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# Scottish Birds

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Plate 93. The Carn Liath study area, North-east Scotland, May 2010, with incubating Golden Plover in the foreground. © R. Rae

## Numbers and breeding success of Golden Plover and Dunlin in an area frequented by Ravens

R. RAE, E. WESTON & E. DUTHIE

*Declines have been reported in upland breeding wader populations in the UK. Predation by Ravens has been put forward as a cause and gamekeepers have called for licenses to kill Ravens to protect upland birds. In 2010, we re-surveyed three areas in North-east Scotland primarily for Golden Plover and Dunlin to establish the current breeding populations. Repeat visits throughout the breeding season at one site were used to assess breeding success. Published Raven records for North-east Scotland from 2001 to 2009 were collated, and we also recorded the numbers seen on each site visit. Small numbers of Ravens were present throughout the breeding season, but we found no large flocks. Numbers of breeding waders were similar to the 1990s. Breeding success appeared to be high, with many pairs displaying behaviour that indicated young; no nest failures were recorded.*

**Introduction**

Upland breeding waders have been said to be in decline in many areas of the UK, including North-east Scotland, where declines of 37% and 36% respectively were recorded in Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina* between surveys in the 1980–93 period and a repeat survey of upland waders in 2000–02 (Sim *et al.* 2005). Predation by increasing numbers of Ravens *Corvus corax*, particularly mobile flocks of up to 300 juveniles in early spring, has been blamed for this decline by gamekeepers, who now seek licences to kill Ravens in order to protect these upland waders (Anon 2010). However, analysis of the Repeat Upland Bird Survey data by Amar *et al.* (2010) did not show a correlation between increases in Ravens and declines in upland waders and the authors concluded that on the evidence available Ravens were not responsible for recorded declines in upland waders. They did, however, comment that some areas might be experiencing predation and acting as ‘sinks’ which draw in Dunlin and Golden Plover from more productive areas.

In 2009, we visited an area studied in the 1990s (Rae & Watson 1998) and noted that several pairs of both Golden Plover and Dunlin had chicks. We decided to repeat the wader census in 2010 using the same methods as in the previous studies in the 1980s and 1990s (Watson & Rae 1987, Rae & Watson 1998) to establish the current status of the Dunlin and Golden Plover breeding populations in these areas, and also to investigate numbers of other wader species. We also recorded the numbers of Ravens and other avian predators seen during our visits and reviewed the *North East Scotland Bird Reports* for evidence of any recorded increases in Raven numbers.

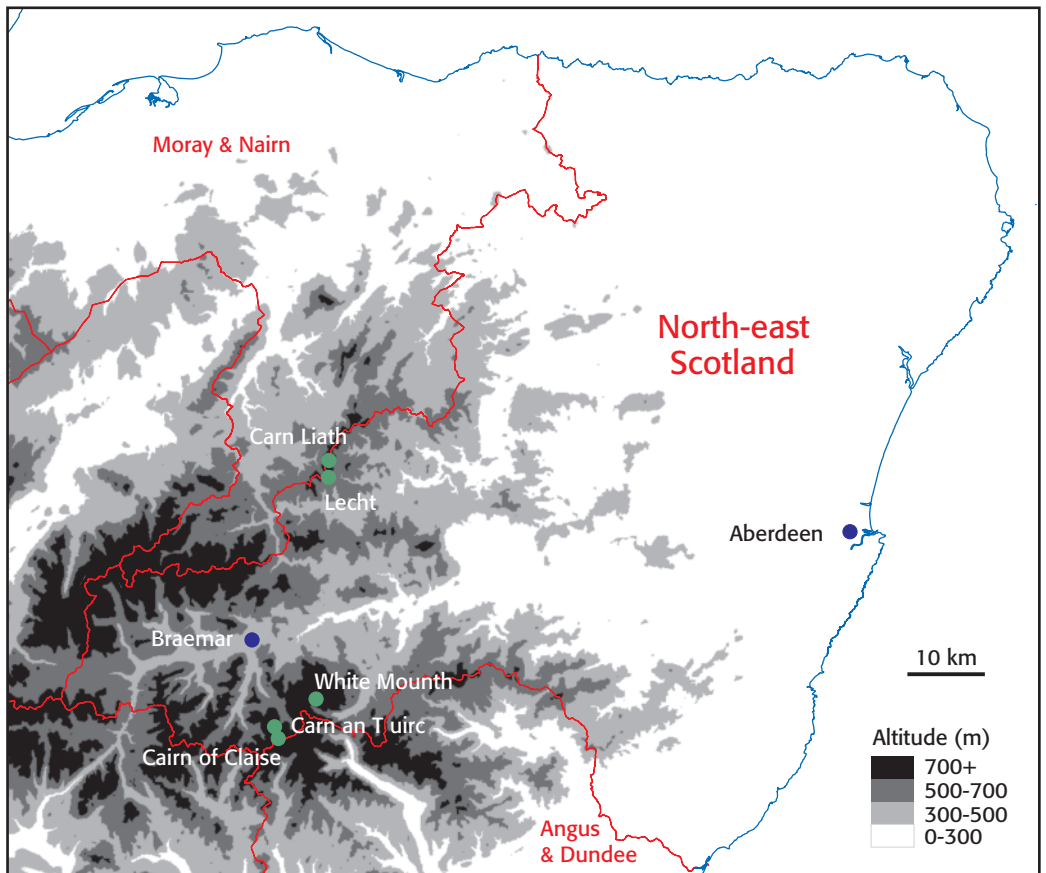


Figure 1. Location of the upland study areas.

## Methods

Three upland areas of North-east Scotland were surveyed in 2010. At the Lecht/Carn Liath, we made repeated visits to estimate the breeding population of waders and their success. The other two areas were to the east of the Cairnwell: the Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise massif and the White Mounth, both of which were only visited to search for chicks.

The Lecht 1.3 km<sup>2</sup> and Carn Liath 2.0 km<sup>2</sup> study area is within the Ladder Hills (800 m asl) complex and was chosen because of the previous published study. This is an area of heather-covered peat bog (Plate 93) that, although unmanaged for Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*, does form part of a grouse shoot. There was little evidence of recent muirburn in 2010, and regularly spaced piles of grit alongside the tracks of a quad bike were the only obvious change to the area since our original study in the 1990s. This area was visited on seven occasions to record arrival, incubation and hatching times and gather information on breeding success.

The Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise 7.5 km<sup>2</sup> study area (1000 m asl) is on the southern edge of the lower Cairngorms. It is an area of montane upland where there is extensive grass-covered peat bog, dry grassy ridges and small areas of scree. There is a long-established high-level track joining the two hills of Carn an Tuirc and Cairn of Claise, but no evidence of recent habitat management. This area was visited on 30 June and 2 July, when most, if not all, waders would have hatched; some Golden Plovers may indeed have fledged by this date.

The White Mounth area 1.6 km<sup>2</sup> (1200 m asl) was only visited once, on 26 June, when some birds were probably still incubating, but prior to any possible fledging.

We visited the Lecht/Carn Liath study area to detect both Golden Plover and Dunlin as they arrived prior to egg laying when they are at their most obvious (Ratcliffe 1976, Rae & Watson 1998). All suitable breeding habitat was visited and we recorded the position of any birds found, returning to



Plate 94. Incubating Golden Plover, North-east Scotland, May 2010. © Ewan Weston

record nests and breeding behaviour at later dates. We also visited the Lecht at dusk on calm nights to detect Dunlin as they sing over their breeding territories at sunset (Watson & Rae 1987).

We did not actively search for nests, but noted any we found, revisiting them to record the outcome. We also recorded skulking behaviour, which is indicative of birds with nests nearby. Single birds giving weak alarm calls were also recorded as probable nesters. Golden Plovers and Dunlin were recorded as having chicks if pairs gave strong alarm calls or distraction displays.

All Ravens and other avian predators seen on visits to the study areas were recorded. A review of *North East Scotland Bird Reports* over the nine years between 2001 and 2009 was conducted to see if changes in Raven numbers had been noted by local observers.

**Results**

**Table 1.** Numbers of breeding pairs of waders recorded on visits to the study areas, 2010

Lecht	2 May	15 May	21 May	2 June	5 June	22 June	26 June	28 June	30 June	2 July
Golden Plover	5	5	9	7	5	5		8		
Curlew	0	0	2	2	2	2		2		
Dunlin	0	1	4	5	2	2		5		
<b>Carn Liath</b>		<b>15 May</b>	<b>21 May</b>		<b>5 June</b>					
Golden Plover		7	8		4					
Dunlin		2	1		0					
<b>Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise</b>									<b>30 June</b>	<b>2 July</b>
Golden Plover									7	7
Dunlin									10	9
Snipe									2	0
<b>White Mounth</b>						<b>26 June</b>				
Golden Plover						6				
Dunlin						4				

**Table 2.** The breeding success of waders in the three study areas. Figures in brackets are from unpublished data of the authors. The 1995 figures outwith brackets are published data (Rae & Watson 1998). No counts are available for Golden Plover in 1988 from Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise.

	1988–95 Pairs with young	Nests with eggs found	2010 No. of nests found that hatched	Pairs with young
<b>Lecht</b>	<b>1995</b>			
Golden Plover	9	3	3	8
Curlew	0	0	0	2
Dunlin	4	1	1	5
<b>Carn Liath</b>	<b>1995</b>			
Golden Plover	(8)	1	1	1
Dunlin	4			
<b>Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise</b>	<b>1988</b>			
Golden Plover	present			14
Dunlin	5			9
Snipe	0			2
<b>White Mounth</b>				
Golden Plover	present			6
Dunlin	present			4

At the Lecht, three nests of Golden Plover with eggs were found, and these all hatched successfully. Eight pairs of Golden Plover were seen with chicks. One nest of Dunlin was found, which hatched successfully, and a further four pairs were observed with young. Both pairs of Curlew hatched chicks. No attempt was made to follow these broods to establish fledging success, but Dunlin, Curlew and Golden Plover pairs gave alarm calls on successive visits in the same areas indicating the continuing presence of chicks. The number of pairs detected here shows no change to the number of pairs found in 1995.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of birds prior to incubation, Figure 3 the distribution of nests and birds displaying behavior indicating incubation and Figure 4 the distribution of birds with chicks.

At the Lecht a fledged brood of two Golden Plover were seen on the wing on 28 June. Attempts to visit Carn Liath to record breeding success in June, when detection is easiest, were abandoned due to extreme weather conditions. One ringed chick from another brood was recovered in December 2010, a further indication of successful breeding.

On Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise (Figure 5) the recorded number of breeding Dunlin had increased from five to nine pairs since the previous study while the 14 pairs of Golden Plover observed with chicks was indicative of a healthy population. Snipe was also now breeding where none had been previously been recorded by us.

Evidence for successful breeding was also recorded at the 1200 m high White Mounth site (Figure 6) for six pairs of Golden Plover and four pairs of Dunlin.

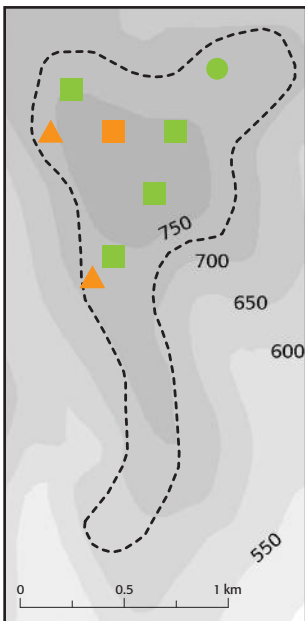
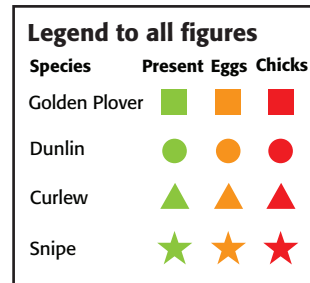


Figure 2. Distribution of breeding waders at the Lecht during the pre-incubation period, 2 May 2010.

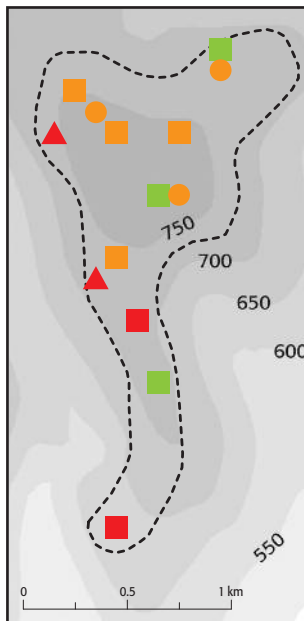


Figure 3. Distribution of breeding waders at the Lecht during the pre-hatch period, 15 May to 2 June 2010.

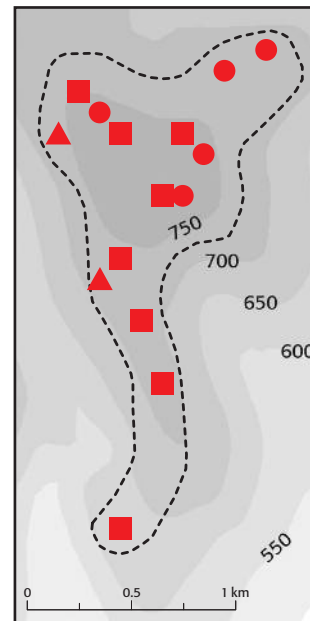


Figure 4. Distribution of breeding waders at the Lecht during the post-hatch period, 5 June 2010 onwards.



The Raven population in North-east Scotland has fluctuated widely over the past 50 years (Francis & Cook in press). In 1968–72, Ravens were still widely recorded across the uplands, but by the time of the 1981–84 Atlas (Buckland *et al.* 1990) very few remained. There was a slight increase by 1988–91, which has continued to the present day. The number of occupied 10-km squares in North-east Scotland has varied from 28 (1968–72) to five (1981–84) to eight (1988–91) to 31 (2002–06), with a current estimated population of 15 breeding pairs (Francis & Cook in press).

We saw Ravens on six of the seven study visits in 2010, with an average group size of 4.3 birds (Table 3). Ravens were also seen on the four other occasions when we were at the Lecht/Carn Liath area. Other potential predators seen included a first-year Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, a first-year Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and a Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. A single Buzzard *Buteo buteo* was seen on all visits. A large colony of breeding Common Gulls *Larus canus* was to one side of the main study area at the Lecht. This was not present in the 1995 study. Common Gulls were regularly seen feeding in flocks of 100–200 birds on newly emerged crane-flies.

No Ravens are known to breed in the Ladder Hills area (pers.obs). Groups of Ravens were, however, regularly seen to quarter the ground searching for food, but no predated wader eggs were found. One predated grouse egg was found next to the Common Gull colony. Ravens were seen to visit the long-dead carcasses of Mountain Hares *Lepus timidus* and Red Grouse where they could be seen turning over the body parts looking for food. A few (less than ten) Raven pellets were found at cairns and below fence posts these contained many beetle wing cases these were opened on site and contained no eggshell fragments.

In 2010, one nest of Ravens in Glen Clunie, only 5 km from Carn an Tuirc, reared three young. Two hundred metres directly below this nest is a small marsh, which held two pairs of Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and single pairs of Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Curlew and Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*. All had young on 23 May. Three other nests of Ravens reared young in the corries within 5 km of Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise. On 30 June, one of these pairs was seen to regularly visit the cairn at the top of Cairn of Claise to look for food left by hikers, while another bird was seen to feed on a dead hare. No Ravens were seen here on 2 July or on the White Mounth on 26 June.

**Table 3.** Numbers and group sizes of Ravens seen at the Lecht/Carn Liath during wader surveys in 2010.

Date	Number of Ravens seen
2 May	None seen
15 May	Groups of 8 and 3 birds
21 May	Groups of 2 and 5 birds
2 June	One bird
5 June	Groups of 14, 3 and 2 birds
22 June	Group of 4 birds
28 June	One bird

**Table 4.** All Raven records reported to the local recorder for inclusion in the North-east Bird Report 2001–09.

Year	No. of observers	No. of observations	Total number observed	Average group size	Largest flock observed
2001	8	28	60	2.14	12
2002	8	13	31	2.38	6
2003	7	56	118	2.10	7
2004	9	22	65	2.95	9
2005	12	43	129	3.00	12
2006	8	36	100	2.77	8
2007	19	37	108	2.91	19
2008	13	20	87	4.35	13
2009	16	23	75	3.26	16
<b>Total</b>		278	773	2.78	

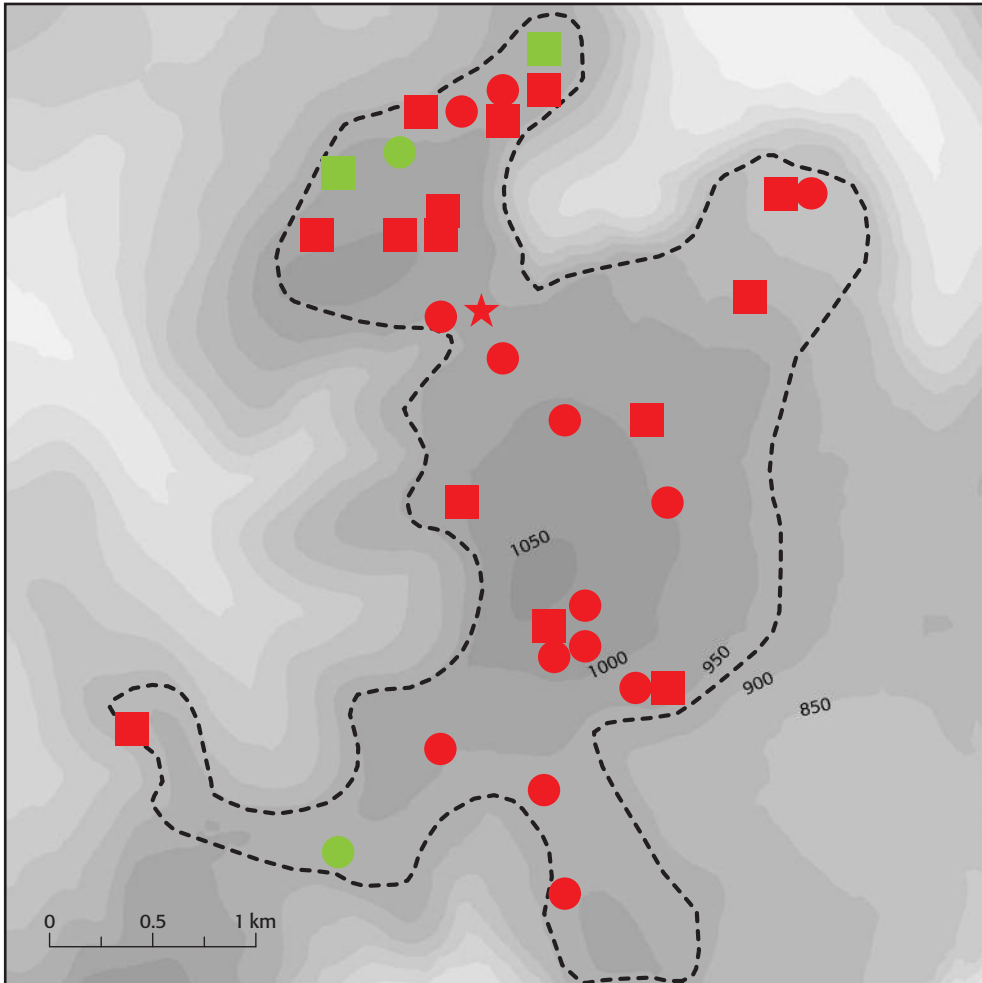


Figure 5. Distribution of breeding waders at Carn an Tuirc/Cairn of Claise, 30 June and 2 July 2010.

### Discussion

Breeding wader numbers at the Lecht study site in 2010 (Table 1) showed no marked decrease or increase in numbers since the 1980s and 1990s (Rae & Watson 1998). An additional species, Curlew, was found breeding within the main study area in 2010. We found no evidence to suggest any nest failures of Golden Plover, Dunlin and Curlew at the Lecht, with all pairs rearing young to at least half-grown, and in some Golden Plover to fledging. Figures 2, 3 and 4 show that the arrival, incubation and hatching dates are as would be expected for the species concerned when breeding successfully with no late or suspected repeat clutches recorded.

At the other two study sites, similar numbers of Golden Plover and Dunlin to our main site were found relative to the areas surveyed, with chicks seen at the end of June and beginning of July (Figures 5 & 6).

We found no evidence to support claims by gamekeepers that Ravens are serious predators of wader nests in the uplands of North-east Scotland (Anon 2010). We found no evidence of any wader chick predation and observed no Raven flocks of more than 15 individuals, let alone

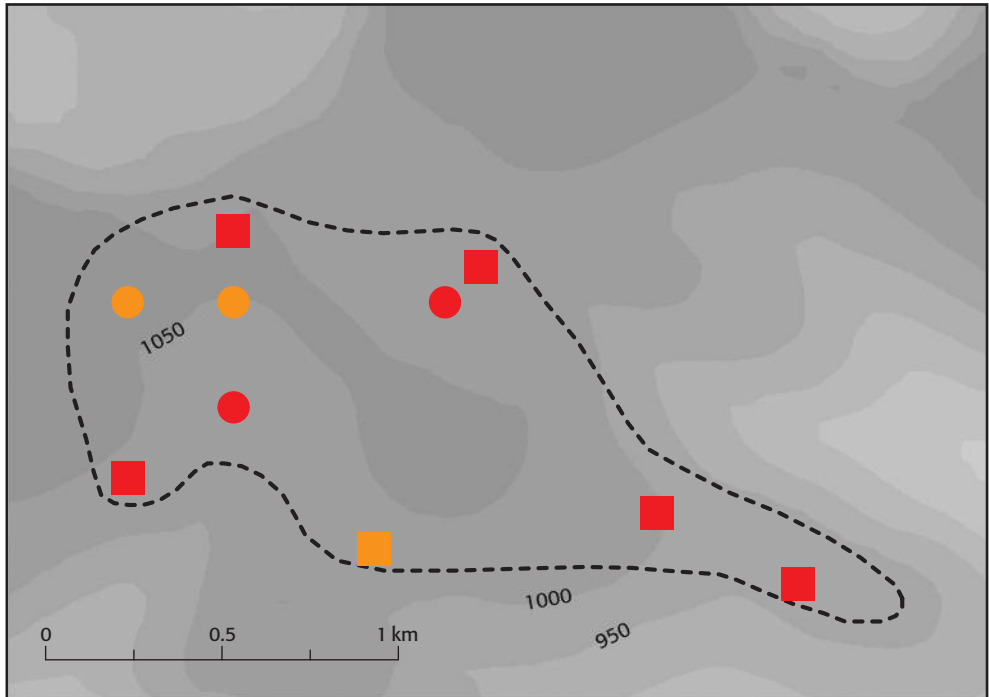


Figure 6. Distribution of breeding waders at White Mounth, 26 June 2010.

300 birds as quoted by some gamekeepers (Anon 2010). Our review of the local bird reports (Table 3) gave maximum flock counts of Ravens for the period 2001–09 of 19. The bird report counts were by many independent observers over a nine-year period and gave annual average flock sizes ranging from 2.10 to 4.35 with an average flock size of 2.78. This is consistent with the 4.3 average group size found in the present study. We suggest that, where there has been a reduction in wader numbers, this is more likely to be the result of habitat change such as intensive muirburn, heavy grazing or drainage.

The numbers of some upland wading birds can be seriously underestimated by survey methods that do not allow observers to spend enough time in the field. Rae & Watson (1998) showed that over 400 pairs of breeding Dunlin had been overlooked by inexperienced observers when surveying for the local atlas in 1981–84 (Buckland *et al.* 1990). Incubating Dunlin and Golden Plover can be hard to detect especially when sitting on well incubated eggs (Ratcliffe 1976, Yalden & Yalden 1991, Rae & Watson 1998). At this point in their breeding cycle, both species often sit tight and remain undetected, whilst birds which do run off or fly from nests at the approach of the observer are frequently silent. Consequently, inexperienced surveyors using transect methods (Brown & Shepherd 1993) can substantially underestimate the breeding numbers of these species and casual observers would have little chance of detecting Dunlin and Golden Plover while these species are incubating clutches (Ratcliffe 1976, Yalden & Yalden 1991). Such elusive behaviour may have contributed to any perceived reduction in the breeding numbers of these species (see Plate 93 which shows a tight-sitting Golden Plover photographed with a standard lens from 10 m).

After hatching parents become obvious as they give alarm calls and perform distraction displays, but failed breeders do not and consequently remain undetected resulting in an underestimate of the population (Yalden & Yalden 1991). In drought years, characterized by

dried out and cracked peat pools, Dunlin and Golden Plovers may postpone or abandon breeding without laying eggs (Rae & Watson 1998). Failed breeding of both species would be impossible to quantify under such circumstances. However, 2010 was not such a year, with late snow and a wet spring providing good breeding conditions, with no recorded nest failures and many broods of chicks being reared. Sim *et al.* (2005) suggested an improved method of monitoring upland breeding waders was required prior to future surveys.

Amar *et al.* (2010) suggested that some areas could be acting as 'sinks' by drawing in waders from other areas where waders bred successfully. However, this presumes low breeding success in North-east Scotland, which our fieldwork does not support. Both the present study and that by Amar *et al.* (2010) do not support the view that Ravens have a detrimental effect on breeding Dunlin and Golden Plover populations in North-east Scotland. Consequently, any application for a license to kill Ravens to protect the nests of waders remains unjustified and should be rejected.

### Acknowledgements

We thank Mick Marquiss, Adam Watson and Jenny Lennon for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to Hywel Maggs for sourcing the original records of Ravens in the *North East Scotland Bird Reports*.

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*Revised ms accepted February 2011*

# Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2009

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on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

This is the second annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC). The first report covered the period 2005 to 2008 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, b), but this and future reports will cover single years.

The main ornithological events of 2009 documented in this report include the 4th Scottish record of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* and the 7th record of Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. An Alpine Swift *Apus melba* in the Outer Hebrides was Scotland's first since 2003, and a Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus* on Fair Isle the first since 2004. More notable than any of these, perhaps, was Scotland's first breeding record of Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*, albeit in a mixed pair with a Common Gull *Larus canus*. Also, 2009 saw the first confirmed Black-tailed Godwit of the nominate subspecies *Limosa limosa limosa* in Scotland. More Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* were recorded in Scotland in 2009 than in any previous year, and there were at least 18 White-billed Divers *Gavia adamsii*, excluding presumed returning birds.

On the other hand, 2009 was unexceptional for large shearwaters, and while American Golden Plovers *Pluvialis dominica* continued to be reported in numbers, there was only a single record of White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*. Species recorded during 2005–08 but not in 2009 included Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*, Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* and Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*.

Not unusually, the Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) enjoyed a monopoly or near-monopoly of several of the passerine species covered by this report. Thus the only records of Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* in 2009 came from these islands. However, all three records of Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* were on the east coast of mainland Scotland, while there were as many records of Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* in the rest of Scotland as there were in the Northern Isles.

## Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the *Scottish List* (Forrester 2011). Several English names have changed since the last report, as has the sequence of passerines.

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

n Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler

- Acrocephalus palustris* and Ortolan Bunting, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated. Similarly, no totals are available for Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*.
- n Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year. Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
  - n Total number in the current year (2009).

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2009, with details. For species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2009 records that were not included in the last report. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided. For White-billed Diver and Cattle Egret, which were assessed by BBRC to the end of 2008, this summary information covers the period since the end of 2004, thus fully updating information in Forrester *et al.* (2007). The same applies to Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*, which was omitted from the last report.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years are sometimes accepted locally without formal submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided. Revised details are also provided for some pre-2009 records published in the last report.

For each record listed in full, the following information is provided. For additional details, see ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a).

- n Year (unless this is 2009).
- n Recording area.
- n Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- n Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- n 'Returning' if applicable.
- n Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was present throughout; in some cases it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- n 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- n Existence of a photograph, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- n Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'
- n Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen number if available.
- n Additional sightings of the same bird, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, local recorder and/or others.

The table of records is followed by the main text of the species account. As in the 2005–08 report, certain species totals are said to be adjusted from Forrester *et al.* (2007). These adjustments have been occasioned for the most part by small discrepancies between the published totals in the species texts of Forrester *et al.* (2007) and the database of records used to compile the graphs and tables in the same publication.

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

## Species coverage

In terms of species coverage, the main difference between this report and the last one is that it includes records for two species previously assessed by BBRC: White-billed Diver and Cattle Egret. For both these species, SBRC assumed responsibility for the assessment of records in Scotland as from 1 January 2009. The same applies to Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*, but in this case no records were accepted by either BBRC or SBRC during the period 2004–09. Given the known presence of a small breeding population in Scotland, this represents an anomaly. To compensate for this anomaly in a pragmatic manner, it has been decided that in future SBRC will not ask to see submissions from recording areas in the immediate vicinity of the core breeding range, except at the local recorder's discretion. At the same time, it is believed that assessment of the status of Parrot Crossbill in the broader Scottish context demands a parallel assessment of the status of Scottish Crossbill. With this in mind, SBRC has defined a geographical area within which it would like to assess all claims of the latter species. Full details are given in the species accounts.

No species were removed from the SBRC list at the end of 2008, although local committees in the Northern Isles took over the assessment of records of Red-throated Pipit as from 1 January 2009. However, 2009 was the last year for which SBRC assessed records of American Golden Plover and Ring-billed Gull, which will in future be assessed locally. The same applies to Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* in the Outer Hebrides (see Appendix 2).

Rare subspecies of several species on the SBRC list are still assessed by BBRC. The most numerous examples are Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and Arctic Redpoll. For both of these, the accounts in this report summarise accepted BBRC records in order to give as complete a picture as possible of the species' occurrence in Scotland.

The most significant omission from the report is Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*. The review of all Scottish records of this species is nearing completion and the results will be made available shortly on the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) website ([www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm)). A full account will then appear in the next report.

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in Appendix 1, while Appendix 2 summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC list. Appendix 3 consists of corrections to the last report.

