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

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Scottish Birds 32:1 (2012)

- 2 President's Foreword K. Shaw

PAPERS

- 3 The status and distribution of the Lesser Whitethroat in Dumfries & Galloway
R. Mearns & B. Mearns
- 13 The selection of tree species by nesting Magpies in Edinburgh H.E.M. Dott
- 22 A survey of Leach's Petrels on Shetland in 2011 W.T.S. Miles, R.M. Tallack, P.V. Harvey, P.M. Ellis,
R. Riddington, G. Tyler, S.C. Gear, J.D. Okill, J.G Brown & N. Harper

SHORT NOTES

- 30 Guillemot with yellow bare parts on Bass Rock J.F. Lloyd & N. Wiggin
- 31 Reduced breeding of Gannets on Bass Rock in 2011 J. Hunt & J.B. Nelson
- 32 Attempted predation of Pink-footed Geese by a Peregrine D. Hawker
- 32 Sparrowhawk nest predation by Carrion Crow - unique footage recorded from a nest camera
M. Thornton, H. & L. Coventry
- 35 Black-headed Gulls eating Hawthorn berries J. Busby

OBITUARIES

- 36 Dr Raymond Hewson D. Jenkins & A. Watson
- 37 Jean Murray (Jan) Donnan B. Smith

ARTICLES, NEWS & VIEWS

- 38 Scottish seabirds - past, present and future S. Wanless & M.P. Harris
- 46 NEWS AND NOTICES
- 48 SOC SPOTLIGHT: the Fife Branch K. Dick, I.G. Cumming, P. Taylor & R. Armstrong
- 51 FIELD NOTE: Long-tailed Tits J. Maxwell
- 52 International Wader Study Group conference at Strathpeffer, September 2011 B. Kalejta Summers
- 54 Siskin and Skylark for company D. Watson
- 56 NOTES AND COMMENT
- 57 BOOK REVIEWS
- 60 RINGERS' ROUNDUP R. Duncan
- 66 Twelve Mediterranean Gulls at Buckhaven, Fife on 7 September 2011 - a new Scottish
record count J.S. Nadin
- 68 Record counts of Storm Petrels off Fife, Lothian and Borders in July 2011 C.D. Scott, M. Griffin
& S.L. Rivers
- 71 Veery, Isle of Muck, 16–24 November 2011 D. Barnden
- 74 Semipalmated Sandpiper, Ythan Estuary, 26 September–4 October 2011 - the first
North-east Scotland record P.S. Crockett
- 78 Brown Shrike, Tiree, October–November 2011 - the first Argyll record J.M. Bowler
- 82 Pallid Harrier at Bogside Flats, Irvine, October–November 2011 - the first Ayrshire record G. McAdam
- 85 Pallid Harrier, Ythan Estuary, 1 October 2011 - the first record for North-east Scotland P.A.A. Baxter
- 87 Recent taxonomic changes affecting the Scottish List S.L. Rivers

BIRGUIDES REVIEW

- 90 1 October to 31 December 2011 S. Menzie

PHOTOSPOT

- BC Cormorant E. Fellowes

President's Foreword

The winter of 2011/12 will be remembered for the unprecedented influx for European White-fronted Geese and Tundra Bean Geese to Scotland. Around Loch Leven, where I live, we have had several flocks of White-fronts and one small flock of Beans. Fife has done better with Beans in four different areas; Rossie Bog has again proved to be the top site in the county. Lothian, Angus and North-east Scotland have also done very well for both species. Another of my favourite counties, Dumfries and Galloway, has also been to the fore. It is always a good goose county, but this winter has given birdwatchers the opportunity to see both Greenland and European White-fronts there.

Most of us will be glad to see the spring however, and it is worth remembering that several counties are still involved in local atlases. These projects are important for a whole range of reasons, not least as the tools for nature conservation. Time is tight for all of us all, but if you do have a few spare hours, please help atlas efforts locally.

This spring will also bring a very special event that the SOC is heavily involved with - the Scottish Birdfair, taking place at Hopetoun House, near South Queensferry on 19th and 20th May 2012. This will be an exciting two-day, festival-style event for bird and wildlife watchers alike, drawing enthusiasts from across Scotland.

SOC staff, volunteers and I have been heavily involved in the planning of the Club's considerable contribution to the Birdfair, which I've no doubt will be one of the top events in the Scottish birding calendar. I am pleased to be able to say that SOC members have been offered a special rate of £10 per person, with children under 16 going free. Let me take this opportunity to also welcome you to our first ever SOC member 'Thank You' event at the Birdfair; a chance for members old and new to get together for a drink and cake reception on the Saturday at 11 am. Thank you kindly to Bibi's Bakery in Edinburgh for sponsoring the event!

It has been a busy time at Waterston House and I would like to thank all staff and volunteers for being so welcoming to our visitors. Our first art exhibition of the year has been a huge success; Darren Woodhead's superb "From Tyne to Coast" exhibit has broken all records and I would like to thank Darren and staff member, Dave Allan, for their fantastic work. The Donald Watson Gallery continues to attract the highest calibre of artists all year round, so if you do get the opportunity to pay a visit, please take it.

Around Christmas I attended the volunteers' party at Waterston House. It was a great event with a really nice atmosphere. The Club is extremely fortunate to have so many experienced, dedicated folk involved in all areas of our work. A big thank you to Wendy and team for making it such a success. I also attended the Fife Branch Christmas party and met up with old friends. The programmes of local events run by the branches are so important to the Club and a terrific way to attract new members and thus vital for our future.

On that subject, I am pleased to report that our new Membership Development Officer, Jane Cleaver, has made an excellent start. Since commencing her employment, membership recruitment has more than doubled against the same period last year. We can all assist with this essential work by contacting Jane at Waterston House and letting her know of potential new members - she will do the rest!

Once again, thank you all for your continued support. Have a good spring...

Ken Shaw, President



Plate 1. Low-lying farmland surrounding the Fleet Estuary, Gatehouse of Fleet, is a core area for Lesser Whitethroats in Dumfries & Galloway, May 2008. © R. & B. Mearns

The status and distribution of the Lesser Whitethroat in Dumfries & Galloway

R. MEARNS & B. MEARNS

The Lesser Whitethroat has been a sporadic breeder in Dumfries & Galloway since at least the 1870s, with peaks of abundance from the 1890s to 1920s and from the 1980s to the present. Numbers have been repeatedly underestimated in bird reports and national publications and the population may now exceed 200 pairs.

Introduction

The Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* is on the edge of its range in Scotland, where its presence is subject to annual and periodic fluctuations thought to be the result of climatic conditions experienced in their winter quarters or along their migration routes (Marchant *et al.* 1990). Attempts to assess its breeding status present a number of difficulties: the song period is relatively short (sometimes lasting only a few days), birds can be hard to see in the dense scrub that they favour, and several visits may be required to establish proof of breeding. When known well, the song is easy to pick up, even at distances of 200 m or more, but it is not familiar to all Scottish birdwatchers. Local bird reports therefore tend to contain few records, mostly of singing males, including those still on migration and others singing late in the season that are often unmated (Byars *et al.* 1991). Mist-netting in Midlothian and northern England discovered far more breeding birds than the local bird reports suggested, and more than could be revealed by standard census techniques (da Prato 1980, Boddy 1994). Accurate population assessments of this warbler in Clyde and Ayrshire required prolonged fieldwork covering all suitable habitat (Byars 2010).



Plate 2. *Lesser Whitethroat* habitat near Dundrennan, with dense low blackthorn and hawthorn, MOD Kirkcudbright Range & Training Area, Dumfries & Galloway, May 2011. © R. & B. Mearns



Plate 3. *Semi-continuous Lesser Whitethroat* habitat on 25 km of coastal slope along the north-east shore of Luce Bay, near Port William, Dumfries & Galloway, July 2011. © R. & B. Mearns

There was no survey dedicated to finding Lesser Whitethroats in Dumfries & Galloway until 2011, so, despite the drawbacks, it has been necessary to revert to an examination of all known records to gain an indication of its past status. Some convincing early breeding reports were overlooked by Baxter & Rintoul (1953) and others fell just outside the periods of the 1968–72 and 1988–91 *Atlases* (Sharrock 1976, Gibbons *et al.* 1993), as well as Thom (1986). Not all records are submitted to the local bird report, and in some years the local data did not appear in the *Scottish Bird Report*. Such things, together with the inherent difficulties in fieldwork and the small number of active local birdwatchers, have given the impression that this warbler is much scarcer in the region than suggested below.

Methods

An extensive literature search was carried out, seeking all records of the Lesser Whitethroat in Dumfries & Galloway (the former counties of Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire). The most obvious early sources were those of Gladstone (1910, 1924), various ornithological papers within the *Transactions and Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* (1862 to present), *Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report* (1985 to present), and earlier versions of county reports dating to the 1960s and 1970s. Additional records were obtained from the *Scottish Naturalist*, *Scottish Birds* and, for example, Quinn *et al.* (1993). Unpublished sources included those of J.G. Gordon (early 20th century) and A.D. Watson (late 20th century). Local and visiting naturalists were contacted for further details concerning their particular records, as far back as 1971, and for any un-submitted records.

For mapping purposes, old records from near Annan, Beattock and Moffat were assigned approximate 1-km squares; other records were traced to precise 1-km squares wherever possible. Most records of singing males were considered as possible breeders but those in unsuitable habitat or heard after July were omitted. Old breeding records are now impossible to verify so were all taken at face value; we were not as sceptical as Clarke (1902) and Paterson (1910).

Our own experience of Lesser Whitethroats relates largely to casual observations (a fifth of all Dumfries & Galloway records from 1985 to 2010), but from 24 April to 4 July 2011 we made searches in as much suitable habitat as possible during fieldwork of up to 8 hours/day on seven days in Dumfriesshire, 16 days in Kirkcudbrightshire and nine days in Wigtownshire. If birds were not already singing, song playback was used for a maximum of 10 minutes to elicit a vocal response or sighting; no sites were subjected to song playback more than once. As in all previous years, there was little follow up to check breeding success.

Results

Jardine (1839) was the first to consider the Lesser Whitethroat for the region, stating that its range extended northward as far as Durham but not 'Upon the border, in Scotland' - by which he meant his home county of Dumfriesshire. About 40 years later there was the telling comment that in Kirkcudbrightshire it was 'very seldom met with, though a constant summer visitant' (Maxwell 1884). Around Dumfries, Service (1906, 1907) reports that although he had seen and heard them 'at various times' he had only ever found two nests. Lesser Whitethroat eggs were verified in 1907 from Dornock Parish, east of Annan, and from near Kinmount, a few miles west of Annan, in 1912 or 1913 (Gladstone 1910, 1924). Indeed, E.W. Brook (of the Brook family of Hoddum Castle who formed a world-renowned aviary of foreign species) asserted that the Lesser Whitethroat bred annually near Kinmount and in 1921 he knew of three or four pairs (Gladstone 1924). Baxter & Rintoul (1953) do not mention any of these Dumfriesshire records apart from the one for Dornock. They do include one for Kirkcudbrightshire in 1916 when a well-known visiting naturalist, who had experience of breeding Lesser Whitethroats elsewhere, was almost certain that a pair was breeding near Gatehouse (Bolam 1916). See Appendix 1 for pre-1950 records.

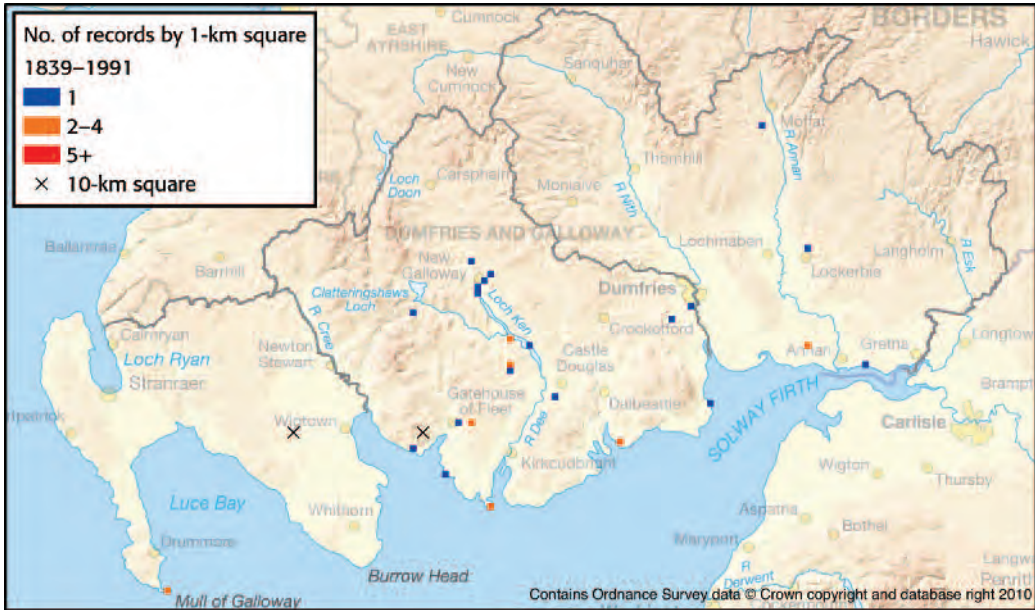


Figure 1. Distribution of Lesser Whitethroat records, Dumfries & Galloway, 1839–1991.

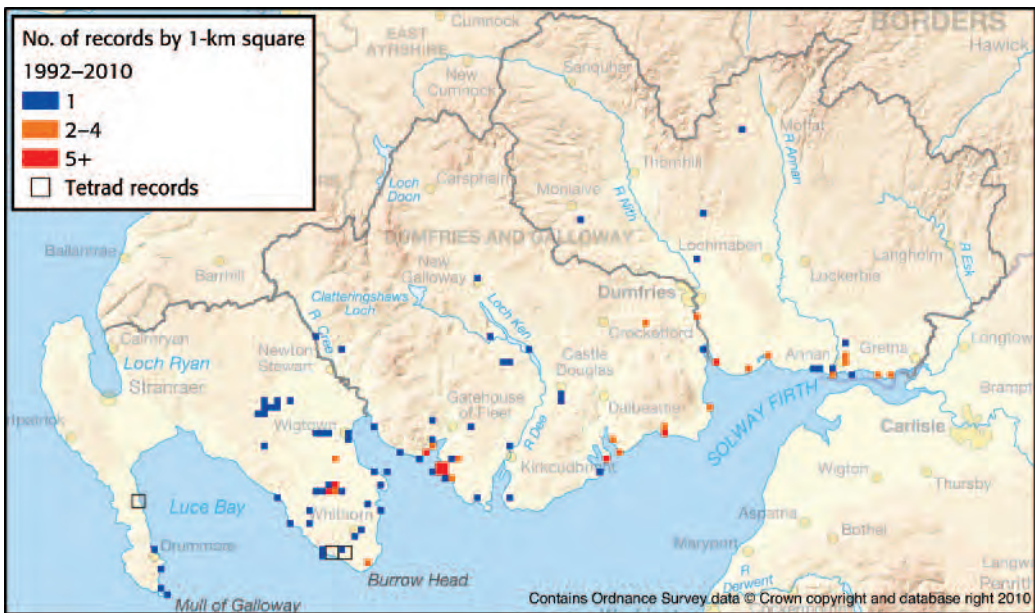


Figure 2. Distribution of Lesser Whitethroat records, Dumfries & Galloway, 1992–2010.

The 1968–72 *Atlas* recorded possible breeding in only two 10-km squares. The 1988–1991 *Atlas* recorded proof of breeding in one 10-km square with possible breeding in a further five 10-km squares, including the earliest known Wigtownshire bird in suitable habitat (Figure 1). This atlas missed confirmed breeding in 1985, on the RSPB Loch Ken/River Dee Marshes Reserve, as well as a second successful nest in 1992 at Cardoness, near Gatehouse. It also happened to cover the only recent year without a single record, 1990, when numbers were below average in Ayrshire (Byars

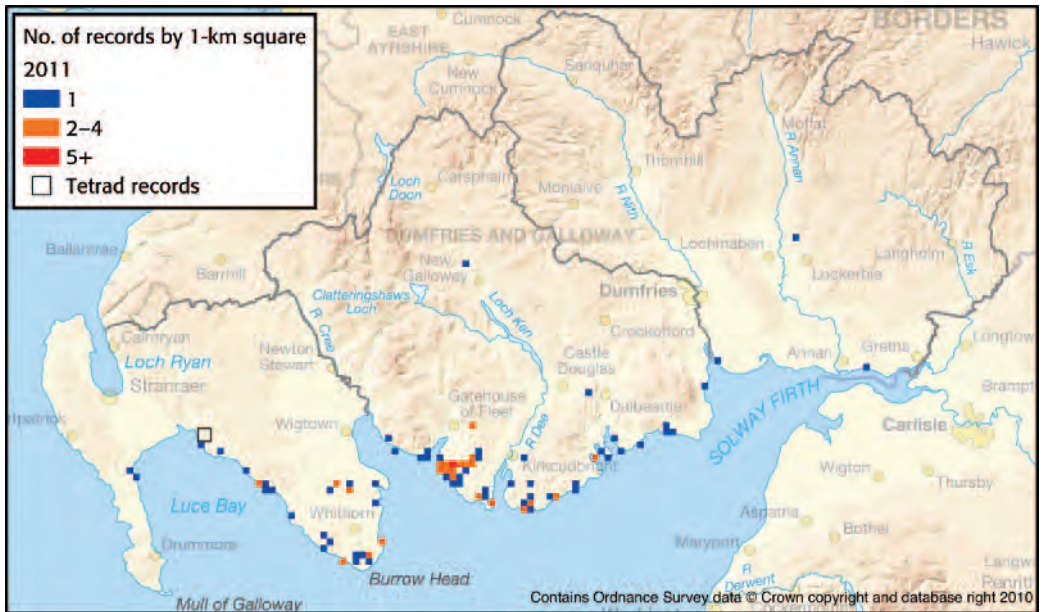


Figure 3. Distribution of Lesser Whitethroat records, Dumfries & Galloway, 2011.

1991). After the 1998–1991 Atlas, more and more Lesser Whitethroats were reported (Figures 2–3). Most of these records were of singing males from sites that were rarely re-visited

In 2011, fieldwork was hampered by poor weather throughout much of May and into early June, with many days rendered unsuitable by unusually stormy or wet weather. Nevertheless, we located Lesser Whitethroats at 93 sites, 33 (31%) detected as a result of song playback. Twenty-eight reports by other observers gave a total of 121 sites where birds were heard or seen (three in Dumfriesshire, 78 in Kirkcudbrightshire, 40 in Wigtownshire). The morning period from about 08:00–12:00 hrs was often most productive, but birds sang at any time of day (earliest 05:45, latest 21:40 hrs). Areas most favoured were near Gatehouse (around Knockbrex, Carrick and Cardoness) where 34 birds were detected during 13–15 May, and from Southwick to Auchencairn, the Kirkcudbright MOD Range & Training Area and the Machars of Wigtownshire. Only one record came from the Ken valley between Castle Douglas and St John’s Town of Dalry, where birds were often present in the 1980s. Few birds were found on the coastal fringes of the inner Solway (from Gretna to Southernness), and only one was heard in inland Dumfriesshire. Further west, we were unable to visit all suitable places, including sites where birds were recorded in previous years, but this was compensated by records from other observers. Breeding was confirmed at less than a dozen sites and there was no information on overall breeding success or the possible disruptive effects of the poor weather in May.

Discussion

Despite Jardine’s 1839 assertion that the Lesser Whitethroat did not breed in Dumfriesshire it would be surprising if some birds did not then occur somewhere in Dumfries & Galloway since it was reported at that time for Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and the Lothians (Rennie 1831, MacGillivray 1839, Gray & Anderson 1869). The first positive mentions for the region do not appear until the 1870s and 1880s as reported by Service (1906, 1907) and Maxwell (1884). Service gave no reasons for dismissing Lesser Whitethroat reports for the inland parishes of Glencairn and Tynron noted by Corrie (1890, 1910) and Shaw (1899). Service’s own assertion that it bred in

Table 1. Published Lesser Whitethroat records in Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire, up to 1950.

Year	Date	Report	Location	Reference
1839		'Upon the Border in Scotland ...there has been no instance of its capture.'	Dumfriesshire	Jardine (1839)
1839		...appearing in the south of Scotland [Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, and Edinburgh are among the places mentioned] where however it is very uncommon, about the 10th May...'	South Scotland	MacGillivray (1839)
1869		'This warbler was well known as an Ayrshire bird thirty years ago. We are not, however, certain of its being a native of Wigtownshire.'	Wigtownshire	Gray & Anderson (1869)
c.1870		'When I was a boy [born 1854] I found one nest... on the farm of Conhuith, an egg of which I still have in my collection.'	Cargenbridge, 2 km west of Dumfries (Kirkcudbrightshire)	Service (1907)
1884		'The Common Whitethroat abounds but the Lesser Whitethroat is very seldom met with, though a constant summer visitant.'	Kirkcudbrightshire	Maxwell (1884)
1890		'The Lesser Whitethroat... may perhaps be considered rare'	Glencairn Parish, Dumfriesshire	Corrie (1890)
1899		'The lesser white-throat and chiff-chaff are rare' [Common Whitethroat not mentioned]	Upper Nithsdale (mainly Tynron parish)	Shaw (1899)
1899		'Mr Service tells me it is a rare summer visitor to Dumfriesshire, and that he has found two nests in that county [cf. Service 1907], but that the bird is seldom met with in Kirkcudbrightshire... It is a rare and extremely local summer visitor to south-western Scotland, occurring only as far north as Ayrshire.'	SW Scotland	Clarke (1902)
1902		'...the Lesser Whitethroat, though it has been known to nest, is of very casual occurrence.'	Kirkcudbrightshire	Service (1902)
1906		'In all my experience I have only met with it on two occasions, and although I have heard its peculiar note at times all my endeavours to get a local specimen have failed.'	'Solway '	Service (1906)
1906	June	'a nest with four eggs of this rare bird was found early in June, 1906, amidst some bramble bushes on the banks of the River Annan.'	Moffat, Dumfriesshire	Johnstone (1907)
1907		'...in later years I had the pleasure of examining a nest of young on Dalscairth, some three miles from Dumfries, and at various dates I have both seen and heard this species.'	Near Dumfries [but in Kirkcudbrightshire]	Service (1907)
1907	16 June	'Mr. W. Bell ...informs me that he found a nest with five eggs in a whin-bush on the Solway shore in Dornock parish on June 16th, 1907, and one of these eggs sent to me for verification was undoubtedly of this species.'	Dornock Parish, Dumfriesshire	Gladstone (1910)
1907		'The late Rev. H.A. Macpherson and others have found this bird breeding in Eskdale, where its status, I believe, is much the same as it is in Cumberland...'	Error for Eskdale in Cumbria	Service (1907)
1910		'Lesser Whitethroat. Summer visitant. Perhaps infrequent.'	Glencairn Parish, Dumfriesshire	Corrie (1910)

1910	'Mr J. Harkness writes me from Ruthwell that "an odd pair used to nest, not noticed lately."	Ruthwell Parish, Dumfriesshire	Gladstone (1910)
1912 31 July	'I saw a Lesser Whitethroat ...near Lockerbie House ...in all probability it had nested in the neighbourhood... it was a very familiar Fair Isle friend.'	Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire	Stout (1912)
1912 or 1913	'An egg which was taken [by Mr. E.W. Brook near Kinmount, Cummertrees] in 1912, or 1913, and which he sent me for identification, was undoubtedly that of a Lesser Whitethroat.'	West of Annan, Dumfriesshire	Gladstone (1924)
1914 30 April /1 May	'One was taken on the lantern at the Mull of Galloway Lighthouse by Mr. Chas Braid on 1st May, 1914 and sent to the Misses Baxter & Rintoul' (Gordon ms); 'A Lesser Whitethroat was killed at the Mull of Galloway lantern on 30th April/1st May and sent to us' (Baxter & Rintoul 1915).	Wigtownshire	Gordon ms; Baxter & Rintoul (1915)
1915 6 May	'Mr James Bartholomew ...believes he saw two Lesser Whitethroats at the bridge over the Evan at Beattock on 6th May, 1915.'	Beattock, Dumfriesshire	Gladstone (1924)
1916 8 May	'A bird of this species was killed at Little Ross lantern at 1 am on May 8th [1916].'	Kirkcudbrightshire	Rintoul & Baxter (1917)
1916 4–8 June	'...in full song in the trees round about the house [Kirkclaugh, Gatehouse of Fleet]. I have no doubt that it was breeding there, although I failed to locate the nest.'	Kirkcudbrightshire	Bolam (1916)
1919 27 August	'The only note in 1919 is from Little Ross on 27th August.'	Kirkcudbrightshire	Rintoul & Baxter (1920)
1920 15/16 April	One in evening of 15th and several the following morning on Little Ross Island	Kirkcudbrightshire	Begg (1920)
1921	'Mr. E.W. Brook informs me that this species nests annually near Kinmount (Cummertrees) and that in 1921 he knew of three, or four, pairs.'	West of Annan, Dumfriesshire	Gladstone (1924)
1947	'This is a species of which our knowledge is extremely unsatisfactory. It occurs on passage, probably in some numbers, and has undoubtedly bred [Bolam 1916] but probably does not do so regularly.'	Kirkcudbrightshire	Duncan (1947)

Eskdale seems to be due to confusion with the Eskdale in Cumbria (Oldham 1907), especially as Gladstone (1910) makes no reference to Service's statement. Although Gladstone had reservations about breeding reports from Moffat and Ruthwell prior to 1910 as there was no corroborative evidence, a few years later he verified eggs from sites to the east and west of Annan suggesting that the Lesser Whitethroat was then established in lower Annandale, especially as there was also possible breeding near Lockerbie and Beattock.

It therefore seems likely that this warbler has occasionally bred in some part of Dumfries & Galloway since at least the 1830s and more regularly in the latter part of the 1800s into the 1920s. There appears to have then been a period of decline, though this could have been accentuated by a general lack of observers up until the 1960s and the absence of any comprehensive ornithological local publication between Gladstone (1924) and Duncan (1947–48). The *Scottish Naturalist*, one of the few outlets for rare bird observations, provided just a handful of Lesser Whitethroat records (chiefly from the lighthouses at Little Ross and Mull of Galloway). In

Cumbria, numbers were already rising in the 1970s (Hutcheson 1986), but in Dumfries & Galloway Lesser Whitethroats did not appear to increase until the 1980s, perhaps due to the slow upward trend in the numbers of recorders. In 1965, when the first local bird report was compiled, there were 37 contributors, with 55 for the 1985 report, and 192 (not including Birdtrack and BirdGuides) for the 2010 report. This is still not a large number of observers considering the size of the region and the present amount of habitat.

Most pre-1950 reports of Lesser Whitethroats came from areas still favoured today: parts of lower Nithsdale and lower Annandale within a few miles of the Solway, and the coastal fringes near Kirkcudbright and Gatehouse. Records from upper Annandale in the early 1900s have not been matched in recent years, probably because there appears to be little suitable scrub available there now. In the Ken valley, where it was seen regularly between 1981 and 1989, breeding has not been sustained, thought to be due to genuine decline (R.G. Hawley pers. comm.), perhaps the result of natural variation in the number of spring arrivals or the result of scrub degradation by grazing. In the Machars, birds have probably been overlooked for decades, though it seems numbers did not rapidly increase there until the late 1990s (G. Vowles pers. comm.).

Habitat and altitudinal preferences are broadly similar to those outlined for Clyde and Ayrshire (Byars *et al.* 1991), except that in Dumfries & Galloway the majority of sites included thickets of Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. Birds were also present on steep coastal slope and cliff where low wind-sculpted Blackthorn and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* predominated, in addition to gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Dog Rose *Rosa canina* and Burnet Rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*. Another difference is that there were three reports of birds in conifer plantations at around 200 m, though there is no information on how long these birds stayed.

Although scrub is increasing at some locations there have been no local studies into whether there has been an overall increase or decrease in the amount of scrub. The impression over much of the last 40 years is that there has been little overall change in its abundance until recently (R. C. Dickson and D. Hawker pers. comm., R. & B. Mearns pers. obs.). Scrub is undervalued by most landowners, and while in the past it was temporarily curtailed by burning or cutting, the current trend is to use heavy machinery to dig out and permanently eliminate it. Unfortunately, stricter enforcement of the rule of the Single Farm Payment Scheme that land with 'dense vegetation cover' is ineligible for grants has had the inadvertent but predictable effect of encouraging more farmers to remove scrub.

Mist-netting might quickly reveal the presence of additional breeding birds (da Prato 1980) but has been carried out only at one small site (near Kennethbank, below Glencaple) where birds were caught in 2000, 2002 (including juveniles in August and September) and in 2008 (an adult with brood patch). Two birds have also been caught at a BTO Constant Effort Site in a reed-bed at Lochfoot, a few miles west of Dumfries (juvenile 30 August 2000, adult 12 May 2009). Any bird caught late in the year may have come from elsewhere or be the result of late nesting after early failure. Second broods are rare in Scotland (T. Byars in Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The next bird atlas will show far more hectads in Dumfries & Galloway occupied by Lesser Whitethroats than the two previous atlases, with apparent westward expansion into Wigtownshire. There has certainly been an upsurge of records in recent years but we believe this is partly due to the increase in observer effort, particularly in 2011. While a small proportion of these birds will have been on migration or un-mated transient males, this can be offset by the detection rate, which cannot have been completely successful, either because some sites were visited before birds had arrived or because birds were present but not heard or seen. For example, two birds were seen at sites where song playback was attempted earlier without success (and the method has also been shown to be occasionally ineffective in Ayrshire (T. Byars pers. comm.)).

