



Scottish Birds

published by the

SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

75
1936 2011
SOC

VOLUME 31(1) JANUARY 2011

Scottish Birds

Established in 1958.

Published quarterly by:

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club,
Waterston House, Aberlady,
East Lothian EH32 0PY.

Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk
Phone: 01875 871330
www.the-soc.org.uk

Editors:

Co-ordinating editor
Ian Andrews

Peer-reviewed papers

Dr Stan da Prato

Assisted by:

Dr I. Bainbridge
Professor D. Jenkins
Dr M. Marquiss
Dr J.B. Nelson
R. Swann

Articles, news and views

Ian Francis
Jimmy Maxwell
Dr Stuart L. Rivers
Harry Scott

Editorial correspondence:

c/o SOC, Waterston House,
Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.
Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk

Designed and typeset by:

Pica Design, 51 Charlton Crescent,
Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN.

Email: picaDES@ifb.co.uk

Printed by:

Crowes, 50 Hurricane Way,
Norwich, Norfolk NR6 6JB

Front Cover:

(L-R) Unknown, George Waterston,
Miss Evelyn Baxter and David
Bannerman, 1950s. © SOC Archive

ISSN 0036-9144

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.

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

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

SOC annual membership subscription rates

Adult	£ 28.00
Family (2 adults and any juniors living at the same address)	£ 39.00
Junior (aged 17 or under)	£ 12.00
Student (aged 18 to 24 and in full-time education)	£ 12.00
Concession (pensioner)	£ 21.00
Concession (unwaged/unemployed)	£ 12.00
Joint Concession	£ 27.00
Life	£ 600.00
Life Family	£ 900.00
Overseas supplement	£ 10.00

All subscriptions may be paid by Direct Debit and Gift Aided. Subscriptions paid by Direct Debit greatly assist the Club. Please ask for an application form by telephoning 01875 871330 or visiting the Club's website at: www.the-soc.org.uk



Scottish Charity Reg. No.

SC 009859

Scottish Birds 31:1 (2011)

- 2 President's Foreword D. Jardine

PAPERS

- 3 Satellite-tracking of a Curlew migrating between Scotland and Finland
R.H. Dennis, B. Etheridge, S. Foster, J. Heaton & R.L. Swann
- 8 Amendments to the Scottish List: species and subspecies R.W. Forrester on behalf of the
Scottish Birds Records Committee

SHORT NOTES

- 21 Common Crossbills feeding on peanuts G. Smith
- 22 Observations on Lesser Whitethroat singing and roosting behaviour in Ayrshire during
May 2010 T. Byars
- 25 Unusual behaviour of Stonechats during severe weather M. Groves

OBITUARIES

- 26 Ian Balfour Paul (1916–2010) M. Fraser & Rev M. Ramsay
- 28 Samuel Michael David Alexander (1932–2010) N. Picozzi & A. Knox

ARTICLES, NEWS & VIEWS

- 30 The 75th Anniversary of the SOC D. Clugston
- 37 NEWS AND NOTICES
- 40 'The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland' I. Francis
- 42 John Latimer - Wildlife Artist
- 46 Szabolcs Kókay - Hungarian Wildlife Artist
- 50 NOTES AND COMMENT
- 52 Bird Atlas 2007–11: the final summer B. Swann
- 52 Ornithology at the University of St Andrews W. Cresswell
- 60 BIRDSPOT Scandinavian Rock Pipits C. McKay
- 64 BOOK REVIEWS
- 67 RINGERS' ROUNDUP R. Duncan
- 71 The 2010 Waxwing invasion R. Duncan
- 77 Red-eyed Vireo, near Kirkwall, Orkney, 3 October 2009 - first Orkney record P. Higson
- 79 Sandhill Crane, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2009 - the third Scottish & British
record P. Higson
- 82 Twitching Pays D. Brown
- 86 Northern Parula, the Isle of Tiree, Argyll, 25–29 September 2010 - the first Scottish record
J.M. Bowler

BIRGUIDES REVIEW

- 91 1 October to 31 December 2010 M. Grantham

PHOTOSPOT

- BC Woodcock J. Anderson

President's Foreword

'Early in 1936 a meeting was held in Edinburgh attended by Miss Baxter, Miss Rintoul, H F D Elder and George Waterston, where it was resolved that steps should be taken to found a national [bird] club'. This is how Ian Pennie describes the momentous decision made 75 years ago to form the SOC - Scotland's Bird Club. The first Club meeting was held on 14 January 1937, in Edinburgh, and was attended by 80% of the founder members.

This is a year to celebrate! The SOC has grown and thrives, despite difficulties through the years - not least those faced in its formative years during the Second World War. Many things have changed since those early years; transport, communication, optics and not least on the birding front. Some populations have declined, others are recovering and the 'Scottish List' has grown enormously. With the addition of the Northern Parula (see pages 86–90) found on Tiree in September 2010, there has been an increase of a remarkable 148 species (40%) occurring in Scotland since the founding of the Club. We owe a great debt to all those who have worked hard over the years to make sure that the Club has been such a success.

I'd like to draw to your attention a few special elements during the anniversary year. I am delighted that David Clugston has been able to provide an update to the history of the Club (see pages 30–36 for part 1), which follows on from the earlier works of Ian Pennie and Joe Eggeling, and is published in this volume.

We will celebrate the 75th Anniversary at two conferences. We chose to return to the Marine Hotel at North Berwick for the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference because of the long association between the Club and this venue. In the autumn, at the Annual Conference, we will go to a new location, the Golf Hotel, Carnoustie, which offers excellent facilities and good birding literally outside the door. If you have any memorabilia which will facilitate nostalgic conversations please let Waterston House know. We hope you will be able to join us for these special events; all are welcome.

Council is encouraging every branch to take the opportunity locally to celebrate the founding of the Club; we hope that this will stimulate membership of the SOC, for new members will provide the Club with what it will require to celebrate its centenary with pride. Please can you make a point personally of asking somebody to join the SOC this year, or better still making sure that they do join!

If you need any help or information on membership, staff at Aberlady will be able to help.

Everybody at Waterston House will be celebrating this year and Dave Allan has managed to develop a superb programme of art exhibitions to mark the 75th Anniversary (please see News and Notices on page 37 for details). If you've not been to Waterston House, this is the year to come as there will be some wonderful artwork on view.

Finally, I'd like to invite you to come on Saturday, 24 September to the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh when Chris Packham will provide a public lecture to celebrate the Club's Anniversary - we hope that you will make an effort to get to this event and will also take the opportunity to bring friends who might become members too.

Thanks to everyone for your support. Enjoy the birthday celebrations this year!

David Jardine, President



Plate 1. The ringed Curlew with the satellite transmitter, Bunchrew Bay, Inverness, March 2009. © Jacquie Heaton.

Satellite-tracking of a Curlew migrating between Scotland and Finland

R.H. DENNIS, B. ETHERIDGE, S. FOSTER, J. HEATON & R.L. SWANN

A Curlew was caught on the Beaully Firth, prior to its spring migration and fitted with a satellite transmitter. In mid-April, the bird flew over mid-Norway to a staging area in Sweden, close to the Gulf of Bothnia, before proceeding to its Finnish breeding grounds. It remained on its breeding ground for a maximum of 53 days, possibly long enough for a successful breeding attempt. In late June, it began its return migration, taking a more southerly route down the Gulf of Bothnia and over southern Scandinavia before crossing the North Sea. It staged in North-east Scotland for a few days before returning to its wintering site on the Beaully Firth. The migration of this bird fits in well with the distribution of Scandinavian ring recoveries of Moray Firth Curlews.

Introduction

Curlews *Numenius arquata* winter in the Moray Firth in internationally important numbers. Annual Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts conducted during winter 1998/99 to 2002/03 gave an average of 5,767 birds (Kalejta-Summers 2006). Within the Moray Firth, three sites are recognised as Special Protection Areas (SPA), partly on account of the internationally important numbers of Curlews present; namely the Dornoch and Loch Fleet SPA, the Cromarty Firth SPA and the Inner Moray Firth SPA. Overall, Curlews represent 9% of the total number of waders wintering on the Moray Firth.



Plate 2. The ringed Curlew with the satellite transmitter, Bunchrew Bay, Inverness, March 2009. © Jacquie Heaton.

Swann & Etheridge (1996) showed that Curlews using the Moray Firth originated from breeding areas in northern Scotland and Scandinavia with around 50% of the ringing returns coming from Scandinavia. It appears that most Scottish-breeding Curlews depart to their breeding grounds in early March, whilst Scandinavian birds remain on the estuaries until mid-April (Bainbridge in Wernham *et al.* 2002).

In order to understand more about this migratory population, the Highland Ringing Group decided to satellite track one of these late-staying Curlews in spring 2009.

Methods

Four Curlews were cannon-netted at a high tide roost at Bunchrew Bay, west of Inverness, on 31 March 2009. The largest female (wing length 308 mm, bill length 150 mm and mass 983 g) was fitted with a Microwave Telemetry 9.5g Solar PTT-100 unit transmitter, using the Rappole method of fixing (Rappole & Tipton 1991; Plate 1). To preserve the battery power the transmitter was programmed to send data every four days. The data were received from the Argos CLS tracking station via a dedicated website. Six classes of signal were used: Class 1–3 which are accurate to less than 1.5 km, Class 0 accuracy greater than 1.5 km. These four classes are calculated from at least four messages received during the satellite pass. The other classes are not given an accuracy by Argos. Class A signals are based on three messages per pass and Class B two messages. These need to be manually checked to ascertain likely fit on a migration route. Unless otherwise stated only locations from Class 1–3 signals are used in this paper.

The Curlew's migration was continuously displayed and updated on the website run by the Highland Foundation for Wildlife www.roydennis.org. All times given are GMT.

Results

Between 13 April and 26 July 2009, 133 locations were received from the transmitter. These varied in the quality of signal received - 34 of the 133 were class 1–3 signals.

Pre-migration

No signals were received on 4th or 8 April, but on 13 April an accurate signal gave a location at 14:01 in fields at Wester Lovat, at the head of the Beaully Firth, when local high tide was at 14:43. These fields are 7 km west of the Bunchrew roost where the bird was initially captured. On 17 April, the bird was back at Bunchrew at 19:13, when high tide was at 18:36. An A class signal at 19:29, 4 km to the NNE on the Black Isle may have indicated the start of migration at dusk.

Spring migration

The next signal (B class) came in at 22:41 on 21 April and indicated that the bird was migrating over Norway. The position was near Kongsmoen, 192 km NNE of Trondheim, and by 02:26 on 22 April another class B signal indicated she had arrived in Sweden, approximately 38 km west of Umea. She had migrated over Norway during the night and had covered around 355 km between the two signals. By 26 April, she was located 70 km further north, in coastal farmlands, 64 km north of Umea, and on 30 April was a little further north in Vasterbotten on the shores of a large lake north of Lovanger. The length of stay at the staging site on the Swedish coastal farmlands was between nine and 12 days.

The bird departed from the Swedish coast and crossed the Gulf of Bothnia sometime between 30 April and 4 May. She had arrived in Finland by 4 May near Vihanti, where she was over forests at 09:23 and then by 10:04 had flown 6 km further east to an area of wet meadowlands SW of Vihanti. By 8 May she had moved a further 24 km north to a district of farms and woodlands near Ruukki, about 42 km SSW of Oulu, in NW Finland. The migration journey from Scotland was at least 1,895 km.

Breeding area

Following arrival sometime between the 4th and 8 May she settled in an area of farms, woodland and rough ground near a small river to the east of Ruukki. Most of the accurate signals over the next few weeks were within a range of 3.4 km east to west and 2.7 km north to south. On the 23 June she was still 3.5 km east of Ruuki, apparently in farm fields.

Autumn migration

At 04:30 on 27 June, an accurate signal showed the bird to be by a small island at the very southern tip of Norway, 8km SSW of Mandal. Three other poorer quality (A and B class) signals in this general area between 01:36 and 05:35 suggest she had probably stopped over on the island. She had covered at least 1,192 km and her migration must have started between 23rd and 26 June. Signals on 1 July indicated that she had crossed the North Sea and was located near Mintlaw, North-east Scotland, having travelled almost due west, a distance of 563 km. Three signals that morning showed she was moving between fields within a 3 km radius of the first location.

The next transmission on 5 July revealed that she was back on the Beaully Firth having travelled the final 140 km from Mintlaw. She was in fields above Muirtown at 10:26, above Bunchrew at 12:00 and back at the Bunchrew catching site at 12:04, local high tide was at 11:03. Figure 1 shows her migration route to and from Finland.

Wintering area

On arrival on the wintering grounds, Curlews start their main annual moult. During this period, birds tend not to migrate and remain within one estuary (Sach 1968, Bainbridge & Minton 1978). The bird was on fields at Bunchrew on 9 July at 12:24, with high tide at 13:45. On 13 July she was off Bunchrew on the low tide mudflats at 20:28. She was on the north side of the Beaully Firth on 17 July and probably on the Black Isle between North Kessock and Ord Hill on

26 July. There were no signals after 26 July and it is not known if the satellite transmitter failed or fell off, or the bird was dead. Both British breeding (Bainbridge & Minton 1978) and continental breeding (Boere 1976) Curlews are known to be site faithful to their wintering grounds, and also often winter where they moult.

Discussion

Since 1977, the Highland Ringing Group has caught 2,960 Curlews on the Moray Firth resulting in 23 breeding season recoveries in or from Scandinavia (Figure 1). The movements of the satellite-tagged bird and its final destination in Finland, fit well with this pattern of ringing recoveries and the general known migration routes of Curlew (Bainbridge & Minton 1978, Bainbridge in Wernham *et al.* 2002).

The details from a single satellite-tagged bird, however, give extra information that ringing alone, to date, has not provided. In particular it revealed a 'circular' migration route and the use of a staging area in Sweden (Figure 1). In spring, she took a fairly northerly route to Norway, where she crossed the mountains in North Trondelag, where they are lower and narrower than further north or south. She then arrived on the fertile coastal plain of the Gulf of Bothnia in Sweden, where she staged for 9–12 days before flying over the Gulf of Bothnia to her breeding grounds in Finland. Her return migration was more southerly, down through the Gulf of Bothnia and over southern Sweden to the southern tip of Norway, avoiding high ground, then across the North Sea at a more southerly latitude to North-east Scotland, where she stopped for 1–8 days before returning to the wintering site on the Beaulieu Firth.

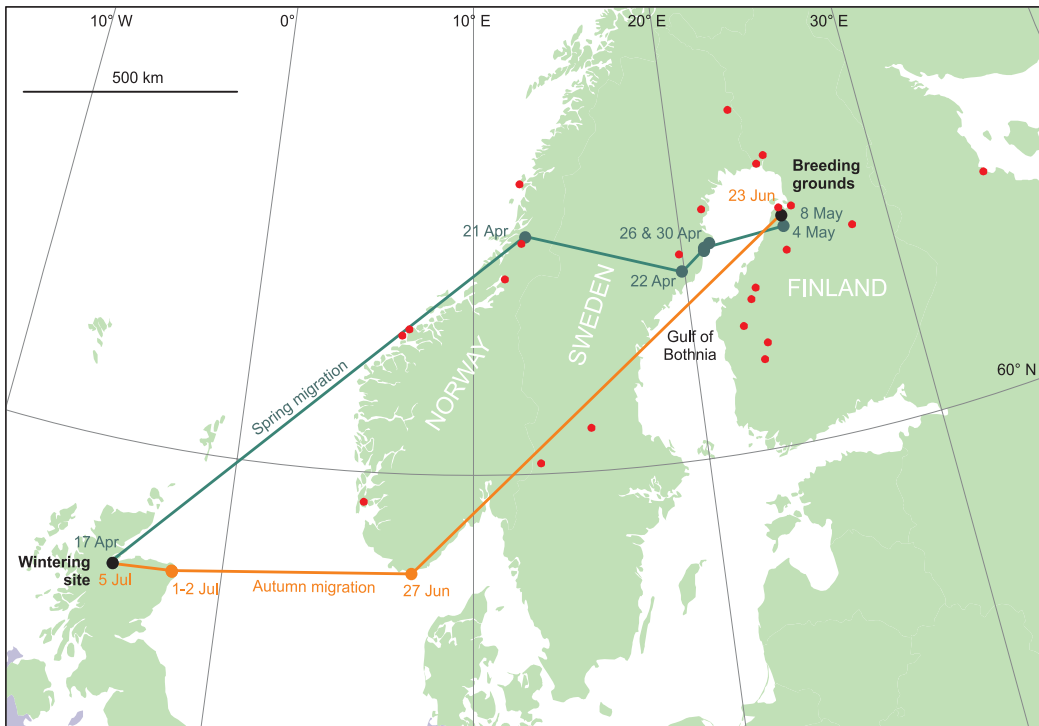


Figure 1. The recorded migration route of the satellite-tagged Curlew between Scotland and Finland, 2009. It should be noted that lines joining sequential dates do not indicate the actual route bird has flown, but indicate the time and distance sequence. The red dots show the location in Scandinavia of Curlews ringed or controlled on the Moray Firth in the non-breeding season.

The other interesting detail is the relative time spent by the bird on her Scandinavian breeding grounds and at her Scottish wintering site. If she arrived in Finland on 5 May and left on 26 June, this would mean she had spent 53 days on her breeding grounds. Egg-laying and incubation takes about 34 days (Cramp & Simmons 1983), whilst Currie *et al.* (2001) found that female Curlews in Scandinavia (unlike those in Scotland; Bainbridge in Forrester *et al.* 2007) deserted their offspring approximately halfway through the brooding period (c.16 days after hatching), leaving the males to complete parental duties (and arrive back in Scotland later than the females). It is therefore entirely possible that this bird successfully bred in Finland. Migration to and from the breeding ground took a maximum of 26 days. These data indicate that this adult female spent around 80% of the year on its wintering grounds and only 15% on the breeding grounds.

Acknowledgements

This study was funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, Highland Ringing Group and the Highland Foundation for Wildlife. We are grateful to staff at SNH office in Dingwall, in particular Steve North and Anne Murray. We are also grateful to fellow members of the Highland Ringing Group, for assisting with our catching activities.

References

- Bainbridge, I.P. & Minton, C.D.T. 1978. The migration and mortality of the Curlew in Britain and Ireland. *Bird Study* 25: 39–50.
- Boere, G.C. 1976. The significance of the Dutch Waddensee in the annual life cycle of arctic, sub-arctic and boreal waders. Part 1. The function as a moulting area. *Ardea* 64: 210–291.
- Cramp, S. & Simmons, K.E.L. (eds) 1983. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic, Vol. 3*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Currie, D., Valkama, J., Berg, Å., Boschert, M., Norrdahl, K., Hänninen, M., Korpimäki, E., Pöyri, V. & Hemminki, O. 2001. Sex roles, parental effort and offspring desertion in the monogamous Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*. *Ibis* 143: 642–650.
- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerney, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. (eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady. Pp. 672–676.
- Kalejta-Summers, B. 2006. Changes in numbers and distribution of waders in the Moray Firth 1988–2003. *Scottish Birds* 26: 1–16.
- Rappole, J.H. & Tipton, A.R. 1991. New harness design for the attachment of radio transmitters to small passerines. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 62(3): 335–337.
- Sach, G. 1968. Die Mauser der Grossen Brachvogels, *Numenius arquata*. *Journal für Ornithologie* 109: 485–511.
- Swann, R.L. & Etheridge, B. 1996. Movements of waders to and from the Moray Firth. *Ringing & Migration* 17: 111–121.
- Wernham, C.V., Toms, M.P., Marchant, J.H., Clark, J.A., Siriwardena, G.M. & Baillie, S.R. (eds) 2002. *The Migration Atlas: movements of the birds of Britain and Ireland*. T. & A. D. Poyser, London. Pp. 332–335.

Roy Dennis, Middle Lodge, Dunphail, Forres, Moray IV36 2QQ.
Brian Etheridge, Beechgrove, Rosehaugh East Drive, Avoch, Ross-shire IV9 8RE.
Simon Foster, 8 Bishops View, Westercraigs, Inverness IV3 8LJ.
Jacquie Heaton, Wester Cruenassie, Breakachy, Beauly, Inverness-shire IV4 7AE.
Bob Swann, 14 St.Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR.
Email: robert.swann@homecall.co.uk

Revised ms accepted November 2010



Plate 3. Brown Flycatcher, Fair Isle, July 1992. © Paul Harvey

Amendments to the Scottish List: species and subspecies

THE SCOTTISH BIRDS RECORDS COMMITTEE

In July 1993, the Council of The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) delegated to the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) responsibility for producing a *Scottish List* and publishing regular amendments. The list was first published in 1994 and SBRC appointed a subcommittee to maintain it. The current *Scottish List* subcommittee consists of Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McNerny and Roger Riddington.

The *Scottish List* was last published in full in 2001 (Clugston *et al.* 2001), since when there have been four sets of amendments (Forrester 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009). This is therefore the fifth update. A full explanation of the procedure for maintaining the list is given in Clugston *et al.* (2001).

The *Scottish List* provided both a foundation and a structure for *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007), published by the SOC in December 2007.

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) announced in its 35th Report (BOU 2007) that the BOU would adopt the standardized English names recommended by the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) in *Birds of the World: Recommended English Names* (Gill & Wright 2006) and subsequent updates (see www.worldbirdnames.org/updates), with the following provisions:

- In respect of the *British List* and publications relating to the List, the BOU will always use both the vernacular English name familiar to British birdwatchers alongside the Gill & Wright standard (international-use) English name.
- Following existing BOU policy, for all BOU publications, the BOU will differ from Gill & Wright in not using a capital letter for a name following a hyphen, e.g. the BOU will use Hawk-owl and not Hawk-Owl.

In the past the same English name has often been used in different countries for different bird species, but perhaps more frequently different names have been used for the same species. The aim of the IOC has been to try to remove this confusion by standardizing the use of English names throughout the world. Use of English names has continually evolved over recent decades, and many would say that changes have been too frequent, so it is to be hoped that we may now enter a period of stability.

The *Scottish List* has always followed the *British List* in the use of English names. The *Scottish List* now shows both the vernacular English name used for the *British List* and the international English name. Within this paper the vernacular English name is being used.

Since the fourth *Scottish List* update, BOURC has published its 37th, 38th and 39th Reports (BOU 2009, 2010, 2011). Decisions by BOURC automatically apply to the *Scottish List* and those applicable are:

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

One individual (of two birds, possibly a pair) bearing neck-collar 6TU2 from Maryland, USA was at Loch Kinord on 17–19 November 1992, then Muir of Fowlis on 22–24 November 1992, at Loch of Skene on 16–17 January 1993 (all North-east Scotland) and shot near Perth (Perth & Kinross) on 26 January 1993, photograph (BOU 1997). The individual bearing the neck-collar provided the first confirmed evidence of transatlantic vagrancy for Canada Goose. Although it had been neck-collared within the range of subspecies *interior* (Todd's Canada Goose), at a site where the overwhelming majority of birds are *interior*, a diagnosis that would be consistent with the field appearance of this individual and its companion, subspecific identification was not confirmed (BOU 2011).

The *Scottish List* has up to now shown the status code IB for nominate *canadensis* and also the status code SV for 'race or races undetermined'. IB should continue for nominate *canadensis*, but the description for SV should now be changed to 'probably subspecies *interior*'.

Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Following a review of the only previously accepted British record of the subspecies *borealis* (Northern Eider), a male found as a tideline corpse, at Musselburgh (Lothian) on 9 February 1978 (specimen held at Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum, Glasgow [GLAMG Z.1978.26.5]), it was determined that the biometrics of this individual were not conclusive, and the subspecies was removed from the *British List* (BOU 2011).

The subspecies *borealis* should be removed from the *Scottish List*.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

1991 North-east Scotland Donmouth, adult or first-summer, 18–19 August, photo (D.J. Bain, K.D. Shaw, G. Smith, A. Webb *et al.*), previously accepted as Greater Sand Plover (*British Birds* 85: 525) this record is now accepted as a Lesser Sand Plover and is attributed to the *mongolus* group of subspecies which includes, *mongolus* and *stegmanni* (*British Birds* 103: 584; Webb & Shaw 2010, BOU 2011).

This becomes the first of two Scottish records. This is also the 1st Scottish record attributed to a subspecies group.

Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*

Following a review, records of American Hawk Owl *S. u. caparoch* from Clyde in 1863, 1868 and 1871 were found to be unacceptable, due to the possibility of importation (BOU 2010, Harrop 2010). The 1871 record had already been rejected by Andrews & Naylor (2002).

This subspecies is removed from the *Scottish List*.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

Following a review, the first acceptable British record of subspecies *L. i. phoenicuroides*, known as Turkestan Shrike, was that from Norfolk in 1995 (BOU 2010). Previously the only accepted Scottish record of *phoenicuroides* was from Fair Isle in 1994, so this now becomes 'race undetermined'. Subspecies *phoenicuroides* should therefore be removed from the *Scottish List*.

Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*

Following a review this species has been moved from Category D to Category A of the *British List*. Two of the three acceptable records are from Scotland:

1992 Fair Isle summer plumage, 1–2 July, trapped, photographed (P.V. Harvey *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 585–586; Harvey 1992, 2010).

2008 Fair Isle first-winter, 24–25 September 2008 (D.N. Shaw *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 585; Shaw 2010a).

Both records were of the nominate subspecies *M. d. dauurica* (BOU 2010).

Move from Category D to Category A. Status code SV. The species should be placed before Spotted Flycatcher.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Following a review of British occurrences of the subspecies *M. f. beema*, known as Sykes's Wagtail, all records, including one from Fair Isle in 1910, were found to be unacceptable (BOU 2010).

The subspecies is removed from the *Scottish List*.

Citrel Finch *Carduelis citrinella*

2008 Fair Isle adult, male 6–11 June (T. Hyndman *et al.*) (*British Birds* 101: plate 184; 103: 628–629, plate 348; Hyndman 2008, Shaw 2009, BOU 2011).

1st British and 1st Scottish record. Monotypic; status SV. Add to Category A.

Chestnut Bunting *Emberiza rutila*

Following a review, Chestnut Bunting has been moved from Category D to Category E of the *British List* (BOU 2009).

Remove from Category D and add to Category E.

The 2008 report on rare birds from the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) included:

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

North American subspecies 'American Black Tern' *C. n. surinamensis*

2008 Outer Hebrides North Bay, South Uist, juvenile, 17 November, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 565; Duffield 2010).

1st Scottish record of this subspecies. Status code SV.

The 2009 report on rare birds from BBRC included:

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

M. f. cinereocapilla x *iberiae* (Ashy-headed Wagtail/Spanish Wagtail)

2007 Outer Hebrides Borge, Benbecula, male, 1–28 June, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 624).

This individual could not clearly be assigned to subspecies and was therefore published at the present time in the indeterminate category. Neither subspecies, as yet, appears on the *Scottish List*.

SBRC has accepted the following record:

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*

2009 Argyll Loch an Eilein and Heylipol, Tiree, 6–7 May 2009 (J.M. Bowler) (Bowler 2010).

1st Scottish record of this subspecies. Status code SV.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

The subspecies of Oriental Turtle Dove recorded in Scotland was previously presumed to be nominate *orientalis* (Clugston *et al.* 2001). At that time there was only one Scottish record of Oriental Turtle Dove, a bird on Fair Isle in 1974. There are now four Scottish records of Oriental Turtle Dove and although the subspecies of the first two records was not established, both the 2002 Orkney bird and the 2003 Caithness bird have been assigned to subspecies *meena*. This, therefore, is the only subspecies to have been confirmed in Scotland.

As a result of the above changes the *Scottish List* totals are now:

Category A	504
Category B	7
Category C	6
TOTAL	517
Category D	10

The Fifth report of BOURC's taxonomic subcommittee (Knox *et al.* 2008) resulted in the following change which was omitted in error from the fourth update to the *Scottish List*:

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*

Genetic studies have shown that Rosy Starling is more closely related to the mynas than Common Starling and is therefore placed in a separate genus, becoming *Pastor roseus*.

Daurian Starling *Sturnus sturninus*

Similarly Daurian Starling (in Category D of the *Scottish List*) is now placed in a separate genus, becoming *Agropsar sturninus*.

The Sixth report of BOURC's taxonomic subcommittee (Sangster *et al.* 2010) assessed the taxonomic sequence of passerines, resulting in significant changes to the order of species on the *Scottish List*.

The BOU website www.bou.org.uk is continually updated and includes the *British List* <http://thebritishlist.blogspot.com> press releases and the most recent committee and taxonomic reports.

Status codes

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Change status code from PV to CB PV.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Change status code from CB PV to MB PV.

Although the *Scottish List* has regularly been updated on the SOC's website (www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-list), in view of the significant changes that have taken place, it is appropriate that the *Scottish List* should now once more appear in print, this time as a stand-alone booklet.

Update to records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions

A list of all records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions was published on behalf of SBRC (Andrews & Naylor 2002) since when there have been three updates (Forrester 2004, Forrester 2007, Forrester 2009). This is the fourth update and includes records from the 2008 and 2009 reports on rare birds from BBRC (Hudson *et al.* 2009, 2010). Also included are records accepted by SBRC for species and subspecies not adjudicated upon by BBRC and contained within their report covering the years 2005–08 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, 2010b), which have not appeared in the previous 'update' paper. An opportunity was taken in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) to evaluate the validity of several old records and to revise the numbering of records up to the end of 2004 for several species.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

2005 Upper Forth Gart Gravel-pits, male, 24–25 September, photo (L. Leisk *et al.*) (*British Birds* 100: 21).

2006 Lothian Threipmuir Reservoir, first-winter female, 22–29 December, photo (M. & B.D.

Griffin *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 105).

17th and 18th Scottish records of 19 birds.

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*

2008 Fife Tayport, female, 26 October to 15 November, photo (P. & R. Blackburn *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 535).
3rd Scottish record.

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*

2008 Argyll Machrihanish, adult, 27 October (E. Maguire) (*British Birds* 102: 538).
6th Scottish record.

Fea's Petrel or Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma feae/madeira*

2007 Outer Hebrides Labost, Isle of Lewis, 24 August (T. ap Rheinallt) (*British Birds* 103: 571).
3rd Scottish record.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

P. c. sinensis 'Continental Cormorant'

1998 Moray & Nairn Loch Spynie, immature, 26 December–20 January 1999, photo (R. Proctor *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2005 Clyde Prince's Dock, Glasgow, 26 December, photo (J.J. Molloy) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2007 Lothian Gladhouse Reservoir, adult, 21 January (M.A. Wilkinson) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2007 Lothian Port Seton, 13 March, photo (K. Gibb, M. Thrower) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2007 Borders Eyemouth harbour, 25 March, photo (R.D. Murray) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2007 Shetland Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, adult, 30 April–4 June, photo (P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington, R.M. Tallack *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2007 Shetland Lochs of Spiggie & Brow, Mainland, first-summer, 18–19 June (P.V. Harvey *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2008 North-east Scotland Girdleness 7 February, photo (M.A. Maher, R.A. Schofield) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109).

