proposed and duly accepted. In his new capacity, he praised the efforts that Chris had

expended in office and expressed appreciation for their working relationship together over the years (a bottle of Black Grouse whisky reinforced these sentiments!). It was hoped that a new Vice President would be found before the March Conference. Roger Hissett was thanked for his term on Council and is to be replaced by Chris McInerny. The auditing of our accounts would continue for the present in the hands of Sandy Scotland.

The Annual SOC Dinner this year was held within the hotel - a much more suitable arrangement than last year that was greatly appreciated by all. The after-dinner address was given by Ian Darling, a past SOC President and present Chairman of the Isle of May Observatory Trust. This was an extremely humorous and pertinent account, referring as it did to his experiences at the Lower Light on the May. He entertained us with readings from old newspapers found when he was there and anecdotes concerning 'the mice' and hopeful remedies for snoring fellow residents.

The evening's ceilidh was directed by 'Nackytoosh' a splendid four-piece band from Fife, who managed to get everyone dancing (even our outgoing President!) with their attractive selection of varying musical styles and superb ensemble. We were also thoroughly entertained by an impromptu Salsa demonstration by Iain English and our Office Manager, Wendy Hicks. The band introduced members to various dances in an encouraging, genial fashion and were the mainspring of a great night for all.

Sunday morning brought the forecast heavy rain and everyone was glad to be in and anticipating the first lectures of the day.

Roy Dennis - Fair Isle Bird Observatory

A legend in his own time, Roy Dennis was first a warden on Fair Isle 50 years ago, so who better to talk about its past, present and future than he who has overseen the establishment of the new observatory (now built), the Chairman of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT). Memories of George Waterston planning FIBOT in a POW camp in Germany to its establishment in 1948 are evocative enough, but to be now

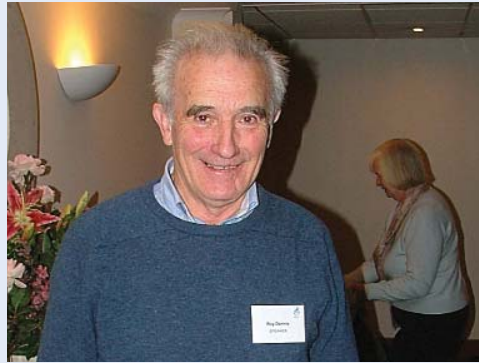


Plate 195. Roy Dennis.

realised 60 years later in the form of a brand new purpose built facility in the 21st century is testament and tribute to his vision.

Scottish ornithology carries this history of such visionary men and women - boys and girls actually, so many of whom began in a childhood or adolescent passion for nature, which included most of this audience! As I listened, I was thinking about the young visionaries of today's generation. I know they exist in the British Isles - nameless souls of passion who need to discover and in time use such facilities.

The aims of FIBOT have stayed the same - to record the migrating and breeding birds, ringing studies and so on, to encourage people in bird study and the identification of rare birds. The new observatory cost £4 million to build with grant funding and will be open in April and bookings can be made from January. Roy ended his talk with a request for donations from all interested parties to complete this great task.

Duncan Watt

Alison Duncan - the Contribution of North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory to our understanding of Scotland's Birds

North Ronaldsay is the youngest of Scotland's observatories, but with Fair Isle visible on the horizon on fine days, it has an illustrious neighbour to live up to. Records only go back to 1985, but one advantage of youth is that they were all computerised from the start. As the warden from 1988, Alison was uniquely well qualified to give us a picture of what has been achieved so far.

As well as being an excellent migration monitoring point, North Ronaldsay has some significant breeding seabirds. Because of the lack of cliffs, one unusual feature of the island is the ground-nesting Fulmars. Usually about one third of their nesting attempts are successful. Arctic Terns were abundant in the 1980s but, as elsewhere, breeding has been poor in recent years, though 2009 was better. Tystie numbers have increased over the last 15 years, with a current population of about 600 birds, but the species is now beginning to attract the attention of the local Bonxies.

Linnet and Twites on the island show opposite trends. Linnet ringing totals and 'bird-days' increased steadily before a partial drop over the last 2–4 years. By contrast, Twite numbers have fallen dramatically over the period of the observatory, though planting seed crops has improved the situation in the last couple of years. Migrating Wrynecks are a regular feature, with the record being 12 ringed in one day (and probably 30 on the island).

North Ronaldsay is a good place to observe migrating waders, and the observatory has been able to provide useful records. In particular, they have been able to assist with more than one Sanderling colour-ringing scheme. Sanderlings monitored or ringed on the island have wintered in Brittany, Holland and Ghana, or moved north through the Faeroes in spring.

Roger Hissett

Stephen Baillie - 100 years of Bird Ringing in Scotland

This talk had a huge remit and Stephen managed to cover the ground extremely well, highlighting the main characters and developments as well as looking to the future. From the origins of ringing at Heligoland in 1899 (bizarrely swapped for Zanzibar by the British Government) he traced the beginnings of ringing in Scotland when the Aberdeen University Bird Migration Enquiry started in 1909, to the formation of a strong network of ringing groups in Scotland since the 1970s. A Lapwing was the very first ringing recovery in Scotland, followed by a Common Tern as 27,802 birds were ringed in this initial scheme.

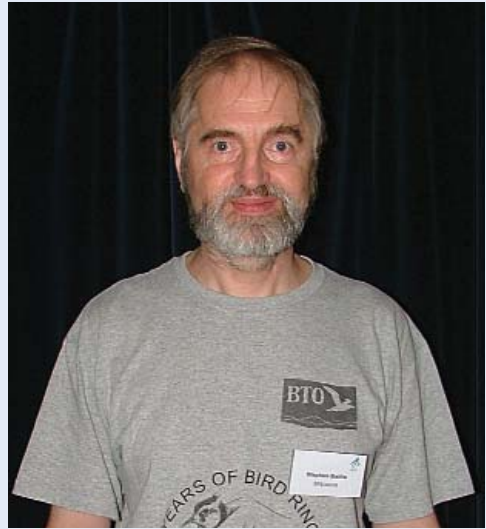


Plate 196. *Stephen Baillie.*

Today the work on Constant Effort Sites and the re-trapping of adults for survival data illustrate how ringing is now very focused. Scottish seabird surveys have made vital contributions to seabird monitoring and the data has been invaluable in assessing the effects on populations of large mortality incidents. Long term life history work has also been critical in advancing our knowledge of species and the photos of George Dunnet with the long-lived breeding Fulmar on Eynhallow (Orkney) illustrated the point well. Similarly the input on wader distribution and patterns is increasingly used in assessing the impact of climate changes.

As to the future, he saw the role of the internet in data recording and exchange, an emphasis on more colour-ringing and new technology such as radio and satellite tracking, data logging and DNA work as the way forward.

The talk was very well presented and left little doubt that Scottish ringing has been, and continues to make a huge contribution to our knowledge of the migration, movements and life histories of our birds and that this has very practical applications in addressing conservation issues. The photograph of the Greylag Goose sexing the ringer as it was being examined was memorable!

Gordon Riddle

Kevin Woodbridge - Looking to the Future

Kevin is Chairman of the Bird Observatories Council, a post he has held for 15 years. He summarised the role and remit of the Council and of the bird observatories with emphasis on the three remaining Scottish observatories (a fourth, on Sanda Island is now sadly defunct). Their primary purpose is 'to conduct long-term monitoring of bird populations and migration'. All birds are recorded in their areas, be they resident or migrant, common or rare. This is done daily, building up huge databases of records, going back 20 years for North Ronaldsay, the newest observatory, and for 75 years for the Isle of May. North Ronaldsay alone has over 4 million records!

Kevin emphasised the important work that the observatories do in ringing birds and also in training would-be ringers. Indeed the observatories actively encourage volunteers to participate in the activities of the centres. He also pointed out one weakness of the present situation, namely the paucity of observatories in Scotland, with now just three and all these, moreover, being situated on the eastern side of the country. Even here there is a considerable gap between North Ronaldsay and the Isle of May, and the next observatory in Yorkshire. Suggestions of Barra, Rattray and St Abbs were floated as potential sites for new observatories.

Looking ahead, a new edition of the book 'Bird Observatories of Britain' is due to be published next year, and while more observatories would be great, within the present system, the emphasis has to be 'Lots more of the same!'

Dick Vernon



Plate 197. *The North Ronaldsay team, Alison Duncan & Kevin Woodbridge.*

In rounding off the conference, David Jardine thanked all the speakers and also the contributors of the stalls at the conference. The Raffle, with generous prizes of whisky, wines and books etc. was ably handled by Wendy and Kathryn Cox - our Admin. Assistant, and realised £363. Thanks were also accorded to the hotel staff for their 'efficient, warm and friendly' services. David of course made special mention of Stephen Hunter who as usual did a superb job keeping the audio-visual machinery ticking over. Then with due appreciation to Wendy, Kathryn and all the SOC helpers for a mountain of hard work this year, it was out into the lashing rain, flooded roads and high winds. Another very successful Annual Conference (All photographs © Jimmy Maxwell).



Plate 198. *View across Loch Leven to Kinross from Vane Farm.*



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Plate 199. Golden Eagle 'Alma' found dead on Millden Estate, Angus in early July 2009 - the result of poisoning. Had it not been for the satellite transmitter this crime would never have been discovered. See www.roydennis.org/golden-eagle for more information of her travels since she was tagged in July 2007 © Roy Dennis.

Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW)

The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) is a multi-agency body comprising representatives of the organisations involved in wildlife law enforcement in the UK. It provides opportunities for statutory and non-Government organisations to work together to combat wildlife crime. Its main objective is to promote

the enforcement of wildlife conservation legislation, particularly through supporting the networks of Police Wildlife Crime Officers, HM Revenue and Customs officers and UK Border Agency officers. For further details see www.defra.gov.uk/paw

At the time of devolution it was decided that Scotland would remain part of PAW UK but would also establish a regional PAW group. Much good work was achieved by this group, especially in the fields of education, training and raising awareness. However, it has to be acknowledged that it lacked strategic commitment from some key partners. Following the last election, Government took increasing interest in wildlife crime issues and the Minister for Environment Michael Russell became directly involved. A further catalyst was the Borders Golden Eagle poisoning in August 2007 which attracted much national publicity and debate within the Scottish Parliament. This led to the Government announcement that there was to be a thematic inspection of the arrangements in Scotland for preventing, investigating and prosecuting wildlife crime. 'Natural Justice' reported in early 2008 and made a total of 24 recommendations. Unfortunately, the report reflected that although a great deal of good work had been achieved in the field, much of it through individual efforts and commitment, a great deal was still required to be done. The need for strategic direction was highlighted and this was vested in a new PAW Scotland structure under the chairmanship of the Minister of Environment, initially Mike Russell and more recently Roseanna Cunningham. Political involvement at this level ensured that a number of key partners came on board at an appropriate level. A number of sub-groups have been established as follows:

- Scottish Wildlife Crime Tactical and Co-ordinating Group
- Media (Scotland) Group
- Legislation, Regulation and Guidance Group
- Intelligence and Information-sharing Group
- Training and Awareness Group
- Funding Group

The work of these sub-groups is now ongoing and a new web site established where the work of PAW Scotland can be viewed at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/paw-scotland

With the Borders Golden Eagle poisoning promulgating much of this work, it is worrying that incidents of persecution of raptors remain extremely high, with the poisoning of two Golden Eagles and a White-tailed Eagle occurring in a two month period in summer 2009. RSPB has always been a committed PAW member and remains an extremely influential and informed voice acting in the interest of raptors and all bird species. However, RSPB cannot address this problem on its own. Scottish Raptor Study Groups is a small organisation of only 250 members which has to fight well above its weight in a PAW Scotland structure in which 'rural interests', described by some as anti-raptor, are extremely well represented and co-ordinated. Unfortunately there has been a degree of complacency around other wildlife interest groups in Scotland. With a Government which is 'open and listening' it is critically important that all views are heard otherwise there is a risk that some pressure groups will exert disproportionate influence. Whilst the Government rightfully claims that crimes against our birds of prey are crimes against Scotland, such claims rest uneasily against recent decisions to relax controls in licensing arrangements to allow the increased destruction of Ravens, and the implementation of changes to allow the licensed control of avian predators to protect gamebird poults as livestock - this includes Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Goshawks. It is important that everyone with an interest in raptors and birds generally, remains aware of what is happening in practice, and ensures that relevant questions are asked. It is also extremely important that crimes against raptors and wildlife are reported to a Wildlife Crime Officer or the RSPB without delay, see: www.scottishraptorgroups.org/persecution2.php

*Bob McMillan SRSGs
representative on PAW Scotland*



BirdSpot - the Autumn Blues in South Uist

It's September and you wander down to your local loch, reservoir or flooded field, and spy three smallish ducks dabbling away happily in the shallows. They're not close, and most of the time their heads are underwater, so it's not easy to get a full view. Identification proves tricky. Their size suggests Teal - but have you judged it right? Their shape, colour and heavier bill hint at Shoveler - maybe young juvs that haven't quite achieved the 'full spatula' bill size yet? Or Garganey? You get that uneasy feeling that you can't comfortably call them one thing or another. Then a raptor flies over and the three-some fly off in a tight flock, revealing dazzling blue forewings - too bright for Garganey, but about right for Shoveler ...

Finding and identifying a rare bird is often about recognizing and responding to that uneasy 'I'm not sure what these birds are' feeling, rather than shying away from it. Below, Steve Duffield describes how he found and identified a lovely trio of (North American) Blue-winged Teal this autumn on South Uist, where he runs Western Isles Wildlife Tours (see www.western-isles-wildlife.co.uk). Steve makes his identification of these birds sound easy, but I wonder what conclusion the rest of us would have come to, had they been on our local patch and perhaps with slightly less

favourable viewing conditions (though what could be less favourable than a car full of kids with flu, I can't imagine!). Make the most of Steve's excellent photos, it's probably the closest most of us will ever get to seeing a 'flock' of Blue-winged Teal in Scotland.

Clive McKay

Although the Long-billed Dowitcher present at Howmore River, South Uist, since 12 September had not been seen over the previous two days, I decided to quickly pop down to see if there were any new waders. I pulled over with two young children in the back of the car hoping that they'd remain asleep long enough for me to see what was about. A scan of the waders revealed little other than a few Redshank, Curlew and the odd Snipe, plus three dabbling ducks feeding in the middle of the river. A cursory glance identified them as female/juvenile Teal, although for some reason I decided I should really have a closer look through the scope. I focused in on them to find three rather odd looking Teal with an obvious large, white spot at the base of the beak. The bill also appeared rather large and completely black. At this point I realized I was looking at not one, but three Blue-winged Teal. A second look confirmed



Plate 200. Blue-winged Teal, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, September 2009 © Steve Duffield.



Plate 201. and in flight © Steve Duffield.

that the swine flu hadn't affected my brain! I rang John Kemp and Brian Rabbitts before one of my wee ones decided it was time for a feed. I obliged with a bottle of milk but when I turned round discovered the threesome had gone! I was somewhat upset although perhaps not as much as JK, who had driven from the south end of the island only to find nothing to look at! He left to search the area and I returned once more to the river where I instantly saw the three teal again. I rang JK who was quickly back on the scene and getting excellent views of the three ducks. They fed constantly until, flying past us within 50 metres, they gave excellent views of their bright blue forewings. It was OK, the swine flu hadn't done as much harm as anticipated; they really were three Blue-winged Teal. Brian Rabbitts and Terry Fountain also made it down during the next half-hour, and enjoyed excellent views, although there was no sign of the birds by the following day.

The combination of an obvious large, pale spot at the base of the beak, a rather heavy black bill and distinctive flank feathering (showing dark centres with prominent pale fringing) left me pleasantly surprised at just how different these birds appeared to female/juvenile Teal. A plainer facial pattern excluded Garganey. Good views obviously helped me to pick out the pertinent features and although I was sure the ducks were Blue-

winged Teal, I was delighted when they flew and showed a striking, bright blue patch in the forewing - characteristic of the species in all ages/sexes. On the water the large, pale spot at the base of the bill was very distinctive, as was the dark line running through the eye and breaking the obvious white eye-ring. The head was rather grey compared with the body whilst the flanks appeared browner. The bill was larger and more robust than a Teal's, as well as being almost totally black (they did show a little pale line along the cutting edge of the upper mandible). At times they even reminded me of Shoveler due to the bill size and general shape. Blue-winged Teal closely resembles Cinnamon Teal, but the latter species in juvenile/female-type plumage shows an even heavier bill, as well as having a weaker face pattern. The upper-wing pattern is also said to be duller, whereas in these three birds it was a distinctive and quite intense blue. The bright blue forewing showed a white band across the greater coverts on two of the birds whilst on the third, this appeared to be greyer, identifying them as two males and a female. All three birds showed rather dull, yellow legs, suggesting they were juveniles. They certainly fed in close proximity to each other at all times and may well have been part of the same brood.

Steve Duffield



Raptor Research Foundation Annual Conference, Pitlochry

In autumn 2009 the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry saw one of the largest international gatherings of ornithologists in Scotland for a number of years, when almost 300 bird of prey experts gathered for the Raptor Research Foundation's (RRF) Annual Conference. This was the first time that this US-based organisation had held its annual conference outside North America, and the RRF had come at the invitation of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups (SRSG). The splendour of the conference centre and the surrounding countryside complemented the hard work of the organising committee, a number of whom were kilt-clad, and the RRF whisky miniature in the conference pack meant that the overseas guests from 34 countries had a fine Highland welcome.

Steve Redpath of the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability gave the Plenary Lecture, in which he described the contribution of Scotland to Raptor Ecology. His talk

gave an overview of Scottish raptors and raptor-workers and paid tribute to the SRSG and the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme. The contribution of the 200 members of the SRSGs is almost unequalled internationally, meaning that Scotland is recognised for 'punching above its weight' in raptor studies and the contribution of the Monitoring Scheme is beginning to be recognised in the field of raptor research through its nomination for the Best Practice Award of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. Steve also pointed to the international significance of a number of Scottish studies including the unravelling of the effects of DDT pollution at the top of the food chain (Derek Ratcliffe), internationally acclaimed studies on Golden Eagle (Jeff Watson) and Sparrowhawk (Ian Newton), and recent work on raptor-gamebird interactions. He closed his presentation with a tribute to two raptor workers in Scotland who had recently died in tragic circumstances; Mike Madders who had done so much on Hen Harriers, White-tailed Eagles and the interactions between wind-farms and birds of prey, and Simon Thirgood who had been a key contributor to the Langholm study on the interaction between Hen Harriers and Red Grouse.

