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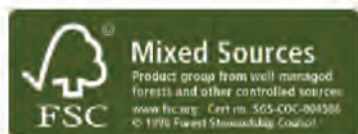
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President's Foreword

I write this foreword in deepest Argyll, as winter becomes spring. It is that superb time of year in Scotland, when summer visitors arrive and some of our winter visitors linger. Argyll has had an excellent winter, with a bonus time for gull watchers in particular. Iceland Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls have been to the fore. Recently, at Council, I met up with Angus Hogg, who has done so much for birdwatching and the SOC in Ayrshire. He was very positive about the superb winter that Ayrshire has had - not all the action is in the east!

Summer visitors are now arriving. I have already seen a couple of Ospreys - one in the Borders and one at Loch Glow in Fife. April is an important month for raptor workers - Golden Eagles have laid and Merlins and Hen Harriers are returning to their breeding grounds. I watched an adult male Hen Harrier yesterday at a beautiful Argyll site.

The recent Council meeting went well. We agreed to part-fund an extension to Bob Swann's contract. Bob has done an excellent job on the BTO/SOC Atlas and this extension will ensure the project finishes strongly in Scotland. We have a very good partnership with the BTO, and I thank their staff for making my job easier.

All in all we are part-funding quite a few projects, including two PhD students. This would not have been possible even a few years ago. However, we are now in a much stronger financial position. This is partly due to some of the legacies we have received. On behalf on Council, I would like to sincerely thank all the families involved. As well as part-funding important work, we must also ensure that we use this money to strengthen our own position and ensure the Club's future. The membership development project is one new way we are doing this.

I will still be involved in atlas work this spring as the Fife Atlas is continuing and I know several other counties are in the same position. If you have any spare time perhaps you could give a little of it to your nearest local atlas.

Whatever you are doing this summer, I hope you have an enjoyable, productive and bird-filled time.

Best to all

Ken Shaw, President



Plate 79. Ken Shaw.
© unknown



Plate 80. Great Grey Shrike, Threip Moor, Dumfries & Galloway, February 2012. © Brian D. Henderson

The Great Grey Shrike in Dumfries & Galloway

B.D. Henderson

The Great Grey Shrike is an uncommon passage migrant and rare winter visitor to Dumfries and Galloway. An extensive search found a total of 344 records, only 36 (10.5%) from earlier than 1960. Peak numbers coincided with large-scale afforestation and autumnal influxes of the 1970s to 1980. Numbers declined thereafter probably due to forest maturation, a downward trend in breeding performances and changes to migration patterns. Ringing studies in Dumfriesshire in the mid- to late 1970s found that birds returning in succeeding years to the same areas, even the same perches, were not necessarily the same individuals. The studies also showed that different individuals were present at the same site on the same day.

Introduction

The Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* is a partial migrant, with normal wintering range south of 60°N. They breed in Russia, western and northern Europe, with some birds, especially from Norway, migrating westwards to Britain (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The status of the Great Grey Shrike in Dumfries & Galloway has been variably described over the years. The present status is 'a rare winter visitor' (Irving 2010). In Dumfries & Galloway, Great Grey Shrikes are found in pine, spruce and larch plantations, at clear-fell areas and forest edges bordering bogs and moors. Dumfries & Galloway has 1.59 million hectares of coniferous plantations (Figure 1) mostly established since 1940, with 75% having been planted since 1960 (Ratcliffe 2007). They also frequent a variety of habitats kept open by non-intensive types of farming or light forestry practices and on the fringes of open agricultural areas. Thickets and hedgerows containing Common Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* are particularly favoured in the lowland river valleys.

All records relating to Great Grey Shrikes observed in Dumfries & Galloway are believed to be of the nominate race *excubitor*. In autumn 1960, Donald Watson observed a bird which showed characteristics of *Lanius excubitor* hybridisation with Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (Meiklejohn *et al.* 1961).

This paper presents an account of the Great Grey Shrike in Dumfries & Galloway using archival and unpublished records with emphasis on distribution, abundance, and occurrences since 1960.

Methods

Historical records relating to Great Grey Shrikes were found in early editions of *Transactions and Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* (1862–1946), *Scottish Naturalist* (1891–1922), *Annals of Scottish Natural History* (1892–1907), *Birds in Dumfriesshire* (Gladstone 1910) and in other publications. Recent records were collated from *Scottish Birds* (1961–89), North Solway Bird Reports (Watson & Young 1967, 1968 & 1970), *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* (1967–71), Ornithological Report for Galloway 1975 (Watson 1975), Dumfriesshire Bird Reports (Smith & Skilling 1978, Smith *et al.* 1979), and *Dumfries & Galloway Region Bird Reports* (1985–2010). Unpublished records were sought from ornithologists, naturalists and forest rangers and the handwritten and typescript notes of J.G. Gordon (early 20th century) and A.D. Watson (late 20th century) were also searched.

Results

Historical records 1878–1959

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries sightings and recollections of Great Grey Shrikes were exiguous. Sir William Jardine (1866) wrote in 1839 that ‘the Great Grey Shrike was a rare bird in the south of Scotland, a few instances only of its capture having occurred to our notice’. Gray (1869) stated that ‘it is only of late years that the Grey Shrike has appeared in our district, or indeed in any part of the west of Scotland. Service (1884) wrote, ‘The species is of very rare occurrence in the Stewartry’. In 1905, Mr R. Service (R. Service in Gladstone 1910) says, ‘Every winter for a long series of years one or more visitants of the kind were reported, but during the last half-dozen years I have not been made aware of any occurrence here’. Service (1907) later wrote ‘the species, formally of regular annual winter occurrence here, has now become decidedly scarce, the last I heard of having been got seven years ago’. Gladstone (1910) was unable to trace a bird shot during the winter of 1878/79 by Mr Tom Crosbie at Kirkbog, Closeburn (Dumfriesshire) and given to Dr Grierson for his museum at Thornhill. The first substantiated record is of a first-winter male shot on 28 February 1880, near Kirkcudbright (Macpherson 1891) and sent to the museum there.

Thirty-six records were sourced for the period 1878–1959, of which 47% were pre-1900. In most years, only single birds were seen, but there were two in 1892, two in 1906, three in 1907 and three in 1915. The winter period (December to late March) accounted for 71.9% of all historical records, the autumn (September to November) and spring (late March to May) passage periods recorded 21.9% and 6.2% respectively. Main locations were the Glencairn, Nith and Palnure valleys. Over half (58.3%) of all historical records involved birds that were shot or trapped, of these, 62.5% were males. No records were traced for the period 1932–55.

Recent records 1960–2011

Three hundred and eight records were sourced for the period 1960 to April 2011. Only four (1.3%) involved sightings of more than a single bird. Sightings of two birds were observed on the A713 Dalry to New Galloway road during autumn 1960, at Loch Ken on 23 February 1975, around the A712 New Galloway to Newton Stewart road during October 1976 and at Margree, Dalry on 29 January 2007. Of the recent records 209 (68.5%) referred to individuals seen on one day only or when only the month was known.

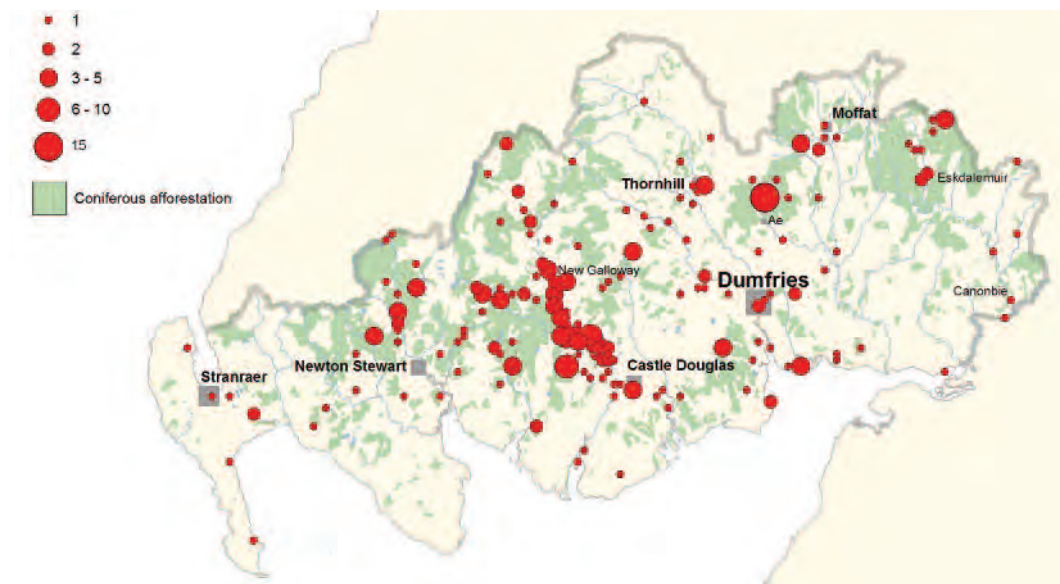


Figure 1. Distribution and abundance by location of Great Grey Shrikes in Dumfries & Galloway 1960–2011.

Distribution: Sixty-four percent of all recent records were in Kirkcudbrightshire, the main areas being the Galloway Forest Park, the Ken-Dee valley and The Glenkens (Figure 1).

Principal localities were Loch Ken (west) including Hensol & Cairn Edward Forest (21), Forest of Ae (18), Clatteringshaws Loch & Craigenallie (14), Loch Ken (east & lower) including Parton & Crossmichael (14), Eskdalemuir & Castle O'er Forest (14), Carsphairn & Deugh (13), Glentrool & Larg (12), Moffat & Beattock including Greenhillstairs & Earshaigs (12), Laurieston (10), New Galloway (9), Dalry (9) and Gatehouse & Cullendoch (8).

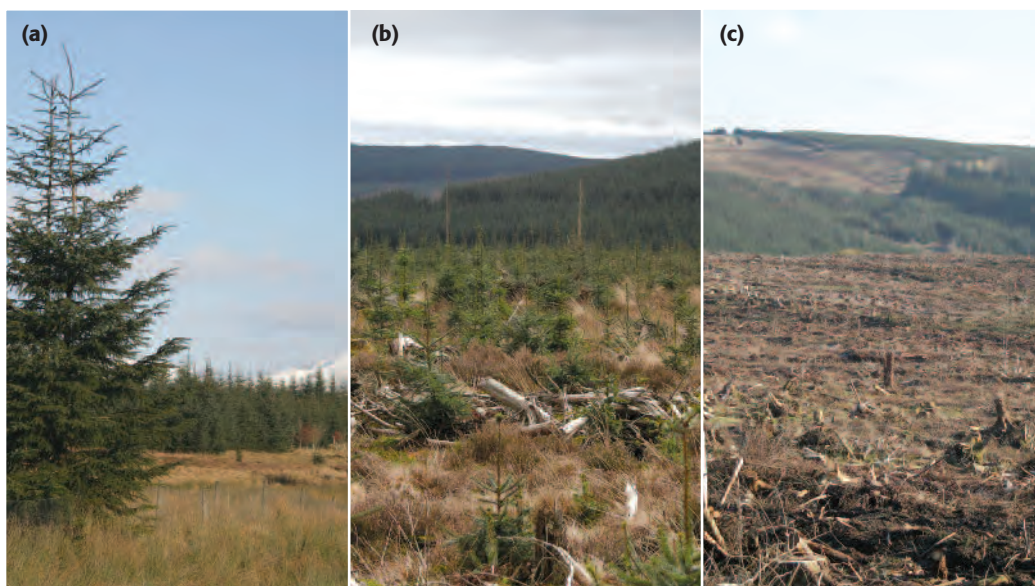


Plate 81. Habitats used by Great Grey Shrike (a) Threip Moor, (b) Poldivan restock, Forest of Ae, (c) Poldivan clearfell, Forest of Ae, Dumfries & Galloway, February 2012. © Brian D. Henderson

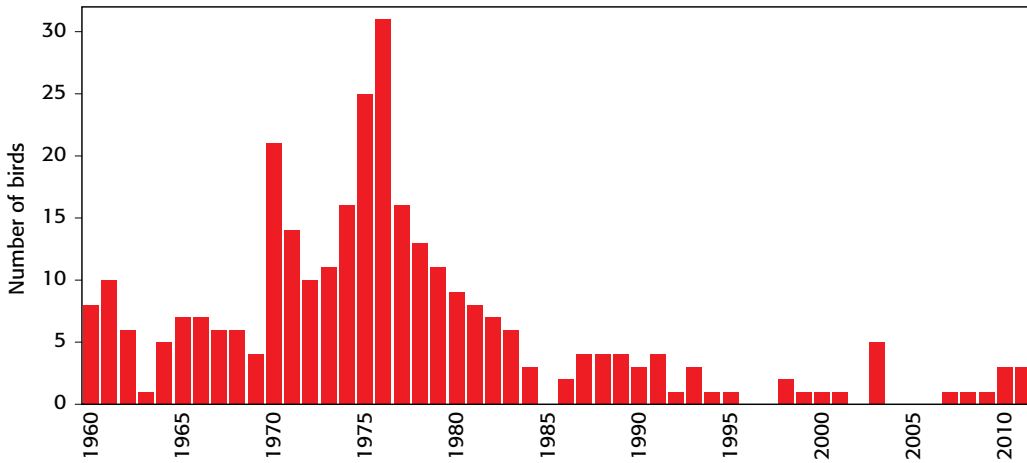


Figure 2. Annual occurrence of Great Grey Shrikes in Dumfries & Galloway, 1960–2011. Long-staying and individual birds seen over two calendar years i.e. winter of 1964/65 are plotted on year of arrival.

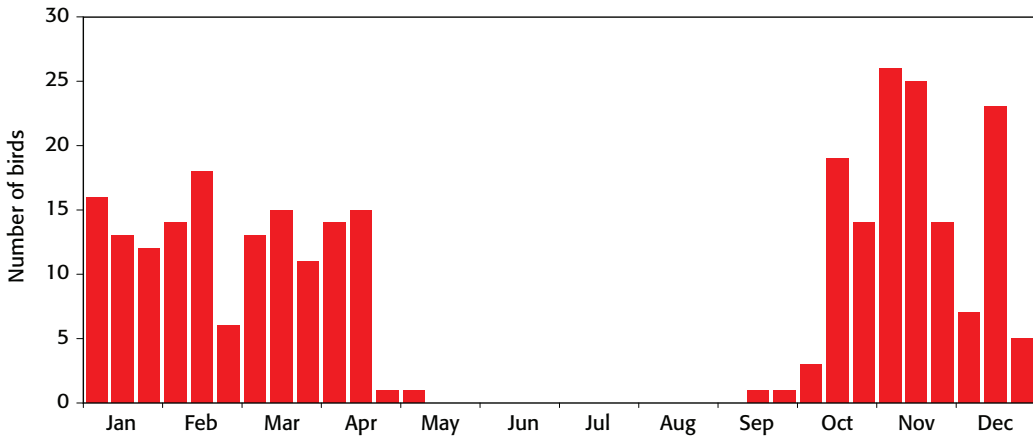


Figure 3. Seasonal occurrence of Great Grey Shrikes in Dumfries & Galloway, 1960-2011. Histogram shows records per 10-day period. Records when only the month is known are plotted mid-month. Only arrival dates are plotted for long-staying individuals.

Annual occurrence: Numbers fluctuated greatly from year to year (Figure 2). After the 1960s numbers increased by 180% in the 1970s, falling again to below 1960s levels from early 1980s onwards.

From 1960 to 1984 annual numbers ranged from one to 32 and averaged 10. Peaks of abundance were noted in 1970-71 and 1975-76. The 1970s accounted for 54.8% of all recent records, with 1976 alone accounting for 10.4%. The period 1985-2011 accounted for 14.9% of all recent records and the averaged dropped to one.

Passage and winter periods: Seasonal variation patterns and changes in abundance of numbers were particularly evident during the autumn passage and winter periods (Figure 3).

Autumn (September–November) records accounted for 34.6% of recent records. Influxes were noted in 1973 and 1975. Earliest autumn records occurred on 16 September 1970 and 24 September 1968. November accounted for 22.7% of all recent records with the period 1-10 November accounting for 9.1%. Eleven individuals stayed for seven days or more during the

autumn passage period. The longest staying autumn passage bird was at Mossdale in 1980, it stayed for 22 days from 2 to 23 November. Three individuals (10%) arrived during the autumn period and stayed through to the winter, one staying through to the following spring.

The winter period (December to late March) accounted for 53.2% of all recent records. Seventy-two percent of all winter records were of 'one-day' sightings. A few birds recorded during the winter period stayed for long periods. Twenty-eight individuals remained at a single site, or within close proximity of a site throughout the winter. A few arrived at the end of November and remained into the winter months. The longest staying wintering bird was around Torthorwald from 3 January to 23 March 1961 for 80 days.

Spring records (late March to May) accounted for 11.2% of all recent sightings. Last spring birds were usually seen before the third week of April. In 1974 one bird was observed on 2 May (Watson 1975). The longest staying spring passage bird was at Thornhill from 28 March to 14 April 1961 for 18 days.

Long-staying individuals: Fifty-four individuals stayed for seven days or more in the region of which 23 stayed for more than 30 days. Twelve stayed for 40 or more days (Table 1). The main locations for long-staying birds were around Loch Ken, Forest of Ae and the Galloway Forest Park.

Table 1. Records of Great Grey Shrikes that stayed for 40 days or more in Dumfries & Galloway 1960–2011.

Location	Period	Days
Forest of Ae	October 1991–5 April 1992	164
Loch Dornal	27 December 1990–15 April 1991	104
Loch Ken	6 January–7 April 1972	93
Gairloch, Torthorwald	3 January–23 March 1961	80
Forest of Ae	15 October–31 December 1974	78
Mains of Duchrae, Loch Ken	29 November 1964–13 February 1965	77
Middlemoss, Langholm	21 October–20 December 2010	61
Troston, New Abbey	7 February–7 April 1993	60
Thornhill	20 January–17 March 1960	58
Barnhill, Moffat	26 January–12 March 1964	47
Caerlaverock Castle	29 January–16 March 2003	47
Moor of Genoch	12 February–23 March 1974	40

A long-staying individual was at Larg, Glentroot in the winter and spring of 1971/72 and another long-staying bird was at Caldons & Holm of Bargrennan, Glentroot during 1978/79. The long-staying individuals at Thornhill (1960) and Loch Dornal (1990/91) were in song at the end of their stay.

Returning birds in successive years: A number of Great Grey Shrikes were thought to be site-faithful returning individuals in successive years. Watson & Young (1968) remarked 'This species is known to hold winter territories and there have been several recent examples in our region of individuals being seen in successive seasons in the same areas.' Sixteen areas recorded birds in successive years and twelve areas recorded birds over three successive years. Presumed site-faithful returning birds recorded over four or five-year periods were found at the Galloway Forest Park, Loch Ken and Mossdale. Most recurrences were during the 1960s–1970s and early 1980s when birds were most numerous.

During the course of raptor studies in Dumfriesshire ten different Great Grey Shrikes were trapped and ringed during three winters of 1975/76 to 1977/78. Five of these were ringed during 21 days from 1 to 21 November 1976 in the Forest of Ae. Three were ringed in a single day at the same site on 19 November 1976. Several key observations were noted: birds were on the same territories in successive winters; no individuals were re-caught; there was no marked movement from one territory to another; different birds in different winters used the same perches and they used the

same thickets to hide and roost in (M. Marquiss, unpublished data). Similar raptor studies, in a 25 kilometre square area of conifer plantations at Eskdalemuir during three winters from October 1975 to April 1978 showed that Great Grey Shrikes turned up at the same sites year on year and had regular wintering areas. Several birds were in the same area at the same time. A few of these birds were caught, including some juveniles, and there was no information on whether these birds returned the following year (A. Village, pers. comm.). There have been no recoveries of the ringed birds (J. Clark, pers. comm.).

Diet and hunting techniques: Numbers of Great Grey Shrikes, their distribution and the succession of 'returning individuals' may have been dependent on good vole populations. Twenty three percent of all long-staying individuals were present at sites where vole numbers peaked for that year. At Eskdalemuir, vole numbers peaked in spring 1976, declined to a low in spring 1977 and increased again in 1978. Sightings of Great Grey Shrikes during spring 1977 at Eskdalemuir were poor, numbers rose again during the autumn and winter of 1977/78 (A. Village, pers. comm.). Pellet analysis from field studies in the Forest of Ae indicated that diet was mainly voles, but large beetles and birds were also taken (M. Marquiss, pers. comm.). One individual in Galloway during the early 1970s had a larder, which consisted entirely of Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* carcasses impaled on barbed wire along the top of a dry stone dyke (G. Shaw, pers. comm.).

Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* has been extensively taken, at clear fell areas, during warm dry spells. During late March and early April 2011 in the Forest of Ae, Dumfriesshire, one individual was observed hunting lizards from early morning to an hour after midday. Several lizard carcasses were found wedged on different uprooted spruce stumps and discarded brushed branches, some distance apart. All had neck lacerations and had either no tail or tail-tip. No larder was located and no other prey species were seen to be taken. The individual never returned to consume the last lizard it cached (pers. obs.). There are few other local records of hunting behaviour, but Watson (1962) recalled seeing a method of pursuit in which 'the manner of attack was reminiscent of a Merlin' and in January 1964 at a rubbish tip near Moffat, Dicerbo (2004) recollected seeing a Great Grey Shrike take 'a mouse from a hovering position'.

Discussion

Great Grey Shrikes can use a variety of habitats (Fraser & Ryan 1995) and have occurred in an array of habitat types throughout Dumfries & Galloway. Many records were from afforested areas that comprised mixed-aged coupes with abundant areas of restock, young conifer plantations and clear fell areas. Most have ample spruce boles and windsnap perches providing good 'sit-and-wait' positions for Great Grey Shrikes.

Early records of Great Grey Shrikes in Dumfries & Galloway were rather meagre and intermittent. The period 1878-1958 accounted for 10.5% of all records; only 4.9% were pre-1900. The three birds in 1907 coincided with years when unusual numbers were recorded in Scotland (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). Limited observer coverage coupled with accessibility difficulties within much of the region probably contributed to the paucity of early records.

Since the mid-20th century observers were more active in the region. From the 1960s there was an upsurge in recording throughout Scotland and records of Great Grey Shrikes were more routinely published.

The pronounced increase in the number of sightings during the 1970s to 1980 probably resulted from increased afforestation, especially its early stages. The west side of Loch Ken, the Forest of Ae, Eskdalemuir, Glentroul and the Galloway Forest Park were areas where Great Grey Shrikes were seen as beneficiaries of forestry practices. The increase in the number of observers happened to coincide with the spread of conifers, particularly in Kirkcudbrightshire.



Plates 82–83. Great Grey Shrike, Poldivan, Forest of Ae, Dumfries & Galloway, January–February 2012.
© Brian D. Henderson

Ornithologists of the period noted that young conifer plantations were a favoured habitat in Dumfries & Galloway. Donald Watson (1981) mentioned, 'in favourable years solitary Great Grey Shrikes are as likely to be found in young plantations as anywhere'. Derek Skilling stated that 'they were fairly often found in Auchenfad and other local coniferous forests while the trees were young' (D. Skilling pers. comm.). Geoff Shaw recalled 'in Wigtownshire, an area not as dense in coniferous plantations as that of other areas in Dumfries & Galloway, most Great Grey Shrikes were seen in young thicket plantations'. He further mentioned that 'the young coniferous plantations on the foothills of Larg, similarly Bennan, were just somewhere where one saw Great Grey Shrikes' (G. Shaw, pers. comm.).

In Dumfries & Galloway, as with the rest of Scotland, there has been a marked decrease in numbers since the mid-1980s. Maturation of the region's vast forest tracts saw young plantation, grow into dense thickets, which became less attractive to Great Grey Shrikes. At the same time yearly fluctuations in the region may have resulted from annual difference in breeding performance and summer survival of European birds (Lack 1986). From the early 1980s, the region witnessed a reduction in both observer coverage and time spent by recorders in the field. Watson (1986) stated 'the local bird report compiler noticed many gaps in coverage, with too little firm information coming to hand'. He further added that 'many observers were restricted in the time they can devote to watching birds'.

Lefranc (1997) stated that most migrating Great Grey Shrikes leave the breeding territories in September with migrants arriving in Britain during late October continuing into November. This migration arrival pattern was, in most years, mirrored in Dumfries & Galloway. The first peak of abundance was noted during November with smaller peaks in October and December. The two September records were notable, as throughout Britain, the species is extremely rare before the last week of September (Fraser & Ryan 1995).

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were occasional late autumn influxes resulting in higher numbers of wintering birds in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). In Dumfries & Galloway, autumn influxes were noted in 1970 and 1976. The influxes in Scotland during 1982 and 1983 were not matched in Dumfries & Galloway.

Some individuals seen for a short time (i.e. one day) during the winter period may have been 'winter wanderers' and were extremely mobile. As no repeat visits or sightings were subsequently recorded, their status was difficult to assess. They may have been resident in the area for some time, but were under-recorded.



Plate 84. Great Grey Shrike, Poldivan, Forest of Ae, Dumfries & Galloway, March 2012. © Brian D. Henderson

Spring passage in Scotland is far lighter than in autumn, accounting for only 19% of all birds between 1986 and 2004 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). In Dumfries & Galloway, the figure was 10.2%. As with the rest of Scotland, it is not known whether spring passage birds include any that wintered further south than Britain (M. Marchant in Wernham *et al.* 2002).

Vole *Microtus* species play a dominant role in the diet of Great Grey Shrikes (Lefranc 1997) including Dumfries & Galloway. The other species taken in Dumfries & Galloway are in accord with those taken elsewhere in Scotland. Unseasonably higher than average temperatures during late March and early April 2011 resulted in Common Lizards being more active than normal and this was reflected in the quantity taken and cached in the Forest of Ae.

Forrester *et al.* (2007) related that Great Grey Shrikes set up winter feeding territories and individuals sometimes return to these areas in successive years, and that presumed returning individuals had often been noted. Watson (D. Watson in Batten *et al.* 1973) similarly stated 'The same areas are re-occupied, sometimes, but not always in successive years, invariably by single birds, but it cannot be assumed that the same individual returns'. Ringing in Dumfriesshire showed that birds caught on the same territories in successive years were not necessarily the same birds; indeed birds caught at sites in successive years included some juveniles.

Some Great Grey Shrikes probably went unrecorded in the region, especially in its vast forests. Others may have been undocumented in the belief that they were birds that had been seen previously.

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Plate 85. Egyptian Goose, adult, Ocrabooy, Lerwick, Virkie & Exnaboe, Mainland, Shetland, 24 February to 25 March 2010. © Roger Riddington

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2010

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

This is the third annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC). Previous reports have covered the period 2005–08 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, b) and 2009 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011).

Details of one addition to the *Scottish List* and one deletion are provided in this report. The former relates to an Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* in Shetland in February and March 2010; it was thought most likely to originate from a feral population and the species is thus admitted to Category C. The latter concerns Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, which is removed from the list following SBRC's recent review of the only accepted record from 1970. Incidentally, we are aware of previous sightings of apparently 'wild' Egyptian Geese in Scotland, and would encourage the observers concerned to submit details of their sightings for formal assessment.

We also report on a recently accepted 19th-century record of White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, which becomes Scotland's first. Other information that relates primarily to previous years includes the results of SBRC's review of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*, hitherto available only online.

Turning to 2010, there were as in 2009 single records of Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* and Alpine Swift *Apus melba*, none of which featured in the 2005–08 report. In contrast, there were no accepted Scottish records in 2010 of either Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* or Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*. The last time this happened was in 1972. Other species reported in relatively small numbers by comparison with other recent years were White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* and Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*. No claims of Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica* or Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* outside the core areas defined in last year's report were received for assessment.

Once again, the Northern Isles had a monopoly of several passerines. Indeed, discounting Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*, only ten individual birds of passerine species on the SBRC list were seen outwith the Northern Isles in 2010. Of these, six were on other islands, with a single observer based on the Isle of May accounting for four of them. The four on the mainland were all in North-east Scotland. One wonders how many others go undetected elsewhere on the mainland.

Returning to Water Pipit, the bird on Unst in November 2010 was Shetland's first, while the late acceptance of a bird seen at Vane Farm in 2009 results in the appearance of the Perth & Kinross recording area in the SBRC report for the first time.

Two species were removed from the SBRC list at the end of 2009: American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*. Only the former features in this report, due to some late acceptances for the Outer Hebrides in 2008 and 2009.

Following the publication of this report, the number of accepted Scottish records of Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* now exceeds 20. As such, this form no longer qualifies for inclusion on the SBRC list as a rare subspecies. It will therefore be removed as from 1 January 2013.

Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the *Scottish List* (Forrester 2011).