2008 Shetland Uyeasound, Unst, adult, 10 May, photo (W. Dickson, R.M. Tallack) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 109). Although there were earlier records published as 'showing the characters of *P. c. sinensis*', it was not until 2005 that SBRC started to examine records of the subspecies *sinensis*. These are the 2nd–10th Scottish records of this subspecies. The 1998 Moray & Nairn record becomes the first for Scotland.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

2008 Orkney Birsay Moors and Evie area, Mainland, adult, 21–26 May, photo (M. Gurney, A.C. Knight, A.J. Leitch *et al.*); presumed same Cottascarth, Isbister, Mainland, 26 May, photo (per Orkney Recorder), and Rousay and Westray, 26 May, photo (per Orkney Recorder) (*British Birds* 102: 528–601).

2008 Shetland presumed same bird as Orkney above, Ronas Hill and Sullom Voe area, Mainland, adult, 28–30 May, photo (G.F. Bell, S.J. Minton *et al.*); presumed same Norwick, Unst, 1 June, photo (G.F. Bell) (*British Birds* 102: 528–601).

18th Scottish record of 19 birds.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

2006 Highland undisclosed site, Inverness district, male, summering from 24 May, photo (C. Crawford, J. & N. Glenn) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 112).

2008 Fair Isle various locations, adult, 7–10 May, photo (S.J. Davies, D.N. Shaw *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 112).

The 2005 Ayrshire record was incorrectly stated to be the 19th Scottish record (*Scottish Birds* 27: 7). Forrester *et al.* (2007) described 19 Scottish records up to 2004 and the above records are therefore the 21st and 22nd Scottish records (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a). The species is now removed from list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis*

- 2009 Highland Sarclet then Latheron, Dunbeath, Helmsdale, Brora and Kildary, adult, 29 September, photo (D. Brown, T.C. Lowe); presumed same as Orkney, 22–29 September (*British Birds* 103: 579; Brown 2011).
- 2009 Orkney Burwick, South Ronaldsay, adult, 22–29 September, photo (P. Higson *et al.*); presumed same as Highland, 29 September (*British Birds* 102: plate 413, 103: 579–580; Higson 2011b). 3rd Scottish record.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*

- 2008 Outer Hebrides Balranald, North Uist, 2–3 May, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 551).
- 2008 Shetland Exnaboe and Virkie, Mainland, adult female, 6 March intermittently to 15 April, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*); presumed same Mousa, 2 April (J.G. Brown), and Noss, 11 April (C.J.R. Dodd, A.D. Taylor); presumed same as Burra, Exnaboe and Virkie 2007 (*British Birds* 102: 551; *Scottish Birds* 29: 10; Haywood 2009).
- 2009 Outer Hebrides Loch Stiapavat, Isle of Lewis, 6 April (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 584). Outer Hebrides birds are 14th and 15th Scottish records.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

- 2007 Outer Hebrides Baile Gharbhaidh (Balgarva) area, South Uist, 11 November–20 April 2008, photo, (A. Stevenson *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 30: 115; Stevenson 2010). 16th Scottish record.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

- 2008 North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary, probably first-summer, 12–19 September, photo (D. Cooper, B. Kay *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 551; Cooper & Kay 2010). Presumed same as Lothian.
- 2008 Lothian Dunbar, probably first-summer, 19–20 September, photo (H. & M. Eden *et al.* per C.D. Scott) (*British Birds* 102: 551). Presumed same as North-east Scotland.
- With the 1991 North-east Scotland record now attributed to Lesser Sand Plover, this becomes the 4th Scottish record.

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*

- 2008 Fair Isle Upper Stoneybrek/Pund, female, 1–2 May, photo (J.M. Reid *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 552; Reid 2009). 3rd Scottish record.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

- 2008 Argyll Barrapol, Tiree, 8 October (W. Allan, J. Dickson) (*British Birds* 102: 552).
- 2008 Dumfries & Galloway Dornock and Browhouses, adult, 6–12 September, photo (A.T. & C.I. Bushell, J. Nadin *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 552).
- 2008 Orkney North Ronaldsay, adult, 27 July to 6 August, photo (J.K. Batten, P.A. Brown) (*British Birds* 102: 553).
- 2008 Orkney North Ronaldsay, adult, 22 August to 7 September, photo (P.A. Brown *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 553).
- 2009 Argyll Sandaig, Tiree, adult, 30 August–1 September, photo (J. Bowler, K. Gillon) (*British Birds* 103: 585). 19th–23rd Scottish records. Now removed from list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

2008 Outer Hebrides Balranald, North Uist, adult, 20 July, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 553).

2009 Outer Hebrides Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, 23 May, photo (A. Fawcett, B. Rabbitts, J. Swalwell) (*British Birds* 103: 586).

2009 Outer Hebrides South Ford, South Uist, juvenile, 20 August, photo (S.E. Duffield) (*British Birds* 103: 586).

15th–17th Scottish records of 24 birds.

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*

2008 Outer Hebrides Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, juvenile, 14–15 September, photo (A. Stevenson) (*British Birds* 102: 554).

2009 North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, adult, 9–11 July, photo (D. & S. Parnaby *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 587; Parnaby 2009).

4th and 5th Scottish records.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

North American subspecies *N. p. hudsonicus*, 'Hudsonian Whimbrel'

2009 Outer Hebrides Bornish, South Uist, juvenile, 12 September, photo (A. Stevenson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 588).

4th Scottish record of subspecies.

Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*

2008 North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 5–6 May, photo (D. & S. Parnaby *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 556; Parnaby 2009).

10th Scottish record.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

2008 Orkney Gretchen Loch and Bridesness, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 28–30 September, photo (P. Brown, R.J. Butcher *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 557).

2009 Argyll Heylipol, Isle of Tiree, juvenile, 31 August, photo (J. Bowler, K. Gillon) (*British Birds* 103: 589).

2009 Clyde Endrick Water, Stirlingshire, adult, 28 November–17 December, photo (M. Culshaw, C. Pendlebury, A. Sampson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 589).

2009 Shetland Quendale, Mainland, juvenile, 11–18 October, photo (P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington, R.A. Schofield *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 590).

19th–22nd Scottish records of 23 birds. Now removed from the list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*

2009 Shetland Ristie, Foula, 6–9 May, photo (R.B. Wynn *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 590, plate 320).
6th Scottish record.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*

2009 Ayrshire Barassie, first-winter, 16–18 January, photo (B.D. Kerr, A.A. Murray *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 594; Kerr & Hague 2010).

2009 Orkney Holm Sound, Mainland, adult/second-summer, 12 July–16 October, photo (K.E. Hague *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 594; Kerr & Hague 2010); also seen Shetland.

2009 Shetland Garths Voe, Mainland, adult/second-summer, 11–12 May, photo (M.S. Chapman *et al.*), presumed same Norwick and Westing, Unst, 24–25 May, photo (J.J. Gilroy *et al.* per Shetland Recorder) (*British Birds* 103: 594, plate 181); also seen Orkney.

11th and 12th Scottish records.

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*

- 2002 Outer Hebrides Gramsdale and Market Stance, Benbecula, first-winter, 20 January–9 March, photo (B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 594–5).
- 2002 Outer Hebrides Gramsdale, Benbecula, first-winter, 2 February–12 April, photo (B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 594–5).
- 2002 Outer Hebrides Gramsdale, Benbecula, first-winter, 3 February (B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson *et al.*), presumed same 2 March–12 April, photo (B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson *et al.*), 4th and 13th June (A. Stevenson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 594–5).
- 2002 Outer Hebrides near Stinky Bay, Benbecula, first-winter, 12 April (B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson *et al.*), presumed same Ardivachar, South Uist, 21 April (A. Stevenson) (*British Birds* 103: 594–5).
- 2002 Outer Hebrides Loch Mor, Benbecula, first-winter, 14 April (A. Stevenson) (*British Birds* 103: 594–5).
- 2004 Outer Hebrides Gramsdale, Benbecula, first-winter, 20 February–1 March, photo (A. Stevenson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 594).
- 2006 Outer Hebrides Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, second-winter, 29–30 August, photo (J.B. Kemp) (*British Birds* 103: 594).
- 2008 Outer Hebrides Stornoway, Lewis, first-winter, 18 January, photo (M.S. Scott) (*British Birds* 102: 560).
6th–13th Scottish records.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

- 2008 Argyll Crossapol, Tiree, adult, 29 September to 2 October, photo (M.J. McKee, C. Turner, T. Warrick *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 564; McKee 2010).
10th Scottish record.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

- 2008 North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 5–9 June, photo (D. Goulder *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 565).
- 2009 Dumfries & Galloway Seafield, adult, 10 May, photo (D. Abrahams) (*British Birds* 103: 598).
5th and 6th Scottish records.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*

- 2009 Orkney The Gloop, Deerness, Mainland, adult, 25 September (G. Cannon, P. Higson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 602, plate 326; Cannon & Keay 2010).
- 2009 Perth & Kinross near Cromwell Park, Almondbank, immature male, 4 October, found dead, photo (S. Keay, E. McLoughlin, C. Pendlebury) (*British Birds* 103: 602; Cannon & Keay 2010).
Skin and part skeleton deposited at National Museums Scotland (NMS.Z 2009.136).
11th and 12th Scottish records.

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*

- 2008 Argyll Caolas, Tiree, 9 October, photo (W. Allan, J. Dickson, E. MacKinnon) (*British Birds* 102: 590).
- 2009 Orkney Langskail, Toab, Mainland, 2 October, photo (P. Higson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 605; Higson 2011a).
9th and 10th Scottish record.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

- 2008 Outer Hebrides Cladach Vallay, North Uist, 18 November, photo (P.R. Boyer, B. Rabbitts), presumed same, 23–24 November, photo (S.E. Duffield, P. & J. Hill, B. Rabbitts *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 587).
4th Scottish record.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*

2008 Fair Isle Barkland and Setter, 20–22 April, photo (S.J. Davies *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 568).
8th Scottish record.

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

2008 North-east Scotland Easter Muchalls, 8 November, photo (P.A.A. Baxter) (*British Birds* 102: 584).

2008 North-east Scotland Balmedie CP, 9 November (P.A.A. Baxter) (*British Birds* 102: 584).

2008 Orkney Bridesness, North Ronaldsay, 7–8 November, photo (P.A. Brown, R.J. Butcher, R.J. Simpson *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 584).

2008 Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 1–5 November (M.G. Pennington, R.M. Tallack, B.H. Thomason *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 584).

2008 Shetland Symbister, Whalsay, 4–7 November (J. Dunn, J.L. Irvine, C. Simpson) (*British Birds* 102: 584).

2008 Shetland Gardie House, Bressay, 11–13 November, photo (G.F. Bell, M.S. Chapman, S.J. Minton *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 584).

13th–18th Scottish records.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*

2008 Shetland Lunna, Mainland, first-winter, 27 September, photo (C. Gooddie, R. Harris, G. Hogan *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 585).

2009 Shetland Ellister, Maywick, Mainland, first-winter, 10–17 October, sound recording, photo (H.R. Harrop *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plate 463; 103: 610, plate 334).

14th and 15th Scottish records.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*

2009 Outer Hebrides South Glendale, South Uist, male, 31 May, sound recording, photo (J.B. Kemp) (*British Birds* 103: 611).

2nd Scottish record.

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*

2008 Orkney Burnbraes, Evie, Mainland, male in song, 8–17 June, photo (S. Green, B. Ribbands *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 579).

2009 Highland Applecross, Wester Ross, male in song, 28 June–14 July, photo (G. Jones, R. & H. Maskew, R. Youngman *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 613, plate 337; Maskew 2010).

20th and 21st Scottish records. Now removed from the list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

2008 Fair Isle Finniquoy, 22 May, trapped, photo (M.T. Breaks *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 579).

10th Scottish record of 11 birds.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*

2008 Shetland Harrier, Foula, first-winter, 23–25 September, photo (P.R. Gordon, M.S. Scott *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 581; Gordon & Scott 2010a).

5th Scottish record.

Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*

2008 Shetland Sumburgh, Mainland, probably first-winter, 25 September, photo (P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 583).

7th Scottish record.

Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*

2008 Fair Isle Guidicum, first-winter male, 25 September, photo (D.N. Shaw *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 575).

5th Scottish record.

Veery *Catharus fuscescens*

2009 Shetland Ham, Foula, first-winter, 1–7 October, photo (H. & J. Aalto *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plates 421 and 428; 103: 617).

2009 Shetland Whalsay, first-winter, 2–5 October, photo (A. Seth, P. Stronach *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 617, plate 339).

4th and 5th Scottish records.

Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*

2009 Orkney North Ronaldsay, first-winter, 5–6 October, photo (P.A. Brown *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plate 422; 103: 618, plate 340).

9th Scottish record.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

2009 Fife Fife Ness, first-winter male, 26–31 October, photo (K.D. Shaw *et al.*) (*British Birds* 103: 620).

17th Scottish record.



Plate 4. Siberian Thrush, Fair Isle, September 2008.
© Deryk Shaw

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

2008 Highland Balnakeil Beach, Durness, male, 24–28 December, photo (S. Fenwick *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 574).

2008 North-east Scotland Don Mouth and Murcar, first-winter male, 15 November, photo (N.A. Littlewood, R. Mavor), presumed same Girdle Ness, 24–30 November, photo (K. Hall *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plate 31; 103: 621).

19th and 20th Scottish record. This species will not feature in future reports.

Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*

2009 Shetland Tresta, Fetlar, first-winter, 22 September–5 October, sound recording, photo (M. Garner, R. Riddington, B.H. Thomason *et al.*), same Gloop, Yell, 9–17 October, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al.*) (*British Birds*: 102: plate 425; 103: 621, plate 343).

2nd Scottish record.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*

2009 Fife Denburn Woods, first-summer male, 16–19 May, photo (D. Clugston *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plate 232; 103: 623; Rivers 2010).

18th Scottish record.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

2006 Fair Isle 21–24 October, photo (P.A.A. Baxter, R.J. Nason *et al.*) (*British Birds* 100: 727).

2007 Shetland West Voe of Sumburgh, 17–18 October, photo (R. Martin) (*British Birds* 101: 554).

5th and 6th Scottish records.

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

2008 Orkney North Ronaldsay, 3–13 October, photo (P.A. Brown, R.J. Butcher, P.J. Donnelly *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 570).

2008 Outer Hebrides Hirta, St. Kilda, 19 September to 3 October, sound recording, photo (W.T.S. Miles, S. Money, R.M. Tallack) (*British Birds* 102: 570).

2008 Outer Hebrides Smerclate-Garrynamonie, South Uist, 1–2 November, photo (S.E. Duffield, J.B. Kemp, A. Stevenson) (*British Birds* 102: 570).

2009 Shetland Da Smaalie, Hametoun and Ham, Foula, 29 September–3 October, photo (K.B. Shepherd *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plate 419; 103: 628).
6th–9th Scottish records.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*

2008 Outer Hebrides North Rona, male, 25 May, photo (S. Bain, M. Gray, J. McMillan *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 592; McMillan 2009).

4th Scottish record.

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

2008 Fife Leuchars, 17–18 May, photo (J. Harwood) (*British Birds* 102: 592; Harwood 2009).
2nd Scottish record.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirius*

2003 Orkney Dale Farm, Evie, 16 November–16 January 2004 (accepted by SBRC).
11th Scottish record of 14 birds.

Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*

2008 Orkney Sangar, North Ronaldsay, first-winter male, 19–21 September, photo (P.J. Donnelly *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 594).

4th Scottish record.

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

2008 Shetland Hametoun, Foula, 28 September, photo (P.R. Gordon, M.S. Scott *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: 595; Gordon & Scott 2010b).

7th Scottish record.

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*

2009 Fair Isle Auld Haa, male, 8–10 May, photo (S.J. Davies, S. Hutchinson, G.K. Stout *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plate 185; 103: 632–633, plate 350; Shaw 2010b).

2nd Scottish record.

Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca*

2009 Outer Hebrides Hirta, St Kilda, probably first-winter male, 12–14 September, photo (I. McNee, W.T.S. Miles, S. Money) (*British Birds* 102: plate 427; 103: 633–634, plate 351; Miles 2010).

2nd Scottish record.

Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata*

2009 Fair Isle The Plantation and Auld Haa, 15–16 October, trapped, photo (S.J. Davies *et al.*) (*British Birds* 102: plate 465; 103: 634).

8th Scottish record.

Errata

- Scottish Birds* 29: 9 - the Ferruginous Duck at Lochgelly Loch, Fife was present from 16 July to 16 August 2006, not 2007.
- Scottish Birds* 29: 10 - the Killdeer seen on Oronsay on 18 October 2006 was probably the same one as previously seen at Clachan Sands, North Uist, Outer Hebrides on 16 October 2006 (D.J. MacDonald) (*British Birds* 100: 710).
- Scottish Birds* 29: 11 - the observers of the Greater Yellowlegs on Foula should be shown as (M.A. Maher, B.H. Thomason, M.A. Wilkinson *et al.*).
- Scottish Birds* 29: 14 - the Hume's Leaf Warbler at Skateraw, Lothian was in October 2005, not 2006.
- Scottish Birds* 29: 14 - the Western Bonelli's Warbler on Tiree was in 2006, not 2007.

References

- Andrews, I.J. & Naylor, K.A. on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee. 2002. Records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions. *Scottish Birds* 23: 61–116.
- ap Rheinallt, T., McInerny, C.J., Lauder, A. & McGowan R.Y. on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee. 2010a. Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland 2005–2008. Part 1. *Scottish Birds* 30: 99–123.
- ap Rheinallt, T., McInerny, C.J., Lauder, A. & McGowan R.Y. on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee. 2010b. Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland 2005–2008. Part 2. *Scottish Birds* 30: 211–229.
- British Ornithologists' Union. 1997. Records Committee: 23rd Report (July 1996). *Ibis* 139: 197–201.
- British Ornithologists' Union. 2007. Records Committee: 35th Report (April 2007). *Ibis* 149: 652–654.
- British Ornithologists' Union. 2009. Records Committee: 37th Report (October 2008). *Ibis* 151: 224–230.
- British Ornithologists' Union. 2010. Records Committee: 38th Report (October 2009). *Ibis* 152: 199–204.
- British Ornithologists' Union. 2011. Records Committee: 39th Report (October 2010). *Ibis* 153: 227–232.
- Bowler, J.M. 2010. A nominate-race Black-tailed Godwit on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll, 6–7 May 2009 - the first Scottish record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 207–210.
- Brown, D. 2011. Twitching Pays. *Scottish Birds* 31: 82–85.
- Cannon, G. & Keay, S. 2010. Yellow-billed Cuckoos in Scotland in autumn 2009. *Scottish Birds* 30: 362–364.
- Clugston, D.L., Forrester, R.W., McGowan, R.Y. & Zonfrillo, B. on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee 2001. Scottish List - species and subspecies. *Scottish Birds* 22: 33–49.
- Cooper, D. & Kay, B. 2010. Greater Sand Plover, Ythan Estuary, 12–19 September 2008 - the first record for North-east Scotland. *Scottish Birds* 30: 79–82.
- Duffield, S. 2010. American Black Tern, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 17 November 2008 - the first Scottish record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 161–162.
- Forrester, R.W. on behalf of Scottish Birds Records Committee 2003. Amendments to the Scottish List. *2000 Scottish Bird Report*: 5–7. (ed. R Murray).
- Forrester, R.W. on behalf of Scottish Birds Records Committee 2004. Amendments to the Scottish List. *2001 Scottish Bird Report*: 7–12. (ed. R Murray).
- Forrester, R.W. on behalf of Scottish List Subcommittee, Scottish Birds Records Committee 2007. Amendments to the Scottish List: species and subspecies. *Scottish Birds* 27: 1–14.
- Forrester, R.W. on behalf of Scottish List Subcommittee, Scottish Birds Records Committee 2009. Amendments to the Scottish List: species and subspecies. *Scottish Birds* 29: 3–15.
- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I. J., McInerny, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. (eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.
- Gill, F. & Wright, M. on behalf of the International Ornithological Congress. 2006. *Birds of the World: recommended English names*. Christopher Helm, London.
- Gordon, P.R. & Scott, M.S. 2010a. Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Foula, Shetland. *Scottish Birds* 30: 70–72.

- Gordon, P.R. & Scott, M.S. 2010b. Bobolink, Foula, Shetland, 28 September 2008 - the sixth Shetland record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 163–164.
- Harrop, A.H.J. 2010. Records of Hawk Owls in Britain. *British Birds* 103: 276–283.
- Harvey, P.V. 1992. The Brown Flycatcher on Fair Isle - a new British bird. *Birding World* 5: 252–255.
- Harvey, P.V. 2010. Brown Flycatcher on Fair Isle - new to Britain. *British Birds* 103: 651–657
- Harwood, J. 2009. White-crowned Sparrow, St Michael's, Fife, 17 May 2008. *Scottish Birds* 29: 260–261.
- Haywood, R. 2009. The Killdeer on Shetland 2007/08. *Scottish Birds* 29: 75–78.
- Higson, P. 2011a. Red-eyed Vireo, near Kirkwall, Orkney, 3 October 2009 - first Orkney record. *Scottish Birds* 31: 77–78.
- Higson, P. 2011b. Sandhill Crane, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2009 - the third Scottish & British record. *Scottish Birds* 31: 79–81.
- Hudson, N. and the Rarities Committee. 2009. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2008. *British Birds* 102: 528–601.
- Hudson, N. and the Rarities Committee. 2010. Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2009. *British Birds* 103: 562–638.
- Hyndman, T. 2008. The Citril Finch on Fair Isle - a new British bird. *Birding World* 21: 243–249.
- Kerr, B. & Hague, K.E. 2010. Franklin's Gulls in Ayrshire and Orkney during 2009. *Scottish Birds* 30: 165–169.
- Knox, A.G., Collinson, J.M., Parkin, D.T., Sangster, G. & Svensson, L. 2008. Taxonomic recommendations for British birds: Fifth Report. *Ibis* 150: 833–835.
- Maskew, R. 2010. River Warbler, Applecross, Wester Ross, Highland, June–July 2009 - second Scottish mainland record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 175–177.
- McKee, M. 2010. Gull-billed Tern, Tiree, Argyll, 29 September to 2 October 2008 - the first Argyll record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 76–78.
- McMillan, J. 2009. The Trumpeter Finch on North Rona, Outer Hebrides, 25 May 2008 - the fourth Scottish record. *Scottish Birds* 29: 262–264.
- Miles, W.T.S. 2010. Blackburnian Warbler, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 12–14 September 2009 - the second Scottish record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 282–283.
- Parnaby, D. 2009. A Nearctic wader hat-trick at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg: Upland Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope and Stilt Sandpiper. *Scottish Birds* 29: 268–272.
- Reid, J. 2009. The Caspian Plover on Fair Isle, 1–2 May 2008 - sixth for Britain and third for Scotland. *Scottish Birds* 29: 258–259.
- Rivers, S.L. 2010. Collared Flycatcher, Denburn Wood, Crail, 16–19 May 2009 - the first Fife record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 173–174.
- Sangster, G., Collinson, J.M., Knox, A.G., Parkin, D.T. & Svensson, L. 2010. Taxonomic recommendations for British birds: Sixth Report. *Ibis* 152: 180–186.
- Shaw, D. 2009. Citril Finch on Fair Isle, 6–11 June 2008 - the first British record. *Scottish Birds* 29: 265–267.
- Shaw, D. 2010a. Brown Flycatcher on Fair Isle, 24–25 September 2008. *Scottish Birds* 30: 73–75.
- Shaw, D. 2010b. Brown-headed Cowbird, Fair Isle, 8–10 May 2009 - the second Scottish record. *Scottish Birds* 30: 170–172.
- Stevenson, A. 2010. Kentish Plover, South Uist, 10 November 2007 to 20 April 2008 - first for the Outer Hebrides. *Scottish Birds* 30: 67–69.
- Webb, A. & Shaw, K.D. 2010. Blast from the past - the 1991 Donmouth Sand Plover. *Scottish Birds* 30: 377–379.

Ronald W. Forrester, Scottish List Subcommittee, Scottish Birds Records Committee, The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ

Revised ms accepted November 2010

Common Crossbills feeding on peanuts

I have lived at Raffin, Assynt, west Sutherland, for two years and have been feeding birds since moving there. There are three large and one small peanut feeders that attract various birds, including Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Brambling, Goldfinch, Chaffinch and House Sparrow. However, on 18 and 19 July 2009, I was surprised to see Common Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra* (two males and two females) taking peanuts from the feeder along with House Sparrows. Plates 5 and 6 were taken from my kitchen window 4 m from the feeders. After feeding, the crossbills flew into the trees in the garden and then left. The nearest conifer plantation is about 5 km away and they may have originated from this. There are also two water bowls close to the feeders, but I did not see them drink. It is unusual for Crossbills to use peanut feeders in Britain, and it will be of interest to see if this habit spreads.

**Gary Smith, Sithean Beag, Raffin, Assynt
IV27 4JH.**

Revised ms accepted November 2010



Plate 5. Common Crossbills at peanut feeder, Assynt, Sutherland, July 2009. © Gary Smith



Plate 6. Common Crossbills at peanut feeder, Assynt, Sutherland, July 2009. © Gary Smith

Tim Harrison, of the BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey (GBFS), has commented that there have only been five gardens in which Common Crossbills have been observed feeding during the 40 years of the survey. Four of these (in Norfolk, Dorset, Powys and Hertfordshire) are not in Scotland, while the exact location of the fifth is unclear. However, as the GBFS is spread across the UK, with c. 250 gardens per winter, areas in which garden rarities such as Crossbills might be common could be poorly represented.

Participants in the GBFS are recruited from the larger BTO Garden BirdWatch, a year-round survey that records all birds in gardens rather than only those using food or water. More participants in the BTO Garden BirdWatch would be particularly welcome in Scotland www.bto.org/gbw.

It may be that Common Crossbills are more likely to come to feeders in areas where tree cover is scarce or absent. On Shetland, Mike Pennington notes that they tend to ignore feeders, but in one invasion about 10 years ago, once they had found his feeder there were up to a dozen daily in the garden, with 15 ringed over two days. Eds

Observations on Lesser Whitethroat singing and roosting behaviour in Ayrshire during May 2010

The Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* is on the north-western edge of its breeding range in Scotland. Observers have commented on the relatively short song period of male birds in Scotland which can make censusing this species difficult (see the species account in Forrester *et al.* 2007). No information on roosting behaviour in Scotland has so far been published. These observations were made at two adjacent Lesser Whitethroat territories at the perimeter of the former ICI Ardeer site at Stevenston, north Ayrshire as part of a long-term study of the species in central Scotland (Byars 2010).

On 3 May 2010, between 07:00 and 09:00 (all times are BST), two male Lesser Whitethroats were observed chasing each other and vociferously defending their territorial boundaries which were 10 m apart. The territories were mapped using previous methodology (Byars & Curtis 1998). Male A's territory was estimated at 0.30 ha and male B's at 0.06 ha. Song rates were also measured with full song phrases counted during a ten minute slot in every hour during the day. In my experience, male Lesser Whitethroats have two totally distinctive song types: (a) a trill regarded as the main song phrase, which is a loud, far carrying repetition of two notes which can be heard from over 200 m. Each trill lasts

about 1.5–2 seconds and has an interval of about 8 seconds between song bursts, and (b) a warbling/twittering sub-song, containing many soft warbling notes and quiet chattering segments, only audible at a range of less than 10 m. In territorial males, the sub-song is usually heard as a short prelude to the trill and is sung very briefly, but on other occasions the warbling can last several minutes.

Frequency rates of the trilling song phrase between the two males were noted. Male B was observed to sing far more frequently than male A; an indication that male B was still unmated and male A was paired. A high song rate made male B easier to track in the dense vegetation and I could follow his movements throughout his territory. I returned in the late evening on 4 May. The different song rates of the two males continued. From 20:20 to 21:20 male A sang only once in 60 minutes and was lost to view around 21:00. Male B sang 280+ trilling song phrases during the same time period and was far easier to locate. At 21:05 male B stopped roving along his territorial boundaries and perched 4 m up in the canopy of a mature Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* bush. He sang an uninterrupted bout of 70 trilling song phrases in 15 minutes. Apart from the Lesser Whitethroat, the only other passerine species

still singing at dusk was a Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*; five other warbler species had stopped singing at the site by 21:00.

I decided to try to follow male B to roost. I settled down on the ground, 4 m away, and watched male B. Sunset was at 21:03, but the light conditions were very poor due to thick cloud cover. Male B gave one last song phrase at 21:20 and, still singing, dropped down parallel with the Hawthorn bole and settled in a dense Gorse *Ulex europaeus* bank directly below the Hawthorn (Plate 7). Male B could just be seen perched on a thin branch underneath the dense Gorse sprays at 2 m. I watched the male until darkness fell and left at 21:40.

At the site's perimeter on 5 May 2010 between 07:00 and 09:00, two pairs of Lesser Whitethroats were so busily engaged in song duels and courtship display that I managed to sit and observe pair A from only 2 m. At 8:00, male A started a soft, sub warble, perched 1.5 m up in a dense patch of mixed scrub, with the

female 2 m away, but well hidden. After 20 seconds of nondescript warbling notes, the male began to imitate Skylark *Alauda arvensis* flight song for 6–8 seconds, after which he reverted to his normal warbling repertoire. This was the only occasion I have heard mimicry in 27 years of field work in Scotland.

On 6 May I returned to the site at 20:00 and discovered that male B was still vociferously singing, while male A was observed, but silent. Sunset was at 21:07. Male B was again easily tracked while singing and patrolling through his territory. Between 21:20 and 21:30 male B sang 44 trilling song phrases in a stand of mature Hawthorns, 12 m away from the previous night's roost. He could be seen settling to roost among dense Hawthorn sprays 4 m up in the canopy. Again, darkness made observations difficult but, at 21:40, I made a 'tuk' call four times. Male B immediately responded, and sang one trill song phrase in the darkness. I left the site at 21:45.



Plate 7. Lesser Whitethroat roost site at Ardeer, Ayrshire. The male was observed roosting in the dense Gorse bank just to the left of the Hawthorn, May 2010. © Tom Byars



Plate 8. Portrait of a mimic - male Lesser Whitethroat, Ardeer, Ayrshire, May 2010. © Tom Byars

Counting song rates by male B on 8 May showed a frequency of 280+ trilling phrases in 60 minutes during the day. That evening, though, male B could not be heard singing at all from 19:45 to 21:45 and so could not be observed going to roost. On the following morning, male B was observed with a female in close attendance; he only uttered only one trilling song phrase during 60 minutes of observation. Observations on roosting behaviour ended on 8 May to avoid further disturbance and any risk of site desertion.

