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

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

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

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

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President's Foreword

As the Club's landmark 75th year draws to a close, this foreword leaves me with the opportunity to highlight several successful events of the autumn and to acknowledge the personal contribution and commitment of so many members.

The Chris Packham lecture in Edinburgh in September celebrated the anniversary with enthusiasm and flair (see pages 327–328) and was an opportunity to open our doors to members and non-members alike.

Along with a superb series of lectures at the annual conference at Carnoustie in October (pages 331–340), we held a well-attended AGM, during which we announced the appointment of our three Honorary Presidents. They are Roy Dennis - for his long term work on rare breeding species especially Osprey, Red Kite and Honey-buzzard as well as his commitment to Fair Isle Bird Observatory; Frank Hamilton - for his enduring dedication to Scottish birds, including his directorship of RSPB Scotland during 15 of its most successful years when many of Scotland's most important nature reserves were acquired; and Keith Macgregor - for a lifetime's devotion to birds in Scotland and the SOC and his leadership in introducing new people to bird watching. I have had the privilege to work with all three of them and I know we have made the right choices - my congratulations to all three of them.

The AGM also voted in four new Honorary Members. They are Ian Andrews - for his excellent work on *The Birds of Scotland* (BS3) and the re-vamp of *Scottish Birds*, Iain Gibson - for a lifetime's commitment to bird watching and bird recording in the Glasgow area, Ron Summers for his major contribution to bird research in Scotland, especially on waders and pinewood species, and Professor Mike Harris - for his outstanding work on seabirds and his leadership on the Isle of May. Again, congratulations to them all.

Those that attended will agree, I think, that it was one of our best conferences ever. The lectures were excellent, but I hope the speakers won't mind if I pick out two: firstly the PhD students from Aberdeen University did an excellent job, giving a variety of short talks about their projects. I am hoping we can increase our connections with Scottish universities, and we are hoping to further boost the number of students we sponsor for the conference itself.

Secondly, I must congratulate Ian Francis, another one of our speakers, and Martin Cook for their work on the superb, recently published, *The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland* (see page 364). I think it will inspire others who are involved in similar projects.

Jane Cleaver has now taken up her newly created post as Membership Development Officer. See page 329 She has brought us lots of skills and enthusiasm. Increasing the strength of our membership is a really important task for the club at this time and you can help by inviting non-members to Club events!

Good birding

Ken Shaw, President



Plate 253. Mute Swans, Stenness, Orkney. © Eric Meek

The status of the Mute Swan in the Orkney Islands, 2006 to 2011

A.W. & L.M. BROWN

Until recently, the Orkney Islands held the most northerly breeding population of the Mute Swan in the UK. This study of the population in Orkney was conducted between 2006 and 2011. The total population in May ranged from 341 to 427 swans. A mean of 60% of the total population comprised non-territorial individuals and two-thirds of the non-territorial population was recorded on the extensive Lochs of Harray and Stenness in central Mainland. The total number of territorial pairs ranged from 75 to 83, of which a mean of 70% bred. Whilst the numbers of both territorial and breeding pairs increased on Mainland during the study period, they decreased in the other islands. A mean of 1.8 cygnets fledged per breeding pair, however, this value was considerably higher in the islands, excluding Mainland, and considerably lower on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness. Comparison of the current findings with historical data indicated that the Orkney population has been subject to considerable fluctuation in numbers in recent years having increased by 150% between 1983 and 1990, but decreased by 39% between 2002 and 2006. Notwithstanding, the total population was found to be higher during the study period than at any time prior to 1990.

Introduction

Until the recent establishment of breeding birds in Shetland (Pennington *et al.* 2004, Brown & Brown 2005), the Orkney Islands represented the most northerly breeding location of the Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* in Britain. Reynolds (1984) referred to the first record of the species in Orkney in 1869, whilst Buckley & Harvie-Brown (1891) mentioned its occurrence at two sites, possibly from introduced birds. Subsequent expansion appears to have been assisted by the introduction of the species for ornamental purposes on various lochs, and by 1941 the species was considered to be widespread on Mainland and various other islands (Lack 1943, Reynolds 1984) and was regarded as a common breeding bird by 1967 (Balfour 1968). By 2002, Orkney held 10% of the Scottish total population of the Mute Swan (Brown & Brown 2005).

The national census of Mute Swans in 1955 (Rawcliffe 1958) was the first to provide a population estimate for Orkney and this was followed by subsequent censuses in 1978, 1983, 1990 and 2002 (Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993, 2005) the results for Orkney being summarised by Reynolds (1984) and Corse (1991, 2003). Further data, including an assessment of productivity, were gathered during the 1990s, but this was restricted to the Lochs of Harray and Stenness on Mainland in relation to a study of the impact of the growth cycle of Canadian Pondweed *Elodea canadensis* in the lochs (Meek 1993, Meek *et al.* 2000, E. Meek pers. comm.). Brown & Brown (2006) provided a brief summary of the Mute Swan population in Orkney up to 2005.

This paper presents the current status and population dynamics of the Mute Swan population in Orkney and places those findings into context with the historical data for Orkney and for other Scottish regions.

Study area, aims and methods

The Orkney Islands are situated off the north coast of Scotland, where weather conditions are influenced by the North Sea to the east and the north Atlantic Ocean to the west and ameliorated by the Gulf Stream. The study encompassed the whole of the Orkney Islands from 2006 to 2008 and also Mainland in 2009 and 2011; no fieldwork was undertaken in 2010. The aims were to determine the size of the total population in spring, which comprised non-territorial individuals, territorial pairs and territorial pairs which nested, and also to quantify breeding success and the productivity of nesting pairs. Historical data were collated in order to enable findings from the present study to be considered in the wider context of long-term variations in the numbers of swans, and thereby enable recent changes in the status of the Orkney population to be more clearly understood.

Non-territorial birds, and territorial and breeding pairs, were counted during visits to all water bodies between mid-May and early June. Breeding success and productivity were based on data gathered in September when cygnets were at or close to fledging. On Mainland, Burray and South Ronaldsay counts of non-territorial swans were undertaken each year during a one-week period in late May, thus minimising any impact of birds moving between sites. The latter approach was especially required for the large Lochs of Harray and Stenness, where observations were undertaken, using a 60x telescope, from various vantage points overlooking the two sites, with repeat observations at the beginning and end of the week. Although flocks of flightless moulting swans were not part of the study, complete counts of moulting swans were made by the authors during visits to the Lochs of Harray and Stenness in July 2001 and 2005, and these data have been included to provide a more complete picture of the species. Observers based on the islands, and in particular RSPB wardens, supplemented the authors' counts. The Orkney Bird Recorder also provided additional information.

Results

In order to analyse the dynamics of the Orkney population, the study area was divided into sub-regions namely the largest island of Mainland, all other islands, Mainland excluding the Lochs of Harry and Stenness, and the Lochs of Harry and Stenness. Coverage was considered to be thorough for all of the islands, except for Rousay in 2008, when it was assumed a minimum of two territorial pairs were present as in previous years and in 2009. It was also possible that a few territorial pairs may have nested later in the season and not been recorded as such, and a small number of swans may have been missed on some islands in September due to a reduction in the number of casual observers. However, such omissions were considered to be minimal.

Total population

Counts of the total number of Mute Swans in Orkney and the sub-regions are shown in Table 1. Over 150 birds were present in 1955 and numbers continued to increase through to the 1983 national census. Following a rapid increase after 1983, numbers peaked at just over 800 swans in

1990 and were relatively high in 2002. Data from this study indicated that numbers declined rapidly by 2006, declined further in 2007 and then increased in 2008. Whilst counts from 2006 to 2008 were much lower than in 1990 and 2002, they were higher than those prior to 1990, which indicated a long-term increase in the size of the total population since 1955, punctuated by a substantial increase at the end of the 20th century (Figure 1).

Table 1. The total number of Mute Swans recorded in Orkney and its sub-regions, 1955–2011. Data from Rawcliffe 1958, Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993, 2005 and this study.

Year	1955	1978	1983	1990	2002	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011
Orkney	153	274	324	810	701	427	341	419		
Mainland						319	258	326	297	463
All other islands						108	83	93		
Mainland, excluding Lochs of Harray and Stenness						84	83	91	96	133
Lochs of Harray and Stenness						235	175	235	201	330

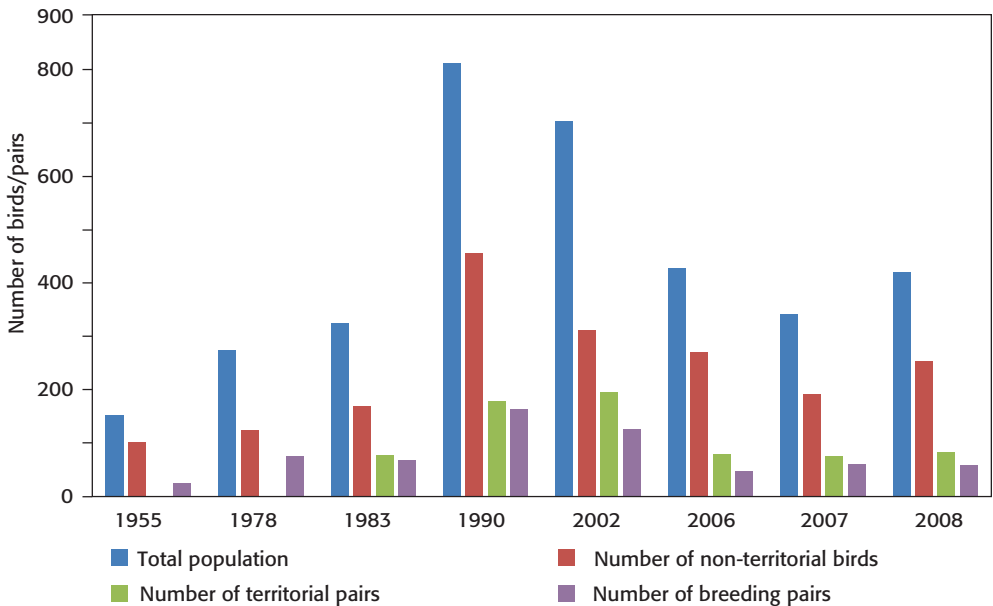


Figure 1. Total number of Mute Swans, the number of non-territorial birds and the number of territorial and breeding pairs in Orkney in May 1955, 1978, 1983, 1990, 2002 and 2006–08. Data from Rawcliffe 1958, Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993, 2005 and this study.

Although numbers on Mainland, Mainland excluding the Lochs of Harray and Stenness, and the Lochs of Harray and Stenness fluctuated between 2006 and 2011, the overall pattern was of an increase. Since two-thirds of the Orkney population had been recorded on Mainland between 2006 and 2008, it was possible that the total in Orkney also increased between 2006 and 2011. In order to account for the pattern of change, it was necessary to consider the sub-sections of the total population, namely non-territorial individuals and territorial pairs.

Non-territorial swans

The location of the peak counts of non-territorial flocks, based on 6-figure grid references, during 2006 to 2008, with additional data for Mainland only in 2009 and 2011, is shown on Figure 2. The total number of non-territorial swans in Orkney (Table 2) showed a similar historical pattern of change to that of the total population (Figure 1). Counts from 2006 to 2008 remained higher than those prior to 1990 despite a substantial decline between 2002 and 2006. Numbers in Orkney

declined further in 2007, but increased in 2008, a pattern replicated in each of the sub-regions (Table 2). Between 2009 and 2011 numbers increased substantially on Mainland due to an increase on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness and also in the rest of Mainland. As a mean of 82% of the Orkney total was recorded on Mainland from 2006 to 2008, it was possible that the total in Orkney also increased substantially by 2011.

The presence of a large proportion of the non-territorial swans on Mainland highlighted the importance of Mainland to that section of the population. Moreover, the Lochs of Harray and Stenness held the largest proportion of non-territorial swans on Mainland, with a mean of 76% occurring solely on the Loch of Harray. Sanday was the only other island which held large numbers of non-territorial swans, primarily on North Loch.

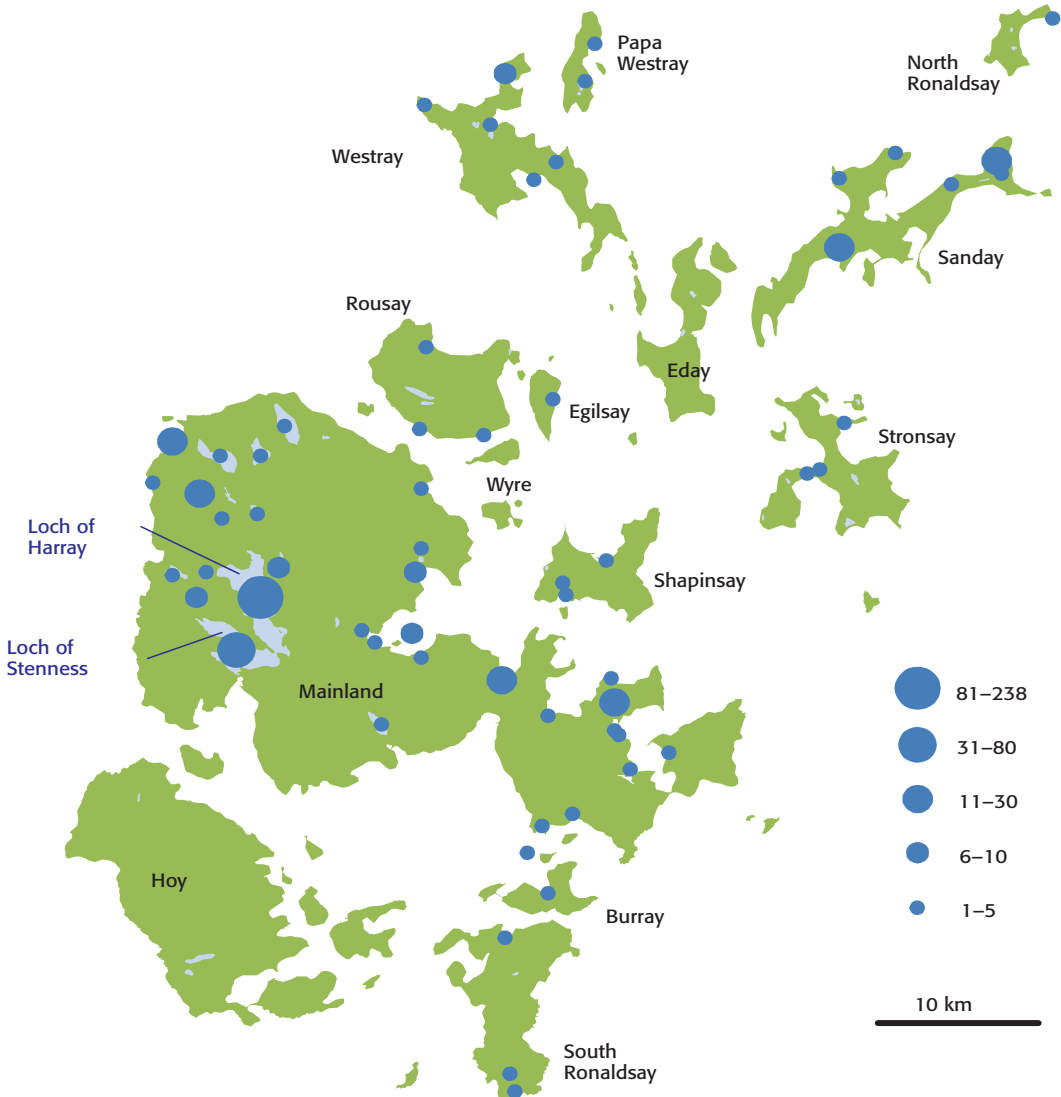


Figure 2. Distribution and peak flock sizes by 6-figure grid reference of non-territorial Mute Swans in Orkney, 2006-09 and 2011. Data for 2009 and 2011 refer to Mainland only (see text). The Lochs of Harray and Stenness are represented by a central grid reference.

Table 2. The non-territorial population of the Mute Swan in Orkney and its sub-regions, 1955–2011. Data from Rawcliffe 1958, Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993, 2005 and this study.

Year	1955	1978	1983	1990	2002	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011
Orkney	101	124	170	454	311	269	191	253		
Mainland						219	156	210	169	321
All other islands						50	35	43		
Mainland excluding Lochs of Harray and Stenness						40	33	43	38	69
Lochs of Harray and Stenness						179	123	167	131	252

A mean of 60% of the total population in Orkney was non-territorial from 2006 until 2008 which was higher than previously recorded, except in 1955. It was lower than in Lothian, greater than in Fife and similar to that in Scotland in 2002 (Table 3). Since the non-territorial population included young birds and those which may have bred in previous years, it comprised a reserve of swans with the potential to hold a territory and to breed in subsequent years. The relatively high percentage of non-territorial swans between 2006 and 2008, and the count of over 300 swans in 2011 on Mainland, may be indicative of a further cycle of increase in the total population.

Table 3. Mean percentage values of non-territorial, territorial and breeding pairs fledging at least one cygnet in Orkney, together with mean productivity compared with Lothian and Fife, 2006–08, and Scotland in 2002.

	Orkney 2006–08	Lothian 2006–08	Fife 2006–08	Scotland 2002
% of non-territorial swans in total population	60	66	43	61
% of territorial pairs which bred	70	70	76	74
% of breeding pairs which fledged at least one cygnet	50	59	72	-
Productivity (number of cygnets fledged per breeding pair)	1.8	2.3	2.7	-

Non-territorial counts during the study included first-year birds, which could be identified through retention of brown plumage. Given that 78 cygnets fledged in 2006 and 28 juveniles were recorded in May 2007, the survival rate was 36%. In 2007, a total of 125 cygnets fledged and 40 juveniles were recorded in May 2008, suggesting 32% survival. Assuming no immigration or emigration, mean first-year survival was 33%. This was the first attempt to quantify first-year survival in Orkney, since no data were available for previous years.

Territorial pairs

The total number of territorial pairs in Orkney increased substantially between 1983 and 1990 and was also high in 2002, but numbers declined between 2002 and 2006 (Table 4). A further decline occurred in 2007, which was followed by an increase in 2008, by which time the number of territorial pairs in Orkney was substantially lower than the peak counts of 1990 and 2002, but generally higher than in 1983 (Figure 1). This pattern of change was quite similar to that of the non-territorial population.

Table 4. The number of territorial pairs of Mute Swans recorded in Orkney and its sub-regions, 1983–2011. Data from Brown & Brown 1985, 1993, 2005 and this study.

Year	1983	1990	2002	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011
Orkney	77	178	195	79	75	83		
Mainland				50	51	58	64	71
All other islands				29	24	25		
Mainland excluding Lochs of Harray and Stenness		22	25	24	29	32		
Lochs of Harray and Stenness				28	26	34	35	39

Whilst the pattern of decline between 2006 and 2007 followed by an increase between 2007 and 2008 also occurred in the other islands, it was not the case on Mainland where numbers increased consistently between 2006 and 2008, and indeed continued to increase in 2009 and in 2011. Numbers on

the Lochs of Harray and Stenness exhibited a pattern of decline followed by an increase, but the converse was the case on Mainland excluding Harray and Stenness Lochs. These results indicate that changes in sub-regions did not necessarily reflect changes at the regional level. The continuous increase in the size of the territorial population on Mainland between 2006 and 2011 may presage a further increase in the territorial population on Mainland and also in Orkney as a whole.

Breeding pairs

The location of territorial-only and breeding pairs, based on 6-figure grid references, during 2006 to 2008, with additional data for Mainland only in 2009 and 2011, is shown on Figure 3. A central grid reference has been used for the Lochs of Harray and Stenness. Most pairs were found on



Figure 3. Distribution by 6-figure grid reference of territorial only (pink) and breeding (red) Mute Swans in Orkney, 2006-09 and 2011. Data for 2009 and 2011 refer to Mainland only (see text). The Lochs of Harray and Stenness are represented by a central grid reference relating to several pairs.

freshwater lochs with a few at coastal locations. The number of breeding pairs in Orkney and its sub-regions are shown in Table 5. An increase occurred in the number of breeding pairs in Orkney between 1955 and 1978, but numbers had declined by 1983, a pattern which contrasted with the continuous increase in the non-territorial population at that time (Table 2). As was the case with non-territorial swans and territorial pairs, peak numbers were recorded in 1990 and 2002, but subsequently declined between 2002 and 2006 (Figure 1). In contrast to both the non-territorial population and territorial pairs, the number of breeding pairs in Orkney increased between 2006 and 2007, but declined in 2008. Between 2006 and 2008 the number of breeding pairs in Orkney was lower than in 1978 and in 1983.

Table 5. The number of breeding pairs of Mute Swans recorded in Orkney and its sub-regions, 1955–2011. Data from Rawcliffe 1958, Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993, 2005 and this study.

Year	1955	1978	1983	1990	2002	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011
Orkney	26	75	68	163	126	48	61	58		
Mainland						26	41	43	51	56
All other islands						22	20	15		
Mainland excluding Lochs of Harray and Stenness						11	22	22	26	25
Lochs of Harray and Stenness						15	19	21	25	31

Pairs in the other islands decreased consistently between 2006 and 2008 whilst those on Mainland increased consistently. The increase on Mainland was evident on Mainland excluding the Lochs of Harray and Stenness and also on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness. The increase on Mainland continued in 2009 and 2011, as was the case on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness. Despite those consistent and proportionally substantive increases, it was difficult to determine any trend in the total number of pairs in Orkney given the consistent decrease on the other islands between 2006 and 2008, and the fact that the other islands held a substantial proportion of the region's breeding population.

The mean percentage of territorial pairs which progressed to breed throughout Orkney from 2006 to 2008 was 70% (Table 3), but ranged between years and varied across sub-regions, being particularly low (63%) on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness, this during a period when the number of pairs was relatively low. However, data from earlier censuses also recorded highly variable values ranging from 92% in 1990 to 65% in 2002 when the number of pairs was comparatively high. The mean of 70% of territorial pairs which progressed to breed compared favourably with Lothian, Fife and the Scottish population.

Productivity of breeding pairs

The number of breeding pairs, the number of pairs fledging young and the number of young fledged from 2006 to 2008 is shown in Figure 4. Half of all of the pairs which bred in Orkney fledged at least one cygnet and this was quite consistent between years, ranging from 48% in 2006 to 52% in 2008 (Table 6). This percentage was lower than in Lothian and Fife (Table 3). Success was greater on the other islands than on Mainland, and poor on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness. It also varied between years with the greatest variation recorded on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness, where the percentage was particularly poor in 2006, but increased in the subsequent two seasons.

Table 6. The percentage of breeding pairs of Mute Swans in Orkney and its sub-regions which fledged at least 1 cygnet, 2006–08.

Year	2006 (%)	2007 (%)	2008 (%)	Mean (%)
Orkney	48	49	52	50
Mainland	38	46	49	45
All other islands	59	55	60	58
Mainland excluding Lochs of Harray and Stenness	45	55	41	47
Lochs of Harray and Stenness	33	37	57	44

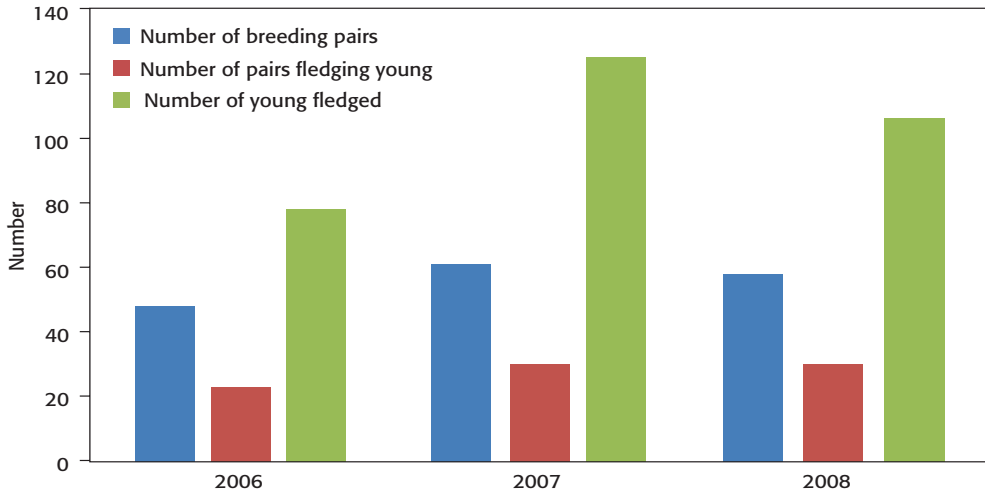


Figure 4. The number of breeding pairs of Mute Swan, the number of pairs fledging young and the number of young fledged in Orkney, 2006-08.

The mean number of cygnets fledged per breeding pair in Orkney was 1.8. As no comparable data were available from earlier years, previous work referred to counts of cygnets in July and did not allow for mortality during the subsequent weeks prior to fledging, this figure provided the first assessment of productivity in Orkney. Considerable variation was noted between sub-regions productivity being highest in the other islands and lowest on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness (Table 7). Annual variation occurred within sub-regions and was especially poor on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness in 2006, but increased in 2007 and again in 2008. The mean for the other islands from 2006 to 2008 was 2.3, which was the same as in Lothian and in 2007 the value on Mainland excluding the Lochs of Harray and Stenness was similar (Tables 3 & 7). This suggested that the Orkney breeding population had the capacity to increase productivity when suitable conditions prevailed.

Table 7. Number of cygnets fledged per breeding pair in Orkney and its sub-regions, 2006–08.

Year	2006	2007	2008	Mean
Orkney	1.6	2.0	1.8	1.8
Mainland	1.2	1.9	1.8	1.6
All other islands	2.4	2.5	1.9	2.3
Mainland, excluding Lochs of Harray and Stenness	1.8	2.2	1.6	1.9
Lochs of Harray and Stenness	0.7	1.4	2.0	1.4

Moulting population

Non-breeding and breeding birds which failed to produce cygnets or lost their brood of young cygnets tended to flock whilst undertaking their annual moult, any time between May and October. There had been no co-ordinated attempts to assess the size of the moulting population in Orkney. Excluding pairs with broods, a count on 20 July 2001 on Mainland found 724 moulting birds on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness (693 on Harray) with few at other locations (Brown & Brown 2006). Similarly, in 2005 on 3 July there were 255 moulting birds on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness (208 on Harray) with another 44 on the Loch of Bosquoy and 33 on the Loch of Skail, many of which were still not in full moult. Those counts illustrated the regional importance of the Lochs of Harray and Stenness to moulting swans, the attraction of the Loch of Harray almost to the exclusion of other water bodies, and underpin the most recent cycle of increase and decline in the Mute Swan population in Orkney.

Discussion

By 1941, breeding pairs were widely distributed across Orkney and during that summer 174 individuals were recorded on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness (Reynolds 1984). It was possible that the severe weather during the winter of 1946/47 adversely affected the population, for the total had declined by 1955, when 153 were recorded in the whole of Orkney (Rawcliffe 1958). Results from the present study indicated an overall increase in the total population between 1955 and 2008, but punctuated by two substantial increases in recent decades. Elsewhere in Scotland, detailed studies of the Mute Swan population have been on-going in Lothian since 1978 (Brown & Brown 1981–2008, 1984, 1999, 2002) and Fife since 1991 (A.W. Brown in Elkins *et al.* 2003, Brown & Brown unpublished reports) and populations in both areas have undergone substantial and almost continuous increases since those studies commenced. Although the Scottish population fluctuated between 1955 and 1983, there was an overall increase between 1955 and 2002. The increase in Orkney was, therefore, in line with the national trend.

Meek (1993) documented the initial introduction of the alien Canadian Pondweed in the Loch of Harray in 1982, its subsequent widespread distribution throughout Orkney and the close association between prolific growth of the pondweed and an increase in numbers of Mute Swans. He detailed the rapid increase in the number of breeding pairs on the Loch of Harray, which peaked in 1990 and subsequently declined rapidly. The decline in the abundance of the pondweed coincided with high mortality of Mute Swans throughout 1991, when 250 birds were estimated to have died. Post-mortem results revealed the swans suffered from emaciation, anaemia and high parasite loads. Some swans were thought to have emigrated (Meek *et al.* 2000). Corse *et al.* (2003) noted that high mortality continued in 1992, with a further 103 deaths recorded at the Loch of Harray in May that year; however, they also noted that numbers of swans began to increase in 1993 and continued to do so until 2002. The July moult counts suggested a substantial decline by 2005. Thus, the swan population was subject to two periods of rapid increase and decline culminating in peak numbers in 1990 and again in 2002 interspersed with minimal numbers around 1992 and 2006. By 2011, total numbers had increased, but it remains to be seen if a further period of rapid increase will develop, since the number of breeding pairs in 2008 was fewer even than in 1978 and 1983.

Mute Swans require suitable vegetation to provide shelter from adverse weather conditions and protection from predators during the breeding season, as well as the availability of aquatic plants, mainly macrophytes, as a food resource. In Orkney, there is a lack of trees, shrubs and tall plants around most lochs and also a lack of emergent vegetation. The International Centre for Island Technology (2004) referred to the perimeter of the Loch of Harray being dominated by stones and boulders. This was also a feature of many other water bodies. Additionally, a number of lochs formed part of the public water supply and so were subject to abstraction and draw-down during the drier months of the summer, which exposed larger areas of open shore line. Small numbers of birds were noted feeding on seaweed on the sea shore, whilst those which fed in fields were frequently discouraged by farmers. The main food source appeared to be pondweeds and the work of Meek (1993 and pers. comm.) indicated a dependence on Canadian Pondweed in particular. Differential growth between years and between lochs caused by variable local weather conditions including rainfall, temperature and sunlight may have contributed to fluctuations in the growth of pondweeds and consequently in the numbers of swans in different years and areas of Orkney. Within both Lothian and Fife, numbers of non-territorial birds and breeding pairs at specific sites fluctuated considerably between years dependent upon the prevalence of Canadian Pondweed (Brown & Brown, pers. obs.).