Two observers reported more birds than they had heard in previous years, but otherwise there was little indication that 2011 was exceptional, as the total number of records from other observers in Dumfries & Galloway was only slightly above average for recent years, and numbers were little changed in Ayrshire and Clyde (T. Byars pers. comm.).

Estimating the actual number of breeding pairs remains difficult. In 2011, birds were located at 121 sites. If the years 2008 to 2011 are combined, then the total rises to over 150 sites. Allowing for additional pairs in unchecked habitat, it seems more than likely that the number of Lesser Whitethroat pairs in Dumfries & Galloway now exceeds 200, ten times as many as suggested by Byars (2007).

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Plate 4. Magpie, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, April 2008. © Ian Andrews

The selection of tree species by nesting Magpies in Edinburgh

H.E.M. DOTT

A total of 185 Magpie nests was recorded in 120 km² of urban and suburban habitat in Edinburgh. Sampling counts of different species of trees were used to assess the availability of different species to Magpies for nesting in: 84 of the 185 nests were in trees recorded during these sampling counts. An index of tree selection based on the proportion of nests found in each species of tree relative to the proportion to be expected due to the availability of each species of tree was used to indicate the degree of preference by Magpies. Preference and avoidance for particular tree species shown by the results mainly supported earlier studies, though there was a strong preference for Monkey Puzzle which is a relatively scarce species. This preference is not shown by previous studies nor by the BTO Nest Record Scheme which indicates Hawthorn as the most used tree.

Introduction

Magpies *Pica pica* use a large variety of tree species for nesting in Britain and elsewhere. The species of trees used are influenced by the kinds available in any locality. Magpies also show preferences for different trees among the kinds available locally, and this can differ in different localities. Few previous studies of Magpies give much information on their tree preferences in relation to availability. Tree preferences were investigated in Manchester and Sheffield in England by Tatner (1982a) and Birkhead (1991) respectively, and some Scottish information is contained in Duncan (1938), Love & Summers (1973) and A. Young in Forrester *et al.* (2007). Studies abroad are reported in Birkhead (1991) and Cramp & Perrins (1994). Examples of Magpies using unusual nest sites in atypical habitats, and nesting in man-made structures, are given in Birkhead (1991), Cramp & Perrins (1994) and Young in Forrester *et al.* (2007).

In the city of Edinburgh, where the density of Magpies has increased (pers. obs.) since it was studied in 1992–93 (Dott 1994), it became apparent since about 2000 that Magpies commonly nest in the Monkey Puzzle or Chile Pine *Araucaria araucana*. There are few published records of Magpies nesting in Monkey Puzzles. An early questionnaire survey of distribution of Magpies in all regions of Scotland (Duncan 1938) noted that they nested in tree species “as diverse as saughs (willows) and Monkey Puzzles”. In Wales, 417 Magpie nests were noted and one was in a Monkey Puzzle (Venables & Venables 1955). More recently two were observed in a suburb in Aberdeen (Woolfson 2009). In Edinburgh, a nest was found in a Monkey Puzzle in 1993 (Dott 1994), and four more noted there in 1994–95 (pers. obs.). In 1995, one was in a Monkey Puzzle at Airthrey Castle, Bridge of Allan, central Scotland (pers. obs.). In 2010, one was noted in Barrhead, East Renfrewshire (D. Clugston pers. comm.), and in the same year one each were seen in Broxburn and Uphall 10 km and 12 km west of the edge of Edinburgh (pers. obs.). To investigate Magpies’ preferences for different kinds of trees further, a more extensive field study was made in Edinburgh during 2006 to 2008.

The study area

Magpies were studied in Edinburgh from the centre outwards to the A720 city bypass road to the east, south and west, and to the coast of the Firth of Forth to the north. This area forms the bulk of the city of Edinburgh and is about 120 km² in extent. The study area includes the historic city centre; tenement housing of late 19th–early 20th centuries; inner suburbs of 19th–20th century houses and mature gardens; large residential areas of 20th century and recent housing; extensive office and commercial areas in central, mid and outer zones; many urban parks with grass, shrubs, trees, strips and patches of woods, rough ground, hills and crags; the Water of Leith corridor with river and wooded banks; smaller river corridors; and a network of former railway lines fringed with trees, shrubs and other plants.



Plate 5. Magpie nest in winter in a planted thicket of alder, Rowan, rose and Ash; though deteriorated, the remains of the dome can still be seen, Edinburgh, December 2012. © Harry Dott

Methods

From November 2006 to September 2008, I travelled by bus, car and on foot through all the habitats described above, and recorded all Magpie nests seen, and the species of tree which contained each nest. In the case of Monkey Puzzle trees, I examined and recorded every tree seen including those that contained a Magpie nest and those that did not. Young Monkey Puzzle trees up to about 3 m height were not recorded, as at this stage they have an open growth form with large spaces between branches, and so are unsuitable for construction or concealment of Magpie nests. For consistency, young trees of all other species below about 3 m height were not included, though some large woody shrubs slightly below this height were included. With hedges, only trees in them of about 3 m and higher were noted.

Nests were looked for in all seasons. Following the success or failure of nests was not part of the study. Nests recorded must have included some that raised young, some that failed at egg or young stage, some built but abandoned, and some old or disused: up to 54–57% of nests present in a breeding season may be disused (Tatner 1982b). Sites of all nests were noted so that no individual nest was counted twice.

Nests built in two adjacent trees were each recorded, being separate choices of tree by Magpies, even though such nests are likely to have been built by the same pair (Birkhead 1991). Two nests in the same tree were recorded as one, being a single tree-choice by Magpies. Any nest which was present in more than one year whether reused or not was similarly recorded as one.

Completed Magpie nests were with practice easily distinguishable as those of Magpies, and many before and after completion were also recognisable. Any nests that were not readily distinguishable from those of Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*, Rook *C. frugilegus*, Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* or other species were not recorded. All Magpie nests found in this study were domed except for two: one in a Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and one in a Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, where in both cases insufficient twig growth above the nests may have made construction of a dome difficult. The proportion of un-domed Magpie nests in different localities varies considerably (Birkhead 1991, Cramp & Perrins 1994).

In order to assess the availability to Magpies of different species of tree, sample counts were made of all tree species seen while walking in different localities in the study area, chosen at random, but ensuring that they were in all parts of the study area, and in all habitats described above. These tree counts were made on routes that varied from straight to complex, were of no fixed distance, and of no fixed duration varying from 10 to 40 minutes. The sum of these sample counts for each species of tree, including those containing Magpie nests, was taken to indicate the availability of different tree species to Magpies. Magpies' preference for each species of tree was calculated using Jacobs' preference index (Jacobs 1974). This index (D) was derived from the proportion of each tree species available (p) and the proportion of nests in each tree species (q) by the formula $D = (q - p) / (q + p - 2qp)$. Values range between +1 (preference) and -1 (avoidance), with zero indicating a neutral selection.

To seek relevant unpublished information, a visit was made to the British Trust for Ornithology's headquarters to examine their nest record cards for Magpies for any information they might hold on Magpies' tree preferences for nesting.

Results

Table 1 shows the abundance counts of species of trees, the numbers of Magpie nests in them, Magpies' percentage use of each tree species, and Magpies' preference for each tree species. The data show clearly that some species were favoured by Magpies, some were avoided, and others used to intermediate extent. The highest preference index was for Monkey Puzzle, though it was derived from a small sample of trees and nests. However, it is supported by additional data: the total number of Monkey Puzzle trees located in the study area was 43, of which 15 contained Magpie nests (including the seven trees and four nests in Table 1) which is 34.9% use of Monkey Puzzles by Magpies. This is 8.5–100 times higher use than for all of the more abundant tree species in Table 1.

Amongst trees with larger sample sizes in Table 1, those with highest preference rates after Monkey Puzzle were Hawthorn, Whitebeam, Horse Chestnut and Norway Spruce.

For tree species where the sample sizes were small, caution must be attached to the preference levels in Table 1. Many large Cotoneasters were examined in addition to those in Table 1, and no Magpie nests were found in them; this suggests that the preference rate in Table 1 was high by chance due to small sample size. Pear and Apple were lumped together due to difficulty in distinguishing these from each other when not in leaf; the nest in Table 1 was in Pear. Additional Pear and Apple trees were found to those in Table 1 with no Magpie nests, and so the selection level in the small sample may be elevated by chance. Seven nests in Beech and six nests in Holly were found in addition to the single nests in the samples, suggesting the selection levels in Table 1 may be lower than larger samples might have measured.

Table 1. Tree abundances measured by sample counts, and Magpies' use of tree species for nest-building, in Edinburgh during 2006–2008.

Tree or shrub species	Number of trees in sample counts	% tree species	Number of Magpie nests	% of tree species used by Magpies	Magpies' preference (Jacobs') index for tree species
de = deciduous, ev = evergreen					
de Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	1917	25.1	26	1.4	0.14
de Lime <i>Tilia x europaea</i>	687	9.0	2	0.3	-0.60
de cherry <i>Prunus avium</i> , <i>P. serrulata</i> & varieties	657	8.6	7	1.1	-0.02
de Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	543	7.1	20	3.7	0.61
de birch <i>Betula pubescens</i> , <i>B. pendula</i> & varieties	399	5.2	2	0.5	-0.39
de Ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	291	3.8	0	0.0	-1.00
de Norway Maple <i>Acer platanoides</i> & varieties	289	3.8	1	0.3	-0.52
ev cypress Cupressaceae	263	3.4	0	0.0	-1.00
de Wych Elm <i>Ulmus glabra</i>	217	2.8	0	0.0	-1.00
ev Pine <i>Pinus sylvestris</i> & <i>P. nigra</i>	205	2.7	0	0.0	-1.00
de poplar <i>Populus nigra</i> var <i>italica</i> , <i>P. sp.</i>	203	2.7	0	0.0	-1.00
de alder <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> , <i>A. cordata</i>	195	2.6	3	1.5	0.17
ev Norway Spruce <i>Picea abies</i>	188	2.5	5	2.7	0.43
de Beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	172	2.3	1	0.6	-0.31
de Whitebeam <i>Sorbus aria</i>	171	2.2	7	4.1	0.60
de Elder <i>Sambucus nigra</i>	146	1.9	2	1.4	0.11
de Blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i>	139	1.8	1	0.7	-0.21
de oak <i>Quercus petraea</i> , <i>Q. robur</i> , & hybrids	136	1.8	0	0.0	-1.00
de willow <i>Salix alba</i> , & hybrids	135	1.8	1	0.7	-0.20
de larch <i>Larix decidua</i> , <i>L. kaempferi</i> & hybrids	129	1.7	0	0.0	-1.00
ev Holly <i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	110	1.4	1	0.9	-0.10
de Rowan <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	101	1.3	1	1.0	-0.05
de Jersey (Wheatley) Elm <i>Ulmus minor</i>	63	0.8	1	1.6	0.18
de Horse Chestnut <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	61	0.8	2	3.3	0.50
ev Yew <i>Taxus baccata</i>	34	0.4	0	0.0	-1.00
ev cedar <i>Cedrus</i> sp.	32	0.4	0	0.0	-1.00
ev gum <i>Eucalyptus</i> sp.	28	0.4	0	0.0	-1.00
de London Plane <i>Platanus x hispanica</i>	27	0.4	0	0.0	-1.00
de laburnum <i>Laburnum</i> sp.	18	0.2	0	0.0	-1.00
de Pear <i>Pyrus communis</i> varieties & Apple <i>Malus domestica</i> varieties	16	0.2	1	6.3	0.70
ev Tree Cotoneaster <i>Cotoneaster frigidus</i> & hybrids	11	0.1	1	9.1	0.79
de false acacia <i>Robinia</i> sp.	10	0.1	0	0.0	-1.00
de Hazel <i>Corylus avellana</i>	9	0.1	0	0.0	-1.00
de Butterfly Bush <i>Buddleia davidii</i>	9	0.1	0	0.0	-1.00
de Lilac <i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	8	0.1	0	0.0	-1.00
ev Monkey Puzzle <i>Araucaria araucana</i>	7	0.1	4	57.1	0.96
ev Cherry Laurel <i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	6	0.1	0	0.0	-1.00
de Field Maple <i>Acer campestre</i>	5	0.1	0	0.0	-1.00
Totals de (n = 28)	6753	88.4	73	1.1	-0.07
ev (n = 10)	884	11.6	11	1.2	0.07
all (n= 38)	7637	100	84	1.1	0.00

The only nest recorded in Jersey Elm was in an atypical tree; the main trunk was broken at mid-height and the nest built on the broken end. Without this nest the Magpies' selection rate would have been 0%. One of the two nests in Birch was similarly on the sawn-off end of the main trunk. In Lime, a numerous species, one of the only two nests recorded was in a tree pollarded some years earlier, thereby artificially altering the growth form. Disregarding this nest shows Lime as a species that was virtually shunned by Magpies.

Tree species found in the study area with Magpie nests but not in the sample counts were: four nests in pine (three, *Pinus sylvestris*; one, *P. nigra*), one in cypress Cupressaceae, three in Field Maple *Acer campestre*, two in poplar (*Populus nigra* var *italica*, *P. sp.*), one in Walnut *Juglans regia*, one in Portuguese Laurel *Prunus lusitanica*, two in tall (3.5 m) Garden Privet *Ligustrum ovalifolium*, one in Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, and one in a 2 m tall Rose *Rosa* sp. in a hedge of intertwining Hawthorn and Rose. Privet and Gorse are very abundant in Edinburgh as hedges and on hills respectively; the vast majority are below the growth height considered here and were not thought to contain many Magpie nests. One nest was in an Ash 0.5 km outside the study area, and one in a gum tree in the study area prior to the study. A few Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*, Plum *Prunus domestica*, Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, Wellingtonia *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, and palms Palmaceae were encountered and had no Magpie nests.

Table 2. Numbers of trees or shrubs noted as the nest site on BTO Nest Record Cards (NCRs) for Magpies, 1962–93 and 2000–08 inclusive. Note: scientific tree names were rarely recorded on NCRs, so tree names here are not given to species level where there may be doubt. Also noted as nest site (one of each) were: hole in quarry, ledge on ground, roof of tall building, top of mining tower, and in crane jib.

Tree or shrub species	England	Wales	Eire & N. Ireland	Scotland	all UK & Eire
Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	632	90	99	7	828
Blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i>	185	8	6		199
oak <i>Quercus</i> sp.	62	9	6		77
Holly <i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	54	6			60
willow <i>Salix</i> sp.	44	4	3	2	53
Beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	35		4		39
Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	31		7	1	39
Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	35	2			37
elm <i>Ulmus</i> sp.	33	1	2		36
birch <i>Betula</i> sp.	30	3	1	1	35
pine <i>Pinus</i> sp.	25	2	3	4	34
Ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	22	4	6		32
Apple <i>Malus domestica</i> , Crab Apple <i>M. sylvestris</i>	28	1	1		30
cypress Cupressaceae	25	1			26
poplar <i>Populus</i> sp.	23				23
cherry, plum <i>Prunus</i> sp.	21	1	1		23
spruce, fir <i>Picea</i> sp. and similar	13	1	3	4	21
alder <i>Alnus</i> sp.	10	3	7		20
lime <i>Tilia</i> sp.	18				18
larch <i>Larix</i> sp.	6	2	1		9
Horse Chestnut <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	7	1			8
Elder <i>Sambucus nigra</i>	6	1			7
Hornbeam <i>Carpinus betulus</i>	6				6
Field Maple <i>Acer campestre</i>	5				5
Pear <i>Pyrus communis</i>	5				5
Rowan <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	3		1		4
maple <i>Acer</i> sp.	3				3
Hazel <i>Corylus avellana</i>	2	1			3
Walnut <i>Juglans regia</i>	2				2
gum <i>Eucalyptus</i> sp.	2				2
rhododendron <i>Rhododendron</i> sp.	2				2
rose <i>Rosa</i> sp.	2				2
Sweet Chestnut <i>Castanea sativa</i>			1		1
London Plane <i>Platanus x hispanica</i>	1				1
Yew <i>Taxus baccata</i>	1				1
cedar <i>Cedrus</i> sp.	1				1
laburnum <i>Laburnum</i> sp.	1				1
butterfly bush <i>Buddleia</i> sp.	1				1
gorse <i>Ulex</i> sp.	1				1
Totals	1383	141	152	19	1695



Plate 6. Young Monkey Puzzle tree, Edinburgh, 2012. At c.8 m height, this young tree still has a fairly open growth structure. It held a Magpie nest that in a later year was renovated and lined by a Carrion Crow though it did not lay a clutch in it. © Harry Dott



Plate 7. Mature Monkey Puzzle tree, Edinburgh, 2012. In the dense growth of older Monkey Puzzles, Magpies tend to nest in the upper outer branches, while in more open less mature Monkey Puzzles they may nest further within the branches closer to the main trunk. © Harry Dott

Table 2 shows information from Nest Record Cards (NRCs) at the British Trust for Ornithology. The BTO has 8558 Magpie NRCs to 2010 inclusive, with fewer per year prior to the 1960s. A total of 6138 cards from 41 years between 1961 and 2009 was examined, comprising a sample of 72% of all the cards. Each NRC records one nest in one year. Recorders are encouraged though not required to name the species of tree which contained the nest. Only 1695 cards (Table 2) of the 6138 sample named the nest-tree clearly; the remainder did not or were ambiguous. To interpret Table 2 in relation to Magpies' preferences for tree species, likely biases must be considered. Recorders of nests must find it harder to reach or view into nests in tall species of trees than smaller species, particularly trees that are both tall and dense such as some conifers. An indication of this was that many of the cards giving tall-maturing species as the nest-tree such as oak, Beech, elm or Ash stated "sapling oak", "sapling Beech", etc. There are further reasons not to assume too much precision in the ranking of species in Table 2. Some active recorders appeared to favour certain habitats or return to particular localities; there were runs of cards that seemed to refer to the same tree over successive years, so for example 15 Limes in Table 2 might have been nests in 15 trees in one year or in the same tree over 15 years. In addition, recorder density varied through different parts of the British Isles and there was a scarcity of records from Scotland and Eire. The 37 cards noting Bramble comprised 24 close to the Calf of Man Bird Observatory, and the others were mostly in the area of one recorder in south-east England. However, the 41-year sample of NRCs contained no records of Monkey Puzzle, showed that Hawthorn is generally the Magpie's most favoured nest tree in Britain and Eire and that Blackthorn is strongly favoured in areas where it is plentiful.

Discussion and conclusions

The main findings were that in Edinburgh, Monkey Puzzle showed the highest preference index by Magpies for any tree species. This high preference was remarkable; over one third of all Monkey Puzzle trees held nests, and the four nests in Monkey Puzzles in tree samples were 4.8% of nests in all tree species samples though the abundance of Monkey Puzzles was only 0.1% of all trees. Sycamore and Hawthorn together held over half of all Magpie nests: Hawthorn due to being abundant and strongly preferred, and Sycamore due to being of great abundance and moderately preferred. There may be unknown biases relating to observation of nests in different trees. It is possible that Magpie nests might remain longer in Monkey Puzzles than in other trees before becoming unrecognisable due to weather or removal of twigs by birds. However, if such a difference in deterioration rate exists, observations suggested it would be too slight to change the conclusion that Monkey Puzzles had a much higher preference rate by Magpies than other trees.

The extent to which Magpies' selection of nesting trees may have been influenced by other factors than tree species was considered. Whether a tree selected was exposed or sheltered to wind and sun; was tall with commanding view or short and concealed from view; close to human habitation or not; close to disturbance such as noise or traffic or not; near corners, edges or centres of gardens, parks or tree-patches; close or not to grass or other food sources; or near or not to other species' nests, all could have influenced where a Magpie built a nest as well as the type of tree.

Although these factors were not tested, it is felt that the tree preferences presented here are valid and not affected significantly by these other possibilities. Magpies in Edinburgh chose remarkably contrasting sites for nest building. For example, some selected tall, conspicuous trees well separated from other high trees or buildings where the nest was very visible and exposed to wind or sun from all directions. However, others chose well concealed sites where the nest was difficult to see and sheltered, such as in dense twiggy growth in clumped small trees or in an overgrown hedge. Nest sites chosen ranged from quiet parks, gardens in secluded zones, gardens in busier denser housing, trees in quiet streets, and beside major city streets where the nest-tree sometimes overhung the noisy dense passing traffic. Nests were at times in sight of Carrion Crow or Grey Squirrel nests. The species of tree selected by Magpies did not seem to relate to any of these contrasting factors.

Monkey Puzzle trees were usually fairly isolated and conspicuous, but other common tall species were also plentiful in such positions. Whitebeams, Jersey Elms and cherries were often in rows along streets, though the latter were also abundant in gardens and parks. Hawthorns were most frequent as hedges but were also common in parks. Grass is an important foraging habitat for Magpies in the nesting season (Tatner 1983) but as long as grass is available somewhere in or near a Magpie's territory the choice of tree to nest in is normally large in a major city such as Edinburgh. Magpies were not found to nest in the interiors of woods or large tree patches in Edinburgh, which agrees with previous observations elsewhere (Goodwin 1986).

What makes tree species attractive to Magpies? Nest building usually begins before deciduous trees are in leaf, apart from some replacement or late nests. None of the seven most abundant trees were evergreen, whereas three of the seven most preferred trees were evergreen (Table 1), and the preference for all evergreens lumped was marginally positive while for all deciduous species it was marginally negative. This suggests that being evergreen might be an attractive factor to Magpies, perhaps due to better nest concealment, but it may be only one amongst other factors. No correlation between date of onset of leaf cover and tree species selected was found by Tatner (1982a).

In Monkey Puzzles, the stiff jagged foliage may give good anchorage for a nest and some discouragement to potential predators, and the mature trees give good nest concealment though less mature trees do not. Structure and growth form of the smaller branches, and perhaps degree of roughness of bark surface, may be significant. Hawthorn, Pear, Whitebeam, Sycamore, Norway

Maple, and Field Maple have robust (not flexible) small branches which divide with relatively pronounced angles to each other, have not too large distances of space between each other, bark relatively rough, and in the case of Hawthorn and Pear usually have dense strong twig growth. In contrast, Wych Elm, birch, poplar, willow and gum have flexible branches, less pronounced angles of division, and smoother bark on small branches. Beech, Horse Chestnut, Holly and Rowan are intermediate in these characteristics. Ash and Lime have large distances of space between branches, as do some varieties of cherry. Whitebeam and Rowan have rather similar growth form to each other, but the leaves of the former give better concealment. In conifers, spruces have relatively robust and dense twig growth, pines less so, cypresses dense but flexible, while larches have open and flexible structure. In Sycamore in Edinburgh, Magpies often nested in young vigorously growing trees but also in mature trees.

Magpie was the only species observed to nest in Monkey Puzzles in Edinburgh, except for one Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* nest in 2008 (S. Welch pers. comm.). Carrion Crows nested in a variety of trees including Sycamore, Beech, Scots Pine, birch and poplar and favoured tall trees, and like Magpies avoided Lime, cypress, larch, cedar and gum. Grey Squirrels in contrast showed a preference for Lime and also used Beech, oak and Sycamore, and nested more often close to trunks or main branches as well as in outer branches.

In a large study in southern Manchester, Tatner (1982a) compared nest tree choices by Magpies with availability of different trees. He found that Holly, Jersey Elm, Lombardy Poplar *P. nigra* var *italica*, Black Poplar *P. nigra*, alder and London Plane were preferred by Magpies, and that Sycamore, oak, birch, ash and lime were avoided. He considered that the preferred species provided a thicket-like canopy aiding the protection of Magpie nests against Carrion Crows, though in his study the Black "Manchester" Poplar *P. nigra* comprised one quarter of all available trees, and it could be that Magpies learned to make frequent use of this species on account of its great abundance. In contrast to the Manchester study, Sycamore was observed to be used or preferred in Cumberland (Brown 1924), Wales (Venables & Venables 1955), Aberdeenshire (Love & Summers 1973), Sheffield (Roberts 1977) and Edinburgh (present study).

Hawthorn has been widely noted as preferred or used by Magpies: in Edinburgh and rural West Lothian (Dott 1994), rural Aberdeenshire (Love & Summers 1973), Cumbernauld (Young in Forrester *et al.* 2007), Scotland generally (Duncan 1938), Cumberland (Brown 1924), Sheffield (Birkhead 1991), Manchester (Tatner 1982a), Wales (Venables & Venables 1955) and for the UK and Ireland in general by the BTO Nest Records Cards (present study).

Magpies have used the establishment of mature conifer plantations to colonise new areas, as in north-east Scotland (Watson 1948) and south-east Scotland (Dott in Murray *et al.* 1998). This could be due to the new abundance of these conifers, to the protection they give from gamekeepers, or a combination of these factors. Duncan (1938) found a general preference for nesting in conifers in Scotland, with Hawthorn second, in a time when game keeping was more intense than now, and perhaps Magpies obtained more success than by nesting in the concealment of conifers.

Abroad, Magpies have shown a preference for pine and spruce in Finland, preference for Pear and avoidance of conifers in Germany, use of *Prunus* species, willow and poplar in Poland (Cramp & Perrins 1994), and preference for conifers in Canada (Dhindsa *et al.* 1989).

Only the present study shows a strong preference for nesting in Monkey Puzzles. It is possible that this could be a recently establishing habit, at present more prevalent in certain parts of the Magpie's range than others. Magpies in Britain increased and newly colonised urban areas through the 20th century from about the 1940s onwards (Marchant *et al.* 1990, Birkhead 1991, Brown & Grice 2005), and so probably began encountering Monkey Puzzles more often from that

time, although in Scotland in the 20th century, suburban and urban areas formed refuges for Magpies from the widespread persecution in rural areas (Young in Forrester *et al.* 2007). It is of interest that Magpies in Edinburgh now show a strong preference for an introduced tree which appears to be little used by other birds or wildlife in Britain.

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Plate 8. Gruney (foreground), showing the ungrazed maritime grassland habitat in which occupied Leach's Petrel burrows were found and Ramna Stacks (background), Shetland, August 2011. © Will Miles

A survey of Leach's Petrels on Shetland in 2011

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In June, July and August 2011, 19 sites on ten islands in Shetland were surveyed for burrows occupied by Leach's Petrels using call-playback methods and endoscopy. In total, 14 occupied burrows were found: 13 on Gruney and one on Gloup Holm and each was examined using a 1.5 m length endoscope. The majority proved too deep to check conclusively, but the breeding status of adults was determined in four burrows on Gruney: two held non-breeders, one (located on 3 August) held an adult and a tiny, entirely downy chick, and one (located on 3 August) held an adult and an egg. More Leach's Petrels were heard responding to call-playback in August than in June and to find one adult with an egg and one adult with a very young chick in August was unexpected and evidence of relatively late breeding. Burrow occupancy by non-breeders was also unexpected and the occurrence of this behaviour and potential implications for the interpretation of Leach's Petrel population estimates from call-playback surveys are discussed.

Introduction

Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* is a rare breeding bird in Shetland, with a total of c.35 occupied burrows recorded during the *Seabird 2000* census, on two remote islands, Foula and Gruney (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). Since the early 1900s, breeding had been suspected on Foula, but was confirmed only in 1974 when a burrow was found at The Noup containing an adult and a chipping egg (Mainwood 1975, Pennington *et al.* 2004). A total of c.15 apparently occupied nest sites was estimated for Foula during *Seabird 2000* (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). In August 1980, Jim Fowler found Leach's Petrels present in ten burrows on Gruney (Fowler 1982, Pennington *et al.* 2004). No eggs or chicks were located that year, but in July 1981 Gruney was resurveyed using call-playback and seven burrows found containing adults, including two with eggs (Fowler & Butler 1982). The colony has since been monitored by RSPB and up to 23 occupied burrows located in any one year (Ellis *et al.* 1997, Pennington *et al.* 2004), with ten found during the last survey, in 2004. In August 2010, Leach's Petrels were discovered in burrows on a third island, Gloop Holm. Four adults were located using call-playback, three had highly vascularised brood patches entirely bare of feathering and two were occupying a burrow that contained a nest; however, all burrows were very deep and no eggs or chicks were found (Miles *et al.* 2010).

Breeding has long been suspected on one other island in Shetland: Fair Isle. Here, a downy juvenile was found at the South Lighthouse in October 1975, three adults were heard calling from the north cliffs in July 1981 and at least two adults were heard calling from the cliffs and scree in the Kirm o' Skroo in July 2006 and July 2007 (Fair Isle Bird Observatory Reports 1970–2008, Dymond 1991). Prior to this study, prospective surveys for occupied burrows using call-playback had never been carried out on Fair Isle. It has also been speculated that Leach's Petrels might breed on other islands in Shetland, particularly those in the north that are located closest to the continental shelf break (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Pennington *et al.* 2004, Miles *et al.* 2010). Relatively close proximity to deep oceanic water appears to be critical to the existence of Leach's Petrel colonies in the UK. All known UK colonies are located within 70 km of the 200 m isobath and there is a significant negative correlation between colony size and distance from the continental slope, over which the species is thought to often feed (Pollock *et al.* 2000, Mitchell *et al.* 2004). The aims of this study were four-fold: 1) to carry out in one year a coordinated call-playback survey for the presence of occupied Leach's Petrel burrows at all sites in Shetland with past records of breeding or nesting; 2) to prospectively survey Fair Isle and islands in the north of Shetland for new Leach's Petrel breeding sites; 3) to examine all occupied burrows with an endoscope and determine the breeding status of adults, including any occupying burrows relatively late in the season, in early to mid-August; and 4) to revisit Gloop Holm to see whether breeding could be confirmed by observing eggs or chicks.