With lectures in two rooms over three and a half days it is not possible to provide an overview of them all in this report, but 42 papers were submitted in the general



Plate 202. *The Adelphi stand with Keith Brockie's artwork and special RRF whiskies © Gordon Riddle.*

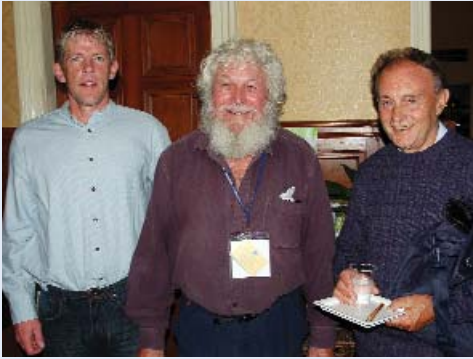


Plate 203. Lorcan O'Toole, Brian Little and Ian Newton © Gordon Riddle.

session. There were also sessions on Scotland (6 papers), persecution (3), migration & wintering (9), *Haliaeetus* eagles (9), re-introductions (3) and conservation management (6). 41 poster presentations were also provided on the Wednesday and Thursday. With such a feast of talks it may seem invidious to single out some. But, amongst the ones which had conference delegates buzzing were Wayne Nelson's talk on 'When Peregrines Fight' which showed video clips of migratory Peregrines from Alaska fighting over territories. D. Brandes *et al.*'s paper on new technology which allowed Golden Eagle fight-paths to be tracked to one metre accuracy every 30 seconds was mind-boggling in terms of its possibilities, and it was fascinating to hear R. Bierregard's description of the problems faced by migrating juvenile Ospreys on the eastern seaboard of North America - a mirror image



Plate 204. Delegates relaxing - Wendy Mattingly, Chris Rollie and Brian Etheridge © Gordon Riddle.

of the European experience. There were also three talks which pointed to international experience which might be useful in Scotland. S. Cuoto *et al.* described how dogs were being used to combat illegal poisoning in Spain, V. Bretagnolle *et al.* gave an insight into the way the more common raptors are monitored in France using 5x5 km squares, and A.C. Stewart described how he had used digital photographs of colour-ringed Cooper's Hawks feeding on garden birds in Victoria, British Columbia, provided by members of the public to study their behaviour outside the breeding season.

The papers in the Scottish Session were provided by Mike McGrady & George Smith (PIT¹ tagging of Peregrines), Phil Whitfield *et al.* (Golden Eagle Framework), Ruth Tingay *et al.* (DNA studies of Golden Eagle), Richard Evans *et al.* (White-tailed and Golden Eagle competition), Bob Elliot (Raptor Crime in Scotland) and Arjun Amar *et al.* (Orkney Hen Harriers). There were also Scottish contributions on persecution of Red Kites (Jen Smart *et al.*), post-fledging dispersal of juvenile Golden Eagles (Ewan Weston *et al.*) and Sparrowhawks (Ian Newton).

On the Friday evening, the second edition of *Raptors: A Field Guide for Surveys and Monitoring* was launched; the updated version includes colour photos of chick development and moulted feathers. Following this, Roy Dennis gave an inspirational presentation on Scotland's Wildlife and Landscapes, covering the interactions between man, wildlife and its habitats throughout Scotland, along with the 'missing' elements of top predators and other key species such as Beaver, backed up with Laurie Campbell's superb photos - this talk was one of the highlights of the conference.

Associated with the lecture programme were a number of social events, including trips to distilleries at Dalwhinnie and Edradour, a whisky tasting session and ceilidh in the ballroom at Blair Castle, complete with red

Footnote¹: **PIT** (*Passive Integrated Transponder*) tags are metal rings that contain a uniquely identifiable microchip) Ed



Plate 205. Some of the organising committee (from left to right - Justin Grant, Malcolm Henderson, George Smith, David Jardine, Francesco Germi, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Gordon Riddle) © Ruth Tingay.

carpet, blazing braziers and piper in full regalia at the castle door to greet the participants. This social evening proved a new dimension to RRF conferences, with over 100 taking part in the closing Orcadian Strip the Willow, and was rounded off with everybody singing Auld Lang Syne! Field trips were organised towards the end of the conference around Pitlochry (Wendy Mattingley), to Atholl Estate (Keith Brockie and Patrick Stirling-Aird), Ben Vrackie (Wendy Mattingley), Central Scotland (Duncan Orr-Ewing and David Anderson), Historical Perthshire (Wendy Mattingley), Cairngorms and Strathspey (Roy Dennis), East Scotland (Brian Etheridge) and for two days to the isle of Mull (Paul Howarth).

An international conference such as this would not have been such a resounding success without the hard-work of the local organising committee; Ruth Tingay (Chair: Organising Committee), Gordon Riddle (Chair: logistics), Malcolm Henderson, Wendy Mattingley, Phil

Whitfield, Mike McGrady, Bea Arroyo, Malcolm Ogilvie, Francesco Germi, Justin Grant, Patrick Stirling-Aird, George Smith and Chris Rollie are all to be thanked for ensuring that the conference was such a great success. Jeff Watson and Roger Hayward also made valuable contributions before their untimely deaths. Also to be thanked are the sponsors (Natural Research, Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural England, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, RSPB, Adelphi Distillery, Atholl Estates, Countryside Council for Wales, Haworth Conservation, Bowmore Distillery, Scottish Power, BTO) whose financial contributions meant that Scotland provided an excellent conference for our international guests.

For members interested in further details, all the abstracts for the RRF conference are available though the RRF Conference website on www.rrfconferencescotland2009.org

Notes and Comment

Drama at sea

- Great Skua killing Grey Heron

We cannot call ourselves ornithologists, but over the years have always been enthusiastic when seeing so much of our bird life in remote and wild spots when canoeing on the seas or climbing mountains. This summer we were fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to witness a dramatic event.

On 27 August 2009 we began a great evening trip around Handa Island, but for the next few days, gale force winds found us skulking in Loch Laxford. When the wind dropped we eventually got out onto the sea for a very pleasant paddle, which was drawing to a close as we approached Lochinver. As we reached the inner section of Loch Inver, we saw something unusual happening in the air - a Grey Heron had taken off and was gliding along the sea shore when a Great Skua flew in and began to dive bomb it. We watched as they circled each other, with the smaller bird clearly harrying the larger. The heron was obviously trying to get away but its slower flight and turning ability could not match the faster skua, which rapidly forced the heron lower. There was much ferocious activity in the air until together they fell towards the sea. We were fascinated and paddled forward for a closer inspection.

It was amazing to watch as the Great Skua continued to harry the Grey Heron, which was now resting on the water. The heron was showing signs of distress and reared back in alarm (Plate 206) but the skua came on regardless. It was difficult for us to get a really good view, so we inched in closer, but clearly our presence interfered with the activity; the skua backed off but was quietly biding its time close by, constantly watching the heron. We withdrew quietly to let nature take its course and soon the skua attacked again - by now the heron was looking decidedly bedraggled (Plate 207). Even so it was not going down easily and made some valiant attempts to fight back against its aggressor (Plate 208) and at one point seemed to view us as an opportunity for salvation and paddled frantically in our direction (Plate 209).

Plates 206–211. *Great Skua and Grey Heron*
© Christine Watkins.



But the skua did not allow escape and the attack went on. As the heron was visibly losing ground and becoming weaker; the skua climbed onto its back and pushed its head down. At one point the heron was under the water on its back with the skua on top pushing its weight down and pecking at its breast; the heron's legs were in the air, appearing to be reaching up and struggling. The heron drowned in around two minutes (Plate 210) and as the episode came to a close, a second skua arrived (Plate 211) and after some mutual aggression the two together began pulling at the dead body.

The whole sequence of events lasted for around 10 minutes (difficult to judge as we were so wrapped up in the events), with the photographs shown here taken in just under five minutes.

**Christine Watkins, Suzanne Pearson
and Jane Stedman**
Email: chris@cwatkins.force9.co.uk

Although Bonxies will eat almost anything, the killing of a Grey Heron appears to be only once mentioned in the literature. In 1954 a British Birds note recalls an incident off Walls, Shetland in which a Bonxie brought down a flying Heron and apparently drowned it (Campbell, W.D. & Denzey, F.J. 1954. Great Skua killing Heron. British Birds 47: 403). Ed

Ravens on Lewis Part 1. Ravens at play

Corvids, renowned mostly for their seemingly murderous ways, can however display an intelligence that far exceeds that of any other species of bird found in Scotland. They can also be very playful and the Raven, the largest member of this family, is no exception.

It was late August and I was returning home after checking one of my Golden Eagle territories when I noticed a small flock, or 'unkindness', of Ravens gathering on a hillside. Some members of the group proceeded to bounce across the ground, standing upright with both legs together, and jumping like kangaroos. One individual, obviously reluctant to participate in this comical marsupial dance began pulling at a clump of heather. Another decided it was safer to remain air-borne, for good reason I might add, although



Plate 212. Raven interaction with stick © Frank Stark.

it did eventually decide to join in the fun by intermittently dive-bombing the bird presently destroying a large clump of Ling.

After a few minutes of tugging, the heather submitted to the Raven's powerful beak. The bird croaked victoriously, continuing with the vocal barrage as it strutted purposefully up the hill, still holding the large bare dry stick it had broken off. Suddenly it took flight and almost immediately the Raven that had remained in the air joined it, flying behind, then alongside and finally taking up position underneath as both birds croaked excitedly. The stick was dropped and the bird below, having inverted its position, caught it. Occasionally the bird that dropped the stick would swoop after it and catch it again before it hit the ground. These capers continued for about 15 minutes before they both flew off, stick and all.

It could all have ended so differently though, as this group of Ravens were actually playing about a quarter of a mile from a Golden Eagle pluck where the remains of two Ravens had been found recently!

Frank Stark

Eagles are an ever-present threat to Ravens in this part of Lewis, as Frank will describe in Part 2.

BOOK REVIEWS



The Birdwatcher's Yearbook 2010. Hilary & David Cromack (eds), 2009. Buckingham Press, 352 pages, softcover, £17.50.

The 30th anniversary edition of this popular yearbook or almanac contains all of its regular chapters along with its usual extras. Described as an 'indispensible companion', this publication now has to compete with the internet as a source of information; the appearance of this, its 30th edition, is a testament to its popularity. Within it you'll find contact details, nature reserve listings, tide tables, web resources, checklists and much more. This year's special features are: best bird books of 2009; 40 years of the Hawk and Owl Trust; top 50 birding websites; latest ornithological discoveries and technology for birders in the 21st century.

Ian J. Andrews

A Natural History of St Kilda. John A. Love, 2009. Berlinn, Edinburgh, ISBN 978-1-8415-8797-4, softback, 351 pages, £20.00.

Much has been written about the St Kilda archipelago, but more on its human inhabitants than its wildlife I suspect. I was therefore pleased to see a book dedicated to the latter with 15 chapters covering every aspect of the islands' natural history, including ones on the seabirds, land birds, marine life and the local Wren, mice and sheep. The bird section complements the annotated species list written by Stuart Murray and published by the Club in 2002.

The book is readable rather than scientific and written in a style that includes many extracts from previous books, papers and writings. This is useful as many of the sources are difficult to obtain even from the best library. They are not all historical, although they do predominate, with notes by some of the recent wardens also included.

The discovery of the St Kilda Wren and the endemic subspecies of mouse is well-written and I learnt of the extinct St Kilda house mouse which I have to admit I hadn't heard of before. The book is all in black and white, except for 30 colour plates in two batches. Most of these are by the author and of good quality, but one of the Puffin shots could have been better. A full bibliography is included.

Most readers will know where St Kilda is, but although it is described in the text, a location map would have been useful by way of introduction. Also the boxed inset map of Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Lee doesn't help to put these smaller islands in context. One fact is worth clarifying - it is unlikely that dinosaurs witnessed the eruption of the St Kilda volcano (p. 25). (Non-avian) dinosaurs are generally considered to have become extinct 65 million years ago; 10 million years before the volcano erupted.

The overall impression is of a thoroughly researched book, written by someone with an in-depth knowledge of the islands. Anyone who has been there, or

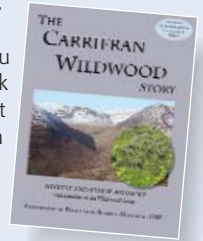
intends to go, should read it from cover to cover, as it will certainly lead to a better understanding of the uniqueness of the flora and fauna and the interplay of wildlife and man.

Ian J. Andrews

The Carrifran Wildwood Story. Myrtle & Philip Ashmole, 2009. Borders Forest Trust, ISBN 978-0-953446-4-0, softback, 224 pages, £15.00.

To say that you have read a book cover-to-cover at a single session is quite an endorsement of the quality of the story, but I owe it to *Scottish Birds* readers to provide more detail of why this 'cake' tastes so good.

The Wildwood Story tells how Philip Ashmole inspired a group of enthusiasts to find a bare, over-grazed valley in the Southern Uplands and start to plant a woodland. No rich media stars, nor a money-making - or tax-avoiding - Sitka spruce monoculture this, but an attempt with a cast of thousands to recreate a forest resembling the type of landscape thought to have existed here and over much of southern Scotland 6,000 years ago. The Wildwood Group wanted to have the full range of tree species, of appropriate provenance and in the right places, using no plough or moulder but just spade and a heel. The Group's expertise in the gamut of aspects relating to woodland creation is probably unique and it has meant that the care and attention to detail in the wood's creation is unsurpassed.



Voluntary skills of fundraisers, letter-writers, musicians, storytellers, artists and many others have also played a part in turning this dream into Philip's monument, although it may take a thousand years to complete. In just 15 years, the biodiversity and ambience is already changing – Willow Warblers and Blackcaps are starting to supplant Wheatears and, just as predicted, Black Grouse are thriving. Such changes are being monitored and will aid our understanding of colonisation processes. The book is attractively produced, with a sepia photograph of an Auroch's skull and a millennial *New Scientist* cartoon suggesting the timescales of such a project. I counted 105 photographs which include people, hinting at the wide involvement and I particularly liked the text-boxes which give cameo contributions from other authors. I look forward to successor volumes in 20, 200 and 2,000 years' time.

Peter Gordon

Up River: the Song of the Esk. Darren Woodhead, 2009. Birlinn, Edinburgh, ISBN 978-1-84158-834-6, hardback, 160 pages, £30.00.



Following the success of his first book 'From Dawn till Dusk' (Langford Press, 2005), here is another one to treasure by acclaimed watercolour artist Darren Woodhead. In fact, this is so good that one of the paintings in it, of a mixed flock of Lapwings, Dunlins and Black-headed Gulls, full of action, won Darren the *Birdwatch Magazine* Artist of the Year Award for 2009.

The book contains a selection of 127 paintings (some of which can

be seen at www.darrenwood-headartist.co.uk) from a much larger number produced from 2006 to 2009 when Darren was Artist in Residence at Carlops, supported by the Orcome Trust. Carlops is a small village south of Edinburgh on the edge of the Pentland Hills and near the valley of the North Esk, so Darren's Residency was entirely appropriate given that he lives where the same River Esk enters the Firth of Forth at Musselburgh. There is a great variety of wildlife habitat in the Carlops area, from the hilltops surrounding the North Esk Reservoir, down through moorland, woodland and farmland, and the valley itself with its historical associations with the Covenanters and Allan Ramsay's play 'The Gentle Shepherd'.

Darren does all his painting out of doors, at all seasons and in all weather, and this immediacy, with wind, rain, snow and ice all exerting their effects on his brush work, only rarely using anything but pure watercolour, has led to some of his most atmospheric art. I just love the studies of black-faced ewes together with various birds in freezing fog and blizzard conditions, and those of Bullfinches feeding among snow-covered branches are simply stunning. Even Julian Spalding, former Director of Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, who wrote the Introduction to this book, clearly recognises a special quality in Darren's work, and that means something given the disdain with which wildlife art is often regarded by the 'art establishment'!

Although they do feature in a majority of the paintings, this book is by no means all about birds. Darren has developed a new interest in fungi, particularly I suspect the edible ones, and his love of mammals, butterflies, trees and flowers is also evident - those

frogs coming up out of the water are just amazing. His ability to use the white of the paper for highlighting has reached a new level of mastery and it is fun looking for and identifying birds he has half-hidden in vegetation or in the background. He introduces the book talking about his Residency and with a description of his methods, while most of the paintings have notes putting them in context. As no doubt you can tell, I like this book, and I recommend it to you unreservedly.

John Savory

A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Jamaica. Ann Hayes-Sutton, Audrey Downer & Robert Sutton, 2009. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-1-4081-0743-0, softback, 304 pages, £24.99.

This new guide comprehensively introduces the reader not only to the 307 species found on the island of which 30 are endemic, but also the whole ecological background that defines the island's natural history and its place relative to its avifauna. Photographic guides are bound to have some limitations, unlike the situation where an artist can illustrate any plumage or activity that he chooses. However the photographs in this book are of high quality and do convey in most cases the main notable features that help in identification. Distribution maps and an index of birding hotspots add to the overall picture of this attractive island. The book is pocket size and it would be a mistake not to have it with you on a visit.



Keith Macgregor

Extreme Birds - from the fastest to the smartest. Dominic Couzens, 2008. HarperCollins, ISBN 978-0-007279234, hardback, 285 pages, £30.00.



This book is something different in the way it opens up a whole world of ornithological facts and figures.

It is divided into four sections covering form, ability, behaviour and families, each conveying in very readable and sometimes humorous details, some of the extraordinary feats and activities that birds are capable of all over the world.

A few examples - the smallest Hummingbird would fit into an Ostrich eye - a young Sooty Tern has never been seen perched in its first four years, but cannot swim because its feathers are not waterproof - Bar-tailed Godwits can fly up to 6,000 miles non-stop, and Tengmalm's Owl thaws out previously stored frozen prey by incubation! The text itself is fascinating but the accompanying full page relative photographs are superb and uniquely combine to enhance this absorbing coffee table book.

Keith Macgregor

A Birdwatching Guide to Lesvos. Steve Dudley, 2009. Arlequin Press, ISBN 978-1-905268061, softback, 272 pages, £19.99.

We were asked to review this book as we were going to Lesvos. We obtained our copy of the book at the Bird Fair at Rutland and had a chat with the author. He was going to be leading a group there during the first week of our holiday.

Lesvos was brought to notice as a superb bird watching destination by Richard Brooks. He published 'Birding on the Greek Island of Lesvos' in 1998 followed by annual updates until 2003/04. These contained a wealth of information but accessing that information, especially when in the field was very frustrating. For that reason alone a new guide is very welcome.

Steve Dudley has compiled a comprehensive guide to Lesvos. There is a 16-page introduction to the island covering history, mythology, eating out and ouzo! We tested his eating out recommendations and agreed with them.

