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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, contains original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, short notes on bird observations, topical articles and Club-related news, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings and information on birding sites.

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President's Foreword

Since the publication of *The Birds of Scotland*, the fortunes of the Club have been on the up, although core annual incomes and expenditures remain finely balanced. With the generous bequests from the estates of Margaret Mowat, Mary Margaret Spires, Donald Stewart and Frances Towns, the SOC is now in its strongest financial position for over a decade. At its meeting in March 2010, Council considered how best to invest for the future, but it also recognised the need for regular increases in subscriptions to ensure that annual revenues and expenditures remain balanced.

Council agreed that more efforts should be made to increase membership through a number of different approaches. They agreed that funds should be made available to promote junior and student membership, through the provision of subsidies for attendance at conferences and for travel to bird observatories. The development of an electronic archive of the local and Scottish bird reports, along with the digitising of past copies of *Scottish Birds* was also supported as electronic communications are widely used by the younger generation. The recent Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland programme has shown the need to strengthen the Club's branch network and to provide educational material to encourage further recording effort in Scotland.

Council also felt that encouragement of active members would come through an increase in payments made by the Research and Surveys Committee through the Endowment Fund. It also agreed that funding should be made available to 'future-proof' Waterston House against increases in energy costs and future upgrades of the Club computer hardware and software, and also to support the Waterston Library.

We also discussed the forthcoming 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Club. It was agreed that funding should be provided to enable this to be celebrated through the annual conferences and special events held by branches, along with a high-profile event involving a celebrity to help promote the Club. Two fund raising events are also proposed, a raffle and a sponsored bird race, which would help further the development of junior and student memberships. We hope that these decisions will help take the SOC forward so that it remains the 'broad church', which will allow it to retain its important role as 'Scotland's Bird Club'.

In the long-term, new and increased membership will ensure the future of the Club and finding new recruits is the responsibility of every member... have you asked somebody to join the SOC recently? If not, please do so; there are many people who enjoy birds in Scotland who are not yet members and the Club has a lot to offer them.

In closing this foreword I welcome Ken Shaw to the post of Vice President of the Club. Ken, who is well known to the Scottish birding community, was voted into this position at the Extra-ordinary General Meeting of the Club, held immediately following the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference held in Culloden Academy on 20 March. Ken's dynamism is a welcome addition to the Club team.

Thanks for everybody's support. Enjoy your birding this summer - keep those breeding records coming for the Atlas.

David Jardine, President



Plate 89. American Golden Plover, juvenile, Torlum, Benbecula, Outer Hebrides, 25–26 September 2008 © Steve Duffield.

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2005–08. Part 1

T. AP RHEINALLT, C.J. MCINERNY, A.W. LAUDER & R.Y. MCGOWAN
on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

This is the first in a planned series of annual reports from the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC). It covers the period 2005 to 2008, thus providing continuity with *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007), which incorporated data to the end of 2004. Future reports will cover single years, starting with 2009. We plan to publish the next one in 2011.

The main purpose of this report is to summarise the occurrence of rare species assessed by SBRC during 2005–08. It is hoped that its publication will stimulate more comprehensive recording and encourage the submission of all relevant records of these species, even retrospective ones. We are aware that a number of claimed sightings from 2005–08 have never been formally submitted. We also encourage finders of rarities that have died to deposit the remains, even if incomplete, in a museum that maintains a permanent reference collection.

The main ornithological events documented in this report include the 1st to 3rd Scottish records of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*, a species that may well feature more prominently in future reports. The same can be said for the Continental subspecies of Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*, which amassed seven accepted records during 2005–08 in conjunction with the delayed acceptance of the first record from 1998. Also notable is the 16th Scottish record of Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, which is also the first for western Scotland and the first involving a wintering bird. Other featured species that are particularly rare in Scotland include Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, with 19 records by the end of 2008, and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, with 22. Interestingly, the 21st Scottish record of Black Kite, reported here, involved a

bird that paired with a Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and reared hybrid young that could potentially pose identification problems for Scottish observers.

One prominent feature of the period was a surge in numbers of several American wader species, including the three covered by this report: American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* and Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*. The total number of individuals of the first two species recorded during 2005–08 represented a remarkable 65% of the previous all-time total. For Buff-breasted Sandpiper, the equivalent proportion for the two years 2005 and 2006 alone (after which records were no longer assessed by SBRC) was 37%. Observers on the islands enjoyed the lion's share of sightings of these wader species, with the Outer Hebrides being strongly represented, and the island of Tiree (Argyll) also producing a good run of sightings. Most other records came from the Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland).

Sightings of rare passerines were concentrated in the Northern Isles, which dominated the picture for several species. For example, c. 128 Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* occurred in the Northern Isles during 2005–08, compared to just 12 elsewhere in Scotland. The equivalent figures for Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* are 59 and 2, and for Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* 23 and 1. Of mainland recording areas, only North-east Scotland had a significant number of records of these rare passerines. Most notably, it accounted for all five records of Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* outwith the Northern Isles during the period, as well as the only records of Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* and Rustic Bunting. It also produced a single record of Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*, a species whose geographical distribution in Scotland differs substantially from all others, being concentrated in Lothian and Ayrshire.

For the observers involved, the period will be best remembered for a species that breeds many thousands of miles away in the South Atlantic. The staggering numbers of Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis* that flew past the Butt of Lewis, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 8 and 10 September 2007 included several flocks of more than 500 birds, making the previous land-based Scottish record count of 190, obtained at the same site a year earlier, seem like small beer indeed. Elsewhere, Dennis Head on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) produced an excellent series of counts in both 2006 and 2007, though overall numbers in 2007 were much smaller than those seen in the Outer Hebrides.

Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) reports published in *British Birds*. We are aware of recent changes to the taxonomic sequence of the *British List* (BOU 2010, Sangster *et al.* 2010), but as these have not yet been formally adopted by SBRC, this report follows Forrester *et al.* (2007), as updated by SBRC (2009), with regard to sequence as well as nomenclature. However, *Pastor roseus* is used in preference to *Sturnus roseus* for Rosy Starling, following Knox *et al.* (2008).

On the header line, after the species or subspecies name, are three numbers:

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with corrections in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases older records or 'At sea' records are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period 2005–08, including acceptances by BBRC and by local committees in the Northern Isles where appropriate. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted. In the case of three species no longer assessed by SBRC from 1 January 2007, totals are for 2005–06 only.
- Total number to the end of 2008, or 2006 in the case of three species.

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted records with details. The list of records in this table covers the whole of Scotland and the period 2005–08, with the following exceptions:

- For 15 species that were assessed by BBRC to the end of 2005, full details are given only for records during 2006–08. BBRC acceptances for 2005, where they occur, are briefly summarised at the beginning of the table. However, there is no table for Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* or Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, which had no records accepted by SBRC during the period.
- For the three species dropped from the SBRC list at the end of 2006, the period covered is 2005–06.
- For 12 species that were assessed by local committees in the Northern Isles but by SBRC elsewhere in Scotland, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, information about these records is presented in summary form, usually in a separate table. We are very grateful for the cooperation of the relevant local recorders in compiling these summaries. For additional details of individual records, the reader is invited to consult the *Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland Bird Reports*.
- For all taxa, details are given of records from 2004 and earlier years accepted by SBRC but omitted from Forrester *et al.* (2007).

For each record listed in full, the following details are given:

- Year.
- Recording area, arranged alphabetically within each year.
- Location(s). In the case of Argyll, the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles, individual island names are given, while for the extensive Highland recording area, the component administrative areas are also named. Note that for locations in the Outer Hebrides, place names follow current Ordnance Survey maps; anglicised names as used in Forrester *et al.* (2007) and other ornithological literature are given in parentheses to facilitate comparison where necessary. Use of the word 'to' to link locations, e.g. 'Meoness to Vaasetter', implies that the bird was also seen at sites between these locations. Use of 'Off' before a place name indicates that a bird was observed at sea from a boat and not from land.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known. Where no details of age are given, records in spring and summer concern birds in adult plumage.
- 'Returning' if applicable. Note that many claims of presumed returning birds were not assessed directly by SBRC but instead accepted by the local recorder.
- Date(s).
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- Existence of a photograph, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. The sole exception to this rule is where no submission was made by these observers, in which case the submitter of the record is also credited; in a few instances, the finders' names were unknown. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'.
- Details of specimen if preserved, with specimen number if available. National Museums Scotland (NMS), Edinburgh (Lothian), is the only museum named in this particular report.
- Additional sightings of the same bird in the same recording area in the same year where appropriate, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is rarely known with certainty but is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, local recorder and/or others.

The table of records is followed by the main text of the species account, which aims to summarise the pattern of occurrence of the species (or, in one case, subspecies) in question. Maps and

histograms are presented where appropriate, and there may be separate tables for the Northern Isles as explained above. Note that the date ranges given in these tables are based on both first and last dates for the individual birds concerned, thus a range may be given even when only one bird occurred in the season in question. Also, the definition of spring and autumn is somewhat flexible in accordance with the temporal pattern of records, and is not exactly the same for every species. Where information about birds in the Northern Isles is presented in the text without references, the source is normally the relevant local bird report.

Note that references to Forrester *et al.* (2007) are to the main text. Supplementary data for 2005 and 2006, presented in Appendix 3 of that work, are not taken into account except where explicitly stated.

At the end of each species account, a brief summary of global breeding and wintering distribution, with mention of relevant subspecies, is given in parentheses.

Species coverage

The period covered by this report saw SBRC taking over the assessment of several long-standing British rarities from BBRC, which carried out a major overhaul of its species list with effect from 1 January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a). The report includes records for 15 of these species, some of which remain very rare in Scotland. They are Ferruginous Duck, Wilson's Storm-petrel, Great Egret *Ardea alba*, Black Kite, Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, American Golden Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, Greenish Warbler, Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*, Dusky Warbler and Rustic Bunting.

It should be noted that rare subspecies of several species now on the SBRC list are still assessed by BBRC. The most important example is Subalpine Warbler, for which BBRC assessed claims of the eastern subspecies, *S. c. albistriata*, during the period of this review, while claims of Western Subalpine Warbler *S. c. cantillans* or birds not assigned to any particular subspecies were assessed by SBRC (or, in the Northern Isles, local committees) after the end of 2005.

Another example is Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*, which like Subalpine Warbler was dropped from the BBRC list as from 1 January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a). In this case, BBRC still assesses records of the subspecies *C. h. hornemanni*, Hornemann's Redpoll, which has traditionally been perceived as rarer in Britain than *C. h. exilipes*, Coues's Redpoll. Arctic Redpoll does not feature in this report, however. No records were accepted by SBRC during 2006–08, and for various reasons only a fragmentary picture of its occurrence in Scotland during 2005–08 is currently available. It is hoped to rectify the omission in the next report.

Another significant omission, in this case involving a species that has been on the SBRC list for some time, is Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*. Although SBRC accepted several records during the period, all of these together with earlier acceptances are currently under review. Again, it is hoped that the results of the review can be published in the next report.

Other omissions involve species for which there were simply no accepted records during the period. These are Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Alpine Swift *Apus melba*, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*, Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, European Serin *Serinus serinus*, and Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*.

In addition to the changes occasioned by the dropping of several species from the BBRC list, SBRC also revised its own list during the period, delegating the assessment of American Wigeon

Anas americana, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Rosy Starling to local committees as from 1 January 2007. No reference is made in this report to occurrences of those species after the end of 2006.

Further changes have been made to the SBRC list since the end of 2008: Yellow-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* were added on 1 January 2009, while American Golden Plover and Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* were delegated to local recorders on 1 January 2010, as was Great Shearwater in the Outer Hebrides only.

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in Appendix 1, while Appendix 2 summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the 37 species included in this report.

At the request of local recorders, SBRC also assessed individual records of several species not on the SBRC list. These records are not listed below but may have been published in local reports if accepted.

SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) Council, with the objective of ensuring that records of birds that were rare in a Scottish context were fully assessed prior to publication in the *Scottish Bird Report*. With the advent of local records committees throughout most of Scotland, a three-tier system of record assessment was introduced in the 1990s. Within this system, SBRC's role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Local committees assess records of slightly less rare Scottish species as well as local rarities. In the case of some species, records from certain recording areas are assessed locally while records from the remainder of Scotland are assessed by SBRC. SBRC is also responsible for maintaining the official *Scottish List*.

There are seven voting members of SBRC, each serving for a seven-year period and with the longest-serving member retiring each year. Current members are Alan Brown (chairman), Tristan ap Rheinallt, Mark Chapman, Alan Lauder, Chris McInerny, Hywel Maggs and John Sweeney, with Bob McGowan as non-voting museum consultant. In addition, Dougie Dickson, Angus Murray, Roger Riddington and Richard Schofield served on the committee during the period 2005–08, but have since retired. The position of non-voting secretary is currently occupied by Angus Hogg, who took over from Ron Forrester in April 2005. The *Scottish List* subcommittee consists of Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny and Roger Riddington. More information about SBRC, including details of voting procedures, can be found at www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we are grateful to all those observers who went to the trouble of writing up and submitting records of Scottish rarities during the period. Without their efforts, this report could not exist. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to those who gave permission for their excellent photographs to be reproduced here.

Next, we thank the following local recorders or co-recorders for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records: Paul Baxter, Mark Chapman, Jon Cook, Martin Cook, Kevin Davis, Paul Daw, Jim Dickson, Iain English, David Kelly, Hywel Maggs, Ray Murray, Chris Pendlebury, Brian Rabbitts, Rab Shand, Deryk Shaw, Fraser Simpson, Jim Williams, Val Wilson and Bernie Zonfrillo.

Ian Andrews produced the maps and graphs, and also provided much valuable assistance throughout the compilation of the report. Angus Hogg, SBRC secretary, played a major supporting role not only by providing information about records but also by commenting on different aspects of the report. Others who helped in various ways were John Bowler, Simon Cohen, Steve Duffield and Harry Scott.

Systematic list of accepted records

American Wigeon *Anas americana* 165: 10 (2005–06): 175

Table 1. Accepted records of American Wigeon in Scotland, 2005–06. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 2.

2005

Angus & Dundee Loch of Kinnordy, male, 13 June to 9 September (S.R. Green, A.J. Leitch *et al.*).

Highland Caol, Fort William, Lochaber, male, 2–17 January, photo (M.J. McKee *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Loch Mòr Bharabhais (Loch Barvas), Lewis, male, 15 January, photo; same, Siadar (Shader), 25–26 March (T. ap Rheinnallt, M.S. Scott *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Mòr (Howmore) & Loch Bì (Loch Bee), South Uist, male, 21 May to 21 June (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

2006

Outer Hebrides Siadar (Shader), Lewis, male (returning), 25 January to 1 April, photo (M.S. Scott *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Loch Bì (Loch Bee), South Uist, two males (one returning), 14–15 November (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

American Wigeon occurs annually in Scotland in very small numbers, with most birds arriving in autumn; many remain to winter and in some cases return in subsequent winters. Arrival is often apparent in the islands of the north and west. Like many other vagrant ducks, American Wigeons can quickly assimilate into flocks of carrier species, in this case almost always Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*.

Records were assessed by SBRC up to the end of 2006, with the exception of the Northern Isles, where they were assessed locally. The species was then delegated to local committees throughout Scotland from 1 January 2007.

Table 2. Summary of accepted records of American Wigeon in the Northern Isles, 2005–06.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2005				
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	-	3	-	25 Sep–10 Oct
Shetland	1	-	1 June	-
2006				
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	1	-	24–28 April	-
Shetland	1	-	6–14 May	-

Eight birds in 2005 was the seventh highest annual total on record, with two birds in 2006 more typical. The Orkney and Shetland records from 2006 were thought to relate to the same individual, which was paired with a female Eurasian Wigeon. The peak annual total, 11 records of 20 birds, was in 2000 and included a single flock of ten birds in Shetland. Additional observations in the period 2005–08, not listed above, involved long-stayers from 2004: a male in the Beauly Firth, Inverness district/Ross & Cromarty (Highland) from 12 December 2004 to 22 March 2005; and a male at Loch of Hillwell and Scatness, Mainland (Shetland) from 2 November 2004 to 18 January 2005 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The latter was thought to be a returning bird that had arrived originally with the 2000 influx.

Females remain rare, or at least rarely identified, with no confirmed records in this period, although a male American Wigeon on Loch of Tingwall, Mainland (Shetland) on 1 June 2005 was seen to mate with a female that may also have been an American Wigeon. American Wigeon pairs have occasionally bred in Iceland and young have also been reared by mixed pairs (Johan Oli Hilmarrsun pers. comm.). This may account for the appearance of hybrids in the population, with resulting identification difficulties. No fewer than three hybrids were observed in Orkney in early 2005.

(Breeds across North America south to northern USA, winters in northern South America.)

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* 15: 4: 19

Table 3. Accepted records of Ferruginous Duck in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

2 birds: Perth & Kinross 1, Upper Forth 1.

2006

Fife Loch Gelly, adult male, 16 July to 16 August, photo (J.S. Nadin *et al.*).

Lothian Threipmuir Reservoir, first-winter female, 22–29 December, photo (M. & B.D. Griffin *et al.*).

Ferruginous Duck is a very rare duck in Scotland with just 19 birds to the end of 2008. Records were assessed by BBRC until the end of 2005, with two Scottish individuals in that year: one at Gart Gravel Pits, Cambusmore (Upper Forth) (Fraser *et al.* 2007a), and the other at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) (Hudson *et al.* 2008, SBRC 2009). With two additional mainland records in 2006, the period 2005–08 augmented the previous all-time total of 15 birds by more than a quarter. The appearance of a flightless individual during the mid-summer moult period at Loch Gelly (Fife) coincided with the occurrence of a growing flock of other moulting diving ducks.

The overall pattern of occurrence in Scotland is poorly defined as birds have been found in most months and in a wide range of areas. The Fife record indicates a bird arriving to moult and now perhaps in long-term association with commoner diving ducks after the breeding season.

(Breeds from south-east Europe to central Asia, as far as western Mongolia. Winters from the Mediterranean, Iberia and Morocco through the Middle East to India and also sub-Saharan Africa.)

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* c. 228: 20: c. 248

Table 4. Accepted records of Cory's Shearwater in Scotland, 2005–08, with late acceptances from previous years not included in Forrester *et al.* (2007).

2003

Highland Portvasgo, Sutherland, 22 August (M.S. Scott).

2004

Lothian Aberlady Bay, 22 April, found dead, photo (I.M. Thomson).

2005

Argyll Aird, Tiree, 24 August (J. Bowler).

Fife Fife Ness, 10 September (R. Shand *et al.*).

Fife Fife Ness, 11 September (A.W. Lauder, T. Moodie).

North-east Scotland Girdleness, 10 September (A.J. Bull, M. Newell).

Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, two, 4 August (T. ap Rheinallt, D. Houghton, N. Wilkinson).

Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 5 August (T. ap Rheinallt).

2006

Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 14 July (R.J. Simpson *et al.*).

Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, two, 28 August (M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson *et al.*).

Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, two, 31 August (M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson *et al.*).

Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 1 September (M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson *et al.*).

Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, two, 3 September (M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, two, 29 August (M.S. Scott).

2007

Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 28 August (P.A. Brown, R.J. Simpson).

Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 8 September (T. ap Rheinallt, M.S. Scott).

2008

Lothian Barns Ness, 1 September (A. Brown).

Cory's Shearwater is a near-annual visitor to Scotland in very small numbers, with records in most years falling between late summer and early autumn. Up to the end of 2004 there were 129 records of around 228 birds (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007, with the addition of late acceptances from 2003 and 2004, detailed in Table 4). The bird found dead at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) in 2004 is one of only three Scottish records in the month of April.

There has been a marked increase in sightings since the mid-1990s, in part due to observer effort, but warmer seas and a changing marine ecosystem in the north Atlantic may also be contributing factors. The species continues to be sought after by birdwatchers in Scotland, and is invariably found by dedicated seawatchers. During the period 2005–08 numbers seen in most years were close to the norm, but 2008, with just a single bird, was well below average. All observations fell within the normal mid-summer to mid-autumn period. The increase in the number of records in Orkney and the Outer Hebrides compared to earlier years was notable and reflects increased seawatching effort in these archipelagos.

Cory's Shearwater remains a difficult bird to identify with a relatively low acceptance rate of 56% for descriptions submitted to SBRC during the period. Scottish observers are still generally unfamiliar with the species, at least at home, and seawatching sightings are often brief and at long range. Thus there can be difficulties in picking up key identification features, or in confirming the lack of certain features to support separation from Great Shearwater and even commoner species such as juvenile Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* and Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*. Many records can end up, at best, as unproven large shearwaters.

(Polytypic with two subspecies: *C. d. borealis* (Cory's Shearwater) breeding on the Azores, Canary Islands and other nearby Atlantic islands, and nominate *diomedea* (Scopoli's Shearwater) breeding in the Mediterranean. Both subspecies can occur in North Atlantic waters in autumn but most assumed to be Cory's and no confirmed Scopoli's yet recorded in Scottish waters.)

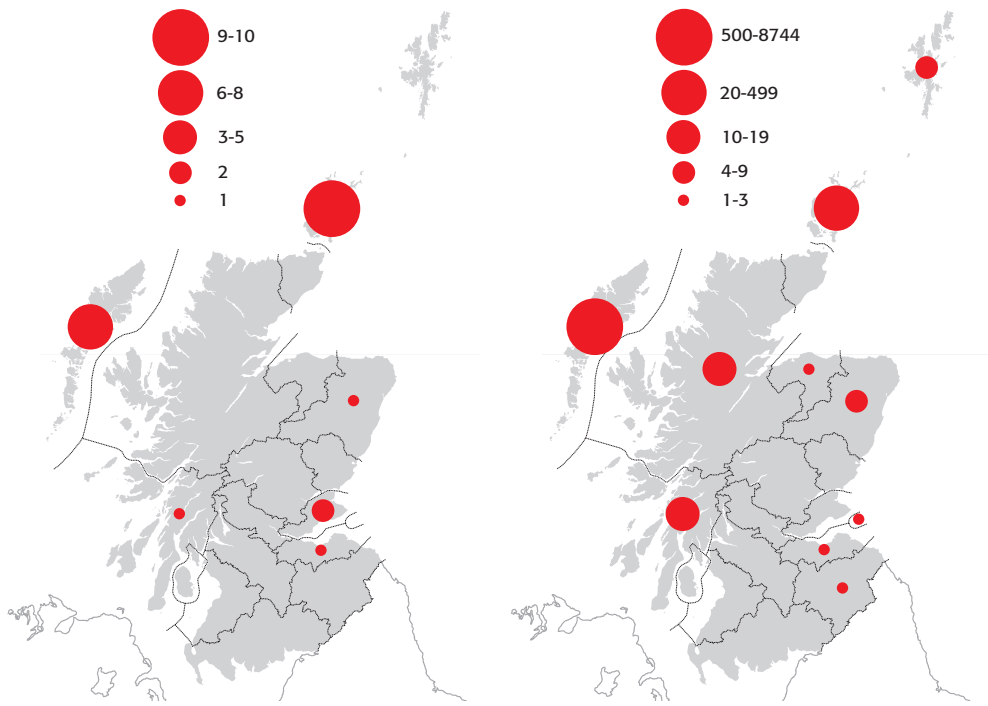


Figure 1. Distribution by recording area of Cory's Shearwater (left) and Great Shearwater (right) in Scotland, 2005–08.



Plate 90. Great Shearwater, off Stonehaven, North-east Scotland, 12 September 2007 © Caroline Weir.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* c. 522 (1950–2004): 9,208: c. 9,730 (excluding 'at sea' records)

Table 5. Accepted records of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2005–08. Data from Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay (Orkney) in 2007 are presented in summary form; for more detail, see Table 6.

2005

Argyll Barra–Tiree ferry, 20 October (J. Bowler).
 Highland Rubha Reidh, Gairloch, Ross & Cromarty, 24 August (E. Maguire, R. Shand).
 Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 5 September (D. Tanner).
 Lothian Cramond Island, 31 August (T. Cranston, J. Steele).
 North-east Scotland Girdleness, 10 September (H.A. Addelese *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 4 August (T. ap Rheinallt).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, two, 5 August (T. ap Rheinallt).
 Outer Hebrides Off Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, 14 August, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, four, 24 August, photo (M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, 29 August (T. Charman, A. Stevenson).
 Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, 20 September (A. Stevenson).
 Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, 24 August (S.J. Minton, D.P. Hall).

2006

Highland Ullapool–Stornoway ferry, Ross & Cromarty, 4 September (M. Coleman, J. Poyner *et al.*).
 North-east Scotland Off Banff, 17 September, photo (N.A. Littlewood *et al.*).
 Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, four, 30 August (M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson).
 Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 46, 31 August (P.A. Brown, M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson).
 Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, six, 1 September (M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson).
 Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 2 September (R.J. Simpson).
 Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, two, 5 September (M.J. Gee, R.J. Simpson).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, four, 28 August (T. ap Rheinallt).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 190, 29 August, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 29 August (T. ap Rheinallt).

2007

Argyll Oban–Barra ferry, four, 7 September, photo (T.P. Drew, M.A. Wilkinson).
 Argyll Aird, Tiree, five, 10 September (J. Bowler).
 Argyll Aird, Tiree, two, 14 September (J. Bowler).
 Borders St Abbs Head, three, 10 September (D.K. Graham).

- Highland Ullapool–Stornoway ferry, Ross & Cromarty, 12, 8 September (G. Owens).
 Isle of May 11 September (B. Bates).
 Moray & Nairn Lossiemouth, 3 September (R. Proctor).
 Moray & Nairn Lossiemouth, two, 14 September (M. Cook).
 North-east Scotland Collieston, 12 September (P.S. Crockett).
 North-east Scotland Off Stonehaven, three, 12 September, photo (C. Weir).
 North-east Scotland Girdleness, two, 14 September (A. Webb).
 Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, a total of 346 birds on 20 dates, 23 August to 29 September (P.A. Brown, R.J. Simpson) (see Table 6).
 Orkney Whitaloo Point, Birsay, five, 26 August (S.J. Williams *et al.*).
 Orkney Whitaloo Point, Birsay, two, 28 August (S.J. Williams *et al.*).
 Orkney Whitaloo Point, Birsay, 13 September (S.J. Williams *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, two, 24 August (J.B. Kemp).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 41, 25 August (T. ap Rheinallt, M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 19, 26 August (T. ap Rheinallt, M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, two, 30 August (M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 7,114, 8 September, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Brù (Brue), Lewis, three, 9 September (M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 165, 9 September (G. Owens, M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Rubha Ghriminis (Griminish Point), North Uist, 74, 9 September (B. Rabbitts).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 16, 9 September (T. ap Rheinallt).
 Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, 9 September (J.B. Kemp).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 1,076, 10 September (M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Oban–Barra ferry, seven, 11 September (T.P. Drew, M.A. Wilkinson).
 Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 12 September (M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 12, 14 September (S.E. Duffield).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 5, 21 September (M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 25 September (J. Bowler).
 Sea area Fair Isle c. 27 km west of Fair Isle, 10, 26 August, photo (J.L. Irvine, J.H. Simpson *et al.*).
 Sea area Fair Isle c. 55 km south-west of Foula (but closer to Orkney), four, 29 August, photo (J.L. Irvine, J.H. Simpson *et al.*).
 Shetland Lamba Ness, Unst, five, 10 September (D. Cooper, M.G. Pennington, B.H. Thomason *et al.*).
 Shetland Renwick Beach, Mainland, 30 September, found dead (R. Riddington); skeleton preserved, NMS.Z 2010.32.

2008

Shetland Eshaness, Mainland, 25 August (M.S. Chapman).

Historically, Great Shearwater has been an infrequent visitor to Scotland, with few or no records in most years up to 2004, although large numbers were seen at St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) in 1910 and 1911, and off the Rockall Bank in 1948 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The total number of birds seen during 1950–2004, excluding 'at sea' records, was c. 522 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Since 2004, there has been a marked increase in sightings, with more birds than usual in 2005 and then a record year in 2006. However, this was completely eclipsed by 2007, with the number of birds seen not only breaking records for Scotland and indeed Britain, but also astounding the observers involved. 2008 reverted to being a more typical year by historical standards.

The two main locations involved in the 2007 series of records were the Butt of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) and Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay (Orkney). At the former site, birds were seen on seven dates, with two remarkable counts of 7,114 on 8 September and 1,065 on 10 September. Fewer birds were seen at the latter site but observations were spread across many more days, with a total of 346 birds seen (Table 6).

Table 6. Daily counts of Great Shearwaters observed from Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay (Orkney) in 2007.

Date	August							September												
	23	25	26	27	28	29	30	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	18	19	20	22	29
Birds	1	1	4	10	20	2	1	29	40	73	95	39	1	17	5	1	3	1	1	2

The 1950–2008 total of c. 9,730 birds incorporates only land-based and inshore records, thus the birds recorded in Sea area Fair Isle in 2007 are omitted. However, the ten birds seen on 26 August that year form part of the Shetland county totals, as does one of the 29 August birds, which followed the observers' boat to within 30 km of Foula (Shetland Bird Report).

The recent increase in observations in Scotland possibly reflects a geographic shift, with a decrease in records from formerly favoured areas of the North Atlantic. It appears that the boom years in Scotland correspond with poorer years in Biscay and south-west Ireland, where birds are normally present. It is thought that flocks follow concentrations of prey species and may then pass headlands in large numbers during periods of strong onshore winds.

The species continues to be sought after by Scottish birdwatchers since, even in recent years, passage has been largely confined to certain headlands and island groups in the north-west and north, away from the bulk of the Scottish birdwatching public. The timing of the species' occurrence in Scotland is later than in other parts of Britain and Ireland, with most sightings from mid-August to mid-September.

In contrast to Cory's Shearwater, the acceptance rate of records by SBRC during the period 2005–08 was high. Records that involve larger numbers of birds demand a different approach to assessment, but even if records of 10 or more birds are excluded from consideration, the remainder still amassed an acceptance rate of more than 98%. Compared to Cory's Shearwater, the presence of better-defined identification features, like the dark cap and belly patch, may help observers and assessors alike.

(Breeds on South Atlantic islands and carries out a loop migration in the North Atlantic outside the breeding season. In the north-east Atlantic occurs most regularly off western coast of Ireland.)

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* 4: 1: 5

One at Labost, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 3 August 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007c) was the fifth for Scotland (SBRC 2009). Since SBRC took over the assessment of this species in 2006, no claims have been submitted.

Continental Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* 1: 8: 9

Table 7. Accepted records of Continental Great Cormorant in Scotland, 2005–08, with a late acceptance from 1998 not included in Forrester *et al.* (2007).

1998

Moray & Nairn Loch Spynie, immature, 26 December to 20 January 1999, photo (R. Proctor *et al.*).

2005

Clyde Prince's Dock, Glasgow, first-winter, 26 December, photo (J.J. Molloy).

2007

Borders Eyemouth Harbour, adult, 25 March, photo (R.D. Murray).

Lothian Gladhouse Reservoir, adult, 21 January (M.A. Wilkinson).

Lothian Port Seton, adult, 13 March, photo (K. Gibb, M. Thrower).

Shetland Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, adult, 30 April to 4 June, photo (P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington, R.M. Tallack *et al.*).

Shetland Lochs of Spiggie & Brow, Mainland, first-summer, 18–19 June (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).

2008

North-east Scotland Girdleness, 7 February, photo (M.A. Maher, R.A. Schofield).

Shetland Uyeasound, Unst, adult, 10 May, photo (W. Dickson, R.M. Tallack).

There is only one accepted Scottish record of this difficult-to-identify subspecies prior to 2005, though a number of other claims were submitted to SBRC.

Criteria for field identification only became available in 1991 and were not widely known until the late 1990s. Since 2000 or so, there has been an improved awareness of these criteria among birdwatchers, and a resultant increase in the number of claims submitted. Some of these were discussed by Forrester *et al.* (2007), but remained unproven for a variety of reasons, including: lack of clear observation or mis-recording of the 'gular pouch angle' (Newson *et al.* 2004, 2005); lack of supporting characters such as size and structure of the bird in the case of a marginal gular pouch angle; misinterpretation of the identification criteria; and use of older, redundant identification criteria. Only recently was the first Scottish record from 1998 accepted. This bird at Loch Spynie (Moray & Nairn) was the subject of debate at the time (Proctor & Donald 2000a, 2000b), but the collection of video and other material was reviewed and finally accepted in a detailed review of claims in 2008. Proving identification remains difficult and claims should ideally be supported by good-quality images.