Methods

The Holm of Skaw, Muckle Flugga, Tipta Skerry, Cliff Skerry, North Holm, South Holm, Gloop Holm and Gruney (Figure 1) were visited by small fishing boat between 09:00 hrs and 18:00 hrs on dates between the 25 June and 18 August (see Table 1 for dates). Visits lasted from half-an-hour to seven hours, according to island size and terrain. Work on Foula and Fair Isle was carried out by the resident wardens between 25 June and 19 August. Nineteen sites on ten islands were visited in total. Sites where no evidence of breeding activity by Leach's Petrels had previously been found were selected for survey in this study because of their location in the far north of Shetland, within 70 km of the 200 m isobath (the continental shelf break; Figure 1). Sites visited on Fair Isle were selected according to previous sightings of Leach's Petrel activity (Fair Isle Bird Observatory Reports 1970–2008, Dymond 1991), accessibility, and the presence of potentially suitable breeding habitat (boulder scree and/or maritime grassland with deep mineral soil).

Most sites were visited twice, once between mid-June and mid-July and once later in the breeding season, in early to mid-August. The timing of the first visit was intended to coincide with peak

burrow occupancy during incubation and high probability of response to call-playback, following previous studies on Gruney (Ellis *et al.* 1997) and on St Kilda (Money *et al.* 2008). Second visits were made later in the season, to locate any additional occupied burrows and to check the breeding status of any adults occupying burrows in early to mid-August; a time when most breeders are thought to be away from the nest finding food for the chick (Ainslie & Atkinson 1937, Huntingdon *et al.* 1996, Ellis *et al.* 1997, Money *et al.* 2008). Every site was visited twice except for the Holm of Skaw, Muckle Flugga, Cliff Skerry, Tipta Skerry, North Holm and South Holm, which were each visited once (see discussion). At all sites, recordings of male and female Leach's Petrel purring and chatter calls were played over accessible areas of petrel breeding habitat using handheld players and speakers carried slowly c.30 cm above the ground and held at the entrance of all potentially suitable burrows. On Gruney, this was done over the western half of the island, the known location of the Leach's Petrel colony (RSPB 1992–2004, unpubl., Ellis *et al.* 1997). When an occupied burrow was found (Leach's Petrel heard responding from inside), the burrow was examined using a 1.5 m Olympus fibre-optic endoscope and the contents recorded. Vegetation height (maximum) and species composition was recorded around occupied burrows (sample area = 1 m², positioned with the burrow at the centre). Work was carried out under Schedule 1 species licence.

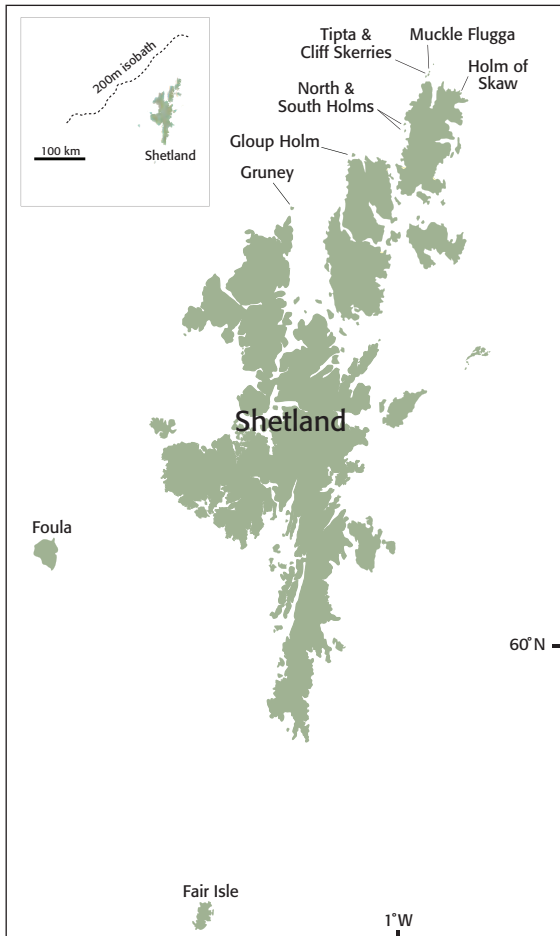


Figure 1. The location of the skerries, holms and other islands on Shetland visited during this study and (inset) the location of the 200 m isobath in relation to Shetland.

Results

In total, 14 burrows occupied by Leach's Petrels responding to call-playback were found on Shetland in 2011. Thirteen of these were on Gruney and one on the northern plateaux of Gloop Holm (Table 1). On Gruney, responses to call-playback were heard from six burrows on 30 June and from nine burrows on 3 August. During the second visit, responses were heard from only two of the burrows that had responded during the first visit, plus seven new burrows from which there had been no response during the earlier visit (Table 2). On Gloop Holm, no responses were heard on 25 June and one occupied burrow was located on 3 August. The contents of four occupied burrows were determined using the endoscope. These were all on Gruney: two burrows held an adult, but no egg or chick on 30 June and 3 August, one burrow (located on 3 August) held an adult and a tiny, entirely downy chick, and one burrow (located on 3 August) held an adult and an egg (Table 2). The contents of the other nine occupied burrows found could not be determined because they were too deep (>1.5 m) to fully explore using the endoscope. All occupied burrows were found in soft, damp mineral soil, overlain by an ungrazed vegetation layer (30–45 cm maximum height) composed of Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* (dominant three species), Common Chickweed *Stellaria*

Table 1. Islands and sites visited for call-playback surveys of occupied Leach's Petrel burrows in Shetland in 2011, with visit dates and total numbers of occupied Leach's Petrel and Storm Petrel burrows found.

Islands visited	Sites visited	1st visit	2nd visit	Total responding burrows	
				Leach's Petrel	Storm Petrel**
Foula	The Noup	13 July	19 August	0	0
Gruney	Whole island	30 June	3 August	13	1
Gloop Holm	Northern plateaux	25 June	3 August	1	0
	Southern plateaux	25 June	3 August	0	1
Fair Isle	Buness	26 June	6 August	0	0
	Greenholm	25 June	10 August	0	0
	Gunnawark	1 July	9 August	0	0
	Kim o' Skroo	26 June	6 August	0	4
	Skinner's Glig	28 June	6 August	0	0
	South Naaversgill	29 June	9 August	0	1
	Toor o' da Ward Hill	28 June	6 August	0	0
	Ward Hill	28 June	6 August	0	1
	Wester Lother	28 June	6 August	0	0
North Holm*	Whole island	25 June	-	0	0
South Holm*	Whole island	25 June	-	0	0
Cliff Skerry*	Whole island	18 August	-	0	0
Tipta Skerry*	Whole island	18 August	-	0	0
Muckle Flugga*	Whole island	18 August	-	0	0
Holm of Skaw*	Whole island	18 August	-	0	0

*Islands with no previous records of any Leach's Petrel activity, where survey visits during this study were entirely prospective. **Storm Petrels heard calling from burrows in response to playback of Leach's Petrel vocalisations.

media, Meadow-grass *Poa spp.* and Thrift *Armeria maritima* (see Plate 8). Two extra call-playback visits were made to the Noup on Foula on 21 July and 9 September, but no birds were heard or seen. Leach's Petrels were not found on any islands other than Gruney and Gloop Holm, but Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* were heard responding to playback of Leach's Petrel calls from burrows on Fair Isle (6), Gruney (1) and the southern plateaux of Gloop Holm (1; see Table 1).

Discussion

Burrows occupied by Leach's Petrels on Shetland in 2011 were few, and their distribution limited to just two small islands in the north. The small number of occupied burrows and wide range of sites to survey on Shetland prohibited use of the exact call-playback and calibration plot survey methods that have sometimes been used at other sites in the UK, in particular at St Kilda and North Rona where population sizes are much larger (see Gilbert *et al.* 1998, Ratcliffe *et al.* 1998, Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Murray *et al.* 2008, Newson *et al.* 2008, Murray *et al.* 2010). There is a possibility that additional birds might have been present on Gruney and Gloop Holm that did not respond to call-playback (see Ellis *et al.* 1998, Gilbert *et al.* 1998, Ratcliffe *et al.* 1998) and the numbers of occupied burrows found at these sites in 2011 should therefore be treated as potential minima. Occupied burrows were not found on Foula and Fair Isle, both of which are grazed by sheep and have populations of feral cats and mice that may predate petrels (e.g. De Leon *et al.* 2006, Rayner *et al.* 2007, Le Corré 2008, Bicknell *et al.* 2009). However, patchy areas of apparently suitable habitat for petrel burrows were seen covering inaccessible parts of the cliffs on these two islands, and the possibility remains that breeding may occur in places that terrestrial mammals cannot reach. The most recent record of a Leach's Petrel heard calling from a burrow on Foula was one individual that was heard at The Noup during daytime on 14 July 2002 and the most recent record of any other activity at the breeding colonies was one bird that was seen and heard calling in flight at The Noup at night on 26 July 2006 (S. Gear pers. obs.). The known breeding colonies on Foula now appear to be extinct, possibly due to predation by Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua* (T. Mainwood

Table 2. Summary of burrow occupancy by Leach's Petrels, responses to call-playback and results of burrow endoscopy on Shetland in 2011.

Site	Visit date	Burrow ID code	Response to playback	Result of endoscopy
Gruney	30 June	GR 1	Responding	Adult present with no egg or chick
		GR 2	Responding	Adult present with no egg or chick
		GR 3	Responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 4	Responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 5	Responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 6	Responding	Burrow too deep
	3 August	GR 1	Responding	Adult present with no egg or chick
		GR 2	Responding	Adult present with no egg or chick
		GR 3	Not responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 4	Not responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 5	Not responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 6	Not responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 7	Responding	Burrow too deep
Gloop Holm	25 June	GR 8	Responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 9	Responding	Burrow too deep
	3 August	GR 10	Responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 11	Responding	Burrow too deep
		GR 12	Responding	Adult with chick (small and entirely downy)
		GR 13	Responding	Adult with egg
		-	No responses	
		GH 1	Responding	Burrow too deep



& S. Gear pers. obs.) and feral cats *Felis catus* (Pennington *et al.* 2004). Six Leach's Petrels were mist netted on Fair Isle in July and August 2011 at the bird observatory during petrel ringing sessions using tape lures (e.g. Plate 9). This technique tends to attract wandering non-breeding petrels rather than breeders and it seems likely that the Leach's Petrels caught in 2011, and in previous years at the bird observatory, were probably not Fair Isle breeders (Furness & Baillie 1981, Fowler *et al.* 1982, Fowler & Okill 1988, Dymond 1991, Okill & Bolton 2005).

Weather conditions and transport logistics often limited site access and the timing of visits and meant only single visits were possible to Cliff Skerry, Tipta Skerry, Muckle Flugga and the Holm of Skaw, late in the season (Table 1). The Holm of Skaw had thin soils and large areas of solid, bare rock, while the deep soil of Cliff Skerry and Tipta Skerry (with many Puffin *Fratercula arctica* burrows) was considerably eroded with little surface vegetation present. Overall, the habitat appeared unsuitable for Leach's Petrel burrows on these islands. Muckle Flugga had relatively high cliffs and patchier habitat, including areas of rank

Plate 9. Leach's Petrel trapped on Fair Isle at the bird observatory during a petrel tape-luring session for ringing, Shetland, August 2011. © Will Miles

grassland with apparently deep soil, and future survey visits to this island might be worthwhile. North and South Holms were visited only once because both had terrain much like the Holm of Skaw, were devoid of Leach's Petrel burrows and lacked potentially suitable habitat.

On Gruney, the majority of occupied burrows were too deep to check conclusively with the endoscope and the breeding status of adults could be determined in only four burrows (see Table 2). Wet mud was found at the entrance of many burrows where calls were heard, and this appeared to have been recently kicked out by Leach's Petrels (see Plate 9), presumably in response to partial flooding by rainwater. If this occurs regularly, occupied burrows in deep, soft soil could progressively become very deep indeed, and this may explain the relatively deep burrows on Gruney and Gloop Holm. Breeding Leach's Petrels have only ever been found on the western half of Gruney, possibly because for many years Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus* nested on the east side and may have excluded petrels by direct predation (Ellis *et al.* 1997, RSPB 1992–2004 unpubl.). Coverage of the east side of the island using call-playback was not possible during this study, but the gull colony appears to be extinct so future playback surveys of the east side may be useful.



Plate 10. Leach's Petrel burrow with wet mud expelled from the entrance, Gruney, Shetland, August 2011. © Will Miles

Previous UK studies have shown that Leach's Petrel eggs typically hatch in mid to late July and that by August most chicks are more than five days old and left unattended while both parents forage out at sea (Cramp & Simmons 1977, Ellis *et al.* 1997, Money *et al.* 2008). To find one adult with an egg and one adult with a very young, tiny chick in two burrows on Gruney in August was unexpected and evidence of relatively late breeding. More adult Leach's Petrels were heard responding from burrows on Gruney in August (9) than in June (6) and, although these counts do not differ significantly ($\chi^2_1 = 0.67$, N.S.), it seems possible that more than just two pairs bred late at this site in 2011. However, it is important to consider that a minimum of 15.4% of all burrows where a response to playback was heard were occupied by non-breeding Leach's Petrels with no eggs or chicks. Burrow occupancy by non-breeding Leach's Petrels has also been observed on St Kilda, where 29.6% of study burrows located by call-playback in late June 2007 were occupied temporarily by adults that did not lay an egg (Money *et al.* 2008). Leach's Petrels found on Gloop Holm in 2010 and 2011 might, therefore, have all been prospecting non-breeders 'trying out' burrows, or, could have involved at least one pair that was breeding late. The occupied burrow found on Gloop Holm in 2011 was too deep for the endoscope and breeding has yet to be confirmed at this site.

Burrow occupancy and response to call-playback by non-breeders has potentially critical implications for the interpretation of Leach's Petrel population survey results. Since 1999, surveys of Leach's Petrel populations in the UK have mostly been carried out using call-playback methods (see Ellis *et al.* 1997, Gilbert *et al.* 1998, Ratcliffe *et al.* 1998, Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Murray *et al.* 2008, Newson *et al.* 2008, Murray *et al.* 2010). Use of an endoscope during playback surveys is extremely rare owing to the expense and weight of the equipment and time necessary to examine burrows fully. Results from call-playback surveys are generally interpreted as the population size of breeding birds, in terms of the total number of apparently occupied sites (burrows). However, given the occurrence of non-breeders in burrows in late June and early August during this study (15.4% of all occupied burrows, n=13) and on St Kilda in late June in 2007 (29.6%, n=27; Money *et al.* 2008), it seems likely that population size estimates from call-playback surveys account for a proportion of non-breeding birds as well as breeders. Further studies to determine the proportion of burrows occupied by non-breeding Leach's Petrels during the breeding season, and whether this may vary within years, between years and at different sites, would be extremely useful and potentially improve the accuracy of population estimates from call-playback.

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Plate 11. Guillemot with yellow bare parts and its chick, Bass Rock, Lothian, May 2010. © Maggie Sheddan

Guillemot with yellow bare parts on Bass Rock

On 24 April 2010 I was part of a group visiting the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth to photograph breeding seabirds. It was only upon returning home that we noticed a remarkably coloured Guillemot *Uria aalge* in a number of the photographs, the distinguishing features being its yellow bill and feet. As well as over-developed yellow pigmentation, the pictures also indicate a possible bridled form due to the white eye ring. In addition to the xanthochroism, the Guillemot also had signs of leucism in the washed-out feathers around the head and neck. Further investigation revealed a small number of similar sightings on the Farne Islands (see <http://farnephoto.blogspot.com/2009/07/guilles-on-up.html> & http://www.flickr.com/photos/cam_shirl/5773378358/) and off the coast of Norway (Blamire 2008). However, neither of these earlier sightings appears to be of a bridled form, or with the same combination of unusual white and yellow pigmentation development.

Reference

Blamire, S. 2008. A yellow-billed Guillemot in Norway. *Birding World* 21: 306.



Plate 12. Guillemot with yellow bare parts, Bass Rock, Lothian, April 2010. © John Lloyd



Plate 13. Guillemot with yellow bare parts, Bass Rock, Lothian, April 2010. © John Lloyd

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Maggie Sheddan, Scottish Seabird Centre, has commented: "A Guillemot with yellow bare parts was first seen on the Bass Rock in 2009. In 2010, the bird described in the note (with a grey-mottled head) appeared on the same ledge, bred and reared a normally coloured chick (Plate 11). In 2011, what is assumed to be the same bird (but again without a grey-mottled head) appeared on the same ledge, but either did not breed or failed."

Reduced breeding of Gannets on Bass Rock in 2011

Using the live cameras at the Scottish Seabird Centre, North Berwick, East Lothian on 12 and 17 August 2011, before significant numbers of fledgling Gannets *Morus bassanus* had left the Bass Rock, JH checked the contents of nests in two groups of breeders in well-established areas. These were (A) below and east of the path near the old chapel, viewed from the top camera, and (B) the group at the foot of the east cliffs, viewed from the lighthouse camera (Table 1).

On 12 August, out of all these nests with young, only one chick was unattended. No unattended chicks were seen on 17 August.

Whilst these counts do not allow detailed analysis, they do show beyond much doubt that once again, as in other recent years, a significant proportion of established, site-holding pairs did not even try to breed in 2011. If foul weather, such as torrential rain and gales had caused large scale failure, there would be no particular problem, but if, as seems the case, this is a comparatively new phenomenon, then we must ask why. Some important change in the food supply within the foraging range of breeding Bass Gannets could be possible, but this raises many questions which it would not be appropriate to explore here. A useful beginning would be to find out how widespread

amongst British gannetries is this apparent withholding of breeding.

Table 1. Nest occupation and productivity, Bass Rock, East Lothian, August 2011.

Group	Date	Number of occupied nests	Nests with young (%)
A	12 August	144	52
	17 August	245	57
B	12 August	99	50.5
	17 August	84	55

The margin for error about what constituted a 'site' will have been considerable, but the main point of interest is the ratio of occupied nests with as against without a chick. Photographs of various parts of the colony in the 1960s and 1970s show that virtually no occupied nests were without a juvenile. So, without claiming to be highly accurate, it is believed these counts do highlight a genuine phenomenon.

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Attempted predation of Pink-footed Geese by a Peregrine

The short note by Shields (2011) recalled a similar incident when I was carrying out a dawn bird survey on a hillside 5 km north of Dalbeattie, Dumfries & Galloway, on 12 February 2008. Twenty-two minutes after sunrise, a flock of 55 Pink-footed Geese were flying in at around 100 m above ground level, when a female Peregrine appeared and split the flock into two. She pursued one of these and singled out one bird, which was forced to descend rapidly to about 5 m above ground, not 10 m from me. Neither goose nor Peregrine seemed concerned by my very visible presence. The Peregrine stooped just once,

missed, and both birds disappeared, close to the ground, at high speed over the hill top and were lost from view. The whole event lasted just three minutes and the outcome was not seen.

Reference

Shields, D. 2011. Attempted predation of Pink-footed Geese by a Peregrine. *Scottish Birds* 31: 317.

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Sparrowhawk nest predation by Carrion Crow - unique footage recorded from a nest camera

Since 2009, cameras have been installed annually for the Lothian and Borders Raptor Study Group by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) at Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* nests in their Edinburgh garden. The purpose of these cameras in the first two years was to record and document their breeding behaviour, as well as pilot a Sparrowhawk public viewing programme in an urban setting. In 2011, a camera was installed as part of a Date with Nature partnership between the RBGE, RSPB Scotland, Lothian and Borders Raptor Study Group and the Scottish Seabird Centre.

The nest, in 2011, was placed c.10 m up in a tall fir tree *Abies recurvata* set within open woodland within RBGE. The nest was located 10 m from a busy road. Both members of the pair were in adult plumage. A neighbouring Sparrowhawk nest was located approximately 540 m away, which equates to a nearest neighbour distance for a population nesting at high density (Newton 1986). The nearest Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* (hereafter referred to as crow) nest was located approximately 25 m from the Sparrowhawk nest.

The territory in which the nest site was located has been monitored since 2009 in an Edinburgh Sparrowhawk monitoring programme by the Lothian and Borders Raptor Study Group and is one of the most consistently occupied and productive territories in the city. During the course of the Edinburgh Sparrowhawk study, this territory has produced an average annual clutch size of 4.5 eggs and average annual productivity of 2.5 fledglings.

In 2011, the female laid her first egg on approximately 4 May and completed a clutch of five eggs by 12 May. At 18:48 hrs on 16 May 2011 the incubating female was observed looking agitated, breathing heavily and regularly rotating her head and fixing her sight in a number of directions. Approximately one minute later she reared up off the nest to attack an in-coming crow resulting in a violent tussle between the two birds next to the nest. The two birds eventually fell out of camera view, leaving the eggs unattended. A crow returned to the nest three minutes later and was again attacked by the incoming female. This resulted in another violent tussle beside the nest with the crow on



Plate 14a–h. Sparrowhawk nest attacked by Carrion Crow, Edinburgh, 16 May 2011. © Lothian and Borders Raptor Study Group

top of the Sparrowhawk, being grasped from below. The crow was observed plucking feathers from the female before she eventually released her grasp after which both birds were lost from camera view. The eggs were left unattended for just over 18 minutes before a crow returned and pecked at one of the eggs, broke the shell and gulped down the egg's amnion before departing after approximately one minute. A crow returned five minutes later to peck at two eggs before leaving the nest after approximately a minute and a half. A further sequence of egg predation, involving several eggs, commenced two minutes later and lasted for approximately two minutes. No activity at the nest was observed for at least half an hour, at which point a crow commenced the final sequence of predation seen on the camera footage. A total of four out of the five eggs present in the nest were observed being eaten. At no point did the camera footage record the presence of more than one crow.

A large number of Sparrowhawk feathers totalling approximately 50 barred body feathers; 60 other feathers and one flight feather were collected from under the nest tree approximately 17 hours after the initial crow attack. The majority of the feathers were found in a clump resembling a raptor pluck. It appeared that the female Sparrowhawk did not survive the attack. She failed to return to the nest and no female was subsequently observed by the authors in the nest territory during that breeding season. The male was last seen c.92 minutes before the attack commenced, bringing a twig to the nest. However, the male was not recorded on the camera footage at any time during the attacks and its absence is unexplained.

A member of the RBGE staff observed a Sparrowhawk at the nest site at approximately 09:15 on the day after the attack, 17 May 2011, but the sex of this bird was unknown to the observer (Dr M. Coleman pers.comm.).

We believe that this project has recorded unique nest predation footage at a Sparrowhawk nest. It has been reported that predation of Sparrowhawk nests accounts for

less than 1% of destroyed clutches (Newton 1986). Moreover, it has been suggested that female Sparrowhawks are often effective at defending nests from predators and that nest predation by Carrion Crows is less likely to occur if the female is present to defend the nest than if she is absent (Newton 1986). This footage, however, shows that this Sparrowhawk nest did suffer predation even though the female was present at the time.

This nest may have been particularly vulnerable to crow predation due the open nature of the Garden's woodland habitat, providing poor nest cover, as well as its close proximity to a nesting pair of Carrion Crows.

Some of the predation footage can be viewed on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPg_kHTjpNI. For further information on the Edinburgh Sparrowhawk monitoring programme visit: www.edinburghhawkwatch.org.uk and for the Sparrowhawk date with nature project visit: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/datewithnature/278092-edinburgh-sparrowhawks>.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the members of the Sparrowhawk public viewing partnership - The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Seabird Centre and The Lothian and Borders Raptor Study Group. We would also like to thank Professor Ian Newton for providing helpful comments and amendments to this note.

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Newton, I. 1986. *The Sparrowhawk*. T. & A. D. Poyser, Berkhamsted.

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Black-headed Gulls eating Hawthorn berries

On 26 October 2011, I was parked by Dunsapie Loch in the Queen's Park, Edinburgh at about 15:00 hrs. Between the loch and the public road were a number of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* bushes, ripe with red berries. A group of Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* were hovering over the bushes plucking and eating berries in flight. This continued for about two minutes until pedestrians walked past. I waited to see if the gulls would continue, but the road was busy and a rival attraction of bread thrown for ducks drew the gulls to easier pickings. I had not seen such feeding by gulls on berries before this.

In a summary on the subject, Vernon (1972) says that "Black-headed Gulls are sometimes attracted to hedgerow trees, especially to oak *Quercus* sp. and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* in the autumn... Most recent records mention the taking of berries either when on the wing or whilst perching". In the only Scottish example "Black-headed Gulls were observed feeding on haws at Bothwell Bridge on 31st December and at Auldhouse, Lanarkshire, on 9th November [1958]. They took the berries both from the air and while perching (M.F.M. Meiklejohn, L.A. Urquhart)."



Plate 15. *Black-headed Gulls eating Hawthorn berries.* © John Busby

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Note: Poyner, J. 2010. Icterine Warblers breeding in Strathspey in 2009. *Scottish Birds* 30: 127. This record has not been accepted by the Highlands Records Committee, and has not been included in the 2009 Rare Breeding Birds Panel report (*British Birds* 104: 528–529). *Eds*



Plate 16. Ray Hewson, accompanied by his pointing dog Tug, locates a fox carrying a radio transmitter, Ardnish, Lochaber, 1976. © Hans Kruuk

Dr Raymond Hewson (1921–2011)

Born in Knaresborough, Yorkshire, Ray attended grammar school till 14, when he became a labourer on his uncle's farm, to support the family. In 1942, he joined the Royal Navy and later the Royal Marines. Posted to Orkney, he wrote papers on Orkney Voles and Scottish Field Voles. On post-war return to the farm, his well-written articles on ornithology appeared in the *Harrogate Advertiser*.

During 1948 he became an Inspector in Customs and Excise, soon to be an excise officer at Banffshire distilleries. There he began the most detailed long-term study of Mountain Hares ever accomplished. A spate of publications followed on mammals, and also Raven, Whooper Swan, Rock Dove, Twite, Dipper, Great Grey Shrike, Kestrel and Short-eared Owl, five of them in *Scottish Birds*. His 1967 account on Rock Doves is scholarly. Two papers on Dippers are still unique in northern

Scotland, models for those who follow. Ray's handwriting and prose distinguished him as a fine craftsman. He helped with bird records for the SOC in Nairnshire, Moray and Banffshire, and became Secretary of the Banffshire Society.

He was a rare example of an amateur naturalist developing into a professional biologist in his spare time. Realising his potential, George Dunnet, DJ and AW encouraged him to do it full time. AW recalls meeting Ray at a Dufftown cafe to offer a job, and a delighted Ray accepting. In 1968, he was appointed Experimental Officer to the grouse team at Banchory. Papers in top journals appeared, on grazing of heather, Red Grouse, Mountain Hares, colour change in Stoats, Ptarmigan moult. Using his hare work, he graduated MSc at Aberdeen University in 1974, supervised by Dunnet and AW.

John Cuthbert in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries created a Vertebrate Pests Group, and DJ told him Hewson would be an ideal recruit. In 1971, Ray became a Senior Scientific Officer studying Red Foxes, still based in the

Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Banchory, and later Principal Scientific Officer. Many publications followed on foxes, sheep, and birds scavenging dead sheep. In 1981, aged 60, he gained a PhD at Aberdeen on foxes and sheep, supervised by Ian Patterson and Hans Kruuk. In 1982 he became a Post-doctoral Research Assistant at Aberdeen University, studying social behaviour of Mountain Hares in relation to feeding, movement and population. He relished the intensive fieldwork, and the folk of Corgarff took to him. In 2007, Scottish Natural Heritage recognised him as an outstanding Highland naturalist along with others such as Seton Gordon and Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, www.highlandnaturalists.com.

Ray's output was impressive, with nearly 100 publications. As well as his official research, he liked spare-time projects such as caterpillars

defoliating heather, bumblebees, and doocots. We recall him smiling when he called these projects "nice little ploys", but his determined rigour later ensured publications for even the smallest ploy! He will be remembered for his abiding charm, sense of humour, and capacity for equality and friendliness to colleagues and local folk. A good observer and intensely curious naturalist, he was also a keen hill-walker and ski tourer, confident on Scotland's hills. Heathers and alpenes he grew with affection.

Ray will be missed, but his writing will live. Both are tributes to a tradition of fine British amateur naturalists.

David Jenkins and Adam Watson

Jean Murray (Jan) Donnan (–2011)

Jan was born and brought up in Dumfries. She was the daughter of a doctor, who unfortunately died when Jan was six. Jan lived in the same house in Laurieknowe all her life, apart from the last few years, when she needed to move into a nursing home.

Jan was a member of the group of friends influenced by Willie Austin, who ultimately formed the Dumfries Branch of the SOC nearly 50 years ago. She was a representative of that important group of members that believe that watching and listening to birds is sufficient, provided that such activities are shared with friends. In her prime, Jan rarely missed a Branch meeting, attended Annual Conferences and Dumfries Branch Goose Weekends. She is known to have joined outings all over Scotland and to many birding hotspots south of the border. I associate her with lunch on a Monday with Bobby Smith followed by birdwatching along the River Nith and at WWT Caerlaverock, Jan's generosity to the SOC is evidence of her lifelong love of the birds of Scotland and particularly of Dumfries. She was a true "Queen of the South".