Both pairs were observed carrying food on 11 June and pair B successfully fledged four young.

My observations on Lesser Whitethroat song are in line with those made in England and continental Europe (Cramp & Simmons 1992) although the fact that Lesser Whitethroats usually occur at low densities in Scotland may explain why some breeding attempts take place with little or no song noted by observers (e.g. da Prato 1980). Research by Klit (1999) into the song function of the Lesser Whitethroat found that the trill is used for male-to-male communication over long distances. The warbling or twitter is quietly delivered by males in communicating with females in close proximity, without giving their location away to other males seeking extra copulations. The only other documented case of mimicry I know of was of an unmated male briefly mimicking the song of a Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* in north-west Germany (Wiehe 1989). Very little has been published on

roosting behaviour anywhere, but Cramp & Simmons (1992) quotes two instances: a pair perched side-by-side in a willow *Salix* bush and another pair using a bush near a house; this male sang at night possibly due to artificial lights. However, Cramp & Simmons (1992) also note Lesser Whitethroats occasionally singing after dark in other situations.

My thanks go to Peter Suedbeck and Mathias Rosenfeldt for translating the German note on mimicry in a Lesser Whitethroat.

References

- Byars, T. 2010. The status and distribution of the Lesser Whitethroat in Clyde and Ayrshire from 1983 to 2005. *Scottish Birds* 30: 316–325.
- Byars, T. & Curtis, D.J. 1998. Feeding studies of the Lesser Whitethroat in Strathclyde. *Scottish Birds* 19: 223–230.
- Cramp, S & Simmons, K.E.L. 1992. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Volume 6. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- da Prato S.R.D. 1980. How many Lesser Whitethroats breed in the Lothians? *Scottish Birds* 11: 108–112.
- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McNerny, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. (eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.
- Klit, I. 1999. The function of song forms in the Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*. *Bioacoustics* 10: 31–45.
- Wiehe H. 1989. [Lesser whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* imitates great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*]. *Vogelkundliche Berichte aus Niedersachsen* 21: 27.

**Tom Byars, 81 Sharphill Road, Saltcoats
KA21 5QU.**

Email: tombysars@btinternet.com

Revised ms accepted December 2010

Unusual behaviour of Stonechats during severe weather

At 1.30 pm on 3 January 2010 in sand dunes at Broughty Ferry beach, Angus & Dundee, I noticed a group of three male and two female Stonechats *Saxicola torquata* at the edge of a dune. I approached to within 2 m and was amazed at how tolerant the birds were of my presence. They were neither calling nor aggressive to each other. I could clearly see, and was able to photograph (Plates 9–10) and video birds of both sexes entering a small hole in the south side of a dune face partially screened by Marram Grass *Ammophila arenaria*. They were almost queuing up to enter and as many as three birds at one time were huddled together, with the others looking on closely. It appeared that the Stonechats were excavating the hole. Grains of sand could be clearly seen adhering to the bill of each bird. None of the birds appeared to be feeding. However it is possible that they had been attracted to the spot when searching for food. Both invertebrates and seeds would be likely to be present at the base of the Marram and Stonechats forage for such items (Cramp 1988). I do not know if the birds used the hole to roost in that night as I did not want to risk disturbing them.

On the day, at -5°C , it was well below freezing. There had been low temperatures for several weeks, with a layer of snow and ice on the beach. Before the start of this cold spell, I had

frequently observed a pair of Stonechats feeding along this part of the coast, but never behaving like this. Coastal Stonechats usually try to maintain their territories in winter although group behaviour has been occasionally recorded (Cramp op.cit. p.743). I can find no reference to Stonechat roosting behaviour or whether they regularly roost communally. What I witnessed may have been an exceptional reaction to the severe cold.

When I returned a week later in milder weather, I could only locate a single male. I suspect that the others had either left the area or perished; this species is prone to high mortality in severe weather.

Many thanks to Brian Etheridge for help with text and comments.

Reference

Cramp, S. (ed.). 1988. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Volume 5, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

**Mike Groves, 'Ingomar', Walker Street,
Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 2ED.
Email : mjgroves@hotmail.com**

Revised ms accepted January 2011



Plates 9–10. Stonechats, Broughty Ferry, Angus & Dundee, January 2010. © Mike Groves

Ian Balfour Paul (1916–2010)

Ian Balfour Paul was a stalwart supporter of the SOC, a passionate birdwatcher and ringer, and a huge influence on generations of pupils at Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh. The bird club that he founded there in the 1950s instilled in many boys and the wider community a life-long interest in birds that they might otherwise never have enjoyed.

Educated at Wellington and Cambridge, Ian's career as a biology teacher began at Merchiston in 1939 but was interrupted by the war, in which he was a patrol commander with GHQ Liaison Regiment. He once claimed that the only shot he ever fired in anger was at a duck that was keeping him awake one night. In fact, he served with distinction and was awarded the Military Cross for courage and determination in the battles of Normandy, Walcheren and the Rhine Crossing.

Having resumed teaching at Merchiston, an interest in birds was sparked by the discovery by one of the pupils, Roly Fraser, of a Kestrel incapacitated by the cold weather. Christened 'Klee', it was taken into care. When it had recovered, Ian thought it would be useful to ring it before release. In those days if you wanted to be a ringer you just contacted the BTO and the appropriate equipment - rings, pliers, etc, was dispatched in the next post. Ringing thus became a leading activity of the bird club started by Ian and the core of lads that had looked after Kestrel Klee.

Ian Balfour Paul was known in Merchiston circles more economically as 'BP', but also enjoyed the nickname 'Swoop', after the birdseed of that name. This he dispensed liberally outside his quarters which, inevitably, were known as 'The Swoopery'. Official bird club meetings, which included slide shows and quizzes, were held weekly in term-time in the biology lab, but the Swoopery was the centre of birding activities during those precious free hours not otherwise taken up by classes and sports. A well-stocked library and a veritable gallery of paintings by Donald Watson, an artist whom he greatly admired, provided the hub for birding banter and activities including



Plate 11. Ian Balfour Paul. © Jack Hutcheson

nestbox building, mist-net repairs, taxidermy, and planning trips. Bird club members also represented some of the most youthful components of the Edinburgh SOC meetings, religiously attended.

The highlight of the club's out-of-school activities were its outings. Almost every Sunday in term time would see the bird club head down to the East Lothian coast to look for migrants in spring and autumn, and elsewhere on the Forth and to the Pentland reservoirs for wildfowl in winter. In the holidays, more ambitious travels were undertaken. Islay at New Year and the Northumberland coast in late summer became almost traditional, but Cornwall, Out Skerries, Bardsey, Ireland, and Scandinavia were also on the long list of destinations. Other members of staff would often accompany these expeditions, nominally to share the driving (and the cooking: Ian's culinary skills were practical but, by his own admission, rather limited - soup, egg-in-a-hole, and cornbeef fritters being his *fortes*), but mainly because the trips were such good fun! A mildly anarchic sense of humour and a storehouse of stories about the war, his fascinating relatives and, of course, birdwatching, made any time with Ian memorable, even if birds were in short supply.

Ian recognized that ringing was an excellent tool by which to introduce youngsters to birdwatching and he had the perfect thoughtful and patient disposition for supervising and encouraging hands-on involvement in it. Mistnets were an almost permanent fixture in the school grounds (even to the extent of asking suitably experienced pupils to leave class every few minutes and check them!), as was a baited clap-net at the Swoopery (although its success rate was often reduced by itinerant, and presumably starving, fourth-formers pinching the peanuts.) Dozens of nestboxes dotted round the policies provided chicks aplenty, and ringing expeditions were a frequent activity, especially in spring to look for nests and wader pulli. The club's annual trip to the Bass Rock to ring Gannet chicks would today have got no further than the first line of a Health and Safety risk assessment, but a number of Ian's bird club-ringed Gannets were recovered, one as far afield as Israel.

School holidays did not coincide with peak migration time (a shocking oversight by the educational authorities), but a week in early spring on the Isle of May was a regular fixture. Ian loved the May and, when his reduced commitments at Merchiston allowed him to be more flexible, he made at least annual visits for many years in the company of the likes of John Arnott, Gerard Sandeman, and J.H.B. ('Ian') Munro. When they weren't birding and ringing, they were doing good works for the observatory, such as building the new Arnott trap. This particular activity was suspended so that they could follow up the pair of Pallas's Sandgrouse that appeared during a memorable fall of migrants in May 1975. Red-flanked Bluetail was another of their quality finds, in October the same year, in the days when it was a real rarity. Although he would never claim to be a fervent twitcher, other notable rarities that Ian enjoyed in the course of 60 years of birding included the Dunrossness Rüppell's Warbler and the Carlingwark Loch Pied-billed Grebe.

Ian stood down from teaching in 1971 but remained at Merchiston in the role of orrman and, of course, the pillar of the bird club, for another 20 years. In 1990 he finally moved to his retirement cottage at Gatehouse of Fleet

where he hosted many visiting friends and former members of his bird club. He rarely missed an SOC branch meeting and, in the tranquil setting of his bluebell wood, he enjoyed garden birding and ringing and bedecked the trees with nestboxes, as he had done at Merchiston. It was fitting that one of these was incorporated into his funeral wreath!

An enormously warm-hearted and generous man of dignified independence and resourcefulness, Ian had more influence on more people than he could ever have imagined. His name lives on in Merchiston's new 'Balfour Paul Science Laboratory', officially opened by Air Marshall Sir John Baird, one of Ian's erstwhile bird club members.

The SOC has, over the years, also benefited richly from Ian's loyalty and his encouragement of his fledgling birdwatchers to join. In addition, he presented the Waterston Library with his valuable copy of *The Birds of Ceylon* and, appropriately, a Donald Watson watercolour of the Peffer Burn at Aberlady Bay. The closing offerings at his funeral and memorial services were also donated to the SOC.

One of many abiding memories of one of us (MF) of 'BP' was on the Isle of May. We had just ringed one of a brood of two Oystercatcher chicks and were looking in vain for the second. After a while we discovered it, all but invisible, crouched within a couple of feet of where we were sitting. "That is the most remarkable example of camouflage I've ever seen", Ian exclaimed with his typical and never-failing amazement and delight at such things, adding after a moment's reflection, "As far as I'm aware".

Something of which those who were lucky enough to know him are very much aware, is that Ian Balfour Paul was unique and brought the enjoyment and wonder of birds to many people. He is much missed.

**Mike Fraser, Appletree Cottage,
Buccleuch Road, Selkirk**

**Rev Malcolm Ramsay, Moulin Manse,
Pitlochry**

Samuel Michael David Alexander (1932–2010)

A stalwart of SOC branch meetings and conferences, S.M.D. (Sam) Alexander will be best remembered for his unfailing good humour, anecdotes, and many illustrated talks on his travels. His interest in birds went back to his school days, first at Colwall on the edge of the Malvern Hills where, at the age of 11, he started to keep 'proper' bird notes to which he could still refer in later life. In 1946, he attended Malvern College where he kept fit by playing rugby and even boxing with an enthusiasm that belied his physical stature. He won his first school natural history prize (a copy of Coward's *Birds of the British Isles*) for his handwritten 'Bird Atlas of the Malvern District'. This led to a meeting with James Fisher and a BBC radio broadcast on 29 March 1950 concerning aspects of village life in Colwall. He participated in the early surveys of rookeries and heronries and, in 1950, was the youngest person invited to the inaugural meeting of the Herefordshire Ornithological Club. In the mid-1990s, he was delighted to be made an Honorary Founding Member.



Plate 12. Sam Alexander at Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, March 2010. © Alan Knox

Also in 1950, he started a medical degree at Trinity College, Dublin, but left after three years. While there he organised an expedition (and its funding by two radio broadcasts on RTE) to the Blasket Islands, and soon after published the results in the first volume of *Bird Study*. His life-long love of islands began there. He became a ringer and ringed his first bird, a Chaffinch, in July 1952 in the grounds of Townsend House, Leominster. Even then, he had a gift for gaining access to private land, so essential for his later fieldwork for BTO and regional atlases in North-east Scotland. These he endorsed with a passion right up to his final winter tetrad visits for the new BTO Atlas in the last week of his life. He didn't take the easy route with atlas work either - he volunteered to cover areas, often miles away, that nobody else would take on. In the late 1960s, he helped survey remote and difficult islands on the west coast of Ireland for Operation Seafarer, and at one stage even landed on Fastnet.

Early in 1954, he was called up for two years National Service and posted to the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt and later to Libya. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant with the 5th Royal Tank Regiment. At Fayid in Egypt he operated a Heligoland trap but, to his dismay, no-one would provide rings for the many exotic migrants caught, and it had to be dismantled. In August 1955 he managed, in lieu of leave, to get the job of Draft Conducting Officer on the troopship *MV Cheshire*. They sailed from Suez to the Seychelles via Aden returning via Port Sudan. He kept a detailed log of the birds seen throughout the trip which, years later, were edited by Dr W.R.P. Bourne and included in Bourne's "Observations on Seabirds" in *Sea Swallow* (1997).

On demob, he joined Esso Petroleum as a sales representative and had some hair-raising incidents (almost literally). He was among the first to realise the potential of petrol stations as outlets for goods other than fuel (although his employers felt that carpet square remnants sold as car mats, though more profitable than petrol, was maybe a step too far). He loved fast cars and was an enthusiastic rally driver with his wife-to-be Anne as navigator. He

even managed to gain access to the paddock of F1 racing in the early days where he saw some of the greats of the sport.

Sam moved to Helensburgh, where he led a YOC group that included the SOC's immediate past and current presidents, both of whom acknowledge his mentoring. Likewise, younger SOC members from his early days in Aberdeen when he moved there in 1975. As Chairman he re-vitalised the Grampian Branch and made it financially secure with an annual BBQ in Upper Deeside and a social evening. Indoors, or in the field, Sam was always generous helping beginners and others, passing on his experience and enthusiasm.

Sam worked in the oil industry from its early days in Aberdeen and had many fond memories of that pioneering era (especially of the 'good ol' boys' from America). It was obvious to him that everyone working offshore would need safety training. While exploration technology was cutting edge, safety lagged behind and he was instrumental in planning courses in highly realistic situations. His pioneering efforts in this field were rewarded with a Fellowship of the Institute of Energy, and he continued with a successful career in training for the oil industry until his retirement in 1997. Some of his contributions can be accessed online through interviews he gave in 2007 to OilCity (www.oilcity.co.uk) and the

University of Aberdeen (MS 3801/5/7; www.abdn.ac.uk/museums, search websites for 'Sam Alexander'). With birds never far from his thoughts, Sam, with David Merrie, Robin Cox, Stan Howe and others, helped set up the North Sea Bird Club in 1979. He was Club Secretary from 1979 to 1981, Treasurer from 1982 to 1983 and Chairman from 1984 to 1990.

Sam travelled widely through his retirement, though with ever-failing health which he bore stoically. Photography was his great passion and his pictures were published widely; many appeared in *Scottish Birds* over the years. He made up stories for his grandchildren (to whom he was devoted) based on animals and birds seen during his travels. These would surely have found a wide audience had he published them. He finally embraced modern technology and took great pleasure in submitting his Atlas results online.

Our long days 'up the coast', were invariably regaled by seamless reminiscences of school, army and oil days, photography, investments, birding, or the latest adventure of 'Diddy the Dolphin' for the grandchildren. The flow was sometimes unexpectedly interspersed rather alarmingly by old rugby songs if we had seen a 'good' bird for ourselves. For Sam, birding was as much about people as birds, and he delighted in the craic and the company. These days will never be quite the same again.

Sam is survived by Anne, his wife of 51 years, two daughters and five grandchildren.

Nick Picozzi & Alan Knox

Plate 13. Sam submitted this photograph of a Nuthatch taken at the Mabie House Hotel, Dumfries & Galloway in October 2010 along with the following note: "I read your interesting article on 'Nuthatches in Scotland - an update'. We recently spent a few days at [a hotel] on the edge of the Mabie Forest in Dumfries. The owner kindly let me take a few photos of two Nuthatches which were on the peanut feeders. I would be grateful if you would pass this note on in case it is a new location. I have now lived in Scotland 40 years and these were the first Nuthatches I have seen! I remember as a schoolboy in Herefordshire Nuthatches and Green Woodpeckers used to work the old trees right outside the classroom windows. Great!"





The 75th Anniversary of the SOC

D. CLUGSTON

Plate 14. Waterston House, Aberlady © Alan Fox

This article documents the important events which have occurred during the past 25 years of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, as it celebrates its 75th Anniversary during 2011/12. The first 50 years were written about by Joe Eggeling in 1986 (*Scottish Birds* 14: 1–6). Rather than taking events in chronological order, I am covering them under topic headings.

Membership

The SOC is only as good as its members and we are very fortunate in having a high proportion of the most active birdwatchers volunteering their time and effort by undertaking bird surveys, atlas projects and bird reporting for their own areas, as well as offering support in many different ways. It is not always “what can the Club do for you?” but rather “what can you do to benefit Scottish ornithology through the SOC?”

Despite the growth of birdwatching within Britain, it would be true to say that during the period under review our membership has fluctuated from about 2800 in 1987/88 to 2600 last year. Council has been acutely aware of the financial implications of reduced

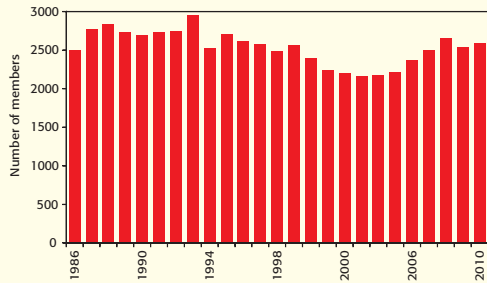


Figure 1. Changes in SOC membership, 1986–2010.

membership income and the impact this has on the services we are able to offer, and are always seeking ways to increase recruitment.

Dr Stan da Prato, Mrs Hetty Harper, Ray Murray, Frank Hamilton, Roy Dennis, Magnus Magnusson, Angus Hogg and Keith Macgregor had honorary membership conferred on them during this period. Sadly, however, the following honorary members died and obituaries can be found in either *Scottish Birds* or *Scottish Bird News* - Mrs Ruby Smillie, Prof. George Dunnet, Bill Harper, Mrs Hetty Harper, Major Alastair Peirse-Duncombe, Dr John Berry, Dr Ian Pennie and Magnus Magnusson.

The death of Galloway artist and Honorary President Donald Watson in November 2005 robbed us of the last surviving member of the Midlothian Ornithological Club, which was the forerunner of the SOC. Our new art display area at Waterston House has been named the Donald Watson Gallery in his memory.

From October 2001, Local Bird Recorders have received complimentary membership in recognition of the many hours of voluntary work which they give to the Club and Scottish ornithology.

The branch network

There are now 14 branches covering most of the larger Scottish centres of population. The last to be formed was in Orkney which, thanks to Colin Corse's initiative, initially operated within the Orkney Field Club. They first appeared in the winter meetings programme for 1990/91.

All branches provide a full programme of eight winter talks from September through to April. Most are arranged centrally by HQ, but now branches are encouraged to organise their own speakers for some of the meetings.

During the summer months, and increasingly throughout the year, many branches arrange outings to birding hotspots, led by a local expert. Some are more adventurous and arrange weekend or even week long trips to birding areas throughout Britain. The Ayrshire Branch has for many years arranged foreign birding holidays thanks to the organisation skills of Tony Fox. In general terms, it is a sad fact that it is often the smaller branches which are more likely to arrange these weekend/week long excursions and our larger branches do comparatively poorly in this regard.

Several branches have now grasped new technology and have established birding on-line news groups and grapevines. These allow branches to communicate directly to their on-line membership about the latest bird sightings; requests for information; canvassing support for and against local planning issues; notification of branch activities such as meetings and excursions and general birding news. Linked to the SOC website, these now form an important avenue of

communication between our HQ at Aberlady, the various branches and many of our members.

The Fife Branch based in St.Andrews celebrated their 60th anniversary with a dinner in October 2010.

Regent Terrace to Aberlady, via Musselburgh

The Scottish Centre for Ornithology and Bird Protection opened in October 1959 at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. It incorporated the headquarters of the SOC, FIBOT, RSPB's Scottish Office and upper floor living accommodation for the Club Secretary, at that time George and Irene Waterston. Ownership was held by the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT).

Starting in 1985, a phased programme of repairs to the roof, re-plumbing and re-decoration was initiated. As tenants, we were responsible for funding the very high costs involved and in view of this, at our request, FIBOT transferred ownership of the property to the Club on 1 April 1986. At that time, a Property Endowment Fund was set up to provide and maintain a Scottish Centre for Ornithology.



Plate 15. Frontage of 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, January 2002. © Ian Andrews



Plate 16. The front library, Regent Terrace, January 2002. © Ian Andrews

After the retirement of the Club Secretary Alastair Peirse-Duncombe in December 1983, the flat above the SOC became available. Limited conversion to office space allowed the RSPB to 'overflow' from their crowded offices in 17 Regent Terrace, thus providing very useful additional income for the Club. However, once the RSPB moved out some years later, the space became vacant for a period, despite a brief spell when BTO Scotland occupied it. It then became quite apparent to Council that the Club could no longer afford to remain in an expensive listed building.

At the November 1999 AGM a motion "that a group be formed to find and cost a financially viable alternative location identified for a Scottish Centre for Ornithology which will offer opportunities for the development of the SOC in the future" was overwhelmingly supported. A Property Working Group was formed and sites in Linlithgow, the Stirling University Campus and Bridge of Allan were investigated, but these later proved to be unsuitable or unavailable. In the meantime, meetings took place with FIBOT as they were very much involved with the move from Regent Terrace through the wording

of the Property Endowment Trust document. It is regrettable that misunderstandings at this time resulted in a temporary low point in relations with FIBOT.

Following the resignation of Sylvia Laing as Club Secretary in April 2001, Helen Cameron, Bob Dawson and Jill Andrews held the fort whilst a complete review of the Club's staffing requirements and future direction was undertaken and apart from an Office Manager



Plate 17. Boxed journals, basement library, Regent Terrace, March 2002. © Ian Andrews



Plate 18. Staff at Harbour Point, Musselburgh, April 2002 (R–L: Jill Andrews, Gordon Anderson, Caroline Scott & Bill Gardner) © Ian Andrews

(the role of Secretary having become a voluntary post) a Development Manager was to be recruited. Bill Gardner was appointed on 1 November 2001. Working with the President and Council, he concluded that we should sell Regent Terrace as quickly as possible and move our office function and library to temporary accommodation in order to facilitate any subsequent move by liquidating the financial assets of the Club. Three rented rooms were found at Harbour Point, Musselburgh and the move took place during March 2002. By far the biggest task was packing up the Waterston Library and Archives, but eventually 700 boxes were filled and neatly stacked on heavy racking in their temporary home.

No. 21 Regent Terrace had been put on the market in January by Rettie & Co. and only six weeks later, after considerable interest in the property, an offer was accepted for £888,000.



The SOC moved out on 28 March 2002, which was two and a half years after the option to move was first discussed.

The search for an ideal site was proving difficult, but with the sale completed, Bill Gardner could focus his attention on locating a suitable site for our new HQ. Council had agreed that a site with year-round birdwatching potential in the central belt of Scotland, manned mainly by volunteers, would enable a centre to be open at weekends.

Given this new brief a coastal site seemed most likely. Attention eventually focussed on Aberlady Bay, East Lothian, a well watched Local Nature Reserve. A site was offered by the Wemyss and March estate at the entrance to Aberlady village overlooking the bay, on the bus route and on the route of the new John Muir Way coastal path. As the proposed site was within the Conservation Area of the village, special planning consideration would be required, but after several meetings with planners and Aberlady residents, an application was submitted. Although this site looked very promising, the search continued for alternatives just in case insurmountable problems were encountered. However, by August 2002 Council unanimously agreed to pursue the option to build a new Scottish birdwatchers' resource centre to be known as "Waterston House" at this Aberlady site.

The Property Working Group was re-established, with the Development Manager as day-to-day project manager. A short list of architects was interviewed with Simpson & Brown of Edinburgh being appointed. After much discussion with



Plates 19–20. Building work at Aberlady, September (left) and November 2004 (right). © Ian Andrews



Plate 21. Frank Hamilton, David Clugston and Stan da Prato at the Waterston House opening, October 2005
© Ian Andrews

branch representatives and our various committees they were briefed with our requirements. Plans were submitted to East Lothian Council in May 2003 and planning permission was gained in October. Throughout this period Bill Gardner focused his time on fund raising and was very successful in securing considerable sums of money as gifts in kind from a number of companies. In particular, Forestry Enterprise (Scotland) agreed to provide all the timber for the massive Douglas Fir frame and European Larch cladding, Redland Roofing would provide the roofing slates and Lafarge Cement (Blue Circle) our concrete requirements. Cala Homes Ltd agreed to be corporate sponsors and through them both cash and internal fittings were generously donated. Apart from an appeal to members in March 2004 when £15,000 was raised, Bill was unsuccessful in raising sufficient actual cash for the project, a situation which resulted in significant financial difficulties on completion of the project.

Finally, on 29 March 2004, a turf-cutting ceremony was held at the Aberlady site. This was led by the Earl of Wemyss and March Estate, SOC representatives, the architects and builders. Construction by John Dennis & Company Ltd. did not start until August 2004,

but by the following spring the 4000 square foot building was almost complete. We now had a very impressive wooden-framed structure topped with a large red clay-tiled roof and large picture windows overlooking our pond and Aberlady Bay. Our staff moved into Waterston House on 1 July 2005, after their rather cramped three years spent at Harbour Point. Temporary staff and volunteers were kept very busy transporting and unpacking the 24 tons of books, archives and office equipment along the 12 mile coast road. Throughout August, the George Waterston Library was re-commissioned. Books were security tagged, audited and then placed on the new Forster rolling shelving system, with two tons of books being shelved onto each stack.

Waterston House was officially opened on 1 October 2005. President Mark Holling gave the opening speech to the invited guests, talking about the work of the Club and our plans for the future. Magnus Magnusson, founder Chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage then gave a memorable address, which can be read in the December 2005 issue of *Scottish Bird News*. Last to speak was Development Manager Bill Gardner, who concentrated on the building's development and construction and thanked the

many generous donors who were present in the audience. The last official duty for Magnus was the switching-on of the artificial waterfall at the rear garden pond.

Waterston House

Our splendid new Waterston House is the headquarters of the SOC, Scotland's national bird club and the Scottish birdwatching resource centre. We have five paid staff, all part-time except for Wendy Hicks our Office Manager, but without a dedicated team of volunteers we could not function. Apart from the Library, we have a small retail area offering binoculars and telescopes, new and used bird books, bird food, cards and artists' prints. Hot drinks are available from a vending machine.

An increasingly important feature of the building is our Donald Watson Gallery which holds up to six exhibitions per year by wildlife artists of national and international acclaim. These are co-ordinated by Dave Allan with help from John Busby.

Starting in March 2006, Keith Macgregor and Dave Allan have led guided bird walks, starting from Aberlady, for the less experienced birdwatchers. Organising between 16 and 20 outings each year has been highly popular and a valuable source of new members for the Club. In addition, several goose watches are arranged

during October to watch the breathtaking spectacle of thousands of geese flying into their night roost on Aberlady Bay.

Waterston Library

The library has been an important resource of the Club since it was first established in 1949. The collection continues to be kept up to date and now numbers about 5000 volumes. In addition, we hold long runs of nearly all of the UK and International journals. We aim to have all published work relating to Scotland's birds, but sourcing this can be quite a challenge!

Most of our new books come direct from the publishers for us to review in *SB/SBN*, but many valuable and interesting donations have also been received over the years. With the agreement of donors, duplicate material is sold for the benefit of SOC's charitable work.

From late 1977 the post of Librarian/Honorary Librarian was held by the late Bill Harper, a retired Edinburgh meteorologist. He put in literally hundreds of hours of work, attending almost every weekday for many years. He was made an Honorary Member of the Club in 1987 in appreciation of his work. Following on from Bill Harper was Dr. John Law (1995–99), John Davies (2000–05), Jean Torrance (2005–09) and currently Karen Bridgood. Keith Macgregor has been assistant Librarian since 1996 and deals with incoming journals - not an easy task when dealing with foreign publishers with highly variable publishing dates.

I joined the Library Committee in May 1977 when George and Irene Waterston were still very much involved with the collection. I have been Chairman since 1981 and my only regret is not living a lot closer to Aberlady!

The SOC played host to a gathering of UK wide ornithological librarians in November 2010 where apart from viewing the Waterston Library, topics of mutual interest and co-operation were discussed. The organisations represented included BTO, RSPB, Bird Life International, British Museum (Tring) and the National Museums of Scotland. This followed several earlier meetings in England some years previously and attended by our Librarian.



Plate 22. Magnus Magnusson opening Waterston House, October 2005. © Ian Andrews



Plate 23. Andrew Macmillan and Keith Macgregor at the Waterston House, opening, October 2005. © Ian Andrews

Perhaps unknown to many members is the fact that the SOC has been given or has actively collected a large volume of ornithological archives. These consist of field notebooks, bird diaries, manuscript records, correspondence, photographs, slides and films and much more. Prior to the move out of Regent Terrace, our then archivist John Ballantyne undertook the massive task of going through every room, cupboard and drawer documenting all that he could find. He produced an initial listing in June 1998. Since then lots more material has been donated and in recent years an archive sub-committee was formed to hasten the ordering and cataloguing of the collection. To this end, John Savory was mainly instrumental in sorting out our large collection of slides. Ian Elphick has during the past year or so completed the re-boxing and listing of all the paper archives and we now have a searchable data base available to all researchers.

Geoffrey Harper, son of Bill and Hetty Harper and the late John Arnott (ex BBC Producer and former Club President) was the driving force behind a small History Working Group which was active between 1997 and 2000. They interviewed and tape recorded many of the older members of the Club who had early recollections of its inception and personalities. These included Dr Ian Pennie, Ian Balfour Paul, Andrew Macmillan and Dougal Andrew. Cassettes of these interviews, with transcripts or summaries prepared by Geoffrey, have been added to our sound archive.

The Bird Bookshop

During 1963 the Club set up a Bird Bookshop, which for many years gave unrivalled service to its customers. At the time it was the first such venture in Britain, holding over 100 titles - a very modest total by today's standards.

After many years of profitable trading our financial resources were under strain. This was due to increased competition, funding and stocking an ever-increasing range of book titles and staffing costs. By October 1988 a bookshop sub-committee was formed to provide more attention to the management and running of the operation as by then it was only making a small contribution to Club funds. Delays in setting up a computer system and staff changes did not help matters. Finally, by the following October the Bookshop was sold to Chris & Christine Johnson trading as St Ann's Books in Great Malvern and for a number of subsequent years they brought their stock to our annual conference. Latterly, Subbuteo Books have brought their huge range of new books, and Second Nature their second-hand books.