Continental Great Cormorants have expanded their population and range dramatically throughout Europe in recent decades following protection in the 1970s (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997). They occur as breeders in southern England, and can mix and occasionally hybridise with *P. c. carbo* in tree colonies. Given the frequency of occurrence of the subspecies in England and its continued range expansion in Europe, its presence in Scotland is likely to become increasingly regular. As there is some potential for conflicts with fisheries, particularly inland, documenting its distribution will be of value in future years. To that effect birdwatchers are encouraged to pay extra attention to Great Cormorants and to submit descriptions accompanied by photographs of any likely *P. c. sinensis* candidates.

The Scottish records reveal a broad latitudinal range, although all but one come from the eastern side of the country. Given that they are likely to involve birds arriving from the south and east, particular attention might be directed to those areas when looking for Continental Great Cormorants in future. While accepted sightings remain too few to show a clear pattern of temporal occurrence, all to date have been in the period from mid-winter through to late spring. During this period, Continental Great Cormorants are perhaps at their most obvious, with adults having striking white head plumes, on average more extensive and untidy than on *P. c. carbo*.

(*P. c. sinensis* breeds throughout central and southern Europe and has expanded recently into parts of northern Europe. Outside the breeding season it occurs both inland and on coasts through much of Europe including England.)

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 46: 6: 52

Table 8. Accepted records of Black-crowned Night Heron in Scotland, 2005–08.

2006

Upper Forth Bridge of Allan, adult, 21 May (G. Owens).

2007

Lothian Bavelaw, adult, 14–15 February (E. Hurley *et al.*).

Shetland Bressay, juvenile, 15 September, photo (A. Ash *et al.*).

2008

Fair Isle Various locations, two adults (including one male), 5–24 April, both died (M. Breaks *et al.*); partial skeletons, head and wing preserved, NMS.Z.2009.148.1–3.

Outer Hebrides Cladach Bhàlaigh (Claddach Vallay), North Uist, first-summer, 8 May, photo (J. Boyle, S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Since the apparent eradication, by 2004, of a free-flying colony of the North American subspecies *N. n. hoactli* at Edinburgh Zoo (Lothian), the status of this species in Scotland has become a little clearer (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, a number of the Edinburgh Zoo birds were translocated to other collections, for example Auchingarrich Wildlife Centre near Comrie (Perth & Kinross), where they exist as a free-flying group. In addition, two ringed free-flying birds remained in the Edinburgh Zoo grounds during 2006–09 (Breaks 2009). Although adults appearing in southern Scotland may still be zoo escapes, the ability to racially identify adults using facial features (Forrester *et al.* 2007) helps to clarify origins as captive birds are of the North American subspecies. Any birds encountered should be scrutinised either to rule out *N. n. hoactli* in southern areas or, potentially, to confirm it in western areas, where vagrancy is possible. It was suggested that the juvenile seen on Shetland in September 2007 might have a transatlantic origin.

The total number of birds seen in Scotland to the end of 2004 was 46 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007). When escapes are removed from the equation, the occurrence of genuine wild vagrants fits the pattern seen elsewhere in Britain, with a spring peak of Continental overshoots and fewer at other times. Some can remain for long periods but may go undetected due to their secretive nature. There is a wide geographical spread of records but the most likely areas of occurrence in Scotland are southern counties, the Northern Isles and the Outer Hebrides.

The Fair Isle birds in 2008 were unusual not only in constituting a multiple record but also because both individuals perished. The corpses were donated to NMS (Breaks 2009).

(Holarctic with four subspecies, nominate *nycticorax* breeding in mainland Europe and into Asia, and *N. n. hoactli* in North America. Both populations move south in winter.)

Great Egret *Ardea alba* 37: 13: 50

Table 9. Accepted records of Great Egret in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

3 birds: Clyde 1, Shetland 2.

2006

North-east Scotland Near Turriff, 18–19 June, photo (J. Littlejohn, S. Mackison *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Driemor (Drimore), South Uist, 13 February to 2 March (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

2007

Ayrshire Eriff, Loch Doon, 4–6 July, photo (J. Graham, A. Hogg *et al.*).

Clyde Wards Pond, Endrick Mouth NNR, 3–14 July, photo (I. Fulton, S. Longster *et al.*).

Orkney Loch of Banks, Mainland, 28 March to 3 April, photo (P. Hollinrake *et al.*).

Orkney Bridesness, North Ronaldsay, 14 May, photo (P.A. Brown *et al.*); same, Loch Carrick, Eday, 17 May, & Sanday, 20 May, photo (G. Byers, M. Cockram *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Various locations, North Uist, Benbecula, & South Uist, 12 October to 23 March 2008, photo (C. Johnson, M. MacRury, M.S. Scott *et al.*).

Shetland Brig of Bakkasetter, Mainland, 8–26 May, photo (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).

2008

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 21–22 April (H.E. Maggs *et al.*).

Shetland Haroldswick & Norwick, Unst, 11–16 April, photo (W. Dickson *et al.*).

Great Egret, along with Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* and Cattle Egret, has gone through rapid population and range expansion in Europe, and now regularly breeds on the near Continent (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Records in Scotland have been assessed by SBRC since 2006. Previously they were assessed by BBRC, with three accepted records in 2005, within the period of this report (Fraser *et al.* 2007a). It is clear that, with more than a quarter of all Scottish records to date falling within the period 2005–08, the trend is one of a distinct increase.



Plate 91. Great Egret (with Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* and Common Crane *Grus grus*), Brig of Bakkasetter, Mainland, Shetland, 8–26 May 2007 © Roger Riddington.

The distribution of first recorded dates in Scotland is obscured by the fact that birds regularly remain for long periods and roam widely, thus their true arrival dates may be unknown. Generally, however, the main arrival appears to be in spring (April and May), followed by a smaller peak in late autumn (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This would fit the expected pattern, with spring migrant overshoots and north-westward autumn dispersal to wintering areas by a small proportion of birds from the Continental European population. Unusually, an individual wintered in the Outer Hebrides in 2007–08, moving between islands.

Despite the apparent ease of identification, the rejection rate of records by SBRC is more than 10%. Frustratingly, some observers do not exclude leucistic or albinistic Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* from their often cursory descriptions. Given that Little Egrets are also occurring in Scotland with increasing frequency, an accurate estimation of size and bare-part colouration is also important. These are the only significant identification pitfalls.

The North American subspecies *A. a. egretta* is difficult to separate without biometrics but some records, particularly in autumn, could involve this subspecies. However, none has yet been confirmed.

(Occurs on all continents outside polar regions. In Europe, nominate *alba* breeds from central Europe eastwards, wintering in Africa and Persian Gulf to China and Korea; *A. a. egretta* breeds in Nearctic, with northern populations wintering in south; two other subspecies.)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* 19: 3: 22

Table 10. Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

1 bird: Ayrshire 1.

2006

Highland Undisclosed site, Inverness district, male, summered from 24 May, photo (C. Crawford, J. & N. Glenn).

2008

Fair Isle Various locations, adult, 7–10 May, photo (S.J. Davies, D.N. Shaw *et al.*).



Plate 92. Black Kite, adult, Fair Isle, 7–10 May 2008
© Mark Breaks.

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from Continental Europe. Most individuals have been seen in spring, from April to June, with just a handful of sightings later in the season, though there have also been instances of summering. One at Pinwherry (Ayrshire) on 7 June 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a), the last year when records of this species were assessed by BBRC, was the 20th Scottish record.

The Black Kite seen in May 2008 on Fair Isle was the first for the recording area. It was presumably a spring overshoot, like many others in Scotland. The 2006 record, on the other hand, was highly unusual in that it involved a bird subsequently found to be paired with a wing-tagged female Red Kite belonging to the Black Isle, Ross & Cromarty (Highland) population. This hybrid pairing, which represented the first confirmed breeding by a Black Kite in the UK, produced two fledged young (Holling *et al.* 2009).

(Nominate *migrans* breeds throughout most of Europe except the far north, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa; other subspecies elsewhere in the Old World.)



Plate 93. *Rough-legged Buzzard*, juvenile, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, 7 May 2006 © Mike Pennington.



Plate 94. *Rough-legged Buzzard*, juvenile (right) with *Common Buzzard* *Buteo buteo*, Cille Pheadair (Kilpheder), South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 2 October 2008 © Andrew Stevenson.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* c. 308 (1968–2004): 17: c. 325

Table 11. Accepted records of Rough-legged Buzzard in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005

Borders Dowlaw, 16 October (D.K. Graham).

Fair Isle Observatory, 13 May (R.J. Butcher *et al.*); also seen Shetland, 13 May.

Lothian Faseny Bridge, 28–29 November (C.N. Davison, S. Ward).

North-east Scotland Bridgend, Newburgh, juvenile, 16 April (D. Parnaby).

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, adult, 1–18 June (T.W. Marshall *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Various sites, North Uist, 6–29 March (B. Rabbitts *et al.*).

Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, 13 May (H.R. Harrop, R.M. Mellor *et al.*); also seen Fair Isle.

Shetland North Roe, Mainland, 27 October (R.M. Mellor).

Shetland Fetlar, 30 October to early April 2006, found dead, photo (M.I. Smith, C. Thomason *et al.*).

2006

Lothian Kingside Hill, Spartleton & Whiteadder, 16–19 February (C.N. Davison); same as Lothian 2005.

Orkney Hindera Field, Harray, adult female, 28 January to 11 April (J.B. Ribbands *et al.*).

Shetland Skaw, Unst, juvenile, 7 May, photo (M.G. & M.J. Pennington).

2007

Orkney Rue, North Ronaldsay, adult, 16 May (R.J. Simpson).

Orkney Queenamidda, Rendall, Mainland, juvenile, 16 December to 23 April 2008, photo (J.B. Ribbands *et al.*).

Shetland Foula, juvenile, 16–18 October, photo (T.P. Drew, M. Garner, M.A. Wilkinson *et al.*).

2008

Angus & Dundee Balduff Hill, Glenisla, juvenile, 2 April (C.R. McKay).

Orkney Tor Ness, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 4–5 May, photo (R.J. Simpson *et al.*).

Orkney Pegal Burn, Hoy, juvenile, 5 November (S.J. Williams).

Outer Hebrides Cille Pheadair (Kilpheder), South Uist, juvenile, 2 October, photo (A. Hogg, A. Stevenson, R.G. Vernon *et al.*).

Rough-legged Buzzard is a rare passage migrant in Scotland, occurring mostly on the eastern side of the country and the Northern Isles in autumn; in addition, a few birds overwinter (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The geographical distribution of sightings in the period 2005–08 reflects this general pattern, with Orkney continuing to be well represented. Arrival dates were divided equally between spring, with eight birds between early March and early June, and an extended autumn period, with eight birds between early October and mid-December. Outside these periods, a wintering individual was on Orkney from January to April 2006.

The North American subspecies, *B. l. sanctijohannis* or Rough-legged Hawk, which occurs in both pale and dark morphs, is a potential vagrant (Forrester *et al.* 2007). As yet this subspecies does not appear in Category A of the *British List*, although it is on the *Irish List* by virtue of a single occurrence. A Nearctic origin is suspected for birds that appear in the west of Scotland relatively early in the autumn, but pale morphs of the two subspecies may not be readily distinguishable.

A dark-morph Rough-legged Hawk seen at various locations on Mainland Shetland from May 2006 to March 2007 had been released at sea off Noss following several years' captivity in the Faroe Islands, which it reached as a passenger on a fishing boat after coming aboard near the Grand Banks of Newfoundland in September 2003. It was found dead in the Faroes in April 2008, more than a year after it was last seen on Shetland (Jensen 2006, *Shetland Bird Report* 2006, 2007).

Claims of Rough-legged Buzzard have one of the highest rejection rates among species assessed by SBRC (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This continued to be the case during the period covered by this report, with ten out of 29 submissions resulting in 'not proven' verdicts. Although some of these claims seemed to involve mistaken identity, the main obstacle to acceptance was the lack of detail in many descriptions.

(Holarctic, with four subspecies; nominate *lagopus* breeds from Scandinavia east to Siberia and migrates south to winter in an area extending from France to central Asia.)

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* 80: 8: 88

Table 12. Accepted records of Red-footed Falcon in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

2 birds: Argyll 1, Lothian 1.

2006

Orkney Burgar Hill, Mainland, adult or first-summer male, 25 July (A. Upton).

Shetland Brow Marsh & Fladdabister, Mainland, first-summer female, 10–13 June, photo (P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*).

Shetland Collafirth, Mainland, first-summer male, 12 June (M.S. Chapman).

2007

Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, adult male, 15 October (D. Tanner).

2008

Lothian Almondell Viaduct, second-summer female, 25 May to 6 June, photo (I.J. Andrews, M. Hannam *et al.*).

Shetland Bixter, Mainland, first-summer female, 3–5 June, photo (M. Henry *et al.*).



Plates 95–96. Red-footed Falcon, second-summer female, Almondell Viaduct, Lothian, 25 May to 6 June 2008
© Jack Brodie (left) & Frank Golding (right).

This species is mainly a rare late-spring migrant to Scotland, with no more than one or two records in most years, although there are occasional influxes, such as in 1992. The total number of Scottish individuals to the end of 2004 was 80 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007), and there were two additional sightings of singles in 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a, Hudson *et al.* 2009).

Red-footed Falcon was dropped from the list of species assessed by BBRC from 1 January 2006. The six records since then reflect the pattern of earlier occurrences (Forrester *et al.* 2007), with the majority coming from Shetland and Orkney, and the three-month period May to July accounting for all but one of the records. Autumn birds are rare, thus the individual at Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty (Highland) on 15 October 2007 was noteworthy.

(Breeds from Hungary and the Czech Republic east to China, wintering in southern Africa.)

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* 15: 1: 16

Table 13. Accepted records of Kentish Plover in Scotland, 2005–08.

2007

Outer Hebrides Baile Gharbhaidh (Balgarva) area, South Uist, 11 November to 20 April 2008, photo (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

Kentish Plover is a very rare visitor to Scotland, first recorded only in 1949. All but one of the 15 records quoted by Forrester *et al.* (2007) were in April and May, the exception being a bird at Carnoustie (Angus & Dundee) on 8 September 1974. None of these remained longer than five days, thus the 2007 individual in the Outer Hebrides was highly unusual in more than one respect. In addition to the late arrival date and the exceptionally long duration of its stay, it was the first Kentish Plover to be seen in the west of Scotland, all previous records coming from the eastern mainland (13), Fair Isle (1) or Shetland (1).

Interestingly, a second long-staying Kentish Plover was present in the British Isles around the same time. This bird, discovered at Youghal, Co. Cork at the beginning of December 2007, was the first to be seen in Ireland for more than a decade. The fact that it was ringed enabled it to be traced to an illegal collection of birds that had apparently been confiscated by police on the German mainland before being taken to Helgoland for release into the wild (*Birding World* 20: 489). Thus, although the South Uist bird was unringed, some doubt was expressed about its origins. There was also speculation at the time that it might belong to one of the North American subspecies, *C. a. nivosus*, but the vagrancy potential of this form seems limited (Stevenson 2010).

(A cosmopolitan species with several subspecies, including nominate *alexandrinus*, which breeds patchily in Europe, North Africa and Asia; European birds are migratory and normally spend the winter in sub-Saharan Africa.)

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* 72: 49: 121

Table 14. Accepted records of American Golden Plover in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

11 birds: Argyll 2, Lothian 1, Orkney 1, Outer Hebrides 3, Shetland 4.

2006

Argyll Greenhill & Crossapol, Tiree, adult, 29 August to 3 September, photo (J. Bowler, K. Gillon *et al.*).

Dumfries & Galloway The Wig, Loch Ryan, juvenile, 16–29 October, photo (B. Orr *et al.*).

Orkney Overbister, Sanday, first-summer, 27–30 September, photo (J. Wright).

Outer Hebrides Cros (Cross) & Eòropaidh (Europie), Lewis, adult, 9–22 September, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, A.J. Whitehouse *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Bornais (Bornish), South Uist, juvenile, 26–28 September, photo (J.B. Kemp).

Outer Hebrides Eòropaidh (Europie), Lewis, juvenile, 15 October to 27 November, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Mòr (Howmore), South Uist, juvenile, 31 October, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Shetland Funzie, Fetlar, adult, 1–2 October, photo (I. & R. Broadbent, P.S. Crockett, I. Gordon *et al.*).

Shetland Challister & Vatshoull, Whalsay, juvenile, 2 October, photo (I. & R. Broadbent, P.S. Crockett, I. Gordon *et al.*).

2007

- Argyll Sandaig, Tiree, adult, 5–6 October, photo (J. Bowler, J. Wilson *et al.*).
Clyde Balgray Reservoir, adult, 16 September, photo (A.G. Jamieson, J.J. Sweeney).
Dumfries & Galloway Seafield Bay, Annan, juvenile, 24 October, photo (C. & A. Bushell).
Lothian Aberlady Bay, juvenile, 22 October to 2 November, photo (M. Griffin *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary, juvenile, 20 October to 18 November (C. Gibbins *et al.*).
Orkney Greentoft, Deerness, Mainland, adult, 8–11 September, photo (K.E. Hague *et al.*).
Orkney Hilltoft, Holm, Mainland, adult, 25 September to 4 October, photo (K.E. Hague *et al.*).
Orkney Tofts, Sanday, juvenile, 8 October (D.M. Bryant).
Outer Hebrides Ceann Ear, Heiskeir (Monach Islands), first-summer, 14–17 July, photo (S.E. Duffield, J.B. Kemp, B. Rabbitts).
Outer Hebrides Aird a' Mhachair (Ardivachar), South Uist, adult, 8 September, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Griminis (Griminish), Benbecula, juvenile, 11 October (S.E. Duffield).
Outer Hebrides Geirinis (West Gerinish), South Uist, juvenile, 17–26 October, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Geirinis (West Gerinish), South Uist, juvenile (second bird), 26 October, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Shetland Fleck, Mainland, juvenile, 4–5 October (R.M. Mellor *et al.*).
Shetland West Burra, juvenile, 10 October (R.A. Haywood).
Shetland Haroldswick, Unst, juvenile, 16 October, photo (R. Tallack, B.H. Thomason *et al.*).
Shetland Stenness, Mainland, juvenile, 31 October (M.S. Chapman, R.W. Tait).

2008

- Argyll Add Estuary, adult, 21 July, photo (J.M. Dickson).
Argyll Greenhill, Tiree, adult, 5–6 September, photo (K. Gillon).
Argyll Balevullin, Tiree, juvenile, 6–10 October, photo (W. Allan, J.M. Dickson).
Argyll Loch a' Phuill, Tiree, juvenile, 7 October, photo (W. Allan, J.M. Dickson).
Outer Hebrides Torlum, Benbecula, juvenile, 25–26 September, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Baghasdal (North Boisdale), South Uist, juvenile, 29 September, photo (A. Hogg *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Eòlaigearraidh (Eoligaray), Barra, juvenile, 6–14 October (K. Gillon *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Siadar (Shader) to Loch Ordais, Lewis, juvenile, 12–17 October, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, D.C. & J.A. Jardine, M.S. Scott).
Outer Hebrides Loch Bi (Loch Bee), South Uist, juvenile, 17–20 October, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*).



Plate 97. American Golden Plover, adult, Cros (Cross) & Eòropaigh (Europie), Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 9–22 September 2006 © Tristan ap Rheinallt.

Shetland Dalsetter, Mainland, two juveniles, 24–27 September, photo (H.R. Harrop, R.M. Mellor *et al.*).
Shetland Baltasound, Unst, juvenile, 29 September to 2 October, photo (D. Fairhurst *et al.*).

American Golden Plover is a scarce but annual visitor to Scotland from the Nearctic, seen mostly on islands during August, September and October. It was dropped from the list of species considered by BBRC in January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a), when the number of accepted Scottish birds stood at 83. Of these, 72 were seen in 2004 or earlier (adjusted for Forrester *et al.* 2007), and 11 in 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a, 2007c).

Following a marked increase in records since the late 1980s, the period under review saw more American Golden Plovers than ever making landfall in Scotland. Indeed, the 49 individuals during the four years 2005–08 represent more than two-thirds of the previous all-time total. Although 2006, with nine birds, was not markedly different from some other recent years, 2007 and 2008 were both exceptional. Improved observer awareness has been invoked as an explanation of the long-term increase in Scottish records (Forrester *et al.* 2007), but is unlikely to account for the flurry of recent sightings. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the changing patterns of Atlantic weather systems, which are believed to have played a part in a general northward shift of vagrant Nearctic waders within Britain (Fraser *et al.* 2007a).

There also appears to have been a recent change in the geographical distribution of this species within Scotland. While the Northern Isles accounted for most records prior to 2005, they were overtaken during 2005–08 by the Outer Hebrides and nearby Tiree (Argyll). Between them, Orkney and Shetland mustered 18 birds during this period, while the Outer Hebrides and Tiree had 22. Mainland sightings are still relatively infrequent: Dumfries & Galloway, Clyde and mainland Argyll all recorded their first American Golden Plovers in the period covered by this report.

In accordance with the usual pattern of occurrence, American Golden Plovers during 2006–8 were seen mostly in autumn, with just two summer records. As usual, autumn adults tended to precede the more numerous juveniles. Indeed, in 2007 there was an almost perfect split in arrival dates between adult birds (to 5 October) and juveniles (from 4 October). Some birds labelled as juveniles in the table, especially those seen later in the autumn, would probably have moulted partially or wholly into first-winter plumage.

(Breeds at high latitudes in North America and northeast Siberia, migrating over the western Atlantic to winter in the south of South America.)

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* 69: 43: 112

Table 15. Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2005–08.

2005 BBRC

27 birds: Argyll 1, Lothian 1, Orkney 10, Outer Hebrides 13, Shetland 2.

2006

Fair Isle Various locations, juvenile, 7–10 October, photo (N. Green, P.A. Harris *et al.*).

Lothian Tynninghame, adult, 6–9 October (A. Brown, B. Doe, M. Griffin).

Orkney Trolla Vatn, North Ronaldsay, adult, 31 July to 1 August (P.A. Brown, R.J. Simpson).

Orkney Loch Gretchen, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 14–22 October, photo (P.A. Brown *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Loch Phaibeil (Loch Paible), North Uist, juvenile, 15–18 November (B. Rabbitts *et al.*).

Shetland Pool of Virkie, Mainland, adult, 22–24 July, photo (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).

Shetland Pool of Virkie, Mainland, adult, 24 July (second bird), photo (H.R. Harrop *et al.*).

2007

Fair Isle South Harbour, adult, 2 October, photo (T. ap Rheinalt, M.S. Scott *et al.*); also seen Shetland, 27 September to 1 October.

North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary, adult, 31 July (R. King, A.J. Whitehouse *et al.*).

Orkney Mill Sand, Tankerness, Mainland, adult, 14–20 August (K.E. Hague).

Shetland Pool of Virkie, Mainland, adult, 16 August, photo (R.M. Fray, P.V. Harvey *et al.*).

Shetland Norwick & Westing, Unst, adult, 27 September to 1 October, photo (M.G. Pennington, G. Woodburn *et al.*); also seen Fair Isle.

Shetland Quendale, Pool of Virkie & Fleck, Mainland, juvenile, 17–22 October, photo (R.M. Fray, J.J. Gilroy *et al.*).

2008

Outer Hebrides Bàgh a' Bhaile (Village Bay), St Kilda, adult, 12 October, photo (W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Baile Gharbhaidh (Balgarva), South Uist, adult, 22–25 October, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Baile Gharbhaidh (Balgarva), South Uist, juvenile, 29 October to 2 November, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Shetland Pool of Virkie, Mainland, adult, 25 October (R.M. Fray).



Plate 98. White-rumped Sandpiper, adult, Pool of Virkie, Mainland, Shetland, 16 August 2007 © Hugh Harrop.

Like American Golden Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper is a scarce but nowadays annual visitor to Scotland from North America. The Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles, North-east Scotland and Lothian account for most of the 68 occurrences catalogued by Forrester *et al.* (2007). A late acceptance of a bird in the Outer Hebrides in September 2004 (Fraser *et al.* 2007c) brings the total recorded to the end of 2004 to 69 birds.

2005, the last year when records of this species were assessed by BBRC, saw an unprecedented autumn influx, with a total of 27 birds seen in Scotland, including up to seven on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) and up to four together at Loch Ordaish, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) in mid-October (Fraser *et al.* 2007a, 2007c). The 16 accepted individuals during

2006–8 represent a return to more normal numbers, though the annual totals of 4–7 birds are still towards the higher end of the range by pre-2005 standards. Geographically, the tabulated records correspond very well to the pattern of earlier years, and the range of dates is likewise typical, although the traditional division between early-autumn adults and late-autumn juveniles appears to be eroding away to some extent as more and more adults are seen in October.

The adult on Fair Isle on 2 October 2007 was identified from photographs as being the same as the bird on Unst (Shetland), almost 150 km to the north, from 27 September to 1 October.

(Breeds in North America at high latitudes, migrating to winter in Brazil, Argentina and Chile.)

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* 134: 49 (2005–06): 183

Table 16. Accepted records of Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Scotland, 2005–06, with late acceptances from 2004 not included in Forrester *et al.* (2007).

2004

Argyll The Reef, Tiree, male, 17–19 June (J. Bowler).

Shetland Funzie, Fetlar, juvenile, 1–3 October (P.V. Harvey, B.H. Thomason *et al.*).

2005

Argyll Various locations, Tiree, up to three juveniles, 3–8 September, photo (J. Bowler, K. Gillon *et al.*).

Highland Traigh Golf Course, Arisaig, Lochaber, juvenile, 8 September, photo (S. Macdonald).

Lothian Tynninghame, juvenile, 25 August, photo (D. Allan, P. Burns *et al.*).

Lothian Tynninghame, juvenile, 15 September, photo (D. Allan, P. Burns *et al.*).

Orkney Tor Ness, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 23–26 August, photo (P.A. Brown *et al.*).

Orkney Kirkhouse, South Ronaldsay, juvenile, 5 September (P. Higson *et al.*).

Orkney Linklet Bay, North Ronaldsay, two juveniles, 9 September (P.A. Brown *et al.*).
 Orkney Linklet Bay, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 22–23 September (A.E. Duncan *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Mullach Sgar, St Kilda, two, 23 August to 4 September (N. Mitchell *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Bornais (Bornish), South Uist, up to five juveniles, 31 August to 20 September (T. Charman, A. Stevenson *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Steinis (Steinish), Lewis, juvenile, 1–7 September (T. ap Rheinallt, A. Robinson *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Borgh (Borve), Berneray, North Uist, three, 3–5 September, photo (B. Rabbitts).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, juvenile, 3 September, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, A. Robinson *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Loch Bì (Loch Bee), South Uist, juvenile, 4–15 September (A. Stevenson *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, juvenile, 15 September, photo (T. ap Rheinallt).
 Shetland Foula, 8 September (A.R. Mainwood).
 Shetland Scatness, Mainland, 14–15 September, photo (J. Wilson *et al.*).
 Shetland Fleck, Mainland, 27 September (P.M. Ellis).

2006

Argyll Loch a' Phuill, Tiree, 29 August (K. Gillon *et al.*).
 Argyll Seal Cottage, Oronsay, juvenile, 10 September (D.C. Jardine *et al.*).
 Fair Isle Meoness to Vaasetter, juvenile, 19–21 September, photo (M. Telfer *et al.*).
 Lothian Tynninghame & Aberlady, 4–6 May, photo (C.N. Davison, K. Gillon *et al.*).
 Moray & Nairn Lossie Estuary, 27 June (A. Jensen).
 Orkney Linklet Bay, North Ronaldsay, 23–26 September, photo (D. Kramer, E.R. Meek, J. Palmer).
 Outer Hebrides Ormaclait (Ormiclate) & Loch Bhornais (Loch Bornish), South Uist, adult, 17–26 August, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, juvenile, 31 August (M.S. Scott).
 Outer Hebrides Loch Bì (Loch Bee), South Uist, up to five, 6–27 September, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Mullach Sgar, St Kilda, two juveniles, 6 September (S. Money *et al.*).
 Outer Hebrides Groigearraidh (Grogarry), South Uist, juvenile, 11 September, photo (S.E. Duffield).
 Outer Hebrides Eachcamais (Eachkamish), Baleshare, North Uist, three, 15 September, photo (B. Rabbitts).
 Outer Hebrides Stornoway, Lewis, juvenile, 24–28 September (T. ap Rheinallt *et al.*).
 Shetland Funzie, Fetlar, 21 September (K. Luxford, B.H. Thomason).

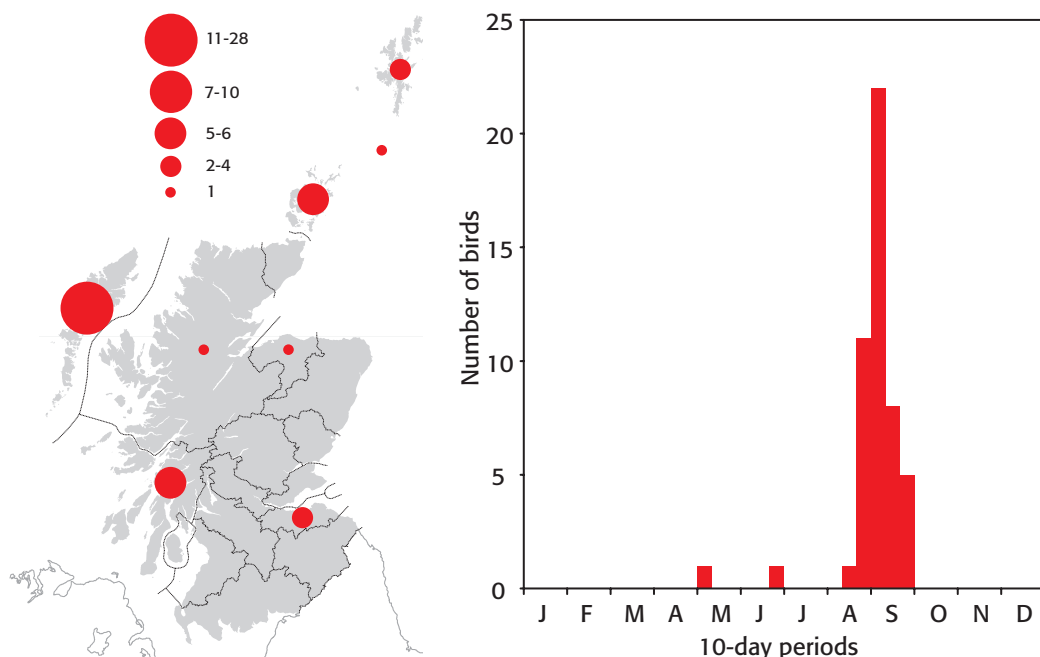


Figure 2. Distribution by recording area and seasonal occurrence of Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Scotland, 2005–06.



Plate 99. Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Tynninghame & Aberlady, Lothian, 4–6 May 2006 © Tristan Reid.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper is a scarce but annual visitor to Scotland, usually in autumn (Forrester *et al.* 2007). In terms of numbers recorded, it comes second only to Pectoral Sandpiper among Nearctic wader species. To the end of 2004, a total of 132 birds had been seen (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007, with the 1996 'At sea' record excluded as it is outside the *Scottish List* recording area). With the addition of two late acceptances from 2004 (Table 16), this total becomes 134.

Although numbers seen in Scotland vary widely from year to year, there has been an overall increase since the mid-1990s. The reasons for this are unclear, and there is some uncertainty about whether the breeding population is expanding or declining (Forrester *et al.* 2007). With a total of 28 birds, 2005 was a record year, although the possibility of repeat sightings of the same individuals, especially in the Outer Hebrides, cannot be ruled out. Fewer were seen in 2006, but the total of 21 still exceeded the next best year (2004, with 11) by a wide margin.