Brian Smith, Chairman, Dumfries Branch



Plate 17. Jan Donnan with Bobby Smith (right) and Stan Laybourne (second from right), Hoddam, Dumfries, 1961. © Bobby Smith (scanned by Edmund Fellowes)



Plate 18. *The cliffs of Noss, Shetland, June 2009. Around 1980, Noss had c.11,000 pairs of Kittiwakes; in 2010 there were 507. In 2001, 46,000 individual Guillemots were counted; in 2009 the count was 22,000 (SNH). © Hugh Harrop*

Scottish seabirds – past, present and future

S. WANLESS & M.P. HARRIS

Scotland has long been famous for its spectacular coastal scenery and seabird colonies. Macaulay's 1764 account of his visit to St Kilda highlighted not only the abundant wildlife, but also how important seabirds were to the human inhabitants for food, oil, feathers and fertilizer. Dependence on seabirds to tap into the rich marine environment was a feature of many other human coastal communities at this time.

Although seabirds obtain their food from the sea, and many are supremely adapted to a marine existence, they need to come to land to breed. Large concentrations of breeding birds are thus usually associated with sites safe from predators, including humans, and close to rich feeding areas. Scotland has both in abundance with extensive cliffs and beaches and, especially in the north and west, offshore islands and skerries near to highly productive waters such as those in the North Sea, strong tidal flows such as in the Minch, Pentland Firth, Fair Isle Channel

and around Islay, or the edge of the Continental Shelf from St Kilda and northern Shetland.

Assessing numbers

Seabird colonies attracted the attention of early Scottish naturalists and feature prominently in the area faunas written by Harvie-Brown, Buckley and others in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These accounts are often beautifully written, but provide qualitative impressions rather than believable estimates of the numbers of breeding birds; hardly surprising given that their visits to colonies were often brief. The tradition of making painstaking counts was started by John Henry Gurney who set out to count every single gannetry, a target he attained with the publication of his classic monograph on the Gannet in 1912. James Fisher's survey of the Fulmar in the 1940s was another milestone in Scottish seabird censusing, but it was not until 1969–70 during *Operation Seafarer* that an attempt was made to locate

and count all the seabird colonies in Scotland. This inventory of colonies, the species present at each and estimates of the population sizes formed the baseline against which future changes have been assessed. Although numbers of many species were higher than expected, there were markedly fewer Puffins and Guillemots than anticipated. These findings, and a major wreck of Guillemots in the north Irish Sea in 1969, were instrumental in stimulating research on auks in Scotland.

Two major surveys have been carried out since 1969–70; one in 1985–8, usually referred to as *The Seabird Colony Register* since a key aim was to compile a computerized database to make counts easier to access, and another in 1998–2002 called *Seabird 2000*. Each survey set increasingly higher standards both in the number of species covered, for instance in *Seabird 2000* considerable effort went into locating colonies of Storm and Leach's Petrels, and the sophistication of the database.

As a complement to these periodic large-scale censuses, since the mid-1970s the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Assessment Group (SOTEAG) has been monitoring seabirds in Shetland and since the late 1970s, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and its predecessors, have co-ordinated approximately annual counts of birds in monitoring plots at large colonies, or complete counts of smaller colonies, throughout the UK, with Scotland being well represented (www.jncc.defra.gov.uk). Below we summarize the main changes in Scottish seabird numbers over the last 40 years. The take-home message is that many species are now declining. We urgently need another Scotland-wide seabird census. A UK survey is scheduled for the mid-2010s, but funding for this is currently far from secure.

Population counts and trends

In the mid-1980s there were probably about 2.6 million pairs of 24 species of seabirds breeding in Scotland (Table 1). This was about 25% more than the total of 2.1 million pairs estimated in

Table 1. Changes in status of Scottish seabirds over the last 25 years. Counts are in pairs. Red indicates a decline, green an increase. Counts and assessment are from Mitchell *et al.* (2004), www.jncc.gov.uk and personal records. Auks = counts of individuals x 0.67, Manx Shearwater and storm-petrels assumed to be the same in 1985–88 as in 1998–2002. *Counts of gulls exclude inland colonies.

Species	1985–88	1998–2002	Change 1985–88 to 1998–2002	Change 2000 to 2010
Fulmar	504,600	485,900	-4%	Decline
Manx Shearwater	?	126,500	?	?
Storm Petrel	?	21,400	?	?
Leach's Petrel	?	48,000	?	Decline?
Gannet	127,900	182,500	43%	Increase
Cormorant	3,000	3,600	20%	Decline?
Shag	31,600	21,500	-32%	Long-term decline
Arctic Skua	3,400	2,100	-38%	Long-term decline
Great Skua	7,600	9,600	26%	Decline
Kittiwake	359,400	282,200	-21%	Long-term decline
Black-headed Gull	9,600	6,900	-28%	?
Common Gull	15,100	20,500	36%	Little change
Lesser Black-backed Gull	19,500	21,600	11%	Decline?
Herring Gull	92,900	71,700	-23%	Decline
Great Black-backed Gull	15,300	14,800	-3	Decline
Sandwich Tern	2,300	1,100	-47%	Little change
Roseate Tern	18	14	-22%	Not regular breeder
Common Tern	6,800	4,800	-29%	Stable?
Arctic Tern	71,200	47,300	-34%	Decline
Little Tern	373	331	-11%	?
Guillemot	631,900	782,500	24%	Decline
Razorbill	82,800	93,300	13%	Decline
Black Guillemot	24,900	25,100	0	Stable?
Puffin	438,100	493,000	13%	Decline
Total	2,644,000	2,766,000	4%	Decline



Plate 19. Guillemot with a sandeel. © Mike Harris.

the late 1960s. Undoubtedly, some of the increase reflected better coverage but taking counts at face-value, 12 species (Fulmar, Shag, Arctic and Great Skuas, Common Gulls (in coastal areas), Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Common, Arctic and Little Terns, Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin) had increased in numbers by more than 5% while five species (Cormorant, Black-headed (in coastal areas) and Herring Gulls, Sandwich and Roseate Terns) had decreased by this amount. Changes in the remaining species were either trivial or the counts too uncertain to allow reliable assessment. By the time of Seabird 2000, numbers had increased further to 2.8 million pairs. However, there were some marked differences in fortunes, with some species increasing e.g. Gannet, Great Skua, Cormorant, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin while others such as terns and the Arctic Skua were decreasing (Table 1).

Assessing the current situation is more challenging because many of the larger colonies have not been counted. However, trends for the majority of species are now downwards - a novelty in recent times. The Roseate Tern no longer breeds regularly in Scotland and species that had previously shown a sustained increase,

e.g. Fulmar, Great Skua and Guillemot, are now in decline. Losses have been particularly dramatic in the Northern Isles and many of the once noisy geos in Shetland are now eerily quiet during the summer (Plate 18). Only the Gannet is still doing well with numbers at most colonies increasing and new colonies being formed.

Breeding success

Until 40 years ago, breeding success of Scottish seabirds appears to have been generally high. Major breeding failures were noted occasionally, e.g. Puffins on St Kilda in 1959, but were regarded as exceptional events. However, things have changed considerably and reports of seabirds struggling to raise their chicks have become commonplace, although complete failures are still unusual. The reasons are varied. On the west coast, breeding failures of gulls and terns have often been as the result of feral mink predation. Elsewhere, failures have been attributed to shortage of suitable food, notably sandeels, during the chick-rearing period (Plate 19). Removals of large amounts of sandeels by industrial fisheries were initially thought to be the major reason for the decline in sandeel stocks but sandeels are also adversely affected by marine conditions such as changing currents or increasing sea temperatures.

Since the mid-1980s, seabird breeding success has been monitored across a range of species and colonies as part of the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme (www.jncc.defra.gov.uk) with three of the four key monitoring sites in Scotland (Fair Isle, Canna and the Isle of May) and a long run of data from Shetland collected by SOTEAG. Since 1986, there have been declines in the breeding success of Arctic Skuas (50% but with marked annual variation), Guillemots (30–50% mainly since 2002), Kittiwakes and Puffins (both 30%) and Fulmars (20%). Breeding success may also have come down in Herring Gulls and, recently, Razorbills. Once again the Gannet is one of the few species bucking the downward trend and Lesser Black-backed Gulls may also be doing better.

There are often marked differences in breeding success in different areas. For instance, low success at North Sea and Shetland colonies may not be mirrored in the west. Even within a region

there can be lack of consistency among species, so for example, Shags can have an excellent season while Arctic Terns do abysmally. Understanding the reasons behind these differences is a priority for current research. One of the species about which we know most is the Kittiwake since success has been monitored more-or-less annually for over 25 years at 30 Scottish colonies. The results show that colonies fall into five clusters that are broadly congruent with different stocks of sandeels, a key prey for the Kittiwake during the breeding season. Fewer colonies of other species are monitored but it appears that these also form clusters, although the boundaries differ from those of the Kittiwake. The factors that determine these groupings are still unknown but the information is useful for the designation of more realistic monitoring regions.

Survival

While it is important to keep track of breeding success, the size of populations of long-lived species such as seabirds, is driven primarily by changes in the survival rate of adults. Several years of breeding failure will have little effect on the number of breeding pairs, but a relatively

small decrease in the proportion of adults surviving overwinter, when most deaths occur, will result in a marked decrease. Obtaining accurate estimates of survival rates is, therefore, a key element in the understanding of changes in seabird populations. Unfortunately, estimating adult survival is difficult as it requires large numbers of birds to be ringed and retrapped, or resighted if the birds have been uniquely colour-ringed, for many years. Survival rates are, therefore, available for only a few species and colonies. Typically, survival rates are analysed colony-by-colony but it is now possible to combine data from several colonies and include information from birds found dead away from where they were ringed. This approach was used recently to compare survival rates of Guillemots from Canna, Colonsay and the Isle of May. Survival of adults at all three colonies showed a long-term decline since the early 1990s. However, the really intriguing result was that, although the annual survival rates of adults was not correlated between colonies, survival of young birds from the Isle of May was correlated with survival of birds fledging from Canna. The mystery was solved when survival was



Plate 20. Aerial view of *The Lamb*, Firth of Forth 29 May 2009 showing the *Cormorant* and *Guillemot* colonies. *Tree Mallow* occurs here, but poses no obvious threat to the birds. © Stuart Murray

considered in relation to where the birds wintered as indicated by ringing recoveries. Birds from the Isle of May wintered mainly in the North Sea. However, while adults from Canna moved south to the Bay of Biscay, young birds entered the North Sea so that their wintering range overlapped with Guillemots from the Isle of May. This type of integrated approach requires advanced statistical skills but the effort seems justified given the opportunity to tackle some of the conservation issues needing urgent attention. Scientists from several Scottish organisations are at the forefront of such work.

Sometimes seabird mortality is very obvious when large numbers of birds are washed ashore dead or dying. Such 'wrecks' often, but not always, occur after storms with birds severely underweight indicating that they were starving. There have been several major wrecks in Scottish waters during the last 20 years, for instance thousands of adult Shags were found dead along the east coast in 1994, large

numbers of Guillemots died after the breeding season in north-west Scotland in 2004 and unusual numbers of Puffins were washed up in the Northern Isles in the winters of 2006–7 and 2007–8. Although many birds can be involved in wrecks, the subsequent impact on breeding populations is sometimes hard to detect.

Birds often winter far from their breeding colonies and many, probably most, die in the open sea and never get washed ashore. Where seabirds winter and what they do then has long been a mystery. The development of geolocators, cheap light-weight logging devices that can be attached to leg-rings and use day-length and the timing of local mid-day in relation to GMT to determine a bird's position each day (Plate 21), has revolutionised the study of seabirds outside the breeding season. One of the most exciting studies has been an international collaboration in which geolocators were attached to breeding Kittiwakes at 19 North Atlantic colonies from northern Norway to Newfoundland including Fair

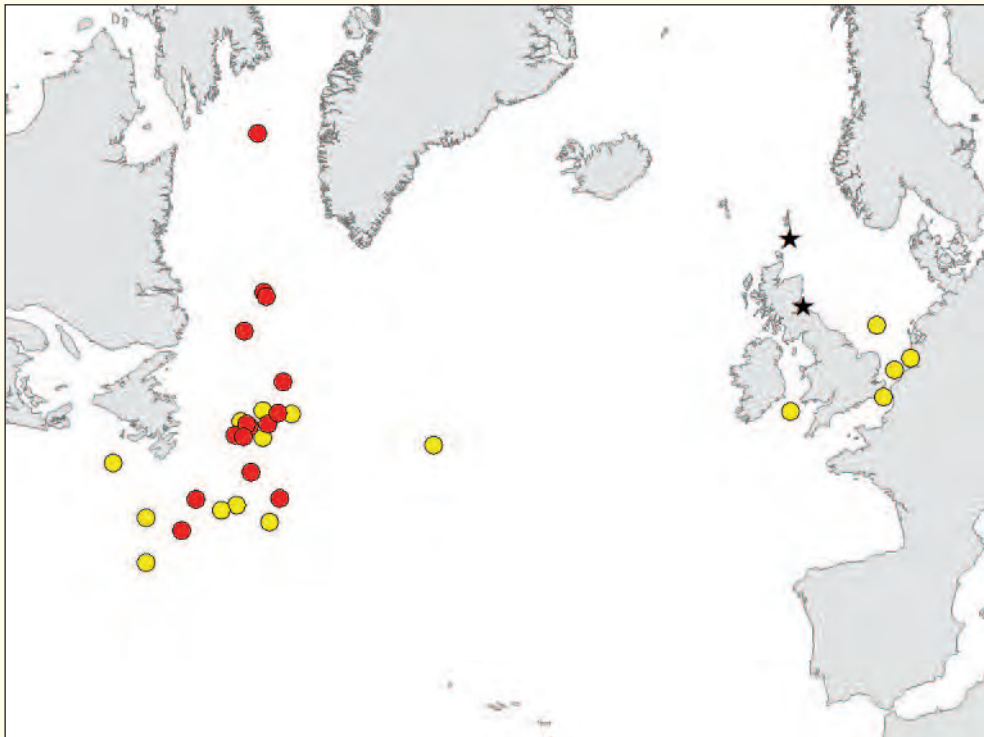


Figure 1. Median December locations of breeding Kittiwakes marked with geolocators on Fair Isle (red circles) and the Isle of May (yellow circles). The locations of the colonies are shown by stars. Data from Frederiksen et al. (2011).



Plate 21. Kittiwake with a geolocator that records its position daily during the winter. © Mark Newell

Isle and the Isle of May. Many of the birds from both these colonies wintered in the West Atlantic (Figure 1), and this region was also favoured by Kittiwakes from most of the other colonies. Extrapolations from these findings suggest that the majority of the 4.5 million adult Kittiwakes in the Atlantic winter there. Kittiwake numbers are declining across much of the breeding range, including Fair Isle and the Isle of May, so it could be that poor conditions on the shared wintering grounds are a key factor. Intriguingly, some Kittiwakes from the Isle of May remained in the eastern Atlantic and a separate study at this colony showed that such individuals were more likely to have been successful breeders. Other studies involving Scottish seabirds are in progress and distribution maps highlighting important wintering areas should soon be available.

Threats to Scottish seabirds

In Macaulay's day the main threats to seabirds were when they were at the colony and vulnerable to humans hunting them for food, oil or feathers. Although some Scottish seabirds

are still shot at sea or flight-netted at colonies in Iceland, the Faeroes and Greenland, totals are small. Moreover, some of these hunts are likely to be banned in the near-future due to concern about decreasing Faeroese and Icelandic seabird populations. Seabirds in western Scotland remain vulnerable to mammalian predators, particularly rats and mink. Continual vigilance to monitor their impact is required and, if necessary, large-scale intervention to carry out eradication programmes such as those that have been successful on Ailsa Craig, Canna and Handa. Bizarrely, in the Firth of Forth, a problem with introduced species comes from a plant, Tree Mallow, taking over breeding areas of Puffins on Craighleith and Fidra. Tree Mallow also occurs on other islands, but poses no problems (Plate 20). While Scottish seabirds are relatively well protected when on land and many colonies are NNRs or RSPB, NTS or SWT reserves, they face an increasing range of threats at sea and from oil spills, chemical pollutants and marine litter, particularly discarded fishing nets and other plastic.

However, the main threats are probably those associated with changing food availability as a result of human fisheries, climate change and developments of marine renewable energy sources. The removal of large amounts of sandeels or other forage fish by industrial fisheries remains a concern, especially as to whether there may be insufficient food left for marine predators. Major changes in discarding practice such that fish too small to be sold and/or where a fishery quota has been exceeded, will no longer be thrown back into

the sea could have a serious impact on the larger gulls, Great Skuas and Fulmars. A ban on discards might benefit fish stocks, but could result in gulls and Great Skuas increasingly turning to predation on eggs, chicks and adults of Kittiwakes, terns and auks.

Climate change is a major threat to global biodiversity. The pace of shifting climate has been particularly marked in the north-east Atlantic, for example the 10°C isotherm in the North Sea has moved northwards by c.22 km per year over the

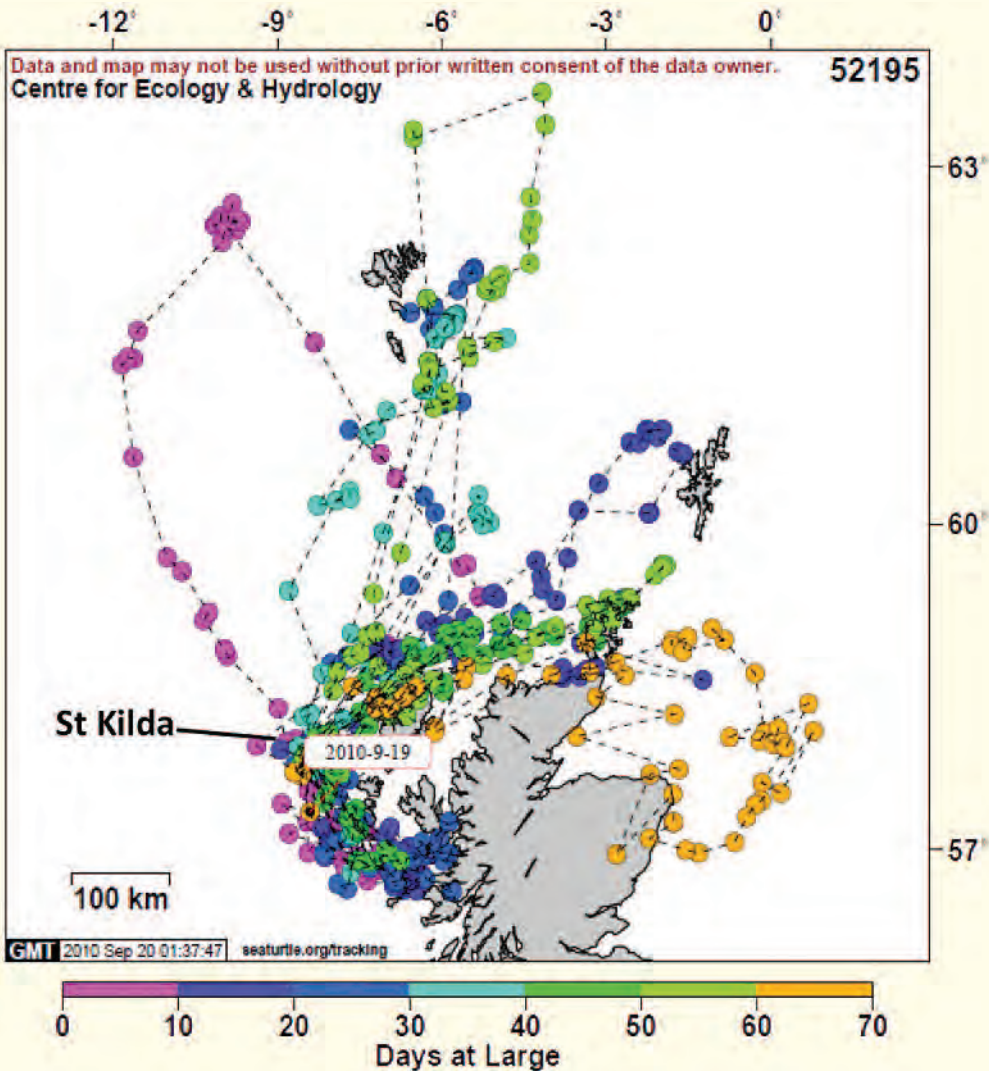


Figure 2. Foraging trips of a Gannet breeding on Boreray, St Kilda followed for nearly 10 weeks in 2010. The trips coded yellow were probably made after the bird's chick had fledged and indicates that it passed through the Pentland Firth and spent time in the North Sea before returning to St Kilda.



Plate 22. Sarah Wanless and Stuart Murray returning from deploying satellite tags on Gannets on Boreray, St Kilda. © Jill Harden

last 50 years and now lies to the north of Scottish waters. This isotherm forms the boundary between boreal and temperate plankton provinces. The majority of Scotland's seabird community is made up of low arctic or cold temperate species and it is probable that conditions will become less favourable for them over the coming years. Thus, current population declines may continue, or even accelerate, particularly at the southern edge of breeding ranges.

Given the speed and potential severity of climate change, actions to reduce the impacts would, at face value, seem likely to find favour with those who care about the environment. However, a major measure suggested is a massive increase in the use of marine

renewable energy by harnessing the power of offshore wind, waves and tides. Developments are proceeding at an unprecedented rate and there is concern that favoured locations for renewables will coincide with important seabird feeding areas. How birds react to serried ranks of wind turbines or underwater tidal turbines is still largely unknown. At worst, individuals will be killed by colliding with structures but effects may also be insidious with birds forced to make energetically costly detours around developments to more distant feeding grounds resulting in lower breeding success or possibly young birds being deterred from recruiting to nearby colonies. However, designation of sites for developments could benefit seabirds because fish stocks within them will be largely protected from fishing. We urgently need the answers to these questions and year-round studies of at-sea distributions and tracking studies of individuals are currently being carried out around Scotland to identify important areas and highlight those that overlap with proposed developments. Figure 2 shows how far some birds, in this case a Gannet, forage when feeding young.

Amidst all these uncertainties, one thing is clear - the ever increasing pressure on the marine environment means that understanding what makes seabirds 'tick' has never been greater and there is plenty for the next generation of Scottish seabird ornithologists to do!

Mike Harris and Sarah Wanless

Emails: mph or swanl@ceh.ac.uk

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NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Ayrshire:** Mr M. McHugh, **Borders:** Mr M. Heger, Mr J.P. Howard, Miss R. McAleese, Mr R. Richardson, **Central Scotland:** Mr W. Attwood, Mr P. Carroll, Mr J. Crumley, Dr J. Taylor, **Clyde:** Dr E.G. Archer, Mr R. Crawford, Mr A. Stewart & Ms D. Hudson, Dr P. Walton, **Dumfries:** Mr J.A. Gray, Mr A. Smith, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr & Mrs L.A. East, Mr A. Thomas, **Fife:** Drs P. & J. Hadoke, Mr J. Henderson, Dr & Mrs M. Hunter, Mr J. Nadin, Ms V. Turnbull, **Grampian:** Mr S. Archer, Mr P. Grant, Mr R. Leslie, **Highland:** Mr S. Brown, Ms F. Knowles, Mr C. Mitchell, Dr R. Rafe, Ms A.C. Rhodes, **Lothian:** Ms L. Allan, Mr D. Anderson, Mr R. Baillie, Mr M. Bishop, Ms E. Bradford, Mr I. Brown, Dr J.S. Buchanan, Ms L. Collen, Ms D.C. Curd, Dr C. Davies, Mr N.K.J. Droog, Mrs M. Elliott, Mrs V. Forbes, Mrs J. Fraser, Mr & Mrs D. Hastie, Mr & Mrs J. Howgego, Ms S. Human, Mr A. Jenkins, Ms R. Johnston, Mr B. Kerr, Mr J. Mackay, Ms J. MacLeod, Mr E. McGuire, Ms C. Nelson, Mr M. Orr & Ms K. Wade, Mr & Mrs

Passmore, Mr A. Patterson, Mrs J. Paul, Mr B. Penman, Mr & Mrs B. Plumb, Mrs M. Selfridge, Mr C. Shaw, Ms A. Spink, Mr D. Stevenson, Miss C.A. Street, Mr C.B. Swan, Mrs D.E. Thompson, Mr & Mrs H. Watson, Ms L. Wheelans, Ms A. Williams, Mr D.M. Young, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr S. Pinder, **Stewartry:** Mrs J. Harris, **Tayside:** Dr J. Farrell, Mrs A. Fell, Mr A. Guthrie, Mrs A. Reid.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **November: 1st** £150 Ms B. Cartwright, **2nd** £75 Mrs V. Wells, **3rd** £50 Brian Turner, **4th** £30 Donald Watson, **5th** £20 Roger Evans, **6th** £10 T. Daniels. **December: 1st** £30 G.A. Ball, **2nd** £20 Ms K. Miller, **3rd** £10 Mrs E.M. Forrester. **January: 1st** £30 Mrs A. White, **2nd** £20 Mrs P.M. Millar, **3rd** £10 Mrs J. McNeil.

Waterston House Events

Art exhibitions:

Carol Barrett 25 February–4 April

Paul Bartlett 7 April–30 May

Richard Allen and Brin Edwards 2 June–25 July



Plate 23. *Sea Aster and Lapwings* by Richard Allen.



Optics Demo:

(Viking Optical Ltd), Sunday 13 May, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm - a wide range of binoculars, scopes and accessories will be available. Thinking of an upgrade? Try before you buy or just come along for some free expert advice!

The Birds of Scotland Fund

The financial success of *The Birds of Scotland* has allowed the establishment of The Birds of Scotland Fund whose remit is to support further ornithological publications and special projects in Scotland. Such publications might include local/regional atlases and avifaunas, with special projects promoting the development of ornithology, particularly among the youth and wider public.

So far The Birds of Scotland Fund has awarded grants to support at least 10 projects. These have included regional avifaunas for the Isles of Arran and Bute, the construction of interpretation panels for St John's Pool in Caithness, assistance in the publishing costs of the new-look *Scottish Birds*, and the digitization of Local Birds Reports and *Scottish Birds* to be placed on the SOC website.

The Birds of Scotland Fund would welcome any new applications, details for which can be found on <http://www.the-soc.org.uk/birds-of-scotland-fund.htm>

Plate 24. *Pair of Shoveler* by Brin Edwards (winner of the RSPB award at the SWLA exhibition in 2010).

Scottish Bird Report online

Three long runs of local bird report species accounts have recently been added to our free download site: North-east Scotland, Angus & Dundee, Ayrshire and Upper Forth. Information of rarities (including all BBRC reports), based on a database compiled by Keith Naylor, is also now searchable by species and recording area. Visit www.the-soc.org.uk/sbr.php

75th Anniversary Conference photograph

The following names can be added to the list below the photograph in the last issue of *Scottish Birds* (31: 336–337): 21 Alan Graham and 119 Lynne Youngs.

Scottish Raptor Scheme Monitoring Report

The 2009 report, published in February 2012, can be downloaded from the Scottish Raptor Study Group website www.scottishraptor-groups.org/srmscheme.php. Owing to funding constraints, the report continues to be available in electronic format only. If you specifically require a hard-copy version to be sent by post, please contact SOC HQ. The 2010 report is due to be published and available to download from the RSG site in March 2012.

SOC SPOTLIGHT: the Fife Branch

K. DICK, I.G. CUMMING,
P. TAYLOR & R. ARMSTRONG



Plate 25. Poster for the inaugural branch meeting in 1950. © Ian Cumming

On 19 October 1950, the St Andrews' Branch of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club was formed at a meeting in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall. Before that date, the only opportunity to attend bird-related talks in St Andrews was by going to the University Natural History Society, whose talks were open to the public but were not well publicised.

That first meeting was chaired by Miss Baxter and one of the speakers was her co-author of that venerable tome, 'Birds of Scotland', Miss Rintoul. The first committee comprised, among others, Mrs Grace of the Grange (Chairman), Ian Munro (Secretary), the Misses Baxter and

Rintoul, and Ian Cumming as a junior member. Sixty-two years on, Ian Cumming is still an active member (although not so junior!) of the Committee, proving that there is no rest for the wicked in the SOC!

In the early days, the branch held monthly meetings, but apart from lectures, was not very active. In 1950 cars were scarcer so excursions were usually in St Andrews, on foot or by bicycle. Our first SOC branch projects were wildfowl counts on the Eden Estuary and a nest box scheme in Tentsmuir forest to encourage nesting woodpeckers. A driftwood hide was built on Shelly Point that lasted several years, to observe the breeding terns in the summer and the vast numbers of waders in the winter.

In the late 1960s, the branch began having weekend excursions. The first few were in Speyside, staying in Kingussie, often led by local guides. In those early days, participants were privileged to see breeding Temminck's Stints, Wood Sandpipers and Wrynecks - how things have changed. After a few years, members' trips ventured farther afield, with weekends in Islay, Mull, Shetland, Orkney, Galloway, Lancashire and Northumberland, allowing us to see many beautiful places and unusual birds.

In some ways, not a lot has changed in the branch. Our last three weekend trips away have been to those haunts first visited in the 1970s, including Lancashire (where we saw breeding Eagle Owls, which definitely wouldn't have been seen in the early trips!), Orkney and Dumfries and Galloway. Islay is our weekend trip for February 2012. We hold monthly outings in Fife and our neighbouring counties, and we have a programme of winter talks to sustain us through the periods when birdwatching requires more stamina and commitment than many of our members possess.