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

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated. Similarly, no totals are available for Scottish Crossbill.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year. Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
- Total number in the current year (2010). In the case of species dropped by SBRC at the end of 2009, no total is given for 2010 when reporting late acceptances.

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2010, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2010 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years are sometimes accepted locally without formal submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided. Revised details are also provided for some pre-2010 records published previously.

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

- Year (unless this is 2010).
- Recording area.
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present throughout; in some cases it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Existence of a photograph, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'.
- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, local recorder and/or others.

The table of records is followed by the main text of the species account. At the end of each account, a brief summary of global breeding and wintering distribution, with mention of relevant subspecies, is given in parentheses.

Species coverage

Species coverage is unchanged from the last report except that, as stated above, American Golden Plover and Ring-billed Gull were removed from the SBRC list as from 1 January 2010, while the local recorder in the Outer Hebrides took over the assessment of records of Great Shearwater as from the same date. Rare subspecies of several species on the SBRC list are still assessed by BBRC, the most important being Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*. For these, the accounts in the SBRC report summarise accepted BBRC records in order to give as complete a picture as possible of the species' occurrence in Scotland.

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in Appendix 1. This includes records of Yellow-legged Gull previously accepted but judged not proven after review. Appendix 2 summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC list.

At the request of local recorders, SBRC also assessed individual records of species not on the SBRC list during 2010. These records are not listed below but may have been published in local reports if accepted.

SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the SOC Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current

members are Alan Lauder (chairman), Tristan ap Rheinallt, John Bowler, Mark Chapman, Hywel Maggs, John Nadin and John Sweeney, with Chris McInerny as non-voting secretary and Bob McGowan as non-voting museum consultant. John Nadin replaces Alan Brown, who was SBRC chairman during the period when the records reported here were assessed.

The *Scottish List* subcommittee consists of Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny and Roger Riddington. For more information about SBRC, see ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a) and www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc.htm.

Acknowledgements

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

Next, we thank the following current and former recorders and report compilers for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Paul Baxter, Mark Chapman, Jon Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Hugh Insley, Scott Paterson, Chris Pendlebury, Brian Rabbitts, Deryk Shaw, Fraser Simpson, Malcolm Ware, Stephen Welch and Jim Williams. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas.

We thank Ian Andrews for making available the database of records of scarce and rare species used during the preparation of Forrester *et al.* (2007), and also for creating the graphics. Roger Riddington and Alan Lauder provided helpful comments on Cormorant records, while Gwion ap Rheinallt helped with data checking.

Systematic list of accepted records

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* 0: 0: 1

Table 1. Accepted records of Egyptian Goose in Scotland, 2010.

Shetland Ocracquoy, Lerwick, Virkie & Exnaboe, Mainland, adult, 24 February to 25 March, photo (G.W. Petrie, R. Riddington *et al.*).

The first record for Scotland.

This species will not have been uppermost in people's minds when contemplating the next addition to the *Scottish List* but, even so, the first acceptable record of this exotic-looking goose will come as no surprise. With significant naturalised populations in Western Europe, notably in England, Denmark and the Netherlands, a Scottish record has been a possibility for some time. Indeed, several Egyptian Geese have previously been seen in Scotland, though none has been formally submitted as being of 'wild' (albeit feral) origin until now. SBRC took the view that given the location and time of year (late winter and early spring being a time when the species can be on the move in England; see Riddington 2011), the Shetland bird was much more likely to have come from a feral population than to be an escape from captivity.

(Breeds throughout Africa south of 20°N latitude, extending farther north into southern Egypt, the only part of its natural range within the Western Palearctic. There are substantial naturalised populations in England (concentrated in Norfolk), the Netherlands and Denmark, with smaller numbers breeding in Belgium, France and Germany.)

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* 197: 110: 16

Table 2. Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2010, with an additional record for 1890.

Highland Melvaig, Ross & Cromarty, adult/second-winter, 16 March (K.D. Shaw).
North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, adult, 25 May (D. Parnaby).
Orkney Gurness, Evie, Mainland, 2-5 July (J. Picksley).
Outer Hebrides Sgiogarstaigh (Skigersta) to Cuidhsiadar, Lewis, up to 8, 6-25 April (B.A.E. Marr, M.S. Scott *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Labost, Lewis, 19 November (T. ap Rheinallt).
Shetland Mousa Sound, adult (returning), 24 April (M. Heubeck, R.M. Mellor).
Shetland Bluemull Sound, adult, 1 May (B.H. Thomason).
Shetland Off Lunna Holm, Mainland, adult, 1 May (B.H. Thomason).
Shetland Kirkabister, Mainland, adult, 2 May (M.S. Chapman *et al.*).
Shetland Lamba Ness, Unst, adult, 31 May (B.H. Thomason *et al.*).
Shetland Kirkabister, Mainland, adult (returning), 24 October to 15 November (R.A. Haywood *et al.*).

1890

Highland Sutherland, juvenile male, January 1890, specimen at National Museums Scotland, NMS.Z 1890.33 (per R.Y. McGowan).

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

In the main, the 16 birds in 2010 are typical of the regional spread of recent years. Nearly all, however, were adults or near-adults detected on spring passage by observers specifically looking for this species in recently discovered 'hot-spots'. The spring passage through the Northern Isles, Outer Hebrides and certain bays along the north-west mainland is now well established, although the wintering sites of these birds remain unknown.

The absence of wintering birds in 2010 was notable. However, the bird seen at Kirkabister in October and November was considered to be a returning individual from previous winters (and different to the presumed migrant seen briefly at the same location earlier in the year).

The 1890 record concerns a juvenile that was collected on the Sutherland coast and then languished for 120 years, labelled as a Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, in the Royal Scottish Museum (now National Museums Scotland). The recent re-identification of the specimen was discussed by McGowan (2011). Following assessment and acceptance by SBRC, this bird now becomes the first Scottish record, predating the previously accepted first record by nearly two years. Together with BBRC's recent acceptance of an individual in Orkney in June 2005 (Hudson *et al.* 2011), it brings the total number of birds seen in Scotland to date to 323.

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

Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* 2: 16: 3

Table 3. Accepted records of Continental Cormorant in Scotland, 2010.

North-east Scotland Girdleness, adult and third-calendar-year, 2 May, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, A.J. Whitehouse).
Shetland Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, adult, 24 April, photo (R. Riddington).

Continental Cormorant is a rare visitor to Scotland, with most records along the east coast or in Shetland between December and June. However, reliable identification criteria for this subspecies, based mainly on the angle of the feathering framing the gular pouch and subtle structural features, have only been established relatively recently, and it is likely to have been under-recorded in the past.

The 2010 occurrences fit in with the pattern of existing records. However, with so few observers taking an active interest in these birds, the significance of this pattern is questionable.

Rare subspecies with more than 20 Scottish records are not normally assessed by SBRC. The 2010 records reported here bring the number of Continental Cormorants accepted in Scotland to 21 and, as a result, this form will be removed from the SBRC list as of 1 January 2013.

(*P. c. sinensis* breeds throughout central and southern Europe and has expanded recently into parts of northern Europe; outside the breeding season it occurs both inland and on coasts through much of Europe, including England. *P. c. carbo* breeds in north-west Europe including Iceland, Norway and the British Isles. The former also occurs in Asia and the latter in North America, with other subspecies in Africa, Australasia and the Far East.)

Great White Egret *Ardea alba* 37: 27: 5

Table 4. Accepted records of Great White Egret in Scotland, 2010, with an additional record and a revised record for 2009.

Angus & Dundee Balgavies & Rescobie Lochs, 7-13 April, photo (J. Cook, I. Hay *et al.*).
Argyll Barrahormid, Loch Sween, 12-30 October, photo *Scottish Birds* 31: 94 (J. & J. Close *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Inverugie, 18-25 January (W. Bruce, M. Innes).
North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 21 April to 2 May (D. Funnell, D. Parnaby *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 30 May to 4 June, photo (I. Moig, D. Parnaby *et al.*).

2009

Clyde Merryton & Baron's Haugh, 7 February, photo (J. McKechnie per I. English, M. Molloy); note revised location (*cf. ap Rheinallt et al.* 2011).
Fife Kilconquhar Loch, 6-12 December, photo (M. Ramage *et al.*).

Great White Egret is a rare but increasingly frequent visitor to Scotland, with sightings in most areas and most months. It is likely that some duplication of records occurs, as these large white birds move around between sites, are highly visible, and are relatively easy to observe. The absence of any temporal overlap among the four east-coast records in 2010 suggests that duplication may well be involved.

The five acceptances in 2010 represent a return to normal levels following a record annual total of 14 birds in 2009 (including the late acceptance from Fife reported here). As in 2009, the records were well distributed throughout the



Plate 86. Great White Egret, Barrahormid, Loch Sween, Argyll, 12–30 October 2010. © Jon Close

year and concentrated along the east coast. Given the significant range expansion of Great White Egret into Western Europe, the species is widely expected to become a British breeder in the near future and North-east Scotland might prove attractive to potential colonists.

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

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* 19: 4: 3

Table 5. Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2010.

Argyll Dalmally, adult, 31 May, photo (A.J. Booth).

North-east Scotland Near Peterculter, Aberdeen, second-calendar-year, 23 May, photo *Scottish Birds* 30: 375, 376 (I. Francis).

Shetland Loch of Voe, Mainland, adult, 19 May (M.S. Chapman).

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most individuals have been seen in spring, from April to June, with just a handful of sightings later in the season, though there have also been instances of summering and a single case of hybridisation with Red Kite *Milvus milvus*.

The three adults in 2010 were widely scattered across Scotland but all occurred during a 12-day period in the latter half of May. This accords well with the established pattern for Britain as a whole, where records peak in early May but are, on average, one or two weeks later in northern Britain including Scotland (Fraser *et al.* 2007). The North-east Scotland individual in 2010 was identified retrospectively by the observer, who had been photographing Red Kites at the time (Francis 2010).

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

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

Table 6. Accepted records of Montagu's Harrier in Scotland, 2010.

North-east Scotland Cotehill Loch, Forvie NNR, wing-tagged female, 22 June, photo *Scottish Birds* 30: 285 (D. Short *et al.*).

Montagu's Harrier is a very rare migrant to Scotland, mostly occurring in spring in North-east Scotland, Angus & Dundee or Perth & Kinross. A few breeding attempts have been successful, though none more recently than 1955, and the total of 45 birds to the end of 2004 excludes fledged young from these breeding attempts (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011).

Montagu's Harrier has occurred six times in Scotland since 2000, four of the sightings being in North-east Scotland, with the two most recent, in 2009 and 2010, being on the same National Nature Reserve. Occurrences peak in May, and midsummer records, such as this, are rare.

Subsequent enquiries regarding the wing-tagged Cotehill Loch bird revealed that it had been ringed as a chick on 18 July 2008 at Villeneuve, Puy-de-Dôme, France (Duncan 2010).

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

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* c. 325 (1968-2004): 21: 9

Table 7. Accepted records of Rough-legged Buzzard in Scotland, 2010.

Angus & Dundee	West Ferry, Dundee, juvenile, 31 October, photo (C. Farquharson).
Highland	Essich, Inverness district, 18 April (H. Insley).
Orkney	Holm/Toab area, Mainland, juvenile, 7-31 January (J. Branscombe, K.E. Hague, D. Shearer, R.J. Simpson).
Orkney	Twingness, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 16 October (R.J. Butcher <i>et al.</i>).
Orkney	Holland House, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 16-17 October (R.J. Butcher, T. Collett <i>et al.</i>).
Orkney	Holland House, Airport & Kirbest, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 18 October, photo (R.J. Butcher, T. Collett).
Shetland	Toab & Scatness, Mainland, juvenile, 16 October, photo (P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington <i>et al.</i>).
Shetland	West Yell, juvenile, 22 November (P.M. Ellis, J. Nicolson, J.D. Okill, G.W. Petrie, I. Sandison <i>et al.</i>).
Shetland	Valla Field, Unst, juvenile, 29 December to 2011, photo (B.H. Thomason <i>et al.</i>).

Rough-legged Buzzard is a scarce passage migrant to Scotland, occurring mostly on the eastern side of the country and in the Northern Isles, with numbers tending to peak in late autumn. In addition, a few birds overwinter. Some 346 individuals were seen between 1968 and 2009 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011).

The nine records for 2010 conform to established geographical and temporal patterns. Following a juvenile in January, one unaged bird occurred in April, and seven juveniles were recorded from October to December, with a peak of five in the latter half of October. This supports the view that autumn records in Scotland mainly involve young birds dispersing from Fennoscandia. Although nine were also seen in 2005, fewer individuals were aged then and the sightings were spread more evenly throughout the year (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a).

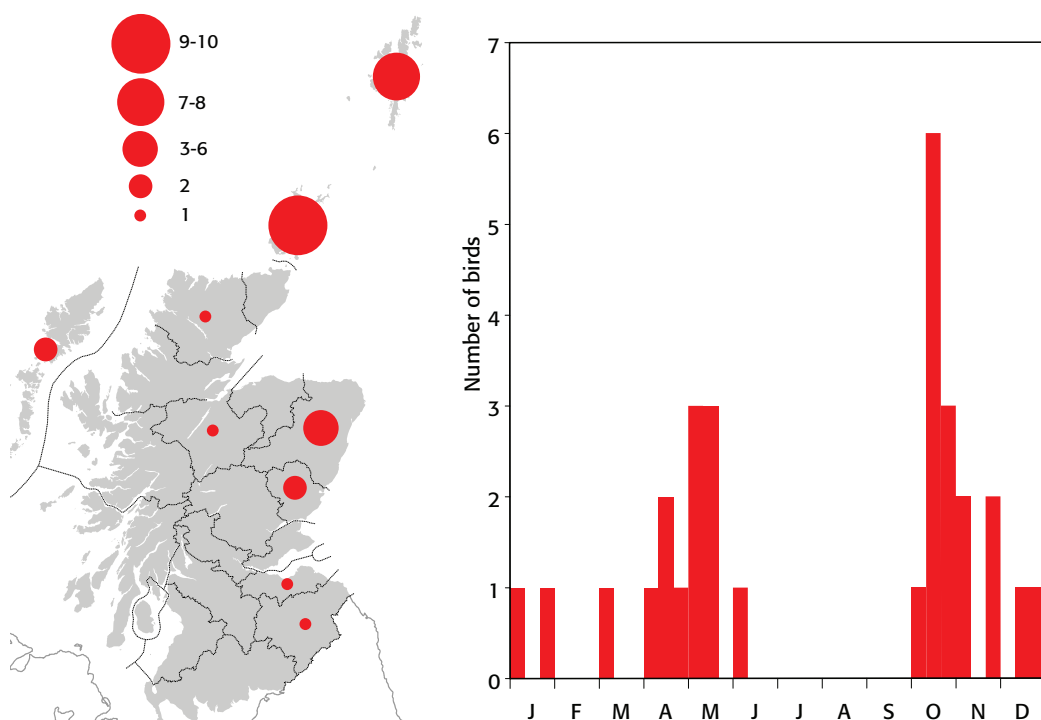


Figure 1. Distribution by recording area and seasonal occurrence of Rough-legged Buzzard in Scotland, 2005-10. Note that the 2005 Fair Isle bird is not included as it was first seen in Shetland.

For the second year in a row, SBRC accepted all submitted claims of Rough-legged Buzzard. This contrasts with the situation in the past, where claims of this species had one of the highest rejection rates among species assessed by the committee (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a). Combined with a general improvement in the quality of submissions, more birds are now being photographed.

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

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* 81: 8: 3

Table 8. Accepted records of Red-footed Falcon in Scotland, 2010.

Argyll Gleann Mòr, Port Charlotte, Islay, first-summer male, 2 May (R. Davidson).

Fife Fife Ness, juvenile, 2 November, photo (G. & K. Leckie).

Lothian Howgate, female, 22 May, photo (M.A. Grubb).

Red-footed Falcon is mainly a rare late-spring migrant to Scotland with one or two individuals seen in most years. Most sightings come from Shetland, Orkney and North-east Scotland, so the distribution of the occurrences in 2010 was exceptional.

The sightings in Argyll and Lothian were during the peak period for Scottish records. The former was the third record for Argyll and the first for Islay, while the latter was the sixth for the Lothian recording area. The juvenile at Fife Ness was the third for Fife; the late date is matched by only two other Scottish records, Newport (Fife) on 21 November 1941 and Moss of Cree (Dumfries & Galloway) on 1 November 1944 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

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

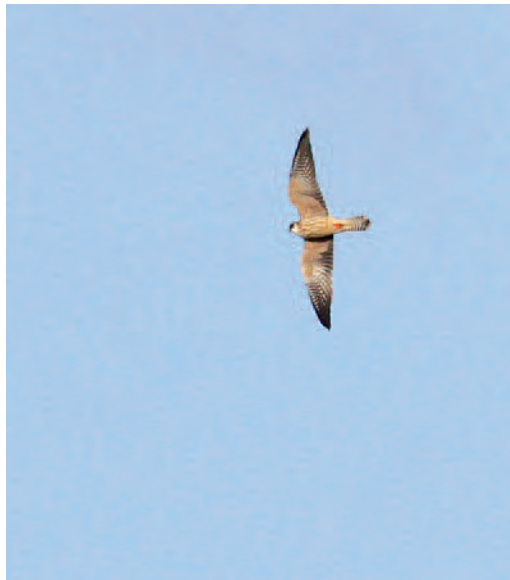


Plate 87. Red-footed Falcon, juvenile, Fife Ness, Fife, 2 November 2010. © Kris Leckie

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* 30: 1: 1

Table 9. Accepted records of Stone-curlew in Scotland, 2010.

Orkney The Lurn, North Ronaldsay, 19 November, photo (P.A. Brown *et al.*).

Stone-curlew is a very rare visitor to Scotland; there were just 31 accepted records to the end of 2009 and half of these were in the Northern Isles, with the remainder scattered across the country. There is a pronounced peak in occurrence in late May and early June (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Plate 88. *Stone-curlew, The Lurn, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 19 November 2010.* © Paul Brown

Prior to 2010, there were only three records during the months of September to December, with the Orkney bird in 2010 being the first to be seen in November in Scotland.

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



American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* 72: 68: -

Table 10. Additional records of American Golden Plover in Scotland, 2008 and 2009.

2009

Outer Hebrides Bòrnais (Bornish), South Uist, adult, 29 August to 13 September, photo (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Mullach Mòr, St Kilda, adult, 23 September, photo (W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).

2008

Outer Hebrides Gleann Mòr, St Kilda, juvenile, 1 October, photo (R.M. Tallack *et al.*).

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

As from 1 January 2010, records of this species in Scotland have been assessed locally rather than by SBRC. The total for Scotland in 2005-08 was formerly 49 birds, with a further 16 in 2009 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011); the additional Outer Hebrides individuals reported here bring the revised totals to 50 and 18, respectively. There have been four previous occurrences on St Kilda, three in September and one in October.

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

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* 69: 45: 1

Table 11. Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2010, with an additional record for 2009.

Shetland Scatness, Mainland, 20 June, photo (D. Eichhorn, M.A. Neumann *et al.*).

2009

Angus & Dundee Montrose Basin, adult, 1-2 August, trapped, photo (C. McGuigan, E. Watson *et al.*).

White-rumped Sandpiper is a rare but annual visitor to Scotland from North America, with nearly all records in autumn. Following the influx of 27 birds in 2005, reported occurrences have declined, with only 16 in 2006-8 and, including records published in this report, just two birds in 2009 and a single in 2010.

The midsummer occurrence in Shetland was only the second June sighting in Scotland, and the second earliest date ever; in 1980, one was observed at Musselburgh (Lothian) on 31 May and 1 June. The near absence of spring records reflects the species' migration routes: in autumn, the majority of birds follow an Atlantic route, but in spring they move north through inland North America (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

The adult at Montrose Basin in 2009 was the third record for Angus & Dundee; both previous sightings were in 1996.

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

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* 12: 7: 0

Table 12. Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 1998 to 2009.

2009

Ayrshire Stevenston, adult, 11 August to 11 September, photo (K. Hoey).

2008

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult (returning), 6 January to 23 February, photo *Scottish Birds* 29: 221 (C.J. McInerny, J.J. Sweeney *et al.*).

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, second adult (returning), 17-21 February, photo (C.J. McInerny, J.J. Sweeney *et al.*).

Highland Bettyhill, Sutherland, adult, 22 June, photo (M.S. Scott *et al.*).

2007

Lothian Seafield, adult, 2 January (A. Jensen).

2006

Ayrshire Troon Harbour, adult (returning), 17-28 February, photo (A. Hogg, B.D. Kerr *et al.*).

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult (returning), 3 February, photo (J.J. Sweeney).

Moray & Nairn Lossie Estuary, two adults, 29-30 June, photo (A. Jensen).

North-east Scotland Peterhead, second-summer/third-winter, 27 August to November, photo (C. Gibbins *et al.*).

2005

Ayrshire Troon Harbour, adult, 25 February to 5 March, photo (A. Hogg, B.D. Kerr *et al.*).

2004

Moray & Nairn Lossie Estuary, fourth-summer or adult, 30 March to 4 April, photo (R. Proctor).

2003

Clyde Hogganfield Loch, adult (returning), 2 February (C.J. McInerny).

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult (returning), 22 February (C.J. McInerny *et al.*); same, 9 December to 25 February 2004 (C.J. McInerny *et al.*).

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult (returning), 9 December to 25 February 2004 (C.J. McInerny *et al.*).

2002

Argyll Loch Gruinart, Islay, adult, 1-7 September (T. ap Rheinallt *et al.*).

Clyde Hogganfield Loch, adult, 3 February, photo (C.J. McInerny).

Fife Tayport, second-winter or third-summer, 21 July, photo (D.E. Dickson, W. McBay, J.S. Nadin *et al.*).

Highland Ullapool, Ross & Cromarty, second-summer, 18 June, photo (D. Dorling).

North-east Scotland Peterhead, adult, 31 December to 16 March 2003, photo (P.A.A. Baxter, C. Gibbins *et al.*).

2001

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult, 6 January to 4 February, photo (C.J. McInerny, S.C. Votier *et al.*); same, 9 November to 6 January 2002, photo (C.J. McInerny, S.C. Votier *et al.*).

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult (returning), 9 November to 6 January 2002, photo (C.J. McNerny, S.C. Votier *et al.*).

Shetland Loch of Cliff, Burrafirth, Unst, adult, 10 January, photo (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).

2000

Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, adult, 9 December to 4 February 2001, photo (C.J. McNerny, S.C. Votier *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Ugie Estuary, Peterhead, third- or fourth-summer, 9-10 July (J.J. Sweeney *et al.*).

1999

North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary, adult, 28 June (C. Gibbins).

1998

North-east Scotland Ugie Estuary, Peterhead, adult, 15 August (P.A.A. Baxter).

Yellow-legged Gull is a very rare species in Scotland, found at scattered locations throughout the country, usually in groups of other large white-headed larids, often Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus graellsii*. Birds, predominately adults, have been found at all times of the year, sometimes remaining for extended periods.

All Yellow-legged Gull records on the *Scottish List* recently underwent a review to ensure that they fulfilled identification criteria published by SBRC (McNerny 2009). The review, the results of which were first announced on the SOC website in May 2011 (www.the-soc.org.uk/ylgull-review.htm), led to the acceptance of 25 submissions, which equated to 18 birds when presumed

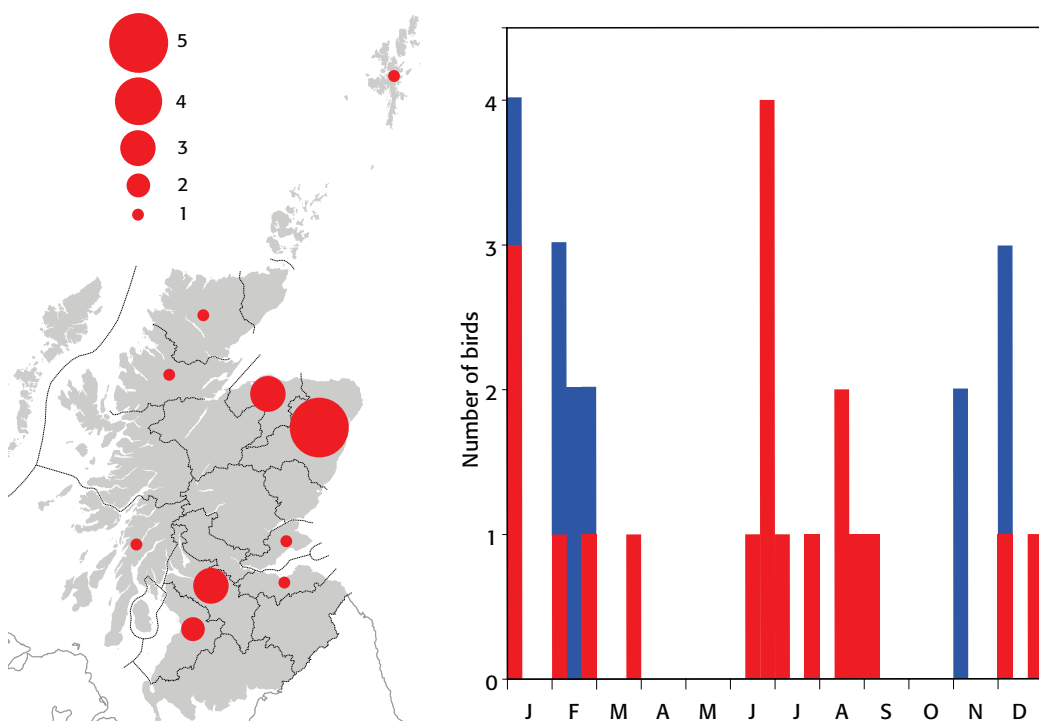


Figure 2. Distribution by recording area and seasonal occurrence of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 1998-2010. Note that the map does not include presumed returning birds which, however, are shown on the graph in blue.

returning individuals were taken into account. Another 17 birds were removed from the *Scottish List*, including the first six published records. Following the review, the first accepted Yellow-legged Gull for Scotland is now the adult seen at the Ugie Estuary on 15 August 1998.

Since the initiation of this review, one new record of Yellow-legged Gull has been accepted by SBRC, involving an adult in Ayrshire in August and September 2009. So far there have been no accepted records in 2010. This means that the current Scottish total stands at 19 birds.

(Nominate *michahellis* breeds mainly from south-west Europe, east to Black Sea, dispersing widely in winter as far north as Britain and Baltic; *atlantis* breeds on Azores, Madeira and Canaries, wandering south to NW Africa.)

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* 34: 1: 1

Table 13. Accepted records of Alpine Swift in Scotland, 2010.

Orkney Oback & Isbister, South Ronaldsay, 24 July to 7 August, photo *Scottish Birds* 30: 383 (L. Campbell, R. Rozier, S. Sankey, G. Voller *et al.*).

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

The sole 2010 record likely relates to a non-breeder, accounting for its prolonged stay.

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

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* 0: 0: 0

As part of its remit to examine older records, SBRC recently reviewed the only accepted record of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on the *Scottish List*. This record related to as many as three birds seen near Aberfoyle (Upper Forth) in consecutive winters during the period 1968-70 (Mitchell 1970). The review resulted in the rejection of this record, and thus Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is now removed from the *Scottish List*. Given its steep decline farther south in Britain (Brown & Grice 2005), it seems unlikely to be reinstated in the foreseeable future.

(Ten or 11 subspecies. Breeds across the Palearctic region from England and Wales to Japan. Northern populations are short-distance migrants, with those farther south being sedentary.)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* 286: 33: 11

Table 14. Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2010. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 15.

Argyll Sandaig, Tiree, 2-7 October 2010, photo *Scottish Birds* 31: 95 (J.M. Dickson *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Girdleness, 30 September to 3 October, photo (P.A.A. Baxter, P. Massey, M. Ponsford, J. Willmott *et al.*).

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

For the third year in a row, there were sightings of this species away from the Northern Isles. The Tiree bird was the second for Argyll, coming two years after the first, also on Tiree, while the individual in North-east Scotland was the third for the recording area, following spring birds in 1995 and 1999.

Another nine birds were seen in the Northern Isles, where claims of this species are assessed locally. Only two of these occurred in spring, the remainder being noted over a prolonged period in autumn, lasting nearly two months.

Table 15. Summary of accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2010.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	1	1	16–17 May	10 September
Orkney	-	2	-	29 Sep–3 Nov
Shetland	1	4	2 June	28 Sep–31 Oct

Not since 1999 has the annual total of Short-toed Larks in Scotland exceeded 11 birds. Against a background of a gradual rise in the number of Scottish records, attributed by Forrester *et al.* (2007) to increased observer effort, annual totals reached double figures on five occasions during the 1990s but have only done so twice since then (2006 and 2010).