The Outer Hebrides have traditionally produced more sightings of this species than any other recording area in Scotland, and this continued to be the case during 2005–06, when they accounted for more than half the Scottish total (28 out of 49). In accordance with the usual pattern, sightings were largely confined to a short period between mid-August and late September. Only two birds were seen outside this period. One, in Lothian on 4–6 May 2006, was the earliest ever in spring by three days; it may have been a northbound migrant that had wintered on this side of the Atlantic. The other was at the Lossie Estuary (Moray & Nairn) on 27 June the same year, and was possibly a summering non-breeder. The same might apply to the June 2004 bird on Tiree (Argyll), which was seen to display (Bowler 2009).

Reflecting the steep increase in records, Buff-breasted Sandpiper was dropped from the list of species assessed by SBRC as from 1 January 2007.

(Breeds in the high Arctic of North America and eastern Siberia, wintering in South America.)

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* 132: 29: 161

Table 17. Accepted records of Ring-billed Gull in Scotland, 2005–08, with a late acceptance from 2004 not included in Forrester *et al.* (2007).

2004

Outer Hebrides Siabost (Shawbost) to Barabhas (Barvas), Lewis, first-summer, 6 June to 11 July, photo (M.S. Scott *et al.*).

2005

Argyll Machir Bay, Islay, adult (returning), 29 March, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, A.J. Whitehouse); same, 8 November (M. Holt, T. Lowe).

Argyll Bowmore, Islay, first-winter/summer, 4–5 April, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, T.P. Drew *et al.*).

Argyll Oban, first-summer, 4 April to 10 May, photo (J.M. Dickson, B. Rabbitts *et al.*); same, 12 September to 5 March 2006, photo (S. Gibson *et al.*).

Argyll Loch a' Phuill, Tiree, first-winter, 5 April (J. Bowler).

Highland Dingwall, Ross & Cromarty, adult (returning), 25 August to 18 October, photo (S. Cohen *et al.*).

Moray & Nairn Colfield, first-summer, 27–28 April (D.M. Pullan, R. Proctor).

Orkney Point of Ness, Stromness, Mainland, adult (returning), 3 January to 7 February, photo; same, 18 November to 12 March 2006, photo (P. Higson *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Mòr (Howmore) & Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine), South Uist, first-winter/summer, 30 January to 29 July; same Àird a' Mhachair (Ardivachar), South Uist, 3–18 September, & Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine), 9 November (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Mòr (Howmore), Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine) & Smeircleit (Smerclate), South Uist, second-winter, 30 January to 7 April (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Teanna Mhachair (Teanamachar), Baleshare, North Uist, second-winter, 6 February (A. Stevenson).

Outer Hebrides Cnoc Gunna, Berneray, North Uist, first-winter, 6–7 March (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Mòr (Howmore) & Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine), South Uist, adult, 27 March to 7 April (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Mòr (Howmore) & Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine), South Uist, second-winter/summer, 5 April (A. Stevenson).

Outer Hebrides Bàgh a Tuath (North Bay), South Uist, first-winter, 9 April (S.E. Duffield).

Outer Hebrides Tobha Beag, South Uist, second-winter, 10 November, photo (M. Benson, B. McMillan).

Upper Forth Kinneil Lagoon, adult, 16 September to 1 November, photo (J. Calladine, D. Thorogood, M.A. Wilkinson *et al.*).

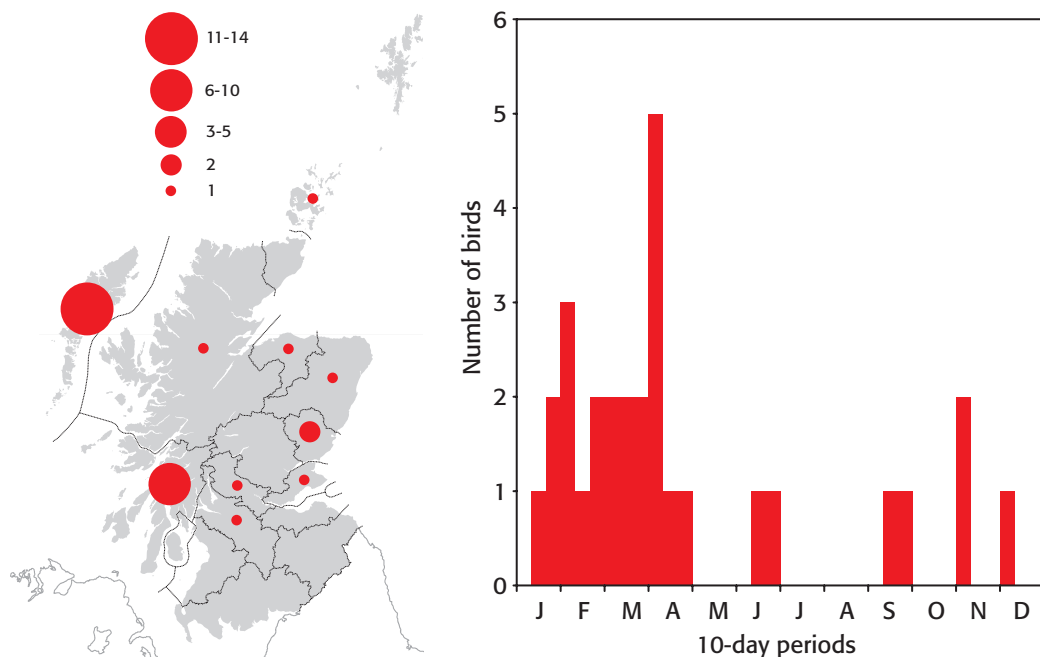


Figure 3. Distribution by recording area and seasonal occurrence of Ring-billed Gull in Scotland, 2005–08.

2006

- Angus & Dundee** Lunan Water Mouth, adult, 3–6 November, photo (H. Bell *et al.*).
Argyll Oban, adult, 14 January to 2 May, photo (N. Milligan *et al.*).
Argyll Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree, adult, 2–6 February, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).
Argyll Bowmore, Islay, second-winter (returning), 22 February, photo (T.P. Drew, A. Hogg).
Argyll Oban, second-winter, 28 February to 5 March, photo (S. Gibson *et al.*).
Argyll Oban, third-winter/adult (returning), 16 November to April **2007**, photo (J.M. Dickson, S. Gibson *et al.*); same as one of the two second-winters present in early March 2006.
Fife Thornton Pool, first-winter, 27 February (D.E. Dickson).
Highland Dingwall, Ross & Cromarty, adult (returning), 25 March to 11 April, photo; same, 4 October to 5 February **2007**, photo (S. Cohen *et al.*).
Orkney Point of Ness, Stromness, Mainland, adult (returning), 27 November to 28 January **2007** (E.R. Meek *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Tolastadh bho Thuath (North Tolsta), Lewis, second-winter, 19 February, photo (T. ap Rheinallt).
Outer Hebrides Siabost (Shawbost) to Arnol, Lewis, first-summer, 12–24 June, photo (C. Dunn, M.S. Scott *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Mealabost Bhuirgh (Melbost Borve), Lewis, first-summer, 24 June, photo (M.S. Scott).
Outer Hebrides Loch Ordaix to Barabhas (Barvas), Lewis, second-winter, 22 September to 10 October, photo (T. ap Rheinallt *et al.*).
Upper Forth Kinneil Lagoon, adult (returning), 26 September to 23 December, photo (T.P. Drew *et al.*).

2007

- Argyll** Oban, adult (returning), 23 August to 9 April **2008**, photo (J.M. Dickson, S. Gibson *et al.*).
Highland Dingwall, Ross & Cromarty, adult (returning), 31 October to 16 November (S. Cohen *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, first-summer, 16 March to 2 April, photo (G. Anderson, A.J. Whitehouse *et al.*).
Orkney Point of Ness, Stromness, Mainland, adult (returning), 29 October to 30 December, photo (S.J. Williams *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Loch Mòr Bharabhais (Loch Barvas), Lewis, first-winter/summer, 29–30 March, photo (S. Cole, T. McKinney *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Balranald, North Uist, adult, 19 April, photo (B. Rabbitts).
Upper Forth Kinneil Lagoon, adult (returning), 28 October to 17 February **2008**, photo (D. Thorogood *et al.*).

2008

- Angus & Dundee** Dundee, adult, 2 December to 25 February **2009**, photo (R. McCurley *et al.*).
Argyll Oban, adult (returning), 16 August to 18 December, photo (W. Allan, S. Gibson *et al.*).
Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult, 9 February to 31 March, photo (K. Hoey *et al.*).
Highland Little Loch Broom, Ross & Cromarty, adult, 18 March (J. Bell).
Highland Dingwall, Ross & Cromarty, adult (returning), 17 November to December, photo (S. Cohen *et al.*).
Orkney Lighthouse, North Ronaldsay, adult, 9 March (R.J. Simpson).
Upper Forth Kinneil Lagoon, adult (returning), 14 August to 10 February **2009**, photo (R. Shand *et al.*).

Ring-billed Gull is a scarce visitor to Scotland, with most observations along the west side of the country on islands. The majority of birds are seen from January to April in flocks of migrating Common Gulls *Larus canus*.

First observed in Scotland in 1976, the species has occurred with increasing regularity over the years. To the end of 2004, a total of 131 birds had been seen (Forrester *et al.* 2007); with the addition of a late acceptance from 2004 (Table 17), this total becomes 132. During the 1980s an average of 3.6 per annum were noted, increasing to 5.4 in the 1990s (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This trend continued with up to 13 new arrivals during 2005, but this was followed by a decline, with nine during 2006, and just three during 2007 and four during 2008. These totals do not include returning birds.

The geographical pattern of incidence follows that seen before 2005 with most birds being noted in coastal areas, particularly on west coast islands in Argyll and the Outer Hebrides, consistent with this species being of Nearctic origin. Many were seen during February to April, apparently moving north with Common Gulls. Such spring occurrences are thought to involve birds that, after arriving in Europe in previous seasons, subsequently move up and down the eastern Atlantic seaboard. Some autumn birds, however, particularly sub-adults, are probably newly arrived individuals displaced across the Atlantic after westerly gales.



Plate 100. Ring-billed Gull, adult, Strathclyde Country Park, Clyde, 9 February to 31 March 2008 © Jim Woods.

In a few cases birds have returned to the same sites for consecutive winter periods, or during migration. One well-known individual wintered at Point of Ness, Stromness, Mainland (Orkney), and was last observed in December 2007, its 21st winter; it was initially seen as a first-winter in January 1988, making it over 22 years old when last seen (Gray 1993, Dillon 2002). Other birds have returned to the same sites at Dingwall, Ross & Cromarty (Highland), at Machir Bay, Islay and on the Oban waterfront (both Argyll), and at Kinneil Lagoon (Upper Forth).

More unusual records include adults seen inland in Clyde at Strathclyde Country Park in February and March 2008 (returning in March 2009), and on the waterfront in Dundee (Angus & Dundee) from December 2008 to February 2009. Also, a first-winter at Thornton Pool in February 2006 was the first to be recorded in Fife (Dickson 2007). Most observations involve single birds, but two second-winters were present together at Oban during February and March 2006.

(Breeds widely in North America, wintering along the south-eastern seaboard, south to Central America and the Caribbean.)

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* 0: 3: 3

Table 18. Accepted records of Caspian Gull in Scotland, 2005–08.

2006

Lothian Belhaven Bay & Dunbar Harbour, first-winter, 28 December to 13 February 2007, photo (C.N. Davison *et al.*).

2007

Lothian Tynninghame, first-winter, 14 October, photo (K. Gillon *et al.*).

2008

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, first-winter, 9–14 February, photo (K. Hoey, C.J. McInerny).

First observed in Scotland in 2006 in Lothian (Davison 2009), Caspian Gull has been identified on just two more occasions, with all three sightings from the southern mainland in late autumn and winter.

Recent changes in the taxonomy of the large white-headed gulls have resulted in this taxon being elevated to full specific status (Sangster *et al.* 2007). This change, along with a heightened interest in gull identification amongst ornithologists, has resulted in a tiny number of individuals, all first-winters, being found in Scotland. This fits with observations elsewhere in England and Continental Europe. A proportion of the population, consisting mostly of immatures, leaves the breeding sites in eastern Europe to migrate north and west to the Atlantic and Baltic areas in late summer and early autumn, with smaller numbers remaining to winter in these areas (Olsen & Larsson 2003). Now that identification features for this species are becoming better known (Gibbins *et al.* 2010, McInerny 2010), it is likely that more will be seen in Scotland in the future.

(Breeds at inland lakes in eastern Europe and the Middle East, wintering mostly in the eastern Mediterranean, but with smaller numbers reaching western maritime Europe.)

Part 2 of this report, covering terns to passerines, will appear in the September issue.

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Early records of bitterns in the Outer Hebrides

The noted Gaelic folklorist Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) submitted observations of birds to J. A. Harvie-Brown (1844–1916), with the result that the latter's *A Vertebrate Fauna of the Outer Hebrides* (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1888) contains several references to him, not only as the principal source for Gaelic bird names in the book, but also as a contributor of records. Carmichael's papers are in Edinburgh University Library, where they form the core of the Carmichael Watson Collection. The collection includes Carmichael's recently identified field notebooks, which contain a wealth of disparate information and observations concerning the birdlife of the islands, including a note on the occurrence of a bittern on South Uist in 1874:

Found at Milton 17th Mar[ch] 1874 - in a gravel pit at roadside within a gunshot of Flora Macdonald's house fo[ugh]t like a buck & squealed like a pig ruff about neck stood out as a lady said like an Eliza[bethan] collar. Serv[an]ts said the bird was unlucky & an evil omen & so when the people got up in the morning the bird was dead & eaten up by the cats. Another bird of the same kind said to have been shot by a shep[herd] near the same place some years ago [*later addition*: & also Bailanloin N.Uist.] [EUL CW MS 111 fos.17r-v].

Also within the Carmichael Watson Collection are three boxes of paper slips, now catalogued as EUL CW MS 131 A–C, recording occurrences and behaviour of birds, mammals, fish and invertebrates in the islands. They are a testament to Carmichael's unrealised ambition of compiling a natural history of the Outer Hebrides. One of the slips in CW MS 131A, probably composed from memory in the late 1880s, contains further information on bitterns:

A Bittern was found? or shot? in a ditch at Baileanloin N[orth] Uist in the winter of 18[] and one was found at Milton S[outh] Uist in the winter of 187[]. The one at Baileanloin was found or shot by Dr John Macdonald and the one at Milton by Dr. Thomas Nicoll - both in a state of extreme exhaustion. [EUL CW MS 131A fo.303]

According to Forrester *et al.* (2007), the earliest acceptable record of Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* in the Outer Hebrides was in 1890. The three records quoted by Carmichael antedate any of these, though the one involving a bittern 'said to have been shot by a shepherd' near Milton is so vague that it is probably best ignored. Given that the Baile an Lòin record is undated, its claim to be considered as a potential first for the Outer Hebrides is also weak. This record can be no later than 1871, since John MacDonald died in that year; it may account for the statement in Gray (1871) that a Great Bittern was shot in North Uist 'a few years ago'.

The Milton record from March 1874 is not only dated but accompanied by the finder's name and a convincing description of the bird's behaviour. As with other bittern records from this part of the world, however, there is a potential complication in that the bird involved could have been an American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*. Given that the great majority of American Bittern records in the British Isles have been in the period September to early January, this is unlikely; on the other hand, an American Bittern was shot in Dumfries & Galloway almost exactly a year prior to this sighting, on 25 March 1873. However, the fact that the Milton bird was in a 'state of extreme exhaustion', at a time when conditions in the Outer Hebrides were relatively mild, suggests it was a recent arrival, and while American Bitterns are not thought to cross the Atlantic at this season, hard-weather movements of Great Bitterns are a recognised phenomenon.

The fact that the Milton bird was thought to be an evil omen suggests that the servants mentioned in Carmichael's note were acquainted with Great Bitterns and the folklore surrounding them. Mistrust of these birds was widespread in Scotland at one time (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Summary of Great Bittern records from the Outer Hebrides

We regard the following as acceptable records of Great Bittern in the Outer Hebrides. Although the possibility that some of these

birds were American Bitterns cannot be ruled out with absolute certainty, the same could be said for a good number of currently accepted Scottish records, especially older ones.

- Found exhausted at Milton, South Uist, 17 March 1874 (previously unpublished).
- Captured on the coast of Harris in January 1890; specimen added to Harvie-Brown's collection (Harvie-Brown 1902).
- Present for a week at Westford, North Uist, between December 1914 and January 1915, but became emaciated and later died; specimen said to have been preserved (Beveridge 1918).
- Killed near Langass, North Uist, on or around 20 April 1915 (Baxter & Rintoul 1916).
- Found exhausted at Carloway, Lewis, 30 January 1917; specimen sent to the Royal Scottish Museum (Mackenzie 1917).
- Observed at close range at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis, 2 and 6 November 1962, by Peter Cunningham and others (Anon. 1963).

A few other occurrences or possible occurrences are mentioned in the literature, but like Gray's record and two of those referred to by Carmichael, they are vague and/or undated. The only significant exception is a record of a bittern present for some time at Loch Hallan, South Uist, in the early winter of 1955. However, J. W. Campbell, to whom this occurrence was reported, believed that the bird in question could have been either a Great Bittern or an American Bittern (unpublished MS).

We would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of Kirsty Stewart, archivist, and Andrew Wiseman, researcher, both at the Carmichael Watson Project, Edinburgh University Library, in compiling this article. Peter Cunningham provided information about past records and made available an unpublished manuscript compiled by Dr J. W. Campbell. Brian Rabbitts commented on the text.

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Some observations on the bowing behaviour of Merlins

According to Brown & Amadon (1969) several species of raptor indulge in specialised greeting ceremonies which include bowing. Orton (1980) could only cite two occasions of Merlin *Falco columbarius* bowing behaviour in four years' study in Wales.

In Galloway, Merlin bowing behaviour was observed on 29 occasions at six breeding sites from 1973 to 1994. Females solicited copulation from males by bowing, fanning their tails and calling. Bowing occurred infrequently at some sites but at one site from 1 April to 12 June 1974 a female was seen to bow 12 times and the male twice.

Cramp & Simmons (1980) mention Merlin bowing behaviour only once when the male of a wild-caught pair bowed to the female in an enclosure. Feldsine & Oliphant (1985) reported that bowing is much less prominent in Merlin *Falco columbarius richardsonii* than the large falcons, although it is

present as a low intensity component of several displays; rarely is the deep bowing, typical of many falcons, seen in Merlin displays.

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Icterine Warblers breeding in Sutherland in 2009

On 28 June 2009, I was surveying for the 2007–11 Bird Atlas project in a strath in south-east Sutherland. I arrived at the first tetrad at 0600 hrs and immediately heard a bird singing from some tall deciduous trees, mainly Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, by an area of ornamental shrubs in the grounds of a large lodge. It was not a song I recognised, but due to the dense foliage I could not see the bird. I continued on my way but on my return in late afternoon I used an MP3 player to give a burst of Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* song. Immediately a large warbler flew towards me and landed in a bush 20 m in front. I could see that it was a *Hippolais* warbler and the light yellow underside, grey-green back and pale wing panel confirmed that it was an Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*. It appeared to be carrying food in its bill. It quickly lost interest in the tape and disappeared.

After about ten minutes I heard an unusual alarm call and eventually located the bird in the lodge grounds. I confirmed it was the Icterine Warbler and it was again carrying food. Later I watched it collecting more food in some young alder *Alnus* trees. I tried to follow it back to a nest, but lost it

amongst the foliage. Reluctantly I had to leave.

As I knew I would not be able to revisit the site, I informed Al McNee, (then) Highland Recorder, about my observations. On 3 July, Al and Dave Tanner visited the site. Following my directions they eventually located two foraging birds and watched one with a beak full of insects disappear into a small ornamental bush in a well manicured part of the lodge garden. The begging calls of the young confirmed the presence of an active nest.

In mid-May 2009, easterly winds had resulted in a small influx of Icterine Warblers into the highlands. Two other singing birds were reported within 25 km of the breeding site and there were at least four other reports at other sites in Highland, including one in Strathspey, where another bird was observed carrying food (see below).

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Icterine Warblers breeding in Strathspey in 2009

On 10 June 2009, I was leading a group in an area of Strathspey in search of dragonflies. The habitat is an open area of birch *Betula* scrub with a mosaic of small lochs and pools surrounded by Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* forest. Near one of the pools, our attention was drawn to a very loud, harsh repeated chattering alarm call, which I did not immediately recognise. We soon located the bird sitting on top of a birch about 200 m away. I could see the outline of what appeared to be a large warbler, with a noticeably long and square-ended tail. Being familiar with Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* on their breeding grounds in Eastern Europe, this species immediately sprang to mind. In the telescope, the rather long, square-ended tail and flat, sloping forehead with long pointed bill fitted that of a *Hippolais* warbler, with dark grey/green upperparts and some pale yellow on

the underside. Although in the very bright sunlight it was difficult to confirm a wing panel, the call and features observed were convincing enough for its identification. Through the telescope it could clearly be seen to be carrying a caterpillar in its bill. A second bird seemed to be responding to its call from the undergrowth nearby. It remained in the tree for some minutes before flying into some scrub and could not be relocated again despite searching. I suspect it may have been feeding fledged young rather than at a nest. The birds were searched for again the next day but without success.

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Mark Holling, Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel has commented: "According to records held by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, documented in Forrester et al. (2007), the two confirmed breeding attempts in 2009 constitute the fourth and fifth records for both Scotland and the UK. Previously, there had been just three records of confirmed breeding of Icterine Warbler in the UK, all in Scotland: in 1992 (Creag Meagaidh NNR, Highland, fledged young seen 29 July), 1998 (near Newtonmore, Highland, female trapped with brood patch) and 2002 (Orkney, at least four young fledged in July from a nest found in June)."

OBITUARY

Michael James Thomas, 1933-2010

Michael Thomas was born in 1933 in Birmingham. He did his National Service as an officer in the Royal West African Frontier Force in Nigeria in 1952-53, and then read economics at University College London. He won a Fulbright scholarship to study in the United States and received his Masters of Business Administration from the University of Indiana in 1956. He began his academic career at Syracuse University in New York, before returning to England to Lancaster University where he championed the new discipline of marketing management. In 1987 he moved to Glasgow to the Chair in Marketing at Strathclyde University. He authored or contributed to more than 30 books on marketing, was a consultant to numerous organizations in the U.K. and abroad, including the United Nations Development Programme and

held visiting professorships at universities in Finland, Malta, the United States, Poland and England. In 1999, he was awarded the OBE by the Queen for his services to Poland.

Professor Thomas was an avid birdwatcher. He wrote four books on birds including an introduction to the birds of Bute and authored a study on the marketing of John James Audubon's seminal *Birds of America*.

He was a member of the SOC and the Argyll Bird Club and a popular lecturer who visited five continents to follow his passion for birds. He had a worldwide network of friends and associates in ornithological societies. He was also a regular contributor to *Scottish Bird News*.

He died aged 76 on 30 January 2010 at his home in Rothesay, Isle of Bute, after a brief illness.

Helen Thomas



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Wind farms and Golden Eagles, the Argyll experience – an update

Plate 101. *Beinn Ghlas wind farm* © Andy Robinson.

In June 2007, *Scottish Bird News* published my article on wind farms and Golden Eagles in Argyll, in which I gave details of two eagle territories where wind farms had been constructed in recent years.

I pointed out that at Beinn an Tuirc in Kintyre, in spite of a fortune having been spent on habitat modifications intended to mitigate any adverse effects, the breeding productivity of the eagles had been zero since the wind farm had become operational. In the case of Beinn Ghlas near Taynuilt, not only was productivity zero, but the territory no longer contained a resident pair of birds. I suggested that taken together the experience at Beinn an Tuirc and Beinn Ghlas ought to suggest that wind farms and eagles did not go well together and extreme caution should be exercised when considering any further proposals for wind power developments in eagle country.

Some three years later it might be of interest to consider if there has been any change in the situation at these two locations. At Beinn an Tuirc after a new male had joined the resident

female, there was a successful nesting in 2008 and two chicks were fledged. The survival of two chicks has never been recorded there before and, if this sort of productivity could be repeated, would suggest that all the expensive habitat management might be bearing fruit. The supplementary feeding provided for the eagles throughout the winter might well have helped. Unfortunately, in common with some other eagles in Argyll in 2009, no eggs were laid, and this was the case in 2006 and 2007. The full productivity of this and five control territories in earlier years was shown in the table included in my previous article. Both the 2008 chicks were fitted with transmitters to allow satellite tracking.

At Beinn Ghlas there has been no improvement and all observers are agreed that certainly for the eight years since 2002 there has been no resident pair of eagles, although birds from the neighbouring home ranges do make occasional visits. For some reason there is reluctance by many people to accept that the abandonment of this eagle territory has anything to do with the presence of the wind turbines. When the Beinn Ghlas wind power project was given planning

approval by Argyll and Bute Council, it was a condition of the consent that the eagles and the effect of the mitigation measures should be monitored and an annual report prepared. The power company employs consultants to do this. These reports are submitted to the Council, and copied to SNH and RSPB, but are considered as confidential and not readily made available for public inspection.

In November 2008, a public inquiry was held at Inveraray into another wind farm proposed at Stacain, very close to one of the most productive eagle sites in Argyll. I offered to give evidence at this inquiry and because I intended to base my objection largely on the fact that eagles had abandoned Beinn Ghlas, I tried to obtain a copy of a summary report that I knew had been prepared. In fact, I had provided data for five control ranges. Unfortunately, my request to the lead author and the power company that had commissioned the report met with a negative response. It was not really a surprise during the course of the inquiry to find that the applicant's consultant was quoting selective items from this very report. Presumably, this was a case of one wind power company helping another.

Some considerable time later in the Council offices, I was allowed to read the annual Beinn Ghlas reports, but not take photo copies. Eventually, I was even given a copy of the summary report for the years 2000 to 2007.

Somewhat to my surprise, this report did not deal only with the results of the annual monitoring at Beinn Ghlas as compared to the control data supplied by me. It also considered the claim in my *SBN* article of June 2007 that eagles and wind farms do not go well together. By taking Beinn an Tuirc and Beinn Ghlas together, and carrying out a statistical analysis of breeding attempts where eggs were laid, it was claimed that this occurred slightly less often after construction of the wind farms than before, but not significantly so. It was concluded that this did not refute my argument, but neither did it offer any confirmation of it. My response to this would be that productivity measured by the number of chicks fledged is more meaningful than breeding attempts. In addition, by combining the data for the two sites together, the high incidence of egg laying at one obviously compensates for the paucity at the other. It was conceded that the attempt to increase grouse numbers at Beinn Ghlas by removing sheep from a fenced area had not been a success.

To summarise, it appears to me that at Beinn an Tuirc, in spite of the expenditure of much time and money in mitigation measures, there has been only a single successful breeding attempt, compared to better results from five control areas. Beinn Ghlas has been completely abandoned by resident eagles, whereas in five adjacent control areas the birds have maintained occupancy and average breeding success. I see no reason to alter the views I expressed in my previous article, namely that extreme caution should be exercised when considering further proposals for wind power development in eagle country, and for the moment, there is no evidence to suggest that habitat management and supplementary feeding are effective in mitigating adverse effects.

I have prepared my own much more detailed report on the Beinn Ghlas eagles, and I would be happy to send an electronic copy to anyone interested.

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Plate 102. Beinn an Tuirc wind farm © Andy Robinson.

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Ayrshire:** Mr & Mrs J. Montgomerie, Mr A. Smith, **Borders:** Mr T. Brewis, **Central Scotland:** Ms C. Convery, Ms C. Kelt, Mr J. McHugh, **Clyde:** Mr & Mrs A. Hill, Mr B. Shields, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr & Mrs A. Brannan, Mr R. Maskew, Mr S. Menzie, **Fife:** Ms J. Herrington, Mr W. McBay, **Grampian:** Mrs H. MacBean, **Highland:** Ms J. D. Bell, Mr D. Carter, Mr M. Hamblin, Mr A. Muir, Ms M. Sharpe, **Lothian:** Ms C. Barrett, Mr W. Brodie, Ms B. Cunningham, Mr L. Hawkings, Mr M. Kennedy, Dr K. MacKenzie, Mr G. Mason, Ms S. Millar, Mr O. Moore, Ms L. Moore, Ms D.M. Porterfield, Ms B. Smyth, Ms M. Walbank, Mr & Mrs H. Wright, **Orkney:** Mr B. Hamill, **Tayside:** Dr L. Easton.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **February** 1st £50 J. Melrose, 2nd £30 Mrs E.M. Smith, 3rd £20 H. Robb, 4th £10 Mrs J. McNeil. **March:** 1st £30 I. Balfour-Paul, 2nd £20 Miss Moncur, 3rd £10 Mrs E. Forrester. **April:** 1st £30 M. Nicoll, 2nd £20 J.M. Wills, 3rd £10 Mrs A. Beggs.

The above is our monthly Cash Prize Draw. Now in its 22nd year, the draw was set up as a fundraising initiative to help to pay for functional items required at HQ e.g. furnishings, fittings, equipment etc. Recent purchases have included a sofa and chair for the library, a strimmer for the gardeners, a new office chair and an electric hotplate for functions.

The annual entry fee is £12 payable from June and new participants are always welcome (entrants must be SOC members and aged over 18). To enter, please complete the form included with your March mailing and send it along with your payment (cheque payable to 'SOC 200 Club' or Standing Order instruction) to: Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH. Forms can also be requested from HQ.

Conferences

SOC Annual Conference, 29–31 October 2010, Windlestrae Hotel, Kinross. The programme and booking form are enclosed with this mailing. Places are limited, so please book early to avoid disappointment.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Saturday 19 March 2011, Macdonald Marine Hotel & Spa, North Berwick.

Upcoming Events at Waterston House

Art Exhibitions:

- Robert Greenhalf, Andrew Haslen & David Koster: until 21 July
- Paul Bartlett, D.I.M. Wallace, Lisa Hooper, Derek Robertson & Martin Ridley: 24 July to 8 September
- Chris Lodge, Jenny Matthews, Tommy Daniels, Darren Rees & Barry Van Dusen (tbc): 11 September to 3 November.
- Michael Warren: 6 November to January 2011.

Autumn Goose Watch: Thursday 14th & Tuesday 19 October, 4.30pm. Illustrated talk followed by watching geese come in to roost on Aberlady Bay nature reserve. Advance booking essential.

Optics Demo Day: Sunday 17 October 10 am to 4 pm.

Annual SOC Book Fair: Saturday 31 July and Sunday 1 August 10 am to 4 pm.

Branch updates

Up-to-date contact details for SOC branch secretaries and local recorders can be found on the inside back cover of this issue.

The date for the Fife Branch outing to Outhead and St. Andrews Bay has been changed to Sunday 12 September to avoid clashing with the Leuchars airshow.

Central Branch Secretary: Roger Gooch has a new email address roger@dollar11.plus.com

SOC Research Grants 2010/11

The following projects have been awarded a grant from the SOC Endowment Fund:

- Pit tag Merlins in Angus (£500)
- Monitoring wader numbers and ecology of Sanderling on the Sanday, Orkney (£300)
- Ring Ouzel breeding ecology in Glen Clunie, Aberdeenshire (£400)
- Breeding ecology and diet of Great and Arctic Skuas on Handa Island (£750)
- Digital nest camera - Kestrel feeding rate/prey choice (£350)

The Research & Surveys Committee wishes to thank Phill Hollard for his kind donation of £22 towards the SOC Endowment Fund.

Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland

On 6–7 February 2010 around 50 of ‘the cream of bird survey co-ordinators’ from all over Scotland, from Shetland to the Borders and from the Western Isles to Aberdeenshire, met at the University of Stirling to celebrate the completion of the Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland (BBMS) programme which has run since 2007.

On the Saturday morning, local recorders, regional reps, Bird Atlas and other survey voluntary organisers heard about how Scottish bird records are used by both government and non-government bodies to assist conservation. In his update, Bob Swann reported excellent progress being made with the Bird Atlas, but that some observers would need to be encouraged to get out and complete the tetrads to which they had committed themselves.