In some other ways, many things have changed. We are now the Fife Branch, instead of the St Andrews Branch, we do not need to rely on gramophone records at talks anymore and the quality of the photographs that we see from several of our members fills us with admiration for what is possible with modern equipment and a lot of talent. We now produce four



Plate 26. Ian Cumming - branch committee member in 1960 and still in 2012. © Ian Cumming

editions of our newsletter each year, which is emailed to members and is available on the SOC website. We have started holding an annual dinner for Fife members, and we are building relations with other wildlife organisations in Fife; for example, we are exploring the possibility of erecting a tower hide at Rossie Bog with Fife Bird Club.

With the interest in Atlas work and the ease of travel around the area, Fife sites gained a new focus in recent years, and the current gazetteer of sites in Fife identifies a staggering 311 locations that have had bird records submitted. Of those, some sites will be well-known to many, including the Eden Estuary, Fife Ness, St Andrews Bay, Rossie Bog, Tentsmuir and Shell Bay, while others are hidden gems that do not gain as much attention.

The Kingdom of Fife has recorded a few special birds in the past few years, including Britain's first Masked Shrike (2004), the first Sardinian Warbler for mainland Scotland (Fife Ness, 2005), Pied Wheatear (2009) and Red-flanked Bluetail (2003



Plate 27. Masked Shrike, Kilrenny, Fife, October 2004. © Iain Leach



Plate 28. Fife Branch members on a weekend trip to Lancashire, 2011. Left-right: Elizabeth Adams, Derek Bottomer, Jean Taylor, Howard Chapman (Treasurer), Brian Downing, Paul Taylor (Chairman), Jean Stewart, David Heeley (Vice-Chair), Stewart Neilson and Caroline Gordon. © Karen Dick (Secretary)

& 2010). Fife is known as a hotspot for Surf Scoter and one has been seen regularly for several seasons from Ruddons Point. The Sea Eagle reintroduction programme in lowland Scotland is also based in Fife. The northerly spread of some previously absent species is providing new interest. Four Little Egrets on the Eden Estuary at the end of 2011 is the largest number recorded in the county, so far, and breeding Nuthatches have almost made it to Fife!

Over the years the strength of the branch has varied. Its lowest ebb was in the early 1960s. There were rumours that Regent Terrace was thinking of closing it (George Waterston was reputed to have called it 'hag-ridden!'). In recent times, the health of the branch has been more robust, meetings have found a permanent home in the Town Hall Supper Room in St Andrews and the membership of the Branch currently stands at around 164.

As with many SOC branches and other membership organisations, our main challenge is to engage and encourage the next generation of birdwatchers and ornithologists. Despite being in

a university town, we have almost no student members and have had limited success in attracting young members, although we are working with Jane Cleaver, the SOC's Membership Development Officer, to change that. Our other big challenge as a branch is reaching members across the county. Fife, being a long and relatively narrow county means that some SOC members, although resident in Fife, are situated much closer to other branch activities. This is an issue that has taxed us for many decades and the branch tried for a while to have meetings in Kirkcaldy, but it was not a success.

We are justifiably proud of our Fife Branch and our 60 years of survival, a milestone that we celebrated by sponsoring one of our iconic birds, the Velvet Scoter, in the upcoming BTO/SOC Atlas. There is always a friendly face, a good talk or a birdwatching companion to be found among folks in the Fife Branch, and we look forward to our next 60 years as part of the SOC.

*Karen Dick, Ian G. Cumming, Paul Taylor
and Rob Armstrong*

FIELD NOTE: Long-tailed Tits

J. MAXWELL

This is a new regular feature which will give readers the chance to contribute a short note (300–400 words) on any interesting aspect of a bird's behaviour or lifestyle observed in Scotland. In our birdwatching lives there are often small details we note in the field that others may not have experienced. On the understanding that no-one knows everything, these bits of knowledge may well be worth sharing. They do not need to be new to science but might draw attention to lesser-known aspects of bird life. We reserve the right to only include observations that we deem of wider interest. We start with one of my own as an example.

All birdwatchers come across parties of Long-tailed Tits throughout the winter, often including other tit species and perhaps a Robin and sometimes a Goldcrest or Treecreeper. Always on the move, they work their way briefly through the branches together picking off tiny food items and soon one leads the others off to the next venue. The mouse-like bodies with their flicking tails are often described as “flying teaspoons”!

Very often it is the contact sounds they make which firstly draw our attention. Noises rather than calls, these tiny dry rasping sounds are a feature of every Long-tail flock. Also at times the much louder higher-pitched “tee tee tee” calls can be heard at greater distance to give away the presence of a foraging party.

However there is a third call which in my experience is always given when there is an aerial predator flying in the area. It is a very high-pitched drawn-out trill which is really different from the usual short sounds. Now that I'm used to hearing this tiny silvery signal, usually given by just one bird, I always do a quick all-round check of the airspace and invariably spot a high-flying Peregrine or passing Kestrel and am totally amazed that during the distraction of their feeding, one of the flock has actually picked up this predator threat and warned the others.

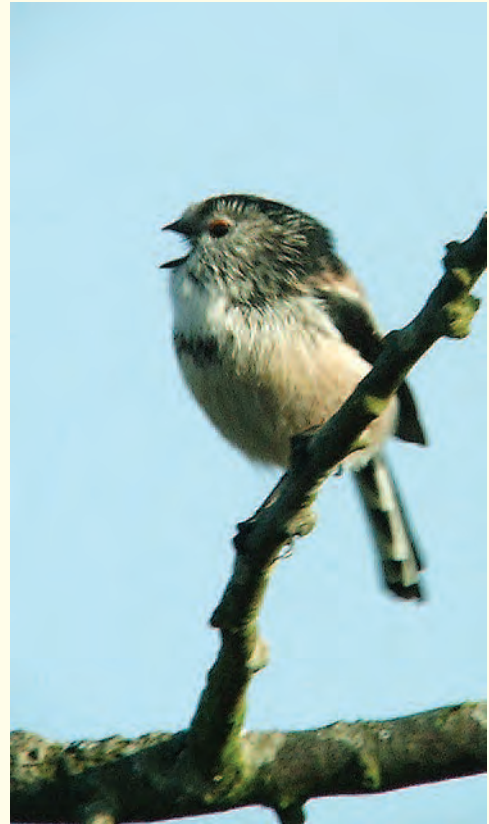


Plate 29. Long-tailed Tit. © Jimmy Maxwell

This very morning, as I write this in early January, on hearing the alarm trill, I was so near the flock that it occurred to me very briefly that I myself might be the cause. But although the day was of overcast grey and nothing to be seen anywhere, I still panned round quickly and just caught the tail end of a Sparrowhawk disappearing over the lime trees above.

Perhaps the Robin and Goldcrest attach much more value to accompanying the Long-tail flock than merely locating food?

Eds. *In BWP, “Call given in response to flying predator, a loud, clear, trilling “tsirrup-rup-rup” (Witherby et al. 1938a; Bergmann & Helb 1982.)” Elderly people suffering from upper hearing loss may be unable to detect this alarm signal.*

Jimmy Maxwell

International Wader Study Group conference at Strathpeffer, September 2011

B. KALEJTA SUMMERS

The International Waders Study Group (IWSG) is an organisation embracing professional and amateur ornithologists who are linked by a passion for waders. Currently, there are 450 members worldwide in over 50 countries. To give an opportunity for the members to meet and exchange the ideas and share results of their research, a conference is held every year at locations in Europe, always close to a good wader habitat.

This year, the Highland Ringing Group (HRG) hosted the conference between 23 and 27 September 2011 in Strathpeffer, 20 km north-west of Inverness. The HRG is a group of dedicated wader enthusiasts involved in ringing waders and wildfowl around the Moray

Firth. The Moray Firth comprises the most northerly complex of estuaries on the East Atlantic Flyway. In winter, the area supports on average 40,000 waders and 60,000 ducks, with several species reaching internationally important numbers (Kalejta-Summers 2006).

One hundred and thirty delegates took part in the conference, representing 15 countries. Some delegates took advantage of the picturesque location and arrived a few days earlier to do some sightseeing of the Highlands.

The evening entertainment on the first night included a film of one of the first wader expeditions to Morocco in 1971, presented by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, followed by a show of some stunning images of waders by Jan van de Kam and two audio-visual presentations by myself on the wader catching in the Moray Firth by the HRG.

The official opening of the conference was on Saturday morning followed by the AGM and then talks. There were two sessions in the morning. The first, on Feeding Ecology, comprised a talk on the foraging patterns of Oystercatchers using GPS-tagging and the second, on the feeding strategies of Red Knots in the Yellow Sea, China. After a coffee break, talks on various aspects of migration continued until lunch. Those included the potential effect of magnetic storms on Ruffs migration, migration strategies of Black-tailed Godwits, Knot migration to Greenland and Canada via Norway, immunological studies of migratory waders and the attainment of breeding plumage prior to migration by Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits.



Plate 30. Black-tailed Godwit, Thingvellir, Iceland, July 2008. © Ian Andrews

In the afternoon, the subjects included habitat selection by Black-tailed Godwit, the breeding ecology of waders in Sweden, evolution of the breeding system in small plovers, the importance of Prairie Dogs to breeding Mountain Plovers in USA and behaviour of breeding Jack Snipe in northern Norway. The late afternoon talks dealt with various aspects of population decline which sadly is becoming a common feature of many waders. Those in decline are Oystercatchers and Black-tailed Godwits in the Netherlands, Curlew in the UK and Lapwing in the Czech Republic.

Just before dinner, there was a poster session. Twenty posters were displayed giving a chance for the delegates to talk to the authors and vote for their favourite poster.

Sunday saw us with five talks in the morning, including a talk on the migration of Purple Sandpipers and Sanderlings, breeding studies of Lapwings in Scotland and Redshank in the UK, and a general overview of the flyway populations of waders. After a group photo outside the hotel and a short break for a coffee, the talks continued. There were two talks on the genetics of Temminck's Stint and Black-tailed Godwit, followed by a talk on the trace element concentrations in waders wintering in France. The population trend in waders at an important site on Sumatra, Indonesia, was the subject of the final talk.

The majority of participants took part in the afternoon excursions. There included, a trip to Knockfarril with views across farmland, forestry and heather moorland; Nigg Bay and the coastal realignment project; and Munloch Bay, which included a variety of habitats such as mudflats, saltmarshes, reedbeds and cliffs with old sea caves. The fourth excursion involved a visit to a Highland glen (Strathfarrar), which holds a remnant of Caledonian forest within picturesque mountain scenery. For those that visited the estuaries, flocks of Teal and Wigeon were seen on the mudflats along with smaller number of Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew and Redshank. Highlights for some of the participants were views of Bottlenose Dolphins and a Peregrine at its breeding site on a cliff.



Plate 31. The ceilidh dance was led by the "Gillie Dhu" band on the Saturday evening and all the males of the organising committee were dressed up in kilts. © Bozena Kalejta Summers

Although the conference was officially closed on Sunday afternoon, two workshops were still held for those who stayed longer. The "Measuring Moults" workshop was introduced by Les Underhill on Sunday evening and the "Flyway Population Review" workshop, chaired by David Stroud and Marc van Roomen, took place on Monday.

The conference proved to be a great success and even the weather, which managed to give us some typical Scottish drizzle during the excursions, failed to dampen spirits.

The conference was kindly sponsored by the SOC, SNH, RSPB and Coriolis Energy.

Reference

Kalejta-Summers, B. 2006. Changes in numbers and distribution of waders in the Moray Firth, 1988–2003. *Scottish Birds* 26: 1–16.

Bozena Kalejta Summers



Plate 32. Siskin and Skylark by John Busby

Siskin and Skylark for company

D. WATSON

Chris Rollie introduces this short article by the late Donald Watson. *This delightful and characteristic short piece was found recently by Louise Watson amongst her late father's papers. Donald Watson was Honorary President of the SOC and an internationally renowned wildlife artist, author and illustrator. He was also a great enthusiast with a profound love of birds. In this short note, his detailed descriptions of Siskin and Skylark illustrate the artist's keen eye and fondness for colour and contrast. Getting inside the heads and make-up of birds, he identifies here with the challenge of Siskins finding food throughout the year. He also reminds us of a time when people really studied birds in unashamed fascination over their behaviour, and one can almost smell the sweet pipe tobacco and feel the contentment of morning coffee with bird song (and I don't even drink coffee!).*

One wet afternoon in August 1963, two little girls came to our house with an injured bird. It was not, as so often, one of the commoner garden birds, but a young Siskin in its first plumage. Although a few pairs breed in this Galloway glen each year I thought they had been scarcer than usual that summer, so I was interested to see this young bird, which could hardly have travelled far. It had probably struck a wire as one wing was almost severed at the carpal joint and it was soon apparent that it would always lack the primary flight feathers on that side. I had had a Skylark in like condition in my studio for a year, so remembering Konrad Lorenz's opinion of Siskins as the easiest and most companionable of small birds to keep I was not dismayed by my new charge.

My first impression was of a very small grey and olive finch, much streaked on the head and breast, with a neatly patterned black and cream wing and yellow-green patches on the sides of the tail. I noticed that the tail was short and rather deeply forked and that the eyes were very small, dark and beady, typical of a finch and so very unlike the large eyes of insectivorous birds like Robins. In a few weeks the flecks of sulphur yellow on the Siskin's belly were creeping up to suffuse the whole breast with exquisite colour as the grey streaked feathers were lost. In a good light the yellow had a silken gleam. During October the moult proceeded and there could be no doubt that it was a male, but I had supposed this from the almost day-long singing that had begun even in September. I specially enjoyed watching the development of the neat black crown, each tiny feather edged with smoky grey, vividly set off by the deep yellow stripe above the eye. Now too the wing bar had become yellow, the back greener and the flanks boldly marked with black or white contrasting with the yellow breast.

From the start the Siskin was confiding and food was no problem. Apart from seed-mixtures as a regular stand-by, it eats a wide variety of seeds of trees and flowering plants as they are in season. I had often watched Siskin parties in Galloway gathering to feed upon the seeds of wayside and wasteland plants such as knapweed, ragwort and thistle in late summer and autumn, sometimes in delightful

association with Goldfinches and Redpolls. Even the best bird books may give a very incomplete picture of feeding habits - Siskins are described as feeding mainly on the seeds of trees, but here at least this is not true for all the year. Of course in winter they are typically to be found hanging like titmice among the mazy Alder twigs by the river, prising the seeds from the little brown husks, and in season the seeds of birch and Larch may seem to offer an almost inexhaustible food supply.

But I have seen the autumn flocks from Scandinavia tarrying on a treeless island where the little birds clustered inconspicuously among the fluffy heads of Spear Thistle, only catching the eye as they rose together in dancing flight with wheezy piercing calls. And in May the local birds visit the dandelions close to my window, joining Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Redpolls and Linnets. Indeed my Siskin has an insatiable appetite for dandelions and can pluck a head clean of seeds in two minutes dead. Recently he discovered the usefulness of a foot, or rather the long middle toe and claw, to hold down a dandelion head, and this has become his regular habit after first pulling the stem down with the bill. But for all the abundance of natural food at many seasons, are there still in-between times when crucial shortages may occur? Gathering food for my bird, I begin to see the problem Siskin-wise: in years of cone failure and when the Alder husks mostly hang empty, the late winter could be a danger period. In early spring the first bronzing heads of Coltsfoot seemed a find, though I do not know if the seeds are commonly taken by wild Siskins.

In a year I have learned something of the contrasting characters - I can think of no other word - of Siskin and Skylark. At first I put them together, but the tiny confident Siskin dominated the larger, timorous lark, threatening it with spread wings, so I separated them into two large cages, the Siskin with plenty of perches and the lark on turf and soil - they have both explored the studio floor on occasion. I am no aviculturalist but both are in remarkably good voice as I write. The Siskin sings all forenoon, less in the afternoon, and in summer is asleep long before dark, bill plunged deep into scapular feathers, as round as a ball except for the tail. The song is Linnets-like but

more wheezy and chattering, lacking the wonderful clear quality of the Linnets in the long notes. It is best when it relapses into sweet meditative undertones. The piercing call-note - like a very loud Coal Tit - can sound unbearably insistent at your elbow, but if this upsets my concentration I give it fresh water and all is quiet except for vigorous bathing noises. If there is talk in the studio it starts to sing or rather, as it is usually already singing, proceeds 'fortissimo'.

The lark differs in every way. Although it sang every day from January to July while I was working alone, it would not sing for my wife for 18 months - she had to listen outside the studio to be convinced that it sang at all, for even the sound of an opening door stopped it dead. But at last it has come to endure even the sound of human talk and now its sweet wild notes and audibly vibrating wings mingle strangely with the Siskin's shriller music to make a background to morning coffee. A Skylark, I suppose, is ever alert to sound or sight of ground predators and I have even begun to wonder whether my bird ever takes more than cat-naps. Characteristically it stands low and crouched with long legs flexed to spring away. It feeds late and even at night I have never surprised it in an attitude of sleep. It requires a great deal of grit - everyone must have seen larks on roads in the early morning or at dusk - and a balance of animal and seed food. But water remains almost untouched - surely all larks must have sprung from desert stock! So in every way it is almost the opposite of the Siskin.

Of course I am sorry that my birds cannot take their chance again in the open spaces and it may be doubted whether there is a case for keeping an injured bird alive in captivity. I might plead un sentimentally that they were useful as a bird artist's models but I know really that I do not keep them just for that reason.

*Donald Watson
precise date unknown (1960s)*

NOTES AND COMMENT



Plate 33. Woodpigeons, Linlithgow, Lothian, September 2011. © Leo du Feu

Garden Oddities

Plate 33 shows a colourless Woodpigeon which was in my garden a month ago. I'm informed that it was probably suffering from a condition known as leucism. Unfortunately the bird hasn't returned so has probably perished or been forced away due to its abnormal colouring.

Plate 34 is of a one-legged Blue Tit which has now regularly been feeding from suet blocks in my garden for the past month. When I first saw it I assumed it would not survive long. It hangs underneath the feeder and performs a sort of 'pull-up' to reach the fat.

Leo du Feu



Plate 34. Blue Tit, Linlithgow, Lothian, October 2011.
© Leo du Feu

BOOK REVIEWS

Avian Survivors. The History and Biogeography of Palearctic Birds. Clive Finlayson 2011. T. & A.D. Poyser, ISBN: 978-07136-88658; hardback 304 pages, £50.



This is an examination of a whole avifauna through time, from before the extinction of the dinosaurs,

through to the present. Finlayson's approach is to assess the bioclimatic characteristics of both families and species. He assesses them in terms of the breadth of their habitat requirements and categorises them as specialists or generalists of various degrees amongst the broad habitat types that are found across the Palearctic.

While he does deal with species and families, orders and superfamilies are the basis of this examination of the avifauna. Those of us that have not kept up with the recent wholesale alterations to bird systematics will be in for some surprising groupings of species. For instance, one very ancient grouping, that predates the dinosaur extinction, links pigeons with sandgrouse (OK so far!), but then with tropicbirds, flamingos and then grebes! This use of the most recent DNA-based systematics also extends to species order in tables and lists, so if you are 'Voous-order' sort of person, be prepared for some confusion.

The overall conclusion of the book, and hence the title 'Avian Survivors', is that the birds we see today in the Palearctic are the

survivors of a long history of climatic change brought about by changes in the geography of the area due to tectonic events associated with continental drift, one of the most important of which was the collision of India with Eurasia 50 million years ago. This led to the formation of the Tibetan plateau which made wholesale alterations to the climate of the area which have continued since. He states that any birds that survived the increasing vicissitudes of the late Tertiary were well adapted to fluctuating climate regimes well before the turmoil of the Ice Ages.

I found this book fascinating. However it is undoubtedly an academic book (and priced as such!) and does not do the reader many favours. It lacks any diagrams showing relationships between the taxa dealt with. One might have expected a few 'family trees' showing relationships through time, for instance. In a book dealing with geography, I might have expected more maps. As this area is an interest of mine, I am familiar with the geographic ranges of most of the species, but for the average reader maps showing the distributional types discussed might have been useful. It is rather heavy with small bar charts and long tables, some of the latter with keys located elsewhere in the book for some reason.

In many respects, this volume could almost act as the appendix to a more accessible book with a stronger narrative taking one through time from the earliest origins of our avifauna to the present day. Fascinating, but more of a story-line is needed.

Ray Murray

The Kittiwake. John C. Coulson 2011. T. & A.D. Poyser, ISBN 978-1-4081-0966-3. 304 pages hardback, £50.



The Kittiwake is one of our most charming birds and provides a beautiful sight and sound to the observer visiting one of its many UK colonies. This book provides the answers to any conceivable question one could pose regarding this bird. It is an illuminating insight into the life of this pretty gull as well as the scientific process of the serious ornithologist. The book covers all aspects of the Kittiwake's lifestyle from the obvious (diet, foraging behaviour and lifespan) to such detail as egg volume and incubation rotas. This detail is impressive; everything that could be questioned is discussed - right down to the direction Kittiwakes prefer to face when sitting on their nests! The author also provides a comprehensive discussion of the population dynamics of Kittiwake colonies and this can be recommended as essential reading for anybody interested in the fluctuating numbers of our breeding seabirds.

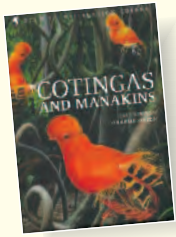
The book is clearly the product of decades of scientific research, but at no point does the reader struggle. The text is clearly and succinctly phrased with numerous simple graphs to illustrate the points made. An excellent series of black and white sketches, by Robert Greenleaf, are found at the beginning and end of each chapter, in addition to eight pages of colour photographs. All in all, this well-written scientific work can be recommended to anybody with an interest in this delightful bird.

Darren O'Brien

Cotingas and Manakins.

Guy Kirwan & Graeme Green, 2011. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 978-0-7136-6025-8. Hardback, 624 pages, £60.00.

Quite simply a big and beautiful reference book rather than a field guide. The Guianan Cocks-of-the-Rock dust-jacket illustration is striking and indicates the quality of the publication. The two families (160 species) covered are restricted to South America and include many of the most colourful and enigmatic birds in the region - the title families plus Schiffornises, Purpletufts, Calyptura, Sharpbill, Fruiteaters, Pihás, Mourners, Berryeaters, Bellbirds, Capuchinbird, Fruitcrows, Umbrellabirds, Cocks-of-the-Rock, Plantcutters and Piprites.



Both authors have a notable pedigree birding in the Neotropics, and their knowledge of these families is readily evident in the accounts: the text oozes with detail and authority. A huge amount of background information is sprinkled throughout standard headings: identification, distribution, movements, habitat, description, measurements, geographical variation, voice, natural history, food and feeding, display, breeding, status and references. The plates are grouped together, and Eustace Barnes' illustrations are superb, with males, females and distinctive races depicted. These are supplemented in the accounts by a tremendous selection of several hundred photographs, many previously unpublished, and these are worth the cover price alone.

If you have ever seen any of these species before, or intend to try, then this book is highly recommended.

Stuart L. Rivers

Advanced Bird ID Handbook - The Western Palearctic.

Nils van Duivendijk, 2011. New Holland, ISBN 978-1-78009-022-1, paperback 416 pages, £24.99.

The original version of this book was reviewed in SB 30 (4). It has now been reissued in a large format with larger typeface and updates to more than 570 species; less of a field guide and more of an at-home reference guide. There are 23 new tables comparing features of similar species for example Hume's Leaf Warbler and Yellow-browed Warbler or Pallid and Common Swift.



It now covers all 1,350 species and subspecies recorded in Britain, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. There is also a handy checklist of the birds of the Western Palearctic, although only for Category A and B species.

This is still unlikely to interest the recreational birdwatcher but access to it is probably essential for experienced ornithologists and photographers. It is highly recommended.

Karen Bidgood

Birds of the United Arab Emirates.

Simon Aspinall & Richard Porter, 2011. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-14081-52577, softback, 240 pages, £24.99.

I've been very fortunate due my father's job to be able to bird in the Middle East under the guise of father-daughter time. When I first went I acquired a second-hand copy of the Poyser *Birds of the Middle East* which was subsequently followed by the first

edition of the Christopher Helm publication, both extremely useful books. Recently a second edition of the *Birds of the Middle East* (2010) has been published and this new Helm guide, *Birds of the United Arab Emirates* is based on it. UAE has become a popular holiday destination and it seems fitting that a guide be produced for this area on its own. Indeed at the back of the book a checklist can be found for all those holiday ticks. The distribution maps within the guides don't just focus on UAE so if you do decide to pop over the border to other states the guide will still be useful. The species accounts are very comprehensive and supported by superb illustrations of over 500 species, which includes three plates of non-natives. Overall a superb book and another gem in the Helm field guides list. My only difficulty with it though would be deciding to purchase this book or the *Birds of the Middle East* (which is almost twice as big with over 810 species), but that I feel would come down to personal choice and rucksack space.

Hayley Douglas

Winged Sentinels: birds and climate change.

Janice Wormworth & Ça an H. ekercio lu, 2011. Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0-521-12682-3, paperback, 262 pages £24.99.

This is a thorough, up-to-date, review of the responses of birds to climate change. The extensive bibliography illustrates the explosive growth in research in recent years, contributing to the book's content, which focuses on phenology, migration, range and population changes, seabirds and conservation. The authors describe the complex and often finely-tuned relationship of birds to their global environment, using numerous examples from every continent. Migratory movements have been



honed to perfection over time, but the current rapid rate at which climate change and humans are modifying habitats is outstripping species' ability to adapt, especially long-distance migrants. Many species are becoming increasingly mismatched to their environment via food resources, namely other living organisms that are themselves subject to climate change at differing rates. The ability of a species to adapt depends on its own capacity to do so and the resilience of its ecosystem, so that specialists suffer most, with risks of extinctions and markedly reduced biodiversity. The authors point out that conservationists must significantly re-examine their strategies to mitigate the effects of our changing climate, although options are few.

The text is well written but on a pessimistic note, except in the final more upbeat chapter on conservation, and is accompanied by some attractive colour plates. I can recommend this book to those who are concerned about declining global biodiversity.

Norman Elkins

Birds of Seychelles. Adrian Skerrett & Tony Disley, 2011. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-14081-51518, paperback, 176 pages. £24.99.

This small field guide is a condensed, but updated, version of a similar guide published in 2001. All 257 species so far recorded in the archipelago are shown in good quality illustrations. This may be overkill, as only 65 species breed and another 27 are annual migrants, meaning that the remaining 165 are either extinct or vagrants. However, it does provide a comprehensive

guide for islanders, hopefully boosting local interest. A useful short chapter describes and maps the island groups while other items feature a list of local names for all species, a checklist for each island and lists of endemics.

To my mind, the treatment of vagrants is overdone, and I would have preferred the endemics i.e. those of most interest to visitors, to be dealt with more prominently. A few of the plates show illustrations with varying scales, and also plumages unlikely to be seen in the islands. The accompanying text could be of a larger font and still fit the page, but the book's dimensions and weight make it ideal for birding trips as it would fit in a large pocket. I would certainly recommend it despite its somewhat excessive price.



Norman Elkins

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RINGERS' ROUNDUP

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

Plate 35. Twite, nr. Corgarff, North-east Scotland, November 2005. © Harry Scott

Some interesting movements

Age/sex: 1 nestling, 3 hatched during calendar year of ringing, 4 hatched before calendar year of ringing but exact year unknown, 5 hatched during previous calendar year, 6 hatched previous calendar year but exact year unknown. f = female, m = male.

Circumstances: x found dead, + shot or intentionally killed by man, F - fresh, L - not recent, W ring read in field, R caught and released by ringer, N nesting.

Mute Swan

Z51411	1f	13/9/83	Montrose Curling Pond, Angus	
	R	11/02/11	Barry Mill, Barry, Angus	31 km

At 27 years and 151 days this is a new longevity record for a BTO-ringed Mute Swan. After being ringed by Norman Atkinson the bird wasn't reported again until she turned up to breed at Barry Mill in 1998 where her fortunes have been monitored ever since by Pete Ellis. She last bred successfully there in 2006 but still returned to attempt to breed (with her 4th mate) when she was finally ousted in 2009 by one of her own cygnets reared in 2003. A fascinating history ...thanks to Pete for the details.

Greylag Goose

5185323	1	13/07/08	Loch of Hundland, Birsay, Orkney	
	WV	10/03/10	Buckenham Marshes, Norfolk	781 km
5185328	1	13/07/08	Loch of Hundland, Birsay, Orkney	
	WV	10/03/10	Buckenham Marshes, Norfolk	781 km
5257262	1	09/07/09	Loch of Hundland, Birsay, Orkney	
	WV	10/03/10	Buckenham Marshes, Norfolk	781 km
5257263	1	09/07/09	Loch of Hundland, Birsay, Orkney	
	WV	10/03/10	Buckenham Marshes, Norfolk	781 km

Greylag Geese breeding in Britain are largely sedentary (BTO Migration Atlas), so it strange and surprising to see this continuing link between breeding birds in Orkney and wintering area in Norfolk.