The concluding part of this article will be published in the next issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Thanks to Ian Andrews, Ray Murray, Mark Holling and Ian Francis for their comments and additional information in the preparation of this article.

David Clugston

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the Club; **Borders:** Mr P. Naylor, **Central Scotland:** Mr D. Ogilvie, Mr S. Roos, Mr F. Sambras, **Clyde:** Ms C. Bailly, Mr D. Brown & Ms H. Watson, Mr B. Scott, **Dumfries:** Mr G. Cowham, Mr C. Taylor, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr G. Jenkins, Mr & Mrs G. Smith, Mr & Mrs D. Warden, **Fife:** Mrs G. Sutherland, Mr M. Ware, **Grampian:** Mr W. Burns, Mr G. Tegerdine, **Highland:** C. & D. Lock, **Lothian:** Mr L. du Feu, Mr & Mrs J. Fordyce, Mr N. Harper, Miss B. Hawkins, Mr J. Hyne, Mr C. Lamb, Mr & Mrs R. Leakey, Mr A. Macdonald, Mr D. McManus, Mrs E. Turner, Mr G. Wallace, **Scotland - no branch:** Mrs L. Cregeen, Mr R. Fray, **Stewartry:** Mr & Mrs J. Gardiner, **Tayside:** Mr S. Toby.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **November: 1st** £150 Ms P.J. Moncur **2nd** £75 B.Pirie **3rd** £50 Mrs Denny **4th** £30 C.K.Mylne **5th** £20 A.C.Bastable **6th** £10 Sinclair Manson **December: 1st** £30 Dr R.Jenkins **2nd** £20 Mrs H.Thomson **3rd** £10 Mrs Craig **January: 1st** £30 W.A.Craigie **2nd** £20 Dr Hissett **3rd** £10 W.G.Prest.

Lots of cash prizes to be won! For an annual payment of £12, you can be entered into draws throughout the year for 40 cash prizes. Members' contributions are split 50/50 between the prize money and SOC funds. To be in the running, see the 200 Club form enclosed with your mailing.

Branch updates

Orkney Branch secretary, Colin Corse, has changed his e-mail address to ccorse@btinternet.com

Perth & Kinross Recorder

Scott Paterson has taken over from Mike Martin as local recorder for Perth & Kinross. Scott's contact details are: email scottpaterson12@yahoo.co.uk and telephone 01577 864248.

SOC Annual Conference, 28–30 October, Carnoustie Golf Hotel

Full programme and booking details will be included with the June Club mailing and will be posted on the SOC website.

Upcoming events at Waterston House

2011 Art Exhibitions Programme

Szabolcs Kókay & Jonathan Latimer, 2 Apr–25 May (see artist profiles on pages 46–49 of this issue)

Carry Akroyd, 28 May–20 July

Mixed Exhibition: including Chris Rose & Chris Lodge, 23 July–14 September

Keith Brockie, 17 September–16 November

Darren Woodhead, 19 November–January 2012

Optics Demo days

Sunday 15 May, 10 am–4 pm

Sunday 16 October, 10 am–4 pm

Annual Book Fair

Saturday 30 July, 10 am–4 pm

SOC Lothian Branch will celebrate the 75th Anniversary with two trips

The first was a weekend trip to Castle Douglas in February.

The second will be to Fair Isle from 14th to 23rd September. Twenty-two members, split into two groups, will each spend 5–6 days on the island, overlapping on one day. There were many interesting rarities last September, so we hope we will be lucky too!

Doreen and James Main



SOC signs up to the BirdTrack partnership

Last year the SOC signed up to the BirdTrack partnership. BirdTrack is the web-based recording system for birds in Britain and Ireland. The other partners include BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland.

BirdTrack is an exciting project, which looks at migration movements and distributions of birds throughout Britain and Ireland. It provides on-line facilities for observers to store and manage their own personal records, whilst at the same time facilitating their use to support species conservation at local, regional, national

and international scales. For example, all bird records entered onto BirdTrack are automatically fed through to the breeding and winter atlas data-bases so that these valuable records are not missed, and at the same time they are also automatically available to your local recorder. So you only submit them once, but the information goes to all the right places without you having to send different copies or fill in different forms.

So if you've been out bird watching anywhere in Scotland (or anywhere else in Britain and Ireland for that matter), or have merely been watching birds in your garden, records of the birds you have seen can be useful data. Thus the scheme is year-round, and ongoing, and anyone with an interest in birds can contribute. Important results produced by BirdTrack include mapping timings of arrivals and departures of migrants, monitoring scarce birds and contributing to the atlas.

It's easy to register as a BirdTrack user - simply go to the SOC website and click on "Enter your sightings on BirdTrack" or go to www.birdtrack.net, then click on the register button and follow the instructions. Thanks to a grant from Scottish Natural Heritage, Clive McKay, SOC's Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator, has been working closely with the Scottish bird recording network (i.e. your local recorders) and the BirdTrack development team at BTO led by Nick Moran to ensure that BirdTrack is both user-friendly and provides the kinds of information that local recorders and bird report producers need to make their lives easier. New features are appearing on BirdTrack all the time, and we are now entering an exciting phase of development which will provide many more tools for you to keep track of your own records, map them on Google maps, draw tables and graphs of numbers and so on. Full details will appear in the next issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Clive McKay



Photographs in Scottish Birds

The editors would like to thank the large number of photographers who have given permission for their photographs to be freely used in *Scottish Birds* over the years. The Club's no-fee policy encourages the free interchange of news, views and images between members and non-members, and we encourage all photographers to consider *Scottish Birds* as an outlet for their photographs. Please contact SOC HQ in the first instance.

...and an apology

Photographs submitted for publication by authors are published on the understanding that prior permission has been agreed. In issue 30(3), this was lacking in several cases. In addition, the images of Radde's Warbler (p. 222) and Hawfinch (p. 258) should have been credited to Eric McCabe/www.wildscot.co.uk. We offer our apologies to those concerned for these omissions.

Ayrshire education initiative

As a contribution to the 75th Anniversary of the SOC, the Ayrshire Branch have become a partner in an innovative educational project to introduce birds to the under 5s. With the RSPB and East Ayrshire Curriculum Outdoors, the 'Robbie the Robin' project was produced and launched on 22 November 2010 at St Joseph's Campus, Kilmarnock.

When Mike Howes brought the project to the attention of the Branch Committee, the decision was made to fund pairs of binoculars for the packs. The packs contain toy birds, with realistic calls, a bird sing-a-long CD, identification sheets, a garden bird book and crucially,



Plate 24. Showing some of the pack contents to the children. © EACO



Plate 25. Mike Howes and Gordon Riddle with RSPB and East Ayrshire representatives at the launch. © EACO

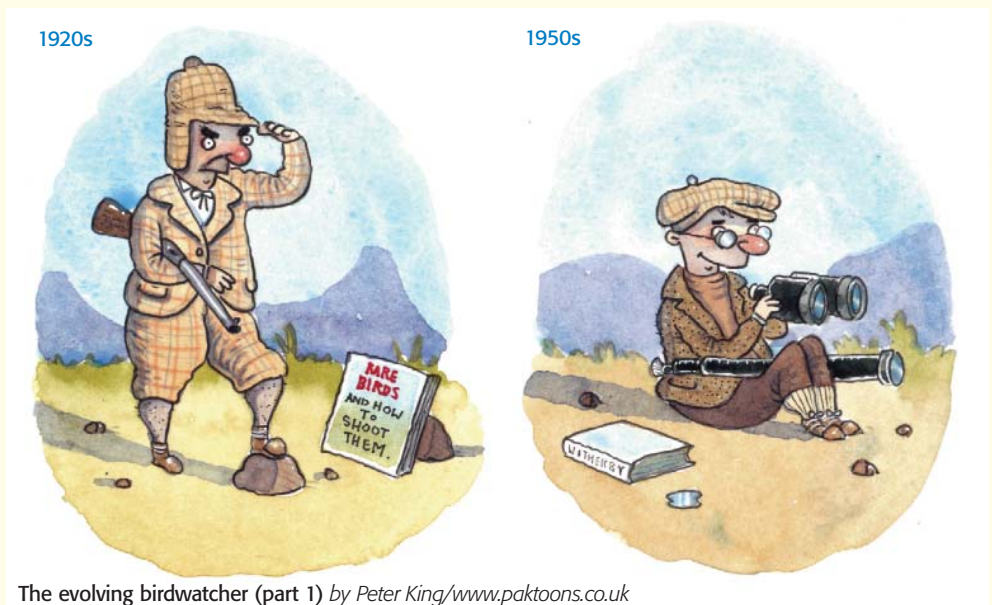
teaching materials targeted to the new Curriculum for Excellence. Teacher training days will back up the teaching materials, and the response so far has been very enthusiastic.

The project was seen as an appropriate way to celebrate the Club's anniversary, as it combines partnerships with other organisations and, most importantly, encouragement for young children to get involved in birdwatching.

**Another anniversary
- 25 years of Bird Watching**

Bird Watching magazine is celebrating its 25th anniversary in its March 2011 issue, with birding memories from long-standing contributors, and a look back at some of the birdwatching landmarks since 1986, plus the usual news, features, sightings reports, walks and columns, and great bird photographs. For more information on subscriptions, go to www.greatmagazines.co.uk.

Gordon Riddle Chairman, Ayrshire Branch



The evolving birdwatcher (part 1) by Peter King/www.paktoons.co.uk

'The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland'

I. FRANCIS & M. COOK

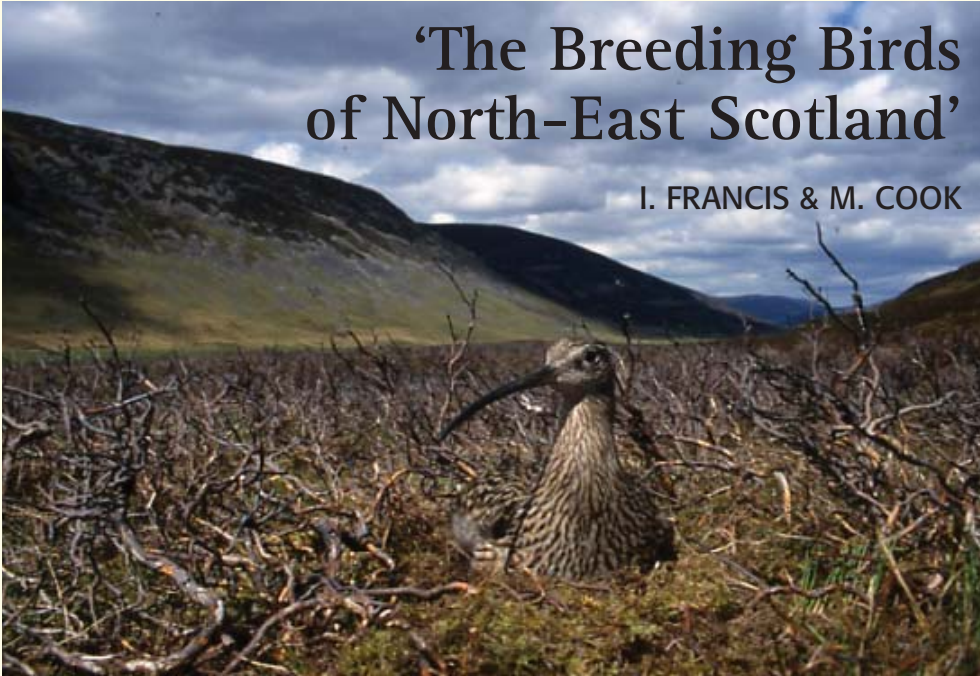


Plate 26. Curlew, Glen Clunie, North-east Scotland. © Ed Duthie

In 2002, five years of fieldwork began for the second breeding bird atlas of north-east Scotland. Spring 2011 sees the publication of the results. Almost 30 years have passed since the fieldwork for the first *Birds of North-East Scotland* atlas, edited by Steve Buckland, Mike Bell and Nick Picozzi - a groundbreaking book, unique in its level of coverage of the distribution and occurrence of birds in the area throughout the year. However, many changes have taken place since then amongst our breeding birds. Our second atlas, *The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland*, coordinated by the Grampian SOC Branch, summarises them and provides a wealth of further information.

This new atlas covers north-east Scotland - Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City and includes almost half of the Cairngorms National Park. It maps the distributions of all birds showing evidence of breeding during 2002–06, and also makes comparisons with all earlier atlases, both local (1981–84) and national (1968–72 and 1988–91). It is the first 'repeat' local breeding bird atlas for any area in Scotland. Where possible, information on breeding birds has been updated to 2009.

The mapping unit is the 2x2 km 'tetrad' and the 2,340 surveyed make this the largest 'tetrad atlas' ever undertaken, covering 8,686 km², or almost 4% of the UK land area and 11% of Scotland. The level of participation in the atlas was very high, with almost 350 observers taking part. Sixty of these also wrote the species accounts, and many photographers contributed a wide range of images illustrating breeding activity, a distinctive feature of this atlas. Almost 117,000 records were submitted during the course of the project.

During 2002–06, 189 species at least possibly bred, and 153 species were confirmed to have done so. The number of 'new' breeding species outnumbered those lost since previous atlases, more species showed evidence of an increase in their breeding range than showed a decrease, and more species appeared to have increased in numbers than decreased. However, these conclusions were certainly influenced by varying levels of observer effort and coverage. Despite this, circumstantial evidence reinforces the conclusion that the breeding ranges (and populations) of many species have increased over the past four decades, and probably more species now breed in north-east Scotland than



John Latimer – Wildlife Artist

I have been watching and drawing birds for as long as I can remember, though my initial interest in the natural world stemmed from an obsession with animals from a very early age. I used to save all my pocket money and collect the zoo animals made by model makers 'Britains' when I was young. These were not the cheapest toys available, but they were the only ones I wanted to play with, as they were realistic and expertly crafted. Even at school, I remember faithfully trying to colour in animals prints during class in their correct tones, rather than some of the more exotic colours used by my friends. This passion for realism in wildlife was important to me then and is evident in my artwork today.

Having later taken art at both GCSE and A-Level, I went on to study for a BA (Hons) degree in Scientific & Natural History Illustration at Blackpool & the Fylde College, gaining a First Class in 1998. I have worked as a professional wildlife artist since 1999. Following encouragement by fellow artist John Threlfall, whom I had met whilst exhibiting at the annual Birdfair at Martin Mere WWT in Lancashire, I made the decision to exhibit paintings at the Scottish Wildlife & Countryside Fair.

During that event, held at Vane Farm RSPB reserve, my work on display, featuring a mix of bird paintings and other natural history illustrations, caught the eye of Ian Langford, publisher of the superb Wildlife Art Series titles, and I was invited to produce a title featuring my own work. Just starting out on my artistic career, this was an opportunity I couldn't afford to miss. Following weeks of research and travel to various parts of the UK, the paintings I produced over the next couple of years, in between working on commercial illustration commissions, resulted in my first solo book being published in the autumn of 2005.



Plate 28. *Just resting - Bar-tailed Godwits (Acrylic on canvasboard).*

Inspiration can come from the most unexpected sources. Whilst trawling the Internet, I came across a beautiful photograph of a pair of feeding Curlews taken on an estuary somewhere in Malaysia, and I wondered how I might portray such stunning light in a painting of my own. Wishing to choose a different species of wader as the main subject, I decided on a pair of juvenile Bar-tailed Godwits, which are vaguely similar in tone and markings to adult Curlews, a factor I felt would assist me in producing a painting having an overall tonal balance similar to that of the original photograph.

The soft purple, blue and ochre tones of the original photo suggested in my mind's eye the fading light of an autumn afternoon on the north Norfolk coast (an area I have visited frequently since childhood), and coming across a pair of young godwits, perhaps having just flown in across the North Sea from their birthplace in the Scandinavian Arctic. It is impossible to be certain just how long a particular migrant might stay around to be admired, and so I wanted to convey a feeling of tension within the posture of the birds. I attempted to do this by having the bird on the right looking out of the picture plane, giving an idea of restlessness and of a destination yet to be reached, with the second bird, busily preening, perhaps in anticipation of an imminent departure to pastures new. Whatever the story, I wanted to give the feeling that these



Plate 30. *Sketch of Mallard at a frozen Martin Mere.*

beautiful visitors might disappear as swiftly as they had arrived. I was delighted with the end result (achieved with the help and critical eye of my good friend and fellow artist Szabolcs Kókay, who is a self-confessed shorebird fanatic).

Most of my work still comes from illustration commissions, and my list of clients is extensive, work being requested by a variety of charities, publishers and corporate bodies, from Plantlife International, the RSPB and BBC to HarperCollins, New Holland and National Geographic. My portfolio of natural history illustrations covers everything from beetles, flowers and freshwater fish to birds, butterflies and, more recently, snakes. I have a much better appreciation of wildlife in general now than I



Plate 29. *Short-eared Owl, Islay (Acrylic on board).*

ever used to have. It is amazing how, once you have studied a particular subject in order to paint it, you become more observant of life, and the world around you becomes a much more interesting and fascinating place.

Despite a new found appreciation in other areas of natural history, birds remain my first love, and a subject I return to again and again. Rather than producing feather-perfect studies of birds, I am much more interested in depicting them within their natural environment, sometimes as almost incidental players in the overall scene. Looking for birds in the wild is as much about getting to grips with a particular habitat as it is finding a certain species. Often it is only after sitting quietly in a particular spot for a good couple of hours or so that the birdlife makes itself apparent. Many birds present only fleeting glimpses of themselves, and would be entirely missed if I were to go trampling around constantly after them. The transitory nature of many wildlife encounters is perhaps the reason why many of my paintings feature birds in flight, just appearing within, or about to exit the picture plane, and flying raptors have become a favourite subject.

It is often a particular landscape or interesting lighting, rather than an encounter with wildlife, that provides the inspiration for a painting, and this study is no exception. During a short break

to Islay, I spent a couple of bright, early April mornings scanning suitable areas of moorland in the hope of catching up with one or two of the island's breeding population of Short-eared Owls. As I explored the island with the help of the obligatory local OS maps, I came across a patch of rough grassland, bordered by a small conifer plantation, that I instantly knew would form the perfect backdrop to the painting. Although I didn't manage to find any owls that day, I knew this was perfect hunting territory for 'Shorties', the resultant painting capturing what I saw in my imagination as I hurriedly photographed the scene before the sun rose too far in the sky. I think it was the vivid contrast between the pale grassland and backlit forest that had arrested my attention so forcefully that morning. This theme of light and dark intrigues me greatly as an artist and is one I will no doubt return to often.

Although keen to try out new mediums, at the moment my paintings are almost exclusively in acrylic. I enjoy the vivid pigments of the paint which enable me to produce realistic looking work. Although the nature of acrylic painting creates limits with its fast-drying time, I enjoy this property as it enables me to work quickly, building up many layers in quick succession to give my subjects form and life. When producing illustration work, I prefer using the very flat, smooth surface of hot-pressed paper, which



Plate 31. *Marsh Harrier at Dawn* (Acrylic on paper).



Plate 32. Sketch of an adult Peregrine at Warton Crag LNR, Lancaster, during nest protection work.

enables me to achieve high levels of fine detail. I usually begin by stretching the paper on a piece of hardboard, wetting the paper thoroughly (usually by laying it flat on cold water in the bath for 10 minutes or so), before taping it down with gum strip.

When producing illustration work, I begin by blocking in the area to be painted, with a mid tone colour. Having covered the surface of the paper with one or two layers of opaque paint, I then usually give this a light sanding, using very fine wet-and-dry sandpaper. This helps to remove any areas of unevenness in the paint, creating a smooth, almost glass-like surface on which to build up subsequent layers of paint. This approach is very different to the one I used to employ when using watercolour or gouache where you have to think almost back to front, leaving lighter areas of tone for the white of the paper to shine through - a very unforgiving medium. Working opaquely allows lighter tones and detail to be added right at the end, enabling the artist to build up the form and structure of the subject matter initially, without having to consider every last detail.

Harriers are my favourite group of raptors, and I have been fortunate enough to study our three breeding species in the field. My home county of Lancashire holds Marsh and Hen Harriers, the latter being probably my favourite of all birds. I never tire of watching them hunt and I received the title of Birdwatch Artist of the Year in 2003 with a painting of a female Hen Harrier flying across typical mountainous habitat - no doubt they will be subjects I return to many times.

This painting, featuring a female Marsh Harrier at dawn, is based loosely on my first sighting of this species in the UK, during an RSPB holiday to Norfolk when I was about ten. It was my first real birding holiday away from home, and I remember being thrilled to see the bird on a late winter's afternoon at Snettisham. In this picture I have changed the scene to that of a winter's dawn, the sun just about to rise over the background trees that have the beautiful, soft lilac glow of a crisp December day. I imagine the harrier, having just left a favourite roosting site, quartering the ground in search of the day's first meal. This picture was selected for inclusion at the 2006 'Birds in Art' exhibition at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wisconsin, the most prestigious exhibition of bird art in the US.

Although most of my illustration work is produced on paper, my larger gallery paintings are usually completed on MDF primed with gesso, or on prepared canvasboard. The rougher surface of the latter is not so favourable to painting in great detail, something that I find useful when trying to loosen up my style. Being trained as an illustrator to produce very detailed pieces, it can be very difficult to really let go and paint in a less prescriptive fashion, no matter how much your heart wants you to do so. Too often my head wins, and I end up working on a piece 'just a little more'. I greatly admire the looser painting style of artists like James Coe and John Threlfall, feeling that there is often more vitality and truth to their work. At the age of 34 and relatively early in my career, I still feel unsure as to what my own painting style will be. The artists who have had the biggest influence on my work have probably been Bruce Pearson and Robert Bateman, the former for his wonderful, spirit-filled work whilst the more considered, realistic, but never over-worked, studio-based paintings by the Canadian master are something I greatly admire. Perhaps I'll find a style somewhere between the two that I'll finally call my own. Watch this space!

Jonathan Latimer, Wildlife Art & Illustration
www.jonathanlatimer.com

(John Latimer's artwork will feature in a dual exhibition at Waterston House from 2 April to 25 May)

Szabolcs Kókay – Hungarian Wildlife Artist



Szabolcs Kókay was born in Hungary in 1976, and has been interested in nature, especially birds, since childhood. Although he has been drawing for as long as he can remember, it was only later on in his life, around the age of 20, when these two interests merged. For Szabolcs now, watching and sketching nature go hand in hand, so much so that he cannot imagine doing one without the other.

After finishing his education he began working in nature conservation, initially for BirdLife Hungary on various projects, and later at the Ministry for the Environment, working on the Washington Convention for Endangered Species (CITES). This work enabled Szabolcs to get a much better insight into the nature conservation of his native country, in addition to widening his reputation as a talented young illustrator. With increasing amounts of time being taken up by commissioned work, it became difficult to juggle both careers, so in 2001, Szabolcs took the plunge and opted to work full time as an illustrator.

Since then he hasn't looked back, and now about 70% of his work comes from illustration, in between which he produces gallery paintings based on his own fieldwork. Whilst many of his initial commissions came from Hungarian NGOs, National Parks and the Ministry for the Environment, his work is also being recognised by a wider audience, thanks in no small part to success he has had in several international art competitions.



Plate 34. *We are all young.*

In 2000 he won the "British Birds" PJC Award, and in 2001 and 2002, achieved overall third place in the journal's main 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' award. In 2002, he won the identification category in "Birdwatch" magazine's 'Bird Artist of the Year', and followed that success in 2008, being awarded overall first prize in the competition, with a painting depicting juvenile shorebirds in his native Hungary.

Plate 34: "This oil painting, showing juvenile shorebirds in their autumn migration, is the most special for me in many respects. Initially I started it for a competition, which was arranged for the front cover of the updated checklist of the birds of Hungary. The right upper quarter is intentionally left blank, as this is where the title of the checklist would have been placed. I hadn't used oils for several months before starting this painting, so I was unused to handling the medium. Probably this was the reason I had real difficulties with the work, especially in the painting of the mud. I became very depressed with the work, so gave up, and missed the competition. After a gap of three

months, I picked it up again, and completed it in one week for the British Birdwatching Fair. It was a really popular painting there and was almost sold, but in the end it stayed with me, so I sent it to the annual exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists where it won the Birdwatch Artist of the Year prize in 2008. The painting is based on field experience the previous autumn. I spent a day sketching juvenile shorebirds in central Hungary and was lucky to be able to study a rare vagrant Pectoral Sandpiper from close quarters."

In addition to exhibiting in the UK, annually at the British Birdwatching Fair since 2005, and more recently at the SWLA at the Mall Galleries in London, Szabolcs' work has received wider international acclaim, with his paintings selected for North America's most prestigious Birds in Art exhibition at Leigh Woodson Art Museum in Wisconsin, in 2006 and 2009. 2010 saw another of his paintings being exhibited in the US, this time one of his book illustration plates, which was selected for inclusion in the biennial 'Focus On Nature' exhibition at the New York State Museum.



Plate 35. *Alone II*.



Plate 36. *Slender-billed Curlew sketch.*

Szabolcs has experimented with various painting media, and worked solely in acrylic for several years on his illustration projects. For the last few years he has almost stopped using the medium, except for larger mural work and plein-air paintings, now preferring to use mainly watercolour, with a little body colour (gouache) for his illustration works. His larger gallery paintings are almost exclusively painted in oils on canvasboard. His favourite medium remains watercolour, which is something he plans to devote his attention to in the future.

Plate 35 & 36: "The Slender-billed Curlew is without doubt my favourite bird. I'm terribly lucky having it on my life list, a long-faded memory from 1996 in Hungary. Ever since this time I have been dreaming about meeting this enigmatic bird once again in my life, though chances of this are ever decreasing. For this painting I studied Curlews in the spring of 2010 on many consecutive days. I chose late afternoon light to give a contrasting effect on the birds. When painting a group of birds, it is the most difficult task to find a pleasing composition. I used paper cut-outs to find the good arrangement, consulting my friends to have other people's opinion also.

For reference, I was lucky to rent a well-preserved specimen of the Slender-billed Curlew for a single day, and was able to study it

closely. I painted a previous version of this painting in 2002, entitled 'Alone', and so this painting is given the number 2. I simply cannot find a better title for these Slender-billed Curlew paintings than 'Alone'. I love the contrasting meaning of this title. People who have never heard of the Slender-billed Curlew will definitely think it is a fool title as it shows a group of birds, but these paintings are not made for them!"

Over the years, Szabolcs' technique when approaching painting wildlife has radically changed, as he used to work solely from photographs. He feels that the revolution in digital photography and the invention of digiscoping attributed much to this approach, making him quite lazy. He now feels lucky to have realised over time the importance of working directly from life, and in recent years he has tried to spend as much time in the field as possible, sketching directly from life. He uses watercolours there, working from life and making loose sketches and studies. His current painting style in the studio remains quite detailed and realistic, as in addition to the sketches he makes, he still takes reference photos, but is trying to rely less and less on these.

Working on painting inspired by his own experience is vitally important to him, which is why his work features species he is familiar with

in Hungary and the surrounding region. His enthusiasm for birding and travel has taken him to other parts of Europe, including Spain and Scandinavia, and also further afield to Morocco and India on a couple of occasions. He has recently been awarded the Don Eckelberry Scholarship Award, the prize giving him his first chance to visit the Americas, with a two-week study trip to Trinidad in January this year.

In addition to birds, Szabolcs is very interested in cats, and he has been fortunate to watch wild Tigers in India. More recently, a trip to Ladakh in the Himalayas in the autumn of 2009 was rewarded with views of what is for Szabolcs, the ultimate big cat - the elusive Snow Leopard. He feels extremely lucky to have been able to see this magnificent animal in its natural habitat, and this subject, along with birds, dominates his current paintings.

Plate 37: "The Snow Leopard is the most enigmatic cat in the world and many people dream about getting a glimpse of it in the wild. I was also dreaming for many years of having such an experience, until the 1st November, 2009. I



Plate 37. Snow Leopard in Ladakh.

was lucky to join a group on a quest to Ladakh, India, which included Mark Andrews, a fellow artist from the UK. The trip had a single goal - to see Snow Leopard. On that day in November, we met one animal on two occasions - I missed the first opportunity, but was lucky on the second. Seeing the animal itself has had a huge inspirational effect on me, but I feel it has been more important to study the habitat of the Snow Leopard, as I always prefer to work from my own references."

"I made this painting during the summer at home in Budapest, and so it was a strange contrast to paint this harsh, wild scene with that icy stream bed in the 30+ °C heat of my green garden."

Solo exhibitions

- 2004 Erdei Gallery, Budapest
- 2005 Kiskunság National Park headquarters, Kecskemét
- 2008 Ministry for the Environment, Green Gallery, Budapest
- 2005–10 British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland Water

Published work

- Amongst many others, in
- 2000 BirdLife (Hungary's magazine)
- 2003 A Birder's Guide to the Behaviour of European and North American Birds
- 2004 Woodpeckers of Europe
- 2004 The birds of the Hortobágy
- 2006 Birding in Eastern Europe
- 2009 Birds of Borneo
- 2010 A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-East Asia
- 2010 Concise Bird Guide, (New Holland)

Contact information

Szabolcs Kókay, H-1212 Budapest,
Széchenyi u. 49. Hungary
Email: kokay@externet.hu
website: www.kokay.hu
blog: www.kokayart.blogspot.com

Jonathan Latimer

(Szabolcs Kókay's artwork will feature in a dual exhibition at Waterston House from 2 April to 25 May.)

NOTES AND COMMENT



Plate 38. *Winter casualty*. © Frank Stark

Four winter sightings

Frank Stark has sent us these two photos taken during the winter snow cover on Lewis. The first is evidence of the toll this kind of weather takes on tiny birds like the Wren. The second is a Mealy (Common) Redpoll which he observed eating snow from the adjacent twigs.



Plate 39. *Kingfisher*. © Alistair Grey



Plate 40. *Snow feeder*. © Frank Stark

Also from the cold snap, Alistair Grey photographed this Kingfisher in Strathclyde Country Park, Hamilton - it had found an unfrozen section of the South Calder Water in which to fish and was indulging in a bit of wing-stretching between dives. His other picture features a Stonechat at Baron's Haugh RSPB reserve, Motherwell. As in 2009/10, this species arrived in the really severe weather to feed regularly in the reeds in front of the Marsh Hide. The ice clinging to its plumage indicates the extremely low temperature at that time, but even so, its paltry body heat is thawing the frosty head of the Reedmace! As last year, the bird eventually disappeared from the area.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 41. *Stonechat*. © Alistair Grey



Plate 42. Mill and Weir, Paisley. © Douglas Maxwell

A local treat in Paisley

The Hammills, Paisley, is beginning to rival Hogganfield Loch as a top birdwatching venue in the Clyde area. This urban location near the Abbey comprises a stretch of the White Cart Water with bridges, a large weir and several mill buildings.