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

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* 68 (1950-2004): 12: 2

Table 16. Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2010, with an additional record for 2009.

Highland Eigg, Lochaber, 4 December, photo (J. Chester).

Orkney Tankerness, Mainland, 9-10 November, photo (J. Branscombe *et al.*).

2009

Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, 10 October (J.L. Irvine *et al.*).

Despite there being a modest increase in sightings in recent years, Woodlark remains a rare bird in Scotland, found in late autumn and early winter almost entirely in the Northern Isles (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011). There has been one instance of attempted breeding, in Angus & Dundee in 1993 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).



Plate 89. Woodlark, Tankerness, Mainland, Orkney, 9–10 November 2010. © Morris Rendall

The Eigg record was only the fourth for the west coast of Scotland in the period since 1950, and the third for the Highland recording area. The two previous Highland sightings were both close by, on Rum (Lochaber), in 1978 and 1993 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

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

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* 40: 20: 3

Table 17. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2010, with an additional record from 2009.

North-east Scotland Forvie NNR, 11 May, photo (M. Souter).

Orkney St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay, 20 May to 3 June, photo (P. Higson, S. Sankey *et al.*).

Shetland Norwick & Haroldswick, Unst, 18-19 May, photo (H. Bradley, R.M. Tallack *et al.*).

2009

Shetland Out Skerries, 1 May (D. Fairhurst).

Red-rumped Swallow is seen in Scotland each year in very small numbers from April through to November along the east coast and on islands. Most occurrences are believed to relate to the subspecies *rufula*, the closest breeding populations of which are in southern France (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, other subspecies, most notably the west-central Asian *daurica*, are potential vagrants.

The four records from 2009 and 2010 detailed in this report, being all in May, likely refer to overshooting spring migrants from the Continent.



Plate 90. Red-rumped Swallow, Norwick & Haroldswick, Unst, Shetland, 18–19 May 2010. © Rob Brookes

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

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* 158: 20: 4

Table 18. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2010. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in the text.

Isle of May First-winter, 10 September, trapped, photo (A. Ash *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, 8 September (D. Pamaby *et al.*).

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

In 2010, as in 2008 and 2009, there was a single record from what has arguably become the mainland 'hot-spot' for this species, Loch of Strathbeg. Two days later, another bird occurred on the Isle of May; this was the first Scottish Greenish Warbler since 2004 to have been observed outwith the Northern Isles and North-east Scotland.

The only other occurrences in 2010 were in Shetland, and involved single birds on 10-11 August and 4 September. This set of dates is typical and underlines the status of the species as an early-autumn migrant to Scotland.

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

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* 46: 7: 4

Table 19. Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2010.

North-east Scotland	Kineff Old Church, Inverbervie, 9 October (P.A.A. Baxter, P. Bloor).
Shetland	Sumburgh Head, Mainland, 2-4 October, photo (M. Ponsford, J. Willmott <i>et al.</i>).
Shetland	Skaw, Whalsay, 8 October, photo (J.A. Atkinson, B. Marshall <i>et al.</i>).
Shetland	Sandwick, Mainland, 11-12 October (P.M. Ellis <i>et al.</i>).



Plate 91. Radde's Warbler, Skaw, Whalsay, Shetland, 8 October 2010. © Jason Atkinson

Radde's Warbler is a very rare late autumn visitor to Scotland, with the majority of occurrences in the Northern Isles, and the remainder along the east coast. All four sightings in 2010 fit into the classic period for this species in Scotland, early to mid-October.

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

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* 60: 9: 3

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

There were only three occurrences in 2010, all involving single birds on Shetland within the space of a few days in early October: one on the 8th which remained until the next day, one on the 9th, and one on the 11th which remained until the 12th.

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

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* 194: 30: 2

Subalpine Warbler occurs annually in Scotland as a rare migrant, mainly in spring. The overwhelming majority of birds are seen in the Northern Isles, where records of nominate *cantillans*, and birds not assigned to any particular subspecies, are assessed locally. Scottish claims of any other subspecies are assessed by BBRC.

There were only two accepted records of this species in Scotland in 2010. They both came from the Northern Isles, where a male of the race *cantillans* was present on Foula (Shetland) on 26-27 May, and one was on Fair Isle on 26 September.

Several Scottish claims of *S. c. albistriata* and *S. c. moltonii*, including a bird of the former subspecies on Shetland in May 2010, are currently with BBRC. Thus the totals given above may not be complete.

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

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* 52: 3: 1

Table 20. Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2010.

Shetland Norwick, Unst, first-winter, 19–27 September (R. Brookes, M.A. Maher, M.G. Pennington, R.M. Tallack *et al.*).

Melodious Warbler is a very rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, recorded in most years but not all: there were none in 2001, 2004, 2005 or 2009, for example. About three-quarters of occurrences have been in the Northern Isles.

The single individual in Shetland in the second half of September 2010 was typical in terms of location and date. Not since 2003 has a Melodious Warbler been recorded in Scotland outwith Fair Isle and Shetland.

(Breeds in north Africa, Iberia, France, Belgium, and south-west Germany to the north-west Balkans; migrates to winter in sub-Saharan West Africa.)



Plate 92. Melodious Warbler, first-winter, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, 19–27 September 2010. © Rob Brookes

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* many: c. 181: 12

Table 21. Additional record of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2009. Northern Isles records for 2010 are summarised separately in Table 22.

2009

Outer Hebrides Bàgh a' Bhaile (Village Bay), St Kilda, 2 June, photo (I. McNee, W.T.S. Miles).

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

Although the only Marsh Warblers in Scotland in 2010 were in the Northern Isles, the recent acceptance of a bird in St Kilda on a typical late-spring date in 2009 increases the total for that year by one to 36.

Table 22. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2010.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	2	5	29 May–3 Jun	22 Aug–20 Sep
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	5	-	3–27 June	-

Far fewer Marsh Warblers were recorded in the Northern Isles in 2010 (12 birds) than in 2009 (34 birds). In fact, not since 1996 have there been fewer occurrences in Scotland in any one year. This is a species whose numerical abundance fluctuates widely from one year to the next. In spring at least, this is related to variation in the prevalence of easterly winds, which are presumed to cause birds to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

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

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* 139: 7: 2

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

As so often, the only occurrences of this species in Scotland in 2010 were in the Northern Isles, where claims are assessed locally. In spring, an early individual was in Shetland on 25 April, while in autumn, one was on Fair Isle on 26 September.

The Fair Isle bird was noticeably long-tailed and had a marked supercilium, thus suggesting the race *africana*, which is not on the *British List* but is a potential vagrant as it breeds on the borders of Europe in the Caucasus area as well as farther east. Details and photographs were sent to BBRC for reference (D.N. Shaw, pers. comm.).

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

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* 142: 10: 3

Red-throated Pipit is a rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, found almost exclusively on islands, with most sightings in Fair Isle and Shetland. Thus the three occurrences in 2010 were typical, there being one bird in spring (Fair Isle, 24 May) and two in autumn (Fair Isle, 27 September, and Shetland, 2 October).

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

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* 45: 3: 1

Table 23. Accepted records of Tawny Pipit in Scotland, 2010.

Orkney Sangar & Airport, North Ronaldsay, 23-26 June, photo (P.A. Brown, P.J. Donnelly *et al.*).



Plate 93. Tawny Pipit, Sangar & Airport, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 23–26 June 2010. © Paul Brown

Tawny Pipit is a very rare bird in Scotland with just three individuals seen during the period 2005-09, all being presumed spring overshoots on islands.

The North Ronaldsay bird in 2010 was only the second for Orkney, following one on Stronsay on 28 May 1988. The late June date is unusual, but there are several previous records in June, the latest being on the 20th (St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, in 1986). In addition, there have been two in July: on the Isle of May on 1 July 1976, and at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 19-22 July 1980 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

(Nominate *campestris* breeds in dry, sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to western Siberia; two other Asian subspecies. Winters in Africa, the Middle East and India.)

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* 86: 23: 3

Table 24. Accepted records of Water Pipit in Scotland, 2010, with an additional record for 2009 and a revised record for 2008.

Ayrshire Seamill, 30 December 2009 to 21 March, photo (A. Hogg, J. McManus *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2011).

Ayrshire Girvan, 31 December 2009 to 8 January, photo (A. Hogg *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2011).

Ayrshire Seamill, 29 November to 28 March 2011, photo (D. Given, A. Hogg *et al.*).

Ayrshire Maidens, 2-21 December, photo (A. Hogg *et al.*).

Lothian Barns Ness, two, 6 December 2009 to 3 April, photo (A. Brown, A. Hogg *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2011), but note revised dates; one of same, 28 October to year end (*per* Local Recorder).

Shetland Norwick, Unst, 21-23 November, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al.*).

2009

Perth & Kinross Vane Farm, 26 November to 6 December (K.D. Shaw, G. Sparshott *et al.*).

2008

Lothian Musselburgh, 18 March to 11 April, photo (B. Kerr, M. Thrower *et al.*); note revised dates and observer's initials (*cf.* ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011).

Water Pipit is a rare winter visitor to Scotland, often found among seaweed on beaches with Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus*. Its seasonal distribution features a late-autumn arrival and a secondary peak in spring. Most sightings to the end of 2009 were in Ayrshire and Lothian.

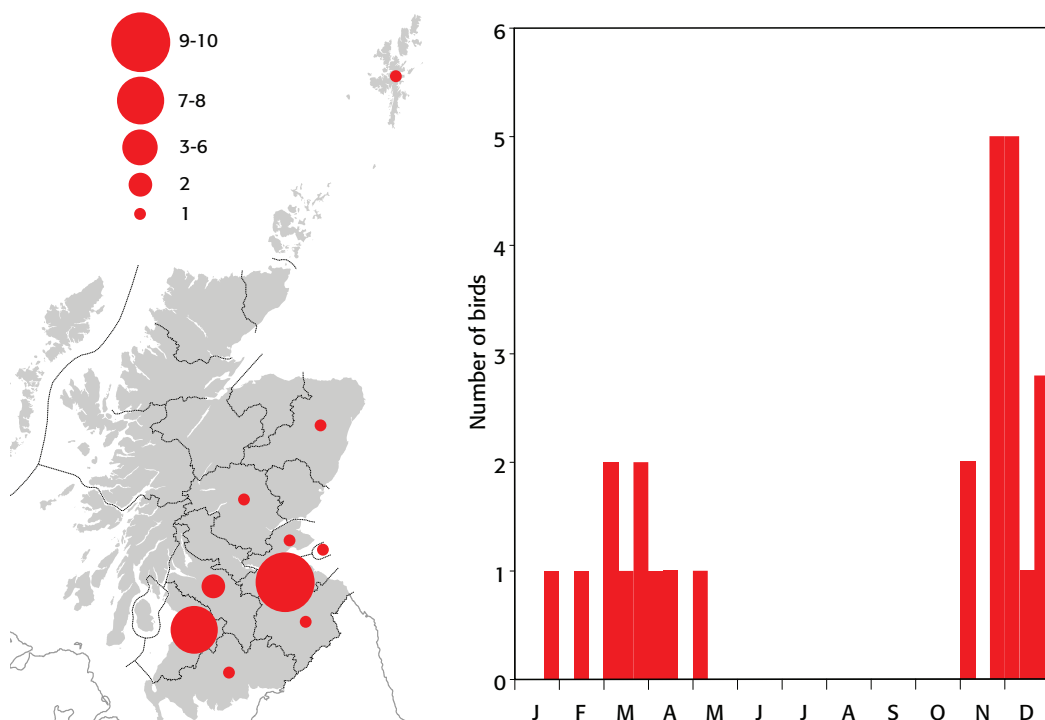


Figure 3. Distribution by recording area and seasonal occurrence of Water Pipit in Scotland, 2005–10.

Four apparently overwintering birds were present at the beginning of 2010, having been first noted in December 2009: two in Ayrshire and two together in Lothian. In addition, the late acceptance of an individual at Vane Farm in late 2009 (the second for Perth & Kinross) brings that year's total to 10 birds, just two short of the all-time high in 1996.

No new birds were observed in early 2010, but three were found towards the end of the year. Two of these were at traditional sites in Ayrshire, and might have been returnees. The third new bird, on Unst in late November, was Shetland's first; see Thomason (2011) for a detailed account of this occurrence. The only previously accepted records from islands were on Orkney, Skye (Skye & Lochalsh, Highland) and the Isle of May.

A bird present late in 2010 at Barns Ness was considered locally to be one of those that wintered during 2009/10, and thus has not been counted separately in the totals.

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

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* 366: 43: 16

Arctic Redpoll is a scarce though annual visitor to Scotland. Most sightings since 2005 have involved the race *C. h. hornemanni* (Hornemann's Redpoll), claims of which are assessed by BBRC, while most earlier occurrences were referred to *C. h. exilipes* (Coes's Redpoll). All but four of the 43 birds during 2005-09 were in the Northern Isles, and the majority of them occurred in autumn.

In 2010, as in several other recent years, the only Arctic Redpolls seen in Scotland were in the Northern Isles during autumn. A total of five were accepted as Coes's Redpolls, claims of which are assessed locally within those islands.

Table 25. Accepted records of Coes's Redpoll in the Northern Isles, 2010.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	-	1	-	12-13 October
Orkney	-	1	-	21 November
Shetland	-	3	-	13 Oct-20 Nov

In addition, BBRC accepted records of 11 Hornemann's Redpolls in Scotland during the period 19 September to 4 November 2010: two in Fair Isle, two in Orkney, and seven in Shetland. All but three of these birds were first seen in September, highlighting the difference in arrival dates between the two subspecies.

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

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* many: 23: 7

Table 26. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in Scotland, 2010. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 27.

Isle of May First-winter, 8 September (A. Ash *et al.*).

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

All seven Scottish records of this species in 2010 were within the space of just over one month in autumn, corresponding to the main migration period during that season. As so often, nearly all occurrences were in the Northern Isles, the exception being a first-winter bird found in September on the Isle of May. The last Ortolan Bunting on the Isle of May was in 2001.

Table 27. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2010.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	-	1	-	19–20 September
Orkney	-	1	-	30 September
Shetland	-	4	-	10 Sep–11 Oct

There is also an additional record from Fair Isle in autumn 2008, within the range of dates (3–19 September) specified by ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010b). This increases the number of individuals seen during 2005–09 from 22 to 23.

Ortolan Buntings have now become less than annual in Scotland in spring, but there has been at least one autumn bird in every year since 1973. While numbers have declined since the mid-1990s, when as many as 40 birds were recorded in a single season, the existence of significant year-to-year variation, coupled with occasional influxes, can obscure longer-term trends.

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

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* 276: 27: 6

Table 28. Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2010.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	2	-	20 May–15 Jun	-
Orkney	1	1	31 May–1 Jun	8 October
Shetland	1	1	28 May	27–30 September

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

As in the two previous years, the only occurrences in 2010 were in the Northern Isles, where claims of this species are assessed locally. Four birds were seen in spring and two in autumn. An individual on Fair Isle on 15 June was late for a spring migrant, but there have been later ones, most notably a bird on North Ronaldsay on 26 June 1995 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

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

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* 593: 78: 15

Table 29. Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2010. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 30.

Isle of May 8-9 September, photo (A. Ash).
 Isle of May 9 October (A. Ash).

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

Occurrences in Scotland in 2010 corresponded well to the established pattern, with all but one of the 15 birds being seen in autumn, and all but two being in the Northern Isles. The two Isle of May birds, seen almost exactly a month apart, were the first to be seen on the island since 2000. Only one of 93 occurrences in Scotland during 2005-10 has been on the mainland.



Plate 94. Little Bunting, Isle of May, 8-9 September 2010. © Alex Ash

Table 30. Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2010.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Fair Isle	1	2	9 May	29 Sep-17 Oct
Orkney	-	3	-	27 Sep-1 Oct
Shetland	-	7	-	20 Sep-8 Oct

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Appendix 1.

List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

- 2010: Great Shearwater Fife Ness, Fife, 15 August. Black Kite Loch of Strathbeg, 19 May. Alpine Swift Kirkcaldy, Fife, two, 24 March. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Clarencefield, Dumfries & Galloway, 14 October. Water Pipit Ardmore Point, Clyde, two, 16 March. Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway, 29-30 March.
- 2009: Yellow-legged Gull Lochmaben, Dumfries & Galloway, 5 April. Subalpine Warbler St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 20 June.
- 2008: Yellow-legged Gull Linkfield, Elgin, Moray & Nairn, 23 March. Lossie Estuary, Moray & Nairn, 16 May.
- 2007: Yellow-legged Gull Newmains, Reston, Borders, 3 January. Barassie, Ayrshire, 14 Sep.
- 2006: Yellow-legged Gull Greengairs, Clyde, 8 January.
- 2005: Yellow-legged Gull Leven, Fife, 18 February.
- 2002: Yellow-legged Gull Tayport, Fife, 16-27 July.
- 2001: Yellow-legged Gull Tayport, Fife, 24 May. Tayport, Fife, 22 July.
- 2000: Yellow-legged Gull Tayport, Fife, 11 August.
- 1999: Yellow-legged Gull Barassie, Ayrshire, 17 August. North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 2 September.
- 1998: Yellow-legged Gull Soa Point, Tiree, Argyll, 23 February. Blairbowie & Martanham Loch, Ayrshire, 20 April to 8 May.
- 1997: Yellow-legged Gull Doonfoot, Ayrshire, 16 April. Doonfoot, Ayrshire, two, 28 July.
- 1991: Yellow-legged Gull Doonfoot, Ayrshire, 6 January to 6 May 1995.
- 1989: Yellow-legged Gull Kirkwall, Orkney, 20 April.
- 1970: Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Near Aberfoyle, Upper Forth, 5-6 January (also reported in 1968 and earlier years).

Appendix 2.

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) and other committees, 2010 (this report) and 2011-2013. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included, with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species assessed by SBRC have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC but not shown here.

2010	2011	2012	2013	
■	■	■	■	Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>
■	■	■	■	Black Brant <i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>
■	■	■	■	Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>
■	■	■	■	White-billed Diver <i>Gavia adamsii</i>
■	■	■	■	Cory's Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
■	■	■	■	Great Shearwater <i>Puffinus gravis</i>
■	■	■	■	Wilson's Petrel <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
■	■	■	□	Continental Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>
■	■	■	■	Night-heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
■	■	■	■	Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
■	■	■	■	Great White Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>

■	■	■	■	Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>
■	■	■	■	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>
■	■	■	■	Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>
■	■	■	■	Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>
■	■	■	■	Red-footed Falcon <i>Falco vespertinus</i>
■	■	■	■	Stone-curlew <i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>
■	■	■	■	Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
■	■	■	■	White-rumped Sandpiper <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
■	■	■	■	Continental Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa limosa</i>
■	■	■	■	Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>
■	■	■	■	Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>
■	■	■	■	White-winged Black Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
■	■	■	■	Franz Josef Land Little Auk <i>Alle alle polaris</i>
■	■	■	■	Alpine Swift <i>Apus melba</i>
■	■	■	■	Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>
■	■	■	■	Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
■	■	■	■	Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>
■	■	■	■	Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>
■	■	■	■	Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>
■	■	■	■	Greenish Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
■	■	■	■	Radde's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>
■	■	■	■	Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
■	■	■	■	Dartford Warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>
■	■	■	■	Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i> (except <i>S. c. albistriata</i>)
■	■	■	■	Eastern Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans albistriata</i>
■	■	■	■	Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
■	■	■	■	Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i>
■	■	■	■	Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
■	■	■	■	Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
■	■	■	■	Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>
■	■	■	■	Red-throated Pipit <i>Anthus cervinus</i>
■	■	■	■	Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
■	■	■	■	Serim <i>Serinus serinus</i>
■	■	■	■	Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni</i> (except <i>C. h. hornemanni</i>)
■	■	■	■	Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni hornemanni</i>
□	□	■	■	Scottish Crossbill <i>Loxia scotica</i>
■	■	■	■	Parrot Crossbill <i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>
■	■	■	■	Cirl Bunting <i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
■	■	■	■	Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
■	■	■	■	Rustic Bunting <i>Emberiza rustica</i>
■	■	■	■	Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>

■ = BBRC ■ = SBRC ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland)
 ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC outside core range (see www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc-crossbill-id.htm) □ = local assessment

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Blackbirds feeding on sandhoppers

The summer of 2010 saw several prolonged, dry spells of weather. On 20 or more occasions between May and July, I noticed Blackbirds *Turdus merula* foraging below the tideline at Balmerino beach on the Tay estuary in north Fife. The shore consists of pebbles and rocks, with some sandy patches, and the intertidal zone has been colonised by seaweeds.

Blackbirds were only seen feeding on the shore after several dry days and when the ground inland was very dry. Three birds were often visible feeding at one time though on one occasion I saw five. Both male and female birds were noted in similar numbers and I would estimate that three or four pairs of birds were foraging down on the shore. The Blackbirds turned over patches of loose seaweed and collected invertebrates. Almost all the birds were seen to be carrying food back inland - presumably to their chicks. On turning over the same patches of seaweed, I disturbed large concentrations of sandhoppers (*Talitridae* spp.). Using a telescope, I confirmed that this was what the birds were collecting. I ring birds in the scrub and gardens bordering the shore and twice caught birds which still had

sandhoppers in their bills. I found two Blackbird nests and saw the adults bringing sandhoppers to feed to their chicks.

Sandhoppers are common on the shore at Balmerino. After storms, they may be found high above the tideline and even among trees and scrub several metres inland. Blackbirds ceased foraging on the shore as soon as it rained and the ground inland became damp again. They ceased feeding on sandhoppers when the breeding season ended even when there were prolonged, dry periods, suggesting that sandhoppers are only taken when other prey is scarce.

Although Blackbirds are recorded as taking marine snails (Vauk & Wittig 1971), Cramp (1988) does not include *Talitridae* among the species' extensive list of prey items. I have seen Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* feeding below the shoreline on Inner and Outer Hebridean islands and the Scottish west coast, but I could not remember seeing Blackbirds doing this. I asked several birdwatchers and ringers who are familiar with these habitats and none of them could recall seeing Blackbirds foraging below the tideline.

I saw individual Blackbirds feeding on the shore at Balmerino in 2011 on just three occasions. The weather was generally wetter than the previous year and the ground inland was not as dry as in 2010.

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Plate 95. Blackbirds feeding on sandhoppers.
© Derek Robertson

Hunting behaviour of raptors targeting hirundine flocks

Teams of bird ringers from the Tay Ringing Group regularly catch hirundines at the large roosts which concentrate at the Tay reed beds, Perth & Kinross. Raptors and owls of several species are attracted by these birds but have difficulty in approaching without alarming their prey and they find it difficult to catch individuals when the hirundines form a swirling flock in response to predators. Over the years, we have noticed some unusual behaviour in raptors hunting these flocks: particularly Hobbies *Falco subbuteo* and Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus*.

While watching a roost of hirundines at the Tay reed beds in August 1992 I noticed what appeared to be a Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* flying out of the trees overhead and crossing the open ground towards the hirundines in typical, undulating flight. As it reached the nearest birds, it accelerated upwards and grabbed a Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* from below.

I now clearly recognised the bird as an immature, male Sparrowhawk: an observation that was also made by the hirundines, which alarmed loudly and started to mob the raptor. They had shown no interest in it up to that point, although the appearance of Sparrowhawks hunting near the roost usually resulted in mobbing, alarming and birds scattering for cover or wheeling into a dense flock. The unusual flight (similar to the display flight but much lower and less undulating) seemed to allow the Sparrowhawk to approach undetected. Typically, Sparrowhawks are seen hunting the reed bed by rushing through at reed-top height and using rides, hedges and the edge of the reed bed as cover to deploy ambush tactics. There was nothing rushed in the approach of this bird which made its way into the flock in an almost leisurely way.



Plate 96. Hobby hunting hirundines. © Derek Roberston

Following this first observation, I have seen the same behaviour on some ten other occasions at different sites in the Tay reed beds and further afield. The Sparrowhawks have all been males, have included 'blue' adults as well as 'brown' immatures, and have mostly been hunting hirundine flocks, although I have seen the same tactics used on Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* on moorland and finches in open fields. The undulating flight gives a surprisingly convincing impression of a Mistle Thrush and the tactic seems to be used when the Sparrowhawk is crossing an open piece of ground with little or no cover.

I was surprised to see a Hobby use the same tactic in 2011. It was seen flying into a flock of Swallows *Hirundo rustica* in a controlled, slow, undulating flight similar to Mistle Thrush but the smaller size and darker appearance of the immature Hobby made it look rather like a Blackbird *Turdus merula*.

Hirundines react in a particularly alarmed way to the presence of a Hobby. Typical Hobby hunting behaviour consists of chases high in the air or in sudden dashes at treetop height or flying low over the reedbeds. They often use cover to conceal their approach, or stoop from a considerable height. The chase or stoop frequently ends in an upward swoop at the end of the dive. In July and August 2011, there were at least two Hobbies present at the Tay reed beds and a particularly unusual hunting method was being used. On eight separate occasions over five evenings, a Hobby was seen to fly very slowly into the hirundine flock using a hesitant, fluttering flight which perfectly mimicked the flight pattern of a Swallow. The hirundines often gather in large, wheeling flocks for some time before flying into the reeds to roost. The Hobby would enter the circling flock using this unusual flight behaviour and join the flow of hirundines before turning round against the stream of birds and grabbing at one of the hirundines flying towards it. Although a Hobby is considerably larger than a Swallow, the disorienting effect of the swarming birds and the atypical flight pattern of the raptor made it difficult for observers to get a sense of scale and pick it out among the Swallows. Presumably the effect was the same on the hirundines. Although birds were

seen to veer away from the Hobby when they got close to it, they only alarmed and scattered when the Hobby made a grab for one of them.

It seems likely that these two species have developed mimicry tactics to approach wary flocks of birds over open ground. There does not seem to be a description of this behaviour in the literature and I have not heard it described elsewhere.

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Plate 97. The audience. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

- OBAN 17 MARCH 2012

The theme of this year's Spring Conference was 'Birds and other wildlife of the West Coast' and it was promoted jointly by BTO, SOC and Argyll Bird Club (SOC does not have an Argyll Branch). It was held in the Corran Halls in Oban. Almost 200 registrants were listed, of whom a greater proportion than usual had actually turned up. Exhibitors included, as well as BTO, SOC and Argyll Bird Club, Second Nature Books, Seil Natural History Society, Wild Caledonia, SNH, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, Highland Biological Recording Group and RSPB.

Chris Wernham (Head of BTO Scotland), in her opening remarks, spoke of changing government attitudes to conservation matters, with less emphasis on species and habitats and more on economic benefit. This might have less appeal to the public who give support by joining organisations and donating money. She then reported that an Otter had been seen that morning on the foreshore by the Corran Halls and well within Oban Harbour.

White-tailed Eagles in Scotland - back for good? - Richard Evans

Richard set the scene by looking back to previous reintroduction schemes on Rhum in 1975 and the subsequent release at Loch Maree. This later release bolstered numbers and unquestionably helped the birds establish a viable breeding stock on the west coast.

He then went on to describe the present distribution of 100 territorial pairs from the first successful breeding in 1985 and discussed the bird's ecological requirements. He concluded that there was no shortage of breeding habitat and there was in fact considerable scope for expansion and infilling of historical home ranges.

To glean a greater understanding of the historical population, distribution and how both eagle species co-existed in the past, Richard researched ancient place names and historical documents, estimating that at one time the UK population of White-tailed Eagles may have numbered 800-1400 pairs, whilst Golden Eagles

ranged between 1000 and 1500 pairs. Not only did this work highlight where the birds could have bred in the past, but also gave an indication as to where they could breed in the future.

In a fascinating comparison between White-tailed and Golden Eagles, Richard illustrated how each species has differing dietary preferences and consequently often hunts in different habitats and thus reduces the levels of competition. However, despite this, conflicts between both eagle species are well documented and he explained the process of nest-site selection and competition for 'air space'. In general terms, White-tailed Eagles prefer to nest in trees close to water and Golden Eagles prefer crags with fewer trees. In treeless landscapes, White-tailed are often 'squeezed' out by Goldies. He finished by saying that currently there was no detectable demographic effect, indicating that the birds are co-existing with only occasional sparks flying.

In concluding what was a well-paced, enjoyable and appropriately pitched talk, Richard illustrated some favoured European habitats for White-tailed Eagles and suggested that they were biologically suited to just about anywhere in Britain.

It is indeed an ever-evolving picture and Richard and his colleague Arjun Amar continue to investigate what drives success in White-tailed Eagles. With a population estimate of 150 pairs by 2025, if you don't already have them, White-tailed Eagles may well be coming soon to a site near you!