The main part of the guide is, of course, about birding on Lesvos and this is superb. The author has extensive knowledge of the island having visited it frequently over a number of years. He has divided the island into nine regions and provided maps and detailed descriptions of each site. From consulting German maps he identified a reservoir near Eressos, hitherto unknown to British birders. This is proving to be an excellent site.

The names of the sites are given in English and Greek script which is helpful when reading signposts or consulting maps. The bird names are given in Latin, English, Dutch and Greek and suitably cross-referenced. The inclusion of the Greek names proved very helpful on two occasions. Once when an Osprey passed close by the locals were puzzled by our excitement. They too became excited when we showed them Osprey in Greek. Another time a local man tried to tell us about

a special bird near a monastery. He wrote it down and we were able to establish that it was a Nightingale.

According to the hoteliers and restaurateurs on the island this book has been keenly awaited. The inclusion of the Greek names particularly pleased them.

This is a well researched and comprehensive bird and site guide to birding in Lesvos. It is cross referenced and indexed so finding details of any bird or any site is easy. The site index on the inside of the back cover was particularly useful when on the road.

A future edition could usefully include a seasonal guide. Some of the sites are particularly good in spring - and less so in autumn and vice versa.

The original copies had defective binding - which meant our guide started to fall apart even before we left the UK and the book had almost completely disintegrated after two weeks hard use. Understandably the author and the publishers were embarrassed about this and have scrapped their original stock. They are sending us a replacement copy.

With this problem rectified this concise guide will, without doubt, be the definitive bible on Lesvos for the foreseeable future.

Steve Dudley has also a very useful web site www.lesvos-birding.com

Doreen and James Main



Birding in Scotland



Plate 213. *Spotted Sandpiper, Kinneil, January 2008* © John Nadin.

Spotted Sandpiper, River Avon, Kinneil, December 2007–April 2008 – first for Upper Forth

R. SHAND & G. OWENS

On 24 December 2007 I was at Kinneil Lagoon on my third attempt looking for the drake Green-winged Teal that Gerry Owens had found there two days previously. He joined me, and soon after some Teal flew up and round a bend on the River Avon. We do not normally walk this far upriver because of the adjacent oil refinery but we had a look, again without success. As we returned to the mouth of the river Gerry pointed to the rocky shore down about 5 m from the embankment and said 'Common Sand' then we both said 'could be a Spot Sand'.

We started to grill the bird but could not remember the critical identification features for separating winter/juvenile plumage Spotted Sandpiper from Common Sandpiper. I ran back to the car to get the *Collins Guide* while Gerry kept an eye on the bird. When I got back it had flown to the opposite side of the river making the observation of plumage details harder.

We could see that the wings almost reached the tail-tip, that the leg colour looked a fleshy-yellow, and that it had a pale bill with a darker

tip. When the bird bent over we were sure we could see the remnants of black spotting on the undertail coverts and between its legs and a more yellow look to the back of the legs. We spoke to Angus Murray at Birdline Scotland to confirm some details and put the news out as an adult-winter Spotted Sandpiper.

The bird returned to the near shore and we were able to confirm the above noted features and also the extent of the wing bar and that there were remnants of spotting on the sides of the upper breast and on the undertail coverts. The bird was not heard to call whilst in flight unlike Common Sandpiper, which normally calls every time. At dusk the bird appeared to go to roost near an old refinery outflow pipe on the opposite shore.

The bird was still present on Christmas Day and Boxing Day providing an unexpected gift and Scottish tick for many birders. The bird was still present on 22 March 2008 when I saw it distantly in poor light. By this time it had started to moult into summer plumage with faint traces of spots appearing on the flanks and belly. It was last reported on 14 April (*British Birds* 102: 557).

Description

The following description was taken on the day the bird was discovered: Basically a Common

Sandpiper with a cut-off look to the rear end caused by wing almost reaching tip of tail.

Head: Brown crown blending into greyish-brown on the nape and back of neck. Ear-coverts/cheeks greyish-brown. Buffish-white supercilium. Thin dark eye-stripe cutting through white eye-ring. Dark eye. **Upperparts:** Mantle, scapulars, tertials and coverts greyish-brown. Flight feathers dark brown with white wing-bar from the bases of the inner primaries to the outer secondaries (short and not as obvious in comparison to Common Sandpiper). On occasion the alula seemed to be held loosely drooping down to side of breast. Tail brown edged and tipped white on outer tail feathers.

Underparts: Throat and upper breast off-white, with grey-brown of neck extending onto sides of breast forming a white wedge between wings and side of upper breast. Rest of underparts white, except for occasional remnant blackish spots on sides of upper breast, lower belly, around and between legs (seen when viewed from rear when bird bent over). **Bare parts:** Bill short and straight, upper mandible dark brown, lower mandible same but with brown-ochre base with dark brown tip. Legs fleshy-yellow with a more yellow look on back, feet dirty yellowish.

Rab Shand & Gerry Owens, 33 Liddle Drive, Bo'ness EH51 0PA.



Plate 214. Spotted Sandpiper, Kinneil, January 2008 © John Nadin.

Spotted Sandpiper – its status in Scotland

This species breeds across North America from Alaska through Canada to Newfoundland and south through the USA to California and South Carolina. The population is almost entirely migratory and winters from southern California across to Georgia and throughout Central America and South America south to Chile and Argentina.

There have been 19 individuals recorded in Scotland, including the Kinneil bird, out of a total of 148 in Britain to the end of 2007. The first British record was of one at Loe Bar, near Helston, Cornwall on 14 June 1924, but the first Scottish record was not until one was seen briefly at Tynninghame (Lothian) on 30 October 1971. The second involved the famous (unsuccessful) breeding attempt by a pair present on the Isle of Skye (Highland) from at least 15 June to 3 July 1975 (Wilson 1976, 1999), with an adult the following year in Lothian on 30 May. There were then five individuals noted in the 1980s and six in the 1990s (Forrester et al. 2007). There was then a seven-year gap before four birds were found in 2007: a juvenile at Lamba Ness, Unst from 21 September to 4 October and another at Burravoe, Yell from 25 September to 11 October (both Shetland); a first-winter was found at Loch Ordais and Bragar, Isle of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 27 September 2007 and then the adult at Kinneil from 24 December 2007 to 14 April 2008.

The Kinneil bird was the longest staying individual in Scotland (113 days) by a considerable margin, with the next longest stay being that of the Loch Rannoch (Perth & Kinross) bird in 1992 (28 days), and otherwise only the pair on Skye (19 days) and the two Shetland birds of 2007 (14 and 17 days) have stayed longer than six days. The Kinneil individual was the first to over-winter in Scotland, and around 10% of records elsewhere in Britain involve birds which have been present through the winter months. This phenomenon was first observed with one in Dorset 1973 and has occurred with increasing regularity since then. The longest stay recorded in Britain is of one at the Hayle Estuary, Cornwall from 5 October 2006 to 3 May 2007 (211 days),

while mirroring the Kinneil bird one was present at Lisvore Reservoir, East Glamorgan from 20 October 2007 to 28 April 2008 (192 days), and length of stay of birds elsewhere in Britain averages considerably longer as a result of many lingering birds.

All but four of the Scottish records have come from the north and west as would be expected of a Nearctic vagrant, and all except the Loch Rannoch bird and a juvenile/first-winter at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) in 1991 have occurred at or near the coast, though elsewhere in Britain this species has regularly been found on inland reservoirs, lakes and pools.

Just over 62% of birds in Britain overall have been found in autumn (after 1 July) whereas in Scotland only 47% have been. Another difference is that all birds found in Scotland have been adults except for the Balgray Reservoir bird in 1991 and the Shetland birds and Lewis bird in 2007 (21%), whereas elsewhere in Britain of those birds that have been aged over half have been juveniles/first-winters.

Wilson, G.E. 1976. Spotted Sandpipers nesting in Scotland. *British Birds* 69: 288–292.

Wilson, G.E. 1999. Blast from the past: Spotted Sandpipers nesting in Scotland - a first for the Western Palearctic. *Birding Scotland* 2: 10–12.



Plate 215. Spotted Sandpiper, Kinneil, January 2008 © John Nadin.



Plate 216. *Night Heron, Fair Isle, April 2008* © Mark Breaks.

Two Night Herons on Fair Isle, 5–13 April 2008 - the first island records

M. BREAKS

The morning of 5 April 2008 started as usual with the daily bird census after breakfast, and it was my turn on the south-east route. As I made my way around Meoness following the cliff edge, and all the time checking for any sheltering birds from the north-westerly gale, I dropped down to South Harbour (10.55 hrs) and started scanning for waders. Seconds later a bird flew from under the cliff below me and headed straight out and around the cliffs from where I'd just come. From this brief view I saw that it was a reasonable-sized bird with a very floppy flight - a heron - but it was too small for a Grey Heron. I was able to note just a few plumage details: grey, rounded wings and a square, black back. However, even after this brief view I was certain that it was a Night Heron and probably a full adult.

I informed Deryk Shaw and Simon Davies, and once they had arrived we began an extensive search of the sheltered east coast, though sadly this produced nothing. We decided to head back to the Observatory for lunch as by now the snow showers were hampering the search! Simon checked the Plantation Trap, when from behind the trap the heron jumped up out of the ditch, briefly showing off its plumage features before it quickly vanished over the top of the Vaadal into the blizzard! Its long, white head plume, red eye, and black cap along with black back and dark bill, yellowish legs, grey wings and whitish underparts all combined to make it unquestionably an adult Night Heron.

Despite a thorough search all afternoon there was no sign of the bird, but thankfully the next morning it was relocated at Setter, where it narrowly escaped becoming a cat's breakfast! It later settled around the Field pond where it remained until the last sighting on the 13th. With a lack of suitable food, a sad end was somewhat inevitable and on 24 April its remains were discovered in Gilsetter.

Meanwhile, on 9 April, Deryk Shaw discovered the fairly fresh, half-eaten remains of an adult Night Heron in Klingers Geo. With hindsight there must be a strong possibility (probability?) that this was actually the bird flushed from the South Harbour on the 5th and that it had continued to fly along the east coast and that the bird discovered at the Plantation later that morning was actually the second individual. Whatever the correct story, the truth is that there were TWO adult Night Herons on Fair Isle in spring 2008, and despite the sad fate of both birds it was a remarkable way to add it to the island list, taking that to an amazing 366 species (and soon to be followed by Caspian Plover and Citril Finch!).

Mark Breaks, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU.

Note: the remains of these birds (skeletons and one intact wing and head) are preserved at the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh (accession number NMS.Z.2009.148) (per R.Y. McGowan).

Night Heron - its status in Scotland

This species has a worldwide distribution with four distinct subspecies: two are restricted to South America, while one (Nycticorax n. hoactli) breeds in wetlands in North America from southern Canada and southwards to northern South America, with the nominate form (N. n. nycticorax) found breeding patchily in Africa and throughout mainland Europe from Iberia, France and the Low Countries eastwards through to the Black and Caspian Sea regions. It is then found more extensively from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, south-west Iraq and Iran eastwards into north-west China, northern Pakistan and India to south-east China and Japan and southwards through southern Asia to Indonesia. Western Palearctic birds mostly winter in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Nile Valley, with smaller numbers around the Mediterranean and North Africa. There is considerable post-breeding dispersal, particularly by juveniles, before birds generally migrate south to the wintering areas.



Plate 217. Night Heron, Fair Isle, April 2008 © Deryk Shaw.

The first accepted record of Night Heron in Britain is of one shot near London (Middlesex/Greater London) in May 1782, while the first Scottish record was of a pair shot at the Hirsell, Coldstream, Berwickshire (Borders) on 25 May 1822. Birds were then recorded almost annually in Britain with about 135 birds recorded by the end of 1949, 11 of these from Scotland: two Coldstream, Borders 1822; one River Cluden, Dumfries & Galloway 1825; one Mennie, North-east Scotland 1866; one near Kilmarnock, Ayrshire 'many years before 1871'; one Alloa Park, Upper Forth 1879; one Loch Creran, Argyll 1884; one Kilmarnock, Ayrshire 1888; one Barra, Outer Hebrides 1896; and one Glasgow, Clyde 1926.

Night Heron was a BBRC description species up until the end of 2001, by which time around a further 460 birds were found in Britain including 32 additional birds in Scotland (detailed in the annual BBRC reports). Since the start of 2002 SBRC have accepted another seven birds up until the end of 2008: an adult at Howbeg, South Uist, Outer Hebrides on 13–20 June 2003; an adult at Bridge of Allan, Upper Forth on 21 May 2006; a juvenile on Bressay, Shetland on 15 September 2007; an adult at Bavelaw, Lothian on 14–15 February 2007; the two Fair Isle adults in April 2008 and soon after, a first-summer at Claddach-vallay, North Uist, Outer Hebrides on 8 May 2008.

Night Heron occurs erratically in Scotland - there were none in the 1950s, two in the 1960s, one in 1970s, 18 in 1980s, 13 in 1990s, but just seven from 2000 to 2008 with 11 blank years since 1980. There were notable influxes to Britain in 1987 and 1990s each involving about 50 birds. Interestingly 1987 is the best year for the species in Scotland with 12 recorded, but by contrast none were found in 1990. There has been an increase in British records since 1980 and there are several records of birds summering in England since the mid-1990s suggesting that there is a strong possibility that Night Herons might breed in Britain in the near future.

Records elsewhere in Britain show a distinct bias to the southern half of England and Wales in spring, with well over a quarter of all

records found in SW England, while in autumn there is a shift to east coast records, though it has been recorded in all counties. By contrast Scottish records show something of a split between the Northern and Western Isles (over 50%) and the southern half of the country, where there is a notable bias to west central Scotland.

The 50 Scottish birds (to end 2008) have mostly been found in spring with a marked peak in April–May (12 and 13 birds respectively) tapering off in June (five birds). There are small early and late autumn peaks from late August to mid-September (five birds) and mid-October to early November (six birds); otherwise there are several scattered records throughout the year. Elsewhere in Britain the bias towards spring records is also evident, with broad spring and autumn peaks and far fewer winter discoveries. This is consistent with birds reaching Scotland/Britain as a result of overshooting of breeding areas in spring and post-breeding dispersal in autumn, indicating that most (if not all) accepted records are likely to refer to true wild birds rather than feral/escaped birds.

The Edinburgh Zoo birds

A free-flying breeding colony of Night Herons of the American subspecies (*hoactli*) was established at Edinburgh Zoo in 1950 and for several decades meant that records in central Scotland, and indeed further afield were tainted with an uncertain origin. An Edinburgh Zoo bird was found as far away as Alderbury, near Salisbury, Wiltshire in 1987 (There is also a collection of free-flying birds at Great Witchingham in Norfolk). From 1997 measures were undertaken to allow the free-flying population to die out naturally, and with no birds recorded anywhere in Lothian from 2002 to 2005 this appeared to have been successful. However, it has recently come to light that up to two ringed free-flying birds were still roaming the zoo grounds in 2006–09. As far as possible birds believed to have originated from this colony have always been eliminated in the published record and in the occurrences quoted above.



Plate 218. Caspian Plover, Fair Isle, May 2008 © Paul Baxter.

The Caspian Plover on Fair Isle, 1–2 May 2008 - sixth for Britain and third for Scotland

J. REID

There can be few better places to conduct a research project looking at Starling population ecology than Fair Isle. On 1 May I had been rigorously searching for colour-ringed Starlings, while all the time keeping an eye open for anything else of interest along the way. I was beginning to home in on a Starling flock near Upper Stoneybreck when a small plover flew in and alighted in the field immediately behind the croft. My pulse had already started racing even before the bird had landed because my first brief look at the bird indicated its size and build to belong to something unusual. Very quickly I turned my telescope, and as I focussed on the bird my pulse went into overdrive as the adrenaline rush kicked in!

The views through my telescope revealed that the bird was a small, long-winged plover and that it was running around on ridiculously long legs. Closer examination showed that it had sandy brown upperparts and clean white underparts, plus a very noticeable white forehead and supercilium and broad, sandy breast band. I continued to watch the plover for the next two to three minutes, until it had walked over a ridge in the field and out of sight. This had given me sufficient time to note the salient features, and I was starting to reach the incredible conclusion that the bird was most likely a Caspian Plover! I was literally shaking at this point but managed to stop for long enough to phone Deryk Shaw, the warden of Fair Isle

Bird Observatory, who I suspected would still be carrying out his morning census round and so probably not too far away.

I uttered a pretty incoherent message of 'Plover - Upper Stoneybreck - now!' and this proved enough to summon Deryk, and I switched my attention back to the bird. Or rather, back to the field where the bird had been walking about only a minute before. A very breathless Deryk plus Simon Davies, arrived almost simultaneously only to find me staring at an empty field and saying 'I think it's a Caspian...'. This was the cue for a rapid and increasingly frantic search of the area. Thankfully our panic ended after 30 minutes when Mark Breaks relocated the plover at Setter. It then flew off again heading towards Hoini, but this time was rediscovered more quickly. I could now start to relax and enjoyed excellent and prolonged views of the bird in company with all the other birders on Fair Isle. Several islanders who had witnessed the initial commotion also came to see this latest addition to Fair Isle's impressive avifauna for themselves.

The bird continued to perform well throughout the afternoon but there was no sign of it in the

evening. Knowing that many birders were extremely keen to see the bird and would be awaiting news, and believing that the dull, overcast conditions meant that the bird would not have departed overnight, we made a particularly early start the following morning. After two blank circuits checking out its favoured spots of the previous day we returned to the Observatory for breakfast and phoned out the news and the anxious charter planes were put on hold.

We quickly headed back out to start the daily census routes and to have one last look for the plover. Chances seemed even slimmer as the skies were now clearing to give way to a bright, sunny and cloud-free day - excellent conditions for migration. However, around 09:30 we were eventually rewarded when Mark Breaks refound the plover near Barkland. The news was rapidly phoned out and two planeloads of expectant birders were soon on their way. An unexpected surprise was the arrival of Hollie Shaw and two visiting birders, one from Shetland and one from Manchester, who had only just flown in on a scheduled flight from Shetland. By now the plover had returned to the field it was originally discovered in at Upper Stoneybreck and was showing very well.



Plate 219. Caspian Plover, Fair Isle, May 2008 © Mark Breaks.

After about an hour the bird started to look more wary and nervous and flew off high to the north and was lost to sight around 10:30. Another search was initiated and was joined by the 18 incoming birders. All efforts proved fruitless and the search was eventually called off when the time reached 17:00 and the last party of dejected twitchers had to leave.

Dr Jane Reid, c/o Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU.