In this severe December weather, the locals have been treated to daily Otter appearances, several Goosanders, a Kingfisher, Herons, Dippers, Redshanks and several types of duck including a drake Pintail. To see this species joining the Mallard flock to beg for bread was strange enough, but the bird had also become totally captivated by a female Mallard and was chasing her relentlessly around the river.



Plate 43. Pintail displaying to Mallard female. © Jimmy Maxwell

When the Mallard tired of being pursued, she settled down to sleep on the ice. The Pintail took up station behind her and contented himself with a series of head-bobbing interspersed with a ritual flaunting and preening of his long tail feathers. In the present low temperatures and sparkingly clear air, the icy surrounds of the river are becoming a venue for many photographers - the Pintail appeared to be revelling in it!

Jimmy Maxwell

Letter

Greetings SOC, I would be thrilled to hear from any other Dipper lovers about any observations you have made, or perhaps literature you may have, about my favourite bird. I am working on research for a book about the American Dipper and would like to expand my horizons and include your *Cinclus cinclus* (it is so much prettier, after all!). I am particularly interested in information regarding nesting boxes. I have only one study titled "Use of nest boxes by Dippers on Sagehen Creek, California" by Vernon M. Hawthorne, which refers to a nest box design by von Jost. Any information about von Jost's study of the European Dipper in 1970 would be greatly appreciated. The citation reads as follows: **von Jost, O. 1970. Erfolgreiche Schutzmassnahmen in den Brutrevieren der Wasseramsel (*Cinclus cinclus*). *Angewandte Ornithologie* 3(3): 101–108.**

I am in the early stages of creating a website about the Dipper www.dippercrazy.com and I would be delighted to hear from any of you regarding what you think would make it a better website and whether you'd like to contribute your own observations in a blog format.

Lastly, any personal experience you have had with banding would also be much appreciated. I have not been successful thus far with finding proper instruction to do this here in the US. Many thanks.

*Lynne Kelly, Mt Index, WA, USA.
Email blynnkelly@msn.com*

Bird Atlas 2007–11: the final summer

Now that all the winter fieldwork for the 2007–11 Bird Atlas has been successfully completed, attention has turned to the final breeding season. Breeding season fieldwork is always more demanding as not only are we trying to ascertain which species are present in each 10-km square (or where local atlases are being undertaken, in each tetrad), we are also trying to establish the breeding status of each species.

As we enter this final season we can be very pleased with progress to date. By the end of the third summer, 95% of the minimum required number of tetrads had received at least one visit for a Timed Tetrad count. This still means that 318 tetrads need both their summer visits, whilst another 246 have a missing early (April/May) or late (June/July) visit that must be completed for us to reach our target. If you are signed up for a tetrad, please make sure you complete it in good time and submit the data promptly so that we can identify any potential gaps in coverage. If you suddenly find that you

will be unable to complete a visit, please inform your local organiser so that it can be reallocated to another volunteer. It may also be worth contacting your local organiser to find out where likely gaps in coverage are, and volunteering to take on some extra tetrads in these areas. Figure 1 highlights 10km squares still short of the minimum required level of coverage.

The other big job to be done is to boost species lists for each square and to get as many at as high a level of breeding evidence as applicable. This is best done by simply going out birdwatching and gathering Roving Records. The **Any Square Summary** button on the www.birdatlas.net website gives details of species recorded so far in each square, whilst the **Priority squares (breeding)** button highlights potential missing species. It is worth printing out these lists for your local squares and squares where you are planning birding trips so you can keep a look out for new species and boost breeding evidence codes. Figure 2 highlights squares where we think, based on the 1988–92 atlas data, species are still missing. The darker the colour, the more species are potentially missing. These darker coloured squares are ones that are in real need of extra effort with Roving Records. Remember that Roving Records and Birdtrack records should be accompanied by appropriate breeding evidence

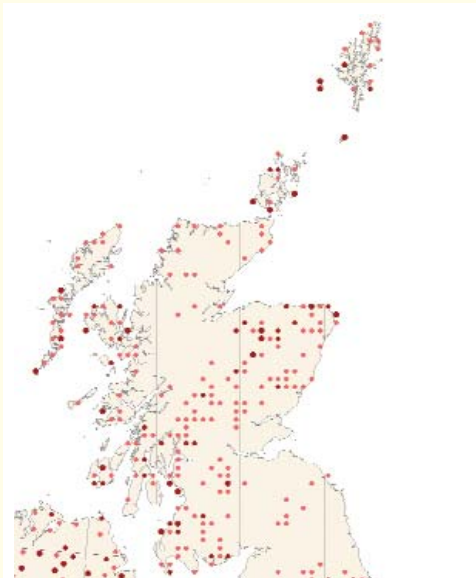


Figure 1. Priority 10-km squares still requiring TTVs. Large dark red dots: no tetrads done. Small dark red dots: 1–4 tetrads done. Small light red dots: 5–7 tetrads done.

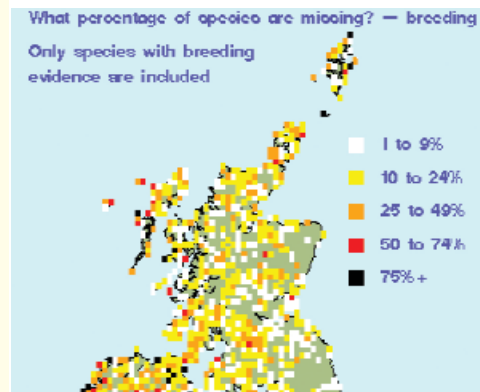


Figure 2. Missing species.



Plate 44. Woodcock. © Roger Tidman

codes. Codes like H= in suitable breeding habitat, P = pair in suitable habitat, T = territorial birds singing, FF = bird with food, or FY = recently fledged dependant young are all very useful. A full list of codes can be found on all atlas literature or on the website. The **My Local Gaps** button on the website lets you see which species require their breeding evidence codes to be boosted in your local squares. This summer is the last chance we have to ensure that the atlas data is as accurate as possible for all species. Please make a final effort to submit your sightings to help us achieve this goal.

With the bulk of the winter data now submitted, records are being validated to check for potential errors such as incorrect grid references. If you receive a record query, it will be displayed on an orange bar on your atlas or bird track homepage. If you click on the bar you will see the actual record with some information as to why it has been queried. You can then either edit or delete the record or contact the validator for further information about the query.

All records need to be validated before they can be used in the final atlas database. As this process is completed, staff at BTO HQ can start to produce accurate maps for each species showing their current distribution and changes since the last atlas. The most difficult job, however, is using the counts from the Timed Tetrad Visits to produce the relative abundance maps. Statistical models are being developed to do this based on a wide range of variables that affect the different counts in each tetrad.

As an example, Figure 3 shows the relative abundance of Woodcock in winter in Scotland

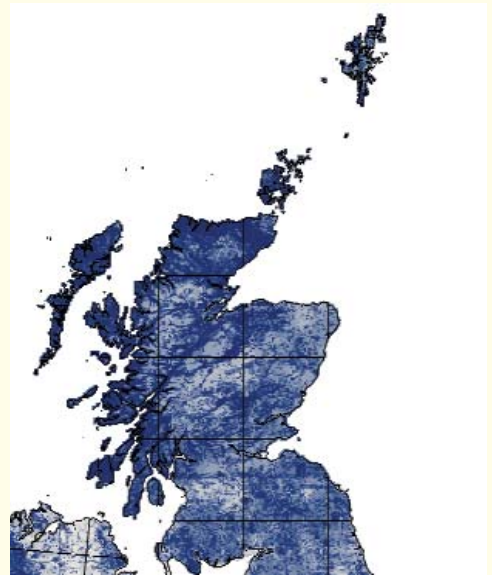


Figure 3. Woodcock winter relative abundance map.

based on the TTV counts completed to date. The darker the colour, the more abundant woodcock were in those areas. The map highlights particularly high densities in north and west Scotland, especially on the milder islands. Within the north, the high abundance in areas such as the Great Glen and Strathspey contrasts markedly against lower densities on the adjacent uplands. As we get towards the end of the fieldwork for this exciting project more and more maps such as this will be made available. Every completed tetrad will help improve the reliability of these maps so please in this final summer make a special effort to gather as much data as you can for this vital conservation project.

Bob Swann
Scottish Organiser Bird Atlas 2007–11

Ornithology at the University of St Andrews



Plate 45. Sue-Anne Zollinger sound recording Great Tits. © St. Andrews University

St Andrews is a small university, but it contains quite a few ornithologists, although few would actually call themselves this. Ornithology as a separate discipline in academia has largely disappeared. This generation's ornithologists now call themselves behavioural ecologists, conservation biologists, evolutionary biologists, psychologists or even neuroscientists. Yet ornithology remains because many of these specialists study birds to a greater or lesser degree. This article reviews the bird-related research that is being carried out at St Andrews currently.

Behavioural ecology

Behavioural ecology seeks to understand why animals have evolved particular behaviours rather than others, and key to this is understanding how environmental constraints or the ecology of species lead to differences within and between species. Many studies are based on field and laboratory experiments on wild birds, and so there are many "ornithologists" to be found lurking under the title of behavioural ecologist.

Peter Slater and his group have been famously studying the behavioural ecology of bird song for many years. Most of their laboratory work has been on song learning and use in Zebra Finches.

Henrik Brumm found that males in this species can modify how loudly they sing depending on how far away the female is that they are singing to, a skill often thought only to be human. Sue Anne Zollinger has recently used hand-reared Great Tits for a study of how environmental noise affects the sounds that birds develop. Great Tits living in noisy urban environments across Europe have been found to sing at a higher pitch than those in quieter forest habitats. Birds in the study were exposed to city-like noise during their entire first year, but as adults they did not sing at a higher pitch than their tutors. This suggests that



Plate 46. Peter Slater sound recording duetting wrens in Central America. © Nigel Mann

the higher pitch of urban songs is not simply a response of individual birds to noise in their environment during song development. Instead, it may be that urban birds must sing louder to get their message across and the higher pitched songs of urban birds are simply a by-product of singing more loudly.

Peter Slater's main recent study has been on a large group of Central American wrens recently split into four separate genera by molecular work carried out by Nigel Mann. Most of the birds in each of the new genera have styles of song that differ from those of birds in the other genera, so this fits in with the molecular results. But some are exceptions and the group hopes to discover why they differ from their closest relatives. The wonderful thing about the songs in many of these species is that they duet, the male and female of a pair coordinating their song in what is often an extraordinarily sophisticated way. As well as understanding why they do this the group are also beginning to look at how they do so. For example, Chris Templeton, an NSF International post-doctoral student, is studying Happy Wrens in the western part of Mexico. Both males and females sing, and each must learn to produce a repertoire of sex-specific songs. Mated pairs then combine these male and female songs to produce intricate and precisely-timed duet songs with each pair having a repertoire of 20–30 different duet song types.

Jeff Graves, perhaps St Andrews' most venerable ornithologist (along with Peter Slater), has been studying how evolution due to mate choice (sexual selection) leads to differences between the sexes, and signals of mate quality. A current project is investigating the reliability of these mating signals and their consequences for reproduction in Blue-black Grassquits, a Brazilian seedeater. Jeff has found that unusually high percentages (up to 50%) of chicks in a nest are fathered by males other than the resident. This makes Grassquits good models to examine how females might choose their mates, because male mating success should depend on how reliable their mating displays are as an indication of their fitness.

Will Cresswell also carries out behavioural ecology work on birds based at St Andrews,



Plate 47. *Happy Wren, an example of a duetting neotropical songbird.* © Chris Templeton

particularly into how predators catch prey and correspondingly how prey avoid being captured. Studies have been carried out for many years on Redshanks and other species that are preyed upon by Sparrowhawks and Peregrines in the nearby Firth of Forth. A major recent development is the recognition of the growing importance of non-lethal effects in determining behaviour, population dynamics and community structure. Put simply, the fear of predation, rather than the actual act of predation may be the most important factor in determining the ecology of a species. Thus Redshank distribution and behaviour may be a consequence of the presence of just a few raptors that actually may eat relatively few prey.

Life histories of tropical birds

Ornithological researchers at St Andrews are also interested in the life history characteristics of tropical birds. Most of the world's songbirds live in the tropics or sub-tropics. Compared with their north temperate counterparts they are generally thought to be long-lived, 'slow', breeders - they rear small broods, have a more protracted breeding cycle and may suffer high rates of nest failure. But there have been very few studies on the breeding systems of tropical birds to establish why this is the case, particularly in Africa.



Phil Shaw, an honorary research fellow at St Andrews, is studying the likely causes of 'slow' breeding in the tropics. He studies breeding performance, nest predation rates and annual survival of the Stripe-breasted Tit, a restricted-range species (but a close relative of the Great Tit) in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, SW Uganda. Provisional results show that nest predation rates (in nestboxes) are similar to those of Great Tits in Europe, but that clutch and brood sizes are much smaller, producing an average of just 2.2 fledglings per attempt. Stripe-breasted Tit nestlings are fed at a slower rate, and grow more slowly, requiring 4–5 days longer to reach fledging age. This is despite contributions from helpers (usually offspring of the breeding pair), present at almost half of all nests. Although the species' low productivity is partly offset by an extended breeding 'season', enabling pairs to rear up to four broods per year, their annual fecundity is only about half that of European Great Tits. Further work should determine whether the species' low productivity is balanced by high annual survival, as life history theory would suggest.

Plates 48–49. Male Stripe-breasted Tit. (Inset) Stripe-breasted Tit nestling being weighed. © Phil Shaw

A current PhD student, Daniel Cox, has also been studying the effects of seasonality on life histories of tropical birds, in this case in tropical savannahs. The research is based at the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI) on the Jos plateau in Nigeria which Will Cresswell helped set up and now helps to manage from St Andrews. Much of the data for the study comes from the Institute's ringing program, which was established in 2001 and now has almost 30,000 records from around Nigeria. Current lines of research include examining the effect of season and year on mass variation in 55 species of commonly caught savannah birds, to establish if seasonal mass variation occurs commonly in the tropics. It was found that, indeed, 56% of species show this, especially transient species compared with resident ones. This may be due to some pre-migration fattening. There also appears to be a clear relationship between seasonal fattening and survival.

Conservation biology

A major area of ornithological research at St Andrews also involves Will Cresswell's group, which is looking at factors determining the density and distribution of Palearctic migrants wintering in West Africa. Survey work in Nigeria for the last 17 years aims to address the basic lack of knowledge of what our migrant birds (or perhaps more correctly, those African species that breed in Europe) do when they are not in Europe. The research has great conservation relevance because it is clear we are facing unprecedented declines in Palearctic migrant bird populations in Western Europe. It seems likely that factors operating on the wintering grounds are behind many of these, yet little is known about migrant ecology and distribution within West Africa, particularly for terrestrial species. There is also good evidence that wintering bird distributions, movements and habitat quality are changing rapidly. Basic survey work is necessary throughout West Africa and a series of PhD students and post-docs have been carrying this out based at St Andrews (and APLORI in Nigeria) over the last ten years. This year another two PhD students will start research to identify the key habitats used by migrants as they spend the winter in Africa and particularly as they fatten up to migrate north in the spring.

Further conservation research on migrants concerns the Cyprus Wheatear. This African migrant breeds only on Cyprus, but commonly

and in a variety of habitats and elevations, making it an ideal model migrant species to examine the effects of habitat and climate change. The aim of PhD research by Marina Xenophontos is to gain information on the ecology of the Cyprus Wheatear and understand the timing of its breeding in a variety of habitats and elevations and so climatic conditions. Over two years Marina has found that Cyprus Wheatears have a very high nesting success rate despite breeding at very high densities, but probably have low overwinter survival; they are also now resident on the islands from March to November suggesting a change to a non-migratory form may be advantageous.

St Andrews researchers occasionally get involved in detailed conservation projects on species of conservation concern. These have included research into the breeding success of the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing in Kazakhstan. A current project being carried out is one by Sam Iwande, a new PhD student of Will Cresswell, who has been assessing the current conservation status of the Grey-necked Picathartes in Nigeria. The project is revisiting known breeding sites, carrying out extensive searches for possible new locations and improving awareness about the species through conservation education campaigns. The project is funded by the Conservation Leadership Programme under the Future Conservationists Award category. Sam is a recent graduate of the



Plate 50. Colour-ringed male Cyprus Wheatear. © Will Cresswell



Plate 51. Daniel Cox training APLORI Masters students in ringing. © St. Andrews University

APLORI Masters in Conservation Biology program that St Andrews helps to run and is one of the bright new products of the capacity building work of APLORI. The lack of fundamental ornithological research and conservation work in West Africa can only be addressed by training many talented locals. St Andrews is committed to conservation capacity building in West Africa through its involvement with APLORI and students such as Sam are concrete proof of this. Sam's main PhD project will be to join the research into the factors determining the density and distribution of Palearctic migrants wintering in Nigeria.

Animal behaviour

St Andrews has numerous researchers in animal behaviour, although many of these study primates. The research groups of Sue Healy and Kevin Laland often use birds as models however. Sue Healy's research group is based in the School of Psychology and is interested in understanding animal's cognitive processes: what can animals learn from the environment and under what circumstances, and what can they remember? Sue's model species is the Rufous Hummingbird, with field work being carried out each year in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, Canada. For example, Rachael Marshall, a PhD student, is studying how free-living Rufous Hummingbirds

are aware of their past experiences as they feed from flowers, and particularly the ways in which they can judge when a past event happened. Rufous Hummingbirds are excellent species to use for asking this sort of question because organising their behaviour in time is of great importance to them. Hummingbirds feed on nectar from flowers, and these take time to refill after being emptied. Therefore birds must be able to judge time efficiently in order to avoid returning to flowers they have recently visited. So far these birds have shown that they can make judgements about flowers in terms of how long ago they last fed from them, as well as learn time rules based on sequences and times of day.

Another example is research on how animals



Plate 52. Rufous Hummingbird. © Sue Healy

make decisions. When making choices humans choose among the range available rather than using absolute standards on which to base a decision. PhD student Kate Morgan has found that the hummingbirds probably do make similar kinds of “irrational” decisions when foraging on wild flowers, as their flowers vary in the amount and concentration of the nectar they provide.

A further example is from PhD student Nuri Flores-Abreu, who is interested in how animals learn about locations in the wild. Most experiments have been done in the horizontal plane only and yet most animals move through three dimensions and so might use vertical information as well. Surprisingly, results suggest that orientation makes a difference: birds do not learn locations in the vertical axis as well as they learn them in the horizontal plane.

Another strand of Sue Healy’s ornithological behavioural research concerns how birds build nests. In spite of our familiarity with nests and of species of birds that build them, we have little idea as to how birds know what kind of nest to build. For example, do they have to learn from their parents when they are young or by trial and error when they grow up? PhD student Felicity Muth is examining these questions using male Southern Masked Weavers in Southern Africa. Weaver birds build intricate grass nests using many techniques remarkably like those used by human weavers. It seems that male weavers vary in how they build their nests and that their building changes with experience, perhaps somewhat like the way we humans refine our building techniques with practice.

Another major area of animal behaviour research at St Andrews is on the evolution of social behaviour and culture, and sometimes this involves birds. Alice Cowie, one of Kevin Laland’s research group is interested in the spread of new behaviours through animal populations; specifically, in what factors are important in determining how widely a given behaviour will spread through groups of Budgerigars.

Applied ornithology

Researchers at St Andrews have been involved in applied ornithology for many years. Most famously Steve Buckland and his team

developed the DISTANCE software now used as standard for analysis of much ornithological census work, although it was originally developed as part of St Andrews’ expertise in surveying whales and dolphins. Recently the commercial division of the Scottish Oceans Institute, which is still mainly concerned with monitoring cetaceans and seals, has expanded into monitoring birds, led by Jared Wilson. With many large offshore wind farms and new untried submerged tidal power generators in the pipeline there is great potential for changes to bird populations, and so opportunities for advising government agencies on the siting of offshore and coastal developments.

Other applied research includes work on Hooded Crows that nest on electricity transmission structures across northern Scotland. These nests not only cause power cuts and damage to the transmission network but can also lead to people and livestock receiving electric shocks. Guillam McIvor, a PhD student supervised by Sue Healy, is attempting to determine what causes the crows to choose to nest on electricity transmission structures on the Orkney Isles so as to determine what will be the most efficient way for Scottish & Southern Energy PLC to manage the crow-nesting problem. He has found that the devices currently being used by SSE to deter the crows from nesting are ineffective. Removing the nest itself, however, can be effective, if removed at the appropriate stage of construction.

This review is a snapshot and is by no means fully inclusive, but overall it can be seen that there is a lot of exciting and topical ornithology currently going on at St Andrews, despite there perhaps being no “official” ornithologists at St Andrews. Birds still provide key subjects for our fundamental biological research and so ornithological skills and research remain a vital part of academic institutions like St Andrews. And many of the biological researchers at St Andrews remain ornithologists at heart. Certainly, when there is an east wind blowing in the autumn many of them will be found out at Fife Ness carrying out spontaneous migratory and vagrancy research!

Will Cresswell, wrlc@st-and.ac.uk

BIRDSPOT

If you go down to the beach today... notes on the identification of Scandinavian Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus littoralis*

If you go down to the beach today, your "local" Rock Pipits might come up with a surprise. For this is the time of year when their Scandinavian cousins come to town, or at least start to show their true colours. Yes, *BirdGuides* and newsgroups across the country will doubtless be reporting records of "Scandinavian" or "*littoralis*" Rock Pipits - but what are they and how can we identify them?

Background

Two sub-species of Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus* occur in Britain. The nominate British race *A. p. petrosus* and the Scandinavian Rock Pipit *A. p. littoralis*. The familiar British race breeds around our rocky shorelines and is a partial migrant, i.e. part of the population is resident, and part migrates or disperses away from the breeding areas. It is likely that the migrants are mostly young birds.

The Scandinavian Rock Pipit breeds around the coasts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and northern

Russia. *The Migration Atlas* (Wernham *et al.* 2002) shows that most foreign recoveries of Rock Pipits in Britain come from Sweden. But, most of these birds were found south of a line from Anglesey to the Wash, suggesting that Scottish birds are from elsewhere. A look at the Norwegian Ringing Atlas (Bakken, Runde & Tjorve 2006) gives a clue. There are only nine winter recoveries of Norwegian-ringed Rock Pipits, and eight of these came from out with Norway - from north to south: Scotland (1 (Fife)), Denmark (1), England (1) and France (5). There is also an autumn recovery from Northern Ireland. So, the Norwegian population is clearly also highly migratory, and it seems likely that this is where our birds originate from.

What ever their final destination, it is clear that a large number of Norwegian Scandinavian Rock Pipits cross the North Sea each autumn, and return north each spring. So, why are they only reported here in spring? The simple reason for this is that the two sub-species are as good as inseparable in the autumn and winter. The good news is that the pre-breeding moult produces distinctive colour changes in the Scandinavian birds that are not shown by British Rock Pipits.



Plates 53–54. Scandinavian Rock Pipit, Barns Ness, Lothian, 21 March 2010. © Ian Andrews



Plate 55. Rock Pipit (sub-species unknown, probably *petrosus*), Dunbar, Lothian, 10 February 2009. © Ian Andrews

Identification

Rocks and Meadows

First things first, let's make sure we're looking at a Rock Pipit, and not a Meadow Pipit. Rock Pipits are famously dark olive-brown in colour - camouflaging perfectly with the kelp and seaweed in which they glean for insects. The underparts have a dull buff background colour, heavily marked with diffuse dark streaks which merge and blend with each other like smudged charcoal. The legs are always dark reddish-brown. Meadow Pipits by comparison are a much brighter golden-brown or olive above, with paler underparts distinctly and clearly streaked; they also have paler flesh-coloured legs and pure white outer tail feathers. But, plumage colours can vary depending on lighting conditions. Because the Rock Pipit is a larger bird, it has a proportionately smaller head than a Meadow Pipit - and so has slightly more thrush-like proportions. Finally, and perhaps most usefully, the Rock Pipit's call in flight is a clear sharp, usually single "feast", whilst the Meadow Pipit's call is a thinner "seep-seep-seep" usually uttered two or three times per phrase.

British and Scandinavian Rocks

The British Rock Pipit's most distinctive feature is their overall dullness! I remember watching Rock Pipits on the shore in Yell Sound from a hide erected to catch Eiders in the depths of mid-winter many years ago. Rock Pipits were the main form of entertainment - but in the poor light of mid-winter Shetland sometimes they seemed to simply disappear before my very



Plate 56. Meadow Pipit in winter light, Barns Ness, Lothian, 28 December 2009. © Ian Andrews

eyes in the kelp. Nothing about the Rock Pipit's plumage is distinct or bright or eye-catching! And it stays this way throughout the year.

But, come the spring, the same cannot be said of the Scandinavian Rock Pipit, whose pre-breeding moult produces paler underparts, a hint of a peachy throat, a distinct whitish supercilium, whiter wing bars and a greyish wash on the head. These features all make for a striking and attractive bird, and one which now looks more like a Water Pipit than a Rock Pipit! However, Water Pipits always show a clear brownish mantle recalling a miniature Fieldfare, and usually have whiter outer tail feathers, so given good views there should be no cause for confusion. Sadly, these attractive little birds will soon depart for their Scandinavian breeding grounds (perhaps the physiological changes producing the pre-breeding moult also initiate migration?) so there is only a short window of opportunity to catch up with them before they depart in mid-April.

But, what about the *littoralis* pipits before the spring moult? Can these be identified? The simple answer is no, except for a small number of well-marked individuals. And here lies the rub - we simply don't know whether we have lots of *littoralis* throughout the winter, which only become obvious following the spring moult, or whether they only pass through in autumn and spring - like White Wagtails.

Having said that, the general feeling is that we probably do have a lot of wintering birds, and careful assessment of plumage features is revealing more of these each year. Good articles are available on the web - see links below. A summary of the main features to look for are as follows:

- Overall appearance of *littoralis* paler than *petrosus*
- *littoralis* tends to be paler below with more distinct streaking compared to the heavily marked and smudged streaks of *petrosus*
- the mantle of *littoralis* tends to be a shade paler (less olive) than *petrosus*, and to show more distinct streaking
- paler tips to median and greater coverts in *littoralis* producing distinct wing bars, similar to Water Pipit
- the base of the lower mandible is usually a brighter yellow in *littoralis*, resembling Redwing; duller yellow-orange in *petrosus*
- *littoralis* tends to show a more distinct pale supercilium

These features are clearly visible in the superb images of autumn/winter birds by Julian Bell and Graham Catley below.

The preferred wintering habitat of some Rock Pipits is salt marsh, as opposed to rocky coastlines, and this habit also appears to tie in with birds identified as *littoralis* (Wernham *et al.* 2002). However, on the Lothian coast, at least, they also congregate on seaweed wrack on the coast in March; but this may be only immediately prior to departure.

The Norwegian bird in Plate 57 is a very clearly marked autumn individual - Julian Bell tells me that not all are so obvious; never the less, such individuals should be identifiable in the UK. Note the small head in relation to body size (typical of all Rock Pipits), the pale overall appearance with distinct pale wing bars and distinct streaking on the underparts and upperparts. The yellow base to the bill is clearly visible. If they all looked like this, we wouldn't have a problem. For more photos of Rock Pipits (and other things!) in Norway see Julian's blog <http://oeygardenbirds.blogspot.com/>

The bird shown in Plate 58 is another autumn bird, photographed by Graham Catley at Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire. It shows similar features to the Norwegian bird, with a bright yellowish bill, pale underparts and distinct streaking - strongly suggesting that this is a Scandinavian bird. A more clear-cut individual later in the winter is shown in Plate 59.



Plate 57. The real deal: autumn-plumaged Scandinavian Rock Pipit, Herdlevær, Øygarden, (60°34'6.94"N, 4°48'56.69"E) north of Bergen, Norway, October 2009. © Julian Bell



Plate 58 (left). Probable Scandinavian Rock Pipit, Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire, 29 October 2009. © Graham Catley, Nyctea Ltd **Plate 59 (above).** Scandinavian Rock Pipit, New Holland, Lincolnshire, 6 January 2011. © Graham Catley, Nyctea Ltd

And finally a word of warning - colour tones vary tremendously depending on the bird's background - a pale grey-brown pipit against dark seaweed will transform itself into a dark olive-brown bird as it walks across pale sand. Make sure you give yourself time to have a good look at your birds in a range of conditions.

What next?

There are many unknowns in this subject. The best way to tackle them would be to colour-ring birds showing characteristics of Scandinavian birds in the spring at a location such as Barns Ness, and then hope that they turn up the following autumn and either re-catch them, or preferably photograph them at different stages through the following autumn and winter.

A very big thank you to Julian Bell and Graham Catley for their superb images and advice, and to Ian Andrews for his selection of photos of birds at Barns Ness.

Buffing up

Sign up to BirdGuides and scroll through the fantastic selection of photographs in their Iris photographic galleries. There's nothing like seeing lots of photos of different birds in varying lighting conditions and postures to familiarise yourself

with birds that you might not see too often. And of course, arm yourself with the incomparable Collins Bird Guide. Also have a look at the websites and blogs mentioned in this article.

Further reading:

The following articles include a selection of excellent photos:

Scandinavian Rock Pipits (*Anthus petrosus littoralis*) on the Isle of Man - C.J. Wormwell <http://www.homepages.mcb.net/wormwell/Littoralis.pdf>

Rock Pipits in Christchurch Harbour - February 2008 - David Taylor & Mark Andrews. of the Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group - <http://www.chog.org.uk/Features/Rock%20Pipit%20February%202008.htm>

References

Bakken, V., Runde, O. & Tjorve, E. 2006. *Norsk RingmerkingsAtlas*. Volume 2: Pigeons to Passerines. Stavanger Museum, Norway.

Wernham, C.V., M.P. Toms, J.H. Marchant, J.A. Clark, G.M. Siriwardena, & S.R. Baillie. (eds). 2002. *The Migration Atlas: movements of birds of the Britain and Ireland*. T & A.D. Poyser, London.

Clive McKay

BOOK REVIEWS

Bird Observatories of Britain and Ireland. Edited by Mike Archer, Mark Grantham, Peter Howlett & Steven Stansfield, 2010. T. & A.D. Poyser, ISBN 9781408110409, hardback, 592 pages, £60.00.



This is an update of the 1976 book of the same title edited by Roger Durman. That featured 14 observatories, while the new one has 18. One

loss since 1976 was Skokholm (the first observatory founded in Britain), but five newly accredited observatories - Filey, Flamborough, Hilbre, Landguard, and North Ronaldsay - now join the well-known names.