John Simpson

Supplementary feeding of sub-adult Choughs in Islay - Eric & Caitlin Bignal

We heard in Eric's report on this study, that the results were monitored by a multiple colour-ring project. Some 1,552 birds were ringed, but the number of re-sightings was very high, more than 30,000. Surprisingly the success of the population depended more on the recruitment of juveniles into sub-adult groups than on actual abundance of food. A 30% survival number was required to maintain the population. Clutch size was 3-7, with a 21-day incubation period. Chicks remain in the nest for six weeks. As regards the actual feeding, it consisted of meal worms and pin head oat meal. Silage aftermath was a significant food source. Much time was spent on the feeding behaviour within the 'cohort' (the word used to describe sub-adults) and dependent juveniles begging, wing-quivering and food-caching.



Plate 98. Nigel Scriven, Eric and Caitlin Bignal and Richard Evans. © David Palmer/www.photoscot.co.uk

Nesting sites were not an issue, since buildings were the favoured location. Thus the main finding of the study was the importance of intergeneration ties. This feature was charmingly mirrored by the fact that Eric was assisted throughout by his young daughter Caitlin who operated the laptop and rounded the whole presentation off with a splendid cartoon-like account of the Chough's life cycle that she herself had produced.

Campbell McLellan



Plate 99. *Chris Wernham introduces Nienke van Geel.* © David Palmer/www.photoscot.co.uk

Marine renewable development and conservation challenges for marine mammals - Nienke van Geel

This presentation described the oceanographic conditions of the Scottish west coast waters, the conservation importance of its marine mammal populations and the potential threats they face in a rapidly expanding off-shore renewable energy sector. Warm Atlantic waters mix with cold waters from the Arctic to create biologically rich mixing zones. Twenty-four species of cetacean (whales, dolphins and porpoises) and two species of seal can be found in these waters, and 14 of these species have a high conservation status. These cetaceans use sound (sonar) for a range of purposes including communication, navigation, prey capture, socialising and predator avoidance.

The Scottish Government has set ambitious targets for renewable energy development, with 100% of Scotland's energy requirements to come from renewable sources by 2020, and marine renewable will play an important role in achieving this. The construction of these marine

renewable devices, and the associated piling, drilling and blasting required, has the potential to seriously impair sonar systems in cetacean populations. In addition to this, operational impacts such as collision mortality, habitat loss and displacement may have an adverse impact on the conservation status of these cetaceans.

The research which is being carried out by Nienke will assess the long-term impacts of off-shore renewable energy development on both individuals and populations, with a particular emphasis on the Bottle-nosed Dolphin populations inhabiting these waters. There is currently a focus on pre-construction research to build up a picture of how cetaceans are using these waters both spatially and temporally. Cetaceans are currently being monitored using photo-identification and passive acoustic techniques. Preliminary models are predicting up to 13 collision deaths for Harbour Porpoise per annum. Ultimately, this research is aiming to produce detailed models of cetacean movement patterns and develop effective mitigation measures to avoid and reduce any adverse impacts from marine renewable development off the west coast of Scotland.

Mike Thornton

Birds in upland woodland: towards a Scottish tree-line? - John Calladine

Scotland's hills and mountains were for many centuries covered in woodland and scrub. Primarily due to a high level of grazing, our hillsides have in the last few hundred years become much more open, however, in recent decades there has been a reversal and both woodland and scrub cover have been returning to our hillsides. John Calladine, Senior Research Ecologist with BTO Scotland, looked at data gleaned from a number of studies to assess how afforestation and increased scrub cover might influence upland bird populations.

John discussed how bird communities vary with scrub type and age/structure, and emphasised the importance of a mosaic of habitats. A Deeside study showed that maximum species diversity occurred where there was a near equal split in habitat between moorland, young birch scrub and older birch and pine woodland. Interestingly in a Galloway study, Meadow Pipit



Plate 100. John Calladine. © David Palmer/
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and Skylark, which prefer open moorland, both occurred in greater numbers in areas with neighbouring scrub.

John looked at other studies, including one in Ayrshire, which showed the importance of isolated moorland scrub for such species as Willow Warbler, Chaffinch, Reed Bunting and Grasshopper Warbler. A Perthshire Whinchat study showed that altitude and climate impacted upon density, with fewer birds at higher altitudes and on north- and west-facing hillsides, therefore whilst an increase in scrub cover on Scottish uplands would be beneficial, we should expect lower population levels than occur at lower levels in more sheltered areas.

John concluded by discussing the impact more scrub would have on different species, with for instance Willow Warbler, Tree Pipit and Lesser Redpoll all likely to benefit but Golden Plover and Dunlin would lose out.

Ron Forrester

Mink and seabirds in west Scotland

- Clive Craik

From his long-term study of seabird colonies between Mallaig and North Bute, Clive illustrated the deadly impact of Mink on eggs, chicks and adults. Visiting around 155 islands annually, he monitored predation on ground-nesting seabirds, including Shags, Eiders, terns, gulls and Black Guillemots and took action to trap and reduce the impact of Mink. Colonies within 1 km of the mainland shore were the

most likely to be wiped out in the absence of protective measures. The success of this costly and time-consuming control programme on 32 islands in 2010 allowed seabirds to breed successfully on 22 of them. Further measures included the development of fenced rafts with an integral Mink trap, one of which in 2010 held the most successful Common Tern colony in the study area. In addition to poor weather (2011 was a wash-out), there continued to be, distressing incidents of seabirds entangled, snagged and hooked by discarded fishing gear.

With over 100,000 ground-nesting seabird clutches recorded since 1990, Clive found a surprisingly high percentage of mixed clutches including Eider/Mallard, Common/Black-headed Gull and Herring Gull/Oystercatcher. In several, the eggs of one species apparently mimicked the colouration of the other. We were asked to consider whether these mixed clutches were premeditated (parasitic) or just a mistake.

Roger Broad



Plate 101. Clive Craik. © David Palmer/
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Marine renewable energy developments; their potential effects on seabirds

- Chris Thaxter

Dr Chris Thaxter outlined how seabirds may be affected by offshore wind farms, tidal turbines and wave energy arrays. Although wind farms have been established in marine areas for several years now, and methods to estimate their impacts on seabird populations have been developed, tidal and wave technologies are very new and their impacts cannot yet be assessed from case studies. But seabirds may be adversely affected by collision mortality, by

displacement from feeding habitat, or by a barrier effect causing them to fly greater distances to avoid structures at sea. Different seabird species may vary in their vulnerability depending on aspects of their ecology, such as the typical heights they fly above the water.

Chris then went on to describe the deployment of the latest technological devices being used to monitor seabirds at sea. Data loggers manufactured by the University of Amsterdam allow GPS measurement of seabird location, including height, to within a few metres accuracy, as often as every few seconds. These detailed data on foraging trips of breeding birds and on winter migrations have been collected from Great Skuas in Shetland and Lesser Black-backed Gulls in south-east England. The data can then be overlaid on the distribution of marine renewable sites to assess how much these birds are at risk when foraging, or during migration. Such data will help to assess the risk that marine renewable energy developments pose for these populations of conservation concern.

Chris showed remarkable maps of Great Skuas from Foula going on feeding trips well over 100 km off to the deep water north-west of Shetland, and of Lesser Black-backed Gulls from Orfordness feeding apparently at pig farms or on earthworms in East Anglia as much as at sea. Even more amazing were maps of migrating Lesser Black-backed Gulls travelling across France rather than staying at sea, and flying at a variety of heights while crossing the country, apparently using thermals and reacting to the topography and habitats below them.

Bob Furness



Plate 102. Chris Thaxter. © David Palmer/
www.photoscot.co.uk

Goose conservation and management in Scotland - Christine Urquhart

Because of conservation actions and changes in climate and agriculture, Scotland now hosts about three times as many geese in winter as it did in the 1970s, resulting in conflict with farmers and environmental problems like the eutrophication of lochs. The national policy framework, established in 2000, covers seven goose management schemes (GMS), most of which involve compensation payments and support for scaring, which are difficult to sustain in the face of reduced funding. The 2010 review of the policy, led by BTO Scotland, has produced a new approach by government for managing our geese.

To illustrate these approaches, Christine focused on two populations. The Greylag population breeding in Britain was only around 500 in the early 20th century but increased about a hundred-fold by reintroduction from the Uists to other parts and by natural spread. Local GMS on the Uists and Tiree allow 'lethal scaring' but elsewhere there is no management of the still-increasing population. Government is considering a trial scheme to manage populations at local levels but do not want to legislate and hope that this can be achieved voluntarily.

In contrast to Greylags, Greenland White-fronted Geese have been declining rapidly since the late 1990s. This is being addressed by a single-species action plan agreed by all range states, with bans on shooting in Greenland and Iceland, the designation of an important staging area in Iceland as a Ramsar Site and local measures to protect small and vulnerable populations. Competition on the breeding grounds from the Canada Goose, an alien species that may already outnumber the Whitefronts, may be a less tractable problem.

Jeremy Greenwood

Breeding waders of the Uists: 30 years of change - Rob Fuller

We might have expected a few neat tables, supported by statistical modelling and some attractive bird portraits and that would have been that. However, it was a much more fascinating story.

Rob Fuller's relaxed style is based on longstanding familiarity with his subject – the waders of the



Plate 103. Christine Urquhart, Rob Fuller and Ken Shaw. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Uists. There is a remarkable variety and density of breeding birds on the machair although he acknowledged that accurate assessments of population are difficult, with Snipe presenting a unique challenge. But overall population figures do not reflect the reality of the situation. Some species flourish in one area while declining in a superficially similar area close by.

A closer study has revealed the complexity of the habitats, and how minor varieties of ecology influence choice of nest sites and breeding success. There have been changes in land usage and natural events during the study period which have influenced bird populations; but there is more.

A lot of publicity has been given to predation by Hedgehogs and while some species have proved to be very vulnerable others have been less affected. Sollas and Berneray, scarcely if at all troubled with these animals, offer an interesting comparison with Balleshare showing that Hedgehogs are not wholly to blame for any fall in numbers. Predation may alter choices of habitat, but also may promote mutual protection among individuals and different species.

Over 30 years the density of breeding birds on the machair remains high, but the composition of species has changed. While the conclusions are important, the questions, which this thoroughly engaging study uncovers, are perhaps even more fascinating.

Ivan Draper



Plate 104. Jane Cleaver and Wendy Hicks. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

The usual raffle demonstrated that tickets of different colour cannot easily be identified in a poor light. There was a varied list of field outings to follow the Conference, which we were told were being well taken up. Ken Shaw in his summing up, paid tribute both to the speakers and to those who had put this most interesting and varied programme together. Good science was the basis for all we heard about, whether by organisations or by dedicated individuals, of whom there were many. He also praised not only the staff of BTO and members of Argyll Bird Club for their organisation, but also rightly commended the caterers and the Corran Halls staff.

John Law

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Borders:** Mr & Mrs J. Cook, Mr & Mrs T. Reed, **Caithness:** Mr & Mrs P. Butterworth, **Central Scotland:** Mr J. Bray, Mr A. Dickson, **Clyde:** Miss E. Anderson, Mr J. Andrewes, Ms C. Mora, Mr A. Reid, Miss C. Winsch, **Dumfries:** Ms S. Storm, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr P. French, **Fife:** Mrs A. Galbraith, Mr R. McKellican, Mr C. Murray, Mr G. Sparshott, Ms A. Warner, **Grampian:** Mr E. Ferguson, Mr D. Oliver & Miss E. McNab, **Highland:** Ms L. Blaker, Miss M. Davidson, Mr B.A.E. Marr, Miss A. Robbins, Mr R. Turner, **Lothian:** Ms C. Adam, Ms R. Bayne, Ms C. Bowie & Mr K. McCann, Ms J. Campbell, Mr & Mrs C. Clark, Mr & Mrs J. Clarke, Mr J.P.R. Dalziel, Ms E. Doherty, Mrs R. Filipiak, Mrs P. Gilmore, Ms B. Gronlund, Mr & Mrs D. Haire, Dr L. Irvine & Dr K. Munro, Mr & Mrs S. Jenkinson, Mr & Mrs P. Johnston, Mr & Mrs C. Mackay, Ms K.B.K. Meager, Ms J. Schonveld, Mr & Mrs P. Stephen, Mr D. Stewart, Mr A. Toomey & Ms C. Hanning, Rev A. Walker, Mr B. Wardman, Mr & Mrs M.I. Williams, Mr K. Woods, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr R. Brookes, Miss E. Parry, **Stewartry:** Mr R.N. Gibson, Mr & Mrs A. McNab, **Tayside:** Mr H. Ray.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **February:** 1st £30 B. Etheridge, 2nd £20 D. Merrie, 3rd £10 M. Nicoll. **March:** 1st £50 A. McNee, 2nd £30 G. Shepherd, 3rd £20 M. Martin, 4th £10 J. Melrose. **April:** 1st £30 Dr MacIntyre, 2nd £20 Mrs J. Kinnear, 3rd £10 A. Hill.

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

Waterston House Events

Art Exhibitions

Richard Allen & Brin Edwards 2 June–25 July
John Threlfall 28 July–19 September
Lisa Hooper 22 September–14 November
Michael Warren 17 November–January 2013

Aberlady Goose Watch

Thursday 27 September and Thursday 4 October, 4.30 pm for 5 pm. £4 SOC members/children (£6 non-members) – includes refreshments. An illustrated talk by local warden, John Harrison, followed by the opportunity to watch the spectacle of thousands of Pink-footed Geese flying in to their night roost on Aberlady Bay. Places are limited so advance booking is essential.

Buying your first pair of binoculars or telescope? Thinking of an upgrade? Make Waterston House your first stop. Please consider buying your optics from Waterston House. The shop at HQ always stocks a wide range of models to suit all levels and budgets. Contact Dave Allan on 01875 871330 or Email: dave.allan@the-soc.org.uk

Optics Demo

Sunday 14 October 2012, 10 am - 4 pm. A dedicated optics day, when binoculars and telescopes can be tried and compared.



Plate 105. Extract from 'On alert' by John Threlfall

The SOC Library – here for you

Remember that your SOC membership now entitles you to borrow books from the Club's extensive library. The library catalogue is available to view on the SOC website. Books can be dispatched to borrowers by post (postal charges applicable).

The Ibis - long run free to a good home

The George Waterston Library is the recipient of many books, bird reports and magazines donated by generous Club members and visitors to Aberlady. Over the years, we have built up a substantial quantity of duplicate ornithological journals, both bound and unbound, which we sell at modest prices to support the work of the SOC.

We are currently holding a long unbound run of *The Ibis* from the 1940s to the 1980s, which are taking up much valuable space in the office and which we are keen to dispose of to any interested party. Whilst we cannot guarantee that the run is complete, they are offered free of charge on a first-come first-served basis, but must be collected in person from Aberlady.

Please let us know preferably by Email (library@the-soc.org.uk) or alternatively by post to the Librarian. Also, please enquire if we can help with any requests for other journals or reports.

David Clugston, Honorary Librarian

Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme Report

The 2010 report is now available (in digital format) to download from the Scottish Raptor Study Group website www.scottishraptorgroups.org/srmscheme.php. If you specifically require a hard copy version of the report, please contact the SOC office.

The SOC on Facebook

The Club has now made the leap to Facebook! We hope you  it. It's waiting for you to upload your images, videos and whatever else bird related. We look forward to seeing you there! www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub

Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report 2010 (No. 21)

Edited by Duncan Irving. Contributing authors: Andy Riches, Mike Youdale, Richard Mearns, Valerie Harrison, Drew Davidson, Alyn Chambers,

Gavin Chambers, Colin Mitchell, Duncan Irving and Alison Robertson. Featured artwork by Paul Collin and photographs by Brian Henderson, Patrick Whalley, David Ledan and Boris Penot.



The price is the same as last year, £8 to non-members and £6 to SOC members + £1.50 p&p. From: Peter Swan, 3 Castle View, Castle Douglas DG7 1BG. Tel: 01556 502144. Email: pandmswan@btinternet.com. Please make cheques payable to "SOC Dumfries & Galloway Branches". Also available from Waterston House, WWT Caerlaverock and RSPB Mersehead.

Back issues are also available from P. Swan: No 20 (2009) is £5 (SOC members) or £7 (non member) including p&p, most others are available for £3 each including p&p.

Forthcoming conferences

SOC Annual Conference, 26–28 October 2012, Carrbridge Hotel, Carrbridge. The theme of this year's weekend event is 'Celtic Connections' and we are delighted to welcome a first-rate line-up of speakers. Fittingly and by popular demand, we return to Speyside. Full programme details and booking form are enclosed with this issue of SB or can be downloaded from the SOC website.

SOC Skye & Lochalsh Mini Conference at Sabhal Mor Ostaig (the Gaelic College), Sleat, Skye. Saturday 17 November 2012, 10 am - 4.30 pm (exact times, cost, booking details to be confirmed).

Settle in for a full and engaging day of talks showcasing some of Scotland's most iconic and treasured Hebridean birdlife; from Corncrakes and Golden Eagles to the White-tailed Eagle. Find out about the dilemmas facing our conservation management decisions past and present, as well as how the voluntary efforts of passionate individuals have contributed to 25 years of bird recording in Lochalsh, and the production of the Skye & Lochalsh Bird Atlas.

Hosted by Highland SOC Branch, this mini-conference is hoped to be geographically

attractive to some of our more widely dispersed SOC members, who continue to support us despite the long distance from the hub of their 'local' branch. More details to follow in the September issue of *Scottish Birds* and via the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk. In case of any queries please contact Jane Cleaver on 01875 871330 or email jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference/Bird Atlas launch, Saturday 16 March 2013, Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh.

Nature of Scotland Awards shortlist Applegarthtown

The Applegarthtown Wildlife Sanctuary near Lochmaben, Dumfries & Galloway was shortlisted for the RSPB Species Champion Award for its provision of artificial nesting banks for Sand Martins. Bobby Smith and Karen Miller attended the awards ceremony in Edinburgh on 1 March 2012.



Plate 106. Bobby Smith and Karen Miller.
© David Jardine

Branch updates

Caithness Branch: owing to illness, Stan Laybourne is sadly having to stand down from his long-held post as branch secretary and county recorder. The Club thanks Stan for his hard work and commitment over the years and wishes him well. His replacements are:

Secretary: Angus McBay, Schoolhouse, Weydale, Thurso KW14 8YJ, tel. 01847 894663, Email: angmcb@btinternet.com

Recorder: Sinclair Manson, Email sinclair.manson@btinternet.com, tel. 01847 892379

Fife Branch: the new secretary is Alison Creamer, 52 Balgarvie Crescent, Cupar KY15 4EG, tel. 01334 657188, Email: alison.hcreamer@yahoo.co.uk. Alison takes over from Karen Dick who is congratulated for her sterling job during the past three years in post.

Lothian Branch: the new venue for indoor meetings from September 2012 is 33 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7JF (see enclosed meetings programme).

Grampian Branch: the new secretary is Hugh Addelee, 31 Ashtree Road, Banchory AB31 5JB, tel. 01330 829 949, Email grampian.secretary@the-soc.org.uk. Many thanks to former secretary Graham Cooper for all his hard work and commitment.

Stewartry Branch's long-serving secretary

At the March 2012 AGM meeting of the Stewartry Branch, a presentation was made by the members of the branch to their secretary, Joan Howie in recognition of the many years she had served as their dedicated and enthusiastic secretary. The branch was originally called 'The Galloway Branch of the SOC' and was started in 1976 by Helen Halliday and her husband Dr. Kenneth Halliday with the great



Plate 107. Joan Howie aboard P.S. Waverley, Kyles of Bute, July 2009. © P. Swan

help of the then secretary of the full SOC, Alastair Peirse-Duncombe. Joan was a founder member of the New Galloway Branch and took over as secretary in 1984 from Dr. Fleming (we think), and has been in that post ever since. In 1987, the branch changed name and became the Stewartry Branch and the presentation to Joan was made in recognition of the 25 years that have elapsed since that date.

Joan was presented with a framed photograph of the *P.S. Waverley* together with a voucher to enable her to purchase several trips on the *Waverley* together with two small glass vases, one etched with the picture of a Wren and the other with a picture of her favourite bird, a Tawny Owl.

In the early days of the branch Joan was known for travelling around in her Morris Traveller with 'Mr. Brown', a Tawny Owl happily ensconced in a cage in the back of the vehicle. These days, apart from her continuing efforts on behalf of the Stewartry Branch, one of her great loves is to spend several summer days on the *P.S. Waverley* on its cruises in the Clyde area which enables her to view the seabirds of Ailsa Craig and the Manx Shearwaters of the Clyde whilst enjoying the wonderful scenery and other bird and marine life in relative comfort and with not too much effort.

The members of the Stewartry Branch were unanimous in agreeing that without all the effort

and work that Joan had put in over the years it is unlikely that the group would have survived to be the strong and vibrant group that it still is. The members present at the meeting gave Joan a heart-felt round of applause along with their thanks and hopes that she might manage another 25 years!

Peter Swan

A potential source for new members

While visiting various reserves and country parks in the Clyde area, I am more and more aware of the growing number of amateur wildlife photographers in these places. Through conversation, I often learn that they are quite new to birdwatching and have therefore a very limited experience of identification and general avian knowledge. However they have acquired, possibly through an inspiration stemming from all the TV coverage of wildlife and photography, and through the availability of reasonably priced camera lenses, a passionate interest in capturing birds on film.

Such is the case with the photographer whose work is quoted here. Andy Djuritschek is retired and lives very near Barons Haugh RSPB reserve, Motherwell. Over the last two years he has developed a consuming interest in birds and other creatures to the extent of spending countless hours on end just to obtain a particular moment in their lives.



Plate 108. First appearance of young. © Andy Djuritschek



Plate 109. *Water Rails mating.* © Andy Djuritschek

Last year he waited for just the moment when a young Nuthatch would emerge from the nesthole - it did, and then sat there while another chick showed at the opening (Plate 108). This year the target was the moment of mating by the resident Water Rails which have been entertaining the visitors (Plate 109). The third was the result of hours of watching over the water area for that inevitable clash of male Coots over territory (Plate 110).

What has the SOC to offer such a person? Certainly the chance to meet like-minded people and share wildlife experiences especially with photography in mind. Many photographers strike up friendships within a group and arrange outings, hide-work etc to their mutual benefit. They may discover new wildlife venues and also have the chance to deepen their understanding of bird behaviour and ecology through lectures and discussion. And let's face it, which keen photographer doesn't take pleasure in displaying their efforts to a receptive audience?



Plate 110. *Coots in action.* © Andy Djuritschek

So, when we see this emerging phenomenon complete with their gear in birdwatching places, remember they will probably be reticent about discussing birds with anyone until a few quiet words are exchanged and they get a chance to enthuse over some sighting or other. A mention of the SOC and your own involvement may just sow the seeds of a future interest and possibly result in a new member.

Jimmy Maxwell

The Birds of Scotland goes DIGITAL - special discounted rate SOC members

Following on from the success of the Club's sell-out and multi award-winning publication, *The Birds of Scotland*, Council decided that in order to extend the book's reach, a low-cost digital version should be made available. At time of writing, preparations were in full swing to get the CD ready (including a huge effort by staff and volunteers at Waterston House to obtain the necessary permissions from the many contributors of images in the original version) to launch at the Scottish Birdfair at Hopetoun House in May. It is hoped that the digital version will prove an attractive incentive when it is offered to new members joining the Club.

We're delighted to offer all SOC members the opportunity to purchase *The Birds of Scotland* Digital format for £10 (a discount of £5 on the RRP) as a small thank you for your continued support of the Club. Available now from Waterston House. Call 01875 871330 or email mail@the-soc.org.uk.



Corrections

In volume 32(1) page 58, the second author of *Winged Sentinels* should read Çağan H. Şekercioğlu.

Also, the North-east Scotland Pallid Harrier account published on pages 85-86 in volume 32(1) under the authorship of Paul Baxter was initially meant to be part of the text for a larger review of Pallid Harrier occurrence in Scotland but by editorial oversight was elevated to a full article without the knowledge of the author and was in fact co-authored by Chris Gibbins.

Membership Renewal for 2012/13

We would like to thank all our members for their continued support, helping the Club to thrive. If you pay your annual subscription by cheque, card or postal order, you will find a renewal notice included with this mailing. If you pay by Direct Debit, your account will be debited as usual on or around 1 September. If we have an email address for you, you will receive an advance notice message in due course, as a courtesy reminder of the amount to be debited. To ensure that you receive this electronic notice, please drop a line to admin@the-soc.org.uk with your email address or call us on 01875 871330.

Paying your annual membership fee by Direct Debit greatly reduces staff time and resources spent on renewal paperwork. If you are considering this method of payment and have any queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch.



Plate 111. *Grasshopper Warbler*. © Amy Lewis

Scotland's long-distance migrants - contrasting changes and new challenges

G. F. APPLETON & C. V. WERNHAM

Scotland has a long and prestigious history of migration studies, involving the long-established bird observatories like Fair Isle and the Isle of May, and some well known ornithologists, including the 'the good ladies' Leonora Rintoul and Evelyn Baxter, and, even before them, the pioneering work of William Eagle Clarke. The accounts of their migration studies make fascinating and inspirational reading. The completion of the second BTO/BWI/SOC Breeding Bird Atlas (Gibbons *et al.* 1993), covering the period 1988 to 1991, seems like a good place to start a review of the recent changes for the migrant songbirds that breed in Scotland. In the mid-1980s, despite the body of migration studies at our disposal, we still knew relatively little about the specific movements of the populations breeding in Scotland. Knowledge at that time was based largely on the distributional information from the first national Breeding Bird Atlas (1968-72; Sharrock

1976) and the relatively few recoveries of ringed birds involving known Scottish breeders. In terms of migration routes and wintering areas in particular, the available ring recoveries provided only patchy information on species that congregated at a small number of African sites, where there had been targeted ringing effort, such as for a range of warbler species caught at the ringing station in Djoudj in Senegal, and Swallows caught at roosts in South Africa. Our knowledge of the African wintering areas of most species was extremely scant, and for some species (e.g. Wood Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler) almost non-existent. In the last decade or so, long-term monitoring has started to demonstrate that, for several species of summer migrant, Scotland is bucking very negative population trends elsewhere in the UK, and conservation scientists have started to use new technologies to reveal the exciting and complex migration patterns of some of these species.

After the 1988–91 Breeding Bird Atlas

Looking back over the last 20 years reveals just how much we have learned about Scotland's long-distance summer migrants. When the second Breeding Bird Atlas was published in 1993, for the first time we were able to quantify distributional shifts for species as diverse as declining resident farmland birds and pioneering species, such as Nuthatch, that were entering the country from the south. Thomas & Lennon in their 1999 paper in the journal *Nature* used the atlas data to analyse changes in breeding distributions between the first two surveys and found that the northern margins of British-breeding bird species had moved northwards by an average of 18.9 km over two decades. Interestingly, migrant species such as Lesser Whitethroat and Reed Warbler were also moving northwards. With so many declining species (such as the suite of farmland birds) to study following the results of the second breeding atlas, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was little focus on increasing species. Exceptions for long-distance migrants in Scotland were studies on Lesser Whitethroats by Stan da Prato in Lothian (1980 and 1985) and Tom Byars in Strathclyde, which explored the limitations on the spread of this species within Scotland.

Annual monitoring in Scotland

One of the aims of the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), when it was set up in 1994, was to provide a monitoring system that covered the whole of the UK, to rectify the English and habitat biases inherent in the previous Common Birds Census (CBC). With over 300 1-km squares covered within Scotland, and this number increasing, fascinating differences in population trends between countries have been revealed (see table). Although it appears from other evidence that some species have probably undergone periods of decline at similar rates north and south of the border, such as Whinchat and Wheatear, some species have fared well recently in Scotland and badly in England (Cuckoo, Tree Pipit and Willow Warbler) and some, such as the shorter distance migrants Blackcap and Chiffchaff, have increased significantly in both countries, but more so in Scotland.

Such trends in population levels can reflect changes in survival levels and/or breeding success. The Constant Effort Sites (CES) targeted ringing project, involving fifteen ongoing sites in Scotland, provides insightful information on these demographic measures and on changes in breeding numbers for some

Table 1. Trends in the breeding numbers of some migrant songbirds in Scotland between 1995 and 2009 compared to changes in England and Wales (from the BBS annual report see www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs; * = statistically significant increase or decrease).