At the request of local recorders, SBRC also assessed individual records of species not on the SBRC list during 2009. These records are not listed below but may have been published in local reports if accepted.

## SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the SOC Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current members are Alan Brown (chairman), Tristan ap Rheinallt, John Bowler, Mark Chapman, Alan Lauder, Hywel Maggs and John Sweeney, with Bob McGowan as non-voting museum consultant. In addition, Chris McInerney served on the committee prior to taking over the position of non-voting secretary from Angus Hogg in November 2009. The *Scottish List* subcommittee consists of Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerney and Roger Riddington. For more information about SBRC, see ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a) and [www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm).

## Acknowledgements

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

Next, we thank the following local recorders, co-recorders and report compilers for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Paul Baxter, Mark Chapman, Paul Collin, Jon Cook, Jim Dickson, Angus Hogg, Hugh Insley, Chris Pendlebury, Mike Pennington, Brian Rabbitts, Deryk Shaw, Malcolm Ware, Jim Williams and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the cooperation of the three Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas.

We thank Ian Andrews for making available the database of records of scarce and rare species used during the preparation of Forrester *et al.* (2007), and also for creating the graphics. David Jardine and Ron Summers provided valuable information and comments on crossbills, while Gwion ap Rheinallt helped with data checking.

We would like to express our special thanks to Angus Hogg, former SBRC secretary, who, although he did not participate directly in the production of this report, managed the assessment process for most of the featured records.

## Systematic list of accepted records

### Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* 15: 4: 1

**Table 1.** Accepted records of Ferruginous Duck in Scotland, 2009.

Fife Loch Gelly, adult male, 26 July to 2 September, photo (J.S. Nadin *et al.*).

Ferruginous Duck continues to be a very rare visitor to Scotland. Initial sightings of the few accepted individuals are scattered through the year, leading to a poorly defined pattern of occurrence.

The Fife individual arrived during the late-summer moult period and may have been the same as that seen at Loch Gelly in July and August 2006. However, with a three-year gap separating the two sightings, it is probably best to treat them as involving different birds.

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



Plate 95. Ferruginous Duck, adult male, Loch Gelly, Fife, 26 July to 2 September. © John Nadin



**White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* 196: 91: 18****Table 2.** Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2009, with a summary of earlier records since 2005.

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<b>Argyll</b>	Laggan Bay, Mull, 1 March (A. Carroll, C. Stevenson).
<b>Highland</b>	Loch Ewe, Ross & Cromarty, two, 11 April (T.P. Drew, M.A. Wilkinson), increasing to five on 12 April (A. & C. Carroll).
<b>North-east Scotland</b>	Girdleness, 12 May (M. Lewis).
<b>Orkney</b>	Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, adult, 6 April (R.J. Butcher <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Orkney</b>	Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, adult, 15 April, photo (R.J. Butcher <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Orkney</b>	Hunda Sound, adult, 5 October, photo (G. Cannon).
<b>Outer Hebrides</b>	Port Nis (Port of Ness) to Sgiogarstaigh (Skigersta), Lewis, at least seven, 12–26 April, photo (B.A.E. Marr <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Shetland</b>	Kirkabister, Mainland, adult (returning), 1 January to 18 April, since 29 October 2008 (Hudson <i>et al.</i> 2009).
<b>Shetland</b>	Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), 15 February to 25 April, photo (B.H. Thomason); presumed same as one of two Bluemull Sound birds below.
<b>Shetland</b>	Mousa Sound, adult, 26 April (M. Heubeck, R.M. Mellor, H. Moncrieff).
<b>Shetland</b>	Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), 16 November (B.H. Thomason).
<b>Shetland</b>	Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), 11 December (B.H. Thomason).

**2008 BBRC**

28 birds: **Caithness** 1, **Highland** 5, **Moray & Nairn** 1, **North-east Scotland** 1, **Orkney** 7, **Outer Hebrides** 8, **Shetland** 5.

**2007 BBRC**

22 birds: **Borders** 1, **Orkney** 2, **North-east Scotland** 1, **Outer Hebrides** 6, **Shetland** 12.

**2006 BBRC**

16 birds: **Highland** 1, **North-east Scotland** 1, **Orkney** 3, **Outer Hebrides** 6, **Shetland** 4, **Sea area Irish Sea** 1.

**2005 BBRC**

25 birds: **Argyll** 1, **Highland** 2, **Moray & Nairn** 1, **Orkney** 1, **Outer Hebrides** 15, **Shetland** 5.

White-billed Diver is a rare but annual visitor to Scotland, seen in small numbers each year, with most records off the north-west coast and in Shetland. Some preferred localities are used each year in spring, and there is growing evidence that birds use these sites as regular stop-overs between their wintering and summering areas (Scott & Shaw 2008).

Records were assessed for the first time by SBRC in 2009, following a decision by BBRC to remove the species from the list of British rarities as from the end of 2008 (Rowlands 2009). This reflects an increase in the number of birds seen annually in Great Britain. In Scotland at least, this increase is probably a result of better observer coverage in key areas, leading to an improved understanding of the pattern of occurrence (Scott & Shaw 2008). The total number of individuals seen in Scotland was 196 to the end of 2004 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007), increasing by more than half to 305 by the end of 2009.

The 2009 records come from typical localities, with some involving long-staying or presumed returning individuals. A count of seven would have raised eyebrows in the past but is now perhaps to be expected, especially coming from the Sgiogarstaigh (Skigersta) 'hot-spot' on Lewis (Outer Hebrides). Because some returnees may not have been identified as such, the true number of birds could be less than the totals suggest. On the other hand, it is thought that some records of apparent long-staying individuals in Shetland during spring may involve more than one bird (M.S. Chapman, pers. comm.).

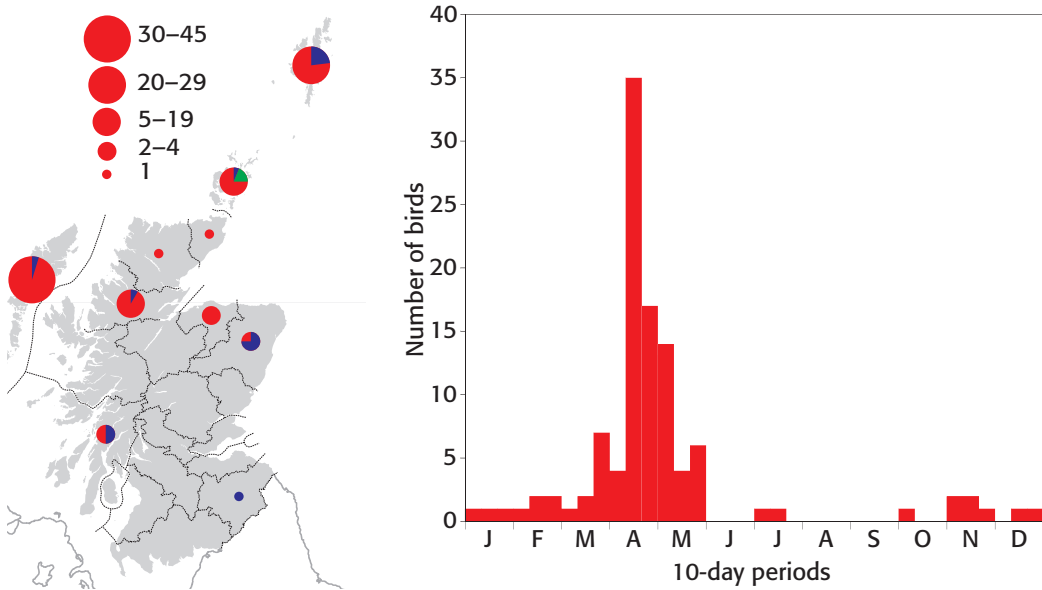


Figure 1. Distribution by recording area and seasonal occurrence of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2005–09. Red = March–June, blue = November–February, green = July–October.

Highland, the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles accounted for 98 of the 109 records during the period 2005–09. There was a very pronounced spring peak, with maximum numbers in April. This peak was if anything even more marked on the west side of the country, suggesting a difference in migration routes between spring and autumn as proposed by Hudson *et al.* (2009).

White-billed Diver is globally rare and was recently upgraded to ‘near threatened’ on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list (IUCN 2010) following a decline in numbers, particularly in Russia. Even small numbers of birds around Scotland may therefore be of some conservation significance.

(Breeds in parts of Arctic Russia, Alaska and Arctic Canada; winters on the Pacific coasts of Russia and Canada as well as along the coast of Norway.)

### **Cory’s Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* c. 228: 20: 2**

**Table 3.** Accepted records of Cory’s Shearwater in Scotland, 2009.

Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 14 September (P.J. Donnelly).  
Orkney Marwick Head, Birsay, Mainland, 29 October (K. Fairclough).

Cory’s Shearwater is recorded near-annually in Scottish waters, with most birds seen off North Ronaldsay (Orkney) and the Outer Hebrides. The 2009 total of only two birds is low given the increase in sightings since the mid-1990s, but their location further underlines Orkney’s status as a favoured area for observations of this species.

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

**Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* c. 522 (1950–2004): 9,208: 6** (excluding ‘at sea’ records)**Table 4.** Accepted records of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2009.

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<b>Orkney</b> Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 31 August (P.A. Brown).
<b>Orkney</b> Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, two, 17 September (P.A. Brown, R.J. Butcher).
<b>Orkney</b> Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 18 September (P.A. Brown).
<b>Orkney</b> Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 30 September (P.A. Brown, R.J. Butcher).
<b>Outer Hebrides</b> Labost, Lewis, 9 September (T. ap Rheinallt).
<b>Sea area Fair Isle</b> c. 20 km east of Fetlar, seven, 27 August, photo (E. Mouat per D. Coutts).

Great Shearwater was a rare bird in Scotland through most of its recorded history up to 2004, but its perceived status had to be revised following the large number of sightings during 2005–07. It is almost exclusively an autumn visitor, with most sightings from islands.

Although 2009 would have been regarded as a significant year by earlier standards, it does not compare with 2006 or 2007. It remains to be seen whether it now represents a normal showing for the species.

The distribution of 2009 records emphasises the importance of North Ronaldsay’s Dennis Head as a key Scottish site for this species. As with similar records in 2007 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a), the seven birds in Sea area Fair Isle are omitted from the totals above, although they do form part of the Shetland county totals.

The bird on Lewis was the only one accepted in the Outer Hebrides in 2009. Nonetheless, based on the large numbers seen in this recording area in other recent years, records of Great Shearwater in the Outer Hebrides from 1 January 2010 are to be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (see Appendix 2).

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

**Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* 2: 8: 8****Table 5.** Accepted records of Continental Cormorant in Scotland, 2009.

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<b>Lothian</b> Musselburgh, adult, 7 June, photo (K. Gillon, C. Scott <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Lothian</b> Musselburgh, two adults, 1 August, photo (K. Gillon <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>North-east Scotland</b> Stonehaven, adult, 27 March, photo (M.A. Maher).
<b>Shetland</b> Lochs of Hillwell & Spiggie, Mainland, at least four adults, 20 April to 11 June, photo (R. Riddington <i>et al.</i> ).

Continental Cormorant is a rare visitor to Scotland, with most records along the east coast or in Shetland between December and June. However, reliable identification criteria for this subspecies, based mainly on the gular pouch angle and related features, have only been established relatively recently (Newson *et al.* 2004, 2005), and it is likely to have been under-recorded in the past. There are only two accepted Scottish sightings prior to 2004: one in Moray & Nairn in 1998–99 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a), and one in Borders in 2002 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The 2009 records reported here bring the total number of birds accepted in Scotland to 18. Regular sightings through the spring at the Lochs of Hillwell & Spiggie (Shetland) resulted in an estimate of a minimum of four individuals, but more may have been involved (Riddington 2010).

With identification now on a much sounder footing, it is likely that a pattern of occurrence will start to emerge from the rather broad range of dates seen so far. The August 2009 birds are of particular interest in falling outwith the date range of previous records. Now that it is understood



Plate 96–97. Continental Cormorant (bottom) and Atlantic Cormorant (top), adults, Musselburgh, Lothian, 7 June. Purple lines indicate the gular pouch angles of each bird, which are different in the two subspecies and represent a crucial identification feature. © Keith Gillon

that reliable identification does not hinge on the presence of white head plumes, seen only in spring, perhaps we shall see more autumn records in future.

Rare subspecies with more than 20 Scottish records are not normally assessed by SBRC. In the case of Continental Cormorant this threshold seems likely to be exceeded soon. Should this happen by the time the 2010 SBRC report is published, then Continental Cormorant will be removed from the SBRC list as of 1 January 2013.

(*P. c. sinensis* breeds throughout central and southern Europe and has expanded recently into parts of northern Europe; outside the breeding season it occurs both inland and on coasts through much of Europe, including England. *P. c. carbo* breeds in north-west Europe including Iceland, Norway and the British Isles.)

### Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 46: 6: 0

**Table 6.** Revised record of Night-heron in Scotland, 2008.

2008

Fair Isle Various locations, two adults (including one male), 5–13 April, both died (M.J. Breaks, S.J. Davies *et al.*); partial skeletons, head and wing preserved, NMS.Z 2009.148.1–3; note revised dates and observers' names (*cf.* ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, see also Breaks 2009).

### Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* 3: 3: 1

**Table 7.** Accepted records of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2009, with a summary of earlier records since 2005.

Argyll Ballimartin, Islay, 23 October to 6 November, photo *Scottish Birds* 30: 187 (M. Anderson, E. MacArthur *et al.*).

2007 BBRC

3 birds: Caithness 1, Dumfries & Galloway 1, Outer Hebrides 1.

Cattle Egret is a very rare bird in Scotland, with just three records of single birds to the end of 2004 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This total was doubled in 2007, when one on the Outer Hebrides in August was followed by others in Caithness in September and Dumfries & Galloway in December. Although it is possible that the same individual was responsible for all these occurrences, many birds were at large farther south in Britain during the same period.

The 2009 Islay (Argyll) individual constitutes the 7th for Scotland, and the first since SBRC took over the assessment of Scottish records from BBRC on 1 January 2009. The species has rapidly expanded its range within Europe, along with other egrets and herons, and it bred in England for the first time in 2008 (Hudson *et al.* 2009). The steep increase in the frequency of records in southern Britain and Ireland may result in more Scottish sightings in coming years.

(Occurs commonly in sub-tropical and temperate areas throughout the world, the European population being centred on the Mediterranean, extending north to central and western France, with increasing numbers of records farther north. Generally a short-distance migrant.)

### Great White Egret *Ardea alba* 37: 13: 13

**Table 8.** Accepted records of Great White Egret in Scotland, 2009.

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<b>Angus &amp; Dundee</b>	Monikie & Forfar Lochs, 14 December (A. Brennan, T. Castleton, B. McCurley).
<b>Clyde</b>	Larkhall & Baron's Haugh, 7 February, photo (J. McKechnie per I. English, M. Molloy).
<b>Clyde</b>	Gilmourton Ponds, Strathaven, 24 February to 8 March, photo (A. Boyd, M. Taylor, K. Thomson <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Clyde</b>	Knapps Loch, Kilmacollm, 16–17 May, photo (E. & J.A. Cumming, E. Williams <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Fife</b>	Kilconquhar Loch, 6–12 December, photo (M. Ramage <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>North-east Scotland</b>	Loch of Strathbeg, 30 April to 3 May, photo (D. Goulder, D. Parnaby <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>North-east Scotland</b>	Loch of Strathbeg, 28–30 June (D. Parnaby <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>North-east Scotland</b>	Durris Bridge, Banchory, 5 November (S. Willis).
<b>North-east Scotland</b>	Loch of Strathbeg, 11–17 November, photo (R. MacLean, D. Funnell, D. Parnaby <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>North-east Scotland</b>	Inchgarth Reservoir, Cults, 21 December (I. Broadbent).
<b>Orkney</b>	Graemeshall Loch, Mainland, 5–18 July, photo (K.E. Hague <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Shetland</b>	Brow Marsh, Mainland, 29 April to 2 May, photo (M.S. Chapman <i>et al.</i> ).
<b>Shetland</b>	Tirsa Water & Sandwater, Mainland, 4–8 August, photo (G. Carle, M.S. Chapman <i>et al.</i> ).

Great White Egret is a rare but increasingly frequent visitor to Scotland, with sightings in most areas and most months. It is likely that some duplication of records occurs, as these large white birds move around between sites, are highly visible, and are relatively easy to observe. Such duplication could well have occurred in North-east Scotland, for example, in 2009.

With this reservation, the 13 accepted individuals in 2009 represent a record number for Scotland and make up more than 20% of the total to date. While impressive, this figure is perhaps not surprising given the rapid range expansion of this and other egret species across Europe.

Sightings of Great White Egrets in Scotland are thought to result from a combination of overshooting in spring, dispersal in autumn, and over-wintering. The dates of the 2009 records cover the full spectrum of possibilities.

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

### Black Kite *Milvus migrans* 19: 3: 1

**Table 9.** Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2009.

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<b>Shetland</b>	Sandwick, Channerwick, Bigton & Fladdabister, Mainland, adult, 27 April to 5 May, photo (J.G. Brown, G.A. Tyler <i>et al.</i> ).
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Black Kite is a rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most individuals have been seen in spring, from April to June, with just a handful of sightings later in the season, though there have also been instances of summering and a single case of hybridisation with Red Kite *Milvus milvus*.



**Plate 98.** Black Kite, adult, Sandwick, Channerwick, Bigton & Fladdabister, Mainland, Shetland, 27 April to 5 May. © Jim Nicolson

The Black Kite seen in Shetland over an eight-day period in spring 2009 was the third for the recording area. There have only been two other April birds in Scotland: one on 7 April 1995 in Lothian, and one on 18 April 2001 in North-east Scotland.

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

**Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* 45: 0: 1** (excluding young from known Scottish nests)

**Table 10.** Accepted records of Montagu's Harrier in Scotland, 2009.

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**North-east Scotland** Forvie NNR, female, 16–17 May (P. Bloor, I.J. Kelman *et al.*).

Montagu's Harrier is an extremely rare migrant to Scotland, mostly occurring in spring in North-east Scotland, Angus & Dundee and Perth & Kinross. There have been a few successful breeding attempts, though none more recently than 1955 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The total of 45 birds to the end of 2004 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007) excludes fledged young from these breeding attempts.

Since 2000, Montagu's Harrier has occurred five times in Scotland and all but one of the birds have appeared in the latter half of May, a pattern reflecting the timing of peak spring passage. The 2009 record was the third from North-east Scotland in the decade and followed five blank years for the species in Scotland.

(Breeds from North Africa, Iberia, England, and Sweden across continental Europe and central Asia to Yenisei River; winters in African savannas and on the Indian subcontinent.)

**Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* c. 325 (1968–2004): 17: 4****Table 11.** Accepted records of Rough-legged Buzzard in Scotland, 2009.

**Highland** Gordonbush Estate, Sutherland, 27 April (D. Douglas).  
**North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, 19 May (D. Parnaby).  
**North-east Scotland** Blackdog, 7 November, photo (N.A. Littlewood).  
**Orkney** Lyde Road, Harray, Mainland, 3 May (R.E. Matson, E.J. & S.J. Williams *et al.*).

Rough-legged Buzzard is a scarce passage migrant in Scotland, occurring mostly on the eastern side of the country and in the Northern Isles, with numbers generally higher in autumn than in spring. In addition, a few birds overwinter. Some 342 individuals were seen between 1968 and 2008 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007 and ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a).

The four records for 2009 conform to the established geographical distribution. The three spring records spanned a three-week period, with just a single occurrence in autumn.

Although claims of Rough-legged Buzzard generally have one of the highest rejection rates among species assessed by SBRC (Forrester *et al.* 2007, ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a), no records were rejected during 2009.

(Holarctic, with four subspecies; nominate *lagopus* breeds from Scandinavia east to Siberia and migrates south to winter in an area extending from France to central Asia. *B. l. sanctijohannis* from North America is a potential vagrant to Scotland.)

**Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* 81: 8: 0****Table 12.** Revised record of Red-footed Falcon in Scotland, 2008.

2008

**Shetland** Bixter, Mainland, first-summer female, 2–3 June, photo (M. Henry *et al.*); note revised dates (*cf.* ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a).

Red-footed Falcon is mainly a rare late-spring migrant to Scotland with no more than one or two accepted individuals in most years. Most sightings come from Shetland and Orkney. There were none in 2009, but BBRC has recently accepted a record from Strathy, Sutherland on 6 June 2003 (Hudson *et al.* 2010), bringing the total in Scotland for that year to three. The all-time total of birds seen in Scotland therefore increases from 88 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a) to 89.

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

**Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus* 30: 0: 1****Table 13.** Accepted records of Stone-curlew in Scotland, 2009.

**Fair Isle** Meoness & Kirk, 24 May, photo (D. Riley, D.N. Shaw *et al.*).

Stone-curlew is a very rare visitor to Scotland with just 30 accepted records to the end of 2004 (adjusted from Forrester *et al.* 2007, with a sighting in Dumfries & Galloway in July 2004 removed in the absence of supporting evidence). The Northern Isles account for 14 of these 30 records, with the remainder scattered across the country. There is a pronounced peak in occurrence in late May and early June (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The 2009 Fair Isle individual was the first to be accepted in Scotland since 2004. The date and location of the sighting corresponded well to the established pattern.



Plate 99. Stone-curlew, Meoness & Kirk, Fair Isle, 24 May. © Deryk Shaw

(Nominate *oediconemus* breeds in open habitats in southern Europe east to the Caucasus, extending as far north as England and Poland; migrates south to winter in Spain and North Africa. Five other subspecies.)

### **Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* 15: 2: 0**

**Table 14.** Additional record of Kentish Plover in Scotland, 2008.

2008

Lothian Aberlady Bay, male, 1–2 June, photo (M. Griffin *et al.*).

Kentish Plover is a very rare migrant in Scotland, first recorded only in 1949. Most records come from the east coast of the mainland and nearly all have been in spring.

Following the overwintering bird in the Outer Hebrides in 2007–08, the 2008 individual in Lothian was more typical in terms of date and location. Of the 15 Scottish spring records to date, six have been in April, seven in May and two in June. More birds (6) have been seen in Lothian than in any other recording area.

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

### **American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* 72: 49: 16**

**Table 15.** Accepted records of American Golden Plover in Scotland, 2009, with a revised record for 2008.

Argyll Barrapol & Sandaig, Tiree, adult, 14 September to 14 October, photo (J.M. Bowler *et al.*).

Argyll Sandaig, Tiree, adult, 1–14 October, photo (R. Ahmed *et al.*).

Argyll Loch a' Phuill, Tiree, adult, 1–2 October, photo (J.M. Bowler *et al.*).

Fife Guardbridge, juvenile, 11–18 October (A.R. Armstrong *et al.*).

Orkney Grindigar, Deerness, Mainland, adult, 21–30 September, photo (T. Dean, K.E. Hague *et al.*).

Orkney Bride's Ness & Kirbest, North Ronaldsay, adult, 24–25 September, photo (R.J. Butcher *et al.*).

Orkney Various locations, Deerness, Mainland, adult, 24 September to 13 October, photo (J. Branscombe, K.E. Hague *et al.*).

Orkney Grindigar & Watermoss, Deerness, Mainland, juvenile, 30 September to 23 October, photo (K.E. Hague *et al.*).

Orkney Watermoss & Waterfield, Deerness, Mainland, juvenile, 20–29 October, photo (K.E. Hague *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Loch Bi (Loch Bee), South Uist, adult, 4–17 September, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Eòropaidh (Eoropie), Lewis, adult, 20–22 September, photo (M.A. Maher, T.J. & S. Sykes *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Borgh (Borve), Berneray, North Uist, adult, 4 October (D.M. Bryant).

Outer Hebrides Baleshare, North Uist, adult, 10–15 October, photo (B. Rabbitts *et al.*).

Shetland Stennes, Eshaness, Mainland, adult, 20 September, photo (M.S. Chapman, R.W. Tait *et al.*).

Shetland Skaw, Unst, adult, 27–28 September (G. Armit, L. Nixon *et al.*).

Shetland Boddam, Mainland, juvenile, 9–17 October, photo (M.S. Chapman, D. Fairhurst *et al.*).

2008

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, juvenile, 29 September to 18 December, photo (D. Fairhurst *et al.*); note revised dates (*cf.* ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a).



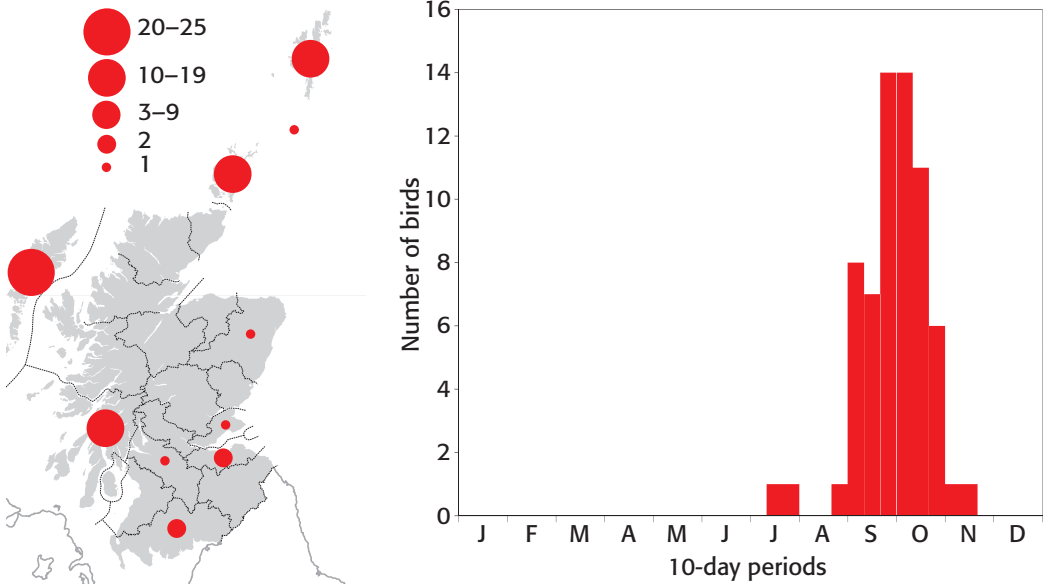


Figure 2. Distribution by recording area and seasonal occurrence of American Golden Plover in Scotland, 2005–09.

American Golden Plover is a rare but annual visitor to Scotland from the Nearctic, seen mostly on islands during August to October.

The high numbers recorded in Scotland over the previous five years were maintained in 2009. All occurrences were in September and October, and adults (12) tended to arrive earlier than juveniles (4). The single mainland record (Fife) was only the second for the recording area, and the other records were almost evenly split between the Northern Isles (8) and the Outer Hebrides and Tiree (Argyll) (7).

As from 1 January 2010, records of American Golden Plover in Scotland are to be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (see Appendix 2).

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

**White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* 69: 43: 1**

**Table 16.** Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2009, with a revised record for 2007.

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 1–9 October (D. Funnell *et al.*).

2007

North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary, adult, 29–31 July (A.J. Whitehouse *et al.*); note revised dates and observers' names (*cf.* ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a).

White-rumped Sandpiper is a rare but nowadays annual visitor to Scotland from North America, with nearly all records in autumn.

There was only a single occurrence in 2009, a bird observed in early October at Loch of Strathbeg (North-east Scotland). This compares with an annual average of more than ten birds during the previous four years.

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

## Continental Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa* 0: 0: 1

**Table 17.** Accepted records of Continental Black-tailed Godwit in Scotland, 2009.

Argyll Loch an Eilein & Heylipol, Tiree, first-summer, 6–7 May, photo (J.M. Bowler).

The vast majority of Black-tailed Godwits that breed in Scotland or occur on passage are considered to belong to the subspecies *islandica*. There has been little evidence in the past to support the conjecture that birds of the nominate subspecies might also occur (Forrester *et al.* 2007), although a pair that probably bred in Dumfries & Galloway in 2005 was thought most likely to belong to this subspecies (Holling *et al.* 2008).

In May 2009, routine scanning of a small flock of Black-tailed Godwits on Tiree (Argyll) yielded an unexpected bonus for the observer when the leg-flag of one bird indicated that it had been ringed as a chick a year earlier in the Netherlands (Bowler 2010). Ringing data and plumage and structural characters, in conjunction with the absence of breeding records of *islandica* in the Netherlands, led to acceptance of this claim as the first proven occurrence of nominate *limosa* in Scotland.

(*L. l. limosa* breeds from western and central Europe to Asia and Russia, east to the Yenisei River, and winters in the Mediterranean, sub-Saharan Africa and India. *L. l. islandica* breeds in Iceland, the Lofoten Islands, the Faroe Islands and Scotland, wintering in the British Isles, France and Iberia.)

## Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* 132: 29: 1

**Table 18.** Accepted records of Ring-billed Gull in Scotland, 2009.

Angus & Dundee Dundee, adult, 2 December 2008 to 25 February, photo *Scottish Birds* 29: 282 (R. McCurley *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a).

Argyll Oban, adult (returning), 16 August 2008 to 1 April, photo (W. Allan, S. Gibson *et al.*), note revised dates (*cf.* ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a); same, 12 October to 8 December (W. Allan *et al.*).

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult (returning), 1–10 March, photo (D. Abraham, D. Stewart *et al.*).

Upper Forth Kinneil Lagoon, adult (returning), 14 August 2008 to 10 February, photo (R. Shand *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a); same, 5 September to 25 October (D. Thorogood *et al.*).

Undisclosed site Adult, 13–17 June, attempted breeding with Common Gull, photo *Scottish Birds* 30: 31 (P.J. Barden *et al.*).

Ring-billed Gull is a rare visitor to Scotland, with most observations on islands along the west side of the country. Birds are typically seen from January to April in flocks of migrating Common Gulls. A few individuals have returned to the same locations over a number of years.

The most striking occurrence in 2009 was an instance of attempted breeding, the first to be recorded for this species in the UK. It involved a bird paired with a Common Gull, but although an occupied nest was observed, it appears that the breeding attempt was unsuccessful (Barden 2010).