The book includes a foreword by Chris Packham, comments from the Chair of the Bird Observatories Council and an Introduction. This covers topics such as: What Exactly is a Bird Observatory? A Brief History of the Observatories Movement; The Future; The Bird Observatories Council; Daily Life at an Observatory, and The Seasons at Observatories. Next are the individual accounts of the 18 accredited observatories, which average 27 pages. There are five appendices: 1a is a table of species seen at each observatory, while 1b is the numbers of birds ringed; Appendix 2 lists the 56 birds new to Britain and Ireland found at observatories; 3 is Non-avian species mentioned; 4 gives accreditation details of current and former observatories, and Appendix 5 lists wardens, assistants and officers up to April 2010. Finally, there is an 8-page references section, but no index. The text includes 48 black-and-white photos, 19 drawings and

maps, 27 tables and 36 figures, plus an additional insert of 41 colour and one black-and-white photo.

The main part is the individual accounts, written by one or more authors directly connected with each one. These are the real strength and attraction of the book and it is fascinating to read about the background, individuals and groups who have been behind the founding and running of each observatory. Each has a header drawing and map, and is based on the general layout of: Introduction (to the site), History and Development, The Birds, The Future, Non-avian Fauna and Flora, and Access, Accommodation and Other Information. These vary considerably in style, specific content and emphasis, particularly the 'Birds' section, which can include material on habitats, breeding species, characteristic species, seasonal migration, best birds and best days, ringing and seawatching.

The accounts ably demonstrate how our observatories have underpinned much of the knowledge gathered about bird movements to and from Britain and Ireland, and have documented many changes. They also show how they are significant data sources which still contribute to our knowledge today and how they expect to continue to play an important, if changing, role in the future. There are many stories of great rarities and migration falls that convey the excitement these experiences can bring, and which really capture the sense of camaraderie and enjoyment that being at an 'obs' can bring. A fantastic book, and highly recommended, and if the price tag puts you off then join your local library!

Stuart L. Rivers

The Golden Eagle (second edition). Jeff Watson, 2010. T. & A.D. Poyser, ISBN 978-1-4081-1420-9, hardback, 464 pages, £50.00.

This updates the first edition (1997) and is the most comprehensive review of scientific literature to date on this iconic species of the wilderness. The author, Jeff Watson, sadly died at the age of 54 in 2007 before the book was published. The book includes details of new scientific work published since the first edition, carried out primarily in Scotland, North America, Scandinavia, Spain and Eastern Europe, covering topics ranging from post fledging dispersal, long distance migration, DNA fingerprinting and population ecology of the species. Considering Jeff Watson's Scottish roots, born in Dumfries in 1952 and son to Donald Watson, another great doyen of Scottish ornithology, it is not surprising that there is a particular emphasis on Golden Eagles in Scotland. Noteworthy new Scottish research detailed in this book includes the development of a conservation framework for Golden Eagles, which Jeff Watson was instrumental in establishing along with colleagues. This in-depth analysis of constraints impacting on the Scottish population clearly illustrates the adverse impact human persecution is having on the population, limiting both the geographical range and population viability of the species. This was an issue which Jeff Watson was particularly concerned about, and one which he considered was an urgent conservation priority for the species in Scotland.

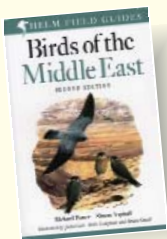


One of the great qualities of this book is the comparative approach taken to illustrate the differences between Golden Eagles in Scotland and populations of this species, and indeed other closely related species, throughout the world. The information and data are clearly presented in an accessible style of writing which is particularly easy to read. Like the first edition, the book is beautifully illustrated throughout with paintings by Keith Brockie, and there is a colour photographic section illustrating Golden Eagle habitats and breeding behaviour.

This book deserves a special place in the history of Scottish ornithological literature. Like his father Donald, Jeff Watson leaves us with a great legacy of ornithological research which is presented so well in this book. I have no doubt that *The Golden Eagle* (second edition) will inspire many generations of ornithologists to go out and admire, study and protect this beautiful icon of the wilderness.

Mike Thornton

Birds of the Middle East (Second edition). R. Porter & S. Aspinall, 2010. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-0-7136-7602-0, softback, 238 pages, £29.99.



This is a major rewrite and redesign of the first edition, published in 1988. Immediately, you will notice that it has reverted to

the standard 'text and map facing plate' format. This makes to book easier to use and has lead to a huge expansion in the number of illustrations. These are by John Cade, Mike Langman and Brian Small.

The area covered extends from Turkey in the north-west to Yemen in the south and Iran in the east. The North African coverage has been dropped in this edition, but importantly Socotra (with all its endemics) has been added. There is clearly an overlap in coverage with the Collins Bird Guide in Turkey and Israel, but it is further east and south that this guide really comes into its own - no other field guide has this breadth of Middle Eastern species (including vagrants) between two covers.

Ian Andrews

Facing Extinction. Paul Donald, Nigel Collar, Stuart Marsden & Debbie Pain, 2010. T. & A.D. Poyser, ISBN 978-07136-70219, hardback, £45.00.

There are so many threats to the world's habitats and wildlife, with nearly 200 species of birds becoming



extinct in the past 400 years. This well-researched book written by the leading experts in the field, tells the story of a further 200 of the most currently endangered species and the race to save them from a similar fate.

Five main chapters explore the following topics - Distribution and Causes of Rarity, Rarity and Extinction on Islands, Saving the Rarest Species, Lost and Found Birds and Rarity and Extinction in the Future. Twenty species are used as examples and I found these the most revealing, but they sometimes made for depressing reading.

It is a terrific book, well designed, with superb photographs and should be widely read and added to all libraries, both public and private.

David Clugston

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook 2011 (31st edition). Edited by David Cromack, 2010. Buckingham Press in association with Swarovski Optik, ISBN 978-0-9550339-9-5, paperback, 336 pages, £17.50.



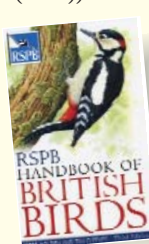
The Birdwatcher's Yearbook is a perennial favourite, which never disappoints and the 2011 (31st edition) maintains the series' high standards. It provides key information for all birders under one roof, yet manages to be both comprehensive and concise.

This year's keynote article on Nature Reserves in the 21st century is a timely as the pressures grow to develop "wild" spaces for infrastructure and leisure. Resources in the book include tide tables, lighting-up times, reserves and observatory details and directories of organisations and people. I particularly appreciated the list of collective nouns for bird species - my crossword completion rate should soar to new heights now!

Jean Torrance

RSPB Handbook of British Birds (3rd edition). P. Holden & T. Cleeves, 2010. Helm, ISBN 978 1 4081 2753 3, paperback, £9.99.

This is the third edition of this popular guide (previous editions reviewed in *SBN* 65 (2002) and 82 (2006)). It does not claim to be a



field guide, rather it is a "handbook" giving succinct information about British birds. Most regular occurring birds in Britain are covered,

each receiving one page with several high quality and appealing illustrations and lots of informative text. It is a very pleasant book to handle and browse and has kept up to date with changing taxonomy (so, for example, there is now full treatment of Common Redpoll, allowing comparison with the more numerous Lesser Redpoll). Each species has information on identification, habits, voice, habitat, food, breeding, movements and migrations, population, conservation, and a distribution map. The maps are clear though sometimes rather optimistic (e.g. Hen Harrier in northern England, Hawfinch in southern Scotland). It is pleasing to see that the distributions in Scotland appear to be derived from the SOC's own *The Birds of Scotland*, as they are depicted much more finely than the sweeping blocks for many species in England and Wales (although the Hawfinch map refers to the historical distribution depicted in *The Birds of Scotland*). But, there doesn't seem to be an acknowledgment of this, and the book is not included in the short bibliography! As a handbook, from which most of us could learn quite a lot about most of the birds in Britain, I would recommend this book.

Mark Holling

Handbook of the Birds of the World Volume 15: Weavers to New World Warblers. Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott & David Christie, 2010. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, ISBN 978-84-96553-68-2, hardback, 879 pages, £185.00.

Once again this is a magnificent piece of work giving up-to-date information on eight families of Passeriformes including: Ploceidae (weavers), Viduidae (whydahs and indigobirds), Estrildidae (waxbills), Vireonidae (vireos), Fringillidae (finches), Drepanididae (Hawaiian honeycreepers), Peucedramidae

(olive warblers) and Parulidae (New World Warblers). It is the 15th of a 16-volume series and contains 495 excellent photographs, 61 colour plates and 614 distribution maps.

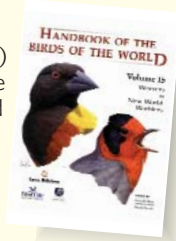
There are many contributions from British academics such as Leon Bennun, Stuart Butchart, Peter Clement, Nigel Collar, Jon Curson, Ian Newton and Alison Stattersfield with illustrations by many artists.

Once again a foreword is included. In this volume it presents a detailed, 56 page summary of the current state of bird conservation, including an evaluation of how far conservation efforts have progressed in recent years. The overall picture of the decline of many species is grim but we understand better the pressures upon the world's birds and the actions needed to tackle them. Bird extinctions continue, with 18 species gone in the last quarter of the 20th century and three species gone since 2000.

Birds are effective indicators of biodiversity and through the efforts of thousands of people and hundreds of organisations we know much more about the state of the world's birds than we did when HBW began 20 years ago. As such this series is not just for bird watchers but an excellent chronicle for the status of the world's birds.

Karen Bidgood

The Eagle Watchers: observing and conserving raptors around the world. Edited by Ruth E Tingay & Todd E Katzner, 2010. Comstock Publishing Associates, ISBN 978-0-8014-4873-7, hardback, 234 pages, £19.95.



Birds of prey such as eagles live and breed in remote areas of wilderness, often at low breeding densities. This makes them a particularly challenging group to study, and the knowledge and data collected on their behaviour, ecology and conservation is down to the commitment and tenacity of raptor ecologists. This book is an anthology of anecdotes from the field, written by raptor ecologists studying a range of eagle species from over twenty countries. The introductory chapter starts with a summary of eagle diversity, ecology and conservation and effectively sets the scene for the following chapters, each chapter dealing with a different species. The field anecdotes are preceded by short biographies of each raptor ecologist, which illustrates the varied background behind how people become obsessed by eagles. Three of these anecdotes come from Scotland, and include an account from Jeff Watson visiting one of his first Golden Eagles nest sites in the Western Highlands. The anecdotes are often illuminating, bizarre and entertaining. You can read about raptor ecologists being stalked by Grizzly Bears in Yellowstone; almost dying in a plane collision with an eagle in South Africa; and even attending, as a guest of honour, a circumcision ceremony in Madagascar! There is, however, one common thread that connects all these raptor ecologists, and that is their tremendous dedication, passion and spirit for adventure which is employed in their single-minded pursuit of understanding these fascinating birds of prey. If you



are interested in eagles and seek a spirit of adventure, then I would thoroughly recommend that you read this book.

Mike Thornton

RINGERS' ROUND-UP

If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles, project updates or requests for information which you would like to be included in the next issue, please email to Raymond Duncan at Raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk Thank you very much to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the many ringers, ringing groups and birders who provided the information for this latest round-up. Thanks also to the many birdwatchers who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them.

Autumn Sandwich Terns, Dutch and more

Plate 60, taken by Dave Allan at Musselburgh, Lothian, on 30 July 2010, shows a Dutch-darvid-ringed and colour-dyed Sandwich Tern. Blue N12 had been ringed on the nest in a colony near Stellendam, Zuid Holland, Netherlands on 19 May 2010. The study co-ordinator, Pim Wolf, replied to Dave's email report saying they had not anticipated such a movement. They had seen northbound movements of Sandwich Terns before from the Netherlands, but this was by far their furthest yet.

By coincidence, whilst ringing Sandwich Terns at night on the Ythan Estuary, north of Aberdeen during autumn 2010, Ewan Weston and other members of Grampian Ringing Group retrapped four more Dutch-ringed birds, as well as two Belgian- and single Danish- and French-ringed birds. Three of these were juveniles, which may well have been wandering around prior to orientating southwards, but the other five were all adults, so it will be very interesting to hear the ringing histories of these birds. Forty other ringed birds from around UK were retrapped on the Ythan in autumn 2010 and 200 were individually darvid-ringed with white rings and a black three-letter inscription with the letter E at the top. Please look out for these ringed birds and report them to ewan_weston@hotmail.com. We are particularly keen to hear from anybody who may be able to read rings at breeding colonies in 2011. This would tie in with work currently being done at the Sands of Forvie colony and on the adjacent Ythan Estuary.

Where did our Coot go?

Once again, we experienced a very cold, harsh start to the winter similar to 2009/10. For a while most of our ponds, lochs and even some of our rivers were frozen for a period of time



Plate 60. *Darvid-ringed and colour-dyed Sandwich Tern blue N12 at Musselburgh, Lothian, 30 July 2010. © Dave Allan*



Plate 61. *Darvid-ringed Sandwich Tern EHD at Burghead Bay, Moray Firth, 20 September 2010. © Dave Pullan This bird had been ringed as an adult on the Ythan Estuary on 25 August.*

during December 2010, leading to some unusual sightings such as "seven Coot on the sea" in Orkney (Alan Leitch, pers. comm.). Clearly, many of our water birds, including Coot, were forced to move away in search of open water and food.

The following ringing recovery shows a cold weather movement. Twenty-two Coot were cannon-netted on Loch of Loirston, Aberdeen on 4 January 1987. The week after ringing, temperatures plummeted and remained below



Plate 62. A severe Coot meele at Southport Marine Lake, Merseyside. © Kane Brides

freezing for two weeks. The loch almost completely froze, leaving a few hard core Coot and Mallard huddled round the last tiny area of clear water in the centre of the loch. One of the ringed Coot, a first-winter bird, was shot on Anglesey, north Wales on 27 January (453 km SSW 23 days after ringing). Clearly a bird forced to move in search of milder weather by the freeze up. Thankfully some survived, as two were retrapped on 6 January the following year.

Ringers in northern England have been busy colour-ringing Coot the past two winters with great success. Kane Brides and his team alone in the north-west have colour-ringed 852 with an amazing 106 in one day, catching the birds by hand as they come to breed.



Plate 63. Colour-ringed Coot (right leg: pink/BTO, left leg: dark green/dark green), ringed at Southport on 2 December 2010 and photographed 26 days later on the 28th, 390 km SSW at Par Beach Pool in Cornwall. © Nigel Climpson

Please check all Coot for colour rings this summer on your nearest pond or breeding site and report any sightings to kanebrides@gmail.com.

Little Egrets are coming

As breeding numbers of Little Egrets continue to increase in England and Wales, so do sightings in Scotland. Autumn 2010 saw record numbers (Angus Murray, *Scottish Birds* 30: 380–381), including five colour-ringed birds.

Table 1 shows that chicks fledging and dispersing from colonies in eastern England and northern Wales are forming the vanguard of these northward movements into Scotland.



Plate 64. Little Egret, Greenan Castle, Ayrshire, 3 September 2010 (left leg: white J, right leg: yellow 4). © Chas Moonie

Table 1. Colour-ringed Little Egrets in Scotland in 2010.

Darvic combination: <i>Ringed as chick:</i> Resighted:	Left leg: Red A 13 May 2010 near North Somercotes, Lincolnshire 25 & 27 July 2010, Ardmore, Clyde 3–8 August 2010, Belhaven Bay, East Lothian 7 September 2010, Langness, near Castletown, Isle of Man 19–20 September 2010, Campfield & Port Carlisle, Bowness, Cumbria	Right leg: Yellow 9
Darvic combination: <i>Ringed as chick:</i> Resighted:	Left leg: Red A 13 May 2010 near North Somercotes, Lincolnshire 28 & 29 October 2010, Aberlady Bay, East Lothian	Right leg: Yellow D
Darvic combination: <i>Ringed as chick:</i> Resighted:	Left leg: White F 7 June 2010 Bangor, Gwynedd, Wales 25 August 2010, Hunterston Sands, near Fairlie, Ayrshire	Right leg: Yellow 5
Darvic combination: <i>Ringed as chick:</i> Resighted:	Left leg: White J 7 June 2010 near Bangor, Gwynedd, Wales 8 August 2010, Bogside Flats, Irvine, Ayrshire	Right leg: Yellow 9
Darvic combination: <i>Ringed as chick:</i> Resighted:	Left leg: White J 7 June 2010 near Bangor, Gwynedd, Wales 2 August 2010, Fairlie, Ayrshire 17 August 2010, Stevenston Point, Ayrshire 1 September 2010, Ardmore, Clyde 3 September 2010, Greenan Castle, Ayrshire	Right leg: Yellow 4

Left white J right yellow 4 and right yellow 9 were siblings from the same brood. Amazingly, a third chick from this brood was reported in Dublin Bay in August 2010.

Left red A right yellow 9 was a particular wanderer, dispersing first cross country to the west on the Clyde from Lincolnshire, followed quickly by a cross country trip back to the east in early August to East Lothian. A month later it turned up over in the west again, this time on the Isle of Man before being last reported northwards in Cumbria a few weeks later.

It is notable that this flurry of colour-ringed birds all appeared between end of July and end of October with no subsequent reports. Where do they go after this initial post fledging dispersal?

A recent entry on the BTO ringing blog suggests some head south, well south! Another chick ringed in the Bangor colony in 2010 was resighted in Tenerife on 3rd and 25 November 2010 while a chick ringed in a colony in Galway, Ireland was seen on the Azores on 15 October 2010 with 4 other unringed egrets!

Many thanks to all the observers, too numerous to mention here, who reported these colour-ringed little egrets, provided photographs and assisted with information in putting this summary together and thanks to Richard Hearn, the coordinator of The British and Irish Little Egret Study, for providing full histories of these birds at short notice.

Norwegian leg-flagged Ringed Plovers

Sunnmore Ringing Group in south-west Norway have been leg flagging Ringed Plovers, Common Sandpiper and Redshank this autumn and bird watchers Moray Souter and Bob McCurley have been lucky enough to spot two of these marked Ringed Plovers on the east coast of Scotland.

Moray Souter reported yellow flag/black letters AAK on the Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland on 20 August 2010. This bird had been ringed 16 days earlier as a juvenile on 4 August at Makkevika, Giske, Møre & Romsdal, south-west Norway.

Bob McCurley reported yellow flag/black letters ANE at Lunan Bay, Angus on 14 September 2010 from the Angus and Dundee Bird Club hide amongst a record count of 54 birds. This

bird had also been ringed as a juvenile at Makkevika on 20 August 2010.

Interestingly, Moray's Norwegian-flagged bird was in the company of three juveniles which had been ringed as chicks in three different industrial sites around Aberdeen during the summer of 2010. It shows how important our shorelines and estuaries are for both local and immigrant waders on passage through Scotland.

Please report all yellow-flagged Ringed Plovers to Kjell Mork Soot at kjellmorksoot@fugler.com.

Scottish Ringers' Conference 2010

In a change to what has almost been a tradition, the 36th annual Scottish Ringers' Conference was held in the Carrbridge Hotel instead of Braemar. The conference was well attended with around 140 people coming along to listen to the wide variety of talks. The Saturday session started with Claire Smith talking about Handa skuas, this showed the importance of long term monitoring of a range of aspects and how the populations of both Arctic and Great Skua had changed over the years. This talk was followed by a fascinating talk from Ellie Owen, Ellie has been looking at where our seabirds are foraging as part of the FAME (Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment) seabird tracking project. Lucy Quinn provided details of her studies on Fulmars where she has been fitting data loggers and looking at the foraging areas in relation to the sex of the birds. We then moved onto waders and Ron Summer gave details of the work Highland Ringing Group have undertaken on sexing waders. Over the last couple of years the group has collected feathers to determine sex using DNA from a number of waders. Ron also showed the differences in sex ratios in the Moray Firth. Simon Foster provided details of some of the recent work the group has done on calculating survival rates for waders in the Moray Firth using the long term data sets the group hold.

In the afternoon session, Bozena Kalejta-Summers showed the distribution and habitat preferences of Scottish Wood Sandpipers. Using the large amount of ringing data from Highland Ringing Group, Carl Mitchell showed

were a range of ducks from the Highlands come from and go to. The Saturday talks finished with an amusing look at some of the record breaking birds (oldest, longest movement etc) by Dave Leech.

The Sunday session began with Jeremy Greenwood, who looked back in time to ringing before there were ringing schemes; to be able to remember that far back was impressive! Brian Etheridge talked about the tern rafts that he and other Highland Ringing Group members have built and monitor around the Moray Firth. The rafts have proved to be a big success for terns, and he showed some of the modifications that have made the counting and monitoring of terns on the rafts easier, whilst also reducing the possibility of predation from mammals. To show that Highland Ringing Group is not just about waders and seabirds, Jacquie Heaton provided us with a talk about the movements of a number of passerines from and to the Highlands. Bob Swann also talked about another passerine the group has been involved in, Linnets, where he looked at the movements of these birds based on the vast amount of ringing data that have been accumulated over the years in the Highlands. Moving further afield Tony Mainwood talked about the setting up of a new ringing scheme in Nepal. Tony has been instrumental in setting up the scheme in Nepal and has provided training and equipment to help them get going. To wrap up the weekend conference, Brian Bates provided us with a humorous look at his experience gained since becoming a fully fledged ringer. His talk also showed that not only does he enjoy his experience of bird ringing, but he is also taking on projects on species such as Common Sandpiper to further his knowledge. This year he is starting to colour ring Common Sandpipers, so keep a look out for them around Scotland!

The conference was a great success and I am already looking forward to the next one in Carrbridge in November 2011.

Simon Foster (Highland Ringing Group).



Plate 65. Waxwings, Fair Isle, October 2010. © Tommy Hyndman

The 2010 Waxwing invasion

R. DUNCAN

Once upon a time Waxwing invasions of any size were believed to occur roughly every 10 years (*BTO Winter Atlas*), probably suggested by the large invasions of 1937, 1946 and 1957. Since then, they appear to have gradually increased, with lull periods (e.g. in the 1980s, when I first got my ringing permit in 1981 and had to wait until 1987 to finally ring a Waxwing). There is no doubt since the start of the 1990s there has been an unprecedented increase not only in the frequency, but also in the size of these invasions. 2004 broke all records, but even that amazing invasion appears to have been surpassed by this winter. Numbers and distribution have been recorded elsewhere in *Scottish Birds* and various local web sites and bird reports.

This article describes the ageing and sexing of Waxwings and summarises the ringing results up to mid-January 2011 from around 500 birds

individually colour-ringed in Orkney and North-east Scotland between late October and late November 2010.

Ageing and sexing waxings

Due to their diagnostic plumage characteristics, Waxwings must be unique in passerines in that you can scan a flock with binoculars and be able to reliably separate adults from juveniles and also sex quite a large proportion of them.

A thorough explanation with diagrams and plumage measurements on how to age and sex Waxwings, chiefly for use by ringers with birds in the hand, can be found in the *Identification Guide to European Passerines* by Lars Svensson. What follows here is a photographic guide to help age and sex birds in the field using a few selected pictures from the many very kindly provided by birders and photographers up and down the country.



Plate 66. Waxwings drinking in a roadside gutter. Even Waxwings let themselves down sometimes! The bird in the foreground is an adult and the colour-ringed bird in the background on the left is a first-winter. The adult clearly shows the pale hook-shaped fringe to the tip of each of the primary wing feathers. The first-winter lacks these, which results in a straight line down the tips of the primaries. Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, 9 January 2011 © Michael Nott.

Adult versus first-winter

The pale hook-shaped fringe to the tip of each of the primary wing feathers separates adults from first-winters. First-winters lack these, resulting in a straight line down the tips of the primaries, rather than the interrupted line on adults. See plates 66 and 67.

Sex

Once aged, many of the birds can then be sexed by determining the following plumage features:

- 1 The number and length of the waxy tips on the ends of the secondary and tertial wing feathers.
- 2 Depth of the yellow tail band.
- 3 Sharpness of bottom of dark chin bib.

Males generally have more waxy tips than females and they are longer, the yellow tail band is broader and the chin bib sharper.

In adults, the pale hook-shaped fringes of each of the primary tips are often more extensive and

bolder in males than females. In first-winters, the straight line down the primary tips can be paler yellow in females than males, sometimes white.

There can be a bit of overlap between first-winter females and males and first-winter males and adult females in the measurements of features 1 and 2. Occasionally the drabdest of first-winter females can have no waxy tips at all. Feature 3 can be ambiguous, even between adults and first-winters, as can the length of crest.

The occasional "mega" adult and first-winter males can even have waxy tips on the end of the tail feathers!

There is a degree of overlap in all the features which, even in the hand, results in some birds remaining unsexed.

RINGING RESULTS 2010/11

The Grampian Ringing Group has been colour-ringing Waxwings since 1988. Of course, due to



Plate 67. Adult, probably male, on the left and a brightly plumaged first-winter male on the right. Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, January 2011. © Mike Wallen



Plate 68. First-winter female showing a few small waxy tips and narrow yellow tail band. The line down the primary tips is very pale yellow, almost white and the diffuse edge to the chin-bib can just be seen. Kingston Shopping Centre, Milton Keynes 19th January 2011. © Ben Page



Plate 69. *Four first-winters drinking in a puddle. The difference in length of waxy tips, broadness of tail band and brightness in the yellow on wing tips and tail band allows the bird on the left to be aged and sexed as a first-winter female. The two birds on the right are first-winter males. Suffolk, 18th February 2008. © Tony Belsham*

the erratic nature of invasions, there have been many winters when we have ringed none. Other ringing groups have also done so in good Waxwing winters, when birds have dispersed throughout the country. In 2010, Grampian and Orkney Ringing Groups individually colour-ringed almost 500 Waxwings between late October and late November.

The following is a brief summary of the results up until mid-January 2011. Thanks to many birders, photographers and ringers throughout the country 94 re-sightings had been reported along with six recoveries, dead birds which had hit windows, were taken by cats or killed by traffic (Figure 1). At 1 in 5 birds, this is an outstanding return rate for a passerine. By the end of winters 2004/05 and 2008/09 the return rate was 1 in 4.

Early movements

Every Waxwing invasion is different, and the 2010 has thrown up its own unexpected vagaries. Returns from the ringing started off fairly normally, with some rapid movements from Orkney to Aberdeen, an Orkney bird in Norwich within a couple of weeks of ringing, and several Aberdeen birds well south within a

few weeks (in Dunfermline, Lothian, Glasgow, Cumbria and Manchester). A first-winter bird ringed in Sweden in early October was recaptured in Aberdeen in early November. Large numbers continued to rampage around Aberdeen during November, clearly augmented by birds from further north, whilst others headed south.

Then the cold and snowy weather arrived towards the end of November. Ordinarily, this wouldn't affect the Waxwings too much as their favoured food, rowan and other berries, is still available whatever the snow cover. But it was the affect on other species of birds such as all the thrushes and Wood Pigeons, which were forced to turn to berries due to the deep snow, and their impact on what was only a medium berry crop, which caused the Waxwings to do two things we have never recorded before in previous invasions.

Firstly, nearly all the remaining Waxwings (which still numbered several hundreds) departed Aberdeen in a mass exodus in early December, earlier than normal and leaving fewer Waxwings to winter here than we have ever seen before in substantial invasions. This was chiefly due to the dramatic reduction in berries mentioned above.

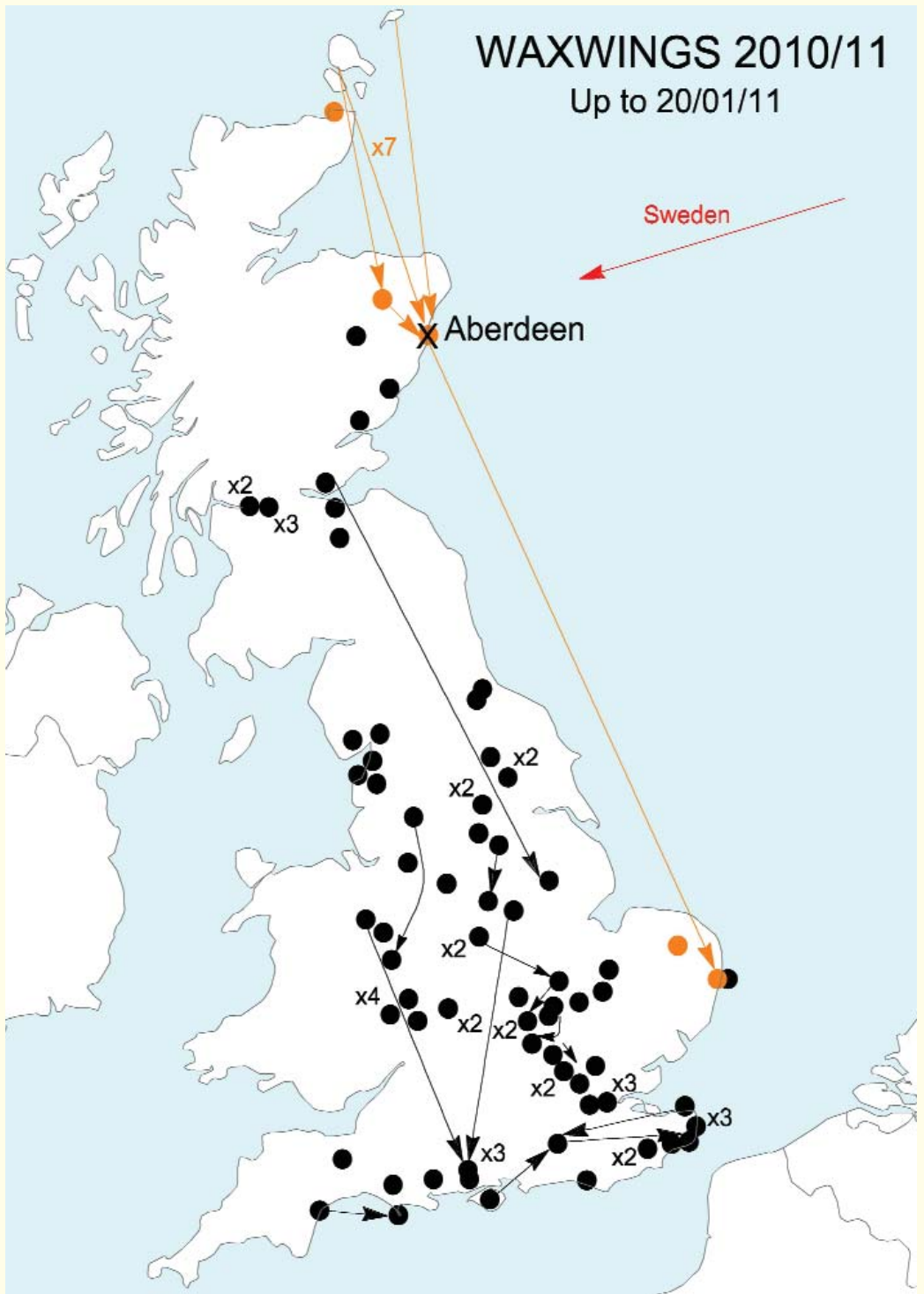


Figure 1. Map showing the distribution of re-sighted Waxwings colour-ringed in Aberdeen (black) and Orkney (orange) in October–November 2010. Updated to 20 January 2011.