Later delegates heard about the 19 training events which had been held as part of the BBMS programme, encouraging at least 40 volunteers to take up new bird recording activities. BBMS has been organised by BTO Scotland and the SOC with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Gillman Trusts and BTO. A workshop session followed which sought to consolidate the lessons learnt from BBMS and at which we discussed how to work together to increase bird recording and to bring on and develop new recorders for the future.

On the Sunday morning parallel sessions were held. BTO Regional Reps and organisers had the chance to get together with the BTO Director, Head of Membership and Volunteer Engagement and other staff involved in organising surveys and supporting volunteers, to hear about recent BTO developments in this area and discuss ideas and any concerns face-to-face. There was a detailed presentation, with question and answer session, on the Atlas, with tips for local organisers to help them complete the project successfully in their area. Downstairs the SOC Recorders held their annual meeting which looked in detail at the developing enhancements to BirdTrack (including validation processes for these records), heard about the new North-east Scotland Bird Atlas, digitising the local and Scottish Bird Reports and had an update from the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP).

All-in-all a useful and very enjoyable time was had by all. Those of us who have been involved in organising the BBMS programme (from BTO and SOC) would like to thank everyone who has taken part. So many people have given so freely of their time, energy and depth of experience to contribute so effectively to training events and offer ideas to assist the project as a whole, and we are very grateful!

David Jardine and Chris Wernham

SRSR Award

At the Scottish Raptor Study Group's Annual Conference held on 28 February 2010 at Battleby, the Donald and Jeff Watson Memorial Award for outstanding services to raptor work in Scotland was made to Gordon Riddle ('Mr Kestrel') for nearly 40 years of dedicated research into Kestrels in the south of Scotland. Gordon was a popular choice and he is currently updating his publication 'Seasons with the Kestrel'. Many congratulations from us all.

Raptor Report 2007 on line

The 2007 Scottish Raptor Report can be viewed or downloaded as a pdf from the Scottish Raptor Group web site www.scottishraptor-groups.org in the Scottish Raptor Monitoring

scheme section. It is intended to produce a new style report with trends as well as annual data and this has led to delays. In order to catch up, several years' data will be combined in one hard copy publication and members will be kept up to date with progress on this.

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MacGillivray's grave desecrated

The Edinburgh grave of one of Scotland's greatest naturalists, William MacGillivray, has been vandalised. Dr Alan Knox visited the grave in April and found the grave stone damaged and the valuable bronze plaque missing.

Former conservator for the College of Surgeons in Edinburgh and University of Aberdeen professor William MacGillivray (1796–1852) was buried in an unmarked plot in the New Calton Burial Ground, which lies just below our former HQ in Regent Terrace. In 1900, a memorial was raised by former students and admirers and a bronze plaque based on a painting of a Golden Eagle by MacGillivray was inserted into a nine foot tall pink Peterhead granite stone.



Plate 103. *The 32 cm by 30 cm bronze plaque above MacGillivray's grave as photographed 10 years ago*
© University of Aberdeen.

Anyone with any relevant information is asked to contact Lothian and Borders Police on 0131 311 3131, or the University of Aberdeen's Museums on 01224 274301 or museums@abdn.ac.uk.

Waterston Library - additional material

(formerly stored in RT (Regent Terrace) Top Shelf boxes)

The Waterston Library, when located at Regent Terrace, held numerous boxes of material that were unsuitable for storage on the bookshelves. These boxes included offprints of papers, reports, letters, booklets, leaflets and press cuttings. This material had been augmented over the years by various librarians, although 80% date from between 1950 and 1990. There are over 2000 individual items.

When re-located to Waterston House, it was decided to sift through this material, dispose of unwanted items and catalogue the remainder. This would provide future researchers with a searchable electronic catalogue, although some of the material is of marginal interest due to the dated subject matter.

Many of the offprints were from journals already held by the library and these have been discarded/sold. Of the reports, some are suitable for shelving, but others were considered too small/flimsy. Other material, such as hand-written or typed letters and local bird lists, was considered to be more suitable for the archives and will be dealt with separately. During the sifting, many fascinating items were found, including George Waterston's wartime bird notes from Crete, complete with a Stalag Luft stamp from his time in a German PoW camp!

The remainder has been re-housed in larger boxes, labelled and numbered, and is now shelved on a library stack. Three broad sections are included - biology and other ornithological topics, species and geographical areas. Further revision will take place, but the material can now be accessed by arrangement. There is a searchable catalogue on the Library computer. It is expected that further items will be added/removed as and when necessary.

Norman Elkins

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 20 March 2010



Plate 104. *The auditorium at Inverness* © David Palmar.

This year's Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference was held in Culloiden Academy, Inverness, where the SOC/BTO Spring conference was hosted by the SOC's Highland Branch. This proved an excellent venue with its purpose-built lecture room adjoining a large octagonal atrium where coffee and lunch were served; there was also plenty of room for the stalls from BTO, SOC, SWT, RSPB, Highland Biological Recording Group and Highland Butterfly Group.

Delegates to the conference were welcomed by Chris Wernham, Head of BTO Scotland.

Marooned with the birds - Dr Matt Low

This was an account of two contrasting studies (one about recovery, the other about protection) with which Dr Low had been involved. In New Zealand he had worked on the Kakapo Recovery Project, using an army of volunteers. As with many of the country's flightless birds, the Kakapo (a large nocturnal parrot) had suffered severely from predation by mammals introduced from Europe. In 1997, 150 were found on Stewart Island, but unfortunately cats found them too and by 1997 the population was down to 56 with no chicks - the small Pacific Rat was eating the young. The

Kakapo team went into action, tagging the birds and monitoring the nests, with the failing chicks taken into care and hand-reared. By 2009, the numbers had gone up to 123 and there is hope for the survival of the species on islands, if not on mainland New Zealand.

Next Matt took us to Bechervaise Island in the Australian Antarctic region where Adelie Penguins have been studied for 17 years. The birds nest on rocky islands where studies of the length of their foraging trips, giving an indication of the availability of food, can be used to inform and influence fishery policy in the area. We were shown distressing photographs of a colony



Plate 105. *Will Miles and Matt Low* © David Palmar.

devastated by lack of food due to pack ice delaying them reaching the sea, but were also amused by the video of a young male ineffectually trying to build a nest to attract a mate.

Living with birds on St Kilda - Will Miles

Then to St Kilda, where Will Miles of Glasgow University has spent three years studying the interaction between the Great Skua and Leach's Storm Petrel. The Bonxie population, which had increased, was causing concern over the petrel colony as this was very susceptible to predation. Will aptly described the atmosphere of visiting the Carn Mor colony at night, and commented on the petrels' reactions to the presence of a large, albeit stuffed, Bonxie in their nesting area! A more recent decrease in skua population will hopefully take the pressure off the colony. Will reviewed some Hirta local species especially the St Kilda Wren and finished with some shots of rare visitors to the islands - Wood Warbler, Bluethroat, Buff-bellied Pipit and Snowy Owl.

Ann Sime

Bird ringing from a Highland perspective - Simon Foster

A member of the Highland Ringing Group, Simon gave an update of some of the current local bird ringing projects, covering mainly seabirds, ducks, geese and waders. About 30,000 birds of over 150 species are ringed annually in this area using a variety of methods of capture, but the actual ringing is only part of it. Data has to be collated and analysed and results extrapolated including studies of food and breeding success.



Plate 106. Simon Foster © David Palmar.

Seabird studies on Canna have involved the ringing of over 100,000 Guillemots and the study of chick diets. A decline in Kittiwake numbers appears to be due to poor supply of Lesser Sandeels, and a study on Shags has shown a steady decrease in numbers since the 1990s, due mainly to rats, but an eradication programme means there is hope for recovery. Decanted food from Puffins has shown that the sandeels caught are very small. Round the Moray Firth, Teal and Wigeon are ringed, and studies of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese at Loch Eye involve fitting visible neck collars. Information from sightings can then determine migration routes and breeding areas.

Recoveries from ringed waders have shown that Dunlin migration involves different staging areas in the Baltic, and that 90% of our local Redshanks are Icelandic. DNA is used to determine the sex of waders and has shown an imbalance amongst Ringed Plovers.

The origins of Purple Sandpipers is another current study - the short-billed birds comes from Svalbard and Iceland, but the origin of the long-billed birds remain a mystery. Over 1000 of these were leg-flagged, but so far this has provided no results. Now geo-locators will be fitted in the hope of finding more information.

It is hoped in the future to add other projects such as fitting satellite transmitters to Wigeon, and studying the increasing numbers of wintering Brent Geese and Black-tailed Godwits in the firth.

Birds living with birds - David Jardine

David's talk concentrated on studies done to determine direct and indirect interaction of eagles, Buzzards, Ravens, Choughs, Kestrels and Grey Herons on Colonsay, a small island, 10 miles by 3, which is advantageous for long-term study. It has many habitats - typical upland, wet and dry heath, pastoral farmland with a little remnant arable, native oak and birch woodland plus 20th century spruce plantations. There are also six lochs, many lochans and plenty streams though no rivers. The shorelines can be muddy, sandy or rocky, sheltered or exposed. The field methods used were estimation of the population of these species, assessment of the prey remains in the nest and the measuring of chicks.

There are about 20 pairs of Grey Heron, mainly a coastal population using unusual nest sites such as an old wall or reed beds. Studies show fairly long-term stability for this species but the low productivity is typical of its coastal location. Golden Eagles are now breeding successfully but there was evidence of direct interaction when the skull of a young bird was found to have a large hole in it, almost definitely caused by another eagle.

Competition for food and nest sites is also an issue. The population of Ravens is increasing. They nest early on cliffs, and although they feed on Rabbits and carrion, are also known to predate the nests of other birds. Cough are declining slightly probably because of poor first-year survival and the decline of good feeding areas due to the reduction of sheep farming. Buzzards have lost their original nest sites to Ravens and eagles and compete for similar food supplies. Their chicks are hatching earlier but whether this is due to climate change, a change in the Rabbit population or a release from density dependence because of eagles and Ravens can only be surmised.



Plate 107. David Jardine with Paul Haworth © David Palmer.

These studies will continue in the future and it has been interesting to note that three pairs of Hen Harriers are now breeding and Kestrels have revived in the last five years.

Lynda Graham

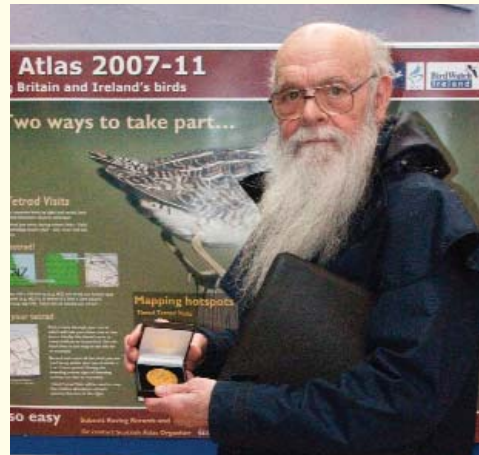


Plate 108. Ray Collier with his medal © David Palmer.

Dilys Breeze Award

Before lunch, Graham Appleton, BTO Director of Communications, presented the Dilys Breeze medal to Ray Collier. This medal was established from a bequest from Dilys Breeze to reward excellence in communicating the work of the BTO to a wider audience. Ray Collier, a ringer for many years, moved to the Highlands with the Nature Conservancy and played a leading role in the management of National Nature Reserves, receiving the regional award for his regular contributions to the highland press, including the local *Inverness Courier*, as well the national press (*The Guardian*).

Understanding the importance of Scotland's garden birds - Mike Toms

Mike began by stressing that gardens have often been considered as managed habitats and therefore unimportant for birds, but most habitats in this country are also managed. Evidence from BTO surveys has now shown that gardens are vital. Not only do they provide food and nest site resources both natural and artificial, gardens are an important component of urban habitat, e.g. two-thirds of House Sparrows and one-third of Greenfinches are found in urban areas. Supplementary feeding throughout the year has great survival value during winter but can also advance the breeding season by improving body condition. Surveys of private green spaces engage householders and enhance citizen science. The BTO Garden BirdWatch (GBW) scheme is funded by the 15,000 participants, of whom 1,000 live in

Scotland. 69 million records are submitted yearly, both on paper forms and online, the latter enabling almost real-time output. Supported by a quarterly magazine and books on garden birdwatching, both of which answer FAQs; participants also record other taxa, such as mammals and butterflies. Mike described how GBW has shown that disease has led to reductions in Greenfinches, and that House Sparrow declines in England have not been mirrored in Scotland. Such regional and other differences throw more light on the causes of population changes and GBW complements other national BTO survey results.



Plate 109. Mike Toms © David Palmar.

Birds and butterflies: who's in your neighbourhood? - Liz Humphreys

Liz followed Mike with a similar theme, highlighting the wide diversity of habitat in Scotland where people tend to be drawn to remote areas. However, 80% of the population live in towns, where public green spaces are often not only poorly managed and under-used but also perceived as being unsafe and littered - both costly to local authorities. Local people are often keen to encounter nature but have limited knowledge. The BIG (Biodiversity in Glasgow) project was conceived to improve management and raise awareness of urban green spaces. Summer surveys of birds and butterflies in Glasgow's green spaces were undertaken in 2007–08 by 102 volunteers who received initial training in identification and methodology. Liz presented some surprising



Plate 110. Liz Humphreys © David Palmar.

results: for example, 91 bird species were recorded during the project, 15 of these being UK LBAP species. The most ubiquitous bird was the Magpie, found on 98% of the sites surveyed while the Small White was the commonest of 17 butterfly species. Species richness was found to be closely related to site area, especially where water bodies, wetland, marsh and wild areas with rank grass were present, the latter important for butterflies if flower-rich. The project was able to inform local authorities by producing management recommendations leading to greater use of green spaces, already successful on some sites. Future challenges are many, not least being the increase in high density housing and the loss of gardens to car parking, which also increases the risk of run-off and flooding.

Norman Elkins

Golden Eagles: prey, productivity and land use - Paul Haworth

The Golden Eagle population in Scotland was generally stable at 440 pairs and had shown little change between the 1992 and 2003 national censuses. Paul's presentation focused on the west of Scotland with an analysis of nest site selection and prey remains in some 90 ranges. Up to 2,000 prey items had been identified including Mountain Hares, Rabbits, lambs and rats amongst the mammals and Red Grouse, Fulmars, corvids and Greylag Geese amongst the birds. The wide spectrum of prey remains reflected what was available and high

breeding productivity did not appear to be associated with dietary specialisation. Breeding failure occurred more frequently during incubation or with small young. Of concern, was the proportion of eggs converted to young, which was generally low in the west of Scotland, especially so in the Ardnmurchan/Lochaber/Morvern/Sunart areas. As a general trend, productivity in the west was in slow decline. Paul then considered a number of factors including forestry, declining sheep numbers, competition with White-tailed Eagles and land-use change such as wind farm developments. These were discounted, although weather, through increasing May rainfall seems to be an important factor. Unless there was improved biodiversity to reverse this decline, potentially this might lead to the loss of up to 50 pairs in the west. Conversely, there was potential for an increase of 100 pairs in the east of the country, but persecution on grouse moors was a major constraint.

Restoring large mammals to Scotland - Roy Dennis

Perhaps an unusual subject for a bird conference, but central to Roy's presentation was the premise that the animals which had been lost in Scotland were influential to our ecosystems. Even the ecological value of large herbivores was poorly understood and there was a need to increase cattle for conservation and the creation of niche habitats. We needed to concentrate on old-fashioned nature conservation and think about ecosystems rather than



Plate 111. Roy Dennis © David Palmar.

individual birds. Roy was at his passionate best, and bemoaned the fact that it had taken four years for a decision to be made on the Beaver reintroduction. Turning to Europe there were lots of examples of reintroductions of larger mammals with public and political support. A feasibility study had suggested there could be 600–800 Lynx in Scotland which, contrary to public perception, do not need wild remote areas. Lynx was a Roe Deer predator and would therefore restore the balance of nature. Wolf was increasingly established throughout Europe and would have an important effect of Red Deer populations. There was a similar position with Brown Bear. Roy's contention is that the major constraint against the reintroducing large mammals was social and political, not ecological. In concluding, he made an emotional plea to be bold. In his view the biggest failure "is not that the project we tried failed, but that we never tried."

Bob McMillan



Plate 112. Chris Wernham with Graham Appleton © David Palmar.

Following the raffle, funds from which were being used for the Highland Bird Report, and the results of the quiz, the conference was closed by David Jardine, SOC President. He thanked all the speakers and organisers, and in particular Chris Wernham and Graham Appleton from BTO for their support of the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference. Next year, the Spring Conference will be held in the Marine Hotel, North Berwick.

David Jardine

Patchwork



Plate 113. *The loch in August 2009.* © Norman Elkins

Most of us have a favourite 'patch' which we visit regularly, whether to count, ring or just enjoy our birds. My local patch is a quarry in Fife that I have visited twice monthly since the owners began to participate in the BTO's Birds and Business Challenge. From the start of my counting in 2002, I have recorded 104 species using the site.

Although the site is small, covering about 50 ha, there are a number of different habitats. The largest is the loch itself, an excavated area of roughly 18 ha with a depth of up to 8 m. Vegetated islands and headlands allow a number of wildfowl to breed in relative safety in an undisturbed environment. A strip of mature conifers runs along the southwest periphery and over 9,000 deciduous trees and shrubs have been planted elsewhere. Continued extraction to the east of the loch is creating other ponds, the shores of which are becoming vegetated but with some sandy or shingle banks. While the site is still a working quarry, it remains closed to the general public.

Approximately 44 species breed or have bred within the site boundaries with wildfowl, waders and woodland species predominating. As the largest habitat is freshwater, wildfowl are the best represented and numerous group. Apart from an occasional winter freezing episode (except for 2009/10, when ice up to 18 cm thick persisted for several weeks!), the loch holds considerable numbers of birds for its size. These fluctuate as birds move between adjacent wetlands. One or two pairs of Mute Swans raise broods and Whooper Swans appear occasionally between October and April although rarely in winter. Both Pinkfeet and Greylags overfly, but only the latter occasionally rest on the loch and then mainly in early spring. Up to ten broods of Mallard and Tufted Duck appear each year with varying success but no other ducks have bred. Mallards peak in autumn, the highest number being 300 in September. At least fourteen Tufted Duck broods were hatched in 2007, but totals rarely reach 100 birds, averaging around 60 throughout the year. The other three species recorded

frequently are Wigeon, Teal and Pochard. Wigeon peak at 300 in midwinter while Teal are present mainly from late July to early May, exceeding 250 in autumn and winter. Over 100 Pochard can be present between October and December, but are scarce in summer - the small local breeding population of the 1990s does not now exist but I live in hope! Small numbers of wintering Goldeneye occasionally remain into May or June and up to 5 Goosander occur. Pairs of Shelduck appear in spring, with other scarce species being Gadwall, Shoveler, Mandarin (a female throughout winter 2002/03), Pintail, Scaup and Long-tailed Duck. Two or three pairs of Little Grebes are resident breeders but Great Crested Grebes are recorded only rarely. The only raptor to use the site regularly is Buzzard, which breeds nearby but occasionally on site. Sparrowhawk and Kestrel are irregular visitors, while Peregrine and Osprey have been seen. One or two pairs of Moorhen and Coot breed, but the latter only irregularly. Coots have peaked at 22 and are scarcest in autumn.

The number of waders present on site varies with water levels and, as with wildfowl, some interchange occurs with nearby wetlands. Nevertheless, it is an excellent undisturbed site where six species breed with varying success. Oystercatchers are present annually from mid-

February to late July, peaking in late March with two pairs remaining to breed. Up to two pairs of Little Ringed Plovers and up to four pairs of Ringed Plovers breed in most years. Lapwings flock all year round, especially in autumn although only one or two pairs breed. The largest flock has been 360. Up to two pairs of Common Sandpipers also breed. Non-breeding waders, mostly on passage, include Dunlin, Little Stint, Snipe, Woodcock, Curlew and Greenshank. The final wader species is the Green Sandpiper, which is a regular visitor in every month except May, with up to three birds recorded.

Gulls utilise the loch for resting or bathing. Most regular are Common and Black-headed, both of which peak in early winter and again in early spring, the latter suggesting passage. A colony of the latter was present in 1998 and 1999, but none have bred since. Herring Gulls are the next commonest, and a small spring passage of Lesser Black-backed Gulls occurs. Counts of all these waterbirds are submitted to the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), while any nest histories are followed for the Nest Record Scheme.

Many songbird species are present all year round. Residents confirmed breeding, in order of abundance, are Chaffinch, Robin, Coal Tit, Blackbird, Great Tit, Reed Bunting, Wren, Blue

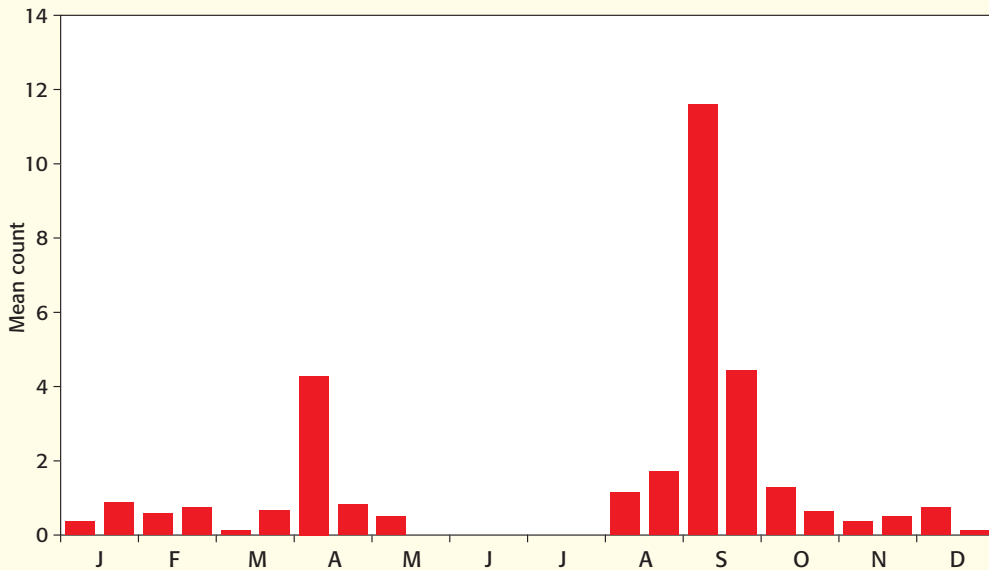


Figure 1. Mean counts of Meadow Pipits in each half-month, 2002–09.



Plate 114. *Comma* and attendant hoverfly. © Norman Elkins

Tit, Skylark, Long-tailed Tit, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Song Thrush, Goldcrest, Dunnock and Pied and Grey Wagtails. Breeding summer visitors include Sedge and Willow Warblers, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Garden Warbler. Chiffchaffs appear in spring and autumn but are not thought to breed, while Spotted Flycatchers rarely visit between June and September. There is a Sand Martin barrel on the main island but up to 50 pairs normally nest in quarried sand banks.

Meadow Pipit passage over Fife has been well-recorded, but peaks on the patch in spring and autumn show that some do stop off (Figure 1). The two winter thrushes, Fieldfare and Redwing, show different usage of the site. The former are mainly seen between mid- October and late December, while small flocks of the latter feed on the berry bushes at any time between mid-October and April. Mistle Thrushes may breed, flocking in autumn. Other species present all year are Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper, Goldfinch, Jay and Carrion Crow. Linnets visit all year round and may breed, but are scarce in winter. Siskins feed on the Alder cones between September and February, peaking at 40, while Lesser Redpolls are extremely uncommon winter visitors.

There is a satisfaction derived from the continuous monitoring over many years. Patterns reveal migration and changes in populations but other taxa are counted, as the site is also excellent for invertebrates. Thirteen species of butterflies have been recorded, ten of these annually. The most abundant species are the Small and Green-veined Whites, Meadow Brown and Ringlet. The Orange Tip is now seen annually after being first noted in 2004 and I recorded my first Commas in 2009, fresh enough to suggest breeding locally. Two species of damselfly (Common Blue and Blue-tailed) and one dragonfly, the Common Darter, breed in large numbers. With Red Squirrels on the site and Otters occasionally recorded in the loch, my patch is a fascinating one.

The value of regular visits to a favourite site cannot be over-estimated, but only if your records reach the appropriate authority. BirdTrack is an ideal online recording project (www.birdtrack.net) where you can enter lists or individual records and access them at any time. All BirdTrack records automatically go into the Atlas database. If you don't have access to the internet, your lists will be welcomed by the county bird recorders.

Norman Elkins

NOTES AND COMMENT



Plate 115. Nest site at Balgavies Loch © Bob McCurley.

Osprey eyrie taken over by Greylag Geese

In 2009, at the SWT Reserve Balgavies Loch near Forfar, Angus, a pair of immature Ospreys went through the motions and built an eyrie on the top of a Scots Pine on a small island known locally as 'Cormorant Island 2' where Cormorants roost daily. The pair obviously intended returning this year and on 27 March 2010 they did come back to find their eyrie occupied by a pair of the local feral flock of Greylag Geese. The Osprey proceeded to dive-bomb the Greylags in an attempt to remove the intruders, but all to no avail. At one point the Osprey were helped by a local Carrion Crow in the dive-bombing exercise, but the Greylags did not budge and showed their displeasure at this

attack. By good luck, Clair Trethowan, a lady visiting the reserve, observed from the hide (Grid Ref. NO529509) and photographed the whole intriguing incident. Greylags have been known to nest in trees in the UK and on the continent, but is this the first record of a Greylag taking over an Osprey's eyrie?

At the time of writing (late April), after a quiet period, the Greylag is still sitting on eggs in the eyrie nest and has lately been again dive-bombed by the Osprey. It followed this particular attack by circling the pine and then



Plate 117. *The latest attacker resting* © Bob McCurley.



Plate 116. Osprey attacking the Greylag nest © Clair Trethowan.

settling on this other tree just below the nest. We will watch with interest the final outcome of this interesting series of events.

Bob McCurley, Tayside SOC Branch

A note from Bob Jaffray, local authority and WeBS counter, gives some history of Greylags in the area: "Currently the total national flock of feral Greylags, which extends as far south as Norfolk, numbers some 25,000. Apparently the initial 'placements' of these Greylags (hatched from eggs taken from the north-west of Scotland where a limited flock was still to be found in the 1930s) were in areas to suit particular sporting needs, but they gravitated to local wetland areas such as the Forfar/Balgavies fault line where the local flock appears to number some 170–190 birds. Breeding at Balgavies Loch is limited to some two or three pairs each year, although at Rescobie Loch nearby there can be as many as 55 goslings in a season."

Grant Balfour has drawn our attention to British Birds July 2006 which contains a note of a Greylag nesting 20 m high at the top of a pine tree in Kent.

Jeremy Greenwood also adds to the picture with a mention of British Birds July 1988 where we read of the nesting of a Canada Goose in a tree hollow. However, there is also a comment in it from Dr. M.A. Ogilvie that in the USA "There is a report of a [Canada Goose] nest 30 m up in the old nest of an Osprey".

Hunting wild birds with birds of prey

At a recent Clyde SOC meeting, there was a lot of discussion after Ian Thomson's talk to the group on wildlife crime. It centered mainly on various reports of hunting with falcons (flying them at wild birds) and points were raised about the licensing of this. Members were expressing concern that, as falconry is obviously increasing in popularity through displays etc and many people are starting to buy and fly their own birds, nationally threatened species, such as Skylark and Grey Partridge for example, are being regularly targeted and therefore may be declining even faster.

I suspect that the law on these matters may be under review, but have noted down a few relevant statements found on the internet:

Naturenet - wild birds and the law

www.naturenet.net/law/birds.html

Mostly from The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Part 1: "Falconers can obtain a quarry licence to take wild birds with birds of prey, for example taking a Skylark with a Merlin."

Falconry and the Law in the UK

homepage.ntlworld.com/hamidk/falc_law.htm

Selling: "Owls and Birds of Prey that are native to Europe (such as Barn Owls, Kestrels, Peregrines and Goshawks), even if captive-bred, must be registered before they can be sold or used for commercial purposes, such as photography or display to the public. Do not buy a bird without an 'Article 10' certificate issued by the D.O.E. - you could be breaking the law. Non-native birds such as Red-tailed and Harris Hawks are currently exempt."

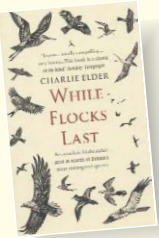
Hunting: "For hunting with birds of prey, the laws are much the same as those for other forms of hunting, e.g. shooting. These include the requirement for licences to hunt wild creatures (other than vermin). A game or quarry licence normally limits the quantity of creatures that may be taken and it also controls the times when they can be hunted. Game Licences can be obtained from main Post Offices."

SOC members may have actually witnessed hunting with falcons in the field and might be able to comment on behaviour observed and which wild birds were being taken. It seems to me, perhaps due to my ignorance of falconry, that a bird of prey flown after a particular bird quarry or vermin, may not be all that particular if another happens to appear and could quite easily be taking Yellowhammers or Corn Buntings etc. Whether for or against this practice, we would be interested in hearing your views on this topic.

Jimmy Maxwell

BOOK REVIEWS

While Flocks Last. Charlie Elder, 2009. Bantam Press, ISBN 978-0593061046, hardback, 288 pages, £14.99. Also published by Corgi Books in paperback, ISBN 978-0552157544, £7.99.



Before he started his quest to see, identify and research the status of all 40 species on the U.K.'s 'Red List' of bird species in serious decline, Charlie Elder, Chief Sub-

Editor of the *Herald* in Plymouth had described himself as a frustrated, armchair bird-watcher.

He gave himself a year and, both to pacify his family and involve them in the venture, decided to start with a return to Egg to see how much things had changed there over a period of 30 years. You will understand now why this book held such a personal fascination for me. First my elder son, who also has two daughters now aged 12 and 14, likewise had to move with his job when the Met. Office moved to Exeter; and relished the change from new-town Bracknell to rural Devon. Secondly, in 1993 I also took a family holiday to return to an island, Foula in Shetland, to assess how that island had changed over the 38 years since I left my job as teacher there in 1955. That visit also led me to write a book, entitled "Inspired by Islands", though in my case more concerned with the changes in a human community than bird numbers, though those are inevitably part of my story.

Not surprising therefore that I feel a strong affinity with the author of "While Flocks Last"; nor perhaps that my perspicacious granddaughter latched onto this book, when she spotted it in a Sidmouth

bookshop, to send to her grandfather when I was in hospital for a hip replacement. It was an inspired choice. I haven't had such a good read for a long time. We all love a good treasure hunt and the twitchers among us will all enjoy the determination with which the author pursues his more difficult subjects and sorts out the tricky identification of Marsh from Aquatic Warblers.

To the older generation who have 'done' most of the bird observatories and know those secret places in Norfolk in autumn or Suffolk in summer where migrants are likely to be found or rare breeding species to lurk, the book is full of nostalgia and happy memories, perhaps of successes, perhaps of near misses, but all conveyed with delightful touches of humour and vivid descriptions of those long waits at dawn, or agonising encounters with midges which make the failures so bitter and the successes so triumphant. I relived endless moments of joy and of frustration over a lifetime of questing after birds throughout U.K. In the process I learned a great deal about the problem Charlie decided to research of why these forty species are now so endangered, because on his journey of discovery we are introduced to exactly the right people, scientists, reserve wardens, civil servants, staff of charities like the RSPB, who have done the fieldwork and know the answers and so prove themselves vital to his particular treasure hunt.

He also gives us intimate insights into the workings of such key organisations as the BTO or field researchers like Ron Summers with his field recordings of Scottish Crossbills, or Will Wagstaff Chairman of the Isles of Scilly Bird Group who failed to find him a Wryneck - for the umpteenth time - but enabled

him to chalk up a brief but clear view of a Balearic Shearwater. This treasure hunt is enormous fun, gave me new revelations about the way twitchers work through their paggers, but also in simple bird-watching terms, gave me a new understanding of intractable problems like the sub-specific identification of crossbills, or how to find Stone Curlews on Salisbury Plain or Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers in the wooded valleys of Dartmoor.