Caspian Plover - its status in Scotland

This species breeds in dry steppes from the Caspian Sea and adjacent parts of Russia to the north-west and then eastwards through Kazakhstan to Lake Balkhash and from Turkmenistan to Kyrgyzstan, north-east

Afghanistan and north-west Pakistan. The entire population is migratory and winters in bare areas and short grasslands in eastern and southern Africa

There have been just four previous records of Caspian Plover in Britain: the first involved a pair (male shot) found at North Denes, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk on 2 May 1890. It was then nearly 100 years until the next, a male on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly on 21 May 1988, followed remarkably by an adult at Aberlady Bay, Lothian on 12–13 July the same year. The next was a female present at Skelberry, South Mainland, Shetland on 3–4 June.

There are just a handful of records elsewhere in Europe, with birds seen in France (August 1980, April 1985 and August 1988), Norway (June 1978) and Finland (June 2005).

White-crowned Sparrow, St Michael's, Fife, 17 May 2008 - the second record for Scotland

J. HARWOOD

At about 08:50 hrs on the morning of 17 May 2008 John and Jane Bullivant found a sparrow-sized bird with an unusual head pattern feeding just inside the open greenhouse in the garden of their house at St Michael's, Fife (between Tayport and St Andrews). They showed it to their mother and father, July and Jim, who managed to photograph the bird at about 5 m range with a conventional digital camera (Canon Powershot A610). The bird was seen several times later that morning feeding underneath a bird feeder in the back garden, often in the company of a small flock of Tree Sparrows, which were similar in size, and with a Dunnock and Greenfinch also present. Weather conditions on the day had been dry but overcast with 7 oktas cloud cover and force 2–3 easterly wind.

I was shown the photograph on the morning of 19 May, because the Bullivant's had not been able to identify the bird (apart from the fact that it was a strange looking sparrow) in any of their field guides. I searched the property on the evening of 19 May but was unable to find the bird and it was not seen subsequently.

Although the image is somewhat blurred, the black-and-white striped crown, lack of a white throat spot or stripe, and the brown flanks all confirmed the identity of the bird as a White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. The photo also shows the rather long-necked appearance, which is also a characteristic of this species.

Following reference to page 495 of the Sibley field guide (Sibley, D.A. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York), the pink bill and dark lores suggest that the bird in the photo is a member of the 'East Taiga' group, more usually referred to as Eastern White-crowned Sparrow *Z. l. leucophrys*. [The definitive reference for identifying *Z. leucophrys* subspecies appears to be Dunn, J.L., Garrett, K.L. & Alderfer, J.K. 1995. White-crowned Sparrow subspecies: identification and distribution. *Birding 27*: 182–200, but I was unable to track down a copy of this at the time]. Although the identification as this form seems fairly clear, BOURC have not assigned any of the British birds to a particular race. It is interesting to speculate whether or not this could be the same individual which over-wintered at Cley, Norfolk from January into March 2008, though sadly the St Michaels individual did not linger long enough to be seen by anyone other than the Bullivants.

Professor John Harwood, Gatty Marine Laboratory, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8LB.

White-crowned Sparrow – its status in Europe

This species breeds across North America from Alaska and northern Canada and southwards through the western USA along the Rocky Mountains, with the subspecies Zonotrichia l. leucophrys occupying the range eastwards from northern Ontario into Newfoundland. The northern populations are almost entirely migratory and it winters along the Pacific coast from Alaska and from southern USA into Mexico.

There has only been one previous record in Scotland - an adult trapped on Fair Isle on 15 May 1977 and still present the next day (Forrester et al. 2007. The Birds of Scotland. SOC, Aberlady). This was the first British record, and was closely followed by the second at Hornsea Mere, East Yorkshire on 22 May 1977. There have been two others since: a first-winter at Seaforth, Lancashire on 2 October 1995 and the adult at Cley, Norfolk from 3 January to 14 March 2008, with one in Ireland - on Dursey Island, Co. Cork on 20–27 May 2003. There are additional accepted records in Europe from France on 24 August 1965, Iceland on 4–6 October 1978 and the Netherlands from mid-December 1981 to mid-February 1982.



Plate 220. White-crowned Sparrow, St Michael's, Fife, May 2008 © J. Bullivant.



Plate 221. Trumpeter Finch, North Rona, May 2008 © Martin Gray.

The Trumpeter Finch on North Rona, Outer Hebrides, 25 May 2008 - the fourth Scottish record

J. McMILLAN

North Rona is a truly wonderful island. It is located about 40 miles north of the Butt of Lewis, making it one of the most remote islands in Britain. It has huge seabird colonies and one of the largest Grey Seal colonies in the North Atlantic. The island itself is green and fertile, and supported a community of up to 30 individuals until the 17th century. The remains of their village occupy the south slopes of the island, and are now home to a breeding colony of Leach's Storm-petrels. The village also contains Britain's oldest intact Christian building, St Ronan's Cell, dating from the 8th century, though visitors need true determination to crawl into its tiny entrance, and get the full St Ronan experience, as dead sheep often block the way.

Despite its natural and cultural attractions, the island's inaccessibility means it gets relatively few visitors. It is almost totally surrounded by high sandstone cliffs, with very few possible landing places, and even these can only be managed in calm weather, which is a rare event this far out into the Atlantic. The only safe ways to get there are either by joining an expedition cruise ship - three or four have managed to get here in recent springs - or by private charter with an experienced skipper. The island is administered by Scottish Natural Heritage, and intending visitors should contact them first. On 25 May 2008 my company *The Travelling Naturalist* was making its now annual stop on North Rona as part of a cruise visiting islands in north-west Scotland when an amazing event occurred.

'Calling Jamie, Jamie, this is Bridge. Please radio Martin now. It is great emergency!' The Russian voice over the tannoy rapidly ejected me from my bunk on our chartered expedition cruise ship *Aleksey Maryshev* where I was resting up for a few minutes before leading the afternoon zodiac cruise to look at Grey Seals.

I rushed out on deck: 'Martin, Martin, Jamie (crackle)...' With no answer on the radio I started to panic, and fearing the worst thought a terrible accident must have occurred. I climbed up another two decks from where I could scan the shore about 400 yards away from our anchorage. I soon spotted our expedition leader, Martin Gray, lying on the cliff top and peering down the cliff through binoculars. My state of panic intensified as a nightmare vision that someone must have slipped over the edge gripped me. I radioed Martin again but the reply was totally unexpected 'Yes, Jamie, I'm looking at a Trumpeter Finch. Get you passengers ashore right now'.

Breathing a huge sigh of relief the focus of my panic changed immediately. I hurtled back down to the restaurant and announced the imminent departure of the two Zodiacs and post-lunch coffee was abandoned. In an impressively short time, we were zooming across the water, to the bemusement of the Russian Zodiac drivers. Either not understanding the situation or displaying a wry sense of humour one said; 'I take you to the seals now?' I made sure that he fully understood the gravity of the situation!



Plate 222. Trumpeter Finch, North Rona, May 2008
© Jamie McMillan.

As we were in transit, Martin, and Susan Bain our historical guide, explained events over the radio. They had been watching Spotted Flycatchers and several other migrants in a sheltered geo close to the landing site when a small, pale, brown finch had flown out in front of them and began feeding on Thrift seeds. Though totally shocked, Martin immediately identified it, and then realised that he'd got a potential problem on his hands - how to ensure our 44 clients could get to see the bird. Most were scattered over the length and breadth of this 1.5 x 1 mile island, and the rest had returned with me for lunch back on the ship. While Martin radioed me, Susan had been dispatched to the ridge of the island to summon as many people as she could, using the most conspicuous distress beacon that their quick-thinking could come up with - Martin's yellow over-trousers!

Gradually the visitors spread around the island became aware of the frantic trouser-waving and made their way down to the cliff top. Our Zodiacs had reached the island by now a little way along the shore, but I knew from past experience that landing would not be easy.

My mind turned back three years to when at this very spot, in a four-foot swell, I mistimed my jump onto seaweed-covered rocks, slipped, and finished up with a dislocated finger. Fortunately this afternoon the sea was calm and the tide was low, which exposed much safer barnacle-encrusted ledges for us to land on. However we all still needed to be careful, firstly getting from the boats to the rocks, and then climbing vertically for about six feet up onto a wide ledge. From there we still had a slow ascent up steep slopes of rock and grass to reach the cliff top about 70 feet above us.

Having carefully got everyone ashore, and up the slope, we hurried along to see the bird, which luckily was showing superbly down to 20 feet on a ledge just below us in bright sunshine. It gave best views when it was feeding on Thrift seeds on the cliff top, but periodically it flew off to the rock ledges a little below, possibly to rest, at which times it became much harder to see. We watched it for about three hours before we had to return to our ship to get in our evening visit to Sula Sgeir, about 10 miles to the west (there was no sign of the albatross).

I've now made four spring landings on North Rona, each for just a few hours, and each time there have been good migrant birds. On the first visit we had an Icterine Warbler and Shore Lark within a few hundred yards in the same area of boulders. Other years have produced Red-backed Shrike and two Short-eared Owls, while in 2008 the Trumpeter Finch was accompanied by a Jackdaw, two Blue-headed Wagtails, several Song Thrushes, Spotted Flycatchers, Willow Warblers, a Chiffchaff and Tree Pipit, but nothing even semi-rare until the finch popped out. 'Rona magic again', said Martin. And who could disagree?

Description

The overall impression was of a stocky, plain, light sandy-coloured finch, with bright orange legs and bill. When it flew short distances along the clifftop, the wings appeared long and the tail short - the pink on the uppertail coverts and rump was particularly striking in the field. **Head:** depending on light and the attitude of the bird, the head sometimes appeared strikingly contoured, with an indent extending back from the eye and curving to follow the line of the head and neck; below this were 'hamster cheeks' which often appeared puffed out. The whole head seemed large and powerful. **Upperparts:** generally unstreaked dull, light sandy-brown with very noticeable pink tones on the uppertail coverts and rump. **Underparts:** generally uniform sandy-brown but slightly paler and greyer than upperparts and with pinkish wash to rear of flanks extending to undertail. **Wings:** coverts- feather centres somewhat darker brown than upperparts, but with broad pale sandy-brown fringes washed with pink; alula contrastingly dark-brown/blackish; secondaries and primaries dark brown with narrow pale sandy-brown fringes. **Tail:** feather centres dark brown with narrow pale sandy-brown fringes. **Bare parts:** bill - large, bright orange; eye - small, black; legs - orange. **Calls:** bird was not heard to call.

Jamie McMillan, The Travelling Naturalist, P.O. Box 3141, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2XD.

Trumpeter Finch - its status in Scotland

This species breeds in arid, rocky, desert and semi-desert areas from the Canary Islands and SE Spain across North Africa through the Middle East to Iran, Afghanistan and northern Pakistan. Western populations are largely sedentary, but eastern populations are notably dispersive with some wintering as far to the east as NW India.

The first British record of Trumpeter Finch was as recent as 1971 when a first-summer male was at Minsmere, Suffolk from 30 May to 15 June. Remarkably during that bird's stay another was found on Handa Island, Highland on 8-9 June. The next record was a male on Sanday, Orkney on 26-29 May 1981, followed by one at Church Norton, Sussex on 19-23 May 1984, one at Foulness, Essex on 21 September 1985, and one at Holy Island, Northumberland on 1 August 1987. The third Scottish record was a male at Balnakiel, Highland on 4 June 1992 with no further records until a multiple arrival in 2005 when a first-summer male was seen at Landguard Point, Suffolk on 21-26 May, a male at Tankerness, Kent on 24-25 May, a male at North Foreland, Kent on 9 June and another male at Dungeness, Kent on 11-13 June. The North Rona bird was the 12th individual recorded in Britain, closely followed by a first-summer male at Blakeney Point, Norfolk from 31 May to 4 June and a male at Telscombe Cliffs, Sussex on 4-6 June 2008.

All except two birds have been found in the period from mid-May to mid-June and all birds that were sexed have been males, which is consistent with birds from the eastern populations seeking territories being over-charged with hormones or having faulty navigational clocks and overshooting the normal breeding range during spring migration. There is a northern bias to the Scottish records and a very marked south-east bias to the ten English records (none in the south-west), again largely consistent with the idea that birds originate from eastern rather than southern breeding populations. Just under half of the birds have only been seen on the day of discovery, and apart from the first record (17 days) none has lingered more than six days.



Plate 223. Citril Finch, Fair Isle, June 2008 © Rebecca Nason.

Citril Finch on Fair Isle, 6–11 June 2008 - the first British record

D. SHAW

At around midday on 6 June, Tommy Hyndman found a yellowy-green finch-sized bird feeding in his garden. He consulted a bird book and identified it as a Citril Finch. Not realising the significance of this, but assuming it would be a rarity, he phoned the Bird Observatory and left a message on the answer-phone at 13:00 hrs. At around 14:15 hrs, Mike Gee came ambling along and TH recounted what he had seen to him. MG was very doubtful understandably (a novice American birder claiming what would be a first for Britain), but changed his mind when c. 30 minutes later the bird popped up on the wall 'My God, it is a Citril Finch! It's a first for Britain!' was apparently the cry.

Elizabeth Riddiford who happened to be passing was the next to see it, followed by Paul King (from the Observatory - having finally heard the phone message) then Kevin Shepherd and his wife Roya (who were staying at TH's B&B) then everyone else at the Observatory and other islanders. Meanwhile, I was blissfully unaware of all this as I was on Mainland Shetland for the day (with my phone off) and was on the way back to catch *The Good Shepherd* (with my phone now on) at 16:00 hrs when I got the voice message from my Assistant Warden!

A stressful two-and-a-half hours on the Good Shepherd followed, but it was in thick fog so I knew the bird wouldn't have left. Luckily it was still present when I arrived back on the Isle (along with the jammy Roger Riddington and Rory Tallack) and we all got great views before it disappeared into the fog and before the rest of the Shetland crowd arrived on a charter boat.

The bird was not seen the following morning, but was eventually relocated in the afternoon at Barkland, much to the relief of the first day's influx of twitchers. It was mobile and flighty for the rest of its stay - on the 8th it was seen at Barkland, then Aester Houll and later refound at the Haa. Next day it was mostly in the Aester Houll area and on the 10th around Quoy, while on 11th it was seen at Quoy, Schoolton and Aester Houll. There was an unconfirmed report on 12th, but it was not seen again.

Description

Head: greeny-yellow cheeks, chin and forecrown. Ear-coverts, rear crown and nape pure grey, reaching around the front (but not joining) like a shawl. **Upperparts:** mantle/upper back a dirty grey-green, similar to (but less brown than) female Greenfinch. Lower back and rump a startling bright lemon-yellow - the most striking part of the bird. Wings quite Siskin-like with dark, blackish flight feathers edged green, and broad yellow tips to black greater coverts. Tertiaries were edged a paler, dirtier green fading to dirty white (cf Siskin). **Underparts:** almost entirely yellow - slightly brighter than face but not as bright as rump. Some undertail coverts whiter. **Bare parts:** bill conical (typically finch-like), grey with matted, brown nasal hairs forming two 'lumps' at base of bill. Legs dark pink. Eye black, quite beady.

The bird was trapped and ringed (ring no: V682771) when it flew into the Heligoland trap at Barkland on 7 June and the following details were taken: wing: 81 mm; weight: 14.7 g; fat score: 3/8; pectoral muscle score: 2/3. Sex/age: 6M - a male based on purer, bright colouration and an adult based on the broad shape of tail feathers and all greater coverts being of same age - green-edged with no moult contrast.

Discussion

Obviously the occurrence of this bird (an adult male of a short-distance migrant) has raised some doubts about its origin. In the hand it had pristine plumage with no signs of foot or bill damage (see photos opposite) - no indication of ever having been in captivity. Dr Marc Förschler of the Institute of Avian Research on Helgoland, Germany has been studying this species since 1999 and he claims he could probably identify the origins of this bird from its song/calls and also stable isotope analysis. I therefore sent him a DVD of some footage of the bird singing and also a few body feathers that fell out when the bird was handled. I am still awaiting his findings!

Deryk Shaw, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU.



Plate 224. Citril Finch, Fair Isle, June 2008 © Rebecca Nason.



Plate 225. Citril Finch, Fair Isle, June 2008 © Rebecca Nason.



Plates 226–227. Citril Finch, Fair Isle, June 2008 © Rebecca Nason.

Citril Finch - its status in Scotland

This is one of a small number of European endemic species, and is a resident breeding species in montane and subalpine conifer woods and meadows in Spain, south-east France, north-west Italy and the Alps. It is a summer breeding visitor to similar habitats in the northern Alps and south-west Germany around the Jura Mountains. It is a short range and altitudinal migrant when snow cover pushes birds to lower elevations in winter. There are numerous vagrant records north of this range in mainland Europe and one from Finland, plus several to the south from southern Spain, Mallorca and north-west Africa (for further details see Hyndman, T. 2008. *The Citril Finch on Fair Isle - a new British bird*. *Birding World* 21 (6): 243–249). Therefore there was already an established tendency for northward vagrancy by this species.



Plate 228. *Upland Sandpiper, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, May 2008 © Matt Slaymaker.*

A Nearctic wader hat-trick at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg: Upland Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope and Stilt Sandpiper

D. PARNABY

With a list currently standing at 266 species, the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve must be one of the best birdwatching sites in Scotland. Among this total is a track record of birds of the calibre of Barrow's Goldeneye, Pied-billed Grebe, Black-winged Pratincole, Caspian Tern, Ferruginous Duck, Killdeer and Terek Sandpiper (not forgetting such notable local rarities as Little Owl), and it's hard to imagine that the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve could get better for rare birds. But, in the last two years, Scottish listers have had more than one occasion to

head to the north-east corner of the Buchan plains, as the reserve has entered a 'new rarities era' - a term coined by a visitor to the site, who had just added another new bird to his list.

What supports the claim to be one of the best birding sites in Scotland, particularly on the mainland, is its year-round interest, fantastic wildlife spectacles and seemingly endless run of good birds. The range of habitats, from coastal foreshore, reedbed, marsh, pools, wet and dry grasslands through to the Loch itself, is always

going to attract a variety of birds and the east coast location helps. In recent years, the memorably named North-east Aberdeenshire Habitat Enhancement and People Engagement Project (a £1.1M project funded by European Regional Development Fund, 'Europe and Scotland: Making it work together', the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Gillman Trusts, the Friends of Strathbeg and the Kemnay Wildlife Explorers Group) saw a number of major changes at the reserve, including new reedbeds, ditches and sluice systems allowing a far greater control of water levels. This new habitat is a huge improvement for wildfowl and waders (both breeding and wintering) and reedbed species and has created the opportunity for the 'new era' to begin.