Secondly, many moved rapidly south through England within a couple of weeks and congregated along the south coast in unprecedented numbers. This was probably due to the fact that as they headed south they encountered similar cold weather conditions and with large numbers of Waxwings already present in northern, central and eastern England for several weeks competing with other species for a mediocre crop of berries, many were forced to continue on south in search of food.

In 2004, the last invasion where numbers came anywhere near to matching 2010, there was a bumper crop of rowans, ornamental and native, and other species of berries, which meant the large numbers of Waxwings present had enough food to maintain high numbers up until Christmas and beyond. That winter, there were two or three rather more relaxed departures of birds, the third being between Christmas and New Year (nearly a month later than this winter), and even then several hundred remained to winter in and around Aberdeen. Colour-ringed birds did eventually reach the south coast, but in most cases these

were later and slower to arrive than this winter and certainly not in such large numbers.

With this build up on the south coast, we wondered if birds might start crossing the Channel into France and Belgium. We haven't had any colour-ringed birds do this in previous invasions. The only sightings of birds in the Low Countries have been of birds in Denmark and The Netherlands later in spring as they head northwards again. However, at time of writing (mid-January), numerous sightings of colour-ringed birds suggests they are preferring to head east or west along the south coast in search of berries rather than face another hazardous sea crossing. That's so far, anyway.

Once again, a big thank you to everybody who has taken the time and trouble to report colour-ringed Waxwings, many with tremendous photographs which we have kindly been allowed to use in articles such as this.

Raymond Duncan

(on behalf of the Grampian Ringing Group)

Email: Raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk



Plate 70. Tommy Hyndman emailed "A small flock of Waxwings had been in my garden on Fair Isle for a few days eating fruit I had put out on sticks. The birds had become used to me from a few feet away on the other side the glass, but if only I could get this close with no window in the way! I stuck two halves of an apple on a long branch and had my son, Henry, stick it out the front door. The first few birds landed for the briefest of moments, but as soon as one started eating the others joined in. We now moved it slowly out into the centre of the garden. It was amazing - the Waxwings ate till the apples fell off the stick. I picked up what was mostly just the skin of an apple, but the next thing I knew they were perching on my finger eating away!"

Some of the birds must of thought Henry's little finger tips were berries and gave him little nips! Henry was crying with laughter in total awe; the birds didn't even fly away. Look at how he is hiding his finger under his thumb so it doesn't get bitten again.

Waxwings were in our garden for over a week, but they only came to our hands this one day. A total of 8-9 was the most Henry ever had at one time, and 39 was the peak garden count. The truth is that on Fair Isle there is not much food left for migrating birds in late October, and this is proof of that sometimes you'll do anything for a free meal."

<http://fair-isle.blogspot.com/2010/11/waxwings-oct-25th-2010-day-well-always.html>



Plate 71. *Red-eyed Vireo*, nr Kirkwall, Orkney, October 2009. © Paul Higson

Red-eyed Vireo, near Kirkwall, Orkney, 3 October 2009 - first Orkney record

P. HIGSON

On Saturday 3 October I was sat at work looking at the weather forecast, the calm sunny conditions were going to end abruptly that afternoon, and a long period of windy, wet weather was forecast. So, I got all the paperwork out of the way and decided to have a very early lunch break. I headed down to Langskaill plantation in St Andrews for a walk up and down the road in the hope of a few birds. I got half way up the road when a Chiffchaff started to call. Now, it is said that if you make a "pishing" noise it attracts birds to investigate the sound. It's never really worked for me, and after five fruitless minutes "pishing" without a response (as usual) I turned back to the car.

Now this is where it starts to get surreal. As I walked along I thought to myself, pishing originated in America, therefore if I stop and try again I will attract an American bird, the bird I most want to find on Orkney is a Red-eyed Vireo, so I shall stop here and find Orkney's first ever Red-eyed Vireo - simple. So I stopped, and turned to face a clump of Sycamores.

Pish, pish - and I noticed a bird flitting into the back of the nearest bush. A third pish, and the bird moved forwards and perched out in the open less than five metres in front of me.

It was about the size of a chunky Garden Warbler, with green upperparts, white below, large strong bill, superb head pattern - grey crown, white supercilium bordered by black lines - a Red-eyed Vireo - if only it was always this easy!

I contacted as many people as I could, and soon other people were watching the bird as it flitted around the Langskaill Plantation. It was last seen later that afternoon just before the bad weather hit.

2009 was certainly an autumn to remember for me - finding the Vireo and the Sandhill Crane, and an 'assist' with the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. I just hope I haven't used up all my luck for the next few years...

Paul Higson, Orkney

Red-eyed Vireo – its status in Scotland

This species breeds across much of North America, from the Northwest Territories of Canada south to northern Oregon and eastwards to Newfoundland and the Atlantic seaboard and south from South Dakota to Texas across to northern Florida. Other subspecies breed in South America. The entire North American population is migratory and winters in South America from Colombia to Brazil.

This is the commonest Nearctic passerine vagrant to the British Isles, with 115 records in Britain to the end of 2009, and about 50 in Ireland. The first British record was a recent as 1962 when one was present on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly on 4 October. Remarkably it was joined by a second the next day and both remained to 10th, with one or other seen again on 17 October. All subsequent records have also been in autumn, with the peak in the first half of October. The earliest British find date is 19 September (Bardsey 1998), though the earliest Irish find date is 5 September (Cape Clear, Co. Cork 2004). The latest bird found is one at Thurso, Caithness, on 8 November 1988. The other Scottish sightings have all been between 30 September and 21 October.

There had been nine birds recorded in Scotland prior to the Orkney individual: two in Caithness (Wick 1985; Thurso 1988), four on the Outer Hebrides (Newton, North Uist 1988; Stornoway, Lewis 2000; Aird Mhor, Barra 2003; Liniclate, Benbecula 2005), two in Argyll (Arinagour, Coll 1992; Caolas, Tiree 2008) and one in Lothian (East Barns 1991). There were further sightings in 2010, with one at North Loch Eynort Plantation, South Uist on 10 October; then amazingly it was joined by a second individual on 11–12 October.

There is a very strong south-west bias to records in Britain and Ireland, with three-quarters of British records from Scilly, Cornwall and Devon alone. There are scattered records north of this including several on the east coast of England. The strong SW displacement vector for this species explains why eight of the 12 records in Scotland have been on Hebridean islands, while Shetland still awaits its first.

Elsewhere in Europe there have been records from the Channel Isles (2006), France (18 birds from 1983 to 2010), Belgium (1995), the Netherlands (eight birds 1985–2005), Germany (1957), Poland (2000), Spain (three birds 1995–2000), Malta (1983) and just over 20 from Iceland.



Plate 72. Red-eyed Vireo, Tiree, Argyll, October 2008. © Jim Dickson



Plate 73. *Sandhill Crane, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2009.* © Steve Nuttall

Sandhill Crane, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2009 - the third Scottish & British record

P. HIGSON

On Tuesday 22 September 2009, I returned home after having had superb views of the moulting adult American Golden Plover in Deerness. I sat down with a cup of coffee, and a list of household chores Jan had left me, and listened to messages on my answer phone. The last was from a local birder John McCutcheon to say that he had had a report of a possible Common Crane down near Liddell Loch in South Ronaldsay. I mentally calculated the

amount of time it would take to get the washing-up etc done and reckoned I had an hour more to spare for a bit more birding.

I rang John back, said I was going down to check it out, and that if it was a crane - it could well be a Sandhill in view of the westerly winds we had been having. He was still laughing as he put the phone down.

So, I set off with my brother, Mark, down to the Burwick area of South Ronaldsay fully expecting to see a Grey Heron, but mulling over in my mind the ID features of Sandhill Crane - you never know.

After over half-an-hour of scanning fields from the network of roads in the area, I came to the last track I could check from. Soon it started to rain very heavily, but rather than retreat to the car, something made me walk an extra 100 yards to the next gate. As I approached the gate I was surprised to find a stubble field coming into view, it certainly wasn't visible from any of the roads. So this was it, one last scan, get the housework done, and I live to bird another day...

There, loafing in front of me in amongst some Great Black-backed Gulls at about 300 yards range was a crane. Down with the bins, up with the scope. I was looking into the light, into heavy rain driven by Force 7 winds. I racked up to 50x focus; as the bird's image grew sharper, plumage characteristics began to show. Smallish grey crane, some feathers admixed with brown, small bill, red mask round the eyes and on the forehead. Oh dear! Things started to fall into place, and I just started to fall apart.

My mind went blank, I've seen thousands of Sandhill Cranes in America, and I knew I was looking at only the third Sandhill Crane to be seen in the UK - but part of me still refused to believe it. A quick call to the Rare Bird Alert team confirmed I wasn't going any madder and I texted the news out to local birdwatchers. Still in a state of shock, I carefully crept away from the bird - straight into a ditch of freezing water.

As I got back to the car, a Hen Harrier flew past and spooked the crane, which fortunately flew just a hundred metres before settling down in a stubble field where it was admired by the growing group of Orkney birdwatchers. Interestingly a local farmer came for a word, and completely unprompted asked if we were watching "the peedie [Orkadian for small] heron with the red head" as it had been in the area for at least the last ten days - a bit galling as this is an area I work regularly, and if I can overlook a Sandhill Crane, what else have I missed?

The bird was seen to go to roost at Liddell Loch that evening - a pattern it followed for the rest of its stay. The bird remained in the area until 30 September when it took off and headed south.



Plate 74. Sandhill Crane, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2009. © Jason Atkinson

Incredibly, it was later seen in southern France, so hopefully it has managed to survive the winter. Over 700 people travelled up to see this bird; a number chartering planes to do so.

Oh, the house work didn't get done, and I nearly didn't live to bird another day!

Paul Higson, Orkney

Sandhill Crane - its status in Scotland

This species breeds in grassy tundra and meadows across North America from Alaska and northern central Canada to southern Alberta and Vancouver Island and south along the Rocky Mountains to northern Nevada, Utah and Colorado, and eastwards through Ontario to south-east Quebec and south through north-east Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Great Lakes into Michigan and northernmost Indiana. It winters in wetlands and farmland discontinuously from northern California to New Mexico and Texas and south into Mexico, with isolated groups regular east to Tennessee and southern Georgia, and small numbers rarely reaching Atlantic coast states.



Plate 75. Sandhill Crane, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2009. © Jason Atkinson

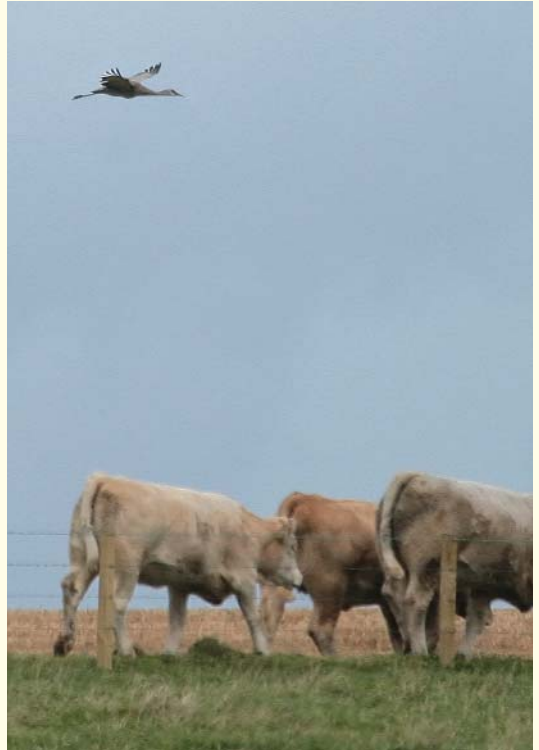


Plate 76. Sandhill Crane, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2009. © Steve Minton

Prior to the 2009 Orkney bird there were only two previous British records of this species - both also in Scotland. The first was a first-summer on Fair Isle on 26–27 April 1981, and the second, also a first-summer, at Exnaboe, Mainland, Shetland from 17–27 September 1991. The latter bird was seen to fly off high out to sea heading south-east around midday on 27th (note corrected date cf BS3, see Ellis 1991). Remarkably it was then seen in the Netherlands on 28–30 September 1991 (Berlijn 1991). There have been two other European records: one shot at Galley Head, Co. Cork around 11–14 September 1905 (assigned to the race canadensis), and a female (also shot) at Akraberg, Faroe Islands, on 14 October 1980.

Berlijn, M. 1991. *DB Actueel - Energieke Canadese Kraanvogel.* Dutch Birding 13: 196.

Ellis, P. 1991. *The Sandhill Crane in Shetland.* Birding World 4: 322–323.



Plate 77. Sandhill Crane, Highland, September 2009
© Dan Brown

Twitching Pays

D. BROWN

I don't twitch, well not if I can help it, but the opportunity of catching up with the Sandhill Crane on South Ronaldsay, Orkney, was too much to resist - particularly with some fieldwork to do in Sutherland. So it was that Tom Lowe and I headed north, and the morning of 28 September 2009 found us 'enjoying' the Sandhill Crane at the back of its field in the lashing rain. Rubbish! I knew twitching never paid. Anyway we headed off to do some birding and located the highly obliging brace of American Golden Plovers before heading back to enjoy much better views of the Sandhill in great light, including a brief fly-around before a flock of Lapwings scared it - not such a big bird now!

Departing Orkney, with the remaining birders, we headed south along the A9 in convoy, but with an hour of light still left it seemed crazy to waste the birding opportunity, especially given the likes of American Golden Plover and

Sandhill Crane just over the water. A large flock of Golden Plovers to the left of the road at the Quoys of Reiss, near Keiss, caught our eye and we broke away from the train of birders to pull in and scan for more AGPs. As TCL commenced ploughing through the 1,500 Goldies, DB noticed a bird hunkered down and back-on in a furrow amongst the winter wheat. As it lifted its head and turned, its dark cap with fine crown stripe, bright yellow beak and discrete ink-dipped black tip, beautifully edged scapulars and a plain face shouted "Upland Sand".

Incredulous, DB blasted away a few long exposures (the light was worse than abysmal). TCL jumped out of the car and scoped the beauty up. We managed a couple of minutes of prime photage¹ plus a few extra-grainy digi-shots, enough to back up the find and no doubt initiate a wave of nausea from those who had been yards in front of us a few minutes previously, and subsequently those heading to Orkney that not only dipped this, but also the crane the following day!

This stunner strutted its stuff, pumping its tail and neck-popping along the furrows. As it paused for a break it fluffed its scapulars which then almost resembled angel's wings (a comment from TCL not DB!), but actually quite an accurate description. For over an hour, we watched as it probed its way across the winter wheat field before finally dropping over a ridge and out of sight as the light left us. Tragically for those with pagers, the Caithness terrain/lack of transmitters prevented the news from reaching the few birders within ten miles of the bird, particularly ironic given that the bird was visible with the naked eye from the A9 and they had *all* driven right past it! We opted out of the drive south in favour of a celebratory steak and pint, and a second shot at the bird in the morning.

The 29 September dawned as any vis-migger would wish with a light northerly airflow and clear skies after the deluge of rain over the preceding days. We headed out for first light and searched the field, but to no avail. A couple of carloads of birders added a few extra eyes and a wider search of the area failed to reveal

Footnote: ¹photage refers to shots taken at short intervals with a camera, rather than video type footage.

anything other than a prime looking golf course (did anybody search this? - DB thinks not). By now the sky rippled with Pink-feet heading south, Whooper Swans joined in the action, and small groups of pipits, larks, and hirundines added some background interest. TCL phoned out the negative news of the Upland Sandpiper and finds out from Will Soar at Rare Bird Alert that the Sandhill is still on Orkney, much to our surprise given the weather.

Following a hearty Scottish breakfast we opted to head south as work commitments called somewhere in the deepest highlands. Due to the overwhelming pull of migrating birds, we fuffed around close to some bushes, scanned a few more Golden Plover fields and even dropped in at Wick river, all of which proved fruitless (not that we were complaining in the slightest). The A9 lead us south and away from the action. By some miracle a single message flashed up on the pager..."Sandhill Crane still present Burwick, South Ron until 10:12 when flew SE"...flew SE! Wow!! By our calculations that would put it heading out to sea, next stop Denmark? Surely it would cut back in towards the Scottish coast and head south-west. Dilemma! Do we carry on south to work like conscientious field-surveyors, hoping that we may encounter a Buzzard or maybe even a Merlin, or do we spin it and race back up the coast on a mission to intercept a bird that might not even be flying along the coast? Clearly we spun it and headed back north.

A close examination of the map revealed a couple of likely interception points. Noss Head was an obvious bet, but Sarclet, to the south, was marginally closer and sandwiched between the sea and a big hill. By now the crane had been flying for 10 minutes, but we reckoned on an hour before we had any chance of it coming into range. Twenty-five minutes later, we were pulling up in to a random person's garden at the tip of a dead end lane in Sarclet. The residents were out, so we established a vantage point in their driveway and prepared ourselves. Cameras out, scopes up, tripod legs tightened. This is a brief summary of what happened...

10:12 Sandhill Crane leaves Burwick, South Ronaldsay and heads SE across the Pentland Firth.

10:14 Pager message alerts the birding world to the above event.

10:20 TCL & DB heading down the A9 at Dunbeath and make the decision to spin the vehicle and attempt an interception

10:45 TCL & DB screech into someone's back garden. Luckily the residents aren't at home and we are able to establish our base here for the next nine minutes

10:51 TCL picks up his bins and immediately detects a crane off to the NW circling over a nearby bungalow. The scopes are swung into action and the bird is confirmed as the Sandhill! The UK's first mainland record. The bird circles, heading out past us and hits the coast, where it thinks twice before deciding that flying over land is a better option.

10:54 The news is phoned out and the chase is on. DB clings on for dear life; TCL puts his right foot down. The initial chase is hampered as we have to back track north to meet the A9 - scattering kittens, small children and old ladies all over the show. More crucially fuel consumption is high and the petrol light comes on indicating that we only have 50 miles of fuel left in the tank, and it's unlikely that TCL is going to be driving economically.

11:15 After 11 nail-biting minutes DB relocates the crane out of the passenger window at Latheron. The bird is motoring with amazingly elastic wing-beats. TCL overtakes his 23rd car in 11 miles then slams on brakes, allowing us to pap away at this phenomenal sight whilst all 23 cars go past us again. Once again the Crane



Plate 78. Sandhill Crane, Highland, September 2009
© Dan Brown

overtakes us but this time we're already on the A9 and the bird is clearly visible tracking along the coast. The road takes us away from the coast, but out of DB's passenger window that distinctive silhouette is still batting along.

11:27 At last it slows. A ridgeline descends to the coast ahead of us and it is apparent that there is no way this bird is cutting out over the sea to get around it. For nearly 10 minutes it circles up above Dunbeath gaining enough height to pass the ridge ahead of it.

11:33 Ready... steady... go! It's off again - like a Tufted Puffin out of the Swale, the bird powers on SW. We jump back into the car, the dial of the rev counter touching red. The road now swings back to the coast over the ridgeline and we realise a direct interception is imminent. Three miles and 12 over-takings later we mount the grassy verge as the Sandhill aims straight for my window. The camera machine-guns in to action as it cruises by, breaking the ridge and away. Back on the road the bird is viewable through the



Plate 79. Sandhill Crane, Highland, September 2009
© Dan Brown

windscreen as it follows the A9. At 48 mph the bird stays in the same position in the window for several miles before finally slowing for another spell of circling. It is apparent now that a distinct ridgeline running just inland is keeping this bird on track. To the south-east Tarbat Ness is clearly visible, and the coastline stretching away beyond it, but it seems that the crane has no interest in making another sea crossing. Then it's off again, this time tracking along the ridgeline just inland and maintaining considerable speed.

11:55 We pull into Helmsdale and fling ourselves out of the car. The A9 is back down close to sea level, but the bird is now 300 m above us and still cruising. We welcome it onto another county list, Sutherland, before jumping back into the car and on with the chase. The ridge and roads now start to diverge. The bird is still clearly visible and TCL and DB can enjoy some more leisurely driving than the previous hour. By now we have less than 23 miles of petrol left and make the decision to continue going until the fuel runs out.

12:16 The bird is now a dot as we pull in just north of Brora. The ridgeline is broken by Strath Brora, while on the south side of the strath a large hill stands in its way. For ten minutes we watch as it circles higher and higher probably reaching approximately 500 m asl. All of a sudden it's away again. Agh! Panic. The A9 goes through Brora at 30 mph. The road is longer than as the Crane flies. Uh-oh! All of a sudden we seem very much out of control of the chase. The bird is still visible as we hit the first house but for the first time in over an hour we lose sight of it. We burst free of Brora and pull in at the first possible opportunity. If it had been doing 50 mph then it would have cleared the valley by now. The cloud appeared to

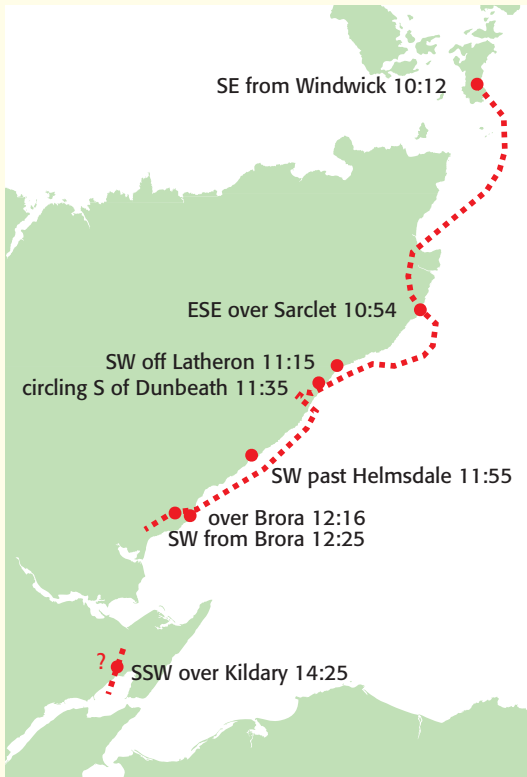


Figure 1. Route of Sandhill Crane journey.

Table 1. Average speed of the Sandhill Crane

Time	Location	Distance since last report (miles)	Duration of flight (minutes)	Average speed
10:12	Burwick, South Ronaldsay	-	-	-
10:54	Sarlet	25.4	42	36 mph
11:15	Latheron	11.5	21	33 mph
11:27	Dunbeath	3.0	12	15 mph
11:33	Dunbeath	0	6	-
11:55	Helmsdale	12.4	22	34 mph
12:16	Brora	11.1	21	32 mph
12:25	Brora	0	9	-
14:25	Kildary?	20.2	120	10 mph

have dropped and as we scanned a skein of Greylags whiffled into view out of the grey, presumably escaping the weather. Expletives prevailed whilst scanning frantically! Still no sign. Had it gone up Strath Brora to investigate the lochs? Had it been lost in the cloud? Had we been too slow? Where the hell was it?

12:25 We phone out our first negative news but do not give up. A quick glance at the map reveals Loch Fleet to the south, could it have dropped in here? As we head south stubble field after stubble field pass us by and we realise the potential for this bird to drop in anywhere, no doubt without being detected. And besides, why should it stop, it had been feeding for days and would now undoubtedly tear its way across the UK on a mission south. Loch Fleet proves fruitless and we have to finally give up to get to work. So frustrating. So many questions left unanswered. We eventually make it down off the hills with minus 16 miles of petrol in the tank, so much for needing petrol to power a car!

Later that day, and another claim came from further down the coast at Kildary. It would seem that, if it were genuine, that the bird either came down in between sightings or, that it had followed the ridge west up the Dornoch Firth before carrying on the south side and around. Even so it seems strange that it would a) take so long, and b) if it did come down, that it didn't feed for longer. Could that sighting refer to one of the Tain Common Cranes? Apparently not, and we'll never know where it went when it got to Inverness.

We hypothesised where it had gone and which route it had followed. It could have taken one of three main routes: a) followed on its course and passed down the Great Glen, out over Fort

William before coming down somewhere between there and Oban (our favoured option), b) gone due south and passed through the Spey Valley; c) done a 90° left and decided that Strathbeg is where it's at, then followed an eastern route south along the coast of the UK. One thing we do know is that it managed to pass over the rest of the UK without a single other birder clamping eyes on it. In fact, it probably fed in a stubble field next to, or powered on over, many birders on its path before finally being relocated in southern France at the Pontonx-sur-l'Adour Reserve near Dax, Landes on 11–12 October before again continuing south to never be seen again. As far as I am aware this is the only time that such a bird has been actively continuously tracked through a section of the UK. What will be the next...?

Over the course of the chase it was interesting to be able to track just how fast a bird such as the Sandhill Crane travels when migrating. The table below provides some indication of the minimum speed the crane travelled at, including several periods of circling and assuming the shortest route was taken on every leg.

Overall, between its time of departure and our last sighting, it averaged 29 mph over the 60 miles it had covered, however as stated earlier, at times, following a spell of ascending, it was able to maintain a steady 45–50 mph.

Dan Brown, Flat 3 / 4, 3 Mingarry Street, Glasgow. Email: danbrown81@yahoo.co.uk

Useful links:

Upland Sandpiper Quoys of Reiss
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XHGOFOY Ea8&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL



Plate 80. Northern Parula, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2010. © Lee Gregory

Northern Parula, the Isle of Tiree, Argyll, 25–29 September 2010 – the first Scottish record

J.M. BOWLER

I have been based on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll as the resident RSPB officer since 2001, and in that time I have discovered that the most consistent site on the island for producing unusual migrant passerines is the relatively sheltered north-east side of Ben Hynish in the south-west corner of the island. Here a patch of relict willow and hawthorn scrub clings to the hillside at Carnan Mor, whilst adjacent gardens at Balephuill hold a few planted willows and roses. Together these act as a magnet for grounded warblers and thrushes on this otherwise rather windswept and treeless island. Repeated visits to this area at migration times over the years have turned up rarities such as Western Bonelli's Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler, (Eurasian) Reed Warbler and Common Nightingale amongst a steady passage of more common species, and perhaps inevitably we moved to live in this part of the island in March 2007.

We have steadily planted up our own garden with trees, shrubs and roses to add to the available habitat and quickly saw results, with species such as Yellow-browed Warbler, Barred Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat appearing more or less annually in amongst a steady turnover of commoner warblers, Goldcrests, finches and thrushes plus the odd surprise such as Lesser Grey Shrike and Golden Oriole. New birds typically appear in the autumn during or just after periods of light easterly or even southerly winds, especially if there has been a little rain overnight, and indeed often occur around the same time as falls on the east coast of the mainland.

September 2010 had already produced some nice migrants in our garden at Balephuill in the shape of a long-staying Pied Flycatcher, a couple of Spotted Flycatchers and a Common Whitethroat plus good numbers of Chiffchaffs

and Willow Warblers. A spell of quite strong NE winds on 23 and 24 September had left the gardens rather birdless, but as the winds eased on 25 September, I was hopeful for some new arrivals. Having touched up the house-paint on that morning, I decided to take a stroll up to the little patch of bushes at Carnan Mor at 14:30hrs, to see what was new in. Given the direction of the recent winds, I was hoping for an early Yellow-browed Warbler, or at least an arrival of some commoner migrant warblers.

As I walked through the field behind our house, I bumped into a group of six Common Redpolls feeding on uncut seed-heads. These all appeared to be "northwest" birds including one huge, dark Greenland bird and were newly arrived, which encouraged me further. I dig-binned the Redpolls and then approached the bushes at Carnan Mor with caution. A check of the main bushes however, revealed just two Blackbirds and a Song Thrush. The bush patch is very small and actively foraging warblers usually show themselves quickly on a reasonably calm

day like this. After five minutes of waiting for any further birds in the bushes, I was thinking about moving on, when a movement in the hawthorn behind me caught my eye.

A small warbler was working its way through the back of the bush and I assumed it was going to be a Willow Warbler. However, it then emerged onto an open branch just three metres away and it was clear this was not the case - I was confronted by a small, brightly coloured warbler with a thin pointed-tipped bill: it was an American wood warbler! The bright yellow throat and upper breast, rich green crown, golden-green mantle and bluish wings bearing two bold white wing-bars immediately, but rather incredibly, pronounced this to be a Northern Parula, a species I have seen previously on the Scillies in October 1992, and more recently in March 2003 in Mexico.

Although I knew that this was a momentous occasion and something that I had been dreaming about for almost ten years on Tiree, I



Plates 81–82. Northern Parula, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2010. © Lee Gregory



Plate 83. Northern Parula, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2010. © Lee Gregory

managed to remain calm and whipped-out my Nikon Coolpix camera in order to take some digi-binned record shots. I managed to fire off half-a-dozen photos before the bird flipped across to a dense willow tree with a soft "sip!" call. Knowing that there were no other birders on the island and that no-one would be able to twitch the island that day, I simply watched and enjoyed the bird for another two hours as it flicked around in the small willows, sketching the bird in my notebook and taking more digital photos.

The bird fed energetically in the small patch of bushes, rarely disappearing for long. It spent much of its time gleaning the underside of leaves and branches for insects but also occasionally sallied out for small moths that it disturbed from the branches. For much of the time it was accompanied by a Goldcrest, which looked rather dull by comparison, but which emphasised its small size. The local Wrens on the other hand were less friendly and frequently chased it through the bushes. On closest views, there was the merest hint of orange on the breast sides, suggesting to me that this was a female, whilst the green crown, green fringes to the primaries

and rather pointed tail feathers, all indicated that this was a first-winter bird. At around 17:10hrs, I noticed my wife Janet return to our house and so nipped down to tell her about the bird and to put the news out on Birdline Scotland via Angus Murray. Janet then came up to the wood with me to see the Parula, which continued to show well there until we left it at 18:00hrs.

Carnan Mor does not have a good track record for holding on to rarities. Both the Western Bonelli's Warbler of September 2006 and the Blyth's Reed Warbler of June 2008 were one-day wonders, which thwarted attempts to twitch them. It was therefore with baited breath that I checked the bushes at first light the following morning and to my immense relief, the Northern Parula was still present, so the twitch was on and eight people chartered a flight to come over and successfully see the bird, including Angus Murray. The bird came down off the hillside in calmer conditions that afternoon, and pleasingly fed in and around our garden at Balephuill, before returning to Carnan Mor towards dusk to roost. The bird stayed in the area for five days and showed well to all

who came to see it. It spent most of its time feeding in the bushes at Carnan Mor but it also came down into our garden again on 29 September, which was a calm sunny day on which the bird fed very actively. The bird returned to the Carnan Mor bushes that evening, but disappeared during the following clear still night, disappointing some 25 birders who came looking for it the next day.