Barnacle Goose

1291347	3	13/11/02	Gruinart Farm, Islay	
	WV	27/11/10	Bronx, New York, USA	5202 km
	WV	03/12/10	Stratford, Connecticut, USA	5132 km
	WV	10/12/10	Westport, Connecticut, USA	5154 km

Only the seventh BTO-ringed Barnacle Goose to be reported in the USA (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Pintail

FP46900	4m	11/11/06	Longman, Inverness	
	x	22/05/11	Prioralskiy Rayon, Yamal-Nenets, RUSSIA	3791 km

Shoveler

FH26236	3	10/08/10	Port Allen, Perth	
	x	11/11/10	Les Ilots de Biganos, At Sea, Bay of Biscay	1306 km

Red-throated Diver

1173866	1	20/07/86	South Unst, Shetland	
	V	27/07/10	South Unst, Shetland	0 km

At 24 years and 7 days this is a new longevity record for a BTO-ringed Red-throated Diver (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Storm Petrel

2426925	4	29/07/74	Fair Isle	
	V	26/05/10	Mousa, Shetland	56 km
2836955	4	08/08/09	Maseskar, Goteborg och Bohus, SWEDEN	
	V	04/08/10	Sanday, Orkney	810 km

At 35 years, 9 months and 27 days 2426925 is a new longevity record for a BTO-ringed Storm Petrel. Also shown is the third Swedish-ringed Storm Petrel to be reported in Britain and Ireland (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Lapwing

DK96117	1	17/05/01	Rhynie, Grampian	
	x	14/01/10	Aghamore, Mayo, Ireland	537 km
DK12592	4	24/08/02	Ythan Estuary, Newburgh, Grampian	
	x	12/01/10	Flaxfort, Cork, Ireland	764 km

Two cold weather movements and mortality due to the severe cold and snowy winter weather in 2009/10.

Purple Sandpiper

NW14772	6f	01/01/06	Buchanhaven, Peterhead	
	v	12/06/10	Longyearbyen, SVALBARD	2397 km
8B10767	3	31/08/10	Longyearbyen, SVALBARD	
	vv	07/11/10	Kingsbarns, Fife	2542 km

This is only the second BTO-ringed Purple Sandpiper to be reported on its breeding grounds in Svalbard and the third to come from Svalbard (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Whimbrel

EK92102	6m	01/06/86	Fetlar, Shetland	
	vv	26/07/10	Fetlar, Shetland	0 km
EW49138	6	20/06/10	Fetlar, Shetland	
	+	17/08/10	Loon-Plagge, Nord, FRANCE	1084 km

At 24 years, 1 month and 25 days EK92102 is a new longevity record for a BTO-ringed Whimbrel. Also shown is another Fetlar breeding adult shot in France on passage to wintering areas in western Africa (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Great Skua

MA22636	1	27/06/09	Handa, Highland	
	v	10/07/10	El Marsa, Chlef, ALGERIA	2484 km

An immature bird probably summering in its wintering area (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Puffin

EB38387	6	08/07/74	Shiants, Western Isles	
	v	21/06/10	Garbh Eilen, Western Isles	2 km

At 35 years, 11 months and 13 days this is a new longevity record for a BTO-ringed Puffin (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Sandwich Tern

6T33579	1	25/05/99	Zeebrugge, BELGIUM	
	v	06/08/10	Ythan Estuary	745 km
7T46621	1	13/06/05	Heist, BELGIUM	
	v	29/07/10	Ythan Estuary	745 km
1370452	1	13/06/07	Griend, NETHERLANDS	
	v	06/08/10	Ythan Estuary	644 km
1389396	1	23/06/05	Griend, NETHERLANDS	
	v	30/08/10	Ythan Estuary	644 km
1439331	1	08/06/10	Griend, NETHERLANDS	
	v	06/08/10	Ythan Estuary	644 km

1440017	1	15/06/10	Griend, NETHERLANDS	
	v	30/08/10	Ythan Estuary	644 km
7147626	1	02/06/10	Hirsholm, DENMARK	
	v	30/08/10	Ythan Estuary	757 km

A tremendous series of foreign-ringed birds on the Ythan Estuary in early autumn, including three chicks ringed two months previously. These suggest perhaps a surprisingly large-scale northwards immigration into the north-east from birds breeding in the Low Countries.

Rock Dove

ES58139	6	14/07/02	Yell, Shetland	
	v	08/04/10	Yell, Shetland	9 km

At 7 years, 8 months and 25 days this is a new longevity record for a BTO-ringed Rock Dove (BTO Ringing Report 2010).

Waxwing

NW31126	5m	11/03/09	Aboyne	
	x	18/04/10	Ostersund, Jamtland, SWEDEN	1176 km
NV43738	5f	18/02/09	Kintore	
	vv	22/02/10	Kintore	0 km

Note the different areas NW31126 and NV43738 were reported from the winter after ringing. There was no significant invasion into the UK in winter 2009/10 but small numbers arrived in mid-February 2010, including NV43738. This bird had been colour-ringed in Kintore Main Street in February 2009, following the large invasion of November 2008 and was resighted by Walter and Ann Burns in their garden back in Kintore in February 2010. This is only the third record ever of a Waxwing returning to the UK in a subsequent winter.

Greenfinch

TH76277	3f	06/10/07	Montrose, Angus	
	x	21/06/10	Konsmo, Audnedal, Vest-Agder, NORWAY	541 km

In some winters numbers of Scandinavian Greenfinches arrive in the Northern Isles and along the east coast of Scotland. They are much harder to detect than other more obvious Scandinavian visitors such as Brambling and Crossbill, but ringing returns can provide us with some useful indications.

Colour-ringed White/Pied Wagtails

This is a request for birders to be on the lookout for colour-ringed Pied and White Wagtails this spring, as the birds return from their wintering areas to the south, and in the summer on breeding sites throughout the country.

The project began here in Lanarkshire in 2003, with three other sites along the south coast of England joining subsequently. The colour-ringing project has been very successful and has confirmed that White Wagtails from Iceland pass through Lanarkshire from mid-August until late September every year. The birds move through quickly and congregate in Devon prior to onward passage into France, Spain, Portugal and end up wintering as far south as West Africa.

The Pied Wagtails are not quite as mobile, but cover an impressive distance nonetheless, with records from Highland and Outer Hebrides in the north, to birds wintering in most parts of England, Channel Islands, France, Spain, and we have one male that spent two consecutive winters in the same site in northern Portugal.

The birds are marked with a metal BTO ring on either the left or right leg, usually one colour ring with the metal one, but this can have two colours on the one ring. The opposite leg carries up to three rings again some may be bi-coloured. Ideally try to get photographs of the birds' legs to assist in correct identification of the bird, but photos of the bird in his/her spring plumage will be of great assistance in the core aim of the project. We have been taking descriptions and photographs of most birds when in uncertain plumages i.e. those that are difficult to allocate to a specific subspecies, so seeing them in spring plumage will make their identification much easier.

Please report all sightings to myself by email on ainlivcrg@googlemail.com or by phoning 01698 749844. I will reply with the ringing details of any of our birds and will pass on the record to the project co-ordinator for birds from English sites.

Thank you, Iain Livingstone Clyde Ringing Group, 57 Strathview Road, Bellshill ML4 2UY.

Online ringing recoveries, totals, facts & figures in your area

If you want to find out how many Blue Tits were ringed in your area in 2010 or any other species in recent years for that matter Rob Robinson, Jacquie Clarke and other members of BTO staff have been busy creating online reports and summaries from the huge amount of ringing data accumulated every year at head office. Go to www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/ringing-scheme and click on the online reports for lots of interesting ringing information.

Big gull colour-ringing

A joint Grampian/Tay Ringing Group 'big gull' colour-ringing project started by Euan Ferguson, Calum Campbell and Ben Herschell in summer 2011 is already producing some very interesting results.

Lesser Black-backed Gull T:027, ringed in an Asda car park in Aberdeen on 27 June 2011 by chasing it under a shopping trolley (!), was resighted and photographed by Rafa Garcia on 5th and 11 September 2011 at La Tapa Saltpan, El Puerto de Santa Maria, near Cadiz in southern Spain. It is well known from ringing that many of our Lesser Black-backed Gulls winter in Portugal, Spain and North Africa so the movement itself is perhaps not unexpected but it is the dramatic change in the bird from its full summer plumage in late June to its full winter plumage (something we don't see much up here in Scotland) by early September which is interesting to compare (see photographs below).



Plate 38. Second-year Glaucous Gull T:193, Ugie Estuary, North-east Scotland, August 2011. © Euan Ferguson

The single Glaucous Gull colour-ringed so far, T:193, was ringed as a second-year bird in moult at the Ugie Estuary, Peterhead on 3 August 2011 (Plate 38). It wasn't reported again until over four months later when Paul Nellist resighted it at Boldon Flats Nature Reserve in Durham on 23 December 2011. There's no knowing where this bird had been during the intervening time but it is surprising how such a large, obvious bird always sought after by ornithologists can apparently disappear for so long.



Plates 36–37. Lesser Black-backed Gull T:027, Aberdeen, June 2011. © Euan Ferguson. **(right).** Lesser Black-backed Gull T:027, near Cadiz, Spain, September 2011. © Rafa Garcia



Plate 39. First-year Great Black-backed Gull T:007, Peterhead, North-east Scotland, December 2011. © Euan Ferguson

Most surprising of all was Great Black-backed Gull T:007, ringed as a first-year male at Peterhead Harbour on 26 December 2011 (Plate 39) and resighted four **days** later in Westküstenpark St.Peter-Ording, Eiderstedt (Nordfriesland), Germany by Martin Kühn. A rather unexpected movement considering it was mid-winter (and during the Christmas holidays too!). T:005 and T:008, ringed around the same time, were still in Peterhead Harbour in mid-January 2012.

Please check all gulls for colour-rings and report any yellow T:000 to Euan Ferguson on e.ferguson17@hotmail.co.uk.

There are many other on-going projects in Scotland, the UK and across Europe. Any yellow or blue rings with a letter and two number might well be from northern Scottish colonies and should be reported to markoksien@btinternet.com. Go to Dirk Raes' website www.cr-birding.org for a comprehensive list of gulls and many other colour-ringing projects across Europe.

Bean and White-fronted Geese

An unprecedented arrival of Bean and White-fronted Geese occurred in the UK in autumn 2011. The reasons and origins for this will be described and analysed elsewhere, but a neck-collared Bean Goose sighting by Hugh Addlesee in North-east Scotland sheds a bit of history on the movements of at least one of these straying individuals.

Neck collar AYA had been ringed at Lith, Middelweg, Noord-Brabant in the Netherlands on 24 January 2010. It was resighted for the first time in early November 2010 in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Niedersachsen in Germany then in Groningen in the Netherlands at the end of November. No further reports were received until it reappeared again in late February, early March 2011 in Sachsen-Anhalt and Brandenburg in Germany before a last spring sighting in Wroclaw, Poland on 7 March 2011.

It arrived in the UK in November 2011 when Neil Fletcher and Chris Redfern reported it in Northumberland on 18 and 20 November. It then moved northwards where Hugh Addlesee resighted on 23 December at Loch of Strahbeg, North-east Scotland.

A neck-collared White-fronted Goose was also reported near Portlethen, Aberdeen by Martin Collinson on 7 January 2012 in a flock of 50 along with Pink-footed Geese and several Tundra Bean Geese. The white code on black collar identified it to be from the Dutch/German scheme but only 2 of the 3 letters were read and at time of writing no history was available.

Request for colour ring sightings: Bean Geese near Falkirk.

Fifteen Bean Geese were caught in early October, 2011 on the Slamannan Plateau, near Falkirk. Prior to the catch only five Bean Geese had been ringed in Britain and Ireland. Each bird was fitted



Plate 40. Bean Goose ringed at Slamannan, near Falkirk, October 2011. © Carl Mitchell

with a standard grey neck collar engraved with two black characters (Plate 40). The geese are fairly faithful to the Slamannan areas from October to the end of February, however they are sometimes absent for up to two weeks each winter and where they go to is unknown.

We are keen to encourage as many sightings of these birds as possible to help identify important feeding areas both on the plateau and further afield. Many thanks in advance for any sightings you are able to make. Contact: Carl Mitchell carl.mitchell@wwt.org.uk

Santa Twite

Twite colour-ringing projects across the UK and in Ireland have provided lots of useful, interesting and important information about this red-listed species breeding and wintering areas. Most projects have used site and winter or summer codes to enable identification of a particular cohort of birds, but due to the large amount of birds being ringed it hasn't usually been possible to individually mark birds and follow them as specific individuals. "Santa Twite" has come up with his own way of helping us ringers follow his particular movements.

Twite X417735 was first ringed as an adult male at Foveran Links, Newburgh, North-east Scotland on 17 January 2009, when it was noted as having a white chin and was colour-ringed orange over yellow left leg along with all the others at Foveran that winter. It has been retrapped there each of the three winters since, on 13 December 2009, 30 January 2011 and



Plate 41. *Twite, Achiltibuie, Wester Ross, May 2011.* © Tony Mainwood



Plate 42. *Twite, Foveran, North-east Scotland, December 2011.* © Hywel Maggs

most recently on 4 December 2011 when it was noted and photographed still sporting his grand wee white "beard" (Plate 42).

It was only on looking at photographs of colour-ringed Twite sent in by observers seeing them on their breeding grounds over on the west coast that we realized "Santa Twite" had been photographed by Tony Mainwood at Achiltibuie, North-west Highlands on 5 May 2011 (Plate 41), 300 km north-west on the other side of the country. The wee white goaty beard can just be made out in Tony's photo and in the hand at Foveran on 4 December 2011 (Plate 42).

There was an unprecedented series of colour-ringed Twite reported along the North Sea coast between Edinburgh and Northumberland at the end of 2011. This involved birds ringed at Clachtoll and Machrihanish in the north-west and west of Scotland and from Heysham in Lancashire. Eddie Maguire also received reports of colour-ringed birds from Machrihanish in the north and south-east of Ireland and Essex. It is not clear if these latest movements are a legacy of the previous harsh winters or more observers looking for colour rings but further ringing and observations will hopefully help to continue to help unravel and monitor the movements of this fascinating species.



Plate 43. Mediterranean and Black-headed Gulls, Buckhaven, Fife, September 2011. © John Nadin

Twelve Mediterranean Gulls at Buckhaven, Fife on 7 September 2011 - a new Scottish record count

J.S. NADIN

The first Mediterranean Gull recorded in Fife was seen at Kilconquhar Loch on 26 September 1982 by David Clugston, and with just 17 more in the following 15 years it remained a rare to very scarce bird in the county. A notable upsurge in records produced over 10 birds in both 1997 and 1998, and 5–10 birds in each of the next seven years. Although the sightings had increased since those early days it could never be predictably seen anywhere in the county,

even at the most productive area - the mouth of the River Leven and adjacent beach near Methil Power Station (now demolished). This site produced the first juvenile seen in Fife (Ken Shaw/Pete Ellis), and the highest day count of three birds together on both 20 November 1997 and 2 November 2001, though Burntisland also hosted three on 29th and 30 November 2000, with four different birds involved (the latter all by Ken Shaw).



Plate 44. Adult winter Mediterranean Gull with Oystercatcher, Buckhaven, Fife, September 2011. © John Nadin

On 24 February 2009, a Mediterranean Gull was reported at Buckhaven, the first from this location. This winter adult soon increased to three, with four birds present on 9 March. The three adults attained breeding plumage before departing by mid-March. Returning birds were again seen in July 2009, with four, possibly five, birds being seen there (up to four adults and a second-summer), and in August five birds were seen together (a new Fife record count). This gathering of Mediterranean Gulls can now be reliably guaranteed from mid-July right through until late February/ early March when the birds presumably depart for their breeding grounds. These are still unknown, as no colour ringed birds have been observed at Buckhaven yet,

although two adults with metal rings have been seen there. Colour-ringed birds noted elsewhere in Fife have originated from Hungary, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Since they were first discovered at Buckhaven, I have gone to see and try and photograph the Mediterranean Gulls on many occasions. The birds can most reliably be found either on the grassy area at Shore Road or on the rocks just off Shore Road. It is also worth checking the grassy area around by the car park at the small harbour area just to the west. In 2010, I was lucky to see some breeding-plumaged birds on 16 July, and I returned again on 3 August and discovered the first juvenile bird to be recorded at Buckhaven (only the third seen in the county), along with two adult birds. In 2011, I again recorded returning birds in July, seeing up to two adults and a second-summer, all still looking smart in their breeding plumage. After that sighting, I noted up to three adults, with similar totals being reported into August by a few different observers, so I got quite a shock when I visited the site on 5 September and saw eight or possibly even nine different birds (five adult winters and three or four juvenile/first-winters) there. At the time I knew this was a new Fife record count and suspected it could even be a Scottish high count, and this was confirmed through correspondence with Angus Murray (*Birdline Scotland*) - previously six had been seen together on the Seton Burn, Lothian on 13 November 2010

As I was not totally sure if I had seen three or four different young birds I returned to the site again on 7 September to try and confirm the number one way or the other. I first checked the



Plate 45. First-winter Mediterranean Gull, Buckhaven, Fife, September 2011. © John Nadin



Plate 46. Three Mediterranean Gulls, Buckhaven, Fife, September 2011. © John Nadin

grassy area near the harbour and was surprised to count six adult birds amongst the Black-headed Gulls - one more than I had seen on 5th. After taking some record shots I drove along to Shore Road; there were no Mediterranean Gulls on the grass here, so I walked to the raised bank overlooking the rocky shore line. There were six Mediterranean Gulls together on the exposed rocks close to the shore: two adult winters and four juvenile/first-winter birds. At this point I was joined by John Anderson and I informed him how many birds I thought I had seen, and that I believed this could be the highest Scottish count to date. After taking some photographs of this group we headed back to the harbour area, but a motor cyclist had scared a lot of the gulls from their original location, but I could still count five adults here, and the one that was missing (a very distinctive pale bird) was not one of the two adults with the group off Shore Road (which we checked for a second time before leaving).

So I had indeed seen 12 different birds - eight winter-plumaged adults and four juvenile/first-winters at Buckhaven on 7 September 2011 - a new Scottish record count. I am sure this total will be bettered sooner rather than later, especially as good numbers of Mediterranean Gulls are now breeding at several sites in England. Indeed it must only be a matter of time before the first Scottish breeders are confirmed.

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Record counts of Storm Petrels off Fife, Lothian and Borders in July 2011

C.D. SCOTT, M. GRIFFIN & S.L. RIVERS



Plate 47. Storm Petrel and Gannet, Fife Ness, Fife, July 2011. © Barry Farquharson

Storm Petrel is a locally common breeding species in Scotland, with colonies present on the Northern Isles, four islands off the north coast of Sutherland and several islands off the north and west coast as far south as Sanda, near the tip of the Mull of Kintyre (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, away from its breeding areas this remains a relatively scarce species in Scotland. In Fife, the largest day counts from a seawatch were 15 seen during a series of overlapping watches on 12 August 2006, and eight on 17 September 2001 (Alan Lauder). By contrast, overnight trapping sessions at Fife Ness (using tape-luring) have produced single-night, high counts of 75 on 12/13 July 2003, 67 on 26/27 July 2004, 57 on 14/15 July 2003, 54 on 28/29 July 2007 and 51 on 31 July/1 August 2001 (Dr. Jim Cobb/Mark Oksien, pers. comm.). The largest day count from a seawatch in Lothian was of at least nine birds (up to 16) off Dunbar on 27 June 2007 (Ewen Forbes & Tony O'Connor), but trapping sessions are very rarely conducted.

On 23 July 2011, a notable count of eight Storm Petrels was made from Foreland Head, the easternmost point of Fife Ness (Fife), however, a seawatch from Dunbar, Lothian on the same day by MG produced a few shearwaters and skuas, but no Storm Petrels. Early the next morning, Mark Wilkinson saw over 25 birds in Roome Bay from the harbour at Crail, Fife. This prompted CS, Keith Gillon and Colin Davison to head to Dunbar where conditions were sunny with an F2–3 NNW breeze, but a huge swell was evident at sea. They counted 53 birds passing north in just over two hours, though more were probably missed in the swell and troughs, while other observers saw at least nine feeding off Torness and two more flew south at Soughall (all Lothian). Meantime, several observers headed for the Fife Bird Club hide at Foreland Head and amassed a total of 124 birds during the rest of the day, while the final total off Crail on 24th was 59 birds (some duplication with Fife Ness counts possible).

In response to the sightings on the 24th, MG went back to Dunbar for another seawatch on 25th. He arrived at 08:45 and immediately started to witness a passage of Storm Petrels. Many of the sightings involved single individuals, but several groups of two or three were logged. Accurate counting was not easy as the swell 'hid' birds as they flew past. This was most evident after he was joined by a second observer, Alan Brown, and he was calling birds that MG could not locate and vice versa. After four hours the total was 81 birds (74N, 7S). MG left at 12:45, and AB continued the count adding a further 21 birds in the next hour (19N, 2S). This minimum count of 102 birds in five hours was unprecedented in Lothian, where only 35 birds had been recorded in the period from 1979 to 2007 (including four dead and six trapped & ringed).

In Fife, 16 birds were seen from the Fife Bird Club hide on 25 July (Alistair Inglis), and a further 16 were observed between Crail and Foreland Head (Barry Farquharson). The same day four were also noted off Anstruther, while on 26th there were 17 off Fife Ness, nine off Crail and two seen from Kinraig Head (west of Elie). No birds were reported from seawatching in Fife on 27th. No Storm Petrel ringing was carried out at Fife Ness on 24th or 25th, but on 26/27 July a total of 13 birds were trapped and ringed.

The displacement was also observed in Borders, with consecutive day totals from St. Abbs of 32 on 24 July between 17:30–20:30, 87 flying

north on 25th from 18:00–20:00, and 77 on 26th, with 63 N and 14 feeding offshore (all Dave Graham). A count of 40 birds was made from Eyemouth on 24 July (James Bryden), which probably had little/no overlap of individuals with those seen off St. Abbs. Storm Petrels have only rarely been observed from seawatches in Borders, with the previous highest day-count being two off St. Abbs on 29 September 2007 (Dave Graham), while best totals from overnight trapping sessions are 19 at Black Gable, St. Abbs on 31 July 1998, 20 at Eyemouth on 27 July 2004, and 25 at Eyemouth on 27 July 2005 (Alan Kerr).

Interestingly, no Storm Petrels were seen at this time from Angus & Dundee or North-east Scotland, but very large numbers were noted off Northumberland and County Durham, though virtually none to the south of this. A total of 132 birds were counted off Northumberland on 24 July, including 69 flying north off the Farne Islands (a site record), and 75 were noted off Whitburn, Co. Durham the same day. On 25th, 139 birds were noted flying past Whitburn in 14.5 hours, and an amazing 358 in the same period on 26th. These latter counts were all the more remarkable given that a combined total of only 106 birds had been noted on seawatches from there between 1970 and 2010. On 27 July only 10 Stormies were seen off Whitburn, which coincided with a change in the weather to only F2 northerly breeze, flat seas and clear skies (Mark Newsome pers. comm.).



Plate 48. Three Storm Petrels, Fife Ness, Fife, July 2011. © Barry Farquharson

The total of 124 birds seen off Fife Ness on 24 July 2011 is a new Fife and Scottish east coast record day count, while the 102 birds seen off Dunbar on 25 July is a new record day count for Lothian and the 87 seen from St. Abbs on 25 July is a new record day count for Borders. No Leach's Petrels were noted among the birds seen in this displacement, though one was trapped and ringed on the Farnes at 03:15 on 28th (first for the site).

The full explanation underlying this unprecedented southward displacement of European Storm Petrels towards the coast of south-east Scotland and north-east England is doubtless complex. Even so, the main factors would seem to be the presence of a large number of birds at sea at the north end of the North Sea and the weather at the time. The Storm Petrel breeding population at the main Shetland (and British) colony on Mousa has increased markedly in recent years, from an estimated 6,800 prs in 1998–2002 to 11,781 AOS (apparent occupied sites) in 2008 [<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-2873>]. However, there is known to be a notable influx of non-breeding birds into Shetland waters

towards the end of July numbering up to 123,000 birds (Fowler & Hounscome 1998, Pennington *et al.* 2004) and this would seem a more likely source of the displaced birds. The weather pattern immediately before the displacement was of a high developing off SE Iceland and a deep low centred over the south end of the Baltic. On 23–24 July there were strong N/NNE winds between the west coast of Norway and Shetland. This unseasonally rough sea was enough to keep the Tall Ships in Lerwick harbour for an extra day; they were finally able to leave when the winds eased on 25th. There was no hint of this gale off the mouth of the Firth of Forth, just an extremely impressive swell, alluding to what was happening further north. On 24th and 25th the low centred off the west coast of Denmark moved west and the associated frontal system was pushed towards our east coast, which may have been responsible for the concentration of Storm Petrels close to shore. This system had dissipated by 26 July.

Acknowledgements

We thank Dr. Jim Cobb and Mark Oksien for details of their petrel-ringing sessions at Fife Ness, Ray Murray for counts from Borders, Mark Newsome for data from Northumberland and Durham, and Barry Farquharson for his photographs.

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Plate 49. Storm Petrel, Fife Ness, Fife, July 2011.
© Barry Farquharson



Plate 50. Veery, Isle of Muck, Highland, November 2011. © Adrian Webb

Veery, Isle of Muck, 16–24 November 2011

D. BARNDEN

The Isle of Muck is hardly renowned for birding rarities, in fact most people wouldn't know where it is. When I moved here five years ago, the island bird list was woefully short. Now I'd not describe myself as a good birder by any means, an average amateur would be a fairer assessment of my abilities. I had the good fortune to farm Bardsey Island off the tip of the Llyn peninsular in north Wales and so got to know Steve Stansfield, the Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory warden. He rekindled my childhood enthusiasm for birds and six years of his guidance left me with a basic knowledge, so, when I move to the Isle of Muck, I set about trying to fill some of the gaps in the island list.

On 16 November 2011, I was at Galanach Farm at the north end of the island when I noticed a small bird busily feeding in the slurry midden. I instantly realised this was something special.

The bird was slightly larger than a Robin and was very thrush-like in its behaviour. The crown, nape, mantle, back, rump and upper tail coverts were a fairly uniform rusty-brown, with a slight two-tone effect. The scapulars were similar, but the dappling was slightly more pronounced. The greater coverts were a similar brown, with light brown tips to the feathers, and the primary coverts were a darker brown, with near black tips. The tail, primaries, secondaries and tertiaries were darker brown, but fringed lighter. The underside from the undertail coverts to the breast was an off-white/grey, with a very faint spotting on the flanks and breast. The chin was also an off white as was the throat, with a light brown flecking which extended down the upper part of the breast forming a bib. The upper beak was a grey-brown, the lower mandible a lighter shade, there was an indistinct eye-ring and the legs were a greyish-pink.



Plate 51. Veery, Isle of Muck, Highland, November 2011. © Stephen MacDonald

As you can no doubt tell from the way the description is written, this was not something I had done much of. My previous best bird was an American Robin on Bardsey Island and I left it to Steve, the warden, to write the description. But I was 99% sure about this bird. I could visualise the page in my well-thumbed *Collins Bird Guide*. This was one of the American *Catharus* thrushes. It had to be a Veery. Purely by chance, I had my camera in the car with me so I hastily took a couple of dozen pictures. The bird was remarkably obliging. Far from being shy, it took little or no notice as I tried to get a few decent shots. For all I knew it might fly at any moment.

Having e-mailed the photos to a friend and full-time birder (who confirmed it was indeed a Veery) I was confident enough to list it on BirdGuides. The next few days shocked the islanders. I did warn everyone (there are only 38 residents, of which 12 are children) that this bird might create a bit of interest, but they were amazed by the demand from birders keen to see this trans-Atlantic traveller. For eight days, a steady stream of birders booked one of the two charter boats running from Mallaig to the island and the bird played ball, rarely leaving the slurry midden and its rich supply of insects and invertebrates. Most nights, it would simply roost in a sheltered corner and would be easy to locate first thing in the morning.



Plate 52. Veery, Isle of Muck, Highland, November 2011. © Robert McMillan

Over 100 people came to see the bird. They were all very polite and respected the islanders' privacy, a credit to their calling. The only slight exception were the three who ran off the ferry, begging people to give them a lift to the other side of the island. The ferry only waits 15 minutes so getting to the bird and back in time was a tall order. In an effort to help, I told them my car was just round the corner and they could borrow that. Five minutes later a rather puzzled neighbour told me someone had just "stolen" their car and raced off up the road.

The whole episode has been a very positive one. Everyone that came got to see the bird, over £120 was donated to the island's community hall fund, the islanders got to

experience a twitch and Muck was put on the birding map, for a time anyway. And it will be a long time before I can walk past the midden and not have a quick look, just in case...

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Veery - its status in Scotland

This North American species breeds across southern Canada from central British Columbia and the Rocky Mountains eastwards to the Great Lakes and across to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and southernmost Newfoundland, and south to north-east Oregon, Montana, western Wyoming and Colorado and from eastern North Dakota east to Maryland and along the Appalachian Mountains. The entire population is migratory, with birds wintering in South America from eastern and central Colombia across to Suriname and south through western Brazil to northern Bolivia.



Plate 53. Veery, Isle of Muck, Highland, November 2011. © Stephen MacDonald



Plate 54. Veery, Isle of Muck, Highland, November 2011. © Steve Nuttall

Prior to the Muck individual, there have been just nine previous records of Veery in Britain to the end of 2010, with five of these in Scotland:

- 1995: Outer Hebrides**, Newton Plantation, North Uist, 20–28 October
- 2002: Orkney**, one (trapped), North Ronaldsay, 30 September to 6 October
- 2005: Shetland**, first-winter (trapped), Northdale, Unst 22 September
- 2009: Shetland**, first-winter, Ham, Foula 1–7 October
- 2009: Shetland**, first-winter, Symbister, Whalsay, 2–5 October

The 2005 Unst bird famously fell victim overnight to a cat, denying many of Shetland's resident birders the opportunity of seeing it. However, their pain proved relatively short-lived. The first British record was a first-winter (trapped) at Porthgwarra, Cornwall on 6 October 1970, followed by one (trapped) on Lundy, Devon from 10 October to 11 November. The fourth British individual was also on Lundy, on 14 May 1997 and the fifth was a first-winter at St. Levan, Cornwall on 13 October 1999.