Charlie Elder is not just an enthusiast and an endearing family man but also has a racy descriptive style of writing which in my case reflected exactly my own reactions to such events as entering a hide full of twitchers on a sea-watch, or missing by seconds the sighting of his most elusive quarry - the disappearing Wryneck. His carbon footprint must be one of the worst in UK with his 300 mile road dashes to Spurn Point or Land's End to achieve his target of the 40 Red Data species in a year. But we forgive him because he gets there and gives us such a thrilling and nostalgic ride in his company. His subject is serious and his treatment of it revealing; but it is decidedly not doom and gloom. Rather it is full of positive action and successful field work, with uplifting tales of the involvement of an army of volunteers working to restore our environment and halt the decline of endangered species. Bird-watchers have a lot to be proud of. And as the reader follows Charlie's progress from diffident beginner to triumphant observer who finally achieves his target, I can see this as the ideal birthday present both for anyone you want to introduce to the lifetime satisfaction of becoming an ornithologist, or to the bird-watcher also on the trail of Stephen Fry's "last chance to see" species before they're gone from the UK for ever.

Christopher Mylne

Peregrine Falcon Populations - Status and Perspectives in the 21st Century. Edited by J. Sielicki & T. Mizera, 2009. Turul, Warsaw & University of Life Sciences, Poznań, ISBN 978-83-920969-6-2, hardback, 800 pages, £105.00.

This book is the biggest collection of papers related to Peregrine studies in Europe. The book is based on papers presented at the 2nd International Peregrine Conference 2007, held on 19–23 September 2007 in Piotrowo near Poznan, Poland. The papers are divided into a number of research themes, including population dynamics across its extensive world range, food and feeding, Peregrines and man, reintroductions, Peregrines in urban landscapes and comparative studies with its close cousin, the Saker Falcon. Many of the papers illustrate how this species is making a welcome recovery since the 1980s, after wide scale environmental poisoning by agricultural chemicals throughout a large part of its range. Its recovery has been so marked in some areas that it is now colonising a number of European cities. I found a number of papers particularly interesting including the diet studies of Peregrines in Bath, England and the PIT tagging programme in southern Scotland and north-east England.

There are a number of papers which review the relationship between falconry and Peregrine conservation, with the suggestion that sustainable falconry can help conserve wild populations. There is also an interesting paper reviewing the history of falcons in stamp collections. The papers on Peregrines and Sakers illustrate how effective conservation

programmes in Hungary have effectively assisted the recovery of the endangered Saker Falcon.

This book is a testament to the dedicated research on Peregrines throughout the world and clearly illustrates how this charismatic bird of prey has captured the interest of many people. It is wide-ranging in its breadth of coverage, however I was surprised to find that Peregrine migration ecology was not fully dealt with. The book also contains a number of photographs which effectively illustrate the nesting biology of the species. This book certainly provides an important addition to the scientific body of work on Peregrines and will be an important reference for many years to come.

Mike Thornton

Birds in Counties. Second Supplement. David K. Ballance, 2009. Published by the author, Minehead, Somerset, 100 copies, signed and numbered, ISBN 978-0955278754, soft back, 182 pages, £20.00 (see below for availability).



Birds in Counties was first published in 1999 followed by the *First Supplement* in 2002. They are ornithological bibliographies for the counties within England, Wales, Scotland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. This *Second Supplement* adds further corrections and updates to the end of 2008 and for the first time extends coverage to the counties of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Bibliographies by their very nature tend to be dry subjects to read page

after page, but are essential reference works for researchers and collectors seeking out information, in this instance, on local ornithology. This is very much a labour of love for the author who has travelled to all the major British libraries holding ornithological collections, including our own Waterston Library. In addition, in order to make the work as complete as possible, he has consulted with a network of people who have specialist knowledge of their county or region.

Copies of this *Supplement* can be obtained for £20.00, including U.K. P&P from the author at Flat Two, Dunboyne, Bratton Lane, Minehead, Somerset TA24 8SQ. Copies of the original work, and the *First Supplement*, can still be obtained from Isabelline Books, 6 Bellevue, Enys, Penryn, Cornwall TR10 9LB. For current prices, phone 01326 373602 or Email mikann@beakbook.demon.co.uk

David Clugston

Otters. An Artist's Sketchbook. Derek Robertson, 2009. Woodlands Studios, Aberdeen, ISBN 978-0953932412, paperback, 48 pages, £14.60.

This is a beautifully illustrated study of Otters in Scotland in their natural habitat which also includes some sketches of other wildlife, particularly birds. Derek Robertson is a renowned Scottish wildlife and landscape artist as well as an enthusiastic, amateur scientific researcher and bird ringer. His observational skills bring us a study of the one of Britain's most elusive but well-loved mammals at close quarters, viewed for hours at a time over four seasons; on land, in the water and even in the air!



There are many full colour, double pages of paintings interspersed with vivid field notes and observations of the Otter at close quarters. The text is broken up with a collection of smaller black and white drawings and describes some remarkable wildlife encounters with these delightful creatures. Otters are swift hunters of frogs, fish, eels and even on occasion of birds such as Teal!

It is not just a whimsical, pretty field diary but a serious, perceptive study of over 20 years. The Otter's behaviour, feeding and hunting skills, playing and resting, its adaptation to the environment and life cycle are all drawn and described with every attention to detail. There is plenty of advice for the otter watcher on how to view these lovely creatures in the wild on coastal sites, lochs, ponds even climbing trees; however, the viewer would be wise to be well-equipped with warm clothes and infinite patience.

This is a book which would appeal to anyone who has an interest in wildlife and would understand the amount of time which has gone into observing any animal in its natural habitat.

Karen Bidgood

Raptors: a field guide for surveys and monitoring - with CD-ROM of raptor calls. Second edition. Jon Hardey, Humphrey Crick, Chris Wernham, Helen Riley, Brian Etheridge and Des Thompson, 2009. TSO (The Stationery Office). ISBN 9780114973452, softback, 370 pages, £19.00.

The first edition of this book, published in 2006, was a ground-breaking piece of work. It was very well received, by both raptor workers and the general ornithological community. It represented a valuable

standardisation of best practice in survey methods, written by professional and amateur experts, many of whom have studied these species for decades.



This edition provides an updated version, taking on board comments from fieldworkers and reviewers of the first edition. It includes a new section, featuring colour photographs of raptor feathers to assist in their identification and it also comes with a CD of raptor calls.

It is primarily aimed at people who watch, survey and monitor raptors and it provides detailed descriptions of survey methods for all species that occur regularly in Britain and Ireland. The changes made in the short period since the publication of the first edition, as well as the introduction of the new photographic section and the CD, will ensure that this guide will remain the 'bible' for all those engaged in studies of our birds of prey, and a valuable source of information to anyone with an interest in some of our most iconic species. The updates made in the three intervening years are surely testament to the authors' commitment to the study and conservation of these birds.

In the preface, the writers urge you "to watch birds of prey and enjoy the experience". This guide will surely assist any reader to do just that.

Ian Thomson

Where to Watch Birds in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Don Taylor, Jeffery Wheatley and Paul James, 2009 (5th edition). Christopher Helm. ISBN 978-1-4081-05856, paperback, 432 pages, £18.99.

This series will be familiar to most, and this is the fifth edition of this particular title. It contains 432 pages, making it over 50% larger than the first (published in 1987). There is a short introductory section covering: access for those with disabilities, websites, bird clubs, geography, climate, general features of the region's birdlife and how to use the book. The main section covers 68 sites in Kent, 43 in Surrey and 48 in Sussex, and absolutely all those I knew from growing up in the region, and many more, are included.

The format now has sites organised into 'clusters' each with an overview map, and then each featured site has its own more detailed map which shows nearest towns/villages, roads and railway lines, tracks and paths together with basic habitat details and services in the area. Each entry follows the same order: habitat, species and timing, access and calendar, with the level of detail, information and advice contained comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate but concise. All this is interspersed by 47 line drawings, only eight of which also appeared in the first edition; many are excellent, but several are poorly reproduced. The very thorough species index runs to nearly eight pages, with each entry keyed to relevant sites, and covers every species seen in the region except House Sparrow and a handful of extreme rarities.



For those unfamiliar with the region, or for anyone wishing to explore less-well-known sites, this book supplies everything you need to make your visit successful. Highly recommended.

Stuart L. Rivers

The influx of Quail to East Lothian in 2009

S. WELCH

Producing accurate information on the occurrence and distribution of Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* is a very challenging task, due both to the often ephemeral nature of their behaviour and the many practical uncertainties affecting the efforts of surveyors in recording them. Moreover, as a broad-front migrant, Quail are 'prone to... capricious colonization and desertion or avoidance of certain regions in certain years; apparently frequently fails to occupy much suitable habitat' (Cramp & Simmons 1980). However, one factor works in the favour of surveyors, since Quail require an effective means to find each other in these large areas of suitable habitat and this is provided by the far-carrying and distinctive song of the breeding males, the repeated liquid 'quic-ic-ic' (or 'wet my lips') advertising call. Delivered around the clock following first arrival, this song is particularly easy to detect at night, when there is less interference from the song of other species. Thus, despite their otherwise secretive nature, and the fact that they are very rarely seen by human observers (other

than during farming operations), it is possible to get some sort of an insight into their numbers and distribution through targeted survey effort to record calling birds.

This article is orientated around a series of maps of lowland East Lothian on which estimates of coverage and Quail occupancy are indicated at tetrad level, together with an assumed (cumulative) territory occupancy chart. Though surveying did not follow a standardised methodology, these approximate representations of coverage are considered to be essential information for interpretation of the distribution and territory occupation records.

Background

The initial motivation for this study was the need to gather better data for the new Bird Atlas 2007–11 project, encompassing both the national BTO-led project (Bird Atlas 2007–11) and more particularly the revision of the local tetrad atlas in Lothian and Borders (South-east Scotland Bird Atlas) which is running in parallel. In the original local tetrad

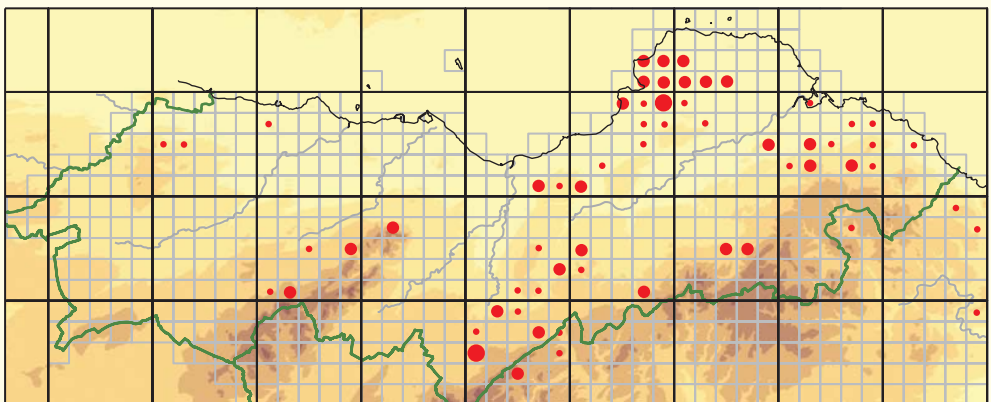


Figure 1. Quail distribution in Lothian, 1988–94 (Murray et al. 1998). Atlas tetrad map shown, with symbols indicate possible (•), probable (●) and confirmed (●●) breeding, according to Bird Atlas 2007–11 definitions. Topography indicated by shading, sea coast in black, rivers in grey and location of the Lothian border in green.

atlas project (1988–94) Quail had been found to be well distributed across Lothian (Figure 1) though it should be noted that the vast majority of these records were obtained in 1989, which was deemed a ‘Quail year’ nationally, and a local record of 74 calling males were reported (Murray *et al.* 1998). However, relatively few records of Quail were gathered in the initial year of the new project, i.e. spring and summer 2008 (Figure 2). It was unclear whether this was simply due to lack of coverage of whether the species really was absent from much of its former range that year. The author therefore decided to visit the areas of former abundance in a more systematic manner in the 2009 breeding season, as described below. In parallel, Abbie Marland was recording territorial occupancy on the traditionally occupied sites in the neighbourhood of her home located about 5 km from the coast, i.e. fairly centrally in the main East Lothian study area, as described in more detail in the sister article (Marland 2010). Sandy Rae also obtained records in the vicinity of his home in Glenkinchie in the upper Tyne valley. Due to the more continuous nature of the monitoring at these sites they are hereafter referred to as the main and Tyne valley ‘constant effort’ sites, respectively. Together, these are the main sources of data used in the study, supplemented by records from a small number of other dedicated atlas fieldworkers, farmland residents and casual records (see Acknowledgements).

Methods

The method adopted did not involve a strict standardisation of effort, though some Quail were recorded during timed tetrad visits (TTVs) for the Bird Atlas, but a more qualitative description of coverage is attempted. Limited coverage, i.e. a least a single visit to a tetrad, typically for a duration of a few minutes, or several shorter stops, is differentiated from more thorough coverage, generally obtained via longer visits and/or cycling/walking through a substantial part of a tetrad (Figures 3–9). In the majority of these cases, those covered by the author, a Quail tape lure was used and this was typically played every 100 m or so along a route. Though these various procedures do not provide a formal control of effort they were deemed appropriate given the many other uncertainties in recording Quail and the need to be pragmatic in achieving reasonable overall coverage.

In generating the maps and chart a number of assumptions were required. Firstly, the breeding category descriptors have been matched to those of the BTO atlas work (Bird Atlas 2007–11), and always taken to be those reflected at the date of reporting, i.e. a singing bird remains a ‘possible breeder’ (small dot) until its territorial presence is confirmed for a period of seven days or more. Repeat visits sometimes failed to re-find birds in the same locations, but this was generally *not* taken to indicate that the birds had departed. There are two exceptions to this rule - coastal birds

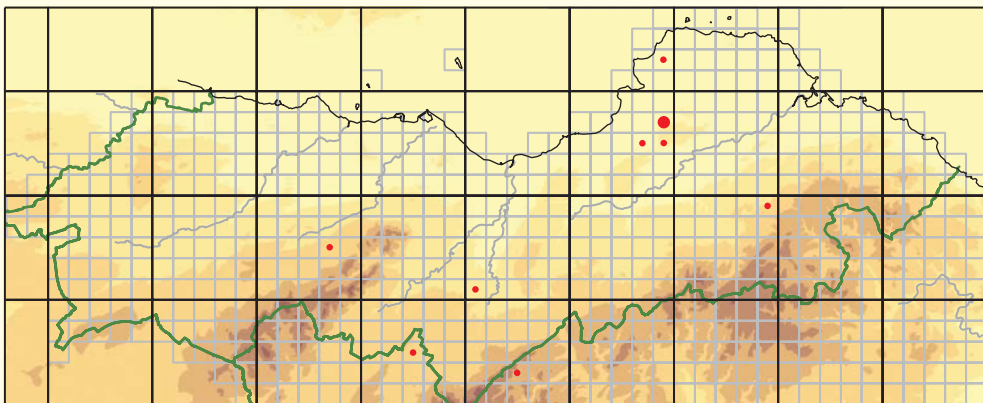


Figure 2. Quail distribution for the period April–July 2008 (South-east Scotland Bird Atlas).

which apparently did disperse, so have not been recorded as permanent territory holders, and records that may represent the temporary clustering of males thought to occur after initial arrival (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Murray *et al.* 1998). Thus, in creating the territory chart (Figure 11), continuing occupation of all other territories has been assumed, though in some cases there was no further evidence to support that. Without this assumption the picture of likely territory occupation becomes very conservative, since it was not possible to continuously revisit all of the areas. However, it is recognised that the cumulative territory information does become

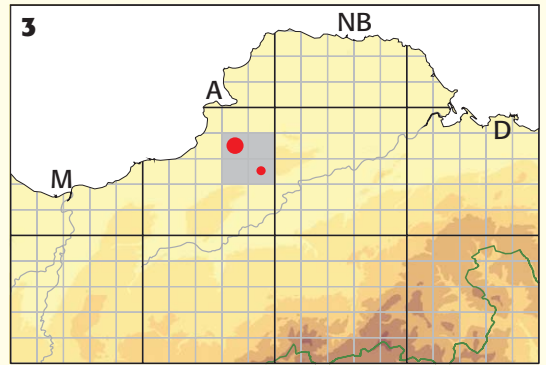


Figure 3. Quail distribution and coverage on 20 May. The first calls were heard at the main constant effort site on 13 May and this first bird moved a short distance and took up residence (Marland 2010). No other coverage had been undertaken at this point. In Figures 3–9, light grey coloured tetrads (■) represent limited coverage and dark grey tetrads (■) indicate more thorough coverage. M = Musselburgh, A = Aberlady, NB = North Berwick and D = Dunbar. See Figure 1 for a key to the red dots.

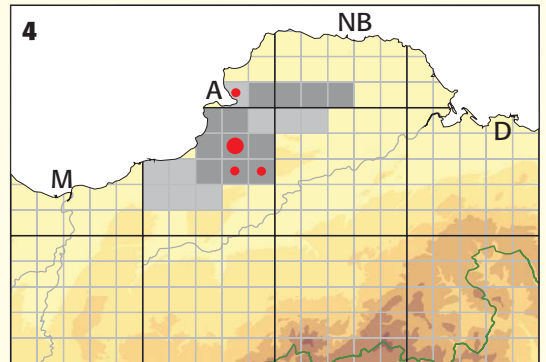


Figure 4. Quail distribution and coverage on 30 May. By the end of May the author had used the tape lure along c. 40 km of roads and tracks in the core region in East Lothian, with most effort on 29–30 May, in the hope of detecting Quail soon after arrival, when their song output should be high. Sufficient coverage was achieved in many tetrads to merit the high coverage category designation, nevertheless, no Quails were heard with the exception of those at the constant effort site, with one new arrival there and a pair having now been seen, and three reported calling in coastal grassland at Aberlady on 30 May.

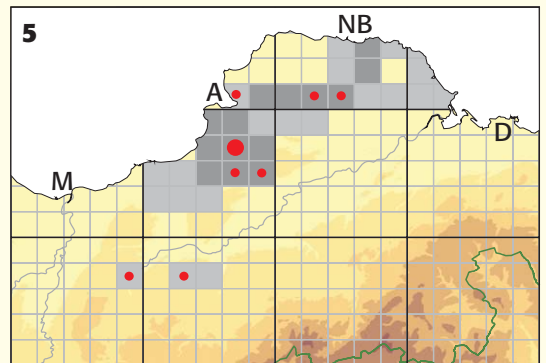


Figure 5. Quail distribution and coverage on 14 June. The first arrival at the Tyne valley constant effort site was noted on 1 June, and a further casual record from a location c. 5 km west of there on 6 June. By mid-June reports of Quail were becoming more widespread in the UK as a whole, for example 23 calling males reported from one locality in South Yorkshire on 14 June. On the same day Quail were now found on revisits to sites covered earlier, these presumably having arrived since 30 May. Numbers of calling males at the main constant effort site increased to two on 2 June, three on 19 June and four on 22 June.

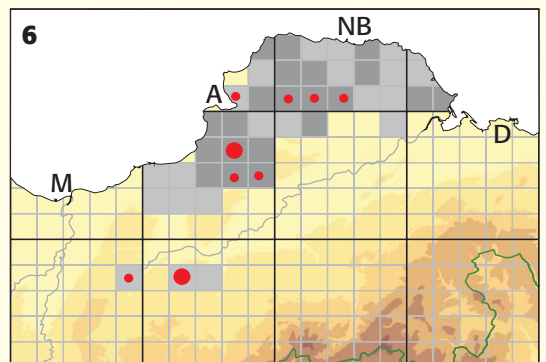


Figure 6. Quail distribution and coverage on 26 June. Towards the end of June new areas were covered further north and east, but with only one new bird found, and that being at a re-surveyed site. Numbers at the main constant effort site increased to 7 on 30 June.

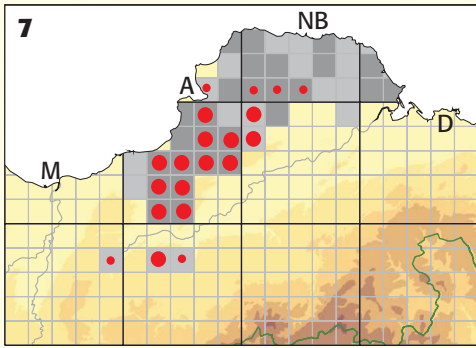


Figure 7. Quail distribution and coverage on 8 July. On 4 July, a survey of areas along the edge of the ridge rising approximately 5 km inland from the coast produced a total of 18 calling males; these included 10 that were new, all at sites having received coverage earlier, and seven still at the main constant effort site.

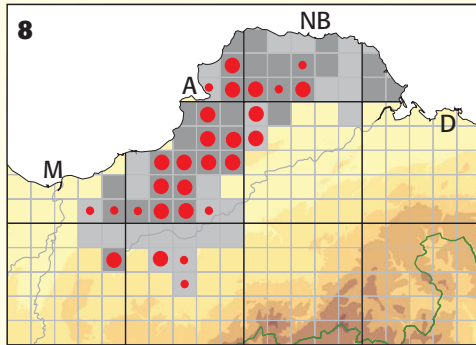


Figure 8. Quail distribution and coverage on 26 July. From mid-July onwards further coverage to the north and west found more new birds - including three in the areas of their historic stronghold nearer the coast (where none had been found in June visits) and three more at another traditional site on the higher ground to the west. Calling birds at the Upper Tyne constant effort site increased to two. However, light coverage elsewhere along the Tyne valley failed to find new birds. Numbers at the main constant effort site increased to nine on 13 July and 11 on 18 July.

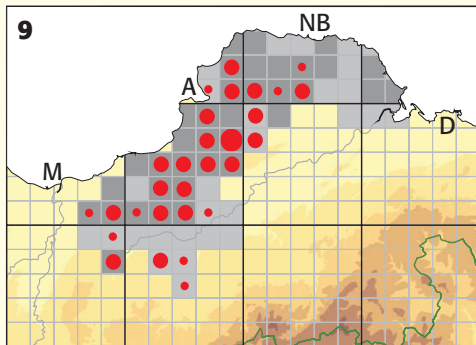


Figure 9. Quail distribution and coverage on 31 August. Limited survey effort was devoted thereafter, but a three new birds were found at the south-west extremity in August. Breeding was confirmed at the main constant effort site with two parties of juveniles seen on 16 and 31 August.

rather more uncertain towards the end of the season, when some birds are moving off territory and failed breeders may be departing, and this should be taken into account.

Chronological summary

Figures 3–9 present a set of distribution maps relevant to the period May to August 2009. The distributions are cumulative. The choice of dates reflects both steps in coverage and also the observations of significant arrivals, this apparently proceeding in a series of phases.

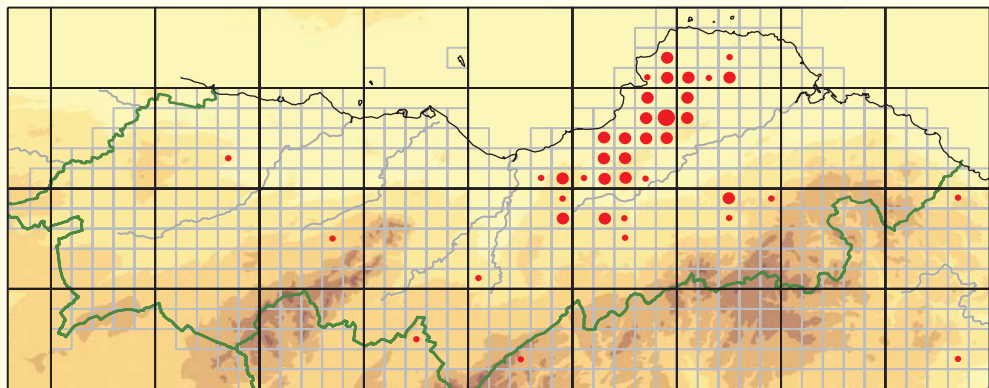


Figure 10. Quail distribution and coverage in Lothian, 2008–09.

Figure 10 presents the final combined distribution map for 2008–09. Outside the main survey area to the south-east, further records had come to light, with anecdotal reports, per combine harvester operator, of Quail 'all over the place'. No attempt has been made to include these in the current analysis, but additional records submitted to the Atlas are shown on the final map. Apart from these, and a single new record for West Lothian, there were no further atlas records submitted in the whole of the Lothian area, though this fact may not be representative of their true status in other areas.

Figure 11 shows the assumed territory occupancy chart (the bands for the main constant effort site are the lowest four, i.e. NT47S/T/X/Y). It requires careful interpretation and must be read in conjunction with the above coverage maps - i.e. the displayed increase in occupied territories reflects both the arrival of Quail and the progressive extension of coverage. Nevertheless phases in arrival are apparent and it seems that the peak arrival period, with the sharpest increase, was in early July.

Very little can be surmised about final departures but hints that this would have been underway in August are provided as follows. A female or

juvenile Quail was collected below a Peregrine site in coastal East Lothian on 3 September, judged to have been dead about a week (George Hogg, pers. comm.) - possibly a departing migrant taken over the sea? Further south, a Quail ringed in June near Matlock in Derbyshire was recovered shot at Aliud, Spain on 18 August.

Discussion

By the end of the season a minimum of 57 calling males had been recorded in 28 tetrads (112 km²), all in East Lothian except for one on the boundary with Midlothian. Of these, seven are assumed to have subsequently dispersed (coastal birds, and post-peak count at main constant effort site) and a number of other birds were also not re-found on repeat visits. By comparison there were 41 males reported from 27 East Lothian 'sites' in the record 'Quail year' of 1989 (Smith & McGarry 1990). There was no evidence that numbers were enhanced by use of the tape lure, with only a single response elicited during the whole season. Nevertheless, the new figures will be an underestimate of the true totals. As ever, the new figures will be an underestimate of the true totals, but the documentation of coverage assists in the interpretation of the

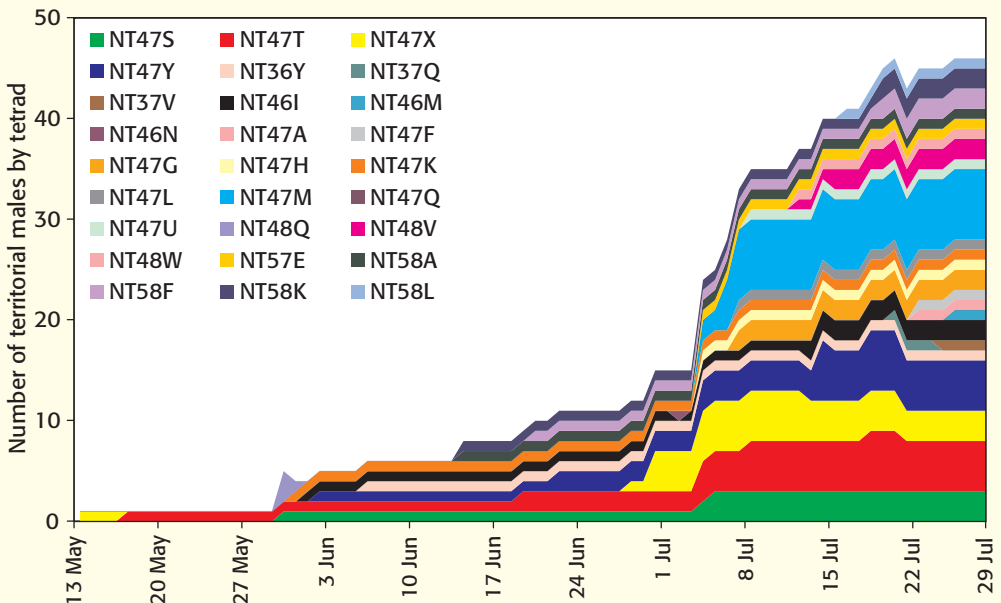


Figure 11. Assumed arrival and territory occupancy of Quail in East Lothian during spring–summer 2009.

progressive nature of the arrivals and in emphasising the geographical limits of the observations. However, apart from coverage effects, there are a number of other potential confounding factors to consider.

One of these is the known tendency of Quail to cluster, particularly on initial arrival, with subsequent dispersal to new areas. This is attributed to the male's strategy of attracting females, this being more effective via a cluster than scattered, as documented previously for south-east Scotland (Murray *et al.* 1998) and also recorded in North-east Scotland and Hertfordshire (Gill 1993). There are indications that the main constant effort site might be one such location (Marland 2010), being an area of consistently high densities of calling birds which also displayed a clear peak in early July. Nevertheless, numbers remained reasonably buoyant thereafter and it seems that many locations in the extended region around this site are attractive to them, whilst fewer birds were detected in some adjacent areas.

It is also perhaps worth noting that the main concentration of territories appears to be along the edge of the ridge a few kilometres inland from the coast, together with an area of higher ground to the south-west and the river valley to the south. Most of these locations involve sloping ground, and while it is noted in literature that either level or undulating landforms are chosen (Cramp & Simmons 1980), others have recorded Quail on slopes, both at a Quail cluster documented in North-east Scotland in 1992 (Gill 1993) and in French studies, specifically 'at the top of slopes' (Mur 1994). In the current study there were some other adjacent areas nearer the coast, with apparently suitable habitat, in which no Quail were found despite good coverage (Figure 9). Distribution is also of course a function of habitat, and as previously in south-east Scotland (Murray *et al.* 1998) the majority of territorial birds were in spring cereals, though roughly equally between wheat and barley, and also in oil-seed rape (early season), linseed and broad bean crops.

Further uncertainties in local status arise from anecdotal evidence that a Quail breeder in the upper Tyne valley is reported to 'let all surplus males go'. However, it is hoped that any confounding effect of these would be fairly localised, and there can be no doubt that 2009 was truly an exceptional 'Quail year' in this neighbourhood.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Abbie Marland and Sandy Rae for providing their site history records, and to local atlas surveyors who made special efforts to assist with Quail coverage, notably Jim Nicholson and Mark Holling; Mike McDowall provided valuable information from the Gifford area and further casual records were also submitted by Ian Ebbage, Graham Clark, Frank Hamilton, Peter Keightley and Tom Gillies. An appeal was made for further information on the *lothianbirdnews* Yahoo! Group (300+ subscribers), but no further information was forthcoming.

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Stephen Welch, Longniddry, East Lothian

Quail – a study in miniature

A. MARLAND

East Lothian often receives a share of Scotland's migratory Quail. Whilst this ephemeral species is not easy to observe, it does have the virtue of being faithful to certain locations. The author has lived in one of these 'traditional' spots since 1982, and discovered that what she had taken for granted over many years was not common knowledge. So this is an account of a particular patch during the summer of 2009, perhaps of value and interest to admirers of a very fine little bird. Welch (2010) puts these records into an East Lothian perspective, in what was clearly a 'Quail year'.

Location and habitat

The study area lies at an altitude of 80 m, roughly 5 km from the East Lothian coast. It forms a shallow natural valley, with direct access for both sight and flight to Aberlady Bay, and is a traditional feeding ground for large numbers of over-wintering geese, particularly Pinkfeet and Barnacles. This location lends itself naturally to the migratory passage of other birds, being a first landfall south from the Firth of Forth. Aspect is open, with well drained slopes and little shelter from prevailing winds (Plate 118).

The farm follows an intensive agro-chemical regime of cereal cropping, mostly winter sown, with large fields, minimal hedgerows and no

uncultivated headland margins or mature trees. However, an access track and right of way, together with a steep-sided burn, provide vital feeding and breeding wildlife habitat. At its lowest point, the track crosses a burn, creating the 'ford' feature of permanent water with weeds and grasses (Plates 119–121). Gardens of adjacent cottages also add corridors and islands of rich cover.

Confirmed breeding records include those of: Linnet, Skylark, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Grey Partridge, Tree Sparrow, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler and Willow Warbler.