Migration and philopatry may also have affected the numbers of swans at some sites and in some years, however, both were very difficult to quantify since they required long-term marking and monitoring of individual birds. As yet there is no evidence to suggest that the Mute Swan population in Orkney is closed. Such an assumption had previously been made for the population on the Outer Hebrides (Spray 1981a), but subsequent movement of ringed birds from there has

shown that this was not the case (Spencer & Hudson 1980, 1981; Mead & Hudson 1983, 1986; Spray 1981b) and indeed in 1981 an Outer Hebrides ringed bird was located on Shetland (Spencer & Hudson 1982). Although Caithness had only a small swan population (Brown & Brown 2005), it is less than 20 km from South Ronaldsay, so the possibility of movement between the Scottish mainland and Orkney could not be discounted, although it was unlikely to involve a large number of birds which would have impacted significantly upon the Orkney population. A number of swans were caught and colour-ringed on the Loch of Harray in the summers of 2003, 2004 and 2005 and subsequent sightings suggested widespread dispersal within Orkney, but no sightings were reported from the Scottish mainland (Adam 2005, 2006; Williams 2007, 2008; Corse 2009, 2010, 2011). Given the assumption of no migration between fledging and the following June, the survival rate of 33% was low compared with 69% during the same period in Lothian (Brown & Brown unpublished data). Whilst the productivity figure of 1.8 was comparatively low, Brown (1997) determined it would have been sufficient to maintain the Lothian population.

The total number of swans counted in Orkney from 2006 to 2008 suggested a long-term increase in the total population, which was in line with the trend in at least two other Scottish regions and Scotland as a whole. That trend was punctuated by two relatively short-term spikes in numbers, these being closely associated with a sharp increase in the abundance of Canadian Pondweed. Both the non-territorial and territorial populations followed a similar pattern and their numbers were most likely sufficient to augment the breeding population if conditions prevailed to support any future increase in the breeding population. No long-term trend was evident in the breeding population whose productivity, although low compared with some other Scottish regions, was probably sufficient to sustain the region's population and probably had the capacity to increase its productivity when suitable conditions prevailed. It remains to be seen if and when the Orkney population spikes again. It is unclear whether a further peak in Canadian Pondweed will occur (International Centre for Island Technology, 2004), but the population appeared to be in a sustainable condition during the study period.

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Plate 254. Red-breasted Merganser, Largo Bay, Fife, March 2011. © John Anderson

Sea duck numbers in east Fife

N. ELKINS

Counts of some sea duck species in east Fife have been declining for the past decade. Sea duck are not monitored well by the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), but local counters have been very aware of the disappearance of large flocks as well as the change in timing of their use of coastal waters. In addition to WeBS counts, casual counts are made throughout the year on an opportunistic basis. Scrutiny of these counts spanning the past 30 years has revealed marked decreases in four species, Common and Velvet Scoters, Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser.

Introduction

The coastal waters around Fife are part of a chain of sites in eastern Scotland that hosts large numbers of sea ducks (Forrester *et al.* 2007). In recent years, some species have declined in Fife, the reasons for which are unclear. This paper describes and quantifies the decline and offers some explanations.

Six species of sea duck are regularly found along the coast of Fife at various times of the year, namely Eider *Somateria mollissima*, Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*, Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*, Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*, Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* and Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*. Species considered here are those that have decreased most noticeably i.e. the two scoter species, Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser. The majority of these ducks form large assemblages in two main sites, St Andrews Bay and Largo Bay.

Methods

Due to the combined problems of weather conditions, sea states, coordinating counts and the mobility and distance of birds, sea ducks are poorly monitored by the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), but casual counts are also made throughout the year in Fife and published in Fife Bird Reports.

Core WeBS counts are made monthly from September to March and often in other months. St Andrews Bay forms part of the Tay-Eden SAC (Special Area of Conservation) on the east coast of Fife and for the purposes of this study stretches from St Andrews to the mouth of the River Tay. It has traditionally been divided into several sections, but there have been large gaps in the coverage of each. Birds relocating from St Andrews Bay may also feature in separate WeBS counts for the Eden and Tay Estuaries. Largo Bay lies on the south coast of Fife, forming part of the Firth of Forth SPA (Special Protection Area).

Peak counts for each year were gathered from WeBS, Fife Bird Reports (FBR) and, in a few instances, Scottish Bird Reports. The FBR frequently publishes higher counts than WeBS, due to the partial nature of WeBS counts and the lack of flexibility due to fixed priority count dates; non-WeBS observers tend to count large flocks as opportunity arises and do so throughout the year. Where WeBS section counts are uncoordinated, absolute totals remain uncertain, as flocks can be very mobile within and between count sections, increasing the possibility of duplication. Weather also plays a role in amplifying sea states and disrupting counts, particularly with strong onshore winds. In view of the difficulties listed above, all species, except Goldeneye (which remain close inshore), are doubtless substantially undercounted at times.

Annual peak counts within the past 30 years have been used to determine five-year averages except for Goldeneye, where annual peak counts are illustrated. While caution should be applied when interpreting the data, they do provide an illustration of the decline in numbers at these two sites.

Results

Common Scoter

St Andrews Bay has always been the traditional winter haunt of this species in Fife, but Largo Bay has also hosted a sizeable flock. Since 1980, counts of between 2,000 and 3,000 birds have been made at the former, peaking at 5,000 in the winters of 1987/88 and 1993/94. The last significant count was of 3,000 in December 2004, subsequently decreasing to below 500 by 2010. On this basis, the site no longer qualifies as nationally important for this species (Musgrove *et al.* 2011).

The Largo Bay flock has exceeded 2,000 birds on several occasions but has generally been below this level. It is not known whether much interchange occurs between the two sites, but the timing

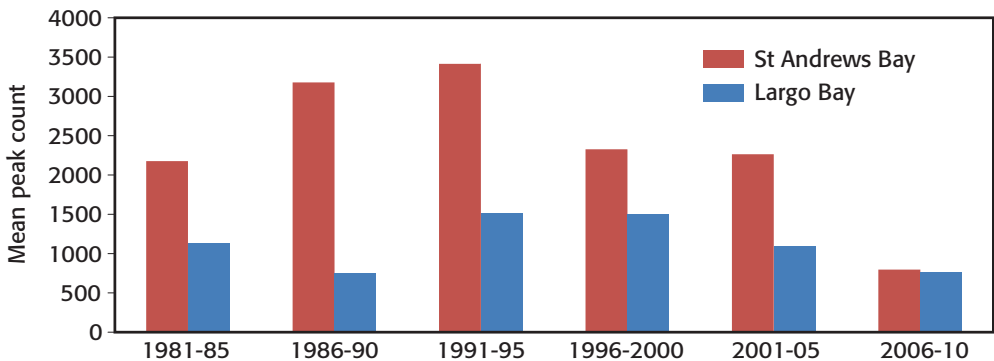


Figure 1. Five-year mean peak counts of Common Scoters in St Andrews and Largo Bays, Fife, 1981–2010.



Plate 255. Common Scoter, Fife Ness, Fife, September 2007. © John Anderson

of peaks indicates so. Common Scoters can be seen in varying numbers in all months of the year. However, St Andrews Bay held the highest numbers between November and February until 1998 (Elkins *et al.* 2003), but more frequently in September and October thereafter. There is also a spring peak, at which time maximum numbers are recorded from Largo Bay. The change in timing of the St Andrews Bay peaks suggests that many birds might now only be staging as moulting flocks before moving elsewhere to overwinter. Few scoters penetrate the Firth of Tay and the Eden Estuary but up to 400 regularly winter west of Largo Bay as far as Kirkcaldy. Other sites along the south coast of the Firth of Forth hold significant numbers but the decline is evident even in the wider area.

Velvet Scoter

As with Common Scoter, St Andrews Bay has always held the bulk of this species in winter. Counts exceeded 1,000 in most years from 1985 until 2004, rising during the 1980s to a maximum of 2,400 in February 1988 and January 1990. At this time, a significant proportion of the UK population was present in Fife (Elkins *et al.* 2003) but since 2005, numbers have been very low, exceeding 100 only in January 2008 and indicating a relocation to winter quarters elsewhere. The Largo Bay flocks have exceeded 500 at times, but a decline began after 2006. A similar decrease has been noted in the moulting flock further north in Lunan Bay, Angus, where peak numbers were formerly reached in late summer and early autumn (Angus & Dundee Bird Report 2007). Peaks in St Andrews Bay occur mainly between November and January, whereas the maximum numbers in Largo Bay are most often in March and April. Small numbers winter elsewhere in the Firth of Forth. Despite the declines, Velvet Scoters are sufficiently scarce in the UK for both the Fife sites to remain as nationally important for this species (Musgrove *et al.* 2011).

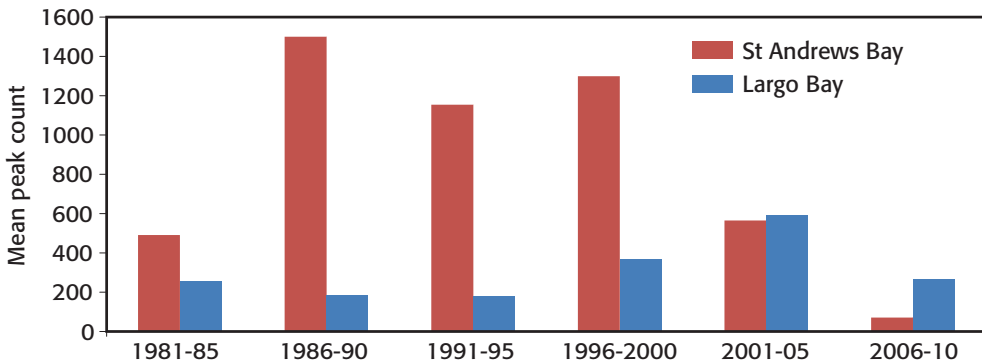


Figure 2. Five-year mean peak counts of Velvet Scoters in St Andrews and Largo Bays, Fife, 1981–2010.

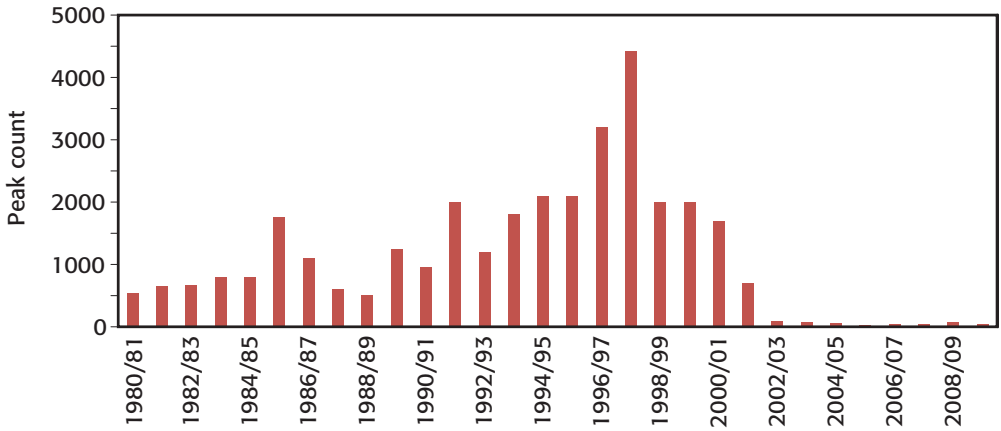


Figure 3. Annual peak counts of Goldeneye in Largo Bay, Fife, 1981–2010.

Goldeneye

Goldeneyes are widespread in the Firths of Tay and Forth with smaller numbers on inland waters. They are chiefly winter visitors and passage migrants. Very few are present in St Andrews Bay, but a very large winter flock was present regularly in the 1990s at the western end of Largo Bay, frequenting the sewage outfall at Leven and the warm water outflow of the Methil Power Station. All peak counts were made between November and March. The frequency of peaks in March suggests that the flock was augmented by birds on spring passage. Following an immense flock of 4,425 in December 1997, the species decreased markedly after 2001, mainly due to the cleaning up of the outfall and the closure of the power station. Several hundreds also frequented nearby Kilconquhar Loch on occasions, probably from the bay flock, since the species also declined here significantly after 2001.



Plate 256. Goldeneye, Leven, Fife, March 2007. © John Anderson

Red-breasted Merganser

Historically, Largo Bay and the northern part of St Andrews Bay have held a substantial number of mergansers, exceeding 1,000 in the latter in the 1980s. The peak numbers have been 1,100 in St Andrews Bay in November 1987 and 774 in Largo Bay in September 1992, but a steady decline has occurred since the mid-1990s (Elkins *et al.* 2003). This has resulted in the species no longer qualifying as being of national importance in St Andrews Bay (Musgrove *et al.* 2011). Maximum counts occur in Largo Bay in September and October, but rather earlier in St Andrews Bay. Wintering flocks rarely exceed 100. However, there is also a peak in March elsewhere in the Firth of Forth (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Timing suggests that non-breeders and moulting flocks pass through east Fife to and from winter quarters elsewhere. Birds move into the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary from time to time, but counts in the Tay have been compromised in the past by mis-identifying the nationally important late summer moulting flock of red-head Goosanders *Mergus merganser*.

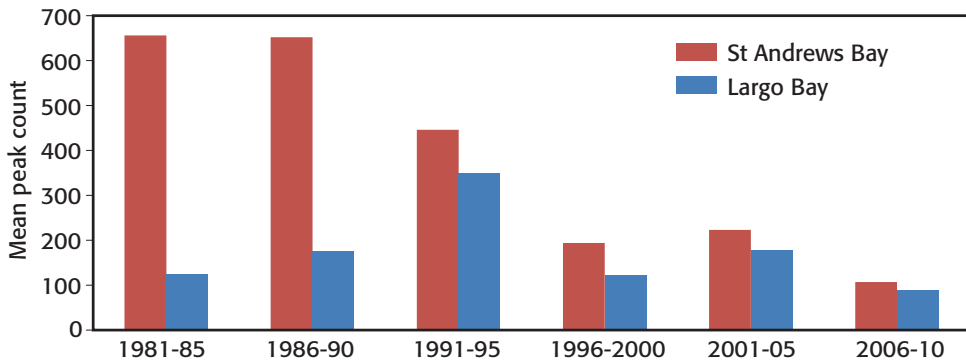


Figure 4. Five-year mean peak counts of Red-breasted Merganser in St Andrews and Largo Bays, Fife, 1981–2010.

Discussion

Counts of Common and Velvet Scoters, Red-breasted Mergansers and Goldeneyes in coastal waters of east Fife have revealed marked declines in the past 10–15 years. Aerial surveys of the region earlier this century (Wilson *et al.* 2006) located some scoter species up to 7 km from the shore, but the highest numbers were close inshore. These surveys provided figures no larger and often much smaller than shore-based counts suggesting that most ducks are observable from land for much of the time. The changes in local distribution and timing probably reflect the highly mobile nature of these flocks and could merely be due to movements in and out of the area from concentrations elsewhere in eastern Scotland, but there is little local information on the flight lines of ducks moving between sites and on migration. Food supply is the main cause of the Goldeneye decline, but it is not known to where birds have relocated.

The most recent report on WeBS Alerts (Thaxter *et al.* 2010), which are based on downward trends in numbers over set periods of time, shows that alerts have been in force at times for all four species in the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary and the Firth of Forth. However, unlike this study, the alert system uses only core winter WeBS counts, the irregularity of which renders conclusions problematic.

Conclusions

The reduction in food resources that have affected Goldeneyes in Largo Bay may also be a contributory factor in other sea duck decreases at that site. Until the 1990s, Scaup *Aythya marila* flocks in Largo Bay were substantial (Elkins *et al.* 2003); now there are very few. However, changes in coastal wildfowl distribution and numbers in the UK have also been related in part to climate change, during which milder winters have allowed birds to remain further north and east



Plate 257. Velvet Scoter, Fife Ness, Fife, September 2008. © John Anderson

nearer their higher latitude breeding grounds (Holt *et al.* 2011). In particular, this is likely to influence the Velvet Scoter, which is at the western fringe of its winter range. The distribution of sea duck in UK coastal waters is currently an issue in areas with offshore oil-related activities and wind farms, such as the turbine arrays proposed east of the Firth of Forth. Velvet Scoters tend to be especially sensitive to disturbance (Garth & Hüppop 2004) and therefore counts of birds frequenting such areas are of great importance.

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Plate 258. White-tailed Eagle chicks in nest. © Robin Reid

Clearing nests of food remains does not influence subsequent nest choice in White-tailed Eagles

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Practical research is important in the understanding and application of conservation management to animal populations. However, when the species concerned has a small population size or is threatened in some other way, it is particularly important to identify and evaluate any effect of the research methods on the individuals studied. Researchers therefore frequently use staged or 'natural' experiments to test whether particular field methods introduce biases in results. In birds, such potential biases have been investigated to assess the effects of, for example, the use of colour-rings (Bart *et al.* 2001) and radio-tags (Kenward 2000).

Dietary studies of raptors often involve clearing nests of prey remains at the end of the breeding season (e.g. Steenhof & Kochert 1988, Mersmann *et al.* 1992, Katzner *et al.* 2006). The method can involve some disruption to nest structure when searching through nest material. There is a possibility that such disruption to the nest, even if birds are not actively using it at the time, may disturb parental birds and cause them to shift to another nest site in the following year. Such a change may result in the selection of a poorer nest site; for example in a more exposed location or at increased distance from food resources. In addition, building an entirely new nest would increase energy demand, and a change in nest site can lower breeding success (Desrochers &

Magrath 1993). In a study of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla*, we examine the possibility that nest clearing might influence a breeding pair's nest site choice the following year.

Our study involved the reintroduced population of White-tailed Eagles in western Scotland whose history and biology has been thoroughly documented (Love 1983, 2003, Bainbridge *et al.* 2003, Evans *et al.* 2003, 2009, Whitfield *et al.* 2009). Since the first breeding attempt in 1983, the nest site location and breeding success has been monitored for every breeding territory. In 2008 there were 44 territories occupied by pairs, 35 of which laid eggs, leading to 28 fledged young. All released birds and the large majority of wild-bred nestlings have been individually marked, mostly with patagial wing-tags (Evans *et al.* 2009). Wild-bred nestlings are typically wing-tagged and/or ringed when aged six to eight weeks.

Dietary studies on White-tailed Eagles in Scotland have been ongoing for many years (Watson *et al.* 1992, Marquiss *et al.* 2003, Madders & Marquiss 2003) and these typically include visiting nests after a breeding attempt has failed or nestlings have fledged, to collect all remains of food items. Nests were situated both on cliffs and in trees. In almost all cases they were rebuilt by research workers following thorough collection of remains and in a very few cases they were left in a structurally safer condition than they were before. For the purposes of the present study, between 1992 and 2008 we recorded the territory identity, year, whether a nest was cleared of food remains ('clearout') at the end of the breeding season and whether a different nest was used on the territory in the year following a clearout.

Breeding failure is well known as a factor which can cause birds to change nest site (Haas 1998) and so we considered data only involving successful breeding attempts. We also wished to control for the possibility that our results were not confounded by other sources of potential disturbance and so we included data only from breeding attempts where nestlings had been wing-tagged and/or ringed (Evans *et al.* 2003). Change in breeding partner can be associated with change in nest site (Desrochers & Magrath 1993), but we could not account for this factor because not all birds were individually marked. However, annual survival of mature adult eagles was high (94 – 97 %: Evans *et al.* 2009) and dispersal of breeding adults was very low (Whitfield *et al.* 2009), and so this deficiency should not have introduced a serious bias, as was confirmed in the many cases where we knew the identity of partners between years.

After screening data for potentially confounding factors we had 120 records involving 34 territories with a median of 2.5 data (years) per territory (range 1 – 13). In our analysis, carried out in R 2.8.1 (R Development Core Team 2008), we used a binomial Generalized Linear Mixed Model (GLMM) with nest site change (0 or 1) between years x and $x + 1$ as the response variable and nest clearout (0 or 1) in year x as the explanatory variable, with territory identity nested within year x as a random factor.

It was highly unlikely that clearing a nest of food remains had any effect on nest site use in the following year (value = -0.02, SE = 0.38, df = 85, $t = -0.06$, $P = 0.96$). It is probably safe to conclude therefore that nest clearouts do not have a detrimental effect on our study population since, if birds do not shift nest sites as a result of the method, then 'higher order' manifestations of disturbance, such as reductions in breeding success or survival would not be expected. Examination of such potential effects is important in any research, but especially involving reintroduced populations which may be vulnerable in the early stages of expansion.

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Opportunistic food robbery of Grey Wagtail by Pied Wagtail

On 7 May 2011, at Leithen Lodge in the Moorfoot Hills, Borders, I watched a pair of Grey Wagtails *Motacilla cinerea* collecting food for their young in a nest nearby. At 08:15 GMT, the female Grey Wagtail landed on a telegraph wire near the presumed nest site with only a single larva in her beak. The male landed on the wire close by with a beak full of food items, including some winged insects. He then flew down to the tarmac track below the wires and started to walk towards the nest site. The female stayed put. At this point a female Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*, which was feeding on the tarmac but not collecting food for chicks, lunged at the male Grey Wagtail and caused him to drop his food items. The female Pied Wagtail immediately ate what the Grey had dropped, while he wandered off along the track and short grass verge, picking up invertebrates from the surface and flycatching.

Over the next 20 minutes no further robbery was witnessed. It appears that the female Pied Wagtail was not habitually targeting the Greys,

but she was obviously capable of doing so opportunistically, possibly following inter-specific aggression.

The Grey Wagtail nest contained five chicks around six days old. It is unlikely that the Pied Wagtail had a brood nearby as she was not collecting food.

I can find no mention of this behaviour in either Simms (1992) or Snow & Perrins (1998).

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Multi-species groups of finches feeding on Wych Elm fruits in spring

Elm trees are well known to provide food for finches in spring (Newton 1972). Amongst the three main elm species in Britain, Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra* has a northerly distribution and is the only undisputed native species in Scotland. The value of Wych Elm fruits for birds in Scotland, therefore, would have been high relative to those of the introduced English Elm *Ulmus procera*, which is scarce away from its southern homelands and only an irregular producer of seed in Scotland. Furthermore, the relative importance of Wych Elm for birds could have increased recently following the widespread decline of mature English Elms due to Dutch Elm Disease (DED) (Osborne 1983). Wych Elm has hitherto been rather less affected, especially in the north of Scotland. My observations in lowland central Scotland show that six or more species of finch feed regularly on Wych Elm fruits, including mixed-species groups in the same tree. This suggests that in spite of the

impact of DED, Wych Elm fruits can provide an important food source for many finches in central Scotland, and probably elsewhere, in the early stages of the breeding season.

Wych Elms produce conspicuous bunches of pale green fruits in April, just before their leaves appear. The winged fruits remain on the tree for about two months and drop between May and July, although they only seem to be attractive to finches until late May or, further north, into early June. Middleton (1918) provided an early record of their appeal: "little birds occasionally dart and flutter about the sprays [of Wych Elm], eating the seeds with relish". He did not mention the species involved, although finches and tits are amongst the obvious candidates. More recent records include Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* and Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* taking Wych Elm seeds (Newton 1967a & b). Hawfinches

Table 1. Finch species recorded feeding on Wych Elm seeds at Bridge of Allan, 2009–11. Maximum number of individuals of each species seen together, and (final column) maximum number of species recorded feeding together in same tree.

Year	Chaffinch	Greenfinch	Goldfinch	Siskin	Linnet	Bullfinch	Species seen together
2009	2*	3*	6*	2*	2*	0	5
2010	1	4*	3*	2*	0	3*	4
2011	2*	4*	3*	0	0	3*	4

*these species were recorded feeding together in the same tree in each year

Table 2. Occurrence of finches feeding on Wych Elm fruits at Bridge of Allan, 2009–11; earliest and latest observations in each year.

Year	First record	Last record	Fruits unsuitable	Number of days feeding	Days of observations
2009	10 May	14 May	19 May	5+	5
2010	23 April	25 May>	<4 June	33+	10
2011	21 April	6 May>	<17 May	16+	12

The '<' and '>' symbols indicate that the dates of events in 2010 and 2011 may be earlier or later than shown, by up to five days, due to gaps in observation schedules. The 'days feeding' period may have been underestimated for the same reason, as indicated by + symbol.

Coccothraustes coccothraustes also take the seeds in tree crowns in both May and June (Mountfort 1956).

I noted several species of finch making repeated visits to a single multi-stemmed Wych Elm (8 m high) in Bridge of Allan, Stirlingshire (Upper Forth), over five days in May 2009. They settled quietly in the crown of the tree and extracted the soft seeds singly from each fruit. More than one species was often present and on two occasions five finch species were feeding in the crown at the same time. Maximum numbers for each species in the tree ranged from six Goldfinches *Carduelis carduelis* to two Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* (Table 1). While four of the finch species bred in gardens within 200m, the Linnets probably came from further afield. All five species focused their attention on the crown; lower branches and smaller Wych Elms nearby were almost entirely overlooked. The finches only attacked unripe fruits (i.e. with pale not dark seeds and green 'wings'), either from wholly green fruit bunches or selected from amongst those with a mix of green and browning fruits. Feeding occurred throughout the day, and appeared to involve repeated visits of 1–15 minutes each by a small pool of birds of both sexes. By 19 May in 2009, all the fruits had browned and no further visits were recorded (Table 2).

Observations over the two following years added Bullfinches to the visitors seen to take seeds and confirmed that the pattern of elm seed-eating

detected in 2009 was regular, at least during three years when fruiting was prolific. As in 2009, I recorded feeding finches on every day observations were undertaken (Table 2). Up to four species were present together in the same tree on two or more occasions in both years (Table 1). Feeding visits to Wych Elm in these two years began in late April and continued into mid- or late May, by which time the fruits had browned and again were no longer attractive (Table 2). Interest spread beyond the single tree in both 2010 and 2011, however, with three others being visited regularly for feeding amongst the seven elms in view.

Once settled in the crown, feeding finches were hard to detect; usually silent and often obscured by bunches of fruits and leaves (Plate 259). The



Plate 259. Bullfinch feeding on Wych Elm, Bridge of Allan, Stirling, 6 May 2011. © David Bryant

finches usually pulled pieces from the winged samara *in situ*, then plucked the fruit and held it in the bill to extract the seed (Plates 260–262). On still days the falling fragments and ‘empty’ fruits often provided the first indication of the presence of feeding birds above. These detailed observations were made much easier by the principal tree being on a slope, allowing eye-level viewing from the house about 10 m away. Complementing this, observations during a period of light winds in 2011 allowed the attacked fruits to be counted beneath a tree growing on cleared ground; at least 2,200 fallen fruits had been plucked and ‘emptied’ by an unknown number of finches over seven days. This illustrates another activity which could alert observers to the presence of finches, at least before the ripe fruits fall and smother the evidence.

Several other species used the Wych Elms at the same time as the finches but were mostly perching or singing. Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus*, for example, sought insects amongst the elm fruits and were not seen to attack the seeds. Grey Squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis*, however, were frequent visitors to feed on the fruits. Evidence of intraspecific competition amongst finches came from occasional bouts of chasing, involving Goldfinch (unsexed), Greenfinch (males) and Bullfinch (males). This occurred in spite of an apparent superabundance of fruits and feeding positions, suggesting that chasing might have concerned access to a subset of high quality seeds or involved competition for or protection of mates. In contrast, no interspecific clashes were seen.

The only finch ‘missing’ from my observations, that is known to feed on Wych Elm, was the Hawfinch. It is rare in the Stirling area, however, so its absence is entirely expected. That they cash in too, however, is illustrated by a record of a migrant Hawfinch at Kergord on Shetland, photographed while eating Wych Elm seeds, by Jacqui Herrington in late May 2010 (Plate 263). Calladine & Morrison (2010) list several tree species used by Hawfinches in winter near Perth; and also demonstrate the cryptic behaviour of this species and the consequent risk of bias in determining dietary preferences. Wych Elm was not amongst the trees used, as expected, because their study took place well before any fruits would have



Plate 260. Goldfinch feeding on Wych Elm, Bridge of Allan, Stirling, 4 May 2011. © David Bryant



Plate 261. Greenfinch feeding on Wych Elm, Bridge of Allan, Stirling, 30 April 2011. © David Bryant



Plate 262. Chaffinch feeding on Wych Elm, Bridge of Allan, Stirling, 2 May 2011. © David Bryant



Plate 263. Hawfinch feeding on Wych Elm, Kergord, Shetland, 30 May 2010. © Jacqui Herrington

appeared. Hawfinches and other finches probably rely on a succession of buds and seeds as they become available with the arrival of spring; this sequence is likely to be somewhat delayed at more northerly latitudes.

Whilst the Wych Elm is recognised as generally valuable for birds, and its planting is sometimes encouraged by woodland conservationists, it has a particular value because it is one of only a small subset of deciduous tree species that provide canopy-level seed supplies in spring. Certain individual trees, furthermore, provide a popular focus for feeding finches, perhaps because they offer better cover from hunting Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* or protection from the elements and other hazards? Hence, the context, or crown structure and density of a Wych Elm, or perhaps the quality or size of its seed, may affect selection by finches. Use of Wych Elm, however, did not appear to be affected directly by access to bird-feeders, since attendance at local feeding stations had tailed off by late March, several weeks before the finches moved onto the elms.

The Wych Elm, in spite being a common native formerly called the 'Scotch Elm' in some parts, is sometimes known as 'Scotland's forgotten tree' (Edwards 2009). The importance of Wych Elm for finches may have been under-recorded since detecting silent, near-motionless birds in dense tree crowns can be difficult. While mixed-species finch flocks are common in winter, a feeding-aggregation of up to six species in spring is much less frequent and suggests that for a period of 2–5 weeks in late April and May, Wych Elm seeds provide a useful food source for mainly territory-holding finches. Taking Wych Elm seeds while ignoring seed on nearby feeders suggests that specific nutrients, palatability or digestibility, rather than energy shortages, drives this choice. The soft pulp extracted from the seeds, furthermore, could play a very specific role in preparations for egg laying (Carey 1996). The extent to which use of Wych Elm fruits is related to the availability of other natural seed supplies, whether in tree canopies or at ground level, is unclear.

Elm was the only tree to feature prominently in most finch diets in England in late spring

(Newton 1972). Ensuring the availability of elm seeds in April and May could be a valuable complement to other measures to maintain food supplies for these birds. The retention of weed-rich stubbles overwinter, provision of wild-bird seed crops and enhancement of natural herb-seed supplies, provide important benefits to non-breeding finch populations and other birds of farmland and woodland (Roberts & Pullin 2007), but do so only until depletion, germination or cultivation occurs in spring. Thereafter, the seeds of Wych Elm, relatively secure from human interference, can help bridge the gap until other plant and animal food supplies increase in May.