Species	Scotland 1995-2009	England 1995-2009	Wales 1995-2009
Cuckoo	-2	-63*	-34*
Swift	-27	-32*	-50*
Swallow	+49*	+33*	+25*
House Martin	+114*	-15*	-2
Tree Pipit	+51*	-50*	-26
Redstart	Too few squares	-3	+10
Whinchat	Too few squares	-45*	Too few squares
Wheatear	+3	+7	-15
Grasshopper Warbler	Too few squares	-21	Too few squares
Sedge Warbler	+30	-5	Too few squares
Blackcap	+209*	+61*	+74*
Garden Warbler	Too few squares	-17*	-15
Lesser Whitethroat	Too few squares	-2	Too few squares
Whitethroat	+94*	+23*	-9
Chiffchaff	+274*	+53*	+31*
Willow Warbler	+21*	-30*	-10
Spotted Flycatcher	Too few squares	-52*	Too few squares

migrant species. There are still too few sites to produce separate Scottish trends but these are available for northern Britain. The results (see the 2011 *CES News* at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/surveys/ces) support those from BBS and show a much slower decline in Willow Warbler abundance in the north than in south-west or south-east Britain. A much faster increase in Reed Warbler productivity in northern Britain is also apparent. Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) studies of Sand Martins (five projects), Pied Flycatchers (two), Wheatears (one) and Willow Warblers (one) are contributing to our detailed understanding of the survival rates of Scottish migrants.

The Willow Warbler has recently been the focus of a PhD by Catriona Morrison, supervised by Jennifer Gill at the University of East Anglia, and the BTO's Rob Robinson and Jacquie Clark. Using national survey data from Britain (BBS) and Ireland (the BWI/NPWS/Heritage Council Countryside Breeding Survey or CBS) from 1994 to 2006, Catriona modelled the variation in Willow Warbler population trends over time and space. Across Britain and Ireland, population trends follow a gradient from sharp declines in the south and east of England to shallow declines and/or slight increases in parts of north and west England, and across Scotland and Ireland. The rates of population change also vary temporally: rates of decline in the south of England are slower now than at the start of the time series, whereas populations further north in Britain have undergone periods of increase and decline. These geographical differences in breeding season population trends of Willow Warblers suggest regional-scale drivers of population change, such as changing climatic conditions, across different parts of Britain & Ireland (Morrison *et al.* 2010). The work does not rule out an influence of the conditions experienced in the non-breeding season through migratory connectivity, however, which could arise if Scottish Willow Warblers are wintering in different areas to English ones, or variation that might be caused by the timing of passage of birds from different parts of Britain & Ireland. If either of these is shown to occur, then regional-scale environmental changes in Africa or on passage sites could also be influencing the patterns within Britain & Ireland. Catriona has

been delving into nest record and CES ringing data further, to investigate the reasons for the north-south split for Willow Warblers, and we await the results with anticipation!

Information on migration

The BTO Migration Atlas (Wernham *et al.* 2002) brought together all of the movement data collected by thousands of bird ringers between 1909, when Arthur Landsborough Thomson launched the first ringing scheme in Britain at the University of Aberdeen, and 1997. For some species, there was sufficient information for the team and its invited expert authors to discuss the differences between the recoveries of birds ringed in different parts of the British Isles but, over the distances covered by our relatively tiny cluster of islands, and because so few recoveries have occurred in African wintering areas, it was difficult to tell whether there was a leap-frog pattern of migration for summer visitors travelling to Africa. Previous work, at larger scales, had shown for some species that migrant birds breeding further north within a species' range tended to winter in areas which are further south – travelling south, they 'leap-frogged' birds breeding further south within Europe and wintering closer to the Sahara. Potentially, this differentiation in wintering areas could explain some of the patterns we see for Willow Warbler population changes.

Looking for links that can explain the way that populations of breeding summer migrants are affected by conditions in Africa has been a key area of research in the last few decades. There was clear evidence of the relatedness of summer and winter conditions with the sudden disappearance of huge numbers of species such as Sand Martin and Whitethroat in the late 1960s and 1970s, following the run of very dry winters in the Sahel region, at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. In their classic paper, Peach *et al.* (1991) showed that fluctuations in the population levels and adult survival rates of British Sedge Warblers in the period from the late 1960s were strongly correlated with indices of wet season rainfall in their African winter quarters. Their population changes were unrelated to estimates of breeding productivity in the previous year, suggesting that overwinter survival was the main driver of population change.

More recently, two related studies (Hewson & Noble 2009, Ockendon *et al.* 2012) have shown (see Figure 1) that recent declines in our summer migrants seem to be most severe for species that travel furthest, to the moist tropical rainforests and Guinea savanna (Nightingale, Wood Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Garden Warbler) than they are for the species that only travel as far as arid areas (Sand Martin, Reed Warbler, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff), many of which have increased in numbers in recent years.

In another study of this connectivity, Rob Robinson *et al.* (2008) used data from the RAS ringing project to show that the apparent survival rates of hirundines were correlated with rainfall on the African wintering grounds, but not with rainfall in Britain, suggesting that overwinter food resources may be more limiting. House Martin survival is most closely linked to the maximum monthly rainfall during the wet season, Sand Martin survival to the minimum monthly rainfall during the wet season and Swallow to mean monthly rainfall during the early austral summer.

Adding 450 miles to the journey

The drive experienced by migrants to travel further north is assumed to be linked to longer summer days and the chance to breed in areas with lower densities of resident birds but there are potential costs too, in terms of poor early spring weather and the huge distances that must be travelled. A Spotted Flycatcher migrating north to Inverness might be adding about 15% to its migratory journey, with an equivalent addition of 10% for Swallows returning from South Africa, compared to birds migrating back to southern England. The same applies in the autumn. Research funded by the BTO's Swallow Appeal has shown that Swallows ringed in Scotland at summer roosts gained less fat but started fattening earlier than birds caught in roosts in southern Britain, suggesting that the first leg of the journey is a 'connecting flight', rather than the start of the real inter-continental journey (Coiffait *et al.* 2011).

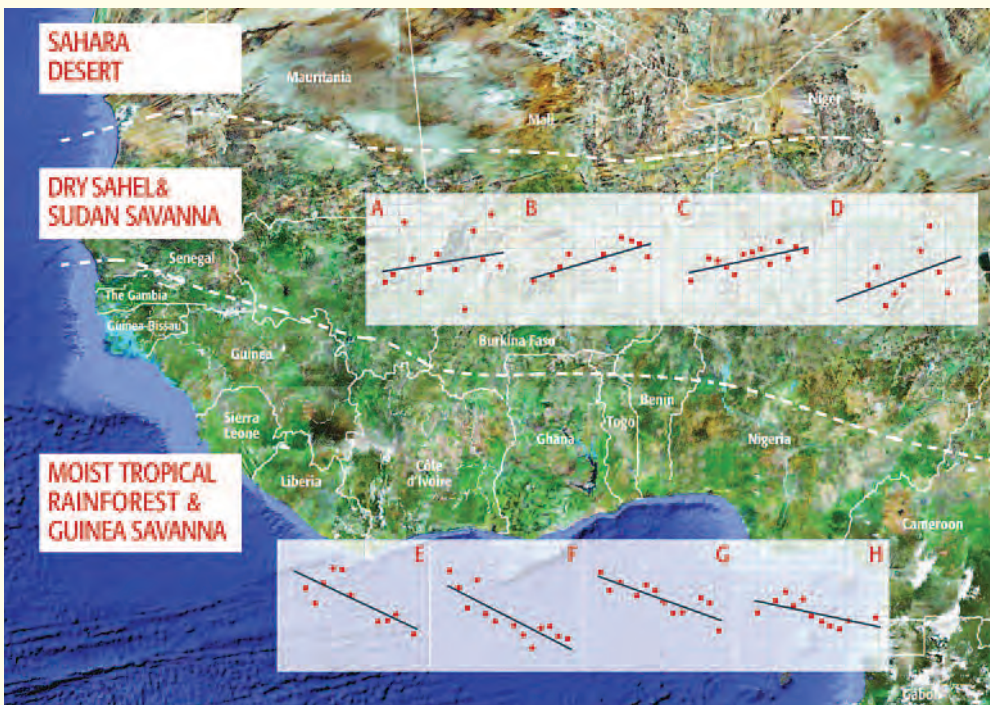


Figure 1. Breeding population trends for eight species of long-distance migrant from the UK that spend the winter in two different areas of Africa south of the Sahara (from Ockendon *et al.* 2012). These are UK 10-year Breeding Bird Survey trends for the period 1996-2006 for species as follows: A Sand Martin, B Reed Warbler, C Whitethroat, D Chiffchaff, E Nightingale, F Wood Warbler, G Spotted Flycatcher, H Garden Warbler.

The most recent changes in Scotland revealed by atlasing

The House Martin is an interesting example of a species that is operating at the edge of its range when in northern Scotland. The early results from the BTO/BWI/SOC Bird Atlas 2007-11 project (see Figure 2) show that the species is continuing to colonise new areas. The results from this most recent atlas survey are still being checked, but, from the provisional maps, it is already clear that the edges of range for species such as Lesser Whitethroat continue to move northwards. New analyses are planned to look at how the core parts of the ranges of individual species may be moving north, and perhaps we will discover further that southern declines are being mitigated by increases in Scotland. We also expect the new atlas maps for African-Eurasian migrants to support and provide greater clarity on the differential changes we have seen in population changes between Scotland and England (e.g. for

Cuckoo and Willow Warbler). The observed changes in distribution and relative numbers over the last 20 years that will be revealed by the atlas will allow us to investigate in more detail the reasons for the observed changes, which might turn out to be as much to do with land-use changes in Scotland compared with England, as to do with climatic changes. For example, migrant species that show a preference for shrubby habitats may be benefitting from the increase in native woodland planting and regeneration schemes across Scotland in recent decades, and from the (perhaps temporary) reduction in sheep grazing pressures. Those that depend on the marginal hill ground between lowland intensive agricultural areas and open higher ground may still be struggling (e.g. Whinchat). A full analysis of distributional changes for migrant birds in Scotland will be possible once all of the Bird Atlas 2007-11 data are available and we eagerly await this new knowledge.

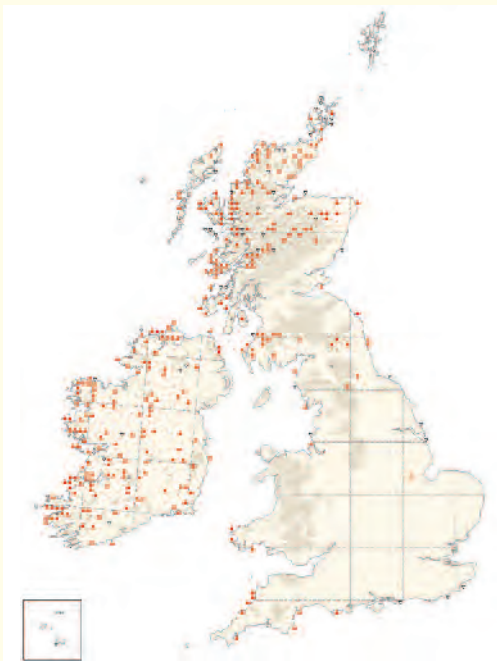


Figure 2. Provisional results from the BTO/BWI/SOC Bird Atlas 2007-11 project (see www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas) showing changes in the distribution of breeding House Martins in Britain and Ireland since the previous atlas in 1988-91. Note the gains (red triangles) in 10-km squares occupied by the species particularly in the north and west of Scotland and on the west coast of Ireland. Losses from 10-km squares are shown as black triangles.

Future challenges

Research on the ecology of African-Eurasian migrants will continue to lean heavily on demographic parameters, arising from the huge efforts of volunteer ringers and nest recorders, to allow us to understand the drivers of changes in their populations. The increasingly valuable information that is being assembled by collating observations by birdwatchers and those who study visible migration, through initiatives like the BTO/RSPB/BWI/SOC BirdTrack recording scheme (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack) is also increasingly giving us information on the timings and patterns of spring and autumn migration to add to our knowledge across the UK. In addition, there are exciting technological developments that are starting to reveal the fascinating stories of individual migrants. As we saw when satellite transmitters were first added to large birds like Whooper Swans and wintering geese, a migratory journey is not just a straight line joining point A to point B. Devices that can provide real-time data have already been reduced to 5g, allowing a sample of Cuckoos to carry out spying missions that have revealed the diversity of routes taken, the final wintering areas and the key habitats upon which they depend in a range of different countries (www.bto.org/cuckoos). During 2012, five Scottish Cuckoos

are being asked to undertake similar missions. If the timing of their journeys, their routes and destinations tend to be comparable to those of birds caught in East Anglia, then this will suggest that the differences in Scottish and English population trajectories are more likely to be driven by processes occurring during the brief breeding season.

For smaller species, such as Nightingales and Swifts, geolocators are currently providing an alternative way to collect information for individual birds. These devices must currently be attached to the bird during one breeding season and retrieved later to download the data. In the intervening period, information is collected on day length and the timing of midday, which allows calculation of the latitude and longitude of locations visited and the durations of stop-overs.

When the BTO compiled the Migration Atlas, using ringing data through to 1997, there was a group of winter Swift records (see Figure 3a) from the Congo, through eastern Africa and onwards to the Indian Ocean (grey dots refer to birds that were found during winter months but long-dead). The ring recoveries could not tell us whether individual birds move around during the winter or if birds use different areas in different winters. By attaching geolocators to a small number of birds, BTO researchers Chris Hewson and Phil Atkinson, with the assistance of volunteer ringers Paul Noakes, Doug Radford and Jamie Hooper and funding from Action for Swifts, have added dramatically to the story. One of these Swifts, tagged overnight in July at Fowlmere in Cambridgeshire, spent time across the whole of the wintering area previously suggested by ring recoveries, and also revealed an important new spring refuelling stop in the skies above Liberia, an area which was also used by a number of other tagged birds.

In the near future, researchers should be able to deploy satellite tags on more Scottish species, such as Ring Ouzels, and geolocators on species as small as Wood Warblers and Grasshopper Warblers. These are expensive technologies to use but they will provide fascinating insights to complement the essential work of those monitoring populations in other ways. A combination of the use of these new

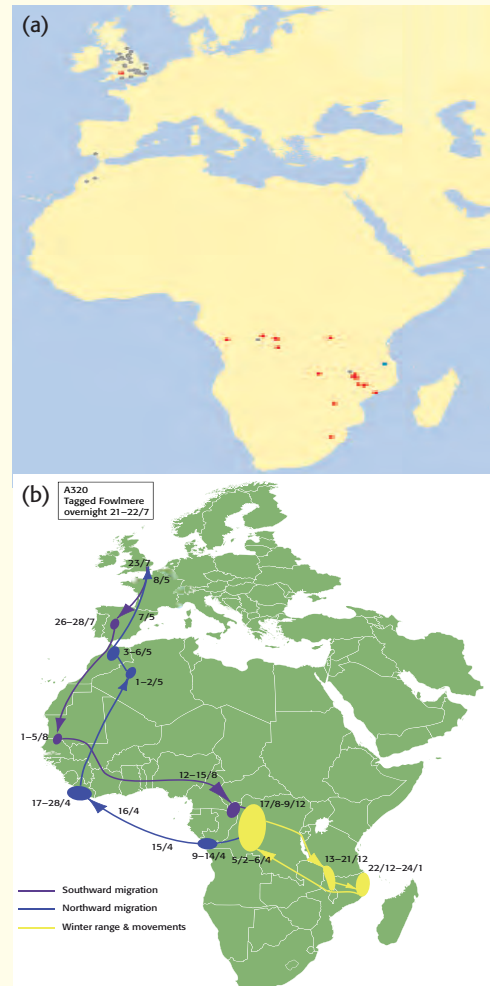


Figure 3a–b. The migratory journeys of Swifts. (a) shows in red the winter recovery locations of Swifts ringed in Britain and Ireland up to 1997 (from the 2002 BTO Migration Atlas), while (b) shows the detailed information that can be obtained from tracking a single Swift equipped with a geocator.

technologies for tracking individuals, and the continuing huge and greatly valued efforts of volunteers across Scotland in carrying out survey work through atlassing, BBS, BirdTrack, targeted ringing and nest recording, will mean that we will soon be in a better position to understand the needs of Scottish long-distance migrants, like the Wood Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler. Their lives outside of Scotland will be less of a mystery, but surely no less fascinating, and their conservation, along with that of other Scottish migrants, is sure to remain a challenge into the future.



Plate 112. Wood Warbler. © Edmund Fellowes

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Graham Appleton, BTO Thetford & Chris Wernham, BTO Scotland.



Four days in the life of the SOC President

K. SHAW

Plate 113. One of two male Lesser Scaup to use St. John's Pool in 2012 - the ninth record for the site. © D. Devonport

"Wouldn't it be boring for everyone?" I ask. I am sitting next to Ian Andrews at the Lothian Discussion Group. "Well, I think members would be really interested in what Council discuss and writing about it has never been done before". He has asked me to write an article for *Scottish Birds* on how Council and Management Committee works. "OK, I take your point. How about I describe three or four days of my SOC life, building it around Club meetings and engagements?" Ian looks at me approvingly "yes, that might work."

It is Sunday 5 December and SOC Council is meeting at Vane Farm RSPB reserve. There are about 12 members present, a combination of elected members and branch representatives. Club officials Alan Fox (Treasurer), Chris McInerney (Vice President) and Mike Martin (Secretary) are all present. The atmosphere is informal but business-like.

It is always difficult at Council to draw a balance between discussion and decision-making. One subject we need to progress is the annual conference 2012. We start with a review of the 2011 conference. Wendy, the Office Manager, has written a paper to assist us. Feedback from the last event was mostly positive, but we have no plans to take the conference back to the same venue (Carnoustie) in 2012. There is some discussion about returning to Kinross, but Speyside seems to be winning the day. Wendy mentions that there are some good hotels there that are accustomed to hosting similar events. I outline

my progress with the programme of lectures. Some of the speakers are coming from Ireland, so Paul Taylor suggests we call it 'Celtic Connections' - I like that! On a sensitive subject, Alan outlined how important legacies have been to the Club. Council expressed their sincere thanks for recent legacies.

Jane Cleaver, our Membership Development Officer, gives an update on membership and this leads to a lot of debate about retention of members. The importance of paying by direct debit rather than standing order is discussed. We must be flexible about how members pay; however, not all members are keen on using direct debit. Next, how far do we develop our database to help with recruitment/retention? Again, the balance between becoming more professional and still being a Club has been a major topic in my presidency so far. We move on. We need a new Council member. I am very happy that Ian Thomson is back on Council, as he seems to get on with everyone, has lots of ideas and is a real team person, but we are still one short. A few names are mentioned. Then Wendy says "What about Hannah Grist?" Hannah is doing a PhD on the wintering behaviour of Shags, part-funded by SOC, and she has proved very popular when giving her talk on the subject to the branches. Everyone seems to think it is a good idea and I agree to approach Hannah.

It is 14 December and I arrive at Waterston House at around lunchtime. Way back in the mists of time, I was one of those who campaigned for



Plate 114. *Iceland Gull, Anstruther, Fife, 2009.* © John Nadin

SOC HQ to be re-located further north, but I have to admit that I have become very fond of Waterston House in its picturesque East Lothian setting. It has a great atmosphere. Today it is the volunteers' Christmas party followed by a joint management/staff meeting. The party is in full swing. There are so many SOC heavyweights present; several ex-Presidents and some of the very experienced people involved with *Scottish Birds*. The Club is in safe hands for the next few years at least. It is also good to see all the volunteers, who do a great job at Waterston House itself, assisting the staff and welcoming visitors. We mix and chat with staff and volunteers. Later there are team quizzes which everyone enjoys. After the party, we head into the library for our scheduled meeting. The Management Committee is small and therefore more informal than Council. Again Alan and Chris are present as well as Keith Macgregor and Waterston House staff. Matters arising include the appointment of Honorary Presidents, the Scottish Birdfair 2012, and a review of the very successful Chris Packham lecture. I outline my priorities for the next two years: to increase membership, work closely with the staff, and continue the previous President David Jardine's work with Council and Management Committee to encourage more young members. Alan gives us the financial update, and we discuss the autumn conference further – it looks like Carrbridge. The venue for the 2013 spring conference is also discussed. The most likely venue is Edinburgh

and it is going to be a big one, as the BTO/SOC Atlas will be launched then. Jane then updates us on membership recruitment; the figures show recruitment has more than doubled during the period of Jane's employment as against last year's figures. Let's hope it continues. We discuss future Council and Management committee members – Hannah Grist for Council and Pete Carroll for Management. Pete's involvement has been my idea – he has been helping staff with management of the retail and reception area at Waterston House and he will be a great addition to the Management team. The last item on the agenda is proving tricky. *The Birds of Scotland* has been a huge success for the Club and we were hoping to produce a digitised version as an incentive for membership recruitment. However, it looks as if it will not be ready for the Scottish Birdfair – OK, we can't win 'em all, time to move on. Lastly we agree Council and Management committee dates for the following year.

It is the morning of 2 February and I am having a day with Ray Murray, a past SOC President. Ray explains that the President used to be in office for more than the current two year period but that longer duration is not really practical these days mainly because the post is so time consuming. We discuss how the President's role is changing. Like me, Ray is worried about the longer term future. We agree the Club will have good people to run it for perhaps another decade but after that it is difficult to see younger

folk coming forward. I inform him that we are further increasing the number of students we sponsor for the annual conference.

The Borders, like my home counties, Fife and Kinross, are taking another year to complete their county atlas fieldwork, so we spend the afternoon collecting records and missing a Great Grey Shrike before visiting the rubbish tip in Galashiels where we find an adult Iceland Gull. This unlikely site has had four different Iceland Gulls this winter.

A few days later I am on a lecture tour of northern branches. On 8 February I travel up from Inverness to Caithness – more Iceland Gulls and a few Glaucous too. I am meeting Julian Smith and looking forward to a good natter. The weather is poor, but even so, the view from his house is amazing – right across St. John's Loch. Julian is a committed man, whose plan to create a wetland bird reserve has recently come to fruition - although by his own admission it will always be 'work in progress'. He goes on to tell me:

"St. John's Pool has evolved over the past 23 years, through some fascinating and extraordinary times. One of the most rewarding highlights was



Plate 115. Looking north across the Pentland Firth towards Orkney with St. John's Pool in the centre. © J. Smith

in April 2007 when over 100 Sandwich Terns roosted, and within a couple of weeks, 11 pairs nested – apparently becoming the only UK inland colony. However, the despondency that followed the predation of all eggs by Otters was a pivotal point in the history of the reserve.

The reserve is open and free to the public all year round. Spring and summer are the most popular periods – but with Foxes and Otters removing virtually all the breeding interest every summer, the project was becoming not only highly dispiriting but potentially unviable as a bird reserve. The status quo was not an option so a five-year plan was devised to redevelop the site by securing enough funding to re-landscape the pool, improve the visitor experience with a new hide and interpretation, and crucially, install a ground predator exclusion fence. This monumental task was achieved in May 2011 - synchronized to hit the arrival of Arctic Terns on 3 May.

Season 2012 was exceptional. With the new fence in place fledged Arctic Tern chicks increased from a single bird the previous year to more than 40; Black-headed Gulls from just one to over 200!

Other species also profited handsomely from the protection, including Redshanks and Lapwings, but especially ducks, with 'tufties' having a bonanza year in 2011 producing at least 72 ducklings, most of which made it out onto the loch.

The ornithological satisfaction has been heightened by the impact the new hide has had on visitors. The comments in the book have made all the years of effort truly worthwhile. People have been genuinely thrilled with what they can see, without the need for binoculars, let alone a telescope. The breeding birds are right outside the window and the sensory overload of a thousand terns and gulls screaming around amongst waders and wildfowl is not easily forgotten.

Funding came from many sources including the SOC's *Birds of Scotland* Fund which helped with the production of interpretation panels and the rebuilding of the website. This is crucial to getting the message out there.

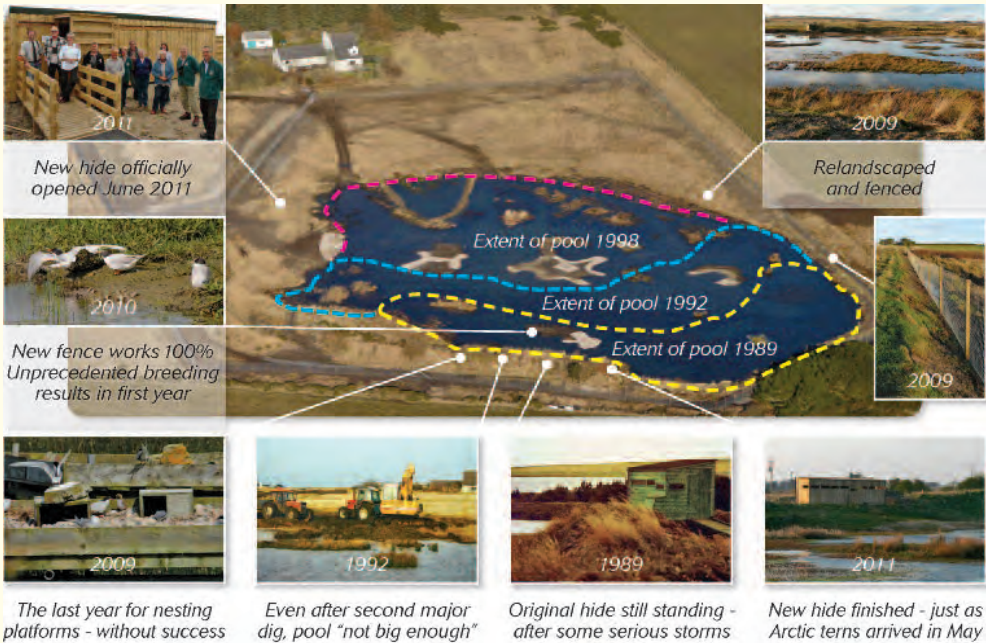


Plate 116. Extract from an interpretation poster for St John's Pool which was part-funded by the SOC.

There are plans for the next 20 years too. Efforts will be geared towards enthusing as many visitors as possible to 'get involved' and ideally joining national and international birdwatching and conservation organisations. This will hopefully translate into some new members for the SOC.



Plate 117. St John's Pool, Caithness, May 2011. © J. Smith

Beginners' birdwatching, drawing and photography courses will all be part of the mix, and who knows, if the punters are lucky they may be fortunate enough to capture something as exciting as a Caspian Tern, Red-rumped Swallow or an Oriental Turtle Dove – just some of the rarities amongst the 200+ species and sub-species recorded to date.

For more info on the site, visit: www.stjohnspool-birds.co.uk or just go visit the place - you'll always be welcome!"

My talk on 'Birds of the Western Palearctic' is in Thurso and Julian is pleased with the turnout. The next day we have a look round Dunnet Bay before Julian heads north to give a talk himself to the Orkney Branch about his beloved wetland reserve. Meanwhile, I head for Ayrshire and the last stop on my tour.

It has been an interesting few months so far. There is a lot to look forward to, a couple of issues to concern me, but overall I feel that thanks to all the support from the members, the Club is well placed to prosper in the future.

Ken Shaw



Plate 118. Storm Petrel and Leach's Petrel. © Dave Devenport

BIRDSPOT: Separation of Storm Petrel and Leach's Petrel in flight

S.L. RIVERS

Five species of storm-petrel have been recorded in Scotland: Wilson's Petrel, White-faced Storm (Frigate) Petrel, (European) Storm Petrel, Leach's Petrel and Swinhoe's Petrel. Of these Frigate and Swinhoe's Petrels have only been recorded once, and Wilson's just four times. The remaining pair both breed in Scotland in good numbers, but exact population sizes are not known. Storm Petrel numbers include at least 32,000 breeding pairs from Shetland and isolated sites on the west coast as far south as Sanda Island, Argyll, and this population is swelled by up to 123,000 non-breeding birds around Shetland waters alone in late July, prior to a southward movement to wintering areas off southern Africa. The entire British Leach's Petrel breeding range is restricted to a few sites in Shetland and remote islands off north Scotland and the Outer Hebrides and numbers include around 48,000 breeding pairs and possibly up to 150,000 birds on passage in autumn comprising non-breeders and birds from breeding areas in Scandinavia and even North America. Mostly winters in the South Atlantic, but also as far north as the north-east Atlantic and some linger in British waters (Forrester *et al.* 2007, and references therein).

The main problem facing a birder who encounters a storm-petrel in Scottish waters is virtually always

to distinguish between Storm Petrel and Leach's Petrel to arrive at a correct identification. What follows should hopefully aid that process.

Field Identification

Structure

Storm Petrel is a small bird about 15-16 cm long, and with a wingspan of 37-41 cm. It resembles a House Martin in size (and upperparts plumage), but is structurally very different: it is obviously more robust, has a squarer head-shape with a steep 'forehead', and the tail is square-ended when closed and rounded when spread. By contrast Leach's Petrel is 18-21 cm long and has a wingspan of 43-48 cm, so that it is similar in length to a Starling/Little Auk and has a wing span averaging just larger than a Little Tern. The tail can appear square-ended or forked depending on its flight action, the latter effect exaggerated by the outer feathers being raised above the level of the central ones. Storm Petrel has a shorter wing, with a relatively shorter 'hand', than Leach's Petrel which has a proportionately long outer wing. Although Leach's Petrel is only a few centimetres greater in length and wingspan than Storm Petrel, it can seem up to twice the bulk (cf. A4 to A3 enlargement), and this is particularly evident when seen together (Plate 118) or next to other familiar species (Plate 119).