Arrivals

The first calling Quail was heard on 13 May in winter wheat, quickly transferring itself to oil seed rape. This bird ranged widely, before selecting a preferred location, singing throughout each 24 hours, falling silent for a few days, but present at least until 16 July. On 31 May, a pair was flushed from beside the ford, dropping back into wheat before returning to the field of oil seed, giving reason to believe that the earliest arrival had attracted a mate.

Between 2 and 18 June, two additional calling males arrived, with a third and fourth staking



Plate 118. The site lies in direct sight and flight of the Forth coast and Aberlady Bay © A. Marland.



Plate 119. Junction of track, ford and field corners offered key habitat for Quail to rest and feed © A. Marland.

their claims in wheat and barley with flights and song contests between 26 and 28 June. A fifth individual announced its presence on 4 July, to occupy what transpired to be the last available niche in wheat.

Influx

The established pattern was disrupted by a flurry of arrivals between 13 and 20 July, with a peak of 11 calling males present on 18 July. This event appeared to be part of a much wider pattern across parts of East Lothian. Dispersal of the unusual 'overlay' apparently then followed, and numbers dropped back to birds singing sporadically from the original five territories. However, the influx caused a temporary rumpus of agitated behaviour, particularly at the key location where several territories converged. This gave a unique opportunity to photograph a calling male on 18 July (Plate 122). It was a simply wonderful experience.

Late July enjoyed quiet weather. The large number of Quail could be heard at dawn, with a domino effect as adjacent males sparked each other into voice. On one fine night, a neighbour's musical party triggered a chorus of calls!

Breeding and departure

Several pairs were seen in flight during the summer. After 4 August, calling fell to virtually nil. However, birds were still present, and were spotted during 'roguing' of crops. No nests were found, but two parties of chicks (five and three respectively) were observed on 16 and 31 August. Individual birds were also flushed during

harvest on 2 September. The last sighting of one female and two young was on 6 September.

Songlines

The attached field plan is an attempt to 'map' the clutch of five territories (Figure 1).

How was this musical mapping achieved? Very simply - by ear! After listening practice, each of the five resident male Quail could be identified by his call signature. The variance was significant enough to recognize individuals over a considerable distance. This led to the interesting observation that males were 'beating the bounds' during the day, with a tendency to call most vigorously at a central position, and at the

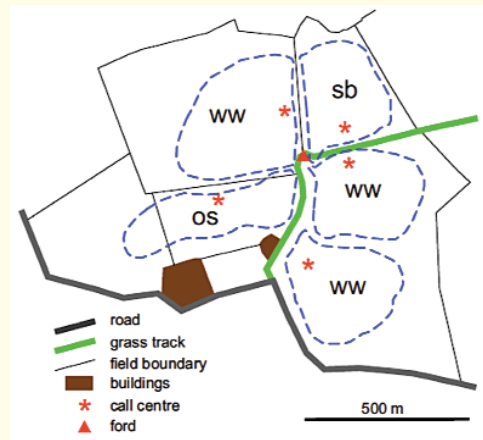


Figure 1. Location of Quail territories in the East Lothian study area, May–September 2009. Letters refer to crop types: sb = spring barley, ww = winter wheat, os=oil seed rape. Area of occupation sites estimated at between 17.1 and 26.6 acres.



Plate 120. A grass track running parallel to the burn divided three territories © A. Marland.



Plate 121. This sloping field, under spring barley in 2009, is a traditional Quail haunt © A. Marland.

junction with other occupied sites at dawn and dusk. Boundaries seemed to align with physical features such as hedgerows, track and burn. Whilst the exact area of each occupied site is obviously unknown, an estimate is as follows: NW 26.6 acres, W 17.1 acres, NE 17.2 acres, E 19.3 acres and SE 20.2 acres.

Apart from the familiar 'wet-my-lips' tri-syllabic call, which is often preceded by a nasal vibratory twang, it was also possible to hear lesser, or part-song of individuals. Windy conditions rendered most of these quieter calls inaudible beyond a few yards, but careful listening on still days could result in recording short 'mews' or chuckles, which (under different circumstances) might not be associated with birds at all. Most of the 'fixed' territorial calls appeared to be passive, without overt response. However, on several occasions it was possible to locate a pair in conversational mode. This was confirmed by hearing short rhythmic rolling and low 'wer-wau' notes being exchanged, then sighting a female

creeping across open ground to join the 'wer-wau' bird (a male).

Perhaps the most charming discovery was that local Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler and Skylark had incorporated Quail notes into their own songs! This did result in the quail equivalent of a few wild goose chases, but gave much pleasure to everyone who came to listen.

Social ecology

Throughout the summer, the most fruitful to places to watch or listen for Quail were the grassy track, the ford and cereal tramlines. The latter were much travelled and provided singing points. This fact did not go unobserved by local raptors - Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Peregrine all having a shot at predation. Despite some spectacular stooping, no success was actually witnessed. However, an adult Quail carcass was recorded from a Peregrine food cache elsewhere in East Lothian during the summer (George Hogg, pers. comm.) The oil seed crop, its margins rich with Mayweed, also supported



Plate 122 a–d. This series of a calling male Quail was taken on 18 July 2009 at a special 'hot spot' where several territories converge. I've previously had very fine encounters with Quail here. They do cruise around just above crop level for unpredictable short bursts, and tend to sunbathe after poor weather. But trying to take photos is usually fruitless. However, that windy evening I'd simply gone to listen to a particularly loud contest, and was lucky enough to be sitting down when a Quail suddenly moved closer, calling only feet away. But still invisible! I froze...and waited. Silence fell, and I was just on the point of giving up, when this beautiful tiny creature crept out of the barley and into a patch of pineapple weed. It preened, fluffed up its plumage, then turned round to deliver a torrent of calls at a rival. The effect was electric, with a wave of sound starting deep in the bird's belly and rocketing upwards until its whole body was vibrating. Miraculous, really, though my nerves and eardrums are still ruined! (camera info: small compact digital Lumix Panasonic FZ18) © A. Marland.

numerous insect species, directly benefiting many birds feeding young. Watching Sedge Warblers catch butterflies and moths was a lovely sight. The dense growth obviously harboured less dense patches as the 'oil seed' Quail's song was delivered unmuffled from its core. This crop was sprayed off, losing all vegetation before harvest. Such was the dedication of Quail to its chosen site that the male returned to a completely bare field to call from the original position.

Quail were using the track for shelter during bad weather and for dust baths when the sun shone. The month of May was extremely dry. Certainly the presence of shallow water was a major attraction to other bird species for drinking and bathing.

Individuals were also observed during late May and June occupying the area round the ford without exhibiting competitive activity - only moving if disturbed. It appeared that Quail like to socialize. Droppings (containing beetles and seeds) and scrapes were present during this early phase, but absent later.

During July, this 'comfortable' behaviour seemed to change. An elevated weedy patch overlooking the ford became hot property, defended by one of the 'barley' birds, and a focus of numerous calling spats with other males challenging from under cover of the crop edges. At the end of the season, with harvest underway, this was also the place where both parties of chicks were located.

Concluding thoughts

It is a mystery why this particular location should be so valued by returning Quail. However, the study has shown how some birds use their summer haunt, so perhaps it would be safe to suggest that certain elements may contribute to a winning combination.

Firstly, the area has ecological integrity. It sports discrete natural boundaries, and whilst lacking most 'obvious' biodiverse features, does offer what may matter (to Quail, at least). These include deep cover round field margins (indented by burnside and the path), permanent water and patches of open weedy growth. The

latter provide essential social space and chick feed. Local topography also offers a valuable degree of slope for good drainage - something which 'traditional' returners would be seeking.

Secondly, it is energy efficient. A strongly demarcated pattern of corridors means sites can be occupied with least dispute. The burn and track, with their associated 'goods' are axial, offering minimal distance travelled from each core. Winter-sown crops provide necessary shelter for May arrivals, and the open aspect may serve to reduce predation by certain raptors. Perhaps significantly, access to the land is not encouraged, hence inadvertently lending protection from disturbance to ground nesting birds from walkers and dogs.

Thirdly, the acoustics of the valley mean that the birds can communicate with ease. It is contoured to echo and resound to loud territorial calls, whilst offering pockets of shelter for transmission of what might be construed as more intimate vocal exchange. The level of Quail conversation through the season was far higher than might be expected to the casual listener.

Lastly, an uncertain but interesting feature is that the elements are all very obvious from an aerial perspective - that is, highly visible to migrating birds by day or night. The altitude and perhaps also distance from the coast also appears to be significant - East Lothian records for 2009 show a distinct lowland 'ridge' for calling Quail (Welch 2010). Since the valley acts like a funnel from the coast, migrating Quail could drop into the area without having to negotiate any further barrier.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to Ian Andrews for encouraging me to write this up, and for converting the musical map into reality. And to Stephen Welch, for advice and enthusiasm. Lastly, to the Quail themselves, who patiently shared their patch with a constant observer.

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Abbie Marland, East Lothian

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

Welcome to the first of what is hoped to be a regular bi-annual feature about our bird observatories in Scotland. The intention is to publicize the work of the observatories, visiting opportunities, as well as incidental snippets of news from the islands. This first 'Round-up' covers the recent major events on Fair Isle, preparing for the future with the completion of its brand new observatory building.

A new Fair Isle Bird Observatory

After three years of talks, negotiations and tough decision making, the Trustees of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust reached the conclusion that the 40 year-old observatory building had to be replaced. On 28 August 2008 (FIBO's 60th birthday), an appeal was launched to raise £4 million. By April 2009, 75% of this had been secured and the Directors of FIBOT gave the go-ahead to proceed with the project. Warden, Deryk Shaw, his wife Hollie (FIBO Administrator) and family vacated the Fair Isle Bird Observatory in early April 2009 and moved to Burkle, a vacant croft house in the south of the isle. Thanks to the National Trust for Scotland (the owners of Fair Isle) the Assistant Wardens were also housed in the Chalet and researchers in the Puffinn Hostel (and later Taft).

The initial dismantling of the old building was carried out by Fair Isle's Northmen, who salvaged as much of the fabric of the building as they could, to be recycled on the isle - lots of good building wood, doors, windows and block work... and even more firewood! By early July, the shell of the building was ready to be demolished. All the B&Bs were filled with A.H. Wilson's (the Orkney building firm who won the building contract) workmen, and on 7 July, Deryk shed a tear as he watched the old FIBO being finally laid to rest. Ground works then began and after several weather-induced false starts, the first sections of the new observatory arrived by barge from Orkney on 2 September and two weeks later, all 20 pieces of the jigsaw were in place. A team of up to 23 workmen then set about securing the 'pods' and starting fitting out the internal layout whilst also landscaping the external environs.



Plate 123. The newly completed Fair Isle Bird Observatory © Deryk Shaw.



Plates 124–128. Fair Isle Bird Observatory; from the old to the new © Deryk Shaw.

Building on an offshore island throws up many logistical problems and Fair Isle perhaps throws up more than most. The workforce have been unprepared for how much the weather affects transport to and from Fair Isle in autumn and winter and thus they experienced frequent delays in getting building materials and supplies to the isle when they needed them. Consequently, the initial handover date of 31 March came and went with the building nowhere near ready to be handed over. However, by mid-April the plush new building is very nearly finished, it has power from two brand new generators, supplemented by a series of photovoltaic cells on the roof and is due to open in early May. Returning visitors to Fair

Isle will not recognise the new Observatory Lodge - it is a much larger building, entirely two-storey with a high pitch roof. All rooms are more spacious with brand new furniture and all bedrooms are en suite. There are more research facilities and a brand new interpretative room, but the old welcoming family atmosphere will remain. Bookings for the new season are already looking healthy but there are still plenty of vacancies, even for the peak autumn period. For further details telephone 01595 760258, visit our website: www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk or e-mail: fibo@btconnect.com.

Deryk Shaw, Fair Isle Bird Observatory

The Great Shearwater passage off Lewis, September 2007 – Scottish and British record day counts

M.S. SCOTT

At the end of August 2007 Tristan ap Rheinalt and I managed a couple of days of seawatching from Labost on the north-west coast of the Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides. We had seen 41 Great Shearwaters on 25th and 19 on 26th - totals that already vastly surpassed the usual handful of annual records, and exceeded only by a total of 190 flying west past Butt of Lewis we had seen on 29 August 2006 - the (soon to be exceeded) record day count for Scotland.

At the start of the second week of September the wind had swung round from several days of strong westerlies, arising from fast moving Atlantic depressions, to a Force 5 northerly wind and quite bright conditions. Many seawatchers would have dismissed these conditions as poor, but because they came on the back of a spate of westerlies, which had clearly pushed birds east from the Atlantic, birds were now re-orientating out of the north Minch area. Early on 8 September Tristan and I were seawatching from Butt of Lewis when, in quick succession, an Orca and several Great Shearwaters were visible. The intention had not been to do a prolonged seawatch, but the sight of more Great Shearwaters soon after these initial birds meant that the all-day seawatch was on. Birds passed in clusters, often in the teens, often a lot more, but several groups involved flocks of over 300 birds. The largest groups were 630, 596 and 479 birds. Fortunately, I had my clicker counter with me, which helped massively during the six hours of observation. The final total for the day was 7,114 - certainly a red-letter day, and one that will remain at the fore of our birding memories for years to come

Visibility was poor on 9 September, but I still managed a total of 165 Great Shearwaters off

Butt of Lewis (with Gerry Owens), plus three off Brue in the afternoon. Conditions had improved on 10 September, with 1,076 observed over flying west past Butt of Lewis. On 12 September I had one flying south-west off Labost, and on 14th a total of 12 off Butt of Lewis flying west. A week later there were still birds offshore with five noted passing Butt of Lewis on 21 September.

During our seawatches we were able to use our experience to pick out Great Shearwaters at considerable range by a combination of features. They always gave the impression of being large shearwaters, clearly bigger than Manx Shearwater and with a gliding flight on straighter wings than Cory's Shearwater, with the wings always held out at right angles to the body. They were more direct and purposeful than Cory's in flight lacking the lazy laid-back feel so often portrayed by Cory's.



Plate 129. *Great Shearwater, off Lewis, September 2007* © Martin Scott.



Plate 130. *Great Shearwater, off Lewis, September 2007* © Martin Scott.

Plumage-wise, the darker primaries contrasting with a paler saddle was evident at a distance, as was the pale trailing edge to the wings, forming a dusky 'M' pattern. As birds got closer, the white collar became apparent and then the black cap could be discerned. On more distant birds this showed as a white wedge on the neck - something that is never shown by Cory's. The white horseshoe rump could also be seen on the best views. The black belly patch was not evident on most birds as they were too distant, but on closer individuals this, and the dusky armpits on the underwing, could be seen. Otherwise the underpants seemed white with nothing else apparent at range.

This unprecedented passage was also witnessed from headlands down the west coast of Ireland, and to a far lesser extent in the North Sea. An estimated 3,000 flew west past Tory Island, Co. Donegal on 9 September 2007 (in daylight hours based on timed counts), with 4,164 past Annagh Head, Co. Mayo on 10 September 2007 (08:00–11:00) and 6,000+ past Kilcummin Head, Co. Mayo on 14 September 2007 (07:15–16:30).

The total of 7,114 Great Shearwaters observed from Butt of Lewis on 8 September is the largest day count for any single site in Britain and Ireland (and probably Europe) to date (equivalent to a passage rate of 1,187 birds/hour). The previous highest day counts in Britain had, unsurprisingly, all come from south-west England, and Porthgwarra (Cornwall) in

particular. A total of 1,950 were seen off there on 17 August 1999, with 1,553 birds noted on 14 September 1991 and 1,000+ on 23 August 1997. In addition, a count of 1,138 was made from St Mary's, Scilly on 18 September 1999 (Brown & Grice 2005).

The most consistent site for observing Great Shearwaters in Europe has been Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, where a small passage is noted most years from August to October, but large movements are occasionally observed, mainly after south-westerly gales and in conditions of poor visibility at sea. The single best day count from there was 5,118 flying west in four hours on 15 September 1965 (a passage rate of 1,280 birds/hour). This was part of a phenomenal movement of birds, and the largest documented passage of Great Shearwaters in Europe, with well over 12,200 birds logged between 18 August and 21 September, including other day counts of 4,177 west in 6½ hours on 14 September, and 1,432 west in 10 hours on 21st (Newell, 1968, Sharrock 1973). Other notable counts were also made from here in September 1973: with 4,487 on 3rd, 2,916 on 4th, 1,334 on 7th and 1,517 on 9th, whilst 1,014 were noted on 4 September 1980 (Hutchinson 1989). Elsewhere in Ireland there have been peak day counts of 2,350 off Kilcummin Head, Co. Mayo on 19 August 2005, and 4,493 past Annagh Head, Co. Mayo on 27 August 2006. In Europe a total of 25,284 birds was counted past Porto Moniz, Madeira between 24 August and 18 September 2006, with four outstanding peak days: 4,472 on 24 August, 5,023 on 1st, 6,600 on 2nd and 3,200 on 11th September.

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Plates 131–134. *American Black Tern*, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, November 2008. © Steve Duffield

American Black Tern, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 17 November 2008 – the first Scottish record

S. DUFFIELD

On the morning of 17 November 2008 I got a rather excited phone call from John Kemp saying that he was watching a very dark Black Tern in North Bay, South Uist. Black Terns are rare in the Outer Hebrides and after four years birding in the islands I had not seen one here (having missed one in spring 2008 that John had found at Rubha Ardvule). The lateness of the occurrence combined with John's brief description of its appearance set the alarm bells ringing; this was obviously not a time to hang around. Fifteen minutes and 10 miles later I was at North Bay where John was still positioned and flitting through his digi-scoped images. Out in the bay the tern was patrolling the shoreline with the usual light, buoyant flight and dipping feeding action of a Black Tern. Despite not having seen a Black Tern for close on seven years (a consequence of living in the far north), this bird was immediately recognisable as something rather different. The upper parts were strikingly

dark and the underwing was a dark, smoky grey. The flanks showed a distinct grey wash whilst the head pattern was more reminiscent of White-winged Black Tern.

I positioned myself in the car so that the tern would pass within a reasonably close distance to allow me to obtain some images whilst trying to take in all the details as the bird passed by. This was obviously no normal Black Tern and documenting the occurrence in an image was going to be the best way of securing the record. After taking a few photos the bird suddenly swung round as a gust of wind took it along the shoreline before it veered off, heading over land across the northern part of South Uist. All too quickly this striking bird had disappeared, never to be seen again.

Initially the most striking feature of this marsh tern was the very dark appearance of the upper parts compared with the juvenile Black Terns

that I had seen previously in Britain. The mantle showed a very dark, brown saddle to otherwise dark grey upper parts. The wings and tail were much darker grey than you would expect for one of 'our' birds and the rump although paler than the mantle, tail and wings was still much darker than the pale, grey rump shown by (Palearctic) Black Terns *Chlidonias niger niger*. The head pattern showed less extensive markings, with the dark feathers more restricted to the crown, extending onto the ear-coverts and creating an impression that it was wearing ear-muffs. Black Terns originating from the Palearctic show more extensive dark head markings with the black feathering reaching onto the nape. The underparts were largely white although a dark smudge was evident at the shoulder, reaching towards the breast sides. This large prominent smudge merged into dark, grey flanks; the latter feature was very noticeable on this individual. The underwing was also completely grey and merged with the grey flanks in contrast to 'our' Black Terns which shows a much paler, largely white underwing and white flanks.

The combination of features noted above left the observers in no doubt that this was a classic juvenile American Black Tern *Chlidonias niger surinamensis* and a first for Scotland.

Steve Duffield, Drimsdale, Isle of South Uist, Western Isles HS8 5RT

American Black Tern - its status in Scotland

Black Tern Chlidonias niger is classed as a 'marsh' tern given its preference for breeding in freshwater marshes and well-vegetated lakes, and is divided into two subspecies: nominate niger which breeds in the Palearctic and surinamensis which breeds in North America. Interest in American Black Tern has increased for European birders as it has recently been considered for potential elevation to full species status.

The 2008 South Uist bird is only the second ever bird of this race to have been recorded in Britain, with the first a long-staying juvenile which frequented Weston-super-Mare Water Treatment Works, Avon, on 3–11 October 1999 (Andrews et al. 2006). Subsequently a third

individual, also a juvenile, was found inland at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire where it was present from 28 to 31 August 2009.

There have been four records in Ireland up until the end of 2008. Three of these were also juveniles: one, Sandymount Strand, Dublin, Co. Dublin, 3–7 September 1999; one, Smerwick Harbour, Co. Kerry, 14 September 2003; one, Rahasane Turlough, Co. Galway, 2–5 September 2007, while the fourth bird was in first-summer plumage - at Lady's Island Lake and Carnsore Point, Co. Wexford, 16 July–1 August 2006. There are also three Icelandic records of American Black Tern, all in June, from 1956, 1957 and 1970, and a fully summer-plumaged adult at Funchal Harbour, Madeira in mid-August 2007, which means the possibility of a summer-plumaged bird turning up in Britain should not be overlooked.

The western bias to these records is no real surprise and observers of any Black Tern on the west side of Scotland should be alert to the possibility of a North American origin for the bird, particularly for any notably late individuals.

The identification of the American race of Black Tern is fully discussed in several useful papers and publications:

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Plate 135. Bobolink, Foula, Shetland, September 2008 © Martin Scott.

Bobolink, Foula, Shetland, 28 September 2008 - the sixth Shetland record

P.R. GORDON & M.S. SCOTT

On 28 September 2008 we were birding at Hametoun near the south end of Foula when PRG flushed a bunting-sized passerine. He called me (MSS) and said "Was that a yellow passerine?" This was quickly followed by "Do Bobolinks run?"

As we now know it was, and they do, and soon all the islands' birders gathered to watch our 'American' passerine skulking in an iris-filled ditch. That a 'crowd' of just 10 was enjoying such a major prize pretty much sums up birding on Scottish islands in autumn!

The bird continued to show well down to 10 m or so, allowing us to get a really good opportunity to study the bird and obtain video clips and a full description. Unfortunately it was not present the next day.

Description

A stripy, essentially yellowy-buff passerine - as the accompanying images show. The bird had

the jizz of a large finch, and had an especially robust bill - this was no Yellow-breasted Bunting!

The main features of the bird were its streaked mantle, with two pale mantle braces; an 'Aquatic Warbler' head pattern due to a very noticeable pale yellowish median crown stripe; upper breast washed yellow; ear-coverts open, and not bordered in black, easing the elimination of Yellow-breasted Bunting; the bill was large, hefty and pink, with a slightly convex upper mandible; the flanks were streaked dark brown, with the streaks becoming finer and paler on the breast; the rump was olive and slightly streaked; the nape was plain olive - contrasting with the streaked crown and mantle; the bird had a long primary projection in the folded wing. The bird was heard to call in flight, with this sounding like a sharp "blink".

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Bobolink - its status in Scotland

This North American species breeds from southern British Columbia south to northernmost Nevada, and eastwards through the Great Lakes and northern USA to southern Quebec Province and Nova Scotia, and south to New Jersey. The entire population is migratory (actually undertaking one of the longest migrations of any Nearctic passerine) and passes through south-east USA and over the Caribbean to wintering grounds in South America from Peru and southern Brazil to northern Argentina.

There have been 29 Bobolinks in Britain to the end of 2008, with seven of these in Scotland including the 2008 Foula bird. The previous six Scottish records are: one on Out Skerries, Shetland on 18 September 1971, one on St Kilda, Outer Hebrides on 28 September 1986, one on Fair Isle from 29 September to 2 October 1986, one at Durigarth, South Mainland, Shetland from 28 September to 2 October 1998, a first-winter on Out Skerries, Shetland on 21–22 September 2000, and one on Foula, Shetland from 29 September to 4 October 2005. The near total monopoly on records for Shetland is very obvious.

The first British record was one on St Agnes, Scilly on 19–20 September 1962, and remarkably the Isles of Scilly have accounted for just under half of all British records, the others being in 1968, 1975, 1976, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996 (2), 2003 and 2008. There are also four records from Devon: Lundy, 1984; East Soar, 1991; Prawle Point, 2001; Hengistbury Head, 2002. There are also single records from Porth Joke, Cornwall (2008), Portland, Dorset (1992), Skokholm, Pembrokeshire (1999) and Easington, Yorkshire (2008).

All British records have been found in autumn between the extreme dates of 2 September (Scilly 1983) and 1 November (Devon 2002), with most between mid-September and mid-October. Interestingly the peak time for Scottish records is slightly earlier than for those elsewhere in Britain, while the average length of stay for birds in Scotland is 3.28 days compared to 5.5 for those elsewhere in Britain. The latter figure is boosted by long-staying individuals on St Mary's, Scilly in 1983 (probably 33 days) and one at Hengistbury Head, Devon in 2002 (23 days). The geographical spread of records in England and Wales shows a very marked bias for the south-west, with only the 2008 Yorkshire bird bucking this pattern, and perhaps increasing the likelihood of ship-assisted passage for this individual.

The slightly earlier peak for the finding date of Scottish records compared to those elsewhere in Britain may simply be a result of these birds originally being at a more northerly latitude when displaced across the Atlantic than birds at slightly later dates which have travelled further south by this time.

There have been three records in Ireland: one at Hook Head, Co. Wexford from 12–14 October 1971; one on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork from 13–24 September 1982, and one on Cape Clear Island on 10 October 2003. Elsewhere in Europe there are Bobolink records from Norway (6–8 November 1977), France (15–16 October 1987; 17 August 1995; 25 September 2005), Italy (18 September 1989) and Gibraltar (11–16 May 1984), with the latter the only spring record from the Western Palearctic.



Plate 136. Bobolink, Foula, Shetland, September 2008 © Martin Scott.



Plate 137. Franklin's Gull, Holm, Mainland Orkney, July 2009 © Keith Hague.

Franklin's Gulls in Ayrshire and Orkney during 2009

B. KERR & K.E. HAGUE

Franklin's Gull, Troon, 16–18 January 2009 - the second Ayrshire record

Back in 1991 *The Observer* had a front page photo taking up a quarter of the top of the paper entitled "It's called *Larus pipixcan*...". It was a lovely adult in full summer plumage, and I immediately wanted to see one. Eighteen years later I still hadn't seen one, but all that was about to change.

It must have been about the turn of the millennium that I started to spend the winter afternoons looking through the gull roost on Barassie Beach. Though looking regularly since 1980, when I moved to Troon, it wasn't until about then that I realised that many more gulls appeared in the late afternoons, and particularly within half-an-hour of sunset. They still continue to arrive later on, of course, but it is just too dark

to see them. It was probably my interest in observing the returning adult Mediterranean Gulls that I have to thank for that, as they regularly come in to roost quite late. Working shifts, there are only two afternoons out of ten when I can't get to look.

On 16 January 2009 I had, as I frequently do, arranged to give my daughter a lift home to her flat giving me the excuse (as if I needed one) to look at the gulls for a while. I arrived later than normal, at about 4 o'clock, and immediately picked out two adult Mediterranean Gulls sitting on the water in amongst Black-headed and Common Gulls with Herring Gulls in the background, and a solitary Lesser Black-backed Gull. There were no Great Black-backs that evening, which was a bit unusual and gull numbers were generally lower than normal,

maybe just over a thousand with the majority being Black-headed. The wind was from the south-west, which meant that when viewing from the car park near Troon swimming pool, the gulls were head on. However, this was balanced by getting some shelter to prevent telescope shake as the wind was 25 mph gusting to 35 mph (the Internet is good for Met Office weather records within 24 hours of a sighting), and though it was dry, it was overcast and the failing light was making observation more and more difficult in the gloom. It wasn't a 'thin cloud' overcast either, but a heavy layer with only a thin shaft of light from a red velvet tear in the cloud on the sunset horizon.

The sea was at high tide, as high as it gets. A disadvantage in not being able to see the birds' legs as they all sit on the water, though they do tend to come closer to you on a high tide. On a lower state of the tide most stand on the beach. I guess they know humans don't tend to go into the water there. The sea state was slight, so there were only little choppy waves that didn't hide the gulls, which was useful.

I always scan flocks several times, even when there aren't many birds. Partly because they are never all side-on and have a tendency to sit or stand behind one another, but also because as numbers increase it becomes more and more impossible not to overlook birds. That evening the birds all had gaps between them on the water and it was easy to see individuals. It was on the fourth scan at about 20 minutes into the watch that I noticed a small gull, smaller than a Black-headed Gull and with a black hood and pencil-lead grey wings. That immediately narrowed its ID down to Franklin's or Laughing Gull. I had seen two Laughing Gulls before. One in Newcastle, that I visited several times as it progressed from first-winter through to adult plumage, the other just a couple of years ago in Ardrossan. I had never seen Franklin's Gull.

Thinking probably Franklin's, but none too sure as I couldn't remember the sizes of the two, I phoned Angus Murray and blurted out to him I had one or the other. Thankfully he was also at Troon, by the harbour, and within five minutes was standing next to me saying "It's a first-winter Franklin's, Bruce". It was now very late on

and light was at a premium. A few frantic phone calls got Paul Wheatland (Troon), Dave Given (Prestwick), and Brian Orr (Irvine) there that evening, but people from further away stood no chance as it was now too dark to pick it out.

It was present at the evening roost the following two nights, coming in just before dark and in the most atrocious conditions with driving squally rain. I saw it on the second night of its appearance, but not the third as I had to work. During the day, nobody managed to locate its whereabouts. After that, it was never seen again.

Description: Over the two days I saw it I took the following notes: A small gull, smaller than the surrounding Black-headed, and about the size of Little Gull or slightly larger. Black hood extending up the nape as in Black-headed, almost complete, but showing a white area around the bill dotted with small black flecks. Small, white eyelids (which were difficult to see in the light conditions at times) above and below the eyes, which were dark. The bill was heavier-tipped looking than on a Black-headed, and was darker in colour, looking black in the available light. The chin, throat, neck, flanks, belly, were all white. The neck had an extremely faint grey wash, and this extended slightly onto the sides, similar to Bonaparte's Gull. The mantle and scapulars were a cold, dark slate grey somewhat similar to a Lesser Black-backed, but lacked any warm tones with the coverts being grey washed with dark brown. The secondaries and tertiaries were blackish with mid-brown running through the colour. The primaries were black with tiny, barely visible, white crescents to the tips. The wing tips looked more rounded than on Black-headed Gulls. The underside of the forewing was white, the rear being dark-centred with pale edges so individual feathers could be picked out but looked dark overall. The secondaries had a broad white trailing edge on both the upper and underwing. The legs were black. I could not see the tail as on the water the primaries covered it and in the brief flights it made I had enough problems keeping up with it amongst other gulls and did not note this feature with certainty.

It bobbed around like a cork on the choppy water, more so than the larger surrounding gulls,



Plate 138. *Franklin's Gull, Holm, Mainland Orkney, July 2009* © Keith Hague.

and it was only seen briefly in flight for a few seconds on three occasions, but could be picked out by dark and rounded wings and a flight similar to Little Gull, notably more buoyant than Black-headed. On landing it held its wings at such an angle and almost facing me so that on the underside I could see the inner wing clearly, but not the outer wing so I didn't see the underside of the primaries.

Bruce Kerr, Troon, Ayrshire

Franklin's Gull, Mainland Orkney, July–October 2009 - the first Orkney record

On 12 July 2009, I was taking a more than usual interest in gull flocks in the parish of Holm, in the East Mainland of Orkney, following the report of a Laughing Gull in the area. After studying several flocks close to the original sighting, I had not found anything unusual and decided to look further afield. On checking a mixed gull flock at Wester Sand, one of my favourite spots for gulls, I found a bird in the middle of the flock which appeared to warrant closer inspection. It seemed to be resting in a small hollow and the only parts of the bird visible were its crown and upper mantle.

Although it was difficult to judge size on such a restricted view, it appeared that the head was slightly smaller than nearby Black-headed Gulls. The crown was also darker and there were signs of moult. The mantle looked darker than Black-headed Gull and in fact looked a shade darker than nearby Common Gulls. The bird was resting and it was impossible to see the bill. I was reluctant to flush the flock in case the bird flew off and could not be relocated.