Considering the large number of sightings of this species during 2005–08, it is surprising that only four other individuals were observed in 2009. Two of these were birds that had arrived in 2008 and stayed to winter, and the other two were returning birds from previous years. Thus it appears that there were no new arrivals of passage migrants in Scotland during 2009.

As with American Golden Plover, 2009 was the last year that records of Ring-billed Gull were assessed by SBRC (see Appendix 2).

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

**Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* 0: 3: 1**

**Table 19.** Accepted records of Caspian Gull in Scotland, 2009.

North-east Scotland Ugie Estuary, Peterhead, first-winter, 10 January (C. Gibbins *et al.*).

Caspian Gull is extremely rare in Scotland, observed on just three occasions up to the end of 2008. All three occurrences involved first-winter birds in late autumn or winter. Following this pattern, another first-winter bird was found in mid-winter during 2009, on this occasion in North-east Scotland. It was the first for the recording area.

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

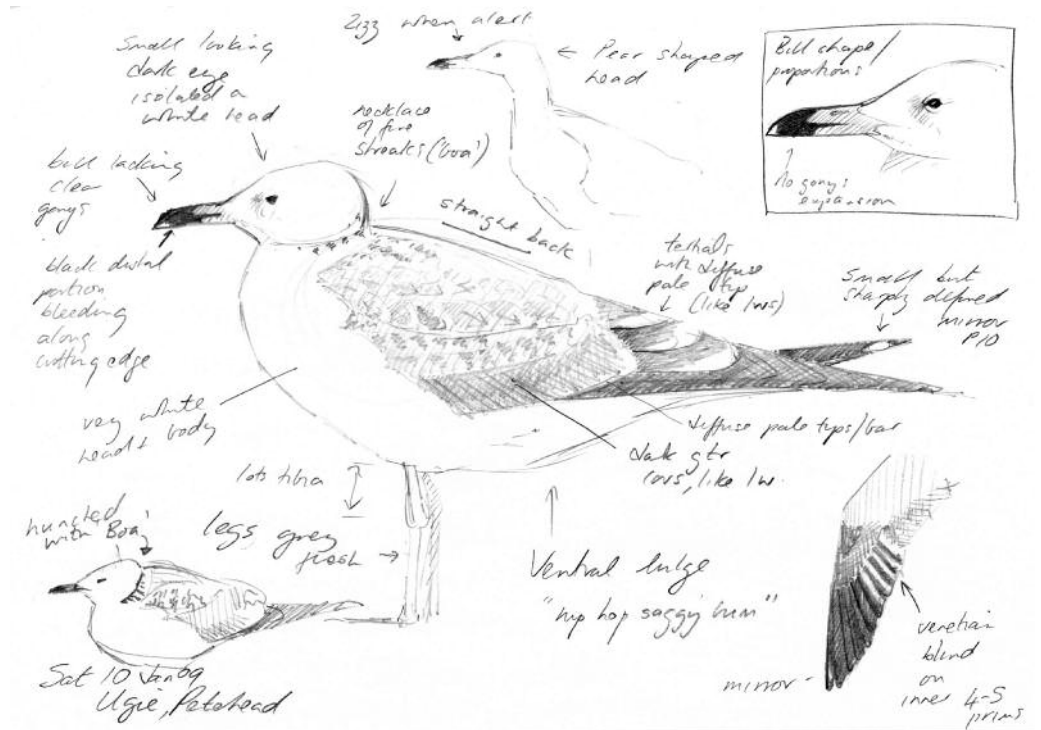


Plate 100. Caspian Gull, first-winter, Ugie Estuary, Peterhead, North-east Scotland, 10 January. © Chris Gibbins

**White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* 59: 8: 2**

**Table 20.** Accepted records of White-winged Black Tern in Scotland, 2009.

Fife Guardbridge, adult, 18 May, photo (A.R. Armstrong *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, first-winter, 29 August to 2 September (D. Pamaby *et al.*).

White-winged Black Tern is a rare visitor to Scotland, mostly observed along the east side of the country between late spring and late autumn. Both records in 2009 fit well with this established pattern of occurrence.

(Breeds on marshy lakes in central and eastern Palearctic areas, migrating south to winter in Australasia, the Indian subcontinent and Africa.)

### Alpine Swift *Apus melba* 34: 0: 1

**Table 21.** Accepted records of Alpine Swift in Scotland, 2009.

Outer Hebrides Barabhas (Barvas), Lewis, 30 May (M.S. Scott).

Alpine Swift is a very rare visitor to Scotland, with most records between mid-April and late July. Spring occurrences are thought to involve overshoots from breeding grounds on the Continent, while those in summer presumably relate to wandering non-breeders. Autumn records are fewer. The Northern Isles account for almost a third of records, with most of the remainder coming from other islands or the mainland coast (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Until 2005, records of Alpine Swift in Scotland were considered by BBRC, but the species was removed from the BBRC list in January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007a), with SBRC then taking over. There were no accepted records in the period 2005–08, and the bird on Lewis (Outer Hebrides) in 2009 was the first for Scotland since 2003.

(Ten subspecies. Breeds in southern Europe from Iberia to the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and Africa, with northern populations moving south to winter.)

### Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* 86: 7: 1

**Table 22.** Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2009.

Shetland Skaw, Unst, juvenile, 18 September, photo (M. Kerby *et al.*).

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland. Most birds are seen in the Northern Isles, where autumn juveniles predominate. Thus the sole 2009 record was typical of the general pattern.

(Nominate *senator* breeds from north-west Africa, Iberia, France and Belgium south to Turkey; *L. s. badius* on Mediterranean islands; and *L. s. niloticus* from Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

### Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* 286: 28: 5

**Table 23.** Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2009. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 23a.

Angus & Dundee Seaton Cliffs, Arbroath, 2–17 January, photo (R. Bramhall *et al.*).



**Plate 101.** Short-toed Lark, Seaton Cliffs, Arbroath, Angus & Dundee, 2–17 January. © John Anderson

Short-toed Lark is found annually in Scotland in very small numbers, mostly in spring and autumn, with almost all observations in the Northern Isles. It is very rare elsewhere, particularly on the mainland.

In 2009, the only sighting away from the Northern Isles involved a bird in Angus & Dundee in January. This was the first winter record for

Scotland. In the Northern Isles, where records are judged locally, one was found on Fair Isle, two in Shetland, and one on North Ronaldsay (Orkney). All these birds were seen during the autumn migration period, between 2 October and 4 November.

**Table 23a.** Summary of accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2009.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	-	1	-	14–16 October
Orkney	-	1	-	19 Oct–4 Nov
Shetland	-	2	-	2 Oct–1 Nov

(Eight or nine subspecies. Breeds widely in dry, sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to the Middle East and western China, with populations migrating to winter in India, the Middle East and Africa.)

### Woodlark *Lullula arborea* 68 (1950–2004): 6: 5

**Table 24.** Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2009.

**Fair Isle** Neder Taft & Quoy, up to three, 23 October to 2 November, photo (S.J. Davies, D.N. Shaw *et al.*).  
**Orkney** Westness & Kirbest, North Ronaldsay, 31 October to 7 November, photo (R.J. Butcher *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Brough, Whalsay, 23–24 October, photo *Scottish Birds* 30: 190 (J. Atkinson *et al.*).

Although there has been a slight increase in sightings in recent years, Woodlark remains a rare bird in Scotland, found almost exclusively in the Northern Isles in late autumn and early winter. All three records in 2009 conformed to this pattern, but the Fair Isle one is unusual in that it involved three birds seen and photographed together. This is the largest group observed in Scotland since 1950, though small parties occurred on Fair Isle in the early part of the 20th century.

(Two subspecies breed from the Middle East across to Morocco, extending north as far as Finland, Norway and England north to Yorkshire, where the population is increasing. Most populations move south to wintering areas, with more northerly populations moving the farthest.)

### Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* 40: 12: 7

**Table 25.** Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2009.

**Borders** Eyemouth, juvenile, 18–24 November, photo (J. Ellison *et al.*).  
**Fair Isle** Hesti Geo, Shalstane & Hesswalls, 20 April to 3 May, photo (A. Seward *et al.*).  
**Fife** Kilmany, 28–30 April, photo *Scottish Birds* 30: 95 (A. Cage *et al.*).  
**Fife** Kilconquhar Loch, 18 May (C.J. McInerney *et al.*).  
**Fife** Kilminning, 28 October, photo (W. McBay, J.S. Nadin *et al.*).  
**Highland** Balblair, Sutherland, 8 November, photo (M. Finn *et al.*).  
**Lothian** Aberlady Village & Gosford Estate, 3–5 November, photo (I.J. Andrews, J. Harrison, P. Johnson *et al.*).

Red-rumped Swallow is seen annually in Scotland in very small numbers from April through to November along the east coast and on islands.

The three sightings in Fife in 2009 were the first for the recording area. Plumage features suggested that the two spring birds were likely to be different individuals. The bird in Highland was also the first for the recording area, while the sighting in Borders in November was the latest ever in Scotland.

(Eleven or 12 subspecies. Breeds widely from southern and eastern Europe eastwards across the Palearctic region, and in sub-Saharan Africa. Northern populations are migratory, wintering in Africa and southern Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western areas.)

### **Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* 158: 16: 4**

**Table 26.** Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2009. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in the text.

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**North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, 4 September (D. Funnell, D. Parnaby, H. Regan).

Greenish Warbler is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland, having become increasingly regular in autumn over the past few decades. It is generally seen in August and September, with more than 80% of sightings in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally.

The single record away from the Northern Isles in 2009 was at a typical east-coast location on a typical date. In addition, there were three birds on Fair Isle during a two-week period in early autumn, between 17 August and 3 September.

(*P. t. viridanus* breeds from the Baltic east through Russia to the Yenisei and south to Afghanistan, and winters in the Indian subcontinent and south-east Asia. There are a very few records of *P. t. plumbeitarsus* (eastern Siberia) in England.)

### **Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* 46: 4: 3**

**Table 27.** Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2009.

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**Angus & Dundee** Easthaven, 22 October (R. Bramhall *et al.*).

**Fife** Fife Ness Muir, 23 October, photo (D.E. Dickson *et al.*).

**North-east Scotland** Girdleness, 23 October (N. Picozzi, R.A. Schofield, B.H. Thomason *et al.*).

Radde's Warbler is a very rare autumn visitor to Scotland, with the majority of occurrences in the Northern Isles and the remainder along the east coast.

Unusually, all sightings during 2009 were on the mainland. The dates of these three birds, all of which were found within a two-day period, are late but by no means unprecedented. Short stays are typical of this species.

(Breeds from southern Siberia east to Sakhalin and North Korea; migrates to winter in southern China and south-east Asia.)

### **Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* 60: 8: 1**

Dusky Warbler is a rare but more or less annual visitor to Scotland, with the autumn migration period accounting for all records but one. Like Radde's Warbler, it occurs mainly in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. Nearly all other sightings have been on the east coast.

The only Scottish record in 2009 came from Shetland, where one was photographed at Sandwick, Whalsay, on 5 November. Several previous occurrences have been in early November, the latest date being the 15th.

(Breeds from western Siberia to China, wintering from the Himalayas to south China; two subspecies, with European vagrants belonging to nominate *fuscatus*.)

**Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* 194: 25: 5**

**Table 28.** Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler in Scotland, 2009. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 28a.

North-east Scotland Forvie NNR, female, 18 May, photo (C. Reid, D. Short *et al.*).

Subalpine Warbler occurs annually in Scotland as a rare migrant, mainly in spring. The overwhelming majority of birds are seen in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. BBRC assesses claims of subspecies other than nominate *S. c. cantillans*.

The female at Forvie NNR in May 2009 was the first to be seen on the Scottish mainland since 2005, and the fifth for North-east Scotland. All four birds in the Northern Isles were also in spring, and all were males. The Fair Isle individual and two of those from Shetland were accepted as belonging to the nominate subspecies, while the subspecific identity of the remainder was undetermined.

**Table 28a.** Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2009.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	1	-	21 May	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	3	-	22 Apr–31 May	-

In addition to these birds, claims from Shetland of both *S. c. albistriata* and *S. c. moltonii* (Pennington 2010) have been submitted to BBRC.

(*S. c. cantillans* breeds from Iberia to Italy; *S. c. albistriata* from the Balkans to Turkey; *S. c. moltonii* in the Balearics, Corsica, Sardinia and northern Italy. Migrates to winter in the sub-Saharan Sahel.)

**Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* many: c. 145: 35**

**Table 29.** Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2009. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 29a.

Angus & Dundee Springfield Park, Arbroath, male in song, 1 June, photo (R. Bramwell).

Marsh Warbler is a scarce annual migrant to Scotland with most occurrences involving singing males in late spring; very rarely, birds remain to breed. The Northern Isles account for the overwhelming majority of records.

Only a single individual was seen away from the Northern Isles in 2009, the location and date being typical. This compares with at least 34 in Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland, where records are assessed locally. As usual, autumn records in these islands were relatively few. They extended from late August into October, while spring birds were confined to the last few days of May and the month of June. Unlike 2005 and 2008, there were no reports of breeding.

**Table 29a.** Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2009.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	10+	1	31 May–30 Jun	1 September
Orkney	5	-	29 May–23 Jun	-
Shetland	13	5	24 May–28 Jun	28 Aug–11 Oct

Also, there are additional records from Shetland in 2007 (one bird in June) and 2008 (one in August) (*Shetland Bird Report 2009*), while records of three other birds in 2008 (two in August, one in September) (*Shetland Bird Report 2008*) have now been accepted. This increases the total number of Scottish records in the period 2005–08 from c. 140 to c. 145.

(Breeds in Britain, France, Denmark and Fennoscandia east through Europe to Russia; winters in sub-Equatorial Africa.)

### **Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* 139: 5: 2**

Nightingale is a very rare, but almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland. Spring records predominate, and Fair Isle and Shetland account for the vast majority of sightings.

In 2009, as in many other years, none were seen away from the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. One at Toab, Mainland (Shetland) on 28–29 April was followed by another on Fair Isle on 21–23 May.

(Nominate *megarhynchos* breeds from Morocco and western Europe through North Africa and southern and central Europe to the Ukraine and Turkey; *L. m. golzii* from the Aral Sea to Mongolia. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

### **Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* 142: 9: 1**

**Table 30.** Additional record of Red-throated Pipit in Scotland, 2008.

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2008

Outer Hebrides Pabbay, Barra Isles, 24 May (A. Stevenson).

Red-throated Pipit is a rare spring and autumn migrant in Scotland, found almost exclusively on islands, with most sightings on Fair Isle and Shetland.

The only Scottish individual in 2009 was seen on 18 May on Fair Isle, where records of this species are now judged locally. The date coincides closely with that of the additional 2008 record reported here. Mid- to late May is the peak period for this species and is indicative of spring overshoots.

(Breeds widely in northern boreal Palearctic regions, migrating to winter in Africa and south-east Asia.)

### **Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* 86: 13: 9**

**Table 31.** Accepted records of Water Pipit in Scotland, 2009, with an additional record for 2008.

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Ayrshire Bracken Bay, 8–9 November (A. Hogg *et al.*).

Ayrshire Seamill, 30 December to 21 March 2010, photo (A. Hogg, J. McManus *et al.*).

Ayrshire Girvan, 31 December to 8 January 2010, photo (A. Hogg *et al.*).

Clyde Crom Mhin Marsh, Endrick Mouth NNR, 1 December 2008 to 25 March, one of two present on former date, photo (I. Fulton, C.J. McInerney, J.J. Sweeney *et al.*), see also ap Rheinnallt *et al.* (2010b).

Dumfries & Galloway Rigg Bay, 22 January (P.N. Collin).

Fife Coble Shore, Eden Estuary, 29 March (M. Ware *et al.*).

Lothian Scoughall, 28 November, photo (K. Gillon, C. Scott).

Lothian Barns Ness, two, 6 December, with one remaining to 31 January 2010, photo (A. Brown, A. Hogg *et al.*).

Lothian Skateraw, 20 December, photo (N. Milligan).

2008

Lothian Musselburgh, 18 March, photo (B.D. Kerr, M. Thrower).





Plate 102. Water Pipit, Seamill, Ayrshire, 30 December 2009 to 21 March 2010. © Angus Hogg

Water Pipit is a rare winter visitor to Scotland, often found on beaches among seaweed. Its seasonal distribution features a late-autumn arrival and a secondary peak in spring. Most sightings to the end of 2008 were in Ayrshire and Lothian.

With nine new birds, 2009 becomes the second best year for this species in Scotland. The spatial and temporal pattern of sightings is very much in line with the established norm, with only two birds outwith Ayrshire and Lothian, and none during April to October. The Rigg Bay individual was the first to be accepted for Dumfries & Galloway.

(Nominate *spinoletta* breeds from highlands of Iberia to the Balkans and Turkey, dispersing widely in Europe in non-breeding season; two other Asian subspecies.)

### **Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* 366: 21: 22**

Arctic Redpoll is a rare though annual visitor to Scotland, most sightings prior to 2004 being referred to the subspecies *C. h. exilipes* (Coues's Redpoll), which tends to arrive in association with Mealy Redpolls (*C. f. flammea*). A major influx in winter 1995–96 was responsible for more than half of accepted Scottish records to date.

The subspecies *C. h. hornemanni* (Hornemann's Redpoll), which breeds in Greenland and parts of Arctic Canada, was in the past regarded as a very rare migrant, with no more than two Scottish records in any year prior to 2003. Of the 366 accepted Arctic Redpolls in Scotland to the end of 2004, 328 were referred to *exilipes* and the remainder regarded as probable or definite *hornemanni* (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The perception of *hornemanni* as by far the rarer of the two subspecies in Great Britain was reflected in BBRC's decision to consider records of this subspecies alone as from 1 January 2006 (Fraser *et al.* 2007b). SBRC assumed responsibility for the assessment of Scottish claims of *exilipes* and of birds not assigned to any subspecies, other than in the Northern Isles where records were to be assessed locally.

During the current decade, the relative status of the two subspecies in Scotland appears to have undergone a marked reversal. In the period 2005–09 there were 38 accepted *hornemanni* (Fraser *et al.* 2007c, Hudson *et al.* 2010) but only three accepted *exilipes* (Fraser *et al.* 2007b, Hudson *et al.* 2009, *Fair Isle Bird Observatory Report 2007*). In addition, two birds in Shetland were accepted as Arctic Redpolls of undetermined subspecies (*Shetland Bird Report 2007, 2008*).

The geographical distribution of sightings during 2005–09 corresponds to the pattern established for the species in previous years, with the Northern Isles accounting for 39 of the 43 records, and just one mainland bird, an *exilipes* in Lothian in 2005. Most of the accepted records of *hornemanni* were in autumn, mainly September and October, with a few in spring. None occurred during June to August, but the 2007 *exilipes* on Fair Isle was found in July, and one of the Shetland birds of undetermined subspecies in June.

**Table 32.** Accepted records of Arctic Redpoll in Scotland, 2005–09.

	<i>hornemanni</i>	<i>exilipes</i>	undetermined
2009	Orkney 3, Outer Hebrides 1, Shetland 18		
2008	Fair Isle 1, Outer Hebrides 2, Shetland 4		Shetland 1 (12–17 June)
2007	Shetland 5	Fair Isle 1 (19–22 July)	Shetland 1 (1–8 October)
2006	Fair Isle 1 (same as Shetland), Shetland 4		
2005		Fair Isle 1, Lothian 1	

Observers should be aware that very pale redpolls of the ‘North-western Redpoll’ complex *C. f. rostrata/islandica* may occur as autumn visitors in those areas where Hornemann’s Redpolls are also likely to be found. These are often labelled ‘*islandica*’ but their taxonomic status is not entirely clear. Both the British Ornithologists’ Union (BOU) and BBRC mention *C. f. rostrata* (from Greenland) and *C. f. islandica* (from Iceland) as subspecies that occur in Britain (BOU 2006, Kehoe 2006), but although the status of *rostrata* in Britain has a long-established pedigree, this is less so for *islandica*. The (Common) Redpoll account in the BOU’s 5th Checklist (BOU 1971) accepted subspecies *rostrata*, but also commented: ‘The Icelandic race *A[canthis]. f. islandica* (Hantzch) has probably occurred in northern Britain and Ireland, but no examples have been certainly identified.’

Some years later the BOU Records Committee (BOURC) considered redpoll taxonomy and reaffirmed the status of the two species Common and Arctic Redpoll *inclusive of their respective subspecies* on the *British* (and *Irish*) *List*; shortly afterwards *islandica* appeared in the 6th Checklist (BOU 1991, 1992). As formal recognition of a subspecies on the *British List* is normally dependent on a voucher record of the taxon being acceptable to BOURC, it appears that *islandica* became established on the *British List* by default, and without the explicit determination of a voucher record. Partly as a result of the absence of such a voucher record, the lack of defined identification criteria for *islandica* is a major problem in recording its status; furthermore the validity of the subspecies has been questioned (Herremans 1990, Cramp & Perrins 1994).

Until the BOURC formally pronounces on the validity of *islandica* and determines a voucher record, the current usage of ‘North-western Redpoll’ is a pragmatic method of recording the occurrence of birds of the *rostrata/islandica* complex.

It should be noted that Scottish claims of *hornemanni* regarded as ‘not proven’ by BBRC could in principle still be acceptable as Arctic Redpolls. Observers who believe this might apply in their case are invited to consider resubmission, via the local recorder, to SBRC or to local record committees in the Northern Isles.

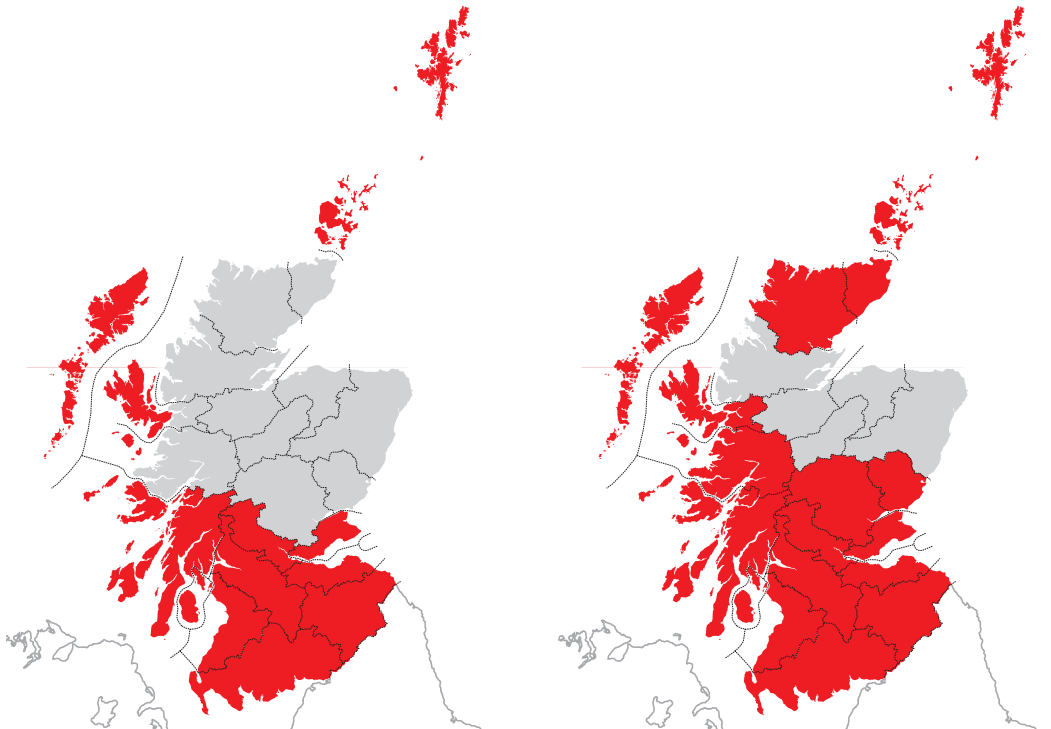
(Breeds on the Arctic tundra, with a circumpolar range divided between two subspecies: *C. h. hornemanni* on Ellesmere and Baffin Island (Canada) and in Greenland, and *C. h. exilipes* elsewhere. Winters to the south of the breeding range.)

### Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*

Recent work has shown Scottish Crossbill to be widely distributed in northern Scotland, with an estimated population of some 13,600 post-juvenile birds (Summers *et al.* 2004, Forrester *et al.* 2007, Summers & Buckland 2010). The species is not restricted to Caledonian pine forests as was once thought to be the case.

It is known that Scottish Crossbills occasionally stray some distance from the main range, for example to Fife and Stirlingshire (Dawson 2004, Summers *et al.* 2004). In order to gain a clearer idea of the species' potential for such movements, and provide comparative data to support the assessment of the status of Parrot Crossbill (see below), SBRC would like to receive submissions for all claimed sightings within all recording areas except Angus & Dundee, Caithness, Highland (mainland), Moray & Nairn, North-east Scotland, and Perth & Kinross. Any such submissions will be assessed by the committee and, if accepted, published in future reports. At the local recorder's discretion, SBRC would also be happy to assess records within the exempted areas above where they involve birds well away from established core sites.

Observers are reminded that while photographic evidence may go some way to identifying a crossbill, excitement calls are believed to constitute the only entirely reliable method for separating Scottish Crossbill from Parrot Crossbill (Summers *et al.* 2002, 2004). Submissions should therefore be accompanied by sound recordings and/or sonograms wherever possible. Should birds be feeding on cones, the tree species involved should be identified, as different crossbill species have different feeding preferences (Rae 2010). To assist observers with identification, audio recordings of excitement calls and sonograms of Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*, Scottish Crossbill and Parrot Crossbill are available on the SOC website ([www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm)).



**Figure 3.** Geographical areas (marked in red) for which SBRC would like to receive submissions of all claimed sightings of Scottish Crossbill (left) and Parrot Crossbill (right).

(A resident endemic species that breeds in conifer forests in the Scottish Highlands.)

**Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* 111: 0: 0 (migrants only)**

Until the 1980s, Parrot Crossbill was regarded as a rare vagrant to Scotland, with influxes in 1962 and 1982 accounting for nearly all occurrences (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Following the first accepted Scottish breeding record in Abernethy Forest, Badenoch & Strathspey (Highland) in 1991, the existence of a small breeding population, restricted to old Scots Pine forests, became apparent. This population, currently estimated to total some 130 post-juvenile birds (Summers & Buckland 2010), is concentrated within a small area in Strathspey and in Deeside (North-east Scotland), although there are scattered breeding-season records across several adjacent recording areas (Forrester *et al.* 2007). It is not known how long the population has been in existence. Most of the 111 accepted records of presumed migrants, on the other hand, have been in the Northern Isles and Outer Hebrides (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Prior to 2009, records of Parrot Crossbill in Great Britain were assessed by BBRC, although records relating to the Scottish breeding population did not feature in its annual reports (Rowlands 2009). Similarly, no records were submitted to SBRC in 2009, the first year in which it assumed responsibility for this species.

Since SBRC's concern is to monitor the status of the Parrot Crossbill as a vagrant rather than a localised breeder, it will aim in future to assess all submissions from all recording areas other than the following, centred on the core breeding range: North-east Scotland, Moray & Nairn, and parts of Highland (Badenoch & Strathspey, Inverness, and Ross & Cromarty districts). As with Scottish Crossbill, any such submissions will be formally circulated and published in future SBRC reports if accepted. Again, as with Scottish Crossbill, this does not preclude local recorders responsible for North-east Scotland, Moray & Nairn, and the Highland districts listed above from submitting records of birds that do not appear to belong to known breeding populations.

(Breeds in Scots Pine forests from Scandinavia across Finland and Russia to the Kola Peninsula and Pechora River, with a small, recently discovered population in Scotland. Makes only limited movements in most years, but occasionally involved in irruptions.)

**Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* many: 18: 4**

**Table 33.** Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in Scotland, 2009. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in the text.

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Angus & Dundee Arbroath–Auchmithie coastal path, 17 October (V. Wilson *et al.*).  
Argyll Craignure, Mull, female, 9–10 May, photo (A. Ingle, S. Price).

Ortolan Bunting is a rare and declining but still annual passage migrant in Scotland. In recent years the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally, have accounted for more than 90% of occurrences.

Unusually, sightings in 2009 were equally divided between the Northern Isles and the rest of Scotland. In total, there were two spring and two autumn birds. The female on Mull was the first for Argyll, while the autumn bird in Angus & Dundee was the first of the decade for the recording area. Interestingly, the last sighting in Angus & Dundee, on 22 September 1999, was also at Auchmithie.

In the Northern Isles, one was seen on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 26 May, and one at Virkie, Mainland (Shetland) on 19–20 October.

(Breeds patchily from Algeria and Iberia north to Norway and east through Europe to Asia; winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)



Plate 103. Ortolan Bunting, female, Craignure, Mull, Argyll, 9–10 May. © Sandra Price

**Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* 276: 24: 3**

Rustic Bunting is a scarce, annual vagrant in Scotland with the majority of birds appearing in the Northern Isles. Numbers have declined in recent years.

In 2009, as in two of the four years 2005–08, there were no Scottish occurrences outwith the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. The dates of the spring individuals in Fair Isle and Shetland, and the single autumn bird in Fair Isle, were typical of the respective migration periods.

**Table 34.** Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2009.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	1	1	26 May	14–16 October
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	1	-	15–16 May	-

(Breeds from Fennoscandia to Siberia; winters mainly in Japan, Korea and China.)

**Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* 593: 61: 17**

**Table 35.** Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2009. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 35a.

**Fife** Coaltown of Callange, Ceres, 1–9 January, photo (J. Dean *et al.*).

Little Bunting is a scarce though increasingly regular passage migrant in Scotland, with most occurrences in the Northern Isles. The great majority of birds are found in autumn, but there have also been a few sightings in winter and spring.

The sole record away from the Northern Isles in 2009 involved an individual seen over a period of several days in mid-winter. Of the ten previous Scottish winter records, all in the period 1977–2004, eight were on the mainland and some certainly involved overwintering birds (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

In the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally, the 16 individuals in 2009 were all within the peak autumn migration period in September and October. Since the end of 2004 only two birds have been seen in Scotland in spring.