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White-billed Diver: new first Scottish record

The Birds of Scotland states that the first Scottish record of White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* was collected at Aberdeen on 17 December 1891, with the specimen held at Chelmsford Museum [CHMER E135441] (Forrester *et al.* 2007). That specimen had hitherto been identified as a Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* and its true identity was only recently established (Green & Forrester 2005). Prior to the discovery of the Aberdeen bird, a bird found dead at Whiteness Voe, Shetland on 21 January 1946 was acknowledged as the first Scottish record.

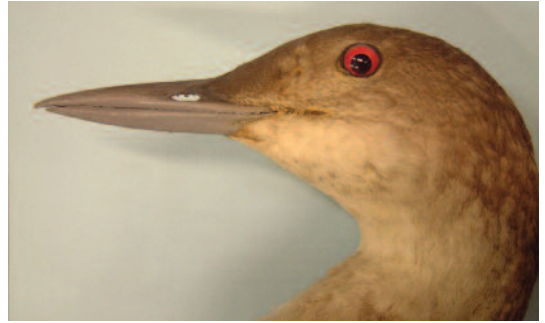


Plate 264. *The Sutherland White-billed Diver specimen collected in January 1890 © NMS. Note that the bill has been painted.*

In 2008, following closure of the exhibition galleries of National Museums Scotland (NMS) for major refurbishment, a close examination of a small number of mounted birds was considered worthwhile. One was a juvenile diver (NMS.Z 1890.33) that had been collected by Mr Erskine St Clair Steele on the Sutherland coast in January 1890 and donated to the museum. It had been accessioned, and then exhibited, as a Great Northern Diver. A contemporary ledger indicated the specimen was a male and this has been confirmed by DNA-sexing (M. Collinson, in litt.).

With the first claim of White-billed Diver in Scotland only made in the mid-1940s, it is not difficult to see that any diver, other than Red-throated and Black-throated, acquired by the museum in the 19th century might have simply been assumed to be Great Northern Diver. This would particularly be the case for birds in non-adult plumage.

Identification

Earlier statements on 'diagnostic' bill shapes for White-billed and Great Northern Divers have been shown to be unreliable, and there are further difficulties for juvenile birds as bill dimensions of the former do not attain classic adult shape until, or beyond, first-summer (Burn & Mather 1974).

To further complicate the issue of bill appearance, the culmen of the Sutherland bird was rather poorly painted at some time in the

past, and this has concealed the natural colour. This effectively obscures one key characteristic that might be useful in separating these two species. In addition, the ranges of culmen, tarsus and wing lengths overlap for the species, the latter compounded by moult of remiges during December to March. The challenge was to demonstrate that sufficient features exist to prove this particular specimen is a White-billed Diver.

The most concise and detailed document for identifying diver species in the hand is the Gaviidae section of the *Handbook on Oil Impact Assessment* which gives a number of morphological characteristics that define all four (or five, if *pacifica* recognised) species (Camphuysen 2007). As the culmen length, shape and colour and wing length of the Sutherland bird are non-diagnostic for identification, the following key features were examined.

Number of tail feathers. Eighteen in White-billed Diver, 20 in Great Northern Diver. The number recorded for the Sutherland bird was 18.

Primary shafts. Light brown or whitish in White-billed Diver, dark brown or blackish in Great Northern Diver (Plate 266). The shaft streaks of the Sutherland bird are pale (Plate 265).

Mantle feathers. Mantle feathers in juvenile White-billed Divers show 'broad, light terminal fringes' and Great Northern Divers show 'light terminal fringes' (Camphuysen 2007). The



Plate 265. Primary shaft streaks of the Sutherland specimen showing the pale colouration typical of White-billed Diver. © NMS



Plate 267. The mantle of the Sutherland specimen showing broad, pale terminal fringes. © NMS



Plate 266. Dark primary shaft streaks of a typical Great Northern Diver (NMSZ 1980.60.27). © NMS



Plate 268. The underside of the bill of the Sutherland specimen showing mandibular rami fused along c. 50% of length. © NMS

Sutherland bird shows broadly fringed mantle feathers typical of White-billed Diver (Plate 267).

One other distinctive character is also evident in this specimen. The two rami of the lower mandible are joined for c. 50% of the length of the lower mandible (Plate 268). For Great Northern Divers, the rami are only joined at the tip (c. 10% of the length) (Plate 269); see Burn & Mather (1974) for diagrams.

Conclusion

On a number of key diagnostic characters, it is possible to demonstrate that the specimen collected on the Sutherland coast in January, 1890 is a White-billed Diver. In May 2011 SBRC ratified the identification and accepted this juvenile male as the first Scottish record.

Acknowledgment

I thank Dr A.G. Knox who alerted me to his suspicions over the identification of this



Plate 269. The underside of the bill of Great Northern Diver NMSZ 1980.60.27 showing mandibular rami fused only at tip. © NMS

specimen and suggested it was worth a closer inspection. Dr J. Martin Collinson, University of Aberdeen, kindly arranged DNA-sexing of a tissue sample.

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Attempted predation of Pink-footed Geese by a Peregrine

On 13 October 2010, on an upland plateau around 400 m altitude in rural Inverness-shire, I witnessed a predation attempt by a female Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* on a skein of Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*. Around 100 geese were flying over the plateau in a southerly direction at an altitude of over 100 m when a female Peregrine appeared from behind. She raced towards the skein; alarm calls going up from the geese as she neared. Flying directly into the skein, she split it in two before selecting one of the halves and flying into that one. She did this again until there were only four geese left in the group she was following. From there her tactic changed, and instead of flying level with the geese she then took up position slightly above the single goose she had selected to chase. No more than a metre away from it, the Peregrine forced the goose downwards. The goose, flying rapidly, began to lose height quite quickly in an attempt to evade its attacker with the peregrine following every move. Both were at 10-20 m above the ground when my view was obscured by a knoll. While all the other geese rejoined the main skein, neither the final goose nor the Peregrine were seen again.

I witnessed this behaviour again the following day. Exactly the same tactic was used to break up the skein until only four geese remained. As before, an individual was selected, chased and forced lower and lower. Again on this occasion, my view was obscured by a knoll which they flew behind. This was no more than 2 km from the site of the first attack and may have been the same bird given the rarity of Peregrine sightings in this area.

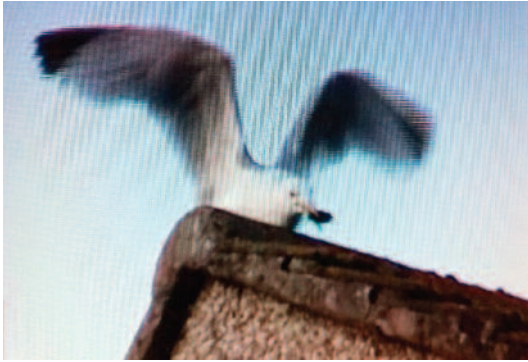
Some goose species have been shown to be able to inflict serious injury to falcons of similar size to the Peregrine (Hayes 1976). Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis* will nest in protective association with Peregrines (Quinn *et al.* 2003). However, there are several records of predation attempts by both adult and juvenile Peregrines on various species of geese (George 1979, Stabins 1995). This suggests that, while geese are occasionally taken, they are not a common prey of Peregrines.

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Plates 270–71. Herring Gull catching then eating presumed Common Pipistrelle, Garlieston, Dumfries & Galloway, July 2011. © Maureen Nicol

Herring Gull catching and eating live bats

A remarkable piece of video taken by Maureen Nicol shows a Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* standing on the ridge of a tiled roof and very adeptly catching bats as they leave a roost. This footage was taken by Maureen whilst visiting Garlieston, a small coastal village in Wigtownshire, south-west Scotland. The video was taken during the last week of July 2011, and, although edited, shows the gull gulping down five bats in a few minutes (www.youtube.com/watch?v=AffGN5OYCFY). I visited the site on 13 August, by which time the bats had abandoned the roost.

The activity of the Herring Gull was first noted during the third week of July and it visited regularly but not daily until around the end of the first week of August. The last bats were seen on about 10 August. It appears that only a single gull had learned the skill of catching bats; on occasions a second gull was in attendance, but never seen to attempt to catch a bat.

The bats were roosting below the cement roof tiles and had not entered the roof space. They were leaving the roost by a number of holes below the ridge tile and at a point where the cement pointing at the gable end of the tiles was cracked. The size of the roost was not known, but it was thought to hold hundreds of bats; this is supported by the frequency of bats leaving the roost on the video. It was assumed to be a maternal roost of Common Pipistrelles *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*.

On one evening the gull was seen to consume 11 bats in a 15 minutes period. In addition the house owner regularly had to collect dead and injured bats from the path below the roost. The gull quickly grabbed the bats as they exited but before they could take flight. It then simply swallowed them whole and alive within a few seconds. There was no thrashing or beating of the prey to stun or kill it. Over a three week period this gull could have consumed in the region of 50 to 100 bats, which would have had a significant effect on that particular roost.

The house was an end of row terrace, south-west facing, over-looking a wooded estate of grazed pasture, about 500 m from the shore. By early August, 400 Herring Gulls were roosting on the shore.

Eleven species of birds have been recorded consuming bats in the British Isles and it is estimated that they consume in the order of 200,000 bats a year (Speakman 1991). Cramp & Simmons (1982) quote a wide range of food items both predated and scavenged by Herring Gulls and mention Herring Gulls recorded in aerial pursuit of a number of items including a large bat, possibly a Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, which was killed and partly eaten (Cleeves 1969).

I thank Stephen Welch for bringing the video to my attention.

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Mute Swan and Canada Goose sharing a nest

Several pairs of Mute Swans *Cygnus olor*, Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* and Greylag Geese *Anser anser* nest on the River Esk in Musselburgh, Lothian. As numbers have increased, nest sites have been at a premium, and there is often conflict between geese and swans. However, there are also cases of unexpected mutual tolerance. In 2002, three pairs of Mute Swans nested together on a small island (Brown & Brown 2004). In 2011, this same island saw Mute Swan and Canada Goose nest side by side, effectively in the same nest.

On 20 April 2011, a female Mute Swan (colour-ringed LST) was sitting on one swan egg and one goose egg, with another swan egg by the water's edge and a Canada Goose trying to sit on the same nest. On 23rd, the roles were reversed with the Canada Goose sitting on the eggs, and the Mute Swan standing nearby. For the next four weeks, both birds sat adjacent to one another, effectively on the same nest, but it is not known if the eggs were in one clutch or had become slightly separated. On occasion, the wing of one bird was over the other, and

after rain, the goose was seen to drink water from the swan's back. Unfortunately, after 30 May, incubation became erratic, and eventually (by 6 June) both pairs deserted.

In 1998, a pair of Greylag Geese at Glendevon Farm pond, Winchburgh, Lothian, laid eggs, but these were incubated by a Mute Swan that then reared the four goslings (Kelly 1999). In addition, a pair of swans at Dalmahoy Golf Course, Lothian, raised two goslings in 2004 (Brown & Brown 2006).

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Plate 272. Mute Swan and Canada Goose using the same nest, Musselburgh, May 2011. © I.J. Andrews

Allan Brown, *Lothians and Fife Swan Study Group*, commented: "Swans and geese often do not mix well at the nesting time – Greylags often nest earlier than the swans and take the best breeding sites resulting in occasional fights/disputes. Apparently Mutes are even used as a Canada Goose deterrent in the USA! Sharing a nest with a Canada Goose, both species laying eggs in the same nest and both species incubating (if the clutch is complete) is a new one on me."

Revised ms accepted August 2011



Plate 273. Greenland White-fronted and Barnacle Geese. © Clive McKay

Wildfowl in Scotland – a review

M. OGILVIE

In the third of our 75th anniversary review series, Malcolm Ogilvie reflects on the development of wildfowl counting in Scotland and the changes that have occurred over recent decades in the numbers of our swans, geese and ducks.

Seventy-five years ago, in 1936, the British Section of the International Committee for Bird Preservation (a direct forerunner of BirdLife International) set up a special sub-committee to inquire into the status of wildfowl in the British Isles. There was considerable concern at the time over perceived declines in populations of several species, though this was nearly all based on anecdotal information. The sub-committee decided that all available information should be brought together and published, and in due course two volumes under the heading 'International Wildfowl Inquiry' appeared. Volume I (published in 1941) was entitled "Factors Affecting the General Status of Wild Geese and Wild Duck". The authors of the

various chapters reviewed such matters as conditions on the breeding grounds, punt-gunning, ringing and abundance of eelgrass *Zostera*, and included such luminaries as Dr A. Landsborough Thomson, C.T. Dalgety, Major W.M. Congreve and C.W. Mackworth Praed. The second volume had already been published by this time, coming out in 1939 and entitled 'The Status and Distribution of Wild Geese and Wild Duck in Scotland'. It had a sole author, John Berry (later Director, Scotland, of the Nature Conservancy), but with the considerable acknowledged assistance of the Misses E.V. Baxter and L.J. Rintoul, who undertook the task of collecting and collating reports from observers all over Scotland, as well as searching the literature for published records.

John Berry's book was a masterly review of the situation at the time, summarising the status of each species across Scotland as best could be done using the material to hand. While some of the accounts are necessarily sketchy, others give

a reasonable full picture of the situation in the 1930s, and it has certainly been possible to use them as valuable records, at least of distribution if not numbers, against which to measure more recent changes.

The Second World War brought a temporary end to the activities of the Wildfowl Inquiry Sub-Committee, but in 1947, the members undertook the task of examining any long-term trends. The method adopted was to persuade observers to carry out synchronised monthly counts at as many wildfowl haunts as possible. The Wildfowl Count Scheme, as it was called, was funded, almost from the start, by the Nature Conservancy (whose Director-General, Max Nicholson, was an enthusiastic supporter of amateur bird surveys), enabling the appointment in 1952 of a full-time organiser, George Atkinson-Willes. In 1954, the scheme was taken over from the sub-committee by the Wildfowl (and Wetlands) Trust, and George moved to Slimbridge where he stayed until his retirement in 1987, by which time the Wildfowl Count Scheme had, together with the BTO's Birds of Estuaries Enquiry, become the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and had grown from covering a few hundred sites to about 2,000. The records, originally received on paper forms and collated by hand, can now be submitted online and manipulated in a sophisticated database. And in addition to ground counts of inland and coastal wetlands, aerial surveys have revealed what is happening offshore where substantial numbers of seabirds have been discovered in a number of areas of shallow sea.

It became apparent quite early on that the Wildfowl Count Scheme did not cope very satisfactorily with geese which, with the exception of the Brent Goose, and more recently feral Greylags and Canada Geese, tended to use wetlands just for roosting and so were absent at the time most counts took place. Hugh Boyd, the Wildfowl Trust's first research officer, was already investigating the status of geese in Britain when the Wildfowl Count Scheme arrived at Slimbridge. With their more concentrated populations, Hugh Boyd was able to institute annual autumn censuses for several species, which still continue today and still rely on the efforts of a great many dedicated amateurs,

plus, as more and more important goose roosts have been given protection, the ever-growing numbers of reserve wardens. In Scotland, where the great bulk of the Pinkfoot and Greylag populations wintered during the 1950s and 1960s, Hugh gained the invaluable help of enthusiasts such as Valerie Thom (Perthshire) and Willy Brotherton (Lothians), each of whom acted as local organisers in their respective areas. To fill in the gaps in coverage of the autumn censuses, Hugh spent two–three weeks around the time of the census date carrying out counts and assessing annual breeding success of the geese. I joined him on these regular trips in 1961 when I became his assistant, and we were usually accompanied by various friends who were happy to take part in the dawn and dusk counts which are the most efficient times to census the geese. When Hugh got head-hunted by the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1967, I took on these and other goose censuses, and also got involved in national censuses of swans. The still-continuing work of Allan and Lyndesay Brown on Mute Swans enabled me to leave the organisation of the censuses in Scotland in their capable hands.

Two other geese wintering in Scotland, the Barnacle Goose and the Greenland White-fronted Goose, caused more problems when it came to regular censuses. The Svalbard population of Barnacle Geese was, and still is, relatively straightforward as it is just a question of covering their known feeding areas (and hopefully discovering previously unknown ones as the population continues to grow) around



Plate 274. Barnacle Geese. © Malcolm Ogilvie

their exclusive wintering area of the Solway Firth. The Greenland population, on the other hand, is distributed mainly on about 30–50 islands (the majority small and uninhabited) between Orkney in the north and Islay in the south, while if a complete census is required, the range continues south through western Ireland from Donegal to County Kerry, again with the emphasis on small uninhabited islands. The answer, pioneered by Hugh Boyd in 1959, was aerial surveys. Barnacle Geese are comparatively easy to see from a light aircraft flying at around 800 feet (and as slowly as is safe). The aircraft causes the geese to fly making them much more visible than when on the ground and, with pilots using their skill to keep the flock in the view of an observer sitting alongside, it is possible to count flocks of up to 1,000–2,000 with reasonable accuracy, as determined by comparisons with photographs. The latter can never be relied on completely – flocks can split up or do not conveniently fit in the viewfinder. Fortunately, the largest flocks to be counted from the air are rarely more than 1,000 and often only tens or very low hundreds. The major haunt of Islay has always been far easier to count on the ground, and the same is true of the growing numbers on Tiree and at the few mainland Irish sites. The one drawback of aerial surveys is the cost, and so Barnacle censuses have only ever been carried out at intervals of about five years. However, with 60–65% wintering on Islay, regular censuses there, often a number of times each winter, coupled with age counts, give a good indication of how the total population is performing.

The knowledge of Greenland White-fronted Geese wintering in Britain was accumulated only slowly, bearing in mind that the subspecies was only identified as such as recently as 1948. Hugh Boyd gathered what information he could, and the various haunts, often only holding very small numbers, became known during the 1950s. Like the Greenland Barnacle Goose, Islay held by far the largest numbers in Scotland and I began to count these as accurately as possible once or twice a winter from the mid-1960s. Elsewhere, our knowledge remained patchy and, in particular, it was hard to assess what was happening to overall numbers. Major Robin Ruttledge was concerned at declines taking

place in the numbers of Greenland Whitefronts wintering in Ireland, with habitat loss of bogs and wet places a major consideration. In 1979, Robin and I published a report on numbers across the British and Irish range (there is a small population in western Wales, but none in England) which showed a dramatic decline in numbers (much worse in Ireland than in Scotland) and we made a strong plea for measures to reverse this. By very happy coincidence, our “wake-up” call had already been answered (!), by the founding in 1978 of the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study by a group mainly comprised of Aberystwyth University students who mounted an expedition to the West Greenland breeding grounds in summer 1979. From that initial interest stemmed the Greenland White-fronted Goose study group, covering the range of the goose from Greenland to Ireland, which not only carries out twice-annual censuses across the wintering range but has published a “Flyway Plan” to take forward the conservation and management of this vulnerable population across its range.

After that description of some of the ways that wildfowl counting has developed in Scotland in the last 75 years, with a perhaps not unsurprising bias towards geese, what has happened to wildfowl populations over that same period? It is not possible to compare all species across the whole period, but, concentrating on the commoner ones, I will attempt to describe what has happened to them over the last several decades. To do this, I have relied heavily on ‘Birds of Scotland’ to give me recent totals, and the excellent references therein for some of the earlier ones.

Swans

Mute Swans were first censused in Scotland in 1955 when a total of about 4,000 birds, including c.500 breeding pairs, was reported. Numbers have grown slowly since, being knocked back in severe winters, and at the time of the last census, 2003, a total of 5,000–8,000 birds was found/estimated, including 1,012 breeding pairs. Coverage was probably better in 2003, accounting for some of the increase, but other facts include greater tolerance to the species and expansion onto waters at higher altitudes. The



Plate 275. Whooper Swan. © Lang Stewart

Whooper Swan passes through Scotland in considerable numbers in autumn, with individual flocks of over 1,000 reported on a number of occasions. However, national censuses are carried out in January by which time many of these have moved on, and numbers in Scotland since the first census in 1986 have varied from 3,527 that year to 4,142 in 2005, but this was in the face of an increase in the total Iceland population of from 16,742 to 26,366.

Geese

Bean Geese are one of the most difficult species to summarise as this was probably the commonest grey goose in Scotland in the nineteenth century, though there are no figures to look at. It is assumed that then, as now, it was the Taiga Bean Goose (*Anser f. fabalis*) wintering here. Numbers then clearly underwent a major decline, and by the 1930s, the main wintering flock was of 400–500 on the Dee marshes in Dumfries & Galloway. After the war, this flock gradually declined, disappearing completely in the 1980s. Other small flocks, rarely more than 100, appeared in a few other haunts, but none permanent, until the establishment of the flock based mainly on the Slammanan Plateau, which currently numbers around 250–300.

When Hugh Boyd started his annual censuses of Pink-footed Geese in 1960, the total population, almost all in Scotland, was under 50,000. The most recent count (November 2009) was 355,000 of which over 200,000 were in Scotland, though there were probably more than that as the birds arrived in September–October before moving onward into England. In contrast, the Iceland Greylag Goose

population, which almost entirely winters in Scotland, was once increasing at about the same rate as the Pinkfoot, from a total of about 30,000 in 1960 to a peak of about 115,000–120,000 in the mid-1980s, but it then went into reverse, falling back to under 80,000 by the early 2000s. It has made some recovery since to a approaching 110,000, accompanied by a remarkable shift northwards to Orkney where 80,000 have been counted. However, at least 10,000 of these are thought to belong to the resident Scottish Greylag population which has grown from no more than 1,000 in the early 1980s to at least 30,000 in 2009.

Greenland White-fronted Geese were not counted accurately across Scotland until 1983, when there were about 7,500, slightly more than half of which were on Islay. A steady increase took them to just over 20,000 in 1999 with c.14,500 on Islay. Since then, numbers have fallen back to under 12,000 with no more than 7,000 on Islay. This pattern has been repeated across the rest of the range (mainly in Ireland), and the total population is now some 23,000 compared with nearly 35,000 ten years ago.

The Svalbard Barnacle Goose population wintering on the Solway presents an astonishing conservation success story, increasing from a few hundred in the 1950s to the present 34,000. Anecdotally, there were probably some thousands present on the Solway before the Second World War, but disturbance from wartime airfields and overshooting are thought to be the main reasons that brought the population down to its parlous post-war state. The Greenland



Plate 276. Pink-footed Goose. © Lang Stewart

Barnacle Geese have also increased considerably, if not quite as drastically, in the last 50 years, from c.14,000 in the early, of which c.10,000 were in Scotland and the rest in Ireland, to 70,500 in spring 2008 (the latest census) of which just over 58,000 were in Scotland and the rest in Ireland. In the 1930s, there were about 4,000 Brent Geese (believed to be Light-bellied) wintering in the Moray Firth where they had probably been even more plentiful in the previous century. Overshooting and a disease attacking the eelgrass on which they fed caused the abandonment of the area by the 1940s. Since then, only very small numbers (mostly tens) winter, but flocks of hundreds pass through the Hebrides in autumn and spring.

Ducks

Shelducks as measured by the WeBS annual indices seem to have been remarkably stable in numbers for the last 40 years, perhaps more, though this masks local increases and declines. It is estimated that the Scottish population is around 7,000 birds with about 1,750 breeding pairs. The common dabbling ducks all have broadly similar wintering populations, Wigeon (76,000–96,000), Teal (c.37,500 – but with massive confidence limits of 22,500–125,000) and Mallard (65,000–90,000). Wigeon numbers fell during the 1960s and early 1970s, but have since recovered to old levels. Teal, contrastingly, have grown steadily and are now about five times more numerous in winter than they were in the mid-1960s. Mallard halved in numbers between 1965 to 1975 but have since fluctuated with a present level of perhaps a further 20% below that of 1975. Breeding pairs are difficult to estimate, and changes in them even more so, but current totals are put at Wigeon (240–400 pairs), Teal (1,500–2,600 – thought to be on the low side) and Mallard (17,000–43,000).

Wintering numbers of Pintail (4,000–5,000) are accurately described as “volatile”, while the tiny breeding population, principally in Orkney, hovers around 20–25 pairs. Probably no more than 400–750 Shoveler winter in Scotland, though there are regularly 1,100–1,600 in the country during autumn migration. Breeding numbers increased from the 1950s to the 1990s, but have declined since then, with a

current population of probably no more than 200–250 pairs.

Changes in local feeding conditions, i.e. at Musselburgh and Lochs Harray and Stenness in Orkney, are thought to have been mainly responsible for the substantial changes seen in wintering Pochard numbers, accounting for most of the more than halving in numbers to the present 4,000–6000. Some 25–50 pairs are thought to breed and numbers may be slowly increasing. Wintering numbers of Tufted Duck, put at 11,000, have been remarkably stable over the last four decades, but the breeding population has increased and spread over the same period, with currently some 2,250–2,700 pairs, and now perhaps showing some signs of levelling off. Scaup, more than Pochard, suffered a massive crash in wintering numbers when the Edinburgh sewage works were built at Seafield in the 1970s, dropping from 30,000–40,000 in the late 1960s to under 100 by the early 1980s. There was little indication that more than small numbers of these birds remained in Scotland, or indeed Britain. The present Scottish population is between 4,000 and 8,000.

The Eider is second only to Mallard in the number of breeding pairs (c.20,000), while the total wintering population is put at 64,500. There have been many local fluctuations but overall numbers seem to be relatively stable. Another seaduck showing apparent stability in wintering numbers is the Long-tailed Duck, with about 15,000 birds. Their offshore locations are difficult to survey from land, but recent aerial surveys have not revealed significant additional numbers. Common (25,000–30,000 wintering) and Velvet (2,500–3,500) Scoters are both found in their largest numbers on the east coast of Scotland where counting conditions are often not the easiest. Recent aerial surveys are helping, but have not, as yet, located substantially more birds offshore, as has been the case off England and Wales. Trends in wintering numbers are difficult to assess, though in the last few years there appear to have been definite declines in both species at their haunts in Fife. The breeding population of Common Scoters in Scotland seems to be declining, from 95 pairs in 1995 to 85 nine years later, with the near-desertion of an important haunt on Islay since then.



Plate 277. Eider. © Malcolm Ogilvie

Like the two scoters, the Goldeneye has shown recent declines in its Fife wintering haunts, which as yet have not been reported from elsewhere. Goldeneyes in Scotland declined sharply in the 1970s, with only some of the 4,000 wintering in the Firth of Forth relocating following the building of the Edinburgh sewage works. The current winter population is put at 10,000–12,000 having been reasonably stable for the last three decades. In contrast, the breeding population, from its genesis in 1970, now numbers 80–100 pairs, a great testament to the nest-box scheme instigated by Roy Dennis and now continued by the Goldeneye Study Group.

Wintering Red-breasted Mergansers have shown local declines in recent years, including in Fife, but while their numbers have long been subject to considerable fluctuations after a period of rapid growth in the 1970s and 1980s, there does seem to have been downward trend nationally in the last 10–15 years, with the present population put at c.8,500. Censusing the breeding population has been fraught with methodological difficulties and the current c.2,000 breeding pairs is of doubtful accuracy. It has proved difficult to count Goosanders, too, whether in winter or summer. Thus, the wintering population is given the very wide range of 2,600–12,200 birds, with the picture confused by the irregular presence of large moulting flocks in late summer/autumn. Breeding numbers and distribution have both shown a long-term increase, since the 19th

century indeed, but in the last three or four decades the overall situation seems to have stabilised, with increases in some areas balanced by declines in others.

The state of the commoner wildfowl in Scotland shows a remarkably healthy situation, with substantial increases in many species in the last 50 or so years, particularly geese, stability in others, and only a few in decline. There has been a huge increase in the protection of wildfowl over this period, especially the creation of wetland reserves, both inland and on the coast, coupled with restrictions on shooting and, importantly for some species, increased protection on the breeding grounds away from Britain. Hazards, perhaps especially the threat of oil pollution to marine species, but also freshwater pollution, recreational disturbance and some persecution of species thought to be in conflict with, for example, fishing, still exist, but so far have only rarely had major effects on other than local populations. This summary is also a tribute to the far sighted people who set in train regular counts of wildfowl all those years ago, and to those who have continued to fund it ever since. The very many volunteer counters provide the information which the relatively few professionals are able to turn into vital statistics showing just how our bird populations are doing. The verdict is “mostly fine”, thanks to you all.

Malcolm Ogilvie
 Email: Malcolm@ogilvie.org

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Ayrshire:** Mr A. Macintosh, Mr A.J. Winnington, **Borders:** Mr R.M. Greenshields, **Clyde:** Mr P. Chand, Mrs G. Emmanuel, **Dumfries:** Mr R. Clarkson, Miss E. Petrie, **Fife:** Mr R. Campbell, Mrs J. Richard, **Highland:** Mr J. Hammond, Mr J. Poyner, Mr P. Stronach, **Lothian:** Mr G. Boyle, Ms J. Cleaver, Mr M. Duck, Mr & Mrs D. Ferguson, Ms R. Hunter, Mr & Mrs K. Kneller, Ms H. Macaulay, Mr D.F. Mackenzie, Ms M. Malcolm, Mr R. Wells, **West Galloway:** Mr S. Flower.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **August: 1st** £30 K.McGregor, **2nd** £20 Mrs P.M.Millar, **3rd** £10 Mrs E.Smith. **September: 1st** £30 Mr & Mrs Bielby, **2nd** £20 Dr L.H.Campbell, **3rd** £10 Neil Hudson. **October: 1st** £30 Mrs E.Trevathen, **2nd** £20 Mrs A. McVie, **3rd** £10 Duncan Watt.

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

SOC Annual Report 2010/11

We regret that a batch of the annual reports printed by sponsor company XOS were faulty (e.g. pages out of sync or missing). A correct version of the report is available on the SOC website on the Members' Page. If you prefer to receive a replacement copy by post, please contact the office on 01875 871330. We apologise for any inconvenience caused if you have received one of the bad copies.

Honorary Presidents

As part of the 75th Anniversary celebrations, Council considered the position of Honorary President of the SOC; a position which had remained vacant since the death of Donald Watson in 2005. At the AGM, members elected three new Honorary Presidents, in recognition of their services to Scottish ornithology:

Roy Dennis – for his life-long conservation of Ospreys in Scotland, his work on the Red Kite and White-tailed Eagle projects and wider work

on raptors; his work as Chairman of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust and development of the *Scottish Bird Report* during the 1970s.