Plate 119. Leach's Petrel - banking in flight showing the classic plumage marks and structure, with large size evident compared to the nearby Eiders. © Dave Devenport; **Plate 120.** Storm Petrel - travelling flight showing characteristic uniformly dark upperparts and extensive white rump patch. © Dave Devenport; **Plate 121.** Storm Petrel - travelling flight showing the diagnostic white underwing bar and white rump extending round flanks onto vent as it banks. © Dave Devenport; **Plate 122.** Storm Petrel - feeding bird with wings and tail raised high. The underwing bar is visible at considerable distance. In poor light/longer distances the angle of the wings can be a useful ID pointer. © Stuart L. Rivers; **Plate 123.** Leach's Petrel - foraging bird with wings held in typical bowed position. © Dave Devenport; **Plate 124.** Leach's Petrel - bird in foraging/feeding mode showing the classic upperpart markings. © Dave Devenport

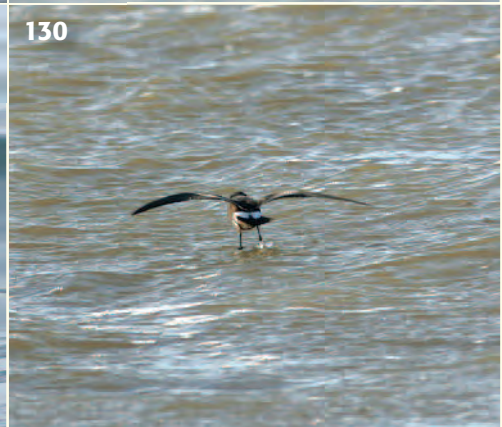
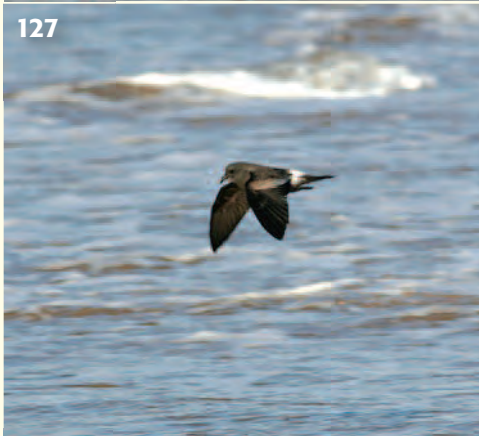


Plate 125. *Leach's Petrel* - travelling flight, a dark individual with less obvious rump patch. Head barely projects beyond carpal joint. © Mark Gibson; **Plate 126.** *Leach's Petrel* - travelling flight, a dark individual with inconspicuous rump and faded covert bar giving more uniform appearance. © Mark Gibson; **Plate 127.** *Leach's Petrel* - travelling flight. This bird has an extensive white rump but the dark underwing with no white bar, and obvious carpal bar identify this individual. The marsh tern-like impression is enhanced by the raised head and neck in this flight posture. © Mark Gibson; **Plate 128.** *Storm Petrel* - travelling flight. Uniformly dark upperparts and head projects noticeably, with wings markedly angled at carpal joint and trailing edge. © Mark Gibson; **Plate 129.** *Storm Petrel* - foraging bird with wings raised in a V-shape making the underwing bar more obvious from most angles, and upperwing lacks a carpal bar. © Mark Gibson; **Plate 130.** *Leach's Petrel* - foraging/feeding bird. The dark line down the rump is diagnostic, while bowed wings are typical of *Leach's* in this mode, but upperwing difficult to see clearly. © Mark Gibson

Plumage

Storm Petrel is typically a very dark bird with an obvious broad white rump, and the latter wraps around the sides of its body to extend noticeably onto the rear flanks towards the vent. The diagnostic feature of Storm Petrel plumage is a broad white band along the centre of the underwing – though this can vary in distinctiveness between individuals (Plates 120–122). The upperwing and upperparts are uniformly blackish, though at close range juveniles do show a narrow, whitish covert bar in autumn.

Leach's Petrel has a more varied plumage: it is not as intensely dark as Storm Petrel and has a diagnostic broad pale greyish covert bar on the upper wing, and this is widest towards the carpal joint. Leach's Petrel also has a white rump, but this is less extensive than on Storm Petrel and varies considerably in how obvious it appears – often the carpal bar is more eye-catching. Seen from above, the rump tapers towards the uppertail and usually shows an obvious darker notch or line extending up from the tail. This can be quite extensive in some individuals. The upperwing is darkest on the flight feathers and usually a bit paler on the coverts of the inner wing ('inside' the covert bar) and on the upperpart feathering and head and flanks. The tail feathers and underwing are notably blackish (Plates 119, 123 & 124).

Limits on discernible identification features

Given that there are several obvious structural and plumage features to help distinguish Storm Petrel and Leach's Petrel even brief views of close birds should allow correct identification. However, the reality of separating Storm Petrel and Leach's Petrel in flight is that many birds are seen in poor weather and/or at considerable distance. Coupled with this is that by their very nature the birds are often close to the sea surface and readily lost behind waves and in troughs, making views frustratingly brief.

The angle of observation plays a significant part in what is visible on a passing bird. Seawatching from cliff tops and headlands means that features on the underside of a bird are unlikely to be seen, but should allow more prolonged views of the plumage features of the upperparts as birds are less often lost in an active sea. Lower height

watch-points such as on a boat or sitting just above the high tide mark can resolve the issues of seeing important plumage features on the sides and underside of a bird, but the observer will now encounter the limitations of following small birds as the swell schemes to alternately raise and lower waves to block your view and the birds themselves hug the bottom of troughs and choose to change direction at a whim when your view is blocked. We have not even considered the nightmare of being in a group of observers where the person who first sees a bird seems totally incapable of giving clear, concise, unambiguous directions to the unfortunate ones still trying to find it: "It's in a trough, it's straight out, I don't want to take my eyes off the bird - get a line from my 'scope", will all be familiar to most regular seawatchers, as will the fact that the person in question is apparently unaware that they are looking at 45° to the rest of the group!

Distance is another enemy of getting the necessary details to identify the storm petrel which is flying past. You can only keep watching and hope that the bird shows for long enough, and gets closer, to reveal a useful plumage feature or other clue. As distance increases the ability to properly judge the size of birds also diminishes and it is a fact of seawatching that not every such bird will have another suitable species alongside for comparison to make it reliably identifiable – learn to accept this!

In addition to viewing angle and distance, other factors which can influence your chances of making a correct identification are light and weather conditions and plumage wear. Some days the angle of the light in a particular direction is such that plumage features on passing birds are 'burnt out' rendering them as little more than backlit silhouettes, while rain and strong winds will reduce useful viewing distances and make following birds even harder. Feather wear and bleaching is normally less of an issue, but a worn adult Storm Petrel in autumn will look less intensely blackish than in spring and can approach the generally 'less-blackish' colouration associated with Leach's Petrel, and the carpal bars of Leach's Petrel become browner and fade with age (Plates 125–126).

So, can we only reliably identify a close-in bird which flies back and forth several times? Do we just give up on anything further out which just shows a couple of times? Hopefully not – there is still one major weapon in our armoury – jizz, and in particular flight action. Indeed, for regular seawatchers it is flight pattern which often first draws attention to a Leach's Petrel to mark it apart from Storm Petrel, and this ability improves with experience: much as with distant skuas and shearwaters.

Field guides classically describe the flight of a Storm Petrel as being 'bat-like' and that of Leach's Petrel as being buoyant and reminiscent of a 'marsh tern' or even a Nightjar. More recent specialist texts also re-affirm that Storm Petrel and Leach's Petrel have notable differences in flight pattern, but also point out that flight action also differs within each species depending on whether the bird is 'travelling', 'foraging' or 'feeding'.

A 'travelling' bird is one which is simply flying through an area. In the case of Storm Petrel the wings often appear 'stiff' and flat, and the general behaviour is to fly in a fairly direct line with few deviations and stalls, and with fluttering wing beats (hence bat-like) interspersed with short periods of gliding (Plates 120–121). The leading and trailing edges of the wing are notably angular. For Leach's Petrel, the flight line is less direct and the action more relaxed, including stalls, alterations of height, shearing, and many changes of direction (hence buoyant, marsh tern-like etc., Plate 127), while the wings are typically held with a notable angle at the carpal joint (pushed forward). The latter can give the impression that the head does not project as far forward as with Storm Petrel (Plate 1128), and the wing beats are normally slower and deeper with Leach's Petrel making them more easily counted individually. Leach's Petrel tends to look less compact than Storm Petrel, being somewhat slimmer in profile and with proportionally longer wings, particularly the 'hand' (Plates 119–121). The forked tail of Leach's Petrel is least evident when fully fanned. In stronger winds Storm Petrel still seems to make good progress (Plate 128), whereas Leach's Petrel can appear to be struggling and uses more shearing in its flight.

A 'foraging' bird is one looking for food, and consequently flying somewhat slower. Storm

Petrel now makes more frequent changes in direction and the flight feathers are spread more, giving an even broader, blunter-tipped wing profile and the tail feathers are spread more openly making the rounded tail more noticeable. Even so, Leach's Petrel is still the more skittish of the pair when foraging, with its 'buoyant' flight more evident in this mode (Plates 118 & 123).

A 'feeding' bird stays over a specific area making short flights back and forth, hovering with feet down, and dipping down to the surface to pick up food and then flit on to the next item. In calmer conditions both Storm Petrel and Leach's Petrel will feed by sitting on the water and may make shallow dives. With a breeze Storm Petrel usually has its wings and tail raised up as it holds position, and patters its feet over the surface for short periods (Plates 122 & 129), and generally has a restless behaviour. By contrast, Leach's Petrel typically holds its wings bowed, swept back and more parallel to the surface when feeding, and has a graceful action as it skips along part flying, part walking/foot pattering, jinking from one spot to the next (Plates 124 & 130).

Acknowledgements

The whole idea for this extended note was based on the excellent sequence of photographs obtained by Dave Devenport in autumn 2010, at Castletown Bay, Caithness, and I thank him for permission to use some here. I am also indebted to Mark Gibson for providing a range of images taken in the Wirral and southern Ireland which help illustrate some of the points made in the text.

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Whoopers tuck in on tatties

S. WELCH



Plate 131. Whooper Swans at Prora waste management site, Lothian, 2 January 2012. © Stephen Welch

For such an elegant bird, the winter feeding habits of Whooper Swans can sometimes appear rather unbecoming, grubbing around in muddy fields and squabbling over bits of rotten food. This past winter saw our local Whooper herd taking to the particularly incongruous surroundings of a former landfill area on an active waste management site at Prora in East Lothian, complete with CCTV and an alarmed entrance gate (Plate 131). The main attraction here was a mound of rotten potatoes dumped on the edge of the landfilled area – and rotten potatoes are something they really can't resist.

Background

There have been a number of changes for the birds wintering in East Lothian farmland inland from Aberlady Bay in the last ten years or so. In the previous two decades, annual peaks rarely exceeded 100, with different feeding areas exploited from year to year (per Lothian Bird Reports). Roost locations included Aberlady Bay and inland farm reservoirs, but the principal roost in the wider area was at Tynninghame on the North Sea coast only a few miles east. Much interchange was noted between these herds. The annual cycle of food sources exploited

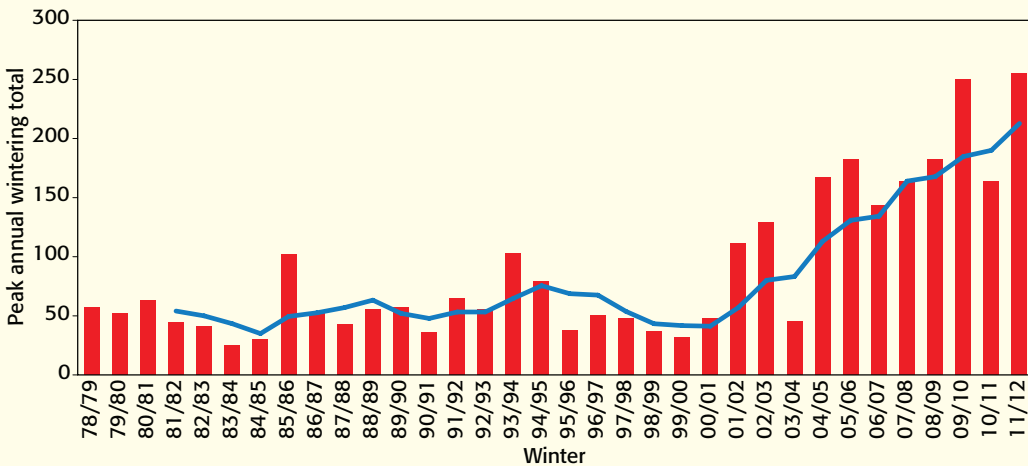


Figure 1. Annual wintering flock peaks for Whooper Swans in inland East Lothian. The solid line is a four-year moving average.

included *Zostera* on estuaries on arrival, stubble in late autumn, flooded potato fields, then finally oil-seed rape and grass in early spring (Robinson *et al.* 2004).

By this time, a farmer at East Fenton was also providing supplemental food for wildfowl. This practice has continued with grain and rotten potatoes offered, the latter also being provided at neighbouring Muirton and further east at East Fortune. Certainly these food sources have been important, enabling decent flocks to remain in the area right through the two spells of very severe weather in the previous two winters (2009/10 and 2010/11), when most other food was inaccessible. Due to this, and perhaps other reasons such as the development of more farm reservoirs, there has been a steady rise in wintering numbers, these now regularly exceeding the current threshold designating a site of international importance (210). General stability of flock numbers and repeat sightings of ringed individuals suggests there is no longer a great deal of interchange between this herd and those still wintering at Tynninghame. Figure 1

shows the trend of the annual peaks in this area, excluding counts from Tynninghame. The highest count during the same period (340 at East Fenton on 1 November 2007) is omitted, this relating to an influx of migrants, many of which did not remain to overwinter.

Winter 2011/12

The most recent winter saw a relatively early arrival with 4 at Aberlady on 17 September, 39 at Chapel 15 October and 100 at East Fenton by 23 October. As usual they fed locally mainly in stubble initially, then in harvested potato fields, with numbers reaching at least 210 by 11 December. On 21 December the entire herd had moved to feed on the potatoes dumped at nearby Prora (Plate 132) and they returned here daily thereafter, with a peak count of 255 birds on 25 February. They roosted and washed at nearby farm reservoirs, East Fenton and Chapel (Plate 133). The juveniles ratio was 22.3% (n=220), a typical figure. All had vacated the Prora site on 3 March when the whole area was ploughed, and the entire flock had apparently departed the area by 10 March.



Plate 132. Whooper Swans at Prora waste management site, Lothian, 25 February 2012. Chapel farm is in the background. © Stephen Welch

As in previous years, an effort was made to read leg colour rings (darvics), thus contributing to the life histories of known individuals. In the last ten winters, a total of 33 different birds have been recorded in this area (excluding Tynninghame); the majority (17) are local/east Scotland wintering birds (14 ringed in Iceland, two ringed in Scotland), with four Caerlaverock wintering birds (two passage only, two apparent transfers) and ten from Martin Mere, Lancashire (six passage only, four apparent transfers). This year, ten ringed birds were recorded, including some old timers such as yellow-UH3, present in East Lothian in nine winters since being ringed as an adult male in Iceland in August 2001, and yellow-PL5 (plate 134), ringed as a cygnet male at Martin Mere in 2000/01 and spending his first five winters there, but now having transferred to wintering here, present for the sixth consecutive year. Most interesting was yellow-461 (plate 135), caught as a cygnet female in Iceland in August 2003, and recorded in the last three

winters in the River Blackwater area in southern Ireland. Though autumn transits have been recorded previously, with PL5 arriving via Co. Londonderry and UH3 via Co. Donegal, this is the first wintering transfer from Ireland.



Plate 134. Whooper Swans including yellow-PL5 (right), Prora waste management site, Lothian, 1 January 2012. © Stephen Welch



Plate 133. Whooper Swans in grass at Chapel, flying to feed at Prora, Lothian, 15 January 2012. © Stephen Welch



Plate 135. Whooper Swans including yellow-461 (centre), Prora waste management site, Lothian, 19 February 2012. © Stephen Welch

Flock interactions are always a joy to watch, ranging from toddler behaviour, with two individuals bickering about a particular chunk of rotten potato (whilst standing adjacent to a great mound of them!), to courtship occurring between two juveniles (Plate 136) perhaps setting up a new pair for the future. We'll miss them during the summer, but hopefully a good number will make it back from Iceland and find more tatties to tuck into next winter.

Stephen Welch
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Plate 136. Courting juvenile Whooper Swans on grass at Muirton, Lothian, 11 March 2012. © Stephen Welch

Notable recent additions to the collections of National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh

R.Y. McGOWAN

Buff-breasted Sandpiper

A Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* found dead at Eshaness, Shetland on 3 October 2011 was prepared as a skin (NMS.Z 2011.148). This is only the seventh specimen of the species in the museum collection, and the first to originate outwith the Americas. The most recent specimens, until now, were collected on Barbados in 1888 and the most recent donation was 110 years ago, in 1901.

Collared Dove

A dark-plumaged Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* found on Hirta, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides in June 2009 has been prepared as a skin (NMS.Z 2011.149). This was one of several dark-coloured Collared Doves observed on Hirta during May and June and recorded by Will Miles in *British Birds* 102: 512 and Sam Alexander in *Scottish Birds* 30: 247.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* found dead at Cill Amhlaidh (Kilaulay), South Uist, Outer Hebrides on 4 November 2010 has been prepared as a skin (NMS.Z 2010.98). It was an immature male and had a fresh weight of 38.1 g. The bird was found only a short distance from the Atlantic coast. The stomach was empty.

The South Uist bird was the 13th Scottish occurrence. Five of the ten sexed specimens were male, and ten of the 12 specimens were immature. It should also be noted here that the specimen from North Ronaldsay, Orkney (25 September 1991) has now been donated to NMS (NMS.Z 2010.102).

Rufous-tailed Robin

The Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* that was found dead on 2 October 2010 on North Ronaldsay, Orkney has been prepared as a skin (NMS.Z 2010.95). It was aged as first-winter and sexed (by DNA) as a male. Stomach contents nil. There have only been two other European records: Fair Isle in 2004 and Poland in 2006.

Siberian Blue Robin

The Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* that was killed by a cat at Leraback, Foula, Shetland on 1 October 2011 has been prepared as a skin (NMS.Z 2011.151). This is the third British record. It was a first-winter and sexed (by DNA) as a female. Although the plumage showed a limited degree of blue colouration, this feature was not conclusive in determining the sex, as some skins of juvenile male Siberian Blue Robins at the Natural History Museum also show moderate blue tones. An attempt to establish the race (nominat *cyane* or *bochaiensis*) on the basis of comparative skins was inconclusive. The stomach contained many fragments of many insect species; these will be investigated further.

Thanks are due to Dr Martin Collinson (University of Aberdeen) for facilitating DNA sexing and to Hein van Grouw (Natural History Museum, Tring) for arranging a loan of skins of Siberian Blue Robins and supplying images of juvenile males.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Puffin. Mike P. Harris & Sarah Wanless, 2011. T. & A.D. Poyser, ISBN 978-4081-0867-3, hardback, 256 pages, £50.00.



This new version of *The Puffin* is not a reprint and only uses the original (1984) as a foundation in which to incorporate old and new

information. The authors, who between them have spent 60 years studying Puffins, have created a superb addition to the ever popular Poyser monographs. The clear and concise text is in nice bite-size sections which allow the reader to put the book down and digest the information without losing the flow. Although the authors have studied the Puffins on the Isle of May, this book is not based solely on their own findings and the state of puffindom has been examined across its range. With topics such as food & feeding, survival and Puffins & people, all aspects of Puffin biology have been extensively covered including new data from recent studies. One example is that we now are gathering information due to the development of data loggers which are allowing us to see where Puffins are going outwith the breeding colonies and as these techniques are developed I'm sure more questions will be answered.

Kenny Taylor contributes by writing an enthralling chapter on Puffin behaviour and anyone that has watched Puffins can imagine the different forms of posturing in their mind's eye. Each chapter is also host to the beautiful pictures produced by Keith Brockie.

As stated in the authors' own blurb, the last book left us with the

feeling that all is well with the Puffin, but that has now changed. In the final chapter, the authors examine what lies ahead for the species, with climate change affecting fish populations and the urgency of our government to allow the development of coastal and off-shore windfarms. These topics don't paint as rosy a picture for the species 20 years on since the original and we are left to wonder what the future holds for this iconic bird.

Hayley Douglas

Foula - the time of my life. Christopher Mylne, 2011. The Islands Book Trust, ISBN 978-1-907443-15-2, hardback, 218 pages, £20.00.

Scottish ornithologists have always had a special relationship with islands. Huge seabird colonies and the smell of migration have ensured that. All islands have an attraction, but dramatic, isolated ones are held in the highest esteem. Foula is in the premiership when it comes to dramatic, isolated islands.

Chris Mylne's personal story brings Foula to life for me. It is truthful, yet charming. Foula has changed less than most places in the last 50 years; many of the issues of the 1950s are live issues today - depopulation, the number of children at the school, isolation and relationships within the community. Some readers may find this book a little too personal; Chapter 7 - Writing Home, is an example, but for me this is a very interesting part of the book. Chapters 9 and 10 give a really observant insight into island life. I have spent over six months in

all on Foula, and even seeing the main names of the island - Holbourn, Isbister, Ratter and Gear - brought back a flood of disjointed memories. Some of the older images add greatly to the book - seeing the elder statesmen and women of today as children gave me a strange feeling.

It is not always easy to write about island communities, but Mylne has done a good job. Foula can be dark, even daunting, but it can also be awe-inspiring, strangely beautiful, even majestic ... and bird filled. When I was a younger man I attended a slide lecture by Chris Mylne, it may even have been at an SOC conference, and now I know more about the man. This is a well-written, personal account of an amazing place. If you too are a 'Scottish islands person', buy it.

Ken Shaw

A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests. James Ferguson-Lees, Richard Castell & Dave Leech, 2011. British Trust for Ornithology, ISBN 978-1-906204-79-2, softback, 272 pages, £24.99.

This field guide is intended as an aid to those involved in monitoring nests for research and conservation purposes. Written and illustrated by experts, this richly illustrated guide contains a wealth of information for 146 British and Irish species, together with introductory sections on nest-monitoring techniques, nest identification, legislation, the



BTO Nest Record Scheme and nest-finding skills. Its combination of concise notes and quick-reference facts and figures,

together with expert advice and chapters on the basics, makes it an ideal field companion for both beginners and experienced nest recorders.

Each species account covers: where the species breeds, with a UK distribution map and details on typical habitat and nest sites; seasonality of breeding, with a timetable of when most birds are on eggs and chicks; identification of eggs and young, with photographs; and species-specific nest finding methods and considerations.

For someone who wants to develop the practical skills of finding nests and contribute to the BTO Nest Record Scheme, I would thoroughly recommend this book.

Mike Thornton

Extinct Birds. Julian P. Hume & Michael Walters, 2012. T. & A.D. Poyser, ISBN 978-14081-57251, 544 pages, hardback, £50.00.

This well-produced new book claims to be the first fully comprehensive treatment of the subject ever undertaken, and will surely be the standard reference for generations to come. Previous works, by Rothschild (1907), Greenway (1958) and Fuller (1987, 2000), concentrated on species known to have become extinct since 1600, because that was when written documentation began in earnest. This review, however, covers all species known to have disappeared in the last 700 years that are represented by museum specimens (skins, skeletons, subfossil remains and eggs), and also those species known only from credible accounts and illustrations.



The authors are two of the world's leading experts on extinct birds, and both have worked at the Natural History Museum at Tring. Julian Hume is also a professional artist, and his excellent line drawings (based where possible on museum specimens) illustrate more than 80 of the many hundreds of species described. The main part of the book covers species known to be extinct, in 91 families. There then follows a section dealing with "hypothetical birds" (the validity of which remain in doubt) in 17 families, and finally four appendices on data-deficient taxa, doubtful and invalid taxa, rediscovered taxa, and museums and institutions holding relevant material. There are nearly 70 pages of references and an index.

Where known, location of specimens, status, range, description and habits are shown for each species, and many historical accounts are quoted. All the well-known extinct species are there of course, and there are countless others I had never heard of. This book will no doubt be an important source of information for research and it is a sad testament to humanity's impact on birds. It is truly fascinating and I highly recommend it.

John Savory

Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 16. Edited by J. de Hoyo, A. Elliott & D.A. Christie, 2011. Lynx Edicions, ISBN 978-84-96533-78-1, hardback, €212 or approximately £180.

So finally, the *magnum opus* comes to an end. When the first volume of HBW appeared nearly 20 years ago, there was unqualified praise for the quality of the text, illustrations and photos, but much scepticism as to whether such a project, from a (then) little-known publishing company in Spain, could



possibly be carried through to completion. Well, the sceptics have been proved wrong, and this final 16th volume, covering tanagers, cardinals, buntings, and New World sparrows and blackbirds, is just as stunning as its 15 predecessors. The fabulous photos, beautiful artwork and fact-filled, but readable, text of peerless academic standard (with extensive bibliography) are all there. As in previous volumes, there is a foreword on a topic of current interest, and here Anders Pape Møller contributes an erudite and thought-provoking article on climate change and birds.

Actually, the HBW project is not quite finished; an extra volume containing a much-needed general index, and details of – amazingly – 52 new species discovered during the course of publication, is due later this year. An on-line HBW is also promised. Meanwhile, anyone who has collected the earlier volumes will need no encouragement to purchase this final one. The HBW editorial team and Lynx Edicions are to be congratulated for successfully pulling off what is arguably the most ambitious ornithological publishing venture of all time.

Jeremy Brock

Birds of Senegal and The Gambia. Nik Borrow & Ron Demey, 2011. Bloomsbury Publishing, ISBN 978-14081-34696, 352 pages, softback, £29.99.

Despite rapid population growth and the consequent destruction of the natural habitat, Senegal and Gambia are still rich in species diversity and, with improved access to both countries from European airports, many birders

now visit this part of Africa. Having been in The Gambia in 2000, I used the field guide by Barlow, Wacher & Disley (1999).

Not surprisingly, the constantly improving knowledge of the region's bird life has brought the publication of a new field guide which the authors have aimed to make as user-friendly as possible. The plates (largely comprising illustrations from two of their previous guides) are very clear, using larger and fewer images per page. The text on the facing pages is, by necessity, brief, but manages to convey essential information such as identification features and relevant habitats.

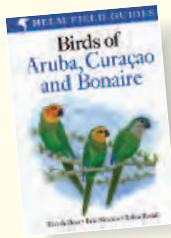
The accompanying range maps provide a concise guide to the status of each species. Timing your visit to this area is important and, although such maps can only offer approximate guidelines, the inclusion of a full checklist provides a complementary planning tool for potential visitors.

The introductory section includes brief, but useful, descriptions of the geography, climate and important bird areas. Perhaps it might also have been useful to have included a small section on "Getting Around" in the two countries. The crunch question, though, is "Would I buy this book if I was going to The Gambia again?" The new format is indeed easy to use. The guide is a really valuable update on what was available. The answer has to be yes.

Angus Hogg

Birds of Aruba, Curacao and Bonaire. Bart de Boer, Eric Newton & Robin Restall, 2012. Helm Field Guides, ISBN 978-1-4081-3727-7, paperback, 176 pages, £24.99.

I received this book for review a few days after returning from a



cruise in the Lesser Antilles, with a call at C u r a c a o , where I was disadvantaged in having only the *Helm Guide: Birds of the West Indies*. I was further disadvantaged with a call at Tobago, which is covered by a third Helm Guide. Given the degree of overlap of species between the texts, and the relatively high cost of this most recent slim volume, there must be merit in considering a publication that covers the whole of the West Indies avifauna in a single book ... it would still be pocket- or rucksack-friendly.

Moan out of the way; this is a good addition to the Helm Field Guide aviary. It follows the familiar Helm format, and will work well for the birder unfamiliar with species in this island group. I have benefitted by retrospectively identifying one of the parrot species, and confirming detail from another couple for which I had used the West Indies book. I find both the species texts and illustrations helpful, although given the comparative rarity of many of the birds covered, I do wonder if a format could be developed to aid the bird-watcher to focus more quickly on the likely targets.

Mike Martin

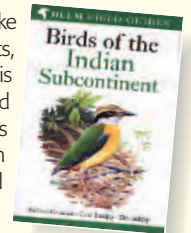
Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp, 2012. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-14081-2763-6, paperback, 528 pages, £35.00.