**Table 35a.** Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2009.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	-	6	-	14 Sep–16 October
Orkney	-	3	-	26 Sep–30 October
Shetland	-	7	-	2–29 October

(Breeds from northern Fennoscandia to eastern Siberia; winters from north-east India and Nepal to south-east Asia.)

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## Appendix 1.

List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

- 2009:** White-billed Diver Little Loch Broom, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 19 March. Little Loch Broom, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 14 April. Cory's Shearwater Gott Bay, Tiree, Argyll, 28 July. Fife Ness, Fife, 5 September. Great Shearwater Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 10 October. Great White Egret North Keanchulish, Ullapool, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 5 July. Montagu's Harrier Hatton, Angus & Dundee, 18 May. Ring-billed Gull Port Ellen, Islay, Argyll, 18 March. Loch Beg, Mull, Argyll, 15 April. White-winged Black Tern Leith Docks, Lothian, 15 May. Tawny Pipit Breckan, Deerness, Mainland, Orkney, 13 September. Marsh Warbler Kilchiaran, Islay, Argyll, 27 May. Dusky Warbler Skateraw, Lothian, 15 October.
- 2008:** Cory's Shearwater Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 13 July. Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 10 August. Caspian Gull Barns Ness & Skateraw, Lothian, 20–24 January.
- 2007:** Great Shearwater Peterhead, North-east Scotland, 8 September. Newtonhill, North-east Scotland, two, 18 September. Water Pipit Barns Ness, Lothian, 26 November.
- 2005:** American Wigeon Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, 16 December to 12 February 2006.

## Appendix 2.

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) and other committees, 2009 (this report) and 2010–2012. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included, but some of the former have additional rare subspecies assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) and not shown here.

09 10 11 12

m m m m Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*  
 m m m m Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*  
 m m m m White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*  
 m m m m Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*  
 m m m m Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*  
 m m m m Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*  
 m m m m Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*  
 m m m m Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*  
 m m m m Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*  
 m m m m Great White Egret *Ardea alba*  
 m m m m Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*  
 m m m m Black Kite *Milvus migrans*  
 m m m m Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*  
 m m m m Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*  
 m m m m Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*  
 m m m m Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*  
 m m m m Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*  
 m ? ? ? American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*  
 m m m m White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*  
 m m m m Continental Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*  
 m ? ? ? Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*  
 m m m m Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*  
 m m m m Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*  
 m m m m White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*  
 m m m m Franz Josef Land Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*  
 m m m m Alpine Swift *Apus melba*  
 m m m m Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*  
 m m m m Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*  
 m m m m Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*  
 m m m m Woodlark *Lullula arborea*  
 m m m m Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

09 10 11 12

m m m m Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*  
 m m m m Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*  
 m m m m Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*  
 m m m m Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*  
 m m m m Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*  
 m m m m Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* (except *S. c. albistriata*)  
 m m m m Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata*  
 m m m m Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*  
 m m m m Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*  
 m m m m Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*  
 m m m m Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*  
 m m m m Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*  
 m m m m Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*  
 m m m m Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*  
 m m m m Serin *Serinus serinus*  
 m m m m Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* (except *C. h. hornemanni*)  
 m m m m Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni hornemanni*  
 ? ? ? m Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*  
 m m m m Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*  
 m m m m Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*  
 m m m m Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*  
 m m m m Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*  
 m m m m Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

m = BBRC

m = SBRC

m = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland)

m = SBRC except Outer Hebrides

m = SBRC outside core range (see text)

? = local assessment

### Appendix 3.

Corrections to the 2005–08 report.

The following 2005 records accepted by BBRC were assigned to Shetland but should be under Fair Isle (number of birds shown): American Golden Plover 1, Red-rumped Swallow 1, Subalpine Warbler 1, Rustic Bunting 2.

The 'not proven' record of a Great Shearwater from the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, on 28 August 2005 was in fact on 28 August 2006.

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## Little Ringed Plovers in Fife

Oliver (2008) described the breeding status of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* in north Fife up to 2006. Several suitable sites still exist in the north-east of the region. This note summarises observations from 2007 to 2010.

In the BTO's national survey in 2007 only two pairs were located in the 20 sites monitored in Fife, neither of which was successful (Elkins 2008). Details of two additional pairs were not submitted to the survey organiser. Holling *et al.* (2010a, b) noted 22 confirmed or probable breeding pairs in Scotland in both 2007 and 2008; these included the results of the Fife survey. That source quoted seven pairs in Fife in 2008, later revised to nine, of which six pairs were thought to have been successful (M. Holling pers. comm.).

I currently monitor two sites in north-east Fife, one being on a working gravel pit and the other on a land reclamation site. Successful fledging has occurred in every year from 2005 to 2010 except 2007, when the one clutch found was predated. Single broods fledged in 2005, 2006 and 2008, with two broods in 2009 and 2010. The average number of chicks fledged per pair in the successful years was 2.7, with the best

season in 2010 seeing six fully grown chicks fledged by two pairs. The earliest hatching also took place in that year, with one pair fledging four young which were fully grown by 13 June and flying strongly on 24 June, suggesting a relatively early hatching date around 22 May. Fortunately, both sites are relatively undisturbed and one has sympathetic management.

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Plate 104. Newly hatched Little Ringed Plover chicks, Fife, July 2006. © Norman Elkins [taken with an appropriate licence]

## Dr Maeve Rusk (1918–2011)

On 7 January 2011 Dr Maeve Rusk died, just four months short of her 93rd birthday. Frail health had curtailed her activities, but her lively mind remained active to the end. Her kindly and modest manner hid a fulfilling childhood, a remarkable wartime service, a distinguished medical career and a pioneering passion for birdwatching.

Maeve was born in St Andrews on 3 May 1918, and named after the mythical Irish queen. The family moved to Glasgow five years later, where she suffered all sorts of infections, but particularly bronchitis. Maeve was six and a half before she could attend school. At only 17 Maeve won a place at Glasgow University, spending an enjoyable year studying botany and zoology, before she could be admitted to the medical faculty. She graduated during the Clydebank blitz and went on to specialise in ophthalmology.

The shortage of male doctors during the war years threw Maeve into the deep end of hospital routine. In 1942, she entered the Armed Forces as a medical officer, receiving full military training based in Hampshire. Attaining the rank of captain when the war ended, she volunteered for Burma but was sent to Germany instead. When asked by a general whether, as a woman, she had difficulty in disciplining the men, Maeve characteristically replied: 'No Sir, I mothered them!' Turning down an offer to become a regular, Maeve was demobbed back to Glasgow in autumn 1946 where she resumed her surgical career, doing duck counts on the River Clyde during lunch hours. Her duties took her to Bute and Arran and more bird watching and botanising. During this time Maeve began visiting Fair Isle. In 1954, a year after her mother died and her father had retired as Acting Principal of Jordanhill College, Maeve became ophthalmologist in Inverness, the first woman consultant in the Highlands.

I first met Maeve in 1958 when, as schoolboys, Melvin Morrison and I began to attend the barely fledged Bird Watching Group in Inverness. Maeve, and the Club Secretary, James



Plate 105. Dr Maeve Rusk, January 2008 © J. Love

MacGeoch, a local police sergeant, readily took us under their wing. Besides organising regular lectures and outings for members, they took time to school Melvin and I in field craft and identification instilling an interest in ornithology that has never left us. At weekends we were trained to ring birds in her garden.

Maeve had been a member of the Glasgow SOC since 1950. Moving to Inverness in 1954 she was invited to join the Inverness Bird Group recently formed by Mrs Cecily Knowles at George Waterston's suggestion. When Mrs Knowles left in 1957 Maeve took over the chair with James MacGeoch as Secretary. Maeve also took over duck counts on the Beaully Firth and the role of BTO Local Representative which she held until 1977. At first the Inverness club did not have sufficient members to become an SOC Branch but, after Inverness hosted the SOC's Northern Conference in 1962, a meeting was held in the following June and, together with members from other parts of the Highlands, Branch status was achieved. Maeve continued as Interim chair until Dr Derek Mills was appointed but she continued a loyal supporter for the rest of her life. She will be sorely missed.

**John Love**

### Dr Maeve Rusk: a personal memoir

When I first met Maeve Rusk about 1960 she was chief eye surgeon for the north of Scotland, based in Inverness with clinics in the Outer Hebrides and Northern Isles. I, in Stornoway, was an Officer of Customs and Excise and Board of Trade representative throughout the Outer Hebrides. I was also the first resident SOC Recorder for the Outer Isles. We became close friends, bound closer when I carelessly spilt creosote into my right eye and had to be flown to Inverness for urgent treatment. It was probably owing to Maeve Rusk's care and skill that I am binocular today. She became a regular visitor when attending clinics in Stornoway. I would show her any interesting birds and profit from her expert botanical knowledge. My first lessons in ringing took place on such a visit to the local colonies of Arctic and Great Skuas. I was able to show her Snowy Owls, breeding Red-necked Phalaropes and more Golden Eagles and Ravens than she had ever seen before. In return I recall my excitement when she showed me breeding Slavonian Grebes on several lochs around Inverness.

At that time she lived in a splendid old house with her father, formerly a Lecturer in English at Jordanhill teacher training college. The school attached to the college was my *alma mater*. When she found that I was two months her junior she would take pleasure in pretending to keep me in my place.

After graduating she was called up into the army and rose to a senior rank in the Royal Army Medical Corps in occupied Germany. She would reminisce on her problems as a young woman in a male dominated sphere. Although Maeve gave an initial impression of a gentle feminist, she was no shrinking violet and liked to tell how she knocked down an importunate passenger in one of the inter-island ferry boats.

Among the many foreign students she trained was one from Pakistan. When he rose to be her opposite number in Karachi she would spend time every year with him and his family, adopting Indian dress and becoming fluent in Urdu. In 1978 our son had to spend some weeks in hospital in Inverness and Maeve, the soul of kindness, invited my wife and I to stay with her in her elegant little bungalow nearby. Her deep knowledge of botany was evident in the variety of uncommon plants she grew until she became too frail to live alone. She moved into the Isobel Fraser Home and our active pursuit of birds came to an end. Of all the close friendships I formed in that way, that with Maeve Rusk will reign almost supreme.

Bound copies of *The Scottish Naturalist* from 1950 to 1957 that she gave me adorn my shelves, the only material memento I have of a remarkable ornithologist.

**Peter Cunningham**



Plate 106. Dr Maeve Rusk (left, with George Waterston and Ursula Pennell), Loch Garten, c.1959 © SOC Archive

## John Peden Pringle (1931–2011)

John Pringle loved the out-of-doors and enjoyed bird watching in beautiful surroundings in good company. He inherited his love of nature from his father during his childhood in Edinburgh. As soon as he could ride a bike he explored the countryside and youth-hostelled frequently with his sister Margaret. He often spoke of seeing a Corncrake in the fields at Fairmilehead.

After leaving the Royal High School John joined the Commercial Union Insurance Company in Edinburgh. He married his beloved Nancy in 1955. He was promoted to a post in Liverpool and, in addition, became an Assistant Coastguard, working at night. He did some bird watching between duties! John, Nancy and family returned to Edinburgh in 1964. Bird watching was curtailed by family commitments, but he still rose early in the spring to check on favourite breeding birds. After 40 years' service John retired from a senior position in the company. His meticulous attention to detail, organisational skills and pawky sense of humour were all greatly valued.

He then enjoyed 20 years of freedom! He liked to start the week with a day's birding, often in the Pentland Hills. His favourite walk was round the 'seven reservoirs'. John liked to speak to the people he met chatting (often lengthily) with the local shepherds and keepers. He also went out regularly with his great friends, Sid Morgan, Colin Beckett and John Hamilton. They also enjoyed a trip to Lesvos together in 2009.

He was a great supporter of the SOC. He led many field trips when he shared his enthusiasm and knowledge with others, whilst chatting on the way. He enjoyed his food; lunch started at 12 and lasted until teatime. He liked discussing which mutton pies were the best. Mutton pies were served at his funeral tea; he would have approved!

He was well known in wider birding circles. Bob McCurley recalls looking for a Baird's Sandpiper in 2003. At the site he met John, who pointed out the bird. They agreed to keep in touch and were friends thereafter.



Plate 107. John Pringle in Waterston House garden, 2007. © SOC Archive

John was an excellent Treasurer of Lothian SOC for 10 years. His wise counsel was appreciated and he personally attracted new members to the Club and to the Committee.

When Waterston House opened in 2005 John became head gardener; he really had 'green fingers'. Every Wednesday, in all weathers, John was there working and planning how the garden should be done. He had firm views on this; plants had to know their place, preferably in lines. Not everyone agreed and once, when John was away, a line of Rowans was replanted in clumps. On John's return, they were soon back in line - and there they remain.

What did John do before email? He frequently sent jokes to an appreciative audience. Unlike others, John's were funny - many of us felt better for reading them (and having a good laugh). We all feel privileged to have known John and miss him. He was a delightful, kindly, companion with a lively sense of humour and many friends.

In February this year he was birding with the Tayside Group and other friends when he slipped on ice and injured his head. He died in hospital three days later.

**Doreen Main**  
on behalf of SOC Lothian Branch



## Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 19 March 2011

Plate 108. *The delegates.* © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

This year's Scottish Birdwatchers conference was held in the Marine Hotel North Berwick, where the SOC/BTO Spring conference was hosted by the SOC's Lothian Branch.

This proved an excellent venue with its purpose built lecture room adjoining a large octagonal atrium where coffee and lunch were served; there was also plenty of room for the stalls from BTO, SOC, SWT, RSPB, Aberlady Bay and Second Nature.

David Jardine, SOC President, welcomed delegates noting that it was fitting that the meeting should be held in the Lothians as it was 75 years ago in 1936 that the decision to form the SOC was made by members of the Midlothian Ornithological Society. The partnership between SOC and BTO had strengthened the birdwatching community in Scotland by bringing together bird watchers and bird recorders. He urged delegates to buy *The Birds of Scotland* as there were only 30 copies left.

### **The Bass Rock Gannets - Bryan Nelson**

Dr Tom Brock, CEO Scottish Seabird Centre, introduced Dr Bryan Nelson, the world expert

on Gannets. His lectures at Aberdeen University were famous for his graphic demonstrations of their behaviour. The first edition of his prize-winning book on Gannets had sold out. He was awarded the MBE in 2000.

Bryan Nelson showed slides of the Gannets on Bass Rock. He explained his good fortune in following on from James Fisher who had investigated their history but had written nothing on their behaviour and ecology. So his work on the Gannets of Bass Rock was new. He was also lucky that Sir Hugh Dalrymple, whose family had owned the rock for centuries, had allowed him to live there without even meeting him beforehand.

Gannets are aggressive birds and may fight for up to two hours to keep a nest site. They breed usually from their fourth year and 90% are constant pairs, mating with the same individual year on year. Both birds incubate the egg, keeping it under the web until hatched then transferring it to above the web. The chicks are vulnerable to predation (mostly from gulls) at 3–4 weeks when they are too big to hide under the adult. After 93 days chicks are

spangled black. They are probably black to protect them from being killed by their neighbours.

The chicks fledge independently of the adults. Australasian Gannets are less aggressive and the young do not fledge irrevocably. They will go to the edge then return to the nest for food. The Atlantic Gannet has evolved for a stormy habitat.

Dr Nelson had colour-ringed individual Gannets and had plotted their nests by marking them with concrete cones cast in traffic cones to establish their life history. This work should be done again as the way the colony is spreading has changed. In the 1960s new nests were built in a three-row fringe around existing conglomerations, but now Gannets are building in scattered locations making the eggs more vulnerable to predation.

Also, many more are building nests but not breeding. Since Gannets lay only one egg despite experimentally being able to rear two chicks, this requires explanation. Non-breeding Gannets are called 'club' birds and gather on the windward side of the Rock.

New technology suggested that Gannets are now feeding up to 400 miles away whereas in the 1960s this was about 300 miles. The Atlantic Gannet is specialised to live in a fierce climate and their success is due to not having any competition at their feeding grounds.

His photographs of the Rock showed how the Gannets had gradually spread from the cliffs over the whole surface, leaving only the areas in wind shadow empty. In the 1960s there were 7,000 occupied nests and now in the 21st century there are over 50,000. The three stacks at St Kilda have about 60,000 nests.

Bass Rock, besides being the largest single rock Gannet colony in the world was also where Tinbergen had made the first film of them fledging. Now cameras remotely controlled from the Scottish Seabird Centre, which Bryan Nelson had helped to set up, were being used to collect data.

*Mary Winsch*



**Plate 109.** *David Clugston and Bryan Nelson.*  
© David Palmer ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

### **Recording Birds in Scotland with BirdTrack - Nick Moran**

Nick Moran, BTO BirdTrack Organiser, provided a helpful update on the development of BirdTrack. Much of this work has been facilitated by a joint project between SOC and BTO, which has been funded by Scottish Natural Heritage. Bird Track can be accessed through the SOC website or <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack> It can be used to show seasonal movements and annual changes in migration times which might be due to climate change. It was also proving helpful in filling gaps in the atlas fieldwork by providing more 'roving records'. The data on the website was used for conservation work and to advise on agri-environmental schemes. The Atlas had almost 16,000 contributors.

The data showed, for example, how some birds like the Nuthatch were spreading northwards into Scotland and others like the Red Kite were almost ubiquitous in the UK. The frequency of Stonechat records showed the effects of hard winters. Migrants from Scandinavia, such as Waxwings, Whimbrels and Wheatears could be tracked as they moved across country.

He explained that BirdTrack was able to take historic records so that a birdwatcher's personal list could be saved and used on computer as he demonstrated with his own data. It was now possible to add 'pinpoint' records and dead birds and records which were only located within a 10-km square. He urged birdwatchers to submit complete lists as these were the most useful for analysis.

The data was kept on two servers, one at the BTO the other at the University of East Anglia. The connections with other data sets such as the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) are also being enhanced.

*Mary Winsch*

### **George Waterston: a celebration of his life** - Roy Dennis

George Waterston's contribution to the development of Scottish ornithology is immense and one hundred years after his birth, Roy gave us a fascinating insight into the man himself. He set the tone at the very start of the presentation by stating that it was an honour to talk about George and that he had been pivotal in Roy's own career. The affection and respect for his mentor came over strongly.

As George's career was traced through his internment in a German prisoner of war camp, the fulfilment of a dream on Fair Isle, the founding of the SOC, his time as the first Scottish Director of the RSBP, his drive, energy, vision and infectious enthusiasm, shone through.

Typical of the man, he used his internment to produce a blueprint for a bird observatory on Fair Isle. Imagine the destiny of being part of a prisoner exchange due to the kidney problems, which plagued him for most of his life, and for the first sighting of home to be Sheep Rock on Fair Isle. He was able, with the help of others, to set up the observatory and later handed it over to the National Trust for Scotland with the economic and social welfare of the island at heart as well as the birds.

When he took on his post with the RSPB, his second wife Irene was heavily involved with the SOC and, what a partnership they forged. His total immersion in his work, his commitment to the mentoring of young ornithologists and his various novel ideas which were well ahead of his time, made him the ideal man for the job. He had so many contacts which enabled him to tap into a huge reservoir of resources. As Roy put it, he was "adept at putting the squeeze on everybody from crofters to the Secretary of State".

His handling of the Osprey situation was typical of George. Going against the pervading grain of secrecy concerning the return of the



Plate 110. Roy Dennis paying tribute to George Waterston. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

Osprey, he had the foresight to see the potential of ecotourism and the benefits of bringing in the public. His planning skills, his way with people and his passion were put to the test and the rest is history.

The Sea Eagle project in 1958 was the first of the re-introduction programmes and although it was unsuccessful, once more the foundations were laid for what we have today with successful Red Kite, White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle and Osprey projects. He was indeed a man who made a huge mark on Scottish ornithology and Roy certainly did him justice. So when will you write the long overdue biography Roy?

### Gordon Riddle



Plate 111. Jeremy Greenwood, Sylvia Bates and David Bates. © David Palmer ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

### Aberlady Bay: the past 30 years - a warden's eye view

The after-lunch subject was Aberlady Bay, the Local Nature Reserve east of Edinburgh set up in 1953. Keith Macgregor, one of the two first joint wardens of the reserve, introduced the trio of speakers to follow; all wardens of the reserve who spoke on the evolving tasks during their times there.

### Before Buzzards and Pagers - Peter Gordon

Speaking first was Peter Gordon, warden of Aberlady for 12 years from 1980. He outlined the original reasons for the creation of reserve status which was for protection of the flora of salt marsh, dunes, and of birds notably including breeding terns, waders, and wintering wildfowl. There had been much public concern about uncontrolled

shooting of ducks, and this was solved by issuing a limited number of licences and by the warden getting to know the individual shooters.

The tern colony on the sand spit, of some tens of Common and Arctic and a few Little Terns, became of major concern. Fencing and persuasion were tried to keep foxes and humans off the area, but any success here was eclipsed by problems of wind-blown sand covering nests to which no real solution was found, and of flooding by high spring tides to levels above which some of the Little Terns in particular nested. Nests were raised onto fish boxes, and some physically shifted up-shore, and the speaker had memories of working on occasions in the dark just prior to some predicted extra high tides. However, tern numbers continued to dwindle. Other tasks included dredging the choked Marl Loch - manual volunteers' attempts being completed by use of an Aquacat, creation of a wader scrape which later became overgrown, reducing the spread of Sea Buckthorn, CBC breeding bird censuses, and monitoring rare plants.

### Millenium bugs and wandering waders - Ian Thomson

The next speaker, Ian Thomson, was warden after Peter from 1992 for over 14 years. Attempts at tern protection continued with electric fencing and moving nests, but demise was unstoppable and terns ceased to be regular breeding species on the Reserve. The wader scrape was allowed to remain overgrown with Reed Mace and rushes, and served as a duck refuge. A new plan was initiated to attempt to reverse the decline of breeding waders; an area of short vegetation was created from rank salt marsh by grazing using a small flock of sheep, on loan from the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Plant monitoring found most rarer plants to be doing well including Strawberry Clover, and a new plant found, Pyramidal Orchid. Ian also initiated more recording of invertebrates, particularly butterflies and dragonflies and also beetles. Both speakers let slip that the job was in part being paid to do their hobby, bird-watching, and rarities continued to be logged. In Peter's time a "find" was notified by a phone call and passed on by degrees with a "phone tree". Ian recalled the





Plate 112. Ray Murray, Neil Bielby and Ron Hill catching up... © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

Western Sandpiper that rapidly brought about 400 people who moved *en masse* between Aberlady and Musselburgh over the next three days as the bird switched locations.

#### Playing our cards right - John Harrison

Third to speak was John Harrison, the current warden in post since 2007, who had to speak quickly as the previous speakers' enthusiasm made them exceed allotted time. Monitoring habitats has revealed that the sand spit has now grown bigger and that salt marsh has increased significantly by colonising what was bare sand. This raises hopes that terns might find the location suitable for nesting once again in the future. The area under grazing by the sheep flock is now extended to 20 hectares, resulting in greater numbers of breeding Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe; 21 pairs of waders bred on the reserve in 2010 comprising these three species and Ringed Plover. An aim is to reduce the ever colonising Sea Buckthorn to four specific zones, by the efforts of John and his team of reserve volunteers, and a JCB in 1970. With all the habitat management, care is being taken to maintain suitable places for other species of interest such as Lesser Whitethroat, Grasshopper Warbler, Kestrel and Short-eared Owl; all breeders or potential breeders.

The three speakers also noted rises or falls of certain species on the reserve, such as the huge increase in Pink-footed Geese from 300 in 1950 to over 32,000 recently, increases in Wigeon, Teal

and Shelduck, increase then decrease in Grey Plover, and loss of breeding Eider. The three wardens' talks together, with their slides, combined to give a clear account of the ongoing natural and managed changes on the reserve.

Harry Dott

#### BTO and SOC: Joint Achievements in Scotland - Andy Clements

Currently Director of BTO, Andy described the joint achievements of SOC and BTO Scotland. Whilst we are celebrating our 75th Anniversary, BTO has only had a formal presence in Scotland for the past 11 years, but much has been achieved during that time. Andy reviewed the main developments, stressing how vital is the input of SOC members in helping BTO achieve its principal function of recording Britain's birds.



Plate 113. Andy Clements - Director, BTO. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

He hoped that the successful collaboration and promotion of BirdTrack here could be the role model for the rest of UK.

He was particularly pleased that over 80% of records for Bird Atlas 2007–11 are being submitted on-line, and he thanked Bob Swann who, with other helpers, is covering so many of the remote parts of Scotland. But he did issue an urgent plea to all participants to improve breeding evidence during this year's final summer season. He gave examples of significant changes that the Atlas is demonstrating, with major reductions in breeding Redshanks and Yellowhammers as well as the more widely known Ring Ouzels. On the positive side, Goldfinches and Greylags are doing well, as are Barn Owls and Nuthatches.

Andy went on to discuss the successful collaboration with SOC to improve bird monitoring in Scotland. We have huge gaps away from the main population areas in, for example, the Breeding Birds Survey, and a series of courses have been run: training has been given to landowners and gamekeepers as well as volunteers. He was also very impressed by the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, which brings together diverse individuals and groups, provides excellent data, and gets its information out with great urgency.

In summary, Andy felt that the successful collaboration to date would continue to develop positively, with both partners improving their working practices, their use of technology, and their communications, particularly with the younger generation.

*Mike Betts*

### **Oasis: Birds of the Esk Valleys - Neil Grubb**

This was our final speaker, although his words were actually the commentary to his new film "Oasis: Birds of the Esk Valleys" which captivated us for the next 20 minutes or so. Filmed in high definition, with music especially composed, it had been two years in the making - and we were all left wondering "how many hours spent in the field, let alone in the editing?" It was superb, demonstrating Neil's excellent field craft as well as filming skills.

Starting with Waxwings by the mouth of the River Esk at Musselburgh in January, he took us up the courses of the river's two feeders, the North and the South Esk, showing us a variety of the wonderful birds to be seen through the seasons so close to Scotland's capital city. (Incidentally, how many Starlings can fit into a dovecot? There must be a research project out there somewhere!). His film credits acknowledged the help he had received from local birders in finding nest sites, and breeding Ravens and Peregrines played starring roles; indeed one of my favourites was the young Raven which put so much bodily effort into every beginner's croak. As someone who has been doing the CBC in Roslin Glen for many years, I was delighted to see such excellent coverage of the developing Nuthatch population there. The Tawny Owl struggling to get out of its nest cavity was charming, but so were the shots of the female Spotted Flycatcher being fed on its nest by the male bird, the Kingfisher making the most of the much cleaner water now that industrial waste no longer pollutes the river, and the close-up of the Redstart carrying food and chatting to its mate. The final selection of summer visitors ended with a Grasshopper Warbler reeling away into the dusk - a fitting way to end. Thank you, Neil, for a very enjoyable film

*Mike Betts*



**Plate 114.** Hedly Merrie and Richard Allan.  
© David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

Following the raffle the conference was closed by Chris Wernham, Head of BTO Scotland. Chris paid tribute to all the hard work by the SOC Lothian Branch members, ably led by James and Doreen Main, to mean that the conference had been such a success.

# NEWS AND NOTICES

## New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Borders:** Ms B. Khursheed, **Central Scotland:** Dr S. Mathieson, Ms J. Osinski, **Clyde:** Mrs L. Laming, Mr B. Macintyre, Mr R. MacLean, Mrs G. Mercer, Ms A. Thomson, **Dumfries:** Mr L. Hayes, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr J. Almond, Mr A. Tyrrell, Mr T. Vaughan, **Fife:** Mr C. C. Nixon, **Highland:** Ms H. Chance, Mr R. Greenwood, Mr R. Holland, **Lothian:** Mr M. Beard, Dr H. Forrest, Mr N. Kenworthy, Ms R. Langeland, Mr I. Macintyre, Mr F. Popovics & Mrs M. Franco Popovics, Mr C. Scott, Mr & Mrs T. Springford, **Stewartry:** Mr S. Beck, Dr R. Jones, **Tayside:** Dr & Mrs J. Brunton.

## 200 Club

The latest prizewinners are: **February:** 1st £30 R.S. Smith, 2nd £20 T. Johnson-Ferguson, 3rd £10 Miss C. James, **March:** 1st £30 Mrs H. Thomson, 2nd £20 Mark Holling, 3rd £10 Miss M. Speir, **April:** 1st £50 Mrs Cartwright, 2nd £30 J. Fairbrass, 3rd £20 Miss S. Goode, 4th £10 I.J.A. Brown.

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

## Borrowing books from the George Waterston Library

In an effort to increase the usage of the library, a new scheme is being introduced, with immediate effect, to allow members to borrow books. Club members will be permitted to borrow two books for up to two months. Nearly all books held in the collection can be borrowed except for the rare and valuable books on the two locked stacks and the major regional handbooks e.g. *The Handbook of the Birds of the World*.

Journals, county bird reports and our archival collection are also excluded.

Details of the scheme can be found on the Club website or by visiting Waterston House. The library catalogue will clearly show which books are available to be borrowed.

*David Clugston, Honorary Librarian*

## Upcoming Events at Waterston House

### Art Exhibitions:

- n Carry Akroyd, until 20 July
- n Chris Rose, Chris Lodge, William Neill, Howard Towll, Paul Henery & Leo du Feu, 23 July–14 September
- n Keith Brockie, 17 September–16 November
- n Darren Woodhead, 19 November–January 2012

### Annual Book Fair

Saturday 16 July, 10 am–4 pm

### Aberlady Goose Watch

- n Tuesday 4 October, 4.30 pm
- n Thursday 6 October, 4.30 pm

An illustrated talk by a local expert followed by the opportunity to watch the spectacle of thousands of Pink-footed Geese come in to roost on the nearby nature reserve. Price: £4.00 (£6.00 non members). Places limited. Advance booking essential. To book, call the office on 01875 871330.