Shape and size

The Northern Parula appeared to be slightly larger and longer than the adjacent Goldcrest, but it was a small, nimble and very active warbler all the same, that was often moved-on by a resident pair of Wrens. When feeding, it would sometimes hang upside down like a tit, but at other times it would fly-catch or twist to reach the underside of leaves like a Goldcrest. The bird often appeared rather short-necked and quite rounded in shape, but also slimmer and longer-bodied at other times. The wing showed moderately long primary extension, whilst the tail was rather short and appeared slightly forked. The tail feathers looked fresh and were nicely pointed. The bill was slim and fine-tipped. The bird was generally

silent and mostly fed in the open without calling. However, on occasion it called a soft "sip", particularly when moving between bushes, or when moved-on by other birds.

Plumage

The most striking feature when viewed front on, was the bright yellow chin, throat and upper breast, contrasting with the whiter lower breast, belly and vent. On some views, a hint of orange was visible on the breast sides, but oddly this does not appear in the photos and may have been a result of some feathers being fluffed up, either giving the impression of a darker colour or revealing darker feather bases. There was a greyish wash to the upper flanks and a hint of a yellowish-grey suffusion on the belly-sides and under the tail, encircling a white vent. The crown was richly green, whilst the ear coverts were blue-grey and there was a dark line through the eye from the bill, bordered above by the hint of a pale supercilium. More obvious were broad white semi-circles above and below the dark eye, given the face a "lidded" expression. The mantle was rich green in colour with a golden "Firecrest" glow to it, whilst the nape was a little



Plate 84. Northern Parula, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2010. © Lee Gregory



Plates 85–86. Northern Parula, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2010. © Phil Woollen (top), Lee Gregory (bottom)

greyer. The rump and uppertail coverts had a greenish hue but also showed hints of blue-grey. The closed wing was bluish-grey, especially the greater coverts, with green fringes to the primaries, and two bold white wing-bars on the coverts. The wing-bar on the greater coverts was longer and more prominent than the one on the median coverts. The alula was dark grey-brown with a paler, greyish fringe. The uppertail was dark blue-grey but the undertail pattern was more boldly marked showing an obviously clear-cut darker base, followed by a whiter area and then a dark tip. The bill had a darker blackish upper edge and a paler fleshy orange-yellow lower edge, all the way from base to tip. The legs were fleshy-grey, but with obviously yellowish feet and pinkish toenails. In short, a very colourful bird indeed!

John Bowler, Balephuill, Isle of Tiree, Argyll
Email: john.bowler@rspb.org.uk

Northern Parula – its status in Scotland

Northern Parula breeds in boreal regions of the eastern half of North America with its range extending from south-eastern Manitoba eastwards to Nova Scotia and south to the Gulf of Mexico to southern Texas. It winters primarily in the West Indies, in southern Florida and from north-east coastal Mexico south to Costa Rica. Spring migration occurs on a broad front through the Gulf of Mexico, while autumn birds mostly follow the Atlantic coast, with a peak from mid-September to early October.

As John correctly states above, this is the first record of this Nearctic species for Scotland. It has been an oft-predicted and long-awaited addition to the Scottish list - largely due to the fact that it was the most frequently recorded Nearctic warbler seen in Britain never to have been found in Scotland. There have been 14 individuals recorded in Britain up to the end of 2009 (first in 1966), and a further three in Ireland.

There is a very strong south-west bias to British records with all but one from Scilly (1966, 2 in 1983, 1985, 1992, 1995), Cornwall (1967, 1985, 1987, 1988) or Dorset (1968, 1985, 1988). The exception is one found moribund in Wigan (Greater Manchester) on 2 November 1982. Similarly, the Irish records are from Co. Cork (1983, 1989) and Co. Waterford (2003). All of these records have been in autumn, found between 25 September (Durseys Island, Co. Cork, 1989) and 26 November (Porthgwarra, Cornwall, 1967), with most in the first half of October. The Tiree individual therefore has the earliest find date for Britain, ahead of two found on 30 September - Dorset in 1985 and 1988. Elsewhere in Europe there have been seven records from Iceland (1913, 1948, 1952, 1957, 1962 and 2 in 1989); three in France (1987, 1995, 2009) and one from Germany (1985).

BIRDCUIDES REVIEW

1 October to 31 December 2010

M. GRANTHAM

All records refer to the period 1 October to 31 December 2010 unless otherwise stated.

Records in BirdGuides Reviews are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

To submit your sightings, use the following web link www.birdguides.com/birdnews/submit.asp, telephone on 0333 5772473, email sightings@birdguides.com (no large attachments please), or text BIRDS RPT (followed by your message) to 07786 200505. Sightings are also picked up from selected local news groups and various other sources.

Recent bird news can be viewed at www.birdguides.com (free registration is required), with a valued-added service available on subscription.

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.

Rarities

The two Lothian Ross's Geese continued to wander at the start of the October, seen around Aberlady Bay, Gullane, Dirleton and North

Berwick, with another in Montrose Basin (A&D) on 4–9 October. One also roamed Dumfries & Galloway, seen at Caerlaverock to 12 October, Browhouses on 12 November, back with Barnacle Geese at Caerlaverock on 11–23 December and finally at Ruthwell on 28 December.

The annual arrival of 'small' Canada Geese on Islay (Arg) in October saw three Richardson's, two Lessers (race *parvipes*) and a bird showing some characteristics of both Taverner's and Cackling at Loch Gruinart, and there were also reports of Richardson's, Todd's and Taverner's at Bridgend, Islay, towards the end of October.

A drake Blue-winged Teal was in Wigtown Harbour (D&G) on 18 October, with it or another then at Threave (D&G) from 26 November to 9 December, the first

twitchable bird in the county since 1980. The only Lesser Scaup were a drake at Innermessan (D&G) on 12–16 October and the third for Orkney, a female, at St Mary's on 2–19 December.

Several drake King Eiders remained, with the long-stayer off Burghead (M&N) to 27 December and others off North Ronaldsay (Ork) and Fair Isle in October. There was also a female at West Voe of Sumburgh (Shet) from 6 November, incredibly joined by a first-winter drake on 5 December, which remained to 29th. Equally interesting were Northern Eiders at Embo (High) from 12 October to 24 November and again on 10th and 29 December, with another at Bluemull Sound (Shet) on 24 November. The at-sea highlight though was a Fea's Petrel past North Ronaldsay (Ork) late morning on 16 October.



Plate 87. Blue-winged Teal, Threave, Dumfries & Galloway, November 2010. © Brian Henderson

One of the most intriguing records of the autumn was a possible **Steppe Buzzard** photographed at Barns Ness (Loth) on 30 September. Despite reservations initially considered a Common Buzzard, but a photograph posted online was noticed three days later and news of this would-be British first emerged. The only other raptor of note was an immature white-morph **Gyr Falcon** on Coll (Arg) on 6 December.

The influx of **Glossy Ibises** into the UK made it as far as Dumfries & Galloway, with one at Mersehead on 10–13 October, appearing to show injuries to its right leg. Presumably the same was also reported from nearby Kippford on 20 October. This is only the third for the county, following singletons in 1986 and 1911.

The **Semipalmated Sandpiper** remained at Tynninghame (Loth) to 15 October and a very interesting 'possible' was a **Wilson's Snipe** in front of the hide at Wigtown (D&G) on 12–15 October. With the only previous accepted British records being on the Isles of Scilly (and one reported in Cornwall in October 2010), this would be an exceptional record. Other interest came in the

form of a **Spotted Sandpiper** at Strand Loch (Shet) on 11 October and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH), on 3–6 October and presumably the same bird at Cheese Bay, North Uist (OH), on 9th.

With the country plunging into Arctic conditions during December, it was rather surprising to not see more Arctic vagrants, with the only contender being a brief first-winter **Ross's Gull** past Machrihanish Observatory, Uisaed Point (Arg) on 12th. There was also a probable first-winter **American Herring Gull** at Troon (Ayr) on 5 December.

The Outer Hebrides produced the only **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** in the UK this year, though sadly this was found freshly dead on South Uist on 4 November - surprisingly the first for the islands. The lingering male **Snowy Owl** at Mangurstadh, Lewis (OH) was reported on 1 October only.

A **Red-eyed Vireo** at North Locheynort, South Uist (OH) on 10 October was remarkably joined by a second bird on 11–12th. This is only the third time that two birds have been recorded together in the British Isles; previously at Hook

Head (Co Wexford) in October 1995 and on St Mary's (Isles of Scilly) in October 1988. The Outer Hebrides have provided four of the previous ten records in Scotland.

A **Steppe Grey Shrike** was at Loch of Strathbeg (NES), found by the eight-year-old daughter of the warden on 14 October. It remained to 18th and as expected of this species was very obliging at times. An **Isabelline Shrike** was at Scousborough (Shet) on 12–16th; the first on the islands since 2004.

Whilst there have been several small groups of **Northern Long-tailed Tits** south of the border, a group of three at Salen, Mull (Arg), on 26 October was exceptional, being the first in Scotland since 2004. There was also a possible reported from a garden in Wishaw (Clyde) on 25 November.

There was a superb run of rare warbler records on Shetland and Fair Isle during October. Possible **Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers** were on Fair Isle on 2nd and 6th and at Sandwick (Shet) on 7–8th, with confirmed birds on Out Skerries on 8th and Fetlar on 9th. **Lanceolated Warblers** were on Fair Isle on 2–3rd, at Skaw, Unst on



Plate 88. *Semipalmated Sandpiper* (bottom right) with *Dunlin* and *Curlew Sandpiper*, Tynninghame, Lothian, October 2010. © Ian Andrews

6–7th and on Out Skerries on 9th. The only **Booted Warbler** was at Quendale on 1–2nd and a **Sykes's Warbler** was at Channerwick on 2–9th. There was also an unidentified **Booted/Sykes's** on Out Skerries on 10th. A **Western Bonelli's Warbler** was reported at Lerwick on 11–16th with a late bird at Helendale from 29 October to 1 November - there is only one later-staying record, on South Ronaldsay (Ork) from 29 October to 15 November 2004. **Blyth's Reed Warblers** were on Out Skerries on 9th, Aith, Fetlar, to 7th and on Fair Isle on 11–19th and, further south, another was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October. Lastly, a **Hume's Warbler** was at Fladdabister (Shet) on 6–7th.

Despite so much of the action being on Shetland, those on the Outer Hebrides scored with a good run of Nearctic vagrants in mid-October. A **Hermit Thrush** at Brevig, Barra, on 9–11th was amazingly followed by another at Loch Druidibeg, South Uist, on 10th. The Brevig bird was then relocated in trees by the football pitch at Castlebay, Barra on 14–16th. These are the first records of Hermit Thrush away from Fair Isle (two) and Mainland Shetland (one). Elsewhere, a **Swainson's Thrush** at Levenwick (Shet) on 2–3 October was the sixth for the islands, with two additional records from Fair Isle, including one earlier in the autumn on 15 September.

This looks to be a record year for **Black-throated Thrush** in Scotland. The first of the year was ringed at Melvich, Sutherland (High) on 2 October, followed by one-day birds at Scalloway (Shet) on 10th and at Kirkwall airport (Ork) on 16th. With one also on Fair Isle on 23–29 October, the four records in one autumn beats the three in both 2003 and 2005.

The second of two sad finds over the autumn was the **Rufous-tailed**

Robin found dead outside North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory (Ork) on 2 October. This is the second for Scotland, and third for the Western Palaearctic, following one on Fair Isle in October 2004.

With an ever-increasing European population, records of the once-legendary **Red-flanked Bluetail** continue to increase, and the UK saw a record autumn count of over 30 birds. Following on from the late September sightings, further birds were found over the period 8–16 October: Shetland saw birds at Geosetter, Westerfield, Kergord and Boddam, with one on Fair Isle on 16th. Elsewhere, birds were ringed at Queenamidda (Ork) on 11th, and St Abbs Head (Bord) on 16th, with another mainland record at Scoughall (Loth) on 11th. A male **Pied Wheatear** on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10–13 October.

In October there were several **Olive-backed Pipits** on Shetland with birds on Out Skerries, Unst and at Quendale, and others on Fair Isle, at Halley Bay (Ork) and Brevig, Barra (OH). There was also a unconfirmed report of a **Blyth's Pipit** on Whalsay (Shet) on 2 October. Even more notable was the arrival of **Buff-bellied Pipits**, with the bird at Esha Ness (Shet) remaining to 6 October, possibly relocating to Braewick on 11th. Mid-October **Citrine Wagtails** were all on Shetland, with birds on Out Skerries on 2–10th, at Sandwick on 4–7th and Breiwick, Lerwick on 10th.

Small numbers of **Hornemann's Arctic Redpolls** occurred in the Northern Isles. Early arrivals were mostly on Unst, with birds at Northdale, Hermaness and Baltasound during October. Other Shetland birds were at Wester Quarff and Toab, with birds further south on Fair Isle and South Ronaldsay (Ork). By November, the only remaining birds were at Sumburgh on 4th and Scatness on

21st. **Coues' Arctic Redpolls** always turn up later, and following birds at Baltasound, Unst, on 13–16 October and a probable at Wester Quarff (Shet) on 6 November, others were at Sumburgh (Shet) on 10 November, Sullom and Maywick (Shet) on 20 November and North Ronaldsay (Ork) the next day. Those not specified to race included birds on South Ronaldsay (Ork), Strath Brora, Sutherland (High) and Scatness (Shet).

There was a **Black-headed Bunting** on Out Skerries (Shet) from 2 October, and remarkably it was joined by a second bird on 8th.

Scarce species

In general migration terms, October was rather spectacular, with a blocking high over Scandinavia and light easterlies dropped excellent numbers of migrants along the coast. Good numbers of **Brambling** arrived, especially during mid-November, and although it was good to see reasonable numbers of **Goldcrest** again, there were still no big falls as might be expected.

As winter progressed, we plunged into an early Arctic winter, and with such prolonged periods of freezing weather, many birds will move to warmer, southern climes or, for some passerines, into gardens. Perhaps most notable was the big shift in the distribution of **Pink-footed Geese**, with birds abandoning traditional sites and heading south and west. More at home in the snow were **Snow Geese** in Shetland, Orkney, Highland, Argyll and Borders. Other wildfowl will have suffered as water bodies froze over, though perhaps this also made finding them easier.

Several **Ring-necked Ducks** were one-day birds, with one female at Loch an Duin (OH) on 22–26 October. There was also a drake on Barra, at Loch Tangasdail on



Plate 89. Great Egret, Ulva Lagoon, Argyll, October 2010. © Jim Dickson

26th, and others at Loch Elix and Loch Calder (High), with two females in Dumfries & Galloway, at Soulseat Loch on 24 November and at Threave on 7 December. The first **Green-winged Teal** of the autumn was a drake at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) from 14 October to the end of the year, with other long-stayers at Wigtown (Dumfries & Galloway) from 23 October to 24 November, Caerlaverock (D&G) from 6 November to 19 December and at Aberlady Bay (Loth) from 7 December to the year's end. Briefer birds included three on the Outer Hebrides, two in Argyll, and singletons in Moray & Nairn, North-east Scotland and Dumfries & Galloway.

Several **Surf Scoters** were kept good company, including birds off Kincaig Point (Fife), Inganess Bay (Orkney) - with 11 Velvet Scoter and 12 Slavonian Grebes - a drake off Ruddon's Point (Fife) between 6 November and 12 December - with up to 55 Velvet Scoter - off Rerwick Head (Ork) on 12 December - with 24 Great Northern Divers and 13 Velvet Scoters - and Gullane Point (Loth) on 31 December. Notable were two drakes and a female from a ferry in the Sound of Barra (OH) on 22 December.

Two redhead **Smew** were early arrivals, on 23 October at Loch of Kinnordy (A&D) and on 27 October at Loch of Strathbeg (NES). By late November many more arrived and were reported from 12 further sites, including five in Lothian. All were singletons apart from two at Auchenroch Loch (NES) on 28 November, and all were redheads apart from one drake at Vane Farm (P&K) on 21 November.

The only **White-billed Divers** reported were on Shetland, in South Nesting Bay on 24 October and at Kirkabister on 6 November, though there was also a 'possible' in Udale Bay (High).

There were some large counts of shearwaters at the start of October, with 82 **Sooty Shearwater** past North Ronaldsay (Ork) in just one hour on 17th, with a late bird in the Moray Firth on 14 December. There were also late records of both **Balearic Shearwater** - past Tarbat Ness (High) on 19 October - and **Manx Shearwater** - past Haugh of Urr (D&G) on 19 December. Other seabird interest included a count of 3,908 **Little Auk** past the Isle of May in just one hour on 29 October.

Despite there being very large numbers of **Great White Egrets** south of the border, there was just a single report over the period, at Ulva, Kilmory (Arg) on 12–14 October and again on 30th. Also more numerous further south were **Rough-legged Buzzards**, and in October there was one at Toab (Shet) on 16th and two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 16–17th. November saw one on Yell (Shet) on 22nd, with December birds on Unst on 29th and at Scatness on 30th. One at Hownam Law (Bord) on 2 December had apparently been present for a week previously. Rather more out of place was a late juvenile **Red-footed Falcon** at Fife Ness briefly on 2 November, which was hopefully checked for Amur Falcon!

With winds from the west, there were good numbers of Nearctic waders reported. The first **American Golden Plover** was on South Uist on 10 October, and the Outer Hebrides also saw a long-stayer at Baleshare, North Uist, and up to two at Eoropie, Lewis. Others were at Keiss (High) on 13 October and Loch of Clumlhie (Shet) on 7 November. Several **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** also remained and built up in number, with up to three at Esha Ness (Shet) to 12 October and two on Tiree (Arg) to 9 October. Brief singletons were then at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 4–7 October, Sanday (Ork) on 4 October and at Eastside, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6th. The **Pectoral Sandpiper** remained at Kirkwall (Ork) to 2 October, with another at Loch of Boardhouse. Other singletons were reported from Shetland, Highland and Ayrshire, and in North-east Scotland one was at Rigifa Pool on 5–7 October and up to three were at Loch of Strathbeg until 8 October, with one to 16th. Other waders of note included the late **Dotterel** at The Wig (D&G) to 3 December and a **Stone Curlew** on North

Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19 November was the first island record.

With the cold weather in December, many **Woodcocks** moved into unusual places, such as gardens, but to count 120 (and 14 dead) at St Abbs Head (Bord) on 12 December must have been some experience.

There were plenty of **Grey Phalaropes** reported, with most in the Outer Hebrides in October. Most were fly-bys or short-stayers, but one popular bird was at Dunbar (Loth) from 20 November to 13 December. Most were singletons, apart from three at Loch Ardville, South Uist (OH) on 5 October, two off Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 5 October and two off Tarbat Ness (High) on 13 October.

There was the usual scattering of white-winged gulls, with several sites holding more than one bird. There were three **Iceland Gulls** in Stornoway Harbour (OH) on 26 November, two at Peterhead (NES) on 27 November and a nice trio of an adult, third-winter and juvenile at Stromness (Ork) on 20 December. There were fewer **Glaucous Gulls**, but two were on Lewis (OH) on 13 December. There were four adult

Ring-billed Gulls reported and in Argyll, one was at Dunstaffnage Bay, Dunbeg, on 12 October, and possibly the same then in Oban from 15 October to the end of the year. Others were at Doonfoot (Ayr) on 9–10 October and Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 16–19 October. There were just two records of **Sabine's Gulls**, both juveniles on 1 October, at Wigtown NNR (D&G) and past Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH).

Hoopoes were unsurprisingly scarce, with two birds reported, on Yell (Shet) on 8 October and at Kinbuck (UF) on 10 October. Rather unusually there were no reports of **Wryneck**, with most birds arriving into Britain much further south. There were plenty of **Short-toed Larks** though, with at least eight on Shetland, including five on Unst, up to 3 November. Elsewhere, birds were reported from North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18 October and 31 October to 1 November, at Sandaig, Tiree (Arg) on 2–8 October and the sole mainland bird remained in allotments at Girdle Ness (NES) to 3 October. Late migrants lingering into November included a **Swallow** in Clyde on 26th and a **Whinchat** in Lothian on 7th. Far happier in the cold were the

Shore Lark that turned up in small numbers, with a long-staying flock of up to 10 birds on the Tynninghame saltmarsh (Loth).

For many, the highlight of the winter was one of the biggest ever early arrivals of **Waxwing**. The first birds were in the Northern Isles on 16 October, followed by a more widespread arrival from 22nd. There were numerous flocks of over 300 birds, with the largest being 1,000 at Kirkfield, near Thurso (Caith). By late November and early December, flocks peaked at 2,000 around Inverness (High) and 1,500 in Glasgow (Clyde). But with increased competition for berries, birds rapidly moved south and there were reports of birds colour-ringed in Aberdeen from as far south as Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Bedfordshire, London and Kent.

Richard's Pipits 'shreep'-ed overhead at several sites in late October, including Outer Hebrides, Highland, Shetland and two in Ayrshire. There were also two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 October. Other pipit interest included three **Red-throated Pipits** on Shetland in October, at Brough, Whalsay, on 2nd, Sumburgh on 10th and Boddam on 17th, and an **Olive-backed Pipit** on Out Skerries (Shet) on 2 October. **Bluethroats** were far from numerous, although the start of October saw up to seven on Shetland. The only one away from the islands was on Tiree (Arg) on 5 October.

The only **Icterine Warbler** was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 9 October, though predictably **Barred Warblers** were much more numerous. Most were on Shetland, including two at various sites, and there were also two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) and at least three on Fair Isle on 11 October. The first **Pallas's Warblers** were on 8 October at three sites on Shetland, with another three birds the next



Plate 90. Short-toed Lark, Tiree, Argyll, October 2010. © Jim Dickson

day. These all moved through quickly, and after this two-day bonanza, the only other was at Torness (Loth) on 10–11 October. **Yellow-browed Warblers** arrived en masse, and at the start of October good numbers were in the Northern Isles, including 12 on Fair Isle on 12 October and eight at Kergord (Shet) on 2 October. Most moved on by the end of the month, with late birds at Uigen, Lewis (OH) to 3 November and at Caerlaverock (D&G) on 15–19 November. There were six **Radde's Warblers** reported, five of which were on Shetland over the period 2–15 October. The only one away from the islands was at Kinneff (NES) on 9 October. Shetland also hosted all of the **Dusky Warblers** reported, with birds at Hallgarth on 8–9 October, Quendale on 9th October and Fetlar on 11–12 October. Other warbler interest came in the form (literally) of **Central Asian Lesser Whitethroats** at Rousay (Ork) on 4 November, with a *minula* **Desert Lesser Whitethroat** ringed at Sumburgh Head (Shet) on 9 November, staying to 11th.

Other good autumn fare included good numbers of **Red-breasted**

Flycatchers, with plenty of birds on Shetland. Most were singletons, apart from two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7 October and two at Langais, North Uist (OH) on 24–25 October, the latter the latest apart from one on Isle of May on 6 November.

The arrival of **Great Grey Shrikes** continued apace. Notable records included two on Foula (Shet) on 11 October and three were caught together on the Isle of May on 8 October. There were just five records of **Red-backed Shrikes**, including one at Kinncraig Point (Fife) to 3 October. Others were on Shetland, Angus & Dundee, Orkney and North-east Scotland. Perhaps surprisingly there were almost as many **Rose-coloured Starlings**, with juveniles on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2–8 October, Voe (Shet) on 23 October and 7 November (and presumably in-between times), and one at Cunningsburgh (Shet) from 13 October was sadly found dead on 24th. Also on Shetland, a late **Serin** on Out Skerries from 7 November eventually revealed its Belgian cage-bird ring, proving its dodgy provenance.

Common Rosefinches were frequent visitors across the Northern Isles during the first two weeks of October, including two at Norwick, Unst (Shet), Pool of Virkie (Shet) and at Halley Bay (Ork). Away from the islands, other birds were on the Outer Hebrides - at Siadar, Lewis on 10 October and Barra on 12 October - and at Trumpan, Skye (High) on 11 October. It was a good year for **Northern Bullfinch**, with several birds reported, including six at Strath Carnaig (High) on 13 November and two at Lerwick (Shet) on Boxing Day.

There were still some very impressive flocks of **Lapland Buntings** around, with peaks of 160 on Tiree (Arg) on 13 October, 150 at Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 3–7 October and 146 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October, with 242 Snow Bunting. October also saw three records of **Ortolan Bunting**, all from Shetland: on Foula on 9th, at Sandness on 10th and Melby on 11th. Shetland and Fair Isle also hogged most of the **Little Buntings**, with up to seven on the islands, including two at Norwick, Unst. Elsewhere, there was a flighty bird on South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October and one on Isle of May on 9 October. Bringing up the rear quite nicely was a **Rustic Bunting** at Sanday (Ork) on 8 October.

As a final aside, notable ring recoveries during the month included two exceptional movements by very different species. Firstly, a **Wren** ringed on St Abbs Head (Bord) was killed by a cat in Gloucester on 1 October. Equally rare was a **Barnacle Goose** ringed on Islay in November 2002 that spent the winter on the east coast of the USA. After ringing, it was regularly seen on Islay until March 2005 when it disappeared, leaving behind its parents and a sibling which are still present on the island.



Plate 91. *Lapland Bunting, Scatness, Shetland, October 2010.* © Steve Minton

SOC Branch Secretaries

Ayrshire: Anne Dick
Rowanmyle House, Tarbolton, Mauchline KA5 5LU.
Tel: 01292 541981
Email: Anne.Dick@sac.ac.uk

Borders: Graham Pyatt
The Schoolhouse, Manor, Peebles EH45 9JN.
Tel: 01721 740319
Email: d.g.pyatt@btinternet.com

Caithness: Stan Laybourne
Old Schoolhouse, Harpsdale, Halkirk KW12 6UN.
Tel: 01847 841 244
Email: stanlaybourne@talk21.com

Central: Roger Gooch
The Red House, Dollarfield, Dollar FK14 7LX.
Tel: 01259 742 326
Email: roger@dollar11.plus.com

Clyde: Hayley Douglas
Top Right, 35 Church Street, Lochwinnoch PA12 4AE.
Tel: 07715 634079
Email: h.a.douglas@hotmail.co.uk

Dumfries: Pat Abery
East Daylesford, Colvend, Dalbeattie DG5 4QA.
Tel: 01556 630483
Email: eastdaylesford@onetel.com

Fife: Karen Dick
South Lodge, St Michaels, St Andrews KY16 0DU.
Tel: 01334 848278
Email: fifesoc@sky.com

Grampian: Graham Cooper
Westbank, 72 Beltie Road, Torphins, Banchory
AB31 4JT. Tel: 01339 882706
Email: grm.cooper@btinternet.com

Highland: Ann Sime
4 Culduthel House, 71 Culduthel Road,
Inverness IV2 4HH.
Tel: 01463 236529
Email: annsime503@btinternet.com

Lothian: Doreen Main
Seatoller, Broadgait, Gullane EH31 2DH.
Tel: 01620 844532
Email: doreen.main@yahoo.com

Orkney: Colin Corse
Garrisdale, Lynn Park, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1SL.
Tel: 01856 874 484
Email: ccorse@btinternet.com

Stewartry: Joan Howie
60 Main Street, Dalry, Castle Douglas DG7 3UW.
Tel: 01644 430 226

Tayside: Brian Boag
Birch Brae, Knapp, Inchture PH14 9SW.
Tel: 01828 686 669

West Galloway: Geoff Sheppard
The Roddens, Leswalt, Stranraer DG9 0QR.
Tel: 01776 870 685
Email: geoff.roddens@btinternet.com

SOC Local Recorders

Angus & Dundee: Jon Cook
01382 738495
1301midget@tiscali.co.uk

Argyll: Paul Daw
01546 886260
monedula@globalnet.co.uk

Ayrshire: Fraser Simpson
recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk

Borders: Ray Murray
01721 730677
raymurray1@tiscali.co.uk

Caithness: Stan Laybourne
01847 841244
stanlaybourne@talk21.com

Clyde: Iain Gibson
01505 705874
c/o wilsonval@btinternet.com

Clyde Islands: Bernard Zonfrillo
0141 557 0791
b.zonfrillo@bio.gla.ac.uk

Dumfries & Galloway:
Paul N. Collin
01671 402861
pncollin@live.co.uk

Fair Isle: David Parnaby
01595 760258
fairisle.birdobs@zetnet.co.uk

Fife: Malcolm Ware
07733 991030
mw160598@hotmail.co.uk

Forth (Upper): Chris Pendlebury
07798 711134
chris@upperforthbirds.co.uk

Highland: Hugh Insley
07831 479804
hugh.insley@btinternet.com

Isle of May: Iain English
01698 891788
i.english@talk21.com

Lothian: Stephen Welch
01875 852802
lothianrecorder@the-soc.org.uk

Moray & Nairn: Martin Cook
01542 850296
martin.cook99@btinternet.com

NE Scotland: Hywel Maggs
07751 373793
hywelmaggs@hotmail.com

Orkney: Jim Williams
01856 761317
jim@genieflea.freeseve.co.uk

Outer Hebrides: Brian Rabbitts
01876 580328
rabbitts@hebrides.net

Perth & Kinross: Scott Patterson
01577 864248
scottpaterson12@yahoo.co.uk

Shetland: Mark Chapman
01806 242401
msc.1@btinternet.com



**WORLD
LAND
TRUST™**

www.carbonbalancedpaper.com

CBIP0003590202112146

PhotoSPOT

Plate 92. While central Scotland was frozen solid in November and December, Crail was not so badly affected due its proximity to the sea. Birds, seeking refuge from far and wide, began to move into the East Neuk area to forage for food.

Huge flocks of Woodpigeon and several thousand Pinkfeet were the most obvious arrivals. However, Woodcock started to appear in the village and were seen at dusk flying over. As the cold spell continued, they became more common, with birds even being seen flying down the main street. Denburn Wood and the field opposite hosted double figures and were seen flying about during the day. My garden is bordered by a small stream, which did not freeze, and Woodcock and Snipe began to drop into it to feed. Woodcock then

started walking from there into the back garden, then into the front garden, until it got to the point that I had to be careful not to run one over when driving into the garage.

While I would like to say the shot was the result of days of careful observation and careful approach, it was in fact taken one sunny afternoon from my dining room window when birds were checking the soft earth along the hedgerow!

As soon as the thaw came, the birds disappeared overnight, leaving only the carcasses of those that had fallen prey to the local raptors.

Camera: Canon 7D with 500 mm lens and 1.4x extender. Shutter speed: 1/250.

John Anderson



Featuring the best images posted on the SOC website each quarter, PhotoSpot will present stunning portraits as well as record shots of something unique, accompanied by the story behind the photograph and the equipment used. Send in your photos now - it's open to all.