This welcome new single-volume field guide is based on the same authors' *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* (1998), and is a major revision of their *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian*

Subcontinent (1999). It is not particularly big, and yet it covers all 1313 (some potential splits make this 1375) species that have been recorded in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. There are 226 excellent colour plates, many of which have been repainted for this edition, and texts and distribution maps for up to seven species per page are placed opposite the plates. Every species is depicted, together with plumage variations where appropriate. At the start there is a useful map of the whole region, followed by introductory sections dealing with taxonomy and nomenclature, plumage terminology, climate, habitats, conservation, and family summaries. After the species accounts there are appendices listing vagrants and doubtful species.

Taxonomists do like moving goalposts, and users of this book will find numerous changes in both English and scientific names compared with earlier publications, changes which the authors admit are both contentious and confusing. For example, what was the Greater Flameback (a woodpecker) is apparently now the Crimson-backed Goldenback, a contradiction in terms if ever there was one! Some alternative English names are given, but by no means all. Still, I have no doubt this comprehensive guide is the best one for the region and I have no hesitation in recommending it to you.

John Savory



OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

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

Fair Isle, one year on...

The rebuilding of the Observatory (see *Scottish Birds* 30(2): 157–158, with the official opening written up in 31(4): 368–371) was just one of several recent significant changes for FIBO. Roy Dennis stood down as Chairman of the FIBO Trust after a 16-year stint to be replaced by Roger Riddington. Roy maintains his long link with the Observatory (which began when he became an Assistant Warden in 1959) by taking on the position of Honorary President of FIBOT. Deryk and Hollie Shaw also stood down after 12 seasons running the Obs and were replaced at the start of the 2011 season by David and Susannah Parnaby.

David recounts some of his personal memories of his first year at this most famous of observatories:

Right from the move up to Fair Isle, we knew we were in for an exciting year. Three return trips on the Northlink ferry to get our furniture and belongings to Shetland all saw weather delays and some rough crossings. As a friend who was travelling with me observed mournfully whilst staring at his dinner, 'you know you're in for a rough crossing when there's swell in your gravy'. The crossings caused a delay in getting everything to Shetland, but that didn't matter too much as the weather was way too bad to get anything onto Fair Isle anyway (but also cost me Bewick's Swan on my Fair Isle list!). We were getting regular updates from Hollie and Deryk about the gales, snow on the airstrip and battles with the heating in the warden's flat, so it was a relief to all arrive on Fair Isle on the same day as the last of our furniture on a sunny, mild and perfectly calm day.

The weather changed again shortly afterwards and we got to see some proper wild Shetland weather. Some rapid learning followed as we juggled unpacking with getting to know the new job, new neighbours, new island etc, whilst a Coot caused the first rush of excitement of my



Plate 137. David Parnaby, Fair Isle. © Susannah Parnaby

stay (I've worked on island reserves before, so I know that ignoring such birds when you first arrive can quickly seem foolish as you are haunted by the gap in your new patch list!). Perhaps genuinely more exciting was the appearance of a superb pod of Killer Whales just offshore for two consecutive days (and viewable from the kitchen window).

And then it was here, the start of the new season. The end of April not only saw the start of our visitors to the Obs but also witnessed an incredible run of rarities, headlined by Collared Flycatcher, Great Snipe, Red-rumped Swallow and two Subalpine Warblers in the space of a few days, all in t-shirt and shorts weather! The spring continued to produce regular scarcities and the odd good rarity, with birds arriving right up until July (the first week of the month produced Black-headed Bunting, Wryneck, Common Rosefinch and Lapland Bunting).

Sadly, the summer brought the familiar sight of failing seabird colonies. Although some species fared better than others, it was a disaster for Arctic Skuas, Arctic Terns, Guillemots, Razorbills, Shags and Kittiwakes. That said, the colonies were still spectacular and some of the tamest Puffins I've ever met just a couple of minutes

walk from the Obs were appreciated by my two-year old daughter. Storm Petrel ringing was as popular with visitors as it was with the staff and the trapping of six Leach's Petrels was an added bonus. A White-winged Black Tern found from the van whilst I was picking up the shop order in July showed that it is never safe to switch off from birds on Fair Isle.

August can be an underrated month amongst birders, but 2011 provided Pallid Harrier, Great Snipe, Citrine Wagtail, Booted Warbler, two Arctic Warblers, Melodious Warbler and an impressive fall that included up to 19 Wrynecks, eight Barred Warblers, Corncrake and day counts including over 100 Tree Pipits.

September and October is the peak birding season on Fair Isle and, although 2011 saw a larger than usual amount of westerly winds, there were still plenty of good birds. Often just the hint of an easterly wind can produce something special. Such conditions saw the UK's only Eastern Olivaceous, Lanceolated and Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers of 2011 arrive on Fair Isle, with a constant presence of a variety of other rare and scarce birds to keep everyone happy. Even the westerlies produced some goodies, including Baird's Sandpiper and Fair Isle's first Lesser Scaup. Another American bird added to the Fair Isle list in the autumn was Hudsonian Whimbrel, although this was an 'armchair tick' as the result of the BOU splitting this distinctive form. These changes see the Fair Isle list rise to 378 (plus an albatross *sp.* that hung around the island for a day in 1948), whilst the Hudsonian Whimbrel becomes the 31st 'first' for Britain to be found on Fair Isle, that's more than ten per square mile!

The start of November saw the Obs close up for the winter and the staff drift away, but the weather conditions meant the birds kept coming and amongst impressive numbers of Blackbirds and Woodcock there were three Olive-backed Pipits (to add to the two seen earlier in the year), a Blyth's Reed Warbler (although unlike the four previous records in 2011, this one was not trapped), a very interesting swift *sp.*, Rough-legged Buzzard and a record-breaking arrival of Tundra Bean and European White-fronted Geese. The late flurry of good birds took our total number

of descriptions up to around 66, so plenty of work for those long winter nights! Things then quietened down a bit, although early in the New Year, Fair Isle cashed in on the Iceland Gull bonanza and 2012 was underway...

So what will this year bring? Well it would be nice to get a large spring fall, although those are scarcer than they used to be. Hopefully the autumn will see a prolonged spell of easterlies and with four years since the last 'first' for Britain on the island, perhaps we could be due another? Could it be the year for Grey-necked Bunting, Siberian Accentor or perhaps another American mega (eight of Fair Isle's previous UK firsts have been from the west).

Some things we can be sure of are that FIBO will continue to remain an important site for ornithological studies. The daily census and regular trapping routine will continue to add to over 60 years of data accumulated by the Observatory and we'll start an ambitious programme of computerising the Log data to make it more accessible to researchers. We'll also host a variety of researchers and students at the Obs, where our facilities will support research into the seabirds and other species of the island. The RSPB-led Future of the Atlantic Marine (FAME) project will continue to fit data loggers to a selection of seabirds, allowing us to gain fascinating insights into where 'our' birds are finding their food. Ornithological research is the bedrock of all that we do at FIBO and we provide grants and reduced accommodation rates for researchers; see our website for details on how to apply.

FIBO also provides support for younger visitors to the island, the long-running JHMF scheme provides grants for those under 24 to come and volunteer with the Observatory's ornithological team. This year also sees the introduction of a 50% discount for visitors under 21 to visit the Obs for just £30 per night (full board), see the website for details of this fantastic offer and start thinking about what you could find!

The new facilities at the Obs attract a wide range of visitors, the comfortable en-suite rooms have given plenty of people the incentive to make their first visit to Fair Isle, whilst birders are

perhaps more interested in the hearty meals and views from the library window, where the Observatory garden attracts a wide range of good birds that often gets the day list started well even before breakfast! One of the most pleasing things for me in my first year was the compliments the new Obs attracted from so many of our visitors. We received messages from many of the birders, ringers, casual wildlife watchers and 'island tickers' who stayed at the Obs saying how much they had enjoyed their visits. I had imagined it may not be easy to keep all of our visitors happy, but the island, the birds and the people help make the task so much

simpler. The relaxed atmosphere in the bar and lounge in the evenings shows that the new building retains a lot of the old Obs charm.

We still have vacancies for visitors outside the peak periods in 2012, so if you'd like to see the new Obs building, find your own good birds, hold a Storm Petrel or just experience some time in the unique atmosphere of Britain's most remote inhabited island, then get in touch, we look forward to seeing you.

David & Susannah Parnaby, Fair Isle.



Plate 138. Isle of May Coastguard Signal Station - original home of the Observatory. © Ron Morris/IoM Archive

Isle of May Bird Observatory - past, present and future

The recent 75th anniversary of the founding of the observatory (see *Scottish Birds* 30(4): 352–361) has sparked many interesting conversations. The Trust Committee also became acutely aware of the need to ensure we continue to properly document the history of the observatory. Our recent AGM in March was very fortunate to be host to a talk on the naval history of the May by Ron Morris, the foremost authority on the subject, and he has been most helpful with our quest and questions. Previous committees have already assembled a good archive of material, but we would very much

welcome further contributions of copies of photographs or other items, particularly details of the original observatory home (Plate 138), from the SOC membership who have visited or stayed on the island. Please contact Stuart Rivers (details below) or Mark Oksien (mark.oksien@btinternet.com) if you have anything to contribute.

The list of species recorded on the island continues to grow, with four new birds added in the last three years: Little Egret and White's Thrush in 2009, and Avocet and Tundra Bean Goose in 2011. It is ironic that none was added in 2010 as this provided the best ever year total of species recorded on the May with 162, just exceeding the previous best total of 161 birds noted in 1998. A big part of the credit for this achievement lies with Alex Ash, SNH assistant warden in 2010, who spent most of his spare time combing the island for new arrivals and racked up a dozen or more notable finds. Among the highlights for 2010 were the seventh Honey Buzzard, fourth Mediterranean Gull, 13th Greenish Warbler and sixth Hawfinch for the island plus three Red-breasted Flycatchers, three Common Rosefinches, two Oortolan Buntings, two Little Buntings, a Red-backed Shrike, Barred Warbler and Icterine Warbler. Rare and scarce visitors found in 2011 included only the second Garganey for the island (25 May), whilst two Avocets flying south past Kirkhaven on 2 June were the first island record (Mark Newell), and were supplemented by three Common Rosefinches, two Barred Warblers, an Icterine Warbler, a Marsh Warbler and a Little Bunting. A late bonus occurred during a visit to the island by

CEH staff on 14-15 November, which produced the second ever Dusky Warbler for the island, and its first (Tundra) Bean Goose (all Mark Newell).

The island continues to provide surprises and new record totals are set annually. Manx Shearwaters bred on the island in 2008 – the first successful breeding of the species recorded on the east coast of Britain south of Orkney. A superb total of six Balearic Shearwaters seen from the island on 2 October 2009 (Alan Lauder) is the best day count for the east coast of Scotland, while four Firecrests trapped and ringed on 21 October 2009 equals the best site count for the species in Scotland – the previous record was also on the Isle of May, on 2 October 1972. In 2010 unusual observations involved the pairing of a drake Velvet Scoter with a female Eider (*Scottish Birds* 31(2): 164) and a Red-breasted Flycatcher found on 6 November – one of fewer than 30 Scottish sightings in that month (both Keith Brockie). New record island day counts were set for Black-throated Diver and Pied Wagtail in 2009 and in 2010 for Whooper Swan, Canada Goose, Barnacle Goose, Goosander, Reed Warbler and Lapland Bunting, with many other species achieving highest totals for several years.

Ringling activities continue to achieve good results with 4,410 birds of 64 species ringed in 2009, 4,982 new birds of 68 species in 2010, and 3,290 birds in 2011. New additions to the island ringing list from the last few years are Hoopoe in 2008, White's Thrush in 2009 and Buzzard in 2010, taking the overall total to 187. The latter year also provided the unusual event of three Great Grey Shrikes trapped and ringed on the island on the same day (Plate 139).

Details of the sightings and ringing activities on the island can be found in our annual reports. The 2009 report was published in a new double format of a 64-page printed 'core report' plus a CD containing a 160-page 'full report' and additional articles and photos from the year. The 2010 report follows the same format, but with a 192-page 'full report' plus articles and photos on the CD (contact Stuart Rivers or see our website: www.isleofmaybirdobs.org for details).

This year sees a new phase in the history of the observatory as we commence the upgrade of the accommodation at the Low Light, the observatory's home since 1946. The main differences will be the removal of the current



Plate 139. Three Great Grey Shrikes were ringed on the island on 8 October 2010. © Libby Welbourn



Plate 140. Current view of the Observatory from north-west. The washhouse (white painted building behind seat) will be removed for the new extension. © S.L. Rivers



Plate 141. IoMBO - the woodshed (centre) and the 'black hole' (the tool store - behind) will also be removed in the upgrade. © S.L. Rivers

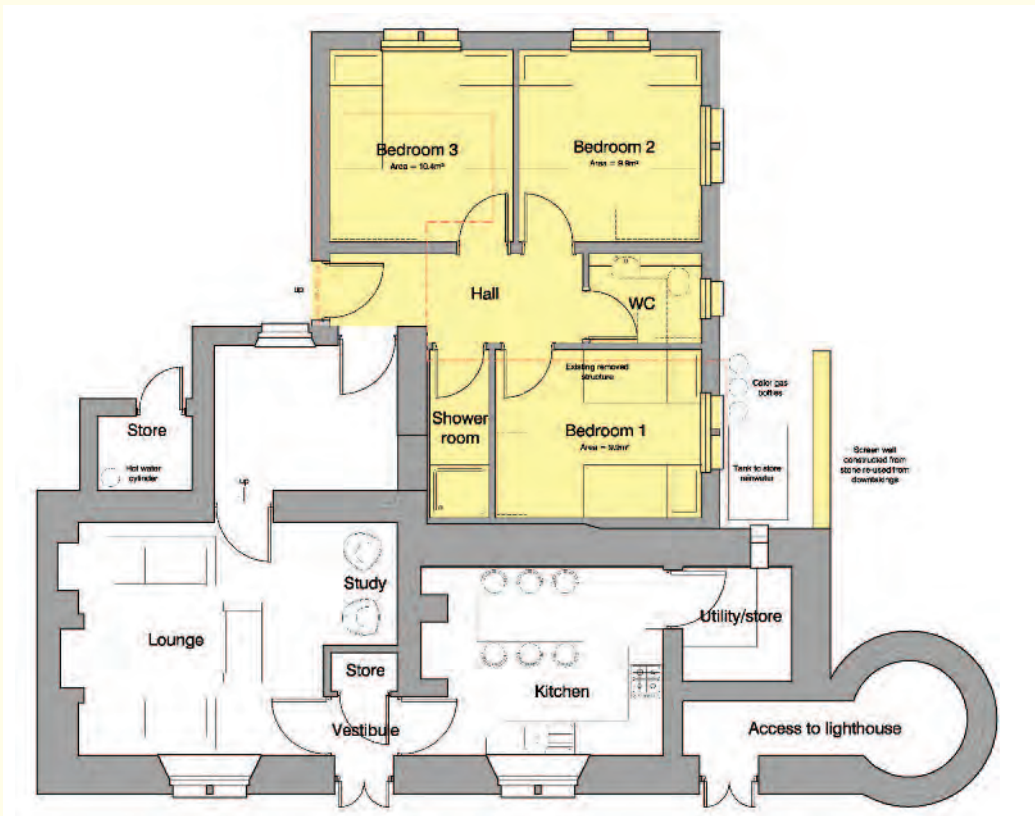


Plate 142. Ground plan of proposed upgrade. © IoMBO Trust



Plate 143. *IoMBOT Chairman, Ian Darling (left), and Colin Campbell, a visitor from Canada, get stuck into clearing the ground for the Observatory upgrade. © Frank Hamilton*

washroom area, the 'Black Hole' (tool store), and the outside wood store (Plates 140–141). In their place will be three new bedrooms, a shower and washroom, and a flush toilet – luxury! The kitchen will also be moved from its current location to the existing bedroom (Plate 142). Work on the project should commence in July and good fortune and good weather permitting should be completed by October. While the previous fundraising drive has raised enough money to cover the alterations of the building structure, we would still be grateful of any donations towards the planned upgrade of the interior and the purchase of new furniture and room fittings. Please send any donations to Niall Campbell, IoMBOT Treasurer, 15 Warriston Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 5LA. Similarly, the prints kindly produced by Keith Brockie and Derek Robertson for our fund-raising push (see *Scottish Birds* 31(3): 238–239) are still available from Waterston House, with all proceeds going to the Observatory Development Appeal. The new building layout will provide much greater flexibility for groups and individuals wanting to book a stay at the observatory, and we intend to introduce residential ringing and bird census courses once

the observatory is fully back up and running in its new arrangement. Meanwhile, some keener members of the Trust have already started clearing the ground for the expansion (Plate 143).

Sanda Island Bird Observatory

Observatory activity was resumed in 2012 following its effective closure in 2011 due to severely limited access as a result of extensive refurbishment work to buildings. The start-up visit on 25 March recorded two Wheatears and 20+ Meadow Pipits, but of greater interest will probably be the three seabird ringing courses which are due to be held over this summer. For details of these courses and of the observatory in general, including membership rates, check out the website: www.spanglefish.com/SandaIslandBirdObservatory, or contact the Bird Observatory Chairman - Rab Morton, 33 Longrow, Campbeltown, Argyll, PA28 6ER. Email: sanda.bo@btinternet.com.

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The Dunbeg ‘High Arctic Gull’; is it a Thayer’s?

J.M. DICKSON & A.W. ALLAN



Plate 144. Juvenile Kumlien's or Thayer's Gull, Dunbeg, Argyll, 22 November 2011. © J.M. Dickson. Showing overall grey-brown plumage tones and contrasting dark primaries with pale tips.

On 12 November 2011, Bill Allan found and photographed a juvenile Iceland-type gull at Dunbeg Bay, near Oban, Argyll, which due to its overall grey-brown appearance made him think of Kumlien's or even Thayer's Gull, both of which were unfamiliar to him. Realising the marked differences to the many juvenile Iceland Gulls he has seen previously in Argyll, in particular its less pronounced primary projection, pot-bellied appearance and overall dark colouration, he emailed his photos to me. His email read: *'Only had a few minutes and at first wasn't sure it was not a Herring Gull...brief view of dark (not as dark as Herring) but even-coloured wings. Primaries really interesting as well towards Thayer's never mind Kumlien's...'*

From Bill's photos it was immediately clear that this bird was in the dark Kumlien's/Thayers bracket. From this point on the problem was separating the two alternatives- was it a dark Kumlien's or a Thayer's Gull? At this stage, as always with unusual gulls, the question of a hybrid had to be considered. The most likely cross involved a member of the Iceland Gull group (*Larus glaucoides/kumlieni/thayeri*) and (American) Herring Gull. Due to work commitments, I was unable to travel to see the

bird until the following day, but fortunately located the bird within a few minutes and took several photos in dull light. From what I could observe in the field, and from the previous day's research, I put the word out to Angus Murray that this bird was most likely a juvenile Thayer's Gull. In the following weeks, the bird visited Dunbeg Bay infrequently for only very short spells. It was watched most often by Bill Allan and less so by me, with very few other birders connecting with it. Later in the winter Simon Pinder discovered that it was associating with some Iceland and two Kumlien's Gulls off Taynuilt pier, about 12 miles further east up Loch Etive, until last recorded on 3 March 2012.

Feedback

Over the following days and weeks the identity of this bird was debated online, often heated at times on various bird forums. Feedback from several North American birders familiar with Thayer's were saying that this bird looked like a fairly typical mid-range Thayer's, while some 'experts' through UK bird forums were saying it was not one. Some wrong information for Thayer's was also circulated - notably that to get a UK bird accepted, features such as the primaries and tail, should be 'black' rather than

Footnote. The SOC and the Scottish List follow BOU with respect to systematics. As a result, the following classification applies: Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides* with three subspecies - nominate *glaucoides* (Iceland *sensu stricto*), *kumlieni* (Kumlien's) and *thayeri* (Thayer's).

'dark brown and milky brown' respectively! Looking at online photographs of juvenile Thayer's Gull, in particular the good quality photos taken by Jeff Polken (www.pbase.com/jpkln/gulls) in California, I was amazed to see just how variable these birds can be, from very pale through to dark, and just how similar several of the photos were to the Dunbeg bird. In contrast, birds in eastern Canada labelled Kumlien's can be just as dark, (birdingnewfoundland.blogspot.com). I also contacted Peter Adriaens a recognised expert on Kumlien's Gull for his opinion and his feeling was leaning towards a dark Kumlien's type. Some of his dark example Kumlien's types are shown at (www.aerc.eu/KumliensGull). Bruce Mactavish in Newfoundland said it was an interesting bird, suggesting Thayer's in the dark outer primaries and tail, but probably just too pale overall for Thayer's. Klaus Malling Olsen also thought that it was a bit on the pale side, which would make ruling out a Thayer's/Kumlien's hybrid difficult, however said that if he saw this bird in California he would most probably treat it as a pale type Thayer's Gull. It was quickly becoming apparent that this subject was going to be a rather large can of worms and certainly not as straightforward as it initially appeared.

This article will hopefully help clarify what conclusions can be drawn from this individual and just where its identification fits in with current understanding of this gull group. To do this I feel it is fitting to give a brief outline of what a Thayer's Gull is thought to be and how it fits in with other high Arctic Gulls and American Herring Gull. This of course will be a well-trodden path for many Scottish and UK birders who have had previous encounters of putative Thayer's Gulls (e.g. claimed birds coming previously from Ayrshire and a briefly seen, but photographed, bird on Fair Isle in spring 2011). There have been birds reported from Ireland and its rare bird committee has accepted some records of Thayer's and other birds have been accepted in Norway, Denmark and Iceland. As yet the British Birds Records Committee (BBRC) have not yet accepted Thayer's, however there have been an increasing number of reports in recent years with one record currently being circulated and a dark plumaged bird at Elsham, Lincolnshire, April 2012 appearing to 'tick all the boxes'.

Thayer's Gull background

Thayer's Gull was described as a new species in 1915 by John H. Thayer with type specimens taken from Ellesmere Island, Canada, and compared with Kumlien's and American Herring Gulls. Soon after however, in 1917, Dwight considered it to be a subspecies of American Herring and in 1925 considered Kumlien's as a hybrid between Iceland and Thayer's. This debate has continued ever since. Thayer's was considered a full species by Brooks (1937) and Salomonsen (1950) who considered Thayer's as the high Arctic form of Iceland. The American Ornithologist's Union (AOU) in 1957 however continued to list Thayer's as a subspecies of American Herring Gull and as such few birders paid this form much attention or indeed knew how to identify it. In the 1960s, however, it became more widely accepted that Thayer's was a species in its own right, with studies showing that it was breeding side-by-side with American Herring Gull and with illustrations in *The Birds of Canada* for the first time (Godfrey 1966) birders began to take more notice of it. In 1973, the AOU gave Thayer's Gull full species status and North American birders were starting to see this species widely. In the 1980s things moved on, with studies showing wide interbreeding between Thayer's and Kumlien's phenotypes in islands to the north of Hudson Bay. Taxonomic reviews concluded that the Iceland-Kumlien's-Thayer's complex formed a single polytypic species. From the late 1980s and in the 1990s Thayer's was widely regarded as a subspecies of Iceland Gull with the Kumlien's form being an intermediate between the two. The AOU currently still lists Thayer's as a separate species, however other American authorities and the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU 1991) treat Thayer's as a subspecies of Iceland Gull. It is clear then that in North American classification, Thayer's Gull has moved from being considered as a subspecies of Herring Gull to a species in its own right and now more widely as a subspecies of Iceland Gull.

Kumlien's Gull is a highly variable taxon and has been regarded as a full species, a sub-species of Thayer's and more widely now as a sub-species of Iceland. It has also been considered as occurring from Thayer's and Iceland hybridisation giving rise to the variability in plumages recorded. This 'hybrid swarm' theory has been questioned

by Adriaens and others believing that Thayer's and Kumlien's have distinct separate ranges and recent DNA results appear to indicate that Thayer's Gull is more closely related to Glaucous-winged than Iceland or Kumlien's Gull.

Identification

To try and resolve the identity of the Dunbeg bird, I will first summarise here the main features associated with a juvenile Thayer's Gull noting that juvenile plumage is usually retained until at least February, while *kumlieni* can start to replace some juvenile mantle/scapulars from Oct–Nov (Olsen & Larsson 2003). Also in a similar way to *glaucoides* and other juvenile gulls, the plumage becomes much more washed out and faded as the winter progresses and by spring some birds can be very pale indeed.

Summarising features noted by Klaus Malling Olsen in his *Gulls* (2003), Greg Gillson (Birdguides) and Steve Hampton (www.terial.us/gulls/gulls.htm): Thayer's is a medium-sized gull, smaller than Herring and similar in shape to Iceland Gull but closed wings shorter/less attenuated. Like Iceland/Kumlien's, the head is rounded but with more of a sloping forehead. The bill is short and black with purplish tones on the base of the lower mandible later in the winter. The eyes are large and dark, set quite well back in the head. It shows a deep breast and short dull pink legs. The overall body colour is like a pale washed out juvenile American Herring Gull being coffee brown or grey brown in tone. Juveniles usually show a darker eye mask, pale frontal face and long lores. The palest birds are as dark as dark *kumlieni*. To differentiate from such *kumlieni* the tail and wing pattern are crucial: outer webs of primaries and secondaries are brown and slightly darker than the rest of the upperparts and darker than the greyish-brown centred tertials which are concolourous or slightly darker than the rest of upperparts and have variable pale notches at the tips. The folded wing tip should be dark coffee brown (not black) and show neat thin pale tips and edges however the wings become more washed out as spring approaches. In flight the outer five or six primaries show darker outer webs and the inner primaries are paler and more uniform showing a pale window more like a Herring Gull. The secondaries should show a darker bar contrasting with the rest of the upper



Plate 145. Juvenile Kumlien's or Thayer's Gull, Dunbeg, Argyll, 22 November 2011. © J.M. Dickson. Showing underwing pattern, silver-grey primaries with slightly darker trailing edge.



Plate 146. Juvenile Kumlien's or Thayer's Gull with Herring Gulls, Argyll, 17 January 2012. © W.A. Allan. Showing more clearly the tern-like dark trailing edge to primaries and Herring Gull-like head shape.

wing coverts. The underside of the primaries should show as silvery grey usually with a slightly darker narrow trailing edge. The tail should be mainly brown, darker than the rest of the upperparts, uniform and with uneven whitish tips on all feathers and the rump heavily barred more dark than light. First-generation mantle and scapulars are brown, pale edged often with darker sub-terminal anchor markings and tipped whitish.

Features more in keeping with a dark juvenile Kumlien's are: as Thayer's above, but showing a more rounded head, shorter lores and smaller eye appearance. The dark bill shows a paler base usually much earlier in the winter. The outer primaries are more grey brown or washed out with dark webs not always reaching to P6 (usually P6 or even P5 in Thayer's). In the closed wing, the pale edges are usually broader

and less well defined. There is less contrast between the secondaries and other wing coverts, paler tertials often same as or lighter than body tones, tail feathers showing mottled faded patches or shadow bands but unlike Thayer's are usually un-patterned on mid-tail feather tips. The scapulars and upper-wing coverts showing more light than dark coverage and giving a more barred effect.

With photographs and field notes taken of the Dunbeg bird it should then be possible to see what features noted above apply to this bird and see if it can be judged as a Thayer's or a dark Kumlien's. To help with this process advice was sought from various sources in the UK and Europe, and Martin Scott was very helpful in

contacting several gull experts in the US and Canada. Many others, although showing an interest were less-committal and to be honest I don't blame them! Interestingly to generalise, feedback from North America was in favour of this bird being within the plumage range of Thayer's and UK birders were going for an intergrade or a dark Kumlien's. I found this to be a rather curious position and wondered if different standards or weighting of features were being applied. It was perhaps understandable that in the UK context where there have been several previous claims, there was a feeling of here we go again and in order to get this subspecies accepted in the UK it would have to be a classic 'dark' bird that ticked all the boxes.



Plates 147–150. Juvenile Kumlien's or Thayer's Gull, Dunbeg, Argyll, 13 & 22 November 2011. © J.M. Dickson. Showing size comparison with Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, the sloping forehead and large eye appearance, dark outer shafts on P10-P6 with darker tips and evidence of a dark secondary bar.



Plate 151. Juvenile Kumlien's or Thayer's Gull, Dunbeg, Argyll, 22 November 2011. © J.M. Dickson. Showing the solid dark tail with white tips on all feathers, scapular and covert pattern and the paler inner primary window.