Frank Hamilton – who as RSPB Director Scotland for 15 years was instrumental in development of many of Scotland's most important reserves and for significantly furthering the conservation of birds.

Keith Macgregor – who has led 'birding for beginners' courses in the Lothians for half a century, greatly increasing local understanding of birds and for unstinting work as a volunteer for the SOC during this time.

Having more than one Honorary President is not unique in the Club's history, indeed the 'good ladies' Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul were the first Honorary Presidents in 1948, along with the Rev. John M McWilliam. Donald Watson was appointed Honorary President in 1986 along with Valerie Thom.

Honorary Members

Following the election of the Honorary Presidents, four new Honorary Members were appointed by Council; each has made an invaluable contribution to ornithology in Scotland.

Ian Andrews – for his leadership in recording and publishing about Scotland's birds.

Iain Gibson – for his service as the Clyde area recorder for over 35 years, the longest standing local recorder in Scotland.

Professor Mike Harris – for his outstanding leadership in seabird studies.

Ron Summers – for his research contribution to Scottish ornithology across a wide range of species including in particular waders and pinewood specialists.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference 2012
(a joint Argyll Bird Club, BTO, SOC meeting)
Saturday 17 March 2012, Corran Halls, Oban

A date for your diary...

The Scottish Birdfair 19–20 May 2012, Hopetoun House, West Lothian. www.scottishbirdfair.org.uk

Club Officials

At the AGM in October, David Jardine handed over the post of President to Ken Shaw and Chris McInerny became Vice President. On Council, Jeremy Wilson retired by rotation and Ian Thomson was elected as his replacement.

Waterston House Events

Exhibitions:

From Tyne to Coast by Darren Woodhead, showing until 25 January 2012. See pages 355–357.

The Environment by Group XII Textile Artists, 28 January to 22 February; *Africa In Sight* by Carol Barrett, 25 February to 4 April; Paul Bartlett, 7 April to 30 May

Optics Demo Day: Sunday 13 May 2012, 10 am–4 pm Viking Optical Ltd.

Branch Updates

Clyde Chairman: Darren O'Brien (e-mail: darrenianobrien@gmail.com, telephone 07540 379516)

Kids' Corner at Waterston House

Our 'Kids' Corner' in the library is proving very popular so far with visiting little people to HQ! We've been thinking of having such an area of the library for younger visitors for a while and



Plate 278. Jo-Jo and Freddie. © Marta Franco

thanks to Karen Bidgood's initiative, it's finally up and running – Karen purchased a beanbag and a special colourful box with junior books and quizzes (a work in progress that we shall continue to add to) from 200 Club funds. One of our new volunteers, Marta Franco, took this photo of a couple of young lads from Aberlady enjoying the new facilities.

SBRC – seeking a new member for the committee

SBRC is seeking a new member for the committee to replace Alan Brown, the current Chairman, who retires later this year. To maintain geographical representation across Scotland SBRC would prefer a candidate from the south-east of the country. Any potential candidates should send their name to the Secretary (Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk). If more than one name is put forward, a ballot will be instigated with Local Recorders having one vote each.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC



Plate 279. Dave Allan and Chris Packham, Waterston House, 24 September 2011. © Dave Allan

75th Anniversary Lecture – 'A Wild Life Exposed' with Chris Packham

On 24 September 2011, an audience of over 500 gathered in the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh to hear Chris Packham, the BBC TV Spring- and Autumnwatch presenter, give his lecture 'A Wild Life Exposed' to celebrate the Club's 75th Anniversary. Following a short introduction by Club President David Jardine, Ian Darling, a former President of the SOC and now the Chairman of RSPB Council, gave a short history of the development of the SOC before introducing Chris.



Plate 280. Chris Packham in full flow during the 75th Anniversary lecture. © The Queen's Hall

Chris' two-part lecture lasted over two hours and the audience of members, friends and members of the public were entertained by a series of his stunning images which took them all over the world. From winter shots of tigers and foxes, where he discussed the importance of conserving large scale habitats and working with man, rather than just trying to conserve species, to beautiful slow-shutter artistic shots of dragonflies and damselflies, the evening was spent in the company of a real professional.

He took us behind the scenes of his attempts to create his perfect image of a Great Spotted Woodpecker in a stand of white Silver Birches against a red background. It was the near-perfect image; for perfection he just needed to counter-weight the cut logs, which he had baited with peanuts and fat to attract the bird, to prevent them moving from the vertical when the bird landed in his photographer's 'rig'.

Chris' photography covered a wide range of natural history, including some wonderful shots of plants and elephants at a waterhole, but the best bird shots were from Gambia where he delighted the audience with some beautiful images of Black-winged Stilts against an orange background (the reflection of a truck coming to the sewage works!) and some exquisite shots of Egyptian Plovers.

Earlier, Chris Packham had visited Waterston House, where he was presented with one of the few remaining copies of *The Birds of Scotland* and enjoyed viewing Keith Brockie's exhibition. While there he met with SOC staff and the public.

The prize winners of the free draw held on the evening were: Leo du Feu, SOC Lothian (signed Chris Packham book *Back Garden Nature Reserve*); Andrew Sandeman, SOC Lothian (signed Chris Packham Elephant photograph); Sue Goode, SOC Lothian (*Scottish Birds* field guide) and Andy Stewart, Cumbernauld (one-year SOC membership).



Figure 1. Download of Chris Packham's tweet about the lecture. The SOC bursts into the social media!

The lecture allowed the SOC to make a big splash as it broke into the social media field when Chris Packham 'tweeted' about his lecture to all his followers ... there's over 20,000 of them, effecting a super endorsement of the Club. Watch out all you tweeters for more developments on this front shortly!

Thanks for a wonderful celebration Chris!

David Jardine

Raptor Reports Update

In the next few months, production of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Reports will be brought up to date. At present, the 2008 report can be viewed and downloaded as a pdf on the Scottish Raptor Study Group's website www.scottishraptorgroups.org. It is hoped that the 2009 report will be available on the website from the end of November 2011 and the 2010 report is due to be completed by spring 2012.

New Membership Development Officer for the SOC

Jane Cleaver has been appointed as the SOC's new Membership Development Officer (MDO). Despite not starting work officially until 10 October, she rolled up her sleeves and helped at the 75th Anniversary lecture in the Queens Hall in late September, where she successfully recruited three new members.



Jane is originally from Lenzie, near Glasgow and following a BSc (Hons) in Zoology at Glasgow University, she worked as the RSPB Black Grouse Information Officer at Crieff, before becoming the Visitor & Publicity Officer at Vane Farm. She has also volunteered for SWT, the Nature Conservancy Council New South Wales, SOS Tobago and with the RSPB at Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow. She brings a lot of useful experience, enthusiasm and contacts to this new post in the SOC. Her contract is for 18 months, with an option to extend.

Council recognised the need for an MDO who would work to increase membership (including younger members) and to raise the profile of the SOC. This would be done through direct membership recruitment by the MDO, strengthening the branch network and developing new models which will support the membership of the Club (e.g. developing the website). A key purpose will be to generate a culture of membership recruitment within the SOC.

Jane will be involved in:

- developing and running a series of recruitment events
- training of SOC branches/members/staff in recruitment and membership retention
- preparing and issuing press releases which help to raise the profile of the SOC
- assisting in the review and updating of the SOC website to improve the Club's digital profile (e.g. on social networking sites)
- establishing a 'teaching about birds' programme (in conjunction with partner organisations) through SOC branches
- ensuring that materials for the 'teaching about birds' programme are available for use by branches

The SOC is dependent on developing more members who can continue to record, monitor and enjoy Scotland's birds in the medium- to long-term. Please help Jane as she works to help the Club achieve this.

Jane's email address is jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk

David Jardine

Plate 281. Jane Cleaver. © Ruth Carruthers



Plate 282. Ken Shaw. © Kathy Shaw

Following the October AGM, our new President is Ken Shaw, who is well known to many in Scotland and further afield. Here we welcome Ken, and ask him to tell us a little about himself and his vision of the future for the SOC.

How did you get into birdwatching?

I was born in 1952 in Glasgow, and like many of my generation, my interest in birds began through egg collecting. I studied at Paisley, starting in the late 1960s, and here my interest grew and I took part in several projects on waders on the Clyde. Through the 1970s, as a hobby I spent much of my time in the Scottish uplands, and this is still where my heart really lies!

You've worked in several ornithological jobs through your career. Tell us about those.

My first contract was with the RSPB in 1979, working on Golden Eagles in the Lake District. After a brief spell in Edinburgh as Development Officer, I returned to the north of England as RSPB Assistant Regional Officer and became involved in many species protection schemes there. Later, I came back to Scotland as Area Officer for Grampian and Tayside and this gave me the chance to work with many of my favourite species. I then became Regional Manager for East Scotland. The last 11 years of my time with RSPB was as Site Manager at Vane Farm, doing important work increasing numbers of lowland breeding waders. I've been a freelance ecologist since 2006, and involved with several EU projects particularly in central Europe, together with

guiding in Europe and the Indian subcontinent. I'm also a professional bird surveyor and trainer.

What are your main bird interests?

I think of myself as an all-round birdwatcher who has worked on many species. For example, my recent publications have been on species as varied as White-billed Diver, Whinchat and Madeiran Petrel! Fieldwork for the BTO/SOC Atlas has been a big part of my last five years and I really enjoy local atlas work. But, I also really enjoy pioneering rarity finding work on islands, especially Foula. I am a great supporter of the bird observatories and have spent much time on the Isle of May, North Ronaldsay and on Fair Isle, where I have been a director of the bird observatory Trust. I have been a county recorder and also served on the British Birds Rarities Committee, Scottish Birds Records Committee and the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee.

And the SOC? What do you think are the issues you have to get to grips with?

I've been a member of SOC most of my adult life - I first went to a meeting in Glasgow in the early 1970s, and I've been a member of both the Edinburgh and Grampian branches over the years. This is my second time on Council, and it's great to be back on Council now we are in a better financial position! I would like to say a huge thank you to the last five or six presidents who have seen us through many storms to calmer waters. But, we must build on this, and there are lots of challenges. The main priority is to increase membership and perhaps most pressing of all, continue David Jardine's important work of encouraging young members. To this end, we have recently employed Jane Cleaver as a membership development officer.

As I get older the tradition of Scottish ornithology has become very important to me. As Scotland's bird club, the SOC must be a serious player but it must also be enjoyable to be a member! There is much to be proud of over last few years - for example, *The Birds of Scotland* and *Scottish Birds*, but we do have to keep looking forward. There is a real opportunity for the SOC to be a little higher profile and confident enough to be an equal partner in some interesting up and coming projects. I intend to play my part in making that happen.

SOC Annual Conference - the 75th anniversary



Plate 283. The hotel. © The owners

The special location for our 75th Anniversary conference in October 2011 was Carnoustie Golf Hotel & Spa, Angus. The sea breezes over the famous links and some lovely sunshine ushered the 180+ delegates into this grand hotel's spacious accommodation and very well-appointed conference room on the Friday evening. After a warm welcome from President David Jardine, the first lecture commenced.

Bird Migration - Ian Newton

Ian Newton opened the conference with the keynote lecture on bird migration, 40 years almost to the day since he gave his first presentation to the SOC. He approached this huge subject by posing, then answering the question as to why birds migrate south for the winter and, less obviously, why they come back in spring. The basics and mechanics of bird migration were explained in Ian's usual clear and concise way. He expanded on the theme that birds exploit the benefit of moving to improve both winter survival and then returning to gain a breeding advantage. Food supply was central to everything.

The story line was illustrated throughout with some fascinating insights into the research work carried out as our knowledge of the subject improved. Peter Berthold's ground-breaking work with caged Blackcaps showing migratory restlessness was a good example as he shed light on the variation in migratory directions taken by these birds. The physical aspect of migration was graphically shown by examples of

rapid build-up of fat before migration, with different strategies adopted by species such as Sedge Warbler and Brent Geese.

We were introduced to the world of obligate and facultative migration, namely compulsory or optional movements and irruptive behaviour. Work on the latter has revealed some astonishing journeys - a Redpoll moving between Belgium and China, a distance of more than 8,000 km.

Ian also traced the improvements in study methods from the early ringing programmes. He highlighted the work of pioneers like David Lack and his interpretation of birds on radar schemes, his angels on radar screens, and his 'sacrifice' in volunteering for work on Orkney. Enormous advances in technology in recent times have revolutionised the study of migration, and Roy Dennis's work tracking Ospreys, Honey-buzzards and Golden Eagles with online viewing of birds' progress is now part of our ornithological culture. Amazing journeys are being revealed such as the female Bar-tailed Godwit which made the longest recorded non-stop flight, from Alaska to New Zealand, an incredible 224 hours of direct flying.

Geolocators and satellite tags are now able to dramatically extend our knowledge and can throw up surprises like a tagged Gyr Falcon spending a winter at sea between Greenland and Iceland, hunting seabirds and auks from drifting icebergs.



Plate 284. Ian Newton signing copies of his books. © Jimmy Maxwell

Anyone not initially switched on to the sheer complexity and mysteries of migration, certainly was by the end of the lecture. Ian gave us a wonderful start to the weekend with his usual very high standard of presentation and as a follow up, his Collins New Naturalist book *Bird Migration* is a must.

Gordon Riddle



Plate 285. Toast to the SOC. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 286. Cutting the cake. © Jimmy Maxwell

There now followed a special drinks reception (kindly sponsored by Swarovski), where David toasted the SOC in its 75th year and the audience sipped their champagne and soft drinks as Keith Macgregor cut the magnificent SOC birthday cake. A very fitting and enjoyable start to the weekend.



Plate 287. Talk at the mill. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 288. Bruce Lynch and friends ringing. © Jimmy Maxwell

Saturday saw a choice of activities for delegates. Firstly a bird ringing demonstration at the NTS's Barry Mill, where Bruce Lynch and friends caught and ringed a large variety of the local birds and explained all the subtle feather signs of moult, ageing etc and demonstrated many technical details in the ringing process. Another choice was to be shown round the actual Water Mill, hearing the fascinating story of milling through the ages and see the mill in action. This was a beautiful woodland location with Dippers constantly calling as they flew past down the stream. A third choice was to drive down to Arbroath to view the two Dusky Warblers there - rare little gems that teased the visitors with tantalising views along a gully of dense willows and scrub.

After a buffet lunch, the main lectures of the day on the theme "Celebrating the Achievements of the SOC" got underway.

A Changing Scene - Local Recorders' Network and the SBRC - Chris McInerney

Chris took us through past and present Scottish recording schemes, emphasising that bird recording is a core activity of the SOC that allows birders to contribute towards conservation. Local recording within the regions complements that from surveys, and the recent great strides in online recording, through a partnership with the BTO and others in BirdTrack, allow searches and analyses that potentially greatly ease the load of Local Recorders in producing bird reports. These are now annual in most SOC areas, which follow on from the original faunal areas that preceded the formation of the Local Recording network since the 1950s. Until 2001, records were initially drawn together to produce Scottish Bird Reports, since when progress in digitising has allowed the SOC to begin the development of a searchable online database. A built-in delay will prevent these data from overtaking the publication of local bird reports.



Plate 289. Chris Waltho chats to Chris McInerney. © Jimmy Maxwell

Chris also described how records of scarce and rare species are validated. The rarest species in Scotland are validated by the *British Birds Rarities Committee* (BBRC), while lesser rarities are delegated to the *Scottish Birds Rarities Committee* (SBRC) comprising seven experts drawn from different Scottish regions. Below this comes a third level, at which local committees validate species that are unusual in their areas. Using *Scottish Birds* as a medium, the SBRC publishes an annual report dealing with records post-dating the publication of *The Birds of Scotland*. It also produces articles on important identification problems and reviews past records where necessary. The future of recording in Scotland will increasingly use online systems in which Local Recorders will be crucial.

Norman Elkins

Scottish Local Bird Atlases - a NE success story - Ian Francis and Martin Cook

This atlas is superbly designed, printed, illustrated and written and is a fine addition to the suite of Scottish (and British) local atlases produced over the last 20 years. Those of us engaged in local atlases concurrent with the UK and Ireland national bird atlas will find so much in this atlas to inspire us as we move towards completion. The survey for the 'new NE Atlas' covered five breeding seasons 2002–06 and this period was chosen because it would be 20 years after the previous survey (of Aberdeenshire) for *The Birds of North-East Scotland Atlas* (1990). The new atlas covers Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray, an area of close on 9,000 km² with 2,340 tetrads and may be the largest tetrad atlas ever undertaken. Breeding species number 153, with 16 gains and 6 losses from the previous atlas. Gains include Gannet, Kingfisher and Red Kite; losses include Greenshank and Wryneck. Increasing species include Buzzard and Tree Sparrow; decreasing species include Lapwing and Capercaillie. Introductory chapters cover methodology and a detailed description of bird habitats, fully illustrated. Following the species accounts, analytical chapters cover distribution patterns, species richness, changes in bird populations and current problems of conservation. The atlas is a fine tribute to the 348 people who participated in the work. With copies of this latest tetrad atlas available at the conference, Ian (joint editor with Martin Cook) had no difficulty giving us an effective sales pitch!

Graham Pyatt



Plate 290. Ian Francis with Martin Cook. © Jimmy Maxwell

The way we were - a blether with Frank Hamilton and Keith Macgregor

Computer and projector switched off, two armchairs lifted onto the stage - enter two gentlemen, discreetly wired for sound, each with a glass well-charged to refresh. Keith Macgregor and Frank Hamilton, elder statesmen of our club, had been invited to reminisce together about times past.

Within moments, we were transported back to when they first met in 1943! Travelling with them by bicycle and bus to the birdwatching sites of their wartime boyhood, most notably Aberlady Bay, and the sight of terns, waders, Shelduck and geese. Undaunted by the shooters and nudists, they counted and recorded the avifauna. What began then was a lifelong passion. Keith took Frank to the SOC in Edinburgh. Crucially, although the club was less than ten years old, it functioned on many levels - scientific, artistic and adventurous. Older members willingly mentored the boy apprentices to be ready for the return of George Waterston and the post-war expansion of avian research. By 1949, the pair were on the Isle of May, trapping, nesting, ringing and recording.

Our animated raconteurs moved us on to a 1950s trip to South Uist, by now in a Morris 8 motor car, being craned onto the boat!



Plate 291. Keith Macgregor with Frank Hamilton. © Jimmy Maxwell

Chance meetings with James Fisher, Roger Tory Peterson and Jack Longlands; finding a Wilson's Phalarope at Rosyth in 1954; tales of SOC Conferences and dead or alive Yellow-billed Cuckoo...

All too soon, the 30 minutes had run its course, with one glass empty, the other half-full and an audience wanting more!

The Way We Were? At 75 years old, we should look back, SOC, and learn.

Duncan Watt

Tea and coffee now and a chance to look round the various stalls. SOC Bookstall & Shop, Subbuteo Books, Second Nature, Viking Optical Ltd., along with displays by Angus & Dundee Bird Club, BTO, RSPB, SWT and the photographer Eric McCabe. The afternoon's lectures continued.

Seeing ourselves as others see us - Andy Douse

As the Ornithological Policy and Advice Manager for SNH, Andy Douse was in an ideal position to give us an outsider's view of the SOC and point out some of our strengths and weaknesses, guided by the opinions (sometimes colourful) of some of his colleagues. A general view that emerged was of the need for the SOC to maintain its identity, distinct from the RSPB and BTO, despite a recent tendency for the distinction from the latter to become somewhat blurred. The SOC's network of local recorders and annual bird reports, collecting data from so many amateur birders, means that we hold a very valuable source of information on Scotland's birds, but one that in the past has not been used as much as it should have been because it was not accessible through the National Biodiversity Network. With cuts in funding for SNH and other government-sponsored bodies coming, the role of the SOC in providing data from amateur birders could and should be developed. There is a potential to deliver a huge amount of information, perhaps as a web-based "one stop shop" for local ornithological data.

The role of the Club in the Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland and Integrating Bird Recording in Scotland projects are good examples of the new role we should pursue.



Plate 292. Andy Douse. © Jimmy Maxwell

However, when questioned about the SOC, none of Andy's colleagues mentioned *Scottish Birds* or BS3, despite the fact that they regularly use these publications. The public profile of the SOC could be raised.

Finally, Andy suggested that in future the SOC should get more involved in public debate on environmental and conservation issues. In light of this, it was gratifying that after the talk, David Jardine was able to announce that, after an absence of many years, the SOC has now re-joined Scottish Environment LINK. Andy Douse's talk provided much food for thought for members, and particularly Council, in plotting our course for the next few years.

Roger Hissett



Plate 293. Stuart Rivers. © Jimmy Maxwell

The Adventures of the Barra Boys - Stuart Rivers

In a talk appropriately entitled "Adventures" of the Barra Boys, Stuart Rivers delivered an entertaining and lengthy account of recording vagrants on the island. Although this could not be considered a piece of heavy scientific research, it did without doubt demonstrate that there is a considerable passage southwards over our western seaboard as well as the east coast and over mainland Britain. The bird-finding forays of this dedicated band of enthusiasts were limited often by long periods of rainy weather, but the strategy of routinely checking all the areas of cover on the island, mainly in gardens, seemed to be paying off. They found the Barra residents very friendly and welcoming and not at all annoyed at the garden searches. Sea and shore watching too were fitted in to the daily schedule. The list of species recorded was lengthy and unexpectedly included many transatlantic storm-blown vagrants which do not have much significance in relation to the west coast migration route. However, I leave the reader to ponder if a Red-eyed Vireo on Barra would exhibit the same enthusiasm as our speaker.

Campbell McLellan

There now followed the SOC 75th AGM

David Jardine began by sharing with the audience the very sad news that well-known SOC member Ken Halliday had passed away just two days before the conference.

After last year's Minutes were adopted, he moved on to significant changes at SOC - details covered the digitisation of *Scottish Birds*, grateful acknowledgement of legacies, the success of the Chris Packham lecture, the Club's role at next year's Scottish Birdfair and the welcome increased involvement of students with SOC.

His President's Annual Report emphasised the current strength of our financial position and welcomed all the new additions to the SOC website with the database etc. The appointment of Jane Cleaver as our Membership Development Officer was a sure sign of rejuvenation within the Club. David thanked all the committees for their work, Council and all the hard-working staff at Waterston House.



Plate 294. 75th Anniversary conference group photo, Carnoustie, 29 October 2011 © Angus Boyd (www.angusphotography.com). To purchase a copy of this photograph (or a choice of 18 others) just go to www.angusphotography.com and select Online Albums, then Events and look for SOC; pictures can be purchased online or alternatively contact Angus Photography, 1A High Street, Carnoustie DD7 6AN Tel: 01241 859255. At short notice, the following delegates have been identified. We apologise if some names are missing or are incorrect; we will publish an update in the next issue.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Keith Brockie | 27 Ivan Draper | 54 Ken Shaw |
| 2 Mike Martin | 28 George Thomas | 55 Roger Hissett |
| 3 Eleanor Martin | 29 Barbara Helm | 56 Kathy Shaw |
| 4 Ian Darling | 30 Malcolm Ogilvie | 57 Lyn Duncan |
| 5 David Clugston | 31 Dawn Thompson | 58 Alan Fox |
| 6 Frank Hamilton | 32 Brian Boag | 59 Alan Drever |
| 7 Des Thompson | 34 Arthur Bastable | 60 Roger Gooch |
| 8 Brian Etheridge | 35 Ian Thomson | 61 David Palmar |
| 9 Stuart Benn | 36 Gordon Riddle | 62 Anne Davidson |
| 10 Chris Rollie | 37 Graham Cooper | 63 Alan Sidaway |
| 11 Wendy Mattingley | 38 Joan Wilcox | 64 Carol Ogilvie |
| 12 Anne Cotton | 39 Sue Crowther | 65 Rosemary Boag |
| 13 Paul Speak | 40 Graham Pyatt | 66 Torquil Johnson-Ferguson |
| 14 Neville Crowther | 41 Lesley McCabe | 67 Ron Downing |
| 15 Ray Murray | 42 Sarah McBride | 68 Margaret Johnson-Ferguson |
| 16 Malcolm Porteous | 43 Bob McGowan | 69 Keith Macgregor |
| 17 Eric McCabe | 44 Mike Beard | 70 Bobby Smith |
| 18 Eilidh McNab | 45 Chris McInerny | 71 Karen Miller |
| 19 Duncan Watt | 46 Anne Reid | 72 Peter Rathbone |
| 20 Danny Oliver | 47 Dick Vernon | 73 Wendy Hicks |
| 22 Janet Jardine | 48 Martin Cook | 74 Norman Elkins |
| 23 Angus Hogg | 49 Morag Maxwell | 75 Gillian Herbert |
| 24 Jimmy Maxwell | 50 Susan Sidaway | 76 Rosemary Davidson |
| 25 Paddy Grant | 51 Jenny Cook | 77 Alison Creamer |
| 26 Heather Woodbridge | 53 Ron Forrester | 78 Chris Wernham |



79 Paul Taylor
 80 Jean Kinnear
 81 Ros Pyatt
 82 Arthur Kinnear
 83 Halina Newton
 84 Ian Newton
 85 Jeremy Greenwood
 86 Alan Duff
 87 Bill Torrance
 88 Stephen Hunter
 89 Mark Holling
 90 Andy Douse
 91 Duncan Davidson
 92 Liz Barclay
 93 Dorothy Macgregor
 94 David Jenkins
 95 Kevin Woodbridge
 96 Chris Waltho
 97 Derek McGinn
 98 Campbell McLellan
 99 Janet Palmer
 100 Robert Greenwood
 101 Alan Knox
 102 Rosie Riddle
 103 Jane Cleaver
 104 Kathryn Cox

105 Ina Clark
 106 John Clark
 107 Jean Stewart
 108 Lesley Creamer
 109 Frances Elliot
 110 Gordon Elliot
 111 Peter Holt
 112 Carol James
 113 Tom Lawson
 114 Eleanora Forrester
 115 Tom Gray
 116 Noreen Stabler
 117 Biddy Gray
 118 Margaret Jenkins
 120 Edna Haydock
 121 Margaret Mylne
 122 Jean Burton
 123 David Jardine
 124 Ian Hopkins
 125 Cherle Smith
 126 Anna White
 127 Joan Howie
 128 Sue Goode
 129 Ian Francis
 130 Mike Thornton
 131 Bob McCurley

132 Jean Torrance
 133 Phil Dean
 134 Janet Crummy
 135 Jon Cook
 136 Barbara Cartwright
 137 Muriel Draper
 138 Rosalind Garton
 139 Brian Pirie
 140 Alistair Duncan
 141 Gavin Woodbridge
 142 Alison Duncan
 143 Harriet Trevelyan
 144 Angela Hissett
 145 Heddy Merrie
 146 David Merrie
 147 Robert Mitchell
 148 Ruth Mitchell
 149 Doreen Main
 150 Joan Cooper
 151 Pierrette Young
 153 Jean Southall
 154 Geoff Sheppard
 155 Stuart Craig
 156 Gavin Boyle

Alan Fox then talked the audience briefly through the Accounts, thanking Jean Torrance for her help and the auditor for his advice. The last financial year was the best for a long time, mainly due to large legacies, sales at Waterston House involving Dave Allan's art initiatives and the fact that *Birds of Scotland* is now sold out. SOC has given grants to *The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland* atlas production and also towards the Isle of May work at the Lower Light. (For this Ian Darling later thanked SOC and all the individual contributors). Solar panels had been installed at Waterston House showing an annual income of £2,500. Alan also mentioned another very recent legacy of around £100,000 from Jan Donnan from Dumfries & Galloway.

There now followed the first election of Honorary Presidents of SOC for many years. Those proposed were Roy Dennis, Frank Hamilton and Keith Macgregor and these were duly accepted amidst hearty endorsement from all those present. David Jardine now retires as President and he warmly wished Ken Shaw every success for his period in office when he was elected by the members present. Ken then formally proposed Chris McInerney as Vice President and this was unanimously seconded. Mike Martin (Honorary Secretary) and Alan Fox (Honorary Treasurer) agreed to continue in post. There are normally 12 Honorary Members chosen for their outstanding contribution to ornithology in Scotland. At the moment there are four vacancies and Council had decided that Honorary Memberships should be bestowed on Ian Andrews, Iain Gibson, Ron Summers and Mike Harris. On Council, retiring member Jerry Wilson is now replaced by Ian Thomson.

Finally, the inspection of the accounts will remain in the hands of Sandy Scotland.

Ken Shaw announced the date of the next SOC AGM as 27 October 2012 and finished by paying a very warm tribute to David Jardine as retiring President.

Conference Dinner and Ceilidh

The spacious, comfortable dining room easily housed all the guests. Service was extremely fast and efficient and the meal itself of high quality. The after-dinner speaker this year was

Malcolm Ogilvie, who recounted for us all the previous times he had been persuaded to perform this task even having been originally excused by Irene Waterston from ever having to do it again in the future! This all led humorously to the traditional toast to the guests.

The Ceilidh part was conducted by the Orwell Ceilidh Band and featured the usual variety of Scottish dances, all beautifully performed by this splendid group, as usual assisted by Heather Woodbridge from North Ronaldsay. Wendy Hicks did her now traditional Salsa spot where members were initiated into the seemingly simple basic steps and thereafter succeeded variously to advance in the style. Great fun!

Sunday's lectures were titled "A Broad Kirk - Celebrating Scotland's Birds"



Plate 295. Brian Etheridge and Des Thompson.
© Jimmy Maxwell

Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme - Des Thompson and Brian Etheridge

Des Thomson gave a well-structured account of the 19 species of raptors breeding in Scotland, making quite stark comparisons between their relative success or failure. Detailed explanations of the factors involved followed, be they direct human persecution, loss of habitat, climate change or some subtle interplay of these components. The study of Golden Eagles was cited as the first comprehensive study and protection of a species and should be considered for tackling the severe Hen Harrier problem. No punches were pulled and in the second part of the talk Brian Etheridge described the harrier situation as a disgrace - the direct use of language being one of the refreshing aspects of this paper. Much time was spent explaining

the teamwork needed for success in this field, and praise was duly awarded to the many stalwarts of the monitoring group. In fact, a feeling of confidence and competence was generated - the right people are in place for this complicated, but very necessary job!