The prevalence of records in Scotland since 2002 may reflect greater observer awareness and coverage rather than changes in population numbers or migration timing. The pattern of timing and distribution of records in Scotland/Britain is very similar to that of the other Nearctic Catharus thrushes (Swainson's, Grey-cheeked and Hermit), with the exception that this species has yet to be found on Scilly.

Semipalmated Sandpiper, Ythan Estuary, 26 September–4 October 2011 - the first North-east Scotland record

P.S. CROCKETT



Plate 55. *Semipalmated Sandpiper*, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, September 2011. © Nick Picozzi

Semipalmated Sandpiper has long been predicted as a new bird for North East Scotland, and it is a surprise it had not turned up before. Given the exceptional influx that was occurring nationwide, it seemed like a good time to look for one. Thus, having most of 26 September off work, I thought it was best to check the waders on the Ythan Estuary. I worked my way up from the edge of Newburgh, and timed my visit to the Fisherman's Path, which lies between the Logie-Buchan Bridge and the Waulkmill Hide, for the rising tide. In autumn, good numbers of waders often congregate there. I arrived around 10:20, and was gratified to see there was indeed reasonable numbers including a very active mixed flock of approximately 50 Dunlin, with five Curlew Sandpipers present on the far side of the river. I was viewing from the fishing shelter, which is set back somewhat from the main stream of the river, but has good elevation.

I had been there a while when I noticed a significantly smaller (than a Dunlin) and grey-looking wader keeping further back up the mud on the far side. It had probably been there all along, but its behaviour meant it was hard to see, being obscured by other waders and dips in the mud. Eventually, it came a bit further forward, and stood more on its own and I realised this was a very interesting bird. I noted the shortish, straight bill, with a relatively broad base. The very grey upperparts, contrasted with mostly strikingly

white underparts. The upper breast-sides were delicately streaked with grey. It had a rather dumpy, short-winged structure. The size was clearly smaller than the Dunlin, but without the very attenuated rear-end of a Baird's or White-rumped Sandpiper. Due to the neatly pale-fringed upperparts, I aged the bird as a juvenile.

I realised the possible pitfalls including Little Stint and Western Sandpiper. The bird was not on view continuously; the fresh breeze was often ruffling the feathers, and glare at times and the range (c.75 m) made exact observations of the scapular pattern nigh on impossible. Gradually it worked its way upstream making it harder and harder to see anything of note on the bird plumage-wise. However, in the brief spells when the views were good, I became positive that the primary projection was short, and that the bill looked good for Semipalmated Sandpiper. It was generally short and thick. In my limited experience of this species I thought this bird's bill would be on the short side for Western. The head also had a very distinctive capped appearance, a prominent white supercilium, and a marked darker mask extending out from behind the eye. I could not determine any scapular centre shapes at this stage, but they looked dark blackish. I noted early on the dark, matt grey centres to the tertials, and also the lack of any rufous tinges to the fringing in the wing feathers or scapulars, with only pale buff or whitish fringing present. I did

worry however that due to viewing conditions I was just not capable of judging any plumage features with complete certainty, including the absence of rufous tones in the scapulars and tertials and so on. I was also a bit concerned by the extent of the warmer, brown colouration in the mantle and head, and wanted to be completely sure this didn't actually extend into the scapulars. However, the bird clearly lacked the structure and shape, feeding action and bill shape of a Little Stint to my mind.

Perhaps wrongly, I decided not to approach any closer for fear of flushing the flock (I could have moved upstream to a narrower part of the river). During this initial period I discussed what I was seeing with a variety of local birders, including Phil Bloor, Paul Baxter and John Gordon, who very usefully kept me on track with the range of features to consider. No one else was able to come down, and all too quickly the rising tide shifted the birds off. I was not free to look for the bird later on, with the lower tide, and no one else managed to relocate it.

I went back at first light the next morning, and after an anxious wait by the river the bird very quickly came into view at exactly the same spot, with a similar sized group of birds. Other observers, including Phil Bloor and Andy Webb, arrived shortly afterwards and a full discussion ensued, though conditions rapidly deteriorated with some heavy rain and a gusty breeze again. We did approach to a closer range though. At the end of these observations, I was near certain the bird was a Semipalmated Sandpiper, due to the overall structure, including a broadening of the bill tip, the very grey appearance, the capped head with clear, complete, whitish supercilium and short primary projection. I was sure I had established the lack of indicative features of Western Sandpiper and Little Stint and was finally convinced I had seen anchor shapes on the rearmost lower scapulars. Phil Bloor concurred. With viewing conditions still tricky however, the news was put out as a 'probable' Semipalmated Sandpiper at that point. I then had to leave for work. Later that day though Chris Gibbins reported seeing the bill shape as perfect on an extremely brief view, and along with my continued reflections, which produced no real alternative, I put the bird out as a certain identifi-

cation. The next morning viewing conditions were great and I got my closest views yet: though still not close enough for "certain semi-palmations" (just a few "is it mud or is it the palmations?" moments!), I double-checked all the crucial features. Though these views did at some angles hint at mantle-Vs, these were always indistinct. A few days later, others had closer views, confirming the full suite of features once again and some saw the toe webbing. Before this there were some concerns expressed, and local discussion, relating to distant photos taken on day two and day three, which left some ambiguity about bill shape especially, but all were left happy once close views were obtained.

Description

Size and Structure: This was a small wader: in the region of 25% smaller than a Dunlin. The bird was more compact, stockier and longer-legged than a Little Stint, and slightly larger. In most postures no more than two primaries could be seen projecting beyond the tertials. The tail tip did not project beyond the wing tips. In the field I estimated the primary projection as 20–25% of tertial length. One of the most obvious features of the bird, I felt, was its short, straight and broad-based bill, which did thicken laterally at the tip when good views were obtained. The bill length was about three-quarters of the head-length, and shorter than on the few Western Sandpipers that I have seen. It was a blunter-tipped bill than a Little Stint's would be; thicker along its whole length, and with a markedly thicker base, than that species as well. Other observers noted the half-webbed toes.



Plate 56. *Semipalmated Sandpiper*, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, September 2011. © Nick Littlewood



Plate 57. *Semipalmated Sandpiper*, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, September 2011. © Nick Littlewood

Upperparts: The overall colouration was grey, with some richer brown tones in the cap and mantle. In poor light, these rich tones were easily lost. In all conditions, the whole bird always appeared greyer than the nearby Dunlin. Head; The head showed a marked capped appearance at most angles, formed by the brown-grey crown which was heavily marked with fine blackish streaks. The crown often appeared the richest brown part, almost chestnut, of the whole bird. The capped effect was emphasised by a clearly defined, and complete whitish supercilium. In most views there was no trace of a split supercilium present, but in my third day of views and on some photos, a thin, partial split was seen before the eye. The lores were obviously marked black. The eye, which appeared dark, was surrounded by a fine, whitish eye-ring. The upper ear coverts were a darker, smudgy grey-black giving a masked appearance to the facial colouration. Otherwise, the head, nape and neck had a greyish-brown colouration with fine darker, diffuse streaks. These streaks extended down the neck in a restricted 'boa' onto the upper breast side, which in most lights had a very pale grey appearance. The lower 'cheek' of the bird was also pale whitish, merging with the throat. Mantle; this was a grey-brown, though in some lights this could look richer brown-toned as well, but to a lesser extent than the crown. Mantle feathers were clearly fringed pale buff, or buffy brown. Feather centres were dark, blackish-grey. There was the suggestion of paler mantle braces formed by paler buff to whitish fringes, but these

were not prominent in the least. At no time did this approach what you would expect on a juvenile Little Stint. Rump; this was a dark brown-grey, and plain in appearance. Tail; this was darker, blackish-brown in the centre than the rest of the upperparts, with paler outer tail feathers. The bird had white uppertail feathers. Wings; Feather centres were blackish, within a surround of grey-brown. The grey appearance was accentuated by the neat, and mostly even, pale buff and whitish fringing present on the coverts, scapulars and tertials. There were no rufous tones visible on the tertials and the upper row of scapulars, and I especially examined these over lengthy periods to be sure of the absence of this kind of colouration. The lower scapulars, especially at the rear, did show internal anchor-type markings created by the greyish-black centres. In all cases the feather centres lacked the broad dark area that a Little Stint would show, though they were broader than the arrow head shape you might get in a Western Sandpiper. The primary tips were blackish. In flight the bird showed a thin white wing bar.

Underparts: In the main the underparts were strikingly white. The throat was pale. As described, there was a small and delicate boa of grey streaking extending down onto the upper breast sides. The streaking did not extend right across the breast. There was also a small area of smudgy brown-grey tone extending down at the join with the wing, only visible when the bird raised its wings. The flanks otherwise were clean white, as was most of the breast and belly merging into the undertail.

Bare parts: Bill was black. Eye was dark. Legs were black. Structure as described already.

Behaviour: The bird favoured the higher parts of the mud, and would often be the rearmost bird when actively feeding. When more at rest, would then sometimes be further forward, even in the edge of water. It was less rapid than a Little Stint in feeding activity, though still quick in bursts of actions. The bird often fed in a pattern of short bursts of activity probing at the mud and moving forward, followed by a short period of relative inactivity and standing still. On the first two days of observations, I noted an intermittent limp, apparently focussed on its right leg, which by the third day had markedly settled. Mostly with a core

group of up to 50 Dunlin, and up to five Curlew Sandpipers, though there was little interaction shown. Call; Not heard.

This was a pleasing find that needed caution for many reasons, not least because it was surprisingly, a first for the region (subject to acceptance by BBRC). The bird remained until 4 October, allowing many observers to see it.

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Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerney, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. (eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.

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Semipalmated Sandpiper – its status in Scotland

This species breeds in large numbers in sub-Arctic and Arctic tundra from west and north Alaska across coastal northern Canada to the southern edge of Hudson Bay and Baffin Island and south to northern Quebec and Labrador. The entire population is migratory, with small numbers wintering in coastal Central America south from the Yucatan Peninsula and Haiti in the Caribbean, and most along coastal South America south to Uruguay and eastern Argentina on the Atlantic coast and Peru on the Pacific coast.

There were 20 birds in Scotland up to the end of 2003 (listed in Forrester et al., 2007). There have now been 99 accepted individuals in Britain to the end of 2010, with 26 of these in Scotland. The six accepted records since 2003 are:

- 2005: Shetland**, juvenile, Grutness, South Mainland, 1–6 November
- 2008: Outer Hebrides**, adult, Balranald, North Uist, 20 July
- 2009: Outer Hebrides**, one, Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, 23 May
Shetland, adult, Brough, Whalsay, 29 July
Outer Hebrides, juvenile, South Ford, South Uist, 20 August
- 2010: Lothian**, juvenile, Tynninghame Bay, 27 August to 15 September.

The Ythan individual is only the third to be found on the Scottish mainland following a juvenile at Port Logan, Dumfries & Galloway on 18–23 September 1999 and the 2010 Lothian bird. All other records are from islands, with four on Shetland, two on Fair Isle (not including the 1956 bird - see Forrester et al. 2007), three on Orkney, four in Argyll and 11 on the Outer Hebrides, the two latter totals boosted by an exceptional arrival of birds in autumn 1999.

Scottish records show a notable westerly bias (61%) as would be expected of a Nearctic vagrant, and while most records in England & Wales (and Ireland) also show a W/SW bias, there are records from all coastal counties from Cornwall to Northumberland, though just two 'inland' sightings. Five of the Scottish records (19%) have been in 'spring' (before end June) which is proportionally higher than records from elsewhere in Britain (10%). It is considered likely that these records could involve birds migrating north in Europe after trans-Atlantic displacement in a/the previous autumn rather than birds overshooting their east Canadian breeding grounds. The autumn records in Scotland involve arrivals between 20 July and 1 November, with the majority (14) in September, which is very similar to the pattern elsewhere in Britain.

The unusually large arrival of Nearctic waders in Britain and Ireland in autumn 2011 included record numbers of Semipalmated Sandpipers. The first birds were noted from July, mostly in Ireland, with a peak of 16 individuals in GB & Ireland on 24 September and the last bird lingering in Cleveland until the start of December. In Scotland, in addition to the Ythan individual six or more others were noted. The first was an adult at Pool of Virkie, South Mainland (Shetland) on 4–5 August. On the Outer Hebrides, a juvenile was present at Peninerine, South Uist on 15–17 September, with it or others then seen at nearby Kilpheder on 21–23 September, and at Scarista Sands, Isle of Harris on 25–26 September. Another juvenile was then at Ardivachar, South Uist from 4 October, with two there on 5th and 6th and one still on 7 October, and another juvenile was at Northton, Isle of Harris on 7–10 November. A further juvenile was seen on Foula, Shetland on 13 October.

Brown Shrike, Tiree, October–November 2011 - the first Argyll record

J.M. BOWLER



Plate 58. *Brown Shrike, Tiree, Argyll, October 2011.* © Sam Northwood

Early autumn 2011 saw a succession of scarce birds on Tiree, thanks to excellent coverage received by visiting birders and to frequent fast-moving depressions whipping across the Atlantic. In common with the rest of the western seaboard of the British Isles, there had been bumper numbers of American waders including two White-rumped Sandpipers, a Baird's Sandpiper, a Lesser Yellowlegs, an American Golden Plover, two Buff-breasted Sandpipers and at least five Pectoral Sandpipers. Given the predominantly westerly winds, eastern migrants were less in evidence but these still managed to make an appearance whenever the westerly winds eased or swung round to the east, with a Common Nightingale, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Hoopoe and two Common Rosefinches all logged in September. A first-winter Red-backed Shrike managed to appear at Kilkenneth on 9–11 October despite the prevailing westerlies, but the weather then deteriorated further with frequent gales making birding hard-going.

After three solid days of rain and strong southerly winds, there was a brief lull at around

15:00 on 22 October, so I headed off on a walk from our house at Balephuill with my wife Janet. As we walked past our neighbour's garden, I noticed a shrike perched prominently on the trackside fence-line ahead of us. We stopped and the shrike flew towards us and then landed in our neighbour's back hedge. Watching through binoculars, I was confronted by a strikingly dull and plain looking shrike. It appeared to be uniformly "milk chocolate" brown on its upperparts with a thin whitish supercilium above a complete black-looking mask and a whiter lower cheek line. It also showed buff-washed, whitish underparts with some dark scaling on the breast and flanks, plus a rather long, slim, rather graduated tail that was minimally rusty. I was immediately struck by how dull and uniform this bird looked by comparison with the recent Red-backed Shrike, so it immediately rang alarm bells!

The shrike moved back through the hedge being mobbed by Robins, Chaffinches and Wrens. Knowing I needed to get more on the bird to confirm my suspicions, I gave up on the walk

and headed back to our house to retrieve my camera. I picked up the bird again briefly perched in our garden but it then flew back towards the track. A quick scan from the front of our house revealed the bird on a field fence-line running parallel to the track and I was able to scope the bird from my car using a window-mounted scope. The bird was feeding in the open giving great views and I picked up further features including solidly dark-centred tertials with bold whitish-buff fringes, a rather prominent pale buffy line along the base of the greater coverts, short wings with very limited primary projection, a double lobe-tip to the rather thin tail with additional feather tips ending some two-thirds down the length of the tail, plus an absence of any obvious pale markings on the mantle. The head seemed large in relation to the body and the bill was also relatively large with a broad base and a bulbous culmen.

The bird looked very good for a first-winter Brown Shrike to me, but my camera had run out of battery power and, as luck would have it, we had a power cut all day which prevented me from recharging it! I took some field notes on the bird and phoned up Toby Green, a birder stuck on the island because the ferry had failed to get in due to rough seas. I asked him to come over quickly

with his telescope-mounted camera as I had what I thought looked good for a Brown Shrike and I needed photographic evidence! The rain then set in once more as Toby arrived and the bird moved to shelter deep in our neighbour's hedge. Together we watched the bird for a further hour in increasingly dull conditions and constant rain, whilst Toby took some record shots and obtained some video footage. Checking off the key features for Brown Shrike as we watched, by 17:00 we were both 100% happy about the identity of the bird, and put the news out via Angus Murray (Birdline Scotland).

There was no sign early-on of the bird on the following day but at midday, I relocated it further down our road in the lee of a different garden where I was able to watch the bird closely and finally obtain some digi-scoped photos. The bird moved between the new garden and our neighbour's garden showing well all afternoon. It could not be relocated the following day in wild and wet conditions but re-appeared briefly in our garden at 15:00 on 25 October and I watched it for a further 15 minutes feeding in the field behind our house. The bird then stayed in the same, rather small, area until 7 November: showing well on occasion most days and was seen and photographed by a



Plate 59. Brown Shrike, Tiree, Argyll, October 2011. © Jim Dickson

small number of visiting birders including Jim Dickson, Sam Northwood and Andy Robinson. Having last seen it at Balephuill on the afternoon of 7 November, I was somewhat surprised to find the bird feeding nearby at Carnan Mor on the afternoon of 20 November - this was the last time it was seen.

Description

Shape and size: A rather slim mid-sized shrike, with a rather large domed head. The crown was occasionally partly raised giving the impression of a bulging forehead. The body was relatively sleek particularly when the bird was active, although the breast could look more dumpy when perched and when wet. The wings appeared relatively short and stubby, particularly when viewed from behind and in relation to the rather long tail. On close views, the primary projection could be seen to be very short with the primary tips bunched close to the end of the tertials, and only just about reaching the very base of the tail. The tail was long and slim and appeared to be graduated, with a thinner base and broader towards the tip. The very end of the tail split into two small lobes, whilst the outermost tail feathers were obviously shorter than the inner ones and these could be seen at times projecting out from the edge of the tail some one-third of the tail-length back up from the tip. The bill was rather large and broad-based, whilst the culmen had a bulging convex upper edge. In flight, the wings appeared rather short compared to the relatively long tail. The bird spent most of its time perched on barbed wire fences and umbellifer stems, scanning the ground below and occasionally dropping down to snatch food items such as spiders and beetles but also including a small mouse.

Plumage: A key feature of the bird in relation to Red-backed Shrike was the strikingly uniform colour of the upperparts. These were a deep "milk chocolate" brown, with no obvious contrast in this colour between the crown, nape, mantle and rump. Also, unlike on first-winter Red-backed Shrike, there was no obvious pale barring on the mantle, although fine dark scaling could be discerned on the closest views. The tail and upper tail coverts generally looked more or less concolourous with the mantle too, but at certain angles and in better light could be seen to be

rather warmer-toned with a slight rusty hint. The upperside of the tail tip was diffusely darker than the rest of the tail. There was a narrow, pale buffy border down the tail-sides which could be seen on both the upper and under-sides of the tail. Viewed front-on, the undertail coverts were greyer, with the underside of the tail-tip appearing warmer and browner in relation to these. The upperwing coverts were also a rather uniform milk chocolate brown, with a fairly prominent pale buffy line formed by pale tips to the greater coverts and there were also less obvious pale fringes along the sides of the greater coverts. The tertials had solidly dark blackish centres with a neat whitish-buff lower fringe, forming a distinctive pattern when viewed from behind. The flight feathers on the closed wing were obviously darker and greyer than the coverts, and contrasted with the broad pale edges of the tertials above, although on closest views they could also be seen to have very thin paler fringes themselves. The alula was also dark and had a thinly pale-buff fringe below, but there were no other obvious pale marks or spots on the wings.

There was a complete blackish mask area running from the bill across the all-black lores through the eye and out onto the ear coverts, and this in turn was bordered above by a thin whitish supercilium, which also started very indistinctly from the bill base and flared a little over the eye. This supercilium was often more prominent in the field than it appears in the photographs. There was a thin whiter line below the black mask running across the lower cheek which merged with the whitish chin and upper throat. The rest of the underparts were whitish, but there was an indistinct buffy wash across all of them, especially on the breast, flanks and vent. The flanks could look greyer at a distance and this was because of fairly frequent indistinct dark grey scaling on them and these dark scaly edges also spread across the upper chest. The legs and feet were quite a dark bluish-grey in colour, whilst the rather stout bill was distinctly two-toned having a paler pinkish base and a dark blackish tip. The eyes appeared to be black in colour. All in all a rather distinctive bird, given prolonged good views.

John Bowler, Balephuill, Isle of Tiree, Argyll
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Plate 60. Brown Shrike, Tiree, Argyll, October 2011.
© Jim Dickson

Brown Shrike – its status in Scotland

This is an Eastern Palearctic species whose breeding range extends through dry steppes and semi-deserts east from the West Siberian Plain (c.80°E) to the Kamchatka Peninsula and south from about 70°N to Novosibirsk and SE through Mongolia to eastern China, North and South Korea and Japan. All except the southernmost populations are migratory, wintering south and east from Vadodara in the Gujarat region of India through Bangladesh and Myanmar, and from coastal SE China and Taiwan into Malaysia and Indonesia.

There have been 10 previous records of Brown Shrike in Britain with five of these in Scotland:

1985: Shetland, Sumburgh, adult, 30 September to 2 October

2000: Fair Isle, first-winter female, 21 October (Shaw 2001)

2004: Shetland, Skaw, Whalsay, adult male, 19–24 September (Marshall 2004)

2008: Outer Hebrides, Vallay Strand, North Uist, first-winter, 18 & 24 November

2009: Shetland, Geosetter, Mainland, first-winter, 11 October.

The 1985 Sumburgh bird was the first record for Britain, and the second for Europe. Elsewhere in Britain there have been records from Scilly (2001), Cornwall (2010), Surrey (2009–10) and two in Yorkshire (2008 & 2010). There has also been one in Ireland - Co. Kerry in 1999, plus records in Sweden (1984), Norway (2005), Denmark (1988), Germany (2001), France (2000 & 2004) and Italy (2002–03).

There has been a remarkable upsurge in records in Britain since 2000, which may be due largely to better identification criteria and observer awareness to distinguish Brown Shrike from its nearest relatives - Red-backed Shrike and Isabelline Shrike. However, it is possible that changes in breeding range and population numbers may also be contributory factors.

As would be expected for a far-Eastern vagrant, there is a bias towards records on the Northern Isles and the east coast, with the Tiree, Surrey, Scilly and Cornwall birds all perhaps more likely to have filtered down from their original site of first landfall rather than arrived direct.

Apart from a female at Sennen Cove, Cornwall on 20 May 2010, all the British records have been found in autumn between 19 September and 18 November, with a peak in the latter half of September. The records elsewhere in Europe have also all been found in autumn. Four of the birds found in Britain have only been present on the day of discovery, with one present for two days, one for three, another seen twice over a week, and two for six days. The Tiree bird was unusual in staying for 30 days, though the first-winter at Staines Moor, Surrey found on 11 October 2009 remained until 2 January 2010 (84 days).

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Shaw, D.N. 2001. Brown Shrike on Fair Isle, 21st October 2000. *Birding Scotland* 4(1) 33–35.



Plate 61. Pallid Harrier, Bogside Flats, Irvine, Ayrshire, October 2011. © Angus Hogg

Pallid Harrier at Bogside Flats, Irvine, October–November 2011 - the first Ayrshire record

G. McADAM



Plate 62. Pallid Harrier, Bogside Flats, Irvine, Ayrshire, October 2011. © Chas Moonie

Bogside Flats (NS 305394) is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located at the junction of the River Irvine and River Garnock at Irvine. The designated area comprises estuarine saltmarsh, mudflats, and adjacent coastal grassland and developing heath. In autumn and winter, the area is recognised as potentially holding several individuals of both Short-eared Owl and Hen Harrier. With that in mind, I spent the morning of 26 October 2011 walking around the estuary hoping for sightings of those species. I was lucky enough to encounter one ringtail harrier, which, at a distance, appeared to be a “standard” Hen Harrier. It was quartering the saltmarsh at the southern end of the estuary, but soon made off directly up along the River Garnock. Following in the same direction, I had a further distant sighting of the bird, which was now hunting over the disused race course. By now, it was approaching midday and I had to return home, and the bird disappeared north-eastwards towards the area known locally as Garnock East.

The latter area is hardly watched, but as I knew that there was suitable habitat for both owls and harriers, I decided I would focus my attentions there the following day - Hen

Harriers are also occasionally seen over the Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve at Garnock Floods, which is separated from this area only by the Glasgow–Ayr railway.

Thursday 27 October started off overcast with a light drizzle, so rather than go to the site just after 08:00, having dropped my wife at work, I decided to return home and make some headway on a pile of ironing that was waiting - who knows what might have happened had I not made that decision. Given the timing of subsequent events that day this could easily have been one Pallid Harrier that slipped through the net as the area is virtually unwatched by birders. Consequently, it was just after 10:00 before I reached my previously chosen observation point behind the recycling centre on Sandy Road.

About 10:20, I noted a harrier flying along the fence line, some 380 m distant. As it was being followed closely by a Merlin, I was paying more attention to that, wondering if there would be any interaction between the species. The Merlin appeared to be following the harrier with a view to taking advantage of anything it flushed, as each time the harrier stalled, the Merlin followed suit by lifting almost vertically before falling-in behind the harrier when it resumed its forward flight. This pattern was repeated over c.100 m before the Merlin flew off south.

When the harrier reached a point about 300 m distant it banked over the fence. At that point the bold colouration on the underside caught my eye and I realised that it was, potentially, a Montagu's Harrier, a Pallid Harrier, or "just" a very interesting Hen Harrier. The depth of the colouring on the underside (neck, breast, belly, flanks and ventral area) was a bright, unstreaked orange colour - as were the underwing coverts. This suggested that Montagu's or Pallid was a distinct possibility. That this was not a wash, or a base colour, seemed to rule out an 'interesting' Hen Harrier. The undersides of the primaries were barred, but the underside of the secondaries was dark and unmarked (at that range anyway) - again supporting the idea that it was not a Hen Harrier. The bird's head showed a really bright collar and white areas above and below the eye. Additionally, the nape appeared



Plate 63. *Pallid Harrier, Bogside Flats, Irvine, Ayrshire, October 2011.* © Chas Moonie

white, with the crown being tightly streaked brown. All features supported Pallid as opposed Montagu's, it seemed.

It was eventually seen at a range of less than 200 m, and at that point I was becoming certain that it was a Pallid Harrier rather than one of the other two species. All of this occurred over a minute or so, by which time the bird was lost to sight heading in the direction of the disused racecourse. I followed it and some 30 minutes later relocated the bird there (flushing a Short-eared Owl on the way - a nice bonus). I was able to watch it again for another short period before it returned to its previous location. I followed once more and relocated it again. On both these latter occasions I was able to confirm the identification points that I had initially noted. I last saw the bird just before 13:00.

I didn't realise at the time that, if my ID was correct, it would be a first for Ayrshire and was fully aware of the potential pitfalls. I did know, however, that I needed to get more eyes on the bird, so at that point I tried to contact Robert Lambie, but he was unable to get to the site that day. I therefore contacted Angus Murray with the details and put a message on the local bird email group with the same details in the hope

that others would be able to search for the bird later. I arranged with Robert Lambie, who also contacted John Selvey, to meet the following morning, so that the three of us could position ourselves across the whole area to maximise the chances of picking the bird up again. I relocated the bird in the area roughly where I had first seen it, and the three of us gathered at the initial viewing point behind the recycling centre. Two other birders from Ayr were present, and I had noticed Chas Moonie was also in the area photographing wildlife.

All five of us had good views of the bird, now showing in bright sunshine and were happy that the bird showed the relevant characteristics of a Pallid Harrier. Fortunately, Chas, who was in the area to photograph Buzzards and unaware of the potential Pallid Harrier that had been reported, had managed to obtain some excellent images of the bird allowing confirmation of the identity as Pallid Harrier. Chas's images enabled us to see the following details of the wing:

- Four "fingers", three long and one short - cf. Hen Harrier (five visible fingers).
- Only slight grey bar on underside of secondaries - cf. Hen Harrier (distinct pale bar).
- Pale trailing edge on primaries and secondaries - cf. Montagu's Harrier (trailing edge dark).
- Tips of primaries did not appear as extensively dark as on Montagu's Harrier.
- Unbarred patch at the base of the primaries - cf. Montagu's Harrier.

The photographs also confirmed that the underside and the underwing coverts were completely unstreaked. They also showed that the collar was unstreaked and extended all the way round and below the throat - further ruling out potential confusion with the other possible species.

At that point the news was released as the observers were 100% certain that it was a juvenile Pallid Harrier. That afternoon a number of local birders gathered, but as the bird disappeared shortly after being reported and phone calls made, there was a palpable tension in the air emanating from those who had not yet connected. Thankfully it reappeared after a couple of hours and a huge sense of relief was apparent.

Plate 64. *Pallid Harrier, Bogside Flats, Irvine, Ayrshire, October 2011.* © Angus Hogg





Plates 65–66. Pallid Harrier, Bogside Flats, Irvine, Ayrshire, November 2011. © Mike Thrower

The next day, Saturday 29th, was the first chance for most people to look for the bird. Unfortunately, it dawned wet and miserable, and got worse as the morning wore on. Probably around 30 to 40 observers were present on and off and, sadly for some, the weather got the better of them. But, for those made of sterner stuff (or with no other commitments), the bird eventually showed again in mid-afternoon.