Despite the reserve's east coast location, it is three American birds in the last two years that have kick-started the rarities era and brought the reserve extra attention.

The first of these was an Upland Sandpiper on 6 May 2008, which was found at the neglected north end of the reserve. Despite having a regular spring trip of Dotterel and enough hints that more birds could be found with regular observation, very few birders venture along the beach, dunes and fields south of St Combs. It was whilst checking for the Dotterel that Susannah (my wife) and I found a large flock of Whimbrel, containing a clearly smaller wader. Even without a telescope, the views with binoculars steadied on a fencepost suggested Upland Sandpiper. The unusual build of pot-belly, skinny neck, small, square head, big eyes and long tail, making it a distinctive species, but not one that is expected in a crop field in Aberdeenshire in spring! It was a real concern when the Whimbrel flock flew whilst the Upland Sandpiper was out of sight behind a ridge - with no view through the telescope, could I be absolutely sure of what I'd seen? Would anyone believe me if it wasn't refund, so there was a huge wave of relief when it wandered out from behind the ridge, seemingly unconcerned by the paraglider that had disturbed the other birds. Indeed, as its stay went on, it was clear that it was anything but shy, with photographers having to back away from the bird to get it in

focus! Better views showed the extensive barring on the flanks, streaked crown with a pale, thin central stripe, prominent eye ring and generally barred plumage.

A two-day stay enabled birders from across Scotland to catch up with this scarce visitor to the country, only the second record for the mainland - and given that the first was shot in 1933, there can't be many people who got that one on their list.

That autumn, the Loch of Strathbeg was again the focus of local birders' attentions with another sought after Scottish rarity, but one that I missed! Shortly before taking leave, I'd found both White-winged Black Tern and Greenish Warbler on the reserve, so I was quite content with my birding lot and looking forward to a ferry trip across the Bay of Biscay. Things were going well, with no good 'fall' conditions forecast. I was therefore somewhat gutted to check the Internet shortly before setting off for the ferry to find that: (a) there were gales forecast for Biscay and (b) there was a Wilson's Phalarope at Loch of Strathbeg. Sure enough, when I turned my mobile back on, there were various gleeful messages about this fantastic visitor. On returning, I got the full story of its discovery - several times in fact!

Johanes Kamp, a friend of our residential volunteer, was visiting the reserve on the 1 September and wandered into the office, casually asking for a field guide before announcing that there was a Wilson's Phalarope on the pools if anyone was interested! The wardens were indeed interested and got good views of the somewhat flighty bird on the pools. The news was put out, and those birders who were quick off the mark were able to enjoy views of the bird for the rest of the afternoon, but unfortunately it wasn't seen the next day. It was an elegant wader, with a long, thin bill, pale plumage, yellow legs and a white rump; it was a distinctive species, making only its second appearance in the region.

Despite these impressive visitors, the reserve's year-list got stuck on 199 and remained there until the end of the year, so we were particularly determined to break the 200 barrier in 2009.



Plates 229–235. (Top row) Upland Sandpiper, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, May 2008 © Left; Matt Slaymaker, Right; Andrew Whitehouse. (Middle row) Stilt Sandpiper, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, July 2009 © Willie McBay. (Bottom row) Wilson's Phalarope, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, September 2008 © Chris Jones.

That meant that any migrant hunting or seawatching was to be done from the reserve, even if there were better locations closer to home! On 9 July, my wife and I set off for Strathbeg, this time joined by Grace, who at nine-weeks old still needed a few common Scottish ticks! Having finished the household chores we decided to head up for a seawatch from the north end of the reserve. As was proving to be the case with our family trips, it wasn't the most organised and halfway to the reserve we realised we had forgotten the telescope! We decided to pop into the office to pick one up and thought we'd best check to see whether anything had been seen that day. There wasn't much in the log, but on my first scan, I noticed a wader feeding in a channel to the right of the centre. Spotted Redshank, Snipe, a dowitcher and Ruff all flitted through my mind as possibilities to its identity, but I couldn't place it. Curious, I trained a telescope on it and things became clearer. The long legs, long bill, rangy build, chestnut ear coverts and cap, pale supercilium and extensive dark barring on the body added up to adult Stilt Sandpiper - I was looking at the reserve's 44th species of wader! I got Susannah onto the bird and contacted Dominic Funnell, the site manager. We released the news immediately and kept the visitor centre open beyond the usual closing time. Birders starting arriving soon afterwards, with meals abandoned and emergency baby-sitters drafted in to enable people to get to the site before dark. A Pectoral Sandpiper was also found and could often be seen in the same scope view.

With only four previous accepted Scottish records of Stilt Sandpiper it was another popular bird and lingered until the 11th, allowing many observers to enjoy it. The only previous mainland record was in Sutherland in April 1970, so Loch of Strathbeg had scored another second record of an American wader for the Scottish mainland - what odds Short-billed Dowitcher or Grey-tailed Tattler in 2010?

Perhaps the reserve will finally get the 'real biggy' - a first for Scotland. It's not just the wetland birds: although the last two years have produced Whiskered Tern, Bonaparte's Gull, two White-winged Black Terns, four Great White

Egrets, Glossy Ibis, White-rumped Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs and a host of scarce and locally rare birds. There is a lot of potential for finding vagrant passerines, with Hume's Warbler, two Greenish Warblers, three Yellow-browed Warblers and a Richard's Pipit in the last two years just hinting at the potential of the plantation, dunes and farmland.

So the two questions that the reserve now poses - what will be the next major bird in our 'new rarities era', and will it be you that finds it?

*David Parnaby, RSPB Visitor Officer,
Starnafin Farm, Loch of Strathbeg.*

Upland Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope and Stilt Sandpiper - their status in Scotland

Although these three Nearctic vagrant waders all breed in northern North America they occupy very different habitats. The breeding range of Stilt Sandpiper is confined to wet tundra of northernmost Alaska and Canada and the southern edge of Hudson Bay and does not overlap with the other two species. Upland Sandpiper is found in open grasslands from Alaska/Yukon and then eastwards from British Columbia south into Oregon and then eastwards to the Atlantic states from Nebraska to Virginia. Wilson's Phalarope breeds in wetlands in SW Canada and NW USA and around the Great Lakes. All three species are entirely migratory and generally follow inland routes hence their relative scarcity compared to other Nearctic waders in Britain. Stilt Sandpiper typically winters in central South America with a few in southern California, the Gulf Coast and Florida; Upland Sandpiper winters in east central South America, and Wilson's Phalarope winters in west and south-west South America.

Upland Sandpiper

There have been 10 individuals recorded in Scotland, including the Strathbeg bird, out of a total of 44 seen in Britain to the end of 2008. The first Scottish record was an adult female shot at Kirkstyle, near Ruthwell, Dumfries & Galloway on 13 October 1933. Since then there have been individuals on Fair Isle on 5 October

1970 and 25 September 1975, one on St Kilda on 24 April 1980, and then a remarkable run of records from Foula, Shetland with birds seen on 22 September to 6 October 1993 (found long dead on 18 November), on 2 September 1996, with presumed same on 14–15 September 1996, and on 4–8 May 2004. The eighth Scottish record was one at Borge & Linciate, Benbecula, Outer Hebrides on 3–6 October 2005 (Duffield 2005), and the ninth was a juvenile at Norwick, Unst, Shetland on 6 October 2006, and then at Baltasound, Unst the following day (Maher 2006).

Only two of the 10 Scottish records have been in spring, with the others all found in autumn between 2 September and 13 October, with two on Fair Isle and four on Shetland, but only two on mainland Scotland, and an average length of stay of 4.6 days. Elsewhere in Britain spring records are similarly rare but there are also records from July, August, November and December, while the majority of records come from the Isles of Scilly, with several from SW Wales and Cornwall, and only a handful of records in other areas. Several of the Scilly birds have lingered for over two weeks but elsewhere birds tend to stay no more than a few days.

Wilson's Phalarope

The first Scottish and British record was of one at St Margaret's Marsh/Rosyth, Fife from 11 September to 5 October 1954. There have now been 31 birds recorded in Scotland out of a total of 226 individuals to the end of 2008, with the Strathbeg bird the thirtieth of these, and this was followed by one at Balgarva, South Uist on 21 September 2008.

Whereas the frequency of records of most Nearctic waders continues to increase with successive decades, the number of records of Wilson's Phalarope in both Scotland and Britain overall increased markedly from the 1960s to 1980s but took a notable downturn since 1991 despite occasional good years in 1997, 1998, 2007 and 2008 - which mirrors the decline in the breeding population observed in North America.

A notable lack of sightings in north-west Scotland up until 2004 was rectified by records

of a first-winter from Bornish, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 19–23 September 2005 and the Balgarva, South Uist bird of 2008. Shetland is still the most productive area (six records), and surprisingly, given its generally poor track record for Nearctic waders, Fife is next with four. The other records are spread down the coastal counties of east and south-west Scotland. There are four spring records, occurring between 9 May and 4 June, with all others present between 25 August and 25 October with over half (54.5%) of these first found in September, and an average length of stay of around four days. The geographical distribution and seasonal timing and split of records are similar to records elsewhere in Britain.

Stilt Sandpiper

There have been 27 individuals of this species recorded in Britain to the end of 2008, with four of these in Scotland, and the 2009 Strathbeg bird constituting the fifth. The first British record was of one at Kilnsea, Yorkshire from 31 August to 4 September 1954, though the first Scottish record (eighth British) was not found until one was present at Dornoch Point, Highland on 18 April 1970. The second Scottish record was an adult at Loch of Gards, Scatness, Shetland on 11–18 September 1976 and was eventually followed by a juvenile at Norwick, Unst, Shetland on 5–7 November 2002 (Maher et al. 2003). The fourth was a juvenile at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, Outer Hebrides on 14–15 September 2008.

Unusually for a Nearctic wader, records of this species in Britain exhibit an east coast bias, and particularly surprising is that there are none from SW England or Scilly. Only three of the British records have been found in spring, including the first Scottish record, while there is a fairly scattered spread to the five Scottish records.

Duffield, S. 2005. Upland Sandpiper, Linciate/Borge machair, Benbecula 3rd October 2005. *Birding Scotland* 8 (4): 175–176.

Maher, M. 2006. Upland Sandpiper, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, 6th–7th October 2006. *Birding Scotland* 9 (3): 100–101.

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Plate 236. Adult male Two-barred Crossbill, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, August 2008 © Hugh Harrop.

Two-barred Crossbills in the Northern Isles, 2008

H. HARROP

Between 20 July and 22 August 2008 at least 56 Two-barred Crossbills were recorded in Shetland and Orkney, with 40 of these arriving during the period of 5–10 August. Previous influxes of Two-barred Crossbills in the Northern Isles have occurred in 1987 (23 individuals), 1990 (12 individuals) and 2002 (also 12 individuals). None have thus been so dramatic as in 2008, which alone nearly trebles the previous highest influx of birds of 1987 - and surpasses the combined total of the three previous influxes by over 10%.

Establishing the cause of any influx is always speculative but all species of *Loxia* are well known for their irruptive behaviour in response to food shortage. Shetland also recorded relatively high numbers of around 120 Common Crossbills from early June to mid-August 2008, with obvious peaks occurring during the last week of June and first 10 days of July. It is interesting to note that large numbers of Common Crossbills also occurred in the Northern Isles during the Two-barred Crossbill influx years of 1990 and 2002 but relatively few Common Crossbills were

recorded in the 1987 influx (e.g. there were just two records from Shetland).

For a bird that is so characteristic of a dense, remote, larch and spruce forest it was a real privilege for many birders to be able to watch such a true boreal denizen in an environment as spartan as the Northern Isles. At coastal sites like Sumburgh Head and Eshaness the birds fed almost exclusively along the cliff tops on the flower heads of Thrift and at inland sites, birds were noted feeding on Hogweed and Meadowseet. One juvenile at Sumburgh Head was also attracted to birdseed and fed alongside House Sparrows and Twite. Once located, the birds were typically quite tame but the coastal birds were also sometimes extremely elusive, choosing to spend large amounts of time at the bottom of cliffs and in geos, taking advantage of ungrazed areas of vegetation. Given the low number of observers and the vast, expansive landscape of the two archipelagos and offshore islands, one can only guess at what the true figure may have been.

The following series of records have been compiled:

Shetland

A total of at least 28 individuals

July

- 26th male, Lamba Ness, Unst
- 28th female, Sandgarth, near Voe (until 29th)
- 30th juvenile, Eshaness (until 3 August)

August

- 5th female, Norwick, Unst
- 6th male and five juveniles, Sumburgh Head (1 BBRC)
- 7th male and 12 juveniles, Sumburgh Head (new male and seven new juveniles) (7 BBRC)
- 8th male, two females and 11 juveniles, Sumburgh Head (two females were new) (13 BBRC) juvenile, Houbie, Fetlar at least one juvenile, Windhouse, Mid Yell, Yell (and 9th)
- 9th two males, two females, one first-summer female and 13 juveniles, Sumburgh Head (one new female and at least one new juvenile)
- 10th two juveniles, Sumburgh Head (no new birds) juvenile, Saxa Vord, Haroldswick, Unst
- 11th two males, one female and eight juveniles, Sumburgh Head (no new birds)
- 12th male and juvenile, Sumburgh Head (no new birds) juvenile, Tresta, Fetlar (and 13th, new bird)
- 14th male and two juveniles, Sumburgh Head (no new birds)
- 16th at least one male and four juveniles, Sumburgh Head (possibly two new juveniles)
- 18th male, Lower Voe
- 20th male and two juveniles, Sumburgh Head (5 BBRC)
- 22nd juvenile, Frakkafield, Lerwick

Fair Isle

A total of 15(or 16) individuals:

July

- 25th female, Easter Lothar (then Malcolm's Head until 1 August)
- 27th new female, Skaden (then Malcolm's Head until 1 August)

August

- 1st male, South Light and Malcolm's Head (then at Hesti Geo on 2nd) new female, Malcolm's Head
- 5th juvenile, Observatory area, presumed new female, Vaasetter
- 6th nine (new) juveniles, Bunes (until 9th, with eight present to 12th and four present until 18th)
- 11th two juveniles, Finniquoy (no new birds)
- 17th five juveniles (no new birds)
- 18th four juveniles (no new birds)

September

- [7th juvenile, Barkland area (until 14th)]†

Orkney

A total of 10 (or 11) birds

July

- 20th male, Dale Farm, Evie
- [28th female, Mull Head] †
- 29th juvenile, Queenamidda, Rendall (until 2 August) juvenile, Stenness (flew into a window, released from care on 30th, present to 1 Aug)

August

- 3rd female, Stronsay
- 6th two juveniles, North Ronaldsay (one until 11th)
- 7th one male, three females, Hestily, South Ronaldsay



Plate 237. Adult male Two-barred Crossbill, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, August 2008 © Hugh Harrop.



Plate 238. Adult female Two-barred Crossbill, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, August 2008 © Hugh Harrop.



Plate 239. Juvenile Two-barred Crossbill, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, August 2008 © Hugh Harrop.

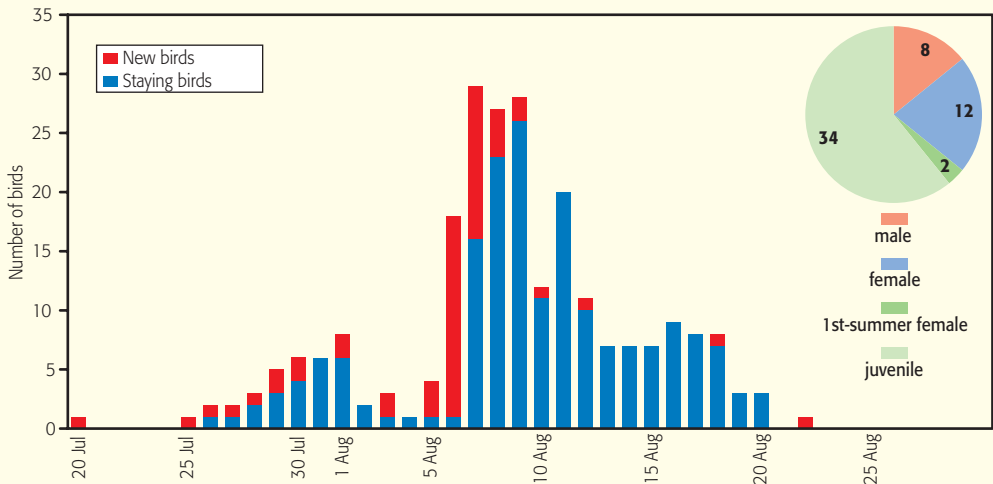


Figure 1. Daily numbers (showing ages and sexes) of Two-barred Crossbills in Scotland, July–August 2008.

Notes

BBRC has still to publish its decision on two records (marked †). Although the total number of birds seen at Sumburgh (18) is the same in both the BBRC report and the *Shetland Bird Report*, the daily totals differ. The *Shetland Bird Report* totals are given here, with the BBRC totals in parentheses.

Away from the Northern Isles the only other Scottish records were of three birds in the Outer Hebrides - a male at Borve, Harris on 30–31 July, a first-summer female on St Kilda on 3–7 August and a juvenile at Tarbert, Harris on 7–8 August.

Acknowledgments

A big thank you to all those who discovered these beautiful birds. Mark Chapman, Russ Haywood, Mick Mellor, Steve Minton, Paul Harvey and Martin Heubeck all kindly provided information on their observations of the Sumburgh 'flock' compositions in order to ascertain the number, sex and age of birds involved. Deryk Shaw and Stuart Williams provided data from Fair Isle and Orkney respectively. Thanks also to Harri Tavetti for lengthy discussion on variation within juvenile Two-barred and Common Crossbills.

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Birdline Scotland REVIEW

compiled by

Angus Murray & Stuart Rivers

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All records refer to the period 1
January–31 December 2008
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The main event in January was an unprecedented influx of Cranes into northern Scotland, including the largest flock ever to be reported in Scotland. There was an increase in numbers of white-winged gulls compared to the end of 2007 and there were several unusual instances of rare waders over-wintering into 2008. A fairly typical range and number of rare and scarce wildfowl were present in the first few months, with Lesser Scaup and King Eider dominating the headlines on most days in March. The first flush of summer migrants appeared in early March, but from then on it remained fairly slow on the migrant front up to the end of the month. Fair Isle attracted several good birds in April, and Shetland had an unusual influx of Hawfinches but things were quiet elsewhere and even numbers of commoner migrants were below average. May was almost completely dominated by easterly winds though it took the magic ingredient, rain, in the last few days of the month to produce a sizeable fall of scarce migrants. June produced a fine crop of rarities, mostly on the Northern Isles, with pick of the bunch being Britain's first Citril Finch.