Campbell McLellan

Progress in our understanding of Scotland's seabirds - the FAME project - Ellie Owen

The Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment (FAME) project is a joint venture by the UK, Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal. Its aims are not only to do research on seabirds, the effect of fisheries etc., but to recommend sites for designation as Marine Protected Areas and advise on their subsequent management, communicate scientific findings to decision makers, NGOs and the general public, and to advocate better management of human impacts on the marine environment.

At a time when Scotland's internationally important breeding seabirds are in trouble, Ellie reported on her studies on the foraging movements of some of these. As well as traditional methods such as surveys from boats and planes, detailed information is now coming from the use of GPS, time depth recorders (TDRs) and geolocation devices. By combining GPS and TDR, a very detailed picture of feeding trips can be obtained, showing not just the distance and route travelled but the effort put into hunting in the chosen area. Geolocation devices require less battery power so can operate for longer periods but are less precise.

A total of 750 foraging tracks have shown that many birds are travelling great distances from their nests to find food. While Kittiwakes from Copinsay were recorded making six-hour feeding trips (including a freshwater bath) to sites 85 km away, Guillemots and Razorbills from Fair Isle sometimes had to travel more than 300 km to fish, and a Fulmar from Orkney made a two-day trip to the Norwegian coast. Tracking has shown that Razorbills from Colonsay exploit the eddy currents caused by the strong tidal movements north of Jura. Dr Owen cautioned that several of the favoured foraging areas coincide with those designated for future offshore windfarms.

Roger Hissett



Plate 296. *Ellie Owen*. © Jimmy Maxwell

From Starlings to Cuckoos to seabirds - research highlights from the University of Aberdeen

Within the Institute of Biological and Environmental Sciences of Aberdeen University a number of postgraduate students, co-ordinated by Jane Reid, are working on the population ecology of birds and we had short presentations from five of them.

Daisy Brickhill is extending an existing long-term study of Starlings on Fair Isle, looking at brood sizes and survival in relation to habitat quality for the species. On this treeless island, Starlings nest in drystone dykes and it is fairly easy to get access to their nests. The population peaked at 160 pairs in 2008, but has fallen recently. Parts of the island seem to support more-or-less successful groups and Daisy is using colour-ringing of chicks to find out what happens to birds born in the different groups.

Chloe Denerley is involved in a new project on Cuckoos, which have declined by 65% in north-east Scotland over the last 30 years. She is trying to establish whether the numbers of the host species (e.g. Meadow Pipit) or of the hairy caterpillar, main food of Cuckoos, is mainly responsible for the decline. Caterpillars are more



Plate 297. *Daisy Brickhill, Evelyn Philpott, Lucy Quinn, Jane Reid and Chloe Denerley*. © Jimmy Maxwell

frequent in heath than rough grass or pasture habitats but overall may be themselves declining.

Lucy Quinn is involved in a long-term project on tracking the movements of Fulmars in winter. Fulmars from Eynhallow (Orkney) and from Little Saltee island off south-east Ireland are being compared. Females travel further in winter than males and even reach the Russian islands in the east and Greenland in the west of their range. Females who travelled further in winter tend to be more successful breeders, a finding that could have several explanations!

Evelyn Philpott is concerned with the possible effects of exploiting tidal energy on seabirds in the locality of installations. Tidal energy varies greatly around Scotland and it does seem that seabirds find food where there are faster flows. She has been studying bird behaviour off the south end of the Isle of May and relating it to various measurements of water chemistry, biology and flow rate. Future plans include installing a small turbine.

Hannah Grist is participating in a Centre for Ecology & Hydrology study of the wintering behaviour of Shags on the east coast from Caithness to the Farnes Islands. Chicks born on the Isle of May have been colour-ringed. The birds winter throughout the east coast. A line of equally-spaced birds on the concrete of Fraserburgh pier behave territorially, defending their metre of concrete from all-comers! Many of them may have come from Isle of May. Aberdeen Harbour has had 64 colour-ringed Shags behaving similarly. Hannah would like to hear from anyone who sights colour-ringed Shags (shags@ceh.ac.uk). (In Hannah's absence Jane made the presentation).

Graham Pyatt

75 years of bird conservation in Scotland - Paul Walton

A typical Paul Walton performance, live, of themes and variations.

The title was the core, but from the beginning Paul encompassed the world of ages past, emphasising the cultural relevance of human symbiosis with wildlife illustrated by the Pictish 'Eagle Stone' found near Huntly, then suddenly showing a world graph from 'Nature' 461 2009 article.



Plate 298. Paul Walton. © Jimmy Maxwell

Paul Walton is a hugely enthusiastic and most authoritative scientist who, with the heart and art of a poet, communicates matters of concern and pride for what has been achieved and what could be achieved in years to come. "Had they known then what we know now, the Great Auk could have been saved from extinction."

His tracing of the Scottish history of bird conservation was meticulous. Taking from George Waterston in 1936 the key theme of 'nurturing', Paul showed how, during the War, subtle changes in attitude to our national heritage by the civil service led to nature conservancy getting serious, presaging the advances in the 1950s and the forestry disasters of the 1980s - but the partnership of RSPB, SOC *et al.* managed to reverse Government incentives to attempt the regeneration of Caledonian forest.

Now what? 75 years on, we still have to nurture the planet that humanity has colonised. Can the SOC step up to operate our space more safely?

Duncan Watt

The raffle was then drawn by Frank and Keith, realising the sum of £526 and thanks were expressed to all the donors. The 200 Club, still generating funds regularly for the SOC and organised by Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, was as usual handled by Vicky McLellan.

Ken Shaw then thanked all concerned and committed himself to a term of hard work as new President on their behalf, thanked everyone for coming in such encouraging numbers and wished members a very pleasant journey home.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 299. *Stac an Armin and Boreray, with Stac Li behind.* © John Love

The last Great Auk?

J.A. LOVE

And I am the last of my family ... Once we were a great nation, and spread over all the Northern Isles. But men shot us so, and knocked us on the head, and took our eggs... And soon I shall be gone, my little dear, and nobody will miss me...'

The Water Babies by Charles Kingsley (1863)

Martin Martin's *A Late Voyage to St Kilda* published just after his visit in 1697 was the first detailed account of the St Kildans and their way of life. A Gaelic speaker, Martin learnt much from the St Kildans about the Great Auk, details that exist nowhere else. Martin described the birds that were so important to the islanders:

'The Seafowl are first, Gairfowl being the stateliest, as well as the largest ... it lays its egg upon the bare rock, which if taken away, she

lays no more that year... its egg is twice as big as that of a Solan Goose, and is variously spotted, black, green and dark; it comes without regard to any wind, appears the first of May, and goes away about the middle of June.'

When Martin wrote, the old Julian calendar was still in use and it is necessary to add 13 days to his dates, which brings the breeding cycle more in line with what we know about other auks. In his *Great Auk Islands* (Poyser 1993) Tim Birkhead has argued that the Great Auk's chick may have quit its nesting rocks when only five days old, much sooner than most other auks.

A manuscript in the National Library of Scotland, probably written by the Rev. Neil Macleod, a brother of two St Kilda Factors for the owner Macleod of Dunvegan, recalls a visit made in 1746:



Plate 300. Great Auk. © John Love

'The Gernhell is the most remarkable fowl about St Kilda, for his enormous size and rarity, his wings are so very small in proportion to his bulk that he does not fly; they are taken by surprising them where they sleep, or by intercepting their way to the sea ... they lay their eggs a little later above the sea mark on rocks easy of access; they carry off their young soon to feed them at sea.'

It is obvious that the Great Auk was now a rarity. Another account of St Kilda, written by the Rev. Kenneth MacAulay, appeared in 1758. He lamented:

'I have not had an opportunity of knowing a very curious fowl, sometimes seen upon this coast, and an absolute stranger... in every other part of Scotland. The men of Hirta call it the Garefowl... It makes its appearance in the month of July. The St Kildians do not receive an annual visit from this strange bird... It keeps at a distance from them, they know not where, for a couple of years. From what land or ocean it makes its uncertain voyages to their isle, is perhaps a mystery in nature.'

It is also clear from this that only 60 years after Martin's visit the Great Auk no longer bred on St Kilda. It may have been scarce in 1697 since a flightless bird would be easy prey for a community that depended upon seabirds. The St Kildans did not bother to eat Razorbills or Guillemots, but they relished the eggs. According to Martin, the islanders knew that the smaller auks would lay again, even a third time, if the first was removed early enough. Being larger, the Great Auk provided more meat, but they were aware that it did not relay. Whether they killed them for meat or took their eggs, the islanders may have hastened the Great Auk's extinction on St Kilda. Hungry European sailors readily consumed the adults in great numbers when on the other side of the Atlantic and this was undoubtedly the main cause of decline and, by the 1840s, the ultimate extinction of the species.

By the end of the 18th century, there is hardly a mention of the Great Auk anywhere in Britain. At the beginning of the next century, one was known to have frequented the Orkney island of Papa Westray for several years. The collector William Bullock arrived in 1812 only to be told that the female had been stoned to death and 'for many years now' only the male was being seen.

'Mr Bullock had the pleasure of chasing [the Great Auk] for several hours in a six-oared boat, but without being able to kill him, for although he frequently got near him, so expert was the bird in its natural element, that it appeared impossible to shoot him. The rapidity with which he pursued his course under water was almost incredible.'

In his *General History of Birds* Dr John Latham noted how, as soon as Bullock departed, the local boatmen knocked the bird down with an oar – a 'lucky stroke' which secured for the Natural History Museum its finest stuffed specimen, and the only one known with confidence to have a British provenance. However, according to the Orkney zoologist James Traill, Professor of Natural History at Aberdeen University, the bird was shot a fortnight after Bullock left. Traill supposed that they tried to nest on the island, but the egg was washed off the rocks when the birds laid. According to Traill's sister, who sent the specimen on to Bullock, the bird was taken in

the summer of 1813. Bullock's collection was sold to the museum in London in 1819. Several decades later J.A. Harvie-Brown was shown the exact spot where the bird was found and includes a photograph of 'the last resting place of the Great Auk in life' in *A Vertebrate Fauna of the Orkney Islands* published in 1891. A monument on Papa Westray now commemorates this as the last Great Auk in Britain. It may have made the last breeding attempts in Britain but it certainly was not the last to be seen.

In 1885 the ornithologist Symington Grieve wrote a monograph on the Great Auk, where he quotes a note by the Fife ornithologist, Rev. John Fleming, in the *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* of 1824 which tells of a Great Auk captured on St Kilda 'three years ago':

'Two young men and two boys, who were in a boat at the east side of the island, observed it

sitting on a low ledge of the cliff... At last, becoming frightened by the approach of the men, it leaped down towards the sea, but only to fall into the arms of the youths, who held it fast. Five years ago (1880) one of the boys, Donald McQueen, was still living, aged 73. From these men the bird was obtained by Mr McLellan, the tacksman of Glass or Scalpa [Harris].'

At Scalpay, we are told, the bird was presented to Mr Robert Stevenson, grandfather of the writer Robert Louis Stevenson. As engineer to the Board of Commissioners of Northern Lights, he was on the annual tour of inspection in the yacht *Regent*. Rev. Fleming doubtless appreciated the bird's rarity and together they intended to keep the Great Auk alive as long as possible and then present its body to the Edinburgh University Museum. In volume 10 of the *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, Fleming (1824) gave this description of his Great Auk:



Plate 301. Sheep on Boreray with Stac Li. This shows the only possible ledge (lower left) that a Great Auk could have got ashore, and in fact virtually the only landing place for humans too, May 2010 © Stuart Murray

'It was emaciated, and had the appearance of being sickly; but, in the course of a few days, became sprightly, having been plentifully supplied with fresh fish, and permitted occasionally to sport in the water, with a cord fastened to one of its legs, to prevent escape. Even in this state of restraint, it performed the motions of diving and swimming under water, with a rapidity that set all pursuit from a boat at defiance.'

However, after Stevenson and Fleming had left the ship at the Mull of Kintyre, the Great Auk escaped. In his *Birds of the West of Scotland* Robert Gray gave a rather confused account of this incident in 1871, and added that a dead Great Auk was said to have been washed ashore near Gourrock a short time after. Later, another dead specimen was found floating in the sea off Lundy.

By 1831, on his visit to St Kilda, the naturalist George Clayton Atkinson could discover little about the species. In the *Edinburgh Journal of Natural and Geographical Science* (1830) Professor William MacGillivray of Aberdeen included it amongst *The Birds of the Outer Hebrides*:

'Alca impennis, the Great Auk – an Gearbhul – The late Mr MacNeill, who was long tacksman of St Kilda informed me that it occurred there at irregular intervals of two or three years, but I have not heard of its having been seen on the coast of the Outer Hebrides.'

MacGillivray's 18-year-old son John visited St Kilda in July 1840. He was told:

'...by several of the inhabitants [that the Great Auk was] of not unfrequent occurrence about St Kilda, where, however, it has not been known to breed for many years back. Three or four specimens only have been ever procured during the memory of the oldest inhabitant.'

J.A. Harvie-Brown mentioned a curious incident on St Kilda, his synthesis of various accounts being quoted in *A Vertebrate Fauna of the Outer Hebrides* (1888). The first incident took place in 1821 and has already been referred to. Henry Evans was a keen sportsman and naturalist with estates in Jura who often

sailed to St Kilda in his private yacht and was confident in the accuracy of his source.

'The bird, frightened by men on the cliff jumped into a boat in which was a boy of fourteen years of age, named Donald MacQueen, whose son of the same name – now a man of from fifty to fifty-five years of age – gave Mr Henry Evans these particulars, and heard his father say he caught the bird thus. It was on the main island, ie St Kilda itself [Hirta].

'But it also seems, from Mr Evans's information, that another bird was caught on Stac an Armine, in or about 1840, by some five men who were stopping there for a few days. Three of them were Lauchlan McKinnon, about thirty years of age – and now, or till recently, alive – his father-in-law, and the elder Donald MacQueen before mentioned – both now dead. McKinnon told Mr Evans that they found the bird on a ledge of rock, that they caught it asleep, tied its legs together, took it up their bothy, kept it alive for three days, and then killed it with a stick, thinking it might be a witch. They threw the body behind the bothy and left it there. McKinnon described the bird to Mr Evans, so that the latter has no doubt about its having been a Garefowl.

'It was Malcolm McDonald who actually laid hold of the bird, and held it by the neck with his two hands, till others came up and tied its legs. It used to make a great noise, like that made by a gannet, but much louder, when shutting its mouth. It opened its mouth when any one



Plate 302. The sloping south face of Stac an Armin showing the situation of the bothy about a third of the way up. © John Love

came near it. It nearly cut the rope with its bill. A storm arose, and that, together with the size of the bird and the noise it made, caused them to think it was a witch. It was killed on the third day after it was caught and McKinnon declares they were beating it for an hour with two large stones before it was dead: he was the most frightened of all the men, and advised the killing of it. The capture took place in July. The bird was about halfway up the Stack. That side of the Stack slopes up, so that a man can fairly easily walk up. There is grass upon it, and a little soil up to the point where they found the bird. Mr Evans says that he knows there is a good ledge of rock at the sea-level, from which a bird might start to climb to the place. Mr Evans tried in vain to fix the exact year in which this event happened, but could only get 1840 as an approximate estimate.'

By the middle of the 19th century, the St Kildans did not even know what a Great Auk was. This seems strange, for Donald MacQueen himself had been the boy who had laid hold of the auk in 1821. Thus, tragically, around 1840 they clubbed to death the last British example and one of the very last Great Auks in existence. It is strange that none of the naturalists visiting at this time mentioned this incident. Indeed, only MacGillivray referred to the Great Auk at all. More significantly, nor did the island minister, Rev. Neil Mackenzie, mention this last Great Auk in his bird notes. Amongst these, his son the Rev. J.B. Mackenzie could find nothing about the species.

'... but from conversations I had with him I know that he made all possible inquiry. None of the natives then living had ever seen it, but they had heard of a bird of that kind, which they vaguely described. After consideration of all that he could ascertain about it, his conclusion was that at the time when the island was uninhabited it did breed there in some numbers, but that after the island was inhabited it gradually got exterminated by the frequent robbing of its eggs. This could very easily be done, as the places where it could land and breed were very few, and all on the main island and near the village.'

We know from later visitors that one or two of the men from the 1821 incident would still have

been living so it is strange that they never seemed to have confessed this to their minister. Yet the accepted accounts indicate that the last Great Auk was killed just before Mackenzie's departure for the mainland in 1844 (not 1843 as sometimes reported). Or was it?

Henry Evans reckoned that the garefowl had been killed around 1840. Perhaps, as Mary Harman first suggested in an article in the *Hebridean Naturalist* (1993), the islanders were ashamed to admit to it; they might have feared that the good Reverend would have disapproved of their killing it as a witch. But, it is just possible the incident happened *after* the Rev. Mackenzie left St Kilda in 1844. If this was the case, then it might qualify as the last Great Auk on the planet!

Here we need to add a note of scepticism. Charles Dixon, in his *'Ornithology of St Kilda'* published in *Ibis* (1885):

'I am convinced that much of the information which has been gathered at St Kilda respecting the Great Auk is very unreliable... None of the young men know anything about the species, not even by name. The Great Auk's only link with the present day is the grey-haired weather-beaten old St Kildan with whom I conversed respecting its visit so long ago.'

This man could only have been Lachlan McKinnon (1808-95), the sole survivor of the incident. It was he who had advocated killing the bird. Intriguingly, Dixon claimed the event had taken place 40 years earlier, which tantalisingly might put it at 1845! Maybe that is why MacGillivray, Wilson and the Rev. Mackenzie did not mention the incident; it might just have taken place after they all left. Apparently, Malcolm (Calum) Macdonald died in 1846. Whatever the date of the incident, if indeed it took place at all, it could just vie with the last two Great Auks killed on the island of Eldey, off south-west Iceland in 1844 as the acknowledged final extinction event of the species.

In July 2010, Andrew Wiseman of the School of Scottish Studies drew my attention to some papers and manuscript notebooks in their collection which were being examined by staff of

the Carmichael Watson Project. They were compiled by well-known Gaelic folklorist Alexander Carmichael who visited St Kilda on 22 May 1865. Interestingly, he collected a song written by the mother of 76-year-old Euphemia MacCrimmon, whose father was killed on the cliffs hunting seabirds. Her mother composed the song which was translated by Calum Ferguson (1995, 2006):

*M'eudail thusa, mo lur 's mo shealgair,
You're my treasure, my hero and my hunter,*

*Thug thu 'n-dè dhomh 'n sùl 's an gearrbhall.
Yesterday you gave me the Gannet and the
garefowl.*

*...Na h-eòin a'tighinn, cluinneam an ceòl!
The birds are approaching, let me hear their music!*

Amongst the many slips of paper upon which Carmichael took down notes on natural history is one with an account of the '1840' incident on St Kilda:

'About 40 years ago or so say about 1848 a party of S[t] K[ilda] people found a Gearrabhal on Stac-a-li, a stack near Borrery. They brought it home but did not know what bird it was, what to do with it nor what to make of the bird. They knew not what to make of it and they came to no decision that night. They tied a strong cord or rope to its leg and fastened a stake to the other end of the rope and fixed this in the ground. Thus they left the bird all night tethered behind the house like one of their cows. 'Nuair thig la thig comhairle' 'When day comes council comes.' But the bird had his revenge in the noise he made and the sleeplessness he caused. He cried all night long and made night hideous with his noise. He screamed and roared like a creature possessed and the people got no sleep no rest. In the morning the people met as usual in the daily parliament (Comhairle) and among other matters what they were to do with this demoniacal bird-like creature they caught. The parliament which is composed of all the heads of families in the place and which met daily [decided] that this strange bird or bird-like creature must be possessed of a demon and that it was only a demon that could make [the] noise it made all night long. They therefore decreed that the bird must be put to death and

so the bird was put to death accordingly. Every man in the community set upon the poor bird with sticks and stones and staves and attacked him till he was dead. And as the bird took a deal of killing the people were the more confirmed that he was possessed of a demon and they belaboured him accordingly. The body of the bird was then thrown to the dogs of the village and torn asunder by dogs and children. Next year when they came to discover their mistake they were searching about for bits of the broken bones of the bird!

Carmichael's story differs from the more thorough accounts by visiting ornithologists in several ways. It is perhaps more likely to have taken place on Stac an Armin, for the precipitous Stac Li has only one small ledge in the south-east corner that a flightless Great Auk could possibly land on and be out of reach of the sea (Plate 303). But Stuart Murray has landed there several times and, knowing the capabilities of some penguins such as Rockhoppers, reckons that Great Auks were probably just as nimble. Once ashore the bird would not have been able to progress any further so would have been an easy catch when the men landed.

Carmichael at first wrote down '1847' but sometime later he had stroked this out and inserted 1848, suggesting he was being more precise with his facts. One significant inconsistency is that apparently Malcolm (or Calum) MacDonald, the perpetrator, had died in October 1846. If Carmichael's dates help push



Plate 303. The bothy on Stac an Armin where the Great Auk was killed. © Jim Vaughan

forward the date of the '1840' incident by a few years, at least as far as the summer of 1846 then the killing of this last St Kilda Great Auk would have taken place after the accepted extinction date (1844) in Iceland.

The mystery does not end there, for I recently came across references on the internet, posted by James E. Ducey on 10 April 2010, that suggest other Great Auks may have survived beyond this date in Canada and Greenland. Robert Randolph Carter was first officer on the brig *Rescue* which in 1850-51 was searching for the lost Franklin Expedition. In his journal, not to be published for another 150 years, Carter frequently mentioned birds of various species. On 16 August 1850, when the ship was off Cape York, Melville Bay in northern Greenland, he wrote:

'The hills here at least 1000 feet high and very steep. The Commo saw a fox. Docr Kane saw a beast like a weasel and got into a bog trying to get a shot at it. I killed three dovebies which came here to look at the strangers on a piece of floating ice. And so we left standing up the coast again. Brooks shot a Great Auk.'

...nothing more! Henry Brooks was the bosun/first officer on 'Rescue'. The ship's position was 75°59'N and 60°47'W, further north than the accepted range of the species. Alfred Newton gave the range as 'within the limits of the Arctic Circle' based on a bird that had been killed in 1821 at Disco, on the western coast of Greenland. Cape York is 200 miles further north.

Ducey goes on to cite a record dated December 1852 on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and another dead specimen picked up the following year in Trinity Bay, St John's, Newfoundland. Both are quoted, but dismissed, by Symington Grieve in his monograph (1885). Given that the species always seems to have been more numerous on the Canadian coasts of the North Atlantic, these new records do not seem surprising. The last two seem to have been ignored in any subsequent history of the Great Auk and the accepted wisdom is that the species became extinct in 1844, when two individuals were clubbed to death, and their egg smashed, by some Icelandic fishermen. St Kilda

may well surpass that date by 2-4 years, so could claim the last on the planet were it not for some unauthenticated reports that a few Great Auks survived into the next decade on the other side of the Atlantic.

My thanks to Murdo Macdonald and Stuart Murray for comments on the manuscript, and to Andrew Wiseman at the School of Scottish Studies for drawing my attention to the blog piece.

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John Love

Birding West Lothian for the BTO/SOC Atlas 2007–11

A. FINLAYSON

Like so many other people, I signed up as a volunteer recorder for the BTO/SOC Atlas scheme, which ran from November 2007 to July 2011. Being resident in Linlithgow, it was natural that I should get involved primarily with recording in West Lothian. This is a relatively small county, and so it was possible for me to visit practically all of it during the four years of the survey period. This county is not one of the best areas for rare or unusual birds, probably because it lacks a significant area of coastline. It has only a small part of the inner Firth of Forth estuary, from near Blackness in the west to near South Queensferry, a distance of c.6 km, and the area is also quite far from the east coast proper. West Lothian consists mainly of farmland and moorland, urban areas, a few reservoirs, large areas of conifer plantations, some deciduous woodland, rivers, and areas of bog/marsh. The Union Canal also runs right through the county.

Where to go

The best site is the stretch of coastline (Plate 304). Brent and Barnacle Geese, Arctic and Great Skuas, Curlew Sandpiper and Greenshank are all fairly regular autumn migrants, and other species recorded include Red-backed Shrike,

Firecrest, Yellow Wagtail, Little Stint, Great Northern Diver, Iceland Gull, Merlin, Peregrine, Manx Shearwater, Ruff, Whimbrel, Lesser Whitethroat, Jay and Nuthatch.

Other places worth a visit are Linlithgow Loch (NT000775), Lochcote Reservoir (NS975738), Bangour Reservoir (NT014718), Bathgate Bog (NS977677), Tailend Moss (NT003678), Easter Inch Moss (NT000665), Almondell Country Park (NT080684), Calder Wood (NT070665), Hermand Birchwood (NT030620), Linhouse Glen (NT072643), the River Almond ponds at Livingston (NT022663), and the reservoirs at Cobbinshaw (NT019582), Crosswood (NT057575) and Harperrig (NT095610).

Doing the Atlas survey

It turned out to be a wonderful experience. In May 2009, right in the middle of the project, I retired and was able to devote much time to it. I have lived in West Lothian since 1990, and thought I knew the county pretty well. But one of the best features of the project was the amount of new areas I discovered, many of which, apart from being good for birds, turned out to be lovely places simply to visit and explore. Even in summer 2011, right at the end



Plate 304. Blackness Bay, Lothian, April 2011. © Ian Andrews

of the four-year period, I was still finding new sites, such as around Fauldhouse Moor (NS932619) and the community woodland at East Whitburn (NS965645).

The weather often decided how comfortable it was in the field, and it also had an effect on the birds. A great number of field trips took place in inclement weather, but you just had to get on with it, and as everyone knows, the last two winters were horrendous, with severe effects on birds.

Another aspect worthy of note was the attitude of the people I met when out and about. In remote country districts, especially in winter, the majority of birds were often to be found around human habitation, usually farms or isolated country cottages. Many people took a great interest in what I was doing. Some wanted to know what the survey was all about, others were very keen to tell me of the local birds they had seen themselves. Like most birdwatchers, I am also interested in other forms of wildlife, and one spin-off from the survey was coming across other creatures, e.g. coming eyeball to eyeball with a Red Fox at Tailend Moss, with five Roe Deer present there at the same time, and watching with pleasure the northward march of the Comma butterfly into West Lothian. In April 2011, thanks to a spell of exceptionally good weather, I found two new sites for Green Hairstreak butterfly (only one had been reported in the county in 10 years) and a new site for the Emperor Moth near Cobbinshaw Reservoir.

Birding highs and lows

If I had to pick out some highlights, I would perhaps choose the following:

- Finding a site where I could consistently see wintering Hen Harriers.
- Whooper Swans which wintered in fields near Bangour Reservoir.
- The number of Common Crossbills present in the conifers in the south-west in different locations.
- Discovering many more Tree Sparrows.
- Sharpening up my ID skills - for example, the songs/calls of Redpoll, - a species far commoner than I had thought.
- Finding a Quail at East Whitburn in June 2011 (a locally rare species).



Plate 305. Tree Sparrow. © Harry Scott

And if I had to pick out one highlight above all, I think I would choose the last day of the last winter session of the last year of the atlas. It involved the 10-km square NT05E, the only one still coloured orange on the map. In other words, the expected total of species had not been achieved. I was fortunate enough to bag seven new species during the course of that day, which was enough to turn the colour from orange to red.

And the lows? Not too many, fortunately:

- The loss of Redstart and Tree Pipit as breeding birds at Hermand Birchwood (although Spotted Flycatcher is still hanging on there).
- The decline of birds at Tailend Moss. Numbers much lower than when I used to visit in the 1990s, partly due to human disturbance.
- Not now finding any Short-eared Owls in West Lothian.
- Worst of all - the decline of so many species compared with the 1988-94 local survey.

Conclusion

When the invitation came to join in the survey, I hesitated, as I had never taken part in anything quite like this before. I wondered whether it was really for me. Would I be able to devote enough time to it? Would it become a routine chore? Was I competent enough? Could I be bothered with the form filling? But within a few weeks, I was completely hooked and enjoyed the whole project immensely. Indeed, I am quite sad that it has now finished. So, for anyone else who has also swithered about taking part in surveys, I would just say this - if you love birds (or butterflies, or whatever), don't hesitate. You have nothing to lose and you might well end up having a life-changing experience!

Allan Finlayson



Plate 306. *Rossie Bog from the south.* © Norman Elkins

Patchwork 2 - Rossie Bog

N. ELKINS

Having described one of my local patches in *SB* 30: 139-141, another, larger site is also worthy of note. Rossie Bog is one of the most extensive and undisturbed marshes in Fife. A large area of marsh, unimproved neutral grassland and semi-improved acid grassland as well as small areas of mature coniferous and deciduous woodland are bordered by arable fields and improved grassland together with a working farm. The area covers approximately 2 km², but almost 3 km² if the peripheral fields are included. The marsh itself covers about 80 ha.

The bog originated from 'Loch Rossey'. This 120 ha loch (apparently once a commercial fishery) was drained by 1805, Rossie drain having been dug in 1740. By 1882, the bed of the old loch was quoted as being 'good meadow and pasture land' but 'not all suitable for crops'. Early Ordnance Survey maps (early 20th century)

have a note 'liable to flooding'. The present open water in the bog itself was mapped as small ponds by 1969 and their winter size is much larger now. Water levels fluctuate, and some drainage has been attempted in the past, invariably unsuccessfully.

As the land is privately owned, observations have primarily been made from the minor road along the eastern edge of the site. It is only now that the number of visiting birders is on the increase as in the past it has not been well known. I have been watching and recording there for 25 years. Latterly I surveyed the tetrad in which the bog lies for Bird Atlas 2007-11 but it is a difficult area to work with much of the marsh itself unapproachable. It is possible to walk round the periphery but this depends on water levels and can be almost impossible in winter. If water levels are high and vegetation is low e.g. in late winter, much of the

large wildfowl population is visible with a 'scope. In autumn, when vegetation is high and water levels low, wildfowl are impossible to count successfully. The following account is based entirely on my own observations.