That was to be story of the next 10 days, as the bird seemed to be able to just disappear and suddenly reappear even though many pairs of eyes were watching the area. On those days that it was present, it showed very well, but it would often disappear for hours on end. On 2nd, 4th and 6 November, there were no sightings at all, although it was reported over the disused racecourse on 7th. It seems that heavy ground frosts on 5th and 6th may have contributed to the bird moving on.

No one was counting the number of observers, but estimates range as high as around 300, some of whom had travelled considerable distances having failed to connect with Pallid Harriers elsewhere across the UK - and even here some had to make more than one trip due to the bird disappearing for long periods of time. Such was the level of interest that the event actually made the local press.

Gordon McAdam
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The Ayrshire bird was only one of an unprecedented influx of c.15 Pallid Harriers into Scotland in the autumn of 2011. A comprehensive overview of this influx will be published in the next issue of Scottish Birds.

Pallid Harrier, Ythan Estuary, 1 October 2011 - the first record for North-east Scotland

P.A.A. BAXTER

Many rare bird finds have a twist in their tale, and the occurrence of the Pallid Harrier in Aberdeenshire was no exception.

On 1 October, myself and Chris Gibbins had planned a day out birding in the north of the

region. We had not had particularly good views of the Semipalmated Sandpiper that had been present on the Ythan estuary during the previous week, so we decided to start the day off there. The tide was high, but dropping, so on arrival we headed to the hide at Waukmill on the estuary,

were the mud usually appears first as the tide is dropping. When we arrived at the hide, an unfamiliar car was already parked there, and as we entered the hide, we were greeted by three visiting birders, looking for the 'semi-p'. Soon after arrival, the birds started to arrive and we had great views of the estuary birds in front of the hide, but with no sign yet of the target bird. We started to chat amongst ourselves, and we discovered that the three visitors had travelled on the overnight ferry from Lerwick, having enjoyed two weeks birding Shetland. They were calling in for the Semi-p before commencing the long drive south. I was keen to hear about their Shetland fortnight, so started asking about their trip and what birds they had seen. During the chatting, they mentioned they had seen several juvenile Pallid Harriers, including the long-staying Quendale bird, as well as several others around the islands. The discussion of the Pallid Harrier influx continued over the next five minutes or so. I expressed my concern (and disgust) that the region had not yet played host to a Pallid Harrier, and bemoaned

the fact that we had surely 'lost our best ever chance' as the influx seemed to be coming to an end. Amongst other things, I highlighted the problem of where to begin looking for a Pallid Harrier in Aberdeenshire, which is a very large region, and that the Sands of Forvie NNR, adjacent to the estuary and visible from where we were currently sat, would probably be our best chance as it has been favoured by two Montagu's Harriers in the last year.

As we continued looking for the sandpiper, Chris had noticed that the Golden Plovers were looking decidedly edgy, with many of the birds looking up, skywards. He had noticed them do this before when a raptor is around, so looked upwards from the hide. This is when he proclaimed "there's a ringtail harrier above the estuary!" Panic ensued and Chris elected to stay in the hide to scope the bird whilst I and the visitors ran out of the hide to view from outside. We quickly located the bird in our scopes, and it was easily proclaimed as a Pallid, the bird showing a lovely wide pale collar, amongst other features. Chris emerged from the hide and had reached the same conclusion independently of us. The two of us then started out customary 'jig' which often happens after we have found a rare bird and the mutual handshakes and back slapping commenced, much to the amusement of the visitors. This was simply amazing - literally five minutes ago we were expressing our disappointment that we hadn't shared in the Pallid Harrier invasion, to be then confronted with a beautiful juvenile bird, appearing right in front of us. It circled over the estuary, before heading south over Sands of Forvie. One of the visitors turned to me, saying "that was some prediction!" If only all birds could be predicted that way.

The news of the bird and its direction of departure was released immediately. Nick Littlewood, rather than dash up to the Ythan, elected to stay put at his Blackdog patch, and was rewarded just 20 minutes later with the bird heading south over him.

Paul Baxter



Plate 67. Pallid Harrier, Blackdog, North-east Scotland, October 2011. © Nick Littlewood

Recent taxonomic changes affecting the Scottish List

S.L. RIVERS

The most recent report of the BOU taxonomic subcommittee (Sangster *et al.* 2011) makes a number of recommendations that affect the *Scottish List*. Perhaps most significant are that both Hudsonian Whimbrel and Siberian Stonechat should be regarded as a full species. Other changes will be detailed in the annual SBRC report in a subsequent issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Hudsonian Whimbrel now elevated to full species status

Analyses of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequences from specimens from different parts of the breeding range of the Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) indicate that birds breeding in North America are sufficiently different those in Europe and Asia to merit full species status as Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus*. Hudsonian Whimbrel is considered monotypic and averages slightly larger than Eurasian Whimbrel, with diagnostic differences in plumage.

There have been seven accepted records of Hudsonian Whimbrel in Britain, with four of these in Scotland. The first Scottish (and British) record was of one on Fair Isle from 27–31 May 1955, the second was on Out Skerries, Shetland from 24 July to 8 August 1974, the third, a probable adult female, was present on Fair Isle on 29–31 August 2007 (Shaw 2009), and the fourth was a juvenile at Bornish, South Uist, Outer Hebrides on 12 September 2009.

Siberian Stonechat now elevated to full species status

The revision of the Stonechat complex is based on analyses of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequences from individuals previously ascribed to the forms 'European' Stonechat, 'African' Stonechat and 'Siberian' Stonechat of what was formerly *Saxicola torquatus*. This shows that they exhibit sufficient genetic differences to be regarded as full and separate species; they also

differ in aspects of their morphology (Sangster *et al.* 2011; and references therein).

In addition, mtDNA sequences from the eastern subspecies of Siberian Stonechat (*stejnegeri*) were found to be "highly divergent" from the western race (*maurus*) and to be closest to those of the European Stonechat complex (Zink *et al.* 2009). This suggests individuals of the form *stejnegeri* should also qualify for full species status, but further work is needed to examine the mtDNA of other 'eastern' races within the Stonechat complex to determine the genetic distinction between these, and to properly establish the species and subspecies relationships of all these forms.

The current revision therefore recognises [European] Stonechat *S. rubicola* which is polytypic with two subspecies (*rubicola* & *hibernans*), Siberian Stonechat *S. maurus*, which is polytypic with six subspecies (*maurus*, *variegatus*, *armenicus*, *indicus*, *stejnegeri* & *przewalski*) and African Stonechat *S. torquatus* is also polytypic with 14–17 subspecies (none of the latter have occurred in Britain to date).



Plate 68. Siberian Stonechat, Isle of May, October 1913. © National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

The identification of the Stonechat complex, and of Siberian Stonechats in particular, is covered by several authors (e.g. Robertson 1977, Stoddart 1992, Urquhart & Bowley 2002 and references therein).

Siberian Stonechat status in Scotland

Siberian Stonechats of the forms *S. m. maurus* and *S. m. variegatus* have been identified in Scotland. The subspecies *maurus* breeds from north-east Russia east to the Pechora River valley and Ural Mountains, and south into Kazakhstan, eastern Uzbekistan and north-east Afghanistan and across north-west China into western Mongolia. It winters in northern India eastwards through southern China into south-east Asia. [The form *stejnegeri* breeds to the east of *maurus* across to the Pacific and south to north-east China, Korea and much of Japan.]

There have been 344 Siberian Stonechats *S. m. maurus* recorded in Britain to the end of 2010, with 140 of these in Scotland.

The first Siberian Stonechat to be accepted for Britain is a bird shot on the Isle of May on 10 October 1913 (Baxter & Rintoul 1913; plate 68). This bird was originally cited as a young male (Rintoul & Baxter 1935), but was listed as a female by Robertson in his review of eastern Stonechat records in Europe from 1883–1976 (Robertson 1977), and in Forrester *et al.* (2007). A number of other authors have continued to list it as a male, and to definitively resolve this issue material has been sent for DNA analysis to establish its gender and also to try to determine its subspecies affiliation (R.Y. McGowan pers. comm.). These results will be published by BOURC in due course.

The second British record was not until 1960 (Hartlepool, Durham), with the third, fourth and fifth all from Fair Isle - 13–21 October 1961, 1 November 1964 and 5–6 October 1965. Since then the Northern Isles have continued to dominate the Scottish records (84.3%), with only one record from the Outer Hebrides - a female/first-winter male at Europie, Ness, Lewis on 5 October 2008, and one other west coast record - one at Turnberry, Ayrshire, on 20 September 1998. The remaining 20 birds are from the east

coast of the Scottish mainland: Caithness (1), North-east Scotland (9), Angus & Dundee (1), Fife (4), Isle of May (3) and Borders (1) [see Forrester *et al.* (2007) for further details].

The subspecies *S. m. variegatus* (a strong candidate for full species status) is typically referred to as 'Caspian' Stonechat and breeds along the north and east coast of the Caspian Sea westwards into adjacent areas of south-west Russia and Azerbaijan. It has occurred three times in Britain, with one of these in Scotland - a presumed first-summer male at Virkie, South Mainland, Shetland on 7 May 2006 (Riddington & Harvey 2006).

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S. MENZIE

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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.

All reports of Ross's Geese came from October with adults at three locations: West Water Reservoir (Bord), Caerlaverock WWT (D&G), and Carrbridge (High). Bean Goose & White-fronted



Plate 69. *Bean Goose (Tundra)*, Musselburgh, Lothian, January 2011. © Calum Scott

Goose: an exceptional and widespread influx of both species occurred in November, with many birds still present to the end of the year at least. On Islay (Arg), a variety of vagrant Canada Geese were seen, with the first bird - a **Richardson's Canada Goose** at Loch Gruinart RSPB - appearing on 6 October. It seems at least seven birds were present on the island with a peak count of three Richardson's, one **Taverner's-type Canada Goose** and three 'small' Canada Geese present at Loch Gruinart RSPB on 14 October. The peak count of Richardson's Canada Goose was four Bridgend on 16 November, while a Taverner's Canada Goose was also reported from Mulindry on 18 December. Away from Islay, a **Lesser Canada Goose (ssp. *parvipes*)** was present with Barnacle Geese at Mersehead RSPB (D&G) on 30 October and three birds, probably also *parvipes*, were with Pink-footed Geese at Loch Leven (P&K) on 9 December. Nine

Snow Geese were reported, including a blue-morph on Tiree (Arg) from 16 November to 20 December, a white-morph on Barra (OH) on 5–25 October, and a white-morph with Pink-footed Geese at Greenloaning (P&K) on 22, 27 & 29 December. **Brent Goose:** 1,334 were logged flying south past Caolas, Watersay (OH) in seven hours on 5 October

All reports of **American Wigeon** concerned drakes, with single birds at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 16–28 October, on Islay (Arg) from 14 October to 1 November, in the Kirk Loch area (D&G) from 17 November to end of the year, on Orkney at Holm on 5 October & Loch of Harray on 16 October, and on South Uist throughout the period. All reports of **Green-winged Teal** were also, not unexpectedly, of drakes; sightings included birds were at Caerlaverock WWT from 2 November to end of the year, with presumably the same bird making a brief sortie to Souleseat

Loch on 10–20 December (both D&G); at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) from 28 October to 18 December; and at Vane Farm RSPB (P&K) from 8 December to the end of the year. Other singles were seen at Scatness (Shet), North Uist and South Uist (OH), Shapinsay (Ork) and Loch of Kinnordy RSPB (Ang). A female **Blue-winged Teal** was at Wigtown (D&G) on 27 October. A female **Lesser Scaup** was on Fair Isle on 7–8 October. There were three **Ring-necked Ducks** seen; a female at Grimsay (OH) on 27 December and two drakes together at Loch Kinord (NES) on 21 November, presumably the same two drakes that had been seen together at the same site in September 2011 and perhaps the same individuals that were seen at the site in early 2009.

A drake '**Northern**' **Eider** (ssp. *borealis*) was present with Common Eiders off Tarbat Ness (High) on 7 November. At least one **King Eider** remained off Burghead (M&N) with an adult drake present through the period; an immature drake was reported from the same site on 27 October with a report of two drakes in the harbour there on 21 December. **Surf Scoter**: all reports involved drakes and came from the eastern side of the country during October and November, with singles off Ruddons Point (Fife), Burghead Bay (M&N), and Inganess Bay and Rerwick Bay (both Ork). The drake **Black Scoter** remained off Blackdog/Murcar (NES) until 4 October.

There were five **White-billed Divers** reported during the period, with single one-day birds at St. Combs (NES), Graemeshall (Ork), Bluemull Sound (Shet) and Tiree (Arg); the only lingering individual was a moulting adult off Peninerine, South Uist (OH) on 14–16 November. A **Fea's Petrel** flew

west past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12 December. The only reports of large shearwaters concerned a **Cory's Shearwater** flying north past Collieston (NES) on 9 October and a **Great Shearwater** from the Uig–Tarbert ferry (High/OH) on 20 October. Records of **Leach's Petrel** were spread across the region, with all coming from October; birds seen included individuals off Tiree (Arg) and Lamb Holm (Ork), with larger movements noted off the Outer Hebrides, with 10 past Cleatt, Barra in two hours on 6 October, five past Ardvule, South Uist on 10 October; eight from Griminish Point, North Uist on 18 October, and a peak count of 13 past North Uist on 9 October.

Great White Egrets were at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 26 Oct and Balnamoon (Ang) on 12–16 December; at least one bird was present on Whalsay (Shet) from late October to December, with two together from 27 October to 5 November, with a sighting of a single bird on Out Skerries on 7 & 17 November perhaps relating to one of these individuals. A **Night Heron** was reported in a private garden at Kirkcudbright (D&G) on 12 October. The only **Cattle Egret** seen during the period was on Tiree (Arg) on 17–21 October. Two **White Storks** were reported: a one-day bird at Gretna (D&G) on 24 October and a longer staying bird at Leven (Fife) from 14 November to 21 December.

Following the autumn's unprecedented influx of juvenile **Pallid Harriers**, birds continued to be seen across the region into November. At least three remained on Shetland (with one new bird on 9 October); the last report came from Loch of Hillwell on 17 October. One was reported on Benbecula (OH) on 6 November. Mainland records

included a bird at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 1 October, with presumably the same individual flying south over Blackdog 15 minutes later, a bird briefly at St Abbs Head (Bord) on 26 Oct and a popular individual at Garnock Floods (Ayr) from 27 October to 5 November. A probable second-year male **Lesser Kestrel** was reported present at Port of Ness, Lewis (OH) on 23 November, though news was not released until 2 December and there were no subsequent reports. An **Eleonora's Falcon** was seen at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 12 October. Three reports of white-morph **Gyr Falcon** on Orkney on 30 & 31 November and 3 December may have related to a single wandering individual. There was also a female grey-morph seen in the Findhorn Valley, Speyside (High) on 20 November.

The only **Spotted Crake** sighting came from Fair Isle on 29 October. Three **Common Cranes** were with Pink-footed Geese at St Combs (NES) on 2 October - perhaps the same three birds that had been seen in the wider area earlier in the year. Single birds were seen at West Freugh (D&G) on 11 & 12 November, Dun's Dish, Montrose (Ang) on 15 November, and at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 24 November.



Plate 70. White Stork, Leven, Fife, November 2011. © John Nadin

A probable **Killdeer** was seen in flight on Tiree (Arg) on 2 December. **American Golden Plover:** a juvenile was seen at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 29–30 October, with perhaps the same bird seen there again on 20 November; one on Tiree (Arg) 7–27 October; and one at Crail (Fife) on 22 & 23 October. Several birds were on the Outer Hebrides (on Lewis, Barra, and South Uist). On Shetland, birds were reported from the Loch of Spiggie, Quendale, Skelberry, Hillwell area, and from Fetlar on 6 October; the latter site also held a **Dotterel** on the same date. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** sightings included the juvenile on the Ythan Estuary (NES) lingering from September until 4 October, one on Foula (Shet) on 13 October, a juvenile at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 4–7 October, with two birds there on 5 & 6 October, and one at Scarista, Harris (OH) on 7–8 November. **White-rumped**

Sandpiper: sightings included an adult at Musselburgh (Loth) lingering from September until 4 October, an adult at Castletown (High) on 6 October, one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 10–11 October and several on the Outer Hebrides during mid-October/November including two juveniles together on Harris on 8 November. **Baird's Sandpipers** included one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 29 October to 18 November and singles on South Uist and Lewis (OH) in October. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** a notable influx included peak counts of eight at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 7 October, four at Loch of Huxter (Shet) on 2 October, and two on South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13 October, and a single juvenile at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 4 & 5 October. One at Dundonald Camp (Ayr) from 16 December to the end of the year was the only bird seen outside of October.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: sightings were largely confined to the Outer Hebrides with birds being seen at Bru, Lewis on 3 & 4 October with perhaps the same bird two miles away at Barvas on 7 October, at Loch Sandrary, North Uist on 11–13 October, and at Bornish, South Uist on 12 October. Additionally, one was picked up dead at Esha Ness (Shet) on 3 October. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** singles were at Lochlea (Ayr) on 7–17 October, Baron's Haugh RSPB (Clyde) from September to 7 October, on the Lossie Estuary (M&N) on 2–6 October, and at Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 10–15 October. An individual at Caerlaverock (D&G) on 7–15 October was perhaps the same individual that was later seen at Wigtown (D&G) from 22 October to 15 November. A **Spotted Sandpiper** was at Scolpaig, North Uist (OH) on 4–17 October. A first-winter **Greater Yellowlegs** was found at Loch Fleet (High) on 14 December, believed to be the same individual that had previously been seen south of the border in Northumberland through November to 12 December; it remained at Loch Fleet until at least the end of the year. There were three **Lesser Yellowlegs:** a juvenile at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 6–9 October, a bird in Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 6 October, and one on Tiree (Arg) on 15 & 16 October. A **Red-necked Phalarope** was off Stevenston Point (Ayr) on 7 December, where it kept company with a **Grey Phalarope**, which was in residence at the site on 2–15 December. Other Grey Phalarope sightings included singles regularly on the Outer Hebrides through October and November, with peaks of six past Caolas, Vatersay (OH) on 5 October, four in Halaman Bay, Barra (OH) on 7th, five off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11 October,



Plate 71. *Semipalmated Sandpiper*, Ardivachar Point, South Uist, October 2011. © Steve Duffield

and four off Ardivachar, South Uist (OH) on 11–13 October. Elsewhere there were two on Fair Isle (Shet) on 17 October, two at Portree, Skye (High) on 28 October, two past St Abbs Head (Bord) on 6 November, one off Peterhead (NES) on 20 October, and one at Mersehead RSPB (D&G) on 26 October.

Long-tailed Skua sightings were confined to October with just over a dozen reports; the only multiple sightings came from Hound Point (Loth) where two juveniles passed on 23 October with a further two birds passing on 25 October. There were fifteen reports of **Sabine's Gulls** stretching from October to 8 December; the only multiple count concerned three juveniles past Machrihanish (Arg) on 6 October. An adult **Bonaparte's Gull** was at Lamb Holm (Ork) on 6–8 October and a first-winter flew past Blackdog (NES) on 27 November. A possible adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Barassie (Ayr) on 27 December. One of the most challenging identifications during the period concerned a first-winter **Thayer's** or **Kumlien's Gull** at Dunbeg, near Oban (Arg) on 12–23 November, and intermittently until the end of the year. **Iceland Gull**: the first report was a juvenile on Lewis (OH) on 18 October, with three birds (two juveniles and an adult) at Butt of Lewis on 20 October. Numbers of Iceland Gull were considerably higher than average with 115 reports of the species from 1 October to 31 December - many reports concerning more than one individual. Sightings were also widespread. The highest counts came from Lewis with six together at Butt of Lewis on 6 December and six in Stornoway Harbour on 20 December. With exceptionally high numbers of Iceland Gulls in the Faroe Islands, it seems as if these birds



Plate 72. *Isabelline Shrike, Hillwell, Shetland, October 2011.* © Hugh Harrop

may be the forerunners of a notable arrival. Associated with the high numbers of Iceland Gulls, **Kumlien's Gulls** were seen on Barra (OH) on 7–9 October, off Labost, Lewis (OH) on 10 December, and at Hamister, Whalsay (Shet) on 5–19 December. Ayr's returning adult Iceland Gull reappeared on 9 November and remained until at least the end of the year; its 21st winter in the town. Numbers of **Glaucous Gulls** were lower, with peak counts including four on South Uist (OH) on 28 December, two in Bay of Skail (Shet) throughout late December, two at Ormsary (Arg) and two juveniles at Fraserburgh (NES).

The only confirmed **Snowy Owl** sighting reported during the period was a male at Mangursth, Lewis (OH) on 23 & 28 October, with an unconfirmed report coming from Glen Isla (Ang) on 13 November. An **Alpine Swift** was present at Cunningburgh (Shet) on 1 & 2 October. A possible **Pallid Swift** flew south past St Abbs Head (Bord) on 29 October, and a Pallid or Common Swift was over Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) on 17 November. Other unidentified

swifts were seen at Belhaven Bay (Loth) on 29 October and Kilwinning (Ayr) on 2 November. A **Hoopoe** was reported at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 28 October.

A **Red-eyed Vireo** was seen in the grounds of Lews Castle, Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 9 October. A first-winter **Brown Shrike** was an excellent find on Tiree on 22 October, where it remained until 20 November. Two **Isabelline Shrikes** (both ssp. *isabellinus* "Daurian Shrike") were recorded on Shetland, a first-winter at Levenwick on 2–5 October and a female at Hillwell on 6–29 October. **Red-backed Shrike**: the bird at Sumburgh (Shet) remained until 1 October with another at Quendale (Shet) on 16 October; on Tiree (Arg), a first-winter was present on 9–11 October. **Great Grey Shrikes** were considerably more numerous with most sightings coming from Shetland and smaller numbers from Orkney; lingering birds included singles at Leuchars (Fife) from 23 November to 24 December and at Lindean Reservoir (Bord) from 28 October to 21 November.

A **Woodlark** was on Unst (Shet) from 15 November to 23 December. A **Short-toed Lark** was present on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from the end of September to 3 November, with two present on 1 November; another bird was on Fair Isle on 6 October.

Pallas's Warbler: ten were reported during the period, with five birds on Shetland and one on Orkney. On the mainland, birds were seen at Linn Park, Glasgow (Clyde) on 30 October, Rattray Head (NES) on 26–28 October, Boarhills (Fife) on 9 November, and Balmedie Country Park (NES) 12–15 November. **Yellow-browed Warblers** were, not unexpectedly, seen in good numbers; peak counts included 15 on Fair Isle (Shet) and 19 on Whalsay (Shet) on 1 October, though perhaps more surprisingly was a count of eight at St Abbs Head (Bord) on 2–3 October. Away from the east coast, single birds were on Barra (OH) on 1st, South Uist (OH) on 16–17th, Barra on 24th, with two

there on 25th, Tiree (Arg) on 26th, Westerlands, Glasgow (Clyde) on 31 October to 1 November, and Auchie Glen (D&G) on 5 November. A **Hume's Leaf Warbler** was at Foveran Links (NES) on 12–19 November. The only other confirmed reports came from Shetland, where up to five were reported during mid- to late November; though there was a report of a possible at Loch of Swannay (Ork) on 17 October. **Dusky Warblers** were present at Balmedie Country Park (NES) on 4–12 November, Girdle Ness (NES) on 15 November, Arbroath (Ang) on 27–30 October, Holm (Ork) on 2–3 November, North Ronaldsay on 27–28 October, Foula (Shet) on 15–16 October, at Exnaboe, Lunna and Sandness (Shet) during November, and one on the Isle of May (trapped & ringed) on 14 November. **Siberian Chiffchaff:** singles were reported from South Uist (OH) on 19 & 20 October, Rattray Head (NES) on 26 October, and Kilminning (Fife) on 9 November.

Barred Warbler: sightings were restricted to the first two weeks of October, with about 25 birds involved, and most reported from Shetland. Away from Shetland, birds were recorded at Balmedie Country Park (NES) and on Barra (OH) on 1 October, Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 2 October, North Ronaldsay on 2 & 7 October, St Abbs Head (Bord) on 15 October, and at Girdle Ness (NES) on 16 October, the last sighting of the autumn. The peak count was two birds on Fair Isle on 1 October. The only **Lanceolated Warblers** of the autumn were on Fair Isle with a bird seen on 13 October and what appeared to be a different bird found dead on the same island on the next day. A **Paddyfield Warbler** was on Bressay (Shet) on 20 October. **Blyth's Reed Warblers** were on Fair Isle (Shet) on 1 October, 14 October and 5 November. A probable **Marsh Warbler** was at Kinneff (NES) on 5 November.

Both reports of **Rose-coloured Starling** related to juveniles, with a bird on Fair Isle (Shet) remaining from September to 2 October, and a bird at Inverkeithing (Fife) on 8–12 November. A **Swainson's Thrush** was at Birsay (Ork) on 21 October, and a **Veery** present on Muck (High) on 16–24 November - a surprising find so late in the year. Bird of the autumn for many who saw it, a first-winter male **Siberian Rubythroat** was at Gulberwick (Shet) on 19–30 October. A bird that would have proved equally popular if circumstances had been different, a **Siberian Blue Robin** was found dead on Foula (Shet) on 1 October. There were three reports of **Bluethroat:** all from Shetland, with singles at both Sandwick and on Fair Isle on 1 October and on Unst on 3 October. The only **Red-flanked**



Plate 73. Swainson's Thrush, Birsay, Orkney, October 2011. © Nicholas Watt



Plate 74. *Siberian Rubythroat*, Gulberwick, Shetland, October 2011. © Hugh Harrop

Bluetail reported during the period was a bird at Papa Westray (Ork) on 14 & 15 October. A male **Siberian Stonechat** was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25 & 26 October. **Desert Wheatear**: a female was at Sandside Bay (Ork) on 29–31 October, with a male on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1–5 November, another male at Girdle Ness (NES) on 4 December, and a female at Lerwick (Shet) on 11–15 December. **Red-breasted Flycatcher**: most reports were from Shetland, but a run of records on the Outer Hebrides included singles at Gleann, Barra on 2 October, at Northbay, Barra on 9–10 and 12–21 October, and Eorpie, Lewis on 31 October.

Citrine Wagtail: sightings were confined to Shetland, with one at Quendale/Fleck on 1–11 October and one lingering on Fair Isle from September to 3

October, with a further report of one there on 10 October. Two **Richard's Pipits** were found at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 15

October, with a third individual appearing on 17 October; all birds remained until 25th. Other Richard's Pipit sightings



Plate 75. *Red-breasted Flycatcher*, Collafirth, Shetland, October 2011. © Mike Thrower



Plate 76. Buff-bellied Pipit, Quendale, Shetland, October 2011. © James Wood

concerned two on South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October and one at Voe (Shetland) on 8 October. Shetland took the lion's share of **Olive-backed Pipit** records, with the first bird of the autumn on Fair Isle on 1 October; the high count came from Fair Isle on 10 November, when two individuals were present, while the latest reported bird was present on Unst on 19 November. The only reports away from Shetland concerned one at Rattray Head (NES) on 26 October and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13–15 October. **Pechora Pipits** were at two localities with one at Gulberwick (Shet) on 20 October and one ringed on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October. All records of **Water Pipit** came from the south-east with a bird at Dunglass Burn (Bord) from 30 October to at least the end of the year, and birds in Lothian at Barns Ness from 27 October to the end of the year (with two birds there on 5 November), Skateraw on 8 November, and Dunbar on 5 November. An **American Buff-**

bellied Pipit was at Quendale (Shet) on 8–13 October.

Common Rosefinch: most records were on Shetland, with a peak count of three from Unst on 5 October, while sightings away from Shetland involved one at Loch of Swannay (Ork) on 1 October, one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2, 5 & 7 October, one

on Arran (Clyde Islands) on 21 October, and singles on Barra (OH) on 1 October and 23 October. **Lapland Bunting:** A notable count of 24 flew over Siadar, Lewis (OH) on 1 October. A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was reported from Eday (Ork) on 10 October, though it was not subsequently sighted again. A female **Pine Bunting** was on Unst (Shet) on 5–7 November with a **Black-headed Bunting** and a **Rustic Bunting** on the same island on 1–5 October and 4 October respectively. An **Ortolan Bunting** was on Whalsay (Shet) on 4 October. **Little Bunting:** two were at Hillwell (Shet) on 1 October with one lingering in the area until 5 October; singles elsewhere on Shetland included birds at Scalloway, Geosetter and Northravine. Additionally, a single bird was in the Northbay area, Barra (OH) on 2–11 October. An **Ovenbird** was on Barra (OH) on 23 & 24 October.

Late summer migrants included a **Northern Wheatear** at Girdle Ness (NES) on 14 November and three **Barn Swallows** at Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) on 5 December.



Plate 77. Pine Bunting, Clibberswick, Unst, Shetland, November 2011. © Robbie Brookes

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 78. This picture of a Cormorant was taken in the centre of Dumfries on 28 September 2011. There is excellent access to the east bank of the River Nith in the area adjacent to the bus stops on the Whitesands (A781), and there is convenient parking within a few metres of the river bank, and even public toilets nearby. Migratory fish such as Salmon, Sea Trout and River Lampreys are held up below the weir at this point of the river and this attracts birds, particularly Goosanders, Cormorants, Black-backed

gulls of both species and a resident Grey Heron. If you are lucky it is also possible to see Kingfishers here. All the birds are readily seen, and can come relatively close providing great photo opportunities.

Equipment used: Canon 1D Mk4 camera with 500mm f4.5 lens, and image taken at 1/2500sec, f4.5 and ISO 800.

Edmund Fellowes



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