### Optics Demo Day

Sunday 16 October, 10 am–4 pm

### Chris Packham talk

Saturday 24 September, 7 pm, Queen's Hall, Edinburgh. See below for full details.

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

Programme and booking details enclosed with your mailing. Please book early to avoid disappointment!

## Branch updates

New Highland Branch Secretary: Kathy Boniface, Alt Dubh, North End, Tomatin IV13 7YP. Tel: 01808 511740. Email: kathyboniface@aol.com. Kathy replaces Ann Sime, who the Club wishes to thank for her commitment and hard work over the past six years.

## Merchandise

We've started selling quite a few of the new SOC fleeces and hoodies, but can anyone beat Stephen Jackson's record? Stephen is one of our southernmost members (he lives in Falmouth):

"The micro fleece you sent arrived yesterday it is great, it fits nicely and it's warm. I was wearing it whilst out birding today and amongst others I saw Ring-necked Duck, Garganey and Purple Heron. Is this a record for a first day's birding with this garment?" It may be... unless you can tell us otherwise.

### Award for Geoff Sheppard

At the Scottish Raptor Study Groups' Annual Conference held on 26 February 2011 at Battleby, the Donald and Jeff Watson Memorial Award for outstanding services to raptor work in Scotland was made to Geoff Sheppard, for his long-standing study of Barn Owls in the south-west. Geoff, a very long-standing official with the West Galloway SOC Branch, gave an excellent overview of his work at last year's SOC Conference. Many congratulations from us all.

### Waterston House Staff

**Plate 115 (below).** From left to right: Karen Bidgood (Librarian), Wendy Hicks (Office Manager), Dave Allan (Events Co-ordinator), Kathryn Cox (Admin Assistant), Jean Torrance (Book-keeping), North Berwick, March 2011 © David Palmer (www.photoscot.co.uk)

### Forty-three years of *Scottish Birds* back issues now online

As part of the Club's 75th celebrations, Council is pleased to announce that scanned copies of volumes 1-22 of *Scottish Birds* are now available for free download from our website [www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-birds-online.htm](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-birds-online.htm). This project stemmed from a request made at the 73rd AGM in autumn 2009 and has been paid for by *The Birds of Scotland Fund*.

Each issue is available as a separate 'pdf' file (c.4 MB in size), and this can be browsed or interrogated using the standard 'search' facility. An initial index is available for volumes 1-20 and this can be used to jump straight to the volume concerned (remember the page number to select the relevant issue). Volumes 21 and 22 are not yet indexed, but the originally published contents pages can be downloaded. More recent volumes will be added and it is hoped to upgrade the index in due course.

Thanks go to Keith Naylor for his index and Stephen Hunter for all his work on the website including the integration of the index.





Plate 116. Chris Packham. © David Foster Management

### 75th Anniversary Lecture

Queen's Hall, Clerk Street, Edinburgh, EH8 9JQ  
7 pm, 24 September 2011

TV presenter, Chris Packham, who helps bring wildlife to millions through BBC's *Springwatch* and *Autumnwatch* programmes, will give a public lecture 'A Wild Life Exposed' to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club.

Chris Packham is an enthusiastic supporter of many wildlife, conservation or environmental charities, being the Vice-President of the RSPB, the Bat Conservation Trust, the Butterfly Conservation Trust and the Wildlife Trusts and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. He recently was awarded the Dilys Breese BTO Medal for "his outstanding work in promoting science to new audiences". Dr Andy Clements, Director of the BTO, presented the award to Chris on 17 November 2011. He said. "Chris is an outstanding communicator who has made science and natural history accessible to new audiences. In particular, he has emphasised the importance of volunteers collecting information on our wild birds."

The title of Chris' talk is 'A Wild Life Exposed' and it will use a series of his astonishing images to chart his quest to reflect the pure beauty of nature. His journey has wound from his roots in suburban Southampton to the frozen poles and the sticky forests and searing deserts in between and brought him eye-to-eye with the humble and the fearful. He tells his story and theirs, ponders his reflections of their perfection and asks "what of their future"? Informative, thought-provoking and inevitably controversial, this entertaining romp will be fun for all the family and studded with his trademark quick-witted and irreverent humour. It is sure to be a great event.

Tickets are available from the Queen's Hall ([www.thequeenshall.net](http://www.thequeenshall.net) tel 0131 668 2019), priced £10, student/ child/unwaged £6. Book yours now! (£1.50 booking fee per ticket applies). A limited number of tickets are available from Waterston House.

To find out more and to view some of Chris' amazing photos visit [www.chrispackham.co.uk](http://www.chrispackham.co.uk)

### Apologies

In the last issue a number of errors crept in - apologies to those concerned. Page 31, Tony Fox should have been Tony Scott. Page 36, Ian Elphick should have been Ian Elfick. Page 42, John Latimer should have been Jonathan Latimer.

### 1980s



The evolving birdwatcher (part 2)  
by Peter King/ [www.paktoons.co.uk](http://www.paktoons.co.uk)



Plates 117–118. Past Club Presidents, North Berwick, March 2011. © David Palmer ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk)) Left to right (rear): Ian Darling, David Jardine, Chris Waltho, Brian Downing, Mark Holling, Ian Andrews, Ray Murray; (front) Frank Hamilton, Ivan Draper, Jeremy Greenwood and Stan da Prato; (inset) Janet Crummy.

## The 75th Anniversary of the SOC – part 2

### D. CLUGSTON

#### Publications

Club journal *Scottish Birds* was founded in autumn 1958 and for many years appeared quarterly publishing original papers, short notes, obituaries and club notices. Financial constraints resulted in only two issues per year from 1986 and only a single one from June 2003. Past editors are listed at the end of this article.

Our less formal quarterly newsletter *Scottish Bird News* was born in March 1986, marking the Club's Golden Jubilee. The first lead editor was Valerie Thom and its aim was to keep members informed of Club and branch activities, topical news about ornithology in Scotland and to publish short notes and articles. In addition,

recent bird reports, book reviews, small advertisements, crosswords and quizzes were regularly included. It was printed size A4, in black and blue colours, either 12 or 16 pages in length and illustrated with black-and-white photographs and drawings. It was an immediate success and was much appreciated by our varied membership. In the following years the lead editorship changed and included Dr Stan da Prato, Sylvia Laing, Keith Chapman, Martin Collinson and Mike Fraser with numerous assistants helping out. The profile of the magazine was raised further by the introduction of full colour in a millennium makeover for issue 57 in December 1999, followed a few years later by the design being taken over by Harry Scott.

A fresh four-man editorial team consisting of Jimmy Maxwell, Brian Cartwright, Martin Collinson and Ian Francis took over from Mike Fraser for the December 2003 issue. However, within a year the editorship was in the hands of Jimmy Maxwell and Ian Francis and they have been primarily responsible for its outstanding content until the last independent issue, number 91, which appeared in March 2009.

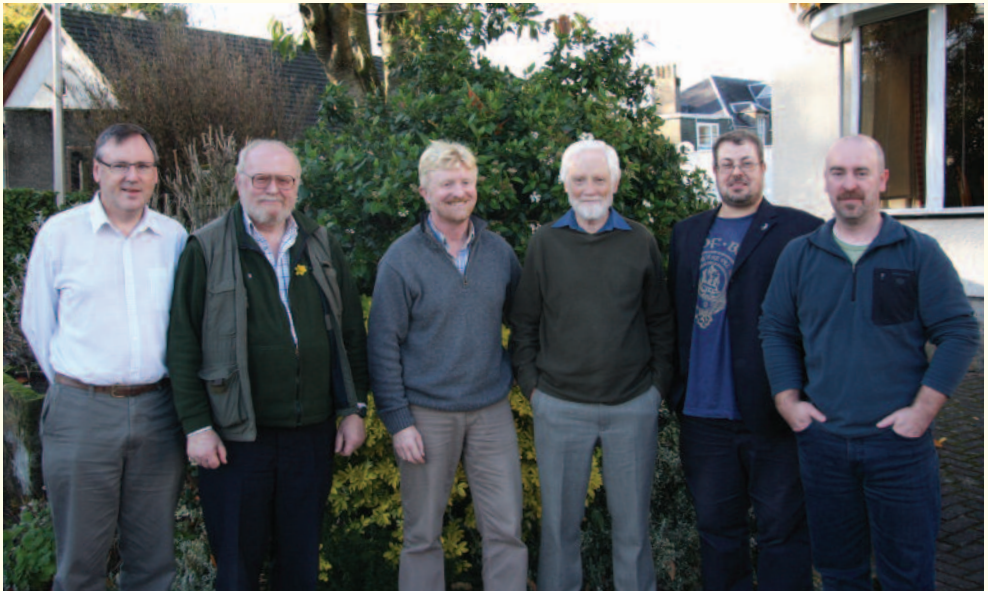
June 2009 marked a striking change in *Scottish Birds* with a major redesign in layout, larger paper size and wider use of colour. It now brought together *Scottish Bird News* and the independent *Birding Scotland* into one stunning publication which returns to its original quarterly schedule. High quality digital photographs, different coloured paper for the three sections, superb design by Harry Scott and a new editorial team co-ordinated by ex-President Ian Andrews, have transformed our principal publication.

Raptors represent a very important species group in Scotland and they have been monitored by Raptor Study Groups for many years. From the very first issue of *SBN*, a report on the state of these birds has been

published with the RSPB bringing all the data together for an annual report. From 1996 through to 2004 they appeared as a supplement to *SB*. Separate reports for the years 2003–06 were published by the SOC on behalf of the Raptor Groups, as part of the SOC's partnership with others within the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, with grant aid from SNH.

Several local bird books have been published in the period, many written by SOC members and some partly or fully-funded by SOC grants and loans. Local avifaunas and the results of local atlas surveys in particular have greatly increased our understanding of Scotland's birds. *The South-east Scotland Breeding Bird Tetrad Atlas* was wholly funded and privately published under the SOC banner in 1998. Again, SOC members were also key to the publication of both *The Birds of North-East Scotland* (1990) and *Fife Bird Atlas* (2003).

Before finishing with our publications, I must cover perhaps the most important book ever to appear on Scottish birds, the two-volume *The Birds of Scotland* (affectionately known as BS3).



**Plate 119.** *The Club's Editorial Committee, Kinross, October 2010. From left to right: Ian Andrews, Stan da Prato, Ian Francis, Jimmy Maxwell, Stuart Rivers and Harry Scott. © Ian Andrews*



**Plate 120.** Editors of *The Birds of Scotland* at its launch in Edinburgh, January 2008. From left to right: Bernie Zonfrillo, Harry Scott, Ian Andrews, Ray Murray, Ron Forrester, Mike Betts, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny and David Jardine. © David Palmer ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

### The Birds of Scotland

There have been two previous books on the birds of Scotland. The first appeared in 1953 and was written by our two joint founding presidents Miss Evelyn Baxter and Miss Leonora Rintoul and published by Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh. The second was published in 1986 and was written by another lady, also an ex-President, Valerie Thom and published by T. & D. Poyser, with the royalties accruing to a Birds in Scotland Fund.

In 1994, The Scottish Birds Records Committee had published the official *Scottish List*, with an agreement for its continued maintenance. In 2001, an amended list now with status symbols and including sub-species was published by the same committee. This was to be the forerunner of a plan to produce a new series of regional avifaunas, first published in an 11 volume *Fauna of Scotland* series a century earlier by John A. Harvie-Brown *et al.* After discussions with Local Recorders it was the Committees' preference to first write a new *Birds of Scotland*.

The first BS3 meeting took place at Musselburgh in June 2002 attended by Ian Andrews, Ron Forrester, Bernie Zonfrillo, Bob McGowan, Ray Murray and myself, and where the project was formulated. It was clear from the outset that this editorial team did not have all of the necessary knowledge to write up all the species accounts and that expert authors would need to be recruited. In the end 157 authors and nine editors contributed to the book. The original editorial team was enlarged with the addition of Mike

Betts, David Grundy, David Jardine and Chris McInerny. To my eternal regret, I was later forced to stand down through pressure of work.

One early decision was to only use the best available Scottish-taken photographs to depict each species. Where no suitable photographs could be found, Tommy Daniels drew fine scraperboard drawings and John Busby produced many coloured vignettes to enliven the text. In addition, Keith Brockie and Chris Rose painted outstanding frontispieces for the two volumes.

Throughout the commissioning period SOC Council was kept fully informed of the project and in due course agreed to publish the book. Quite naturally, this was a large financial undertaking and without the very generous support of a number of donors, most notably SNH, this would have been impossible to fund. All royalties were to accrue to a new *Birds of Scotland* Fund to promote future bird publications within Scotland.

On 9 January 2008, after five and half years of very hard work this magnificent two-volume work was launched in the presence of Mike Russell MSP, Minister for Environment, in the Bute Hall of the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. It is very gratifying for all concerned to see how authoritative this book is, testimony to the advanced state of knowledge within Scotland and the SOC. It is a very high quality production, with the only complaint being its weight, a knee crushing 7.3 kg!

The book has received two notable accolades. Firstly, it was awarded a Silver Medal from the Zoological Society of London and Ron Forrester, on behalf of the BS3 team, received the Neill Medal from the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

### Technology and website

Technological changes over the past 25 years have been immense. Computers were first used at Regent Terrace in about 1985 with the purchase of a BBC microcomputer for the Bookshop. This was later used to establish a membership database. As technology moved on, the Club, perhaps slowly at first, moved on to better and faster computers, allowing the office to produce many parts of the Club



publications as text files. This helped to keep printing costs down and eventually, as desk-top publishing came along, to produce print-ready files to our printer, saving further costs. So, from literally moving around bits of paper on a table-top to establish the lay-out of the then new *Scottish Bird News*, these jobs could now be done with a few (well, many!) clicks of a mouse!

The establishment of a website, initially by Ian Andrews in late 1999, and later by Stephen Hunter, both volunteers, has allowed the Club to keep pace with the changing needs and expectations of both our membership, and the general public seeking information.

The publication of *The Birds of Scotland* was entirely done on a digital basis. From the tens of thousands of e-mails and text files that circulated between authors and editors to write the book, to the brilliant digital photography that was used to grace the pages of the book and to the final computer files that were sent out to the Hong Kong printers to finally put ink to paper.

### Bird recording

One of the principal strengths of the SOC has been our ability to co-ordinate and publish bird records for the whole of Scotland. This has been

possible by having a network of Local Bird Recorders (a complete list appears as an appendix to BS3), most of whom publish a county or regional bird report. In addition, they submit their records centrally and through an editor an annual *Scottish Bird Report* is published. There has been a huge increase in the volume of records over the years and the task of synthesising them into a single report, however desirable, is a daunting task. Ray Murray has been the driving force since 1989, but as a local recorder and one of the editors of BS3 even he found it too much work and the latest report covering the year 2001 appeared in 2004. The new *Digital SBR* alluded to above, will hopefully continue the SOC's central position in collecting and collating the huge amount of data that annually accrues concerning Scotland's birds.

The Club has also been proactive in aiding with the collecting of the bird data that form the basis of the many local bird reports across Scotland. Mark Holling, with advice from Ray Murray on the requirements, developed a simple spreadsheet in 2001 using Microsoft Excel that allowed observers to keep a digital diary which could easily be sent to local recorders with a collection of records for the



**Plate 121.** Attendees at the Scottish Recorders' Conference, Stirling, December 2003. From left to right: Martin Cook (Moray & Nairn), Ian Andrews (Lothian), Paul Baxter (North-east Scotland), Malcolm Ogilvie (RBBP), Bernie Zonfrillo (Clyde Islands), Ron Forrester (SBRC), Andy Thorpe (North-east Scotland), David Kelly (Lothian), Neil Beilby (Upper Forth), Iain Gibson (Clyde), Paul Collin (Dumfries & Galloway), Cliff Henty (Upper Forth), Angus Hogg (Ayrshire), Val Wilson (Clyde), Dave Butterfield (Highland), Alastair McNee (Highland), Andrew Stevenson (Outer Hebrides), Jim Wilson (Clyde) and Ray Murray (Borders). © Ian Andrews

past month, quarter or year. This simplified the work of the local recorder in that the amount of data that needed to be keyed into regional databases on an annual basis was in many cases suddenly halved. This also aided the local recorders responsibilities in forwarding data to organisations such as the National Biodiversity Network. With easily manipulated datasets, writing local bird reports was also considerably simplified. However, not everyone uses these aids and data still has to be processed and handled, each stage providing opportunities for the accumulation of keying errors. Also despite the use of e-mails, records still have a habit of being sent in at the last moment, causing publication delays for local reports.

To this end, in April 2006 Dr Clive McKay was appointed SOC Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator, a part time post funded by the Club and Scottish Natural Heritage. His remit was to encourage the digital submission of bird data. To identify the requirements of local recorders, Clive reinstated the Local Recorders Conferences that allowed him to meet with the recording community that receive and manipulate the large amounts of information collected every year from birders across Scotland. His first step was to develop improved spreadsheets and databases that could be used by individual observers and local recorders. However, the possibility of on-line submission of bird records has overtaken this aspect. The SOC is currently looking at actively working with the BTO to develop systems that would suit both ours, and their, needs. The SOC was in fact the first voluntary bird club in Britain to submit a data set for all bird species, when all 5,700 records from the Highland recording area for 2002 were uploaded to the new NBN Gateway. More has followed until much of Scotland now have reasonable coverage for birds.

### Conferences

The principal social event of the calendar is the autumn annual weekend conference which for the first five years of the period was held in the Marine Hotel at North Berwick. In 1987, a September weekend at the Pollock Halls, Edinburgh University was not generally considered a success. Council then decided that it was high time that our northern branches

were accommodated and for the next 16 years, excluding 1994, we visited the Spey valley, gathering at Aviemore (1992 & 1993), Kingussie (1995, 1996, 2006 & 2007) and Newtonmore (1997–2005). The great attraction, particularly for southern branches, was the opportunity for local birding with its range of special species.

Each conference has a theme dealing with some aspect of Scottish ornithology, either by species family, habitats, migration or conservation issues. Apart from the more formal talks by invited professional researchers, many amateurs give talks on their own projects.

After a meal on Friday evening, there is often a slide presentation followed by the very popular bird quiz in the bar. The Saturday morning talks were the real start to the conference, followed by lunch and the afternoon free for local birding. The Annual General Meeting is held in the late afternoon and in the evening the Annual Dinner and a late night ceilidh. However, an electrical power failure at the Balavil Hotel, Newtonmore in 2002 resulted in the programme being switched and the morning suddenly became free for birding. This was to be the format for all future conferences.

Our official conference dinner was for many decades quite a formal affair with an obvious top table, printed menus and after dinner speakers. All the gentlemen would be in a suit and tie and the ladies in dresses. However, in recent years the dress code has been relaxed and we often do not have an after dinner speaker. The latter point is to be regretted, but organisers have found it very difficult to find suitable speakers.

The annual spring one-day conference is organised in alternate years by one of our SOC branches and the BTO. They have been held in many localities, from Inverness in the north to Dumfries in the south-west and are well supported. The national outbreak of foot and mouth disease in early 2001 led to the cancellation of the March Peebles conference and seven years earlier the Aberdeen meeting had to be cancelled through insufficient support.

## The 200 Club

In November 1988, Council approved the formation of a "200 Club" organised by Daphne Peirse-Duncombe as a private lottery. Half of the annual £12 subscription is paid out in monthly cash prize draws, whilst the balance is available to be distributed by the organisers on a wide variety of equipment, decorations and furnishings for our headquarters. Well over £22,000 has been raised to date, a most worthwhile venture.

I have not covered every aspect of the Club's activities during the past 25 years, but have dealt with my personal highlights. The valuable work of the Research and Surveys Committee, Scottish Bird Records Committee, Waterston House volunteers and SOC Website has hardly been mentioned but greatly contribute to the status of the SOC. The Club is currently partnering with BTO and Birdwatch Ireland in the latest Bird Atlas 2007–11. This major project is being organised in Scotland by Bob Swann and involves thousands of hours of footwork by volunteers to cover every 10-km square and many tetrads throughout the country.

## Office Bearers of The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 1986–2011

### Honorary Presidents

Miss Valerie M Thom	1986–1998
Mr A. Donald Watson	1986–2005

### Presidents

Mr John Arnott	1984–1988
Dr Jeremy Greenwood	1988
Dr Stanley da Prato	1988–1990
Mr Frank Hamilton	1990–1993
Mr Ray Murray	1993–1996
Mr Ian Darling	1996–1999
Mr Brian Downing	1999–2001
Mr Ian Andrews	2001–2003
Mr Mark Holling	2003–2005
Mrs Janet Crummy	2005–2007
Mr Chris Waltho	2007–2009
Mr David Jardine	2009–

## Secretaries/Administrators/Office Managers

Mr John Davies	1984–1988
Major Alastair Peirse-Duncombe	1988–1989
Ms Maureen Williams	1989–1990
Mr Michael Murphy	1990–1994
Ms Sylvia Laing	1994–2001
Ms Caroline Scott	2002–2004
Ms Kate Walshaw	2004–2006
Miss Wendy Hicks	2007–

## Honorary Treasurers

Mr Bill Harper	1980–1986
Mr Graham Appleton	1986–1990
Prof. Peter Vandome	1990–2001
Mrs Janet Crummy	2001–2003
Dr Dick Vernon	2003–2009
Mr Tony Fox	2009–

## Librarians

Mr Bill Harper	1977–1995
Dr John Law	1995–1999
Mr John Davies	2000–2005
Mrs Jean Torrance	2005–2009
Mrs Karen Bridgood	2009–

## Editors of *Scottish Birds*

Miss Valerie Thom	1982–1987
Mr Nick Picozzi	1988–1990
Mrs Ann-Marie Smout	1990–1994
Dr Stan R. da Prato	1995–2008
Mr Ian J. Andrews (Co-ordinating editor)	2009–

## Editors of the *Scottish Bird Report* (with year of reports)

Mr Angus Hogg	1983–1988
Mr Alan Wood	1989
Mr Ray Murray	1990–2001

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

*David Clugston*

# Birds and gardens in Scotland

S. DA PRATO



Plate 122. *Edinburgh's gardens and parks.* © Stan da Prato

*This article is the first of a series of review articles on species groups written by experts to celebrate their knowledge and experiences in the Club's 75th year.*

Most of us look at garden birds almost daily even if only casually while doing other things. Around 80% of the population live in towns where around one quarter of the land is used for gardens. UK gardens cover a greater area than all National and RSPB Nature Reserves combined. However quantitative studies of birds in gardens in Scotland and the rest of the British Isles have been remarkably scarce until relatively recently. For years we had better data on numbers of Golden Eagles and Greenshanks than the numbers of common garden birds. National surveying of garden bird numbers only really started when the BTO set up the winter Garden Bird Feeding Survey in 1970 followed by the larger, year round Garden Bird Watch in 1995. Both now provide data from volunteer reporters throughout the UK though the later in particular would benefit from greater coverage in Scotland.

## Scottish gardens

Britain has been described as a nation of gardeners and Scotland has been very much part of this. Early gardens were utilitarian to provide food, herbs or medicinal plants. Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden was founded as the country's first physic garden in 1670. Gardens gradually became a means for the

better off to demonstrate their power and success. Styles were copied from Continental Europe and emphasised man's domination and reordering of nature. Good remaining examples are at Pitmedden and Drummond Castle. The range of plants used was limited and designs relied heavily on evergreens clipped into shape; topiary was very popular.



Plate 123 *Rural garden.* © Ian Francis

Scotland's native flora is not large due to glaciation, geography and climate. Partly due to the introduction of plants from abroad, including many by Scottish collectors, more natural styles of garden evolved. These are still characteristic of the best known gardens in Scotland, particularly on the west coast, where the climate allows a wide range of plants from north temperate zones to flourish. However plantings have largely been of non-native species and their cultivars e.g. Rhododendrons.

Many Scottish gardens are well known internationally but not necessarily typical of the much smaller gardens most Scots have by their houses. These would typically have an ornamental area with a lawn at the front and vegetables and some fruit at the rear. Most Scots live in towns in the central belt. The plants that grew well when these towns were expanding were those that withstood a degree of smoke pollution thus the shrubberies of laurel bushes. Until recently the amount of sulphur in the air kept urban roses free from black spot disease. Not all Scots have a garden and this is not new; tenements were a feature of mediaeval Edinburgh while many streets of flats were built in all our cities in Victorian times. Partly to provide recreation for the landless town dwellers many public parks were created or extended in that period. They are still an important feature of most of our towns and cities though currently under severe financial pressure. A different type of open space was created post 1945 with New Towns of which Scotland has five. These were laid out to cope with motor vehicles and all have large green spaces in which literally millions of trees, shrubs and bulbs were planted. Again the choice of plants was influenced by horticultural rather than ecological thinking i.e. how well they would grow and how they would look; the concept that native species have an intrinsic value was rarely considered.

Garden size decreased significantly after 1945 as developers and local authorities tried to accommodate more people per hectare. Many large gardens have been split to allow more homes or the ground paved over to allow cars to park - with subsequent loss of soil and plants and increased problems with rapid water runoff and

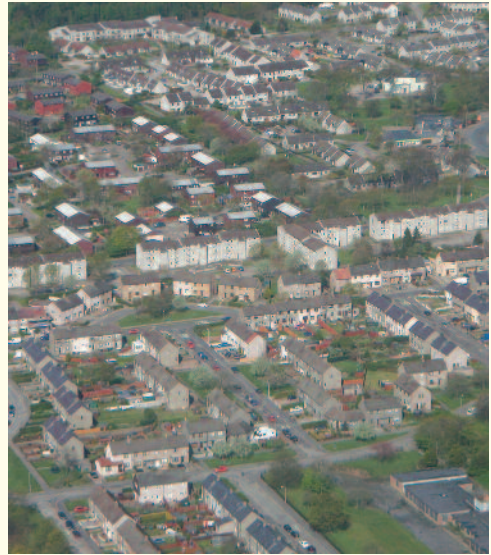


Plate 124. Suburbs of Aberdeen. © Ian Francis

even flooding. With gardens the trend has been to reduce work usually by planting shrubs, lawns or even covering the soil with gravel and slabs. However the number of gardening magazines on sale and regular TV series - Scotland has its own Beechgrove Garden with viewing figures that make it one of BBC Scotland's most popular programmes - as well as the presence of garden centres at every sizeable community in the country demonstrate that gardening is one of the nation's most popular hobbies.

The way people garden is changing. The last few years have seen sales of vegetable seeds outsell flowers and there is now a waiting list for allotments. More people garden organically although they are still in the minority. Health and Safety legislation as well as environmental concerns have drastically reduced the range of chemicals on sale. Issues of sustainability and the extent to which a garden is 'wildlife friendly' are now very much in the mainstream.

A range of national competitions and award schemes now encourage gardeners to think about more than just colourful bedding plants. Beautiful Scotland and Britain in Bloom now allocate 25% of their marks to Environmental Responsibility, which includes Conservation & Biodiversity, another 25 to Community Participation while the 50 for Horticulture includes subsets for permanent

/sustainable planting. No longer can a town win any of these awards simply by growing more bright red geraniums than anyone else. There is now a determined effort to involve areas not usually seen as environmentally attractive. Beautiful North Lanarkshire may sound a contradiction in terms but on the ground it is changing stereotypes about our former industrial landscapes.

In education virtually all Scottish schools are now in the Eco Schools Programme and around 40% have a Green Flag, the top award, on display.

Commercial horticulture has long been important in the Scottish countryside. It too has seen great change recently. Many of the market gardens and nurseries which used to ring our towns have been built over. Those that remain are usually bigger and more high-tech; the acres of polytunnels are one prominent example. As with farms the older, mixed commercial gardens were more bird friendly than modern, intensively cultivated sites.

### What do birds get from gardens?

Birds need food and water, cover and roost sites and nest sites in the breeding season. Gardens can provide some or even all of these but only for a limited range of species. Providing food is the most effective way of attracting birds. If a householder wants to spend enough money large numbers of birds will use the garden though some will largely occur there outwith the breeding season. Traditionally scraps were the main food but increased affluence means many



Plate 126. Nesting Blackbird. © Ian Francis

people now spend quite a bit on feeding 'their' birds. The bird food industry is now worth in excess of £150 million per annum in the UK. Due to ease of handling, seed is most popular. Around 60,000 tons of peanuts and seed are fed to birds in British gardens annually. The greater range of seed, such as sunflower hearts and niger, now available has probably encouraged the increase in species such as Goldfinches coming to feeders. As not all garden birds take seed, the industry has developed products for species such as Wrens or thrushes based on the 'softbill' mixes used by aviculturists.

Most gardens have some natural food sources among the plants. Gardeners often now plant for wildlife which may benefit birds though not always; wildflower meadows and butterfly/bumble bee nectar bars are not necessarily useful for woodland birds. Planting for birds usually means berry-bearing shrubs and small trees e.g. Cotoneaster and *Sorbus* (rowans). This can create a dilemma as the native rowan which birds go for first is usually stripped of berries by early autumn; some gardeners prefer to plant Asian rowans with pink or yellow fruit as birds are less likely to eat them. By dispersing seed birds have added to our flora; over ten species of Cotoneaster are naturalised in the Lothians alone. At a UK level four Cotoneasters are on the invasive non-native species list.



Plate 125. Chaffinch and Greenfinch. © Ian Francis

Fewer birds nest in gardens than feed there. This is linked to the limited quality of the garden habitat, more specific requirements of breeding birds and the small size of so many gardens - a Robin pair will need several small gardens to provide a territory. A BTO survey found that only with Blackbirds did slightly more than half of gardens report nesting. Blue Tits attempted to nest in just under half of gardens; Great Tits and Robins in just under than 30%; House Sparrows and Woodpigeons in around one in five.

The numbers of birds feeding in gardens is linked to the amount of food available in the woods and fields. A study in Argyll found that Siskin and Coal Tit numbers at feeders were higher when the Sitka Spruce cone crop was poor.