After what seemed like an eternity, the flock became unsettled. The field adjoins a road that is popular with local people, especially those walking dogs, and many of the gulls flew further back into the field. Luck was on my side as some settled on fence posts including the mystery bird, which was now standing next to a Black-headed Gull. The view through the telescope left no doubt as to its identity as a Franklin's Gull, so I put the news out.

The bird stayed in the area till the end of the month and was seen by most local birders in that time. This was not the end of the story however, as I encountered the bird on three further occasions - on 10 September at Grindigar, Deerness, on 13 September at the Loch of

Tankerness and on 16 October at Mill Sand, Tankerness. On the latter date I noted that it had completed its moult to adult winter plumage. This is the first record of the species in Orkney.

Description: The bird was smaller than Black-headed Gull, and both bill and legs were shorter than that species. The bill was however decidedly stouter, and had a blunter tip than Black-headed. The bill was relatively much shorter and straighter than two Laughing Gulls that I had seen previously in Orkney, and lacked the drooping tip to the bill of that species. In some ways the bird reminded me of a Little Gull. The flight was lighter and more buoyant than the two previous, larger species. On the ground the bird had a waddling gait strongly reminiscent of Little Gull.

It was a darker grey above than the other small gull species, and could readily be picked out from them on that feature alone. The tail was mainly white, but the central feathers were pale grey (difficult to see in the field). The white underparts were strongly tinged pink, but this gradually faded as the moult progressed. The head was black with white feathering breaking through on the forehead, lores, chin and throat, and there were thick, white eye-crescents above and below the eyes. The wings were dark grey (as mantle) with outer primaries broadly tipped black, and the extreme tips white, with a further white band immediately behind the black. The colour sequence along the outer primaries therefore was dark grey - white - black - white. After wing moult in autumn the bird acquired much larger white primary tips. There was a red tip to an otherwise blackish bill. Legs and feet were blackish tinged red. The eye was dark.

I aged the bird as either an adult or second-summer, as it had conflicting features. The very small white primary tips suggested second-summer, whereas the grey-centred tail, I felt, was indicative of adult. There is a good possibility that this was the same individual that was seen previously on Shetland on 11–12th and 24–25 May 2009.

**Keith Hague, West Heath, Holm,
Orkney KW17 2SA**

Franklin's Gull – its status in Scotland

This species breeds at inland freshwater bodies in the prairies of North America from Alberta to southern Manitoba in Canada and south into the USA from northern Alberta through North & South Dakota and north-west Minnesota, but with isolated colonies in Oregon, Nevada and eastern Idaho/westernmost Wyoming into north Utah. The entire population is migratory, wintering along the Pacific coast from Central America south to Chile, and inland in smaller numbers from the Andes of Peru and Bolivia into central Argentina.

Its migration routes in North America are usually along a narrow inland corridor from west of the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and then through coastal areas of Central America to/from the wintering areas. It is very scarce on the east and west coasts of the USA. Consequently it is far rarer in Britain and Europe than its close relative, Laughing Gull, which breeds along the Atlantic coast of the USA.

There have been 60 individuals recorded in Britain up to the end of 2008, with 10 of these in Scotland. The first British record was as recent as 1970 when a presumed second-summer bird was seen at Farlington Marsh, Hampshire on 21 February, and present again from 1 March to 16 May. Since then this species has been recorded with increasing frequency with four birds in 1970s, 10 in 1980s, 22 in 1990s and 24 already from 2000 to the end of 2008. The first Scottish record was a probable first-summer at Irvine, Ayrshire from 2–6 July 1980, with further birds as follows: a second-summer on Canna, Lochaber, Highland from 5–11 July 1981; an adult at North Boisdale, South Uist, Outer Hebrides from 6–14 August 1985; birds on Shetland in 1990, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 2004; a first-summer at Musselburgh, Lothian on 3–4 June 1992, and an adult on the Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland from 21–26 August 2006 (Bloor 2006, Forrester et al. 2007).

In 2009, there were up to four further birds recorded in Britain: the first-winter at Troon on 16–18 January, a second-summer/adult on

Shetland on 11–12th and 24–25 May, the second-summer/adult on Orkney from 12 July to 16 October and a second-winter at Canvey Island, Essex on 29–30 November. The Shetland and Orkney sightings may well refer to the same bird, but it is also (if remotely) possible that the Essex record could relate to this same individual.

The Troon bird was only the fourth record for Mainland Scotland though the second for Ayrshire, following the Irvine bird in 1980. It is also the first Scottish record to fall outside of the 'spring/summer' period, with all others found between 10 May (Shetland 1990) and 21 August (Ythan 2006), with the latter remaining until 26 August. Elsewhere in Britain birds have been found throughout the year with three in January, four in February, four in March, three in April, three in May, seven in June, six in July, five in August, one in September, two in October, nine in November and four in December.

The ten Scottish records to 2006 included three one-day birds, three two-day birds plus stays of five, six, seven and nine days (average 3.6). The Troon bird was seen for just three days but in marked contrast the Shetland and Orkney sightings span 15 days and 97 days respectively (assuming different birds) and 159 days if just a single bird was involved. By contrast, the average sighting period in the rest of Britain is 16.6 days (to end 2008), with 22 one-day birds balanced by several long-stayers including: a probable second-winter bird present in Suffolk for 139 days from 13 November 1977, a first-winter in Devon which lingered for 106 days from 16 December 2000, and a wandering bird in 1982 which was also seen over a period of 106 days and visited sites in Cornwall, Devon and Dorset.

Another difference between Scottish records and those elsewhere in Britain is the low proportion of adult birds, with only two in Scotland to end 2008 (20%) compared to over 60% in England and Wales. Similarly, the distribution of records elsewhere in Britain shows a strong bias to the counties of south-west England (50%), with most others in south-east England & East Anglia (21%), with

just six in north-east England, four in north-west England and three in Wales.

The pattern of occurrence of this species in Britain and Ireland is notably different from that of the other Nearctic gull species, probably as a consequence of its normal migration route in North America being inland. The initial lack of records from Ireland (only eight to the end of 1999) and the lack of first-year birds in autumn and early winter in Europe had given rise to the belief that birds arriving in north-west Europe had more likely been displaced on northward migration from the southern hemisphere wintering grounds. However, the occurrence of up to seven first-winter birds in southern Ireland during winter 2005/06 and other individuals in Carmarthenshire and Cornwall in November 2005 indicates that this is not always the case. These birds were associated with the largest influx of Laughing Gulls into south-west Britain and Ireland recorded to date, and was a result of Hurricane Wilma, which was the most intense hurricane ever witnessed in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. It tracked up the eastern seaboard of North America in the last week of October 2005, and reached the Western Approaches at the end of the month, dragging a large number of displaced gulls with it.

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Plate 139. *Brown-headed Cowbird, Fair Isle, May 2009* © Deryk Shaw.

Brown-headed Cowbird, Fair Isle, 8–10 May 2009 - the second Scottish record

D. SHAW

On the afternoon of Friday 8 May 2009, I noticed a message on my mobile alerting me to a voice-mail. It had been left by Kenny Stout who lives at Upper Stoneybrek, a croft about one-third the way up the island, and west of the school. While most of the islanders on Fair Isle don't consider themselves to be particularly knowledgeable about birds, they are aware when something different appears in their gardens, and every so often I get calls reporting sightings of 'strange birds'. The majority of times it just turns out to be something common, a brightly-coloured spring male or an oddly-plumaged individual, but the Bird Observatory staff always respond - because every so often a prize awaits. In this case Kenny described the

bird as: "About the size of a Starling, with a black, shiny body, a brown head and a big bill, kinda like a Hawfinch. I think you should come right away as soon as you get this message" I spent a few moments to take in this information and my thoughts started to crystallize - "Hmmm, it sounds like a Brown-headed Cowbird". I hastily set off in the car and headed straight up the road. When I caught sight of Kenny's croft the Observatory van was already parked outside and as I drew up, my mobile rang again. Simon Davies, one of my Assistant Wardens, excitedly spoke to me: "Del, there's a Brown-headed Cowbird at Upper Stoneybrek!" I replied: "I know, and I'm right behind you!"

I hastened inside, which immediately set the dogs off barking. Kenny shouted at them to be quiet and duly ushered me into the lounge and then pointed out the window to the bird. I was greeted by a view of a cracking male Brown-headed Cowbird. Amazing! It was casually strolling around the grassy part of the garden amongst Kenny and Sue's collection of odd-looking ducks. I immediately put the news out on the Shetland Birders' Grapevine and then phoned several islanders who I knew would want to see it. I also informed everyone that it was only the second record for Britain. Jack Ashton-Booth, my other Assistant Warden, then arrived at Kenny's and added that a possible Brown-headed Cowbird had been present briefly in Norfolk the previous day! The locals soon started to arrive to admire the bird, and my mobile started to go into meltdown as birders from Shetland and further south all wished to congratulate me and learn more! About an hour after I had got there the Cowbird flew south and the locals headed back to their respective homes. A few of us then set out on foot to look for the bird. Some 20 minutes later, my wife Hollie phoned to tell me that she had just added Brown-headed Cowbird to our

garden list! With the demolition and subsequent rebuild of the observatory, our family had been living at Burkle (the red and blue house in the south-east corner of the isle) and I had started keeping a garden list. It favoured our garden for the rest of its three-day stay, but occasionally strayed to Auld Haa and Schoolton.

On Saturday seven plane-loads of birders flew in to Fair Isle to see it and all left successful. Unfortunately one plane, from Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) came in, flew over the airstrip and departed without touching down. It transpired that the pilot reckoned the airstrip was too short for him to land the plane! I can only imagine the frustration and language of the birders on that journey home - and I certainly would not have wanted to be the pilot! That day the wind switched from a south-westerly to north-westerly direction and strengthened overnight, such that by Sunday wind conditions at the Fair Isle airstrip were not suitable for the small charters to land. By contrast, Monday dawned bright, calm and sunny, but the bird was nowhere to be seen - bad news for those birders who had travelled to Shetland and then chartered a boat to bring them over.



Plate 140. *Brown-headed Cowbird, Fair Isle, May 2009* © Jason Atkinson.



Plate 141. Brown-headed Cowbird, Fair Isle, May 2009 © Deryk Shaw.

Description

In its general gait and habits the bird was quite starling-like, but was slightly smaller and slimmer, with a more thrush-like shape. Its head was a milk chocolate brown colour with a very slightly darker colour on the cheeks, around the eyes and on the lores. The rest of the bird was entirely black with (apart from flight feathers) a glossy, green sheen. One tail feather was in pin, about 1/3 grown. The bill was large and conical, similar to a Hawfinch but not quite as strong, slightly longer, more pointed and dark grey. The legs and feet were starling-like, black with strong claws.

I, and all the others who saw the bird, owe a big thanks to Kenny Stout and Sue Hutchison for being so vigilant. The 40 or so birders who came to see it were all well-behaved, and *mostly* (but not including the editor of a well-known birding magazine) contributed to the observatory tick tin. It also allowed some island regulars to say a fond farewell to the old observatory. The new bird observatory building is now in place and open to visitors again. Money is still to be required to help with the refitting of the building, and to enhance the library etc. PLEASE consider donating to this very worthy birding cause. For more details visit www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk.

Deryk Shaw, Fair Isle Bird Observatory

Brown-headed Cowbird – its status in Scotland

This species breeds right across North America from the Pacific coast of Canada eastwards from south-east Yukon Territory to Newfoundland and south through the entire USA to southern Mexico. Much of the population is resident, but birds in the northern part of the breeding range, from California east to the Great Lakes and New Hampshire, move south for the winter, with some remaining along the Pacific coast south from Vancouver Island. This is an abundant species with numbers estimated in excess of 20 million birds, but since it is a relatively short distance migrant on the Atlantic coast is less prone to trans-Atlantic displacement than many less common birds.

The first record for Britain was a male seen at Ardnave Point, Islay, Argyll on 24 April 1988, and this was preceded by the only other record for the Western Palearctic - an adult female, found dead, in Telemark, Norway on 1 June 1987.

The male present on Fair Isle on 8–10 May 2009 was heard singing on the latter date, and was the second record for Scotland and the second, third or fourth individual to have occurred in Britain depending on whether or not sightings in England immediately prior to the Fair Isle occurrence are viewed as relating to the same individual or not by BBRC. These involve one seen and photographed in a garden at Belford, Northumberland on 1–2 May and one present briefly at Weybourne, Norfolk on 7 May. A subsequent report was made of a probable male at West Runton, Norfolk on 3 June, while a male was seen and photographed in a garden in south Pembrokeshire on 13–15 July 2009.



Plate 142. Male Collared Flycatcher, Crail, Fife, May 2009 © John Anderson.

Collared Flycatcher, Denburn Wood, Crail, 16–19 May 2009 - the first Fife record

S.L. RIVERS

On 16 May 2009, David Clugston visited Denburn Wood in Crail, Fife to check for any spring migrants that may have dropped in. Denburn has played host to many excellent birds over the years, including a Swedish-ringed Black-throated Dipper, Red-flanked Bluetail, Subalpine Warbler, Arctic Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Hume's Leaf Warbler, numerous Yellow-broweds, several Pallas's Warblers, and Golden Oriole, and is always worth a check during a trip to Fife Ness. Reward for his decision came in the form of a first-summer male Collared Flycatcher, a first for mainland Fife and only the third ever to be found on the Scottish mainland.

The bird favoured the south-east part of Denburn Wood, an area of mature, mixed deciduous trees with a good understorey of

shrubs and ground vegetation. The contrast between the black, freshly-moulted primaries and the browner ones still retained from first-winter plumage enabled it to be aged as a first-summer bird. It remained a further three days and proved very popular, attracting a large number of admirers. The same weather pattern which delivered this gem was presumably also responsible for the White-winged Black Tern which frequented the Eden Estuary, about 10 miles to the north-west, on 18–19 May.

Collared Flycatcher - its status in Scotland

This species is an endemic breeder within the Western Palearctic, with the bulk of the population found in Eastern Europe and

eastwards from Estonia to the Ukraine into Russia, mostly between 45° and 55°N, and beyond the Volga as far as 53°E, but with scattered breeding populations as far west as easternmost France, southern Germany, Switzerland and Italy. The entire population is migratory, and winters predominantly in East Africa, south of the equator, from Lake Victoria to southernmost Mozambique, and in small numbers in sub-Saharan West Africa.

There have been 30 individuals recorded in Britain to the end of 2009 with 18 of these in Scotland, including the Crail bird above. The first British and Scottish record was an adult male shot on Whalsay, Shetland on 11 May 1947. Since then most other Scottish records have come from islands, with seven further birds on Shetland (Out Skerries, 13 May 1975; Out Skerries, 25 May 1976; Bressay, 23–24 May 1979; Tresta, 5 June 1995; Skaw, Unst, 13 June 1999; Muness, Unst, 2 June 2004, and Brow Marsh, near Loch of Spiggie, 9–10 May 2006), three on Fair Isle (8 October 1986; 28 May 1998; 9–12 May 2004), three on Orkney (Newhill, Harray, 30 May 1963; Stronsay, 31 May 1980; North Ronaldsay, 31 May 1999), and one on the Outer Hebrides (St Kilda, 24 May 1992).

There have been just three records from the Scottish mainland, all from the east coast: a first-summer male at Ethie Mains, Angus & Dundee, from 31 May to 1 June 1997; a male at Cove, North-east Scotland from 30 April to 1 May 1999, and the first-summer male at Denburn Wood, Crail from 16–19 May 2009. Elsewhere in Britain the majority of records are from south-east England and East Anglia (7), with two from south-west England, and singles in north-east and north-west England and from Wales.

Birds found in Scotland have all been short-stayers, with 12 one-day birds, four two-day birds and just two lingering for four days - Fair Isle 2004 and Fife 2009. Records elsewhere in Britain are similarly brief, with most being one or two-day birds and just single individuals lingering for three and five days. The notable exception is the male that was present at Foreness, Kent on 24 May to 9 June 1984 - a stay of 17 days.

The continuing rarity of this species in Britain, despite breeding populations as close as France and Germany, is shown in decade totals of one in the 1940s, one in 1950s, three in 1960s, four in 1970s, seven in 1980s, eight in 1990s, but just six in the 2000s. There are two notable biases with Collared Flycatcher records in Britain - the domination of males (first-summer or adult) and spring occurrences. Only two females have ever been identified: one on Out Skerries in 1976 and the other on North Ronaldsay in 1999. Similarly, all but one of the 18 birds seen in Scotland have been found between 30 April and 13 June, and this is mirrored by the 12 records elsewhere in Britain, which were all found between 28 April and 20 June. The only autumn record in Britain is the first-winter trapped and ringed on Fair Isle on 8 October 1986.

The bias towards males reflects the extreme difficulty in separating first-winter and female Collared Flycatchers from similar-aged Pied Flycatchers. It is also more likely that it would be hormone-charged males that overshoot the normal breeding areas in spring and become prone to subsequent displacement to Britain by existing weather patterns. An additional suggestion is that migrants of this species in Europe are strongly programmed to adopt a strictly north-south flight direction in autumn.

Collared Flycatcher is much rarer in Britain than Red-breasted Flycatcher, whose breeding range overlaps much of the former but also extends a lot further east, and which winters further east into Asia. This observation is often cited as support for the 180° reverse-migrant mechanism of vagrancy in autumn (as opposed to general vagrancy in all directions). Any such genetically aberrant (180° reversed-compass) Collared Flycatchers would be expected to follow northerly to north-easterly vectors, whereas similarly aberrant Red-breasted Flycatchers are going to end up in northern Europe on a westerly to north-westerly displacement vector, and hence more likely to reach British shores.

Stuart L. Rivers, Edinburgh
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Plate 143. River Warbler, Applecross, Highland, July 2009 © Ian Fulton.

River Warbler, Applecross, Wester Ross, Highland, June–July 2009 – second Scottish mainland record

R. MASKEW

Since 2004, my wife and I have visited Applecross annually during the spring and summer months, and on one occasion I made a trip in late winter. Applecross is an isolated coastal village on a peninsula flanked by Loch Torridon on the north side and Loch Carron to the south. Immediately to the west lies the Isle of Raasay and behind that, Skye, with its distant snow-capped peaks of the Cuillins, making a fine sight from the village in winter and early spring.

There are two ways of approaching Applecross: one is to follow the coastal road from Shieldaig, a distance of some 25 miles, or the more direct route leading from Lochcarron via the mountain road over Bealach na Bà. Over a distance of a mile or so the road rises to 620 m (just over 2000 feet) with a few spectacular hairpin bends near the top. From the car park on Carn Glas there are panoramic views of the Outer Hebrides, and to the north the impressive

Beinn Bhan rises to 896 m. The higher ground just to the north of the car park is the best place I know to see Ptarmigan.

Like much of north-west Scotland, an isolated locality such as Applecross is severely under-watched and most bird records are sourced from visiting birdwatchers. Fortunately, Applecross Bay is shallow and sandy and only about a kilometre across and therefore it is possible to get a reasonable view of the whole bay from a number of points.

Great Northern, Black-throated and Red-throated Divers can be seen at any time of the year and a few Black Guillemots and Long-tailed Ducks are usually about, one of the latter was present in June 2008. A mixture of waders occurs during passage, a single Black-tailed Godwit stayed for a couple of days in September 2005, and occasionally a few Twite



Plate 144. River Warbler, Applecross, Highland, July 2009 © Josh Jones.

and the odd Snow Bunting put in a brief appearance. Perhaps the best find was one evening in early March 2008, when a first-winter (white form) Iceland Gull bathed at the mouth of the River Applecross for at least ten minutes, but unfortunately had left by the following morning. Dippers are present on the river, and further up the valley is a good place to see Golden Eagle. In 2004, there was a Ring Ouzel singing on the western slopes, but I have not heard any since. Close to the village, there is a large area of both coniferous and deciduous woodland, together with some open heathy ground. Common Crossbills are resident and summer visitors include the odd Grasshopper Warbler and Wood Warbler, and in the last two years Garden Warblers appeared to have moved in. A Pied Flycatcher singing outside the village post office for a short time one morning in 2007 was a real surprise. However, the find of 2007 was on a June morning.

Around breakfast time a visiting fellow West Midlands Bird Club member told me that he had heard what he thought could be a Marsh Warbler singing from a trackside behind the village about a mile away, but had dismissed the idea on the grounds that it could not possibly occur in this part of the world and had concluded that it must be a Garden Warbler with

an aberrant song. Within the hour I visited the site and amazingly it was a Marsh Warbler, singing from a boggy hollow with scattered willows surrounded by Bracken. It sang vigorously from early morning to about midday each of the three following mornings that we remained in Applecross. In view of the fact that I provided much information and had pointed out that for many years I had monitored the one time population of Marsh Warblers in the Avon Valley, Worcestershire I was surprised how long it took the SBRC to accept this record.

However, even this record was surpassed in 2009. In the Applecross Inn on the evening of 30 June 2009, I had heard that a Barn Owl had recently been seen hunting over a tract of marshy ground adjacent to the heritage centre and decided to go down there at dusk that evening and have a look. As I walked along the road beside the marsh, I heard a strange loud mechanical sound coming from somewhere close to the heritage centre. The sound was more reminiscent of a cicada or something similar rather than that of any bird familiar to me. I approached carefully and stood for a few minutes looking out into nearby scrub where the sound seemed to be coming from. Eventually I managed to obtain a brief but close view of a small bird on the top of a fence post. Although by now the light was fading fast it appeared to be a warbler and similar to Grasshopper Warbler and therefore I concluded that it must be an unfamiliar *Locustella* species. I returned to the Inn and having consulted the field guides decided that the plumage was indeed that of a *Locustella* warbler and the one species described as having a song likened to the sound of "a powerful sewing-machine" was the River Warbler *L. fluviatilis*. The record of such a rare bird, particularly on the western mainland of Scotland, needed some confirmation. I rang Al McNee (then Highland Recorder) and the following evening he and two friends drove across from Inverness. Unfortunately, it had been raining during the day and although it had stopped shortly before they arrived, the evening was damp and murky. A recording of the song was played for comparison and all agreed that it was undoubtedly a River Warbler. Unfortunately, no doubt owing to the poor weather conditions, the bird was very retiring

and only offered brief bursts of song and one or two rather poor views.

However, during the early morning of the following days the bird sang prolifically, often in uninterrupted bursts for minutes at a time, one burst was timed at four minutes 15 seconds; on one calm morning I was able to hear the song clearly while standing on the edge of the bay at least 400 m away. Surprisingly, the preferred song perch was a prominent dead twig at the top of a 15 m high Sycamore *Acer pseudo-platanus* which was within 5 m of the wall of the centre, and the bird appeared to only occasionally wander into the immediate area, consisting of damp areas of rush (*Juncus* sp.) grassland and scrub mainly of Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*. It was very tame and allowed approach right up to the tree. Apparently the bird had been present at least two days earlier and had originally been identified as a Grasshopper Warbler with an unusual song, even though there were two Grasshopper Warblers singing close by for comparison. We left Applecross four days later with the bird still singing his head off, no doubt continuing to do so for the benefit of many visitors during the following days. *It was last reported on 14 July (eds).*

Roger Maskew, Worcestershire

River Warbler - its status in Scotland

This species breeds predominantly in the Western Palearctic from southern Finland and the south-east Baltic States south through Poland, eastern Germany and Austria eastwards through Europe and the Ukraine into Russia from the White Sea to the Sea of Azor, and through the Urals into westernmost Siberia. The entire population is migratory and winters in East Africa from Kenya and southernmost Somalia south to Botswana and northernmost areas of the Republic of South Africa.

There have been 35 River Warblers recorded in Britain to the end of 2008, with 20 of these in Scotland. The first British record was a first-winter on Fair Isle on 24–25 September 1961. Since then there have been two further British records in the 1960s, none in the 1970s, nine

in the 1980s, and six from 2000 to 2008. In addition to the Applecross bird, there were two others in 2009, both on Fair Isle - one on 31 May and one on 5–12 October.

The Scottish records to the end of 2008 have virtually all been on the Northern Isles with five on Shetland (Out Skerries on 9–10 October 1993, Foula on 14 September 1995, Lerwick on 14 September 1995, Sumburgh on 15–17 September 1995 and Foula on 15 June 2006), 12 on Fair Isle (24–25 September 1961, 16 September 1969, 23–24 May 1981, 22 September 1982, 24–26 September 1982, 7 June 1984, 25–28 May 1993, 26–27 September 1993, 27 May 1995, 21–25 September 2002, 15 June 2006 and 11 June 2007), and two on Orkney (North Ronaldsay on 15 September 1995 and Burnbraes, Evie on 8–17 June 2008). The only exception was the long-staying, singing male at Clatto Reservoir, Fife on 16–25 July 1994. The find dates for these fall into discrete spring (40%) and autumn peaks (60%) peaks, and the average length of stay is just 2.7 days, with nine one-day birds and two lingering for 10 days. The Applecross bird is therefore the longest staying individual in Scotland by a margin of four days.

Elsewhere in Britain there have been 14 records in England, mostly from east coast counties, from Northumberland (two in 1996), Gtr Manchester (1995), Yorkshire (1981, 1989), Staffordshire (1996), Lincolnshire (1998), Cambridgeshire (1992, 1995), Norfolk (1981, 1989), Suffolk (1984), Buckinghamshire (1997) and Sussex (2008), with many birds found well inland. There is also a single record from Wales - Bardsey, Caernarfon on 17 September 1969. Interestingly, and by contrast to Scotland, the find dates for these records are spread from spring through to autumn (4 in May, 5 in June, 3 in July, 2 in August and one in September), while the average length of stay for these birds is 9.3 days, with five individuals remaining for two weeks or more - Pettistree, Suffolk from 13 July to 3 August 1984 (22 days); Boughton Fen, Norfolk from 8–21 July 1989 (14); Scotsman's Flash, Greater Manchester from 11 June to 12 July 1995 (32); near Bellingham, Northumberland on 16–30 June 1996 (15); and Doxey Marshes, Staffordshire from 20 June to 22 July 1996 (33).



Plate 145. Parrot Crossbill 'licking' seeds from ripe Scots Pine cone, North-east Scotland, May 2003 © Harry Scott.

Crossbills – some clues for their identification in the field

R. RAE

Crossbills can be found throughout the world, wherever cones are available on the various species of conifer that occur within their widespread range. This wide range has facilitated the evolution of many species and sub-species.

In the UK, three breeding species are currently recognised: Common Crossbill, Parrot Crossbill and, the UK's only endemic bird species, the Scottish Crossbill. In all three, numbers vary from year to year according to the type and availability of cones within the various regions and the ranges of the three species. All species will temporarily abandon areas when cones become scarce or absent, only to reoccupy them again when the cone crop becomes plentiful.

Correct identification of these birds has long been an issue (e.g. Knox 1990) and the recent trend towards further splitting these to different

'types' using sonagrams (e.g. Robb 2000) has probably overcomplicated the issue. However, there are just four species of *Loxia* recognised in Europe (Two-barred Crossbill is not covered here) and these can all be positively identified in the field with careful observation and the use of some fairly obvious clues.

I have never looked at crossbills in the UK outwith Scotland so the following should be applied only to Scotland, although I can see no reason why the principles should not be sound for the whole of the UK. The following guidelines will not identify **all** birds conclusively, but they will be helpful for the vast majority of birds encountered in suitable conditions. It should be stressed at the outset that these hints are no substitute for competent fieldwork, familiarity with the species and careful observation. Please remember, we all regularly see birds we need

second observations of to confirm their identification, and some we just never get the features we need to make that conclusive identification - crossbills are no different.

Range & habitat

At present, the full ranges of the three species in the UK are only roughly known (Forrester *et al.* 2007); this is probably the result of observers being unwilling to positively identify many birds they see (as is apparent in the new BTO/SOC atlas fieldwork). Published maps can tell you what is likely to be found in a given area, but a word of caution and to reiterate, the ranges of these species are **not** fully understood, so do not rule anything out on that basis alone.

The habitats described below are a far better guide to what may be expected in any given area. In fact, an understanding of the habitat is essential. Crossbills have evolved bill sizes to exploit the different cone types found on the various species of conifer. This in turn can be used as an indication to what species are likely to be found feeding on them (Marquiss & Rae 2002).

Sitka and Norway Spruces are used primarily by Common Crossbills and by Scottish Crossbills if they occur within the species' range.

European, Japanese and hybrid Larches are used frequently by both Common and Scottish Crossbills at all times of the year.

Lodgepole Pines are used by Scottish and Common Crossbills, although sparingly by Commons; Parrots do also occasionally also use these trees.

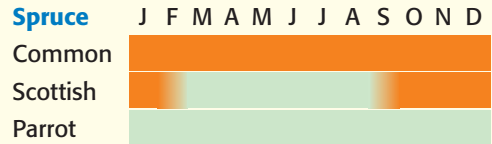
'**Plantation Pines**' are used by Scottish Crossbills and occasionally by Parrot Crossbills, especially if the plantation is near to native Caledonian Pine. Common Crossbills use both plantation and native pine especially in spring when the spruce crops are exhausted and the pine cones are ripe and dropping their seed.

Native Caledonian Pines are used by both Scottish and Parrot Crossbills throughout the year. They can be used by Common Crossbill (see above).

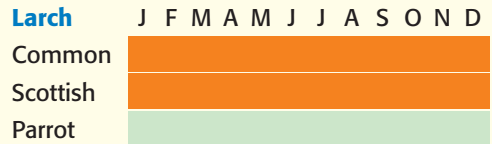
Time of year

Below are typical times of the year to expect these species on the following trees.

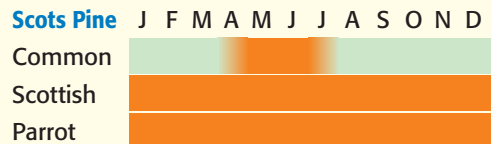
Spruce. Cones of the year are used by Common Crossbills from July, when the cones are still green, until the last of the cones have dropped their seeds during the following spring. Scottish Crossbill will use these on occasions when available up to January/February



Larch. Larch cones, being vertical, hold their seed for more than a year and are regularly fed on by Scottish and Common Crossbills. They are eaten from July/August onwards, when the purple/green cones of the year appear. Scottish Crossbills will feed on these, particularly if the cone crop on pines is poor. I have never seen Parrot Crossbills feeding on Larch.



Scots Pine. from August onwards when the cones are still green, by both Parrot and Scottish Crossbills. After the cones open in spring, Common Crossbills may also be found feeding on Scots Pine.



Common Crossbills are of course migrants and are regularly to be seen feeding on Thrift and thistles on the islands that surround our coasts. I have also watched Scottish Crossbills attacking apples. None of these are regular food supplies, but it does illustrate that food is what is available at the time - again caution should be exercised when using this criteria.

What are they eating?

Spruce. Common Crossbills feed on the green cones from July onwards. They remove these from the tree, hold them in their feet and extract the seeds before discarding the cone. These discarded green/purple cones may be found, often in great quantities, below favoured feeding trees. From autumn onwards, these cones begin to ripen to the familiar brown, and as the cones ripen further, they open them to discard their seed. The crossbills can then simply extract the seed from the cones in situ and quickly flit from cone to cone simply licking out the ripe seeds that are ready to fall.

Larch. Fed on from late summer/early autumn when the cones are still green/purple to the following summer by both Common and Scottish Crossbills. As already stated, larch cones hold their seed for more than one year and birds can often be seen foraging on cones that are two or more years old.

Plate 146 A–D. (A) *Green Sitka Spruce cones opened only at the base by Common Crossbill*; (B) *Green Sitka Spruce opened along the complete cone by Common Crossbill*; (C) *Green Larch cone opened by either Common or Scottish Crossbill*; (D) *Ripe Larch cone again opened by either Common or Scottish Crossbill*.



Pine. Both Parrot and Scottish Crossbills are capable of opening pine cones throughout the year. When they feed on ripening green cones, the different species can be identified with certainty. Only Parrot Crossbill can access the seeds by slicing through the cones with their powerful bills. Scottish Crossbills can only pry open the scales of the cones in a more conventional manner (see Plate 146). By spring, when the cones have ripened and opened, all three species may be found feeding on pine, again often just licking out the seeds from the open cones without removing them from the trees.