The two main events of a quiet July were influxes of Rose-coloured Starlings and Two-barred Crossbills, the latter reaching record numbers in August. Evidence for the first successful breeding of Spoonbill in Scotland also emerged in August. An exceptional number of rare and scarce passerines from the east were found in September, mostly on the Northern Isles, by contrast there were only two Nearctic passerines. The main events in October were the record breaking 'wreck' of Grey Phalaropes in NW Scotland and the Northern Isles - the numbers noted being totally unprece-

ded in a Scottish context, and a large invasion of Waxwings. Early November saw a good selection of rare and scarce migrants, with autumn leaf warblers to the fore, and the continued build-up of Waxwings, most of which shifted to the central belt by December.

The following abbreviations for the respective recording areas are used within the text: Ang - Angus & Dundee; Arg - Argyll; Ayr - Ayrshire; Bord - Borders; Caith - Caithness; D&G - Dumfries & Galloway; High - Highland; Loth - Lothian; M&N - Moray & Nairn; NES - North-east Scotland; Ork - Orkney; OH - Outer Hebrides; P&K - Perth & Kinross; Shet - Shetland; UF - Upper Forth.

Wherever possible only records accepted by the relevant records' committee are listed. Records of species on the SBRC List for which descriptions are awaited are marked †. See www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm for updates. Records marked ‡ are listed in the BBRC work-in-progress file on www.bbrc.org.uk/workin-progress.htm.

Bewick's Swan: four lingered at Montrose Basin (Ang) from December to at least 26 January. There were no other reports until one near Collieston (NES) from 21 March to 14 April. **Tundra Bean Goose:** at least two were in Shetland during November with one also seen at Loch of Skene (NES) on 30th. **Snow Goose:** six were seen in January - blue morphs in Dumfries & Galloway, North-east Scotland and Fife and white morphs in Caithness, Orkney and Argyll. In February birds were still present at the latter five sites. One was again with Pink-footed Geese in the Longside/Meikle Loch area (NES) on 12–16 March, while one remained in Fife into March and others were still in Orkney and Dumfries & Galloway through to

April when new sightings occurred in Argyll and North-east Scotland. Three white-morph birds were seen in October - in Argyll, North-east Scotland and in Orkney. Three were noted in December - a blue morph and a white morph amongst Pink-feet in Moray & Nairn from 23rd, and a white morph Lesser with Icelandic Greylags in Ayrshire also from 23rd. **Ross's Goose:** an adult was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 29–30 March†. Birds presumed to be this species were at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 3 April and over Kirktown of Slains (NES) on 5th, whilst an adult was with the Pink-feet at Loch Leven (P&K) on 15–25 April†. **Canada Goose:** one of the form *hutchinsii* (Richardson's) was found amongst the returning Barnacle Geese at WWT Caerlaverock (D&G) on 28 September and was joined by a Cackling Canada Goose (form *minima*) on 2 October†. Three different small-race birds were noted there in October, two Cackling Canada Geese (form *minima*) and a Taverner's Canada Goose (form *taverneri*) again, whilst at least six different birds of three vagrant forms were seen on Islay (Arg) during the month. In November one of the form *minima* was present off-and-on at WWT Caerlaverock, at least three were still on Islay (Arg) and one of the form *hutchinsii* was on Berneray (OH). In December two of the form *minima* and one of the form *taverneri* remained on the Solway, often at WWT Caerlaverock reserve, whilst the Richardson's Canada Goose (form *hutchinsii*) was still on Berneray. Note that only a few of these records have so far been submitted to BBRC. **Black Brant:** one seen with Barnacle Geese on South Walls (Ork) on 20–25 November† was only the second Scottish record - the first was on Islay (Arg) in 1989. **Red-breasted Goose:** the elusive individual among the Solway Barnacle Geese was last reported from WWT Caerlaverock (D&G) on 6 February.

American Wigeon: a drake was at Maywick (Shet) still until 25 February at least, and a drake at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) from 15 January throughout February into March, another was found at Wick (Caith) in February and also stayed into March. No birds featured in April, but a drake was on North Uist (OH) on 21–26 May. Single drakes were at Wick again from 14 November and Loch Bee, South Uist from 15 November. A drake was at RSPB Mersehead (D&G) on 22–30 December, with other drakes still in Caithness and the Outer Hebrides during the month. **Green-winged Teal:** a good showing in January with seven drakes reported. Four were seen in February - in Ayrshire, Shetland, Orkney and Outer Hebrides, and 10 drakes in March, four of them in Orkney. Numbers dropped to just four in April, and three in May - drakes on Islay (Arg) still, North Uist and in Shetland during 1–16th. Three drakes were seen in October - in Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway and Renfrewshire. Six were noted in November - in Dumfries & Galloway, Upper Forth, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Orkney and Outer Hebrides. Ten drakes were seen in December including two in the Outer Hebrides and two at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 13th. **Garganey:** unusually early drakes were seen at the Ugie Estuary (NES) on 3 February and at Lochmaben (D&G) on 13–28 February. A drake was on Benbecula and South Uist (OH) from 4 March with another drake

reported on Coll (Arg) on 29 March. At least 20 were noted in April, and in a good spring for this species in Scotland over 50 were reported in May including at least six at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES), where at least two pairs successfully bred. In June there were also two drakes in Angus and a pair at Bavelaw (Loth) from 13th. A female and three juveniles were seen on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 24 July - the second site with confirmed breeding this year. **Ring-necked Duck:** six were noted in January, with two drakes in Shetland, two drakes in Caithness, a female still on North Uist (OH) and a female at Loch Morlich (High) from 8 January which was still present up to 13 April, with a drake at Loch of Tingwall (Shet) still up to 21 April and the female at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 24 April. Four drakes were noted in May - in Caithness, Orkney, on Islay (Arg) and in Ayrshire. Two eclipse drakes were found in July - at Linlithgow Loch (Loth) on 19–22nd and Loch Gelly (Fife) on 20–31st. A drake was at Loch Leven (P&K) on 15 September with a juvenile present on Foula (Shet) from 29 September. Seven were seen in October - in Shetland (3), in Caithness (2) and in the Outer Hebrides (2). Singles were in Shetland and Tiree (Arg) in November. In December a female was at Martnaham Loch (Ayr) from 4th with the only other report being the drake still on Tiree. **Lesser Scaup:** a drake remained on



Plate 240. Lesser Scaup, Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, December 2008
© Brian Henderson.

Benbecula (OH) throughout January into March, with a female still on Fetlar then Yell and Unst (Shet) which stayed into February, whilst a presumed returning drake was on Loch Leven (P&K) on 3–10 February. A drake was at Quarry Loch, Blair Drummond (UF) from 19 March and two in Dumfries & Galloway; at Loch Magillie/Soulseat Loch on 3–31 March and another at Auchenreoch Loch on 30–31 March. Four drakes were reported in April - one on Outer Hebrides still on 1st, two still in Dumfries & Galloway and one still in Upper Forth, while a drake was at St. John's Pool (Caith) on 13–15 May. An eclipse drake was found at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) from 21 July to 17 August. Three drakes were seen at the end of the year - up to two at Hogganfield Loch (Clyde) from 19 October to 31 December and one at Loch Leven (P&K) again on 23 September to 26 December. At least nine different birds were seen during the year.

King Eider: nine presumed different birds were seen during the year, four of them presumed to be new with five returnees. Only two were reported during January - an adult drake in Mousa Sound (Shet) from 2007 which remained through February into March, and a first-winter drake still at Girdleness, Aberdeen which was present up to 15 February and then refound at Murcar (both NES) on 24 February whilst an adult drake, presumably a returning bird, was at Uisaed Point (Arg) on 28th. Five records in March probably involved four different birds with drakes still in Shetland and at Aberdeen, a first-winter drake at Ruddons Point (Fife) on 27th and the adult drake still at Machrihanish (Arg) on 5th and then at Troon on 11–13th and then Girvan (both Ayrs) from 27th. A drake was at Peterhead on 20 March. Three birds were noted in April - an adult drake still in Ayrshire and first-winter drakes at Girdleness (NES) still on 10th and off North

Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3–22nd. In May birds were in Ayrshire still, on Fair Isle and in Shetland. Two drakes were reported from Shetland in October. The only reports in November were a drake and a female in Shetland. In December a second-winter drake was at Earlsferry (Fife) from 25th†, with a drake also still in Shetland. **Surf Scoter:** in January single adult drakes from 2007 were still in Fife and Orkney with new first-winter birds found on Tiree (Arg) on 6–27th and off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21st. Nine were reported in February including up to three (two drakes and a female) in Largo Bay (Fife), three in Sound of Taransay (OH) and a drake at Dornoch (High) from at least 11th. Seven were noted in March with no new birds involved. In April drakes were in Orkney and in Highland still and two in Largo Bay. Eight birds seen in May included first-summer drakes on Fair Isle and in Shetland. Single drakes were at Catfirth (Shet) still on 1–10 June and at Spey Bay (M&N) on 4–8 June whilst at least five different drakes were noted amongst the large moulting Common Scoter flock between Blackdog and Murcar (NES) during the month. At least two drakes were seen in July - one still off Blackdog with another at Dales Voe (Shet) on 10–22nd. Six were seen in September including a female/juvenile at Loch Scridain, Mull (Arg) on 11th. The only birds reported in October were two drakes at Lunan Bay (Arg). Five seen in November comprised four drakes in usual areas and a female at Hough Bay, Tiree (Arg) from 16th. Three remained into December - in the Outer Hebrides, Tiree and Largo Bay (Fife). **Hooded Merganser:** a female was at Tayport from 26 October until 15 November - the first for Fife and third for Scotland. **Smew:** a total of 15 birds were reported in February, including three at Loch Leven (P&K). Only six were reported in December.

Quail: one was seen on 21st and 30 March at Newmains Farm, Reston (Borders) possibly having over-wintered. Definite migrants included 17 in May, with three different singing birds in Ayrshire, and at least 22 singing birds in June. Around 25 singing males were reported in July with most from Angus and Borders.

Great Northern Diver: an unusual inland record was of one at Loch Leven (P&K) in February. **White-billed Diver:** up to 29 different birds were noted during the year. At least three were noted in Shetland during January, and four in February, with an adult off Port of Ness, Lewis (OH) on 27 February. At least six were reported in March though only one was off Lewis (OH), off Port Skigersta on 6th. At least four were noted in Shetland including singles off West Burra and in Mousa Sound on 30 March. A good spring passage was again noted in April with 14 birds reported from 4th - four in the Outer Hebrides, three in Shetland, two in Orkney, an adult off Burghead (M&N) from 24th and four in Highland from 16th, two at Loch Ewe and two at Gruinard Bay. Four birds, including three adults, were seen off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2–4 May. Ten other birds were reported in May - from Caithness, Highland (2), Shetland (2), Outer Hebrides (4+) and Moray & Nairn. An adult in summer plumage was at Water Sound, South Ronaldsay (Ork) from 2 July up until 14th December at least whilst the regular wintering adult returned to Kirkabister (Shet) on 29 October. In November two adults were in Shetland - in Bluemull Sound and at South Nesting and one was off Girdleness (NES) on 15th. The adult was at Kirkabister throughout December. **Slavonian Grebe:** an unusual inland record was of one at Loch Leven (P&K) in February.

Black-browed Albatross: an adult flew past the Machrihanish Seabird



Plate 241. *White-billed Diver* © David Edgar. This species has become increasingly regular in Britain, with at least 374 birds noted by the end of 2008, such that it was removed from the BBRC list of description species from January 2009 (now SBRC). At least 33 were found in 2008, with 28 of these in Scotland, which accounts for three-quarters of all records, with over 50% coming from Shetland (90+), Orkney (36+) and the Outer Hebrides (66+) alone. It has been recorded from every coastal recording area in Scotland except Upper Forth, the Isle of May and Dumfries & Galloway. There has been a dramatic rise in British records from 68 in the 1980s to 84 in the 1990s and at least 154 from 2000 to the end of 2008. An increasing contributor to the totals has been the discovery of a regular northward spring passage of birds up the north-west coast of Scotland and through the Northern Isles to its Arctic breeding areas - over 40% of records are from April and May. The wintering areas for the Western Palearctic populations include the north-east Atlantic off Norway, but remain largely unknown suggesting it is mainly pelagic and widely dispersed.

Observatory (Arg) on 27 October. **Cory's Shearwater:** a very early bird flew north close inshore past Saltcoats harbour (Ayr) on 1 April†. Five were reported in July including two off Fraserburgh (NES) on 20th†. One flew past Barns Ness (Loth) on 1 September. **Great Shearwater:** six were reported in August - three from a boat off Gairloch (High) on 17th†, one past Eshaness (Shet) on 25th and two past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27th†. **Sooty Shearwater:** the first of the autumn was off the Butt of Lewis (OH) on 13 July with small numbers seen through into August, with 36 past Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 25 August the best count. **Balearic Shearwater:** one was off Collieston (NES) on 29 July, and 16 were reported in August - mainly from Argyll and Ayrshire. **Leach's Petrel:** one was trapped during a storm-petrel ringing session at Fife Ness (Fife) on 27 July.

Bittern: one was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) during January, and one was present again here from 6 December. Others were seen in Shetland (January), Upper Forth (May) and Angus & Dundee (October–November). **Night-heron:** an adult on Fair Isle on 5 April - the first record for the island. It was found dead on 13th, with amazingly a second, also found dead, on 9th. A first-summer was at Claddach-vallay, North Uist (OH) on 8 May. **Cattle Egret:** the bird near Gatehouse of Fleet (D&G) was last reported on 11 January (*Scottish Birds* 29: 164–166). **Little Egret:** one was still at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) up to 27 January at least with up to four in Dumfries & Galloway during January and February. At least five were reported in March including one near Newburgh (Fife) on 23rd. One was present at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) throughout April,

with five others noted during the month - one in Fife on 9th and four in Dumfries & Galloway. Six birds were noted in May. Eleven were seen in October, mainly in the Outer Hebrides and Dumfries & Galloway. Two were on North Uist (OH) and at least five different birds were in Dumfries & Galloway during December. **Great White Egret:** the over-wintering bird remained in the Outer Hebrides throughout January to 2 February, commuting between Benbecula and South Uist, and was then reported again on South Uist on 23rd and 27 March until 21 April at least. Three further birds were also found - on Unst (Shet) on 11–16 April and one at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 21st† that was joined by a second bird the next day†, both then remaining until 24 April. **Black Stork:** one in Orkney on 21–26 May was the fifth county record, with then presumably the same bird on north Mainland Shetland on 28–30 May, where it was only the second county record. It was last seen on Unst (Shet) on 1 June. **White Stork:** one flew over Chirnsidebridge (Bord) on 28 March. One seen at several sites across south-east Scotland from 10 April was assumed to be an escape, but a party of three birds that were present in Moray & Nairn on morning of 26th and then on North Ronaldsay (Ork) that afternoon were undoubtedly wild. They were still present on 27th before relocating to Loch Shin (High) on 28–29 April and were last reported near Balmaclellan (D&G) on 1 May. One was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 7 May, though sightings in the Clyde area, Upper Forth and Angus during 7–31 May could all relate to a presumed escaped bird. **Spoonbill:** one flew north at the Ythan Estuary on 29 April and was then found at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (both NES) later that day where it remained into May. One was at Loch of Mey on 4 May - the second record for Caithness, whilst



Plate 242. *White Stork, Paisley, Clyde, May 2008* © Keith Hoey.

two were at RSPB Mersehead (D&G) on 26th with then presumably the same two seen over Merryton (Clyde) and then the Isle of May the same day. Two were at Balcary Bay (D&G) on 8 June with one seen nearby at Kirkcudbright on 27–28 June. Two were then seen during July and were accompanied by three juveniles from 29 August up to 20 September at least - presumably these were a family party and had nested nearby (Kirkcudbright) - the first confirmed breeding for Spoonbill in Scotland (*Scottish Birds* 29: 40–41) though birds have attempted nesting before in Dumfries & Galloway, at the RSPB Mersehead reserve. Two adults were at Kinneil (UF) from 2 July through to end August; a juvenile was at Belhaven Bay (Loth) on 30 October with another at Loch Leven (P&K) on 30–31 October.

Honey-buzzard: migrants were seen in Angus on 9 May, North-east Scotland on 16 May and Unst (Shet) on 30 May. In June four birds were noted in Shetland with singles at Coldingham Loch (Bord) on 8th and over Penicuik (Loth) on 12th. Three were reported away from breeding areas in July - on Fair Isle

on 13th, over Baron's Haugh RSPB (Clyde) on 21st and at Crimond (NES) on 27th; 28 birds were reported in September including five from Fife from 14th onwards and nine in North-east Scotland including four over Collieston on 14th. **Black Kite:** one was seen near Padanaram (Ang) on 12 April - first county record, similarly one on Fair Isle on 7–10 May was the first for the island. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** a juvenile was at Rendall, Mainland Orkney throughout January, February and March; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4–5 May; one was at Kilpheddar, South Uist (OH) on 2 October and one was on Hoy (Ork) on 5 November. **Osprey:** the earliest report was one at Caddonfoot (Bord) on 13 March with the first birds back at nest sites by the end of the month. **Red-footed Falcon:** a first-summer female at Almondell Viaduct (Loth) on 25–31 May attracted many admirers, and one was between Bixter and Bridge of Walls (Shet) on 2–3 May. Two were reported in August - a male near Dalchreichart (High) on 9th† and a female on Harris (OH) on 11th†. **Hobby:** seven were reported in May from 10th, and seven were reported in June - three in Shetland,

two in Orkney and singles in Highland and North-east Scotland. Seven were reported in August including a juvenile at Baron's Haugh RSPB (Clyde) from 17th; 14 were reported in September, mainly juveniles and included up to seven in Lothian. **Gyr Falcon:** a white-morph bird was on North Uist (OH) on 22 April.

Crane: after SE gales 16 birds arrived on 5 January - two on Orkney Mainland and a flock of 14 at Thuster Mains near Wick (Caith). Next morning, 11 of those departed, but were then seen that afternoon coming in off the sea at Lossiemouth (M&N). These birds (10 adults and one juvenile) then relocated to fields north-east of Elgin (M&N) where they remained to 23 February. Five then moved to North-east Scotland, three remained near Elgin and the whereabouts of the last three was unknown. The other three birds from the original flock were still in Caithness up to the end of February at least, with two further birds found at Bowermadden (also Caith), on 25–27 January at least - possibly the two birds initially seen in Orkney. Another single adult was seen in Fife near Elie on 17 February. Three birds (two adults and a juvenile) remained near Elgin until 10 March at least with the three birds at Hastigrow (Caith) also still present the same day. Two were also reported over Banff (NES) on 6 March with singles then at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 11th, over RSPB Loch of Kinnordy (Ang) on 29 March and on Fair Isle on 31 March. At least 14 were noted in April - mainly in Shetland and Orkney though six were reported between Tore and Muir of Ord (High) on 22nd with two still there the next day. At least five were reported in May, and three were seen in June - in Shetland, in North-east Scotland and near Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 1–17th. One was taken into care after hitting power lines near

Lockerbie (D&G) in early June: it was then successfully released at WWT Caerlaverock on 19 June and remained on the reserve through into September, three were on Whalsay (Shet) on 22 September with presumably the same three birds then on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 24–25 September.