Wildfowl are the most abundant group at Rossie. Both Greylag and Pink-footed Geese use the bog as a roost and the adjacent fields for feeding. Up to 1,000 of the former and 2,000 of the latter can be found in mid-winter. They are often joined by Whooper Swans, which build up rapidly in late autumn. Peak numbers exceed 70 in most winters but have reached well over 100 at times. In four of the winters that I have watched the bog, a handful of Bewick's Swans have been recorded, including an 11-year-old marked bird in 2002. Mute Swans occasionally breed. A few Barnacles, Canadas and White-fronts appear occasionally and a Red-breasted Goose accompanied the Greylags in 2011. Ducks are prolific. All common species occur, with peaks often difficult to ascertain. Realistic

counts have been made over the years of Wigeon (peak 900) and Teal (1,350). Peak Mallard numbers are unknown and small numbers of other species appear such as Gadwall (peak 21), Pintail (56), Shoveler (40), Tufted Duck (15), Pochard (8) and Goldeneye (13). Other waterfowl include Moorhen, Coot and Water Rail, all of which breed, and a heronry holds up to 11 pairs. Cormorants visit in winter.

Another group, the waders, have shown a surprising diversity, mainly during migration. Up to 12 pairs of Lapwing, three pairs of Redshank and at least four pairs of Snipe breed in most years. Sightings are usually made on the wet meadows surrounding the marsh, where migrants have included Common Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Golden Plover, Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, Pectoral Sandpiper, Ringed Plover, Ruff, Whimbrel and Wood Sandpiper. In winter, flocks of up to 600 Lapwing and 70 Curlew are found, although the latter may reach 100 in spring.



Plate 307. Rossie Bog from the east. © Norman Elkins



Plate 308. Mute and Whooper Swans. © Norman Elkins



Plate 309. Snipe. © Norman Elkins

Buzzards are the commonest raptor with three breeding pairs, with Kestrels mainly in winter and Sparrowhawks regular visitors. Hen Harriers and Peregrine are regular in winter and Marsh Harrier and Merlin have occurred. Since the local releases of White-tailed Eagles, these magnificent birds have graced the area at times.

The marsh in summer is home to up to three Grasshopper Warbler territories and at least 30 pairs each of Sedge Warbler and Reed Buntings. Small flocks of up to 20 of the latter feed in the field in winter along with a similar number of Yellowhammers, although 60 of this species have been recorded. Other seed-eaters include winter flocks of Chaffinches and Goldfinches (up to 60 each), Linnet (up to 180) and Siskin (up to 50 in the woodland). Both House and Tree Sparrows are present all year round. Both frequent farmland with up to 50 of each in winter and at least three pairs of each breeding around the farm. The surrounding patches of woodland hold all the common warblers and other woodland passerines, as well as a healthy population of Jays

and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Green Woodpeckers are scarce. The fields round the marsh are home to a good population of Skylarks and, in winter, flocks of up to 60 are present.

The marsh has no wildlife designation, not even an SSSI. It is sorely in need of one, but at present there are no plans, despite speculation of further drainage. The greater the understanding of the bog's wildlife, the more likely it is to attract the right attention from conservation bodies. Local wildlife groups keep a watching brief but it is essential that all birders record what they find.

Norman Elkins



Plate 310. Skylark. © Norman Elkins

A hawk from a handsaw

P.W.F. HADOKE

Having an active, but unstructured, interest in garden visitors is usually enough to alert me to the appearance of something unusual on our patch. This happened recently (on 1 October 2011), whilst I was standing at my back door looking into my suburban garden in Burntisland, Fife. My attention was caught by some unusual activity in one of several mature Buddleias in the garden. There was obviously something larger than the usual Blue Tit or Wren moving clumsily amongst the leaves.

My first thought was of Sparrowhawks, probably because I had seen a Sparrowhawk in the town on two of the three preceding days. Almost immediately I revised this identification to "possible" Blackbird given the apparent size of the visitor. I then had a glimpse of brown, speckled plumage more suggestive of a Kestrel. This train of thought flashed rapidly through my head and it was within 30 seconds of the original observation that I called my son and a

visiting friend to come and see. As they arrived at the door, a small hawk appeared amongst the leaves, then flew unsteadily out of the bush and tried, but failed, to fly over the perimeter wall. Falling back it landed on the chimney before flying down to perch on the edge of the roof.

Since, like Hamlet, I know just enough to "tell a hawk from a handsaw", I was aware that this was a bird I had never seen before. Given its size, this left Hobby and Merlin as the two native species most likely to fit the bill. The three of us watched as the bird flew over the perimeter wall and we rushed around the side of the house to find ourselves almost face to face with the visitor. It was sitting on the wall eating something from its claw. The bird still appeared dazed which allowed us to walk quietly to within about 10 feet of its perch; close enough to get a good view of its brown speckled front and yellow legs. It was apparently eating a butterfly, as wing-parts fluttered down the wall. On

finishing eating, it turned its back, giving us a good view of its brown wing feathers and brown barred tail. As we watched it turned its head full 180 degrees (much to the delight of the two boys) to give us a very suspicious glare. Notable on its light brown face were two faint, but discernible, darker brown "tear tracks" or "moustaches" which had me thinking "Hobby". It also had such a distinctive short and stubby beak that the two boys commented on it. When it turned away again it showed a light brown nape with a darker brown central, vertical stripe. Its plumage was rather tousled, suggestive of a juvenile. After several minutes the bird flew back into the garden and we were able to retrieve a couple of fragments of the butterfly (clearly a Red Admiral) that it had been eating.

There was no further sign of the bird when we returned to the garden but consultation of various books indicated very clearly that it was most likely a young female Merlin, rather than a Hobby. A little later I got another good view of it when, returning to the house, I was alerted by a ruckus from our bantams, upon which the Merlin flew down and landed on our fence,

once again holding a butterfly. It fed briefly on the fence then hopped down onto the ground to complete its meal. Finally, it jumped back onto the fence, paused briefly, voided, and then flew off out of the garden; this was the last we saw of it. During this episode, I had been able to get to within c.12 feet of the bird. Once again, discarded wing fragments indicated it had been eating a Red Admiral.

I am fairly confident of the identification of our visitor as a juvenile, female Merlin. I'm not sure how to account for some of its behaviour but would speculate that in stooping for butterflies in the Buddleia it had collided with our boundary wall (which is obscured by the shrubbery) and stunned itself. Whatever the reason, it was a delight to see this uncommon bird and doubly fortunate that my son and his friend were able to share in the experience. What is more, I hope to add the Merlin to the small list of birds that I can now confidently distinguish from ironmongery.

Patrick W.F. Hadoke



Plate 311. *The Merlin*. © Patrick Hadoke



Plate 312. Darren Woodhead with Sula, Amazondean, Lothian, July 2009. © John Macgregor

Darren Woodhead

"22nd December 2010. Clear frosty start, temperature well below freezing, crunch to snow so -6 / -8 or so. Still in this period of Arctic conditions, snow has been on the ground since 30th November. Overcast by 10:30 am with heavy snow over lunch / early afternoon giving at least another inch of cover. I settled and waited by the apple tree beside the old A1 for thrushes to arrive. As I laid the washes of colour on, I was so used to the paint freezing in small rosettes of colour, textures created by the conditions. As it began to snow heavily the temperature rose significantly, not the instantaneous freezing point as before and it was amazing how helpful this was."

My diary extract taken from part of a series of large Fieldfare paintings. Painted all outside and direct in brush with watercolour, as all of my work is, it describes how the elements are as much a part of painting as is the subject for me. I am a passionate field painter, and I believe that working outside for me brings a sense of the

Plate 313. Pallas's Warbler and Goldcrests in autumn Whitebeam (Watercolour 560mm x 380mm). **Text on the painting reads:** 11th October 2010, Torness, Lothian. Overcast and calm after the strong easterly of the weekend. Beautiful bird, silent among the twitters and buzz of cresties.

subject onto the page that I would struggle to do any other way. I have no studio, just the field. Having moved from Musselburgh into the heart of East Lothian two years ago, I have channelled my time and energy into a solo exhibition, which has seen me focus on the area and



subjects around our new home. The show, which will be the last of the SOC's 75th Anniversary year, will showcase this new work.

I am and always have been passionate about working direct from the natural world outside, and have a fascination for watercolour. Yes, there are days when my page has been wiped clean with a sudden onslaught of rain or snow yet somehow, whether it is how I have had to tie the board to the trees to escape the buffeting wind or how ice has formed intricate patterns in the washes of colour, the environment has had a say in the end result. It is this unpredictability that grips me.

As a young naturalist, I grew up practically spending all of my spare time outdoors with a small group of friends. But being passionate about art I wanted to describe things by drawing what I saw but this was so much easier said than done. Inspired by the work of Joseph Crawhall and Charles Tunnicliffe, I began using watercolour and it rapidly became an obsession. Through the support and enthusiasm showed by great artists

and friends such as John Busby and the late David Measures, it became possible to have a way of keeping the energy and life of the subject.

When I give talks and demonstrations, I always recall how watercolour changed for me one day. It was grey, wet and windy, a day off from working on the boats that took people around a beautiful island reserve in Pembrokeshire. As I painted a dead Mole that I had just found, direct in brush, texture was created by the paint giving a perfect feel to the velvety coat of the Mole. Suddenly, watercolour had a life of its own. It is such a delicate simple medium but incredibly complex at the same time. Everything around it, the moisture, the weather, the paper, paints and even water that I use affects the finished image. I have spent many years now pushing pure brush paintings, nothing is pre-drawn, just colour working next to colour.

After studying at the Royal College of Art in London, we moved to south-east Scotland, where my first book, 'From Dawn Till Dusk' explored this new environment. Drawing and painting as much



Plate 314. Fieldfare and Waxwing in Buckthorn (Watercolour 660mm x 1016mm). **Text on the painting reads:** 5th February 2010. Fieldfare and Waxwing feeding on Buckthorn, Gullane. Overcast with the promised rain arriving mid-morning then relentless by early afternoon. Fresh south-easterly wind, cool. Again huge numbers in excess 2,000 but positioned myself in usual valley, the dins, chirping, twittering so absorbing. Waxwings around mid-afternoon but mobile



Plate 315. Winter Woodcock (Watercolour 560mm x 760mm). **Text on the painting reads:** 8th December 2010, Tynninghame pines. After a run of cold weather since 27th November, pines now bouncing with Woodcock. In this small area near channel, around 30 birds with groups of 8–10 feeding together. First time I have ever seen Woodcock like this. Fed all day, preferring to remain motionless to danger first before either scuttling for cover or rising vertically to wing. When fed, held bill in ground for three to four seconds presume foraging with tongue. Some birds working same ground over and over. Flock Waxwing overhead, small group Whoopers and Brambling. Bitterly cold, paint freezing on contact. Could have been -14 overnight.

as I could I was obsessed with spectacular new subjects such as displaying Long-tailed Ducks off the coast and boxing Mountain Hares in the nearby hills. I was offered a residency working in a small area of the Scottish Borders, the brief to depict the natural history and seasons of the Carlops area, working in situ as well as giving talks, demonstrations and exhibitions. This changed my work and in this upland environment I could push the way I was working to the maximum and we managed, through the kindness of so many people, to secure funding for 'Up River, The Song of the Esk', my second and most recent book. As well as importantly creating an important archive of the upper reaches of the river Esk from its source in the Pentlands through Carlops, I was now working on large-scale pieces of paper, sizes that I could only have dreamed of doing the day I painted that Mole.

The winter here is one of the reasons that brought me to these parts, and the natural history just seems to get more and more spectacular. I feel

very blessed that within minutes I can venture from the heather clad hills, through winding wooded valleys to open estuaries and stunning rocky shorelines. The recent work that will feature at Waterston House will include paintings of the masses of Fieldfares that gorged on the Buckthorn on the Lothian coast as well as the spectacular arrival of Waxwings that stripped the Rowans, haws and eventually rosehips. There are paintings of Roe Deer among autumn Beech trees and the occasional butterfly and Adder hiding among bracken. Painting for me is about what happens when I am out, unscripted stories of the day and excitement when often it is least expected.

'From Tyne to Coast', Darren's forthcoming exhibition at Waterston House, Aberlady will open on 19 November 2011 and run through till 25 January 2012. It is his first large-scale, solo show for two years. The Gallery will be open 10 am to 4 pm, seven days a week, being closed for the festive period 25 December 2011 to 3 January 2012.



Plate 316. SOC Annual Conference, Aberdeen, October 1953. © SOC Archive

A reflective view of the SOC on its 75th anniversary

S. ANDERSON

These musings on earlier times in the life of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club may complement the historical records of the club presented by David Clugston (Scottish Birds 31: 30–36, 148–153). They are personal memories of how things have changed over the years and the reader must, like me, be over 80 years old to remember some of them!

We have, as a club, been fortunate in having had so many interesting and entertaining people in our midst; fellow members, speakers, as well as guests and 'camp followers'. Sadly, few of us would have been acquainted with some of these people other than from reading their obituaries. It would be impossible to list all of them here, but it would be difficult to begin without a mention of our charismatic founder, George Waterston. There must be several around today who, like myself, would have come under his influence and had his or her life changed around for the

better. In my own case, I was attracted to a small newspaper article stating that George Waterston was setting up a bird observatory on Fair Isle and needed some help with this. He probably did not foresee how successful his idea would become in the ensuing years. I wrote to him, whereupon he referred me to Professor V.C. Wynne-Edwards to check that I was a 'suitable person'. In fact the observatory was just at the construction stage, so I missed out on that particular opportunity. It was nearly half a century later that I made my first visit to Fair Isle! In the interim, Vero Wynne-Edwards persuaded me to leave my employment as a draughtsman in a very noisy shipyard and to join his 'team' in the Department of Natural History at the University of Aberdeen. There followed many happy years; on expeditions large and small, the acquisition of a BSc degree and participation in numerous ecological projects. I owe most of this to George Waterston.

Many of our interesting club members were talented scientists (we still have quite a number!) and several raconteurs. One such was 'Maury' Meiklejohn, a professor of Italian, whose lecture on 'the Hoodwink' is still a talking piece at the club. This talk related to the birds, which catch out all bird-watchers at one time or another. His centrepiece caused great hilarity when he presented a stuffed bird, put together in random fashion, by the Royal Scottish Museum taxidermists.

Amongst the many well-remembered members with whom we have rubbed shoulders, was the distinguished ornithologist David Bannerman. He was the author of many bird books, such as *Birds of the British Isles* and the eight volumes of *Birds of Tropical West Africa*. David, whose hearing was poor, made up for the shortfall with the aid of a rather obvious wooden-boxed hearing aid, perched on his knee. If the subject proved not to be of his liking, he was heard, occasionally, to cut the lecture short for himself by means of the noisy switch! I also recall the impressive but rather aloof Col. Richard Meinertzhagen, the subject of several apocryphal tales. There are at least two published books on his colourful life. There are many others who I remember with affection and about whom much could be said; Ian Pennie and his love of Arctic travel and Jimmy McGeoch with his illustrated talks and recollections of living with the 'Guga' Lewis men on North Rona. Bobby Tulloch not only protected the Snowy Owls on Fetlar, but also entertained us by playing his accordion occasionally. There is, of course, my old friend Sandy Tewnion, a wounded ex-serviceman, who, while studying birds on the top of Ben MacDhui, is alleged to have shot the 'Grey Man' which was following him down the snow slope!

Memories of David Bannerman and his cumbersome hearing aid lead me to thoughts on how fortunate we are with the advancement and miniaturisation of so much of our present-day equipment. Ludwig Koch, the prime mover of bird song recording, sent excitement through our audience in 1948 when speaking of his efforts to record bird song and we could all see how widespread this technique could become. Indeed this has

come about, but we should remember that Koch did his research work using a large van stuffed full of mechanical devices together with large parabolic reflectors etc. Photography has gone through a continuous, and similar, evolutionary process, particularly due to the arrival of the microchip and also with improved lens developments.

Charlie Palmar presented to his fellow SOC members, in those distant days, remarkable films of Scottish Golden Eagles and other birds, but at what cost in sweaty toil? Having to drag bulky, heavy, cine cameras and tripods up mountainsides for our brief entertainment. Now we can use cine cameras the size of a shoebox with even better results. Still photography is in the same category; today, a small digital camera attached to a light telescope can produce bird photos which professionals of yesteryears could only dream of. I could expand on this topic to include radio trackers and other markers, how wonderful to be able to follow precisely the route to the winter quarters in West Africa of Ospreys and Nightingales; something that ringing can not readily do. When I was Recorder for the North Sea Bird Club some years ago, I received a remarkable observation from the pilot of a submersible in the North Sea at 54 m. A Guillemot came and looked through his window! Submersibles with bird-watching pilots are not plentiful, but nowadays technology wins with transponders attached to diving birds.

The annual conference is the highlight of the year, drawing members and guests together under one roof, for one weekend, to take part in discussions, bird-watching outings and evening ceilidhs of one kind or another. Participants come from many corners of the UK and also from abroad. All our speakers have been of the highest quality at these meetings. I still remember the fascinating delivery of James Fisher that he did while partially sprawled on the huge lecture bench, head couched on forearm! He was in the process of writing his definitive book on the Fulmar at that period. During the afternoon outing I had the good fortune to bird watch with him, but was taken aback by my revered ornithologist misiden-

tifying a Great Tit. Later, I conceded, to myself, that he was probably testing me.

In the course of writing this article, I found myself engaging with the older journals which the SOC has produced from its beginning. The first *Scottish Birds*, our principal publication, came into being in 1958. Its origins were closely related to the *Scottish Naturalist*, which was discontinued in 1964. The 'Scot. Nat.' as its many readers affectionately knew it, had a large bird content which included useful censuses of Scottish birds, but it also contained much on mammals as well as papers on invertebrates. Clearly, the SOC needed a journal devoted to birds only; hence *Scottish Birds*. There followed, in time, other publications which were important to us such as *Scottish Bird Reports* and *Scottish Bird News*. These publications were all helped along by the purchase of computers (technology again!) and we are indebted to those of us, computer-literate members, who were involved. Improvement to our publications is evident over

the years, especially diagrams, maps and in particular, photographs; all enhanced by the use of colour. Advanced methods of statistical analyses have also helped push the standard of our journals toward perfection, which is where our *Scottish Birds* stands today. My own retrospective view of our publications is the importance of the Editorial Committee and how it has brought them to those high standards.

What of the future of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club? Innovation and new ideas are to be encouraged, always. What better way to achieve this than to encourage and actively seek the help of young people who may wish to join us in our endeavours?

This is and has always been an *ornithologists' club*, where research in its many forms, as well as bird watching, has brought pleasure to many and a greater understanding of the life of birds.

Sandy Anderson



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NOTES AND COMMENT



Plate 317. Dr Torgeir Nygård of NINA at a cliff site. © Gabriel Levy

White-tailed Eagles in Ireland

SOC member, Gabriel Levy travelled with the TV crew and field workers in this project, witnessing each stage of the process.

Norway, June 2011 saw the fifth & final chick collection for the Irish White-tailed Eagle reintroduction. Dr Allan Mee who heads the project spent a busy week with scientists and volunteers from NINA (The Norwegian Institute for Nature

Research) taking chicks from nests that had been monitored over the previous months for successful breeding. The nests also had to contain two chicks, as lone birds are never taken from their parents. The team scoured the coast of Sør-Trøndelag and Nord-Trøndelag by foot, car and boat covering literally thousands of square miles. Nest locations ranged from walk-in sites on the ground (dismissed as “too much like a shopping trip”) to the tops of 15 m high pines and cliffs, which provided much more of a challenge. This year’s 20 chicks bring the total collected to 100. There are high hopes that 2012 will see the first native-born White-tailed Eagles in Ireland for more than a century.

Gabriel Levy

Wintering Redshanks benefit at Port Glasgow

The Port Glasgow shoreline is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest and new sports pavilion and synthetic pitches are currently being built there by Barr Construction for Inverclyde Council.



Plate 318. Ornithologist Tom Roger Østerås ringing, and the TV crew. © Gabriel Levy



Plate 319. Port Glasgow shoreline and the fence. © Jane Hamilton

Work was scheduled to avoid disruption to the Redshanks (and other waders) and to safeguard the habitat for the future. Paul Griffen, construction director of Barr Construction, said: "The schedule Barr developed with Inverclyde Council and Scottish Natural Heritage was very demanding and presented considerable time challenges because of the expected arrival of the wintering Redshanks. Thanks to the project team completing the building envelope and viewing stand works and erecting an acoustic fence prior to the birds' arrival, we have been able to ensure that site activities can continue while protecting the birds from disturbance."

Working in partnership with Inverclyde Council, SNH and RSPB in Scotland, Barr Construction has also commissioned and installed posters to inform local people and visitors of these important avian residents.

Based on a press release by The BIG Partnership on behalf of Barr Construction. For further information please contact: Jane Hamilton, The BIG Partnership Tel: 0141 333 9585 or 07709 671 599 www.barr-construction.co.uk

Quail chicks at Pentcaitland, Lothian

Since 11 May 2011, I had been hearing Quail calling almost daily from a field adjoining the Pentcaitland Railway Walk in East Lothian. Often I could hear two birds and occasionally three;

sometimes a bird would be so close to the railway walk that I could hear the "kwa-waa" call in between the "wet-me-lips" calls. The farmer began to harvest the barley, but a single bird was still calling from the south-east corner of the field, which was yet to be cut.

On 24 August, I walked the, by now, totally cut field with my Labrador and ended up in the area where I last heard a bird calling and an adult bird 'exploded' from under my feet and flew off. The flight was unlike that of a Grey Partridge; it was in some ways similar to a Common Sandpiper, with shallow down beats, and a bit like a Snipe zig-zagging as it flew off uttering some low, guttural, short calls. It landed about 100 m away from me, in the stubble and out of sight.

I then realised that my dog was focused on the stubble field in front of him and when I looked, two Quail chicks broke cover. I took some photographs of one on my phone (Plate 320) and left the field. The chicks looked less than a week old, so must have been quite late birds. Having survived the combine harvester and the baler, their next trick was to avoid the Buzzard I noticed perching nearby on a bale!

Brian Robertson

Originally posted on the LothianBirdNews Yahoo!Group on 24 August 2011



Plate 320. Quail chick in stubble. © Brian Robertson

BOOK REVIEWS

The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland. Ian Francis & Martin Cook (eds.), 2011. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberdeen, ISBN 978-0-9561126-3-7, hardback, 528 pages, £25.00.



When fieldwork for the first national breeding bird atlas began in 1968, the limited number of local birders available in Aberdeenshire (I was one of them!) little realised that 'atlasing' would eventually become a whole new way of life for countless birders. Local atlases had hardly made their mark, and north-east birders were the earliest to take the plunge in Scotland, publishing their first atlas in 1990. This was an all-year round project covering Aberdeenshire only and was a novel habitat-based survey, since coverage of the 1,700 tetrads was considered to be unworkable. How much more surveying was necessary, then, to cover all the 2,340 tetrads in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Moray for this atlas between 2002 and 2006?

This stunning volume is one for which the editors and all others who were involved should be justly proud; and at such an affordable price! It begins with a foreword by Adam Watson followed by a short summary and introduction. The first chapter describes the survey methods and data analysis. One problem common to all atlases is variation in observer coverage and an innovative map shows that almost a quarter, mainly in upland and remote areas were visited for fewer than three hours. The significance of this may be lessened by the lower species richness in such

areas and therefore detracts little from the results. Analysis of the huge amount of data generated has been made so much easier since the first atlas, given the advances in electronic processing. One just has to glance at the book to see that design and production methods have also progressed enormously.

Chapter 2 is a comprehensive and fascinating portrayal of the habitats that make up northeast Scotland. It describes land cover and the changes that have occurred in the last few decades. Eighteen habitat accounts are accompanied by lists of the main species breeding in each and illustrated by many striking photographs.

Chapter 3 is the meat of the book, with 190 species described by 60 authors. It begins with a useful example page labelled to demonstrate the salient points of the breeding maps. Each species account is accompanied by a tetrad map in full colour, except that sensitive species are mapped at the 10-km level or not at all. The conventional dot sizes of confirmed, probable and possible breeding are shown in black, with a presence (breeding unlikely) dot in yellow. Virtually my only criticism of the book is that these yellow dots are difficult to discern. Photographs are excellent, and the texts are short and succinct, describing habitat, breeding ecology, distribution, status, population and trends. Some have updates beyond the fieldwork period. Smaller maps show distribution in previous atlases at the 10-km level, giving a valuable measure of change since the late 1960s, despite slight differences in methodology across the years. Indeed, maps demonstrating comparisons between the two

regional atlases at the tetrad level needed some nifty manipulation to counter this.

Chapters 4 to 6 cover distribution, conservation and the changes in both birds and habitats revealed by this atlas. That on conservation is particularly topical and thought-provoking. There are maps showing distribution patterns for a variety of bird groups and of species with a conservation designation, such as those on Schedule 1 and biodiversity lists. References, annexes and indices follow and I particularly liked the end-papers, showing an Ordnance Survey map and satellite image of the region.

In all, this atlas is as comprehensive as one could imagine, without any superfluous content. It would be disingenuous to point out the few minor errors and therefore I cannot fault the book in any meaningful way. Together with *The Birds of Scotland*, it shows the extremely high standard that SOCPublished works can achieve. For anyone with an interest in the birds of the north-east of Scotland, this is an absolute must for the bookshelf.

Norman Elkins

On Rare Birds. Anita Albus, translated by Gerald Chapple, 2011. Saraband, Glasgow, ISBN 978-1887354-80-6, hardback, £19.95.

Anita Albus is a German author who has written a really interesting and fascinating book. It is basically in two parts. Firstly, dealing with a few extinct birds, including the Great Auk and Passenger Pigeon and secondly, six threatened and endangered species including the Waldrapp (Bald Ibis), Corncrake, Nightjar and Hawk Owl. Each

chapter tells the story of the life history and decline of each bird in amazing detail, the Waldrapp runs to 42 pages. All have been thoroughly researched using historical sources, with full references in Endnotes and a Bibliography.

Visually the book is a real treasure, finely produced and illustrated by Anita's own superb artwork. My favourite is an oil painting *Waldrapps in a World Landscape*, but there are many others to delight the eye. In addition, the author has chosen images from many of the great natural history books of the past five centuries to enliven the text. Less well-known to English language readers are the sequential photographs of a bird's development by the German biologist Oskar Heinroth, used to great effect.

The chapter entitled Afterword and, somewhat curiously, her translation of Buffon's treatise *Discourse on the Nature of Birds* (1770) complete the book.

David Clugston

There and Back? A Celebration of Bird Migration. Andy Brown & Michael Warren (eds), 2011. Langford Press, ISBN 978-1-904078-37-1, 352 pages, hardback, £50.00.



This is a hefty book with a hefty price tag, and is arguably the most ambitious publication by Langford

Press so far. It consists of a series of 46 essays by 39 authors, and is lavishly illustrated by 39 artists (some of whom are also authors). Despite its claim to be a celebration of bird migration, about a third of

seems more of a lament. It is published in association with Birdlife International Malta, and all royalties generated from sales will go to help their work in protecting migrant birds. Judging from essay after essay recounting the sustained persecution in many Mediterranean locations, but especially Malta, they need all the support they can get. It seems incredible that the Maltese Government can persist in contravening EU law so blatantly even now.

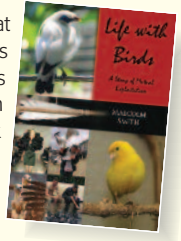
To me it lacks a coherent thread and could have done with more rigorous editing. There are essays on insect and fish migration, just one on global flyways for migrating birds, a good but short section on migrants in the UK, and an undoubted bias towards the depressing story in the Mediterranean. Overall, it is a bit of a mixed bag, but some of the essays, like much of the superbly reproduced artwork, are excellent. Despite my reservations, I enjoyed it, not least because it introduced me to some new and exciting artists, and, given its dedication to such a worthy cause, I would recommend it.

John Savory

Life with Birds: A Story of Mutual Exploitation. Malcolm Smith, 2011. Whittles, ISBN 978-1-84995-028-2, 192 pages, paperback, £18.99.

This is a fascinating book; it is more than a miscellany, but short of comprehensively covering its subject. Yet it doesn't fall between these two stools, as it leaves you with a genuine sense of the richness of the many points of contact we have with birds, knowing that there is so much more that could be said, and certainly for me wanting to follow up. I don't want more in this volume, it could never say it all, and I will enjoy filling in the gaps for myself. It is one of those books that provides a window

into a subject that those of us fascinated by birds do not often manage to think through. For the non-birder it will perhaps also suggest something of what inspires those of us who have the birding bug.



In 12 relatively short chapters, Smith explores subjects as diverse as: birds as food; domestication; non-food use of birds; in sharing our habitation; competition with us for our food; as contributors to and cleaners up of urban rubbish; as the inspiration for poets, artists and composers; as pets; and, in symbolism and superstition across the range of human cultures.

My first impression was that this was a slightly pricey volume, but maybe it's not such bad value.

Mike Martin

Growing Barn Owls in my Garden. Paul Hackney, 2011. Whittles, ISBN 978-1-84995-027-5, 160 pages, softback, £16.99.

This is a personal account of the author's earliest encounters with Barn Owls, and long hours spent studying the animals in the wild and captivity, and then applying this knowledge to developing effective measures and approaches for their conservation. It has a list of contents, acknowledgements and preface then 152 pages split into 37 short chapters, an appendix of Barn Owl facts, a list of seven useful contacts, and another with five titles for suggested further reading. There is a 16-page section of colour photographs which tie in with different topics within the book.

Early chapters cover childhood memories of encounters with a

variety of wildlife, moving on to rehabilitation of birds and a developing fascination with Barn Owls, collaborative work with Chester Zoo, and then captive breeding and release programmes. Other topics covered are ecology and habitat requirements and factors leading to local and national declines in the population. There is a strong conservation message, and several tales illustrating the, often frustrating, process of dealing with Government bodies.



An enjoyable book, written in an enthusiastic, light, easy style and crammed full of anecdotes that bring life to the subject. A good read for anyone interested in how single individuals can

contribute to species conservation not just Barn Owls.

Stuart L. Rivers

A Zoologist on Baffin Island, 1953. Adam Watson, 2011. Paragon Publishing, ISBN 978-1-907611-70-4, 241 pages, softback, £32.99.