The main points in favour of the Dunbeg bird being a Thayer's: a rather heavy Iceland-type bird. Head and bill shape identical to numerous Thayer's photos studied with bill size thought to indicate a female by Steve Hampton a Californian birder who sees numerous Thayer's each winter. Forehead shape more sloping than the gently rounded appearance of *glaucooides/kumlieni*, and showing a good dark facial mask. Overall grey-brown body appearance with dark brown closed primaries with pale arrow head tips and showing good dark outer webs in P10 –P6 in the open wing and silver grey underwing with a discernible darker trailing edge. Inner primaries formed a paler window like American Herring Gull. The secondaries formed a slightly darker but discernible bar effect however was less obvious or absent in strong sun light. The tail was dark grey brown and not internally mottled as in most Kumlien's, but more solid with pale tips to all feathers. The tertials were noticeably paler than the dark brown primaries but not lighter than the upperparts and mottled whitish only near the tips. The scapulars and mantle gave a spangled effect with some feathers showing mid-brown centres and paler edges and some appearing to show paler bases as well. Fortunately this bird turned up in a winter when some very definite Kumlien's types were to make an appearance in Argyll. In

total of the 150 or so Iceland Gull records in this region at least 10 were Kumlien's and of these four were juveniles. As such it was good to be able to compare these birds with the Dunbeg bird. These Kumlien's juveniles were all noted to be quite small neat birds with smallish bills and a more pronounced primary extension than the Dunbeg bird and showed a different 'jizz' due to the different head, body and wing profile. This relatively short primary extension of the Dunbeg bird was at times very noticeable and a feature more associated with Thayer's than *glaucooides/kumleni*. In flight, the wings appeared proportionately longer and slimmer than Herring Gull.

The points that were made against the Dunbeg bird being a Thayer's from feedback focused on it just being a bit too much on the pale side; thoughts that the secondaries were just too uniform and did not form a strong enough and contrasting dark bar; the tertials being too pale with suggestions that they should approach the primaries in tone (something not evident in many Thayer's photos but more in keeping with American Herring Gull) and the scapulars showing too much pale at the bases and not dark centred enough. As such it quickly looked like the Dunbeg bird was not the classic dark Thayer's that birders were hoping for and therefore was soon

Plate 152. Juvenile Kumlien's or Thayer's Gull, Dunbeg, Argyll, 22 November 2011. © J.M. Dickson. This photo shows more detail of the scapular pattern - solid brown centres seen on some lower feathers and whitish tips (rather than bases) and sub-terminal dark anchors seen on top-most scapulars. Also solid brown tail and unchequered inner greater coverts.



'relegated' to Kumlien's or intergrade status. Interestingly this winter, along with the unprecedented numbers of Kumlien's Gulls that have turned up, two or three have been very dark like the Dunbeg bird, with photos appearing on BirdGuides and elsewhere, with one similar to the Dunbeg bird labelled as a Thayer's in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh and a slightly paler bird as a Kumlien's in Ardglass, County Down.

Discussion

It is clear that nearly 100 years after Thayer's Gull was first described our knowledge of them still has a long way to go and maybe future genetic studies will be the way forward. In terms of trying to look at phenotypic differences between *glaucoides*, *kumlieni* and *thayeri* Steve Hampton in California has been trying to move the identification frontier forward. He has proposed a *thayeri-kumlieni-glaucoides* four-point scale for first-cycle birds based on scoring seven variable features that strongly differentiate *glaucoides* from *thayeri* from 0-4, where 0 is towards a pure type *glaucoides* and 4 indicates strongest *thayeri* features. His system, by nature of being phenotype based, can be subjective, however is from vast experience, numerous photographs and discussion with other experts. What is interesting for the Dunbeg bird is that Steve scores it 25 or possibly 26 out of a possible 28 and in his proposed scale a Thayer's is anything above 22 and a Kumlien's lies somewhere between 6-22. His website is at www.tertia.us/gulls/gulls.htm and this is what he had to say about the Dunbeg bird.

'This looks like a typical Thayer's Gull. We have several hundred present here now and this bird would fit right in. I can't imagine anyone on the West Coast, and probably not even the East Coast, of the US, would consider calling this a Kumlien's. It would certainly not be accepted as a Kumlien's in California; it would be called "a fairly typical Thayer's".

Using my scale and going point by point: **Primaries** - 4; very typical; the size of the pale edge is variable and there is nothing remarkable here for Thayer's. **Secondaries** - 4; seems to be a strongly contrasting dark bar (at most lighting angles); very typical of Thayer's. **Tertials** - 3.5; the solid interiors are a tad paler than normal, but still concolor with the covert markings; this is seen on many Thayer's and, in Calif, would not get me excited about a possible Kumlien's. **Tail** - 4; there no evidence of a pale shadow band or unusually large pale tips— what you see here is pretty typical. Actually, most Thayer's have more pale barring at the base of the outer rectrices, producing a more banded rather than solid tail look. **Coverts/Body** - 3.5; some Thayer's can be positively frosty here, close to a 2; this bird is not a dark checkered as some, but the amount of white vs brown is nothing abnormal. **Bill colour** - 3; only because the good photography is picking up the dusky red tones; in the field I'd probably call it a 4; again, nothing unusual. **Head/Bill shape and size** - 3; this feature varies a full point between males and females; this bird feels like a female Thayer's, based on the refined bill and small gonydal angle; note the elongated face toward the bill, typical of Thayer's. Kumlien's/Iceland have steeper foreheads and more dove-like heads. So the total score is 25. I imagine West Coast birders would call this a Thayer's quite comfortably.'

This may or may not be a step forward in the assessment of putative Thayer's Gull records. Members on rare bird committees may find it difficult to judge effectively due to a lack of

experience of paler birds. Such a rating scale may be a useful way forward however it is unclear how the scale would positively differentiate a dark Kumlien's from a Thayer's. The problem as I see it is, can we ever be sure what a 'pure' Thayer's is? A Thayer's type gull even with a small amount of *glaucooides/kumlieni* genes is a hybrid Kumlien's or intergrade even if it looks good for Thayer's. Can we ever be sure that the accepted Thayer's Gulls in Ireland, Iceland, Norway and Denmark are 'pure' Thayer's...surely this is impossible to answer and therefore a strongly validated rating scale may be a practical solution, where birds are labelled according to plumage type. To complicate matters further can we honestly be sure that the paler Thayer's being recorded in west coast North America in winter are pure Thayer's when it is known that pure type Thayer's have and do hybridise with Kumlien's types (Snell 1989). Steve Howell in his 'Gulls of the Americas' says of such pale type juvenile Thayer's in North California 'whether birds like this represent pure Thayer's Gulls remains to be determined' and in trying to determine and find an answer to that question we have a conundrum as far as these birds are concerned, Steve Howell going onto say generically 'we can't learn how much Thayer's and Kumlien's are interbreeding until we can distinguish them, but we can't distinguish them because they interbreed'.

Proof that pale to mid-range Thayer's types are actually pure Thayer's rather than dark Kumlien's or intergrades may have been touched on by Garner (2012) where he presents photographs of two juvenile Thayer's collected from Igloodik, Nunavut, Canada which is a known core area for Thayer's. These individuals show a darker example and a much paler juvenile. This is good evidence that from an area not known to be affected by the influence of Kumlien's types we can have juvenile Thayer's ranging from pale to dark. As with other juvenile large gulls variability in pigment tones is common and it is unlikely that Thayer's are immune to this variation.

Conclusion

So where does this leave the identity of the Dunbeg bird and can we say with any 'certainty' what this juvenile plumaged bird is? This question is of course not one that I can answer, but instead just express an opinion, leaving judgements to

those with more knowledge and experience of this group of gulls. In summary, the terms 'Thayer's Gull and certainty' do not go well together, particularly in immature plumages, and there is quite a definite split in opinion regarding pale juvenile birds in North America. Whether such birds can be found to be pure Thayer's only time and more research will tell. Of course given fortunate circumstances whereby a bird returns each winter until adult can be very useful. Out with a west coast North American context, the Dunbeg bird looks more like the dark examples of Kumlien's or Thayer's/ Kumlien's intergrades more familiar on the Great Lakes around Ontario or indeed eastern Canada. The plumage characters for which the Dunbeg bird has been criticised as falling short of Thayer's may or may not be valid however these cannot be ignored and therefore until such features, as seen in many pale Californian juveniles, are shown to belong to pure Thayer's then it is perhaps not safe to identify the Dunbeg bird as such. I would argue then that a bird that fits well structurally for a Thayer's should not be readily dismissed as Kumlien's/intergrade just because it appears a bit on the pale side and perhaps in future we may be more confident in identifying paler type birds as Thayer's as they do in California, using a rating scale like that proposed by Hampton rather than expecting all European occurrences to be of exceptionally dark birds. The recent Lincolnshire bird has been widely recognised as being a Thayer's on account of it being very dark and the Dunbeg bird being widely dismissed on account of it being 'too pale' with often little discussion on other features. Strong indicators of intergrade type birds showing *kumlieni* influence appears to be most noticeable in the tail and scapulars where these feathers show some central paler patchy areas or mottling. These areas looked relatively good for the Dunbeg bird, however possible *glaucooides/kumlieni* influence is perhaps seen in the scapulars which were noted to show pale bases (however, on closer inspection may actually be the broad whitish tips giving this 'effect') and the upper wing lacked contrast with the secondary dark bar being weak particularly in photos taken on 22 November in strong direct sun light however would be in keeping with a weakly pigmented bird as shown by Garner. In my opinion other features such as the head and bill shape and the shortish primary projection compared to *glaucooides/kumlieni* appear much like Thayer's.



Plate 153. Juvenile Kumlien's or Thayer's Gull, Dunbeg, Argyll, 22 November 2011. © J.M. Dickson. Showing upper tail and wing detail.

With reports that Thayer's Gull has increased in North America by 2200% in the last 40 years (BirdLife International 2007) and large increases of Kumlien's Gulls in the 20th century it is likely that the occurrence of Kumlien's, and perhaps Thayer's will increase on this side of the Atlantic. This winter, 2011-12 has seen exceptional numbers of Kumlien's types reported in the UK and for the first time in some other European countries, as well as reports of juvenile Thayer's again in Ireland. Whether the BBRC will eventually accept a record of a Thayer's only time will tell but deciding if such a bird is pure or not will no doubt present a difficult subjective challenge particularly with paler individuals.

Acknowledgements

We thank Martin Scott for his active encouragement with this record and contacting several North American gull experts on our behalf. Very useful feedback was received from many people and in particular Klaus Malling Olsen, Bruce Mactavish, Peter Adriaens, Steve Hampton, Mark Gawn, Chris Gibbins, Lee Evans, Josh Jones and Chris Batty. Chris Gibbins also kindly made useful comments on an earlier draft of this report.

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Greater Yellowlegs at Loch Fleet, Highland, December 2011 to February 2012

D. MacASKILL



Plate 154. Greater Yellowlegs, Loch Fleet, Highland, December 2011. © Marcus Conway

On 14 December 2011, I left home at 10:30 in search of the grey geese wintering around the Loch Fleet area, in the hope of finding some European White-fronts or a Bean Goose or two. Five minutes later I was driving down the small hill towards Coul Links. I could see a large flooded pool in the field at the bottom of the hill and as I drove by I noticed a *Tringa*-type wader feeding at the water's edge. I stopped briefly and looked at the bird through my binoculars, expecting to see a Redshank. Viewing conditions were not ideal due to the poor light, a heavy rain shower and the bird being in silhouette. It had the look of a Greenshank rather than a Redshank. I drove a little further down the road and as I pulled into a lay-by I was thinking it most likely to be one of the local wintering Greenshanks. I had another quick glance over my shoulder at the bird about 150 m away. This time I could make out the dark brownish grey upperparts, with many feathers heavily spotted with off-white marks, but most noticeable were the long yellow legs. I immediately set up my scope and with light improving as the rain eased off, I could clearly

see this was not a Greenshank. I began thinking that this could be a Greater Yellowlegs. That would be a lifer for me and on my local patch.



Plate 155. Greater Yellowlegs, Loch Fleet, Highland, December 2011. © Dave Devonport



Plate 156. *Greater Yellowlegs (left) with Greenshank, Loch Fleet, Highland, December 2011.* © W. Carlyle

I quickly phoned Bob Swann and gave him a brief description of the bird and location details. Bob said he would be over as fast as he could and about 20 minutes later he and I were watching the bird. Suddenly it took off and circled overhead allowing excellent views of the all dark wings, square white rump, barred tail and long yellow legs projecting well beyond the tail. It was calling as it settled back down on the pool, a higher pitched "teu teu teu" than that of a Greenshank. The rain returned, so we retreated to our cars. Alistair and Jenny McNee arrived soon after. As we watched the bird feeding around the pool, a Redshank dropped in and began to feed alongside the Yellowlegs, which gave us all the opportunity to get a size comparison and see that the yellowlegs was clearly the larger and particularly taller of the two. This with the long bill length helped to confirm the bird as a Greater Yellowlegs.

feathers on the mantle and upper scapulars. In flight, the square white rump, long yellow legs protruding beyond the tail and all-dark wings were characteristic.



Plate 157. *Greater Yellowlegs, Loch Fleet, Highland, December 2011.* © Marcus Conway

It was not unlike a Greenshank in structure with its bill at least one and a half times the head length and dark with a paler base. Its head and neck were grey with fine streaks stretching down to the upper breast. It had a white eye ring and a white supercilium extending from the top of the bill to the eye. Its crown was slightly darker than the neck and heavily streaked. Its throat and underparts were white, with some greyer speckling on the flanks. The upperparts were primarily greyish brown juvenile feathers with extensive off-white spotting, but with some newer, greyer, less spotted adult winter plumage

The bird fed in the pool mainly on earthworms and was still there on the following day. It was very confiding, allowing many observers close views down to a few metres. Over the next month, it favoured the pools close to the entrance to Coul Farm, at times it was in the company of both Redshank and Greenshank. On 13 January, it was seen on the mudflats of Loch Fleet and appeared to be injured; however, by 19 January, it had recovered and was photographed back at the now-frozen pool at the entrance to Coul Farm.

It was not seen again until Tony Mainwood and Alan Vittery found it feeding in a pool at the Dornoch caravan park on the afternoon of 20 February. I managed to get down to see it around 17:00, when it was now feeding along the Dornoch burn. It flew past me calling and headed out towards the beach, this was the last sighting of the bird in Highland.

It is very likely that this is the bird that had been present at Low Hauxley since 13 November. The Northumberland bird was last seen there on 12 December, two days before this bird turned up at Loch Fleet, following a southerly gale. Bob Swann had seen the Greater Yellowlegs in Northumberland and noted that the plumage on both birds was very similar.

There have been eight previous records of Greater Yellowlegs in Scotland.

- 1957 North-east Scotland**, Ythan estuary, 25 October, found dead later that day.
- 1978 Outer Hebrides**, Peninerine, South Uist, 14 August.
- 1985 Highland**, Loch Sligachan, Skye & Lochalsh, 19 May.
- 1985 Argyll**, Glenegedale, Islay, 25 October.
- 1999 Outer Hebrides**, Loch Mor, Benbecula, 2 November–9 March 2000.
- 2002 Outer Hebrides**, St Kilda, 28–30 April - 8–9 May.
- 2002 Argyll**, Loch Gruinart, Islay, 11–14 May.
- 2007 Shetland**, Ristie, Foula, juvenile, 11 October.

This would therefore be only the second record of this species wintering in Scotland.

Dean MacAskill

Greater Yellowlegs at Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, March–April 2012

P.A.A. BAXTER & C. GIBBINS

Saturday 3 March 2012 started in typical fashion as we headed to Peterhead for first light. The influx of white-winged gulls in the UK this winter had pretty much dictated our weekend birding activities and we had enjoyed every Saturday of the year so far, gull watching in the region. This Saturday was no different and a couple of hours at Peterhead in the morning had produced over a dozen Iceland Gulls and several Glaucous Gulls. We had been photographing and cataloguing all the Iceland Gulls in an attempt to estimate how many individuals were involved in the influx. However, the day was grey and the weather was wet and windy and not ideal for photography, so being happy that we had seen everything that Peterhead had to offer that morning, we headed north to Fraserburgh.

Fraserburgh was quiet, with just a single Iceland Gull there, along with the long-staying Kumlien's Gull that we had found in January. Having toured along the north coast and seen very little, we headed back south and headed towards the RSPB reserve at Loch of Strathbeg for lunch and a hot drink at the Starnafin centre on the reserve. Upon entering the centre, the weather hadn't improved and the viewing conditions were awful, with poor visibility across the pools. A visitor from Cambridgeshire, who had travelled to see the ermine Stoat that had been around, was the only other person in the centre, and he hadn't seen much. We chatted as we had our lunch, but there wasn't really much to look at. Chris was the first to spot the unfamiliar wader that was flying towards us from the direction of Tower Pool and said to Paul "Get on this wader" as it continued to fly towards us. Paul latched onto it straight away, as it very quickly flew alongside the right hand side of the visitor centre. We both yelled simultaneously "greater legs!" and ran down the steps and out of the visitor centre, to the bemusement of the stoat visitor, only to see the bird quickly disappear over the warden's cottage. We ran across the car park and picked up the bird as it flew inland. The



Plate 158. Greater Yellowlegs, Loch Fleet, Highland, December 2011. © Dave Devonport

bird was flying low, and at one point looked as if it was going to land in the field adjacent to the reserve access track, but it had other thoughts and came up higher and appeared to cross the access track. At this point, we lost it behind a group of trees and couldn't relocate it. We were confident of our identification and texted out the news, although in all honesty we had only seen it for around 10 seconds. We then spent the next hour or so driving around the area, looking for any flooded fields or hidden pools that the bird might have been favouring, but to no avail. After heading back to the Starnafin centre and looking from there, we headed to Tower Pool, but had to admit defeat in our searches to relocate the bird. Maybe it had headed off the reserve altogether? The news was out and for the remainder of the day and the following day observers searched the reserve, but there was no further sign of the bird.

Although we had seen the bird only in flight, the identification was straightforward enough. It was clearly a *Tringa* wader, and the square white rump clearly placed it as one of the 'yellowlegs', with the combination of large size and bulky body, with broad long wings and long stout bill all added up to the bird being a Greater Yellowlegs, as opposed to Lesser, which is a much smaller, daintier and more delicate looking bird

The disappointment of the bird's apparently short stay and our brief, flight-only views of it, later evaporated, as it reappeared on the reserve, on Tower Pool, on 9 March, just in time for the weekend. It spent the majority of its stay on Tower pool, but did occasionally come closer to the visitor centre. On the ground, the bird was aged as a first-winter (e.g. by its rather worn, uniform-looking, first-generation wing feathers). On 7 April, since finding it over a month ago, we enjoyed our best views and although it was still quite distant, we could see that it had commenced its moult and had dropped the smallest tertial on each wing and had acquired some first-summer scapular feathers.

The bird was well received by both local and visiting birders, and constituted the second record for the region, following a first-winter on the Ythan estuary in October 1953. It was quite rightly assumed to be the same individual that had spent the Christmas and New Year period on Loch Fleet (see above). However, and somewhat amazingly, there appeared to be no visible indication of the injuries the bird had sustained when at Loch Fleet in January.

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BIRDCUIDES REVIEW

1 January to 31 March 2012

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.

A blue morph Snow Goose was seen on Tiree (Arg) on 16 & 26 January and again on 27 March; white morphs were at Carnwath on 15 January and Douglas Water (both Clyde) from 7 March

onwards, Loch Evelix (High) on 21 January, and Greenloaning (P&K) from the year's start to 9 January. Single adult Ross's Geese were at Caerlaverock WWT from 15–25 February with presumably the same bird being seen at Mersehead RSPB on 6 March (both D&G), and in the Lanark/Carluke area (Clyde) from 14 March to 25 March. A first-winter Red-breasted Goose was seen with Barnacle Geese in the Caerlaverock/Loaningfoot area (D&G) from 23 January to at least the last day of March. Another was at Upper Rhynd (P&K) with Pink-footed Geese on 31 March. The majority of Lesser Canada Goose records came from Argyll, with three Richardson's-type birds on Tiree (along with two smaller race Canada Geese), and another four Richardson's-type and a Taverner's-type on Islay. A Richardson's-type bird was also at Blair Drummond (UF) on 13 February. A Todd's-type Canada Goose was in the Caerlaverock WWT area (D&G) from 31 January to 15 March.

There were two reports of Blue-winged Teal; a drake at Threave (D&G) on 4 & 10 February and a female/immature on Loch Stiapavat, Lewis (OH) on 13 & 19 January. A drake American Wigeon lingered on South Uist (OH) from 2011 to 19 January, joined by a second drake from 18 January. Other drakes were at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 16 January with presumably the same bird again on 5 & 10 February; on Kirk Loch (D&G) throughout the period; and at Bay of Suckquoy, Mainland (Ork) from 19 February to 25 March. A hybrid American Wigeon x Eurasian Wigeon was present at Largs (Ayr) on 29 March. There were about a dozen sightings of Green-winged Teal, all drakes, including birds at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB (A&D) from 22 February to 10 March, Mersehead RSPB/Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) throughout the period, and Kinneil Lagoon (UF) from the year's start to 12 March.



Plate 159. Red-breasted Goose, Loaningfoot, Dumfries & Galloway, March 2012. © John Nadin



Plate 160. *Iceland Gull, Peterhead, North-East Scotland, January 2012.* © Harry Scott

There were two **Lesser Scaups** – a drake at St John’s Loch (High) from 21 February to 29 March, and a female at Loch of Skene (NES) from 6–15 January. Two drake **Ring-necked Ducks** were present on Loch Daven (NES) on 18 March, with one remaining until 19 March. A single drake was in the Trabboch/Broadwood Flash area (Ayr) from 24 January to 29 March and a female on Benbecula (OH) from 11 February to 15 March.

A drake **King Eider** was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) at the end of March, with other drakes at Burghead Bay (M&N) on 1 March, one west past Chanoray Point (High) on 10 January, and one at Kintradwell (High) on 24 March. A drake **Northern Eider** (*borealis*) was on Benbecula (OH) on 21 & 25 March. A drake **Surf Scoter** remained in Largo Bay (Fife) throughout the period.

Three **Bitterns** were reported: at Duddingston Loch, Edinburgh (Loth) from 26 January to 22

February, on Rum (Highland) on 18 March and at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES) on 19–25 March. A **Little Egret** was seen intermittently at Creetown (D&G) - the only one reported.

Two **Gyr Falcons** were seen: one at Stomness (Ork) on 23 January and one on North Uist (OH) on 27 February. All confirmed reports of **Rough-legged Buzzard** came from Shetland, with a bird at Graven, Mainland, throughout the period being the longest stayer. A bird at Scousburgh was perhaps a different individual. Another individual, on Unst, was seen intermittently through February to 2 March.

There were three reports of **Common Crane**: at least one over Doune (UF) on 22 March, one at Glenborrodale (High) on 23 March, and one over Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 26 March.

The first-winter **Greater Yellowlegs** lingered from 2011, initially in the Loch Fleet (High) area from the start of the year to 14 January. It

was then over a month before it was seen again, at nearby Dornoch on 20 February. It wasn’t reported again until 3 March when it arrived at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB (NES), staying until the month’s end. The first-winter **Long-billed Dowitcher** was present at Wigtown (D&G) throughout. A first-winter **Pectoral Sandpiper** spent the winter at Dundonald Camp (Ayr), being present throughout the entire period except for a brief spell when it moved to flooded fields at Loans in late January/early February. An unseasonal arrival was a bird at Loch Gruinart RSPB, Islay (Arg) on 5 March. A **Grey Phalarope** was at Macduff (NES) on 15 January; birds were seen on Orkney at Bay of Skail on 24 January, Newark Bay on 1 February and Sandside Bay on 4 & 5 February.

One of the most notable events of early 2012 was an unprecedented influx of **Iceland Gulls**. The highest gathering was 88 birds at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 9 March - a record British site count. High counts from elsewhere included 65

at Marwick (Ork), at least 60 at Lerwick (Shet), 26 on Islay (Arg), 25 at Badcall Bay (High), 20 at Fraserburgh (NES), at least eight at Fauldhouse (Loth), seven roosting at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde), four roosting at Forfar Loch (A&D), four at Troon (Ayr), four at Loch Ryan (D&G) and two at Tweedbank (Bord). Additionally, several single birds were seen in Forth, Fife, and Perth & Kinross, and many smaller counts in addition to those listed above. With the exceptional numbers of Iceland Gulls came high numbers of **Kumlien's Gull**. The peak count came from Lerwick (Shet) where 10 were present on 19 February. Other multiple counts included four in Peterhead Harbour (NES), three at Taynult (Arg), two at Mallaig and two at Thurso (both High), five at Marwick (Ork), and at least three at Stornoway (OH). In addition to the aforementioned, smaller numbers and singles were reported from other sites, including birds in Angus and Lothian. The dark individual at Dunbeg (Arg) remained until 24 January. Independent of the influx, Ayr's adult Iceland Gull remained throughout the period for its 21st winter.

There were nine records of **Ring-billed Gull**, including three records from Argyll: the adult at Oban, a

second-winter at Lochgilphead, and a first-winter on Tiree. A first-winter was at Barassie (Ayr) from 5 January to 12 March; an adult was at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 16 & 18 January and again on 21 March; an adult at Dingwall (High) on 24 & 28 January and an adult at Fort William (High) from 18–23 January; a first-winter at Barvas on 27 January and a second-winter at Stornoway (both Lewis, OH) from the year's start to 18 January. An adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Hunterston Sands (Ayr) on 8 March; a possible adult was reported from Athelstaneford (Loth) on 25 February.

An **Alpine Swift** was seen over Butt of Lewis (OH) on 24 & 25 March.

Passerines of note were rather few during the period. Rarest by some margin was a first-winter **Red-flanked Bluetail** ringed at Uigen, Lewis (OH) on 31 March. A **Woodlark** remained on Unst (Shet) until 17 January and **Water Pipits** were at Dunglass Burn (Loth/Bord) until 18 March, Barns Ness (Loth) until 30 March, and at Out Head (Fife) on 9 February. A **Siberian Chiffchaff** (or *abietinus/tristis* intergrade) was at Dalgety Bay (Fife) from 22 January to 21 March, singing towards the end of its stay.

Lingering **Great Grey Shrikes** were reported from Cleish (P&K), Kilmahog (UF), Guardbridge (Fife), Mitchellslacks (D&G), Lindean Reservoir (Bord), and Loch of Leys/Loch Kinord (NES). An adult **Rose-coloured Starling** was in Muirhead, Troon (Ayr) from 28 January to 24 March.

The first migrants included a **Sandwich Tern** at Inverkeithing (Fife) on 1 March, **Common Chiffchaffs** near East Linton (Loth) on 11th, a **Barn Swallow** at Tain (High) on 14th, **Northern Wheatears** at Mersehead RSPB (D&G) on 15th, a **Sand Martin** at Stevenston (Ayr) on 17th, a female **Osprey** at Loch Garten (High) 21st, **Ring Ouzels** in both the Pentlands and Lammermuirs (both Loth) on 24th, **House Martins** on South Uist (OH) and Skye (High) on 24th, a **Marsh Harrier** at Loch of Kinnordy (A&D) on 24th, four **Manx Shearwaters** off Coll (Arg) on 25th and a **Willow Warbler** at Beeswing (D&G) on 25th.

Belated news from November 2011 concerned a **Brünnich's Guillemot** photographed in Burghead Harbour (M&N), but not identified until January.



Plate 161. Brünnich's Guillemot, Burghead, Moray & Nairn, November 2011. © Jonny Pott

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There is a basic division in *Scottish Birds* between papers and short notes that are peer-reviewed and articles, news and Club items that are not. This split in content is differentiated by fonts used and paper colour.

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Plate 162. Otter catching Iceland Gull, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, 18 January 2012. Like many parts of Scotland, Unst had an influx of Iceland Gulls during the first two weeks of January 2012. I had gone down to the pier at Baltasound to count and also to photograph any gulls that might be present. On this occasion, there were 12 feeding in the relative shelter of the east side of the pier. There was quite a lot of interaction between the gulls, Fulmars and also Shag that were also feeding there. The Fulmars were particularly aggressive towards the gulls and it was this I was trying to photograph. After an hour I decided to go home, but then thought, 'I'll just give it 10 more minutes'. Almost immediately I noticed

one of the gulls flapping rather violently in the water near to the rocky breakwater and quickly realized an Otter had caught it. Getting out of the car I managed to get a dozen or so shots before the Otter dragged the bird into the rocks and out of sight. As often with these kind of shots I didn't have any time to check camera settings etc - almost point and shoot! I've both seen and heard of Otters catching birds on the water, but I've never been lucky enough to be so close.

Equipment used: Canon 7D camera with 500mm f4 lens, image taken at 1/8000 sec, f4, ISO 1250, minus 1/3rd exposure compensation; bean bag.

Robbie Brookes



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