Nest boxes are popular but their value may be over rated. Many species will not use the tit type which is the one most often seen. A group of enthusiastic volunteers told me that they had made 100 boxes for local schools and planned another 100 for next season. When asked how many were actually in use they were unsure but agreed it was no more than five. The educational value of boxes can be considerable, especially if a remote camera system is used, although positioning boxes at eye level can lead to vandalism. Boxes can be valuable winter roost sites for cold-sensitive species.

### What sort of birds occur in gardens?

This reflects what is in the garden that birds can utilise as well as the surrounding countryside. Although the Scottish avifauna is far from identical to that of England differences are much less marked with garden birds as gardens are not as different as some other habitats. Obviously there are exceptions. If you live in a large garden adjacent to a Caledonian pine wood you are likely to get Crested Tits - even Red Squirrels - but most Scottish gardens are not in such favoured locations.

The BTO Garden Bird Watch survey lists 41 'core species'. However, only around 20 species are regularly recorded in one third or more of gardens (Table 1) and around ten species regularly occur in half or more of the survey gardens. A handful of species occur in nearly all gardens. Not surprisingly seasonal variation occurs especially in hard winters when local birds such as Yellowhammers or migrants like Redwings and Waxwings come to take food. However, these species do not make the top ten or even 20 which are dominated by a group of relatively sedentary species irrespective of season or region within Scotland or the UK .



Plate 127. Yellowhammer. © Ian Andrews

**Table 1.** The average percentage of gardens occupied by different species per week in Scotland in 2010 (BTO Garden BirdWatch)

Species	%
Blackbird	88.5
Blue Tit	80.2
Chaffinch	77.2
Robin	76.2
House Sparrow	73.7
Dunnock	71.9
Great Tit	65
Coal Tit	56.8
Greenfinch	56.7
Woodpigeon	55.2
Starling	54.6
Goldfinch	48
Collared Dove	45.1
Magpie	36.5
Carrion Crow	32.9
Jackdaw	30
Feral Pigeon	29.5
Siskin	25.5
Wren	22.4
Great Spotted Woodpecker	19.7

Over the period of these surveys there have been some marked declines and increases. The BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey has noted decreases since 1970 of over 50% in Song Thrush, Starling, Treecreeper, House Sparrow and Mistle Thrush. Surprisingly, the average number of Blue Tits per garden has dropped by 42% over the period though the species is doing well in other habitats. Not all these changes are fully understood but they tend to reflect similar changes in the wider countryside, many of them related to food availability. House Sparrows, which have disappeared from city centres, still seem to do reasonably well where there are gardens or allotments. More recently there have been declines in Greenfinch and Chaffinch linked to disease. Very large increases have been recorded in Blackcaps, Scandinavian thrushes, corvids, feral and Woodpigeons, Long-tailed Tits and Goldfinches. Some of these increases have occurred in severe weather. However increased quantity and variety of food provision has also attracted more birds into gardens. For example niger seed is very attractive to Goldfinches and Redpolls which have both become commoner at feeders.



**Plate 128.** Siskin on garden feeder. © Ian Francis

Woodpigeons have become commoner and tamer, reflecting reduced levels of shooting and increased winter survival due to increased production of oilseed rape. The increase is particularly significant given their size. This species' biomass must now be the greatest of all garden birds. Nuthatch, which is spreading north in Scotland, is often first noticed in a new area at garden feeders.

On one weekend in late January the RSPB organises its Big Garden Birdwatch. This very successful mass participation event attracted over half-a-million people in 2011 of whom 45,000 were in Scotland. The most commonly recorded species for both Scotland and the UK are shown in Table 2. Species are similar to those recorded in the BTO surveys though the rank order is slightly different owing to the different timeframes over which these surveys run.



**Plate 129.** Lesser Redpolls on niger. © Jimmy Maxwell



**Table 2.** The average number of the 2011 top 10 species of birds recorded per garden across Scotland, compared with the results from 2010 (Scottish Big Garden Birdwatch).

Species	Average per garden 2011	Average per garden 2010	% change 2010–2011
Chaffinch	6.09	5.77	5.55%
House Sparrow	5.31	4.93	7.71%
Starling	4.72	3.99	18.3%
Blue Tit	3.09	2.43	27.16%
Blackbird	2.96	3.39	-12.68%
Goldfinch	1.70	1.06	60.38%
Great Tit	1.52	1.24	22.58%
Woodpigeon	1.46	1.30	12.31%
Robin	1.46	1.61	-9.32%
Coal Tit	1.17	1.00	17%

Schoolchildren can take part in a week-long event. Of the ten most numerous species recorded by the children Black-headed and Common Gulls feature reflecting the more open habitat of school grounds.

A wide range of birds have been recorded in gardens in small numbers. Gardens on the Northern Isles, notably Fair Isle, and Outer Hebrides regularly record rarities. Occasionally something very unusual turns up in a mainland garden such as the American Robin in Inverbervie on Christmas Day. Other rarities in mainland gardens have included a Dark-eyed Junco in Hamilton, a Black-headed Bunting in Gullane and, though not on the mainland, the recent Black-throated Thrush on Bute.

Gardens are not entirely safe habitats for birds. UK-wide cat predation has been estimated to kill 55 million birds annually. Birds also die or are injured flying into windows though this can be minimised by ensuring that the glass does not reflect foliage.

### How important are garden bird populations?

This depends on how we define gardens. In 1986 I surveyed a variety of gardens in Edinburgh and East Lothian to see how they compared with surveys done further south largely in pre-war suburbs with large gardens. This is still one of the largest studies of bird across built up areas in Scotland. Numbers of

species ranged from 13 in housing estates to 28 in the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh while densities were from as low as 0.25 per hectare in high rise developments to nine in the Botanics. Many of the garden densities were actually higher than on arable farmland but many species that occurred in scrub or woods were absent from the gardens.

When gardens are considered as part of the total urban environment the picture changes. Most urban areas have considerable habitat diversity. Even buildings are important for some birds and most House Martins and Swifts breed there. Extensive areas of grass in parks near the coast often attract feeding waders such as Curlews, Redshanks and Oystercatchers as well as gulls and corvids. There is a remarkable record of a pair of Oystercatchers nesting in a flower bed at Balmoral Castle.



**Plate 130.** Oystercatcher nesting in Balmoral flower bed. © Jimmy Maxwell

'Derelict' land can provide habitat such as scrub with plants such as nettle, bramble and thorns most gardeners destroy yet such habitat is essential for many warblers and finches. Birds colonise new habitat quickly - they do after all have wings! Most of our song birds naturally occur in woodland or scrub, although scrub is usually still seen as an area only for development. Even among conservationists there can be an assumption that a habitat that can develop quickly is less valuable than something like ancient woodland. BTO research has shown that urban breeding bird populations have been underestimated. Over half of our House Sparrows and Starlings and around a third of Blackbirds breed in houses and gardens.



Plate 131. *Song Thrush gathering food.* © Ian Francis

It is likely that the amount of food now given to birds improves winter survival rates. One difficult question is whether feeding common species that take food in gardens could allow them to out-compete scarcer species in the breeding season in woods. It is not clear if supplementary feeding in gardens increases breeding productivity - there is even some evidence that it may reduce it.

### Do birds benefit gardens?

Although there are many examples of attractive gardens where no chemicals are used it is a myth that the level of protection that most gardeners want for their plants can be reliably provided by natural predators. Most invertebrate populations e.g. aphids can multiply at such speed in favourable conditions that birds and other predators merely skim off the surplus. Similarly there is no evidence that birds like thrushes reduce the number of beneficial invertebrates such as earthworms. It is also extremely unwise for anyone interested in conserving raptors to give credence to the idea that predators normally limit the numbers of their prey. Weather is the most usual limiting factor for many invertebrates.

Birds can be a problem in gardens. Some birds, particularly pigeons, damage vegetable and some fruit crops; the latter can also be damaged at the bud stage by Bullfinches. Indirect damage includes fouling from faeces and loosening of young plants and labels by birds looking for invertebrates. Herons can empty ponds of expensive ornamental fish. Despite many claims to the contrary, Magpies and Sparrowhawks are not responsible for declines in garden songbirds

though there have been situations where hawks have killed ornamental doves.

### Concluding thoughts

Gardens are important for some birds and very important as places where people can easily interact with plants and wildlife. The extent to which most gardens will accommodate wildlife may be limited although new initiatives to encourage wildlife gardening on a community rather than just an individual basis will be worth exploring. There is a need for better explanation at local levels over what wildlife gardens can support and under what conditions. This should complement the national work of BTO and RSPB and help focus attention on areas in and around our towns which support birds that are rarely attracted into gardens. The number of people who garden is impressive. For example one SOC branch covers the Lothians, meeting between Edinburgh and Aberlady. There are at least 20 gardening clubs active in the same region and not all gardeners belong to clubs. SOC members could usefully liaise with garden clubs to their mutual benefit and to that of conservation.

*The RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch is co-ordinated by Sarah Kelly. Dr Tim Harrison provided details of BTO garden bird studies. To help the BTO increase its coverage of Scottish gardens please join Garden BirdWatch or request a three week 'taster' form to give the survey a try. Email [gbw@bto.org](mailto:gbw@bto.org) or telephone 01842 750050 and ask for the Garden Ecology Team or write to GBW, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU.*

Stan da Prato

# Fair Isle's living legend - James A. Stout

T.H. HYNDMAN

A strange call comes from a flushed pipit as 14-year old Jimmy walks across the croftlands. The inquisitive youngster follows the bird and sees unusual white markings. Later the boy recounts his observation of white mantle stripes and the swooping movement in flight to his father George ('Fieldy') Stout and house guest, the pioneer ornithologist and naturalist Surgeon Rear-Admiral John H. Stenhouse. The next day, relocated at Gaila, Jimmy and Stenhouse shoot the bird as it feeds on standing oats. After close inspection in the hand, Stenhouse is quoted to say the locally famous phrase: "James... this could be Pechora!"



Plate 133. Jimmy Midway.



Plate 132. Jimmy in his new suit - £10 worth?

Among birdwatchers, Jimmy is best remembered for his finding and collecting Britain's first Pechora Pipit on Fair Isle, Shetland, as a teenager in 1925. The Pechora Pipit was skinned and is still in the collection at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Jimmy received £10 for his keen observational skills and that was a large sum of money on Fair Isle in 1925. Also Stenhouse gave him a book: R.G. Wardlaw Ramsay's (1923) "Guide to the Birds of Europe and North Africa", inscribed "To James Stout, in remembrance of his pleasant companionship at Fair Isle in Sept.1925 & our successful hunt for the Petchora Pipit. From J.H. Stenhouse. Edinburgh, October 1925".

It is not widely known that Jimmy was at Stenhouse's side much of the autumn as they also collected the first record of Paddyfield Warbler that very same September. Hardly surprising that these events, his father's passion and living his entire life on Fair Isle led to a life-long fascination with birds.

That book must have been a great source of identification and education for not only Jimmy and his father but the whole island. A few years

before Jimmy was born, his father, most commonly known as Fieldy, had already collected many skins of rarities including the first British record of Red-rumped Swallow in 1905. Fieldy was encouraged by visiting ornithologists and naturalists, most notably Dr Eagle Clarke and his friend the Duchess of Bedford, to shoot anything that looked interesting, as they were big collectors of birds' skins. Several islanders soon became skilled skimmers, this occasionally supplementing their income and providing bird skins for museums and collectors. Jimmy, Fieldy and other islanders' expertise grew with the continued contact of visiting ornithologists and birdwatchers. The Fair Islanders would never spend money to post a misidentified bird, so they had this extra incentive to make positive identification. The unassuming experts on their own patch were a force within nature, sometimes teaching the professionals a thing or two.

Jimmy used to refer to this story - "The one that got away", as his other "first" for Britain. In October 1928 a Calandra Lark was collected and sent to the Paisley Museum, but the bird's skin was lost in the post. Only seen and confirmed by islanders, his Calandra Lark record was never accepted, but occasionally appears in notes. As in birdwatching and ornithology today, sometimes only the seeing is believing and the right people need to see it, not someone else. The second British record is one of the four subsequent Fair Isle sightings of Calandra Lark that have been accepted since 1978.



Plate 134. *Pechora Pipit*. © Tommy Hyndman.

In 1931 Jimmy shot what was believed to be the first Pallid Harrier ever seen in Britain. In the hand, Jimmy and Fieldy confirmed the identifi-

cation and the skin was sent to Edinburgh. There the identification was discredited - not a Pallid Harrier, but a Montagu's or common Hen Harrier. Fieldy was furious and wrote a letter insisting the bird be sent on to London for further review. Many weeks later they received confirmation of what they already knew, that the bird was an immature male Pallid Harrier, an understandably tricky identification. As a result of the new emphasis on birdwatching rather than shooting, two other Fair Isle visual records from 1942 and 1949 were both subsequently rejected.

The Stouts became friends with George Waterston before World War II and even wrote to him during his stay in a German prison camp. Jimmy was instrumental in supporting George Waterston's development of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory. He and the rest of the Fair Isle were happy to have a new laird, but Waterston soon realised it was hard enough to run just an observatory, and Fair Isle was then sold to the National Trust for Scotland. The new observatory changed the island, bringing a semi-resident warden and many new experts. Jimmy's advice was less sought by visiting birdwatchers but his expertise was still called upon from time to time, being the only one around who had ever seen a particular rare species before.

Fair Isle's first Red-flanked Bluetail was spotted on the 29 September 1981, a second record for Britain. John Holloway, a keen birdwatcher who lived on Fair Isle for six years, recalls racing across the island to see the bird. Along the way he passes Jimmy tending to his ewes and shares the exciting news. Jimmy lifts his head and looking at John, says "aw the Tarsiger ... old Stenhouse told me we would find it someday". He puts his head down and continues his work as John goes quickly on his way, duly impressed. (*Tarsiger cyanurus* is the Latin name for Red-flanked Bluetail). This story is a testament to Stenhouse's predictions and to Jimmy who had for most of his life been well aware of this species. The island twitch was in view from where Jimmy was, but he waited until his work was done before eventually seeing the long-awaited Tarsiger.

On 7 November 1981, Nick Riddiford's first autumn as Warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory was seemingly over. On his way to the Hall for



Plate 135. *Good Shepherd 3* and crew with Jimmy third from the right.

a community event, he drove past the Gully Trap and to his surprise a small warbler flew into the catching box... a Firecrest! He knew everyone would be at the Hall so took it along to show them, and especially Jimmy. "There you are", Nick said to Jimmy: "First for Fair Isle". "You're right, boy", says Jimmy "but only because I didn't have a gun with me on the 23rd of September 1934 when I saw one on the wall at Setter."

"The things you see when you don't have a gun" is a humorous Fair Isle saying attributed to James A. Stout.

Jimmy was born 100 years ago on 7 March 1911. Birdwatchers often refer to him as Jimmy Midway, as Midway is the name of his house, while Fair Islanders know him as Myers Jimmy, Myers being the name of his croft. Over the years he has seen

birdwatching's beginnings starting with the gun - but now "shot" in digital HD. In his life he has mastered many skills, but his knowledge of avifauna was equalled and surpassed at sea at the helm of the *Good Shepherd* ferry. He could predict the weather and changing tides with a glance out the window. His knowledge of crofting and tending to sheep has been passed down to his sons and grandchildren. He talked as enthusiastically of the nuances in catching lobsters as of the sightings of rare birds. Even today, the slightest mention of "the Pechora" still sparks the memory. Anyone who has ever had the chance to meet James A. Stout has ticked their meeting with the knowledge and honour of knowing an exceptionally rare man. Happy 100th Birthday Jimmy!

*Tommy H. Hyndman with help from Jimmy, his family and friends*

# NOTES AND COMMENT



Plate 136. Male Velvet Scoter with incubating female Eider, Isle of May, May 2010. © Keith Brockie

## Male Velvet Scoter paired with an Eider, Isle of May

On 12 May 2010, I was walking up Haven Road at 08.00 hrs and was astonished to see a male Velvet Scoter waddling up the West Braes behind a female Eider. He followed her up the slope until she settled on her nest in the centre of a concrete form, part of the old aerial mast construction. The drake then spent the whole day sitting by or within a few metres of the incubating female. The scoter was incredibly tame, allowing an approach to within metres without showing any concern. I spent hours sketching him for my new book on the island. Initially, after a shower of rain, he was covered in raindrops reflecting the colours of the spectrum in the sunlight - stunning against his velvety-black plumage. During this time he was very relaxed, contentedly preening and dozing in the sun. At one point a male Eider approached and the scoter chased him away.

Subsequently, he was not seen again. The crew of the *May Princess* had reported a strange duck with white wing patches in the Kirkhaven harbour two weeks earlier, but no one else had seen him in the interim.

The two eggs hatched on 7 June and the chicks looked just like normal Eider ducklings. Blood samples were taken (under licence) from the ducklings and feathers from the female in case a future database can be found to compare DNA to prove a mixed pairing. Could the scoter have been brought up with a crèche of Eider ducklings in the Baltic? It will be intriguing to see if he returns in 2011.

*Keith Brockie, Fearnan Gallery,  
by Aberfeldy, Perthshire PH15 2QW  
Email: kbrockie@btinternet.com*

## Coot squatter

On a recent visit to Linlithgow Loch in April, I witnessed a Coot sitting on what was apparently a Great Crested Grebe nest at the water's edge. The grebes were bringing bits of vegetation to add to their floating structure as normal, placing them carefully beside the sitting bird. We do not know whether the Coot had any proprietorial interest in the nest or whether it had just found a handy place to rest, but within this odd situation there was no evidence of antagonistic behaviour on either side throughout.

*Frank Stark*



Plate 137. Nest situation. © Frank Stark

### Redwing breeding in Roy Bridge in 2010

The Redwing is now a very rare breeding bird in Britain. From a peak of 110 confirmed breeding pairs in the 1980s, the British population is now in decline and since 1989 all confirmed breeding has been in Scotland. The core of the population is around and to the north of the Great Glen. Redwings readily breed in large gardens, with nests recorded in trees, shrubs, creepers, bank cavities, piles of sticks and on the ground.

For 25 years I have observed summering Redwings around Glen Roy and Glen Spean, just to the east of the Great Glen, with varying degrees of certainty as to the likelihood of breeding. Although the evidence has included sightings of adults carrying food and fledged chicks being fed, I had never located a nest. However, in 2010 I was able to observe an active Redwing nest in my parents' garden in Roy Bridge. Relatively large at c.0.6 hectares, it extends to the River Roy and includes birch and oak woodland, birch and willow scrub with fruit trees/bushes. Some larger birches and occasional rhododendrons are interspersed with areas of short grass and three 'wildlife' ponds.

In the spring of 2010, a male Redwing sang frequently from tall birch trees at the rear of the garden. For several weeks he was only ever seen alone and when in song. However, on 16 May my father noticed a Redwing making several visits to a large patch of rhododendrons at the side of the house including several small birches and some willow scrub. Further observations revealed a pair of Redwings taking in food and carrying out faecal sacs. On 21 May a local ringer located the nest with five chicks about one metre from the ground and towards the edge of the thicket. It was constructed from dry grasses, small twigs and moss and had a mud inner layer lined with dry grass. The chicks were ringed and on 26 May two young were seen on the lawn being fed by the adults. Much to my mother's relief, all five youngsters fledged successfully.

A second brood would not have been unusual for Redwings, but as June

progressed, sightings of the young decreased and the male began singing again as he had previously, being heard for the last time on 27 June. We found no evidence to suggest a second brood had been attempted.

I understand that since 2006 the only other Redwing brood ringed was one of five young in 2008.

*Dominic Sargent*

### Nuthatch replacements at Dalzell Woods, Motherwell

Thanks to previous ringing of Nuthatches at this site, we now know that one of the males bred for six years and was replaced this season by a new bird. The original female was replaced after four years. So at this moment in April, the current pair are busy replastering the hole in readiness for laying. It is interesting to know that this site in Motherwell is not just a temporary outpost for adventurous birds, but an established site drawing from other birds that have appeared in the area. They could in fact be previous young produced here, but we have no way of knowing this as not every brood could be ringed.

The photograph shows another pair in this area mating in between journeys back and forth adding fresh Scots Pine flakes to the nest.

*Jimmy Maxwell*



Plate 138. Mating Nuthatches. © Lang Stewart

# BOOK REVIEWS

**Shetland Bird Report 2009.** Mike Pennington (ed.), 2010. Shetland Bird Club, ISSN 1364-4149, 144 pages, softback, £10.00 (inc. P&P).

The Shetland Bird report is a celebration of birds and birding. It's an advert for all the different forms that our interest can take, superbly enlivened by a mouth-watering array of photos which show just how much this medium has enhanced our hobby. The report is a credit to Mike Pennington and the compilers, to the photographers, and to the birders of the wonderful Shetland Islands. It is also testimony to the great longevity of the Shetland Bird Club, which has been producing bird reports to a high standard for many years. But this report raises the bar high for others to follow.



What else can I say? The text for all species is informative but concise, and backed up where appropriate with tables (e.g. for WeBS counts), and figures (e.g. for breeding productivity of seabirds). The overall layout is very clear, and I would commend it to any bird report producers. The report includes a bird ringing report, a seasonal summary, and five articles - ranging from a report on a Greylag Goose census to the first Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler for Britain.

No less than 22 photographers contributed images (1-4 on each pair of facing pages), which are worthy of an exhibition in their own right. Firstly, there is an unparalleled selection of photos of rare waders, gulls, warblers, pipits, and buntings which are an education in

themselves (more like looking through the *Collins Bird Guide* than a local bird report), including a feather perfect portrait of a Spotted Sandpiper (Lee Mott) (so that's what they look like!) and a Grasshopper warbler showing its classic *Locustella* proportions in the open (Hugh Harrop).

But there is also a fine and often evocative selection of more typical Shetland bird life images: a Ringed Plover on a Fetlar beach in February between snowy rocks and crashing waves (Brydon Thomason), a pair of Shelducks with 3+ ducklings amongst seaweed in a sheltered bay (Roger Riddington), a Mallard duckling fly-catching (Dave Gifford), a Fulmar in flight in snow (Brydon Thomason), and an amazing shot of an Arctic Skua carrying off an Oystercatcher's egg (Roger Riddington).

*Copies are £10.00 including p&p, and each report purchased includes a complimentary one year's membership of the Shetland Bird Club. Make cheques payable to Shetland Bird Club. Available from Hugh Harrop, SBC sales (SOC), Longhill, Maywick, Shetland ZE2 9JF.*

**Best Birdwatching Sites: the Solway: Cumbria/Dumfries and Galloway.** John Miles, 2010. Buckingham Press, ISBN 978-0-9550339-3-3, softback, 240 pages. £17.50.

This small book, covering the regions of Cumbria and Dumfries & Galloway, is packed with information. It is one of a series produced by this publisher and is written by a former RSPB reserve warden who, based on personal experience, describes more than 95 sites. The sites are listed in alphabetical order for each

region, making it easy to find your favourite birding spot. Descriptions are up-to-date with each site mapped in detail accompanied by a list of target birds. A checklist of Solway birds and a month by month guide to the regions' birding are two useful items. In fact, there appears to be little information that the reader cannot find - public transport, parking places, toilets, wheelchair access, seawatching advice, detailed routes and access to watch points are all here, as well as handy contact details of local reserves and centres. Interspersed among the pages are some eye-catching illustrations by Mike Henry. A very helpful map of each region at the end of the book shows the location of all the sites. How I wish I had had this book during my trip to Dumfries & Galloway last autumn! I would thoroughly recommend it to any birder visiting this beautiful, wild region, and it even fits into a large pocket.



*Norman Elkins*

**Where to Watch Birds in Ethiopia.** C. Spottiswoode, M. Gabremichael & J. Francis, 2010. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-1-4081-3075-9, softback, 192 pages, £19.99.

Just two years ago there was no local field guide, an out-of-print status book and no site guide to Ethiopia - now we have all three and actually two





where-to-watch guides including the book under review. So, what a great time to contemplate a trip to this fascinating country.

This is a pocket-sized book full of information, photos and a few maps and GPS co-ordinates. The photos are of great quality and are useful as identification aids too. All the main birding regions are covered, at least those in areas that are reasonably easily accessed; remember that some are still off-limits. The maps are generally at a small scale giving general locations, rather than footpaths. The fact that one of the authors is a local and willing to share his knowledge and enthusiasm is a great asset to the book.

Ian Andrews

**RSPB British Birds of Prey.** Marianne Taylor, photographs by Stig Frode Olsen, 2010. Helm, ISBN 9781408128497, hardback, 220 pages, £24.99.



The introductory chapters of this book put British Birds of Prey into context, reviewing their place in the historical, social and biological

landscape of Britain and the sometimes devastating effects of humans on their ecology, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries. Latterly, species such as White-tailed Eagles have been re-introduced to Britain and the hazards faced by introduced populations as they establish themselves are discussed.

There follow species accounts for all birds of prey resident in the British Isles, which are readable and very detailed. Definitions are used sparingly but to good advantage. Use is made of information boxes, giving the book a modern feel

without sacrificing content, and the text is well supported by excellent photographs. The efforts of the RSPB to protect and maintain our raptor and owl populations are brought to life by case studies of tagged individuals.

Whether your interest is in a particular species, birds of prey in general or management and conservation this book, like a good novel, holds the reader enthralled. It is definitely a book to come back to more than once.

Jean Torrance

**Wildlife Walks: great days out at over 500 of UK's top nature reserves.** (3rd edition). Malcolm Tait, 2010. A. & C. Black, ISBN 978-1-4081-3025-4, paperback, 320 pages, £14.99.

This is a guide to the reserves of the Wildlife Trusts in the UK, Isle of Man and Alderney. Each Trust has responsibility for 10–16 reserves; some have legal status, others are looked after by informal local groups. The book is organised into three tiers: Regions (9); County groups (22), each of which has a map showing the reserves and a different coloured flash on the page edge; and the individual Trusts (47).

There are two levels of information. Firstly, a brief mention of some reserves, with OS map reference and page number of the map, Trust mission statement, contact information, a brief site description and location information. Secondly, full reserve details, including in addition to the above a site description, opening times, access, walking time taken to see most of the reserve, what to see in 30



minutes, members' comments and a 'did you know' box.

There is a uniform framework, but the site descriptions seem to be written by members of the local Trust. There is an index of all the reserves, so if you know the name of the reserve there is no problem in finding it. But, if you don't know what reserves are present in an area it's a time-consuming two or three step process.

There are, in all, more than 550 UK reserves covered in this book, of which 22 are in Scotland. It could be most useful when visiting other areas in the UK - but only in combination with a guide which covers more than the Wildlife Trusts.

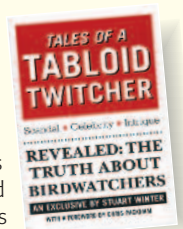
Harriet Trevelyan

**Tales of a Tabloid Twitcher.** Stuart Winter, 2010. New Holland, ISBN 978-1-84773-693-2, 208 pages, softback, £7.99.

Stuart Winter is a journalist and birder. He wrote the 'Strictly for the Birds' column in the *Daily Star*, before moving on to the *Sunday Express*, for which he now writes the 'Birdman' column. Not surprisingly, the front cover of the book recalls the front page of a redtop, where it purports, in typically tabloid style, to reveal the truth about birdwatchers.

The book comprises 16 chapters, taking a humorous look at many aspects of twitching, as well as more serious issues relating to conservation. Winter also gives space to his 'heroes and legends', and devotes a whole chapter to twitching guru Lee Evans.

Many of the passages in the book are lifted directly from his

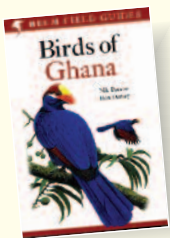


newspaper columns, which are written in the characteristic journalese one associates with the tabloids. This sits uncomfortably alongside the more conventional writing style he adopts for the rest of the book. The book also suffers from having been poorly proof-read, with numerous typos. However, he is obviously passionate about birds, and does get his facts right.

The blurb on the back cover proclaims the book to be "the biggest 'must-read' since Bill Oddie's *Little Black Bird Book*". I think it falls some way short of that accolade, but it is entertaining in parts, at times thought-provoking, and most birders would find it worth a read.

Malcolm Quirie

**Birds of Ghana.** Nick Borrow & Ron Demey, 2010. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-1-4081-2279-2, softback, 352 pages, £29.99.



The publication of this latest Helm Field Guide, a few weeks before departing on a private tour of Ghana, was very fortuitous, enabling our small group to test it in the field.

It is based on the *Birds of West Africa* (2001) and the *Field Guide to the Birds of Western Africa* (2004) by the same illustrator and author. Early chapters cover essential topics such as: How to use the Book; Geography, Climate and Habitats; Important Bird Areas including two colour maps and Taxonomy & Nomenclature.

As with all field guides the accuracy of colour plates, key identification pointers and distribution maps are of paramount

importance. We found that it scored quite highly in most of these areas. Nick Borrow's plates are for the most part very good, but the colour reproduction is rather too dark. The text opposite each species plate is naturally concise, but reliable. Distribution maps are provided for all species and are based on current information, but they must be used with care as new records are being added all the time for this increasingly popular birding destination.

We found this guide very easy to use with the quick index to the main bird groups inside the back cover being most beneficial. During a 16-day led bird tour it is quite possible to see a high proportion of the total Ghanaian list and this guide is an essential purchase.

David Clugston

**The Biggest Twitch.** Alan Davies & Ruth Millar, 2009. A. & C. Black, ISBN 978-14081-23874, 320 pages, £12.99.

This is the account of an attempt to see the most species of birds in a single year. Depending on the taxonomy used, there are around 10,000–11,000 species on the planet. While most folk are content to try for a 'Big Day', and get close to the 140-odd species record level for an area (in Scotland at least), the authors decided to try for the world record of 3,662 species, set by Jim Clements in 1989. They sold up their house and went for broke, aided, it must be said, by the travel company which supplied many of the guides they used.

The book is like an extended diary with each chapter, about a particular place on their trip,



written alternately by Alan or Ruth. It's a good idea, as the styles of the two authors are sufficiently different and help to vary the pace of what could have been a tedious list of species and places.