Adam Watson provides a lively and evocative account of four months spent researching in the Arctic wilderness of Canada's Baffin Island in 1953. His account is rich in descriptions of the behavioural ecology of bird populations, with some stunning photographs of Snowy Owls. The photographs, although taken long ago and limited by the reproduction quality, are superb. They capture the grandeur of this arctic wilderness whilst also acting as a window into a simpler age and one in which the expedition kit now looks strangely foreign – although I can vaguely remember such items still in use in the 1970s! The photographs are powered by that

strange pure ethereal light and blue-upon-blue skies that for me forever conjure up the atmosphere of such northern climes.



The writing has a certain poignancy; one not just triggered by the death of the author's friend on the expedition, but one of looking back on a long-lost youth. Just how quickly times change is shown by the propensity to shoot the very birds that they were spending such incredibly long days observing, all in the name of research.

Having spent a great deal of time in the Arctic wilderness of east Greenland, I enjoyed the book as it transported me back to these wonderful areas, driven by a man who displays a real passion for the region and its avian inhabitants in particular.

Nigel Bidgood FRGS

It's a Fine Day for the Hill. Adam Watson, 2011. Paragon Publishing, ISBN 978-1-907611-58-2, 182 pages, hardback, £34.99, paperback £29.99.

This is a book of personal reminiscences from when the author was aged 5 to 32. The longest chapters tell of his friendships with Seton Gordon (to whom he first wrote at the age of nine), Bob Scott (stalker at Luibeg Cottage by Derry Lodge, who with his wife treated AW as "one of the family"), Tom Weir and Tom Patey. Shorter chapters describe the single journeys in Scotland, often on skis and alone, when going solo was less frowned upon than nowadays, and brief expeditions to Iceland, Lofoten and Abisko. There are lengthy extracts from diaries and some

chapters appeared long ago in the journals of various clubs. Birds often get mentioned in passing, but there is nothing of the author's distinguished professional life.

The main strength of the book lies in the very warm personal tributes to the four friends' names above. There are numerous photographs, all of them good, many of people and often against a backdrop of hills. Much material relates to the Cairngorms approached from Deeside. Those with an interest in the social history of hill walking or mountain skiing, or who remember the days before most hill paths had developed or Landover tracks had been made, or who knew any of those friends of the author's, will wish to get this book. It could become a classic, so get it now.

John Law

Watching Waterbirds. Kate Humble & Martin McGill, 2011. A. & C. Black, ISBN 978-1-4081-3022-3, 256 pages, paperback, £12.99.

This book is set over a day's birdwatching at WWT's Slimbridge reserve with Kate Humble as a novice birdwatcher teaming up with the senior reserve warden Martin McGill, with the aim of trying to see 100 birds in one day. Each of the five chapters starts with a light-hearted account by Kate of the birds seen while carrying out this challenge. These are then followed by species descriptions accompanied by photos, distribution maps and wingspan comparisons. What Kate

writes has an uncanny ability to stick in your mind; for example, she finds that the calls of Eiders remind her of the oohing



and aahing of the Monty Python women. The distribution maps are fairly accurate and the book benefits from the photos included in it, particularly when comparing similar species such as Common and Spotted Redshank.

As you browse through the book, Martin has included quiz questions. Although many of these are basic, there are certainly some gems. For example, I never realised Sanderlings have no back toes.

With this book being aimed at beginners, each bird is given a score on the likelihood of it being seen. This "Great Waterbird Challenge" has been designed to make birdwatching fun for beginners while at the same time helping to develop their identification skills. If you are new to birding or struggle with waterbirds, I would certainly recommend this book.

Hayley Douglas

Kestrels for Company. Gordon Riddle, 2011. Whittles, ISBN 975-18495-029-9, 198 pages, softback, £18.99.



A first sight of this book poses a question. We see a Starling-sized Kestrel with heavily spotted underparts.

The answer is found (it's a Mauritius Kestrel) along with much else in this fascinating and absorbing book written by a dedicated expert. Over 40 years the author has assembled a wealth of information mostly on Kestrels in Scotland, but also in other parts of the world. There are details of habitat choice, popular prey, breeding, migration, persecution and population trends. This last sadly reflects a fairly substantial drop in numbers in recent years, particularly in northern Britain, of

which most of us are aware. There is some evidence that the increase in other raptors such as Buzzard, Peregrine and Goshawk has had an effect, with a hovering Kestrel being very vulnerable.

The book is easily read and contains large numbers of excellent photographs not only of Kestrels, but of other species the author came across in his travels.

Keith Macgregor

Birds of Trinidad & Tobago.

Martyn Kenefick, Robin Restall, & Floyd Hayes, 2011. 2nd Edition. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-1-4081-5209-6, paperback, 272 pages, £24.99.

Trinidad and Tobago are a perfect gentle introduction to the unfamiliar, and perhaps daunting, new families of birds found in South America. When I went, the first edition of this guide was not available and I had to rely on Richard ffrench's classic guide, which although comprehensive did require a lot of careful reading.



So is this new edition and guide better? Emphatically yes. It is laid out like a standard field guide, with introductory chapters on geography, climate, habitats etc. But the bulk of the book comprises plates (perfectly adequate) facing species descriptions on the opposite page.

The second edition includes new species which have recently been found and the latest taxonomic changes; so my Blue-crowned Motmot now becomes Trinidad Motmot. The number of plates has been increased, including plumages in differing ages of birds. I particularly appreciate the

inclusion of those showing ducks swimming rather than standing, and those of the owls and Elaenias are much improved.

The changes to the text are more subtle, but it is clear that the authors are endeavouring to ensure that this guide remains up to date. So, if you are considering trying to break the ice and going birding in South America, buy this guide and start your homework!

David C. Jardine

The Atlas of Birds. Mike Unwin, 2011. A. & C. Black, ISBN 9781408134702, softback, 144 pages, £16.99.

This book is very different to many that readers of *Scottish Birds* will be used to. It's not a regional avifauna (despite its title), nor does it describe a particular group or type of bird. Instead, it sets out to describe birds in their entirety, from origins, classification and distribution, through to their interactions with humans, conservation and protection. Such a wide range of topics is covered in a surprisingly short A4 sized book of just c.150 pages. This is achieved through a judicious use of colourful maps, diagrams and photographs, which are sprinkled throughout the text.

On first browsing through this book, I was unsure how well it would work, attempting to cover such a wide range in such a short space. And yet I discovered much information of interest, and found myself dipping into different parts and finding new facts and figures. The central tenet of the book is that birds are fascinating, beautiful and amazing, and so worthy of study, protection and conservation. I found that the author Mike Unwin managed to convey this well, and in this regard the book is a success, and I recommend it.

Chris McInerney

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.



It's official – the new Fair Isle Bird Observatory is open!

D.C. JARDINE

Plate 321. Fair Isle Bird Observatory. © David Jardine

In early July top ornithologists from across the UK gathered on Fair Isle for the official opening of the new bird observatory. The £4 million building was completed in 2010 and is enjoying a busy season with a new warden and administrator looking after visitors.

The observatory now has accommodation for 20 guests and en-suite facilities in every bedroom – a far cry from the original observatory, which was situated in a collection of ex-Naval huts which had a heating system which required the daily passing of an alarm clock between residents to allow them in turn to re-stoke the coke oven in the middle of the night to keep it alight. This now-famous observatory was the brainchild of George Waterston and opened in 1948. He realised that attracting visitors to enjoy and study the huge numbers of migrant birds that find shelter on Fair Isle was a way of securing the economic future of the island.

Fair Isle is Britain's most remote inhabited island with a population of around 70. The observatory is run by the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT), a charitable trust, who decided to replace the old 1960s building that was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain (*Scottish Birds* 30: 157–158). The new building, on the site of the old, was made possible by many individual donations and money from charitable trusts as well as major funding from the Scottish Rural Development Programme (£1,807,175), Shetland Islands Council (£1,090,766) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (£359,999).

Fair Isle is a mecca for birders and many leading ornithologists spent formative periods at the observatory. Among the ornithological heavyweights who attended the opening were Ian Newton, an expert on migration, David Parkin, co-author of the definitive *Status of the Birds of Britain and Ireland* (2010), Andy Clements,

Director of the BTO and many of the former wardens at the observatory.

Previous visitors will find big changes; the new observatory is eco-friendly with a high tech energy system which features innovative 'breathing building' insulation and heat recovery. This means that any waste heat from, for example, the kitchen and laundry room is captured and used to heat the accommodation, while filters in the walls deliver fresh air and keep heat loss to a minimum. There are also photovoltaic panels on the roof, which turn sunlight into electricity.

Although the observatory is still very much a working environment geared to research, it is also a welcoming place for visitors. The new obs has an impressive collection of original artwork, which helps to make it an attractive place to stay. There are bright wall hangings commissioned from Orkney artist Sheila Scott. Sheila has also helped design interpretation boards explaining the key bird life and natural heritage of Fair Isle, as well as 15 striking metallic maps showing the

flyways of Fair Isle's best known migrants, and a mobile depicting a flock of Arctic Terns being chased by a couple of Arctic Skuas.

FIBOT Chairman, Shetland-based Roger Riddington, said: 'Our aim is to continue the research work on our seabirds, migrants and breeding landbirds, but in a setting where we can provide a welcoming environment for all visitors to Fair Isle.'

The new warden David Parnaby commented: 'As a birder, working on Fair Isle is just as amazing as I thought it was going to be. There are times when I have to remind myself that this really is what I am paid to do. We're in the middle of the breeding season and the island looks fantastic and full of life. The migrant birds have also been incredible, with an array of rarer species seen. It's not just the birds which make the job special though, the range of people who have visited are what contribute to the atmosphere of the observatory. We've had loads of positive comments about the new building and plenty of people are planning their next visit.'



Plate 322. Wardens and Administrators of Fair Isle Bird Observatory at the opening of the new observatory, 2 July 2011. Back Row (left to right): Susannah Parnaby, Roger Broad, David Parnaby, Deryk Shaw, Judy Broad, Iain Robertson, Roger Riddington. Front Row: Hollie Shaw, Nick Riddiford, Elizabeth Riddiford, Elizabeth Harvey, Roy Dennis. © David Jardine



Plate 323. FIBOT President, Roy Dennis, opening the new Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, 2 July 2011. © David Jardine

Susannah Parnaby, the observatory administrator, said: 'Relocating to Fair Isle, to run the observatory, felt quite daunting as our moving date approached, but we have been very lucky to move to such a welcoming and supportive place, making it much easier to cope with the inevitable challenges that come with running a large guesthouse on a remote island.'

The building was supplied by Orkney contractors Andrew H. Wilson, who went into receivership before its completion last year. The final work was carried out by Northmen, who are based on Fair Isle.

Roy Dennis, President of FIBOT and former Chairman of the Trust and warden at the observatory, performed the official opening which was attended by around 120 islanders and guests, including some visiting Swedish birders who had come by yacht to enjoy the seabirds.

Roy Dennis paid tributes to all those involved in the re-building of the observatory, but in particular the outgoing warden and administrator Deryk and Hollie Shaw and the treasurer, Mike Wood, who had helped steer FIBOT through the financial complications during construction.

Jimmy Stout of Skerryholm, Fair Isle, noted that: 'effort is essential if the excitement is to be maintained', and the efforts of all those associated with FIBOT has certainly been rewarded with exciting birds over the years, with no fewer than 26 additions to the *British List*. He closed his speech with a toast: 'To those before who saw the future, and to those who see it now and look forward'.

As the community of Fair Isle celebrated the official opening of the new Fair Isle Bird Observatory they called for a Marine Protected Area for the island's waters. With support of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT) and the National Trust for Scotland, they are drawing up a proposal to the Scottish Government to make the coastal waters a Demonstration and Research MPA. The new Scottish Marine Bill provides an opportunity for communities to pioneer marine management methods, aimed at more sustainable use of the marine resource.

Full community support is one of many factors underpinning the proposal. Islanders have been concerned about breeding failure of some seabirds. Fair Isle has one of Scotland's largest seabird colonies. The health and productivity of

the marine environment is vital, to ensure that it stays that way. They say the new bird observatory, with its excellent research facilities, as well as local expertise and the substantial information already collected, mean the qualities of the marine environment, culture and maritime heritage can be interpreted and made available.

The community congratulated FIBOT for its considerable investment in the new building and its determination to secure its future.

'For more than 60 years the observatory and staff have been an essential element of our

island community', said Fiona Mitchell, chair of the Fair Isle Committee and Community Association. 'The observatory work not only draws attention to our rich environment, but also plays a large part in the socio-economic well-being and stability of the community attracting visitors to Fair Isle and Shetland.

More information on the Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative see <http://www.fairisle.org.uk/FIMETI/>.

David Jardine

SOC Lothian Branch trip to Fair Isle – September 2011

D. MAIN

"Why don't you go to Fair Isle" - this from Willie Prest at the Christmas outing in 2009. "You could go in May/June for the nesting season or in September/October for the autumn migration. Either way you'll have a good time!" (This was in response to our considering how to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of both the SOC and Lothian Branch). Others agreed and, as we had two events planned for the spring, autumn it was. We would be going to see for ourselves what inspired George Waterston to purchase the island and open a Bird Observatory there; plans that he put together while in a prisoner of war camp from 1941 to 1943.

Twenty-one members were interested and, in our initial discussions with the Fair Isle Bird Observatory ('the Obs' or 'FIBO'), we were firmly put off the idea of taking such a large group – not least as it would mean hiring a plane at £1,000 per hour. So, we opted for two shorter but overlapping periods. With the benefit of experience, a group of 21 would not have worked.

Most people had their preferred way to get to Shetland, fly from Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen, bus to Aberdeen and ferry to Lerwick, camper van/caravan to Lerwick so the arranged

part of the trip started from Shetland. The Good Shepherd IV was considered but we were put off by the tales of very rough crossings (this proved to be a good decision as the Good Shepherd was laid up for part of the time we were there). Direct Flight had two planes and would be able to take each group to and from Fair Isle 15 minutes apart. Nearer the time we were told they had only one plane as the other was in bits in Cumbernauld – this did cause some logistical problems – more of that later.



Plate 324. *The first Lothian SOC group on Fair Isle, September 2011 - without Mark Holling who was still outside savouring "the best day's birding of his life". © Doreen Main*

James and I had three days on Shetland before the trip and were lucky to have excellent views of one of the juvenile Pallid Harriers at Hillwell. On 13th, eight of the group (minus Mark Holling, who was arriving on the 14th) met for dinner at the Grand Hotel, Lerwick. Despite booking a table in the bar, the waiter insisted that we ate in the very posh dining room, even although we were in our birding gear. However, we did have a good meal and it was a good start to the trip.

On 14th, eight of us met at Tingwall at 9.30 and luckily we all got on the 10 am flight – in spite of some heavy pressure from two day trippers that we should let them go on the first flight. (We had been booked for a year!). We arrived in brilliant sunshine and were met by Susannah Parnaby, the administrator, who quickly whisked us to the Obs, gave us coffee and an introductory chat then we walked down to the South Haven. There were Bonxies everywhere, some Ringed Plovers, Twite and one very confiding Knot. After lunch, we were taken by Jason Moss, one of the rangers, to Shirva where we had excellent views of a long-staying Melodious Warbler. It was on a fence 20 feet away catching flies and oblivious to the 14 or so birders watching it. The group then settled down for six days there.

Fair Isle lies between Orkney and Shetland and is only three miles long and a mile and-a-half wide with 70-75 inhabitants, a chapel, a church, a shop and two lighthouses and, of course the Observatory and the George Waterston Museum. Despite, or because of, the small population it is a very integrated and supportive community. The Observatory plays a key role in the community and it is used for community events and weddings.

Staying at the Obs is wonderful. The public areas are well laid out and very comfortable and the bedrooms all have en-suite facilities – Roy Dennis was incredulous that bird watchers needed en-suite facilities! We had no complaints. The food is good and ample, seconds always available – if you have room! At breakfast there was always porridge, cereal and fruit as well as a cooked breakfast and filter coffee. At lunch there was home-made soup and a main course and a very fresh salad bowl. (Sunday lunch was a roast and all the trimmings). Dinner was a main course and pudding and tea and coffee were available at all times in the lounge. The bar opened before dinner and stayed open until 11 pm or when the last drinker went to bed. We were never that



Plate 325. The second group of Lothian SOC members, Fair Isle, September 2011. © Doreen Main

late. The bar has an excellent selection of Shetland beers from Simmer Dim to Auld Rock and the usual lager, spirits and wine.

Outside the Obs is a new plantation, which is already proving attractive to migrants. While we were there we had a Great Grey Shrike, Yellow-browed Warbler, Wryneck, Blyth's Reed Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler and numerous more common birds in this plantation alone. Many of those could be viewed from the library! Also down at the North and South Havens there were the usual waders, a Slavonian Grebe one morning and Snow Buntings on Bunes. Also there was an almost-comatose young Gannet. We expressed concern but were assured it would probably be OK - just sleeping off an overdose of fish. Sure enough on day three it seemed to perk up in the morning and later, made its way down to the water then swam off into North Haven and out to sea.

A typical day started in the Boot Room at 07:00 then off to run the traps - back to the ringing room at 07:45 with the birds from the traps. The rangers are hugely knowledgeable and expert at ringing and bird identification and were happy to share their knowledge with us. The traps and mist-nets were checked frequently throughout the day and if a rarity was caught we were all invited to the ringing room to witness the ringing and release.

Morning and afternoon outings were weather and bird dependent. We might decide to seek out a particular species e.g. Lapland Bunting at Pund or for Citrine Wagtail, initially at Furse then at Da Water. Alternatively, we might just check out all the croft gardens in the hope of finding our own rarity. One particularly windy day we opted for a sea watch from South Lighthouse. We were able to find a sheltered spot and were rewarded with Sooty and Manx Shearwater, one Razorbill and Guillemot as well as the common Tysties or Black Guillemot. If a rarity is discovered the Obs minibus flies round the island picking up birders - if it is a BBRC bird, the bus sports a red flag. One afternoon, we were swept off to Da Water, where a Great Snipe had been spotted. Once everyone gathered the rangers organised a line over the marsh and we all had a good view as it flew off and landed nearby.



Plate 326. Great Grey Shrike, Fair Isle, September 2011.
© Mark Holling

You could order a packed lunch but usually we were back at the Observatory for a fairly quick lunch, coffee and then out again. We had to be back for dinner at 6 pm. After dinner our group did our own checklist. On four nights there were talks, one by our own Mark Holling on the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, one on a great birding trip (if somewhat rain-soaked) to Colombia and one on some Norfolk rarities. Jason Moss also gave an interesting talk on Fair Isle and the role of the rangers. Then at 9:30 pm there was the main checklist, taken by the warden, Dave Parnaby or one of the rangers. This was mainly to record the birds seen by the rangers and their counts were hugely impressive. Occasionally, either our group or one of the other visitors had seen something the rangers hadn't, but this was unusual.

The best way to see the island is to walk. It is only three miles from north to south. However, we were there for 10 days, so we decided to hire a car from Florrie and Jim Stout at



Plate 327. The group at Pund, Fair Isle, where they had been watching Lapland Buntings. © Doreen Main

Skerryholm. Jim is the grandson of the famous George Stout. The car was a white L-registered Volvo Estate, which got us around safely. The car deserves a page to itself, but let's just say it had certain idiosyncrasies. Some old hands are probably expressing horror at the idea of a car, but it did save the slog back to the Obs towards the north of the island, especially for lunch and dinner. Interestingly, the Obs has just started an experimental "taxi" service to and from the shop, which is two-thirds of the way down the island.

Regarding the shop (the Stackhoull Stores) this carries a comprehensive stock and has a cash machine; the garden and area around is a well-known mecca for rare birds, so much so that John Holloway wrote a book called 'Fair Isle's Garden Birds' in 1983, which records birds seen from the shop between 1978 and 1983. This includes Great Grey Shrike, Ring Ouzel, Pied Flycatcher, Wryneck, Hawfinch, Bluethroat and Isabelline Wheatear. It also includes ornithological recollections as told by the Fair Isle households as well as a sketch of each house. This includes notes on a "big bird" sitting at Barkland in 1970. It turned out to be a Great Bustard! Also a Song Sparrow at Setter. There are also some interesting comments on bird watchers, not necessarily complimentary. One resident commented that, had they been better informed, they wouldn't have teased the Assistant Warden about their cat having orange feathers sticking out of its mouth, when everyone was hunting a Baltimore Oriole in 1976.

Regarding our own experience, we soon got to know the island and the crofts and areas by the birds found there, e.g. Pund for Short-eared Owls and Lapland Buntings (Plate 327); the shop and the chalet for Barred and Yellow-browed Warblers; the Haa for the Spotted Flycatcher and the many waders on the back fields; Schoolton for Common Rosefinch and Barred Warbler (the owner, a previous warden at the Obs, flagged us down and told us about the Barred Warbler – an example of how it all works on the island); Bull Park and Utra for Little Bunting (only two of the group were lucky!); Shirva for the long-staying Melodious Warbler; South Harbour and Bunes for Snow Buntings, Purple Sandpipers and, on one day, 35 Whooper Swans flew in.

I noted earlier that the fact that Direct Flight had only one plane caused some logistical problems, not least on the last day when six were booked to go out at 2.30 pm and six at 3.30 pm. The 2.30 flight went off and there were no indications of any difficulties, but the plane never made the second flight as it was diverted to Fetlar. So six of the group had to be found space at the Obs for one more night. One of the group opted to sail on the Good Shepherd and had a very rough, miserable crossing. The plane returned the next morning to take the remaining five to Tingwall. One compensation – a Baird's Sandpiper had been spotted at the Haven by Al (Alastair) McNee from Inverness (a former Recorder for Highland).

The Good Shepherd sails three times a week and it can be very rough. However, it is an essential link to the island for the delivery of food and all other commodities, including cars. It also takes the Fair Isle sheep to market in Shetland. Jim Stout, previously mentioned, was on the Good Shepherd for 40 years, 20 of them as Captain – he now chooses to fly!

Fair Isle is very special especially for bird watching but, just being on such a small island is a unique experience. Mark Holling was one of the first group and he describes one day on the island as probably the best day's birding he has ever had! Fair Isle weaves a magic all of its own. Many of us are planning to return, probably next year.

*Doreen Main,
SOC Lothian Branch Secretary*



Sandhill Crane, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, September 2011 - the first record for North-East Scotland

D. FUNNELL

Plate 328. *Sandhill Crane, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, North-East Scotland, September 2011.* © Joseph Nichols

The autumn at Strathbeg is always exciting, from mid-September onwards numbers of returning Pink-footed Geese steadily increase and there is always the possibility of some other goodie turning up as well (Steppe Grey Shrike in October 2010 for example). This week was no exception and, in addition to the geese arriving, there had been a couple of sightings of Common Crane showing briefly before disappearing. I was annoyed that I kept missing it, whilst the rest of the team had seen it briefly, and had been chatting to Tim Marshall, saying that it would be just my luck that we get sent a photo and it had turned into a Sandhill Crane!

On 22 September, there was a steady arrival of Pink-footed Geese from early that morning. After lunch, we were standing outside the office enjoying the sights and sounds of the geese arriving and working out the priorities for the rest of the day, so that everyone could enjoy the seemingly never ending stream of geese arriving. The team went off to hang a couple of gates and I headed back into the office to finish a few things when Ken Jack and Pauline Johnson came over and mentioned that the crane had just landed on Savoch Low Ground, I grabbed my scope and wandered over, e-mails or Common Crane not really a choice!

I scanned the area, but could see nothing crane-like, lots of Herons, but nothing larger. My attention was caught by a group of Black-tailed Godwits and Ruff flying over the marsh, and as I watched, they flew in front of a crane. At this stage I was counting the flock, but did register that the crane had lots of red on its head, so it must be an adult, then as the waders started to land I did a mental double take – there was no white or black on its neck. I quickly abandoned the waders and turned my full attention to the crane – sure enough huge area of red extending down to the base of the bill and no black or white markings at all. Sandhill Crane instantly crossed my mind and the harder I looked, the more convinced I became that it was one, but there was no one else around to confirm that I was not hallucinating. At this point without taking my eye from the scope I called the team and left some apparently very funny messages pleading with them not to drive any closer to the Low Ground, as I did not want this bird flushed and at the same time telling them to get back here with cameras as it wasn't a Common Crane. I also phoned two of our regulars – Margaret, who had only left the centre about 45 minutes before, and Tim, who was probably the next closest. The conversation with Tim in particular was not in the least bit

coherent; I suspect he thought I had been drinking, but I did get across that I was watching a crane that was not a common and he should get up here fast. I finally managed to get in touch with Diana, our Visitor Officer, who was on her day-off shopping at the time and convinced her that she should come in pronto.

I sat back and watched the bird whilst taking notes and having a quick scan through the *Collins Bird Guide*, and yes everything fitted, red patch on forehead that seemed to encompass the eye and extended to the base of an all dark bill, the face and the front of the neck was more silvery grey than the rest of the bird and, although distant, it did appear to have brown feathers on the wings and the base of the neck. Surely, this had to be a Sandhill Crane, a bird I had wanted to see so much that, in 2009, I had broken my rule of never leaving my home county and twitched the Orkney bird (there is a moral in this somewhere). After what seemed to be several hours, if not days, but in reality was probably no more than 20 minutes, Margaret came in and was soon grilling the bird, followed by Diana (shopping carelessly thrown

into the boot of her car) and then a short time later by Tim – who had taken the garbled conversation seriously and had bought a decent field guide with him. It is amazing what stress and adrenaline does to your ability to think rationally, normally I am quite confident that I know my alphabet (even if my spelling leaves a little bit to be desired), but I was completely unable to find Crane in the index and had to rely on calmer members of the team to undertake that simple task on my behalf.

With multiple birders watching it, all absolutely happy that I was not mad but had indeed found a Sandhill Crane we started to put the news out as widely and as rapidly as possible. Of course in true Strathbeg style the minute other people started to arrive the crane decided to fly off low to the north – although we were able to see that it did land again. By this stage thanks to Pauline and Ken, we had some perfectly adequate photos that readily confirmed its identification just in case it was never re-located – which as my attempts at digiscoping are more a source of amusement than instruction was a good thing, in truth if my pictures had been the



Plate 329. Sandhill Crane, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, North-East Scotland, September 2011. © Joseph Nichols

only supporting images I am not sure I would have been able to convince anyone (myself included) that I was looking at a bird let alone a Sandhill Crane!

As it was well past four, with unavoidable childcare duties beckoning (my wife was on 12-hour night shifts) I had to abandon the fun and leave the relocation of the bird to others and I sped off to pick up my youngest from nursery school before I started to get phone calls asking if I was leaving Cameron there for the night - an option that did briefly cross my mind, as I wanted to enjoy the bird, but one I felt would not be too popular with my wife, Cameron or the nursery school. In fact, on arriving home just before my wife left for work, I got a rather amusing response to the news of my great find, along the lines of "didn't you travel a long way to see one of those just a couple of years ago as they were so rare ... always thought you were mad!"

The relief was immense when I started to get messages from Diana to say it was showing well, feeding in fields close to St Combs and was watched until it got dark, although she had not seen it coming in to roost...

With it likely to prove quite a popular attraction (should it show), opening the centre at 08:00 just was not an option, so a rota was prepared. To say I was relieved when Diana sent me a text just after 07:00 the following morning to say that it was asleep on the Low Ground, would be an understatement, although the text that followed about ten minutes later saying it had flown got my pulse racing again! The bird spent the Friday feeding in stubble fields around St Combs – occasionally giving everyone the slip when it would fly off low and disappear behind buildings or contours in the fields, sometimes taking over an hour to be relocated. That evening, it flew back onto the reserve at about 19:00 and was watched until it got dark – Saturday was going to be busy!

On Saturday morning, again at around 07:00 I got the message that the crane was probably on the Low Ground, but due to the centre being packed was not certain. This was followed not long after by confirmation that it was behaving in the same manner as the previous day and had



Plate 330. Sandhill Crane, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, North-East Scotland, September 2011. © Harry Scott

flown off north to feed. Over the weekend, it followed the same pattern, roosting on Savocho Low Ground, before flying off to feed in recently harvested fields close to St Combs. It usually showed well, although was very good at hiding behind the big bales of straw and in previously unnoticed dips in the ground. The reserve was busy over the weekend, including, on Sunday morning, three birders from Belgium, who had driven overnight up to Strathbeg and had to get back to Dover by 20:00 that night – whilst calling in on an American Black Tern in Lincolnshire on the way, which as they did not leave until about 08:00 was going to be pretty tight.

On the 26th, the bird was definitely more jumpy than on previous mornings, although this could have been related to the level of shooting on adjacent land. It left the roost before 07:00, when it again flew low north to feed, before returning to Savocho by 11:30. At midday, it took off and started to circle over the area steadily gaining height before it drifted off to the south and being lost to view.

A great bird with which to finish my seven-year stint at Strathbeg.

Dominic Funnell, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, Aberdeenshire.



Plate 331. Little Egret with Hooded Crow, Broadford Bay, Skye, October 2011. © Martin Benson

Little Egret, Broadford Bay, Isle of Skye, October 2011 - the fourth Skye record

S. BENTALL

Despite Broadford Bay's limited intertidal zone it provides some of the richest feeding grounds along the north-west seaboard. Poor weather in late September-early October had already seen Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Jack Snipe and significant numbers of Pale-bellied Brent Geese arrive at Broadford Bay.

The 4 October 2011 started bright in Broadford turning overcast by midday with strong south-westerly winds. At 15:45 visiting friend Andrea Hudspeth and I were preparing to leave the house when I decided to take one last look out across the bay from my living room. Scanning across Glas Eilean with the naked eye I picked out a medium-sized white heron-like bird flying very low over the skerry. My hopes were raised immediately. The identification was quickly

established as Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*. I told Andrea our plans had changed and she was to start her car immediately and that this was a local rarity. I grabbed my bins, scope and camera and we rushed to a friends' house further along the bay.

The egret was feeding frantically when we relocated it and I knew that there was a good chance that this bird could leave at any time. Its greenish legs and pink lower mandible showed clearly this bird was a juvenile. I took a few quick shots and then commandeered Paul Withey's phone to contacting my wife, and local birder Martin Benson. They both promptly arrived within minutes and Martin was able to secure some fantastic images.

The egret continued to feed for an hour before being harassed by Herring Gulls and then flew to roost in a neighbour's garden. Martin broadcasted the news on BirdGuides and I submitted the record to BTO BirdTrack and Highland county recorder Hugh Insley.

The Little Egret has continued to show well throughout October providing many local residents and passing birders with great views.