I have seen Common Crossbills attempt to open green pine cones in autumn. This they can do, but not very efficiently; it is very probable that these are generally just too hard for them.

I have on occasion seen Parrot Crossbill feeding from the ground on fallen pine seed; this has always been in June/July.

Plate 146 E–H. (E) *Open Scots Pine cone showing heal when torn from tree by a crossbill;* (F) *Ripe Scots Pine cones opened by Scottish Crossbills;* (G) *Green Scots Pine cone prised open by Scottish Crossbill;* (H) *Green Scots Pine cone 'sliced' open by Parrot Crossbill.*





What colour are they?

Common Crossbill

Generally Common Crossbills are more variable in their colouration than Scottish or Parrot Crossbills. **Males** often tend towards a lurid pink or bright 'Pillar Box Red' all the way to an orange/yellow/gold. Pink males can be identified as Common Crossbills. **Females** are olive/grey towards a lime colouration, sometimes with lemon yellow rumps. Flocks of commons frequently have birds showing juvenile streaky plumage as late as December. Juveniles may be expected from late January/February onwards.

Scottish Crossbill

These are less brightly coloured and are less prone to the variation of colour found in Common Crossbills. **Males** can be described as being orange/red but not pinkish. Birds displaying a variety of colours may be found but these colours are never as lurid as Common Crossbills. Gold coloured males are not uncommon. **Females** are mostly dull olive in colour, often with much grey around the head. I have handled bronze/red females. Scottish Crossbill flocks seldom have birds showing juvenile plumage after September/October as juveniles are generally to be expected from April/May.

Parrot Crossbill

These are similar in colouration to the Scottish Crossbill, but generally less bright and frequently with more of a grey hue to their plumage. Juveniles may be expected from April /May.

It should be noted that plumage coloration is dependant on the food supply during moult, so again caution should be exercised. I have also observed yellow/green males, gold males, females with red overtones and almost every variant of these in all the species described. This is particularly true of Common Crossbills, although Scottish Crossbills also show a similar, but not as extensive a variation. Parrot Crossbills, probably as a result of their less varied diet, display less of a variation in their plumage coloration.

Plate 147 A–E. *Variations and extremes in colouration of Common Crossbills showing 'gold' and 'red' males on the left with 'gold' and 'red' females (which can be separated by dark spots on crown) on the right. Birds 'B–E' are adults caught in lower Deeside, North-east Scotland in late September 2009 and bird 'A' was caught in early November 2008 © Rab Rae.*

Bill shape

Crossbill species are generally separated on bill size (Plate 148 overleaf).

Common Crossbills have the smallest bill size of the three UK species, the ranges of which are described elsewhere (Cramp 1977), however, it is not the size but the overall shape that is important. In Common Crossbill the tips of the mandibles always point forwards; this appearance is created by the downward curvature of the upper mandible, which in Commons is the least of the three species. This often, but not always, gives the bill a slender appearance that can often appear small in relation to the overall head size.

Scottish Crossbills have larger bills than Common Crossbills. They are also generally deeper, on both the lower and upper mandibles, with the tip of the lower bill pointing upwards rather than forward. The upper mandible is steeply decurved, this gives the bill a thick, stocky appearance. The bill appears powerful and has a well balanced appearance to the overall head shape.

Parrot Crossbills are probably the easiest to separate, as their bills often appear to sprout from the top of their head giving them a very 'Roman nosed', bulbous appearance. The lower mandible in particular appears powerful and deep, often almost the same depth as the upper mandible. Again, the lower bill tip points up and the upper down. The upper mandible very steeply down curved and can often appear to be almost too big for the head and almost 'parrot like' in appearance.

All crossbills show a great variation in their bill shape and size, even between the individuals in known pairs, let alone flocks. It is the general bill shape in relation to the bird's head that is the principle.

So to summarise, Common Crossbills have small neat bills in relation to the head size, while Scottish Crossbills have a bigger, stocky bill but not excessively big for the head size. Only Parrot Crossbills have a bill that starts from the top of the skull, although not all Parrot Crossbills display this feature.



Plate 148. Differences in head and bill shape of live birds across the three crossbill species, all caught in Deeside, North-east Scotland. Note all bills cross in the same direction to keep comparisons consistent. (C1–5) Common Crossbill, (S1–5) Scottish Crossbill and (P1–5) Parrot Crossbill © Rab Rae.

Flight & flock contact calls

Common Crossbills have the most variable flight calls. In general, they are best described as high pitched, crisp and 'cheepy'. Flocks can often sound quite frantic. The alarm/contact call is a similar tone and is given at the fastest rate of the three species.

The call of the **Scottish Crossbill** is probably best described as 'chooky' and is lower pitched than that of Common Crossbill. The alarm/contact call is noticeably lower and slower.

Parrot Crossbills have the deepest call of the three species; the flight call also has a resonating quality compared to that of the other two species and a slower rhythm than the Scottish Crossbill. The call is also less 'crisp'. The alarm/contact call is deeper and slower than that of Scottish Crossbill.

Alarm contact calls are frequently given from the very top of a tree by all species.

Much has recently been made of the calls of the various Common Crossbills found across the UK and Europe, with many observers trying to divide, subdivide and categorise the various crossbills calls into even more 'types' (Förschler & Kalko 2009).

However, as Common Crossbills are originating from regions from Scandinavia to Siberia (Newton 2006) the fact that their calls differ is hardly surprising. Common Crossbills caught for ringing do show differences in their biometrics, indicating that there are differences in the populations, but this does not make them a different subspecies.

The Common Crossbill is an irruptive species and, from ringing results, birds are known to have bred one year in the UK and then abroad in a subsequent year (Newton 2006). As such behaviour is a regular feature of this species, there is clearly great opportunity for interbreeding across the wide ranges of suitable habitat that exists for this species within the Western Palaearctic. Such behaviour is unlikely to lead to the species evolving into separate subspecies.

Calls, as has been shown, can also be learned as well as inherited (Groth 1993). Differing calls

can also be caused by local dialects. After all we have all heard the difference between Great Tit and Chaffinch songs and calls within small distances. These local dialects can often differ between different glens, never mind countries, but they are still Great Tits and still Chaffinches. We should therefore always use calls for positive identification with great caution.

With all that said, to the experienced observer call is often the first indication of the presence of crossbills and with practice, the species can often be correctly identified on call alone.

In conclusion, there is no shortcut to the correct identification of these species. Patient observation and familiarity of the species is essential and this comes with getting out into the habitats described above and getting to know the species through field-work on a regular basis.

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Birdline Scotland Review: 1 July to 31 December 2009

A. MURRAY & S.L. RIVERS

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The long-staying River Warbler remained the headline bird into July, but was temporarily displaced by the discovery of Scotland's fifth Stilt Sandpiper, heralding the start of Nearctic wader occurrences for the autumn. Typical August scarcities and rarities were largely in short supply this year, while seawatching too was generally disappointing. It was birds of Nearctic rather than Eastern Palearctic origin that were the main talking points in September - the Blackburnian Warbler and Yellow-billed Cuckoo were only seen by a lucky few, but the adult Sandhill Crane on Orkney proved a major draw. The first fortnight of October saw the Northern Isles and especially Shetland almost

totally dominant in respect of rare birds, not just in Scotland but also in the whole of the UK. October also saw an unprecedented influx of Firecrests. Wildfowl were the main feature of November which otherwise proved generally disappointing except for an unprecedentedly late Blyth's Reed Warbler on Shetland and a couple of long-staying American waders in Lothian. Waders continued to dominate the headlines into December rather than the traditional midwinter rarities, despite it being one of the coldest Decembers in Scotland for many years.

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.

Bewick's Swan: an adult was seen briefly at WWT Caerlaverock (D&G) on 8 December. **Tundra Bean Goose:** a mini influx brought up to nine birds to Shetland in November. **Snow Goose:** four were seen, all amongst the returning Pink-footed Geese: in North-east Scotland (2), Highland and Lothian. At least three were reported in November, including the blue morph Lesser at Gollanfield (High) on 15th, with then possibly the same bird with the Pink-footed Geese at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) from 17th.

Up to five were noted in December: the blue morph in North-east Scotland, white morphs in Argyll and Perth & Kinross and then at the end of the month a blue morph and a white morph with Pink-footed Geese at Coxtontower, near Elgin (M&N) on 24–28th. **Canada Goose:** at least four presumed vagrant birds were reported in October and November, all on Islay (Arg). Up to six small and medium race birds were reported from Argyll during December, all on Islay and Tiree.

Ruddy Shelduck: at least four were seen in July - two at Montrose Basin (Ang) on 1–30th, and two on the Eden Estuary (Fife) on 3rd, with then presumably the latter two at Loch Leven (P&K) on 4th. Two were seen off and on at Loch Leven (P&K) throughout August, with two birds again at Montrose Basin (Ang) on 17–18th. **American Wigeon:** two different drakes were seen in Dumfries & Galloway from 13 October. Single drakes were in Dumfries & Galloway and on Shetland in November. Two drakes were seen in December, both in Dumfries & Galloway: at Castle Loch, Lochmaben up to 14th and at WWT Caerlaverock on 2–9th.

Green-winged Teal: a drake was at Graemeshall Loch (Ork) on 2–5 July. Three were seen in October, and seven drakes were seen in November, including three in Dumfries & Galloway. Two were still in Dumfries & Galloway in December with further drakes in Moray & Nairn, on Islay (Arg) still and at Vane Farm RSPB (P&K) on 31st. **Blue-winged Teal:** three juveniles were at Howmore River, South Uist (OH) on 14 September - largest group ever in the UK. One was reported briefly at South

Nesting (Shet) on 31 October.

Ring-necked Duck: a drake was present at Loch Gelly (Fife) from 28 July to 2 September with further drakes in August at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) on 14–17th and Loch Leven (P&K) on 25th; in September two drakes were at Loch Leven (P&K) on 20th, a juvenile drake on Tiree (Arg) on 22–28th, and one at Loch Ryan (D&G) on 29–30th. Four were seen in October, and a female was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14 December. **Ferruginous Duck:** a drake at Skinflats on 25 July was the first record for Upper Forth, with presumably the same bird then relocating to Loch Gelly (Fife) the next day where it remained throughout August to the start of September, with presumably the same bird then seen at Loch Leven (P&K) on 19 September. **Lesser Scaup:** a drake was again at Loch of Benston (Shet) on 16 September. **King Eider:** a drake was between Burghead and Hopeman (M&N) from 16 November into 2010, and a first-winter drake at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 21 December. **Surf Scoter:** up to two drakes were still off Blackdog (NES) during July; two drakes were off Kinnaber (Ang) on 2 August, with at least one still present on 8th, up to three drakes were between Murcar-Blackdog (NES) on 8–9th and a drake was at Burghead Bay (M&N) on 24 August with two drakes there on 30th; in September drakes were in NE Scotland, Angus and on Orkney (2). Eight were reported in October; up to two drakes were in Largo Bay (Fife) during November with a returning female on Tiree (Arg) from 23rd. At least six were seen in December, all at usual areas: at least one drake on Orkney, two drakes at Sound of Taransay (OH), a female still on Tiree (Arg) and a drake and a female at Largo Bay (Fife). **Smew:** only five were reported in November - three of these at Loch Leven (P&K). Seven were reported in December, with three still on Loch Leven.



Plate 149. Cattle Egret, Islay, Argyll, October 2009 © Jim Dickson.

Quail: July saw the best showing in Scotland since 1997 with c. 120 singing males reported, mainly from east coast counties, with the largest numbers reported from Lothian. **White-billed Diver:** an adult was off Burray (Ork) on 5 October. One in Bluemull Sound, Yell/Fetlar (Shet) on 16 November was presumably the regular returning bird. The only report in December was an adult again off Sound Gruney, Fetlar (Shet) on 11th. **Red-necked Grebe:** numbers at Gosford Bay (Loth) peaked at 51 birds on 17 August. **Black-browed Albatross:** an adult was reported from Fife Ness (Fife) on 17 October. **Cory's Shearwater:** a very late bird was reported past Marwick Head (Ork) on 29 October. **Great Shearwater:** the first of the autumn was one flying past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 August; around 35 were logged in September, mainly from North Ronaldsay and Lewis (OH), though 11 were seen from Oban–Lochboisdale (South Uist, OH) ferry on 1st. One was reported from Tarbat Ness (High) on 10 October. **Sooty**

Shearwater: small numbers were noted from 21 July, while the largest count reported in August was of 37 past the Brough of Birsay (Ork) on 28th. **Balearic Shearwater:** in July two flew past Dunbar on 7th and one past Barns Ness on 15th (both Loth). In August 13 were reported - all from Ayrshire and Argyll between 11–23rd.

Bittern: two were seen in December - one near Craobh Haven (Arg) on 8–9th (the first in Argyll since 1999) and at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 20th. **Cattle Egret:** one present on Islay from 23 October to 6 November was the first record for Argyll. **Little Egret:** four were reported during July; 17 in August, mostly in Dumfries & Galloway, and over a dozen in September, including a long-staying bird on the Eden Estuary (Fife). Thirteen were seen in Scotland in October; at least 12 were noted in November, all in western Scotland between Dumfries & Galloway and the Outer Hebrides. At least nine were reported in December: three each from Outer Hebrides, Argyll and



Plate 150. *Glossy Ibis*, Loch of Strathbeg, N-E Scotland, October 2009 © Chris Gibbins.

Dumfries & Galloway. **Great White Egret:** two were noted in July - singles on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 3–6th and Graemeshall Loch (Ork) on 5–19th. One was on Mainland Shetland at the start of August, at Tirsá Water on 4th, then nearby at Sand Water on 6–8th. One was seen flying south in the Sound of Islay (Arg) on 16 October. At least two were seen in November, with a series of sightings in North-east Scotland and Moray & Nairn. A single bird could have been responsible for all sightings in December: at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) on 6–12th - third county record, Miltonhaven caravan park (NES) on 13th, at Monikie CP and then Forfar Loch (both Ang) on 14th - only second county record, over Inchgarth Reservoir (NES) on 21st and in flight near Loch Spynie (M&N) on 24th. **Glossy Ibis:** the influx of c. 50 birds into Britain in September produced just a single bird in Scotland - a juvenile on Mull (Arg) on 16–17th with (presumably) the same bird at Loch Sween (Arg) on 24–27th. A first-winter was near RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve (NES) on 9–26 October, and one

was seen briefly on the River Forth near Dunmore (UF) on 9 November. **Spoonbill:** two were at Tullibody Inch (UF) on 3 July, then Loch Leven (P&K) the next day, with one or other then perhaps responsible for sightings at Dundee (Ang) on 5th, Kinneil (UF) on 12th, Montrose Basin (Ang) on 14–18th and at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 16 July.

Rough-legged Buzzard: the only report was one at Blackdog (NES) on 7 November. **Hobby:** three were seen in July - all on Shetland between 7–21st, and seven were reported in August. **Gyrfalcon:** an adult white morph bird, photographed on a fencepost at Glen Clova (Ang) on 2 August was presumed to be of suspect origin. A grey morph bird flew in over the sea near Stromness (Ork) on 8 December. **Common Crane:** in August one was Tynninghame on 25–29th and then over Aberlady Bay on 30th (both Loth), with another bird again at Mid Walls (Shet) on 24th; three birds were near Tain (High) on 24–27 September. **Sandhill Crane:** one was on South Ronaldsay (Ork) -

the fourth UK record and first since the well-watched bird at Exnaboe (Shet) in September 1991. Present on at least 22–29th in the Burwick area (though almost certainly first seen at least 10 days prior to this) this year's bird proved a very popular draw indeed. On the morning of 29th it flew out to sea to the south-east and was then remarkably tracked offshore along the Caithness and then Sutherland coasts for the rest of that morning by two observers before it was last seen circling inland of Brora just after 12.15 pm that afternoon.

American Golden Plover: an adult was at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 29–31 August. At least 15 birds were logged between the start of September and the first week of October, all on Scottish islands, and all bar one being adults including four different on Tiree (Arg) and three birds together at Deerness (Ork). Nine were reported in October. **'Lesser' Golden Plover:** an indeterminate bird was on Tiree from 30 August to 1 September. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at the South Ford, South Uist (OH) on 20 August. **Little Stint:** following one at Musselburgh (Loth) on 23 July, just eleven were reported in August. After a few in September, the last was on 10 October. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** an adult was trapped on 1 August at Montrose Basin (Ang) during a wader ringing session, and was still present on 3rd at least (a Pectoral Sandpiper has also been ringed here before). One was present at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve (NES) on 1–9 October. **Baird's Sandpiper:** during September two juveniles were seen on the Outer Hebrides - at Loch Paible, North Uist on 6th and South Uist on 10–12th, with another juvenile on Tiree (Arg) on 19–28th. One was at Kilpheder, South Uist (OH) on 2 October. A juvenile was at Belhaven Bay (Loth) on 7–11 November with the bird then relocated nearby at White Sands Bay on 30th where it

remained into January. This appears to be only the second ever over-wintering record in the UK - the other a juvenile at Staines Reservoir, Surrey in 1982/83.

Pectoral Sandpiper: an adult was present at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve (NES) on 9–11 July, with a second there on 30–31 July, with further birds on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17th and 24th and one briefly at Cramond (Loth) on 26 July. Five were seen in August - two at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES), on Orkney (2) and at Loch of Houll, Whalsay (Shet) on 20–27th; up to 20 birds were seen in September including three in Dumfries & Galloway, four on Tiree (Arg) on 26th and at least two in North-east Scotland. Eleven were seen in October. **Stilt Sandpiper:** an adult at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve (NES) on 9–11 July was only the fifth record for Scotland and only the second ever for the Mainland.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: at least 12 birds were seen in September, all on islands, and three were noted in October.

Long-billed Dowitcher: a juvenile was at Howmore River, South Uist (OH) on 12 September, with another juvenile at Ballo Reservoir (Fife) on 13–19 September. One was on South Uist then North Uist (OH) on 2–26 October, and one was reported at Loch Gruinart, Islay (Arg) on 28 December.

Hudsonian Whimbrel: a juvenile was at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 12 September.

Upland Sandpiper: one was at Quoys of Reiss, near Wick, on 28 September - the first record for Caithness.

Spotted Sandpiper: a juvenile was at Heylipol, Tiree (Arg) on 31 August and juveniles were on Orkney on 5 October and Shetland on 11–18 October; an adult was on the Endrick Water, near Killearn (Clyde) from 28 November to 17 December.

Green Sandpiper: good numbers were reported in August.

Greater Yellowlegs: one was seen briefly at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 24 December.

Lesser Yellowlegs: one was on the Eden

Estuary (Fife) on 21–22 July - second for Fife, and an adult at Aberlady Bay (Loth) from 22 July to 20 December - fourth record for Lothian and the longest staying bird ever in Scotland. Another was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 16–18 September.

Wood Sandpiper: at least 20 were reported in August.

Wilson's Phalarope: one was present at Musselburgh Lagoons on 14–26 November - fourth record for Lothian.

Grey Phalarope: one in non-breeding plumage was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve (NES) on 17 July.

Pomarine Skua: only low numbers were reported in August, with 15 past Kinghorn Harbour (Fife) on 30th the peak count.

Long-tailed Skua: six were reported in July - three in Highland, singles in Lothian and Shetland, and an adult past RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 11th - the first record for the reserve. Disappointingly low numbers were noted in August. **Sabine's Gull:** two were reported in July - singles off Gairloch (High) on 23–25th and from the Ullapool–Stornoway

ferry on 29th. There was a remarkable series of reports from Highland from 11 August when a first-summer was at Balchladich Bay, with then at least three different birds seen from whale-watching trips out of Gairloch on seven dates between 12th and 27th and finally an adult was reported from Tarbat Ness on 25th. An adult spent the evening of 29 August on the Eden Estuary (Fife).

Laughing Gull: an adult was at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 13 September. **Franklin's Gull:** a second-summer on Holm, Mainland Orkney from 12 July was the first record for Orkney, but became elusive and was last reported at Mill Sand, Tankerness on 16 October.

Ring-billed Gull: an adult at Dunstaffnage Bay (Arg) on 11–12 October was presumably a regular returning bird. The only report in November was the regular adult at Oban (Arg); five were reported in December: adults still at Oban (Arg) on 8th at least, and Kinneil (UF) on 10th, and others at Findhorn (M&N) and Ormsary (Arg) both on 29th, and a second-winter was at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 28–31st.



Plate 151. Lesser Yellowlegs with Redshank, Aberlady Bay, Lothian, November 2009 © Mike Thrower.

Gull: about 12 were still being reported in July. The adult at Ayr (Ayr) returned in October for its 19th winter. Just 10 were reported in November, and only 19 in December. **Glaucous Gull:** around 12 were still present during July. Just seven were noted in November, and only 13 in December. **Caspian Tern:** one was at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 4 July - the first in North-east Scotland for 33 years. **Black Tern:** 14 were noted from 22 August, including five off Hound Point (Loth) on 24th, and three at Loch Leven (P&K) on 25th. **White-winged Black Tern:** a juvenile was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) from 29 August to 2 September.

Turtle Dove: late birds were at Watnish, Skye (High) on 18–19 October and at Collieston (NES) on 14–15 November. **Yellow-billed Cuckoo:** an exhausted juvenile was discovered at Deerness (Ork) on 25 September; it remained up until dark but unsurprisingly was not seen the next day. Remarkably a second bird was found, freshly dead, at

Cromwellpark, near Perth (P&K) on 4 October. The only bird out of the previous 10 Scottish records to have been seen alive by several observers was at Montrose Basin (Ang) in 1953. **Snowy Owl:** two different birds were on St. Kilda (OH) up to 13 July at least, and the male was again at Mangursth, Lewis (OH) on at least 12–14 September. The male was noted again, at Crowlsta near Uig, Lewis (OH) on 24 December, whilst a probable was reported near Scalloway (Shet) on 29th. **Nightjar:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6–14 July. **Hoopoe:** in October singles were on Lewis (OH) on 7–18th, Portree, Syke (High) on 16–18th and South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22nd. **Wryneck:** eight were reported from Shetland in August from 15th.

Short-toed Lark: three were reported in October, all on the Northern Isles, one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1–4 November, with another on Unst (Shet) on 1st. **Wood Lark:** four were reported in October, all on the Northern Isles - three

remained on Fair Isle until at least 2 November, with one nearby on North Ronaldsay (Ork) until 7 November. **Shore Lark:** one was on Fair Isle on 28 October until at least 4 November. **Red-rumped Swallow:** one was at Kilminning (Fife) on 28 October - the third county record (all found this year). Others were at Aberlady (Loth) on 3–5 November, Balblair, Ross & Cromarty (High) on 8th and Eyemouth (Bord) on 18–24th. **Richard's Pipit:** four birds were on Shetland from 18 September; 16 birds were reported in October, including the first record for Caithness, at Dounreay on 1st. Four were noted in the first week of November - singles on Shetland and in North-east Scotland still and two on the Outer Hebrides. **Tawny Pipit:** one was reported at Deerness (Ork) on 13 September. **Olive-backed Pipit:** at least 10 were seen on Shetland in October, and one was at Grutness (Shet) on 4 November. **Pechora Pipit:** singles were on Foula (Shet) and Fair Isle on 30 September, with then a further nine birds seen on Shetland in October. **Water Pipit:** up to seven were reported in November, including four in Lothian and one at Vane Farm RSPB from 24th - the first record for Perth & Kinross. Up to four were reported in December: one in Lothian, two in Ayrshire and one still at Vane Farm RSPB (P&K) on 2nd. **Buff-bellied Pipit:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 29–30 September. **Citrine Wagtail:** a juvenile was seen briefly at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve (NES) on 28 August; in September a first-winter was on St. Kilda (OH) on 13th–16th with two others on Shetland from 19th, and a late bird was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18 October. **Waxwing:** a very poor showing with four on the Northern and Western Isles from 11 October, the only birds reported in November were nine at Skelpick, Sutherland (High) on



Plate 152. Wood Lark, Whalsay, Shetland October 2009 © Jason Atkinson

15th, and the only confirmed sighting in December was one on Fair Isle on 6th.

Bluethroat: eight were seen in September from 14th to 28th, two on Fair Isle and six elsewhere on Shetland; 19 were reported in October, all on the Northern Isles. Three late birds were seen on Orkney and Shetland between 1–8 November, and a female at Errol (P&K) on 8–15 November.

Red-flanked Bluetail: in September two were found on Shetland: at Sandgarth on 12–14th and Quendale on 15th. **Pied Wheatear:** a first-winter male was

at Fife Ness (Fife) on 26–31 October - the second county record after one in 1992. **White's Thrush:** one was on Fair Isle on 10 October. **Veery:** two individuals were found on Shetland in October - on Foula on 1–8th and at Symbister, Whalsay on 2–5th (second and third county records).

Eye-browed Thrush: a first-winter female was on North Ronaldsay on 5–6 October - the second record for Orkney.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler: two were reported in October: on St. Kilda (OH) on 4th and Foula (Shet) on 21st. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was on Shetland on

7–15 October and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12th - only the fourth for Orkney. **River Warbler:** the singing male at Applecross, Wester Ross (High) was last reported on 14 July. One was on Fair Isle on 5–12 October.

Savi's Warbler: one was on Fair Isle on 4 October. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** five were seen on Shetland between 2–11 October. One at Quendale (Shet) from 29 November to 1 December was the latest ever found in the UK.

Marsh Warbler: one was on Fetlar (Shet) on 28 August; singles in September at Northdale, Unst on 5th and Skaw, Unst on 26th (both Shet), and one at Quendale (Shet) on 11 October. **Great Reed Warbler:**



Plate 153. Veery, Foula, Shetland October 2009 © Jason Atkinson

one was on Fair Isle on 15–25 July. **Booted Warbler:** one was at Channerwick (Shet) on 11–12 September. **Icterine Warbler:** the first four of the autumn appeared on the Northern Isles in the first week of August, with 18 noted by the end of the month, all on Orkney and Shetland; only five birds were seen in September, including one in Fife. **Barred Warbler:** the first of the autumn was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 5 August with around 23 further birds seen by the end of the month, all on the Northern Isles; about 35 were seen in September, mainly on the Northern Isles. About 30 were reported in October, and late singles were at Rattray Head (NES) on 2 November and Tingwall (Shet) on 9 November. **Greenish Warbler:** only two were noted in August - both on Fair Isle, on 17–19th and 26th. One was at Loch of Strathbeg on 4 September. **Arctic Warbler:** in September five were noted from 16th, all on Shetland, and five were seen on Shetland between 4–15 October. **Pallas's Warbler:** four were seen between 21–26

October - on Orkney, in Fife and two in North-east Scotland. One at Gobhaig, Harris on 7–8 November was only the third record for the Outer Hebrides. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** only around a dozen birds were noted in September following the first on Shetland on 14th. By contrast, 142 were reported in October, with 86 on Shetland whilst elsewhere four different birds were seen on Tiree (Arg) and one was at Troon (Ayr) on 28th–29th. Two were noted in November: at Fife Ness (Fife) still on 1st and at South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 10th. **Radde's Warbler:** three were seen in October between 22nd and 28th: in North-east Scotland, Angus and Fife. **Dusky Warbler:** one was on Whalsay (Shet) on 5 November. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** one was near Bigton (Shet) on 10–18 October. **Firecrest:** in a record-breaking Scottish showing at least 37 were reported in October, including 14 in Angus, at least nine in North-east Scotland and at least eight in Fife. Just two were reported in November: at Lerwick (Shet) on 5th and Lairg, Sutherland (High)



Plate 154. Blackpoll Warbler, Fair Isle, October 2009 © Deryk Shaw.

on 22nd. Three were reported in December: in North-east Scotland, Outer Hebrides and Dumfries & Galloway.

Red-breasted Flycatcher: only two were logged in September - singles on the Outer Hebrides and Borders; 11 were reported in October including two in North-east Scotland. **Taiga Flycatcher:** one was on Fetlar (Shet) from 22 September then relocated to Gloup, Yell on 9 October, remaining to 17th - the second for Shetland, but only the third record for Britain. **Golden Oriole:** a male was reported near Alemill (Bord) on 4 July, and singles were on the Outer Hebrides and Shetland in September. **Brown Shrike:** a first-winter was at Geosetter (Shet) on 11 October. **Red-backed Shrike:** five were reported in July: two different males on Fair Isle, two different females on Orkney and a male at St. Abbs Head (Bord) on

18–22nd; two were seen in August - at Stornoway (OH) on 30th and Fair Isle on 30–31st, and just four birds were reported in September. One was on Fetlar on 14–24 October and one at Portuisk, Ardnamurchan (High) on 20th. **Lesser Grey Shrike:** one was at Laxobigging (Shet) on 27 July. **Great Grey Shrike:** six were reported in October from 10th. The only report in November was the bird at Glen Feshie, Strathspey (High) still on 6th, and the only bird reported in December was at Slockavullin (Arg) on 7–16th. **Woodchat Shrike:** a juvenile was at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 18 September. **Rose-coloured Starling:** three were reported on Orkney during October with an adult on Shapinsay (Ork) remaining until the first week of December, and juveniles were reported from Peterhead (NES) on 28 October, and briefly near Dunphail (M&N) on 19 November.

Arctic Redpoll: three birds (all *hornemanni*) occurred on the Northern Isles in late September - one on Foula (Shet) on 27th, two there on 28th and one on North Ronaldsay on 29–30th. This developed into a mini influx (associated with a small arrival of Greenland Redpolls), with around 30 more noted in October, all in the Northern or Western Isles - almost all of the form *hornemanni*.

Two-barred Crossbill: a male was on Fair Isle on 23–24 July, and a male was at Levenwick (Shet) on 26 August.

Common Rosefinch: in July singles were on North Ronaldsay on 3rd and Fair Isle on 23–25th; in August one was seen briefly at Girvan Mains (Ayr) on 16th and three on Shetland from 18th; about 17 were seen in September - all on the Northern and Western Isles; 23 were reported in October, mainly on Shetland.

Blackburnian Warbler: a female was on St. Kilda (OH) on 12–13 September - only the third British record (second Scottish).

Blackpoll Warbler: one was on Fair Isle on 15–16 October - the second island record.

Lapland Bunting: in December up to three were at Dowlaw (Bord) on 13–20th, two at Balemore, North Uist (OH) on 5th, with one still there on 24th, and one was also reported at RSPB Mersehead (D&G) on 16th.

Ortolan Bunting: one was seen between Arbroath and Auchmithie (Ang) on 17 October with another at Virkie (Shet) on 19 October.

Rustic Bunting: the only bird of the autumn was on Fair Isle on 14–16 October.

Little Bunting: just four birds were seen in September, all on the Northern Isles from 14th; 15 were reported in October - 12 on Shetland, and three on Orkney. One was found in a garden at Dunnet (Caith) on 20 December, and remained well into 2010 (the same garden held a Rufous Turtle Dove in winter 2003/04).

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 155. On a wintery day in March 2010 I drove to the Cairngorms to record any birds I might see. There was snow at 1000 feet, and the mountain I decided to climb was not far from thousands of skiers. I encountered Red Grouse at 1500 feet and just a little bit higher at c. 2000 feet I came across my first Ptarmigan. There was also a pair slightly higher at c. 2900 feet.

On my climb I also found foot prints of Mountain Hare and more grouse. I'm sure the Ptarmigan had been forced lower down the hill to feed, as there was so much snow cover and on the tops it must have been -15°C the night before.

The pair of Ptarmigan were roosting either side of a boulder, and observing them for a while, they didn't move. I decided to move a little bit closer to try and capture a picture and I did this every five minutes or so until I got to a decent distance for the 400 mm lens. The picture I believe gives a real feeling to the extreme habitat in which Ptarmigan exist. I backed off and left them to roost in peace.

For people who are interested in camera gear, I used a Canon 40D, 400 mm lens and a Bushawk shoulder mount.

John Chapman
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