To say they travelled the world would be an understatement, criss-crossing the planet and visiting all continents except Antarctica, which was presumably not cost-effective. Many well-known bird-rich places were visited. Ecuador features twice, as does the USA. Perhaps the most interesting country was Ethiopia, where it seemed to be more of an adventure compared to some of the more 'run of the mill' places they visited.

The title gives away the outcome but suffice it to say they reached their target by the end of October in Australia and that during November and December were free to build their total to over 4,000 species.

The account is amusing, informative and thoroughly entertaining. While we may not all be so well travelled as the authors, most readers will have visited at least three of four of the places they visited. So while we may dream of going to Peru or Ghana, many of us can relate to their visits to Spain, Cyprus or even the Bird Fair at Rutland! At a relatively modest price this is a bird book that charms us, and has the vicarious pleasure you get reading when an account of a first record for the UK, without all of the boring descriptive bits!

Ray Murray

# OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

*Observatories' Roundup is a regular bi-annual feature about our bird observatories in Scotland. The intention is to publicize the work of the observatories, visiting opportunities, as well as incidental snippets of news from the islands.*



Plate 139. North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory. © Kevin Woodbridge/NRBO

## North Ronaldsay - the forgotten island

In the twitching heydays of the 1980s and early 1990s, the island of North Ronaldsay emerged as an exciting new prospect for those seeking rarities, situated at the north-east extremity of the Orkney archipelago and with Fair Isle sitting just 48 km away on the horizon, expectations were high. By the early 1990s it was firmly on the birding map with good coverage producing birds such as Yellow-browed Bunting, Siberian Thrush, Yellow Warbler, the popular and much-debated Pallas's Rosefinch, and later in 2001, the much sought after Siberian Blue Robin.

In bird observatory terms North Ronaldsay is still an infant, with daily bird-logging only dating back as far as 1985, and the observatory building itself only officially opened in 1995. Yet, the island currently boasts an impressive list of 341 species and offers a versatile birdwatching experience unrivalled by any, with great seawatching, visible migration, a variety of breeding waders, wildfowl and seabirds and many common and scarce migrants as well as the aforementioned rarities, appealing to all levels of birdwatcher and non-birder alike.

Since this period staff coverage and numbers of visiting birders slowly declined as has twitching, despite the island still producing first class rarities such as Collared Flycatcher, Veery, Calandra Lark and Sykes's Warbler, and with an increasing shift within the birding community towards self-found listing it seemed odd that such a prolific rarity hotspot should slowly fade away as a popular destination for birders.

The Bird Observatory itself lies in the south-west of the island and incorporates the old croft house of Twingness and its croft land with the neighbouring croft of Lurand making up 35 acres of land which is utilized in a non-intensive, environmentally conscious manner. A flock of North Ronaldsay Sheep are used along with a traditional arable crop rotation, and other areas are set aside for wild flowers, with a damp meadow of species-rich grassland and another of coastal heath, plus small plantations of trees and a number of Heligoland traps used for trapping and ringing birds; something all guests are welcome to observe, with tape-luring and trapping of Storm Petrels in the summer always a popular attraction.

The observatory has seven comfortable guesthouse rooms (a single, two twins and four doubles), all en-suite, with one twin room on the ground floor suitable for wheelchair access. Families are welcome and cots or additional floor couch beds for children can be set up in rooms. The hostel annex is self-contained with ten bunk spaces and a self-catering kitchen. One four-bedded dormitory is en-suite with the other four- and two-bedded rooms sharing a bathroom with shower.

A full cooked breakfast and evening meals (including a choice of North Ronaldsay mutton) are available on an individual or half board basis, also lunches in the Obscafe or packed lunches as required. Vegetarian and special diets are catered for and evening à-la-carte meals are available by arrangement. For current prices see our website.



Plate 140. North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory. © Kevin Woodbridge/NRBO

There is space to relax in the bar lounge, conservatory, small lounge and beer terrace; the observatory stocks a wide selection of quality wines, local beers and spirits. Other facilities include Wi-Fi Internet access and digital projection. For the non-birding visitor there is plenty to see and do on the island with other wildlife including the famous seaweed-eating North Ronaldsay Sheep, seals and occasional cetaceans, the Old Beacon (Scotland's third lighthouse), New Lighthouse with exhibition room and wool mill, local heritage archive, 9-hole golf course and several archaeological sites.

Arriving in 2008, highlights in my short time have included Collared Flycatcher, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Buff-bellied Pipit, Eyebrowed Thrush



Plate 141. Cretzschmar's Bunting, September 2008, North Ronaldsay. © Alex Lees

and the unfortunately freshly dead Rufous-tailed Robin, amongst many exciting rarities, plus some spectacular falls of scarce migrants and North Ronaldsay's hidden gem - fantastic seawatching. Yet despite all of this, visiting birders remain few and far between. Considering the island's history and afore mentioned highlights in the past few years alone when less than half of the island is covered daily by observatory staff, there's huge potential for those wishing to find their own birds.

For the rarity finder the possibilities are truly mouthwatering on such a small, under-watched island given its geographical position and proximity to Fair Isle. Frustratingly, the few observatory staff only manage to cover a fraction of the island daily, yet along with the above have still turned up rarities such as White's Thrush, a total of nine Pine Buntings, 14 Blue-winged Teals, Yellow-rumped Warbler,



Plate 142. Eyebrowed Thrush, October 2009, North Ronaldsay. © Paul A. Brown



**Plate 143.** *Wryneck, North Ronaldsay. Recorded annually in small numbers: at least five Wrynecks were noted in September 2010. © Rael Butcher/NRBO*

Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Dark-eyed Junco, White-crowned Sparrow, Little Bustard, Ross's Gull, Brünnich's Guillemot and Steller's Eider, plus many more heart-stopping finds.

Mega rarities aside, species such as White-billed Diver are near-annual, as are Pectoral and Buff-breasted Sandpipers. Almost 10% of all British records of Pacific Golden Plover have occurred here and regularly, though later, American Golden Plover too are no doubt overlooked and under-recorded amongst the large flocks of European Golden Plover present from July through November, and in October 2005 an impressive flock of seven White-rumped Sandpipers present on The Links is certainly worth a mention. Without giving too much away, it's suffice to say North Ronaldsay has undoubtedly huge potential and rewards for those willing to put in the effort, and the key to unlocking this is increased coverage. There is a maze of dry stone dykes, large thistle patches, miles of coastline, and of course extensive Iris beds, all acting as a sponge for tired migrants, and the latter surely the reason for so few records of shyer species such as *Locustella* warblers, with two Lanceolated and just single records of River and Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler to date. All of which means there's plenty of undisturbed areas to get stuck into. The observatory is managed by Alison Duncan and Kevin Woodbridge, though the acquisition of two more ornithological staff this year, doubling the norm, sees four assistants helping out - Paul



**Plate 144.** *Bluethroat, North Ronaldsay. North Ronaldsay is one of the most reliable sites for Bluethroat in Scotland, with birds annual in spring and autumn. © Kevin Woodbridge/NRBO*

Brown, Rael Butcher, Richard Else and Mark Warren. 2011 is already proving our thoughts and belief in the island's birding potential, with a very productive early spring, but we're still unable to cover the island even once over each day.

Aside from the rare and unpredictable, North Ronaldsay has a great deal to offer for all interested in birds with an ever-changing cast throughout the seasons. Even in the fiercest of weather there's always the comfort of the observatory lounge and bar to shelter in, where you can have a drink whilst reflecting on the day's birding with stunning views of the surrounding croft land and neighbouring islands.

#### **Rael Butcher, Assistant Warden**

*If you would like to know more about North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory or are planning a visit please see our website [www.nrbo.co.uk](http://www.nrbo.co.uk) for more information and latest bird sightings.*



Plate 145. Northern Harrier, Isle of Lewis, February 2011. © Iain Macleod

## Northern Harrier on the Isle of Lewis

M. SCOTT

*Having a Snowy Owl return to your home is certainly not to be sniffed at, but was eclipsed by a fly through 'Hawk' on the Isle of Lewis.*

Gulls, corvids, the local Buzzards and a 'Hen Harrier' all appeared in the morning of 8 February 2011 behind our house to take their turn at mobbing the returning roosting Snowy Owl. It was back for its annual visit, which has become a feature since 2005 when it first showed up in my village, Brue, on the Isle of Lewis.

Hen Harriers are scarce on Lewis (no voles, unlike Uist, so they don't breed here) but I usually see four or so each winter. So noteworthy, but in the 30-odd seconds view it looked odd - very odd. Dark mahogany on the upperparts, rich bright rusty-cinnamon and plain on the underparts, and it seemed to be 'hooded' with a pale collar, all rather akin to a Pallid Harrier - but this was no Pallid on structure and jizz. It was gone all too

quickly as it drifted over the crofts towards the next village of Barvas. For an optimist these subtle features pointed towards a 'Nearctic origin' and more specifically the sub-species/species known as Northern Harrier, as opposed to 'Eurasian' Hen Harrier. But with such views, and a complex identification to be made, and with no photos - what to do? Hope it comes back - and it didn't - and I had to get on and do some work.

Niggling and frustrating it certainly was, but the main doubt in my mind was how dark the uppers were. I didn't recall this as a feature of Northern, but again I didn't recall seeing a Hen Harrier as deep mahogany as this. Other features such as the underparts colour and hood were encouraging, but from memory the nitty-gritty seemed to be about primary barring and seeing that on a flying, nae mobbing, harrier is frankly fanciful. Parking the record and hoping it showed seemed the only option on observer starved Lewis.

Iain Macleod, a local friend and keen amateur photographer, who had come to see the Snowy Owl, then later managed to get some photos of the harrier as it hunted over Barvas. He e-mailed them through that afternoon and now things were getting interesting and features could be properly examined. Yip - it really did look like a Northern Harrier (the Nearctic form of Hen Harrier "*hudsonicus*" or Marsh Hawk as it was once more quaintly known). I discussed it with Tristan, the other active birder on Lewis at the time, as well as some RSPB work colleagues and Angus Murray at Birdline Scotland. A thumbs-up from everyone, especially an enthusiastic Richard Millington in Norfolk, seemed to suggest it was time to put the news out nationally. Hats off to Iain - no photos would mean a record like this would almost certainly be lost; such is the emphasis on the image these days over the observer's written word.

So perhaps a Scottish first and another one in a year which has seen at least three Northern Harriers cross the Atlantic - and a fine addition to the patch/garden list. Two 'BB' rarities in a day within 50 metres of the house can't be bad, especially in February.



**Plate 146.** *Northern Harrier, Isle of Lewis, February 2011.* © Iain Macleod



**Plate 147.** *Northern Harrier, Isle of Lewis, February 2011.* © Iain Macleod

### Description/discussion

This has largely been collated from looking at the images obtained.

Clearly a ringtail harrier: the dark uppers, dark brown head and 'boa', combined with rusty 'Irn-Bru' coloured underparts immediately drew attention. The underparts were rather plain and showed only limited streaking (usually heavier and more distinct in Hen). The hooded appearance given by the dark head and boa is a primary indicator for ringtail Northern Harrier. Hens show a ring of streaks flowing into the breast, rather than the more solid contrasting band of Northern. This is a cardinal feature.

Bars on the primaries are, I would suggest, impossible to count in the field. Photos however showed five on the longest feather. This is positive for Northern, but there is overlap, with Hen showing three to five and Northern often six.

Photos suggested a dark eye, and the darkness of the remiges, combined with the cleanness of the underparts were suggestive of a juvenile female.

The latest in-depth identification article in a European context is by Mullarney & Forsman (2011).



Plate 148. Northern Harrier, Isle of Lewis, February 2011. © Iain Macleod



Plate 149. Northern Harrier, Isle of Lewis, February 2011.  
© Iain Macleod



Plate 150. Northern Harrier, Isle of Lewis, February 2011.  
© Iain Macleod

Any future identifications of Northern Harrier in Scotland will no doubt require a series of images to allow acceptance: not easy for this (sub) species, and many may fall foul of this. Previous harriers showing features of Northern have been seen on North Ronaldsay and St. Kilda. The North Ronaldsay bird was an inspiration and debate-fueller (Punkbirder 2011). I have also discussed the birds with a number of raptor workers; several talk of orange-toned birds over Scottish moors, certainly thought provoking, and hopefully this article will stimulate further scrutiny of any ringtail 'Circus' that readers come across.

The bird was seen intermittently in the same area in February and until 25 March.

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*Martin Scott, Brue, Isle of Lewis*





Plate 151. *White's Thrush, Isle of May, June 2009.* © Keith Brockie

## White's Thrush, Isle of May, June 2009 – the first island record

**K. BROCKIE**

2 June 2009 dawned grey and misty with light east winds, but little expectation of any exciting migrants. I spent most of the day sketching seabirds and decided at 20:00 hrs to do a last round of the traps. On entering the Top Garden to drive the trap, I stopped just inside the door to look at a Collared Dove sitting on the front spar over the mouth of the Heligoland. On glassing the dove I caught sight of a movement near the base of an elderberry bush to the right of the catching box. I shifted my binoculars to view the bird and immediately exclaimed 'White's Thrush' after several unprintable expletives to my wife Hazel standing beside me!

My first ever White's Thrush, utterly unmistakable and stunning even in the poor evening light, sitting in full view low down in the

bush some 10 m distant. Its large size, almost as big as the nearby Collared Dove, and distinct, scaly, crescent-shaped markings over most of its body precluded any other species.

We retreated out of the garden and made our way round the wall to the north-east corner and peered over the top of the wall. The thrush was perched just 2 m away! I gave the bush a gentle shake to try and chivy the bird into the mouth of the Top Trap, but it flew out over the wall down into the Sheep's Well gully, briefly showing its distinct boldly patterned underwing. We hurriedly opened-up the catching boxes of the Top and Arnott traps, catching a couple of Chiffchaffs in the process, prior to informing the inhabitants of Fluke Street about the new arrival.



Plate 152. *White's Thrush, Isle of May, June 2009.*  
© Keith Brockie

Despite their initial incredulity, Mike Harris, Mark Newell and Dave Pickett joined us and we erected some mist nets in the Top Garden to aid the capture of the thrush. It was gently pushed from the gully back into the garden and I duly extracted the bird from a mist net in front of its favoured bush. In the hand it was truly stunning and was quickly taken down to the ringing hut to be processed.

The thrush was aged as a 2nd-calendar year, ringed and measured: wing 163 mm; weight 134 g; fat score 1, before being admired and photographed by around 20 people resident on the island at the time. In the field the bird's behaviour was skulking with a crouching run. At no time was any call heard. Weather-wise, the wind that day had been easterly Force 3-4, with poor visibility in the early morning clearing up later to a grey day with total cloud cover. The only other noticeable passerine migrants were two Blackbirds and some Chiffchaffs. The thrush was released back up by the Tower and left in peace. It could not be relocated the next day, which is consistent with the behaviour of most other White's Thrush records in Britain.

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Plates 153–154. *White's Thrush, Isle of May, June 2009.* © Keith Brockie

## White's Thrush – its status in Scotland

*White's Thrush is an Eastern Palearctic species with four to six subspecies generally recognised, several of which probably merit species status. Records in Britain are all believed to relate to the most northerly form (Zoothera [dauma] aurea = 'Scaly' Thrush) whose breeding range extends discontinuously westwards from Korea and easternmost Russia across Siberia and just extends into the Western Palearctic in the southern Ural Mountains. It is entirely migratory and winters in southern China, and from NE India eastwards across to the Philippines.*

*There were 71 accepted records of White's Thrush in Britain to the end of 2008, with 38 of these in Scotland. In 2009, in addition to the Isle of May bird, there was a further individual on Fair Isle on 10–11 October. Of the 40 Scottish occurrences the great majority have come from Shetland (14) and Fair Isle (12), but with just two on Orkney (1990, 2003). Away from the Northern Isles there have been three on the Outer Hebrides (1993, 1998, 2004), two in North-east Scotland (1913, 2008) and Borders (1878, 1990), and singles in Highland (1991), Perth & Kinross (1956), the Isle of May (2009), Lothian (1998) and Clyde (1979). There has been a notable increase in records in Scotland in recent years with just one in the 1980s, but then nine in 1990s and 20 in the 2000s. Though less than annual, there are periodic influxes into Scotland - with three found in 1990, two in 1993, 1998, 2002, 2003 and 2009, and five in both 2004 and 2008.*

*Up until the end of 2004 the pattern of occurrence in Scotland was for most arrivals (80%) to occur in late September and October, with two found in November, one in December, two in January and one in February (Birds of Scotland, Forrester et al, 2007). Elsewhere in Britain & Ireland the trend is for birds to be found in late autumn and winter. Since 2004 this trend has continued with nine further birds discovered in Scotland in autumn: a first-winter found dead at Kennaby, Fair Isle on 2 October 2007; a first-winter at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shetland) on 13 October 2007; two on Fair*

*Isle on 1 October 2008 (the first ever multiple occurrence) and another on 8 October; a first-winter at Kergord, Mainland (Shetland) from 13–18 October 2008; one at Parkhill, Dyce (North-east Scotland) from 18–24 October 2008 and the Fair Isle bird of 10–11 October 2009. The only other British record in this period was one found dead at Thorngumbald, Hull (Yorkshire) on 21 October 2007. More unusual have been two 'spring' records in Scotland, with one at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shetland) on 28 April 2005 and the Isle of May individual on 2 June 2009. There are records from England in spring (Cleveland 1870; Cornwall March 1903; Weaversham, Cheshire, 7 May 1964) and from Ireland (Ballymahon, Co. Longford 1867; Copeland, Co. Down, 16–20 April 1993) but the Isle of May individual is the only June record. This extends the window of occurrence to virtually nine months of the year, with the earliest autumn birds being one on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 21 September 1993, one at Sumburgh (Shetland) on 22 September 1990 and one found dead in a garden in Hove (Sussex) on 26 September 1898, which may have been present for up to three weeks.*

*The overall pattern of occurrence is consistent with birds arriving in northern Britain in the autumn and then filtering south during late autumn and winter and then occurring again in eastern areas in spring. The latter birds are generally believed to be individuals that have overwintered, but (some) could conceivably be birds overshooting the breeding areas in their north-west spring migration.*



Plate 155. Southern Grey Shrike, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, October 2010. © Chris Gibbins

## The Southern Grey Shrike at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve and a short review of *pallidirostris* within the Southern Grey Shrike complex

H.E. MAGGS

Autumn 2010 was dominated by prolonged periods of promising weather for the arrival of migrants on the east coast of Scotland. Birds began showing up in early September during periods of low pressure, heavy rain and easterly winds. This was followed by rising pressure which resulted in an anticyclone forming over Scandinavia and a subsequent easterly airflow by early October. In North-east Scotland, the usual suspects were found, with minimum counts of seven Barred Warblers, 13 Yellow-browed Warblers, one Greenish Warbler and two Red-breasted Flycatchers between early September and mid-October. One or two rarer migrants were also found, including a Radde's Warbler and the region's first Blyth's Reed Warbler.

The arrival of migrants was widespread across the UK. One species that was clearly arriving in good numbers was Great Grey Shrike. *Birding World* reported around 30 at mainly east coast sites during September and 135 during October. In eastern Scotland and the Northern Isles, around 20 were seen between late September and mid-October, with five of these being in North-east Scotland.

On 14 October 2010, eight-year-old Xanthe Funnell found a 'cute white bird' just outside the Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve Office, where her father is the site manager. A member of staff and a volunteer checked it out and found that the bird was a grey shrike. I was at the

reserve ahead of a meeting and on hearing the news of a grey shrike outside, I left the office to look for the bird with other staff. The bird was soon located sitting in a hawthorn. Some observers immediately suggested it was a Great Grey Shrike and I believe news was put out on the local grapevine to this effect. My initial thoughts were that it was very pale and the dark mask looked restricted to mainly behind the eye. After a few seconds, the bird flew, exposing substantial amounts of white in the wing. I started to get excited and suggested to others that we needed to get a good look at the bird to check for features of *pallidirostris* (one of the races of Southern Grey Shrike - but see later). The bird landed a short distance away and caught, killed and impaled a Dunnock on a hawthorn bush. We approached and obtained excellent views down to about 15 metres. After prolonged close views, I was happy that the bird showed all the recognised features for the form *pallidirostris*, and after a quick look at some on-line images, the news was put out. Coincidentally, I had recently been reading up on Southern Grey Shrike identification, as I was about to head off to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) the very next day. I have previously been to the UAE in 2004, where I saw several Southern Grey Shrikes of the races *pallidirostris* and *aucheri*.

The bird spent the next few hours around the reserve garden and feeding station bushes where it killed and ate another Dunnock, fed on hawthorn berries and generally showed extremely well. The next day it appeared to have gone, but on 16th was found in a residential garden, opposite the reserve entrance, where it remained until 17th. It returned to the reserve on 18th, after which it was not seen. During its stay, the shrike showed particularly well, often down to just a few metres. Whilst present in the residential garden, it was regularly seen hunting insects by running after them on the lawn. This behaviour has



Plate 157. Southern Grey Shrike, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, October 2010. © Mark Sullivan



Plate 156. Southern Grey Shrike, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, October 2010. © Harry Scott

been noted for other *pallidirostris* shrikes occurring in Britain, such as the Lincolnshire bird in November 2008. This extremely confiding bird was observed running about on ploughed farmland to catch earthworms. In parts of its range, *pallidirostris* occupies areas of arid and sandy areas with few scattered bushes. Perhaps hunting on the ground by running, with the occasional short burst of flight to catch prey is characteristic of this race in natural habitat?

Structurally the bird looked similar to nominate Great Grey Shrike but with some clear differences such as the longer, more sturdy hooked bill, shorter tail, a more rounded head and a very long primary projection. At least six primaries could be seen extending beyond the tip of the tertials. Only three or four primaries extend beyond the tertials in nominate Great Grey Shrike. The overall structure and the sometimes fluffed up appearance made the bird look hunched, dumpy and generally more compact than Great Grey Shrike.



Plate 158. Southern Grey Shrike, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, October 2010. © Chris Gibbins



Plate 159. Southern Grey Shrike, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, October 2010. © Dave Pullan

The colouration of the bird was a washed out sandy-grey and far paler than the blue-grey of nominate Great Grey Shrike. Much of the upperparts were largely concolorous, being a pale sandy-grey. There appeared to be a paler area above the bill at the base of the steep forehead. In flight, the rump was clearly paler, contrasting with the rest of the upperparts. One of the most striking features of the upperparts was the large white scapular patches, which often cloaked the wing coverts.

The broad, black mask was bold behind the eye, reaching to the rear of the ear coverts with the lower edge following the gape line. At times, there appeared to be a hint of a 'ghost' mask joining the bill and a darker area directly in front of the eye. However, generally the lores looked an empty off-white. There was an indistinct pale supercilium over and extending just behind the eye. The bill was pale horn coloured with a darker upper edge to the upper mandible, paler cutting edge and a dark grey tip.

The underparts were pale in comparison to the upperparts, with no markings: however in certain light, there was a distinct pinkish flush to the face, throat, upper breast and flanks. This faded towards the lower breast and the belly and vent area looked white. The legs were dark.

The darker wing feathers were brownish and slightly worn suggesting the bird was a first-winter with retained juvenile coverts and remiges. In some photos the primaries, primary coverts and secondaries appear darker than the alula, greater coverts and tertials. However, in other pictures there does not appear to be a significant difference in the extent of wear between these feathers. The post-juvenile moult of some first-winter Southern Grey Shrikes may involve outer primaries but unlike other races, first-winter *pallidirostris* may also moult some secondaries and tail feathers. Adults undergo a complete post-breeding moult between June and October so would presumably show a full set of very dark and fresh flight feathers during mid-October. The large white primary patch extended well down the primaries and formed a broad white wing bar in flight. The inner primaries appeared to be around two-thirds white. There was no white at

the base of the secondaries. The tips of the tertials, secondaries, inner primaries and greater coverts were boldly tipped white, with the white extending some way up the outer edge of the feathers. The median coverts were rarely visible but on one photo they appear thinly edged pale and considerably darker than the brownish ground colour of the greater coverts. The alula was more neatly edged white as were the tips of the primary coverts. There was a thin pale edge to the tips of the outer primaries.

The spread tail was never seen particularly well, but in flight and from some photos, the outer tail feathers appeared largely white and the central feathers entirely dark.

Formerly, Southern Grey Shrike was considered conspecific with Great Grey Shrike, of which there are currently seven Palearctic races and a further two Nearctic races. In their twenty-third report (July 1996) the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) announced that the *excubitor* Great Grey Shrike group and the *meridionalis* Southern Grey Shrike group should be treated as separate species. This was based on work carried out by various shrike experts during the early to mid-1990s. BOURC also suggested that further research into the relationship of taxa in the *meridionalis* group would be particularly desirable.

Lefranc & Worfolk (1997) list 11 subspecies of Southern Grey Shrike, whereas others (e.g. Klassert *et al.* 2008, Panov & Bannakova 2010) do not include *theresae*. The nominate *meridionalis* is found closest to Britain and inhabits the Iberian Peninsula and southern France. Further south *koenigi* is found only on the Canary Islands. There are four races in Africa, with *algeriensis* in the north-west, *elegans* in western Africa, Sahara, Egypt extending into Israel and *leucopygos* in the southern Sahara and Sudan. *Aucheri* is found on the west coast of the Red Sea, but is more widespread in the Middle East. *Buryi* is the only race found exclusively on the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and *uncinatus* is restricted to Socotra. *Theresae* is present in northern Israel, but some authors (e.g. Harris & Franklin, 2000) include this race under *aucheri*. *Lahtora* and *pallidirostris* have breeding ranges in Pakistan, India and central Asia.



Plate 160. *Race elegans*, Southern Morocco, March 2007.  
© Alan Bull

Variation between races mainly involves colouration, with birds occupying areas of north-west Africa gradually becoming paler to the south-east. Races in the Middle East (*aucheri* and *buryi*) are darker than birds to the north-east and in India (*pallidirostris* and *lahtora*). The changes are strongly clinal, and intermediates are common.

*Pallidirostris* is the most easterly race of Southern Grey Shrike and may be found in north-eastern Iran, Kazakhstan and the Central Asian republics of the former USSR, northern Mongolia and north-western China. Some populations are long distance migrants, whereas other Southern Grey Shrike races are mainly



Plate 161. *Race algeriensis*, Morocco, December 2009.  
© Gary Woodburn

resident or generally only undergo small scale movements. *Pallidirostris* from northern parts of the range may leave breeding grounds towards mid-September and winter in an area extending from Iran, Iraq and southern Afghanistan to Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. Birds return to breeding grounds from early March.

*Pallidirostris* is often referred to as 'Steppe Grey Shrike', which could potentially give rise to some confusion regarding its status. It is perhaps the only race of Southern Grey Shrike that is most regularly afforded a 'stand alone' Common/English name. The issue is further complicated by the fact that the *homeyeri* race of Great Grey Shrike is referred to as 'Steppe Shrike' by some (e.g. Dement'ev & Gladkov 1968), and Panov & Bannaikova (2010) actually suggest that *pallidirostris* is more of a desert species than a bird of the steppe.

Based on recent molecular studies, Klassert *et al.* (2008) suggested various changes to the taxonomic treatment of the Southern Grey Shrike group. Suggested updates include assigning full species status to *meridionalis*. Klassert *et al.* went further by suggesting *meridionalis* is actually more closely related to the Nearctic race of Great Grey Shrike, *invictus*, than other Southern Grey Shrike races. A review was also proposed for *pallidirostris*, *aucheri* and *algeriensis*, with each being treated as an independent species. Others have also suggested *pallidirostris* differs considerably from other races and is possibly better treated as a full species (*Birding World* has done so for the past 14 years). It is given full species status in the Netherlands. The Dutch Committee for Avian Systematics (CSNA) separate *pallidirostris* from the 'Southern Grey Shrike' complex, aligning it with *lahtora*, *aucheri* and *buryi* under the common name of 'Asian Grey Shrike' (*Lanius lahtora*). They place this species/group as being most closely related to 'Great Grey Shrike' (*L. excubitor* consisting of subspecies *excubitor*, *homeyeri* and *leucopteros*), and only distantly related to *meridionalis* (Poelstra 2010). They treat *meridionalis* as a monotypic species with the common name 'Iberian Grey Shrike', and suggest that *koenigi* is most closely related to *algeriensis*, *elegans* and *leucopygos* which they group as races of a separate species (*L. elegans*) termed 'Desert Grey Shrike' (Gonzalez 2008, Poelstra





Plate 162. *Race meridionalis*, Spain, April 2006. © Chris Gibbins



Plate 163. *Race aucheri*, UAE, October 2010. © Hywel Maggs



**Plate 164.** *Race algeriensis* or *algeriensis/elegans intergrade*, southern Morocco, January 2011. © Hywel Maggs

2010). By contrast, Hernández *et al.* (2004) suggested splitting Southern Grey Shrike into two species, involving *meridionalis* and *koenigi* as a western species, with *aucheri* and *pallidirostris* making up an eastern species.

Away from the in-depth detail of molecular studies, there is currently perhaps good reason for not elevating *pallidirostris* to species status. Panov & Bannaikova (2010) suggest that *algeriensis*, *aucheri* and *pallidirostris* are all interconnected through a chain of hybrid populations, so splitting into two or more species would make no zoological sense. *Pallidirostris* is known to interbreed with *aucheri* and probably *lahtora*. Hybridisation with *aucheri* has led the formation of an intermediate population in north-east Iran. Intergradation is also known for *algeriensis* and *elegans*, and for *elegans* and *aucheri*.

So, for the moment *pallidirostris* remains a subspecies of Southern Grey Shrike, at least in Britain. However, it does stand out somewhat from the other races for reasons mentioned above. One of the other main differences is that it has occurred in Britain. The Strathbeg *pallidirostris* Southern Grey Shrike is the 23rd individual recorded in Britain and the first for mainland Scotland. The first for Britain was on Fair Isle on 22 September 1956. Since then there have been five further Scottish records, all in autumn: in 1964 on Fair Isle, in 1994 when two were on Orkney and one on Shetland, and in 2000 on Orkney.