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Record count of Little Egrets in Scotland

In late summer 2011, the Scottish record count for a group of Little Egrets was equalled and then broken twice. In July, four were counted at Guardbridge (Fife); this equalled the previous Scottish record (surprisingly on Mull in 1969). Five were then seen in Dumfries & Galloway in August. In Lothian, varying numbers of egrets were seen at Aberlady Bay, Tynninghame and Belhaven; some ringed and some not. A hint as to the true number of birds involved only came when seven were seen together at Tynninghame on 20 August. Colin Davison, Keith Gillon and Calum Scott were birding the south side of the Tyne Estuary when they saw two and then three birds across in the Heckies Hole area. Returning later, the number of individuals visible increased as birds were pushed out of the creeks by the rising tide, and the final count reached seven together on the saltmarsh.



Plate 332. Little Egret, Broadford Bay, Skye, October 2011. © Martin Benson



Plate 333. Red-flanked Bluetail, Kergord, Shetland, October 2010. © Lee Mott

Red-flanked Bluetails in Scotland in autumn 2010

M.S. CHAPMAN

The first Red-flanked Bluetail for Scotland (and second for Britain) was shot at Skaw, Whalsay, Shetland on 7 October 1947. It was 24 years until the next, a spring male on Fetlar in 1971. It remained an extremely rare visitor here until very recently: occurrences in Scotland were few and far between, with three in the 1970s, two in the 1980s, then four in the 1990s. The first multiple occurrence was in 1999, when two birds were found. It is almost exclusively a late autumn visitor, with just two spring occurrences, with the vast majority of records referring to first-winter birds, although several adult males have appeared: Fetlar, Shetland 31 May to 1 June 1971; Foveran bushes, Ythan Estuary, North-East Scotland, 27–28 September 1998; Fair Isle, 29 September 2004.

As a rare migrant it has everything: stunning looks, Siberian taiga origin, and it is related to a favourite everyday species, though more skulking, enigmatic and exotic. Its fleeting visits on cold autumnal days to remote, sometimes obscure, coastal sites gave those places a special aura and their finders a privileged status. This changed in 2010. It has now become a realistic target for late autumn bird-finders at almost any of the migration hotspots, though so far maintaining a strong east coast bias in its appearances.

In recent years, it has continued a westwards range expansion, which started in the late 19th century in Russia. This is linked by some to climatic amelioration in northern Europe from that time; with a few pioneering males singing in

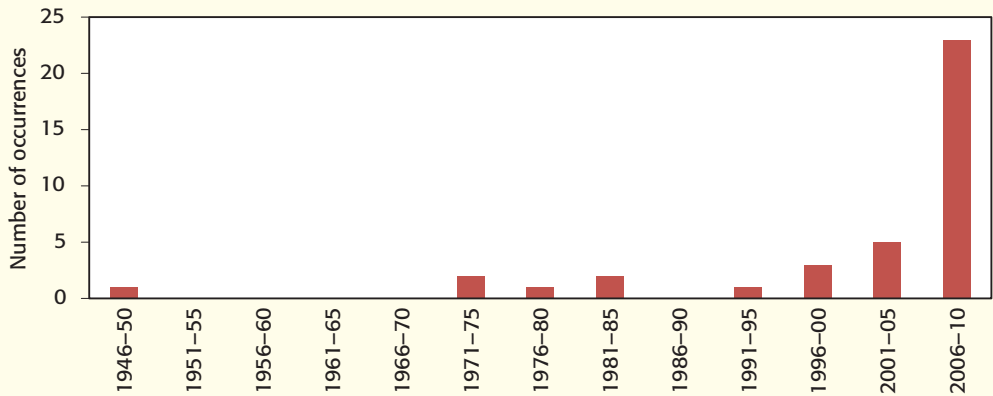


Figure 1. Records of Red-flanked Bluetails in Scotland by five-year periods.

the high latitude forests of Finland from the early 1970s the vanguard of a serious colonization there, with up to 500 singing males estimated to be on territory from the early part of this century. The population is centered in forested regions between latitudes 70° and 75°N, especially around Kuusamo. Breeding attempts have also been made in Estonia and Sweden.

A steady rise in occurrences in Scotland in the last decade is apparent, with 15 up to and including 2009, and three records each in 2003, 2006 and 2008, coinciding with the consolidation of the range extension.

With the previous highest annual total in Scotland of three (2003, 2006, 2008), 2010 was clearly exceptional, with 13 birds, and records exhibit a split between the Northern Isles (10 birds) and singles in Fife, Lothian and Borders (Fig. 2). Perhaps surprisingly, none has yet been recorded on the west side of Scotland.

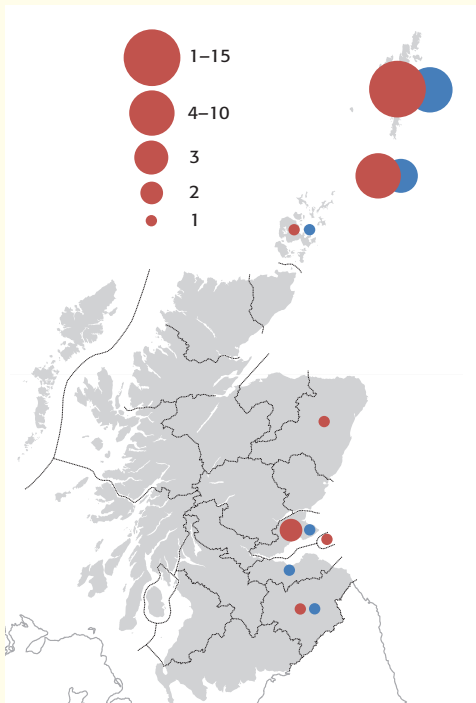


Figure 2. Distribution of Red-flanked Bluetails in Scotland (red = up to end 2009; blue = 2010 only). The Fife 2010 record is included, but is still to be assessed by BBRC.

Table 1. List of 2010 Scottish records.

Five in September:

- 27th two (one trapped) Fair Isle
- 28th one first-winter trapped Fife Ness, Fife*
- 28th one Norwick, Unst, Shetland
- 30th one trapped Skaw, Whalsay, Shetland

Eight in October:

- 8th one Tresta, Shetland
- 8th one Geosetter, Shetland
- 11th one Queenamidda, Rendall, Orkney
- 11th one Scoughall, Lothian
- 14-15th one Kergord, Shetland
- 15th one Troswick, Shetland
- 16th one Fair Isle
- 16th one first-winter trapped Mire Loch, St. Abbs Head, Borders

*Of these, all were accepted by BBRC with the exception of the record of one trapped at Fife Ness (Plate 336), details of which have recently been submitted via the BTO Ringing Office.

UK records

There have now been a total of 98 accepted individuals in Britain to the end of 2010, with 37 of these in Scotland.

In addition to the 13 birds in Scotland, there were 18 accepted records in the rest of Britain in 2010, where the recent pattern of increasing sightings has broadly matched the situation here. Of these the timings of the majority of east-coast records correlate closely with ours, but the five in the far south and south-west all occurred a little later, making a case perhaps for some filtering down of earlier more northerly arrivals, although late 'sibes' in the south-west also appear to turn up quite often when those parts are also in the thrall of their own locally ideal weather patterns for a direct easterly origin.

Associated birds

The clear arrival in the last few days of September was associated with a good arrival of migrants of possible Fenno-Scandinavian origin, such as Red-breasted Flycatchers, Rustic and Little Buntings, and several Arctic Warblers, as well as more classic Siberian species such as Yellow-browed Warblers and White's Thrush. From 8th to 15 October, the 'second wave' of Bluetails coincided with a clear arrival of Siberian species; Pallas's Grasshopper, Lanceolated, Pallas's, Yellow-browed, Dusky and Radde's Warblers and Isabelline Shrike, as well as Blyth's Reed Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatchers and Ortolan Buntings, again perhaps with closer Scandinavian origins.

Origins of Scottish birds

The first accepted record for Finland occurred as recently as 1949, although birds were reported prior to this, but before the national records committee there assessed them. Singing birds in the 1970s heralded the start of the colonization. Although only four pairs were actually confirmed in 1995, for example, with the remoteness of the region and the unobtrusive breeding presence of the species, only good estimates of breeding numbers are possible, typically taken as being c.10 times the number found on transect surveys. These estimates varied between 50–300 pairs/occupied territories in the 1990s, with some variation between years and an average of 100 pairs or less then (Väisänen *et al.* 1998), with between 150–350 pairs or occupied territories in 2000–05, increasing to 300–1,500 pairs in 2006–10 (Valkama *et al.* 2011), with an amazing peak of possibly as many as 4,000 pairs in both 2009 and 2010 (A. Rajasärkkä pers. comm.). Similar rising patterns, of migratory occurrence, for the UK and places like Norway and Sweden, and the close correlation with the timings and progress of Finnish colonization mean a case could be made for linking all the records and theorizing that the bulk of our Bluetails originate from the Finnish population, although presumably there has been a similar



Plate 334. Red-flanked Bluetail, Kergord, Shetland, October 2010. © Hugh Harrop

pattern of breeding range expansion and perhaps greater numbers involved in neighbouring parts of west Russia.

It was also suggested recently (Hudson *et al.* 2011) that migration patterns may have recently altered. With a large and growing population moving westwards, and with the associated 'random' dispersal of juveniles into new areas, it does seem possible that new routes may be 'trilled' and even new wintering sites and areas found. However, we might also logically expect that with a large new population in northern Europe of a long distance migrant with a wintering range in southern Asia, there would be increased vagrancy in north-west Europe by way of the 'normal' vagrancy routes explained by theories such as reverse migration and high pressure drift.

Equally, the effect of prevailing weather conditions in the UK on the number of Red-flanked Bluetails occurring in different years should not be underestimated. In Shetland and much of eastern Britain in 2010, late September and the second week of October saw spells of sustained suitable easterly winds from the continent and produced a large influx of Bluetails. In Shetland, in particular in 2011, the local weather has been dominated by Atlantic systems and a strongly prevailing westerly airstream. To date (end October) we have had none and the only bird in Scotland was a first-winter on Papa Westray, Orkney on 14 October, whereas there have been ten birds on the English east coast from Kent to County Durham during 13–19 October.

In Scotland, Red-flanked Bluetails will probably always remain a rare treat, but it does not seem too far-fetched to imagine a young male being discovered at some point in the future singing atop a small conifer on a sunlit, forested slope in some remote glen...

Acknowledgments

To all the photographers whose excellent portraits appear here: George Petrie, Lee Mott and Jim Cobb. Also Hugh Harrop for photos, helpful discussion and help with contacting Finnish observers, and to Ari Rajasärkkä, Conservation Biologist with the Finnish Forest and Park Service, for the most up-to date breeding data from Finland, very many thanks.



Plate 335. Red-flanked Bluetail, Geosetter, Shetland, October 2010. © George Petrie



Plate 336. Red-flanked Bluetail, Fife Ness, September 2010. © Jim Cobb

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BIRDCUIDES REVIEW

1 July to 30 September 2011

S. MENZIE

All records refer to the period 1 June to 30 September 2011 unless otherwise stated.

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

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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

A Lesser Canada Goose was reported with Greylags at Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 10 September, and the adult Ross's Goose at Loch Leven (P&K) remained from

June to 1 July. A drake Blue-winged Teal was at Bridgend Farm Pool (Clyde) on 10 September. A drake King Eider was in Burghead Bay (M&N) from 23–25 September, with another off Wester Quarff (Shet) on 3 September. The drake Black Scoter was seen intermittently off Blackdog/Murcar (NES) throughout the period.

A probable White-billed Diver was reported on the sea off Tarbat Ness (High) on 5 September. An albatross sp. was reported off Barlocco Isle (D&G) on 18 September, whilst a presumed Fea's Petrel flew past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 September.

A Cattle Egret was at Eoropie/Fivepenny, nr Tabost, Lewis (OH) on 29 September.

There was something of an influx of Pallid Harriers during August and September, with the first individual seen on Fair Isle on 12 August. All were juveniles, with reports of singles at many sites on Shetland, including one on Noss on 24 August, at Norwick, Unst on 25th, Bressay on 26th, a probable on Out Skerries on 27th, Northdale, Unst on 28th and 30th, Sandgarth, Voe and Sand Water, Central Mainland on 31 August. One was at Haroldswick, Unst on 1 September, Stromfirth, Central Mainland on 2nd, various parts of Unst on 4–14th, at Hillwell, South Mainland on 6 & 8th, at least one at various sites in South Mainland from 10 September to the end of the month, one at various sites on Yell on 12–16th, one near Voe, Central Mainland on 17th, and another on Bressay that day.

Additionally, two birds were seen together in the Hillwell–Quendale area from 28 September onwards. On Orkney, juveniles were seen at The Loons RSPB on 23–25 September, at Marwick Head on 24th, and on North Ronaldsay from 25–28th. A juvenile bird was on Mull on 20 & 24 September and a bird flew past Uisaed Point on 22 September; a possible was at Mellon Charles (High) from end of August to 4 September. A male Montagu's Harrier was reported from Carnan, South Uist (OH) on 3 August, with Montagu's/Pallid Harriers seen at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 18 September and Barns Ness (Loth) on 19 September. A first-summer male Lesser Kestrel was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–21 September. A grey morph Gyr Falcon was reported from Ythan Estuary (NES) on 25 September.

An adult Sandhill Crane made the headlines in late September when it settled at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 22nd and remained until 26th. Following its departure, it was then tracked at several sites as it made its way south through England.

An adult Pacific Golden Plover was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5 July, with a 'lesser' golden plover on Mainland at St Mary's on 12 August. An adult Semipalmated Sandpiper was at Pool of Virkie, South Mainland (Shet) on 4–5 August, a juvenile was at Peninerine/Kilpheder, South Uist (OH) from 15–23 September, with perhaps the same bird moving to Scarista Sands, Harris on 25–26 September, and a

juvenile was present at the Ythan Estuary (NES) from 27 September onwards. A juvenile **Least Sandpiper** was at South Ness, Foula (Shet) from 14–24 September. There were six **Baird's Sandpipers** reported during the period, with individuals at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 23 August, at Banna Minn, Burra (Shet) on 30 August, on Islay (Arg) on 4–5 September, on Fair Isle on 24 September, at Uig, Lewis (OH) on 13 September, and at Loch Paible, North Uist on 21 September. **White-rumped Sandpipers** sightings included birds on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 29 July and 21–22 September, on Tiree (Arg) on 4 August and 15 September, two at Uig, Lewis on 13 September, an adult at Peninerine /Kilpheder, South Uist on 15th and 21st, and singles on St Kilda (all OH) on 19–20 September, Hopeman (M&N) on 23–24 September, at Northton, Harris (OH) on 26th, and at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 30th. A possible **Hudsonian Whimbrel** was seen briefly at Grenitote, North Uist (OH) on 24 September. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 25 September. A **Great Snipe** was on Fair Isle from 30 August to 2 September, with presumably a second bird on the island from 18 September to 29 September. A juvenile **Long-billed Dowitcher** was at Baron's Haugh RSPB (Clyde) from 17 September until at least the end of the month.



Plate 338. *Short-toed Lark, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2011.* © Jacqui Herrington



Plate 337. *Baird's Sandpiper, Islay, Argyll, September 2011.* © Jim Dickson

A first-winter **Laughing Gull** was photographed off Torsa Island (Arg) on 14 September. **Bonaparte's Gull** sightings consisted of a 1st-summer off Berneray, North Uist (OH) on 18 & 19 July, an adult at Borve, Lewis (OH) from 14–19 August, with another, or the same, adult on Berneray, North Uist on 26–30 August, and an adult at Dornoch (High) from 14–17 August. Single **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Stranraer (D&G), Barassie (Ayr), and a probable full adult at Aith, West Mainland (Shet) on 25 July.

A **Whiskered Tern** made a brief appearance at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve (NES) on 12 September. A **White-winged Black Tern** was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9 & 10 July, with presumably the same bird then seen on Fair Isle on 16 July.

On Lewis (OH), a male **Snowy Owl** was reported intermittently at

several sites from 23 July through to 17 September. An **Alpine Swift** was present at Laxo, Central Mainland (Shet) on 29 July.

Short-toed Larks were restricted to the Northern Isles, with a bird at Inner Skaw, Unst (Shet) from the end of June staying until 5 July, with a second bird there on 19 July and on 18 September, a bird on Fair Isle from 7 August to 27 August and presumably a second bird present a month later on 20 September, and a bird on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 27 September onwards. There were two records of **Red-rumped Swallow**: on Mull (Arg) on 5 July and at Loch of Hillwell (Shet) on 19–21 August.

A **Red-eyed Vireo** was on Barra from 22 September to the end of the month. An adult **Lesser Grey Shrike** was at Laxo, Central Mainland (Shet) from 25–29 September.

All records of **Greenish Warblers** came from Shetland, with the exception of a bird at Collieston (NES) on 24–26 August. The earliest and latest records from Shetland came from Fair Isle on 12 August and Sumburgh on 4 September. **Arctic Warblers** were restricted to Shetland, with birds on Fair Isle on 23–24 August, Sumburgh/Grutness, South Mainland on 24–26 August, at Norwick, Unst on 25 August, Tresta, Fetlar on 4 September, Hoswick,

South Mainland from 7–9 September and Sandwick on 17–18 September, the latter being joined by a Greenish Warbler on the second day of its stay. There was a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** from Gulberwick (Shet) on 9–12 August, and another at Leagarth, Fetlar on 12 September.

A **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** was on Fair Isle on 30 September, with an **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** there on 2–3 September. **Booted Warblers** were seen at several sites across Shetland with birds at Grutness, South Mainland on 24–26 August, Fair Isle on 26 August, Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 23–28 August and at Scatness on 2–3 September; a probable was at Wester Quarff on 28–30 September. A **Melodious Warbler** was at St Abbs Head (Bord) on 30 August. A **Blyth's Reed Warbler** was on Tiree (Arg) from 19–26 September, one at Bixter, West Mainland (Shet) on 19th, with another trapped and ringed on Fair Isle on 19 September. **Marsh Warblers** were in Shetland at Unst on 7 July, Ham, Foula on 6 & 8 September, at Quarff, South Mainland on 13 September, and in Orkney on North Ronaldsay on 1 July and 30–31 August.

A **Grey-cheeked Thrush** was present at Tresta, Fetlar (Shet) from 22–24 September, while at Boddam, South Mainland (Shet), a **Swainson's Thrush** was present from 21–23 September. A **Common Nightingale** was on Tiree (Arg) from 3–8 September.

All records of **Citrine Wagtail** came from Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) during the last week of August onwards, except for a possible at Rigifa Pool (NES) and one seen on a vessel at sea approximately 37 miles east of South Ronaldsay. A **Pechora Pipit** was at Burns and Harrier on Foula (Shet) from 18–20 September. Up to two **Buff-bellied Pipits** were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22–26 September, with other single birds on St Kilda (OH) on 18th and near Ham, Foula on 22–29th. A **Tawny Pipit** was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18 September and a **Red-throated Pipit** was on the same island on 30th.

A juvenile **Yellow-breasted Bunting** was on Foula (Shet) from 25–28 September. A male **Black-headed Bunting** was on Fair Isle on 3–16 July, and one at Belmont, Unst (Shet) from 28 September. **Little Buntings** were at Sanday

(Ork) on 18 September and at several sites on Shetland including one on Fair Isle on 19–29 September, one at Aith, Fetlar on 25th, one at Vaivoe, Whalsay on 25–29 September, and one on Out Skerries on 29 September. **Two-barred Crossbills** were seen at several sites across Shetland, with a female at Halligarth, Unst on 29–31 July, joined by a male from 30th to 1 August, then a female at Sumburgh on 14 August and a juvenile on Tronda on the same day.

Scarce

Snow Geese were at several sites and included a white morph on Barra (OH) on 27 September, a white morph at Craobh Haven (Arg) from 8 August to 5 September, and three at Blackdog (NES) on 25 September. An **American Wigeon** was at Loch Stilligarry or Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) from 13 July to at least the end of September and in Spey Bay (M&N) on 11 September. **Surf Scoters** were seen off Blackdog (NES), peaking at four individuals on 4 July, in Lunan Bay (A&D) from 1 August, and a male was in Ronas Voe, North Mainland (Shet) from 28 September.

Cory's Shearwaters were seen at three sites, with birds passing Dunbar (Loth) and then St Abbs Head (Bord) on 17 September and Rubha Reidh (High) on 28 August. **Great Shearwaters** were slightly more numerous, with singles passing North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28 August and 9 September, two past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 2 September, and a probable past Coll (Arg) on 7 September. Single **Balearic Shearwaters** were seen off the Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 27 & 29 August, with 306 Sooty Shearwaters seen off there on 28th, and a Balearic was seen off Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 24 September.

Single **Leach's Petrels** flew past Peterhead and Kinnaird Head (NES) on 27 and 29 August, Griminish Point, North Uist (OH)



Plate 339. *Black-headed Bunting*, Unst, Shetland, September 2011. © Mike Throver

on 7 September, Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) on 12 September; several passed Islay (Arg), with seven seen on 6 September, three past on 7 September and one on 13 September. Other multiple counts came from the Ayrshire coast, with four past Troon on 12 September and two past Turnberry Point on 13th, and four from the Outer Hebrides on 6 September. Two were noted from Griminish Point, North Uist and singles off Ardvule, South Uist (both OH) on 22 and 26 September, another past the Oban–Barra ferry on 24th. Birds were ringed overnight on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on several dates through the period.



Plate 340. Long-tailed Skua, Tynninghame, Lothian, September 2011. © Mike Thrower

There were three reports of **Honey Buzzards**, all heading south, from Portobello (Loth) on 27 August, Saltcoats (Ayr) 24 September and Glasgow (Clyde) on 30th. A **Hobby** was seen at Clumlie, South Mainland (Shet) on 7 July, one at Scatness, South Mainland on 14 August, and one at Quarff, South Mainland on 26 August. Three adult **Common Cranes** were at New Pitsligo (NES) from 1–3 September, with a single bird at Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 18 September. A **Corncrake** on Whalsay (Shet) on 1 September was notable.

American Golden Plovers were at several sites, including one at Uig, Lewis on 3 September, and at least two juveniles at Borve, Barra (OH) from 25–30 September and three with Golden Plovers at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 30 September. A **Temminck's Stint** was at The Shunan, Mainland (Ork) on 9 July, with a juvenile on Aberdeen beach (NES) on 28 August and a report of one from Doonfoot (Ayr) on 13 September. Most records of **Pectoral Sandpiper** came from the Western Isles, with singles at Loch Bee, South Uist on 10 August and 13 September, Butt of Lewis, Lewis on 2nd and 7 September, two at Loch Paible, South Uist on 4 September, a juvenile at Ardvule,

South Uist on 9th, and a high count of six near Butt of Lewis, Lewis from 9–11 September, then singles at Ardvule on 11th, Loch Bee, South Uist on 13 September and Peninerine, South Uist and St. Kilda on 17 September, singles at West Gerinish, South Uist on 22–29th, Butt of Lewis on 22nd, and Northton, Harris on 26th. Other birds included five birds together at Loch of Strathbeg RPSB on 8 September, with one bird having been present since 19 August and one bird remaining there until the end of September; then singles at Tynninghame (Loth) and Loch of Banks (Ork) on 30 August, Isbister (Ork) on 12 September, Loch of Tingwall, Central Mainland (Shet) on 22 July, Fair Isle on 4–9 September, at Loch of Funzie, Fetlar on 30 September, with at least three at Loch of Huxter, West Mainland (Shet) the same day. **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were reported across the region, with single birds at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 10–14 August, North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11–21 August, at Uig, Lewis (OH) on 2–3 September, Portnaluchaig (High) from 8–19 September, Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 14 September, Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 15 September, Tiree (Arg) on 29 September, Lewis (OH) on 3

& 14 September, at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 28–30th, and on Shetland two were at South Ness, Foula on 17–18 September, then one from 19–22nd, and another at Esha Ness, North Mainland on 22–28 September. Two were seen from the Oban–Barra ferry crossing on 11 September, and two at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 26 September. **Grey Phalaropes** were seen at a number of sites from late August through September, including an early one at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 29 August, and one at Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) on 13 September.

Long-tailed Skua - an adult was at East Burra (Shet) from 5–9 July, other reports came from Girdle Ness (NES), with one bird on 8 July; a juvenile past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 8 September, Coll (Arg), where seven birds passed on 10 September, Aberdour (Fife) with one on 16 September and two on 22 September; Fife Ness (Fife), where three passed on 3 September; and others were noted from Chanonry Point (High), Skye (High), Dunbar (Loth), Tynninghame Bay (Loth), Hound Point (Loth), Portknockie (M&N) and one at Traigh Mhor, Barra (OH) on 25 September.

The only **Ring-billed Gull** reported during the period was an adult at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) from 30 August to 25 September. **Sabine's Gulls** were largely restricted to the west coast, with sightings including one off Butt of Lewis, Lewis, on 1 September, singles past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 6th & 13th and two on 26 September, three juveniles past Tiree (Arg) on 13 September and at least three past Hunterston Sands (Ayr) on 13 September. In the east, at least two Sabine's Gull were seen off the Tynninghame–Dunbar–Barns Ness coast during 13–18 September. An adult **Black Tern** was at Loch Fada, Benbecula (OH) on 1–4 July.

Hoopoes were at Coll (Arg) on 22–26 August, Tiree (Arg) on 30 September, Newmachar (NES) on 6 & 18 September, and North Berwick (Loth) on 23–27 September. **Wrynecks** included birds on Mull (Arg) on 15 August, at Caolas Liubharsaigh, South Uist (OH) on 29 August, and at least ten reports from Shetland. The peak count came from North Ronaldsay (Ork), where four birds were present on 25 August. A **Golden Oriole** was at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 18 August.



Plate 341. Hoopoe, North Berwick, Lothian, September 2011. © Fiona Govan

Red-backed Shrikes were restricted to the Northern Isles, with birds on Orkney at Deerness, Sandray, Evie and on South Ronaldsay in September, and birds on Shetland at Sumburgh, Grutness, on Fair Isle, on Foula and on Unst; the first bird reported during the period was at Pool of Virkie on 10–11 August. A **Great Grey Shrike** was on Fair Isle on 19 & 24 September.

Yellow-browed Warblers began to arrive on 13 September, with birds on Foula and Out Skerries (Shet). Peak counts included three on Yell (Shet) on 18 September, five on Fair Isle on 19th, five at Quendale (Shet) on 23rd and three at Sanday (Ork) on 25th. Away from the Northern Isles, birds included four on St. Kilda (OH) on 17 September with singles at Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 21–22 September, Creachan and Brevig, Barra on 22nd, Snishival, South Uist on 24th and Drinsishader, Harris (all OH) on 26th, on Coll (Arg) on 26th, and at Kinneff and at Collieston (NES) on 17th, with a **Barred Warbler** also at the latter site on the same day. Other Barred Warblers were seen at Balcomie (Fife), where three were present on 18 August and one was noted on 27 August, at Port of Ness, Lewis (OH) on 1 September, Rattray Head (NES) on 4–17 September, St. Kilda (OH) on 19–20th, at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 19th with birds at Creachan and Glenn, Barra on 22 September. There were birds on Orkney from 26 August onwards, with two on North Ronaldsay on 2 September, and birds on Shetland from 15 August onwards, with a peak count of seven on Fair Isle on 26 August. **Icterine Warblers** were recorded in August at Whalsay, Unst, Sumburgh, Quendale and Quarff (all Shet) and North Ronaldsay (Ork); one was on Unst on 19 September.

Adult **Rose-coloured Starlings** were on Islay (Arg) from 3–23 July, on Handa Island (High) on 6–8 July and at Loch Camon, South Uist

(OH) on 29 July to 7 August, on Mull (Arg) on 26 September; juveniles were seen on Fair Isle on 25–27 September and Isle of Whithorn (D&G) on 5–8 September.

Bluethroats were at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 25 September and on Unst (Shet) on 27–29 September. **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were rather thin on the ground, with singles at Kirkwall Airport (Ork), and Wester Quarff and Eswick (both Shet) being the only three reported. The only **Richard's Pipit** was a probable reported from Sanday (Ork) on 23 September. **Common Rosefinch** reports came largely from Orkney and Shetland, with birds seen in numbers from mid-August.

Elsewhere birds were seen on Benbecula (OH) on 27 July and again on 3 August, at Fife Ness (Fife) on 23 August, and Bru, Lewis (OH) on 3 September and Druidibeg, South Uist (OH) on 26 September, and on Tiree (Arg) on 30 September. The peak count was a remarkable 15 on Fair Isle on 3 September; even more remarkable, one of the birds was colour-ringed and had originally been ringed on the west coast of Sweden on 25 August. A **Coue's Arctic Redpoll** (*C. h. exilipes*) was at Ronas Voe, North Mainland (Shet) on 25 September.

Notable common migrant records included a **Turtle Dove** at Voe, Central Mainland (Shet) on 6 July, with another at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 28 July and with one at Bragar, Lewis on 12 July, with it or another seen there on 17 August, and one at Vallay, North Uist (all OH) on 31 August. An early **Lapland Bunting** was seen at Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 28 August, with another at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 8 September, and 28 there on 9th.

Correction: in the last issue on page 288 the Forest of Ae should read "D&G" not "Ayr".

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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

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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.

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 342. As Cameron Thomson and I left Edinburgh on 13 June 2011, it was a cold damp morning and we had our doubts about our trip to the Isle of May. It was cold and the wind was blowing pretty strong. When we got to Anstruther, we were told that we might not be able to land as the wind was so bad! I was not surprised. Anyway, we sailed out to the island. It was choppy, but when we approached the harbour, all was calm; it was as though the island was sheltering the landing dock for us. So the landing was on.

After we had our usual tern attack on landing, it was off to the Puffins. I was determined to get some close-up shots of the Puffins this year, so I

headed to my favourite spot, close to some burrows that I have known to be there for some years. I lay down beside them (not too close) and waited. After about 15 minutes, they soon got used to me.

The parent birds were coming in fast and furious, all with full beaks of Sandeels, so I guessed it was going to be a successful season. The less said about the return trip the better; it was like being on a rollercoaster. To end our great day was a visit to the famous Anstruther fish and chip shop.

Camera: Canon 40D, Canon 100–400mm, f5.6, 1/350 second, 300 ISO.

Bill Brown



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