Avocet: one was seen at Guardbridge (Fife) on 4 January with presumably the same bird then present at Montrose Basin (Ang) from 8 January to end February. A pair was at WWT Caerlaverock (D&G) from 22 April (there are no previous Scottish breeding records) with one also seen on Papa Westray (Ork) on 25th. Up to 10 birds were noted in May - in Dumfries & Galloway, Orkney, Lothian and North-east Scotland. **Stone-curlew:** one was seen briefly at Donmouth on the morning of 29 April† - only the second record for North-east Scotland. **Killdeer:** the long-staying bird of 2007 (*Scottish Birds* 29: 75–78) made a surprise re-appearance at Exnaboe and Virkie (Shet) from 6 March to 15 April after a four-month absence, and was also seen on Mousa on 2 April and then Noss on 11 April. One was at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 2–3 May. **Kentish Plover:** one present since 2007 remained at South Ford, South Uist (OH) up to 20 April. A male was at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 1–2 June. **Greater Sand Plover:** a probable first-summer bird was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 12 September until early afternoon on 19th with the bird then relocated that evening at Dunbar (Loth) remaining there until late afternoon on 20th - only the fourth record for Scotland. **Caspian Plover:** a female on Fair Isle on 1–2 May was only the third record for Scotland. **Dotterel:** two early birds were reported from Cairnmore of Fleet (D&G) on 3 April with two on Islay (Arg) on 17th. **American Golden Plover:** a first-summer was on the Add

Estuary (Arg) on 21 July. Seven were noted in September - in Shetland (4), Outer Hebrides (2) and on Tiree (Arg). At least six were noted in October - at least four in the Outer Hebrides and two different birds on Tiree on 6–10th. One was on Unst (Shet) on 18 December. **Pacific Golden Plover:** an adult summer was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 27 July until 6 August, with a different adult noted on there from 22 August to 7 September. An adult was at Dornock and Browhouses on 6–12 September - first for Dumfries & Galloway. One was on Tiree (Arg) on 8 October.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: an adult was at Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 20 July. **Little Stint:** one at Montrose Basin (Ang) on 6–13 January was a good Scottish winter record. Around 60 were noted during September. **Temminck's Stint:** 10 seen in May included three at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 23–27th - the highest count ever in Scotland is four birds seen at Monikie CP (Ang). One was at Slains (NES) on 4 June. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** three were seen in the Outer Hebrides in October with another at Pool of Virkie (Shet) on 25th; two were reported from South Uist (OH) on 2 November†. **Baird's Sandpiper:** different adults were on South Uist (OH) on 13–14th and 16–20 August, while in September a juvenile was on the Add Estuary, Crinan (Arg) on 15th. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** one was at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 3 June; one was on St. Kilda (OH) on 23 July. At least 21 were reported in September from 13th including a Scottish record count of seven birds at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 29th. Around 20 were reported in October including five birds at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 15th. **Stilt Sandpiper:** a juvenile at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 14–15 September was only the fourth record for Scotland, with

presumably the same bird then relocated in Cumbria later in the month. **Curlew Sandpiper:** five were seen in July - in Argyll, Lothian, Ayrshire (2) and Shetland. At least 130 were reported during September.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: at least four were reported in August - at least two juveniles on Tiree (Arg) from 26th, and adults on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6–19th and Doonfoot (Ayr) on 6–9th - fourth record for Ayrshire. Ten were reported in September, and singles were on Tiree, Orkney and in Caithness during 4–12 October.

Great Snipe: one was at Quendale (Shet) on 12 September. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** a first-winter was at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) from 16 November intermittently until 22 December, and was also seen on 14–17 December at North Bay, South Uist. **Whimbrel:** at least seven were found over-wintering into 2008, with birds in Orkney, Highland, Moray & Nairn, Borders, Dumfries & Galloway and Ayrshire. **Upland Sandpiper:** one was at the north end of Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve (NES) on 5–6 May - only the tenth record for Scotland and second for the mainland after one in Dumfries & Galloway in 1933. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was still present at Kinneil (UF) from 2007 and was last reported on 14 April. A juvenile on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28–30 September was only the second record for Orkney. **Spotted Redshank:** five were reported in July, and 18 in August. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one remained at Montrose Basin (Ang) from 2007 to 9 March. A juvenile was at the Eden Estuary on 3–24 September - the first record for Fife. A juvenile was on Barra (OH) on 2 October. **Wood Sandpiper:** 45+ birds in May was a good total and included five at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 21st. Of eight reported in June six were at the Loch of Strathbeg reserve. Fifteen were reported in

August. **Wilson's Phalarope:** a first-winter was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 1 September - the first record on mainland Scotland since 1997, and a first-winter was briefly at the Balgava, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 21 September - only the second record for the Outer Hebrides. **Red-necked Phalarope:** the first birds were back in the Outer Hebrides on 19 May and Shetland on 20th, with a migrant male at WWT Caerlaverock (D&G) on 30 May. **Grey Phalarope:** one was at Newark Bay, Deerness (Ork) on 1–14 January with up to two present in the Outer Hebrides during 1–12 January. One was at Seafield/Portobello (Loth) on 16 March. An unprecedented influx occurred in October, particularly the latter part, with birds reported from Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Highland, North-east Scotland, Outer Hebrides, Argyll and Ayrshire in record numbers. High counts included at least 157 logged in the Outer Hebrides during the month, up to 500 seen in Orkney including c. 110 in Scapa Flow off Glimps Holm, Burray on 30th, whilst on Skye (High) 150+ were in the Sound of Raasay off Gedintailor on 2 October, with a count of 197 birds then being made there on 2 November. Good numbers also remained into early November in Orkney with numbers then tailing-off by the end of the first week; 14 birds passed Aird, Tiree (Arg) on 11th and one was at Stevenston Point on 12–16th - the fourth in Ayrshire this autumn, and the last report was one off St. Abbs (Bord) on 23 November.

Pomarine Skua: four were reported during 2–6 January - three in Fife and one at Slains (NES) on 3rd. Two early spring birds passed Aird an Runair headland, North Uist (OH) on 28 March. Four were noted past Saltcoats harbour on 13–26 April, with two past Benbecula (OH) on 24th and three past Newbie (D&G) on 25–26th.



Plate 243. Ring-billed Gull, Dundee, December 2008 © Sandy Morrison.

Six were reported in July from 6th with the rest of the autumn being a poor one for the species, only very low numbers were noted. **Long-tailed Skua:** it was one of the poorest springs ever for both this species and Pomarine Skua with the easterly-wind dominated May especially resulting for example in just one adult Long-tailed Skua being seen off Aird an Runair, North Uist, on 10 May. Two were reported in North-east Scotland in June, an adult was at Spey Bay (M&N) on 26 July & nine were reported in September and October. **Ivory Gull:** a first-winter was at Lerwick (Shet) on 21 November, with what is presumed to be the same bird at a baited beach at Oddsta, Fetlar (Shetland) on 14–15 December (*Birding World* 21: 498–499). **Sabine's Gull:** an adult was reported past Eyemouth (Bord) on 26 July, while 17 were reported in August, mainly from 25th and included counts of three, all juveniles past Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 25th and five in The Minch from the Uig, Skye-Lochmaddy ferry on 30th. **Bonaparte's Gull:** an adult was at Ardivachar, South Uist (OH) on 18–19 January and wintering adults were still at Peterhead (NES) until 25 March and at Ferryden (Ang) until 10 February. An adult was at Loch of Strathbeg on 16 March and on the Ugie Estuary (both NES) on

22–23rd, whilst another adult was seen at Thurso (Caith) on 25 March. An adult was at Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 4–20 April (presumed to be the January bird) and the adult was again at Thurso (Caith) on 16–20th. A first-summer was at Loch Ruthven RSPB (High) on 3–14 June, the news of its presence emerging somewhat bizarrely via the BBC's Springwatch programme. **Ring-billed Gull:** the regular adult was still at Oban (Arg) throughout January, February and March and one was at Kinneil (UF) from 6 January into February†, while an adult was present in the roost at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) from 9 February and seen off-and-on throughout March, an adult was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9 March, and an adult was at Little Loch Broom (High) on 18 March†. An adult was at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 22 April†. An adult was again at Kinneil on 14 August†. Presumed returning adults from previous winters were at Dingwall (High) and Oban in November and December, whilst an adult at Riverside, Dundee (Ang) from 2 December showed very well into the New Year. **Yellow-legged Gull:** two were noted in the roost at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) in February, with at least two others seen in Lothian during the month†. Five were reported in March from the Clyde area† and Dumfries &

Galloway†. An adult was at Bettyhill (High) on 22 June. The only bird seen in the latter part of the year was an adult at Hogganfield Loch, Glasgow (Clyde) from 12 December†. **Caspian Gull:** a second-winter bird was between Skateraw and Barns Ness (Loth) on 20–23 January† being only the third record for Scotland, the other two also both from Lothian. Breaking this monopoly a first-winter was seen in the gull roost at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 8 and 14 February and 6–7 March†. **American Herring Gull:** a first-winter was found at Stornoway (OH) on 18 January. **Iceland Gull:** at least 95 were reported in January - the best single site proved to be Mallaig harbour (High) with at least eight birds present on 26–31 January while Clyde produced good numbers including at least three different birds at Strathclyde Loch during the month and four (all first-winters) at West Ferry, Renfrewshire, on 20 January. At least 145 were present in February - best counts were at least 12 at Mallaig (High) on 12th, nine at Loch Roag, Lewis (OH) on 15th with seven on the same island at Stornoway on 9th, six at Kirkwall (Ork) on 7th & 17th and five in the roost at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 2nd. At least 60 were recorded over the Easter weekend of 21–24 March. At least 30 were seen in November, and around 70 were reported in December - Lerwick (Shet) proved to be the best site with counts of nine on 14th and 26th, whilst elsewhere at least five were at Mallaig (High) on 26th. **Kumlien's Gull:** a first-winter was present at Mallaig harbour (High) throughout January up to 8 February, with two also seen in Shetland and two in the Outer Hebrides in January, and one at Brue, Lewis (OH) on 3 February. Individuals were seen at Fraserburgh (NES) and Loch Ryan (D&G) in February and March with a first-winter at Loch Barvas, Lewis (OH) on 22–24 March. At least

three were seen in November. **Glaucous Gull:** 56 were reported in January mostly from Shetland and the Outer Hebrides. About 66 were seen in February with highest counts in the Outer Hebrides including 11 between Ardivachar and North Bay, South Uist on 10th, attracted to the area by dead whale carcasses. At least 25 were recorded over the Easter weekend of 21–24 March. Around 30 were seen in November, and up to 40 were reported in December - mostly on the Northern Isles and Outer Hebrides. **Gull-billed Tern:** an adult was on Tiree from 29 September to 2 October - first record for Argyll. **Whiskered Tern:** an adult was at the Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve on 5–9 June - only the fourth for Scotland though the third found in North-east Scotland. **American Black Tern:** a juvenile was at North Bay, South Uist (OH) briefly on 17 November - the first record for Scotland. **White-winged Black Tern:** two different adults were found on 11 August - one at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES)† and another by Inverness Airport (High), with the latter remaining until 22nd. **Sandwich Tern:** one was at Grutness on 11 March - the earliest ever in Shetland and well ahead of the next reports - one at Uisaed Point (Arg) on 23 March and one at Loch Ryan (D&G) on 25th. **Roseate Tern:** small numbers were noted in July including an adult at St. Mary's Bay on 14th - only the

11th for Orkney and the first since 2000. **Little Auk:** only small numbers were noted in December, with 49 past Sumburgh Head (Shet) on 14th the best count.

Snowy Owl: up to five different birds were in the Outer Hebrides between 6 May and 12 November, with sightings coming from North Uist and St. Kilda. Elsewhere an immature/female was on the Ben Macdui plateau (M&N) on 16 February and a male was at Munloch Bay (High) on 15 June. **Nightjar:** an unprecedented fall occurred on the Northern Isles in May with eight in Orkney and Shetland from 29th, and up to three birds - two on North Ronaldsay and one on Stronsay (both Ork) were noted into the first week of June. **Bee-eater:** one was at Voy, Stenness (Ork) on 28 April, while one bird may have been responsible for all sightings in Caithness, Outer Hebrides (first county record) and Highland during 11–27 May. One was at Stromness (Ork) on 29 July with then presumably the same bird nearby on Shapinsay on 1 August. **Hoopoe:** one was on the Isle of May on 21–26 April, with then around 10 more seen up to the end of the month. Six were reported in May, three of them in the Outer Hebrides. One was at Carsethorn (D&G) on 13–23 September; up to three were reported in October - from North-east Scotland (2) and Dumfries & Galloway; one was at Dyce (NES) on 5 November. **Wryneck:** three singles were noted from 23 April - on North Ronaldsay (Ork), Coll (Arg) and at Johnshaven (NES), though only eight birds were noted in May. Eleven were noted in August including two in North-east Scotland and one at Montrose Basin (Ang) on 21st with at least 55 were found in September mainly in Shetland though at least 10 were in Fife, Lothian and Borders including a long-staying bird at Barns Ness (Loth) on 15–28th.



Plate 244. *Whiskered Tern, Loch of Strathbeg, NE Scotland, June 2008* © Chris Jones.



Plate 245. *Calandra Lark*, Fair Isle, April 2008 © Mark Breaks.

Calandra Lark: one was on Fair Isle on 20–22 April. **Short-toed Lark:** one was present on Fair Isle on 22–23 April, one was on St Kilda on 23 May, and one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 16 June until 2 July; one was on Tiree (Arg) on 12–29 August - the first for Argyll and first mid-summer record for Scotland away from Fair Isle. Singles were on Whalsay and Foula (both Shet) from 14 September until 15 October at least, with another on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17 October. **Woodlark:** one was at Peffer Sands (Loth) on 15–24 February - only the third record ever for Lothian; one was on Fair Isle on 6–15 November. **Shore Lark:** single birds were at Tynninghame on 5 January and between Torness and Skateraw from 11 January to at least 3 February (both Loth). One was at The Oa, Islay on 8 May - only the

second record for Argyll; one was on Fair Isle on 5–15 November. The only report in December was on Unst (Shet) on 17–18th. **Red-rumped Swallow:** one was on Whalsay (Shet) on 5 June and one on St. Kilda on 2 June and then potentially the same bird at Scolpaig, North Uist on 6 June (both OH). **Richard's Pipit:** one was near Auchmithie (Ang) from 17 January to 9 February, and was seen there again on 12 March. At least 10 were seen in October - all in Shetland apart from one at Cardross (Clyde) on 26th. Two were seen in November - on South Ronaldsay on 2nd and North Ronaldsay on 21–25th (both Ork). **Tawny Pipit:** one was at Boddam (Shet) on 24–26 May. **Olive-backed Pipit:** three were seen in November - Toab on 5th, Bressay on 7th (both Shet) and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8th. **Pechora Pipit:** one was at Knock-cuien, North Uist (OH) on 4–5 October with another briefly at Isbister (Shet) on 14th. **Red-throated Pipit:** four birds were reported in May - on the Isle of May on 10th†, Handa (High) on 12th, Pabbay (OH) on 24th† and Fair Isle on 30th. One was on Foula (Shet) on 19 September† with another on Fair Isle on 23 September; one was at Clevigarth (Shet) on 5 October. **Water Pipit:** one was at Dunglass

(Loth/Bord) from 3 February into March, with four others seen in March - one still in Lothian and singles in Borders†, Ayrshire† and Fife†. Five were noted in April, four wintering birds still plus one at Meikle Loch (NES) on 14th. Up to two were at the Endrick Mouth at Loch Lomond (Clyde) throughout December. **Buff-bellied Pipit:** one was on St. Kilda (OH) from 19 September to 3 October; one was on North Ronaldsay on 3–13 October - first record for Orkney. One was at Garrynamonie, South Uist (OH) on 1–2 November. **Grey-headed Wagtail:** at least 36 birds were reported in May, and included 11 on Fair Isle alone on 30th. **Citrine Wagtail:** a female was on Fair Isle on 11–13 May, and a first-summer male graced the WWT reserve at Caerlaverock on 4 June - second record for Dumfries & Galloway. In August two early juveniles/first-winters were in Orkney - on North Ronaldsay on 2–8th and Stenness on 10th, and two were on Fair Isle - one on 16–23rd with a second bird there on 23rd. Two different birds were seen there during 1–8 September with four others reported elsewhere in Shetland. A first-winter found at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 28th Sept remained to 1 October. Another was on Barra (OH) on 1 October, but was found dead on 3rd. Another was seen on Fair Isle on 6 October.



Plate 246. *Citrine Wagtail*, Caerlaverock WWT, Dumfries & Galloway, June 2008 © Craig Shaw.

Waxwing: over 120 were noted in January but the only flock of any size was 50 in Westhill (NES) on 28–31 January. Few areas had birds in February - reports only came from Longforgan (P&K), with a high count of 13 there, flocks of 15 and 6+ in Glasgow and Motherwell respectively (both Clyde) in the last week and around Aberdeen, with a peak count from there of 45 in the city on 20th. 100+ were reported in March, with 53 at Westhill (NES) on 27th the highest count and a flock of 24 was at Dunblane (UF) on 14–25th. One bird in a flock of 13



Plate 247. *Desert Wheatear*, Girdleness, NE Scotland, November 2008 © Dougie Preston.

at Longforgan (P&K) on 23 March was a colour-ringed bird that had been ringed on 17 December in Aberdeen earlier in this winter's influx. There was an unprecedented mid-summer mini-invasion with 13 birds reported during 11–25 June, all from the Northern and Western Isles. Three more were seen in July with one near Elgin (M&N) on 4th and two at Scatness (Shet) on 20th. Winter birds were noted from 5 October, with low numbers until a major influx took place in the last week of October into November with 1,500–2,000 birds having been reported by 3 November. The largest counts were in Highland with flocks of 400+ in Portree, Skye, 250 at Ullapool, 200 at Brora and 140+ at Arisaig. Over 4,000 birds were reported in November with 1,700 still on 30th alone, though by the end of the month very few birds were present north of the Central Belt - the majority being around Glasgow and Edinburgh. The largest counts were 850 birds at Mossend, Lanarkshire (Clyde) on 23rd, and at least 690 at Allenvale Cemetery, Aberdeen (NES) on 9th. Several thousand remained into December with records from all areas of Scotland including up to 150 still in Aberdeen. The biggest flocks though were in the Central Belt area including 400+ at Grange, Edinburgh on 4th, 396+ Dalry

Road, Edinburgh on 7th (both Loth), 350+ at Ayr (Ayr) on 6–7th, 250 Renfrew on 22nd and 207+ Paisley on 3rd (both Clyde). **Black-bellied Dipper:** a wintering bird from 2007 was still on Fair Isle up to 13 March, with it or another seen on 12–13 April. One was near Boarhills (Fife) on 11 December.