Thank you to Paul Baxter for useful discussion on the Strathbeg Southern Grey Shrike, and to Alan Bull, Chris Gibbins, Dave Pullan, Harry Scott, Mark Sullivan and Gary Woodburn for providing photographs.

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Plate 165. *Pied-billed Grebe, Isle of Mull, March 2011.* © Alan Curry

## Pied-billed Grebe, Salen Bay, Isle of Mull, March 2011 – second record for Argyll

### B. OFIELD

For a family holiday this year we had chosen to go to the Isle of Mull, primarily to see the raptor specialities: Hen Harrier, White-tailed Eagle and Golden Eagle. On Tuesday 22 March we were driving along the north side of the island heading for Ben More. At about 08:00 we had reached Salen and I glanced across to the bay where there were a couple of birds swimming close inshore. I pulled into a convenient stopping place and scanned the area. Two Great Northern Divers and a few Red-breasted Mergansers were visible initially, but as I continued looking I spotted two small grebes. Through binoculars it was possible to see that one looked slightly larger than the other and had a longer neck. Having never really studied Little Grebe close-up before, I quickly got my telescope out and began to examine the two birds.

As soon as I had focussed on them I knew immediately that the larger bird was a Pied-billed Grebe: it was notably bigger than the accompanying Little Grebe, and differed in its white eye-ring, head shape and the thick, heavy bill with a broad, vertical black line through the middle. When it faced away from me while swimming I noticed that it lacked any markings on the back of the neck. By now the adrenaline rush was kicking in and I got a strange, shaky feeling as I realised that I had found a major rarity - such a different experience to going to see someone else's find!

After a short period, in which we watched and compared the two grebes, they started to swim away. At this point I rushed back to the car to get my digital camera in order to take



some 'digi-scoped' record shots of the bird. My Dad had his Canon SLR camera with him and also obtained some images. We stayed to watch the Grebe for another 40 minutes or so, but it continued to swim further away and eventually disappeared. We had managed to get very good views of the bird, and it was obvious that it was in the transition between winter and breeding plumage. It was notably wary and unapproachable.

I was not able to send the news out straight away, as the phone signal was poor, but on getting back to the lodge we were staying in I found the telephone number of Alan Spellman (local birder and compiler of the *Mull Bird Report* - [mullbirds@btinternet.com](mailto:mullbirds@btinternet.com)) and contacted him. We arranged to meet the following morning, but I was so fired-up I couldn't sleep and kept checking the digital photos, slightly disbelieving and doubting it could be true.

On the morning of the 23rd I had to drive past the bay to meet Alan. I stopped briefly to scan the area and immediately picked the bird out again, so was able to give Alan the good news that it was still there and we returned to look for it. We couldn't find it at first, but after about 30 minutes it popped up in another part of the bay, and Alan confirmed my ID and got some photos of his own. The bird continued to be elusive for the rest of its stay, but seemed to favour the floating seaweed strip, just out from the water's edge, between a wrecked boat and the mouth of the River Aros. The bird remained in the bay until 6 April, but has not been reported since.

Finding the grebe was a brilliant experience, and really made my holiday!

**Ben Ofield, 65 Junction Way,  
Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9LA.**

**Plates 166–168. Pied-billed Grebe, Isle of Mull,  
March 2011. (with Little Grebe in middle plate)  
© Stuart L. Rivers**

## Pied-billed Grebe – its status in Scotland

*This is a North American species, which breeds in well-vegetated, shallow, freshwater habitats from central and SE Canada and across virtually the whole of the USA south to central Mexico. It is a partial migrant, with northern populations heading south in winter to western and southern parts of the breeding range and southern Arizona and western Mexico.*

*There have been about 38 individuals recorded in Britain to the end of 2010, with nine of these in Scotland. However, due to the number of presumed returning birds and wandering individuals the actual total could be nearer 25 birds. There have been up to nine birds noted in Ireland in this period.*

*The first British record involved one found at Blagdon Lake, Avon on 22 December 1963, with it or others noted regularly at Chew Valley Lake or at Blagdon Lake (both Avon) until July 1968. The first Scottish record was of one at Carlingwark Loch, Castle Douglas (Dumfries & Galloway) on 1–8 October 1975. The subsequent Scottish records involve single individuals at: Loch of Strathbeg (North-east Scotland), from 9 January to 27 March 1977; Askernish and Loch na Liane Moire, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) from 8 June to 22 August 1983; Lochmaben (Dumfries & Galloway) on 24–25 April 1987; Airthrey Loch, University of Stirling, Bridge of Allan (Upper Forth) on 3–7 June 1998; Loch Peallach and Mishnish Lochs, Isle of Mull (Argyll) on 8th and 15 June 1998; Loch Fada, Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) from 28 November to at least 11 December 1999; Loch Osgaig, Achiltibuie (R&C, Highland) on 24–25 April 2000, and Harrow Harbour (Caithness) on 6 May 2002.*

*This species showed a notable rise in birds found in Britain from around three in both the 1960s and 1970s, to five in the 1980s, and over 20 in the 1990s. However, there were only five new birds in the 2000s, with none at all after the 2002 Caithness bird until one at Hollingworth Lake Country Park (Greater Manchester) on 7–21 November*

*2010. There were also three records in Ireland in 2010, following a gap since November 2000. The reasons for these changes in vagrancy are unclear.*

*There is a notable western bias to Scottish records (60%), and it is perhaps surprising none has yet been found on the Northern Isles. Elsewhere in Britain most records come from SW England (c.35%), and the southern half of England (c.25%) and south Wales (c.12%), with others from Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Yorkshire and Northumberland. British occurrences have been discovered in all months except September, with notable peaks in late autumn/winter and in spring/early summer. Scottish records are mostly in the latter peak, and it has been suggested these may involve birds moving northwards from more southerly overwintering sites in Britain/Europe rather than newly displaced trans-Atlantic vagrants.*

*The Salen bird is unusual in that virtually all other British and Irish occurrences have been discovered on (smallish) freshwater bodies. Only the 2002 Caithness bird has been on a truly saltwater environment, though one on the River Hayle (Cornwall) from 31 December 1996 to 15 April 1997 was in a brackish estuary. Salen Bay is probably brackish at its northern end, where the River Aros drains into it, and this may have influenced the bird's choice of location. In North America Pied-billed Grebes are often found on brackish waters, particularly outside the breeding season, but less frequently on the sea.*

*While all sightings have involved singles, one at Stithians Reservoir (Cornwall), from 2 April 1993 to 13 September 1995, actually paired up with a Little Grebe in 1994 and three hybrid young were hatched in July that year, with two surviving to 15 October, and one until at least 28 March 1985.*

*Elsewhere in Europe there have been two birds recorded in Iceland, four in Norway, one in Poland, two in Germany, four in the Netherlands, one in Belgium, six in France and five in Spain. There are further records from the Canary Islands and the Azores.*

# BIRGUIDES REVIEW

## 1 January to 31 March 2011

M. GRANTHAM

All records refer to the period 1 January to 31 March 2011 unless otherwise stated.

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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 wintering Ross's Goose that commutes across the border to Cumbria was back with Barnacle Geese at Caerlaverock (D&G) on 20–26 February, and another was at Loch Leven (P&K) from 27 March. One with Barnacle Geese at Dowlaw (Bord) on 27–28 March arrived with an apparent hybrid Barnacle x Ross's. This looks to be the same bird (and flock) as seen earlier in the winter in Norfolk, last seen flying west past Cley Marshes on 19 March. On Islay (Arg), the

wintering Richardson's Canada Geese remained around Loch Gruinart and Neriby until at least 22 March, and another possible was reported from Kelton (D&G) on 7 March. It was a good winter for Red-breasted Geese, with the second record for Fife at Rossie Bog on 12–13 February, with 200 Greylag Geese and one was at Vane Farm (P&K) on 19–28 March: Loch Leven now accounts for five of the six county records.

The female Lesser Scaup was at Wester Sands (Ork) until 7 January, later reappearing on 2 February, though a second bird at nearby Echna Loch on 4 January appeared to be a hybrid. There was then a drake at Milton Loch (D&G) on 22–24 March, and you do wonder if this is the same that's been returning to the loch since 2002?

On the sea, the drake King Eider remained off Burghead (M&N) until 22 January, reappearing on 14 March, with the first-winter drake and female also at West Voe of Sumburgh (Shet) to 9 February. Another, or the same, first-winter drake was then in Bluemull Sound on 17 February to 3 March and Uyeasound, Unst from 21–25 March, with an adult drake also there at the same time. Away from Shetland, the drake also returned to the Ythan estuary (NES) on 30–31 March. There were also plenty of reports of Northern Eider, with up to three drakes off Embo (High) throughout, associating with up to 360 Long-tailed Duck, 32 Velvet Scoter and 65 Slavonian Grebe. In Shetland, there were up to four in Bluemull Sound, Unst, from mid-February to early March, and one



Plate 169. Red-breasted Goose, near Vane Farm, Fife, April 2011. © John Nadin



Plate 170. Snowy Owl, Isle of Lewis, February 2011. © Iain Macleod

reported at Linga, Yell, on 22 March. Back in Highland, one was at Tarbat Ness on 26–27 March, with three at Golspie on 27–29 March and one was living it up in Stinky Bay, Benbecula (OH) on 30 March. There was also ‘possibles’ off Musselburgh (Loth) on 3 March and Seton Sands (Loth) on 6th.

One of the highlights of the period was a **Pied-billed Grebe** in Salen Bay, Mull (Arg) on 22–31 March. It was rather elusive at times, but shared the bay with a Little Grebe, allowing an excellent comparison to be made. This is the 10th Scottish record and, remarkably, the second for Mull, following one in June–July 1998.

But this Nearctic vagrant was outshone by a **Northern Harrier** photographed at Bru and Barvas, Lewis (OH) on 8 February. It was first seen mobbing a Snowy Owl (which must be a first!) and remained in the area until 25 March. With two wintering birds in Ireland and one in Norfolk, lengthy online discussion on ID features will certainly help in the clinching of this potential first for Scotland. Other raptors of note included a grey-morph **Gyr Falcon** at Loch

Caoldair (High) on 19 January and possibly the same at Drumguish (High) on 11 February, found by birders watching the Great Grey Shrike. It was reported again on 18th and also at nearby Loch Insh on 21st. There was then a white-morph bird at Loch Barvas and nearby Lionall on 19–21 March, with possibly the same bird on North Uist on 25–26th.

Another quality Nearctic vagrant was an all-too-brief **Killdeer** on the beach at Lossit Bay, Islay (Arg) on 31 January. Found by a visiting birder, it wasn’t seen again, though was, frustratingly, heard calling on 1 February. This is the third record for Argyll, following a one-day bird on Oronsay in October 2006 and a two-day bird on Colonsay in January 1984.

The predictable spring return of an adult **Bonaparte’s Gull** at Castletown (High) on 23 March was almost certainly the same bird that has been seen here and at Thurso since September 2004. It isn’t recorded every year, though may just be overlooked, but has turned up in the springs of 2005, 2008 and 2010. It is interesting to speculate where this bird might

spend the rest of the year and why it only turns up so reliably in spring. There was also a first-winter on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 6 March. Big-gull interest came in the form of two possible **American Herring Gulls**: a first-winter was in Stornoway Harbour, Lewis (OH) on 18 March, although an adult at Graemeshall (Ork) on 2 February will be a harder sell to BBRC. Knowledge of the identification of adults is far from complete, but a good set of photographs will help this bird’s case. Equally interesting was a **Yellow-legged Gull** photographed at the Bishop Burn, Stranraer (D&G) in mid-March, with several features seemingly pointing towards it being of the *lusitanicus* race from northern Spain.

The afore-mentioned **Snowy Owl** was reported from various sites around Lewis (OH) during February to early March and there was also a ‘probable’ at Stromness (Ork) early morning only on 2 March.

### Correction

The Semipalmated Sandpiper at Tynninghame (Loth) was last seen on 15 September, not October (*Scottish Birds* 31: 92).

## Scarce species

**Whooper Swans** returning to Iceland are among our earliest spring migrants. The first evidence of this was a flock of 29 flying N over Aberfoyle (P&K) on 13 March and 45 N over Glenisla (Ang) on 21st, followed by 71 NW over Tiree (Arg) on 23rd.

Following the recent trend, there were more reports of Orkney-ringed **Greylag Geese** in Norfolk. Four birds ringed on Birsay in July 2010 spent the winter in east Norfolk, with 'HSK' remaining at Strumpshaw Fen into late January and 'HSI' was shot near Burgh Castle on 17 January. The **Snow Goose** remained at Craobh Haven (Arg) to 21 March and another wandered Shetland in March, seen at Strand Loch and Gott on 9–18th, Laxfirth on 26th and Loch of Vatster on 28th. Others were at Kirkwall and Loch of Stenness (Ork) on 4–12 January, and Gremista, Shetland, to 5th February, with one seen from a train at East Fortune (Loth) on 8 February presumed to be a feral bird. Two **Bean Geese** that flew NW over Tiree (Arg) on 26 March were at an unusual location.

A drake **American Wigeon** was at Udale Bay (High) from 16 January to 12 February but had possibly been present since December. Others were at Martnaham Loch (Ayr) from 25–31 January and Culswick (Shet) from 25–30 January. **Green-winged Teal** were at 11 widespread coastal sites in the first six weeks of the year, but of the two reported from Caerlaverock (D&G) at different times, one showed some hybrid features. The first returning **Garganey** were two at Loch of Strathbeg (NES) from 22 March, closely followed by a pair at Caerlaverock (D&G) from 26th. The only **Ring-necked Duck** was the long-staying drake at Loch Evelix (High) to 16 February, moving to Loch Ospisdale on 28th.

Drake **Surf Scoters** remained off Ruddon's Point and Lower Largo (Fife) throughout and off Ferny Ness (Loth) on 18–24 January. There was also one at Rerwick Head (Ork) on 3 January and a drake in the Sound of Taransay (OH) on 10 January. Small numbers of **Smew** graced 16 sites, with most being singletons along the northeast coast. There were two redheads sporadically at Loch of Tingwall and Loch of Asta (Shet) from 23 January to 12 March, two redheads at Loch of Strathbeg (NES) from 20 February to 23 March and a drake at Lochwinnoch RSPB (Clyde) from 2 March was joined by a redhead from 15th.

On the sea, a **White-billed Diver** was at Port Skigersta, Lewis (OH) on 22 January and 15 February and one passed North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28 March. In Shetland, birds were in Bluemull Sound on 26 January and South Nesting Bay on 7 February. More unusual winter records included a **Manx Shearwater** past Girdle Ness (NES) on 27 January and two **Storm Petrels** north of Stromness (Ork) on 4 January.

An interesting colour-ring record involved Green 'HLF'; a **Cormorant** ringed at Inverbervie (NES) in July 2009. It was seen at Waterbeach Gravel Pits (Cambridgeshire) in March 2010, then back as a non-breeding bird at Inverbervie in summer 2010, before returning to Waterbeach again on 16 January. Such wintering site fidelity is rather unusual. Wintering **Bitterns** were scarce in the freezing weather, with birds reported from Insh Marshes (High) to 4 January, Loch Lomond (Clyde) on 11 January and 8–11 February and Loch of Kinnordy (Ang) on 20 February and 5 March. In Dumfries & Galloway, there were single **Little Egrets** at Kirkcudbright on 1 January, Lochmaben on 1–5 March and in Skyreburn Bay on 9–10 March. A single **Great White Egret** was in fields at Spey Bay

(M&N) on 6–7 January and presumably the same was briefly at Garmouth on 22 February, before heading back towards Spey Bay. A **White Stork** over Fairlie (Ayr) on 13 March may have been the same as over Edinburgh (Loth) on 18 March and near Musselburgh on 18–19th. This ringed bird is presumably the same as has been in the region for as long as 10 years. More genuine was the single **Spoonbill** at Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 2–3 March.

Back on the sea, noteworthy counts of **Slavonian Grebes** included 146 off Orkney mid-January, 84 off Ardmore Point (Clyde), 72 in Gosford Bay (Loth) and 54 off Dornoch (High).

The two **Rough-legged Buzzards** remained on Unst (Shet) and elsewhere on Shetland, one was at West Burra on 2 January and another was at Toft from 5 January to the end of March. The only others were one-day birds on Orkney - at Finstown on 25 January and Kame of Corrigal on 5 March - and one over North Kessoock (High) on 7 March. Apart from an early bird over Kincaig (High) on 1 March, the first **Ospreys** filtered through from the third week of March, with birds back at breeding sites by the end of the month, including Loch Garten (High) and Loch Awe (Arg) on 24th and Loch of the Lowes (P&K) on 28th - the 21st year this bird has returned to the site. An insight into the spring migration of our Ospreys came from the Highland Wildlife Foundation satellite tracking project, which showed that birds such as Beatrice and 'Red8T' set off from their wintering areas (in southern Spain and southern Senegal respectively) during March, reaching northern France by the end of the month, but not quite reaching the UK.

No less impressive was a day trip of 250 km by the **Peregrine** "Vega"



satellite tagged as part of the raptor track project ([www.raptortrack.org/category/peregrine-falcon/vega/](http://www.raptortrack.org/category/peregrine-falcon/vega/)). This bird had spent the winter in the Carrbridge area, but on 21 March clearly decided to go for a little wander which took it SE over the Cairngorms, as far as Dundee, west to Aberfeldy and Blair Atholl, and back home to roost at Carrbridge by dusk!

A **Common Crane** drifted east over Aberlady (Loth) on 29 March. The only waders of note were **Grey Phalaropes** at Aird Asaig, Harris (OH) on 2 January and Spo Ness, Westray (Ork) on 7 March, although the recapture of a 27 year-old **Oystercatcher** was also notable.

**Black-headed Gulls** were returning to breeding areas by the start of the month - e.g. 40 on Tiree (Arg) where they are rare in the winter. There were four **Mediterranean Gulls** at Seton Sands (Lothian) on 3 March. The wintering **Ring-billed Gull** remained in Oban (Arg) until at least 11 February, also seen at nearby Dunbeg on 30 January. Other adults were at Dingwall (High) from 9–31 March, Stranraer (D&G) on 8–10 March and one-day birds were on Tiree (Arg) on 16 January and at Balivanich, Benbecula (OH) on 19 March. There were several one-day adult **Yellow-legged Gulls** reported; at Barasie and Doonfoot (Ayr) and Stranraer, Loch Ryan and Drummore (D&G). There was also a probable adult on Strathclyde Loch (Clyde). A third-winter **Kumlien's Gull** was in the harbour at Lerwick (Shet) from 18 January to 6 March, along with up to three **Iceland Gulls** and a single **Glaucous Gull**, although in general, big white-winged gulls were in short supply in the Northern Isles. Iceland Gulls were widespread and mostly singletons, though there were three at Loch Oire (M&N) and Loch Barvas, Lewis (OH) and 'twos' were

reported from Stromness (Ork) and Strathclyde Loch (Clyde), the latter joined by a **Glaucous Gull** on 23 January. Loch Barvas also recorded up to three **Glaucous Gulls**, with three also on Foula (Shet) and North Ronaldsay (Ork). Other **Glaucous Gulls** were restricted to more northerly sites, with fewer inland birds.

Apart from a mid-winter **Sandwich Tern** at Stonehaven Bay (NES) on 17 January, the first arrivals were generally from the third week of March, with the first at Seton Sands (Loth) on 18 March and an early bird as far north as Orkney on 21st. Birds were back on the Ythan Estuary (NES) from 23rd. The most notable **Sandwich Tern**, though, was a bird ringed at Sands of Forvie (NES) in 2006 that was found dead in Iceland on 31 March: the first recorded **Sandwich Tern** movement between the UK and Iceland. Other notable ring recoveries included a **Red Kite** from Co. Dublin found dead in Stranraer (D&G), a **Purple Sandpiper** ringed on Svalbard recaptured at Crail (Fife) - only the third from there to the UK - and a 20-year-old **Great Skua** from Unst (Shet) was the first ever to be found in Guinea Bissau. Also of note was a small wreck of **Puffins** in the

Bay of Biscay at the start of March, with ringed birds from Teshnish Isles (Arg), Garbh Eilean (OH) and Sule Skerry (Ork) amongst the casualties found on the coast of Spain and France. Ringed **Great Black-backed Gulls** on 21 March at Seton Sands (Loth) had come from Caithness and Essex.

Early spring check of **Barn Owl** nest boxes in the Borders by Malcolm Henderson revealed no active nests during March, but a total of four dead birds that had evidently succumbed during the hard winter. A large flock of 170 **Woodpeckers** was recorded near Kirkwall (Ork) on 11 March. **Great Grey Shrikes** were well spread, with birds reported from as many as 13 mainland sites. In the Northern Isles, birds were on Rousay (Ork) on 6 January, Sanday (Ork) on 22 January, Fair Isle on 22 March and at Wester Quarff (Shet) from 11–18 February. Perhaps the most interesting race keeping birders on their toes is **Nordic Jackdaw**, with two at Braid Hills (Loth) on 19 January, two at Achavandra Muir (High) on 10 March and singletons at Intermessan (D&G) on 14 March and Dingwall (High) on 28 March.



**Plate 171.** *Two Mediterranean Gulls with a roosting Black-headed Gull, Buckhaven, Fife, February 2011. © John Nadin*



Plate 172. *Blue Tit, Tiree (Argyll), 22 March 2011.* © John Bowler

Rarely are **Blue Tits** of note, but one at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 22 March was added to John Bowler's garden list - five months later than last autumn's Northern Parula! A bird ringed in Broughty Ferry (Arg) in January 2004 was found dead in Oban (Arg) on 10 March - a long distance movement for this species. The five **Shore Larks** remained at Tynninghame (Loth) until 28 January and then reappeared from 25 March.

In contrast, the first **Sand Martins** appeared on 13 March, with two at Littleton Reservoir (Clyde), Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) and Baron's Haugh RSPB (Clyde) and a singleton at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth). There were then two at Kendoon Loch (D&G) on 14th and up to 30 at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 18th, with birds widespread by the end of March. One at Inganess (Ork) on 28th was only the third March record on Orkney in the last 10 years. Numbers of **Swallows** were much reduced in comparison with previous years, with the first at Fintry (Clyde) on 23 March, followed by birds in Lothian and at three sites in Ayrshire on 24th, and 10 at Bemersyde Moss (Bord) on 28th. The only **House Martin** reported was an early bird at Loch Guinart, Islay (Arg) on 28 March. Returning **Pied Wagtails** began returning to breeding areas from early March onwards. The arrival of some other migrants was slow, with first arrivals including a **Blackcap** at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 23 March - the first March

record for the island - **Willow Warbler** at South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 29 March and singing **Chiffchaffs** were widespread from mid-March, with up to 11 seen at Musselburgh on 16th representing a significant arrival.

The **Waxwing** invasion continued apace, but as competition for the dwindling supply of berries increased, flocks moved south. The largest flocks at the start of the year were in Clyde, including 200 in Renfrew, 150 at Rutherglen and 120 in Paisley. By February, peak counts were down to just 70, still in Clyde, but by March, the largest flocks were in Lothian, with 80 in Leith and 76 in Edinburgh, with the furthest north being five at Contin (High) on 26 March.

The first **Ring Ouzel** was a male in the Moorfoot Hills (Bord) on 27 March, followed by another male at Glen Esk (Ang) the next day.

It seems that one of the real casualties of the hard winter weather was **Stonechat**, with widespread absences reported. Birds were missing from much of coastal Ayrshire with little sign of birds returning to breeding areas and along the east coast birds were seemingly absent from large stretches of the Moray Firth and Black Isle. The decline also shows up in the BirdTrack reporting rate results for Scotland, as do similar declines for species such as **Meadow Pipit**, **Wren** and **Grey Wagtail**. An early **White Wagtail** was on Coll (Arg) on 20 March.

The first returning **Wheatears** were at Callander (UF) on 14 March, followed by birds at Loch Beg, Mull and Ardnave, Islay (Arg) the next day. The first on the Northern Isles were at Bay of Skail and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24th - only two days later than their earliest ever - Fair Isle on 30th and Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 31st.

The excellent redpoll winter continued, the highlight being a **Coues' Arctic Redpoll** at The Bell wood (Loth/Bord) on 4-30 January, keeping company with up to 200 **Lesser Redpoll** and 40 **Common Redpoll**. There was also a possible at Bellshill (Clyde) on 12 January. There were also some interesting ring recoveries, with Lesser Redpolls caught at Hamilton (Clyde) in January including birds ringed in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Herefordshire and Suffolk. Birds ringed in Scotland were also found in Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Essex and Dorset. Returning **Siskins** were noted during March, with an "invasion" of 50 birds into an Ayrshire garden on 11 March. Further evidence of migration came from Siskins caught at Kildonan (Arg) in March which included birds that had been ringed as distantly as North-east Scotland, Merseyside, Co. Dublin, Norfolk and Shropshire, the latter having been ringed just 12 days before being recaptured. Movements 'the other way' included Scottish-ringed birds found in Somerset, Sussex, Berkshire and Warwickshire over the period, and one was also found in The Netherlands.

There were several records of **Northern Bullfinch**, mostly in the Northern and Western Isles. In Shetland, two were in Lerwick on 2 January and singletons at Firths Voe on 26 January, Brae on 7 February and Pool of Virkie on 19 March, and on the Outer Hebrides, one remained at Bragar, Lewis, until at least 26 February. Elsewhere, two were at Loch Gruinart, Islay (Arg) on 18 February and a male was in a garden in Rosyth (Fife) on 19 January. Meantime, while some birds are heading to their breeding grounds, others have already finished breeding - a newly fledged **Common Crossbill** was recorded at Backwater Reservoir (Ang) on 14 March.

## Advice to contributors

There is a basic division in *Scottish Birds* between papers and short notes that are peer-reviewed and articles, news and Club items that are not. This split in content is differentiated by fonts used and paper colour.

The first part accepts manuscripts on the status, distribution and populations of birds in Scotland and, particularly, changes in these over time. Write-ups of census work find a natural home in this section, as do the culmination of research topics and updates to information in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Original work and observations are encouraged, but summary papers will be considered and key-note papers of a more general nature may occasionally be commissioned. Papers should be fully referenced as in any scientific work, and our house style should be followed. Articles of less than 700 words are generally considered as Short Notes, but are otherwise in the same format.

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

*Scottish Birds* publishes obituaries of Club members and others who have contributed to Scottish ornithology. These are organised through Waterston House, where the Office Manager will liaise with contributors. Book reviews are organised through the Club Librarian.

The second part of *Scottish Birds* welcomes informal as well as more serious contributions about any aspect of birds and their habitats in Scotland. It is not peer-reviewed, has minimal editing and contributions can be descriptive, anecdotal, controversial, humorous or quirky. They can report on surveys, express opinions, describe birds and places, look back into history, speculate as to the future and can represent organisations or be the work of private individuals. The documentation of rare and scarce birds in Scotland, plus a wide range of identification, site and species related information is lavishly illustrated by high quality colour photographs. We welcome photographs, maps, cartoons, and will accept basic graphs and tables when relevant. Meeting reports or field trip accounts are all welcome, but our main aim is to focus on Scottish birds in Scotland or abroad. We will occasionally include articles from other parts of the world and sometimes about other wildlife. In terms of length, we accept anything from short notes up to articles of c. 2,000 words. There are no strict guidelines as to format, but we would encourage contributors to follow our house style shown in the excerpts from a recent issue available on the SOC publications web page.

Please submit articles! We very much wish to encourage unsolicited contributions to this part of *Scottish Birds*. The editors spend much time requesting articles - a task that would be far less onerous if they are submitted freely from members and other readers. We wish to make it as easy as possible for contributors to send us material that reflects the enormous range of news, work and opinion relevant to Scotland's birds.

### Text, image and graphics formats

Contributions should preferably be submitted in electronic format either on disk or by email to mail@the-soc.org.uk, stating the type of word processing package used if not Microsoft Word or a generic 'rich text format'. Only short articles and letters can be accepted in printed or hand written form. No fees are paid.

Tables, maps and diagrams should be designed to fit either a single column or the full page width. Table and photograph captions should be self explanatory and should be able to stand alone from the text. Please include all captions after the text. For photographs please supply the locality and month/year taken, together with the name of the photographer.

Maps and other graphics should preferably be provided in eps (Encapsulated PostScript) format, or as a high resolution jpg/tiff file, good quality computer print-out or drawn in black ink. Other formats can be accepted; please liaise with the Office Manager. Photographs should be supplied as high resolution jpg/tiff files with minimal or no cropping or enhancement.

Reference should be made to *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) for guidance on style of presentation, use of capitals, form of references, etc. Detailed instructions for contributors with respect to house style conventions can be found on the SOC website's publication page.

Please send all correspondence to the SOC Office Manager at Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY or e-mail mail@the-soc.org.uk. Telephone 01875 871330 or e-mail for further advice and assistance.



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## PhotoSP©T

**Plates 173–175.** This female Goshawk was photographed at the beginning of 2011 while it was out hunting on a private Scottish estate. It is a captive bird, but is flown without jessies and kept as wild as possible by its owner. Over the previous few months it had favoured a fallen down Scots Pine as a plucking post for large prey; if disturbed the bird would take the prey high into the tree, so I always used a hide and tripod and waited while she hunted. Often the bird was unsuccessful, so a lot of time was spent waiting, and only on three occasions did she bring back prey.

On the day of the shot it was quite sunny and I placed my hide in the location opposite her usual plucking spot on the fallen down pine tree. On this occasion I used the Canon 5D MK II for its full frame ability for a 50% crop with a 400mm f5.6 lens and a 1.4 converter mounted on a tripod with a cable release with an aperture of f8, which gave me a reasonable shutter speed to take the shot.

**Dean Bricknell**

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