Thrush Nightingale: singles were at Grutness, South Mainland and Northdale, Unst (both Shet) on 30 May, and on Foula (Shet) on 4 June. One was noted on Fair Isle on 18–19 August with another on 13–15 September and two others seen elsewhere in Shetland during the month: Fetlar on 15–16th and Virkie on 22nd. **Nightingale:** one was at Wester Quarff (Shet) on 30 May. **Bluethroat:** at least 31 birds were reported in May, while six were

noted in June - all in Shetland. Twelve were seen in September - all in Orkney and Shetland, and six in October - all in Shetland. A female was at Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) on 6 November. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** one was on Fair Isle on 24 September, with further singles on Foula (Shetland) on 25th and North Ronaldsay on 25–26th - first record for Orkney. **Black Redstart:** at least two were at Dunbar (Loth) from 19 January into February and a further four were reported in February - two in Ayrshire and singles in Clyde and on Tiree (Arg). Seven were noted in March, and about 30 during April. **Siberian Stonechat:** one was on Fair Isle on 26 September; three were reported in Shetland in October. **Desert Wheatear:** a first-winter male was found between Donmouth and Murcar (NES) on 15 November; with then presumably the same bird relocated at Girdleness (NES) on 24–30 November. A male was at Balnakeil on 24–28 December - the first record for Sutherland and the Highland recording area and mirrors a similar record of a male in nearby Caithness at Freswick Bay that was found on 26 December 1984. **White's Thrush:** two were on Fair Isle on 1 October with remarkably a third bird there on 8th, with another at Kergord (Shet) on 13–18th and then one was inland near Dyce (NES) on 18–24 October. **Siberian Thrush:** a first-winter male on Fair Isle on 25 September was the first record for the island.



Plate 248. *Siberian Thrush*, Fair Isle, September 2008 © Deryk Shaw.



Plate 249. Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Fair Isle, October 2008 © Mark Breaks.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler: singles were on Fair Isle on 23 September, and 1 October, with one on Foula (Shet) the next day. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was seen at Sumburgh Head (Shet) on 12th, with two different birds on Fair Isle on 23 September. A late bird was on Foula (Shet) on 15–16 October. **River Warbler:** a singing bird showed well at Evie on 8–17 June - only the 2nd record for Orkney. **Savi's Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 22 May - the 11th record for Scotland. **Aquatic Warbler:** one was at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 4 August. **Paddyfield Warbler:** an early individual was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 17 August; one was on Fair Isle on 13 September, with further singles on Unst on 9–11 September and Virkie on 20–21 September (both Shet). **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one singing at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 3 June was the first record for Argyll. Three were found on 24 September - at Sumburgh, Quendale and on Foula (all Shet), with another at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 12 October. **Marsh Warbler:** at least 21 were reported from 28 May, mainly singing birds and included three birds on mainland Scotland, with a further four reported†. About 40 were noted in June, mainly in Shetland including counts of seven on Foula on 4th and five on Fair Isle on 7–8th, - the best showing since 2002. One was on Fair Isle on 1–12

July; three were seen in August - all on the Northern Isles. **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 23–25 September. **Booted Warbler:** one was at Sumburgh Farm (Shet) on 20–21 August, **Sykes's Warbler:** one was in the same patch of thistles that had held a Booted Warbler in August at Sumburgh Farm (Shet) on 25 September. **Icterine Warbler:** at least 40 were reported in May - almost all from the 28th, and about 25 were seen in June - mainly in Shetland though a singing bird was on Speyside (High) in the first week of the month. Three were noted in August from 6th - all on the Northern Isles; 16 were seen in September including three in both Angus and Lothian. **Melodious Warbler:** two were reported in August - at Sumburgh Head on 6–11th and at Twatt on 18th†, with yet another on 1 September at Wester Quarff† (all Shet). **Barred Warbler:** the first of the autumn was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 16 August with 11 more seen by the end of the month and then an increase in the first week of September including at least five on Fair Isle. Around 70 were noted in September. **Lesser Whitethroat:** two different birds visited Ayrshire gardens during January. **Subalpine Warbler:** 10 seen in May included three different birds in the Outer Hebrides with the remainder in Shetland. **Greenish Warbler:** one

was on Noss (Shet) on 3 June. Five were found within the species' classic period of 17–20 August - two in Orkney and the other three in North-east Scotland†. **Arctic Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 25 September, with two others elsewhere in Shetland on 14–19th and 26–27th. **Pallas's Warbler:** 11 were noted during 5–11 November, with six of these in North-east Scotland. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** a very unusual spring occurrence was of one on Foula (Shet) on 14 May the first of the autumn was at White Sands Bay (Loth) on 13 September with c. 166 seen by the end of the month including a record 45 birds on Fair Isle on 24th with 15+ on North Ronaldsay the same day and elsewhere one in a garden near Beattock (D&G) on 25–26th was notable. Around 80 were seen in October, with three in North-east Scotland during 8–12th the only ones reported from Mainland Scotland. Six were reported in November. **Hume's Warbler:** at least eight were reported during 1–15 November, with three of these in North-east Scotland [one†], three in Shetland, one on North Ronaldsay - second record for Orkney, and one on Lewis† - first record for the Outer Hebrides. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 17–18 September†, with another at Lunna (Shet) on 27th. **Firecrest:** one near Grangemouth Golf Club on 3–26 January was the first record for Upper Forth. Singles were reported at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 6 February and Erskine (Clyde) on the same day. Four were seen in March with singles at Bearsden, East Dunbartonshire (Clyde) on 6–16th, at Collieston (NES) from 24th, at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 30th and at Stembister (Ork) also on 30 March. Three were reported in April - singles in Angus and North-east Scotland on 2nd and at Fife Ness (Fife) on 15–20th. Three were reported in November - on Outer Hebrides, Angus and North-east Scotland.

Brown Flycatcher: a first-winter bird on Fair Isle on 24–25 September was only the second Scottish record (third British) following elevation of the species from Category D and acceptance of an earlier bird, also on Fair Isle, seen on 1–2 July 1992. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** five birds were seen from 27 May - in North-east Scotland (2) and Shetland (3). Five were seen in June from 1–7th with three in the Outer Hebrides and singles in North-east Scotland and Shetland. Sixteen were found in September mainly in Shetland though two different birds were seen at St. Abbs Head (Borders) between the 15th and 25th; 15 were seen in October - in Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides; four were seen during 4–6 November - on Outer Hebrides (2), Orkney and Shetland. **Collared Flycatcher:** a first-summer female was on North Ronaldsay on 26 May† - third record for Orkney. **Golden Oriole:** 16 were noted in May - a very good showing, and seven were seen in June - all typically in Shetland. A male was at Balephuul, Tiree (Arg) on 5 July. **Brown Shrike:** one was at Claddach-vallay, North Uist (OH) on 18th and 23–24 November - fourth Scottish record. **Red-backed Shrike:** an early male was at Firth (Ork) on 26 April.



Plate 251. *Rose-coloured Starling, Cromdale, Highland, August 2008*
© Bill Cuthbert.

Around 80 birds were logged in May, all from the 21st and almost all in the period 28th–31st, including counts of 10 on Fair Isle on 28th and 30th and 10+ on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28th and 29th and a good showing of 11 different birds in North-east Scotland. Some 45 birds were reported in June including 10 on Fair Isle and six on Foula both on 1st. A male was at Grutness (Shet) on 31 July. Five were reported in August - all on the Northern Isles, 30 were reported

in September. **Lesser Grey Shrike:** one was at Balephuul, Tiree on 6 August - the third Argyll record. **Great Grey Shrike:** two remained in the Clyde area from January into February but were erratic in their appearances whilst the only other report was of one near Farr (High) on 12 February. Five were noted in April from 12th. Up to seven were noted in October from 8th - all on the Northern Isles. Only four were reported in November, and just two in December - at Dalwhinnie (High) still on 11th and near Upper Largo (Fife) on 28th. **Woodchat Shrike:** a juvenile was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 30 September. **Rose-coloured Starling:** 15 birds were reported in June with up to six in Orkney alone from 17th and nine elsewhere in Scotland from 3rd onwards - in Shetland, Argyll (2), Outer Hebrides (2), Clyde, Highland, North-east Scotland and Moray & Nairn - the best spring/summer showing since the record influx of 2002. Fourteen were seen in July - singles on Mull (Arg), at Scarferry (Caith), on Canna and at Alness (both High),

in September. **Lesser Grey Shrike:** one was at Balephuul, Tiree on 6 August - the third Argyll record. **Great Grey Shrike:** two remained in the Clyde area from January into February but were erratic in their appearances whilst the only other report was of one near Farr (High) on 12 February. Five were noted in April from 12th. Up to seven were noted in October from 8th - all on the Northern Isles. Only four were reported in November, and just two in December - at Dalwhinnie (High) still on 11th and near Upper Largo (Fife) on 28th. **Woodchat Shrike:** a juvenile was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 30 September. **Rose-coloured Starling:** 15 birds were reported in June with up to six in Orkney alone from 17th and nine elsewhere in Scotland from 3rd onwards - in Shetland, Argyll (2), Outer Hebrides (2), Clyde, Highland, North-east Scotland and Moray & Nairn - the best spring/summer showing since the record influx of 2002. Fourteen were seen in July - singles on Mull (Arg), at Scarferry (Caith), on Canna and at Alness (both High),



Plate 250. *Brown Shrike, Claddach-vallay, North Uist, November 2008*
© Paul Boyer.

at Lossiemouth still (M&N), at Portsoy and Newburgh still (both NES), at Wester Quarff (Shet), at Barvas then Upper Siadar, Lewis (OH) and up to five different birds in Orkney. In August singles were on Mull and Bowmore, Islay (both Arg) with further adults elsewhere at Cromdale (High) on 11–20th and Deerness (Ork) on 25–27th. Four were reported in September - two juveniles in Shetland, a juvenile on the Forth Road Bridge (Loth) on 25th and the adult at Bowmore, Islay (Arg) which remained until 27 October. **Red-eyed Vireo**: one at Caolas, Tiree on 9 October was the second record for Argyll.

Citrel Finch: an adult male on Fair Isle on 6–11 June‡ was the first record for Britain (*Birding World* 21: 243–249). **Arctic Redpoll**: one visited a Wick garden (Caith) on 9 January‡, one of the form *hornemanni* was on Fair Isle on 8 April‡, and one of the form *exilipes* at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 12–17 June. An influx of 10 birds‡, all of the form *hornemanni*, occurred during 1–19 October - all in Shetland apart from two on North Uist (OH). One was at North Loch Eynort, South Uist (OH) on 2 November.

Two-barred Crossbill: an influx in July, associated with an arrival of Common Crossbills, was confined to the Northern and Western Isles with 10 birds seen by the end of the month. A male at Dale, Evie (Ork) on 20th was the forerunner, with four then seen in Orkney Mainland from 28th and three birds on Mainland Shetland also from 28th and a female on Fair Isle on 25th. This bird was joined by a second on 28 July with this increasing to four birds, including a male, on 1 August. Numbers on the Northern Isles continued to increase during the first fortnight of August with a remarkable 18 birds present at Sumburgh Head

(Shet) on 9th. In total 57 birds were noted in July and August, though none were reported after 18 August. All were in Shetland and Orkney apart from three in the Outer Hebrides - a female on St. Kilda on 3–4 August and two males on Harris on 30–31 July and 7–8 August. See *Birding World* 21: 329–339. The last twitchable mainland Scotland bird was a female at Carron Valley Reservoir (UF) in winter 1985/86. **Trumpeter Finch**: a first-summer male was on North Rona (OH) on 25 May - only the fourth for Scotland and like the last record (1992) was found in north-west Scotland after an easterly-wind dominated spring. **Common Rosefinch**: 38 were noted in May including counts of six on both North Ronaldsay and Fair Isle in the period 28–31st, four on the Isle of May on 28th and only the second record ever for Moray & Nairn, at Hopeman on 30–31st. Around 19 birds were logged in June including eight on Foula (Shet) on 1st, a singing first-summer male in Selkirk (Bord) on 10th and a popular male that visited feeders at Tyndrum (UF) from 12 June to 14 July with further males seen on the Isle of May on 9 July and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10th. Three were noted in the last week of July - all on Fair Isle; seven were seen in August, and 35 in September - mainly in Orkney and Shetland. **Hawfinch**: counts at the premier Scottish site of Scone Palace (P&K) peaked at 18 birds on 14 February. A remarkable influx saw about 20 present on the Northern Isles from 13 April.

White-crowned Sparrow: a belated report of one that was photographed at St. Michael's (Fife) on 17 May was only the second record for Scotland.

Lapland Bunting: birds remained from 2007 at Dowlaw (Bord), with a peak count of 11

birds on 20 January, with one at Barns Ness (Loth) the same day. Up to four were noted along the East Lothian coast during February whilst five were still at Dowlaw on 10 February. About 12 were reported in April, mainly from the Outer Hebrides. **Ortolan Bunting**: a male was on St. Kilda on 21–23 May. Six birds were seen in September - all in Shetland, the earliest were one on Unst from 2nd and on Fair Isle on 3–4th. **Cretzschmar's Bunting**: a male was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19–21 September - fourth record for Scotland and Britain after three spring males: on Fair Isle in 1967 and 1979 and on Stronsay (Ork) in 1998 (*Birding World* 21: 384–386). **Rustic Bunting**: two different birds were on Fair Isle from 24 May with three further birds seen in Orkney during 14–30 May. One was at Geosetter (Shet) and one still on Fair Isle in the first week of June. One was at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 17 September; one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 9–10 November. **Little Bunting**: one was trapped at Noss Head near Wick (Caith) on 12 February then seen again briefly there on 15th. One was on Fair Isle on 30 May. One was on Fair Isle on 25–30 September, with the only other one reported during the month being at Hoswick (Shet) on 15–17th. Up to six were seen in October - all in Shetland. **Yellow-breasted Bunting**: two were seen in Shetland in September - one on Fetlar on 12th and the other at Brough, Whalsay on 13–14th. **Black-headed Bunting**: a male was on Fetlar (Shet) on 4–29 June at least. A male was on Barra (OH) on 21 September. **Bobolink**: one was on Foula (Shet) on 28 September - seventh record for Scotland.

Advice to contributors of main papers

Authors should bear in mind that only a small proportion of the *Scottish Birds* readership are scientists and should aim to present their material concisely, interestingly and clearly. Unfamiliar technical terms and symbols should be avoided wherever possible and, if deemed essential, should be explained. Supporting statistics should be kept to a minimum. All papers and short notes are accepted on the understanding that they have not been offered for publication elsewhere and that they will be subject to editing. Papers will be acknowledged on receipt and are normally reviewed by at least two members of the editorial panel and, in most cases also by an independent referee. They will normally be published in order of acceptance of fully revised manuscripts. The editor will be happy to advise authors on the preparation of papers.

Papers should be typed on one side of the paper only, double spaced and with wide margins and of good quality; two copies are required and the author should also retain one. We are also happy to accept papers on disk or by email at: mail@the-soc.org.uk, stating the type of word processing package used. If at all possible please use Microsoft Word or a generic 'rich text format'. Contact the SOC Office Manager on mail@the-soc.org.uk or telephone 01875 871330 for further information.

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Headings should not be underlined, nor typed entirely in capitals. Scientific names in italics should normally follow the first text reference to each species unless all can be incorporated into a table. Names of birds should follow the official Scottish List (*Scottish Birds* 22: 33–49 and www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-list.htm). Only single quotation marks should be used throughout. Numbers should be written as numerals except for one to nine and at the start of sentences. Dates should be written: ... on 5 August 1991 ... but ... on the 5th ... (if the name of the month does not follow). Please do not use headers, footers and page numbers. Please note that papers shorter than c. 700 words will normally be treated as short notes, where all references should be incorporated into the text, and not listed at the end, as in full papers.

Tables, maps and diagrams should be designed to fit either a single column or the full page width. Tables should be self explanatory and headings should be kept as simple as possible, with footnotes used to provide extra details where necessary. Please insert all tables, graphs and maps with their captions after the text or supply as separate documents. Maps and other graphics should preferably be provided in eps (Encapsulated PostScript) format, or as a high resolution jpg/tiff file, good quality computer print out or drawn in black ink, but suitable for reduction from their original size. Contact the SOC Office Manager on 01875 871330 for further details of how best to lay out tables, graphs, maps etc.

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 252. On the 21 October 2009 I was offered a lift to check the East Lothian coast for migrants after the overnight south-easterly winds but I felt it was a day too early and the wind and rain put me off. On checking 'Bird Guides' online, I saw that a Firecrest had been found between Skateraw and Barns Nest but very little else. Due to the weather, I reasoned that the bird would be forced to stay the night and I would make an attempt to see it and hopefully get some images the next day. I needed Firecrest for my Lothian List, so a double incentive lay in front of me. Next morning I arrived at the area where the bird had been seen the day before to find just one other person. The bushes it was ranging in covered a large area and were difficult to negotiate through. Within ten minutes

we located the Firecrest and were fortunate to find it feeding in a lightly leaved Elderberry bush. After watching the little beauty I noticed it followed a pattern and stuck to the Wild Rose and Elderberry bushes and thank goodness did not venture into the Gorse which would have been a nightmare to see, never mind photograph. As the sun broke through the bird became more active – feeding vigorously on what was left of the autumn leaves. With this combination of activity and light, I was able to set my Nikon D300 and 500mm Sigma lens to f5.6 and 1/600th of a second which was far more generous than when I first located the bird. It has been a good autumn for Firecrest in Scotland, at least four birds were reported that week in Fife and up to two dozen were reported along the British east coast.

Mike Thrower



PhotoSpot is a new feature showcasing the best image posted on the SOC website each quarter. It may be a stunning portrait, or a record shot of something unique, but when presented in Scottish Birds, it will be accompanied by the story behind the photograph and the equipment used. Send in your photos now - it's open to all.